

BICENTENNIAL TO 250TH: GRANDMOTHER LAUNCHES NATIONWIDE OUR50 PROJECT INSPIRED BY THREE FAMILY JOURNEYS TO ALL 50 STATES

New initiative to help children discover America one state at a time through monthly boxes, virtual experiences, travel stories and community partnerships.

NAPLES, FL, UNITED STATES, June 9, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As America celebrates its 250th birthday, Southwest Florida grandmother, journalist, travel writer, author and business owner Marlene Graham is launching [OUR50](#), a nationwide educational project based on a remarkable family legacy spanning three generations and three separate journeys to all 50 states, the first during America's Bicentennial celebration in 1976.

Through monthly state-themed educational boxes, virtual learning experiences, travel storytelling, volunteer opportunities and community partnerships, OUR50 aims to help children explore the people, places, history, culture and natural wonders that make each state unique while building connections with families across the country.

"With America celebrating its 250th birthday, I can't think of a better time to encourage children to learn about the people, places and stories that make our nation unique," Graham said. "And to realize that no matter where we live, we are more alike than different."

The story behind OUR50 began fifty years ago when Graham's late mother, a Colombian-born naturalized American citizen, wanted her children to better understand and appreciate the



Paul and Maria Smith with children Marlene and Joseph pose beside the family's Volkswagen Beetle during their 1976 Bicentennial Journey through all 50 states, the first of three nationally publicized adventures that inspired OUR50.

opportunities she found in her adopted country.

During the nation's Bicentennial celebration, she convinced her husband and children to set out on an ambitious journey to visit all 50 states. Armed with just \$500 that she had carefully saved, the family traveled across America in a Volkswagen Beetle, funding their adventure by taking temporary jobs along the way ranging from restaurant work and yard mowing to migrant labor and other odd jobs.

By the end of the journey, the family had visited all 50 states and had become known nationally as "[The Bicentennial Family](#)."



Craig and Marlene Graham with children Collier and Courtney pose beside their custom-painted van during the family's 1996-1997 journey through all 50 states, the second of three nationally publicized adventures that inspired the OUR50 project.

"My mother started this legacy," Graham said. "She wanted us to see America firsthand and understand how fortunate we were to live here. As a teenager, I had no idea that our Bicentennial journey would influence so much of my future. Looking back fifty years later, it helped shape my love of travel, storytelling, volunteerism and ultimately the creation of OUR50."

Twenty years later, Graham and her late husband, Craig, repeated the experience with their own children, traveling to all 50 states during a highly publicized 1996-1997 family adventure.

Years before social media, smartphones, GPS navigation and YouTube, the family became one of America's earliest online travel families, sharing daily updates through dial-up internet connections and a simple website. Thousands followed the adventures of "America's Family" and often invited them not only to visit their communities, but also their homes.

The following year, the Grahams embarked on a third 50-state journey, this time focused on promoting volunteerism. Known as "The Volunteerism Family," they encouraged families nationwide to serve together while participating in volunteer projects throughout the country themselves.

All three journeys generated extensive local, national and international media attention, including newspaper, magazine, radio and television coverage, with appearances on programs including Today, Oprah, Donny & Marie, Home and Family, and The View.

Graham later chronicled the family's 1996-1997 adventure in her book, *Headfirst Into America*. A graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism and a former television reporter, she also wrote about her family's 1976 Bicentennial journey for *Seventeen* magazine and her family's 1996-1997 journey for *Ladies' Home Journal*.

Families participating in OUR50 will receive monthly state-themed boxes designed to teach children about America one state at a time. The boxes are expected to include a real piece of each state such as sand, soil, stones, rock chips or other natural collectibles, along with snack treats, collectible maps, State Explorer cards, stickers, vintage postcards, recipes, activities, challenge projects, travel stories and educational materials. The first OUR50 educational box is expected to focus on Florida as part of the project's planned fall rollout. Additional states are expected to follow as the project expands. The program is designed for families, educators and grandparents looking for engaging ways to help children discover America.

The project will also incorporate technology and live learning opportunities. Planned Zoom sessions will allow children to interact with each other, as well as park rangers, historians, educators, tourism representatives and other experts from each featured state.

Graham is also developing a long-term vision that will hopefully lead to the creation of small OUR50 Founders Parks across America, beginning with a modest pilot park in Florida.

The vision is to create places where today's Founding Kids could someday bring their own children and grandchildren while taking pride in knowing they helped launch something meaningful for future generations.

The project is currently building its list of Founding Families ahead of its anticipated fall rollout. To learn more about the three journeys, join the interest list or explore the project, visit OUR50.com.



In addition to family participation, Graham is seeking partnerships with tourism organizations, attractions, educators, volunteer groups, community leaders and towns interested in being associated with the project as it travels state by state across America over the next several years.

Graham has also developed informational brochures, flyers and QR code materials for parents, grandparents, teachers, schools, homeschool families, libraries, community and church organizations and others interested in spreading the word to additional families and supporters. Individuals and organizations are encouraged to request materials to share.

High-resolution photos, historic newspaper clippings, magazine features and other media coverage documenting the family's three nationally publicized 50-state journeys, along with current OUR50 images, logos and promotional materials, are available to media outlets upon request. Media inquiries may be directed to Marlene Graham at 239-821-9046 or by email at info@OUR50.com or mgrahamvip@comcast.net.

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