



WELCOME TO THE

Newsletter

I'm so glad you're here!

The Stories We Author Together

As we prepare for The Mark Wandall Foundation's 23rd Annual Memorial Golf Tournament, I am filled with gratitude for everyone who continues to make this work possible. Whether you have supported the Foundation throughout its 23-year journey or were recently introduced to our programs and services, thank you for believing in our mission to uplift children and teens grieving the death of a parent, sibling, or guardian.

My work in grief support, traffic safety, advocacy, and motivational speaking is deeply connected. Through each of these roles, I meet children, teens, families, and survivors whose lives have been forever changed by grief, loss, and life-altering circumstances. Their stories continually reinforce the importance of prevention, education, compassion, and ensuring that no one must navigate grief alone.

October carries profound meaning for me. It has been 23 years since Mark's death, and this month would have been our 24th wedding anniversary. October gently holds both the love we shared and the loss that forever changed the course of my life. This month also reminds me that while we cannot choose every chapter of our story, we can always help author what comes next. We can choose gratitude amid sorrow, love that continues beyond loss, education that protects others, and service that transforms pain into purpose.

Thank you for walking alongside me and helping continue a legacy that uplifts young people, supports grieving families, and creates safer and more compassionate communities. My story is still being written, and I am deeply grateful to everyone who is helping author its next chapter.

Melissa Wandall

JOIN US!



Click here to register today: There are just a few spots left for The Mark Wandall Foundation's 23rd Annual Memorial Golf Tournament on Oct. 30th!

My Product Recommendation

A COLD BREW SLAM DUNK

A couple months ago, I bought this Banana Bread coffee from Wandering Bear. I do not know why, as I really do not like anything banana, but this was SO good. If you are a cold brew lover like me, you will not be disappointed by this authentic, good coffee.



Equine Sessions Return in October!

October brings the return of one of The Mark Wandall Foundation's most popular programs!

Beginning in October 2026 and continuing through June 2027, TMWF will offer two equine sessions each month, giving youth more opportunities to connect and grow through our equine-assisted learning programs.

We are excited to welcome back Suncoast Therapeutic Equine Partners (STEP) for another season and are thrilled to introduce our newest equine partner, Csatar Acres Farm!



Csatar Acres Farm

40555 Clay Gully Road

Myakka City, FL 34251

Sessions at this location will be held on the second Saturday of each month.

Suncoast Therapeutic Equine Partners (STEP)

1615 Verna Road

Sarasota, FL 34240

Sessions at this location will be held on the third Saturday of each month.

We can't wait to saddle up for another incredible season of learning, connection, and fun! For additional information about the equine program, including if you're interested in volunteering or registering, please email [foundation Program Coordinator Kim Smith](mailto:foundation@markwandall.org).

National School Bus Safety Week: *Safe Rides, Everyday Heroes*



National School Bus Safety Week is October 19–23, 2026, a time to raise awareness about school bus safety and recognize the drivers and transportation professionals who help millions of students travel safely each day. This year's theme, **Safe Rides, Everyday Heroes**, celebrates the important role these professionals play while reminding motorists and communities that protecting students is a shared responsibility. **Our message is simple: Stop Today. Protect Tomorrow.** Every time a driver stops for a school bus, slows

down, and stays alert, they are helping protect a child's safety today — and their future tomorrow.

To help you participate, we're sharing **a free, customizable School Bus Driver Appreciation Letter** that schools, school districts, law enforcement agencies, community organizations, businesses, and individuals can use to recognize the everyday heroes behind every safe ride. Simply download the template, add your organization's name and logo, personalize it with a local message or statistic if you choose, and share it with the school bus drivers and transportation professionals in your community.

Want more? Enter your contact information here at the **National Coalition for Safer Road's website** to receive our upcoming release of additional National School Bus Safety Week information, downloadable assets, safety statistics, and resources to help spread the message in your community.

Together, we can recognize the people who keep students safe and remind every driver that protecting children around school buses is a responsibility we all share.



Making a Splash, Memories at Back-to-School Reconnect

On September 19th, our The Mark Wandall Foundation families came together at Sun Outdoors Sarasota for a fun-filled Back-to-School Splash! The day offered our youth and their families an opportunity to enjoy the last days of summer with others who understand their grief journey.

Reconnect events are an important part of The Mark Wandall Foundation. For children who have experienced the loss of a parent, sibling, or guardian, they are able to join a community where they feel connected.

Whether it was the big slide, the pool, or the pizza, everyone enjoyed the time together, and the Back-to-School Splash was a wonderful reminder that our youth are loved and are not alone. We are thankful to all the families who joined us and helped make the day so special.

Thank you to Sun Outdoors Sarasota for welcoming our families and helping us create another memorable day for the TMWF families. We are also grateful to foundation Board Member Lindsey Wagner, who helped maximize enjoyment by ensuring everything ran smoothly, and TMWF Program Coordinator Kim Smith for her generous donation of food and drink.



Thank You, Bradenton Police Department!

The Mark Wandall Foundation is grateful to the Bradenton Police Department for awarding us a \$2,000 Florida Contraband Forfeiture Grant in support of our 2027 Annual 3-Day Bereavement Camp, held in partnership with Comfort Zone Camp.

This generous investment will help provide grieving youth with a safe, supportive environment where they can connect with others who understand their experiences, develop healthy coping skills, build resilience, and know they are not alone. We are especially grateful to the Bradenton Police Department for recognizing the importance of early support for young people and for investing in the well-being of children and families in our community.



Thank you, Bradenton Police Department, for helping us continue to create connection, confidence, and a sense of belonging for grieving youth.

Community Conversations That Matter



On September 29, I had the pleasure of speaking to the Bradenton Kiwanis at the Manatee Performing Arts Center about a topic that is deeply personal to me: hope, healing, and community for Florida's grieving youth.

Through The Mark Wandall Foundation, I shared how compassionate support can help children build resilience, find connection, and discover hope after the death of a parent, sibling, or guardian. It was an honor to share more about the foundation's life-changing programs and the growing need for grief support for young people. Most importantly, I was reminded once again of the remarkable resilience of the children and families we serve.

No child should ever have to navigate grief alone. By coming together as a community, we can make sure grieving children have the support, understanding, and hope they need to move forward.

Thank you to the Bradenton Rotary for welcoming me and for creating space for this important conversation.

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