

Above the Skyline



What stands head and shoulders above the Valdosta skyline, and weighs more than 8,500 tons? It's one of the significant new investments the city has made in providing quality water services for its citizens. The 2-million gallon elevated water storage tank—the biggest in the city's history—is under construction on Fry Street. Once the interior of the tank is complete this spring, the \$3.5 million project will replace two older and much smaller storage tanks in the city and will significantly improve water quality and fire protection capabilities in the southern most areas of the city.

Valdosta Chief of Police Retires

After 41-Year Law Enforcement Career

Valdosta Chief of Police Frank Simons retired from the City of Valdosta, effective Jan. 1, 2013, following 17 ½ years of public service “to protect and serve” the City of Valdosta and a cumulative 41 years in the law enforcement career field.

Chief Simons joined the Valdosta Police Department (VPD) at a time when the city department was facing many challenges. Under his leadership and with strong mayor and council support, the VPD regained credibility with state and federal agencies and became state certified and nationally accredited within just five years. He rebuilt the department and restored the trust and confidence of the community.

“The VPD is highly respected, full of talented professionals, and is a place where graduates of the Police Academy and others seek employment,” said Mayor John Gayle. “Frank’s tremendous leadership ability, integrity and unwavering commitment to do what is right are the qualities that place him at the top of his profession.”

The VPD is the city’s largest department with 175 employees and an operating budget of over \$13 million. Its accolades include state certification, national accreditation, and being recognized internationally as a Flagship Agency by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) on several occasions. The VPD has been reaccredited by CALEA four times since receiving the initial accreditation in 1995. Many of the VPD’s policies are held up as models for agencies around the country to utilize.

Among a long list of accomplishments, Chief Simons managed the complete renovation of the headquarters facility, implemented and funded new and modern training for all personnel, implemented a new pay classification plan, improved the department’s equipment and vehicle fleet, and made substantial advancements in the use of technology to improve service as well as efficiency for officers. The department added highly-qualified professionals in each bureau and implemented new divisions such as the Power Squad, Narcotics Squad, and special tactical teams with highly trained personnel.

In 2010, under the leadership of Chief Simons, the Valdosta/Lowndes Regional Crime Laboratory opened its doors. The facility houses crime scene personnel from both the VPD and the Lowndes County Sheriff’s Office, a forensic specialist, an evidence custodian and a crime laboratory director. The joint Crime Lab facility has helped to resolve crimes, as well as assist in the timely prosecution of criminal cases.



City Manager Larry Hanson presents Chief Frank Simons with one of many awards to commemorate the Chief’s dedication and service to the citizens of Valdosta at a recent ceremony.

Arbor Day Activities Feature Valdosta as a Tree City U.S.A. Community



The Valdosta Tree Commission will host the annual Arbor Day ceremony, on Friday, Feb. 15, at 10 a.m., on the Palms Quad at Valdosta State University. The City of Valdosta will be honored as a “Tree City U.S.A.” for its 27th consecutive year, and VSU will be certified for the first time as a “Tree Campus U.S.A.”

Valdosta will be recognized for meeting four standards including designating a Tree Commission, passing a tree care ordinance, establishing a comprehensive community forestry program, and proclaiming and hosting an Arbor Day celebration. This award further demonstrates the city’s management in the planting, maintenance, and removal of trees in Valdosta’s urban forest.

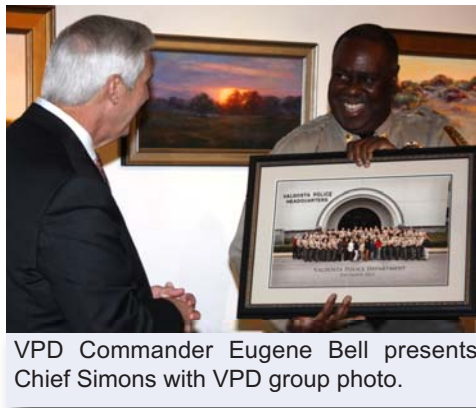
Mayor John Gayle and VSU President Dr. William McKinney are expected to accept the respective Tree City/Tree Campus U.S.A. designations from the Georgia Department of Forestry and the Arbor Day Foundation.

The Tree City U.S.A. program was established by the Arbor Day Foundation, along with the National Association of State Foresters and the USDA Forest Service, to improve community forestry. There are more than 3,400 Tree City U.S.A. communities across the nation, representing 135 million citizens.

A limited number of tree seedlings will be given away to guests at the event. For more information about the Arbor Day activities, contact Kevin Conrad, Chair of the Valdosta Tree Commission, at (229) 242-7600.

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Chief Simons began his career in law enforcement as a Police Officer in Americus, Ga., and moved through the ranks to detective at the Columbus Police Department. He worked as an Instructor at the Regional Police Academy in Tifton, Ga., and later became the Director of the Academy. In 1987, he became the Chief of the Perry Police Department. Throughout his career, Chief Simons has continued to impact and improve the law enforcement profession. He has served as the President of the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police, as a member of the Peace Officers Standards and Training Council, and on numerous committees through the years. He was also selected by his peers for the 2005 Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police Outstanding Chief of the Year. Chief Simons retired on Jan. 2, with over 41 years in public safety.



VPD Commander Eugene Bell presents Chief Simons with VPD group photo.

Chief Simons has agreed to serve as Interim Chief until the city completes its professional search for the most qualified candidate to take over the reins as Chief of Police and oversee the VPD’s outstanding agency.

“Serving in demanding public positions is very stressful, and many sacrifices are made for the good of the city and its citizens,” said City Manager Larry Hanson. “Frank will be sorely missed, but I am truly happy that he and his wife Kathy can enjoy a retirement together and all that life has to offer.”

Mission

To be known by our customers and others for high quality municipal services.

Purpose

To provide public services that meet or exceed the expectations of citizens.

To improve the quality of life in the community by a sincere commitment to the ideals of public service.

To be creative and innovative in our approach to the needs of citizens, recognizing the trust and confidence that our citizens place in us as caretakers of governmental services.

To be efficient and effective and use wisely the public resources we are entrusted to manage.

Quality Service by Quality People



City Council

- John Gayle.....Mayor
- James R. Wright.....Councilman, District 1
- Deidra White.....Councilwoman, District 2
- Joseph Vickers.....Councilman, District 3
- Alvin Payton, Jr.....Councilman, District 4
- Mayor Pro Tem
- Tim Carroll.....Councilman, District 5
- Robert Yost.....Councilman, District 6
- Ben Norton.....Councilman At Large

Editorial Staff

- Larry H. Hanson.....City Manager
- Sementha Mathews...Public Information Officer

City Beat is a quarterly newsletter for the citizens of Valdosta and is written and published by the City of Valdosta Public Information Office. For more information, contact Sementha Mathews at (229) 259-3548.

City Accepting Nominations for Preservation Awards

Are you proud of your recent historic building rehabilitation? Do you know a person or group whose effort to preserve or maintain a historic building is outstanding? Consider submitting a nomination for a Valdosta Preservation Award. Nominations are now being accepted for the fifth annual Valdosta Preservation Awards program. Projects, groups, or individuals may be nominated in five award categories:

Award of Outstanding Achievement: This award recognizes exemplary accomplishments in historic building rehabilitation or restoration for complex or large-scale projects. A successful project in this category will preserve the exterior historic integrity of a building by retaining a building's significant portions and features through repairs and sensitive alterations (including compatible additions), while making possible an efficient contemporary use; and/or the project may restore a building's exterior to its original appearance based on historical or physical evidence.

Award of Distinguished Merit: This award recognizes improvements made to historic resources (buildings, structures, sites, landscapes) important to Valdosta's heritage. Awards in this category are given for simpler, smaller-scaled projects and do not require extensive restoration or rehabilitation work.

Award of Stewardship: This award recognizes property owners for their long-term care, maintenance, stabilization, or protection of a contributing historic property.

Award of Excellence for Compatible New Construction: This award recognizes excellence in the design of new construction that complements and reflects the architectural character of the Valdosta Historic District.

Harold M. Bennett Lifetime Achievement Award: This exceptional award recognizes a person from our community who has dedicated many years of his or her life to historic preservation and impacted preservation efforts in the City of Valdosta. This person has had significant accomplishments related to the preservation of our community's architectural and cultural heritage. Established in 2011, this award is named for the late Harold Bennett, known as Valdosta's "father of historic preservation."

The deadline for nominations is Friday, April 26, 2013. Awards will be announced at the City Council meeting on May 23, 2013. For more information, contact Historic Preservation and Special Projects Planner Emily Foster at (229) 259-3563 or efoster@valdostacity.com. Citizens may also download the official nomination form at www.valdostacity.com/planning.



Stormwater Tip

Do you know where your yard waste is going? When preparing for residential yard waste collection, be sure to keep leaves, branches, and other materials out of the street and away from storm drains, ditches and streams. Leaves and other debris can block drainage ways and clog storm drains, which can impact water quality and lead to flooding. Whenever possible, use a rake or broom to clean your yard, driveway and gutters. If a leaf blower is necessary, use it responsibly in order to prevent waste from entering the stormwater system.

For more information, contact the Stormwater Division at (229) 259-3530. Remember, only rain goes down the storm drain.

WANTED: Local Farmer's for the 2013 Farm Days Season

The 3rd annual Downtown Valdosta Farm Days will kick off on May 6. The popular outdoor market takes place on the sidewalks around the historic Lowndes County Courthouse on the first and third Saturday of South Georgia's warmest months. Farm Days will run through October 19.

Since the month of June is in the middle of the heavy growing season for South Georgia Farmers, the market will be open EVERY Saturday during the month of June. "You don't have to have a farm to be a farmer," said Valdosta Main Street Manager Amanda Peacock. Many citizens in the city limits grow produce on less than one acre of land, in pots, or even plastic swimming pools.

The community-sponsored Gardens in the Community Program offers citizens and civic groups guidance and start-up supplies for gardening. Many churches, afterschool programs, and neighborhood groups have already taken advantage of the training and have become participants in community gardening, as well as the popular Farm Days event.

For more information on starting a garden, contact Diane Howard at 229-560-5692 or dhoward202@mchsi.com. To learn more about Valdosta Farm Days, contact Valdosta Main Street at (229) 259-3548 or visit www.valdostamainstreet.com.



SAVE THE DATE

Feb. 15: Arbor Day Event. The event will be held this year on the Palms Quad of Valdosta State University, at 10 a.m.

Feb. 27: Bird Supper. Tickets are on sale for the 2013 Bird Supper, scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 27, at the historic Georgia Railroad Depot, in Atlanta, beginning at 5 p.m. Event tickets cost \$50 each; round-trip charter bus tickets to and from Atlanta on Feb. 27 cost \$40 each.

Apr. 6: Spring Electronic Recycling Event. Bring your unwanted electronics to the city's Customer Service Center, 102 N. Lee Street, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. NOTE: New location of event.

Citizens may sign up for E-News at www.valdostacity.com/publicinformation to stay in tune weekly with the news and events happening within our city. For more information, call the Public Information Office at (229) 259-3548.

Homeownership Education

Make your homeowner dreams come true with a variety of educational classes offered by Habitat for Humanity.

The First Time Home Buyer Education Workshop will be held on Saturday, Feb. 16, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. It will be offered again on Mar. 16.

Homeownership Skills classes are also offered free to citizens who complete the First Time Home Buyers Workshop. These workshops are offered on Mar. 5, 7, 9, 12, 14 and 16. All sessions must be attended to qualify for Habitat for Humanity's program.

All classes are held at the Habitat for Humanity facility, at 2010 E. Cypress Street. Pre-registration is mandatory for all classes. Call Carolyn at (229) 245-1330, ext. 22 for more information.

Free Tax-Preparation Services

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) provides free tax-preparation services for qualifying individuals and/or households with incomes of less than \$49,000. VITA staff helps individuals file a tax return and are trained in helping individuals apply for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a refundable federal income tax credit for low to moderate income working individuals and families, as well as other tax credits.

The VITA sites in Valdosta are open now through April 15, 2013. For information about the site locations or for a list of the items citizens should bring to their visits, contact JaTaryia Thomas with the Cash Prosperity Campaign at (229) 234-2364.

Citizens Register for Government 101

Applications are now being accepted for the 4th annual Government 101 Citizens Orientation Program, which begins April 1, 2013. The program will meet on Mondays, from 5:30 – 8:30 p.m., for six weeks, and is designed to give Valdostans age 21 and older a deeper understanding and appreciation of their local government. Participants will be exposed to all city departments--such as Fire, Police, Municipal Court, Engineering and Finance--and will get an inside look at how the city operates daily.

A maximum of 25 people will be selected for the class from citizens who submit a completed application by the March 8, 2013 deadline and pass the required background checks. If more than 25 people apply, the city will give preference to the applications on a first-come, first-served-basis. **You MUST be a City of Valdosta resident in order to apply.**

Government 101 Citizens Orientation is an initiative of the Mayor and City Council. Citizens can receive more information at www.valdostacity.com or by calling (229) 259-3522.



The City of Valdosta Government 101 Citizen Orientation Program

Registration Form

Applicants for the Government 101 Citizen Orientation Program must be at least 21 years of age, be a legal resident of the United States and a resident of the City of Valdosta. Applicants will undergo a background investigation as part of the application process. Applicants must complete a separate Criminal History form that may be obtained from the Public Involvement Department located on the second floor of the City Hall Annex, 300 N. Lee Street. Please be aware that a felony conviction or recent serious misdemeanor conviction may result in an applicant's exclusion from participation. Personal information given will be kept strictly confidential.

Name: _____ SSN _____ - _____ - _____
Address: _____ City _____ State/Zip Code _____
E-mail: _____ Phone: _____
Occupation: _____

Are you a City of Valdosta resident? Yes / No

Why do you want to participate in the Citizen Orientation Program?

Will you be able to attend all classes (if not, you will not graduate)? Yes / No

How did you hear about the Citizen Orientation Program? (Circle One)

Metro Valdosta 17 Publications Radio
Newspaper www.valdostacity.com/E-news Other _____

I understand that I am required to complete and submit this application form AND a Valdosta Police Department Criminal History Form, which may be picked up in the Public Involvement Department. By signing these forms, I give the City of Valdosta Police Department permission to obtain any criminal history record information pertaining to me, which may be in the files of any state or local criminal justice agency in Georgia. I understand that a felony conviction or recent serious misdemeanor conviction may result in my exclusion from participation. I also understand that the class is limited to 25 participants selected from all of the applicants.

Signature _____ Date ____/____/____

Closing Date: March 8, 2013

Return this form to: Public Involvement Department, City Hall Annex, Room #202, N. Lee Street, Valdosta, GA 31601.

Valdosta People's Choice Photo Contest Celebrates 5th Anniversary



Lin McMichen's photo "Upside Downtown," pictured above, stole the Best of Show award in 2012 in the Adult Division.

What began as a simple Georgia Cities Week event five years ago has turned into an enjoyable city tradition that continues to inspire citizens to notice and capture the beauty of our community in photography. Applications are available for the 2013 Valdosta People's Choice Photo Contest, sponsored by the City of Valdosta and the Annette Howell Turner Center for the Arts. Citizens are once again invited to submit their original photos in these five categories by the May 31, 2013 deadline (*categories are subject to the artists' interpretations*):

Colors of the City ~ Beauty

Heart of the City ~ People & Pets

Pace of the City ~ Work & Movements

Moments of the City ~ Snapshots in Time

Size of the City ~ Big & Small Concepts

Entries may be mailed or hand-delivered to: Annette Howell Turner Center for the Arts, 527 N. Patterson Street, Valdosta, Ga, 31601. All entries will be displayed in the art center's Tillman Gallery from June 10 - July 31, with the People's Choice Voting taking place from June 10-July 12.

Awards include an overall Best of Show, and a first-place and honorable mention in each of the five categories for adult and youth divisions. Winners will be recognized at an awards reception at the Turner Center, on Friday, July 19. To download an application and a complete list of contest rules, visit www.valdostacity.com/publicinformation. For more information, citizens may call the city's Public Information Office at (229) 259-3548 or the Turner Arts Center at (229) 247-ARTS.

Sixth Graders Compete in Local and State Essay Contest

Local 6th graders can dream about what it would be like to be the city's top elected official by participating in the "If I Were Mayor, I Would..." essay contest, sponsored by the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) and the City of Valdosta. The contest gives students a chance to creatively use grade-specific language arts skills and civics knowledge to express, in 350 words or less, how they would make a difference if they were mayor.

One winning essay will be selected from each of GMA's 12 districts across the state and invited, along with their parents and a teacher, to an awards luncheon in Atlanta, Ga., in April 2013. The winners will receive a \$250 check and other prizes. One overall statewide winner will also be selected from among the 12 essay winners and will receive an additional \$250.

Local 1st, 2nd and 3rd place essay contest winners will be recognized by the Valdosta Mayor at the April 25 City Council meeting. Top essays will be displayed at the Valdosta Customer Service Center during Georgia Cities Week, April 20-27, and at Valdosta City Hall.

All area 6th graders—from public, private and home schools—are eligible to compete in the essay contest. Entry forms may be downloaded at www.valdostacity.com/publicinformation. Individuals or class groups should submit their entries to the City of Valdosta Public Information Office, "If I Were Mayor Essay Contest," 300 N. Lee Street, # 206, Valdosta, GA 31601 by the March 1 deadline.

For more information, contact Public Information Officer Sementa Mathews at (229) 259-3548, or at smathews@valdostacity.com.

*If I were
mayor,
I would...*