

# SWFL CHRONICLE

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## Celebrating a Trailblazer: Marie Hicks Honored for 40 Years of Dedicated Service to Charlotte County

By McKinley G. Williams, The SWFL Chronicle

With warmth in her smile, grace in her demeanor, and a legacy carved in excellence, Marie Hicks is closing the chapter on an extraordinary 40-year career of public service to the citizens of Charlotte County. As she retires, the entire community joins together to honor her decades of unwavering dedication, her groundbreaking achievements, and the unmistakable joy she brought to every corner of the Clerk's Office.

From the moment she walked through the doors of the Charlotte County Clerk of the Circuit Court's Office on September 3, 1985, under the leadership of then-Clerk Barbara T. Scott, Marie Hicks began a journey that would touch countless lives and transform not only the processes within the courthouse—but the people working inside it.

*"Marie had a humble start and became a rising star, because she cared about helping people."*

McKinley G. Williams

Beginning her career as a floater in the Traffic Department, Marie did what others often avoided. She took on the work that was overlooked or underappreciated—disposing of traffic citations by hand, managing backlogs, and lending a helping hand wherever it was needed. Her meticulous nature, strong work ethic, and cheerful attitude quickly caught the attention of supervisors and colleagues alike.

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**The SWFL Chronicle Staff Receives SEC Approval to Cover Conference Football Events**

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By 1986, she transitioned into the role of Computer Operator before advancing to Court Clerk I, where she attended court, processed court documents, and even served as a Traffic Cashier. She didn't stop there. Over the next several years, she grew her expertise, moving into Misdemeanor Criminal and Civil Court, processing everything from evictions to adoptions.

By 1989, she was promoted to Court Clerk II, and in 1993, she became a Court Clerk III, helping to lay the foundation for what would become a centralized Appeals Process for both civil and criminal cases—a system that, remarkably, is still used today.

Marie Hicks is no stranger to breaking new ground. She proudly holds the distinction of being the first African American woman hired in the Clerk's Office, a milestone she never took lightly. Her strength, leadership, and unwavering dignity set a powerful example, opening doors for those who would follow in her footsteps.

In 2015, she became the youngest person in Clerk history to reach 30 years of service. Now, in 2025, she becomes the first employee to reach 40 years of continuous service—a record unlikely to be matched anytime soon.

Over the years, Marie held numerous leadership roles, each one building on the next:

- 2003 – Court Services Supervisor
- 2009 – Senior Court Services Supervisor
- 2015 – Court Services Manager
- 2018 – Court Services Director
- 2021 – Operations Training Coordinator

As a supervisor, she guided and mentored teams ranging from 5 to over 20 employees. Whether managing the courtroom's pace, streamlining procedures, or encouraging her colleagues with kind words and consistent leadership, Marie's presence was a source of strength.

In 2023, when the Traffic Supervisor resigned, Marie didn't hesitate to step in—again—as Interim Traffic Supervisor, even training her own replacement. That kind of commitment doesn't come with a job description—it comes from a deep sense of purpose and care. Think about it - not many people would train someone to do the job they were already doing.

In her most recent role as Operations Training Coordinator, Marie turned her attention toward building a positive and inclusive culture across the entire office. She scheduled speakers, organized team-building events, and fostered a workplace

where people felt valued. She ensured that every initiative aligned with the Clerk's Mission, Vision, and Core Values—but more importantly, she made sure



everyone felt like they mattered.

"I hope that my legacy will be that of positivity and the way that I made others feel," Marie shared. And indeed, for those who worked with her or simply crossed paths, Marie Hicks leaves behind a legacy not only of historic achievements but of kindness, integrity, and humility.



ELGIN HICKS

## Public service runs in the family.

Marie is the proud mother of Elgin Hicks, who serves as the Parks and Recreation Director for the City of Fort Myers. His own reputation for excellence and community commitment mirrors the values instilled

by his mother—a living testament to the power of example.

Elgin, along with family, friends, and colleagues from across the state, has often spoken about the quiet strength and warmth that define his mother. Her ability to lead with compassion while remaining rooted in integrity is what has made her a cornerstone of Charlotte County's government for four decades.

To celebrate this unprecedented milestone, the Clerk's Office and the broader community hosted a ceremony honoring Marie Hicks' legacy. But even as the accolades pour in, Marie remains ever-humble.

"It's been a joy to serve," she said. "Every position I've held has taught me something. But more than that, I've had the honor of working with some of the most dedicated, thoughtful, and passionate people you could ever hope to meet."

And they would say the same about her.

As Charlotte County says goodbye to one of its most beloved public servants, we do so with gratitude in our hearts and admiration for a career that will forever be remembered. Marie Hicks may be retiring, but her influence, her impact, and her inspiring story will continue to shape lives for generations to come.

Congratulations, Marie Hicks—thank you for 40 years of extraordinary service. Your legacy is eternal.

HEALTH CARE

IN LEE COUNTY

*The League of Women Voters of Lee County (LWVLee) invites members and the public for a presentation and discussion of Health Care in Lee County*



**NEW SPEAKER:**  
*Susan Allen, Community Advocate and Retired Registered Nurse*

**Development And Population Growth Impact on Public Safety and the Medically Underserved**

Susan Allen (“Susie”) is a retired registered nurse with 43 years of experience in Pediatric Critical Care, Neonatal ICU, Emergency Medicine, Oncology, Hospice, and Nursing Education. After relocating from Virginia to Alva, Florida, she has dedicated her time and expertise to community advocacy, preservation, and civic engagement.

She currently serves on the Board of Trustees for the Alva Museum, was a founding member of Alva Strong, and previously served on the Board of Alva Inc. Susie is also an active member of the Lee County Republican Executive Committee, where she serves as Membership Chair and as Chair of the Ethical Campaign and Accountability Initiative.

Her advocacy focuses on preserving rural and conservation lands in Lee County, with a strong emphasis on public safety amidst the region’s rapid population growth. Through her research, Susie has highlighted how unbridled development worsens the strain on Lee County’s already medically underserved healthcare system. Educating and informing the public—and the Board of County Commissioners – on these issues remains central to her mission.

Beyond her civic and professional contributions, Susie is a semi-professional potter, a wife, and the benevolent dictator of two dachshunds (one of questionable genetics) and two German Shepherd grand-dogs.

Panelists will highlight issues, resources, and opportunities for action, including:

- Medicaid Expansion – Rita DiSalvo, Lee County HUB, Florida Decides Health Care
- Health and Wellness Coalition – Mareen Chase, Partnership Manager, Collaboratory
- LWV Health Issues for Action – Dana Clark, PhD, LWVLee Director

**LWV Policy Position on Health Care:** Promote a health care system for the United States that provides affordable access to a basic level of quality care for all US residents, including behavioral health that is integrated with and achieves parity with the physical health care system.

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2025  
9AM TO 11AM**

*(9:00 Registration & Networking,  
9:30 Program)*

**COST:** Free

**LOCATION:** Collaboratory, 2031 Jackson Street, Fort Myers and Virtual via zoom

**Register through this link:**  
<https://HealthCareinLeeCounty.eventbrite.com>, email [lwvlee@lwvlee.org](mailto:lwvlee@lwvlee.org), or call 239-278-1032  
*A zoom link will be emailed to registrants.*

**MODERATOR:** Lorna Washington, Director-Health, League of Women Voters of Lee County, inc.



**The League of Women Voters of Lee County, Inc.**  
The League of Women Voters of Lee County, Inc. is a nonpartisan organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy.  
The League of Women Voters does not support or oppose candidates and/or political parties.  
Information on the programs and issues of the League of Women Voters is available on the web at [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org), [www.lwvfl.org](http://www.lwvfl.org), and [www.lwvlee.org](http://www.lwvlee.org). Call 239-278-1032 or e-mail [lwvlee@lwvlee.org](mailto:lwvlee@lwvlee.org)



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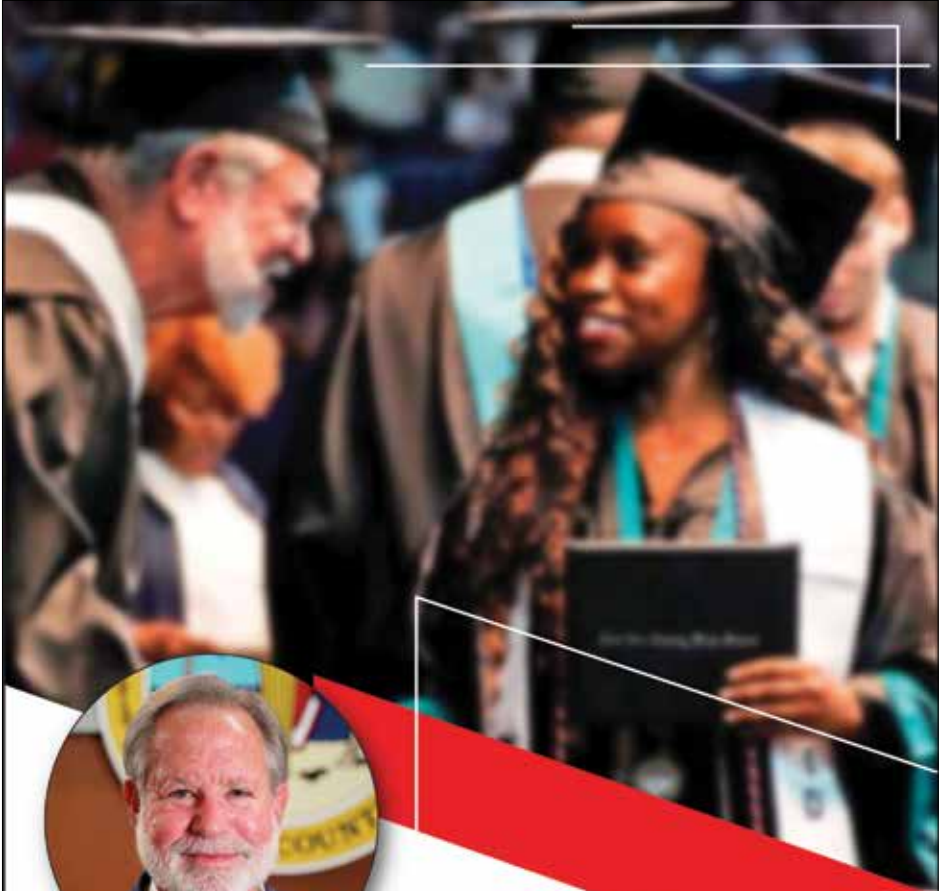
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# Addressing Special Act Bill

MAYOR TERESA LEE HEITMANN  
CITY OF NAPLES

239-213-1000  
Mayorheitmann@naplesgov.com



I want to take a few moments to address the circumstances surrounding the Naples Airport Authority and how recent proposals may impact our community. On September 15th, a Special Act Bill was presented to the Collier County Delegation, and it has since passed state legislation. This bill, introduced by State Representative Adam Botana and supported by our legislative delegation—including State Representatives Yvette Benarroch and Lauren Melo, and State Senator Kathleen Passidomo—proposes changing the governance of the Naples Airport Authority.

Specifically, it would shift the board from being appointed to being elected by all voters in Collier County. While this may sound like a simple procedural change, it has profound implications for the City of Naples because the airport sits on land owned by our city.

The Naples Airport Authority was established decades ago to operate on this city-owned land, under a long-term lease designed to support aviation, business, and community services. Over the years, the airport has grown into a regional hub, benefiting not only Naples but Collier County as a whole.

The concern is clear: under this proposal, the decision-making power for an airport on City-owned property would be placed in the hands of voters across the entire county, not just the residents of Naples. To put this into perspective, Naples has about 16,400 registered voters. Collier County has over 266,000. That means for every Naples voter, there are more than sixteen county voters. Simply put, our voices—the voices of the landowners—would be drowned out.

This is more than just a numbers issue. It's about fairness, home rule, and accountability. Naples residents live closest to the airport and experience the impacts most directly—noise, traffic, safety, and environmental concerns. Yet under this proposed structure, our residents would have little influence over the very decisions that affect our daily lives and neighborhoods.

Let me be candid: this proposal represents a power shift that threatens Naples' economic development, quality of life, and control over key resources. Less responsive airport management

could have serious consequences for our tourism industry, local infrastructure, and the overall well-being of our community.

Think of it this way: Imagine if your homeowners' association—your HOA—decided to allow residents from a neighboring town to elect your HOA board members. These are the people making decisions about your neighborhood rules, your landscaping, your common areas, and even assessments. You live there, you pay the dues, you deal with the noise or traffic—but suddenly, the majority of voters who choose your board don't live in your neighborhood at all.

That's essentially what this proposal would do with the Naples Airport. The airport sits on city-owned land, and Naples residents live closest to its impacts. Yet under this plan, decisions about the airport's governance would be made largely by voters from outside our city, leaving us with little say over our own property and community.

We recognize that the airport serves a vital role for all of Collier County, and we value our regional partnerships. But local control is a principle enshrined in our state constitution for a reason. Communities must have a meaningful voice over decisions about the land they own and the quality of life they protect.

City Council and I are carefully reviewing this proposal. We will continue advocating for transparency, accountability, and fairness. We urge Senator Passidomo and our state leaders to reconsider this approach and protect the rights of Naples residents. I also encourage each of you to make your voices heard—contact your elected officials and share your concerns.

Finally, I urge everyone in our community to stay engaged, attend meetings, and speak up. Together, we can ensure that decisions about our airport reflect both regional needs and the interests of the people of Naples.

Thank you, and thank you for your ongoing commitment to our city.

Blessings,  
**Teresa Lee Heitmann, Mayor**

# Collier County Supervisor of Elections Employees Receive National Designation

IT Director, Joseph Hudak, and Voter Services Analyst, Justin Vacca, of the Collier County Supervisor of Elections office were recently recognized as Certified Elections/Registration Administrators (CERA). They join over 1,700 other election professionals who have completed the CERA program. This brings the total of CERA accredited staff members in the Collier County Supervisor of Elections office to six.

The CERA program is offered through the National Association of Election Officials, also known as Election Center. The certification is accredited through Auburn University and covers topics ranging from election planning and management to ethics and election laws.

*“Obtaining a CERA designation is an incredible accomplishment, and our office is proud of the time and work that Joseph and Justin put in to obtain their designation. This reaffirms their unwavering commitment to ensuring the integrity of the electoral process.”*

- Melissa R. Blazier, Collier County Supervisor of Elections.

For more information about Election Center, visit [www.ElectionCenter.org](http://www.ElectionCenter.org).



Joseph Hudak

Justin Vacca

## FLORIDA FOOTBALL ASSISTANT COACH JABBAR JULUKE SUSPENDED FOR THREE GAMES

The Southeastern Conference and University of Florida have jointly announced a three-game suspension of Jabbar Juluke, associate head football coach and running backs coach at Florida, for his involvement in an altercation prior to the Florida at LSU football game on Saturday, Sept. 14.

“Jabbar Juluke’s conduct during the pregame altercation reflects behavior that is unacceptable and not aligned with the standards of the Southeastern Conference,” said Sankey. “Coaches are expected to be leaders and to de-escalate tense situations, and that did not happen in this circumstance. This suspension is appropriate, and any future misconduct by Jabbar Juluke will result in more severe disciplinary action.”

**Quote from Jabbar Juluke, Florida associate head coach and running backs coach:**

“I, first, would like to apologize to both Florida and LSU universities, their teams, staff and fans. I also sincerely apologize to the young athlete and his family. On Saturday, I reacted in a manner I’m not proud of. There’s no excuse for my behavior and I take full responsibility for my actions. In this game, emotional situations occur and bad reactions happen. I regret my reaction and commit to using this moment to strengthen my emotional intelligence. I know more is expected of us as coaches, and I commit to living up to that expectation. I believe growth is in ownership and learning from the good and the bad. I intend to use this situation as a teachable moment, not only for myself, but for those I impact. Again, I offer my sincerest apologies to both institutions and the staffs and families involved.”

**Quote from Scott Stricklin, Florida Athletics Director:**

“Jabbar has consistently been an upstanding member of our staff, and I commend him for accepting responsibility in this situation. We will continue to support him as he works to meet the high standards we set for our program.”

**Quote from Billy Napier, Florida Head Football Coach:**

“Coach Juluke’s actions prior to our game against LSU are not up to the standard of our program. Coach Juluke is a man of character and has taken full responsibility for his actions. I believe Coach Juluke will learn from this experience and be better for it.”





# FADE EM' UP BARBERSHOP:

THE SPORTS CENTER FOR SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

BY MEL  
WHITLOCK

Located in the heart of Lehigh just off Homestead Road, Fade Em' Up Barbershop has been a pillar of their community for more than ten years. Owner, Alan Pruitt, has made Fade Em' Up Barbershop one of the 'safe spaces' for men to come and speak respectful, yet freely, about a broad range of topics without criticism or judgment. In terms of sports conversation, I would argue that few barbershops can speak on the history of the talented athletes who have come through Lee County the way the barbers at Fade Em' Up Barbershop have been able to over the years.

Alan graduated from Riverdale High School and played varsity football during his time as a Raider. Emmitt Williams IV, who has been my barber for a decade and my sons' barber since they were 2-years old, is a product of North Fort Myers High School. Then there is Thomas Young, who everyone simply calls 'coach' because he has coached track and football on various levels throughout Lee County. I consider coach a local sports historian, because whenever I come in the shop, he teaches me (and others) about so many great players who have come through our area that may have been forgotten for various reasons.

## FADE EM' BARBERSHOP SUPPORTS HOMEGROWN TALENT

During this time of year if one were to walk into Fade Em' Up Barbershop on Saturdays, he or she would see a college football game on one or both televisions. If Alabama is playing on that day, the television will be on their game to see how Lehigh alumnus Richard Young is doing for the Roll-Tide. If Colorado is playing, the television will be on their game to see how North Fort Myers High School alumnus Deion "Prime Time" Sanders is doing in his effort to revitalize the Buffaloes program. Lee County continues to produce some of the best football talent in the nation and Fade Em' Barbershop is a place where that talent is often celebrated because of its connection to the "239."

Emmitt is the father of Emmitt Williams V, arguably the highest recruited southwest Florida basketball player in this century thus far. Williams V went on to play college basketball at LSU and whenever his team was featured on television, it was automatically assumed that clients in the shop were all Tiger fans rooting for both father and son. The roots of athletics runs deep at Fade Em' Up Barbershop from the affiliations of the barbers, to the current student-athletes getting themselves a 'fresh cut' on gameday; the barbershop is the place to find out the score of a game between Dunbar and Fort Myers, why coaches were fired, and who is the latest top player to transfer schools.

## JORDAN VS. LEBRON...AND DON'T BET WITH ZAY!

Now let me be clear, Michael Jordan is the greatest NBA player in the history of the league. I say that not as a fan of Jordan (Olajuwon was my favorite player growing up); however, Jordan changed the entire trajectory of how basketball is viewed even in today's game. Despite this well-thought and articulate argument that I am goaded into while getting a haircut, I am constantly in a debate with Emmitt, and another barber named Zay because they want to crown LeBron James as the greatest of all time. I also learned that if Zay ever says "you wanna bet on it" don't take the bait! These are some of the conversations to expect while waiting for a top-of-the-line haircut by qualified barbers which also include Jay, Michel, and Mychel.

## APPRECIATING THE SACRED SPACE FADE EM' UP BARBERSHOP

The main takeaway from this op-ed in celebrating community staples such as the local barbershops, by highlighting my own, is that these places are more than just a business to get a service. At Fade Em' Up Barbershop men can escape from the stress of daily expectation and talk freely where respect is mutually given. All of the barbers are qualified in their craft, but most important, each barber reflects the best of what a barbershop should be to real men.



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# Treasures

## IN THE DARKNESS

BY LISA ESWAY

Darkness... seems like one of the main things people are afraid of. A top fear? Darkness. How about a treasure in the darkness? Sounds like a contradiction. Do you believe it though. In the dark your mind can play tricks on you. God is able to give you a treasure in a dark place. Kind of like a shooting star then in this moment you are thankful for a dark place. You could be staring at something in the light that you don't know is there until the dark. There is just something foreboding and mysterious about the dark. It is the night that reveals the treasure of darkness. Darkness is a symbol of things that we face that are difficult. I go through things that feel dark. A dark season.

God sends rain on the just and the unjust. Why do bad things happen? In some degree wrong place wrong time. Right place right time? The rain just falls and it is not always connected. It just happens. Following God in a sense invites darkness into our lives. Darkness is a symbol of pain. Persecution. Opposition. Trial. I will suffer these things and I will not count it strange. The enemy would rather have you stay where you were. But now you're awake. Now you're in the light. Opposition comes = rejoice.

This is an upside down Kingdom. The testing of your faith produces patience. It doesn't feel right at all... but... but do it anyway. Because it doesn't feel like the right course of action... do it anyway. Pain is not forever. You will wipe every tear from my eyes, there will one day be no more darkness, no more pain, no more addiction, no more death, no more sorrow, no sin, no separation, no everything that was not meant to be. So don't get used to your pain. Jesus said My Kingdom is not of this world. Things will be far better. What kind of treasures are in the darkness? What can I expect? Apostle Paul writes that his chains have a purpose while he's in a prison sentence. Come on that is so good! My chains had a purpose. As long as I am here, I have a testimony to preach, I got love to show. Pain's got a problem.

Meaning it opens up doors that wouldn't be open otherwise. Without that, there wouldn't be this. It's going to bring volume to your life. Only after the darkness blinds all of us it is the light that opens our eyes. Darkness can be a mercy. God can scream and get our attention. It's about Him getting louder in our lives. And we get louder in His hands. Pain is preparation for what is to come. The deeper the pain the greater God can use this person. There is a humility to suffering and the trials that I've walked through. When I look back on it now, it is the greatest thing that I have ever faced. Right. The things of this world will always bring anything that

will last. No satisfaction. The trials put into my life will bring growth... it was hard but I grew. It was hard but then I trusted it. It was hard but then I... Found peace. Found joy.

On the inside. The hard thing is what caused me to walk away humble. To appreciate what I have taken for granted all along. We can talk about what's good and what's bad but if God allowed it then He's got plans to turn it into good. God is going to use the pain in my life. I am yours, I am not my own.

### HE BOUGHT ME WITH A PRICE.

From separation to hardship to life and life more abundantly. I am not in control. I surrender. I trust you. You give and you take away. I will trust you know what is better for me more than I do. When I am in control or whatever it is I think is control... I mess everything up. If I ever get to do one more thing I will honor you. You are raising me up for such a time as this. You plunder the dark places of my life and you put treasure into my hands. You are all that I see. You are what I see. You have rescued me. You speak the end from the beginning.

Things are not always what they seem. Seldom as they seem. The value of what I have in my hands might not be visible but I won't let it go. What if what I am holding on to seems worthless? Don't let it go there very well could be treasure there. I was handed a rare treasure. There are two sides to every chain the thing I am chained to and what is chained to me. It could be more valuable than you think. And the things that I will find are not just for me. Treasure. Hidden in the dark place. Secret, lonely, lowly places. The higher I go the more there is. Keep walking. Discover there is always more to see. I am not limited. Keep trusting. He wants to show you more. He wants to show me more. I don't even need to see it...

***I will just trust and believe  
in this secret moment.***





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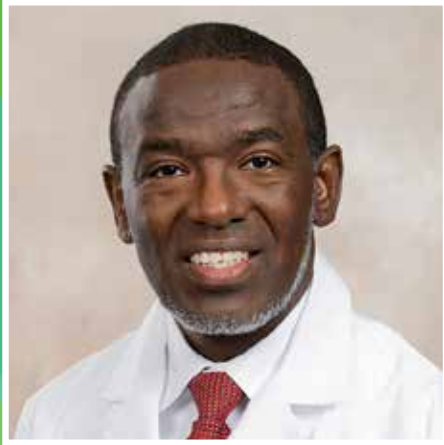
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## Experienced Residency Director Dr. Alfred Gitu Promoted to Chief Academic Officer at Lee Health

We are pleased to announce the promotion of Dr. Alfred Gitu as Lee Health's new Chief Academic Officer. Since joining Lee Health in 2012, Dr. Gitu has demonstrated exceptional academic leadership and a strong commitment to preparing physicians for the next phase of their careers.

In his new role, Dr. Gitu will oversee education, research and training programs to ensure the highest standards of academic and clinical excellence. He will play a key role in expanding Lee Health's academic programs, focusing on creating a leading teaching institution in the region and beyond.

Dr. Gitu will also lead the development of innovative programs to expand career opportunities for medical residents. He will champion cutting-edge medical research, enhance training initiatives, and attract top talent from around the world.

"Dr. Gitu is deeply committed to preparing the next generation of physicians and growing a skilled healthcare workforce for Southwest Florida," said Lee Health Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Iahn Gonsenhauser. "As a core member of our team, he has been instrumental to Lee Health's success, and I am confident that in his new role, he will further strengthen and elevate both our health system and academic programs."

Dr. Gitu earned his medical degree from the University of Nairobi in Nairobi, Kenya. Before joining Lee Health, Dr. Gitu was a faculty physician for the Self Regional Healthcare Family Medicine Residency Program in Greenwood, SC, where he had also completed his residency training.

Since joining Lee Health, Dr. Gitu has helped to provide training for resident physicians and medical students in the Florida State University (FSU) College of Medicine Family Medicine Residency Program based at Lee Memorial Hospital. The program welcomed its first class in 2014. In 2018, Dr. Gitu was named the program

director. Under his leadership, the program has maintained a 100% board pass rate with zero citations. He spearheaded the expansion of the program from a total of 24 residents a year to 33 residents a year.

Due to the success of the Family Medicine Residency program, Lee Health also collaborated with FSU to create the Internal Medicine Residency Program at Cape Coral Hospital. The program, which takes three years to complete, is approved to accept 20 residents a year for a total of 60 at full capacity.

Lee Health has also received approval from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) to launch a four-year obstetrics and gynecology residency program and a one year transitional year program at Cape Coral Hospital, in collaboration with the FSU College of Medicine.

Resident doctors are medical school graduates who are training to specialize in their chosen medical field. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), about 60% of residents choose to practice medicine in the state where they trained. For primary care, the in-state retention rate is 70%.

Training new doctors in the community creates a network of physicians ready to practice medicine in Southwest Florida, addressing the nationwide physician shortage and the healthcare needs of our community. Lee Health's residency programs play a vital role in preparing physicians to help treat Southwest Floridians with the high-quality, innovative healthcare the community trusts.

Please join us in celebrating this exciting new chapter in the academic medicine enterprise at Lee Health under the leadership of Dr. Alfred Chege Gitu.

***To learn more about Lee Health's residency programs, please visit [www.leehealth.org](http://www.leehealth.org).***



### 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 [www.LeeHealth.org](http://www.LeeHealth.org).*

# LEE COUNTY AT A CROSSROADS:

## *The Time for Leadership Is Now*

Lee County has flourished for years through the vision, perseverance, and risk-taking of its business community. Entrepreneurs understand what it means to balance budgets, endure setbacks, and seize opportunities turning trials into triumphs. Those very same qualities are exactly what we need in local government today.

The Republican Party of Florida rests on principles familiar to every business leader who has known success: accountability, fiscal discipline, freedom, and personal responsibility. These are the values that guide entrepreneurs through long nights, difficult payroll choices, and the determination to press forward until achievement is realized.

Yet these principles face constant pressure. Local rules on taxes, zoning, education, and regulations can either stifle growth or empower it. That is why Lee County needs conservative leadership with business experience – firmly grounded in family, faith, and community—to secure prosperity for the generations ahead.

The Lee County Republican Executive Committee calls on like-minded business leaders to consider service in local office. Your record of turning challenges into opportunities is the strongest preparation for shaping policies that defend liberty and foster growth.

Today, Lee County stands at a crossroads. We may leave our future to chance, or we may rise to this moment. Business leaders, your county needs your courage, your vision, and your voice. Step up now to help preserve the promise of prosperity and freedom in Lee County for the generations to come.

Those who want to learn more about candidacy or involvement with the Republican Party of Lee County should visit [www.LeeGOP.org](http://www.LeeGOP.org) or call me at the LCREC headquarters in Fort Myers at 239-936-8779.

**Mercedes Price-Harry**  
*Chairwoman, Lee County Republican Executive Committee*







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## THE SWFL CHRONICLE STAFF RECEIVES

# SEC APPROVAL TO COVER CONFERENCE FOOTBALL EVENTS

The SWFL Chronicle's Michael H Blank received official approval by the SEC on September 9th to cover and photograph Conference Football Events for the publication. Mr. Blank is a noted and exhibited photographer and the Publisher of The SWFL Chronicle has multi-generational family involvement with college football. This led to the decision to investigate adding college football coverage to the already successful Chronicle's area of coverage.

*Mr. Blank noted, "This is a great honor and a significant challenge. The SEC's press system is essentially two tiered. First, there is the SEC approval, which we've received, but we still need to request permission at each event to attend and operate as media. While I look forward to the opportunity to photograph these games, I am keenly aware there will be a very sharp learning curve as it is a hectic dance as everyone is trying to get that perfect shot." Mr. Blank continued to say, "We know this will be a while in development while we work out how, and if, this fits best into the Chronicle."*

The Publisher of The SWFL Chronicle, McKinley G. Williams stated, "Fittingly, I can say I threw the ball to Mr. Blank on this and he ran with it. He took the initiative and pushed this through to reach this first milestone. I am looking forward to the photographic coverage and assistance in commentary he will provide." Mr. Williams continued, "It is easy working with Mr. Blank on difficult projects because, using another sporting euphamism he always wants the ball. I can count on him to strap his helmet on an running through any obstacle that gets in the way."

When ask why he chose to look at adding sports coverage, The SWFL Chronicle's Publisher, McKinley G. Williams commented, "I believe team sports, particularly early on in life, helps build character and a healthy, competitive nature. This used to be a regular part of our culture, now, in too many places, sports have fallen by the way side. We have left children without the healthy outlet of sports and a result we have unhealthy bodies housing unhealthy minds." Mr. Williams hopes that adding coverage will not just add to the circulation of the chronicle, but help bring sports back more fully into the fabric of everyday life.

To find out more, or to speak with The SWFL Chronicle's staff, please contact McKinley G. Williams via email at [mckinley@theswflchronicle.com](mailto:mckinley@theswflchronicle.com)



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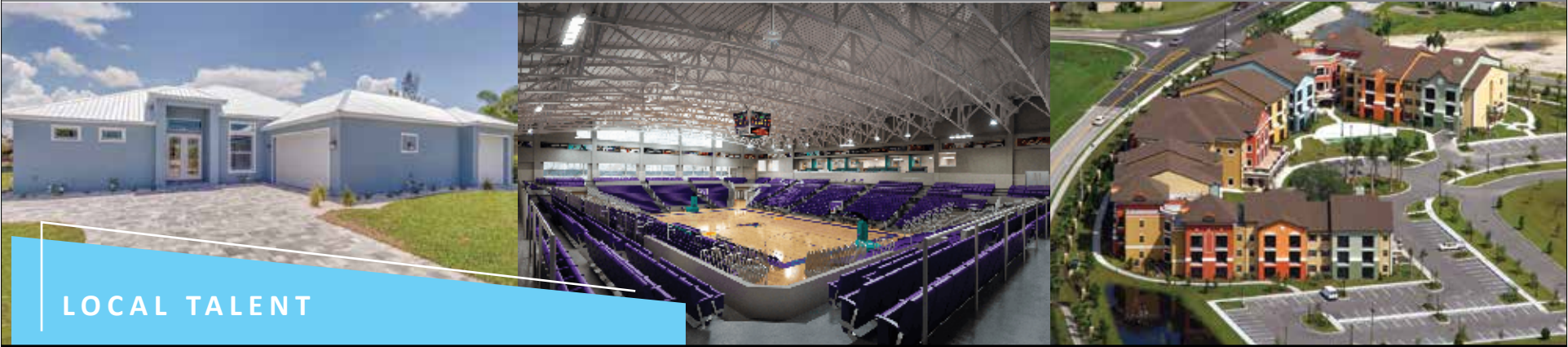
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# Legal and Financial Questions about Conservation 20/20 Unresolved

by the League of Women Voters of Lee County | lwvlee.org

Lee County Commissioners adopted the 2025-2026 \$3 billion dollar budget, with \$25,000 funding to cover the administrative costs of the Conservation 20/20 Land Acquisition Program. And, \$25,000 projected for each of the next five years. The budget does not replenish the fund as is lawfully required by LDC Chapter 11, Article VIII - Conservation Lands, Sec. 11.535 - 11.543 and Ordinance 21-02. The Conservation 20/20 Land Acquisition and Stewardship Program has twice been approved by voters. In the 2016 referendum, 84% of voters opted to continue with a .5 millage self-tax to fund the program. When the fund dips below a floor of \$40 million the ordinance says it is to be replenished up to a ceiling of \$100 million.

Recently, \$42 million in properties have been nominated to the program, a change after many, many years when few properties were brought forward to purchase. Only 20% of total lands in the program were purchased from 2013-2024. This decrease raises concerns for transparency given the co-mingling of the .5 millage in the general fund. Today only \$14 million remains in the Conservation 20/20 Acquisition fund, well below the \$40 million minimum set by the ordinance.

The League of Women Voters of Lee County salutes our local nonprofits for their advocacy and their alerts informing the public given such little notice on such an important issue. And, the public who met the challenge by writing emails and speaking in support. The LWVLee recognizes these nonprofits who called for civic engagement:

- Eyes on Conservation 20/20 Coalition
- Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation
- Audubon of SW FL & Florida
- Engage Estero
- Calusa Waterkeepers

Special thanks to:

- Bill Hammond, who led the initiative in 1996
- Barbara Manzo, former Lee County Parks and Recreation Director

- John Cassani, Calusa Waterkeeper Emeritus
- Members of the Calusa Land Trust en force
- Joe Bonasia, The Right to Clean Water
- Alessia Leathers, Eyes on Conservation 20/20 Coalition
- Paul Bonasia, Protect Our Wetlands



A shout out to the community groups in Buckingham and Alva. For those members of the community who were inappropriately discouraged from speaking at the hearing and those who were unable to make it because of work, we see you. We know you care!

The League of Women Voters policy positions are informed by study and consensus. The intention of League's stated policy-positions is to inspire, to advocate, litigate, educate, and take action to ensure accountability at all levels and in all branches of government. The League's stated policy on Citizen's Right to Know and Participate in Government. [Impacts on Issues 2024-2026] includes:

- Informed and active participation at all levels of government
- Right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings, and making public records accessible
- transparency in governance

The LWVLee opposes proposed defunding, changing criteria retroactively, and delaying the timing for acquisition of Conservation 2020 properties. The LWVLee urges the Commission to fully fund and timely implement Conservation 20/20 as enacted and codified for the protection of environmental resources, access to public lands and safe recreation opportunities for Lee County residents and visitors.



**CONSERVATION**  
**20/20**  
LEE COUNTY, FL CONSERVATION LAND

Conservation 20/20 is Lee County's environmentally-sensitive land acquisition and management program. There are 30,000 acres of conservation land protected in Lee County through the program.

The program was established in 1996 through voter referendum and reaffirmed at the ballot box in 2016, receiving 84 percent majority support from Lee County voters. Conservation 20/20 manages 49 preserves spread throughout Lee County.

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# THE SW FLORIDA CHRONICLE SUPPORTS

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*“Shine the Light – Share the Hope”*

**Saturday, October 18 – 6:00 PM**

**The Westin Cape Coral Resort**  
5951 Silver King Blvd., Cape Coral, FL 33914

Please join us in celebrating Living Well Mission’s 19-month milestone and our achievements thus far. It will be a night of inspiration, celebration, and hope as we honor the lives impacted through mental health support and the community that makes it possible. Together, we’ll look back at how far we’ve come—and forward to the brighter future we are building, one session at a time.

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*Email: [vicki@livingwellmission.org](mailto:vicki@livingwellmission.org) or Call: (239) 308-5626*

*Attire: Semi formal*

*To learn more: [www.livingwellmission.org](http://www.livingwellmission.org)*

*To buy tickets, scan QR code.*



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# TO THE Leaders of SWFL...

...and when I say Leaders; I'm talking the full gamut. Everything from politicians to pastors, to leaders of clubs and organizations, people who supervise, department heads, directors, and even those who may be over a team or stewards in unions. I want to take this time to salute each and every one of you individually and collectively for all the work that you've done in SWFL.

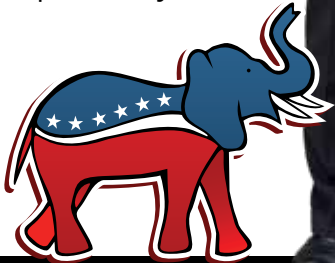
This has been a tumultuous year. One of Recocking. One of Shaking. Any time you build something you have to tear down a few things and level it... And build a deep foundation. The deeper the foundation; the higher the structure - the stronger the structure - the more fortified the structure. So I just want to take this time to salute you leaders... ALL OF YOU!... for standing in the gap and being faithful and doing the best you can.

IF you are reading this; please remember to keep ALL OUR LEADERS in your prayers, because they really are trying to do the best they can and balance a family. Focus on the issues and NOT on the person, because none of us are walking on water.

It is very important to not make things personal and stick to the business at hand. Look at what is righteous. Look at what is steadfast. Look at what is immovable based on case law and the law of the Bible...

Again – Thank you leaders for all the work that you've done. I Love you and may God continue to Bless each and every one of you as WE move SWFL from Englewood to Marco Island to the next level of peace, tranquility, and the nice small quaint aquatic way of life that we call SWFL.

**McKinley G. Williams,**  
**Publisher**  
**The SWFL Chronicle**



**SHERIFF CARMINE MARCENO REMINDS YOU...**

# **COUNTERFEIT CURRENCY SCAM ALERT**



The threat of counterfeit U.S. currency to the financial system of the United States continues to evolve. Advances in technology, the availability of scanning and printing devices and the adoption of the U.S. dollar by nations as their legal tender have exacerbated the global threat.



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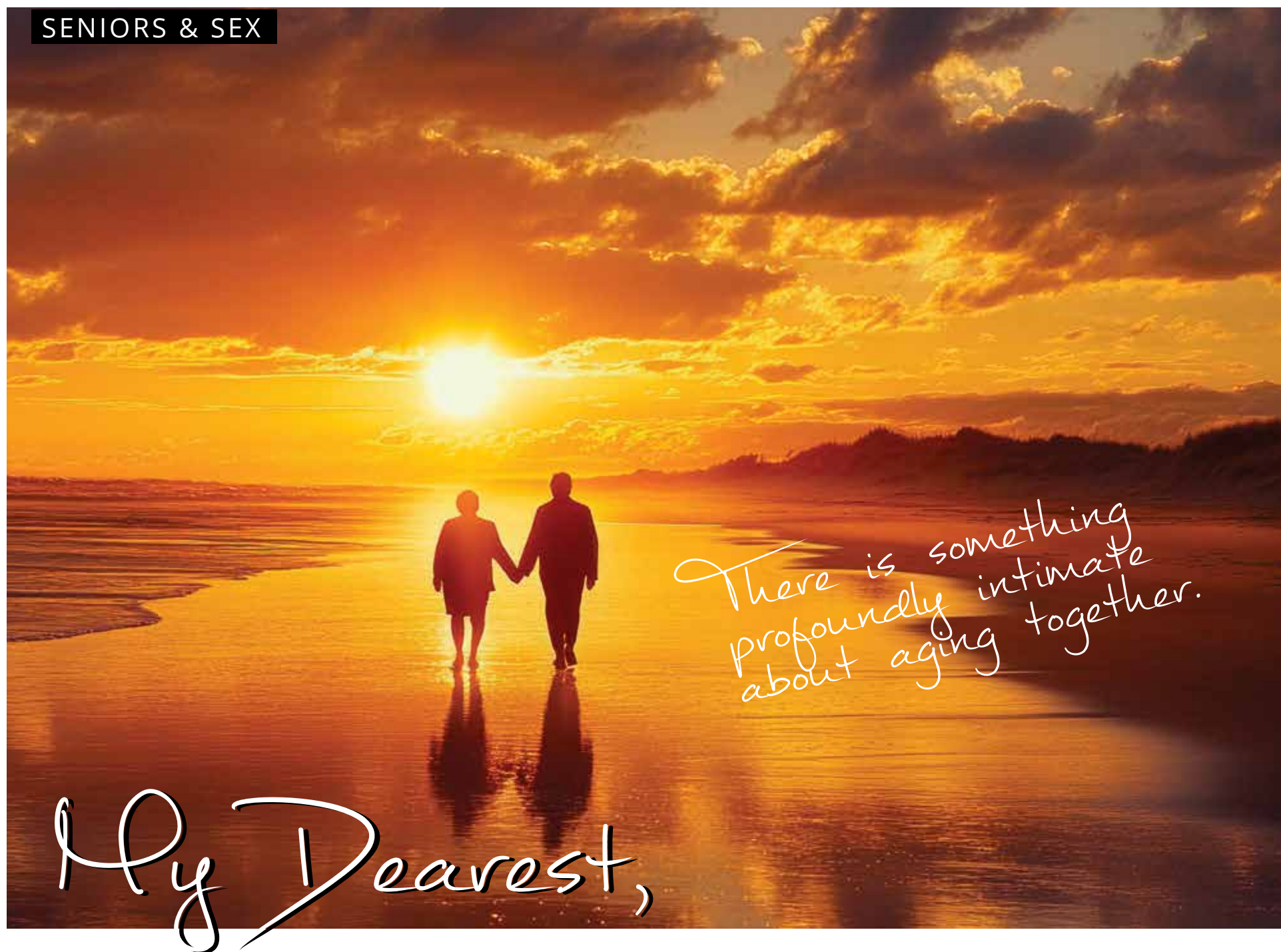
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As I sit quietly in this well-wornout armchair, watching the golden light of evening spill across the garden we once tended together, I find myself reflecting—on us, on the years, and most of all, on the kind of love we came to know.

There was a time when love burned hot and fast for me, the way it does in youth. Back then, love felt like a flame you had to cup your hands around to keep alive. I remember the thrill, the chase, the aching want. It was beautiful in its own way – urgent, alive, bursting at the seams. But with time, I’ve come to understand that what we had – and still have – is something far richer.

You see, my darling, love in our senior years doesn’t flare with the wild abandon of youth. It doesn’t come crashing through the door like a summer storm. It doesn’t demand to be noticed. No, this love – our love – is quieter. But in that stillness, it holds an unfathomable depth. It’s not that it’s less passionate; it’s that the passion runs deeper, grounded in a thousand shared moments and quiet understandings.

When we are young, we often love the idea of someone – their laughter, the way they make our hearts race, the promise of what might be. But as we grow older, we begin to love the truth of someone. We love not just the parts that shine but also the parts that ache, that falter. In our younger years, I loved you for your smile, your strength, your dreams. But now, I love you for the way you’ve endured life’s trials, for the softness you’ve allowed in, for the wisdom behind your eyes.

We have lived. Oh, how we have lived.

We have seen joy so expansive it filled our lungs with light. We have known sorrow deep enough to hollow out entire weeks. And yet through it all, we stayed. We remained. Our love didn’t burn out; it matured. It grew into something with roots.

*There is something profoundly intimate about aging together.*

***There is something profoundly intimate about aging together.*** The way we’ve come to know each other’s rhythms – the way you reach for my hand in the dark, not because you’re afraid, but because that’s where it belongs. The way we no longer need to fill silences with words, because the silence is no longer empty. It’s full of understanding, of shared history, of deep, abiding connection.

When I think about the passion of our youth, I remember breathless kisses and sleepless nights. But when I think of our love now, I think of the nights you rubbed warmth into my aching knees, the mornings you brought me tea before I could even open my eyes, the quiet way you sit beside me when words fail. Passion like that is not lesser – it is sacred.

I’ve watched time etch lines into your face, silver your hair, soften your walk. And somehow, I love you more. Not despite the changes, but because of them. Every line tells a story, every ache a shared journey. We’ve earned this love. We’ve tended to it like a garden, through all seasons. It has bloomed in the spring of our youth, and now it glows like autumn leaves – more vibrant for the time that has passed.

When we are young, love feels infinite because we are naive to the reality of time. But as we age, love becomes precious because we know it is finite. There is an urgency – not of lust, but of appreciation. We cherish moments more deeply. A hand held at the end of the day means more when you’ve known what it is to live without it.

Remember when we used to say, “forever”? We didn’t understand it then. But now, as our hands grow older together, I realize that forever was never about time. It was about presence. It was about the way our hearts chose each other again and again, every day, through every trial, through every change.

*Young love is a beautiful promise. But senior love is the fulfillment of that promise.*

*Young love is a beautiful promise. But senior love is the fulfillment of that promise.*

There is courage in the love we share. It is a brave thing, to keep choosing someone as they change. As they slow. As they struggle. And what a miracle it is, that you have continued to choose me. Even on the hard days. Especially on the hard days.

Our love is no longer about what we can become – it’s about what we have become. And how we’ve done it together.

We’ve grown roots that run beneath every conversation, every glance, every shared silence. We’ve built something resilient. Something unshakable. Not in the grand gestures, but in the quiet ones. The ones that never make it into songs or movies—the setting of the table, the folded laundry, the soft goodnight. Those are the gestures that define a lifetime.

And in those simple acts, our love burns bright. Not like a firework—but like an ember that has been carefully tended, never burning out, only glowing stronger with time.

So when people talk of the passion of youth, I smile. Because I know a different kind of passion. One that isn’t loud, but fierce. One that has weathered decades, not days. One that has survived disappointment, distance, illness, grief – and grown more beautiful through it all.

I want to thank you—for growing old with me. For allowing me the sacred privilege of witnessing your life unfold, year by year. For being the constant when everything else has changed.

I used to think the most romantic moments were the grand ones—the sweeping declarations, the wild adventures. But now, I know better.

Romance is you helping me with my coat.

It’s you knowing which book will make me cry.

It’s the warmth of your palm against mine when we sit quietly by the window.

It’s this life we’ve built—not perfect, but real. And, my love, so very deep.

If I could go back and tell my younger self one thing about love, it would be this: Wait. Just wait. The best part is yet to come.

Because nothing compares to this – this quiet, enduring, soul-deep love that knows your scars and loves you not despite them, but because of them.

You are my home, now more than ever. And the love I feel for you now is not a flicker. It is a fire that has weathered every storm, still glowing, still warm – lighting the way, even as we walk a little slower now.

Thank you for this love.

Thank you for every year.

Thank you for being my forever.

With all that I am,

Yours, always.

Vernon

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**Jesus is the word – stand with and for Jesus!**

Jeremiah is a prophet to Israel and is often called the weeping prophet because of the judgment God is bringing on the Israelite people. Jeremiah exposes false prophets, has a yoke placed on him and is told not to marry or have any children. Jeremiah is imprisoned for the prophecy of God and for a time, God hid him for his safety. Jeremiah is a great example for all of us to stand for God, His word and the Truth. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and, as stated in John 1; Jesus is the word—it is simply put to **STAND WITH AND FOR JESUS!**

What is really significant here is that Jeremiah is faithful and delivers the word of the Lord at all costs. This is what we all need to do. We need to speak truth and the gospel to others that may not want to hear it. I do want to preface by saying we need to do it all in love. Not in confrontation, disdain for anyone and not in the spirit of self-righteousness. The word tells us **Jeremiah 1:5 "I chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born, I selected you to be a prophet to the nations."** I have told others that have asked, "How do I speak about Jesus with others who don't believe?" and my response is out of love and to open your mouth. God, the Holy Spirit, will give you the words that will be able to touch the heart of the person you are speaking to. You have to trust that God will give you the strength,

the spirit and the word to tell others about Him. Once you do it once or even twice, your faith in God will grow and give you more confidence.

In Revelation 6:11 we are told that **we will be martyred** for our faith. I get it, sometimes it is better to be silent—maybe even safe. I understand that some people seem to be so far from God that they are actually offended when you talk about Him. However, let your life and your love speak. Love covers a multitude of sins (**1 Peter 4:8 Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins**) and no matter what they say, we need to love on them anyway. Forgive them without them asking. That is what will win them. We need to remember to pray that God will put the desire in unsaved loved one's heart to worship Him. Pray **Jeremiah 32:40 "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good for them. I will put a desire in their hearts to worship me, and they will never leave me."** I believe we should be in prayer prior to opening our mouth and in prayer and fasting to break any strongholds in someone's life that is withholding them from accepting God into their heart. God hears our prayers and is faithful to fulfill His word. He tells us **Jeremiah 33:3 "Call to me, and I will answer you; I will tell you wonderful and marvelous things that you know nothing about."** If you aren't hearing from God, if He feels distant to you; ask Him to

search your heart, to forgive you of your sins, and maybe forgive someone you haven't forgiven yet. These are some areas that may be blocking you from hearing from God.

Saints, in these times, we need to stand for the truth and for the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to also let our life preach and to let all other topics be secondary, tertiary or less important. Don't get caught in politics or in things that are going to bring you into a pit, instead; talk about what God has revealed to you. Instead talk about good things and be the encourager, the salt and light to the world. If you speak truth, it will be difficult for someone to argue with you. God will never stop doing good for you (**Jeremiah 32:40 I will never stop doing good for them**).

God delights in the details of your life (**Psalms 37:23 The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives.**). God has plans to prosper you and not harm you (**Jeremiah 29:11**). Jeremiah is a prophet that delivers hard warnings to the people but God still gives hope. God is our hope. God is our salvation. I find Jeremiah is an example to all of us today to be bold and brave to deliver the truth to the people and to also deliver hope. That is what we are to do. Be bold, be brave and be like Jeremiah!

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***Proverbs 13:22,  
“A good man  
leaves an  
inheritance to  
his children’s  
children.”***

# Partnering to Educate Our Community

## ON LIFE INSURANCE, FINAL EXPENSE PLANNING, AND ESTATE PROTECTION

I hope this letter finds you well and blessed in your ministry. I have been fortunate to attend churches from Englewood to Marco Island and met amazing people from all denominations. I am reaching out with a heartfelt and urgent message concerning the long-term financial and generational well-being of our beloved SWFL community. As spiritual leaders, your influence goes beyond the pulpit; you shepherd not just the souls but also the lives and livelihoods of your congregants. Today, I am inviting you to partner in an initiative that will empower your members to make wise financial decisions that will benefit their families for generations to come.

Too often, our community is left vulnerable in the face of death, financial hardship, and legal complications due to a lack of proper planning. Many families, in the wake of losing a loved one, are forced to face not only grief but also the stress of unpaid funeral expenses, unprotected assets, and legal battles over estates—problems that could have been prevented with proactive financial planning. Many people don’t like to talk about death, but it is a part of life.

This letter serves as a proposal and a plea to consider hosting educational seminars in your churches to teach the importance of life insurance, final expense planning, and estate protection through trusts and wills. These tools are not just for the wealthy—they are essential instruments that every family, regardless of income, should understand and have access to.

In the SWFL community and many communities like ours, there is a concerning pattern that emerges time and time again as soon as someone dies:

- Families launching GoFundMe pages to cover burial and funeral costs.
- Homes, vehicles, and other valuable assets lost due to

- improper titling or lack of a will.
- Family disputes leading to expensive probate proceedings and broken relationships.
- Generations losing wealth due to failure to properly protect and transfer it.

This cycle continues, not because our people don’t care, but because they often don’t know how or why they should prepare. There’s a glaring educational gap, and the church—an institution trusted, respected, and central to the life of the community—is the perfect place to help fill it.

Every church in SWFL should hold at least one seminar per year on the following:

- 1. Life Insurance and Final Expense Planning**  
Life insurance is a foundational tool in financial stewardship. It ensures that in the event of an untimely passing, a family’s financial stability is not jeopardized. Final expense policies, specifically designed to cover funeral costs and immediate bills, relieve families from having to raise thousands of dollars in a moment of crisis. These policies are often affordable, even for seniors or those with health issues.
- 2. Trusts and Wills to Protect Family Assets**  
Proper estate planning through legal instruments such as living trusts, wills, and power of attorney can make the difference between a seamless transfer of assets and years of complicated probate litigation. Trusts protect homes from being lost, keep bank accounts accessible, and ensure that the deceased’s wishes are respected without delay or dispute. When families are prepared, they can grieve in peace, not in chaos.

As scripture teaches in **Proverbs 13:22, “A good man leaves**

**an inheritance to his children's children."** This passage speaks to a legacy mindset—a mindset we must encourage and nurture. Churches are uniquely positioned to reach and teach people of all ages and backgrounds. Your pulpit, Bible studies, and fellowship halls can serve as launching pads for transformation—not just spiritually, but financially and practically.

I propose that we work together to bring free, community-based Life and Legacy Planning Seminars to your congregation. These workshops will:

- Break down the myths and fears surrounding life insurance.
- Explain, in plain language, the benefits of final expense policies.
- Provide step-by-step guidance on how to set up a trust or will.
- Offer consultations with licensed professionals and estate planning experts.
- Equip families with actionable tools and resources to take immediate steps.

The timing of this initiative is critical. In an uncertain world—rising healthcare costs, unexpected deaths due to illness or accidents, and increasing legal fees—our people cannot afford to be unprepared. Every year that goes by without these conversations is another year families remain at risk. We must act now to educate, equip, and empower.

The SWFL CHRONICLE will partner with you to provide

seminars. We would be honored to collaborate with your church to host one or more seminars. These sessions can be tailored to fit your schedule—held during a weekday evening, after a Sunday service, or as part of a special event. We bring all necessary materials and qualified speakers. There is no cost to the church or its members.

All we ask is that you open your doors and help spread the word to your parishioners. Together, we can shift the narrative from crisis and confusion to clarity and confidence.

This is more than just a financial issue—it is a ministry opportunity. Helping families prepare for life's eventualities is an act of love, stewardship, and wisdom. By taking steps now, we ensure that our elders are honored, our children are protected, and our community continues to thrive in strength and dignity.

I welcome the opportunity to speak with you further and schedule a time to visit your church or meet with your leadership team. Please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience. You may email the [swflchronicle@gmail.com](mailto:swflchronicle@gmail.com) and we will have someone arrange to schedule a FREE SEMINAR to educate and help your parishioners protect their family's interest.

Thank you for your continued service to the people of SWFL. Together, we can build a legacy that lasts.

With deepest respect and hope,

**McKinley G. Williams, Publisher**  
**The SWFL Chronicle**



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# 6 Steps to Build “Be Nice Muscles”

| By Roberto Fuller

## ***Building Your “Be Nice Muscles”: How to Practice Kindness Every Day***

Every man wants to be buff. Every woman wants to be “hot”. Everyone hits the gym and trains frantically and watches their diet until the holidays roll around. lol. We often talk about physical fitness—lifting weights, running miles, eating clean. But what about emotional and relational fitness? Just like going

Kindness isn’t weakness. It’s strength in action. But being consistently kind takes effort, intentionality, and sometimes, patience—especially in a world where stress, distractions, and misunderstandings are common. The good news? Kindness is a skill that can be developed. Here’s how to start building your “Be Nice Muscles” and why it matters more than ever.

Being nice is more than just being polite

- **Improves relationships:** Being kind fosters trust and connection.
- **Reduces stress:** People who consistently practice kindness report lower levels of anxiety and depression.
- **Spreads positivity:** Your kind actions encourage others to be kind, creating a cycle of goodwill.

So if kindness is this powerful, how can we train ourselves to be more



to the gym builds muscle, practicing kindness daily builds what we might call your “Be Nice Muscles.” These muscles don’t just make you more pleasant to be around; they strengthen your relationships, improve your mental health, and create a ripple effect that touches every corner of your life. It’s the only muscle that we can train daily and not have to use icy hot, and biofreeze.

or saying “please” and “thank you.” It’s about practicing empathy, showing respect, and offering compassion, even when it’s not easy or convenient.

Scientific studies show that kindness:

- **Boosts your mood:** Acts of kindness trigger the release of serotonin and dopamine, the brain’s natural feel-good chemicals.

consistently kind, even when we’re tired, annoyed, or dealing with difficult people? Well - I’m glad you asked.

## ***Step 1: Understand That Kindness Is a Choice***

Kindness isn’t just something that “happens” when you’re in a good mood. It’s a decision. You choose to smile. You

choose not to snap back. You choose to offer someone grace, even when it feels undeserved.

Start by accepting full ownership of your attitude. You can't control others' behavior, but you can control your response. This mental shift is the first and most important rep in building your "Be Nice Muscles."

**Step 2: Start Small – But Be Consistent**

You don't need grand gestures to make a big impact. In fact, it's the small, consistent acts that matter most.

- Hold the door for someone.
- Compliment a coworker.
- Say hello to the cashier.
- Let someone merge in traffic without honking.
- Send a quick text to check on a friend.

These tiny actions are like doing daily push-ups for your character. They're easy to do—and easy not to do. But over time, they add up to a life filled with meaningful, positive connections.

**Step 3: Practice "Kindness Under Pressure"**

Here's where the real workout begins. It's easy to be nice when everything's going smoothly. But what about when:

- Someone cuts you off in traffic?
- A colleague takes credit for your idea?
- A stranger is rude for no reason?
- Someone steps on your bunions accidentally?

These are your "heavy lifting" moments. This is where you grow. Choosing kindness in hard moments doesn't mean being a doormat—it means responding with dignity and grace. It may sound soft, but it takes real inner strength to stay calm and kind when you're under pressure.

A helpful trick? Pause before reacting/ cursing. Take a breath, and ask yourself, "What would the kind version of me do in this moment?"

**Step 4: Don't Just Be Nice—Notice People**

Being kind isn't only about what you do—it's also about how well you see others.

- Notice the quiet person in the room.
- Recognize the effort someone put into something.

- Acknowledge someone's feelings or point of view.

When people feel seen, they feel valued. And when people feel valued, they respond in kind. This deeper level of niceness builds empathy and emotional intelligence—both essential for strong relationships.

**Step 5: Be Nice to Yourself, Too**

You can't pour from an empty cup. In other words, Treat yourself first. Self-kindness isn't selfish—it's essential. Talk to yourself with the same gentleness and encouragement you'd offer a friend. Forgive your mistakes. Rest when you need it. Give yourself space to grow.

The way you treat yourself sets the tone for how you treat others. A well-developed "Be Nice Muscle" includes kindness turned inward.

**Step 6: Make It a Daily Habit**

Like any good workout, consistency is key. Try building a kindness ritual into your daily routine:

- In the morning, set an intention: "Today I will find one opportunity to make someone's day better."
- Keep a kindness journal: Write down something kind you did or experienced each day.

- Use tech for good: Send uplifting texts or voice notes to people just because.

Think of it like brushing your teeth. Small, regular habits prevent decay—in your relationships and your mindset.

**Final Thoughts: Being Nice Is a Legacy**

The world can be harsh, chaotic, and divisive. But your decision to be kind, day in and day out, is a quiet rebellion against that noise. It's a statement of values. It's a way of being that inspires, comforts, and uplifts.

You may not always see the impact of your actions. But kindness has a way of echoing far beyond the moment. One smile, one kind word, one patient response—these can change someone's entire day. And enough changed days can change a life.

So flex those "Be Nice Muscles." Train them daily. Use them generously. Because the strongest people aren't always the loudest or the toughest—they're the ones who are kind, even when they don't have to be.

And that kind of strength? That's the stuff real change is made of.

So try building your BE NICE MUSCLES; it's the only muscle that everyone can build regardless of age, health, and you don't need a gym membership.





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