

CITRUS COUNTY CHRONICLE

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Founded by Albert M. Williamson
"You may differ with my choice, but not my right to choose."
 —David S. Arthurs publisher emeritus

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Editorial board shares best wishes

Each year, members of the Chronicle editorial board share their Christmastime thoughts with readers. Here is this year's Christmas message:

My Christmas wish is that the people in our fine community will collectively celebrate the beauty of our surroundings and the individuality of our neighbors so we can show kindness and concern for each other.

—Gerry Mulligan

Reading about murder and war and famine and abuse and corruption and hatred and injustice — and on and on — leaves one to wonder why; why can't the human race embrace goodness, care for one another and treat our existence as the gift it is?

It's the gravity of bad news that leaves a sense of helplessness.

In Citrus County — and all over the world — people defy that gravity every day. There's an indomitable spirit, an unfathomable force that cannot be underestimated.

Each and every day in our community, people extend care to those who have fallen on hard times, those who are alone, those who are developmentally or physically disabled, those who are mentally ill, those who are broke and hungry, those who lack skills to survive in modern society.

It's an imperfect world and the economics of supply and demand in a world of good and bad can be overwhelming. But don't tell the masses who in big and small ways refuse to give in.

These people come from different walks of life but share a spirit of goodness. As we give thanks on this Christmas Day, the heavenly spirit that's been infused into these earthly beings is one gift we should never take for granted.

—Charlie Brennan

In celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Christmas is a time of joy and of giving from the heart. Having lived in many locales during my lifetime, I

have yet to find a place where the joy of Christmas and the spirit of giving are as alive as in Citrus County. Christmas parades, concerts, decorated homes and bedecked businesses abound as heartfelt wishes of "Merry Christmas" fill the air. The spirit of giving also fills the air as numerous groups and individuals generously give of their money and time to make sure that no child or adult is forgotten. So, on this Christmas Day, I feel blessed that I chose a place to call home that truly embodies the spirit of Christmas. To all, jolly wishes for a Merry and Blessed Christmas.

—Curt Ebitz, citizen member

Especially those of us who experienced losses in 2016 understand that it's the sweet, simple things that matter most. People forget years and remember moments. My Christmas wish for everyone is this: I wish you a day of ordinary miracles, little things to rejoice in. I wish you a day of happiness and little bite-size pieces of perfection that give you the feeling the Lord is smiling on you, holding you so gently because you are someone special and rare.

—Rebecca Martin, citizen member

My holiday wish for everyone is that the peace of the season will transcend the hustle, and during this time we will pause to remember that there is much good in the world and there are many people who dedicate themselves to making our community and our world a better place. As we enter a new year, my hope is that each of us will be more thoughtful of others and be more thankful for our many blessings.

—Mac Harris

My wish is for those who've been elected to lead, whether local, state or national, do so with a visionary eye toward the future and a caring heart for those they represent.

—Mike Arnold

UNITED WAY NEEDS YOUR HELP

■ The United Way of Citrus County needs your help. Please consider making a \$36 donation to the effort. (Any amount contribution would be great).

■ You can send your checks to Gerry Mulligan, Citrus County Chronicle, 1624 N. Meadowcrest Blvd., Crystal River, FL 34429. You can also drop off the contributions at the Chronicle office in Inverness or Meadowcrest.

Thank you to all who make this journey work

Merry Christmas! I hope this finds you with a warm cup of coffee, cozy jammies and heart full of joy. Christmas wishes are one of my favorite parts of this holiday. The hallway of our home is presently lined with Christmas cards from friends and family, far and near; all sending their love and wishes for a beautiful Christmas. In that spirit, I would like to send out a few of my own through this Christmas Day column.

The first goes to Mike Bays, Dr. Vernon Fowler, Ray Chirayath and Marie Straight who have all served as board chair during my tenure at United Way. Each one gave their heart and soul to our organization. Serving as a board chair is a volunteer role that quickly racks up quite a few hours. I appreciate the leadership, guidance and devotion that each of you invested into our community. Thanks for answering phone calls and emails at all hours of the day and night. Thanks for "thinking big" and believing in me as I steered our organization in a new direction. Mostly, I thank you for your support and friendship as together we make this place we call home better for all.

A special Christmas wish goes out to our dear friends at the Chronicle. You give volume to our voice and I am so very grateful for the heart you all have for Citrus County. Gerry Mulligan, thank you for taking a chance and starting this United

Way with Wilson Burns and Steve Lamb and for being our biggest cheerleader for the last 30 years. Deb Kamlot, there are not enough words to describe the abundance of your love for our community and I am so very thankful for your support and friendship. Renee McCallum, thank you for working so hard to make sure the workplace giving campaign is so great. Tom Feeney, thanks for allowing your co-workers to duct tape you to the wall — all in the name of supporting United Way — Dave



Amy Meek

UNITED WAY

Worlton, Lori Driver and Trista Stokes, thanks for being creative geniuses and sharing your talents with us. Mike Arnold, thank you for making space for this weekly column and for allowing us to share our story with Citrus County. Nancy Kennedy, thanks for being awesome and for highlighting our successes.

A special holiday wish is being sent to our amazing volunteers. I hope this holiday is as warm as your heart for our community. To our 20 board members, 160 Reading Pals volunteers, 100 Kids Tri volunteers, 25 Land That Job volunteers, 45 campaign coordinators, 40 Impact Council members, without all of you, our job would be impossible. To Sue Taylor, Diane Daniels, Rob Danielson, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and thank you for your countless hours of work in our office. To Janet Siegle, Happy Hanukkah and thank you for your

outstanding commitment to making sure all of the behind scenes work gets done.

Warmest wishes to our amazing donors. You give and give some more. Your contributions feed the hungry, house the homeless, bring financial stability, make learning fun for kids, support seniors, encourage veterans and so much more. On behalf of the 2,000 people this United Way helps every month, please accept our deepest gratitude.

Blessings and joy are extended to everyone at Publix for your generous support and for making all of our holidays tasty. To everyone at Duke Energy, thank you for your outstanding contributions and for keeping the energy flowing that keep our Christmas lights glowing. To Jewel and Steve Lamb, giving is who you are, it's a part of your DNA. You two set the gold standard of community stewards. May your Christmas be filled with love.

To close out this list of Christmas wishes, I send love, peace and joy to my precious family. Joe, Joe and Jackson, you are the light of my life and my greatest blessing. I am overwhelmed by your love, inspired by your faith and humbled by the gift of each of you. Christmas blessings and wishes are the most special part of this day because they all represent the best gift we could ever receive, a baby who came to make all things new and show us all the most perfect examples of grace and mercy. Merry Christmas!

Amy Meek is CEO of United Way of Citrus County.

Are your kids ready?

As the economy continues to improve, we'll no doubt continue to see an increase in the number and variety of jobs in our area. But are we ready for those jobs?

Every parent wants things better for their kids than they have had. It's the cornerstone that drives the American Dream. Pressure from my generation to have their sons and daughters attend a four-year college has pushed our education system to minimize career and technical skills.

Many have forgotten that there are good jobs in the skilled craft and tradesperson areas. This is especially true in our three counties where plumbers, electricians, HVAC technicians and the like are needed to serve the large number of retirees that have moved here. While manufacturing and logistics were hard hit by the recession, these business sectors are also on the upswing here. But they need a skilled workforce.

The Florida Chamber 2030 Report calls "talent" the new currency of economic development. Certainly, we can attest that if talent is not there to support the vision and direction of a company's growth, financial

incentives will not bring them here.

We are fortunate that our school boards and superintendents, along with the leadership at the College of Central Florida, are investing in education for skilled careers. As parents, we should be investigating the career options that our educational institutions offer. Step back from what we want our kids to do and find out what interests them. Last year, CareerSource CLM and the Marion School District did a Career Expo. This was a good idea for collaborating on this career awareness effort for our middle and high school students. We are planning our first Career Expo in Citrus and Levy Counties.

On our YouTube site, <http://bit.ly/CSCLMYouTube>, we have the first 20 of an ongoing series of videos that highlight manufacturers in our area — what they make and the skills they need. This year we are expanding this project to Citrus and Levy and adding technology careers. We are also going into the classroom to highlight the training that our educational institutions have that will lead to these new career opportunities.



Rusty Skinner

GUEST COLUMN

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To those who dismiss this because they do not think the jobs are there, I say you are wrong. Today's job market is not just Ocala, Marion County; Crystal River, Citrus County; or Chief Land and Levy County. It is a one- to one-and-a-half-hour commute from where you live. Our world is smaller and our job market is larger. As the economy grows and unemployment continues to fall, the antiquated idea of a captive workforce will also be an issue for our area's employers. The notion of "we pay good for County" will need to be evaluated in terms of that broader regional labor market.

The talent supply that will be our future begins to form in our middle schools and matures at Marion Technical College, Withlacoochee Technical College and the College of Central Florida. They are all gearing up to help our kids be prepared to start their careers. Are you?

Rusty Skinner is CEO of CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion which is part of the CareerSource Florida network of 24 workforce development areas. CareerSource CLM is a business-led nonprofit that connects employers with qualified, skilled talent and career seekers with employment and career development opportunities.

Hot Corner: CHRISTMAS CALLS

■ My grandparents were Russian immigrants who grew up in a community diverse in religion and many cultures. We all shared a respect for each other and a love for our country, the United States of America.

When I wished my fellow citizens "happy holidays," it was with a recognition that others may be celebrating Hanukkah, Christmas or maybe some other religious persuasion.

Additionally, the coming new year was something we all had to look forward to. Have always took pride in wishing "happy holidays" as a recognition of our beautiful melting pot that defines our country. Having been raised Catholic, to me, it demonstrated the inclusiveness of Jesus Christ, who appealed to the outcasts of society and gave them hope.

The concept of political correctness has become a wedge to divide us and I would ask those who are triggered by an expression of

inclusiveness to consider the compassion of Christ and that may be the intent of this holiday greeting. Merry Christmas, happy Hanukkah and happy holidays to everyone. All the best for a peaceful new year.

■ I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Christmas angel in line at the Hernando Post Office who paid for my package to be mailed when I realized I was short on money, ensuring that it got to our grandchildren on time. She lives the true Christmas spirit. I assure her again, I will pass this favor on. Thank you.

■ This is from some of the people in Sugar-mill Woods. We'd like to say happy holidays to all the employees of the Chronicle and especially the Sound Off people. You are great and that there and just have a great holiday and Christmas and that there. Thank you.

■ I just wanted to say that there's no "X" in Christmas.