

SILHOUETTES

BY WILLIAM MARCH

Julie Clark Ames has three daughters. One is, to use Ames' word, "typical." The other two aren't.

But then Ames isn't either. To start with, she's a former beauty queen and steelworker, who transitioned between stiletto heels and hard-toed work boots.

She's an industrial engineer, but also an accomplished dancer who says she thinks she has a liberal arts major trapped inside her. And she's a radio show host.

But maybe her most atypical characteristic is that her experience with her two autistic daughters has made her one of Tampa's leading advocates for the cause of rearing disabled children and preparing them for an independent future.

Starting as a PTA volunteer where her two daughters went to school, she's become active in the PTA at the state level. She's involved in several Hillsborough County school system committees that deal with exceptional students, including serving as president of the Superintendent's Exceptional Student Education Advisory Committee and a member of committees that plan transportation and choose textbooks for exceptional students.

She hosts a weekly radio show, the Special Needs Family Hour, on WGUL, 860 AM, and she's writing a book about her experience as the mother of two children with intellectual disabilities, hoping to help others through the experience.

Part of the reason for her activities, Ames said in an interview in her Temple Terrace home, is that when she had her two oldest daughters, Maria and Christina, now 19 and 17, she didn't understand why they weren't like other children.

She didn't understand why Maria, until age 2, wouldn't hug her, why it was so hard to get them to eat, and why they were so slow learning to talk. They refused to chew food.

She spent hours making shakes and soft foods and trying to get them to eat baby food.

"People didn't talk much about autism then," she said. "I wasn't familiar with it and I'd never been around children much."

When she and her husband Jeff moved back to Tampa with the little girls in 2002, their first Christmas with her family was agonizing.

"I was trying to hide that they wouldn't eat, that they weren't potty-trained," she said. "I thought it was because I was a bad mother. I'm lucky I didn't spontaneously combust."

It wasn't until the girls were nearly 7 and 5 that Ames learned they were autistic and why, and what autism was.

That was after years of mistaken advice and misdiagnoses from experts.

The two girls are "atypically autistic," as result of a genetic abnormality they inherited from her. They're not severely autistic, but are what scientists call "on the autism spectrum."

And it wasn't until her youngest child was born that Ames began to understand the problems with the older ones weren't her fault. At six months, Anna ate normally.

"I told Jeff, 'I can't believe most parents have it this easy,'" she said. "He said the prob-

Julie Clark Ames



The Ames family, Julie, Christina, Anna, and Maria.

Photo by Kim DeFalco

lem was with them, not me. But as a mom, it's hard to take the 'you' out of it."

Ames comes from a prominent Tampa family - her father is Robert Clark, head of Tampa Steel Erecting Co., founded by her grandfather, where her husband is now vice president. She has better financial resources to deal with her children's problems than some parents in her situation.

But that's far from eliminating her worries about their future. What will they do as adults? How and where will they live? What will they do when their parents are no longer there to take care of them? Will the Social Security program continue to be able to provide them supplemental security income payments?

For that reason, much of the focus of her research lately is on independent living for those with disabilities.

Her most recent radio show was "Life Beyond High School - Transition to Adulthood for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities," featuring experts talking on the subject.

Before she began studying the issue, she once told a counselor her goal in life was, "to live one day longer than Maria and Christina."

"Now I realize I don't have to do that," she said. "I just have to have things in place" - things like guardianships, trust funds and living arrangements.

In fact, she said, it's far better for children with such disabilities to start living on their own while their parents are still alive to help.

"You want them to make that transition before you die," she said. "It's the hardest thing they'll ever do, and they shouldn't have to do it without you there."

Ames, 53, grew up in a comfortable home, first in Seminole Heights and then on a farm in Lutz. Besides running his business, she joked, her father wanted to be "a gentleman farmer."

She went to Berkeley Preparatory School in Tampa, but instead of heading for the beach on spring breaks and during the summer, she worked in her father's shop, wearing a hard hat and steel-toed shoes while helping fabricate structural steel.

In the meantime, the petite brunette with a pixie-ish look also took modeling and dancing lessons - "Every kind,

tap, ballet, even hula" - and became Latin Fiesta Queen in 1978, Miss Hillsborough County in 1980 and Krewe of Venus Queen in 1983.

She wanted to go into business, and told her dad she wanted to major in marketing and finance. But he suggested something she hadn't thought of, industrial engineering, telling her that having an expert on the subject would be an unusual luxury for a small firm.

She headed off to Georgia Tech, and found herself part of a student body including four men for every woman.

"I thought I would meet a lot of other ambitious women like me," she said. "Instead I found a lot of

women just looking for that MRS degree," meaning a husband. Her freshman roommate studied more bridal magazines than engineering books, she said.

While there, she met Jeff Ames, then a graduate student and West Point graduate in the 82nd Airborne.

After school, they moved to Alexandria, Va., where he was assigned to the Pentagon. She got a job in industrial sales for a paper-recycling company, but became a stay-home mother in 1996 after Maria was born.

Still, she longed for the Florida lifestyle, and when her father offered Jeff a job in the family business, he took it.

Today, she's still a stay-at-home mom, but spends some 30 hours a week preparing for and hosting her radio show, and often more on her other advocacy work. Still a technician, Ames compiles a thick folder of research for every show so she can guide the guest-experts to the information she believes families with disabled children need.

She talks about how home-based industries could make disabled adults independent, about a 50-acre community being developed in Polk County called Noah's Ark for disabled adults.

Ames is familiar with the controversy over whether modern vaccines are related to autism, and doesn't rule it out, even though physicians and researchers unanimously say there's no connection.

She said regardless of those worries, her children have regularly received all their vaccinations.

"Still, autism has become so common you have to wonder whether there's an environmental contributor to the cause," she said.

A recent show dealt with guardianships, and the unpleasant surprise some parents have when disabled children turn 18.

Without a guardianship, the parents find they no longer have authority to make their children's business and health care decisions, and under federal law, doctors must see the guardianship papers before they'll even talk to the parents about the children's health.

Ames notes that she keeps the papers in her purse and in her car, just in case.

"There are so many things

parents need to know that they don't," she said.

Maria, her oldest, will graduate from high school this year with a special diploma for disabled children. Christina is expected to graduate next year, and Anna, the typical child, is in the 9th grade.

Ames recalled a touching

moment when Anna heard her discussing Maria and Christina's future and said she wanted to be the one to take care of them.

"I told her she could be involved," Ames said. "What you have to do is work with friends and family and put a structure in place that will outlive you."

**CURRY
& LAW
GROUP**

CLIFTON C. CURRY, JR.
ATTORNEY AT LAW

LaViva Professional Center
750 West Lumsden Road
Brandon, Florida 33511

CLIF.CURRY@CURRYLAWGROUP.COM
WWW.CURRYLAWGROUP.COM
813-653-2500

INVITATION TO BID

The TAMPA SPORTS AUTHORITY hereby issues Public Notice of its intention to receive sealed bids at the office of the Authority, located at 4201 North Dale Mabry Highway, Tampa, Florida, at which time bids will be opened and publicly read aloud.

Sealed bids are invited for the following:

BID #15-02

CERTIFIED TIFWAY 419 BERMUDAGRASS SOD AND SOD GROWN ON PLASTIC, RAYMOND JAMES STADIUM

**MANDATORY PRE-BID CONFERENCE:
MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2015 @ 9:30A.M.**

**BID OPENING DATE/TIME/LOCATION:
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2015 @ 10:00A.M.
AT THE TAMPA SPORTS AUTHORITY OFFICE**

Bid packages will be available for distribution and pick up at the Tampa Sports Authority office after 10:00 am on Monday, October 12, 2015 or online at www.tampasportsauthority.com. Further details and specifications may be obtained from the office of the Tampa Sports Authority by calling (813) 350-6500 Extension 6511.

The TAMPA SPORTS AUTHORITY reserves the right to reject any and all bids, to waive irregularities, if any, and accept the bid, which in the judgment of the Authority, is determined to be in its best interest.

Dated at Tampa, Florida this 30th Day of September 2015.

/s/Deltecia Jones
Procurement Manager
TAMPA SPORTS AUTHORITY

10/9/15 1T

Florida Department of Transportation District Seven PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE We want to hear from you!

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), District Seven, invites you to provide your comments to FDOT by participating in the Five-Year Tentative Work Program Public Hearing. The Tentative Work Program for fiscal years July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2021 covers preliminary engineering, right of way acquisition, construction, and public transportation projects for Citrus, Hernando, Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas Counties and includes Florida Turnpike Enterprise projects in these counties.

There are four ways you can participate:

1. Go to www.D7wpph.com between Monday, October 26, 2015 and Friday, October 30, 2015.

You will be able to see all of the presentations and maps, submit comments, ask questions, and directly contact a department representative if needed.

2. If you do not have access to a computer or the internet, you can use a computer at the local public libraries in the five counties during the libraries' regular operating hours

3. FDOT representatives will be available at the following locations on Wednesday, October 28, 2015 from 4:00 - 6:00 pm to meet with you in person, answer any questions, and assist with website access:

Citrus County: Lakes Region Library, 1511 Druid Road, Inverness, FL 34452

Hernando County: East Hernando Branch Library, 6457 Windmeer Road, Brooksville, FL 34602

Hillsborough County: MPO Offices, 601 E Kennedy Blvd, 18th Floor, Tampa, FL 33602

Pasco County: MPO Offices, West Pasco Government Center, 8731 Citizens Dr, New Port Richey, FL 34654

Pinellas County: MPO Offices, 310 Court St, Clearwater, FL 33756

4. FDOT representatives are also available during this week at the **Florida Department of Transportation - District Seven offices** located at 11201 N. McKinley, Tampa, FL 33612. You can schedule a meeting at the district office by calling Lee Royal at (813) 975-6427.

Comments will be received thru the website, at the locations listed above, or you can mail written comments to Debbie Hunt, Director of Transportation Development, Florida Department of Transportation, 11201 N. McKinley Drive, MS 7-100, Tampa, FL 33612 or email them to: debbie.hunt@dot.state.fl.us. Comments must be submitted or postmarked by **November 9, 2015** to be a part of the official record.

Public participation is solicited without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability or family status. Persons who require special accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act or persons who require translation services (at no charge) should contact Lee Royal, Government Liaison Administrator, at (813) 975-6427 or (800) 226-7220 at least seven days prior to the hearing.

10/2/15 & 10/16/15 2T