

THE
**CITY
BEAT**
MAGAZINE

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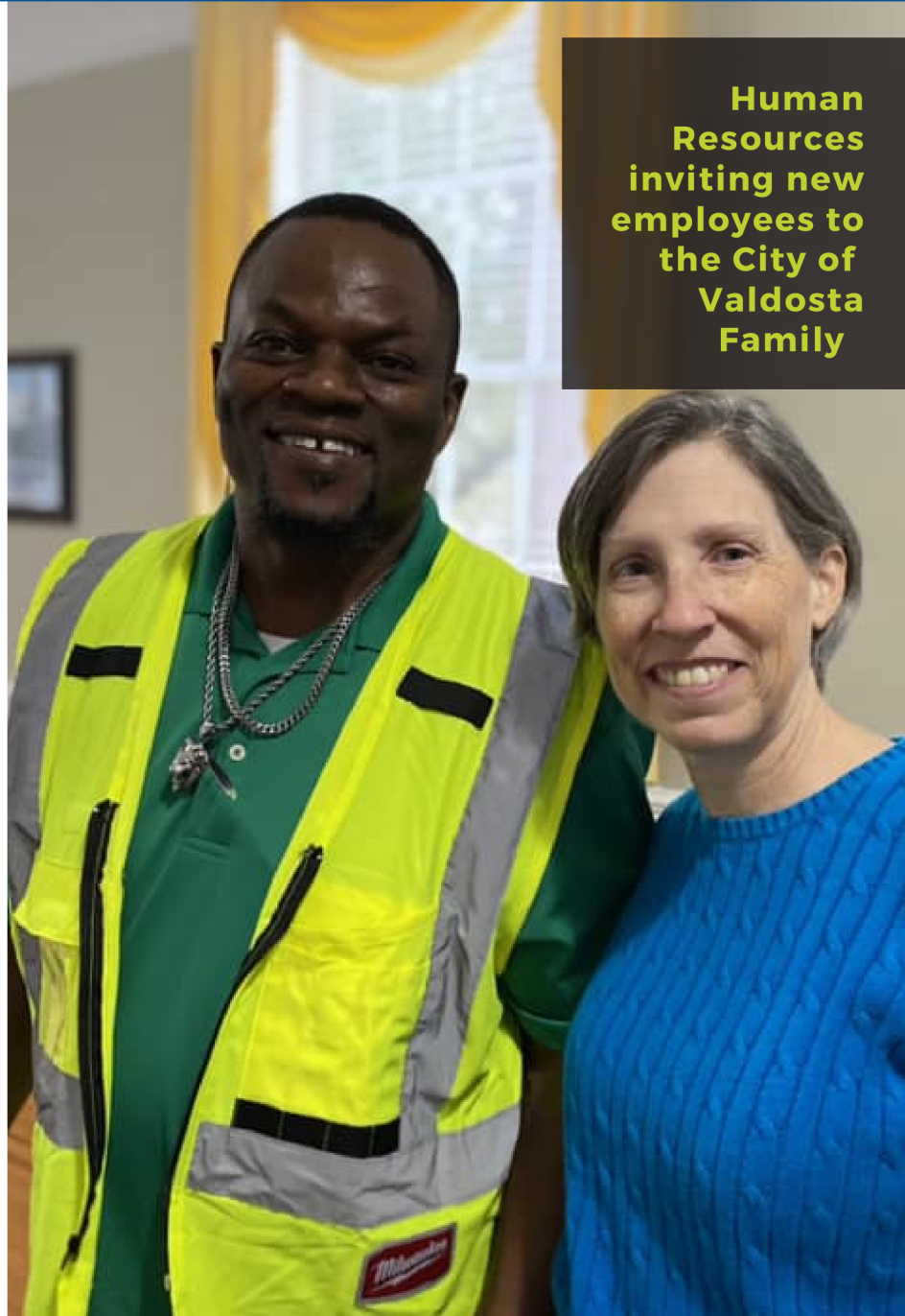
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NEW MAYOR PRO-TEM

Congratulations to the new Mayor Pro-Tem Councilman Eric Howard. Eric was elected by citizens in November 2017 to serve on the Valdosta City Council representing District 4. His first term began in January 2018. He was re-elected to serve a second term in November 2021 and was sworn into office on January 6, 2022. His current term will end on December 31, 2025.



THE NEW INTERIM CITY MANAGER

The City of Valdosta Mayor and Council appointed Deputy City Manager Richard Hardy as the Interim City Manager effective on February 1, 2023. Hardy fills the vacancy left by City Manager Mark Barber, who retired after 35 years.

He has served as the Director of Public Works for the City of Valdosta, Georgia, since September 2014. He is a 33-year Department of Defense Veteran and a retired Chief Master Sergeant (CMSGT) of the United States Air Force (USAF).

Hardy holds a Bachelor of Science in Occupational Education from Wayland Baptist University and a Master of Science in Information Systems from American Sentinel University. He received his Certificate of Local Government Management by completing the Management Development Program from the University of Georgia, Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

He has also completed seven tiers of Professional Military Education focused on Leadership and Management.





New Watergoat

The Stormwater Division of the Engineering Department was happy to receive a much-needed upgrade to the existing Watergoat serving Sugar Creek. This upgraded installation is equipped with larger marine-grade buoys and a double-row configuration to catch floatable debris and litter more effectively. It's important that the community works together to keep the rivers and streams clean.

Here are some ways people can help:

- Throw the beverage container in the nearest trash can.
- Secure any loose trash in a truck bed.
- Ensure household trash is safely contained in the trash can at the road during pickup day.
- Instruct commercial/residential landscapers to pick up litter on the property during routine grounds maintenance.





Spring Cleaning

A fantastic collaboration with the City of Valdosta's Engineering Department and WWALS Watershed Coalition is Suwannee Riverkeeper provided litter clean-up along the creek beds of Two-Mile Branch and Berkley Drive. This is a great example of how dedicated our community members are to keeping Valdosta beautiful. Here are a few ways to reduce the output of trash and help the environment, some of which include:

- Reduce your use of single-use items like plastic bags, straws, and water bottles.
- Recycle properly by separating recyclables from non-recyclables and disposing of them in designated recycling bins.
- Donate or sell items you no longer need or want instead of throwing them away.
- Opt for reusable items like shopping bags, water bottles, and containers.

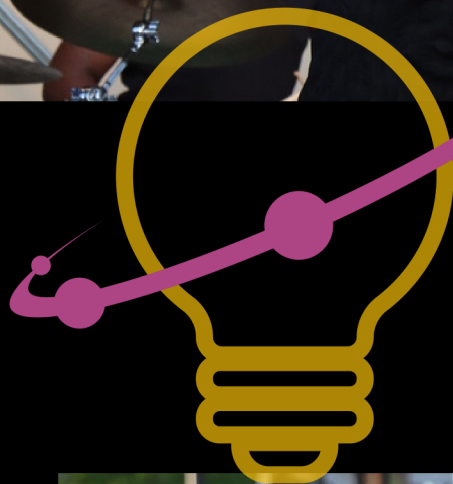
River Clean-up



BIG GAME BASH



The City of Valdosta, Valdosta Main Street, and Pepsi collaborated for the Inaugural Big Game Bash at Unity Park Amphitheater on Saturday, February 11. The community enjoyed sporting their favorite football team paraphernalia and a day of live music, vendors, food trucks, bounce houses, and much more.



Azalea

AFTER DARK



The City of Valdosta, Valdosta Main Street, and the Annette Howell Turner Center partnered to present the Inaugural, Azalea After Dark. This two-day event had various activities and entertainment in correlation with the annual Azalea Festival. On day two, the City of Valdosta and Valdosta Main Street concluded the event at Unity Park Amphitheater. Citizens came out for an evening of shopping with vendors, live bands, and food trucks. Carmen Bradford and the Valdosta State University Jazz Band were a fantastic addition to the Azalea City Festival weekend.

MAYOR/ CHAIRMAN'S PADDLE



The 4th Annual Mayor & Chairman's Paddle, organized by WWALS Watershed Coalition is Suwannee Riverkeeper, was a huge success! This event is where people mix fun with work. As the paddlers paddle down the river, they also collect litter. Thank you to all the organizations and volunteers who supported the event. The City of Valdosta is proud to have a community dedicated to conserving and protecting the environment.

STORMWATER DIVISION

The Stormwater Division teamed up with the Pack 491 & 420 Cub Scouts to pick up litter & mark curbs. In addition to learning about stormwater, participants gained a better understanding of why the Stormwater Division and staff are so important.





The City of Valdosta is proud of Downtown Valdosta Main Street for maintaining its Georgia Exceptional Main Street (GEMS) designation. Georgia Main Street visited Valdosta to determine the GEMS designation. The process began with a PowerPoint presentation at the Turner Center for the Arts and ended with a tour of downtown.

A community can participate in three unique tiers as part of the Georgia Main Street Program. GEMS communities represent some of the best of the best Main Street programs that the state has to offer.

These Main Street programs have exceeded expectations by making a solid and positive impact in their communities as measured by the monthly reporting and the annual assessment process.

RIBBON-CUTTING CELEBRATION



Valdosta's Wild Adventures Theme Park constantly surprises the community. Council members and City of Valdosta leaders attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony to show their support for the almost three-acre expansion, The Oasis Outpost. They also paused for a moment to have some fun!

Interim City Manager Richard Hardy and Councilwoman Vivian Miller-Cody channeled their inner child and enjoyed the thrilling spin and tilt experience of the Sidewinder ride.

During the ribbon-cutting ceremony, Wild Adventures had more exciting news! They will break ground on its new campground in early summer and expand the park's Wild Adventures Christmas event.





Lowndes County Bird Supper

This traditional event, sponsored by the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners and the City of Valdosta, brings together hundreds of state officials and Valdosta community members for a dinner of quail and meaningful conversations. The supper provides an opportunity to allow community members, residents, business owners, industry leaders, and nonprofit organizations to come together in Atlanta and meet with their legislators, other state representatives, and the Governor's Office.





On January 22, during the Georgia Municipal Association's (GMA) Cities United Summit, nine cities across the Peach State were recognized with the Visionary City Award. The awards were presented by GMA CEO and Executive Director Larry Hanson, Georgia Trend Co-Publisher, and Editor-in-Chief Ben Young as a partnership between GMA and Georgia Trend.



Valdosta was recognized in the large city category for developing the Unity Park Amphitheater, a space for citizens to gather and hold local celebrations. The amphitheater includes:

- A large, covered stage, event lighting, and backstage areas.
- An extensive greenspace for seating.
- A large splash pad.
- Family-friendly restrooms.
- A water station and enough space to comfortably host Valdosta's renowned festivities.

NEIGHBORHOOD

Neighborhood Development is a fantastic department that does so much to help Valdosta citizens. Homes are rebuilt and made safe thanks to the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program. CDBG provides the Neighborhood Development Department with the opportunities to help citizens bring their properties up to code.



Development

The City of Valdosta had the honor of hosting the Leadership Lowndes Class of 2023. Mike Duvall gave the class a tour of our Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment plant. The Planning and Zoning Departments gave excellent presentations in the council chambers of City Hall. Additionally, they enjoyed lunch with a panel of local leaders and elected officials.



LEADERSHIP LOWNDES



Arbor Week

On February 17, 2023, the City of Valdosta was honored by the Georgia Forestry Commission as a Tree City USA for its 37th consecutive Year at the annual Arbor Day Celebration, sponsored by the Valdosta Tree Commission.

Mayor Scott Matheson proclaimed Arbor Day at City Hall, and a tree-planting ceremony was held at Scintilla Charter Academy to honor Valdosta's status as a Tree City USA community. The designation as a Tree City USA signifies Valdosta's ongoing commitment to growing and maintaining a healthy urban forest.

The Valdosta Tree Commission gave opening and closing remarks at the event and led the prayer. Georgia State Forester presented the Tree City USA flag, held by Scintilla Charter Academy students. Before the ceremony, the City of Valdosta's Arbor Division planted a Willow Oak in the playground. The ceremony concluded with City Leadership, the Georgia State Forester, Scintilla's staff, and students shoveling dirt onto the tree.

To coincide with Georgia Arbor Day, the Azalea City Woman's Club recently honored Ms. Jeanette Coody by planting a tree through the Valdosta Tree Commission's Memorial Tree program. The planting of this tree commemorates her 100th birthday and celebrates her contributions to our community.

Ms. Coody chose Fire Station Two as the location to plant her Summer Red Maple because she is a passionate supporter of our Valdosta Fire Department.

The Valdosta Tree Commission's Memorial Tree Program allows community members or organizations to honor an individual, group, or event by planting a tree in the City of Valdosta. The tree is planted and maintained by the City of Valdosta Arbor Division.

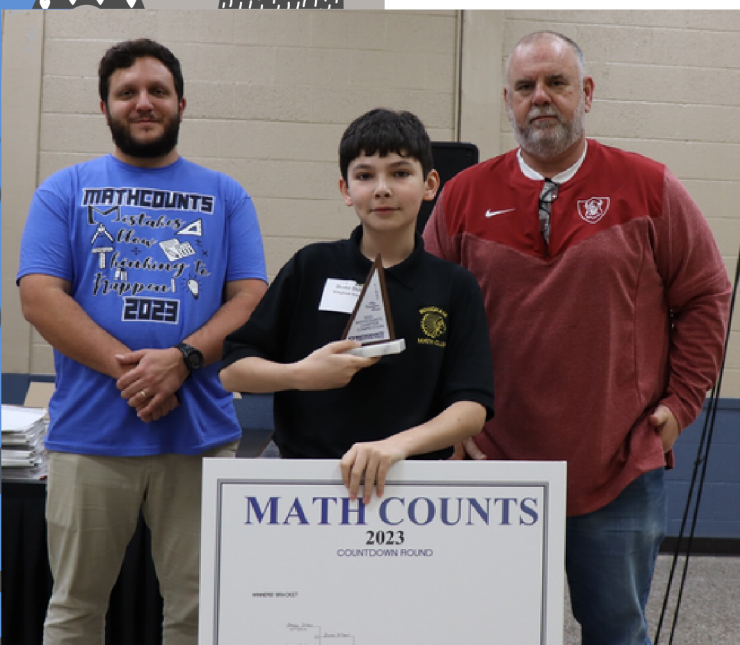




MATHCOUNTS

On Friday, February 17, 2023, city employees served as judges in the MATHCOUNTS competition held by the South Georgia Chapter of the Georgia Society of Professional Engineers at Mathis City Auditorium.

'Mathletes' first compete regionally to qualify for the state competition. The winning teams and individuals then advance to Georgia MATHCOUNTS. Advancing to the state competition secures a chance to proceed to the National MATHCOUNTS competition.





Valdosta Fire Department



Valdosta Fire Department honored early firefighters with a Push-in Ceremony on Friday, March 24, 2023. The ceremony commissioned its newest 2023 Sutphen Fire Engine 8 and placed it into service.

Fire Chief Brian Boutwell began the ceremony by explaining its tradition and history, saying that it dates back to the 1800s when horse-drawn apparatuses had to be pushed into the bays. Many fire departments hold push-in ceremonies as a tribute to early firefighters and encourage community members to participate.

Following a prayer led by Deputy Chief Marcus Haynes, the community was invited to push the fire engine into the bay. Scintilla Charter Academy students, fire personnel, parents, and other citizens took part in pushing the apparatus into the station. Following the engine's placement into the bay, the children cheered, "We did it! We did it!". Afterward, children and other community members were invited to explore the new unit.

"The community's outstanding support for this event is profound," Chief Boutwell said. "I am proud to serve a community that demonstrates such a strong commitment to its first responders."

The Valdosta Fire Department thanks the community and organizations who supported and participated in welcoming the new engine.





Officer of the Year



Officer Castellanos was awarded the Rotary's Officer of the Year at the 16th Annual Law Enforcement Appreciation Dinner. Castellanos was nominated by his peers for this award. He has been with the department for three years and is a very reliable and proactive officer. Throughout the past year, Officer Castellanos has been involved in over 130 arrests, which included a home invasion he investigated that resulted in several arrests, seized cocaine, seized currency, and a recovered firearm.

He is quick to assist other officers and highly efficient in dealing with offenders while being caring and kind to victims in need. Over the past year, he has received numerous commendations for his professionalism, dedication, excellent work ethic, and commitment to his law enforcement career.

The Valdosta Police Department thanks the Rotary Club of Valdosta for honoring local Law Enforcement Officers.



GREAT AMERICAN COOK-OFF

As always, the friendly competition of the First Responders' Great American Cook-Off that benefits Valdosta's Boys & Girls Club was a success.

The Valdosta Police Department had to relinquish its trophy to the Lowndes County Sheriff's Office this year. The Valdosta Fire Department maintained their cornhole championship and took home the trophy for the chicken flickin' game.

Miller Hardware Seasons Valdosta always hosts a fantastic event. The City of Valdosta Public Safety Departments are grateful for its sponsors, Renasant Bank and Taylor Insurance Company.

