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Orlando Family magazine

JANUARY 2025



YEAR IN REVIEW

A look back at an eventful **2024**

plus **BEST OF HOME & GARDEN**

The experts to trust for your next project

With a career spanning over five decades, the Oscar and Emmy award winner is back as **Matlock**

KATHY Bates

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page 43:
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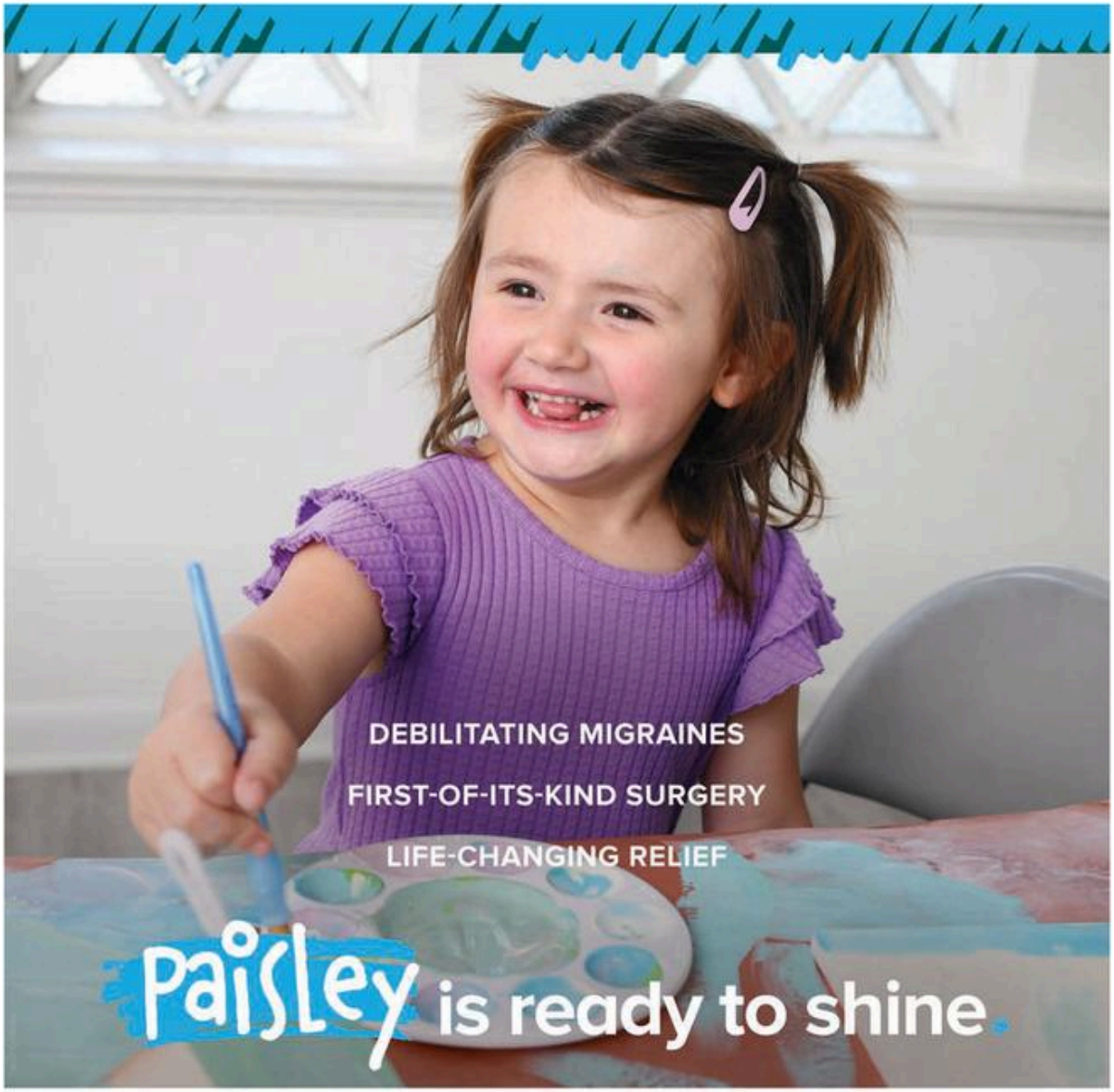
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JANUARY 2025

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Photo courtesy of Gage Ann Bruno/CBS

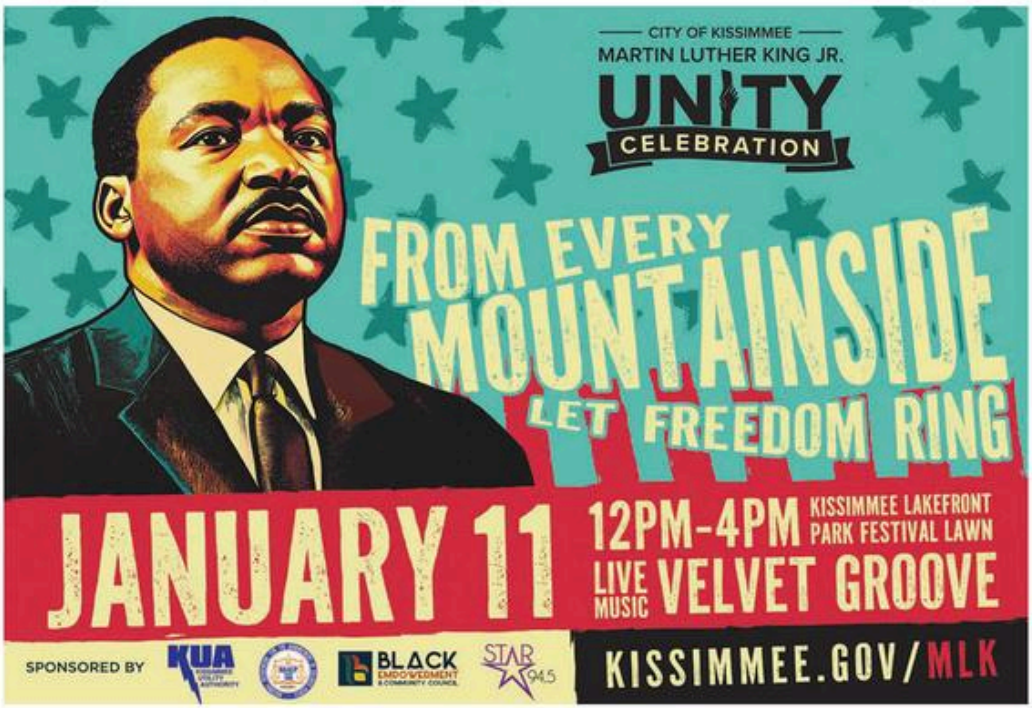
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CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Madeleine Maccar, Carly Murray
Debra Wallace

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES
Donna Colona, Catherine Randell

SALES ASSISTANT
Maria Foster

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Hank Alspach

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Brian Mikulski

DESIGNERS
Alex Bianco, Jay Urbaniak,
Lisa Zollinger

ACCOUNTING MANAGER
Max Haggerty

STAFF ACCOUNTANT
Karmal Pritchett

SOCIAL MEDIA AND
DIGITAL CONTENT COORDINATOR
Chelsea Valcourt

PUBLISHER
Gerry Haggerty

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Home Front

by the Numbers

$5M
The amount that Amazon founder Jeff Bezos' philanthropic foundation recently gave to the Coalition for the Homeless of Central Florida

$1.45 billion
The combined private investment for a soccer complex and tech manufacturing headquarters proposed in Osceola County.

10
The estimated number of years it will take to complete an I-4 improvement project which will widen 14 miles of highway in an effort to better handle ongoing traffic congestion.

262
The number of participants at the Orlando Science Center who recently helped set a new Guinness World Record for the Most People Flying Paper Rockets Simultaneously.

300
The number of employees that JP Morgan plans to hire in Orlando over the next two years as the banking giant eyes expansion in the southern part of the country.

$200,000
The amount awarded to two nonprofits—Lighthouse Central Florida and The Sharing Center—by Bank of America's Neighborhood Builders program, which has awarded a total of $10 million to 51 Central Florida nonprofits since 2005.

1,700+
The number of acres of environmentally sensitive land across 19 properties which has been protected by Orange County's Green PLACE program.

MISS AMERICA FINALS
Jan. 5
Competitors from across the nation will vie to be crowned this year's pageant winner.
7 p.m., tickets from $180, Walt Disney Theater

SARAH SILVERMAN
Jan. 10
The famed comedian takes the stage for a stop on her Postmortem tour.
7 p.m., $60.50-$100.50, Hard Rock Live Orlando



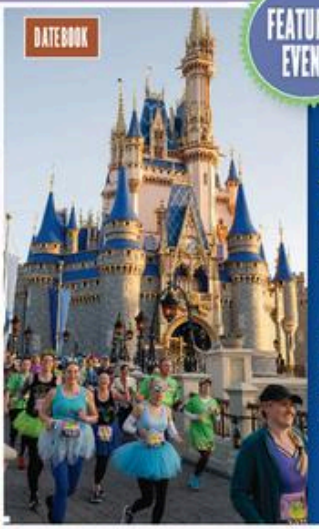
HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS
Jan. 10
The basketball showmen bring family-friendly entertainment to the hardwood.
7 p.m., $30-$120, Addition Financial Arena



MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. UNITY CELEBRATION
Jan. 11
This event will feature live music, food, crafts and a kids zone. *Noon-4 p.m., Kissimmee Lake Front Park*

DATEBOOK

FEATURED EVENT



WALT DISNEY WORLD MARATHON WEEKEND
JAN. 8-12
A SERIES OF RACES will take runners nearly 50 miles across all four of the Disney theme parks.
Times and registration fees vary, Walt Disney World

MAMMA MIA!
Jan. 14-26
The popular musical based on songs by ABBA returns for a special engagement.
Times vary, $50-$165, Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts

CANDLELIGHT: A TRIBUTE TO ADELE
Jan. 15
Join the Listeso String Quartet as it performs some of Adele's biggest hits at this candlelight concert.
8:30 p.m., $41.50-$63.50, The Abbey



MELISSA ETHERIDGE
Jan. 23
The longtime performer and Grammy winner brings her vast catalogue and 2025 tour to Orlando. *8 p.m., $48.50-$126.50, Hard Rock Live Orlando*



80TH ANNIVERSARY HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY
Jan. 26
Join others in honoring the memory of the millions of lives lost during the Holocaust and take part in a ceremony to honor both victims and survivors. *3 p.m., Roth Family JCC of Orlando*

Hit



The Universal Orlando Foundation has awarded more than $1 million to 31 area nonprofits as part of its annual Celebration of Giving.



The Orlando Pride soccer team was feted with a parade after winning the National Women's Soccer League championship, the club's **first title.**



Luke Malegni, a 17-year-old junior at Windermere High School, organized a homemade food drive to help families in need and give them a better Thanksgiving.

More than 30 people face charges after police conducted undercover drug stings at various downtown bars and nightclubs. In all, "Operation Night Cap" led to 85 charges and several arrests after officers were able to purchase the illegal drugs, which included cocaine, ecstasy, cannabis and fentanyl among others.

After being pulled over for a traffic violation, a woman fled the scene in her vehicle while an officer was in the back seat tending to her daughter. She was apprehended and faces charges of fleeing and eluding police.

A driver was allegedly shot and killed by another motorist following a road rage incident on Colonial Drive. At press time, the investigation was ongoing and authorities would not say whether the suspect was in custody.

Miss





reader response

Each month *Orlando Family Magazine* will poll our readers with a question to spark a topic of conversation. This month we want to know:

What are you most looking forward to in 2025?

Visit **OrlandoFamilyMagazine.com** and click on the contests tab to submit your answer!



Best of Home & Garden

Whether you are looking to boost your home's curb appeal, renovate an outdated kitchen or finally create that backyard oasis you've been dreaming about all these years, home improvement projects can be a daunting task. But, thanks to the many skilled professionals found in Central Florida, changing the look and feel of your home is made easier with their guidance and expertise. Our Best of Home and Garden list is full of the names to know when it comes time for your next big project.

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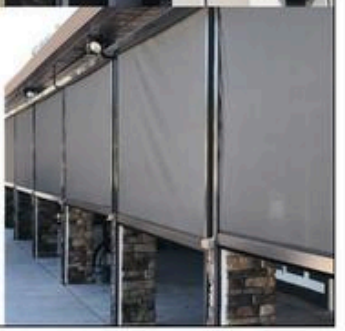
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UNSTOPPABLE

From *Misery* to *Matlock*, the legendary Kathy Bates continues to breathe life into some of entertainment's most formidable characters. BY DEBRA WALLACE

KATHY BATES HAS LONG HAD A LIFE PHILOSOPHY that has kept her in good stead. Throughout her stellar 50-year acting career on stage and screen, which began in 1971 with Milos Forman's film *Taking Off*, she is known for always working hard to be the best that she can be.

"I've only ever been interested in doing the best work that I can possibly do every single time," says the multi-award-winning actor, now 76. "I always want to dig deep and at the same time also make it look easy."

From her Oscar-winning role as a psychotic, obsessed fan in the 1990 psychological thriller *Misery*, and her hilarious portrayal of a liberated housewife in 1991's *Fried Green Tomatoes*, to her emotional performances as six different disturbing characters in *American Horror Story*, her roles are more than memorable.

During her acclaimed career, Bates has received two Primetime TV Emmy Awards (*Two and a Half Men* and *American Horror Story*) and a Best Actress Tony Award for her emotional role in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

Along the way, she starred as the Unsinkable Molly Brown in *Titanic*, as well as in the likes of *The Blind Side*, *Dolores Claiborne*, *The Waterboy* and *Primary Colors*. A common thread is that Bates can never be underestimated—a theme that resonates with her current TV show.

The iconic actor stars as an experienced attorney named Madeline "Matty" Matlock in *Matlock*, a clever new CBS legal series with a surprise twist. It also has a wink and a nod to Andy Griffith's beloved, folksy legal drama of the same name, which ran from 1986 to 1995 and helped set the stage for the many procedural dramas to follow.

In the new Matlock, Bates' character Matty rejoins the work force at a prestigious law firm, where she uses her unassuming demeanor and clever tactics to win cases and expose corruption. Rounding out the A-list cast are Beau Bridges, Jason Ritter, David Del Rio, Leah Lewis and Skye P. Marshall, who plays Matty's much younger boss. It's expected that each episode will also feature one or two guest stars.

Jennie Snyder Urman, the show's creator, executive producer and showrunner, says the series' guiding principle is how older women are often overlooked in society.

"I wanted our heroine to be constantly telling the audience that she's being underestimated, and then I wanted the audience to enjoy watching her take advantage of that underestimation," says Urman, who is an accomplished storyteller. "Then, by the end, even though she said it constantly and we watched it happen over and over again, I wanted to still be able to shock the audience when they realize that they, too, have underestimated Madeline Matlock."

Matty remarks in the pilot episode something that truly resonates with the actor: "There is a funny thing that happens when women age: They become damn near invisible. This is extremely helpful because nobody sees us coming." Bates concurs that "a lot of us feel invisible and not useful these days."

The witty new series fits in perfectly with Bates' overall career, as she is known for her portrayals of strong women who act against the societal norms. Despite earlier mentions of possible retirement after a recent film project that did not go as well as she had hoped, Bates tells us she's not ready for her "last dance" anytime soon. And it appears as she won't have to as *Matlock* has already been renewed for a second season.

Q&A

What can you tell us about the new Matlock series?
This is a wonderful role, and I feel the joy on the set. I have to say I love playing all those facets of this character, and I just feel so lucky to be able to do all of that in one person and in the same episode.

You have said the role reminds you of your mother. Can you elaborate?
There's a lot of what I imagine my mother, Mary, could have been if she had been given the opportunity to realize her dreams of becoming a lawyer. I think about the frustration she must have felt of having that kind of dream and having it subverted by the time period she lived in.

There are a lot of different aspects to your character when it comes to her colleagues, witnesses and home life. How do you juggle all of these levels of your performance?
I feel really lucky. I get to play all of those levels with everything I've learned over the last 50 years. It's interesting that you say she is honest at home, because I think she even keeps things from her husband, every now and then and—without giving too much away—I think there's a struggle between her relationship with her husband Edwin and then this new relationship that she's having at work with this woman that she so admires, and they click.

I think she begins to love that part of her life almost even more than she does at home with Edwin. So, we get to see a really different side of her as their relationship develops.

Do you hit different toggles to play each of those things, or is it all the same process?
Playing each scene is like sort of creating a little bead on a necklace, you know? You need to have faith. Because of course, when you're making television or film, you're breaking everything up, so we really have to be careful about where we are in the show, what's happened, and where we are in this character development and that one. It all shifts and changes and that's part of what makes it exciting, because you never know what's ahead. Matty is never sure what's happening in front of her own eyes, and she has to shift with all of it. So, each scene is its one little pearl, so to speak, so I just have to focus on what happens moment to moment.

How familiar were you with the original Matlock TV series?
I was starting out in the New York theater


Bates in a scene from Matlock

[scene], so I wasn't watching television at night. But I did watch it a little bit. And of course, I've been a huge fan of Andy Griffith. But what excited me about this was that I read the script on a Friday, and when I was going in to sit down with Jennie [Snyder Urman] on a Monday, I think the first thing I said to her was, "Don't change a word." And then I said, "Don't leave me," because I knew what a challenge it was, and also how much I would need her to create this amazing character.

Why was this the right role at this time in your life?
Well, because a woman my age would never have received such a role, and the complexity of the role and the writing. I pinch myself every day. This is certainly a business where a lot of ageism exists. I've only been interested in doing the best work I can possibly do. So to be able to bring in all those facets that I've learned from doing all those different kinds of roles into this, I'm glad I stuck around for it.

How can you relate to your own career experience when they try not to realize how much you can bring?
When I was younger, I would get my feelings hurt. Sometimes I'd get on a plane and fly home. But I had a wonderful producer, God rest his soul, the three-time Oscar-winning Saul Zaentz. I remember we were in London doing a British press tour and it was a nightmare. I remember I got very upset, and I said, "I'm going home, that's it. I'm not going to put myself through this anymore." I remember Saul coming up to me and saying, "You gotta get tougher." And someone else had said to me around that same time, "You gotta have a head like a bullet and a heart like a baby."

So that's what I've tried to do. But sometimes I take it too far and I can be like a bull in a china shop. But I'm not like my characters; I wish I was.

How different is this experience from when you did the 2011 TV legal drama *Harry's Law*?
Well, of course, this is a much more complex character. Although I loved playing Harry. I met some wonderful people doing it. But this is different, and I'm different than I was way back then. I appreciate the complexity of the role, and getting an opportunity to work with Jennie, and I mean, you text her and she texts you right back. I know we didn't have texting back then, but she's right there with us, and so it seems like it's incredibly collaborative.

This series is a very different experience to be able to say, "Hey, I need help with this. What's going on? I don't want to bother you," and suddenly she's right there, so that's very different for me. That wasn't really the style that [*Harry's Law*] producer David E. Kelley had back in those days.

You previously mentioned wanting to retire. Did you change your mind?
I had thought I might semi-retire or retire, but then *Matlock* came along, so I am not ready to take a final bow yet. I am having the best time with this show. I am eager to stay with this for several years.

Do you feel like this series has given you multiple roles to kind of play? Or is it just one role that sort of weaves its way through this story?
It's just one minute she's doing, you know, she's at the office and she's trying to figure things out, the other minute she's with her husband at home and they are very tender moments. It's because of all those layers that I love this experience so much. And as my mother, God rest her soul, would have said, she would always wish that I'd not play all these characters that were afflicted.

I think my mother would be very happy because she wanted to be a lawyer. I'm not afflicted in this show, you know so it's just so fun to play all those different facets of the same woman, and facets that she's learning about at the same time as they are happening. It's a feeling of, "Oh, my God, I didn't know I could do this!"



YEAR IN REVIEW 2024



For those of us old enough to remember the Y2K scare, it's hard to believe we're already a quarter-century into the new millennium. Each year goes by in a blur, which is one reason why it's always important to take a moment and reflect on the past 12 months as we head into January. Here at *Orlando Family Magazine*, 2024 was highlighted by our conversations with Oscar winners Cate Blanchett and Halle Berry, red-hot stars like Timothée Chalamet, Chris Hemsworth and Zendaya, and local notables such as Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer. Our annual Year in Review features interesting quotes from those interviews, along with a look back on our lists of Central Florida's top doctors, dentists, attorneys and realtors and our comprehensive Best of the Best roundup. This past year was memorable in many ways, and 2025 promises to be unforgettable in its own right.

YEAR IN REVIEW 2024 THEY SAID IT!

Memorable quotes from our best interviews in 2024.


Jennifer Garner

"It's crucial that we foster an industry that reflects the world's diversity and offers rich, multifaceted roles for women. My focus has always been on contributing to this change through the choices I make and the projects I take on. It's about lifting each other up, ensuring equal opportunities, and being a part of the collective effort to inspire and enact progress." —*Jennifer Garner*


Dakota Johnson

"When you follow in your parents' footsteps, it's natural to worry about making your own name in the industry. Even today, I'm always searching for roles where I'm judged solely on my acting, not anything else." —*Dakota Johnson, daughter of Don Johnson and Melanie Griffith*


Zendaya

"Often, roles featuring chaotic, powerful characters are not offered to actors who look like me. So, whenever I have a chance to portray such a multifaceted character, I'm definitely going to seize it." —*Zendaya*


Mayor Buddy Dyer

"While [Orlando] is a city that is known worldwide, it's also one that people may not realize what it's actually like to live here. It's an incredibly diverse and welcoming city that offers an array of amenities for all ages and a very high quality of life." —*Mayor Buddy Dyer*

"I think it's easier when it's two girls. If I had a son and was trying to stay on his level, I think that would be a lot more difficult. At least there are a number of life lessons I can pass on to my daughter with some degree of confidence. With boys, it's a bit more of a mystery." —*Hannah Waddingham*


Hannah Waddingham

"It's incredible how quickly [children] grow up. I think any parent will tell you it's frightening and it makes you totally aware

BEST OF THE BEST 2024 FOOD + DRINK

SIGNATURE COCKTAILS
Bellhop

TIKI BAR
Permanent Vacation

MEDITERRANEAN
Mediterranean Deli

CHEESECAKE
Bakery 1908

PASTRIES
Buttermilk Bakery

CAKES
Butter Bliss Bakeshop

PO BOYS
Tibby's New Orleans Kitchen

CREAM PUFFS
Light on Sugar

EMPANADAS
Alma Argentina

SALADS
Greens and Grille

GARLIC KNOTS
Pizza Bruno

BUTCHER SHOP
Petty's Meats

ITALIAN ICE
Jeremiah's Italian Ice

KOREAN BARBECUE
Shin Jung Korean BBQ

CUBAN
Black Bean Deli

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Hawkers Asian Street Food

REUBEN
The Pastrami Project

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Deli Desires

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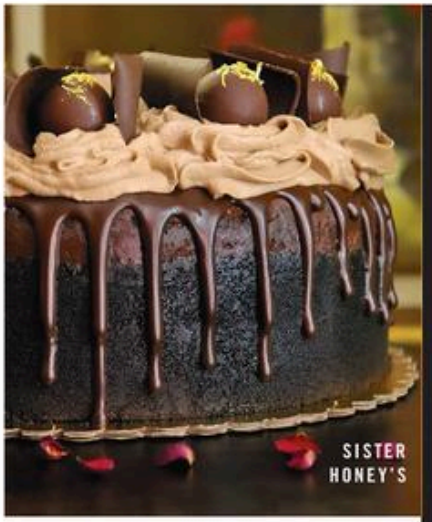
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FOOD + DRINK

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Melo's Barber Shop

HAIR STYLING
Privé Salon

FACIALS
Skin Studio

YEAR IN REVIEW 2024 THEY SAID IT!


Chris Hemsworth

of your own age and your own mortality. I also find myself getting much more philosophical about parenting and all that it involves. My upbringing was modest financially, yet my parents were my greatest role models. Their kindness, respectfulness and their consistently inspiring, nurturing demeanor left an indelible impact on me." —*Chris Hemsworth*


Joey Fatone

[Central Florida is] just a great place to raise kids and live a good, enjoyable life. I like living in a place where I don't have to go out to industry events. I also enjoy the theme parks; I go at least once a month to one of them. I just love watching families enjoy the entertainment." —*Joey Fatone*


Cate Blanchett

Getting older happens to all of us and there are many advantages that come with age. I feel much more comfortable in my skin today than I ever have before. I am much more confident and secure in who I am than when I was in my 20s—I would never want to go through those years again. I enjoyed my 30s a great deal and not my 40s. Now, in my 50s, I feel my life has become better again, because the pressure is off."
—*Cate Blanchett*


Channing Tatum

Fatherhood has been one of the most important events in my life. Maybe that's an obvious kind of thing to say, but you definitely do feel a different sense of responsibility toward everything. I'm a very ambitious person and my life has been so involved with my work and trying to develop projects as well as find the best films to be part of as an actor, but now I've definitely adjusted my focus. I want to experience everything about my daughter's world and be fully involved in watching her grow and discover things." —*Channing Tatum*

I've had my struggles in life but I'm not a tortured soul like some of my screen roles. This is actually one of the lightest times in my life and I feel that so many good things have been

BEST OF THE BEST 2024

SPA
The Spa at Shingle Creek

MASSAGE
The Mokara Spa at Omni Resort

MANI/PEDI
Luxy Nails & Beauty

PILATES
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WAXING
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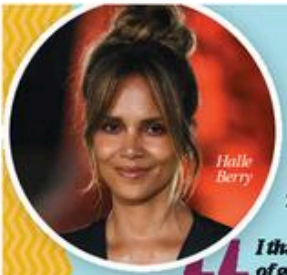
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THEY SAID IT!

YEAR IN REVIEW 2024

happening to me of late. It's just that as an actor you're attracted to the heavy and serious stuff because that's where the great drama tends to be found." —*Halle Berry*



"***I think*** *there were moments* ***of good*** *work,* but it's **tough** to find many meaty parts for women in film. Too often, you're cast as the wife or girlfriend, with little to do other than look worried or sad. On TV, I'm constantly challenged with deep, nuanced material and that's what keeps me engaged." —*Keri Russell*



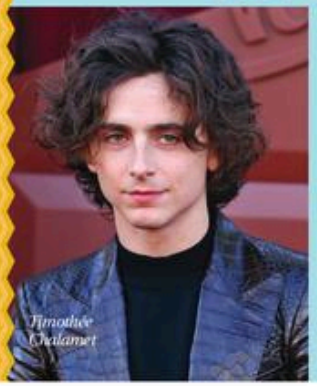
"***I never, ever considered anything else.*** [Music] was in my blood. I never really felt like I had much of a choice because it just seemed to come so naturally to me." —*Broadway musician* ***Kevin Kuhn***



"*"It was very* ***hard to leave Florida.*** I **always knew** my time would come, and I just got really lucky that my first job was close to home and I was able to stay in the South. But I saw all of my friends moving to **the middle of** nowhere—Kentucky, **the cold in Buffalo**—and I knew that **would happen. For** my next step to be **Philadelphia, the best** sports market in the **country, it was a no**-brainer." —*Sports broadcaster and Florida native Ashlyn* ***Sullivan***

"***I want to spread the word*** that the culture of gymnastics does not have to be a harsh, critical **or high pressure**-filled environment; that **things can be** done in a healthy way."
—*Olympic gold medalist Dominique Dawes*





"***For me, acting is always a learning process*** and I hope that never changes. Each role pushes me in new directions, whether it's playing a whimsical character like Wonka or embodying the complexities of Bob Dylan. I just try to stay focused on the work, stay curious, and keep growing. If people respond to that, it's amazing, but I'm always looking ahead to what's next." —*Timothée Chalamet*



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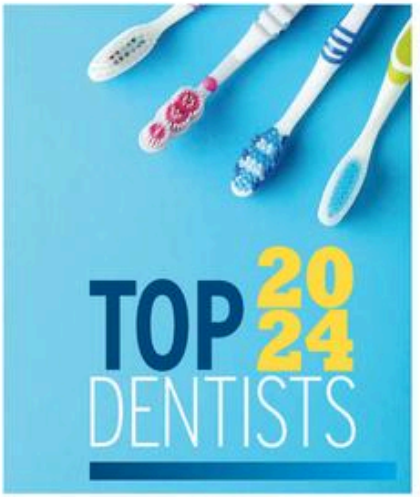
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Dr. Jorge Mercado



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NaturalSmiles Orlando.com

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Dr. Aileen Trivedi
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Dr. William Aippersbach
MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Dr. Luis Alcalde
LAKE NONA

Dr. Leslie Andujar
LAKE MARY

Dr. Frances Ballagas
ORLANDO

Dr. Ryan Brennan
LAKE MARY

Dr. David Burch
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Dr. Lina Cortez
KISSIMMEE

Dr. Stephen T. Galla
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Dr. Aaron Isler
MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Dr. Gretchen Jungermann
MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Dr. M. Cameron Kharazi
MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

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MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

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Dr. Tina Ren
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Dr. Mikal Baaqee
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METHODOLOGY

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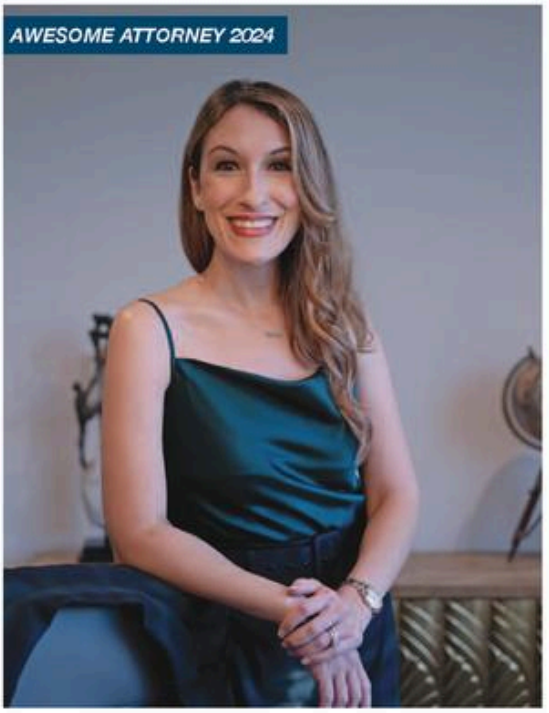
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METHODOLOGY

WE SENT OUT CORRESPONDENCE to the leading attorneys and law firms in Greater Orlando in search of nominations for our annual Awesome Attorneys list. In addition, we also tasked our readers with going online and recommending the legal professionals they've had positive experiences with. The results were tallied and after applying a minimum number of votes to be considered for the list, the leading vote getters in each specialty were then vetted using public sources of information to verify peer recognition, professional achievements, experience, honorable accolades and more.

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AWESOME ATTORNEY 2024



POLO WIEDERHOLD LAW, P.A.

Jessylin Polo Wiederhold, Esq.

As founder of Polo Wiederhold Law, P.A., Jessylin brings her passion for serving others to her clients in the areas of personal injury, estate planning, real estate and commercial leases. She is a member of The Florida Bar, Middle District of Florida Court's Bar, American Bar Association, Orange County Bar Association and Florida Justice Association.

BACKGROUND

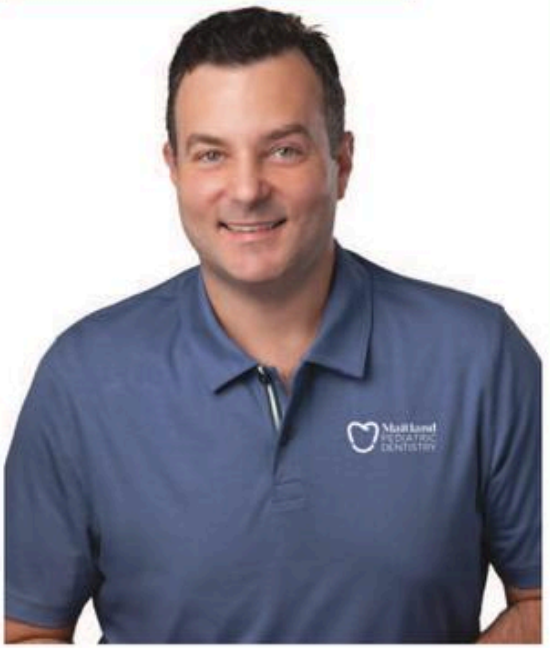
Originally from Miami, Florida, Jessylin began her legal career as a paralegal in personal injury. For over eight years, she diligently assisted in the representation of individuals who had been injured in automobile and slip and fall accidents. It was during this time that Jessylin's passion for serving others inspired her journey of becoming an attorney so that she may help others in a greater capacity.

EDUCATION

Jessylin graduated from the University of Central Florida with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Legal Studies with Summa Cum Laude Honors. During her time at UCF, she was an active member of Delta Epsilon Iota, The National Society of Leadership and Success, and Golden Key International Honour Society. Jessylin went on to earn her Juris Doctor Degree from Barry University, Dwayne O. Andreas School of Law with Cum Laude Honors. During her time at Barry University, she received the High Honors Certificate in Litigation and Advocacy as well as numerous Book Awards, all the while serving her community as Secretary then President of Barry University, School of Law's Rotaract organization.

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TOP DENTIST 2024 - PEDIATRIC DENTISTRY



MAITLAND PEDIATRIC DENTISTRY

Dr. Domenic Aloise, DMD

Dr. Domenic Aloise is a Board-Certified Pediatric Dentist offering comprehensive smile solutions tailored to your child's unique dental needs at his practice in Maitland.

EDUCATION

Dr. Aloise obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology with honors from Florida State University. His dental education began at Nova Southeastern University where he earned his Doctorate in Dental Medicine in 2010. Following dental school, he completed a 1-year fellowship in Special Needs Dentistry from Helen Hayes Hospital and Columbia University in New York. Dr. Aloise then returned to Nova Southeastern University, where he completed his specialty residency in Pediatric Dentistry and served as chief resident. He became a board-certified pediatric dentist in 2015.

PERSONAL

When not at the office, he enjoys having fun with his wife and two young children, cooking, scootering or biking with the "neighborhood scooter crew" and attending local community events.

PASSION

Dr. Aloise has always had a passion for making children feel at ease so that going to the dentists is an enjoyable and fun experience! He strives to build trusting relationships with his patients and their families and to provide a positive dental experience.

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AWESOME ATTORNEYS 2024

HAWM PLLC focuses on serving the needs of Orlando families in the areas of Criminal, Family, and Immigration law. Their commitment to preserving the well-being of families facing difficult legal challenges sets them apart as true advocates for their clients.

ACHIEVEMENTS:
In addition to being Awesome Attorneys, the Firm's remarkable achievements have been acknowledged with the prestigious SEMINOLE 100 award from Florida State University. For the past three consecutive years, HAWM PLLC has been honored as one of the top 100 fastest-growing businesses owned by FSU alumni. This recognition not only underscores their professional success but also serves as a testament to the firm's resilience, innovation, and enduring commitment to excellence.

COMMUNITY:
HAWM is active in the Orlando community, demonstrating a genuine commitment to making a positive impact beyond legal matters. Their involvement in various community initiatives, including Second Harvest, Boys & Girls Club, and Orange County Public Schools, reflects a dedication to enhancing the overall well-being of the families they serve.

MISSION:
With a strategic mission aimed at enhancing access to justice, HAWM Law is committed to delivering innovative, cost-effective, and high-quality legal services. The firm takes pride in its client-centric approach, fostering open communication and ensuring that clients feel supported throughout the legal process.



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TOP DENTIST 2024 - COSMETIC DENTISTRY

After graduation from College, **Dr. Jorge Mercado, D.M.D.** moved to Florida and has practiced there for 10years expanding his experience in allaspects of dentistry by working along-side different specialists. He hastaken many continuing educationcourses to further his mastery in theart of dentistry focusing on cosmeticsdentistry, endodontics, prosthodontics, orthodontics, oral surgery, zirconia implants, and biologic dentistry

He purchased a practice right in the heart of downtown Orlando. He strives to give every patient the most comfortable dental experience possible to make sure they leave the office smiling.

EDUCATION: Dr. Mercado graduated from the University Of Oral Medicine of Puerto Rico in 2008, and then completed a GPR at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester N.Y.

MISSION STATEMENT: Natural Smiles Orlando strives to provide Comprehen- sive Dental Care to our community. Our practice goal is the prevention of oral disease by utilizing the most up-to-date technology. and to provide a relax at- mosphere and biologically safe dental option for the people of Central Florida.



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TOP PHYSICIAN 2024 - PEDIATRICIAN

Dr. Marie R. Quiñonez "Dr. Q" was born and raised in Caguas, Puerto Rico. At 5 years old she announced that she was going to be a Pediatrician just like her Godmother. She accomplished her dream and graduated from the University of Puerto Rico with a biology major, then attended Ponce School of Medicine in Puerto Rico.

During her fourth year of medical school, she came to Orlando to complete one 4-week rotation at Orlando Health Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children. She liked it so much that she ended up doing two more rotations. After graduation in July 1993, she started her pediatric residency at the hospital, then continued to work there for four years before starting to work in private practice with a couple of groups. On the side, she dedicated extra time doing locum tenens in low-income areas through-out Georgia.

In January 2004, she opened her own practice in Orlando, Dr. Q Pediatrics. To this day, Dr. Q and her team are dedicated to providing a comprehensive approach to pediatric health with a small practice atmosphere that allows her the ability to develop a very close relationship with her patients and families. In fact, some of her patients are now all grown up and have started bringing a new generation back through her doors...which is the biggest compliment to a job well done!

Dr. Q is certified by The American Board of Pediatrics and is a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics and American Medical Association. She maintains a high level of expertise through continuing education in order to provide the most up-to-date care for the young patients she is privileged to serve.



Dr. Marie R. Quiñonez
Dr. Q Pediatrics
448 S. Alafaya Trail, Suite 1
Orlando, FL 32828
DrQPediatrics.com
(407) 275-5700





SAKOWITZ SMILES ORTHODONTICS
Scott Sakowitz, DMD, MS & Marla Sakowitz, DMD

DR. SCOTT SAKOWITZ

Dr. Scott Sakowitz is a Board-Certified Orthodontists and has acquired expertise in all aspects of orthodontic care. With his extensive experience and passion for helping patieints achieve their best smiles, it's easy to see why he was voted one Orlando's Top Orthodontists by Orlando Family Magazine for 7 consecutive years.

DR. MARLA SAKOWITZ

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Preventing a Tragedy

Local experts sound off on what the public should know for National Human Trafficking Prevention Month.

By Madeleine Maccar

HUMAN TRAFFICKING ISN'T A NEW PROBLEM, but the combination of awareness campaigns, jarring headlines, and survivors finding both the support and strength to share their stories has brought increased attention to the issue.

Myths persist around the topic, though, and those committed to combatting such a pernicious crime are just as determined to correct those potentially dangerous misconceptions. Among them: that only women or girls are targeted, when demographic data collected by the National Human Trafficking Hotline indicates that more than 20% of victims are male; that it doesn't happen right in our own backyard, when the U.S. is actually one of the worst places for human trafficking; and that being kidnapped by a stranger is the primary avenue of abducting victims, when the reality is that groomers are often someone a targeted individual knows and online interactions require just as much caution as physical spaces.

January brings National Human Trafficking Prevention Month along with it, so we asked local experts and advocates for their insights into what people should know.

What accounts for human-trafficking awareness finally getting the attention it deserves?

I think that a combination of high-profile cases like Jeffrey Epstein and most recently the P. Diddy case have helped to shine a light on human trafficking and bring the conversation about the issue into the mainstream. Having the topic become more of a mainstream issue has certainly helped bring awareness and resources to fight human trafficking, but has not necessarily helped with fighting the misconceptions: Along with human trafficking becoming a mainstream topic has come movies like *Taken* and *Sound of Freedom* that have portrayed human trafficking in a way that's entertaining for audiences but not necessarily accurate. [But] overall, human trafficking becoming a mainstream topic has been more beneficial than damaging.—*Trent Steele, president and director of investigative operations, Anti-Predator Project*

What kind of education does your organization provide?

Each month, our dedicated staff actively engages with the community to train organizations on identifying the signs of human trafficking. We provide training to schools, law enforcement, church groups and other local organizations. Additionally, we host Lunch and Learn sessions, both at our office and virtually.

For National Human Trafficking Awareness Month, our primary focus is on expanding our educational outreach and launching a support group for survivors across Central Florida. We encounter many victims in diverse situations, many of whom long for a safe community to connect with. This support group aims to provide that space, offering survivors the opportunity to heal and share their experiences. We are committed to providing even more resources to those in need and look forward to creating this vital support network.—*Jill Cohen, CEO and founder, The Lifeboat Project*

How can people protect themselves and their children from traffickers preying on individuals through internet interactions, communities, forums and DMs?

The main recruiting ground in the modern internet era is social media. Traffickers seek to target the vulnerable: Tweens and teens are extremely pliable for manipulation. Traffickers are master manipulators who can find and exploit a vulnerability for their own personal gain. The internet gives traffickers the ability to connect with and target children and teens through anonymity and deception. I have seen time and time again in our cases that children (and their parents) think that strangers cannot access them, and are tricked and manipulated until they become victims. The best way that parents can protect their children is to keep them off social

media as tweens and young teens.

The State of Florida passed a law that went into effect Jan. 1, 2025, and has made it illegal for children under 14 to have social media accounts, and 14-15 year old children can have accounts only with parental consent. Abiding by this law prevents traffickers from having any access to children during some of their most vulnerable years.—*Lisa D. Haba, partner, The Haba Law Firm, P.A.*

What's some advice you have that the general population should know to protect themselves?

Get educated, be brave and have courageous conversations. People should learn about: recruitment and grooming tactics used to lure kids in; apps to watch out for; managing children's game time; safe ways to begin conversations; weaning kids off games, videos and apps; facts—not myths—about human trafficking; and what our youth have to say about all of this.

This issue is solvable, we just have to be willing to have courageous conversations with ourselves and our children. Create no-phone zones at home, reduce [your child's] time online or in front of a computer, and create a cone of trust and safety in the family: no judgment means no secrets.—*Jan Edwards, president and CEO, Paving The Way Foundation*

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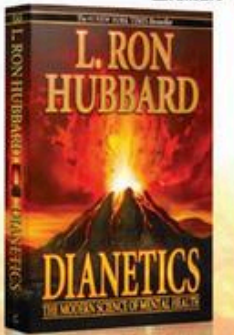
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Back to School



In response to the increased demand for alternative education options, local higher education institutions are providing new pathways with innovative technology to help make academic success accessible to all students.

by Carly Murray

As educational leaders continue to have vital conversations with local industry powerhouses, the curriculum and degree pathways subsequently adapt to best secure the next stage of each student's journey, whether they are right out of high school, beginning school later in their adulthood or returning to higher education to pursue a graduate program.

"Students in general have become more nontraditional in that many students are not going to college directly from high school. They are entering the workforce, starting families, obtaining technical skills, joining the military, and moving in and out of higher education based on balancing all of their commitments. Additionally, finances play a major role in when and where a student takes classes and pursues higher education," says Paul Dosal, senior vice president for student success at University of Central Florida. "Given all of these factors, a student's educational pathway is not linear in nature, and they may attend several institutions over the course of their careers. Higher education must provide multiple pathways and on ramps for students to be successful, as many students transfer into our university with a variety of credits."

Providing equal opportunities regardless of traditional or nontraditional pathways expands the possibility of finding talented students who are skilled in new and developing fields. The cognizance of giving students a chance to thrive regardless of background and equipping them with tools necessary for success requires a societal and emotional understanding in culmination with academics. It also takes outreach to prospective students who might not know these programs are available or affordable.

"Some of the most significant things impacting this trend include rapid technological advancements like AI, the need for flexible learning options—like being able to take classes online or at an accelerated pace—and cultural changes," says Heather Dartez, DBA, director of graduate studies at Full Sail University. "These changes—[which] have more of an emphasis on lifelong learning and younger generations challenging the need for traditional pathways and exploring unconventional ones—are enlightening and shaping the future of education."

Higher education institutions are implementing programs and resources to assist the growing demand for flexible education and timeframes. Full Sail University, for instance, has online and in-person courses that can be completed at an accelerated pace, a year-round enrollment schedule, and even online short-form courses in entertainment media and emerging technology for those who are not students in its Full Sail DC3 program. Although a high school diploma is required to pursue a bachelor's degree at Full Sail University, it is not required for the



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With the plethora of modern options, some colleges may provide these types of no-prerequisite classes and even GED support. There are online, in-person and hybrid courses that have been streamlined following the example of pandemic-learning's necessity.

"Nontraditional students are such a big part of higher education that now some people call them 'new-traditional' students, and many institutions seek to bring them to campus—though often just virtually. The growth of online learning on many campuses is driven by the rise of nontraditional students, who often work full time and raise families while they're going to school," says Lauren Smith, Ph.D., dean of Hamilton Holt School of Professional Advancement and Graduate Studies at Rollins College, which is designed for adult continuing education.

Holt School strives to include nontraditional students in the campus community, especially since they will be surrounded by peers in similar situations. Support services, advisors and faculty are available to help them navigate educational, social and personal circumstances.

Naturally, the same applies to graduate students, who may be interested in expanding their current career or transitioning to a new field. In the current, ever-evolving competitive career landscape, graduate student enrollment is high.

"Our grad programs allow students with seemingly unrelated bachelor's degrees to take our master's programs, allowing students to pivot mid-career or qualify for broader opportunities. For example, our most recently added degree program is the computer science master's degree, designed for students looking to learn more about AI, machine learning and data science," explains Dartez.

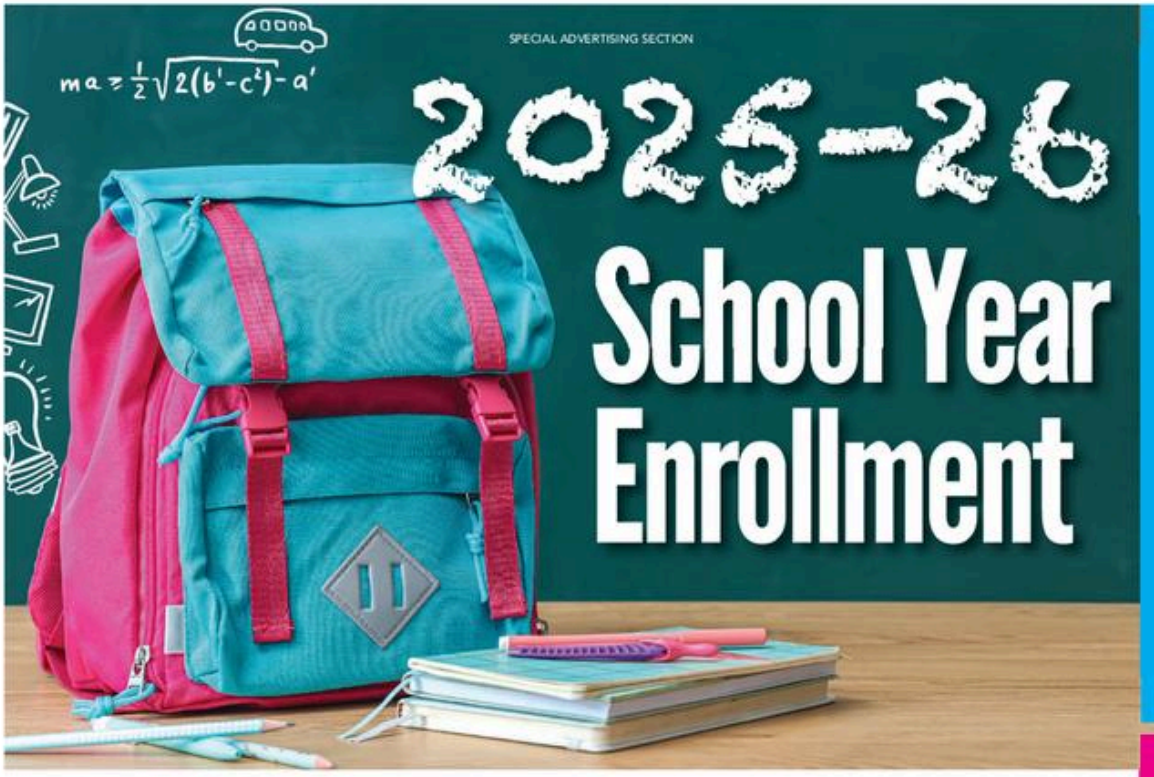
In addition, programs for graduate students at Full Sail University include peer mentorship and networking opportunities that can both enhance their skills in a current field or help them pivot to a new one.

"Many people enroll in graduate school because they know exactly what they want to do next, and they know that graduate school is the best path," explains Smith. "Classes provide them with the chance to learn about areas of specialization, new subfields and new areas of learning. They get to know peers and faculty, and they learn from this network the direction their next steps might take them. You don't have to know exactly what you want to do to benefit from a graduate school education. Graduate school can also help you understand better what you want from your career and your life."

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