

A Salute to
**FRIENDS
& NEIGHBORS
2017**



Dr. Bernard Bray:

The story of a life of politics and personal meaning

By JULIE WASHINGTON
Special To The Daily Home

TALLADEGA -- Dr. Bernard Bray has worn many hats in his long career in political science. He chose a signature beret one day after Donald Trump was inaugurated as the United States' 45th president.

A light rain fell outside Bray's rustic home as he discussed his career as a scholar, ACLU leader, award-winning researcher, educator, political theorist and movement leader. A self-described student of race and politics, the Talladega College professor has spent much of his career studying racial disparities in the application of the death penalty.

Surrounded by photographs and published papers and attended to by an assistant, Bray mused keenly on his past experiences as well as the current tumultuous state of American politics, hours before the Women's March commenced 70 miles away in Birmingham.

Indiana roots and starting a movement

Bray was born in a tenant house on his grandparents' farm in Craig Township, Switzerland County, Indiana, in 1933. He remained there until his high school graduation from Vevay, Indiana, in 1951. Then he did something amazing, at least by his parents' standards. He went off to attend Indiana University in Bloomington the fall after graduation.

"My father had no expectation of me going to college," Bray said. "He said 'I thought Bern might go to one of the two-year technical schools. I had no idea he'd be going to a four year university.'"

Bray's parents' support continued even when his beliefs were not politically popular. A few years after World War II, Bray sought aid for an injured Japanese student who needed financial support. He wrote his parents asking they share his request with their community's church and then to the countywide Baptist association.

"When they presented it at the church, a longtime family friend of ours said something like 'We can't support any of those Japs,'" Bray said. "My parents felt this was very derogatory and they just walked out the church. They went back the next Sunday, but that's the way they responded in support of me."

Bray said he spent a portion of his life in church while growing up on his grandparents' farm and was very committed to practicing the Baptist faith. He looked to continue that activity in college, leading him to join the Roger Williams Fellowship, which featured a weekly group meal and political discussion.

"We talked politics and really paid attention to the news. We were very alert to things and very interested in discussing what Jesus would do about social and political issues."

His early Christian upbringing and participation in the Roger Williams Fellowship led Bray to become one of five leaders of the Green Feather Movement on Indiana University's campus.

The movement began in response to a member of Indiana Textbook Commission's desire to remove all books mentioning Quakers or Robin Hood from public schools -- the Quakers because of their belief in peace, and Robin Hood because he stole from the rich and gave to the poor, Bray explained.

"This was in the time of McCarthyism. Generally, we had the attitude that we wanted to stand for civil liberties," he said. The group adopted Robin Hood's green feather as its symbol and became the Green Feathers. They wore and distributed pins with their symbol.

"On the first of March 1954, one Sunday evening, we walked onto the campus of Indiana University carrying burlap bags filled with chicken feathers that for the last few weeks we'd collected from a local poultry house and dyed green," Bray remembered.

"We spread the feathers on the cam-

pus and on all the walkways so when the students, faculty and staff came the next Monday morning they'd see the whole place decorated with green feathers."

The group also drafted and printed a statement on green paper. Bray entered the campus buildings early one morning to pin the statements around campus before anyone else arrived.

"This became a movement that went beyond Indiana University. Students at Harvard and UCLA were doing things with it, and the University of Wisconsin joined in the effort."

Bray's involvement with the Green Feather Movement ended during the spring of 1954. However, the notoriety it brought him led to his involvement in forming a university forum to discuss public issues. He also participated in canvassing for the Democratic party. These activities further inspired Bray to be engaged actively in politics while studying political science and making it his profession.

Teaching in and out of the classroom

"In 1965, I took a job teaching political science at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois, and taught there six years. That was 1965 to 1971, a time of a lot of protest activity across the country," he said.

An act of violence on another university's campus had a major affect on him.

"It was in May, 1970, that four students at Kent State University were shot and killed by members of the National Guard. In solidarity to the students and other people protesting around the country, at noon one day at Bradley University, we had a gathering. Four faculty members spoke about these matters of injustice, war and freedom. I was one of them.

"In my talk on the lawn, after saying the university is a great place in which to share ideas and that we should respect the university, I counselled all who were of draft age not to cooperate with the draft. And I advised those who were not of draft age to counsel those who were of draft age not to cooperate with it."

Considering the talk an act of civil disobedience, Bray wasn't prosecuted for his outspokenness, although some of his contemporaries were.

'Going abroad'

In 1971 Bray decided to leave Bradley University.

"I said to myself and to some friends, 'I want to go abroad.'" When asked his destination, Bray had a ready answer.

"I want to go to the southern United States," he said. "That would be going abroad." At the time, Talladega College was seeking a generalist who could develop a political science curriculum.

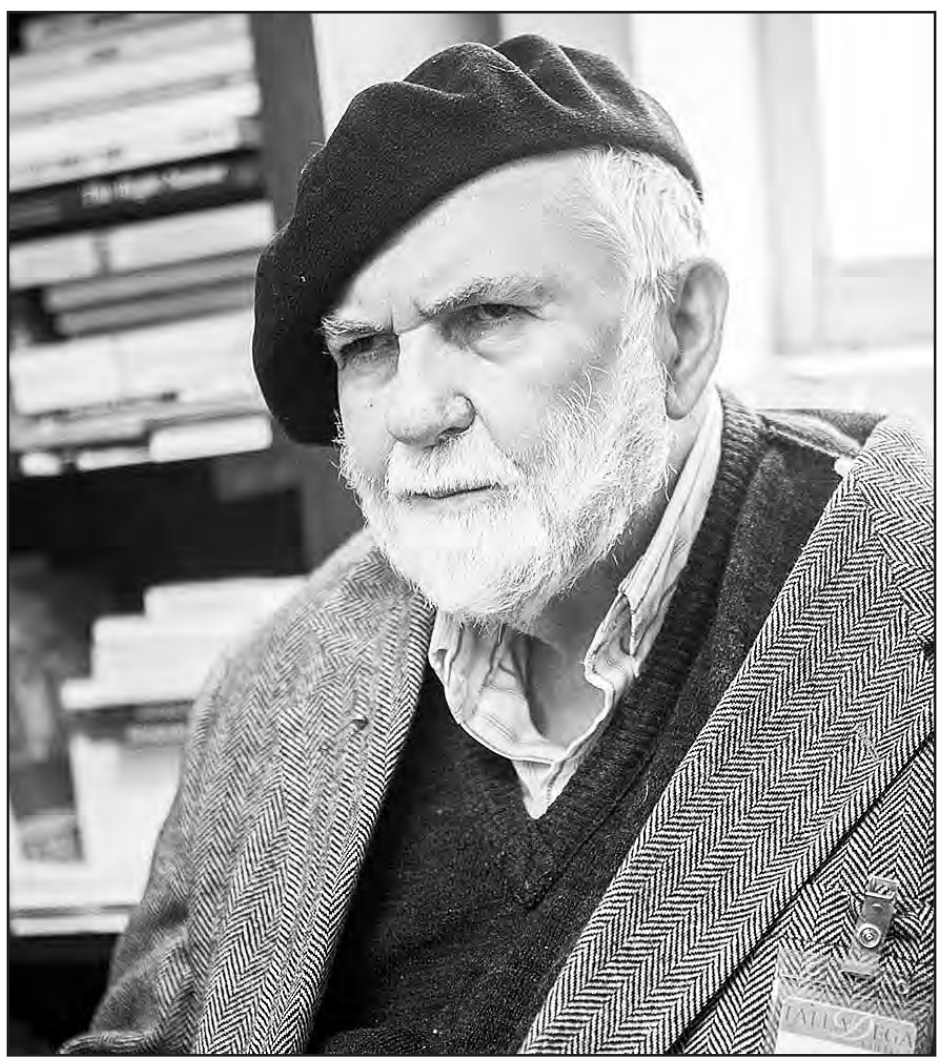
"When I got here, I didn't call it Political Science. I called it Politics. I came in the fall of 1971, and I've engaged in a lot of different kinds of activities since coming to Talladega."

Those activities included becoming involved with the Wilmington Ten, a group of young people who were convicted of arson and conspiracy and sentenced to a total of 282 years as political prisoners. Their convictions were later overturned. Bray's collection of materials on the case, including a transcript of the trial, will reside in Talladega College's archives.

'The Civil Liberties Union Man' on President Trump

While at Talladega, Bray became involved in representing individuals whose cases represented widespread violations of civil liberties or whose civil liberties were violated but they could not afford legal representation.

"I became known in Talladega as the Civil Liberties Union Man," he said. "Now I've gotten away from working in that sort of way and haven't done that in at least a decade." Bray served as president of the board of directors of the ACLU in Alabama in 1978. His duties included statewide organizing, mobilizing defense teams, attending protests and serving as an observer so the press and others could



Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

Dr. Bernard Bray is a professor at Talladega College.

have a clearer idea of what occurred.

Twice Bray recalled being in physical danger due to his ACLU work. He was sprayed with liquid mace by a member of the Ku Klux Klan while observing a march in another part of the state. On another occasion, police officers physically removed Bray from Anniston City Hall during a march related to sanitation workers' rights.

"I was there to observe so I could report to the ACLU what needed to be done in terms of litigation and in terms of putting together publicity. You need to know what's happening to do the civil liberties work, and a way to find out what's happening is to go observe these events. The purpose of the ACLU is to make the Bill of Rights a reality in our lives."

Bray said his time in the ACLU has influenced how he sees America's current political climate.

"When I think about Barack Obama's presidency, I go back to the Kennedy administration and my conclusion is we've had no president with anything like the style the Obamas had, not since the Kennedys." From the standpoint of someone who has long been an enthusiastic and involved champion of civil liberties, he believes Donald Trump is "an interesting lesson" for political scientists.

"When he announced he was running for the Republican Party's nomination for president and he started speaking and participating in debates, I said 'He won't go far.' After he won the Republican nomination, I said, 'He really won't beat Clinton.' And I think most all of my colleagues in political science said the same thing," Bray said. "But on January 20 we inaugurated him, and I said 'we' because as a country -- that's 'we' -- we inaugurated Donald Trump president."

Bray said he is displeased at Trump's cabinet choices, which he said "represent big money and the military in this country."

He stopped short of saying the United States is in danger of entering into Fascism, as some Trump opposers have charged.

"But that doesn't mean that we need to do any less. The main point is that we need to fight for our liberties. Our liberties are not going to mean much if we don't fight for them. Perhaps every so often, we need to have someone come along to give us a test to see if we're up to the task. For the most part I think the whole population of the United States is far too apathetic. I hope people can be scared enough and encouraged enough to engage in the fight. We need to find ways to become part of the struggle."

What's needed now

He encouraged Trump opponents to take action.

"The 700 or so demonstrations criticizing Trump and in support of women are basically a good idea in that they bring people together. They provide a basis for further organization. Mainly, I think what we really need to be doing in regard to Trump is organizing to gain control of the Senate and House of Representatives in 2018. We need to become active politically in electoral politics to defeat Donald Trump in 2020."

Still, the professor's perspective remains positive.

"Having lived through McCarthyism and through the kind of racism that we have had in the state of Alabama, having worked in the Wilmington Ten case where some people were unfairly prosecuted, one can survive. It's a hell of a lot better to survive while engaging in battle and a hell of a lot better to go down in defeat than to have one's rights wiped out. It's a hell of a lot better to be engaged in the opposition than to sit by and not fight."

He invoked the work of Dr. Martin Luther King.

"We celebrated Dr. King (last) month, but we tend to celebrate the more calming aspects of Dr. King. We tend not to celebrate him as a revolutionary. One of the things Donald Trump mentioned was that he did 'not deal in heroes.' I think we do need heroes, and we can't allow the revolutionary dimensions of our leaders to be taken away from us. What we really need to be doing is finding ways to get students to get more active, to get more of them register to vote and to get more of them participating in organizing."

Leaving a legacy

When asked how he would like to be remembered, Bray fell silent. When he finally spoke, he said he would not like his 60-plus years in political science to be summarized in one single phrase or physical monument.

"To a large extent, everything I've accomplished in my career has been through working well with other people. I would like my legacy to be that some of my students caught something from me that made their lives better. And I would like my legacy to be that some who have worked with me have learned how to do politics successfully under difficult circumstances. I have tried to live my life in a way that has political and personal meaning. And I feel pretty good about that."

Outside, the rain cleared for afternoon sunshine.

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Amanda Lovelady: Getting back to our roots

By **BUDDY ROBERTS**
Special Projects Editor

When meeting Amanda Lovelady for the first time, most people don't guess that she's an agriculture teacher.

That's been the case with some of her students at Childersburg High School, where she is in her first year of teaching, having revived a program that hadn't been offered there for some time.

"I don't hold it against them," she said. "You know, you walk into an ag class and I'm a 5'1" 23-year-old girl in here trying to teach them about agriculture. But if they think I don't know anything, I set them straight very quickly. I admit I don't know everything, but what I do know I want to pass along to them."

A native of Autaugaville who holds a degree in agriculture education from Auburn University and grew up on a farm, Lovelady has a familiarity with her subject – and a love for it – not often found in someone her age. In between classes on a recent afternoon, she discussed her background and why sharing it with her students is so important to her.

Down on the farm: "Autaugaville is a little small farm town between Prattville and Selma, and

I grew up there on a farm. My dad was a row cropper. He farmed cotton, corn, soybeans, peanuts and watermelons. That's where my love for farming started. I loved going to work with my dad, especially during harvest season. It's the happiest time that there is. It's a hard time – you work very, very hard – but it's still a happy time."

Her favorite crop: "Cotton, I guess just because of the memories. I always liked seeing the white fields, and when I was little, my mom would always fix a huge meal for lunch – she'd fry a chicken or something like that, and it was just a good old Southern meal – and put it in the back of her car, and we'd go out to the cotton field or wherever Daddy was working and feed him and all the help."

When I got older, I'd go to work with my dad, and my job was to run the module builder. The machine is like a big rectangle, and it's run by hydraulics, and I would pack the cotton down in it. I remember thinking, "This is heaven. I don't want to do anything else."

What she learned from farm life: "We didn't live flashy, but we worked hard. One thing my parents taught me is to work hard for what you have, and that's what I try to teach my students. It

doesn't matter what you have or what you don't have. You can work hard and be proud of whatever you can do. My parents really instilled in my brother and sister and I to work hard and help other people.

"Every time I go home, we sit around the dinner table, and Daddy will get to telling his farming stories, and he'll talk about his friends that he farmed with. If you needed a crop harvested but were having trouble and couldn't get to it, they'd just swing by and harvest it for you. Honestly, that's a lost art. In general, people just aren't that way anymore. But farmers just have a certain love in their heart for what they do. You can't farm and not love it."

Getting back to the farm: "Several years back, you could ask a classroom full of students, 'How many of you live on a farm? How many of you have grandparents who live on a farm?' Most hands would go up. It's not that way now. We've gotten so far away from our farming heritage that most kids today don't have any idea about milking cows, slaughtering your own meat or selling eggs from your chickens. They go to the grocery store and don't think anything about what goes into it or how many hands have



Buddy Roberts/The Daily Home

Amanda Lovelady instructs agriculture student Hayden Weldon about how to prepare soil for planting flowers.

worked hard together to get a product to you.

"And a lot of my kids don't get my passion for it. I'm telling them about how agriculture is the coolest thing in the world,

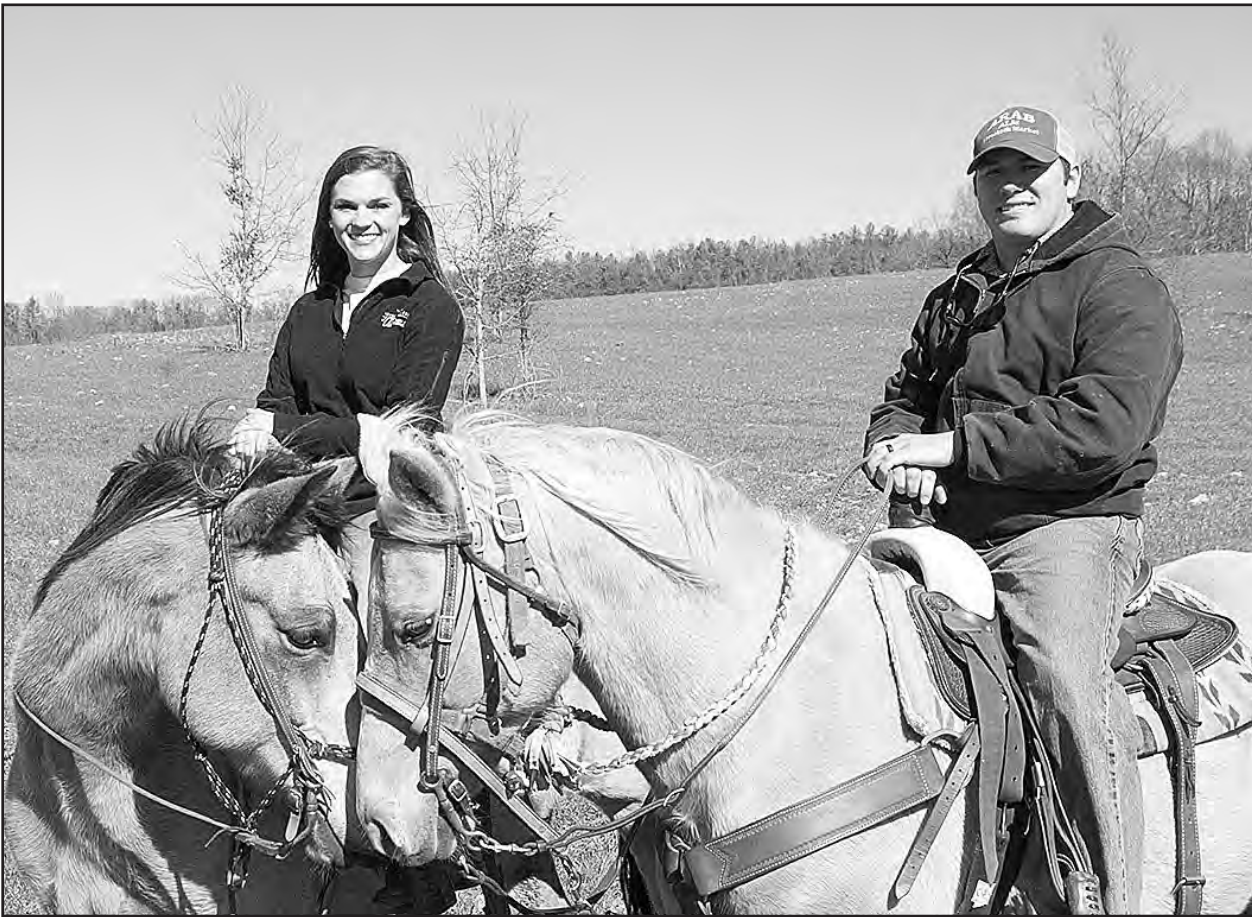
and they think I'm crazy for thinking it's so cool, and that's okay. But they still need to know where their roots are."

Keeping it in the family: Her husband Whit teaches agriscience for the Coosa County School System. "It is so cool because we do the same thing at our jobs in a way and race home every afternoon to work on the farm. One of our favorite things to do together is check our herd of cows watch the sun set from our house spot on the farm. Whit is one of my biggest motivators. He is one of the hardest working men that I know, and that makes me very proud. He is constantly encouraging me especially when I feel like I am not a good teacher. He helps me do things that I am unfamiliar with and

teaches me a lot of what I know now. My family and my husband play a major role in my life daily, and I would not be who I am without God and my husband and family."

Good advice from a family member: "In high school, all I wanted to do was go to Auburn, but I had a hard time getting in, and I was crying and upset about it. I remember my mom looking at me and saying, 'God has this.' And I did get in. Ever since then, whenever things get rough, I refer back to that. I love the Lord, and I feel like he's placed me at Childersburg for a reason."

How she describes herself: "I'm the kind of girl who can wear pearls and gut a deer – but not necessarily at the same time."



Buddy Roberts/The Daily Home

Lovelady and her husband Whit on their family farm near Alpine in Talladega County.



Buddy Roberts/The Daily Home

Childersburg High School's agriculture classes recently undertook a horticulture project to spruce up the campus' main entrance.

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Summer Ernest: 'Take ownership in your community'

By **BUDDY ROBERTS**
Special Projects Editor

SYLACAUGA – Summer Ernest loves her hometown, and she wants everyone else to love it just as much as she does.

But there was a time when the Sylacauga High School alumna and former Miss Sylacauga who holds two degrees from Auburn University briefly resided elsewhere.

"After college, I didn't think I'd come back to Sylacauga," she recalled. "Not because I disliked it, but just because life can sometimes move you around. We were living in Birmingham, and I was teaching at Spain Park, and after a while I realized what a special experience I had growing up in a small town. There was no traffic to deal with, the dry cleaners knew my name, and it's a lot less expensive to live in Sylacauga."

So she returned with her husband and enjoys her new role as one of the Marble City's foremost cheerleaders.

"I'm a stay-at-home mom and community volunteer now, and I'm busier than I was when I was teaching. But I love it. Our son Payne is 8, and he loves Sylacauga as much as I do. I hope I've been able to instill it in him."

Describing herself as energetic, optimistic and happy – "the only thing that makes me sad is not having access to sushi" – Ernest says she believes in "living each day to the fullest" and has immersed herself in Sylacauga's community affairs.

She serves as vice president of the newly-organized Sylacauga Young Professionals, vice president of the Sylacauga Arts Council, a member of the Marble Festival Committee and the Magnolia Garden Club, chair of the annual Dinner Under the Stars Event, host of TV 47's Library Connection program and Christmas parade broadcast, volunteer for the Miss Sylacauga and Miss Marble Valley pageants and a member of the Sylacauga Community Playhouse and the First United Methodist Church.

"Basically, whatever people ask me to,

I try to be able to help out," she said. "Anything that will promote Sylacauga, I'm all about it."

One of her favorite endeavors is helping organize the city's annual Marble Festival. This year's event is scheduled for April 4-15.

"Thirtysomething sculptors from all over the nation will be here at Central Park, across from Blue Bell, and they'll be there sculpting. That's what it's all about. Each sculptor gets a piece of Sylacauga marble to work with, and they'll be sculpting all kinds of things. It's fascinating to watch. Craigger Brown is our resident sculptor, and we have a partnership with Pietrasanta, Italy, which is Sylacauga's sister city, to host a sculptor from there. It's really neat. Pietrasanta is very similar to Sylacauga – it's a small town with a quarry – and their visiting artist creates one piece of art during the festival to leave here to become part of the sculpture collection at the Comer Library."

Other events are scheduled during the festival, including the Taste of Sylacauga on April 6 and the Nematik 5K on April 8. "There will also be quarry tours to show off what we have here that is no place else in the United States: the huge vein of marble that has kept Sylacauga thriving," Ernest said. "The tours book up really quickly, because there's limited space and they're only offered certain days during the festival. If you'd like to take one, you can sign up through the mayor's office."

While her volunteer work may keep her busier than she's ever been, Ernest says she wouldn't have it any other way.

"I think it's fulfilling. I feel like I'm making a difference. I want Sylacauga to be great because it's my hometown. My undergraduate degree is in mass communication, and I enjoy using the skills I learned in a productive way toward making a difference in my town and letting people know what it has to offer."

As she sees it, it's all about taking ownership in her community, and she still remembers when she first understood what that meant.



Submitted photo

Summer Ernest, left, with Lindsay Johns during a holiday event sponsored by the Sylacauga Young Professionals.

"In 1996, I was Alabama's Junior Miss, which is now the Distinguished Young Woman program. Sylacauga got behind me completely. There are people I still see today who tell me, 'We went to Mobile to watch you win at Junior Miss.' I felt like I had a million cheerleaders, and that was a special experience I know could not be duplicated somewhere else, especially in a bigger city. This was my town, and I wanted to take ownership in it."

It's something she encourages other young adults to do.

"Especially when you look at all the organizations and events we have in Sylacauga, we've seen how the older population has headed things up and done the work. Now it's time for us to take on those things. Yes, we have to focus on ourselves and our families, but we still have a great responsibility to the community, to make it great."

"Ultimately, it is our generation and those that follow that will take on leadership roles in government and business

and industry. That's why shopping locally and helping out where we can and using our hospital are so important – so there will continue to be a community for us to take ownership in. I want to see young people stay and have families here in Sylacauga, which may encourage their children to stay here."

She acknowledges that encouraging young people to stay in their hometowns as they grow up can be challenging.

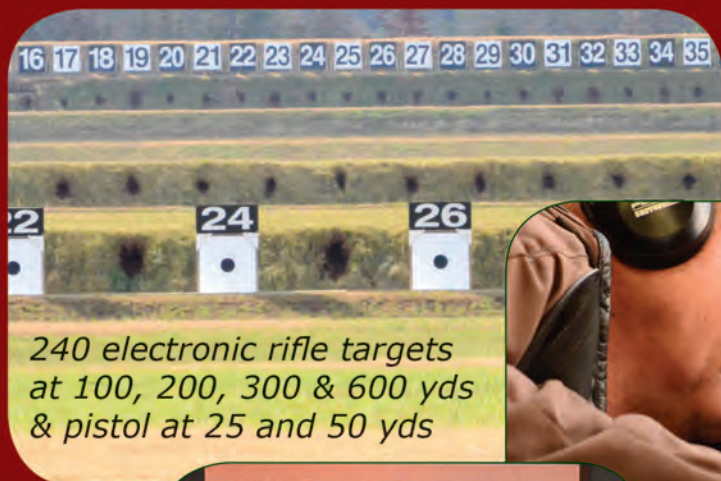
"There are a lot of people my age, that I graduated with, who aren't here anymore. But now I have a large group of friends who are non-Sylacauga natives. They've moved here because they appreciate the value of what this city has to offer, and it's very exciting to have them here and being a part of things."

For both natives and newcomers who want to be a part of community activities in Sylacauga, Ernest has simple advice: "Just get involved. And if you don't know how, talk to me."

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J.P. Dailey:

Baseball brought him to Pell City

By **DAVID ATCHISON**
Home staff writer

State Farm Insurance Agent J.P. (John Patrick) Dailey has loved and played the game of baseball most of his life, and it was the game of baseball that led the 30-year-old man to Pell City.

"I've been here five years now," Dailey said. Dailey's office is in the corner suite of the Towne Park commercial center on U.S. 231, next door to The Daily Home and St. Clair Times Pell City Bureau office.

He pointed to the drawings and paintings hanging on his office wall, all related to the sport that has been called America's national pastime.

Dailey grew up with a bat and baseball in his hand. He played youth league baseball and later was a member of the Trussville High School Huskies, qualifying a baseball scholarship to Faulkner University in Montgomery, where he earned a degree in business management.

The baseball center fielder was going to give the minor leagues a try, but it was not to be.

"My batting was consistently inconsistent," he joked.

Dailey said he met retiring minor league baseball player Matthew Maniscalco, who ran two

businesses in Oxford, a State Farm Agency and a baseball instruction business.

"He asked me to come do both when my baseball career did not work out," Dailey said.

Dailey instructed baseball players through Excel Baseball Academy, and he helped with Maniscalco's State Farm Insurance agency.

That's how he got to know Pell City. He instructed some former Pell City Panthers players in baseball, such as Cole Billingsley and Locke St. John, through Excel Baseball Academy.

"We were instructing kids who were working towards the next level," Dailey said.

They would also assist players during the summer through traveling teams.

"I did that for two years," he said.

Dailey said State Farm Insurance saw the growth in St. Clair County and Pell City and decided that the city could support another State Farm Agency, and now there is a wooden State Farm sign outside Dailey's office.

Dailey comes from a large family and has two brothers and sisters.

His sister Amanda worked with him a short time before she opened her own State Farm Insurance office in

Pinson. He said Amanda played softball at Shorter University and was an "All American."

"She was probably the most athletic one in the family," Dailey said.

Much of Dailey's family was involved in sports. His younger brother, Sean, was an offensive lineman for the UAB Blazers.

His father, John, played both baseball and football at Huffman High School. His father made the decision to play football instead of baseball in college. He was a defensive end for the Auburn Tigers. He played for Auburn when Bo Jackson carried the ball for the Tigers.

His father also played in the Canadian Football League and tried out for the San Francisco 49ers during the 1988 lockout, before leaving the gridiron for good.

"My grandmother (Mary Ann Giattina) was a big baseball fan. She loved baseball," Dailey said. "She would come out in the front yard and play with me and my brother when my dad was at work."

Dailey married his childhood sweetheart.

"I met my wife in church," he said. "We went to church together, growing up in Trussville."

His wife, Michelle, is a speech pathologist



Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

J.P. Dailey opened his insurance firm in Pell City five years ago.

at Odenville Middle School. They expect their first child in April.

Dailey said in his spare time, when the opportunity arises, he coaches a little baseball.

"I still enjoy doing that," he said.

Dailey is a member of the Pell City Chamber of Commerce, and so far things have gone well for him in Pell City.

"Honestly, every day I am humbled that people have given me the opportunity to serve them," Dailey said. "I'm humbled, grateful and excited for the future."

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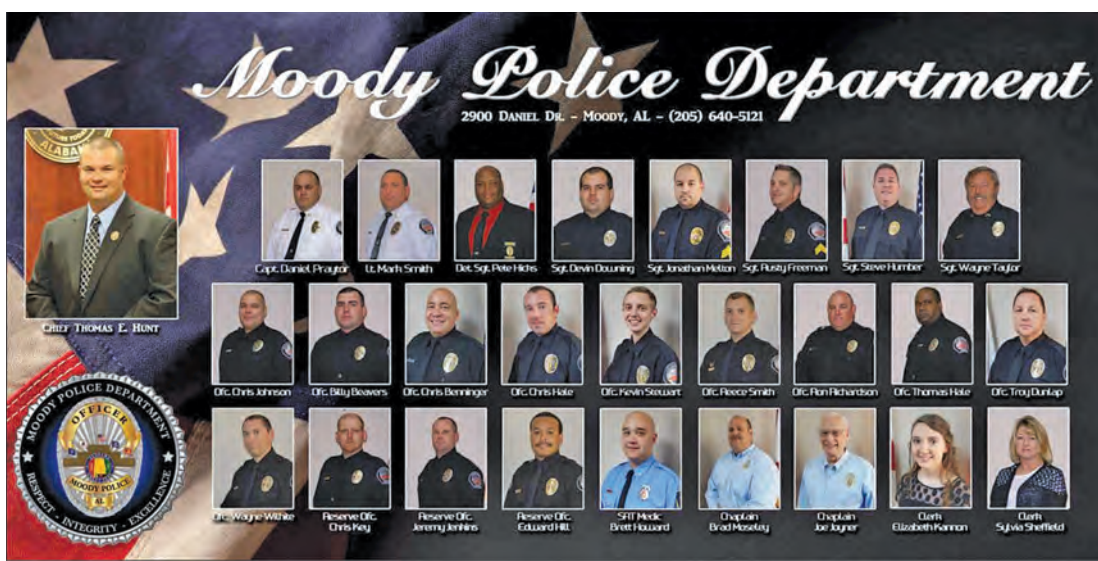
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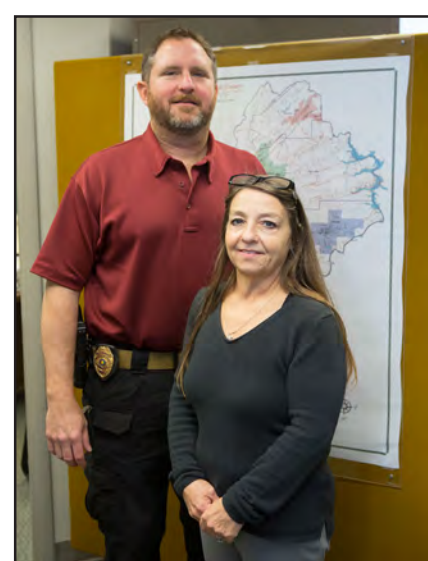
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Leland and Speer: Good friends and good works

By KELLI TIPTON
Home Staff Writer

PELL CITY -- Lifelong friends Jean Speer and Carrie Leland share a common interest and passion for helping people their community. They are co-founders of the Good Works Charitable Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides a hot meal and free groceries once a month to any resident of St. Clair County who needs assistance.

"We've been friends our whole life. We grew up together, we rode the same school bus, and we graduated together from Pell City High School in 1995," Speer said.

"In high school, we were both very compassionate toward people who were hurting and struggling. We were sensitive to the needs of others, because we were both raised that way," Leland said. "I was an activist. I was interested in movements and systems. I was interested in equality, in the rights of other people, and advocating for the less fortunate. Jean and I have always been champions of the underdog."

Speer began teaching free swim classes when she was fifteen years old. "This will be my 25th year teaching swim classes. I teach children and adults, and children with special needs," Speer said.

As young adults, Leland ran a domestic violence shelter program, and Speer volunteered to oversee a children's program there. "During my time at the shelter, several programs were established including a children's support group, a prom dress giveaway, and



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

Jean Speer, left, and Carrie Leland founded the Good Works Charitable Foundation in Pell City.

a toy drive at Christmas," Leland said.

"The toy drive was called Santa's Workshop, and we set up a boutique where parents could come in and select toys for their children for Christmas. Prom Dress Giveaway was for any girl in St. Clair County who had a need for a prom dress, who otherwise would not get to go to her prom," Speer said. The toys and prom dresses were donated by people in the community and were free for those who needed them.

"We started going out on our own and doing what we called 'good will hunting.' We would find people and projects to invest in, in addition to our work at the shelter," Leland said.

Then, on April 27, 2011, tornadoes ripped through St. Clair County, killing 13 people and leaving behind a trail of devastation. "We

were contacted to see if we could help in the efforts to identify impacted areas and to determine what people in those areas needed. Jean and I took off from our day jobs and went out scouting and surveying to see what was needed. We were able to set up some immediate help in some of the impacted areas, but we discovered that even though they had been immediately affected by the tornado, a lot of people we met were affected daily by poverty," Leland said.

"We found people without water who were without water before the tornado hit, and without heat and utilities before the tornado hit, and without food or proper shelter. So, we realized that even though we were there to provide tornado relief, these people's lives were devastated daily by the systemic effects of poverty," Leland said.

"We promised those people we would come back and check on them. We started going back monthly, taking food, bottled water, coats, blankets, shoes and socks. In the beginning, we bought these things ourselves. Then, we asked friends and family to clean out their closets and donate stuff to us. We would ask for a case of bottled water in lieu of a birthday gift," Speer said.

"The need was so great, and we were driving all over the place, trying to get to everyone who needed us. Carrie and I decided it would be better to have a central location so that people could come to us, instead of us trying to get to them. So, we formed a 501(c)(3). We have always been interested in doing good works, and that's how our organization got its name," Speer said.

Thanks to its corporate sponsors and donors, Good Works Charitable Organization has given away 60,000 pounds of groceries, not including the meals served at the organization's monthly event, The Community Table. It is held on the third Monday of every month at the 19th Street Recreation Hall in Pell City and starts at 6 p.m. Volunteers prepare and serve hot meals to anyone who shows up. "We see people who come once or twice, we see people who come every month, and we see people who were once recipients become volunteers. It is very rewarding," Speer said.

As friends and partners, they know each other's strengths and use it to their advantage. "I am much more of a dreamer. I get caught up in the spirit

and the philosophy. Jean is all logic. We make a great team," Leland said. "I'm all passion, and she is

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Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

Doug Brewer has enjoyed building relationships with community leaders since taking the helm at Citizens Baptist.

Doug Brewer: 'This hospital is important'

Citizens Baptist Medical Center's new CEO values community connection

By LAURA GADDY
Special to The Daily Home

Citizens Baptist Medical Center CEO Doug Brewer took the helm at Talladega's hometown hospital three months ago, but already his influence extends beyond the walls of the hospital.

"I'm incredibly impressed with Doug," said Talladega City Manager Patrick Bryant. "He's sharp, forward thinking, community minded and I think he will take an aggressive approach to integrating (Citizens) into our community."

Brewer, a native to Oklahoma, and wife Heidi Brewer have three sons, 31-year-old twins Joshua and Jason, and Colton, a 20-year-old

studying at the University of Oklahoma. At Citizens Baptist, he said he's found a perfect fit.

"For years I had told my wife that the last 10 or 15 years of my career, I would like to spend that time at a community hospital," Brewer said. "When this came up I was really excited."

Brewer comes to Citizens from Brookwood Medical Center where he served as the chief administrative officer and became recognized for his leadership in cardiovascular care, but his experience in medical administration spans almost three decades. Prior to his work at Brookwood Medical Center, Brewer held five jobs ranging from president to chief development officer of hospitals and medical companies.

He currently serves as a national board member and vice chair for the Brain Injury Association of America.

At Citizen's, the CEO's responsibilities range from general to specific. It is up to the hospital's CEO, for example, to establish mid-range and broad, long term goals and to make sure staff members understand them. It's also up to the CEO, Brewer said, to be aware of the details related to how patients are being treated and to ensure that physicians, nurses and support staff are equipped with the resources they need to do their best work.

Brewer's work days are long. They usually start at 7 a.m. and wrap up at about 8 p.m. after dinner meetings, he said.

Chief nursing officer Ann McEntire, a 40-year veteran of the Citizens' network, is one member of a leadership team who meets with Brewer daily. She said Brewer's transition at the hospital has been motivational.

"He is a very inspirational kind of leader," she said. "He has taken his leadership role here at Citizens very seriously, but also in the community."

Brewer also emphasized his interest in strengthening the connection between the hospital and the community, adding that he tries to reach out to locals who work outside the hospital each day.

In Talladega, Brewer has spent time building relationships with leaders at the chamber of com-

merce, school officials and municipal leaders. Among them is Bryant, the city manager, who said he is hopeful that the new CEO's involvement will lead to positive changes for the city.

"I appreciate their willingness to work with the city to achieve some of our long term community goals," said Bryant.

He described Citizens as "not only a component but a necessary partner," in the push to make improvements in the city. The hospital, he said, has a critical role to play in both recruiting residents and contributing to the quality of life in the city.

"Access to medical care is critical for any community," he said. "We have the benefit of having a tremendous asset in (Citizens) that

other communities don't enjoy."

In a conversation about the hospital, Brewer touted some of the hospital's changes that may contribute to residents' quality of life. He said the facility has developed a reputation for keeping a clean facility, for keeping patients free from infection. He spoke also of recent renovations and plans to add doctors' office space this year and plans to provide care to the local residents at public health fairs. But the conversation about the hospital turned back to the community.

"I don't have a desire to leave or go to a bigger hospital," he said. "This hospital is just so important to the community."



Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

Brewer, an Oklahoma native, says he's found Citizens Baptist to be "a perfect fit."

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Cindy Pennington:

Talladega native loves her hometown

By **KELLI TIPTON**
Home Staff Writer

TALLADEGA COUNTY -- Deputy Revenue Commissioner Cindy Pennington is a self-described small town girl.

She loves her hometown of Talladega and considers it an honor, through both professional and civic service, to make it a better place to live. A 1985 graduate of Talladega High School, she has worked for the Talladega County Revenue Department for 30 years and is active in many civic organizations. "I love this town. I love the small-town atmosphere and how people care about their neighbors. I was born here in 1966 and raised here. I began work at the Talladega County Revenue Department in January of 1987. I did whatever they needed me to do. I was just tickled to have a job," she said. She married her high school sweetheart, Adam Pennington, in August of 1988.

She was eventually assigned to the appraisal department of the revenue office. "That's the part with all the maps, and we were responsible for determining the value of every piece of property in Talladega County, and any buildings on it, for tax purposes," she said.

She worked upstairs at the county courthouse but would occasionally

go downstairs to work in the assessing and collecting department. "Then, when Sally Flowers took office in May of 2009, she asked me to be her deputy, and I was appointed," she said.

At work, her day-to-day responsibilities include making sure that every piece of property in the county is properly mapped, appraised, assessed and collected for. "The revenue office is basically a collection and distribution agency. We collect taxes from the taxpayers, for their property and their licenses and car tags, and then we distribute that money to the various agencies, such as the city and county schools, the state, the county general fund, the road department and others. It's my job to make sure it all keeps flowing. From appraisal and mapping to assessing and collecting," she said.

And when she is not on the job, she serves her hometown as a volunteer. She is president of the Talladega Rotary Club. "I became a member of this Rotary Club about four years ago, and I very much enjoy it. It's a great civic organization. We typically meet for lunch once a week, and we listen to a speaker. Our goal is to help the community," she said. Pennington recently presented Talladega College president Dr. Billy Hawkins with a check for \$500 to help

cover travel expenses for the Marching Tornadoes, who were invited to play at the presidential inauguration of Donald Trump. The club also helps other organizations with such needs.

"Every year, we hold a fundraiser. For a number of years, it was a golf tournament. Last year, it was a draw down. We sold tickets for \$100. It was a very good fundraiser for us, and we were actually able to split the profit we made with the sports programs at Talladega High School. We were glad to be able to help them, and to help us help other people in the community. It was a win-win," she said.

She is a mentor for the Talladega Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors. "My older son was an ambassador, and now my younger son is. It is a great program for our young people. These students are in the 7th through the 12th grade, from schools in the north end of the county. We help them and teach them how to serve our community and how to be a good responsible community member," she said. In December, the Ambassadors helped manage the city's booth during Christmas on the Square.

"Just last week, we helped out with the Chamber of Commerce awards banquet at Shocco. We helped them set up and serve."



Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

Active in many civic organizations, Cindy Pennington has worked for the Talladega County Revenue Department for the past 30 years.

Ambassadors are required to have four volunteer hours a month.

Jason Daves, executive director of the Greater Talladega and Lincoln Area Chamber of Commerce, said Pennington is an asset to the city of Talladega in more ways than he could count. "I can't say enough good things about her. I don't know where she finds the time to do everything she does. The Ambassadors already have more than 950 hours in community volunteer service. That would not be possible

without Cindy's help and dedication. She's that person who is always there when you need her. She is always very positive, and if she says she will do something, she will do it. She always has a smile on her face."

Pennington also serves as president of the Historic Talladega Ritz Theater board of directors. "I love that little theater. I grew up going to movies there. I love what they've done with it," she said. "Our board is there to assist the executive director, George Culver. He is so good at

bringing an amazing variety of acts to Talladega. We are trying to find something for everyone," she said.

She is also serving the last year of her five-year term in the Talladega Junior Welfare League. "My term will be up this summer, and I have really enjoyed my time there," she said. "I am honored and humbled to be able to serve my community. I have met a lot of people and formed some friendships that I wouldn't have if not for these organizations," she said.

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CEPA's Jeff Thompson: 'Momentum' is the word of the year

By **BUDDY ROBERTS**
Special Projects Editor

PELL CITY – When Jeff Thompson talks about what has been accomplished at the Center for Education and Performing Arts (CEPA) during the past year, there's a particular word he frequently uses. Momentum.

"I've seen it since day one," said Thompson, who became the center's director last summer. "There's been nothing but support and excitement around this thing."

On the campus at Pell City High School, the center boasts a 400-seat theater and full gymnasium, which hosts the Panthers' home basketball games. The center developed considerable momentum during its past fall season, which its board of directors and Thompson began working on as soon as he arrived at CEPA.

"There wasn't a performance that wasn't a resounding success," Thompson said. "We were dreadfully blind about what we were getting into, but the results were amazing. Everyone talked about how they had a good time, how they enjoyed what we'd put together and how they'd be back."

Especially was that true when the Alabama Symphony Orchestra performed on the CEPA stage. Thompson said special was on display that night.

"Pride. It was pride. That's what you could see in people's faces. Big eyes just full of pride. And there were some tears in those eyes. It made people feel good about their community's potential. This isn't Birmingham, but they were getting a Birmingham experience in their town. Now we have to take that momentum and turn it into something big for this year."

Announced last month, CEPA's

See **CEPA**, Page 2B



Buddy Roberts/The Daily Home

Jeff Thompson, director, and Lesley Warren, Spotlight director, at the Center for Education and Performing Arts in Pell City. The center's spring season kicks off next month with a schedule that includes music, comedy, drama and Broadway-style productions.

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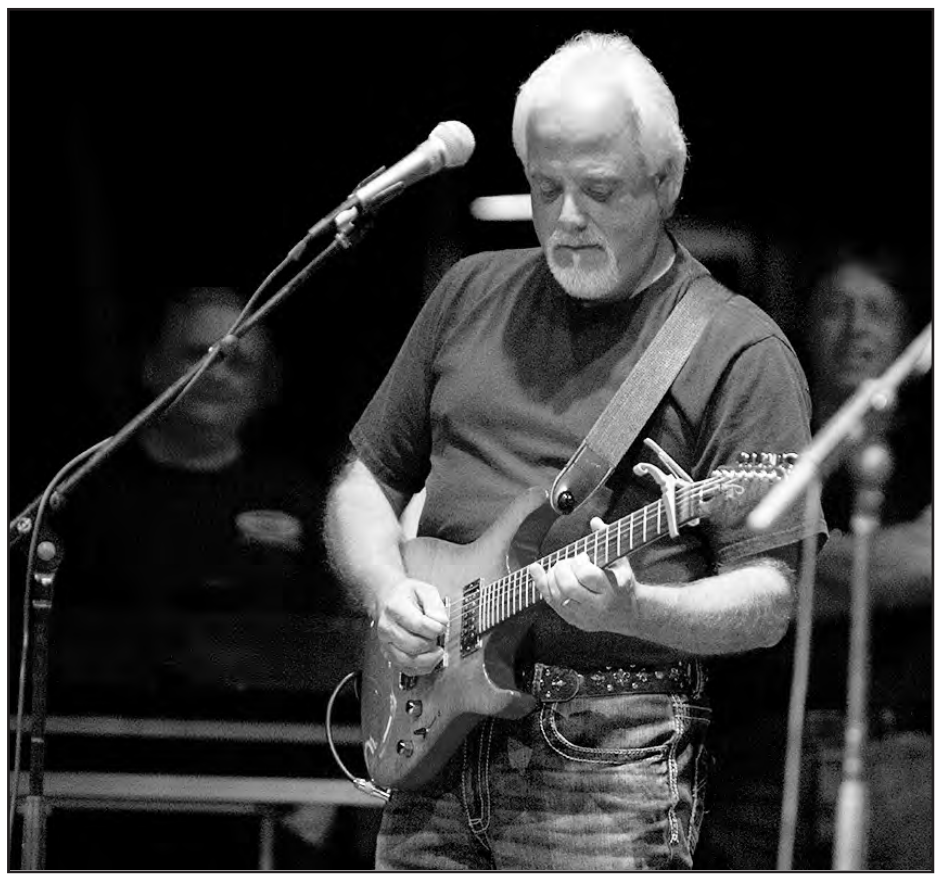
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Photos by Austin Nichols

Top: The Alabama Symphony Orchestra receives a standing ovation from the CEPA audience.

Above left: Storyteller Dolores Hydock performs during the acclaimed Voice of St. Clair production.

Above right: Confederate Railroad's Rusty Hendrix on the CEPA stage.

CEPA

From Page 1B

spring season begins in March with the first of six events continuing through mid-May. "This spring season is going to be pretty fun," Thompson said. "I think we've put together a season people will like. Chances are, there's something on the schedule you'll want to come see, and there are a lot of reasons to be excited about these shows."

The spring season schedule follows.
March 10: Dueling Pianos. Performed by Fun Pianos! – an acclaimed group of traveling musicians that regularly performs all over the country – Thompson describes it as "a really interactive fun show."

March 16: CEPA Comedy Night, featuring Comedienne Joy. The Birmingham performer – billed as the Queen of Clean – headlines an evening of family-friendly stand-up comedy.

April 7-9: Bus Stop. CEPA's new Spotlight partnership with Jefferson State Community College presents William Inge's Tony-nominated play. "We're very pleased to be able to present such a quality literary work on this stage," Thompson said. "Our stage will be made up to look like a diner, which will be very cool to see."

April 29: Martha Reeves & The Vandellas. "Man, I'm excited about this," Thompson said in anticipation of this performance by the famed Motown group. "We're catching them on their way back through the South after a tour in Europe, so that's a big score for us. Martha Reeves still gets rave reviews everywhere she goes, so it's going to be a real treat."

May 12-14: Sister Act, presented by the Pell City Players. "We haven't seen the Players here in a while, so will be nice to have them back on our stage, especially putting on such a well-known production," Thompson said. "It's going to be stellar."

While it's not part of the spring season schedule, CEPA will play host to the Pell City High School drama department's spring production of Cinderella from April 20-23. "I want the community to understand what a

quality production this high school kids are putting on. They deserve to be celebrated and supported for it."

For ticket information and season memberships, call 205-338-1974.

What has been accomplished at the center and the momentum it has generated, according to Thompson, is more than the work of one person.

"The board of directors gives us direction about what they want to bring here, and it is their vision that the staff and I here are carrying out," he said. CEPA's staff includes assistant director Casey Engelbrecht, Spotlight director Lesley Warren and intern Austin Nichols.

"It's very much a group effort," Thompson said, "and it happens because of our partnership with the Pell City Council and the board of education. "This building and every show that gets put on here is impossible without their support. The board and staff here make these things happen, but it is really the city and school board that provides this fantastic venue for the community. Ten years ago, this community set aside funds to put this center here. Ten years later, it's clear how much that investment has paid off."

Thompson hopes that as momentum builds, CEPA will be seen as more than just a theater and gymnasium.

"We are building an experience," he said. "The idea is to get things in the theater and gym that the community can believe in and support, whether it's a play local students have written or a nationally-known act like Confederate Railroad or Martha and The Vandellas. We want to continue to give people something to be proud of in their own backyard."

Making it happen, he added, will require consistency and frequency of quality performances.

"Those two things will without doubt make it happen. You can't show people a flash of light and expect them to believe it's sunshine. That's kind of the mantra we keep in the back of our minds. I still believe in this center's potential to impact the community in many different ways. This is a product that's moving forward. We're not saying 'if only we could do this.' Now we're doing it."

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Gary Hanner/The Daily Home

Members of Arbor Baptist Church in Pell City prepare bags of food for Backpack Buddies. This program is aimed at combating childhood hunger in local schools.

Joe and Sheilah Vick: 'We will not stop'

BackPack Buddies founders are dedicated to fighting childhood hunger in our schools

By GARY HANNER
Home Staff Writer

A few years ago, Joe and Sheilah Vick had lunch with their granddaughter on Grandparent's Day at her school in Moody.

As they enjoyed eating with their granddaughter, their hearts were broken as they witnessed children around them who appeared to be dealing with food insecurity.

According to Sheilah, the term food insecurity refers to when children do not know where their next meal is coming from. Shocked by what they saw, the Vicks felt God tugging at their hearts to do something to help children in such a situation.

They formed a ministry called Touch of Faith Family Services in August, 2013. The program for the children was called Backpack Buddies, and it was patterned after Blessings in a Backpack, a national organization started by a retired teacher in 2005.

"BackPack Buddies is dedicated to fighting childhood hunger in our local schools," Sheilah said. "One in four children in central Alabama go hungry. Most are on the reduced or free school lunch program. The school lunch is the only meal they consistently receive."

Sheilah said she and her husband did some research, contacted a Backpack Program in another county, learned as much as they could and then launched the program in St. Clair County starting with two children at one elementary school in September, 2013.

"Our goal was to be in every school in St. Clair County in five years," she said. "We have been so blessed with the number of school administrators, counselors and teachers who were receptive to what we were doing."

Today, Backpack Buddies is in every school in the St. Clair County School System, feeding 388 children weekly; five schools in the Pell City School System, feeding 100 children weekly; and four schools in the Leeds School System, feeding 72 children per week.

All total, there are 25 schools participating and the program is feeding over 600 youngsters per week.

The children range in age from kindergarten students to seniors in high school.

"Children on this program are identified by principals, counselors and teachers," Sheilah said. "They are screened for food allergies, and they then start receiving a bag that is discreetly placed in their backpack on Fridays."

BackPack Buddies supplies non-perishable food with an estimated 2,000 calories per day. A sample menu includes two or three pop-top meal items two 100 percent juice boxes, two small vegetable items, a fruit cup, two or three breakfast items, peanut butter crackers, macaroni and cheese, potatoes, rice cups, pudding cups and healthy snack items.

In addition to providing bags of food to each child every Friday of the school year, the program gives the youngsters hygiene bags three times per year.

Goody bags are given on special holidays. Letters are sent home with the children at the end of the school year to guide their families to food banks during the summer.

"While we are excited about what God has done, we know there is so much more to do," Sheilah said. "Our vision is to expand to other locations in Alabama where this program is not available. We will not stop as long as there is a child who needs this program."



Gary Hanner/The Daily Home

Joe and Sheilah Vick are the founders of Backpack Buddies.

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Caitlyn McTier

80th Miss Sylacauga strives to be role model for community

By **BUDDY ROBERTS**
Special Projects Editor

Caitlyn McTier was named Miss Sylacauga late last month, the latest in a succession of accolades the local teen has received, ranging from scholarship program titles to a seafood eating championship.

"You know I'm a world record holder, right?" the Sylacauga High senior asked with a laugh. "It happened at a youth conference I went to in Birmingham in 2012. When I got there, they asked me if I wanted to be part of a world record. I said, 'Of course.' Who says no? So I ended up in the world's longest finger trap line. There were over 1,000 people connected with finger traps. I was number 438."

The 80th titleholder in the history of the Miss Sylacauga pageant, McTier is a native of the city she now represents in the Miss Alabama Organization.

"I'm very happy to be able to represent my actual community in the Miss Alabama Organization," she said. "I've been Miss Sylacauga Outstanding Teen, and after that I was Miss Tuscaloosa Outstanding Teen and then Miss Tennessee Valley Outstanding Teen. It was nice having those last two titles, but there's nothing like representing your hometown."

Shortly after receiving the Miss Sylacauga crown, she spoke about her platform, her feelings for her community and what she hopes to accomplish during the coming year.

On being the 80th Miss Sylacauga: "I grew up watching the Miss Sylacauga pageants, my mom usually worked backstage and I always looked up to all the Miss Sylacaugas. Now I get to be that role model for those little

girls who used to be me. I hope to impact them the way Miss Sylacaugas did for me when I was growing up."

Upon being crowned: "I was completely shocked. If you look at the photos, you can see. I thought I would have to do a lot more preliminaries before I won one. With Outstanding Teen, I did 11 preliminaries before being named Miss Sylacauga Outstanding Teen, so I was excited and extremely thankful. I still don't know that I completely comprehend that I won. It really is an honor."

The most challenging aspect of pageantry: "Well, interview is my favorite part - I love talking - so I'd probably say fitness. I really try to be in shape and toned and the healthiest self I can be. Between now and the Miss Alabama pageant, it will be a lot of exercise, watching what I eat and maintaining a healthy lifestyle."

Addressing a commonly held stereotype about pageant participants: "People don't realize how much work is involved. They think it's all about materialism and superficiality, but one of the great things about the Miss America Organization is that our scores for interview, scholastics and talent trump swimsuit, which is actually the lowest part of our score. So is evening gown. They want a person who is involved in their community. We are required to have platforms and to give back. You can't be Miss Alabama or Miss America unless you're well spoken and have a heart for service and a love for the community."

Her platform: Caitlyn's Cubby, an initiative to combat childhood hunger. "It's a partnership with Alabama Childhood Food Solutions here in Sylacauga.



Buddy Roberts/The Daily Home

High school senior Caitlyn McTier was named Miss Sylacauga last month. She will compete for the Miss Alabama title this summer.

We started it when I was a seventh grader in Outstanding Teen. I've spent many weekends packing bags of food for students and their families, and I see myself as a liaison between ACFS and the community, helping make people aware of what they do."

McTier said she first became aware of the problem when she in elementary school. "In fourth grade, I noticed my best friend didn't have snack. When I asked why, she said her parents could not afford it. That was my first exposure that hunger was happening in our community, that it wasn't a problem that only happened someplace else in the world, and it was something I really wanted to fix. I want to see hunger ended for children in Sylacauga and America."

Beyond pageants: "Last year, I attended ALA Girls State, which is a program about how government works, and I got to be governor. That was one of the greatest experiences I've ever had. Since doing it, I've had several

people ask me if I'd like to go into politics. I am considering a minor in political science, but I don't know if I'd ever go into public office. But I don't know that I'd rule it out either."

At Sylacauga High: McTier serves as producer of Aggie TV, student council president, an FBLA officer, a member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, S Club and varsity cheerleading squad, National Honor Society and Mu Alpha Theta.

After high school: "I'll be going to the University of Alabama. I already have 28 college credits through dual enrollment, so I'm almost a sophomore in college. I want to study telecommunications and film and go into television production, behind the camera, hopefully producing or directing news or sports oriented programs."

Her family: Caitlyn is the daughter of Pamela McTier, a teacher at Sylacauga High School, and the granddaughter of Jesse and Priscilla Cleveland.

"My grandmother owns Blue Horizon Travel Agency, and my grandfather used to be mayor, and he's on the hospital board. They're both very involved here in Sylacauga."

Miss Sylacauga style: "I'm in my cheerleading uniform a lot, but I like to dress up. You know I'm sick if you see me in sweatpants and a t-shirt."

Her favorite guilty pleasure: "Netflix and a bowl of popcorn. I'm a Netflix fanatic, although between school and everything else I'm involved in, I'm so tired Netflix ends up watching me sometimes."

The food she could eat every day: "I'm obsessed with seafood. I'll eat any type of it you give me." While representing Talladega County as an at-large titleholder in the state Distinguished Young Woman competition, McTier won the oyster eating contest. "I ate 38 in three minutes. I almost lost to Mobile County - she ate 35 - but I'd say winning that shows my dedication to seafood."

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Lucas still serves his city

Former city councilman is proud of recent accomplishments

By DENISE SINCLAIR
Home staff writer

SYLACAUGA – Former Councilman Rocky Lucas is continuing to work to improve his city.

Lucas served four years as president of the Sylacauga Council, but lost his seat to Lee Perryman in the 2016 election.

Since then, Lucas has been concentrating on his family, work and helping form an organization through which young professionals can network.

"I didn't realize I how much time I spent on council meetings, work sessions and other activities related to being a councilman," he said. "Now I can go home after my job and be with my family. Being on the council is really time consuming. Don't get me wrong -- I loved it, but it does take time away from your family."

Asked about entering public service again, Lucas said he has no thoughts about running again, even though he's not taken it totally out of the question in the future.

As far as being councilman, he said meeting people was one of the things he enjoyed most about it. "I got to meet people I would not otherwise have met, from citizens to city employees. These people I would never have known if not for being elected to office."

Lucas said he is proud of what the administration got done during his term.

"We assisted the board of education with the property tax extension. We got Sunday alcohol sales approved, which will bene-



Denise Sinclair/The Daily Home

Besides his involvement in Sylacauga's government and civic activities, Rocky Lucas is an avid musician.

fit the city even more so in the future. I'm proud of the work we did with Second Street Development on making improvements to the old Coast to Coast building. It is a vast improvement and will generate tax dollars for the city. In addition, our council got the ball rolling on the U.S. 280 project with Hutton LLC. It is now moving forward and again will provide jobs and tax dollars for the city."

In the meantime, Lucas serves as patient care representative for Coosa Valley Homecare, where he works in marketing.

When not working or enjoying time with his family, Lucas is president of the Sylacauga Young Professionals. He, Summer Newman Ernest and

Lindsay Johns worked last summer to form the organization to give back to the community.

Ernest serves vice president, and Johns is secretary/treasurer.

"We saw an opportunity and need in the community for the younger generation to get involved in Sylacauga. So many pillars of our community are no longer here. It is our responsibility to keep the ship sailing. If we don't do it, then who will?" Lucas said.

The organization provides social and networking events for the young professionals in the community. Recent events sponsored by the group include a supply drive for the Animal Shelter with a concert in a city-owned parking lot

behind Fermenter's Market on North Broadway and an Iron Bowl-themed food drive for Care House at Harvey's On Noble.

Lucas said the group meets at a local restaurant at night so those who can't meet at lunch can come at night. He points out the organization is not restricted to Sylacauga professionals but is open to anyone.

"We are giving folks an outlet, a way to get involved with people and events to attend. You hear so much about there is not enough to do in Sylacauga for young people, well here's an opportunity to get involved and help your community," Lucas said.

Dues are \$25 a year, and it is an all inclusive group.

Lucas attends First United Methodist Church with his family. He is a member of the church's Praise Team, under the leadership of David Simpkins. The team performs at the 9 a.m. Casual in Christ service.

In addition, Lucas does a solo acoustic set two to three nights a month. He became involved in music while at Southern Union Community College where he received a performing arts scholarship.

"I met my wife at Southern Union," he said.

A native of Dadeville, where his father still lives, Lucas and his wife Leslie have two daughters, Lilly Kate, 11 and Lexi, 6.

Lucas is also a high school football referee. He said Steve Lewis got him interested in becoming an official in 2010. "I love it. I travel across the state refereeing games on Friday nights."

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Keith Etheredge on coaching: 'It's not just a job; it's an opportunity to be a mentor'

By **BUDDY ROBERTS**
Special Projects Editor

Ask Keith Etheredge why he coaches football, and he'll give you a quick answer.

"It's as close as you can get to playing."

Then after a chuckle, he'll give you a more serious reply.

"The main reason I do it is that I enjoy mentoring. Coaching is an opportunity to share things I've learned with the kids I get to work with and help them be successful. You can do it as a job, but a lot of the coaches who have success are those who don't do it just as a job."

Etheredge brought his track record of gridiron success to Pell City High School last year, taking the helm of the Panthers and guiding them to a 6-5 record and an appearance in the Class 6A playoffs. He'd spent the previous decade as head coach of the Leeds High School Green Wave, a team he led to four state football championships in seven years.

"It's been a good move to Pell City," he said. "We still have great friends in Leeds, but things are awesome here, and I'm excited about the future here."

On a recent morning at the Panthers' field house, Etheredge took a break from filling out some athletic department paperwork to discuss his new team's future and reflect about how he tries to pay back what has been given to him.

The Panthers' 2016 season: "We were 6-5, made it to the playoffs and we were two plays away from being 8-2 at the end of the regular season. So it was a good first year, but it's hard in just a year to track everything and get it to where you want it to be. Are we there yet? No, not even close. I want us to contend for region and state championships. That's going to take a lot of work, but we'll get there."

First-year accomplishments: "We had some kids do some really good things. Offensive lineman Ken Foster was named to the all-state team, and he got to play in the Alabama-Mississippi All-Star Game. Chris Lynch and Marquis Posey both rushed for close to 1,000 yards, and Hudson Hughes threw for over 1,300 yards. Nose guard Tyler Estell was chosen to play in the Blue-Gray All-American Game, and we've had a number of kids sign scholarships to play at the next level. I suspect we'll have two or three more who will probably sign before it's all said and done."

The Panthers: "They're all good kids who are working tremendously hard. They're grasping what we expect of them, and they're doing a good job getting stronger in the weight room. We had 24 seniors this year, which for a 6A school is about average. We'll have a smaller senior class next year, but our current 10th grade group is good-sized, and we have about 50 on our ninth grade team, and that's a big old group."

What he appreciates about Pell City: "The thing about it is that we have great leadership here. The superintendent, the board of education, the principal, the assistant principals, the assistant athletic director, the



File photo

"They're good kids who are working tremendously hard," head coach Keith Etheredge said of the Pell City Panthers.

middle school principals, they're all good people. They want what's best for the kids, and it's a great thing when everybody's on the same page about that."

One of his goals as head coach: "A big thing we're working on is more cohesiveness between our athletic programs, the school as a whole and the community. I want folks to understand that our football and athletic programs are an extension of the community and a part of the community. You're going to see us out there involved in doing things to make the community a better, happier place."

The impact coaches can have: "I was raised by a single mom - my dad died six months before I was born - so as male role models, my coaches impacted me tremendously. Guys like Bobby Fairley, Andrew Brisky, Coach Sheets and Coach Copelands and my youth coaches, Coach Dutton and Coach Lewis - these guys were a huge influence on my life. They were good men, and I watched them be great dads and husbands. All of them at some point helped me to be a better person. I want to do the same for the kids I coach."

"It's a privilege to make a difference in a young man or young woman's life. Some coaches don't take that seriously. But you know, high school kids...you're not going to fool them. They know whether you really care about them or not. When they know you do, they'll run through a brick wall for you."

More about why he coaches: "The majority of coaches I know don't get into it for the money. I didn't, and I didn't get into it for the championships. They've been great when they happened, but they come from the hard work of the kids and what you and the other coaches put into your program. This is what I love to do, and I'd still be coaching football in some way whether they paid me or not. And as athletic director, I try to be at everything as much as I can, whether it's baseball, basketball, soccer, track,



Submitted photo

Coach Etheredge congratulates Ethan Jett for earning his varsity football letter.

volleyball or band. If we have kids there, I want to be there."

Something he tells his

players: "Life is about going through ups and downs. But the true mark of character is how we

react when we hit hard times and things get rough. Good people go through bad times, but

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Miss Marble Valley: Science and shattering stereotypes

By **BUDDY ROBERTS**
Special Projects Editor

SYLACAUGA – Sammy Rizzuto isn't native to Sylacauga, but she's fallen in love with it since being crowned Miss Marble Valley in January.

"My first impressions of Sylacauga are wonderful," she said. "The first time I really spent time here was the day of the pageant, and after I won I was astounded by the number of supporters there and how much community support there is. I've been back since, and everyone is so supportive and uplifting."

A native of New Jersey, Rizzuto said she appreciates "the real family feel Sylacauga has, and I love all the little boutiques and shops downtown." She may not have spent much time in Sylacauga before being named Miss Marble Valley, but she wasn't completely unfamiliar with it.

"My sister is a freshman at UAB, so I've passed through several times going to visit her, sometimes stopping of at Huddle House on the way. I'm excited now to be a part of the community and to serve it during the next year and hopefully even longer. It's a wonderful place."

On a recent Saturday morning, on another trip to UAB to visit her sister, Rizzuto detoured through town to the B.B. Comer Library to discuss her platform and goals and explain why she enjoys breaking down stereotypes.

Her hometown: Long Valley, New Jersey. "It's about 45 minutes north and west of New York City." She moved to Alabama two years ago to attend college at Auburn University.

What led her to Auburn: "I competed in the Miss America organization when I was in New Jersey. I was Miss New Jersey Outstanding Teen and then Miss Union County and Miss Camden County. I found out about Auburn through Outstanding Teen. Several colleges partner with the national program, and Auburn is one of them. I was able to secure a scholarship to Auburn, and when I stepped on the campus, it felt right at home."

At Auburn: Rizzuto is a sophomore with a double major in physics and mechanical engineering and a minor in nuclear power systems.

"Ever since I was in the second grade, I wanted to be an engineer. My dad always had a love for science, and I get my love for it from him. We watched science shows together, and for Christmas I asked for science kits and he would do them with me. I fell in love with science because I got to experience it in a hands-on way, not just reading about it in a textbook."

Her career goal: "To work for the military as a civilian. In high school, I did an internship at Picatinny Arsenal, which is a military base near where I lived in New Jersey. I had such a blast working with the scientists and engineers there. I want to work on developing apps and technology that will help the men and women who are serving our country."

Her platform: Operation Full Steam Ahead. "It's all about getting more boys and girls involved in science. Of course, I have a particular interest in getting more girls involved, but the fact is that more Americans in general are needed in science careers. Of the one million new STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) jobs that are available, there are only 200,000 candidates to fill them."

Rizzuto developed the platform when she was a sophomore in high school, and "people have been very receptive to it. I've gotten a lot of positive feedback, and I've been able to adapt it and make adjustments to it based on the feedback I've been given."

How encouraging young women to pursue science can tear down stereotypes: "People believe a smart person should look a certain way. My first semester at Auburn, I worked with a lab group that for the first five weeks of lab would not let me use the equipment or set anything up. It was so frustrating that I had to prove myself capable."

"At the same time, it's so much fun to surprise people. Shattering stereotypes is very powerful. Stereotypes hold people back, but it opens doors

when you break them down. There's nothing wrong – whether you're a man or a woman – with being articulate and smart. That should be encouraged and celebrated."

The best advice she ever received: "Fail boldly. My favorite teacher in high school, that was his favorite saying. He would tell us that that was what he wanted us to have learned from him by the end of the year, to not be afraid to fail boldly. It's okay to make mistakes. You don't have to like it, but learn from it and help others learn from it."

"You don't gain anything without taking risks, even if the risk of failure is high. If the risk is meant for you to take advantage of, you will. If it isn't, you'll still learn and gain a lot from the experience."

How she describes herself: "Bold, passionate,

driven and tenacious. My mom instilled fearlessness in me and that you don't give up. I don't believe in letting your fears hold you back. I believe in finding ways to take your limitations away."

Miss Marble Valley style: "On campus I look like an Eighties workout. I love my crazy leggings and workout jacket. When I dress up, I like a look that's trendy but classic."

Her best friend: Bo, a cocker spaniel-miniature poodle mix. "He's an Auburn puppy, named after Bo Jackson."

The food she could eat every day: "Chesseburgers. That's my after-pageant meal when I no longer have to worry about swimsuit. I always get a cheeseburger."

The food she hopes she never eats again: "Pickles. Cucumbers are fine just the way they are."



Buddy Roberts/The Daily Home

Sammy Rizzuto is the fifth titleholder to be named Miss Marble Valley.



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