

THE  
**CITY  
BEAT**  
MAGAZINE

July - Sept 2022



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# OPENING CELEBRATION



Unity Park is the product of a long-term plan to cultivate a family-friendly, inviting, music and entertainment venue in the heart of Valdosta.

On Saturday, August 20th, Unity Park's Grand Opening Celebration was a huge success! Citizens enjoyed five bands, a kid's zone, and food trucks kicking off after the ribbon-cutting ceremony of Unity Park. The featured bands played music from the Oldies, Rock, Soul, and Country. This celebration couldn't have been pulled off without the help of wonderful city employees and volunteers. City leaders were ecstatic to gather with fellow citizens to commence what they envisioned will be a place of cohesion, fellowship, and fun for future events.

We are ever-thankful that city officials sought to invest in this project. The City is confident it will prove to be a boom to downtown commerce and recreation as citizens and visitors find Unity Park a welcome place to play and another reason to love their downtown.





## Gary Turner - City of Valdosta, Public Works Employee, wins an award

Every year the Georgia Chapter of the American Public Works Association (APWA) recognizes a Public Works employee from across the state by awarding the APWA Chapter Employee of the Year Award to an employee with outstanding achievements. This year, the APWA Awards Banquet was held on August 10, 2022, at Jekyll Island. Gary Turner, Groundskeeper II for the Right-of-Way Maintenance Division of the City of Valdosta, was selected as the recipient. The Right-of-Way Maintenance Division falls under the Public Works Department. This Division is primarily responsible for repairs, general ground maintenance, and landscaping of the Downtown Main Street area, including mowing grass, weed control, pressure washing, and litter control. Seasonal activities include changing decorative banners to installing Christmas Décor, shrubs, flowers, and mulch.

Gary Turner began his career with the City of Valdosta in June 2004. He is integral to the behind-the-scenes operations at special Downtown events, ensuring that everything runs smoothly and effectively for the enjoyment of the citizens of our community. Rather than being micromanaged, Gary takes the initiative to get things done. Even on weekends and evenings, he is always available for these events. He serves the City as a role model when interacting with citizens and visitors daily as he maintains Downtown. The City constantly receives praise complimenting the appearance of the Downtown area. Gary's actions display great dedication and a "Service-Before Self" attitude.

The Downtown Valdosta community wholeheartedly endorses Gary Turner as APWA Employee of the Year. His commitment to his work is always noticed and appreciated by the Downtown Development Authority, the Main Street Office, other City staff, and the Downtown community. With a smile, a friendly remark, or an exuberant "hello," Gary can often be seen Downtown going about his daily tasks, such as clearing the gutters of the seemingly endless amounts of leaves.

Many Downtown merchants appreciate Gary's dedication and work ethic. One such person stated, "Gary is such a hard worker. He goes out of his way to keep our buildings and Downtown looking great. I only know him from talking with him when he is working around our building, but from what I see when others take a break, he keeps on working. He takes pride in what he does, and it shows!" Another person wrote, "Gary is energetic, cooperative, and friendly. He assists the Downtown businesses and property owners whenever asked and goes out of his way to do things correctly and on time. We always know that for events such as First Friday, Art After Dark, and others that Downtown will be looking great!" Gary's commitment to his work and the City of Valdosta pleases the City's residents and Downtown business owners.

Gary's leadership initiative in preparing the Woman's Building for the Mayor and Council's Strategic Initiatives Summit is another example of his exemplary dedication. Gary continued to assist with specific tasks beyond his regular duties. Because of his perseverance, the deadline was met, resulting in a successful event. Besides his assigned responsibilities, he also devoted considerable time to maintaining the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Park. Gary has also received numerous nominations for the City's Employee of the Month Award. He was nominated for the Chamber's World Class Employee Program along with another City employee. As a finalist in the program, he was served breakfast at the James H. Rainwater Conference Center. He was also honored by the Employee Relations Committee for his dedication and rise above mentality.

Gary is an excellent representative of the City of Valdosta through his interaction with citizens and Downtown visitors. A simple thank you isn't enough for recognizing his hard work and caring attitude to make Downtown Valdosta a better place to visit, work, and own a business.



# NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The City of Valdosta’s Neighborhood Development Department hosts the Community Block Party every year to provide students with back-to-school supplies to school children K through 12th grade in the City of Valdosta and Lowndes County. During the event, students and parents could get their bookbags full of supplies, free food and drinks, and free resources from organizations such as the Department of Public Health and other local organizations. We had DJ Tremayne on site and the City’s Fire Department. This was a great event and the Neighborhood Development Department was able to make an impact because of the support of the City and local sponsors.





## **Valdosta receives APWA award for "Valdosta On-Demand Transit"**

On August 9th, the City of Valdosta's transit system, Valdosta On-Demand, received the Small Cities and Rural Communities Transportation Project of the Year award during the Georgia Chapter of the American Public Works Association Awards Ceremony at Jekyll Island.

For more than a year, the City of Valdosta has partnered with Via, an innovative leader in transit technology, to bring the first transit system to the city.

**"This is a well-deserved recognition and celebration of the City of Valdosta, its leadership, and its citizens; congratulations," said Burt Lancaster, Via's Operations Manager.**

Richard Hardy, Deputy City Manager of Operations, stated, "The city transit has been a great success with Valdosta On-Demand. We are moving about anywhere between 275- 300 citizens a day throughout the city of Valdosta."

On April 27, 2021, the City of Valdosta launched Valdosta On-Demand, a dynamically routed on-demand public transportation service. As a result of a partnership with Via, Valdosta On-Demand has expanded access to affordable, efficient, and convenient public transportation for city residents. Recently, the City of Valdosta increased the number of vehicles from seven to ten and extended the hours of operation.

**"We are extremely honored to be recognized for Valdosta On-Demand. Our transit system continues to receive both statewide and national recognition. More importantly, many of our citizens have a much-improved quality of life," stated City Manager Mark Barber.**

A partnership between Via and the City of Valdosta marks Via's first in Georgia. To help connect more people to transit, Via has already partnered with more than 200 partners in over 20 countries, including Green Bay Metro, Columbus Ohio Transit Authority (COTA), and the Transport for New South Wales in Sydney.

**"The response for Valdosta On-Demand has surpassed our expectations for a better quality of life for the citizens of Valdosta," said Mayor Scott James Matheson. "We are thankful for the recognition and the opportunity to serve our citizens better."**

# MARCUS HAYNES NAMED DEPUTY FIRE CHIEF



The City of Valdosta is pleased to announce the promotion of Marcus Haynes as the City's new Deputy Fire Chief, effective August 1, 2022. The City conducted an internal process for qualified and exemplary applicants. Candidates participated in a highly competitive and comprehensive interview process, which included multiple panel interviews with Department Directors and Fire Chiefs from outside fire departments. The candidates' perception, judgment, decisiveness, oral communication, leadership, and organizational planning skills were evaluated and scored. The assessment panel members were unanimous in recommending him for the promotion.

**"The City of Valdosta Fire Department has a rich history of leadership and high-quality service to our community. Marcus typifies those qualities that will continue to carry forward the exemplary service from the Valdosta Fire Department,"** said City Manager Mark Barber. **"I am excited to see what Haynes brings to the table given this opportunity, and if his past performance and accomplishments are any indication, I am certain he will perform his new responsibilities with passion and commitment. Haynes is prepared for his new role within the Fire Department and is much deserving of this recognition."**

Haynes began his career at the Valdosta Fire Department in 2007 as a firefighter rising through the ranks where he most recently served as the Accreditation Manager. Haynes graduated from Waldorf University with a Bachelor of Applied Science in Fire Science Administration. He received the Fire Officer Designation from the Center for Public Safety Excellence and is a Graduate Member of the Institution of Fire Engineers, serving on the Professional Development Committee. Haynes was also instrumental in data analysis in preparation of the most recent ISO evaluation.

**"Deputy Chief Haynes is a highly-skilled, experienced, and qualified fire service leader. I value his accomplishments and know that together we can provide the support needed for the men and women of the VFD,"** said Chief Brian Boutwell. **"He recognizes the importance of the Department's growth and well-being; therefore, I am confident he will continue to be a valuable mentor to the firefighters."**

**"It is with great honor and immense humility to serve as the new Deputy Fire Chief of the Valdosta Fire Department,"** said Deputy Chief Haynes. **"I am grateful for the continued opportunity to serve our community and organization to the best of my ability. I am eager to continue building a solid Department alongside my fellow fire service team."**

**Valdosta  
Main  
Street's  
Super  
Dad 5k  
was a  
huge  
success!**







# PUBLIC WORKS

## EMPLOYEES HONORED AS JULY 2022 EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

Valdosta Mayor Scott James Matheson and Deputy City Manager of Operations Richard Hardy honored Joe McKinnon, Bryce Finley, and Devon Nicely as Employees of the Month at the July 21 City Council meeting. The honorees received a framed certificate, a check, and their names on a plaque in City Hall.

Public Works Administrator Anthony Musgrove submitted the nomination regarding their compassion and assistance to a citizen during their time of need.

Musgrove received a call from a citizen stating that her neighbor, who lives alone, saw the City Sanitation truck pulled up outside and asked for their immediate help due to her inability to get up off the floor. The three men did not hesitate to assist her and ensure she was not injured. She applauded the three men for being her hero that day.

The three men showed compassion, respect, and courage in assisting the civilian. For this reason and many others, they were nominated as the July 2022 Employees of the month.





# NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The City of Valdosta welcomes the 2022-2023 Great Promise Partnership students from Valdosta High School!

By being paired with different departments in our city, the following students will be preparing themselves for their futures!

**Rhalyn Burton** – Public Information Office

**Greha Patel** – Customer service

**Armere Dukes**– Utilities

**Bryan Schell**– Public Works

**Jamiah McEady**– Meter Reading

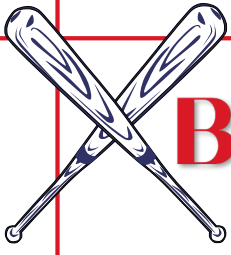
# MARCUS MCCONICO



The August, 2022 Employee of the Month was Marcus McConico in the Public Information Office. He is the Media Coordinator and has been with the City of Valdosta for over seven years. Sarah Denton, the new Public Information Officer (PIO)/Community Relations and Marketing Manager, stated that Marcus took over some transitional stumbling blocks with City Government 101 and the People's Choice Awards Photo Contest.

If their Department has a last-minute event to cover, Marcus is very supportive in assisting with planning and connecting with the correct Departments to implement the event or activity. He stepped up to take the lead on the Photo Contest in order to help Sarah transition into her leadership role.

Marcus has also been very monumental in showing her the history of their Department's decision-making for certain media information that goes out to the public. Marcus has connected her with Valdosta State University to strengthen their partnership with interns and the Metro 17 Channel. Marcus is very objective and logical regarding ideas that their Department can implement.



# Valdosta Main Street BRAVES' TROPHY TOUR

Community is what the City of Valdosta is all about! Everyone enjoyed the Braves World Champion Trophy Tour hosted by the Georgia Beer Co. There were smiles on people's faces as the kids played games, the adults socialized, and families took photos with the World Champion Trophy in Downtown Valdosta Main Street.



# VALDOSTA POLICE DEPARTMENT

Congratulations to Commander Robert Renfroe and Captain Scottie Johns! The week of August 21-26, 2022, Commander Robert Renfroe and Captain Scottie Johns, represented the Valdosta Police Department at the 12th annual Georgia Law Enforcement Executive Development Seminar (FBI GA LEEDS), held in Atlanta. Attendees of the seminar are members of the Command Staff for law enforcement agencies throughout the State of Georgia. They received executive training in topics such as media relations, leadership, legal issues, crisis management, and managing critical incidents.



# People's Choice Photo Contest



Valdosta Mayor Pro Tem Vivian Miller-Cody and Coleman Talley representative Attorney Bart Davis announced the winners of the 14th Annual Valdosta People's Choice Photo Contest at an Awards Reception at the Annette Howell Turner Center for the Arts on Monday, July 25. For the past month, citizens have voted for their favorite contest photos on display in the Art Center's Tillman Gallery.



A \$200 cash prize was awarded to each adult first-place winner and \$100 to the youth winner. Four honorable mentions were also selected. The photographs will become part of a traveling display that can be viewed from August until December 2022 in various locations.

*This year's winners are:*

## **First Place Winners:**

- City Life: Leo Solieau – "Rainy Sunday Morning"
- Country Living: Rena Taylor "Free Range"
- Peoples Choice: Marvin Smith "Reflection 2"

## **Honorable Mentions:**

- Marvin Smith "Wedding Dress"
- Cuyler Kirkland "Happy Dog"
- John Roling "Eye See You"

## **Youth Winner:**

- Noah Warren "Closeup of the Courthouse"
- Honorable Mentions: Yvonne Hester "Butterfly"

The partnership between the City of Valdosta and the Annette Howell Turner Center for the Arts, co-organizers of the Photo Contest, recognizes the importance of the arts as a quality of life, civic engagement, and economic development tool in the community.



# VALDOSTA FIRE DEPARTMENT FIREFIGHTERS RECEIVE LIFE SAVE AWARDS



The Valdosta Fire Department (VFD) received an Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Agency License from the Georgia Department of Public Health, Office of EMS and Trauma as a Licensed Medical First Responder (MFR) Agency in May 2022. For the first time in its history, the VFD is now recognized as a Fire/EMS agency.

On August 11, 2022, during the City Council Meeting, the Valdosta Fire Department (VFD) and South Georgia Medical Center (SGMC) recognized five firefighters for their impact on the disposition of patients they responded to and treated since obtaining the MFR license.

Lieutenant Wade Briggs and Sergeant Allen Carter received a Life Save Award for their emergency medical efforts on a pediatric cardiac arrest. Lieutenant Charles Phillips, Lieutenant Michael Walden, and Firefighter William Sumner received the same award for their treatment of an adult patient in cardiac arrest.

Ms. Emily Brown, SGMC Trauma Program Manager/ Interim EMS Director, played a key role in helping VFD acquire its MFR license. Brown attended the joint award presentation and was also recognized and given a City of Valdosta Mayor's coin for her assistance in obtaining the MFR license and strengthening the partnership between the VFD and SGMC.





# VALDOSTA MUNICIPAL COURT



High school students of the Valdosta Housing Authority Community Center presented and defended their case during a mock trial at the Valdosta City Municipal Court with Judge Baker as the presiding judge.

The Prosecution and Defense teams did an excellent job arguing their cases!

Mayor Scott Matheson, Mayor Pro-tem Vivian Miller-Cody, City Manager -Mark Barber, Deputy City Manager -Richard Hardy, Police Chief - Leslie Manahan, and Fire Chief- Brian Boutwell joined the audience in support of the students' hard work preparing for their mock trial.





# MAIN STREET

## Host Successful First Annual Pup Crawl

**More than 200 people and their fur pals participated in Valdosta Main Street's first annual Pup Crawl on August 5. The event intends to provide a new opportunity to bring people downtown.**

"The pup crawl entices various groups of shoppers to embrace their love of animals and realize Downtown Valdosta is a place to play and engage," said Valdosta Main Street Director Brandie Dame.

The USA Rescue Team brought pets to be adopted. Main Street provided special Pup Crawl merchandise to people that presented a receipt from a downtown business or donated pet supplies. The downtown merchants welcomed shoppers with furry friends inside their stores and had a "Pet-Friendly Business" sticker on their windows.

Brandie Dame and Main Street Program Coordinator Ally Sealy created the event after their personal experience of adopting rescue pets. They wanted to host an event that would be enjoyable for shoppers while supporting a great cause.





## **Valdosta Police Department's Chief Manahan completes FBI seminar**

Chief Leslie Manahan was one of the 50 Chiefs and Sheriffs of mid-sized law enforcement agencies nationwide selected to attend the 80th Session of the FBI Law Enforcement Executive Development Seminar (LEEDS). During the two weeks in Virginia, participants discussed leadership, strategic planning, legal issues, health/wellness, recruitment/retention, and current social issues affecting law enforcement.

# VALDOSTA POLICE DEPARTMENT

## Hosts Drug Education for Youth (DEFY) Camp



On day one of DEFY camp, the kids were greeted with breakfast by VPD officers. Later they visited Valdosta Fire Department for a station tour!

On day two they visited our city's Municipal Court. The kids enthusiastically asked Judge Jeremy Baker lots of questions! They also participated in a mock traffic violation trial. Before leaving, they pledged to be drug-free and signed a certificate as a promise to themselves.

On day three of DEFY, the kids enjoyed a visit from the K9 handlers. Officer Ambercrombie brought his book about K-9 Ziggy.

On day four, kids enjoyed participating in Redman Suit drills provided by VPD Training Division. The students learned why officers receive defensive tactics training. The Training Officers also taught the students STRANGER DANGER tactics."



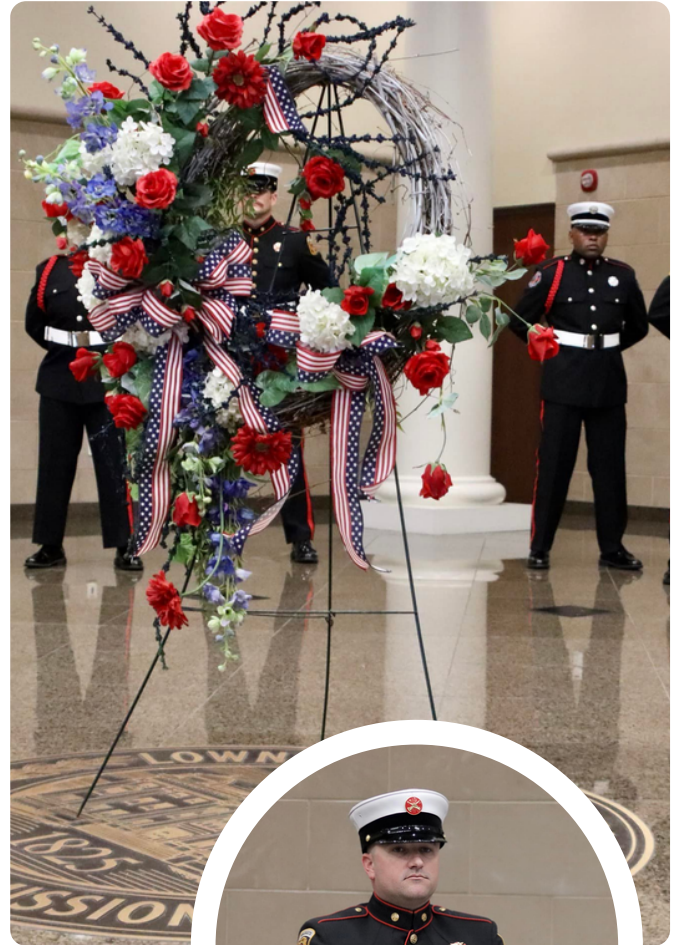
The last day of Drug Education For Youth (DEFY) Camp was filled with laughs, fun, and bowling!!

They also have the opportunity to demonstrate lessons learned during DEFY Camp concerning community involvement. One Saturday, they collected six trash bags in and around the Downtown Valdosta area. Afterward, they were treated to a movie and snacks at the Valdosta Cinemas!



## Valdosta-Lowndes

# 9/11 MEMORIAL CEREMONY



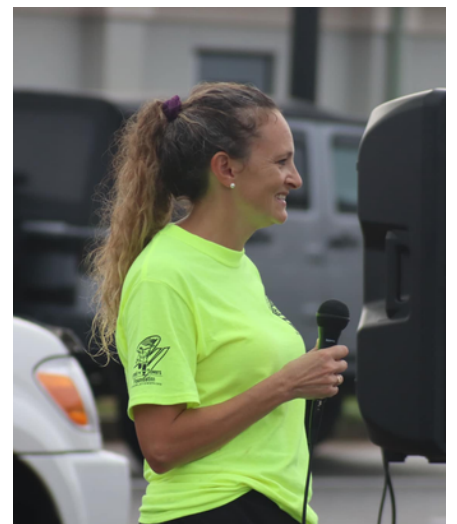
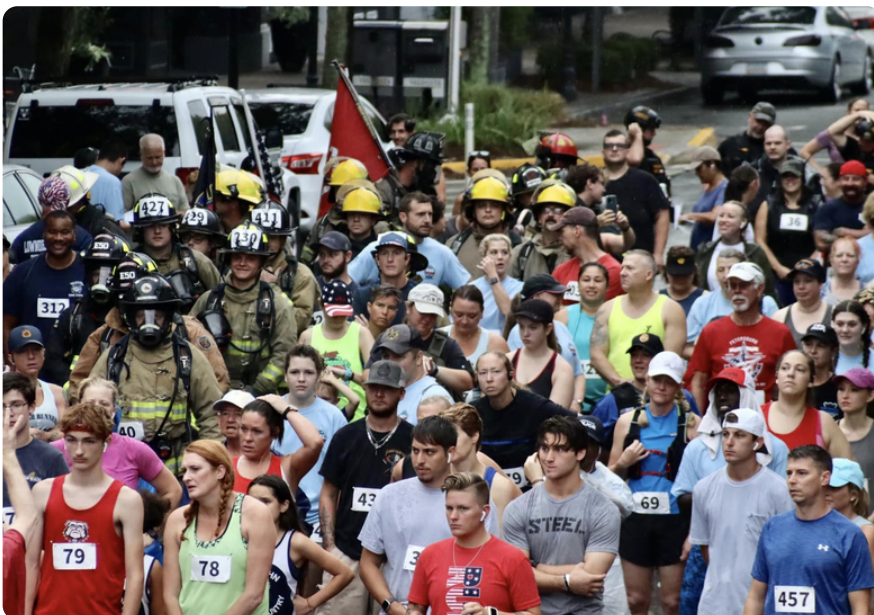
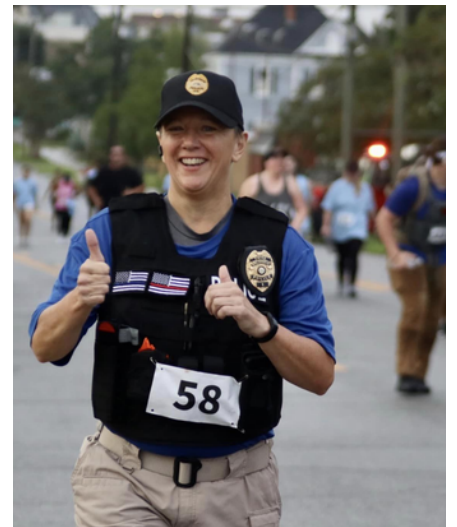
In honor of the tragic events that occurred 21 years ago, the City of Valdosta and Lowndes County, hosted a memorial ceremony to remember the lives lost on 9/11 and honor the first responders and military who continue to keep our nation and communities safe.



# 9/11 MEMORIAL 5K

In remembrance of the events that transpired on September 11, 2001, The Valdosta City Fire Department hosted their 2nd annual 9/11 Memorial 5K Run.

The event paid homage to those who lost their lives or loved ones and acknowledged all the brave first responders who have passed in the line of duty. Proceeds from the 5K event aided the Tunnel to Towers Foundation in its mission of helping our nation's heroes and their families. The Foundation was established in memory of Stephen Gerard Siller, a Brooklyn Squad 1 Firefighter who died savings others on September 11, 2001.



# Alisa Collins



**Congratulations to Ms. Alisa Collins, Administrative Assistant, on her 30-year anniversary of dedicated service to the Valdosta Fire Department! She is truly an inspiration and mentor to the members of the Valdosta Fire Department.**

# K-9 Vader

In September, K-9 Vader walked his Hero Walk through the station. He was given his badge, and all officers saluted as he made his final walk to the patrol car.

Chief Manahan stated, "He served honorably with our department for over seven years. During his time with us, he had over 150 apprehensions and seized over \$300,000 worth of currency and narcotics. Vader had approximately 200 arrests resulting from narcotics and patrol deployments. Four years ago, Vader survived an injury he received from a gunshot, and he never missed a beat. Even though this is a bittersweet moment, I am honored to be a part of a celebration to recognize his service to our department and community. Our Department will miss him, but I know he will enjoy his retirement years with his handler, Officer Suarez! Thank you, Vader, for your service to our Department and community!"

