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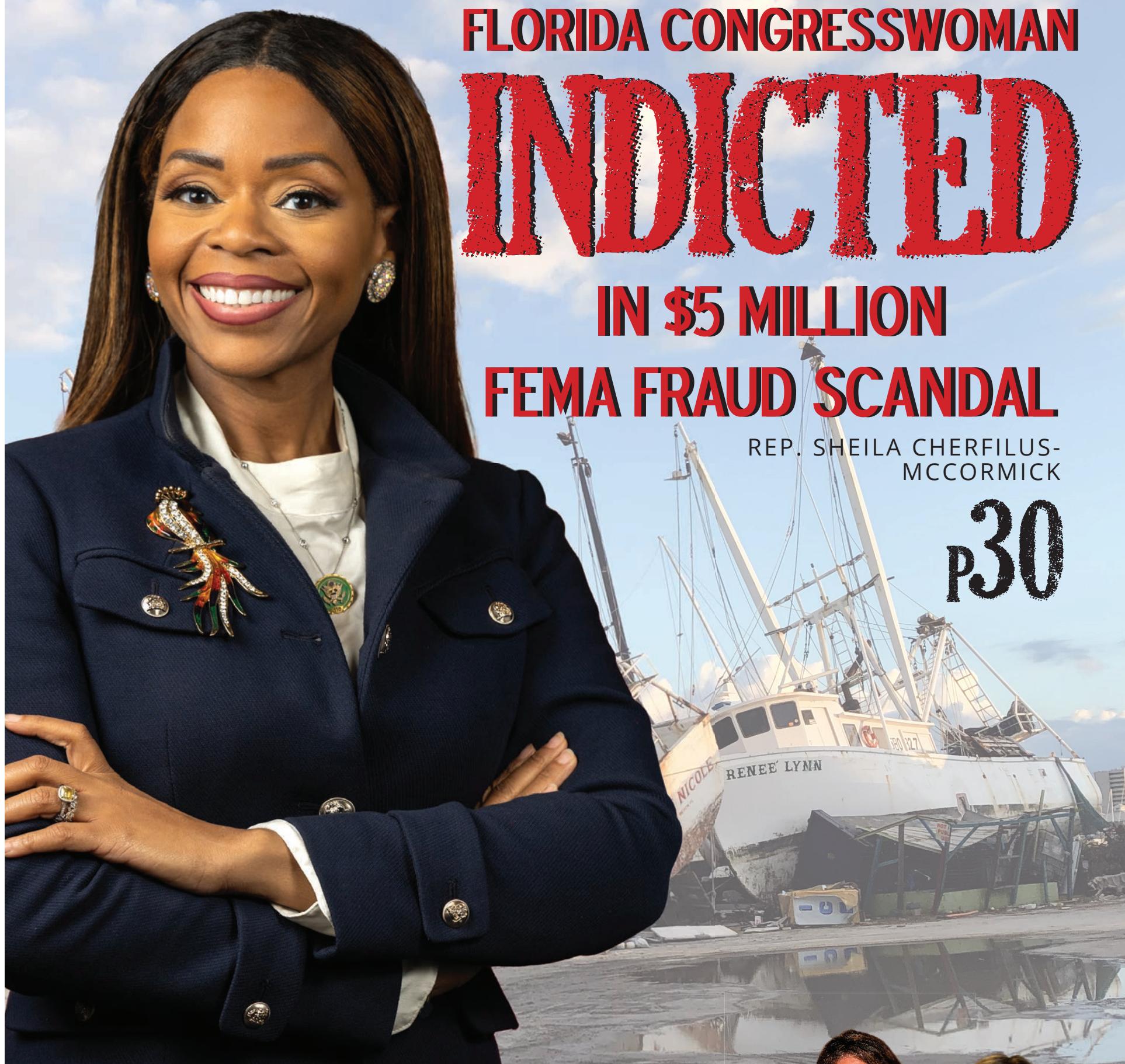
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P30



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Distribution: Jean Pierre, Joe Wise, Frank Reagan, and Rebeca Gonzalez

Production: OAS Graphics

Photography: Broderick Hall

Contributing Writers: Vernon Brown, Dr. Petruhka Moise, Michael H. Blank, Monique Wooley, Roberto Fuller, Melvin Whitlock



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PROMISES MADE, PROMISES KEPT!

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School District Selects 2026 Principal and Assistant Principal of the Year



The School District of Lee County is excited to announce that Linda Buckley, Principal at Tanglewood Elementary School, is the 2026 Principal of the Year. Superintendent Dr. Denise Carlin, Board members, District administrators, and Tanglewood staff surprised Buckley with the award this morning. She will go on to represent the School District of Lee County in the Florida Department of Education's Principal of the Year competition.

"I know my why," Buckley said in accepting her award. "My why is kids and I have an amazing team that I am honored to work with to make a difference in kids' lives every day. I'm deeply honored and very appreciative of this award."

Under Ms. Buckley's leadership, Tanglewood Elementary has become a model of growth, empowerment, and unity.

Over the past decade, she has fostered a culture where every student and educator are recognized as a leader, anchored in the Leader in Me framework, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and a deep commitment to teacher collaboration.

This shared vision has led to exceptional results, including an "A" school grade in 2024-2025. Beyond academic success, Tanglewood students demonstrate confidence, responsibility, and compassion, while teachers lead with purpose and collegiality. Together, Ms. Buckley and her team have built not only a high-performing school but a thriving community where every child is inspired to learn, lead, and succeed.

"With four decades of distinguished service, Ms. Buckley exemplifies outstanding leadership, student achievement, and community engagement," said Jessica Hering, Dean of Student Discipline at Tanglewood Elementary. "She consistently elevates student success by fostering a culture of academic rigor and continuous professional growth among staff. Through data-driven instruction and targeted interventions, she ensures every student is challenged and supported to reach their full potential, as documented by this year's increase to an A grade."

Harns Marsh Middle School Assistant Principal Samantha Hower is the 2026 Assistant Principal

of the Year. Over the past seven years, she has helped transform Harns Marsh Middle through strong community partnerships, targeted academic supports, and an unwavering focus on safety, character, and achievement. Her data-driven leadership has produced record-high academic performance, including significant gains in math, science, and subgroup achievement. At the same time, discipline incidents have decreased by more than two-thirds, and teacher retention has risen dramatically.

"I did not do this alone," Hower said when surprised with her award. "I have an exquisite team working with me, and Mr. Dworzanski, I couldn't ask for a better mentor or boss. This was not expected, but I am extremely grateful."

Ms. Hower was the School District's Teacher of the Year in 2019.

She transferred to Harns Marsh Middle and was

promoted to Assistant Principal in 2023. She is the second Assistant Principal of the Year from Harns Marsh Middle School in four years.

"Under Ms. Hower's leadership, math achievement rose above district averages, while discipline incidents dropped," said Harns Marsh Middle School Principal Alex Dworzanski. "She has improved every process in our school, from data-driven instruction and mentoring to PBIS, to recognition programs and community partnerships, leading to our highest school grade in history, along with increasing staff retention so we had zero vacancies to start the year."

School administrators, employees, students, and members of the community nominated deserving principals and assistant principals. Nominated administrators then submitted a writing task which was reviewed by a committee of stakeholders to select the award recipient.

Ms. Buckley and Ms. Hower will be recognized by the School Board as Principal of the Year and Assistant Principal of the Year at an upcoming meeting. Florida's Department of Education will announce the finalists and winners of the state Principal and Assistant Principal of the Year next spring.

The School District of Lee County would like to thank Suncoast Credit Union for sponsoring the Principal and Assistant Principal of the Year recognitions.



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COMMEMORATING THE CITY OF
NAPLES POLICE DEPARTMENT

100th Anniversary

MAYOR TERESA LEE HEITMANN
CITY OF NAPLES

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As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the City of Naples Police Department, our community stands at a meaningful moment in history, one that invites us to look back with appreciation and forward with purpose. Since its establishment in 1925, the department has grown from a small local force into a modern, highly trained organization that embodies the principles of professionalism, accountability, and community partnership. On Wednesday, November 19th, in front of City Council, I had the honor of presenting an official proclamation commemorating this remarkable milestone and recognizing the century-long dedication of the men and women who have served our city. This moment not only honored the department's rich legacy but reaffirmed our shared commitment to the values that define our community.

According to Naples, A Second Paradise by local historian Lila Zuck, the city's earliest chapters were shaped by visionary civic planning, reflected in initiatives like the "Naples Plan," which prioritized parks, infrastructure, and service institutions. While Zuck's comprehensive history does not provide extensive chapter-by-chapter detail on the formation of the police department, her work makes clear that policing grew in step with other municipal services, rooted in the same community-oriented spirit that defines "The Naples Way."

The early years of the Naples Police Department were shaped by a developing city, limited resources, and a strong sense of civic responsibility. Officers worked closely with residents, built trust through personal relationships, and set standards that continue to influence the department's culture. As Naples grew and public safety needs expanded, the department enhanced its organizational structure, increased training requirements, and adopted innovations that improved both efficiency and responsiveness. These steps allowed the department to provide higher levels of service while maintaining a constructive and accessible presence within the community.

Across its 100-year history, the department has achieved significant accomplishments in patrol operations,

investigations, emergency response, communications, and public outreach. From establishing formalized patrol routes and adopting standardized procedures, to embracing digital evidence systems, data-driven policing, and enhanced radio communications, each advancement has strengthened its capacity to safeguard residents and visitors. These efforts have not only improved day-to-day operations but have contributed to long-term public confidence in the department's mission.

Community engagement has always been a cornerstone of the department's success. Programs designed to connect officers with youth, families, and local organizations have reinforced mutual trust and demonstrated that public safety is a collaborative effort. Neighborhood-based policing, school partnerships, citizen academies, and ongoing outreach initiatives all reflect the belief that a strong community relationship is essential to effective service. These efforts embody the spirit of unity and cooperation that Naples residents value deeply.

Today, under the leadership of Chief Ciro Dominguez, the Naples Police Department remains committed to transparency, preparedness, and innovation. The sworn officers and professional staff who serve our city each day demonstrate professionalism, integrity, and compassion. These are qualities that have defined the department for generations. Their dedication ensures not only the enforcement of our laws, but also the protection of the quality of life that makes Naples an exceptional place to live, work, and visit.

As we honor this centennial year, we recognize every officer, past and present, whose service has strengthened our community and upheld the safety of our residents. The proclamation presented today serves as a record of gratitude and a tribute to their century-long commitment. For 100 years, the Naples Police Department has carried forth its mission with honor, courage, and dedication fulfilling the promise to serve and protect, the Naples Way.

Teresa Heitmann, Naples Mayor



Naples
BOAT
SHOW

JAN 22 AT 10AM TO JAN 25 AT 5PM EST

Marine Industries Association of Collier County



THE NAPLES BOAT SHOW takes place on land at Sugden Regional Park and in-water at the Naples City Dock, with complimentary shuttle service.

The Naples Boat Show is the largest and most prestigious recreational marine event in the Naples-Marco Island region. It takes place on land at Sugden Regional Park and in-water at the Naples City Dock, with complimentary shuttle service connecting both locations.

This exciting event showcases a wide variety of exhibitors, including boat dealers, marinas, and other marine-related businesses.

Admission:

- 1-Day General Admission: \$15 in advance / \$20 at the gate
- Children 12 and under enter free with a paying adult

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- Preferred parking available at Sugden Regional Park
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PROMISES MADE. PROMISES KEPT.

Lee Health Marks One Year as a Community-Focused Nonprofit Health System.

This month, Lee Health proudly marks the first anniversary of its historic conversion from a public entity to a private, community-focused nonprofit health system. The milestone represents a successful transition built on the promise to preserve local healthcare, strengthen access, and continue serving all residents of Southwest Florida.

"One year ago, our community leaders understood the importance of ensuring Lee Health could remain strong, sustainable, and locally governed for generations to come," said Larry Antonucci, M.D., president and chief executive officer of Lee Health. "Their vision and support made this transition possible, and today we're seeing the results in expanded services, innovation, and continued commitment to every person who visits our facilities or experiences our life-changing programs."

Since the conversion, Lee Health has honored its pledge to preserve safety-net care, maintain critical community programs, and expand access to high-quality services. In 2025, Lee Health

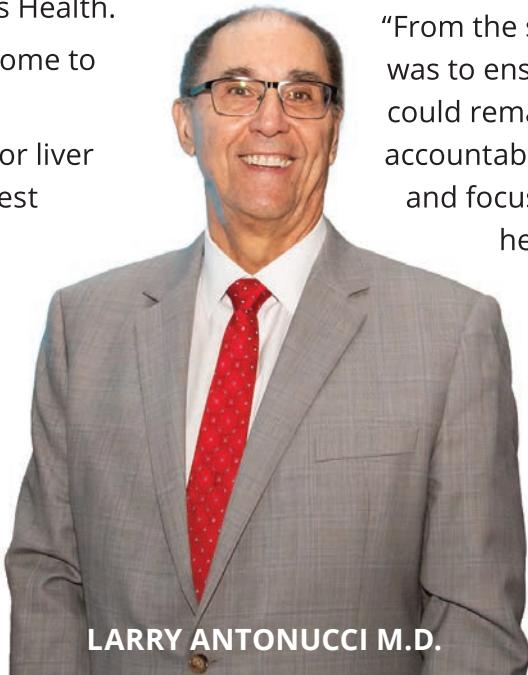
provided approximately \$168 million in charity care, continuing its legacy of serving patients most in need. The system also launched new and expanded initiatives to improve health outcomes across the region, including:

- Approval of a \$150 million expansion at the under-construction Lee Health Fort Myers medical campus, adding 92 beds and future capacity.
- Opening a 60-bed rehabilitation hospital with Encompass Health.
- Expanding Hospital at Home to multiple campuses.
- Introducing histotripsy for liver cancer, a first in Southwest Florida.
- Growing cancer and musculoskeletal services, opening a Cancer Support Community, and launching the Advanced Lung Care Center.
- Opening the

Golisano Pediatric Clinic at Franklin Park Elementary School.

- Advancing physician training through new OB/GYN and Transitional Year residencies at Cape Coral Hospital.
- Partnering with Lee County to expand the Community Paramedicine Program.
- Breaking ground on a new three-story laboratory and data center with next-generation molecular testing.

"From the start, our goal was to ensure Lee Health could remain independent, accountable to our community, and focused on improving health and wellbeing," said Lee Health Board of Directors Chairperson David Klein. "We are deeply grateful to the leaders who shared this vision and trusted us to see it through."



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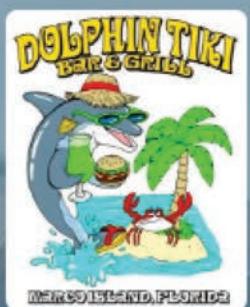
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After

BY LISA ESWAY



I may lose my breath, somehow I keep breathing. Somehow, I stay standing through my storm surviving the depths that I have been to. I feel like I have proven that in my most darkest moment, I have had the faith to make it. I came back up with a gift. I will set my heart on things above. You will get me through this. Somehow. Some way. You protect me. You restore joy to me. You put me back together.

You opened my eyes. You made me wiser and stronger as a result of this. You have caught me. You heard my cry. You cover me. You draw close to me. I will no longer listen to the wrong voice. Normal enough on the surface I know. I have become broken apart by believing the wrong message. I receive the truth around me and within me. You speak to me in a gentle whisper because You are so close to me like a silence that can be heard. I must condition my heart and train my mind to know the difference between the threats of the enemy and God's voice of truth. Lies or truth?

Paralyze or mobilize? Vague or specific? Stay or change? Take me out or move me forward?

Always know that we will make it to the other side of this valley we are passing through. Nothing is wasted. Charles Dickens wrote "The success is not mine the failure is not mine but the two together make me." My actions must reflect Your love however Your love toward me is not based on what I do. You love me in the middle of my mess not just when I'm cleaned up. Even when the damage is severe. I hear the things You have spoken to me and I so badly believe them. I would hope that I've matured enough to know what is true and what is not true. Even being a numbered inmate sitting in this prison. See? Your assessment of me God isn't limited by where I've been before and where I am now. You Lord reflect on the places You plan to take me. You see past tense the battles I am currently fighting. And you choose not to remember. You bring to life this moment that I am in. You have sustained me through this season and I've learned to embrace that. Over and over again. I will never forget. You gently remind me of what I already know... as I grow the more intense the battles have become. I wish someone had explained this to me a long time ago. This is what was never told to me. The bosses get bigger the battles have gotten more complicated. Almost like the next level is designed to keep me out. It's always going to be hard right before my breakthrough. It's the right things I'm supposed to choose running full speed toward impending opposition. And the wrong choices. Inside I want to do the right things even if it doesn't look that way sometimes just like apostle Paul wrote. The strength I get from You runs deeper than the circumstances. Even if it is against all odds. I've learned through this prison sentence that my joy and peace is not determined by what happens to me or the circumstances that I am in. Because I have learned the secret. I will try not to get discouraged as much as long as I can see what I'm doing is working. Knowing the difference between what I expect and what I experience I know that I am not alone. Even in this place. You are with me in the imperfect and even disappointing circumstances of my life. When my heart is inside out. It's just that this is such a different place. Maybe where I was supposed to go? However sometimes I feel the pain will never ever go away because of the loss. The very significant loss. Restoration is now my dream. I will no longer feel stuck waiting for something that is already mine. Such a rare thing to witness but when it happens, restoration and when you personally witness it you will never forget it. You've done it before You will do it again. And if I let it this time it will transform me for the making. It will mark my heart. I thank You in advance for what You only make sense in reverse. This is the silver lining. Thought by thought moment by moment. I will keep standing, keep believing, not look back. You haven't brought me this far You haven't saved me again just to merely exist it's time to live. And that is what will get me too my ever after.

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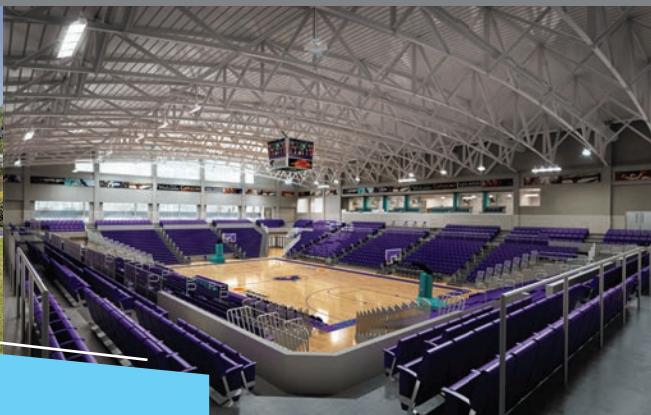


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Praising Casey Lucius

A Smart, Frugal Choice for Marco Island, Florida

When the Marco Island City Council recently approved the appointment of Casey Lucius as interim city manager, the decision was met with approval — and for very good reason. In a moment of transition, the council didn't just look for a stopgap; they found a leader committed to responsible stewardship and fiscal prudence. Lucius' willingness to serve without typical benefits — foregoing insurance and an assistant — represents a poised, conscientious embodiment of public service, and a significant financial win for the Island's taxpayers.

"I am amazed at Casey's humility and integrity," one resident said.

The backstory bears emphasizing. The city's former manager, Mike McNees — who had served nearly six years — resigned abruptly after mounting tensions with council members, setting in motion what could have been a long, uncertain leadership gap. In response, the council turned to their own ranks: the assistant city manager, Casey Lucius.

Rather than seize power overnight, Lucius offered what many saw as the hallmarks of a thoughtful leader — deference, respect for process, and clarity. She encouraged council members to open up a formal application process before committing long-term, signaling humility and a long-term view. Instead, the council unanimously agreed that she serve as interim city manager while a search begins for a permanent replacement.

That decision was not only pragmatic but wise — and Lucius' own actions undercut any notion that she viewed the role as a mere stepping stone.

What sets Lucius' interim appointment apart is her unusual — and commendable — willingness to forgo certain standard perks. By declining insurance and opting not to bring on an assistant, she materially reduces overhead at a time when the city might be paying double (or more) for interim management. This is not a symbolic sacrifice: according to local reporting, these choices "save the city a significant amount of funds."

At a time when many municipalities automatically incur higher costs with interim appointments (hiring consultants, temp staff, extra benefits), Marco Island is recapturing fiscal discipline — and doing so with dignity. The council's trust in Lucius speaks volumes about what they value: competence, commitment, and respect for public dollars.

For residents — many of whom are property owners and taxpayers — this means that the transition in leadership doesn't come with a hidden surcharge. Instead of paying more for "acting leadership," the city is effectively trimming administrative costs and preserving the public purse.

Lucius is not an outsider parachuted in temporarily until something "better" comes along. She has served as assistant city manager — and thus knows the ins and outs of Marco Island's governance, administration, and community priorities.

That continuity matters — especially at a time of potential upheaval. Infrastructure projects, budgeting, public services, and long-term planning don't wait for ideal candidates. Having

a steady hand who already understands the city's workings ensures minimal disruption.

Moreover, by acting as interim manager while a wider search proceeds, Lucius offers the City Council breathing room. They can take their time to find the best permanent candidate — without rushing, without pressure, and without leaving leadership unattended.

In an age when "public service" often comes with headlines of inflated costs, opaque contracts, and bureaucratic bloat, Lucius' approach stands out. Her decision to sacrifice personal benefit reflects a mindset rooted not in self-interest, but in civic responsibility. It's a refreshing reminder that government — at its best — is about service, not salary.

It's also a powerful signal to residents: The city values accountability and is willing to avoid unnecessary expenses even when no one is watching. That kind of discipline builds trust, respect, and long-term fiscal health.

For the community of Marco Island, the appointment of Casey Lucius as interim city manager brings several concrete, beneficial ramifications:

- **FINANCIAL RESTRAINT:** The city avoids the extra expense of additional benefits or assistant-level staffing — savings that can be redirected toward infrastructure, community programs, or simply kept in reserves.
- **CONTINUITY AND STABILITY:** With Lucius already embedded in city administration, daily operations are more likely to proceed smoothly. Residents won't face lapses in municipal services or confusion during leadership turnover.
- **THOUGHTFUL GOVERNANCE:** The open-search plan for a permanent manager, combined with interim stability, reflects a commitment to due diligence and quality hiring — not just quick fixes.
- **PUBLIC TRUST:** Choosing an internal candidate — and one willing to reject perks — sends a message that municipal leadership values integrity and public money.

Casey Lucius' elevation to interim city manager should inspire confidence — not only because of her credentials and familiarity with city operations — but because of the manner in which she chose to serve. In refusing insurance and an assistant, she makes a rare and public statement: that the role is about service, responsibility, and doing what's right for the community first.

As the city embarks on what could be a lengthy search for a permanent manager, residents can rest assured that the helm is being held by someone who understands the importance of prudence, continuity, and respect for taxpayers' money.

It is a wise, forward-thinking decision by the City Council — and a model of public service that many municipalities would do well to emulate. Casey brings stability, continuity, and local knowledge. Congratulations to Casey Lucius, and here's hoping her example encourages more thoughtful, fiscally responsible governance in Marco Island and beyond.



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

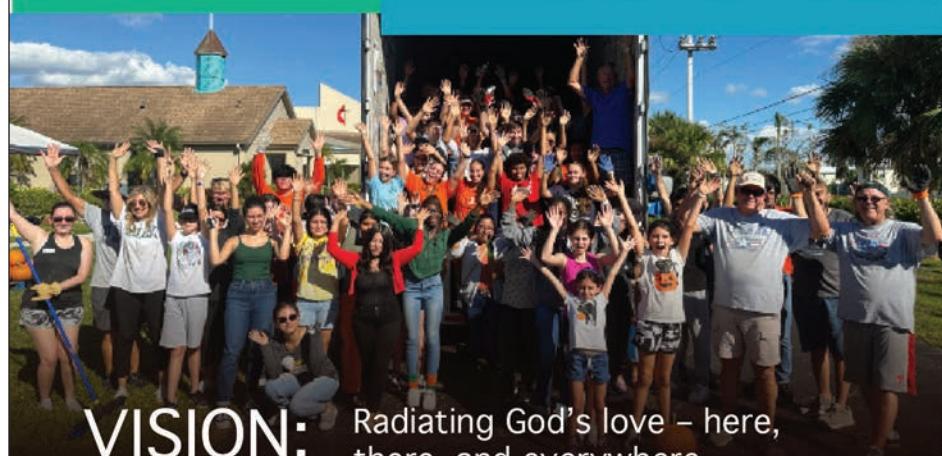
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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we step into this Christmas season, I pray that your heart remains lifted and your spirit renewed, refreshed, and revived. As we enjoy the lights, the music, the Christmas celebrations, and the gathering of loved ones, let us not forget the greatest gift we have ever received—Jesus Christ, the greatest gift of all.

The Word of God in John 3:16 declares, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

I don't know about you, but believing in and accepting Jesus Christ into your heart is the greatest gift you could ever receive. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are given the promise of eternal life in Heaven. Now doesn't that sound like an incredible gift?

Let us remember that God wrapped Himself in flesh and stepped into this world. He gave us hope that does not fade, joy that the world cannot take away, and love that reaches us right where we are. Do you remember the song, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so"? Hear me today—Jesus loves you. Now tell yourself, "Jesus loves me!"

So whatever you may be facing, remember this: because Jesus came, you are never alone. Because Jesus came, you have purpose. Because Jesus came, you have victory. Walk into this season with complete victory in Jesus Christ, knowing that the Savior of the world came just for you. Jesus is the greatest gift to all who will receive Him. And you, too, are a gift to Him when you give yourself to Him.

Merry Christmas to each of you, and may you receive the greatest gift of all—Jesus Christ!

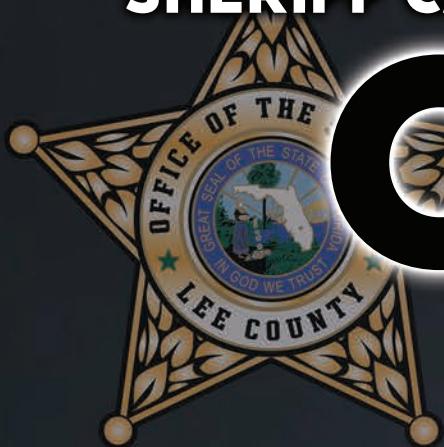
*With Love,
Pastor Demetrius Thomas
St. Mary Baptist Church of Punta Gorda*



Pastor Demetrius Thomas
St. Mary Baptist Church of Punta Gorda

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DECEMBER 13, 2025 | SENIORS CHRISTMAS DINNER

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DECEMBER 24, 2025 | CHRISTMAS EVE

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DECEMBER 25, 2025 | CHRISTMAS

A joyful celebration of the Savior's birth with music, scripture, and family fellowship.

DECEMBER 26, 2025 | DR. GLOVER'S BIRTHDAY

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Attorney Joe North

School District Selects 2026 School Related Employee of the Year, Rebekah Rudd

The School District of Lee County is proud to announce Rebekah Rudd has been selected as the 2026 School Related Employee of the Year. Rudd is the Parent Involvement Specialist at Manatee Elementary School. She was recently surprised by Superintendent Dr. Denise Carlin, School Board members, District administrators and school staff with her award.

"I can't believe it. I'm really surprised," Rudd said after receiving her award. "The best part of my job is helping families get the things they need. A lot of our families don't have a lot, and I love to see the smile on their faces when we are able to provide for them."

Rudd has made a lasting impact on her school community. She builds strong relationships with students, families, and colleagues through open communication, respect, and collaboration. Her commitment extends beyond the classroom as she leads the school's food pantry and uniform closet, ensuring families have access to essential resources. She arrives early, stays late, and steps in wherever help is needed. She is credited with creating a positive and nurturing environment where students are supported academically, socially, and emotionally.

"Rebekah is a shining example of what it means to be a dedicated, compassionate, and community-driven school professional."

said Kristine Calcara, Principal at Manatee Elementary.

"As our Parent Involvement Specialist, she builds lasting and meaningful relationships with families, students, staff, and the community, always putting others first and serving with a heart of gold. In every way, Rebekah exemplifies the values of service, compassion, and excellence. Her work benefits not only individual students and families but also the school and district as a whole. She leads with her heart, lifts others, and is deeply deserving of recognition as an outstanding school-related employee."

The School Related Employee of the year represents the thousands of dedicated staff members that work in Lee County Schools every day. They are the bus drivers, technical support staff, social workers, helping teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, cafeteria staff, custodians and more. School administrators nominated deserving support personnel. A selection committee of school and district leadership reviewed nomination forms, commendations received, and continuing education and training courses completed by nominees to select the award recipient.

Ms. Rudd will be formally recognized by the School Board of Lee County for her award in February. Her nomination will be forwarded to the Florida Department of Education for state School-Related Employee of the Year competition. The School District of Lee County would like to thank Suncoast Credit Union for sponsoring the School Related Employee of the Year recognition.





BY FRANK REAGAN

New York State Police have charged Englewood resident, 65-year-old Scot D. Thompson, in the deadly shooting of his two brothers at a hunting cabin in the town of Allen, NY on Sunday.

Thompson is now behind bars and faces two counts of second-degree murder and two counts of criminal use of a firearm.

Allegany County Sheriff's Office

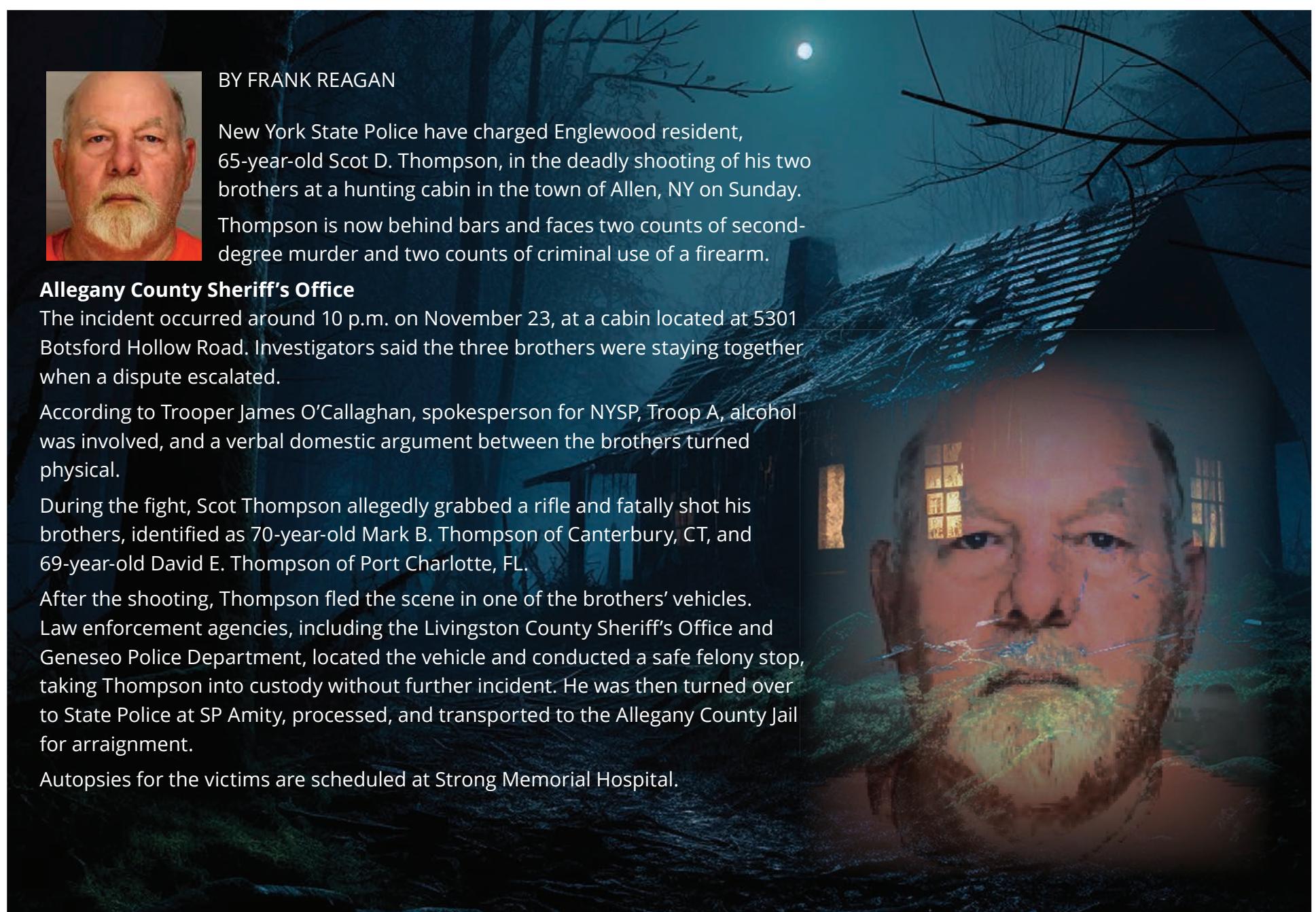
The incident occurred around 10 p.m. on November 23, at a cabin located at 5301 Botsford Hollow Road. Investigators said the three brothers were staying together when a dispute escalated.

According to Trooper James O'Callaghan, spokesperson for NYSP, Troop A, alcohol was involved, and a verbal domestic argument between the brothers turned physical.

During the fight, Scot Thompson allegedly grabbed a rifle and fatally shot his brothers, identified as 70-year-old Mark B. Thompson of Canterbury, CT, and 69-year-old David E. Thompson of Port Charlotte, FL.

After the shooting, Thompson fled the scene in one of the brothers' vehicles. Law enforcement agencies, including the Livingston County Sheriff's Office and Geneseo Police Department, located the vehicle and conducted a safe felony stop, taking Thompson into custody without further incident. He was then turned over to State Police at SP Amity, processed, and transported to the Allegany County Jail for arraignment.

Autopsies for the victims are scheduled at Strong Memorial Hospital.



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DEAR Beloved

Pastor Dr. Deb Walsh | Mountain Mover & Water Walkers

Silver and Gold I have none...

This Christmas season, let's remember what Christmas is all about! The love of God! God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son. Jesus is the gift to the world and God's

love came down to earth so that we may know the love of God and have a personal relationship with Him. We know that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. We know that He removes our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 36:26 NLT – ***"And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart."***

Don't let mammon have any room in your life this Christmas. I know many of us can overspend and even go into credit card debt just to give gifts that our loved ones want or desire. That

is not the way your loved ones would even want their gifts; to have you in debt. I can tell you that the best gifts are free.

All the gifts that come with our free salvation is a blessing to us and everyone around us. We learn how to love like Jesus loves, be more selfless than selfish, and give more of ourselves. It is a process that we have to work at daily as we pick up our cross daily to follow Him. We have to fight our flesh constantly.

AS A SINGLE PARENT, living paycheck to paycheck and the only food in the house was baby food, I had to learn to lean on Jesus for everything. I asked Him to help me give a gift for Christmas to my daughter so she would experience the joy of opening gifts. He taught me how to give real gifts. For example, one year I gave a bouquet of flowers. One flower for each year of her life. I typed on paper each year of her life and what was significant and the memories of each year. Then I taped it to the flower and set them out for her on the table. She is now a mother, wife and in her mid-thirties and that is one of the gifts she remembers the most. It wasn't a particular barbie or toy that she opened but the flowers. She told me many times how much she loved it. The cost was minimal but the impact was great.

ACTS 3:6 (NLT) ***"But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!"***

Fast forward to today and my husband and I had our grown children come down to Florida from Connecticut to celebrate Christmas together. We gave them stocking stuffer gifts and other smalls but what they cherished the most was my husband copying their child videos to thumb drives and I wrote out the prayers I prayed for each one of them daily. They were overjoyed and made blankets with the prayer printed on it, framed it and made other reminders with the prayer on it. They still talk about it and often call me just to have me pray for them.

So today, reader, as you are reading this, this is my gift to you. Silver and gold I have none, but in the name of Jesus I pray health over you, peace, joy and love. My gift to you is this – I pray that you will know God personally and experience Him today and every day. I pray that God will give you a heart of flesh and fill you with His love. I pray God's spirit will guide and lead you in all your ways. That God will bless you in your coming in and your going out and everything you put your hands to. I pray God will send good people in your path to continue your knowledge in Him. God has plans to prosper you and not harm you. God has ordained you, knit you, chosen you, called you and ordered your steps. I pray you know He only thinks good thoughts towards you. Merry Christmas.

*Love,
Pastor Dr. Deb Walsh*

rowpixel



MEMO TO THE COMMUNITY:

A Year of Fulfilled Commitments

On November 19, 2024, I had the honor of being sworn in as Lee County's first elected Superintendent of Schools in fifty years. That day was more than a personal milestone. It marked a turning point for our

community. For the first time in decades, the people of Lee County had a direct voice in choosing who would lead their school district. You placed your trust in me, and I have worked every day to honor that trust through action, accountability, and results.

After more than thirty years serving as a teacher, principal, and district leader, I have always believed that Lee County has a sound school system. This year, we began the work of becoming a great one. We focused on strengthening our foundation, modernizing outdated systems, and putting students, families, and teachers back at the center of every decision we make.

Our shared vision of a world-class school system is taking shape across six key priorities that guided our work from day one.

1. SAFE AND SECURE SCHOOLS

Nothing matters more than safety. This year, we built on previous security investments, including the OPENGATE weapons detection system, by expanding training, upgrading critical equipment, and securing an additional \$2.9 million in state safety funding.

We also addressed long-standing transportation challenges through the Safe Start Initiative, which restructured routes, improved operations, and strengthened driver recruitment and training. These steps led to safer, more reliable arrivals for thousands of students across Lee County.

2. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND LEARNING TIME

We set out to restore focus in the classroom and give students more time to learn. The new "bell-to-bell" policy limiting personal device use during the school day is helping reduce distractions, while the addition of 30 minutes to the high school schedule has created 42 extra hours of instruction each year. These changes, along with improved transportation efficiency that brought on-time arrival rates to 95% in the morning last week are helping ensure that every student starts the day ready to learn.

3. CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION EXPANSION

Preparing students for tomorrow's workforce remains a top priority. This year, we expanded career and technical pathways with new programs in Applied Robotics, Solar Technology, and Environmental Water and Reclamation, all aligned with local job markets.

Agriculture, marine, and veterinary assisting programs now reach 10 high schools, and we launched Xello, a K-12 platform that helps students plan their futures through career

exploration and goal-setting.

These programs reflect our belief that success has many paths and every student deserves the opportunity to find theirs.

4. TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Strong schools start with strong teachers. Through Project Believe, we reduced teacher vacancies from 575 in April to just 37 by the first day of school, a tremendous milestone. As of today, there are 19 teacher vacancies.

We also launched the Teacher Incentive Initiative, offering up to \$9,000 in bonuses to educators serving at-risk schools. This has helped place experienced, high-performing teachers where they are needed most, giving students greater stability and support in the classroom.

5. FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND EFFICIENT OPERATIONS

We took a hard look at every dollar spent. Every administrative department implemented a five percent budget reduction, and we reorganized several district functions to reduce duplication and streamline operations. These efforts produced more than twenty million dollars in operational savings. Those funds have been redirected into the highest teacher pay raises in the state of Florida, in addition to other classroom priorities.

Fiscal responsibility is more than good accounting. It is a promise to taxpayers that their investment is used wisely and transparently.

6. PARENT PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

Parents are our greatest partners in student success. This year, we launched a Parent Task Force to strengthen collaboration with district leadership and held a series of community town halls across Lee County. Families now have more opportunities than ever to share feedback and engage directly with school and district leaders.

We also simplified the student assignment process and created easy-to-follow video guides to make online enrollment more accessible for parents. These changes reflect our commitment to service, communication, and partnership.

LOOKING AHEAD

This has been a year of rebuilding trust and real progress. Together, we have made our schools safer, our classrooms stronger, and our district more accountable to the people we serve.

We are also planning for the future, investing in new schools, modernizing aging facilities, and creating the foundation for long-term success. Our goal remains the same: to make Lee County a model for excellence in public education.

Thank you for your continued support, encouragement, and partnership. Together, we are proving that when we set high expectations and work with purpose, great things happen for our students.

Sincerely,

Dr. Denise Carlin, Superintendent of Schools

Lee Health Honors Tom Golisano with Humanitarian Award

Lee Health Foundation Board of Trustees hosted the annual Evening of Appreciation event on Thursday, Nov. 20 at Hyatt Regency Coconut Point. With more than 400 in attendance, the evening celebrated the impact of philanthropy on healthcare in the Southwest Florida community. Key moments of the evening included the presentation of three humanitarian awards.

The 2025 Frank Haskell Humanitarian Award was received by Tom Golisano, a leading supporter of children's healthcare throughout the nation and at Lee Health. With total support for Golisano Children's Hospital reaching \$30 million, his generosity has transformed pediatric care for families across Southwest Florida.

His \$20 million gift in 2012 helped build the hospital and inspired \$104 million in community philanthropy, followed by a \$10 million gift in 2024 to expand pediatric services. In 2025, Lee Health joined the Golisano Children's Alliance, collaborating with nine additional children's hospitals throughout the nation that carry the Golisano name.

During the event, Dr. Emad Salman, chief physician executive and VP of operations at Golisano Children's Hospital was awarded as the Physician Champion of Philanthropy. His award was presented by Dr. Gonsenhauser, chief medical officer of Lee Health. Reverend Denise Sawyer was honored with the Clinical Champion of Philanthropy Award, presented by Jen Higgins, chief nursing officer for Lee Health.

"This event reminded all of us just how powerful philanthropy can be," said Dominic Cameratta, board chair for Lee Health Foundation. "It was inspiring to celebrate with so many dedicated supporters as we honored three remarkable leaders whose passion is shaping the future of healthcare in Southwest Florida. I look forward to seeing the incredible impact that philanthropy will continue to make in 2026."

Dr. Larry Antonucci, Lee Health president and CEO, and Chris Simoneau, chief development, marketing and communications officer for Lee Health, shared the vision for the future of Lee Health. They underscored the impact of the organization's transition to a community-focused nonprofit and the promises



Evening of Appreciation event recognizes individuals for their commitment to healthcare in Southwest Florida.



kept to the community over the past year. They also emphasized major milestones including new facility openings, technological advancements, and the continued investment in innovation and patient-centered care.

This year's Evening of Appreciation event was sponsored by Flad & Skanska. For more information about the humanitarian awards and healthcare advocacy in Southwest Florida through Lee Health, visit LeeHealthFoundation.org.

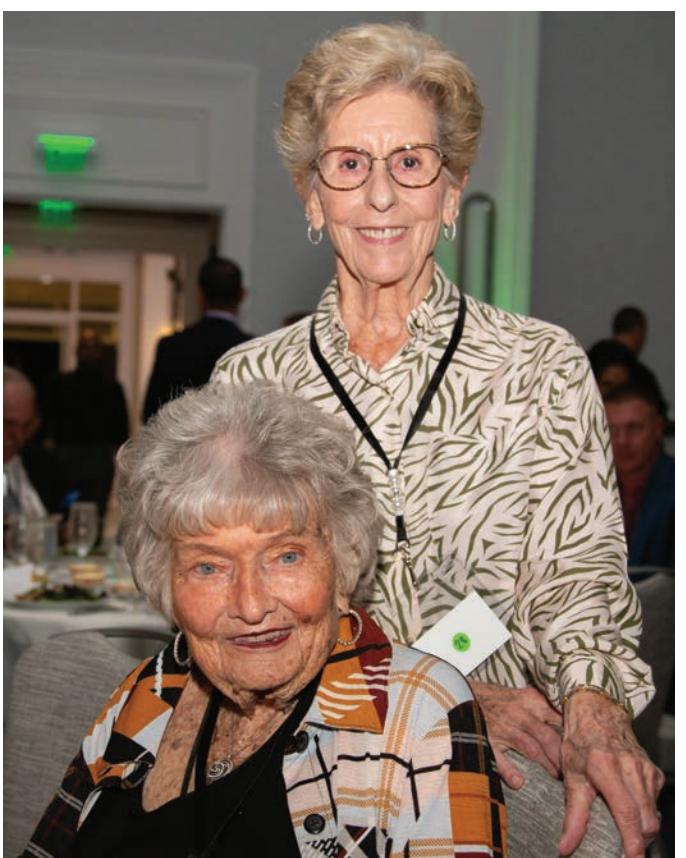
About Lee Health Foundation

Lee Health Foundation raises philanthropic support on behalf of community-focused nonprofit Lee Health to establish, expand, and enhance lifesaving and preventive programs in Southwest Florida. Contributions to the Foundation benefit all five Lee Health hospitals, including Golisano Children's Hospital and the future Lee Health Fort Myers campus, as well as key service areas such as Lee Health Cancer Institute, Lee Health Coconut Point, Lee Health Heart Institute, Community Health Clinics, Lee Health Musculoskeletal Institute, Golisano Children's Health Center in Naples and the Pediatric Specialty Clinic in Port Charlotte. In the past year, the Foundation provided more than \$34+ million in funding to enhance patient care throughout the region. Please visit LeeHealthFoundation.org or call 239-343-6950 for more information about the role of Lee Health philanthropy in Southwest Florida.



continued on the next page...

Evening of Appreciation event continued...





EVENT

WHY PUBLIC SCHOOLS MATTER

TOPIC: Why Public Schools Matter: A Look at Florida School Choice Options

DATE/TIME: December 6, 2025, 9am to 11am
(9:00 Registration & Networking, 9:30 Program)

COST: Free

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

INFORMATION AND REGISTRATION:

lwvleepublicschools.eventbrite.com

EMAIL: lwvlee@lwvlee.org

CALL: 239-278-1032

Don't miss this opportunity!

The program will spotlight:

1. Florida's district public schools, charter schools, and private/voucher-funded schools, focusing on transparency, accountability, funding, and access.
2. Schools of Hope co-location rules: what they mean, how they're being applied, and the potential implications for local school districts and communities.

Moderator: Betsy Vaughn, Director-Education, LWVLee and former Lee County School Board member.

Speakers:

Damaris Allen, Executive Director, Families for Strong Public Schools.

Damaris Allen, a product of Hillsborough County Public Schools, began her advocacy journey when she registered her oldest child for kindergarten in HCPS and discovered that her neighbors were opting out of sending their children to their neighborhood public school. Instead of pulling her child from their school, she decided to focus her efforts on working with parents, teachers, and administrators to improve the school. Today, this local elementary school is one of the most sought after schools in the district.

Damaris went on to serve in numerous roles, including but not limited to, President of Hillsborough County PTA/PTSA, Chair of the Hillsborough County School Board Citizens Advisory Committee, and a member of the Florida PTA Legislation Committee. Prior to becoming a full-time education advocate, Damaris attended Florida Southern College and worked with children, youth, and their families in the United Methodist Church. Damaris is driven by the desire to help parents discover the power of their voice and empowering them to use them to create high quality public schools for all children.

Ami Marie Granger Welch, Deputy Director, Families for Strong Public Schools.

Ami Marie Granger Welch is a dedicated public education advocate with over a decade of experience in grassroots organizing, legislative engagement, and nonprofit leadership. As the Deputy Director of Families for Strong Public Schools, she leads efforts to advance pro-student policies and mobilize communities across Florida. Ami's work is grounded in her belief that every child deserves access to a high-quality, fully funded public education—regardless of their zip code. Her advocacy is shaped by her roles in local and state PTA leadership, and her deep commitment to equity, transparency, and community voice in education policy.



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.

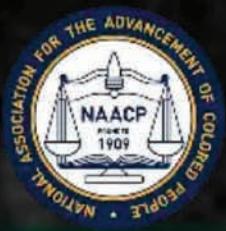
The League of Women Voters does not support or oppose candidates and/or political parties.

The League's Principles, Public Policies, Actions, and Advocacy articulate and document its support for public education. For details see: Impact on Issues 2024-2026, pages 140-153. Some highlights:

The League of Women Voters believes:

- Every person should have access to free public education.
- All levels of government share the responsibility to provide an equitable, quality public education for all children from pre-K through grade 12.
- A quality public education is essential for a strong, viable, and sustainable democratic society and is a civil right.
- The first five years of a child's life are crucial in building the foundation for educational attainment and greatly impact success or failure in later life.
- Quality, developmentally appropriate, voluntary early learning experiences should be available to all children.

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BLACK HISTORY MONTH

COMEDY NIGHT

Celebrating 100 Years of Black History Commemorations

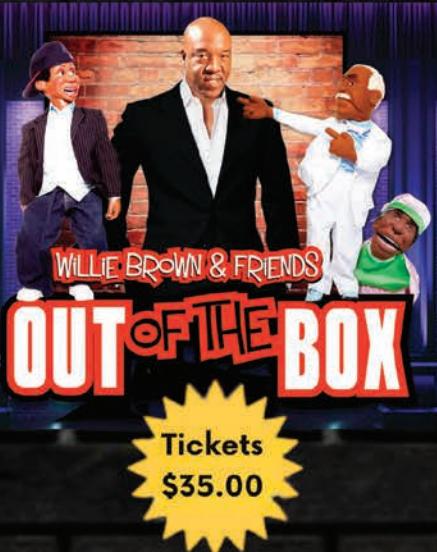
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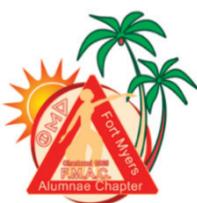
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Fort Myers Alumnae Chapter

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated



Diamonds are Forever

60 Years of Brilliance with Stellar Community Service

On Saturday, December 20, 2025, the Fort Myers Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated will be celebrating their 60 Year Anniversary as the first established sorority in Southwest Florida! On May 9, 1959, Ms. Marie Mallory Ackord was initiated into Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, at Bethune Cookman College, later established as Bethune Cookman University. In 1960, Ms. Ackord began her professional career as a high school educator after graduating from Bethune Cookman College, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics. She received an offer of employment to teach Mathematics in Naples, Collier County, Florida, at Carver High School and lived in Naples during her initial tenure with the Collier County School District. Ms. Ackord moved to Fort Myers after teaching for a period of 5 years in Naples, Florida and began teaching at Dunbar High School.

Ms. Ackord envisioned establishing a graduate chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated to implement the sorority's mission in Collier, Charlotte, Hendry, and Lee counties. As a result of research and a charter application, Ms. Marie Mallory Ackord became Charter President of the Fort Myers Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. Twelve other Delta women from the surrounding communities were selected to assist Ms. Marie Mallory Campbell, in chartering the Fort Myers Alumnae Chapter on December 18, 1965. The Charter members who followed the national guidelines and created brilliant programs and a dynamic legacy of stellar community service programs are: Marie Mallory Ackord, Theora Hamilton Austin, Ida Speed Baker, Annette Johnson Booker, Alma Livingston Cambridge, Mary Gillings Leon, Richardeen Ellis Jones, Dr. Ann Murphy Knight, Melvin Smallwood Morgan, Gwendolyn Primus Mosley, Geraldine Simpkins Ware, Constance White-Davis, and Celestene Johnson Williams.

On April 24, 2004, the Fort Myers Alumnae Chapter led in chartering the first Black Greek Sorority at Florida Gulf Coast University. Monique Campbell was the Acting Chapter President. The Southern Regional Director appointed Ms. Ackord as the first "Primary Advisor." The formation of that nucleus created the implementation of worthwhile community service projects at FGCU. The Fort Myers Alumnae Chapter has received many distinguished city, state, and regional awards for its service.



Marie Campbell Ackord



Annette Johnson Booker



Melvin Smallwood Morgan



Geraldine Simpkins Ware



Constance White-Davis



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STORM OVER WASHINGTON: FLORIDA CONGRESSWOMAN INDICTED IN \$5 MILLION FEMA FRAUD SCANDAL

BY MCKINLEY G. WILLIAMS

In a stunning turn of events that has sent shockwaves through Capitol Hill and South Florida, U.S. Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick (D-Fla.) was indicted by a federal grand jury in Miami. The charges allege that the congresswoman misappropriated \$5 million in COVID-19 relief funds — money meant to aid struggling communities — and instead funneled it into her 2021 congressional campaign and her own pockets.

Once celebrated as a rising star and committed public servant, Cherfilus-McCormick now faces the gravest of accusations: theft of government funds, money laundering, campaign finance violations, and tax fraud. If convicted, she could face decades behind bars — up to 53 years, prosecutors say.

This is not just a routine political scandal. It is a dramatic forensic unraveling of alleged misuse of taxpayer dollars in the midst of a global pandemic — and the potential betrayal of public trust by an elected official. In the coming days, as the legal, political, and ethical fallout deepens, America will be watching: How did this overpayment happen? Who knew what, and when? And can a congresswoman survive an indictment of this magnitude?

1. The Origins: A Family Contract and a Mysterious Overpayment

The heart of the case lies in a COVID-19 vaccination staffing contract. Cherfilus-McCormick and her brother, Edwin Cherfilus, worked through their family-run healthcare company — Trinity Healthcare Services — on a FEMA-funded contract in 2021, according to the Department of Justice (DOJ).

In July 2021, Trinity allegedly received an overpayment of \$5 million from FEMA, the grand jury found. Rather than returning the surplus, prosecutors allege, Cherfilus-McCormick and her co-conspirators plotted to conceal it. They channeled the funds through multiple bank accounts to “launder” the money, masking its source, the indictment says.

The overpayment was not trivial. According to the indictment, it was part of a broader payouts scheme — and not simply accounting error. The scale of what



\$5M FRAUD INDICTMENT

prosecutors characterize as a deliberate operation raises serious questions: Was this money ever intended to be returned? Or was it always meant, in part, to be repurposed?

2. The Alleged Scheme: From FEMA to CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Once the funds landed in the family business accounts, prosecutors say the money didn't merely sit there. A “substantial portion” was allegedly diverted into Cherfilus-McCormick's 2021 congressional campaign, according to the DOJ. But that was not the only method — or the most brazen.

Federal prosecutors allege an orchestrated “straw donor” scheme: Cherfilus-McCormick and former staffer Nadege Leblanc allegedly funneled FEMA-paid funds to friends and relatives, who then donated those same sums to her campaign — hiding the original source. In other words: money meant for a public health crisis was allegedly repurposed to fuel a political ascent, disguised through a web of frontmen.

Beyond campaign contributions, prosecutors say some of the money served private ends. The indictment accuses Cherfilus-McCormick of using “a portion of the misappropriated funds... for the personal benefit of the defendants.”

3. Tax Fraud: Falsified Returns, Inflated Deductions

The alleged misconduct did not stop at FEMA and campaign funds. Also charged is her 2021 tax preparer, David K. Spencer, with whom Cherfilus-McCormick is accused of conspiring to file a false tax return.

According to the indictment, they mischaracterized personal and political expenses as business deductions. They also allegedly inflated charitable contributions to a Maryland-area church to reduce her tax liability. The IRS and DOJ maintain that her tax returns were manipulated to present a far rosier — and legally misleading — financial picture.

4. Reckoning: Voices from Justice

Attorney General Pam Bondi did not mince words in the DOJ's announcement: “Using disaster relief funds for self-enrichment is a particularly selfish, cynical crime.” Her statement echoed the gravity of the allegations — public funds, she said, belong to the American people, and diverting them betrays that trust.

Also speaking was U.S. Attorney Jason A. Reding Quiñones for the Southern District of Florida, who framed the indictment as a reaffirmation of accountability: “Public money belongs to the American people... When FEMA funds are diverted for personal or political gain, it erodes trust ... We will continue to ... ensure that taxpayer dollars are used as intended.”

Federal law enforcement agencies are deeply involved: the FBI's Miami Field Office and the IRS Criminal Investigation unit are both investigating, according to prosecutors.

5. The Political Backdrop: Ethics, Oversight, and House Scrutiny

This isn't Cherfilus-McCormick's first ethical storm. For months, she has been under the microscope by the House Ethics Committee, following a referral from the Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE). In May 2024, the OCE referred allegations including:

- She may have requested community project funding earmarked for a for-profit entity.
- She may have accepted campaign contributions tied to her official duties.
- She may have failed to report in-kind payments, or improperly received services from people who were not officially employed by her congressional office.

The House Ethics Committee responded:

in June 2024, it unanimously expanded its investigative subcommittee to dig into those claims. The committee's report suggests potential violations of both House rules and federal law.

Now, with a criminal indictment in hand, the ethics process may take on even more weight. The question is no longer just about political propriety — it's about criminal culpability.

6. The State-Level Drama: Florida Sues, Questions Multiply

Adding to the pressure, a Florida state agency has already filed a lawsuit. The Florida Division of Emergency Management claims Trinity Healthcare, the company tied to Cherfilus-McCormick and her brother, overcharged by nearly \$5.8 million for pandemic-related work. According to court documents, Florida says Trinity processed invoices that were "more than 100 times its typical invoice size" during the pandemic.

State-level scrutiny and federal indictments have now converged. The overpayments that state auditors flagged may be the very funds now at the heart of the DOJ's case — raising the specter of systemic mismanagement, or worse, criminal coordination.

7. The Response: Denial, Defiance, and a Fight for Reputation

Cherfilus-McCormick, through her legal team, has fiercely denied the allegations. In public statements, her attorneys — David Oscar Markus, Margot Moss, and Melissa Madrigal — called her "a committed public servant ... dedicated to her constituents" and pledged to "fight to clear her good name."

Her office reiterated that she intends to cooperate with authorities. Yet, equally pointed was her dismissal of the timing: she called the indictment "unjust, baseless, [and] a sham" designed to distract from more pressing national issues.

Despite the severity of the charges, she has stated she will not resign. That defiance sets the stage for a prolonged legal and political battle.

8. The Stakes: Prison, Expulsion, and Political Fallout

If convicted, Cherfilus-McCormick faces a statutory maximum of 53 years in prison, prosecutors say. Her brother Edwin Cherfilus is charged too — up to 35 years — and co-defendants Nadege Leblanc and David Spencer face up to 10 years and 33 years, respectively.

On the political front, the indictment has already triggered fury among some of her opponents. Rep. Greg Steube (R-Fla.) has introduced a resolution calling for her expulsion from the House, citing the gravity of the charges. Yet expulsion is politically fraught: it requires a two-thirds

majority in the House — a daunting hurdle, especially in a closely divided chamber.

There is also reputational damage beyond Washington. Representing Florida's 20th District — portions of Broward and Palm Beach counties — she once ran on a platform of community uplift and public service. Her indictment now threatens not only her future in Congress, but the trust she built among her constituents.

9. Bigger Picture: Pandemic Aid, Oversight, and Trust

This case is emblematic of larger, systemic tensions that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic: the rush to distribute aid, the potential for fraud, and the challenge of oversight. Billions of dollars flowed through state and federal agencies, often under tight timelines and limited scrutiny. Allegations like these raise profound questions:

- How did a \$5 million overpayment go unnoticed — or unreturned — for so long?
- What internal controls failed at FEMA, at Trinity, and in state agencies?
- To what extent did political ambition distort the line between public service and private gain?
- And perhaps most importantly: how can Congress restore trust when a sitting member is accused of siphoning disaster relief for electoral advantage?

For the American public, the stakes are deeply personal. These were emergency funds meant to stem a once-in-a-century health crisis. If prosecutors are proven correct, what was supposed to serve vulnerable communities was allegedly diverted to fuel political power — a betrayal that could resonate far beyond Florida.

10. What's Next: The Legal Countdown

Here's what to watch moving forward:

1. Court Proceedings: The indictment sets the stage, but trial is not imminent. Pre-trial motions, discovery, and legal jockeying could stretch over months. Her defense will almost certainly contest the prosecution's narrative: Was the overpayment truly fraudulent, or a mistake? Were the campaign contributions illicit, or legitimate?

2. House Ethics Committee: The Committee on Ethics must decide how to proceed now that a criminal case is pending. Will it accelerate its subcommittee work? Initiate a full-blown investigation? Or defer while the courts weigh in?

3. Political Pressure: The expulsion resolution by Rep. Steube brings political heat, though its fate is uncertain. Meanwhile, radical shifts in her standing

among constituents could reshape her re-election calculus — if she chooses to run again.

4. Media Scrutiny: Journalists will dig deeper into Trinity's books, campaign finance records, and internal emails. Investigative reporting could unearth new dimensions: Did others benefit? Were external advisers complicit? Is this part of a broader pattern?

5. Public Reaction: Voters in her district — and beyond — will weigh in. Some may see this as a war on corruption; others may cry foul, suggesting political motivations. How this debate unfolds could affect public trust in pandemic-era oversight, FEMA, and Congress itself.

6. A Crisis of Confidence: Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick's rise was once framed as a story of service, resilience, and community advocacy. But the federal indictment now paints a very different picture — one of alleged deception, financial manipulation, and political ambition run amok. The \$5 million overpayment, once signed off with bureaucratic oversight, is now at the center of a legal maelstrom.

This case isn't just about one congresswoman. It is a test of America's ability to police its own, especially those in the corridors of power. Will justice be done? Will public trust be restored? Or will this become yet another chapter in the long saga of political scandal?

As the courtroom drama begins and the political fallout intensifies, one truth remains: the eyes of the nation are fixed on this scandal — and the fate of Representative Cherfilus-McCormick may echo far beyond her district, shaping how we think about emergency government programs, accountability, and the very meaning of a public servant. Here is a dramatic, in-depth report (~2,500 words) on the unfolding investigation into U.S. Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick — its legal, political, and moral implications:

Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick's indictment is more than a political scandal — it is a moral crucible. At stake is not simply whether she broke the law, but whether she betrayed the trust of her constituents, the integrity of public office, and the spirit of public service. For her supporters, this may feel like a repudiation. For her critics, it may be a vindication. For the American public, it is a painful reminder: in times of crisis, as much as in normalcy, power must be watched, money must be safeguarded, and leaders must be held accountable.

The courtroom will decide her legal fate. But the court of history — and public opinion — may prove even more unforgiving.

CHARLOTTE COUNTY MECHANIC BRUTALLY ATTACKS CUSTOMER

ENGLEWOOD, Fla. — A Trusted Mechanic, a Makeshift Weapon, and a Violent Betrayal at a Charlotte County Auto Shop

Noone would have guessed in a million years what happened in Englewood... Why? ...because Englewood is where heat shimmers off Placida Road and locals trade stories over coffee after morning errands... but news of violence tends to travel fast. But even longtime residents were startled by the arrest of Frederick Ciampi, owner of Lemon Bay Auto, after deputies say he attacked a customer with a makeshift pipe inside his own garage.

The Charlotte County Sheriff's Office confirmed Ciampi was taken into custody on charges of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, a charge that paints only the broadest outline of what one victim describes as a shocking, sustained beating that left him bloodied, shaken, and betrayed by a man he once considered family.

Anthony Caruana, who brought his 2004 Lincoln Aviator into Ciampi's shop on Tuesday, says the day began ordinarily enough. He'd been living out of the SUV with his dog—his only transportation, home, and lifeline—and brought it in for what he expected to be a straightforward transmission replacement.

But something, he says, went terribly wrong.

"When they put the new one in; the old sludge went into the new one and destroyed it," Caruana told investigators. *"When I brought it to his attention, he snapped."*

Anthony not only SNAPPED! HE LITERALLY TURNED INTO A BOWL OF RICE KRISPIES & SNAPPED, CRACKLED, & POPPED!!!!!!

WOW - What in the Hell was Fred thinking! Was he trying to get on a reality TV Show?

Caruana said he wasn't arguing or raising his voice—just trying to understand what happened to the expensive transmission he'd paid for. He recalls Ciampi suddenly becoming agitated, pacing, then





ARTICLE BY MCKINLEY G. WILLIAMS

storming away. But Caruana didn't believe he was in any danger. After all, this was Fred—someone he'd known for 20 years, someone he said he trusted more than virtually anyone else in his life.

According to the sheriff's office, the moment that turned a customer complaint into a criminal investigation began when Caruana reached into his raised vehicle to retrieve a pack of cigarettes he'd left near the driver's seat. The Aviator was still on the lift, leaving his belongings several feet above his head.

Caruana bent toward a nearby toolbox, searching for a pair of pliers to grip the cigarettes from the elevated interior.

He never saw Ciampi coming.

"It's a makeshift pipe, it's metal over wood," Caruana recalled. "So it would be a half pipe on a piece of wood. While I was bent over trying to get the cigarette, and the pliers... I got hit in the head." The strike, he said, landed squarely at the back of his skull—an instant, stunning blow that sent him stumbling backward onto a tire machine. Before he could fully process the attack, he said Ciampi was on top of him, swinging again.

"He was on top of me, like really trying to get into my skull," Caruana said. "I'm on the floor blocking, and then his worker came and pulled him off. He drops the weapon, runs in the back." The worker, unnamed in the report, may have prevented the attack from escalating into something far worse.

What makes the assault more devastating for Caruana is the history he shared with Ciampi.

"Fred was the only one who stood by my side," he said. "So I was the only one that I trusted with my car. And you know, we became very close."

He shook his head as he recounted the betrayal, still unable to reconcile years of friendship with the violence he endured.

"I made this guy like family to me. I was so blown away. I still don't have anger with this guy. And he robbed me for \$1,350."

That money—his entire savings—had gone toward the transmission job. Now his SUV was disabled, the job incomplete, and his trust destroyed.

Caruana is left without transportation or shelter, stranded with his dog and the few belongings he carried with him. The injury, he says, is both physical and deeply personal.

When detectives questioned Ciampi, hoping to understand what led a mechanic to strike a longtime customer with a pipe, they

described his answers as inconsistent, especially concerning whether he actually hit Caruana with the weapon.

Ciampi told investigators he acted in self-defense, claiming Caruana was hovering over mechanics and approached him with a wrench—an account that differed sharply from the victim's statement, and from physical evidence at the scene.

One detail in the affidavit stood out prominently:

Investigators noted the location of the red mark on Caruana's back. Ciampi is right-handed, and if he had struck Caruana while facing him—as his story suggested—the mark would likely have been on the victim's right side.

It wasn't.

"The victim had a red mark on the left side of his back," the affidavit states, "which is inconsistent with Frederick's statement. The injury to the victim's back and head is consistent with being struck from behind and also consistent with the aggressor."

These contradictions, paired with physical injuries and witness intervention, led deputies to determine Ciampi was the aggressor, not a man defending himself. In short, he is screwed.

On Placida Road, Lemon Bay Auto has long been one of those small, local shops that rely on reputation more than advertising. Regulars wave to each other. Cars sit out front for days, sometimes weeks. People talk about fishing conditions and the heat while waiting for their oil changes.

Now, the shop is at the center of a violent episode that residents say feels out of place for the normally quiet stretch of Charlotte County.

For Caruana, the community's sympathy offers some comfort, but it doesn't replace his car, his home, or the stability he briefly hoped he was rebuilding.

As for Ciampi, he now faces a felony charge that could result in prison time—all stemming from a few chaotic seconds inside a garage where trust, friendship, and a man's livelihood collided with a crude weapon.

What remains is a disturbing question for everyone who knew the men involved:

How does a 20-year friendship end with one man on the ground, shielding his skull, and another fleeing to the back of a shop?

As investigators continue gathering evidence, one thing is certain: This was more than a business dispute. It was a violent personal rupture—and its impact will ripple through Englewood for a long time.

Finding Love After Loss:

Transitioning Into a New Relationship While Honoring Your Late Spouse and Supporting Your Children



BY VERNON BROWN, THE DUNBAR SHADE TREE PHD

Losing a spouse is one of life's most profound heartbreaks. The grief changes you—how you see the world, how you love, and how you imagine the future. For many people, the idea of opening their hearts again feels impossible at first, and for some, it feels wrong or disloyal. But as time passes, a new truth often emerges: the heart is capable of carrying deep love for someone who is gone while also making space for someone new.

Transitioning into a new relationship after a spouse has died is a deeply personal journey, and it is not unusual to feel a mix of hope, guilt, and fear. When children are involved, the emotions become even more layered. Children, regardless of age, may interpret a new relationship as an attempt to replace the parent they lost, or as a betrayal of the family's shared history. This is why communication, compassion, and patience are essential—both with yourself and with your children.

The goal is not to erase the past but to build a future that honors both your love story and your capacity to continue living fully. Life goes on, and that truth can be difficult but also healing. You deserve happiness, companionship, and love, and entering a new relationship does not—and should not—diminish the relationship you shared with your late spouse. Instead, it can become another chapter in a life that continues to grow despite loss.

One of the greatest misconceptions about moving forward after the death of a spouse is the idea that loving someone new somehow means you loved the person who passed away less. This belief is rooted in guilt, not in reality. Love is not a limited resource. Loving one person deeply does not erase the love you felt—or still feel—for another.

Your relationship with your late spouse remains a permanent part of your story. Their influence, your memories together, and the life you built do not vanish because you found companionship again. In fact, many people enter new

relationships with a deeper appreciation for life, love, and emotional connection precisely because of what they lost.

Children may need help understanding this. They might worry that a new partner means their parent's memory will fade or that loyalty to the deceased parent will be questioned. These fears are normal. A gentle reminder that love multiplies, rather than replaces, can help them adjust.

There is no "correct" timeline for entering a new relationship after a spouse has died. Some people find connection again sooner than expected, while others need years. What matters most is that your steps are guided by your emotional readiness—not by pressure, loneliness, or expectations from others.

Children might wonder, "Is it too soon?" or "Why now?" You can reassure them by explaining that grief and healing look different for everyone. Just as they have their own pace in processing the loss, you also have your own pace in rediscovering companionship and joy.

There is strength, not betrayal, in allowing yourself to love again.

One of the most important things to do is communicate openly and age-appropriately with your children. Talking to children about a new relationship after a parent has died can feel intimidating, but openness helps reduce fear and misunderstanding. Depending on their age, children often worry about different things:

- Young children may worry that their parent is being replaced or forgotten.
- Teenagers may feel that their loyalty is being tested or that family dynamics are changing too quickly.
- Adult children may struggle with seeing their surviving parent in a new romantic role or fear the loss of family traditions.
- Regardless of age, children need reassurance. Some important messages to share include:

- "No one will ever take your mother's or father's place."
- "My relationship with you doesn't change."
- "I will always honor your parent's memory."
- "Loving someone new doesn't erase the love I have for your mom/dad."

Children also appreciate being informed rather than surprised. Tell them about your relationship before they hear it from someone else. Give them space to react—whether with support, confusion, or even resistance. Their emotions are not a rejection of your happiness; they are part of their own adjustment.

Letting Children Know That Life Goes On — Without Diminishing the Past

One of the hardest truths in grieving is that life continues. The world keeps turning, birthdays come, holidays arrive, and daily routines take shape again. A new relationship doesn't mean the past stops mattering. It means that healing is happening.

You can explain to your children:

- Life going on does not mean forgetting.
- Moving forward does not mean moving away from the parent who passed.
- Healing does not mean the love or memories you all shared are any less meaningful.

Encourage your children to talk about their late parent. Keep pictures up, continue family traditions if they bring comfort, and allow their memory to remain alive within the household. When a new partner understands and respects this, the transition becomes easier for everyone.

It is entirely possible to honor your late spouse and still build a future with someone else. Many people find that the two forms of love coexist peacefully. Practical ways to honor your late spouse include:

- Keeping meaningful belongings or mementos.
- Talking about them with your children.
- Sharing stories or memories with your new partner when appropriate.
- Acknowledging anniversaries or special dates that matter.

Your new partner should not feel threatened by the presence of your past love, just as you should not feel pressured to erase its significance. Healthy relationships are built on honesty, understanding, and acceptance of each other's histories.

A new partner may also feel uncertain. They may wonder how much space they're allowed in a household where grief still exists, or how to interact with children who may be guarded. It's important to support them by:

- Setting realistic expectations.
- Allowing the relationship with your children to form naturally.
- Encouraging them to respect the memory of your spouse without feeling overshadowed.
- Reminding them that they are not competing with someone who has passed away—they are building something new with you.

A good partner understands that loving someone who has lost a spouse means accepting that grief—and love—do not disappear. They become part of the deeper emotional landscape.

Many people who enter new relationships after loss experience guilt. They may feel:

- Guilt for being happy again.
- Guilt for "moving on."
- Guilt for changing family dynamics.
- Guilt for loving someone new.

These feelings are normal, but guilt is not an indication that you are doing anything wrong. You are allowed to feel joy without betraying your past. You are allowed to seek companionship without diminishing the love you shared. You are allowed to continue living. Often, reminding yourself—and your children—that your late spouse wanted your happiness can be comforting. Most partners would never want their loved ones to remain lonely forever.

You are not starting over; you are continuing forward with all the love, memories, and experiences that shaped you. Your children, your late spouse, and your new partner all influence the person you are today.

Family can expand without replacing or erasing anyone. The heart can hold more than one great love. And happiness after loss is not only possible—it is part of honoring the life you have left to live.

Perhaps the most important message—both for you and for your children—is this:



You deserve to be happy again.

You deserve companionship.

You deserve love that brings comfort, joy, and fulfillment.

Finding someone new doesn't mean you no longer love your spouse who passed. It means you are human, you are healing, and you are embracing the life that continues.

Transitioning into a new relationship after the death of a spouse is a journey filled with emotion, vulnerability, and hope. It requires open communication, patience, and grace—both from you and from your children. But it is also a journey that can lead to renewed joy, deeper emotional connection, and a life that honors both your past and your future.

Your late spouse will always be part of your story, and no new partner will erase that. At the same time, your heart is capable of expanding, growing, and embracing new love. Life goes on—not in a way that forgets, but in a way that continues to love.

You deserve to live fully. You deserve to be happy. And finding new love is not a betrayal—it is a beautiful testament to the resilience of the human heart.



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