

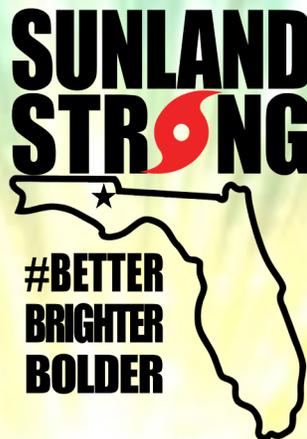


The Agency Supports Persons with Developmental Disabilities in Living, Learning, and Working in their Communities

## Special Edition ~ End of Year Review

As 2019 draws to a close, we look back over life at Sunland, and what a breathtaking journey we've experienced! September was a month of many activities, some routine and some first time events for the Center. Then came October, and beyond ... and suddenly life changed for Sunland in more ways than anyone ever saw coming. Although Hurricane Michael changed the landscape of the Center, the spirit of Sunland remains steadfast and strong! During this harrowing experience, we were truly blessed as we saw the best of humanity demonstrated in the helping hands of staff, residents, volunteers, relief workers, and the generous donation of supplies to assist our residents, staff and their families with post-hurricane recovery. The outpouring of support was phenomenal, and we are forever grateful! As we adjust to a new normal, we move forward, resolute and determined to continue providing the highest level of quality care for the individuals we are privileged to serve! Life has been hard, there have been challenges, yet we never gave up! Together, we are "Sunland Strong!"

As you browse through the pages of this special edition Beacon, we trust you will see with fresh eyes all that makes Sunland the special community it has been for 55 years, and all that will continue as the legacy of this Center moves forward. This beautiful community, a place of hope for the individuals who call Sunland home, and the employees who have made this important work their life's calling... this special place is truly a "Beacon of Hope" whose light shines brighter than ever before!



## From the Superintendent...



Team – I want to express my sincere appreciation to each of you for hard work, dedication, and commitment to the individuals we are privileged to serve. This is meaningful work and you are making a mighty difference. I applaud you! Please know that I am the richer for having shared space and time with you in this universe we call human services. We are resilient, spirited and strong willed! I am not going to bid you farewell. I'll think of you often and I'll see you soon. In the words of everybody's grandmother, "All good byes ain't gone!" I'll be watching you soar! Keep up the good work and stay encouraged. Remember always, "You are phenomenal!"

We have been gifted with this inspiring piece from the Greers, whose son resides at the Theil Center:

Geri and Sunland,

Despite all of the heartbreak of the mighty hurricane Michael, there was the courageous 'American Spirit' waiting patiently to spring into action. This spirit is present all of the time but it is most evident when we are faced with catastrophic events such as Michael.

As Michael stormed away, we realized our yards were shingled but our roofs were not, our windows gone, our trees gone, our communication systems gone, our vehicles damaged and we were without electricity. But, we were safe and sound. Our Lord, by his grace had truly blessed us all by bringing us safely through.

The American spirit I speak of is all around us found in the folks we see every day. I've seen it in my neighbors, the clerk at the grocery store, our church family, the staff at Sunland, and so many others. All with loving hearts and helping hands. We had a troubled night but we woke to calm. We saw destruction but we knew with time, we would overcome all of that. As I looked out my window, hoping to see my beloved wild birds, I was not disappointed. Taking a sunbath was a little lizard, flitting around was a butterfly, and perched on the feeder was not one, but two, tiny chickadees. Joy. The hummingbirds stayed with us another week. Our blessed Lord Jesus, the one who loves us unconditionally kept us and them safe.

Our gratitude to all the Sunland employees for the care given to our precious special needs folks who make their home at Sunland. Forgive the inadequacies of my words and understand my intentions. We are very grateful to all of you and pray God's richest blessings for you all the days of your lives.

John, Elizabeth, Eddie and Jeanni Greer

I, too, am grateful,  
*Geri Williams*  
Superintendent

## From the Deputy Superintendent...

“The eagle has no fear of adversity. We need to be like the eagle and have a fearless spirit of a conqueror!”

*-Joyce Meyer –*

The Most Dynamic Team,

Most humble greetings. As we approach the ending of 2018 and embrace the start of 2019, I want to celebrate your hard work and commitment to those we are privileged to serve. You have embraced the initiatives to move us ahead with forward momentum like embracing known challenges with solutions, building effective partnerships and providing lasting training, and simply raising the bar. Superintendent Williams' leadership over these 4 ½ years has been a multiplying effect. We are thankful!

First, let me say how humbled I am to serve alongside giants. The work that is undertaken at Sunland is simply amazing. However, I take this moment to reflect the triumphs of the year. I reflect on the resilience of our staff to be the very best in human service provision. I reflect on the opportunities that have been taken from our teams to be agents of positive change. I reflect on the many commendable acts of staff and our residents to embrace the community concept. Sunland is a community that is ever growing, changing, and reaching people.

On October 10, 2018, the Northwest Florida region was impacted in a way we never imagined by the devastation of Hurricane Michael. But what is amazing is how the Sunland Community united and put the needs of our residents first. We are still rebuilding but we are Sunland strong. The slogan adopted after Hurricane Michael speaks volumes about the commitment. The efforts are to be applauded.

It is important as we embark upon 2019, a year of greater heights, we remember that we should never view our challenges as a disadvantage. Rather, we should remember that facing and overcoming adversity is one of the best advantages. We are thankful to the families and support systems that are connected to our residents that we serve with gratitude twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week.

There has been so much change during this calendar year, but we want to salute our team (Marianna and Rish Park). The support is overwhelming and allows us to keep making a difference. Your sacrifice and total commitment is what fuels our progress. 2019 will be a year that will change the world for the better. We close the chapter of 2018 and prepare to write the story for 2019. Team, we are conquerors!

With humility and honoring commitment,

**Adrian D. Abner**

*Deputy Superintendent*



## Sunland Hub Hosts Student/Teacher Art Show

Sunland's Hub art program hosted their Student/Teacher Art Exhibition, Thursday, September 13 at the Historical Bank Building and Multi-Use Cultural Facility, in downtown Marianna. The show featured the creative works of students from The Hub Art Center, as well as their instructor, Volunteer Services Coordinator and local artist Maria Lincoln Johnson, in addition to local artist Lillie Clark, who retired from Sunland as an RN. Visitors, estimated at 200, enjoyed a beautiful evening viewing the art and meeting the artists.



## Be Everything and More!

Sunland Recreation reports a tremendous turnout at the inaugural BEAM (Be Everything And More) classes held September 19. A total of 67 residents participated in the class. Classes will be held every other Wednesday from 3 - 4 pm at the Gym. The class is open to residents from all three Units and Pathways. Instructor Tara Dent, R-DMT,GI-CMA, is well suited for this class, having prior experience working with individuals with physical and developmental challenges. Participants will enjoy an inspirational health and wellness curriculum that employs music and movement to promote and celebrate potential, strengthen body, mind and spirit connections; and move people into lighter and brighter ways of being in the world. Objectives of the class include: Reduce tension and stress levels through breathing, stretching, dance and structured exercise; Instill positive coping skills through the 4 B's (Brakes, Breath, Body and Brain) and impulse control and emotional regulation techniques; Increase confidence and self-esteem through body awareness exercises, self-expressive movements; Expand movement repertoire and Increase unity and camaraderie through group rhythmic activity, team building exercises and group celebration dances.

Congratulations to everyone who has signed up to participate. Go get 'em and BEAM On!



## Special Olympics Bowling

Jackson County Bowling Games were held on September 26th and over 50 residents from Sunland took part in a day of bowling at Kindel Lanes. The Marianna Women's Club donated lunches of sandwiches, chips and cookies much to everyone's delight.

Hurricane Michael rolled in on October 10th and Kindel Lanes suffered significant damage. As a result, Area Games were cancelled but nonetheless five individuals from Sunland were selected to take part in the State Championships in Orlando December 6 & 7, 2018. Of the five individuals, two won medals at the State Games. David R. won a gold medal and Arnaldo M. won a bronze medal. The other three bowlers (Cheryl D., Eddie T. and John B.) all won ribbons for finishing in the top eight for their respective divisions. Thanks to everyone who had a hand in making this bowling season such a success. Staff traveling with the bowlers to State Games included Ruth Moore, Johnny Hodges, Mary Herring (Nurse) and Clint Cox.



# Residential Services

During the month of September, residents of Unit 1 were treated to a special cookout at Sunland's Environmental Park, hosted by the Knights of Columbus. Everyone enjoyed a meal of grilled hamburgers, grilled hotdogs and a host of delicious sides. It was a perfect day! A special thank you to Maria Johnson, Volunteer Coordinator, for arranging this outing with our friends from Niceville!



Unit 3 Social Services, on behalf Mr. Cliff H. of Connally Manor, sends a great big "THANK YOU" for his recent family visit. Social Worker Faye Johnson says "If you could have seen the smile on Mr. Cliff's face and observe the wonderful time that he had with his family. It was worth it all. He has been talking about their visiting him for the last 6 months. Thank you greatly for making it happen for one of the residents that we are so privileged to serve."

We are saddened at the passing of Mr. Bert S. who resided at Sunland for many years. Most recently, at Unit 3, Connally Manor. Sunland has many fond memories of Bert. He came to Sunland on January 7, 1963. On May 1, 1967, he transferred to Florida State Hospital, returning to Sunland on October 4, 1971. On October 1, 1976, he moved to Hodge Group Home in Pensacola. He was readmitted to Sunland at Marianna on November 10, 1976. He also had a brief placement at an Escambia County ARC Group Home in Pensacola in 1989. He returned to Sunland Marianna in December of 1989 on a respite basis and was officially readmitted to Sunland Marianna on January 23, 1990. He remained at Sunland since that time where he enjoyed the company of his many friends and staff who loved him very much.

We will fondly remember Bert. He was truly a gentleman who enjoyed looking very nice each day. He always liked to have a name badge on before going to his work site each day. Recently, a Unit 3 team member, Ms. Faith Barnett created Bert a very nice vintage name badge made out of wood. He was so proud of his new badge and wore it to his worksite daily, showing it off to everyone as they passed by. May you rest in peace Bert!



## Hurricane Michael

On October 10, Hurricane Michael made landfall near Mexico Beach and quickly tore its way across the Panhandle, leaving much devastation in its wake. The community of Sunland was not spared, and sadly, we suffered much loss. Amid the destructive forces of the storm however, one thing was not lost: *The Spirit of Sunland!* As time has passed, Sunland staff and residents have demonstrated a strong resiliency and determination to move forward. We have and we will!





# The Sunland Beacon



Sunland Administration sends a huge "I See You" shout-out to everyone who worked so hard during and after Hurricane Michael! Your hard work has not gone unnoticed! Featured on the following pages are some of our residents, staff and others who stepped up to provide support. There are so many who worked hard during the recovery process that we do not have photos of, but your efforts were seen and are deeply appreciated!





i(see)you



# The Sunland Beacon



## 2nd Annual Scarecrow Row Contest

As September drew to a close, the 2nd Annual Scarecrow Row contest was in full swing. A total of 17 unique and creative scarecrows were entered. A special thank you to Linda Hatcher, RN/Sunland Retiree, Lt. Wayne Beasley, Marianna Police Department, and Judy Stanton, JCARC, for serving as judges for this event. Congratulations to everyone who participated. Your scarecrows were awesome!

### Funniest Category

- 1st Place Accounting
- 2nd Place Security
- 3rd Place Unit 2

### Upcycled Category

- 1st Place Recycling
- 2nd Place Unit 3 Connally
- 3rd Place Unit 3 Monroe

### Most Unusual Category

- 1st Place Quality Management
- 2nd Place CSS – The Hub Art Class
- 3rd Place Nursing

**Honorable Mentions:** Unit 1 Administration, Unit 1 Day Program, Pathways Rehab, Unit 3 Westside, CSS Suntown Mall, Unit 2 Frankie P, Unit 3 East Washington, Unit 1 Harrison



## Sunland Hosts Leadership Jackson County

Sunland was host to the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce and the 2018 Leadership Jackson County class on September 27. The group held their September meeting at Sunland, followed with an overview of the Center by Superintendent Geri Williams and a tour of the campus. Leadership Jackson County supports the development of emerging leaders within the business, education, government, professional and local communities, and assists them as they prepare for well-informed, engaging leadership positions. Contributors and presenters for this class include top businesses, civic, community, government and organizational leaders who represent the most influential entities in Jackson County. Sunland is honored to lend support in this capacity.



## Let the Holiday Season Begin!

As Sunland transitioned from post-hurricane recovery mode into the holiday season, it was clear that the storm did not dampen the spirits of residents and staff! While our surroundings still bear the scars of a major hurricane, we pushed forward because the spirit of the holiday season lives within our hearts. By end of October and into November and December, residents and staff enjoyed the annual Halloween Carnival and Halloween Dance, followed by Thanksgiving and Christmas activities. Students in Jennifer Grantham's classroom enjoyed celebrating Halloween by wearing their Halloween masks and partaking in a pizza party, followed by Halloween treats. In November, sponsors Payton O'Pry and Jennifer Grantham enjoyed a Thanksgiving outing at Po Folks Restaurant with Frank, Sandra and Rachael.



## It's Beginnig to Look a Lot Like Christmas!



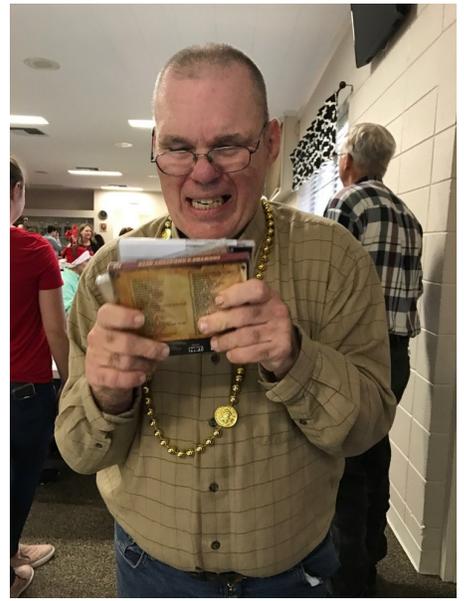
# The Sunland Beacon



# The Sunland Beacon



Have  
A Holly Jolly  
CHRISTMAS



## Sunland Staff Enjoy Christmas Celebrations

In the spirit of Christmas, various departments around the Center hosted holiday celebrations for their employees. The range of goodies included delectable holiday goodies, BBQ dinners, smoked steaks, and holiday games. The food, fun and fellowship made these gatherings with co-workers very special.



## A Tribute to Superintendent Geri Williams

The staff and residents of Sunland Center are saddened to learn of the retirement of our leader, mentor and friend, Superintendent Geri Williams.

Mrs. Williams, a veteran leader in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities, solidified her commitment to working with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities during her early teen years. She began her volunteer work with children who participated in Special Olympics, because of her friend Susan. Susan was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and helped with Special Olympics. Because of Susan, Geri Williams was inspired to get involved. That friendship set the stage for decades of public service. Throughout her career, she has strongly advocated for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and mental health challenges. Sunland Center was blessed to have her serve as our Superintendent for 4 ½ years.

Mrs. Williams has been a strong force for good at Sunland. Upon her arrival, she invested the necessary time to study and assess the operations of the Center, to get to know the staff, residents, their families and many within the Jackson County community. She quickly earned our respect and our trust. She demonstrated what it means to serve, and she conveyed the most important message that it is truly *our privilege to serve* those who call Sunland home. Under Mrs. Williams' lead, Sunland has thrived with new life and new opportunities for staff and residents. She never accepted the status quo; she encouraged us to be better, to grow and be strong. And we are. Under her guidance and leadership, Sunland has expanded services and opportunities to include the Hub fine arts program, the performing arts, the Mixer culinary arts program, the annual Art in the Park, new initiatives for the precision execution of the annual Fall Festival, building and strengthening community partnerships, leadership and professional growth opportunities, grounds restoration and beautification, communications expansion, job fair for the recruitment of key positions across the Center, recreational and social inclusion opportunities for residents, and much, much more. Mrs. Williams has led by example, always demonstrating the highest level of professionalism and personal integrity, treating everyone with dignity and respect. She directed the Center with a calm, steadfast assurance during the devastation of Hurricane Michael, never faltering or leaving the residents and staff who looked to her for guidance and stability. Because of her leadership, Sunland is a better place and stronger community.

Thank you Superintendent Williams for investing in the lives of everyone at Sunland. We commend you for a distinguished career spanning 30 plus years in the field of developmental and intellectual disabilities. We have learned much under your tenure; we have grown and we are better because you were here. We bid you a fond farewell and trust that your future will be filled with goodness, happiness and much success.

*“Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Some stay for a while, leave footprints on our hearts, and we are never, ever the same.” ~ Flavia Weedn*



## Lessons from Sunland's Majestic Oak



The majestic oak at Sunland has always been an icon, representative of the beauty and strength of the Center. The grand oak has withstood the tests of time, offering shade and tranquility, and a place of final rest for many former residents whose ashes have been scattered there. It is a place of beauty and a haven of peace. In its pre-hurricane state, the massive tree was beautiful, thick with green leaves and Spanish moss, beckoning passersby to linger for a moment to enjoy its beauty. When the hurricane blew across the Center, many were fearful that our beloved oak had succumbed to the destructive high winds. Yet, when the storm had passed, there she stood. Strong and proud! She had withstood the storm for her roots run deep! When an oak has a good root system, the winds of adversity actually strengthen rather than topple it. In times of drought, the roots sink even deeper to find the water needed to nourish the tree. If these roots grow to the surface, the tree will die, but if they sink deep into good soil, the tree can withstand anything. This process is hidden from the rest of the world. If the roots are strong, no one notices. If, however, they fail to take in the nourishment needed or grow deeply enough, the lack become obvious. This growth must take place in the good seasons, before the storms hit.

Yes, our grand oak withstood the storm. She bears the scars of the wind, with many of her beautiful leaves now gone. Yet, her beauty remains. Take a closer look. You can now see her strong branches and outstretched limbs. And, the serenity of the setting sun shining through symbolizing the beauty of a brighter tomorrow. Yes, she was attacked by the forces of nature, but she proved she is a force to be reckoned with. She is strong, she is resilient. Years of growth prepared her for the storm, and she overcame the winds of adversity.

Ponder the resiliency of our grand, majestic oak. There is a lesson to be learned from her for she represents the spirit of Sunland. We are strong, we are resilient, and we too have withstood the tests of time. What Hurricane Michael took from the Center was physical; what remains cannot be shaken. The roots of our spirit and strength run deep.

Sunland, we are well grounded, and we have survived!

