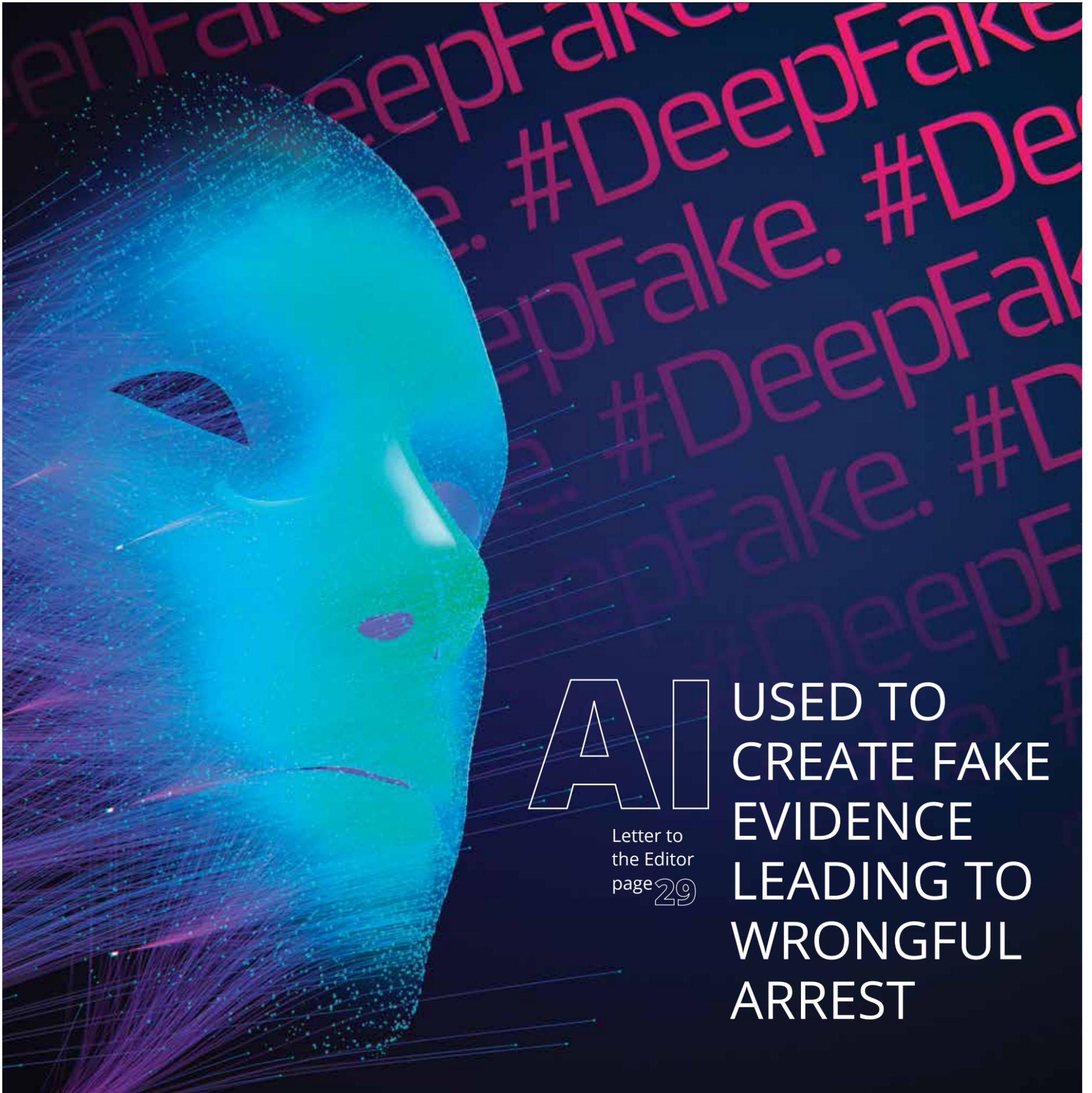


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AMIRA FOX CAMPAIGN KICKOFF





The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) released high school graduation rates for the Class of 2025 on January 13, 2026. The graduation rate for the State of Florida is 92.2%. Collier County Public Schools (CCPS) proudly announces our 2025 graduation rate is 94.4%, outperforming the State average by 2.2 percentage points. Out of 67 school districts in Florida, the CCPS Class of 2025 ranks 13th for graduation rate. This marks a significant increase from the rank of 25th for the Class of 2024. This level of achievement reflects the successful efforts to provide high-quality instruction and consistent monitoring and support to meet the needs of all students.

Table 1 | 2025 District and State Comparison

Four-Year Federal Graduation Rate	SY22	SY23	SY24	SY25
COLLIER	91.5%	91.5%	91.3%	94.4%
STATE	87.3%	88.0%	89.7%	92.2%

As evidenced in Table 2 below, CCPS has the highest graduation rate in the six-county Southwest Florida (SWFL) region. With more than 94% of CCPS students graduating in four years, this feat represents the highest 4-year graduation rate in the history of Collier County.

Table 2 | 2025 SWFL District Comparison

District Name	Total Graduates	Total Cohort	Total Federal Graduation Rate
CHARLOTTE	1358	1482	91.6%
COLLIER	3609	3822	94.4%
DESOTO	246	316	77.8%
GLADES	80	89	89.9%
HENDRY	949	1158	82%
LEE	6978	7771	89.8%

The FDOE also reports graduation rates for student subgroups.

Table 3 | 2025 Graduation Rate by Subgroup

	SWD	FRL	ELL	Migrant	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic
COLLIER	94.3%	93%	83.3%	83.8%	92.6%	96.2%	97.6%	97.9%	91.5%
STATE	89.1%	89.5%	86.3%	84.9%	90.7%	93.7%	94%	89.2%	91.6%

SWD - Students with Disabilities FRL - Free/Reduced Lunch ELL - English Language Learner

The graduation cohort is comprised of students who began Grade 9 in the fall of 2021 and completed all graduation requirements by July 31, 2025. Of the 3,822 students in the Class of 2025 cohort, 213 did not complete the requirements within that timeframe. It is important to note that students may remain enrolled to complete required coursework or assessments and may have finished, or will finish, during the current school year.

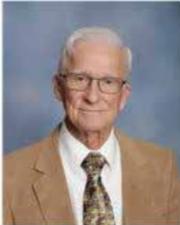
Non-graduates include students who:

- have not yet completed all graduation requirements and remain enrolled in CCPS;
- earned a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) through the State of Florida; or
- are continuing their education through adult education programs.

"I am incredibly proud of the Class of 2025 for their resilience and dedication in reaching this significant milestone. Their success reflects not only their own hard work, but also the consistent guidance, expertise, and commitment of our teachers, administrators, and staff at every stage of a student's journey from elementary through high school. As we recognize this accomplishment, we remain committed to closely monitoring and supporting students who still need additional help to meet graduation requirements. Our continued focus is ensuring that every student has access to the resources, support, and opportunities necessary to graduate and move confidently toward their future goals. With CCPS achieving the highest graduation rate in the six-county Southwest Florida region, and more than 94 percent of students graduating in four years, this record-breaking success further demonstrates why our community can trust Collier County Public Schools to deliver exceptional results." ~ Dr. Leslie C. Ricciardelli



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Member

District 2



Stephanie Lucarelli
Member

District 3



Kelly Lichter
Chair

District 4



Erick Carter
Member

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FEBRUARY 2026

SUNDAY FEB 1

& Juliet 2:00pm
& Juliet 7:30pm

TUESDAY FEB 3

Asian Art and History 10:30am
Farrenc & Beethoven 3:00pm
The Paul Simon Songbook 7:30pm

WEDNESDAY FEB 4

Bob Mintzer 6:00pm
The Paul Simon Songbook 7:30pm
Bob Mintzer 8:30pm



REED TETZLOFF

THURSDAY FEB 5

Reed Tetzloff 7:00pm
Artis—Wellness 7:00pm
The Paul Simon Songbook 7:30pm

FRIDAY FEB 6

Jazz History 10:00am
Studio Glass 2:00pm
The Rat Pack 6:00pm
. 8:30pm
The Paul Simon Songbook 7:30pm

SATURDAY FEB 7

Colm Tóibín 10:00am
The Rat Pack 6:00pm
. 8:30pm
The Paul Simon Songbook 2:00pm
. 7:30pm

SUNDAY FEB 8

Farrenc & Beethoven 3:00pm
Winter Concert 4:00pm

MONDAY FEB 9

Exploring Dance 1:00pm

TUESDAY FEB 10

Asian Art and History 10:30am
Chicago 7:30pm

WEDNESDAY FEB 11

Chicago 7:30pm
Chladni Sound Bath
Meditation 9:00am

THURSDAY FEB 12

Chicago 7:30pm
Dance Master Class 4:00pm
Artis—Wellness 4:00pm
Classical Music and Our Natural World 10:00am

FRIDAY FEB 13

The Language of Film 10:00am
Chicago 7:30pm

SATURDAY FEB 14

Chicago 2:00pm
. 7:30pm

SUNDAY FEB 15

Chicago 2:00pm
. 7:30pm
Wine Tasting 3:00pm

MONDAY FEB 16

The Language of Film 10:00am



MIN KWON

TUESDAY FEB 17

Asian Art and History 10:30am
The Philadelphia Orchestra 7:30pm

WEDNESDAY FEB 18

Flute Master Class 3:00pm
Violin Master Class 4:00pm
The Philadelphia Orchestra 7:30pm

THURSDAY FEB 19

Min Kwon 7:00pm
Samara Joy 7:30pm

FRIDAY FEB 20

Hooray for Hollywood 10:00am
Meet the Community Advisory Committee 6:00pm
Top of the World 6:00pm
. 8:30pm
Trombone Shorty 7:30pm

SATURDAY FEB 21

David Foster & Katharine McPhee 7:30pm
Winter Chamber Ensembles Concert 4:00pm

SUNDAY FEB 22

117 Years of Broadway 3:00pm
. 7:00pm
Kwon Plays Brahms 3:00pm

MONDAY FEB 23

Hooray for Hollywood 10:00am
Dance Master Class 4:00pm
Steve Young 6:00pm
. 8:30pm

TUESDAY FEB 24

Asian Art and History 10:30am
Miami City Ballet 7:30pm

WEDNESDAY FEB 25

Music and Art 10:00am
Art After Hours 6:00pm
Clarksdale Blues 6:00pm
. 8:30pm

THURSDAY FEB 26

Critic's Choice 10:00am
Violin Master Class 5:00pm
Artis—Wellness 7:00pm
The British Invasion 7:00pm
Paul Reiser 7:30pm

FRIDAY FEB 27

Classics Corner 10:00am
Inside Photography 1:00pm
Dvořák & Copland 7:30pm

SATURDAY FEB 28

Critic's Choice 10:00am
Winter Concert 11:00am
Dvořák & Copland 7:30pm



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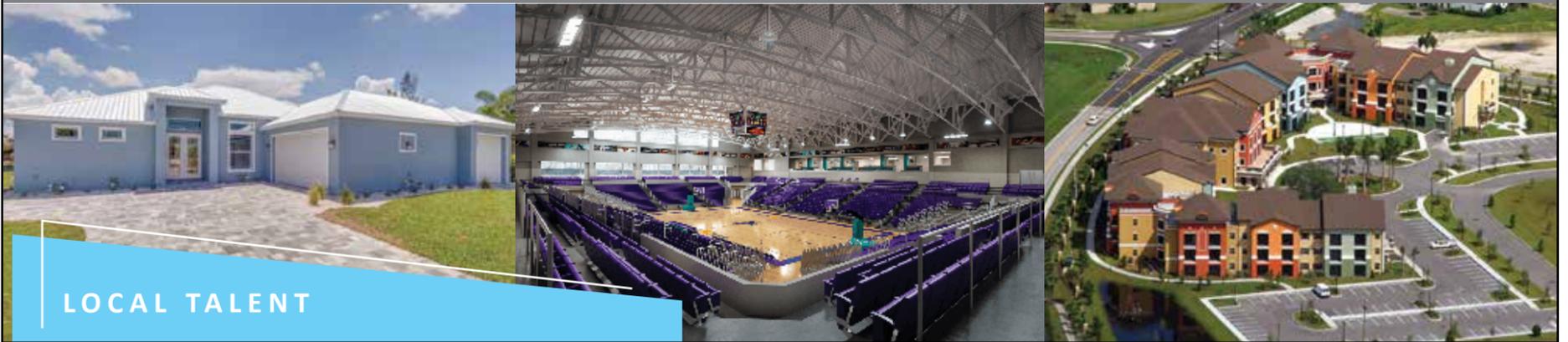
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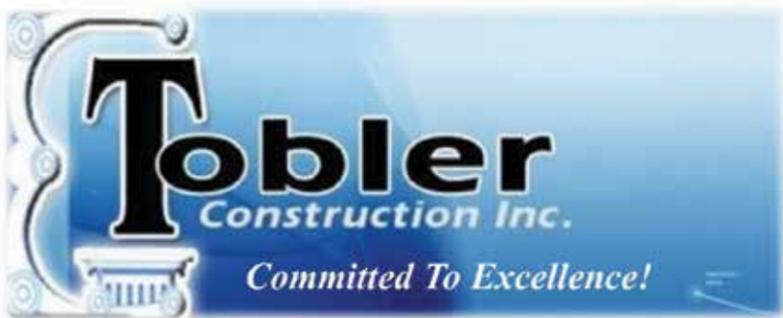
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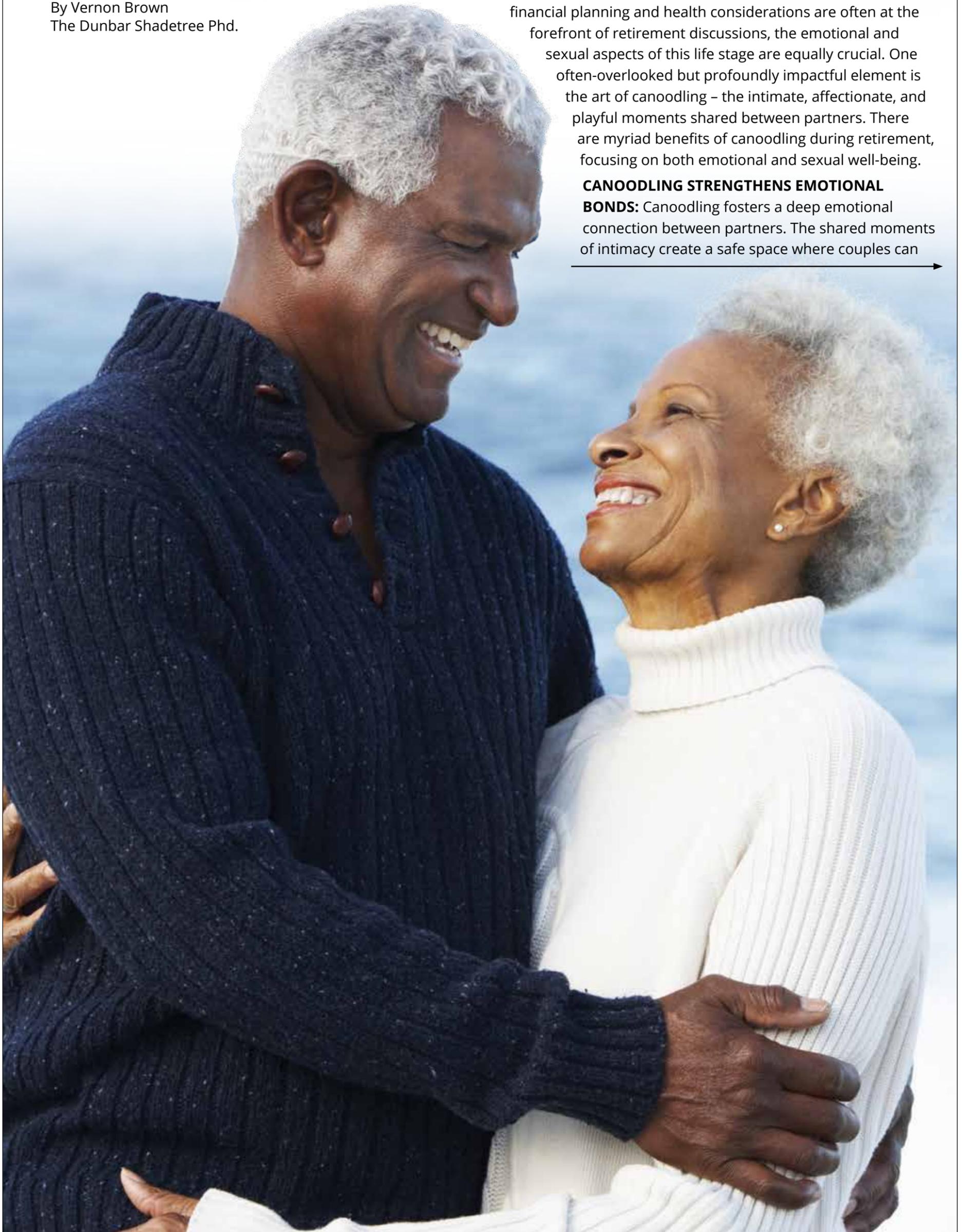
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THE ART OF CANOODLING: A PRESCRIPTION FOR A FULFILLING RETIREMENT AND SEX LIFE

By Vernon Brown
The Dunbar Shadetree Phd.

Retirement is a significant milestone in one's life, marking the transition from a bustling career, to a more relaxed and leisurely pace. While financial planning and health considerations are often at the forefront of retirement discussions, the emotional and sexual aspects of this life stage are equally crucial. One often-overlooked but profoundly impactful element is the art of canoodling – the intimate, affectionate, and playful moments shared between partners. There are myriad benefits of canoodling during retirement, focusing on both emotional and sexual well-being.

CANOODLING STRENGTHENS EMOTIONAL BONDS: Canoodling fosters a deep emotional connection between partners. The shared moments of intimacy create a safe space where couples can



express their love and affection, reinforcing the emotional bonds developed over a lifetime.

STRESS REDUCTION: Retirement can bring its own set of stressors – the adjustment to a new routine, the potential loss of identity tied to a career, and the uncertainties of aging. Canoodling acts as a stress reliever, triggering the release of oxytocin, the “love hormone,” which promotes feelings of trust and reduces stress.

ENHANCED COMMUNICATION: Intimate moments allow for open and honest communication. The vulnerability inherent in canoodling facilitates discussions about fears, desires, and future plans, strengthening the foundation of a relationship.

Improved Mental Health: Engaging in regular physical affection has been linked to improved mental health. The emotional support provided through canoodling can mitigate feelings of loneliness or depression that may arise during the retirement phase.

REDISCOVERING ROMANCE: Retirement provides an opportunity to rekindle the romance that may have taken a back seat during the busy working years. Canoodling allows couples to rediscover the joy and excitement that initially brought them together in the first place.

SEXUAL BENEFITS OF CANOODLING:

ENHANCED INTIMACY: Canoodling is a gateway to enhanced sexual intimacy. The physical closeness and affectionate touch can reignite the flame of passion, leading to a more fulfilling sexual relationship.

INCREASED LIBIDO: Regular physical affection has been linked to increased libido. Retirement provides the time and space for couples to explore and enjoy each other, contributing to a more satisfying sexual experience.

STRENGTHENING PHYSICAL HEALTH: Sexual activity, including canoodling, has numerous physical health benefits. From improved cardiovascular health to stress reduction and pain relief, a healthy sex life can positively impact overall well-being.

HORMONAL BALANCE: Engaging in canoodling stimulates the release of endorphins and hormones such as testosterone and estrogen, promoting hormonal balance. This not only contributes to a healthier sex life but also supports general health and vitality.

LONGEVITY AND QUALITY OF LIFE: Studies have suggested that an active and satisfying sex life is correlated with increased longevity and a higher quality of life. Canoodling, as a precursor to sexual activity, plays a vital role in achieving these benefits.

In the journey of retirement, emotional and sexual well-being are integral components of a fulfilling life. The art of canoodling emerges as a powerful tool, seamlessly weaving together the emotional and sexual threads that form the fabric of a lasting and satisfying relationship. As couples embark on this new chapter, embracing the joy, intimacy, and connection that canoodling offers may very well be the secret to a rich and rewarding retirement experience and happy sex life.

● END

SHERIFF CARMINE MARCENO REMINDS YOU ABOUT...



During this Valentine's Day season, be cautious when interacting online with people that you have never met. Should you have seniors and/or vulnerable individuals in your life, please take time to discuss these fraudulent activities. Scammers skillfully earn your trust as they lead their victims to believe that a special love is blossoming between them. Photos are exchanged and the victim receives smiling photographs of an attractive individual searching for love. Words of endearment such as a “honey,” “darling,” and “sweetheart” quickly find their way into the messages. Once the bait is taken, scammers begin their work. Requests for cash, gift cards and/or personal identifying information are made. Problems may arise and the victim is asked for a “brief loan.”



It is likely that the scammer is simultaneously maintaining similar “relationships” with dozens of other unsuspecting individuals and, once the victim shows an unwillingness to part with gift cards, send cash, etc., the “once in a lifetime” relationship abruptly ends.

IF YOU THINK YOU'VE BEEN A VICTIM OF A ROMANCE SCAM, CALL LCSO HEADQUARTERS AT (239) 477-1000.



DEAR *Beloved*

Pastor Dr. Deb Walsh | Mountain Mover & Water Walkers

"I am Doing a New Thing, Isaiah 43:19

This is a new year and a God is doing a new thing! **Isaiah 43:19 See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.** The question to ask yourself is, are you perceiving it? It springs up and that means it can come suddenly and forceful. A spring when it is irrigated gushes up from the ground. He is making a way in the wilderness which means those areas of your life that are not fruitful or barren—He can make a way where there seems to be no way. In the wilderness is where Moses, Jesus and many others went to spend time with God and to themselves prior to coming out and making a huge impact on people. Streams in the wasteland means that His mercies, grace and blessing flow! Wasteland is where nothing will grow. It takes water to make things grow and God will make streams of living water come out of you when you accept Jesus as your Savior! Like the woman at the well, He is the only one who can give living water.

There are some good habits to incorporate that have proven positive outcomes. First is to read the Bible. I recommend starting at Proverbs, the book of wisdom. If you are doing the same thing and expect different results, you need wisdom to make changes to bring about better results. It has 31 chapters and therefore, you can read one chapter a day for each and every month. Second, is to prepare a budget. This is what every person should do to stay in the confines of what you can afford. Mammon will have you overspend and keep your debt in darkness or secret. If you know your finances, you will be able to make better decisions. Better decisions then lead to better outcomes.

However, did you know that God's Spirit has already given you wisdom with understanding to have skills and abilities that will help you to be successful? **Exodus 31:2-3 "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, 3 and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills.** This year, ask God what He has given you to help you be

prosperous. What are some things you enjoy doing? What do you get recognition from others that highlights your strengths? Spend time with God and ask Him to reveal them to you.

Deuteronomy 28:8 states, "The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you."

That is a great promise and add that to what wisdom He has given you, how could you not be prosperous? Have you asked God to bless what you put your hand to? Start seeking God and His prosperous plans, wisdom and blessings that are too numerous to count. God delights in the details of your life **"Psalm 37:23 The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives."** If you want to know Him, ask God to forgive you of your sins and ask Him to come into your heart. Knowing that He came to earth, lived and died for our sin. He paid the price for us already. He ransomed us back to Himself at the cost of His precious blood. Nobody loves you more than Him. Find a Bible-believing church and attend regularly so you can get encouragement and support in your walk with God.

Love, Pastor Dr. Deb Walsh

Ephesians 4:22-24 states, "To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

There may be moments when life feels like a wilderness, dry, uncertain, and unmapped. Yet Isaiah 43:19 reminds us that God is never idle in barren places. "See, I am doing a new thing!" This declaration is not whispered; it is announced with intention, calling us to lift our eyes and adjust our vision. The shift does not begin in our circumstances, it begins in His presence.

Too often, we look for God to move the way He always has, while He is already unfolding something new. Shifting in His presence requires us to let go of old expectations and make room for fresh faith. It is in stillness, prayer, and surrender that our spiritual lenses are cleaned, allowing us to perceive what was previously unseen. What once looked like wasteland becomes the very place where streams of hope begin to flow.

God specializes in creating pathways where none seem possible.

When we shift our vision from what was to what is becoming, we discover that the wilderness is not a punishment, but a preparation. Every dry season carries the promise of renewal if we are willing to see through eyes of trust rather than fear.

This is the invitation before us: to pause, to perceive, and to believe that God is actively at work right now. As we shift our vision in His presence, we align ourselves with His divine movement. The new thing is already springing up. The question is not whether God is moving, but whether we are willing to see it. Declare and decree over you and everyone connected to you that you are Shifting into the presence of God this year!

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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THE INNATE CIRCLE

by Monique Wooley



FROM GIRLHOOD TO WOMANHOOD:

I Call it Grace

Girls are often sheltered in the warmth of childhood innocence. The world feels like a playground filled with dreams, wonder, and endless curiosity, while the challenges of adulthood seem distant and unreal.

As we grow older, experiences, challenges, and relationships shape us into women. These are moments that, as girls, we may not fully understand. Yet as women, we look back and suddenly recognize the seriousness of life and the quiet pressures that mold us along the way.

Girls often view independence as not having to ask permission, getting a driver's license, or making decisions without guidance. Womanhood teaches us that true independence lies in choice—and in accepting the consequences of those choices. The emotional, financial, and physical cost of living life on your own terms can be heavy. Still, that same independence can be priceless, empowering, and deeply transformative.

Then there is young love, often seen through the lens of innocence—fairy tales, true love, and dreams of happily ever after. With time, women come to understand love's true complexity. It is a roller coaster that can bring profound joy and painful lessons. Through experience, women learn the importance of self-love, the necessity of communication, and the non-negotiable need for respect.

Many young women do not yet understand what it means to lead a spiritual life. As we grow older, life's challenges begin to chip away at the core of who we are, quietly stripping innocence and certainty. Little by little, we seek deeper understanding and grounding—something to help make sense of the journey and provide perspective in uncertain times.

In womanhood, we stop telling ourselves comforting lies driven by fear. Instead, we begin to own our truth, because we understand what we bring to the table. We start cleansing our mind, body, and soul from the inside out, allowing self-love and confidence to take root.

Women are often reflections of how they are treated.

When our circle feels wrong, it becomes necessary to look inward—to examine what we are projecting and, more importantly, why.

Many of us were taught how to pray and read the Bible as part of a Sunday routine. That foundation was meant to guide us toward spirituality and respect for Christianity, but the deeper work must be done personally. Too often, we are too busy, too afraid, too ashamed, or too distracted to allow that genuine connection into our souls.

Yet when we are burdened, exhausted, torn down, or weak, we often find our way back to the spirit—and that is okay. As 2 Corinthians 12:9 reminds us, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Psalm 34:18 offers comfort as well: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

February is the month of love, but love should never be confined to one month. This month—and every month—show your daughter, your sister, your auntie, your mother, your wife, and every woman in your life love. Show her patience. Show her understanding.

Show her grace.

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BY BEBE KANTER

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"Flo's operates without the safety net of pretense—providing only grease, salt, and raw authenticity."

The \$12.95 Special. The Friday Fish Fry is the metric of success at Flo's. The battered cod must be pristine; any hint of a "watery" texture constitutes an immediate failure. Notably, the batter used for the flounder shares a striking technical lineage with tempura. This is no coincidence; Portuguese explorers originally introduced the art of deep-frying to Japan, and Rhode Island's own culinary history is deeply rooted in its Portuguese immigrant community. The result is a crust that is unapologetically brittle, though the oil content often strains the paper tray's structural integrity.

The environment complements the menu's simplicity. If the fish lacks firmness or the sides are overmatched by the deep-fryer, the deficiency is laid bare.

This establishment offers an authentic taste of its northern roots, but it requires a patron who values the raw integrity of a shack over manufactured elegance. In this space, the only thing that matters is the freshness of the yield and the temperature of the fat. I have zero patience for culinary padding; if a dish lacks caliber, it is a waste of a caloric opportunity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bebe Kanter is a Harvard and Barnard alumna who has been dissecting culinary trends by reading cookbooks, eating, and taking classes since 1980. A Level 6 Google Local Guide and dedicated environmental advocate, she seeks technical excellence in both the kitchen and the soil. She contributes unvarnished reviews to the SWFL Chronicle, Yelp, NextDoor, Facebook, and Quisine Collier on LinkedIn. She doesn't disclose her identity so that what she experiences is the same as any other customer.



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Nelson Tillis was Fort Myers's first free black pioneer, who arrived on Christmas day in 1867. He was known to have worked as a fireman, a farmer and a remarkable fisherman who also guided Thomas Edison on fishing trips.

On August 5, 1890, Nelson Tillis land was granted through the homestead act of 1862 which allowed people to claim up to 160 acres of public land during that time.

Nelson Tillis met Ellen Summerall, fell in love, and married. Although the exact date is not known, it is presumed they were about 24 and 19 years old, respectfully, when they married. Their union produced 11 children.

As a land owner of 110 acres in Fort Myers, on the North Banks of The Caloosahatchee River, this land served as his family's home and work space as a farmer and fisherman.

Owning 110 acres of land, He then decided to unselfishly, and with his community in mind, build the first school for black students. He built it on his own land and even traveled as far as Key West to hire a tutor for his school.

That school became the Paul Lawrence Dunbar School in

THE INNATE CIRCLE

by Monique Wooley



1927 located at 1857 High Street. The last graduating class of the original Paul Lawrence Dunbar School was the year of 1962, with about two-thirds of that graduating class going on to attend college.

That school today is known as the Dunbar Community School and was added to the national register of historic places in 1992.

Nelson Tillis was a respected community leader that helped to shape and develop the community. He helped to transport materials on the river for early development of Fort Myers buildings such as the courthouse building that stands in what is now known as Downtown Fort Myers.

Nelson Tillis was a truly inspiring man who originated from a Central African Country, Cameroon, but he was also a Central European descent and Cherokee Lineage.

Nelson Tillis passed away in the Bahamas in 1910.

***There is a lot more to this Black History story which is encouraged to research and read the full history of this remarkable pioneer.*

Join us for a neighborhood BBQ in the heart of the River District and help support a Community Sailing & Boating Center!

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Edison Sailing Center envisions a vibrant Community Boating Center – one that opens public access to the water and invites both residents and visitors to enjoy our beautiful local waterways. This new center will serve as a gateway to downtown Fort Myers and the river, creating opportunities for recreation, connection, and a deeper appreciation of our river community.

We welcome our community's input as we gather ideas for our new Community Boating Center. Your thoughts and visions will help shape a space that truly serves everyone.



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Otherside

BY LISA ESWAY



Let the nets down... and they may come up empty. And you let it down again and it came up empty. All it was doing was holding the place, because when God shows up you'll be ready for what's on the other side. I'm ready. I'm ready now. My heart is ready. He has me where He wants me. I am teachable. I am with it now. I am whiter than snow now. I'm hopeful now. I've had a change of character. I'm ready now. Don't focus on anything in this season nothing but nets. Because what is coming is greater. He is going to do it but it is going to be bigger. I think that everything in my life that is in front of me there is something that God already did. He will not do it the same way so don't look for the same thing. God will use different tools in different seasons. Anything that is truly for me in my life God won't let get away from me. Whatever it is you're about to do, do it. I'm going down this path and I'm going. I'm going to do whatever it is. I am alive again some of the things God wants to bring alive again in your life they aren't really dead. They are just waiting for you to recognize them. Sometimes it is not about something God needs to add to your life it's about something that we need to remember again. Say it. Surrender. Turn your will into His will. God is a good

teacher that knows how to get through to me. He will never run out of what I need more of. He is there again for me as many times as I need. You are able to become what you believe and you believe what you repeat especially when you repeat within yourself. Come back home again. If I was lost what mattered most to me what would I give to have it back? Maybe I have lost a person or something in my life... what would I give to have that something back if it went away? Everything? So what do you have right now? Sometimes you need to remember again what you already have been given it is good to stand in a situation not knowing what God's going to do next. He already did this. He already gave me that. If I already have you I have everything and what He has already done once He will do it again. Remember your past victories. And have the courage to face what is allowed in your life. My God is standing over my life. Whatever you're walking through I believe He will do it again. He told the storm to be still, He told the walls to fall, He told the chains to break, He told the sea to part, He told the bones to come alive. It's not the one that's got away it's the one that got you ready for what is on the other side.

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WINNER**

Dunbar High School teacher Dan Trembley has been named one of four national winners of the CYBER.ORG Annual Educator Award.



This prestigious recognition highlights Trembley’s exceptional contributions to cybersecurity education and his impact as one of the nation’s leading educators in the field.

Mr. Trembley has played a key role in advancing cybersecurity education since the Academy for Technology Excellence inception in 2004. Under his leadership, students have earned professional-level certifications from industry-leading organizations, including Adobe, Certiport, Cisco, CompTIA, and Microsoft. Over the past two decades, many of Trembley’s former students have gone on to successful cybersecurity careers in the military, government, and private industry.

“We are exceptionally proud to see Mr. Trembley receive this distinguished national honor,” said Principal Dr. Carl Burnside. “As a cybersecurity professional with more than twenty years in teaching cybersecurity education, he has elevated our technology programs to a level of excellence that attracts students from across the district. His ability to translate complex industry concepts into engaging, practical learning experiences has transformed countless young lives. The graduates

of his programs are now safeguarding critical infrastructure and defending our digital landscape in some of the most important organizations in the world. This CYBER.ORG recognition is truly a celebration of his remarkable dedication and impact.”

CYBER.ORG, the academic initiative of the Cyber Innovation Center, is a cybersecurity workforce development organization dedicated to preparing K-12 students for careers in cybersecurity. The organization provides career awareness programs, curricular resources, and professional development opportunities for educators nationwide.

CYBER.ORG’s efforts are supported by a grant from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This funding enables CYBER.ORG to develop and distribute high-quality cybersecurity education resources at no cost to educators across the country. For more information about CYBER.ORG and the Annual CYBER.ORG Educator Award, visit cyber.org.

For more information about Dunbar High School and its consistent award-winning IB STEM programs, contact Denise Spence, IT Programs Manager at (239) 461-5322.



February 3, 3:00pm

February 8, 3:00pm

Farrenc & Beethoven
Naples Philharmonic Syper Salon Chamber Music

Musicians of the Naples Philharmonic
Farrenc — Piano Trio in D Minor
Beethoven — String Quartet in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3

Musicians of the Naples Philharmonic explore the shifting musical landscape between the Classical and Romantic eras in a program highlighting Beethoven and Louise Farrenc.

The concert opens with Farrenc’s Piano Trio in D Minor, a work marked by lyrical elegance and expressive harmonic writing. Reflecting the influence of Viennese classicism, the trio gives equal weight to each instrument, creating a dynamic interplay that showcases both individual artistry and ensemble cohesion.

The program concludes with Beethoven’s String Quartet in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3 — part of the composer’s bold middle period. Celebrated for its structural innovation and dramatic range, the quartet moves from brooding introspection to moments of luminous wonder, capturing Beethoven’s evolving emotional and artistic voice.

The Syper Salon Series is generously sponsored by Drs. George Syper and Joy Arpin.



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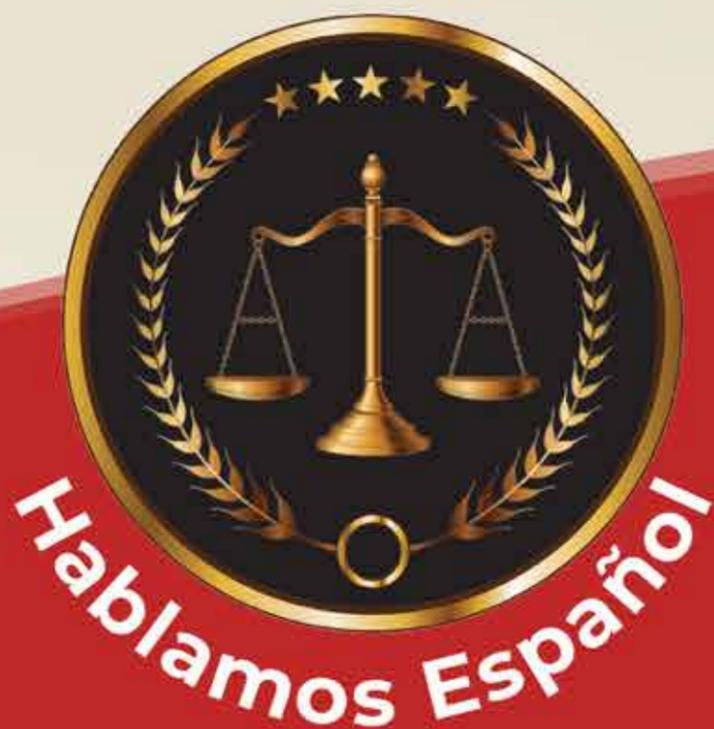
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WHY LEE COUNTY HAS FAILED TO WIN AN FHSAA

BY MEL WHITLOCK

In 1963 the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) established divisional football championships. Since that time, 350-plus high school football teams around Florida have been crowned a division. Of those 350-plus state champions, zero...yes you read that correctly, zero, have come from a school here in Lee County! How is it possible for a county that produced talents such as Deion Sanders, Jevon Kearse, and Sammy Watkins be ringless when it comes to an FHSAA football championship?

In addition to zero state championships, only three teams from Lee County have ever made it to a championship game (Bishop Verot in 1991 and 1994, Estero in 1998). Instead of being a Monday Morning Quarterback, I will speak as someone who has covered high school football in Lee County for seven years in stating that the three biggest reasons Lee County has failed to produce a football state champion are: (1) too many high schools, (2) too little student-athlete preparation, and (3) not enough coaching loyalty.

TOO MANY HIGH SCHOOLS

THE PROBLEM

When Estero appeared in the 5A FHSAA Final in 1998, Lee County had eight public and two private high schools. Today there are sixteen public high schools and five private and/or charter schools within the county. Although twenty-one high schools may not seem a lot compared to Orange or Dade County, only two of our high schools (Lehigh Senior and Gateway) have a population greater than 2,000 students.

Why is this a problem? With each new high school being built it requires a new football program, new equipment, new athletic facilities, new coaches, and of course new athletes. Furthermore, the need to compete for playing time or even a roster spot is lessened because a player can transfer easily to another school, therefore, it is not impossible to believe a decrease in competitive urgency amongst our high school athletes could be attributed to this phenomenon.

THE SOLUTION

At some point the school district will need to consider school consolidation, not just for athletics, but also for: transportation, staffing, and building maintenance purposes. Instead of building more community schools, it is time for the district to consider bigger facilities to house larger populations of students. School consolidation athletically is beneficial because it narrows campus focus for resources, improves competition amongst the student athlete population within the school, and it helps to keep quality position coaches from taking unsuitable head coaching positions at other schools.

LACK OF MIDDLE SCHOOL FOOTBALL

(Student-Athlete Preparation in Middle School)

THE PROBLEM

I first moved to southwest Florida in 2015, and I quickly realized how imperative Pop Warner football was for the development of our future high school football players. The Fire Cats, Raiders, Sting Rays, and Knights just to name a few, have been instrumental in developing our high school talent here in Lee County. However, two of the biggest challenges that I continue to see for our incoming freshmen are (1) understanding the importance of eligibility and (2) being coached differently.

ELIGIBILITY: I would argue that a fifth of all football players who enter high school here in Lee County are either ineligible or face risk of ineligibility after their first semester. High school athletes, in general, enter their freshman year without any real understanding of what it means to be accountable, athletically and academically. According to the FHSAA students are ineligible to participate in high school athletics if their GPA is below a 2.0, which means if a freshman bombs his or her first semester in high school that freshman cannot participate in spring football.

COACHABILITY: To no fault of Pop Warner coaches in our area, unfortunately many of their players entering high school struggle to adjust to the expectations put forth by their head coach. In many ways, this could be a factor in players opting

THE SOLUTION

to transfer more frequently in search of a better coach, instead of a better education, which the latter being the sole intent of school choice. It is past time for Lee County to form a middle school athletic association. Creating a middle school association here in Lee County will help middle school athletes prepare for the demands of being grade-eligible upon entering high school. Another benefit of establishing a middle school association will be certifying qualified coaches to potentially elevate into vacant high school positions. Lastly, promoting middle school pride will foster the necessity in strengthening rivalries between schools in Lee County.



LACK OF COACHING LOYALTY WITHIN THE BROTHERHOOD

When Fort Myers High School head football coach Sam Sirianni Jr. recently retired, it unfortunately brought a reminder of coaching mortality for the greats that we all admired over the years. Apart from Sammy Brown at Dunbar and Darren Nelson at Estero, no current football coach for Lee County Public Schools has served in their role for more than five years. With the new responsibility of being a head coach in such a large county, two errors I have seen novice coaches make in the area are: (1) non-credible reporting against other coaches, and (2) not investing long-term for championship success.

UNFAIRLY REPORTING OTHER COACHES

I wrote a past article on Teddy Bridgewater being unfairly dismissed as the head football coach for Miami-Northwestern because he reportedly violated an FHSAA policy on permissible gifts. Instead of supporting the reality that Bridgewater was guilty of feeding his players and ensuring his players had a ride to school, I received some reaction on my article from coaches justifying his dismissal. As if any of us, who coached a sport in high school, never fed a hungry player or provided



a ride home to a stranded player? Any coach that is worth his or her whistle has surely gone above and beyond to help a player with a physiological need.

Unfortunately, it's all about "who we like" when it comes to this kind of jaded reporting, and this trend will only get worse as the old guards like Sammy et al are fading into the sunset.

Coaches are fallible, violations do occur, and programs should be held accountable. However, if a coach reports one school for violating and not another school who commits worse crimes, then that 'whistle blowing' coach is nothing more than a hypocrite to the profession.

CLOSING POINT

Zero for 350-plus championships in an area that has so much rich football history is unacceptable in my opinion and view. Resolving the conflict of having so many schools diluting our talent pool, creating a sustainable feeder system in middle school, and building better coalitions within the coaching community are the first steps in securing our first FHSAA football championship in the history of our county.

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OPERA NAPLES

ANNOUNCES ADDITION OF SAMANTHA HANKEY CONCERT TO 2025/26 SEASON



An Evening with Opera Star Samantha Hankey

April 7 // 7pm
Moorings Presbyterian Church

Samantha Hankey mezzo-soprano
Ramón Tebar piano

A much sought after recitalist who has been praised by the Financial Times for her “much elegance and youthful tone,” Hankey has enjoyed a rapidly rising career with appearances at The Metropolitan Opera, Vienna State Opera, Royal Opera House, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Carnegie Hall and The Kennedy Center, among other premier performance halls around the world.

A resident of Naples, Florida, Hankey will be joined for this performance by Opera Naples Artistic and Music Director Ramón Tebar at the piano. Maestro Tebar commented, “I have been following Samantha’s career for some years now, and she is an artist I wanted very much to perform with. When I found out that she is local and spent many summers in Naples during childhood and is now living in town, I couldn’t resist adding a performance with her as soon as possible. I am very happy that she made herself available while in town between her international engagements to perform in this recital.”

VIP tickets: \$250
(includes premium seating plus pre-concert and post-concert receptions)
GA tickets: \$50

As an extension of the 2026 Festival Under the Stars (February 13 to March 15), Opera Naples plans to conclude performance season with intimate concert featuring renowned mezzo-soprano on April 7

2026 Opera Naples Festival Under the Stars

Opera Naples Artistic and Music Director Ramón Tebar leads the festival’s musical activities, conducting the Naples Festival Orchestra, which includes several musicians from The Metropolitan Opera and San Francisco Opera, including the San Francisco Opera’s concertmaster. The festival is notable for being the only outdoor winter opera festival in the United States. Festivalgoers will enjoy three operas featuring internationally renowned artists, special concerts featuring the Opera Naples Chorus and Resident Artists, the second Luciano Pavarotti Foundation Opera Naples International Voice Competition and a performance of Don Quixote by the Gulfshore Ballet.

Tickets: Reserved Seating \$38-\$157. VIP Tables start at \$390, including access to a VIP reception from 6-7pm.

Feb 13 // 7pm



Wang Opera Center
Voices of Triumph: A Celebration of the Opera Chorus

Join the Opera Naples Chorus and Resident Artists for an unforgettable evening celebrating the power and beauty of the human voice with famous opera choruses. Featuring highly recognizable repertoire with selections from popular works such as Carmen and La Traviata, this uplifting program showcases timeless works that have inspired audiences for generations. Experience the rich harmonies that only a full chorus can deliver.

Feb 21 // 7pm
Feb 22 // 2pm



Wang Opera Center
Scalia/Ginsburg by Derrick Wang
Scalia/Ginsburg is a witty and heartfelt comic opera that brings Supreme Court justices Antonin Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsburg to life in a powerful musical dialogue about law, friendship and the Constitution. Blending operatic drama with sharp legal humor, this unique production celebrates the unlikely bond between two ideological opposites united by mutual respect. The composer Derrick Wang will also be in attendance at the Toast to Opera event on February 19 to provide more insight into his opera.

More details about Toast to Opera events are included below.

Feb 28 // 6:30pm



Wang Opera Center
Don Quixote by Ludwig Minkus with Gulfshore Ballet
Don Quixote is a three-act ballet based on Miguel de Cervantes’ novel Don Quixote de la Mancha, featuring choreography by Iliana Lopez and Franklin Gamero after Marius Petipa and music by Ludwig Minkus. Gulfshore Ballet presents a ballet renowned for its Spanish theme and Spanish-inspired melodies. Join us for an unforgettable evening of bold adventure and fiery spirit!

March 7 // 10am

Baker Park
FREE Family & Community Day!

This event features activities and special performances for the whole family. A children’s-themed opera performance presented by the Opera Naples Resident Artists, plus fun activities and games, bounce house, face painting and balloon artistry. Admission is free; no tickets required.

continued on page 24

BUILDING RESILIENCE TOGETHER
**How Our City is
Preparing for the Future**

MAYOR TERESA LEE HEITMANN
CITY OF NAPLES

239-213-1000
Mayorheitmann@naplesgov.com



Resiliency isn't something a city achieves alone. It requires informed residents, thoughtful policy decisions, and skilled professionals working together toward a shared goal. Since 2019, that collaboration has driven significant progress in our city's approach to stormwater management and long-term resilience.

Over the past several years, City Council, guided by resident input and supported by city staff expertise, has allocated \$282 million toward stormwater improvements as part of a broader \$600 million resiliency plan. These investments are already translating into projects across the city, with a focus on the neighborhoods that need them most.

Just as important as the projects themselves is how they're funded. A sustainable funding plan is in place that phases stormwater fee increases over four years, totaling 25%, while the city continues to aggressively pursue state, federal, and local grants. This approach balances fiscal responsibility with the urgency of addressing flooding and drainage challenges.

Science and planning are also central to this work. A sea-level and saltwater intrusion analysis is currently under review and will be incorporated into development codes to better protect against rising water levels. At the same time, the Comprehensive Plan 2045 update will establish policies and laws designed to preserve our city's safety, economy, and environment for decades to come.

One of the most important lessons we've learned is that solutions must be neighborhood-specific. Every area of the city experiences water differently, and our implementation strategy reflects that reality. Clearer codes, stronger intergovernmental coordination, and continued lake management all play a role in making these solutions effective.

Our community's progress was on full display on January 5th as we gathered to celebrate the groundbreaking of the Naples Pier, a cherished landmark that stands as both a symbol of our recovery and a reminder of what we can accomplish together. The rebuilding effort reflects the same values driving our resiliency plan: collaboration, foresight, and a shared commitment to protecting the city we love.

None of this happens without partnership. Residents who show up, ask questions, and share local knowledge make better outcomes possible. City staff bring technical expertise and day-to-day execution. Council provides direction, accountability, and long-term vision.

Resiliency is ongoing work, and transparency remains a priority. Public review sessions, neighborhood meetings, and regular project updates will continue as this effort moves forward.

When residents, staff, and elected leaders work together, we don't just respond to today's challenges, we build a stronger, safer city for the future.



March 7 // 7pm
Wang Opera Center
Stars and Standards: An American Songbook Celebration

Step into an evening of timeless tunes as Opera Naples brings iconic melodies to life, featuring beloved classics from composers such as Berlin, Bernstein, Gershwin and Porter. It's a night of nostalgia, charm and pure American musical magic.

March 11 // 7pm
March 13 / 7pm



Baker Park
 Turandot by Giacomo Puccini
 Puccini's Turandot is a grand and emotionally charged opera set in ancient China, where a cold-hearted princess challenges suitors with deadly riddles. Featuring the iconic aria "Nessun dorma," this visually

stunning production delivers a powerful blend of passion, mystery and unforgettable music. Sung in Italian with English supertitles.

March 12 // 7pm
March 14 // 7pm



Baker Park
 The Elixir of Love by Gaetano Donizetti
 Donizetti's The Elixir of Love is a charming romantic comedy filled with playful twists, heartfelt melodies and irresistible humor. When a lovestruck young man tries to win the heart of his beloved with the help of a "magic" potion, chaos and laughter ensue. This delightful opera sparkles with warmth, wit and timeless appeal. Sung in Italian with English supertitles.

Ticket availability varies by event. For tickets, please visit OperaNaples.org. Millennium Club and members may purchase tickets with Concierge Ticketing by calling Rita Albaugh at 239-844-SING or emailing ralbaugh@operanaples.org.

Opera Naples is grateful for sponsorship support from Larry and Louise Ost, Sally Gleason, John and Nicoletta Pepe, Melody Sawyer Richardson, Cindy Stegemann, Susan Gibbons, Kathleen Field Orr and Roy Beck, Steve and Kathy Nichols, Bruce and Lois Selfon, Ronald C. Smith, Ice Miller, PNC Private Bank, Starkweather & Shepley Insurance, Freeman's, Bentley Naples, Ciccarelli Advisory Services, FineMark National Bank & Trust, Florida Trust Wealth Management, Peacock + Lewis Architects and Planners, Stock Development, Luciano Pavarotti Foundation, Gulfshore Life, The Naples Press, Naples Daily News, Gulfshore Ballet, Winfield Coffee, City of Naples, National Endowment for the Arts, Florida Theatrical Association and the Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention and Visitors Bureau, Florida's Paradise Coast.

OTHER ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

February 5 // 4pm
February 19 // 4pm
March 5 // 4pm
Wang Opera Center
Friends of Opera Naples TOASTS TO OPERA



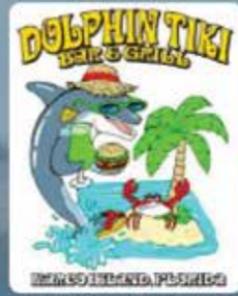
Learn about the composer, historical context, story, characters and musical themes of upcoming productions including Turandot, The Elixir of Love, and Scalia/Ginsburg (with special guest appearance by composer Derrick Wang) as well as historic background of voice competitions which inspired the Luciano Pavarotti Foundation Opera Naples International Voice Competition. Dr. Tom Cimarusti, Florida Gulf Coast University Professor of Musicology in the Department of Bower School of Music & the Arts, will present an entertaining, informative and educational lecture with Q&A. Afterwards, wine and light bites will be served as together we TOAST the upcoming Opera Naples production.



March 14 // 1pm
FGCU's Bower School of Music & the Arts

Semifinal Round of the Luciano Pavarotti Foundation Opera Naples International Voice Competition Semifinal Round (at FGCU) and Final Round (at Baker Park) of the Luciano Pavarotti Foundation Opera Naples International Voice Competition
 The second Luciano Pavarotti Foundation Opera Naples International Voice Competition, presented by Opera Naples in partnership with the Luciano Pavarotti Foundation and The Bower School of Music & the Arts at Florida Gulf Coast University, continues to take the opera world by storm bringing together talented up-and-coming singers from around the world to compete for coveted contracts with top opera houses. Get ready to be awestruck by astonishingly virtuosic voices from across the globe.

March 15 // 7pm
Baker Park
 Final Round of the Luciano Pavarotti Foundation Opera Naples International Voice Competition

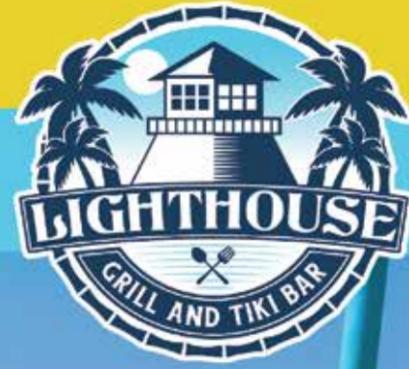


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The Benefits of Laddering Bonds as an Investment Strategy

BY MCKINLEY G. WILLIAMS

I recently had a conversation with one of my mentors who was the Finance Director of a particular county in Florida. I joked and reminded him that he was the first person who taught me the power of laddering bonds. So I decided to share this information with my readership. First let me outline the benefits of laddering bonds as a long-term investment strategy and to explain why it is often favored by investors seeking stability, predictable income, and prudent risk management.

In an environment where interest rates and market conditions can shift unexpectedly, bond laddering offers a disciplined approach that balances return potential with financial security.

Bond laddering is the practice of purchasing bonds with staggered maturity dates—for example, bonds that mature in one, three, five, and ten years—rather than concentrating investments in a single maturity. As each bond matures, the principal is typically reinvested into a new long-term bond, thereby maintaining the structure of the ladder. This approach delivers several important advantages.

One of the primary benefits of a bond ladder is consistent and predictable income. Because bonds generally pay interest at regular intervals, holding multiple bonds with different maturities can create a steady stream of cash flow. This predictability is especially valuable for retirees or income-focused investors who rely on investment earnings to

meet living expenses. Unlike equities, whose dividends may fluctuate or be suspended, bond interest payments are contractually defined, making them easier to plan around.

Another key advantage is reduced interest rate risk. Interest rates and bond prices move inversely, meaning that when rates rise, bond prices typically fall. By spreading investments across multiple maturities, a ladder helps mitigate the impact of interest rate fluctuations. If rates rise, the bonds maturing in the near term can be reinvested at higher yields. If rates fall, the investor still benefits from holding longer-term bonds that were locked in at higher rates. This balance helps smooth returns over time and reduces the risk of making poorly timed investment decisions.

Bond laddering also enhances liquidity and flexibility. Because bonds mature at regular intervals, investors have periodic access to principal without needing to sell bonds on the secondary market, where prices may be unfavorable. This built-in liquidity can be useful for meeting unexpected expenses, rebalancing a portfolio, or taking advantage of new investment opportunities as they arise.

Diversification is another important benefit. A well-constructed bond ladder can include bonds from different issuers, sectors, or credit qualities, such as government, municipal, and high-quality corporate bonds. This diversification

helps reduce credit risk, as the impact of any single issuer's financial trouble is limited within the overall portfolio. Additionally, diversification across maturities reduces reliance on a single economic outcome.

From a behavioral perspective, bond laddering promotes disciplined investing. By following a structured reinvestment plan, investors are less likely to react emotionally to short-term market movements. Instead of attempting to predict interest rate changes—a notoriously difficult task—investors using a ladder focus on a systematic process that has proven effective over long periods.

Finally, bond ladders can be tailored to individual goals and risk tolerance. Investors can adjust the length of the ladder, the types of bonds used, and the level of credit risk to align with their financial objectives. Whether the goal is capital preservation, income generation, or balancing a stock-heavy portfolio, laddering offers a flexible and transparent framework.

In short, laddering bonds is a practical and time-tested investment strategy that provides income stability, manages interest rate risk, enhances liquidity, and encourages discipline decision-making. For investors seeking a reliable foundation within their broader investment portfolio, bond laddering deserves serious consideration.



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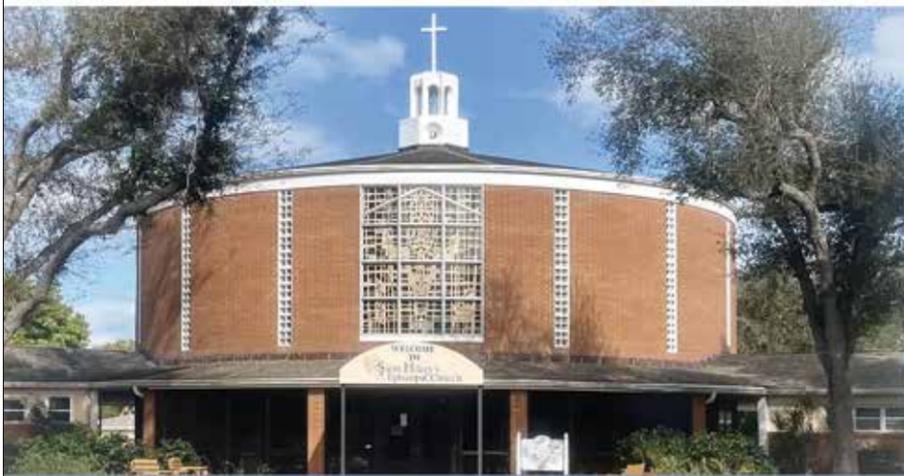


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The Power of the Written Word

The Witness: Incidents of the War of the Rebellion by Thomas LaVoy

WORLD PREMIERE

The Fort Myers Symphonic Mastersingers presents

THE WITNESS

INCIDENTS OF THE WAR OF THE REBELLION



Composer Thomas LaVoy weaves together James Waxler's Civil War journals, written in 1888, with notable Civil War poetry and music by formerly enslaved composers and their descendants.

The music is in part built on themes by black composers who were formerly enslaved, or whose ancestors were enslaved.

This work represents musical perspectives that would never have come into their eventual forms without the existence of the institution of American slavery; an institution that James and his companions fought so hard to dismantle.

SAT MAR 21
5:00 PM
FAITH PRESBYTERIAN,
CAPE CORAL

SUN MAR 22
4:00 PM
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN,
BONITA SPRINGS



FORT MYERS SYMPHONIC
MASTERSINGERS
Matthew Koller, Artistic Director

mastersingersfm.com/concerts

Saturday, March 21, 2026 | 5:00pm
Faith Presbyterian, Cape Coral

Sunday, March 22, 2026 | 4:00pm
First Presbyterian, Bonita Springs

Tickets:
www.mastersingersfm.com/concerts/

Artistic Director of the Fort Myers Symphonic Mastersingers, Matthew Koller, has transcribed handwritten journal entries from his Great-Great-Grandfather, a Union soldier in the Civil War. The Mastersingers have commissioned contemporary composer Thomas LaVoy // www.thomaslavoy.com // to compose a Civil War Cantata based on the stories within the journals.

Most major choral works are sacred masses, requiems, oratorios and cantatas. With these journals we have had the opportunity to create something unique, sharing untold stories and experiences in history. Bringing a choral and orchestral work of this form to our area will increase social awareness, connecting communities through music and dialogue.

This world premiere is scheduled for March 21 at Faith Presbyterian Church in Cape Coral and First Presbyterian Church in Bonita Springs on March 22. Tickets are available on the Mastersingers website // mastersingersfm.com/concerts //

The Mastersingers is proud to partner with representatives of the Dunbar community to uplift the rich cultural heritage and history of our region. Through informal gatherings and conversations, we have forged a deeper connection with members of the Dunbar community to highlight the significant contributions of African American history in Lee County. Together, we are committed to creating a vibrant, inclusive environment where the arts can flourish and resonate with all members of our community.

This master work - nearly 80 minutes in length - is influenced by the music of Sawney Freeman, likely born into slavery, and one of the earliest Black composers of the 18th century. Musical influence within the cantata also includes slaves Wallace and Minerva Willis who traveled the Choctaw Trail of Tears from either Mississippi or Alabama in the early 1830s with their owner, Choctaw Brett Willis. Their composition, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot", would in 2002, be recognized by the U.S. Library of Congress and honored as one of 50 recordings chosen that year to be added to the National Recording Registry. Additionally, Robert Nathaniel Dett was a leading Black composer, known for his use of African-American folk songs and spirituals as the basis for choral and piano compositions in the 19th century. These musical contributors are heard within the lyrics and score of The Witness, tribute to the legacy of Black musicians and composers.

Bringing this score to life will include Tanisha Anderson, a three-time Grammy Award Winning, National Marian Anderson Scholar Artist and 2024 International Opera Awards World Premiere Finalist Mezzo-Soprano singing throughout the East Coast and Europe. And as tribute to his great great great grandfather, James Waxler, Christian Koller, son of Artistic Director Matt Koller, will be the featured tenor (as James Waxler).

We invite our community to participate in an historic tribute and witness a piece of America's story. Cultural Passes will be available at the Fort Myers Public Library, Dunbar Jupiter-Hammon branch. The Fort Myers Mastersingers wish to express their appreciation to the City of Fort Myers Arts & Cultural Grants Department and to the Claiborne and Ned Foulds Foundation for their support of this artistic endeavor.

DEAR EDITOR:

I wanted to bring to your attention a growing and urgent issue here in Florida as the state considers its **Artificial Intelligence Bill of Rights**.

Last year, I was arrested and jailed based on a fabricated “text message” that was never verified, never authenticated, and never produced in its original format. Basic forensic review would have immediately proven it false — but it never happened. This experience has cost me freedom, peace of mind, and deeply affected my life. My story has been shared publicly and featured in:

- **Investigative articles by Naples Press:** Fake Digital Evidence: New Law Needed to Prevent AI Arrests
- **ABC Action News Channel 6** (Philadelphia) investigative segment:
- **ABC Tampa Bay:** AI-generated evidence is landing people in jail
- **Kim Komando Podcast**
- **The Deepfake Dialogues:** An AI-Faked Text Got Her Arrested. Now She’s Fighting for Legal Reform. - Spotify

Florida’s proposed AI Bill of Rights focuses on how AI chatbots and platforms use personal data, which is important. But it does nothing to protect citizens from AI-generated or manipulated content being used as “evidence” in criminal cases. This is a dangerous gap, and the problem is growing nationwide — AI is increasingly being used to fabricate messages, documents, and other digital evidence that can frame innocent people.

I am advocating for what I call “**Melissa’s Law**” — an amendment to the AI Bill of Rights requiring mandatory authentication and forensic verification of any AI-generated or digital evidence before it can be used in arrests, prosecutions, or court proceedings. Florida has the opportunity to lead the nation in protecting both our privacy and our freedom.

I would welcome the opportunity to provide documentation from my case, discuss the proposal for “**Melissa’s Law**,” and explain the broader risks of AI-manipulated evidence for Southwest Florida residents.

Thank you for your time and attention to this urgent issue.

Melissa Sims, Legal Nurse Consultant | AI & Digital Evidence Accountability Advocate | Proponent of Melissa’s Law



ABC ACTION NEWS CHANNEL 6

‘No one verified the evidence.’ Woman says AI-generated deepfake text sent her to jail

By Chad Pradelli WPVI Channel 6
Thursday, January 8, 2026

THE DEEP FAKE DIALOGUE PODCAST

An AI-Faked Text Got Her Arrested. Now She’s Fighting for Legal Reform.

January 21, 2026 • 22 mins

What happens when a single AI-faked text “receipt” can land you in jail?



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- Launching Ideas
- Scaling Impact

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Invitation to Host a Free

ESTATE PLANNING SEMINAR

sponsored by the SWFL Chronicle

Dear Church Leaders and Community Organization Representatives of SWFL,

I hope this letter finds you well and continues the important work you do in serving your congregation and community. I am writing to invite your church or organization to partner with the SWFL Chronicle in hosting a free educational seminar on the importance of estate planning, led by respected local attorney Donald Isaac.

Estate planning is a topic that affects individuals and families of all ages, yet it is often delayed or misunderstood. Many people believe estate planning is only for the wealthy or elderly, when in reality it is a vital tool for anyone who wants to protect loved ones, preserve assets, and ensure that their wishes are honored. Through this seminar, Attorney Donald Isaac will help demystify estate planning and provide practical, easy-to-understand guidance that empowers attendees to make informed decisions.

Attorney Isaac will cover essential topics such as wills, trusts, powers of attorney, healthcare directives, and strategies to avoid unnecessary probate delays and expenses. He will also address common misconceptions, recent legal considerations, and the consequences of failing to plan ahead. The goal of the seminar is not to sell services, but to educate and inform, giving attendees clarity and peace of mind about an often-overlooked aspect of life planning.

This seminar is completely free to your members and guests and is sponsored by the SWFL Chronicle as part of our ongoing commitment to community education and public service. We believe churches and community organizations are ideal partners for this initiative because they are trusted gathering places where meaningful, life-enhancing conversations naturally occur. Hosting this event offers your organization an opportunity to provide valuable information that can help families avoid confusion, conflict, and financial hardship in the future.

The seminar can be scheduled at a time and location that is convenient for your organization—such as after a service, during a weekday gathering, or as a special evening event. The presentation typically lasts about 60 minutes, with additional time allotted for general questions. Attorney Isaac presents in a respectful, approachable manner and is mindful of the values and mission of the host organization.

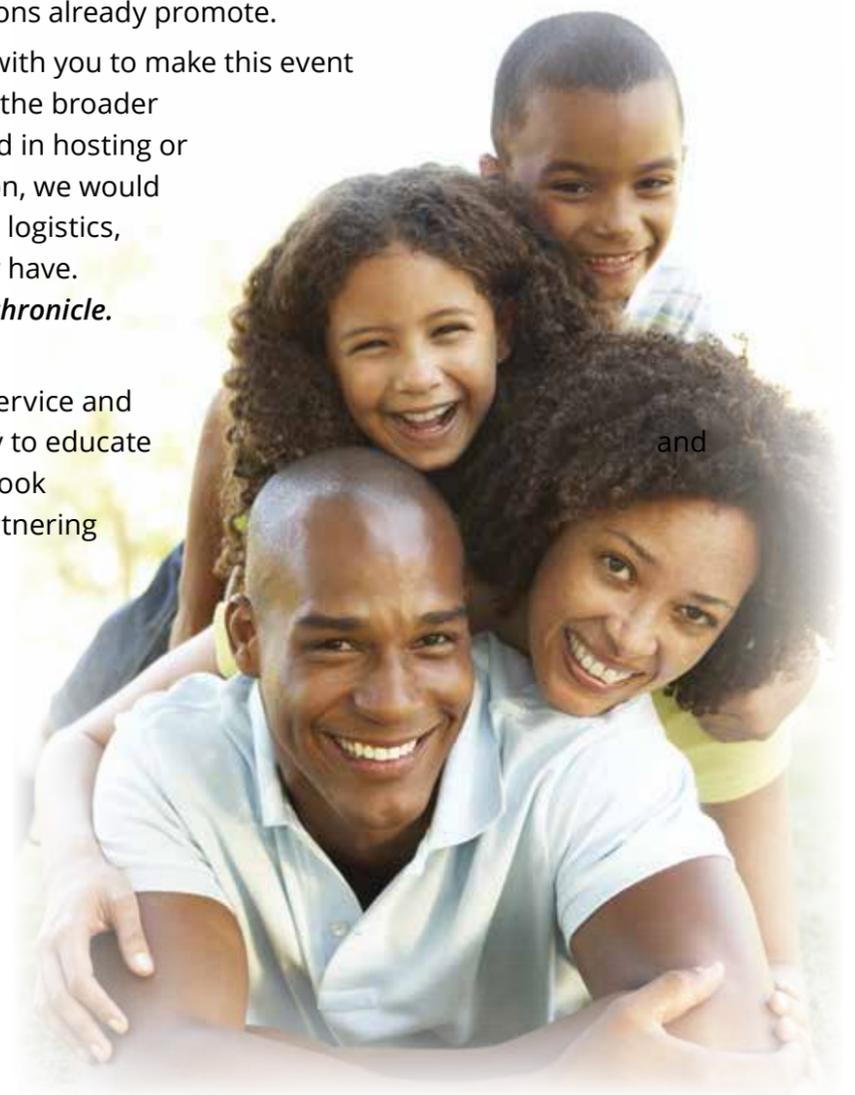
By welcoming this seminar, your church or organization will be offering a tangible benefit to your community: knowledge that protects families, honors personal wishes, and encourages responsible stewardship. Estate planning aligns closely with values of care, foresight, and responsibility—principles that many faith-based and civic organizations already promote.

We would be honored to work with you to make this event available to your members and the broader community. If you are interested in hosting or would like additional information, we would be happy to discuss scheduling, logistics, and any specific needs you may have.

Please email mckinley@theswflchronicle.com for prompt response.

Thank you for your continued service and for considering this opportunity to educate and empower those you serve. We look forward to the possibility of partnering with you for this important community seminar.

Warm regards,
SWFL Chronicle
Community Outreach Team



Donald Isaac Esq.

Attorney at Law

239-275-2200

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The Responsibility of Stewardship

Stewardship • the job of supervising or taking care of something, such as an organization or property.

When the children of God fall short of their Stewardship responsibilities, all hell breaks loose.

The Faithful embrace a deeper meaning of stewardship. They must be stewards in a better way. There are levels to stewardship responsibilities. It begins with the stewardship of money and extends to our democracy. When you've experienced those who have no voting rights, you understand what a blessing it is to be a part of a Democratic Republic.

Stewardship is the responsible and intentional management of financial resources entrusted to one's care. It encompasses using money with wisdom, integrity, and a focus on long-term well-being, not just for the individual, but for the country as well. These same elements should and must be applied to how the faithful vote and interact with society politically. Based on who and what is currently representing us in our halls of government, we have certainly neglected the stewardship of our democracy. Stewardship involves moral and ethical considerations regarding how wealth is acquired, managed, and, most importantly, shared. It is not about building 100-million-dollar mansions in the hills for the 1%, while American Vets sleep in tents in valleys, and working Americans can't find affordable housing. This has led us from being a creditor nation from a debtor nation. We have an 18 trillion-dollar deficit. At this rate, we will be dealing with enslaving our future generations.

Scripture teaches us that the debtor is a slave to the creditor, yet we allowed administration after administration to kick the can down the road. This debt devalues our economy and becomes inflationary. All because we are not doing enough due diligence and not participating in local elections in sufficient numbers. If we, the children of faith, were living up to our responsibilities of stewardship, would we allow our country to be in this kind of financial shape?

Let's examine Key Principles of Stewardship.

Ownership and Accountability are core principles, particularly in a faith-based context. It is the recognition that all resources ultimately belong to a higher power or society, and individuals are temporary managers or care-takers for our future generations. This shifts the mindset from accumulation for personal gain to responsible management for a greater purpose, with an emphasis on future accountability for how resources are used. What kind of country do we want to leave our future generations? Here is where many elected officials have clearly lacked perspective. For the individual, sound financial planning is key. Let's use the tools we have available so the faithful can effectively extend legacies and transfer generational wealth. Let's also do the same by electing fiscally responsible leadership to transfer a healthy economy.

Integrity and Transparency: These involve honesty in all financial dealings, such as with taxes or avoiding hidden purchases from a spouse. Operating with transparency builds trust and ensures that funds are used for intended purposes. How often do we hear of legislators voting on bills that affect the economic lives of their constituents, and they haven't even read the bills they are voting

on? We also find years later how some secret foreign policy came back to bite us. That's poor stewardship of the trust the people give the government, which works to their economic detriment.

Living Within Means: A good steward practices discipline by spending less than they earn and avoiding unnecessary debt, which can otherwise lead to financial bondage. Creating and sticking to a budget is a primary tool for achieving this. 18 trillion dollars deficit, need we say more regarding governmental stewardship?

Planning and Saving for the Future: This principle emphasizes foresight, such as building an emergency fund, saving for retirement, and making wise investments to build lasting wealth. Planning ensures preparedness for unexpected events and long-term goals, like leaving an inheritance. Like making investments in our infrastructure and creating jobs domestically.

Generosity and Giving: Stewardship involves using resources to help others and support causes that align with one's values. This can include tithing, donating to charities, or helping those in need, reflecting a spirit of abundance rather than scarcity. Helping Allies and creating partnerships instead of the cost of subjugating others is where we should be as a country.

Practical Applications

Good stewardship can be applied through several practical habits:

Create a Budget: A budget helps track income and expenses, ensuring that spending and savings are aligned with your goals.

Prioritize Needs over Wants: Distinguishing between necessities (food, housing, basic utilities) and luxuries helps in making intentional spending choices and avoiding materialism.

Avoid High-Interest Debt: Focus on paying off high-interest debt quickly to avoid the negative effects of compound interest and free up income for saving and giving.

Invest Wisely: Invest money in diversified, proven strategies that align with your long-term goals and personal values, such as faith-based or sustainable investing options.

Seek Wise Counsel: Don't be afraid to seek advice from trusted financial advisors or mentors, especially when making complex decisions. Let's be wise Children of faith and all Americans. Let's be good stewards of our blessings, and that is being good stewards of our country and all that we have been blessed with. Understanding the plurality of stewardship provides a stable value driven economy. This creates an economic ecosystem that helps all of us access the dream that is America.

Cleon A Mitchell, Financial Advisor, WFG/TransAmerica, I would love to share tools and ideas that would allow you to be a good steward. What have you been blessed with?

LOCAL VOICE, LOCAL CHOICE:

Saturday, February 7, 2026
9:30 Registration & Networking
10:00 Program
East Regional Library,
881 Gunnery Rd, Lehigh Acres

Choosing Commissioners by Single-Member Districts

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

Hear from experts and ask questions about the November 2026 Lee County referendum on County Commissioner elections. Lee County voters will decide if future Lee County Commissioners are elected by the voters in their district (single-member) or continue to be elected by voters county-wide (at-large). Lee County voters can ensure the Commissioner representing their District is elected by the people they serve! The League of Women Voters of Lee County, Inc. invites the public to this free event: Local Voice, Local Choice: Choosing Commissioners by Single-Member Districts, Saturday, February 7, 2026, 9:30-11:30am, at the East County Regional Library, 881 Gunnery Rd. North, Lehigh Acres and virtual. This program is not sponsored/endorsed by the Lee County Library System. For Flyer click here **REGISTER:** <https://LWVLeeSingleMember.eventbrite.com>, email lwvlee@lwvlee.org, or call 239-278-1032 A zoom link will be emailed to registrants two days before the event and the day of the event.

In November 2026, Lee County voters will decide by referendum on the structure of the Lee County commission. Approval by a majority vote will amend the Lee County Charter to require members of the county commission to be elected from the voters in their district (single-member) beginning with the 2028 election. Currently Lee County Commissioners are elected county-wide (at large).

Speakers will discuss this critical Lee County issue. Topics include the referendum ballot language, how the change may improve community representation, encourage responsiveness and accountability, strengthen resilience and emergency response, and enhance consideration of district-specific issues.

Speakers include:



NICHOLAS WARREN, ESQ.

Florida native Nick Warren joined the ACLU of Florida in 2020 as a staff attorney focusing on voting rights. At the ACLU-FL, he has litigated redistricting cases; ballot initiatives; and led voting rights advocacy projects. He attended Middlebury College and NYU School of Law before resettling in Jacksonville.



SANDRA PAVELKA, PH.D.

Dr. Sandra Pavelka is Founding Director of the Institute for Youth and Justice Studies, Professor at FGCU and a Lee County District 5 resident. She received her Ph.D. in Public Administration with a specialization in Justice Policy from FAU and is the recipient of the prestigious 2024 Women in Business APEX Award by the Greater Ft. Myers Chamber of Commerce.



**MATT CALDWELL, Lee County
Property Appraiser**

Matt Caldwell has served as the Lee County Property Appraiser, since 2020, he represented Lee County in the Florida House of Representatives from

2010 to 2018. Caldwell has been a long-time proponent of changing Lee County's commission structure from at-large voting to single-member districts, having pushed for this change since serving on the Charter Review Committee in 2008.

The League of Women Voters of Lee County, Inc.

The League of Women Voters of Lee County, Inc. is a nonpartisan organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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

Information on the programs and issues of the League of Women Voters is available on the web at www.lwv.org, www.lwvfl.org, and www.lwvlee.org. Call 239-278-1032 or e-mail lwvlee@lwvlee.org



7 STEPS

to Mitigate Increasing Property Taxes in SWFL

BY MCKINLEY G. WILLIAMS

Here's a guide for residents in Southwest Florida (SWFL)—including Lee, Collier, Charlotte, and surrounding counties—on practical steps you can take to mitigate increasing property taxes. Florida's tax system offers several powerful tools and strategies that, if used correctly, can significantly reduce your annual bill or slow future increases.

1 Secure Every Property Tax Exemption You Qualify For Homestead Exemption

The most important step for most SWFL homeowners is to apply for the Florida Homestead Exemption. If your home is your primary residence, qualifying for homestead can reduce your taxable value by as much as \$50,722 (first \$25,000 applies to all taxes; an additional exemption up to ~\$25,722 applies to non-school taxes). This significantly lowers your base on which tax rates are applied.

Key tips:

- **Deadline:** Typically file by March 1 each year with your county property appraiser.
- This exemption automatically renews annually as long as you maintain residency.

Other Exemptions

Florida offers additional exemptions that can apply to seniors, veterans (especially disabled veterans), widows/widowers, and individuals with disabilities—each of which can yield further savings. Be sure to check your county property appraiser's site to see which ones apply to you.

2 Get the "Save Our Homes" Assessment Cap Working for You

Once your homestead exemption is in place, the Florida Save Our Homes (SOH) cap limits how much your assessed value (used for taxation) can rise each year. The cap is the lesser of 3% or the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). That means even if your home's market value surges, your taxable value can only increase modestly.

Why this matters:

Without SOH, non-homestead properties (like investment homes or second homes) can see much higher annual assessment increases—up to 10%—which leads to higher tax bills.

Tip: If you haven't yet applied for homestead, do it as soon as possible. Even one year of protection under Save Our Homes can reduce future tax growth substantially.

3 Use SOH "Portability" When You Move

If you sell your current home and buy another in Florida, you don't have to lose your accumulated tax savings. Florida allows homeowners to transfer their SOH benefit to a new homestead within a specific

timeframe (typically up to two years).

This can be especially valuable in SWFL, where home values are high and rising. By transferring your low assessed value to a new, more expensive home, you prevent a big jump in your tax bill that would otherwise come from buying at current market rates.

4 Challenge an Incorrect Assessment

Often, tax increases happen because the assessed value of your property was set too high relative to market conditions or comparable sales.

How to contest your assessment

- **Review your TRIM notice:** You receive this in the fall each year showing your assessed and taxable values along with the millage rates.
- **Check comparable sales:** If similar homes nearby sold for less, that could be evidence your assessment is too high.
- **File a Value Adjustment Board (VAB) appeal:** Most counties have a VAB where you can formally protest your assessed value. Even simple evidence like recent sales data or photos of property issues can help.



Taking action early—before deadlines—can reduce your taxes for that year and future years.

5 Be Strategic About Property Improvements

Major renovations like room additions, pools, or large upgrades can increase your home's market value—and thus your assessed value—especially if not covered by an existing homestead cap.

Smart planning includes:

- Phasing renovations over multiple years so you don't trigger a large reassessment all at once.
- Consult local appraisers before starting big projects to understand the likely tax impact.

6 Participate in Local Budget and Millage Decisions

Your property taxes don't just depend on assessed value—they depend on millage rates set by local governments (county commissions, school boards, city councils, special

districts). These entities vote annually on budgets and tax rates.

What you can do:

- Attend budget hearings and public meetings.
- Advocate for controlled spending and lower millage rates.
- Vote in local elections for candidates who align with your views on taxation.

Active participation can help influence the rates that affect your final tax bill.

7 Consider Long-Term Legislative Changes

Florida's tax laws can and do evolve. For example, there are ongoing proposals (for the 2026 ballot) to expand homestead exemptions, tweak the SOH cap, and broaden portability, which could offer future relief for homeowners.

While these changes aren't guaranteed, staying informed and engaged with state tax policy can help you benefit from changes as they arise.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS THE BOTTOM LINE

Mitigating rising property taxes in SWFL is achievable through a combination of:

- Filing all exemptions (especially homestead),
- Leveraging the Save Our Homes cap and portability,
- Contesting excessive assessments,
- Planning improvements carefully,
- And engaging in local tax decisions.

By using these tools and staying proactive, homeowners can meaningfully manage and often reduce the growth of their property tax bills over time.

Don't put this off... and yes it will be a pain in the rear end. In the long run; you will be pleased you took the time to save money in the future by being proactive today.

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Meet Stephanie Howard!

President and CEO of All About Closing Inc., Stephanie is a licensed title professional with nearly 30 years of experience in the real estate and title industry. Her deep expertise, leadership, & commitment to excellence have made her a trusted name in helping clients navigate even the most complex closings with confidence and ease. Under her direction, All About Closing continues to set the standard for professionalism, accuracy, and customer care in the title business.