

# League Lines

2024-2025 Annual Report



**Jean Bunch  
receives the  
2025 Sarah  
Dukes McKay  
Award**

PG 24



JUNIOR LEAGUE OF  
**GREATER  
LAKELAND**



The Junior League of Greater Lakeland's mission is to advance women's leadership for meaningful community impact through volunteer action, collaboration, and training.

League Lines Staff

Chimere Butler  
Sheila Lotterhos  
Kerry Murray

# Letter from the President

## Katherine Fitzwater President 2024-2025

Dear Members,

As I reflect on this past year, I am filled with immense gratitude and pride. Serving as President of the Junior League of Greater Lakeland has been one of the greatest honors of my life. Together, we embraced a renewed sense of engagement, strengthened our mission, and built momentum that will carry the Junior League of Greater Lakeland forward for years to come. From the very beginning, I felt the collective desire for connection, to return to the relationships, shared purpose, and hands-on service that define who we are. You showed up with enthusiasm, determination, and a deep commitment to our community. Because of that, this year has been one of meaningful progress.

**I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to the countless women whose leadership made this year possible. Our Board of Directors, committee chairs, and every woman who said "yes" to serving played an essential role.**

I am especially grateful to our Sustaining Vice President, Kimberly Elmhurst, whose experience and thoughtful guidance were invaluable. Her partnership throughout this journey strengthened not only me, but our entire League.



Our work this year was intentional and forward-thinking. We completed a major system transition to **Member Essentials**, giving members a more intuitive and efficient platform to engage with JLGL. We launched a more flexible **member credit system**, empowering women to tailor their League experience. We consolidated off-site storage to improve efficiency and stewardship of our resources. And after many months of discussion and collaboration, we implemented important organizational changes to ensure that our League remains strong and sustainable well into the future.

Through Reading Is Fundamental, Ready to Read Nights, World of Reading, and new book distributions at Bonnet Springs Park, we placed more than **6,100** books into the hands of local children. Our collaboration with the Junior League of Greater Winter Haven served hundreds of families through toiletry drives, food distributions, and hurricane relief efforts. And our Kids Tennis Clinic once again delivered joy, and opportunity to more than 100 young athletes.

# 2024-2025 Leadership

This year also marked exciting growth in our fundraising efforts. Our inaugural **Art of Tablescaping** event exceeded expectations, showcasing creativity and hospitality in a fresh new way. The **Black Diamond Ball**, held for the first time in our historic headquarters, brought together members, partners, and friends for a night of celebration and impact. And our members continued to champion the **Little Black Dress Initiative**, raising critical funds and awareness to support our community programs.

**None of this would have been possible without the dedication of our Actives, the wisdom of our Sustainers, and the enthusiasm of our Provisionals. Each woman who joined a committee, attended a meeting, or volunteered at an event helped make this year a success.**

As this chapter of my presidency comes to a close, I could not be prouder of what we have accomplished together. Our League is strong, engaged, and full of extraordinary women who care deeply about one another and about our community. It has been a privilege to steward this organization alongside you.

Thank you for trusting me, uplifting me, and inspiring me every single day. I will forever treasure this year of service.

With sincere appreciation,

*Katherine Fitzwater*

Katherine Fitzwater  
President, 2024–2025



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

<b>President</b> Katherine Fitzwater	<b>Assistant Membership VP</b> Gayleen Courtney
<b>President-Elect</b> Angel Davis	<b>Finance VP</b> Nicole Minott
<b>Sustaining VP</b> Kimberly Elmhurst	<b>Treasurer</b> Jennifer Burnett
<b>Assistant Sustaining VP</b> Anne Furr	<b>Funding Director</b> Carolyn Woodger
<b>Communications VP</b> Chimere Butler	<b>Assistant Funding Director</b> Nicole Bradham
<b>Assistant Communications VP</b> Tori Bateman	<b>Bylaws Chair</b> Lisa Gifford
<b>Secretary</b> Tracy DiCesare	<b>Nominating Chair</b> Jessica Brown
<b>Corresponding Secretary</b> Stacy Walsh	<b>Community VP</b> Nichole Summers
<b>Membership VP</b> Katie Surrency	

## LEADERSHIP TEAM

<b>Provisionals</b> Kerry Murray
<b>Placement</b> Paige Peck
<b>Special Events</b> Taylor Carson & Nikki Casha
<b>Arrangements</b> Kelly Thomas
<b>Education &amp; Training</b> Emily Bowers
<b>World of Reading</b> Sheena Butts
<b>Reading Is Fundamental</b> Tresa Green & Valerie McDonough
<b>Christmas Parade</b> Kira Ross
<b>CRPD</b> Vianey Butterfield
<b>Kid's Clinic</b> Caroline Masters Sharpe
<b>Black Diamond Ball</b> Kerriane Hopkins
<b>Clothe Our Community</b> Erica Lupercio
<b>Webmaster</b> Kaleigh Avian

## Art of Tablescaping

Sara McEntire

## Little Black Dress Initiative

Jessica Brown

## SUSTAINING COUNCIL

### Sustaining Vice President

Kimberly Elmhurst

### Assistant Sustaining Vice President

Anne Furr

### Historian

Sheila Lotterhos

### Transfer Chair

Lu Fitzwater

### Treasurer

Susan Dryer

### Funding

Alice Koehler

### Secretary

Joy Williams

### Sustainer Project Chair

Callie Neslund

### Sustainer Engagement Chair

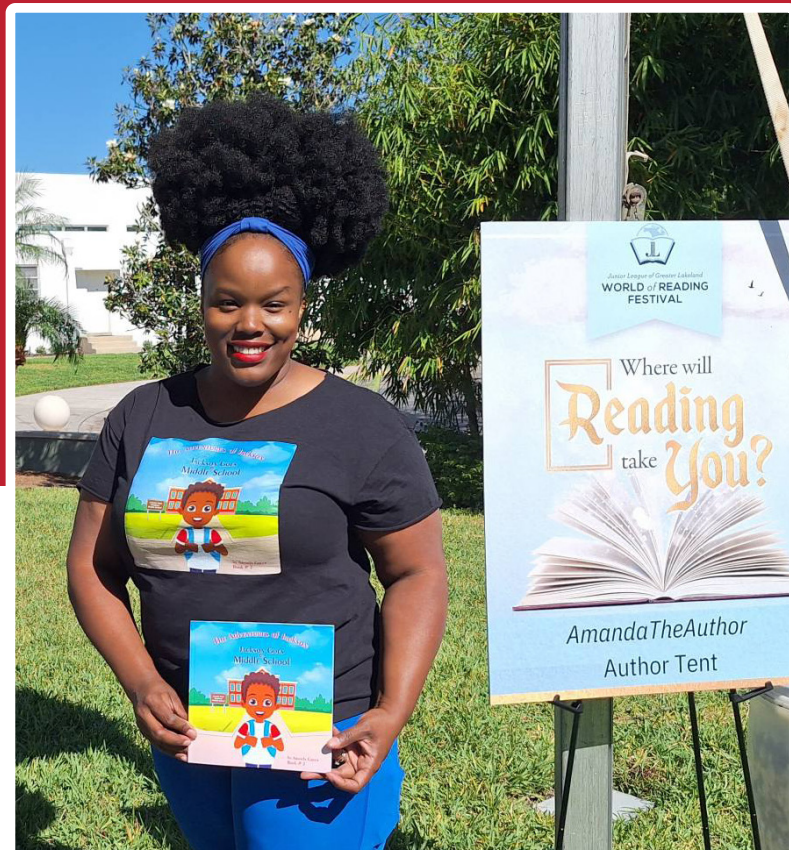
Alice O'Reilly

### Book Club

Gloria Lunz

# Community Initiatives

For 92 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.



## World of Reading

World of Reading is one of the Junior League's most beloved and impactful community events, a true celebration of literacy and imagination.

On April 12, 2025, Barnett Family Park transformed into a vibrant literacy festival as hundreds of families gathered for a day designed entirely around the joy of reading. Children didn't just receive FREE books — they experienced reading as something magical, exciting, and worth celebrating.

Families enjoyed glitter tattoos, balloon art, snacks, and interactive activities, creating an atmosphere that felt more like a festival than a traditional book distribution. The energy was contagious — laughter, music, and the excitement of children proudly selecting books to take home.

A highlight of the day was an unforgettable performance by children's music icon Jack Hartmann, whose high-energy literacy songs had families singing, dancing, and learning together. His presence elevated the event into a full-scale literacy rally.

Children also had the opportunity to hear live readings from spotlight authors Amanda The Author and Heather Marie, giving them the rare chance to meet real authors, ask questions, and see firsthand how stories come to life.

## Reading Is Fundamental

Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) is a powerful expression of the Junior League mission in action. At every distribution, RIF places a brand-new book and a snack directly into the hands of 500–800 elementary students — all in a single morning. For many children, this is the only new book they will receive all year.

Last year alone, we hosted nine RIF distributions and participated in two family engagement nights at local Title I schools. These evening programs created meaningful, interactive opportunities for parents and caregivers to be part of their child's literacy journey. In total, we distributed more than 6,000 books to children across the Lakeland community.

This year, our RIF Committee reached exciting new milestones, including hosting several STEM-themed book distributions at Bonnet Springs Park, expanding both access and educational focus.

Beyond the classroom, our community partnerships continue to grow.

Through our partnership with the City of Lakeland, we participated in the annual SnowFest celebration and distributed over 1,000 books in a single evening. The inclusion of free books at this citywide Christmas event has been exceptionally well received, and the City now anticipates our involvement each year. Volunteers consistently share their gratitude for being part of an event that combines

celebration with meaningful impact. Similarly, Lakeland Regional Health invited us to partner for the second consecutive year at their Back-to-School Bash at the Grasslands Campus. This event equips students with physicals, school supplies, and — thanks to the League — a free, age-appropriate book to start the school year with confidence.

Through every distribution, partnership, and parent engagement opportunity, RIF is doing more than handing out books — we are strengthening literacy, supporting families, and investing in the long-term success of Lakeland's children.



## Lakeland Christmas Parade

The 43rd Lakeland Christmas Parade took place on Thursday, December 5, 2024. As the first firework launched, the parade officially began, leaving the RP Funding Center. Community icon and Junior League sustainer, Alice O'Reilly, served as this year's grand marshal. The parade included 101 floats, marching bands, and decorated trailers, ending with Mr. and Mrs. Claus atop their sleigh. The theme this year was Christmas at Swan Lake, spotlighting your favorite Lakeland landmarks, with each float incorporating it into their design.

The 2024 Lakeland Christmas Parade winners were presented with plaques during a City Commission Meeting, where Mayor Bill Mutz stated that this was the finest parade we've ever had!

### Christmas Parade Float Winners:

Judge's Choice Award  
Chick Fil A

Best Pro Float  
Family Reptiles

Most Outstanding Band  
Kathleen High School

Most Original Float  
Family Martial Arts

Best Youth/Educational Float  
Lake Gibson FFA

Best Community Float  
Iglesia Enseñanzas de Jesús Inc  
(DBA Jesús a las Naciones)

Best Business Float  
Publix

Best Themed Float  
Lakeland Insulation and  
Energy Saver

## 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.

**The campaign shares information about the literacy and clothing needs in our area, as well as how the League works to combat these issues. This year they collectively raised over \$15,000!**

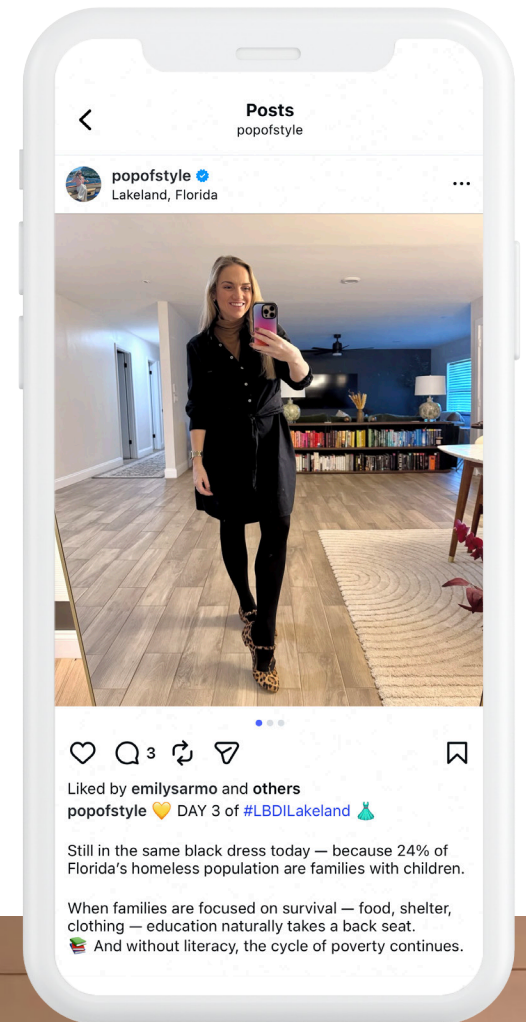
Notable fundraising teams included Terri Schroeder and Vicky Prescott; Jamie Baker and Holly McCrosson; Kim Elmhorst, Katherine Fitzwater, and Kelsey Wesche; and Nichole Summers and Brittany Sale, **with top fundraising honors going to Terri Schroeder and Vicky Prescott.**

## Kids Tennis Clinic

In April, the League proudly led the Kids Tennis Clinic as a hands-on investment in youth confidence and opportunity. In partnership with the men's and women's tennis teams at Florida Southern College, children received personalized instruction in fundamental tennis skills from collegiate athletes who served as both coaches and role models.

More than a sports clinic, this project intentionally removed barriers to participation. Every child left equipped with their own T-shirt, tennis racket, and ball – ensuring they had not just the experience, but the tools to continue playing.

Through movement, mentorship, and access, the League created a space where children built confidence, developed new skills, and discovered that new opportunities are within their reach.



## Hurricane Relief

In light of the devastation from Hurricane Helene, the JLGL reached out to JL Tampa and JL St. Pete to offer support. Our membership donated requested items (groceries, cleaning supplies, fans, dehumidifiers, storage bins) and gift cards to home improvement stores. They also provided in-kind donations to assist Junior League members in St. Pete and contributed directly to sister organizations in North Carolina through designated donation links.

Hurricane Milton significantly impacted our community, and many faced challenges in the aftermath. Our League leadership reached out to members to provide community resource information and to ensure any needs were fulfilled. In October 2024, four of our members participated in a Feeding Tampa Bay food distribution alongside the Junior League of Winter Haven. Together, we were able to provide meals, water, and toiletry items to over 246 families in need.

To further assist those affected by Hurricane Milton, JLGL hosted a drive-thru food and water distribution on October 17, 2024 at the Junior League building's parking lot. Each car received cases of water and ready-to-eat meals. The resources were generously provided by Polk County Emergency Management, United Way of Central Florida, and The Freedom Tour.



## Find the Good Day

JLGL and the Junior League of Greater Winter Haven united to remove barriers for local students through a powerful partnership supporting the HEARTH Project.

Together, members assembled and delivered more than 450 wellness kits filled with essential hygiene supplies — ensuring children experiencing homelessness or transition have the basic necessities needed for school enrollment, attendance, and academic success.

In addition, our Sustainers expanded the impact through their Bee the Difference initiative by donating feminine hygiene products to HEARTH, addressing a critical and often overlooked need for young women.

These items were delivered on September 19, 2024, in honor of International Find the Good Day, demonstrating how collaboration across Polk County Leagues creates tangible support for families and a lasting ripple effect of stability, dignity, and opportunity.

# Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging



The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Committee continues to turn commitment into action.



In January 2025, JLGL proudly marched in the City of Lakeland Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Parade under the theme "Unity Through Diversity."

**Our presence was more than participation, it was a visible affirmation of our dedication to honoring Dr. King's legacy and strengthening unity within our community.**



During Black History Month, DEIB led a meaningful celebration at our general membership meeting featuring music trivia highlighting Black artists and catering from Jazzy's Diner, a local Black-owned business. Members also received resources to continue their learning, including opportunities to visit the Luster African-American Heritage Museum — reinforcing that inclusion is an ongoing commitment, not a one-time event.



**The JLGL's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Committee is thrilled to announce another successful event with our Fourth Annual Women's Entrepreneurship Panel, held on March 20, 2025 at the Junior League building.**

This year's theme, "Women Branding Like a Boss", honored Women's History Month by celebrating women's achievements, promoting diversity, supporting local women entrepreneurs, and sharing best practices for business leadership.

The event featured an inspiring keynote speaker from our own community, Junior League of Greater Lakeland member Jessica Robinson, owner of Cohesive Brands. She, along with a panel of dynamic women entrepreneurs and vendors, shared insights and experiences.

**Attendees enjoyed ample opportunities for networking, shopping, self-care, and connecting with others.**

The day was further enhanced with complimentary refreshments, a sound bath, and raffle prizes, making it a memorable celebration of women's entrepreneurship and empowerment.

# Member Socials

## Summer Trivia - Bridgerton & Taylor Swift

Keel Farms hosted a couple of trivia nights that our members attended in July 2024.

## Disney Trips

Fun under the sun was had at Disney visits in September and October 2024. League members and some of their family enjoyed the Epcot Food & Wine Festival.



## Snack Box

For some League members, hurricane prep included the making of a charcuterie box at Tienda Studio. These ladies had fun learning how to put together a beautifully balanced snack box with a variety of meats and cheeses on September 25, 2024.



## Lugo's Distillery

The Pour & Explore social event at Lugo's Distillery on November 14, 2024 had our members learning the craft of cocktail mixing. League members and guests were taught how to create 3 cocktails and received a pamphlet with the recipes enjoyed that night.

## Wicked

On November 22, 2024, you would have found league members and guests enjoying a private screening of Wicked. This social event with Junior League of Winter Haven members was held at Cinemark in North Lakeland.



## Cookie Exchange

This sweet annual event was held on December 10, 2024 at Stephanie Sposaro's gorgeous lakeside home. A cocoa bar next to the cookies on display made a delicious combo to warm the league members that attended.



## Yoga & Brunch

In January 2025, league members welcomed health into their new year burning calories while striking a pose! Attendants were told the calories burned were enough to cover several rounds of mimosas. This girl-math points to time well spent!

## House Parties

An innovative and fun way to learn together was implemented this year at house parties. In November 2024 and March 2025 in lieu of our monthly meeting day, members met at the home of generous sustainers to connect and learn about select topics.

Over the two months subjects targeted were Calligraphy, Cocktail Mixing, Cybersecurity, Emergency Preparedness, Flower Arranging, Gift Wrapping, Personal Safety, and Setting Boundaries. We are thankful to our hosts, Brittany Sale, Hilary Crenshaw, Jami Miller, Julia Harrell, Kim Elmhurst, Tiffany Hawks, Tiffany Kilpatrick, and Tracy DiCesare, all of whom graciously opened their homes to us and provided a light yummy meal.

## Galentines

League members wined and dined together to celebrate friendship! At this fun event members also got to treat others with a favorite item.



# Funding Update

The League has made a significant impact in our community through our philanthropic outreach. From our successful community projects to our signature fundraising events, we have raised the funds necessary to positively impact and better our community. Thank you to the many organizations and community members who entrusted the League to be good stewards of their finances so that we can collectively make a positive impact in our community.

## ANNUAL FUND

Lynda Buck  
 Kimberly Elmhurst  
 Anna Raffoul  
 Virginia McClurg  
 Cececia Wilhite

## LEAGUE SPONSORSHIP

Amy Laderer  
 The George W. Jenkins Fund within the GiveWell Community Foundation

## SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Ana Gillespie  
 Beth Sherling

## BUILDING PRESERVATION FUND

Historic Lakeland

## BEE THE DIFFERENCE

Kaleigh Avian  
 Arletta Black-Torres  
 Gina Cowley  
 Lu Fitzwater  
 Mary A. Hinson  
 Margaret Holmes  
 Sheila Lotterhos  
 Paula Mims  
 Marie Rumph  
 Marsha Vass

## LITTLE BLACK DRESS INITIATIVE

Christian & Kaleigh Avian  
 Jamie Baker  
 John Baker  
 James Brown  
 Barb Cadiz  
 Brian Cadiz  
 Mark Carew  
 Carla Burnett Cody  
 Constant Grind Concrete & Prep  
 Juliana Curtis

Angel Davis  
 Kim Daniels  
 DCP Holdings, Inc  
 Cecelia Dezayas  
 Margaret Dezayas  
 Kimberly Elmhurst  
 Katherine Fitzwater  
 Lu Fitzwater

Anne Furr  
 Mark Hegan  
 Tiffany Hawks  
 Nellie Kay  
 Kayla Keen  
 Amy Martinez  
 Miranda Martinez  
 Nicole Minott  
 Libby Mintz  
 Debbie Misch  
 Anita Poteat  
 Melody Rider

Lora Robinson  
 Brittany Sale  
 Greg Sale  
 Sara Scoynes  
 Barb Schroeder  
 Terri Schroeder  
 Brandy Stanton  
 Suzie Sullivan  
 Laura Taft  
 Maggi Wall  
 Lori Yancey

## BLACK DIAMOND BALL

Ashley & Nicholas Barnett Foundation within GiveWell Community Foundation  
 Bank of Central Florida  
 Corrosion Control, Inc  
 Emily Plank  
 Joel Rakowski  
 Katherine Fitzwater  
 Keller Williams  
 Lacey Meyer  
 Lu Fitzwater  
 Margaret DeZayas  
 MidFlorida Federal Credit Union  
 Publix Super Markets Charities  
 Stuart's Plumbing LLC  
 United Way of Central Florida

## ART OF TABLESCAPING

Deanna & Howard Bayless  
 Dixie Southern Industrial Inc

Doris Lyons & Stacey Clyne  
 Elite Construction Management  
 First Revolution Marketing  
 FHS Doors  
 Gaines Jewelers - The Saunders Family Charitable Fund within GiveWell Community Foundation  
 Gina & Phil Wegman  
 Jenn Management Group  
 Kathy Cook  
 Keller Williams Realty Smart  
 Lu Fitzwater

Lynda Buck  
 Lynn & Thomas Oakley  
 Nineteen61  
 Rita Staffing  
 Sheila Lotterhos

The Mims Family Community Fund within GiveWell Community Foundation  
 The Skin Boutique  
 Tiffany & Bill Kilpatrick  
 Tracy & Thomas DiCesare  
 Wall Household  
 Williford Flooring

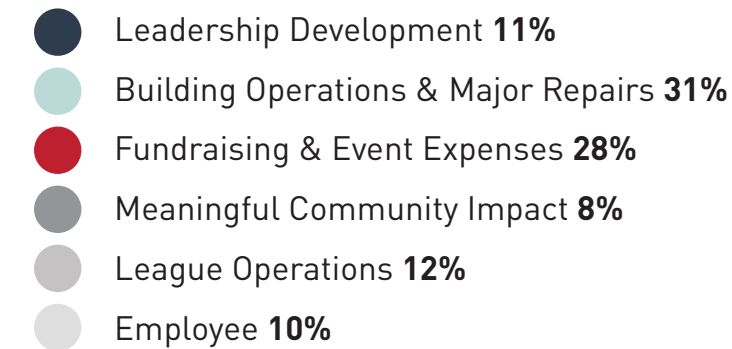
## KIDS CLINIC

Youth Tennis Foundation

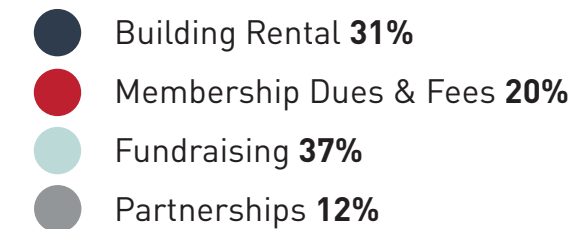
## WORLD OF READING

ConnectED Polk  
 Focus Realty Group  
 Lakeland Regional Health

## Total Expenses \$328,648



## Total Revenue \$297,403



**This year reflects a strategic shift in how the Junior League approaches fundraising and long term sustainability.**

While fundraising revenue was lower than anticipated, we remained committed to our efforts while also focusing on strengthening our foundation by investing in leadership, maintaining our building, and enhancing member and community experience. We also began evolving our fundraising strategy, including the introduction of a new event that we believe will grow into a strong, sustainable source of support for future League projects.

These efforts position us for long term growth, while our commitment to meaningful community impact remains



### Honor Our Legacy

What better way to ensure the long-term security and stability of the League than by giving to our annual fund. Simply put, your gift is your ability to leave a legacy that will allow the League to sustain our service.

To learn more about the Annual Fund and to give a gift, visit [jlg.org](http://jlg.org). Questions? Contact [funding@jlg.org](mailto:funding@jlg.org).

# Black Diamond Ball

On January 11, 2025, JLGL hosted its fifth annual Black Diamond Ball at the Junior League of Greater Lakeland building. This evening brought together 100 supporters who celebrated, connected, and contributed to our mission.

## The event was a resounding success, raising nearly \$75,000!

The event was co-chaired by Kerriane Hopkins and Brittany Currier. The Junior League Building was transformed into an elegant dining hall and then into a flashy Casino where guests showed off their sparkling personalities and outfits.



As guests arrived, they were greeted with a walk down the red carpet, champagne, and opportunities to take photos and support the mission of the league. The black-tie crowd mingled, ready to enjoy an unforgettable evening.

The glitz did not distract from our purpose for the night: serving our community.

## Through our Clothe our Community initiative, we fulfilled wishes of local schoolchildren for clothing and school supplies.

Our program opened with a blessing from Mayor Bill Mutz. League President, Katherine Fitzwater, welcomed guests. Her message emphasized the impact of our work and what we have been able to accomplish together.

Our Guest Speaker was Tracie Upton, the Principal at Kathleen Elementary School, where her leadership and passion shapes the lives of countless young learners. A proud graduate of both the University of South Florida and the University of North Florida, Tracie brings a wealth of knowledge, experience, and heart to everything she does. Beyond her professional achievements, she is a proud dog mom to three charming English Spaniels, a soon-to-be grandmother to her first grandchild, and an adventurer at heart. Her travels have taken her to Kenya, Germany, Ireland, Scotland, and England, with an Alaskan cruise on the horizon.

The Black Diamond Ball was made possible thanks to the generous support of our sponsors and donors. We are especially

grateful to Publix Super Markets Charities, The Nicholas and Ashley Barnett Foundation within GiveWell Community Foundation, International Diamond Center, Wilson Diamond Brokers, Corrosion Control, Stuart's Plumbing, MIDFLORIDA Credit Union, United Way of Central Florida, and Keller Williams Realty Smart Focus Group, along with the many others who contributed to making the evening a success.



Many talented individuals and businesses generously contributed their time and in-kind donations, as well as items for our auctions, including Stationery Loft, Bella Visage, Premier Party Rentals, Nineteen61, Barb and Brian Cadiz, Courtenay and Art Fulmer, Nichole Summers, and Mike and Maurkice Pouncey, along with many others.

Thank you to all who one way or another contributed to this evening! Your generosity transforms lives and improves our Greater Lakeland community.

# The Inaugural Art of Tablescaping

On date 2025, JLGL proudly hosted our inaugural Art of Tablescaping fundraiser, and we could not be more thrilled with its success!



We kicked off the event Friday night with a full house as we welcomed our Sponsors and their guests for an exclusive first viewing of the stunning tablescapes. Guests enjoyed delicious hors d'oeuvres while mingling with our keynote speaker, Lydia Menzies of Lydia Menzies Celebrates, and the talented 18 Tablescaping Designers who brought their creative visions to life.

On Saturday morning, nearly 115 guests gathered at the Ashley Gibson Barnett Museum at Florida Southern College for an inspiring and entertaining Q&A discussion between Lydia Menzies and David Ecton of Parker Kennedy Living. Lydia captivated attendees with a live tablescaping demonstration and presented her newest book, *The Supper Club*, which guests had the special opportunity to have signed. Attendees then viewed the 13 thoughtfully designed tablescapes and explored an outdoor garden market while enjoying refreshing mimosas.

At noon, the exhibition opened to general admission, where an additional 153 guests joined us to marvel at the beautifully curated displays. We closed the afternoon with a celebratory toast to our talented Designers at 4 PM.

We were honored to have over 51 volunteers who played an essential role in making this event a success. Additionally, we welcomed Junior League members who traveled from the Junior League of Washington, D.C., and the Junior League of Tampa to support the event. Our talented Designers journeyed from across the region, including South Florida, North Georgia, Alabama, and even Wisconsin!

As part of the festivities, two prestigious awards were presented:

**The Royal Swan Award, voted on by our Sponsors, was awarded to BASH Event Planning from Winter Park, Florida. The Bevy of Swans Award was presented to Patricia Meyer Events from Lake Wales, Florida.**

We extend our deepest gratitude to our Sponsors, Designers, volunteers, and all of the guests who made *The Art of Tablescaping* an unforgettable event. Your support allows the Junior League of Greater Lakeland to continue our mission of community impact and service. We can't wait to see you at next year's event!

# Annual Spring Meeting



**JLGL held its annual Spring Meeting at the Ashley Gibson Barnett Museum of Art on Tuesday, May 6, 2025.**

Over 140 provisional, active and sustaining members attended the event celebrating the 92nd year of the JLGL's commitment to improving our community and developing women leaders.

President Katherine Fitzwater presided over the meeting as she completed her term as president.

Past President Anne Furr announced Sheila Lotterhos as the Carol Jenkins Barnett Sustainer of the Year honoree and Paula Mims, daughter of the late Sarah McKay, recognized Jean Bunch with the organization's top honor, the Sarah D McKay Award.

After a year of leadership development and community service opportunities, **37 women graduated from Provisional to Active membership.**

**President Katherine Fitzwater shared highlights from the year, including the creation of a new fundraiser, the Art of Tablescaping, and recognized that the organization gave away over 8,000 books this year.**



In an emotional ceremony, Angel Davis was recognized as the first black woman elected president in the organization's history. Angel began her term on June 1, 2025.





## Several members were recognized for their service and commitment to the organization during the 2024-2025 year.

### VANESSA VALENCIA

**Spirit of the League** was awarded to Vanessa Valencia, an attorney and public defender, who loves her job and all she can do to help others and loves our League's literacy initiatives and how they help the community's children. Vanessa also is crazy about Christmas Parade for the opportunity it gives her to meet the Provisionals. And she thoroughly enjoys World of Reading as it provides Vanessa with the opportunity to show her own children where and why she donates her time, hopefully inspiring them to one day do the same. This cheerful bundle of energy, who's a foodie and runs 5-K races monthly just for fun, has a favorite expression: "The worst that can happen is that they say no!" And the best expression which Vanessa seems to eagerly say is: "YES!" .

### KALEIGH AVIAN

**Volunteer of the Year** was awarded to Active Kaleigh Avian who is a serious lover of reading and movies, especially the classics such as Alexandre Dumas' "The Count of Monte Cristo" and anything by Jane Austen, but especially "Pride and Prejudice" — Keira Knightly being the perfect Elizabeth Bennett! On the professional front, Kaleigh works for MidFlorida Credit Union as the Operations Support Manager, but in her spare time, she is teaching herself to play the piano and thoroughly enjoys singing. Kaleigh also enjoys our Tennis Clinic and World of Reading events. Why? Because they allow us to be able to give the community's children something extra to spark their interests. And her favorite advice? "Give, Serve, Grow!" That is advice well received and eagerly followed.

### DANIELLE DANIELS

**Provisional of the Year** was awarded to Danielle Daniels, a twelve year veteran of our city's library system and facilitator of two library-affiliated book clubs. Encouraged by her friend and co-worker Angel Davis to join the League, Danielle has proven to be a tireless volunteer. She volunteered for every Provisional Done in a Day, attended all meetings and social gatherings, and did it both eagerly and cheerfully. Danielle obviously loves to read and wants to share that love with children. Hence RIF is near and dear to her heart as her volunteering outside the League featured being a "United Way ReadingPal" for a local elementary. This self-professed "Disney Adult" loves warm weather vacations, is learning Mandarin which echoes her time spent in a military family, and has as a favorite expression: "Be yourself." And Danielle, we're glad you are exactly that!

### SHEILA LOTTERHOS

**Carol Jenkins Barnett Sustainer of the Year** was awarded to Past President Sheila Lotterhos. In addition to serving as our JLGL Historian, Sheila also served this year as a Provisional Sustaining Advisor and inaugural member of The Art of Tablescapeing Committee, a Tablescape Designer, and as an event Silver Sponsor. This dovetailed perfectly with her time as a former JLGL Arrangements Chair, serial home restorer, copious china collector, and former blogger. A 44-year member, Sheila's favorite advice came from her presidential sustaining advisor and beloved friend, the late Freddie Trovillion: "This is the day which The LORD hath made. We will rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118:24) Or put less formally: "Enjoy today, a gift from God, which is why it's called the present!"



# 2025 Sarah Dukes McKay Award Winner



## Jean Hauger Bunch

Recipient of the Junior League of Greater Lakeland's 2025 Sarah Dukes McKay Award

**Jean Bunch is a name automatically associated with Historic Lakeland and the preservation of some of Lakeland's most important landmarks, especially Lake Mirror's beautiful Frances Langford Promenade. Jean Bunch is also the name of a quiet person with a penchant for hard work and devoted service.**

An inspiration to her peers, Jean is additionally an inspiration to younger generations of Lakelanders who continue to carry the torch for preserving things that matter in our community. The term "Bee the Difference" is a perfect sceptor for this can-do Sustainer. And the "Sarah D. McKay Award", our League's highest honor, is the perfect crown for her years of achievement!

The road to the beauty of Downtown Lakeland, while a group preservation effort, was not always an easy road to travel. Many of Downtown's antique buildings were in sad condition by the late 1970's, and thankfully Jean recognized this and helped lead the charge to restore and preserve them. It takes a village, and as a co-founder of Historic Lakeland, Jean helped rally and inspire the troops, a team of devoted members from professionals to history and architecture lovers, in what sometimes seemed an uphill battle.

Downtown Lakeland had a number of historic structures and buildings whose futures were in danger. The Francis Langford Promenade around Lake Mirror, designed by a famed sculptor and landscape designer, was in what Jean describes as "deplorable condition". Yet with lobbying efforts and local support from groups like the Jr. League who in the 1970's donated \$15,000 to help with these preservation efforts as well as with the aid of other grants and fundraisers, awareness was raised and the Promenade gloriously saved.

Jean's personal efforts in historic preservation began with a 1914 home that came with a ranch the family purchased and promised to preserve. What began with weekend parties in the country in a Florida vernacular farmhouse ended up being a devoted effort to fully restore the house into a family home for Jean, her husband David, and their three children. And what a beautiful restoration it was and remains!

In terms of Jean's volunteer service, she is a long time member of our League, having served in a number of capacities including as Corresponding Secretary, and she remains a supportive Sustainer Emeritus. Jean also served as Community Research Program Development (CRPD) Chair the year the group discovered the need to found the Learning Resource Center, originally called the Learning Disabilities Resource Center, filling a desperate need for such an educational facility. The LRC just celebrated its 50th Birthday in 2025.

Jean, along with fellow League and Historic Lakeland member the late Juanita Black, is remembered as part of a dynamic duo, fighting hard for historic preservation. This included not only the preservation of the Promenade but the important step of closing the road beside it whose traffic vibrations had led to the wall's deteriorated condition and million-dollar repairs!

As an active member of the Florida Trust, Jean gained valuable contacts she could rely on for support on a state level and knowledge she could bring home to Lakeland to apply. Under Jean's participation, Lakeland actually hosted a Florida Trust state meeting at Florida Southern College in 1989, showcasing not only the college's Frank Lloyd Wright architecture but the early preservation efforts of the South Lake Morton neighborhood through a homes tour as well as the Downtown preservation efforts, including a tour and reception at the Promenade. In addition to preserving the past, Jean's concern for Lakeland's present and future projects is equally important. Along with her beloved husband David, Jean helped spearhead the push for Lakeland's Bonnet Springs Park. Hence, we all owe them a debt of gratitude for helping assure that our city is a beautiful, historic, and desirable place to live.

For much of Jean's life, she has sung in the choir at First Methodist Church, where she is a steadfast member of the same Sunday School class that she and David joined when they first married. Jean is a devoted mother to her three children, having participated in their school and numerous activities, and an equally devoted wife and grandmother. Family means everything to her as do her friends. Jean also enjoys her antique club, PEO, Leadership Lakeland, and Kiwanis for which her husband has recently been honored for his many years of service.

**What are the connecting dots of Jean's life that have so enriched the lives of others? While they are almost too numerous to mention, Jean is foremost a dedicated, dependable, and dynamic volunteer. She sees a need for a project and doesn't hold back.**

She moves forward, encouraging others to move with her, never forgetting to say "thank you." Above all, and a rarer quality, Jean has the uncanny ability to see the big picture as well as how the pieces fit. Hence, she's a visionary, and Lakeland is far richer for her vision of it as well as David's, including their selfless work. As a result, the couple together received the Lakeland Chamber's George W. Jenkins Award.

Therefore, it is with both pleasure and undying gratitude that we, the members of the Junior League of Greater Lakeland, thank our friend Jean Bunch for all she's accomplished over the years and congratulate her for winning our League's highest honor for each community job she has done so well! Wishing you continued success in your future endeavors, Jean, along with all of our love.

■ ■ BY SHEILA LOTTERHOS, LEAGUE HISTORIAN

# Provisional Year in Review



The 2024-2025 Provisional Course was a great success for the Junior League of Greater Lakeland!

**On May 6, 2025, we welcomed 37 new active members at the annual Spring Banquet at the Ashley Gibson Barnett Museum of Art.**

These women are incredibly enthusiastic and have a strong passion for volunteering, leadership development, and improving the Lakeland community.

Sustaining Member Paula Mims welcomed approximately 75 women into her home to kick off the Provisional year on August 15, 2024. 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 Kerry Murray 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. This half-day retreat is a fundamental kickstart to 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 (thanks in large part to Sheila Lotterhos and her monthly history quizzes), organizational structure, fundraisers, projects, and community impact. Organizations and businesses throughout Lakeland welcomed the League into their spaces to host meetings. Locations included: LVIM, The Salvation Army, The Ashley Gibson Barnett Museum of Art, the Polk Theatre, and the Florida Children's Museum. 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 served as volunteers on the day of both events, providing an opportunity for new members to collaborate as a team and form lasting connections.

This year, Provisionals also participated in two "Done in a Day" volunteer initiatives. The first took place on Saturday, October 26, 2024, when members of the Provisional Class and Committee teamed up with VISTE to pack bags of food for elderly clients. The second occurred on Saturday, January 8, 2025, when they joined forces with kidsPACK and prepared 504 meals for local students. Additionally, Provisionals were invited to monthly Provisional Socials, offering



extra opportunities to create lasting connections. 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 2024-2025 new member course one to remember!

## New Actives

- |                    |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Lindsey Back       | Kayla McClenthen |
| Raven Brookins     | Holly McCrosson  |
| Julie Bunker       | Kaitlynn Mintz   |
| Addie Christian    | Lark Mitchell    |
| Susan Crawford     | Sam Odom         |
| Danielle Daniels   | Claudia Oppelt   |
| Paxton Evans       | Vicky Prescott   |
| Halle Fortune      | Anna Raffoul     |
| Hannah Garcia      | Olivia Rigolini  |
| Heather Grigsby    | Kris Rodriguez   |
| Marcie Hoecker     | Peyton Sale      |
| Camellia Jenkins   | Jenna Smith      |
| Tara Jessup        | Tina Stone       |
| Debbie Kempen      | Christina Taylor |
| Ashley Kincaid     | Jess Taylor      |
| Staphanny LeClaire | Clare Tinsley    |
| Kristin Levy       | Kelsey Wesche    |
| Laura Lewenhaupt   | Annie Witherup   |
| Camille Marquess   |                  |



To help with the Provisional Course, email [provisionals@jql.org](mailto:provisionals@jql.org)

# Sustainers Year in Review



**The JLGL Sustainers had an outstanding year of connection, impact, and generosity.**

To deepen engagement, the League launched a Sustainer Engagement Committee led by Alice O'Reilly, whose leadership — alongside a dedicated committee — created meaningful opportunities for fellowship all year long. From Summer Lunch & Games (with up to 35 attending each month), to a 70-member Fall Luncheon at Grasslands, to cultural outings in Winter Haven and Lakeland, participation continued to grow.

**The year concluded with a record-breaking 80 Sustainers gathering for the Spring event hosted by Ana Vargas Gillespie — a true celebration of community and sisterhood.**

#### **Bee the Difference**

In the fourth year of the Sustainer “Bee the Difference” project, led by Callie Neslund, 24 Sustainers raised \$1,400 through donations, grant support, and in-kind gifts.



Products were distributed to the Polk County Public Schools HEARTH Program, Oasis at Lakeland High School, and Lakeland Volunteers in Medicine — directly supporting vulnerable neighbors across our community.

With strong participation, growing impact, and meaningful connection, this year proved the power of our Sustainers to lead, give, and Bee the Difference.

#### **Past Presidents Gathering**

Each year, the Past Presidents of the Junior League of Greater Lakeland gather to reconnect, reflect, and pour wisdom into the League's future leaders.

This year, Past President Callie Miller graciously opened her home to host this special tradition. President Katherine Fitzwater shared organizational updates and vision for the year ahead, while President-Elect Angel Davis led a thoughtful discussion focused on League projects, member engagement, and fundraising strategies.

**The gathering served as a powerful reminder that strong leadership is built on shared experience, continued mentorship, and a deep commitment to sustaining the League's impact for generations to come.**



# In Memoriam

## 2024-2025



### Jo Lee Blondheim Sawyer Past President and Sustainer Emeritus

On July 13, 2024, the Junior League of Greater Lakeland sadly lost our friend and JLGL Past President Josephine Lee "JoLee" Blondheim Sawyer (85). JoLee spent the last years of her life in her native Duval County where she fought a valiant battle with Alzheimer's Disease.

As our president, JoLee served during the 1981-1982 League year. Under her leadership, we saw our annual Thrift Sale become a one-day event, and we witnessed our (GATE) Gain Awareness Through Education Committee begin the research for a drug education project for the community. The League also presented several forums and workshops in conjunction with other community groups.

A graduate of Florida State University, JoLee was a Kappa Delta Sorority member there along with her good friend, JLGL Past President Celie Moore Wilhite. In addition to being a Sustainer Emeritus with our League, JoLee was a nurse, a devout Episcopalian who served on All Saints' Altar Guild, and a member of PEO. After her husband's death in 2013, this compassionate lady put her best foot forward. Every Thursday JoLee greeted and ministered to families connected with Lakeland Hospice House. This volunteer work was near and dear to her heart.

Preceded in death by her husband, Dr. Dane Sawyer, and by the untimely death of their daughter, Amy Lynne Hennessey, those left to cherish JoLee's memory include her son, Aubrey Dane Sawyer, III; her grandchildren, Neland Sawyer, Abbey Sawyer, Maggie Hennessey, Alexandra Hennessey, and Jack Hennessey; and great grandchild, Amy Sawyer; along with extended family and her League and community friends. We offer our deepest sympathy and our heartfelt prayers to all who knew and loved JoLee. While we miss her friendship dearly, we honor her in our memories and hold her forever in our hearts.

### Sarah Dukes McKay Past President and Sustainer Emeritus

#### *Namesake of League's highest honor – the Sarah Dukes McKay Award*

On September 17, 2024, Sarah Dukes McKay, our senior most past president and one of our most esteemed League and community members, died peacefully at home not long after her 98th birthday. With Sarah's passing goes one of the kindest, most solid friends and mentors many of us have ever known. She leaves behind a legacy of love and learning equaled by few others.

A Lakeland native and lifelong member of College Heights

Methodist Church, Sarah married her childhood friend and fellow church member, Kirk McKay. After an exciting elopement and civil marriage in Cuba, the pair married in a Methodist ceremony in Mexico, and from there they began a life of fascinating world travel and a beloved family of three children.

After studying at Wesleyan to become an executive secretary and her subsequent marriage, Sarah settled into life as a wife, mother, and community leader. As Junior League president, Sarah oversaw the League bringing not only theatre to children in the community but also helped involve them with the symphony and ballet while circulating for the first time what was known as the Suitcase Museums for children. This desire to see children prosper was evident throughout Sarah's entire life in everything she did from her devotion to the Museum to both public and private education.

Yet Sarah never rested on her laurels. Nor did she assume the role as a quiet widow when Kirk died. No. She came out with a zest and a distinct business acumen, assuming the presidency of McKay Enterprises, while displaying other long-ranging abilities that garnered local, state, and national honors.

Throughout her long life, and especially during her golden years, Sarah, with her trademark kindness, politeness, and sense of humor, holds an impressive list of firsts and honors including: first woman chair of the hospital board and the hospital's first recipient of the Sarah D. McKay Advocate Award named in her honor, first woman chair of FSC's Board of Trustees and founder of the McKay Archives Building there, founder of a civics initiative for middle school students, champion of Florida House in Washington, the first female recipient of the the Lakeland Chamber's George W. Jenkins Award, recipient of the Stanley S. Kesge Award by the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation, Legacy Award from the Community Foundation of Greater Lakeland, Polk Pioneer Award from

the Polk County Historical Society, the former Polk Museum of Art's (current Ashley Gibson Barnett Museum) Harrison Hooks Lifetime Achievement Award, United Way's Alexis de Tocqueville Award, the Florida Department of State's prestigious Great Floridian Award, recognition as an AJLI Notable member, and of course having the JLGL's highest volunteer award named in her honor.

In addition to being our 1964-1965 and amid her philanthropic and volunteer endeavors, the most important legacy Sarah left behind is her family, whom she loved dearly and nurtured fervently, along with generations of younger women whom she mentored with that same energy and caring. The one thing Sarah never assumed was an arrogant attitude. She was as friendly and down to earth as could be. Welcoming and unassuming, Sarah loved deeply and shared abundantly of her talent and treasure but mostly her time and her heart. Her trademark smile preceded her every encounter.

We offer our deepest sympathy and sincere thanks to Sarah's daughter Sustainer Paula McKay Mims (Tom), Sarah's son Kirk, and daughter Mona McKay Williamson (Paul); Sarah's grandchildren who include William Tanner Williamson, Graham McKay Williamson, Ashley Rickett and her daughter Adeline Williamson-Rickett, Patrick Mims, New York Jr. League Active Dr. Brittney Mims Hogan, Brian Hogan, and a new great granddaughter; Sarah's nieces Barbara Andrews (Dan), Sustainer Lynda Buck (Steve), and Sustainer and Past JLGL President Joy Williams (Robert), and their families; and to the entire Dukes/McKay clan on the loss of their matriarch. To say Sarah was and remains well-loved and that she loved well is the truest testament to her legacy.

### Christine "Chris" Parmelee Sikes Sustainer Emeritus

On October 16, 2024, members of the League received the

sad news that long time member and native Floridian Chris Sikes passed away at the age of 87.

Born in West Palm Beach on August 15, 1937, Chris was a graduate of Palm Beach High School. After graduation, Chris headed to Florida State where she was a member of Pi Beta Phi Sorority and a trapeze artist for the FSU Flying High Circus. This was only the beginning of a lifetime love affair with sports. Chris enjoyed tennis and snow skiing and stayed active in sports and exercise throughout her life including participation in the Polk County Senior Games. Additionally, Chris was an avid football fan.

After graduating from FSU with a major in elementary education, Chris moved to Dallas to teach, and it was there that she was introduced to her future husband, Jimmie Sikes. Chris and Jimmie married in 1962, and she made the move to Lakeland where Jimmie's family had a tile plant. Jimmie helped to make Florida Tile into a multi-million dollar industry.

In addition to her family, Chris loved the Jr. League and enjoyed volunteering in the community. She was a member of All Saints Episcopal Church, the DAR, a founding member of the GiveWell Community Foundation, and was a board member for numerous community boards. Chris' beautiful home was a welcome spot for friends and family alike, and she was able to enjoy it for many years until she made the move to assisted living.

Chris was predeceased by her parents, her husband Jimmie, her son James "Jamie" Wesley Sikes Jr., and her sister Lou P. Hatton. She is survived by her daughter, Shannon Knapp (Richard), her sister Jane P. Newell, and many nieces, nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews. We offer our deepest sympathy to these cherished family members and to all who knew and loved Chris. While she will be missed by members of the Junior League as well as the community at large, what a lesson Chris taught us all in giving to others! That is her legacy, and that is one of the

many things that made Chris Sikes such a special lady.

### **Audrey Miller Heath Sustainer Emeritus**

On October 27, 2024, Audrey Miller Heath (95), a beloved mother, grandmother, friend, and emeritus League member, died just weeks short of her 96th birthday.

A native Floridian born in Boyton Beach on November 16, 1928, Audrey grew up in West Palm Beach and graduated from Palm Beach High School. After high school, Audrey attended and graduated from the University of Martha Washington in 1950. She then taught first grade in Palm Beach, Chapel Hill, and University City, Missouri.

In 1952, Audrey eloped with the love of her life, Gordon Heath, and the two lovebirds moved to Lakeland in 1955 where they started a family of three children and where Gordon began his medical practice. In Lakeland, Audrey was involved with her children's schools and was also an active community volunteer with First Methodist Church, the Polk County Medical Auxiliary, the Polk Museum of Art (now the AGB Museum), PEO Chapter CP, Finer Things Antique Club, and the Jr. League of Greater Lakeland.

As a League member, Audrey served as our very treasured treasurer, and she thoroughly enjoyed volunteering at the League's Bargain Box and at our children's museum which was the early forerunner of the Museum. Audrey's smile and innate kindness were always evident whether on the phone or in person, and she enjoyed playing bridge with her friends in a group that extended over 60 years! When Audrey wasn't enjoying one of these activities, she loved reading, working crossword puzzles, sewing, and spending time with her family and grandchildren who lovingly called her "Boo".

It is to these beloved family members that we extend our heartfelt condolences. Preceded in death by her husband, parents, and siblings, the loved ones left to cherish Audrey's

memory include her daughter and fellow Sustainer Lucy Heath (Tom) of Lakeland, G. Read Heath, Jr, (Linda) of Bradenton, Paul L. Heath (Julie) of Gastonia, North Carolina, and special niece Diane B. Halloran (Jim) of Madison, Georgia; grandchildren Heath A. Tavriles (Jenna) of Austin, Texas, Emily T. Woodsby (Clark) of Orlando, Garrett F. Heath (Callie) of Charleston, South Carolina, and Gray H. Brown (Dylan) of Charleston, South Carolina; and great grandchildren Cora L. Woodsby, Ruby L. Woodsby, Jasper C. Woodsby, Stella R. Tavriles, and Cleo M. Tavriles.

Please know we are thinking of you, share in your loss, and will continue to remember this lovely lady, League member, and friend.

### **Patricia Nease Fore Sustainer Emeritus**

On January 1, 2025, friends of Patricia Nease Fore (90) received the sad news that she had passed from this life while surrounded by her family members. A native and fifth generation Floridian, Pat was born in Winter Haven on March 4, 1934, and she was involved in every aspect of school life there.

Pat's bubbly personality and beauty resulted in her selection as a high school cheerleader, Key Club Sweetheart, and Winter Haven Homecoming Queen. Cypress Gardens, at that time one of the key attractions in the entire state, saw Pat participate as one of its belles as well as an Aquamaid on its famed water ski team. Then upon graduation from high school, Pat attended Lakeland Business School and met the love of her life, Jim Fore, while she was serving as Cotton Queen in a parade. Sparks flew, and the couple soon made arrangements to marry while Jim was on shore leave from the US Navy. Once married, the couple moved to Lakeland where they started their family and spent the rest of their lives together.

Pat's love for gardening saw her become involved with The Women's Garden Club, and her love for community service saw her participate as a devoted member of the Jr. League. Her favorite League activities were those of many of her friends and included both Bargain Box and volunteering with the League's early children's museum that became the Polk Museum of Art (now the AGB Museum). Pat also volunteered as a candy-striper at the hospital, cheering up all in her path. As a Methodist, Pat understood the meaning of service to others.

A love for decorating, led Pat to open her own home decor boutique called The Classic Corner. This love of establishing a beautiful home stayed with her throughout her long life. And if home is where the heart is, her home and heart welcomed family and friends, young and old, throughout her life. Her love for hospitality garnered her the name "partymom" by her grandchildren, whom she dearly loved. In addition to Lakeland, Pat and Jim also loved traveling throughout Florida and the Southeast and particularly enjoyed the early years on Boca Grande.

The League joins Pat's family in mourning her loss, and we extend our sincere sympathy to everyone who loved her. This includes her son Scott (Jami) of Siesta Key, and his children Clare (Alex) and Callahan; Pat's daughter Kathy (Bill) of Jupiter, and their daughters Karry and Carley; her son Andy (Linda) of Jupiter and their daughters Kelsie and Emily; and her sister Jean Bergman of Lakeland and her daughter Stacy Davis (Brian) and their children Miranda and Mitchell Davis; and Pat's niece, Sandy Rowe of Jacksonville and her sons, Dario Bretana and Justin Rowe. Please know we appreciate Pat's service over the years and will always remember her winning personality and love for others, especially all of you. She will be missed as she was loved.



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