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Inside {local } June 24

6 The Business of Family Fun

Local teacher transforms family hobby into thriving business

OVER 51 YEARS AND GROWING

12

Foley business provides personal services with every transaction

LOCAL FOCUS BUSINESS & SERVICE DIRECTORY 11 FAITH & WORSHIP PAGE 14, 15

ON THE COVER: Last month's mild Spring weather helped provide the perfect setting for one of Foley's largest annual events, the Gulf Coast Hot Air Balloon Festival. Photo by Chris J. Hinton

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Nikki Walker is the owner of the Coastal Camellia Pageant Company. Photography provided

COASTAL

PAGEANT COMPANY

FAMILY, FASHION AND FUN

LINDA WILLIFORD

When her four-year-old wanted to be in a beauty pageant, it all started for Nikki Walker, owner of the Coastal Camellia Pageant Company in Foley. Walker's daughters, now 10 and 12 years old, love to compete in pageants. Walker and her mother and the two girls would go out to have girl fashion fun and family time together as the two girls would compete in pageants. Walker said many times, "We would talk about what we would want and not want in a pageant. So, one day we decided to put on our own pageant."

In the 1st year, Walker said they had 60 contestants to participate. She considered it to be successful. In the 2nd year, they had an overwhelming response and had to cut it off to 134 contestants. This year is their 3rd year hosting pageants. This year, Walker will host a two-day pageant to include "special needs children" along with the main title event. The contestants competing are babies up to 19 years old. They come from multiple states to participate in the event in Foley, which is held at the Foley Civic Center. The pageant will be on July 27th and 28th. Tickets will be available at the door on the day of the event.

At first, Walker was working in the pageantry business from home. However, when the company started to grow, the collection of dresses and gowns would no longer fit in her house. She had to have a place to put all her inventory.

Walker's new store, Coastal Camellia Pageant Company, just recently opened. She has over 500 gorgeous dresses and gowns for rent or sale. Because Walker is a 4th-grade teacher, her store is open by appointment only during the week and most Saturdays. Visit her Facebook page for new summer hours and upcoming events. Walker encourages people to message her for more information about the store hours, dresses, and upcoming pageant.

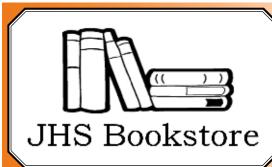
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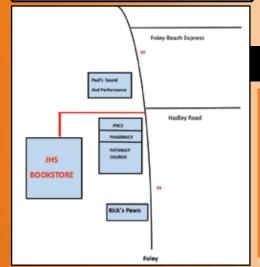
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< FROM PAGE 6

After a while, Walker realized a need for specific dress designs, sizes, and colors unavailable on the market. So, she decided to start designing dresses for her contestants' needs and wants. She wanted all her contestants to be able to participate in the pageants with the perfect dress for them. She is now in the process of finding a manufacturer to produce her designs, which she will carry in her store. She is an official retailer for the brands Sugar Kayne, Tiffany Princess, and 2 Cute. She also has a line of Mardi Gras and prom dresses.

"The pageantry is like sports," Walker said. "Everything sport events have to offer to their players; the pageantry offers to their beauty contestants. Walker said, "Actually, the only difference is, we get to wear prettier shoes." Walker said these events teach the girls how to win and lose. It teaches them life skills. It gives the girls experience with interviews and public speaking. It allows them to develop and showcase their talents.

"I love to see the girls shine on the stage," Walker admits that

she spoils her contestants. "We don't put on a pageant where only one girl gets a crown; all my girls get awards. They also get goodie bags, t-shirts, and jewelry at registration.

Walker encourages her contestants to do community service. She awards them with a crown and sash, and they are recognized as Charity Ambassadors. She challenges the older girls to write an essay about community service that they have been involved in throughout the year. The contestants can also participate in bringing canned goods and staples for the "Blessing Boxes" in the community neighborhoods. "We want to give back to the community," Walker added.

The world of pageantry sometimes gets a bad rap with all the glitz and negative commentaries "But it's not really like that for me and my pageants." Walker said. "We're developing character and getting the girls prepared for the world. We are all about building the girls up."

For more information, see their ad on page 17 or visit **Coastalcamillia.weebly.com**

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Charles Squire is the owner of Benson's. Photography provided

ONE-STOP-SHOP

LINDA WILLIFORD

Benson's Appliance Center, a trusted name in Foley since 1973, was founded by Ed Benson. With a successful track record of over 51 years, the business has been in the capable hands of Charles Squire for the past six years. A former employee of Mr. Benson, Squire took over the reins of the appliance business in 2018, ensuring a seamless transition and continued commitment to quality and service.

"The store has grown a lot since I bought the business," said Squire. "We've done a good job of changing with the trends. With the economy like it is today, we had to diversify ourselves." The Benson's Appliance Center has more than just appliances. They have added mattresses, furniture, and outdoor furniture to the store. They have also opened two new locations. They have a





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< FROM PAGE 12



"scratch and dent" outlet store in Robertsdale, and a Pensacola store which also carries appliances, mattresses, furniture, and outdoor furniture. The Foley location has more selections of outdoor furniture, including grills.

Squire said that their prices are competitive with the big box stores. "What sets us apart is our dedication to customer satisfaction. Service is a big part of our business. We not only sell the product, but we service everything we sell." At Benson's, they deliver, install, and then give service after the sale. "We have good employees who are knowledgeable and know what they are talking about."

They do about 2% of online sales. Squire said, "Most people want to shop in person." They have multiple brands of appliances, including Amana, Frigidaire, Whirlpool, and Kitchen Aid, just to name a few. The most popular kitchen appliances are the Café G.E. full kitchen, and Speed Queen is the #1 for the laundry appliances. They have financing options through Synchrony Home Credit and Progressive Leasing with flexible lease-to-own options. Go to www.bensonappliance.com to browse their catalog.

The Foley store is located at 501 N. McKenzie Rd. Store hours are Monday-Friday, 8 am-5 pm, and Saturday, 8 am-2 pm. See their ad on page 16 for more details.



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