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**SCORE of Citrus County accepts Levy County as a service area;
Williston Chamber mixer offers networking opportunities**

Jim Green, chapter chair of SCORE of Citrus County, stands below a banner that helps promote the organization.

**Story and Photos
By Jeff M. Hardison
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at 11:08 a.m.**

WILLISTON -- SCORE of Citrus County sponsored the Williston Chamber of Commerce mixer Thursday evening (Aug. 16) in conjunction with Dr.

Kenneth Schwiebert and Heidi Schwiebert of Two Hawk Hammock.



Among the many members and guests at the event are (from left) Williston Chamber President Marc Pompeo of Harriett Downs Real Estate, Williston Chamber Vice

President Kimberly McLane of Gamma Communications Solutions, Williston Mayor Jerry Robinson and Joel Maxson of Harriett Downs Real Estate. Standing in front of the group is Nicky, a 4-year-old male standard poodle. Nicky was raised by McLane since he was born. He is a very-accomplished dog with an impressive pedigree, and his official name is longer than just Nicky. He is also a service dog. There was a relatively large cat in the pole barn-stable during the event, and while the two animals looked at each other, both pets exhibited model behavior. There was not one bark or hiss to be heard. A good time was had by all.



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Hors d'oeuvres were plentiful during the Williston Chamber mixer. There was free beer available as well.

Two Hawk Hammock is a retreat home rental property at 17950 N.E. 53rd Lane, Williston.

The property includes an adjacent pasture for visitors who are traveling with a horse. It is pet-friendly with a fenced yard. The property is near to Devil's Den Spring for scuba divers and snorkelers, and it is within walking distance of Cedar Lakes Woods and (botanical) Gardens.

As for the Chamber mixer, there were plenty of hors d'oeuvres, including shrimp, a couple of different kinds of meatballs, various breads and sauces. Cone Distributing of Ocala provided the beer via SCORE of Citrus County. Other available drinks at the mixer included tea and lemonade.

Heidi Schwiebert's homemade soaps were in a basket and open for the free taking by members and guests. The main gathering was in a huge outdoor pole barn-stable. Horses, a cat and several other types of animals were in or near the barn or stable.

Members and guests all enjoyed an opportunity to share information with each other in regard to what their businesses provide.

During Thomas L. Griffin's speech about Bird Dog Boats, there was a donkey, mule, burro or some animal of that ilk that

made some loud calls, as if it was music playing off an actor to leave the stage at the Oscars, because the actor's time was up. Everyone enjoyed the humorous timing, because coincidentally, that animal's call wrapped up Griffin's description of what his group does for people.

Griffin is the director of the non-profit group – Bird Dog Boats – that is dedicated to the charitable cause of helping people with disabilities, so that they may enjoy outdoor water sports like boating, fishing, kayaking, swimming and the like.

Griffin notes that he is appreciative of the following people who made this program possible: Capt. Bobby Witt of Scale Key Clam, in Cedar Key; Robert and Rick Coarsey of Coarsey Fiberglass, in Chiefland; Troy Wilson of Marine Metals, in Williston; and David Jones of the Florida Disabled Outdoors Association, in Tallahassee.

Among the free door prizes that were randomly selected for winners were two tickets to Two Tails Ranch - All About Elephants for its 7th Annual Elephant Appreciation Day & Fundraiser.

This two-day event is scheduled for Sept. 22 and 23 from 11 a.m. until 5 p.m. Gate admission is \$10 per person. Children 2 years and younger are admitted for free. Two Tails Ranch is located at 18655 N.E. 81st St., Williston

Patricia Zerbini, owner of Two Tails Ranch, said this educational facility teaches people about elephants. She let Chamber participants know the ranch draws thousands of people to Williston each year.

In addition to Zerbina, who is the owner of All About Elephants as well as being a past president of the Williston Chamber of Commerce, other members at the mixer included representatives from Al's

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TV Antenna and Satellite; Capital City Bank; Citrus County SCORE; the City of Williston; Custom Sage; Devil's Den Spring; Gamma Communication Solutions; *HardisonInk.com*; Harriett Downs Real Estate; Regional General Hospital of Williston; Sharon C. Brannan, CPA; *Williston Pioneer*; and others.

Jim Green, chapter chair of SCORE of Citrus County, shared information about this organization with the group.

Katherine Regan and Chuck Kircoaf, two of the other six SCORE certified mentors at the event, also shared their insight about the group that, when it was founded in 1964, had the acronym SCORE – derived from Service Corps of Retired Executives.

The latest motto or slogan for SCORE is “For the Life of Your Business – Your No Cost Business Partner.”

The SCORE Association is supported by the United States Small Business Administration (SBA). The SBA is a federal government agency that provides support to entrepreneurs and small businesses.

SCORE is a nonprofit association of thousands of volunteer business counselors throughout the United States and its territories.

SCORE members are trained to serve as counselors, advisors and mentors to aspiring entrepreneurs and existing business owners.

SCORE of Citrus County has an office at the College of Central Florida Citrus Campus in Lecanto and now has one at the CF Jack Wilkinson Campus in Levy County, just south of the city of Fanning Springs, Green said.

Green said SCORE of Citrus County received a one-time grant to incorporate Levy County into its service area. Formerly SCORE of Gainesville was the service-provider for Levy County, Green said.

Green said he hopes to recruit another three or four people in Levy County who will become certified mentors to help business interests in Levy County. The training takes 18 to 20 hours online, Green said.

Once a SCORE mentor is certified, he or she can create a plan to donate hours to help business interests. Green said this is a very flexible volunteer position, where the mentor and the business owner work when they can schedule their activities together.

For instance, Green said, a mentor may want to play golf in the morning and assist a client in the afternoon or evening.

SCORE is connected with the SBA and it is working with the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Development program as well.

Katherine Regan, a SCORE mentor for four years now, said she helps encourage people who plan to start a business. She gives them guidance and helps them with their business plan. One woman, she said, had a vision to start a daycare venture.

After looking at the plan and the market, however, that person chose against starting the enterprise. Regan said the woman was very thankful to her for helping her understand business concepts showing how this venture probably would have resulted in an outcome other than the one she desired.

Chuck Kircoaf, an eight-year veteran SCORE mentor who specializes in restaurants, said he meets with clients to help them with their business plans. This includes reviewing the finances and legal obstacles in business.

Inventory control and flow are among the aspects of a business plan that can be reviewed.

For an existing business, Kircoaf said, he can help them consider obtaining a bridge loan. This is short-term financing that the SBA can assist a business in locating. Kircoaf said there are some attractive packages for relatively low interest rates.

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Therefore, if a business owner saw reasons to want to increase his or her inventory and they needed a loan to go forward with this expansion, a certified SCORE mentor could help counsel that owner to lead the person toward the best resources to obtain that loan.

SCORE is aiming toward assisting rural and agricultural business owners, too, Kircoaf said

For instance, the USDA, Kircoaf said, is providing \$12 billion to American farmers and ranchers affected nationwide by trade wars and tariffs that recently came into existence. SCORE and the SBA can help agricultural interests interested in learning more about these options, Kircoaf said.

Beyond this assistance, SCORE mentors can help farmers and ranchers with other aspects of their business plans.

Anyone interested in becoming a SCORE mentor in Levy County is asked to contact Jim Green at jim.green@scorevolunteer.org or jgreenbrs@msn.com, or call him at the office at 352-249-1236 or on his cell phone at 352-464-7971.

As for the Williston Chamber of Commerce mixer, people appeared to enjoy the food and fellowship as they socially networked with other Chamber members and guests.

The 2018 officers of the Williston Chamber of Commerce are President Marc Pompeo, Vice President Kimberly McLane, Secretary Lon Sullivan and Treasurer Paul Jones.