

# JR News

Fall 2025

## **WORK, HOME, AND PLAY**

*Life is precious... Remember to make the most of each day.*

### **Fall 2025:**

***Growing up, I listened to music and watched movies that all celebrated an “endless summer.” This summer was one of those endless ones. I also have good news about work, health, and some wonderful adventures to come.***

### **PLAY:**

Summer 2025 was one to remember. We managed to fit in one of those “life trips,” two visits to Rish Park, a reunion with fellow Presidential appointees, and, of course, the quarterly bowling competition against my PCAs.

Not too long ago, a dear friend of mine shared the following Mark Twain quote, and I could not agree more with his sentiments:

**“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating on one little corner of the earth in all one’s lifetime.”**

To this end, Erika and I were most fortunate to explore Rome, Pompeii, Istanbul, and Athens as part of our “life trips.” Rome is one of those cities you need to visit repeatedly; there is simply too much to see and



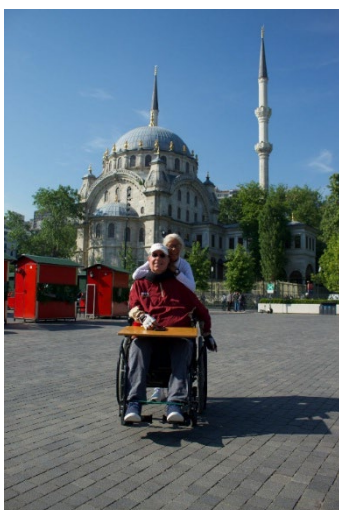
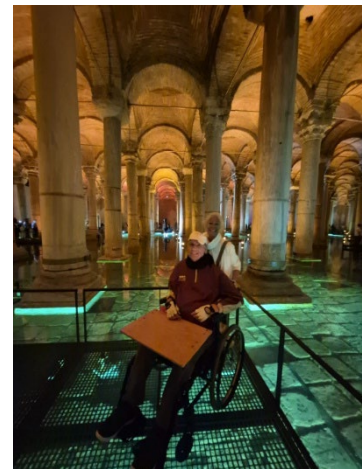
experience. This was my first time exploring the Colosseum and all of its corners because of the new accessibility features, and specifically, the elevator. On our way out, we saw some Italian firefighters practicing their rappelling skills down the front of the Colosseum. They were there in preparation for the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. We highly recommend buying tickets in advance for the Vatican and Sistine



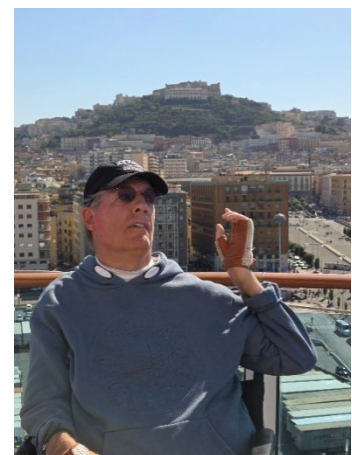
Chapel; those lines are longer than those in Disney World. Seeing some of the world's greatest art up close and in person is a much better experience than the art history days of undergraduate classes (unfortunately, we were not able to take pictures inside). It is amazing how religion, art, and politics came together to create one of the greatest

cities in the world.

We felt very blessed to be able to stay in a historic monastery that had been turned into a hotel. We were right beside the Tiber River and within walking distance of many attractions – location is everything.



Exploring the streets of Pompeii, descending the stairs of the Basilica Cistern, and having a rooftop dinner overlooking the Acropolis are memories that will last a lifetime. We almost got lost in Istanbul's Grand Bazaar. Yes, we paid too much for a beautiful Turkish rug, but it will last a lifetime and more. It was the Aladdin and the Magic Carpet narrative that



sold me. Our rug is called The Seven Hills of Istanbul, which matches the seven hills of Tallahassee.

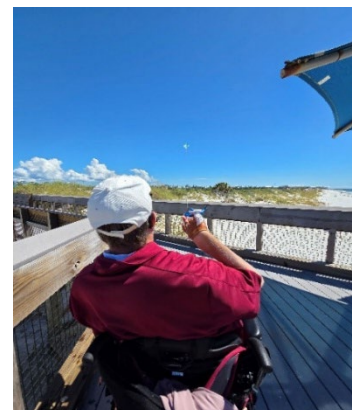
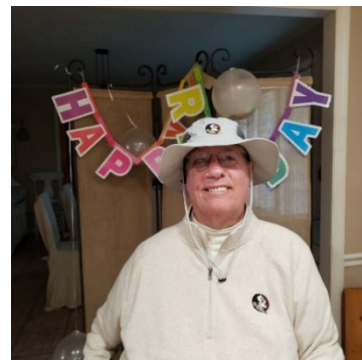
The weather was amazing, and we definitely suggest visiting in late May or early June for any fellow travelers to this part of the world. The food, culture, art, and history are simply incredible. It beckons for a return trip.

Returning to Florida, we enjoyed two wonderful trips to Rish Park this summer. The partnership with the Florida State Park system has proven to be a great way to improve access, promote inclusive recreation, and enjoy nature with people with and without disabilities.



The park recently completed a thousand-yard accessible nature trail, made of raised boardwalk and concrete, allowing visitors in wheelchairs and other mobility devices to explore the alligators, picnic areas, and beautiful wetland surroundings without barriers.

During my visits, I managed to complete three different books, fly a kite, explore the new nature trails, and, of course, get sunburned. Sometimes, simply unplugging and relaxing is the best medicine. I celebrated my 59th birthday at the park with good food, friends, and family.



It was super fun to go target shooting with one of my former PCAs. He came down from army training and set me up on the range with his AR weapon. My shot group at 25 yards was tight, slightly low, and a little right. The bigger question is: can we make the setup more stable to enable hunting? Hitting a moving target just isn't possible right now, and it requires a lot of focus. My recreation goal for target practice is to someday go to Louisiana and hunt some nuisance boars. To reach this goal, I need a little more practice.



I continued to bowl regularly with team JR. I must admit publicly that I lost my bowling supremacy against my PCAs this past summer. Joshua beat me two out of three games and crushed the rest of the team that afternoon.



As we wrap up the 'live well, play hard' theme, I always try to squeeze in a mini golf game whenever I can find a course. This photo was taken this summer in Orlando. Although I did not win the match, I secured a strong second place. In Vegas, over our anniversary weekend, we attended a couple of shows. We highly recommend the

Michael Jackson experience—the music, dancing, and gymnastics were spectacular. The MJ dancing hologram at the end of the show was mind-blowing. We also played indoor golf, and yes, Erika took the victory home, with me finishing a strong second out of four participants. I am working with the College of Engineering at FSU to improve my mini-golf gizmo and hopefully make my strokes more consistent. Currently, we simply duct-taped the putter to my arm, and hopefully, with this partnership, the process will be easier and my game will be better. Who knows, the *new JR gizmo* might become an on-demand accommodation at the mini golf course near you. The goal is to have the updated tool ready for the Christmas cruise.

### *Home/Health:*

Despite all the new hires in late spring 2025, my health remains strong. Just a few minor issues that are manageable. At the time of writing this letter, I am taking one of the newbies on his first business trip and airplane flight. Air travel always highlights the differences in competence among PCAs. It is not that my care is different on a road trip compared to at home, but rather that it involves anticipating all the moving parts, different environments, managing equipment, and being able to adapt quickly. Not all PCAs are equal. Perhaps that's why Hunter has had the privilege of accompanying me on so many different "life trips".

My current power wheelchair is aging rapidly as it reaches its five-year mark. I have replaced the tires, battery, and motor more than once. I plan to begin the replacement process in Spring 2026 since insurance will only cover new chairs every five years. New wheelchairs are much more complicated than new shoes and typically take about six months to arrive. As a result, the brands, styles, and features are constantly being refined. The old chair will not be identical to my new one, and we will need to make adjustments so that it fits my van, wheelchair table, and other small nuances.

While I was successful in recruiting new PCAs in the spring, they were all juniors and seniors; therefore, I have started the challenging process of recruiting, training, and onboarding again. Remember, being a quadriplegic is my first job! Without good health and a strong team, all other aspects of work and fun become secondary.



Maintaining good health includes working out, doing cardio, and sometimes scuba diving. Most people see scuba diving as a recreational activity, but getting me in and out of the ocean isn't enjoyable. So, I use it as part of my fitness routine a few times a year in our pool. This picture was taken during my recent dive. Breathing deeply with my diaphragm becomes

more difficult the deeper I go. Also, breathing while lying down is harder than while sitting up. Since I only dive a few times annually, I have to relearn to trust the equipment and stay calm. I recommend hydrotherapy for anyone with some mobility challenges. An interesting thing is that I come out of the pool "hungry," just like I did as a kid. Swimming is tough work.

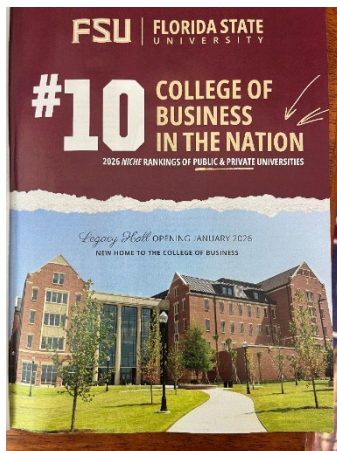
As we all know, home ownership is a labor of love and comes with endless expenses. These past 6 weeks have tested our patience and vividly reminded us how important an emergency fund can be. First, the swimming pool motor needed to be fixed, and then it was leaking. As if the Gods were not already mad, we had to replace both the dishwasher and the washing machine. Next, we moved on to the air conditioning system and a blower that needed to be replaced up in the ducts. Last but not least, the 30-year-old garage opener finally died and

had to be replaced. Two weeks later, I'm still getting used to the new car clicker. It simply does not respond to my forward reach as well as the old one did. When you couple all these things together and add the 6 trees that had to be removed during the spring, it has been an expensive year in the Harding house.

## Work:

We started the new semester with a promotion to Senior Lecturer. This is the highest level of specialized teaching faculty within the college. The other day, one of my colleagues mentioned that, as “a member of the senior teaching team,” we need you to be involved in recruiting new faculty. While I quietly lamented the additional busy work being assigned, it was a wonderful affirmation to be part of the senior teaching team and help recruit future colleagues.

The promotion did not change my job description, and I will continue to be evaluated on my teaching, research, and service activities. After Thanksgiving, we will move into our new building, which will open for business in the Spring semester.



The building is called *Legacy Hall* and costs over 100 million dollars. It is the largest academic space built at FSU. Ironically, we have already outgrown our space because we started planning it in 2015. It takes that long to raise the money, design, and build it. I am very excited because I now have a full-service bathroom I can use (we borrowed some features from the UK model, including an adult changing table; they call their bathrooms “Changing Places”).

Speaking of service, every October is crazy busy with my extracurricular activities and Board leadership. I assisted my students in planning and implementing the annual disability speaker series and the Goalball demonstration and competition in conjunction with the FSU Rec Department. These are program and awareness activities that my University of Choice student group promotes every October during Disability Employment Awareness Month. The students even made the evening news. Click [here](#) for the coverage.

I am still exploring Fulbright Scholarship opportunities for 2027 or 2028. Unfortunately, we couldn't find the right match or location for this year's application (I need accessible infrastructure and an emphasis on teaching).



Visiting a country for a week or two is one thing, but fully immersing yourself in the work and culture for a semester is entirely different. It reminds me of American pioneers leaving St. Louis in a covered wagon—you don't always know if you have all the gear you need for the journey west.

As many of you know, I serve on the Delta Airlines Disability Advisory Board. This year, Delta celebrated its 100th anniversary as the carrier of choice for people to explore the world, conduct business, and experience different cultures. As part of their celebration, they included a piece in their annual newsletter about their 25-year history with the Advisory Board on Disability (ADB). I have been on that team for 19 years. Like all good things, my time with them is coming to an end. We are beginning to recruit and replace all of us “old dogs” with some younger blood. We are always looking for frequent flyers with disabilities who want to improve the airline industry. Anyone within my network with a disability who is interested in serving, please reach out.

Speaking of being an “Old Dog”, I concluded my sixth year as a director on the Family Network on Disabilities (FND). They were exceptionally kind with a generous service award and a picture of the group.



During July and October, I was busy expressing my thoughts on the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on [TV](#) and in the [newspaper](#), and trying to improve wheelchair repair services with an article in the [paper](#).



On a related note, my father was attending his 65<sup>th</sup> high school reunion and found something interesting. Some of you may recall, we went to the same boarding school (Culver Military Academy). While touring the beautiful library overlooking the lake, he took a picture of our shared books on the library shelf. Sharing library space with your father is super cool! He wrote a fun, fictional account of marrying my mother – he cleverly articulated how he married up and used some army stories to build the plot lines. It is called *The First Posting*.

For those who forgot about my two books, the Amazon links are found below.

Wishing everyone a wonderful holiday season and a happy New Year. Erika and I will be spending 8 days cruising the Caribbean with Mom and Dad. Yes, life has been good, hope yours is as well.

Don't be shy, we would love to hear from you!

-JR

With the holiday season upon us, you may know someone who could benefit from one or both of the following books. They are not the next great New York Times bestseller, but everyone tells me they are good. If not for you, maybe for a friend in need. They are [“Now What?”](#) and [“ADA Adventure”](#).

