



# the NOODLE

Open up and say AHHHH!!!



The 100th Edition

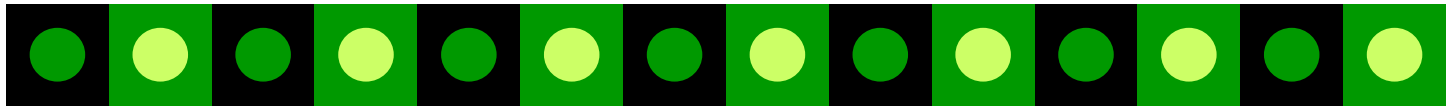
June 2016

Welcome to the 100th edition of *The Noodle*! We would like to share some of our favorite *Noodle* articles from throughout the years, so get ready for some extreme *Noodle* reading! We would also like to introduce you to our new Youth Advisor in the 100th edition. So sit back, relax, and prepare to go on a journey back in time to the beginning of *The Noodle*!



## Meet the New Youth Advisor!

Hi everyone! My name is Niki Germain. I am 30 years old and I live in Tallahassee, Florida. I am married to Megan Atkinson, who is a member of the Florida Youth Council. I like to travel, and one of my favorite places to travel to is Saint Augustine, Florida. It is so beautiful! I also love history, and that is one of the reasons why I love Saint Augustine so much. I also love the Florida Keys. I have family and friends there, and I lived on Marathon Key when I was younger. I try to enjoy life to its fullest and take in as much as I can. I am very excited to be the Youth Advisor.



## Coffee, Coffee, Coffee

*By: Alex Brown*

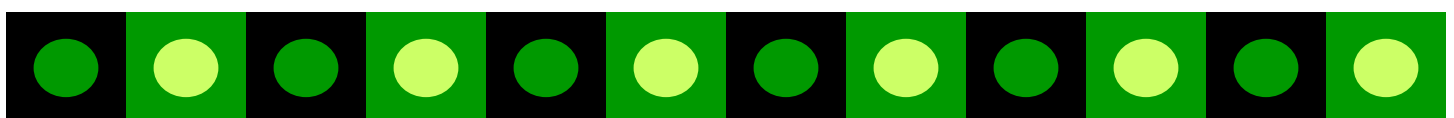


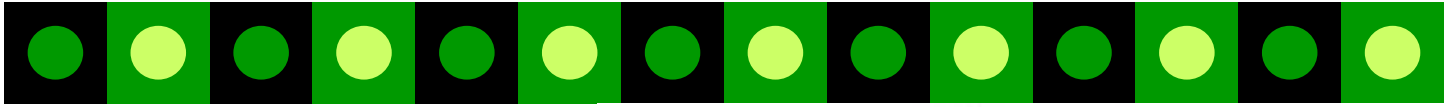
Every morning start the same way. I get up take a shower and then I get a cup of coffee. With my Kuerig brewing system it takes me less than a minute to have a fresh brewed up coffee made. Add a little sugar, a little half and half and I am good. However, I am not done with coffee for the day. On a typical day I will at least another cup or more. I really enjoy iced coffee. I recently discover that the dollar store by my house sells canned mocha cappuccinos for just a dollar. I can buy two and have my fix for the rest of the afternoon. I love coffee. I could drink coffee at every meal, if only it were appropriate. I am addicted to coffee.

Yeah, I am addicted to coffee. When I don't get my coffee fix I get a headache. That is a new development. I didn't realize that I was so dependent until I went on a trip to see some of my wife's family. The person we were visiting didn't have a coffee maker. Who doesn't have a coffee maker?

On the day left I wasn't really thinking and we got off around on in the afternoon. By three my head was pounding and I didn't know why. I took some Tylenol, but when we got home around 7 my head wasn't any better. What was weird that all I kept thinking was that a cup of coffee sounded like the best thing in the world. I made a cup and about 5 minutes after the first sip my headache was completely gone.

Yup I am addicted to coffee, but I am done. Starting this last Monday I have stopped drinking coffee everyone morning. I don't like the thought of having to have coffee to get going. I mean what if I wake up late and don't have the opportunity to make my coffee? I don't want to have to plan my life around having coffee. I intend to go back to enjoying coffee as a treat, not a necessity.





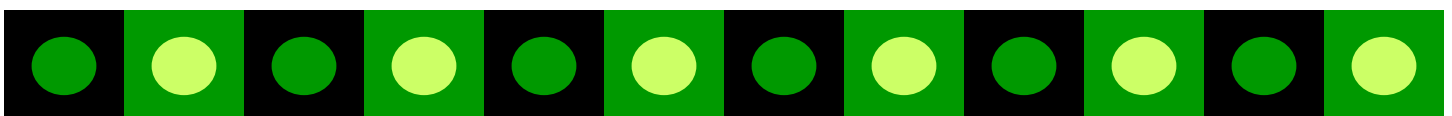
*dare to dream*

## Dreams Do Come True

*By: Lizzy Barrows*



All summer I kicked back and relaxed. I knew that when the fall came I would have to figure out what I was going to do with myself. Lately my days have consisted of getting up early eating breakfast, drinking a little coffee and checking my Facebook. I know sounds like a typical morning when you're on summer break. I have been out of school over a year now and all I hoped for was the chance to go back and do something different. In high school I was given an option of 1 diploma, not realizing it wasn't going to get me far. I didn't go for the standard diploma because I could not pass the FCAT. My dream was to get my GED and then go on and get an associate's degree. Everybody told me including my VR counselor that getting my GED probably wasn't possible. I knew with all my heart this is what I wanted to do. VR sent me for some new testing. It was a psycho educational evaluation; in easy terms an "IQ" test! This test was to determine if I possibly had the ability to pass the GED. I went for the testing and I'm not going to lie it was hard! I did not think I did well. I felt I didn't do well and was a little sad when I left. My VR counselor called me and said she had good news and we set an appointment time to go in. I was so anxious and nervous this past week waiting for my appointment. Well guess what, I saw her today and she gave me the good news that I did very well, I scored an 84 which is in the normal range. I was very excited I could barely sit in my seat. We discussed how the test will open doors for me and now I can look forward to a bright future. My plan is to contact the local school system and get the ball rolling, but I know it's not going to be easy but I promised myself I will not quit. I am responsible for my own future and I can't wait to get started. I know now that taking the web design program and becoming a certified web designer helped my brain further develop. The VR counselor told me that our brains continue to grow until we are 25. If I do the math I have 3 more years to let my brain grow- imagine all I can learn within 3 years. After I successfully master my GED (I know it may take me a while) I want to go to a community college and hopefully take courses toward becoming a counselor. This is the most exciting thing that has happened to me in a long time.



# Education Advocates

*By: Megan Atkinson*



The biggest advocates in my life were my parents; they fought for me when no one else would. They are the reason I did so well in school. Up until middle school I was in all exceptional student education (ESE) classes. My parents fought tooth and nail to have me placed in mainstream classes because they knew I had the potential to do well in them. And I did, with set accommodations such as extra time on writing assignments and tests. I excelled very quickly and in high school I was placed in honors classes all because my parents advocated for me because they knew I was capable of reaching my dreams. I graduated high school with honors and a 3.7 GPA. I am now attending the College of Central Florida to get my Associate of Arts degree in Human Services. This is all thanks to my parents who saw what I was capable of and advocated for me to be mainstreamed in middle school and high school.





# My Way to My Heart

*By: Josh Ortiz*

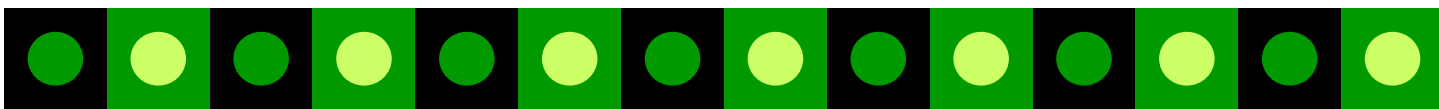


Being a Hispanic male in Florida has its perks. I get to eat cuisines from all over the world and mix them with my Latin flavors. The weird thing is, in my family we eat everything with rice. I mean pasta, soup, vegetables, all types of meat, we eat it all. But my favorite food to eat with rice is eggs. I love eggs maybe a little to much. I've cooked it in way that to some might be a little crazy but I love it. But of all the dif-ferent ways I cook it I have a favorite, a signature dish you may say and it's called "huevos al Plato"

That is the best dish ever in my eyes. I could eat that every day if I could. It's so good and I'm going to teach you how to cook it. First you make white rice to the way you like it.

Mine is just with water, oil, and a little salt. Then you'll need butter, two eggs, shredded Gouda cheese and tomato paste. Sounds weird I know but let me explain. First you put the butter on the skillet let it melt and go all over then you crack the eggs and put them to cook in the skillet. Next while the eggs are crackling a bit you add the tomato paste on the eggs and mix it all together. You don't have to use the whole can of it by the way. Then when the eggs are pretty much cooked you add the cheese. Mix all to get her till you have them all cheesey, serve yourself a spoon of rice and serve the eggs over it and then you'll have yourself a plate of huevos al Plato which translates to eggs on a plate.

Hope you like my signature dish. I know it's a little out there but trust me it taste good!!!



## Youth Summit Here We Come



*By: Matt Zebroski*

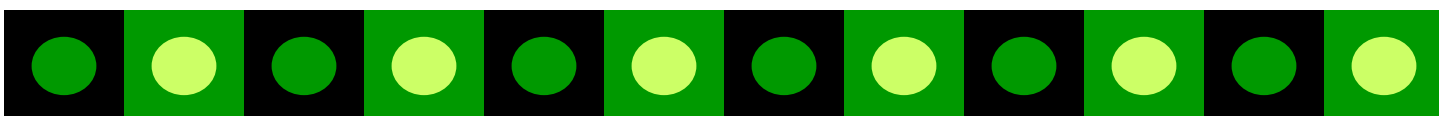
Hi! I am Matt Zebroski. I am 22 years old and I have a visual impairment known as Retinitis Pigmentosa. This means I have a small field of vision and can see very little in low light and at night. I also have learning disabilities. Even though this is my second year on the FYC, this will be the first time I have attended the Youth Summit. I am looking forward to meeting Josh Sundquist. I am interested in hearing about what he has accomplished in his life. I think it will inspire me to challenge myself and try new things. I am looking forward to seeing my old friends and meeting new people. I am excited about leading small groups and hearing what my peers have to offer. I don't care much for dancing, but I enjoy music, so Saturday night should be a lot of fun. Let's all have a great time and share some good ideas.

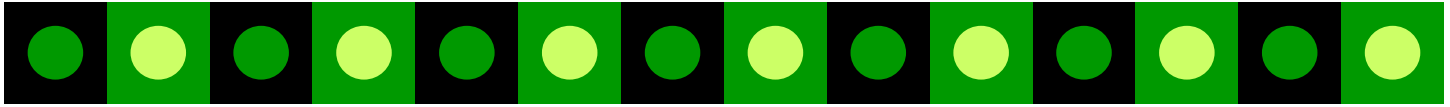
## All In



*By: Dakota Smoot*

Even though the Jags have never won a Super Bowl, or been to one, I find it easy to cheer for them because I know how it feels to be looked down on. I have three reasons why I like the Jacksonville Jaguars. First of all, the players give back to the community. They care for the people around them, and they are less selfish each year. Second, they donate stuff to kids with special needs. The team cares a lot about kids. Last, they have donated tickets to the games in the past. Any way you look at it, they are awesome and caring. Like any good team the Jags have to start losing before they can win. It's just common sense! So in times like this, I have one thing to say: I'm all in. Let's go Jags!

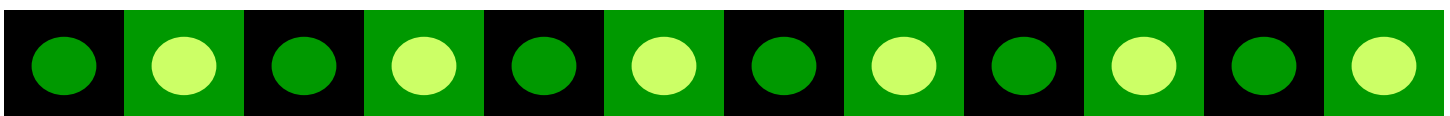




## Making Dreams Come True

*By: Garrett Mayersohn*

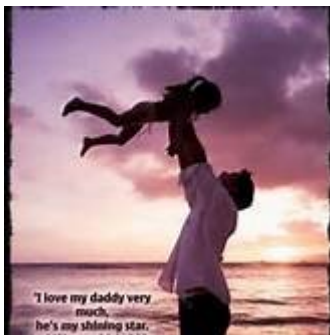
We all have jobs that we can only dream about having. However with hard work and a little bit of discipline we can have the job of our dreams. For me that job is a motivational speaker/advocate. It's what I have wanted to do since I was in middle school when I first attended the family cafe in 2008, 2 years before I applied for the Florida youth Council (FYC.) The FYC shed light on the facts that I was clueless, at that time, of that fact that people were taking advantage of how gullible I really was back then. The FYC made me more aware and less gullible and sitting in that room that day I felt reborn and a light bulb went off inside my head and I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. Bring awareness to this very important issue and helping people who are living with some sort of a disability/impairment. I'm already doing that now with the FYC, but if I can keep reaching out to people and empower them to make a difference in the world that to me is a dream come true.



# Act of Love

*By: Shevie Barnes*

Valentine's Day is supposed to be a day where love is celebrated across the United States. Some chalk it up to a "retail" created holiday while others experience things they couldn't imagine life without. To answer the question, "What does Valentine's Day mean to me?" I have to flash back to my first Valentine's Day (well the 1st one I remember). I was around eight or nine years old, and I woke up to my dad and a gift. It was a diary and a card that read "Daddy loves you." I can remember thinking my dad was awesome and my hero. Over the years more gifts have emerged, but what I remember most is the act of love shown by a father to his daughter. It's the memory that has reminded me of my self-worth over the years as I have become a woman. Valentine's Day means so much to a lot of people, or nothing to some. For me it's the day that I get to spread the love, confidence, and belief that I was given on this day. My family began the legacy to share and give on this holiday and I intend on passing it on. When Valentine's Day comes around this year you should accept and also give a little love.





## Family Tradition

*By: Christina Waldron*

As my ancestors came from Ireland, we have a love for the Irish. On Saint Patrick's Day, we celebrate by having dinner of corned beef and cabbage and attending mass. We wear green shirts and remember our past connection with the Emerald Isle. The immigration began with my great, great, great grandparents and continued for many years and they eventually settled in Louisville, Kentucky and the majority of my relatives still live there.



## Transformational Learning

*By: Christopher Regan*



To celebrate the annual Disability History & Awareness Weeks, I fostered a collaborative effort at the University of North Florida, between the Taylor Leadership Institute where I currently am an intern, and the Disability Resource Center. Together, we developed an event that would also coincide with our Leadership Speakers Bureau series, and centered it on teaching leadership skills to empower people with disabilities. It was hard work, but it was totally worth it. The attendance for the event was somewhere between 120 and 150 people in total. We arranged for guest speakers to speak on a special group panel from the Disability Resource Center, as well as influential community leaders with disabilities in the Jacksonville area. They all talked about how people with disabilities could utilize leadership within themselves to advocate for ways to improve their quality of life. Everyone was listening intently to what was being said. At the end, there was a delicious reception catered by Jason's Deli. I feel that the event truly embodied the "Transformational Learning" initiative of UNF. It provides valuable information that everyone, including those with disabilities, can employ in order to make their lives better. I am so incredibly honored to have played a valuable part in this event, and I look forward to positively impacting more lives in the future.

# Accessibility

*By: Whitney Harris*

The Americans with Disabilities Act passed on July 26, 1990, just three days after I was born. Being born without one of my arms and one of my legs left my future slightly undetermined mobility-wise. Though I did learn how to walk and become very independent using prosthesis, there is always the option of needing to use my wheelchair. In a world prior to the ADA, many buildings were not accessible to individuals using a wheelchair. I do not enjoy using my wheelchair because I find it very hard to maneuver with only one hand. Some days I really should give myself a break from wearing my prosthesis and use my chair, but my own stubbornness gets in the way. I can imagine it would be even harder if I had to maneuver over curbs, steep ramps or through narrow doorways of every single building I wanted to enter. Luckily, with the passage of the ADA, using my wheelchair is not limited by my surroundings, and only limited by own head. Accessibility is probably the first thing you think about when you hear the acronym ADA. It truly is one of the biggest issues for people who use wheelchairs. If there were no ramps, elevators, power doors, or disabled parking, I would be excluded from pretty much everything out there in the world. When I was little, I used to be able to ride a special needs bus with the wheelchair lift. I didn't have to ride the bus, but like other kids, it gave me a sense of independence. It also helped my mom so she didn't have to spend so much time driving back and forth.





## A Change in History

*By: Nick Grabowski*



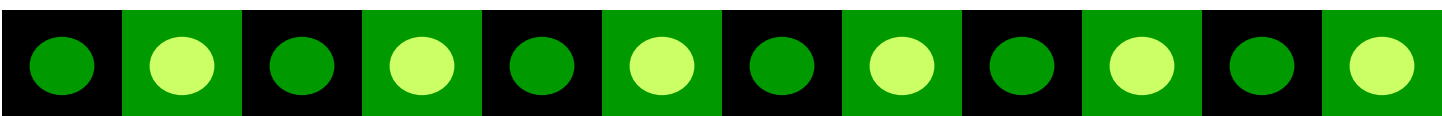
The Americans with Disabilities Act had a large impact on the disability community. What impact it has on the individual changes depending on their disabilities, experiences, and interests. For me, I have a lot of interest in history, so I enjoy seeing the changes in how any people or group acted or were treated at a different time. The Americans with Disabilities Act provides ones of the closest marks of this to today. Being unable to use my hands to write much, I had to rely on computers all through schooling. At first, due to the ADA I was given a small laptop for note taking. Prior to this I was not really able to take any kind of notes. I generally would just depend on my memory. I probably could have continued by using memory, but it was nice to have an easier way.

## How the Passage of the ADA has Changed my Life

*By: Serena Wetmore*



My physical disability is cerebral palsy, which makes it challenging to do a lot of things. Because the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibited discrimination, it has allowed me the opportunity to go through school and pursue a standard diploma. The school has provided me with many accommodations, such as a paraprofessional who takes notes for me and transcribes my dictation of answers for schoolwork and tests. They also allow me to have extra time (or sometimes shorter assignments) because I am not the fastest reader in the world, despite vision therapy to help my tracking. It also takes a lot of time to talk my paraprofessional through answers, especially in Algebra! I think the ADA has allowed me to fulfill my full potential. Hopefully I will be able to go to college and pursue a degree in marketing, which I find really interesting. No one can tell me I can't follow my dreams. Thank you to those who made the ADA possible!



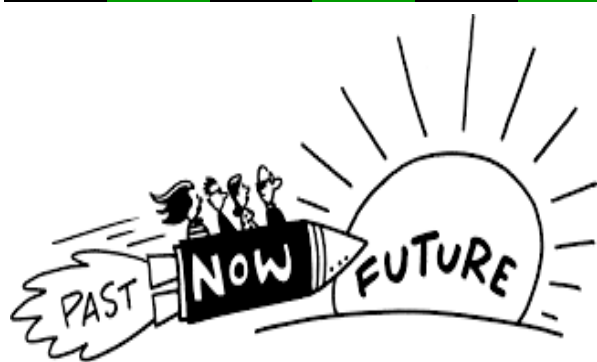


## The ADA Changed My Life

*By: Derek Carraway*

Well, considering I have had a disability since birth, I would say the ADA has definitely changed and influenced my life in a positive way. There are probably countless examples I could share on how it personally has affected me over the years, but instead I will just touch on a couple of them that currently affect me at this moment in time. One is the mandate that all public transportation services offer a paratransit service with fixed routes. This allows me to take advantage of the Transportation Disadvantaged service where I live, since my disability prevents me from being able to drive. It's not perfect (believe me it's not) but it's better than nothing, and it is just one way the ADA has changed my life. Without it providing the provisions for transportation, I'd probably be up the creek. Another way it has changed my life is the provision that an employer can't discriminate against a qualified individual with a disability and must provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations for them. Since I recently graduated and am now looking for work and have a disability, this definitely affects me and could come into play. The area of work I'm looking for would, for the most part, be indoors sitting at a desk, but if there were to be a lifting requirement or something similar, I would definitely require some assistance and that is where the ADA comes in. I'll always be grateful for the passing of the ADA because it has changed not just my life, but those of all people with disabilities, and allows us to live out our lives as normally as possible without the fear of unlawful discrimination.



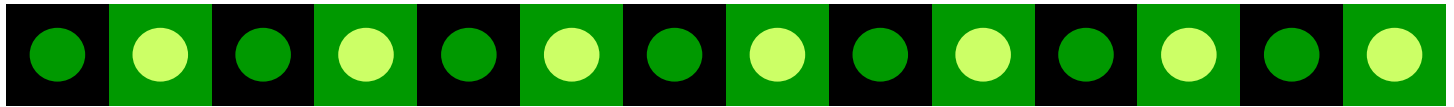


## Planning for the Future

*By: Carly Fahey*

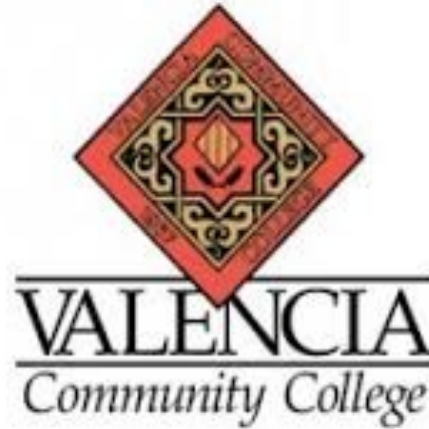


Planning for my future has to be the most difficult part of the new year so far. As I picked out classes for the close of my time in community college, life decisions started to become more and more important. Where should I continue my education? Do I want to move? I felt like I was finally prepared to answer those critical questions with confidence. After much consideration and research, I decided where I wanted to be. Mountains, opportunities, academics, friends, a great value . . . I finally felt like I had found the right college for my final years. After I filled out my application online, coordinated my college interviews, and called the school's disability office, other factors started pouring in my mind. Where will I live at the new university? Will I have to take out a loan? Will others be upset to see me move across the country? Can I really do this? The pressures from others began piling up in my mind. Slowly, I realized that my own opinion and perspectives on decisions were more important than how others might react. Having the strength to make long-term changes and possibly disappoint others in the process can never be an easy task. However, as my new plans continue to move along over time, I have seen myself grow tremendously. I am finally getting to a larger-scale independence, which is worth any difficulty I might face along the way. As I figure out my path, I learn by taking the steps to being out on my own. I can't wait for what my future has in store.

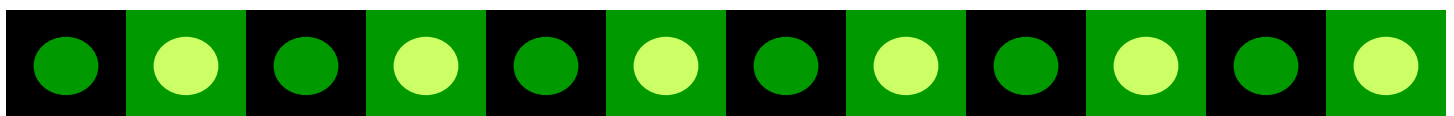


## Reflections of College

*By: Matthew Murray*



I am on my way! After having to wait a year, I am now officially a freshman at the Career and Community Studies Program at The College of New Jersey. I had to wait a year because I couldn't get up to New Jersey in time for my interview. Since they already had their quota of eight students, I had to wait until this year to start. While I was waiting, I took a few courses at Valencia Community College. My orientation was on June 11th of 2008. It was awesome. Walking around campus made me feel psyched. I got an opportunity to meet the other freshmen. There were some sophomores and juniors there, too. There is a wide variety of different disabilities in the program. I think this will be very interesting because I will be able to learn about their difficulties and how they cope with their handicap. I met the professors there and they seem really nice. We went over the schedule and I will be busy from 9:00 to 3:00 from Monday through Friday. The professor gave us a book for summer reading. It was called, "World Made By Hand." I just finished it. It was the type of book that you just want to keep on reading but in parts, it was a little too violent. There are no dorms yet for the students who are in this program. I met another student who wanted to live on campus so we found a house to rent nearby. It has three bedrooms so we are hoping another student will rent with us. The mother of the student will act as a house monitor for us. I am so excited about this. I have been blessed with this opportunity. I am hoping to write articles for *The Noodle* about my college experience as time goes by. I hope you will enjoy them!



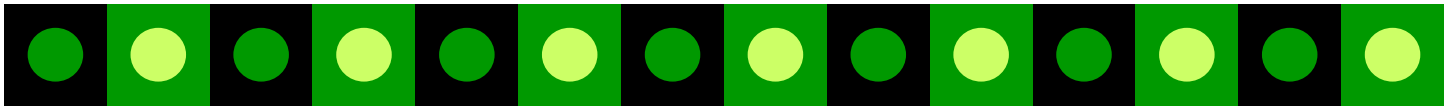


## Spring Fling

*By: Matthew Boselli*

My sister decided to visit me from Portland, Oregon for my 26th birthday, which was February 23<sup>rd</sup>, and to make it a fun week-end trip. To make it a memorable visit, we took a four hour drive to Saint Augustine, Florida with my Dad. St. Augustine is one of the oldest European cities in the United States, which makes it a very interesting city here in Florida. It has so much history. Saint Augustine was first visited in 1513 by a Spanish settler named Ponce De Leon. Some people say it's haunted by spirits and ghosts. The city is very eerie and has a sense of people watching over you. I would have liked to go on the haunted ride that they had but we didn't have the time to do that. We went to a grave yard in the evening which was filled with soldiers and their loved ones. On Saturday, we went to Flagler College. The college is old and was cold. Due to school being in session, we were not able to explore the campus in depth at the time. Their major studies are in the Arts and Math. After that, we went to Fort Worth Castle. The Castle was made of sea shells to absorb the cannon balls that were fired at them, and not shatter the walls. The shells were called "coquena." We decided to stay in a bed and breakfast which was called The Bay Front Inn and had a beautiful serene view of the Gulf. The staff was very nice, and the rooms were comfortable – I would recommend for anyone visiting Saint Augustine to stay at this Inn. I enjoyed my birthday with my family and my week-end fling to St. Augustine very much.

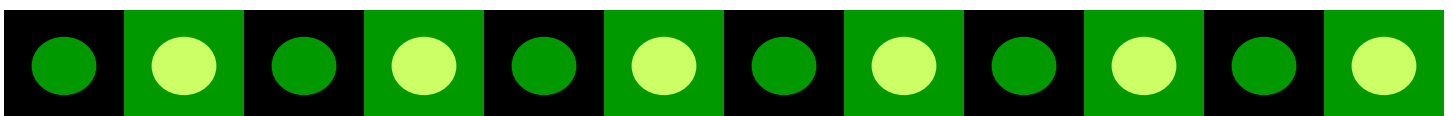




## Is There Springtime in South Florida?

*By: Grier Harris*

When I sat down to write this article the question I wanted to answer was: Is there springtime in South Florida? When I thought about that question, I kept running into problems. I thought about how spring is the time that bears wake from their winter sleep, bunnies hop around and birds return to their homes. I thought about flowers that bloom and trees that get new leaves. I thought about my sister and brother sitting in the sun in Central Park on a Sunday in New York City. But I knew that this wasn't spring for me. I kept on wondering, "Is there springtime in South Florida?" After a while, it occurred to me that maybe I was asking the wrong question. The question is not if there is spring in South Florida. The question really is what does spring mean for me? Spring for me means flying kites at the park and going to backyard BBQ parties. It is going canoeing on the Peace River with my Dad. Spring is still layering my clothes for fashion, but also going to the beach in my swimsuit instead of my jeans. It is not worrying about hurricanes or mosquitoes and is also about making plans for the summer vacation. The best part of spring for me is that my birthday is in the spring. I realized that spring has to deal with what each person believes spring is about. So, I hope you catch some Spring Fever and have a good time.



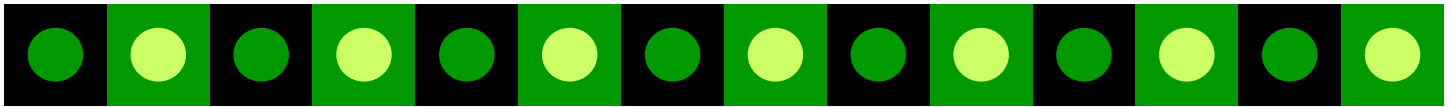


## Bells, Showers, & Baby Cries

*By: Cynthia Melgar*



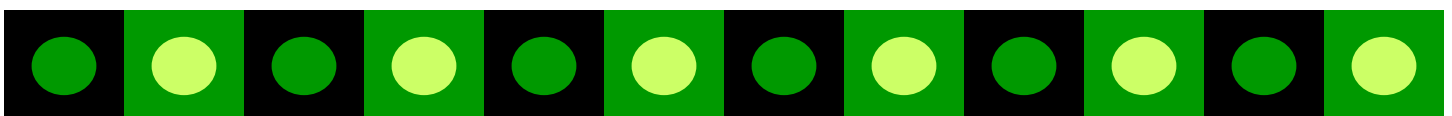
March 20, 2009 was our official first day of spring. For many people spring is preparation for spring break, a vacation from work, or just spring cleaning, but for me it's all about planning for my big moments to come. There are so many things to prepare and plan for and so little time. Of course these things won't happen until months from now, but so many things need to be ready for the events. I would do a lot of the planning myself, but because of a previous incident I need to be more careful and less stressful. On February 23, 2009 I was rushed to the hospital because I had unexpected bleeding. In the book I am reading, "What to Expect When You're Expecting" by Heidi Murkoff, they say that during pregnancies it normal to have spotting. Unfortunately, mine was not spotting. I was so frightened that I might just lose my first baby. The doctors in the ER said that it was a threatened abortion. I had to be in bed rest for 3 weeks without work and school, but it had to be done for my little peanut. Well back to the bells part. This means I am getting married. Yes married. It's an awesome feeling. We need the rings, to find a court and a witness, and money to get a marriage license. We also need to save the money before June. Our court wedding date is June 8<sup>th</sup>. Besides the wedding plans, I have to think about baby shower plans. So many things need to be done that it's unbelievable. I need to find a location, set a date and time, fill out the baby registry, find a caterer and DJ and even decide what games will be played. Of course this will take a lot of time and a lot of money. Mostly likely I will be 7 months pregnant at the time of the shower. I will be pretty big and heavy to be doing everything without help. Thankfully my cousin and sister-in-law will help me with my share of the party. If you have been to other baby showers you will notice that it's for women only. Well, mine is very different. I am doing a couples baby shower, meaning men, women and children are allowed to come. You might think that after the baby shower there are no worries, but not for me. After the shower comes the birth of the child. That's right: the big moment. Before the baby is born I need to prepare myself for the cries of the baby. My life will change so drastically that it's almost unbelievable. New beginnings and endings are happening at the same time. This is the first time that during spring time I will make a big difference in someone else's life. It really won't be easy because of my disability and all the restrictions my disability requires, but I am ready for whatever ride I need to get on. This adventurous spring time will be the memory of my life, and am glad I have friends and family to tag along for the ride.



## Extreme Makeover Home Edition Comes to Tallahassee

*By: JT Davis*

Ty Pennington, host of *Extreme Makeover Home Edition*, recently came to Tallahassee to do a home makeover for a local family. The Kadzi's were chosen as the local family. They have one child of their own and have adopted five children from Chinese orphanages with various disabilities. Melody was born blind, Julia is deaf, Martin's right arm and hand are deformed, and Phoenix and Celeste are now having their cleft palates repaired. Another child, Aileen, lost her birth father to cancer and her mother fled after his death. The Kadzi's couldn't speak Chinese and the kids couldn't communicate much in English so they used a universal language of music to heal, communicate and transform. The father has brain cancer and was there the day the crew of *Extreme Home Makeover* came to announce they were chosen. Later that day, the father George Kadzi was admitted to the hospital. They completed the home on Friday and the father passed away on Sunday. He never got to see the new home. Ty Pennington, the host of *Extreme Home Makeover Edition*, also has a disability. He was diagnosed with ADHD when he entered high school. He says he knows what it was like to struggle to try to deal with a disability without even knowing what the disability was for many years of his life. He is now a spokesperson for the organization ADHD Experts on Call. Ty truly is an inspiration for those who suffer from ADHD or ADD and feel limited by their condition. He is a perfect example of how these things can be overcome and even used to your advantage. He struggled through school with this disability, but now he is an outstanding host on the *Extreme Makeover Home Edition*, always full of energy and spirit. I got to watch this home go up and it was really amazing to watch the volunteers and crews working on this home. I am glad that the Kadzi's got the help and new home needed. I wish the family luck with their new chapter in their life.





## Advocacy Thru Filling Boots

*By: Iris Roberts*

When I was 9 years old I did many MDA fundraisers including the "Boot Drive" with the firefighters and the Shriners; that was where the main source of funding came from. For many years we would sit/stand out in front of Walmart and the sidewalks and wherever else we were allowed to fill the boot. All of a sudden a group of people wanted to change that and got some Shriners and firefighters arrested for soliciting. In 2007 the Iris Roberts Act was created to allow fundraising for non-profit organizations. I lobbied along with my mom, Shriners, and the firefighters for two weeks straight, I believe, talking to every House representative we could find to get support. House Bill 99, the Iris Roberts Act, was on the floor for voting. I spoke on the House floor not only has a child with MD, but for everybody with a disability. I explained the importance of fundraising for all non-profit organizations, and where all of us would be without any kind of funding at all for any and every disability. The only thing I could think about at that moment was all the losses of all my childhood friends from disabilities and what would they say if they were still here. That day was one of the best days of my life. The bill passed unanimously 112-0 and a few weeks after that, my bill was passed in the Senate unanimously 40-0. My bill was signed in June later that year. It was one of the most memorable moments in my life. I knew that I finally made a difference and spoke for not only myself but for many others. I could have just helped a little girl my age get her first surgery to make life a little bit easier. I was presented with many awards after that. After I received an award I would always say I only spoke because some people can't. Those are some of the moments that I knew I wanted to be an advocate.



## **Becoming a NAMI Connections Facilitator**

*By: Sarah York*

Coming up in September I have some heavy stuff happening. September 10th through the 12th I will be going to Maitland, Florida to get trained to become a NAMI Connections facilitator. Jacksonville does not have a connections support group so it is long overdue. But you must be wondering a couple of things, like what is NAMI and what is a NAMI connections support group? Well NAMI is the National Alliance for Mentally Ill, and they provide services like support groups and advocacy for people with mental illness. Connections are support groups for consumers or peers with mental illness. The only thing that has been available from NAMI in Jacksonville is a family support group, so I am looking forward to this, but this is no easy task. I have to have a co-facilitator who will be my mom (we both have bipolar disorder). Then I have a lot of leg work to do before the group can get started. I have to find a place that will allow us to meet there and get out the word. Then there is the publishing so people will come. Sometimes they come but won't come back. I'm looking forward to this even though there is going to be a lot of work involved. I think I'm up to the challenge. Plus, I'll have my mom's help and my local NAMI will be backing us with any support we need. After I get it up and running maybe I can write a blog about how it's going for y'all.



# Technology Makes Life Easier

*By: Ashlen McWhorter*



Many of those living with disabilities take for granted the monumental technological advancements that make our everyday lives more manageable. This forward progress has saved lives as well as greatly improved the quality of life of countless individuals. Even in only the last several years, it is obvious just how quickly innovative minds have engineered newer and better products and methods for the public. This has become incredibly clear to me every time I have a doctor's appointment or get admitted to the hospital. For example, when getting blood taken, they now use one needle in which blood test tubes are interchangeable preventing the uncomfortable sucking feeling of the extraction with a syringe of several tubes worth of blood. I can really appreciate any methods that make taking blood less painful as I have to do this quite often. In my case, advances in the technology of wheelchair design have contributed to my success in becoming an independent individual. Engineers are now discovering ways to make wheelchairs lighter and more durable. My chair is only 33 pounds, a great accomplishment in the world of technology at the time when I got it. Now there are wheelchairs that weigh in the low teens! Because my chair is relatively light for a custom chair, I am able to load it up into the back of my vehicle and unload it without requiring help from anyone. This means that I can drive anywhere I want to by myself without worrying that I will need to find help. Lighter AFO's, or leg braces, without so much metal have made walking so much more comfortable for me. The braces I have, called Anterior Floor Reaction AFO's, that I recently was fitted for, have helped me to stand up straight for the first time in my life. Wearing these braces helps prevent me from overworking the muscles in my back and legs. One might not imagine that braces can help relieve discomfort from other parts of the body beside the legs, but by changing the way you walk, they can change how the rest of your body functions. It's pretty amazing! Having lighter braces makes walking less difficult as there is less weight to have to carry on my legs as I walk. Years ago, braces were made with a large amount of metal making them heavy, cumbersome, and uncomfortable. Now, most of the brace is made with a very pliable plastic which forms to your leg much easier and allows for more movement of the feet. Another great example of the positive contributions from advancing technology are the many new and clever medical procedures used to treat various illnesses that were not available just last year. For some, these medical treatments could mean the difference between living in the hospital and being able to lead a more normal, independent life. I am constantly reminded of the benefits of technology as just forty years ago, 90% of children born with Spina Bifida (like myself) died in infancy. When I was born, a little over twenty years later, the infant mortality rate had reversed: only 10% of infants born with Spina Bifida died in infancy. This is the most profound example of the extreme benefits of progress in technology. I am reminded every day that I am living the healthy, independent lifestyle I am in large part due to technology.



## No Nest to Return To

*By: Mason Charles*

As I write this, I am three days away from my 18th birthday. However, just because I am this age doesn't necessarily mean that I am an adult. Society now recognizes me as my own person, but I still have much to learn before I am truly an independent adult. I don't really feel any different than I have for the past few years, but I occasionally see small signs of maturity and growth. I am going to try to take one step at a time towards handling more responsibility for myself. The first thing I want to try is balancing a job as well as a full course load at college. A few short months ago, I was finishing my high school education at a dual enrollment institution, so I am already familiar with how college works, but it still feels weird to not return to the comfortable nest of the public school system like I have every fall in the past. I am not taking many rigorous classes, but I still intend to work very hard, because I want to be successful enough to keep climbing in my education. At the same time, I want to make my own money and start having a little more financial responsibility. I also want to maintain a busy life of friendship, activities and various groups. I will definitely have to work on my multitasking skills. It will probably be more difficult for me, since my Asperger's makes it hard to balance many activities, but I am sure that with God's help I will find some sort of success, just like I always have in the past.



# Inclusion

By: Sara Romine



One word to describe my inclusion experience so far is Endurance! When I entered the school system in pre-school, I was labeled Mentally Retarded and placed in a Varying Exceptionalities classroom which was self-contained. In kindergarten, I was one of the first students in my county to be included and I have been ever since. There have been many challenges throughout my years of inclusion. Yet the rewards far outnumber the problems, so I am very grateful that I was included. With a lot of hard work and a lot of help from my dedicated mom, family, friends, teachers, therapists, and tutors ... I am happy to say I am now a senior with high honors looking forward to college next year! I am also very proud to say I am a self-advocate and an advocate for others with disabilities! Inclusion Rocks!

Thank you for taking the time to read the 100th edition of *The Noodle*. It featured both former and present members of the Florida Youth Council, from the very first *Noodle* to the most recent. We hope you enjoyed our greatest hits!

## Previous members:

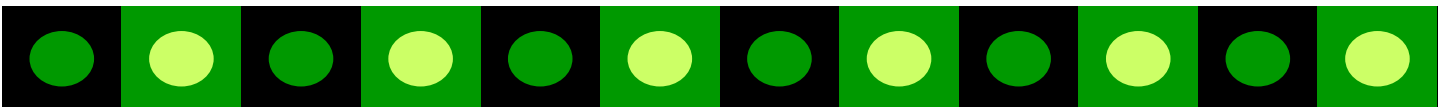
Lizzy Barrows  
Alex Brown  
Matt Boselli  
Mason Charles  
JT Davis  
Carly Fahey  
Nick Grabowski  
Grier Harris  
Whitney Harris  
Garrett Mayersohn  
Ashlen McWhorter  
Cynthia Melgar  
Matthew Murray  
Iris Roberts  
Sara Romine  
Sarah York  
Matt Zebroski

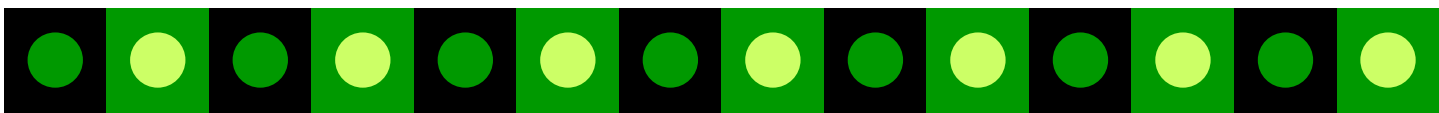
## Present Members:

Megan Atkinson  
Shevie Barnes  
Derek Carraway  
Josh Ortiz  
Christopher Regan  
Dakota Smoot  
Christina Waldron  
Serena Wetmore



The Florida Youth Council is a program of  
The Family Café





## How Do I Become Part of The Florida Youth Council?

The Florida Youth Council is a group of youth (between the ages of 15 and 17) and emerging leaders (between the ages of 18 and 30) with disabilities or special health care needs that live in Florida.

The Florida Youth Council is all about getting youth and emerging leaders involved in self advocacy, peer mentoring and other activities that will improve the quality of life for youth and emerging leaders with disabilities in Florida. The program empowers youth and emerging leaders to decide what issues are important to their generation, to express those issues in their state and local communities, and to develop strategies to solve them.

We are seeking a group of enthusiastic, motivated youth and emerging leaders to participate. If you would like to take a leadership role in advocating for youth and emerging leaders in Florida, please visit The Florida Youth Council website at [www.floridayouthcouncil.com](http://www.floridayouthcouncil.com). The program is open to application year round. We hope to hear from you soon!



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