

Accolades

■ **The Florida Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Foundation** is honoring **Sara Friesel** of Sarasota, a young local scholar, for her achievements in the face of major challenges.



Sara Friesel, at work at Pak Mail in Bradenton. Photo by: Grant Jefferies

Eighteen-year-old Sara has won one of the Foundation's Triumph Awards, which recognize high-achieving youth served by the Guardian ad Litem Program. After three years in foster care, she has graduated from Braden River High School, holds down a responsible job at Pak-mail, takes classes at the State College of Florida and wants to be a travel nurse.

"We could not be prouder of Sara - and her Guardian ad Litem," said GAL Interim Executive Director Dennis Moore. "Youth aging out of foster care face unique challenges and need their support systems in order to achieve their goals."

Sara's Guardian ad Litem, Sandee Woods, represented Sara in foster care, where she lived in several group homes until aging out last spring and transitioning to independent living. "She has remained in the same group home for three years, which is very rare," says Woods. "She needed to prove to herself and everyone else that she was going to be something - and she is going to be something. She's a fighter."

Guardian ad Litem represents abused, abandoned and neglected children in Florida's dependency courts. Sara came into the system as she was beginning her sophomore year of high school.

"Being in foster care was a very rough and hard time for me," she says. "But I stayed strong and got through it and have used everything I learned as well as all tools available to me to live independently."

"She is one of the most independent young people I've seen in a while," says Jordan Faza of Springboard, which provides housing for youth who have aged out of foster care.

Sara coped by working, saving her money and buying a car, at one point holding down three jobs. She drove herself to work and to school. She developed a strong relationship with Lori and Chuck Radtke, the owners of Pak-mail. "In that

kind of a business, the increasing responsibilities are about making decisions without having to ask," says Lori. "We've come to trust her judgement."

"I felt very supported through the Guardian ad Litem Program because they were there for me, and they have helped me with life-changing decisions," Sara says.

There are eight Triumph Award honorees this year. All will receive scholarships and MacBook laptops from the Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation, with the Guardian Trust Foundation and the Florida Blue Foundation as sponsors.

To learn more about becoming a Guardian ad Litem volunteer, call (386) 364-7720 or visit www.guardianadlitem.org. To learn more about the Florida Guardian ad Litem Foundation, visit www.flgal.org.

■ **Jeanne Dubi**, President of **Sarasota Audubon chapter**, is one of two winners of the 2021 National Audubon Society Charles H. Callison Awards.



Jeanne Dubi

The Charles H. Callison Awards are given to honor outstanding efforts contributed by staff and volunteers to continue Audubon's mission for birds and habitat conservation. One award is given to a staff member, and one award is given to a volunteer.

This year's Callison Awards recipients are **Paul Gray**, Everglades Science Coordinator for Audubon Florida and **Jeanne Dubi**, President of Sarasota Audubon Society.

Paul Gray, PhD, has been with Audubon for more than 25 years in a variety of areas, including water quality and management, and agricultural best management practices. He has focused on habitat connectivity on public and private lands, water management and quality challenges in the Everglades, and tackled bird conservation issues in the Northern Everglades and Lake Okeechobee watersheds.

Jeanne Dubi, President of Sarasota Audubon chapter, has received the Charles H. Callison Award to honor her outstanding contributions to advance Audubon's mission for birds and habitat conservation. Dubi has been in leadership positions at this chapter for several decades and most notably helped turn the Celery Fields, a regional stormwater treatment facility, into a world-class ecotourism destination.

This effort also included fundraising and overseeing the construction of a new LEED Gold-certified Audubon nature center. Dubi, along with the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, successfully persuaded Sarasota County

to give Sarasota Audubon the right to manage 27 acres adjacent to the Celery Fields. This acreage was granted a conservation easement (held by the Conservation Foundation) and will become a newly created wildlife habitat.

Her most recent initiative engages multigenerational families from the area's Hispanic/Latinx community for Spanish language field trips. Sarasota Audubon Society is a local chapter of the National Audubon Society.

Appointments

■ **All Faiths Food Bank** has hired **San Juana "Janie" Ramirez** as its new DeSoto Food & Resource



"Janie" Ramirez

Center (FRC) client services representative. In this role, Ramirez - who is bilingual - will serve as the primary point of contact for all clients and visitors to the DeSoto FRC, whether in person or via telephone.

This position is critical in ensuring that all clients are properly registered into the client database, welcomed, and provided needed information or directed to the appropriate staff member.

While Ramirez has the requisite managerial and interpersonal skills to successfully fill the position, it is her life experience that makes her a perfect fit. As a child, between the ages of 6 and 17, Ramirez traveled with her parents - who were migrant farm workers - between Florida, Texas and Michigan for picking seasons. As the eldest of eight siblings, she is family-centric and understands the challenges of maximizing resources when money is in short supply.

"As you can imagine, I can well understand the value of hard work and a positive attitude. My mother has also instilled the importance of giving back," Ramirez said. "Throughout my childhood and adult life, I have been proud to be able to assist other migrant workers in accessing health and dental care by providing transportation and financial assistance for those appointments. Giving back is important to me and my family."

In DeSoto County, where agriculture is the dominant industry, the number of persons living in poverty is nearly 22%, well over the national average. With a population of 38,000, household income is just over \$35,400 and, in 29% of households, a language other than English is spoken at home. While food is also distributed there, All Faiths Food Bank's DeSoto FRC is

designed to be the epicenter for vital resources with wrap-around services including: needs assessments; benefit assistance for SNAP (formerly food stamps), Medicaid, TANF, Social Security and Disability; legal aid; group classes; and referrals for other social services. Free tax preparation was offered this year as well.

To learn more about All Faiths, go to allfaithsfoodbank.org or call 941-379-6333.

■ **Making An Impact, Inc., (MAI)** received grants from the **Sarasota Police Department's 2021 Law Enforcement Trust Fund**, and the **North Port Police Department's 2021 Law Enforcement Trust Fund**. The grants will help underwrite the costs of revising and printing **MAI's 2022 Community Connections Resource Guide**.

The Community Connections Resource Guide is a comprehensive guide providing residents in Sarasota and Manatee counties with information to connect with more than two hundred service agencies, ranging from addiction treatment, to education, food pantries, immigration, mental health, utility assistance and Veteran's services. Divided into 17 categories and color-coded by geographic region for ease of use, the guide was developed in line with MAI's mission to reduce disparities and unmet needs for disadvantaged people in our community. The third edition of the guide will be available in early 2022.

"In addition to protecting our community, police officers are also on the front lines when it comes to human and social services. They are the ones who discover that a car seemingly abandoned on the side of the road is home to a family, they are trained to recognize the not so obvious signs of domestic abuse, and they serve as a vital resource for the homeless and people dealing with mental illness," said Victoria Kasdan, MAI Board Chair. "These grants recognize the importance of community collaboration in alleviating disparities and unmet needs for people in our community. We are grateful to the Sarasota and North Port Police Departments for their partnership."

More than 1,500 guides were distributed throughout Sarasota and Manatee counties in 2021. The spiral-bound, pocket-sized guides are in use by the American Red Cross, Sarasota Police Department, North Port Police Department, Sarasota Sheriff's Office, Longboat Key Police, Fire and Emergency Management, Tidewell Hospice, Multicultural Health Institute, Turning Points, Boys & Girls Clubs

of Manatee County, and other organizations.

Also available online, the guide can be accessed or ordered at <https://www.Making-An-Impact.org>.

■ **Shantele Marcum** has joined RE/MAX Platinum Realty as a Realtor in the downtown Sarasota office. Growing up in a family of homebuilders, Marcum developed a passion for real estate, architecture and design. She has a background in sales, marketing and promotion, and has worked in the hospitality, retail, and health and fitness industries. The Sarasota office is located at 1500 State Street. Marcum can be reached at (941) 961-4959 or ShanteleSellsSarasota@gmail.com.

■ **Melissa Voigt** has returned to **Sarasota Opera** as Senior Development Officer.



Melissa Voigt

Voigt first joined the company in 2000 as Individual Giving Officer and became Director of Development in 2002. During her tenure, she led the completion of the \$20 million capital campaign that funded the renovation of the historic Sarasota Opera House.

Voigt left the company in 2009 to become the Chief Development Officer for Girl Scouts of Southwest Florida. From 2013 to 2018 she served as Director of Development for Child Protection Center and the Van Wezel Foundation. Most recently, she was Executive Director of the Ear Research Foundation.

In her new position at Sarasota Opera, Voigt will work closely to develop relationships with high-level donors and some institutional partners. She will also collaborate with fellow development colleagues to supplement the stewardship of high-level corporate partners and to cultivate new and increased gifts.

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