

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RE: First Virginia Lassiter Leadership Luncheon Features LW Native & Dean of University of Florida's College of Journalism & Communications

The first annual Virginia Lassiter Leadership Luncheon will be held at 12:30 p.m., Saturday, April 1 at the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd Parish Hall, 221 South Fourth Street, Lake Wales. The luncheon will be followed by *A Conversation with Diane McFarlin*. Lake Wales native Diane McFarlin is dean of the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida.

Diane McFarlin will discuss her early life in Lake Wales and her extraordinary career with Polk County Historic Preservation Manager, Myrtice Young.

McFarlin began her journalism career while a student at Lake Wales High School where she worked as a cub reporter for the Lake Wales Daily Highlander.

McFarlin took a reporting job in Sarasota after earning her degree at UF. McFarlin rose through the ranks to become managing editor of the Sarasota (FL) Herald-Tribune at age 30. She was named executive editor of The Gainesville Sun three years later and then returned to the Herald-Tribune, serving as executive editor for a decade and publisher for 13 years. Under her leadership, the Herald-Tribune Media Group, the largest media company in Southwest Florida, was touted as an industry leader in media convergence and digital innovation.

She became dean of the UF College of Journalism and Communications in January 2013. In this role, she has expanded interdisciplinary initiatives, established a central hub for professional advising and student services, and increased research productivity through top faculty hires and increased funding. In addition to academic excellence, the college's hallmark is the professional immersion opportunities it offers students. Venues include the multimedia Innovation News Center, GatorVision sports production, and The Agency, an integrated communication agency. Each of these programs is led by professionals, staffed by students and inspired by faculty.

McFarlin is active in state and national media organizations. She is a past president of the American Society of News Editors and has served six times as a juror for the Pulitzer Prizes. She has taught at the Centers for Independent Journalism in Prague and Bucharest, and addressed the World Editor's Forum on the subject of multimedia newsrooms. McFarlin has worked on behalf of numerous nonprofit organizations and founded the Season of Sharing charitable fund, which has raised more than \$13 million to provide crisis funding to families on the brink of homelessness.

The Virginia Lassiter Leadership Luncheon honors Mrs. Lassiter's 58 years of dedicated service to her community. In 1954 a group of Lake Wales citizens began an organized effort to bring publicly funded library services to the city resulting in the founding of the Lake Wales Library Association.

From the earliest days of the of the Lake Wales Library Association until her death in

2012, Virginia Lassiter continuously served as a volunteer, board member, fund raiser and supportive voice of the Lake Wales Public Library.

A limited number of tickets for the Virginia Lassiter Leadership Luncheon, featuring *A Conversation with Diane McFarlin*, are available for \$25 per person at the Lake Wales Public Library. This fundraising event will aid the Lake Wales Library Association's support of the library.

Sponsors for the Virginia Lassiter Leadership Luncheon include The Lake Wales Library Association, The Family of Robert & Virginia Lassiter, Citizen's Bank & Trust, Peterson & Myers, PA, Frank & Margaret Hunt, Ruth Freeman, Carlton's Petals & Bows and Three Oaks Bed & Breakfast.

For details call 863-678-4004 or email library@cityoflakewales.com. The 2017 Virginia Lassiter Leadership Luncheon is a Lake Wales Centennial Program, celebrating 100 years of Lake Wales' Heritage.