

THE  
**CITY  
BEAT**  
MAGAZINE

April - June 2022



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On Thursday, May 26, 2022, the Valdosta Fire Department was informed that they maintained their top rating in what is referred to as an Insurance Service Office (ISO) Class 1 rating. This is the highest possible rating to be issued by the Public Protection Classification®. The ISO Class 1 rating represents an elite group of communities totaling less than half of 1% of communities rated. Valdosta is proud to share the same rating with larger nearby cities like Atlanta, Jacksonville, and Savannah.

This is a significant achievement for our city and our citizens. Valdosta's ISO rating is the highest fire insurance rating globally, held by only 136 out of 48,000 communities nationwide with only 11 of them in Georgia out of nearly 700 local governments. Valdosta remains the first local government in South Georgia to receive a Class 1 rating.

**"This significant accomplishment ensures communities that their fire service organization has and will continue to respond timely, with well-trained personnel, carrying state-of-the-art equipment, to provide a continued quality of service,"** said Valdosta Fire Lieutenant Marcus Haynes.

The areas rated include the fire department, water distribution, and the dispatch center capabilities. Any score of 90 or above is rated as a Class 1 fire department. The evaluation, conducted last October, came back in May indicating an overall score of 94.95. This is an increase from the 2016 score of 93.25.

The Valdosta Fire Department thanks the Valdosta Utilities, Southern Georgia Regional Commission, and Lowndes Communications Center for their assistance in maintaining an ISO Class 1 rating.

**"There are several key components to achieve this rating,"** said Fire Chief Boutwell. **"We are fortunate to have a professional network of outstanding services throughout the city. I am very proud of the Valdosta Fire Department, who understands the value and importance of remarkable community service,"**

ISO is an independent company that serves insurance companies, communities, fire departments, insurance regulators, and others by providing risk information. The office collects and evaluates information from communities across the United States on their structure fire suppression capabilities. ISO further represents cost savings for property owners and serves as an essential measure of economic development in business expansion for the City of Valdosta.





**Pictured: Josh Hunt, Tom Meyer, Brandon Corbitt, Winston Williams**

We welcomed a new Marshal to the City of Valdosta's Community Protection Division. The swearing-in ceremony of Marshal Carlton Richard was held on March 24, 2022. Richard has twelve years of service as a correctional officer. He was welcomed into the Community Protection family by his peers and supported by his wife, Latasha Richard, who is a patrol officer at the Valdosta Police Department.

"I chose to pursue a career as a Marshal for the City of Valdosta because my passion is protecting our community."

*-Carlton Richard*



**LaTasha and Carlton Richard**

# SHARAH' DENTON

The City of Valdosta announces Sharah' Denton as its new Community Relations and Marketing Manager. Denton, a native of California, has made Valdosta her home for the past 16 years. In 2010, she led the charter of the Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Section of NCNW, Inc. and served as the Section President from 2010-2016. In August of 2016, Sharah was elected as the Interim State Coalition of NCNW Georgia President, and in 2017, elected as the first official State President of Georgia NCNW. She served as NCNW's National 3rd Vice-Chair of Young Adults and Collegiates from 2016-2020. During her time as State President, she led the state in hosting its second state conference in Valdosta, which hosted leaders throughout the state of Georgia and national leaders of affiliated organizations of NCNW. She has over 13 years of communications, public relations, and marketing experience through her time as a reporter and non-profit and small business sectors.

Denton was the Parent and Community Relations Specialist for Brooks County Schools for nearly five years, and most recently worked as the HIV Prevention Program Manager for the Department of Public Health, South Health District. She is a member of the Valdosta Junior Service League and was named the 2012 Valdosta Woman of the Year, 2013 Valdosta Metro One 4 Under 40 Recipient, 2013 Georgia Trend Magazine 40 Under 40 Best and Brightest Recipient, 2012 Leadership Lowndes Graduate, 2017 Georgia Forward: Young Game Changer. She launched her PR Consultation Services in 2016, Go4It Communications, LLC, where she provides communication and social media branding, consulting for nonprofits and small businesses, and hosts a podcast, The GreatHER Purpose Podcast which is on several platforms. She is the mother of two amazing children, son, Jalen and, daughter, Laila.

Denton works with Erica Thrift, the new Community Engagement Coordinator. Thrift is a recent graduate of Valdosta State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Art. She is currently earning her Masters of Fine Art in Media Design.



## ***Community Relations & Marketing Manager***



# BRANDIE DAME

The City of Valdosta announces Brandie Dame as the new Main Street Director for Downtown Valdosta. Dame comes to Downtown Valdosta from her previous role as the Main Street Director for the City of Adel. She was the first Main Street Director for Downtown Adel, and her principal accomplishment was establishing Downtown Adel as a “Classic” Main Street community. Dame started her career in Sales & Marketing for the Valdosta Daily Times for several years. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Organizational Leadership with a minor in Public Administration from Valdosta State University.



**Brandie Dame**

**“I look forward to using my experience in Main Street, sales and marketing, and my “never meet a stranger” personality to assist Downtown Valdosta and the Downtown Valdosta merchants to grow and prosper. Downtown Valdosta is such a wonderful and welcoming place to shop, dine, work, and stay.”**

- Brandie Dame

## MAIN STREET DIRECTOR

Dame works with Ally Sealy, the new Main Street Coordinator. Sealy is a recent graduate of Valdosta State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in the disciplines of Marketing and Communications.



# PUBLIC WORKS

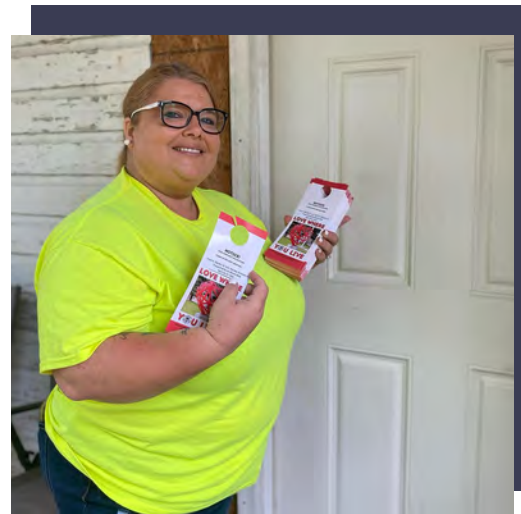
## Electronic Recycling Event

On April 9, 2022, Public Works held the Spring Semi-Annual Electronic Recycling Event; with help from volunteers of our community, this was a great success! If the community wants to do electronic recycling, this is also available on the first and third Wednesday every month at the Public Works Department (1017 Myrtle Street).



## Love Where You Live Community Clean Up

On Saturday, April 23, 2022, the City of Valdosta's Public Works Department hosted Love Where You Live Community Clean Up. Before the Clean Up, Teresa Turner, Community Sustainability Coordinator, hit the pavement to inform the residents of the upcoming Clean Up in their area. During this Clean Up, Public Works crews aided the area residents with picking up bulk trash items at no charge as well as yard debris. With the help of our city employees and volunteers, this event helped keep our community litter free and beautiful. We appreciate the volunteers, The Sigma Iota Chapter of Alpha Phi Omega National Service Fraternity Inc., the foreign exchange student department, and other Valdosta State University (VSU) volunteers, along with Dr. Harris and her daughter, Bella. This dedication to their community shows their love for where they live.



## Love Where You Live River Clean Up

On May 7, 2022, Public Works held their quarterly Love Where You Live River Clean Up. They had volunteers and staff meet to pick up trash and remove large items such as tires from our local rivers. Events like these help us remember that citizens do their part to help our community stay clean. Always keep in mind to be kind to the environment by not littering.



## Love Where You Live Veterans' Memorial Headstone Cleaning

On May 21, 2022, the community came together with the Public Works Department of the City of Valdosta to honor those who fought for our freedom by cleaning Veterans' headstones in Sunset Cemetery. While these volunteers worked hard cleaning the monuments, Future Home Loans provided refreshments and snacks.



# VALDOSTA UTILITIES



In honor of National Drinking Water Week, the Utilities Department visited local schools. Joseph Gangler (FOG Coordinator), Jason Barnes (Water Plant Superintendent), and Christine Espanol (Sr. Admin Support Specialist), led interactive presentations on water conservation education.

David Frost, former Utilities Director, presented this year's Water Week Art Contest award to Miracle Strickland, a student at Valdosta Early College Academy.

Drinking Water Week is an annual national observance in May sponsored by the American Water Works Association to recognize the critical role drinking water plays in our daily lives. Treating the water before it reaches our tap to kill or remove harmful germs or chemicals is essential to ensure it is safe to drink. The employees at our water treatment plant diligently work with the latest technology to provide safe and good-tasting water for our community. They also have a public education program and conduct tours for community members of all ages who want to learn more about how our water treatment plant treats our drinking water.







# NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The City of Valdosta recognized six Valdosta High School students who graduated from the Great Promise Partnership (GPP) program at a ceremony in the Valdosta City Hall Annex multi-purpose room. The students received a GPP stole, a graduate certificate from the GPP program, and gifts from the city.

These internships are funded through the City of Valdosta’s Community Development Block Grant. The City of Valdosta partners with Valdosta High School to allow the GPP students to work part-time in various departments while balancing academic and extracurricular schedules.

Samara Willis worked with the Public Works Department. Aaliyah Daniels and Aiyana Matchett worked with the Customer Service Department. Jessiah Ogundu worked with the Meter Reading Department, and Tyren Martin worked with the Community Protection Department.





## **City Manager Mark Barber, receives Certificate of Recognition**

Congratulations to our City Manager, Mark Barber! He received the prestigious Certificate of Recognition from the Harold F. Holtz Municipal Training Institute during the Georgia Municipal Association's (GMA) Annual Convention in Savannah on June 27.

The Harold F. Holtz Municipal Training Institute, a cooperative effort of GMA and the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government, provides a nationally recognized series of training opportunities for city officials. To receive a Certificate of Recognition, a city official must complete a minimum of 42 units of credit, including at least 18 hours from a list of required classes. The training program consists of more than 70 courses.

Based in Atlanta, GMA is a voluntary, non-profit organization that provides legislative advocacy, research, training, employee benefit, and technical consulting services to its 537 member cities.

# CITY COUNCIL REPRESENTS VALDOSTA AT GMA

The City of Valdosta is proud of our City Council Members, who represented at this year's annual Georgia Municipal Association Conference (GMA) in Savannah! Our City Councilman, Andy Gibbs and City Councilwoman, Sandra Tooley, are pictured during the parade of flags. GMA's 2022 Annual Convention theme was "Georgia Cities: Lighting the Way, Leading the Future."



GMA's Annual Convention features engaging sessions and unrivaled training for city officials and local leaders from across the state. It also includes a trade show featuring products and services that improve the operations of cities to enhance the lives of their citizens



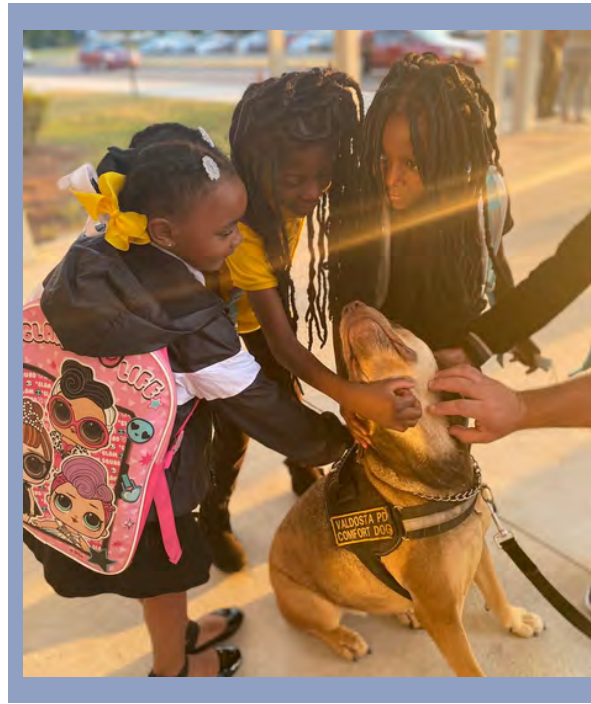
# VALDOSTA POLICE DEPARTMENT



The Valdosta Police Department is dedicated to serving the community of Valdosta. One of their favorite community outreach programs is visiting our local schools.

In honor of Georgia Cities Week, the Valdosta Police Department, Chase and Hope, the comfort dog, greeted the students of Pinevale Elementary and Sallas Mahone Elementary.

Seeing lots of smiling faces is a good start to any day for the Police Department!



# LARRY OGDEN



Larry Ogden, Traffic Manager, representing the traffic management team, traveled to Columbus, Ohio, to accept the Smart 50 Award for transformative work in small cities.

# CHIEF LESLIE MANAHAN

The Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce recently hosted a fantastic “Women Who Work: A Balancing Act Day Conference! Our very own Valdosta Police Chief, Leslie Manahan, made us proud as one of the panelists on the topic, “What I Wish I Was Told.” Of course, our Main Street and Public Information ladies were there to support!





## Valdosta On-Demand celebrates One Year Anniversary

April 27, 2022, marked the first anniversary of the Valdosta On-Demand transit for the City of Valdosta. This past year the transit has already provided 65,100 rides throughout the community. "It's been such a successful project for the city and our community," said Mark Barber, City Manager. The transit system hires local citizens, and locally owned businesses to service the vehicles, which directly impacts the City of Valdosta. For Barber, it also means that the citizens' quality of life has been enhanced to meet their medical needs, doctor appointments, grocery shopping, and much more.

**"We continue to have launched one of the most successful micro-transit systems that Via, our transit partner has launched thus far," said Barber. "The positive economic impact that Valdosta On-Demand has had on our city is tremendous."**

Barber mentioned the positive response citizens have given when discussing the appreciation of independence in using the services on their own. Barber thanked Richard Hardy, City Deputy Manager of Operations, his team, Burt Landcaster from Via Transportation, Corey Hull formerly of the Southern Georgia Regional Commission, and the Mayor and City Council for their support of the Valdosta On-Demand since its early planning.

**"We couldn't be prouder of the results," said Mayor Scott James Matheson. "Every council person knew that we had that need in the City of Valdosta, and we answered that need."**

Councilwoman and Mayor Pro-Tem Vivian Miller-Cody mentioned that she was standing in for Councilwoman Sandra Tooley who, envisioned transportation opportunities for citizens.

**"We are so happy to see this great success for the City of Valdosta," said Miller-Cody.**

# "SONNY" VICKERS

The City of Valdosta was saddened to announce that Council Member Joseph "Sonny" Vickers passed away on Thursday, June 16, 2022.

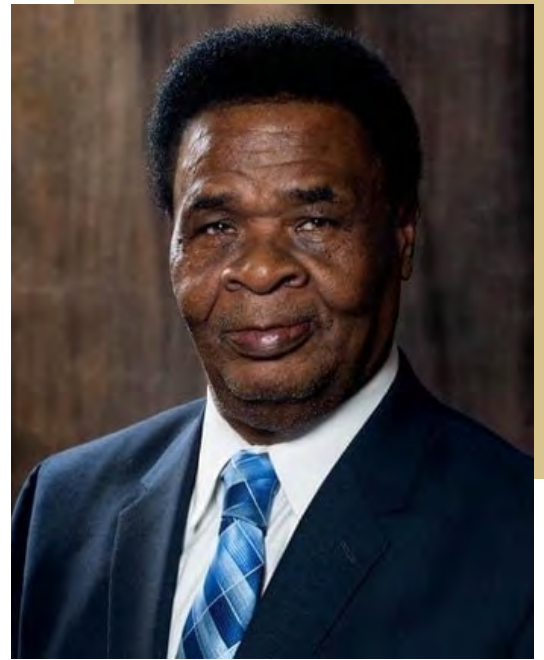
Councilman Vickers' life was a record of dedication to family and to the community including his spiritual family, his children and family, his family of extended relatives and friends, and his City of Valdosta family. Councilman Vickers was born in Valdosta, Georgia, where he received his elementary and high school education from the Valdosta City School System. He was an actively involved member of the River Street Church of Christ. He was elected to the Valdosta City Council for a one year term in 1985.

He was re-elected to the Valdosta Council for a four year term in 1986 and has served more than twenty-two years as the Councilman for District 3 before being appointed Mayor by the Valdosta City Council in 2011, in which he served the unexpired term of the previous Mayor. Councilman Vickers proudest accomplishments as a local elected official was paving more than twenty-six miles of dirt streets and spearheading the efforts to establish a housing program in the city.

Councilman Vickers was passionate about working with and helping people. His philosophy can be summed up in these words, "Service can be given wherever there are people."

**"Since my first encounter with Councilman Vickers, I can truly say I was honored to serve along side him. He provided wisdom, openness, and love for our community."**

- Mayor Scott James Matheson



**In honor of  
Councilman  
Joseph "Sonny" Vickers**

**"Councilman Vickers was not just a councilman, he was my friend and a leader whom I have admired and respected since we first met. The city will definitely feel this loss from a phenomenal man and leader. He will be deeply missed."**

- City Manager, Mark Barber



# 2022 Government 101 Class Graduates

Local citizens who want an inside look at their city government can participate in the annual Valdosta Government 101 Citizens Orientation. The program, an initiative of the Valdosta Mayor and City Council, also includes the participation of up to five high school seniors who have a parent or legal guardian also enrolled in the program.

Participants of the program meet on seven consecutive Mondays, beginning the first Monday in April, from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., and are exposed to the programs and services of the city government. The sessions include presentations on the following: City government overview, public safety, municipal court, engineering, public works, utilities, financial administration, industrial and economic development, recreation, community development, planning and zoning, and neighborhood development, in addition to several facility tours and guest presentations.





# VPD WINS GREAT AMERICAN COOK-OFF



The Great American Cook-off: Battle of the First Responders, which benefits the Boys and Girls Club, was a close competition this year! The drums rolled as they announced there would need to be a tie-breaker between Valdosta Police Department (VPD) and Moody Air Force Base. Everyone anxiously waited as the judges taste-tested again.

Finally, the judges announced that our Valdosta Police Department was this year's winner! As winners of the last cook-off, Lowndes County Fire Rescue graciously passed on the winning trophy to our VPD.

We cannot go without mentioning that our Valdosta Fire Department took home the winning trophy in Corn Hole! The City of Valdosta thanks Seasons Valdosta for hosting this fantastic event. Also, thanks to our local first responders for their daily hard work, training, and community protection.



# BROWN BAG LUNCH CONCERT SERIES



During the week of May 23 – May 27, 2022, the City of Valdosta's Main Street department held the annual Brown Bag Lunch Concert Series. The Brown Bag was held at Olympic Park from 11:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. Olympic Park provided great space and shade during the summer heat for all who attended. The community was able to eat lunch and listen to live music. The Brown Bag Lunch Concert Series was a great success due to the live bands and food trucks that participated. Valdosta Main Street thanks the bands, The Page Brothers, The Gypsy Pushers, 2 River Station, and Dirty Bird and the Flu, for playing. We also thank Daylight Doughnuts, Caribbean Delight, Big Nick's, The Mix, Chick-Fil-A, and Kona Ice for selling delicious lunches to the community.





# Valdosta Fire Department Receives EMS Agency License

The City of Valdosta is excited to announce that our Valdosta Fire Department (VFD) received an EMS Agency License from the Georgia Department of Public Health, Office of EMS and Trauma as a Licensed Medical First Responder Agency.

The VFD has been providing aid to patients through a partnership with South Georgia Medical Center (SGMC) for many years and has always strived to improve the level of care and services they provide. With the increase in medical calls over the past several years nationwide, this license will further enhance the assistance and medical care they will be able to provide for our community.

They have been a state-recognized training facility for more than two years, conducting monthly training to personnel on emergency medical care for patients. The partnership with SGMC has allowed them to receive more training emphasizing trauma care and providing a more diverse educational foundation.

# GOODBYE HELLO



**Teresa Bolden, City Clerk  
saying goodbye**

This is not goodbye- it is see you later to City Engineer for the City of Valdosta, Pat Collins. Laughter was had, and tears were shed, but we were happy to see Pat ride off into the sunset in his white Corvette and Miami Vice shirt. Happy Retirement to Valdosta's City Engineer, Pat Collins!

The City of Valdosta welcomes Benjamin O'Dowd as the new City Engineer. We look forward to working with Mr. O'Dowd!



**Benjamin O'Dowd**

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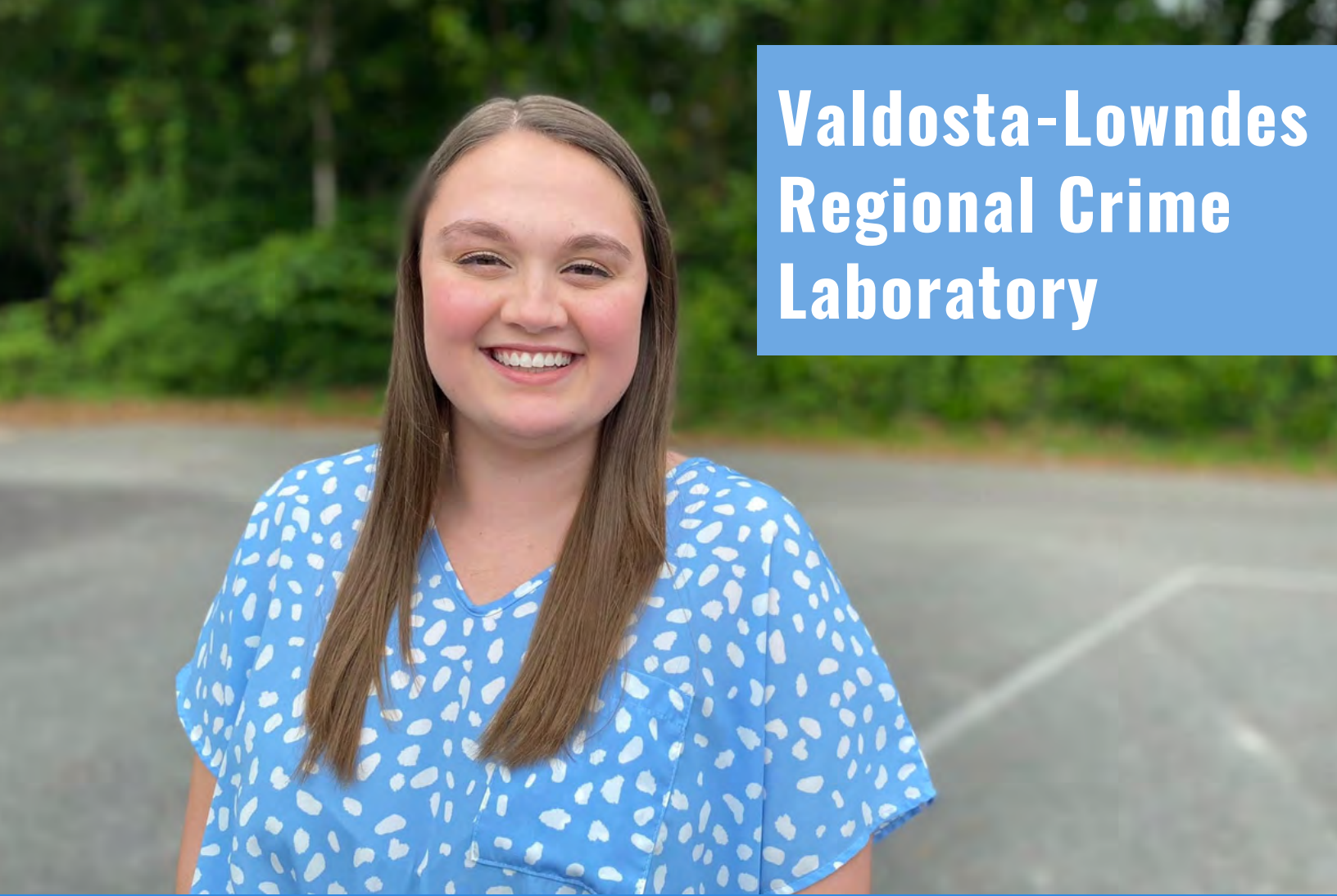
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# EMPLOYEE HEALTH & BENEFITS FAIR



The City of Valdosta's Human Resource Department hosted the annual Employee Health & Benefits Fair at Mathis City Auditorium. Thank you to Taylor Insurance and Pepsi for providing lunch and beverages. Additionally, we want to thank the community vendors who participated in the baseball-themed event! Lastly, thank you to HR for planning and organizing this event for employee wellness.





# Valdosta-Lowndes Regional Crime Laboratory

The City of Valdosta wants to recognize Criminalist Carly Eaves and Criminalist Jordan Greene for their hard work and dedication to the Shimadzu Hemp analyzer.

Eaves has been employed as a Chemist with the Valdosta-Lowndes Regional Crime Laboratory for a year and half. She has done an excellent job performing the validation of the analysis. Criminalist Eaves has spent the last year validating the Shimadzu Hemp Analyzer, otherwise known as a High-Performance Liquid Chromatograph (HPLC). A validation demonstrates an instrument or method meets specified requirements that are adequate for the intended purpose. Liquid chromatography is a separation technique used to separate a liquid sample into the individual components. HPLC will allow a plant sample dissolved in a solvent to separate cannabinoids like delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (delta-9-THC).

During the validation, Carly was responsible for validating standards and plant material, developing an accurate calibration curve, and developing an extraction procedure for plant material. Through this process, she completed a great deal of research to aid in the validation. She observed webinars and symposiums and reached out to other chemists in the field for their expertise on the validation. After the validation, the chemists must be deemed competent before performing casework. Criminalist Carly Eaves and Criminalist Jordan Greene are authorized by the laboratory to perform casework with the HPLC. Criminalist Greene has been employed at the laboratory as a Chemist for five years.

The Valdosta-Lowndes Regional Crime Laboratory (VLRCL) purchased this new instrumentation due to the Hemp Farm Bill. The Hemp Farm Bill allows the processing of hemp plants to be prepared in a form available for legal commercial sale, but not including food products infused with THC unless approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration.

According to the Farm Bill, hemp is defined as plant material from the Cannabis Sativa plant with not more than 0.3% delta-9-THC. Marijuana is defined as plant material with greater than 0.3% delta-9-THC. The Hemp Analyzer (High-Performance Liquid Chromatography or HPLC) will allow chemists at the laboratory to determine the concentration of delta-9-THC in plant material submitted as evidence by law enforcement agencies.

-submitted by Julie Grantham, Quality Manager at Valdosta-Lowndes Regional Crime Laboratory



# NO WATER, NO BEER

In honor of National Water Week, the City of Valdosta celebrated No Water, No Beer at Georgia Beer Co. They partnered with the Georgia Section American Water Works Association (GAWWA) to celebrate water in a unique way – by having a beer fest! As you know, if you don't have water, you don't have beer. All proceeds from this event benefited Water for People, a global nonprofit organization that helps people bring clean water and sanitation solutions to underserved communities worldwide.





# UNITY PARK AMPHITHEATER

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## GRAND OPENING

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The City of Valdosta is proud to announce the grand opening of the Unity Park Amphitheater. Located on the corner of Lee Street and Central Avenue, the development of Unity Park was an action item agreed upon at the 2020 Strategic Initiatives Summit.

"Unity Park will bring more people to the downtown area and can be used for so many great events as well as make the downtown area more vibrant and beautiful," said City Manager Mark Barber. Unity Park will be a place for the community to host various activities and events such as movie nights, concerts, and food truck events in the future.

City staff and the University of Georgia Civil and Environmental Engineering Department collaborated on this project during the fall of 2019 and winter of 2020 semesters. Three (3) senior students prepared a preliminary site design as part of their Capstone Project requirement for graduation. Final design amenities included a theater with storage, sidewalks, landscaping, a stormwater bio-retention pond, park benches, and ample parking for food trucks.