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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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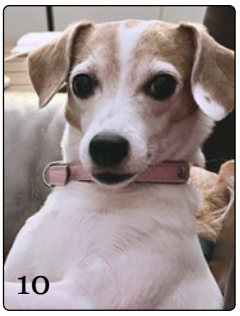

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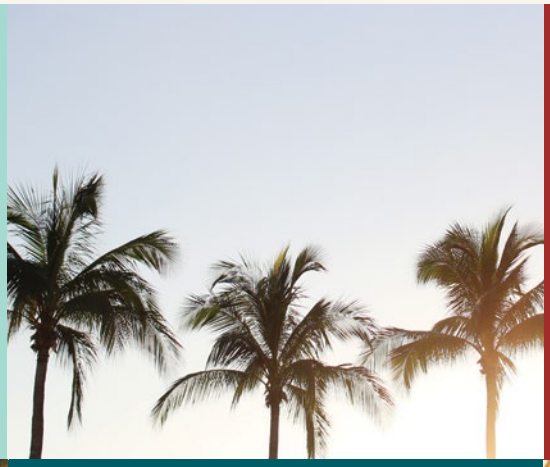
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Write and tell us what you think. *Pooler Magazine* welcomes all letters to the editor. Please send letters to Jan Southern at Jan@JDelSURMarketing.com. Letters to the editor must have a phone number and name of contact. Phone numbers will not be published.

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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Celebrate with us!


Jan Southern

There is something especially fun about our **Best of Pooler** issue. Every year, we ask our readers to tell us who they believe represents the very best of our community, and once again, you showed up!

Inside this issue, you'll find our **2026 Best of Pooler Readers' Choice Awards**, recognizing the businesses, organizations and people you chose as your favorites.

Congratulations to all this year's nominees and winners! Your customers, clients, neighbors and friends took the time to vote for you, and that says something about the impact you are making in our community.

We also had the opportunity to share the stories of several of this year's honorees, including Derek Horne of the Horne Law Firm, Hannah Sikes of Full Bloom Salon & Dry Bar, Jennifer Taylor of Renegade Paws Rescue, and Patrick and Nicole Bailey, voted Pooler's Best Couple. Their stories are different, but they share something important: a genuine commitment to people and to the community they call home. That is really what this issue celebrates.

So, turn the pages, meet some incredible people, and most importantly, **check out the complete list of your 2026 Best of Pooler Readers' Choice winners**. You may see some longtime favorites, discover a few new ones, and find even more reasons to love Pooler.

Congratulations to all of our winners and thank you to everyone who voted!

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BEST LAW FIRM

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BEST MALE BUSINESS OWNER

THE VERDICT IS IN:

Personal Injury Deserves Personal Attention

Story by Gail Parsons | Photography by Thomas Reimer

For Derek Horne, the success of the Horne Law Firm isn't measured simply by verdicts, settlements or the size of the firm. It is measured by the lasting relationships built with clients, the trust those clients place in his team and the firm's commitment to the Pooler community.

That philosophy recently earned the Horne Law Firm recognition from the people it serves, with the firm taking home honors including Pooler's **Best Law Firm**, **Best Male Business Owner** and **Best Attorney**. For Horne, the awards represent more than professional recognition. They are confirmation that the firm's emphasis on personal attention, community involvement, and helping clients through some of the most difficult periods of their lives is making a difference.

"Personal Injury deserves personal attention" is the firm's brand, and Horne said that philosophy guides everything from the first meeting with a client to the final resolution of a case.

A Winning Formula

The Horne Law Firm has now been recognized as Best Law Firm for what Horne believes is the fifth consecutive year, a streak he attributes to its deep roots in the community and its commitment to delivering on the promises made to clients.

At the heart of that approach is accessibility. The vast majority of clients meet personally with someone from the firm, Horne said. Clients also receive the cell phone numbers of their case manager and attorney, as well as Horne's own number.

That accessibility is intentional. "Fear starts in the dark," Horne said, explaining a phrase he frequently reminds his staff to keep in mind.

When a client is waiting for a promised phone call or update and doesn't hear from an attorney, uncertainty can quickly turn into anxiety.

For someone already dealing with an injury, financial concerns and the emotional aftermath of an accident, the last thing they need is additional stress caused by not knowing what is happening with their case, he said.

His goal is to keep clients informed and involved throughout the process. In turn, Horne believes that experience leads clients to recommend the firm to friends and family. "Nearly 40% of our new clients come from referrals from previous clients", says Horne.

Giving Back to the Community

Horne Law Firm's community involvement is another part of the philosophy Horne believes contributed to the awards. He is involved with several local organizations and initiatives, including serving on the board of Gilliard and Company, a nonprofit that works with young people aging out of foster care. The organization helps provide housing and life skills to young adults as they transition into adulthood. The work has personal meaning for Horne, who was adopted and has memories of spending time in three foster homes when he was a child.

> "Where you pray, live, eat, sleep, work you should give back to the community."

Horne is also involved with the Pooler Chamber of Commerce and the Pooler Juneteenth Celebration Committee. The firm is also major donor to Tharros Place, a Pooler based nonprofit which works with children affected by sex trafficking.

For Horne, community involvement isn't separate from his work as an attorney.

"Where you pray, live, eat, sleep, work you should give back to the community," he said.

That commitment, he believes, has helped people see that the firm is interested in more than financial success.

"I think people who know us... know that it's all not just about the money," he said. "It's also about giving back to the community and trying to make this area where we all live a better place."

From Law School to the Horne Law Firm

Horne's path to becoming an attorney wasn't entirely traditional.

After working as a stockbroker at E*Trade, he graduated from Tulane Law School in 2004 . His early career included working as a legislative adviser for U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, followed



by work with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and public policy work for the British Consulate in Atlanta.

Then the financial crisis of 2009 changed his plans.

After being laid off, Horne said he wanted to continue working in a profession where he could help people. Personal injury law offered an opportunity to combine that goal with his interest in the law.

That interest was sparked much earlier. Horne said his father, who had served in the Air Force and later worked as an FBI supervisory special agent, decided to attend law school himself.

Watching his father pursue a law degree while maintaining a career convinced Horne that he could do the same. He also saw the law as something practical.

"The law is a tool to solve problems," he said. "It's a tool to understand the way the world works. It's a tool to bring justice."

After working for other law firms, Horne opened his own practice in 2018.

Today, the Horne Law Firm has grown to 18 staff members and two full-time interns, with four attorneys. The team includes investigators, paralegals, case managers and other personnel who each play a role in handling clients' cases.

What Happens Behind a Case

A personal injury case involves more than filing paperwork and negotiating a settlement.

The process generally begins with sitting down with a client, often in the client's home, and learning what happened and what the client needs.

From there, the firm works to make sure the client receives appropriate medical treatment. The team gathers medical records and other documentation, investigates the circumstances surrounding the injury and develops the evidence needed to support the claim.

Typical evidence can include photographs, witness statements and obtained surveillance or security-camera footage.

The firm then prepares a demand for settlement and enters negotiations with the insurance company. If a settlement cannot be reached, the case may proceed to mediation or litigation.

Throughout that process, Horne said, communication with the client remains essential.

Some clients need time before they feel comfortable sharing everything about what happened to them. Those conversations don't necessarily happen during a first meeting. "Building trust and getting to truly know a client requires real effort, real time, and there's really not a lot of shortcuts to that," Horne said.

That is one reason he believes the firm's relationships with clients often extend well beyond the length of a case.

Fighting for the Client

One of the biggest challenges Horne sees in personal injury work is dealing with insurance companies.

He said clients sometimes become frustrated because they want their cases resolved immediately; however, developing a claim the right way can take time.

But Horne believes patience is necessary to achieve the best possible result.

Some of the cases that stand out most to him are those in which the firm has helped clients achieve significant financial recoveries after initially receiving a denial or lowball offer from an insurance company.

In other cases, the financial outcome isn't necessarily what makes the case memorable. Horne recalled helping a client with a traumatic brain injury navigate the medical system after the person had difficulty accessing treatment and had no health insurance. The firm invested the time and effort needed to help the client find appropriate care, and worked to delay his discharge from a local hospital.

Those are the cases Horne considers particularly rewarding. "You can't get someone's severed finger back; you can't undo a scar," he said. "But we can advocate for a client and make sure the person receives the compensation to which they are entitled."

What Clients Should Know

Horne also has a straightforward message for people who are injured: don't wait too long to seek advice.

He recommends contacting an attorney as soon as possible if someone believes legal guidance may be necessary. Not every accident requires an attorney, he said, but an early conversation can help someone understand what steps to take.

One of the biggest mistakes people make, in his view, is talking to an insurance company about their injuries without legal guidance.

"It's like the Miranda rights," he said. "Anything you say, can and will be used against you. The insurance adjusters are very crafty. They're coached on how to ask questions."

For example, if an injured person tells them their right shoulder is really bothering them after an accident, but they don't mention their left knee is hurt as well, an insurance company may use that conversation later.

"They'll come back and say, 'Well, we talked to you on a recorded line, and you never said anything about your knee, so we don't feel we have to pay any of your medical bills related to that," he said.

He also advises people to preserve evidence, take photographs, obtain an accident report and seek medical treatment rather than waiting to see whether an injury improves on its own.

The sooner important information is documented, the less likely it is to be lost.

A Team Effort

Ultimately, Horne sees the awards as recognition not just for himself, but for the entire Horne Law Firm team.

He describes the staff as dedicated, committed and willing to go beyond the basic requirements of their jobs. The team is close-knit, he said, with members supporting one another both professionally and personally.

"We are a close-knit family," he said. "We have each other's back. We all care about each other. We vacation together. It is truly a blessing that we have such a great team."

That sense of family extends to the firm's philosophy toward its clients. Horne describes the firm as a "360-degree law firm," one that wants to help clients wherever it can rather than limiting assistance to the portion of a case that generates revenue.

"We don't make a dime helping a client find the right body shop, but we still want to help."

Horne Law has also helped clients find jobs, assisted with school-related matters and provided letters of recommendation. The goal is to look at the whole person, not simply the legal claim.

"To know that the community appreciates the energy and the effort that we're giving back to our clients, to the community is absolutely a tremendous amount of pride, not just for me but for the whole team."

His philosophy can be summed up simply: God first, clients second and money third.

The community awards, he said, are especially meaningful because they indicate that people notice the effort.

Personal injury law can be emotionally demanding. Attorneys work with people dealing with pain, lost wages, disrupted family lives and injuries that may permanently change what they can do.

Knowing that the community recognizes the firm's work provides a different kind of reward.

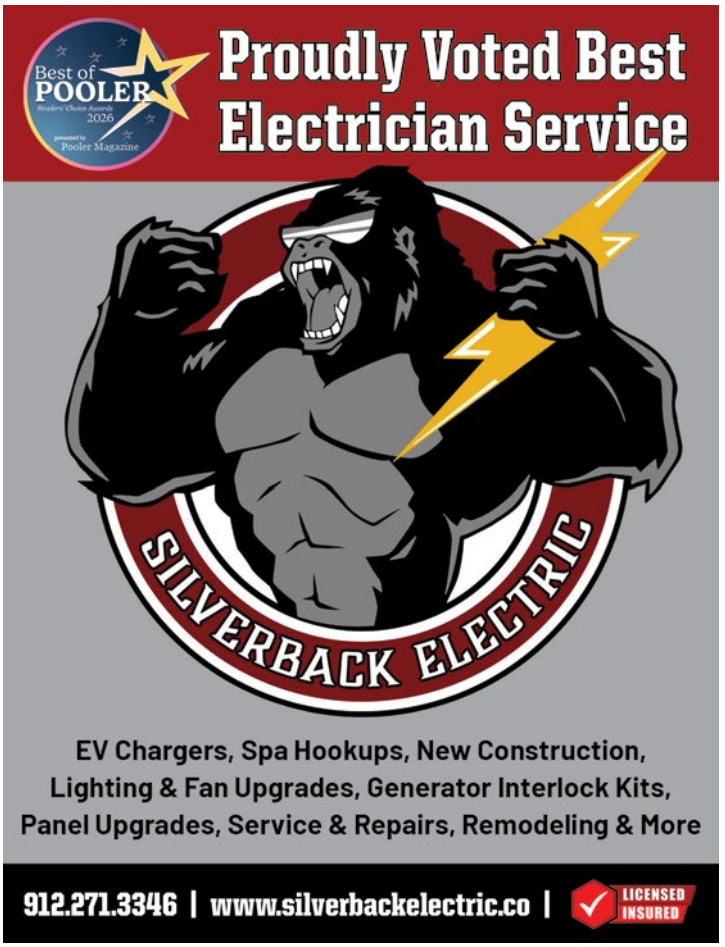
For Horne, that recognition isn't about being the biggest firm or boasting about how much money the firm has made. It is about being able to point to the people the firm has helped, and knowing those relationships matter.

"To know that the community appreciates the energy and the effort that we're giving back to our clients, to the community," he said, "is absolutely a tremendous amount of pride, not just for me but for the whole team." ■






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The Corner Table

Pooler & Chatham County

by Gail Mihalik







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Three Tree Coffee at The Front Porch



Stepping into **Three Tree Coffee at the Front Porch** feels a bit like opening the door to a memory. Housed in the oldest home in Pooler, this charming café wraps you in the kind of comfort that only a creaky wooden floor, a wrap-around porch, and the aroma of freshly brewed coffee can provide. It's equal parts neighborhood gathering place and nostalgic retreat—somewhere between your grandparents' living room and your favorite study nook.

Here as that door opens, the staff welcomes you with their greetings and smiles. They don't just take orders; they help you navigate their expansive coffee menu with enthusiasm and a touch of artistry. Lattes, pour-overs, cappuccinos, French press—you name it, they craft it. When I can't decide, I simply tell the baristas the flavor I'm craving, and they conjure up something wonderful. Somehow, they always seem to know exactly what my morning needs.

One of my personal favorites is their Philosopher's Cup. This isn't just a drink; it's a mood. Layers of chocolate, caramel, toffee and a nutty flavor swirl together into a smooth, indulgent sip that feels like a gentle blanket on the chilly Southern mornings we pretend we don't get. It's the kind of coffee that makes you slow down and savor the moment.

But Three Tree isn't only about coffee—it's a delightful stop for breakfast or a light bite. Their baked goods alone are worth a visit. The homemade muffins come in rotating varieties, always fresh and tender. Let's not forget the kolache, Eastern European sweet bread stuffed with savory sausage and cheese. Their quiche selections are equally tempting, packed with flavor and wonderfully flaky. And if you need something hearty, the breakfast burrito—filled with scrambled eggs, bacon, and melted cheese, with a side of hot sauce—will keep you going well into the afternoon. Those with dietary restrictions will appreciate the thoughtful gluten-free and dairy-free options, which never feel like an afterthought.

The space itself is part of the magic. The wrap-around porch, which proudly gives the café its name, is one of the best seats in Pooler when the weather cooperates. Whether it's a crisp fall morning or the gentle warmth of spring, it's the perfect spot to sip, snack, and take in the charm of the neighborhood.

Inside, the historic home offers an array of cozy rooms, each with its own personality. Some are tucked away and perfect for quiet reading or working, while others are open and airy—ideal for meeting friends, studying, or hosting small gatherings. Every corner feels like home, inviting guests stay awhile.

Three Tree Coffee at the Front Porch isn't just a café—it's a community anchor, a comfort stop, and a place that feels instantly familiar. Whether you're grabbing your morning brew, catching up with friends, or simply seeking a peaceful moment, this Pooler gem makes every visit feel like coming home.



Savannah Tech Brings Home the Gold

Story by Cindy Reid

Savannah Technical College students proved they are among the nation's best of the best at the SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference held this June in Atlanta. It was high-stakes at the competition and the Savannah Tech students absolutely crushed it. Their impressive five gold medal win tied as the top postsecondary chapter in Georgia and pushed the state's total to 36 postsecondary medals, making Georgia the sixth-highest medal winning state in the country.

SkillsUSA is a national non-profit that provides vital support for middle school, high school, and college students training for essential careers in trade, technical, and skilled service occupations. Members have the opportunity to prove their capabilities through local, regional, and state-level competitions. From there, the top performers advance to the National Leadership and Skills Conference, where thousands compete in the rigorous, hands-on SkillsUSA Championships.

In addition to the gold medals, Savannah Tech excelled in the leadership arena. Student Corina Stewart was named 2025-2026 SkillsUSA National College/Postsecondary Secretary, earning one of the most prestigious student leadership roles in the organization. In this highly visible role she helped facilitate conference activities and ceremonies before the audience of over 19,000 attendees, demonstrating how Savannah Tech students are prepared to lead in their industries.

Corina Stewart says the school has taught her practical learning and the opportunity to do the actual work. "I learned that I did not have to walk into a competition hoping I was prepared; I could enter knowing I had already practiced the skills the judges expected me to demonstrate", she says, " Savannah Tech helped turn my studies into an asset with which I could confidently lead. Competing revealed my capabilities, but serving in leadership, especially as a national officer, completely transformed the way I viewed my future."

For the students these honors have a profound impact on their plans and attitudes towards their careers. Joby Taylor, Gold Medal Winner, Mobile Electronics says, "The training at Savannah Tech prepared me for this experience in the best way because my instructor and trainer worked with me at every moment to ensure that I was ready to compete on a national level. Achieving a national Gold Medal was a massive stepping stone that proved to me that I could launch my own business."



Malcolm Pannell, State Gold Medal Winner, HVAC says, “SkillsUSA gave me a new level of confidence and opened my eyes to a world of unlimited potential within HVAC. It allowed me to bring together the diverse training I received at Savannah Technical College and use my knowledge creatively. I enjoyed thinking through problems, troubleshooting different systems, and finding solutions in a challenging yet genuinely fun way. Winning made me realize that I am not limited to simply working in the field; I have the potential to grow, innovate, and discover the true boundaries of my potential in the HVAC industry.”

For some, winning was actually a complete surprise. Says Ocean Jenkins-Lofton, Gold Medal Winner, Job Interview, “My experience with SkillsUSA Nationals was very exploratory. After competing, I was left with a defeated mindset and became depressed about my presumed loss. Overcoming these emotions made me find joy in aspects of the conference beyond winning. That new discovery is the best award I have ever been given. Thank you, SkillsUSA!”

SkillsUSA is a national non-profit that provides vital support for middle school, high school, and college students training for essential careers in trade, technical, and skilled service occupations.









Jennifer Weatherly, LaRena Phillips, and Meredith Baker, were the Gold Medal Winners in the American Spirit category. Jennifer Weatherly," Winning a national Gold Medal means a lot because I know how much hard work, time, and determination went into achieving it. It was more than just winning a competition; it proved that I could set a major goal, push past my comfort zone, and accomplish something of which I once felt unsure. I am incredibly proud of what I achieved." Like the other medal winners she is grateful to Savannah Tech for providing the path to get there, "as well as for the support of Professor Rushe Hudzinski-Sero and Leigh Anne Moore. Having an educator and advisor who believes in you truly makes a difference. Their support gave me the faith to push past my comfort zone and believe that I could succeed."

Advisor to the team Leigh Anne Moore says,"I am incredibly proud of our students and everything they accomplish through SkillsUSA. Seeing their hard work, confidence, and determination pay off on such a big stage is exciting, not just for them, but for our entire Savannah Tech family. As an advisor, one of the best parts is watching our students realize just how talented they are and knowing this experience is helping prepare them for even greater milestones in their careers. "

Heather Riggs, the SkillsUSA Georgia Postsecondary Vice President believes the hands-on training she received at Savannah Technical College gave her more than technical skills; it gave her confidence in her own capabilities. She says, "When I competed in SkillsUSA, I was able to take the skills I had practiced in the classroom and deploy them. Winning the gold medal at the state level as a Nurse Assisting competitor showed me that preparation, determination, and confidence can turn hard work into success. It also taught me that I am capable of stepping forward, taking the lead, and representing my school and my profession with pride. " She says "These experiences are preparing me not only to become a successful nurse, but to become the kind of healthcare professional who leads with confidence, compassion, and purpose."

One thing the winners have in common is that they are not waiting for their careers to happen, instead they are actively building their future through attaining specialized skills, the practical application of classroom lessons and excelling at leadership opportunities.

David Dillie, SkillsUSA Georgia Postsecondary Parliamentarian says being able to practice real skills, learn from instructors with industry experience, and solve problems independently helped him trust his abilities. He says the training helped him step up, take the lead, and ultimately win because he trusted both his knowledge and his practical ability.

"As president of our Savannah Tech SkillsUSA chapter, I am responsible for more than my own success. I have to lead other students, communicate, organize, and represent our institution. Competition pushes me to sharpen my technical skills, while leadership teaches me how to collaborate with people and make decisions." He says, "Together, those experiences are helping me command my career instead of simply waiting for opportunities to arrive. I am building the skills, relationships, and confidence to create those opportunities for myself and help other students achieve the same results."

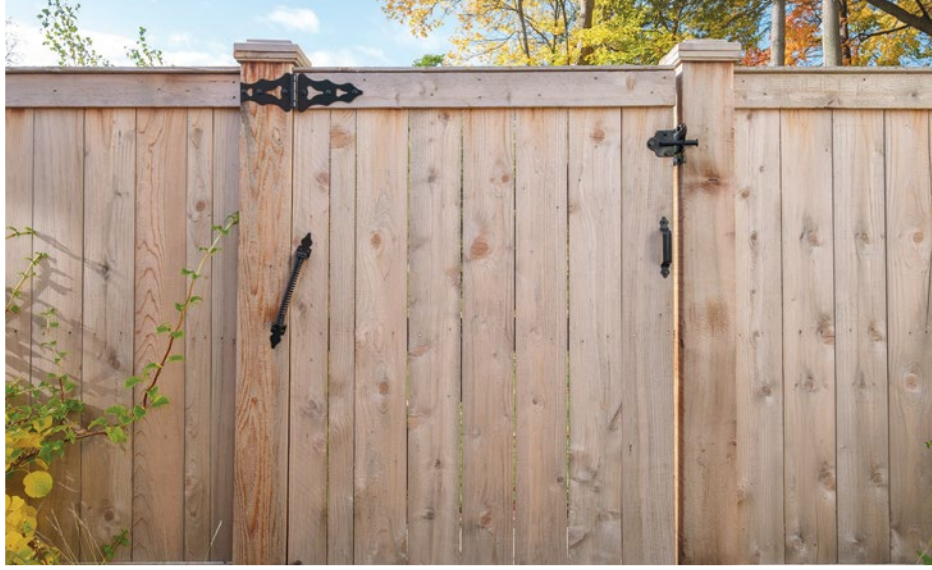
"Winning a national Gold Medal ... proved that I could set a major goal, push past my comfort zone, and accomplish something of which I once felt unsure."

Dennis Adams, Advisor to the team, says "Winning always brings a sense of pride to the team. Talking with students after the Skills Conference, it was clear that they were excited to be a part of Savannah Tech and are there to represent. I am looking forward to helping next year's students work toward achieving their goals." He says whether it's a certificate, diploma, or degree, seeing students master their outcomes gives him a tremendous sense of pride and accomplishment and he looks forward to continuing to incorporate the SkillsUSA initiative into the HVAC program.

Savannah Tech President Dr. Ryan W. Foley is justifiably proud of the students' achievements. "To see our students tie for the most medals in the state and represent us in national leadership roles is outstanding," he said "They are proving to the entire country that Savannah Technical College students are ready to step up, lead, and command their careers." ■

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BEST PET RESCUE

DOGGONE GREAT ADVOCATE

Jennifer Taylor earns another plaudit as she pursues her passion of helping pets and owners

Story by Stephen Prudhomme

Jennifer Taylor was born in New Jersey and lived in Miami, a foster child going from one home to another. She moved to Savannah a dozen years ago and worked as a trauma nurse.

Taylor combined her experience as a foster child and work as a nurse to pursue a new avenue in life, one in which she can help people and their dogs find the comfort of a warm and caring home she desperately sought as a youngster and offer the compassion of a nurse to those in need.

Taylor is the founder and director of Renegade Paws Rescue, located on Ogeechee Road in Savannah. The shelter houses 40 to 50 dogs that can be reclaimed by their owners or placed in foster homes and frequently adopted. Additionally, there are between 450 and 600 dogs in foster homes.

The contributions of Renegade Paws to the community have earned the nonprofit group a number of honors during its seven years of operation and a spot on the Today Show in July 2025 featuring Taylor and Igor, one of her shelter dogs. The latest is **Best Shelter** in *Pooler Magazine's* 2026 Best of Pooler.

"I was shocked," Taylor said. "We're very honored the people in Pooler recognize us. We strive to keep that reputation up."

Lisa Hayes learned of Renegade Paws' reputation after fostering a dog through the nonprofit. A resident of Pooler

who has volunteered for Chatham County Animal Services for several years, Hayes extended her volunteering to Renegade Paws and has fostered two dogs from the shelter.

"I'm impressed with Jennifer's heart and how much she cares," said Hayes, who makes monthly donations to Renegade Paws and helps out with microchipping clinics. "She cares not just for the dogs but the foster community, staff and volunteers. They do everything they can to let people keep their animals and do a lot as far as educating about spaying and neutering and microchipping. They've built such a strong support group in the community. People step up."

Before stepping up for animals, Taylor answered the call to help people. She moved to Savannah in 2014 and took a job as trauma nurse at Memorial Hospital. Five years later, she left the security of that job for an opportunity filled with uncertainty.

"I was a foster kid all my life," said Taylor, who lived in five to six foster homes and several group homes. "I have a heart for helping people and dogs. Rescue is not inclusive. I want to keep them in the home. I love dogs."

That love was put to the test with the harsh reality of financing the fledgling operation. She solicited donations and grants while searching for a suitable shelter in Savannah's westside, where she said the median income is $32,000 a year and people and their dogs struggle to survive.

"Thanks to our community's unbelievably generous support, we were able to purchase the small shelter to support dogs and cats while they wait for foster and forever homes."

In 2023, after operating primarily as a foster-based agency for four years, Taylor found a building with kennels on Ogeechee Road that had just became available and could house the dogs but needed renovation. She purchased the structure, built in 1940, and embarked on a capital campaign to raise the funds for renovation that included redoing the plumbing and replacing the roof. In 16 months, Taylor raised $400,000.

"Thanks to our community's unbelievably generous support, we were able to purchase the small shelter to support dogs and cats while they wait for foster and forever homes," Taylor said.

The work had just begun. Now came the formidable task of rescuing the dogs, feeding and caring for them and, with something she could personally relate to - placing them in a safe and secure home.

Taylor works with the Chatham County Animal Shelter, rescuing dogs and a few cats slated for euthanizing. "Forty percent of our dogs come from the Chatham County Animal Services," said Taylor, who also rescues dogs from Macon, Effingham and Bryan counties but whose focus is on Chatham County.

Taylor has made life easier for Jodi Lewis, executive director of Chatham County Animal Services. By taking animals from the shelter, Taylor frees up space for other four-legged denizens.















"If the community needs something, it can call on her," Lewis said. "Jenn provides food, vet care and special needs for the animals. That frees up vital cage space and allows time to work with the animals that need me. I wonder how she still functions. If anyone can make it happen it's Jenn."

According to Lewis, Taylor possesses another quality that separates her from likeminded individuals. "So many have the heart, desire and creativity but not the work ethic," Lewis said. "Not only does Jenn care but she has the work ethic. She doesn't take no for an answer and believes there has to be a way."

Taylor said 90 percent of the dogs she rescues are large ones, adding they're dog friendly and people friendly. "We won't take in aggressive dogs," she said. "We want dogs that will adapt to a new home and people."

Once the dogs are brought to Renegade Paws, they're fed and spayed and neutered. Those that don't come from the animal shelter belong to individuals who can't afford to care for them. In some cases, these owners, who couldn't afford the spaying and neutering and other costs, will take their dogs back home. Otherwise, the dogs remain at Renegade Paws until a foster home is found.

"The foster parent takes the pet home to see if it's a good fit," Taylor explained. "We suggest they keep it at least a week before adoption. About 20 percent of the owners end up keeping their dogs. Instead of judging them (the owners), we do what we can to help them."

Taylor said the operating costs for the facility are over $100,000 a month and cover staffing, veterinarian care, food and insurance. The annual budget, she noted, is $1.8 million, raised largely through donations and a few grants.

Offsetting the ongoing challenge of financing the nonprofit operation is the satisfaction of helping people and dogs in need.

"I work 16 hours a day," Taylor said, "but I love my job. I'm thankful to be here. I see people at their worst and families in crisis when they can't keep their dog."





Taylor has a symbiotic relationship of sorts with Mandy Sperrui, director of Trapping, Rescuing, Advocating and Providing (TRAP). The two women head up nonprofit agencies dedicated to rescuing dogs and frequently collaborate with one another to achieve that goal. Sperrui volunteers at Renegade Paws and periodically serves as a foster parent for the agency.

"She's really built a community," said Sperrui, who connected with Taylor after trapping a dog on Hutchinson Island and the latter reached out to offer support. "A good chunk of individuals volunteer at both places. Renegade Paws resonates with a lot of folks concerned about dogs and community."

As a foster parent, Sperrui said she typically keeps dogs for a year and gets those that are more fearful and have trust issues with people. Taking dogs off the street and putting them into foster homes rather than a kennel, she noted, gives them a chance they wouldn't have had otherwise.

Taylor's heart for dogs and people goes beyond Renegade Paws. Sperrui said she's gone with Taylor to homeless camps and watched her provide food, vaccinations and microchipping for the individuals' dogs.

"Jennifer does what she can to keep dogs and families together," Sperrui said. "She's an extremely giving person, sometimes to the detriment of taking care of herself. She has a huge heart and cares for people and dogs. That's a rare quality. Jennifer's an amazing person."

Another volunteer and foster parent is Caroline Young. The Pooler resident has fostered several dogs and volunteers by cleaning out the kennels and her favorite thing of walking the canines. She became involved with Renegade Paws early this year after moving from California to Pooler.

"Jennifer does what she can to keep dogs and families together. She's an extremely giving person … She has a huge heart and cares for people and dogs."

"I've met so many good people through Renegade Paws," said Young, remarking she likes dogs more than people sometimes. "Jennifer is one of the finest, most supportive people I've met. I've watched her drop everything for humans and dogs. I'm blown away by her capacity to extend herself. She maintains kindness and generosity and created a safe haven for people and pups."

Reflective of Taylor's impact in the community, Taylor noted, in early August, after the air conditioning went out, 50 people showed up to rescue 50 dogs at the kennel. "She's done so much good people want to help her out," Young said. So many people in Savannah - probably 85 percent - know about Renegade Paws. It's such a big part of my Savannah life."

It all started with a woman whose life was difficult growing up but who has found a true home and calling with Renegade Paws. Given her compassionate and altruistic nature, it's not surprising Taylor wouldn't object to her nonprofit closing its doors one day.

"I love my job and I love the animals, but we can't save them all," Taylor said. "Spay and neuter and access to care is the only thing we can do. We spay and neuter at no cost to the community so we can decrease the pet population and hopefully not have to do this in 20 years."

In a few short years, we've grown from a dozen fosters to over 300 foster families. We have expanded our organization to include a community program that provides free spay and neuter services and food to help keep pets in homes.

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Co-founder and director Jennifer Taylor says it best. "We work all hours of the day, every day of the week because the innocent souls that come our way need us. And they are worth every bit of blood, sweat and tears." ■

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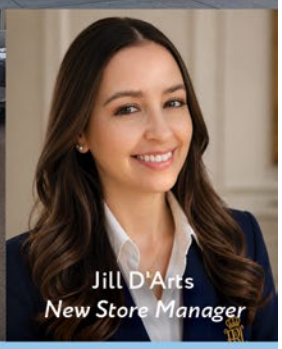
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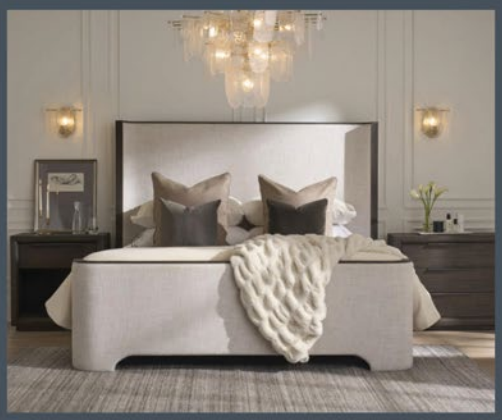
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Flood Preparation Tips from the City of Pooler

The City of Pooler has areas that have a history of flooding in the streets, yards and on some occasions, water has reached levels entering garages and buildings. In most cases, as soon as tides change and pressure is relieved from the canal system, the flood waters in these areas subside. It should be noted that some areas in Pooler do experience some flooding even though they are not in the designated Special Flood Hazard Area.

Predictions are that this hurricane season, which runs June 1st to November 30th, there will be 19 named storms. Out of these, 9 could reach hurricane status with 4 becoming major hurricanes of Category 3 or higher intensity. We need to be prepared because hurricanes are unpredictable. Located 30 miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean, our city would experience some flooding from a Class 3 storm surge and severe flooding from a Class 5 storm surge.

There are several actions you can take to mitigate the flood hazard, including:

1. Know the flood warning procedures.
2. Prior to evacuating your residence, turn off electricity, gas and water in your home.
3. During times of heavy rainfall, monitor the level of water in the drainage way and stay tuned to radio or TV for possible flood warning.
4. Evacuate the flood hazard area in times of impending flood or when advised to do so by the police chief or fire chief.
5. Do not walk through flowing water as little as 6 inches of moving water can knock you off your feet.
6. If your car stalls in high water, abandon it immediately and seek higher ground. More people drown in their cars than anywhere else.
7. Keep children away from flood waters, ditches, culverts, unstable stream banks and storm drains.
8. Be especially cautious at night.

Many buildings can be protected against flooding by retrofitting. Retrofitting is changing an existing structure in some manner to help reduce flooding. Some retrofitting techniques are waterproofing walls and doors, adding waterproof fences (usually brick or concrete) with sealing gates and even elevating the building above flood levels. Emergency measures you can take during a flood which will help reduce property damage include:

1. Place furniture on beds, then personal items on top of the furniture. Anchor, secure or weigh down items which may float or move.
2. Move cardboard and newspapers to high ground. Otherwise, they may disintegrate and/or clog drains when the flood waters recede.
3. Put chemicals (insecticides, weed killers, those that give off heat, explosive or toxic gases when exposed to water) in waterproof containers and remove to high areas of the building.
4. Note that some flood protection measures may need a building permit and others may not be safe for your type of building, so be sure to talk to the City of Pooler.
5. Avoid backflow of sewer lines by closing off all sewer line entries into the house. If this is a somewhat regular occurrence during heavy rains, you may consider installing a backflow prevention valve on your sewer line. If you have a backflow prevention valve, be sure it is properly maintained. All appliances must be disconnected prior to re-establishing electrical service. Getting around debris or wreckage to get to electrical outlets after a flood may be difficult and perhaps dangerous.

City Staff can make site visits, upon request, to assist property owners with flooding, drainage, and sewer problems and to address any site-specific flooding concerns within the community. The service is provided at no charge. For additional information on flooding, flood insurance, flood zones, retrofitting, how to pick a contractor, obtain an elevation certificate, past flooding or environmentally sensitive area or wetlands, you may call the Planning & Zoning Department at (912) 748-7261. Free publications on how to protect your property are available at City Hall and additional information can be found on the City of Pooler's website at www.pooler-ga.gov and FEMA's website at www.fema.gov

All development in the floodplain (not just construction of buildings) needs local permits. Always check with the Building/Inspections Department before you build on, make substantial improvements, alter, regrade or fill on your property. A permit is needed to ensure that these types of projects do not cause problems with other properties. If you see building or work without a "permit sign" posted, contact the Building/Inspections Department at (912) 748-7261. The ordinance also requires that all substantial improvements to a building be treated as a new building. That is the structure must be elevated one 2 feet above the base flood elevation. A substantial improvement is when the value of an addition, alteration, repair or reconstruction project equals to or exceeds 50% of the value of the existing building. Substantially damaged buildings must also be brought up to the same standards. More information on the substantial improvement and substantial damage rules can be found in *Answers to Questions about Substantially Damaged Buildings*. Copies are available at Pooler City Hall. ■

For more information about flood risk in Pooler, visit www.pooler-ga.gov or call 912-748-7261.

WHAT POOLER RESIDENTS ARE SAYING

Themes, voices, and standout comments from the community survey

WHAT PEOPLE LOVE

Convenience
Shopping, dinning, services, and daily needs are close by

Location
Easy access to Savannah, the airport, interstates, and regional destinations

Amenities
Residents value the variety of restaurants, retail, and entertainment

Neighborhood feel
Several describe a friendly, connected, small-town atmosphere

Community ties
People, public safety, and local relationships were praised

WHAT NEEDS ATTENTION

- **Traffic**
- **Growth and development**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Parks & Recreation**
- **Housing affordability**
- **Schools**





THE BIG PICTURE

Pooler comes across as a community people appreciate for convenience, accessibility and amenities, but many residents worry that rapid growth is eroding what works. Traffic is the clearest frustration, often tied to development, rezoning and road capacity. Across the responses, residents ask for more green space, parks, trails, family activities and a stronger sense of local identity as Pooler grows.

THEY WANT MORE OF...

- Local shopping
- Fine dining
- Walking & biking trails
- Parks
- Family activities
- Entertainment
- Night life
- Attractions
- Community amenities



LOCAL FAVORITES

Tom Triplett Park and Three Tree Coffee were among the most frequently mentioned. Other repeat favorites include Pie Society, Ember Lotus, Sam Snead's and the Tanger Outlets area.

IN THEIR WORDS

"Relationship-driven town."

"More trees!"

"It's amazing."

"It takes 45 minutes to travel 6 miles."

"Great location! But traffic can be bad."

"You don't have to look far for anything!"



Source: Pooler Community Survey



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The Moment You Realize You've Become *"The Voice in Their Head"*

by Alycia Calderin



It happens quietly. There's no ceremony, no milestone photo, no warning. Just a random moment where your child says something about themselves, and you recognize your own words staring back at you.

Sometimes it's harmless: *"I can't, I'm not good at that."*

Sometimes it lands heavier: *"I always mess things up."*

And suddenly you realize: you're not just raising a child anymore. You're shaping the voice they'll hear when no one else is around.

I used to think parenting was about teaching manners, routines, right from wrong. I didn't realize I was also writing the internal script they'll carry into classrooms, friendships, relationships, and rooms I'll never step foot in.

They're listening when we think they aren't. They're absorbing tone, not just words. They're learning how to talk to themselves by how we talk to them, and how we talk about ourselves.

The first time it really hit me, it scared me. Because I know the voice in my own head. I know where it came from. And I know how long it took to unlearn the parts that weren't kind. I don't want my stress to become their self doubt. I don't want my exhaustion to become their inner critic. I don't want my "I'm fine" to teach them to swallow everything.

But here's the part no one talks about: we won't get it right all the time. We will raise our voices when we're overwhelmed. We'll sigh too loudly. We'll say things we wish we could take back. And yes, some of that will echo longer than we'd like.

What matters is what echoes most. The apologies. The corrections. The moments we say, "I was wrong." The times we choose gentler words, even when we're tired.

- Every time we tell them, "*You're allowed to try*," **we plant courage.**
- Every time we say, "*Mistakes don't define you*," **we plant grace.**
- Every time we say, "*I love you even when it's hard*," **we plant safety.**

One day, when they're older and standing alone in a moment that scares them, they won't hear our voices out loud anymore. They'll hear them inside.

And I hope, more than anything, that when they do, it sounds like reassurance instead of judgment. Like encouragement instead of fear. Like love, steady and familiar, reminding them they are capable, worthy, and not alone.

That's when you realize: Parenting isn't just about raising kids. It's about becoming the voice you hope they'll carry with them forever.



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Meet The women behind the wins



Hannah Sikes
Best Female Business Owner



Michelle Quick
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Marijane Swanson
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Villas at Park Avenue

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Sawaddee Ka Thai Cuisine

Best Assisted Living
Oaks at Pooler

Best Attorney
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Home Town Auto Care

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Camille Moore

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Small Cakes Savannah Quarters

Best Bank
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Jada Pinckney | *Great Oaks Bank*

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Noble Roots

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Chop Barber Shop

Best Barber
Susan Mueller | *CHOP Barbershop*

Best Bartender
Jenny Spikes | *Greenfire Pizza & Sports Bar*

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Buff City Soap

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Jim 'N Nick's Bar-B-Q

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Hello Retail Therapy

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& Farmers Market

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Coastal Crashouts Athletic Club

Best Community Sports Coach (K-12)
Miguel Calderin

Best Community Sports Team
Coastal Crashouts Athletic Club

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Stacie New | *West Chatham YMCA*

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Katelyn Baker | *Miller Dental Group*

Best Dentist
Dr. Julie Howard DMD | *Miller Dental Group Pooler*

HANNAH SIKES

POOLER MAGAZINE'S BEST FEMALE BUSINESS OWNER

Hannah Sikes, voted **Best Female Business Owner for the second year running** and the powerhouse behind Full Bloom Salon & Dry Bar in Pooler, Georgia, attributes her success to a simple philosophy: doing the right thing every single day.

When things get hectic and the salon runs behind, you won't find Hannah hiding in the back. Instead, she is out on the floor, catching up with clients, helping the stylists, and keeping it real. That mix of community, personal connection, and luxury is exactly what makes Full Bloom a standout beauty destination. Hannah truly believes every woman deserves personalized, pampered service.

Business Savvy

Two years into working at a salon, the owner offered to sell, and Hannah leaped. At just 20 years old, she became a business owner while her friends were still out partying. She admits she grew up fast and made plenty of mistakes, but that early trial by fire shaped the leader she is today.

And she must be doing something right because **Full Bloom Salon & Dry Bar was voted Best Hair Salon in Pooler for 2025 and 2026.**

Being a local Springfield girl gave Hannah a head start. She knows her community and often discovers that she cuts hair for a client's mom, sister, friend, or neighbor. Those hometown connections created powerful word-of-mouth growth that continues to fuel the business.

Seven years into running Full Bloom, Hannah has also learned how to balance being a supportive friend with being a respected boss. Managing a diverse team means understanding what motivates each person, from busy working moms to young women just beginning their careers.

Hannah is never afraid to jump behind the shampoo bowl, blow out a client's hair, or step in when a difficult situation arises. She wants her employees to know she has their backs and strongly supports a healthy work-life balance. Her goal is to create an environment where team members can build successful careers without sacrificing their families.

Always Learning

In an industry where trends change constantly, continuing education is a priority. The Full Bloom team participates in quarterly education and travels to major industry shows in Orlando to learn new techniques, discover products, and stay ahead of what clients are asking for.

That dedication recently caught the attention of luxury haircare brand Maria Nila. After bringing the product line into the salon in January, Hannah received an exclusive invitation for an all-expenses-paid trip to Sweden. In true leader fashion, she decided to bring stylist Marijane Swanson along, rewarding her for the quality and volume of her work. For Hannah, moments like that make the long hours of business ownership worthwhile.



Giving Back

Community is just as important to Hannah as business success. When one of her stylists suggested a school donation drive, Hannah turned the idea into Full Bloom's first annual Back-to-School Giveback Event. Students received free haircuts in exchange for donated school supplies.

Hannah initially expected to help only a handful of children. Instead, the salon provided more than 60 free haircuts and collected enough supplies to distribute among four area schools. Full Bloom's stylists volunteered their time, while Hannah organized and promoted the event and provided hair products and lunch.

The salon has also supported Manna House Ministries through a Holiday Food Drive, and Hannah is already looking ahead to another community partnership for a toy drive during the upcoming holiday season.

Work & Life

Hannah's biggest balancing act these days is being both a mother and business owner. She describes modern motherhood as sometimes feeling like trying to sweep sand on a beach. Between being a present mom, supportive wife, and strong team leader, there is always something demanding her attention.

But motherhood has also changed her perspective, helping her worry less about the little things and appreciate the beautiful chaos. At the center of her life is her husband, Dalton, who works at Gulfstream, and their son, Shepard. Hannah and Dalton grew up together, attended the same high school, and became extensions of one another's families.

With a strong family support system and a dependable salon team, Hannah can occasionally step away, travel, and enjoy life outside the business. Still, Full Bloom is never far from her heart. "I want to thank everyone for voting for me, and I especially want to congratulate my team members on receiving awards this year as well," Hannah says.

For Hannah, Full Bloom has never been just about hair. It is about helping women feel confident, cared for, and welcome. And after seven years of building a business, a team, and a reputation in the community she calls home, Hannah Sikes is still doing what got her here in the first place: showing up and doing the right thing every single day.

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L.A. Pete

Pooler Magazine's Best Local Artist





For Pete Castaneda, better known as L.A. Pete, tattooing has never been just about putting ink on skin. It is about creating artwork people carry for life.

Since picking up his first tattoo machine in 1988, L.A. Pete has watched the industry transform from a niche profession into a respected art form embraced by people from nearly every walk of life. Along the way, he has tattooed soldiers, firefighters, police officers, veterans and everyday customers looking to honor loved ones, commemorate milestones or simply express themselves through art.

Today, L.A. Pete is the owner of **High Rank Tattoo in Pooler**, where experience, artistry and professionalism have earned the studio a loyal following and Pete recognition as ***Pooler Magazine*'s Best Local Artist**.

His journey began in Southern California, where drawing came naturally long before tattooing entered the picture. "I've always drawn," he said. "I took art classes in high school and even studied drafting."

While serving in the military, friends recognized his artistic ability and encouraged him to try tattooing. His first tools were homemade machines assembled from cassette-player motors and guitar strings.

"I was nervous," he said. "But people liked what I did, and seeing how happy they were afterward, that's what hooked me."

The military eventually brought him to Fort Stewart, where his artwork caught the attention of Jack and Sharon Witt, owners of California Tattoo, Savannah's first tattoo shop.

Pete joined the shop in 1993 and learned from experienced professionals, including artists with formal training from the Savannah College of Art and Design. "I didn't go to college for art," he said. "I learned from people who did. They had the degrees, and I got to absorb everything they knew."

After returning to California in 2001 to be closer to his children, Pete opened the original High Rank Tattoo outside Fort Irwin. Twelve years later, with his children grown and Georgia still feeling like home, he headed east again.

When Pooler updated its zoning to allow tattoo studios, another opportunity appeared. High Rank Tattoo opened in Pooler on Halloween 2020 and has continued growing ever since.

Pete is quick to credit his team. Tattoo artist Ray Calico joined him after the two worked together in Richmond Hill. His son PJ, known around the shop as "Little Pete," followed in his father's footsteps after leaving the military. Linda Kong, a Clemson University graduate, also found an opportunity at High Rank after other studios were hesitant to take on a newcomer. "I saw her talent," Pete said. "We've got a really good, family-oriented crew."



30 Years of Advancement

The tattoo industry looks dramatically different from when Pete began. "The biggest change is technology," he said. Pencils, tracing paper and hand-drawn stencils have largely been replaced by digital tools. Today, artists can create and revise designs on iPads using programs such as Procreate and share artwork instantly with clients.

Equipment has changed just as dramatically. High Rank Tattoo now operates with a completely disposable setup using single-use cartridges, improving safety for both artists and customers.

Public perception has also shifted. "When I started, tattoos weren't accepted like they are now," Pete said. Today, visible tattoos and sleeves are common among firefighters, law enforcement officers and professionals across many industries.

Despite those changes, one piece of advice remains constant: Do your homework. With more tattoo shops now operating throughout the area, Pete encourages customers to research the individual artist, not just the studio. "Look at their work," he said.

Someone seeking portrait realism should study portrait portfolios. Someone interested in fine line work should examine an artist's line work. Pete also recommends checking local health department inspection scores.

Price should not be the deciding factor. Once a tattoo is on your skin, it is too late to discover that the least expensive option was not necessarily the best one. Pete sees that lesson regularly when clients come to High Rank seeking cover-up work for poorly executed tattoos.

Different Styles for Different Folks

Like any art form, tattooing includes many different styles. Pete does not have one favorite. He began with American traditional tattooing, expanded into colorful West Coast work while living in California and later became known in Georgia for black-and-gray realism and fine-line tattoos.

"I just like doing tattoos," he said. "I like challenging tattoos." Among the most rewarding are realistic portraits of loved ones. "When someone looks in the mirror and sees their family member, not the reference photo, but actually recognizes them in the tattoo, that's when you know you did your job."

Even after nearly four decades, creative requests continue to keep the work interesting. One customer even requested a scannable tattoo that played the song "Georgia on My Mind," blending traditional body art with digital technology.

For L.A. Pete, tattooing is ultimately about combining artistic skill with technical precision, adapting to new technology while respecting traditional craftsmanship and creating something meaningful enough for a client to wear every day for the rest of their life. "We just try to put out the best work that we can," he said.

After nearly four decades in the industry, that philosophy continues to leave a lasting impression, one tattoo at a time.

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PATRICK & NICOLE BAILEY
Voted Pooler's "Best Couple"

"She and I are rock solid. We're a team. We're a unit," Patrick Bailey says of his wife, Nicole. Patrick and Nicole are pleased to call Pooler home. Patrick is Pooler born and bred, while Nicole relocated to the area many years ago. The couple are proud parents of one daughter, 14, and two sons, 12 and 10.

"Pooler has such a special place in my heart. It means so much to me. I love the people. I've seen it grow so much," Nicole says.

Commitment to Service and Community

Patrick and Nicole share a strong commitment to service through their careers. Patrick is a detective, while Nicole is a registered nurse currently in school to become a nurse practitioner. Patrick comes from a family of military and law enforcement service. His mom, Nancy Bailey, one of his biggest inspirations, was a member of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

"I absolutely love it. I've always felt called. I come from a long line of people who have served in some capacity," he says.

Patrick began his career with Chatham County Emergency Services, eventually becoming a paramedic. He later entered law enforcement, serving as an officer and member of the special weapons and tactics unit (SWAT) before becoming a detective.

Patrick values helping make his community a better place and the time his profession allows him to spend with his family. "Service to others is very important," Patrick says.

Nicole agrees."We are able to make an impact through our careers; I love that. We care about the community. We care about people. I love being a nurse," Nicole says.

Nicole has worked in several areas of nursing, including as an emergency room nurse. Having been on the front line of medical care, she understands what it means to care for another person's welfare. She sees that same desire to make a positive difference in Patrick. "We both have fields where we can give back," she says.

Time Together

Patrick and Nicole enjoy spending time with family and friends, but they are intentional about making time for each other. They love traveling and date nights, whether that means a movie night at home or trying a new restaurant. Patrick admits they are both big foodies. They also enjoy CrossFit workouts and an occasional run at Tom Triplett Community Park.

Triplett holds an especially meaningful memory: it is where Patrick proposed. On a cold, dark and gloomy day, Nicole was hesitant about going anywhere, unaware of what Patrick had planned. He eventually convinced her to go to the park, where they walked to the bridge over the pond and he asked her to marry him.

"We finally [came] to that little bridge. I was shaking because of how cold I was and shaking because of how nervous I was. It was fantastic," he recalls.

Nicole was beyond words, but she had no doubt Patrick was the man she wanted to spend her life with. "I knew he was my soulmate and was so excited to start the next chapter with him," she says.

Words from the Heart

Patrick adores his wife and still remembers a heartfelt assertion he made to her sometime after his proposal. "I would not have proposed to you if I knew that you were not the one and if I could not see myself with you for the rest of my life."

Nicole feels she can never speak highly enough of her husband. "In my opinion, Patrick is the definition of what a husband should be. He is strong, caring, responsible and always puts us first. I am so grateful," she says.

Family

Patrick and Nicole treasure the time they spend with their children, from playground days to ball games and practices. "I [have] three amazing kids. Right now, we have the time and opportunity and the blessing to be with them every day. Regardless of what else is going on in our lives, we make it a point to be there. I pride myself on that. When they're older, and I'm gone, they'll have that. That's what matters most," Patrick says.

They also want to provide the best examples possible for their children, including showing them what a healthy marriage looks like.

"They're getting older; I have such a small window to teach them right from wrong. I want my sons to see how I treat their mom to be an example of how they should treat their spouses. Yes, I still open my wife's car door. I still pull the chair out for her, and I tell her how good she looks. I want my daughter to see how she should be treated," he says.

Nicole refuses to take any moment for granted.

"I want to enjoy as much time as we can with them while also teaching them what a good, healthy relationship looks like so that one day, they can find that same kind of love," she says.

Gratitude

The couple is grateful to have been voted Pooler's "Best Couple." It is especially meaningful because they get to represent the city they both love and are proud to call home.

"To have this together is very special for me and for her. She's absolutely the greatest woman ever. We are each other's biggest fans, supporters, cheerleaders. We feel honored," Patrick says.

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