

First Coast News “12 Who Care”
Nomination of Chris Woolston
April 2022

Chris Woolston is a real-life example of the Golden Rule. He treats people and animals with kindness and has a heart for service, for his community, for his students, and for furry friends. Within his circles of community, he makes the world a better place.

Chris and his wife Ashley have been San Marco residents for almost 10 years. They are both teachers, dog lovers, and advocates for education and positivity.

Chris is a fourth-grade teacher at PV Rawlings Elementary School. He’s an enthusiastic teacher in the classroom, tutors students after class hours, and has even created a guest speaker series at the school (the very first speaker for which was best-selling author Dion Leonard). He advocates for learning and literacy every chance he gets — not only at school, but in his neighborhood. He co-created a free monthly literacy event called Story Time in the Square, open to kids of all ages on the first Saturday of each month under the gazebo in San Marco Square. The event has featured local authors, dance performances, treats for kids and parents alike, and several stories are read each month. Chris himself is a member of a local book club, and can be found frequenting locally owned small business the San Marco Bookstore picking out his next read.

The Woolstons are fur pawrents to three doggies — Moxie, Wendy, and Winston — and often attend and support animal fundraisers. They love dogs and have given their rescues a grand life. Chris recently created time to combine two of his favorite things — his students and his dogs — by beginning “Day at the Dog Park,” where he arranged for his students’ families and their pups to meet at the dog park to spend time interacting outside of school.

Chris’s other passion is photography. A keen traveler, Chris enjoys taking photos wherever he goes; from people to places and from small moments to big events. His Instagram features everything from rodeos in Colorado and Montana, a temple in Bali, and elephants in Thailand to a child walking hand-in-hand with her parents, shadows on a sunny afternoon, and a squirrel pausing with his hard-earned snack. Last year, Chris donated his photography skills to the Douglas Anderson School of the Arts production of RENT, taking headshots and personality photos of the actors to be used in the play’s advertisement. In March 2022, he took more than five hours’ worth of photos for locally owned gym Crucible CrossFit for their website update and edited the images, all for free. He loves the work, and loves love, even photographing friends’ weddings free of charge.

When Chris isn’t teaching, volunteering, taking photos, or spoiling his dogs, he’s likely out for a run. An avid runner, he has participated in the Gate River Run six times and placed in the Top 10% at the 2022 race, as well as placed second in his age group at the most recent Children’s Miracle Network Festival of Lights 5K. His physical strength and strength of character are evidenced in these successes.

The San Marco Preservation Society (SMPS) was founded in 1975 by neighbors to maintain the integrity and charm of historic San Marco by protecting, promoting, improving, and advocating for the neighborhood. For over 45 years, it has remained a volunteer-run organization. It's governed by a Board of Directors, of which Chris has been a member for more than seven years. He has served in multiple chair positions, as the 2020-2021 Board President, has chaired multiple annual fundraiser events such as Concert in the Park, Wine Down in the Parks, and holiday Luminaria, and perhaps most notably, is often the first board member to offer assistance on projects, constantly ensuring there is enough support to make each project and event a success.

When Chris and Ashley's previous home on Flagler Ave. was flooded in Hurricane Irma in 2017, not only did they navigate the hardship with grace and dignity, never complaining, but in turn quickly pitched in to support others most affected by the flooding in the neighborhood. Chris contributed to arrangements for the Hurricane Irma #SanMarcoStrong relief fundraiser organized by the SMPS, although he himself qualified for this same support. He refused attention and sympathy, and instead bestowed it upon his neighbors. His humility is perhaps his loudest characteristic, never boasting or seeking praise. His heart is evident in his actions, always stepping up to fill a need, find a solution, or contribute to hard work.

The list of Chris's accomplishments would be incomplete without mentioning his positive attitude and wit. He's always ready with a quick quip to lighten the mood or bring levity to a conversation. A British transplant, Chris's accent lends him an air of friendliness that makes him instantly likable and permanently unforgettable. Chris offers a level head and a kind word even in the toughest situations, and no room is whole without his good humor.

Whether it's driving to pick up supplies, assembling an extra 200 luminary kits in his garage in an hour's notice, reading to children, or inspiring the next generation, Chris will (and frequently does) drop everything to meet a need. He is one of the best spirited and most selfless board members the SMPS has ever had. Chris Woolston brings passion and energy to each of his roles and has made remarkable and measurable contributions to his school, the SMPS, education, and our community with his leadership and thoughtfulness, and is deserving of this award.