

The United States of
AMERICA
@250



It's time to celebrate America 250! and the time capsule



By **WILLIAM SNOWDEN**
Editor

This year is the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America.

In addition to the usual Fourth of July fireworks and festivities at Sopchoppy and

St. Marks, there's going to be something a little different on the courthouse grounds a couple of days before that: digging up a time capsule buried in 1976 for the Bicentennial.

And then burying a new time capsule to be opened in 50 years, in 2076.

Thanks to Clerk of Court Greg James for chairing this committee and bringing together people interested in it.

I looked up stories on the time capsule from the bounds volumes of the newspaper from 1976 and found a story

from November 1976 where the main issue before county commissioners was where to bury the time capsule. The site selected was the flower bed in front of the courthouse.

("It was one of the shortest and least controversial meetings in recent months," the article said.)

A month later, a story in the Dec. 23, 1976 issue, noted that the time capsule was originally going to be buried for 100 years, but that was reduced to 50 years – and a second time capsule was added.

Some of the items placed in the capsules range from a J.C. Penny's catalog to a savings passbook from Wakulla State Bank in which then-bank vice president Walter Dodson noted the account had been created with \$100 in it.

There was a \$2 bill, a brochure from the Panacea Blue Crab Festival and a Bicentennial necktie, brochures of Wakulla County and Wakulla Springs, a copy of the historical publication Magnolia Monthly, and a Wakulla War Eagle button. Plus various business

cards and menus from local restaurants.

What survived? What condition is this stash of stuff in? We'll find out on July 2 on the courthouse grounds at 5:30 p.m.

The only surviving person at that ceremony from 50 years ago is retired Sheriff David Harvey, who was sheriff-elect at the time and just 26 years old. He is scheduled to be at the capsule-opening ceremony, as are members of the Wakulla High School Class of 1976 and the Class of 2026.

Local civic groups

have been asked to submit items for the time capsule that's being buried that day, to be exhumed in 50 years, in 2076.

The Wakulla Sun is proud to participate in this historic event and a copy of this section will be buried in the time capsule for a future generation to get in to. And we appreciate those who are in this section with their messages to the future.

July 2 promises to be a dramatic day.

William Snowden is the editor and publisher of The Wakulla Sun.

Welcome to The Wakulla Sun of 2026

We started The Wakulla Sun in February 2022 as a weekly newspaper. A few months later we added The Wakulla Sun Neighbor, a monthly tabloid that is delivered to every address in the county and includes Alligator Point and St. Teresa. We went online with our website, thewakallasun.com. And we subsequently started the Gulf Coast Breeze, a glossy magazine, as a visitors guide to our area.

We reported the local news, features and sports, provided advertising and marketing services to local business, and delivered it to the community.

For our magazine, the Gulf Coast Breeze, we took the name of an old Wakulla newspaper founded in 1897 by R. Don McLeod Jr., who was only 14 years old when he started the Gulf Coast Breeze.

We are hopeful that some version of The Wakulla Sun continues into the future and that, 50 years from now, it's still being published in some form and the community still relies on it for information.

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**SHERIFF
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(RETIRED)**



★ **300TH BIRTHDAY** ★
JULY 4, 2076

HONORING OUR PAST ★ INSPIRING OUR FUTURE

Letter to the Citizens of Wakulla County— Time Capsule To Be Opened in 2076

June 24, 2026

**AMERICA
250**
1776 ★ 2026

Dear Citizens of Wakulla County - both present and future,

As I write this letter on June 22, 2026, our community is preparing to open a time capsule that was buried in front of the Wakulla County Courthouse in 1976, the year America celebrated its Bicentennial and the year I was elected Sheriff of Wakulla County at age 26. I was honored then to place several items into that capsule, and fifty years later on our 250th birthday I am equally honored to place this letter into a new capsule that will be opened in July 2076 on our 300th birthday.

At the age of 76, it is highly unlikely at age 126 that I will be present when this new capsule is opened. However, it brings me great comfort to know that future generations of Wakulla County will gather to reflect upon their past, just as we are doing in a few days.

In the 1976 time capsule, I included a letter to the citizens encouraging them to cherish their freedom and reminding them that an elected Sheriff would always serve them better than an appointed bureaucrat (Police Chief). I also quoted President John F. Kennedy and placed a photograph of myself and my grandfather inside. I look forward to seeing those items revealed when the capsule is opened soon on July 2, 2026.

During the fifty years since that capsule was buried, I had the privilege of serving this county for thirty-five years as its elected Sheriff. I was elected at the age of 26, becoming the youngest Sheriff ever elected in Florida. Over the course of nine terms and becoming Dean of Florida Sheriffs, I had the honor of serving the people of Wakulla County as well as becoming President of the Florida Sheriffs Association. I was also honored to be selected to the Florida Law Enforcement Hall of Fame by Governor Ron Desantis and the Cabinet.

Following my retirement as Sheriff, I was selected by my fellow sheriffs to serve as Executive Director of the Florida Sheriffs Risk Management Fund, a statewide insurance program providing automobile liability, workers' compensation, and healthcare coverage to sheriff's offices across Florida. During my tenure, the organization grew into an entity with assets approaching \$500 million. I retired from that position in 2017 and continue to work as a law enforcement consultant from my office in Crawfordville. I also own a real estate company and a Dairy Queen franchise in Crawfordville.

As I reflect upon my life, I am eternally grateful for my wife of fifty-five years, Rhonda, and our son, Trafton. Rhonda was the first homecoming Queen as well as Valedictorian of Wakulla High School. We have lived a beautiful life and our family's roots both run six generations deep in Wakulla County. I grew up on a farm where we raised poultry, cattle, and vegetables and sold them through our family business, Harvey & Sons Service Station and General Store. Founded by my grandfather, Roy Harvey, the store became a gathering place for neighbors and travelers alike. The sixty acres he purchased remain part of our family's history, including our private family cemetery. Rhonda grew up on a 500-acre farm in Sopchoppy, the 11th of 12 siblings and served Wakulla as a pharmacist for 3 decades.

I graduated from Wakulla High School in 1968, and I took Americanism vs Communism, played pitcher on the baseball team obtaining an athletic scholarship at Chipola Jr. College and later graduated from FSU in 1972.

Growing up in that store taught me valuable lessons. I pumped gas, carried groceries, listened to conversations about politics and community affairs, and learned firsthand the value of hard work and public service. Those experiences helped prepare me for the tremendous honor of becoming Sheriff of this remarkable county.

When I took office in 1977, the Sheriff's Office operated with a budget of approximately \$350,000.00, employed eleven people, and housed up to 18 inmates in the county jail. During my thirty-five years as Sheriff, that budget grew to approximately \$13 million, with 180 employees and a jail population that often exceeded 300 inmates about half of which were illegal alien prisoners that I held for the Federal Government. The Federal prisons were very lucrative for the county generating about \$13,000,000.00 annual income to the Sheriff's office.

Today, Wakulla County is far different from the county of my youth. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Wakulla was a relatively poor rural county. As of 2026, the median household income is approximately \$82,000.00, and the county enjoys prosperity and opportunities that earlier generations could scarcely imagine. In contrast Leon is at \$66,000.00 and the State of Florida overall is at \$74,000.00.

My hope and prayer is that America remains as strong and free in 2076 as it is today. I pray that the citizens opening this capsule will have preserved the principles upon which this nation was founded. I hope you will continue to protect our freedoms, respect our Constitution, support the American Dream, and preserve the values that have made this nation exceptional.

I also hope that you will remember and honor those who came before you. My father was a combat veteran of World War II, and my grandfather was a combat veteran of World War I. Like millions of Americans, they answered their country's call in times of great need. Their sacrifices, and those of countless others, helped preserve the freedoms we enjoy today.

As you look toward your future, I challenge you to continue making America strong. Protect your nation, your communities, and your families. Value freedom, personal responsibility, PROPERTY RIGHTS, faith, hard work, and service to others. Never take liberty for granted.

If this letter has survived the passage of fifty years, then perhaps its message has as well: America is worth protecting, Wakulla County is worth serving, and freedom is worth preserving.

May God bless Wakulla County, the State of Florida, and the United States of America.

Sincerely,

David F. Harvey

Sheriff David F. Harvey (Retired)
Former Sheriff, Wakulla County, Florida
1977-2011

Congratulations Pat Jones

50 Years of Service. A Lifetime of Impact.

"If people ask me to use one word to describe my career," she said. "It would be 'Blessed.'"

Pat Jones ran buses for Wakulla schools for 50 years, finally retiring at the beginning of this year.

Jones was honored at a school board meeting on Monday, April 21 – the meeting room was packed with family and friends.

She repeated at that meeting that her working life was "Blessed by God Almighty." The comment was greeted with applause.

Jones said what made her career so special was the love of the kids, the students she was responsible for transporting everyday to and from school as the district Transportation Director.

It was a job that, to hear the stories, nobody before her wanted.

In her 50-plus years, Jones worked for six superintendents: William Payne, William Whaley, Roger Stokley, David Miller, Bobby Pearce and Rick Myhre.



Before the board meeting, the four surviving superintendents – Payne, Miller, Pearce and Myhre gathered to share stories about Pat and their years working together.

Jones presented each of the superintendents with a bag with chocolates and a mug from the Wakulla County Historical Society that said: "Wakulla – Roots run deep."

"That's the way I feel," she said. "Because of y'all, and the two no longer living, you made a big impact on our system."

She turned to Payne, who was superintendent from August 1968 to January 1977, and said: "Thank you for hiring me."

Why did Jones stay at the job so long? "Love of the kids," she said.

Although she did recount a story of the worst day of her life, driving a bus to the old Jack Crum Trailer Park on Jack Crum Road. "A little boy came walking down the center aisle of the bus," she recounted. "I told him, 'Sit down.' He did not." Instead he walked up to her, as she is driving, and asks: "Do you want this snake?" and handed it to her.

Jones was terrified, but thought to herself: "You cannot let the children see how scared you are." She pulled the bus to the side of the road – it wasn't far from the trailer park – ordered the child and the snake off the bus. She drove to the trailer park and the child's mother was there as the bus unloaded and asked where was her son. Jones told her, and said the child got a spanking when he showed up.

Her scariest day was when she almost hit a boy at a bus stop on Emmett Whaley Road. The stop required the students to cross in front of the bus – and students got on and she happened to look back at the door and there was a little fellow who had crossed in front of the bus and she hadn't seen him. "I could have hit that young man," she said.

Superintendent Miller recounted back in 2004 when the district was one day from running out of fuel and being forced to shut down. (They found another source for fuel.)

It is a mark of leadership, Miller said, to hire the best people you can and let them do their job.

Jones recalled when the law changed in 1983 and drivers were required to have a commercial driving license (CDL) not just a chauffeur's license, and how she taught CDL classes at Shadeville for weeks.

Payne recounted the challenges of the civil rights era: in 1968, there was a teacher walk out at Wakulla High, Martin Luther King was shot, he had death threats slid under his door. He worked to reduce the pressure by changing the name of the high school team from the Rebels to the War Eagles. (Payne is an Auburn alumni.)

Superintendent Pearce said Jones helped bring stability during some of his biggest challenges: the Covid pandemic and the bus driver shortage. As for drivers, Pearce credited Jones with coming up with a bonus plan to create incentives for drivers to work. "A lot of districts started after we did it," he said.

Later, at the school board meeting that evening, Superintendent Myhre praised Jones for her career and all the students whose lives she made better.

"She is," he said, "a top tier human being."

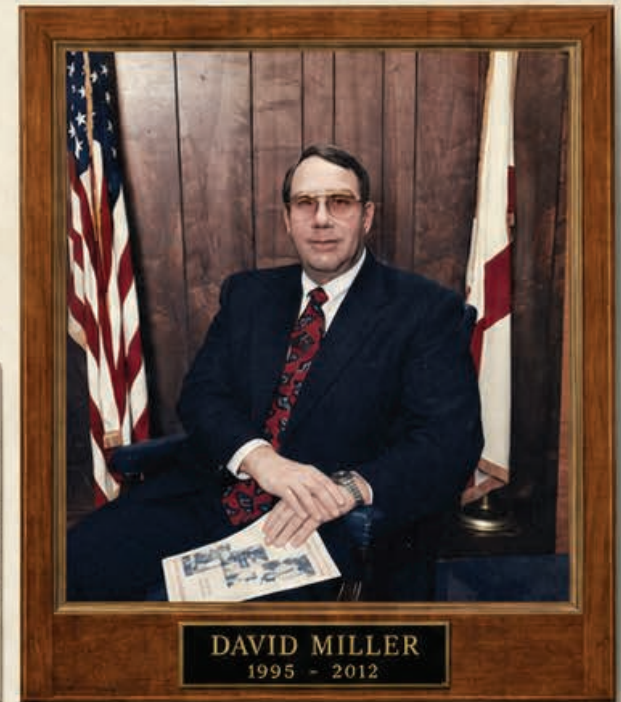
Thank you, Pat, for half a century of driving our students toward a brighter future.

YOU ARE TRULY BLESSED – AND A BLESSING TO WAKULLA.



THE LIFE AND CAREER OF SUPERINTENDENT DAVID MILLER

— Who's Roots Run Deep in Wakulla County —



DAVID MILLER
1995 - 2012

HERITAGE AND EARLY LIFE

The legacy of David Miller in Wakulla County began in the early 1900s, when his great-grandfather homesteaded 300 acres of federal land in the Hilliardville/Riversink Community, located north of Crawfordville. This ancestral property sits along what is now known as Buck Miller Road, named in honor of David's dad, John Buchanan (Buck) Miller. It is on this family land that David and his wife, Dolores, raised their three children: Derek, Danielle, and Dylan.

Education was a foundational element of the Miller household. His mother, Dorothy Reynolds Miller, was a dedicated educator who taught at Crawfordville High School at 69 Arran Road, later transitioning to Wakulla High School in 1967, where she was head of the math department.

David attended these local institutions and distinguished himself as an exceptional baseball catcher, ultimately helping lead the high school baseball team to the State Final Four in 1968 losing 2 to 1 to Tampa Catholic. The starting battery that year was pitcher David Harvey and David Miller was catcher.



WAKULLA HIGH SCHOOL
BASEBALL
STATE FINAL FOUR
— 1968 —



Coaches (L-R) Jimmy Duggar, Richard Tomberlin, Head Coach J. D. Jones, David Miller, and Buddy Tomaini.

PROFESSIONAL FOUNDATIONS AND COACHING CAREER

David Miller graduated from Wakulla High School in 1969 where he played football and baseball. He was also on the yearbook staff, National Honor Society and student council throughout his high school years.

David began his teaching career at Wakulla High School in 1974 where he was teaching science and was an assistant football coach and the head varsity baseball coach. During the 1978-79 school year David moved to PE. In the 1980-81 school year David became the assistant principal at Wakulla High School.

Mr. Miller dedicated 39 years of professional service to the Wakulla County School District, assuming numerous roles including teacher, coach, athletic director, assistant principal, and principal. He initiated his career at Shadeville Elementary School as a teacher and coach, later serving as the institution's principal for 13 years.

During his tenure at Wakulla High School, Mr. Miller left a significant mark on the athletic department. As an assistant football coach, his strategic expertise drew high praise from Head Coach J.D. Jones, who remarked, "that Mr. Miller's profound knowledge made him a better coach." His greatest athletic impact, however, occurred in baseball. As head coach, he established a winning record that remains unsurpassed in the history of the program.



In December 2002, the Florida Association of District School Superintendents named Mr. Miller the Florida Superintendent of the Year.

During a school board meeting that month, School Board Member Jerry Evans commended his statewide reputation, noting that his accomplishments spoke for themselves.



District staffer Beth O'Donnell highlighted that, under his leadership:

- ✓ Wakulla fifth graders ranked FIRST in the state in reading
- ✓ Third and fifth graders ranked FIRST in mathematics
- ✓ The district achieved the 8th-highest graduation rate in Florida

Mr. Miller deflected the praise, stating that the success was a collective achievement of the parents, students, teachers, and staff.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP AND RISE TO SUPERINTENDENT

As his administrative reputation grew, Mr. Miller was appointed to the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium Board of Directors in 1995 beginning a two-decade tenure of regional service that lasted until 2012.

In 1995, following the untimely passing of Superintendent Roger Stokley, Governor Lawton Chiles appointed Mr. Miller to fill the vacancy. He subsequently secured election to the office, serving continuously as the Superintendent of Wakulla County Schools until his retirement in 2012.

From 1998 to 2009, he concurrently served as Chairman of the Small School District Council Consortium.



ADMINISTRATIVE ACHIEVEMENTS AND DISTRICT GROWTH

Superintendent Miller's administration was characterized by historic infrastructure development and exceptional academic performance.

- 1995 — Oversaw the completion of Medart Elementary School.
- 1997 — Began the process of securing funds for the construction of Riversprings Middle School, which opened in 2001 using state lottery allocations.
- 2003 — Secured \$12.5 million in special facilities funding to construct Crawfordville Elementary School, which opened its doors in January 2003.
- 2008 — Riversink Elementary School opened using special facilities funding; at only \$8 million, it cost taxpayers one third of the cost of a typical new school.
- Extensive renovations at Shadeville Elementary School.
- Significant expansions at Wakulla High School, including a new media center, cafeteria, carpentry building, and wings for mathematics, science, and social studies.
- Constructed the high school's football fieldhouse, stadium restroom facilities, and girls softball locker room complex.



Throughout his tenure, he challenged administrators to dedicate 110 percent of their efforts to Wakulla students and faculty.

In his final year in office, 2012, Superintendent Miller successfully secured the first regular salary increase for Wakulla County teachers in five years.



Under his guidance, the school system consistently maintained an "A" rating in the state grading system, falling to a "B" only once.

In 2006, the district received the Accreditation Quality Achievement Award from the (SACS) Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

RETIREMENT AND ENDURING LEGACY

By the conclusion of his tenure in 2012, Mr. Miller retired as the longest-serving superintendent in the history of Wakulla County and as one of the longest-serving district chiefs in the State of Florida.

David Miller and his wife
Dolores Miller



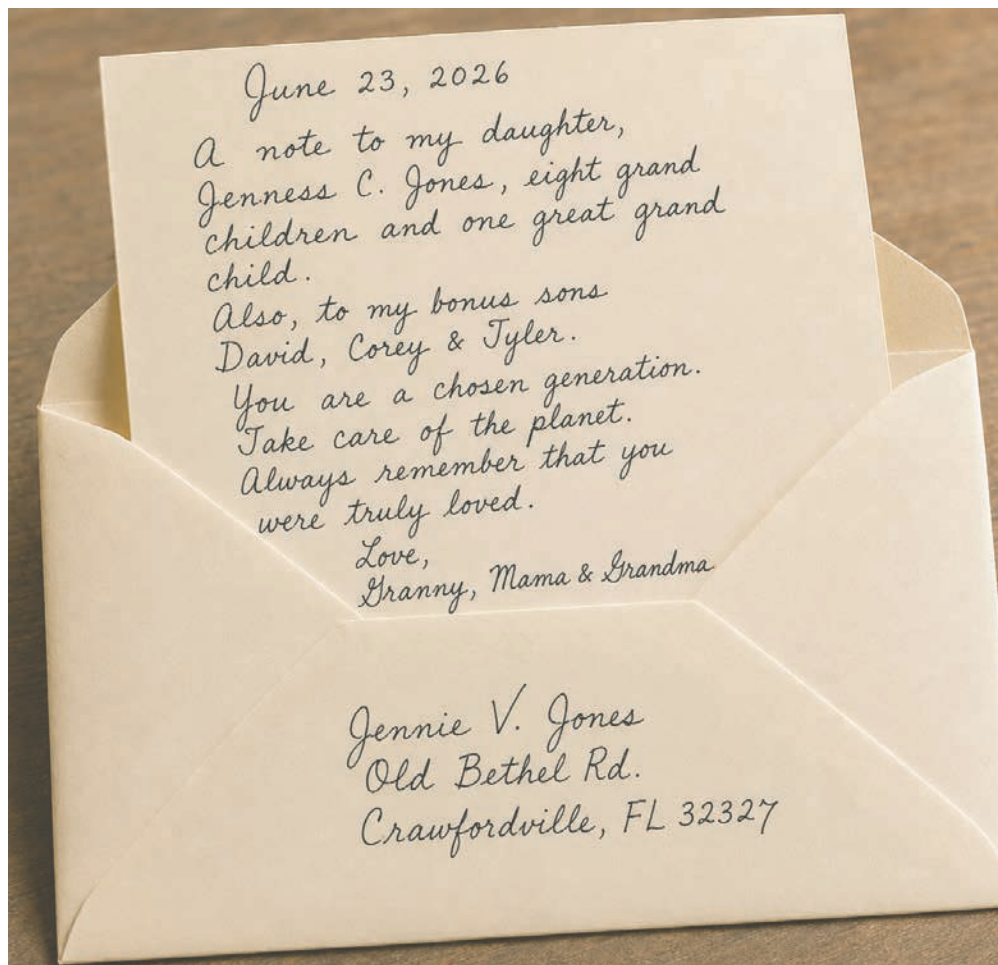
Upon his retirement, Florida Senator Bill Montford issued a formal Proclamation honoring his service, noting that Mr. Miller was among the most supportive superintendents with whom he had ever collaborated.

In further recognition, the Wakulla County Sheriff's Department presented Mr. Miller with an American flag that had flown over Wakulla County's law enforcement headquarters. Mr. Miller was the first civilian in Wakulla County history to receive this honor.



Superintendent David Miller's legacy remains preserved in the history of Wakulla County Schools. Under his supervision, the old Crawfordville School was renovated into the current Wakulla County School Board Office.

In a notable historical parallel, the Superintendent's office within this building is located in the exact classroom where Mr. Miller once sat as student and where his mother originally taught. The office was subsequently occupied by his successor, Superintendent Bobby Pearce, and remains the office of the current Superintendent of Schools, Rick Myhre.



MOUNT OLIVE PRIMITIVE BAPTIST CHURCH #2

Established in 1870




Mount Olive Primitive Baptist Church #2 was established in 1870 after locals saw a need for a place to worship. These devoted Christian leaders and workers joined forces to build and create their first church near the River Sink area.

A huge credit goes to Elder Ed Carwell, Sam Scott, Robinson, Holmes, Watson, Twine, Deacons Ed Farmer, Noah White, and William Shingles. The church was used for worship and meetings for 25 years.

Parishioners decided to centralize the location to help the growth of the church and move closer to the people who attend the church. That church burned in 1895.

A barn was rented from a caucasian across the road. The members prayed for better things to come, however, while they prayed the barn like the church was burned.

In 1901 the members pooled their labor and resources and purchased one acre of land from Deacon Noah White for \$12. And built a small church on the site. The membership grew and so a larger church was built, then a larger church was built in 1970, 100 years after the original church started.

Additional leaders in the growth of our church are: R.B Ivey, C. J Jones, and the present pastor Samuel Hayes.

— — — — —

Credited for researching and writing the history of Mt. Olive Primitive Baptist Church goes to: Pastor; Dea. J.J. Shingles, Chairman, Bro. Rufus Williams and Frenchie Lewis, Secretary;

Happy Birthday America

250 * & * 300

250 YEARS OF FREEDOM. 300 YEARS OF LEGACY.

Honoring Our Past. Celebrating Our Future.
— Proud to be an American. —

KEITH

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CONSERVATIVE REPUBLICAN
FOR CONGRESS

- ★ FAITH
- ★ FREEDOM
- ★ FAMILY
- ★ FUTURE



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PAID FOR BY KEITH GROSS FOR FLORIDA, INC.




★ A PLACE LIKE NO OTHER ★

St. Marks has welcomed travelers, fishermen, boaters, and families for generations. As one of Florida's oldest communities, our story is tied to the rivers, the waterfront, and the people who call this place home.

As America celebrates 250 years of independence, we're proud to celebrate the history, traditions, and community spirit that make St. Marks special.

★ CELEBRATE WITH US ★

 Community Market • 4–8 PM

 Family Activities

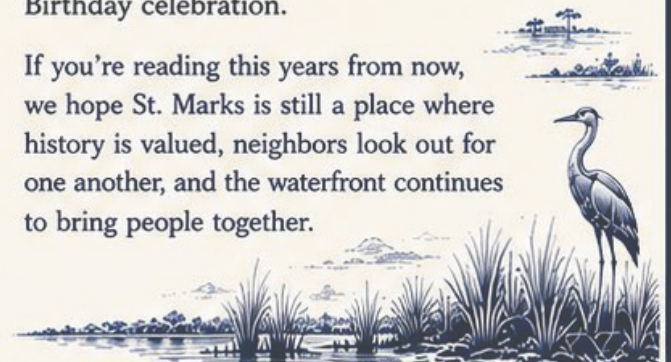
 Food Vendors

 *Fireworks at Dark*

★ TO FUTURE GENERATIONS ★

This page is being preserved in a time capsule as part of America's 250th Birthday celebration.

If you're reading this years from now, we hope St. Marks is still a place where history is valued, neighbors look out for one another, and the waterfront continues to bring people together.



★ UNIQUELY HISTORIC, PROUDLY ST. MARKS ★

The businesses below helped make St. Marks' America 250 Celebration possible and are proudly preserved as part of this community time capsule.

★ STARS & STRIPES SPONSORS ★

★ INDEPENDENCE SPONSORS ★

★ COMMUNITY SPONSORS ★



ST. MARKS, FLORIDA ★ AMERICA 250 TIME CAPSULE ★ JULY 4, 2026

*Uniquely Historic,
Proudly St. Marks*

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



A nation gets a name

September 9, 1776, may not be the first date Americans think of when pondering their nation's history, but it's a significant day nonetheless. According to the National Constitution Center, on September 9, 1776, the Second Continental Congress adopted a new name for a collective of colonies that had been referred to as the "United Colonies." The name chosen on that day in late summer 1776, the United States of America, has endured. While the opening sentence of the Declaration of Independence, which was issued on July 4, 1776, refers to the "thirteen united States of America," it was a little more than two months later when the Congress passed a series of resolutions, including one in which it replaced "United Colonies" with "United States" as the fledgling nation's new name.

Lorra L. Phillips, CPA
Jessica S. Revell, CPA

SHEPARD
ACCOUNTING & TAX SERVICE

Celebrating
250 YEARS *of America*

WHILE PROUDLY SERVING
WAKULLA COUNTY
FOR NEARLY 3 DECADES!

Lorra founded Shepard Accounting & Tax Service in 1997 after working with Brent Thurmond CPA (who later became the Wakulla County Clerk of Court). Shortly thereafter, her daughter, Jessica, joined the firm and went on to earn her CPA license in 2013.

Today, Lorra and her husband, Randall Phillips, along with Jessica and her husband, Jason Revell, are active members in the community and passionate equestrians.

Jessica also owns and operates Rocking J Farm in Sopchoppy, where she offers riding lessons, breeding, and training. When not serving clients, she fills the weekends with barrel racing and baseball with her children.

ROCKING J FARM
SOPCHOPPY, FL

We look forward
TO CONTINUING TO SERVE
OUR COMMUNITY FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.



HAPPY 250TH!

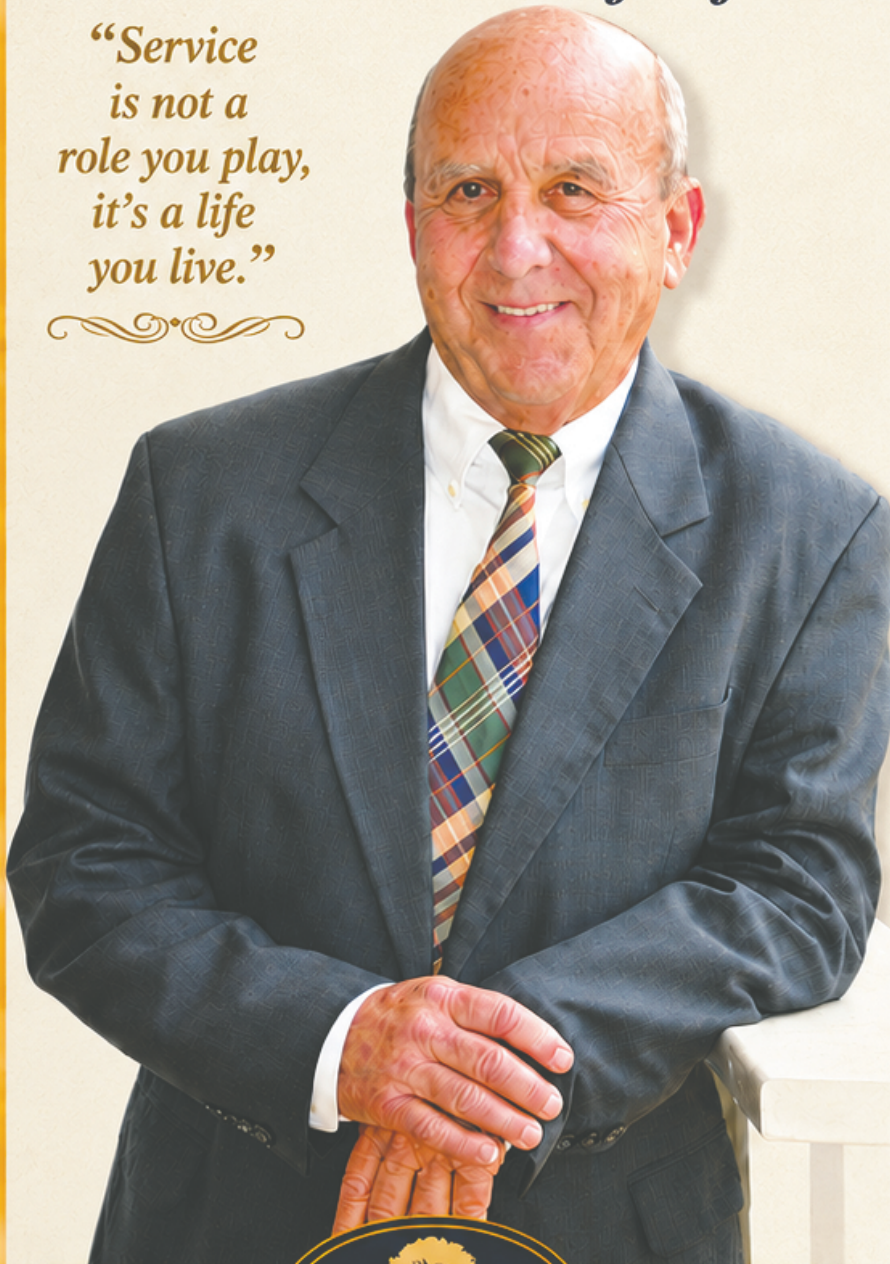
Here's to our future! All of us at JOY-Filled Journeys Corp. are so proud to be part of Wakulla County serving our Special Needs community.



L. F. “Skip” Young Jr.

A Life of Service to Wakulla County

*“Service
is not a
role you play,
it’s a life
you live.”*



**A LIFE ROOTED IN FAITH,
SERVICE, AND COMMUNITY,**

*Thank you, Skip, for your lifelong
dedication to Wakulla County.*



INTRODUCTION

Few individuals have played as many roles in the civic, business, and community life of Wakulla County as LeHarve Francis ‘Skip’ Young Jr. For more than five decades, his work in funeral service, banking, civic organizations, church leadership, and public service has touched thousands of lives throughout North Florida.



THE YOUNG FAMILY LEGACY

The Young family has long been associated with leadership and public service in Wakulla County. Skip’s father, LeHarve Francis Young Sr., was a respected educator, veteran, and the first principal of Wakulla High School when it opened in 1967. The family’s commitment to education, community service, and local leadership provided a strong foundation for Skip’s future career.



EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Skip was born in Tallahassee FL on May 24, 1952. He spent his younger years in Madison FL, before moving to Wakulla County in High school for two years and graduated from Blountstown High School. Skip graduated from Miami Dade junior college with his AA degree in 1971 and finished his funeral directors internship in Gainesville FL. Growing up around and in Wakulla County during a period of significant growth and change, Skip developed deep ties to the community he would later serve throughout his professional life. By the early 1970s, he had entered the funeral profession, beginning a career that would span more than half a century.



A CAREER IN FUNERAL SERVICE

Funeral service became the cornerstone of Skip Young’s professional life. Skip purchased the historical Harper House in 1986 and established Harvey Young Funeral Home. Over the decades he helped guide families through some of life’s most difficult moments, earning a reputation for compassion, professionalism, and dedication. Through the Young family funeral tradition, he became a familiar and trusted presence throughout the county.



LEADERSHIP IN BANKING

In addition to funeral service, Skip was a founding board member and served as President and Chief Executive Officer of Citizens Bank of Wakulla. His banking career expanded his influence into economic development and local business leadership, helping support growth and investment throughout the community.



CIVIC LEADERSHIP

Skip served as president of numerous organizations including the Wakulla County Rotary Club, Crawfordville Lions Club, Wakulla County Chamber of Commerce, Wakulla Diamond Club, and Wakulla Ducks Unlimited Chapter. These roles placed him at the center of charitable projects, community events, youth programs, and economic development efforts.



FAITH AND COMMUNITY

As a founding member and past president of Trinity Lutheran Church in Crawfordville, Skip contributed to the spiritual and charitable life of the community. His church involvement reflected a lifelong commitment to service beyond business and civic responsibilities.



PUBLIC SERVICE

His service on the Wakulla County Planning and Zoning Board and the Wakulla Tourist Development Council allowed him to help shape the future growth and development of Wakulla County.



THE 3Y RANCH

3Y Ranch was acquired in 1990 and the Young family’s 3Y Ranch has served as a gathering place for community events, charitable functions, and fellowship. Through these gatherings, the family continued its tradition of bringing people together in support of local causes.



LEGACY

The story of Skip Young is closely connected to the story of modern Wakulla County. Through funeral service, banking, church leadership, civic involvement, and public service, he has contributed to the growth and well-being of the community for decades. His legacy continues through his son and grandsons’ moving in the future for what is now Young Family Funeral Home. The institutions he helped strengthen and the generations of families he has served throughout his years solidified LeHarve Francis Young Jr. “Skip” in Wakulla.

Hello from 50 years in the past

I am Linda Ann Marti-McDonald, and since 2005, I have worked for The Wakulla Sun Newspaper.

My mother, Marilyn Marti, who is 89 years old, recently moved to Wakulla County with me from Kissimmee, Florida because her husband of 67 years - my father - Joseph Ivan Marti, passed away, God bless his soul.

Today, it seems some media is going digital these days, and we hope the printed newspaper will still be available 50 years from now because it is special and we would like to share why.

Currently, a lot of folks feel the printed newspaper is still the number one choice to catch up on any news.

A printed newspaper is a mainstay to a weekly morning ritual which includes a hot cup of coffee, a new weekly edition of the newspaper, and a cat trying its best to nudge your coffee cup and rattling your newspaper, in effort to steal your attention. This is a warm feeling that makes every day



special, and something to look forward to every morning. You cannot get this type of morning enjoyment anywhere else. It is much better to read the newspaper in your hands like a book versus the computer.

The Wakulla Sun shares the community's wins by highlighting positive news and community events, as

well as the community's losses, by sharing obituaries. The newspaper is the glue of the Wakulla community.

When an appliance breaks, if you are looking for a job, looking for services offered by local businesses, the local newspaper is the first place everyone looks. Having a printed newspaper on hand is a reliable source for information, that is counted on in every household.

Readers feel a personal touch when they can recognize photos and names in the paper of their neighbors, schoolteachers, church families and community leaders.

The Wakulla Sun newspaper brings our community together by sharing informa-

Happy BIRTHDAY AMERICA

LISA CRAZE AND STAFF
WAKULLA COUNTY TAX COLLECTOR'S OFFICE

Lisa Craze, CFC
Wakulla County Tax Collector

★ WAKULLA COUNTY ★ We Be People ★ Every Vote Counts

The Primary Election will be held on AUGUST 18TH!

- Early Voting will begin on **AUGUST 8TH** and run through **AUGUST 15TH!**
- Hours for Early Voting: **8:30 AM TO 4:30 PM**
- Election Day hours will be from **7 AM TO 7 PM** at your precinct!
- Deadline to register or change party's will be **JULY 20TH!**

We look forward to serving you!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY AMERICA!!
★ 850-926-7575 ★

Joe Morgan,
Supervisor of Elections and Team

There is also a purpose for printed newspapers after the fact. When the news is old, and the new edition of the paper is printed, the older copy is recycled, used for fish fries as grease liners, used to wrap up and protect

dishes and glassware from chipping and breaking when moving, any many other re-purposing projects.

In conclusion, the printed newspaper is a household fixture now and has been for many, many years, and we

hope in 50 years from now you will be enjoying and looking forward to the new weekly and monthly editions The Wakulla Sun Newspaper and The Wakulla Neighbor, as we do today.

- Linda Ann McDonald

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Crawfordville, Fl

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6:30 pm
Main Meeting Room

Come a few minutes early if interested in joining or transferring in and speak with an officer. You'll need to provide your 9-digit member ID (if transferring) and should also be prepared to show a copy of your DD214 (or similar) to verify your eligibility. You did NOT have to serve in a combat zone to become a member of the American Legion and thanks to the LEGION Act (Let Everyone Get Involved In Opportunities for National Service Act), Congress expanded the current eligibility period to cover Dec. 7, 1941, to the present, and includes the current war campaigns.

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PAID ADVERTISEMENT

PERIPHERAL NERVE WARNING!

The most common method your doctor will recommend to treat your chronic pain and/or nerve issues is with prescription drugs that may temporarily reduce your symptoms. These drugs have names such as Gabapentin, Lyrica, Cymbalta, and Neurontin, and are primarily antidepressant or anti-seizure drugs. These drugs may cause you to feel uncomfortable and have a variety of harmful side effects.

Chronic pain and/or other nerve issues is a result of damage to the nerves often causing weakness, pain, numbness, tingling, and the most debilitating balance problems. This damage is commonly caused by a lack of blood flow to the nerves in the hands and feet which causes the nerves to begin to degenerate due to lack of nutrient flow.

In order to effectively treat your neuropathy three factors must be determined.

- 1) What is the underlying cause?
- 2) How much nerve damage has been sustained. NOTE: Once you have sustained 95% nerve loss, there is likely nothing that we can do for you.
- 3) How much treatment will your condition require? The treatment that is provided at Dr. Ferrin's clinic has three main goals.

- 1) Increase blood flow
- 2) Reduce swelling
- 3) Stimulate and increase small fiber nerves
- 4) Decrease brain-based pain

The treatment to increase blood flow, stimulate small nerve fibers and get you back to



health is Dr. Ferrin's clinic.

The vaso-pneumatic electric cell signaling system delivers energy to the affected area of your body at varying wavelengths, including both low frequency and middle-frequency signals. It also uses amplitude modulated (AM) and frequency modulated (FM) signaling. During a treatment session, the

system automatically changes to simultaneously deliver AM and FM electric cell signal energy.

AND THE GREAT NEWS IS THAT THIS CARE IS VERY AFFORDABLE!

The amount of treatment needed to allow the nerves to fully recover varies from person to person and can only be determined after a detailed neurological and vascular evaluation.

As long as you have not sustained at least 95% nerve damage there is hope!

Dr. Ferrin's clinic will do a chronic pain and nerve severity examination to determine the extent of the nerve damage as a public service to you and/or your family and friends.

This nerve pain severity examination will consist of a detailed

sensory evaluation and a detailed analysis of the findings of your neuropathy.

Dr. Ferrin's clinic will be offering this chronic pain and nerve severity examination from now until July 9, 2026. Call 850-745-6095 to make an appointment to determine if your chronic pain and nerve issues can be successfully treated.

Due to our very busy office schedule, we are limiting this offer to the first 25 callers. Normally this initial evaluation can be very expensive, but the first 25 callers will receive their examination for only \$27. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO SUFFER ANOTHER MINUTE, CALL 850-745-6095 ... NOW!

We are extremely busy and, if your call goes to our voice mail, please leave a message and we will get back to you.

HERE'S WHAT SOME OF OUR PATIENTS HAD TO SAY.

I recommend Dr. Ferrin's clinic."

-Joseph L. Scheppers, Westphalia, MO

"I came in for severe pain and noticed instant improvement!

I rate my improvement 4 out of 5 and love the 'old Waylan' they play in the morning!"

- Charlie Koelling, Hermann, MO

"I came in for help walking on my leg.

Now I rate my improvement at Dr. Ferrin's clinic a 4 out of 5!"

- Linda Juno, Eldon, MO

"My numbness was improved 4 out of 5 stars,

I immediately noticed improvement and Rate Dr. Ferrin's clinic 'the best!'"

-Jacque Sue Meyer, Lohman, MO

"Foot and leg pain is a great deal better! 4.5 stars out of 5 -

I wish this treatment had been around for my Dad!

I recommend Dr. Ferrin's clinic!"

- Mitch Anderson, Russellville, MO

"My foot feels a lot better!"

- Greg Borgemeyer, Wardsville, MO

noticed improvement after my first treatment! I recommend Dr. Ferrin's clinic!"

- Gary Dake, Jefferson City, MO

"The treatments have given me a better outlook on my overall health. Thank you ... Dr. Ferrin's clinic"

-Jerry Schmitz, Jefferson City, MO

"I immediately started feeling better and it lasts all day!"

- Mark Kerstner, Lohman, MO

"The staff are very compassionate, capable and friendly!"

- Hazel Rea, Russellville, MO

"I came in to relieve pain in my foot and shoulder and noticed improvement after my third treatment!"

- David Welch, Holts Summit, MO

"I recommend this office; I enjoyed the appointments, the staff were friendly and professional!"

- Bill Wekenborg, Jefferson City, MO

"I've had serious issues with my leg nerves for years!

Thanks for offering this treatment to us in Jefferson City, very much needed!"

- Tonny Hammond, Jefferson City, MO

ful and did everything I was hoping for. Everyone in the office is very professional and friendly!"

-Tim Frevert, Jefferson City, MO

"I would refer family and friends - noticed improvement after first treatment."

-Leroy Lenger, Jefferson City

"On a scale of one to five, I rate it a five! Maximum improvement."

- Margaret Poettgen, Freeburg, MO

"I rate Dr. Ferrin's clinic 5 out of 5! The Best!!"

-Jacque Sue Meyer, Lohman, MO

"I noticed improvement right away! Have had great service and am looking forward to more sessions!"

- Sharon Massman, Jefferson City, MO

"I came in for pain in my legs and feet. After very good treatments I've improved to 3 on a scale of 1-5!"

- Stanley Neuner, Jefferson City, MO

"I rate my improvements 5 out of 5! I'm gonna miss you guys- now, my extended family!"

- Evelyn Sue Kauffman, Jefferson City, MO



"After a few sessions, I experienced a big improvement in my body! I no longer experienced leg cramps, my bowel movements became normal without medications and my sciatic nerve pain was gone without taking pain pills!"

Thanks to the expertise of Dr. Ferrin.

- Dr. Eriberto Languido, M.D.

"I noticed improvement after 3-4 treatments - improvement is a 4 on a scale of 1-5! I would definitely recommend someone to Dr. Ferrin's clinic."

- William T. Ward, Russellville, MO

"I sought treatment for my neck; I recommend Dr. Ferrin's clinic and rate their service Excellent."

- Richard Rackers, Jefferson City, MO

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Fun Facts

about some of the colonies that formed the U.S.



It's been 250 years since the 13 colonies joined to form the United States of America, but those 13 territories continue to feature prominently throughout the country each and every day. That's because the 13 stripes on the American flag represent the original 13 colonies.

The American flag serves as a visible reminder of the 13 colonies, and that's not the only interesting fact about the territories that would become the United States of America.



There was a constitution that predates the United States Constitution.

ConnecticutHistory.org notes that the Connecticut Colony had a framework for government by the mid-seventeenth century not unlike the one that would be spelled out in the U.S. Constitution. The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut were adopted in 1639 and are considered the first written constitution in America. Roger Ludlow of Windsor is believed to have drafted the Fundamental Orders, which consisted of a preamble and 11 orders (or laws) and mirrored trading company charters common at the time. Notably, the Orders did not reference the authority of the crown.



A debt sparked the founding of Pennsylvania.

After the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660, Charles II of England took the throne. Money was tight at the time, so Sir William Penn, a British admiral, funded the rebuilding of the Royal Navy out of his own pocket. Charles II was petitioned for repayment by Sir William's son, also named William Penn, twenty years later. But the younger Penn, who had become a Quaker by this point, requested land in lieu of funds, with a goal toward establishing a place where religious tolerance was rule. The king granted the younger Penn's request in 1681, and decreed that the territory granted to Penn be named after his father. Thus, Pennsylvania got its name.



Colonial New Jersey was home to a notable rift in a famous family.

Benjamin Franklin was among the most renowned and recognizable of the Founding Fathers of the United States, and his commitment to the ideals of the burgeoning nation did not waver even when

the conflict that became the American Revolutionary War divided his family. William Franklin was a son Benjamin fathered outside his common-law marriage to Deborah Read. Though William was raised by his father and Read, father and son did not see eye-to-eye on every issue, including the war. William, in fact, served as the thirteenth and final Colonial Governor of New Jersey, and remained a steadfast loyalist throughout the conflict. The prospects of victory were looking dim for loyalists by 1781, and William departed for England in 1782, never to return to New Jersey or the infant nation it became a part of. Curiously, William's own son from an extra-marital relationship, William Temple Franklin, sided with his grandfather during the conflict, and even served Benjamin Franklin while the latter negotiated a pivotal alliance between America and France.



Rent was cheap in New Hampshire by the mid-eighteenth century.

The colony of New Hampshire was so sparsely populated by the end of the French and Indian War in 1762 that Governor Benning Wentworth came up with a unique way to entice people to move to what's now known as the Granite State. According to History.com, Wentworth recruited settlers by offering one-acre lots that required annual rental payments of just a single ear of Indian corn payable on December 25.

John Tyler

From the tenth president to... 2025?!

John Tyler's visage might not have survived on American currency the way images of various figures from America's early history have, but the tenth president of the United States did manage to remain newsworthy well into the twenty-first century. Tyler, who was born in 1790 and served as President of the United States from 1841 to 1845, was a father of 15. Despite passing away in January 1862, less than a year after the start of the American Civil War, Tyler still had a living grandson at the start of 2025. Harrison Ruffin Tyler, who passed away on May 25, 2025, at the age of 96, was the last surviving grandchild of President Tyler. That means the period from President Tyler's birth in 1790 until the death of his last surviving grandchild spanned nearly a quarter of a millennium.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY AMERICA

★ **250 YEARS 2026** ★
★ **300 YEARS FOR EVERYONE CELEBRATING IN 2027** ★

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Happy Birthday America!

AMERICA 250

1776 ★ 2026

★ ★ My semiquincentennial message ★ ★

I am so blessed to have grown up in Wakulla County and to have so many friends, from elementary schools and Wakulla High, and later from my career and civic groups and churches.

After graduating FSU, and then running my accounting practice for 14 years, I was privileged to serve as your Clerk of Court for 24 years. I cannot thank you enough for the trust you placed in me. Mine has truly been a storybook life and I thank God for that.

Wakulla has been the best place to live and work and raise my family! To make it even better, my grandkids are the 8th generation to enjoy living in Wakulla County.

I am so blessed to live in the United States of America and to be able to celebrate the amazing 250th anniversary of our independence and freedoms. Too often, these blessings are taken for granted but one only has to look at the other 7.5 billion folks on the planet to realize how great America is.

The Wakulla I grew up in was almost all dirt roads and had very little growth, few jobs, and was very laid back. Kids played outside and rode bikes everywhere and were safe. We visited old folks and sat on the porches and valued family and friends. Kids also fished and swam in ponds, creeks, and sinkholes. We went hunting by ourselves and ate what we shot or caught.

We were taught reverence and faith. We sang church hymns in Crawfordville school music class. Even during the Vietnam era we felt respect for our nation and its freedoms. We were taught to appreciate the flag and the republic for which it stands. We even had a class in high school called Americanism vs Communism!

As a 4th grader, I volunteered to be a part of integration and enrolled in the previously all black Shadeville Elementary. Six years later, Wakulla High School students elected two of the black youth I met in that 1970 year as class presidents, in both 77 and 78.

Wakulla High was grades 7-12 and I knew just about everyone in the school. That was because I liked people and it helped that we didn't grow much so not a lot of new students other than the annual group of new 7th graders.

One thing I learned early was that freedom isn't free. I've loved history all my life but only recently discovered that 8 ancestors of mine served in the Revolutionary War that purchased our freedoms we enjoy these last 250 years. I don't think enough of us realize just how blessed we are, living in an imperfect but amazing country of great opportunity. No other country in world history had such a successful Revolution with such a long and unprecedented history.

One more thing, Wakulla got our first traffic light around 30 years ago. Before then, one way we described our rural county to others is we don't have any traffic lights. Today I count about 10 and even have some roundabouts and yet I feel we still have too much traffic.

Now in my golden years, I am also blessed to be able to work with groups like the Wakulla County Historical Society, helping to preserve and share our rich and fascinating history!

I am excited about our semiquincentennial celebration and the opening of the 1976 time capsule as well as burying the new one. I cannot imagine what our county will be like in 2076 when this paper will be again circulated to those here in our wonderful county. But I sure hope Wakulla's neighborliness and heritage is kept.

Likewise I wonder what our country will be like and I hope and pray it remains a republic true to the founders great wisdom and is full of grateful, freedom-loving patriots!

For today's readers, embrace the amazing tradition and story of our first 250 years and recommit yourself to independence, self determination, and our individual freedoms and rights endowed by our Creator.

For those readers in 2076, congratulations and *may God Bless America!*

★ *From Brent and Anne Thurmond* ★

PANACEA CHOCOLATE
a collectionary cure-all

PANACEA CHOCOLATE

WAKULLA HIGH SCHOOL IN 2026

The original part of Wakulla High School, built back in 1967 when the school was created to integrate students in the county, is scheduled to be demolished over the next several years. In its place is a planned two-story building with classrooms flanked by a performing arts center on one side and an athletic center on the other. (Photo by Gerald Brown)



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CITY OF SOPCHOPPY, FLORIDA

★ HAPPY 300 YEARS AMERICA ★

Interesting Facts About Sopchoppy in 2026

Front Row L to R: Leonard Taff, Mayor; Mike Porter (retired 2026); Luke Steinle; Dale Rushton
Back Row L to R: O'Neil Ward; Justin Roddenberry; Seth Green; Tommy Barton; Dorian Allen; Jack Santamarina; Bobby Henderson

- ★ After the railroad came to Sopchoppy in 1894, the town grew and was eventually incorporated in 1955. The old depot is still standing and is now a museum.
- ★ As of the 2024 Census, the population of Sopchoppy was 496.
- ★ Sopchoppy sits on the Sopchoppy River in Wakulla County, south of Tallahassee.
- ★ Downtown Sopchoppy features several local businesses, including Civic Brewing, the Sopchoppy Bakehouse, Sand and Soul, Vintage & Vain, Sopchoppy Feed Store, CF&A Realty, Coast & Country Realty, Rick Ott Performance and Production, The Corner Marsh, and others.
- ★ Proud to host Sopchoppy 4th of July fest since 1973.
- ★ There are 8 churches within the city limits.
- ★ The City of Sopchoppy has 12 employees.
- ★ The city is governed by 5 city council members, including the mayor.
- ★ The City of Sopchoppy water system has 7 wells and 5,308 total connections throughout Wakulla County.
- ★ The 24th Annual Sopchoppy Worm Gruntin' Festival was held in 2026 and was hosted by Rick Ott Performance and Production.
- ★ The Sopchoppy Opry ended its run in March of 2026 after 26 years of operation.
- ★ The historic Sopchoppy School is home to the Wakulla Community Theater group.
- ★ Sopchoppy is home to 2 city parks – Myron B Hodge & Depot park.

Small Town Charm. Strong Community. Bright Future.

PROUD OF OUR PAST — EXCITED FOR OUR FUTURE!

America then *and* now

Celebrations of the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the United States of America will unfold throughout 2026. As millions join in the festivities, it can be fun to compare the nation in its infancy to the one that has since firmly established itself as a global leader.

Population

- **1780:** 2.8 million*
- **2025:** 342 million**

* The National Archives note that the first decennial census of the United States was not taken until 1790, so the figure cited for 1780 is a widely accepted estimate of the burgeoning nation's population during the opening years of the American Revolutionary War.

** This represents the U.S. Census Bureau population estimate as of late 2025.

Income taxes • 1776: 0%

Debates regarding income taxes may seem like an ever-present component of American life, but colonists did not pay income tax in 1776. Though taxation was undeniably a notable issue throughout colonial America, the Tax Foundation notes the situation was considerably different in 1776 than it is today, when taxes are a highly debated component of American life. In 1776, the British Crown relied on tariffs and excise taxes to fund the American colonies, whereas modern Americans pay federal and, in most states, state income taxes to finance a range of public goods and services.

Land mass

- **1783:** 800,000 sq miles
- **2026:** just under 3.6 million sq miles

The Times Atlas of World History indicates that the United States had an area of approximately 800,000 square miles in 1783. The country is considerably larger today, with a rough land mass of just under 3.6 million square miles according to the U.S. Census Bureau. To put that expansion since the nascent days of the nation in perspective, today the combined land mass of the country's two largest states eclipses the land mass of the entire nation in the early 1780s. Alaska (estimated land mass 571,000 square miles) and Texas (262,000), with roughly 833,000 square miles between them, are larger than the total land mass of the United States in 1783.

States

According to the National Constitution Center, a series of resolutions passed by the Second Continental Congress in September 1776 officially cited the collective colonies fighting in the American Revolutionary War as the "United States."

- **1776:** 13
- **2026:** 50

Transportation

- **Late eighteenth century:** Horses
- **2025:** 298.7 million registered vehicles

The Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress notes that walking was the most common and cheapest mode of transportation in the late eighteenth century. Horses and wagons enabled business and distance travel, but such modes were only available to those who could afford it, greatly limiting who could get around by any means other than their own feet. Getting around in the present day is a little more accessible, and a recent analysis from Hedges & Company found there were 298.7 million registered vehicles in the U.S. in 2025.

Here's to
Celebrating 250 & 300 years
OF THIS NATION.
May we continue to strive for equality and opportunities for all!!!!

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= PROUD TO BE AN =

AMERICAN

Happy Birthday America

40 Years ago Mike called me on Friday, June 20th at work at the Gabor Agency, and said, "I am loading my tools on my truck (it was a 1976 Ford Pickup) and leaving Walker Body Shop". He said he was opening his shop on Monday, which would be June 23, 1986. He and I would figure out the money later. I could only have faith that I could carry the home bills on my salary.




HAPPY 40th ANNIVERSARY

Mike's Paint & Body!

Happy 300th BIRTHDAY!

Dear future generation of Wakulla County, Carolyn and Tom Mann wish the USA a Happy 300th birthday. Remember the words of Ronald Reagan, our 40th president.



Ronald Reagan, 40th president served 1981-1989

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction

NIRAJ PATEL

*Leading with Heart,
Serving without Limits.*

Niraj Patel is a Wakulla County leader who never stops pouring service back into his community.

FOR NIRAJ, MAKING A DIFFERENCE ISN'T A MOMENT, IT'S A MINDSET.

BUSINESS BUILT FROM THE GROUND UP

Niraj is the owner of Barn's Spirits and Barn's Liquor retail stores, specializing in the sale of liquor, wine, and beer. The first store, Barn's Spirits in Panacea, opened in 2015. Later in 2017, his business expanded with the opening of the second store, Barn's Liquor, which is located near St. Marks. Both businesses were started from ground zero by Niraj.

"Our goal from the start has been to provide excellent customer service and products," he says.

Occasionally, Niraj donates allocated bottles of rare and premium Bourbon to local non-profit organizations for raffles, raising thousands of dollars. He also provides liquor at cost or deep discounts for events held by community organizations.

FAMILY IS EVERYTHING

Born in Kampala, Uganda, the youngest of eight children, Niraj moved with his family to India at almost 2 years old then next to London at 14 years old where he completed high school. His father, Ambalal was a merchant farmer and his mother, Kusum, was a homemaker. In Crawfordville's Hudson Park is a bench that has been dedicated by Niraj to his parents.

"When I feel down, I sit on the bench," he says. "Anyone who takes care of their parents is good in heart."

Niraj has been married to his wife Bhaveshri for more than 36 years. They have a son, Anuj and a daughter Riddhi.

"I am very lucky to have her by my side." Niraj boasts of his wife. "We were arranged to be married through family; we met one week and we were married immediately afterwards. My cousin and my wife's uncle are friends; they put us together. I took her out for a half hour and a few days later were engaged, and a few days after that, we were married in India. We are both service-minded and we believe in marriage, you should give a little, take a little."

(His stores are named for his family: the first letter of the first name of each person, Bhaveshri, Anuj, Riddhi, and Niraj = BARN.)



A JOURNEY OF HARD WORK AND DETERMINATION

After moving to the United States, he attended both Tallahassee Community College and Florida State University and built a professional career spanning many years in IT and hospitality, owning and operating the Best Western in Wakulla County. He has made his home in Wakulla County since 2005.

Previously, Niraj worked for DSL.net in Connecticut for 2 years, then New Jersey for ADP, and then Virginia for Sigma Networks. He worked in New York City for Yahoo and was assigned to Hotjobs.com. He moved to Florida to start a motel project with his brother.

"I came to the USA 19 months after high school with \$260 in my pocket I saved, and I immigrated here with the support of my family who was already here," he says. "I came here for education."

A PASSIONATE COMMUNITY CHAMPION

Always showing up for the community, Niraj is actively engaged in multiple organizations throughout Wakulla. He is known for his signature question, "How can I help?"

Niraj brings synergy to community events. He has both a passion for community service and a passion for cooking for events. Synergy is when the combination of passions creates something stronger or more impactful than each alone.

Showing off his international culinary skills, Niraj shared both Indian chicken tikka masala and shrimp with Indian grits (semolina) dishes at The Wakulla Sun's Open House events last month to share with community friends.

- He is an active member of the Wakulla Optimist Club and its fundraiser Men Bake Cakes for Kids auction, which raises money for local youth programs. Niraj baked an Indian fused dessert to auction off to raise funds.
- He cooks for the Wakulla Chamber of Commerce's annual Low Country Boil, where he currently serves as president-elect and is Title Sponsor of the Low Country Boil. He also cooks hot dogs at Keep Wakulla County Beautiful's clean-up events.
- In the past, he has provided lunch and donuts for the staff at Wakulla County Sheriff's Office and supports the sheriff's annual golf fundraiser.
- Promoting local tourism and culture, Niraj supports Panacea Waterfront's Oyster Fest and the St. Marks Brewfest, and KWCB's Mudbug by the Bay Music Festival as an additional way to give back to Wakulla County.

A HEART FOR SERVICE

Niraj is a civic-minded individual and a cherished member of Wakulla County; he enriches the lives of those around him. Leading by example so others feel inspired to give back to their community is Patel's objective while serving his community. "When people get encouraged to help others in the community, I have met my goal, especially with the younger people."

Empathy is non-negotiable for Niraj Patel. "I have three main things I help with: food, and anything to do with kids, and senior citizens. I have a personal investment in them, and I want to help them the most."

You will see Niraj supporting the annual FRESH Back-to-School Backpack program and he is active on the Wakulla Senior Citizens Board and supports the senior center's fundraising events. He has also provided funds and volunteered for a free Thanksgiving Dinner held at Azalea Park.

Niraj supports Friends of the Wakulla County Public Library, 4-H activities and the Wakulla Environmental Institute as well.

PAWS of Wakulla, which is an animal centered organization, is something Niraj also believes in. He supports the Florida Wild Mammal Association, which rescues injured and orphaned wildlife.

*There is nothing in Wakulla County
Niraj does not genuinely support.*



INTEGRITY, LEADERSHIP & RECOGNITION

Niraj's unwavering integrity is unmatched. A past president of the Rotary Club of Wakulla, Niraj consistently applies the fair and truthful Four-Way Test of the club to his everyday life: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

With more than 18 years of involvement with Rotary, Patel was the recipient of the 2022 Rotarian of the Year Award. He is a Paul Harris Fellow, and was nominated a couple of years ago for the Rotary Club of Tallahassee's Ethics in Business Award, which shines a spotlight on local businesspeople who conduct themselves with integrity.

"That was a very proud moment for me, I thought, Wow!"

His business has been nominated numerous times for the Wakulla Chamber of Commerce's Business Excellence Awards; and he was the recipient a few years ago of the Volunteer of the Year award.

LIVING BY VALUES

Niraj credits his family for his values and ethics.

"I live my life now with what I was taught to do from my parents and siblings too," he says. "We make our life the best way we can, which is to be fair to everyone else. What you do comes back to you somehow, so I enjoy and I share."

A LIFE ENJOYED

In his personal time, Niraj is both a movie and sports enthusiast. "I am a sucker for any kind of web series movies and I like FSU, but I really love the sport of cricket. I was watching New Zealand in the World Cup on television, and I was so into the game, I lost track of the time, and I forgot about the store and work!"

SHARING IS HIS PURPOSE

Focusing on impact and not being out front seeking attention is why you will mainly see Niraj working behind the scenes.

"I do community work because I love sharing," he says. "I don't like to use the word 'giving' - I don't give, I share. I share what we have with my community and people I love and care for."

"People can give to their community in any way, my helping the community is not always enough. You don't need money to help these organizations; you can help with your time and there are so many places you can help. It is healthy to help. When I volunteer, I get my steps in easy!"

"When I retire, I see myself still volunteering and watching more movies," he says with a laugh.

Thank you, Niraj Patel,
for leading with heart, living with integrity,
and making Wakulla County a better place -
every single day.