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FALL 2019

GEORGIA BLACKMON

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Opioids and Seniors from 12 to 1 p.m.
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NOVEMBER 1

Agency Overview from 12 to 1 p.m.
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DECEMBER 6

Holiday Party from 12 to 1 p.m.
United Way Office | 1301 West Government St.

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[FROM THE EDITOR]



Josh Newby

Marketing Communications
Director and Editor-in-Chief

Having just returned from a statewide conference on aging issues, it is more obvious to me than ever that there is a lot of work to do. From making streets more pedestrian - and wheelchair - friendly and bringing healthcare to rural areas, to finding ways to make transportation affordable and accessible and including underrepresented voices of the elder community, there are a lot of challenges to tackle at once. It may feel intimidating or downright demoralizing, and yet, being surrounded by hundreds of people who were just as passionate as me (if not more), I felt the exact opposite. Florida stands ready to address these issues. And while we may disagree on tactic, we all stand steadfast for the same goal.

Bureaucracy can be annoying and the government can be disheartening; funding may be limited and the burnout may be real. But at the end of the day, there are hundreds of people in this very community willing to work late, roll up their sleeves and get dirty if it means making your day even a little better. And those are the people—not the legislators, not the bureaucrats—who are making the tangible difference in your life. Tallahassee is far away and government interests can at times seem

even further away, but your neighbors and friends and fellow church-goers and the social worker who checks up on you are right here for you, everyday, just wanting to help. That should give us hope, even if the issues seem too big and the decision-makers seem too preoccupied.

In this issue, we're bringing the close, familial, community type of help to you. Whether it's service animals or grandparents raising grandchildren, the best assistance often comes from those we can see and touch and appreciate. We'll also discuss grassroots change like the naming of the new bridge.

Finally, our cover star is local legend Georgia Blackmon. Her story is fascinating and she's done so much for a community, often behind the scenes. Well, it's her moment in the spotlight so I hope you read all about her!

Reach out to me directly if you have any questions, comments or concerns. I'd love to know how someone has impacted your life. As always, it's (850) 266-2507 or jnewby@coawfla.org. Until next time, enjoy life—you've earned it!

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When calling or emailing us your change of address, please provide Council on Aging of West Florida with both the old and new addresses to expedite the change.

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LETTERS

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WRITING OPPORTUNITIES

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COMING of AGE™



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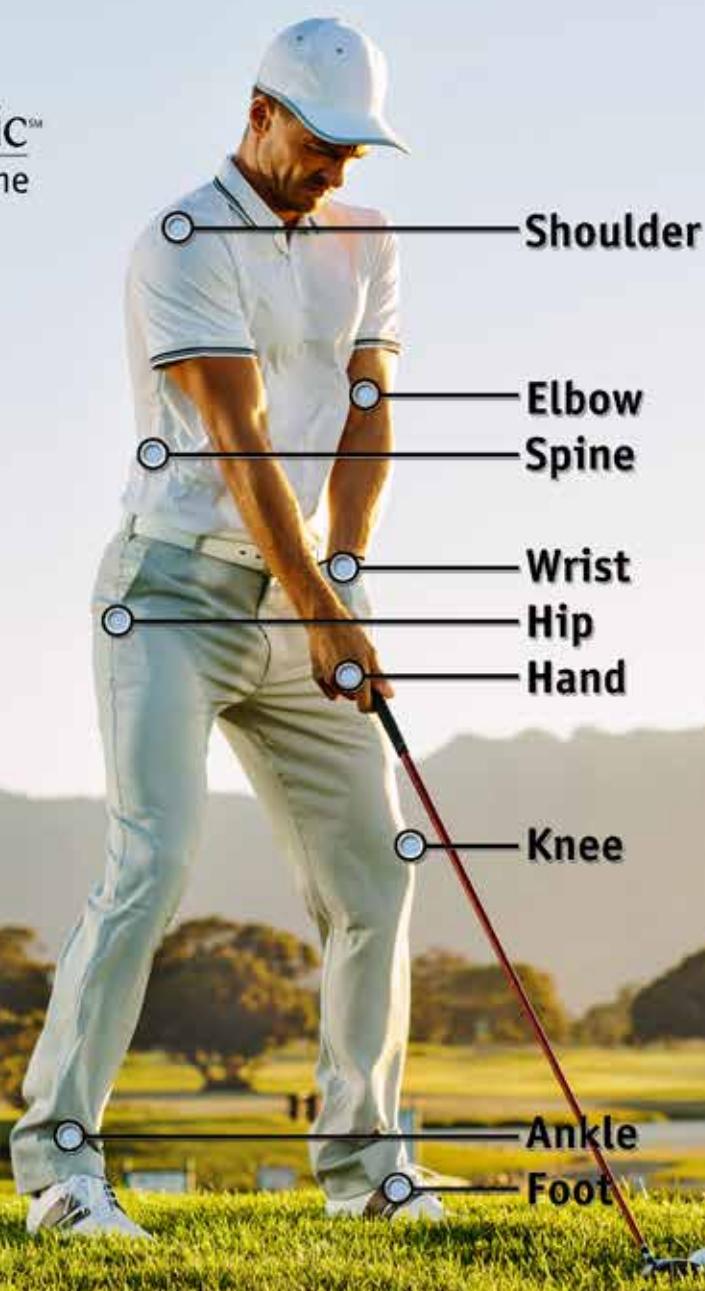
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Cover: Georgia Blackmon photographed by Guy Stevens

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SLOW DOWN?

By Kathleen Vestal Logan, MS, MA

"You need to slow down," a friend told me recently. Yes, my life is much busier since taking over as Chair of the Board of Directors for Council on Aging, but I'm happy to serve and do what's needed to provide and care for our elderly citizens. I am one myself, but still healthy and capable, thankfully.

What motivates me? In a sermon years ago, Dr. Hugh Hamilton reminded us that "We are saved not by good works, but for good works." Another favorite phrase (and I don't know the source): "Do as much as you can, for as many as you can, for as long as you can."

Council on Aging, under the leadership of John Clark over the past 45 years, has grown in its outreach. When I was the caregiver for my mother, I wish I had known about and taken advantage of their services. At the time, my husband and I both had demanding jobs and a son still in high school. The

Retreat, a licensed day care facility located adjacent to COA's office, would have been a huge help.

As one woman who spoke to the board said, "I'm so grateful for The Retreat. It allows me to work all day and not worry about my mother. I know she's safe and cared for."

Caregiving can be stressful, so we also offer Caregiver Support and Training groups.

Our Meals on Wheels volunteers deliver around 100,000 meals—annually along with a check on recipients' well-being and a cheery greeting—to some 280 appreciative customers in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. But do you know that we also host 19 dining sites scattered throughout the two counties that serve a hot, nutritious lunch to more than 700 people every weekday? That also matters because the biggest risk factor for a person's well-being is loneliness, which tends to increase with age and loss. The dining sites help ameliorate that issue with recreation and socialization opportunities. In June/July this year, the sites served about 5,000 meals to 500 people in Escambia and 1,900 meals to 190 folks in Santa Rosa.

Many citizens have an image of elderly people as "takers," no longer contributing members of the community. It's time to dispel that myth! CoA has a Foster Grandparents program in which men and women work with school children who need some extra attention. As a one-time elementary teacher, I know children thrive when they receive positive guidance and encouragement. During the school year, 55 Foster Grandparents worked in various schools with 165 children. This summer, 41 Foster Grandparents worked with 123 exceptional needs children at 11 sites.

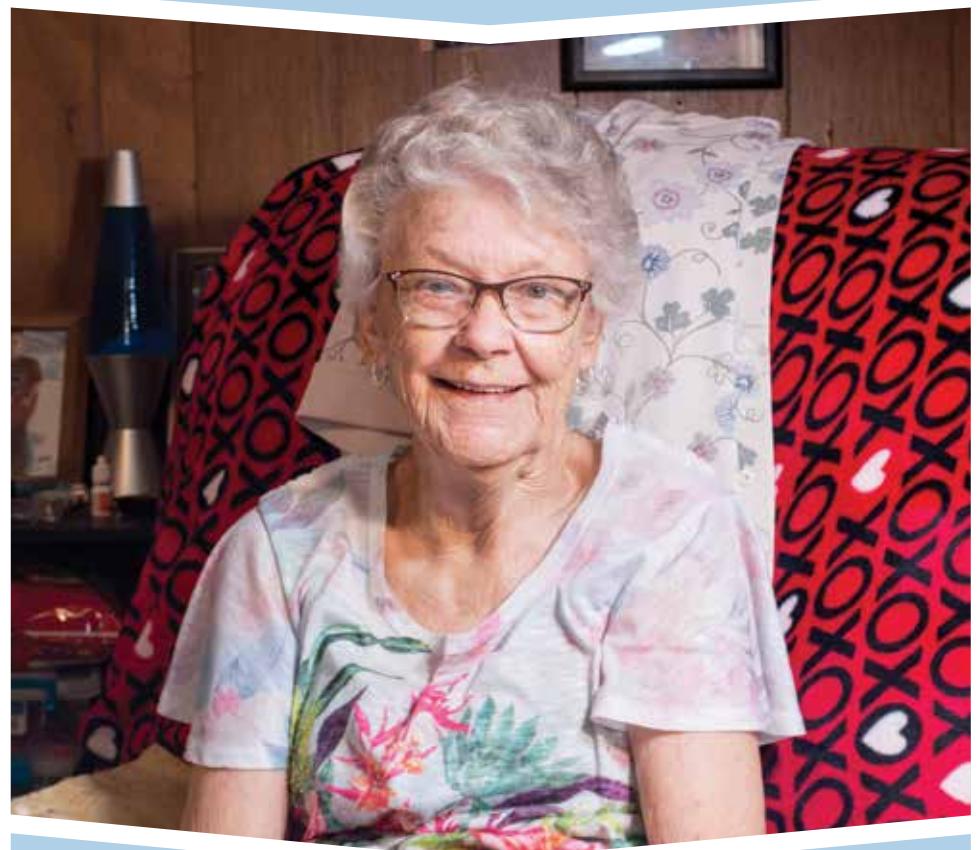
The Senior Companion program is another favorite. Like the Foster Grandparent program, it provides a win-win for those who serve and their clients. Income-eligible seniors 55 and older earn a tax-free stipend and other benefits while helping their peers remain in their homes. In March/April 2019, 48 senior companions served 66 grateful clients.

COA receives many requests for help, incurring expenses that are not covered by restricted funds. That's why we appreciate our many donors. Our entire volunteer program, for example, is not

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funded. Our biggest fundraiser is the Rat Pack Reunion to be held Oct. 25. This is our ninth year of this popular gala. "Rats" are chosen based on their philanthropy in the community. It's a delightful evening of food, fun, friendship and fundraising. We raised more than \$150,000 last year enabling us to cover unbudgeted expenses. We hope you will make plans to attend!

One such unbudgeted expense includes the materials for our ramp building program. A dedicated team of five or six men volunteer their time and skills to build ramps for people in wheelchairs. Do you know of someone who needs a wheelchair but can't afford one? CoA also has a Community Care Closet containing wheelchairs, walkers, bedside commodes, etc., that can be borrowed.

What we do could never be accomplished without our generous volunteers. Altogether in March/April, for example, 180 individuals served 3,585 hours. As a military wife/mother, I am proud to see active duty folks pitching in at special events, too.

It's wonderful to have people recognize the need to care for the elderly who need assistance. After all, they include our parents, grandparents, scout leaders, coaches, teachers, neighbors and clergy who helped raise us. We're simply returning the favor.

Obviously, I value COA's big heart and the wide array of services it provides that enrich our community. So, am I going to take my friend's advice and slow down? Not a chance!



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Phenomenal Philanthropists: Partying for a Cause

By Lauren Meadows



THE RAT PACK REUNION

Council on Aging's Rat Pack Reunion gala is right around the corner. This annual party celebrates community pillars: those that have played a huge role in shaping Pensacola's businesses and culture. This year's event takes place Oct. 25 at Skopelos at New World and features four incredible individuals.

Ashton Hayward is no stranger to the spotlight over the past decade. His eight years as mayor shaped Pensacola into what it is today, a vibrant hub of ideas and opportunity. Both his public service and his current work at the Andrews Research and Education Foundation have expanded the Pensacola community in immeasurable ways.

Michael Murdoch brought the cybersecurity industry to the area through his creation of AppRiver. Under his leadership, the company rapidly expanded to hundreds of employees providing technological services to companies all over the world.

Brenda Vigodsky worked closely with her late husband Fred to build the

business community in Pensacola for decades. Known for her class and tact, Brenda has been involved in any non-profit in Pensacola that you can think of. Today, her close involvement with the Pace Center for Girls has changed the lives of the young girls involved.

Michael Riesberg is an ear, nose, and throat doctor in the area and supporter of the Pensacola Opera, First Tee of Northwest Florida, Capstone, and countless other organizations. An inventor of various medical devices, he is the only surgeon that some professional opera singers will see.

The four will be roasted and toasted by family and friends over an exquisite dinner as guests dance to a Frank Sinatra tribute band. The evening is an elegant affair and highlights truly incredible and giving individuals, of which there seem to be no shortage as the gala kicks off its ninth year.

PANHANDLE CHARITABLE OPEN

How do you transform a game of golf from a church fundraiser into an annual staple of a city that supports more than

It's no secret that fall is a busy time for non-profits. Between gala season, the holidays and end-of-year giving, charitable organizations everywhere are full speed ahead until the end of the year to secure funding for their programs and initiatives. There are so many things to do and see in the upcoming months that some non-profits make sure to book their events at different nights almost a year in advance!

On almost any weekend, you can find an event that raises funds to provide someone in the community with hope and life-changing services. Just look at all the individuals involved in these events if you ever doubt that we live in a uniquely kind and charitable community.

Council on Aging's largest fundraiser is its annual gala, the Rat Pack Reunion. Council on Aging's second largest local funding source is the Panhandle Charitable Open, an annual golf tournament that is completely volunteer-run. These events are just two examples of all the phenomenal philanthropy events coming up.

20 organizations? John Peacock has worked tirelessly with his team over the past 18 years growing the Panhandle Charitable Open, a charity golf tournament in memory of John Ryan Peacock and Ashley Lauren Offerdahl. This year's event will be held Sept. 26 to 28 and is sure to continue making a strong impact.

After the death of his son, Peacock moved to Marcus Pointe and learned about the church's golf tournament that benefited Child Guardians. In memory of his son, he wanted to help grow the tournament.

"Pensacola is philanthropic," said Peacock, "Pensacola was kind to me when I moved here as a single father of three sons, and now I can pass that on."

And pass it on he certainly has; the Panhandle Charitable Open has donated \$1,465,000 to local non-profits since 2006.

The two-day golf tournament raises funds for numerous organizations by collaborating with non-profits and donors to create an incredible event.



In the first few years, the kickoff party was a get together with a local band held in the Marcus Point neighborhood. Now, the "par-tee," as it's called, fills Sander's Beach Community Center to capacity, selling out every single year. In 2018, 28 organizations benefited from the event.

Surely no one would fault Peacock if this event was his single involvement in the community throughout the year. With his own full-time job, running this huge event as an extracurricular activity has become a second occupation, even with the help of his son Matt, Dave and Ann Hickerson, Nels and Abbie Offerdahl, and a team of volunteers. However, if you look around town, you can see his name on a number of events consistently every year. Peacock points to the philanthropic nature of Pensacola again, and that it's "quid pro quo," with individuals always stepping up to support each other.

What is most unique about the Panhandle Charitable Open is its collaborative nature. The model brings non-profits together to raise money, each selling raffle tickets and helping gather silent auction items. By leveraging these partnerships, each charity sees what they help bring in multiplied.

Peacock said, "It's a collaboration and the mission was always to uplift organizations. After 18 years it is clear that we have accomplished this mission."

If golfing or dancing the night away is not quite your thing, there is good news! So many of the amazing non-profit organizations in the area have fundraising events in the fall, ranging from walks to black tie events and even cookoffs! Skip dinner and a movie during your next date night and attend a charity event. The event may only last for a few hours but seeing first-hand the charitable spirit of the community is an experience that lasts.

For more information, call
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Fall Events

Fall is the best season in the South for outdoor festivals and activities, and we've rounded up a list of our go-to favorites for the year.

PENSACOLA SEAFOOD FESTIVAL

September 27 to 29

Sample a variety of mouth-watering seafood dishes and enjoy continuous entertainment in Fountain Park Sept. 27 through 29. Arts and crafts vendors will be displaying their unique wares, many items reflective of our area's unique Gulf Coast lifestyle. A children's area is filled with activities for all ages. The Fiesta Seafood Grille offers cooking demonstrations where you can watch area chefs prepare regional delicacies. For more information, visit pensacolaseafoodfestival.com.

60TH PENSACOLA GREEK FESTIVAL

October 11 to 13

If you're looking for something the whole family will enjoy this fall, then look no further than the 60th annual Pensacola Greek Festival. The Pensacola Greek Festival is a true sight to see. From the delicious Greek food and pastries, lively Greek music

and dancing, to the beautiful church tours, the Pensacola Greek Festival has something to offer everyone. With a warm smile and an open heart we welcome all who want to have a good time. The festival runs from 1 to 9 pm on Friday and Saturday and 12 to 5 pm on Sunday. For more information, visit pensacolagreekfestival.com.

PENSACOLA INTERSTATE FAIR

October 19 to 29

It's fall again, and that means it is time for the Pensacola Interstate Fair to roll into town once again! Come enjoy the entertainment, food, rides, games and showcases that make the fair a can't-miss event. Entertainment this year includes Starship featuring Mickey Thomas, Mitchell Tenpenny, Jordan Davis, White Tie Rock Ensemble, Seaforth and Thane Dunn's 'Elvis on Tour.' For more information, hours of operation and showtimes, visit pensacolafair.com.

SWEET SEASONS PUMPKIN PATCH AND CORN MAZE

September 28 to November 3

Ready for a challenge? Come on down to the Sweet Farms corn maze! Bring your family and friends and tackle this year's twisting and turning design. Each year they offer a fun, new design to get lost in. The corn maze has been the farm's signature attraction since year one, starting out at only five acres and growing in size each year to now over eight acres of maze with lots of room to get lost. The maze is divided into two sections, which includes a kiddie maze, in case you don't want to tackle the whole maze or want to try a smaller challenge before entering the main maze.

After you've made your way through the tall, majestic rows of corn, you and your family can choose from a variety of pumpkins in the pumpkin patch. The farm also offers a long list of attractions for all ages, including a hayride, corn silo,

pony rides, country carousel, barnyard animals, farm playground, a tractor slide, cornhole and redneck golf.

For more information on the maze, pumpkins or attractions, please call 850-675-3573 or visit info@sweetseasonsfarms.com.

HISTORIC PENSACOLA ANNUAL HAUNTED HOUSE WALKING AND TROLLEY TOURS

October 19, 25, 26

Historic Pensacola will host its 29th annual Haunted House Walking and Trolley Tours. Ghoulish guests may choose from three walking tour routes including the Seville Spirits, Murder and Mayhem and the Adult-Only Redlight Tour. The walking tours, led by volunteer guides who share the haunted history of Pensacola, last an hour and 15 minutes. This year, Historic Pensacola is also offering the Trolley of the Doomed trolley tour and two Friday the 13th Mayhem walking tours. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit historicpensacola.org.

FOO FOO FEST

October 31 to November 11

The Foo Foo Festival is a 12-day festival that brings an eclectic mixture of art and cultural events ranging in tastes—with everything from the Blue Angels air shows and songwriters' music festivals to ballet, opera, fine art and even the Big Green Egg Cook-off.

The festival includes a changing calendar of events each year, but is traditionally anchored around the Great Gulfcoast Arts Festival, the Frank Brown International Songwriters Festival, and the Blue Angels Homecoming Air Show. Previous years have included more than 20 different events presented by local arts organizations and special performances in town.

While many events on the Foo Foo Fest calendar are free, some events do require a ticket. More information about each event can be found through the Foo Foo Festival website at foofoofest.com.

GREAT GULFCOAST ARTS FESTIVAL

November 1 to 3

The Great Gulfcoast Arts Festival is one of the most popular arts festivals in the United States. The three-day, juried art show draws more than 200 of the nation's best painters, potters, sculptors, jewelers, graphic artists, photographers,

craftsmen and other artists. The Festival is ranked No. 30 in the nation by *Sunshine Artist* magazine.

In addition to the art on view, live musicians hit the right notes from the main stage with sounds ranging from bluegrass to Cajun blues to jazz, to classical. Dozens of local and traveling performing companies, dance schools, community groups, and area folk groups also have their time to shine.

Craft artists demonstrate traditional arts, crafts and trades, including blacksmithing, engraving, spinning, weaving and other skills in the heritage arts area.

Children become artists at their very own section of the festival, the Children's Arts Festival, with numerous hands-on art activities. All children's art activities are free, fun, and geared toward children toddler age and older.

For more information on the festival, maps or a list of participating artists and vendors, visit ggaf.org.

BLUE ANGELS HOMECOMING AIR SHOW

November 8 to 9

It's pure aviation excitement as the Blue Angels return home for the NAS Pensacola Homecoming Air Show. The United States Navy's flight demonstration squadron will close out their season during Veterans Day weekend with their NAS Homecoming Air Show, which will be held on November 8 and 9.

The air show gates will open at 8 am, with the show beginning at 9:30 am.

For a list of performers, attractions, and vendors, or to purchase tickets to the show, visit naspensacolairshow.com.

FRANK BROWN INTERNATIONAL SONGWRITER'S FESTIVAL

November 7 to 17

For more than 30 years, songwriters have migrated south in the fall for this meet-up of Grammy Award-winning lyricists and up-and-coming stars of tomorrow. They take to the stage each night to share their songs and stories in settings from quiet, intimate performances to raucous, sing-along parties.

The Frank Brown Songwriters' Festival is the oldest festival of its kind and has been referred to as the largest gathering of songwriters at one time anywhere in the world. Festival attendees enjoy an up close and personal concert experience and are often able to learn the stories behind some of their favorite songs as told by the original author. Whether looking for a "listening room" experience, a pleasant dinner and music venue, a family-friendly musical adventure or a gritty roadhouse, the songwriters have a place for you.

Most venues are free to attend; a few charge a small cover at the door.

For more information on the festival performers, and show times, visit frankbrownsongwriters.com.



True Blue BBQ

By Will Isern



Blue Dot Barbecue
Owner J. Byron Long

Blue Dot Barbecue in the Belmont-Devilliers neighborhood just west of downtown Pensacola doesn't look like much from the outside. Its signature blue frontage and a small white sign are all that might suggest that the old building is home to more than meets the eye.

"I just tell people there's a lot of love and care put in to them"

Certainly, there's no flashing neon sign out front advertising the world's greatest hamburger. But ask any of Blue Dot's many, many regular customers and they'll tell you that's exactly what the restaurant is making.

"There's nothing else like them," said Anthony Purifoy as he waited to order two burgers on a recent Tuesday.

For more than 60 years, through boom and bust, Blue Dot has been churning out hamburgers of unparalleled quality. As Pensacola has morphed and changed, Blue Dot has remained, a reversion to a time before smartphones and credit cards, a time of lunch counters and cash transactions.

At the head of that operation today – indeed synonymous with Blue Dot – is J. Byron Long. Five days a week, you can find Long apron-clad behind the counter of the Blue Dot, taking and filling orders, sometimes five at once. He takes no notes and uses no calculator. He remembers the order in which customers arrived at the counter and tends to each in their turn. After collecting a round of orders he disappears into the back where, alongside one or two employees, he creates what many proclaim to be the best hamburger they've ever had.

Long isn't the type to pay much attention to what people say online, but of the more than 1,000 reviews posted on places

like Google, Facebook and TripAdvisor, nearly all rate the restaurant five out of five stars. When lunchtime rolls around at Blue Dot, all walks of life can be found rubbing elbows at the counter, cash in hand, eager to pick up a single burger for themselves or take a bulging brown paper bag back to the office.

The burgers themselves are deceptively simple. A meat patty, onions, tomato, mayonnaise and mustard on a seeded white bun. How Long gets them to taste so good is a closely guarded secret, passed down for generations.

"I just tell people there's a lot of love and care put in to them," Long said.

It was Long's great uncle Blue Robinson who, along with his wife, Dot, opened the Blue Dot Barbecue in 1946. Long's father Thomas Long Jr. took over the business when Robinson died. Byron Long began helping his father at the restaurant when he was 21 years old and took over the business himself after his father passed seven years ago.

Long's reputation for terse transactions and no-nonsense orders makes some first-time customers wary of saying the wrong thing, but Long thinks those kinds of concerns are misplaced.

"Sometimes the people who come in the first time find it kind

of intimidating, but once you get to be a regular with me you see I do smile, I do laugh," he said. "It's just in that moment, it's all business. I don't have time to stop and talk to one person because if I do I'll miss two or three on the other side."

For many, Blue Dot is a tradition that spans generations. The restaurant has been one of the few businesses in the Belmont-DeVilliers neighborhood to survive the economic ebbs and flows of the past six decades. Once a cultural and commercial hub for Pensacola's black residents, the neighborhood was all but abandoned by the start of the century. As Pensacola has developed in the last decade and proximity to downtown become a desirable quality, the neighborhood has recently undergone significant gentrification. New homes prices in the neighborhood are approaching \$400,000 and a new apartment complex is currently under construction right across the street from Blue Dot. Meanwhile, Long continues to sell his hamburgers for \$5.58.

Long said whatever the future brings, he plans to go on making hamburgers just the way his father and uncle did before him.

"Everybody has got to eat, so whatever anybody is going to be around me or across from me the only thing it's going to do is help me and my business," Long said.



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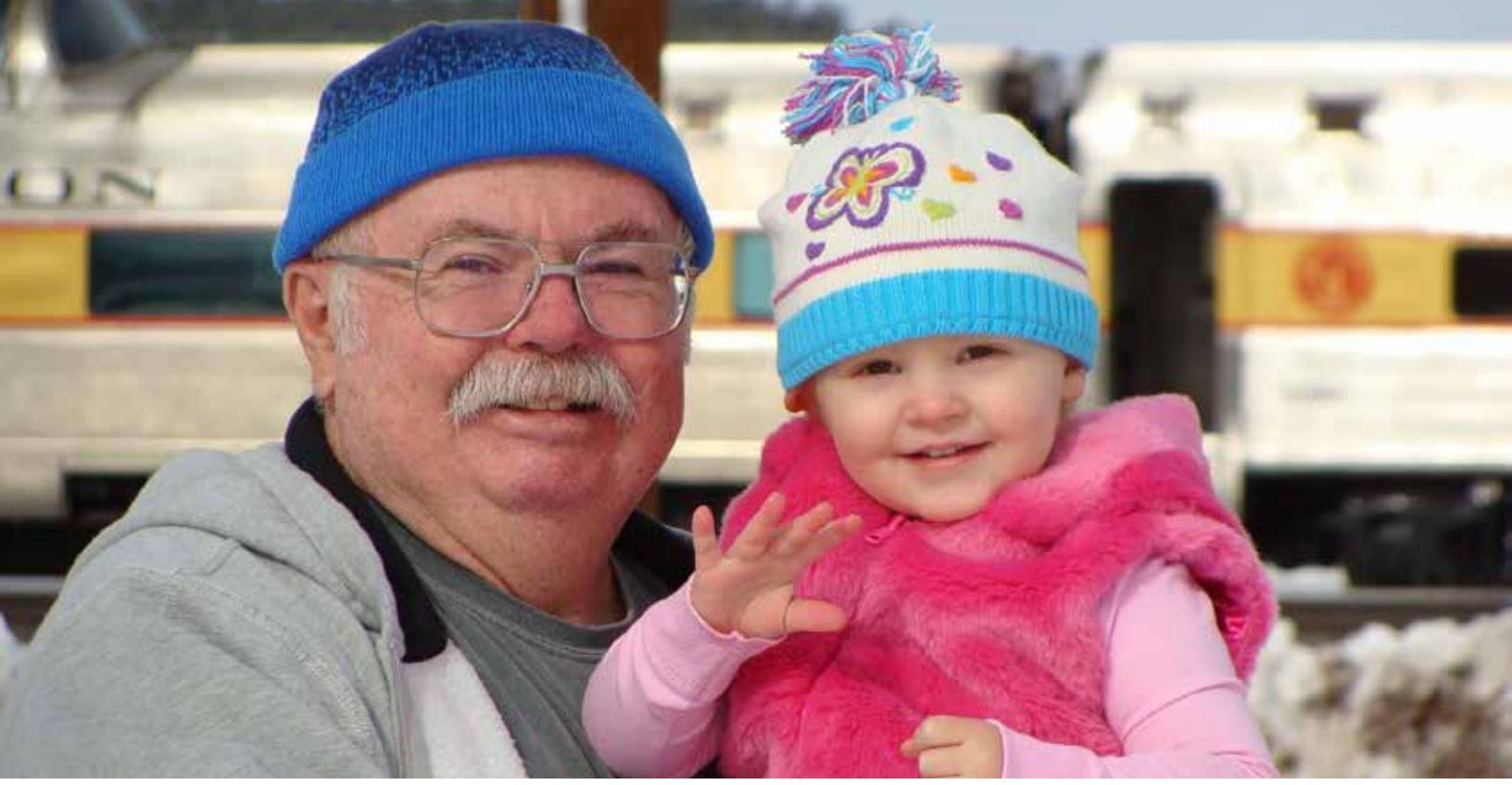
Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

By Josh Newby

Having the grandkids come stay for a weekend or even part of the summer is a highlight for many grandparents, but what happens when those brief stints are replaced by months or even years of being the primary caregiver? Economic pressures and issues with substance abuse among 20-somethings and 30-somethings often force biological parents to seek assistance in ways that remove them from their children. When that happens, children often go to live with their grandparents for an extended period of time, creating a phenomenon where these once-empty-nesters are now faced with child rearing once again.

Over the past 10 years, the number of grandparents raising grandchildren has steadily risen seven percent, from 2.5 million to 2.7 million. The number of children living with grandparents is 5.8 million, or about eight percent of kids under 18. That means 2.7 million senior adults are now responsible for raising their children. One-fifth of these elders have incomes that place them below the poverty line.

For obvious reasons, this model is simply not sustainable and is not ideal for any party in this equation. But for the millions of parents suffering from addiction or mental health challenges, imprisonment, physical health issues or just general instability, this situation is reality. ➤



The initial transition from reveling in the empty-nester life to suddenly caring for a child or children can be at once bewildering, exciting and stressful. For the first few weeks, the grandparent may be understandably excited as they get to spend more time with their grandchildren, but as the realities of parenting as an older adult set in, they will need support to manage the stress and expenses of their new lives.

While widespread opiate use among the middle generation is considered most to blame for this troubling development, the situation is unfortunate for all parties involved. Children feel most at home with their own parents, parents want to have a positive impact in the lives of their children, and grandparents want to remain in both of their lives. Thankfully, generous grandparents are there to step in the gap when necessary, but that resource could quickly dwindle if the community does not support them.

Sometimes, these two generations are fused together through no fault of their own. That is what happened to Kathy Huntley and her grandson

Jayden, now 14. Huntley adopted him before he was 2, after his mother was tragically killed in a DUI accident. While she reports that it has been a wonderful transition, the dynamic is not without its hardships.

"We had to contend with substance issues," says Huntley. "He's doing much better now, though. I also lost my mother when I was young, so we've tried to keep his mother a central part of his life, even though she has passed."

That is key to a successful relationship, experts say. No matter the issues and challenges that parents often put themselves through, children will love their parents unconditionally. It's crucial to not challenge that love, but to encourage it.

"We still go lay flowers at her grave," says Huntley. "We try to make it not all gloom and doom. I tell Jayden what a wonderful person his mother was."

Of course, there are times when the grandchild will simply miss their

parent. This is normal, too, and those feelings should be allowed to be processed.

"They need a support system just like we do," says Huntley.

Thankfully, that support does exist. Council on Aging of West Florida offers support groups the second Thursday of the month at 6 pm at 875 Royce St. in Pensacola and the first Wednesday of each month at 9:30 am at 1936 Navarre School Rd. Refreshments are provided.

Huntley has attended for the past nine years. Many participants report how the program has helped them, connected them with resources and been a network of empathy when no one else understands.

"I have a real bond with the ladies in the group, and that bond has strengthened the one I have with Jayden," says Huntley. "We weren't expecting to do this; no one ever does. But it's okay, because you feel closer and you feel more and that's good. Things are looking up."

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Animal Therapy

By Lauren Meadors

"Animals are such agreeable friends—they ask no questions; they pass no criticisms."

—George Eliot

There is nothing like talking about your problems to get them off of your mind. Sometimes, however, it is nice to talk to someone you know won't say too much back. Other times the weight of your mind can be too much to verbalize and you can't quite form words. In those times, it is nice to have a friend to just be with. It's even better if that friend is cute and likes ear scratches. Individuals in any state of mind can benefit greatly from their four-legged friends. Therapy animals can be a source of comfort and support for many as they navigate stressful situations and various health conditions.

Therapy animals often go into hospitals, schools, nursing homes and other places in the community to educate individuals and change lives. These animals can help alleviate the strain of depression, anxiety, PTSD and a number of other mental health conditions. Children's hospitals often have dogs to comfort the children during treatments and relieve stress during difficult times. Nursing homes receive visits from various therapy animals

to brighten the residents' days and make a new friend.

While all pets bring love and warmth into a home, not all pets are natural therapy animals. Therapy animals may be certified and registered by organizations such as partnerpets.org that provide education and volunteer opportunities. An animal certainly does not need certifications to bring comfort, but it provides additional resources and better



prepares them for serving the needs of larger groups.

There are plenty of creatures big and small that provide these benefits that can be therapy animals. The seniors at Council on Aging's adult day care center, the Retreat, have had the pleasure of meeting a whole zoo of therapy animals. Tyler the Goldendoodle visits monthly to show off his tricks followed by greeting everyone

in the room to receive pets from his friends. Dogs are certainly the most traditional type of therapy animal, and for good reason. Therapy dogs can often smell distress in individuals and will go over to comfort whomever in the room needs it most. The American Kennel Club's Therapy Dog Program features a list of well-vetted organizations in your area if you wish to register your dog.

Another visitor to the



Retreat is Charlotte, the minipig. According to local pig rescue, In Loving Swineness, pigs are incredibly intelligent creatures that are often misunderstood and mistreated. Pigs are empathetic and sensitive. Pigs that are handled from an early age or have been rehabilitated by organizations like In Loving Swineness make exceptional therapy pets. The American Mini Pig Association provides therapy pig resources and encourages mini pig handlers to enroll to both serve the community and to become advocates for mini pigs by showing how wonderful and gentle they truly are. Therapy animals can also include cats, birds, and even snakes!

All of these animals can be trained to participate in pet therapy. However, it is typically dogs and horses that are used in animal-assisted therapy. Animal-assisted therapy involves the animal and its handler working closely with social workers and counsellors with individual cases. The counsellor will design a plan for an individual to work closely with the animal to work on skills like trust and problem-solving.



Kindred Spirits Therapy Minis provides both forms of animal therapy to the community. Located in Baker, Nancy Lambert and her husband travel the Gulf Coast with their four mini horses to bring happiness. They recently brought one of their horses Elmer to the Retreat, where participants lit up when they saw him, many reminiscing of growing up on a farm with horses like him. As they pet Elmer, they told stories of their childhood horses and beamed. Even those who were standoffish and unsure of him at first came

around, but his handler said that this is a common experience.

"When someone says that they don't want to pet him, but are truly needing him emotionally, he can often tell and asserts himself," Lambert said.

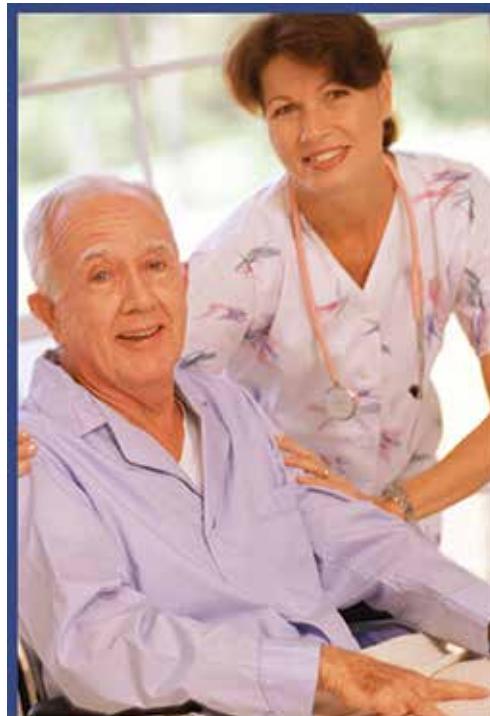
It is often said that horses understand people better than people do, and this may just be the case with Elmer.

According to Lambert, horses make great therapy animals because they are herd animals and belong to a community in their natural state. Domesticated horses seek community as well in both other horses and humans. They are naturally kind and intelligent which helps them with reading body language to understand and bond with humans.

"If you move aggressively, they can tell that you aren't happy," Lambert said. "They can even read someone's tone of voice or touch and know if they are sad."

This bond transforms those that the therapy horse works with, pausing them in a safe moment in time without any outside worries.

While not all types of animals can be registered as therapy animals, all critters bring a unique type of love to those who care for them. Pets bring companionship into the lives that they touch, especially in older individuals. When seeking mental and emotional health benefits from animals it is important that you seek professional mental help should you feel unsafe rather than exclusively hanging out with miniature-horses.



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Bridging a Pensacola Legacy

By Kaitlyn Peacock

There's been something big happening in Pensacola the past year or so. In case you haven't noticed, there's a new bridge spanning the way from Gulf Breeze to Pensacola. The old Three Mile Bridge is a thing of the past. Instead, there's a new, shining white arch signaling the way into the city now.



**Col. Daniel "Chappie" James Jr. in front of his F-4 Phantom II.
He piloted the plane during the Vietnam War.**



The first span of the new bridge opened to north and southbound traffic Sept. 8 in preparation for the old Three Mile Bridge to be demolished for a second span. While it remains nameless, that won't be true for much longer. The Pensacola Bay Bridge Committee, consisting of officials from Escambia County,

Santa Rosa County, the City of Pensacola and the City of Gulf Breeze, voted unanimously July 9 to name the bridge after U.S. Air Force General Daniel "Chappie" James Jr. With the committee's approval, Florida State Senator Doug Broxson has submitted a proposal to name the bridge after James. The Florida legislature will vote on the name in January.

James was a Pensacola native born in 1920. In 1943, he became an officer in the U.S. Air Corps and went on to become one of the Tuskegee Airmen, who were the first African American pilots of the Air Corps. In 1975, he was pinned on as the first African American Air Force

four-star general. After serving for 35 years in the military, he retired in 1978 and died approximately three weeks later. For his position and his dedication to the United States, he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.

The name for the bridge had been in contention for months prior to the committee's vote in July. The more commonly known Three Mile Bridge was officially named after Philip D. Beall, a 1934 Florida State Senator representing District 2. In 1943, he was voted president of the Senate and died of a heart attack while in office. For his work transitioning the

first Pensacola Bay bridge from private to public ownership, the then-new bridge was named after him in 1962.

The committee's vote for James was based on community suggestions. More than 1,000 emails were received by the committee, though about 260 were thrown out as duplicates. Of the 804 emails left, 359 were in favor of naming the bridge after James. The closest contender was Beall, who had 65 votes, and third place belonged to the colloquial name Three Mile Bridge at 57 votes.

James' name was first brought up by retired Marine Cris Dosey, who



went on to become chairman of the Chappie James Memorial Bridge Foundation. The foundation supported the naming of the bridge in James' honor and drew up plans to build a memorial park at the end of the bridge. The park would include a statue of James as well as display of the fighter jet that James flew in the Vietnam War, an F-4 Phantom II. With the name chosen, plans are moving forward in the foundation to raise money for the park with hopes of having it completed by the time the second span is opened to the public.

Dosev said that honoring James in this way continues not only an American legacy, but a Pensacola one.

"Not all towns have the heritage we have, the military heritage," he said. "We claim to be one of the

firsts, the first settlement, and here we have the first African-American four-star general."

The naming of the bridge is not the first instance of Pensacola continuing James' legacy. The James' old family home on Martin Luther King Drive was converted into a museum and a building behind the house was opened in 2018 as a flight academy. The academy teaches the basic mechanics and science of flying to mostly underprivileged children. Classes had run for years as an annual camp before the academy building was opened, currently with sessions ongoing throughout the year.

The museum and academy continue a different legacy than James', that of his mother Lillie James, who ran a school for the neighborhood

children from that house. James attributed a lot of his passion and characteristics to his mother, who was a strong figure in the community. She had 17 children, with only seven reaching maturity. Chappie was her youngest son.

With the current span open to traffic and construction starting on the second span once the old Three Mile Bridge is taken apart, the Chappie James Memorial Bridge Foundation is eager to celebrate James' centennial birthday with the official name expected to be announced in January. James, born Feb. 11, 1920, would be turning 100 next year.

Dosev said it is a neat idea to consider that the bridge will be named for James on his 100th birthday and that this bridge could last another 100 years.

"In the big scheme of things, it's the quintessential American story," Dosev said. "But, unlike a lot of people's successes that we recognize for material goods or wealth, this one was dedicated to the defense of a country that, when he was a young man, would deny him a place even at a counter at a diner. That's a big deal."

The new bridge is set to be completed in summer 2021. The current span will serve as the southbound lane with the second span serving as the northbound lane. It will have dedicated walking paths for pedestrians and LED light railings to better illuminate the roads and walkways. The name of the bridge is unofficial until the Florida legislature votes on it, however there is no current opposing legislation against the name.

Many people say they will stick to calling the bridge Three Mile Bridge, however the community gave their voice to this process. An overwhelming number of those voices called for James to have his name marked on the largest landmark in Pensacola. No matter what people may call it on the street, the community's pride in James and his accomplishments led to the decision to continue his name and his legacy as one of Pensacola's greatest.

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GEORGIA BLACKMON

An Exclusive Interview

By Kelly Oden

When local Pensacolians picture Georgia Blackmon, her signature locks, which she grew for more than 30 years, often come to mind. You'll notice those locks are gone in our cover photo of Mrs. Blackmon. "It was time for a change," Blackmon said. The 78-year-old Pensacola native has changed more than her hair in recent months. Deciding it was time to retire, late last year, Blackmon closed the bookstore she opened in 1989. The Gathering Awareness and Book Center served as both a bookstore specializing in African American literature and history and a community gathering place that offered a welcoming spot for the community to gather, talk, learn and grow. >

Photo by Guy Stevens

Blackmon also founded Mother Wit, a 501(c)3 focused on two agendas: community outreach and education for children and historic preservation. Mother Wit's current preservation project is the restoration of the Ella Jordan House, which was built in 1890 and used for decades as a teaching center for the black community, a center for voter registration and a meeting space for a variety of organizations including the Colored Women's Foundation. Mother Wit is restoring the house for use as a museum that will commemorate Ella Jordan's impact in our community.

Coming of Age had the pleasure of talking with Mrs. Blackmon about her upbringing, her passion for community and her marriage of 57 years.

Hi Georgia, thanks for taking the time to talk with me today. Let's start by talking a little about your childhood and upbringing.

I was born in Pensacola, but I went to Camden, Ala. when I was about six years old. My mother had five other children who were older than me and she had to work, so I went to live with my grandmother and my great-grandmother right there at the Alabama River and it was awesome. The closest house to me was five miles. I thought that was fun because I had these two old people there with me. A lot of people ask me questions today, but it took me a long time to understand that by being raised by these old people with nobody

else around me—no other children around me—I was a kind of an old soul. I was different even in school. One of the things that I am thankful for is that I did not allow the bullying at that time and being different to change the way I thought.

So they instilled some self-awareness.

Oh, they instilled things that I still use. A lot of times I was grown before I really understood what they were saying. Two of the things that always stayed with me that they said were, "Tongue and teeth fall out. You bite your tongue, but just because you bite your tongue you don't pull your teeth" and she said that "If you

follow someone going nowhere, you'll go nowhere with them," so always be very careful who you hang out with. It was good advice.

Did they instill your love of literature or did you find that on your own or somewhere else?

No, I have to give my husband credit for that. I came from a poor family and my husband came from kind of a middle class family. And so he was accustomed to reading. I wasn't. The only thing that we had in our house was a Sears and Roebuck book and things like that. When he and I got together in our 20s—we've been married for 57 years—he started reading to me. He read that first book to me—I never shall forget. The first one was *Manchild in the Promised Land* and the next one was Richard Wright's *Black Boy*. The third one was the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. When he got to that, I was on my own. I was reading for myself.

How did you two meet?

My husband was a football player. He got a scholarship to Southern University and he was a ladies' man. He really was. The ladies were just crazy about him. I think we met at a going together party and I didn't stay. The lady that I was with stayed in

the party, you know, we were in high school. He came outside and tried to talk to me and I just kind of ignored him. The next time I saw him, we were living in the same apartment complex and he came up and started talking. So we got together.

Do you have children?

Two children, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. My daughter has one child and she lives in Valdosta. She's in education. My son lives here and he has four sons. His children have their own children. My oldest grandson has two and my second grandson has one.

What's different for you about parenting versus grandparenting or great-grandparenting?

One of the things for me is that I came up in a village. I really did. The church, the community and the teachers worked together as one. So we were trained and taught that we were capable of doing anything that we could imagine from all three of those places on the same line. They would tell us to reach for the moon. You might land among the stars, but reach. That's where Mother Wit came from. The older people that I was around used the phrase Mother Wit and it

GEORGIA BLACKMON



Georgia and Johnny Blackmon

meant you were smart. They would say, "That gal got mother wit. That boy got mother wit." So that's how the naming came about. The generation that I came up in was different. The time I came up in—it wasn't just black people that were poor. It was poor across genders and race in the neighborhood that I came up in. I live in the same house that I came up in as a child. Across the street there was a man named Mr. Bob who happened to be white. Mr. Bob would

bring all the children in the neighborhood—black and white—to his house once a week and he would teach us games and stuff. Mrs. Bob, she would come out when he finished and she would bring us cookies and Kool-Aid.

It seems that there used to be more of that—going to neighbors houses and hanging out and just knowing them more than we do now.

There was. I really truly believe that somewhere

along the line we lost our way. See, I think what people fail to believe is that like it or not, we are all one. I'm going to say a poem to you that I believe:

"God of love,
forgive—forgive
Teach us how to truly live

Ask me not my race or creed,
Just take me in my hour of need
And let me know You love me, too,
And that I am part of You.

And someday man may realize That all the earth, the seas, and skies Belong to God who made us all— The rich, the poor, the great, the small— And in the Father's holy sight

No man is yellow, black, or white. . . . And peace on earth cannot be found Until we meet on common ground And every man becomes a brother Who worships God and loves each other"

—Helen Steiner Rice

I believe that with all my heart. The older I get, the more I know. I think

if we could just come to that as a people, all of this hate in the world will disappear. If we could just come to understand that we are one—we are all connected. And even if we don't come to that understanding for ourselves, we could look at coming to that understanding for the next generation and the children. They need to know that.

How are you feeling about the current state of race relations in America and in politics?

I cry. I'm 78 years old and what I know about myself and the things I've learned along this journey is that that's not the way. It's not the way and it never will be the way. I might not ever see the change, but I know that's not the way. So what we have done—there's a group of us across race and gender that have come together and we work with children across race and gender. We bring them together and they work together and get to know each other. They put on a program about three or four times a year. They're going to put one on somewhere around the Christmas holiday. Last year we had the program at the United Methodist Church

"If we could just come to understand that we are one—we are all connected."

downtown. There wasn't anybody on the program but children. Susan Polis Schultz wrote a poem called "One World, One Heart, One Moon after 9/11. And so we had the children write an essay on that.

I think the question that you asked about what is going on now—I think it's there to let us see, and some of us don't see it, that we are all connected and we need to work together to make things better for unborn generations. We are just one people.

We go to Selma for the bridge crossing every year. There was a white lady that was killed there and her family still comes. There's a young man, young white man from Michigan who brings a busload of his students every year. I'll be honest with you, I go for the energy. Yes. It's such a good energy up there across race and gender—it's almost like you forget race when you go there. It's so different. I told my husband Johnny, I said, "We have to go because I need that energy. That energy gives me the energy for the year when I come back to Pensacola." It's good.

When did you come back to live in Pensacola from Alabama?

I started school here. I think somewhere around the second grade. I went to J. Lee Pickett. I started off at Spencer Bibb, but it was over crowded so we were going to a couple churches. When J. Lee Pickett was built, we went there. Then I went to Booker T. Washington High School.

Did you go back to Alabama?

Every summer, but that was not my choosing. You see, my grandmother farmed. So she had three daughters. My mother had the most children—she had seven. My other two aunts had two apiece. When school was out for the summer on a Friday, all the cousins were in Alabama on Sunday to help gather those crops. I had to pick the cotton, the peas and the peanuts. We were there for the whole summer, you know, but it was also good. It was good to just be there with my cousins and all. Again we were right on the Alabama River and that was beautiful.

What did you do after high school?

Well, I met Johnny and we got married. I worked at Carmen Daniel's dress shop for about six years. Matter of fact, I was a part of the march against segregation in downtown Pensacola. I was already working and I was a maid. With that march, the maids that were working down there became the first sales associates. And so that's how that happened. I left Carmen Daniels and went to Judy Leslie at Cordova Mall. I stayed there for maybe about five years and then I left and I went to McRae's. I was a sales associate there for 19 years. When I left there,



Georgia with her extended family.

GEORGIA BLACKMON



Georgia with her eldest grandson, Elijah.

that's when I opened the bookstore.

What was your inspiration opening the bookstore?

The bookstore is the Gathering Awareness and Book Center. It is the gathering of peoples in awareness of mind. It specialized in African-American history and self-awareness. What really made me go into it is when we would go to Atlanta or even down to Tallahassee they had black-owned bookstores and that was the only place that I could find black books, so I thought we need a black bookstore here. So that's what I did. I started out—I wanted a black bookstore that

specialized in books about African American history and self-awareness.

My husband has taught me to listen. So I was talking to my pastor about what I wanted to do and he brought his wife. His wife is a lot like me – we are both very strong-minded, strong-willed. And so I was sharing with him what I wanted to do and I couldn't understand why he brought his wife. So she says, "It amazes me how people always want to give you what they think you need instead of what you want." I started to come back at her and the Spirit said, "Be quiet." So about two weeks later, the Spirit woke me up with what she

had said and I thought, "Hmm, What people want." And the churches came up. What kept the bookstore open was the service we did to the churches. It allowed me to do the other stuff that I wanted to do. You see, the church is going to always need their communion. They're going to need their Bibles, their hymnbooks, their Sunday school books. So serving the churches enabled me to do the other stuff I wanted to do.

When you closed it, did you consider passing it down or selling it?

I tried that. I wanted that so bad. I think that it served a purpose here. I think that it would be good for it to go on and I tried that, but I couldn't get anyone to see that. My children, that's not their mindset. It's not my children's dream, it's mine. They're happy with what they're doing.

What do you think about the growth and development in Pensacola particularly in Belmont Devilliers where your bookstore was located, and downtown in general?

As a matter of fact, we just had a guy come up and speak

on the importance of African American history because the Ella Jordan house is going to be the Ella L. Jordan African-American Museum. Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois both said, "If you don't know your history, you're doomed to repeat it." So, it is important that we keep that history—not just for us but for our children, our grandchildren and for everybody. I need to know your history. You need to know mine. We need to know because we are all in this universe together. What I see in Belmont Devilliers, my thing is that people do not allow the history to disappear. So my thing is that you have so much African American history in here. You want everybody's history, but African Americans cannot afford to lose their history. They need it for their children and grandchildren.

So that's what we want to do with the Ella Jordan house because that house was built in 1890. Mrs. Ella Jordan bought it in 1929. You just think about that and those women and the things that they did there. Booker T. Washington's wife came to that house. Mary McLeod Bethune came

"But let me tell you something—like I tell people, I'm not religious—but God has brought people together across race and gender to save that house."

to that house. Eleanor Roosevelt came to that house. They had different clubs there. They had their Top Leaders of Distinction. They had the Colored Women Federated Club.

The universe belongs to everybody and you need everybody's history. Your children need to know all history and how it happened. You know what I'm saying? I think Belmont Devilliers has a good toehold on it and I pray that they don't let it go.

We have a good oversight committee with the Ella Jordan house so it will be there. We have Mrs. Barnes who runs the John Riley Museum in Tallahassee. She's guiding us all the way. We're just really excited about what's going on. We're looking at being open either the latter part of this year or the first of next year. You'd be amazed at how many people across race and gender wanted us to just knock it down. When we got

started with this, they said in order for it to stay historical, it would cost \$362,000. We owe a little bit over \$100,000 now. But let me tell you something—like I tell people, I'm not religious—but God has brought people together across race and gender to save that house.

How can the average citizen still help?

They can still donate money. They can make the check out to Mother Wit and note the Ella Jordan House in the memo. Donations can be sent to P.O. Box 2054, Pensacola, FL 32513.

So you mentioned the inspiration for the name Mother Wit. Tell me a little bit about when and why you started the foundation.

The foundation was started in 1996 and became a 501(c)3 in 2005. Now the other part away from the Ella Jordan house is focused on working with children 13 and up. Every second

Saturday from 11 until 12:30 we do Tomorrow's Leaders Preparing Today. We have speakers come before them to tell their stories. I think our second speaker was Bentina Terry. We rotate male and female speakers. Then, we do Party for a Purpose. That's when the Center for Disease Control comes in. So many young people 13 and up were getting infected with HIV. So Center for Disease Control started party for the purpose. We have a speaker for 30 to 35 minutes, we feed them and we have a DJ until 11 o'clock at night. We do that every 90 days. We also take them on a trip. We took them to New Orleans, we took them to Selma and we took them the Gulfarium.

You recently cut off your signature dreadlocks, which was a surprise for a lot of people. How long did you have them?

Well, I had a big Afro in the 1960s. It must be

over 30 years because I was selling books and I was reading the information on the locks. And then I read the story. A lot of people call them dreadlocks and this book was saying they are Nubian locks. The word dreadlock came from negative people. I read that book and I thought I want to try that. There was a young couple here. They came out of Atlanta. He was a barber and she was a beautician and so that's how I got started. I loved it, but it was time for a change.

Let's talk about Pensacola as a community and what it means to you having been born and raised here.

I was born and raised here and I love it. I have no desire to go any place else. Whenever I travel, it's always good to come home. Pensacola has a have a lot of good people across race and gender. If you are a human being you will recognize that.

What's the news?

Annual 65-hour online fundraiser for Council on Aging of West Florida breaks records – third year in a row

For 65 hours, from 7 am, July 9 to midnight, July 11, senior care organizations across the country joined together to solicit contributions for their causes. The online event, called GIVE65, is a fundraiser facilitated by Home Instead Senior Care Foundation and remains the first and only crowd-fundraising platform exclusively devoted to helping elders in the communities where they live. Through help from the local Pensacola Home Instead Senior Care office, Council on Aging of West Florida raised money through this platform for its annual Senior Chill Out drive.

Council on Aging of West Florida is fortunate to participate each year in the GIVE65 event, which provides matching funds for the first \$5,000 raised. With that match, Council on Aging raised \$12,930 this year, more than last year's \$12,825 and over than \$2,000 more than 2017's \$10,740.

"The heat is so dangerous to our senior clients, because their bodies are unable to control

internal temperature as efficiently as they once could," said Council on Aging president and CEO John Clark. "This can lead to some cyclic and devastating health outcomes. With funds from GIVE65, we are able to eliminate that heat and provide comfort and safety for those who truly need it most."

The local Home Instead Senior Care office, headed up by owner and vice president Stacy Robello, is always instrumental in recruiting donors, raising awareness and building enthusiasm for the 65-hour fundraising blitz.

"Because of GIVE65, we have been able to serve those on the Senior Chill Out waitlist who need help cooling their home, that otherwise may not have the funds to do so," Robello said. "This program has truly been a game changer. It's so inspiring to see how giving our community is and to know that we may have saved a senior's life."



Escambia County Board of County Commissioners honors John Clark for 45 years of service



On Aug. 1, the Escambia County Board of County Commissioners issued a proclamation celebrating Council on Aging president and CEO John Clark's 45 years to the elder services community. Many board members and staff were in attendance as Board Chairman Lumon May, who also serves

on the agency's board, read the proclamation.

Clark has been president and CEO since 1974. Under his leadership, the Council on Aging has experienced significant growth in home and community-based services to the older population

of Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. Today the agency administers programs such as case management, Senior Companions, Foster Grandparents, Meals on Wheels, The Retreat, a licensed adult day care center, 20 Senior Dining Sites, two rural Senior Centers and much more. The Council on Aging serves more than 2,200 elders and about 10,000 caregivers each year.

Under Clark's leadership, the agency has grown from a small agency with a budget of \$100,000 to a multi-county lead service provider with revenue and expenses of more than \$5 million. Partner organizations, legislators and state leaders regularly rely on John's expertise of aging issues for programs and services to help positively transform the aging industry across Florida.

Call For Help

Our Council on Aging volunteer ramp team meets once every month or so to construct and install a wheelchair ramp for a homebound elder adult. These seniors cannot leave their home because of the simple challenge of steps. They rely on a ramp to rejoin the outside world, to go to the doctor or the grocery store or even to just enjoy the outside. The volunteer team of 5 to 8 is in need of more volunteers. We request strong men who don't mind getting sweaty and dirty. Council on Aging provides tools and sustenance for the day. If you are interested, please call Trish Dixon at (850) 432-1475.



Thank You.

Many thanks to our donors. We appreciate your generous support. Gifts received from May 24 - Aug. 23.

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Council on Aging of West Florida is a local independent 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that has served seniors and their families since 1972. Council on Aging of West Florida helps seniors in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties live healthy, safe and independent lives in their own familiar surroundings by providing community-based, in-home programs and services such as Meals on Wheels and Alzheimer's respite care. For more information, call 432-1475 or visit www.coawfla.org.

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Milton gets up every morning to watch the sunrise. The highlight of my day is making him coffee, talking about his little dog, Polly, and how the neighborhood has changed over the years. As a Home Instead CAREGiver, the services I provide allow Milton to stay at home, where he wants to be.

Michael S.

– Michael S.
Milton's CAREGiver



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