

life in natural florida

# CURRENTS

magazine

VOLUME 17 ISSUE 3  
SUMMER 2023 • PRICELESS

## *All Fired Up*

Audrey Felknor eyes  
the international  
twirling stage

Jeffrey A. Moore's  
art, aviary, jewelry  
make him a  
renaissance man

Bethel United  
Methodist  
celebrates 200 years  
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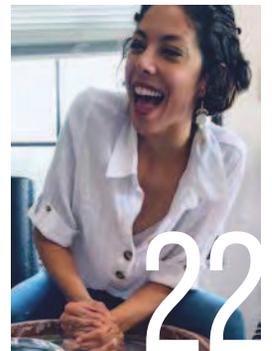
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COVER STORY



**On The Cover:** Recent Suwannee High School graduate Audrey Felknor is ready to compete at the world championships for twirling.

PHOTO COURTESY OF Behold Photography by Lori



# Letter

## From the Editor

### Fire up your creativity

From Live Oak twirler Audrey Felknor to Distinguished Friend Genie Norman and everyone in between, the summer heat has nothing on the fiery passion our Currents subjects show.

While Felknor is just a recent Suwannee High graduate, she has jumped headfirst into chasing her dream of performing on some of the world's biggest stages, all the while twirling a baton and trying not to get burned. That goal and hard work and determination, combined with some natural athletic ability too, will carry Felknor to England in August for the world championships before she returns to North Florida and heads to 'The Swamp' as a Gatorette this fall.

Just like Felknor expresses herself in front of fans at a football game or judges at a competition, Leanna Beartree has found her mark in creating works of art through pottery at her downtown Lake City gallery. Her passion also has also provided healing as she is able to remember and memorialize her mother through some of her work.

Fredrick Vandyck is also a creator and a bit of an artist, although in an entirely different set of tools. Vandyck's masterpieces are produced with a welding rod and horseshoes, producing one-of-a-

kind signs for businesses and individuals alike.

But there may be nobody more creative than Jeffrey A. Moore, who just moved to Lake City last fall but is already making a difference in the art community here. Whether it's painting or producing jewelry or baking a cake or creating a resin tray, Moore craves to let his creative juices flow and does so in a wide variety of ways.

Norman's passion, for years, has been bettering the community. That desire to make Columbia County — and the rest of North Florida — better has meant sitting on the board for The Foundation for Florida Gateway College and raising funds for the college and educational opportunities for our youth.

So take some time on a hot summer day to read about the passion on display here in Natural Florida and ignite your own creativity and find a way to best express yourself.



**Jamie Wachter**

Jamie Wachter | Editor

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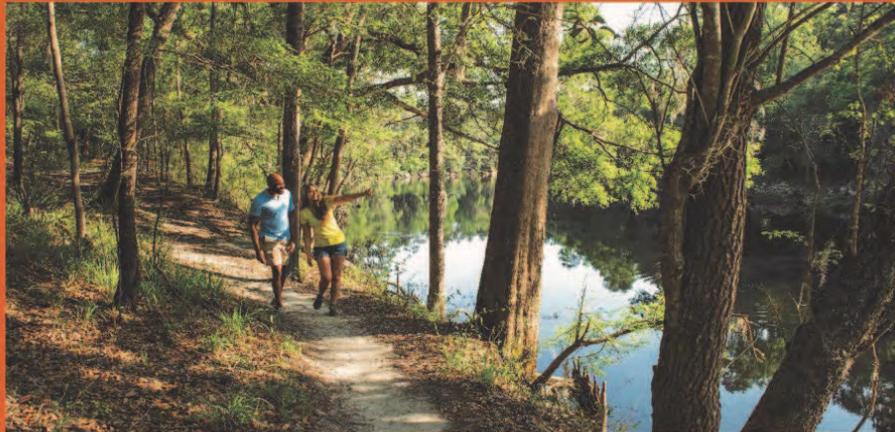
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# BETHEL'S BICENTENNIAL

200 years of faith and service under  
the Florida sun

By CHRISTOPHER ESING

**B**ethel United Methodist is believed to be the oldest church in Columbia County having been first organized in 1823. During its early years, services were held at members' homes until 1832 when the first church sanctuary was built two miles northeast of its current location on the banks of Alligator Lake. Abraham Isaac and Ann Andrew Robarts are thought to be the progenitors of the original Bethel congregation. Abraham was the son of John Robarts, who was the first subscriber for the Old Midway Methodist Church in Liberty County, Georgia, in 1854. Having been raised in the faith, Abraham and Ann were devout Methodists who followed Circuit Riders into what would become Columbia County. Many of the Circuit preachers from Georgia who ministered in Florida first stopped at the Old Midway Church before leaving for Florida on horseback. Abraham and Ann, along with other Methodists from South Carolina and Georgia, came with the preachers through the Wiregrass moving into Florida and gathering together to found the first congregations in the state. Among the early circuit riders of the area was Rev. John L. Jerry. He was admitted into the Georgia Conference

in 1818 and sent soon after into the Florida territory. His journeys brought him to Alligator, and he is the first recorded pastor at Bethel.

The first convert of the church was Zachariah Randall Robarts, who was accepted in 1824 upon his profession of faith to Rev. Jerry. According to family records, Zachariah had become sick and dependent upon his family. Wishing to no longer be a burden to his loved ones, he turned to the Bible and was miraculously healed after continuously reading scripture. Having felt the power of God, Zachariah joined Bethel and was instrumental in helping to grow the church and built the original log sanctuary. Mrs. Martha Perry, who attended the log church, described the building as being a small cabin located on Alligator Lake. The pulpit and floor were made of logs split in halves and pegs were put in half logs for seats. The old graveyard was located next to the church under a canopy of sprawling oaks and was considered the oldest cemetery in Columbia County. The original church was blown down in a hurricane in 1896 and the cemetery was destroyed by real estate developers during the Florida Land Boom in 1925.

Bethel Church at the turn of the century before the front porch was added. Notice the tables for dinner on the ground.



The original log cabin church on Alligator Lake.

While there are no charter documents for the church, several families are listed as founding members for Bethel including Abram Isaac and Ann Andrew Robarts, Langley and Mary Bryant, William and Devine Tyson Niblack, S.L. Sparkman, James Bryant, John S. and Charity Crews Goodbread, Charles H.B. and Ann Mary Robarts Collins, Zachariah Randall and Mary Vinzant Hancock Robarts, Arthur and Rebecca Bryant Robarts, and Elijah Mattox. Other families that joined later included the Cox, Goolsby, Pritchard, Price, Henry, Hunter, Perry, and Fife families. A list of early converts to the church included Harriet Sparkman Niblack (wife of William Tyson Niblack), received in 1829; Mary A. Robarts (wife of George Washington Robarts), received by baptism in 1830; Mary A. (Weatherington) Bryant, who professed her faith in 1840; and Capt. Arthur Roberts, received in 1840 with an article of faith. Church records also note that Tuestenuggee Methodist Church was first organized in the home of Bethel member Charles H.B. Collins in 1846.

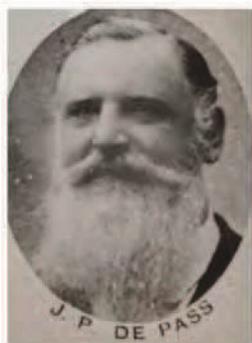
Few details remain of the earliest activities at Bethel, but Rev. Isaac Boring's diaries provide one of the rare chronicles of preaching in Columbia County in the early 19th century. Boring records that he arrived in the area on August 15, 1829, while traveling on his circuit. He crossed the Santa Fe River by raft and headed toward Rocky Creek where he preached at settlements along the way. He writes that he had made an appointment with Brother Roberts

for a two-day meeting/revival to be held at Alligator. Another early account of the Alligator congregation notes that Abraham and Ann Robarts were visited by her brother, Bishop Osgood Andrew, in 1832, and during his stay, he baptized several of the Robarts children including William Henry Fitzgerald, John C.C., and George Robarts. Church documents also record that Mortimer Bingley Collins, son of Charles H.B. and Ann Mary Robarts Collins, was born at Fort Lancaster in August 1836 in the midst of an Indian attack during the Seminole Wars. Stories handed down from church members note that during the years of hostilities with the Seminoles, men stood guard during church services and that children climbed the surrounding tree tops searching for any sign of Indian activity during meetings.

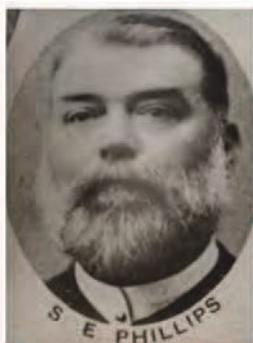
“After Florida became a state in 1845, the congregation outgrew the church on Alligator Lake. At the time, the Old Newnansville Road was built between Alligator and Alachua County. It ran into what was later Alachua St. as one entered into Alligator Town. The road eventually became Highway No. 2/441. Because of the traffic along the road, the congregation decided to move to a new location in hopes of increasing membership.”

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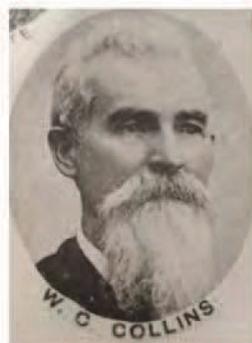
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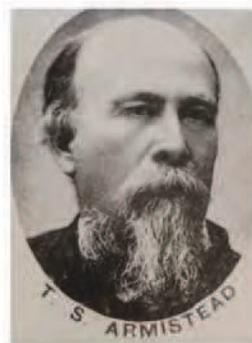
**James P. DePass - 1870**



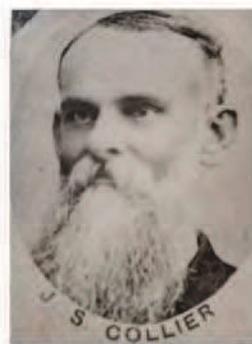
**Samuel E. Phillips - 1873**



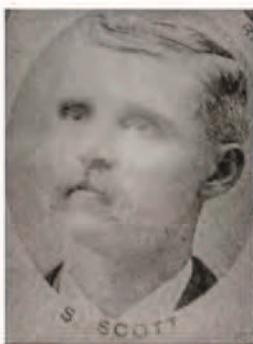
**W.C. Collins - 1878**



**T. S. Armistead - 1883**



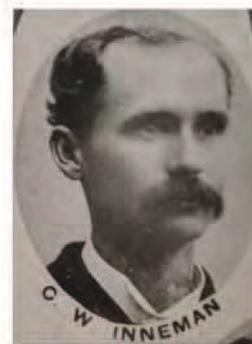
**Julius S. Collier - 1885**



**Samuel Scott - 1892**



**T.J. Phillips - 1894**



**Charles W. Innman- 1894**

**Former Pastors of Bethel**

Some of the early pastors of Bethel United Methodist Church.

George E. Mattox and Sarah M Cox were the first new members to join the church in 1857. The cemetery was created in 1862 after Lt. Thomas Strange was killed during the Civil War and became the first person to be buried there. He was followed by Wright B. Cox who died in battle in the same year. Other soldiers soon followed including several members of the Hunter family. Nathan Hunter II died in 1864 after being wounded at the Battle of St. Mary's Bridge. He was buried at the Frazier home nearby, but his father, John Cureton Hunter, went to retrieve the body to be buried at Bethel. On the trip, he caught pneumonia and soon after succumbed to his illness. John Hunter's eldest son, Thompson Young Hunter, died the following year in 1865. Sorrow descended upon the families of many church members. Four Robarts men died during the war including Abraham Isaac Robarts in 1861, George Washington Robarts Jr. in 1863 at Missionary Ridge, Thomas Langley Robarts at Rock Island Prison in 1864, and 15-year-old Charles Edwin Robarts died in 1864 while tending to his grieving mother. John C. Hill, the youngest son of Dr. J.H. Hill, also died and was buried at Bethel while his father was away.

Following the war, Rebecca Bryant Goolsby, wife of Charles H. Goolsby and a descendant of the original land owners, was interred in 1866.

The oldest person to be buried in the cemetery was Stephen Sparkman who was born in 1782 and died in 1872. The second oldest person was Sarah Hull Bryant who was born in 1787 and died in 1867. Because of the number of losses during the war, Mary Ann Worthington Bryant planted a magnolia tree to provide shade and beauty for visitors to the gravesides. It grew tall for over a century becoming one of the landmarks of the cemetery grounds. Captain Arthur Roberts also planted the four cedar trees in the cemetery as memorials "with humble thanks and praise for God's blessings, church, family, friends, neighbors, and soldiers." The cemetery was expanded in 1871 when Stephen Sparkman donated two acres of land. More land was added in 1919 when J.C. and Delia Geiger donated two acres, and Walter W. Davis deeded another acre in 1939. Families initially took care of the cemetery, but at the turn of the century, Robert H. Hadden cared for the property until he was unable. Then his daughter Mary and her husband Raymond Bedenbaugh tended to the cemetery along with their children. Later a fund was established through donations for the continual upkeep of the Bethel Cemetery.

Over the years, Bethel has accepted more than 825 members into the church and congregation, 180 of those converts were brought into the fold over the 19th Century. Another 480 members



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Rev. William Henry Fitzpatrick Robarts, born in Columbia County, is pictured with wife Rosanna Gunnin Robarts and children, William, Annie and John. Rev. Robarts is the only former preacher buried at Bethel.

joined Bethel in the 20th Century, and 120 have been added since the turn of the millennium. Throughout this period, Bethel evolved with the times. Electric lights were added in 1938 allowing the church to forego kerosene lanterns for their nighttime services. The front portico and steps were built in 1940. The inside of the church was painted for the first time in 1943 under the ministry of Brother Toole. A metal shingle roof was added in 1954 and the inside painted a soft shade of green under Rev. Ernest B. Luttrell. The Sunday School rooms were built in the 1950s. The Fellowship Hall was added in the 1980s. The old church pews were replaced with new ones in 1982. Henry and Dorothy N. Jones donated land for the Bethel Church Parsonage in 1989. A church sports pavilion was added in 1993. The church erected the first Florida State Historic Marker for Columbia County in 1994. The first audio-sound system was placed in the church and fellowship hall in 1996, and an outdoor cemetery directory was added in 1997 mapping all of the graves.

What has made Bethel a special place over the years are the people who helped establish a rich heritage of faith and a loving and accepting home within the church. Church historian and

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member Aleen M. Havrid noted in her research that “the pioneers of this community were blessed with God’s love and guidance in making Bethel Church a house of worship that has provided unbroken service for almost two centuries. Traditionally, the religious service at Bethel has been unchanged from generation to generation. All day service was the custom with a dinner spread, friends and neighbors all partaking — spirits and bodies fed, they came in joy, came in sorrow, seeking strength and grace. Whatever the need, it was found in this hallowed place.” In addition to researching the early records



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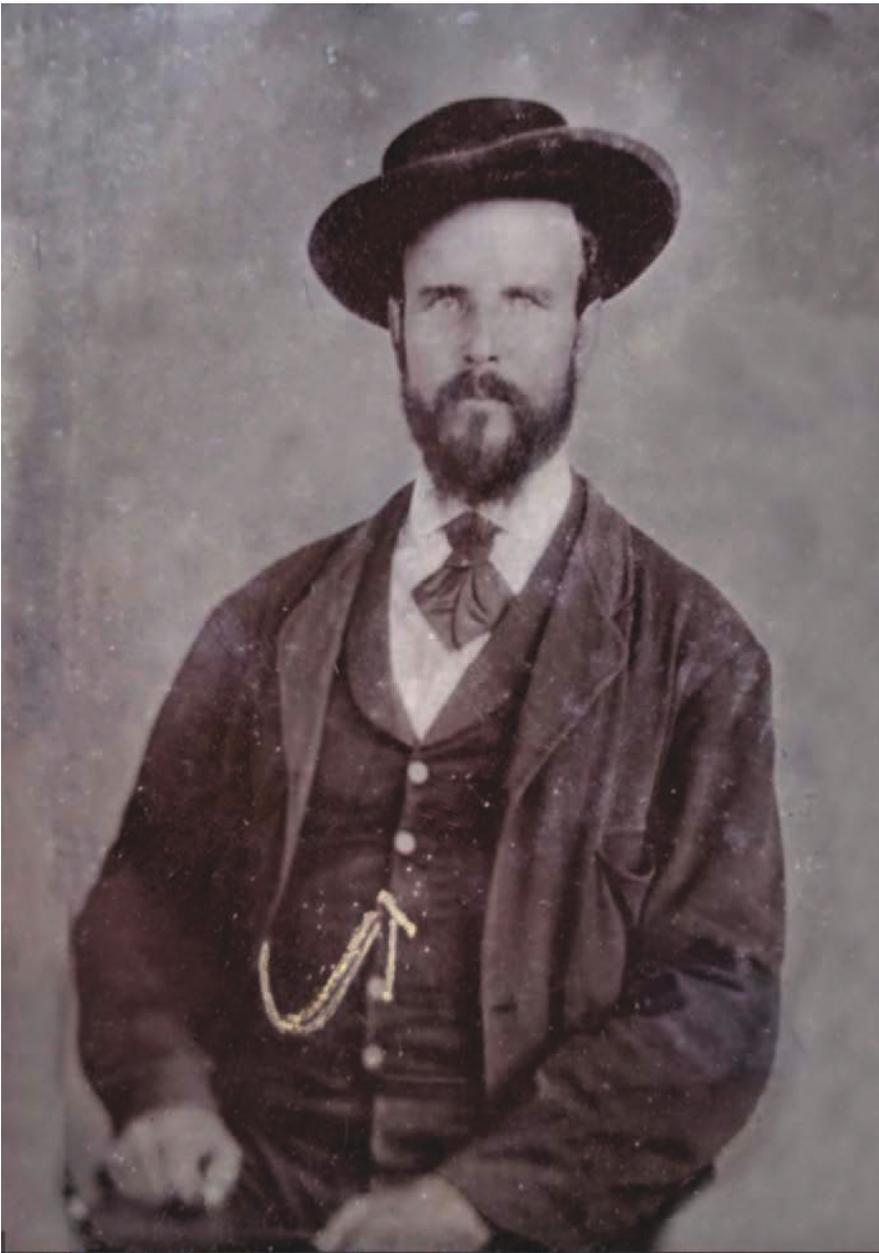
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Zacariah Randall Robarts was the first convert of Bethel United Methodist Church.

of the church, Havrid worked to collect the memories of many of Bethel's members over the years, and those reflections offer a glimpse into the social and religious fabric of the church and its congregation.

One such member was Marjorie Jones Rutledge. When looking back at her time in the church, she recalled "I have been in Bethel off and on all of my life, and as a child growing up, we went to Bethel, Bethlehem, Hopeful, and Roundtop Presbyterian. Churches would meet once or twice a month, and we would go to the ones having service. I remember as a child, we kids would walk the mile on Sunday afternoon for Sunday School. Our parents gave us a choice of going to

church or staying home, and of course, to church we went. We always looked forward to Homecoming on the 3rd Sunday in October. Everyone did a lot of work to clean the church and the cemetery to make it look good. Back then, no one had lawnmowers, and we would hoe and rake the sand to get the weeds and grass out. It always looked real nice when we finished. I remember the wagon days and dinner outside under the trees. We always had a great group and plenty of food — such good fellowship. We would stay all afternoon sometimes and have a sing. We used to make a wood keg or tub of lemonade. Now, they would think it would kill us to drink out of a wash tub, but oh boy — how good it

was, hard to get enough. Times have changed. We have a wonderful church, padded seats. Then we had hard seat benches and a pot belly heater. Now we have lights, a/c, running water, beautiful social hall, well equipped kitchen, and have wonderful times. We have come a long way, but the good old days bring back so many fond memories."

"I remember as a child, we kids would walk the mile on Sunday afternoon for Sunday School. Our parents gave us a choice of going to church or staying home, and of course, to church we went. We always looked forward to Homecoming on the 3rd Sunday in October. Everyone did a lot of work to clean the church and the cemetery to make it look good."

Lena Bedenbaugh Burnsed also offered her recollections of being raised in the church. She noted "Bethel is the most precious place on earth to me. Mama and Daddy took all 13 of us children to Bethel every time the door was open. Our home was always open to the preachers. Brother Nease would spend the night with us on Saturday night. He didn't eat fried chicken, but he ate cold biscuits. He took a nap on the front porch on the floor. One Sunday night when we got home after church, Daddy did a head count and found we were one child short. He hitched up the buggy and went back to the church and found Edwin on the back seat asleep. We also had a (Epworth) league, and we would go to various churches for different functions. We had a Lemon Squeeze to make money for expenses. Everybody brought a lemon, and we would



Forty members of the Home Demonstration Clubs of Columbia meet and have dinner on the grounds at Bethel in 1941.

squeeze it, and guests paid a penny for every seed. Then we made lemonade. Everybody brought cookies or cake for refreshments. We also had Measuring Parties. Everybody paid 1 cent an inch for our height. We didn't get rich, but we had a good time."

Looking back on his experiences at church, Wayne Williams remembered "as a young boy, I was a member of Bethel. I sat on the second row behind the center post, dodging that post, I find myself dodging the same post today. As far as some of the things that I recall as a young boy, we would go to the bridge to relieve ourselves. We did not have indoor plumbing. Our only source of water was the old pitcher pump that everyone used. I am also reminded of the old days of the Men's Brother Hood. This was a group of men that had projects for helping someone. They helped my brother Gerald to get started in the ministry from which he has now retired. In years past, I remember the large windows with no screen. You would raise the window up to the level you wanted, and you would put a wood peg in a hole to hold up the

"One Sunday night when we got home after church, Daddy did a head count and found we were one child short. He hitched up the buggy and went back to the church and found Edwin on the back seat asleep."

window. When I was a young teenager, Mrs. Donna Payne played the piano. She was a person like Betty Jones. She would always be there to play unless she could not make it. There were times she would play when she was not in good health. As a young boy, our preacher was Rev. Toole. He was a preacher that loved to sing. He would sing as long as the members would allow. We would have revivals that went from Sunday night through Saturday night, and the spirit of God was in that old church, Bethel. Over the years, as always, we would have Homecoming/Dinner on the Ground. People came from everywhere — member and non-member alike. The women of Bethel were and still are the best cooks in the country. It seems as though each woman had their own special dish they would cook. It was set up on wood tables outside as we did not have the Fellowship Hall as we do now. We would stand around cars and trucks and eat our dinner. It seems that the Lord blessed us most of the time with good weather. Of course, all the small kids would play during this time. Then later years as I had gotten older,

we would go back in the church and sing for an hour or two. Some people would take the time to speak about things of the church and things of their own lives. It was a great time, and I enjoyed the singing as I love to sing myself.”

“As a young boy, our preacher was Rev. Toole. He was a preacher that loved to sing. He would sing as long as the members would allow. We would have revivals that went from Sunday night through Saturday night, and the spirit of God was in that old church, Bethel.”

Reminiscing on his early experiences at Bethel, Rev. W.M. Mike Wright recalled that, “as a child we traveled from Jacksonville every year to come to Homecoming. All of mother’s brothers and sisters and their families would be there, and my grandmother would be there along with numerous other relatives. The church service was reserved for the ‘older’ folks, and we children were left to play outdoors while carefully tended to by the younger mothers. I can remember running through the cemetery playing and hearing some black frocked preacher giving the devil his due through the wide-opened windows while the congregation fanned with funeral home fans. After the service, the women would come out of the church, and I would be introduced as Freddie Nell’s boy at which time some heavy-set woman would give me this big, seemingly endless hug. As soon as she let go, there would be another who would say ‘and you are Freddie Nell’s boy’ and here we go again. Little did I know that I would one day have the honor of serving as this wonderful old church’s pastor.”



The large magnolia that shaded the cemetery at Bethel.



The cemetery and church at Bethel.



Bethel United Methodist Church women Irene Porter, Marian Waldron, Betty Jo Leslie, Grace Richter, Shirley Williams, Ann Thrasher, Margje Rutledge, Elaine Denmark, Donna Hyde, Eleanor Estees, June Olson, Jane North, and Jan Hogan.

Bethel sponsored many events over the years for the youth. Irene Porter fondly remembered the annual Children's Day events that dated back to the early 1900s in which the Sunday School children put on a pageant and play for visitors. Porter recalled "I did these activities for many years with my mother, Ethel Kinard, who was the Sunday School Superintendent and Leader of Programs. I also remember coming to church in a wagon driven by my father, George Kinard. Sometimes, we would walk the miles from home to church. All of my memories of Bethel are fond. When I was in my

"The church service was reserved for the 'older' folks, and we children were left to play outdoors while carefully tended to by the younger mothers. I can remember running through the cemetery playing and hearing some black frocked preacher giving the devil his due through the wide-opened windows while the congregation fanned with funeral home fans."

teens, I especially enjoyed nighttime church, and the United Methodist Youth Fellowship under the direction of Esta Mae Bedenbaugh. At that time, we were all meeting at Bethel one Sunday, then Pleasant Grove, Columbia City, and Siloam on different Sundays. All the youth really enjoyed the fellowship."

As the youth of the church grew up with each other, it was not uncommon for young people to fall in love with other members at the church. Ruth Hunter Robarts reminisced fondly that "Bethel is the dearest spot in the world to me. I remember wanting to come to



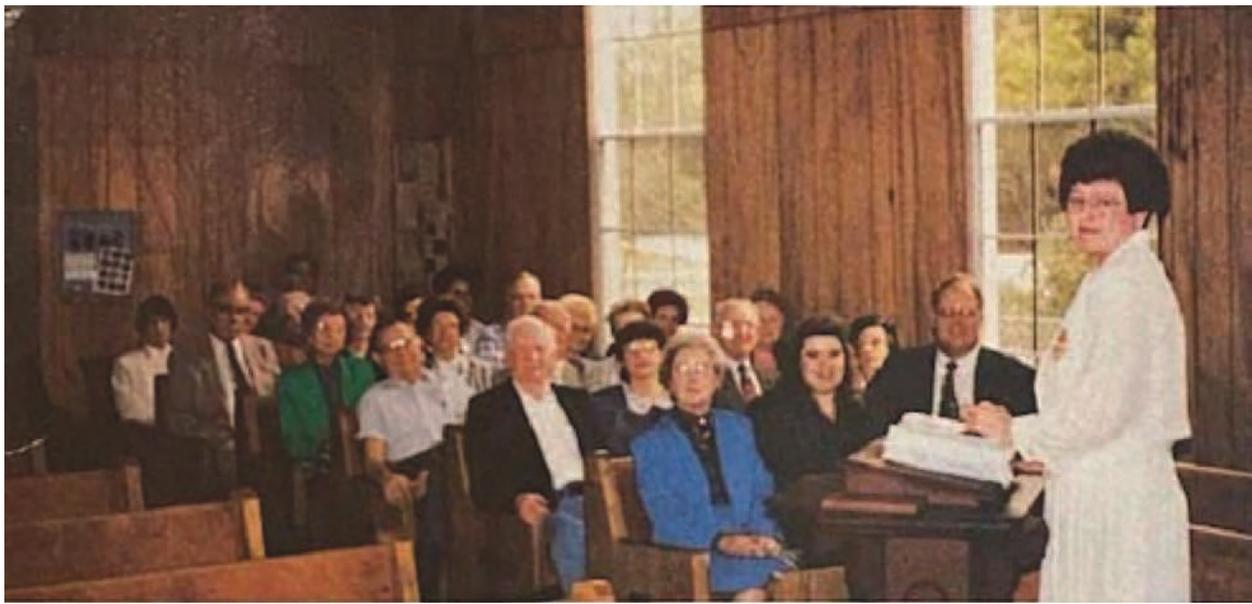
A portrayal of the 'Last Supper' at Bethel with actors Wayne Williams, Todd Denmark, Chris Williams, Ken Tibbits, Scott Denmark, Ken Hamilton, and Wesley Faris.

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Esta Mae Bedenbaugh teaching Sunday School Class. Jeanie and Brian Simpson, Red Porter, Dot and Henry Jones, M.L. Bednebaugh, Margie Jones Rutledge, Eleanor Estes.

church when I was young, partly to see Wash (Robarts) because Mama wouldn't let me 'date.' I always got real thirsty at church, so Wash would pump water for me. We did most of our courting in church."

Food and fellowship were the most common memories shared by the congregation. Jack R. Herndon reminisced, "I remember going to Bethel church in the early 1920s with the family. Grandma Herndon would have a large chest full of food. After the church service, we would all have a picnic on the tables on the northwest side of the church." Clarice Wood Morrell also recalled that her mother, Leila Jones Wood, and uncle, Rufus Jones, grew up attending Bethel, joining in 1914 and 1917. Her grandmother was a Sunday School teacher there for many years. She remembered that "on days that dinner was served on tables in the church yard after church service, Grandma would get up very early to prepare the food she carried to church for the noon meal. She baked cakes and cookies, vegetables, and meat. Grandma and Grandpa were good neighbors to the people of the Bethel Community. Grandma would go and take care of sick people. Many times, she assisted when a baby was born in the community."

The biggest feast day of the year was the annual Homecoming. At the 1933 Bethel Homecoming, newspapers noted that a large crowd gathered to hear the program and eat the sumptuous basket dinners prepared by the ladies as well as large quantities of barbequed meat that several of the men faithfully cooked to provide for the occasion. Features of the program were music, a reading of the history of the church, and a sermon by Brother Sam Scott filled with spiritual power, followed by Brother E. F. Steinmeyer who spoke on prohibition. Homecomings allowed friends and loved ones to see each other every year even after many had moved far away. Elaine Jones Denmark looked back on these times fondly. She reminisced that "as a small child, long wooden tables with food were

spread from end to end under the oak trees. I especially remember my grandmother, Agnes Jones, setting up her box lunch. She made the most delicious dishes. She was always asked by others if she brought chicken and dumplings, pound cake, and carrot cake. She always made sure that they had some of her cooking. Sometimes she would make sure that they took some home with them that day. I also have fond memories of Aunt Betty Jones playing the piano every Sunday. She is lovingly referred to as my 'second mother.' I remember the cemetery and church cleaning that was done



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Jack Herndon and Kurt Havrid at the dedication of the State Historic Marker in 1994.



Bethel at Christmas Time.

“As the youth of the church grew up with each other, it was not uncommon for young people to fall in love with other members at the church. Ruth Hunter Robarts reminisced fondly that “Bethel is the dearest spot in the world to me. I remember wanting to come to church when I was young, partly to see Wash (Robarts) because Mama wouldn’t let me ‘date.’ I always got real thirsty at church, so Wash would pump water for me. We did most of our courting in church.”

before every Homecoming. Everyone wanted to make sure that Bethel was shining for her special day. I look now at the congregation on Sunday and feel so blessed to see my former Sunday School teachers as well as childhood friends still in attendance. Bethel is my family, and I thank the Lord for letting me be part of Bethel.”

The congregation at Bethel was, and is, a family. Looking back over his years as a member of Bethel, Al Williams was flooded with memories of the good times and bad as well as friends and loved ones. He noted “I recall the Sunday School classes with Bessie Nettles, Louise Colley, and Pearl Bedenbaugh. I remember my first part in our Christmas play. I recall homecomings of the past as if they were yesterday, and I remember all of the people that would come year after year for Homecoming. One of my fondest memories is how after we finished eating and playing, everyone would gather back inside the church and sing. I can see my Daddy, Guy Williams, my cousins, Roy Hunter, Lem Owens, Leslie Owens, and many mothers singing with Miss Donnie Payne playing the piano and Mr. George Adams or Mr. Carl Dobbs leading the singing. I remember the yearly revival; it was either the week before or after homecoming. One year, I fell asleep on the first row. I started talking in

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Bethel United Methodist Church.

my sleep. I hollered out for my brother, Wayne, to get a bucket of water and throw on the fire. Boy, the Preacher, V.J. Ragsdale, must have been preaching a real fire and brimstone sermon for me to have done that. There are so many memories for me, but the most precious are the memories of how Bethel has shaped my life. I've been taught that God is with me every day. I've seen preachers, members, and nonmembers come and go, but all I have to do is look around, and I know God is here and will always be here. The fond memories of those Joneses, the Bedenbaughs, the Kinards, the Witts, the Adamses, the Griffins, and all the others that I love and have always respected. Most of all, my dearest Mother, Irma Robarts Williams, and my dearest Daddy, Guy G. Williams. I hope and pray that the young people will have fond memories like mine, but most of all, I pray that they will one day say that they were also blessed to be part of Bethel."

The memories of Bethel's congregation reflect a church that has shined bright for more than two centuries in the Florida sun. Its earliest members gathered together and established a church on their shared faith and love of God. Those early pioneers were pillars of faith, love, family and fellowship. In their daily lives, they honored God, helped their fellow man, and laid the foundations of their beliefs that has been passed down from one generation to the next. The history of Bethel church is one that has seen many changes over the years, but what has remained a constant is the heart of its congregation and the open arms with which they have welcomed friends and strangers. Bethel has provided a place of refuge for those who are lost and a home to those who have been saved. As Bethel enters into its bicentennial, the church continues to grow in love and faith, and through God's glory, it will continue to serve as a beacon and light in which future generations can find hope and salvation.

# BETHEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH PREACHERS

**For much of its early history, Bethel was serviced by Circuit preachers. There are few records of pastors before 1860, however, those recorded include:**

- Rev. John L. Jerry (1824)
- Rev. Robert Huren (1840)
- Rev. J.M. Bradley (1829)
- Rev. James Huren (1841).

**After 1860, the church has a complete record of its pastors including:**

- J.W. Williams (1860)
- W.D. Davis (1865)
- J.W. Jackson (1867)
- James P. DePass (1870)
- T.K. Leonard (1871)
- Samuel E. Phillips (1873)
- W.M. Watts (1877)
- W.C. Collins (1878)
- Thomas Joseph Phillips (1881)
- C.G. Fife (1883)
- Thomas S. Armistad (1883)
- Julius S. Collier (1885)
- W.M. Watts (1887)
- Julius D. Rogers (1888)
- Wm. Henry Fitzpatrick Robarts (1889)
- Samuel Scott (1892)
- Thomas Joseph Phillips (1894)
- Charles Wesley Innman (1894)
- T. Bishop (1895)
- George P. Parker (1889)
- Samuel Scott (1901)
- Julius S. Collier (1902)
- Theodore Lafyles Zabud Barr (1903)
- R.C. McWilliams (1905)
- F.L. Crowson (1906)
- M.O. Williams (1908)
- Thomas Williams (1911)
- J.F. Clark (1914)
- W.V. Bethea (1915)
- J.E. Shepard (1916)
- H.C. Rogers (1916)
- L. Glazier (1918)
- W.L. Nelson, J.B. Rooney (1919)
- Outland, W.L. Nelson, R.A. Selby (1919)
- Joe Barton (1920)
- S.T. Duchworth (1921)
- H.M. Harrison (1922)
- E.L. Roy (1923)
- P.A. Black (1925)
- C.M. Cottton, D.C. Carn (1926)
- A.B. Bowen (1927)
- R.E.L. Folsom (1928)
- W.N. Herndon (1929)
- Charlie H. Voss (1930)
- T.B. Kemp, F.P. McCall (1932)
- R.A. Shelby (1933)
- A. A. Godfrey (1934)
- Walter Jefferson Nease (1936)
- Paul Wagner (1939)
- John Adams, F.P. McCall (1940)
- H.T. Toole (1941)
- C.M. Sappington (1949)
- John T. Adams (1950)
- Francis C. Smelt (1951)
- H.D. Carr (1952)
- Ernest B. Luttrell (1953)
- Otis Alshire (1961)
- T.M. Goff (1963)
- C.B. Davis (1964)
- Louis Leigh (1969)
- Charles Rogers Sr. (1970)
- Marvin Buckner (1972)
- Rush Severence (1974)
- Ira Conley (1976)
- C. Richard Jones (1977)
- Delbert King (1978)
- John Frederick Danielson (1980)
- Alfred H. Tracy (1983)
- Al Vogt (1984)
- Donald Ray Dalton (1985)
- John R. DeRuyter (1989)
- Dennis Bryan Simpson (1991)
- Erle Leslie Prevatt (1994)
- William Michael Wright (1997)
- Kenneth Hamilton (2000)
- Melanie Fierbaugh (2010)
- Deborah Wright McKown (2011)
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# Clay Therapy

Leanna Beartree's Sunflower cups are in memory of her mother.

## How Leanna Beartree is teaching healing in art

BY MORGAN MCMULLEN

If Leanna Beartree wasn't an artist, she might've done quite well in the field of therapy. After all, her art — particularly her clay sculpting — is sort of a window into her healing process from the daily stresses of life.

It doesn't show up in just her sculpting, which is readily available at her art gallery, Beartree Pottery, located at 128 NW Veterans St. in downtown Lake City. Her painting has become therapeutic for her. She connects the healing power of honest expression with the freedom she feels around a lump of clay. And she wants to share that personal power with Lake City.

Beartree hasn't been at it long, at least in the grand scheme of things. Roughly eight years is all it took to turn her from adrift college student to practicing artist. Her journey took her across the country and back to Florida, picking up techniques and strategies along the way to pass on to adult and child students alike.

"Art is just the perfect thing for when you're going through anything," she said. "I use it when something good happens, when something bad happens, when I'm confused, when I'm

anxious.

"Anything like that, I can turn to art."

### FINDING HER MEDIUM

Originally from Oviedo, Beartree wasn't always destined for this path. She and her husband, Rheed, attended Florida State University, where she originally studied interior design. From there, however, nothing else was mapped out in front of her.

"I had the meltdown like we all do in college and was like, 'I don't want to do this with my life,'" Beartree said.

Her professors tried to convince her to stay in the program, however, because of one major thing they each said they saw in her: a knack for artistry.

"I had, what they said my strengths were, was my artistic view of everything," she said. "There wasn't another person in the program that was as artistic-minded and creative-minded as I was."

Beartree decided to take that



Leanna Beartree said art can help her through anything that happens – good or bad.

advice while still stepping away from interior design, instead focusing her efforts to channel that artistic stride, switching up her major to art in the process while getting on track to earn a master's degree in art education.

Originally, Beartree said, her main strengths lied in drawing and painting. It wasn't until she took a pottery class that she fell in love with the medium.

Even if it was an imperfect love.

"I was like, 'I've got this, I'm gonna be so great,'" she remembers thinking. "And I was awful. Absolutely so terrible."

She'd never worked with clay before, but that single class convinced her to pursue it regardless.

"I just became obsessed with it," Beartree said. "I just loved the idea that you have this lump that came from the ground, and then you get to be the person that helps shape it into something beautiful. It just wasn't beautiful yet."

Yet.

Beartree spent hours outside the classroom studying, molding, shaping, sculpting. It wasn't like painting or drawing, she said, where you can carefully plan each step of the process and adjust along the way until you have your finished product.

"Clay isn't like that," she said. "It is such a slow working medium... You kind of have to let the clay do its thing and let go sometimes. And I was not very good at letting go."

"It wasn't until I realized that it doesn't have to be perfect to be beautiful that then, all of the sudden, I was like, 'Oh my gosh, it was me, I was the problem...' If you're not centered, you can't get centered on the (spinning) wheel. I was too much in my own head, thinking about what it should be instead of focusing on the present moment of just being there with the clay."

For Beartree, that was the biggest hurdle in shaping her own view of the medium. Now she just needed to spread that mindfulness to others.

### SHARING HER JOY

After moving around a bit to Colorado and South Florida, Leanna and Rheed found themselves in St. Augustine. Rheed is a Live Oak native and, when the couple had their daughter, Luna, they decided to move back to the area a little over a year ago. Recently having taught at Suwannee High School, Beartree said she and Rheed got to talking about how sad it was that students don't have many outlets or opportunities to practice art in that kind of setting once they graduate.

"How wonderful would it be to give adults that joy back of a creative outlet again?" she remembers Rheed asking her. However, Beartree

I just loved the idea that you have this lump that came from the ground, and then you get to be the person that helps shape it into something beautiful. It just wasn't beautiful yet.



Jewelry are among the items available at Beartree Pottery in downtown Lake City.



Leanna Beartree said she had to learn to let go while on the pottery wheel.



Leanna Beartree offers pottery sessions at her gallery.

took it more as a prodding than a question.

“He’s been pushing me for years,” Beartree said. “He’s like, ‘It combines everything you love. You get to focus on your own pottery, you’ll still be teaching, but you get to teach people that want it and want to learn and want to evolve or use some sort of therapy or whatnot.’”

Beartree’s father, Jaime Arroyo, was another pillar that helped steady her ladder on the way up.

“My dad likes to say he was the first investor in Beartree Pottery, because he was the one who bought me my first wheel eight years ago,” she said. “He has always been my No. 1 fan.

“Honestly, I’ve been super blessed.”

These conversations had been happening for the better part of a decade by that point. But this time, when that topic came up, Beartree saw a path forward with it when a storefront next to Amazing Graze opened up for a buyer.

“The stars aligned for it to be able to work out,” she said. “Then we were just pedal to the metal... just trying to get it all together.”

If you’re not centered, you can’t get centered on the (spinning) wheel. I was too much in my own head, thinking about what it should be instead of focusing on the present moment of just being there with the clay.

### STRONG SUPPORT

Beartree had her fears. She remembers being a little hesitant to make the leap from simply wanting this outlet to teach and create art to actually fulfilling that role at her own significant risk. She said she wouldn’t have been able to follow through on those dreams without her own support system.

“From my family, from (Rheed’s) family, from him, all these loving people around me,” she said. “I’m still terrified, you know? It’s scary... Are you going to — even if you are successful — handle this success in a way that is going to be sustainable. But mainly, it’s

excitement. A little bit of fear, but mainly just elated and happy that I get the opportunity to do this, and I get to do it with my family. That was one of the biggest things that pushed us to do this full time.”

In her gallery, Beartree offers mugs, planters, and jewelry on top of her pottery sessions, which can range in expertise and scale from a fun parent-child instruction to a whole party of sculpting, and going up to full-on pottery classes.

Beartree has already noticed the interest in her Lake City gallery. She said she’s found the community supportive and willing to spread the word on her work.

“There’s not been one person that I’ve talked to about what I’m doing here and them being like, ‘Oh, that’s lame,’ or whatever,” she said. “Everyone’s just super stoked and super excited to have something else to do and to do creatively without having to drive an hour and a half or two hours or whatever to be able to have an experience like this and get your hands dirty, when you can really get muddy and actually create something with the mud, or just splash around. It really has been wonderful. I’ve felt a lot of support here.”

When she’s not manning her booth at the growers and makers market every other weekend downtown, she’s filling custom orders or teaching classes on her own terms back at the gallery.

“I’m just so thankful,” she said.



Mugs and planters are offered at Beartree Pottery.



### HEALING CREATION

Beartree has her favorites among her own art, of course. Her sunflower mugs, for example, reflect some of the heaviest grief she had to carry in her life. Her mother, Doris, passed away about a year and a half ago. Beartree was devastated, saying she grappled with the fallout of her passing.

“She was my best friend,” Beartree said. “I struggled for a while. Usually, when I’m grieving or going through something, I do paintings in order to deal with my feelings. But I couldn’t paint when it came to her. I don’t know why.”

Beartree questioned if it was too soon or if there were too many emotions involved for that medium. Still, she knew she needed something to commemorate Doris’ memory.

“Her favorite flower is sunflowers,” Beartree said. “I did her urn, and it was all sunflowers and everything. So I started doing the sunflower cups, and they take an exuberant amount of time, way longer than I probably should be spending on one piece. But I’m spending hours on it.”

The time spent with her sunflower cups is never wasted though.

“It’s my favorite thing because it’s her, you know?” Beartree said. “She would like that she’s the most time-consuming. She was such a personality. And when you talked with her, you would spend hours talking with her, so it makes sense.”

### PLANNING AHEAD

Beartree has a fairly comprehensive map in her head for the future of Beartree Pottery. She wants to open a bigger teaching side to her gallery, to expand her storefront into a full-blown studio.

“I would love to expand to have a studio space where people in the community can come,” she said. “Basically just like if you were paying to go to the gym, same kind of



Leanna Beartree hopes to extend the teaching side of her gallery.

I guarantee that you'll make something, and you end up with something that you can bring home and sit on your shelf that you can either laugh about or be proud about.

membership. You come when we're open hours, and you get to bring your own clay, create your own creations. Then I can just offer all the services. Obviously, I'd still do classes, because, selfishly, it's one of my favorite parts."

Still, she knows not everybody is all-in on self-expression through clay. Maybe other art mediums that are a little less messy. But Beartree would still have those folks over to try to persuade them regardless.

"If you're making a fool, you're making a fool of yourself, and it's with somebody else that you care about," she said. "No one else is going to judge you.

"I guarantee that you'll make something, and you end up with something that you can bring home and sits on your shelf that you can either laugh about or be proud about."



The community support for Beartree Pottery has been noticed by Leanna Beartree.



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# Quite a Ringer

Fredrick Vandyck holds up a 'Welcome' sign that he made out of horseshoes while standing in front of some of his other creations.

Vandyck combines welding, horseshoes into artwork

By TONY BRITT

The passion of creating and sharing appears to be a dominant trait in the DNA of Fredrick Vandyck. Although he does countless jobs as a welder, he also manages to find time to create unique home decor pieces as well as teach others the skills that are needed for success in the technical field.

Vandyck, who recently celebrated his 46th birthday, is a resident of O'Brien. He has been welding for about 35 years.

Vandyck has been welding since he was 11 years old, after being inspired by his older brother's friend.

"Growing up as a kid, I always saw my older brother's best friend come to the house on his lunch break and he would always be driving a really, really crazy looking car — like half worked on and the other half all messed up," Vandyck said. "No matter what he looked like, his clothes were always tore up, but he would always have money in his pocket. I used to look at that and say, 'This is what I want to be. I want to be able to be dirty, but always be self sufficient.'"

Once he entered the field of welding and became a

professional, Vandyck was able to turn the skills he learned for work into a craft where he could let his imagination guide him to a broader creator with a welding torch.

Vandyck moved to O'Brien from Illinois about three years ago. He said he began welding home decor items as an extension of his regular welding work.

"Once I started doing welding and started my own business, I realized that I could do other things, more than just weld," he said, noting that his work affords him the opportunity to handle jobs at different times. "I'm always free. I always have some free time and then I started thinking about horseshoes. I could do stuff with horseshoes."

He said in Florida, it appears that lots of people seem to like to purchase antiques and old-school items and he wanted to create items incorporating horseshoes.

After gleaning some tips from videos on YouTube, Vandyck began practicing and soon he was making home decor items featuring horseshoes as the main component.

"I started trying it and putting my own flair on it and that's

how they took off,” he said.

After showing some of his pieces to his neighbor, the neighbor encouraged Vandyck to attend some shows as a vendor.

“The first time I went, I did not sell a single thing,” he said.

However, a silver lining appeared at the end of the day that encouraged his venture.

Vandyck met a woman as he was packing up for the day, who said she had no money but offered to give him a tent in exchange for one of his ‘Home Sweet Home’ signs and an extra \$50 since he had no tent.

“I needed a tent if I was going to be going to these shows, so I did. We made that trade and I still have that tent today,” he said, noting he began creating his custom pieces of home decor featuring the horseshoes three years ago. “The welding part always still comes, but I wanted something different to keep me busy and interested and so that’s how I got into those pieces.”

“We have an old barn that I use horseshoes to make fringes on it. I always played with horseshoes, but I just got into it more when I realized I could make signs and stuff with them.”

Vandyck said he was attracted to putting his personal touch and flair on the pieces with horseshoes.

“Everything I do, I always make sure I put my own signature on it,” he said. “Even with the welding, everybody can put down a bead, but I don’t have to sign it. My welding, I can always come back 20 years later and know I welded that. Everything I do, I always try to put my own touch on it.”

Vandyck said he decided to work with horseshoes because Florida and Kentucky are the major states that are nestled with a lot of horses.

He said a lot of people he worked for had an abundance of horseshoes and wanted to know whether he could do something with them.

“We have an old barn that I use horseshoes to make fringes on it,” he said. “I always played with horseshoes, but I just got into it more when I realized I could make signs and stuff with them.”

Using the horseshoes, Vandyck makes ‘Welcome Home’ and ‘Home

Fredrick Vandyck goes through a 55-gallon drum of horseshoes in about three weeks to create his signs and decor.





Fredrick Vandyck has created signs for businesses out of horseshoes and signs with people's names on them.

Sweet Home' signs. He's also created specialized signs out of horseshoes for businesses and he even creates some pieces signs with people's names out of horseshoes.

He said he's even created pieces with the name of a customer's child out of the horseshoes that were used to shoe their horses.

"I make anything," Vandyck said. "In the front of our house, I have 'The Vandycks' written in horseshoe, so it glows at night so everybody can see it. At night, even if you can't see the address, you can still see 'The Vandycks.'"

Not exactly sure of how many horseshoes he uses in a year as he creates the different pieces of decor, art work and sculptures, Vandyck knows it's a rather large amount.

"Let's just say the guy gives me 55-gallon drums full, which probably there is probably anywhere from 10,000-20,000 horseshoes, aluminum and steel," he said. "I can probably run through that in about three weeks."

Vandyck also teaches a virtual welding class and constantly reminds his students to take their time and make sure they weld things correctly. He applies the same process, mentality and commitment in creating and

"Every place I go everybody always says, 'I'm so glad I came to this booth, because your stuff is amazing.' I get a lot of awesome reactions where everybody is blown away when they see the pieces."

completing his work.

"When I first started, sometimes it took me a day," he said of completing pieces. "Now, sometimes it takes me about 30 minutes."

Vandyck is a regular at arts and crafts shows and takes pride in sharing the pieces that he's created through his welding.

He said he likes selling his creations to different people that he meets at the shows.

"I get this saying all the time, 'Oh my God, I've never seen anything like this before' or 'Oh my God, your stuff is amazing,'" Vandyck said of customers'

reactions to the hand-created and welded pieces. "Every place I go everybody always say, 'I'm so glad I came to this booth, because your stuff is amazing.' I get a lot of awesome reactions where everybody is blown away when they see the pieces."

Last year Vandyck sold nearly \$13,000 worth of his pieces at different events, venues and settings.

Now that he is established and known for creating pieces with the horse shoes, Vandyck hasn't yet decided what challenge as that he wants to take on next.

"I am good where I'm at now with the welding," he said. "I'm good there. I'm comfortable. The only part that I was really, really wanting to get into was the teaching part and I've got that as well, so I would hate for this trade to die."

Vandyck admitted some people are afraid of the fire, arcs and getting burned while welding.

"If you trade that, basically you never will go hungry," he said.

In the near future, more of Vandyck's work will be available for public consumption, as he and his wife plan to bring people onto their property, showing off their animals and providing camping space.

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# GIVING IT A *Twirl*

## Baton carrying Felknor to bigger, international stages

By JAMIE WACHTER

Photos by Behold Photography by  
Lori and Paul Buchanan.

In a sport known for uniformity, a recent Suwannee High graduate is ready to shine, globally.

At the IBTF Nationals Cup and World Championships in Liverpool, England, in August, Audrey Felknor and the All-Stars Twirling Academy will be making their world championship debut.

The global scale will be just the start for increased attention for Felknor, who will also start performing this fall as a Gatorette at the University of Florida.

They are the culmination of years of work, and the realization of a recent goal that with every toss of the baton, Felknor could soar higher.

“I was like, ‘If I want to go farther with this, I need to get out there and step out of my comfort zone and try new things,’” Felknor said of her decision in the fall of 2021 to try and join the All-Stars. “That’s when I decided to go bigger.”

### SMALL BEGINNINGS

Before she knew she wanted to go big, Felknor’s start in twirling began small. As a fourth-grader with a background in dance, Felknor saw her friends enjoying a different sport: twirling. So she decided to try it, too.

While it is carrying her to England and the Southeastern Conference, it wasn’t exactly love at first sight — or throw.

Rather, there were “some ups and downs,” Felknor admitted. She performed during competitions for two years with Twirling by Kary before she decided she’d had enough.

“I was like, ‘I don’t want to do this anymore. I’m done,’” she said, adding there was also the added challenge of a southpaw having to learn how to perform right-handed since that is how the majority of twirling is done.

Audrey Felknor, who graduated from Suwannee High in May, will compete at the world championships for twirling in August with her team, the All-Stars Twirling Academy out of Middleburg.

But she wasn’t completely finished. She still practiced some at home by herself, just not for competitions or with a team.

That all changed a few years later when high school and the lure of the Friday night lights brought Felknor and her baton back out of the shadows.

As a freshman, Felknor’s serious pursuit of twirling was put into motion.

“I really love the team and I love performing on Friday

Audrey Felknor began twirling in the fourth grade, wanting to join friends in trying out the sport.



nights,” Felknor said, adding her years of dancing helped as the routines involve dance, just with a baton in hand. “I always thought it would be cool to do it on a bigger scale, more people, bigger facility. That’s what I’m doing.”

“I really love the team and I love performing on Friday nights. I always thought it would be cool to do it on a bigger scale, more people, bigger facility. That’s what I’m doing.”

#### CHASING THE DREAM

Enjoying the performances at Langford Stadium on Friday nights, Felknor started to dream about performing on a larger scale.

So even when football season ended, and practice for the majorettes usually stopped, Felknor continued to work with Kary Black. Every week, whether it was in the gym at SHS or the courtyard at the school, Felknor kept practicing throughout the school year, honing her skills.

“That’s when I was like, ‘I want to go bigger,’” she said.

During that time, Felknor also added a nerve-wracking skill to her routine. At the end of summer camps with Twirling by Kary, Black would introduce the campers to fire batons. They would have the opportunity to hold them and practice doing it.

At Bulldog Bash during Suwannee’s homecoming activities her freshman year, Felknor transitioned from practicing it to performing it. She’s been doing it ever since, although the nerves never really leave.



Audrey Felknor started to get more interested in twirling as a freshman at Suwannee High, when she joined the school’s majorettes.



Performing in front of a crowd at a game is something Audrey Felknor enjoys doing.



As she performed throughout high school, Audrey Felknor started thinking about bigger stages.



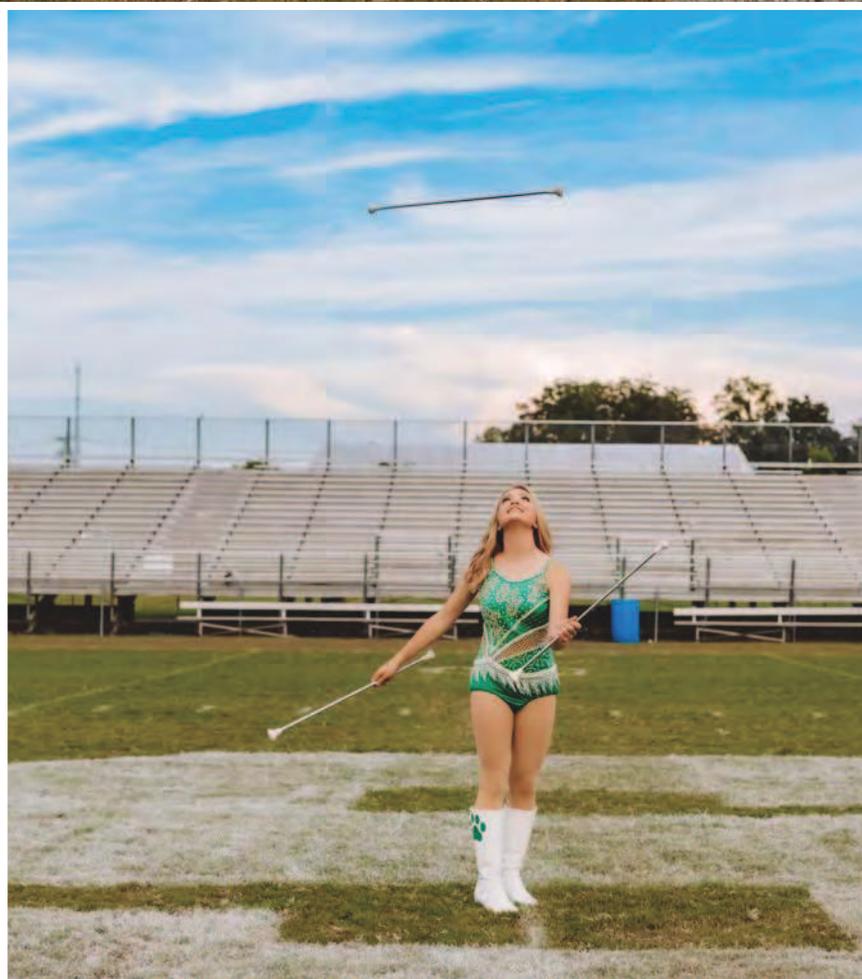
Audrey Felknor first performed with fire batons for a crowd at the Bulldog Bash before homecoming her freshman year at Suwannee High.

“It’s still nerve wracking even after I’ve done it how many years,” she said. “You have to keep it going. You can’t just hold it because then the flames will go up your arms. So you have to think while you’re doing it to keep it moving, don’t drop it on the ground and light the field on fire at the homecoming game.”

Felknor also pushed past the nerves to chase after that goal of going bigger.

Following a camp with the SHS majorettes during her junior year, another camper’s mom offered to reach out to June Stoeber with the All-Stars, the Middleburg-based gym that also has groups in Gainesville, Macclenny and Lake Butler.

With introductions out of the way, all that was left was for Felknor to find the right fit. She attended a class in both Gainesville and Macclenny before settling on Gainesville as her home gym.



Audrey Felknor joined the All-Stars Twirling Academy team during her junior year, competing with the team at nationals last summer.

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Training at different gyms, Audrey Felknor said team-building activities helped the All-Stars come together in time to qualify for worlds during last summer's nationals meet in Indiana.

“You have to keep it going. You can’t just hold it because then the flames will go up your arms. So you have to think while you’re doing it to keep it moving, don’t drop it on the ground and light the field on fire at the homecoming game.”

A couple of familiar faces, including the camper that offered the opportunity, helped seal the deal. “It’s smaller and I already kind of knew one of the girls,” she said. “That really helped.”

#### GOING TO NATIONALS

While finding her footing in Gainesville throughout the competition season in 2021-22, last summer offered a new challenge.

In preparation for the USA and World Twirling Championships at the University of Notre Dame last July, the various pockets of All-Stars had to come together as one.

“It was really hard at first,” Felknor said, adding that at times during the competition season the various gyms would compete against each other. “We didn’t know each other. At first, we didn’t really feel like a team. It felt like we all were just getting together, twirling together and then going home.”

So Stoeber instituted some team-building exercises, including “secret sisters.” Plus, there were the constant practices, three to four a week.



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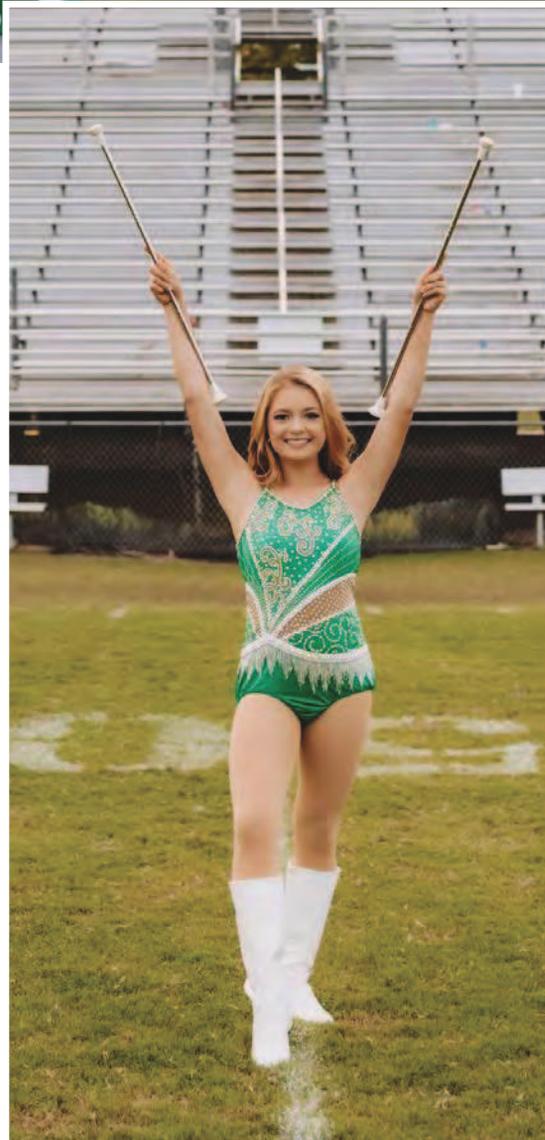


When she joined the All-Stars, Audrey Felknor trained in Gainesville.

By the time the All-Stars reached South Bend, Indiana, they were a team and brought home a runner-up finish to qualify for this year's world championships.

It was a first for the All-Stars.

"It was really hard at first. We didn't know each other. At first, we didn't really feel like a team. It felt like we all were just getting together, twirling together and then going home."



Audrey Felknor and the All-Stars finished second last summer at nationals, qualifying for the world championships for the first time.



Audrey Felknor and the All-Stars will have a new experience at worlds: the judges will be front and center and give out scores immediately.

### GOING INTERNATIONAL

With that first trip to the world championships, there are a lot of unknowns.

For starters, Felknor said in normal competitions, the judges sit in the back of the bleachers, out of sight and out of mind. The teams also don't immediately know their score.

That won't be the case in England. Instead, the judges will be front and center and the scores will be delivered while they are still on the mat.

"That will be different from anything we've ever done," she said. "It'll be nerve-wracking for sure."

Prior to heading to Europe, though, the team plans to practice for that change to help ease those nerves.

What they won't need help with this summer, though, is becoming a team. That was already accomplished a year ago.

"We really get along and we work well together," Felknor said.

"I feel like no matter how many times I sit there and think about how it will be, I feel like you don't know until you're really there experiencing it."

### BECOMING A GATORETTE

The trip to England for the world championships isn't the only big scale that Felknor will be performing on.

Within days of returning from the European competition, band camp will begin at the University of Florida where Felknor will perform as a Gatorette following the "longest day" of her life in May and a "rough few months" until she found out she had made the team.

That success, though, was the end result, she believes, of joining the All-Stars and competing at nationals a year ago.

The extra practice meant learning new skills. Seeing other twirlers that were better and more refined helped as well.

"That really pushed me to get to their level," she said.

Reaching that level means the performances are also going to be bigger, much like she's dreamed



about the past four years. From performing in front of a couple thousand fans at Suwannee games, Felknor now will be taking the field at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium in front of 88,000.

But so far, Felknor is trying her best not to think about all those eyes being on her.

“I feel like no matter how many times I sit there and think about how it will be, I feel like you don’t know until you’re really there experiencing it,” she said. “That’s what one of the girls who is already at Gatorette told me, she was like, ‘Nothing prepares you. You won’t be prepared the first time you’re out there. It’s so different from anything you’ve ever experienced.’”

After competing at the world championships in August, Audrey Felknor will continue as a Gatorette at the University of Florida.

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Jeffrey A. Moore creates a wide variety of artwork.

# Renaissance Man

## Moore fills creative need in many areas

By JAMIE WACHTER

Jeffrey A. Moore doesn't do things half way. When Moore, who relocated to Lake City last fall from South Carolina, pursues a creative outlet, he does so full-bore.

It has made the artist a modern-day renaissance man with a wide variety of talents.

"I've always been creatively driven, so I touch on everything," said Moore, who also is the vice president and director of creative services and brand management and marketing for Genesis Healthcare. "But when I do it, I go in 100%. It's scary."

While he's able to use his natural creative ability at work, it's during his free time that Moore really finds ways to get that fix. And it comes in so many ways. He's an award-winning photographer, who also produces art in watercolors and acrylics. He's also done pottery and makes and sells jewelry. The former journalist also has raised champion Labrador Retrievers and takes care of 25 species of finches in his backyard aviary.

"I have a very short attention span," Moore said in

explaining his wide array of interests and talents, noting he can spend weeks or months painting with watercolors before losing interest and moving on to a different medium or talent.

But through it all, Moore is focused on finding a way to create.

"It's almost addictive to me now," Moore said. "I need to fulfill that creative need. It's sort of like, I don't want to get heavy with it, but it's sort of like a drug for me. When I'm creating, my mind is at ease. If I don't, I'll actually go into like a depression, sort of. I need to do that creative. I have to have that."

### ARTISTIC ABILITY

Art has always come naturally for Moore, who said he was terrible in school except for that one class.

"I could draw from a young age," he said.

Still, art took a backseat when Moore pursued a degree and a career in journalism. But a funny thing happened. As he was in the job market, vying for reporter openings, he'd



Jeffrey A. Moore finds inspiration for some of his paintings from the aviary in his backyard

always get pushed toward the creative and graphics departments, building ads.

He transitioned to a publishing company and, again, soon found himself in production, turning out covers.

“It came naturally and I could do it fast,” he said.

After a move from Pennsylvania to a small town in South Carolina, Moore found himself without much to do and a lot of time on his hands, especially when the covid-19 pandemic hit.

The newfound time led to an old creative outlet: his artwork.

“I had to occupy myself,” he said. “It just sparked a whole new creative mindset for me and I haven’t stopped since.”

“It’s almost addictive to me now. I need to fulfill that creative need. It’s sort of like, I don’t want to get heavy with it, but it’s sort of a drag for me. When I’m creating, my mind is at ease.”

#### LOOKING FOR A CHALLENGE

While Moore hasn’t stopped fulfilling his creative needs, the outlets for those creations has changed and adapted widely over the years.

In Pennsylvania, Moore tried his hand at landscape photography. He began going to trade shows to better hone his craft.

Soon, Moore was asked to start taking portraits and headshots, to shoot weddings and other events.

So, he bought a building in the historic district of Shrewsbury, Pennsylvania, and turned it into a photography studio.

“I did that for years,” he said, racking up honors as the best photographer in York County for four or five years in a row.

Suddenly, Moore decided to pursue a



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Jewelry is one of Jeffrey Moore's creative outlets.

new outlet.

"I got bored with it," he said. "I didn't want to do that anymore, I wanted to show dogs."

So Moore sold his photography business and turned the studio into an artist co-op. He also began raising and showing Labrador Retrievers, continuing until he raised a national champion.

Once again, the passion started to wane.

"I'll get kind of good at something, then I get bored with it," he said. "It's almost like a challenge to be really good at it. Then when I really am, or I feel I am, then I need to move on to a new challenge."

"It's kind of like the dogs. I'm like world-renowned for the dogs. After that happened, I was just like, 'All right, I need to move on to something else.'"

**AVIARY AND ART**

Currently, that something else is producing jewelry, producing other art — one of his watercolors of a sea turtle placed second at the Wally Reichert Memorial Art Competition through the Gateway Art Gallery and Columbia County Public Library — and taking care of birds in his backyard aviary.

The different outlets help keep the creativity flowing when the boredom starts to kick in. One also helps feed into each other.

For starters, his aviary, which includes 25 different species of finches from all over the world, is a source of inspiration for his artwork. Decorated with antique boxes and old wheels as well as bushes, shrubs and trees that provide a natural

habitat for the birds, Moore can always find inspiration.

"There's always something interesting in a picture," he said, using those pictures as a reference to create his paintings.

But the aviary is more than just inspiration for artwork. For someone who grew up on a 200-plus acre farm, it's a way to keep that connection to animals and to nature. With the natural habitat created in his aviary, he can watch the birds build their nests and feed their babies.

It also allows Moore to make connections in his new hometown.

**"I'll get kind of good at something, then I get bored with it. It's almost like a challenge to be really good at it. Then when I really am, or I feel I am, then I need to move on to a new challenge."**

**'THAT'S SO ME'**

On Moore's website, jeffrey-moore.com, he uses the tagline, "That's so me."

That phrase serves as a reminder of the emotional connection Moore, as an artist, can make with those enjoying the art or purchasing the art.

Regardless of what piece it is, Moore has a way of connecting with pretty much everybody.

"If I did it and they're interested in it, then I probably have some of the same interests that they do. That always winds up being a catalyst," he said.

For starters, his bird pieces leads to conversations about the animals, which in turn can lead to an invite to tour the aviary and see the multitude of species that have a home there.



Jeffrey Moore won second place in the Wally Reichert Memorial art show with his sea turtle painting.

"I've actually met so many people and become friends with so many people because I invite them over," he added. "It's just kind of cool to meet these new people."

The birds, too, can end up inviting people over.

Moore said some of the powerhouse singers in his aviary can end up luring walkers on the roads in his neighborhood to his front door, wanting to see where the beautiful melody is coming from.

#### PUTTING HIS SPIN ON IT

As his interests change and he pursues new creative outlets, Moore not only likes a new challenge, but he also enjoys learning.

A self-taught artist, Moore turning his photo studio into a co-op for artists to produce and sell their wares helped recharge his creative batteries in Pennsylvania. The Gateway Art Gallery in downtown Lake City, he said, has the potential to do the same.

The co-op in Pennsylvania helped lead to Moore taking up pottery for awhile, moved by the ability to really let his creativity run wild.

"I like the things that just have a world of creativity to them," he said, adding that is why he enjoys about his jewelry, is the seemingly endless options of what to make and create.

When he moved to Lake City last fall, the first thing Moore did was look into the art community in the area, which led him to the Gallery. It has



A lot of Jeffrey Moore's work is inspired by animals and nature.

"I like to go in and I like to learn how they're doing it. But I'm never satisfied with that. I always want to figure out how to put a spin on it so it's different."

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More than an artist on canvas, Jeffrey Moore can also bake a delicious cake.

not disappointed him, especially the wide array of artists who are part of the group, who also have a vast variety of talents and techniques that Moore can learn from.

“There’s a lot of classes down there I still want to take, to be exposed to different things,” Moore said, noting his next venture may be stained glass, a recent class offering at the Gallery. “I like to go in and I like to learn how they’re doing it. But I’m never satisfied with that. I always want to figure out how to put a spin on it so it’s different.

“I think that’s why people are drawn to a lot of my stuff is it’s just different.”



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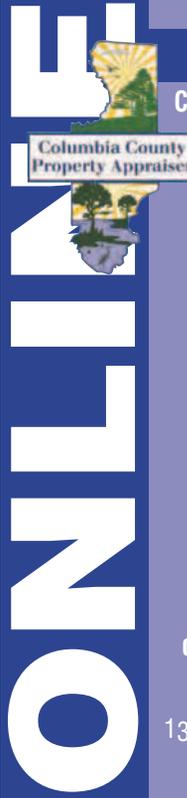
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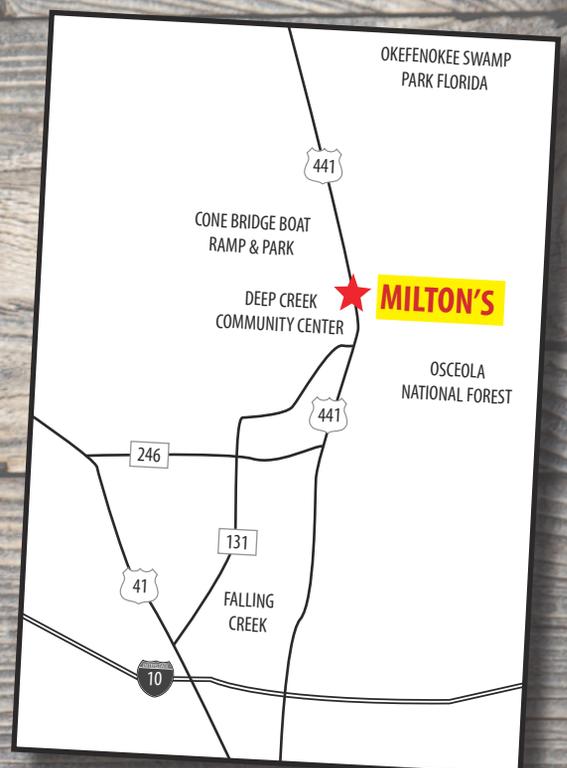
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Genie Norman, the  
2023 Distinguished Friend  
of the Foundation for Florida Gateway College,  
is pictured with her niece, Kimberlynne, at her  
graduation from FGC

# Distinguished *Friend*

FGC Foundation honors  
Norman for her 'large impact'

By JAMIE WACHTER

A long-time board member for The Foundation for Florida Gateway College, Genie Norman couldn't believe what she was hearing in March.

Lee Pinchouck, the foundation's executive director, was describing the nominee for the 2023 Distinguished Friend of the Foundation during the board's March meeting.

With every description, Norman realized Pinchouck could be — and was — describing her.

"All I could think of was that it can't be me, I don't deserve this," Norman said of her initial thoughts. "There are so many other people in our community that should be chosen for this prestigious award."

But Pinchouck said Norman is definitely deserving in her own right. She will be honored in September at the foundation's donor appreciation luncheon.

For starters she has been a board member for 28 years and spent nine of those years as the chair of the foundation's board.

Those accomplishments were among the items Pinchouck started listing out during that March meeting, including that Norman has helped raise nearly \$750,000 for the college during her time with the board.

"She continues to work extremely hard for us, continuing to introduce people to the foundation and has proven to be a wonderful, not only a donor herself, but a fundraiser for us," Pinchouck said of Norman deserving the recognition.

"I'd say why not?"

Still, when Pinchouck finally revealed that, yes, Norman was the person set for recognition, she initially resisted. Norman said she told her fellow board members she wasn't the right selection. They should choose again.

"They laughed," she said.



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Pinchouck added: “When we announced it in the meeting to her that she was being granted this award, she accepted very humbly and expressed that there are many people in the community who deserve this award, but she was excited and humbly accepted this year’s honor.”

It’s an honor that doesn’t come with a set criteria to guide the selection every year.

Rather, it’s an honor that the foundation bestows on “people who have been good friends to us,” Pinchouck said, who have made a “large impact.”

“All I could think of was that it can’t be me, I didn’t deserve this. There are so many other people in our community that should be chosen for this prestigious award.”

One year, that person could be someone who made a single, large donation and the foundation board wants to honor them as a show of appreciation. Other years, it’s for friends who have made contributions over the course of time.

That would definitely describe Norman, who transferred to Lake City while working for the U.S Department of Veterans Affairs in 1994, becoming the first female director of the Lake City VA Medical Center. Shortly after, she joined the foundation board.

During those 28 years, she said there have been so many changes and improvements along the way for The Foundation of Florida Gateway College, new endowments and scholarships, fund drives and

luncheons all designed to “making our Foundation a viable and productive part of Florida Gateway College.”

Once an initial list of friends have been created, a nominating committee from the foundation’s board then selects the eventual winner. After the nominating committee makes a selection, it gets brought to the entire board for approval.

In recognizing Norman — a board member herself — this year’s process was slightly altered.

Instead of a discussion at the board meeting in March, Pinchouck instead emailed the other board members to conduct the vote.

They then, instead, announced it to Norman.

“It’s definitely her time,” Pinchouck said. “She’s done amazing things for us and our students.”

Still, the selection and recognition left Norman, who also wrote the “Taste Buddies” column for the Lake City Reporter for years, amazed.

“To be chosen as the Distinguished Friend this year is an honor and privilege as I will be following the footsteps of such worthy people as Philip Moses, James Montgomery, Billy Ray Foister, Wilson S. Rivers, Keith Leibfried and so many others,” Norman said. “To be honored for doing something I love makes this just icing on the cake.”

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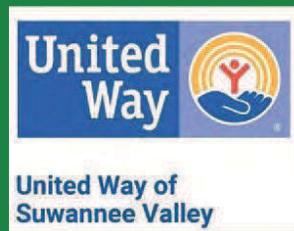
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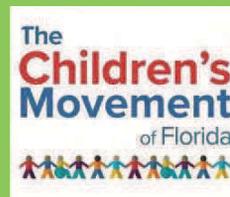


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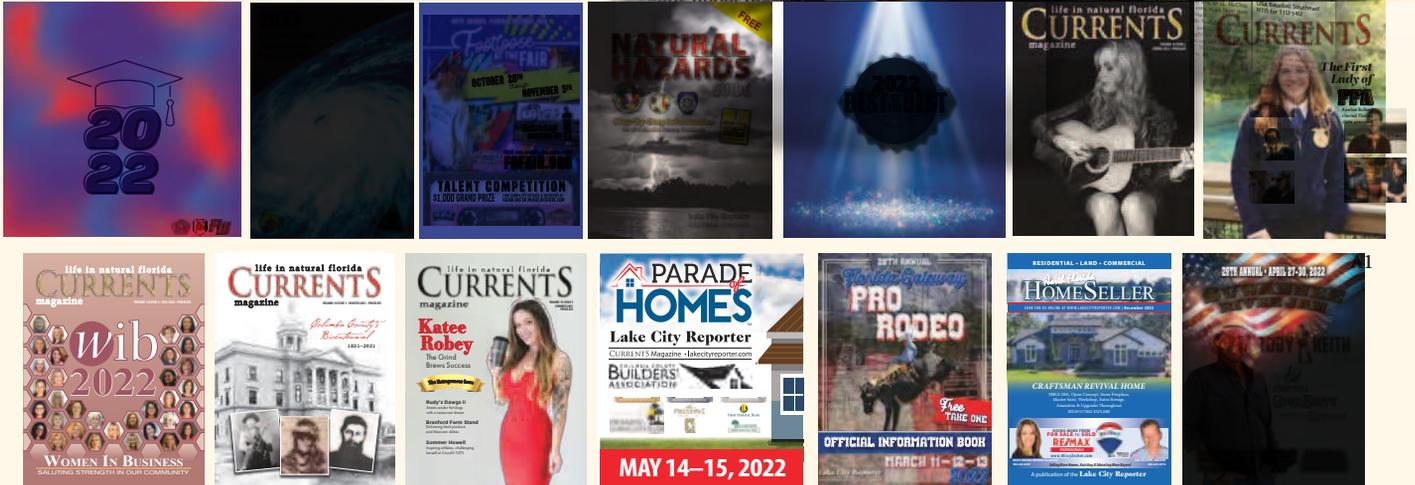
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