

from the marketing department of The Anniston Star



Have a classic Christmas with a live tree

There's a stigma that comes with buying a fresh-cut tree: it'll be sticky, the needles will fall out and the tree will die by Christmas, no exceptions.

Well, hold on. It's not quite like that anymore, as more species of tree have become available at local farms, supplanting cedar trees (which dry quickly and can lose needles soon after cutting) as the norm.

In fact, picking up a locally-grown, hand-cut tree is easier than ever. We met up with local Christmas tree farmers Rick and Dianne West, who have been running Westwood Plantation Christmas Tree Farm in Munford for 15 years, to find out how to pick our tree.

PICKING THE TREE

Know your house's height

Some of the trees on the farm are more than 15 feet tall, so don't come home with more tree than you need.

Play favorites

The farm has four tree types: Murray Cypress, the green, cone-shaped trees that you see when someone says "Christmas tree;" Carolina Sapphire, with a blue tint to its needles; oldfashioned cedars, for traditionalists who loved the smell at grandma's house; and Blue Ice, which shares colors with the Carolina Sapphire, but has its own distinct scent.



Timber!

You can bring your own saw or use the farm's tools to cut down your tree, and chainsaws are allowed. The farm provides helpers on the weekend, too.

Arrive before 5

The sun goes down a little earlier this time of year, and the Wests have seen people try to cut down trees by phonelight — it's not exactly easy.

PACKING IT UP

Shake it out

The tree goes into a shaker, a machine that dances the tree around to get any broken branches and other matter out before it's packed. "If there are any rhinoceroses living in there, it'll shake them out," said Rick.

The tree is then pulled into a baler, which will net it up to make it easier to carry, load and unpack. Be sure to have a truck or trailer to carry the tree home; they're not only tall, but very wide.

Dianne and Rick West of Westwood Plantation Christmas Tree Farm stand in front of one of their trees at their farm in Munford.

CARING AT HOME

Water, water, water

"When you have a fresh cut tree, it absorbs an enormous amount of water, people just don't understand," said Dianne. "You water it in the morning and at night for about a week."

Newly cut trees can take in a gallon of water a day or more, though intake slows down after about a week. If you keep it watered a tree will easily last through Christmas, even if it comes home in November.

Funnel for a better back

Funnels are available at the farm and most home stores that stretch into the tree base from the outside (usually, you'll hide the funnel in the back). This will let you water the tree without crawling under it.

Visit Westwood Plantation Christmas Tree Farm at 130 Pinewood Drive in Munford, just south of Oxford on Highway 21 on your left. The farm is open through Dec. 24, from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Call 256-591-7295 for more information.



Your Spot For HOLIDAY SAVINGS QUINTARD —MALL—

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Keep Santa happy and safe with a clean chimney

There are plenty of good reasons to maintain your chimney.

Safety is a major factor; dying embers can get lodged into cracks in the lining and sneak their way into a home's woodwork to start a fire, and without regular cleaning the layers of soot can get so thick they crystallize into a solid layer that has to be washed out with chemicals.

But if you ask Heath Burr, owner of Oxford's Heath Chimney Services, he'll give you 12 good reasons to keep up with your chimney: "Out of one chimney, at one time, I pulled out nine squirrels and three ducks," said Burr. It's important to make sure chimneys are capped.

Burr's been in the business for more than a decade, and in that time he's carefully removed chimney swift nests and spooked away enough bats to put Bruce Wayne to shame. The time on the job and his certification with CSIA, the Chimney Safety Institute of America, makes him something of an encyclopedia when it comes to flue work. He offered us some important tips about maintaining chimneys for the holidays:

their chimneys, and that's really a little too late," said Burr, who encourages his regular customers to get their cleanings scheduled during the spring and summer, when the schedule is more open and easy to arrange. Doing so ensures that the chimney is ready to go when cold weather sets in.

Get your chimney cleaned regularly

Regular customer Lane Millwood describes his fireplace use as frequent, and has his chimney cleaned annually to keep up with his regular usage.

"I use it to augment my gas heat; I spend a lot of time down in my den with my wife, so we turn the gas heat down and crank up the fireplace," said Millwood. When Heath employee Jeff Vaughan slides out of Millwood's fireplace after scrubbing down the last year of soot, his white full-body suit is covered in dull gray and smoky black patches. It's actually not that bad, according to Burr, who says that annual cleaning is generally a tidy affair. If a customer waits a few years in between cleanings, though (or never has one done at all), layers of creosote build up in the flue, which range from a level 1 layer, like Millwood's simple cleaning, up to level 3, with a thick,

nigh-impenetrable layer of black crust up the chimney that is much more costly to remove.

Suck it in, Santa Modern chimneys don't leave a lot of room for jolly fat men to slide through, but Burr reckons that there's at least one Santa-friendly model still in use — assuming St. Nick sheds a few pounds, first.

"There are flues that they

call '20 by 20,' which if it was a thin Santa, he could probably fit down there," Burr said, chuckling. Kids like to ask if he's cleaning the chimneys to make St. Nick's job a little easier, and he always tells them that's exactly the plan.

Contact Heath Chimney Services at www. heathchimneyservices.net or by calling 256-832-0205.



Don't wait until it gets cold

"When you start getting that first cold snap, that's when people start thinking about



Heath Burr, left, and Jeff Vaughan, of Heath Chimney Services say chimney cleanings using a chimney sweep, also pictured above, are essential for safety.

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Local School

The benefits to *buying local* this holiday season

Holiday shopping dominates many people's free time between the day after Thanksgiving and the final days before Christmas. While many people may shop 'til they drop on Black Friday and Cyber Monday, those days still account for a relatively small amount of the hundreds of billions of dollars that are spent each holiday season. Shoppers now have a bevy of options at their disposal as they embark on holiday shopping season. Traditional in-store retailers are still around, and online shopping continues to grow in popularity with each holiday season. But many holiday shoppers are looking to buy local this holiday season, and such a decision can pay a host of dividends for both shoppers and the communities they call home.

• Buying local benefits your local economy. Studies from Civic Economics, an economics and strategics planning firm, found that independent, locally-owned retailers return a far greater percentage of their revenue into their local economies than national chain stores. One such study examined the disparity between revenue recirculation among independent, locally-owned businesses in Raleigh, North Carolina, versus four major national chains in the city. The former recirculated 51.1 percent of revenue into the local economy, while the latter recirculated less than 14 percent. Similar results were discovered in many cities, indicating that buying local not only benefits local business owners, but also the communities those owners and their customers call home. • Buying local creates jobs in your community. One of the biggest ways local business owners in Raleigh recirculated their revenue in the local economy was job creation. While national chains also create jobs, such jobs only benefit your community if the chains are located within your community. If your local mall is a considerable drive away,

chances are the chains within that mall are not employing many of your fellow community members. Local businesses in your community are more likely to employ residents of your town.

• Shopping local may provide

access to more unique gifts. In addition to the economic benefits of buying local, shoppers may find merchandise made by local craftsmen is more unique than mass-produced items found on the shelves of national retailers. Recipients may cherish more unique items that they cannot find on their own, and that appreciation may even spur them to visit more local retailers after the holiday season has come and gone, benefiting their own communities in so doing.

• Local business may provide a more personal touch. Buying from national chains has its advantages, but customer service is not always one of them. Should your loved ones encounter problems with their gift that requires assistance, they might be forced to wait on the phone for extended periods of time as they and thousands of others wait for customer service representatives to answer their calls. Local businesses do not deal with nearly the volume of customers as national retailers and, therefore, are capable of addressing concerns more quickly and personally than large chains. Buying local not only benefits small business owners, but it also pays dividends for their customers and the communities they call home.









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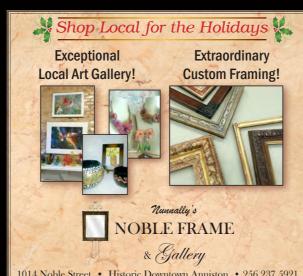




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Dress your home for the holidays

Tips from an interior designer

With the holiday season at our doorsteps, it's time to, well, decorate our doorsteps.

Dad grumbles into the garage to get the ladder and Christmas lights, Mom breaks into the attic to drag out the decorations. It's usually a good time, but if there's anything we've learned over the years, it's that it's a whole lot easier with a plan in mind. That's why we got in touch with Patsy McKinney, owner of Oxford decorating and home store Above and Beyond, to get some tips on how to decorate with style:

Find a focus

"I would always start where my family was going to meet," said McKinney. She suggests taking simple items and placing them in the center of your table, or in the family area at home, to create a festive gathering place. The items don't have to be complicated — candles, a bowl of ornaments, even dishes — they just have to represent you and your family.

"It's what makes you feel warm," said McKinney.

Go rustic

Christmas trees at Above and Beyond are decorated with natural items amidst more traditional ornaments, with earthy features like spraypainted sticks standing from the treetops, and painted deer antlers hanging from the branches.

"The flair for the season this year is a rustic warmth," said McKinney. "It's about what the holidays are to you, spiritually and emotionally, what you can put your heart in touch with."

Glitz and glamour are still in high demand, but cozy, lowkey approaches have become more popular in the last five years, according to McKinney.

Decorate with community originals

Make your indoor decorations unique by picking up handmade crafts from the community. There are plenty of local artisans that sell decorative crafts, like Sarah Cavender Metalworks or Concrete Creations, and local shops like McKinney's offer handmade, naturalistic items that fit into any environment.

Try a new tree lighting method

For years, we've all lit up our trees by winding lights around them like maypoles. It always works — lights hang on trees, no questions asked — but there are other methods that can make your tree's lighting more full and vibrant.

The vertical lighting method is considered to be the professional method, employed every year by the decorators at Rockefeller Center when they get their massive Christmas tree ready. Decorating this way makes it easier to pack lights in and get a more consistent look without any "dead spots," and it's not much more of a time investment than the usual, horizontal method. Just imagine the tree as three triangles; with a front and two sides. Weave your light string in and out of branches up to the top of the tree, then weave them through again as you come back down. Connect another string of lights and repeat for the next sections.

Another method is wrapping individual branches in lights. It's time intensive and takes more lights, but the effect can be worth it, as the entire tree will be lit inside and out. It's done just how it sounds: wrap a branch with lights toward the center of the tree, then wrap the next branch coming back out and repeat.





Feel free to keep it simple

McKinney stresses that simple choices and things you already own can do a great job — though there's something to be said for a little bit of new, shiny decor — and that no matter how you choose to decorate, you do it for yourself and your family, and not to impress the rest of the world.

"We make it hard because we expect it to be hard," she said. "You just have to slow down enough to look at something and see the prettiness of it, and see the possibilities."

Stop by Above and Beyond to meet Patsy and learn more about decorating or to pick up something new for your home. The store is located at 30 E. Choccolocco St. in Oxford.





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For those about to wrap...

Clean folds, tight corners and bows are key for a great wrap job

Christmas shopping can be a great time, but if there's a hangup that slows down the fun, it's having to wrap it all. Fortunately, 2nd Chance's gift wrap at the Quintard Mall is back this year to lighten the load.

"It's an outstanding outreach event for us to to get out in front of so many people and be able to talk about domestic violence and sexual assault, and what we do and how to access our services," said Susan Shipman, executive director of 2nd Chance. The organization continues its holiday gift wrapping tradition at the Quintard Mall this year starting Nov. 30.

According to Shipman, the gift wrap is one of the most important funding events of the year for 2nd Chance, giving the organization money that it can use for any need that may arise, unlike grant money, which is targeted to very specific requirements. Because 2nd Chance has both communal housing and transitional apartments, with dozens of women and their children in the program, there are plenty of opportunities for special needs to arise. "They can stay in our transitional housing for up to 24 months, which is enough time to get to work on a GED, or Gadsden State's two-year programs," said Shipman. "It's extra time to get things together."

itself to get a flat, clean edge. Secure the paper with tape.

Fold and crimp

Getting the corners folded without mangling the paper can be a bit of a challenge for a newcomer, but it's the hallmark of a pretty present.

"What's important here is that I've got good, crisp, clean folds, that are tight," said Shipman, showing off her technique.

Fold the paper sticking over the edges of your package down toward the table, starting in the center of the box. You should have little "wings" at the left and right edges; just fold them in (don't be afraid to flatten them out for a tight fold, like making a paper airplane) and you should have a big "V" of paper sticking over the edge of the package. Fold that down tight and tape it up to finish wrapping the package.





Shipman gave us some gift wrapping tips from the pros:

Have enough paper for the box

It might seem obvious, but rookie mistake number one is to cut too little paper to cover the whole box. Shipman has a bolt of wrapping paper about two and a half feet wide and boxes she's already measured for the gift wrap, so she flies right by measuring.

If you're not quite at that level of preparation? Put the box on your uncut wrapping paper and pull the end up so it reaches just over halfway across the box when you stretch it over. Then cut an equal length on the opposite side, so they overlap a bit. The end you've just cut will probably have a curled edge; you can fold the end in on

Dress it up

Susan uses a bow on her presents, with a ribbon that wraps all the way around the package, which gives the finished gift a nice, classic look. You can get creative with your embellishments and go beyond the bow. If you're giving gifts to family friends, put a custom tag on the gift with a photo of your family, for instance, or use twine to hold mistletoe in place on the box for a rustic feel.

Let someone else do it

The holidays are hectic, and 2nd Chance's gift wrap offers shoppers at the Quintard Mall a way to quickly get their gifts wrapped before they even leave the building, which means they go straight under the tree when you get home. Wrappings range from \$2 to \$5 depending on the size of the gift and help support 2nd Chance's multiple programs for women and their families in crisis.

To find out more about 2nd Chance or volunteering for the gift wrap, call their office at (256) 236-7381 or visit 2ndchanceinc.org. You or your business can also adopt a family and purchase needed items for 2nd Chance women and families for the holiday season. Speak with Susan Shipman for details. OPEN HOUSE

Thursday, December 17 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Come celebrate the season with us!

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Upcoming holiday events

The Calhoun County holiday season is no slouch when it comes to events and activities, with parades, visits from Santa and tons of entertainment opportunities taking place throughout. Whether you want to get the kids to a crafting corner or go out to a show for the whole family, there's something for everyone, and we've got you covered with our comprehensive list of upcoming dates:





Every Christmas Story Ever Told

WHAT: Rather than running through A Christmas Carol, the actors decide to tell every Christmas story ever, from ancient myth to pop-culture and everything in between.

WHEN: Today at 2:30 PM

WHERE: Berman Museum, 840 Museum Dr, Anniston

COST: \$20 adults, \$10 children **INFO:** www.castalabama.com for information and tickets.

Voices of the South Christmas

WHAT: The Central Alabama chapter of the Barbershop Harmony Society perform an a cappella Christmas concert.

WHEN: Dec. 18 at 7 PM WHERE: Oxford Performing Arts Center COST: Free INFO: www.oxfordpac.org

OPAC Christmas Movie Festival

WHAT: Showings of Christmas movies in the week leading up to Christmas.
WHEN: "Miracle on 34th Street" Dec.
20 at 2:30 PM; "ELF" Dec. 21 at 7 PM; "Christmas Vacation" Dec. 22 at 7 PM; "A Christmas Story" Dec. 23 at 2:30 PM.
WHERE: Oxford Performing Arts Center COST: Free INFO: www.oxfordpac.org

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Friday, December 18 · 10am-10pm Saturday, December 19 · 10am-10pm Sunday, December 20 · 12pm-8pm Monday, December 21 · 10am-10pm Tuesday, December 22 · 10am-10pm Wednesday, December 23 · 10am-10pm Thursday, December 24 · 8am-6pm Christmas Day · CLOSED (Amstar Cinemas Open) DEPARTMENT STORE HOURS MAY VARY.



THE SEASON OF GIVING

Local organizations depend on the community to help those in need

The holiday season reminds us to give what we can to help those that aren't as fortunate, donating time, goods and money to make the most impact. Decide where to focus your efforts with our listing of charity organizations operating within Calhoun County:

2nd Chance, Inc. PO Box 2714, Anniston, AL 36202

(256) 236-7381 2ndchanceinc.org

2nd Chance holds a fundraising gift wrap at Quintard Mall every year during the holiday season, and this year is no exception. Get your gifts wrapped from Nov. 30 through Dec. 24 in return for your donations (small items are \$2, medium items are \$3 and large items are \$5). You can also help out by volunteering for a four-hour block as a gift-wrapper. Just call 2nd Chance and let Danielle or Susan know you'd like to volunteer.

Habitat for Humanity of Calhoun County

- 1212 Walnut Avenue, Anniston, AL 36202
- (256) 237-3700
- habitatanniston.org/news.html

Habitat for Humanity helps create affordable housing for families, and they take donations of funding and volunteer time.

Community Enabler Developer

- 104 F-Street, Anniston, AL 36201
- 256-237-6144
- unityenabler.org

CED provides food, clothing and financial aid to anyone in need, and takes donations of both money and household goods. Volunteers can help with donation processing and distribution.

Piedmont Benevolence Center

 piedmont benevolence center. weebly.com/volunteers.html

Help with distribution of goods



Sav-A-Life

- 13 East 13th Street, Anniston, AL 36201
- (256) 237-9999
- savalifecalhouncounty.org/Sav-A-

Arc provides support and services to adults and children with developmental disabilities. Volunteers can help with day to day tasks or become involved with organization leadership. Donors can give through Arc's website.

through volunteer time blocks.

Anniston Soup Bowl

- Soup Bowl at PO Box 2072, Anniston, AL 36202
- facebook.com/pages/Anniston-Soup-Bowl/112481352167531

The Soup Bowl is open Monday through Friday, where volunteers can help by serving food or getting it ready. Donations to help build their new location are also accepted through their mailing address.

Calhoun / Cleburne Children's Center, Inc.

- 2100 Leighton Avenue, Anniston, AL 36207
- (256) 238-0902
- cchildrenscenter.org/donate/

Children's Center offers aid to kids who are victims of abuse, offering support and stability while providing legal information to parents, abuse counseling for children. Financial donations appreciated. Life/Volunteers.html

Sav-A-Life can always use volunteers for a variety of positions, including client advocacy, ministering, hosting baby showers, offering financial assistance or even as greeters to help new arrivals find their way in the office.

Opportunity Center

- 6300 McČlellan Blvd., Anniston, Al 36206
- (256) 820-9960
- opportunity-center.com/donations/

Opportunity Center accepts financial donations as well as goods like household items, all the way up to vehicles and real estate, which can be written off for tax purposes.

Arc of Calhoun and Cleburne Counties

- 401 Noble Street Anniston, AL 36201
- (256) 236-2857
- calhouncleburnearc.org/getinvolved/

Boys & Girls Clubs of East Central Alabama

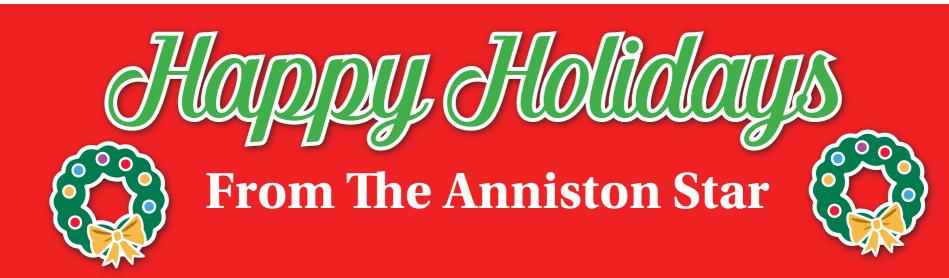
- 256-236-7050
- http://bgcecal.org/donation-form. pdf

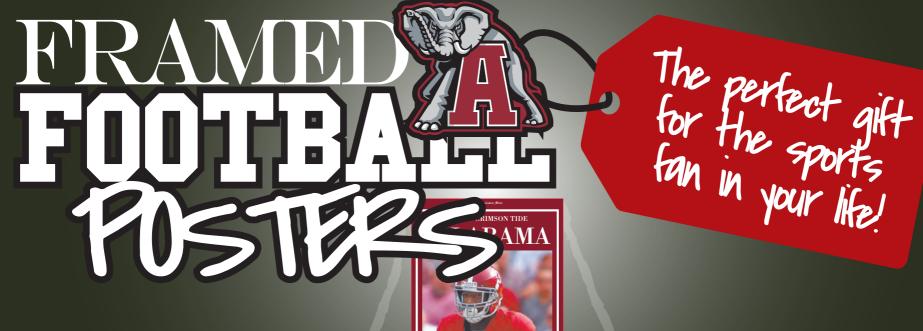
Boys & Girls Clubs give kids a safe after-school environment where they can get help with homework, socialize and learn useful skills. Monetary donations are gratefully accepted.

Interfaith Ministries, Inc.

- 1431 Gurnee Avenue, Anniston AL 36201
- (256) 237-1472
- interfaithcalhoun.org/donate%20 and%20volunteer

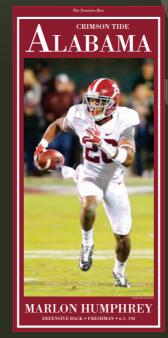
Interfaith helps with several needs, including assistance with rent and utilities, medication and household goods from towels and blankets to food and water. Volunteers can donate money or time, and help delivering meals to home-bound clients throughout the week.

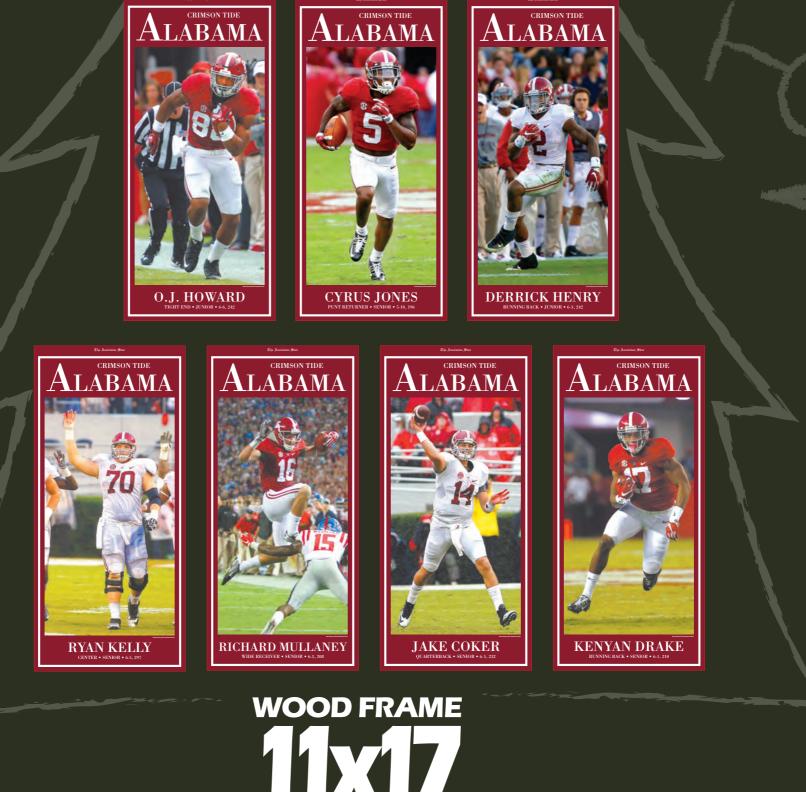


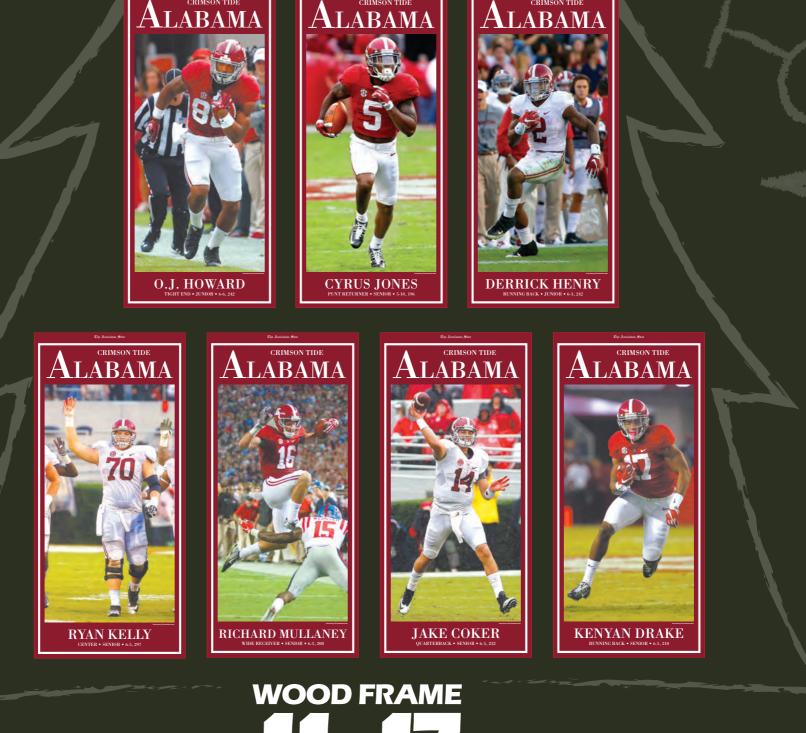


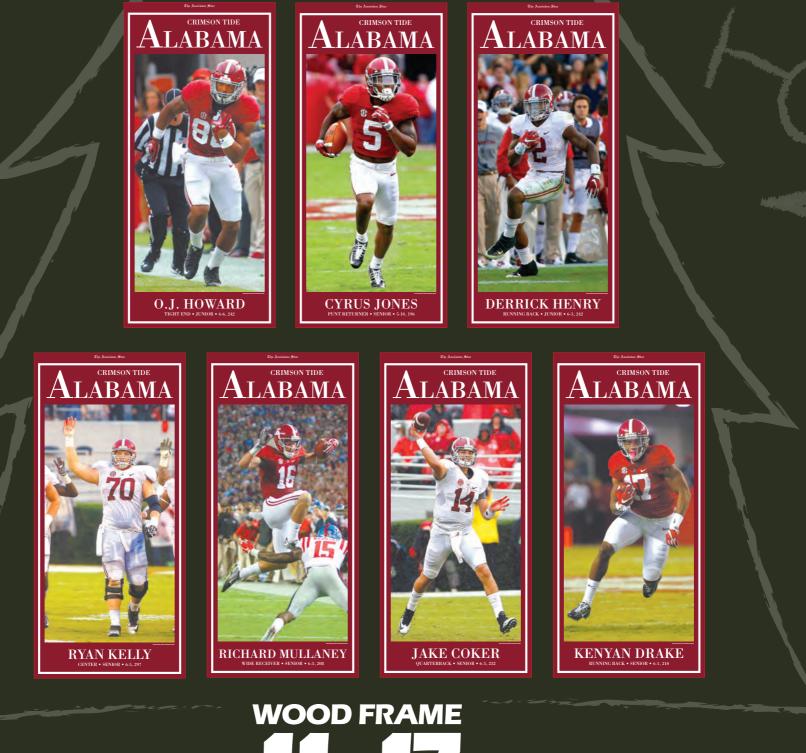












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