



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Ellany Johnson and Paul Davis retire with nearly 50 years of combined service

PLANT CITY, Fla. (Apr. 28, 2023) – The Florida Strawberry Festival announced today that Vice President and Office Manager Ellany Johnson and President Paul Davis have retired.

“Although we are sad to see them go, we are looking forward to wishing them well into retirement,” said Immediate Past Chairman Phil Waldron. “Under Paul and Ellany’s leadership, the Festival has evolved from being a successful fair to becoming an extraordinary 11-day event that brings so much joy to so many.”

Johnson, a lifelong resident of Plant City, has been affiliated with the Florida Strawberry Festival since 1972. In 1975, she was asked to oversee the Showcase Tent, which she originated and continued to manage as a volunteer for many years. She was the initiator of the Shoebox Float Contest, which has been in effect for more than 50 years. In 1989, she was asked to join the staff as a ticket office employee where she was promoted to ticket office manager in 1991. By 2008, she was named office manager and shortly thereafter named vendor and exhibitor vice president, which she was continuing to supervise until her retirement last week. Ellany was grand marshal of the Strawberry Grand Parade in 2012.

Davis began working as general manager of the Florida Strawberry Festival in 2008 where he, upon retirement, was in his 15th year as president. Prior to taking on this role, he was employed with Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office for 32 years, from which he retired as a colonel in charge of special investigations. During his career as a law enforcement officer with the Sheriff’s Office, he served as stadium supervisor, assistant event commander, and event commander for the Festival. Under Paul’s direction as president, the board of directors initiated the construction of the Grimes Family Agricultural Center, Astin Family and Swindle Family Pavilions, Stadium Exhibit Building, GT Grandstands, and the Neighborhood Village Building, including establishing the Strawberry Queen’s Exhibit and the Badcock &more Media Center. In the latter time of his career as Festival president, Paul and the board of directors purchased more than 40 acres of land to aid in the expansion of the Festival grounds and parking lots and worked to update and refurbish all buildings on the grounds. Paul was grand marshal of the Plant City Christmas Parade in 2022 and grand marshal of the Strawberry Grand Parade in 2023.

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“We encourage everyone to attend,” said Florida Strawberry Festival President Kyle Robinson. “Let’s show our love and appreciation for Paul and Ellany in the best way we can, by welcoming friends and family, from far and wide, to fellowship and celebrate them, and all their accomplishments within this industry. We have been blessed by their contributions to our Festival, so let’s party!”

The Festival will host a retirement celebration for Johnson and Davis on Friday, May 12th beginning at 5:30 p.m. in the TECO Expo Hall on the Festival grounds. The Festival is asking all those who plan to attend to RSVP to the Festival Administrative Office at 813.752.9194.

About the Florida Strawberry Festival

The Florida Strawberry Festival is an 11-day community event celebrating the strawberry harvest of Eastern Hillsborough County. Each year, more than 600,000 visitors enjoy the Festival’s headline entertainment, youth livestock shows, exhibits of commerce and, of course, its strawberry shortcake. The 2024 Florida Strawberry Festival takes place February 29 through March 10 in Plant City, Florida. For more information, visit www.flstrawberryfestival.com, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter (#berryfest24).

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