

School News

HAPPENINGS FROM OUR CLAY COUNTY SCHOOLS

OCTOBER 2021

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Kaylee Moore a Clay High graduate serving aboard U.S. Navy ship forged from 9/11 steel.



Clay High graduate serving aboard U.S. Navy ship forged from 9/11 steel

By Lt. Omari Faulkner
Navy Office of Community Outreach

As the Nation prepared to observe the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, a Clay High graduate is serving in the U.S. Navy aboard a ship built using steel from the World Trade Center.

On Sept. 11, 2001, Petty Officer 2nd Class Kaylee Moore, was in school but didn't really understand what was going on.

"It is one of the biggest tragedies in the U.S. and something we can all learn from," she said.

Moore joined the Navy five years ago.

"I went to college and didn't know what I wanted to do, but my mother also served

in the military so it was an easy decision for me," Moore said.

According to Moore, who graduated in 2013, the values required to succeed in the military are similar to those found in Clay County.

"I learned that it's possible to branch out; you are not stuck in one place," said Moore. "I wanted to see different things and do things outside of the box."

USS New York's bow is forged from steel salvaged from the wreckage of the 9/11 World Trade Center attack. According to Navy officials, the Navy's 9/11 namesake ships uphold the virtues of service, sacrifice and selflessness that have always been the source of America's strength.

"It is an honor and privilege to carry on the legacy of the selfless heroes and unwilling victims of the 9/11 attacks," said the commanding officer of USS New York, Capt. Javier Gonzalez. "Our ship embodies the fighting passion that united Americans, despite an inconceivable tragedy, to defend our country's values and continue the pursuit of freedom worldwide."

New York is designed to deliver Marines and their equipment where they are needed to support a variety of missions ranging from beach assaults to humanitarian relief efforts. Homeported in Norfolk, the New York is longer than two football fields at 684 feet. The ship is 105 feet wide and weighs more than 24,000 tons. It has four diesel engines that can push the ship through the water at more than 26 mph.

Serving in the Navy means Moore is part of a world that is taking on new importance in America's focus on rebuilding military readiness, strengthening alliances and reforming business practices in support of

the National Defense Strategy.

"We are the first line of defense and it's important to be the first to arrive in any situation," she said.

With more than 90% of all trade traveling by sea, and 95% of the world's international phone and internet traffic carried through fiber optic cables lying on the ocean floor, Navy officials continue to emphasize that the prosperity and security of the United States are directly linked to a strong and ready Navy.

As a member of the U.S. Navy, Moore and other New York sailors are proud to be part of a warfighting team that embodies the spirit, strength and resilience of the American people.

"Serving in the Navy means a lot because it helps you grow and molds you into a better person," Moore said. "It also enhances your leadership and discipline skills."

For more information about the Navy's commemoration of 9/11, please visit www.history.navy.mil.

CLAY TODAY

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St. Johns Country Day has 4 National Merit Scholarship semifinalists

For school News

ORANGE PARK – Officials of National Merit Scholarship Corporation announced the names of approximately 16,000 semifinalists in the 67th annual National Merit Scholarship Program, including four from St. Johns Country Day School, the most of any high school in the Jacksonville area. The four semifinalists are:

- Sean Gregson, of Fleming Island
- Mia Morin, of Orange Park
- Robert Morris, of Orange Park
- Arie Sauer, of Jacksonville

"I'm very proud of each of these students," said Head of School Valorie Baker. "They've worked hard over many years to achieve this recognition, and it's very well-deserved."

These academically talented high

school seniors have an opportunity to continue in the competition for some 7,500 National Merit Scholarships worth nearly \$30 million that will be offered next spring. "It's an incredible honor to be named a National Merit Semifinalist," said Director of College Counseling Caroline Morris. "Only one percent of high school seniors nationwide achieve this recognition, so these four Spartans have a lot to be proud of."

To be considered for a Merit Scholarship award, Semifinalists must fulfill several requirements to advance to the Finalist level of the competition. About 95% of the Semifinalists are expected to attain Finalist standing, and approximately half of the Finalists will win a National Merit Scholarship.

SEE MERIT, 11



From left, St. Johns Country Day School's Sean Gregson, Robert Morris, Ariel Sauer and Mia Morin all have been selected as National Merit Scholarship semifinalists. Finalists will be notified in February.



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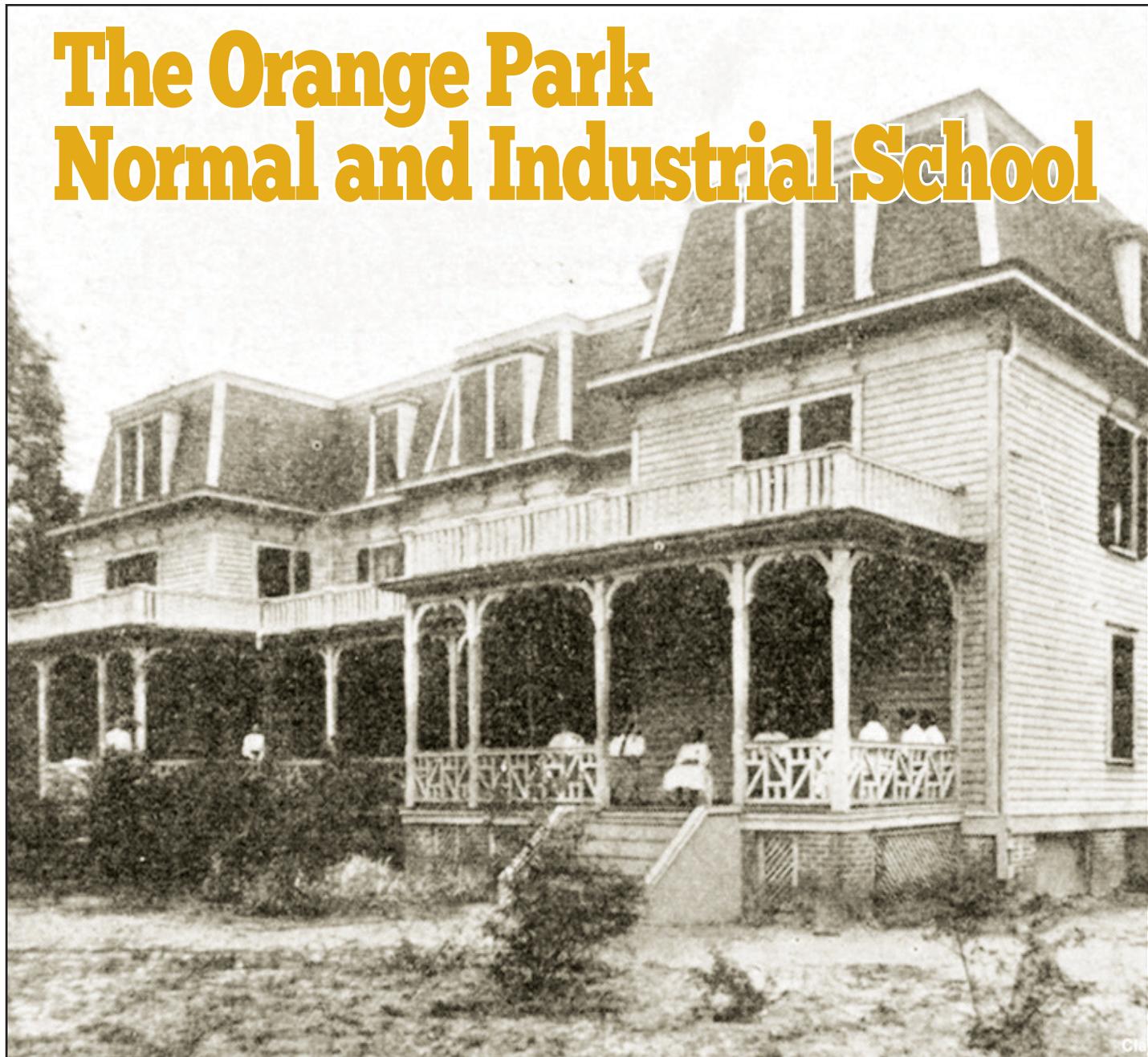
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The Orange Park Normal and Industrial School

By Archives Specialist Vishi Garig
A Service of Clerk of Court and Comptroller Tara S. Green

The Normal School once took up an entire block of Orange Park. It stood where the town hall now stands and covered about 10 acres.

What made the Normal School special was its students. The school taught both white and Blacks together, in the same classroom, with the same teachers. This was unacceptable to the segregationist William Sheats, the Superintendent of Public Education for Florida. He was going to make sure he rid Florida of that "vile nest of fanatics" as he called the school and its supporters.

Reconstruction had ended and in Florida, Democrats ruled. This meant black

SEE SCHOOL, 5

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School

from page 4

Floridians had fewer rights and a series of Jim Crow laws were put on the books. In 1888, the American Missionary Association opened the Orange Park school. AMA was a Protestant-based abolitionist group founded on September 3, 1846, in Albany, New York. The main purpose of this organization was to abolish slavery, to educate African Americans and other minorities, to promote racial equality, and to promote Christian values.

Originally, the school was to teach only black children but the fine quality of the education received there brought white children to the school. Children there received lessons in both the trades and in classical studies of languages, grammar, biology, mathematics, Latin, bible, American literature, history, bookkeeping, physics, English, geography, government and pedagogy (recitation, review studies and practice teaching). Trades were taught in sewing, woodworking, bookkeeping, cooking and other practical lessons. In addition, there was music, piano being at the forefront.

The students were able to live on campus. There was family life for the children outside of school hours, and there was church every Sunday. It was just a good school and ahead of its time in race relations. Despite the Florida constitution requiring universal education Sheats wanted to create a law forbidding the teaching of white and Black people together in any way, place or time. In May of 1895, Sheats goal was realized with the enactment of a law making it illegal for any "individual, body of individuals, corporation or association to conduct within this state any school of any grade, public, private or parochial wherein white persons and negroes shall be instructed or boarded within the same building, or taught in the same class, or at the same time by the same teachers."

Sheats wrote to a friend, "I want the AMA to keep hands-off in Florida." Sheats got wind that the Orange Park Normal School has white teachers teaching Black students. He investigates further discovering that both races of students are taught together, live in the same dorms and even go to church together.

Indictments were handed down on April 6, 1896. Assigned the unpleasant

task to going to arrest the teachers and headmaster, Sheriff James Elam Weeks was reluctant but did, as he had to do. He was arrested, B.D. Rowlee, principal, Edith Robinson, Helen S. Loveland, A. Margaret Ball, T.S. Perry, and O.S. Dickson. All were from either New York, Massachusetts, or Connecticut except Ms. Ball who was an Orange Park native. He carted them down the jail.

They quickly made a bond. The AMA hired top-notch Jacksonville lawyers, Horatio Bisbee and Clement Rinehart. The attorney's legal strategy was a four-pronged defense: Asserting their 6th Amendment rights to know the charges and evidence against them they filed a motion to quash the indictments as being void for vagueness and asserted that their 1st Amendment rights of freedom of religion and freedom of association was being violated. And, as the 14th Amendment applied federal rights to the states' they asserted that too. Judge Rhydon Call heard the case. All of the charging documents and the motion to quash are available for public viewing at the Clay County Archives. Judge Call was progressive when it came to issues like the Sheats Law. He agreed with the Defense and by signing his name on the back of the motion and writing "Granted" he dashed William Sheats's dream of dismantling the Normal School.

The AMA and their supporters were ecstatic. The Northern papers carried the story far and wide, just as they had when Sheats first passed his law (they were appalled.) The teachers went back to teaching. In 1913, the Governor approved an "Act Prohibiting White Persons from Teaching Negroes in Negro Schools." This just put in place more laws against desegregated schools.

Rather than fight the law this time, the AMA chose to close its Orange Park school, which in the interim had suffered a fire (possibly arson) and reduced attendance by whites who had been scared away by all the trouble. When it closed in December of 1917 a noble experiment ended.

May 14, 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren delivered the opinion of the Court in Brown Vs Board of Education, stating, "We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal ..."

There is a historical marker for the school right next to Kingsley Avenue at the Orange Park Town Hall Park.



Mrs. Maude Burroughs Jackson, one of the county's first Black teachers to teach in a desegregated classroom in Clay County, stands with her class in 1968.

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Prewitt eclipses 600 WINS

By Randy Lefko
For School News

MIDDLEBURG - Middleburg High volleyball has been a staple of playoffs for nearly 40 years under the tutelage of coach Carrie Prewitt and within those 40; specifically 37 years, Prewitt has achieved a milestone 600th win with a 3-0 victory Thursday against Episopal.

"I did not even know I was that close until the morning of the Episcopal game," said Prewitt. "Too many losses though. I didn't keep track of wins and certainly don't keep track of losses. I don't have a best one; just the one that you just had. The last win is always the best one."

Ironically, Prewitt did not know of the

total just two days prior when her Broncos were taking on number one ranked nationally Ponte Vedra High which wound up a tough 3-0 loss.

"I don't think it would have made much of a difference against Ponte Vedra," said Prewitt. "We played tough in that one, but they were just that good."

In her tenure, the Lady Broncos have had their glimpses of greatness with a slew of Final Fours and state championships berths, but the one that Prewitt would like back is her championship run in 2004 and that championship game against Gainesville.

"We had kids in the hospital getting IVs from food poisoning," said Prewitt. "Stephanie Bradley told a nurse to take out the



Carrie Prewitt

High School: Started playing as seventh grader, Barrington High School in Illinois (Four Final Four finishes with Prewitt)

College: Northern Illinois University (Outside hitter)

1985: Arrived at Middleburg (Marilyn Lee, coach at MHS)

Final Fours: 1988 (Lost to Port Charlotte), 1989 (Lost to Brandon), 2003, 2004, 2013 (Lost to Jensen Beach), 2014 (Lost to Ocala Vanguard)

State finals: 2003 2004 (2003 lost to Gainesville 4A; 3-1 2004 lost to Gainesville 4A 3-0)

Region playoffs: 1988, 1989, 1990, 1994, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006 2007, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019

IV because she had a state final to play in. We ate a healthy meal somewhere and everyone got sick and we had the state championship game two days later. They were warriors in the game though. It was sad because those girls lost to Gainesville the previous year and I thought we had the better team."

That being said, Prewitt noted that the wins and losses are not the top priority in keeping her on the sidelines, but more the coaching relationships.

"There really is no win that is the highlight, but more just the opportunity to be a part of a kids that have a dream and are willing to work hard for it," said Prewitt, who thought she had 80 or so college athletes that have come through the program. "Jenny Manns in the 1990s was the most dominant player of her time and played college and international ball. She was an All American at the University of Florida. That 1996 team was ranked first in state, but we lost in regions."

Prewitt recalled some past players

"There really is no win that is the highlight, but more just the opportunity to be a part of a kids that have a dream and are willing to work hard for it."

- Carrie Prewitt

including Becca Alford, sprawling all out across the court to set Mann up for scoring kills; Courtney Veasey, an All American libero at Florida Southern, who had so much explosive energy that infused the team; Jessica Burkhart who, at times, was carried off the court for expending so much energy and Jenna Erwin knocking over chairs and making the dig then getting back on the court. Though Middleburg has had their deep playoff runs in the past with two state title runnerup finishes and four Final Fours, Prewitt is unphased about the elusive state title.

"It's more about the journey than the wins and losses," said Prewitt, 60. "It's about wanting the kids to experience the state championship tournament."



Prewitt has tapped a few names over her years for advice and strategy with Jill Stephens, a coach at Florida Southern, and Florida legendary coach Mary Wise on top of the list.

"Emotional and mental support is what they give me," said Prewitt. "I've brought teams to watch Florida practices. The nice thing about college coaches is that they are so willing to help. I go to a tons of coaching clinics."

Prewitt's questions to ask one of her college assets range from volleyball strategy to player emotions.

"I often ask how to approach kids that are having technical issues, motivation issues and also coach strategies for me," said Prewitt. "The difference in generations of players has evolved from 1985 to now from very competitive kids with raw talent to kids who have played club ball since age six or seven and come to the high school with a lot of volleyball intelligence."

Prewitt's final say was that no team on her schedule is more important than others.

"I don't have a favorite team or coach that I like to go after, but no team is too big or too small to go after as a rival," said Prewitt. "We used to battle Bishop Kenny years ago, Gainesville is always tough, Ridgeview has become a good district rivalry, but all of them we go after and fight for."



TikTok star using social media to advocate for social change

Orange Park High grad tries to break stigma that follows a felony conviction

By Wesley LeBlanc
wesley@opcfla.com

CLAY COUNTY – Tayler Harber was a model student at Orange Park High.

Less than a year later after graduating in 2016, though, she committed a felony that would change the rest of her life. Unwilling to let an armed robbery charge take over her life – no matter how hard her past tried to affect her future – Harber turned her story into a platform for advocacy, support and change. Just months after creating it, her TikTok has more than one million followers, and it's there that she makes frequent posts about what she endured behind bars, the kind of change Florida prisons need for women and how one careless decision doesn't have to be the end-all-be-all society can make it out to be.

"I can't complain about my childhood; it was decent," Harber said. "I did sports my entire life and I was a tri-state athlete. Sports are what kept me going and they're what motivated me to do good in schools. I made As and Bs and I graduated in 2016."

A model student and school athlete her entire life, things began to change her senior year. But when she was a senior, she couldn't play anymore. Because sports kept her motivated in the classroom, her scholastic performance began to wane, but she graduated in 2016 despite all of that. She was in her own apartment two months later, working full-time, and "on top of the world," as any 18-year-old fresh out of high school feels.

Less than a couple of months into her Wells Road apartment, she met people who would later become her co-defendants in an armed robbery that would stick with her for the rest of her life.

"One of the co-defendants was the main person who took over my life, alongside drugs and alcohol," Harber said. "I let them [co-defendants Jake Harley Davison and Alexia Rae Eure] move in with me so now this is my everyday life now as far as bad habits and bad people go."



Tayler Harber was an outstanding athlete at Orange Park High.

Harber soon lost her job, her car became basically unusable and she was about to lose her apartment. Everything was falling apart around her and in her lowest moment, she and the co-defendants decided to commit an armed robbery. Harber never touched the gun involved in the robbery, but she and the co-defendants beat and robbed a drug dealer of \$200 at gunpoint in her apartment. Harber turned herself in two hours later and she was charged with a felony charge.

"I never touched the firearm but I was present...and it was in my apartment," Harber said. "All of us got the same charge. I had just turned 19 in January and by May, I had committed a felony. Within a year of graduating high school where I was a tri-state athlete with As and Bs, my entire life had changed in the blink of an eye. I knew nothing about the criminal justice system and now I was guilty of a crime."

At first, Harber was told she'd likely



Tayler Harber accepts a trophy from one of the Boot Camp officers. While she credits what she learned at Lowell Correctional Institute as helpful, she became an advocate against the abuse uncovered by a statewide investigation.

get 12 years. What she had done truly sunk in at that point. Her bond was set at \$250,003, which means she'd have to forfeit \$25,000 to get out of the Clay County Jail.

Harber remained in jail and her mugshot was public, printed in Clay Today, too. Her teachers, fellow students, neighbors and more would know exactly what Harber had done. She received the Clay Today newspaper every week in jail and it's how she stayed connected to Clay County, the place she called home her entire life.

Harber did not accept the 12-year charge for obvious reasons. Instead, she asked to be charged as part of Florida's Youthful Offender Program.

"In the State of Florida, it states that you are not allowed to be sentenced to over six years if you're aged 18 through 21 at the time of sentencing and if it's your first offense," Harber said. "I accepted my charge as a Youthful Offender charge ... but part of that agreement was that my felony would remain on my record for the rest of my life. I received two years of prison time and four years on probation."

Harber said she knew that felony would affect her, but just how much wouldn't be realized until she was released. She believes she got her charge down to two years of prison time and four years of probation due to her plea.

"I spent weeks working on my plea, I was actually the last one to be sentenced," Harber said. "I had teachers from Orange Park High School writing recommendation letters for me and I think that and my actual plea helped. I wrote a letter and read it to the judge in court. When you plea out, you're guilty, and I told the judge that I was guilty and that I deserved to be punished. I emphasized that I was around the wrong crowd but that despite that, I was still my own person and I still had the power to do something different that day and didn't. I told him, 'I just hope you hear me out and don't punish me for as long as I can be punished.'"

The judge sentenced her to two years in prison and four years of probation. She got out of prison almost a year early, though, and all thanks to Lowell Correc-

SEE CHANGE, 8

Change

from page 8

tional Institute's boot camp program. There are hundreds of boot camps in prisons for men around the United States, but very few for women. LCI was one of the few boot camps for women. Rules don't allow anyone with a felony charge to join the boot camp and initially, she was denied entrance into the program.

She worked with her attorney to ask a judge to reconsider ... and it worked. She was one of three women accepted into the boot camp out of thousands of applicants. Harber was thrilled – she desperately wanted to get into the camp because participants are not put into the prison general population. Nine percent of boot camp graduates re-offend. Thirty-three percent of the general population prisoners re-offend. Harber wanted this prison sentence to be her last, and boot camp would help make that happen.

The camp was run by one sergeant who worked full-time in the military and a few other officers who worked at the actual prison. Harber said her sergeant was a godsend and a true blessing. The other officers in charge of Harber and the two other boot camp women were not. Boot camp was from 4:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. It consisted of physical training, discipline training, and more. It's supposed to be exactly what you think of when you hear "boot camp," along with a lot of charity work with Habitat for Humanity and other nonprofits.

The night shift – 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. – officers did their best to ruin the entire premise and experience of boot camp. They woke Harber and the other two women in the middle of the night and force them to do things that would later get them fired. She said they were basically forced to drink entire canteens of water, lunge up hills and roll down them until they threw that water up. Then they'd have to do it again. They were being worked late into the night and sent to bed around 3 a.m., and then back up again at 4 a.m. for the boot camp routine.

Harber and the other women knew that what was happening wasn't OK, but they didn't know what to do about it. There weren't cameras outside where the officers treated them inhumanely, so they couldn't document their proof. They felt prison is designed to make prisoners feel

less than human.

"Maybe we deserved this?" Harber said. "But deep down, we knew we didn't. We were prisoners but we were still humans. This was not OK but we didn't know what to do."

The women stuck with it for two months but a torturous game of charades was the straw that broke the camel's back. Three corrupt guards made them act like walruses, or horses struck by lightning, and more. At one point, they were told to act like dogs and forced to tie one belt around another woman's neck. Then, one woman would use the belt as a leash to walk the woman acting like a dog. Harber remembers the woman acting as a dog rubbing up against her leg, barking like a dog and doing other things.

"It was completely dehumanizing, degrading," Harber said. "We knew it wasn't OK and the next time we saw our sergeant, we explained what had happened. He couldn't even watch two minutes of it [on camera]. The lieutenant watched it all and immediately sent us to confinement for our safety while the prison conducted a two-week investigation."

The three guards were transferred to other prisons and for two weeks, Harber was in the dark, unaware of how the investigation was going and unaware if anything would happen. The women testified and everything came to light. The three guards were fired and the boot camp was forever changed – all for the better.

The women completed the boot camp program, despite the torturous process they endured at the hands of three corrupt guards. She asked to speak publicly at the boot camp graduation and she said she was thankful for the program. And it convinced her to stay out of trouble. She used the time to explain her gratitude for her sergeant, who wasn't corrupt like the three guards fired. He was hard but kind, disciplined but understanding, and most of all, fair.

"He actually treated us like humans," Harber said. "I would not have made it through boot camp without him. Boot camp taught me a lot of life skills and brought me back to my roots as far as who I was and what I'm capable of, both mentally and physically."

The armed robbery happened on May 11, 2017. Harber sat in the Clay County jail for seven months before she was transferred to LCI. Boot camp began around February 2018, and four months later,

she was released, destined to serve the remainder of her prison time on house arrest. After that, she faced four years of probation. She's still on probation today, but she's thriving in many ways despite it.

But getting to this point wasn't easy.

"I wanted to prove to others that I'm a good person and that I'm not just a prisoner," Harber said. "But this is a small town and that felony followed me everywhere. I was petrified by the idea of job interviews. Who would accept me? I didn't know the extent of how much this felony would follow me, but in many ways, I learned quickly. It's for life and that sucks a lot."

Harber said a background search of her shows "armed robbery" and that often leads to an immediate "no" when it comes to job and house hunting and other aspects of life that can easily be taken for granted. She was lucky, though, because thanks to some family members that recognized Harber for who she truly was and not just as a felon, she had a job almost immediately after prison.

One day during her lunch break back in January of this year, she randomly posted a video to TikTok, one of the most popular social media services in the world. She didn't think anything of it. The reason she was going to make a quick video about her time in prison was: "just because." She posted the video and finished her day. The next day, that TikTok video had 50,000 views and 10,000 likes. She joked she felt famous at that moment. Little did she know, five months later, she'd amass a following on TikTok of more than one million followers.

"I just wanted to share my story and how it happened and then I was posting videos every day and by July, I hit one million followers," she said. "Despite what I talk about and despite being a felon, I had a massive following of people that believed in me."

Harber's TikTok growth would land her brand sponsorships. The money she makes from TikTok covers her monthly rent now. She shares videos about being a felon and a single mom. She shares videos about what goes on in prison and what happened to her during her sentence. She talks about what Florida's prison system gets wrong and how it can be changed for the better. She advocates for more women boot camps because of how "life-changing" the program was for her.

Harber talks about how hard life can be as a felon, how hard obtaining a job can

be, how difficult housing can be and more. She doesn't hold back, either. All aspects of her life as both a prisoner and a felon on the outside are on the table.

"I just want to help others," Harber said, touching on how something so negative in her life is now fueling positivity in her life. "I want more girls to be aware of the boot camp program and ... I want more girls to know that prison doesn't have to be the end of their life. There is still a life to live and I want to be proof of that."

Harber plans to get a communications degree and learn more about marketing so that she can promote herself better on TikTok and as a public speaker. Public speaking is her ultimate goal, after all. She wants to speak in schools and especially in prisons. She wants to share her story.

"There are so many obstacles to cross as a felon on the outside," Harber said. "My thinking is if you've served the time, is that not enough? If a judge says that I need to serve this much time for the crime I committed, then isn't that time enough? If more time was deserved, the judge would have sentenced it...and yet, when you get out of prison, you're still dealing with that charge...even though you served your time."

Harber said she understands how tricky that can be, especially in the realm of murders and sex-related charges. But she's unsatisfied with the blanket statement-like way criminal charges are applied to human beings.

When people pull up her record, they just see an armed robbery felony charge. They don't see that she's served the time and bettered her life. They don't see she wasn't the one with the gun. The same goes for felons around the country. She wishes there was more nuance in the conversation and tracing of criminal records. Why does a crime she served the mandated time for still need to follow her around for the rest of her life?

She's not sure of the answer, but she's using her story and her massive TikTok platform to spread awareness, support other women in positions similar to hers, and ultimately, change the landscape of criminal charges and how they follow people.

"I am more than my record," Harber said. "My issues are someone else's issues too and if sharing my story makes people feel a little bit better, or if they help people in their own situations even just a bit, then I have succeeded."

Kids First of Florida gets resources for remote learning, critical services

AT&T, Connected Nation, Dell Technologies, Intel, Sunshine Health promotes success of local foster children

For School News

CLAY COUNTY – Sunshine Health and its parent company, Centene Corporation, teamed up with AT&T, Connected Nation, Dell Technologies and Intel to bridge the Digital Divide for youth in foster care by enabling greater internet access. Sunshine Health deployed the K-12 Digital Divide Program in Florida by donating technology to foster care agencies to distribute to youth in need.

Kids First of Florida, a community-based program that provides child welfare and foster care to Clay County children. One hundred and fifty laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots were delivered to the organization last Friday, said Chief Executive Officer Irene Toto.

“These will help with the academic achievement and schoolwork of, primarily,



“These will help with the academic achievement and schoolwork of, primarily, our foster kids. We’re thrilled.”

– Irene Toto

our foster kids,” she said. “We’re thrilled.”

Toto said Kids First now is working to prioritize the needs of local children.

Through the K-12 Digital Divide

Program, Sunshine Health donated 500 laptops and 1,700 Wi-Fi hotspots to foster care agencies across Florida to distribute to youth in need. These packages will help connect youth with the hardware to access the internet for schoolwork, job searches, telehealth, online tutoring, behavioral health services and other daily activities – helping to bridge the Digital Divide. The other foster care agencies received devices were:

- Brevard Family Partnership
- Community Partnership for Children
- Family Integrity Program
- Family Support Services of North Florida
- Heartland For Children
- Kids Central Inc.

“The COVID-19 pandemic revealed challenges amongst vulnerable populations, like children in foster care facing issues with access to internet and computer equipment,” said Liz Miller, President and CEO, Sunshine Health. “By providing these devices to foster youth, Sunshine Health is ensuring that the needs of young children are being met, so that they can further grow and advance.”

The Digital Divide refers to the economic, educational, and social inequalities between those with internet access and those without. For children in foster care who may experience additional challenges in education, researchers suggest that online technology can be a tremendous advantage in this area. This Digital Divide has been especially prevalent and impactful during the COVID-19 pandemic, as computers and internet access have been required for everyday tasks from attending school to visiting the doctor, which could ultimately impact the youth’s overall health and wellness.

“On behalf of all of us at Brevard Family Partnership we wish to extend a heartfelt appreciation for the donation of so many computers and hotspots for our children in foster care throughout Brevard County,” said Phil Scarpelli, CEO of the Brevard Family Partnership. “On a personal note, working with our partners at Sunshine Health has been an absolute blessing as they selflessly contribute to the success



Kids First of Florida received a donation of 150 laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots from Sunshine Health of devices designed to bridge the digital divide for children in foster care.

of our mission as we serve at-risk children who are so deserving.”

“I am so thankful for the partnership with Sunshine Health that allowed us to provide high-speed internet and laptops for our children in out-of-home care,” said Shawna A. Novak, Director of Health and Human Services for the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners. “High speed internet has shifted from being a luxury to being a necessity, especially during the past year. Being able to ensure all our children, including those in rural and underserved areas, have access to reliable internet and capable computers is truly a blessing.”

Sunshine Health has been supporting Florida residents since 2007 across its Medicaid, Medicare and Ambetter plans. Their efforts to address the social determinants of health reinforce their long-standing commitment to supporting the whole health of their communities, one person at a time.

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Merit

from page 3

that operates without government assistance, was established in 1955 specifically to conduct the annual National Merit Scholarship Program. Scholarships are underwritten by NMSC with its own funds and approximately 400 Guinness organizations and higher education institutions that share NMSC's goals of honoring the nation's scholastic champions and encouraging the pursuit of academic excellence.

High School juniors entered the 2022 National Merit Scholarship Program by taking the 2020 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test, which served as an initial screen of program entrants.



NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The nationwide pool of Semifinalists, representing less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors, includes the highest-scoring entrants in each state. The number of semifinalists in a state is proportional to the state's percentage of the national total of graduating seniors.

To become a Finalist, the Semifinalists and a high school official must submit a detailed scholarship application, in which they provide information about the Semifinalist's academic record, participation in school and community activities, demonstrated leadership abilities, employment, and honors and awards received.

A Semifinalist must have an outstanding academic record throughout high school, be endorsed and recommended by a high school official, write an essay, and earn SAT or ACT scores that confirm the student's earlier performance on the qualifying test.

From the approximately 16,000 Semifinalists, about 15,000 are expected to advance to the Finalist level, and in February, they will be notified of this designation. All National Merit Scholarship winners will be

selected from this group of Finalists. Merit Scholar designees are selected on the basis of their skills, accomplishments, and potential for success in rigorous college studies, without regard to gender, race, ethnic origin or religious preference.

Three types of National Merit Scholarships will be offered in the spring of 2022.

Every Finalist will compete for one of 2,500 National Merit \$2,500 Scholarship awards that will be provided by approximately 220 corporations and business organizations for Finalists who meet their specified criteria, such as children of the grantor's employees or residents of communities where sponsor plants or offices are locat-

ed. In addition, about 180 colleges and universities are expected to finance some 4,000 college-sponsored Merit Scholarships for Finalists who will attend the sponsor institution. National Merit Scholarship winners of 2022 will be announced in four nationwide news releases beginning in April and concluding in July.

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