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FALL 2020

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How does America know what America needs?

Passing Down The Crown

Phenomenal Philanthropists: Gulf Winds Credit Union

Back to School 2020

Adapting to Learning Options

Sandy Sansing

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



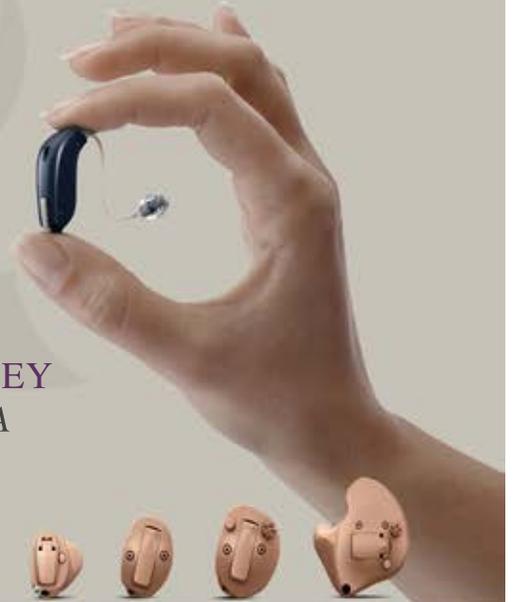
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[FROM THE EDITOR]



Josh Newby
Marketing Communications
Director and Editor-in-Chief

How is everyone doing? It's interesting that the common question, generally asked as a polite greeting has become more of a genuine inquiry over the past couple months of pandemic chaos, racial tensions, political unrest, severe weather and increasing addiction and mental anguish. Generally the question is met with an obligatory, "Oh, you know, as well as anyone," but I encourage you to dig a little deeper amongst your friends, family and neighbors. This year has demonstrated how fragile our society really is, and how any moderate disruption can have far-reaching consequences. You may not be able to assist in any tangible way, but serving as a sounding board for your friends' and family's frustrations can often go further than you think.

This is a time when the majority of Americans fall squarely into one camp or another—you have the anti-maskers and -vaxxers versus the strict adherents, All Lives Matter versus Black Lives Matter, the deplorables versus the nasty women. You may not legitimately care how "those" folks are doing, but I can promise you that if you ask with sincere intent, you will begin to care. Selfless empathy is the only way we're

going to survive this year somewhat intact. Whether it's wearing a mask, standing with those who don't look like you, or understanding the other side, these times demand that we ask, and genuinely mean, "How are you?"

In this issue, we've got stories that appeal to your better angels, to the person you know you can be. Discover how a small act of trust and vulnerability can lift our entire community through the census.

Finally, we chat with local car magnate Sandy Sansing, whose life embodies the fact that selflessness and philanthropy can also lead to great personal success.

As always, please let me know if Council on Aging can assist you in any way. My personal line is (850) 266-2507. I'd love to hear from you and to help you. Until next time, enjoy life—you've earned it, especially now!

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When Will It End?

by John Clark

In the last issue of *Coming of Age*, I asked, "What's Next?" Now I ask, "When will it end?" You all know what I am taking about. Like most Americans, I want the quick fix. Feeling sick? Go to the doctor, emergency room, etc. and insist on a pill for a quick cure. Nevermind that you are told that you have a virus and that an antibiotic, or a pill, won't do anything. A pandemic? No, problem; find a vaccine and let's get this show on the road. I mean, come on. On March 11, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic, and just several days later, the United States declared a national emergency concerning COVID-19. So, you all have had six months to find a cure and still nothing definitive? So, like most Americans, I want to know "When will this end?" When will things be back to normal? When can I meet friends after work at the Wine Bar for wine and cheese? When can I stop wearing a mask? When can we go to see a movie at a theater? When will it end?

However, if you are like me, there is probably a little voice in the

back of your mind that says, "Bad news, this is not going to end any time soon, and most definitely not until 2021!" At the same time, will things ever be "normal" for those people who lost their businesses, those employees who lost their jobs, their income, their health insurance; those who lost their health and those who lost loved ones to death because of COVID-19? For many, it will never be normal again. The TV talking heads you see every day are an interesting lot (be they right or left); the majority have lost nothing. They still have their jobs, their incomes, their health insurance, they have the luxury of a job that allows them to work from home. Locally, many of our fellow citizens who lost jobs cannot work from home and, in some cases, have seen their jobs disappear for good. This is true especially in the private sector – for profit and not for profit.

Council on Aging in just the past six months had to close our day care center – and in addition to not being able to serve elders in this vital program, several employees had to be furloughed.

Likewise, in other programs, the method of operation was literally turned upside down. No longer able to have people come together in a congregated setting for fellowship and lunch, we had to change our 20 dining sites in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties to a grab-and-go method of operation. Our agency's major fundraiser had to be cancelled which caused a \$150,000 loss in our 2020 budget and we lost revenue from some other sources. Yes, we are looking at virtual avenues to raise money such as www.enrichingelders.com, but it is unknown if we can make up for such large losses and that can be scary. BUT it won't be for lack of trying. So, as I said in the last issue of *Coming of Age*, this too shall pass (but when?) and in the meantime, do good, be grateful for what you have and care for one another. And oh, yes: wash your hands, wear your masks, don't touch your face, and practice social distancing. Because I fear we might be in this for the long haul.



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Phenomenal Philanthropists: Gulf Winds Credit Union

By Lauren Clark

When a community's citizens are thriving, so are its businesses. Uplifting those who need assistance through social services is a form of equity that not only decreases economic gaps between citizens, it raises the standard of living for us all. Many businesses and corporations know that and give to Council on Aging to play their part in the growth of the community. One of these corporate sponsors is Gulf Winds Credit Union, who are a joy to partner with not just on a financial level but in a mutual commitment to community and corporate social responsibility.

Gulf Winds has been a corporate sponsor of Council on Aging's programs for five years and has already given \$55,000 to support senior services in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. Each summer, the organization reaches out with a \$10,000 check for Meals on Wheels after a deep dialogue to understand our greatest need. As we all know, those community needs are greater than ever this year, and so you can

imagine our surprise when this year they increased their donation to \$15,000. After this is leveraged for federal matching dollars, Gulf Winds will have a \$150,000 impact on Council on Aging from just this one generous gift!

Gulf Winds supports more than just senior programs. Their four areas of service are senior services, youth services, basic needs, and financial

education. True to their holistic approach to community success, the credit union awards at least one donation for each category annually. They do not just donate to one nonprofit and call it a day: they make sure to donate to each of the four areas in all three regions that they serve: Pensacola, South Alabama, and Tallahassee. Gulf Winds Public Relations Specialist Frank Giammaria attributes this wide charitable net to the credit union's core values and philosophy of "People helping people."

Gulf Winds' philanthropic activity in Pensacola alone is more than phenomenal. Recent projects have supported and funded the Ronald McDonald House of Northwest Florida, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northwest Florida, Junior Achievement, the Studer Family Children's Hospital at Ascension Sacred Heart, and so many others.

These are not small gifts, either; support for these organizations range from five figures to \$125,000 gifts for capital campaigns. Manna Food Pantries was the recipient of this large gift after Gulf Winds had already gone above and beyond. When Manna's building flooded five years ago, Gulf Winds quickly reached out and provided them with trailers to work out of so they could continue to feed the community without interruption. Once Gulf Winds made sure the organization was surviving, they looked to make it thrive by contributing the large gift to the capital campaign for a new warehouse.

This drive to contribute to all of their members' needs is apparent in not just the staff, but the Board of Directors, as well, which is known for being open, responsive and quick to step up when needed. The Board's Coronavirus response included an immediate commitment of \$100,000 to combat the virus. They focused on purchasing personal protective equipment and other materials to assist essential workers, donating \$65,000 to Ascension Sacred Heart, \$27,000 to first responders, and \$8,000 to south Alabama hospitals. These supplies included hazmat suits, gloves, N95 masks, and hundreds of gallons of hand sanitizer, which Giammaria made sure to ration out to nonprofit partners as



needed. All of this while working on their business procedures and branch safety response!

Gulf Winds' quick response issued a challenge and got other local credit unions in the area involved, which Giammaria says is not out of the ordinary. "Local credit unions tend to have a good spirit of community togetherness and heart for Pensacola," said Giammaria, "We understand that when the community thrives, we thrive." This is reflected from the top down at Gulf Winds. Chris Rutledge, president and CEO, jests that if he ever has his name put on a building, to scrape it off, because that is not why they give. Employees are encouraged to give back as well and are given two paid days a year to volunteer in the community.

As a former professional fundraiser, Giammaria knows what it is like on the other end of philanthropy. He knows the stresses of trying to get the attention of corporations and donors and express needs and meet goals. Frank makes sure nonprofit partners can skip this step with Gulf Winds, keeping a close eye on community developments and often contacting partners to help with specific needs before they even think about what to ask for. "I like to think I'm helping Gulf Winds invest our profits in a smart way, having worked with nonprofits for so many years," said Giammaria. "It is rewarding to be on the giving end and help in any small way we can and to be somewhere that puts the wellbeing of people before profits and cares about the best interest of our community."

With partners like Gulf Winds, nonprofits can increase the socioeconomic status of the community, helping citizens become independent and relieved from various financial burdens. Empowering individuals in this way ultimately benefits the economy and local businesses. Those who continue to support social services through philanthropy as they grow engage in what is certainly one of the better feedback loops of our times as we step into a more just tomorrow.



Thomas | Mitchell | Rafferty | Proctor | P.A.



Escambia County Is on the Top of Some of the State's Worst Lists for Children

Additional focused resources are needed to achieve long-term sustainable improvements

by Ron Ellington

When she was two and a half, "Iris" got lucky. She was moved from a neglectful home setting to a foster family who quickly fell in love with her. Her angry outbursts diminished as she began to feel safe.

When the new school year began, Iris' foster mother enrolled her into the Head Start three-year-old classroom at C.A. Weis Community School. That is when she really blossomed! Today, at age six, she is thriving. Speech therapy, behavioral therapy, a nurturing classroom and a loving family turned her life completely around. The future looks very bright for Iris.

Parents and grandparents want the same for every child that they want for theirs: that every child has the support they need to thrive, just like Iris. Sadly, our community has fallen woefully short of that goal. Too many children are being left behind for lack of resources in early childhood education, detection, intervention, prevention, and health and wellness programs. Escambia County voters have the power on Nov. 3 to change those outcomes to give all children a better chance for an education, a good paying job and a bright future.

Escambia County has generous donors supporting the children's service's providers, but their financial

resources are finite. And as generous as they are and as hard as the service providers work, Escambia County is still on the top of many of the state's worst lists. We have the fourth highest rate of 67 counties in reported child abuse cases and the incarceration of African-American males under 18. Fifty-three percent of kids are not ready for kindergarten. Escambia County is in the bottom one-third (47th) of 67 counties in child wellness, an index of 16 factors. Santa Rosa is eighth.

The community has wrestled with these problems for decades and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated challenges many of our families face, highlighting crucial gaps and cracks in our children's safety net. Long-term sustainable improvements will not be achieved without additional funding that is controlled locally to invest in evidence-based successful programs that yield measurable improvements.

Voters have the opportunity on Nov. 3 to vote for the creation of a new and substantial funding source for children's services, the Escambia Children's Trust, a children's services council (CSC). The Trust is not another layer of government. It will not deliver services. Rather it will be a comprehensive partner investing in current and new innovative children's services programs with great transparency and accountability operating under all Sunshine laws. Florida Tax Watch has endorsed CSCs as "an incredibly good value to taxpayers."

The legislature recognized the need for a new laser-focused entity in 1986 when it passed legislation creating Children's Services Councils (CSCs). There are nine independent CSCs in the state, whose metrics-based program investing has created many documented, positive outcomes.

The Florida CSC, a statewide umbrella organization, tracks the nine independent county CSC programmatic outcomes on a broad

range of measures and has found the CSCs have achieved notable, measurable results, including:

- **Reduced juvenile crime, violence and incarceration.**
- **Increased kindergarten readiness and reading proficiency by third grade.**
- **Reduced rates of teen pregnancy and fewer cases of child abuse.**
- **Increased physical and mental health and well-being.**
- **Reduction in the infant mortality rate.**
- **Reduction in youth alcohol use.**

Making improvements in these areas also increases high school graduation rates, increases our trainable available workforce and improves our community for all. The larger and better educated the workforce, the more local companies will expand, and new ones will come making sure that our grandchildren can find a good paying job and not have to leave.

CSCs have a significant advantage in that they have sustainable, recurring annual revenue that is locally controlled and is not dependent upon annual governmental allocations or the strength of the economy. This provides an additional level of critical consistent investment particularly important in unstable times like these when contributions to service providers can drop while demand for services increase.

The Trust's recurring funding is controlled locally by a diverse 10-member governing board dictated by state law. Five members are appointed by the Governor from a list recommended by the County Commission with public input and must represent the diversity of the county. The other five include a County Commissioner, district

administrator for the Dept. of Family and Children Services, a Juvenile Judge, School Superintendent, and a School Board Member.

The Trust will be funded by a 0.5 (1/2) mill increase in ad valorem taxes. The average homeowner will pay an increase of \$40 annually. The average owner of any other type property will pay an increase of \$67 annually. Obviously, larger property owners will pay more. Julian MacQueen, founder of Innisfree Hotels, owns five hotels at Pensacola Beach and the Airport Hyatt. His tax bill will increase by \$33,000 annually. But Julian believes that we must make this investment in our children early and give them a better opportunity to succeed.

The Trust is on the Nov. 3 general election ballot and must be approved by a majority of Escambia County voters. It has a 10-year life and must be reauthorized by the voters every 10 years.

The half-mill increase will raise an estimated \$7.8 million annually (\$78 million over 10 years), the investment of which into evidence-based childhood development, detection, intervention, and prevention, health and wellness programs will be controlled locally. Less than 6 percent will be spent in administrative cost. These investments are used by the service providers as matching funds to secure an average of 70 percent in additional funds. That is \$130 million invested in our children over 10 years.

The additional tax would not be collected until 2022. While this is a challenging time to ask people to incur additional cost, community members supporting the creation of the Trust believe the voters will Vote Yes For Our Kids on Nov. 3 when they understand the long term financial and community benefits.

The reality is that Escambia County residents are already paying for the negative outcomes from our

current status. The County spent \$150 million to build the new jail. It spends \$4.2 million annually for the jail's mortgage payment and \$33,000 annually to house each prisoner. The County spent \$8.8 million in FY 2020 to reimburse the State its pro rata share of the State's Medicaid charges and the Detention Center cost. The School District spends millions in remedial education that could be repurposed if the needs of those students were identified earlier and given proper support. The Escambia Children's Trust is an opportunity to invest in positive outcomes and reduce the cost in lives and dollars of the negative outcomes.

A zip code should not be a major determinant in a child's ability to succeed, but today it is. The county has vast health care and educational deserts in many parts of the county that must be addressed to ensure every child has a pathway to prosperity.

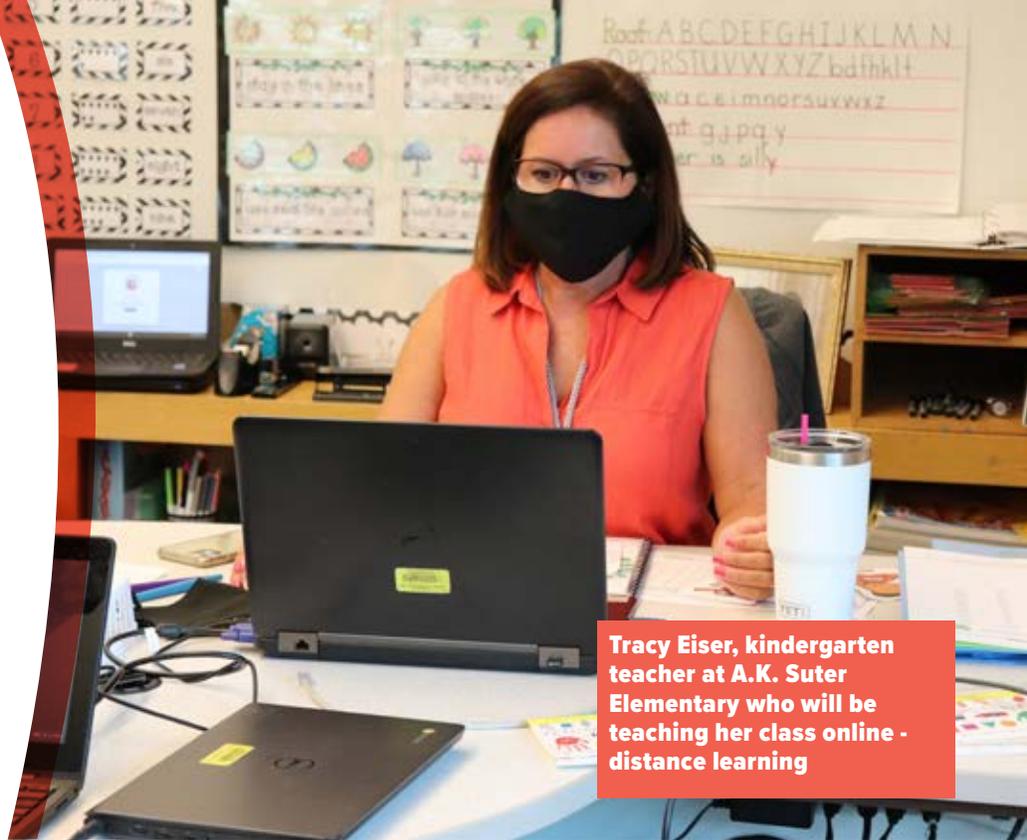
This is a transformational moment and your help is needed to make it happen. Keith Hoskins, Sr., former NAS Base Commander and now vice president of Navy Federal Credit Union, the county's largest employer, summed it up this way. "The Escambia Children's Trust is a smart move financially; it makes business sense for sure. But more than that, it's the right thing to do as community leaders, as citizens and especially as parents."

Please visit the Escambia County Trust website for additional information at www.escambiachildrenstrust.org and to get involved in helping make a better future for all of our children and our community. Please Vote Yes For Our Kids on Nov. 3.

Back to School 2020

Adapting to Learning Options

By Dakota Parks



Tracy Eiser, kindergarten teacher at A.K. Suter Elementary who will be teaching her class online - distance learning

When schools closed in the spring due to rising COVID-19 concerns, no one knew what the fall semester would look like. Plexiglass surrounding desks, clear shower curtains partitioning classrooms, hand sanitizer everywhere and a teacher's union lawsuit were not what a lot of people had in mind. As Florida continues to surge as a hotspot, the Florida Education Association has filed a lawsuit against Governor Ron DeSantis to stop the executive order that requires all Florida schools to resume in-person classes in the fall, five days a week until COVID-19 numbers lower. One thing is certain amid the back-to-school debate: online education is more important than ever, and many grandparents and caretakers are curious about how they can help their children succeed virtually.

As parents prepare to return to work and adjust to having children complete their schooling at home, many grandparents are stepping up to the plate to help watch their grandchildren. Each school district gave parents a variety of back-to-school choices: brick and mortar, remote, virtual and homeschool.

Brick and mortar is traditional face-to-face education at the child's school with increased social distance measures in place, including face coverings when social distancing is not possible. Remote education follows a traditional schedule with set times to log in, meet over video for class and complete assignments. Virtual education is hosted by Florida Virtual, which has been hosting online education for 23 years and allows students to work independently at their own pace with a flexible schedule and a set

curriculum. Lastly, the option to homeschool puts a child's education and curriculum in the hands of their parents with annual state evaluations.

As parents decided options, both Escambia County and Santa Rosa County School Districts voted to delay the start of the school year to Aug. 24 to allow for increased teacher training and social distancing preparation.

Escambia County School District (ECSD) witnessed nearly double the number they anticipated of parents choosing the remote distance or virtual schooling option. As of mid-August, the numbers of students completing each option are 47 percent brick and mortar, 37.3 percent remote learning, 7 percent virtual school and 8.7 percent unknown. Dr. Patti Thomas, the director of elementary education at

ECSD, explained what the remote curriculum will look like this semester.

"We received a lot of feedback from finishing the spring semester remotely. A lot of parents explained that one of the biggest challenges was keeping students motivated and engaged," Dr. Thomas said. "We have added some instructional time and created a plan that follows a traditional school day. Of course, we don't expect students to be logged in at a computer all day long.

elementary student would consist of 120 minutes of reading broken up throughout the day, 30 minutes of science and social studies, 60 minutes of math, one special interest area (either PE, music or art) chosen by the student, lunch and recess to get some time outside if possible.

"For grandparents and caretakers of remote learners, first of all, we appreciate you. The online learning system is very user friendly. It's a single

difficulties. Teachers will be in the school building just a phone call away if there is an issue."

As part of ECSD Superintendent Malcom Thomas' Vision 2020 plan, all students in the district have been provided Chromebooks to assist in completing schoolwork. Typically, they are issued to students at the beginning of the school year and turned in again in May, however, students were also allowed to keep their Chromebooks over the summer this year. For

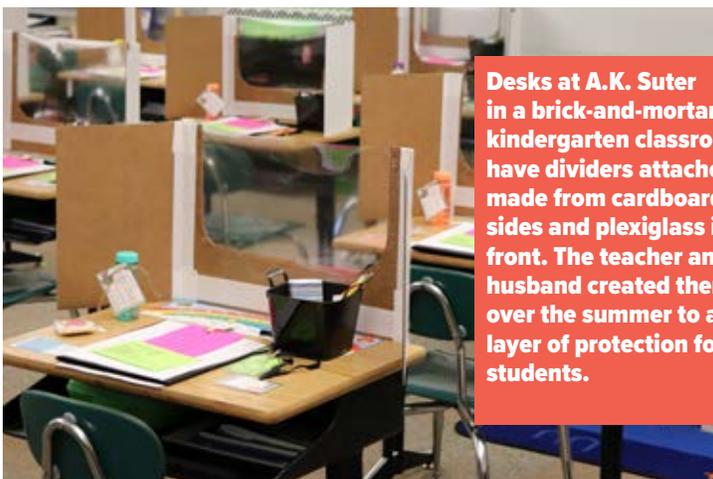
caretakers, the Focus Parent Portal is a crucial tool to remote learning. It allows parents to keep up-to-date on assignments, read district news, see report cards and communicate easily with their child's teacher.

Chelsea Cournyea, a parent in the ECSD explained her decision on choosing a learning option this fall. Cournyea is a college student at the University of West Florida, her fiancé works a full-time job and her family lives in Texas, leaving her to enroll her daughter in the traditional brick and mortar option.

"My daughter is in third grade and I wouldn't have anyone to help watch her. I am nervous about school starting, but I do feel confident in the social

distancing measures that will be in place at her school," Cournyea said. "My daughter has already been provided plenty of masks to wear and has been taught social distancing rules. The teacher has provided a barrier for each desk for her students. Remote schooling was pretty easy for my daughter to adjust to because she loves learning, but if school goes remote again, I'll have to withdraw from college this semester. Her education comes before mine."

Cournyea's experiences reflect what a lot of parents, grandparents and caretakers are going through right now as they try to ensure what is best for their children. Each school district has lists of resources available on their websites. The Council on Aging also offers a support group called Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, which meets on the second Thursday of the month at 6 pm at the Council on Aging building. The meeting is also accessible on Zoom. Contact Margaret Jerauld at 850-432-1475 for more information.



Desks at A.K. Suter in a brick-and-mortar kindergarten classroom have dividers attached made from cardboard sides and plexiglass in the front. The teacher and her husband created them over the summer to add a layer of protection for the students.

Teachers can monitor their work and log in times. We have scheduled breaks throughout the day and we're sending out workbooks to utilize away from the computer."

In March, ECSD developed an instructional continuity plan, which they have revisited and modified to ensure remote learning is still challenging but not fatiguing to students. As Dr. Thomas explained, a typical day for a remote

sign-on, so no one has to have a lot of technological experience," Dr. Thomas said, "Any student that has been in our school district will be familiar with the log in process and how to use their Chromebooks. Monitoring your students while they complete remote work at home is important. You don't need to sit next to them all day long while they work, but just check in on them and make sure they're working and not having any

How does America know what America needs?

By Josh Newby

The answer is the census. *Coming of Age* isn't going to bury the lede or make you work for the answer. Nope, if you want community centers and Meals on Wheels, schools for your grandchildren and Medicaid and Medicare for your loved ones, you have got to fill out the census. Fill it out right now at www.my2020census.gov, tell a family member or friend to do the same, and you can stop reading.

When asked when the national census was due, after Coronavirus delayed the initial schedule, Atlanta Assistant Regional Census Manager Marilyn Stephens provided a simple answer: "Today."

Remarkably, that is still the answer. The census is due today.

Why the urgency? Well, it's a Constitutional imperative and is a uniquely universal civic experience. It also helps with apportionment and redistricting, but you don't care about any of that. You care about the kitchen

table economics of it all, and take it from Council on Aging, take it from your community leaders and the people who have come and gone before you: there is probably no bigger determinant of your economic wellbeing outside your education and upbringing than the census.

If you receive Social Security, Medicaid or Medicare; if you visit a health clinic, benefit from SNAP or WIC or even play bingo at a community center, you are a beneficiary of correct census data.



2020 Census Bureau
National Processing Bureau
Logistics and Administration



“The primary reason we conduct the census is apportionment, which means a community’s or a state’s voice to those who make the decisions,” said Marilyn Stephens, assistant regional census manager for the Atlanta Region. “The louder your voice, the wider the pipeline of resources is. Essential programs are funded based on census numbers, like healthcare services, Medicaid, Medicare, and community health centers. The census supports viable neighborhoods and good education, Meals on Wheels and so much more.”

“The primary reason we conduct the census is apportionment, which means a community’s or a state’s voice to those who make the decisions. The louder your voice, the wider the pipeline of resources is.”

are huge numbers of people that would benefit, but the numbers on the census don’t support the need in the community. The census is how we know what we need.”

not wanting to be counted. We have to reverse that.”

That makes total sense. I wouldn’t want to be counted either if I knew the government was going to use it to deport me or haul me off to jail or otherwise persecute me. But census data is kept private and confidential as part of federal law, and every census employee takes an oath to protect that data under threat of \$250,000 fine and prison time. And believe us, every census taker out there just wants to make sure you get yours. Because you know who is definitely getting theirs? The Villages. That’s right, Sumter County in Florida routinely tops the list of the nation’s most responsive.

The census is how we know what we need. That’s a powerful statement. Do you think the feds couldn’t care less about you? Do you think the talking heads on TV are too preoccupied with their political posturing and their mutual funds to care if you get your Meals on Wheels? Well, imagine how little they’ll care if they don’t even know you exist. Like it or not, you have two voices in our civilized society: voting and the census. And I know as well as you do that you need every voice you can get.

So why do communities, especially communities of color, seem so reluctant to fill out the census?

“A lot of it is historical mistrust of government,” said Stephens. “The three-fifths compromise and later disenfranchisement of black people created an attitude and a culture of

How do America, the decision-makers, and the purse-keepers know what you need? Because you use your voice. The census is due today. What are you waiting for?



But if you don’t fill out the census, surely those things will still exist, right? It’s not like they go away. We yield the floor again to Ms. Stephens.

“The saddest stories I hear are about neighborhoods that need a community center, for example,” said Stephens. “They need a community center, everyone knows there

U.S. Census Bureau
Processing Center
1100 Avenue
NW 47144
BUSINESS
Use \$300

PASSING DOWN THE CROWN

by Gina Castro

Adorned with an elegant hat and a head held high, African-American women are known to sport their crowns each Sunday. Wearing a hat, also called a “crown,” to church on Sunday is a cherished tradition within the African-American community. This tradition can be traced back to Africa. In Africa, hair is symbolic. It symbolized one’s family background, social status, spirituality and tribe. Decorating the head and hair was an essential part of the dress, especially in West Africa, where most black people in America have their origins. Women, depending on their tribe, would embellish their hair with braids, silver coins, cowrie shells and beads.

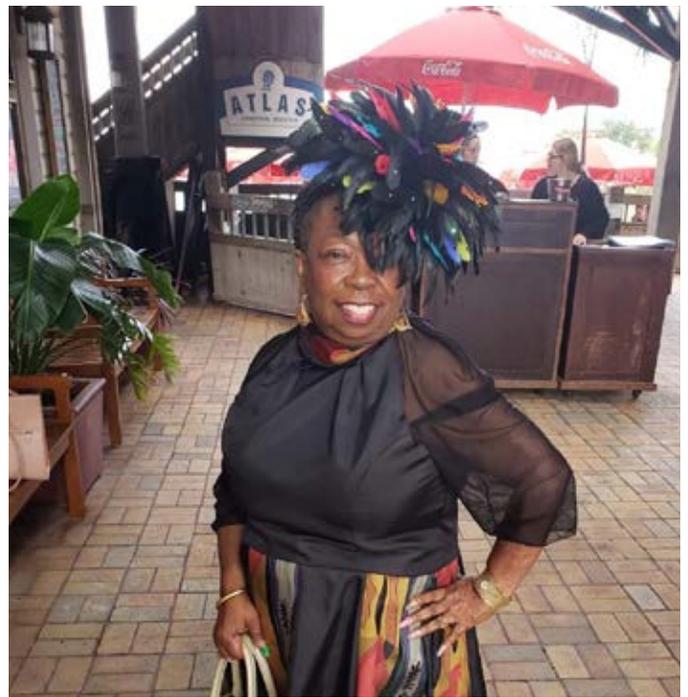
When Africans were sold into slavery and brought to the Americas, many of the African women continued to style their hair. This became problematic for slave owners because they were afraid white men would be attracted to these women, so colonizers enacted laws to limit the Africans’ cultural expression. Esteban Rodriguez Miro, the Spanish governor of Louisiana, created the Tigon Laws of 1786, which forced women of color to cover their hair. This law was made to mark these women as inferior.

However, black women found a way to turn the tables by making the head wrap fashionable. They used unique colors and wrapping styles to enhance their skin tones and facial features. Hair wraps are still popular today. Although not all African women had access to stylish fabrics during slavery, this loophole helped pave the way for African-American women to take pride in their hair, head wraps and, eventually, hats.

By the Reconstruction Era, African Americans gained more rights and opportunities, which allowed them to express themselves more freely. Somewhat a combination of rebellion and a reverence for church, African Americans chose to dress their absolute best from head to toe each Sunday.

“I think for black people, especially if you were working in the cotton fields all day, you never got a chance to look good. You certainly don’t look good in the cotton fields,” Mamie Hixon, English professor at the University of West Florida, said. “Sharecroppers had on a sack dress, a sack on their back and a rag on their head. So, you have a cause when you go into a house of worship to put on a nice dress and a crown—the crown you deserve.”

Today, most women follow this tradition simply because the women before them did. Lola Presley, charter member of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women Pensacola



Chapter (NC100BW), recalled that every woman in her family carried on the tradition.

“My mother was born in the 20s. She always dressed up with a hat on Sunday. My mother, grandmother, aunts and cousins, they are all from that era. They all wore hats,” Presley said. “It was a tradition on the day that you get dressed up, you went to church and you had a hat on, so when it got to my generation, of course, I did the same thing. I love hats. I passed them along to my daughter.”

Member of the National Council of Negro Women, Julia Arnold, 89, went to a Baptist church and a Lutheran church growing up. She remembers noticing a difference in how people dressed at each church.

“Hats aren’t in Lutheran churches as much as they are in a Baptist church,” Arnold said. “I guess it’s because the Lutheran church is more German oriented. I wore hats when I went to the Lutheran church also, but they didn’t wear hats like those Baptist folks do.”

Dr. Natalie Hardeman, First Lady of Antioch First Missionary Baptist Church, remembers the planning and detail her mom, a first lady, too, did before each Sunday.

“As most were getting ready on Sunday morning, she was already ready for church by Saturday. Every outfit that she wore to church, she had a hat to match it. Every single one,” Hardeman said. “She has never gone to church without a hat on.”

Pairing an elegant skirt suit with an equally classy hat empowered black women. It made them feel “seen,” as Presley described. “Wearing a hat says you’re sophisticated, trendy and classy. You’re going to be seen if you’re in a nice hat,” Presley explained. These hats are more than a basic head covering. The hat is an extension of black women’s original crown: their hair.

“Black women, traditionally, in black culture your hair is your pride and glory—your crown. So, the hat became a kind of



crown, and it denotes regalness as well,” Hixon said.

Black women’s hair has been scrutinized since the dawn of slavery. It’s been stereotyped as “distracting,” “unkempt” and “unprofessional.” These women still experience hair discrimination today. In 2019, Dove found that black women were 50 percent more likely to be sent home from the workplace because of their hair. Just this year, California became the first state to enact a law prohibiting the discrimination of natural hair. That law was coined the Crown Act.

Each year, NC100BW hosts a heavily attended hat show to empower women. This year would have been NC100BW’s 19th Annual Scholarship and Hat Show. It was cancelled due to COVID-19. Hixon, who was charter member president

when NC100BW’s Pensacola Chapter was established, created the idea for the show one year when the organization’s plan for the annual fashion show fell through.

“One part of the coalition’s national mission statements is to empower women at various stages in their lives,” Hixon said. “About the time of the meeting, I had just finished reading this book called *Crowns*. So, I asked ‘Why don’t we do a hat show?’”

Inspired by *Crowns*, a book featuring portraits of black women in Sunday church hats, Hixon launched what would be the first of many hat shows. The Pensacola Chapter loved the idea. Women from all over Pensacola and neighboring cities came to show off their crowns. The hat show has multiple categories, including the hat with the most hattitude, the largest hat and the fanciest hat. Hixon also thought to use ticket sales to fund scholarships, which were awarded to students of all genders.

“Women worked hard and that’s how we knew that this show was going to be a hit and stayed a hit for several years,” Hixon said. “Women looked forward to designing a hat or buying a hat from a local shop.

We always did that show on a Sunday at two o’clock, so women just came after church since many of them were in hats anyway.”

The hattitude category is the most popular. When Council on Aging asked these women if they have hattitude, we were met with a resounding “Yes.” But what is “hattitude”?

“It’s a hat wearing attitude,” Hixon explained. “Not only are you wearing the hat with a certain kind of demeanor and personality, but the hat itself speaks. It has a personality. That’s hattitude.”

Although hat wearing is a beloved tradition, all traditions are bound to change. Each generation adds their own personal touch. Arnold explained that almost every time she leaves the house now —it’s with a hat on. Pensacola historian, Teniáde Broughton has practically trademarked headwraps in Pensacola. She is hardly ever seen without a beautiful fabric framing her face.

Dr. Hardeman explained that she is one of the few first ladies in the area who continues to wear a hat on Sundays, but even she doesn’t wear a hat each Sunday like her mother did when she was a first lady.

“A lot of people have gotten into wearing fascinators, instead. A lot of ladies in the traditional churches have gotten out of wearing hats. There are still some that do. But as far as an every Sunday thing, we hardly wear them. We hardly wear them because they’re heavy and uncomfortable,” Dr. Hardeman explained. “It’s more comfortable to wear a fascinator. Some pastor’s wives don’t even wear hats. They just wear dresses or pants when they have to dress up. As the times change, traditions change.”

Even if hats transition to fascinators or if hats somehow phase out, there is one thing for certain: a black woman’s crown is always in style.

Sandy Sansing

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

BY KELLY ODEN

ANYONE WHO HAS SPENT TIME IN PENSACOLA HAS LIKELY COME ACROSS SANDY SANSING—they may have caught a commercial or seen a billboard for one of his 10 car dealerships, they may have come across him at a business or fundraising event, they may have met him at church or out on the golf course, they may have even bought a car or two from him. Wherever one may have met Mr. Sansing, there is no doubt he left an indelible impression in their mind.

It is Sandy Sansing's profound belief in family, faith, hard work and community that sets him apart and makes him such a likeable person. There is no pretense with Mr. Sansing. He came from modest beginnings, he worked hard, he took a few chances and he found incredible success—both in business and in life.

After earning the first golf scholarship to the University of West Florida, Sansing graduated with a degree in accounting. It was the dawn of the computer era, and Sansing saw an opportunity. He and his partner leveraged \$2,500, a little know-how and a lot of determination into an extremely successful company, Digital Systems, which they sold in 1980 for a “very, very nice sum.”

Not content to rest on his laurels, Sansing set out to define the next chapter of his professional life. He found it an unlikely place—the car business. Once again, Sansing leveraged a single Nissan dealership into a regional powerhouse of 10 dealerships, including the coveted and illusive BMW contract.

When not spending time at work or with family, Sansing is a dedicated member of his church and generous philanthropist both at home and abroad. COA had the pleasure of speaking with Sandy Sansing about his life, work, family and faith. »





Sandy Sansing AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

COA: Good morning, Mr. Sansing. Thanks for talking with me today. I'd like to go back a little bit and talk about your upbringing and your childhood. Were you born and raised in Pensacola?

SS: I was born in Birmingham, Ala. I moved here in 1950 when I was three years old. My daddy was working for the drug manufacturer Eli Lilly, and they moved him to Pensacola. We lived in the same house in East Hill my whole life. I went to Agnes MacReynolds and then A.V. Clubbs for junior high and then Pensacola High School. Our house was on the corner of 20th Avenue and Scott Street. It was nice. We had little Zamora Park a block and a half away that I'd ride my bicycle to every day in the summer. They'd have some organized games, and I played baseball. I was a big baseball player. There was a Bill Bond baseball league, and Bill Bond was my coach from 10 to 12. Next to my daddy, he was my best role model and a wonderful man.

COA: You mentioned riding your bike and playing baseball. What else did you do as a child?

SS: I love sports. I was a little skinny kid. When I

started high school, I was 5'3 and weighed 99 pounds. I wanted to play football at Pensacola High School, but at five foot three and 99 pounds, obviously no coaches noticed me. In my 11th grade year, I grew to 5'11 and 115 pounds. So, I was skinny as skinny could be. My daddy was a golfer, and he got me into golf when I was about five years old. I have continued to play golf to this day. I had a scholarship at Pensacola Junior College. It paid \$99 a semester, and that covered my tuition. Then the University of West Florida opened, and I was in the very first full class. I also had the first golf scholarship. So, I played golf. I was still way too skinny to play anything else.

COA: I read that you met your wife via a blind date that your father set you up on. Is that right?

SS: That is correct. My daddy worked for Eli Lilly, and they had won a sales contest. All the district had won a trip to the Grand Hotel in Fairhope, Ala. My daddy had been telling me about this pretty young pharmacist —she had her doctorate in pharmacy—that was working in Montgomery. She was coming anyway, as a winner. He wanted me to come over and play golf

with the boss during the day and that night go to their banquet with Peggy, the young lady from Montgomery. I woke up that morning, and it was raining. That was back in the days before cell phones and everything. I did have a landline, and I kept expecting daddy to call me and say it's raining, we can't play golf, so don't



Sandy's first-grade school photo.

worry about coming. But he never called. I drove over and I said, "Daddy, it's raining." And he said, "Yeah, but I want you to meet Peggy." So, we ended up getting to play golf, and I went to the banquet with her that night. In less than a year, we were married.

COA: How old were you then?

SS: I was 26. She had a real good job, and I was a sales manager with Burroughs Corporation, selling computers. I was a sales manager—the youngest sales manager in the southeast. But another guy and I were getting ready to start our own business. Peggy and I dated for less than a year and decided to get married. I had \$2,500 saved when we started talking about getting married. I told her that I was getting ready to start a new business. "I've got \$2,500. And that's it. I'm leaving a very good job to start a brand-new business and I want you to know that ahead of time before you embark on marrying me." She said, "I love you. We'll make it work." She had a good job, and we lived on her paycheck for the first year until we started getting a little paycheck from our company.

COA: What a great story.

SS: It's a tremendous entrepreneurial story. I don't know if it could be done today. The night before I resigned from my job to start my own business, I went to see my Daddy. I said, "Daddy, I'm scared to death. I'm walking away from a good job with a good

future to start a new business. I have a little over \$2,000 saved and Peggy's got a job." I said, "I'm walking away from a good job and I'm scared to death." Daddy looked at me and I'll never forget it. I've told the story 1,000 times. He said, "Sandy, go for it. This is your dream to have your own business. I don't want to see you back out and then for the rest of your life, look over your shoulder thinking, 'What if I had tried my own business?' I don't want to see you live with regrets. Go for it." I was 27 years old at the time. The next day, I resigned. The company threatened to sue me, but it ended up phenomenal. We had the business for less than five years and then we sold it.

COA: What did the company sell?

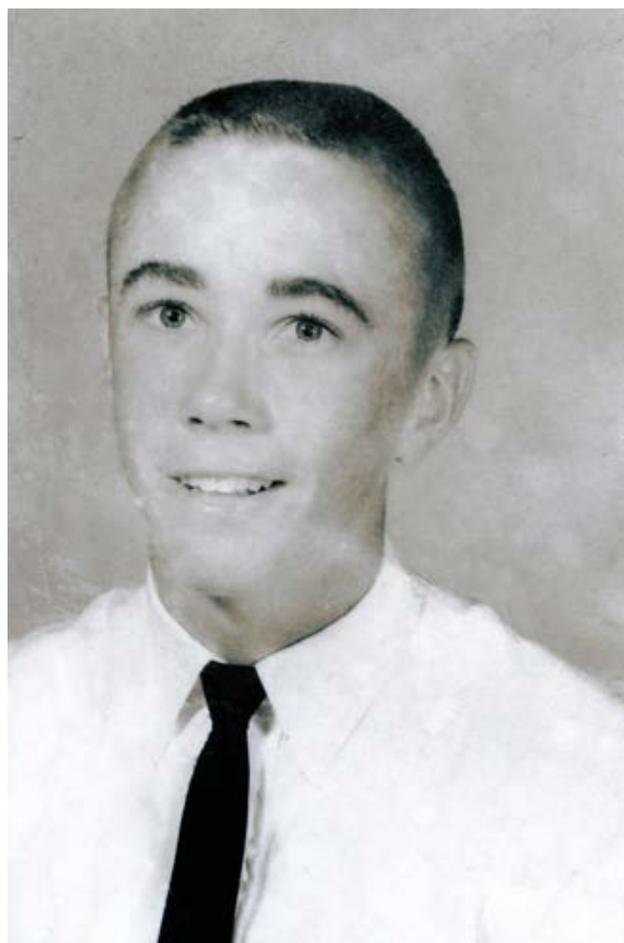
SS: To start off, we would sell a computer to anybody who would buy one. That didn't work because we were having to hire programmers out of the University of West Florida and take them to a construction company, take them to a credit union, take them to a private school, whoever we sold to. Kids coming out of college may know a little bit about writing programs, but they don't know anything about accounts receivable, accounts

payable, construction, bank statements—all the things that they had to go do. So, at the end of the year, we had no happy customers. We were coming back from a convention in Atlanta for credit unions, and we were big time bankrupt. We had to decide what we were going to do. My partner and I both had degrees in accounting. We had sold a couple of CPA firms a computer with the monthly financial statements for their class. Let's say it was a doctor, the doctor would bring in his checkbook with his check stubs for where he had paid his utilities or where he paid his payroll and he had his revenue. Our computer system would load all of that in and then print out a profit and loss statement and a balance sheet. He would be prepared at the end of the year to go do his taxes with his CPA firm. We made a life changing decision then — instead of trying to be something for everyone, let's be the very, very best at one business. And we selected accounting firms. So, there I was, a 27-year-old talking to a 60-year-old CPA partner at a big firm trying to convince him to spend \$30,000 with us on our system.

COA: How did you make it work?

SS: The fact that I had a degree in accounting, and I had worked a year in accounting was helpful. I understood the system and I gained the older CPAs' respect because I did know what I was talking about. I

the CPA would say, "Well, I have depreciation every month or I have rent every month. How do I handle that?" I would look him in the eye and I'd say, "Well, Mr. Smith, if I add that to the system to be automatic, will you buy the system?" I'd just sit back and shut up



Sandy's high school graduation yearbook photo.

could relate to him in terms that he understood as to what his needs were. He saw that and he understood that. For the first 50 computers that we sold, I might be in the middle of a demonstration and

and wait for his response. And 90 percent of the time when I would do that, the CPA would say yes. It gave them a little authorship of the system, and they saw that I was flexible. We did that, and we became the

Sandy Sansing AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

biggest and the best company in the country selling computer systems to CPA firms and public accounting firms to do their monthly work for their clients. We started the company in 1975, and we sold it in 1980.

COA: When did you decide to get into cars?

SS: Well, we had a contract to stay for three years after we sold it. I stayed for a year and a half. My partner stayed longer. I should have been the happiest guy in the world. I had some money. I didn't have to work. But I wasn't happy because I didn't know what I was going to do next. I had two little kids. I had enough money to lightly retire. But I don't think that was God's plan for me —to hang it up at 33 years old. I didn't want my little children going into school and people saying "What does your daddy do?" Well, he plays golf every day. I wanted to be a role model for my kids. I had a friend who worked for Chevrolet motor division, for the manufacturer. He kept telling me, "You need to get in the car business." I'm not a car nut. I'm not a car guru. Bob Salter owned Bob Salter Chevrolet back then. Bob and I were on the Baptist Hospital board together, and we were also both deacons at First Baptist Church. He was getting

near retirement, and I began talking to Bob about buying his dealership. In the meantime, I spent a year traveling all over the South looking at other car dealerships. Mr. Salter and I ended up making a deal, and I bought the dealership in 1986. I was scared to death. I had invested about every penny I had to buy him out. I didn't know the business. It was very different from the computer business with college graduates in three-piece suits. The car business has come a long way today in being legitimized. It was rougher back then, and I had many, many, many sleepless nights. Two years later, I bought Cliff Fields, Nissan. I had hired a guy after my second year named Mike Addison. Mike played football at Alabama with Bear Bryant. He was a college graduate. He was working in a big used car operation in Birmingham, and a friend I had hired encouraged Mike to come down and talk to me. I hired Mike as an assistant used car manager. His wife and family were in Birmingham, and he told him to stay in Birmingham. "Let me go see if this works. This guy's brand new in the business. Supposed to be a nice guy. Let me go see if this will work out." After about six months, Mike brought his family down. He helped me tremendously, and now Mike is a partner in

nine of our 10 dealerships. Mike and I are still working closely together after 32 years.

COA: That's wonderful. I understand getting the BMW dealership was quite a challenge. Tell me about that.

SS: The BMW story is an interesting one. They were not



Sandy posing for a yearbook photo during his time at Pensacola Junior College.

in Pensacola, and I got the name of the guy in Atlanta who was over market development, which means looking at new stores, taking on new owners, closing stores. I wrote him letter after letter. I called him. I went to see him. My wife and I would go to the national car conventions. We would hang out at the BMW booth trying to meet some other influential people. We would go as far as finding out what hotel they were staying at and going and hanging out in the lobby and looking for BMW people coming in. I did that for three solid years. In February of 1993, I was sitting in my office. I heard a knock on the door, and a guy walked in. He said, "I'm Larry Carlson with BMW. We've decided to come to Pensacola, and we want to offer the dealership to you." It blew me away. The most awesome thing that has probably ever happened.

COA: I know that faith is a big part of your life. I wanted to ask how you became involved in the church, what denomination you are and why that is such a deep part of your life.

SS: Well, faith is a very big part of my life. I grew up as a kid in Gadsden St. Methodist Church, and then I accepted Christ as my Savior as a junior in high school.

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*I think it's **an obligation and a desire of mine to give back to help others** because I have been so unbelievably blessed.*

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When my wife and I got married, she had grown up Baptist, so we began going to First Baptist Church in downtown Pensacola. We're still very active. I'm a deacon and a Sunday school director. I do quite a few mission trips. I've been to Uganda, Africa multiple times. In Gulu, Uganda, there's a rebel army that kidnaps 12 and 13-year-old boys and girls. The girls were forced to become sex slaves. The boys are forced to become killers and soldiers. When I was there, they showed me this little bitty house where they were taking the kids who escaped and trying to train them on a trade. They told me what they want to do, which was to build a much bigger one and train them in welding, cosmetology and sewing for six months and then give them all the equipment they would need. They told me what it would cost, and I said, "I'll do it." I went back a year later for the very first graduation. One hundred and fifty kids who had escaped had finished the six months training and we're given complete sewing, welding or cosmetol-

ogy equipment. The joy and excitement on their faces was amazing. The young girls—a lot of them had two or three kids because they had been raped by the soldiers and the boys—they were all smiling and laughing and happy. Sitting next to them were the kids who had just escaped, who were getting ready to go to the next class. They still had the shock, the fear, the shame in their eyes because they had just recently escaped. What a difference that six months made. We have been doing that now for almost 10 years. We've been to Guatemala multiple times on a similar type trip. I've been to Cuba and quite a few other places on mission trips like that.

COA: I know you do a lot of philanthropic work locally as well. Tell me about that.

SS: In our home city, we do scholarships for both the University of West Florida and Pensacola State College for kids who are from this area. About 15 years ago, I was driving to work, and I saw a kid about three

blocks from Pensacola Junior College. He was limping, carrying a stack of books and I figured he was walking to junior college. I had gone to junior college because my parents told me, they said, "You've got two younger sisters. We don't have the money for all of you to go off, so we want you to go local for two years and then we'll see what we'll do." So, my heart went out to this young man, and I began giving money to Pensacola Junior College, now Pensacola State College, for scholarships. I said I'd like to give it to local people who want to continue their education. I've been doing that for 15 years, and over I think 1,200 kids have received some form of a scholarship. About eight or nine years ago, I began doing the same thing at the University of West Florida. We support the Gulf Coast Kids' House for abused children. Sue Straughn from Channel 3 began the communities caring at Christmas program 40 years ago, and I've been Sue's partner in that for 33 years helping kids have a Christmas. I could

go on and on with different charities that I support. I believe that God has blessed me unbelievably. I believe that I'm to be a steward of what he has entrusted to me. It all belongs to him, not to me. He has blessed me with it. There's a verse in the Bible, Luke 12:48 that says "To those who much is given, much is required." I have been given everything from a wonderful family to health to financial success to business success. I think it's an obligation and a desire of mine to give back to help others because I have been so unbelievably blessed. I'm still very active in my church. There's an organization, Fellowship of Christian Athletes — it's a worldwide organization. I have served as a local chairman for 25 years and as the vice chairman of the International organization. There are others, but those are just the highlights just to show that my faith and my commitment is very, very number one in my life. I am blessed to be where I am.

Sandy Sansing AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



Sandy celebrating the one-year anniversary of Sandy Sansing Chevrolet in 1987.

COA: You support so many charities and so many organizations in this town, but you do tend to focus a lot on children. What is it that drives you toward that, and what do you see as some of the most pressing issues for kids in our community?

SS: Well, I love children. I've got six grandkids and two kids. I love children. A little child in need cannot help themselves, so unless

somebody steps in and offers help in some way or the other, that little child has no chance in life. I am not necessarily gifted as a teacher or in other ways to help children, but where God has blessed me is on the business side. I can give financially to help support Gulf Coast Kids' House and different schools, and then the teachers, the coaches, the counselors can help as well. There's no one person who can do everything, but

if each of us can do something, together we can accomplish a whole lot. We're partners in education with six schools and support 50 Little League baseball and soccer teams. I do believe in children. Almost all the money that we give is tied to helping children or the Christian faith. We have pressing needs in our community. We have needs in education. We have needs in feeding the children. We have needs in role models for the children. Programs like Take Stock in Children, which my daughter Stephanie got me involved with are wonderful. We give a sizable amount of money, and the organization selects a child. If that child maintains the grades and the integrity and stays out of problems, then they have a free college education. We've been doing that for many, many years. Through the different scholarships, feeding and counseling programs, we can help a lot of kids. I was fortunate to have wonderful, loving parents. They weren't wealthy. I didn't go to some prestigious university. I went to the two local colleges. If I can give money or my time to help other children have a chance at life, I think that's what God's calling for my life is today.

COA: I wanted to back up a little bit and ask about your partnership with Bubba Watson. How did that come about?

SS: When Bubba moved back to Pensacola, I was at the Pensacola Country Club one day playing golf, and he and his business partner Randall Wells were there playing. Bubba and Randall came over and said, "What are you doing on Friday?" I said, "Why?" They said, "We want you to play golf with us." I said, "Well, whatever I'm doing just got cancelled, if I can go play golf with Bubba Watson." So, I played with them, and we just hit it off and started talking. Bubba and his wife Angie are very close in age to both my son and my daughter and my daughter's husband. After playing golf with him several times, I invited him to a barbeque at my son's house. Bubba and my son became best friends. Angie, Bubba's wife, and my daughter have become best friends. He kept saying that he wanted to get in the car business. At that time, I had been negotiating with a guy named Lou Sobh who owned the Chevrolet dealership in Milton. I talked it over with my family because we didn't have any outside partners except Mike, who is my working partner in every store. I told Bubba I was negotiating on a dealership in

his hometown. Bubba grew up in Baghdad right outside of Milton and went to Milton High School. I said, "If I buy it, I'm going to let you come in and buy a piece of it." He was so excited. He's been a wonderful partner. He wants to help. He wants to learn. He keeps joking with me about buying into all the dealerships. But he's in that Chevrolet dealership, and he loves the car business. We've become dear friends.

COA: Your son-in-law ran for public office and you supported him in that endeavor. Has the current state of politics made you step away from or lean into statewide politics?

SS: I'm a passionate American. I have my feelings, but in the retail business, half the people may feel like me and half may feel otherwise. So, I am very, very selective in terms of which local politicians I support because then everybody who is for the other candidate may say, "Well, I'm not going to buy a car from him. I'm not going to support his business." When my son-in-law ran, yes, I came out big in support of him. I've supported Malcolm Thomas and Sheriff David Morgan—certain people who I have known and have been involved deeply with. Mostly, I am very quiet and behind the scenes because my

business has to survive on selling cars and service to everybody, not just people who may have my same political feeling.

COA: Speaking of business, how is business? How has the pandemic affected car sales for you?

SS: Well, business has been good. The pandemic began in March. I was out of town, and I flew back. I explained to my managers that our business was going to tank and that we needed to tighten our expenses immediately. I said, "You've all got some marginal employees that we can carry during good times, but we're going into some desperate times, and the key factor is that the business has to survive or none of us will have a job. So, we have some tough, tough decisions." We cut advertising tremendously. We let quite a few people go and business went off about half. Then the federal stimulus program kicked in, and business picked back up. Business was very good for April, May and June. Now, the federal stimulus is off, and business is starting to slow down. We've just got to kind of manage our business as best we can.

COA: Do you have any plans to retire?

SS: I really don't. I love what I do. I may take off in the afternoon to go hit golf balls or I may take off in the afternoon to go play with grandkids or take grandkids to hit golf balls, but I still have a sincere passion for my business. And for my people. I love my people. We've got almost 600 employees, people who have been with me 20 to 30 years. I enjoy seeing them. I enjoy the excitement of running the business, of working with my son and my partner, Mike. We just opened a new Nissan dealership in Foley, Ala. One of my managers was promoted to General Manager to run that. And it's exciting for me to be able to give opportunities to our young guys and girls and help them have good jobs. As long as I have a passion for it, I'll still be here at work. Again, I don't work near the hours I used to work. I used to be six days a week, eight in the morning to seven or eight at night. I don't do that anymore.

COA: How long have you been married?

SS: We have been married for 44 years.

COA: What's the secret to a long, happy marriage?

SS: Give and take. Learning to say, "Yes, dear." Learning that I don't get my way all the time. I have a partner whom I love dearly. Her thoughts are not always my thoughts, and I need to do my best to understand and appreciate her and her desires, thoughts, wants and wishes.

COA: Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you think it's important for people to know about you?

SS: No, I think you've hit on everything—my faith, my family, my business, my childhood, my college, starting business, our growth in our business. I think you've asked all the right questions. I've tried to seek God's will in my life. I kind of want to be like the Apostle Paul. When it's over, then God can look at me and say, "You were faithful. Good job." That's my goal in life now is to be a servant. To be in the middle of God's will and do what he wants me to do. He has blessed me unbelievably, and I sincerely appreciate it.

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