

MS. WHEELCHAIR FLORIDA, INC.

Inspire

ADVOCATE. COLLABORATE. INITIATE.

PRESENTED BY: Celebrity  Cruises &  ROYAL
CARIBBEAN

*52nd Annual
Black Tie Gala*

March 22, 2025
Embassy Suites by Hilton





AUTISM FRIENDLY

THIS IS AN AUTISM FRIENDLY FAMILY ADVENTURE

Voted Best Cruise Line Overall by Travel Weekly for 20 consecutive years, Royal Caribbean® offers industry-leading programs for families living with autism and other developmental disabilities.

DISCOVER OUR RANGE OF AUTISM FRIENDLY AMENITIES ONBOARD:

- Enjoy complimentary television programming from The Autism Channel only on Royal Caribbean. Exclusive content includes entertainment and resources designed to enrich the lives of people with autism spectrum disorders
- Family movies shown in a low-lit, low-volume, sensory friendly environment
- Toy lending bags with autism friendly toys
- Youth staff tour, consultation, and activities to accommodate the child's specific needs
- A "social story" available online before cruising, helps parents explain the cruise experience

CURRENT FEATURES:

- Priority check-in, boarding and departure
- Special dietary accommodations, including gluten-free options
- Adventure Ocean® Youth Program flexible grouping for children 3 to 11 years old
- Adventure Ocean® toilet-trained policy exception

Ask your travel agent about Autism Friendly cruising
Visit [www. RoyalCaribbean.com/AutismFriendly](http://www.RoyalCaribbean.com/AutismFriendly)

CONTACT YOUR TRAVEL ADVISOR TO RESERVE YOUR VACATION TODAY!



2 Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc.

Tonight's Program

Welcome

Color Guard

National Anthem

Invocation

Occasion

Introduction of Contestants

Introduction of Dignitaries

Introduction of Judges

Platform Speeches

Keynote Speaker: Dana Mathewson, 3X US paralympic tennis player, top-ranked American
wheelchair tennis player, First American woman to win a grand slam title

Intermission & Silent Auction

Contestants' On Stage Questions

State Coordinator Remarks & Recognition of Sponsors

Farewell from Ms. Wheelchair Florida 2022

Ms. Congeniality Award

People's Choice Award

Influencer Award

Crowning of Ms. Wheelchair Florida 2025

Mistress of Ceremony



Lauren Rozyla-Wong is a public relations professional and Emmy award-winning television journalist with more than a decade of experience in media and strategic communications. As the media relations manager for AdventHealth West Florida, she oversees public relations efforts for a network of 14 hospitals, helping to shape impactful health care stories across the region. Before transitioning into public relations, Lauren spent years as a dedicated television reporter, most recently at ABC Action News in Tampa, delivering news coverage that earned her industry recognition.

Beyond her career, Lauren is deeply committed to serving the Tampa Bay community. She is an active member of the Junior League of Tampa, where she focuses on initiatives supporting children in foster care, advocating for adoption and addressing diaper need in Hillsborough County. A proud mom of three, Lauren treasures time with her family and her husband, Barry. She is passionate about storytelling, service and making a meaningful difference in the lives of others. Connect with Lauren on social media at @laurenrozya.



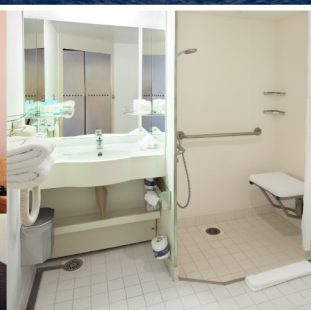
Congratulations LeQuina. We love you !
Love mom, and Jericka

ACCESSIBLE CRUISING AN UNRIVALED CRUISE VACATION

Celebrity **X** Cruises®



**2020 GOLD AWARD
SPECIAL NEEDS**
Special Access Program
Travel Weekly's Magellan Awards



ACCESSIBILITY ONBOARD*

Celebrity Cruises® believes the best vacations come without boundaries. We're committed to providing the most accessible cruise vacation experience to our guests with disabilities. That's why we strive to meet the needs of every guest, by outfitting our fleet of award-winning ships with a wide variety of features designed to give access to our guests*, including guests who have:

- Mobility disabilities
- Hearing disabilities
- Visual disabilities
- Autism, developmental and intellectual disabilities
- Other disabilities, including people of short stature

Every year, thousands of guests with disabilities sail on Celebrity Cruises.

*Available only on Millennium Series, Solstice Series, and Edge Series Ships. Excludes Galapagos ships.

2

MOBILITY DISABILITIES*

Feel right at home on our spacious ships. These features and services ensure guests with mobility disabilities can cruise with ease.

GETTING AROUND THE SHIP*

- Wider corridors that accommodate wheelchairs
- Automatic doors available only on Celebrity Solstice® and Celebrity Edge® series ships.
- Gradual inclines into public rooms
- Elevators and ramps

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

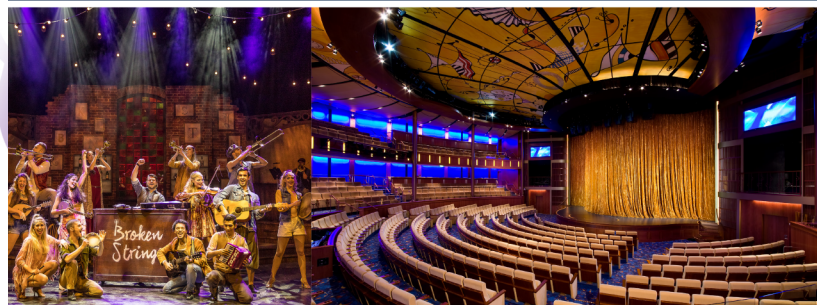
- Lifts for one pool and one whirlpool per ship, throughout the fleet
- Lowered playing tables and slot machines in the casino
- Accessible Guest Relations desk with lowered counter
- Accessible public restrooms

ACCESSIBLE STATEROOM FEATURES*

- Stateroom and bathroom door width: at least 32 inches
- Lowered closet rods and safes
- Lowered sink and vanity
- Ramped bathroom doorway thresholds
- Roll-in showers with grab bars
- Fold-down shower seat and hand-held shower head
- Raised toilet seats—between 17 and 19 inches high
- Five-foot turning radius in sleeping, sitting, and bathroom areas for easy maneuverability
- Accessible verandas*
- Most located near elevators

*Available only on Millennium Series, Solstice Series, and Edge Series Ships. Excludes Galapagos ships. *Please know we are not able to provide personal assistance to guests with eating, dressing, toileting, etc., and therefore, guests requiring assistance with these functions should consider these needs when making a booking. If you have any questions, please contact our Access Department at special_needs@celebrity.com

3



HEARING DISABILITIES*

Don't miss a minute of the action. Our deaf and hard of hearing guests can enjoy an immersive cruise experience and peace of mind, thanks to features like visual alerts, sign language interpreters, and captions.

ACCOMMODATING HEARING DISABILITIES

- Portable hearing room kits that provide visual and tactile alerts for door knocking, telephone ringing, alarm clocks, and smoke detector**
- TTY (teletypewriter) that interfaces with Guest Relations desk TTY to meet all in-stateroom needs**
- Assistive listening system (ALS) available in:
 - Main theater on all ships
 - Celebrity Central on Solstice® Series ships
 - The Club on Edge® Series ships
- Sign language interpreters* (available on a shared basis to guests who utilize American Sign Language as their primary means of communication)
- Closed-captioned televisions in all staterooms fleet-wide. Closed captioning provided on select programs

*Available only on Millennium Series, Solstice Series, and Edge Series Ships. Excludes Galapagos ships.
**Notify us at least 30 days prior to sailing.
***Notify us at least 60 days prior to sailing in order to ensure interpreter services. Requests are subject to availability of interpreters. Sign language interpreting services are provided on cruises that depart from and return to the U.S. and Canada.

4

VISUAL DISABILITIES*

For guests with visual disabilities, Celebrity Cruises has worked to incorporate braille wherever possible, including but not limited to: staterooms, staircase handrails, and public areas. Additionally, our crew and staff are on hand to assist by reading menus and signage or any other way we can make our guests' cruise vacation experience even more exceptional.

ACCOMMODATING VISUAL DISABILITIES

- Service dogs welcome on board – a 4 x 4 foot relief area** with cypress mulch will be provided
- Braille/tactile signage
- Braille/tactile elevator buttons and audio call signs
- Braille deck numbers on staircase handrails
- Menus and Celebrity Today available in large-print**
- Qualified readers
- Orientation tours



5

Celebrity **X** Cruises® 4 Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc.

Sponsors

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

PRESENTED BY SPONSORS

Celebrity **X** Cruises



PLATINUM SPONSORS

THE
WAY
FORWARD

FORMERLY THE WOODY FOUNDATION

5 Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc.

SILVER SPONSORS



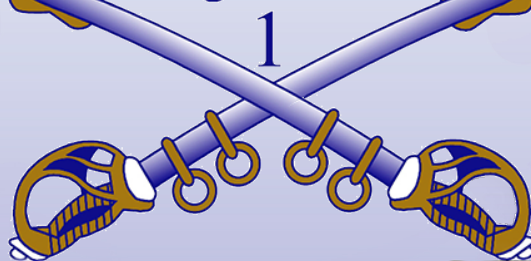
Julie Weintraub's
Hands Across the Bay

"A Helping Hand for a Better Tomorrow"



REMOVING
THE BARRIERS

*1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry
Regiment*



Letter from Ms. Wheelchair Florida 2022



To all contestants, families, and loved ones watching, sincerest welcomes to Ms. Wheelchair Florida 2025. I want to wish each beautiful contestant luck as you compete today. Being selected to compete in this competition is an honor and a testament to the unwavering commitment and passion each of you have for your platforms. Celebrate yourself and your loved ones for their support in getting you here, you deserve it.

The year that I competed, I had no idea that I would take the title. I thought my platform was not strong enough, and that the benefits it presents to the disabled community were not far reaching enough. But I believed in my mission, and it radiated out with every word, thought, and action, and that was enough to take me to the top. Self-belief will carry you higher than you ever thought possible.

My experience as Ms. Wheelchair Florida helped me become a stronger, more confident woman. I came into the competition without knowing a single soul, and left with lasting bonds and new friends. My platform focuses on equine assisted therapy and the benefits it provides to those with disabilities. During my reign I gave talks, wrote articles, and spoke one on one with anyone who would listen. I'll never forget when one of my fellow contestants turned friends sent me a picture of them astride a horse. They told me they would never have tried it if not for meeting me. It was a sweet reminder of why my platform matters.

I know all of you came here to win. Why should you desire anything less? However, the crown and sash are not everything. Your platform and everything you worked for do not disappear if you do not win. You are so much more than the title. Please remember that. You will always be part of this family. Carry yourselves proudly no matter what happens. You are strong, talented, courageous, and so many wonderful things that will persist title or not. Advocacy is a lifelong endeavor.

Welcome from the State Coordinator



Welcome to Ms. Wheelchair Florida 2025! Formerly Ms. Wheelchair Florida 2008, I now have the honor of being the state coordinator for Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc. Ms. Wheelchair Florida is an opportunity for women who use wheelchairs to successfully educate and advocate for the 64 million Americans living with disabilities. These women will have the opportunity to showcase and highlight their inner strengths and accomplishments. I have adopted the hunger, vision and dedication to serve those in need; encouraging them to overcome the discrimination and isolation which results from lack of knowledge and injustice. One of my major life focuses is to serve as an encouraging example to show that in spite of hardships and setbacks, one can overcome, be successful, have aspirations and live life to its fullest. My life motto is "Each One, Teach One."

It is my vision that this organization continues to serve as a platform for women in all 67 counties in Florida while advocating for the 64 million Americans who are living with disabilities. Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc, strives to bring awareness for all people with disabilities by promoting independence and improving the communities where they live, work and play. Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc. endeavors to be a voice for those who otherwise may not effectively articulate their needs and concerns when it comes to issues in the community that have a daily impact such as transportation, housing, employment and education.

I want to thank the beautiful contestants for taking the first step on this amazing journey, a journey of self-discovery. I want to thank the Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc. committee, family, friends, and community partners for assisting me and working diligently to ensure that the Ms. Wheelchair Florida Empowerment Conference and Gala is a success.

I leave you with this message. I am a wheelchair user and I am ENABLED and EMPOWERED. I am enabled because of a positive attitude, support from family, and most importantly, my perseverance. You, too, are enabled and you'll become more EMPOWERED.

My life was not destroyed; therefore, it is my personal responsibility to help others realize their inner strength and purpose so that they too have the opportunity to Live, Laugh and Love.

Our Mission

The mission of Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc. is to provide an opportunity for women of achievement who utilize wheelchairs to successfully educate and advocate for all individuals with disabilities.

Keynote Speaker



DANA MATHEWSON, PLY

**3x Paralympian, Wimbledon
Champion, Former Professional
Wheelchair Tennis Player,
Motivational Speaker**

Dana Mathewson is a trailblazer in U.S. wheelchair tennis, recognized as one of the sport's most prominent figures. A three-time Paralympian and the top-ranked American woman, Dana made history in 2022 as the first American woman to win a Grand Slam title with her doubles victory at Wimbledon. Over her illustrious career, Dana secured 16 singles titles and 32 doubles titles. At the 2023 Para Pan American Games in Santiago, Chile, she captured gold medals in both singles and doubles and was honored by her Team USA teammates as a flag bearer. In 2024, she broke new ground again as the first American to compete at the Miami Open Wheelchair Tennis Championship.

Born in San Diego, California, Dana's journey in adaptive sports began after she contracted transverse myelitis, a rare autoimmune disease, at the age of ten. She was introduced to wheelchair tennis at thirteen, which sparked her lifelong passion for the sport. Dana now resides in Orlando, Florida, where she is connected to the USTA National Campus.

In December 2023, Dana married Dristin Hughes, a medical resident, and the couple are proud dog parents to Riley and Beau. Before retiring in October 2024, she qualified for the prestigious NEC Singles Masters, finishing her professional career with a career-high international singles ranking of #7. Beyond her achievements on the court, Dana is dedicated to advancing wheelchair tennis, mentoring future athletes, and organizing clinics to grow the sport. She also collaborates with brands to promote adaptive fashion, leveraging her platform to create meaningful change.

Dana's remarkable career and advocacy efforts have been supported by sponsors such as Adidas Tennis, Deloitte, Wilson Tennis, The Hartford, Dobel Maestro, and RGK Wheelchairs. Her legacy is defined by her excellence, resilience, and commitment to expanding opportunities for adaptive athletes worldwide.

Dana Mathewson is a trailblazer in U.S. wheelchair tennis, recognized as one of the sport's most prominent figures. A three-time Paralympian and the top-ranked American woman, Dana made history in 2022 as the first American woman to win a Grand Slam title with her doubles victory at Wimbledon. Over her illustrious career, Dana secured 16 singles titles and 32 doubles titles. At the 2023 Para Pan American Games in Santiago, Chile, she captured gold medals in both singles and doubles and was honored by her Team USA teammates as a flag bearer. In 2024, she broke new ground again as the first American to compete at the Miami Open Wheelchair Tennis Championship.



CLIENT TESTIMONIAL

"Dana is a phenomenal athlete with a fearless attitude driven by the energy of overcoming uncertainty, while challenging herself to think - and to deliver - outside (even the most unimaginable) of limits! She is a thought-provoking and inspirational speaker, who I've had the opportunity to engage in a variety of ways, and she has a profound manner of communicating her life-changing story through a captivating and authentic approach tailored to her audience...driven by her mantra to "chase butterflies" - her journey (and her dreams) continue to motivate others to endless bounds - she's only just begun!"

- Deborah Golden, Principal, US Cyber & Strategic Risk Leader, Deloitte

Get in Touch with Dana Mathewson

 @dana.mathewson

 www.danamathewson.net

 **Agent: Ish Tanyeri, Dromos**
ish.tanyeri@dromosagency.com

10 Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc.

Contestants



Schuyler Arakawa

Crushed by a boulder in 2016, Schuyler's life was forever changed—but her unstoppable smile, tenacity, and passion for making a difference in the world remain unshaken. Before the accident, Schuyler had already traveled to five of the seven continents, embodying her mission to positively impact the world. She truly lives up to her middle name, Sachi, meaning “happiness” in Japanese, as she continues to radiate joy and resilience in all she does.

As a self-proclaimed “Joy-rior,” Schuyler brings her special sparkle to every challenge, showing that unpredictability and change are no match for her spirit. She is deeply grateful to her family, including her “global family,” whose unwavering support has made her journey possible. With her contagious optimism and drive, Schuyler is determined to keep spreading her light and joy—one smile at a time—around the globe.

Here are the words that I hear the most.... Energetic, hard-working, optimistic, inspiring and “infectiously joyous”.



Cody Bowman

Born & raised in Columbus, Ohio, Cody was diagnosed with Spina Bifida shortly after birth. However, she is the first of three girls and gives thanks to her family who never treated her like she had “special needs” Because of their confidence in her and pushing her to succeed, Cody is the first in her family to graduate college. She received her Associate of Arts in 2014 and her Bachelors of Arts in Professional & Technical Communications from the University of South Florida in 2023. Her dream career would be in digital marketing. Cody has spoken about living with a disability and sharing about her experiences on social media. She works as a sales associate at TJ Maxx. Cody enjoys traveling and spending time with her two nieces. Cody describes herself as sassy, outgoing, passionate, creative and loyal. Her motto is “Don’t Stop Believin’!”



Sara Canali

Sara lives in Sebring, Florida and graduated from South Florida State College in 2021 with an Associates of Arts degree. In 2024, she also received a graphic design certificate from South Florida State College. Sara is a senior at Belmont University and will be earning a bachelor's degree in the creativity entertainment industry. Sara describes herself as being an advocate, creative, enthusiastic, dependable, and caring. Sara's hobbies include songwriting, playing her guitar, and doing graphic design. Her goal is to make the disability community better in the music business.

The challenges of living with Cerebral Palsy have taught her to never give up. There have been times Sara has had trouble overcoming obstacles, but staying determined has helped her accomplish her goals.

Sara has learned that, regardless of her ability, it is possible to follow her dreams. She believes, “If there is will, there is a way.” Sara's motto is to focus on abilities, not disabilities. She enjoys helping others and connecting with them.



Cheryl Dirienzo

Cheryl is 55 years old and lives in Orlando, Florida. At the age of 5, she was hit by a car. She lost all motor skills and had to learn how to do everything all over again. Cheryl was diagnosed with Dystonia, and, over the years, her left side of the body started to weaken slowly.

Through her advocacy, Cheryl would like to see more ramps built, better accessible transportation and housing for people with disabilities to live independently. She enjoys gardening, cooking, baking, and making people happy. Cheryl describes herself as smart, funny, helpful, crafty, and cheery. Her motto is "Safety first."



Maya Hill-Henderson

Maya is a native of Tampa, Florida and graduated from Chamberlain High School in 1997. Before graduating, Maya was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis at the age of 17. Despite her diagnosis, Maya graduated from Bennett College with honors and a B.S. in Business Management. She has been licensed in the field of insurance for 22 years and is Agent/Owner of Bright Beacon Insurance since 2019.

Maya's disability has turned a simple task into a challenge. She's unable to be spontaneous as she would like to be, and she has to carefully plan things out. Prior to the disability, she was very independent. Now she finds herself having to rely on other people. Despite the challenges, she sees herself as being a leader, driven, hard-worker, giving, and kind. Maya knows the love of God and loves her husband, family, and community.



Natalie Horne

Natalie is a college graduate and has taught and counseled developmentally disabled adults. Her Cerebral Palsy impacts aspects of her life, including the ability to do things and participate in work opportunities, but what she has learned is to never let that defeat her, and, If anything, she has used it as motivation to not let it impact her life in a negative way. Although she has limitations, living life with a purpose is her passion.

She enjoys participating in the "Let's Talk" ladies' group and appreciates speaking to medical students about taking care of people with disabilities. People in her community have seen her riding in her wheelchair and are inspired by her spirit even though she has limitations. Natalie is a writer of poetry, song lyrics and she has written two novels. She likes to spend time with family and friends. Natalie loves plants, art, music, and her fish aquarium. She describes herself as resourceful, courageous, creative, motivated, and determined. Her motto is YAHOO (You Always Have Opportunities and Options).



LeQuina Knox

LeQuina Knox, a native of St. Petersburg, Florida was raised by her mother who encouraged her love for activism and literacy from an early age. Now 32, LeQuina advocates for inclusivity, equality, and empowerment within the disability community. Even though living with Cerebral Palsy has presented her with obstacles she continues to define the odds. She graduated with a Bachelor's in English Literature in Cultural Studies and a Master's in Liberal Arts from the University of South Florida. As a tutor, she has helped students develop strong literacy skills inside and outside the classroom. Through her dedication to improving her community, LeQuina has become an exemplary leader.

She serves as a United Able Account Brand Ambassador and participates in the Partners in Policymaking program. When she is not engaging in advocacy work, you can find her working on her blog BlackGirlRolling where she educates others on the issues within the disability community and encourages people with disabilities along their journey of self-acceptance. LeQuina describes herself as ambitious, capable, thoughtful, resilient, and courageous. Her motto is "Reach for the stars, but then keep on reaching."



Dashley Venezario

Dashley, who is 29 years old and lives in Central Florida, comes from a big Latin American family. She is a bit timid, but once you get to know her, she's a lot of fun. Dashley likes to read romance novels. She loves spending time with her family, friends, and especially her dog, Jack. She would like to improve education options for people with disabilities. Dashley enjoys volunteering at her church and working with youth. Dashley describes herself as kind, honest, family-oriented, sensitive, and thoughtful.

*"The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling,
but in rising every time we fall."*

Nelson Mandela.

Judges



Lendel Bright

Lendel is the City of St. Petersburg Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Diversity Coordinator. He graduated from Florida State University with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. Lendel worked for 20 years with the Pinellas County Sheriff's office and five years with the Pinellas County Urban League. He is the statewide coordinator of the Consortium of Urban League Affiliates in the state of Florida.

He has worked for the City of St. Petersburg for 10 years where he helps the City with ADA Compliance related issues, employee and resident ADA accommodations requests, law enforcement and community relations and oversight of law enforcement, handling citizens' complaints and community outreach. Lendel is certified as a Professional Associate from National Association of ADA Coordinators. He is also a Certified Practitioner of Oversight In Law Enforcement from National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE).



Keegan Julius

Keegan Julius is an autistic activist with a career dedicated to social justice. They have previously campaigned to have racism declared a public health crisis, fundraised for organizations like the ACLU, and worked to protect our environment. Now, Keegan serves as Executive Director of YES! of America United - a non-profit that has served Tampa Bay's disability community for over twenty years! Keegan also serves as Vice President of Fulbrighters with Disabilities and is proud to be a member of the Tampa Bay Watch Leadership Council. In their off time, you can often find Keegan singing everything from Luther Vandross to Edith Piaf, guiding tours at the Tampa Bay Auto Museum, or even doing aerial acrobatics!



Nyasia Long

My name is Nyasia Long. I am a dedicated Registered Behavioral Technician. I am from Clearwater, Florida. I am 23 years old. I currently hold a Bachelor's degree in Psychology. I have a passion for helping others. I enjoy self care, traveling and spending time with friends and family. I am honored to be involved in this organization.

Judges



James H. Vann

James Vann is a dedicated Army veteran and proud graduate of the University of South Florida. His military background instilled in him the values of hard work and integrity. James knows the importance of service, and that's exactly what he brings to the table for both his clients and community.

In 2020, he opened Vann Rainey, LLC, which offers transportation services for the elderly and disabled, and extends support to veterans. He has seen fellow veterans struggling with mental health, finding jobs, and seeking stability along with adults being treated differently because of their lack of ability. James, and his business partner, Michael Jordan, have not only broken barriers that divided communities, but also have built bridges that unite them. After seeing the compassionate level of care shown to his aunt in a group home, James also knew he wanted to make a difference for those who needed help. James believes that by fostering unity, progress can be achieved at an accelerated rate. James and his team have been instrumental in improving the quality of life for countless individuals.



Carla Warren

Warren is a native of Tampa Bay, Florida. Carla graduated from Tampa Bay Technical High School in 2004. Carla is a graduate of Florida A&M University. Carla is a member of Northwest Church of Christ. Carla has worked in the healthcare field for over 20 plus years. Carla is a service waiver provider for the Agency of Persons with Disabilities. Carla is the owner of Bay Area Care Agency. The services provided may include personal care such as hand on assistance with activities of daily living, taking medications, transportation, housekeeping, companionship and supportive living supervision.

"Challenges are what make life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful."
Joshua Marine

Congratulations LeQuina Knox

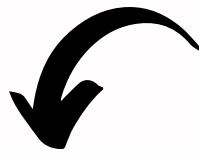
You are an advocate for inclusive youth development
and make a meaningful impact in the community.



Scan the QR Code to view my
new Sight Word Song,
animated books, educational
resources and poems.

Tameka Harris, CEO

Poet
Educator
Motivational Speaker
Author
Educational Rap Artist



@alwaystruthincorporated

www.alwaystruthincorporated.com



**This Schuy Has
No Limits!**
Love, Grandad & Kathy



Sara you have brought us so
much joy watching you grow.
We love you and wish you the
best.

Love,
Grandma and Grandpa



**Congratulations Dashley
from the Family**





Good luck,
Schuyler
“Sachi”
Arakawa!

*Love, Mom and
Mike
(And the Girls)*



**“You is kind,
you is smart,
you is
important”**

Kathryn Stockett

In-kind Donors



Buff City
Soap



THE FLORIDA
AQUARIUM
DOWNTOWN TAMPA

WonderWorks™

MUSEUM
OF FINE ARTS
ST. PETERSBURG



Coca-Cola
BEVERAGES FLORIDA



COOPER'S HAWK™
WINERY & RESTAURANTS

HAND & STONE®
MASSAGE AND FACIAL SPA

Wawa®



MOBILITY TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS
ADAPTIVE EQUIPMENT FOR FREEDOM ON THE ROAD

MIDFLORIDA
Your community credit union



MUSEUM
OF DISCOVERY
& SCIENCE
AUTONATION® IMAX THEATER



YACHT
StarShip
DINING CRUISES





Inspire

ADVOCATE. COLLABORATE. INITIATE.



Be the Change

Are you the next Ms. Wheelchair Florida?

Have a passion for advocacy?

Are you a change agent willing to address the architectural and attitudinal barriers in your community?

Here's what you need to apply:

- Be a US citizen who is 21 years of age or older
- Utilize a wheelchair for 100% of daily community mobility
- Be a resident of Florida for at least the past 6 months - Marital status is not a consideration
- Have not held a title in another state Be willing to raise money and obtain sponsors for the state and national entry fees
- Be willing and able to travel throughout the state - this includes having access to reliable and easily obtained transportation
- Be ready and willing to successfully Advocate. Collaborate. Initiate for all persons with disabilities through various opportunities over the course of the year

For more information or to request an application, please contact State Coordinator, Shari Wilson at swilsonmwfl@gmail.com

Planning Committee and Partners

Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc. thanks the planning committee for their hard work and dedication in making our 52nd Annual Empowerment Conference and Gala a success!

Committee:

Jamie Santillo, JS Creative Concepts & Marketing

Alexander Jackson, Disability Advocate, Creator of “Tuesday Talk with Alex” (disability blog)

Brenda Clarke-Disability Community Partner

Partners:

City of Orlando

1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment

City of St. Petersburg

Z’Leah Liburd

City of Tampa

Decorator:

Richedean Hills-Ackbar

Photography:

Forbes Visuals

Wicked Blades Photography

Partner with us...

Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc. is a 501(c)3 organization in need of your support. Thanks to our generous statewide partners., we are able to further the cause of equality and opportunity for those with disabilities. Our sponsors play such a crucial role in helping us each year to accomplish great things and we are forever grateful. Please help us fulfill our mission and inspire women to advocate, collaborate and initiate change for all people with disabilities in our state. The more awareness we bring, the more change we create. Be a part of this incredible movement and help enable someone to become more independent in their lives, as well as, in their community. We truly appreciate all the support our sponsors, volunteers and friends provide each year. We are implementing other events throughout the year, so connect with us on social media and on our website for updates. We hope you will join us in making a difference in the years to come.

Thank you, and we look forward to hearing from you soon!

Ms. Wheelchair Florida Planning Committee 2025



Unleash
the epic you
Life Skills Deliciously Lived

www.gritmindsetacademy.com

Supporters



CITY OF TAMPA

— OFFICE OF THE MAYOR —

Jane Castor, Mayor

Greetings:

It is a pleasure to welcome all those attending the **Ms. Wheelchair Florida Empowerment Black Tie Gala** on March 21 – March 23, 2025, held at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Tampa USF Near Busch Gardens. Featuring the theme *Inspire – Advocate. Collaborate. Initiate*, this event will provide an opportunity for women who use wheelchairs to successfully educate and advocate for individuals with disabilities, and a message of achievement shared throughout the year.



Ms. Wheelchair Florida, a chapter of Ms. Wheelchair America, was established in 1972, and it serves as a platform for women in all Florida counties. This 52nd annual gala event is an empowering competition designed to further develop the advocacy skills of a unique group of leaders, provide a state-wide network for accomplished women and invite everyone to a greater awareness of the potential of people with disabilities. One participant is selected as **Ms. Wheelchair Florida**, and she will hold the title for one year, bringing awareness and education to others, and serve as an advocate for inclusion, acceptance, and respect for those living with disabilities.

Tampa is a wonderfully unique and diverse city, and I hope you will have the opportunity to visit our many signature city parks, and the cultural, historical and entertainment attractions we are known for. Whether it is on Bayshore Boulevard or the Tampa Riverwalk, ride the streetcar to historic Ybor City and Sparkman Wharf, enjoy a meal at one of our fine restaurants, or visit one of our many landmark attractions and first-class shopping areas, you are sure to find your visit to be unforgettable.

Again, welcome. Best wishes for a successful conference and gala, and congratulations to the individual named Ms. Wheelchair Florida for 2025.

Sincerely,

Jane Castor



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG

KENNETH T. WELCH, MAYOR

March 22, 2025

Dear Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc.'s 52nd Annual Empowerment Gala Contestants and Guests, on behalf of the City of St. Petersburg, we welcome you to the Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc.'s 52nd Annual Empowerment Gala.

Tonight's gala showcases the inspiring spirit and achievements of women in Florida who utilize wheelchairs. This empowering competition is designed to further develop the advocacy skills of a unique group of leaders, provide a state-wide network for articulate and accomplished women, and invite everyone to greater awareness of the potential of people with disabilities. These women bring awareness to the architectural and attitudinal barriers faced in the disability community. I know their families and supporters are as proud of them as we are at the City of St. Petersburg.

We commend the conference and gala organizers for their efforts to elevate this important group of women. Our community's future is bright and is represented before you in the accomplishments of each of these exceptional young women.

Best wishes and congratulations!

We Are St. Pete,

Kenneth T. Welch
Mayor

March 14, 2025

Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc.
1852 First Street North
Winter Haven, FL 33881



Greetings Attendees and Supporters,

I am honored to extend my warmest welcome to all of you as we gather in Tampa for the 52nd Annual Ms. Wheelchair Florida Empowerment and Leadership Conference and Gala. As Orlando City Commissioner representing District 6, I take great pride in our city's strides toward ensuring access and inclusion for all individuals, particularly those with disabilities. It is my firm belief that women with disabilities possess immense inner strengths and talents that deserve to be celebrated.

The workshops offered during this conference—from public speaking and advocacy to disability rights and health and wellness—are crucial in equipping participants with valuable skills that empower them to become effective community leaders. In my commitment to promoting equity, I recognize the critical importance of platforms that uplift underrepresented voices. Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc. is a remarkable initiative that has often gone unrecognized.

This conference and gala aim to highlight these incredible contributions and create an environment where community agencies, families, and individuals—both disabled and non-disabled—can come together to support one another in our shared journey toward equity and empowerment.

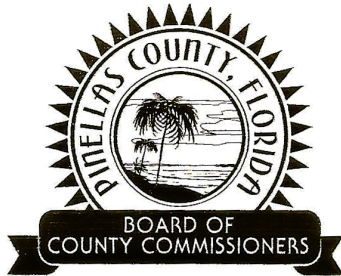
I encourage each of you to engage fully in this conference, learn from one another, and share your stories of resilience and leadership. Let us forge a brighter future where inclusivity and respect for all individuals are ideals and realities we can achieve collectively.

Thank you for your support and commitment to this vital cause. I hope you enjoy the conference and gala, and I look forward to witnessing the impact of our combined efforts.

Warm regards,



Bakari F. Burns
Orlando City Commissioner, District 6



DR. RENÉ FLOWERS
COMMISSIONER

PINELLAS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

PHONE (727) 464-3614 • FAX (727) 464-3022 • 315 COURT STREET • CLEARWATER, FLORIDA 33756
www.pinellas.gov

March 22, 2025

Shari Wilson, J.D.
Ms. Wheelchair Florida 2008
State Coordinator, Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc.
Tampa, FL

Dear Ms. Wilson,

As an elected official for Pinellas County, it is my great honor to extend my heartfelt congratulations to you and the participants of the *Ms. Wheelchair Florida, Inc's 52nd Annual Empowerment Black Tie Gala*. This year's event is a remarkable opportunity for women to showcase their inner strengths, talents, and determination, and it is truly inspiring to witness the continued growth of this empowering competition.

The Ms. Wheelchair Florida competition is more than just a pageant; it is an incredible platform for women to further develop their advocacy skills, build a supportive statewide network, and raise awareness of the untapped potential of individuals with disabilities. Through this competition, these accomplished women highlight their unique leadership abilities, and their stories of resilience and determination are truly transformative for our community.

As an advocate for inclusivity and equal opportunities, I firmly believe in the power of recognizing the diverse skills, abilities, and talents that all our constituents possess. The efforts that Ms. Wheelchair Florida has made to empower women and elevate their voices is an essential part of advancing these ideals, and I am thrilled to see how this event continues to grow and impact lives across the state.

To the 2025 Ms. Wheelchair Florida, I offer my deepest congratulations. Be encouraged by the work you have done and continue to strive to be the best version of yourself. Your courage, advocacy, and strength inspire all of us, and I look forward to seeing the positive impact you will make in our community and beyond.

Thank you, Shari, for your unwavering leadership as the State Coordinator and for your dedication to this empowering cause. It is an honor to support and celebrate the extraordinary women involved in this event.

Warmest regards,

Dr. René Flowers
Pinellas County Commissioner, District 7

"PINELLAS COUNTY IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER"



PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

Dear Esteemed Guests,

It is with great pride and excitement that we welcome you to the 52nd Annual Women's Empowerment and Leadership Conference and Gala! This year, we come together to celebrate the incredible women who are shaping our communities, empowering one another, and breaking down barriers.

Our theme for this year's conference is centered on the amazing women who are raising awareness of the architectural and attitudinal challenges faced by individuals in the disability community. These women are truly trailblazers, working tirelessly to challenge societal norms, redefine perspectives, and create spaces where everyone—regardless of ability—can thrive.

We are also thrilled to highlight the work of **Commissioner Shan Rose**, whose leadership has made a significant impact in ensuring access and inclusion for people with disabilities.

Commissioner Rose has been a tireless advocate, spearheading initiatives that promote equal opportunities and improve accessibility for all. Through her efforts, she has worked with local agencies and community organizations to ensure that public spaces, transportation, and services are more inclusive, breaking down the physical and social barriers that too often hinder those with disabilities. Her commitment to advocacy has helped shape policies that prioritize accessibility, ensuring that every individual, regardless of ability, has the resources and support they need to live, work, and thrive within our community.

At Ms. Wheelchair Florida, we firmly believe that every woman, regardless of her background or abilities, deserves the opportunity to be seen, heard, and celebrated. This conference and gala are an embodiment of that belief, offering a platform for women to showcase their inner strengths, talents, and resilience.

Throughout today's event, we will witness stories of perseverance, innovation, and strength—reminding us that, together, we are stronger. We extend our deepest appreciation to the community agencies, families, disabled and non-disabled individuals, and supporters who make this all possible. Your contributions are the driving force behind the success of this event, and the ongoing work to ensure that women everywhere have the tools, support, and opportunities to lead with confidence.

As we celebrate and honor these remarkable women, let us be inspired to continue our collective efforts in removing barriers and building a world that is accessible, inclusive, and empowering for all.

Thank you for being here, and for being a part of a movement that uplifts and empowers women everywhere. May today serve as a reminder of the power we have when we come together as a community, and the difference we can make when we celebrate each other's strengths.

With gratitude and admiration,



Shan Rose
City of Orlando Commissioner of District 5
52nd Annual Women's Empowerment and Leadership Conference & Gala

OFFICE OF COMMISSIONER SHAN ROSE • DISTRICT 5
Orlando City Hall · 400 South Orange Avenue · Second Floor
PO Box 4990 · Orlando, FL 32802-4990
P 407.246.2005 · F 407.246.3010 · Orlando.gov



Inspire

ADVOCATE. COLLABORATE. INITIATE.