

Your Community Magazine

POOLER MAGAZINE

HEALTH & WELLNESS

INSIDE:

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January/February 2025

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Best of POOLER Readers' Choice Awards 2024 Presented by Pooler Magazine

CONTRIBUTORS

1. Tricia Brown, a SCAD graduate (2009), Trisha designs avant garde event wear. When she isn't multitasking as a mom of 4, she can usually be found meditating at a nearby park or beach, brainstorming for her next vision board!

2. Leidy Lester is a freelance photographer, originally from Bogota, Colombia. One of her proudest achievements was working with models and highly experienced photographers in Las Vegas.

3. Gail Mihalik lives in Rincon with Scott, her high school sweetheart, and their two rescue dogs. Chef by trade with over 50 years of experience, she spends most of her time living, loving, and sharing the history and culture of the area.

4. Scott Douglas Miller is a broadcaster celebrating 50 years in radio as an air personality, news director, event DJ and content provider several publications. He Originally from Mississippi, Scott shares a home in Rincon with his high school sweetheart, Gail.

5. Gail Parsons has more than 30 years of experience as a writer. In 2023, she and her husband fulfilled their dream to move to Savannah and have settled in Rincon. She is also an artist and enjoys traveling and spending time at the beach.

6. Erich Perez and his wife are owners of iHeart Dental in Rincon. Erich's other role is Founder and president of Kronos Media Productions and K&R Studios in Rincon. Erich and his wife are avid Jeep enthusiasts and have 5 American Bulldogs. You can check them out at @gods.of.dogs on Instagram.

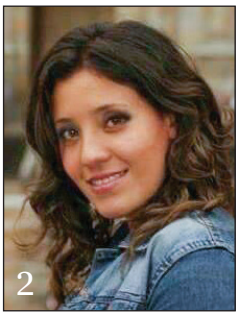
7. Claire Sandow is a marketing professional who lives in Savannah with her husband, daughter and cat. In her spare time, she enjoys pursuing her many hobbies, including knitting, crocheting, quilting and running.

8. Katrice Williams is a married mother of two. A graduate of Georgia Southern University, Katrice appreciates the Lord Jesus Christ and the many blessings He has bestowed upon her.

9. Laura Zielinski is a freelance graphic designer specializing in print design. With more than 17 years' experience, Laura enjoys shaping stories through meaningful design. When she's not working, she loves spending time with her husband Keith and their three beautiful children.

10. Mabel, morale officer, enjoys roaming the backyard at home, sitting for hours on the back porch and coming to the office to greet visitors and encourage the staff. Mabel loves getting treats and taking long naps in her mommy's office in the afternoons.

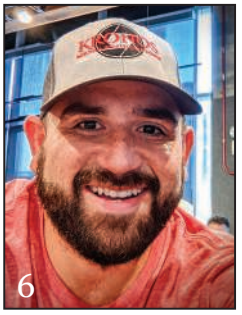

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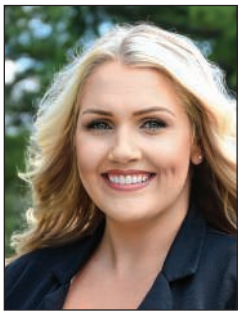

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
Write and tell us what you think. *Pooler Magazine* welcomes all letters to the editor. Please send letters to Jan Southern at Jan@JDelSURMarketing.com. Letters to the editor must have a phone number and name of contact. Phone numbers will not be published.

ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS
Pooler Magazine welcomes story ideas from our readers. If you have a story idea or photos to share, please submit ideas and material to Jan Southern at Jan@JDelSURMarketing.com. Stories or ideas for stories must be submitted by email. Only feature stories and photo essays about people, places or things in the Pooler area will be considered.

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Health & Wellness


Jan Southern

What a year it has been! It's hard to believe we're already in 2025 and celebrating the release of our annual *Pooler Magazine* **Health & Wellness** issue. This past year brought its share of challenges to our community, yet the resilience and support we showed one another truly highlighted the strength of our neighbors.

Despite the challenges of the past, there's a renewed sense of optimism for the future—a sentiment I hear every day from the people I speak with. We do have so much to be grateful for, and it's a privilege for the team at *Pooler Magazine* and J. DelSUR Marketing Group to share the stories that celebrate the incredible people who make our community shine. Thank you for allowing us to be part of your lives.

In this issue, you'll find a few practical tips to help you improve your health, fitness, and overall well-being. Don't miss our Pet Friendly section on page 10, where we highlight the local places you can go with your furry family member. Anyone who knows me will surely tell you that I stop and take notice anytime I see a dog relaxing with its owner at a local restaurant or coffee shop. That is my favorite thing.

We're also thrilled to introduce a brand-new column, Mom-ing Unplugged, written by Alycia Calderin, a mom of 4 and proud South Georgian. Alycia brings an honest, witty perspective on the joys and challenges of motherhood in our community. We hope you enjoy her refreshing take as much as we do!

As we step into 2025, I am once again hopeful for the opportunities this year holds. My greatest hope is that you share this optimism and prioritize your health and well-being alongside those you love. Let's make this the year of self-care and meaningful growth.

Here's to a happy, healthy, and fulfilling 2025!

Warm regards,

Jan Southern

CEO/Publisher
Pooler Magazine

Introducing **Mom-ing Unfiltered**, a new column by Alycia Calderin. More on page 31.

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Finding Magic in the Madness of Motherhood



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Melissa McBride Stille
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Are You Ready for Health Insurance Open Enrollment?

The Medicare Open Enrollment Period is when everyone with Medicare has to choose to either keep their current plan or enroll in a different one. Health and drug plans often change cost, coverage, and who is in their networks from year to year. It's tempting to keep what you have, even if you aren't satisfied, because navigating health care options can be overwhelming to the consumer - but not to Melissa Stille, licensed health care broker, who has been in the health insurance industry for sixteen years. As the sole proprietor of Stille-DeWitt Health Brokerage she is dedicated to presenting her clients with the best health care options available because "I work for my clients, not the insurance company!"

Open enrollment Oct 15-Dec 7

Melissa says, "They are predicting many changes with the 2025 plans. It's imperative that everyone with Medicare review their plan options this year." One very important change is the new law that will affect every prescription drug plan whether you are in a Medicare Advantage plan or in a stand-alone prescription drug plan, starting January 1, 2025.

Plan changes cannot be submitted until October 15, but you can start preparing NOW. "We have just 54 days to review everyone's plans and submit applications for 2025 plans," says Melissa. With years of experience, she can explain the four parts of Medicare (A, B, C, and D) as well the difference between Medicare Advantage and Supplemental Plans. She can also assist with seeing if you qualify for Extra Help (federal prescription help), Medicaid or to eliminate the monthly $174.70 Medicare Part B Premium (2024 premium).

Melissa also works with Medicare recipients under 65, including those who have Medicare through Social Security Disability because they too have to make the same decisions annually. When someone qualifies for a level of Medicaid, there are additional Medicare Advantage plans available. She says, "If you are getting help through the state Medicaid program and would like for us to check the status of your state Medicaid, please call or email me."

Questionnaire

Melissa is using a questionnaire to obtain your information along with the compliant form needed prior to meeting with her. It asks for your basic information, a list of your doctors, your medications and any concerns you may have. It's crucial you include all medications accurately. Melissa states, "I am asking that each person I meet with to complete this. After you complete the questionnaire, we can start working on looking at plans that fit YOUR needs."

Beware of Scams

She says, "There are going to continue to be scam calls/emails happening again this year and possibly even more because of these new changes to the prescription drug benefits. Medicare will NOT be calling you. You may be scammed by someone who only wants to make a buck off you." Their only goal is for you to change your plan. "That's how they make money. They do not have any special plans, so don't be fooled," says Melissa. "They can change your plan without a signature or without you knowing! All they need is your Medicare number, so please do not give it out."

Local Trusted Agent

It's important to get local help, someone who knows you and your circumstances.

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"My service is always free to the consumer. For plans that are commissionable, I get paid by the insurance companies. Because I believe in doing the right thing for my clients, I also look at plans I won't get paid for and if that plan is right for your needs, we will work together to enroll you with that plan." Melissa has offices in Springfield and Rincon but may not be at both offices every day. Therefore, all client meetings will be by appointment only this year and must be scheduled 48 hours prior to meeting. To reach Melissa, please call or email:

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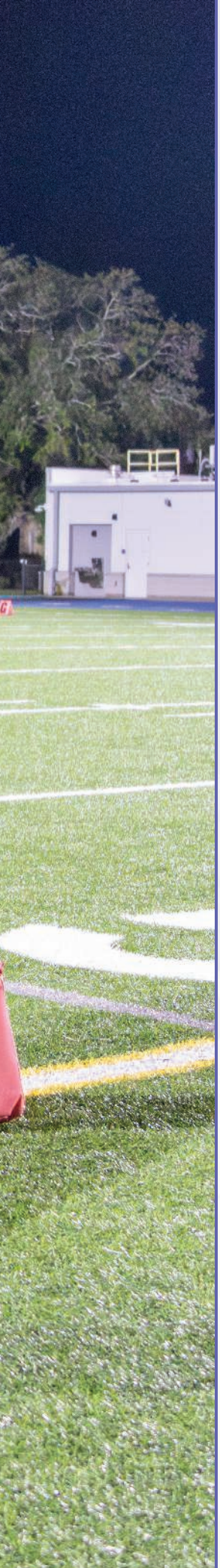
ABOUT THE COVER



Pooler is a city that truly embraces pets. Whether you choose a spot for a cappuccino, a tall cold brew while listening to music, or even a quiet dinner overlooking a pool of water, Pooler has multiple places that cater to both you and your furry companion.

Read all the stories and more at PoolerMagazine.com


NOLVERINES
40



JAHNARRIAH MASSEY
Excellence On & Off the Field

Story by Katrice Williams | Photography by Erich Perez

"It's about having passion for what I'm doing and knowing what I can do. It's about my team and having good energy. Overall, it's just a good time with my coaches and teammates. It's a pleasure to be on the field," says Jahnarriah Massey.

Jahnarriah, "Nari," is a high school senior at Woodville Tompkins Technical & Career Institute (Woodville), which is under the leadership of Principal Alfred McGuire. Besides being a stellar student, Nari is an outstanding athlete. Woodville has proven to be a great fit for her. Nari, who aspires to become a nurse practitioner, has enjoyed being a part of Woodville's nursing pathway.

"You can start your career early while you're still in high school; that's what I enjoy about Woodville. It has good academic programs. The teachers are great, and the opportunities are awesome," she says.

Nari has already earned her certified nursing assistant (CNA) license; she is also looking forward to attaining her patient care technician (PCT) certification prior to graduating.

Nari has played a variety of sports since she was very young; her dad Jahnard played a tremendous role in her athletic endeavors.

> "Nari has developed a special place in her heart for a sport that was never initially on her radar – flag football."

Sports

"My father always wanted me to be active. I started playing basketball at the YMCA at about eight years old," she says.

Over time, Nari grew to love the sport. She eventually began playing soccer as well. Nari continued both sports throughout elementary and middle school while she also became involved in swimming.

Nari was excited about her freshman year of high school, especially since she planned to try out for the basketball team. The Woodville Wolverines are under the leadership of Athletic Director Emma Sharp. Woodville offers its students a variety of sports.

Nari felt privileged to earn a position on the team; this is her fourth year.

"I enjoy playing it. I like the competition. The team and the coaches are very consistent. They want to get things right. I appreciate the coaches because they are very motivating," she comments.

Nari appreciates the growth and development she has experienced under the direction of her coach Jeffery Roberson, who is assisted by coaches Emmett Ready and Jamaica Ready. Coach Roberson speaks highly of Nari.

"I consider her a leader. She has a lot of potential. I have enjoyed coaching her over these years. She's not a player that says a lot, but she's a person of action. Her primary position is forward, but she can play any position on the floor from the one (point guard) to the five (center)," Coach Roberson states.

For the Love of Flag

Over the past couple of years, Nari has developed a special place in her heart for a sport that was never initially on her radar – flag football (flag). This season marked Woodville's third year of offering girls' flag. Nari did not try out during her sophomore year when the program had first begun; at the time, she was focusing most of her athletic efforts on playing basketball.

"At first, I didn't really realize how big the sport would end up being. I started playing it for fun, and I really liked it," Nari reveals.

The popularity of flag has been astounding over the past several years; the sport has become a part of many high school athletic programs across the country. Flag follows much of the same premise as touch football but without the contact, decreasing the risk of injury from impacts. Whereas a traditional football team has eleven players on the field per play, flag has only seven.

Nari's flag coach is Coach Jamel Miller, who coaches girls' soccer as well. Coach Miller, who is also a school counselor, is assisted by Coach Aaliyah Bell, who joined the Wolverines at the beginning of this season. She leads the junior varsity team.

Coach Miller has been pleased with the overall athletic development of his team since the first season.

"It wasn't a bad first year, considering that most of the girls had never played it nor understood the concepts," he states.

The first year of the program was so successful that many additional girls participated in tryouts. Coach Miller created the junior varsity team from that multitude.





Nari, who is one of the captains of the varsity team, plays the position of wide receiver on offense and safety on defense.

The first game of this year's flag season was in October. The team's growth, athleticism and cohesiveness have been apparent.

"Each year, we've made incremental gains; each year, we've grown the program. This year is the first year that we've made the playoffs," Coach Miller says.

Nari appreciates Coach Miller's efforts and direction in helping her develop into the successful flag athlete that she has become.

"He's a good coach. He's very serious. I appreciate him because he's the one who [encouraged] me to take the sport more seriously," she says.

Nari is also thankful for the team she was afforded the opportunity to play alongside.

"They have really good energy. It's fun to be out there with them," she states.

> "Nari has already received two collegiate offers for flag. She is excited for what is to come."

Coach Miller is proud of Nari–her tremendous growth, diligence, aptitude and overall impressive skill set. "Right from the onset, I noticed her skill set. I noticed she would add value to the team. She can catch the football really well, and she's a good route runner. She's a smart, high IQ football player; she's dynamic in that way. As one of my captains, Nari is very assertive. She's no-nonsense because she takes it seriously," he says.

He knows that Nari has proven herself to be a phenomenal role model and leader; she has even taken time to help some of the younger players with the sport.

"She shows them how to do certain things—pointers on how to run routes or catch better. She works well with the team," he states.

Coach Miller is confident that the program will continue to thrive and provide great opportunities for its athletes.



"We've established this program by building a culture of positivity, respect and character; I would like to maintain that and consistently provide the girls with a safe, supervised space after school. I want to continue to develop my players. I want to continue to give the girls more opportunities to earn scholarships for college," he says.

Nari has already received two collegiate offers for flag. She is excited for what is to come.

Nari knows that school athletics can make a real difference in the lives of countless young people, often helping them to embrace beneficial skills along with good character traits: sportsmanship, self-control, diligence and tenacity, to name a few. Even more, Nari knows that athletics always comes second to academics.

"Academics always comes first… student first and athlete second," she says.

Inspiration and Mentors

Nari does not take for granted the meaningful people who have played instrumental roles in her life, particularly her mom Demetria, who has been a true inspiration for Nari's decision to pursue a nursing career; Demetria has been in the field of nursing for quite some time.

"She has always been there, helping me through things and teaching me life lessons. She is definitely my number one inspiration," Nari says.

Nari has sincere gratitude for two of her biggest mentors at Woodville:

Natasha Harris-Haggan, who has been her healthcare instructor, and James Blocker, who has been her Economics and AP Government instructor.

"Ms. Harris-Haggan is a very stern teacher, but I appreciate everything that she does. She looks for the best in people. She's doing it all out of love. Mr. Blocker really tells it like it is. You can talk to him, and he's going to help you through it," Nari states.

Doing More

Nari is a member of several extracurricular organizations in school.

In addition, she works at a retirement facility, offering help to those who often need it most. The aspiring nurse loves helping others; she feels it to be very rewarding.

Nari would advise any young person, especially young ladies, to be diligent and persist toward their goals.

"I'd tell them to get out there and try; you never know where it all might take you. Last year, I never knew that I would get offers to play flag. I never knew that I would be here," she says. ■

47th ANNUAL

May 3, 2025

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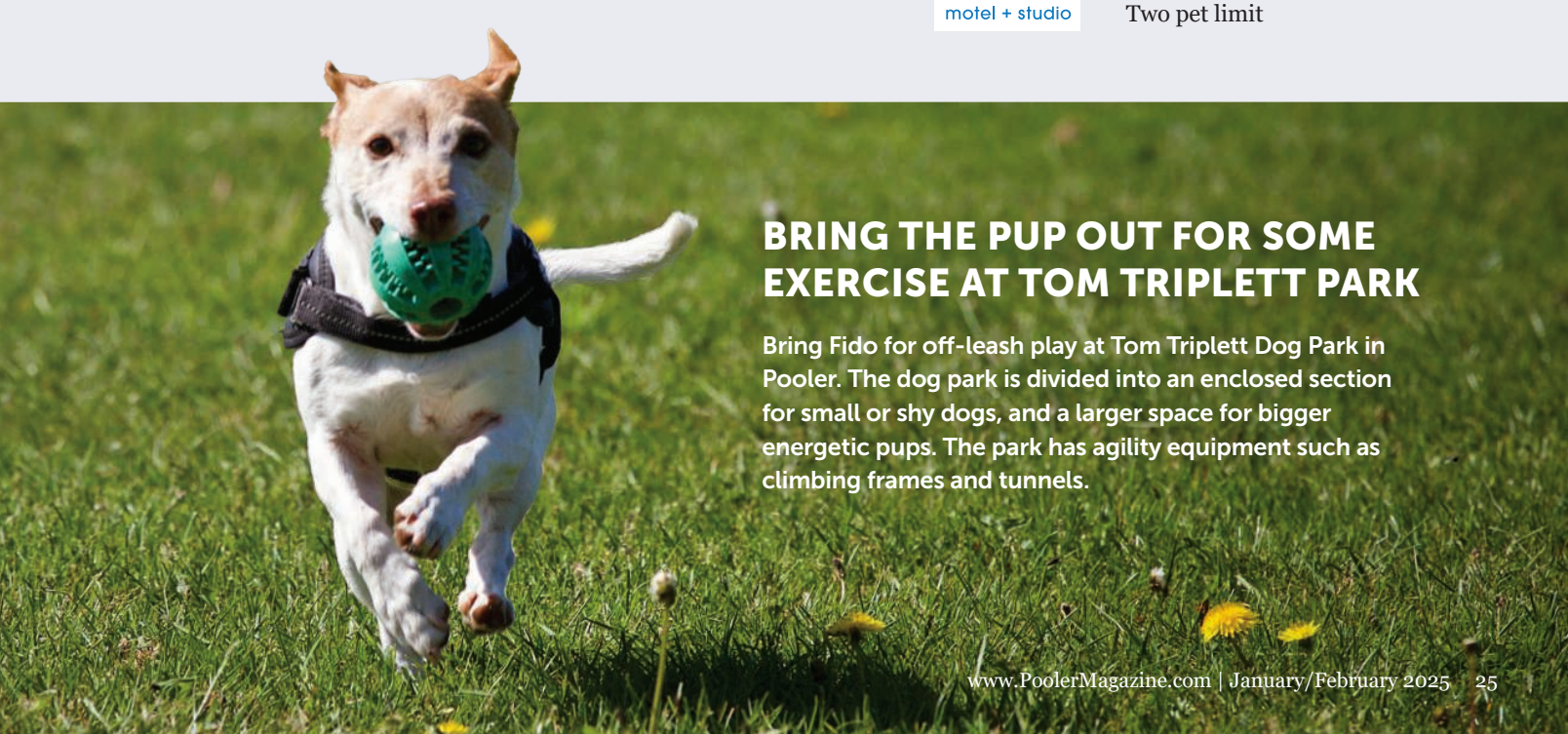
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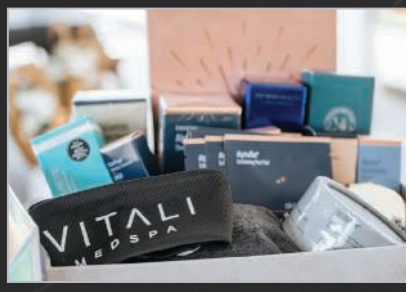
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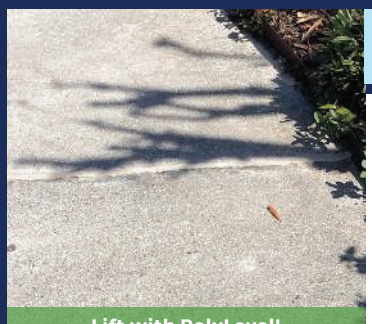
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A Journey of REMEMBRANCE

Story by Gail Mihalik | Photography by Erich Perez

On April 30, 1975, the Vietnam War ended. Although the war took place over 40 years, American soldiers were fortunately only involved for approximately half that time.

In 2025, 50 years will have passed, and many hearts in our nation are still healing from the scars of war; one man's profound experience at the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1982 inspired his new journey of "The Wall."

This memorial is trucked across the states with many scheduled stops, each lasting about five days. The completely illuminated synthetic granite wall panels have over 58,000 names etched upon them, and people can visit them day and night.

The names on the wall have an indicator (+) next to them denoting whether they were reported missing or prisoners of war, and a (♦) for those who were known or presumed deceased when this memorial was built.

The Moving Wall, also known as the Healing Wall, is a powerful symbol of healing and remembrance for those affected by the Vietnam War.

One Man's Inspiration

John Devitt, a U.S. Army veteran who spent two tours in Vietnam as crew chief and door gunner with the First Cavalry Division, attended the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1982. That day changed his life. He wasn't expecting anything more than a simple ceremony, but it touched his soul.

As moved as he was, he felt he needed to share that feeling with others. Knowing many could not make the trip to Washington, DC. His idea to create a replica of the Wall and take it to cities across the nation became a reality. He and Norris Shears, Gerry Haver, and other Vietnam veterans volunteered to build the Walls. Together, they worked designing, planning, and creating the three walls; in just two years, they had the first one out on the road, with its first stop in Tyler, Texas, in October of 1984, with the plan of two more right behind.

The first was permanently retired in 2004 at the Veterans Memorial Amphitheater in Pittsburg, Kansas. The monument is open to the public, free of charge, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Showing the memories will never be forgotten.

The Walls symbolize the immense strength and sacrifice of the men and women who enlisted to help North and South Vietnam battle the communist takeover. Their commitment and sacrifice are deeply honored in the Moving Wall. So many people lost loved ones in the war, while some never had closure. This traveling Wall, a powerful symbol of remembrance, honors the soldiers lost at war and provides the families left behind with a sense of closure and peace.

Despite being half the size of the original, the traveling Wall, with the center standing 6 feet in height and a length of 300 feet, is a powerful symbol. Its impact is not diminished, and it continues to honor the fallen soldiers with multiple scheduled stops and state trooper escorts.

The tours run from May into November, honoring the months in which the involvement in the Vietnam War began and ended. To locate a stop, visit www.TheMovingWall.org



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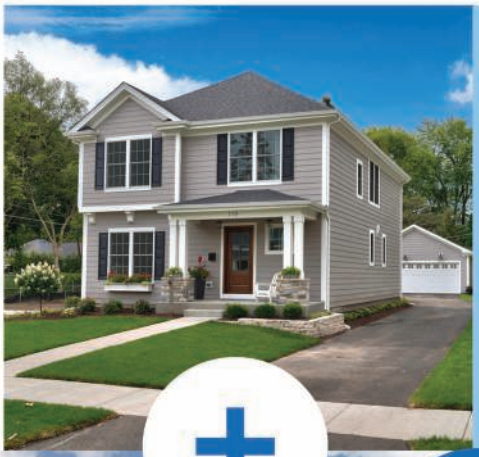
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mom-ing | UNFILTERED

Finding Magic in the Madness of Motherhood

Making Mom Friends is Like Dating, But *Weirder*

by Alycia Calderin

Remember when making friends was as simple as asking, "Wanna play tag?" Those were the golden years. Now, as a mom, making friends is more like dating, but way weirder. You're not just finding someone you click with; you're also trying to match schedules, parenting styles, and the wildly different personalities of your kids, who may range from sticky toddlers to phone-addicted teens. It's like speed dating, but with more Goldfish crackers and chaos.

Step 1: The "Meet Cute"

Every great mom friendship begins with a "meet cute," but it's rarely glamorous. Maybe it's at the park while your toddler is clinging to your leg and hers is making a break for the swings. Maybe it's at middle school pickup, where both of you are deciphering whether "sus" is a compliment or an insult in your kids' latest conversation.

Breaking the ice is the hardest part. Do you start with a compliment? ("Your kid's laugh is so contagious!") A question? ("Do you understand this slang they're using, or are they just making words up?") Or a mutual sigh of exhaustion as you both trail behind your teens, who are busy Snapchatting while pretending you don't exist?

The stakes feel high because if it doesn't click, you might still see her at soccer practice or PTA meeting for the next decade.

Step 2: The First "Date"

You've exchanged numbers or Instagram handles, because moms don't hand out business cards, they swap memes. The next step? The playdate or hangout. This is the mom friend equivalent of a first date, complete with the nerves and overthinking.

For moms of toddlers, it's a playdate at someone's house or a park. You're debating whether to pack snacks (will her kid eat Goldfish, or does she only do organic?). For middle school moms, it might be a sleepover drop-off or a science fair booth. And for moms of teens, it's a trip to the mall or a coffee shop while your kids "hang out" (and you pray they aren't secretly dating).

During this hangout, you're subtly evaluating her mom style. Is she laid-back, or does she color-code her calendar? Does she judge your spicy book obsession, or does she secretly own a Kindle full of smut novels too? These are the mom friend equivalent of asking someone about their music taste or favorite TV shows.

Step 3: The Texting Phase

If the first "date" goes well, congratulations! You're now in the texting phase. This is where the real magic happens. You're swapping memes about toddler tantrums or deciphering the weird slang middle schoolers are using (Why is everything "fire"? Why is "rizz" a thing?).

Texting a new mom friend is a delicate balance. You don't want to overdo it and come off too eager. ("Did I just double text her about the PTO bake sale?") At the same time, you don't want to leave her hanging too long and seem uninterested. A true mom-friend match happens when you both hit "send" on a message about how your kid just tried to argue that Fortnite is educational.

Bonus points if your conversations shift to non kid topics, like spicy book recommendations or your shared dream of sneaking off to a beach resort where no one calls you "Mom."

Step 4: The Red Flags

Not every mom friend is meant to be. Just like dating, you might encounter a few red flags. Maybe she's the supermom who drops humblebrags like, "Oh, Brayden just loves his calculus tutor. It's such a shame the violin competition overlaps with chess nationals!" Or maybe she's the mom who's way too intense about PTA fundraisers, texting you at 10 p.m. about cookie quotas.

Sometimes the red flags are smaller. Like realizing her idea of fun is a daily 5 a.m. workout, while yours is sleeping in and reading while enjoying a giant coffee. It's okay to let those friendships fade. You can still wave at her at school events without committing to weekly playdates.

Step 5: Finding "The One"

Eventually, you'll find her. The mom friend who just gets you. She's the one who doesn't flinch when your toddler throws a snack tantrum or your teen announces they need a ride to a party five minutes before it starts. She's the one who laughs when you confess that your dinner plan is "whatever they can microwave themselves."

Your kids may not even like each other, but that doesn't matter. She's your person. The one you can text about book plot twists, vent to about middle school chorus concerts, or laugh with about the fact that your teen calls everything "cringe" (including you).

Why It's Worth It

Yes, making mom friends is awkward. It's vulnerable. It's exhausting. But it's also one of the best things you can do for yourself. Because no matter what stage your kids are in, having someone who can laugh, cry, and sip lukewarm coffee with you makes it all a little easier.

So, the next time you see a mom who looks like she could use a friend, take the chance. Share a snack, a story, or even your favorite new show rec. Because while making mom friends might feel like dating, it's worth every awkward moment to find your tribe.

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WELLNESS IS NOT A TREND: Local Tips to Get on Track in 2025

Story by LaTrisha Brown

Let's be honest—every January, gyms are packed with New Year's resolutions in full swing. But by Valentine's Day, that energy tends to fizzle out. Sound familiar?
If health and wellness didn't make your priority list this past year, don't worry. These five simple and actionable tips will help you build healthy habits that stick—so you can make 2025 your year of lasting wellness.

1. Habit-Stacking: Build Wellness into Your Day
One of the biggest pitfalls in developing a consistent health and wellness routine is time management. But here's the secret: if something's a priority, you *make* the time. Enter **habit-stacking**, a proven method to make new habits easier to adopt.

Here's how it works: First, make a list of your priorities ensuring your health goals are in the top three. Once you've developed your priorities, you've got to make the goal easy to achieve. Habit stacking is a great way to achieve your goals. With habit-stacking you take a habit, or task you must do daily, and attach a task to it.

For example, if you desire to be more active and you must go to work every day, try adjusting your commute so that you pass beautiful parks or trails on your way home and are enticed to enjoy nature before retiring for the evening.

2. Move It to Lose It—Make Fitness Scenic
Exercise doesn't have to mean hours in a crowded gym. Instead, head outside! Tom Triplett Park is a great location for being active. Boasting eight baseball and softball fields, a playground, various walking trails and soccer fields, Hendrix Park makes the goal of getting physically fit both attainable and scenic.

3. Stretch Your Body – and Your Budget
If you're craving calm and balance, a budget friendly yoga practice can be found at Awakening Yoga Studio. Just a short drive down Highway 17, and you're on your way to Namaste! New students can purchase a $50 pass for 30-Days of Yoga. Topping out at $1.67/day, yoga can help you achieve your wellness goals while being easy on the wallet.

4. You Are What You Eat
If yoga isn't your jam, another way to improve your health goals is incorporating more whole-foods and plant-based options into your diet. Try visiting the Mega Pop-Up and Farmer's Market at Tom Triplett Park. The market is full of local vendors and farmer's booths with locally sourced produce and other free workshops and fitness classes the second Sunday of each month excluding July and August. You can elevate flavors and heal your body all while helping the community by supporting local vendors.

5. A Little Help from Your Friends
Another fulfilling way to accomplish your health and wellness goals is joining others who can keep you accountable. Find friends to work out with or who will check in on your progress. You will also feel great about helping them stay true to their goals as well. Check in by working out together, texting or joining an online community of like-minded locals.

Want more? Consider helping in the community. This will improve your sense of well-being and even improve mental health.

Kiwanis Club of Pooler is always looking for committed volunteers. Their program focuses on impacting child hunger, literacy and mentorship. Working with volunteer organizations builds communication skills and deepens connection with the community, further increasing the likelihood that you'll stick with it! Assisting youth within this organization develops communication skills and deepens connection with the community, further increasing the likelihood that you'll stick with it!

Whether it's mentoring kids, volunteering at events, or just showing up for the group walk at the park, contributing to your community will enhance your sense of purpose while keeping you on track.

Make 2025 the Year You Thrive
Wellness isn't a trend—it's a lifestyle. From scenic walks to calming yoga, farmers' markets, and community connection, Bryan County has everything you need to build healthy habits that last.

So, this year, let's skip the fad diets and fleeting gym memberships. Start small, be consistent, and embrace wellness in a way that fits into your life. Your future self will thank you!



ARTIST PRESERVES IMAGES OF LOWCOUNTRY ONE SNIP AT A TIME

Story by Gail Parsons | Photography by Erich Perez

Using a 60-year-old pair of Revlon cuticle scissors, Norm Owens deftly snips at a piece of black paper creating intricately detailed silhouettes of people, animals, trees, birds, and marsh grass.

The 80-year-old interior designer has cut silhouettes since he was a child but only recently learned the way he does it is unique.

"I don't use a pattern or draw it out first," he said. "Most people are amazed because they want you to sketch it out but then you're forced to follow a pattern. This way, it's actually more of an impromptu art.

According to an article in *Trend & Tradition* magazine, silhouette portraiture was popular in America in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It was an affordable option over a costly painted portrait. Of the artists who create cut silhouette portraits, there are only about 20 in the world known to work completely freehand, the article states.

Advances in camera photography aided in the decline of silhouette portrait art. It is also why Owens isn't fond of creating portraits.

"I never have liked doing them and the reason I don't like it is because I don't care how good you are people are used to seeing a photograph," he said.

Instead, the inspiration for his designs comes from what he described as his first love—the Lowcountry.



Finding Silhouette Art

Raised in Hampton, South Carolina, Owens was first introduced to the art when he was about 12 years old. He saw a set of glass tumblers by silhouette artist Carew Rice.

"He did a set of tumblers," Owens said. "To me, they were the most gorgeous things I'd ever seen in my life. I would sit and stare at them, hoping I could do it."

He owns four of those tumblers and counts them among his most prized possessions, enough so that anytime he has had to evacuate because of a hurricane, they are carefully packaged up and go with him.

"It's the first thing I grab," he said. "They are irreplaceable."

There have been replications made of Rice's tumblers, but the quality doesn't come close in comparison to the originals.

Each of the tumblers has landscape scenes of the Lowcountry. With Owens' love for the region already stamped on his heart, the silhouette tumblers sparked his interest in the art form.

Owens had the opportunity to meet Rice one time and learned that he too was self-taught in the art and the two had grown up about 15 miles apart from each other.

While the subject matter of both men's silhouettes was similar, Owens said a professor once pointed out that he had "a little bit more of a delicacy in the delicate cuts than (Rice's) does."

When he started learning the art form, he didn't have the right black paper available to him. Construction paper is too thick and heavy to make the cuts. So, rather than cutting black silhouettes and mounting them on white paper, he worked in the reverse.

In school, each day started with chapel programs and he was in charge of creating the artwork. He recalled one of his teachers being very encouraging with a few simple words.

"She said to me, 'Work on this,'" he said. "And you know, I have learned that you can do a lot of things simply by doing."

Thinking in Pictures

When Owens picks up a piece of paper and starts snipping away at it, he usually has an idea of where he's going with it. Turning the paper over and over as he cuts out shapes, he's working off memories of the Lowcountry.

"I think in pictures," he said, as he recently demonstrated his technique. "I might change my mind a couple of times because I wasn't sure exactly how I wanted it."



But he knew he wanted a duck, an ibis and one of his favorites—a tree with Spanish moss similar to the ones that grow in the swampy areas near his home.

"They're not grand, glorious trees, but they are beautiful to me," he said. "And the Spanish moss is a symbol of the South."

The Fine Details

The most difficult part of cutting the silhouettes is fine details, like the tiny spaces between a bird's legs as it is taking flight or in the branches of a tree. It's those delicate details that are the hallmark of Owens' work, but they don't come by accident.

He spends hours sitting by the river, or near the marsh just observing the world around him.

"You have to go out and look," he said. "Is this the way a cypress tree grows? Is this how a palmetto tree grows? An oak tree? What do birds look like in flight? I have one of a heron in flight, coming off a piece of grass—I went out one day to The Battery in Charleston and just watched them coming in and going out and coming in."

In watching them so close he could see their feet go straight out and when they're in flight their neck goes back and curves. The way they fly is different than other birds. These are the kind of details that he cuts into his silhouettes.

> "I don't use a pattern or draw it out first … This way, it's actually more of an impromptu art."

While most of his work is landscape and he doesn't do portraits, he has cut full-body silhouettes of Gullah people.

"They fall into some of the most graceful poses, but they don't like you to watch them," he said.

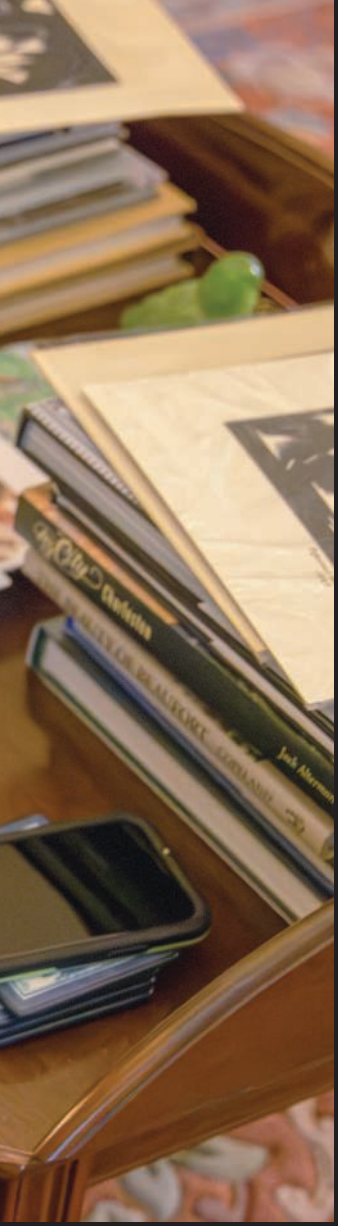
They are also an important part of life in the region and that is what Owens tries to show in his art.

"It's a good way to show the Lowcountry to people who are not from here," he said.

Some of his pieces are cut with a frame, those he described as, "Pieces of paper with holes in it. That's all it is," he said.

Other silhouettes seem to float on the white background.

"It's like it has no beginning and no end," he said. "It's just like a snippet of something I have seen. It's not a real place, but it's sort of a combination as I think it should be, and that's why I like it, to me, there's a certain grace and charm. You really just don't know how to put your finger on it, but you know, it's there."





Sometimes he'll cut one based on a request like the time a gentleman from New York said he wanted one with palmetto trees and a sailboat with the sail down. He made it and liked it well enough to replicate it but with the sail up. That one is on display at George C. Birlant Antiques & Gifts in Charleston, the only place that carries Owens' work.

Interior Design

While Owens can turn out an intricately cut silhouette in about 30 minutes, the art is only a piece of his creativity. He is an interior designer by trade.

"I was in high school when I realized I could sell my artwork," he said. "But after I got out of high school and college, that's when I really knew if I wanted to go in that direction, I could, but I didn't want to be an artist, you know, trying to make a living at it. So, I became an interior designer."

Straight out of college, he started work in a design firm and then went to Sears and Roebuck, where he got a job in the custom drapery department.

"I had this wonderful lady who sort of took me under her wing and believe you me, she knew her draperies," he said.

Sears was also where he learned that sometimes business takes priority over creativity and art—it was a lesson he was not comfortable with. He was sent to give someone a quote on new draperies. The room had high/low sculptured carpet in multiple colors, wing-back chairs with a busy pattern and the client wanted draperies with a print.

He gave her his honest opinion.

"By the time I got back to the store, she had gotten on the phone and called, not my immediate boss, but the one over him," he said. "He said, 'Boy you have stepped in it big time.' I said they should put that room on wheels and take it around to people of good taste and say, 'It could happen to you.'"

He didn't get fired but was told in no uncertain terms they were in the business of selling merchandise. He soon left that job and went to work for Ethan Allen, but still craved the freedom to handle interior design the way he wanted and the way he felt would benefit the clients.

He started Interiors by Norman, in 1999 in Savannah and in 2008 relocated to Pooler. In design, he said his strength is the Charleston look.

"Charleston to me, is just heaven on earth," he said. "My new slogan is, 'The Charleston look, old and new.' Not everybody wants the old look. They want a contemporary look, and that's easy."

What he strives for is to combine traditional pieces that are a hallmark of the Charleston look, with the modern, more contemporary.

The interior design work allows him to make a living in a creative field but it also affords him time to enjoy the Lowcountry and share it with others through his art. ■

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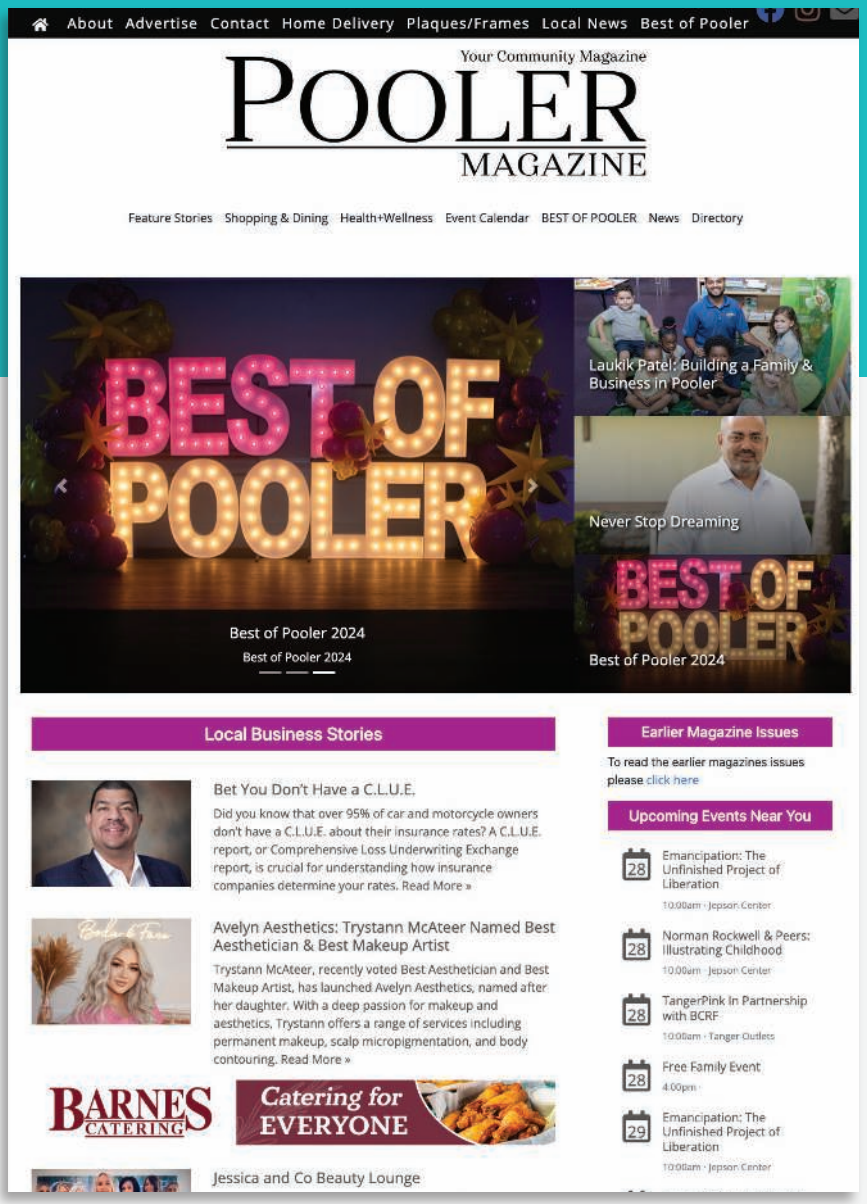
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