



The Florida Herald



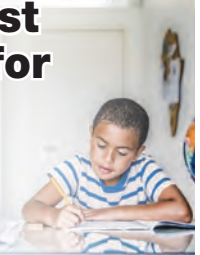
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The Local Newspaper from Florida's Friendliest Small Town

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Dollar General opens new branch in Havana

By Ashley Hunter
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As of December 20, a new Dollar General store has opened just outside of Havana.

Located on the corner of Shady Rest Road and Highway 27, the new Dollar General store will be the third to serve the Havana area.

This new store will provide the same household items, such as food, cleaning supplies, paper products, over-the-counter medicines, health and hygiene items, and baby goods, that other Dollar General stores offer to shoppers.

In addition, shoppers

to the Shady Rest Dollar General will find an extended selection of party-supplies.

The store will also be rolling out a new selection that is being offered by Dollar General stores around the country: fresh produce.

According to the store, the new branch will provide an assortment of fresh fruit and vegetables, including lettuce, tomatoes, onions, apples, strawberries, potatoes, sweet potatoes, lemons, limes, salad mixes, and more.

"At Dollar General, we believe the addition of each new store provides positive economic growth for the communities we proudly



Photo By Ashley Hunter

A new Dollar General branch has opened in Havana, making this the third to service the Havana area.

serve, and the addition of our new Havana store highlights our commitment to deliver a

pleasant shopping experience that includes great prices on quality products in a

convenient location," said Dan Nieser, Dollar General's senior vice president of real estate and store development. "We look forward to welcoming customers to our new store and hope they will enjoy shopping at our new location."

To celebrate the opening of the Dollar General's new location, the store plans to donate 100 new books to a nearby school.

Leadership staff within Dollar General say that with the opening of the new store, they plan to create jobs in the Havana community; the store is expected to employ 6-10 people.

Each employee will be presented with competitive wages, training and development opportunities, health insurance coverage options, savings and retirement plans, tuition reimbursement, paid parental leave, and adoption assistance to eligible employees.

As of Tuesday, January 4, the store still had four openings for employment: two lead sales associates (one part time and one full time), a store manager position, and a sales associate.

Visit careerarc.com/job-map/dollar-general-corporation to view the open job postings.

"Another successful year" for Havana Police Department toy drive

By Ashley Hunter
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For over 20 years, the officers with the Havana Police Department have made it their December mission to make sure no Havana child wakes up on Christmas morning to no presents under the tree.

And according to Havana Chief of Police Tracy Smith, the 2021 Christmas morning did not disappoint.

Throughout the month of December, the police department joins partnerships with various businesses, individuals, and community organizations that collect toys and other goods for distribution on Christmas.

This year, Chief Smith says the toy-drive and donations went "real well."

Because of the ready involvement from citizens around the community, Chief Smith says the Havana Police Department was able to provide a toy-filled Christmas morning to 68 kids from Gadsden County.

While that is less kids than the department has seen in previous years - not something that Chief Smith takes as a negative - that did mean that the department was able to provide toys and items to everyone who came to them for Christmas assistance.

"Some years we have 100 kids, and some years we have 75 kids. It just varies year-to-year," said Smith. "We took care of everyone - we didn't turn anyone away."

While the main focus of the Havana Police Department is to ensure that they help residents of Havana, Chief Smith says that the department regularly helps people from around Gadsden County and tries to not turn anyone away.

Because the funding and donations were so generous this year, everyone got a slice of Christmas cheer without fear of running low in the donations pool.

"We are very fortunate that the donations came in like they did," Smith adds.

"We had people throughout the month of December dropping off items that they wanted to donate," said Smith.

The new, unopened toys that were donated by members of the community serve as 'extras' for the Havana Police Department's Christmas program - the donated toys are an addition to the personal toy-purchases that the department makes for each child.

For that, Chief Smith says the department raised over \$10,000, meaning the department was able to budget roughly \$150 to spend on toys, electronics, clothing, and more on each child.

Then, after shopping for the child, the officers

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The Star arrives at Elephant Refuge North America

Tarra the elephant is reunited with longtime trainer and owner, Carol Buckley



Photo Courtesy of Suzanne Carr

Carol Buckley, with Elephant Refuge North Florida (located in Attapulgus) is pictured with Tarra - the elephant who Buckley began training as a teenager and who launched Buckley's passion for elephant wellbeing.

By Stephen Klein
Gadsden County News Service

Attapulgus is a small town in southern Georgia, close to the Florida border; it is also home to two Asian elephants, Bo and Tarra.

Tarra, an 8-foot tall, 9,700-pound specimen born in Myanmar, is the newest addition to a sanctuary, which is designed to hold up to 10 of these impressive animals.

She also has a special history with the founder and operator of the refuge, Carol Buckley, who first met Tarra, then called "Fluffy" because she was small and hairy, in Buckley's home town in Southern California.

It was 1974. Buckley was 20 years old and attending a school for aspiring animal trainers; currently, the focus of such schooling is on zookeeping, but at that time, students of the school were taught to train exotic animals for performance in venues like circuses and travelling animal shows.

Before meeting Tarra ("Fluffy"), Buckley was not really sure what kind of animals she wanted to work with - she would soon find out.

During her first year at the school, Buckley saw "Fluffy" being led down a road.

The baby elephant belonged to a local businessman in the

area, who had a love for exotic animals.

Buckley soon began working with the young elephant, first as a caregiver and trainer, and eventually as her owner.

For nearly two decades, the two were an international act; Buckley's innovative training method, involving positive reinforcement, was a first in the world of performing elephants.

Traditional methods of training often involve domination of the handler over the animal, and painful punishment for 'bad' behavior.

Although the elephant was originally named "Fluffy", Buckley chose to rename her "Tarra" (pronounced TAH-ra) for its regal sound, and was later surprised to find that there is an east Asian goddess named "Tara," who is half-human and half-elephant, and whose name (pronounced the same) translates to "star" in English.

The name seems fitting, considering the groundbreaking work the two have accomplished.

"She is the elephant that is responsible for an entire shift in the thinking of how we keep captive elephants. She is the reason we have elephant sanctuaries," says Buckley.

The story of Buckley's relationship with Tarra does

indeed show a pattern of evolution.

"We performed in circuses for about eight years, and then we started contracting with zoos, doing rides and educational programs for another 10 years."

At first, Tara enjoyed performing in the circus.

As she grew older, she showed less enthusiasm, so the pair moved on to working with a number of zoos.

This proved unsatisfactory as well.

"We moved around from zoo to zoo," says Buckley. "I was like, 'whoa! What a life! You're just in a cage all day. It was really mind numbing.'"

Buckley adds that elephants, like humans, are intelligent and social animals, and being confined to a small habitat and a dull routine did not seem to be right for Tarra. "I wanted her to thrive."

The solution she arrived at was to purchase land and create a place for Tarra and other elephants to live in an environment where they can roam freely, well insulated from the stress and disruption that can come with a constant stream of human visitors.

The first such sanctuary was The Elephant Sanctuary, co-founded by Buckley in 1995 in Hohenwald, Tennessee.

It was during this time that Buckley and Tarra endured a painful 11-year separation

due to a legal dispute with the board of directors which administered the Tennessee refuge.

Eventually, though, the courts ruled in Buckley's favor and the two were reunited.

Tarra would be coming home to Buckley's new, larger sanctuary and returning to the care of her longtime partner and friend.

The retired elephants live on 850 acres just south of Attapulgus called Elephant Refuge North America. It has a climate and terrain well suited for the animals, as well as facilities for veterinary and hospice care.

Elephant Refuge North America is operated by Elephant Aid International, a non-profit organization founded by Buckley. All funding comes from donations.

Buckley is clear: this is not a zoo, and it is not open to the public.

However, anyone can view the elephants in real time via the organization's website elephantaidinternational.org day or night.

On the website, viewers can also find a wealth of information about the organization and its projects and goals, along with plenty of facts about elephants.

Ultimately, the focus of Elephant Refuge North America is on the elephants, and allowing them to be what they are, instead of performing for the entertainment of an audience. It is, essentially, a quiet, well-equipped and compassionate retirement community for elephants who have spent their lives entertaining humans.

Not everyone has the good fortune to spend a lifetime doing work they are truly passionate about, or possesses the drive to constantly agitate for a cause over a lifetime.

When asked what keeps her motivated day in and day out, Buckley's answer is both simple and sincere:

"Elephants," she says. "They are highly intelligent, very evolved...I've been with them 47 years. I still love to spend all day with them. They're amazing."

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