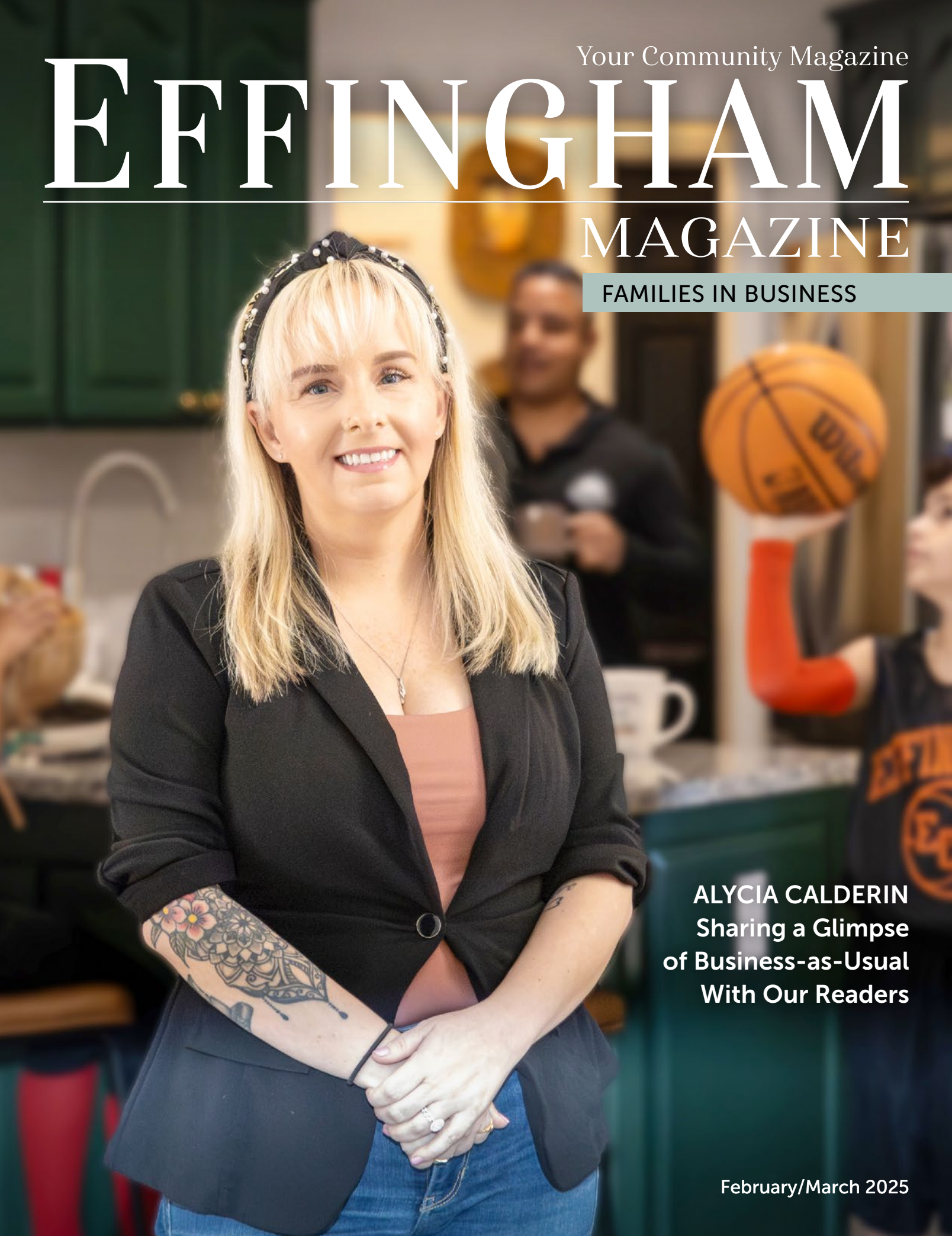
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February/March 2025



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
Write and tell us what you think. *Effingham 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 Phone numbers will not be published.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
Effingham 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 Effingham area will be considered.

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Families in Business


Jan Southern

As we dig our way out of January's historic snow, I'm thrilled to share one of our best issues yet: the **Families in Business** edition of *Effingham Magazine*. This idea came to me nearly four years ago, and it has since become a beloved tradition. Effingham's families are as inspiring as they are deeply rooted in our community, and their stories never fail to intrigue me. Whether working together as entrepreneurs, business owners, or colleagues, these families exemplify the power of collaboration. From spouses and siblings to parents and cousins, so many amazing people are building their dreams side by side—and we love sharing their journeys with you.

In this issue, we are excited to officially introduce our newest columnist, Alycia Calderin. Alycia is a dynamic woman who, alongside her husband, runs a business, works as a realtor, and is a devoted mother of four. You can learn more about her on page 24 and dive into her debut column, Momming Unfiltered, on page 27. Be sure to watch for more of Alycia's insights in the months ahead.

When I think of families in business in Effingham, one of the first that comes to mind is Dr. Misty Seale and Erich Perez, owners of iHeart Dental in Rincon. After many years of running a thriving practice, Erich has recently branched out into more creative pursuits. Read all about it on page 18.

Also in this issue, don't miss the latest installment of our restaurant series, The Corner Table, where we share the freshest updates on food and dining around Effingham (page 28). And for those who love all things coffee, Gail Mihalik continues her popular series with another installment of culinary expertise on page 36.

We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we enjoyed creating it. Thank you for letting us share these incredible stories with you—happy reading!

Jan Southern

CEO/Publisher
Effingham Magazine

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Melissa McBride Stille

of Stille-DeWitt Health Brokerage, LLC

Are you turning 65 and need help navigating through your options?



Melissa McBride Stille Works for Clients—Not the Insurance Company!

Are you turning 65 and thinking about retirement and don't know what to do? "Many people are trying to decide if they should retire and how that would impact their health insurance." says independent insurance agent Melissa McBride Stille, "If someone is 65 years old and wants to stop working, knowing their health care options ahead of that decision is crucial because there are far reaching consequences."

Melissa has been in the health insurance industry for 17 years and is the sole proprietor of Stille-DeWitt Health Brokerage. She says, "DeWitt Insurance Agency has been in business since 1956. When I purchased the agency's health department, I incorporated it into my agency name to keep the continuity within the community." As a health insurance broker specializing in Medicare, she is dedicated to presenting her clients with the best health care options available.

She says at age 65 most people need to think about the pros and cons of Medicare options or continuing insurance through their employer. Don't stress over the paperwork she says, "All you need is to bring me is yourself and your current group benefits. Don't depend on your Human Resources department to help you because they are not insurance specialists. We can do a three way call between yourself, your HR dept and me so I can thoroughly assess your situation. Together we will optimize your benefits while tailoring them to your needs."

Melissa can also facilitate your Medicare application with the Social Security office. "There are many factors, particularly with Medicare Part B." Some scenarios involve penalties but they may not apply to you, that's why working with a Medicare specialist is critical to obtaining the best outcome.

Each client presents individual issues. You may have a spouse who is dependent on your benefits and too young for Medicare. Melissa will help you compare the cost of staying at your current position and using your employer benefits plan, versus retiring and having your spouse obtain health insurance through the marketplace. Perhaps your spouse has a chronic illness or is in an assisted living facility—these are important factors in your decision.

Step By Step Process

- Is Medicare Primary or Secondary
- Open enrollment periods
- Deductibles vs out of pocket
- Spousal Considerations
- All income levels need expert guidance

Melissa also works with Medicare recipients under 65, including those who have Medicare through Social Security Disability and with people using Affordable Care Act Marketplace insurance, and some group insurances.

"I care about each and every client and do a review of everyone's health policies every year because there are so many changes annually," she says. "I like to simplify things and present you with your best options." She gives every client her cell number—it's in all of her advertising so that every client, even future clients, can feel comfortable reaching out to her. She says, "I work for my clients, not the insurance company."

If you have a question regarding Medicare or other health insurance options, give Melissa a call!

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1. Alycia Calderin is a Florida native who moved to Georgia in 2013, where she planted roots with her husband of 16 years. When she's not balancing the whirlwind of activities for her four kids, she escapes into the world of books.

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. 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.

6. Stephen Prudhomme lived in Savannah and Rincon for 25 years before moving to Pikeville, TN, with his wife and son. He's written sports, features, news and business for a number of newspapers and magazines over nearly 40 years and likes table tennis, Frisbee and running.

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. 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.

9. 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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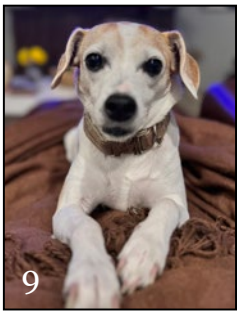

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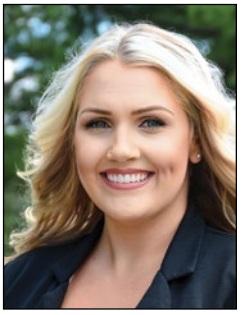

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Alycia Calderin is also the newest voice in *Effingham Magazine*, where she pens the column "Mom-ing Unfiltered." Through her candid and relatable writing, Alycia shares the joys and challenges of motherhood, offering a refreshing perspective on parenting.

Don't forget to check out *EffinghamMagazine.com* for more content, more photos and more information about events and happenings around Effingham County.

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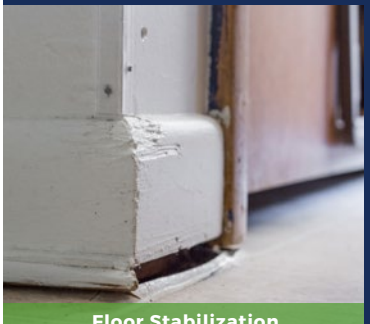
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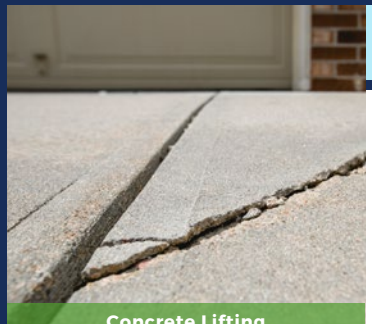
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Save the Date for the Habitat for Humanity Annual Gala

Saturday, March 15 | Moncrief Square Event Center

Celebrate attainable housing with Habitat for Humanity of Effingham County's annual fundraising gala on March 15! The event has a new look and new venue this year, utilizing the beautiful Moncrief Square in downtown Springfield. This indoor/outdoor space will hold both seated and high-top tables to enjoy cuisine and drinks while mingling with other guests. Live entertainment and testimonials from some previous Habitat partner families will liven up the evening.

"We are excited about the new format for this event," says Jimmy Rutland, president/CEO of Habitat for Humanity of Effingham County. "More people in our community will be able to learn about Habitat for Humanity's work while they spend time with friends in one of Springfield's best event spaces."

Previous attendees will recall the table decorating tradition from earlier years, where guests decorated their own tables with festive themes. This year, each Habitat staff and board member will decorate a table with a theme of their choosing. Guests will be able to vote for their favorite and the winner will receive a year's worth of bragging rights!

Tickets will include food, non-alcoholic beverages and raffle tickets that may be drawn for the opportunity to win door prizes. There will also be a silent auction with prizes donated by local businesses. All proceeds will go toward the next home building project, which is slated to break ground this spring.

Corporate sponsorships are available at multiple tiers for businesses to show support for the Habitat mission. Each tier includes tickets to the gala and levels of exposure for your business. Contact president/CEO Jimmy Rutland at 912-826-6433 for more information.



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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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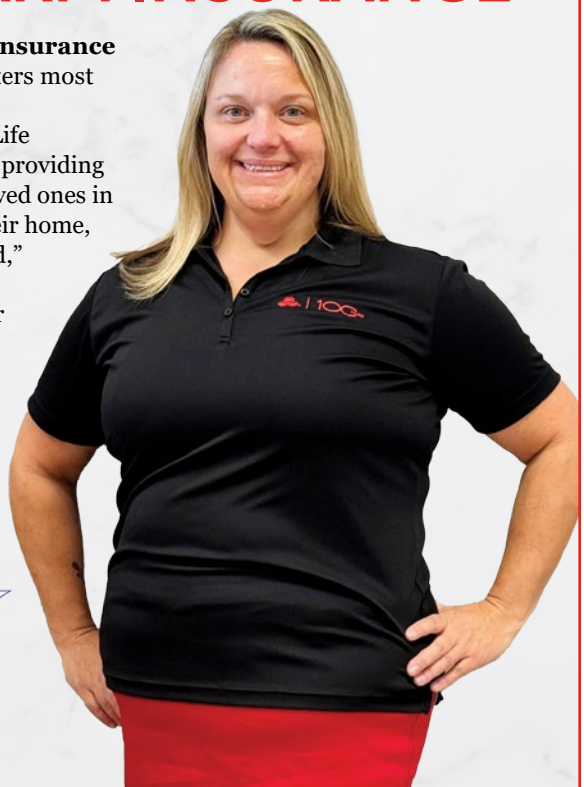
Ashley focuses on finding solutions. She says, life insurance is one such area, "Life insurance is where we can be a beacon of light during a time of trauma and loss by providing much needed funds." The proceeds can pay off debts that might otherwise leave loved ones in a difficult position. Ashley can find a policy that ensures your family can stay in their home, something she is passionate about. "As little as $20 a month can buy peace of mind," she says, "And we often settle the death claim within five days."

She supports small business as well with benefits packages for owners and their employees. Her services are free of charge every day. She says, "I love what small businesses bring to our community, from yoga studios to restaurants. Our area is growing, and it is such a wonderful community.

Ashley graduated from Georgia Southern University and is a longtime Effingham County resident. Being local means Ashley sees her customers in town, at community events and while volunteering at Habitat for Humanity, the Rotary Club, and the Effingham County Chamber of Commerce.

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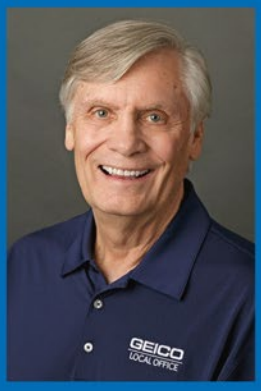
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BARKING UP THE RIGHT TREE

Erich Perez Brings Short Films to the Effingham Area

Story by Stephen Prudhomme | Photography by Erich Perez



Erich Perez describes himself as a creative individual with varied career pursuits and interests. These include photography and owning a dental practice with his wife in Rincon. The 41-year-old Pooler resident is sinking his teeth into another creative venture, one that has plenty of bark and bite and could shine the spotlight on Effingham County as an up and coming player in the movie industry.

Perez and his wife own iHeart Dental in Rincon. He's a lab technician who does the prosthetics for the practice. To help promote the business, Perez helped with commercials and received positive feedback. He started doing his own commercials and opened Kronos Media Productions in 2019, followed by a studio in 2021. That eventually led to short films, which have received positive reviews at various film festivals.

His latest, "BARK," is following a similar path. It's a dark comedy written and directed by Steven Lai and Leonard Giovenazzo and featuring an impressive lineup of veteran and rising Hollywood actors and actresses.

Ted Ricker and Chris Kleinmann, producers of the movie who work at Kronos Media Productions, set up a meeting between Lai and Perez that ultimately led to their collaboration on "BARK."

The story revolves around an Asian-American girl, Bella, and her white boyfriend, Roger. On the way to meeting Roger's parents for the first time, Bella hits a dog at night with her car. She finds the badly injured animal bloody and whimpering and hits it with a rock to put it out of its misery. Understandably upset over the incident, Bella arrives at Roger's home and finds the parents to be "super weird," according to first assistant director and SCAD student Sam Prim.

While looking through some family photos, Bella spots a picture of the dog she hit and ultimately killed. She's about to tell the family what happened when her boyfriend proposes to her. She accepts the proposal. To be continued - hopefully.

The Actors

Eric Roberts plays Roger's father, Albert. The veteran actor has over 700 film and TV credits during his long career. His movies include "The Dark Knight," "The Expendables," "National Security," and "The Specialist."

As Albert, he's the classic dad and retired professor with a dry sense of humor who gets along with everyone and thinks he's the best chef in the world, according to Prim.

Karen Culp has the role of Roger's mother, Evelyn. A veteran actress of stage and screen, she's starred in TV in "Blue Bloods," "30 Rock," House of Cards," and "Law & Order."



Evelyn is very protective of her son, Prim said, and almost has a rivalry with Bella.

One of the most unique aspects of working of working on "BARK," Culp said, was having an executive producer as hands-on as Perez.

"From airport pickups to coffee runs, he went above and beyond to make everyone feel valued," Culp said. "His dedication made a real difference to the on-set rapport."

Culp noted the other actors were not only incredibly talented but also a joy to work with. Their energy and humor, she added, made those overnight shoots fly by.

Making the experience even more enjoyable for Culp was the opportunity to film the movie in Savannah. "Savannah is an incredible city," Culp said. "It was such a privilege to work there. We were lucky to film in so many beautiful, unique spots around the city, which richly enhanced the experience."

Culp said she's played upscale, entitled women before but not in a horror/comedy.

"It's an interesting genre because it allows for uncertainty of character in order to keep the audience guessing as to whether the character is really sinister, so to speak, or just misguided," Culp said. "But at times that also kept me guessing! For instance, how much does Evelyn really know about what's going on?"

Culp added that Steven, the director, would often see her processing it and would call out "Just make a choice." She said he was very patient and it turned out that working that way was a lot of fun. "Now I'm hoping to work on more horror films," Culp said.

Brianne Tju plays Bella. Her credits include Amazon's "I Know What You Did Last Summer," "47 Meters Down, and Scream." She's also in "Uglies," an upcoming Netflix movie.

Bella, in shock over hitting the dog, is hesitant to meet Roger's parents and is super on edge, Prim noted.

Rounding out the quartet of thespians is Kiser Shelton, cast in the role of Roger. He's starred in "Strangers in The Night," and "Our Own Creation."

Prim described his character as super sheltered and the goofiest boy you've met.

Prim said Lai and Giovenazzo did a great job of handling the actors on the set and allowed them to express their talents and embody their characters. He added the cinematography is beautiful, with Savannah's iconic Spanish moss visible throughout the movie.

Proof of Concept

The 10-minute film, known as a proof of concept and designed to attract investors, was filmed in Savannah in August over three and a half days. Filming was done from 5 p.m. to 6 a.m., with two nights at a reportedly haunted home at 432 Abercorn St., and one night at Bethesda Academy.

"It went smoothly," said Perez, who is funding the film. "SCAD (Savannah



College of Art and Design) provided interns. I have a 42-person crew with skills. We had four stars and a dog. All the actors and actresses love Savannah and can't wait to come back."

The dogs, Bullet and Diesel, were handled by Kirk Brennaman, of Down and Dirty Dog Training in Effingham County. Bullet is an all Black German Shepherd, while Diesel is an all Black Rottie/Golden Retriever mix. "They were great," Perez said. "Working with animals can be challenging," Perez said.

Perez submitted the film to a the prestigious Sundance Film Festival, which will announce selected films Dec. 4.

"To get into Sundance is huge," said Perez, who also submitted his film to the Atlanta Film Festival. "The 10-minute film is a hook. I want to get someone to invest in it and make it a full feature. We hope to get full funding on it and bring it back to Savannah for production."

> "The 10-minute film is a hook. I want to get someone to invest in it and make it a full feature. We hope to get full funding on it and bring it back to Savannah for production."

Kleinmann described the venture as great. "It'll bring more attention to Savannah as a film area," he said. "There's been a lot of interest in it. We hope someone will invest in it as a full length movie, with the understanding we're making it in Savannah."

Ricker worked in the movie industry in Los Angeles before coming to Savannah and said the local crew is just as competent as the ones in Los Angeles. Through his Hollywood connections, he's urging movie people to come to Savannah to take advantage of its great tax incentive program and work with Perez. Noted Ricker: "Eric respects the artists' vision."

Future Plans



The following are the 17 festivals Perez has entered BARK into, along with their response dates

- Atlanta Film Festival, Feb. 14
- Cleveland International Film Festival, Feb. 28
- Florida Film Festival, Feb. 28
- In the Palace International Film Festival, Feb. 25
- Aspen Shortsfest, March 7
- Hong Kong International Film Festival, March 24
- Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival, March 31
- Seattle International Film Festival, April 25
- Tribeca Festival, April 30
- Brooklyn Film Festival, May 3
- Raindance Film Festival, May 16
- Palm Springs International Film Festival, May 16
- Provincetown International Film Festival, May 23
- Fantasia International Film Festival, May 30
- Melbourne International Film Festival, June 30
- Flickers' Rhode Island International Film Festival, July 18
- Austin Film Festival, Sept. 23

Perez isn't stopping with "BARK." He plans on shooting a movie in Springfield and show that Atlanta's not the only place in Georgia where movies are made. "I want to build a huge studio in Effingham County," Perez said.

Prim said Perez is a great leader who's super driven and motivates his crew to follow his example. He added that Perez pushed their expectations of what they could do as far as attracting top acting talent, capitalizing on their desire to visit Savannah, and this is only the beginning for Kronos Media and local filmmaking.

Possessing a high school diploma, Perez is a self-made individual who has Hollywood connections. He has a cousin who's a director, a second cousin who's an actor, and an uncle who's a chef for the stars. "It's in our blood," said Perez, who grew up in Augusta.

Prior to "BARK," Perez has done a number of short films that have garnered recognition.

"Harmless" was selected in the Toronto International Nollywood Film Festival and Charlotte Film Festival and will be screened at the latter event. Perez served as executive producer for the film, which stars Jordan Spalding and Jordan Carpenter.

"Mary's Mixtape" was also selected in the Toronto International Nollywood Film Festival and Charlotte Film Festival and will be screening at the Charlotte Film Festival. It was written and directed by Prim.

"The Road Agent" has 22 selections with 12 awards. Most notable are the WorldFest-Houston International Film Festival (Remi Award winner) and Austin Lift-Off Film Festival, where it was nominated for best Short Film. It was best short film directed by Brian Liepe and written by Liepe and Kleinmann.

Perez serves as executive producer and occasional actor in his films, using his 5-foot-eleven, 260-pound size to play intimidating characters. He's also a photographer for DelSur Marketing and its various magazines and operates the aforementioned dental practice.

"I like to be busy," Perez said.

Perez could even be busier this year as "BARK" has been selected or is under consideration for showings at a number of prominent film festivals. In the former category, the film will be shown at the Santa Barbara Film Festival. In the meantime, Perez has submitted his film to 17 festivals and is waiting for a response.

Perez is now working on his next project, noting he's in pre-production for a full feature horror film that will be shot in Savannah. He said they're in talks with several distribution companies. ■

More Than Pest Control

Darrell Dasher

Branch Manager, Rincon Office



Darrell Dasher grew up in the Sand Hill area, so managing the Rincon office of Yates-Astro really is "home" for him. He gives back to his hometown by officiating sports events for all age groups in and around Effingham County.

His influence goes beyond our area through his involvement as a Shriner and a Mason. Shriner Hospitals for children never charge for their services, a blessing that is the result of the work of Darrell and many others. The Children's Home in Macon is an outgrowth of his volunteer work as well.

Darrell considers it a form of "giving back" to his hometown by protecting area homes and businesses as a pest control professional with Yates-Astro. It is hometown people like Darrell Dasher who have made Yates-Astro, a family owned local business, the largest pest control provider in the region.

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ALYCIA & MIGUEL CALDERIN: Sharing a Glimpse of Business-as-Usual With Our Readers







Effingham County is home to many hardworking families, but few embody the spirit of community and entrepreneurship quite like Alycia and Miguel Calderin. As parents of four children and business owners, the Calderins are a family that thrives on balancing their professional lives with a deep commitment to their community.

Miguel and Alycia Calderin own Coastal Contracting, a thriving local business that has earned a reputation for quality craftsmanship and reliable service. With Miguel at the helm, the company has become known for its attention to detail and personalized approach—a reflection of the Calderin family values.

Alycia, a licensed realtor, is a Florida native who moved to Georgia in 2013, where she planted roots with her husband of 16 years. When she's not balancing the whirlwind of sports practices, club meetings, and entrepreneurial ventures, Alycia escapes into the world of books. She hosts a local book club every six weeks, where she's known for her humor, sharp wit, and the occasional deep dive into spicy romance novels. Whether she's deciphering her kids' ever-changing trends, chauffeuring teens to their next adventure, or finding joy in the everyday chaos, Alycia brings a relatable, laugh-out-loud perspective to the beautifully imperfect life of a modern mom.

Alycia is also the newest voice in *Effingham Magazine*, where she pens the column "Mom-ing Unfiltered." Through her candid and relatable writing, Alycia shares the joys and challenges of motherhood in a way that resonates with readers. Her column provides a refreshing perspective on parenting, reminding local moms that they are not alone in their struggles and triumphs.

Alycia and Miguel Calderin are making a lasting impact in Effingham County and we couldn't be prouder to share Alycia's gift of writing with our readers. ■

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Finding Magic in the Madness of Motherhood

Making Mom Friends is Like Dating, But *Weirder*

Story 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. ■

THE CORNER TABLE

Story by Gail Mihalik

Effingham County is known as a charming bedroom community—home to three major cities and several quaint hamlets. With that in mind, you'll find a variety of privately-owned mom-and-pop spots to enjoy. Let's take a stroll and sample some of the delicious, home-style goodness this area has to offer. Whether you're craving comfort food or something new, Effingham County's local spots offer a dining experience that's filled with heart, soul, and Southern charm.





PADDLES

401 North Laurel Street, Springfield | 912-407-0721

This cozy, spacious café is the perfect spot for breakfast or lunch. The friendly counter staff is always ready to help you choose from their mouthwatering menu. Paddles is much more than just a coffee shop—it stands out with its freshly made pastries and creative lunch options. Whether you're in the mood for a fresh drip coffee, a frothy cappuccino, or a silky-smooth macchiato, you'll find plenty to satisfy your cravings. Their seasonal specials, like frosted cookies or "snow-conuts," add a playful touch to the experience.

When it comes to cold beverages, they've got you covered with iced flavored coffees, frappes, and smoothies. Their breakfast menu may appear simple, but the daily specials are anything but. Take, for example, the "Homebody" breakfast bagel—a double egg, bacon, and cheese creation topped with tomato, onion, and cream cheese, all served on an Asiago bagel. One word: YUM!

For lunch, you'll find classics like soups, salads, and sandwiches, all served with care. What truly sets Paddles apart is the love and thought put into every dish, ensuring a special dining experience. Don't miss the chance to start your day at Paddles!

108 ALE HOUSE

108 Weisenbaker Road, Rincon | 912-826-0117

Run by sisters Kelly and Lizzie, this family-owned bistro-style pub is a testament to their dedication and culinary talent. With eight years under their belt, they've created a lively, welcoming spot that's earned its place in the community. Their hard work will soon be featured on America's Best Restaurant, a well-deserved recognition of their unique dining experience.

Whether you're visiting for lunch or dinner, you're in for a treat. The open dining space features a long high-top bar and a casual, energetic atmosphere, perfect for families and friends alike. The menu is packed with options, from appetizers and salads to sandwiches and hearty dinners.

One highlight is their burgers—over 10 unique creations to choose from, plus a monthly special that's always worth trying. With fast service, even on busy nights, you won't have to wait long to dig into something delicious. Don't be surprised if this becomes your go-to spot for a fun, satisfying meal.

CENTRAL STATION AND BAKERY

116 North Laurel Street, Springfield | 912-754-6897

Arrive early—this place is popular for a reason. By 11:45 a.m., the line is often out the door, with the dining area filled to capacity. Becky and Donna, the hands-on owners, learned their craft from their mother, and it shows in every bite.

Central Station offers a menu full of fresh, made-to-order dishes. Their desserts, crafted by an in-house pastry chef, are a must-try, with freshly baked bread available for purchase. I opted for the grilled chicken sandwich—tender, juicy, and seasoned to perfection. Paired with a side of crispy fried potatoes (French fries), it was one of the best meals I've had in a while.

And don't leave without dessert! The flourless chocolate torte I tried was rich, decadent, and absolutely perfect. Whether you're there for lunch or just a sweet treat, this spot will leave you wanting more.

THE RUSTY PIG

360 South Columbia Avenue, Rincon | 912-654-4744

In the South, BBQ is a way of life, and The Rusty Pig delivers with its slogan, "BBQ with an Attitude." This family-owned gem combines generations of secret recipes with a modern twist, operating two restaurants and a mobile food truck.

Don't let the unassuming exterior fool you—what's inside is what counts. Their pulled pork BBQ is a standout, served with your choice of one or two sides. I highly recommend the potato salad, which has just the right hint of mustard and plenty of chopped egg. The brisket is another winner—tender, flavorful, and paired with generous portions of sides that will leave you with leftovers to enjoy later. A Southern staple, Brunswick stew, is a must-try here. It's a hearty mix of BBQ pork, chicken, vegetables, beans, potatoes, and tomatoes in a savory broth. For an extra treat, try it served over mashed red potatoes. Even the chicken wings are elevated—they're smoked, creating a crispy, flavorful bite you won't forget. For the kiddos, there are plenty of lighter options, like grilled cheese, chicken tenders, and petite BBQ sandwiches.

And before you leave, don't forget to check out their signature sauces and grab some Rusty Pig swag, like a t-shirt or hat.

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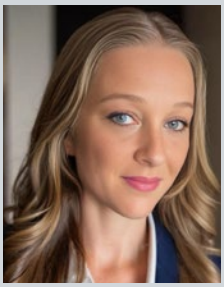




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Q&A WITH EFFINGHAM FAMILIES IN BUSINESS TOGETHER



CLEANING BY DESIGN, LLC, Corina Stewart

You're in business with a family member—what is the relationship?
I started my company in 2018 with my sister. She moved out of state in 2023. Now I run the business with the help of my stepmom and daughter.

How long have you been in business?
7 years.

What do you love most about running your business?
The best part about running a business is being able to offer job opportunities to others in our community and helping them be with a company that prioritizes families first.

What do you find most challenging about running a business?
The most challenging part about running a business is knowing that not only do your employees rely on you to create a steady income, but their families do as well.

What is the most rewarding part of working with a family member?
One of the top rewards is the bonding through common goals and aspirations.

What advice would you give to others considering going into business with a family member?
Ensure you have common goals, dreams and aspirations when it comes to what you want to achieve with your business.



TOMMY'S PIZZA AND PASTA

You're in business with a family member—what is the relationship?
Father and Son

How long have you been in business?
1 year

What do you love most about running your business?
I love pizza and Italian food so being able to bring a great product into the community makes it that much more enjoyable.

What do you find most challenging about running a business?
Food costs and finding employees with work ethic.

What is the most rewarding part of working with a family member?
Being able to teach my son the business I've been in my entire life.

What advice would you give to others considering going into business with a family member?
Choose wisely—not all partnerships work.



REAL GOOD ROOFING

You're in business with a family member—what is the relationship?
Father and three sons.

How long have you been in business?
4.5 years

What do you love most about running your business?
Satisfaction from helping people.

What do you find most challenging about running a business?
Working in a family dynamic.

What is the most rewarding part of working with a family member?
Unquestionable loyalty to our work and one another, easy to do the right thing for others when it's your family involved.

What advice would you give to others considering going into business with a family member?
Clear the rules in writing before you begin, clearly defined responsibilities and a willingness to let it go at the end of the day.



13 STARS EVENT VENUE, Ivy Eilerman

You're in business with a family member—what is the relationship?
Husband and wife.

How long have you been in business?
3 years

What do you love most about running your business?
We love having a creative outlet, not only for the interior design of the space, but also for having a place to enjoy playing music for the folks who enjoy the space when we open to the public a few times every year. Our community to use. We are proud of the work we put into it!

What do you find most challenging about running a business?
The most challenging thing for us is accepting that things won't be perfect all the time, because we are perfectionists.

What is the most rewarding part of working with a family member?
To look back and be proud of our accomplishments, especially when you can do that with someone you love while also being able to bring something special to your community.

What advice would you give to others considering going into business with a family member?
Be patient with one another. Hear each other's ideas and maybe even consider trying something you normally wouldn't. Also, don't be afraid to fail. Sure, there is risk involved but positivity and work ethic can go a long way!



WILEY'S HOME CENTER

You're in business with a family member—what is the relationship?
Husband and wife and then daughter and sister

How long have you been in business?
38 years

What do you love most about running your business?
That it's ever-changing. Every day is different.

What do you find most challenging about running a business?
Keeping inventory stocked and up to date with current trends.

What is the most rewarding part of working with a family member?
You know you have someone that has your back and is working towards the same goals. You spend a lot of time together that you would not when you have separate jobs.

What advice would you give to others considering going into business with a family member?
This really depends on the family. Some dynamics work, some don't. You have to be able to work through differences of opinion without ruining the family relationship.

RINCON PACK AND SHIP

How long have you been in business?
14

What do you love most about running your business?
Building relationships with the community through outstanding customer service

What is the most rewarding part of working with a family member?
Working with family allows for an easy-going, fun, yet efficient environment. Our love and friendship translates to a fun business!

What advice would you give to others considering going into business with a family member?
Have a strong relationship with good communication. It's important to always check in and re-adjust goals as working partners and family members.



iHEART DENTAL, Erich Perez

You're in business with a family member—what is the relationship?
My wife and I own iHeart Dental together. My wife Dr. Misty Seale is the dentist and I'm the lab technician and head of marketing. Angelique Perez, my niece, is a dental assistant.

How long have you been in business?
We've been proudly serving our community since 2019.

What do you love most about running your business?
We love seeing the positive impact our dental care has on patients' lives—especially when they walk out with a healthier, more confident smile.

What do you find most challenging about running a business?
Balancing multiple roles can be tough. From overseeing operations to maintaining patient satisfaction, it's a lot of responsibility, but it's worth the effort.

What is the most rewarding part of working with a family member?
We share a strong sense of trust and understanding. It's rewarding to combine our individual strengths and see our vision come to life together.

What advice would you give to others considering going into business with a family member?
Open communication is key. Clearly define roles, respect each other's expertise, and maintain a healthy work-life balance to ensure both the business and the family relationship thrive.



HARVEST OF BELIEVERS, Pastor J and Lady Nikki

You're in business with a family member—what is the relationship?
Husband and wife.

How long have you been in business?
4.5 years.

What do you enjoy the most about running your business?
We enjoy "loving on people." Empowering individuals spiritually and physically brings them immense joy and fulfills their calling to make a difference in the lives of others.

What do you find most challenging about running a business?
Challenges include promoting the church, acquiring financial support, and finding willing workers to join the fellowship and help carry the vision of the ministry.

What is the most rewarding part of working with a family member?
Witnessing each other's spiritual growth and challenging one another to be better leaders and individuals.

What advice would you offer to someone considering going into business with a family member?
Go for it! Cherish the journey of building something meaningful together, but always prioritize your relationship by carving out time outside of business responsibilities to nurture your connection.

BANK OF NEWINGTON



You're in business with a family member—what is the relationship?
Four generations of family members

How long have you been in business?
106 years!

What do you love most about running your business?
We enjoy who we meet and work with on a daily basis. Whether it's helping them build a new home, starting and operating a new business, or pretty much anything in-between, we get a sense of fulfillment from helping people achieve their goals.

What do you find most challenging about running a business?
Sometimes the day to day can get a bit overwhelming. When there are so many different things competing for your time, energy and attention, you can really get "lost in the weeds" if you're not careful.

What is the most rewarding part of working with a family member?
Having the opportunity to contribute to something that spans generations. It's also a great feeling to be able to build something alongside the people that matter the most to you.

What advice would you give to others considering going into business with a family member?
It's not for everyone. If you can truly separate the business from the personal when necessary, it can be great. If not, it can make for some pretty awkward Christmas dinners.



MONCRIEF SQUARE LLC, Ashlie Moncrief

You're in business with a family member—what is the relationship?
Bonus Mom and Bonus Daughter

How long have you been in business?
4.5 years.

What do you love most about running your business?
I love seeing our venue come alive with the events our clients create—each one is unique and full of joy, whether it's a wedding, party, or community gathering.

What do you find most challenging about running a business?
Balancing all the moving parts—from managing daily tasks and planning events to maintaining the venue's charm. But every challenge is an opportunity to grow and improve.

What is the most rewarding part of working with a family member?
The most rewarding part is the trust and shared vision. Knowing you have someone by your side who cares about the business as much as you do makes every success even sweeter.

What advice would you give to others considering going into business with a family member?
Communication is key! Remember to celebrate each other's strengths and focus on shared goals. Respect and patience go a long way!



EMPIRE GYM, Mary Cain, CPT, MSPH

You're in business with a family member—what is the relationship?
Husband and wife

How long have you been in business?
18 years in the gym business industry.

What do you love most about running your business?
Watching people physically, mentally, and emotionally transform right before our eyes.

What do you find most challenging about running a business?
Using social media and knowing what works on one platform may not work on another.

What is the most rewarding part of working with a family member?
That we are 100% solidly built on the same moral grounds. At the end of the day, we can relate to one another about the good, the bad, and the ugly of running a business together and then put it all aside to play with our kid!

What advice would you give to others considering going into business with a family member?
I would recommend they have a solid foundation in what their business goals/expectations are.



EL REAL MEXICAN RESTAURANT

You're in business with a family member—what is the relationship?
Husband, wife, brother, and father

How long have you been in business?
22 years.

What do you love most about running your business?
The relationship we have developed with our customers. They are friends, they are family to us.

What do you find most challenging about running a business?
Pleasing everyone or trying to. Can't make everyone happy!

What is the most rewarding part of working with a family member?
Knowing that they care, that they are looking out for you, that they go into work with that same mindset as you and even though it can be challenging at times, we as a family are working together towards the same goal.

What advice would you give to others considering going into business with a family member?
Make sure that you get along and that you are on the same page as far as goals and expectations. It won't be easy but if it's something that you have your heart set on, it's definitely doable and so rewarding! ■

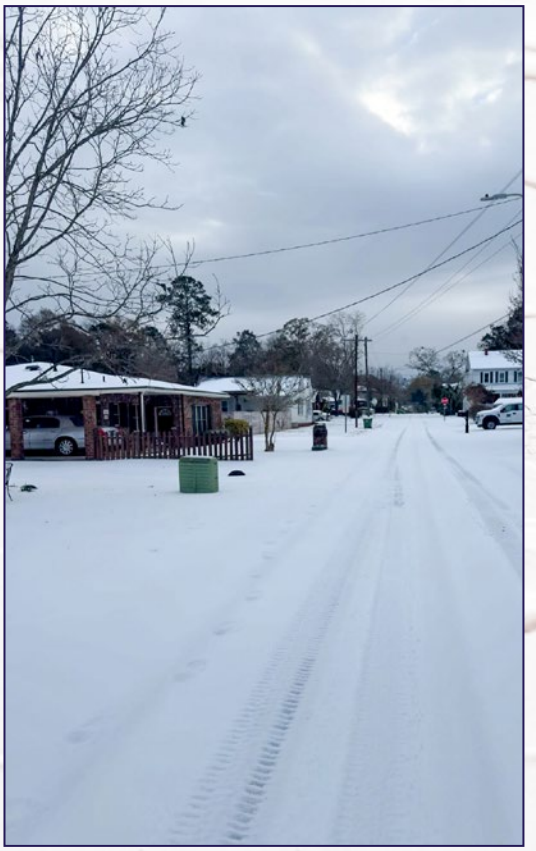
EFFINGHAM Happenings

HISTORIC SNOWFALL

Effingham was blanketed in an historic snowfall last month. We all took advantage of the snow days to have some fun!



The Castanons







The Wilsons











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What is Cosmetic Dentistry?

Cosmetic dentistry focuses on improving the appearance of your teeth, gums, and overall smile. At iHeart Dental, our services are tailored to meet your individual needs. From brightening stained teeth to repairing chips and cracks, to completing full mouth reconstructions including implants, our expert team utilizes state-of-the-art technology and advanced techniques to deliver stunning results.

What Should I Expect During a Cosmetic Dentistry Consultation?

Your journey to a radiant smile begins with a personalized consultation. Dr. Seale will take the time to understand your goals, assess your oral health, and recommend treatments that align with your vision. During your visit, you'll enjoy our cozy amenities and advanced diagnostic tools, ensuring a comfortable and thorough evaluation.

Who is a Good Candidate for Cosmetic Dental Treatment?

If you're looking to enhance your smile and address issues like discoloration, chips, misalignment, gaps, or missing teeth, cosmetic dental care could be right for you. Our tailored treatments ensure that every patient achieves their dream smile with confidence.

What Conditions Can Cosmetic Dentistry Address?

Cosmetic dentistry can transform your smile by addressing a range of issues, including:

- Stained or discolored teeth
- Chipped or cracked teeth
- Gaps or uneven spacing or missing teeth
- Misaligned or crooked teeth
- Worn or aging dental restorations and prosthesis

Our team uses aesthetic dentistry solutions like porcelain crowns, bridges, veneers, implants, 3D-printed aligners, and in-office teeth whitening to resolve these concerns effectively.

How Do Cosmetic Dental Treatments Enhance Oral Health?

Beyond aesthetics, many cosmetic dental procedures improve your oral health by:

- Restoring damaged teeth to prevent further decay.
- Correcting misalignments for easier cleaning and improved bite function.
- Protecting teeth from wear with durable restorations.

At iHeart Dental, we combine form and function to give you a smile that looks great and supports lifelong health.

Why Choose iHeart Dental for Your Cosmetic Dentistry Needs?

When it comes to your smile, choosing the right dental practice makes all the difference. Here's why patients trust iHeart Dental for their cosmetic dental care:

- **Comprehensive Services:** From teeth whitening to dental implants, we offer a full range of treatments in one convenient location.
- **State-of-the-Art Technology:** Advanced tools like our Cone Beam CT Scanner and 3D scanner and printers ensure precision and efficiency.
- **Comfort-Centered Care:** Enjoy amenities like pillows, blankets, oral sedation and therapy dogs for a relaxing dental experience.
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Coffee Series Part III

The BENEFITS of Coffee

Story by Gail Mihalik



In her last edition of this series, Gail Mihalik shared the nuances of this delicious bean (or was it a berry?). Now she introduces some of coffee's health benefits as well as delicious recipes.

Could you imagine a day without that first cup of coffee in the morning?

Are we all conditioned to having this ritual to start our day? How many of us have that first cup nestled in our hand while driving to work? Something is soothing about that aroma, the steam rising from the mug. It creates a sense of peace. The beverage, with its rich aroma and rising steam, not only triggers the release of dopamine in our brains, giving us that happy feeling but also significantly boosts our mood and energy. But is it good for you?

Believe it or not, your morning coffee might be doing more for you than just waking you up. Recent studies have uncovered many benefits, from the abundance of active substances such as vitamin B2, B3, magnesium, potassium along with multiple antioxidants that can reduce inflammation and protect against disease.

Coffee has positive results that help with the fight against conditions more prevalent in women, such as Alzheimer's disease and heart disease, potentially leading to longer life spans.

Studies have found people who drink more coffee process sugar or glucose better and are less likely to develop type 2 diabetes.

A couple of studies done at Harvard have found different benefits for men and women. Women who drank at least two cups of coffee daily decreased their risk of heart failure, stroke, and cardiovascular disease. Another study focusing on men found that the increased consumption of caffeine helped reduce the uncontrollable movements caused by Parkinson's disease. Those who drank more coffee were also less likely to develop Parkinson's.

I've presented many health benefits of your morning cup of joe; it's important to remember that moderation is crucial. Overdoing caffeine can lead to negative side effects, such as increased cholesterol levels, restlessness, nausea, and even headaches. Therefore, let your body be the judge and consume your coffee responsibly.

Every good meal should be completed with a sweet treat, and every good food article needs that cherry on top. So allow me to share a few recipes of ways to use coffee in sweet and savory ways!

CAFE LIEGEOIS

Servings 4



INGREDIENTS:

1/2 cup whipping cream
2 tbsp powdered sugar
1/4 tsp vanilla extract
8 scoops of vanilla and or coffee ice cream (combining both is fun!)
1/2 cup espresso coffee.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Whip the cream with powdered sugar and vanilla extract
2. Scoop the ice cream into four glasses, pour an even amount of espresso over the top, and finish with whipped cream. Dust with cocoa powder if you like.

COFFEE MOUSSE

Servings 4



INGREDIENTS:

1 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup milk
1/4 cup espresso or strong coffee
1/4 cup confectioners sugar
4 oz. dark chocolate

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Whip cream until stiff peaks form.
2. Combine milk, confectioners sugar, coffee.
3. Melt chocolate and let it cool.
4. Add chocolate to the milk mixture.
5. Once cool enough, gently fold whipped cream into the chocolate mixture. Spoon into serving cups and chill until set.

COFFEE RUB FOR BBQ ENTHUSIASTS



INGREDIENTS:

1/3 cup ground coffee (not instant coffee) If you need to buy grounds just for this recipe, You can freeze in a seal-tight container for up to 2 years.
1/3 cup brown sugar
1 tbsp salt
1 tbsp black pepper
1 tbsp granulated or ground garlic
1 tbsp fennel seeds
1/2 tbsp dried rosemary
Add 1 tbsp of cayenne pepper to the seasoning mix if you want to kick it up!

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Mix all ingredients and store them in an airtight container for up to six months. The mix will not turn, but as with all dried spices, it will lose its flavor over time.
2. Rule of thumb for this recipe: Use 1 tablespoon of mix per pound of meat.

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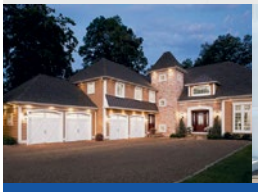
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Every Christmas, Matt and his family sponsor local families in need, ensuring they have a joyous holiday. Partnering with United Way, they began supporting families year-round. Their generosity extends to donations for the Young Farmers Program, Victim Awareness Program in Effingham, local schools, and youth sports teams.

Their largest contributions go to the Shriners, to whom they donate thousands of dollars annually. For Matt and his family, the overwhelming support they've received from their community fuels their commitment to giving back. They are deeply grateful for their loyal customers and the county they call home.

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AN IMPRESSIVE SPAN OF TIME

Historic Bridge Reaches the End of the Road

Story by Stephen Prudhomme

For more than a century, the James P. Houlihan Bridge in Port Wentworth was in service. It witnessed the evolution of the automobile, starting with the Model T and continuing with the present-day vehicles that hail from around the world and boast the latest in technological innovations.

The bridge, which crosses the Savannah River and carries Hwy. 25, went through an evolution of its own. In 1954, the original 18-foot roadway was widened by 10 feet by removing the swing span bridge. The T-beam spans were retained but widened by adding 6-foot extensions on each side.

The Houlihan Bridge has finally reached the end of the road. Just as an aging superstar mentors a rookie in sports until the latter becomes the focal point, the Houlihan remained in the lineup, handling traffic until its successor took over in July.

Kyle Collins, E-3 communications manager with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), said the Houlihan Bridge has served a good life but has always presented maintenance challenges. The new bridge, he added, is much safer and able to handle heavier traffic and larger vehicles.

"It meets modern design standards," said Collins, noting it's located west of the old bridge. "It has added shoulder widths in case emergency vehicles need to get through and increased clearance for ships. A swing bridge is no longer needed."

The old bridge, in the meantime, is being removed slowly due to its nature and close proximity to the Savannah National Refuge Center. It leaves behind an interesting history.

Although it has a construction date of 1922, the entire main span of the Houlihan Bridge was demolished and replaced in 1954. That same year, its concrete t-beam and approach spans were widened by adding beams. All approach railing was replaced, meaning the only remnants of the 1922 bridge were the approach spans and substructure. With HistoricBridges.org defining a bridge's main construction date when the main span superstructure is built, Houlihan was constructed in 1954.

Boasting a swing span, the Houlihan Bridge was the only one of its kind in Georgia. Recognized for retaining its historical integrity as a 1954 swing bridge, it did undergo one change. The bridge tender house, located over the roadway in the center of the swing span, was removed and replaced with a new tender house, located at the western end of the swing span.

The bridge is named after a former judge and county commissioner in the early 20th century. In 1934, Houlihan served as grand marshal in Savannah's St. Patrick's Day Parade.



Photo courtesy of Nathan Holth – HistoricBridges.org

"It's definitely unique," Collins said. "It's led an incredible life and drivers might be a little sad not seeing the Houlihan anymore. Hopefully they'll enjoy the new structure."

The old bridge is being torn down. Collins noted it was made available for an alternative use, focusing on GDOT's best management practices for storage of historic metal truss bridges, but did not attract any interested parties.

Historical markers will be reinstated in their original positions once the construction is complete.

Additionally, GDOT will create plaques/interpretive panels chronicling the natural, cultural and historical significance of the Houlihan Bridge, Atlantic Coastal Highway, Colerain Plantation District, and flora and fauna of the tidal marsh in the surrounding area. The design and text for the plaques/panels will be submitted to the Georgia State Historic Preservation Office for review and approval.

Other Local Bridges

As part of the $77.7 million GDOT bridge replacement project, the Middle River Bridge, located downriver from the Houlihan Bridge and dating back to 1922 and widened in 1953, is being replaced by a new structure. As with the Houlihan Bridge, offset construction will keep traffic flowing on the existing bridge until the new structure opens in late 2025, according to Collins. The Scott Bridge Company handled construction of the two new bridges, while the Michael Barker Design Firm did the design work.

In neighboring Effingham County, the Steel Bridge in Guyton crosses the Ogechee River, which serves as the boundary between Effingham and Bulloch counties. It started out as a wooden bridge over a century ago and got its name from the steel supports under the structure. In 1950, the present concrete bridge replaced the wooden structure and is part of the route for Hwy. 119.

The river area near the bridge on the Bulloch County side had a boat landing, while a store on the Effingham side featured a wooden floor and hosted Saturday night dances. Susan Exley of the Historic Effingham Society, noting that people still swim in the area, said she has a photo of her father visiting the area on a class trip in the 1940s.

The CSX Savannah River Bridge was built in 1909 served as a conduit for trains since 1909. Measuring 13,000 feet in length, the bridge crosses the Savannah River in Effingham County was rebuilt in 1968-'69 by Seaboard Coast Line Railroad following the merger of Atlantic Coast Line and Seaboard Air Line in 1967.

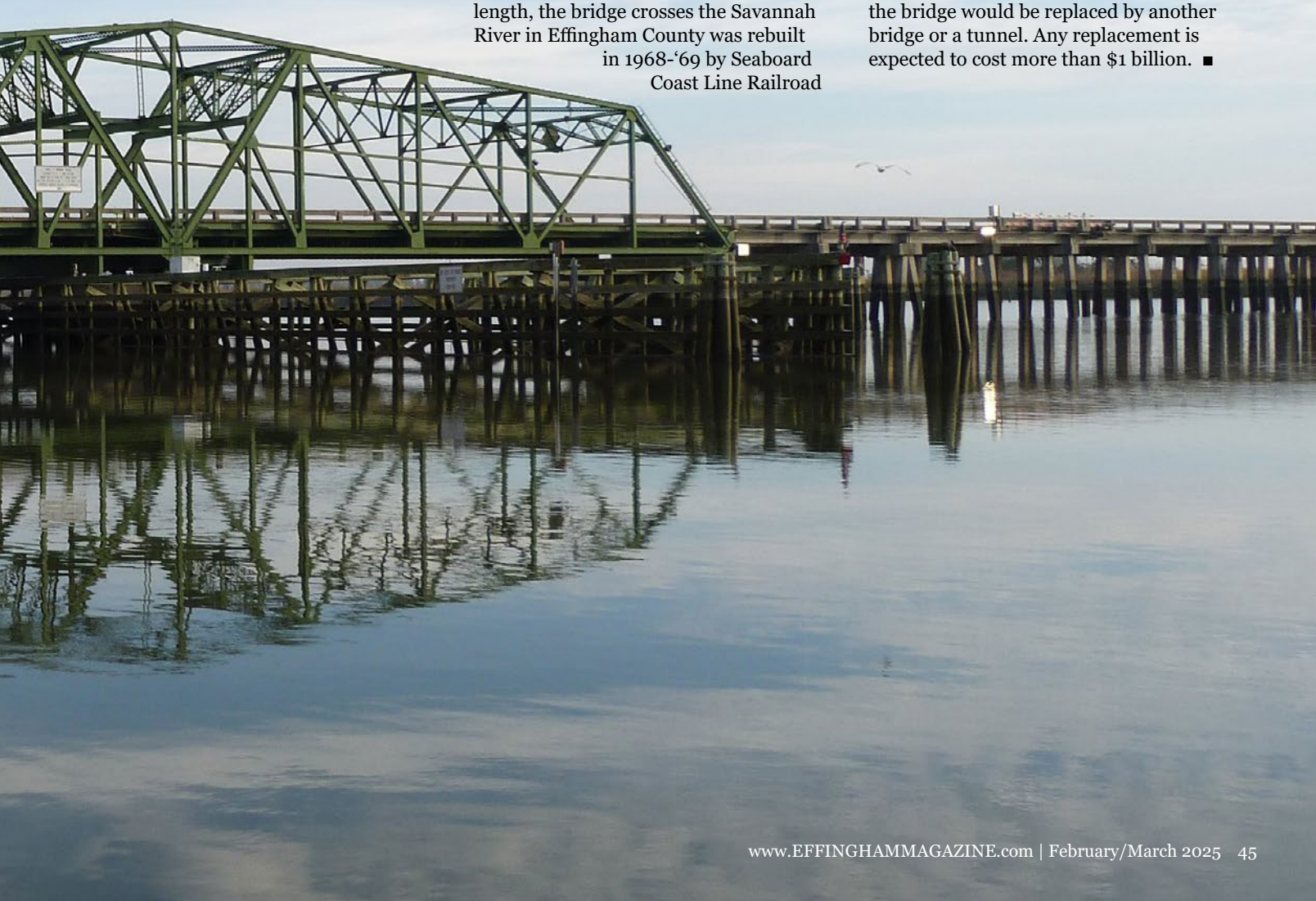
Another span crossing the Savannah River is the Talmadge Bridge. As with the other two bridges, it's over 70 years old.

Named after Eugene Talmadge, Georgia governor in the 1930s, the cantilever truss bridge, characterized by structures that project horizontally into space and supported only on one end, was constructed in 1953. With the growth of the port, the bridge became obsolete and was replaced with a cable-stayed bridge in 1991. The new span measured 1,100 feet in length and rose 185 feet above the Savannah River.

That 185 feet isn't high enough to accommodate the super-sized cargo ships the expanding port wants to attract. Subsequently, officials concluded the bridge needed to be raised to service the Neo-Panamax vessels.

In October 2023, (GDOT) announced it would raise the bridge and deepen and widen the shipping lanes. Two months later, GDOT stated that although the bridge still needed to be raised, it would eventually have to be replaced because it still wouldn't be high enough to accommodate the larger cargo ships.

The state agency didn't indicate whether the bridge would be replaced by another bridge or a tunnel. Any replacement is expected to cost more than $1 billion. ■



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Harry Sheppard stepped down as President, and current President **Tripp Sheppard** took the reins

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New location in Springfield opened

2025

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Mr. Harry's wife, **Lynn Sheppard**, and her twin sister, **Margo Metts,** both work for Bank of Newington. They are the daughters of **Mrs. Mary Wilma Wells**, who was Tripp's grandmother. She served over **50 years** and on the **Board of Directors** until her death in 2021.

Mr. Harry serves as **Chairman of the Board**; Mrs. Margo serves on the board along with Tripp as President.