

Volume 5, Issue 9 ~ September 2025

MAGAZINE

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Ready for an Adventure?
Join Girl Scouts!



GET INVOLVED

County Commission Meetings
September 2 and September 16
9 a.m.

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

Ocala City Council Meetings
September 2 and September 16
4 p.m.

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

Marion County School Board **September 9 and September 23** 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.



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 Monica M. Jacobs

Let's Talk We want to hear from you:

Email your submissions, events, comments or questions to **Towntalkmagazine@yahoo.com**. Please include contact information (name and phone number) on the submission. Deadline is the first Monday of each month for the

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EDITOR'S DESK



I don't know about you, but I'm ready for some cooler weather. It's Hot!! Hopefully, it's on the way since Labor Day (September 1) marks the first day of Fall.

September is also a time for reflection, celebration and preparation for the rest of the year. Several national events are observed during this month: **September 10, World Suicide Prevention Day**, raises awareness about suicide prevention and mental health: September 21. **International Day**

of Peace, promotes peace and non-violence worldwide; and the month of September is National Recovery Month, also known as Recovery Awareness Month, which promotes and supports evidence-based treatment and recovery practices; celebrates individuals in recovery and highlights the dedication of service providers and communities. Please join us for the 8th Annual Ocala Recovery Festival on Saturday, Sept. 13, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Tuscawilla Park, 829 N.E. Sanchez Ave. The free event includes Exhibitor Booths, Recovery Resources, Entertainment, Kids Zone, Food, Swag and Giveaways and the annual Recovery Champion Award will be presented.

And finally, Are you ready for Give4Marion? Don't know what that is? According to Lauren Deiorio, Executive Director of the Community Foundation Ocala/Marion County, **Give4Marion is a Chance to Strengthen Our Community Together!** On September 16, at 10 a.m., our community will come together for Give4Marion, a 33-hour online community giving event that runs through September 17, at 7 p.m. This annual campaign, hosted by the Community Foundation for Ocala/Marion County, is a unique opportunity for every resident to make a difference no matter the size of the gift.

Why does it matter? Because local nonprofits are the heart of Marion County. They serve children in need, provide shelter for the homeless, support our veterans, protect animals, preserve the arts, and so much more. These organizations operate on limited budgets but carry enormous responsibility. By giving during Give4Marion, you directly strengthen the causes that touch lives right here at home.

One of the most exciting aspects of Give4Marion is the power of collective giving. A \$10 gift may feel small, but when combined with hundreds of others, it creates lasting impact. Add in matching gift opportunities and Power Hours, and your donation can go even further multiplying the support nonprofits receive.

Give4Marion is more than just fundraising; it's about unity. It's about neighbors rallying together, businesses encouraging employees to give, and families showing the next generation the value of generosity.

Participating is simple! Visit **Give4Marion.org**, choose the causes you care about, and give. Whether it's \$10, \$100, or more, your contribution stays right here in our community, fueling the nonprofits that make Marion County a better place for everyone.

Mark your calendar for September 16 –17, and join us in building a stronger community through Give4Marion. Together, we can turn compassion into action and create impact that lasts far beyond 33 hours.

The Family Violence Prevention Workgroup, which raises funds to provide emergency resources and services to victims

Let's Talk! *Monica Bryant* Monica T. Bryant, Editor emergency resources and services to victims and survivors of domestic violence, is one of hundreds of worthy organizations participating this year. Scan the QR Code to support our work.



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COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS - MARION COUNTY



Education has always been a priority in Steve Leilich's family. His parents taught at the University of Florida and initially, his goal was to become a teacher. Throughout his career Leilich, who graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Special Education and a Master's degree in Educational Administration and Supervision from Nova Southeastern University, was constantly asked to take on leadership positions.

"I noticed by doing so, that I could have a larger effect on improving the lives of children and families I worked with," he said. "I served on the Board of Directors for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Marion County at the time and started the NAMI on Campus programs at area high schools."

Now Leilich is the executive director of NAMI, a nonprofit organization that offers mental health education classes for peers and family members three times a year. The eight-week long classes meet once a week. NAMI also has support groups that meet biweekly for peers and families, NAMI on Campus high school programs at Vanguard, Forest and West Port High Schools, and they provide classes for the Marion County Mental Health Court.

"Working as an administrator for 20 years with Marion County Public Schools, I saw firsthand the need to help students and their families with improving their mental health," he said. "Having the opportunity to lead NAMI County is an honor and I am happy that we have Education as one of our three pillars."

Leilich said one in four Americans experience a mental health condition annually so support groups are a great way to meet people and get support from their peers. In the future, they would like to add more Signature Programs such as NAMI Homefront and NAMI in the Workplace, but if someone is struggling with mental illness now, he advises them to seek help.

"There is hope for anyone facing or suffering from a mental health condition or crisis. There is no need to suffer in silence," he said. "There are free, available services in our community to help you. Reach out to NAMI Marion County and let us assist you with getting the help you deserve."

Leilich said the biggest myth about mental illness is that it is a sign of weakness or personal failure. This belief, he said, is deeply rooted in stigma from society and often leads to discrimination and isolation.

"In reality, mental health challenges are a normal and human response to life's difficulties and seeking help is a sign of resilience and strength," he said. "It is important to recognize that mental health conditions can be caused by a combination of genetic, biological and environmental factors and that recovery takes time, support and often professional treatment."

NAMI Marion County, which relies on donations from individuals in the community, has served the citizens of Marion County since 1988. They are part of NAMI National and one of 800 affiliates nationwide. In 2024, they were named NAMI Affiliate of the Year by NAMI Florida.



NAMI does not have a physical office with regular operating hours, but individuals can call their message line at (352) 368-2405 and leave a message. Calls and emails received Monday through Friday are returned within 24 hours. Messages left on Saturday and Sunday are answered the following Monday. They have two employees, but utilize volunteers who have lived experience with mental health.

Leilich said he appreciates the community helping spread the word that help is available for individuals and families experiencing mental health challenges, but their greatest need right now is getting monetary donations to continue operations. Donations can be made using the Donate Now option at **namimarioncountyfl.org.** Checks can be mailed to NAMI Marion County at P.O. Box 5753, Ocala, FL 34478. He said in-kind donations, such as the cost of a media production company, are usually tied to one of their events such as Hometown Heroes.

For more information or to support NAMI, contact Leilich at ExecutiveDirector@namimarioncountyfl.org.

AGE DISCRIMINATION - WHO REALLY LOSES?

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



As an entrepreneur, I'm always attending networking functions, whether private organizations or those I have been invited to as a result of professional association. During the past year, I have come in contact with an alarming number of people over the age of 50 that are unemployed and frustrated at their inability to gain employment in fields where they have more than 20 years of experience.

So what's the problem?

Initially I suggested everything from rewording their resume to an award winning author I am affiliated with who specializes in helping 40+ executives re-enter the job market. However, upon further investigation and interviews, I have begun to see consistencies with the responses and treatment of those applicants who are a part of the Baby Boom generation.

Phrases like, "you are too qualified for this position." "I would feel uncomfortable asking you to work for this wage," or my favorite, "I don't think you will stay if something better comes along," were common in my discussions with more than 20 prospective applicants.

As I began to analyze this mindset, it became obvious why employers are willing to pass up a wealth of experience and knowledge Money! Statistically speaking, older employees cost an employer more in salary, benefits and longevity. Therefore, companies look for younger workers who are convinced they don't need health insurance, will work for a lower wage and typically stay at a company less than two years ... but how sound is that reasoning?

Who really loses?

While an employer may save money on the front end by hiring the less skilled worker, this philosophy is contrary to strong growth and a high level of customer service. A company's success can be identified by its positioning among its target audience and markets. In many instances, seasoned employees understand what it takes through years of experience and practical knowledge. While I can't discount the fact older workers tend to be set in their ways and less flexible with change, who would you rather have Michael Jordan or a rookie straight out of college?

Effective business occurs through critical thinking, process analysis and strategy development. Having experienced workers allows for a diversity of ideas, insightful analysis from a historical perspective and in many cases a refinement that only comes from living a while. So the next time you find yourself looking for a new employee, take time to consider who will bring "the most bang for the buck."





LATRISHA SIMS NAMED INTERIM CEO OF THE ELC



The Executive Committee of the Early Learning Coalition of Marion County Board of Directors has named LaTrisha Sims Interim CEO following Carrie Theall's departure. Sims has worked with the Coalition for more than 20 years directing the day-to-day operational aspects of the Coalition as Chief Operations Officer for the past six years.

Theall joined the Coalition in 2023 and was instrumental in bringing new early childhood programs to the community, including Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, Kaleidoscope Play & Learn weekly playgroups and The Incredible Years® preschool parenting program. Coalition Chairman Todd Panzer stated, "Carrie has decided to move on, and we wish her the best in her next chapter. The Board has the utmost confidence in the Coalition staff to continue operations without any interrup-

tions in services for our families and child care providers. The Early Learning Coalition of Marion County will continue to meet and exceed State mandates while serving this community."

The Coalition's mission is to equip every young child and family for success. They implement the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK), School Readiness, and Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) programs on behalf of the Florida Department of Education Division of Early Learning plus additional complimentary programs that support parents as a child's first and most important teacher. For more information, call (352) 369-2315 or visit elc-marion.org.

PLEASE GET OUT AND VOTE IF YOU'RE ELIGIBLE

The City of Ocala will hold a Special Election on Tuesday, September 16, to fill the offices of Mayor, City Council District I, City Council District III and City Council District V.

Seven candidates Qualified for the Special Election:

Mayor:

Ben Marciano (Incumbent) Zachary "Arbor" Feliciano

City Council District 3:

Jay Musleh (Incumbent) Mark Clark TamBoura Jenkins

City Council District 1:

Barry Mansfield (Incumbent)

City Council District 5:

James "Jim" Hilty, Sr. (Incumbent)







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Where:

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Heartoftheparkocala.com

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Time:

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ALL AGES WELCOME

- AUGUST 23 - SEPTEMBER 20

Come and explore this amazing exhibit and the accomplishments of local pioneers from our community!

REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED!



The Heart of the Turf: Racing's Black Pioneers Exhibit Meet & Greet

Thursday, September 18th 5:30pm to 7:00pm

This event is open to the public!

Marion County Black History Museum at Howard Academy Community Center 306 N.W. 7th Avenue Ocala, FL 34475

Honoring African American Pioneers of the Horse Industry in Ocala/Marion County. Florida Cowboys/Ranchers, Owners, Jockeys, Trainers, Groom and more!

Sponsored by: Tammy Gantt (FTBOA), Big Licks Gives, Florida Thoroughbred Breeders & Owners' Association, and Master of Possibilities at On Top of the World.



For more information, call (352) 671-4175

PARENTING FOR PRESENCE: HOW PARENTS CAN HELP PREVENT ABSENTEEISM AND TRUANCY

By Monica M. Jacobs, Teacher and Author of "My New Church," a children's book

The Marion County School District is cracking down on absenteeism and truancy. Some parents and guardians have already gone to court and even been jailed. This is because it's the law for students to be at school and on time. It is paramount to show up.

One of the most valuable life skills you can teach your child is the importance of showing up. The biggest complaint I receive from teachers about their students' is absenteeism and truancy. The purpose of school is to prepare them for a career. So, why not start by helping kids get to school on time every day?

You might ask, "What is so important about attending school every day?" One reason to attend is that lessons are typically taught in sequential order. Therefore, students who miss one or two lessons could be lost for the rest of the week or in future lessons (unit). A teacher explained, "The teacher then has to make time to catch the student up on any information that could be pertinent to moving on to the next unit." In my experience as a teacher, when students miss class, they do not make as much progress as their peers.



Monica Jacobs

Another reason students should be on time is to respect the negative impact it has on the entire class.

For example:

Interruption #1: The office calls.

Interruption #2: Two students are dismissed to escort the tardy student to class. This means up to three students are missing important information as the teacher continues to teach.

Interruption #3: The three returning students knock on the door.

Interruption #4: The teacher must stop teaching to receive the tardy student.

Tardiness is also detrimental to the child's education. You might ask, "What is so important about getting your children to school on time?" The first thing many children do when they get to school is eat breakfast. They only get about 5 to 7 minutes to sit and eat because the cafeteria must feed the whole school within about 25 minutes. If the child is not at school on time, he/she may not even get the nutrients they need at the start of the day to be productive in class.

Simple Fixes to Common Excuses:

"I had to run errands." Run errands without the student.

"He needed a haircut." Try making all appointments after school.

"We are always at the end of the car line." Modify your routine so that you leave 15 minutes earlier.

"I work nights, and the kids are not ready when I get home." Train them to get their clothes ready the night before and have your kids leave their homework folder in one location for you to check daily. Then, call them or set an alarm for when you are on the way home so they will be up and ready to go.



Ensuring your child arrives at school on time is essential as you lay the foundation for developing crucial life skills. As the parent, you serve as your child's first instructor. One teacher advises parents to "Play like you practice!" So, start playing "showing up early" for school and thereby practice punctuality for life and work. If your child is consistently late, they are likely learning from their parents that it is acceptable to be late. However, most jobs have a certain number of times that an employee can be late or absent before the employee is fired. Responsibility is learned at an early age. Children learn a lot by watching their parents. It is paramount to show up.

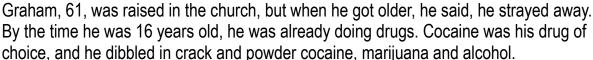
To reach Jacobs, contact her via e-mail at Jacobsmonica628@gmail.com.

MAXIE GRAHAM: A WALKING, BLESSED MIRACL

Maxie Graham didn't think he would live to be 25 or 30 years old.

Graham and his six siblings, four boys and three girls, were raised by their grandparents after their father died when he was young and their mom struggled trying to take care of all of them.

"We weren't rich or nothing, but they did the best they could trying to take care of us," he said.





Maxie Graham

"It was more or less being in a crowd of people, growing up and hanging out with people that was doing drugs," he said.

In 1982, he graduated from North Marion High School. While hanging out with the wrong people, Graham was shot in the neck in 1989 and ended up in a wheelchair. The bullet remains in his neck. He has regained some feeling in his legs, but not in his hands and feet. He's also been stabbed. In 1990, he was riding in a car and the driver got into a wreck. The car flipped over seven times. Graham broke his leg in 10 places and his face required surgery.

"All of this extended from my drug use. I was still being hard-headed and rebellious even after I got shot," he said. "I knew I was never suppose to be trying to be a drug dealer. I thank God because at that moment he could have called me home then."

But God had another plan for his life.

After his long journey with drugs and alcohol, a family member introduced him to Laura Johnson in 2017. He said when he approached her he was still addicted to drugs so he had to be comical. They started hanging out and things progressed from there. Things were rough sometimes because they were on two different sides of the fence. Her lifestyle was totally different from his and since she was raised in Miami, she saw drug addiction and how hard it was.

Graham said Johnson had a lot to do with him getting clean. In 2018, they got married and started building a life together.

"She was there for me, not only someone that was lifting me ... she didn't just see me as a drug user but she saw me as a person," he said. "When you look beyond the surface of a person, what you see on the outside isn't really what you see."

Laura Graham said her husband did it all by himself with no help but quit cold turkey. She said before he got clean, you couldn't even have a conversation with him without being called a b....

"He gave up everything. He was a hot mess," she said. "I'm proud of him. He's come a long way, a long, hard way."

But Graham said he needed an overhaul and he needed more Christ in his life. After his mom died and his only son was shot and killed, his drug use escalated more because of all the resentment he had.

"I wasn't a good father and that played a lot more into my expensive drug use," he said.

.E: EMBRACING THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE!

Graham said he never would have walked through the doors of the church if his brother-in-law, Willard Thomas, had not called him one Saturday and invited him to church. It wasn't the first time Thomas, who's also a deacon at the church, had asked him, in the past, he just never took him up on the offer or showed up because he said he wasn't clean and he wasn't sure.

Graham said he remembers hearing stories that he was going to be just like his dad who was an alcoholic. He said sometimes we have to break those old generational curses because we don't have to do what our parents and grandparents did. We define our own destiny.

"Sometimes that sticks with you when you're a kid," he said. "I know how it feels to feel not wanted and less fortunate."

When he rides his scooter, he said he meets a lot of people that are homeless or going through something and he shares a prayer with them, gives them some words of encouragement, shoes or clothes.

"I'm a walking, blessed miracle," Graham said. "I'm thanking my grandparents for being praying grandparents, the ones that were standing in the gap for me, praying for me when I didn't have the good sense to pray for myself."

Graham said some of the people he use to hang out with are still around, but a lot of them have gone on. He believes God saved him to show not only his family, friends and his kids to not look at him as that person, but look at what God is doing in his life and see what God is doing around him. He said God took him out of all those bad places and from around all those negative people.

"They didn't see this side of me. I'm praying that they are looking down right now saying that ole boy, he did it. He made it," Graham said.

Graham has formed better relationships with his kids and his grandkids, and he's built a nice rapport with his wife's kids, who he says loves him and who he thinks of as his own biological kids.

"They don't have to look at their father as a drug head, an alcoholic or a person who has no concern for them," he said.

Graham has been clean for five years and has served as a deacon for three years at the Pressing Place Church. He participates in a recovery ministry and leads prayer on the church's prayer line every Wednesday at



7 a.m. He still goes fishing and on cruises and is more active with his family because he no longer has to isolate himself and they don't have to be like hey, here comes that

"I just thank God for a made-up mind," he said. "When I was out there doing my drugs and doing what I was doing, I thank God for keeping me through all that because he could have just took my life at any given time."

READY FOR AN ADVENTURE? JOIN GIRL SCOUTS!

Melissa Casto already knew what she wanted to do when she took an early retirement. She planned to help raise her grandchildren, focus on writing and publishing children's books and launch *SurvivingHer*, a women's empowerment organization.

But those plans changed when an opportunity to work with the Girl Scouts, an organization she believed in, fell in her lap.

When she was a little girl, Casto was a Brownie for about a year before deciding to focus on swimming and tennis. Her daughter Jillian was a Girl Scout growing up too, and now her granddaughter, Bailey, is in her second year as a Daisy.

"I get to see the impact of Girl Scouts through the eyes of my granddaughter. She has blossomed from being shy into a confident, curious girl who is learning about entrepreneurship, leadership and life skills," she said. "Watching her grow through Girl Scouts has been an inspiring and beautiful reminder of why this movement is so important."

Now Casto, the Community Manager for Marion and Sumter Counties with the Girl Scouts of West Central Florida (GSWCF), wants to help girls of all ages reach their full potential and have opportunities to develop leadership, life skills and confidence while being part of a supportive community.

"When I learned about this position, I felt it aligned perfectly with my values, my faith and my lifelong passion for empowering women and girls," Casto said. "Accepting this role felt like a natural extension of the work I was already doing personally and professionally."

The local GSWCF is one of more than 100 councils nationwide and holds a charter from the national organization, Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA), to provide programming in Hillsborough, Pinellas, Pasco, Polk, Marion, Sumter, Citrus and Hernando counties. Currently, more than 580 girls are active in Girl Scouts in Marion County supported by over 100 dedicated volunteer troop leaders and parent helpers, all of which Casto manages and support.



Girl Scouts is supported through membership fees, grants, community partnerships, donations and its annual Cookie Program. The annual membership fee is \$45, which helps cover program materials, training and administrative costs. Casto said while the fee helps support the program, GSWCF is committed to ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent any girl from participating. She said financial aid covers membership fees, uniforms and other costs for families who need assistance and they leverage a variety of grants to help defray the costs.

More than 50 families currently benefit from a United Way of Marion County grant which helps girls in targeted schools gain access to memberships, uniforms, field trips and camp opportunities.

One of the Girl Scouts' biggest challenge is finding volunteers, specifically troop leaders, willing to

make a long-term commitment to guide and support the girls for more than a year. While there are hundreds of girls interested in the program, a troop's success depends on having dedicated adults who can consistently guide and mentor them.

"Balancing volunteer availability with the needs of girls and families in diverse communities can be difficult, but it's essential for maintaining the quality and impact of our programs," Casto said. "A troop leader is often more than a mentor; they become a consistent, trusted presence in a girl's life."

A big part of Casto's work involves building community partnerships by connecting with schools, faith-based organizations, community centers and agencies to expand opportunities for girls and increase the visibility of the Girl Scout mission. She said community members can partner with them by offering meeting spaces, sponsoring events or mentoring girls in specialized programs such as STEM, Entrepreneurship or the Arts.

"Every contribution, whether time, resources or funding directly impacts a girl's ability to build confidence, leadership skills and lifelong friendships," Casto said.

For now, Girl Scouts is a great fit for Casto.

"I plan to remain in this role until I decide to fully retire and embrace the retired lifestyle. For me, this isn't working, it's fun!," Casto said. "I often tell my colleagues as long as I'm still having fun, I'll be here. I don't see that changing anytime soon."

For more information, to find or join a troop, visit **gswcf.org** or call toll-free (800) 881-(Girl) 4475 or local (813) 281-(Girl) 4475 for troop meetings near you. Families are also encouraged to attend a troop meeting to see if it's a good fit for their daughter.

To stay up to date on local events, troop activities and community initiatives, follow them online on Facebook: **@GirlScoutsWCF**; Instragram: **@gswcf** and X (formerly Twitter) **@gswcf**.

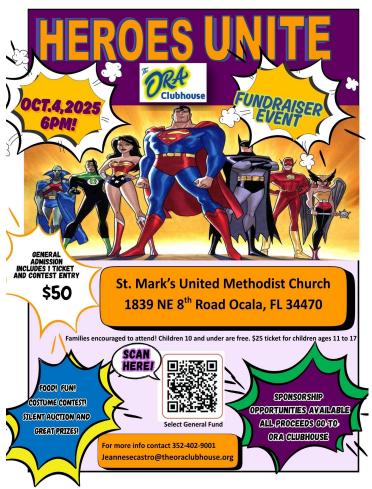


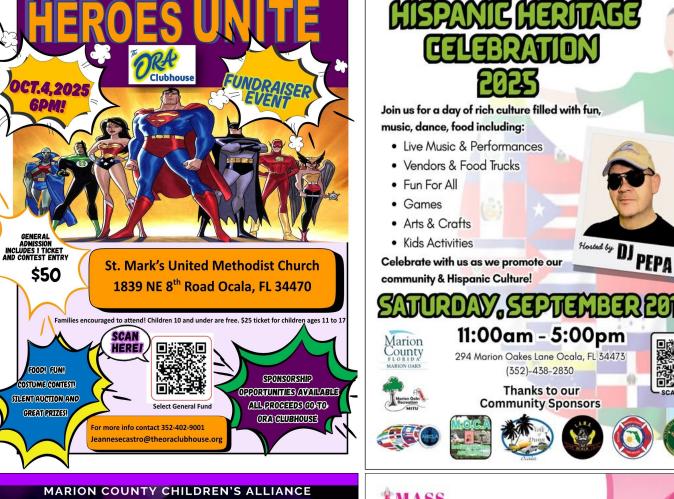
of west central florida

BASIC QUALIFICATIONS TO BE A TROOP LEADER

- -- Be at least 18 years old.
- -- Be a registered member of Girl Scouts of the USA, which requires completing the membership registration and paying the annual fee.
- -- Successfully pass a background check, which is required for all volunteers who work directly with girls.
- -- Complete required online and in person trainings, which covers Girl Scout traditions, safety, troop management and programming. And how to use the Volunteer Toolkit to plan meetings and activities.
- -- Agree to and uphold the Girl Scout Promise and Law.











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JUDGE BARNES RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS AWARD AT CONVENTION

Judge LeAnn Mackey Barnes was awarded the prestigious Silver Helmet Civil Servant Award for her efforts in helping to establish Marion County's Veterans Treatment Court (MCVTC) at the 2025 American Veterans National Convention.

Since its inception, the program has served 236 participants. The program's mentor component, which involves pairing voluntary servicemen from various branches of service with program participants, is a unique feature that distinguishes it from other alternative court programs in Marion County. To date, the program has had 30 military mentors, with 12 currently active, including one who has graduated from the Veterans Treatment Court program himself.

The MCVTC, a special division of the Marion County Court system, is a Court-supervised program for those arrested in Marion County who have a mental illness, substance use disorder, or other mental health condition related to their military service, who need treatment and other services and who choose to participate in the MCVTC instead of having their case proceed through the regular court process. Its mission is to promote public safety while supporting eligible veterans and their families through a coordinated effort among veteran's services, community services and the Court to leave no eligible veteran behind.

CROSS PROGRAM RENAMED REMEMBER AND HONOR

The Marion County Veterans Memorial Park has renamed the Cross Program Remember & Honor which honors service members who have passed away.

Veterans' families can honor deceased loved ones and friends by purchasing a cross with a mounted flag and emblazed with their name, branch of service and military conflict in which they served. The crosses are displayed at the Marion County Veterans Park for a full week before and a full week after Memorial Day and Veterans Day every year in perpetuity. A special display is also posted to honor the 13 soldiers killed at Abbey Gate during the military evacuation at the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan in 2021. Crosses can be purchased by calling (352) 804-6953.

Resources: https://marionvetpark.com/





MONEY SMART TIPS

By Scott Hackmyer

TIPS AND THINGS TO DO TO HELP WITH PRICE INCREASES

This is not a political statement but just an acknowledgement of what is happening to prices. With tariffs now in effect you might have noticed some prices have gone up but what you will definitely notice is prices going up even higher on many more items in the coming weeks. A lot of stores and companies have already announced that they have no choice but to raise prices to cover these tariff costs. Many companies stocked up before the tariffs went into place so the price increases have been slow



but now that their stock is gone imported items are going to cost more. Things like fresh fruits and vegetables, coffee, furniture, appliances, cars and car repairs, shoes and sneakers and clothing will all be going up. Look at the packaging on the things you buy and if says made in China, India, Vietnam, Canada, Mexico or any other foreign country you are going to pay more. If you are on a tight budget, you need a strategy to survive these price increases. Many strategies are just the ones we have been writing about for years. Shop sales and if the sale is really good, like a Buy One Get One Free, check the expiration date and stock up with enough until you think that item will be on sale again. These items seem to follow a regular sale schedule and once you get used to it planning on how much to buy becomes much easier. Some items can be frozen to make them last longer. Use coupons, both the paper and digital kind. Most grocery stores and stores like Dollar General have digital coupons available on their websites. Just a few minutes of time will save you a surprisingly large amount of money. Pay attention to what store routinely has a lower price on items you like. I have shared my preference for Tide detergent before and have learned that Target consistently has the lowest price. Additionally, Target often offers free gift cards if you purchase two or three bottles at a time. This past week I bought three bottles that were \$12.99 per bottle, used my Target Circle card which gives me a 5% discount and then received a free \$10 gift card. If you deduct the value of the discount and the free gift card you will see my real cost for each bottle of Tide was \$9.01.

On the way home from the store I passed the gas station that usually has the cheapest price on gas around. It is a Shell station and with their free Fuel Rewards card I save 5 cents per gallon. Might not seem like much but just by signing up and then entering my phone number at the pump (or sliding the Fuel Rewards card) according to my last statement I have saved over \$337 since I got this discount card. This is real money and most gas brands offer a similar discount card program. Christmas items are going to be



HIGH-YIELD SAVINGS ACCOUNTS

another area where prices are going to be higher. Most toys are made overseas as are the clothing and shoes we already mentioned. Start looking for sales now and put those items away until December so you can capture lower prices on these items that you know you are going to buy.

If you are fortunate enough to have enough money coming in or in savings to cover these higher prices and don't struggle to pay your bills let me emphasize a little more what I touched on last month. Only do this if you aren't paying off credit card high interest bills but if you are in good financial shape pay yourself every month for large

yearly bills that you know are coming. I put money into a no fee High Yield Savings Account every month to cover future car and homeowners' insurance bills, property tax

bills and projected income tax bills. I also save \$200 a month for my next car purchase. If I wait five years to buy a new car this \$200 a month will give me a nice \$12,000 down payment plus the value of my trade when I go to make my next purchase.

A heads up. Look for great sales around Labor Day. Items that are traditionally marked down include mattresses, appliances, clothing, back to school items and season ending items like patio furniture and grills.



Business Spotlight



Business Name: Future Scholars Academy Inc.

No. of Employees: 6

Business Owners: Cassandra Christie

and Shavonda Grimes

Business Address: 5854 S.E. 5th St., Suite 7

Business Phone: (352) 694-3115

What Year Did You Start Your Business? 2018

Hours of Operation: 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday; Closed Saturday and Sunday

Products and/or Services: Before and after care, VPK, summer care for ages one to five years old.

E-mail Address:

futurescholarsacademyinc@gmail.com

Website Address: N/A

Are You on Social Media? Yes

If yes, on what platforms?

Facebook: Future Scholars Academy Inc.

What or Who Inspired You to Start Your Business?

Our inspiration comes from both personal experiences and a shared passion for early childhood education. Cassandra Christie began her career with a degree in Elementary Education, teaching first in a prison setting with adult and youth offenders. After witnessing the cycle of release and reoffending, she felt called to shift her focus to "boots on the ground" in elementary schools, where early intervention could truly change lives. She taught in public schools for six years, but after the passing of her father in 2018, she and her co-founder, Shavonda Grimes, signed the lease for their preschool, turning grief into purpose. By 2022, Cassandra transitioned full-time into the preschool after seeing the growing need in the community for strong early education and supportive care. Shavonda's journey began over 15 years ago, when she opened a home daycare so she could educate her own children at home. Her passion for teaching and helping her community quickly grew, leading her to open her own center. Together, we realized our shared belief: that a strong foundation in early learning is essential, and every child deserves a village invested in their growth.

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

The way we combine a professional, high-quality program with the warmth of a close-knit family. Although our licensed capacity is 45 students, we pride ourselves on knowing every parent by name and treating each family as our own. Our relationships don't end when children age out of our program. Many families continue to reach out for tutoring, academic advice and support throughout their child's school years. We are more than a preschool; we are a community hub where education, family and genuine care come together.

What Advice Would You Give Someone Starting a Business?

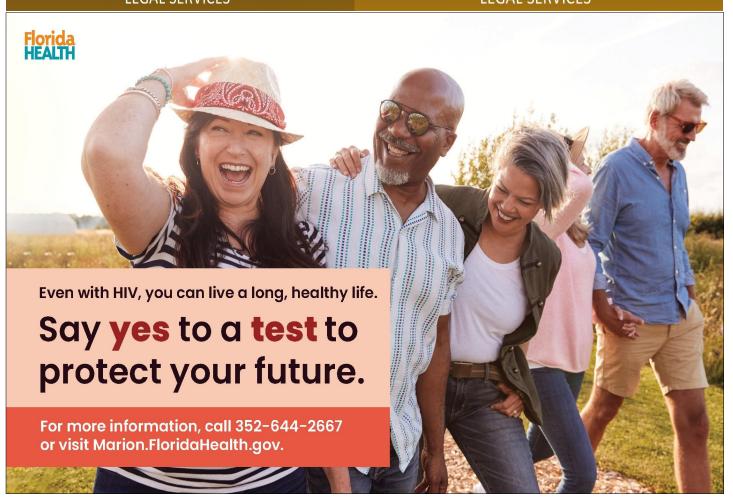
What seems impossible, is always possible with God.

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.

THINGS THAT ARE GOOD TO KNOW!





MCFR LAUNCHES FIRST RESPONDER ACADEMY

Marion County Fire Rescue (MCFR) recently launched a First Responder Academy, an innovative program, designed exclusively for high school seniors interested in a career in public safety.

Throughout their senior year, students enrolled in the academy will complete the **Firefighter I training curriculum and certification**. Upon graduation and successful completion of the program, each student will be hired by MCFR and continue their education with **Firefighter II and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training**, officially beginning their careers in public safety immediately after high school.

This exciting new initiative builds on the foundation of the former Career Academy program, previously offered through Marion Technical College and Marion County Public Schools. With the First Responder Academy, MCFR continues that legacy, providing high school students with the opportunity to pursue a career in public safety while completing their senior year.

Learn more about all Marion County Fire Rescue programs at www.MarionFl.org/MCFR.





First Baptist Church Weirsdale opened a Clothing Closet, Essentials and Food Program recently.

To receive services, you must call or text to schedule an appointment. Walk-Ins are

available but very limited due to scheduled appointments.

The service is free, but you must live in Marion County.

You will be able to visit twice a month for yourself or your family, but food is based on availability.

The program is scheduled to be open the 2nd and 4th week of each month on Tuesdays and Fridays, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Call or text Vanessa at (352) 430-7302 to get on the schedule!





First Friday Family Law Forms Review Clinic

Marion County



Have you completed your own forms for Divorce, Child Support, Child Support Modification, Paternity, Name Change, or some other family law matter?

Would you like an attorney to review your forms before filing them?

Not sure what forms you need to file?

Occurs the first Friday of each month 1:00PM - 3:00PM

Marion County Courthouse
Law Library
110 N.W. 1st Ave. Ocala, FL 34475

Register: https://bit.ly/2MLv7Sb



or call 1-800-405-1417





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

Saturday October 111, 2025

WEAR YOUR WINGS 5K FUN RUN/WALK

Proceeds benefit victims and survivors of domestic violence

College of Central Florida 3001 S.W. College Rd Ocala, FL 34474





\$30/ Early Rate Through 9/5 \$35/ Late Registration 9/6 - 10/10 \$40/ Day of Race Registration Ask About Becoming a Sponsor



7 a.m. Registration & Packet Pickup
7:30 a.m. Pre-Race Celebration Begins
8 a.m. Fun Run/Walk Race Begins

Shirts guaranteed to the first 150 registrants
Medals guaranteed to the first 150 finishers
Awards for top three male/female finishers in each age group





-an equal opportunity college-

