Government & Nonprofits

STATE, CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATION

VALDOSTA — Lowdnes County residents have access to state and federal representatives.

FEDERAL

U.S. House of Representatives: Congressman Austin Scott, R.
U.S. House of Representatives: Congressman Buddy Carter, R.
U.S. Senator: Sen. Johnny Isakson, R.
U.S. Senator: Sen. David Purdue, R.

STATE

Governor: Brian Kemp
Lieutenant Governor: Geoff Duncan
Secretary of State: Brad Raffensperger
Attorney General: Christopher M. Carr
State School Superintendent: Richard Woods
Commissioner of Agriculture: Gary W. Black
Commissioner of Insurance: Jim Beck
Commissioner of Labor: Mark Butler
Public Service Commission: Doug Everett, Tim Echols, Chuck Eaton, Lauren "Bubba" McDonald Jr., Tricia Pridemore

STATE REPRESENTATIVES

District 174: John Corbett
District 175: John LaHood
District 176: Undecided as of print
District 177: Dexter Sharper

STATE SENATOR

Sen. Ellis Black

AUSTIN SCOTT, R.

BUDDY CARTER, R.

JOHNNY ISAKSON, R.

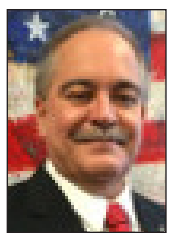
DAVID PERDUE, R.

BRIAN KEMP

GEOFF DUNCAN

BRAD RAFFENSPERGER

CHRISTOPHER M. CARR


RICHARD WOODS

GARY W. BLACK

JIM BECK

MARK BUTLER

DOUG EVERETT

TIM ECHOLS

CHUCK EATON

LAUREN "BUBBA" MCDONALD, JR.

TRICIA PRIDEMORE

JOHN CORBETT

JOHN LAHOOD

DEXTER SHARPER

ELLIS BLACK

LOWNDES COUNTY COMMISSION

The General Assembly of Georgia established Lowndes County Dec. 23, 1825. The county contains five commission districts, headed by a non-voting commission chairman. Each district elects a commission representative to a four-year term. Lowndes County has a population of 115,000.

Commission Chairman: Bill Slaughter
District 1: Joyce Evans
District 2: Scott Orenstein
District 3: Mark Wisenbaker
District 4: Demarcus Marshall
District 5: Clay Griner

BILL SLAUGHTER

JOYCE EVANS

SCOTT ORENSTEIN

MARK WISENBAKER

DEMARCUS MARSHALL

CLAY GRINER

VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL

VALDOSTA — The City of Valdosta was incorporated in December 1860. It has a population that is expected to be 60,000 in the next census. It serves as the county seat of Lowndes County.

Mayor: John Gayle
District 1: Vivian Miller-Cody
District 2: Sandra Tooley
District 3: Joseph "Sonny" Vickers
District 4: Eric Howard
District 5: Tim Carroll
District 6: Andy Gibbs
Councilman at Large: Ben Norton

JOHN GAYLE

VIVIAN MILLER-CODY

SANDRA TOOLEY

JOSEPH "SONNY" VICKERS

ERIC HOWARD

TIM CARROLL

ANDY GIBBS

BEN NORTON

REMERTON CITY COUNCIL

Remerton, incorporated in 1951, is a municipality of Lowndes County. The population was 1,123 at the 2010 census. It was incorporated as a town in 1951, and chartered as a city under Georgia law in 2000. Remerton is an enclave of Valdosta and is a popular place for Valdosta State University students to live.

Mayor: Cornelius Holsendolph
District 1: Bill Wetherington (Mayor Pro-tem)
Councilman at Large: Jasen Tatum
Councilman at Large: Brandy Barnes
Councilman at Large: Steve Koffler

CORNELIUS HOLSENDOLPH

BILL WETHERINGTON

JASEN TATUM

BRANDY BARNES

STEVE KOFFLER

LAKE PARK CITY COUNCIL

Located in South Georgia on Interstate 75, Lake Park is Georgia's Southern Gateway City. Lake Park is known for its spectacular natural beauty. The many lakes and trails, retail stores and outlets, ample industrial properties, churches and schools, make Lake Park a great place to live or visit. It has a population of 883, according to the census.

Mayor: Keith Sandlin
Mayor Pro-tem: Ronald Carter
Council member: Tyler Davis
Council member: Carl Taylor
Council member: Tom Barr

KEITH SANDLIN

TYLER DAVIS

RONALD CARTER

CARL TAYLOR

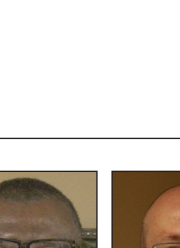
TOM BARR

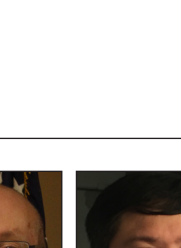
HAHIRA CITY COUNCIL

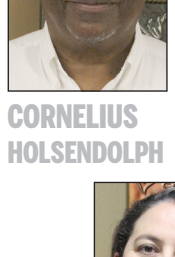
Hahira is an incorporated city of Lowndes County with a population of 2,959, according to the census. Some say the name Hahira (pronounced hay-Hi-ra) was created by Berry Folsom, Hahira's first postmaster, but overall the origin of the name remains a mystery.

The town of Hahira received its charter incorporating the community on Oct. 2, 1891. The first mayor, Henry Briggs Lawson, was elected in November 1891 and served until 1907.

Mayor: Bruce Cain
District 1: Terry Benjamin
District 2: Kenneth Davis
District 3: Patrick Warren
District 4: Mason Barfield


BRUCE CAIN


TERRY BENJAMIN


KENNETH DAVIS

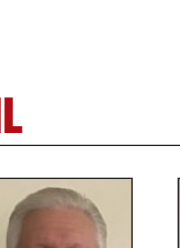
PATRICK WARREN

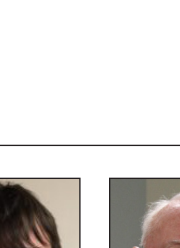
MASON BARFIELD

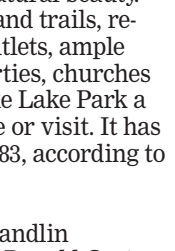
DASHER CITY COUNCIL

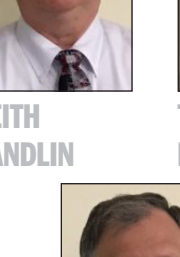
Dasher is an incorporated city of Lowndes County with a population of 991, according to the census data.

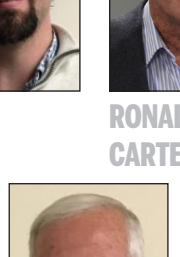
Mayor: G.R. Holton
Post 1: Jeff Guilliams
Post 2: Donald Bryan
Post 3: Bill Hatfield
Post 4: Anita Armstrong-Scott


G. R. HOLTON


JEFF GUILLIAMS


DONALD BRYAN


BILL HATFIELD


ANITA ARMSTRONG-SCOTT

BOARDS OF EDUCATION

LOWNDES COUNTY SCHOOLS

Clyattville Elementary Schools: Pre-K to 5
Principal: Dr. Tenry Berry
5386 Madison Highway
Valdosta, Ga. 31601
(229) 316-8602

Dewar Elementary School: Pre-K to 5
Principal: Katie Chappuis
3539 Mt. Zion Church Road
Valdosta, Ga. 31605
(229) 219-1370

Hahira Elementary School: Pre-K to 5
Principal: Iris Mathis
350 Claudia Drive
Hahira, Ga. 31632
(229) 316-8600

Lake Park Elementary School: Pre-K to 5
Principal: Julie Klein
604 W. Marion Ave.
Lake Park, Ga. 31636
(229) 316-8603

Moulton-Branch Elementary School: Pre-K to 5
Principal: Dr. Debbie Brantley
5725 Perimeter Road
Valdosta, Ga. 31601
(229) 245-2294

Pine Grove Elementary School: Pre-K to 5
Principal: Al Swilley
4175 River Road
Valdosta, Ga. 31605
(229) 245-2297

Westside Elementary School: Pre-K to 5
Principal: Beth Lind
2470 James Road
Valdosta, Ga. 31601
(229) 245-2289

Hahira Middle School: 6-8
Principal: Stacy Dickey
101 S. Nelson St.
Hahira, Ga. 31632
(229) 316-8601

Lowndes Middle School: 6-8
Principal: Bill Haskin
2379 Copeland Road
Valdosta, Ga. 31601
(229) 245-2280

Pine Grove Middle School: 6-8
Principal: Ivy Smith
4159 River Road
Valdosta, Ga. 31605
(229) 219-3234

Lowndes High School: 9-12
Principal: LeAnne McCall
1606 Norman Drive
Valdosta, Ga. 31601
(229) 245-2260

Parker Mathis Learning Center: 6-12
Lowndes Alternative Program Director: Danny Redshaw
1500 Lankford Drive
Valdosta, Ga. 31601
(229) 245-2271

VALDOSTA CITY SCHOOLS

J.L. Lomax Elementary School: Pre-K to 5
Principal: Dr. LaConya McCrae
1450 Howell Road
Valdosta, Ga. 31601
(229) 333-8520

Sallas Mahone Elementary School: Pre-K to 5
Principal: Dr. Artrice Haugabrook
3686 Lake Laurie Drive
Valdosta, Ga. 31605
(229) 333-8530

S.L. Mason Elementary School: Pre-K to 5
Principal: Kevin Daw
821 W. Gordon St.
Valdosta, Ga. 31602
(229) 333-8525

Pinevale Elementary School: Pre-K to 5
Principal: Royce Thomas
930 Lake Park Road
Valdosta, Ga. 31601
(229) 333-8535

W.G. Nunn Elementary School: Pre-K to 5
Principal: Wade Beale
1610 Lakeland Ave.
Valdosta, Ga. 31602
(229) 333-8575

J.L. Newbern Middle School: 6-8
Principal: Dr. Elena Ponder
2015 E. Park Ave.
Valdosta, Ga. 31602
(229) 333-8566

Valdosta Middle School: 6-8
Principal: Beth DeLoach
110 Burton Ave.
Valdosta, Ga. 31602
(229) 333-8555

Valdosta Early College Academy: 6-12
Principal: Dr. Mae McKinney
1605 Azalea Drive
Valdosta, Ga. 31602
(229) 671-8455

Valdosta High School: 9-12
Principal: Dr. Janice Richardson
4590 Inner Perimeter Road
Valdosta, Ga. 31601
(229) 333-8540

Horne Learning Center: K-12
Principal: Keith Hose
930 Old Statenville Road
Valdosta, 'Ga. 31601
(229) 333-8597

Horizon Academy
Regional Director: Dr. Samuel Clemons
3101 N. Forrest St.
Valdosta, Ga. 31602
(229) 333-8500 ext. 4011

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

St. John the Evangelist Catholic School
Principal: Vito J. Pellitteri
800 Gornto Road
Valdosta, Ga. 31602
(229) 244-2556

Valwood School
Head of School: John Davis
4380 Old U.S. 41 N.
Hahira, Ga. 31632
(229) 242-8491

Open Bible Christian School
Principal: Peter Smith
3992 N. Oak St. Ext.
Valdosta, Ga. 31605
(229) 244-6694

Highland Christian Academy
Principal: Cobie Tomlinson
4023 Pine Grove Road
Valdosta, Ga. 31605
(229) 245-8111

Georgia Christian School
President: Dr. Brad Lawson
4359 Dasher Road
Valdosta, Ga. 31601
(229) 559-5131

Victory Christian School
Administrator: Dr. Steve Ward
3229 Madison Highway
Valdosta, Ga. 31601
(229) 245-7770

CHARTER SCHOOL

Scintilla Charter Academy
Dean of Students: Mandy Avera
2171 E. Park Ave.
Valdosta, Ga. 31602
(229) 244-5750

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Valdosta State University
President: Dr. Richard Carvajal
1500 N. Patterson St.
Valdosta, Ga. 31698
(229) 333-5800

Wiregrass Technical College
President: Dr. Tina Anderson
4089 Val Tech Road
Valdosta, Ga. 31602
(229) 333-2100

Georgia Military College
Executive Director of Valdosta campus: Billie Washburn
4201 N. Forrest St.
Valdosta, Ga. 31605
(229) 269-4848

Park University: Moody Air Force Base campus
President: Dr. Greg Gunderson
3010 Robinson Road
Moody AFB, Ga. 31699
(229) 245-7077

VALDOSTA BOARD OF EDUCATION

VALDOSTA — The Valdosta City Schools Board of Education meets for its regular meeting every second Tuesday of the month and its work session every fourth Tuesday, unless otherwise stated.

Meetings begin 7 p.m. and are located at the Superintendent's Office, 1204 Williams St., except for the work-session meetings from September to May — those are held at various campuses throughout the district on a rotating basis.

Superintendent: Dr. William Todd Cason
District 1: Liz Shumphard
District 2: Vacant. This seat will be voted on March 19.
District 3: Warren Lee
District 4: Tyra Howard
District 5/Chair: Trey Sherwood
District 6: Dr. Tad Moseley
At Large/Vice Chair: Stacy Bush
Superward East: Debra Bell
Superward West: Kelly Wilson

DR. TODD CASON

LIZ SHUMPHARD

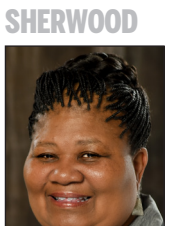
WARREN LEE

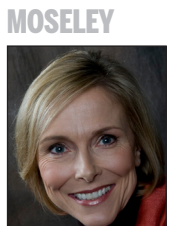
TYRA HOWARD

TREY SHERWOOD

DR. TAD MOSELEY

STACY BUSH


DEBRA BELL

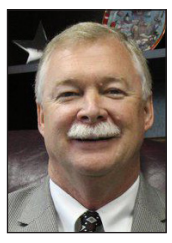

KELLY WILSON

LOWNDES BOARD OF EDUCATION

VALDOSTA — The Lowndes County Schools Board of Education meets every first and second Monday of the month, unless otherwise stated.

Meetings begin 6 p.m. and are located at the Lowndes County School's Office, 1592 Norman Drive.

Superintendent: Wes Taylor
District 1: Mike Davis
District 2: Eric Johnson
District 3: Brian Browning
District 4: Ronnie Weeks
District 5/Chair: Dave Clark
District 6: Dr. Glenn Gregory
District 7/Vice Chair: Eddie Smith


WES TAYLOR

MIKE DAVIS

ERIC JOHNSON

BRIAN BROWNING

RONNIE WEEKS

DAVE CLARK

DR. GLENN GREGORY

EDDIE SMITH

SCINTILLA BOARD OF EDUCATION

Scintilla Board of Education was established in 2014. The school's board of education consists of six members.

Chairman: Zachary R. Cowart
Vice Chairman: Jeremy Baker
Secretary: Enid Santana
Treasurer: Eric Tillman
Jerry Jennett
Garrett Copeland

ZACHARY R. COWART

ENID SANTANA

ERIC TILLMAN

JERRY JENNETT

GARRETT COPELAND

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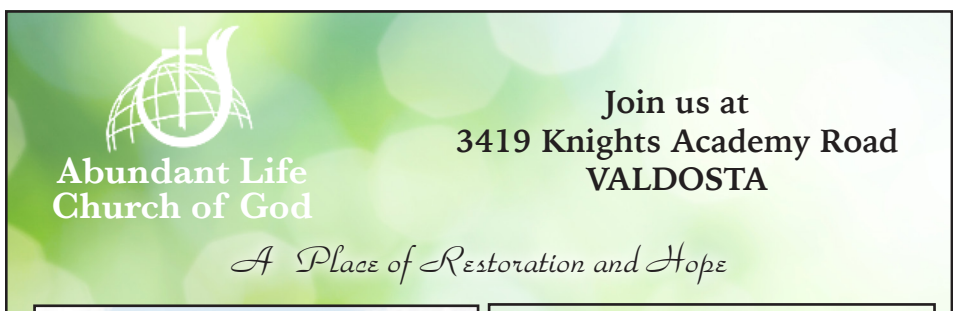
** Some restrictions do apply*
Georgia Christian School admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all privileges, programs and activities generally recorded and made available to students at the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin in the administration of its educational policies, admission policies, financial aid, athletic and other school-administered programs.



VSU brings college life to South Georgia

BY THOMAS LYNN
tom.lynn@gaflnews.com

VALDOSTA — From humble beginnings in 1913, Valdosta State University has become a thriving piece of Lowndes County, bringing a variety of students from across the nation.

VSU is rich in history as it opened as South Georgia State Normal College in January 1913 with three college freshmen and 15 sub-freshmen. Tuition was $10.

In 1922, it became a four-year college named Georgia State Woman's College and expanded from three to seven buildings under the New Deal programs between 1935-48. Powell Library was dedicated by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

It was in 1950 the college became co-educational and was renamed Valdosta State College, which is when Greek life began.

Valdosta State University received its current name and status in 1993 and became the second regional university in the University System of Georgia.

As of the fall 2018 semester, there were 11,211 students from across the globe who attend the university.

VSU's goal is "to operate the university with a focus toward human, environmental and financial sustainability while increasing value to local, regional, national and international stakeholders," according to the university's mission statement.

VSU is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. Many of the colleges within VSU have received national recognition by their respective professional associations and some have achieved national accreditation for their aligned professional associations.

VSU offers more than 100 degree, certificate and endorsement programs on campus or online, according to the university's website.

In 2015, VSU announced it would waive out-of-state tuition for prospective students in South Carolina, Florida and Alabama who meet the requirements for admission.

VSU also draws students by having an excellent athletic program. It boasts championship teams in baseball, softball and men's tennis. The Blazer's football team is a four-time national championship winning program, its most recent success in fall 2018.

On Jan. 1, 2017, Richard A. Carvajal was appointed president of the university. He is the 10th president, and prior to his appointment as interim president of Darton State College in 2015, Carvajal served as president of Bainbridge State College in Bainbridge from 2011-15.

VSU is located at 1500 N. Patterson St. For general information, call (229) 333-5800 or visit www.valdosta.edu.

FILE PHOTO

Valdosta State University's football team won the National Championship for Division II.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Four Valdosta State University journalism students earned a certificate in multimedia basics from the Poynter Institute during the fall semester. Pictured are Prince Robinson, Kaitlyn Balch, Dr. James LaPlant, dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Hannah Colligan and Arelexus Brown.

AMANDA M. USHER | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Suvi Savolainen accepts her degree from Valdosta State University President Dr. Richard Carvajal during the fall 2018 commencement ceremony on VSU's front lawn.

KATELYN UMHOLTZ | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Valdosta State University students and community members gather at the front of the University Center before the Martin Luther King March.

Wiregrass hones technical skills

BY THOMAS LYNN
tom.lynn@gaflnews.com

VALDOSTA — Wiregrass Georgia Technical College has been a fixture in Valdosta since 1963, although not always under its current name.

In 2008, a merger was approved by the State Board of Technical and Adult Education for East Central Technical College and Valdosta Technical College, according to the school's website.

One year after the merger was approved, the local board announced the name for the new institution would be Wiregrass Georgia Technical College.

Wiregrass aims to "promote community, educational and economic development by providing a trained workforce in our 11-county service area and throughout the state of Georgia," according to the school's mission statement.

The 11-county service area includes Atkinson, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brooks, Coffee, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes and Wilcox counties.

There are more than 140 programs offered at Wiregrass including 31 degrees. Programs offered at Wiregrass include business, computer science and digital media, health care, professional services and technical and industrial.

For students interested in continuing education at a four-year institution, Wiregrass has articulation agreements with Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, Albany State University, Ashford University, Clayton State University, College of Coastal Georgia, Columbia Southern University, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Georgia Military College, Herzing University, Kaplan University, Life University, Mercer University, Middle Georgia State University, Pace University, Park University, Robert Gordon University, Southern Polytechnic University, Thomas University, University System of Georgia and Valdosta State University.

While some credits may transfer to colleges not listed, Wiregrass states the articulation agreements make transferring easier.

Wiregrass is accredited by the Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges.

It is also part of a network of colleges called the Georgia Virtual Technical Connection, GVTC, that allows Wiregrass to offer technical certificates, diplomas and degrees online. Three methods are offered including online, hybrid and web-enhanced instruction.

Additionally, the adult education program allows for adults to obtain their GED, learn basic skills and learn English as a second language.

All programs have been developed with direct involvement of businesses, meeting specifications for each occupational program, according to Wiregrass' website.

If a graduate enters the workforce and does not meet the employer's standards, the college will retrain the employee free of cost. The guarantee is effective for two years after graduation.

Dr. Tina K. Anderson currently serves as the president of Wiregrass.

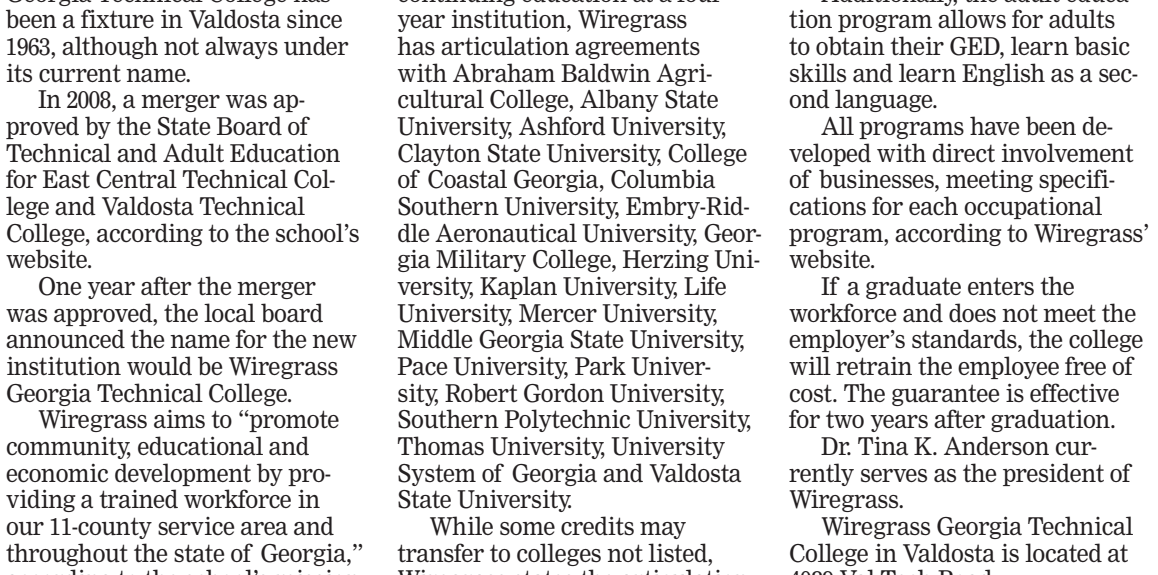
Wiregrass Georgia Technical College in Valdosta is located at 4089 Val Tech Road.

Wiregrass also has three other campuses including Ben Hill-Irwin Campus, Coffee County Campus and Cook County Center. There are also other Wiregrass locations in Lakeland, Moody Air Force Base, Nashville, Ocilla, Pearson, Quitman, Rochelle and Statenville.

For more information, visit www.wiregrass.edu.

AMANDA M. USHER | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Eleventh graders Jared Seals and Nelleah Shellman participate in the fire-extinguisher activity during Get Wired, an interactive event at Wiregrass Georgia Technical College. Both students attend Brooks County High School.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Wiregrass Georgia Technical College RN seniors are pictured in the lobby of Dasher Memorial Heart Center at South Georgia Medical Center. The nursing program at Wiregrass was accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

David Orr in the barbering program at Wiregrass Georgia Technical College placed third in the nation at SKillsUSA national competition. The Wiregrass cosmetology program, which includes barbering, has been recognized among the top 10 in the nation.

FILE PHOTO: DERREK VAUGHN | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Terry Stewart with Sam's BBQ lifts a pan of chicken from the grill at the 100 Black Men of Valdosta annual barbecue competition.

100 Black Men impacts thousands

BY DEAN POLING
dean.poling@gaflnews.com

VALDOSTA — 100 Black Men of Valdosta has been making a difference for nearly a quarter of a century.

The organization hosts a two decades-and-running barbecue competition the first Saturday in August. It hosts an annual Black Tie Gala that has featured keynote speakers such as Georgia Supreme Court Justice Robert Benham, Gov. Sonny Perdue, U.S. District Court Judge W. Louis Sands, actress Victoria Rowell, etc.

Martin Luther King III spoke of the need to nurture youth at the group's first gala.

The 100 Black Men of Valdosta feeds hundreds of people with a Thanksgiving Day dinner.

It has sponsored a Black History Artifacts Exhibit in the past.

The organization has helped numerous area students through more than $100,000 in scholarships.

The 100 Black Men of Valdosta became chartered July 12, 1995 during the Ninth Annual National Convention of the 100 Black Men of America.

It is the 56th chartered chapter of the national organization.

"100 Black Men of Valdosta seeks to channel the energy of young people in a positive direction; hopefully, down a path of their own choosing," according to the Valdosta chapter of the organization.

"They must be inspired by our dedication, strengthened by our resolve and motivated by our efforts and accomplishments. Our mentors are leaders in the community. Our members are men who have obtained a certain degree of success in their own right, and realize the value of hard work. Our members have faced and overcome adversity, and are willing to dedicate time and effort to steer local youth in a positive direction."

In a past article in The Valdosta Daily Times, the "100 Black Men of Valdosta describe themselves as a force for cultivating outstanding men whose collective skills, experience, and training achieve meaningful gains for the African-American community," according to the organization's website.

"The group expends added effort in grooming young African-American males, helping to ensure the youth develop into strong men."

In the mid-2000s, 100 Black Men promised to present a $1,000 scholarship check to the top 50 percent of the Valdosta Early College Academy's 30-member Legacy class.

A few years ago, the promise was kept.

Eleven members of the class remained. The 100 Black Men of Valdosta presented a $1,000 scholarship to each of the 11 remaining students.

VECA is a partnership between Valdosta City School System and Valdosta State University.

Then-VSU President Dr. Patrick Schloss also attended Copeland's meeting with the class. Copeland challenged Schloss and VSU to meet or exceed the 100 Black Men of Valdosta's scholarship commitment.

VSU also kept the promise.

100 Black Men of Valdosta continues funding scholarships. And keeping the promises of its charter.

FILE PHOTO | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Members of the Valdosta chapter of 100 Black Men Willie T. Head Jr., Lymas Johnson and James I. Garland help with the placement of their office space in this file photo from several years ago.

FILE PHOTO: DERREK VAUGHN | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Michael Anderson of Creations by Mike shows off his ribs which took first place in the 2018 100 Black Men of Valdosta barbecue competition.

FILE PHOTO: THOMAS LYNN | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Bernard Perry, member of the 100 Black Men of Valdosta, gets a plate of Thanksgiving food at the 25th Annual Thanksgiving Food Fest. Perry and fellow members fed hundreds of people in 2018 at the Salvation Army.

AIRMAN TARYN BUTLER | AIR FORCE

Airmen return to Moody Air Force Base from a deployment in southwest Asia, Jan. 24.

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS EUGENE OLIVER | AIR FORCE

An A-10C Thunderbolt II from the 75th Fighter Squadron at Moody Air Force Base, Ga., returns from supporting Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Jan. 25. The A-10C Thunderbolt II, which has an increased loiter time and weapons capabilities, deployed to southwest Asia in support of ground forces.

SENIOR AIRMAN JANIQUA P. ROBINSON | AIR FORCE

A Moody Mud Run participant slides down a rope obstacle, May 5, 2018, in Ray City. Participants trekked 4.6 miles through the mud, water and 29 obstacles that made up the course. This is the fifth year Moody has hosted the event and more than 800 patrons participated.

Moody Air Force Base keeps U.S. safe, Lowndes secure

BY TERRY RICHARDS
terry.richards@gaflnews.com

MOODY AIR FORCE BASE — One of the last entries in the book "History of Lowndes County Georgia: 1825-1941" mentions the U.S. Army Air Corps had started building a field north of Valdosta.

From humble beginnings of tents and temporary beaver-board headquarters grew an important military base with globe-girdling responsibilities and a major economic engine of Lowndes County.

Moody Air Force Base had its beginnings in 1940. Europe was already embroiled in World War II. The U.S. wasn't in the fight yet, but growing military preparations meant army bases and air fields began sprouting up across the country. The Air Force did not yet exist as a separate uniformed service; it was officially a part of the U.S. Army.

"Valdosta Airfield" went to work in September 1941. It was later renamed after the late Major George P. Moody, a pilot who was killed in a flight test at Wichita Army Airfield, Kansas. The renaming took place Dec. 6, 1941.

The next day, the forces of Imperial Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and the U.S. was at war.

During the war, the mission at Moody Field was pilot training. Along with Moody proper, the base also had control of auxiliary fields in Lake Park, Moultrie, Nashville and Quitman.

After the war's end, the military faced a massive wind-down and found itself with many excess properties. The powers-that-be decided to turn the lights off at Moody, and the base went into "inactive status," though it was still Army property.

In 1949, with the Korean War heating up and military expenditures increasing across the board thanks to the Cold War with the Soviet Union, Moody was reactivated as a permanent base.

By then, the Army was out of Moody's picture; the National Security Act of 1947 pulled the Air Force free of Army control.

For the next quarter-century, Moody answered to Air Training Command, turning out pilots and trained ground crews. Perhaps the most famous of the base's trainees from this period was a young Texas Air National Guard pilot named George W. Bush, whose career would eventually take him to the White House.

In 1975, Moody's mission changed dramatically. The base was transferred to Tactical Air Command. Pilot training at the base ended as Moody became an active fighter base. F-4E Phantoms and F-16 Fighting Falcons filled the skies over Lowndes County for years to come.

Among the base's Phantom pilots in the early 1980s was Rick D. Husband, who would eventually join NASA as an astronaut and command the doomed STS-107 Columbia flight in 2003, dying with the rest of the crew when the shuttle disintegrated in the skies over Texas while gliding in for a landing.

In 1991, the base faced a threat that galvanized the community: BRAC — the Base Realignment and Closure commission. Financial constraints led to a decision to shutter a large number of military bases, and Moody showed up on a preliminary list of targeted facilities.

A task force of local government and business leaders set to work picking apart the numbers the Air Force crunched in making its decision, and succeeded in getting Moody's BRAC listing reversed by showing that part of the military's cost-benefit analysis was based on faulty or obsolete data.

Today, the base is home to the 23rd Wing, including:

• The 23rd Mission Support Group, based at Moody AFB, which trains, equips and deploys personnel support forces to build, protect and sustain air bases worldwide for combat air operations;

• The 23rd Medical Group, based at Moody AFB, which provides outpatient medical, dental, occupational, environmental and preventive health-care services in support of two combat ready wings;

• The 23rd Maintenance Group, which consists of seven maintenance squadrons located at three geographic locations. The 23rd Maintenance Group is responsible for the operation and quality of organization and intermediate-level maintenance and repair supporting combat-ready HC-130s, HH-60Gs and A-10Cs;

• The 23rd Fighter Group, which directs the flying operations for the USAF's largest A-10C fighter group, consisting of two combat-ready A-10C squadrons and an operations support squadron;

• The 347th Rescue Group, which consists of one HH-60G rescue squadron, one HC-130P rescue squadron, one Guardian Angel squadron and one operational support squadron;

• Operational control over the 563rd Rescue Group at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, as well as, the 563rd Rescue Group, Operating Location-Alpha at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev.

Also at Moody is the 93rd Air Ground Operations Wing, the first wing to provide highly trained ground combat forces capable of integrating air and space power into the ground scheme of fire and maneuver.

The 93rd AGOW is comprised of three operational groups, 17 squadrons, 10 detachments and 12 operating locations at 20 sites with 18 host Air Force bases.

The 820th Base Defense Group, based at Moody AFB, provides planning, training, equipping and preparation of the three security forces squadrons. They maintain a high operational tempo to support cyclic rotations of deployment, on-call and reconstitution/training status.

In Fiscal Year 2015, Moody had a combined military and civilian payroll of $300,810,413, according to figures provided by the base. Construction, services and commodities contracts totaled more than $67 million. The total economic impact was $430 million, the base's website.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Established in 1879, Georgia Military College's mission was 'to educate young men and women from the middle Georgia area in an environment which fosters the qualities of good citizenship.' There were 219 students during that first year.

GMC excels in academic offerings, athletics

BY KATELYN UMHOLTZ
katelyn.umholtz@gaflnews.com

VALDOSTA — One of Georgia Military College's several campuses is located right here in Valdosta.

Established in 1879, GMC's mission was "to educate young men and women from the middle Georgia area in an environment which fosters the qualities of good citizenship." There were 219 students during that first year.

It has since grown into a 14-campus establishment — that doesn't include its online program.

Although its history and namesake are military, students do not need to have any military affiliation to attend.

GMC programs are guided by "The Four Big Ideas": contribute to student success, grow enrollment, think and act as one institution and invest in the future of GMC.

For the 2017-18 school year, GMC had 16,317 students enrolled, with 2,601 of those students attending the Valdosta campus.

GMC offers 24 associate degrees and three bachelor of applied science degrees. Only one of the bachelor's degree programs – supply chain management and logistics – is offered at the Valdosta campus, but all are offered online.

There are also plenty of athletic programs for students, including golf, soccer, softball, cross-country and football.

In the 2017-18 school year, the GMC Athletic Department experienced unprecedented success in which every program was nationally ranked, and/or competed in a national championship tournament, highlighted by men's golf winning the NJCAA Division III national championship.

Bert Williams, head football coach and director of athletics, has accumulated a record of 144-49 in his 18 years at the helm for the GMC Bulldogs and has led the program to one of the country's highest win percentages in junior college football.

Only a high school diploma or GED is required to attend GMC, and numerous scholarship and financial aid opportunities are made available for more than half of the students attending GMC.

Other GMC campuses are located in Albany, Augusta, Columbus, Dublin, Eastman, Fairburn, Fayetteville, Madison, Milledgeville, Sandersville, Stone Mountain, Warner Robins and Zebulon.

The Valdosta campus is located at 4201 N. Forrest St. For more information, visit gmc.edu.

City, county schools rely on fundraising

BY KATELYN UMHOLTZ
katelyn.umholtz@gaflnews.com

VALDOSTA — The City and county school systems are setting big goals when it comes to its foundations.

Both created around 20 years ago, the Valdosta City Schools Foundation and Lowndes Education Improvement Foundation exist to fund programs, teachers and students through grant and scholarship money.

The money raised has gone toward REACH scholarships, buying classroom equipment or sending student organizations on field trips. They hold 5ks, joint trivia nights and receive help from generous donors to afford its schools those opportunities.

This year, both foundations are in talks to take their fundraising goals to the next level.

"At this time, we're in the stages of looking at doing a capital campaign on the Lowndes County side," said Whit Chappell, LEIF director. "You're going to ask for larger numbers. It's not like a fundraiser where you may raise $5,000."

Chappell, who is serving his first year as LEIF director after raising funds for Valdosta State University athletics, said the number they are looking at raising is $1 million.

The capital campaign planning is in its early stages, but Chappell said achieving that big of a number is possible when building relationships with the community.

"Fundraising is a very slow process, especially when you're brand new," Chappell said. "It's all about relationships. It takes time to develop relationships."

For Jennifer Steedley, executive director for Valdosta City Schools Foundation, she hopes to build relationships for a different purpose.

Although they don't have any million-dollar plans as of yet, Steedley said their foundation's goal is to increase scholarships, especially for the system's teachers who want to return to school to get a higher degree.

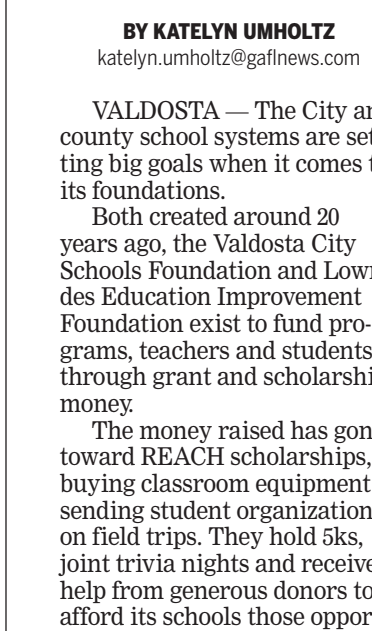
Right now, those scholarships would be around $1,000, but Steedley hopes that dollar amount will only increase in time.

"We would love to get it to $5,000 (scholarships) for our staff and students, but we realize we have to start a goal that is smart for who we are and the pace we're moving in," Steedley said.

Upcoming this month is the returned Winnersville Raffle, which both foundations take part in. Last year's prizes were worth up to $12,000.

Both foundations' spokespersons said it's important for the two to work together because both school systems are producing this community's next generation of working citizens.

"We want to show people it's okay to show support for education because these children are the future of this community," Steedley said. "It's really fun working together too."



Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis impact 1.4 million Americans. These digestive diseases are painful and isolating. We do not yet have cures or a means of prevention.

The **Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America (CCFA)** is the nation's largest nonprofit organization dedicated to finding cures.

To learn more about CCFA, visit **www.ccfa.org**. If you have Crohn's or colitis and need help, our **Information Resource Center can be reached at 888.694.8872.**

Provided as a public service • A CFC participant

SUBMITTED PHOTO

The National Council for Negro Women has 145 members this year. Photographed are some of its current members.

NCNW grows in membership

BY AMANDA M. USHER
amanda.usher@gaflnews.com

VALDOSTA — Dr. Jamie Foster-Hill has been with the National Council of Negro Women since its inception.

The local chapter of NCNW was chartered Aug. 3, 2011 by Sharah Denton with goals to lead, develop, advocate and empower.

The group's current president, Hill was a chartered member of NCNW when the group was first organized.

"I was amazed at when it got started by Sharah Denton, and she asked me to come on board," Hill said. "I did not hesitate."

Hill said she continuously volunteers her time and helps others.

"I've always been active in the community, and I've always just given my time and volunteering wherever I could," she said.

The mission of the National Council of Negro Women is to awaken its sisterhood and be more active this year, Hill said.

She said the organization has social engagements each month so the members can better learn from each other.

"We've started to do more bonding together as sisters," she said. "That's one of the major changes."

Hill said NCNW strives to remain visible within the community with its initiatives including a back-to-school extravaganza, a Bethune leadership banner and a prayer breakfast.

"We're just trying to get the word out a little more and be stronger in those areas where more people know what NCNW is, what National Council of Women stand for," she said.

Membership has increased to 145 members, the highest it has ever been since first chartered, Hill said.

Open enrollment is between April 1 through Aug. 31, and the organization is open to all women, youth and men. Meetings are available to the public, especially during the open-enrollment period.

The organization is made up of various committees such as entrepreneurial and economic empowerment, hospitality, bylaws, a mother-daughter brunch, community and program fundraising, education and the Bethune health committee.

NCNW meets all year except for June and July, at noon, the second Saturday of each month. Meeting places vary.

The organization will host the Fifth Annual SELFIE Conference, 8:30 a.m., March 23, at the Valdosta State University University Center Magnolia Room.

For more information, email ncnwofvaldosta@gmail.com or visit ncnwofvaldosta.org.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

National Council for Negro Women Second Vice President Brandy King and President Dr. Jamie Foster-Hill with Sharah Denton, Georgia State NCNW president and National Young Adult vice president.

YEA! prepares businesspeople

BY AMANDA M. USHER
amanda.usher@gaflnews.com

VALDOSTA — Husband and wife DeWayne and Amanda Johnson have committed themselves to feeding the entrepreneurial spirits of children.

Through Bridgebuilder Education and Investments, the Johnsons have been contracted by Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce to spearhead Young Entrepreneurs Academy.

They both serve as program directors while Amanda Johnson has dual-responsibility as lead instructor.

YEA is a nationwide franchise program that began in Rochester, N.Y., DeWayne Johnson said.

Planning for the local franchise took roughly three years, and the program has been running for two years.

Middle and high school students endure a 20-week course starting in the fall as they explore the process of establishing a business from the beginning.

The tuition-based program can serve up to 25 students per year, and each student is partnered with a business mentor for five weeks.

The Johnsons assist the class with creating ideas based on passions, interests or crafts during the first program phase.

The next phase allows students to navigate through writing business plans as they prepare for a pitch competition.

Amanda Johnson said the students practice body language, inflections, voice amplification.

Similar to Shark Tank, investors judge each student's pitch as he or she presents a business proposal for five minutes.

AMANDA M. USHER | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

DeWayne and Amanda Johnson head the Young Entrepreneurs Academy.

Students present ideas, marketing strategies, financial planning, business plans and the passions from which the ideas originate.

"Basically the ideal situation is that all students participate in that event, and that all students actually get some level of funding for that event," DeWayne Johnson said.

Past students have received funding for startup costs that have been used to launch businesses.

"That's the true intent of it is to give that foundation and confidence they can actually start a business," DeWayne Johnson said.

Other lessons YEA teaches is perseverance and the necessary habits to be successful as a business owner, he said.

Some of YEA's students are involved in other business-related programs such as Future Business Leaders of America.

"They're already heavily involved," DeWayne Johnson said. "They're already used to presenting. They're already used to doing research projects."

He said students have "blossomed" throughout the course.

"You start to see them peak out, and you start to see them develop that confidence," he said.

Amanda Johnson agreed with her husband that parents don't see change in their children until presentation day.

"They see probably the work that they have to do to put into it when it comes to the business plan and the research. But they don't see the part where they're practicing to speak in front of an audience," she said. "That takes everyone by surprise."

She said she believes there has been more visibility from the business community since YEA's inception.

"It's just making them want to be involved," she said. "It's definitely getting out there by word of mouth and whatever visibility that we're trying to use in regards to marketing."

She said more and more students and parents are asking how they can join YEA.

YEA meets 5-8 p.m. every Tuesday in the Valdosta State University Health Sciences and Business Administration building, Room 3050.

More information: email amanda.johnson@iamabridgebuilder.us or dewayne.johnson@iamabridgebuilder.us; call the Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce at (229) 247-8100; visit yeausa.org.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Caleb Hunter and Burnis Williams listen to a lecture educating them on how to research and structure their business financials during a Young Entrepreneurs Academy meeting.

YMCA's Team Lean observes 10 years of fitness achievement

BY SHANE THOMAS
shane.thomas@gaflnews.com

VALDOSTA — The Valdosta YMCA moves into 2019 looking to capitalize on its 2018 success.

The YMCA observes its 10th year hosting its Team Lean weight loss challenge program — an eight-week community-wide healthy weight loss challenge sponsored by the Valdosta-Lowndes County Family YMCA.

Team Lean has excelled at helping people sustain a healthy lifestyle. Offering a team concept that provides accountability and motivation to work hard and achieve healthy results, cash prizes are awarded as extra incentive to reward winning teams and individuals.

Participants decide what exercise and nutrition program works for their health and well-being. The YMCA supports Team Lean participants through free exercise classes and nutritional education that promote healthy lifestyle changes.

Team Lean participants can enter as an individual or as part of a team. Teams of four to five members compete to crush fitness goals. Every Thursday from Jan. 6 to March 8, participants weigh-in at either the Valdosta or Lake Park YMCA. YMCA fitness coaches are trained to assist with expert knowledge, personalized fitness programs and healthy suggestions. Once the challenge is complete, the team that loses the highest percentage of weight is eligible for cash prizes.

Cheryl Maddox, YMCA senior program director, who will observe her 22nd year with the Y in December, has seen the Y grow by leaps and bounds during her tenure, highlighting the number of members and community involvement as the biggest areas of growth.

"This year, in December, will mark my 22nd year," Maddox said. "During my time here, where we've grown the most is definitely in our membership base and supporting the community. Our commitment to inclusion is always going to help you get along better with anyone. It is a YMCA for all, period."

Maddox said despite a change in leadership with Randy Gaytan, program/fitness director, undertaking the program, Team Lean has seen its number of participants increase in a year's time.

Maddox detailed how substantial flooding at the facility in 2009 gave rise to improvement and policy changes, crediting being open longer to serve the community as a key reason behind the growing membership.

"Even though the leadership in that department has changed with a new fitness director, Randy Gaytan — who has also been here 20 years, she was the first one to oversee Team Lean when we started in 2009," Maddox said. "That was also the year we were flooded. So, the year it flooded here, we say that which doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

"It was kind of a blessing in disguise because we had three feet of water in the Y here for three days. The community came together, pulled together, and under the direction of our CEO and president, Larry Tobey, we were able to make (the Y) better and stronger and revamp everything. We were able to make our facility (open) 24 hours then, which let us reach out more to the community so shift workers could utilize it or people who like to be up in the middle of the night or anyone else who wants to come any time of day."

In 2017, Maddox announced the Y's partnership with South Georgia Medical Center. The partnership was made to aid in Phase-III cardiac rehabilitation for patients recovering from heart procedures. Staffed with a nurse on-site and a certified trainer, the rehab center continues helping patients recuperate and meet new people in their daily lives.

SHANE THOMAS | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES
Randy Gaytan, Valdosta YMCA program/fitness director, and Cheryl Maddox, senior program director, have more than 40 combined years of service at the YMCA.

In 2018, the SGMC rehab center was updated with new equipment.

"We're still seeing those members who started years ago continually come back in on their own now but they've graduated, so to speak, from cardiac rehab," Maddox said. "It's a nice way to socially integrate them again and reach our ultimate goal which is always for people to be infinite exercisers. So, we see them not only in the Y exercising, but socializing and then bringing new people into the Y as well."

The Y also has seen considerable success with its Group X program, which features 80 different aerobics classes a week and implemented a new class known as "Barre" in 2018.

Barre utilizes a ballet barre for a third of the class time and focuses on strengthening smaller muscles that stabilize core muscle groups. In addition to Barre, the Y added high intensity interval training classes.

Group X includes different variations of spin classes, yoga, step aerobics, boxing, body pump, yogalates, TRX and circuit training and fitness boot camps during the week.

"It's tougher than it seems," Maddox said. "With the trend toward HIIT classes, we're revamping our pool deck. On the pool deck, we've stripped out the old carpeting that was down there, we've revamped that. We've added more TRX frames and do some class training out there to incorporate the pool as well as the open-air concept out there."

Presently, the Y boasts a member retention rate of more than 80 percent. With more members placing their faith in the YMCA to improve their overall health and fitness, Maddox said, expansion is a necessity between the Valdosta and Lake Park locations.

After receiving a land donation for the Y's new gymnastics center on Val Del Road, Maddox said she hopes to garner more community support to aid in the construction of the new gymnastics center.

"We're always trying to liven up and make Lake Park YMCA better, too," Maddox said. "Then, hopefully this year with the support of the community and donations, start developing the land on Val Del. We'd like to see much more progress. Hopefully, (2019) is going to be the year for that."

Owen 'rock' of Children's Advocacy Center

BY AMANDA M. USHER
amanda.usher@gaflnews.com

VALDOSTA — The staff at the Children's Advocacy Center has undergone changes since last year, but it seems as if Clinical Director Allison Owen is here to stay.

At least that's what Executive Director Ashley Lindsay believes, describing Owen as her right hand and the rock of the CAC.

Owen began working at the child therapy center six years ago after noticing a job opening.

"It sounded like a really good job, a good fit for me," Owen said. "I love working with kids. I love working with families."

She has a master in marriage and family therapy from Valdosta State University.

She has worked with an agency similar to Behavioral Health, a nonprofit counseling center focused on children and adult therapy and an agency contracted with the Division of Family and Children Services doing in-home therapy.

Owen said a child's progression makes her passion worthwhile.

"You have a kid that comes in, they're scared of everything, they're having nightmares, they're wetting the bed, having panic attacks or crying all the time," she said.

"You want to get the kid to the point where they're happy again, and they're not so worried, and they feel safe. It makes it worth it."

Lindsay said Owen is a rock at the CAC and does more than run the clinical department.

"She's just amazing. Her main goal and her main focus is that these children that come in here always have the best," Lindsay said.

"Whether it's the best therapy, or whether she has to be the advocate for them, she doesn't mind being the advocate even if somebody else disagrees. She's going to make sure that child's voice gets heard and that they have what's best for them and what they need."

Owen's day-to-day includes supervising staff and interns, providing grant reports assistance and doing therapy with a few clients per day.

"Right now, I'm trying to focus on really just making sure we're following best practices and we're giving quality services … No day here is ever the same," Owen said.

She said she enjoys speaking to master of social work students as well as counseling students about the signs of abuse and reporting it. She also tells them about therapy types for trauma-related issues.

The CAC conducts play-therapy, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing therapy.

"We try to get trained in as many evidence-based practice approaches as we can because not every one approach is going to work for everything," Owen said.

The difference between TFCBT and EMDR is that EMDR doesn't require clients to detail what happened to them, she said.

"All they have to do is think about it, so we'll have them pull up a memory and we'll work from that memory," Owen said. "It's really interesting."

In 2018, the CAC assisted 776 children and performed 1,280 child-abuse services, Lindsay said.

Services are available for youth ages 3-18 in the following counties: Berrien, Brooks, Cook, Lanier, Echols and Lowndes.

Forensic interviews are done on location and are utilized for investigative purposes while the clinical-therapy sessions are long-term and aid the child in healing from the trauma or abuse, according to staff members.

Aside from law enforcement and the Division of Family and Children Services, CAC has partnered with the Southern District Attorney's office, the Haven women's shelter and schools along with mental-health partners.

To provide a comfortable environment for children and their families, CAC offers tours of the facility to the child and the parents.

Once the child is comfortable, the interview proceeds into the occurrence of abuse. After, the child can choose a stuffed animal and get a snack while staff speaks with parents.

Donations can be made to CAC by calling (229) 245-5362 or by bringing them into the office. The CAC is located at 3325 Skipper Bridge Road.

AMANDA M. USHER | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES
Allison Owen, clinical director of Children's Advocacy Center, has been with the agency for six years.

AMANDA M. USHER | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES
Play-therapy sessions are used to help children overcome trauma at the Children's Advocacy Center.

Boys and Girls Club has positive impact on youth

BY SHANE THOMAS
shane.thomas@gaflnews.com

VALDOSTA — The Boys and Girls Club has served Valdosta and Lowndes County since 1944.

The Boys and Girls Club's mission is to enable young people — especially those in need — to reach their full potential as moral, responsible, caring and productive citizens.

With the Valdosta Boys and Girls Club's David S. Waller Unit, 614 N. Toombs St., and the Lake Laurie Unit, 3628 Lake Laurie Drive, and even the Boys and Girls Club in nearby Brooks County, the Boys and Girls Club continues to evolve and make new breakthroughs in the community.

Bill Holt, Valdosta Boys and Girls Club vice president of operations, calls 2018 a success. The Valdosta club worked with the Valdosta Housing Authority and installed programs at Ora Lee West and Hudson Dockett to extend its reach.

"Our membership doubled in 2018," Holt said. "We had like 923 kids in summer camp last year. I have almost 400 kids on this campus alone almost every day, year-round. I think it was pretty successful and we had a pretty good year. We've added a couple new programs at Ora Lee West and Hudson Dockett — we've opened extensions there and we've also opened an extension at Lowndes Middle School. At the moment, there's probably 60-70 kids to every one of those every day right now.

"A unit has certain numbers and size and all that. It's another office — at the community centers at Hudson Dockett and Ora Lee West, we're running programs just like we are here over there and that's really neat to help those folks."

The Boys and Girls Club continues raising the bar in its learning centers. The Georgia Department of Education has in place the Title IV, Part B, 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program.

As part of the No Child Left Behind Act, the 21st CCLC Program provides federal funds to establish or expand community learning centers that operate during out-of-school hours to provide opportunities for academic enrichment and tutoring, offer students a broad range of additional services, programs and activities to reinforce regular academic programs and offer families of CCLC students opportunities for literacy and related educational development.

"Lowndes Middle School has a 21st Century grant," Holt said. "We have three of those now — here, we have a K-5 building and a teen center next door on this campus. Both of those have 21st Century Community Learning Centers and they're grant-funded and they have different things and it's really neat.

"All three of those have real teachers coming, teaching real lessons every day so our kids get homework time, they get teacher time. They actually have a couple different enrichment things whether that's the gym or the game room or the tech lab or the art room. It rotates through which one you get that day and they all get fed every night before they go home, so those are really instrumental there."

Holt said the Brooks County Boys and Girls Club will soon be upgraded like the Valdosta Club was years ago.

"Part of it's built but we're about to have a whole new club like this in Brooks County that is mostly constructed now," Holt said. "It's really a neat time. It's growing really fast."

The Boys and Girls Club of Valdosta has developed an array of parenting programs as part of its 13-week Families First Program.

Holt said the Families First Program is a way "to tighten the circle between schools, the kids and the parents."

"To me, that's where you see a lot of the impact," Holt said. "Having real teachers that'll help parents — we're all on the same team trying to help. The neat thing is that we get grades, discipline and attendance just like we're at the school. You can tell me you're doing good but, 'Wait a minute, this doesn't quite say that. Let's see how we can improve that because that's not good for here or at home (laughs).'

"We make sure there's an academic time or a homework time so you know that you're going to play a lot but you're going to have some time to work and focus on what counts, too. Just having the grades and some of that stuff just really helps. You can't get away with things. Most of the time, most after-school programs you're gonna find, they come and play and hang out till Mama gets there. ... Some of that is just structure and how you set the schedule up and how you make it conducive for kids to want to help and do the right thing."

In addition to working with schools and parents, the Boys and Girls Club is placing an emphasis on workforce readiness and working to help teens get different experiences to tap into their passions to find their calling.

"We want to give them experiences to find something they're passionate about and it's even better if you can do your passion and get paid for it," Holt said. "If you can do that, then (your occupation) isn't like a job. It's something where you're trying to go make a difference."

SHANE THOMAS | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

The swim area at the Boys and Girls Club of Valdosta's David S. Waller Unit.

SHANE THOMAS | THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Pictured is one of the youth classrooms at the Boys and Girls Club of Valdosta's David S. Waller Unit.

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Bill Holt is the Boys and Girls Club of Valdosta vice president of operations.

Flanders strives to help community

BY AMANDA M. USHER
amanda.usher@gaflnews.com

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Yureshema Flanders, programs assistant for Lowndes Associated Ministries to People, has been with the organization for three years. She began as a house supervisor.

VALDOSTA — "When I see a need for something, I feel like if somebody doesn't take action, nothing will ever get done," said Yureshema Flanders of Lowndes Associated Ministries to People.

"I like to be that advocate, if I see something wrong, to put something in place to try to help."

Flanders has been with LAMP for three years, working her way from house supervisor to case manager to programs assistant for the homeless shelter.

Her passion for helping others was elevated after working at Brooks County High School where she was a parent engagement coordinator for three years.

"Working with the community, joining the community together … I've always had a passion for helping," Flanders said.

She is the parent advisory council president for J.L. Newbern Middle School, a chairperson in the National Council of Negro Women, president of the American Legion Auxiliary and a district associate matron for Prince Hall Masonry Valdosta.

She's worked with special-needs young adults for more than 11 years as a life-sharing home provider.

"In this field, and with working with special-needs young adults, a lot of times their circumstances are not always their faults," Flanders said.

"You need somebody that can listen, somebody that can understand that sometimes we just get a bad break, depends on what happens in life, but it doesn't mean that's the end."

Flanders said she's a listening, nonjudgmental ear for her clients.

She assists with resume-building and interviewing to help the clients get jobs.

She also oversees all of LAMP's programs, including Rapid Re-housing and the newly implemented prevention program.

The prevention program was established last October and is available to residents who have been given a court-ordered eviction.

LAMP will pay a percentage of what is owed, and the client must pay the rest. This is a one-time service per year.

The Rapid Re-Housing program is for the sheltered and unsheltered and provides temporary financial help with rent and utility deposits.

Feleica Harrington, LAMP executive director, has previously said the program is to promote self-sufficiency and get clients into homes suitable to their income.

LAMP houses single men, single women and families from nine counties, including Berrien, Brooks, Colquitt, Cook, Echols, Lanier, Thomas, Tift and Lowndes.

The organization provides temporary emergency shelter and operates a day center for people who are unsheltered and in need of a laundry area, computers, food and a bath.

Coordinator Tyrese Sherman leads LAMP's street-outreach program, which is created to search for homeless people who are sleeping on the streets or holding signs.

Residents who enter the shelter receive aid applying for government assistance, finding a job, finding transportation, preparing for interviews, finding a home, etc.

LAMP assisted 1,052 sheltered and unsheltered residents, including individuals in the day center, in the street-outreach program and in the Rapid Re-Housing program.

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Yureshema Flanders oversees all programs at Lowndes Associated Ministries to People.

The government provides 54 percent of LAMP's funding, and the United Way helps with funding.

LAMP accepts toiletries, cleaning supplies, household goods and food donations. Donations can be made by visiting lampung.org. Checks can be mailed to P.O. Box 3502, Valdosta, Ga. 31604.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Miracle League of Valdosta opened the Miracle Field Complex, a specialized rubber baseball field for regional special-needs children at Freedom Park. VLPRA and Freedom Park hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the complex March 2.

Parks & Rec focuses on growth after breakthrough ventures

BY SHANE THOMAS
shane.thomas@gaflnews.com

VALDOSTA — The Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority had a successful 2018 and have big things planned for 2019.

When asked what the biggest success was for 2018, VLPRA Executive Director George Page put things simply.

"Moving dirt," Page said with a laugh, "2018 was a big construction year for us, working with the city and the county through some of the SPLOST projects."

VLPRA has begun construction on the $5.8 million expansion of North Lowndes Park. The expansion will include eight multi-purpose fields for soccer, football and other activities.

The state donated 65 acres of land to Lowndes County for the expansion and VLPRA is using additional special purpose local option sales tax funds to build an additional full-sized field at the park as well as a concessions building, back restrooms and other add-ons.

A current project on the verge of completion is the Miracle Field Complex located at Freedom Park, which held its ribbon-cutting ceremony on March 2 at Freedom Park.

"This is a $5 million-plus project and it's a great public-private partnership with the Miracle League of Valdosta raising over $1.5 million," Page said.

In addition to the Miracle Field Complex, VLPRA is completing its expansion of the Harry B. Anderson Tennis Center at McKey Park. The Tennis Center currently has 12 courts but will soon add six more courts and a gazebo.

"We will now have 18 lit courts and that project is almost complete," Page said.

Last year also marked the establishment of a new community center in nearby Naylor with SPLOST funding of $265,000. VLPRA is building a boat ramp in the Naylor community on the Alapaha River.

"We're trying to work to get more access to our blue ways in the county," Page said. "We're looking in the future to assess all of our rivers throughout our county and look at possible ways to upgrade our blue ways throughout Lowndes County and connect to other areas north and south of us."

VLPRA won the Georgia Recreation and Park Association Agency of the Year in 2018 — the fourth time receiving the statewide award in the last five years. Tammy Crosby won GRPA's Mike Daniel Award, the highest individual honor for excellence in programming.

Andre Newson's summer basketball program won outstanding athletics/aquatics program.

Crosby won the National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials "Removing Barriers Initiative Award with the Egg-Ceptional Egg Hunt."

Freedom Park won the SSUSA Sports Complex of the Year after hosting the senior softball national championship during the summer. VLPRA recruited the USSA to bring the Sacramento, Calif.-based organization to Valdosta for the event.

"Close to 40 senior teams from all over the United States participated," Page said. "All of these seniors that were playing — men and women — were raving about how nice our complex was, the customer service our staff gave them. This is just one of the many tournaments that VLPRA has facilitated over the past seven years."

Locally, VLPRA had a record year in participation for youth sports in 2018. VLPRA featured 16 girls basketball teams in 2018. Before the move to school-based athletics, VLPRA never had a girls basketball league. Now, the organization has more than 90 girls and boys teams.

"We had close to 200 girls playing school-based volleyball — the most we've ever had since we started the program," Page said. "We had a record number of football players playing this year of 505 and a record number of cheerleaders at 265. Nearly 800 kids played football and did cheerleading.

"Our school-based programs are breaking records every year with participation numbers. The youth basketball program, this year, we almost had 900 boys and girls playing basketball this past year and it's also school-based, too. We changed our models — years ago, we had no school-based programs. Since we've gone to school-based programs, our numbers are continuing to flourish."

In terms of other parks in Valdosta, VLPRA updated parts of the playground at Vallotton Park with nearly $80,000 of equipment at the park.

This year, the organization is looking to re-seal and re-stripe the basketball courts at Scott Park and Saunders Park.

Page said VLPRA is considering remodeling the basketball floors at the VLPRA location as well as the Mildred Hunter Community Center with hardwood flooring.

"Our basketball is growing by leaps and bounds and we want to take a look at those things this year," Page said.

By law, VLPRA is required to do a master plan of the area every five years. The authority will be conducting its comprehensive, system-wide parks and recreation master plan later this year.

"(The master plan) is a guide to help us move forward in all of our aspects of day-to-day operation, capital improvement and the walks of the community," Page said. "There will be at least six or seven community meetings where the public will be invited to give input on things they would like to see — whether it's new amenities, updating what we currently have, new programs ideas and different things like that. The system-wide master plan truly gives us direction of growth for the future.

"Our community is constantly changing and we have to look at the fact that a lot of the folks that live here in Valdosta-Lowndes County are military families with children So, we have to be very mindful that we're serving everybody and we're an amazingly diverse community. It's our mission to try to take that input and the master plan helps us do that."

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A player from the Live! Casino men's 40 division runs the bases following a hit during an Eastern National Championships tournament game at Freedom Park Aug. 3, 2018.