

SWFL CHRONICLE

SERVING CHARLOTTE, LEE & COLLIER COUNTIES | JULY 2025



PAGE
28

ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ

A SWAMP OF CONTROVERSY IN COLLIER COUNTY

Meet the Siblings Running Against Each Other for the Florida State Senate Seat

Nationwide — Siblings Randolph Bracy and LaVon Bracy Davis are competing against each other in a Florida special primary election for a state senate seat once held by Geraldine Thompson. Both have political experience and come from a family deeply rooted in public service and civil rights activism.

The seat became vacant after Thompson died earlier this year. She was not just a political figure but also a close family friend. Their mother, LaVon Wright Bracy, a well-known civil rights activist, was the maid of honor at Thompson’s wedding.

Randolph Bracy is a former state senator, while LaVon Bracy Davis most recently served as a state representative. Their father, Randolph Bracy Jr., once led the local NAACP, co-founded a Baptist church in Orlando, and taught at Bethune-Cookman University.

According to the Associated Press, this is not the first time politics has come between the siblings. In last year’s Democratic primary for the same seat, Bracy Davis endorsed Geraldine Thompson over her brother. Now, they’re competing head-to-head.

The winner of the Democratic primary will go up against Republican Willie Montague in the general election. The district is heavily Democratic, with Black voters making up more than half of its registered Democrats, making the outcome of the primary especially important.



2025 WOMEN OF DISTINCTION	4
TURNING IDEALS INTO ACTION.	8
TO NATURE LOVERS & CURIOUS EXPLORERS	20

ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ: A SWAMP CONTROVERSY	28
STANDING UP TO THE BULLY.	32
SENIORS & SEX	34

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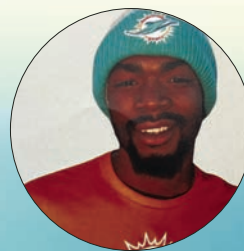
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THE 2025 WOMEN OF DISTINCTION

Serving from the Heart



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continued on next page >





LISA ESWAY

FORGIVING Love

Perhaps you could think of it this way. Jesus. You are my very heart. I am desperate for you. Have you ever felt lovesick? This is what I have learned. In Song of Solomon this word appears twice. **Lovesick**. Once when the woman is overwhelmed by the feeling and presence of love in her life. Then it appears again, and this time... this time it is much different. The woman is lovesick because there is a deep longing and desire for the same love that has gone away from her. She is heartbroken and seeks her beloved. I think I like the word pursue right here because that means to chase after. What are you chasing after? It is very easy to apply this to our own lives isn't it? My question is where do you look to find this perfect love? In people? **Or in the one who is perfect love?** The one who is full of mercy and compassion. The one who will never hurt us and never ever change. Agape. This is a Greek word. Agape love a selfless, unconditional love, the highest form of love a divine love that gives and gives, even if it's never responded to. Wow. That's incredible.

My writings are cries out to God. I will be starting here and forgiving love will be a 3 part series.

I was separated from you from a short period of time so that you could have me back forever. You see things are not always what they seem. So let's take this one step further. I've dared to believe for what lies ahead of me. And further still what I see in front of me is intimidating to me. It doesn't get any plainer than that. I have truly found the only real foundation worth establishing my life on. And I have it in me now. It's time. All of this... this that you have brought me to and through I can see that you give me the exact experience that you want me to have in order to reach the places I must go. I can look back and see all of this come together now. Even here in this place. I'm able to connect the dots. Since the beginning of this season my passions have been redirected I have more clarity about what it is I need and want to do. And one way to get it right this time is to make sure that I'm familiar with the real thing. So what is your real thing? What is the most Impossible thing you're believing that God will make possible in your life? A relationship that needs healing? A temptation to overcome? Someone you need to reach out to? Restoration from a place in your past? A weakness to be made strong? You see... now I am able to see That I was trying to do the right thing. Just the wrong way. You whisper to me I will always be with you. Because of you I am able to change me. Because of you. And time has not been on my side. Trials by fire and pressure.

Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.



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Turning Ideals Into Action for a More Sustainable Naples

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We live in a time when our values and our actions do not always align, especially when it comes to sustainability. Nationally, it is estimated that 75 percent of the American waste stream is recyclable, yet only about 30 percent is actually recycled. Here in Collier County, which includes the City of Naples, we are proud to have achieved a 75 percent recycling rate in 2021, one of only five counties in Florida to reach this milestone, according to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. This success reflects a robust residential recycling program and award-winning initiatives like foam recycling.

To me, sustainability is not just an environmental concern. It is a civic one.

Sustainability is not a trend or a marketing term. It is a civic mindset grounded in stewardship, accountability, and community. When we allow sustainability to become symbolic, something left to packaging engineers or labeled products, we miss the opportunity to strengthen our civic culture. We trade meaningful participation for performative virtue.

But there is a better path forward, and we have the tools to walk it.

Policy measures like Extended Producer Responsibility laws, which hold manufacturers accountable for the full lifecycle of their products, are promising. Yet laws alone are not enough. True change begins with us, with residents, neighbors, and families who commit to making small but consistent contributions to the greater good.

Imagine if every household in Naples made just one more environmentally conscious decision each week. Small efforts, multiplied across a community, can lead to real and lasting impact.

Are you composting food scraps or yard waste instead of sending them to the landfill? Reusing household items instead of discarding them? Avoiding single use plastics or switching to reusable containers and bottles? Participating in local cleanup efforts or helping protect our beaches and waterways? Choosing to bike or walk to nearby destinations instead of driving?

This is not about regulation for its own sake. It is about reweaving the social fabric. It is about building a culture in

which we are not just consumers, but citizens, people who take responsibility for the communities we love.

Here in Naples, where our natural beauty and quality of life are central to who we are, we have an opportunity to lead by example.

And we are leading.

The City of Naples has taken significant steps to embed sustainability and resilience into our operations and long-term planning:

- We adopted a Multi Basin Stormwater Master Plan in March 2024, designed to improve water quality, reduce flood risks, and modernize critical infrastructure.
- The 2024 to 2029 Capital Improvement Plan, approved in October 2023, prioritizes investments in climate resilient infrastructure such as seawalls, drainage systems, and expanded green public spaces.
- Naples secured 35.5 million dollars in state appropriations in alignment with our legislative priorities, including substantial funding for water quality and flood mitigation projects.
- We launched the design phase for Basin IV stormwater improvements, vital projects for shoreline protection and community safety.
- Beach renourishment efforts, including the full restoration of Park Shore Beach in April 2025, help protect fragile coastal ecosystems and guard against erosion.
- Through focused conservation, we permanently preserved 104 acres of coastal land through the Naples Beach Club conservation easement, recorded in October 2024.

These are not just projects. They are expressions of our core values in action.

Shared responsibility, especially around something as tangible as waste, can be a powerful unifier. It reminds us that our actions matter, and that together, we can protect what makes Naples special.

Let us move beyond aspiration and into action, one household, one habit, one week at a time.

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TO THE READERS OF THE SWFL CHRONICLE,

Southwest Florida is more than a region on the map — it is our home (i.e. Charlotte, Lee, and Collier County.) It's the place where we work, where we raise our children, where we worship, and where we build our businesses from the ground up with our own hands. And it's because I love this place with all my heart that I have dedicated my time, energy, and voice to fight for you — the hard-working families, the small business owners, the pastors, the teachers, the fishermen, the community volunteers, and every resident who calls SWFL home.

This letter is my promise to you. A promise that I will never stop being an abrasive champion when it comes to protecting your interests. A promise that I will be bold, clear-eyed, and determined in standing up for the people and values that make SWFL special. I don't care about political correctness or towing the line for special interests — I care about results. And I care about doing what's right for our communities, even when it's uncomfortable, unpopular, or inconvenient.

I believe in small businesses — not just because they're vital to our local economy, but because I come from the same soil they do. ***I know what it means to RISK EVERYTHING on a dream.*** I know what it means to be homeless, I know what it means to be on top of the world. I know the long hours, the sleepless nights, the razor-thin margins, and the endless paperwork. I've seen it firsthand. And I know that small business owners don't need handouts — they need a level playing field, FEWER REGULATIONS, and local officials who actually listen when they speak.

In too many cases, we have systems built to benefit massive corporations while local entrepreneurs are stuck in red tape. That's not acceptable. That's not free enterprise. That's cronyism — and I won't stand for it. Whether you run a mom-and-pop restaurant, a landscaping company, a bait shop, or a tech startup, ***I will be your advocate at every turn.*** I will fight to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, streamline licensing, cut fees, and give you the tools to thrive.

Small business owners are not just job creators — they are community builders. They sponsor the little league teams. They donate to local causes. They hire our neighbors. They are SWFL. And I will continue to be the loud, relentless voice that ensures their concerns are not only heard but prioritized.

Supporting Our Pastors and Faith Communities

Our local churches are the moral compass of our communities. They are places of hope, refuge, and redemption. In times of tragedy, we don't just turn to politicians — we turn to our faith leaders. We turn to the Word. Our pastors baptize our children, marry our couples, bury our loved ones, and provide spiritual guidance every single day, asking little in return.

Yet increasingly, faith communities are under pressure — socially, legally, and financially. Whether it's restrictive zoning laws, discriminatory policies, or an aggressive push to sideline religion from the public square, churches and pastors are finding it harder to do their work freely.

That's not just an attack on religion — that's an attack on community.

I will always stand shoulder to shoulder with our pastors. I will support their right to preach the truth as they see it, to operate their ministries without government intrusion, and to be recognized as the essential institutions they are. Whether it's advocating for church property rights, resisting unfair restrictions, or simply being present and supportive, I am

committed to the spiritual health of our communities.

Because strong churches build strong families, and strong families build strong communities.

WE NEED Government That Works — Not Government That Wastes

Let me be blunt: I believe in government that works — not government that talks in circles, wastes your tax dollars, or makes decisions behind closed doors. The people of SWFL deserve effective and efficient government — the kind that respects your wallet, your time, and your intelligence.

That means eliminating bloated budgets. That means demanding transparency from every office and agency. That means holding people accountable — even when it's uncomfortable. And yes, it means being abrasive when necessary. Because the easy path — the path of silence and complacency — only leads to higher taxes, lower performance, and a government that forgets it works for the people.

You elected your leaders to serve you, not themselves. Every policy should be weighed not on how it sounds in a press release, but on whether it delivers real results for real people. I've pushed for performance audits, I've challenged unnecessary expenditures, and I will continue to do so.

It's not enough to show up at ribbon cuttings and smile for the camera. Public service means work — hard, often thankless work — and I am ready and willing to do it, day in and day out, on your behalf.

Clean Water Is Not Optional — It's Life Itself

If you've lived in Southwest Florida for any amount of time, you understand this one truth: clean water is everything. Our health, our economy, our property values, our tourism, our fishing industry, and our very way of life depend on clean, abundant water.

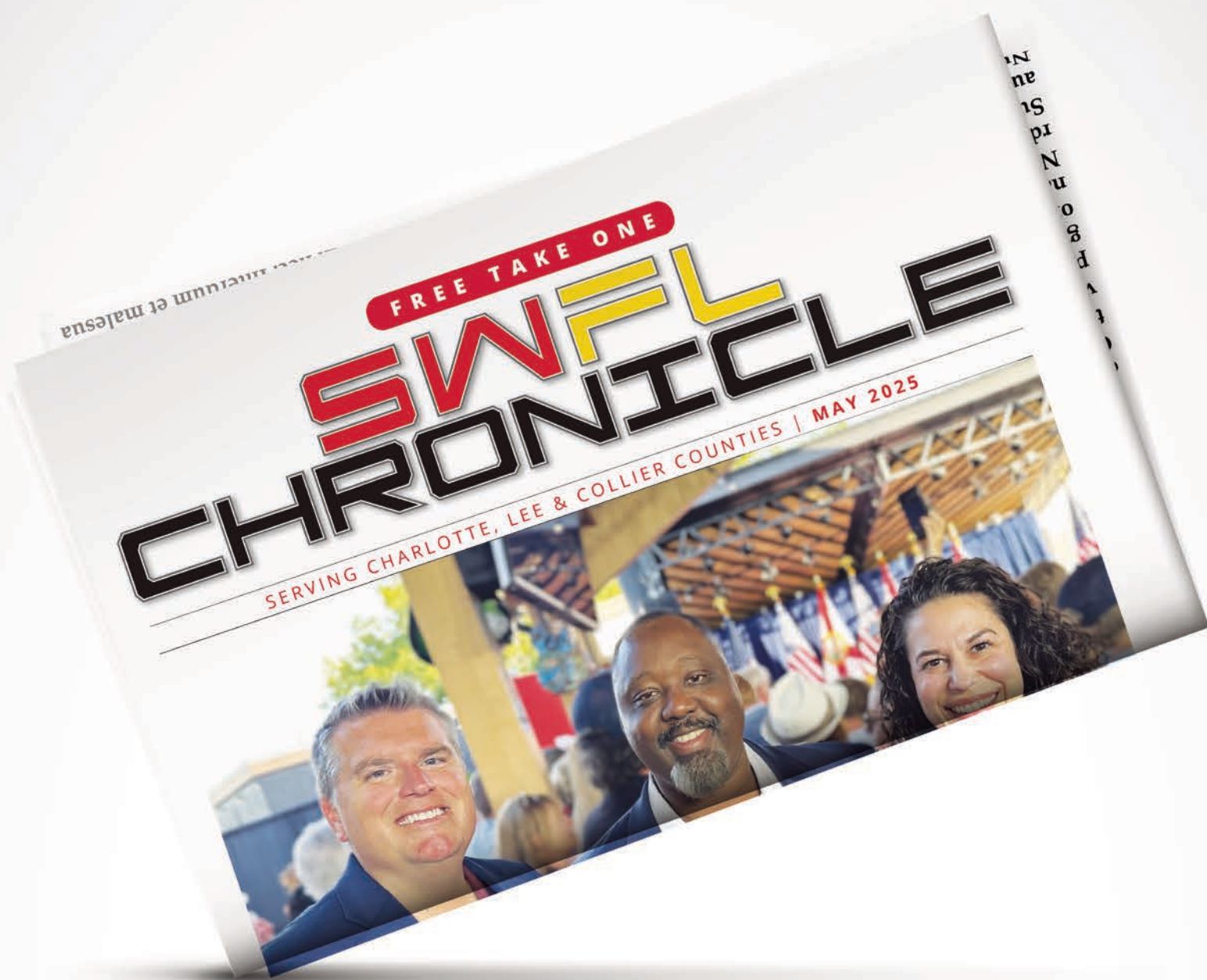
Red tide, blue-green algae, polluted runoff — these aren't abstract environmental issues. These are our issues. They affect our children, our businesses, our wildlife, and our future. When our waterways are poisoned, everything we love about SWFL is put at risk.

I don't believe clean water is a partisan issue. It's a common sense issue. It's a survival issue.

I've stood shoulder to shoulder with residents demanding stronger water quality protections. I've spoken out against polluters, outdated infrastructure, and weak enforcement. I've demanded funding for real solutions — not cosmetic fixes or PR stunts. And I will continue to be a thorn in the side of any agency, official, or

● continued on page 12





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interest group that ignores or downplays this crisis.

We need better stormwater management. We need to stop agricultural and industrial pollution from fouling our rivers and estuaries. We need to strengthen water testing, invest in modern sewage systems, and restore our wetlands. This isn't just an environmental concern — it's a moral obligation to future generations.

Clean water affects every one of us in SWFL, regardless of where we live or how we vote. I promise to keep fighting like our future depends on it — because it does.

I've never been one to sit quietly in the corner. I don't believe in half-measures or empty words. I believe in action. I believe in grit. And I believe in standing up for what's right — even if it ruffles feathers.

This region has incredible potential. We have beautiful land, diverse communities, a rich cultural heritage, and people with unmatched work ethic and heart. But we also face real challenges — development pressures, infrastructure issues, rising costs, and a political system that too often forgets who it's supposed to serve.

I won't forget.

I won't forget the family that can't afford to insure their home. I won't forget the fisherman whose catch is disappearing due to polluted waters. I won't forget the pastor struggling to keep the doors open. I won't forget the young entrepreneur trying to get a business off the ground in a sea of red tape.

You are why I fight. You are the reason I serve. And you are the

reason I'll keep showing up, even when it's hard.

I will always speak plainly, act decisively, and lead courageously. I will challenge the status quo. I will break through the noise. And I will continue to be the voice that says the things others are too afraid to say.

Because leadership isn't about popularity — it's about principle. It's about conviction. And it's about never, ever giving up on the people who put their faith in you.

A Final Word

To every small business owner, every faith leader, every teacher, every parent, every student, and every hardworking neighbor in SWFL: I see you. I hear you. And I am with you.

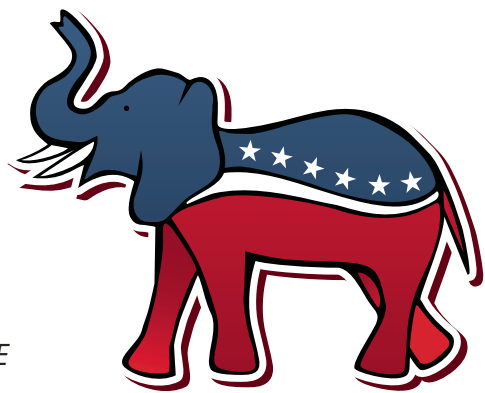
I am not running from the tough fights — I am running toward them. With your support, your prayers, and your continued engagement, we can preserve what's great about Southwest Florida and improve what needs fixing.

This region is worth every ounce of energy we can give. It's worth protecting, defending, and championing — fiercely and unapologetically.

And that's exactly what I intend to do.

God bless you, and may
God bless the people of
Southwest Florida.

Sincerely,
McKinley G. Williams
PUBLISHER, *THE SWFL CHRONICLE*





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Peter 4:10-11

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If you’re a singer, you have a divine chance to replace broken spirits with joy, peace and to connect humanity by fostering a sense of freedom.

If you’re in medicine, you’ve earned the opportunity to give hope where there’s hopelessness in the most compassionate way possible and to promote transparency in real healing.

If you’re a teacher, you have the power to impact and change the trajectory of our future and expand the opportunities for human development.

If you’re law enforcement, you have been handed a huge responsibility and obligation to humbly and as peacefully as humanly possible to equally protect and serve the very folks who gift you back in the form of your paycheck.

If you’re in transportation, you’ve been blessed with the task of transporting the most valuable cargo in the safest manner across the city, state, or country, moving America forward for the benefit of us all.

You get the point?

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Look at your work as an opportunity to serve others. It has nothing to do with titles and paychecks. It’s an absolute opportunity to impact the lives of others. **A Unselfish Offering.** When you step into your calling you’ll never view it as work again because you’ve been blessed with internal satisfaction.

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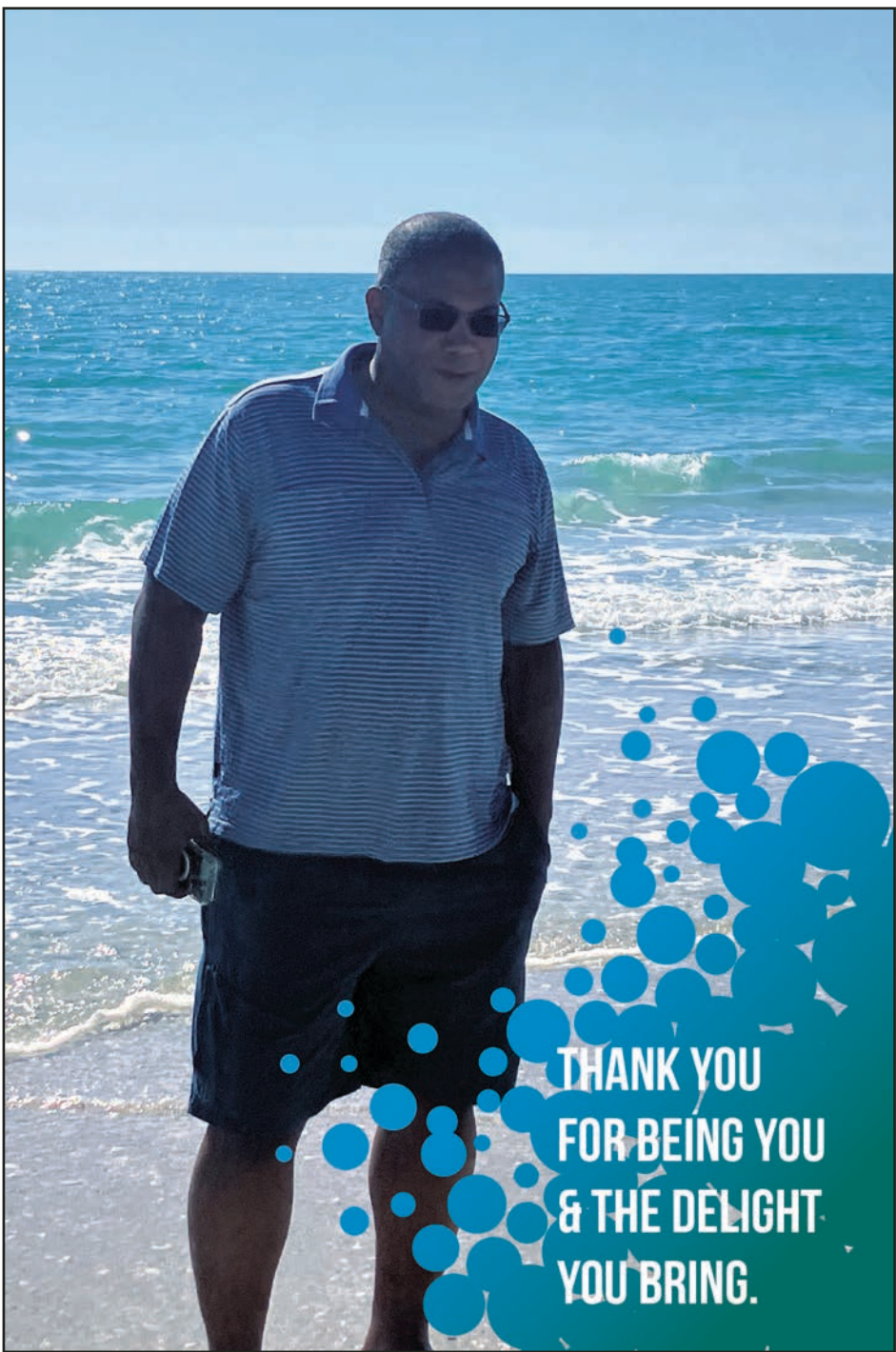
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WHY CHURCHES IN DUNBAR SHOULD INVEST IN A BROKER DEALER

Thank you to the Pastors who participated in the Republican Business Initiative Brainstorming session on “ Why Churches in Dunbar Should Invest in a Broker-Dealer. ” I personally would like to thank the people from the fourth market(i.e. institutions) for their insight as well. I personally would like to thank The people in the Ministry who have maintained discretion and are committed to the vision.

OUTLINE FROM BRAINSTORMING SESSION:

Overview of the Dunbar Neighborhood

- Historical background
- Current socio-economic status
- Importance of community organizations, particularly churches

Introduction to Broker-Dealers

- Definition and role of broker-dealers
- Overview of financial markets and investment strategies

Purpose

- Why this topic is important
- Objectives

Chapter 1: The Role of Churches in the Dunbar Community

1. Historical Impact of Churches

- Historical significance and contributions
- Case studies of influential churches in the neighborhood

2. Current Role and Challenges

- Social and economic impact
- Financial challenges faced by churches

3. Opportunities for Growth and Influence

- Potential for increased community influence
- Examples of successful community initiatives led by churches

Chapter 2: Understanding Broker-Dealers

1. What is a Broker-Dealer?

- Definition and functions
- Types of broker-dealers

2. The Financial Industry Overview

- How broker-dealers fit into the financial ecosystem
- Regulatory environment and compliance requirements

3. Benefits of Owning a Broker-Dealer

- Financial benefits
- Strategic advantages

Chapter 3: The Financial Case for Ownership

1. Financial Viability of Broker-Dealers

- Revenue streams
- Cost structures and profitability

2. Investment and Returns

- Potential returns on investment
- Case studies of successful broker-dealer ownerships

3. Risk Management

- Identifying and managing risks
- Strategies for mitigating financial risks

Chapter 4: Strategic Benefits for Dunbar Churches

1. Enhanced Financial Stability

- Diversification of income
- Building financial reserves

2. Empowering Community Programs

- Funding for community outreach and services
- Strengthening local initiatives and development

3. Increased Influence and Leadership

- Positioning churches as financial leaders
- Expanding influence within and beyond the community

Chapter 5: Steps to Acquire a Broker-Dealer

1. Initial Considerations

- Assessing needs and goals
- Feasibility studies and market research

2. Finding and Evaluating Broker-Dealers

- Criteria for selection
- Due diligence process

3. Acquisition Process

- Negotiation and purchasing
- Legal and regulatory considerations

4. Post-Acquisition Management

- Integrating and managing the broker-dealer
- Monitoring performance and growth

Chapter 6: Case Studies and Success Stories

1. Churches that Successfully Invested

- Profiles of churches that have acquired financial institutions
- Lessons learned and best practices

2. Impact on Communities

- Tangible benefits realized
- Long-term effects on community development

Chapter 7: Overcoming Challenges

1. Financial and Operational Hurdles

- Common challenges and solutions
- Strategies for overcoming obstacles

2. Community Perception and Support

- Addressing concerns and building support
- Effective communication strategies

3. Sustaining Long-Term Success

- Ongoing management and development
- Ensuring continued community benefit

Conclusion

1. Summary of Key Points

- Recap of the financial and strategic benefits
- Importance of ownership for community empowerment

2. Call to Action

- Encouraging churches to take the next steps
- Resources and support available

3. Vision for the Future

- The potential long-term impact on Dunbar
- Inspiring future community-led financial initiatives

Appendices

1. Glossary of Terms

2. Resource List

- Financial advisors, legal experts, and regulatory bodies

3. Sample Feasibility Study

4. Templates and Checklists

- For evaluation and acquisition processes

References

- Cited sources and further reading

This structure offers a comprehensive approach to making the case for why churches in Dunbar should invest in a broker-dealer they own.

****There was an organization in Dunbar who sabotaged millions of dollars in stock their organization could have had, but because someone decided they wanted to be in charge - killed the deal. They killed the deal out of ignorance and haughtiness. The lives that would have been changed including their own was unfathomable. Therefore, we realized the importance of making sure NO ONE would be at the table unless they can keep confidence and are open minded.*



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PAGE 16

THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA CHRONICLE

JULY 2025

AUGUST 21, 2025

EMBELLISHED WEARABLE ARTS FASHION SHOW

Hosted by Bayshore Arts District, Inc., this high-energy runway event fuses fashion, music, and art to raise funds for Naples' flourishing creative community. This year's theme, "Broadway, Beethoven and Bon Jovi," promises a symphonic spectacle — blending theatrical glamour, classical elegance, and rock-and-roll attitude. Every outfit is a living, breathing canvas; every model, a storyteller.

FEATURED HIGHLIGHTS

- Red Carpet Host: Mimy von Schreiner-Valenti.
- Runway Emcee: Kimberly Columbia.
- Auction Co-Hosts: Vicki Tracey and Chris Lombardo.
- Live DJ: DJ Just Jake (CycleBar Naples) — spinning pre-show and post-show.
- Honorary Chair: Vicki Tracey.
- Event Co-Chairs: Josey Prior and Kimberly Columbia.
- Creative Director: Amanda Jaron.

TICKET OPTIONS

- VIP Admission: Includes premium seating, swag bag, and complimentary

drinks.

- General Admission: Includes show entry and access to the afterparty.

THE AFTERPARTY

When the catwalk ends, the party begins. DJ Just Jake takes over the dance floor under Southwest Florida's largest disco ball, spinning favorites late into the night. Fashion with Purpose

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Proceeds will help launch a 10,000-square-foot creative hub in the Bayshore Arts District, featuring:

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says Creative Director Amanda Jaron. "It only comes to life on the human form – it's a living, breathing expression of who we are."

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- 2

VALUING YOUR CLAIM: An experienced personal injury attorney will know how to properly value your claim. This involves understanding and quantifying not just direct costs like medical bills, but also intangibles like pain and suffering, loss of enjoyment of life, future medical bills, and lost earning capacity.
- 3

NEGOTIATION SKILLS: Most personal injury cases are settled out of court. An attorney with strong negotiation skills will be able to ensure that you receive a fair settlement, as they'll know how to present evidence, counter lowball offers, and argue effectively on your behalf.
- 4

ACCESS TO RESOURCES: Good personal injury attorneys have access to a network of experts, from medical professionals to accident reconstructionists. These experts can testify on your behalf or provide important information to strengthen your case.
- 5

OBJECTIVE PERSPECTIVE: After an accident, you may be dealing with physical pain, emotional trauma, and stress. A personal injury attorney offers an objective perspective on your situation and can make decisions based on the facts and law rather than emotions.
- 6

CONTINGENCY FEE BASIS: Many personal injury attorneys work on a contingency fee basis, meaning they only get paid if you do. This aligns their interests with yours, as they have a vested interest in ensuring you receive the maximum possible settlement or judgment.
- 7

FACING INSURANCE COMPANIES: Insurance companies are in the business of making money, which means they'll often aim to minimize payouts. A seasoned personal injury attorney knows the tactics these companies use and can counteract them to ensure your rights are protected.
- 8

COURT EXPERIENCE: If negotiations fail and your case goes to trial, having an attorney with court experience is invaluable. They'll understand the procedures, what evidence is compelling, and how to present your case effectively to a jury.
- 9

SAVES TIME: Dealing with the aftermath of an accident can be time-consuming. From obtaining medical records to communicating with insurance adjusters, a personal injury attorney can handle these tasks for you.
- 10

PEACE OF MIND: Knowing that you have a competent professional handling your case allows you to focus on recovery and healing. They'll ensure all paperwork is filed correctly, deadlines are met, and that you're kept informed throughout the process.

Ultimately, while it's possible to handle a personal injury claim on your own, the expertise and guidance provided by a good personal injury attorney can make a significant difference in the outcome of your case.

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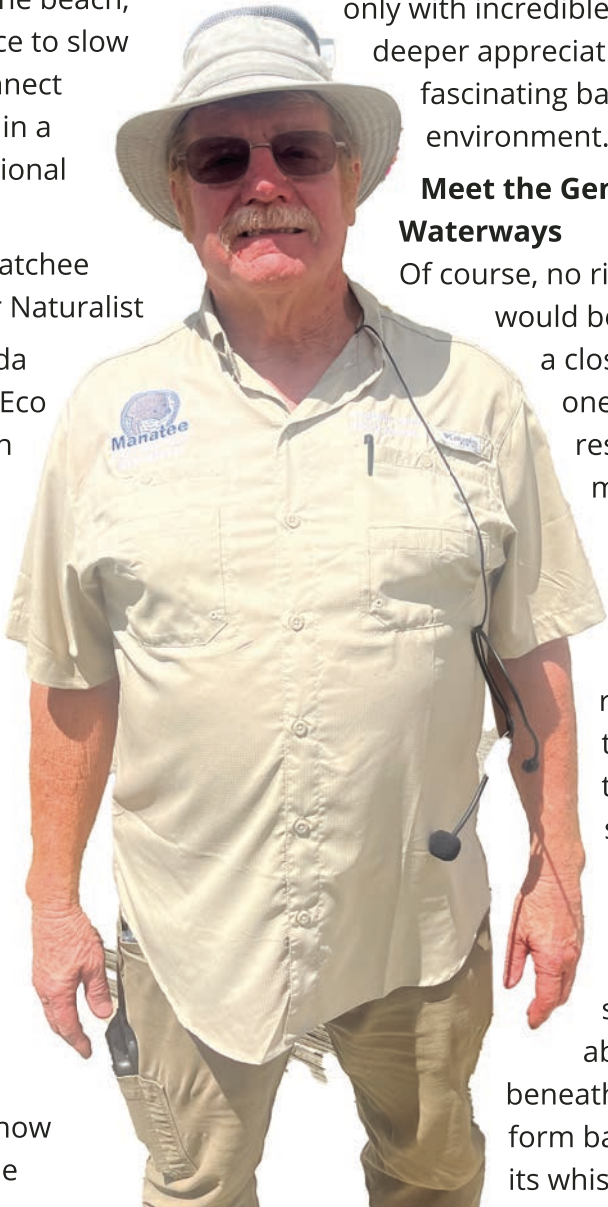
Nature Lovers and Curious Explorers,

There’s a side of Southwest Florida that you won’t find in guidebooks or resort brochures — a living, breathing ecosystem that pulses with the rhythms of the Caloosahatchee River and echoes with the calls of osprey, herons, and yes — the gentle splash of the Florida manatee. It’s a part of our region that’s rich in history, alive with wildlife, and serene in a way that only nature untouched by time can be. And we invite you to experience all of it on our immersive Manatee & Eco River Tour, right here in beautiful Lee County.

Whether you’re a local who’s never fully explored your own backyard or a visitor looking to go beyond the beach, this tour offers a chance to slow down, unplug, and connect with the natural world in a way that’s both educational and inspiring.

Navigate the Caloosahatchee with a Certified Master Naturalist

Led by a certified Florida Master Naturalist, our Eco River Tour is more than just a scenic boat ride it’s a guided journey into the ecological and cultural heart of Southwest Florida. As you float through calm oxbows and alongside shaded riverbanks, you’ll hear the stories behind the water: how the Caloosahatchee River shaped our region’s development, how native peoples relied on its flow, and how its ecosystems continue



to support life both above and below the surface today.

Every bend in the river reveals something new — maybe a cluster of turtles sunning on a log, a snowy egret stalking its prey, or a curious manatee surfacing for a breath. You’ll learn how mangroves protect our shoreline, why bromeliads grow high in cypress trees, and what makes the W.P. Franklin Locks one of the most unique features in Florida’s waterway system.

Our guides don’t just narrate — they interpret. They’re trained to help you see the connections between species, seasons, and habitats. You’ll walk away not only with incredible memories but with a deeper appreciation for the fragile and fascinating balance of Florida’s natural environment.

Meet the Gentle Giants of Our Waterways

Of course, no river tour in Lee County would be complete without a close encounter with one of our most beloved residents — the Florida manatee. Often called “sea cows,” these peaceful, slow-moving marine mammals thrive in the warm waters of our region, especially during the cooler months when they seek refuge near the springs and locks.

Seeing a manatee up close is a truly magical experience. There’s something deeply moving about watching one glide beneath the surface, its massive form barely disturbing the water, its whiskered face lifting gently

for air. These creatures have survived for centuries, yet today they depend on us more than ever to protect the habitats they call home.

Our tours are designed to observe manatees responsibly, with minimal disturbance. You’ll learn about their behavior, their life cycle, and the efforts underway to protect them — from preventing watercraft collisions to preserving vital feeding grounds. Understanding is the first step toward conservation, and our goal is to help foster a connection between people and these remarkable animals.



Witness the Dance of Two Ecosystems at W.P. Franklin Locks

One of the most fascinating highlights of our Eco River Tour is passing through the W.P. Franklin Locks and Dam, a place where freshwater and brackish water ecosystems meet and mingle. This transition zone is more than just a scenic stop — it’s a living laboratory that illustrates the complex interaction between nature and infrastructure.

Here, you’ll see firsthand how water management in Florida works — the push and pull of tides, the regulation of freshwater flow, and how it all impacts everything from fish populations to the health of estuaries downstream. The contrast between the



ecosystems on either side of the locks is remarkable, offering a unique opportunity to understand the challenges facing Florida’s waterways today.

Play, Learn, and Win with Eco Bingo!

We believe that learning about nature should be fun — for all ages! That’s why we’ve added an extra twist to our tours: Eco Bingo!

Each guest receives a bingo card filled with native plants, animals, and other natural features you might spot along the way. Keep your eyes open — if you see something on your card, mark it off! From bald eagles to water hyacinths, from cypress knees to alligator gar, the thrill of discovery adds a layer of excitement to your adventure.

Get a bingo, call it out, and you’ll have the chance to win a fun eco-friendly prize! It’s a great way to keep kids engaged and adults entertained — all while learning about the ecosystems that make Southwest Florida such a special place.

Come Experience the Real Florida

At its heart, our Manatee and Eco River Tour is about connection — to nature, to community, and to the stories that define this unique corner of the world. We don’t just want to show you the river; we want to immerse you in it, to help you understand its moods and mysteries, and to leave you with a deeper appreciation for the fragile beauty that surrounds us.

Whether you’re a birder, a history buff, a wildlife enthusiast, or someone simply looking to unwind and recharge, there’s something on this tour for you. We welcome individuals, families, school groups, and private bookings. No matter who you are, we guarantee you’ll leave with a camera full of pictures, a head full of facts, and a heart full of wonder.

So come aboard, and discover the wild side of Lee County. Let the river be your guide, and let nature speak for itself.



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As People of God, Coming Closer to God's Heart

July is a wonderful month filled with various events, religious celebrations, and moments of historical significance. Here are some highlights:

In July, several Christian and national feasts are celebrated both patriotic and deep theological themes.

- **July 3rd: The Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle** – also known as “the doubter.” He became a major evangelist for the country of India. According to tradition, he traveled to the Indian subcontinent around 52 AD and preached the Gospel in the regions of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. He is credited with establishing Christian communities and converting large numbers of people to Christianity, including both Jews and Hindus. This significant contribution earned him the title “Apostle of India.”
- **July 11th: The Feast of St. Benedict.** Benedict of Nursia, born around 480 AD in Nursia, Italy, is widely recognized as the founder of Western monasticism. He is best known for establishing the Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino and for writing the Rule of Saint Benedict, which became the foundation for monastic living throughout Europe and the world. He is considered the patron saint of Europe.
- **July 22nd: The Feast of St. Mary Magdalene,** also known as Mary of Magdala, is a significant figure in Christianity. She is primarily remembered for her role in the New Testament as the first Follower of Jesus who traveled with Jesus and supported his ministry, second as a Witness to Jesus’ Crucifixion: because she was present at the crucifixion of Jesus, witnessing his suffering and death on the cross, third as a Witness to Resurrection: she is most famously known for being the first person to see Jesus after his resurrection going to Jesus’ tomb and finding it empty, and finally as playing an early Role in Early Christianity so she is often referred to as the “Apostle to the Apostles” because she was the one who brought the news of Jesus’ resurrection to the other apostles. Mary Magdalene’s legacy is continually honored in Christianity to this day.
- **July 25th: The Feast of St. James the Greater,** also known as James, son of Zebedee, was one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus. He is distinguished as being part of Jesus’ innermost circle, along with Peter and John. James was born and worked as a Jewish fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. he is often referred to as “the Greater” to distinguish him from another apostle, James “the Less,” with “greater” meaning older or taller. James is known for witnessing several momentous events in Jesus’ ministry, including the raising of Jairus’s daughter, the Transfiguration, and Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was the first apostle to be martyred, as he was beheaded by order of King Herod Agrippa I of Judea around 44 AD 2. Today he is recognized as the patron saint of Spain, and according to tradition, his remains are believed to be held in Santiago de Compostela in Galicia

Christians celebrate the following feast days worldwide and hold them in special significance in the Christian Church calendar.

In the United States, we commemorate significant secular holidays as well, including Independence Day, celebrated on July 4th, which is the day the colonists secured independence from England through the Declaration of Independence in 1776. It is a day filled with fireworks, parades, barbecues, and patriotic displays.

Historical Events, such as the Apollo 11 moon landing on July 20, 1969, and Bastille Day in France on July 14, 1789, which marks the beginning of the French Revolution, are joined by sporting events in July, featuring the Wimbledon tennis tournament in England and the Tour de France bicycling race.

So, enjoy the Summer Season, characterized by warm weather, vacations, and outdoor activities. It is a popular time for travel, beach outings, and family gatherings.

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Lee Health Names Ohio State University’s Dr. Minka Schofield as its New Chief Quality & Patient Safety Officer

Lee Health is pleased to welcome Dr. Minka Schofield as its new Chief Quality & Patient Safety Officer. A board-certified otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeon, Dr. Schofield brings more than 20 years of clinical experience along with a strong background in academic medicine and leadership. She will lead and champion Lee Health’s clinical quality and patient safety programs and be responsible for patient safety, error prevention and assessment, quality improvement and standardization, national hospital grading and benchmarking, and conformance risk assessments.

“We are thrilled to welcome Dr. Minka Schofield to our leadership team,” said Dr. Iahn Gonsenhauser, chief medical officer at Lee Health. “Her exceptional background, particularly in infection prevention and patient safety, aligns with our mission to deliver the highest quality of care. Dr. Schofield’s leadership and innovative approach will further strengthen our efforts to improve outcomes and enhance the well-being of the communities and patients we serve across Southwest Florida and beyond.”

Before joining Lee Health, Dr. Schofield served as a professor in the Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery at The Ohio State University’s (OSU) College of Medicine, where she was appointed the director of the general otolaryngology division, medical director of surgical operations, and vice chair of diversity, equity and inclusion.

As medical director of surgical operations, Dr. Schofield spearheaded efforts to improve patient access, surgical throughput, and central sterile supply efficiency and quality assurance.

Dr. Schofield has also served as Chief of Staff of the OSU Wexner Medical Center, serving as a key liaison to senior leadership on behalf of medical staff during the COVID pandemic. As a senior quality leader, Dr. Schofield was instrumental in numerous quality improvement and patient safety initiatives aimed at ensuring evidence-based, timely, and equitable care in both acute and ambulatory settings.

Dr. Schofield earned her medical degree and her Master of Public Health – Population Health Leadership and Management from The Ohio State University. She completed a general surgery internship at Mount Carmel Medical Center in Columbus, Ohio, and an otolaryngology-head and neck surgery residency at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center.

Dr. Schofield is board-certified in otolaryngology-head and neck surgery, a Fellow of the American Academy of Otolaryngic Allergy (AAOA), and she has been recognized with national awards from the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS), including the Distinguished Service Award and several Committee Excellence Awards. Additionally, Dr. Schofield is also the past elected Chair of the AAO-HNS Women in Otolaryngology Section.



About Lee Health

Lee Health has been a cornerstone of health care in Southwest Florida since opening its first hospital in 1916. As a non-profit, integrated health system, Lee Health is dedicated to providing high-quality, compassionate care to everyone, regardless of their ability to pay. With a strong commitment to community health and wellness, Lee Health commits to evolving with the growing and changing needs of the region. The system offers comprehensive services through four acute care hospitals, Golisano Children’s Hospital, three skilled nursing locations, outpatient facilities, urgent care centers, and a wide network of primary care and specialty practices. Lee Health supports every step of the health journey, from preventive care to advanced treatment for every member of our community.

Learn more at
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Investing in Excellence—Why Lee County’s New Teacher Incentive Initiative Matters

At the heart of every thriving school is a great teacher.

As the School District of Lee County prepares for the 2025–2026 academic year, we are proud to take the bold new step to honor and support the educators who are making the greatest impact on student achievement with the Honoring Our Educators: Teacher Incentive Initiative.

This initiative is not just another program—it is a strategic investment in the people who shape our future. Backed by the unanimous approval of the School Board of Lee County, this initiative establishes a new salary incentive structure designed to attract, retain, and reward high-quality teachers working in our most academically challenged schools and in subjects where their expertise is most urgently needed.

The goal is simple: to have high-quality teachers in every classroom on the first day of school in August. Our students deserve nothing less.

Across Florida and the nation, school districts are struggling to staff classrooms with certified, experienced teachers, especially in lower achieving schools and high-demand subject areas. Lee County is taking action. By launching this initiative, we are leveraging our legal authority under Florida law to make targeted compensation decisions that meet the needs of our students.

Here’s how it works.

The initiative is built on an academic risk-based framework, identifying schools that face the highest academic and staffing challenges. Educators assigned to these schools with lower achieving students will be eligible for school-level salary incentives. These incentives, up to \$9,000, are on top of a teacher’s base salary.

Additionally, the District has identified Critical and Complementary Subject Areas—specific courses and grade levels that are either directly tied to Florida’s statewide accountability model or have a cumulative, measurable effect on student academic outcomes. Teachers whose schedules include a significant proportion of these subjects will receive additional incentives. Whether it’s a high school Algebra teacher or a Kindergarten teacher, we are intentionally investing where it counts.

Critical Subjects include courses like Grades 3–10 English Language Arts, Algebra 1, Geometry, and Biology—subjects with mandatory state assessments and high vacancy rates. Complementary Subjects, such as early grade science or upper-level English, don’t carry the same testing burden but play a key role in long-term academic achievement.

This dual-pronged strategy supports both immediate staffing needs and long-term student success. It’s important to emphasize that this initiative is statutorily separate from collective bargaining.

While we remain committed to good-faith negotiations and value the work of our labor partners, this initiative stands alone under Florida law, allowing the School District to act swiftly and strategically in support of our educational mission.

Most importantly, this initiative sends a clear message: Lee County supports teachers taking on the critical challenge of prioritizing high student achievement for our entire community. We recognize that teacher quality is the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement. That is why we are not just filling vacancies—we’re creating a system that recognizes the varying challenges our educators face within the classroom and ensures that every student has access to great instruction every day.

To our teachers: thank you. Whether you are closing learning gaps, guiding students through state standards, supporting students with disabilities, or nurturing curiosity in the earliest grades, your work matters more than ever. This initiative reflects our gratitude and our belief in the power of education.

This summer, take time to recharge and reflect on a year well spent. When school resumes in August, you will return to a District that is not only celebrating your success but investing in it.

Because in Lee County, we know that the future of education begins with you.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S. Fisher".

Samuel Fisher
School Board Chair



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Denise M. Carlin".

Denise M. Carlin, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools





A SWAMP OF CONTROVERSY IN COLLIER COUNTY

A piece of Florida history was frozen in time; The Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport—once heralded as the future site of the world’s largest airport—now stands as a relic of grandiose ambition. Long abandoned by commercial aviation, its single, cracked runway has become the center of a new storm: a political, environmental, and humanitarian clash over a bold and controversial plan to convert the remote airstrip into a migrant detention facility, now chillingly dubbed “Alligator Alcatraz.”

A Forgotten Runway, A Renewed Purpose

On a June morning, under the brooding heat of a subtropical sun, a convoy of trucks rumbled into the ghostly expanse of Dade-Collier. Satellite images, drone footage, and on-the-ground reports confirmed the presence of construction crews, cranes, and fencing materials—evidence that the project had been greenlit at full throttle. All hell was gonna break loose and the news lines will spike with all kind of weird stories and assumptions.

“This is a force multiplier,” **Governor Ron DeSantis** declared at a press conference in Tampa. “We had a request from the federal government to do it — and so, Alligator Alcatraz it is.” Like him or not - Once Ron clamps down on something it’s a done deal.



The announcement sent shockwaves across the state. With federal immigration enforcement escalating and detention facilities elsewhere at capacity, Florida had stepped forward. The Everglades site, remote and controlled, was seen as ideal for housing up to 5,000 detainees, with a projected cost of over \$450 million annually. It was, in DeSantis’ words, a “temporary solution” designed to support state and federal law enforcement.

But to many, it felt like the beginning of something more permanent — and more troubling.

The airport itself has a strange and storied history. In the 1960s, planners envisioned a cutting-edge “superport” capable of accommodating Concorde-style supersonic aircraft. It was



to be a marvel of engineering, the centerpiece of a booming Florida future. But environmentalists, Indigenous leaders, and local communities pushed back hard. By the 1970s, public opinion had shifted, and the ambitious plan fell apart.

The airport was never completed. Today, one lonely runway slices through a vast wetland wilderness teeming with wildlife: gators, herons, panthers, and invasive pythons. It’s a place where nature reclaimed what human hands abandoned—until now.

Environmental Flashpoint

To environmental advocates, the new construction at Dade-Collier is an act of ecological vandalism.

“This proposal is not only deeply inhumane — but it is also profoundly irresponsible from an environmental, ethical, and fiscal standpoint,” said Javier Estevez of the Sierra Club, standing before a crowd of journalists in downtown Miami.

Estevez pointed out the deep contradiction: How could the same administration that advocates for Everglades restoration justify building a detention center in the middle of one of the world’s most sensitive ecosystems?

“The Everglades is not a staging area for mobile infrastructure,” he said. “It’s a fragile and irreplaceable ecosystem—central to our heritage and Florida’s future.”

● continued on page 30

Cassie Testifies She Doesn’t Hate Diddy Now, Has ‘Love for the Past’

Nationwide — Cassie Ventura took the stand again on Friday in the federal sex trafficking trial against Sean “Diddy” Combs and made it clear she holds no hatred toward her former partner, despite the serious allegations she’s made. During cross-examination, Diddy’s defense attorney, Anna Estevao, asked her directly whether she hated the music mogul. Cassie calmly responded, “I don’t hate him,” before adding that she still has “love for the past and what it was.”

TMZ reports that the exchange stood out as one of the few moments in which Ventura spoke about her current emotional state regarding Combs, with most of her nearly two-day testimony focused on the details of her harrowing allegations. Cassie previously filed a civil lawsuit against Combs in 2023, which was settled out of court just one day after it was filed. However, the federal government later brought forward criminal charges, leading to the current trial.

In her testimony, Ventura accused Combs of years of abuse, including rape, forced drug use, and being coerced into sex with male prostitutes while Combs watched. She alleges that the abuse began when she was just 19 years old and signed to his Bad Boy Records label. One of the most chilling moments she recalled was after their breakup dinner in 2018, when she says Diddy drove her home, entered her apartment uninvited, and raped her on the living room floor.

The defense has tried to poke holes in her credibility, focusing on inconsistencies and pressing her about why she maintained a relationship with Combs for so many years. They also questioned her about a supposed “closure” conversation she had with Combs following their breakup. Estevao used that line of questioning to ask whether Cassie still had emotional ties to her former partner, which led to Cassie’s statement about loving the past.

Despite the deeply traumatic events she described, Ventura remained composed on the stand. Her willingness to acknowledge that she still holds some affection for their shared history, while simultaneously detailing years of alleged psychological and physical abuse, presented a complicated emotional portrait to the jury.

Combs is currently facing charges that include sex trafficking, racketeering, and transporting individuals across state lines for illegal sexual activity. Prosecutors allege that he ran a decades-long criminal enterprise using his fame, wealth, and influence to control and exploit young women. He has pleaded not guilty to all charges. The trial, which began earlier this month, is expected to continue for several more weeks, with more witnesses scheduled to testify.



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ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ: A Swamp of Controversy in Collier County

●continued from page 28

Drone footage showing bulldozers plowing through sawgrass did little to calm public concerns. Ecologists warn that even temporary facilities risk polluting water tables, disrupting wildlife migration paths, and damaging protected species' habitats.

Garrett Stuart, director of the Eco

Preservation Project and a descendant of the Miccosukee Tribe, was even more forceful in his condemnation. "This site is sacred. It's where Nixon stood when he declared that we needed to protect the environment," Stuart said, referring to the historic 1970s conservation efforts that eventually led to the formation of the Environmental Protection Agency. "To give this land over for cages and razor wire is like cutting off my own scalp and handing it to them."

Cultural and Historical Reverberations

About a mile from the site lies Indigenous land where Miccosukee traditions still thrive in airboat-access-only communities. These communities have long fought to protect the Everglades, not only as an environmental resource but as a spiritual and historical home.

Chokofa Billie, an elder in the Miccosukee Tribe, told local reporters, "We were here before the airport. We will be here long after it's gone. But what happens to the water happens to us. You can't separate the land from the people."

The proximity of the detention center to sacred sites has sparked protests and legal threats. Tribal representatives are consulting with environmental lawyers about the legality of building what some have called a "floating prison" on the edge of sovereign lands.

Political Calculus and National Impact

While Florida's state leaders present the project as a temporary and necessary response to national immigration pressures, critics argue it's also a political play — part of a broader narrative pushed by DeSantis and other conservative leaders.

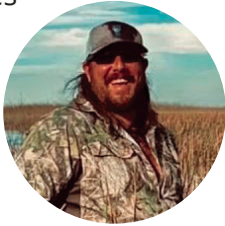
"This is about optics as much as policy," said Dr. Angela Paredes, a political science professor at the University of Florida. "'Alligator Alcatraz' is a name that evokes fear, control, and power. It's designed to resonate with a specific base that feels the federal government has lost control over immigration."

Inside the Wire

According to leaked planning documents obtained by investigative journalists, the facility will include several large prefabricated structures, tent barracks, medical units, and helipads for deportation transport. The fencing — topped with motion sensors and barbed wire — is being installed with round-the-clock security.

The documents also mention "minimum human contact" policies, suggesting a heavily automated or drone-monitored site. Civil liberties groups have already begun filing Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to better understand how detainees will be processed, housed, and released or deported.

"This is a black site in the making," warned Emily Chen, a legal



analyst for the Florida Civil Rights Alliance. "No transparency, no oversight, and no easy access for family or legal aid. That's not a detention center — that's a human rights crisis waiting to happen."

Community Reactions and Uneasy Silence

In nearby Collier County towns like Everglades City and Ochopee, the reaction is mixed. Some locals welcome the increased economic activity, especially the promise of temporary construction jobs. Others fear what the presence of the facility will mean for their already small and isolated communities.

"My cousin just got a job working security," said one anonymous Everglades City resident. "He's got a family, and there ain't much work around here. But even he says it feels wrong."

Local businesses, many of which rely on eco-tourism and the image of the Everglades as a pristine wilderness, worry the detention center could drive visitors away.

"What are we supposed to tell people?" said Amelia Brooks, who runs an airboat tour company. "That they can see alligators by day and hear screams from a detention camp by night?"

DeSantis' Defiant Stand

Despite the uproar, Governor DeSantis has doubled down on the project. Speaking again just days after the initial announcement, he reiterated the temporary nature of the facility.

"This is a black site in the making," warned Emily Chen, a legal analyst for the Florida Civil Rights Alliance. "No transparency, no oversight, and no easy access for family or legal aid. That's not a detention center — that's a human rights crisis waiting to happen."

"This thing's been used a bunch of times over many, many years — and so the impact will be zero. That's in keeping with our policy," he said, referencing previous use of the airport site for military and training purposes.

But environmentalists, tribal leaders, and civil rights advocates aren't convinced.

"They say it's temporary," said Estevez. "But so was Guantanamo Bay."

A Swamp of Questions

As July matures and the facility nears operational status, questions abound. How will detainees be treated? Who will oversee the center? What legal protections will exist? What happens if a hurricane hits the site? How much environmental damage will be done before the first migrant even arrives?

And perhaps most troubling of all: Is this the beginning of a new era in immigration policy — one where remoteness becomes a tool for secrecy?

For now, the runway at Dade-Collier, flanked by buzzards and cypress trees, is quiet. But soon, it will hum not with jets or tourists, but with the machinery of incarceration, powered by politics, fear, and the unforgiving sun of the Everglades.

"Alligator Alcatraz," as the governor calls it, may be temporary. But the scars it leaves — on the land, on the people, and on the soul of Florida — could last far longer.

I say give Rick LoCastro a chance to waltz through the myriad of information and give his findings to the public. We all know that Commissioner LoCastro is one of the best when it comes to resolving issues.





KEYLIME BISTRO at Captiva Island Inn

Keylime Bistro

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971 days after Hurricane Ian pummeled Southwest Florida and devastated the barrier Islands, Keylime Bistro, one of Captiva Island's gems is now open!

The Bistro and surrounding establishments were beat down through Ian, Helene and Milton. However, through resiliency and the hard work of dedicated team members and it's resilient owner, Sandy Stilwell Youngquist, it is now open for business! It opened June 27, to cheers, great music and the upbeat chill clientele it enjoys daily on Captiva. The food, atmosphere and drinks as always did not disappoint!

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Photo posted on Facebook by Commissioner Brian Hammond



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Standing Up to the Bully: Harvard University's Battle Against Trump.

BY
STANLEY G. BUFORD
MAY 8, 2025

(ThyBlackMan.com) The world is in greater peril from those who tolerate or abet evil than from those who do evil themselves. Albert Einstein

They say that when it comes to bullies, handing over your lunch money hoping they won't ask you again is never a good idea; you're just going to get mugged again and again. Reading the article "If Harvard, Armor-Plated by History and Padded with Funds, Can't Beat Trump, No One Can" (The Guardian) struck a chord within me. Here we have an American institution — Harvard! — an emblem of academic excellence and historical standing, standing up against the strong-arm coercion of Donald Trump. And it teaches us an important lesson about how to deal with bullies: stand up to, not roll over for, them.

Speaking as someone extremely blessed to have completed several Harvard classes via the edX platform, this hits home for me. I am the proud holder of certificates from courses hosted by HarvardX, Harvard University's online course initiative. To me, Harvard isn't just a name — it's a part of my journey as a lifelong learner. I wrote a children's book in 2021 titled: *Bringing Grandma Home!* This was at the height of the Covid 19 epidemic. A trusted friend suggested that I take a class being offered by Harvard Medical School for Medical Professionals. This was an attempt on my part to provide background information and credibility based upon the subject matter: Covid 19. Reluctantly, I took the class and was awarded a Certificate of Completion that adorns my wall today. *Bringing Grandma Home!* was an Amazon.com bestseller and received a 5-star review from Readers Choice. Way to go Harvard! That connection makes me doubly proud and inspired to see this storied institution standing tall.



Standing Up to the Bully: Harvard University's Battle Against Trump.

The article which inspired this piece shows how the president's recent antagonism toward Harvard is only his most recent iteration of a broader Trumpian pattern: He looks for some influentially symbolic examples of the "elite" and then tries to take it apart for political advantage. It is a strategy that revolves around intimidation, disinformation and public spectacle. To Trump, institutions like Harvard are not just educational entities; they are ideological foes — organizations that question his grievances and narratives of victimhood.

Yet, Harvard isn't flinching. If anything, they are using their strong brand, litigation experience, and financial resources to defend instead of conceding or capitulating. This is critical. Because if Harvard (with its centuries of history, 56 billion in endowment, cache of influential graduates) can't withstand these bullying efforts... Then who can?

As a proponent of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI); one aspect that I especially admire is that Harvard is not apologizing for its diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. Political pressure has caused many institutions to wither, retrench programs or offer empty apologies. But Harvard, true to its educational mission, knows that constructing a diverse academic community isn't political — it's principled.

It's easy to have a go when you are sitting behind the lectern. It's much more difficult to stand firm when powerful forces are trying to portray you as a member of some imaginary cultural axis of evil. Harvard's position calls to mind something I've come across time and again in reading and thinking over the years: integrity frequently requires taking a stand. A spirited stand for truth, knowledge and a level playing field for all to think and extend effort has more grit than capitulating to fear-mongering and ideological violence.

More broadly, Harvard's pushback is part of something happening all over America. Once it made sense to prefer an air of neutrality above the fray, institutions are increasingly acknowledging, neutrality in many aspects is no longer an option. In such a time, silence is complicity when our most cherished values of free inquiry, inclusivity and academic freedom are under assault.

In its behavior, Harvard is teaching others how to live with this new reality. It's not political games; it is a core principle. At the core, education is about changing. It surprises us with new information, combines elements in ways we never thought of, and can build bridges between cultures and life experiences. These are the very values that Trump, in one way or another, is attempting to overturn: that knowledge and understanding should be available to everyone and not simply to a group that happens to agree with his worldview.

Looking back on my experience with HarvardX courses, I've come to realize I was drawn to them not simply because they were from Harvard but because they were, in spirit if not in fact, Harvard courses. It challenged me to be thought-provocative, to be discerning of assumptions, and to be open to new ideas. Those online courses weren't afraid to pull punches; they called for serious work, the kind of reflection on what you wanted to learn and who you wanted to be

that happens in a real class. They were as close to the real thing of what education should be as anything I've experienced. I take heart from Harvard's defense of that ethos. It gives me a sense that institutions (and also people) should be judged not just on what they do, but on their willingness to speak in defense of principle at moments of maximum hazard. The stakes are greater than even Harvard. When the most powerful institutions in the nation allow themselves to be bullied, it sends a chilling message to every elementary school, high school and college across the country. It says: "You are next." It threatens to incite further attacks, not only on the elite institutions, but on public education, on independent research, on free speech at every level. It actually begs a question of all those willing to compromise...Who's next?

The position of Harvard is a call to arms: We cannot allow this to happen. If we are graduates, if we are online learners, if we were admitted to practice law, if we are parents, if we believe in the power of education to change the world, we are all in this together. Bullies thrive in silence. For them, when fear defines action, they grow stronger. But when they are confronted with firm, principled resistance, they falter. The fact that Harvard refused to be bullied reminds me that no matter how powerful the bully, strength comes from standing your ground.

To me, this moment isn't simply about Harvard against Trump. It's about the sort of country we want to live in. Do we desire a society in which knowledge is free, open and alive—or one in which it's censored, restricted and controlled based on political whims? We all have a choice. Institutions have a choice. And as individuals, we have to rally around those who opt for courage over capitulation.?

For my part, I'll add this modest goal of my own: to keep learning, asking questions and kicking up dust — and doing whatever I can to inspire others who hear the hounds baying to do the same. And through platforms like edX, through conversations like we're having today and through every effort to celebrate and defend education as a public good. Kudos to Harvard University. I am in total agreement with political analyst Roland Martin who says, "If Donald Trump comes for an elite educational institution like Harvard today, he is coming for the HBCU's tomorrow." Thanks, Roland, for reminding us that doing the right thing is usually not the easy thing but is always the thing that matters.

Who's next to stand up?
Let's hope it's all of us.

Associate Editor; Stanley G. Buford
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Remain the Author of Your Own Life

By Vernon Brown The Dunbar Shade Tree Phd.

In recent conversations, I've noticed how often well-meaning adult children believe they know what's best for their widowed parent—whether it's whom they should spend time with, what activities they should pursue, or even who they might consider dating. While this concern comes from love, it often translates into a subtle, yet powerful, message: "Let us decide what will make you happy."

I want to gently challenge this assumption. As a senior who has lived a full life, endured joys and sorrows, and learned hard-earned lessons, you deserve the autonomy to determine your own happiness now. Here are five reasons—rooted in emotional well-being, respect, and real-world wisdom—why you should remain the author of your own life. No senior should have empty voids because adult children dictate who they should date or even worse be rude to someone their parents are dating on purpose in an attempt to sever the relationship... which usually happens when seniors allow their adult kids to dictate who they date. No new person could ever compare to the previous deceased mother/father in the mind of adult children, and they shouldn't because it is a new chapter in the lives of the surviving spouse who wants to date.

1 Independence and Self-Respect Nourish Mental Health

A central pillar of well-being in later life is maintaining independence—physically, emotionally, and socially. Studies from AARP and Harvard's Study of Adult Development emphasize that seniors who stay socially active, pursue meaningful roles, and maintain decision-making power enjoy better cognition and a higher sense of purpose [[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/littmankrooks.com](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/littmankrooks.com)].

Widowhood is often a period of upheaval, and losing a spouse can trigger stress, loneliness, and a decline in life quality. While children stepping in can ease practical burdens, interventions that sideline the parent's voice threaten their dignity and discourage the very independence essential to rebuilding life.

2 Autonomy Over Company and Romance Matters

Mobile seniors may choose to date or remain single—and both paths can lead to fulfillment. Platforms like SeniorMatch, and the popularity of shows like The Golden Bachelorette, illustrate that widowed seniors are both capable of and eager for fresh connections [nypost.com].

Children who treat dating like a parental quiz—"Who's Steve? Have you met his grandchildren? What does he do?"—undermine this normal, healthy exploration. Seniors deserve not only the freedom to choose a partner, but also to shape the pace, nature, and emotional involvement of any relationship.

One expert reminds us: "Independence means having autonomy and the ability to make decisions—key for self-respect and fulfillment" [seniormatch.com]. That includes whether to date at all, and under what terms.

3 Personal Growth Doesn't End with a Milestone Birthday

You've already lived through decades of change—childhood, marriage, career, raising children. That wisdom is a springboard for



continued growth and joy as a senior. Engaging in hobbies, volunteering, learning a new skill, or joining senior-centered classes can be deeply fulfilling.

When children dissuade parents from joining a dance class, church group, or solo travel opportunity—claiming it’s “too much” or “not your style”—they inadvertently squash the spark of self-discovery that keeps life fresh and meaningful in later years.

4 Healthy Boundaries Strengthen the Parent–Child Relationship

It’s normal for children to worry about a parent’s safety, loneliness, or finances. Yet, a relationship where adult children “manage” their parent’s social calendar or romantic prospects fosters resentment on both sides.

A wiser model, supported by sources, is to support autonomy—ask what the parent wants, offer your help, but then step back and trust their judgment. Empowered seniors feel respected; children feel more effective and appreciated.

5 Happiness Is Personal—and Flexible

Happiness in late life looks different for each individual. Some don’t want remarriage—but still crave companionship, travel, or creative outlets. Others may find joy in a new relationship. Research reflects that single seniors can thrive, given self-acceptance and social connections [\[nypost.com\]](#).

Meanwhile, dating seniors often report more confidence, zest, and emotional well-being—even if their relationships don’t lead to marriage. Letting your mom or dad explore, without guilt or coercion, honors their humanity. Too often adult children interfere in ruining what could have been a beautiful relationship.

What Children Can Do Instead

- Start with curiosity, not judgment. Ask, “How are you feeling? What excites you today?”
- Help, but don’t take charge. Say, “I’ll help research community groups—but I’ll follow your lead.”
- Support new activities. Offer transportation, tech setup, or introductions—but let them sign up and attend.
- Listen to boundaries. If they say they’re not ready to date, respect that. If they want to, ask what they need.
- Ask permission before intervening. “Can I share your dating profile?” feels very different from “I’ll handle your profile.”

A Personal Note of Encouragement

You’ve given so much—time, stories, encouragement—to others. Now is a time to invest in your own well-being and joy. Whatever path you choose—solo travel, pottery class, volunteering, companionship, or dating—you deserve the freedom to chart your journey.

Let your days be guided by what lifts your spirit—not by the expectations of others. As Marian Cannon Schlesinger, a 101-year-old sage, put it: “Just go ahead and do your thing no matter what” [\[occatholic.com+5elevate-inc.com+5babyboomer.org+5glamour.com\]](#). Her lifelong independence led to endurance, creativity, and fulfillment. You can do the same.

BOTTOM LINE:

To be clear: caring children are a blessing. But love must include respect for the choices of those we love. Parents who have lost a spouse are at a delicate juncture—vulnerable to both loneliness and feeling stifled. Embracing your autonomy now allows you to shape the rest of your life on your own terms—and to thrive in ways children might never imagine.

Here’s hoping this serves as a gentle reminder and a rallying cry: may you live fully, joyfully, and on your own terms. It’s your life and you have the right to live it on your terms. Your wisdom, experience, and heart deserve that gift. Your happiness is worth defining—and defending—for yourself.



Embracing your autonomy now allows you to shape the rest of your life on your own terms—and to thrive in ways children might never imagine.



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