



A Salute to
**Sylacauga,
Oak Grove &
Childersburg**
COMMERCE



Piggly Wiggly

Grocery business is all in the family for the Culottas

By DENISE SINCLAIR
Home staff writer

The Culotta brothers have been in the grocery business most of their lives following in their father and grandfather's footsteps through generations.

Vince and Charles Culotta own and operate the Piggly Wiggly store on Alabama 21 North and U.S. 280 in Sylacauga and a store in Columbiana. Their brother Sam was in the business until this past year.

Their grandparents, both maternal and paternal, operated grocery stores in Birmingham. So did their father.

Vince Culotta is semi-retired now, spending a couple of days a week at the two Sylacauga stores. He started in the grocery business as a 14-year-old and spent 48 years until his retirement.

"We have been blessed," he said. "It has been good for us."

The three stores the Culottas operate have between 160 and 170 employees. In the two stores in Sylacauga there are some 90 employees.

The store on Highway 280 opened in 2010, while the Highway 21 store opened in 1992 and the Columbiana store in 1979.

The stores get most of the grocery items, fruits and vegetables from Piggly Wiggly suppliers. Vince said in the spring and summer, the stores like to purchase vegetables from local farmers. "We like to buy local when it is in season."

The local theme for the stores is "Down home, down the street." Culotta points out Piggly Wiggly is the only locally owned store in town.

"It's hard to fight the box stores. You've got to find your niche. We pride ourselves on our meat market and our customer service," he said. "We also try to be community minded."

The stores are open seven days a week. The U.S. 280 store is open 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., while the Alabama 21 store is open 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

There is a deli in both locations that offer home-cooked food.

The manager at the Alabama 21 store is Jay Anderson and the supervisor of both stores is Terry Nation. Nessa Goggans is manager of the U.S. 280 store, while Scott Perry is assistant manager. Perry, Culotta said, had been with him since 1992.

Culotta, having spent 48 years in the business, said he loves interacting with people. "I've been in it all my life."



Denise Sinclair/The Daily Home

Store owner Vince Culotta said Piggly Wiggly prides itself on its customer service and its meat department. His family has been in the grocery business for generations.



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- 6 pm - Adult Bible Study
- 6 pm - Children's Activities and Bible Studies
- 6 pm - Youth Fellowship

Watson Paint & Body 20 years of customer satisfaction

By **ELSIE HODNETT**
Home staff writer

Sylacauga native Don Watson opened Watson Paint & Body in 1995.

"I learned about auto body repair from my late father Bobby Watson by helping him while growing up," Watson said.

Watson received further training at J.R. Pittard Area Vocational School under instructor Tommy Burton.

"My first job was at a local Chevrolet dealership where I started as a helper in the paint shop, then moved to refinish technician," he said. "After the dealership closed, I moved to Birmingham and worked for an independent for a short time."

Watson moved back to Sylacauga and managed another dealership body shop until 1995.

"I then rented a small building downtown and went to work," he said.

Watson designed and built a new facility in 1999 and expanded again in 2002.

"Now we have a 13,000-square-foot facility

and employ 10 employees including Jamie Carter, shop manager; Rhonda Matheson, office manager; Raymond Thomas and Casey Patterson, refinish techs; Keith Brazier, Matthew Taft and Jimmy Ridley, body and frame techs; and Mason Vick and Dylan Williams, detail and cleanup techs," he said. "We try to maintain 100 percent customer satisfaction and implemented third-party satisfaction surveys."

"I have always been interested in auto repair. Owning my own shop was always on my mind and I have been blessed with great employees."

Watson said customer retention is key, especially in a small town.

"All employees and management are required to continue training yearly through Icar, ASE and various training modules," he said. "Word of mouth is very important and we rely on repeat customers. We strive to be No. 1 in our area. We have great relationships with all insurance companies and are certified direct repair facilities for most larger insurance companies. Collision repair is our focal point, and we work on foreign and domestic vehicles with a written lifetime warranty on repairs."



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

Watson's employees and management receive ongoing training.



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

Customer retention is important to the staff at Watson Paint & Body.



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

The 13,000-square foot facility accommodates a total of 10 workers.



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

Don Watson is the owner of Watson Paint & Body, which he opened in 1995.

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Danny's Marketplace

Love of people and great location help business thrive



Denise Sinclair/The Daily Home

Danny Robertson, owner of Danny's Marketplace, is shown in his store on U.S. 280 in Childersburg, across from Central Alabama Community College.

By DENISE SINCLAIR
Home staff writer

CHILDERSBURG -- Danny's Marketplace on U.S. 280 across from Central Alabama Community College is known for its produce, which in the growing season is often homegrown.

The marketplace is a favorite stop for locals seeking a host of products, from Alabama grown tomatoes to fruits to jams and much more.

Owner Danny Robertson has been in the produce business for years. He worked awhile at another curb market and at Kroger's. He decided to get into the produce business on his own.

Today, his business has expanded into fresh frozen vegetables, meats, Amish jams, jellies, preserves and local honey.

Robertson said during the winter season there is not much fresh produce or vegetables, so he decided to offer the frozen vegetables and Amish favorites.

"The Amish still do their jams, jellies and preserves the old fashioned way and they have got a better flavor," he said.

Robertson and his family moved to Childersburg in 1963. He said his daughter, Kim Brannon and sister-in-law Tina Ingram help him out at the store. His wife used to, but no longer does due to some health issues.

When it comes to produce, Robertson buys mostly Alabama products in the spring and summer, and he gets his fruits from California and Florida. Of course, his peaches are bought in Clanton, he said.

"I get fresh beans out of Cullman and tomatoes from Sand Mountain."

The most popular item he sells is tomatoes.

With his business, Robertson said he has gone through good times and bad. "Thank God we are still here. Many produce stores like this are unique. Lots of my customers are older. Young people don't eat as many vegetables or fruit."

Some of the specialty products he offers include pure sorghum syrup, Alabama hot sauces and Golden Eagle syrup, which is also made in Alabama. He also has different flavors of cider, local honey and more.

"I try to look for items others don't have."

Basically, he said he has always been in some type of produce business. "I still don't know a lot about it. It is always changing."

Today, lots of produce is hybrid, according to Robertson. "You can't save it for seeds if it is hybrid. Years ago people saved the seeds."

What does the marketplace owner like the most about his business? "Meeting people. We have people stop in here from other states. They stop by to look. Many pick up a jar of honey or syrup. I love talking to people," he said. "I'm in a really good location."



Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

Danny's Marketplace has been open since 1989.

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From left are Sylacauga staff members Dennis Elliott II, Samantha Oden, Leisa Mathis, Kathy Alldredge, Jamie Reynolds, Lacy Edwards and Stevie Wyatt.

Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

By **ELSIE HODNETT**
Home staff writer

The relationship with customers comes first at Southern States Bank.

"At Southern States Bank, 'The Common Sense Bank,' we believe the most important thing is our relationships with our customers," said Meredith Nelson, senior vice president of marketing and training for Southern States Bank. "We are a true community bank that understands the importance and value of providing our customers with the products and services that best meet their banking needs."

"We believe in the communities we serve and we believe in growth and that is why we have established roots in the Sylacauga community. Our Sylacauga staff are seasoned bankers you know and trust who are committed to carrying out our mission of providing our customers with the best service and products available. Our staff live, work and play in Sylacauga and the surrounding communities, so they understand your banking needs and can provide our customers with common sense solutions through relationship banking."

Nelson said Southern States Bank has a full suite of forward-thinking products and services that include personal and business checking, interest, savings and cashback accounts, instant issue debit cards, mobile banking, Apple Pay, consumer and commercial lending services, mortgage lending, ag lending, online banking with bill pay, refunded ATM fees, Visa and American Express credit cards and remote deposit capture for business and merchant services.

Based in Anniston, Southern States Bank opened in August 2007 and has since grown to nine full-service banking locations, an operations facility and a Small Business Administration (SBA) office. Alabama locations include Anniston, Auburn, Birmingham, Huntsville, Opelika and Sylacauga. Georgia locations include Carrollton, two offices in Columbus and the SBA office in Atlanta.

"With a strong executive management team, in addition to a diverse and involved board in place, we have also engaged Advisory board representation in each market to help facilitate local decisions and community involvement," she said.



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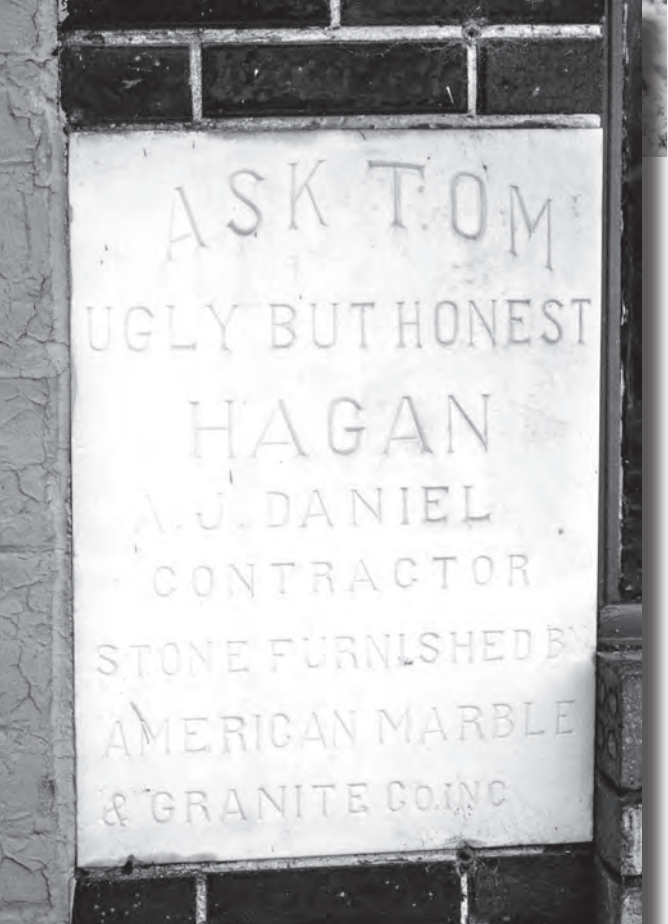
Ghosts of Commerce past

In recent decades, downtown commerce has been a subject of concern for many small towns.

“Long-range planning,” “economic development” and “comprehensive revitalization strategies” are phrases that have come to be associated with them as communities seek to bring new businesses to their once-thriving downtown communities.

Even so, reminders of businesses that once called downtown home still remain in places, including Sylacauga and Childersburg. They may be gone now, but they're still part of a downtown's DNA. They made it what it once was and laid the foundation for the commerce that followed and that yet to come.

Many of their signs still survive. Perhaps they're not as vivid as they once were due to weathering or having been painted over, but they stand as a reminder of their communities' heritage, a testament to their character and the history of their commerce.





Allen Oil

'Work hard, face your challenges, give good service'

By ELSIE HODNETT
Home staff writer

The desire to own their own business began in 1957.

"O.C. and I were iron workers in the 1950s," said Harmon Allen. "The post World War II construction boom had leveled off in the South and to continue our professions we would have had to travel to find work. We had always wanted our own business, and purchased our first service station in 1957."

Allen said through the years, they had opportunities for better service locations and then they purchased the wholesale business in 1971 as Allen Oil Co. of Sylacauga Inc.

"The wholesale business was a Union 76 Oil jobbership, and at that time we were servicing three of our own stations and several others," he said. "We also sold Union 76 oil products."

Tim Allen had always worked in the company, helping his father and grandfather, working after school and on weekends. In 1979, he joined the company full time.

In 1982, Debbie Allen Armstrong joined the company, starting as a receptionist.

"The oil industry is ever changing, and Allen Oil Co. of Sylacauga has changed as well to meet whatever challenges we were faced with," Allen said. "In the 1990s, we were operating two warehouse locations, one in Sylacauga and one in Birmingham, and lubricant sales was one of our primary focuses."

Allen said as the convenience store markets grew, they also increased their operations with adding more convenience store operations as Allen Food Marts.

"We also attracted the wholesale fuel deliveries to convenience stores operated by independent and non-branded owners," he said.

The company now delivers to 40-plus convenience store locations.

"Several of our own convenience stores house liquor stores and a deli or restaurant," he said. "In recent years, our convenience stores are marketed under Allen Brew Markets. We offer an extensive coffee bar in most stores and an extensive line of beers, including craft beers."

Allen Oil Co. of Sylacauga also serves multiple industrial locations throughout Alabama.

"We service these industries with fuel and lubricants," he said.

The Allen philosophy has always been to work hard and give excellent customer service.

"The wholesale business was built around good customer service," he said. "It is important to industry and convenience stores to have their products delivered when they need them. We offer 24-hour emergency service to our industrial customers."

Allen Oil Co. of Sylacauga also gives back to the community by supporting numerous school programs throughout central Alabama.

"We sponsor sports, band and academic programs," he said. "Through the Exxon Educational Alliance program, Allen Oil Company was able to

give 15-plus schools \$500 scholarships each. We are sponsors of Project LifeSaver and Drug Free School programs with local police programs."

Under the watchful eyes of O.C. and Harmon Allen, Tim and Debbie have been groomed to be the third generation to operate the family business with Tim as operations manager and Debbie as financial manager.

"After three generations, our business philosophy remains the same ... work hard, face your challenges, give good service and treat people right," he said.



Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

Tim Allen joined the family business in 1979.

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Sylacauga Chamber of Commerce

Mission of revitalization to continue for 2016

By DENISE SINCLAIR
Home staff writer

Revitalization was a major mission for the chamber of commerce in 2015, and it will continue to be in 2016.

Mike Landers said when he took the executive director's position with the chamber on a temporary basis in January, 2015, the organization needed to look at revitalizing for growth, purpose and its mission. He was later hired as the executive director in the summer of 2015.

Landers said the chamber has to become more relevant to its members. "We had to build economically and grow our membership. Our building had to be repaired."

According to Landers, the chamber's partners in the community helped it over the hump. "IKO Shingles, Omya and Imerys are the partners that moved us forward. You can't discount our partnerships. We set about to develop more partnerships in our community," he said.

The Sylacauga chamber is a member of the Alabama Association of Chambers of Commerce and the organization has helped the chamber redefine its mission.

"We want to become more relevant to our members and grow our membership," he said.

Other partners Landers is proud the chamber has include Coosa Valley Medical Center, the Sylacauga

Board of Education, Central Alabama Community College and B.B. Comer Memorial Library.

"Dr. Todd Freeman's leadership in our schools brings a positive direction and moving the Board of Education's Central Office downtown just adds to the future for our town. The hospital is one of the 10 best hospitals in the state. What a gem the library is and it is envied by others. Ted and Shirley Spears are such key components to our town. Then you have CACC under the leadership of Dr. Susan Burrows. This chamber believes education is the way to move forward."

The chamber had its best banquet ever in 2015, he added, thanks to Southern States Bank and Omya, which funded the appearance of author and Pulitzer Prize winner Rick Bragg.

Landers said he is working with U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby, who is a friend of his, to partner with the chamber in the future for the benefit of local health care services.

"At the end of the day, the question is why do we not get more restaurants, stores and good jobs in our community. The economy has been down but we've had several industries expand such as Nematik. IKO located here. This chamber wants Sylacauga to be great again. Career and technical education is one of the ways to do this and we have that at Sylacauga High and CACC. There are opportunities to grow."

The executive director described Sylacauga as a safe community that provides good city services. "We

are going to develop partnerships to accentuate the positive," he said.

Landers praised the Marble Festival and its mission of highlighting the pure white marble found in the area.

"We got the quarry at Fayetteville that ships overseas. It produces dimension stones used to make architectural stone. This is another great advertisement for Sylacauga."

He pointed out that a sculpture by Craigger Browne, *Moon Over Sylacauga*, sits on the desk of a CEO in Hong Kong. "He tells everyone it is from Sylacauga," Landers said.

The executive director sees Sylacauga as poised to grow in the future. Good things are going to happen, he said.

In looking to the future, Landers said he would like to see more lofts in the buildings downtown adding another positive aspect to the city's growth.

Landers said the move to downtown by the board of education to renovate the old bank building on Broadway was a wonderful move.

"I appreciate everything the downtown merchants do. If we have a viable downtown, it will be like going back to Mayberry and it will be exciting," Landers said. "It will bring that hometown feeling back."

In addition to Landers, the chamber staff includes Teresa Garrett, office manager and Jennie Williams, receptionist.



Denise Sinclair/The Daily Home

Mike Landers serves as executive director of the Sylacauga Chamber of Commerce.

The mission of the Sylacauga Chamber of Commerce is to provide leadership and promote the economic advancement, business climate and quality of life for the City of Sylacauga and surrounding areas.

The chamber remains constantly busy. The following statistics are a rough estimate of a year's activity:

Local Phone calls - 6,000
Out of Town Phone calls - 1,000
Meetings held - 226
Bulk Mailings - 12,000
Local Visitors - 1074
Out of town Visitors - 370
Business Prospects - 24

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Blue Bell Ice Cream

It's back, and people still love it

Consumers in Sylacauga and nearby communities spent four months dealing with what some called "Blue Bell withdrawal" during 2015 while a locally-produced treat was off the market.

But now the ice cream is back, and people are loving it.

Blue Bell products arrived back on shelves after four months of no sales and a listeria scare that forced a recall.

Judy Duke, assistant manager of the Piggly Wiggly store on

Alabama 21, said customers were lined up when the store opened to get their Blue Bell.

"The customers were saying they 'no longer were in Blue Bell withdrawal.' It has been unbelievable. That's all anyone is talking about," Duke said.

Blue Bell returned to store shelves with four flavors the company called its starting lineup: homemade vanilla, Dutch chocolate, The Great Divide and cookies 'n cream. Buttered pecan returned

next, as did 12-pack cups of homemade vanilla and Dutch chocolate.

Now, butter crunch, coffee, natural vanilla bean and pistachio almond flavors are available again.

Keith Mock, store manager at Wal-Mart on U.S. 280, said Blue Bell sales had been great. People were waiting for the ice cream to be put back in the freezer, he said.

"We got all four flavors, and it has been absolutely amazing as people come in to get the ice cream," Mock said.

Blue Bell Creameries resumed selling at locations in Alabama after the Texas-based retailer halted sales due to a listeria contamination at its plants. The contamination prompted health concerns that drew the regulatory scrutiny of federal and state officials.

The Blue Bell plant in Sylacauga began producing ice cream again last July.

Also that month, the company received a cash infusion from Texas billionaire Sid Bass. According to Blue Bell officials, Bass became a private investor in Blue Bell Creameries after the privately-held company was unable to raise enough capital from existing shareholders.

Now, Blue Bell products are available again in parts of Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Mississippi and 11 other states.

"Things have progressed very well, and we are excited to be in stores again, stocking and restocking as needed," said Ricky Dickson, Blue Bell's vice president of sales and marketing. "Our customers in these areas have been patiently waiting, and we are very grateful for their support during this time."

"Our production facilities are doing well. We continue to increase our operations as we add more flavors. Our focus as we move forward will be on product development and future growth."



We are an organization made up of business firms, public officials, professional people, and public-spirited citizens whose primary interest is in publicizing, promoting, and developing commercial and industrial opportunities in their local area, and also improving community schools, streets, housing, and public works.



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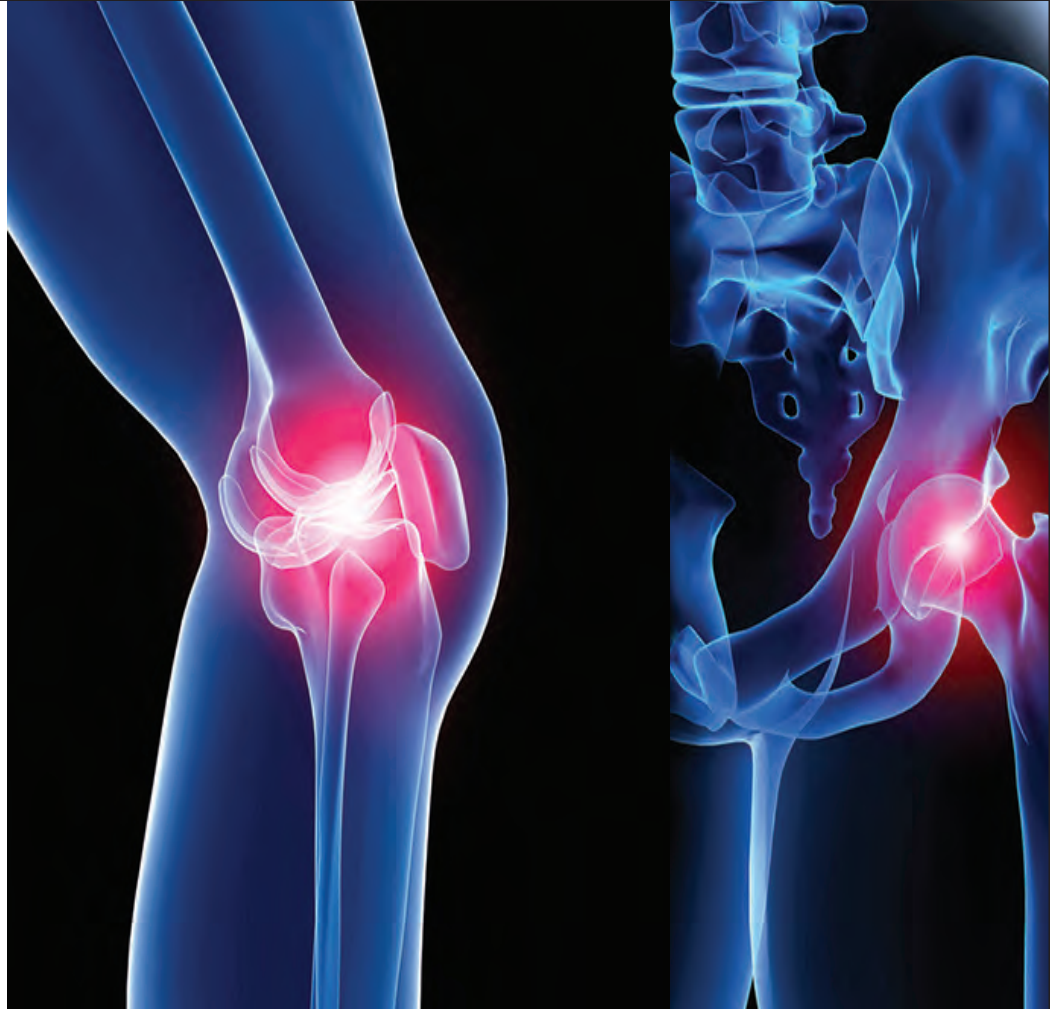
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Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

Blue Bell products left local grocery shelves for four months last year. Nine flavors are now back in stores.

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Richard Blades

Missed by the Sylacauga business community

By DENISE SINCLAIR
Home staff writer

Sylacauga's business community lost one of its fixtures and one of its most respected members early in 2016 with the death of Richard A. Blades.

In the weeks since, friends have remembered the respected businessman, who succumbed to a difficult battle with ALS, as someone who did a lot for people without wanting to be recognized for his kindness.

Such as Jim Morgan, who said Blades was his best friend since 1966.

"I got to know him when I moved here and was working for Avondale Mills," he said. "He put clothes on my three sons. We did a lot of things together. He was a good, morally honest man who did a lot for people and he didn't want

anyone to know what he did."

Everyone in town knew the Sumner twins, Charlie and Carl, Morgan said. The twins had some mental challenges and would often show up at Blades' store, A&M Clothing.

"They would want to borrow \$8 before they got their checks. He would loan it to them and they would pay it back. He always matched their clothes from hats to shirts and put their names on them himself," Morgan said. "He treated them right and helped take care of them."

Morgan said people would drop by the store just to talk.

"Everyone had a good time together. (The last time I sat with him), he wrote me a note, since he couldn't talk and told me to come by anytime. He loved people."

The Rev. Jim Shaw, pastor

of Unity Presbyterian Church, where Blades attended, said, "Richard was a very honest businessman, well loved and respected."

"He helped families in need who had their homes burn. He would provide clothing to those families and never expect anything in return."

Joe Morton helped take care of Charlie and Carl, calling them his adopted sons.

"All through the years, the twins struggled to make ends meet," Morton said. "They would go by A&M and borrow from Richard. He was always so kind to them. He understood their challenges and treated them as human beings should be treated." Morton, a former Sylacauga school superintendent, recalled after Carl died several years ago taking Charlie by to get a pair of boots from

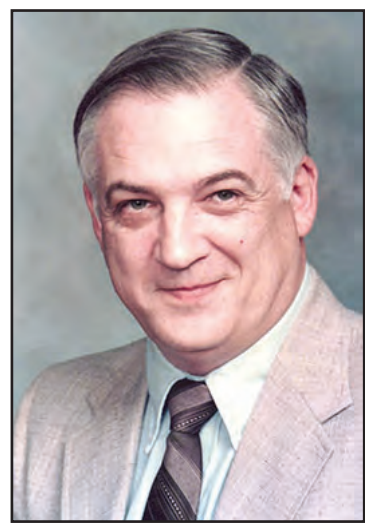
A&M at Christmas.

"Charlie wanted his name written on the tongues of the boots. Richard did that himself for Charlie. It's a sad day to lose him. He was such a kind, gentle and helpful man," Morton said. "He treated people right. Sylacauga lost a quiet and humble man, but also a big man in this community."

Blades led by example. "He would treat people how they should be treating each other," Morton said.

Country songwriter and singer Troy Jones recalls his home burning decades ago the night before Christmas Eve.

"I didn't have any boots, hats, jeans or shirts. I went to A&M. I had money in my pocket," Jones said. "I put my clothing on the counter to pay for it, but Richard wouldn't let me. He gave the items to me. He was



Richard Blades

a true local businessman. This was my biggest memory about him."

Jones said he often stopped by the store to talk to Blades about his career.

"He was always so encouraging about the music business," he said. "He was just a good man and friend."

Blades was a businessman in Sylacauga for more than 60 years. After working at the Sylacauga Cash Store early in his career, he started A&M Clothing on North Norton Avenue in downtown Sylacauga. Over four decades, he and his family made the store a cornerstone in Sylacauga.

He was a member of Unity Presbyterian Church in Weogufka and was previously a longtime member of the First Presbyterian Church in Sylacauga where he served as a deacon and chairman of the Property Committee.

"He was just a good friend and fellow," said Pete Summers, who owned Pete's Feed and Seed on the same block as A&M. "We often stopped by each other's store and hollered at one another. I will miss the old boy."



Buddy Roberts/The Daily Home

Respected businessman Richard Blades owned A&M Clothing in Sylacauga for more than four decades.

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NAPA Childersburg Truck Service

Providing customer satisfaction for four decades

By **ELSIE HODNETT**
Home staff writer

Born and raised in Spruce Pine, North Carolina, Bill and Bob Goins moved to Childersburg in 1964 and started Goins Trucking Company.

“With the trucking company came the need for heavy duty truck parts, which they had to get from either Birmingham or Montgomery, so they opened Childersburg Truck Service Inc. in June 1978,” said Vanda Wallace, the company’s president.

Wallace said Childersburg Truck Service Inc. sells heavy duty truck parts.

“We are the major distributor for Ox Bodies and Silent Drive lift axels,” she said.

Bob Goins took over as sole owner in 1991 and in 2012 he opened Childersburg NAPA store offering automobile and small engine parts.

“Bob, who is 82, still comes to work everyday, but in 2012 he turned over the day-to-day operations to his three daughters: Vicky Riley, Vanda Wallace and Valerie Goins, and general manager Roger Justice,” she said. “We have been in the same location for 38 years.”



Photos by Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

The Childersburg NAPA store opened in 2012. Its knowledgeable staff offers automobile and small engine parts in conjunction with Childersburg Truck Service, which provides heavy duty truck products.



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