

2023-2024

LEAGUE LINES



Annual Report:
**YOUR GUIDE TO
EVERYTHING 23-24**

JLGL



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**HIGHLIGHTING ALL
THINGS JUNIOR
LEAGUE**

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Barbara Cadiz

Reflections on Discovering Our “Why” And Heading Forward Together With Our Strengths



How does one even begin to say “thank you” to the members of the Junior League and to our community partners for the success of the 2023-2024 Junior League year?

To borrow a phrase from our “Bee the Difference” project, you have truly been the difference by working together to make the difference. We have cultivated a positive influence through empathy, partnership, and recognizing the utmost needs of the women and children within our community.

We have united to build efficient committees, where we maximized volunteer hours. We updated our bylaws, policies, and procedures and have worked hard to overcome past challenges with the best interests of our League, members, and community in mind. We shortened League meetings and brought back “meet and greets” across Lakeland to foster social connection.

When it comes to our community impact, you have helped clothe children, provided essential hygiene items and school supplies, and donated thousands of books, giving kids the confidence to thrive in the classroom and the joy of owning a book of their very own.

You have produced another successful World of Reading event at Barnett Family Park. You have hosted an arts event and been a sponsor of the Florida Children’s Museum Watermelon Festival at Bonnet Springs Park. You served Title I schools through Reading is FUNdamental program and encouraged children’s health by hosting a free children’s tennis clinic at Florida Southern College.

You have conducted very successful fundraisers with Black Diamond Ball, Little Black Dress, and Bee The Difference, while our HQ rentals made the most significant profit in its history!

You have witnessed the preserve and repair our historic headquarters with a generous renovation grant from Publix Supermarket Charities. This also provided a much needed alternative storage space, lowering our monthly expenses. Both members of the League and the community have enjoyed leasing our building with these new updates.

You worked hard to assure thousands of community members received a joyous start to the holiday season with the 42nd Annual Lakeland Christmas Parade, “Christmas in Candy Land”.

You have welcomed our new Provisionals and hosted the Past Presidents Roundtable, the March GMM, and the Sustainer Spring Gathering in your homes. You have attended various League meetings and socials, Sustainer Fall Luncheon, the Founders Day Tea, the JLGL Women’s Entrepreneurship Panel & Discussion, Spring Banquet, and fun bingo nights.

You supported one of our proudest contributions to the community, the Polk Museum of Art, now named after one of our sweetest and most philanthropic members, Ashley Gibson Barnett. Through this League grant to the Ashley Gibson Barnett Museum of Art’s garden, you have provided a very special space that will bring a sense of joy, well being, and wonder to everyone in the community, young and old, who enters. And it will help spotlight who we are and what we do to better our beloved community.



As we examine these efforts more closely, I want to thank the members of our Board for all their hard work during the 2023-2024 League year and Katherine Fitzwater for being my right hand as PE. You have each worked hard and long to assure success. I am so proud of you and thankful for your friendship.

Special thanks to our Sustainers, who continue to go the extra mile. Kim Elmhurst, Doris Lyons, Callie Miller, and Amy Royal opened their homes to host the March GMMs, while Kathleen Miller hosted the Sustainer Spring Gathering. With her Permanent Historian service and lifelong devotion to our Sustainers and League, Sheila Lotterhos stepped up to assure we not only got our yearbooks but our annual reports. Jess Brown came back to help with the Provisionals, and Heather Jones came back as Finance VP. Missy deZayas stepped up to help with Treasurer as we made record gains. Callie Miller and Alyss Ruster came back in, to make Black Diamond Ball the most successful it has been to date!

Last, my Sustaining Advisor and our 2023-2024 Sustaining Vice President Tiffany Hawks’ steadfast friendship, wise counsel, and dedicated service was incomparable. Tiffany held my hand, and consequently the League’s hand, all the way from PE to President, and she cheered for me and the League all the way to the finish line and beyond. Her legal knowledge combined with her League knowledge were a force when combined with her commitment.

You have done all of this graciously, gladly, and generously. To that end, I just want you to know that this president’s heart is filled with gratitude for you and for all our members who stepped forward to make everything happen. You are amazing, and I salute and thank each and every one of you.

Here’s to us — the Junior League of Greater Lakeland, our community partners and friends, and to everyone we serve!

Fondly,

JLGL President, 2023-2024

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2023-2024

President
Barbara Cadiz

Corresponding Secretary
Julia Huerta

Assistant Funding Director
Carolyn Woodger

President-Elect
Katherine Fitzwater

Membership VP
Jayde Coleman

Community VP
Amy Bermudez

Sustaining VP
Tiffany Hawks

Assistant Membership VP
Katie Surrency

Assistant Community VP
Nicole Summers

Assistant Sustaining VP
Kimberly Elmhurst

Finance VP
Heather Jones

Bylaws
Kristen Hauk

Communications VP
Alexa Russo

Treasurer
Nicole Minott

Strategic Planning
Angel Davis

Assistant Communications VP
Chimere Butler

Funding Director
Stacy Walsh

Nominating Chair
Courtenay Fulmer

Secretary
Tracy DiCesare

Parliamentarian
Alyss Ruster



WELCOME NEW ACTIVES

2023-2024

Marisol Acevedo
Sarah Back
Jamie Baker
Hafsah Blatz
Michele Bouie
Carissa Capozza
Brittany Currier
Shavonna Daniels

Nikki Dulin
Sarah Skoll
Angelica Hawkins
Kayla Keen
Stephanie Kelly
Gabriela Larrea
Ashley Loute
Von McGriff
Nathalie Orphee

Krysta Perkins
Terri Schroeder
Allison Sikes
Sara Snyder
Karresa Tarver
Alexandra Taylor
Kelly Valk
Samantha Villanueva
Karen Wallace



COMMUNITY IMPACT

For 91 years, the Junior League of Greater Lakeland has been dedicated to enhancing our community through outreach initiatives aimed at maximizing impact with the help of volunteers, partnerships and financial assistance.



LAKELAND CHRISTMAS PARADE

"The warmth of our community, where every float, every marcher, and every wave reminds us that the magic of Christmas is alive in the hearts of us all."

The Lakeland Christmas Parade took place on Thursday, December 7, 2023. As the first firework launched, the parade officially began, leaving the RP Funding Center.

It included floats, marching bands, and decorated trailers, ending with Mr. and Mrs. Claus atop their sleigh.

The theme was Christmas in Candyland, with each float incorporating it into their design. The 2023 Lakeland Christmas Parade winners were presented with plaques during a City Commission Meeting!



Parade Winners

Best Youth/Educational Float: Medulla Elementary

Best Community Float: Salvation Army

Best Business Float: Family Reptiles

Best Themed Float: Make It Happen Auto/RV Sales & Repair

Judges' Choice Award: Cleveland Court Elementary

Best Professional Float: Bethel Baptist Church

Best Band: George Jenkins High School

Most Original Float: Rose Dynasty Foundation Inc.



Photo Credit: City of Lakeland, FL-Government



Photo Credit: LKLDNOW.com

READING IS FUNDAMENTAL



Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) is a phenomenal part of the Junior League mission. At every book distribution, RIF places books and snacks in the hands of 500-800 elementary school children in one morning alone! In 2023, we accomplished 9 RIF distributions and participated in two parent nights at local Title 1 schools. The evening programs granted a more interactive experience with parents present and different schools selected. All together, RIF distributed over 6,000 books to students of our Lakeland community. One of RIF's most memorable visits took place at Padgett Elementary, April 18, 2023

SNOWFEST



Snow made landfall at Lake Mirror in downtown Lakeland during the City of Lakeland's annual Snowfest held on December 9, 2023.

Man-made snow fell as visitors entered the event. There were arts & craft vendors, a 30-foot-tall Christmas tree, Santa and Mrs. Claus, Santa's workshop with treats, a book giveaway by several Junior League of Greater Lakeland members, entertainment, and food trucks. Home Depot provided take-home toy kits, and guests enjoyed hot cocoa while exploring the artisan market and festive lights of Lake Mirror. The event featured a stroll through the snow and other holiday delights around the amphitheater. Attendees were encouraged to bring canned food donations for admission, supporting Senior Orphans and Volunteers in Service to the Elderly. The night ended with Santa's helpers (wink) distributing over 1,000 books and smiles.

WORLD OF READING

"The Junior League of Greater Lakeland's World of Reading event is a celebration of imagination and literacy, where every page turned opens a door to new adventures, inspiring young minds to dream, learn, and grow."



The Junior League hosted its annual World of Reading Festival at Barnett Park on Saturday, April 6th from 9am to 1pm. This free event was open to children of all ages and their families! WOR is a local tradition, loved by local moms, dads, grandparents, and most importantly – KIDS!

At WOR, attendees explored crafts, balloon art, and face paintings while singing and dancing along with Family

Friendly, Folk Singer-Songwriter Will Forever. They met local authors: Ciara F. Bates, author of "A Simple Act of Kindness" and Shelby Mander, author of "Petunia the Piccolo Player." Each child who attended the event received free books.

This program was partly funded by a grant from Florida's Natural Growers Foundation, Inc. of Lake Wales, Florida. Thank you to our sponsors!

KIDS TENNIS CLINIC



This year's Kids Tennis Clinic was held on Saturday, April 20th, at the Wynee Warden Tennis Center at Florida Southern College.

Within 24 hours all 110 registration spots within 24 hours of registration going live. Each participant received a free Wilson tennis racquet, tennis ball and t-shirt. During the 1-hour clinic sessions, children ages 5-12 learned warm-up exercises and basic foundational tennis skills from the men's and women's tennis teams at Florida Southern.

Participants and their families also had the opportunity to choose a free book and read a story with the ladies of Florida Southern's sorority chapter of Alpha Chi Omega. It was a wonderful event for all!

"It's a wonderful opportunity for children to grow, have fun, and build confidence while embracing the joy of staying active and healthy together."



BLACK DIAMOND BALL

A Night of Elegance and Impact

On January 6, 2024, the Junior League of Greater Lakeland hosted its fourth annual Black Diamond Ball at the prestigious Lakeland Country Club. This elegant evening brought together 200 supporters who celebrated, connected, and contributed to our mission. The event was a resounding success, raising nearly \$175,000! The event was co-chaired by Sustainers Callie Miller and Alyss Ruster. As guests arrived, they were greeted by the glamour of a

Vogue-themed photo booth and an acrobat pouring champagne in the foyer. The black-tie crowd mingled, ready to enjoy an unforgettable evening.

Beyond the glitz and glamour, the Black Diamond Ball had a purpose. Guests were led to an area filled with games, where they had the opportunity to participate in our mission-focused activity: purchasing and filling backpacks for local school children. It was heartwarming to see our supporters engage directly with our cause.



The program commenced with a blessing from Mayor Bill Mutz, setting a reflective tone for the evening. Barb Cadiz, our League President, delivered opening remarks, emphasizing the impact of our work.

But the real stars of the night were the winners of the Little Black Dress Initiative fundraising campaign.



Spotlight on Our Emcee: Robert Lay

Robert Lay, our charismatic emcee for the evening, wears many hats. Professionally, he serves as the General Manager of ServPro Lakeland. His community involvement is equally impressive: Past President of Campfire, a Board member of the Polk Theatre and the Lay Legacy, and an advisory committee member for Bonnet Springs Park. And let's not forget his 2023 Fantasy Football Championship win!



Guest Speaker: Kelly De La Cruz

Kelly De La Cruz, Founder and Director of Mi Escuela Montessori, took the stage as our guest speaker. With 25 years of experience in education, Kelly's passion for Montessori and dual language learning is evident. Her journey—from Rookie Teacher of the Year in Miami-Dade County to leading Mi Escuela Montessori—inspired everyone in the room.



A Call to Give

Following Kelly's moving speech, Robert led the invitation to give. Generous donors raised their hands, contributing a remarkable \$27,050 in just minutes. Ashley and Nicholas Barnett's matching donation doubled the impact.



MARDI GRAS-STYLE CELEBRATION

As the stars twinkled overhead, guests stepped outside into the enchanting Mardi Gras atmosphere. The air was alive with excitement as stilt walkers gracefully moved through the crowd, their colorful costumes capturing everyone’s attention. Dancers swirled to the rhythm of jazz music, adding a touch of elegance to the night. And then, the sky erupted in a burst of color. A spectacular fireworks show illuminated the darkness, painting the night with vibrant hues. The crowd collectively held its breath, mesmerized by the dazzling display. It was a moment of pure magic, a celebration of unity and purpose.



Back inside, the energy remained high. Guests exchanged their dessert forks for play money, ready to try their luck at the casino tables. Blackjack, roulette, poker, and craps—each game represented a chance to make a difference. Every chip they wagered translated into support for children burdened by resource gaps. It was more than just a game; it was an investment in a brighter future. But the excitement didn’t end there. Those hard-won chips became raffle tickets, unlocking the possibility of winning incredible prizes. Spa treatments promised relaxation, gift certificates opened doors to shopping sprees, and dream vacations beckoned. As names were drawn, the room buzzed with anticipation, and lucky winners celebrated their good fortune.





GRATITUDE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Black Diamond Ball wouldn't have been possible without the unwavering support of our sponsors and donors. Let's recognize those who stood by our side:

Publix Super Markets Charity, Amy and Ed Laderer, Ansley and Greg Masters, Tinsley Creative, Mid-State Industrial Maintenance, AgAmerica Lending, Carilly, Bernie's Body Shop, Paul and Tiffany Hawks, Stuarts Plumbing, RSR, Dietrich Kelso Orthodontics and Kelso Family Dental, SouthState Bank, Ashley & Nicholas Barnett, Fulmer Law, and Corrosion Control.

And let's not forget the talented individuals and businesses who lent their expertise and donated to our auctions:

Stationery Loft, Bloom Shakalaka, Harlow Events, Tampa Bay DJ Company, Bella Visage, Premier Party Rentals, Florida Southern College, Chef Marcos with Nineteen61, Jenn Humphries, and the Lakeland Country Club.

Together, We Make a Difference

To all who partnered with us, attended the Black Diamond Ball, and believed in our mission: Thank you. Your generosity fuels our work, empowering children and transforming lives.



LITTLE BLACK DRESS INITIATIVE

Little Black Dress Initiative

The League hosts the Little Black Dress Initiative each year, inviting members to raise awareness and funds through their personal networks and social media. This year, they collectively raised over \$25,000!

Notable fundraising teams included Paige Peck and Kira Perkins, Nichole Summers and Brittany Sale, and Kaleigh Avian and Lu Fitzwater. Our top fundraising team? Congratulations to Paige Peck and Kira Perkins!

FOUNDERS DAY TEA



On March 3, 2024, The League hosted a delightful afternoon tea party that was a resounding success.

Guests enjoyed an exquisite selection of teas and freshly baked scones, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. In addition to the culinary delights, attendees had the opportunity to engage in various activities, including flower bouquet making and crafting friendship bracelets.

Fun games added to the excitement, and everyone loved capturing memories at our photo booth, generously provided by Selfie Studio. Friends and family came together, ensuring that no one wanted to miss out on this wonderful gathering!

MEMBER SOCIALS

Junior League of Greater Lakeland member socials are all about good times and great company—where we mix, mingle, and build friendships that make our community shine even brighter!





Creating friendships is key to building strong connections, fostering collaboration, and creating a supportive network that empowers us to make a real impact in our community. Whether it's bonding over our annual cookie exchange, singing along at a Taylor Swift movie viewing, or grooving through a 70s-themed bingo night, these moments of fun and friendship strengthen the ties that help us grow and give back together.

JUNIOR LEAGUE ANNUAL MEETING AND SPRING BANQUET



The Junior League of Greater Lakeland held its annual Spring Meeting at the Lakeland Country Club on Tuesday, May 7, 2024. Over 145 provisional, active and sustaining members attended the event celebrating the 91st year of the Junior League of Greater Lakeland's commitment to improving our community and developing women leaders.

President Barbara Cadiz presided over the meeting as she completed her term as president.

Past President Stephanie Madden announced Sheila Lotterhos as the Carol Jenkins Barnett Sustainer of the Year honoree

and 2023 Sarah D McKay Award winner Lu Fitzwater recognized Alice O'Reilly with the organization's top honor, the Sarah D McKay Award. 27 women moved from Provisional to Active status.

President Barb Cadiz announced that the League Building income has reached over \$100,000 and the Black Diamond Ball raised over \$170,000 making the total money collected for the League \$358,270.

After a year of leadership development and community service opportunities, 27 women graduated from Provisional to Active membership.

The 2024-2025 Board of Directors of the Junior League of Greater Lakeland was installed.

President - Katherine Fitzwater
President-Elect - Angel Davis
Sustaining Vice President - Kimberly Elmhorst
Communications Vice President - Chimere Butler
Finance Vice President - Nicole Minott
Treasurer - Jennifer Burnett
Funding Director - Carolyn Woodger
Community Vice President - Nichole Summers
Membership Vice President - Katie Surrency
Secretary - Tracy DiCesare
Corresponding Secretary - Stacy Walsh
Nominating Chair - Jessica Brown





ALICE CULBERSON O'REILLY

Sustainer

2023-24 Sarah Dukes McKay Award Winner

by League Historian Sheila Lotterhos

“The JLGL dictionary has a face next to the word ‘go-getter’, and that face belongs to Alice Culberson O’Reilly. Alice possesses a reservoir of seemingly boundless energy, and thankfully for our League and our community, she dwells in a world of endless possibility.”

Those same qualities that Alice possesses dovetail perfectly with the prerequisites of winning the Sarah Dukes McKay Award. The qualifications include being a member in good standing who personifies philanthropy, leadership, empowerment, and inclusiveness as well as a commitment to improving our community. Alice, who happens to be a Leadership Lakeland II graduate and Jere Annis Award

winner, is the very personification of these qualities and more.

This true professional and Lakeland native, who coincidentally was the first Lakeland baby born in her birth year, began a successful retail career as a child by charming her dad’s customers in his Pine Street Hardware Store. During her time at Lakeland Senior High School (an institution which she still avidly supports), Alice began working for Maas Brothers, an anchor of Downtown Lakeland shopping for years. “I knew from the time I was small that I wanted to work in retail, and I loved helping out in my father’s store. But I also knew I wanted to work in fashion. So when I was about to turn 16, I applied to Mass Brothers

or a part-time job. The only reason I didn't start on the day I turned 16 is because Maas Brothers was closed on New Year's Day which, of course, happens to be my birthday!"

Alice worked as many hours as she possibly could. Then, after graduating from Lakeland High School with a desire to have a full-time career in retail, Alice attended Andrew College in Cuthbert, Georgia. With a burning passion for retail, it's not one bit surprising that Alice chose to major in business.

Executive training came after college through a job offer to work with Allied Stores as the first woman in their executive training program. Many prominent department stores of the time, including Maas Brothers where Alice worked, functioned under Allied's umbrella. Alice then parlayed her skills into a successful job interview with Saks Fifth Avenue in San Francisco, making what promised to be a glamorous, exciting move with an impressive salary.

Alice's dad, the consummate businessman, had cautioned her before she accepted the position that he had done some research. From his findings, Mr. Culberson asserted that Alice's large proposed salary in California would come with things like state income tax, a higher sales tax than Florida's (7% half a century ago!), and steep costs of living when it came to rent, utilities, gas, and groceries. Still the allure of the job and San Francisco drew Alice, and she spread her wings and flew to another region where she thrived in her chosen profession. After some time, however, Alice discovered everything her father said was true about its cost of

Living within that glittering salary in San Francisco was a struggle. It was also difficult for her older parents to fly back and forth on transcontinental flights for visits. Hence her astute business sense coupled with her love for her parents and Lakeland kicked in and lured her home again.

San Francisco's loss was definitely our gain! Alice returned to Lakeland to be the buyer and manager of Rheinhauser's. From there, Alice proceeded to dress members of the Jr. League for years. Lessons about not cutting yourself in half as a short person, one color elongating the body, black covering a multitude of fashion sins, and travel buff panty-hose as absolute necessities were some of her "Dress-for-Success" rules. That was before she would even let you consider the latest fashions!

Alice's tour de force, however, was her tenure at the helm of VISTE (Volunteers in Service to The Elderly). If there was a problem for Lakeland's frail seniors, Alice found a solution. When it was discovered that some VISTE clients were forced to choose between taking their costly medication and paying their electric bill, Alice set out to conquer the challenge. Governor Jeb Bush tapped her to serve on the Department of Elder Affairs Advisory Council, and she served successfully for his term. Alice was also nominated by then Congressman Adam Putnam to serve on the White House Council on Aging. President George W. Bush approved her nomination as he appreciated Alice's passion for solving the increasing price of prescription drugs for the elderly. With a lot of assistance from many people across the country, the White House

ouncil on Aging was successful in raising awareness of this critical issue, and Medicare Part D was the end result.

Through Alice's leadership, more VISTE clients were served, and volunteers increased. Bi-weekly hot meals were added along with more daily assurance calls, respite care, commodities boxes, and transportation to doctor's visits. A new fundraiser called VISTEBall was adopted, and a new building was purchased along with ample freezer and storage space for donated foods. Vehicles were donated, and new communities were added under the umbrella of this grassroots effort to help frail seniors stay safely in their own homes. When Alice retired, the community gave her a huge retirement party called "Alice in VISTEland" at the RP Funding Center. Friends and admirers packed the house. Large sums were given to VISTE in Alice's honor. And her praises are still being sung today!

While Alice's love affair with the elderly began with the loving care she took of her own family members, her heartbeat has been for every frail senior living alone and lonely in their homes. The stories of the differences made in their lives are endless, but the reward is seeing their gratitude as their faces light up over something as simple as a jar of peanut butter. The more dramatic stories involve lives actually saved by volunteers making deliveries.

Alice credits her Junior League training for much of her success running a volunteer driven agency. As a matter of fact, Alice began her introduction to and association

with VISTE through the Jr. League. Serving as Community Research Program Development Chair, Alice shared that Bascom Carlton, the director of VISTE, came to us with a grant request. Alice's reaction? "I was determined we would fund it!" Sweet as could be, with an earnest humbleness that shined in every direction, when Bascom Carlton spoke, people listened and connected, and he and the agency connected with Alice and the League. VISTE was given their grant and gained several League Board members including Alice as a consequence of that request and of other requests made over the years.

Alice's decision to head VISTE deserves some knowledge of its founding director. The Rev. Bascom Carlton and his wife Betty, an experienced social worker, had devoted their working lives to the needs of the children of the Florida Methodist Children's Home. Upon retirement and a move to Lakeland, their hearts turned toward the needs of seniors who were sometimes "orphaned" by the loss of family and friends. Together, with a group of over a dozen concerned citizens, including Frank O'Reilly (Alice's husband), the late Duane McConnell (the father of Sustainer Kathleen Coffman), Barney Barnett (the husband of late Sustainer Carol Barnett), the late Dr. Sam Clark of Clark Daughtry Medical Clinic, and others, VISTE was founded, and the founders served as its first directors. Bascom and Betty ran the organization for about ten years until health issues prohibited their continuance. Serving as the VISTE Search Committee Chair tasked with finding a new director, Alice and the committee worked for six long months on a national search for the perfect candidate, preferring someone with local contacts if at all possible. When the field was finally narrowed down to two strong candidates,

he committee then did something unexpected to its chair. They told her the person they really wanted was Alice herself!

To say Alice was shocked is an understatement. A plethora of emotions flooded through her. The committee had just spent six months interviewing candidates! She was being asked to give up a lucrative job she loved in retail to do something she wasn't completely sure she could handle! Frank helped convince her it was the right thing to do, but it was Alice's choice to make. And it is no surprise that the VISTE Board and Honorary Advisory Board let out a collective sigh of relief coupled with joy when Alice said, "Yes." VISTE was then poised to go from great to even greater with Alice leading the charge, and VISTE did just that.

In addition to her career and on a lighter note, Alice served as what old friends termed the Lakeland "Mayoress" as the wife of former Mayor Frank O'Reilly. Just ask her about her

adventures! The couple love spending time with their daughter Krista's family, especially their two grown granddaughters, one of whom (Hannah) will be in our upcoming Provisional Class. Outside of the League and family activities, Alice also enjoys PEO, Antiques Circle, and playing mahjong. Most of all, the raconteur that is Alice loves telling stories.

One of the best stories is how Alice and Barney Barnett took a leading community benefactor to lunch to discuss the man's ability to potentially give more money to VISTE. The man looked at Alice and said,

"Alice, I can't believe you left Rheinbauer's. Good for you! And good for ME because I don't think anyone can sell my wife as many clothes without you there to do it!" Consequently, the gentleman doubled his annual giving!

In terms of the League, Alice has been a valued League member for over four decades, having served as CRPD chair, Community Vice President, the Sustaining Vice President/Sustainer Council Chair, and as the 2024-25 Sustainer Engagement Chair. While Alice is impressed with the League's many past accomplishments, she is looking forward to another year of fellowship and working together to meet our present community needs.

As a family insight, Alice learned valuable lessons from her grandmother and related a story about her grandmother's sacrifice during a difficult time. When the boll weevil hit Georgia and destroyed their family farm, Alice's mother's family moved to Florida for Alice's grandfather's work. They relocated a few times until eventually leasing a home in Lakeland on Miramar. With Alice's mother in college at Florida Southern and two younger sisters in high school, the last thing on her grandmother's mind was moving again, but they came close to being uprooted by the landlord who wanted to sell the house!

After unsuccessfully trying to talk him out of selling, Alice's grandmother asked the man how much he wanted for the house. At which point the man looked at her hand and said, "About as much as that diamond ring on your finger." In no mood to uproot her family again and without even flinching, she took her beloved ring from her finger and handed it to the man as payment for the house. Later her daughters got together

and bought their mother a very beautiful pearl ring and matching earrings from the Orient as a special thank-you for what she sacrificed for them.

Yet the sacrifice of the first ring went further in teaching her granddaughter the importance of giving your all and reaping unexpected benefits in return. While Alice sacrificed her retail salary to head VISTE and while the numerous awards Alice has won are beautiful testaments to her hard work, the fulfillment of serving others and the inexplicable joy of witnessing other people's joy and relief when given a hand up surpasses it all.

If you look closely at Alice's hand , you just might see the pearls that once belonged to her bold, self-sacrificing grandmother. The pearls are now arranged in a new setting for a granddaughter who has far surpassed anything her elders might have dreamed possible, a granddaughter who has gained the undying respect and love of her community at large and her League friends in particular. So we honor you, Alice, for all that you are, all that you've done, and all that you continue to do. We hope you'll accept these words along with this award as the League's tribute to you, our very own irreplaceable pearl!







VALERIE MCDONOUGH

2023-24 JLGL Volunteer of the Year Award

by League Historian Sheila Lotterhos

Five minutes spent in the company of Valerie McDonough is not only a lesson in international geography, but a lesson in friendliness, commitment, selflessness, and purposefulness.

Valerie speaks softly with the wisdom of someone twice her age, and she has led a fascinating life on the international level with her parents, two older sisters, and brother. Valerie now happily makes her home in Lakeland with her husband Mark (who is a Lakeland firefighter and Engineer EMT), their son Macoy (four), and daughters Quinn (three) and Ireland (one).

Born in Venezuela to French Canadian parents, Valerie is whip smart but modest — she knows French, English, and Spanish. She also knows what's most important in life and is happy to share it — The Lord, her husband, their children, plus family and friends

. Valerie is quick to prioritize the order in which these relationships occur and feels the order is crucial to the relationship itself.

When asked what this vital and engaging young woman's favorite thing about the League is, she replied with the following:

"I love the fact that, just as my family and I get to be the hands and feet of Christ through our church, as League members we get to be the League's hands and feet in the community. We do it by putting books into the hands of children and encouraging them to read. Also by supplying everything from clothes to hygiene supplies for children in need. It's great to be able to do this and to take my young children with me to RIF distributions and World of Reading. This gives them first-hand experience of how important it is to give to others and to volunteer. It also encourages them to be readers. Handing a child a book is my joy. Community

outreach makes me tick. And lots of reading goes on in our house.”

Valerie’s education is not just limited to schools. Her father worked internationally with a paper company. Hence their family lived in Venezuela, England (twice near Manchester), and the United States (in Tennessee and North Carolina) while spending summers with grandparents and other relatives in Canada. What an experience!

In her formal education, Valerie took her A-levels in England but started college at Polk State, then attended Warner where she majored in Communications and met Mark. Having grown up in Florida, Mark’s family is originally from Rhode Island, but one of his grandmothers was a French Canadian, a sign that this marriage was surely meant to be. The couple have had two weddings — a small civil one to establish Valerie’s dual citizenship and a large church wedding which has been followed by a life of devoted church work.

Valerie began her professional life with a year spent in Canada living with family members and working for a bilingual cell phone/cable/home internet company that was based in England. After her marriage and move to the United States, she then worked as a special needs elementary school teacher at a charter school in Winter Haven followed by six years at Florida Southern College where she was Executive Assistant to FSC Vice President for Finance and Administration Terry Dennis.

Valerie left Florida Southern to become a full-time homemaker when her son was born. Before Valerie became pregnant with Macoy, she and her husband were told they would not be able to have children, basically that it would take a miracle for them to conceive. Three little miracles later, their family of two became a family of five! The thing which is abundantly clear is how much this couple adores children, both their own and others.

Therefore it is not one bit surprising that Valerie has been co-chair of RIF and involved with other book distributions. She has also enjoyed serving on Communications, Marketing, and Thrift Sale. One of Valerie’s favorite activities is event planning, especially elaborate birthday parties for kids which she said, “I do for fun.” Valerie further enjoys living in an older home which she has lovingly decorated with special pieces that include thrifting finds.

When Valerie is not busy volunteering for the League or with her children’s activities, she is involved in her church through women’s ministry, nursery, and as a volunteer for their shoebox ministry. Valerie even served as a youth pastor in a previous church she attended. What a blessing Valerie no doubt is to her whole church family.

And what a blessing Valerie is to her League family! We congratulate you, Valerie, on a job well done as evidenced by this League honor and look forward to seeing you succeed in all of your future endeavors. Thank you for your continued commitment to our League. We are proud to call you a fellow member and even happier to call you a friend!



LAUREN NETTLES

2023-24 JLGL Spirit of The League Award

by League Historian Sheila Lotterhos

In interviewing Active (and now, new Sustainer) Lauren Nettles for this spotlight, her sense of gratitude for the honor of being selected as “The Spirit of The League” is tangible. You can hear it in her voice. You can sense it in her words.

Lauren’s attitude of gratitude was followed by a sincere protestation that she felt so many other members were far more worthy of this honor than she. Yet this is the second time this vivacious, engaging teacher and nine-year League member has won this award. And it is perfectly clear why Lauren is recognized by her peers as “a cheerleader of the organization, constantly displaying the Junior League spirit throughout Greater Lakeland.”

And what a wonderful thing cheering for the League is! Nothing speaks louder about an organization than the way

members characterize it in the community and within the organization itself. A good attitude is contagious, it’s free, and it’s something we should all adopt.

A conversation with Lauren quickly reveals she is a devoted mom to her 3 1/2 year old daughter, Ellie, a loving wife to her husband, Eric, and a dedicated teacher whose students at Highlands Grove Elementary are blessed to have someone who cares so deeply for them, both on an academic level and a personal one. Lauren has taught there for her entire career. She began teaching children with special needs, moved to kindergarten for eight years, and now teaches first grade. And what a great fit for the League Lauren is with so many of our child-centered missions.

This special teacher is a hometown girl and graduate of George Jenkins High School. Upon graduation, Lauren attended The

University of South Florida where she majored in psychology and minored in political science. Her original plans to become a lawyer changed when she struggled with infertility. Lauren shared, “I was told I wouldn’t be able to have children. So if I couldn’t have any of my own, my aspirations of becoming a lawyer faded, and I decided to become a teacher.” What an amazingly positive attitude! But the story doesn’t end there. After over eight years of marriage, Lauren and Eric welcomed their “beautiful miracle” with the birth of their daughter, Ellie Kathrine aka Ellie aka Ellie-Kate.

Lauren’s love story with Eric is nothing short of a Hallmark movie, one scripted by God. Their families had initially attended the same church. Before Lauren was even born, Ryan’s family left to join a different church, and it seemed that the two were never likely to meet. Years later, Lauren and a friend were walking Lake Hollingsworth where Eric was stretching with his personal trainer. Lauren’s friend thought the trainer was handsome, so Lauren walked over with her to play “wing woman”. The plot soon thickened. According to Lauren, “Unfortunately for my friend the trainer was already married, but very luckily for me his cute friend was single. We have now been married for 12 years!”

In terms of the League, Lauren’s placements primarily centered on the Membership Track. She has served on Special Events, Arrangements, Ready to Read (two years) and as our Corresponding Secretary, Membership Assistant VP, Membership VP, Special Events, Education/Training Assistant Chair, and Education/Training Chair. The latter was her favorite placement, and she spent three years on the committee.

In responding to why Education/Training was her favorite placement, Lauren said, “It was during this time I was able to learn the ins and outs of the League. I was able to work with every committee behind the scenes, making sure that our meetings ran smoothly, and I learned the art of speaking. This committee is followed very closely by Ready to Read. As a teacher, it is a joy watching parents and children read together. By teaching basic skills to the parents, we are not only setting their children up to be great readers, but we are facilitating a built-in family time that is wonderfully beneficial to the family unit.”

It is no surprise that Lauren has a wide range of talents and personal interests. Lauren loves to read and is in an online book club. Crafting is another hobby which she says is handy to have when creating a caring classroom environment. Professional development is yet another great pastime where Lauren not only enhances her own teaching skills but is then able to share those skills with others. Her favorite thing to do, however, is enjoying the company of her “amazing family”.

In closing, Lauren offered the following words of advice for League members:

“Try everything! The League is a place where you can learn new skills and grow as a leader. Don’t be afraid to try something you’ve never tried before.”

Wise advice, indeed, from someone with a true servant’s heart who leads by example and in turn has gained the respect and love of her fellow members. Hats off, Lauren, for a job exceedingly well done!



ALEXANDRA TAYLOR

2023-24 Provisional of The Year Award

by League Historian Sheila Lotterhos

What is the one thing award-winning Provisional and new Active Alexandra Taylor (Alex) loves best about the Junior League? The camaraderie. Alex stated, “I postponed joining for a while, and when I finally joined, I discovered a whole new family. It’s all been such a gift!”

Even over the phone, you can hear the enthusiasm in Alex’s voice mingled with her respect for the organization. This energetic member is as bright and cheerful as a spring morning, and there is little doubt that she brings her A-game to everything she does and everyone she encounters. She certainly brought it to this interview.

A sixth generation Floridian and Lakeland native with family roots in the Kathleen area, Alex attended Cleveland Court Elementary, Southwest Junior High, and graduated from Lakeland High School where she played varsity volleyball and was a member of the Keyette Service Club. Her volunteer service in the

.Her volunteer service in the community began at a very young age. Alex had this to say about how she started volunteering with the encouragement of her mom who is also her mentor:

“My mom would sign us up for VISTE shifts or take us to Achievement Academy to help with a Christmas party. Mom has been a nurse for over 30 years, and I watched her selflessness and dedication to her patients on a daily basis. I believe she is the primary reason I chose to go into psychology and social work. It is the blessing and the curse of ‘wanting to help people.’ As a little girl, I felt a deep empathy and connection to the most vulnerable populations. I always loved connecting with other people on an individual and communal level. I wanted to know what someone had been through and all the WHYs and HOWs. These concepts of love, connection, and resiliency fascinated me about the human experience, as well as how tragedy and hardship impacted people, again, on an individual and community level.”

The recipient of a volleyball scholarship to Georgia's Point University, Alex majored in Psychology and minored in Biblical Studies. After graduation, Alex worked as a mentor and community outreach specialist with young adults transitioning into college as freshmen, programming and overseeing weekly free dinners for 200+ college students plus other events including small groups to help build relationships, planning annual women's retreats, working with the counseling center of Spring Road Christian Church to coordinate the screening of clients and connect them with clinical services, and overseeing and helping equip a team of interns.

After Georgia, Alex began work at a non-profit training facility in Lineville, Alabama. The agency trained missionaries and humanitarians on appropriate farming, building, and community development techniques they could apply all over the world. Alex also worked with older adults, teaching group fitness and individual wellness.

Upon returning home to Lakeland in 2020, Alex started her career at the Peace River Center. She was hired as a Crisis Response Counselor, providing crisis intervention and risk assessment for individuals in the community who may be experiencing a mental health crisis, suicidal ideations, or a substance induced issue. While working full-time for Peace River, Alex returned to school and obtained a master's degree in social work at Southeastern University. Her other achievements include being a licensed State of Florida Department of Health Registered Clinical Social Work Intern and certifications in Critical Incident Desensitization (CID), Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), Crisis Intervention Training (CIT), and a member of Polk County Sheriff's Office Crisis Negotiations Team (CNT).

As a member of our Community Mobile Support Team, Alex works directly with the Polk County Sheriff's Office providing mental health assistance in the community. To that end, Alex said, "My team and I assist deputies on scene or provide follow-up contacts after an individual has been placed under a law enforcement Baker Act. Law enforcement social work has become my primary focus in the community. I want to help close gaps and build bridges so individuals, communities, and our first responders are safer. I am a certified crisis negotiator and serve on the Polk County Sheriff's Office team as the assistant mental health liaison."

Alex won the Sheriff's Commendation Award for assisting Deputy Sheriffs with a call for service on February 22nd, 2021. This award is granted by Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd for excellent community service in Polk County.

In her personal time, Alex enjoys spending time with her family, friends, and nine-year-old flat-coated retriever, Athena. And she has recently started learning more about birds, their brains, and how they communicate, and she enjoys any outdoor activity. Alex shared, "My friends and I love staying active and busy... playing tennis or going to watch a Tampa Bay Lightning game. I was honored to start volunteering with InnerAct Alliance this year and assist UthMpact with their new podcast."

In terms of her volunteer work with the League, Alex will be serving this year as Assistant Chair for Education & Training/Leadership Development. She is excited about "supporting the individual growth of women that ultimately impacts the growth and development of the League." And we are excited to see her development as a Jr. League leader.

While Alex considers the League a gift, we consider her an even greater gift. She is truly the gift that keeps on giving, and we are so grateful to call her our friend and a member of the League family. Thank you, Alex, for that friendship. We congratulate you on your service and this award, and we look forward to watching you shine!



2023-24 CAROL JENKINS BARNETT SUSTAINER OF THE YEAR

League Historian and Past President

Sheila Lotterhos

Sheila's love for history was ignited by Sunday afternoon "hysterical tours" with her father. In addition to touring well preserved sites, he took her to see every endangered (i.e., dilapidated) building, far and wide. These tours kindled her burning desire to "rescue the perishing".

It's not surprising then that Sheila and her husband Fred would receive three preservation awards for restoring historic Lakeland homes. They were also the first non-commercial preservationists to receive Historic Lakeland's highest honor, The Landmark Achievement Award. They have opened several homes in Lakeland and one in St. Augustine to various civic groups. Even after a move to Jacksonville, their dedication to preservation and the JLGL motivated them to sponsor the original library, now called The Lotterhos Library, in our Lake Morton headquarters.

Sheila's Jr. League volunteer history extends to her teen years when she was invited to dance as a card belonging to the Queen of Hearts' deck for an Alice in Wonderland Jr. League fundraiser ball. "Hopefully the girls in Lakeland will experience our own League initiatives and someday become involved as members, too."

Sheila's "Provisional Project" involved composing home write-ups for Historic Lakeland's annual tour which she continued doing for several years. Writing about historic architecture was a skill enhanced by volunteering on an Historic Lakeland and League driven project chaired by then Active Shirley Brown with architect John White and City Planner Jim Studiale helping volunteers learn and record the details of homes in the South Lake Morton Neighborhood.

Not only did Sheila help name the historic district, but she lobbied to save properties and helped keep the dream alive until Jim Edward's astute research and the Planning Department's backing helped the neighborhood gain National Register status. Michael Murphy's portrait of Sheila and Fred's first Lakeland home was on the original cover of what became the city's guidelines for preservation.

"Before a meeting to downzone the neighborhood to protect it, I heeded Commissioner Larry Durrence's sage advice and walked the streets obtaining support from around 100 neighbors before leaving for England the next day," Sheila mused. "We were in historic London when everyone's combined efforts won this long-awaited victory for historic Lake Morton in 1988."

As an Active in the League, Sheila served on Finance, Future Planning, CRPD, Education/Training, Follies (tickets, program, backers, and ad sales), and attended SPAC. Additionally Sheila chaired Ways & Means Task Force, Advisory Planning, Arrangements, and Communications/Public Relations where she sold ads, did layout, and was a reporter, assistant editor, and editor of our monthly League Lines. She further helped on Yearbook. As a League officer, Sheila served as Corresponding Secretary, Community Vice President, President Elect, and President.

Reflecting on her service, Sheila said, "During my first years as an Active, I was so eager that I volunteered to do an extra primary placement in addition to my assigned primary and secondary placements, as well as an honorary placement (CRPD) which was like a primary placement plus I attended SPAC and League trainings. Looking back, I basically served four placements plus traveled for training! As an Active, I enjoyed conferences and trainings (local, area, and national), totaling about 17, before going sustaining."

Considering her energy and enthusiasm, it follows that Sheila won a Super Leaguer award as an Active and has twice now been Sustainer of the Year. She was voted the JLGL's Permanent Historian and before that served as a sustaining advisor to Holiday Market, Communications, Sustainer Liaison, and to Past President Stacey Johnson McLaughlin, all while living in Jacksonville! In addition to her historian duties, Sheila will serve as one of several advisors to the Provisional Committee and on the Art of Tablescaping Committee for the 2024-2025 League year.

A Leadership Lakeland graduate, Sheila served on the boards of Historic Lakeland, Polk Theatre, Campfire, and the initial/founding SLMNA, and is a current member of Historic Natchez Foundation where she and Fred won a preservation award, "the preservation equivalent of an Academy Award." Sheila was also board president of The Lawyers

Wives Association of the 10th Judicial Circuit, All Saints Newcomers Steward, is a Cursillista, has been president, advisor, and is current historian of her antique club, and volunteered for over 20 years with VISTE, writing and editing their newsletter, serving on their Honorary Advisory Board, and receiving the Dr. Sam Clark VISTE Volunteer of the Year Award. "I guess you can say I love old buildings, old stuff, and old people!"

st read her resume! She's judged speech tournaments, baby contests, and Christmas Parade. She's written award nominations, newsletters, magazine articles, and newspaper stories. From puppeteering to radio to oral interp to Follies skits to TV interviews to Christmas floats and pageants, she's performed in it, on it, and/or has composed it. She's penned one book foreword and is poised to write another and for years was a popular blogger. The one thing she hates is to be photographed, preferring to be behind the camera.

Sheila follows her two sisters, aunt, and cousin as a Golden Circle (50+ year) Tri Delta. She's a long-time DAR member as well as a candidate for several other lineage groups. Further back, she was probably the only debutante who was later a Womble. Be sure to ask her! As a Dean's List Scholar, Tri Delta Pearl Scholar, pledge class social chair, and Sigma Chi Little Sister, Sheila attributes straight A's in the midst of socializing to advice from an architecture student, now a world class architect — "Study first. Party after." Or in the words of Larry the Cable Guy, "Just git 'er done!"

On the educational front, Sheila's history includes an MA in Communications. Her studies featured the history and criticism of American public address, social movement theory, and classical rhetoric. While in graduate school, she taught basic communications courses and the oral interpretation of poetry and children's literature,

directed Oral Interp Studio, and was a graduate research assistant for the effects of humor on learning. She learned to put makeup on clowns, "But NOT Pennywise!"

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While Sheila worked professionally as a freelance writer, EEO Specialist, and LEDC's Assistant Director, receiving certification in that field, she has made a career out of voluntary community service. She enjoys being an encourager of others. "I love watching women discover exactly what they can do by putting their hearts into volunteering together. League leadership is servant leadership, requiring patience, dependability, service, kindness, and good manners. You have to be a good follower before you are a good leader. It's a journey that is its own reward."

Besides history, preservation, and voluntarism, Sheila's interests are varied and include Bible study, antiques, art, dance, genealogy, interior design, reading, research (she interviewed with the CIA, but moved to Lakeland instead — we think!), rom-coms, "Downtown Abbey" to "Swamp People", and tablescaping, a skill she's been invited to share with hospitality professionals. Voted the wittiest girl in the sixth grade [Note: Fred revealed this fact], she's still at it. When asked for her favorite advice, this was the reply: "Just remember that certain Southerners aspire to be like Faulkner, considered by scholars to be one of the world's greatest writers. In other words, if you can write it or say it in 20 words, we do it in 120!" So our writing team is honoring this tradition. (wink)

n addition to years spent serving as League Historian, Sheila went well beyond her regular duties this year to aid President Barb Cadiz. This involved working to help get the Yearbook and the 2021-2023 Annual Reports/League Lines published and Barb's 2023-24 Annual Report/League Lines ready for publication. These activities were like coming full circle to her early League years.

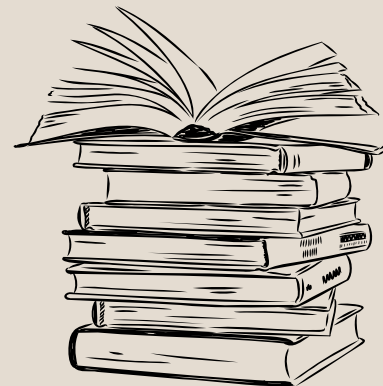
Further snooping revealed that Sheila also contacted as many past presidents as she could reach regarding the unexpected death of Past President Stephanie McLean, served at a GMM home party, provided the cute charger plates for Fall Luncheon, treated a group to the Founders Day Tea, took Sustainer Spring Gathering photos, and aided in other ways when needed or when Sheila felt she could help fellow members, typically behind the scenes.

Accepting the award was especially touching for this warm-hearted and devoted Sustainer who said, "While I was surprised and honored to receive the award nearly 20 years ago when Stephanie Madden was president, I was rendered almost speechless when Stephanie presented it this time. Though unexpected, the award was particularly poignant, since it's now named for the late Carol Jenkins Barnett, one of the kindest, most altruistic League members or people I've ever known."

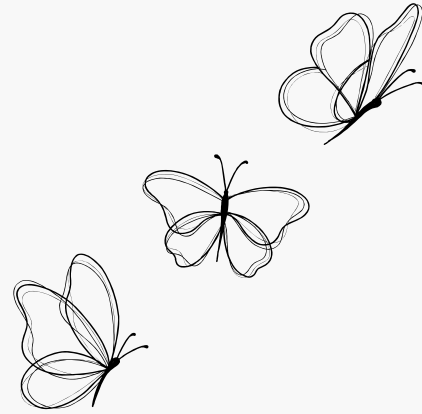
The highlight for Sheila was being surprised at Spring Banquet by her husband whom she claims, "deserves this award more than I and has more League members in his family than any man or woman, dead or alive!" And she loved that League friends' children (one from afar) and grown grandchildren (her godchildren) along with other friends, celebrated the banquet together.

"I owe the League so much, and giving back is the least I can do for all it's meant to me over the 42 years I've been a member. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for allowing me to serve and be a part of this

community of friends." Thank you, too, Sheila, for being our friend and always giving your best from a grateful heart. It matters.



PROVISIONAL COURSE: A YEAR IN REVIEW



The 2023-2024 Provisional Course was a great success for the Junior League of Greater Lakeland! On May 7, 2024, we welcomed 26 new active members at the annual Spring Banquet at Lakeland Country Club. These women have a passion for volunteering, leadership development, and improving the Lakeland community.

Sustaining Member Amy Royal welcomed approximately 50 women into her home to kick off the Provisional year on August 17, 2023. A few days later, a new member retreat was held at the Junior League Building that marked the official start of the year. Provisional Chair Jessica Brown and the other members of the committee reviewed new member requirements and gave an overview of the League. New members were introduced to the Board of Directors and Provisional Committee and got to know each other through fun icebreakers. The half-day retreat is a fundamental part of a great provisional course.

Provisional meetings were held on the second Tuesday of each month, providing an opportunity for our new members to learn about the Junior League of Greater Lakeland history, organizational structure, fundraisers, projects, and community impact. Organizations and businesses throughout Lakeland welcomed the League into their spaces to host meetings. Locations included: LVIM, Polk Museum of Art, Florida Children's Museum, Polk Theatre, and WPCV/WRZ Radio Station. By holding meetings at various locations, new members are able to see first hand the impact the League continues to have on our community and learn more about the businesses that support the League.



In keeping with tradition, the Provisional Class supported the League's two largest community events: the annual Lakeland Christmas Parade and World of Reading Festival. Provisionals serve as day-of volunteers for the parade, getting everyone into the holiday spirit. The parade offers a chance for the newest members to work as a team and is often the time that they begin to feel bonded. For World of Reading, they stamped books at a prior meeting and then worked shifts alongside the rest of our members. World of Reading allows them to see firsthand the impact we have in the lives of local children.

We cannot wait to see this new group of Actives jump in and thrive in the League. The Provisional Committee thanks each of them for challenging themselves and each other to be the best. They would also like to thank everyone involved in making the 2023-2024 new member course one to remember!

To help with the 2025-2026 Provisional Course, contact Kerry Murray at provisionals@jlgf.org

FINANCIALS

Donating to the Junior League not only supports impactful community programs, but also honors the organization's legacy of service and empowers its mission to continue for generations to come. Your gift helps keep that legacy alive while making a real difference in the lives of women, children, and families.

