

Holli Herndon Story:

I moved to Citrus County when I was 7. My family came from Massachusetts. My dad was in door-to-door sales up there and moved down here to work in banking and then went to school to become a barber. He bought Tom's Barber Styling in Inverness which is where I spent my afternoons and school breaks. I was responsible for tracking the haircuts in the old school long green spreadsheet book in which you needed a tiny pencil to write in the boxes. I learned so much about running a business and the sense of community there.

I was a Lecanto Pather in the 1st grade -12th graduating from Lecanto High School and graduating from the Academy of Environmental Science in Crystal River. I am honored to be their first graduate, starting in 1999 in their sophomore program with only me and a teacher, and completing the program in 2002. The experience at AES took me deep into how fragile our ecosystems are here and what an incredible place we live in.

At 17 I was working at Publix as a cashier. My bagger, now my husband asked me out for lunch. I said no politely. He waited a few days and asked again. I responded, "no thank you again. A week later he asked me if I ate? I replied, "yes". He then said, "Why not let me buy you a free lunch. That sounded fair. We ate at Subway and have been together ever since. Our dates were spent at picnics at Potts preserve, boating the river, swimming at big blue and walking the trails in Crystal River.

At 17 my husband was digging ditches for a local plumbing company. His employer said, "Would you like to earn more money by learning plumbing, he jumped at the opportunity. The school set up was not for my husband. He is brilliant mechanically but does not fit the mold of sitting in a seat getting lectured day in and out. He left school right before 10th grade. He was told he wouldn't amount to anything without having a high school diploma. That same boy, now a man, passed his master's exam for the state of Florida in plumbing and business, owns his own businesses and employs 20 locals who can work to feed their families.

I am a thinker by nature, processes, problem solving, creator and builder of processes, systems and ideas. I found my gift in being able to bring people together for the greater good in my college years. I stayed local for my associates degree as we were expecting our first child. Finished my bachelor's while expecting our second child. My husband and I struggled as a young family, but this community, our neighbors were always there in different ways to support in all different ways. I started a local group called Moms Helping Hands in 2004 after my first child where local moms would share items with each other as

our own kids grew out of them. Rockers, swings, clothes, toys, etc. It built a network for moms to have a place to be vulnerable and to gain support.

I started working for the school district in 2008 at Lecanto Primary which was a big moment for me because it was my first school. I have worked in classrooms, moved into coaching teachers and working on site specific data analysis and program planning, then into being a behavior specialist at CREST with a minor in curriculum design for special needs students, then onto the district office in career and technical education and finally landing in program design for the district. Building community partnerships, contracts, data analysis, long range planning and design of district programs and new teacher training filled my year.

I have had a deep seeded passion for helping young people find their passions and harness work ethic and pride in creating something through hard work. I started traveling nationwide teaching at conferences about creating community partners to enhance student achievement based on a 6-year project I did with the district. My husband and I knew we needed to fill a gap in the community without home ec or wood shop in schools anymore, students were missing vital learning opportunities. We piloted Peer Leaders in Engineering, and last year became an official nonprofit. We stand with over 100 kids on the waitlist for programming that includes changing tires and jumping batteries, woodworking, metal working, welding, machining, culinary, life skills and small engines. It is community driven by volunteer interests and funded by local organizations, so no child is left out financially. (www.peerleaderscitrus.com)

Now, to be honest, I was not looking for politics. I work hard, as does my husband and my kids, we pay our taxes, and do right in the world and assumed our elected officials were as well. Then we started to feel it. After a conversation about how good citizens don't run for office and we keep recycling the same people and an ask from a former student's parent, I started looking into the commission position. Running for office is something you don't take lightly. The decisions made affect people's lives.

The further into research on voting records, systems, processes or lack thereof, questionable outcomes, and an imbalance I knew, I needed to run to give our county a chance to right this. Over the last 4 months I have met more people than I have in my 35 years here and what I know to be true, our residents love Citrus and want nothing more than a good quality of life. I realized that the skills needed to put the train back on the tracks and start pivoting us for today, tomorrow and the future were skills and experiences I possessed. As the campaign has gone on and I have met so many more people, I now realize this isn't about a race anymore, it is about survivability of our resources, the environment, our financial future and quality of life. This election is pivotal for our future.

Creating the right team of three this round and two more I two years leaves the voters with the opportunity to change history and build a board, by the people, for the people.

A stranger brought up to me, “I mean no disrespect, but you are plain. Unnoticed really in a room, quiet, and overlooked, but when you speak, the world stops and people are drawn to you like a moth to a flame. Holli you are exactly what we need, right now without question.”