

A group of JROTC cadets in dark blue uniforms with gold buttons and medals are marching in formation. They are wearing black caps and holding rifles. A red and white striped banner is visible in the background.

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magazine

VOLUME 19 ISSUE 3
SUMMER 2025 • PRICELESS

50 Years At Attention

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of building leadership

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finds 'Harmony'
In nature, art

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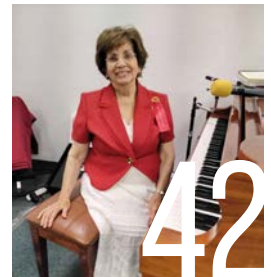
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COVER STORY



On The Cover: Cadets with the Columbia High Army JROTC have been learning leadership skills for 50 years.

Letter

From the Editor

Dreams can boost our community

What began as one man's vision 50-plus years ago to build character in area youths for the future is still paying off here in Columbia County today.

After going around town to various civic groups and to school district officials, Col Lemuel Thomas was successful in launching the Columbia High School JROTC program in September 1974.

That program, which is in the final months of celebrating its 50th anniversary, is still providing a stable influence on students today, helping them develop the character traits needed to be successful long after they have stopped walking the halls at CHS.

The program has also become far more than just a program to help them find discipline and character, it has become a home for many, providing a safe place when turbulence strikes during their teen years.

The dream to make an impact in her community came to Lydia Weatherly much more recently. The 2024 Belmont Academy graduate has grown up in and around community theatre as her family has traveled the country.

Feeling the need to provide that outlet to others here in Lake City and Columbia County, Weatherly took it upon herself to make it happen, recently launching Practically Perfect Performing Arts out of the Lake City Church of the Nazarene.

The group just put on their first performance, Finding Nemo Jr., this summer, but building a community around the stage while doing so, hoping to not only help others find that creative outlet and give theatre lovers a chance to enjoy the performances, but also to bring families closer together by giving them a chance to act together.

Donald Hollingsworth also had a vision 30 years ago. Taking a leap to provide for his family as well as the community through quality service, Hollingsworth

created Holly Electric with just himself, one friend, and his family members helping out.

Now, celebrating 30 years in Columbia County, the operation has grown but still remains committed to those same principles that inspired Hollingsworth three decades ago: good service, hard work and taking care of the community.

Krystal Detty is also taking care of the community, albeit a different community and in a different way.

Detty and her family have become a refuge for mistreated animals in North Florida through their Livin' Like Larry Farm Sanctuary. Detty said it is a way to advocate for those who can't advocate for themselves while living out their mission every single day of 'May all beings receive mercy, justice, compassion and peace.'

For Rachel Budwick, a White Springs artist and teacher, peace comes from being connected with the natural beauty that surrounds us in North Florida. That connection then feeds Budwick's passion to create art, to showcase the "harmony" that exists between music, nature and art.

Creating is also something Mayo's Jonnie Whittington loves to do. For more than 60 years, while traveling all across the country, Whittington has found inspiration with God's help to create both music and writings, producing books and songs. That inspiration has also led Whittington, now 86, to produce her first music CD.



Jamie Wachter

Jamie Wachter | Editor

life in natural florida
CURRENTS
magazine

CURRENTS magazine is a publication of the
Lake City Reporter, 1086 SW Main Blvd., Suite 103
Lake City, FL 32025.

To inquire about advertising, call (386) 752-1293 or e-mail
mslater@lakecityreporter.com.

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Finding Harmony in nature, art

Rachel Budwick channels beauty of North Florida in her artwork.

A painting of a family at the beach created by White Springs artist and teacher Rachel Budwick.

BY JAMIE WACHTER

Inspiration can come from anywhere. For Rachel Budwick, a nature-loving artist, the mood to create can come from just looking outside her window.

Granted, it helps that Budwick lives immersed in nature here in beautiful natural Florida where a wide array of animals seek refuge on her property nestled along the banks of the famed Suwannee River.

"We do live in a beautiful place," Budwick said about the inspiration for her artwork. "All the curvy, wavy trees that we have here. It's unique."

That beauty has long been calling Budwick, luring her to create. That call led Budwick to earning a tremendous honor this spring when she was selected to create the lead artwork for the 73rd annual Florida Folk Festival.

When that time came, Budwick again relied on the inspiration that surrounds her.

"It's hard not to be constantly inspired," she said. "I look at my window, 15 feet in the air so it's almost like a treehouse, I'll see the woodpecker right out the window and all sorts of mushrooms."

"I can see the river right now too, alligators, otters, deer, ducks, all kinds of stuff. It's all around."

ARTWORK ALL AROUND

Growing up here in North Florida, Budwick has long been surrounded by God's own artwork, which has inspired her own. Loving to draw as a child, Budwick said she's been an artist her entire life.

"I think it's pretty innate in most of us," she said. "I just never stopped."

She fed that artistic desire by turning to what surrounded her and all of us: animals and nature. In addition to time spent as a child outside, enjoying the beauty of the Suwannee River on weekends and the numerous plants, trees and animals that are a part of the North Florida landscape, Budwick would also take advantage of any nature special that would pop up on one of the three television stations that were available at the time.

"They start to feel like home and you get interested in them," she said, noting she enjoys painting the most but drawing is

an old standby, the quickest way she has of getting an idea or a scene down on paper when the inspiration hits and time is short.

As a wife, mother and teacher, there often isn't an overabundance of time. But it does also lend to more creative outlets as the materials available to create often change as well.

"A little bit of this, a little bit of that," she said. "Because I am a teacher and a parent, it's whatever I can get my hands on when I do have a good hour or two."

"But in a way they all fit in together, I think that's why I ended up calling it 'Harmony,' a play on the music but also the idea of nature vibing together, co-existing together peacefully."

CREATING 'HARMONY'

When the call came for Budwick to create the cover art for this spring's Florida Folk Festival, instantly Budwick had some idea of what she wanted to include in the piece.

Growing up in the area and living just outside of White Springs where the festival is based and cherished so dearly, Budwick began with the idea of including a folk music string band in her artwork.

That band, or at least the bango, fiddle and tambourin that the band will be playing, are using the roots of a cypress



Rachel Budwick is pictured with her piece, 'Harmony,' which was the cover art for the 73rd annual Florida Folk Festival this year.

tree as stands during an interlude in the performance.

That cypress tree's roots are intertwined with Budwick's own and those of White Springs and the Suwannee River itself.

Again, Budwick turned to what she knows best as the inspiration for her art.

"The tree that's in that is literally the tree across the river from where I live," she said. "I was like, 'I know exactly what I'm going to do, I'm going to use that tree.' So I literally ran down the bank and snapped a photograph of it so I could kind of see how the roots were all kind of growing out of the limestone.

"From there it was just kind of imagination."

That imagination took flight again with the nature that surrounds White Springs and the river. The ducks pictured on the piece were from a family that found a home near Budwick's own before growing up and flying away. The pileated woodpecker flying by the tree was inspired by a flock that had taken up residence on her riverfront yard.

And what better way to capture White Springs than with some wild azaleas showing off as well.

"That was just something special about this area is how many of those pink flowers grow along the river," Budwick said. "Just put a little spin on the shapes and stuff, to keep them all nice and together and balanced.

"But in a way they all fit in together,



A mural of butterflies Rachel Budwick painted on a wall at the CMJ Academy in Jasper.

I think that's why I ended up calling it 'Harmony,' a play on the music but also the idea of nature vibing together, co-existing together peacefully."

INSPIRING OTHERS

That love of art and inspiration is something Budwick shares with others as well.

While staying connected with past classmates at Florida State University, attending some drawing events at The Frame Shop in downtown Live Oak and interacting with professional artists online to continue to hone her craft and add new tips and techniques, Budwick has found a way to share her own thoughts and ideas as well.

Now a first grade teacher at Suwannee Riverside Elementary school in Live Oak, Budwick previously taught art at Hamilton County High School.

That was a rewarding artistic outlet as well. Teaching some students from their seventh-grade year all the way through their senior campaign, Budwick said the evolution students make is inspiring as well.



"They start off barely knowing how to draw and they end up with their own voice and their own style," she said, noting a handful of her students from HCHS have become professional artists as well. "It's pretty cool."

So is getting to teach at Riverside, the school of the arts in Suwannee County's theme-based elementary schools.

As the art school, a day is set out each month where all the classes do an art activity on top of the art and music classes they already take. That activity could be music, painting, poetry, or any number of artistic endeavors.

"I try to pull in something fun, make it a teachable moment about like the animals in Florida," Budwick said.

ALWAYS AN ARTIST

While being a teacher and a mother sometimes mean Budwick doesn't have the time she'd like to devote to her artwork, she said there is never any doubt about who she is or what she is.

"By no means do I ever stop feeling like an artist," she said. "I think if you are, it's a compulsion. You make art because you have to or you go crazy. It's just in you."

That artistic eye and need to create sometimes can manifest itself in a number of ways. If there isn't really time to draw or paint, Budwick can find other outlets to scratch that itch to create.

"Some people find their fix, and I do it too with little things as an outlet when you don't have time to paint but you'd rather paint, so

A portrait Rachel Budwick created for someone.



"By no means do I ever stop feeling like an artist. I think if you are, it's a compulsion. You make art because you have to or you go crazy. It's just in you."

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you might just figure out the colors you're going to put in your living room or redecorate an arrangement of art or photographs on your wall," she said. "It kind of gives you that same feeling of visual peace."

The only downside to being a full-time artist with only a part time to devote to it is when you end up in the "right place at the right time" and the nation's longest-running Folk Festival ends up selecting you to create their cover art and gift you a tent for your artwork to go with it.

"That was a huge honor," she said, adding she had to scramble to pull together some old pieces to show off as well as rush to print off copies of 'Harmony,' to have on display to sell. "That was so cool. I almost felt undeserving."

But there is more work still to come from Budwick, including her best work and her favorite as well.

Continuing to enjoy the nature around her and still learning those tricks of the trade, Budwick is sure there are great things still waiting to be created.

"I feel like I have a lot of me left unfinished," she said. "I don't think I've painted my favorite piece yet, I think I have a lot of things up there brewing around, waiting to come out."

"One day when life settles down a little bit, maybe I can spit them out. This will be my first summer off in three years, so maybe..."

An artist who loves nature, Rachel Budwick's works tend to include the beauty she sees around her in North Florida.



A mural of a Trojan, created by Rachel Budwick, on the wall of the Hamilton County High School gym.



Rachel Budwick said she believes her best work is still to come.

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Over the past 30 years, Holly Electric has grown from basically a family-only operation to 45 employees.

Holly Electric celebrates 30 years of hard work, community commitment.

By TONY BRITT

Hard work, family support and community involvement helped turn a local electrician's dream into a successful business venture that has become a Columbia County staple.

Holly Electric is celebrating 30 years as a local business. The business was founded in June 1995 by Donald Hollingsworth, who was working as a state employee in an electrician's position. When he worked with the state, before starting his own business, Hollingsworth did electrical, vocational and big generator jobs for the state.

"I was trying to figure out how to make more money and I've always worked two jobs my whole life," he said. "I wanted

to start doing electrical work. I've always done electrical work, even when I was in the military."

When Hollingsworth started his business as a full-time occupation, his company consisted of him, a helper and his son, Donald II, who was the first electrician he hired, back in 2003, along with his wife and daughter. The fledgling company of five employees, through the past three decades, has grown to 45 employees.

Now the company has a fleet of vehicles, including two sales cars, eight trucks and 12 vans.

The company had three vans when Donna Denton, Hollingsworth's daughter, Holly Electric's office manager and



human resources representative, started working there in earnest.

"Back then we had two full sized vans and I had the little Astro van," Hollingsworth said. "I did the service work and they did the new construction and remodel work. Now we have a fleet of vehicles."

When Hollingsworth conceived the idea of working for himself, he had a friend qualify him as an electrician, where he did electrical work on evenings and weekends.

"I was wiring houses and trimming them out in the evenings, after hours, because I still had my state job," he said. "On weekends, I even got my wife and kids out there on weekends to help get these houses done. I started with just a couple of contractors and one commercial job and it just kept growing and growing till I was doing more work after hours than I was during business hours."

Word quickly spread that Hollingsworth was a good electrician and the five years of experience he gained locally as an electrician before he took the state job, added to his growing reputation.

"Some of the contractors knew me and when they found out I was doing it on my own, they started calling," Hollingsworth said. "It was just a snowball effect. God didn't open doors for me, He opened up flood gates and it just went on from there. I give Him all the praise and glory for this, but between me, my wife, my kids and a friend of mine, we've done some work."

For his first office, the same as so many new business owners, Hollingsworth's office was at his home. Even after moving to another home, Hollingsworth kept his office in his house. Once he was in the new location he then decided to run the business out of a shed he constructed in his backyard, but a tornado that struck the area on Christmas day years ago severely damaged the building.

"While I'm in the shed in the backyard, my so-called office, and I hear what sounds like a big ole train was coming, but it wasn't a train," he said. "That's when I said this has got to stop, I can't work out of a shed in the backyard, I need a regular office building and that's when we moved."

The business continued to grow and Hollingsworth and his family eventually purchased their current office location at 1981 SW Main Blvd.

From 1995-2003 the company was known as DR Hollingsworth Electric. However, due to state regulations and another company bearing the same name, the business had to have another moniker. Then, once again, Hollingsworth went back to his

military years when he was known as Spec. Holly and the name of the business became Holly Electric.

As an electrical company, Holly Electric provides several services including any type of electrical wiring for residential, commercial, new construction, service calls and electrical repairs.

In 2016, the company began selling and installing generators providing certified service for units from Generac and other premier dealers including Kohler, Briggs and Stratton and Cummings.

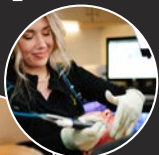
In 2018, Holly Electric was recognized as the Top Regional Energy Dealers of the Southeast award recipient and also in 2018 the company earned a Pro Premier Dealership award, then backed it up by winning the award again in 2019 and 2020.

Holly Electric has won several Best of the Best awards for electrical work through the years as voted on and determined by Lake City Reporter readers.

"It was just a snowball effect. God didn't open doors for me, He opened up flood gates and it just went on from there. I give Him all the praise and glory for this, but between me, my wife, my kids and a friend of mine, we've done some work."



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While Holly Electric has grown over the past 30 years, family remains a key component with founder Donald Hollingsworth (left) joined by daughter Donna Denton, son Donald II and wife Rita.

As a family-owned and operated business, Hollingsworth said his family members played a critical role in the initial start and eventual success of the business.

At first it was Hollingsworth and his wife, Rita, who helped with the work in the evenings and weekends. Hollingsworth was also able to convince his children Donald II and Donna to also pitch in and help with the family business. Donald II, who is now an equal partner, initially worked with his father on the weekends.

"The family was a big part of helping me move forward with it," Hollingsworth said.

"We were labor," added Donna with a smile.

"Cheap labor," replied Hollingsworth with a grin.

Three decades as a successful business is a milestone and Hollingsworth said the business's longevity is based on simple principles.

"Honesty, integrity and being totally involved with the community," were the terms Hollingsworth used to describe his secret to longevity. "Getting involved with the kids through the fair livestock sales, Tough Enough to Wear Pink, community ballgames for the children, the rodeo and Build My Future. When they see you involved in local community activities, they tend to go to you — we're putting back into the community."

"Honesty, integrity and being totally involved with the community... When they see you involved in local community activities, they tend to go to you — we're putting back into the community."



The family business began with just five employees including the Hollingsworth family of Donna Denton (left), Donald, Donald II and Rita.

Holly Electric now has 45 employees, still providing quality service.



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Holly Electric has also participated in the Build My Future events where local high school students get an opportunity learn about the building and trade industry. Holly Electric has participated since the event first occurred locally in 2019.

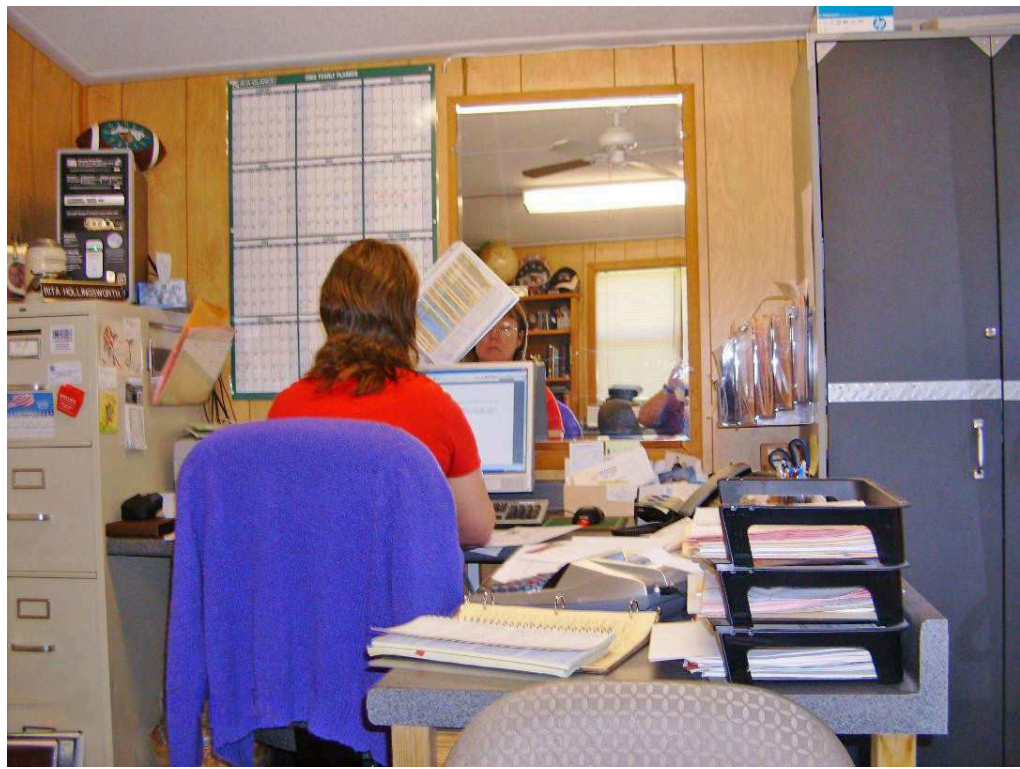
"Again, it deals with the kids and children, the future of our community and I've always told my kids, my employees and everything, 'You've got to promote the children, and if you don't then the families are not going

"It far exceeds where I actually dreamed where I would be at but I'm thankful for it. I am very thankful and it's an awesome feeling that I can leave something for my family to run and be involved in, a business like this."

to be involved," Hollingsworth said, noting he's had several customers that said they saw what he did at the rodeo and fair and that's why they brought their business to him. "We try to stay honest and straight forward. When we give a quote, we tell you exactly what you're getting out of that quote. We don't have any hidden surprises."

Hollingsworth said the 30-year milestone has special meaning for him.

"It's a great accomplishment," he said. "It far exceeds where I actually



The Hollingsworth family jokes that by being a family-owned and operated business, it made for having cheap labor.



When he first launched Holly Electric, Donald Hollingsworth was operating out of a shed at his house.

dreamed where I would be at but I'm thankful for it. I am very thankful and it's an awesome feeling that I can leave something for my family to run and be involved in, a business like this."

Holly Electric has become such a family-centric business that Hollingsworth now has another generation of family members that work at the business including nieces, nephews as well as grandchildren.



Donald Hollingsworth II (left) is now a full partner with his father, Donald, in the Holly Electric business.

"It is a true family owned and operated job," Denton said.

Hollingsworth, 66, was pleased to be able to celebrate his three decades with a community celebration, even though the celebration may serve multiple purposes.

"I'm going out with a bang. I'm fixing to retire," he said. "I'm fixing to turn it over."

"Thirty years is a lot. It's a big accomplishment," Denton added. "Without the community he wouldn't have his 30 years. He's ready to retire."

"It's been a fun ride. I've enjoyed it," Hollingsworth said. "That's another reason I think I'm so successful, because I enjoy what I do."

To this day Hollingsworth says he still enjoys electrical work.

"I'm going to retire. I'm going to take a little time off, but they're not going to get rid of me."

Hollingsworth said when he learned the skills in the military to be an electrician years ago, he had no idea that he would be able to get so much from it.

"When I was in the military, I never dreamed it would be this big or where we're at today," he said.



Holly Electric began selling and installing generators in 2016.



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Cast members rehearse choreography ahead of Practically Perfect Performing Arts' debut of 'Finding Nemo Jr.'

Practically Perfect Producing PRESTIGIOUS PLAYS

How Lydia Weatherly plans to revitalize local community theatre

By MORGAN MCMULLEN

Lydia Weatherly seems destined to have performed this role in life. Her parents, Glen and Tavia, are pastors. Glen serves at the Lake City Church of the Nazarene. But before moving to Columbia County in 2022, the Weatherlys had traveled the country, entertaining audiences with acting and producing in various shows on various mediums. "I grew up with theatre just my whole life," Lydia said. "(My parents) served as producers through a church they were serving at in Illinois, and a lot of their youth group and nearby community started doing theatre through that specific church."

Lydia grew into that mold. She recalls getting her first taste of the stage in middle school in Oregon, again through the lens of the church her parents were then serving.

"They rented out our church space to perform theatre, and so that's how I got into it personally," she said.

Lydia's own ambitions began to take shape. She noticed a

lack of community theatre in her new home, the thing both her and her father in particular grew up loving. She spoke about it with Glen, and the two came up with a plan.

With passion meeting opportunity, Lydia is now laying the foundation to revive the pastime her family has loved.

In late June, Lydia debuted the first step in that plan. Her new company, Practically Perfect Performing Arts, put on 'Finding Nemo Jr.' a production starring a cast of over 20 kids performing a family-friendly musical of the popular Disney Pixar movie. Glen served as a producer with Tavia as the costumer, house manager and art curator.

The reviews are likely already in, unknown by the time this article has been written. But the care with which the Weatherlys have taken to perform and produce in the past, it's nearly a cinch to receive five stars.

Lydia hopes the production kick starts the future for herself, her family and the Lake City community.

"I definitely think it can turn into something that's bigger

and broader, especially since Lake City is all about community and multi-generations involved in different activities,” she said. “If a parent wants to do theatre with their kid, or a grandparent wants to do it with their grandkid, I think that’s another way to form relationships and find an activity that families can do together. Not only seeing the shows here, but being involved in them as well.”

“If a parent wants to do theatre with their kid, or a grandparent wants to do it with their grandkid, I think that’s another way to form relationships and find an activity that families can do together. Not only seeing the shows here, but being involved in them as well.”

ACT I

Glen and Tavia staged productions of ‘Narnia,’ ‘You’re a Good Man Charlie Brown,’ ‘Charlotte’s Web’ and ‘Cinderella’ while ministering in Illinois. However, Glen’s own journey originally began in Oregon, growing up attending a Christian school for many years before graduating from a public high school. Throughout



Lydia Weatherly (left), dressed as Cindy Lou Who, poses with Erin Sapp along with The Grinch’s dog, Max, during the Christmas in Columbia Holiday Market in downtown Lake City in 2022. Weatherly dressed up as the character as part of her role with the Practically Perfect Party Co.



The cast of Practically Perfect Performing Arts’ production of ‘Finding Nemo Jr.’ rehearses during a table reading ahead of its debut in late June.

the first 18 years of his life, Glen performed for various local theatre groups through both school and church.

From there, he moved to California, joining the Screen Actors Guild and appearing as a background actor in shows such as ‘Seinfeld,’ ‘Frazier,’ ‘The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air,’ ‘Beverly Hills 90210,’ and ‘Roseanne.’

But Glen felt a different calling in life. After working about 3 1/2 years in Hollywood, he decided to take his talents to more local-facing productions. He worked for an

outdoor summer theatre in Oregon before making his way to Jacksonville in 1994 to pursue a passion project of his own.

That singular passion eventually turned into two. Originally scheduled to spend about three months in Florida, he stayed roughly three years, meeting Tavia on a car ride to Universal Studios while working on a production of ‘The Giver of Life.’

“I played Judas the betrayer,” Glen said. “We had several thousand people, live animals, charter buses from all over...A month after I got here, I

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ended up meeting the woman I would eventually marry. My suitcase that I had brought for just three months, it never went back to Oregon.”

ACT II

The couple eventually had four children: Jaron, Evan, Ethan and Lydia. A year after Glen and Tavia married, they entered the ministry, moving from Florida to Illinois and then back to Oregon, with Glen eventually getting ordained in 2013.

The family eventually moved to Lake City while Lydia was still in high school. She attended Belmont Academy before graduating in 2024 as well as earning a Florida Gateway College degree through dual enrollment.

Fresh off her first year attending Trevecca Nazarene University in pursuit of a theatre education degree, Lydia already possesses a hefty resume in the field. She has played the Stepmother in TNU's production of 'Into the Woods,' the role of Sandy in a Union County High School staging of 'Grease,' Mrs. Darling in High Springs Playhouse's 'Peter Pan,' and various roles in 'Once Upon a Mattress,' 'Willy Wonka,' 'Frozen,' 'Beauty and the Beast,' and 'Shrek the Musical.' Lydia also gained experience behind the scenes through Nashville's Adonai Arts Academy as a producer and sound operator on 'The Importance of Being Earnest' and 'Frozen Jr.,' respectively, as well as an assistant director, costumer and hair designer on her first go-

around of 'Finding Nemo Jr.'

“I got that experience just seeing how all that operates and how they do their system,” Lydia said of the experience. “I gained ideas of what I liked and then also things that I'm like, 'Oh, I know what I can incorporate into my own company.'”

Practically Perfect Performing Arts wasn't born immediately after moving to Lake City though. Lydia started her first business, the Practically Perfect Party Co., while still attending Belmont with the goal of entertaining kids with fully costumed Disney princesses and superheroes.

That did, however, serve as the springboard to fulfilling her dream. All her past experience leads Lydia to believe that it will work.

“I started performing in community theatre in Oregon, and it led to them renting out the church that my dad was pastoring at,” she said. “That was another way for him to make a community even bigger though connecting the church to theatre. Now we get to do it in Lake City.”



Lydia Weatherly shows off the Gingerbread Man while wearing her costume for Union County High School's production of 'Shrek the Musical.'



Set builder Nick O'Dell gets a head start on bringing Lydia Weatherly's vision for 'Finding Nemo Jr.' to life.



ACT III

There's a big emphasis on the 'community' aspect of community theatre for the Weatherlys. Glen said he's tried to impart some of that learned wisdom onto Lydia as she takes her first steps to running her own production company.

"What we talk a lot about behind the scenes is the importance of being surrounded by a team," he said. "It's not about us. We know. No one person is the star. There's no one person that's in the spotlight. It's truly a team."

That shows in the details of Lydia's production of 'Finding Nemo Jr.' Glen recalls speaking with the father of a girl in the musical, asking if he could build a barracuda puppet. After seeing the pictures of the finished product, Glen said the production staff was blown away.



Concept art shows off different costumes to be utilized in Practically Perfect Performing Arts' production of 'Finding Nemo Jr.'

"It was just absolutely amazing to see the craftsmanship from just that one person," he said. "My whole life, it's just something I've always enjoyed is learning about people, finding what they're gifted in, what they are passionate about, what they enjoy, and then how they might be interested in contributing to the process."

It's equally impressive, Glen said, that Lydia has learned early on to surround herself with those types of people in leadership roles. Lydia said that empowers both herself and everyone involved to perform to the best of their own abilities.

"I was thinking of the things that I love about community theatre is it's small, but it's mighty," she said. "I've had opportunities to work in bigger casts or bigger company theatres and college theatre and high school theatre, so I've gotten to see the different elements from different theatres. But small theatres are just like a family."

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ENCORE

Lydia still expects a certain amount of professionalism put into her productions. After all, she says, theatre has been around for centuries. But with the novelty of it all in a place that hasn't experienced high-level community theatre, she doesn't want to give first-time theatre-goers the wrong impression.

"It's new to Lake City, and so I feel like people don't really know what to expect," Lydia said. "We're really wanting to bring a professional element to it. It's not just kids putting on a colorful T-shirt and singing randomly. It's a lot of hard work from everybody. I think people are going to be genuinely surprised when they come and see (the shows) and realize the effort and amount of work every single person has put into the show."

With most of her life devoted to the craft, Lydia said she just wants to revive the "lost art" of theatre and puppetry to foster and nurture creativity in kids and adults — the community — alike.

"Collaborating with the people you have," she said, "you can grow relationships and friendships with them."



Cast member Brooklyn Woodworth shows off a barracuda puppet built by Jacob Woodworth that will be featured in Practically Perfect Performing Arts' production of 'Finding Nemo Jr.'

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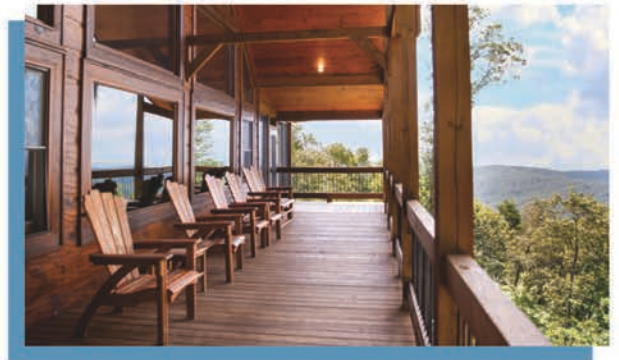


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Striving to do Better

Columbia's JROTC celebrates 50 years of building citizens

By TONY BRITT

More than five decades ago, a local military man took it upon himself to tout the character traits that a Junior Reserve Officer Training course could provide in turning students into citizens.

Some 50 years later, his efforts have shown that they can stand the test of time in offering high school students an alternative to displaying their love of God, country and community.

The program, which started in 1974, was the Columbia High School JROTC program. The program, which is in the final few months of celebrating its 50th anniversary, has been a staple for thousands of local high school students, who were able to build structure in their lives through the foundation that the program provided.

The Columbia High School JROTC began as a three-year program in September 1974 with two instructors assigned to the program. Small portables were used for quarters and a small supply room and weapons room were built by the masonry class within the first six months. Later during the year the JROTC was expanded to a four-year program.

The program was started after Col. Lemuel Thomas advocated for the program around town to local civic organizations and school district officials, citing the value of the ROTC program in building the character of youths for the future. He served as an instructor for the program.

The early program had a Ranger Fitness and leadership management course, in addition to additional curriculum activities consisting of competitive teams: Rifle team, girl's drill team and boy's drill team. The drill teams were state champions in 1979.

CELEBRATING A MILESTONE

Lt. Col. Austin Akers, Columbia High School Army JROTC Senior Army instructor, said for the past year the program has been celebrating and recognizing the 50th anniversary and all the contributions that the program has and the legacy of service and commitment the cadets have in the community.

"I think it was important to just acknowledge that, if nothing else for these kids to know that they're part of a legacy of service, dedication, volunteerism and giving back to the community as part of that," Akers said.

He noted the cadets take part in a number of activities like the battalion's 911 Memorial March, serving as color guards for the parades and other events, as well as recognition the students get as student athletes and competitors in the program and giving back to the community.

"We must do 1,000 hours of community service throughout the year, every year, in different ways," Akers said. "I just think it's important to recognize that and the significance of the 50th anniversary. The things we wanted to highlight are a distinction of maintaining that, continuing those activities things like the Wall of Fame we started in this program to recognize not only the service to the program, high school and community, but those that have made the extra commitment of going into the military."

The Columbia High School Army JROTC program is not part of the recruiting effort, but the program exposes the cadets to the military as an opportunity.

"I think it was important to just acknowledge that, if nothing else for these kids to know that they're part of a legacy of service, dedication, volunteerism and giving back to the community as part of that."



Columbia High's JROTC drill teams won state titles in 1979.

"All of that goodness, all of those things those kids have done throughout their career here in Columbia High School and the JROTC program, we just feel like it's good to highlight to the community," Akers said. "These kids are doing good things. They're doing good things for themselves, their future, the community, the country and the 50th anniversary just allows us to highlight and celebrate that."

First Sgt. Trena Dettmer, Army instructor with Columbia High School JROTC, has been with the program for 12 years and noted the transition she's seen in the program and its cadets is proof the program is having a positive impact on the lives of the cadets. She said she has had numerous

siblings from a family participate in the program.

"The people in this program, way back when it first started, are parents of the kids we have today and they're so proud of themselves and so proud to be a part of something," she said. "It's neat to see the full circle — the parents were here and now we have their kids. The program has grown in different ways and it was strong back then, but I'm not sure exactly all they did back then."

Both Akers and Dettmer seem to be honored in continuing a tradition that was started five decades ago.

Dettmer said she thinks it's huge. She noted that when students begin high school it means they belong somewhere, it becomes their second

family and there are different groups of students in a variety of organizations.

"You can get out of JROTC as much as you want or as little as you want. It's up to you. The colonel and I will give you our shirt off our backs to help you be successful in life," she said. "Sometimes it's hard to give an A away to a kid that doesn't care. We try to bring all of them up one level, so it just becomes a home. I think it's important that we make good citizens... That's our goal, is to make sure they are good, well-rounded young men and women once they leave Columbia High School."

"You can get out of JROTC as much as you want or as little as you want. It's up to you ... I think it's important that we make good citizens... That's our goal, is to make sure they are good, well-rounded young men and women once they leave Columbia High School."

Akers, who was a member of a JROTC program when he was in high school, said he didn't have a lot of direction had it not been for the program.

"I found a home. It clicked for me and I stopped playing high school sports because my focus became JROTC," he said. "I was successful and it made sense to me. I found structure, which I was lacking in my personal life and family life. It put me on a path to go to college... For me it's now paying



The Columbia High ROTC rifle team, the 1981-82 team is pictured, was one of the competitive teams that the program featured early on after its launch in 1974.

that back into a program that needs that kind of leadership and opportunities for this generation of students. We have those kids here where but for JROTC they don't have another home, literally and figuratively. We have kids where this is their safest place in their personal, family and school life and they come here and they thrive to the level that they're capable of. We just try to give them the best opportunity to do that."

Akers said he and Dettmer work to teach the cadets life skills.

"We just want to see that we've made a difference in kids," he added. "For some you do and for some you don't necessarily know right away, it's two-three years down the road when they come back and they just tell you how impactful you were. We don't do it for that, but we know even if they don't know it right now, that we've made a difference in some of these kids' lives."

Akers said he and Dettmer have found a home at CHS and he's excited about the program's future. They have all kinds of ideas for the program and are looking forward to working with the community in different ways and highlighting the program.

LEGACY OF A PROGRAM

There are roughly 120 students in the Columbia High School Army JROTC program, which is traditionally the program's yearly average of cadets.

The Columbia High JROTC program introduces students to interviewing skills, resume building, financial readiness, public speaking and a variety of other skills.

"We expose them to things that they don't get in any other class, and a lot of them don't get anywhere else in life because that's just the nature of where we're at in society," Akers said. "They don't get challenged by people, told to 'do better.' That's one of my phrases, 'It's OK just to do better.' Every day, just try and strive to be a little better."

Akers challenged the cadets to prove their detractors and naysayers wrong, whether it's peers or family members.

"We have a real perspective on the challenges that these kids go through," he said. "We push them in ways that maybe makes it a little uncomfortable... It's rewarding to have that full circle moment, and you don't get it for all the kids, but for the ones that it does make a difference, it can make a huge difference. We're just trying to do the best for these young people."

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Chase Piesel, 18, graduated with the Columbia High School Class of 2025. Piesel was a member of the Fighting Tiger Battalion for four years. His highest rank in the battalion was Major.

He said the JROTC program benefitted him in developing his character and other aspects of his life.

"It made me more self aware," he said. "It let me know there was a lot of things I needed to work on and it made me more physically active."

Piesel said when he came to the high school he wasn't a physically active student, but now after taking part in the program he describes himself as being fairly athletic.

"It built up my confidence, so I can now speak louder in front of people, tell people what to do if I need to and I'm able to make sure things are correct and clean," he said.

Piesel said he would recommend that other students participate in the JROTC program because all of the things that it can help them learn and experience.

"It can help you in so many ways in life, plus it's one of the few electives within the school that

gives you a ton of career opportunities once you graduate," he said. "It can help you in a military career, help you in your careers otherwise by giving you more strength, confidence and things like that."

Kiersten Parson was a member of Fighting Tiger Battalion for three years. She rose to the rank of Lt. Colonel in the battalion.

"JROTC helped me become a more confident person," she said. "It helped me socialize more, helped me become a good leader and helped me realize a lot more ways to connect with people and made me physically fit."

Parson also noted that she would recommend other students participate in the program.

"I think it's a great opportunity for anybody," she said. "It doesn't matter if you're an outgoing person, a shy person, a person who suffers physically for the physical activities or the best athlete there is, it doesn't matter who you are. Anybody can join it and anybody can benefit from the program."

In addition to the 911 Memorial March, the Fighting Tiger Battalion also serves as color guards for parades and other events.



REWARDS OF STAYING THE COURSE

While the program has experienced changes through the years, it continues to reward cadets who stay the course.

"In my opinion, I think that we give them skills that as the colonel said that they don't get in any other class," Dettmer said. "It's forward thinking. A lot of kids now and days don't have that forward thinking knack. I think we make them a well-rounded individual as best as we can in JROTC. I think that we give them skills that they don't get anywhere else in school or from home... We can pour and pour into them, which we do, to make them the best human beings we can and the ones we have for four years we'll have more of an impact than the ones that we get for six months to a year."

Akers said the JROTC program gives students exposures that allow them to

"They don't get challenged by people, told to 'do better.' That's one of my phrases, 'It's OK just to do better.' Every day, just try and strive to be a little better."

Columbia High JROTC cadets must do 1,000 hours of community service throughout the year. Among that service has been helping put up crosses and flags in honor of veterans and first responders for Memorial Day and Veterans Day.



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build confidence in areas of their lives where they would have never had the opportunity otherwise.

"Whether it's just the ability to stand on your own two feet and have a conversation with another adult, graduate high school your personal goals and plans and why you've made certain decisions — just the ability to think about those things and articulate it in a way someone else can understand, I think is important," he said. "So many young people are just lost in their own path of how am I going to get to where it is I think I want to go. Everyone of them can tell you what they aspire to, but they don't necessarily understand the steps along the path that it takes to get there and the realities they might see along that path. We give them sometimes a reality check, sometimes some directional

guidance, sometimes we give them some skills and tools that will help them along that path. It's different for all, but all of them come out better for the thought process and the understanding that they gain out of this experience.

"Does wearing a uniform every week for a grade make or break your entire future and your career? No, but it allows you to understand that there's some responsibility in what you're required to do," Akers continued. "You have some ownership, you have responsibilities to make sure you do what you have to do, that you have some accountability to yourself and your teammates when you do or not do your uniform correctly... A lot of these kids don't have a lot of structure... Not everyone has everything all the time that they need to be successful. We try to fill that gap for every kid."



The goal of the Columbia High JROTC, which is pictured serving as the color guard in a parade, is to help the cadets become good citizens.



The Columbia High Army JROTC is celebrating its 50th anniversary of providing lessons for students.



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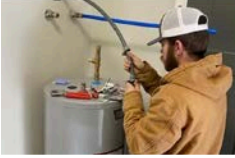


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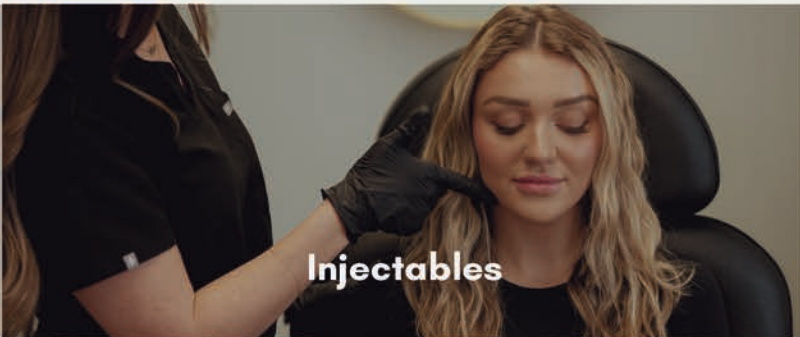
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Caption Jonnie Whittington holds up a copy of 'Building Your House,' the first of the 23 books she has written, at a Writers INK meeting.

finding the Right Words

Jonnie Whittington, accomplished Mayo author, releases her first music CD, 'Hello Love.' BY JAMIE WACHTER

Jonnie Whittington was down in the dumps. With one young child already sharing a room with Whittington and her husband, Malcolm, at their church in Arizona, Jonnie was pregnant and stressed.

"I had a little pity party," Whittington recalled. "I was like, 'This is just the story of my life. I've never had a house that was my own. I've always lived in a church parsonage. We've moved all over the country.'"

"I just had a little pity party. I don't know where I'm going to put this baby."

But as quickly as Whittington started to feel sad for herself, she just as quickly snapped out of it.

In that moment, sitting on the edge of her daughter's bed, God's word spoke to Whittington, the daughter and wife of ministers.

The constant moving that she had experienced, without a real home to put down roots, suddenly didn't seem so bad

any longer.

"All of a sudden I thought, 'Wait a minute, why am I sitting here feeling sorry for myself. According to the Bible, I have a mansion in heaven. When this life is over, I'm going to live in a beautiful mansion,'" Whittington said.

That wasn't the only thing that spoke to her that night. Rather, the words just kept coming to the 21-year-old. The words to her first song, 'I have a mansion.'

"The words just came to me sitting there on the edge of that bed for my first song," she said. "I wrote it down. Then I ran into the church and wrote a tune, started playing a tune and singing it and playing it. It just came to me. I just felt inspired."

FINDING A NEW OUTLET

Sixty-five years later, the words have never stopped coming to Whittington.

At times they've changed from song lyrics to Sunday School lessons to books, but they keep flowing, keep coming to Whittington when the time is right.

That included last summer when Malcolm, her husband of 68 years, passed away. Suddenly, lyrics started coming to Whittington again.

While most of the 50 or so songs that she has written over the past six-plus decades are religious, Whittington crafted a couple love songs as she dealt with her husband's death.

“The words just came to me sitting there on the edge of that bed for my first song. I wrote it down. Then I ran into the church and wrote a tune, starting playing a tune and singing it and playing it. It just came to me. I just felt inspired.”

Then came a song about their 68 years of marriage. One about their family. Another about Jesus always being there, even during those rough patches.

And with the lyrics coming, Whittington decided there was something new she wanted to try as well: Assemble those songs into a CD, which is entitled, 'Hello Love.'

“I just started writing,” she said. “I



The daughter and wife of ministers, Jonnie Whittington has written around 50 songs over the past 60-plus years, mostly religious in nature.



Jonnie Whittington recently released her first CD, entitled, 'Hello Love,' which is dedicated to her late husband, Malcolm.



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thought, 'I'm going to do a CD to dedicate it to him.'"

So with the help of Jerry Guy and his studio in Live Oak, Whittington went to work. Using those songs that she had just written and choosing some of the others that she'd crafted over the years, a 12-song album was compiled.

"I've written a lot of songs, but I've never done much with them," she added. "I just got to thinking, 'I'm getting on up there and I'm not going to live forever. I need to do something with them.'"

Whittington, who has also authored 23 books that are for sale currently on Amazon, hasn't gotten around to that with her music just yet. She said she's still working on getting it added to Facebook and Amazon to try to sell them but that is still in process.

She's also hoping her first CD is not her last. "I'd like to do more CDs and use more of them," she said.

RELUCTANT WRITER

It's quite the change from the younger

Whittington, the one who would write the lyrics but not do much else with the songs. She may perform one here and there at church, but for the most part kept them to herself.

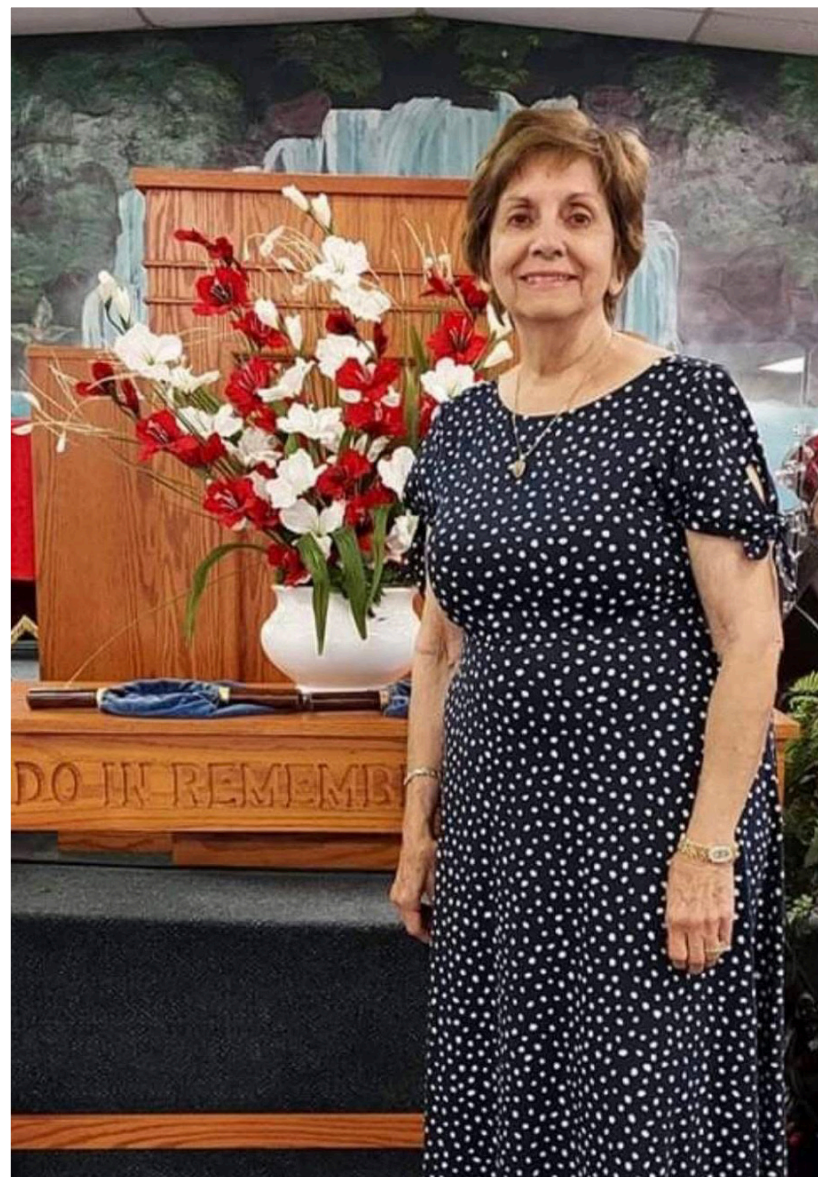
That began with 'I have a mansion.'

"I thought, 'Nobody wants to listen to a homemade song.' I was just thinking, 'This is a homemade song,'" she said. "I always felt kind of bashful about singing them. I thought, 'Nobody wants to hear these.'"

Fast forward a few years, and a few moves all across the country — as a child Whittington lived in Miami, Minnesota, Arizona and Louisiana before going off to school at Lee University in Tennessee where she met her husband; who also took the family from North Carolina to Arizona to Florida and even a stint in Barbados — and the Whittingtons were working in Jacksonville when a parishioner delivered a blunt assessment to Jonnie.

"One day a lady said she thought I was really selfish," she said.

Whittington was taken aback. She thought



Jonnie Whittington held two concerts in Jacksonville to share her songs with parishioners.



Jonnie Whittington, who has 23 books for sale on Amazon, hopes to release additional CDs as well to use the songs she has written over the years.

everybody thought she was a very nice person. So she asked the woman why did she think she was anything but that.

"She goes, 'Because you have all these beautiful songs you've written and you won't share them with us,' Whittington said. 'You just keep them to yourself. You need to do a concert and sing those songs. God has given them to you.'"

So Whittington did.

She put on a concert in Jacksonville that went over so well that it led to a second.

But things soon changed again. Malcolm got a new call from the state office with a new destination: Mayo.

"They said, 'Malcolm, I need you and your wife to go to Mayo and pastor the Alton church,'" Whittington recalled. "The man said, 'You'd fit right in there.'"

FINDING A NEW LANE

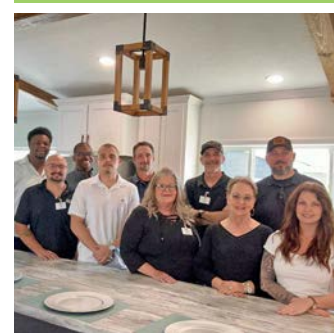
For someone who had lived in Miami, Tampa and Jacksonville in Florida, as well as Minneapolis, Phoenix and Baton Rouge, life in Lafayette County had a bit of a different speed.

"I've lived in some of the major cities in this country and now I'm living in Mayo with

"I thought, 'Nobody wants to listen to a homemade song.' I was just thinking, 'This is a homemade song.'" I always felt kind of bashful about singing them. I thought, 'Nobody wants to hear these.'"

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Jonnie Whittington said she loves writing both songs and books, enjoying whatever God is moving her to create at that moment.

one little traffic light,” she said. “We were just tired of all the traffic.”

That slower pace, as well as some early evenings from her husband, gave Whittington time to pursue a new craft.

When Malcolm would check out early, Jonnie used the extra time for other activities. One day that included the direction from God to get to work on writing some more, this time her first book, 'Building your House.'

It's a book that actually had already really been written years before.

Dealing with her oldest son's substance abuse problems, Jonnie Whittington headed to their church in Tampa one night to pray for help. After seeking favor for her son's problems, Whittington then asked God for some new material to teach her young adults' Sunday School class.

After 25 years of teaching the same lesson over and over again, Whittington wanted something really inspiring to leave her students.

At first she didn't think she got it.

“I was so disappointed,” she said. “I wanted something really deep and profound.”

But then, much like it happened years before in Arizona, God's word spoke to her once again.

The ending of the Sermon on the Mount — if you build your house on the rock, it will stand while if you build on

“I thought this was amazing. I knew God was giving me a book, but I never thought I was smart enough to write a book.”

sand, it will fall — gave Whittington the vision for her new lesson and, eventually, that book.

“The sermon is like building a house,” Whittington said.

So Whittington created a lesson comparing the scriptures from the Beatitudes to the steps in building a house. These verses went with purchasing the property. The next were laying the foundation. Then came putting in the flooring, constructing the walls, putting in windows and finally the roof.

“I thought this was amazing,” she said. “I knew God was giving me a book, but I never thought I was smart enough to write a book.”

FOLLOWING THE INSPIRATION

But like with most of Whittington's works, she said God has

provided the answers and the words when she's needed them.

She said most of the inspiration for her writings, both songs and books, have come as the result of prayer.

“When I'd pray, God would give me ideas about how to write them,” she said.

He also gave her the outlet to produce those words.

An accomplished song writer and author, Whittington said she doesn't care for one over the other. Rather, she enjoys whatever the current inspiration is providing.

“It's like different seasons,” she said, adding she hasn't written any new books in five or six years, although there are three books started that she still hopes to finish at some point. “I'll get inspired to write one or the other and I just love what I'm doing when I'm doing it.

“It's great to create.”



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Chickens, ducks and goats follow Krystal and Brandon Detty around Livin' Like Larry Farm Sanctuary.

livin like *Larry*

Krystal Detty aims to bring peace, comfort to traumatized animals at Branford farm sanctuary.

By MORGAN MCMULLEN

Krystal Detty lives on a funny farm. Cows and ducks and pigs and anything with fur or feathers intermingle and frolic, recover and heal, day after peaceful day. Plastic play sets — mini jungle gyms, in particular — serve as most animals' favorite toys.

"The goats, the pigs, the donkeys, the chickens, the turkeys, they all love them," Detty said. "That's been our most favorite and well-loved and most useful toy around the sanctuary."

The 'residents,' the different animals on Detty's sanctuary, are treated to live music

Most residents experienced immense tragedy leading to their arrival at Livin' Like Larry Farm Sanctuary. Some are there to recover, but all are there to live out their lives in peace after suffering.

Two moments stand out to Detty in her life that led her to this. One informed her values, the other her mission.

She vividly remembers each, down to the conversations

leading to the impacts. In these brief encounters where any number of outcomes were equally likely, everything fell into place for what became Livin' Like Larry.

"Any animal that comes through us, that's our goal is to bring them peace," Detty said. "Show them compassion and bring them peace."

ELEPHANT EARS

Detty was about four years old when her father took her to the Apple Festival in Jackson, Ohio. He offered his young daughter a treat, an elephant ear. Like many 4-year-olds, Detty was confused. When her father returned with the caramelized pastry, the two dug in.

Detty finally asked her father what exactly they were eating. "And he said, 'Well, they take an elephant, they cut its ear off, and they cook it,'" Detty recalled. "I was hysterical, I mean completely hysterical. I would not eat it. I just could not

believe that someone would harm an elephant just to eat their ear.

"From there forward, I just saw animals differently. I was more concerned with what's going on in their head and how are they feeling and to make sure they were safe than anything else."

There was more to it than just childhood trauma though. Years later, around 2010, one of Detty's close friends, a life coach named Fred, passed away. She remembers the email signature he signed off with on every correspondence: 'May all beings receive mercy, justice, compassion and peace.' The phrase went from a friendly reminder to an arm tattoo and, eventually, served as the motto for Livin' Like Larry.

"That's become our motto, but it's so much more than a motto to me,"

"I'm here to advocate for these animals that cannot advocate for themselves.

They can't speak for themselves. I wake up each morning with gratitude. Our motto isn't just words to me. I try to wake up and really live life by that motto."

Krystal Detty, the founder and co-director of Livin' Like Larry, holds a chicken.



Detty said. "I'm here to advocate for these animals that cannot advocate for themselves. They can't speak for themselves. I wake up each morning with gratitude. Our motto isn't just words to me. I try to wake up and really live life by that motto."

THE ORIGINAL LARRY

One other event informed the future for Detty. She and her husband, Brandon, and her daughter, Olivia, were still living in Ohio when the family went to buy some hay for their horse. They were at the feed lot when Olivia, or 'Olive' as she's known, spotted some cows that'd just arrived.

"And she said, 'Can we rescue cows?'" Detty recalled. "I looked over, and there was probably 20 cows standing there. I said, 'Olivia, we don't have the room for 20 cows.'"

Olivia simplified her request, trying to strike a bargain with her mother.

"She said, 'Can we rescue one?'" Detty said. "I looked at Brandon, and I'm like, 'Well, I mean, yeah, I guess we could rescue a cow. How would we pick out of these 20 cows standing here that we know they're going to all get slaughtered? None of them are going to live full lives. How would we pick?'"

Olivia took a gander at livestock. As if fate willed it, Cow No. 7 lifted his head. Detty describes the resulting 'moo'



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Larry, the Hereford steer and namesake of Livin' Like Larry Farm Sanctuary, stands in a new pool at the sanctuary.

from No. 7 as a “two-syllable” utterance.

“Well, that one, No. 7,” Olivia said, according to Detty.

Detty agreed to spare Cow No. 7, at the cost of about \$1.30 per pound, the couple recalled. Cow No. 7, a Hereford steer, could’ve been on the low end as far as size goes for that species, putting him around 650 pounds at nearly a year old at the time, which would fetch an estimated price of \$845.

The family approached the cow’s owner and made the offer. Olivia already had a name picked out.

“Olivia said, ‘Well, his name’s Larry,’” Detty said. Livin’ Like Larry was born.

THE SANCTUARY

The family moved to Florida from there, with Detty losing her right eye and being recommended to move to a more temperate

climate. Obviously, Larry made the trip as well, along with the horse for which the family had originally went to buy hay.

It wasn't without hassle. The family filled out reams of paperwork with different state agriculture departments. Detty believes it was about two years between planning and moving. While scouting out destinations, the family fell in love with Branford, moved there and started the farm sanctuary.

Still, Detty believes there's more to it than that simple name.

"We aren't just a farm sanctuary," she said. "We take in disabled, end-of-life animals that just need a second chance, or an animal that hasn't ever had a chance. This is their last chance, this is kind of the last road before euthanasia. It's a sanctuary, so they live out the rest of their life here."

It's a distinction Detty wishes to make clear. She and her family aren't in the business of adopting out their rescue animals. Nor are they there to give public tours of animals simply trying to live out the remainder of their days in dignity.

"We aren't a rescue," she said. "We don't bring in and adopt out. We are a sanctuary. What we do is bring them peace."

Through it all, Larry, the former Cow No. 7, has grown to a full-sized bovine. He serves as the mascot for the sanctuary, drawn to cartoonish perfection and adorned with a little cowboy hat. The design took inspiration from real life.

"That was from an actual photo that we snapped," Detty said. "We were standing outside, and Brandon was trimming his hooves. Larry kept bending over and grabbing Brandon's hat off his head. So Brandon took the hat and just sat in on Larry's head, and Larry just stood there

Larry, the Hereford steer and namesake of Livin' Like Larry Farm Sanctuary.



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Sweet Pea, a 4-month-old puppy, relaxes at home after being rescued by Krystal and Brandon Detty of Livin' Like Larry Farm Sanctuary.

with that hat on his head for like, 10 minutes.”

It sums up, in Detty’s view, how her theory on animal treatment is justified.

“(Cows) have such personality,” she said. “I don’t think people quite realize how much personality a cow, a pig, a goat, a chick, a turkey, each of these guys have such personalities. They all feel, you know? They all feel fear, they all feel love, they all feel excitement. It’s pretty amazing.”

“They bond with other animals and with people. They have their own little friend groups. They have certain animals they don’t like as much. It’s fun to watch.”

SWEET PEA

Livin’ Like Larry was recently thrust into the spotlight. When a crisis involving the abuse of a now-4-month-old, brown, 10-pound, mixed-breed puppy occurred on March 31, Detty and the sanctuary stepped up.

Live Oak police officers had just responded to an incident near Andra Davis Street and Rogers Avenue involving animal abuse. The puppy, later named Sweet Pea, had suffered cuts around her ears, swollen eyes and had blood dripping from her nose and ears. Officers later arrested Eric Ivan Roldan and charged him with aggravated animal cruelty.

Sweet Pea’s road to recovery will be a long one. In fact, it’s one that will likely never end. Detty said a large portion of Sweet Pea’s skull that had fractured during the incident was absorbed by her body.

“Which is good news that it reabsorbed,” Detty said. “This means we don’t need to go in and remove dead bone, but this also means that she has a pretty large area in her frontal lobe of her brain that’s not protected by any skull.”

Sweet Pea is on medication, Gabapentin, to keep her raucous

puppy energy down a bit to prevent any physical mishaps. Even slightly sedated, Sweet Pea is still exhibiting all the normal behavior of a happy pup.

“Luckily, she’s taller than any other dog she’s playing with right now, so the smaller dogs are about half her size,” Detty said. “She’s at less risk of having her head bumped. We’re trying to balance that for her, that she still has the socialization and the playtime that she desperately needs right now at her young age, and then still keeping her safe.”

“I don’t think people quite realize how much personality a cow, a pig, a goat, a chick, a turkey, each of these guys have such personalities. They all feel, you know? They all feel fear, they all feel love, they all feel excitement. It’s pretty amazing.”

COMMUNITY MISSION

Livin’ Like Larry Farm Sanctuary isn’t open to the public. Animals in recovery tend to relapse or not wholly appreciate being around a stranger, even if they’re kind.

Detty tries to make up for this fact — and for the insatiable appetite of community members to see the progress of these animals — by posting to the sanctuary’s Facebook page, including regular updates on Sweet

Pea's recovery.

"It can cause (the animals) a lot of stress," Detty said as the reason for the sanctuary not offering visits. "We had a lot of people reaching out, and we didn't know a good balance of that because people want to reach out, people want to help."

So Detty formed S.A.V.E. Community Outreach, or the Suwannee Animal-Ambassadors, Volunteers and Educators group. It consists of volunteers who come out to different events and festivals to "spread the word about compassion."

"Just to show that these animals are more than a hamburger, more than a chicken nugget, more than just a cat walking

down the street," Detty said. "... We do a lot of activities like that that try to bring awareness to compassion in the community."

The sanctuary also offers a pet food pantry, one that serves the local Branford community.

"We help out with getting food — cat food, dog food, livestock food — out to places who need them most," Detty said. "We do a lot of post-hurricane help. We do a lot of transporting animals to and from vets for people if they need help. And just lending an ear."

Sweet Pea, a 4-month-old puppy rescued after Live Oak police officers arrested Eric Ivan Roldan for aggravated animal cruelty, rests at the Livin' Like Larry Farm Sanctuary.



A pair of curious goats at the Livin' Like Larry Farm Sanctuary.



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BBQ Pineapple Chicken Kabobs

Ingredients

- ½ cup barbecue sauce
- ½ cup teriyaki sauce
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon freshly grated ginger
- 2 pounds boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch chunks
- 2 cups fresh pineapple chunks
- 1 red bell pepper, cut into 1 ½-inch pieces
- 1 sweet onion, cut into 1 ½-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Directions

1. In a medium bowl, combine barbecue sauce, teriyaki sauce, garlic and ginger. Reserve 1/2 cup and set aside.
2. In a gallon size Ziploc bag or large bowl, combine barbecue sauce mixture and chicken; marinate for at least 2 hours to overnight, up to 8 hours, turning the bag occasionally. Drain the chicken from the marinade.
3. Thread chicken, pineapple, bell pepper and onion onto skewers. Brush with canola oil; season with salt and pepper, to taste.
4. Preheat grill to medium heat. Add skewers to grill, and cook, turning occasionally, until the chicken is completely cooked through, reaching an internal temperature of 165 degrees F, about 10 minutes. Brush skewers with reserved barbecue sauce mixture, cooking for an additional 1-2 minutes.
5. Serve immediately.



Watermelon Feta Salad

Ingredients

- 4 cups cubed seedless watermelon
- ¾ cup crumbled feta cheese
- ¼ cup fresh mint leaves, torn or chopped
- 1–2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime or lemon juice
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

Optional Add-ins:

- ¼ cup thinly sliced red onion
- ½ cup arugula or baby spinach
- Balsamic glaze drizzle
- Chopped cucumber
- Toasted pine nuts or pumpkin seeds
- Fresh basil leaves (as a substitute or addition to mint)

Directions

1. Cube the watermelon: Cut watermelon into bite-sized chunks. Remove any seeds if needed and place cubes in a large mixing bowl.
2. Add feta and mint: Sprinkle crumbled feta and chopped mint over the watermelon.
3. Whisk the dressing: In a small bowl, whisk together olive oil, lime or lemon juice, salt, and pepper.
4. Toss gently: Drizzle the dressing over the salad and toss gently to combine without breaking up the watermelon or cheese.
5. Serve or chill: Serve immediately, or chill for 15–30 minutes to let the flavors meld.
6. Garnish (optional): Just before serving, drizzle with balsamic glaze or top with extra mint for a polished finish.

Summer Sausage Skillet with Andouille Sausage

Ingredients

Summer Sausage Skillet

- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 13.5 oz Andouille Sausage, sliced about ½ in thick
- ¼ cup diced red onion
- 1 red pepper, chopped
- 1 orange pepper, chopped
- 2 small to medium zucchini, sliced and quartered
- ½ tsp garlic salt
- ¼ tsp sea salt

- Fresh cracked black pepper to taste
- 2 ears of corn
- For topping: ¼ cup of basil and cilantro each

Basil Cilantro Crema

- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ¼ cup sour cream
- ¼ cup basil, packed
- ¼ cup cilantro, packed
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- ½ tsp garlic salt
- ¼ tsp white pepper
- Juice from half a lime About ½ - 1 tbsp

Directions

1. Blend the ingredients for the Basil Cilantro Crema in a food processor and set aside. Refrigerate if you are not going to be using it in about 10 minutes.
2. For the sausage skillet, add the extra virgin olive oil to a pan over medium to high heat. When it is shimmering, add in the sausage. Cook for 3 minutes per side and then remove it from the pan.
3. Meanwhile, preheat the grill or skillet and then when it is hot, add the corn cobs. Cook for 4 minute per side over medium heat. If you are cooking on an outdoor grill, cook right over an open flame and close the grill.
4. Back in the skillet, do not wipe it out. Instead, just add in the red onion and cook for 3-5 minutes until it softens. Then add in the pepper and cook for another 3-5 minutes. To get the char on the vegetables you want to keep the heat on a medium to high flame.
5. Add in the zucchini, garlic salt, sea salt and fresh cracked black pepper. Mix it all in and cook for another 3-5 minutes. Make sure the zucchini is touching the bottom of the pan to enable it to char a little. Stir regularly to keep it from over cooking.
6. When the corn is done, cut it off the cob and add the corn and sausage to the skillet. Saute for about 2 minutes. Then turn off the heat and remove the skillet from the burner. Allow to cool for about 3 minutes and add in the cilantro and basil.
7. Serve alone with the Basil Cilantro Crema or serve over rice with the crema. Season with additional sea salt and fresh cracked pepper as desired.



Mexican Street Corn

Ingredients

- 8 ears sweet corn silks trimmed
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- ½ cup sour cream or crema
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 1 lime juiced
- 1 garlic clove minced
- Salt and pepper
- 1 cup crumbled cotija cheese
- ¼ cup coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 teaspoons Tajín seasoning

Directions

1. Shuck the corn husks. Bring a large pot of water to boil and boil the corn for 10-12 minutes, or until they start to tender.
2. Brush the corn with vegetable oil. Heat a grill to high and grill the corn on all sides until charred/browned on all sides.
3. Mix sour cream, mayonnaise, lime, garlic, salt and pepper in a bowl and brush over the cooked corn.
4. Top with crumbled cotija cheese, fresh cilantro and Tajín seasoning.



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Summer Happy Hour



Blue Lagoon

Ingredients

- 1.5 oz vodka
- 1 oz blue curaçao
- 4 oz lemonade
- Lemon slice and cherry for garnish

Directions

1. Fill glass with ice.
2. Add vodka, blue curaçao, and lemonade. Stir gently.
3. Garnish with lemon slice and cherry.

Tropical Mule

Ingredients

- 2 oz vodka
- 1 oz pineapple juice
- 1/2 oz lime juice
- Ginger beer
- Pineapple wedge and mint for garnish

Directions

1. Fill copper mug with ice.
2. Add vodka, pineapple juice, and lime juice.
3. Top with ginger beer.
4. Stir gently.
5. Garnish with pineapple wedge and mint.



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Coconut Margarita

Ingredients

- 2 oz tequila
- 1 oz coconut cream
- 1 oz lime juice
- 1 oz triple sec
- Toasted coconut flakes for rimming
- Lime wedge for garnish

Directions

1. Rim glass with toasted coconut flakes.
2. Shake tequila, coconut cream, lime juice, and triple sec with ice.
3. Strain into glass over ice.
4. Garnish with lime wedge.

Pineapple Mango Rum Punch

Ingredients

- 2 cups pineapple juice
- 1 cup mango juice or puree
- 1 cup light rum
- 1/2 cup lime juice
- Pineapple chunks and mint for garnish

Directions

1. In a pitcher, combine pineapple juice, mango juice, rum, and lime juice.
2. Stir well and chill.
3. Serve over ice in glasses.
4. Garnish with pineapple chunks and mint.



Passion Fruit Daiquiri

Ingredients

- 2 oz light rum
- 1 oz passion fruit puree
- 1 oz lime juice
- 1/2 oz simple syrup
- Lime wheel for garnish

Directions

1. Shake all ingredients with ice.
2. Strain into chilled glass.
3. Garnish with lime wheel.



Strawberry Basil Lemonade Gin Fizz

Ingredients

- 2 oz gin
- 1 oz lemon juice
- 1 oz simple syrup
- 3 strawberries
- 4 basil leaves
- Soda water
- Lemon wheel and basil for garnish

Directions

1. Muddle strawberries and basil with simple syrup.
2. Add gin, lemon juice, and ice. Shake well.
3. Strain into glass with ice and top with soda water.
4. Garnish with lemon wheel and basil.



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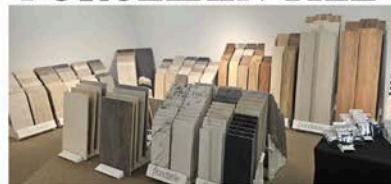
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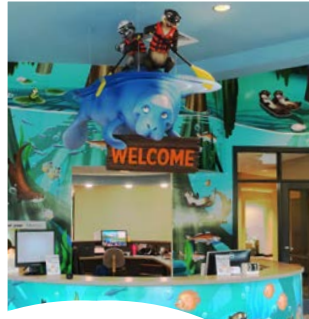
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"It was an amazing public event full of joy at the new location," Bryan Blair, General Manager of Walt's CDJR, said. "Over 100 guests arrived to help kick off the new state-of-the-art Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram dealership located on Hwy 129 N. in Live Oak."

Everyone at Walt's CDJR is proud of the new facility and looks forward to serving its customers by being able to offer a larger section of cars, trucks and SUVs locally.

"The grand opening of Walt's Live Oak Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram is a vision realized after five long years of dedication and hard work, said Mandy Hale, general sales manager at Walt's CDJR. "As a proud member of this community, I am deeply grateful for the support and encouragement from my fellow hometown heroes. This store is a testament to our commitment to bring quality service and quality vehicles to our cherished community. We have built something really special and I can't wait to see you at our brand-new location! Stop by and check it out!"

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