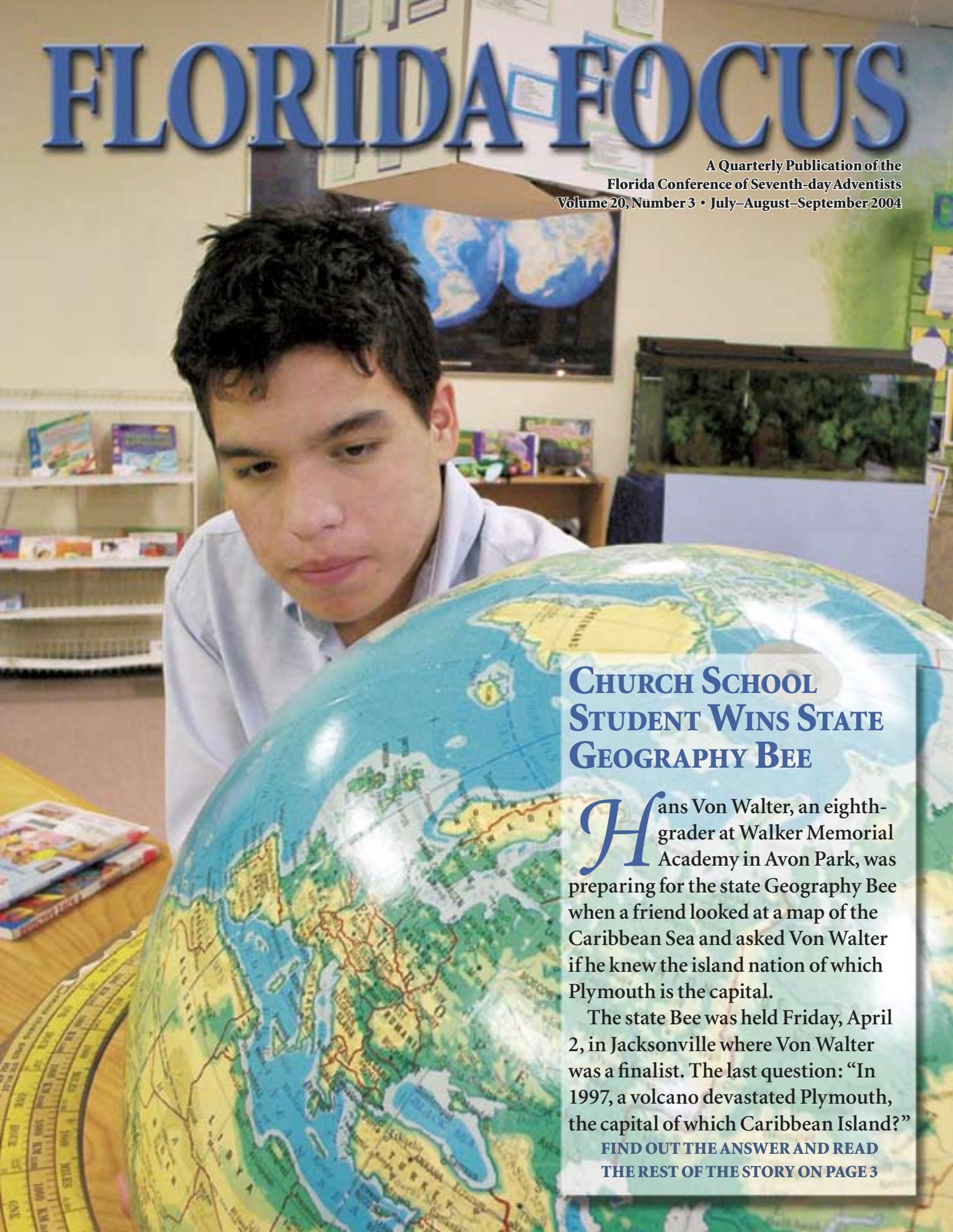


FLORIDA FOCUS

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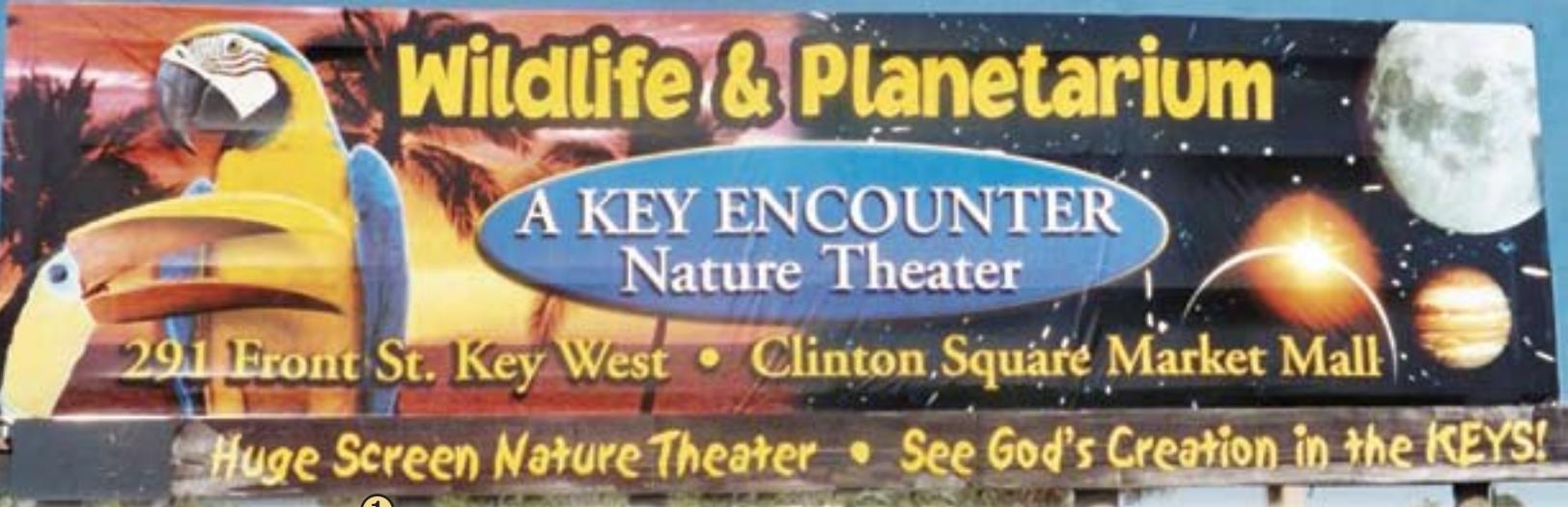
A young man with dark hair, wearing a white shirt, is looking intently at a large globe in a classroom. The globe is the central focus, showing the Americas. In the background, there are bookshelves, a bulletin board, and a fish tank.

CHURCH SCHOOL STUDENT WINS STATE GEOGRAPHY BEE

Hans Von Walter, an eighth-grader at Walker Memorial Academy in Avon Park, was preparing for the state Geography Bee when a friend looked at a map of the Caribbean Sea and asked Von Walter if he knew the island nation of which Plymouth is the capital.

The state Bee was held Friday, April 2, in Jacksonville where Von Walter was a finalist. The last question: “In 1997, a volcano devastated Plymouth, the capital of which Caribbean Island?”

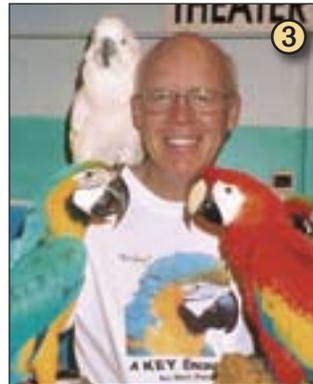
**FIND OUT THE ANSWER AND READ
THE REST OF THE STORY ON PAGE 3**



①

A Key Encounter (AKE) is a creation-based, not-for-profit, educational tourist attraction in Key West, Florida. It was opened to the public in 1996 by Merlin and Juanita Kretschmar who returned to lay ministry after 41 years of service to the Adventist Church. It honors the Creator through His creation and reveals His promised return.

AKE's original attraction, the Nature Theater, is a three-



screen video presentation showing wildlife in the Keys—particularly the marine life on the coral reef that surrounds this beautiful chain of islands.

AKE also includes the Jungle Walk, a gift shop, and the George M. Kretschmar Jr., Memorial Planetarium which highlights the Ultimate Encounter which culminates in a portrayal of Christ's second coming.

All attractions at AKE are free. Prayer, visitor donations, financial gifts from church members around the world, and faithful volunteers keep the doors of the ministry open.

Two of these volunteers, retirees Knick and Betti Knickerbocker from Maryland, have spent three months annually at



PHOTOS: BETTI KNICKERBOCKER

AKE for eight years. "We have learned a lot about trusting in God, taking all matters to Him in prayer, and believing that He will provide answers," says Knick. "We are so thankful to God for this enjoyable way of witnessing."

Stories and testimonies are shared in AKE's free monthly newsletter and thrill readers with accounts of the ministry's impact on some of the 50,000+ tourists who visit AKE each year.

"What a tremendous way to use tech-

nology to present the gospel in a compelling, attractive, and persuasive way," said a theological university professor from Houston. "I never expected to find something like this in Key West."

A guest from Tennessee said, "You are such a lighthouse here." A Florida resident wrote, "Thank you for offering visitors a touch of the Creator and His encouraging truth." A tourist from Texas exclaimed, "This is the most refreshing place in Key West!"

Florida church

1. A large, colorful billboard at mile marker 21 on Highway 1 invites tourists to visit A Key Encounter.
2. The Key West Conch Tour Trains stop at the Clinton Square Market on Mallory Square where A Key Encounter is located.
3. Staff member Gene Hamlin often takes macaws Sir Jack, Peaches, and Rainbow out for a walk to meet tourists and invite them to visit A Key Encounter.
4. Praise House is a residence provided for volunteers and staff.

members are invited to Key West for spiritual and physical refreshing. "Volunteers are needed year 'round," say the Kretschmars. "We offer seven days of lodging at Praise House if four of the days are spent working at AKE." Workdays are 10 hours long, including travel time.

Space is limited, so arrangements must be made in advance with the Kretschmars:
P.O. Box 177
Big Pine Key, FL 33043
www.akeyencounter.org
(305) 872-5434

—Martin Butler

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**WMA - HOME OF STATE GEO. BEE
CHAMP HANS VON WALTER
2004**

Montserrat.” It’s a Caribbean island and it was the correct answer that a Walker Memorial Academy eighth-grader gave to win the state Geography Bee, sponsored by National Geographic.

On his third trip to state, Hans Von Walter, 14, managed to rebound Friday, April 2, to the top spot at the competition at Jacksonville University after finishing 23rd last year. At his first state competition he just missed the top 10 with an 11th place finish.

“No way I could

have made it there without God,” Von Walter said. “Everything happens for a reason.” The questions that he didn’t know the answers to went to other competitors. “I’m very proud of him,” his mother, Doralba, said.

His coach, Walker English/History Teacher Judy Johnson, gave him books and magazine articles to study and kept him informed of current events in preparation for the competitions. “You can’t overanalyze the questions,” Johnson said, in discussing strategy. To buy more

Hans Von Walter and his coach, Judy Johnson, were welcomed home by this sign and Principal Bill Farmer at Walker Memorial Academy in Avon Park upon their return from the state Geography Bee in Jacksonville.

time to answer a question, they discussed having Von Walter ask for the spelling of a question, which is allowed twice during the competition.

About 1,000 fourth-through eighth-grade students in the state qualified to take a written test, with the top 100 students going to the state competition.

The finals started with the top 10 students correctly answering the first four questions; then ques-

tions became increasingly more difficult, Johnson said.

The final two students were asked three questions and given 15 seconds to write an answer. Both students answered the first question correctly. Both answered incorrectly on the second question. Von Walter correctly answered the third question while Matthew Silverstein, 12, of Jacksonville, answered incorrectly.

Von Walter won

\$100, a globe, two geography-related books, and a trip to compete in the national competition, May 25-26, in Washington, D.C.

The National Geographic Society developed the National Geographic Bee in 1989 in response to concern about the lack of geographic knowledge among young people in the United States.

COVER PHOTO AND ARTICLE BY MARK VALERO, REPRINTED BY PERMISSION, TAMPA TRIBUNE HIGHLANDS TODAY, APRIL 3, 2004. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION BY TRIBUNE REPORTER RIC LILJENBERG.



TOM BAKER

Hans Von Walter juggled practice time on the cello, violin, piano, trombone, and steel drums with his school assignments and geography bee studies.

HARD WORK PAYS DIVIDENDS FOR GEOGRAPHY BEE CHAMPION

Hans has worked so hard and planned and prepared,” said Walker Memorial Academy (WMA) Principal Bill Farmer when he learned of his student’s success at the state finals. “It was really nice to see all his hard work come to fruition. It’s a great honor.”

After his early April state win, Von Walter joined 54 other students, May 25 and 26, for the national Bee in Washington, D.C. “The

Nationals were hard and, although I didn’t win, I had a lot of fun, met a lot of new people, and gained unforgettable experiences.”

National Geographic covered the trip expenses for Von Walter and his coach, Judy Johnson. *Jeopardy!* quiz show Host Alex Trebek moderated the May 26 finals which were aired the same day on the National Geographic Channel and later on public television stations.

Von Walter, a

ninth-grader this fall at WMA, had an especially busy eighth-grade year. In addition to studying two to four hours a day for the geography competitions, he maintained high academic achievements.

He also participated in several school music groups. He plans to fine tune his skills on a variety of instruments during the coming school year while studying for—what else—national geography competitions!

—Martin Butler

MISSION OPPORTUNITIES ON HIGHWAY 27



PHOTOS: KEVIN IVES

Sabbath school lesson studies at *The Net* draw enthusiastic participation from 50+ young church members and their community friends.

It could be easily missed—the storefront on U.S. Highway 27 just north of Clermont, Florida. Located down an embankment, the only identification sign is on a window which reads, *The Net*.

Inside this store space on a recent Sabbath morning, youth leaders tuned their musical instruments and prepared the surroundings for Sabbath school and church. Soon, young people arrived by car, motorcycle, and on foot.

With all chairs filled by 10:15, more seats were added, and worship began at *The Net*. Only a short break for juice and a variety of breads separated the prayerful atmosphere of the two services.

The roots of this storefront mission were planted four years ago when Ben and Julie Bacon, newcomers to the Clermont Church, felt led by God to start a Pathfinder program. Four children, three

adult leaders, and two friends of the children came to the initial club meeting. Three months later, on the first Pathfinder Sabbath, 12 sharply dressed young people, in full uniform, marched down the church's center aisle.

New programs and ministries were added to meet the growing needs of the youth. The Varsity Leadership Program gave high school students an opportunity to learn and practice leadership within the club. A blacklight and puppet ministry, *Praise in Motion*, became a popular outreach for club members to depict their spiritual walk through music, Bible illustrations, blacklight props, puppetry, and sign language.

Worship at each club meeting became high priority as leadership moved the devotional—normally first on the agenda—to the end of the program. This 30-minute segment, *Dares from Jesus*, benefitted late-comers and made a positive difference in the spiritual health of the club.

God honored these efforts and, as activities and programs were added, the Clermont Pathfinder club increased to 36 members by July 2003 along with 24 staff. This growth, however, presented a new problem—the club had outgrown available meeting space in the church.

Placing the search for adequate space in

God's hands, they were led to the storefront of a small strip shopping center only minutes from the church. First, they had to prepare the site for city inspection within a given time frame. When it seemed impossible to meet the deadline for completion, a youth group from the community offered to help paint and renovate the space. Working with adult church members, they completed the project.

Next, the Clermont Church took another step of faith and hired Kevin Ives, a part-time youth worker. The new storefront and the addition of Ives was the combination to open the door for *The Net* youth ministry.

Café tables and chairs were placed in one section of the building and a meeting-style setup in the other half. Fishermen's nets, shells, and a wall mural set an appropriate decor throughout the renovated storefront. Here, Pathfinders meet during the

week. Youth church is conducted one Sabbath each month and, on Friday evenings, youth come together for fellowship and Bible study at the program *Nothing But Net*.

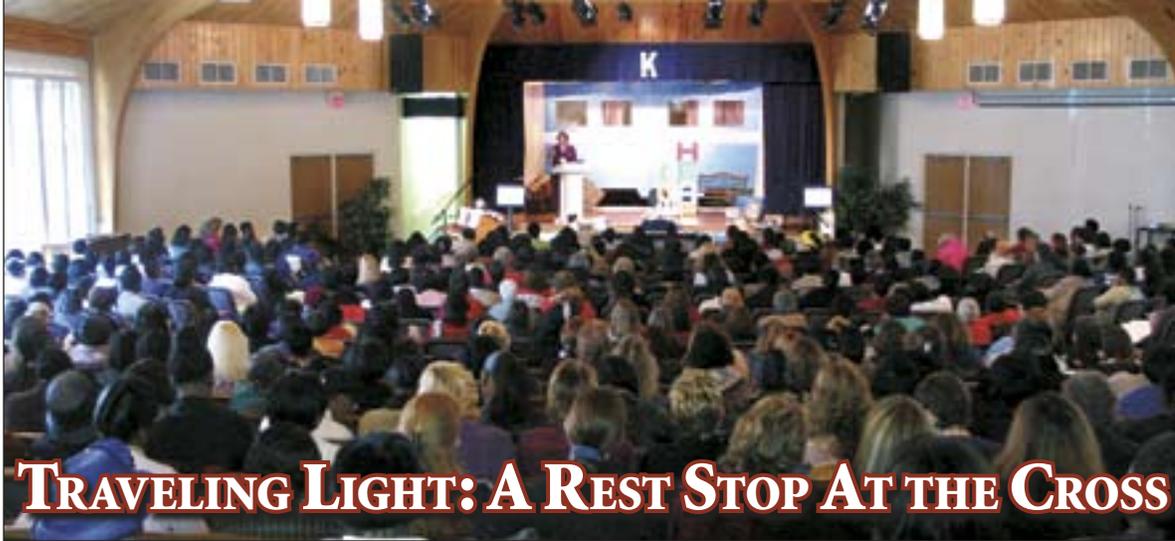
God's guiding hand has already led the parents of one Pathfinder, who were helping the club, into baptism. In another scenario, Pathfinders working on their carpentry honor behind the building were a witness to a young neighbor watching from his backyard. One evening, he came over and asked if he could join the fun and the club.

Today, a Pathfinder club that began with four members has grown into a program with more than 40 youth. Members of the Clermont Church pray for the little storefront on U.S. Highway 27 which continues to prove that, with God, all things are possible as it draws young people into *The Net* and into God's kingdom.

—Sherry Johnson



In just four years, the Clermont Pathfinder club grew from four members to more than 40. The need for more space led them to their new meeting location.



PHOTOS: STEPH HULIN

TRAVELING LIGHT: A REST STOP AT THE CROSS

This year, four women's ministries retreats attracted more than 1,200 attendees.

The luggage of life may be a suitcase of guilt, a trunk of discontent, a backpack of anxiety, or a hanging bag of grief. No wonder we're so tired at day's end! Finally, as a last resort, we ask, "Where can we turn for help?"

Barbara McCoy, an associate pastor at Forest Lake Church in Apopka, transported women's retreat participants early this year to the foot of the cross where Jesus' invitation echoed, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...for My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Traveling Light was the ticket for hundreds to embark on a journey with Him, the One who is the Way. One traveler wrote about her experience to encourage others to "catch the train" to next year's retreats.

"For years, friends asked me to attend a women's retreat with them. The idea of spending a weekend with a group of women; however, wasn't my cup of tea. I always talked my way out of it.

"Last year, three friends ganged up on me and I agreed to go. The time came to pack our suitcases and head for Camp Kulaqua in High Springs.

"Since we arrived late on Friday, we were among the last ones to slip into the evening program. Before the keynote speaker started her sermon, everyone was asked to introduce themselves to the individuals on either side of them.

"I spoke to the person on my left. 'Hello, my name is Brenda and I'm from Orlando.'

"The woman smiled and said, 'I'm Isobel and I'm also from Orlando. What part of

town are you from?'

"Figuring I'd cut to the chase, I responded, 'I'm from the Forest Lake Church.'

"I'm a Catholic, so I don't know your churches,' she answered quietly. 'Where in town do you live?'

"Her response caught me by surprise. 'In Forest City,' I said.

"So do I,' she excitedly answered.

"Back and forth we went, each time getting more specific on directions to our homes. Soon, we found out that we lived only a short distance from each other on the same street in the same subdivision. With each discovery of common

ground, Isobel nearly came out of her seat, exclaiming, 'Me, too!'

"I couldn't believe it! What are the chances I would be in a room with more than 500 women and end up sitting next to my Catholic neighbor whom I'd never met in 13 years?

"After the meeting, I met Isobel's Adventist sister-in-law who had invited her to the retreat. We couldn't stop laughing about the irony of it all as we shared our experience with other women. Before saying 'good-night,' we promised to meet on Sabbath morning for breakfast.

"A few days later, back at home, I ran down the street to visit Isobel and introduce my children.

"Today, I'm thankful that Dot, Karen, and Phyllis twisted my arm. I had a great time, made new friends, heard motivational speakers, attended terrific seminars, ate more than my share of great food, and laughed until I could laugh no more."

Next year, Brenda's friends won't have to twist her arm to attend.

—Sheryal Vandenberghe



Karen Spruill presented the seminar, *Healthy Boundaries: Drawing Lines Down the Road of Life*.

PRESIDENT CHALLENGES MEMBERS:



PHOTOS: WALTER MAIER

A LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

Dear President Cauley:

In the 15 years that I've been a church member, I never experienced a Camp Meeting like this. Everywhere I went on campus, people were praying.

My heart's desire was to see the Holy Spirit poured out this year in great measure. To see it really happen was truly beautiful and inspiring. I saw God's Spirit on the faces of people, in the preachers' messages, and in the seminars.

Thank you, President Cauley, for leading us into prayer. I praise God for the Holy Spirit who teaches us and motivates us to pray. We are coming to the end of time and to see the spirit of prayer poured out so bountifully at Camp Meeting still has me smiling.

Your Prayer Partner In Christ,

Meg Ludy
Dunnellon Company

On Saturday night, June 5, Florida Conference President Michael Cauley brought Camp Meeting 2004 to a close by challenging church members to recapture vintage Christianity. Thoughts from his sermon follow:

A few years ago, my family and I toured historic Adventist church sites in New England. After a stop in Portland, Maine, our car wouldn't start. I tinkered under the hood until I was plenty dirty. Finally, I called a tow truck; then, rented a car. Later, I would learn that a short in the electrical system wouldn't allow any power to get through.

Today, we need the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to have the short in the "electrical system" fixed. We must put aside doing church as usual. We must recapture vintage Christianity.

I want to focus upon the keys to what happened in the Apostolic Church, the key to dynamic ministry and church life, the key to seeing the Church ignite, the key to making a difference, and the key to seeing God change lives. We have to be done with business as usual.

If we are going to fulfill our calling, we must recapture vintage Christianity. It all began with waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Jesus referred to it as the bap-

tism of the Holy Spirit.

We can claim this experience today. "The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church is looked forward to as in the future, but it is the privilege of the Church to have it now," Ellen White tells us. We can experience this at Camp Meetings which she says are "times for the spirit of God to be poured out...."

There are three identifying characteristics of vintage Christianity as found in the book of Acts:

THEY SOUGHT THE HOLY SPIRIT

God says, "I'm more willing to give the Holy Spirit to you than you are to give good things to your children." He wants us to be people of prayer, seeking His power in our lives. He says, "Ask, and it shall be given to you." God is calling us to be a praying conference, committing ourselves to seek the refreshing that comes from being filled with Jesus.

THEY KNEW JESUS

Knowing Jesus is intricately connected to receiving the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to testify about Jesus—to draw people to Him. If we know Jesus, our hearts will be receptive to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We will be led into a closer walk with Him and have a greater understanding of God's character.

RECAPTURE VINTAGE CHRISTIANITY

We must be so close to Jesus that we'll know Him as our best friend. Then, we will be prepared to better-comprehend His great love, His death for us, and that we are saved through the free gift of eternal life. There is nothing we can ever do to make Jesus love us more, nor anything we can ever do to make Him love us less.

The world is dying to know this. The Holy Spirit is given to reveal the truth about who God is to lost men and women. The servant of the Lord says that Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in lifting Jesus up.

THEY REMOVED EVERY BARRIER BETWEEN THEM AND JESUS

In order to connect with the source of

spiritual power, God's people must remove anything that stands between them and a full experience with the Lord. We must have nothing between us and our Savior.

This may mean doing some soul-searching. It may mean reprioritizing some things. It may mean doing some things differently in our families—giving up something that stands in the way from a full, untheatred experience with our Lord. Whatever it takes, it's worth it.

Don't let anything hold you back from fully surrendering. Once these barriers are removed, the Spirit of God will place an unquenchable passion in your heart to reach those who need to know Jesus.

Start praying for your neighbor, the person who cuts your hair, the man who works on your car. Pray for your circle of friends. Ask the Lord to give you people to bring to heaven with you. As God provides opportunities for you to tell others what Jesus has done for you, their hearts will become thirsty for what you have.

Friends, it is time to quit playing church. I'm ready for Jesus to come. I'm ready to get serious about church in Florida. I'm ready to see the power of God manifested, and it will happen as we pray:

Lord, we're tired of playing church. We want to see Jesus come. We really want to have Jesus be everything in our lives. Help us to put first things first. Take

control of everything in us and about us and help us not to just leave this Camp Meeting feeling blessed, filled, and empowered. Help us to leave with a determination, by the grace of God, to make a difference for Your kingdom.

Jesus, we know You are coming soon and there are, literally, millions of people in Florida who will be lost if nobody shares the gospel with them. Give us a sense of conviction, a sense of urgency, a sense of commitment, a sense of loving people, and a willingness to go the second and third mile to spend and be spent in order to be used to see you change a life forever.

Take control of all of us and baptize us with the Holy Spirit. Amen.



PRAYER'S PRESENCE FELT AT CAMP MEETING

When I refer to what God did through prayer at Camp Meeting 2004, I call it the Acts 29 experience.

The spiritual atmosphere on campus reminded me of the early church described in all 28 chapters of Acts.

Prayer was at the center of each day, yet, a special presence was felt Thursday, June 3, as intercessory prayers ascended for the needs of others.

Wherever I went that day, and whatever I did, there was a sense of God's presence because I knew people were praying. Prayer Partners were not only in prayer on the camp ground, they were praying throughout Florida Conference.

You see, a network of Prayer Partners was recruited earlier this year in our churches. Many of you were among the 7,000 people who responded to my invitation, "Yes, Mike.

I'll be a President's Prayer Partner."

NEW WEB SITE ANNOUNCED FOR PRAYER PARTNERS

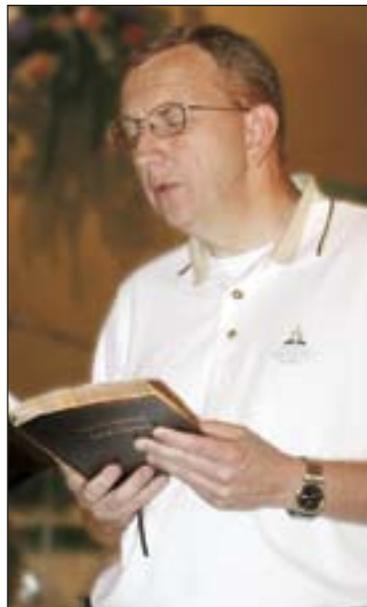
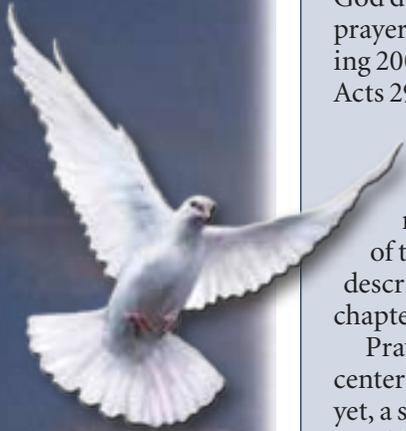
You may have heard my announcement on the final night of Camp Meeting about our new web site. This will make it possible to connect with Prayer Partners on the internet. I look forward to sharing with you and hearing from you. Our Prayer Partners are a very special group. I anticipate

seeing what God will do through you and through the Conference because of this personal prayer connection with Him.

I'd also like to invite those who haven't become Prayer Partners to share in the blessings of joining our prayer team. Sign up today on the new web site at floridaconference.com by clicking on the President's Page link.

May God bless you and keep you.

—Michael Cauley



Camp Meeting was empowered by God's Spirit. Prayer and praise ascended heavenward each day, asking God to be the center of every seminar, sermon, program, and conversation. Florida Conference President Michael Cauley led these seasons of prayer throughout Camp Meeting.

ENCOUNTER WITH GOD IMPACTS YOUNG ADULTS



ALLEN MARTIN

The Encounters Café provided a warm, casual environment where many GODencounters Conference attendees deepened their relationships and found inspiring fellowship.

“You came here today because God wanted to have an encounter with you,” guest speaker José Rojas asserted at the third annual GODencounters Conference (GE:c).

More than 2,000 young adults filled the Forest Lake Church in Apopka throughout the May 28-June 5 event, held simultaneously with Florida Camp Meeting, where God made an impact on lives through teaching, worship, prayer, and fellowship.

“I felt far from God and in need of spiritual renewal and counsel,” said college student Stephanie Cato, 22. “I embraced the practical advice at GODencounters. My feet were put back on the path by the Holy Spirit.”

The goal of the GE:c team was to create an environment where young adults could connect with God and share their spiritual challenges with each other. Each evening at the Encounters Café, attendees could share

poetry, music, or testimonies at the open microphone. Nearby, a 24/7 prayer room provided a quiet place to be alone with God.

“We gave often-disfranchised young people the opportunity to find sanctuary and be open and real about their Christianity,” said Haskell Williams, a GE:c team member and senior pastor of the Apopka Church. “Those who were struggling found a safe place to talk. GODencounters said to them, ‘You are noticed. God is listening.’”

Encountering God also meant being challenged to serve Him outside the walls of the church by fulfilling the GE:c theme, “Love...is an action.” Rojas, director of Adventist Volunteer Ministries Network for the North Ameri-

can Division in Silver Spring, Maryland, told the capacity crowd on the final weekend that servanthood is the *only* call for Christians. “It’s not enough to sit in our houses and be pious people. Jesus must be seen in the streets,” he emphasized.

“God got the point across to me that I must reach out in my community and do something,” said Ashanti Johnson, a 22-year-old student. “I know exactly what I have to do to fully serve my Lord and Savior. I have a responsibility to share Christ’s message of love.”

Darriel Hoy, a pastor and executive director of Baltimore Adventist Community Services, also inspired attendees to live lives of service by making the story of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet come alive.

“GODencounters has made a world of

difference in my spiritual walk with Christ,” says DuVaughn Mahabee, a 28-year-old process engineer. “I enjoy meeting and interacting with others who share the same passion for a closer encounter with God.”

Many young adults said they encountered God through the music which included concerts and worship sessions led by the band, FADE, and musician Elia King. FADE has participated in all three GODencounters Conferences and, each year, the group has looked forward to the spiritual connections and friendships made.

“We want people to take away a personal relationship with God,” says FADE lead singer Nick Zork.

From all accounts, that’s exactly what happened.

—Debbie Pacuch



José Rojas’ role with Adventist Volunteer Ministries Network resonated with the 2004 GODencounters theme, “Love...is an action.”



LEE BENNETT

THE TREASURER ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS



LEE BENNETT

Thomas Verrill
Conference Treasurer

This summer, my family and I celebrated our one-year anniversary of moving to Florida. For us, personally, the last twelve months have been a time of change—new jobs, a new school, a new house, new friends, new coworkers, a new (more enjoyable) climate, and new challenges and opportunities. We thank the wonderful constituents of Florida for assisting us with this transition by graciously accepting us into the family.

The past year has also been a time of change for Florida Conference. The most far-reaching changes relate to the Conference finances. Significant budgetary reductions were necessary, resulting in many questions.

I would like to address the most frequently asked questions in order to assist all of our constituents to better understand our current situation.

HOW SERIOUS ARE THE FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES THE CONFERENCE IS FACING?

For each of the last four years, the Conference has experienced operating losses. Particularly challenging were the losses in 2002 and 2003 of \$6.5 million and \$4 million, respectively.

DOESN'T THE CONFERENCE HAVE AMPLE RESERVES TO COVER THESE SHORTFALLS?

Unfortunately, the Conference reserves have decreased over the past few years as we have experienced these operating losses. At the end of 2003, the Conference's reserves were one third the amount they should be, according to denominational guidelines.

To put that in perspective, it means we have the equivalent of only one month's worth of expenses in reserves to meet current and future financial challenges. This falls far short of meeting the operating and cash flow cycles of a Conference.

IS IT TRUE THE REASON FOR THE DEFICITS IS THE LARGE BALANCES OWED TO THE CONFERENCE BY ITS SCHOOLS, CHURCHES, AND OTHER ENTITIES?

It is partially true. The amount owed to the Conference by schools, churches, and other related entities has more than doubled in the four years from 1999 to 2003—from \$3.5 million to more than \$7.25 million. This has required the

Conference to record expenses of almost \$3 million during these years for potential losses on receivables.

The greater problem caused by the nonpayment of these accounts is with the Conference's cash flow. Because these entities have not paid the Conference in a timely manner, it has significantly hurt the Conference's cash position.

HAS THE CONFERENCE HAD TO BORROW MONEY TO MEET ITS OPERATING DEFICITS AND CASH FLOW SHORTAGE?

Yes. In December 2003, we borrowed \$4 million from the Southern Union Revolving Fund to cover the operating deficit and cash flow shortfall. In May 2004, the Conference Executive Committee authorized the borrowing of an additional \$5 million to fund current cash flow needs as necessary. To date, we have withdrawn \$2.5 of this \$5 million to meet operating obligations.

WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES OCCURRED THAT RESULTED IN THIS FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY?

Although my history in Florida is somewhat limited, let me attempt to respond based on my understanding of the past as it has been related to me and as I have observed in the records.

The Conference has, for many years, budgeted and/or spent more than its previous year's income. In other words, the Conference had been budgeting/spending in anticipation of tithe gains year after year. This worked for many years because the Conference experienced very strong tithe increases to cover the increased level of spending.

For example, from 1992 to 2001, Florida Conference averaged 7% annual tithe increases—well above the national average of 4.8% for the same ten-year period.

This practice, however, posed a

serious problem in 2002. That year, the Conference experienced only a 1.8% increase in total tithe giving over 2001. This was far less than was needed to meet the level of spending for that year.

Several other factors contributed to the deficits around this time. The cost per employee was increasing more rapidly than the tithe income, particularly in the areas of retirement and health care. For example, health care costs more than doubled between 1999 and 2002. The year 2002, alone, experienced a 54% increase over the previous year.

Other costs, such as building subsidies to churches, were also increasing at significant rates. At the same time, dropping interest rates meant less income on our investments. Also, the number of Conference staff continued to increase during this time period.

All of these combined factors created a financial situation that needed to be addressed right away.

HOW HAS THE CONFERENCE ADDRESSED THE CHALLENGES WE FIND OURSELVES IN?

The Conference has taken several steps to address the current financial difficulties. The initial step was to establish Finance Committees for the Conference, Forest Lake Academy, Greater Miami Academy, and the K-12 Education system to address financial needs for each of these entities. The professional, ongoing, detailed review and analysis these Finance Committees perform provides a very high level of oversight, guidance, and accountability to our financial structures.

Based on the recommendation of the administration and the Conference Finance Committee, the Executive Committee voted a three-year turnaround plan to bring the budget back into balance. The plan included a large number of very painful reductions in staffing. The chart on the left outlines these reductions.

Departmental program budgets were cut to core functions and, in some cases,

CONFERENCE POSITIONS REDUCED

	Office	Pastors	Teachers	Total
Reduced	20	15	8	43
Positions Unfilled in 2003	6	4	5	15
Positions Unfilled in 2004	0	11	6	17
Total	26	30	19	75

completely eliminated. The portion of teacher salaries and benefits charged to elementary schools has been increased to be more in line with escalating costs. In addition, we are making considerable efforts with our schools to reduce the amount they owe the Conference. This is part of a new process that requires schools to annually submit balanced budgets and their accounts to remain current before teacher contracts are issued. As a result of this new process, several teaching positions were eliminated for the 2004–2005 school year.

We are implementing other reforms unrelated to staff reductions as well. For example, we adjusted the church building subsidy policies to better match our ability to fund this program. We also instituted a policy that the Conference budget is to be based on no more than the actual income received in the previous year.

WERE THE IMMEDIATE REDUCTIONS OF PERSONNEL NECESSARY?

I've been asked why we couldn't accomplish all of the financial savings in nonpersonnel areas or make the personnel reductions through attrition over time. We wished all of the reductions could have been accomplished through programming changes and other nonpersonnel reductions. However, this was not possible because 75–80% of the Conference's expenses are for personnel. Waiting was not a viable option due to the magnitude of the budget deficit, the growing anticipated debt load, the depleted level of our reserves, and the serious cash flow problem that caused us to fall many months behind in the payment of our largest bills.

ARE SOUTHERN UNION REVOLVING FUND DEPOSITS WITH THE CONFERENCE OR TRUST FUNDS IN JEOPARDY?

No. These funds are separately invested and not available for operations. Therefore, they are not affected by our financial circumstances.

WHAT IS THE CONFERENCE'S CURRENT FINANCIAL SITUATION AND WHAT DO YOU FORESEE FOR THE FUTURE?

The reductions allowed us to decrease the budget deficit from \$4.5

million to \$1.35 million in 2004. For just this year, we will incur additional, one-time transition costs of \$2 million related to the layoffs.

Through June 2004, the tithe is looking strong, showing a 5% increase over 2003. If that rate continues, it would translate into approximately \$1.25 million to the Conference for this year.

We are developing options to liquidate the debt that has been incurred. The cash position will probably continue to be a challenge, and it is likely that quite some time will pass before reserves are back to appropriate levels.

Although much work remains, our goal is to bring the budget into balance no later than the 2006 fiscal year. We feel the financial picture has stabilized and the future looks bright for the Conference. We continue to be blessed with a large membership and a strong financial base from which to operate. With God's blessing and your continued faithfulness, we will soon be back on strong financial footing.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HIGHLIGHTS

MAY 18, 2004

INVITED Glenn Carter to serve as Conference Association vice president for institutional property management and associate treasurer.

APPROVED changes of guidelines for establishing mission groups, companies, and churches.

JUNE 9, 2004

INVITED Derek Morris to serve as senior pastor of the Forest Lake Church.

JULY 18, 2004

APPROVED the organization of the Gainesville Spanish company into church status.

APPROVED the organization of the South Palm mission group in Delray Beach into company status, sponsored by the Boynton Beach church.

—Evan Valencia, Executive Secretary

Coming Events

A complete calendar is available online:
<http://www.floridaconference.com/calendar.html>

Florida Pathfinder Events—<http://www.floridapathfinders.com/>
Singles' Ministries Spiritual Study Group—Every Friday evening.

Forest Lake Church, classroom #4. 7:30 p.m. Details: Melody West, (407) 292-1421 or mwest@ahss.org

Singles' Ministries Monthly Fellowship Dinners—*Second Sabbath*, Forest Lake Church, Apopka. *Third Sabbath*, Kress Memorial Church, Winter Park. *Fourth Sabbath*, picnic, location/details: Melody West, (407) 292-1421 or mwest@ahss.org. *Fifth Sabbath (if any)*, Deltona Church.

AUGUST

Estate Services Clinics and Seminars.

Aug. 21. Orlando Central. Oct. 2-3. Miami Temple.
Aug. 28-29. Pine Hills in Orlando. Oct. 9. Boynton Beach.
Sept. 11. Bethel L'Église Haitienne Oct. 16-17. Florida Hospital
(Bethel French) in Orlando. in Orlando.

Florida Adventist Book Center—Winter Park: (800) 765-6955.

Miami: (305) 805-9900. High Springs: (386) 454-7956. Shop online: <http://www.floridaconference.com/abc/> or order by e-mail: FloridaABC@southernunion.com.

Florida Adventist Bookmobile Schedule.

Maps to churches: <http://www.floridaconference.com/churchmaps/>

Aug. 21: Jacksonville Southpoint. Aug. 22: Jacksonville First, Orange Cove, St. Augustine, Palatka, New Smyrna Beach. Aug. 28: Port Charlotte.
Aug. 29: North Port, Venice-Nokomis, Sarasota, Palmetto, Brandon, Tampa First.
Sept. 11: Pine Lake Retreat, Children's Ministries Workshop. Sept. 18: North Miami. Sept. 19: Fort Lauderdale, Lauderhill, Pompano Beach. Sept. 25: Naples. Sept. 26: Fort Myers, Fort Myers Shores, Arcadia, Lakeland, Lake View, Winter Haven.
Oct. 9: St. Petersburg. Oct. 10: Clearwater, New Port Richey, Spring Hill, Brooksville, East Pasco in Zephyrhills, Plant City. Oct. 16: West Palm Beach. Oct. 17: Jupiter, Ft. Pierce, Cocoa, Titusville. Oct. 23: Ocala. Oct. 24: Lake City, Tallahassee Church School Festival.
L.I.F.E. Living In Freedom Everyday—Aug. 28. 4 p.m. Mount Dora Church. A women's ministries presentation with keynote speaker Dotie Cauley. Food, prizes, and fellowship. Cost: \$12.50 in advance, \$15 at the door. Sponsorships and corporate tables available. Details: Ruby Suss, (407) 814-9207 or rjsuss@earthlink.net.

Evangelistic Series.

Aug. 28-Sept. 18. West Palm Beach Spanish. Rolando and Rebeca de los Ríos.
Sept. 2-Oct. 9. Riverview. Lester and Zula Pratt.
Oct. 2-Nov. 13. Lake City. Bill and Sunshine Waters.
Oct. 14-Nov. 20. Walker Memorial in Avon Park. Lester and Zula Pratt.
Oct. 23-Nov. 13. Northwest Miami Spanish. Rolando and Rebeca de los Ríos.

SEPTEMBER

Florida Pathfinder Leadership Convention—Sept. 10-12. Camp Kulaqua, High Springs. Details: (407) 644-5000 x127.

Community Services and Prison Ministries Workers' Convention—Sept. 10-12. Camp Kulaqua, High Springs. Details: (407) 644-5000 x127.

Third Annual Jacksonville Adventist Academy Alumni Sabbath—Sept. 25. Worship service by Florida Conference President Mike Cauley, Jacksonville Mandarin Church, 10:45 a.m. Vespers, Jacksonville Adventist Academy, 6:30 p.m. Details: (904) 641-2177 or (904) 268-2433.

OCTOBER

Filipino-American Camp Meeting—Oct. 1-3. Pine Lake Retreat, Groveland. Details: (386) 454-1351.

High School Bible Conference—Oct. 7-10. Camp Kulaqua, High Springs. Details: (407) 644-5000 x129.

Second Annual Jacksonville Adventist Academy Golf Fundraiser—Oct. 10. Golf Club at South Hampton, St. Augustine. Sign in: 12 p.m. Benefits student scholarships and classroom technology. Details: (904) 641-2177 or (904) 268-2433.

—Lee Bennett

CONCERT BENEFITS CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Gale Murphy at the grand piano is synonymous with memorable moments from Florida Camp Meeting and many other places. Her professionalism, warmth, and talent bring a touch of inspiration to any stage she graces.

Earlier this year, she brought these same talents to the Jacksonville Mandarin Church in

a benefit concert for Jacksonville Adventist Academy (JAA). The success of the concert was measured by the reception received from those who attended and the \$4,300 raised for Christian education. The funds came in through offerings, print ads on concert playbills, and commitments towards educational programs and scholarships.

Murphy most recently taught at Forest Lake Academy in Apopka. One of her former students, Empress Selassie, a 2004 graduate, also performed at the Jacksonville concert.

Murphy continues serving the Lord with a full-time composing and music ministry.

Booking information: (407) 523-2132.

—David Gardner



WALTER MAIER

Gale Murphy performs at Florida Conference Camp Meeting. This October, she will be featured at the North New South Wales Conference Camp Meeting at Avondale College in Cooranbong, NSW, Australia.

FAMILY REUNION SERIES FEATURES FLORIDA MUSICIANS

The Promise, a new release in the Family Reunion Concert series from Adventist Media Productions, was taped at a Voice of Prophecy benefit program where more than \$60,000 in offerings was raised.

The release features Florida musicians Gale Murphy,¹ Moses Brown,² Larry Ford,³ Zory Hall,⁴ Roy Pauley,⁵ and Neville Peter.⁶

Other songs were taped at the benefit program for an earlier release, *Spirit of Freedom*. This video features

Florida artists Ron Drachenberg and Leslie Hartzog,⁷ Charles Haugabrooks,⁸ Jennifer LaMountain,⁹ and Rudy Micelli.¹⁰

The program was held at the Calvary Assembly Church in Orlando and sponsored, in part, by Adventist Health System as the concluding event of their 13th annual Conference on Mission.

For Family Reunion Concert products, call (877) 467-2662, visit familyreunionmusic.com, or contact an Adventist Book Center.

—Martin Butler



ADVENTIST MEDIA PRODUCTIONS

WALTER MAIER

PHOTOS: LEE BENNETT



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