



MEMORIAL DAY: HONORING THOSE WHO MADE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE



See Story on Page 9

In this issue:

Katie Holt: Giving Her Flowers While She Can Smell Them

When Everyday Feels Like Memorial Day: A Mother's Love Endures Forever

Vetcon Construction: Building Homes for Veterans

Speak Power Over Your Circumstances to Change Your Life!

Let's Talk Tech

Marion County Public Schools will be giving away FREE ECF Chromebooks (while supplies last) to all K-12 students enrolled in an MCPS school who has **NOT** already checked out one on Saturday, May 8, 2023, 9 a.m. to noon
Dunnellon High School,
10055 S.W. 180th Ave. Rd., Dunnellon

Students who checked out a Chromebook from their school earlier this year or received one at the event in April; Pre-K/K/VPK students; or students attending or charter schools are **NOT** eligible.

The ECF Consent Form must be completed and turned in at the event. Please visit www.marionschools.net for the information you will be required to bring.

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

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

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The opinions expressed in this
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or Towntalkmagazine.org**

EDITOR'S DESK



It's hard to believe that this month we are celebrating the second anniversary of Town Talk Magazine! I guess time really does fly when you're having fun.

When we started this publication, our goal was and still is to tell those stories we always wanted to tell; connect people with available resources that can improve their lives; share in formation; get people more engaged in their community; and document our history to pass on to future generations.

Although we don't do this for the recognition, we sincerely thank the NAACP 5114 Marion County Branch for awarding us the Positive Social Awareness Award at the 41st Freedom Fund and Awards Banquet held on April 28. It's truly an honor. We congratulate the other award winners too.



Positive Social Awareness
Cynthia Graham & Monica Bryant



Community Service Uplift
Ocala Alumnae Chapter
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.



NAACP President's Award
Loretha Tolbert-Rich

Jerriel Bazile, owner of Blue Highway and J. Rocks Pizzeria, received the Minority Business Award.

There's so much happening in our community that we need to make an extra effort to make sure our brothers and sisters are doing Okay. It's easy to let the pressures of life get us down, but the goal is not to let those weights keep us down. May is Mental Health Awareness Month, which is dedicated to raising awareness about the struggles we face when it comes to our mental health.

We need to be able to open up and have genuine conversations about the issues that affect us without being judged or stigmatized. Children aren't the only ones who sometimes need a time-out! It's amazing what 10-15 minutes of quiet, uninterrupted time with no phone, no notifications and no interruptions can do. If you're struggling, find someone to talk to. NAMI, National Alliance on Mental Illness is a good place to start if you are in crisis, need resources or a support group. For more information, call **(352) 368-2405**, send email to **info@namiocala.org** or visit their website at **https://namimarioncountyfl.org**.

Symphony Under the Stars is a good way to relax and unwind. The Fine Arts for Ocala's Mother's Day tradition will be held on Sunday, May 14, at the Ocala Golf Club, 3130 E. Silver Springs Blvd. Gates open at 3 p.m. The opening act starts at 5 p.m. and the Ocala Symphony Orchestra performs at 7 p.m. The fireworks show starts at approximately 8:45 p.m. You can bring your own food and beverages or purchase from vendors. Beer and wine will be sold by the Golf Club.

Tickets purchased online cost \$20 for adults 18 years and older. If purchased at the gate, tickets cost \$25. Kids are free. For tickets, go to **https://www.eventbrite.com/e/fafos-symphony-under-the-stars-tickets-513054839837?aff=ebdsoporgprofile**.

We hope you will continue this journey with us. We've met a lot of interesting people along the way who are doing great things in our community. Thank you for the support these past two years. We couldn't do it without you! Town Talk is not about us, it's about our community. We hope to continue bringing not only people, but our community together! The best part is, it's free to connect with us and receive a free copy via email. If you have ideas for future stories, want to share news about an event, have comments or suggestions on what we can do better or want to support our efforts, we want to hear from you.

Let's Talk!

Monica

Monica T. Bryant, Editor

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COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

KATIE HOLT: GIVING HER FLOWERS WHILE SHE CAN SMELL THEM!

The first words out of Katie Holt's mouth as she walked into the room at the Mary Sue Rich Community Center at Reed Place last month and the room full of people started clapping and calling her name was: "Oh my goodness. I am just lost for words," she said. "Wow! I'm in shock. How did everybody do this? How you got these folks here?"

Selestine Washington Poole said she noticed that no one had ever done anything for Holt, who started volunteering as an aerobics instructor at Lillian Bryant Recreation Center in 1995. Since Volunteer Appreciation Week happens during April, which is National Volunteer Month designed to celebrate the impact volunteers have on our lives and recognizes the contributions and dedication of unsung heroes like Katie Holt, Poole decided it was time to do something, so she got help from others, she calls her Possee, to organize the event. Holt received flowers and cards from attendees and cake, light refreshments and snacks were provided.

"This is well overdue! I think it was long overdue. We should honor our volunteers," Poole said. She takes her time out three days a week, anywhere from four hours a day. That's a lot of volunteer hours."

Although Holt seemed to be at a loss for words, several of the 50 family, friends and others from her aerobics class gathered inside the Center on April 3, to honor her for her 28 years of volunteer service, had plenty to say.

Poole kicked off the event by reading a Recognition Letter by City of Ocala Mayor Kent Guinn, who wrote that the foundation stones for balanced success are honesty, character, integrity and service. Katie embodies them all. In his letter, Guinn said Katie has given herself selflessly by volunteering as an aerobics instructor. From 1995 to 2009 at the Lillian Bryant Center; from 2009 to present at the Barbara Washington Senior Center; and since January 2023, at the Mary Sue Rich Community Center. He said it is well known that exercise is great for mental and physical health, and without missing a beat, Katie is always ready to lead her group in exercise, helping them meet their fitness goals. Holt also received a Proclamation at the City Council meeting on April 4.

"I appreciate everyone supporting her. She has a very supportive family," said Teresa Croskey, Holt's first niece.

Holt's husband Willie said he thought of two words when trying to give a description of his wife of nearly 46 years, who he called his better half. He said those of you who watch football notice when a quarterback throw a touch down pass often times the key player, the player that makes the key block is not seen. When that running back runs a touchdown the person that made that key block is often times not seen. Key block are the two words he used to describe his wife.

"She has made key blocks in her home, in her church and in her community that allow them to go from victory, unto victory unto victory," he said.

Holt's great nephew, Dennis Lane, said he's proud of his aunt Katie and he said he loved her. Patricia Shelton met Holt 26 years ago when she joined the class at the Lillian Bryant Center, She said Holt birthed two children but God has given her many more, she probably has hundreds and she is one of them. Shelton said when she was sick with Covid last year, Holt was there.

"She checked on me all the time. She prayed for me. She prays for everyone that needs it," said Shelton, who used the letters in Holt's name to describe her.

"I just love her to death. She should have been in my life along time ago," said Debra Summers, the baby of the bunch, who joined a few months ago. "She is so sweet, just the sweetest person and I just love her. I can't wait to Monday, Wednesday and Friday."

When the class closed at Lillian Bryant, Grace Huffman, recreation leader for the Barbara Washington Senior Center, reached out to Holt's sister-in-law to see if she would teach the class there. The answer was Oh yeah. she'll be there. Huffman said Ms. Katie has been there for 14 years.

"I thank her because the class is growing. It started out small, went to medium and then it got too big and we had to have two classes," Huffman said. "I thank you Miss Katie."

Preserves is one word Willie Holt said he would use to describe his wife. Those of you who know how to cook preserves, if you make preserves correctly, mix it 50/50 and cook it as long as you're suppose to cook it, it never spoils. If you keep it long enough, it might turn to sugar.



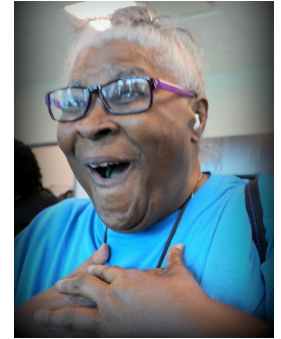
Katie Holt receives Proclamation from the City of Ocala

"The longer I keep her, the sweeter she gets," he said.

Holt said she was very humbled by the recognition because she had no idea and really believed it when they told her they were having a meeting in the room. She said she tells people that their class is family. We're family and my family has grown now it's a whole lot bigger. Our family is close, we share personal. We pray for each other, we cry with each other and laugh with each other.

"I tell you this is a moment ... it's hard to really think of anything to say," Holt said. "I am just overwhelmed by all the love today. I just had no idea.

"I'm just thankful the Lord allows me to do what I do," she said.



Katie Holt

*Motto
shared by Willie Holt*

*Once a task begun,
Never quit it until it is done
Be the labor, large or small,
Do it well or not at all!*

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.

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PARTIAL CLOSINGS AT THE DOWNTOWN PARKING GARAGE

Due to scheduled maintenance, the downtown parking garage, 296 Broadway St., will experience partial closures beginning Monday, April 24, through Friday, June 2. During this time, the parking garage will undergo extensive deep cleaning and restriping. The garage will resume regular parking operations Saturday, June 3.



Signs will be in place indicating parking deck closures and directing guests to available parking, while restricted areas will be marked off with appropriate devices. Vehicles parked in restricted areas will be towed at the owner's expense.

During this time, visitors may utilize parking throughout the downtown area. There are approximately 160 parking meters located throughout the downtown and midtown areas. In addition to the metered parking spaces, guests may use designated on-street parking. Restricted parking spots will be enforced.

For more information, please contact the City of Ocala's Parking Division at **(352) 629-8488**.

EARLY LEARNING COALITION HOSTS FREE PARENT WORKSHOPS

The Early Learning Coalition of Marion County (ELCMC) is hosting free parenting workshops Thursdays at 6 p.m., May 4 through June 8, 2023 at the Mary Sue Rich Community Center at Reed Place, 1821 N.W. 21st Ave.



Dinner and child care is included. These free workshops use the Parents as Teachers curriculum with a focus on parents and caregivers as children's first and most influential teachers. Attendees will participate in fun activities while learning about early childhood development and ways to improve parenting practices.

Families will receive resources to help their children succeed in school and grow to realize their full potential. Plus, Marion County families who attend ALL SIX workshops will receive a \$250 gift card.

Spaces are limited. Please visit www.ELC-Marion.org/parents/success-by-6/parent-training-scheduling to register.

For assistance, contact ELCMC Success by 6 Coordinator Chrissy Vickers at **(352) 369-2315**, ext. 213, or SB6@ELC-Marion.org.

ELCMC provides families with access to quality early learning programs that nurture children's learning potential and prepare them for their educational success.

The Coalition's mission is to provide leadership and foster partnerships to optimize a quality early learning environment for our children through child care, voluntary pre-kindergarten and parent education.

For more information, call **(352) 369-2315** or visit elc-marion.org.

MCPS 2023 GRADUATION SCHEDULES

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>High School</u>	<u>Location</u>
Friday, May 19	11 a.m.	Hillcrest	Hillcrest
Saturday, May 20	8 a.m.	West Port	World Equestrian Center (WEC)
Saturday, May 20	6 p.m.	Dunnellon	WEC
Saturday, May 20	8 a.m.	Bellevue	Bellevue Stadium
Wednesday, May 24	7 p.m.	Lake Weir	Livestock Pavilion
Thursday, May 25	7 p.m.	North Marion	SE Livestock Pavilion
Friday, May 26	7 p.m.	Vanguard	SE Livestock Pavilion
Saturday, May 27	8 a.m.	Forest	WEC

GRADUATING MCPS SENIOR?

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Ocala, FL 34475

Time:
6:00 PM - 7:30 PM

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Vendors: Lady B's & TASforChrist

Saturday, June 24, 2023
4:00 P.M.
Appleton Museum of Art Auditorium
4333 E. Silver Springs Blvd.
Ocala, FL 34470

Tickets: \$25.00

Website: <https://www.eventbrite.com>



On March 31, the staff at Silver Springs State Park, family and friends attended a celebration honoring Oscar Collins for his 54 years of service at the Park.

Collins is the last of the original boat drivers that worked for Silver Springs and Paradise Park before integration in the late sixties. Among those in attendance was Roosevelt Faison, Collins' brother-in-law, who encouraged him to come work at the Springs with him and his brother David Faison.

Roosevelt retired after working for 62 years, and David retired after working for 55 years.

To purchase tickets, go to <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/gospel-explosion-2023-tickets-603872698497>

HISTORIC HOME AND GARDEN TOUR COMING SOON

The Historic Ocala Preservation Society is proud to announce their upcoming Historic Home & Garden Tour on Saturday, May 13, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Starting location is 712 E. Fort King St.

Six historic homes will be available for viewing around two of Ocala's downtown Historic Districts.

Guests will have the opportunity to purchase separate tickets (in limited quantity) for three one-hour workshops on:

- Floral arranging
- Candle-making, and
- How to create a festive charcuterie board

Workshops will be at the Bryant House alongside local vendors who will have floral arrangements and gift items on display and for sale. Food & drinks will be available for purchase at select locations.

Tickets available at [SpringHomeandGardenTour.eventbrite.com](https://www.SpringHomeandGardenTour.eventbrite.com) and in person at Your Hearts Desire, 915 E Silver Springs Blvd, Ocala FL 34470.



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Instructor: **ANN BURNETT** **5/13/23 SATURDAY** 10:00AM - 11:30AM

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A Comprehensive, Coordinated, Community-Wide Child Development Study to Stem Youth Violence

Wednesday, May 24th, 8:30am - 10:00am

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

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WHEN EVERYDAY FEELS LIKE MEMORIAL DAY

Selena Alexander will never forget her last conversation with her daughter Venus Jackson Hernandez before she got ready to leave to serve her country.

Alexander said she and Venus's husband, Jose Hernandez, were at the recruiter's office waiting for the van to leave with Venus and the other recruits who were headed to Great Lakes Illinois Naval Base. Venus wanted her mom to leave before the van pulled off because she didn't want to start crying and didn't want to see her cry.

"I told her she was going to cry anyway because of leaving her husband behind," she recalled telling her daughter. "She also told me to make sure I take care of her baby girl, to send lots of pictures, and be nice to her husband. She said I will be coming back to get all of you soon."

About 30 minutes before it was time for Venus to leave, Alexander said they hugged and told each other how much they loved one another. She left and gave her husband some time along with his wife.

It was the last time she would ever see her daughter.

Hernandez, a Foreign Language Interpreter in the U.S. Navy, died from Myocardial Infarction shortly after graduating from basic training. She was 18 years old.

"I wish I could have convinced her not to go in the military, but I did try my best," Alexander said. "It was clear to me that she was determined to go. She said she could showcase her leadership abilities, which she definitely did because she became a troop leader in a very short amount of time."

Alexander said her daughter enjoyed reading and helping others who were less fortunate. She joined the military because she wanted job stability, new experiences and she loved a challenge. Whenever she went any place, even if it was to her grandmother's house or to the store to buy a drink, she would always make sure she was matching from head to toe with whatever she put on. Even if it was as simple as a pair of shorts, the top had to match the shoes and the socks.

"Her cousins and I talk and laugh about that all the time," she said.

As our nation prepares to celebrate Memorial Day by honoring the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. military on the last Monday in May, Alexander and her family will continue their tradition to honor her daughter.

"Her daughter (Vekira Ida Spachel Hernandez, who's now 21 years old) will buy a cake shaped like a flag with her mother's name on it and invite others to go out to the grave to leave flags and flowers," she said.

The day she got the call, Alexander said she had left work early because she had a hair appointment. She got a call on her cell phone from an unknown number. She can't explain what made her answer that call because she normally doesn't answer calls she can't identify.

"The male voice identified himself as a military officer from the U.S. Navy. He said, Ms. Alexander, could you meet me at your home?"

Among other questions, the first one was how did he get her number. After confirming that he knew her daughter by providing the correct bio information, he asked her to notify her son-in-law and bring him to the house also. Although she asked if her daughter was hurt, he replied, I will see you shortly.

Alexander called the Marion County Sheriff's Office and asked for a deputy to meet her at her home since she still wasn't sure who she was meeting. She picked up her son James from school and Jose and drove home.



In Memory of Venus Hernandez

- V-** Verified lover of family and friends!
- E-** Expected respect and gave a lot!
- N-** Never-ending love was shown to many!
- U-** Unique way of viewing life and all it offered!
- S-** Strong desire to live as God wanted her to and pressed hard to do so in her own special way!

- H-** Humility was a true view of her!
- E-** Experienced a lot of highs and lows!
- R-** Realized that her life was incomplete!
- N-** Navy bound she decided to render!
- A-** A beautiful child she left for us to enjoy!
- N-** No longer here in the flesh but her precious memories linger!
- D-** Devoted daughter and mother she will be remembered to be!
- E-** Enjoyment she gave unto us in her special way!
- Z-** Zealous living she showed us and now remains within our hearts!

By Carolyn Graham

Continued on page 11

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A MOTHER'S LOVE ENDURES FOREVER

Continued from page 9

By then, Alexander was sure her daughter had somehow been hurt, and trying to explain to Venus's husband what had occurred so far wasn't easy at all.

As she drove home, she remembered her co-worker had relatives who were or had been in the military and asked her to see if she could find out what may have happened. Her co-worker called back and told her to go home, but wouldn't give her anymore details.

"I became very worried about my child at that point. When I drove in my driveway, I saw this green military car with two people dressed in uniforms sitting in it," Alexander said. "They got out and asked us to go inside the house, and the rest is history."

Since Alexander had her granddaughter, there was no time for her to grieve, and she had promised she would take good care of the baby since Venus wasn't there to do it herself. She said she was in full denial for a very long time.



Vekira dressed in her mother's wedding dress while writing in her mom's guest book

"It was easy for me to stay in denial because she wasn't here even before she passed, and it wasn't time for her to be back home even before or after her funeral," she said. "Besides, I had to be strong for all her siblings, husband and the rest of the family who were having a terrible time with what had happened."

Venus had planned to have a wedding when she returned home from basic training. Before she left, she had collected items for her ceremony with her mother, including her wedding dress. Several years after her death, Alexander decided to use her daughter's wedding items in a photo shoot with her granddaughter, Vekira.

Alexander has good and bad days, but said having her granddaughter has helped her get through many holidays and birthdays through the years. She said Mother's Day is very special to her, Vekira and Jose, who still lives in Ocala and visits his daughter periodically. He never remarried. Vekira graduates from Santa Fe College this summer.

"Venus had so many plans for her child, and she looked forward to being a mother," Alexander said. "We have a Mother's Day dinner like we do on Thanksgiving and take flowers to her grave. Her husband usually joins us on Mother's Day."



MEMORIAL DAY

★ ★ ★ REMEMBRANCE PROGRAM ★ ★ ★
"NEVER FORGET THE HONOR"



MONDAY - MAY 29, 2023 | 10 A.M.

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Tickets cost \$20. To purchase, got to <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/mothers-day-gospel-brunch-tickets-600972965317?aff=ALLEVENTS>

FOR MORE INFORMATION
PLEASE CONTACT VETERANS SERVICES AT 352-671-8422.

BUILDING HOMES FOR VETERANS

Fred Franks Jr., was following in the footsteps of his dad and his favorite aunt when he decided to serve his country. Franks, who served six years in the U.S. Navy as an Aviation Electrician, wanted to continue the family trend of joining the military.



"I needed a sense of direction, and the Navy gave me a chance to get my mind right and allowed me to mature," he said. "I worked on F-14's during my Navy time, and I enjoyed every moment while I was in."

Helping veterans find a place to live is something else he enjoys. As the owner of Vetcon Construction Services, Inc., Franks wants to build homes for veterans through a program he is launching called Building for Veterans.

"As a disabled veteran myself, I find that many veterans do not get the proper help they deserve, and what I find hard to believe is that there are not enough programs to help veterans with employment and housing," he said.

Franks wants to build 10 homes in the first year and grow from there. The goal is to help as many veterans as possible, and with Covid out the way, he said building supplies are moving at a good pace.

Each home will take approximately three to four months to build. A basic 2 bedroom 2 bathroom home will cost around \$170K; a 3 bedroom 2 bathroom will cost approximately \$225K; and a 4 bedroom 2 bathroom will cost around \$275K. Most starter homes for a single veteran will be around 1,300 sq. ft. Homes for veterans with families can range up to 2,500 sq. ft.

"For a veteran with a family, the goal is to build something that's comfortable and affordable for the family," Franks said. "So for a standard family, we plan on building a 3 bedroom 2 bathroom with a two car garage and the living area size will be around 1,700 sq. ft.

The program will initially serve veterans living in Marion, Alachua, Lake and Citrus counties. If everything goes well, they will expand the program throughout the Central Florida area.

While all veterans are eligible to apply, Disabled and retired veterans receive priority. To apply for the program, veterans can go to vetcons.com and complete the application. A representative will respond within 48 hours after the application is received. Franks said a down payment is not required, but the veteran must find the piece of land they would like the home built on. He said the lender they will use is Loan Depot.

As a licensed real estate broker, Franks said sometimes it seems many realtors do not like helping veterans with finding a home and find the process to be difficult, but if you take the time and understand the process, the VA loan is by far the easiest mortgage to get.

"Our goal here at Vetcon Construction Services, Inc., is to lead the way with helping veterans get the proper assistance they need in the housing area."

Vetcon Construction, which started in 2019, houses a team of experts with a combined 60+ years of experience in the industry. The company has built 43 homes since its beginning and employs many veterans in the fields of commercial construction and renovation, property maintenance and commercial general contractors.

For more information about Vetcon Construction or questions about the program, call (352) 575-7411 or visit vetcon.com.

Business Spotlight



Business Name: S.D Helping Hands Cleaning, LLC

No. of Employees: 3

Business Owner: Shalicia M. Donaldson

Business Address: 20 N.W. 24th Ave.
Ocala, FL 34475

Business Phone: (352) 812-6575

What Year Did You Start Your Business? 2016

Hours of Operation: 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Products and/or Services:

We specialize in commercial and residential cleaning, Airbnb's, churches, RV's, move in, move out residential condo services

Email: Sdhelpinghandscleaning@gmail.com

Website: N/A, but you can Google S.D Helping Hands Cleaning, LLC

Are you on Social Media? Yes

Facebook: S.D. Helping Hands Cleaning

Instagram: S.D. Helping Hands Cleaning

What or Who Inspired you to start your business?

I love organization and I love designing different looks, plus I love to see things clean.

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

We use different, special cleaning techniques, and we are very detailed on every cleaning process that we have.

What Advice Would You Give Someone Starting A Business?

Make sure it's something that you really love or something that you are really interested in.

No job too big or too small, here to help you with all your cleaning and rearranging needs

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.

SPEAK POWER OVER YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Thirty four years ago, an incomplete spinal injury left Claire Casseus paralyzed and feeling powerless. She realized if she was going to survive, she had to change the narrative and speak power over everything in her life. She was paralyzed from the neck down and was diagnosed with permanent total paralysis

“I fought against that, and by working on my body, I regained mobility on half of my body and part of that was speaking power over my circumstances,” she said. “Daily I spoke power to my limbs and by God’s grace, I went from paraplegic to hemiplegic.

After being robbed, Casseus said she needed to change her circumstances again because she walked away from her home because she felt like she was going to have a mental breakdown. Since she was solely dependent on Social Security, she technically became homeless with her daughter, staying with friends whenever she could.

To survive, she said she went back to what she knew and created My Power Enterprises LLC, a business and marketing company in 2017 because she was not physically able to maintain a regular job. In 2019, she became a certified life and business coach and started a nonprofit organization, Power Life Skills, Inc (PLS)., because she believed people with stronger soft skills would be more empowered. She started the organization as a summer youth program because she felt youth lacked those basic foundations. The youth group ended during the pandemic, but she plans to reboot it later this year.

Now Casseus wants to help others change their circumstances through PLS by opening Hope House, a housing initiative for people who need a place to live. She held a launch party on April 24, to introduce the community and community agencies to PLS and Hope House. The event included a tour, light refreshments and a chance to win a 3 day, 2 night Fall Airbnb Pool House Staycation.

“My target population is the un-homed and those at risk of becoming un-homed,” she said. “I know firsthand how one circumstance can quickly transition a person and even whole families from safely housed to un-homed. Likewise, I know with just a little compassion, restoration is possible.

She said opening a Hope House has been on her heart for a very long time since she went through a stretch of time where she wasn’t exactly on the streets but had to couch surf with her teenage daughter because she was unable to secure her own housing.

“To this day, I remember the feeling of hopelessness that nearly drove me to suicide. Knowing the need firsthand, I always wanted to do something to help someone else going through something similar,” said Casseus, a Broker Associate at Residential Movement Real Estate Group for the past five years.

Although she plans to create a variety of homes in the future to serve multiple populations such as seniors, veterans, youth transitioning from foster care and persons with physical disabilities, this Hope House will accommodate women in need with a maximum of two children based on availability.

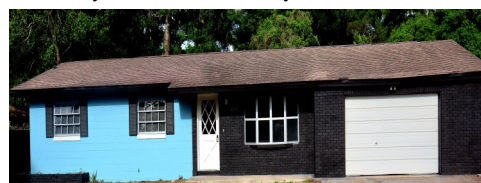
The fully renovated 1,300 sq. ft 3 bed, 2 bath home is fully furnished and currently set up to accommodate four people although they have plans to add two additional bedrooms. Amenities include utilities, a screened-in lanai, a stocked kitchen, central heat and air, a TV room, indoor laundry and a computer station with internet access. One room has a private bath and is handicap accessible and one is a shared room. Smoking is not allowed indoors and there is a zero tolerance for drugs, alcohol or violence or any kind. A background check is required, and residents will be required to sign a lease agreement, which will auto renew month to month based on compliance with the house rules. Room rates range from \$900 to \$700 per person, and first, last and security deposit is required at move in, but they will work with individuals who may have extenuating circumstances. The maximum length of stay is two years.

Residents will receive Life and Career Coaching; Group and Individual Counseling; Substance Use Counseling; Skills Development; Job Readiness Training and referrals to community resources.

Casseus said preferably individuals would come through agencies where they’ve been vetted and wouldn’t need a background check, however, if someone happens to hear about them and reaches out, they will arrange to run a background check. Credit is definitely not a criteria they factor in, she said. Ultimately as long as someone is ready to make real life changes we are ready to help.



Claire Casseus



Power Life Skills, Inc., Hope House

“I’ve always believed that there is power in having hope and with that hope, whatever your circumstances, you could find a way to overcome your challenges,” Casseus said. “Hope House is based on my desire to offer that hope to everyone who comes through the house. I’d love to see Hope Houses all across the country.”

Donations to support PLS Hope House can be made at <https://gofund.me/2a508e5f>. For more information, call Casseus at (352) 598-7202 or email Claire@plsincorp.org.

MONEY SMART

By Scott Hackmyer

SOMETIMES THE EASY WAY IS NOT THE BEST WAY

I came out of a meeting two weeks ago to discover I had a broken tail light lens on my Honda CR-V. I called Honda and discovered the part cost \$416 and learned online the labor cost would be about \$200. I then called a collision body shop and they said they could make the repair for \$410. I finally bought the part online at AutoZone for \$167 with free shipping to my home. Meineke installed the part for \$24.95 in four minutes. I ended up saving about \$200 from what the collision shop would have charged and about \$400 from what Honda would have charged. The point is there might be a BETTER WAY. You don't have to just accept what you are told something will cost but comparison shop and look for other solutions before spending your money. A few more examples. My vet prescribed a prescription for my dog which they would fill for \$22. I asked for a paper prescription instead, looked at GoodRx online (they do pet prescription discounts as well as people prescription discounts) and ended up getting the pills at WalMart for \$6.82. Amazingly, that wasn't even a GoodRx price, that was their regular price for that drug.

A friend of mine recently had to start taking medicine to control his blood sugar level. The price for the prescription was an astonishing \$558 for one month which he could not afford. He called the doctor and asked if there was an option and the doctor wrote a different prescription which the doctor and pharmacist said would work just as well. This was still expensive at just over \$300 but was a three month supply which was about \$450 a month less than the first script. Not sure why the doctor didn't just start with this more affordable medicine but if the cost of something just doesn't seem right don't be afraid to question it. There might indeed be a better way.

My favorite play of the week. My wife likes Triscuit crackers. They are normally \$3.89 a box at Publix. They were on sale for \$3 a box but Publix had a digital coupon good for \$1 off two boxes. I encourage you to download the Publix app and punch your phone number in when you check out at Publix. Look at their digital coupons and "clip" what you want before you go. With my \$1 coupon this made my crackers \$2.50 a box. Then I used a charge card that I have that this quarter gives you 5% back at grocery stores. With this rebate the real cost of my box of crackers became \$2.38. A small victory but when you get in the habit of doing things like this it takes very little time and the savings do add up.

I tell you almost monthly that people want to steal your money. Another risk to watch for is Check Washers. Check Washers use a liquid chemical to take all the ink off of a check you have written except for the signature. They then write in a new name that the check is payable to and a new amount and cash it at the bank. To avoid this AARP offers six things you can do to stop these check washers. 1) Pay your bills online. The payment systems for paying your bills and your bank account are encrypted so this is a much safer way to pay as opposed to sending a check in the mail. 2) If you have to mail a check, don't leave it in your mailbox with the flag up. Don't even leave it in one of the Blue Mail Collection Boxes you see at shopping centers or by the side of the road if it is after the day's pick up time. Thieves have figured out how to get letters out of these collection boxes and your own mailbox is an easy target. 3) Use a pen with blue or black non-erasable gel ink. Gel ink is much harder to "wash" off of a check. 4) Don't let delivered mail sit in your mailbox. Get your mail as soon as possible after it is delivered. If you are going out of town ask a neighbor to get it for you or have the post office hold it. 5) Look at your bank account every few days and check the withdrawals and payments. Don't just wait for the end of the month statement. 6) Report to your bank as soon as possible once you notice suspicious activity. There is a time limit to the protection you may have.



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\$20 Per Person

You can purchase your meal ticket on Act Blue
<https://secure.actblue.com/donate/democratic-women-s-club-of-marion-county-2>

Saturday, May 6, 2023 11am - 2pm

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT dwcmpres2016@gmail.com

W.H. Willoughby Park
 14005 SE 100th Ave, Summerfield, FL 34491

Please Bring a Comfortable Chair

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INDOOR PLAYGROUND CLOSED FOR NOW

Effective immediately, the indoor playground located inside the Mary Sue Rich Community Center at Reed Place, 1821 NW 21st Ave., will be closed for maintenance to allow staff to replace the safety netting around the play area. The playground will be closed until further notice.



For a list of other city playgrounds that can be utilized during this period, please visit <https://www.ocalaf1.org/government/city-departments-i-z/recreation-parks/parks>

For more information, please call the City of Ocala Recreation and Parks Department at **(352) 368-5517**.

Humanists of North Central Florida
2023-24 Student Scholarship Application: Awards up to \$1,500

[www.http://Humanistsncfl.org](http://Humanistsncfl.org).

The Humanists of North Central Florida is an organization that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively. Humanists support reason and intellectual freedom, compassion, and concern for each other, and the planet we call home.

To qualify a student must be committed to pursuing formal education beyond high school. The application must be received by midnight **June 30, 2023**. Email to humanistsncfl@gmail.com or mail to Scholarship Committee, 8878 SW 86th Loop, Ocala, FL 34481-9800

Full Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

_____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Full name of the school where you are currently enrolled or from which you graduated and date of graduation.

Are you a full-time student? Yes No

Please be specific and thorough (minimum 100 words each) in answering the following scholarship questions.

- A. Tell us about yourself: What are your educational, career, and life goals?
- B. Who and/or what influenced you in deciding on your career path, and life goals?
- C. What are the obstacles you have to overcome to achieve your goals?
- D. In what community service areas have you been active? Why are these activities important to you? How much time each week do you spend on these activities?

The first clause in the Bill of Rights states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.”

E. In approximately 500 words please elaborate on the positives and negatives in the interpretation of the first clause of the Bill of Rights.

F. Attach two letters of recommendation from non-relatives, one discussing your merit as a student and the other one addressing your current and potential contributions to the community.

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JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION

SAVE THE DATE
June 3, 2023

Juneteenth Emancipation Celebration
 Empowering Freedom Forward

Juneteenth Celebration Dinner & Dance Fundraiser
Saturday, June 3, 2023
6:30pm-10:30pm

One Health Center, 1714 SW 17th Street, Ocala, FL 34471

Dinner, Live Entertainment, DJ, Dancing,
 Spoken Word, Raffles, Silent Auction, Vendors
 and more...

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

R.A.M.A.L. Educational and Social Services, Inc. a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

SAVE THE DATE

The Ocala Juneteenth
 Celebration Commission

JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION

Saturday, June 17, 2023
10am to 3pm

Webb Field
1501 W. Silver Springs Blvd. - Ocala, FL 34475

For more information, email
ocalajuneteenth2020@gmail.com

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- April 21 | SambaDá
- April 28 | Bassel & the Supernaturals
- May 5 | Hartem Gospel Travelers
- May 12 | Shayna Steele
- May 19 | The Malpass Brothers
- June 2 | Chris Pierce
- June 9 | Vox Sambou
- June 16 | Yusa
Kicking off Juneteenth Celebration weekend
- June 23 | Shamarr Allen

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 Dances by:
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Ticket admission \$50

Sponsorship packages available
 Entertainment By: DJ Tony, Dothan, AL
 FREE GIVEAWAYS
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Friday June 16, 2023
6:00pm -11:30pm

Mary Sue Rich Community Center at Reeds Place
 1821 NW 21st Ave. Ocala, FL 34475
 NO ALCOHOL ALLOWED