

Paul “Tall Paul” Dickens

Paul “Tall Paul” Dickens (February 2, 1950 - January 19, 2026) passed away peacefully in his sleep following complications from Parkinson’s.

Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, Paul lived in Key Largo, Florida, off and on since 1978, and several years in Gainesville and Starke. Wherever he lived, Paul became a familiar and well-loved presence in the community. Known for his warm spirit, easygoing nature, and a sense of humor that was never far from the surface—always ready with a joke, a grin, or a story that made people feel at ease. His smile was infectious, and his laughter even more so.

An avid Cleveland sports fan, Paul proudly supported the Cleveland Browns, Cavaliers and Guardians, rarely missing a chance to cheer on his hometown teams.

Paul lived a richly varied life. In his early years, he traveled coast to coast, embracing new places, people, and experiences along the way. A free

spirit at heart, Paul valued life experiences, family and friends over possessions.

Over the years, Paul held many roles and wore many hats. He worked with the railroad, was a professional painter, coached youth sports, and some may

remember Paul tending bar at the Caribbean Club back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, where his personality was as much a draw as the drinks.

For many years, Paul worked as a school bus driver in Monroe County, a role he truly cherished. He took pride in caring for the children he transported each day and was honored as Monroe County School Bus Driver of



the Year, a recognition that reflected both his professionalism and his heart.

Paul was also deeply devoted to caring for his mother, Ruth, whom he lovingly supported and cared for in his home for many years through-

out her battle with dementia.

Music was a constant companion in Paul’s life. He loved the blues, classic rock, humorous genre-bending music, and Americana storytelling that told honest stories about life, time, and the people we meet along the way. He especially enjoyed live performances and playing acoustic guitar

In his later years, with his long hair,

relaxed demeanor, and unmistakable presence, Paul was often said to resemble singer-songwriter Leon Russell—a comparison he wore well, with ease and good humor.

Paul appreciated life’s simple pleasures: a good drink and—most of all—good company. Paul will be remembered as a kind soul, a storyteller, a music lover, and a family man who lived authentically and freely.

Paul is survived by his loving wife, Joan Johnston-Dickens; his children, Sean Dickens and Whitney Dickens Gonzalez (Jean); grandchildren Jack, Jordan, Leo, Troy, Maverick and Ozzie; his sister, Debora Dickens Kodger, of Destin, Florida; his brother, Dan Dickens, of Coral Way, Florida; his nieces, Emily Kodger Madden (Christopher), Amy Kodger Jones (Jason) and Megan Dickens; and his nephews, Dillon Dickens and Logan Dickens; and many more family and friends whose lives were brighter for having known him.

Community Arts and Culture presents the 28th annual Afro Roots Fest in Islamorada April 4

The nonprofit organization Community Arts and Culture (CAC) curates and produces the longest-running world music event, Afro Roots Fest. On Saturday, April 4, 2026, the award-winning festival returns to the Morada Way Arts and Cultural district, and the Florida Keys Brewing Company (MM81.6) beginning at noon with a series of workshops, and featuring Cortadito (Cuba), the Everglades Songbook Suite (U.S.), Sanba Zao (Haiti), Famato (Guinea, West Africa), percussion and instrument-making workshops, vendors, and more. It’s a free event, with a few ticketed workshops, all ages welcome.

“The flavor of this year’s festival is decidedly Caribbean, with a dash of West Africa, and I am proud to once again present these acts to the global music fans of South

Florida,” says Grammy-nominated musician, composer, and producer, Jose Elias, known for his work with Cortadito. He will perform with his other project, the Everglades Songbook Suite ensemble.

Since its origin 13 years ago, Cortadito has evolved into one of the torchbearers of a pop culture phenomenon that is two centuries strong. Named the Miami New Times’ Best of Miami “Best Latin Act” in 2009, the band focuses on performing one of the earliest styles of Cuban country music, known as Son (pronounced sOwn), a sound best described as reminiscent of the famed Buena Vista Social Club.

The vastly resplendent Everglades has inspired countless works of literature and art, including the musical project “Everglades Songbook Suite,” which was created by

Elias. The project, which stands as the creative and artistic statement of his experiences at Everglades National Park, came to fruition in 2021 as a short film shot in the Everglades.

In 2022, the project received the support of the Kennedy Center to produce pop up concert events at two other Keys locations. The collaborative performance included artists and composers from around the world.

Sanba Zao is a master drummer and Haitian roots music legend. He was also a professor at L’Ecole National des Arts, Haiti’s national arts school, and has devoted his life to teaching and promoting the culture and music of Haiti.

Famato is a West African musical ensemble based in Gainesville that plays traditional music from Guinea,

particularly from the Mandinka tribe. The group’s name is a Sanso word that means “come and see,” and is led by Amo Soumah, a master drummer from Guinea, West Africa. They play instruments such as the Djembe drum and the balafon combined with vocals.

Workshops include Percussion for Peace Workshops led by master artists Soumah and members of Sanba Zao, as well as community partner Power of Percussion. Families and youth can participate in instrument-building workshops through The Inheritants Project, CAC’s Miami-based Afro-Indigenous youth music and dance initiative. This, along with programming by musical instrument maker Eddie Osborne will run from noon to 4 p.m., with the live music from 4=9:30 p.m.

For more information, visit AfroRootsFest.com.

To dress a **salad** the Italian way, lightly coat your greens with olive oil so that when you sprinkle sea salt on them, the flakes cling to the greens. Then add a dash of balsamic vinegar and lemon juice. You’ll never buy packaged dressing again.

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