

CITY BEAT

City of Valdosta

JULY-AUGUST 2021



STORIES COMPOSED BY CITY OF VALDOSTA PUBLIC
INFORMATION OFFICE

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VALDOSTA
A City Without Limits

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"With various ways to obtain information from the city, this podcast will offer a unique option to hear about what's going on in the city on the go, without looking at a screen of some sort."

- Ashlynn Johnson Valdosta
City PIO

BEHIND THE BADGE



*Get to know
the Men and
Women
Serving in
our Public
Safety
Departments*



LIEUTENANT CALEB CLARK

GROWING UP AT THE
STATION MADE A CAREER IN
FIRE SERVICES AN OBVIOUS
CHOICE FOR CALEB

Though most emergencies are difficult to plan for, there is comfort in knowing help is available through our Public Safety Departments. Behind the Badge aims to showcase the courageous men and women serving in these departments by introducing the public to a new member from our Police and Fire crews in each issue of City Beat. In this issue, we sat down with Fire Lieutenant Caleb Clark and Police Detective Paul Garland.

Unofficially, Caleb has been with VFD since he was two. His father, Lieutenant Terry Clark, was hired by the department in 1996 and often brought Caleb by the station to visit with the team.

Luckily when joining the staff in 2016, Caleb was able to work with some of the same guys he used to visit as a child and even got to work with his dad for five years before Terry's retirement in June 2021.

"A lot of the older guys will joke that they changed my diaper at the station, but working with the same guys now that my dad worked with when he was coming up is just so cool, and it means a lot to me. Fire services is built from tradition and legacy, so I am happy to be following in those footsteps," said Caleb.



Above
Lieutenant Caleb Clark at Fire
Station 1

He enjoys the sense of comradeship that comes with the job, and of course, being able to help his community. Though the job can get stressful at times, Caleb is gratified to assist those in need.

He says, "when you find something you love, you'll never work a day in your life, and that could not be truer. Helping people in need when they are at their lowest is fulfilling. Everyone talks about how stressful it is, and it is. I don't want to downplay that, but we truly love what we do, and it shows when we are out serving the community."

Initially, Caleb started his career in South Florida but ultimately knew he wanted to work his way back to Valdosta, where he plans to stay until he retires.

He hopes to keep the tradition alive with his own family some day and plans to encourage his kids to join the department as well.

Caleb considers himself to be very family-oriented and can be found working on his family farm when he is not at the station.

"In my free time, I help manage our family farm, we run a cattle operation and custom haying. We also share peanut crops, so we stay busy with that. Stress builds up here at the fire station, so I use the 48 hours to decompress and get away from it. Surrounding myself with family and friends outside of work helps me decompress," said Lieutenant Caleb Clark.

FAMILY LEGACY



LT. CALEB CLARK AT LT. TERRY CLARK'S RETIREMENT CEREMONY

No doubt, fire service is not for everyone, but Caleb offers advice for those that may be drawn to it, “never lose the drive, never lose the passion, and always remember why you wanted to be here. It is for the community. It is not for us.”





DETECTIVE PAUL GARLAND

Detective Garland has worked in Law Enforcement for a total of 34 years. Though he currently works in the Crimes against Persons Unit at the Valdosta Police Department, he previously worked in Clayton County for 30 years, where he retired as a Chief Investigator with the Prosecutor's Office. Like his father, Garland got his start as a Military Police Officer for the Army National Guard.

Like Caleb, Detective Paul Garland was also inspired by his own father's career, which prompted him to go into law enforcement. "My father was a Military Police Officer who served two tours in Vietnam. When he came back, he worked in the Criminal Investigation Division for Military Intelligence. So, being around all that caused me to follow in my father's footsteps," said Garland.

As a Detective for VPD, Garland is responsible for following up on the criminal reports generated by Patrol Officers that deal with crimes committed against actual people. These offenses can range from simple battery or unwanted touching, all the way up to rape and murder. To put it simply, patrol will go out and document the incidents that occur. The detectives will then receive these reports and use them to develop leads. They will follow those leads until they reach the logical conclusion that someone is arrested.



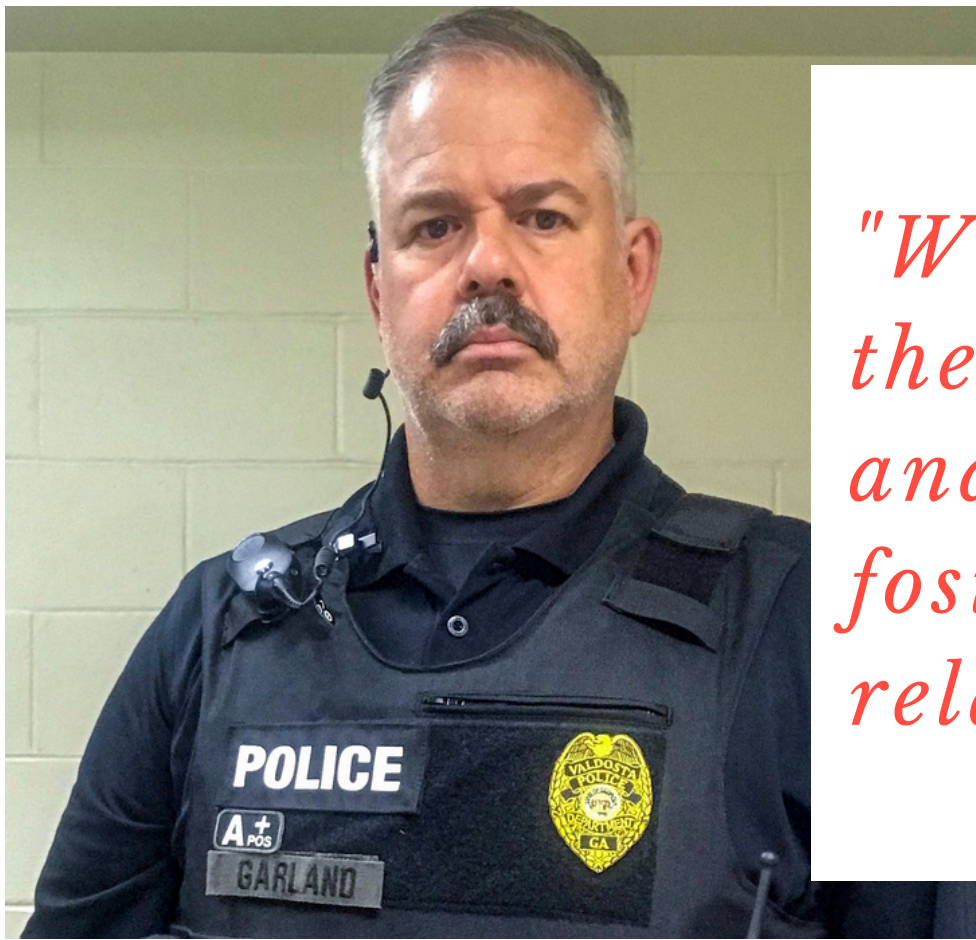
Detective Garland at the Valdosta Police Headquarters

Luckily, the department has a good overall relationship with the community, as they can play a pivotal role in solving cases. “From my experience, we have a good working relationship with the community. We can exchange information that helps us with our cases, and we can get them in contact with different agencies that can help with their needs,” said Garland. Community relations is something that Garland believes VPD does well, and he hopes to continue to be a part of the growing relationship.

He says it starts by getting out into the community and talking to the residents, which is why he places such a high value on programs like DEFY and the neighborhood walks.



DETECTIVE GARLAND RACES VINTAGE MOTORCYCLES THREE TO FOUR TIMES A YEAR IN THE SOUTHERN REGION.



"We care about the community and want to foster those relationships,"

"The neighborhood walks help because a lot of times those people do not see you in any other capacity except for when they are in crisis. So, going on these walks and asking if everything in the neighborhood is going well helps. It is neat to interact with them outside of an emergency as just one person to another. We care about the community and want to foster those relationships," said Garland.

Outside of work, Detective Garland does his best to stay busy. He is active in his church and serves in the Youth Group Ministries.

He and his wife have six grandchildren that they try to visit with as often as possible.

Detective Garland also enjoys racing vintage motorcycles, where he met his now wife of 26 years. He still races three to four times a year in the Southern area.

EMPLOYEE TRAINING

HOSTED BY THE HUMAN
RESOURCES DEPARTMENT



HR STAFF HELD FIVE TRAINING COURSES
OVER THE PAST TWO MONTHS

TRAINING IS ESSENTIAL TO THE CITY

The City of Valdosta Human Resources (HR) Department recently wrapped up an employee training series to provide guidance on safe, efficient work habits and reducing or eliminate hazards.

HR staff held five training courses over the past two months – ultimately training more than 500 city employees. Training is essential to the city because it represents an excellent opportunity for employees to grow their knowledge base and improve their job skills to become more effective in the workplace. Although the cost for training is low, the return on investment is enormous if it is consistent.

“I am a firm believer that better-trained employees make more productive employees. Creating consistency within any organization is difficult. But training helps reduce a disparity between departments and teams. Each employee has baseline knowledge of their individual and team’s goals, putting everyone on the same page.

Additionally, employees all receiving the same training means they share responsibility and are aware of their role on the team,” said Catherine Ammons, Deputy City Manager of Administration.

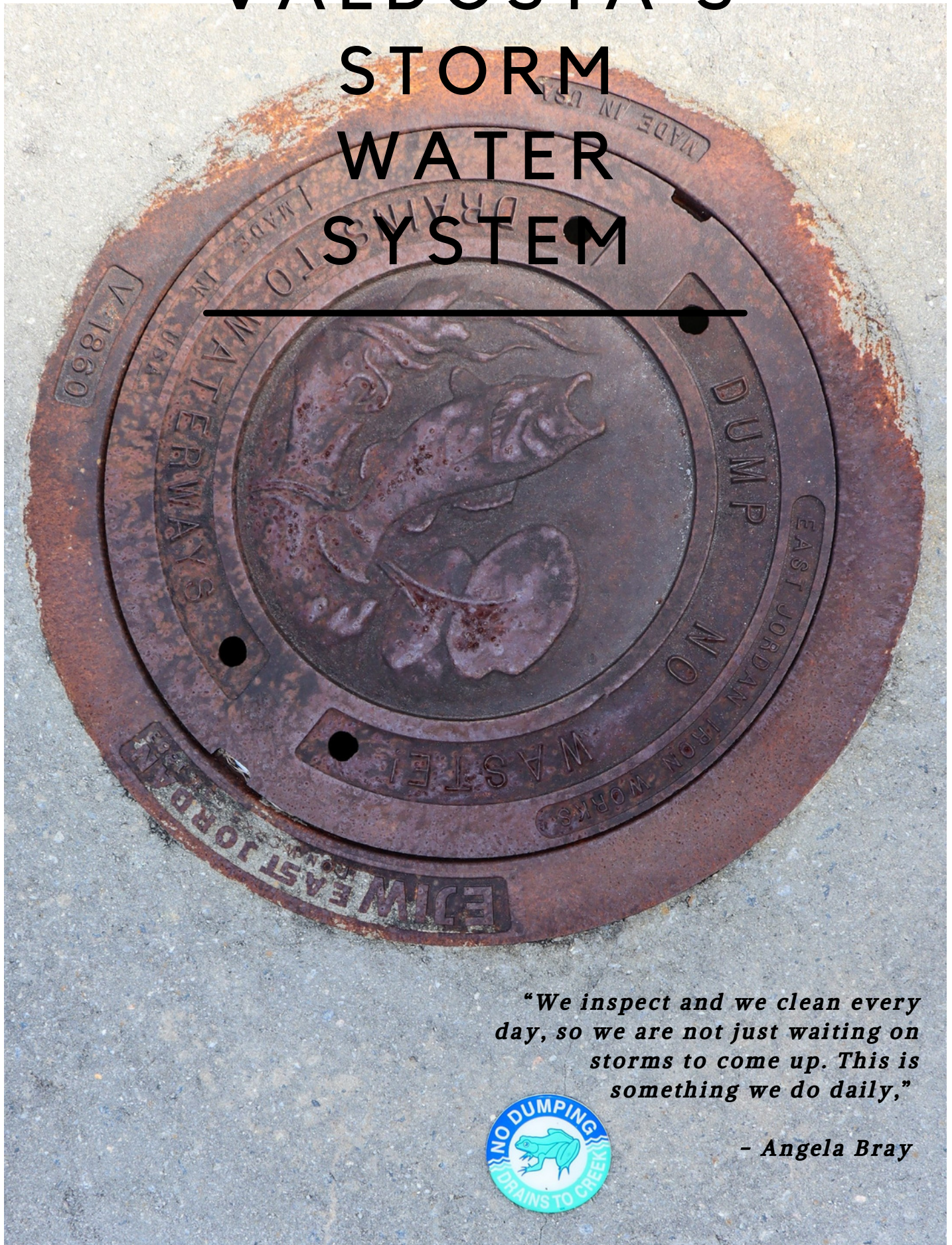
City employees participated in policies and procedures training, an FMLA / Workers Comp course, Discrimination/Harassment training, Defensive Driving, and Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity training.

“The training that the City of Valdosta offers its employees is an invaluable resource to ensure an inclusive workforce and a secure work environment. As a career employee of the city, I appreciate the opportunity to have continuing education opportunities and contribute to the progressive culture of our organization,” said Ellen Hill, Valdosta Main Street Director.

CATHERINE AMMONS, DEPUTY CITY
MANAGER OF ADMINISTRATION



VALDOSTA'S STORM WATER SYSTEM



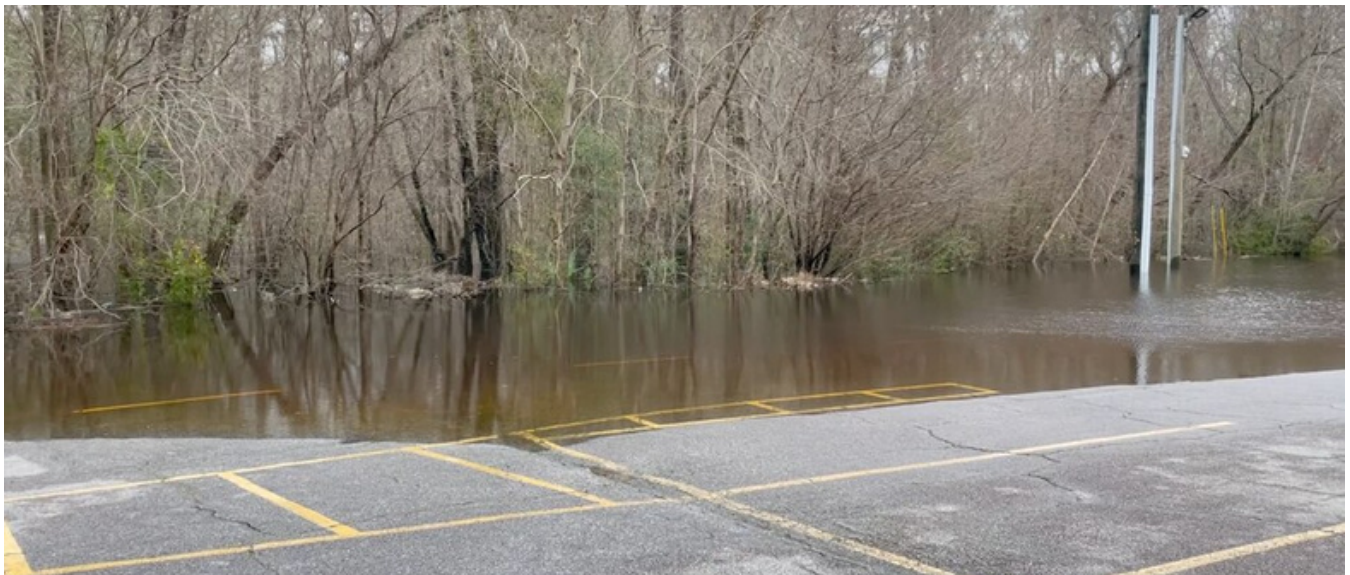
"We inspect and we clean every day, so we are not just waiting on storms to come up. This is something we do daily,"

- Angela Bray



In the midst of hurricane season, it comes as no surprise that Valdosta has been experiencing quite a bit of rainfall. During these heavy periods of precipitation, the city's Storm Water Division will incorporate "rain mode" into their daily operations. This consists of constantly cleaning and clearing out storm drains, grates, and catch basins to prevent clogging and overflow. However, the division not only responds to these issues but take proactive measure daily to help prevent them and urge residents to do the same.

The Stormwater Division was created in July 1997 as a response to flooding issues around the city. Today, it consists of 18 full-time employees, including Stormwater Manager Angela Bray, that operate and maintain the stormwater transportation system. This includes cleaning, maintaining, and repairing over 5,800 catch basins, 195 miles of storm pipes, 775 outfalls, 33 miles of drainage ditches, 22 city detention/retention ponds, and sweeping over 2,000 miles of city streets annually.



A common misconception about the stormwater system is that it operates in unity with the city's sewer system, which is not the case. Wastewater is the product of residential and commercial use. It is the water used by residents daily to cook, clean, bathe and use the restroom. It goes straight from a home or business into the sewer system via underground piping.

It is then carried to a lift station, where it gets pumped through to the water treatment plant. The water is then processed and treated before being disposed of into a local body of water such as a river. Stormwater, on the other hand, is rainfall that is collected by the storm drains. Unlike sewer water, it is untreated and is carried directly from the storm drain to a local body of water.

THE STORM WATER DIVISION SWEEPS OVER 2,000 MILES OF CITY STREETS ANNUALLY

Therefore, it is essential to keep storm drains clear of litter and debris. These items will end up in our waterways and impact the ecosystems that inhabit them, or they will build up over time and prevent the water from draining, ultimately leading to yards and roadways to flood. To help alleviate this issue, crews work daily from 7 am until 3 pm to cleaning and perform maintenance.

“We inspect and we clean every day, so we are not just waiting on storms to come up. We range from cleaning pipes and street sweeping to clearing blockages within our ditches and channels. We are constantly working to make sure the city is draining properly,” said Bray.

However, when the city is experiencing heavy rainfall, the division will shift into “rain mode” by setting their daily operations aside to focus on clearing blockages as quickly as possible. The team will hop on flatbeds trucks equipped with rakes and pitchforks and drive around to ensure there are no blockages. The division has already mapped out local hotspots that tend to see more clogging than others as a preemptive measure.



HELP KEEP STORM DRAINS CLEAR

City staff taught citizens how to build, install, and maintain rain barrels, which can be used to collect and store rainwater from roofs at a recent lunch and learn event

Additionally, the division has significantly ramped up its outreach efforts to better educate the public on the functions of the stormwater system. “We do a lot of educational outreach with residents. We go to schools and have presentations. We also curb marker events where we place a marker on the catch basins that says only rain down the drain to let passersby know not to throw anything inside,” said Bray.

Since its creation, the division has come a long way. However, Bray urges residents to consider that the system can only hold so much water at a time, and flooding is bound to happen on occasion.

“The biggest part is people ask what do you do to prepare, and they don’t realize we are already out there every day, rain or shine. We take the proactive step of making sure everything is clean because a summer storm can pop up within minutes. We don’t get as many calls as we used to, so I know it is getting better with this proactive approach,” said Bray.

If it rains and grounds are already saturated with water, the excess water cannot go anywhere except our infrastructure and yards. This does not always indicate a blockage. When we experience heavy summer downfalls with a couple of inches in an hour, our system cannot hold it all but give it time to drain, and the problem will correct itself.

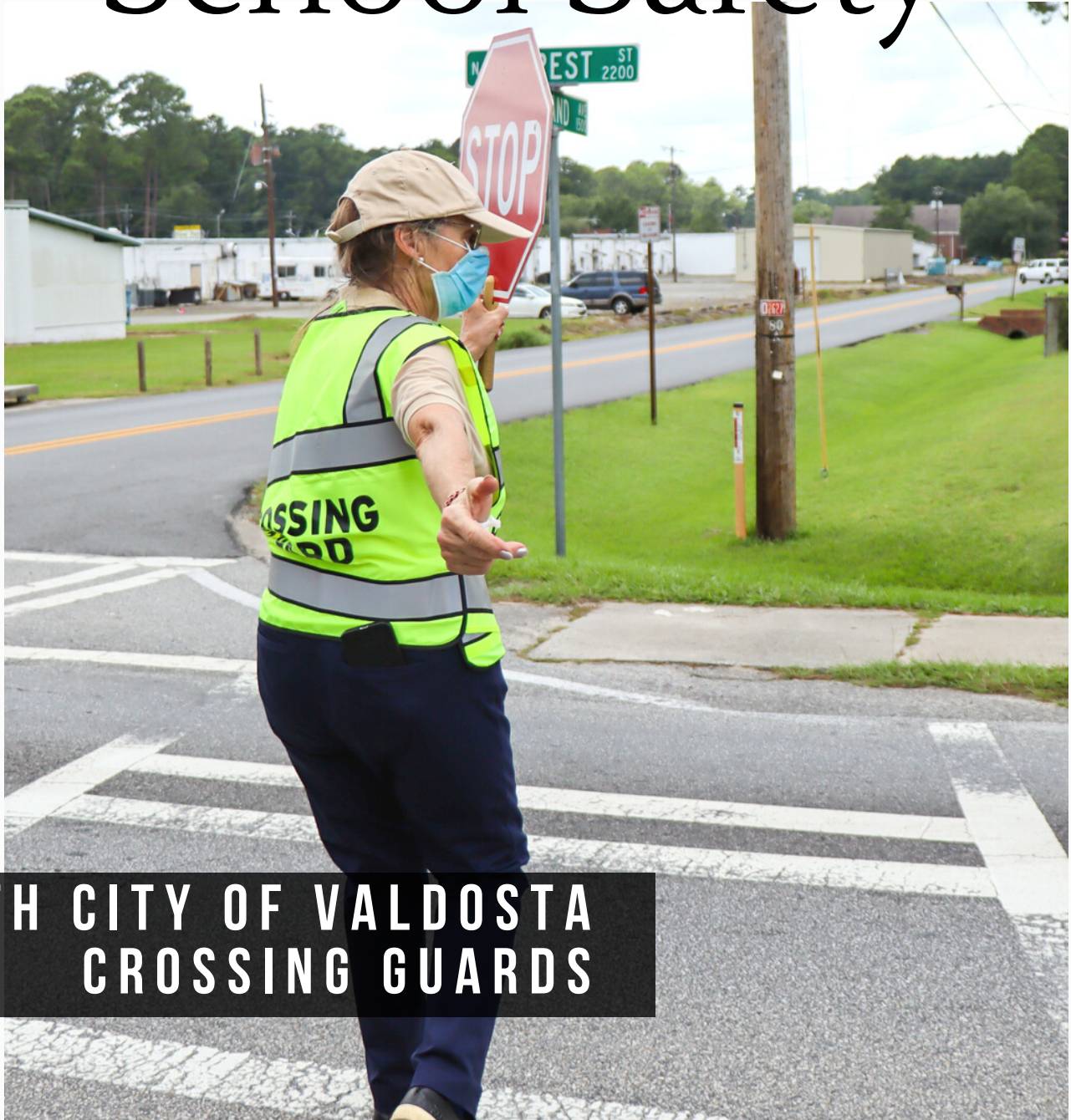


The city is looking to upsize in several areas to alleviate some of the issue in the future, but a process must be followed to account for the budgetary restraints.

In the meantime, residents can help by clearing out the storm drains near their residence or business or reporting any blockages to the stormwater division before it rains. Often when a basin looks blocked, it is just the mouth that is backed up. A simple sweep of the hand can clear a path for water to get through and prevent a backup.

It is vital to be proactive and address these issues immediately. In the South, summer storms can develop within minutes. So do not wait until there is a rain event. Call in advance to give the crews enough time to get the job done. Make sure to keep all yard debris away from the curb, especially when expecting rain, because these items can easily be swept towards the drain. Following these simple tips is sure to help the city drain properly and reduce the amount of flooding.

Back to School Safety



**WITH CITY OF VALDOSTA
CROSSING GUARDS**

SCHOOL CROSSING GUARDS ARE A SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE WAY TO HELPING CHILDREN GET TO SCHOOL SAFELY



Back to school can be an exciting time for young children and teens. With Valdosta City Schools now in session, it is the perfect opportunity for parents to remind their kids how they can stay safe when traveling to school, especially if they use a crosswalk.

According to a 2014 study from Safe Kids Worldwide, a nonprofit organization working to help families and communities keep kids safe from injuries, 40 percent of teens have been hit or nearly hit by a car, bike or motorcycle while walking. The study's research showed that distractions play a large hand in these incidents. It revealed that 1 in 5 high-schoolers and 1 in 8 middle-schoolers cross while distracted by technology.

The Valdosta Police Department has eleven school crossing guards who help ensure that children can get across the street safely, but they ask parents to go over safe crosswalk practices with their children before the start of each school year to help minimize the risks of accidents.

Lavern Riley, who has been a crossing guard for nearly six years, works at the crosswalk on the corner of N Forrest Street and Park Avenue near WG Nunn Elementary School. The most significant issue she faces when helping students cross the street is that they often don't abide by what she tells them.

"A lot of the time, the kids want to run across. They don't want to wait for you to tell them they can cross or for the light to change," said Riley.

She says that the children must wait because the guard will walk into the road first to stop traffic. Once it is at a complete halt, then it is safe for the kids to come across.

Riley has also had a few run-ins with kids that are distracted when attempting to cross but says that more often than not, it is the drivers that are not paying attention. "We have issues with people who don't slow down. They know it is a school zone. They pass by it every day at the same time," she said.

Crosswalk Tips



Crosswalk Tips:

- Before the school year starts, map out the route your child will take and practice it with them until they have it down.
- Listen to the crossing guards at all times.
- Please wait for the crossing guard, DO NOT cross the street without their assistance.
- When using the crosswalk, stay between the double white lines.
- Never cross while distracted. Make sure to keep all electronic devices in your bookbag while crossing.
- Always look both ways before crossing the road, even with the assistance of a crossing guard.
- When dropping your children off, always pull into a safe area. DO NOT disturb the flow of traffic by stopping in the middle of the road, and NEVER leave your children on the side of a road away from the crosswalk.
- Don't drop off your children too early or too late. Instead, bring them at the allocated times to ensure a guard is available.

In that case, the crossing guards will take the vehicle's tag number and report it to the Valdosta Police Department.

Mary Lewis is a crossing guard at the main gate of S.L. Mason Elementary School and agrees with a lot of Riley's statements.

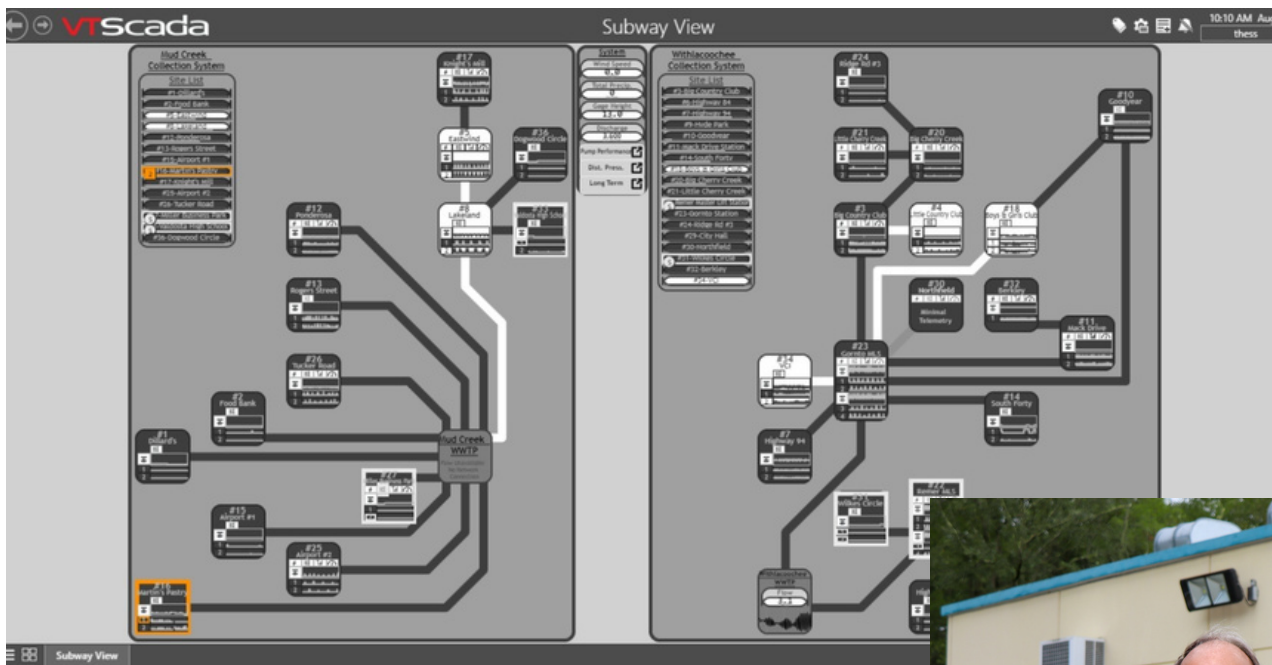
"I am a foster grandparent for the State of Georgia, and I usually work inside the classroom one on one with the students, so I enjoy working with children. Although sometimes it can get very hectic because the kids do not always respect the rules of crossing guards," she said. Lewis is going on her third year of being a crossing guard and enjoys it for the most part, but she urges parents to do their part by teaching their kids the crosswalk rules.

She says, "Teach your children that the guards are there to help and keep them safe. Come up with a routine and practice it with them, and let us take care of the rest."

School crossing guards are a simple and effective way to helping children get to school safely, but it is not entirely up to them. Be sure to review the tips below and discuss back-to-school safety with your children.

SCADA SYSTEM





SUPERVISORY CONTROL AND DATA ACQUISITION



The Utilities Department's Central Maintenance Division utilizes a new state-of-the-art Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) for controlling and monitoring the City's wastewater operations. This system monitors flow at all City Lift Stations, Wastewater Treatment Plants, and the water treatment plant. Central Maintenance Superintendent Tom Hess explains why the SCADA system is beneficial and how it is utilized throughout various industries due to its efficiency.

SCADA is a system of software and hardware elements that allows industrial organizations to:

- Control industrial processes locally and remotely.
- Monitor, gather, and process real-time data.
- Directly interact with sensors, valves, pumps, motors, and more through human-machine interface (HMI) software.
- Record events into a log file.

The Utilities Department went online with the new system in February 2020. The system is based on the proven and reliable VTScada architecture, communicating 24/7 via cellular modems. It can detect problems before they become major issues and notify the technicians via a text alert. When the system detects an irregularity, it will notify the team in a preset order. If the first person on that list does not respond, the system will notify the next team member until it receives a response. “It gives us an extra set of eyes on the entire system. In the first month, we may have caught 20 irregularities,” said Hess.



The system is instrumental in the prevention of sewer back-ups and overflows as it will often detect clogs in the sewer system. Though SCADA cannot directly detect a clog, it can detect where flows have significantly reduced, indicating a blockage or clog.





“

It gives us an extra set of eyes on the entire system.

The main reason for these clogs is due to wipes and grease entering the system. Hess cautions residents from flushing items like wet wipes or baby wipes because even though the packaging may say they are flushable, they are not biodegradable.

These wipes will inevitably get stuck in the grease that restaurants and residents flush into the system and create large rag balls that block the pumps. Hess and his team highly advise against the flushing of grease as well as it hardens over time. “When it leaves your home or business, it is just grease, but it eventually turns into a cement-like substance in the pipes, and many items like the wipes will get caught in it,” said Hess.

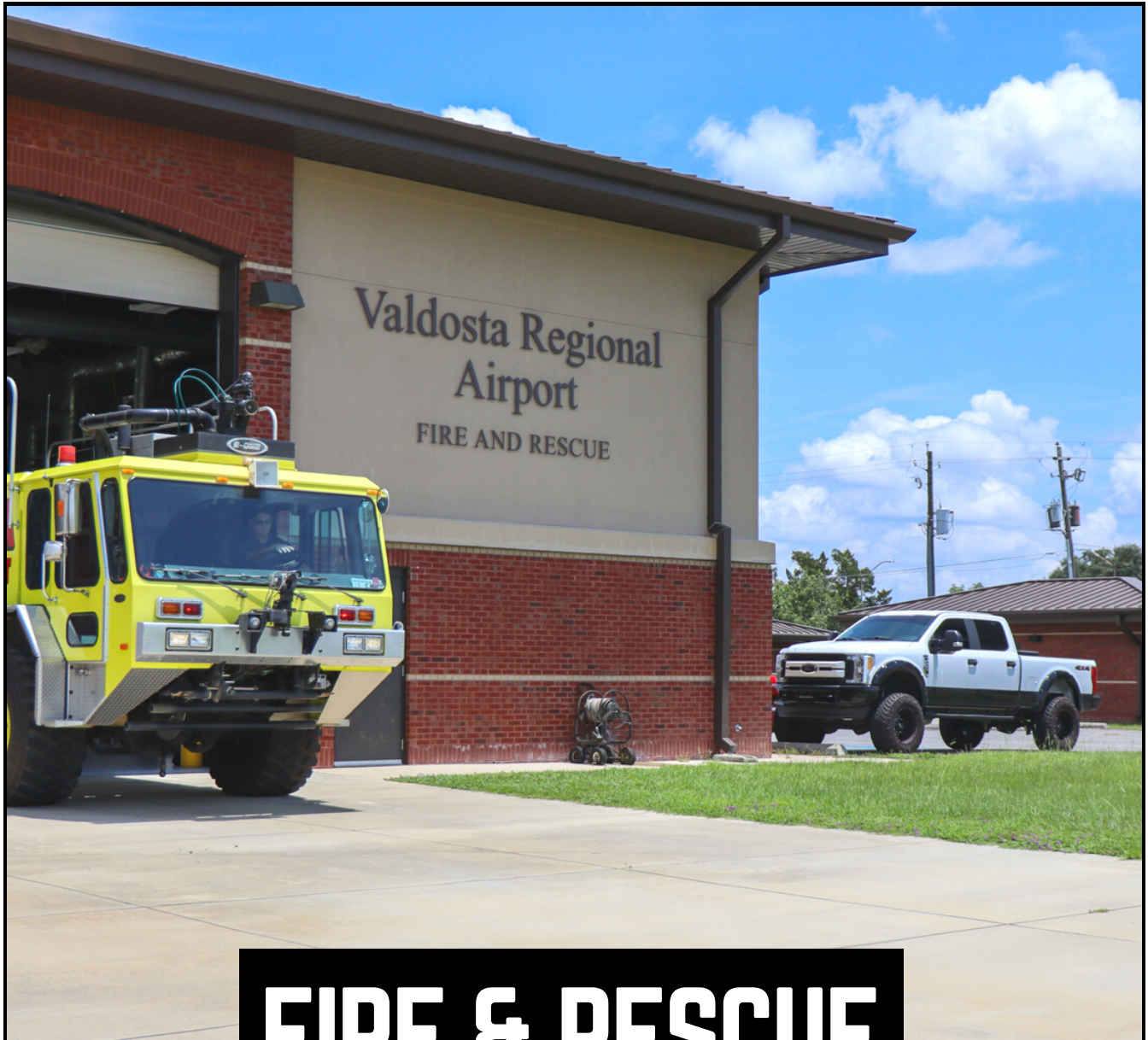
The Central Maintenance Division is comprised of 14 employees, all of whom help monitor the SCADA system, including two after-hours technicians that will respond to any issue it reports.

In addition to identifying issues, the SCADA system also accumulates pump station and plant equipment performance data. This is beneficial because it allows the system to recognize and adjust for trends in the data. If there are certain times when a specific area uses more water than others, for example, the system can recognize that trend and allocate flows accordingly.

Prior to the new SCADA system, the Central Maintenance Division used a different system as their primary alerting system. That system was retained and is now used as the secondary alarm system for redundancy.

FIRE STATION 7

Valdosta Regional Airport



FIRE & RESCUE



Many other flights travel into the Valdosta Regional in addition to Delta commercial flights and general aviation. Including all the branches of the military, the Governor for the State of Georgia, and even the President of the United States on several occasions.

The Valdosta Fire Department (VFD) has six stations strategically positioned throughout the city to provide efficient coverage and fire services to all residents. However, many may be unaware of the additional fire station located at the Valdosta Regional Airport. This station, though small, is essential because it provides emergency protection for passengers and crew on all commercial and general aviation flights.

Airport fire stations are ubiquitous and even mandated for most facilities. In the United States, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) dictates the number of stations an airport requires based on the size of the airport and response times to various points on the property. These stations come equipped with specialized trucks and specifically trained firefighters.

This type of service is known as Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting (ARFF) and requires firefighters to complete ARFF certification. In Valdosta, this is additional to all the certifications that must be met to work as a firefighter. VFD Sergeant Ken Taylor, who has worked at the airport station since 2016, admits that he was a little intimidated during his first year there, but those nerves quickly settled as he continued with his training.

He says, “I was intimidated initially because the planes can be very large and hold a lot of people, but we train every day the best that we can so that we stay proficient.” The airport crew provides emergency services for the flights that come in, so they train on topics such as airport and aircraft familiarization.

In the event of an emergency, the tower will contact the crew by way of the red phone, also known as the crash phone. Their truck will be the first to respond, and they will stage on the engine pad to wait for the plane. During this time, firefighters will pay attention to the wind patterns because it will give them insight into what direction the aircraft will be landing. Planes will usually arrive and take off facing the wind. Once they land, the team will respond as needed to the emergency. In his time at the airport, Sergeant Taylor and his team have assisted with engine and landing gear failures and planes with pressurized cabins that have come in on emergency because of issues with the oxygen.

Aside from assisting with aircrafts, the station functions similarly to the six others. It is comprised of a team of six who alternate two per day for a 24-hour shift. In addition to their specialized training, the airport crew completes all the same training as the city station crews.



Sergeant Taylor's aspiration to become a firefighter developed when he was a child living a few houses down from a fire station. He recalls wanting to hang out with the crew, who always made him feel like a part of the family.

This is because, depending on need, they may be utilized in positions throughout the city.

So it is essential for firefighters at the airport station to stay up to date on all the rules, regulations, and protocols that the other firefighters at various city stations follow.

Taylor has been with the department since 1994 and enjoys seeing a completely different side of fire services. "What I enjoy about being down here is seeing another side of fire services. I spent 20 plus years uptown and then came down here and saw a different side of it. You are still able to assist with things like fire protection and medical calls. Providing that service of helping people is what gives me satisfaction out of life," said Taylor.

MEET OUR PUBLIC INFORMATION TEAM



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Coordinates with local media outlets



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Assists with press releases

STAY INFORMED



Are there any city functions, programs, or departments you'd like to know more about? Feel free to submit your ideas for City Beat features to our Public Information Office at info@valdostacity.com.

There is a possibility your suggestion can be featured in our next issue!

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