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SPRING EDITION >> No. 011-04-2025<< A FREE NEWSPAPER Take One!



Wewa's New Fire Station is Complete! And A Beauty She Is!

By Tom Wynn

The city of Wewahitchka, or Wewa, is proud to announce the completion of its brand-new fire station! This marks the end of a long journey, full of challenges and triumphs, that began over three years ago. From the beginning, I have had the privilege of witnessing every step of this journey as an eyewitness to the city meetings and the process that led to this monumental achievement for our community.

A Long Road to Completion

The project to build a new fire station started back in 2020, but it wasn't without its setbacks. In January 2022, we experienced a halt in construction when the original contractor ran into serious issues. This caused concern and frustration among the city council members and residents. However, we didn't give up.

In July 2024, the city hired Monolith Construction, and work restarted. With the right leadership and contractors now in place, construction has progressed steadily, and we are now looking at a complete and state-of-the-art facility that will serve our community for years to come.

A Modern Facility for Our Growing Community

This new fire station isn't just about having a larger building; it's a modern facility designed with cutting-edge features that enhance the ability of our firefighters to serve Wewahitchka effectively: **(Fire Station cont. on page 2)**



Senior Dance Night at Wewahitchka Senior Center – March 22

By Tom Wynn

On Saturday evening, March 22, the Senior Citizen Center in Wewahitchka hosted a wonderful dance night that brought over 45 residents together. Starting at 4 pm, the event was filled with singing, dancing, and laughter as everyone enjoyed the lively music from the 50s to the 80s era. Several participants even sang karaoke-style, adding to the fun and energy of the evening.

Raffle tickets were sold for a chance to win a cash prize and gift baskets, adding extra excitement to the event. It turned out to be a reunion of old friends, with many reconnecting and sharing memories.

A delicious BBQ dinner was served, and for dessert, everyone savored a tasty apple crumble pie. Best of all, the entire event was free for seniors 60 years of age and over! It was a fun, successful evening, and the next dance will be held on the third Saturday of the month, so be sure to join in the fun next time!

(Firehouse-continue from page 1)-Spacious fire truck bays** that allow for easy access and movement of emergency vehicles. -State-of-the-art equipment and technology that will help firefighters respond quickly and efficiently. Improved living quarters for our dedicated team of firefighters, who often work long hours to keep us safe. Training areas that will help maintain the highest standards of safety and readiness.

This fire station is a significant upgrade over the old one and better equipped to handle any emergencies that come our way. It reflects the city's growth and its commitment to public safety.

A Great Day for Wewahitchka

The completion of this fire station is a proud moment for Wewahitchka. The community has shown its resilience through the process, and we are thrilled to see this project come to fruition. The new fire station is more than just a building; it's a symbol of the progress and strength of our town.

As an eyewitness to this entire journey, it's rewarding to see the hard work, dedication, and cooperation of our city leaders, contractors, and residents come together in this ****beautiful**** new facility.

What It Means for the Community

With the new fire station now operational, Wewahitchka is better prepared for the future. Our firefighters now have the tools and space they need to keep the community safe. This facility will also contribute to job creation and economic growth as it helps attract new businesses and families to the area.

As the Publisher and Editor of The Wewa News, I can confidently say that this is a major milestone for our community, and we should all take pride in what we have accomplished together.

Acknowledgments and Gratitude

As Publisher and Editor of The Wewa New, I would like to take a moment to personally thank Mayor Phillip Gaskin for his tireless efforts and unwavering determination to ensure that no one took advantage of the city's commission and community during the fire station project. Mayor Gaskin's extensive experience in construction played a key role in keeping things on track and ensuring that the project stayed in the hands of those committed to Wewa's best interests. His leadership helped keep the "wolves at bay" and provided the strong guidance needed to see this project through.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Commissioner Ralph Fisher, whose years of experience in constructing similar buildings allowed him to keep a vigilant eye on the fire station's construction. His expertise was invaluable in ensuring that everything was being done to the highest standard.

The entire City Commission, deserves recognition for their unwavering commitment throughout this process. They never once wavered in their resolve to ensure that the fire station was completed as promised, on time, and up to the agreed-upon specifications. When it became clear that the original contractor had failed to honor their contract, the City

Commission acted swiftly and decisively, terminating the contract and holding the contractor accountable.

Thanks to the hard work of our City Lawyer, who worked tirelessly with her team, we won our lawsuit against the previous contractor as quickly as possible. This process was a learning experience for all involved, demonstrating how an effective city government can save money, ensure quality, and weed out poor workmanship in city projects.

The entire experience showcased the strength of Wewahitchka's City Government. We have a sharp, capable, and diligent city commission that truly understands the importance of protecting our resources and delivering on their promises. With their expertise and teamwork, Wewa will continue to thrive and grow.

Looking to the Future

With this new fire station now open, Wewahitchka is set to enjoy improved safety, greater preparedness, and a continued path toward growth and prosperity. As we continue to expand and improve, it's clear that our community is on the rise.**TW**



First Presbyterian Church Receives Grant for Restoration Efforts

By Pastor Carol Wood

The Psalmist writes: "Unless the Lord builds a house, the builders labor in vain." This truth resonates deeply with the history of First Presbyterian Church, a house of worship built from local cypress and heartwood pine, envisioned by faithful builders long gone. The Carpenter Gothic structure, consecrated in 1903 as St. John the Baptist Episcopal Church, has withstood numerous trials—lightning strikes, a hot-rod road race, fires, and hurricanes. But it was Hurricane Michael that caused the most significant damage, shifting the building off its brick piers and leading to structural concerns.

In response to the damage, First Presbyterian Church applied for a FEMA grant to aid in restoring the building. The storm's high winds knocked down trees and separated the bell tower, requiring extensive work. In 2021, the original brick piers were removed, and a new foundation was poured to meet current building codes.

Volunteers from the neighborhood and the Historical Society worked diligently to dismantle the old piers and clean the bricks so they could be reused as a façade around the new concrete blocks and rebar.

The restoration process faced delays after lead paint was discovered in the ceiling, but on October 10—six years after the storm—FEMA approved the scope of work needed to proceed. After the approval, the church went through the procurement process, and Star Contracting was awarded the restoration contract. Skip Drish's crew began work on February 18.

The church hopes to complete most of the restoration by June 7th, when the congregation will celebrate the church's sesquicentennial. In addition to the FEMA grant, the church has received two grants from the State of Florida Division of Historical Resources—one for scraping and painting the church, and the other to support the ecumenical collaboration in Wewahitchka. However, these grants cover only 75% of the restoration costs. Donations to help cover the remaining 25% are much appreciated and can be sent to: First Presbyterian Church, c/o 317 Pineview Drive, Wewahitchka, FL 32465.

The church is also excited to announce that the Wewahitchka Historical Society has approved an application for a Historical Marker, which will be placed in front of the church. The double-sided marker will honor both the founding of St. John the Baptist Episcopal Church and the journey of First Presbyterian Church since 1943. Donations toward the \$2,540 cost of the marker can be sent to Ann Johnson at PO Box 310, Wewahitchka, FL 32465. Please note: "For Historical Marker Fund."

Until the restoration is complete, worship services will continue every Sunday at 11:00 AM Central Time in the Fellowship Hall. All are welcome to join. Volunteers are also needed to help with ongoing improvements to the interior and exterior of the hall. To get involved, please contact Rev. Carol Wood at 850-866-9850 or woodrink@gmail.com. CW



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Proverbs 18:24

HISTORICAL PERIODICALS BY TOM WYNN

Two historical periodicals by the Wewahitchka Historical Society and Friends of The Library are on sell at the Wewa Library. So, look for them and pick up a copy for a donation of \$5.00 each. Please contact the library to share historical information for the centennial.

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How the Bill of Rights Protects You Today

The Bill of Rights isn't just something that happened in the past. It continues to protect us today. If you think your rights are being violated, you have the right to fight for them in court. The courts use the Bill of Rights to decide if a law or action by the government is fair and just.

If a police officer stops you and violates your rights (for example, by searching your car without a warrant), you can challenge that in court. If you are arrested unfairly or held too long without a trial, you can ask a court to protect your rights.

The Bill of Rights is one of the most important parts of American history. It guarantees freedoms like free speech, fair trials, and protection from government abuse. These rights continue to shape our lives today. It is important to understand your rights and to stand up for them when necessary.

By following the **Bill of Rights**, our society can remain just, fair, and free for everyone. **TW**

The History of Wewahitchka and Surrounding Areas (1818–2024)

By Tom Wynn

Early Beginnings (1818–1870)

Wewahitchka and its surrounding communities have a long and rich history that dates back to the early 19th century. The region was home to Native American tribes, including the Creek and Seminole peoples, who lived along the Chipola and Apalachicola rivers. European-American settlers arrived in the early 1800s, with many drawn to the fertile land and abundant waterways.

One of the earliest recorded events in the area was the survival of young Jehu Richards during an Indian massacre in 1818. His family later became prominent settlers in the region. By the mid-1800s, small farming and logging communities began to emerge, laying the foundation for what would become Wewahitchka. The town's name comes from a Native American word meaning "water eyes," inspired by the two nearby lakes, Lake Julia and Lake Alice, which resemble a pair of eyes.

Growth and Development (1870–1925)
By the late 19th century, the timber and turpentine industries flourished in the region. Sawmills were established along the rivers, providing jobs and economic growth. The town of Wewahitchka was officially incorporated in 1926, though its history as a settlement dates back several decades earlier.

During this time, neighboring communities such as Blue Gator, New Eden, Stone Mill Creek, Honeyville, Delkeith, Howard Creek, and White City also saw growth. These settlements were primarily built around industries such as logging, farming, and river trade. In 1925, Gulf County was created from the southern part of Calhoun County, with Wewahitchka originally serving as the county seat before it was later moved to Port St. Joe.

Economic Changes and Cultural Shifts (1925–1965)
The mid-20th century saw significant economic changes in the region. Wewahitchka became known for its beekeeping industry, particularly the production of Tupelo honey, which remains a major product of the area today. Meanwhile, the paper mill industry in Port St. Joe brought economic growth but also environmental challenges.

Veterans returning from World War II and the Korean War played an important role in shaping the community, contributing to local businesses and civic organizations. The development of highways and bridges improved access to the region, further integrating it with the rest of Florida.

Modern Developments (1965–2024)

From the 1960s onward, Wewahitchka and its surrounding communities continued to evolve. While some industries, such as timber, declined, others, like fishing, tourism, and small-scale agriculture, remained strong. The natural beauty of the Dead Lakes and the Chipola River has drawn outdoor enthusiasts, boosting ecotourism.

In recent years, local efforts have been made to preserve historical sites and celebrate the area's heritage through festivals and community events. Wewahitchka remains a close-knit community, honoring its past while embracing modern opportunities.

Notable People and Events

Throughout its history, the region has been home to many notable individuals, including veterans, community leaders, and entrepreneurs. Events such as hurricanes, economic shifts, and political changes have shaped the identity of Wewahitchka and its neighboring areas. The resilience and determination of its people continue to define this historic region.

As Wewahitchka moves into the future, it remains a place of natural beauty, historical significance, and strong community values. **TW**

Romans 15:5-7



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The History of Our Modern
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by Joyelle Linton

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In partnership with The Friends of the Wewahitchka Library,
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Our library, the Friends of the Wewahitchka Library and the Wewahitchka Historical Society have been busy preparing for the celebration of Wewahitchka's 150th anniversary and the County's 100th anniversary.

This is such an exciting time for our community! Mark your calendar for this free family event on Saturday, June 7th from 9:00-3:00 pm CT. It will be located at the library, the surrounding grounds and the courthouse grounds. There will be food and craft vendors, music, fun for the kids, demonstrations, speakers, exhibits and much more. Help us spread the word!

Do you have photographs of local events, businesses or places? How about the bicentennial celebration from 1975? If you have any photos that you would like to share with the library, we ask that you call and make an appointment. Your photos will be scanned and given back to you at that time. Your photos may be used in our exhibits, which we are currently working on.

The Wewahitchka Library is partnering with the Wewahitchka Historical Society to make a community memory quilt in honor of this celebration. It will be on display at the event. This is a fundraiser that will support the Wewahitchka Historical Society and the Wewahitchka Library's sewing programs. The funds will purchase supplies to make the quilt and then any additional funds would be divided between the two. \$10.00 donations for a name strip and \$15.00 for a square for multiple names. Would you like your family name on the quilt? Do you know how to embroidery? Do you need a refresher? Have you never learned? We plan to have several workshops at the Wewahitchka Library and the Wewahitchka Senior Center to assist you. If you are skilled in this craft, we invite you to work on yours at home, if you prefer. For additional information or questions, please contact us at (850) 639-2419. Our library hours are Mondays 9-1, Tuesdays 9-5, Thursdays 9-5, Fridays 9-5 and Saturdays 9-1.

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LEADERSHIP-Billy Traylor: A Proactive Leader and Beloved Public Servant in Gulf County, Florida

By Tom Wynn

Billy Traylor is remembered as one of the most proactive and impactful public servants in Gulf County's history. His leadership as Mayor of Wewahitchka and as County Commissioner showcased his deep commitment to his community, his belief in the power of government, and his genuine care for the people he represented.

A Champion of "We The People"

Billy Traylor grew up in the northern parts of Gulf County, where he developed a strong sense of community and a deep love for the area.

As a public servant, Traylor was a staunch believer in the principles of representative government. He cherished the idea of "We The People," ensuring that every voice in his district was heard and respected. He was well-loved by his constituents, who admired his approachable nature, integrity, and tireless work ethic.

Proactive Leadership

During his tenure, Traylor was known for his hands-on approach to governance. Whether as Mayor of Wewahitchka or as County Commissioner, he sought practical solutions to the challenges facing Gulf County.

Traylor worked diligently to improve infrastructure, expand access to essential services, and foster economic growth. He believed in action and followed through on his promises, making a tangible difference in the lives of his constituents.

A Beloved Figure in Gulf County

Over his decades of service, Traylor earned the respect and admiration of residents across Gulf County. He cared deeply for the people he represented, listening to their concerns and fighting for their needs. His legacy is marked by his unwavering dedication to bettering the lives of those around him.

Gone Too Soon, but Never Forgotten

Tragically, Billy Traylor passed away shortly after being reelected to the district 2 County Commissioner seat, leaving a void in Gulf County's leadership for months. While he never had the chance to continue his work in his new term, his contributions to Gulf County remain an enduring testament to his love for his community and his proactive spirit.

Honoring His Legacy

As Gulf County celebrates its centennial, Billy Traylor's memory serves as a beacon of what true public service should be. His leadership, belief in government, and care for "We The People" remain an inspiration for generations to come.

Billy Traylor's life reminds us of the power of service and the importance of leaders who listen, act, and care deeply for their community. He will always be remembered as a man who truly embodied the best of Gulf County. **TW**

Who Are the Creek Indians? A Look into Their History and Legacy in Wewahitchka

By Tom Wynn Jr.

The Creek Indians, or Muscogee, are a Native American tribe originally from the southeastern United States, including areas of present-day Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. The nickname "Creek" came from English settlers in the 1700s who noticed that many of the Muscogee people lived near rivers and creeks. While the Muscogee had their own names for themselves, the Creek nickname stuck and became commonly used to describe the tribe.

Who They Really Are

The Creek Indians are part of the larger Muscogee Nation, which includes several different tribes. They were known for being strong warriors, skilled farmers, and traders. They built towns along rivers, practiced agriculture, and had complex political systems. Before European settlers arrived, the Muscogee lived in a wide region, including parts of what is now southern Alabama, Georgia, and the

Florida Panhandle, near areas like Wewahitchka. One of the most well-known figures from this area is Chief John Blount, a leader of the Apalachicola band of the Muscogee Nation. Blount was granted the land we now call Blountstown by Andrew Jackson for his assistance in battling the Seminole Indians. After the Second Indian Wars, he and his tribe moved from Iola to the high ground of Blountstown. Blount played a significant role in early American history, negotiating with U.S. officials during the early 1800s.

What Happened to the Creeks?

Over the past 200 years, the Muscogee people in the Wewahitchka area faced many challenges. In the early 1800s, increasing pressure from European settlers and the U.S. government led to conflicts known as the Creek Wars. The Muscogee Nation was forced to give up millions of acres of land. In 1830, the Indian Removal Act was passed, which forced the relocation of thousands of Native Americans to the west of the Mississippi River, including many Muscogee. This journey became known as the Trail of Tears because of the harsh conditions and many lives lost along the way. Even though some Muscogee were forced west, others stayed behind in Florida and Alabama, including Chief Blount and his followers. They tried to hold onto their land and way of life as long as possible.

The Creeks in Wewahitchka

Wewahitchka, which translates to **“Water is here”** (with “Wewa” meaning water and “Hitchka” meaning is here), is deeply rooted in Muscogee heritage. The land around the Apalachicola River was once home to thriving Muscogee communities. These communities engaged in farming, hunting, and trading with other tribes and European settlers. Even after the forced relocations, some Muscogee families remained in the Florida Panhandle.

In addition to Wewahitchka, areas like Iola and Wetappo Creek are significant in Muscogee history. Jehu Cemetery Road, originally known as “New Eden,” is another location tied to the Muscogee legacy in this region. New Eden was where the First Methodist Church and the First Baptist Church were built. Later, the First Baptist Church was moved by rolling large logs and mules to its present location across from Subway. The back parts of First Baptist that were damaged and ultimately torn down were part of the original church structure. Brother Mike Shroud, many years ago, showed me the rafters and the true height of the room above the false ceiling, a “wow” moment for me.

Scott's Ferry, named after Mr. Scott, who owned the ferry, has its own intriguing history. Mr. Scott took his name from a white man he greatly respected. He was a Muscogee Indian and was considered one of the richest men in Calhoun County. The richest man was Mr. Stone, who was instrumental in the formation of Gulf County, as was his

son, T. H. Stone. Prominent local Muscogee family surnames such as Blount, Armstrong, and Weeks highlight the lasting presence of Muscogee heritage in Wewahitchka. These families, connected through friendship, neighborly ties, and kinship, continue to play an essential role in the community today.

Honoring Their Legacy

Back in 2002, I produced and directed two documentaries, one titled “Tupelo Honey and The Amazing Beekeeping” and another about the Muscogee Creek Indians, filming in the Muscogee Museum and interviewing Muscogee Indian Chief Alonso. Although I never released the Muscogee Museum documentary to the public, Chief Alonso taught me the true translation of the word “Wewahitchka” and informed me that the Armstrong family were the first to practice beekeeping in the Wewahitchka area. You can watch the bee video on YouTube for free.

Today, many efforts are being made to honor the Muscogee Indians and remember their history. In Wewahitchka and nearby areas, places like Scott's Ferry and Blountstown remind us of the Muscogee who lived here. They left a lasting impact on the land and the people of this region. The Muscogee people were known for their resilience and strength in the face of challenges. Though much has changed over the past two centuries, their legacy remains alive, reminding us of their important role in the history of Wewahitchka and the surrounding areas. **TW**

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Some Ways to Possibly Detect Scammers

by Tom Wynn

Scams are everywhere today. Scammers try to trick people into giving them money or personal information. They use emails, phone calls, and websites. Here are some signs to look for to detect scammers.

1. Too Good to Be True

If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Scammers promise big prizes or money to get personal details. Be cautious if you didn't enter a contest but are told you won.

2. Unclear Contact Information

Real businesses make it easy to contact them. Scammers often hide contact details. If you can't find a phone number or email, it's a red flag.

3. Pressure Tactics

Scammers rush you into acting quickly, saying things like "Act now!" or "You'll miss out!" Real businesses don't pressure you like this.

4. Suspicious Links or Personal Info Requests

Be careful if someone asks for personal information or sends links. Legitimate businesses never ask for this in emails or calls.

5. Check Reviews

Before giving money or info, check online reviews. If the business has no reviews or they seem fake, be careful.

6. Spelling and Grammar Mistakes

Scammers often make spelling or grammar mistakes. If an email or message looks unprofessional, it may be a scam.

7. Trust Your Gut

If something feels off, trust your instincts. If it doesn't seem right, walk away.

8. Research the Business

Before giving info or money, research the website or business. Look for reviews or feedback. Make sure the website is secure, shown by "https" in the URL.

Scammers can be tricky, but by knowing the signs, you can protect yourself. Always be cautious before acting. **TW**

Accessing Money During Power Outages and ATM Failures

By Tom Wynn Jr.

When hurricanes like Michael hit, power outages and ATM failures are common. Here's how to prepare:

1. Keep Emergency Cash

- Stash Cash: Keep a small amount of small denominations (ones, fives, tens) to cover essential expenses when ATMs are down. Aim for enough to last several days.

2. Use Mobile Banking Alternatives

- Mobile Wallets: If mobile payments fail, use cashier's

checks or prepaid debit cards as backup payment methods.

3. Set Up Direct Deposit and Transfers

- Direct Deposit: Ensure paychecks and benefits are direct deposited for remote access. Set up automatic transfers between accounts for ease.

4. Stay Connected with Your Bank

- Customer Service: Banks offer 24/7 service for emergencies, including wire transfers if ATMs are down. Keep your bank's number saved.

5. Plan for Evacuation Funds

- Prepaid Cards: Load a prepaid debit card before the storm as an alternative to cash.
- Traveler's Checks: Secure traveler's checks for backup if necessary.

6. Stay in Touch with Family

- Family Assistance: Family outside the area can help you find open branches or use money transfer services if needed.

7. Use Non-Traditional Banking Services

- Money Transfer Services: Use Western Union or MoneyGram to access funds remotely.
- Prepaid Cards: Load prepaid cards for emergency use.

8. Prepare for Power Outages

- Backup Power: Use a portable power bank or generator to charge devices and access online banking or customer service.

Conclusion

Prepare for emergencies with cash, prepaid cards, direct deposit, and online banking. These steps ensure you can access funds when traditional banking fails.

My Motto:

Keep your money local, and spend your money local when possible. Your local bankers and credit unions know you, and you know them—sometimes even relatives or high school friends.

Disclaimer:

This article is for educational purposes only and does not provide financial advice. Consult a professional financial advisor for advice on personal financial matters. **TW**

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Philippians 4:19

Moonshine: From North Florida's Roaring Twenties to Modern Day Legalization

by Tom Wynn

Moonshine, the illicitly distilled alcohol, has a long and storied history in Florida, dating back to the Roaring Twenties and continuing through modern times. In Gulf County, from the 1920s to recent years, moonshine operations have thrived, characterized by innovation, secrecy, and occasional clashes with law enforcement.

Moonshine production in Florida traces its roots to the early settlers who distilled spirits from locally available ingredients, including corn, sugar cane, and the unique tupelo honey found in Gulf County's waterways and hidden coves. The use of honey imparted a distinct flavor to moonshine, contributing to its popularity.

During the Prohibition era of the 1920s, moonshine production in Gulf County reached its peak. Bootleggers set up hidden stills along the waterways and in hidden coves, supplying illegal alcohol to locals and beyond (keep in mind, that with one swipe of a pen, hundreds if not thousands of Americans, just 24 hours early were law-abiding citizens, now they were considered criminal). The demand for moonshine soared as access to legal alcohol became restricted.

Legendary Moonshiners in Gulf County became known for their craftiness and high-quality moonshine. These bootleggers navigated the backroads and waterways of the region, constantly evading law enforcement.

Moonshine transportation became an adrenaline-pumping operation, with bootleggers using fast cars to outrun law enforcement on the county roads and highways. The thrill of outsmarting state officials became legendary, and storytelling among the older generation became a cherished pastime.

As the old folks gather around, their faces light up with excitement as they recount tales of moonshine runs and narrow escapes. They vividly describe the hot pursuit, the roaring engines, and the heart-pounding moments of evading capture. For them, these stories are not just memories but living adventures relived through storytelling.

Their tales, passed down through the generations, keep alive the spirit of moonshine culture in Gulf County. Future generations gather around to listen to these tall tales, discussing historical figures and bringing back to life the art of storytelling in the days of Grandpa and Great grandpa, who passed away many years ago but left behind a legacy of daring adventures and cunning escapes.

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"Moonshine and Bootlegging in Florida: A Cultural Legacy." Florida Humanities Council, pg. 54-58.
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First for Gulf County: Navy Vet Gets Home Make-over in Wewa

By AECS Tom Wynn, USCG (Ret.)

Gene Hanlon, a Vietnam Navy veteran, is the first in Gulf County to receive a VA grant to update his Wewahitchka home for disabilities. With help from Gulf County Veterans Service Officer Lynn Lanier, also a Navy vet, Hanlon was approved for the Special Housing Adaptation (SHA) grant. Phase one of construction is almost done. This could pave the way for more local vets to get the help they need.

If you're a 100% disabled and homebound veteran, the VA offers programs to make your home safer and easier to live in:

- 1. Specially Adapted Housing (SAH)** – For severe injuries like limb loss or burns. Up to \$101,754 (2025).
- 2. Special Housing Adaptation (SHA)** – For other serious disabilities. Up to \$20,215 (2025).
- 3. Home Improvements & Structural Alterations (HISA)** – Covers changes for easier access. Up to \$6,800 for service-connected, \$2,000 for non-service (2025).

4. Adaptive Equipment – Items like stairlifts or mobility tools for safer living.

How to Apply:


- Contact your local VA office or certified counselor
- Provide medical records
- Get a licensed contractor for work
- Stay within funding limits

Need Help?

- Ask Veterans Service Organizations like the American Legion or DAV
- Visit va.gov for updates

Contact:

Lynn Lanier, Veterans Service Officer

 (850) 229-6125

 llanier@gulfcounty-fl.gov

 1000 Cecil G. Costin Sr. Blvd., Room 311, Port St. Joe, FL

Don't wait! See what you qualify for — that's an order, Vet!

The History of the Fruit Industry in Wewahitchka, Iola, and the Dead Lakes Area

By Tom Wynn

The Wewahitchka, Iola, and Dead Lakes region in Florida has a rich history intertwined with the fruit industry, particularly citrus cultivation. Over the years, this area has experienced significant changes, including challenges faced by the citrus industry that led to shifts in farming practices.

Early Beginnings of Citrus Cultivation

Citrus fruits, such as oranges and grapefruits, were introduced to Florida in the 1490s by the crew of Christopher Columbus. They brought citrus seeds with them during their voyages, and these seeds eventually began to grow in Florida's favorable climate. By the mid-19th century, commercial citrus farming began to flourish in the state. The Wewahitchka area, with its favorable climate and soil, became a hub for citrus growers.

The Role of "The Cut" and Paddleboats

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Dead Lakes area, near Wewahitchka, was known for its unique waterway system referred to as "The Cut." This artificial channel connected the Apalachicola River to the Chipola River, facilitating the transportation of goods, including citrus fruits, via paddleboats. The Cut played a crucial role in the local economy, enabling farmers to ship their produce to markets more efficiently.

Prominent Families and Growers

Several families were instrumental in the development of the fruit industry in the Wewahitchka area. The Rish family was one of the earliest to establish their presence in the area. Before becoming involved in citrus farming, the Rish

family had already established themselves in beekeeping and cattle ranching in Iola, with documented beekeeping activities dating back to before 1882. Their contributions were foundational to the agricultural development of the region.

The L.L. Lanier family, on the other hand, became prominent in the area in 1901, primarily for their beekeeping operations, which centered around the production of Tupelo honey from the Ogeechee tupelo trees in the Dead Lakes region. The Lanier family made significant contributions to the local beekeeping industry, but they were not involved in citrus farming.

Migration of the Citrus Industry to Central Florida

By the mid-20th century, the citrus industry in the Wewahitchka area began to face significant challenges. Several factors contributed to this:

- ****Freezes and Weather Events:**** The region experienced several severe freezes, notably in 1894-1895 and 1989, which devastated citrus crops. The freezes prompted many growers to seek more temperate climates.
- ****Disease and Pests:**** Outbreaks of diseases like citrus canker and pests such as the Asian citrus psyllid, which spreads citrus greening disease, further challenged the viability of citrus farming in the area.
- ****Economic Pressures:**** Rising costs associated with maintaining groves in the face of these challenges, combined with the allure of more favorable conditions in central Florida, caused many growers across the state to consider relocating. However, the Rish family, among others, did not leave the area but continued to adapt to the changing agricultural landscape.

Though many citrus growers in the state did eventually relocate to regions like Winter Garden and other parts of central Florida, the Rish family remained steadfast in their agricultural operations in the Wewahitchka/Iola area, continuing their beekeeping and ranching activities.

The history of the fruit industry in the Wewahitchka, Iola, and Dead Lakes area reflects both the challenges and the resilience of local agricultural families. While the region once thrived as a center for citrus cultivation, factors such as severe freezes, diseases, and economic pressures reshaped the industry. Despite these challenges, the Rish family remained in the area, preserving their legacy and continuing to contribute to the local economy through their beekeeping and cattle operations. **TW**

NEXT SENIOR DANCE - 19 APRIL 2025. Looking for Volunteers so they can have the Dance often. Volunteers would cook and serve our Seniors.

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The Wewa News is a locally owned and operated local newspaper, created solely for the enjoyment of the people who live in the Wewa area. Our purpose is to bring "Good News" and "Whatever" to our locals' attention. I hope to bring back some joy and fun into our lives again and bring us closer than ever before. Thank you to those who support our efforts. The Wewa News operates in the Private. Freedom of speech and of the Press are fundamental to our efforts of expression, as well as God given rights as men and women on the land called Florida. The Wewa News will be published approximately 4 times a year, Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall Issues. Due to travel, family time, and health issues. I may decide to publish a Surprise, "Special Edition, occasionally. Thank you all for your support and positive feedback. The publishing of The Wewa News will be a periodical as of 1 January 2024 until further notice. We will notify the public via word of mouth and via Facebook pages the day it is published. Hard copies will be placed at the Wewa Subway entrance and the City Library.
TW

Upcoming Events and Other: Mark Your Calendars

The Local Bee Association meets at 6pm Glad Tidings Assembly of God Church 138 E. Orange Ave. in Wewa meeting room in the far Eastside of the Church on the first Tuesday of each month at 6pm.

The Friends of the Wewa Library meet at the Wewa Library on the 2nd Thursday of each month, at 10:00 AM. Come early and "Meet & Greet" with us in the conference room.

Wewahitchka Historical Society meets every month on the Third Thursday at 6 pm at the Presbyterian Church in Hwy 71.

City Hall Meetings: The city meetings are held on the last Thursday of each month sharply at 6 PM CT, unless posted otherwise. Contact the City Hall for possible changes due to weather or holidays.

The Big All County 100th Year Centennial Celebration will be June 7th, 2025, come to Wewahitchka and celebrate our birthdays. The City will be 150 years old.

The Tupelo Honey Festival will be on 17th of May at Lake Alice Park, Come join in the Fun!

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