

SWFL CHRONICLE

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Dear Seasoned/Senior *Lovers*

“Kathy Smith embodies what it means to be a public servant in the truest sense.”

story page 26



Collier County Commissioners' 10 Commandment Vote Makes History

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“The arts have the power to entertain, challenge, enlighten, and invigorate both the mind and body. Yet the disparity in access to these enriching experiences continues to grow.” Sonya McCarter

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Bridging the Gap Center for the Arts Launches Southwest Florida's Premier Creative Hub for BIPOC Artists

Bridging the Gap Center for the Arts (BTG ARTS) is proud to announce its launch and vision to become Southwest Florida's premier creative arts center dedicated to empowering BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) artists. Our center offers a space where creative arts—through performance, education, place-making, storytelling, and community connectivity—serve as catalysts for social and systemic change.

We are proud to introduce our signature offering, the Joe and Benita North Creative Community Program, an eight-week creative journey providing theatre and visual arts education being held at Riverside Community Center in Fort Myers. These beginner courses offer a fun and supportive introduction to both acting and painting. In the acting portion, students will explore stage movement, voice and diction, improvisation, and character development through games and scene work, building confidence, memorization skills, and stage presence—all leading up to a performance for family and friends. Meanwhile, the painting course guides students through the basics of mixing colors, brush techniques, and developing a personal creative style, with each week building on the last. The course concludes with an art exhibit to celebrate and showcase everyone's work.

Step into the spotlight with our Adult Acting Class, guided by the visionary Founder, Sonya McCarter. Young performers can find their voice in the Youth Acting Class, led by the dynamic Nikia Cavanaugh of the acclaimed Ya-Ya Club. Meanwhile, creativity takes center stage in our Visual Arts Classes, led by the talented Cheyanne Lewis, a fresh and inspired graduate of FGCU.

Registration is now open, with classes beginning on September 6, 2025. Visit www.btgart.org to register.

WHAT WE AIM TO DO At BTG Art, we are deeply committed to bridging the systemic, cultural, and opportunity gaps that have persisted for ages in the arts. Our mission emphasizes building connections—across generations, communities, and between artistic excellence and social relevance.

FROM THE FOUNDER:

"The arts have the power to entertain, challenge, enlighten, and invigorate both the mind and body. Yet the disparity in access to these enriching experiences continues to grow."

For the past seven years, I have dedicated myself to bridging the gap in arts education and opportunities for artists of color in Southwest Florida. I firmly believe that our communities are brimming with talented professionals and aspiring artists of color who simply need a dedicated creative space to develop their skills and showcase their work. By partnering with Bridging the Gap Center for the Arts, you can play a crucial role in engaging our community through various forms of expression—including Theater, Dance, Visual Arts, Film, and Playwriting. We are thrilled to embark on this new journey and invite you to join us in providing a platform for marginalized voices to share their creativity, celebrate their culture, and explore the universal connections that unite us all." Join us in shaping a more inclusive creative future. **Visit www.btgart.com to register for classes, donate, or learn how to support artists of color in Southwest Florida.**

ABOUT BRIDGING THE GAP CENTER FOR THE ARTS:

Bridging the Gap Center for the Arts is a new nonprofit creative arts center in Southwest Florida dedicated to providing imaginative, innovative, and equitable opportunities for BIPOC artists. Through performance, storytelling, education, and community engagement, BTG Art empowers marginalized voices to drive social change and foster cultural dialogue, place-making, and artistic excellence.



Top left: Sonya McCarter, visionary Founder; top right: Joe and Benita North; bottom right: Nikia Cavanaugh, Ya-Ya Club; Cheyanne Lewis, inspired graduate of FGCU.



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As we begin this new Council session, I've had time to reflect on everything we've been through together: the storms, the setbacks, and all the challenges we've had to face as a city. And what stands out to me the most is this: Naples shows up for Naples. We listen, we adapt, and we keep pushing forward together.

That's why I am proud to say that the State of the City is RESILIENT.

We've stood strong together to make tough decisions while keeping the values of this city intact through every setback and challenge. That's what resilience looks like.

I want to take a moment to thank the people whose leadership and partnership have made our progress possible:

To our new City Manager Gary Young, and our new City Attorney, Matthew McConnell – thank you for stepping into these critical roles and bringing your expertise and advisement to Council. Thank you to City Clerk Patricia Rambosk for your continued service and diligence.

To our dedicated Council Members: Councilwomen Petrunoff, Councilwomen Penniman, Councilman Kramer, Councilman Christman, Councilman Barton, and Vice Mayor Hutchinson, I appreciate your continued dedication to our community.

To all the residents who volunteer their time to serve on our city boards and committees - thank you, your work is essential and delivers results for our community.

But most importantly, thank you to the residents of Naples, your

voices matter and your priorities are what drive the work we're here to do this session.

We're entering this session with clarity: Naples is growing, our region is changing, and we're called to lead with focus. But at the core of that is cutting through the red tape.

I am committed to continuing to take a hard look at our boards and permitting processes. Right now, residents, developers, and staff alike are frustrated, and not because of the rules themselves, but because the system feels slow and inefficient. And they're right. The process must work for the people it serves.

This session, I am committed to working with the City Manager, Staff, and Council on analyzing our permitting processes so that it saves time and money and removes unnecessary barriers. We will minimize steps. We will evaluate our interpretations. And we will push back against any bureaucracy that favors complexity over common sense and disregards public interest.

That starts with us BUT it does not end here.

Because more and more often, we're seeing decisions that come from Tallahassee and Washington, that are overstepping their place.

We are seeing egregious overreach. It is not the role of the state or federal government to dictate how Naples manages its growth, its safety, or its identity.

I will continue to advocate for and defend Home Rule because we know what works for our community. Naples should never be forced into a one-size-fits-all model of governance that ignores our history, our charm, or our future.

We've called on state leaders to take a hard look at what's burdensome and what's not, but have yet to hear back from them. Whether it's FEMA-level development requirements or preemption laws that threaten our ability to protect against flooding, our safety and resilience must come first.

Infrastructure is at the heart of that. Next November, we will ask our residents to consider a \$120 million ballot referendum or an increase in storm water fees—the largest infrastructure investment in our city's history. These funds will repair seawalls,

The State of the City *continued*

But most importantly, thank you to the residents of Naples, your voices matter and your priorities are what drive the work we're here to do this session.

update stormwater systems, restore streets, and protect our coastlines.

We've already begun:

- The beach ends damaged by Hurricanes Ian and Milton are being repaired.
- Outfalls are under reconstruction.
- And we are moving aggressively to ensure that Naples is ready not only for the next storm, but for the next generation.

NCH broke ground on the Schulze Family Heart and Stroke facility and the city ended the use of fluoride in the water system.

Our dedication to change reflects our broader commitment to listening to residents and making decisions that reflect their values.

But we can't do this alone.

We must work closely with Collier County and the state of Florida—especially when it comes to cleaning up our lakes, strengthening our environmental protections, and making sure Naples doesn't carry the weight of the watershed alone. Our residents pay both city and county taxes, and they deserve a government that listens to them and distributes funding more equitably.

We're also evaluating the impact of major events on neighborhoods, traffic, and quality of life with seasonal tourism surges. We're actively balancing the need for celebration with the need for calm, community-centered planning.

We've also raised public safety wages to remain competitive and attract the best to serve our community.

We're proud to have a thriving cultural economy, from the newly open Gulfshore Playhouse to the incredible renovations that were recently completed just across the street at The Naples Players, and the former Von Liebig Center transformation into the Naples Art Institute. These institutions are not only pillars of the arts, but they are drivers of small business and contribute to our economic engine.

And while we protect our neighborhood charm, we will also invest in our vibrancy.

This is what balanced leadership looks like. Fiscal stewardship. Community-first policies. Smart investments in people, infrastructure, and protection.

Naples remains strong because we know who we are, and we refuse to let outside forces redefine us.

We've made great strides this past year, but we still have more work ahead. And I look forward to working with each of you as we continue to lead with focus and integrity and deliver results for our residents.

May God Bless the City of Naples and Let's Get Back to Work.



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THE BARGAIN BASKET THRIFT SHOP

I N M A R C O I S L A N D



Bargain Basket floor manager Jackie Weiner, operations manager Bill Johenning, and shift leader Frida Hernandez stand on the newly purchased lot. The Bargain Basket is in the background. By Scott Shook

Unlocking High-End Treasures: The Bargain Basket Thrift Shop

The Bargain Basket Thrift Shop is a haven for who seek high-end products without breaking the bank. Established in 1975, it has flourished as the largest thrift store on Marco Island, upheld by a dedicated team of volunteers and the unwavering support from its patrons.

At first glance, one might mistake **The Bargain Basket** for just another thrift store, but it is so much more than that. Beyond the shelves lined with an eclectic mix of items, from clothing and jewelry to housewares and electronics, lies a **commitment to making a difference**. Operated as a ministry arm of the United Church of Marco Island, **The Bargain Basket** isn't just about commerce; it's about community empowerment. With each purchase made, patrons directly contribute to local missions and organizations in need, thus transforming shopping into an act of service.

What sets **The Bargain Basket** apart from other thrift stores is its unwavering dedication to quality. Here, the term "thrift" transcends its traditional connotations, as the store curates a selection of both new and gently used items that rival those found in high-end boutiques. Whether you're in search of designer clothing, exquisite jewelry, or upscale housewares, you'll find it all at **The Bargain Basket**, meticulously sorted and priced to fit every budget. The thrill of discovery awaits within its aisles, where treasures abound and every purchase holds the promise of both luxury

and value.

Yet, the true magic of **The Bargain Basket** lies not just in its offerings but in its people. Behind the scenes, a team of more than 230 volunteers works tirelessly to ensure the store's success, infusing it with warmth, passion, and a sense of community. These volunteers are the lifeblood of **The Bargain Basket**, embodying its ethos of service and compassion. Whether assisting customers, organizing donations, or spreading the word about the store's mission, they are the driving force behind its continued success.

The majority of the volunteers refer to the Bargain Basket as their "Happy Place", one big happy family. Whenever volunteers return from vacation, they say what a wonderful time they have had but missed their BB family and are happy to be back. We feel very blessed to have such a supportive group of volunteers, church members and staff here at the Basket. Obviously, in life we have our ups and downs, not only ill health but also losing partners and loved ones, then on the flip side we can celebrate new births, milestone birthdays and accomplishments of each other's family members.

It truly is "Our Happy Place". Jackie Weiner

For those who seek to make a difference beyond the shopping experience, join **The Bargain Basket** volunteer family. With a diverse array of departments and positions available, there's a role to suit every personality and schedule. Whether you're drawn to customer service, merchandising, or community outreach, volunteering at **The Bargain Basket** is not just an opportunity to give back, but a chance to forge meaningful connections and make a tangible impact on



the lives of others. Plus, volunteers enjoy a range of perks, from exclusive discounts to the satisfaction of knowing they're part of something truly special.

In addition to volunteering, patrons can further support **The Bargain Basket's** mission by donating new and used items during operating hours. From 9 am to 3 pm, Monday through Saturday, the store graciously accepts donations, ranging from clothing and accessories to household goods and electronics. However, to ensure the safety and integrity of donated items, patrons are kindly asked to refrain from leaving donations outside the store, thereby mitigating the risk of theft, damage, or fines. Whether you're in search of your next great find or looking for a way to give back, look no further than **The Bargain Basket** – where every purchase serves a greater purpose.

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CHARLOTTE COUNTY RABIES ALERT

Charlotte County Animal Control, in coordination with the Florida Department of Health in Charlotte County, has issued a 30-day rabies alert following confirmation that a raccoon in the Washington Loop Rd/Trails End Drive area of Punta Gorda tested positive for rabies.

ALERT AREA BOUNDARIES

East: Hidden Valley Circle, Ridgeland Court, Trails End Drive, Palm Hammock Court, and all areas extending one mile east of Trails End Drive/Washington Loop Road.

West: Grayfox Road and surrounding agricultural areas, including all locations within one mile west of Trails End Drive/Washington Loop Road.

North: Sunset Road, Serene Boulevard, and portions of Washington Loop Road, extending one mile north of Trails End Drive/Washington Loop Road.

South: Bronco Road, the Shell Creek Park community, and Hathaway Park, covering all areas within one mile south of Trails End Drive/Washington Loop Road.

This alert serves as a reminder that rabies is present in the wild animal population and poses a risk to unvaccinated domestic animals. While this alert is specific to the identified area, rabies can occur anywhere in Charlotte County, and caution is advised countywide.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

1. Ensure all domestic pets are vaccinated against rabies and vaccinations remain current.
2. Avoid contact with wildlife, particularly raccoons, bats, foxes, skunks, otters, bobcats, and coyotes.
3. Do not feed or attract wild animals by leaving pet food outdoors or unsecured trash.
4. Never adopt, handle, or attempt to rescue wild animals, even if they appear friendly or injured.
5. Secure homes and buildings to prevent bats from entering.
6. Report animal bites or scratches immediately to Charlotte County Animal Control at 941-833-5690 or the Florida Department of Health in Charlotte County at 941-624-7200.

If your pet is bitten or exposed to a wild animal, seek veterinary care immediately and contact Animal Control at 941-833-5690.

Report stray or suspicious animals to Animal Control for removal.

Rabies is a fatal but preventable disease. Prompt action, vigilance, and responsible pet ownership are key to protecting families, pets, and the community.

For more information, visit the Florida Department of Health in Charlotte County website or contact Charlotte County Animal Control at 941-833-5690.

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FORGIVING *Love* PART III

BY LISA ESWAY

Sometimes it's not about what you need to add to my life it's about something that I need to remember. You are a teacher that knows how to get through to me. You will never run out of what I need more of. Sometimes I need to remember again what it is that I've ALREADY been given. It's good to stand in a situation not knowing what you're going to do next ... if I already have you... then I have everything. Sometimes I get so frustrated with my own inconsistency. But I don't want to anymore, keep letting the ones I love down. But really this time? Sometimes I feel weak and limited but what is inside my own heart seems much bigger than what is around me. Following my feelings has always led me to the wrong places. I will recognize that it is your voice leading me and not what I feel. I realize the potential of this moment. Radiating through me. Even when you're trying to convince me to do something difficult whispering to me just how capable that I am. Assuring me I've got what it takes. Seems too good to be true. I have tasted and I have seen. So soon nothing will be missing , nothing will be broken, all things will be made new. Even though even though I messed up big along the way. It is just that sometimes I think the life I once had available to me isn't for me anymore. It will be better. Better. Than ever before. And those are the hardest kinds of setbacks to overcome. The ones we create ourselves. It's not over. You can still use me despite of my failures. You will use my faover.s. How beautiful that this is. I will always suffer negative consequences from my own destructive choices. As you continue to heal my heart through all of this is a miracle. I will remember my first love. I will not do the things that I used to do. I have changed my mind. Nothing I've ever done will make you turn from me. You love me through it all. I'm not useless. Quite the opposite. There is a good chance that one day you will use me to help put other people's hearts back together. Especially when they find themselves in one of my old situations. I will not run around the things that I've done wrong. I will not hide them. I will not deny them. And I certainly won't crumble under the weight of them. Remember pain only lasts for a moment. Maybe someone else let you down? Maybe something came up from behind took everything you know? Something unexpected? That's what happened to me. When these things happen it is easy to lose your way. Every time there has been a significant opportunity in my life it has come out of my mess. Instead of taking away the trouble that



I found myself in it has been used to develop my strength by working through and walking through them. Quite honestly the story of my life so far has been greatly interesting. If I didn't have anything to overcome I wouldn't need to seek you, God. I need you so badly to keep me full... not just full but to overflowing. So this this is the reason. There is purpose.

And I will never give up. Never. Even if things never go my way. Only you know what I am going through. How about you? Are you facing a decision that will affect the rest of your life? Sometimes that feels like exactly where I am. If I actually do this thing right I have the ability to change the direction of my life. Do I actually deserve any of it? You say to call those things that are not as though they are... so here I am. Maybe the desire of my heart is something I will see one day. That is the way you designed it to be. When I reach the place where I think I have done all that I can do I will release the rest to you. I will no longer feed empty. If there is nothing to see, the answer just might be me. And sometimes I have to close my eyes to see it ... to see those invisible answers I need in my life. The pieces have begun to be put back together, I mean every word of it. So herein lies another new opportunity. You will deliver on every promise you've ever made. And there is the payoff. But how about all the stuff in the middle? Was it worth it? That is the process it took. And the process is the point. Without the process there's no progress and this puts it all into focus. It redirects my attention from right now to what will be. One day. And now I have the potential in the little things. I will keep my dreams insight and it turns out there is something there. I'm holding on. You brought me here to save me again. A full rescue I'm not quite sure what's coming over me but this experience continues to change me. You have gotten a hold of my life. My mountain has been moved. Because when I am in you... I feel alive. I fully realize this now this is the time of strengthening this is where I grow and that... that is why I sit here. And deep deep down I know that. Even when I walk through seasons of darkness. The process will change the way I see everything ... the way you will see everything. Dream for things that lie beyond your ability. I know what I believe and why I believe it. And my passion is sincere. Through the deep part of my heart this is how It feels to share my pain my joy and my brokenness and my healing... this is how it feels. I was made for depth.

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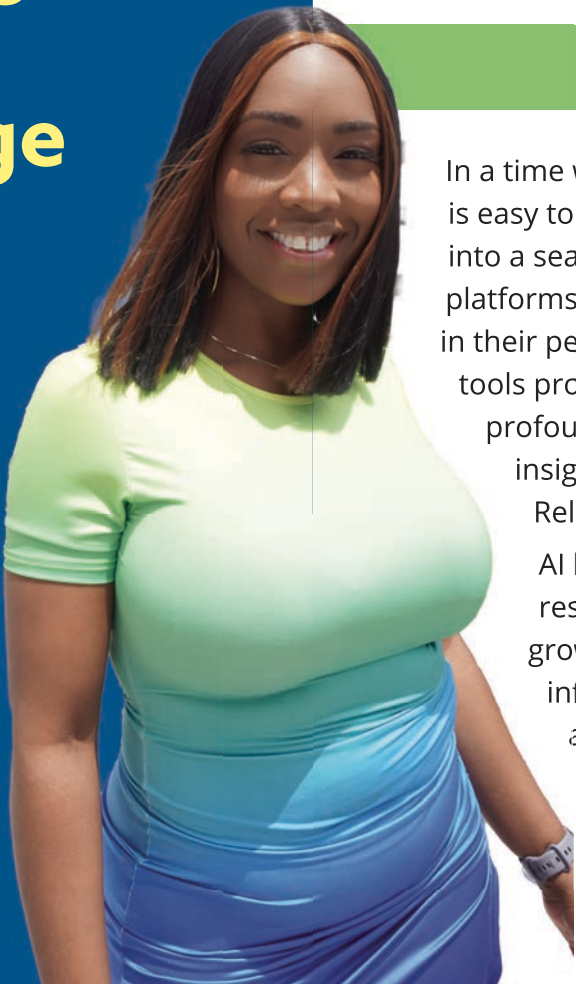
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Why Human Coaching Still Matters in the Age of AI:

5 Benefits You Can't Replace



by Lauraine Giannetta, MPA

In a time when artificial intelligence (AI) is woven into daily life, it is easy to rely on technology for answers. From typing questions into a search engine to engaging in conversations with AI-driven platforms, many people now turn first to technology for guidance in their personal and professional lives. While these digital tools provide convenience and speed, they cannot replace the profound advantages of human connection, accountability, and insight that come from working with a professional Life & Relationship Coach.

AI has its place: it can deliver quick suggestions, summarize research, or even help organize thoughts. However, personal growth and meaningful change require more than rapid information delivery. They demand context, compassion, and customized strategies that are sensitive to the human condition. These are qualities best cultivated in partnership with a real coach. Below are five distinct benefits that highlight why human coaching remains essential, especially in the realm of life and relationships.

ONE



HUMAN CONNECTION THAT RESONATES

Artificial intelligence can simulate conversation and provide thoughtful responses, but it cannot replicate the power of genuine empathy. Coaches are not only trained to listen but also to hear and pick up on the subtleties in tone, body language, and emotion that reveal what words alone cannot. For individuals navigating relationship struggles or seeking personal growth, this depth of understanding can be transformative. It is one thing to receive advice, but it is another to feel acknowledged and validated by a human being who can relate to the complexities of lived experience. The sense of being seen, heard, and understood builds trust, which is a cornerstone of any coaching relationship.

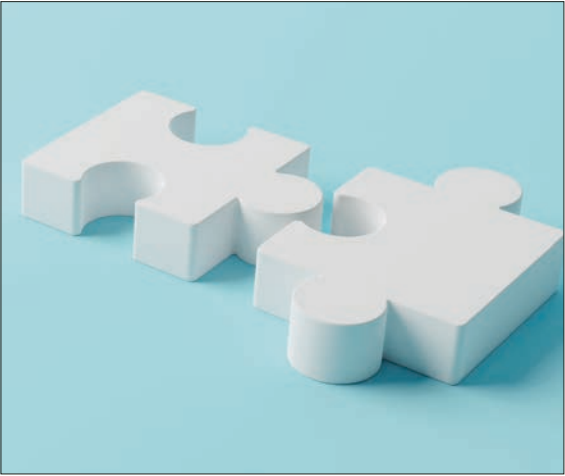
TWO



ACCOUNTABILITY THAT DRIVES RESULTS

Advice alone, whether it comes from a book, a podcast, or an AI tool, rarely translates into long-term change. The missing link is accountability. Coaches provide a structured partnership that encourages clients to move beyond intention into action. This accountability goes far deeper than reminders or checklists. A coach helps clients set realistic, meaningful goals and then follows up to ensure progress is made. This process of regular evaluation, encouragement, and constructive challenge transforms abstract advice into tangible results. The power of having someone invested in your success cannot be overstated because it creates the momentum needed to sustain growth.

THREE



STRATEGIES TAILORED TO THE INDIVIDUAL

Life and relationships are nuanced. A one-size-fits-all approach often falls short because every person brings a unique blend of personality, background, values, and challenges. While AI can provide general advice, a coach goes further by identifying personal patterns, uncovering blind spots, and highlighting strengths. This tailored approach means strategies are not only more effective but also more sustainable. For example, two clients struggling with communication in relationships may need completely different solutions; one may need to address unspoken fears, while another may need practical tools for managing conflict. A coach has the ability to discern these differences and respond accordingly.

FOUR



4. EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IN DIFFICULT SEASONS

Beyond strategies and goals, there is an emotional component to coaching that AI cannot replicate. Human beings experience disappointment, heartbreak, loss, and uncertainty, and in those moments, having someone who can offer both compassion and encouragement is invaluable.

A coach is not merely a sounding board; they are a steady presence who can help clients navigate emotions constructively. This support allows individuals to process experiences in a healthy way rather than feeling isolated or overwhelmed. The reassurance of a human presence, having someone willing to walk with you through the highs and lows, offers comfort technology cannot provide.

FIVE



5. GUIDANCE ROOTED IN WISDOM AND EXPERIENCE

Artificial intelligence generates responses based on data, algorithms, and probability. While this information can be helpful, it lacks the lived experience that shapes human wisdom. Coaches bring with them not only training but also personal and professional journeys that inform their approach.

This lived wisdom allows a coach to recognize nuances and subtleties that AI cannot detect. They can say, "I've seen this before" or "I've walked through something similar," offering guidance rooted in both expertise and human experience. This combination of knowledge and relatability provides a level of mentorship and modeling that enriches the coaching process.

THE ROLE OF COACHING IN A DIGITAL AGE

It is important to acknowledge that AI is not an adversary to coaching but a complement. Technology can provide useful tools and quick insights, but it is not equipped to cultivate deep transformation. Human coaching offers what algorithms cannot: compassion, accountability, individualized strategies, emotional presence, and wisdom.

Organizations such as Lō & Behold LLC demonstrate this distinction clearly. Their coaching philosophy emphasizes helping individuals recognize patterns of self-sabotage, align with their values, and build healthier relationships. Rather than viewing AI as competition, they see it as a starting point and a resource for inspiration, while the real transformation happens in the human-to-human relationship between coach and client.

THE HUMAN TOUCH REMAINS IRREPLACEABLE

In a world where digital solutions dominate, people still crave connection, encouragement, and authentic guidance. Human coaching provides not only direction but also the supportive partnership needed to achieve lasting change. It bridges the gap between knowing what to do and actually doing it which is something no app or algorithm can fully provide.

For anyone ready to move beyond quick answers and embrace meaningful growth, engaging with a Life & Relationship Coach may be the most impactful step forward. After all, transformation is not just about information; it is about connection, accountability, and the wisdom of shared human experience.



Lauraine Giannetta is the CEO of Lō & Behold LLC. She is a certified life and relationship coach with over 15 years of experience. Originally from Brooklyn, New York, her father's military experience and her mother's property management background facilitated a lot of traveling growing up. After stabilizing in Florida, she attained her Masters in Public Administration from Florida International University in Miami, FL and her Bachelor of Science in Public Relations from the University of Florida in Gainesville, FL. She resides in South Florida with her husband and blended family. For more information, visit justloandbehold.com.

A Bright Future Begins with NNN High School

There is no better sign of growth and progress than the opening of a new high school—and in August 2027, the East Zone will proudly welcome NNN High School, a state-of-the-art campus built to meet the educational and community needs of today and tomorrow.

With a planned capacity of 2,000 students, NNN High School will significantly relieve overcrowding in our existing East Zone schools, ensuring every student has room to thrive. But NNN is more than just a solution to a numbers problem—it’s a vision of what 21st-century education can and should be.

This campus will be home to innovative career and technical programs, including the region’s first high school agricultural program focused on AI and modern technology, paired with traditional 4H and FFA offerings. This blend of new and old reflects the future of farming—high-tech, sustainable, and smart—and gives our students a head start in one of Florida’s most vital industries.

The school will also offer a robust JROTC program, dedicated to cultivating discipline, leadership, and service among students. For our hardworking teachers and staff, on-site childcare is a thoughtful addition that reflects a district truly investing in its people.

The school will also meet an important community need by serving as a hurricane shelter. State law requires all new schools, unless located in an evacuation zone, to be built so that at least 50% of the facility can be used for shelter purposes.

Infrastructure is being carefully planned, with public water and sewer access and traffic flow improvements, including new left and right turn lanes on Joel Boulevard and a large snaking parent drop-off and pick-up lane designed to reduce congestion and increase safety.

NNN High School will also feature a full slate of athletic opportunities, including football, basketball, baseball, softball, volleyball, and several other sports. These programs won’t just benefit student-athletes—they’ll become a source of pride for students, parents, staff, and the entire community, bringing everyone together to support and cheer on their team.

Just as the Alva K-8 School has long been a cornerstone of this close-knit community, NNN will become a place where traditions are born, leaders are developed, and pride runs deep. A naming committee will soon be formed, with names like Alva High School and Ruby Daniels High School—a nod to the beloved teacher and founder of Alva Inc.—already in public discussion. A new mascot and school colors will follow, giving students a chance to build their own legacy from day one.

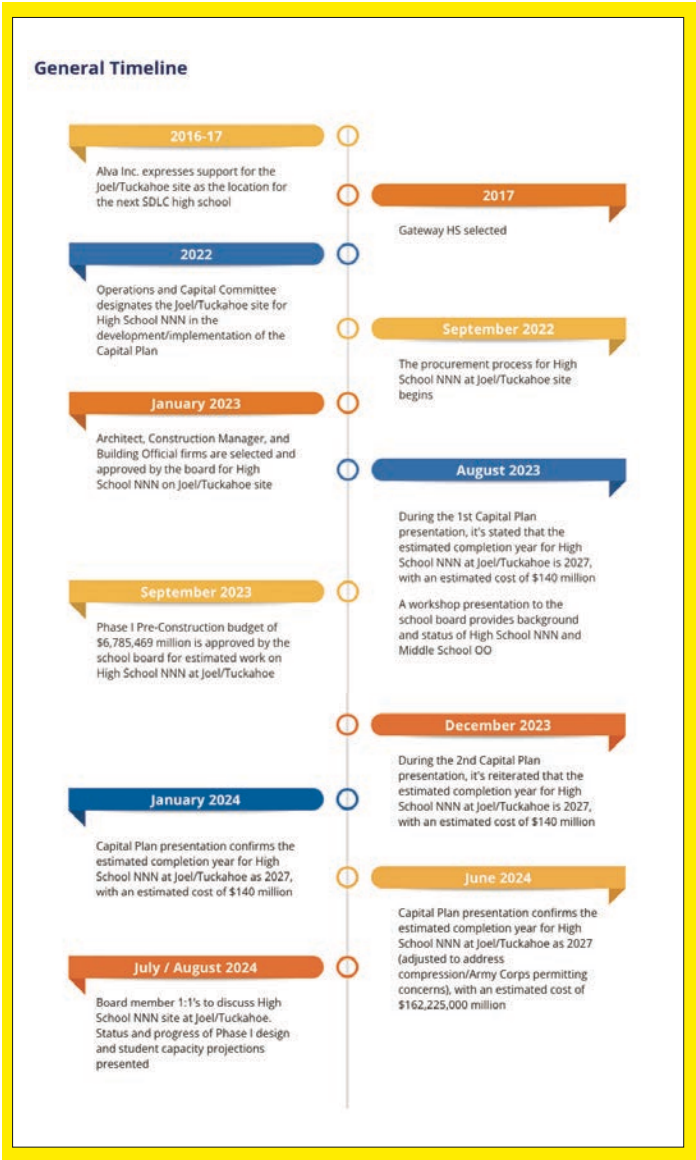
As someone deeply committed to our schools, I am proud to see this long-awaited project coming to life. NNN High School will be more than a building—it will be a hub of learning, leadership, opportunity, and community spirit.

I can’t wait to welcome its first class in 2027 and see the incredible things our students will accomplish on the field, in the classroom, and in life.

This is a win for the East Zone.

This is a win for Alva.

This is a win for our future.



The content and any opinions expressed in this article are solely the author’s and do not necessarily reflect the facts, opinions, and beliefs of the Lee County School Board or its affiliates.

More information about High School NNN can be found at:
www.leeschools.net/our_schools/high_school_nnn



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PROMISES KEPT!**

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You are cordially invited to join us Wednesday,
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If you are unable to attend and would like to make a donation, checks for \$1000 or less, make payable to the Michael Thompson Campaign. Checks for more than \$1000, make payable to The Friends of Michael Thompson. Please mail your donations to: P.O. Box 20252, St. Petersburg, FL 33742. For more information or to make a donation online, please visit www.VoteMichaelThompson.com or email Info@VoteMichaelThompson.com

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*Joe North has been helping clients with
injury cases and death cases for more than 30 years.*

TheNorthLawFirm.com
5220 Summerlin Commons Blvd., Suite 300
Fort Myers, Florida 33907

Attorney Joe North

Hiring a good personal injury attorney is crucial for several reasons:

- 1 EXPERTISE IN PERSONAL INJURY LAW:** Personal injury law can be complex, and having an attorney who specializes in this area ensures that you have someone who understands the nuances of these cases. This includes knowledge of statutes of limitations, liability laws, and the specifics of what victims are entitled to in terms of compensation.
- 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.

BY MCKINLEY G. WILLIAMS

ARIAS LAW FIRM, P.A.

VICTOR M. ARIAS, ESQ.

ATTORNEY & COUNSELOR AT LAW



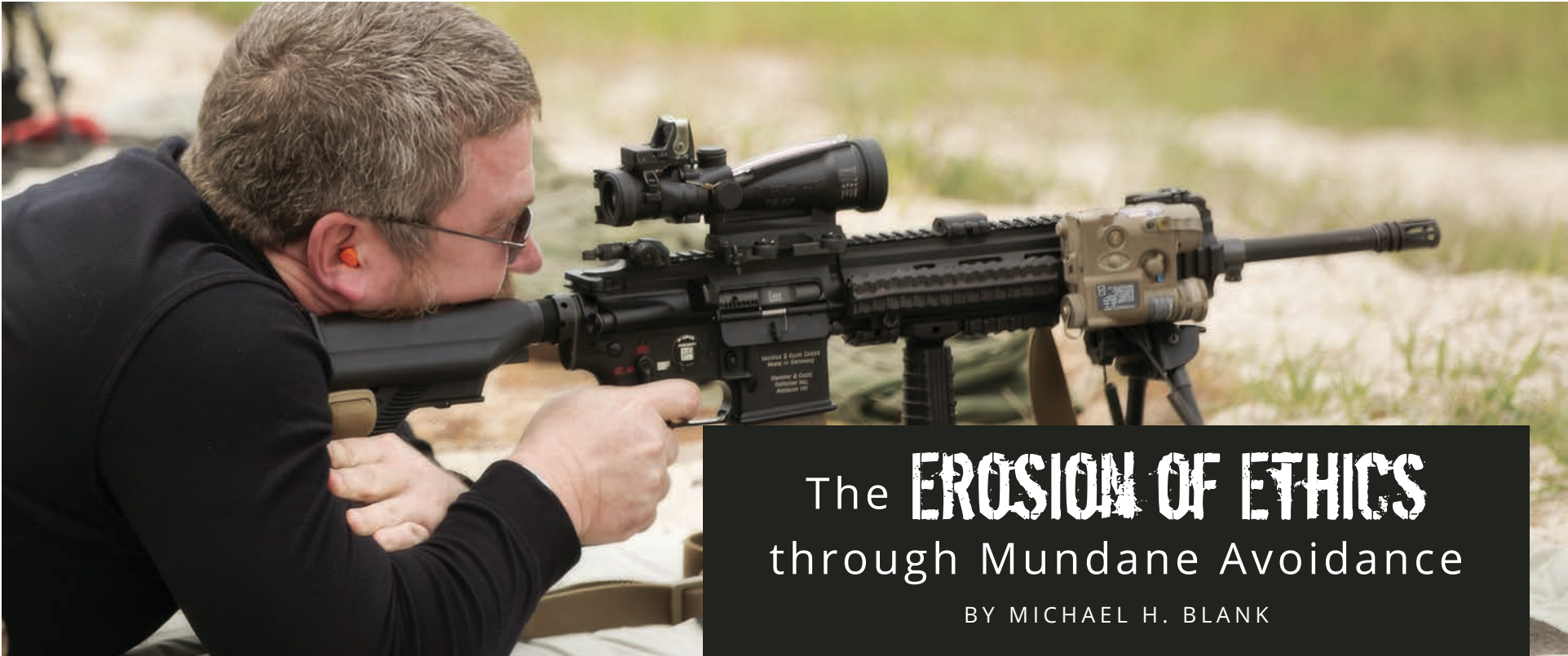
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I've been working through several possible topics for this column. I have one on the practices of credit card companies that seem to be catching the attention of both sides of the aisle in Washington.

I have others on the current state of affairs in Washington, but I've decided to take a stab at the root cause of a lot of the problems we face in society today. Sadly, it isn't the politicians in Washington, nor the CEO's running companies with dubious ethical practices, nor even those running credit companies with policies designed to compound financial issues until they cause the crisis they claim to be trying to avoid. No, dear reader, it is, unfortunately, you and I.

Be it by blind action, carelessly done, or by inaction when acting carries risk to us, or perhaps the worst of all passive acquiescence when we know what is going on around us is wrong, but it is easier not to make an issue out of it. Is it merely physics that keeps us at rest, or fear, or apathy, or financial reward targeted to keep us as confederates of these issues we generally claim to abhor as a society.

I will avoid the internet quotes on this phenomenon, partially because as with many things' internet, the quotes appear to be incorrectly attributed, but also because they fall short. They all stem from a time when it was easier to be ignorant. Now, we have all the information we need at our fingertips, or if not there, just a terminal away, available freely or nearly, at your local library. Today, we have not even the benefit of a layer of forest like the residence of Landsberg, Germany to hide the sins being committed around us. It is piped into us via news apps, X, cable, radio, and so many other formats we'd run out of paper before the list concluded. This is why it isn't sufficient to say we are guilty only of inaction, because with all of it being fed to us, we've obtained a collective state of **ACTIVE AVOIDANCE**. In some cases, this may manifest itself as collective action of the least burden and efficacy.

What do I mean by that? Things like protests that make you feel good about attending, ease your conscience, and enable you to go right back into the passive assistance in the issues as a whole. Perhaps you are feeling that I am a being a bit cynical here, but I think the latest craze, the "No Kings" protest is an ideal example. It is funded by a Walmart Heiress primarily, it seems, for having their cheap source of goods (and profit margins) threatened by the current administration. Sure, the theme resonates, might even have a peppering of truth to it. While they might not be ethical, they sure aren't stupid. They know you won't show up to the "Protect Walmart Profits Margins" march, no matter how well poetically that might read. I'm not condemning anyone who went, but in the end, what

was the real point, rather than to keep us at each other's throats and to continue to be pawns on someone else's chessboard? Did it effect policy? If it did, did it help anyone of your fellow members of this great Republic? Did it lead to more jobs? Or just higher profit margins for an heiress?

This is the **MUNDANE AVOIDANCE THAT LEADS TO THE ACQUIESCENCE TO EVIL** that I am talking about. How many of us have decided to "let it go" when we see something bad happening? How many of us have given up after even a significant effort to address a wrongful situation? How many of us may have been the recipients of someone else reaching out to address a wrong, that we, knowing the amount of work and that potential for a negative impact in our lives, shelved this attempt effectively shutting it down? Maybe you work at a call center, or in a compliance department, or human resources and you are reading this right now actively trying not to remember. I don't really blame you. I have tried to be one of the ones taking effective and prolonged action and I can tell you from my results, I find it a hard thing to advocate for as even our own legal system almost argues for allowing such things to continue in the noble names of **"COMPROMISE" AND "REASONABLENESS"**.

This is truly the insipid nature of the evil we face in the modern world. It was one thing when it was a dark army in a field or a social movement with clear and unsettling goals, but now it is more like a slightly tinted syrup that flows around all of us. The change in the light is almost imperceptible day to day, likewise with the viscosity, until one day we are shocked awake by something only to realize we can no longer distinguish day from night looking at the sky and that we are so firmly cemented in place, movement seems impossible.

I wish I could tell you that there is some frequency you can play on your radio that will shatter that hardened epoxy and set you free and clear, but no such solution exists to my knowledge. We are forced to first **LOOK AT OURSELVES** and the reality of the situation we are in and at our own actions. We got into this situation slowly, so we must extricate ourselves in a similar manner. Next time someone reaches out with letters showing fraud, follow up. Listen to the exasperated client and see if his accusations hold some truth. Read the full length of the submissions about product defects, not just the top line. Do what you can, where you can. **MAKE A CONSCIOUS EFFORT NOT TO BE BLIND**, not to chose comfort over righteous confrontation, but not to allow it to turn into confrontation for its own sake. If we all do just a little bit for each other, perhaps we can start to see the blue sky again. Maybe we can even start to see the tide turn and remember how good we can have it if we just treat each other with the respect we seek for ourselves. Here is to seeing each other at the breach in the wall someday.



Saint Hilary's Episcopal Church



Sunday Morning Worship:
8:00am, Contemplative Rite I | 10:00am Rite II

We are a faith community where progressive Christianity meets the tradition of common prayer, social justice, and outreach.

The mission of Saint Hilary's Church is "to make known the love and kindness of Jesus Christ to all people" within our congregation and in the wider Fort Myers community through worship, service, and compassion.

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Winter Schedule: November – April
9:00 AM Contemporary Family Service with Band
10:30 AM Traditional Service with Choir



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disciples who:
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239-936-1754

Our Beloved Dunbar Community



We must invest in ourselves. Support our businesses. Elevate our institutions. Trust our educators. Honor our elders. Empower our youth. And most of all, STAND TOGETHER.

Dunbar—is more than just a neighborhood. It is a living legacy of Black excellence, family, faith, and the kind of neighborly love that generations before us (i.e. Willie Battle, Willie Green, Gerri Ware, Veronica Shoemaker, etc.) worked tirelessly to preserve.

Today, I write to you not only with pride but with purpose.

Diana Giraldo already gave the Dunbar Community her butt to kiss when SHE VOTED NO against the McCollum Hall project even after Pastor Givens made his statement prior to her vote.

We are living in a time where the future of our community depends heavily on what we do right now. And what we must do is clear: we must support our own. We must uplift, empower, and invest in the very people and institutions that have always stood by us. This includes our local businesses, our places of worship, our educators, our youth, and the civic leaders rising among us.

Dunbar has always had the talent. We've always had the strength. What we need now is unified intention and consistent community action.

Let us begin with our local businesses—the economic lifeblood of our community. Each business in Dunbar represents more than just a product or a service. They represent dreams fulfilled, families supported, and legacy built.

TOBLER CONSTRUCTION

Tobler Construction is not just a construction company. It is a symbol of Black entrepreneurship in an industry where representation is still lacking. They don't just build structures; they build futures. When you support Tobler, you're not only investing in craftsmanship—you're helping employ local residents, mentor the next generation of tradespeople, and demonstrate that we can create from the ground up, and on our own terms. Tobler construction has been a lifeline to those needing a second chance to enter the workforce and provide for themselves and their family.



THE NORTH LAW FIRM & VICTOR ARIAS LAW FIRM

Justice in our community must be both accessible and rooted in understanding. The North Law Firm and the Victor Arias Law Firm have been providing more than legal representation—they've been providing protection, advocacy, and empowerment for people who often don't have a voice in the system. Whether it's criminal defense, civil rights, or family law, these firms ensure we aren't overlooked, unheard, or underserved. Supporting Black law firms means ensuring our stories are told and our rights defended. Joe has poured his life back into the Dunbar community through so many philanthropic ways I can't even count.

VERONICA SHOEMAKER FLORIST

Named after a legendary trailblazer—Veronica Shoemaker, Fort Myers' first Black female city council member—this florist is a living reminder that beauty and legacy can flourish together. Flowers may seem like a luxury, but in truth, this shop brings joy, comfort, and celebration to every corner of our lives—from baptisms to funerals, weddings to community events. Supporting this business honors a powerful legacy while planting new seeds of growth.



LOCAL RESTAURANTS IN DUNBAR

Our local restaurants are culinary expressions of culture, love, and resilience. Whether it’s soul food, Caribbean flavors, BBQ, or the best fried chicken in the county, these eateries are not just businesses—they are gathering places, story-sharing hubs, and job creators. Every time we choose to dine in Dunbar, we keep our dollars circulating within the community. We keep doors open. We keep young people employed. We keep tradition alive on every plate. Hell - Oxtails, fried turkey wings, collard greens, mac and cheese, candy yams, and field peas never go out of style especially if G-Mo is catering it.

DR. WILLIAM L. GLOVER: DUNBAR CHURCHES OUR SPIRITUAL AND CIVIC FOUNDATION

“ Thank GOD for Dr. Glover and his ministerial alliance of churches for holding our community together “ one lady said on a prayer line I was listening to.



No conversation about Dunbar is complete without honoring the churches and pastors who form the spiritual and civic foundation of our neighborhood. Our pastors are more than Sunday morning leaders. They are counselors, community organizers, emergency responders, role models, and trusted voices in times of crisis.

When hurricanes blow through, when a young person is taken too soon, when an elder needs food or housing or comfort, our churches respond—without fanfare and without fail.

These sacred spaces have provided food pantries, COVID testing, voter drives, mentorship programs, clothing closets, and more. If you look closely at almost every grassroots movement in Dunbar, you will find the hand of the church somewhere behind it.

But churches cannot continue to serve if we treat them as background noise. They need our active presence, our time, our tithes, and our talents. It’s not just about faith—it’s about the future.

Give FINANCIALLY into the lives of your spiritual leaders. One of the most powerful things I ever witnessed was Bishop Washington who only prayed, studied the Bible, and ministered to the congregation during service. He said McKinley “ All I do is pray for my members daily, worship in my prayer room, study my Bible in my home office, and minister the word. I don’t go to any meetings. I even know how much money is in the bank.” His congregation serves him three meals daily, manicures his lawn, cleans his house, drives him to the barber shop or doctor as needed....and every member of his congregation flourishes in life, because their spiritual leader “ does not have to entangle himself with the cares of this world.”

BLACK HISTORY, BLACK KNOWLEDGE: PROFESSOR LODOVIC KIMBLE

Education is empowerment. And in a world that still misrepresents or erases Black history, we must take our education into our own hands.

Enter Professor Lodovic Kimble—a gifted, respected, and passionate educator whose knowledge of Black history is matched only by his love for this community. We need his voice. More importantly, our children need his voice.

I urge our churches and community leaders to work with Professor Kimble to establish a



permanent Black History education series hosted at one of Dunbar’s local churches. This can be a weekly or monthly event open to the entire community—youth, elders, families, and everyone in between.

Imagine the power of our young people learning about real Black heroes, understanding the civil rights battles fought in Fort Myers, and being inspired by the richness of African and African-American contributions. Imagine them seeing themselves not as statistics, but as leaders in a lineage of excellence.

We don’t have to wait for February to celebrate who we are. Let’s make Black History a living, breathing, year-round experience—right here in Dunbar.



THE DIVINE NINE: CULTIVATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

The Divine Nine—historically Black Greek-letter organizations that make up the National Pan-Hellenic Council—have always played a critical role in shaping the leadership, service, and civic engagement of Black communities across the country.

These sororities and fraternities are filled with educators, doctors, lawyers, activists, clergy, business owners, and public servants—many of whom are already here in Dunbar or have roots in this community.

We must engage the Divine Nine in the process of mentoring, educating, and empowering our youth.

Let’s bring them into schools, churches, and community centers to:

- Host bus trips to Florida Memorial, Bethune-Cookman, Edward Waters, and FAMU
- Offer career workshops and networking events
- Provide mentorship and leadership training
- Engage in community service and civic initiatives

The children of Dunbar deserve access to the same opportunities, knowledge, and guidance that have shaped generations of successful Black professionals across the country. And who better to provide it than the Divine Nine?

When young people see what’s possible, they reach higher. When they’re mentored by people who look like them and share their struggles, they believe deeper. And when they’re given the tools to lead, they will surprise us all.

THIS MATTERS NOW MORE THAN EVER!

There are those who believe Dunbar is on the decline. That our best days are behind us. That our economic strength has faded. That our young people are too lost to be found.

To those voices, I say: You don’t know Dunbar.

Dunbar is not dying—it’s evolving. It’s still here. And it’s still ours to define.

...continued on next page

But we cannot afford to wait on outside forces to save or shape us. We must invest in ourselves. Support our businesses. Elevate our institutions. Trust our educators. Honor our elders. Empower our youth. And most of all, STAND TOGETHER.

This is a call to action:

Eat local. SHOP LOCAL. HIRE LOCAL.

Worship local. LEARN LOCAL. LEAD LOCAL.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TODAY?

Here are just a few simple, powerful actions you can take starting right now:

- Visit **Tobler Construction** and refer them for any upcoming construction or renovation projects.
- Hire the **North Law Firm or Victor Arias Law Firm** for your legal needs and recommend them to your family and friends.
- Buy your next bouquet or funeral arrangement from **Veronica Shoemaker Florist**.
- Dine at a local **Dunbar restaurant** this week, and bring a friend.
- Attend your church regularly, and ask your pastor how you can get involved in community outreach.
- Support **Professor Kimble’s** educational efforts and ask your church to host his classes.
- Connect with **Divine Nine** members and invite them to speak at your school, church, or youth group.
- **Mentor one young person**—just one. It makes a difference.

THE FUTURE IS LOCAL.
THE FUTURE IS DUNBAR.

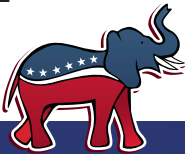
If we want our children to have pride in their community, we must show pride in it first. If we want our youth to believe in their power, we must reflect that belief in how we invest our time, energy, and money.

The blueprint is already here. We don’t have to reinvent anything. We simply need to look around, reach out, and lift up.

Let us be the generation that not only talks about community love but demonstrates it boldly—with our actions, our choices, and our unwavering commitment to one another.

Let Dunbar be known not only for its history, but for how it rose again—stronger, smarter, united, and unapologetically proud.

In strength and solidarity,
McKinley G. Williams, Publisher
The SWFL CHRONICLE





SHERIFF CARMINE MARCENO REMINDS YOU... CRYPTO CURRENCY SCAM ALERT

Cryptocurrency...a digital currency that only exists electronically...is exchanged and purchased online, through an exchange platform, without the involvement of a bank or banking entity.

There are many “brands” of cryptocurrency with the list growing daily.

Cryptocurrency has become a popular form of investment and can be used for quick payments, to avoid transaction fees that regular banks charge, or because it offers some anonymity.

Cryptocurrency accounts are not backed by our government...or any government, for that matter. Cryptocurrency accounts are not insured by the government the way that U.S. dollars are when deposited into a bank account. If you store cryptocurrency with a third-party company, and the company goes out of business or is hacked, the government has no obligation to step in and help get your money back. Should you make payment(s) using cryptocurrency, and the transaction is fraudulent, you have no legal protections.

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REFLECTIONS

OF AN EPISCOPAL PRIEST

The Very Rev. A Charles Cannon, III | Saint Hilary's Episcopal Church

RENEWAL GROWTH AND INTROSPECTION



Across the planet, September is a month rich with spiritual, cultural, and symbolic meaning as it marks transitions and transformations in both nature, religious, and personal lives. Not surprisingly, this month resonates with themes of renewal, growth, and introspection as it is seen as a period of change and preparation, bridging the golden days of summer and the quieter, cooler tones of fall.

The Christian tradition offers celebration on **September 8**, remembering the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary, **September 14** celebrates the Exaltation of the Holy Cross honoring the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified and recognizing the cross as a sacred instrument of salvation, **September 21** commemorates the Feast of St. Matthew the Apostle and Gospel writer, **September 29**: celebrates the Feast of the Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael.

As autumn begins at various times, there are differing ways to define the start of the season: **Meteorological Fall** is based on the annual temperature cycle and the 12-month calendar starting on **September 1** and lasting for about three months. **Astronomical Fall** is based on the position of the Earth relative to the Sun, and begins on the **autumnal equinox**, which this year is on **September 22 at 2:19 PM ET**.

NOTABLE SPIRITUAL EVENTS FOR MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS:

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year, which represents a time of spiritual reflection and new beginnings. It is also a period for self-examination and repentance leading up to Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement.

Diwali is a major Hindu festival known as the Festival of Lights. It symbolizes the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. It involves lighting oil lamps, bursting fireworks, and sharing sweets.

Ashura is a significant event in the Islamic calendar, commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the Grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, who died at the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE. It is always a day of mourning and reflection for many Shia Muslims.

Mabon is a pagan festival that celebrates the autumn equinox and is celebrated as a time of balance and reflection. It also marks the second harvest and is a time to give thanks for the fruits of the earth and to share them with others.

Some Christians and retail outlets anticipate Christmas in September, especially as the weather begins to cool down. September is also a time for family gatherings, gift-giving, and festive meals as Fall begins to take hold of weather patterns.

Finally, September is a transitional month seen as a metaphor for “letting go and preparing for” what is next, symbolizing the idea that all endings lead to new beginnings. These events are celebrated with various rituals and traditions, reflecting the rich spiritual heritage of each religion.

In Florida, **Sea foodie Adventures and Food Tour are offered in Key West**, the Stand-Up Paddleboard (SUP) race is held at Higgs Beach. **Art Festivals** are fun this time of year in Florida: especially in Downtown Venice during Labor Day Weekend and the Fall Arts & Crafts Show in Punta Gorda. **Music, Food, and Cultural Festivals:** highlight the diversity and vibrancy of Florida. All these activities and events make September a fantastic time to explore and enjoy the beauty and culture of Southwest Florida.

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Champion for the Most Vulnerable:

A TRIBUTE TO KATHY SMITH, PUBLIC DEFENDER

“Kathy has tireless energy, unwavering dedication, and unwavering compassion.” McKinley G. Williams



We all know everyone wants to get tough on crime and gives Amira Fox the State Attorney kudos for locking up the bad guys, but everyone should note that the defenseless need an advocate as well in the person of Kathy Smith.

Kathy Smith, the Public Defender for Florida's 20th Judicial Circuit, exemplifies the mission of public service. Her leadership touches thousands—delivering quality representation to those who cannot afford it, advocating for smarter justice approaches, and pushing tirelessly against structural and budgetary challenges. Through innovation, cost-savings, and empathy, she is a true protector of the defenseless—one whose efforts are well deserving of recognition.

The Office of the Public Defender covers a vast region: Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Hendry, and Glades Counties. In some years, the office handled over 50,000 criminal cases—ranging from minor misdemeanors to serious felonies—and served around 80 attorneys. That volume, under tight budgets, is a testament to the immense demand for public defense. And yet, Kathy Smith's office has met this demand despite facing frequent budget cuts and resource constraints. I don't know how she does it, but she always finds a way despite the revolving door of lawyers who bolt to private practices.

BUDGET REDUCTIONS—from deep legislative cuts—have eliminated staff positions and required the office to do more with less. Despite this, Kathy Smith and her team adopted a business-oriented mindset: renegotiating vendor contracts, implementing telephone deposition systems in place of costlier court reporters, and conducting in-house legal training to reduce expenses—all to preserve quality defense delivery while stretching taxpayer dollars.

Kathy Smith also embraced forward-thinking programs like drug court and mental health court—diversionary alternatives to incarceration. By treating addiction or mental illness rather than punishing it, such courts reduce recidivism, save money, and strengthen public safety: incarcerating an offender can cost about \$65 per day, while outpatient treatment is around \$2,500 annually.

Through these initiatives, Smith doesn't just defend the accused—she invests in their rehabilitation and in community well-being. The public has no idea what she does to enhance our community intrinsically and extrinsically with her innovative ways that are actually a safety net for the mentally ill.

Her leadership extends beyond the courtroom, illustrated in her civic recognition: in January 2023, she received the GEM award from the Fort Myers Republican Women's Club (symbolizing Great leadership, Excellent programs and policies, and Major contribution of time and effort). That honor reflects both her legal and community contributions.

PUBLIC DEFENSE—as with all public service—is not without

...continued on page 28



challenges. Smith's office, serving the 20th Judicial District, struggled with attorney retention due to budget constraints. While hiring attorneys cost about \$60,000–\$65,000, legislative funding only allocated \$50,000 per position, forcing Smith to draw on other parts of her budget to bridge the gap. The mismatch between actual labor costs and allocated funding placed strain on staffing—especially in higher-cost-of-living areas like Collier County, where housing expenses made salaries even more insufficient.

Despite hiring challenges and 25% turnover rates, Smith remained focused on ensuring that every person assigned a public defender receives **competent, vigorous representation**—even in a labor-short climate.

Kathy is in my opinion...**an unsung hero in Modern Justice**. Imagine this; against the backdrop of widespread funding limitations and rising demands, Kathy Smith embodies what it means to be a public servant in the truest sense: adapting to budgetary shortfalls with creative solutions, prioritizing fair treatment of the accused, investing in rehabilitation, and serving with integrity under pressure. The lives that hinge on fair representation—some at the brink of losing everything—are better because of her relentless pursuit of justice.

In times where defenders are overworked, underpaid, and overlooked, Kathy ensures no one slips through the cracks. Instead of letting budget crises define her office, she defines what is possible—when compassion meets innovation.

Four Reasons Kathy Deserves Recognition in My Opinion:

RELENTLESS ADVOCACY UNDER ADVERSITY

Despite facing significant funding cuts and staff turnover, she has shielded the constitutional right to counsel, ensuring

representation for thousands. Many Public Defenders would not be able to handle the pressure Kathy endures.

CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

From in-house training and cost-saving reforms to diversion courts and community programs, her leadership models both fiscal responsibility and humane justice.

COMMUNITY AND PEER ESTEEM

The GEM award validates that her influence goes beyond legal defense—it resonates in civic circles and among professionals committed to public welfare. More importantly, she is always approachable and down to earth.

FUTURE-DRIVEN VISION

Her commitment to raising base salaries and refocusing on retention illustrates that she fights not just for today's needs but for sustainable, just structures long-term.

Kathy Smith's contributions deserve formal recognition—be it through professional honors, community awards, or legislative commendations. She has preserved the dignity of public defense during challenging times and lifted up the vulnerable through equal access to justice. Celebrating her is not simply rewarding an individual—it underscores a principle crucial to our democracy: that every person deserves a strong, compassionate advocate, regardless of means. She definitely has done more with less. We all have needed someone to advocate for us at sometime in our lives. Kathy Smith just happens to be the advocate for people who may never see her face, but her influence and commitment to fairness has given them an angel they may never see in the person of Kathy Smith.

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THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA CHRONICLE

SEPTEMBER 2025



Cape Coral veteran earns national recognition for the American Legion Department of Florida

After a year of late nights dedicated to research, writing, and design, Elbert Zeigler, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran of the Vietnam Era and the Cold War, has achieved a remarkable milestone by winning **First Place in the 2025 American Legion National Digital History Contest and Showcase**. The judging of this prestigious contest took place during the American Legion’s National Convention from August 21–24, 2025, in Tampa, Florida.

Zeigler served as the Department Historian for the American Legion Department of Florida during the 2024–2025 term. He is a member of the American Legion Post 192 in Fort Myers.

The winning entry was a 136-page, full-color interactive digital history book that documented the Department’s activities from June 2024 to June 2025. While the Department of Florida is headquartered in Orlando, the focus currently is on Southwest Florida. Zeigler’s over three weeks of dedicated work on this project—compiling photographs, records, coverage of events, and personal accounts—resulted in a history book recognized as the best in the nation.

“My Marine Corps background has been the foundation of my work as a historian. The Corps instilled in me discipline, accuracy, and the pride of giving your very best. Every event and story called for honor, precision, and respect. That is why I approached this book with focus, commitment, and a firm determination to complete it with excellence.”

“I hope readers take away from the history book that veterans are more than dates and uniforms—we are fathers, mothers, neighbors, community leaders. The Legion’s story is America’s story, and it needs to be told with heart. This is a living record of the impact Florida’s Legionnaires made that year,” Zeigler said. “I’m proud to preserve this history, and honored they recognized it nationally. This is something to make every Florida Legionnaire proud.”



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DEAR *Beloved*

Pastor Dr. Deb Walsh | Mountain Mover & Water Walkers

If God is for you, who can be against you?

This month our children have gone back to school and I have been praying for our youth as the enemy wants them. We need to be diligent to pray for them and train them in the ways of the Lord. They are precious in the Lord's sight and we have been blessed with them in our care. The responsibility is ours and God gives us the strength and wisdom to be parents. One of the best books I have read is Dr. James Dobson, *"Dare to Discipline"*. This book is a classic parenting book that provides practical advice on how to establish boundaries and discipline in a loving and effective manner and remains a staple in parenting literature.

The key word is love. *"The Five Love Languages of Children"* by Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell is another foundational book for raising children. Let's look at some ways to implement the love languages to incorporate them into your child's day.

ACTS OF SERVICE:

Help them to prepare for the day the night before. Placing out their attire, making sure their bookbag has everything they need, and making their snacks/lunch. Everything you can do to prepare the night before will help you and them to sleep without worry. Your service to them is also a love language showing them you care about their day and success.

QUALITY TIME:

When you pick them up or meet them at home after work, put aside any household duties and make them a priority if even for five to ten minutes. Ask them about their day. Keep eye contact. Prioritize them and let them know they matter.

PHYSICAL TOUCH:

This one is easy. Pick them up and hug and kiss them. If you can't pick them up, hug and kiss them. Hold their hand when you are walking to and from your vehicle or bus

stop. Any opportunity to gently hold their back or to touch them, do it.

GIFTS:

This love language I enjoyed as I created handmade chart and bought gold stars to put in the weekly chart when they accomplished tasks. This should help them to develop good habits. Some items can be as easy as brush your teeth, make your bed, put your clothes away and etc. Also, this chart can lead to a reward. This should be determined by the parent and something that will motivate the child.

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION:

This is something that may be the most effective and will help with all the above love languages. The words of affirmation need to be authentic and from the heart. This is something that the more you do it, the better you will be at it. Children need to be praised for their good behavior and it makes them eager to continue to do more to receive your praise. Be quick to praise them! Similar to being quick to praise the Lord, praise your children quickly for the good things they have done. What you are doing is creating positive reinforcement for good behavior to guide them from behavior that is not conducive for their success.

Children are our future, blessing and inheritance from the Lord. Let this year be their best year yet. Let this help you to be the most influential person in their life. God is your strength and present help in times of need. He is your source to help you and with God, all things are possible. Find a good Bible-believing church and stay connected to the community who will help you as well. I believe in you and God is on your side. If God be for you, who can be against you?

Pastor Dr. Deb Walsh



The Voice of the Misunderstood

Understanding the barriers and stereotypes of people who may have supportive contributions, but are not always allowed to plant them due to social stigmas.

The sad truth is that people are often categorized based on their looks, gender, ethnicity, or zip code before they even show up to the game.

Why is it that people who don't look like you, follow in your group, agree with your personal opinions or beliefs, have no chance of being heard or accepted as a potential candidate, resource or positive influencer?

We ask the all too familiar question "what do you do" in efforts to size up unfamiliarity.

Are we so blind these days or self absorbing that we allow fear of the potential of others to stop us from creating opportunities for dialogue and connections with those whom we never took the time to actively collaborate with, without bias opinions?

Let's celebrate diversity and individuality by amplifying the voices of the misunderstood. Advocate by sharing information, being open to suggestions, offering resources and support for empowerment of not just ourselves but also for others.

THE INNATE CIRCLE

by Monique Wooley



Putting an end to standing in the crevices, analyzing and critiquing what could be your most valuable resource in building reliable and trustworthy relationships.

There's always something to learn from each other's experiences and perspectives if we foster a culture of compassion and acceptance without fear of judgment or rejection but rather from love and unity.

As the famous quote by Maya Angelou describes;

"All great artists draw from the same resource: the human heart, which tells us that we are all more alike than we are unlike"

You may find that the story you read has nothing to do with your assumption but for one's own experiences.

A promotional banner for Awaken Church. The top section features three black and white photos: a man with a beard, a woman holding a child, and a woman singing. Below these is a large blue section with the text 'AWAKEN CHURCH' in white. Underneath the blue section is a white section with the text 'GENEROSITY | RELEVANCE | AUTHENTICITY | COMPASSION | EXHUBERANCE'. Below that is a blue section with the text 'SERVICE TIMES | SUN 8:30AM, 10:00AM, 11:30AM' and '3990 FLAMINGO BLVD, PORT CHARLOTTE, FL 33954 | MYAWAKEN.CHURCH'. The bottom section features four black and white photos: a woman holding a sign that says 'I AM HERE TO HELP!', a woman singing, a woman with her arms raised, and a man with a beard.



7 Tips for Talking Money with the Person You Love

There's nothing more exciting than tying the knot with the person you love. Of course, there are conversations you'll want to have with your partner as you take this step. To avoid disagreements and finance-related pitfalls down the road, one of the most important ones is about money.

Here are some top tips for talking about money with the person you love:



1 ALIGN YOUR FINANCIAL GOALS.

- If your spouse's primary goal is paying for a huge vacation and yours is to maximize your contributions to your 401(k) retirement plan, conflict can result. Make sure to talk about your priorities and what sacrifices will need to be made, if any, to progress toward those goals. The key to disagreements is to work out a compromise.



2 DETERMINE YOUR 'MONEY STYLES'.

- To pave the way toward a harmonious future, have a calm conversation about your money styles. Is one of you more of a spender and the other more of a saver? Does one of you view money hyper-rationally while the other feels a great deal of emotion around financial decisions?
- The key is to understand the "why." One person may be focused on saving because he grew up in a household where money was tight, but his partner learned about money from parents who were spendthrifts. It's important to understand each other's background and emotions around money as a result. Where are your styles similar and different? How can you work together as a team?



3 FIGURE OUT HOW YOU'LL MANAGE YOUR MONEY.

- Do you plan to merge your accounts? Do you want to keep some things separate? Generally speaking, your options include remaining fully separate, merging absolutely everything, and a hybrid approach, where you both deposit a certain amount every month into a shared account based on your income.
- Whether you commingle your accounts or each party takes responsibility for different bills, you need to communicate regularly to make sure you're on the same page. Maybe that means sitting down once a year to chart your shared priorities, or checking in quarterly on your progress. The frequency is less important than both parties feeling free to raise the topic at any time.



4 DISCUSS YOUR HEALTH CARE PLANS.

- It's not fun to talk about worst-case scenarios, but your future spouse should know your wishes should you become ill or unable to make your own medical decisions. You should consider filling out a health care directive or health care proxy that states who's empowered to make medical decisions on your behalf.



5 UPDATE YOUR BENEFICIARIES.

- Designating beneficiaries for your financial accounts such as insurance policies, retirement plans and Individual Retirement Accounts (sometimes referred to as TOD or POD—transferable or payable on death) is an easy way to state your financial wishes should something happen to you. This is a valuable way to help your loved ones avoid probate court and protracted legal issues.

6

DECLARE YOUR EXISTING DEBTS.

- Whether or not you fully combine your finances, it's important to be on the same page as you work together toward shared goals. Set aside a time to discuss any preexisting debts either of you have, like student loans, mortgages, auto loans, credit card debt or any other financial obligations. It's important to talk about the impact these financial burdens may have on your budgeting or long-term plans.
- Also consider sharing your credit scores or credit reports, as your financial history could have bearing on your ability to qualify for a mortgage at a competitive rate.

7

CONSIDER A PRENUPTIAL AGREEMENT.

- Not every couple needs a prenuptial agreement (a "prenup"), but prenups can be a key way for individuals to plan for the "what ifs." This process can prevent a lot of stress in the future. Prenups may be especially relevant for those who enter a marriage with significant assets such as real estate and investment accounts, or children from a prior union.
- Prenups can be a very important financial tool, but if you're considering one, it's recommended that you're able to articulate why this matters to you, and be very empathetic to the other party. Listening to each other's perspectives can help ensure you're not hurting the relationship before you even tie the knot.

Ultimately, the love you share with your partner isn't about dollars and cents. Your main goal should be a fulfilling and happy life together. As it turns out, a little financial planning as you set off on the road together may just help you get there. With so many options to consider, a Financial Advisor can help you create a plan that's tailored to the future you both envision.

Courtesy of: Chuck West & Tiffany Massay, Financial Advisors at Morgan Stanley
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Dear Seasoned/Senior *Lovers*

DR. VERNON BROWN, THE DUNBAR SHADE TREE PHD

Congratulations.

If you're reading this, that means:

You've made it to the golden years, and

You're still curious about what's going on below the belt.

Bravo! That alone deserves a standing ovation (or at least a slow clap from the knees).lol. Society may have tried to retire your libido along with your AARP card, but I'm here to remind you: just because there's a little snow on the roof doesn't mean there isn't a fire in the furnace.

In fact, sex in your later years can be like fine wine—more complex, more enjoyable, and less likely to be spilled on the carpet in a moment of reckless enthusiasm. You've had time to learn, grow, and ideally figure out what buttons to push and which ones are clearly labeled "do not disturb."

But we're not here for just a pep talk. You came for ideas. Strategies. Tactics. Maybe even some light stretching exercises. So pour a glass of prune juice (or something stronger—I'm not judging), prop your feet up (or your partner), and let's dive into "How to Keep Your Sex Life Exciting After 60", one laugh and wiggle at a time.

1. THROW OUT THE RULE BOOK

(But Keep the Manual If You Need It)

Forget what you thought sex "had" to be in your 20s. Back then, it may have been fast, spontaneous, and performed on surfaces that now make your sciatica wince just thinking about it.

Now? It's about comfort, creativity, and a healthy respect for orthopedic pillows.

Don't be afraid to redefine what intimacy means. A sensual massage? That's foreplay. Holding hands in the kitchen while eating leftover pie? That's connection. Reenacting a scene from Bridgerton with a heating pad strapped to your lower back? That's... ambitious, but also intimacy.

2. COMMUNICATE LIKE YOU'RE PLOTTING A HEIST

Want to spice things up? Talk about it. Not just in passing. I'm talking full-on pillow talk with the energy of two retirees

planning to rob a casino.

You might say:

- "Hey, honey, remember that thing we tried in '84? What if we tried it again but this time with less carpet burn?"
- "I read about edible massage oil. Want to test it on your elbow first and see where it goes?"
- "Would you rather role-play as a pirate and a governor or just lie naked and eat cheese?"

The secret sauce to exciting senior sex? Curiosity + Communication + Consent = Magic.

And if your partner says, "I don't know," reply with: "Well, we've got all night and a bottle of Merlot. Let's find out."

3. LUBE IS NOT OPTIONAL. IT'S MANDATORY AFTER 60'S

Let's have an honest moment. Mother Nature is a beautiful, majestic lady, but sometimes she takes things without asking. Like collagen. And natural lubrication.

So let's not pretend we're 22 anymore and just "wing it." That's how hips get thrown and egos bruised. Lube is your new best friend. Water-based, silicone, warming, flavored—there's a whole aisle at the pharmacy dedicated to ensuring you don't sound like a rubber boot in a mud puddle every time you get intimate.

Stock up. Experiment. And remember: if you're embarrassed buying it in person, that's what discreet online shipping is for.

4. STRETCH BEFORE YOU STRUT

Let's not underestimate the power of flexibility. Not metaphorically—literally. Want to try that new position you saw in that article? You're going to need a gentle pregame warm-up.

Before sex, do a few stretches. A couple toe-touches. Rotate the hips. Maybe some deep breathing. Not only will this prevent muscle cramps mid-thrust (nobody wants to have to scream for help while tangled in Egyptian cotton), it'll also enhance circulation—which is great news for all involved organs.

Bonus: Partner stretching doubles as foreplay. "Let me help you with that hamstring" has more potential than you think.

5. TRY TOYS—THEY DON'T HAVE TO BUZZ LIKE A LAWNMOWER

If you haven't walked into the 21st-century toy chest yet, what are you waiting for? There's something out there for every comfort level—from elegant little gadgets that look like they belong in a museum, to devices that require charging cables and a sense of adventure.

Toys can help with arousal, sensation, and even mobility issues. That's right—some gadgets are ergonomically designed for folks who can't twist like a pretzel anymore.

And yes, you can absolutely use them alone or with your partner. Share the experience, laugh when things go sideways (or buzz in the wrong direction), and treat it like what it is: grown-up playtime.

6. SCHEDULE IT—BUT MAKE IT SEXY

We schedule everything else in life: doctor visits, dinner with friends, oil changes. Why do we think sex has to be spontaneous or not at all?

Setting the mood doesn't kill the mood—it creates it. Put it on the calendar. Call it something cute like "Tuesday Tango" or "Naked Thursday" or "Operation: Make the Neighbors Jealous." Anticipation is sexy. So is putting effort into your partner. And frankly, at this stage, you'll both appreciate knowing when to shave your knees or take the extra arthritis meds ahead of time.

7. LAUGH DURING (AND AFTER) SEX

Spoiler alert: weird noises will happen. Knees will crack. You might pass gas at a crucial moment or fall off the bed because someone got "a little too excited."

This is normal.

In fact, if you're not laughing during sex, you're missing out on one of the greatest joys of getting older: not taking it all so seriously.

So giggle. Be goofy. Embrace the ridiculous. Nothing kills a mood like perfectionism, and nothing heats it back up like saying, "Well, that wasn't quite what we planned, but I'm still naked and into it."

8. EXPLORE FANTASIES—EVEN THE TAME ONES

You don't need leather swings or a full dungeon to explore fantasies (though if that's your vibe, you have my full support and a safe-word suggestion).

Sometimes, it's as simple as:

- Pretending to be strangers at a hotel bar.
- Dressing up like your partner's high school crush (glasses optional).
- Reading each other romantic passages from a steamy novel.
- Watching a racy movie and pretending you're film critics. With benefits.

You've got imagination, privacy, and no kids barging in

anymore. Use that to your advantage.

9. REIGNITE THE ROMANCE BEYOND THE BEDROOM

Exciting sex begins before you're naked. It starts in the little things:

- Flirty texts.
- Long kisses in the hallway.
- A love note on the mirror.
- Sharing a memory of a wild night from your early days.

You're still growing together. Falling in love again at every stage. Keep dating. Keep seducing. Keep reminding each other that you're still here, still hot (yes, even with bifocals), and still deeply, unapologetically human.

10. GET HELP IF YOU NEED IT. SERIOUSLY.

There's no shame in asking your doctor about changes in libido, ED, vaginal dryness, or anything else. Medical professionals have seen it all, and half of them are Googling the same stuff in their off hours.

Medication, hormone therapy, pelvic floor therapy, or even a simple blood pressure adjustment can work wonders.

If you're in a long-term relationship, consider couples therapy—or even sex therapy—to explore new avenues of connection. There's no expiration date on sexual joy, and if something's not working, it can be fixed. Or upgraded. Or laughed about until it is.

FINAL THOUGHTS, YOU BEAUTIFUL DIRTY-MINDED LEGENDS

The truth is this: sex doesn't end when youth fades. It evolves. It deepens. It becomes a place not just for lust, but for trust, comfort, joy, and yes, ridiculous amounts of giggling.

Whether you're 65 or 85, flying solo or partnered up, it's not too late to spice things up. You are not past your prime—you're in a different prime. A tastier, wiser, "let's not do it on the floor unless there's a plan to get back up" kind of prime.

So get out there (or in there—your call), light a candle, warm up the lube, stretch those hips, and remember:

YOU'RE STILL SEXY.

YOU'RE STILL CURIOUS.

YOU STILL GOT IT.

NOW GO PROVE IT—GENTLY.

With admiration and a standing ovation (from a safe ergonomic chair),

Yours in Love, Laughs, and Latex-Free Fun,

Dr. Vernon Brown, The Dunbar Shade Tree PhD

President, Society for the Preservation of Grown-Up Giggles & Bedroom Shenanigans



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