# **IIIUPDATE III** 2022

# a salute to Government E Industry



# **UPDATE** 2022 **|||**

### Update 2022

This special publication you're reading -- whether in its print or digital format -- is one that has been produced annually by The Daily Home for more than 20 years. Other newspapers produce their own versions specific to their coverage areas, often referring to them as their Progress editions.

We call ours Update.

Not that there's anything inaccurate or ill-fitting about Progress, but we like Update better because of how well the word highlights this publication's purpose.

Look up the word "update" in most dictionaries, and you'll likely find two definitions: one for its use as a noun and one as a verb.

"Update" the verb refers to the action of improving something, making it more modern and up to date. (Notice how similar it is to the definition of "progress," which is the process of improving or developing something over time, the forward movement toward a place or goal.)

"Update" the noun is a report designed to bring someone up to date.

Both definitions apply to what you're now reading. The Daily Home's 2022 Update edition contains information

Buddy Roberts Special Projects Editor

about accomplishments that have been made by local government officials in such areas as economic development, education and civic improvement. It explains some of the challenges they have faced and what has been done to meet those challenges. Update also outlines what community leaders hope to accomplish in coming months, as one year has closed and a new one begins.

Why is an Update edition necessary? Because progress has been made during the past year -- another year during which local governments and industries faced unprecedented challenges of the pandemic -- and progress should be documented.

This edition updates the stories of Talladega and St. Clair counties by taking a look back at some significant accomplishments of 2021 while considering the state of municipal and county governments, schools, healthcare and businesses at the start of 2022.

As in past editions, we've grouped these stories into four main categories.

This section, Government & Industry, examines how local counties and cities have adapted to changing circumstances to continue to provide needed services to their residents, as well as how economic development initiatives have moved forward rather than been set back by the persistent specter of COVID-19.

In Health & Education, we offer a glimpse into the state of local schools and health care providers as they continue to deal with an unprecedented crisis that has significantly impacted both sectors.

Friends & Neighbors will introduce or reacquaint you with some fine folks who are doing great things in their respective communities, recognizing what they do for the benefit of others.

In the three Commerce sections, we'll visit some local businesses that have been mainstays or are newcomers to communities in Talladega and St. Clair counties. We'll also find out what are chambers of commerce have been up to and what their current plans are.

As you read these stories, it is our hope that you will support the advertisers who have enabled us to bring this information to you. They have invested in Update because they believe it is important to recognize and document progress and because they believe in investing in the communities they serve.

The Daily Home is grateful to them for this opportunity and to you as our readers, both on a daily basis and on such special occasions as this Update.



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### There's good news ahead for Talladega County's economic development

#### By CHRIS NORWOOD cnorwood@dailyhome.com

The last couple of years have not exactly been the best ever for economic development.

In fact, you could argue that the last couple of years have not exactly been the best for anything. But even then, there is some good news to be had, and, according to Talladega County Economic Development Authority Executive Director Calvin Miller, there should be more good news in the coming year.

The best news for economic development in the county is the completion of two speculative buildings on industrial sites on opposite ends of the county.

The one in the south is a bit more recent, Miller said. The building is 60,000 square feet, located next to the airport in Sylacauga and a stone's throw from U.S. 280 and about half a mile from a rail spur, all of which are potential selling points. Construction was completed last year.

The north end speculative building, near Lincoln, was completed in 2020 and has already attracted some attention.

This one is 100,000 square feet, close to Interstate 20 and with available utilities. The city of Lincoln and Talladega County have already made some road improvements west of Alabama 77, and the city of Lincoln has applied for funds to make more improvements to the east, Miller said.

"That road's in pretty bad shape," he said.

Although there are no build-



Executive Director Calvin Miller

ings on it yet, Miller also said the EDA had recently purchased 55 acres across Alabama 21 from Precision Strip, adjacent to the city of Talladega.

"That was also purchased for industrial purposes, with good access to Alabama 21 and to the 275 Bypass," Miller said.

There is also rail access close by. The property has already attracted some interest, but nothing close to final just yet.

Existing businesses are starting to come back to life as well, with the biggest expansion starting at Nemac last year.

"They're switching over some of their production from foam to high pressure die casting, based on some contracts they've gotten for companies making parts for electric vehicles," Miller said. "And of course, they're still doing work for traditional vehicles as well, but they are looking to the future."

The American Metals Group, in the Bon Air/Childersburg area, is also in the process of adding another 25,000 square feet to their facility. The process actually broke down in 2021 due to, naturally, the COVID pandemic and supply chain issues, but is expected to go ahead in 2022, creating more jobs.

They work primarily with tubular steel and other metal fabricating processes.

"They have contracts to make a lot of different things for various companies," Miller said.

He added, "It was a slow year. I

do expect to see more activity this year because I think COVID is going to become less of a factor than it was in the last two years. The biggest thing going forward now is that everyone is still looking for skilled employees. That's not just true here, it's true everywhere right now, in all manufacturing areas and in local businesses from restaurants to Walmarts. Even schools are desperately in need of employees. But the state, and especially the community colleges, are doing a lot for workforce development, and we seem to be getting to a position where we can take advantage. ... But that's the big factor right now. Unemployment in Alabama was only 3.7 percent last month, which is pretty low. Everybody is looking for people."



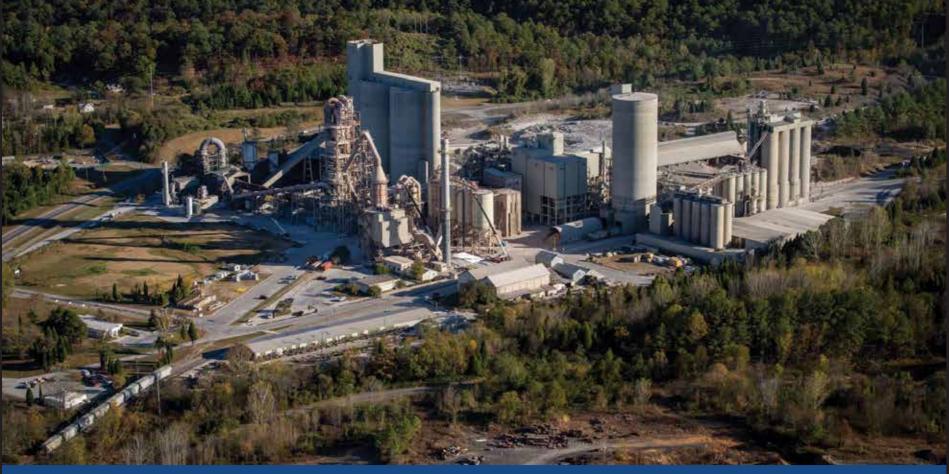
The north end speculative building, near Lincoln



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### 2021 was a year of accomplishment for City of Talladega

# City manager and council work together to achieve new goals

#### By CHRIS NORWOOD cnorwood@dailyhome.com

Talladega City Manager Seddrick Hill is still in his first year in office, but has already laid out a vision for the city and taken steps toward implementing that vision.

"Talladega is a diverse community with a rich history and a promising future," he said. "However, it is critical that we attract new businesses, retain existing businesses and maintain a strong workforce. My priorities include promoting and preserving Talladega's heritage while also ensuring its economic development and vitality."

Accomplishing those goals encompasses "enhancing our parks and recreation centers and academic institutions; building tourism; developing a strong infrastructure; beautifying our communities; reducing crime; and helping our businesses to flourish to ensure our economic development while also improving the quality of life in Talladega," he explained. "I am committed to working with accountability and transparency to help transform and restore a sense of pride in our community."

With the approval of the city council, Talladega joined the Main Street Alabama Network Community and participated in the New City Application Workshop. "As a member of the Network Community, city leaders are learning new strategies to promote economic development and help Talladega complete the Main Street Alabama membership application and the Alabama Cities of Excellence Program," Hill said. "The city has (also) met with and interviewed local businesses to explore their needs and support their growth." ► The city added LED lighting to brighten dangerous areas; installed ShotSpotters to alert police when a gun is fired; established a partnership with Crime Stoppers; increased police training and community engagement with youth in order to build trust and better serve Talladegans; updated our pay scale to help attract new officers; and hired 8 new officers. We are Working on Public Safety Plan for the city which includes a city-wide communication system.

► Talladega firefighters earned 920 hours of certification from Alabama Fire College and the city clerk received Certified Municipal Clerk designation from the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. To better protect and serve the community, the City purchased a Ford F-550 Rescue Truck and a new hydraulic tool. The City has also updated its pay scale and implemented incentives to attract new firefighters and police officers.

► The city raised more than \$66,000 for Christmas on the Square 2021 by securing donations from First Bank of Alabama, The Daily Home, Georgia Pacific, Talladega Superspeedway, Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind (AIDB), InSite Engineering, LLC and other sponsors. The first Community and Employee Appreciation Day was held at Shocco Springs to enhance communication with citizens. Employees, community members and volunteers enjoyed food, fellowship, pedal boats, golf, fishing and swimming. The city has updated its computer network, expanded its social media presence and is now building a new website.

► The city received diverse awards in 2021, including a \$72,356.00 Assistance to Firefighters (AFG) grant used to purchased Thermal Image Cameras and Wild Life Turn-out-Gear/accessories; a \$15,000 Alabama Historic Commission (AHC) grant to repair or replace the roof on the Chamber of Commerce building; three Alabama Power grants totaling \$4,500 for community improvement and promotion; and a \$2,500 Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant to install more Little Free Libraries. In addition, Talladega received the Tree City USA Award for demonstrating increased levels of tree care and community engagement and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) Optimization Award for providing high-quality water.

► With enhanced safety measures in place, services at Talladega Parks and Recreation's Spring Street Recreation Center have resumed. All pool services are back to pre-pandemic levels, and athletics and community programs are growing.

► The Armstrong-Osborne Library implemented various measures to improve service. A drive-through window was installed to better serve patrons who are reluctant to congregate in public spaces during the pandemic and to increase convenience for all patrons; book readings were recorded and shared via social media; the Summer Reading Program for ages 3-12 was successful; and the computers lab, makers space and Krayola Kiosk with ipads are available for patrons.

► The city has secured approval for its first new comprehensive plan since 2006.

► The city has formed a partnership with Career LIFE to help cultivate success in students and retain local talent via internships, co-ops and workforce development.

► Animal Control took in over 4,700 animals; assisted in the transfer, adoption or housing of over 3,300 animals; and returned over 100 animals to their owners.

► A paving plan has been initiated.

► The city has combined forces with neighboring communities to develop a comprehensive tourism plan.

► More than \$700,000 invested into nonprofits and

Other notable projects on Hill's watch include:

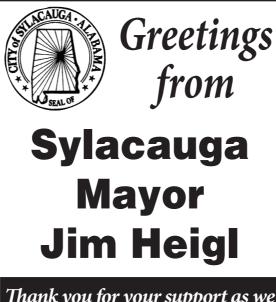
► City cleanup projects included removing litter and mowing from Alabama 21 to 275 Bypass, from Eastaboga Rd to 275 Bypass, from Alabama 77 North to the welcome sign, and from the Alabama 21 South welcome sign to 275 Bypass; removing 25 dead trees; rebarking Spring Street Rec Center, BN Mabra Center (Westside), the Chamber of Commerce, and Davey Allison Park; cutting the golf course, the Isbell Circle ditch off Jackson Street and the Talladega Downs ditch to Howard Street; installing a new fence at the AIDB walking bridge on Fort Lashley and cleaning up under the bridge; cleaning Wehadkee and the Recycle Center bank; completing extensive boom mower work in Ward 1 and Ward 2; and partially completing boom mower work in Wards 3, 4 and 5. Other projects included cutting down trees behind the historic tank at Veterans Park, deadheading all of the roses behind the memorial in preparation for spring, shaping shrubs, and preparing an estimate to add a concrete walkway around the tank. Also, "to reduce dumping in public places and facilitate the disposal of broken furniture and other unwanted items, the city invited Talladegans to drop off unwanted items at Old Wehadkee Mill every Saturday throughout October. The city also hosted two E-Recycling Day events, including a record-breaking E-Recycling day in which over 8,000 pounds of unwanted electronic items were collected. An additional E-Recycling Day event is scheduled for March 18, 2022," Hill said.

► The City repaired or replaced 108 traffic signal fixtures; repaired or replaced 146 traffic and street signs; patched 7,296 potholes for approximately 320 miles of roadway in the 26.14 square miles of city limits; cleaned 352,620 linear feet or 66.7 miles of curb and gutter; cleaned vegetation, brush and debris from 18,794 linear feet of major City-owned ditches; replaced/repaired 1,081 square feet of damaged sidewalk; placed speed breakers down Long Street to assist with traffic control; completed annual bridge inspection of 18 bridge/culvert structures; pressure washed the sidewalks around the court house square (48,746 sq ft); painted curb and guttered area in West Gate (6,272 linear feet); and provided traffic control for 23 parades/events and projects. The Recycle Facility on South Street had 4,926 visitors this year.

"The city (also) identified 14 blighted properties to be removed via the \$200,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and has begun the bidding process," he added. "The city hosted two food drives and also partnered Interviews for a permanent chief of police begin shortly with local organizations such as Red Door Kitchen, Samaritan House and United Way to reduce hunger in the community. Also, City employees purchased Christmas gifts for youth at Presbyterian Home and police officers donated gifts to the Department of Human Resources (DHR) for foster children."



Talladega City Manager Seddrick Hill



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### Talladega County steps up to meet the challenges of Covid pandemic **County commission eyes new projects to initiate in 2022**

#### **By CHRIS NORWOOD** cnorwood@dailyhome.com

At some point, COVID will be written about in the past tense. But not this year.

"COVID challenges continued," Talladega County Administrator Pat Lyle said. "Like all governments and businesses, COVID-19 continued to plague the county's ability to operate normally. The county did not have any COVID-related closures of county buildings during 2021, as was the case in 2020, (and) the county was able to lift most in-building restrictions for the public."

Unfortunately, she continued, "supply chain problems and the labor shortages for businesses escalated, causing projects and other work to be delayed. The county's number of employees dropped from 253 (pre-pandemic), to 224 in 2020, then to 196 in 2021. While it's been difficult to keep up with the regular workload in most county departments, the effects of the labor shortage at the county's road department have probably been the most noticeable to the public. There are now only 26 fulltime employees working on over 1,000 miles of county-maintained roads within a 760 square mile area. (This means) more trash on the roadsides and less manpower to pick it up; more rain brought more potholes and less manpower to fill them promptly; parts shortages caused delays in maintaining/repairing road department's equipment, in turn, causing delays in gravel road, shoulder, ROW, and ditch maintenance.

Also, Lyle said, "the county's small, aging, rural water system that had experienced no growth in 20 years saw an immediate increase in water use when many people left the city to live full-time in what had been week-end homes, pushing the system to capacity. At the same time, individuals and developers looking to build new homes on and around the lake, applied for new water service. With the system already at capacity, it had become stress to the point that the county had to stop approving new water customers in order to avoid serious wide-spread low pressure and interruptions of service for the existing water customers."

County government has stepped up to meet the challenges of COVID in several different ways, according to Lyle.

"The county now has a full-time securi-

ty guard at the Talladega Courthouse who assists the public in getting to the right offices. This has helped keep things moving inside the courthouse so people are not uncomfortably crowded in the hallways," she said. "While not mandatory, the county still has masks available for those doing business inside the courthouse."

Outside the courthouse, "in March, 2021, Commissioner Phillip Morris introduced a Volunteer Litter Cleanup Program, led by volunteers Sondra Epperson and assisted by District 1 Volunteer Coordinator, Andy Cowan. Commissioners Malley Limbaugh, Kelvin Cunningham, and Jackie Swinford got out in their districts and assisted volunteers with roadside cleanups. In April, Sheriff Jimmy Kilgore partnered with the county road department for an inmate roadside cleanup crew. To address the capacity issues with the county's water system, the engineering firm - Goodwyn,

Mills, & Cawood - completed their evaluation of the entire water system, along with a Capital Improvement Plan that addresses immediate capacity concerns, as well as projected future growth."

To combat the ongoing labor shortage, commissioners approved a new pay scale, as well as hiring and retention incentives for law enforcement personnel. And to pro mote good health habits and the county's wellness program, the county held its first health fair for employees. Participation in the wellness program keeps health insurance costs lower for the county and its employees. Offering free health screenings and vaccines is expected to keep more employees well and working.

Also last year, around the time that the evaluation/improvement plan for the county's water system was complete, the county was provided with \$15 million in funds from the American Rescue Plan that should pay for the water system's improvements. Engineering contracts for the water system's projects were signed in December and work began to design the projects.

"Sadly," Lyle said," Talladega county unexpectedly lost District 1 Commissioner, Jackie Swinford in August. In November, Governor Ivey appointed Darrell Ingram to fill the unexpired term for District 1."

Looking forward, Lyle pointed out that two engineering firms were hired - Goodwyn, Mills, & Cawood and Neel Schaffer - to design the various water system improvements. Some projects could begin bidding as early as August 2022. "Hopefully, when the weather warms, spring cleaning can begin and the volunteer litter program and community cleanups will continue to grow. 'Rebuild Alabama' projects should resume in the spring."

A list of projects can be found on the county's website.





### SHERIFF **JIMMY KILGORE** SAYS:

TALLADEGA COUNTY SHERIFF JIMMY KILGORE would like to remind all residents of Talladega County that it is not policy to call or contact citizens to tell them there is a warrant for their arrest. More importantly, deputies and staff will not ask for money, or demand that a resident send money or purchase gift cards to take care of any situation. A simple phone call to one of the offices can verify if there is a warrant for their arrest.

In recent months, there has been a rash of fraudulent telephone-oriented schemes. The most recent scam is that the caller claims to be from the Sheriff's Office, using the name of an actual employee of the Sheriff's Office. Unfortunately, the names of staff members can be found online. The caller informs the victim of a legal situation that can be rectified by purchasing prepaid debit/credit cards or gift cards and delivering the cards to a location other than the Sheriff's Office. In the past the caller has had the victim purchase the cards and read the information over the telephone. Once the caller has the information and PIN numbers from the card, the funds are transferred from the cards and is almost impossible to trace, much less retrieve the funds. The people perpetrating these crimes are primarily out-of-state and outside the United States.

The callers now instruct the victim to leave home, purchase the cards and deliver them to a nearby location without "breaking contact". This instruction is used to keep the victim on the telephone so he or she cannot contact the Sheriff's Office to verify the validity of the so-called warrant.

Sheriff Kilgore also warns citizens not to give out Social Security numbers or bank account numbers over the

telephone. As tax season is here, remember the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) typically contacts taxpayers via good old-fashioned mail through the United States Postal Service. "Your bank will know your account numbers. All you should ever have to relay to the caller is some security information, such as a mother's maiden name, or the answer to some other pre-selected security question," advises Sheriff Kilgore.

The Social Security Administration also still typically uses the United States Postal Service to communicate with recipients. "These scammers use an app to make the number they are calling from appear to be legitimate, so the most prudent action to take would be to hang up and call the listed telephone number for the business," reminds Sheriff Kilgore. Often the targeted victims are elderly or people who have never had any interaction with law enforcement. Citizens who have received similar calls or been victimized by scammers are encouraged to contact the Sheriff's Office at 256-761-2141 or 256-245-5121, or if after business hours, 256-362-6117.



### **'Our communities know how to win'** St. Clair County EDC director recounts victories of 2021

#### **By JOSIE HOWELL** *jhowell@thestclairtimes.com*

The St. Clair County Economic Development Council had a busy yet successful 2021 in accomplishing its mission statement: to create jobs, increase wealth and improve the quality of life for St. Clair County residents.

More specifically, the job of the EDC is to work directly with all of the municipalities in St. Clair along with the county commission in recruiting new investment into the community. These can include developers, industrial companies or community projects in relation to projects that will benefit the overall economy of St. Clair County.

According to EDC Executive Director Don Smith, in the past 18 months, the council has announced or completed \$75 million in new investments and announced 650 new jobs. This does not include current projects across the county that the EDC has not been given the greenlight to discuss just yet.

Some of these projects include the Steele Unipres Alabama Expansion which has created 30 news jobs with a \$6 million investment. All American Ford Grand Opening in Odenville also broke ground in 2021 while Big Canoe Creek Nature Preserve in Springville that will break ground this month. The council also helped Ashville in being selected as an Alabama Community of Excellence to help expand its community.

The council also saw numerous projects in both Pell City and Moody, two of the biggest cities in the county. The projects in Moody include:

► Dunlap & Kyle Company opening that created 40 jobs with \$26 million investment;

► J&M Exotic Foods Expansion created 11 jobs with \$2 million investment;

▶ Processor's Choice Expansion began that created 11 jobs with a \$6 million investment;

► Wal-Mart and Landing warehousing created 25 jobs each;

► And, the Kelly Creek Commerce Park held a groundbreaking, but has not yet been completed. This will be a \$125 million investment and is expected to create an estimated 800 new jobs.

Meanwhile, the EDC also took hand in the following Pell City projects:

► A Ford Meter Box expansion;

► Eissmann Automotive expansion that created 40 jobs with a \$2 million investment;

► Garrison Steel saw a \$2 million expansion;

► Quick Trip Travel Center sewer line construction began;

► Starbucks Shopping Center construction began;

► And, the TJMaxx and Hobby Lobby shopping center was announced, but has not yet broken ground.

Going into 2022, the EDC has already set some goals in relation to new projects that the council hopes to put in the works including grocery stores in certain underde Other projects the EDC hopes to tackle include development down the Interstate 59 corridor. Smith said while he can't talk specifics, some of these projects would have the similar effect of the All-American Ford car dealership in Odenville.

"We're competing with a lot of counties, but we're hoping to win one or two of those projects," Smith said, adding the council hopes to focus on not only retail, but also industrial development along that area.

The directors also said the council will continue to focus on exit development as St. Clair has both interstates 59 and 20 both running through it. Smith said the county is fortunate to have this as it brings a lot of business from those passing through the county.

"In the past, rivers were where towns located because that's where commerce boats would go through, and interstates are like that now. Retailers want to be right off the interstate so when folks are driving from Birmingham to Atlanta or Birmingham to Chattanooga, we want to give those folks a reason to stop off and spend money," Smith said, adding that those traveling through the county are ultimately the ideal customer.

"They give you their money, but then we don't have to educate their kids, we don't necessarily have to protect them with the police and fire departments, it's like free money," he said. "So we do focus on them because a lot of those locations on the interstate won't compete with the businesses we already have."

The council has also worked on many projects in helping businesses already established within the county including promoting tourism through the Visit St. Clair initiative.

"(Visit St. Clair) helped increase lodging tax by 47% and increased attendance 30 to 50 percent in different sections of the county in most events we are tracking compared to 2020," Smith said.

The EDC also went the extra-mile to help small businesses in the county when they were being directly affected by the initial government shutdown in 2020.

"We knew small businesses had been affected the most, and so we wanted to work through our local chambers of commerce throughout the county to make sure we had a support system there for them." Smith said.

Small Business St. Clair not only provides resources to small businesses throughout St. Clair County, but it also provides the local chambers some additional tools for their members, including marketing tools and help getting certain small business loans.

Recently, the program has also pushed the need for small businesses to have an online presence in order to better inform the public about the businesses itself.

"If you don't have an online presence, it's hard for the customers to do business with those folks," Smith said.

There are many people who make up be council in order to make these projects activities, but focuses primarily on retail development within the county. Jason Roberts, who is the director of industry and workforce development, recruits manufacturers. He also works with the educators to make sure the citizens and students are trained for the jobs in the region.

Candice Hill is the marketing specialist and works primarily with the small businesses in the county including through Leadership of St. Clair program and Small Business St. Clair.

Lastly, Blair Goodgame is the tourism coordinator who promotes tourism in and outside of the county through the Visit St. Clair initiative.

"We work hard with the local cities and county commission to attract new business to St. Clair County," Smith said. "It's a team effort, and our communities know how to win."



St. Clair EDC Director Don Smith





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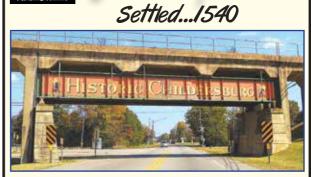
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### For St. Clair County, 2021 was another year of progress

#### Special to The Daily Home

Can a county be successful in times of a pandemic? The answer is, absolutely it can. According to St. Clair County Commis-

sion Chairman Paul Manning, 2021 will go down as one of the most progressive in county history.

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IMPACT

Don Smith, executive director of the St. Clair Economic Development Council, said a rebound was predicted for 2021 after the uncertainties and struggles of 2020. "The predictions were not off, with a record increase in overall retail sales throughout the county. There were also \$75 million in new investments and 650 new jobs announced on the projects."

The increase in new jobs creates an ongoing need for workforce development.

"It is critically important that we focus on our workforce development efforts with our partners in education and training; not only to keep pace with new job creation, but also to keep pace with the evolving skill sets required for many of those new jobs," said Jason Roberts, Director of Industry and Workforce Development for the EDC.

It's not only the local job market that has rebounded, but recreation and tourism in St. Clair County have flourished over the past year.

"Lodging tax was up 47 percent in 2021, attendance to events increased 15-to-50 percent, scores of new events have been added to annual calendars at St. Clair attractions, and Visit St. Clair celebrated it's one year anniversary," Smith said.

Blair Goodgame, Tourism Coordinator for the EDC, said Logan Martin LakeFest and Boat Show, the South's largest in-water boat show, held annually at Lakeside Park in Pell City expanded their attendance from 2019 with 20,000 people to 2021 with 35,000.

According to the EDC, St. Clair County has welcomed new events such as the Rustik Bucket Vintage Market at the St. Clair Arena, bridal shows at the Woodall Building and Homestead Hollow Summer and Fall Music Festivals in Springville, Logan Martin and Neely Henry Lake music festivals like Rockin' the Banks of Greensport and Lakeside Live, a new Farmers Market in Moody, and Rumble at Logan Martin brought live professional boxing to CEPA in Pell City. Efforts were also put into place to help support the local businesses hurt by the pandemic and economic shutdown. The Small Business St. Clair initiative was successfully launched to help support the local chambers of commerce and local businesses.

Moody on intersection improvement projects at the intersection of US Highway 411 and Sanie Road and at the intersection of 411 and Park Avenue (County Road 10).

"Right-of-way acquisition is almost complete at the Park Avenue intersection and the Sanie Road intersection right-ofway acquisition should be starting within the next couple of months."

According to Dahlke, the county is working with the City of Moody and ALDOT to update the interchange at I-20 and Kelly Creek Road and the project should start in February of 2022.

"ALDOT recently awarded the County a \$2.4 million ATRIP II Grant to improve the intersection of US Highway 411 and Kerr Road," Dahlke said. "The county has continued work with ALDOT on plans to provide an alternate railroad crossing for the Trails End community. In 2021, the County continued to work with the City of Moody and a local developer to build a road to provide alternate route for citizens who use the Dragline railroad crossing. The road has now been built and opened."

Dahlke also said the County is working with Pell City and ALDOT on relocating a portion of Hazelwood Drive that will provide better access to St. Vincent's St. Clair Hospital and Jeff State Community College. He mentioned the right-of-way acquisition phase has been completed and the project is scheduled to be let to bid in 2022.

"The county assisted with ATRIP II Grant with the City of Odenville which addressed needed turn lanes on US 411 between Council Drive and Burgess Drive and this project is near completion," he added. "The county also assist the City of Springville on a ATRIP II Grant that will address the four-way stop at the intersection of Alabama 174, US Highway 11, and Murphrees Valley Road (County Road 9)."

#### EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

According to St. Clair County EMA Director Patrice Kurzejeski, the county's EMA faced many hurdles in the past year Assistant. We have assigned over 1,250 new addresses in 2021 so that tells me that St. Clair County is still growing fast."

Campbell added that they have started the process of converting 911 data and maps to the new NextGen 911 standard.

"This is a GIS based format and the project should be completed by the end of 2023," Campbell said. "I was honored to be appointed to the executive board of the Alabama Association of 911 Districts (AAND) as Secretary/Treasurer."

#### NEW JAIL IN PELL CITY

According to Chairman Manning, the law-abiding taxpayers of St. Clair County will not be charged for the cost of this new jail.

"The folks using the court system are the ones who will be paying for it," he said. "Those folks who are incarcerated will now be paying a portion of what it cost to run the jail in St. Clair County. Recent legislation added \$10 in court cost for individuals who are incarcerated. This county commission has worked extensively with the sheriff's department to provide upgrades and equipment; we provided upgrades to the jail in Ashville and brought it up to code; and we purchased a new building for the investigators' unit."

#### **FINAL WORD**

Manning said the EDC and all of the municipalities worked very well together in

2021 to make sure this county thrived.

"I look forward to the future and I know we as a county are headed in the right direction," Manning said. "Despite working through a pandemic there has been such a positive approach by this county commission and every department."

The commission, he added, was unable to give the employees as large a raise as they would have liked due to increases in insurance cost to the county.

"Each fulltime county worker receiving family coverage for medical and dental benefits will not be asked to pay the more than \$120 per month increase. We will pay this increase for each employee so that they will have health/dental benefits as part of their compensation. This compensation to our employees will not end. It is an ongoing expense paid to the employees by the county commission."

Manning added that the staff in the commission office has worked very hard and are to be commended for all they have done getting this county through a rough year with Covid at the forefront. Every elected official has led his/her office in continuing service for our citizens.

"There is no doubt Covid put everything on reset for the past 18 months to two years," Manning said. "However, all our staffs have gone above and beyond to make sure this county remains one of the best in this state. St. Clair County is a great place to live, work and enjoy recreational activities."

#### **ROAD DEPARTMENT**

St. Clair County Engineer Dan Dahlke said the county paved and/or did pavement preservation work on over 25 miles of roads and prepared over 30 additional miles for paving in 2021. Dahlke said they will continue to work on needed road repairs around the county.

"A bridge replacement project has started in the Springville area on Washington Valley Road, and a portion of the roadway is closed but should be re-opened sometime in the Spring," Dahlke said.

He added that St. Clair County continues to work with the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) and the City of

due to the pandemic.

"But we also experienced amazing things to advance our program to serve our citizens," Kurzejeski said. "The St Clair County Commission approved a new emergency notification system, Alert St Clair. This moved us into the new age of reliable notifications for severe weather, hazmat incidents, road closures, and public events."

Kurzejeski also said public safety is their top priority.

"What made 2021 an even better year is that we procured and distributed 750 NOAA weather radios," she said. "And your County Commission approved to purchase 250 additional radios this year. We also renovated our Emergency Operation Center due to flooding issues. We now have an enhanced operation and training center to benefit our community leaders and first responders."

#### 911 BUSINESS OFFICE

Aislinn Campbell, director of St. Clair County's 911 said there were several positives for 2021 from the 911 Business Office.

"We were thrilled to be able to move back into our newly renovated offices," Campbell said. "Our new address is 1610 Cogswell Ave, Suite B-20, in Pell City. Our addressing department grew so we were able to hire Steve Webb as Addressing



St Clair County's employment numbers have returned to pre-pandemic levels, and its current unemployment rate is 2.1 percent, according to EDC Director Don Smith.

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# City of Sylacauga uses lessons learned during pandemic to prepare for the future



#### **By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

The city of Sylacauga is continuing to advance in the face of the challenges presented by the pandemic.

Mayor Jim Heigl and the city of Sylacauga used the pandemic to "look toward the future" and acquire software to enable the city and all its departments to function as normally as possible.

"Covid changed the way we operate. There are personnel who can run inspections with their tablets. Our police officers have computers in their cars that send info directly to the courthouse, so they don't have to deal with paperwork," Mayor Heigl said.

When speaking about one of the things

that makes Sylacauga special, Mayor Heigl highlighted the people who make their home in Sylacauga.

"Our families go back generations and generations. People move here, so their children can attend our schools because they have such a high reputation of learning," said Mayor Heigl. "We're not so large where you don't know everybody, but we're not so small that everybody knows everybody else."

Mayor Heigl invites input from residents and reminds them that his office is open all the time for them.

The central location of the city experiences traffic from multiple highways. The city's eight percent sales tax is touted by the mayor as one more benefit to shopping in Sylacauga. "They don't have to drive 40 miles anywhere else. They can shop here and save on gas and sales tax," said Mayor Heigl.

Businesses also see the benefit of doing business in Sylacauga. Mayor Heigl said that at the last count, 63 permits for renovation and construction had been approved.

Mayor Heigl said that jobs are available in many different fields and emphasized the availability of artistic and athletic opportunities in the city.

"We have hunting, fishing, golf, swimming, kayaking and trails for hiking and bicycling. There is something for everybody. You don't have to travel forty miles to find it. You will find it right here," Mayor Heigl said.

Although there have been changes for

the Marble City, the city continues to rely on calcium carbonate, or white marble, for art, industry, science and other things.

"The calcium carbonate is shipped by truck and rail, and the city is working with ALDOT on how to relieve the heavy trucking on our roadways," said Mayor Heigl.

Mayor Heigl is looking forward to the annual Marble Festival in April supported by the Alabama Arts Council and the Sylacauga Arts Council. At the festival, the city invites a sculptor from Sylacauga's sister city, Pietrasanta, Italy, to create a sculpture using Sylacauga's white marble.

"The sculpture that the artist makes for us is kept in the library. The public can observe the pieces there. You cannot find this marble anywhere else. No other marble is as pure," concluded Mayor Heigl.

### Town of Oak Grove seeks to attract new businesses

**By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

Tony White has served as mayor of Oak Grove since 2013, and he enjoys working in municipal government.

"There are a lot of great people and employees in this town and because of them they make the job of being mayor quite easy," he said. "I love how the community works together. The problems we have are so minimal that they can usually be fixed with a phone call. So for me, it is easy to be mayor."

According to White, the population of Oak Grove has increased by about 100 during the past year, which he and the town council consider a complement to the community.

"It is a reflection of people seeing the hard work being invested. For instance, Oak Grove Park offers a playground for kids, a walking trail, and just an overall great place for families to gather. We have a great senior center and are constantly working towards offering more."

Achievements that Oak Grove is most proud of include the improvement of the sewage system that was completed in 2021. White said that the need to upgrade the system dates back to 2016-17, when the town sought a grant to fund the project. The grant was approved during the 2019-20 fiscal year, and work was done to fully recondition the system and install new pumps.

Coming in the new year also includes new vehicles for the street department, finishing up the sewer system, working on a new storm shelter, and providing improvements to the park for the kids.

White said that efforts are underway to bring new businesses to Oak Grove. As no arrangements are final at present, no details are available to make public yet.

In other developments, Oak Grove now has a weather camera, and plans are already being made for the annual Fall Festival in October. Preparation for this event includes the construction of a pavilion for the festival. However, the pavilion will be a permanent structure that can be used for future events and entertainment.

"I believe Oak Grove has progressed well, and it's because of the town's employees," the mayor said. "In fact, as an appreciation of their hard work, they have been given a 5-percent raise. I strongly believe that it is important to take care of our employees because they work hard to take good care of us."

During the pandemic, White said that he is thankful the town was not impacted by Covid to the degree other cities have been.



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#### **GOVERNMENT & INDUSTRY**

**The Daily Home** 

### Town of Munford continues to weather pandemic and look to the future





2021 brought some changes and expansion to the Town of Munford, including renovations and a property purchase.

According to Mayor Jo Ann Fambrough, the council and court chamber within the Town Hall is being remodeled, and 85 acres off Priebes Mill Road have been purchased for an industrial park.

"We are working with Rep. Steve Hurst to have our latest property purchase included into the city limits through legislation. This will increase the limits some and hopefully attract new business.'

Fambrough said that the hardest thing Munford has endured this past year was Covid. However, town leaders and staff members learned to work around it and have continued to keep things moving.

Munford is a small town that works together for the best interest of everybody, according to the mayor. Because of its small size, more people are able to contribute as a whole and are more aware of the needs of the community.

"I would have to say that it means so much to see Munford move forward," Fambrough said. "We have developed an employee handbook with the help of many citizens in our community that want to see Munford grow. We have formed so many committees of concerned citizens, all of which have the same goals in mind. We all want to see our community grow but must recognize and develop from the core of things. If you don't begin with the core and build up, then you will fall."

For the new year ahead, Fambrough said that the council remains concerned about the old school property. The goal is to remodel the building and move the Town Hall to that location.



# PROGRESS LINCOLN

Lincoln Mayor Lew Watson said one of the greatest achievements over the last year was the opening of the Lincoln's Landing tournament fishing park. He said the park, which operates as an independent city department, is still not completely finished, even thought it hosted dozens of tournaments in 2021 after the boat launch was completed. Watson said this year has also been a planning year focused on building up the rest of the city's park systems and its administrative policies. He said throughout the year the city has worked on creating a new zoning ordinance that is designed to focus on using property for its highest and best use and helping residents. Watson said the other great achievements were the development of a city Human Resource Department and Sanitation Department. Lincoln also approved agreements with Stemley Industries and Carillon Oaks, which are building new facilities in the industrial park and on Magnolia Street, respectively.

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### Pell City's housing market 'extremely active' in 2021

# Tax revenues also on the rise during the past year

#### **By TAYLOR MITCHELL** *tmitchell@dailyhome.com*

Pell City Manager Brian Muenger said 2021 was a year of great accomplishments for the city, despite facing the same overall challenges faced by our society in general.

"As the needs of our community change, the city must be prepared to modify its operations accordingly," Muenger said. "I am pleased that during the year we were able to resume many activities, such as youth sports, without interruption."

At the same time, the city was also able to continue some new traditions, such as the Black Jacket Symphony performance at Lakeside Park, which drew a huge crowd.

Other service elements, such as senior citizen meal services, resumed as well, with additional components added.

Muenger said the Pell City Council previously approved the purchase of a meal delivery van during the previous year, which helped staff to serve in excess of 12,700 meals to senior citizens in our community, with more than 4,000 of those meals being delivered to homebound seniors. The city also partnered with the St. Clair County Commission's transit program to provide for continued transportation to and from the further with the construction of the recently announced commercial development on the former hospital site, which will bring more than \$20 million in annual sales per year to the city upon its completion," he said. "The newly constructed Coosa Commons center, the McSweeney dealership, and the hospital site development will be a powerful economic driver for the city for decades to come, and will further solidify the city's position as the commercial hub of St. Clair County."

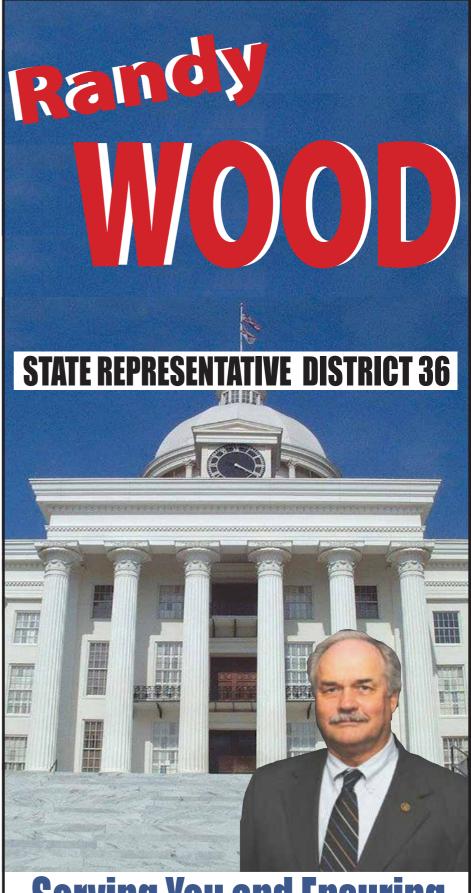
Muenger said the city has also made strides in several other areas over the last year.

The first is the funding and completion of a comprehensive street paving plan, which will guide future paving investment. Through a draft of that plan the city also contracted with Vulcan construction for \$2.7 million in paving, to be completed in 2022.

He said 2021 also saw the completion of the widening and resurfacing of Dickey Drive, helping the road better serve residents and prepare for future development. Also in the realm of roads the city submitted and received funding for a road safety grant for Mays Bend Road via Alabama Department of Transportation.

Muenger said the city also made some





Pell City Manager Brian Muenger

Center.

"We plan to continue this successful partnership moving forward," Muenger said, "and are very pleased with its effect thus far."

The housing market in Pell City continued to be extremely active in 2021, with 195 new home permits issued during the year.

"Over the past three years, the city has seen 447 new single-family homes constructed," the city manager said, "which is extraordinary."

Muenger said the city council also approved expanding the Planning & Zoning Department this year to add an additional Building Inspector to aid in the increased workload in this area.

He said the housing market has not been the only exceptional part of the local economy however. The city manager said as indicated by the robust demand for housing in the area, the economic indicators for the city were all positive over the course of the year.

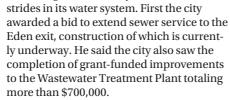
"As noted in the most recently adopted budget, we closed the FY21 fiscal year with a surplus general fund budget, as well as a balanced Utility Department budget." Muenger said.

He said sales tax revenues for the city increased by more than 10 percent over 2021. On the other hand, online tax receipts continued to increase, growing by 28.71 percent over the previous calendar year.

"It is important to note that while online taxes have outpaced the brick and mortar tax growth, we are still seeing substantial growth in brick and mortar," he said.

Muenger said he expects the city's revenues have even more potential to grow in the coming years.

"We expect the sales tax base to grow



Muenger said the city has also made a conscious choice to reinvest in its current facilities, to ensure they continue to meet quality standards. He said the park improvements at the Glenn City Park are a great example of that focus, and the new restroom, basketball court, and other amenities have made the facility more popular than ever.

Overall, Muenger said that none of the projects and improvements the city has been able to see come to fruition in 2021 would be possible without its greatest asset, its employees.

"Maintaining a high quality workforce and further building staff capacity are of the utmost importance to the city," he said

To help achieve this the manager said the city council approved both a 3 percent step raise and a 3 percent cost of living adjustment during the previous year, while also absorbing all healthcare related increases.

"This is the second consecutive year that this has occurred." Muenger said. "Furthermore, in recognition of the exemplary service provided by our staff, the council authorized the payment of premium pay to our full-time and part-time employees. These investments in our workforce are essential to ensure the recruitment and retention of high quality employees to serve our citizenry."



### Serving You and Ensuring Your Voice Is Heard

### 2022 appears to be a year of promise for the City of Riverside

#### By TAYLOR MITCHELL

tmitchell@dailyhome.com

Riverside Mayor Rusty Jessup said despite some twists and turns, the lakeside city has had an overall successful year in 2021.

"It has been a weird year," Jessup said, referring to several challenges the city faced this year.

Chief among these challengers was an unusually high amount of turnover in the city council.

"2020 was actually the election year but then in 2021 we lost two city council members and had to rebound from that," he said, "but we did and we got some good people in place and everyone's anxious to get started."

In July of 2021, longtime Riverside City Councilman Frank Riddle resigned from the city council because of a battle with brain cancer. Riddle, who was also the former head of the Riverside Water Department, later passed away in September.

Around the same time, freshman Councilwoman Taylor Turner also resigned, citing personal reasons that caused her to need to move out of Riverside.

As replacements the council appointed Sam Maddox and Dan Cain to succeed Riddle and Turner respectively.

Maddox was nominated by Councilman Jimmy Hollander, who described him as a good friend and a person who puts in a lot of work for the community.

"I've known Sam a long time. We've gone to church. He's taught me Sunday school. He's done everything," Hollander said when nominating Maddox in August. "Part of what I am is because of Sam, believe it or not."

Cain was a long time member of Riverside's Variance Board and a father of four which Jessup said gives the council a unique perspective.

"Dan represents a demographic we haven't had on the council for a long time and that's the younger married couple with children in school," the mayor said in November. "We are excited about that and what he brings to the table."

Despite these shake ups, however, Jessup said the year has overall been pretty successful.

"We just got our fourth quarter budget report and it's very good, we finished the year under budget and we are proud of that," he said. "The other significant thing about the 2021 financial report is that our city income is up over 10 percent, which is really really good. We love to see numbers tracking in that direction."

The mayor said he feels the increase in revenue is caused by people just generally getting out more and spending more time in town. He said the city also has new businesses such as the home decor shop Local Sister and restaurant Saucy's, which it's very excited about.

Jessup said one of the big projects he is looking forward to in 2022 is finishing up the playground project.

"We've finally got our playground funded," he said. "Construction has already started but putting the playground equipment together and getting it all out of the ground is going to start probably in late March or early April." Jessup said the new playground will include new features and be more handicap accessible. Part of the funding for the new equipment was gathered through fundraising efforts by the Riverside Beautification Organization. He said the previous equipment was quite old and the upgrade was long overdue. "The playground that was behind city

hall, it was here actually when I became mayor back in the early 2000s," Jessup said. "Over the years it had just run down. Lack of maintenance, which turned into lack of use and then it got to the point where it was dangerous, so we just had to tear it down a couple three years ago."

He said the long term plan is to connect the new playground to the rest of the city's park system around city hall through a new walkway.

"It's going to be a great place to go," the mayor said, adding that the city is excited to tie the playground back into the overall park system, which has been a project the city has worked on for years.

"Our park system here around city hall, which would really include Riverside Landing and the boat launch and the walking trails and the ponds that we have, is pretty close to 10 acres," Jessup said.

The park is centered around Lotus Pond where the city, with the help of the RBO, have worked to create a native bird sanctuary.

"We are going to let it grow with the environment and create a bird sanctuary in that," he said.

The mayor said the park, while not a never ending project, is something the city likes to make progress on each year. He said it is a great benefit for residents of Riverside.

"It makes for a better quality of life for our citizens and they enjoy the park," Jessup said.

Another project Jessup said the city wants to get done in 2022 is paving. Over the last few years, the city has budgeted money for paving to help address several issues, but the mayor says it's run into issues finding someone to do the work.

"We've got money in the bank ready to spend on several paving projects here in Riverside and we are going to do that in 2022, we hope," he said. "The problem that we are running into is the pavers, with this new gas tax money going out there and all the paving that everyone is doing, it's hard to find a paving contractor to come and do smaller jobs like we need here on the streets in Riverside."

Jessup said the city basically has been forced to wait in line, but he hopes to make movement on it.

"It's a problem that small rural cities like ours have," he said.

Jessup said he has wondered if those problems will also hold true for the other big project the city wants to undertake in 2022, the placement of sewer infrastructure along U.S Highway 78 near the Interstate 20 exit 162.

The mayor said that the city plans to use money from the American Rescue Plan Act to do water and sewer projects in Riverside, but may have the same issue with needing to wait.

"This ARPA money, American Rescue Plan money, that's coming down the pipe, the first phase of tis says we have to spend that on water and sewer projects." Jessup said. "Well we've got an application in and we are going to get those, get those grants, and we are going to have some water and sewer projects."



and it's gonna take a long time to accomplish that," Jessup said. "Probably longer than 2026."

The mayor said he thinks that as long as the project does get started before the 2026 deadline that the federal government won't take the money back, but with the complexity of the project and the size of Riverside, he thinks the city may see those same delays it sees with paving.

"For example we are having contractors tell us 'ok Riverside we'll come talk to you after we're done with this Birmingham project," Jessup said, "but the Birmingham contract is going to take them two years."

The mayor said he and several other mayors of small cities have talked to Governor Kay Ivey about these issues.

Yet, despite these challenges, Jessup said the city needs to do this project as it will open up further development on the exit 162 interchange.

"We desperately need it," he said "Highway 78 and I-20 intersection is the only exit on the I-20 corridor between Birmingham and the Georgia line that has not been developed, and the biggest reason it hasn't been developed is there is no sewer out there."

Jessup said Riverside can't afford to do this kind of project on its own, it may never be able to afford it on its own, but the federal dollars can make it work if the timeline works out. He said the city is also working with the St. Clair County Commission on the project.

"This is important to our country as well as Riverside that this I-20 intersection get developed. Jessup said. "Hopefully they will see and help us out and join with us in a grant or a grant application and try to make this happen out on 78."

The mayor said the project is also not without its challenges as it will have to juggle a railroad track, fiber optic line, gas line and flood easements all in one project. He admits the considerations taken even for something like environmental impact are staggering.

"Quite frankly that's why it hasn't happened when it should have 20 years ago," Jessup said. "That's why we haven't been able to develop this particular intersection like Lincoln has theirs and Pell City has theirs."

He said overall the project is the future not just for Riverside, but the county.

"It's something that if we could do and get done it will pay dividends for hundreds of years," Jessup said. "It's going to happen, I mean it's got to happen, the demand is there. We just have to figure out how to make it happen and my fingers are crossed that this new ARPA money that's coming down the pipe may put us in a position to at least get started."

He said no matter how you look at it the undertaking will be a several-million-dollar project.



He said the problem comes in with the fact that money from ARPA needs to be spent by the end of 2026.

"Now if we want to get sewer out on Highway 78, which is part of what we are applying to do, that's a pretty big project,





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### 2022 State of the State: 'Alabama's economy is rock solid' **Gov. Ivey addresses budget, education, federal mandates in annual speech**

#### **By BUDDY ROBERTS** Special Projects Editor

When comparing what has been accomplished in Alabama by residents and government officials working together "with what our national leaders in Washington have been doing, the difference is quite clear," according to Gov. Kay Ivey.

The governor made the remark during the 2022 State of the State address last month, portions of which she used to criticize the Biden Administration and the Democrat-controlled 117th Congress for what she described as "un-American" federal mandates.

"When our federal government overreached, we found a way to fight back," Ivey said. "From the moment the White House rolled out their scare tactic plans to try to force the Covid-19 vaccine on Americans, I assured the people of Alabama that we were standing firmly against it. I'll call this nonsense what it is, and that is an outrageous breach of our federal law.

"While the Legislature has stood with me in opposing these federal mandates, we have also been fortunate to have a strong leader in Attorney General Steve Marshall, who hasn't shied away from the fight one bit. Momentum is on our side. As I have said all along, the courts are where we will win this battle."

Opposinging President Biden's vaccine regulation (which the U.S. Supreme Court ultimately blocked) was one of few direct references to the pandemic in Ivey's State of the State address this year. Another came when addressing education, which the governor called the single most important issue here in Alabama.

"No doubt," she said, "the Covid-19 pandemic shined a light on our country's education system in many ways. Let me be crystal clear: it is more critical than ever that every Alabama student is receiving in-person learning. Despite the fact Alabama led other states in getting kids back in the classroom, last year during this occasion, I called on our local school districts to work with community partners to close the learning gap. That is why I am proud to propose funding for after school programs I know will go a long way in getting our students on track for success.

"In Alabama, our students will be focused on core curriculum. That means being proficient readers by the end of third grade. After we collect useful data during this upcoming spring semester, implementing the Alabama Literacy Act will be a must. We must also ensure our kids are focused on developing their math skills, studying history – not theory – and mastering other classes like science and writing."

Ivey said she supports legislation aimed at creating a Math Task Force to provide "timely and actionable recommendations for recruiting and retaining math teachers, increasing support for struggling students, as well as for evaluating the quality of our assessments, learning materials and standards. We cannot continue letting our students and teachers struggle and rob them of a chance to achieve their dreams."

She challenged to schools, communities, and officials to "no longer accept the existence of a failing elementary school in our state. Early learning is the bedrock of a quality education. How can we expect to have successful middle and high schools if we have failing elementary schools?

"To that end, I am proposing resources to support grants for failing elementary schools that are not one-size-fits-all but rather are customized to the particular needs of each of those struggling schools."

Money, she added, "isn't going to fix our problems in education. We need to work with an Alabama spirit of cooperation and determination, and we need to find new ways to address old problems. That begins with making sure that every elementary school in Alabama is a successful school. We will ensure we recruit and retain good teachers. We are expanding funding to math and science teachers. We need more highly qualified math and science teachers if we want to improve student achievement and prepare our children for the new economy, and we must continue to work every single day toward this goal."

A former high school civics teacher, the governor praised educations for making "a difference in each of our lives. The job of teachers is no small task, and during the height of covid, parents witnessed firsthand the adjustments and the obstacles that faced our educators. To that end, I am proud to once again propose a well-deserved 4-percent pay increase for our teachers."

Ivey also had praise for infrastructure improvements made through the Rebuild Alabama Act.

"As promised, every single penny has gone to road and bridge projects," she said. "I am proud to report that on top of local improvements, the state has administered projects in almost all 67 counties already, and we've only just begun. I am proud to announce that we will be widening I-59 from Chalkville Mountain Road to I-459, in east Jefferson County near Trussville, from four lanes to six lanes. In Alabama, we actually know what we are talking about when we use the word 'infrastructure."

In criticizing federal lawmakers, the governor made an exception for Alabama's congressional delegation, including one longstanding official.

"While Washington, D.C. seems to be filled with partisan politics, Alabama is blessed to have strong representation by our congressional delegation led by our senior Senator Richard Shelby. Last year, Senator Shelby announced he would not seek reelection. Beginning with his service in the Alabama State Senate in 1970 and continuing over four terms in the U.S. House and now six terms in the U.S. Senate, Richard Shelby has been instrumental in giving Alabama a seat at the table and has been vital in our state's successes. We are proud of all he has accomplished for us and congratulate him and his wife Annette on their truly impactful contributions to our state and nation, and we thank our entire federal delegation for their service."

She also praised former President Donald Trump for signing "the CARES Act into law. We in Alabama quickly acted to ensure that those funds went directly into the hands of Alabamians. From our small businesses to our churches, nonprofits and classrooms, I am proud that working with the men and women in this room, Alabama used every cent and invested it wisely. But even today as states like Alabama are making record economic comebacks, Congress is wanting our country to spend more and more federal dollars, and now we are tasked with allocating the American Rescue Plan Act funds."

The funds should be used wisely, the governor said, because they're one-time funds.

"We must be smart with this one-time money and commit to the people of Alabama that we will wisely invest – not just casually spend – these dollars. This is not free money. We will make robust investments that will pay long-term dividends to the state.

"As we prepare our budgets for any possible events in our nation's economy, today, Alabama's economy is rock solid. Our preliminary numbers for 2021, even despite all of the curveballs we have been thrown, are looking strong. It is projected that Alabama saw investments totaling \$5.4 billion with some 9,000 new jobs created. I am confident that our final numbers will be even bigger."



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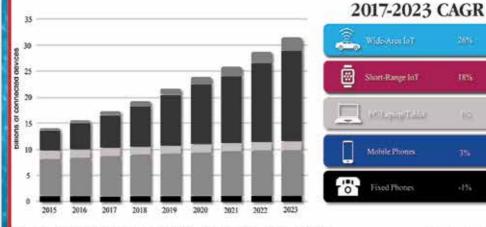
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Source: ONF and Ericsson Mobility Report, November 2017

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### Honda of Alabama marks milestone: **20 years of production in Lincoln**

**By DAWN AZOK** Alabama News Center

Honda is marking 20 years of auto production in Alabama, an era that has transformed communities across the state touched by the automaker's vast network of business.

At the same time, the company's auto assembly plant in the Talladega County town of Lincoln has become a pivotal part of Honda's global success as its primary production source for light trucks and the V-6 engines that power them.

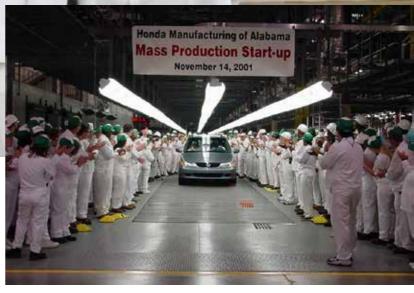
The Lincoln plant has expanded multiple times over the years with new models, innovative manufacturing processes, additional jobs and key investments. Today, the operation represents a cumulative capital investment of \$2 billion and has more than 4,500 employees.

Since the facility rolled out its first Odyssey minivan on Nov. 14, 2001, Honda's Alabama autoworkers have produced more than 5 million light trucks and V-6 engines.

The plant is the sole producer of Honda's Odyssey minivan, Passport SUV, Pilot SUV and Ridgeline pickup, with the capacity to turn out 340,000 vehicles and engines each year. Bob Schwyn, vice president and Alabama Auto Plant lead for Honda, credited the dedication and challenging spirit of the local workforce as instrumental to the company's success. "Since Honda began production in Alabama in 2001, we have accomplished a great deal and put a number of high-quality products on the road, but it is our people – our Honda associates – who are the driving force in all of our accomplishments," he said.

Greg Canfield, secretary of the Alabama Department of Commerce, said Honda helped form the foundation for Alabama's modern auto manufacturing industry, which today includes more than 40,000 jobs and an annual production capacity topping 1 million vehicles.

Honda continues to be a leader in Alabama's auto sector and on the worldwide auto manufacturing stage, Canfield said. ▲ Working at Honda Alabama has become a family affair for 20-year associate Connie Suttle, second from left, and her three children, Cachauna Burns, Kwuantae Suttle and Derrick Hunter. All three of Suttle's children have followed in her footsteps and are working alongside their mom as associates at the auto plant in Lincoln.



▲ Associates gather on Nov. 14, 2001, for the official mass production start of the Honda Odyssey minivan, the first vehicle produced at the automaker's Alabama Auto Plant.



"One of Honda's biggest strengths is the innovative design and manufacturing methods that keep its vehicles in high demand in markets around the globe," he said. "The company has brought cutting-edge developments to its Talladega County plant many times over the past two decades, putting great trust in its local workforce, and Alabama autoworkers have delivered outstanding results again and again."

The plant is in the middle of another hiring wave, seeking applicants for permanent production associate positions. Hourly wages start at about \$20 for the assembly line jobs, with a wide range of medical, retirement, fitness and tuition assistance benefits available. The jobs require 2.5 years of production manufacturing experience

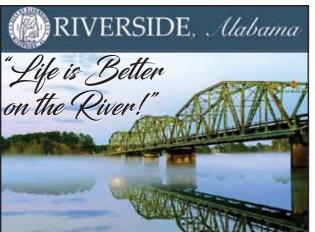
Current Honda employees say the company is committed to the community as well, through numerous service projects and support of charitable organizations.

"Honda is not just here to build cars," said Connie Suttle of Talladega, a production team lead at the plant who has worked there since 2001. "We are building families. We are building communities and we're doing it together."

Suttle knows a lot about Honda's influence on families. All three of her children work at the Lincoln plant.

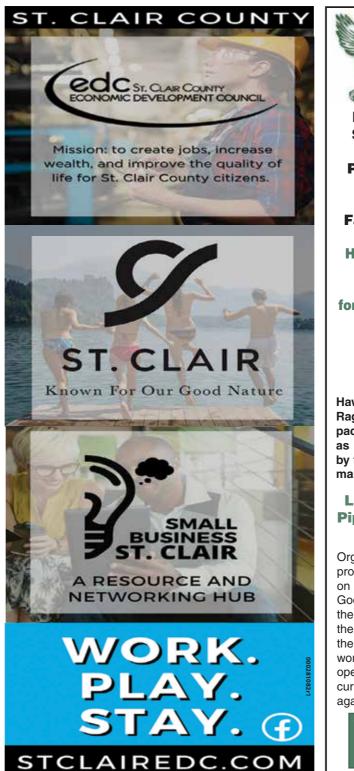
"I found a home when I came to Honda," she said.

Honda contributes \$12 billion to Alabama's economy each year, according to a 2019 economic impact study commissioned by the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama. The study found the automaker accounts for more than 19,000 direct and indirect jobs.



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Riverside City Hall 379 Depot Street | Riverside, Alabama 35135 205.338.7692 ▲ A row of Ridgeline pickups on the line at Honda's Alabama auto plant in Talladega County. The factory is the sole producer of the Ridgeline and several other models.







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# Goodgame Company's legacy grows in Pell City Local contracting firm at work on new St. Clair Jail project

#### **By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

The Goodgame Company is a historic industry in Pell City. The family-owned general contracting firm has been a fixture in the city since 1955 when they began as a lawnmower repair company.

The company changed directions over the years, becoming focused on welding and repair then more industrial services. In the 1980s, Goodgame Company became a general contracting business.

Jason Goodgame, corporate vice president, began learning the business from a young age.

"I started here at age 12 or 13. We have a lot of longtime employees who would say they ran a daycare for me," Goodgame said.

Today, Goodgame Company has about 100 employees locally. They mostly work in central Alabama, but they are licensed to work all over the state and in the states surrounding Alabama.

"We have really great self-starter employees. I try to see every employee at least once every two weeks. It is important to me to stay visible to clients and employees," said Goodgame.

On days when Goodgame cannot travel to certain sites, he is able to virtually check on the sites digitally. Even though he utilizes high-tech software for business, Goodgame keeps a handwritten to-do list, as well as a "got-to-do list". "Our slogan is 'We build relationships.' Eighty to 90 percent of our customers are repeat customers," said Goodgame, "We have several customers who have been with us for 30 to 40 years."

Goodgame says that the business is so diverse, they sometimes provide maintenance services for customers.

"We have had a staff of people on site at Honda since we started with them 20 years ago. We will repair break rooms and do things like that. There is nothing too big or too small," Goodgame said.

Goodgame Company has had a long relationship with entities in the county. One of the projects Goodgame Company is working on currently is the St. Clair County Jail to create a better atmosphere and make it safer.

"The sheriff's goal is to make sure everyone is safe. We were brought in about a year ago for a feasibility study, and now, we are managing the whole process for the county. We keep staff on site and make sure everything is on schedule," said Goodgame.

Goodgame is proud of Goodgame Company's connection to the community.

"My parents have always wanted to help the community, and now that we have more means, we are able to help more," Goodgame said.

He has been involved with the St. Clair County Educational Foundation, CEPA and sits on the St. Clair County Cattlemen's Association. Goodgame also serves as the chairman of the board for Alabama Construction Industry Craft Training.

The Goodgame Company also supports the Chamber of Commerce and the St. Clair County Economic Development Council.

"We work hard to be a good asset for the community. We love building relationships," concluded Goodgame.





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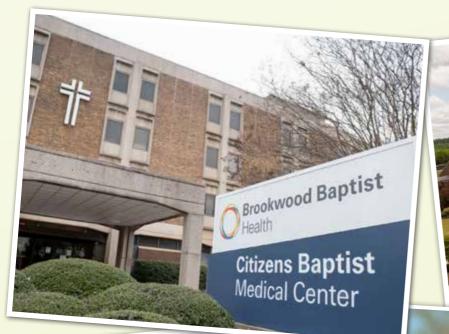




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# IIIUPDATEIII 2022

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February 2022 Special Supplement to **The Daily Home** 



# III UPDATE 2022 III

### 'All did their part' to help Pell City Schools cope with challenges

#### Superintendent lists school system's 2021-22 accomplishments, goals

**By TAYLOR MITCHELL** *tmitchell@dailyhome.com* 

Superintendent Dr. James Martin says the Pell City School System has seen plenty of challenges over the last year but has also seen several successes.

Martin said one big issue during the year has been COVID-19.

"We are still dealing with waves associated with COVID," he said. "We had a big wave back in August, and we had one



Superintendent Dr. James Martin

again shortly after Christmas, as has everyone in this state."

Pell City saw one of its worst couple weeks of the entire pandemic in August of 2021, with 177 students testing positive for COVID-19 in a two-week period. At the time, Martin canceled school open houses, instituted deep cleaning measures at facilities and started encouraging but not mandating masking for students. The schools eventually were able to lower the trend and avoided moving to virtual school.

The same cannot be said for the surge the system experienced along with the rest of Alabama in January. During this surge, which took place during a larger COVID surge nationwide, Martin sent students home to virtual instruction, as it became hard to staff classrooms and 179 students tested positive for the virus.

That surge also eventually subsided with students returning after four days of virtual instruction.

Yet despite these challenges, Martin said he is proud of how the system has handled COVID.

"We have stayed in school far more than most, and that is something I am very proud of."

Martin said he feels the community pulled together and all did their part. He said parents kept sick students at home and staff all pitched in to take proper precautions.

"Kids need to be in school," he said. "I think people have heard me say that so much, but they do need to be in school." Martin said another challenge the system has faced over

the last year, which can also be listed as one of its successes, is the passing of a 5-mil ad tax increase in November.

The referendum ultimately passed on a 21-vote margin and was only of only two tax referendums to pass in St. Clair County after legislation allowed the county to decide on ad valorem taxes based on school zones instead of voting for a county-wide rate.

"I think I told you at one point I would be happy if it was just by one vote," Martin joked. "Thankfully it was more than that – not much more, but it was more than that."

The superintendent said he appreciated how the community came together for the referendum, coming to meetings and giving feedback.

"We are truly grateful that people believe in us and believe in what we are trying to do in the school system as far as our vision of what we want our school system to be," he said.

The effort began with a public forum in May of 2021, when the system laid out the plan for using the additional funds. While the plan did change over the course of the year, it ended up with priorities the system had in the beginning, with other priorities discovered from feedback.

The final plan included full-time art and music teachers for all the the system's elementary schools, storm shelters at Eden Elementary School and Coosa Valley Elementary School, a complete renovation of Pell City High School along with a new cafeteria and band hall, a new multi-purpose building to Duran North Junior High School and various improvements and upgrades to the system's sports facilities with a focus on safety.

Martin said one item actually came off the list over the course of the year: a new HVAC system for Walter M. Kennedy Elementary School. Martin said the project was ultimately funded with federal COVID relief funds.

The tax referendum projects, which the system is working on starting up, aren't the only projects the system has in mind. In 2021, the system broke ground on an addition to Duran North Junior High School that will allow the school to host both seventh and eighth grade students. The plan was initially to have that facility open in August, but Martin said he wasn't sure the system would meet that goal.

"That's our goal," he said. "We're also at the mercy of where our contracts are, but that's our goal and they are working. So we'll see."

Martin said there are contingencies in place if the construction goes into the next school year.

The system has also taken the first step in its plan to transition Duran South Junior High into a pre-kindergarten facility and student center.

In January of 2022, the system opened up public comment on renaming the building the Training School Legacy Center of St. Clair County. The proposed name change comes after nearly two years of discussion with The St. Clair County Training School Alumni Association.

The building that is now Duran South was previously known as St. Clair County Training School and served as the school for African-American students in St. Clair County before schools in the county were integrated in the late 1960s. The name is meant to celebrate that legacy.

"That school is a historic facility and it's been a very important part of this community," Martin said, "and it's going to continue to be a very important part of this community."

Martin said the system, along with all of Alabama, implemented a new standardized test called ACAP. Pell City, again like much of the state, saw low scores likely caused by learning loss due to the pandemic. He said teachers are already working to address those issues.

"We are beginning to see some progress on that especially in our younger grades," he said.

Martin said there has also been progress on the referendum projects and he expects to start seeing those results in the next couple years. He said plans are being finalized for the storm shelters.

"Our hope is next school year hopefully to break ground on those two facilities," Martin said.

He said plans have also started on the new playing surface for the baseball and softball fields. The superintendent said new music and art teacher positions will be advertised as early as this month. He said he feels getting started on those projects soon is important to the people of Pell City.

"The big thing I've always said throughout the referendum is give us a chance to show you we are going to do what we say we are going to do," Martin said. "Now we are at the point where we're showing people that we are doing what we said we were going to do."







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### 'It's time for the state to recognize what our scholars can do,' new Talladega city superintendent says

**By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

#### According to the new superintendent of Talladega City **Schools, COVID-19** has been the biggest challenge for the school system in the last year.

"Instructionally, it affects us with split schedules and other things like that. We are working on everything for our scholars, including closing instructional gaps," said Dr. Quentin Lee, who is in his first year serving as superinten-

dent.

There are about 1,680 students and about 276 faculty and staff in the Talladega City school system, and Dr. Lee said there are positive upward trends in all of their data. "Our students are grabbing hold and want more. We have seen double-digit growth in almost every category through the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program-even in the middle of a pandemic."

The morning Dr. Lee spoke with The Daily Home for this Update

interview, four of the city's students were participating in the Talladega County Spelling Bee.

Talladega City Schools recently celebrated their Commit to Graduate event, honoring ninth graders and seniors. This year's event also included the sophomores who were unable to participate last year due to the pandemic. "It shows our scholars it is time for the state to recognize what our that graduation is not unattainable," said Dr. Lee.

The school system also prepares students for life after high school with a career tech program.

In other recent developments, for schools' staff, there has been an increase in focus on professional development.

The system purchased new Chromebooks last summer, as well as new smart boards and improved printers.

The system also hired a mental health coordinator and parent involvement specialist. Talladega High School has hired a new football coach who will oversee a new strength and conditioning program.

Schools are now hosting "parent academies," which feature helpful tips for parents. "Our last academy was on grief, anxiety and suicide. We had counselors on hand, and it was well attended, even in a pandemic," said Dr. Lee.

The superintendent said Talladega City Schools are working on what they can do to

impact the community while remaining committed to the pursuit of excellence and being creative and innovative for TCS students.

The school system places an emphasis on project-based learning, which is a real-life application of education.

"They are presented with a problem and solve it," Dr. Lee said. "It helps with problem-solving skills, as well as collaboration. Not all students are great test takers-some

are problem solvers or public speakers. Project-based learning is nothing new, but it is an opportunity to bring something new to our scholars in the city school system."

Superintendent

Dr. Quentin Lee

The school system is also looking at more activities with computer science and STEM, as well as focusing on the Literacy Act and mastering standards.

"We have our work to do, but we believe scholars in the city of Talladega can do," concluded Dr. Lee.









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#### **HEALTH & EDUCATION**

### Talladega County schools focus on STEAM education, preparing students for the workforce

#### **By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

The Talladega County school system is currently focused on science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics (STEAM).

Eleven schools in the system have achieved Cognia STEM Certification: Childersburg Elementary School, Childersburg Middle School, Winterboro High School, Talladega County Central High School, Munford High School, Munford Middle School, Munford Elementary School, Lincoln Elementary School, Fayetteville High School, Lincoln High School and Charles R. Drew Middle School.

The six remaining schools in the district who not currently certified are working toward earning the credential, according to Superintendent Dr. Suzanne Lacey.

"Through this process, students are being prepared for careers of tomorrow by exposing them to inquiry-based learning environments that encourage innovative and creative solutions to 'real world' issues," Dr. Lacey said.

Recently, the district was awarded a \$200,000 grant from the Alabama State Department of Education for STEAM education through career tech and a \$25,000 exploratory grant to support environmental education in the Munford schools.

Talladega County Schools, along with two other districts from across the nation, was awarded a \$1 million grant to create computational thinking pathways with the goal of increasing computing opportunities in every school and specifically attracting more females to computer science and computational thinking.

"Over the past three years, Talladega County Schools has led the nation in this important work. Teacher leaders have developed a pathway for each grade level that includes key standards and computational competencies such as algorithmic thinking, data analysis and building models and simulations," Dr. Lacey said.

She emphasized the system's practice of project-based learning, the teaching method through which students gain knowledge and skills by investigating, researching, and

responding to an authentic "driving question."

"Project-based learning encompasses five areas that are critical for preparing students for a high-tech workforce: communication, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and computational thinking," said Dr. Lacey. "What makes project-based learning such a fluid strategy for all subjects and especially in career technical education courses is the fact that students are able to simulate their learning through authentic opportunities oftentimes with business and industry."

Career and technical program pathways include health science, information technologies, AP computer science, forensics law and public safety, agriscience, family and consumer science, multimedia, finance and accounting, engineering, Project Lead the Way and Microsoft Lead Academies.



Superintendent Dr. Suzanne Lacey

Students from Lincoln High School, Munford High School, and Talladega Central High School have participated in the Tiny House Project. The first tiny house was sold at auction last spring, with another nearing completion. Dr. Lacey considers the project "a powerful example of project-based learning where students from have worked diligently to design and build a tiny house through hands-on learning including framing, carpentry, electrical wiring, plumbing, HVAC and roofing."

Dr. Lacev also touted the importance of digital resources for the students in Talladega County

Schools. Talladega County students have access to a multitude of digital resources to enhance learning including Discovery Education Streaming, Science Techbooks, DefinedSTEM, Nearpod, iReading and Actively Learn.

In addition, embedded professional learning is designed for teachers, so they can use the various tools with a high level of confidence to support student learning.

'The primary purpose of the district's aggressive campaign to integrate technology is to support student learning. The district constantly monitors digital resources to ensure that these tools are effective and relevant in supporting the academic needs of students," Dr. Lacey said.

A priority for the district is developing proficient readers. All eight schools serving kindergarten through third grade have full-time reading coaches who provide professional development and coaching for schools. The district continues to collaborate with regional instructional staff from the Alabama Reading Initiative to receive updated and targeted training to improve reading achievement at all grade levels.

To help achieve the district's commitment to provide optimal resources to enhance instruction and improve student achievement, all eight elementary schools will continue Summer Reading Camp in 2022. More than 500 students participated in 2021, up by 350 students from the previous year.

The Alabama Math Science Technology Initiative (AMSTI) partners with Talladega County Schools to support mathematics and science instruction. Six of the eight county elementary schools have full-time mathematics coaches who provide professional development and coaching for teachers.

AMSTI has also played a valuable role in professional development training for teachers on the Next Generation Science Standards including coding, engineering design, robotics and 3D printing.

"The district has earned a reputation for innovation and excellence and exemplifies effective transformation in a high-poverty, rural school district," said Dr. Lacey.



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### Sylacauga's new superintendent seeks to equip everyone for excellence

#### **By FAITH DORN**

Special to The Daily Home

Dr. Michele Eller is in her first year as superintendent of Sylacauga City Schools.

"My goal when I started in education was to make a difference. I never aspired to be a superintendent. I just wanted to be used in the best capacity for the children," said Dr. Eller.

Dr. Eller previously served 16 years in the classroom, teaching English and theater. She has also served in various capacities in education, including as an assistant superintendent in Chickasaw City Schools.

"When I was the assistant superintendent, I was blessed that the superintendent allowed me to work hand-in-hand with him. From that experience, I knew I could serve as a superintendent and make a difference," Dr. Eller said.

One reason Dr. Eller wanted to be part of the Sylacauga City Schools system was the "amazing" support the school system receives from the community and the city

"There is a lot you can do when everybody is working together to make it happen. This system was already great, and I saw an opportunity to build on that and make it even better," she said.

Another reason Dr. Eller wanted to work in the school system was the close proximity to her family. Originally from

Montgomery, she moved around the country often as a child due to her father's job and attended several schools in the Midwest and out West, graduating high school in Simi Valley, California. Once her father retired, her parents moved to Logan Martin Lake.

Dr. Eller's three-fold plan for Sylacauga City Schools is to honor the past, challenge the present and envision the future. To honor the past, the system assesses its foundation. To challenge the present, the system looks at current data, job opportunities and student needs. Part of challenging the present includes making difficult decisions. While envisioning the future, Dr. Eller has worked to hire people who may be able to see multiple solutions to different issues.

"We may have always done something one way, but that may not be the best way to do something now. Nothing is too great or too big for us to envision tackling all working together and going in the same direction," she said.

Dr. Eller is proud of the school system's focus on the whole child which includes everything from providing

meals to social and emotional support to academic support to the opportunity to grow through the arts and athletics

"No stone is unturned. Every single opportunity is given, and students have no choice but to flourish," she said.

She is also proud of the efforts made in prevention and support. Students and student leaders learn how to deal with peer pressure, support classmates and how to get an adult if a situation arises.

The system also hired a mental health coordinator to work with students and families. Additional fine arts teachers were also hired.

"Even from pre-K they are exposed to the arts," said Dr. Eller, "It is wonderful to see how the students are growing." The school system is also bringing in experts to help the teachers grow.

"They are learning how to analyze data to meet the needs of our students. We are seeing assessment gains in every single grade level in reading and math," Dr. Eller said.

She says that she has been inundated with emails and phone calls from individuals who have heard what the school system is doing and want to come here. "Other places are having teacher

shortages, and we have people wanting to come work for us," said Dr. Eller.

The school system is also looking at blended learning.

"What we have experienced over the last couple years may not go away, so we need to equip our teachers to teach in every situation," Dr. Eller said.

The system is upgrading facilities and equipment and looking to add e-sports and wrestling. Dr. Eller praised volleyball and football for making it to the state playoffs and anticipates basketball to also make it to the state playoffs.

"Our tagline is 'equipping everyone for excellence,' and I am looking forward to us excelling in every single area," said Dr. Eller.





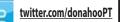
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# St. Clair Schools look forward to new projects on county campuses

#### **By JOSIE HOWELL** *jhowell@thestclairtimes.com*

Despite the unique challenges that the 2021-22 school year has presented school systems across the nation, the St. Clair County Board of Education has found ways to thrive and keep moving forward.

Superintendent of Schools Mike Howard gave a rundown of the accomplishments the system has seen throughout the most recent school year. The board completed multiple facility upgrades in 2021 including new HVAC systems, roofs, paving projects and new safety features.

The board also completed compliance monitoring, expanded EdSTREAM, improved offerings at the technical school, refinanced debt to allow for district projects and approved a stipend to all staff trained in LETRS. It also approved construction of the MHS football field and St. Clair County High School baseball field.

The board of education has recently presented goals set for the upcoming year. Some of these include an increase in report card scores, CCR and graduation rate, continuing focusing on the Literacy Act, more expansions and upgrades, recruitment and retention of staff and more.

The biggest accomplishment the board saw was the passing of the new district tax in Moody that raised ad valorem taxes by 15 mils. It passed by only three votes. However, because of this, Moody schools will benefit from multiple projects, including a new high school with a performing arts center, STEM labs and new science labs.

Plans following the passage of the new tax will also call for Moody Junior High School to move into the existing high school building to allow for more space, including its own lunchroom, which the high school and junior high students currently have to share. The elementary school will also see renovations, while the middle school will have such additions as a playground for special-needs students, along with outdoor classrooms and a STEM lab of its own. Lastly, the football stadium at Moody is slated to get a new turf field.

Howard said he was excited for the students and staff at Moody. "This (was) a big day for Moody. We are happy to forge this partnership with the community and major projects will be beginning very quickly," he said.

The current goal will be to have the newly built high school ready by August 2024. Meanwhile, the work will start on the football field, the playground at Moody Middle and the new entrance at Moody Elementary will begin as soon as possible.

Howard said the board will continue to campaign for the remainder of the school districts who did not pass the new tax.

"The district school tax is something that must continue to be on the forefront of people's minds. Our student population continues to rise and the county does not have enough resources to build new schools," the superintendent said.

"I believe everyone did a great job of getting the information to the voters. The voters must decide if they want to help the schools in their district or not."

Just like the previous school year, COVID-19 continued to present new and frustrating challenges. However, St. Clair County Schools have been able to adhere to in-person learning for the majority of the school year.

"We had success in staying open because we utilized staggered attendance when needed and kept the buildings sanitized to prevent the spread of the virus," Howard said. "This new variant is more contagious and causes absences very quickly. It's been difficult to staff and find subs because most people seem to be contracting the virus."

Earlier in the school year, the board put together a comprehensive plan to enforce masks if a school system reached a certain threshold of positive COVID cases in order to prevent a transition to virtual learning. This proved to be controversial for many parents at the time. So did the option of not requiring masks.

Howard has previously emphasized that while some parents within the system overwhelmingly stated their opposition to a mask mandate, the main goal was to take every step possible before shutting down schools and having to go virtual. This happened during the Delta variant phase of the pandemic and was only enforced in December for Ashville schools.

At the end of 2022, the school system will go through a significant change as a new superintendent will take Howard's place. He announced in the first board meeting of the new year that he will not be seeking re-election.

At this meeting, Howard said there's no underlying reason other than he does not have a desire to be an elected official anymore. However, the superintendent emphasized that he entered into the position about five months before COVID-19 hit, and the role has been proven to be difficult with the pandemic thrown into the mix.

Howard was elected as superintendent in 2018 after serving as principal at St. Clair County High School. His term as superintendent will end in December. While he isn't sure what his next steps will be moving forward in his career, Howard said he will also continue to have support for the St. Clair County School System and feels like he's been adopted into the county.

The election for a new superintendent will take place in November.



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### Alabama schools observe Career Technical Education Month

#### Special to The Daily Home

Local school systems joined others throughout the state in observing Alabama Career and Technical Education (CTE) Month during February.

"Leading experts continue to indicate that a full recovery from the devastating impact of the recent global pandemic will rely heavily on sustained economic growth over the next decade," said Dr. Eric Mackey, state superintendent of schools. "Our nation must maintain its world-class and highly-skilled workforce. This year's celebration is the most meaningful yet, as Alabama's local educators continue to work hard to inspire every young person to do their very best in school now, to ensure a lifetime of success in the future."

Statewide, more than 173,000 students in grades 9-12 are enrolled in Alabama CTE programs, according to the Alabama Department of Education. "We are truly appreciative for the opportunities our state workforce development partnerships are creating for students," Mackey said.

Pell City is among the local systems observing Career and Technical Education Month.

Superintendent Dr. JamesMartin said that career tech forms "a good part" of the systems programs for high school students. "We offer it in a variety of pathways," he said, explaining that the system separates programs into different career tech academies that students can choose from. "Career tech programs are really something where

Alabama's high school CTE programs

- Dr. Eric Mackey, state superintendent of schools.

are now considered to be among the top in

the nation. We proudly celebrate Alabama

Career and Technical Education Month.

they can put their work into action." Special partnerships between "our state's education and workforce development communities continues to have a positive impact," Mackey said. "Alabama's high school CTE programs are now considered to be among the top in the nation. We proudly celebrate Alabama Career and Technical Education Month."

According to Dr. Jimmy Hull, the state's assistant superintendent, "there are so many excellent learning opportunities for students in today's CTE. With personal dedication and hard work, we believe every Alabama student can increase their potential to earn high-paying salaries in the future. Career and technical education can be a very valuable resource in developing a student's essential workplace skills and professional knowledge."

Alabama CTE is focused on preparing K-12 students for in-demand career opportunities in America's leading career areas. The National Career Clusters are 16 basic categories, in which all current jobs in the United States can ultimately be placed into and organized, representing 79 different career pathways.

"These categories help students and adult learners navigate their ways to greater success in the professions they are interested in," Mackey said. "Many Alabama middle schools are now also utilizing the career cluster concept too. Their goal is to spark more career interest and STEM-related learning in students – at a much younger age."

State Superintendent, Dr. Eric Mackey



Cynthia Bell interacts with a student during a meeting of the Alabama Board of Education. She represents District 3, which includes Talladega County.

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### Coosa Valley Medical Center continues to offer daily COVID-19 vaccinations

**By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

Coosa Valley Medical Center in Sylacauga is a state-ofthe-art, 168-bed facility offering 19 areas of medical specialization.

Glenn Sisk, CVMC CEO, is in his 21st year at Coosa Valley Medical Center and still considers working at the hospital a privilege.

Sisk describes the staff at the hospital as a great team who are focused on meeting people at their point of need and allowing people to stay close to home for healthcare needs. Two awards the hospital received last year in recognition of its staff include the 2021 Mission Lifeline Award and the 2021 Hospice Award.

One of the challenges faced by the hospital in the last year was dealing with COVID-19. The hospital was significantly affected by mandates putting elective surgeries on hold. The first wave was challenging, but the second wave with the Delta variant was far more challenging, and now, the third wave is in the community and at CVMC. According to Sisk, many Sylacaugans have had two to three doses of the Pfizer vaccine. He is very thankful for the work the team at CVMC has done Coosa Valley Medical Center continues to offer the vaccine now through the Coosa Valley Apothecary Pharmacy that is located on the ground floor at CVMC on Monday-Friday from 8:30 a.m. until 4 p.m. Follow the CVMC Facebook page for updates and information regarding the vaccine. Last vear. CVMC installed a second CT scanner and experienced significant improvements in its relationship with the Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine in Dothan. The CVMC team is continuing to grow its wound center. It is now integrating that service to in-patient care and working to treat wounds before they become more problematic.

The medical arts building has received some improvements. CVMC continues to grow its hematology and oncology departments.

According to Sisk, the Coosa Valley Medical Plaza will be the next focus for the CVMC team. Planned work for early this year includes improvements to HVAC, the elevator and parking lot.

Sisk said that CVMC is a rural hospital but is still one of the larger providers of care in the state. He is interested in Coosa Valley Medical Center more aggressively pursuing telemedicine relationships and identifying services that are not currently offered at the hospital that would be beneficial for patients. Sisk said CVMC will also work to enhance its online presence, including on social media.

Coosa Valley Medical Center is funded by direct patient care, but the hospital looks for alternative sources of income, as well. The Coosa Valley Medical Center Foundation helps raise money for the hospital.

The plan this year is to become more aggressive in the foundation's fundraising strategy. Most of the fundraising has been driven by

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activities, such as the annual golf tournament. According to Sisk, CVMC greatly appreciates those who donate.

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III UPDATE 2022 II

# Citizens Baptist receives high marks for quality care while coping with challenges of the pandemic

**By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

#### Citizens Baptist Medical Center in Talladega has continued to excel in providing quality healthcare to the community despite a pandemic that is going into its third year.

CEO Frank Thomas said that the past two years have been "strange and difficult" for hospitals as they have lived through the COVID-19 pandemic. However, he is proud of the way the local hospital has been able to maintain staff and care for patients during a time when resources have been scarce.

Hospital personnel continues to stand on the front lines battling new cases daily, the CEO said. "Medical professionals and staff have not had a break since the start of the pandemic." The tiresome workload medical professionals have had to carry raises the question of what impact will the pandemic leave on them.

"Recruitment is a continual pro-

cess, and it can be difficult to find physicians," Thomas said. "In June of this year, the Association of American Medical Colleges released data projecting an estimated shortage of between 37,800 and 124,000 physicians by 2034. This shortage impacts physicians of all types, from specialists to primary care physicians. Though recruiting is a challenge, our team is continually working to fill the needs of the community."

When a new doctor needs to be hired, Thomas considers the community's needs and tries to address those than can be identified. One of Citizen Baptist's immediate focuses is the recruitment of a new general surgeon.

The need to be creative in providing services has been a great change for many medical centers, and Citizens Baptist is no different, according to Thomas. "Modifications have had to take place to adhere to the CDC guidelines, the safety of employees, patients, and visitors. The pandemic has caused us to change the way we have operated over the past two years. Our hope is that the pandemic will ease up and we can get back to a more normal state. I would like to be able to open the hospital to more visitations, but, of course, this will depend on the circumstances."

Patient visitation restrictions might have put a damper on support that some patients can receive, but employees have been stepping up to help as much as they can. This exceptional commitment and quality care has led to a high level of recognition from The Leapfrog Group, a Washington D.C.based nonprofit organization that promotes quality health care. Leapfrog assigns grades to more than 2,600 general acute-care hospitals across the nation twice a year. This evaluation is considered the gold standard for measuring patient safety.

Citizens Baptist received an A score in October from The Leapfrog Group. The local medical center is one of 13 hospitals in the Alabama to receive an A in the most recent grading period.

"Working to fill the healthcare needs of this community gives me a tremendous amount of satisfaction," Thomas said. "My friends and family live in this community, and it is important that we have good, quality health care here. It is not easy for many to travel long distances, and it is important to have healthcare locally. So as demonstrated by our high quality scores, we deliver excellent local care at a high level."



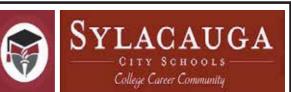
Citizens Baptist CEO Frank Thomas

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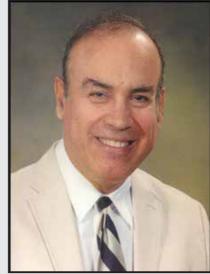
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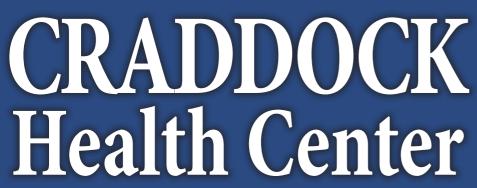


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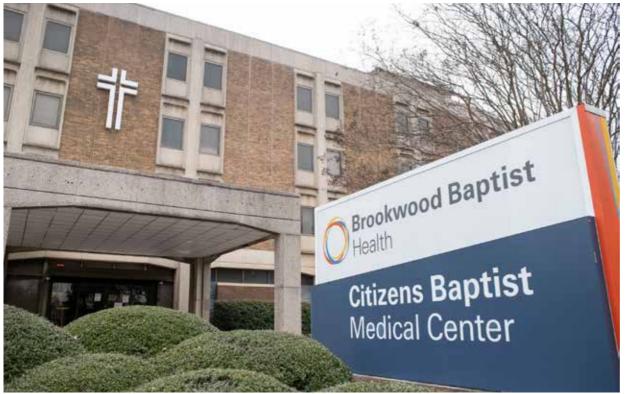


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### 'Don't put off routine checkups,' Citizens Baptist cardiologist recommends





#### Do you know the signs that indicate your heart might be in trouble or if you're having a heart attack?

#### **By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

Dr. Saema Mirza with Cardiovascular Associates says that the most common symptom of a heart attack is chest pain. "It can feel like a lot of pressure in the center of the chest and may go down the left arm. There are times it can feel like a squeeze and sometimes like a weight, as if an elephant was sitting on your chest. The pain is usually so severe that it may make the person break out into a cold sweat."

Patients may experience associated shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting. A person having a heart attack may have one or all of the mentioned symptoms. "If any of these symptoms are being experienced, 911 should be called right away," Dr. Mirza said. "The safest ruling of what is going on is to have the symptoms properly assessed instead of feeling embarrassed or brushing it off as nothing. It is better to be safe than sorry."

Dr. Mirza has been practicing cardiology since 2004 after completing her fellowship at UAB. She offers patients the services of women's cardiology, lipid therapy, ischemic heart disease care, coronary artery disease care, cardiac catheterization. congestive cardiac failure care and general and preventive cardiology. She practices in both Birmingham and Talladega, is affiliated with Citizens Baptist Medical Center and is a member of the American Medical Association and the American College of Cardiology. "I chose to be a doctor and a cardiologist in memory of my father who died of a heart attack and congestive heart failure when I was a student," she said. "Thankfully, we have made a lot of strides in the field since then. We can do a lot more for patients than we used to be able to. Heart health and preventing heart disease is a topic near and dear to my heart. A healthy lifestyle starts from childhood and we carry our habits into adulthood. I have gone around the state to give lectures to communities on the heart, diseases and tips for prevention as well as the importance of diet and exercise. As they say, 'prevention is better than a cure,' and I am a firm believer in a healthy diet and exercising." According to the CDC, someone has a heart attack every 40 seconds in the United States. It is important to create awareness for preventative actions and healthy lifestyle choices to increase better heart health. Heart disease has unfortunately become too common and is a conversation that is worth addressing "It is very important to have yearly physicals and lab

work done even if you feel fine," Dr. Mirza said. "Regular blood pressure, sugar and cholesterol checks are important because diabetes and hypertension are silent killers. Sometimes you will not know till you get checked. If risk factors are discovered early and addressed appropriately it can prevent heart disease. Maintaining a healthy weight, not smoking, not drinking excessive amounts of alcohol and avoiding drugs are good ways to avoid heart disease in the future. However, some types of heart diseases are genetic. Genes can't be fought, but you can certainly lower your risk by taking simple mea-

sures as mentioned." The pandemic has now been added to the list of things that can affect one's heart. Mirza said that COVID-19 can affect the heart in many ways. It may damage the lungs and cause low oxygen levels, and it causes inflammation of the heart muscle, which may lead to congestive heart failure. COVID also predisposes patients to blood clots in the heart, lungs and brain, causing heart attacks, pulmonary emboli and strokes. These conditions can be life threatening.

"Though the pandemic is ongoing, that is no excuse to detour from routine checkups," the doctor said. "To put off routine checkups could possibly lead to worse health. I strongly recommend that anyone who has an underlying heart condition to take the COVID vaccine and the booster as indicated to prevent worsening. Any side effects from the vaccine are a much smaller risk than what the virus itself can do. It is advised by all medical societies all over the world to get vaccinated against COVID-19."





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Dr. Saema Mirza





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### 'No pandemic is going to stop us," AIDB president says

**By FAITH DORN** 

Special to The Daily Home

During the past year, he Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind (AIDB)'s K-12 schools experienced the same pandemic impacts as other schools across the state and nation, including high numbers of staff and student absences due to illness and challenges with virtual learning formats.

"For our students, in-person education is a critical need," said President Dr. John Mascia. "Despite the many challenges posed by COVID-19, across the board, our school leadership and teachers rose to the challenge and approached the situation with a commitment to excellence and our students. Innovative and engaging ways to convey information were discovered."

Stress and isolation from their classmates and teachers had a negative impact on AIDB students' mental health.

"Our teachers and school counselors readily stepped into serving that need for additional support and began including purposeful activities that afforded opportunities for meaningful connection when we were virtual and when we were in-person. At AIDB, we approach everything with a limitless mindset and will not stop until we have done all that we can to meet the needs of those we serve. Our teaching staff have shown throughout this pandemic just how valuable they are to the success of our students," Dr. Mascia said.

During the lockdown, some AIDB students went back to homes without limited technology.

"We immediately created a plan for instruction and evaluation, a means to provide the infrastructure for learning, as well as a means to distribute the tools for learning to the students into their homes. We developed a way to virtually job coach by utilizing smart devices, tripods and video conferencing software," said Dr. Mascia.

AIDB saw an increase in successful job placements when most of the country was on lockdown. The virtual experience also allowed instructors and staff to get to know students better as they connected remotely with them every day from their homes.

"We saw where they lived. They saw where we lived. We saw their family members and pets, and they saw ours. The distance learning platform that we developed in answer to the pandemic will serve a greater purpose. It will remain long after the pandemic is gone—increasing opportunity for those across Alabama with hearing, vision or dual sensory loss," Dr. Mascia said.

The institute also started an external review of several areas of compensation, which resulted in a \$500,000 annual compensation investment in residential dorm aides and an increase in substitute rates.

AIDB went electronic with hiring processes. It implemented new remote work procedures, allowing eligible positions the flexibility to work remotely while in quarantine.

In late 2020, federal COVID-19 legislation was passed providing employers with the option of extending the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) leave for their



employees. AIDB extended the deadline to take unused FFCRA leave for those employees who qualify through March 31, 2021. To continue to support employees, between April 1 and September 30, AIDB provided 10 days of paid leave for any employee who was out due to testing positive for COVID-19.

The pandemic posed several challenges for AIDB's consumers across the state. To address food and financial insecurities, the Talladega regional center collaborated with other AIDB units to provide over 2,500 meals to AIDB students and adults through the early months of the pandemic. To bridge information and accessibility gaps related to COVID and CDC guidelines, AIDB provided reliable and accessible COVID information to the communities it serves using American Sign Language (ASL), large print, Braille and audio.

AIDB assisted consumers who wished to get a COVID vaccine with navigating and getting registered for vaccinations and provided transportation to and from vaccination clinics. AIDB encouraged consumers' independence and ability to make an informed decision about their own vaccination status. To improve mental health for those who may be prone to isolation, AIDB provided devices and training to help consumers communicate with others through the Alabama Telecommunications Access Program (ATAP) and ICanConnect. AIDB also held virtual support groups and conducted wellness check calls to all consumers.

Alabama Industries for the Blind (AIB) has faced the

challenge of keeping its team members safe in a manufacturing environment. AIB has continued to mitigate the effect of COVID-19 by maintaining its guidance on mask wearing, social distancing, intense daily cleaning and offering on-site vaccination clinics. These efforts have resulted in AIB having a lower positive infection rate than Talladega County.

AIB team members faced reduced transportation offerings from private and municipal systems. To help with these increased challenges, AIB collaborated with the Talladega regional center to expand transportation, including a weekly bus route around Talladega and additional staff drivers. AIB saw an increase in supply chain disruptions and has changed its purchasing strategy and renegotiated its contracts with the federal government to allow for these disruptions. AIB negotiated a pricing freeze with some of its key suppliers in order to offer better prices to its state customers. These price negotiations allow AIB's state customers the peace of mind of knowing that they can continue their vital missions without having to worry about price spikes affecting their budgets.

The individuals and schools AIDB serves throughout the nation have adapted as best as they could to continue education virtually and in-person when feasible. Special Projects has shifted to continue to offer the same services for those in-person, as well as adapted most services for virtual consumption. Training via Zoom enabled trainers to virtually travel the Southeast all within the span of a day. One trainer may spend an hour with a teacher from south Florida,



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#### The Daily Home

take a lunch break, then serve a student in Kentucky.

'We really are limitless at AIDB, and the students show us every day how to live a life with adversity. We take the lead from our kids. Whatever comes our way we find ways around adversity," said Dr. Mascia.

All classes have the technological tools to succeed in the 21st-century classroom. AIDB was able to hold prom and graduation in the spring of 2021. Over the summer, they were able to hold summer camp and ACT bootcamps. This school year has seen the return of athletic programs and activities for residential students.

"In 2021, we learned that we can have high expectations for our students and not be okay at the same time. It is not an either-or. Even though we are in a pandemic, our teachers have never stopped teaching. They have always continued to put our students first. In 2021, we have learned that we are resilient. We don't quit," Dr. Mascia said.

During the past year, enrollment grew at the E.H. Gentry Facility. The pandemic pushed AIDB to explore different ways to instruct, train, meet and network-strengthening their programs. Their distance learning protocol and procedures grew and were strengthened and opened opportunities for utilization of interpreters from across the state via Zoom and Google Meets. Virtual conferences and meetings are also more cost-efficient.

"We learned to work, live and learn with the virus. After a long period of remote learning, students returned to campus during the fall of 2020. Protocols such as social distancing, wearing masks, and temperature checks were implemented. The virus waned, surged, waned and surged again. Throughout the peaks and valleys, our staff and students have remained resilient," said Dr. Mascia.

AIDB has acquired 200 acres to develop the AIDB North Campus for the expansion of services across north Alabama to individuals who are deaf, blind, deafblind or multi-disabled and their families. This includes the establishment of the new Decatur regional center. Construction will soon be complete on the new Opelika regional center. The pandemic inspired great creativity regarding ways to deliver services. AIDB consumers and staff developed deeper relationships with individuals in their close circle. Union Village in Talladega continues to provide safe, accessible and affordable housing throughout the pandemic.

Special Projects is AIDB's collaborative effort to invest time and funding with federal partners in programs that serve a multi-state footprint throughout the southeastern United States. Special Projects continued encouraging creativity and thinking outside the box while maintaining contact with existing consumers and gaining new contacts.

"While our method and approach changed, our contacts and service did not diminish much during COVID. During the second year of COVID, we gained and served more people from across the Southeast," Dr. Mascia said.

Alabama Industries for the Blind was selected to pilot a new program for the Defense Logistics Agency and Tailored Logistics Support. This pilot program allows these agencies to more rapidly respond to large purchase needs and provide for the overall military readiness of the units on each installation. AIB was awarded the research and development contract for the U.S. Space Forces necktie. This continues AIB's legacy of providing all of the Armed Forces' neckties for the last 70 plus years.

AIB hosted NASCAR driver Natalie Decker at its Talladega facility. During her visit, AIB was also invited to

#### **HEALTH & EDUCATION**

participate in a documentary about Decker, during which AIB had the chance to share its mission. AIB achieved ISO 9001-2015 recertification for the fifth year in a row. AIB was awarded a contract to become the sole provider of toner cartridges to the IRS, and it partnered with four local companies to expand and scale their businesses to meet rising customer demands. AIB has been awarded over \$4.5 million in textile contracts for the U.S. military, taking its production schedule out until 2023. For the second year in a row, AIB has won the National Industries for the Blind's Employment Growth and Retention Award.

Helen Keller School will be enrolling approximately 20-25 new students thanks to a restructuring in the way student assessments are handled. The new elementary school



Dr. John Mascia

building opened earlier this year, encompassing more than 9,000 square feet at a total cost of more than \$1.8 million.

"We acquired funds and donations to build a therapeutic playground for students at Helen Keller School. It will be fun, but teachers and therapists also will be able to use it to help children. It will be the only one in Alabama. This is a \$450,000 project," said Dr. Mascia.

Alabama School for the Blind is looking forward to summer programs that will be designed to benefit current students and attract new students. Later this year, construction on a new Independent Living Center will begin.

Alabama School for the Deaf is anticipating the return to going on experiential educational trips and the completion of the renovation of the elementary building-a \$3.9 million investment in the students and Talladega.

While staff at the E.H. Gentry (EHG) facility continue to engage in professional development opportunities and engage with professional partners via virtual platforms, they are looking forward to a return to in-person training and networking opportunities. Programs and services statewide in all areas continue to grow with the opportunity to add new, innovative programs and creative team members, both staff and students. EHG is looking forward to enhancing Residential Life/Extended Day through teaching, activities, cultural awareness and mental and physical well-being while still adapting to the effects of COVID. EHG is also looking forward to an upcoming Commission on

#### Weekend Edition, February 26-27, 2022 Page 5B

Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) accreditation site visit sometime during the summer of 2022. In 2019, EHG received accolades from the CARF accreditation site visitors. Since the last site visit, staff members have been working hard to build upon that level of excellence.

AIDB is expanding its statewide network of regional centers to include two new regional centers, Opelika and Decatur. AIDB is relocating the Talladega regional center to a facility that will house the entire staff, allow for training and other services for consumers. The institute is growing transportation services in regional centers. Regional centers are teaming with EHG to grow services for consumers who are DeafBlind. There will be a Waves of Opportunity Workshop and an increased number of early intervention workshops for families. AIDB will also increase collaboration between departments on a state-wide scale to enhance quality and quantity of services and support.

Alabama Industries for the Blind is excited about the prospect of continued employment growth in 2022, Dr. Mascia said. Last month, AIB and other agencies participated in business development meetings to launch a commercial apparel brand and expand its retail footprint. AIB is also in talks to add several new government contract listings that will provide more career opportunities for people who are blind or visually-impaired.

"AIB is also excited about continuing to expand its upward mobility program through investment in new equipment and expanding the training programs offered at the industries," the president said. "AIB is excited to continue its legacy of expanding the economic success of the state of Alabama and helping provide for the readiness of the U.S. Armed Forces.

"Most of the contracts we have are related to the military. These contracts help our people support the country in a way they may not have been able to otherwise. This is a way for them to give back."

AIB is in negotiations now to staff a base supply store at the Anniston Army Depot. "While we don't have an agreement yet, we are hopeful it will happen. We have always supported the Depot, and the Depot has always supported us." said Dr. Mascia.

AIB currently operates four base supply stores at Ft. Rucker, Moody Air Force Base, Redstone Arsenal and Robins Air Force Base.

Special Projects is looking forward to another year of virtual services where needed and in-person workshops and training when possible. The Center for Assistive Technology (CATT) is making plans for a family retreat for parents of children who are blind or visually-impaired, and those involved hope to make it happen in-person. The Regional Early Acquisition of Language (REAL) program is looking forward to expanding training sessions and diversifying the kinds of education and support they provide in nine states, as well as deepening connections. In addition, Special Projects is launching a Deaf Mentor program, which will provide one-on-one language acquisition assistance to families in their homes.

"We are dedicated to ensuring that everyone regardless of their disability can explore their God-given talents," Dr. Mascia said. "Our goal here is to make sure they have the training and the opportunity to live the life they want to live, and no pandemic is going to stop us."



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#### **HEALTH & EDUCATION**

### 'This community is a great place to be,' St. Vincent's St. Clair administrator says



#### **By TAYLOR MITCHELL** *tmitchell@dailyhome.com*

In another year that was defined by the COVID-19 pandemic, St. Vincent's St. Clair administrator Lisa Nichols said the key has been staying flexible.

"COVID-19 has definitely been the biggest challenge that we've had," she said, adding that throughout the last year the hospital has been dealing with several surges of COVID-19. The hospital experienced a surge in August and again in late December. Nichols said the surges offered several challenges for the 40-bed hospital, which was certainly not the only one in Alabama dealing with an influx of

patients. "We have to be flexible," she said. "I am so proud of our staff."

"Typically, we don't have all 40 beds full," she said. "When we were in the surge, we had 45 patients that were considered impatient."

She added that the situation has also led to a strange issue as, outside of COVID surges, the hospital has actually seen fewer patients than it normally would in a year.

"We have had points with low volume but then hit records in ED in the current surge," she said, referring to the Omicon variant surge, which began in December and continued into January.

Balentine, in December before that surge began, said volume in late November was down by as much as 10 percent from previous years. Nichols said the Decem-

ber surge didn't affect the

surges. Nichols said these clinics were often staffed by managers and administrators to allow doctors and nurses to focus on patients. She said she even helped out with the clinics personally, as she is a registered nurse. Nichols said the hospital has vaccinated about 2,310 people.

Despite the year being so defined by COVID-19, Nichols said the hospital also saw several achievements beyond its response to surges.

The administrator said the hospital went through its Joint Commission survey, which looks at the hospital's accreditation. "It was a very good survey. I am just so proud of the work the leaders and staff here have done." the patient over a video link while having access to charts and medical histories to help give an informed opinion. She said the system has been used at several other rural hospitals across the state, and St. Clair is working with UAB to implement the program.

"It's shown really good results," Nichols said.

St. Vincent's St. Clair is also looking to bring more specialists to the community. Nichols said specifically that the hospital wants to get a full time pulmonologist to help serve needs in the community. She said the hospital previously had a part time pulmonologist but she feels the hospital needs to grow with the community.

"I think the community



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According to Nichols, one area that's required flexibility is the emergency room. She said when beds were full, often the hospital had to look for other places to send patients, such as other Ascension facilities or even medical centers outside of the hospital's network. If push came to shove, Nichols said staff would start treating ER patients like they were in inpatients.

Emergency department director Dr. Bryan Balentine said in early December that to deal with the problem, St. Clair eventually brought on new providers and started treating patients in the triage area and waiting room to help deal with the overflow.

"Some people were treated in those two locations and never saw the formal emergency department," he said, adding that patients were given an X-ray or had their blood drawn in those locations and were brought into a private space to discuss test results.

Nichols said the hospital also had to deal with having intensive care patients that did not have COVID but needed a place to be treated. The hospital's solution was to use space in the post-anesthesia care unit. The administrator said this space is usually used for post-surgery recovery, which meant some equipment was already in place.

She said ultimately it's a balancing act that staff have to look at. Nichols said the hospital has 40 beds but in a surge is often having to treat more people than that at one time. hospital surgical department like other surges have. Beyond elective surgeries that require overnight stay, most surgeries were able to continue as planned.

She said the last year also saw local residents having a greater interest in getting vaccinated for COVID-19, and the hospital held several clinics even during COVID Nichols said the hospital also continued to grow its telemedicine program, which has been a priority for several years.

She said the hospital is currently working on a system that will allow outside specialists to consult on ICU patients through telemedicine. The system will allow a doctor to observe could support a full time pulmonologist," Nichols said.

She also greatly appreciates all the support the community has given to St. Clair over the last year. Nichols said the community has given doctors and nurses food and snacks and even hosted prayer vigils. "This community is a great place to be." she said.

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### Birmingham Heart Clinic cardiologist offers advice about how to have a healthy heart

#### **By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

Birmingham Heart Clinic was founded on care and continues to provide it to patients in St. Clair County and neighboring communities. Its Pell City office is at 74 Plaza Drive.

For more than 20 years, this practice has offered a wide range of services focused on general cardiology care as well as interventional cardiology, electrophysiology and structural cardiology. With some of the latest technology and equipment available, patients have access to care that caters to diagnosing and treating diseases of the heart, blood vessels and arteries

Dr. James Trimm, interventional cardiologist, has been in practice for 16 years and strongly believes that Birmingham Heart Clinic benefits the community because it understands the needs of its patients. He recently spoke with The Daily Home about heart health.

#### Q: What is involved in good heart health?

Trimm: "I define good cardiac or good heart health by what a patient does to improve their overall well-being. This includes things such as daily exercise up to 50 minutes, for a total of 250 minutes per week or better, not smoking, pursuing a BMI of 25 (which is very difficult to do, but is a goal that will pay off with the benefits of good heart health over the long run). Make sure to get 7 to 8 hours of sleep at night, limit alcohol to 1 ounce per night, pursue a diet that is high in fruits and vegetables and low in saturated fats

"If s patient has high cholesterol, treating that to levels defined by the American College of Cardiology and American Heart Association can certainly improve heart health. Lastly, if the patient has hypertension that has not responded to the basic

is described in the media as broken heart syndrome. This can be seen in someone exposed to sudden stress such as a car accident or witnessing the loss of a loved one or other sudden traumatic stress. It seems to be more predominant in elderly women, but we have seen it in men and even young men and women. Everyday stressors such as one's job, finances or family can contribute to not sleeping well, not eating properly, noncompliance with medications, drinking more, smoking more, exercising less and weight gain - all of which can lead to an increased risk of a cardiovascular event.

#### Q: What is the importance of having good (as opposed to bad) cholesterol?

Trimm: "Having a favorable cholesterol profile is quite important. Early on,

we only paid attention to the total cholesterol, but if you look at total cholesterol, it is predominantly made of other major categories which include LDL, HDL, triglycerides and VLDL. HDL greater than 50 has a very positive impact on the patient's cardiovascular health, whereas a low HDL of less than 30 can certainly have a more negative impact. HDL that is higher is usually considered favorable. Men tend to have a lower HDL than women do. Conversely, a low LDL is much more favorable in the long run than a very high LDL."

#### Q: What overall advice would you give about heart health?

Trimm: "My advice to anybody who is concerned about their heart care is to schedule an appointment with a cardiologist. Cardio-





vascular disease is still the leading cause of mortality in our country. We do a great job of screening for colon cancer, breast cancer, prostate cancer and even do a fairly decent job of screening for skin cancer. But when you look at screening recommendations for coronary artery disease, they are still mostly based on presentations of symptoms and not based on patients who are the highest risk or who have moderate risk. The best preventative care for checking for heart diseases is not waiting until the recommended ages for men and women, but taking on those screening at least 10 to 15 years prior. Early detection is always the best option to increase longevity."



**Dr. James Trimm** 



modifiable risk such as the ones I have described above, then treating the high blood pressure pharmacologically and being very aggressive with that certainly will pay off with good heart health."

#### Q: What are signs that someone may be having heart trouble?

Trimm: "Heart troubles come in all shapes and sizes in varieties. Shortness of breath, palpitations, unexplained fatigue, chest tightness or chest pressure with exertion followed by episodes at rest are certainly warning signs. Unexplained lower extremity edema is something that cannot be ignored. Believe it or not, one of the rare early warning signs of cardiac disease is sudden onset of night terrors."

#### Q: What are things you can do to keep your heart in good condition?

Trimm: "They are very basic. The American Heart Association recommends the following: 250 minutes per week of continuous exercise, treating blood pressure to a goal set forth by a person's risk factors, discussions with primary care physicians, refraining from tobacco as well as cannabis, low-salt or even no salt and a diet low in saturated fats and high in fruits and vegetables."

#### Q: Does stress affect the heart?

Trimm: "The concept of stress affecting the heart is certainly controversial in many ways. There is something that is seen called stress induced cardiomyopathy or takotsubo. This

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**HEALTH & EDUCATION** 

**The Daily Home** 



# CACC partners with AIDB for new dual enrollment program

#### Special to The Daily Home

Central Alabama Community College (CACC) and the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind (AIDB) have long-partnered to provide a bridge to postsecondary education and training opportunities for adult students who are deaf, deafblind, blind or multidisabled.

Piloting a Manufacturing Skills Standards Council (MSSC) dual enrollment program that began in January, three of AIDB's E. H. Gentry Facility students and three E. H. Gentry Work Experience/Manufacturing staffers have attended MSSC classes onsite at Talladega's CACC campus. Transportation, interpreters and accessible materials in American Sign Language, Braille and large print are provided by AIDB.

"CACC has been an amazing partner to AIDB and we are thrilled to see the partnership continue to grow with the addition of the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council dual enrollment program," said Dr. John Masica, president of AIDB. "AIDB stands ready to create a future-ready resilient workforce that is well equipped to meet the needs of today's employers."

Jeff Lynn, president of CACC, said he feels similarly. "We are so proud to expand our long-time partnership with AIDB with the MSSC pilot dual enrollment program, and additional work-

force and academic course offerings. This is an outstanding opportunity to grow and provide additional career opportunities to the students at AIDB through dual enrollment and normal courses. We have some really big plans for our Talladega Center, and this program will definitely enhance the offerings we currently have at the center."

Currently, 10 E. H. Gentry students attend both academic and credentialing classes through CACC in Talladega, Childersburg and Alexander City in partnership with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS). Tutoring and academic supports are provided by E. H. Gentry Facility.

Through the pilot initiative, once students become MSSC credentialed, E. H. Gentry Facility job developers and job coaches will work with local industry partners, cultivated by CACC, to place students in paid, 90-day work experience placements, with the students' hourly wages offset by E. H. Gentry and ADRS. As the students learn the job, they will be supported by E. H. Gentry Facility Job Developers and Job Coaches who help facilitate any accommodations needed, educating the businesses on the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities, including tax incentives and a truly inclusive and diverse workforce. The

goal is for the students to become full-time team members upon the conclusion of the 90-day trial period or, because of the credentials and experience obtained, obtain full-time employment in a similar business or industry.

"The MSSC program is a great way to introduce students to industry and align them with jobs that will lead to full time employment in those fields," said Michael Barnette, dean of workforce at CACC. "We are already looking to add more programs which will give students more options when they come to CACC."

AIDB and CACC anticipate other partnerships involving AIDB's K12 programs - the Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf and Helen Keller School of Alabama - including the potential for summer classes for students and staff who are interested in additional training and upward mobility.

"We are fortunate to have two strong educational partners like AIDB and CACC here in Talladega county who are working together to provide world class opportunities for our citizens," State Rep. Steve Hurst said. "Educational partnerships such as this will only help our area of the state grow stronger and will be the driving force behind economic development."



From left are State Rep. Steve Hurst, CACC President Jeff Lynn, AIDB President Dr. John Masica, Jessica Edmiston, executive director of E.H. Gentry Facility; and Michael Barnette, CACC's dean of workforce.

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# **IIIUPDATE III** 2022

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# IIIUPDATE 2022 III

WEST POIN

### Emergency care physician enjoys making a difference in Talladega



**By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

#### Dr. Jeffrey Milner often feels that he has a target on his back, but that does not deter his love and dedication to saving as many lives as possible.

As the first African American accepted to the University of Alabama at Birmingham's (UAB) physician scientist training program (not ot mention a legacy physician), Milner is fully aware of the pressure there is on him to make a difference and be a part of the change the world needs to continue to see.

"When I use the phrase legacy physician, it means that the medical road had already been paved before me," he said. "Charles Milner, my father, was in the first class of African Americans at UAB medical school in 1975. Though he did not finish, he worked as a janitor at the medical school and in coal mines to help pay for school. Desmin Milner, my sister who is 17 years younger than me, and my oldest son Jeff are physicians, so the road of our legacy continues."

Jeffrey Milner has a Ph.D. in biochemistry and molecular genetics, was trained as a physician scientist at UAB, and was on the career track to specialize in hematology/oncology genetics. A change of plans that has led him to his current role, and he says that if someone had told him while he was in medical school that he would be practicing emergency medicine, he would have laughed. tract physician with Alteon Health and affiliated with Citizens Baptist Medical Center. He has been practicing since 2003 and believes that he has a story that can inspire many, as his journey into the medical field was and still is not easy, but it is possible.

"The day I graduated from medical school, I felt afraid and confused about how things would turn out for me. I grew up on a small farm and attended grade school in Jefferson County. I graduated from Ramsay High School, then Emory undergraduate with a chemistry degree, and went on to attend UAB for my MD/ Ph.D. training. I left medicine for a while and was a postdoctoral fellow in biochemistry and molecular genetics at UAB. Nevertheless, I went back to UAB for specialty training in emergency medicine. My career has been long, circuitous, and I planned very little of it. Things just seemed to happen."

According to studies and conducted research, there is a racial gap when it comes to health care. In April 2021, Becker's Hospital Review stated that the percentage of Black physicians in the healthcare workforce had only increased 4 percent within the last 120 years. The conducted research stated comes from a study in the Journal of General Internal Medicine.

Milner believes that Black physicians' numbers are increasing but are still largely ignored and disrespected at times. Contrary to belief, he added that his hardest critics are other African Americans because there are some who feel as if he was given a degree and license to practice because he is Black and not because of his training, experience and skill as a physician. Dr. Jeffrey Milner, third from left, with his parents, wife and children.

"My biggest challenge as I emerged into the medical field was working with people who want to see you fail. I've developed a very thick skin over the years, but I have had patients refuse care from me because I am a Black physician, and this is something that has happened more than once. If I perceive they have a true emergency, I ask if I can transfer them to another institution where they feel more comfortable. In the end, it's all about saving lives. I can't change people's hearts, but I can help them get the care they need."

Despite the challenges Milner has encountered over the years, he says it feels great being in his profession as long as he has, and he absolutely loves what he does. He has worked in a number of hospitals, and Citizens Baptist Medical Center holds a special place in his heart. For him, Citizens' is not only a good fit, but it's where he can make a difference.

"My life story has not been a crystal staircase, but one of triumph and victory. I did not have the wealthiest upbringing. My father had 15 siblings, and my mom had 12. I spent my early years working and living on my grandparents' farm but it taught me how to work and to work hard. My parents have lived in the West End community in Birmingham for most of my life. With these very humble beginnings, we have managed to produce three physicians in two generations. So I want readers and future generations to take from me the lesson to not give up. I believe every family has a unique talent. Figure out yours, and grind!"

Editor's Note: This article includes the personal views of the physician and is not the reflection of views of Citizens Baptist Medical Center.



The Birmingham native is now a con-



Dr. Jeffrey Milner II and Dr. Desmin Milner, son and sister of Dr. Jeffrey Milner.

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The Daily Home

**FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS** 



**By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

Jahzara Elm is a senior at Pell City High School who has made history as the school's first student ever to be acceptU.S. Military Academy includes a complete candidate questionnaire, a field force interview, obtaining a nomination, taking a candidate fitness assessment, obtaining letters of recommendations from teachers, taking the ACT or SAT and having a minimum score of 28 on the ACT and 1170 for the SAT, submitting transcripts with an average GPA of at least 3.9 and complete candidate statements.

#### ed to the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York.

The exceptional achievement all began with the example her father set for her over the years.

"My dad being in the Army made the military the focus because I saw how he provided a stable life for my family," she said, "and this is important to me in thinking about a career. His character well portrays the Army values and is one that I aspire to follow in the footsteps of."

Elm is a Dothan native who is definitely striving to achieve her goals personally and professionally. She has 3.70 GPA, scored a 30 on the ACT, loves STEM-based subjects, has the career goal of becoming a general officer, and is playing varsity soccer for Pell City High.

Her dedication has led her to being accepted into one of the oldest American service academies. "Prior to being accepted, I did have doubts due to the 10 percent acceptance rate. I also had to decide between Auburn University and West Point, especially with the academy being quite far from home. But I allowed myself to trust the process and be confident in my application. I had the grades, leadership positions, athletics and demographics which are surprisingly important for it."

When asked what it was about West Point that stood out to her, Elm said that it was the structure of the school, its leadership and the idea of being the first military officer in her family.

Over the course of the application process, Elm said she was advised by some individuals to "play it safe and have a back up plan just in case" she did not get accepted to West Point. With a relatively low rate of acceptance, she took heed of the advice and had in mind that if she did not make it, she would participate in ROTC at Auburn University.

Requirements for acceptance at the

With such a long list to check off before even being considered took some focus and a great bit of encouragement, she said. Elm's voice of encouragement to push forth with her application and believe in her dream becoming a reality was her JROTC instructor at Pell City High.

"Colonel Hearn routinely reminded me to trust the process by reminding me that West Point was an achievable goal, and he helped me work through the steps of the application process. He helped me stay on top of due dates, provide information I needed from outside sources, and always made calls and emails for me. He basically did everything he could to help me along the way."

She received her acceptance letter on December 21.

"I was a bit surprised. I didn't expect to receive a decision that soon, I was ecstatic! Though I was maybe in a bit of disbelief, I probably called over 20 family members after getting the news."

Most high school seniors are preparing for their next step and counting down the days until graduation, but Elm is one Pell City High School student who already knows her next move. She said she plans to use the time before graduation to focus on spending time with family and friends, improving her fitness and maintaining her grades. Having college plans made so early has made her senior year fairly easy, she added.

"I hope that the journey I have endured can motivate others to at least start the application process. Yes, it's an intimidating application, but if I can at least show people that they have the opportunity to make it to West Point and motivate them to complete it, then I am happy. In achieving things like that it can seem impossible, especially for Black women and anybody else not within the orthodox, but I am proof that it is possible."

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### 'The magnitude of the impact of EARTH is unparalleled'

### SAFE director promotes benefits of new regional workforce development center

#### **By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

Margaret Morton is pleased that the East Alabama Rural Innovation and Training Hub (EARTH) is continuing to make progress on its way to fruition.

"EARTH will be a training center, incubation center, and will also have a focus on aspirational industries-industries we don't even know of yet. This is a strategy for sustainable workforce development," said Morton, who serves as executive director of Sylacauga Alliance for Family Enhancement (SAFE).

Plans for EARTH were announced last year by state and local officials, and a design team will be assessing the clean-up of the old Avondale Mills property in Sylacauga, owned by the uTalladega County Board of Education (TCBOE). Debris removal is projected to begin in late spring or early summer of this year.

"The first funding for EARTH was provided in various ways, but the largest piece was from the Public School and College Authority Bond Issue. The governor, state finance director and state superintendent of education decide how to distribute the interest from bonds," said Morton. "EARTH will provide a gateway for development goals and will link all sectors together, including early care and education, K-1

and more."

According to Morton, "EARTH has evolved out of SAFE, but it is truly a collaborative effort with over 90 strategic partners. It is a response to rural economic development.'

Once the hub is operational, SAFE will be housed there, as well as a farm, career tech center and more.

EARTH is focused on regional assets, including natural resources, as well as socio-culture and economic advantages and how these can be leveraged into sustained economic growth and productivity.

Based on a preliminary economic impact study conducted in October 2021 by Dr. Samuel Addy, associate dean for economic development outreach for Culverhouse College of Business at the University of Alabama, EARTH's anticipated impact to the region and the state of Alabama as a whole is significant.

Construction expenditures totaling an estimated \$31.9 million will create economic impacts on Alabama of \$68.6 million in gross business activity-of which \$36.3 million is value-added-\$22.4 million in wages to over 500 jobs across Alabama and \$1.6 million in state and local tax revenue.

EARTH is expected to employ nearly 200 people in its operating phase. The training center is innovative because it will combine early education with K-12 with community



education, post-secondary education, workforce development, business, industry organization such as SAFE.

college with business and industry with an

Dr. Suzanne Lacey, superintendent of Talladega County Schools, is a proponent of the EARTH initiative.



Margaret Morton, executive director of SAFE, speaks during a press conference launching EARTH last summer.



Gov. Kay Ivey and Talladega Mayor Timothy Ragland at the EARTH announcement event in Sylacauga



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"Research and development is built into every facet," said Morton. "Industries currently involved include manufacturing, transportation, healthcare, IT, energy, regenerative agriculture, early child care and education, as well as hospitality and culinary arts."

Morton is particularly excited about it because of how all the industries have come together to work to make this innovative concept a reality.

"It is exciting, and it has been absolutely a collaborative effort. Everyone is working together: government, schools, business, industry and healthcare," Morton said.

The next step for the EARTH "Investment Team," composed of educators, community leaders, businesses and industries, is to address such infrastructure needs as roads and utilities. The team is hoping to time the infrastructure with the debris removal in order to repurpose some of the debris.

"If it comes together simul-

taneously, we could be in a position this time next year to start breaking ground, but I can't say that for sure," said Morton.

In a continued effort to make sure that everyone is involved in EARTH, Morton invites anyone who is interested in being involved in any way to call SAFE at 256-245-4343 and ask to speak with her.

"We don't want any stones unturned. We want everyone involved in this. The magnitude of the impact of EARTH is unparalleled. It is transformational. It has been so exciting working together with so many different representatives of every sector of our world to build solutions for workforce development," Morton said, "We want the community to know what will happen in rural east Alabama will be probably the most powerful impact that we have had on this region in my lifetime and for the future. It is humbling. It is exciting. It is EARTH."









## County health departments have played a vital role during pandemic, public health official says

**By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

The COVID-19 pandemic enters its third year locally and across the nation. The chance of getting back to the normal once known still seems unpredictable state.

Wes Stubblefield, district medical officer and physician, understands how difficult the past two years have been.

"When it comes to health departments across the state, we have all been impacted by the pandemic as a whole and individually," he said. "We have had to pool resources, take people from different areas, and change job roles and titles to gear more people towards COVID testing and to meet the needs of the community while in this pandemic. It has been far from easy, but the progress we have made in the areas of having enough tests, PPE supplies, working to lower hospitalizations and establishing an effective vaccine is progress."

Public health departments are in place to provide protection, safety and security, according to Stubblefield. With 66 health departments across the state of Alabama, the Northeastern District includes Talladega, St. Clair, Blount, Calhoun, Cherokee, Clay, Cleburn, DeKalb, Etowah, Randolph and Shelby counties.

"Each location mostly provides the same services of population health, clinical services, disease prevention and control, regulation, licensure, training, vital records, environmental services and more depending on the location," said Stubblefield, who oversees the departments in the district. "There are some departments that do not have all services or have additional services. It just varies based upon location."

He added that "health departments in communities benefit individuals and families from vaccinating children, check ups, offering women and children programs,vouchers, birth certificates, and STD testing, depending on the department. However, these departments are more than just their offered services and programs.

"I do not think some people understand that amount of work that goes on behind the scenes to keep these programs available and keep the community healthier. Since stepping into this role, I wholeheartedly enjoy the chance to impact more people's lives. As a pediatrician for 14 years, my scale of help centered among a certain age group, but now I am able to make a difference in lives, no matter their age. Working for the community and making effective impacts is what matters most now and for years to come.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, health departments have served to offer testing and vaccines is a helpful and preventative tool. In being tested, getting vaccinated, wearing a mask, sanitizing, and continuing to social distance are the recommendations that can benefit lives.

The Talladega County Health Department offers clinical services, COVID testing, the vaccine, environmental services, and vital records services. However, its Sylacauga branch offers the additional service of home health. COVID testing is available Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m at the Talladega clinic. Individuals can call and make an appointment at 256-362-2593 or stop by the department at 1004 South Street E in Talladega. For those that reside in Pell City, Moody, Ashville, Ragland, Springville, Odenville, Steele and Riverside, the St. Clair County Health Department offers clinical care, COVID testing, the vaccine, home health, and vital records services. COVID testing is available Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m to 11 a.m. Its number is 205-338-3357, and its address is 1175 23rd Street North in Pell City. "The pandemic has certainly had its ups and downs," Stubblefield said. "From the different variants, to the successes and challenges along the way, creating a great vaccine that is now available for ages as young as 5, more testing sites, more available testing kits and supplies on hand all show the growth and changes within this pandemic. In the beginning, the demands were high and shortages were plenty. Vaccine hesitancy was high, but now 50 percent of Alabama has had the COVID vaccine. We still have some challenges to face, but I definitely look forward to continuing to work towards getting things back on track."



District Medical Officer Wes Stubblefield



## UPDATE 2022 a salute to Friends & Neighbors



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The Daily Home

**FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS** 

Weekend Edition, February 26-27, 2022 Page 7A



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\*RadioAlabama's MIX 106.5 & KiX 100.3 Promotions hosted awards for the Best of the Coosa Valley (Hwy 280 Corridor). Top nominees advanced to the voting round where more than 100,000 votes were cast. (RadioAlabama.net) \*\*Coosa Pines FCU is a member of the Co-Op Shared Branch Network™. January 2021 comparison based on claims located at FDIC.gov.

# Faith on the frontlines: Healthcare worker battles burnout with spirituality

Special to The Daily Home

Jennifer Spray has worked at Citizens Baptist Medical Center in Talladega for more than 17 years. Spray is a flex nurse routinely assigned to the hospital's ICU. Like most healthcare personnel at the beginning of the pandemic, she was unfamiliar with the virus that causes COVID-19.

"It was scary, very scary," she said. "I had never really thought about the possibility of ever working through a pandemic. So when it first started, I thought it would be over in a month or two, and everything would be back to normal.

"Six months after it started, that's when it really hit me that it was serious," she continued. "We were doing our best to care for our patients day after day, even for weeks, but they weren't getting any better. Many of them died and that was heartbreaking for all of us. As nurses, our goal is to save lives. It made us feel helpless." The feelings Spray and her colleagues have experienced are not uncommon.

"What healthcare workers are experiencing is akin to domestic combat," says Andrew J. Smith, Ph.D., director of the University of Utah Health Occupational Trauma Program at the Huntsman Mental Health Institute, in a statement from his institution.

According to a study conducted by Smith's group, more than half of the doctors, nurses and emergency responders providing COVID-19 care could be at risk for one or more mental health problems, including acute traumatic stress, depression and anxiety.

Entering the third year of the global health crisis, Spray says spiritual focus has helped her and other frontline medical workers in her religious community battle through the mental and emotional toll of the pandemic.

Spray, who is one of Jehovah's Witnesses, copes by maintaining a weekly spiritual routine that includes Bible reading, daily prayers, Bible studies with her family, and participation in her congregation meetings. This routine is especially important for Spray who is also mom to two young children, ages 9 and 5.

"There have been many days when it's been overwhelming, and the pandemic has been so political and divisive," she said. "The information on jw.org is unbiased and practical for dealing with the pandemic, coping with work stress, and keeping my family safe and upbuilt with a positive outlook towards the future."

American psychological and psychiatric associations, while not advocating or endorsing any specific religion, acknowledge a role for spirituality and religious faith in





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Jennifer Spray of Citizens Baptist Medical Center



#### The Daily Home

#### FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS

coping with distress and trauma.

Lawrence Onoda, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist in Mission Hills, California, noted several ways spirituality can help, including giving people "a positive hope and meaning toward life, comfort by looking for answers and strength from a higher power, and a collective shared experience of support and community."

An avid Bible reader, Spray shares hope and encouragement with her co-workers, too.

"I work at a small hospital, and I know many people who work there, and they know that I'm one of Jehovah's Witnesses," said Spray. "So many things are negative right now and they, too, want to hear something positive because the future is so uncertain."

Spray said she's thankful to work in a facility that has really come together during this pandemic to care for those in the community.

"There have been many tears and hugs, and kindness shown during this difficult time," she said. "It makes me proud to be one of the many nurses to work hard to care for the patients at Citizens Baptist Medical Center."

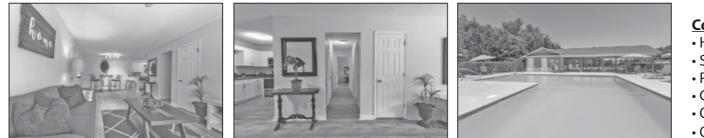
Editor's note: This article includes the personal views of the health care worker and is not the reflection of views of Citizens Baptist Medical Center.



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# Local high school student works with Spotlight Studio to develop 'emotional' film aimed at helping fellow teens

Special to The Daily Home

For Anna Claire Hathorn, a freshman at Pell City High School, SEM;COLON began as a silent film shot on a cell phone. When she presented it to her peers, they were moved by the subject matter: a teen, struggling with depression and torn by thoughts of taking her own life.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically increased the required daily screen time for students, they were suffering from the isolation that comes from adapting to an increasingly digital world. According to Anna Claire, her intent behind the film was to shine a light on the current state of student mental health, and to make others aware of the internal issues she and her friends regularly face.

"I had a gut feeling that I wanted to do something that affected the real world," she said. "Something that affects my age group is depression and suicide."

CEPA's Spotlight Studio program encouraged Anna Claire to convert her idea for a silent film into an episode for The Black Box by Spotlight Studio Podcast.

"The first time I saw it, I was appreciative of the skill it took these students to create the film," said Jeff Thompson, executive director at Pell City's Center for Education and Performing Arts. "But more than that, I was stunned by the bravery they'd exhibited in facing the subject directly."

Last week, Anna Claire directed her friends as they recorded a dramatic podcast episode. The result is a deep, critical look inside the brain of a teen as she struggles with mounting pressures in her life. "Whenever I started, I didn't realize how deep of a subject it was," Anna Claire said. "But as I got more into the script, I realized how big this is, how deep and how emotional it can be for someone to go into a deep spiral and decide to end it all. When I was writing the ending, I was literally sobbing, and I realized this was something a lot of people could relate to on a personal level."

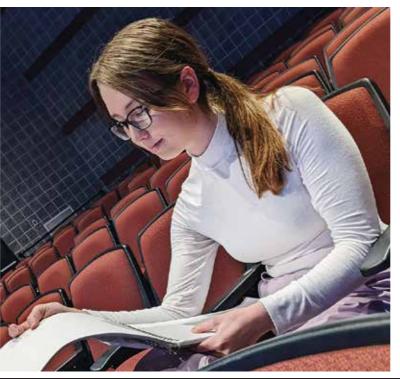
The podcast episode of SEM;CO-LON is being edited, but Spotlight Studio is already working with Anna Claire to develop a film script. In 2021, Spotlight Studio produced its first short film, "Miss Christmas Business," which was written and directed by Lacey Pierson, a member of the Saints in the Spotlight Drama Club at St. Clair County High School.

"Miss Christmas Business" was accepted into the Sidewalk International Film Festival in Birmingham in 2021 and screened for an audience during the event. CEPA intends to produce SEM;COLON this spring and submit it for the 2022 event.

The process of scripting and recording an audio performance and converting that script to film is one that will include several students from Pell City High School and beyond. The significant work involved creates a hands-on educational process that results in learning new skills for artistic content creation including writing, directing, filming and editing.

"At CEPA, our goal is to provide new, educational opportunities in the performing arts, and we are honored that Anna Claire is working with us to produce SEM;COLON," Thompson said. "But personally, I salute the bravery of these students, and I sincerely hope that their work on this project is able to reach people in need of an empathetic voice in the fight against teen suicide."

The podcast episode of SEM;CO-LON will be released in next month, and the film is expected to be complete by September.





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# UPDATE 2022

## 'These kids deserve our all' *St. Clair BOE president has a passion for improving opportunities for students*

By Vallean Jackson Special to The Daily Home

During another year of the unexpected, the St. Clair County Board of Education continues to work to keep students safe, schools open and education flourishing.

"As president of the board of education, my role while in this position is to coordinate and communicate with the rest of the board," Scott Suttle said. "The most effective way to get things done is to work together, and that is what I believe helps us to achieve our goals in the best way possible. Our motto to always keep in mind is to determine what is the best vision for the school system and how to set policies for that vision."

Suttle recently was honored with the State All Star Board of Education Award, which is the highest honor for school board members. He said that he was "humbled and excited" to have received the award, but strongly believes that it is a reflection of the work of the entire school board.

With more than 20 years of experience on the board, Suttle is passionate about the education students are receiving. He has served as board president since 2015. He believes that as a board member, he is helping preparing today's students for tomorrow. He remains dedicated to the role because of the value of things the board is working accomplish. Even when things get overwhelming, he believes that it is just enough good to outweigh the bad, and that alone is inspiration.

"Before my days on the board, I worked full time at Thompson Tractor as a training manager," he said. "I retired about 15 months ago, but my family jokes that I did not truly retire, I just traded one full-time job for about five part-time jobs. I am currently a helicopter pilot for the St. Clair County Sheriff's Office, and I help develop training material for virtual reality training software. Then in December, I was elected to be the District 6 director, where I represent all the boards that fall under my district. I am still learn-



St. Clair BOE President Scott Suttle accepts the All Star Board of Education Award from Shannon Cauley, a member of the Baldwin County Board of Education.

and keeping students more in class than virtual and keeping the schools open has been a big accomplishment, the board president believes. More plans include some building projects that center around improvements to Moody schools.

Moody Elementary is expected to receive improvements of expansion, renovations to the fover of the school. Moody Middle School is one of the newest of the three buildings. There will be minimal improvements to the building itself, but the focus will be on developing an outdoor classroom. Moody High School has groundbreak coming, as the designs are being developed for a new building that will replace the current one. According to Suttle, a new high school is beyond overdue, as the original structure was not designed to hold the amount of students that it does now and to come. The revamping of these buildings will be life changing for students, he added. "I am truly passionate about what I do," he said, "and I believe highly in giving my best to these kids and the school system. I am honored to be part of a board that cares as much as we do and shares the same sincerity and passion for these kids to be successful. These kids deserve our all, which is why I give my all."



ing my role, but I am more than excited and ready."

Asked what Suttle expects during the new year for the school system, he said that in this past year, schools have been in uncharted waters. The goal was to get things back to normal, but then all the variants of COVID-19 started to surface, and that put a damper on the original plans. Suttle worries that the danger of the pandemic will not show for a few years, especially in lower grades. He sees this as a big challenge in coming years.

Despite the obstacles, the goal is to continue to strive towards the once-known norm, keep students in classrooms and steer towards a normal school year. For the most part, the achievement of consistent improvement with higher test scores



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## 'You don't serve to be seen, but you need to be seen serving,' new Talladega City Schools superintendent says

By Vallean Jackson Special to The Daily Home

Dr. Quentin Lee believes that the time to help in education is now.

"In order to try and fill some of the gaps COVID may cause, it is important to work together to help students to be leaders," the new superintendent of Talladega City Schools said. "We must help parents and the community understand that when it comes to these kids, it is no longer about their kids, but our kids. How we must do what is best and all we can so that they can reach their full potential."

Lee has 16 years of experience in education. He was previously the band director at Talladega County Central High School for six and a half years, the assistant principal at Childersburg Middle School for two years, the principal of Talladega County Central High School for three years, and the principal of Childersburg High School for four years.

To serve as a superintendent of schools is a responsibility that has always been a goal to achieve since getting into the field of education. With the experience he has accumulated over the years, he felt it was important to accept a role where he was able to provide resources for all students.

"I would define the role of superintendent as me being the biggest cheerleader for the school system and getting in where I am needed," he said. "If that requires me sitting on a rug reading to children, pulling weeds, helping in the cafeteria, or making decisions to help us thrive as a school system, that is what I am here to do. You don't serve to be seen, but you need to be seen serving."

With the pandemic ongoing, Lee has stepped into his role at a time that presents plenty of challenges that require going the extra mile to help overcome the difficulties that may occur. Some of the challenges that Lee is dealing with include COVID-19 and the school system's budget. With there being a decrease in enrollment, he said that he has to find ways to increase the funding. When the number of students decreases, it causes a loss in funding. He believes the decrease comes from some parents choosing different school systems or the loss of some jobs that have left families with the decision to migrate to other areas for work, therefore shifting their children out of Talladega schools.

Lee went on to say that the system's goal is to do the best they can with the students that they have. This is why his goal for the new year is to help close a lot of the instructional gaps that have occurred due to the pandemic. The focus is getting students on grade level, offering support and even providing professional development to teachers. The offered development for teachers include having training courses and e-learning days that help to enhance remote learning skills.

"This is not a time for the blame game," Lee said. "We are currently in classrooms and working to keep things that way as much as possible. When it comes to the decision of when to go remote, we make those decisions based on data that is constantly monitored. Parents are welcome to incorporate various methods, but it is important to focus on what we are doing. I believe wholeheartedly in developing character education and building relationships.

"It is like a football game. Only 50 percent of the people are there to see you win, but you still play your best. This is why we have also integrated new strategies to help with the learning process. These new strategies include the hiring of a mental health coordinator, a parent involvement specialist and a parent academy that helps to understand grades, address mental issues, and more. We also are working to build community within the school, as well as help teachers become leaders. All these things and more are important in taking the necessary steps to help bridge the gap. It is not about who uses these resources or not, but letting it be known that they are available when the time comes."

Lee's concern for student safety and his approach to how to handling the pandemic has gone viral across various platforms. Lee's "Can't Touch This" safety video demonstrates using social distancing, the importance of wearing a face mask, sanitizing and adhering to the guidelines of the CDC, all set to the beat of MC Hammer's hit song.

When the video was created, he felt that it



would generate some awareness, but he was not expecting the video to "blow up" to the degree it did.

"The amount of avenues the video expanded to has helped me to meet so many people, get a strong message across and led me to so many great opportunities. Because of the video, I was able to be an advocate of education and present on the mainstage as a keynote speaker at the International Society for Technology Education Conference last year. As creators and educators, we are carrying education on our back, and that involves having to get creative especially in times as such."

Asked how he feels the Talladega School System has progressed since he took the helm back in July, and he said that it is making strides toward closing the gaps. In less than six months, the data shows that benchmark scores are up.

As a native of Scottsboro, Lee hopes that his investments in local education as well as his own personal story can help inspire students. As the second oldest of six siblings in a single parent household, he wants to help his students understand that anything is possible.

"I hope students are supported in every avenue," he said. "So much can affect them that it is essential they know they are loved and supported. My hope is that they live to achieve their wildest dreams and know that they can be whatever they want to be."





## a salute to Friends & Neighbors

Dr. Quentin Lee with daughter Aniya, son Cass, wife Dr. Anita Lee and daughter Kiesha.

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## Longtime local education official to seek seat on state BOE

#### By JOSIE HOWELL jhowell@thestclairtimes.com

Marie Manning has called St. Clair County Home for almost 50 years.

Originally from Dekalb County, Manning came to Ashville in 1973 when she married her first husband. After his passing, she went on to marry her current husband, Paul Manning, in 1981.

The Mannings have now been married for 41 years and have one daughter, Lee Ann Clark, who is a councilwoman for the city of Ragland and was most recently named the assistant principal at Ruben Yancy Alternative School. They also have two grandchildren together.

The couple has been quite active in the community. Paul is currently serving as chairman of the St. Clair County Commission, and Marie, a former superintendent of St. Clair schools, now serves as vice president of the county board of education.

She said that she feels as though, even though she is not from here originally, she's been here long enough to say that she is from St. Clair County. "It's my home now."

Her love for her new home led her to become a founding member of the Leadership of St. Clair program, and she still serves on its board.

According to Manning, Leadership St. Clair is a professional development program that introduces residents of the county to the different aspects of a growing county. Some of these include business and industry, education, quality of life, graduation, economic development, infrastructure and government.

"What we want for that program to accomplish is for those people to feel like they are a part of something bigger than just their community and we want them to know how all of those aspects fit together," Manning said. "Everybody who has been through it has an appreciation for it.

She emphasized that St. Clair as a whole is a special place for her because it's where she and her family have grown.

"It's where I met Paul, it's where I raised my children, it's where I did my career after the first four years. The people here are just good people. They want everybody to do well," she said. "It's just a special place."

Manning is not only known for her community involvement, but for her 50 years of experience as an educator. Throughout her journey in education, she worked her way through multiple positions, including vice principal and principal until she was elected superintendent of St. Clair County Schools in 1997.

Most notably, Manning said she helped the school system out of a financial hole. When she first took office as superintendent, the school system had only \$80,000 in the system's reserve fund. However, when she finished her term as superintendent four years later, there was \$11 million.

four years later, there was \$11 million. After retiring, Manning took a few temporary positions in education until 2010 when she ran for Place 3 on the St. Clair Board of Education, where she has served since. Most recently, Manning announced she will be running for a seat on the Alabama State Board of Education. If elected, she will represent District 6 which will include the school systems in St. Clair, Calhoun, Cherokee, Cleburne, DeKalb, and Etowah counties.

Manning said she feels like she would have a lot to offer at a state level with her extensive background in education.

"I've always been involved in education," she said, adding that she wanted to be a teacher since the first day she went to school.

"The reason I wanted to become a teacher was there was a woman who was my teacher that had something I had never seen before. You're going to find this hard to believe, but I had never seen another red-headed person. From that day on, I wanted to be a teacher."

As a potential member of the state board, Manning said she has an interest in being part of both state textbook selection and the Alabama Course of Study. This is something she has experience in, as she served as chairman for the health and physical education course of study for the state.

Manning added that she also has experience in raising test scores, which would translate well should she be elected. When she was first hired as principal at Ashville Middle School, Manning said the scores were the lowest in the county school system. However, after two years, Ashville Middle was second in testing and had the highest scores the following year.

"I knew the students, I knew that community and I knew they were as bright as anybody in this county," she said. "That's why I wanted to make sure the teachers were teaching the Alabama Course of Study for their subject because the testing covers what we're supposed to teach, not what we are teaching."

Manning said she also wants to be able to push the importance of subject coaches in every school, such as math and reading coaches.

St. Clair County Schools has math coaches recently put into place. Manning said these coaches aren't necessarily there to tutor students, but rather serve as coaches for teachers to help them better instruct their students.

"Ten years ago, when we were doing Alabama Reading Initiative the correct way with a reading coach in each school, Alabama had the number one reading gains in the country," she said.

Manning also emphasized the need to push state legislators to provide extra pay for special education teachers, especially during a time where there is a shortage.

"There were only five upcoming special ed teachers at one of the local universities this year," she said, adding retaining these teachers is also important.

"We have to do something and be effective in helping a movement to get teachers who will stay. From the top down to the bottom, we've got to do something with teacher retention, because there is a teacher shortage."



St. Clair County BOE Vice President Marie Manning





Marie Manning with St. Clair Superintendent Mike Howard and school board president Scott Suttle during a board meeting



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## Nicholas Fason takes on new role at the Center for Education and Performing Arts

Special to The Daily Home

The Center for Education and Performing Arts' rapid expansion into digital performing arts has resulted in new grant funding this year and the creation of a new position for the organization – one that has been filled by a member of its current drama education team.

Nicholas Fason has served as technical director for CEPA in Pell City for more than a year, primarily assisting the nonprofit with lighting and sound operation and education for live productions. This month, he was hired to lead the development of the Spotlight Studio program.

"Simply put, he's the right person for this position," said Jeff Thompson, CEPA's executive director. "Nicholas was already our organization's leader in the tech booth and has trained dozens of others in technical operation. His passion for digital performance and continued drive to improve his own skills means we expect this program to advance faster than we originally predicted."

CEPA created Spotlight Studio in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic limiting performance options for members of the Spotlight Drama program, an all-ages drama outreach and education effort led by CEPA in St. Clair County. Spotlight Drama has seven active clubs in St. Clair County and more than 300 members.

Spotlight Studio creates new avenues for performers, technicians, writers and designers by providing them with

hands-on content creation opportunities. It began with short videos in 2020 and has led to a successful podcast (The Black Box by Spotlight Studio) and the creation of a short film screened at Sidewalk Film Festival in Birmingham in 2021 (Miss Christmas Business by Saints in the Spotlight at St. Clair County High School).

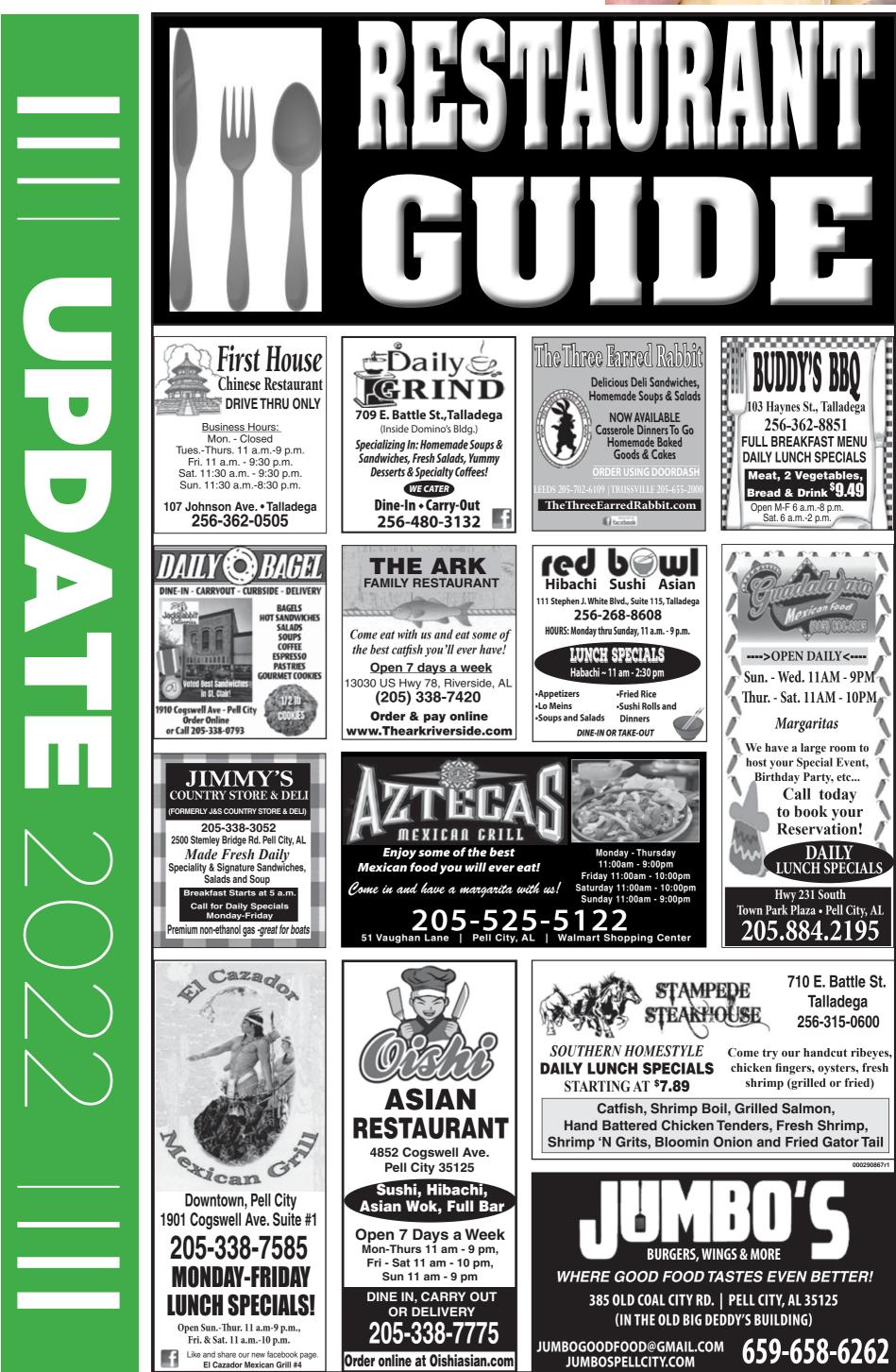
Fason, a former St. Clair County High School student and member of Saints in the Spotlight, will lead the development of The Black Box podcast and Spotlight Films. He will also be working on creating new digital performance spaces for members of area Spotlight Clubs.

"I was initially honored by the opportunity to work with CEPA as it launched Spotlight Studio," Fason said. "I'm thrilled by the chance to drive it forward. With the tremendous amount of community support CEPA receives and the wealth of talent and dedication in Spotlight's membership, I believe we can show this community some very cool things in the coming years."

CEPA is supported through partnerships with Pell City Schools and the City of Pell City. Spotlight is supported annually by St. Clair County Schools, the Alabama State Council on the Arts. Local program sponsors include Hargray Communications, Trussell Funderburg Rea Bell and Fergurson and Goodgame Co.

This year, CEPA also received additional funding to support the growth of Spotlight Studio through a State Council on the Arts Recovery Grant and from a South Arts Sustainability Grant. South Arts is an Atlanta-based nonprofit regional arts organization empowering artists, organizations, and communities, and increasing access to arts and culture.





Page 6B Weekend Edition, February 26-27, 2022

**FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS** 

**The Daily Home** 



Dr. Cynthia McCarty, seated in front, second from left during a meeting of the state board of education

# St. Clair representative on state school board reflects on two terms of accomplishments

#### Dr. Cynthia McCarty decides not to seek reelection to District 6

**By BUDDY ROBERTS** Special Projects Editor

#### Dr. Cynthia McCarty, a two-term member of the Alabama Board of Education, has announced that she will not seek reelection this year.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed engaging with educators throughout the state and am proud of the strides the board has made, but it is time to pass the torch," McCarty said.

The Jacksonville State University economics professor and Anniston resident said she would like more flexibility to pursue career interests and spend time with her family.

McCarty has held the District 6 seat since 2015 (representing, among others, the St. Clair County and Pell City school systems) and served one year as the board's vice president and one year as its president pro tem. District 6 also includes Morgan, Marshall, Cullman, Blount, Calhoun, and Cherokee counties and a portion of DeKalb County.

"I have mixed emotions about this decision." she said, adding that she believes continuing to improve K-12 public schools is critical to the state's future. "Much has been accomplished, but there is much work yet to do."

During her tenure on the board, McCarty said she is proud to have "been a champion for the teaching profession, promoting the need to respect hardworking and dedicated teachers. Alabama is now fourt in the nation in the number of newly certified National Board Certified Teachers, due in part to the almost 800 NBCT scholarships which have been awarded since 2017. I am especially proud of the thousands

of teachers who are currently enrolled or have completed LETRS training, a rigorous program providing teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach reading more effectively."

Alabama is fortunate, she added, "to have so many outstanding teachers who deserve to be rewarded and recognized. We need to make sure we retain these exceptional

educators and attract more to the profession." McCarty has also supported what she described as high



McCarty with Dr. Eric Mackey, superintendent of Alabama schools, volunteering during the pandemic



standards and meaningful opportunities for students.

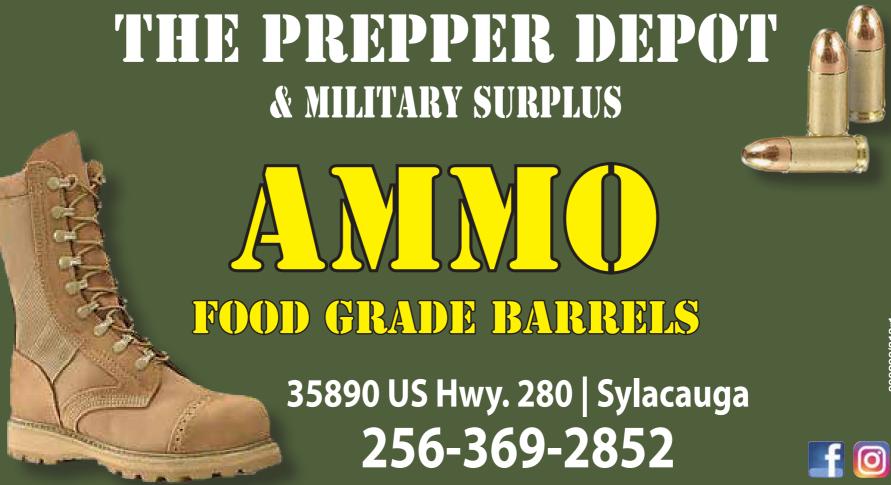
"The jobs of the future require a new skill set," she said. Her interest in expanding options for students in science, technology and mathematics led to an appointment by the governor to serve on the state's Computer Science Advisory Council and the Alabama STEM Council.

The economist also focused on career technical education during her board service.

"Ensuring our students graduate and are prepared for meaningful work is the right thing to do for students -- and the economy," she said. "Witnessing young men and women actively engaged in welding, health science, auto technology and more has been powerfully motivating."

McCarty said she has enjoyed making visits to schools in St. Clair County and Pell City and says those visits are what she will miss most when her term ends next January. "I wish everyone had the opportunity to see the innovative things happening in our schools daily. I plan to keep working and keep asking questions to the last day of my term." We offer more than expected in service at less than the expected cost! 511 Edgewood Drive, Sylacauga, Al 35150 256-245-5201

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Talladega College changes leadership, continues to forge ahead during the past year

#### **By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

Dr. Lisa E. Long is the new acting president of Talladega College. In continuing to move forward in the direction of growth initiated

during the tenure of her longtime predecessor, Dr. Billy Hawkins, Long is fully committed to the college, the community, and giving her best as president to assure the college and its students continue to make progress.

For example, for the third consecutive year, student enrollment has increased, with a current total of a 1,313 student population. This more than quadruples initial enrollment 12 years ago. It is believed that the campus's progress in recent years is the reason behind the student body's growth.

The month of August was busy in 2021, as Dr. Long stepped into her role as the acting president and the campus' first Black female president. Also, there was an anonymous donation of \$250,000 to students. This donation led to the creation of the Angel Award, which is a scholarship that has now benefited almost 100 students.

With the on-going initiative to reshape the campus of Talladega College, in November, there was a ribbon cutting ceremony held for the new multipurpose field. The band practice and community events. Relaunching the school's football program, which has not been active since 1942, is being assessed.

During December, some students may have received the best news when it came to their debt that may have accumulated over the years. The college received an anonymous donation of \$2.5 million dollars contributed to student scholarships. This historic donation led to expanding the Angel Award scholarship and the clearing of \$925,666 for student debt with balances during the Spring 2020 through Summer 2021 terms.

In an UNCF interview, Dr. Long said that she is not certain about the identity of the College's angel in disguise, but she is exceedingly grateful. "This donation is yet another validation that we're on the right track with facilitating the needs of our students," she said.

Dr. Long is not a new face to the campus of Talladega. She has been with the college for more than 20 years. She worked as a field coordinator for the social work program, department chair of the social work department, appointed interim dean of social sciences and education, assumed duties as provost/ vice president for academic affairs, and served as accreditation liaison for SACSCOC 10-year reaffirma-



Last summer, a historical marker commemorating the establishment of the first NAACP chapter in Alabama was unveiled. From left are Quentin Riggins, Senior VP of Governmental & Corporate Affairs, Alabama Power; Dr. Billy Hawkins, past president of Talladega College; Josh Thompson, President Alabama Youth and College Division of the NAACP; Terra Foster, Executive Director of the Alabama State Conference of the NAACP; Benard Simelton, President of the Alabama State Conference of the NAACP; Dr. Dorothy Autrey, retired. professor and chair of Alabama State University's Department of History and Political Science; and the Rev.





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SPECIAL ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

## **AL residents scramble to get last Walking Liberty Rolls**

**ALABAMA** - Once Alabama residents got wind that Alabama State Restricted Bank Rolls filled with Silver Walking Liberties dating back to the early 1900's were being handed over, there was a mad dash to get them. That's because some of these U.S. Gov't issued silver coins are already worth hundreds in collector value.

"It's like a run on the banks. The phones are ringing off the hook. That's because everyone is trying to get them before they're all gone," according to officials at the National Mint and Treasury who say they can barely keep up with all the orders.

In fact, they had to impose a strict limit of 4 Alabama State Restricted Bank Rolls. So, if you get the chance to get your hands on these State Restricted Bank Rolls you better hurry because hundreds of Alabama residents already have and you don't

want to miss out.

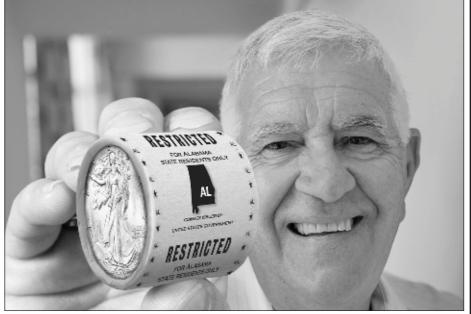
You see, the U.S. Gov't stopped minting these Silver Walking Liberties in 1947 and there can never be any more which makes them extremely collectible.

And here's the best part. The rolls are unsearched so there's no telling how much they could be worth in collector value.

That's why at just the \$39 state minimum set by National Mint and Treasury it's a deal too good to pass up.

But you better hurry because these Alabama State Restricted Bank Rolls are the only ones known to exist and Alabama residents are grabbing them up as fast as they can.

That's because they make amazing gifts for children, grandchildren and loved ones. Just imagine the look on their face when you hand them one of the State Restricted Rolls — they'll tell everyone they know what you did for them.



**GOT 'EM:** Residents all across Alabama who get their hands on these State Restricted Silver Walking Liberty Bank Rolls are definitely showing them off. That's because they are the only ones known to exist. And here's the best part, these Bank Rolls are loaded with U.S. Gov't issued Silver Walking Liberty coins some dating back to the early 1900's and worth up to 100 times their face value so everyone wants them.

## Last State Restricted Silver Walking Liberty Bank Rolls go to Alabama residents

Alabama residents get first dibs on last remaining Bank Rolls loaded with U.S. Gov't issued Silver Walking Liberties dating back to the early 1900's some worth up to 100 times their face value for the next 2 days

**STATE DISTRIBUTION:** A strict limit of 4 State Restricted Bank Rolls per AL resident has been imposed

**ALABAMA** - "It's a miracle these State Restricted Bank Rolls even exist. That's why Hotline Operators are bracing for the flood of calls," said Laura Lynne, U.S. Coin and Currency Director for the National Mint and Treasury.

For the next 2 days the last remaining State of Alabama Restricted Bank Rolls loaded with rarely seen U.S. Gov't issued Silver Walking Liberties are actually being handed over to Alabama residents who call the State Toll-Free Hotlines listed in today's newspaper publication.

"National Mint and Treasury recently spoke with its Chief Professional Numismatist who said 'Very few people have ever actually saw one of these rarely seen Silver Walking Liberties issued by the U.S. Gov't back in the early 1900's. But to actually find them sealed away in State Restricted Bank Rolls is like finding buried treasure. So anyone lucky enough to get their hands on these Bank Rolls had better hold on to them," Lynne said.

"Now that the State of Alabama Restricted Bank Rolls are being offered up we won't be surprised if thousands of Alabama residents claim the maximum limit allowed of 4 Bank Rolls per resident before they're all gone," said Lynne.

"That's because after the Bank Rolls were loaded with 15 rarely seen Silver Walking Liberties, each verified to meet a minimum collector grade of very good or above, the dates and mint marks of the U.S. Gov't issued Silver Walking Liberty Half Dollars sealed away inside the State of Alabama Restricted Bank Rolls have never been searched. But, we do know that some of these coins date clear back to the early 1900's and are worth up to 100 times their face value, so there is no telling what Alabama residents will find until they sort through all the coins," Lynne went on to say. And here's the best part. If you are a resident of the state of Alabama you cover only the \$39 per coin state minimum set by the National Mint and Treasury, that's fifteen rarely seen U.S. Gov't issued Silver Walking Liberties worth up to 100 times their face value for just \$585 which is a real steal because non state residents must pay \$118 per coin which totals \$1,770 if any coins remain after the 2-day deadline.



The only thing Alabama residents need to do is call the State Toll-Free Hotlines printed in today's newspaper publication before the 2-day order deadline ends.

"Rarely seen U.S. Gov't issued silver coins like these are highly sought after, but we've never seen anything like this before. According to The Official Red Book, a Guide Book of United States Coins many Silver Walking Liberty Half Dollars are now worth \$40 - \$825 each in collector value," Lynne said.

"We're guessing thousands of Alabama residents will be taking the maximum limit of 4 Bank Rolls because they make such amazing gifts for any occasion for children, parents, grandparents, friends and loved ones," Lynne continued.

"We know the phones will be ringing off the hook. That's why hundreds of Hotline Operators are standing by to answer the phones beginning at 8:30 am this morning. We're going to do our best, but with just 2 days to answer all the calls it won't be easy. So make sure to tell everyone to keep calling if all lines are busy. We'll do our best to answer them all." Lynne said.

The only thing readers of today's newspaper publication need to do is make sure they are a resident of the state of Alabama and call the National Toll-Free Hotlines before the 2-day deadline ends midnight tomorrow. YEAR VARIES 1916-1947

#### FACTS: HOW TO CLAIM THE LAST STATE RESTRICTED BANK ROLLS

If you are a Alabama State Resident read the important information below about claiming the State Silver Bank Rolls, then call the State Toll-Free Hotline at 8:30 am: **1-800-979-3771 EXT: RWB4208** 

Are these Silver Walking Liberties worth more than other half dollars:	Yes. These U.S. Gov't issued Silver Walking Liberties were minted in the early 1900's and will never be minted again. That makes them extremely collectible. The vast majority of half dollars minted after 1970 have no silver content at all and these Walking Liberties were one of the last silver coins minted for circulation. That's why many of them now command hundreds in collector value so there's no telling how much they could be worth in collector value someday.				
How much are State Restricted Walking Liberty Silver Bank Rolls worth:	It's impossible to say, but some of these U.S Gov't issued Walking Liberties dating back to the early 1900's are worth up to 100 times the face value and there are 15 in each Bank Roll so you better hurry if you want to get your hands on them. Collector values always fluctuate and there are never any guarantees. But we do know they are the only Alabama State Silver Bank Rolls known to exist and Walking Liberties are highly collectible so anyone lucky enough to get their hands on these Silver Bank Rolls should hold onto them because there's no telling how much they could be worth in collector value someday.				

Why are so many Alabama residents claiming	Because they are the only State Restricted Walking Liberty Silver Bank Rolls known to exist and everyone wants their share. Each Bank Roll contains a whopping 15 Silver Walking Liberties dating back to the early 1900's some worth up to 100 times their face value. Best of all Alabama residents are guaranteed
them:	to get them for the state minimum set by the National Mint and Treasury of just \$39 per Silver Walking Liberty for the next two days.

How do I get the
State Restricted
Walking Liberty
Silver Bank Rolls:

Alabama residents are authorized to claim up to the limit of 4 State Restricted Walking Liberty Silver Bank Rolls by calling the State Toll Free Hotline at **1-800-979-3771 Ext. RWB4208** starting at precisely 8:30 am this morning. Everyone who does is getting the only State Restricted Walking Liberty Silver Bank Rolls known to exist. That's a full Bank Roll containing 15 Silver Walking Liberties from the early 1900's some worth up to 100 times their face value for just the state minimum set by the National Mint and Treasury of just \$39 per Silver Walking Liberty, which is just \$585 for the full Bank Rolls and that's a real steal because non state residents are not permitted to call before 5 pm tomorrow and must pay \$1,770 for each Alabama State Restricted Walking Liberty Silver Bank Roll if any remain.

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# **UPDATE** 2022 **|||**

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## Angler Recycling enjoys being a part of the community in St. Clair County

**By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

Do you have aluminum, cell phones, flat screen monitors, cars, copper, unclean stainless steel or electric motors that you need to get rid of, but aren't sure about how to go about it?

Angler Recycling in St. Clair County is a convenient in Odenville and Warrior. location and a leading full-service metal and scrap processor. It is open to the public for both residential and commercial use. The list of accepted materials is long, and the company's belief is that there is no job too big or small for it to take on. The staff and owners of the facility are determined to make a strong impact on the community as well as the environment.

Robby Franklin and Patrick Daniel have been in the business for almost 14 years, operating locations

"I feel like Franklin and Daniel have been very blessed by a supportive community, but with the work they invest into the community it is understood," said Coe Allen, Angler Recycling's bookkeeper. "They are people who will not say no to helping anyone. They provide support to the employees in need, donate what they can to local schools and churches. I truly believe they are doing the Lord's work by blessing others."







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**COMMERCE: PELL CITY** 

Other services provided besides the option to buy or sell scrap metals include vehicle removal, job site relocation and clean-up, domestic and international shipping, paying "top-dollar" for various scrap metals and so more. For the full list of scrap metal items Angler accepts, visit www.anglerrecycling.com.

"I want people to understand that we are more than just a scrap yard," Allen said. "There is so much we have to adhere to when it comes to the laws and rules we must follow in order to keep business going and coming in. In my personal opinion, some of the hardest-working people I know are here. They are dedicated to making sure customers are well taken care of, their questions are answered and that prices remain fair to both commercial and residential clients."

As a Christian-based company, they strongly believe in "living by God's principle of prosperity by continuing to give back while being a service to the community." In its goal to offer the best, Angler Recycling has created an environment where employees enjoy coming to work to make a difference. In developing great relationships ensures that customers receive quality customer care.

Angler Recycling is at 15226 Highway 411 in Odenville and 52 Lester Doss Road in Warrior. Hours are Mondays through Fridays from 7:30 a.m.-4 p.m. and Saturdays from 7:30 a.m. to noon.



**COMMERCE: PELL CITY** 

## Beyond Sken Studio helps clients develop confidence 'from the inside first'

**By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

Are you having problems with acne or dry skin? Then here is your answer.

Beyond Sken Studio in Pell City is the solution but minus the use of harsh treatment care. Owner Alicia Boyd opened her corrective skin care business a little over a year ago to offer a natural approach to typical skincare problems. Located at 1605 Martin St. S Suite #4 in Pell City she aspires to help customers feel more confident.

"I originally just started out doing lash extensions and I still do, but I decided to expand my business because I wanted to start to educate and help people when it comes to skin care and self care. With being diagnosed about five years ago with adult acne, I had to help myself first so I could start helping others, and from there things just started to blossom."

In a profession where working with skins of every walk of life, Boyd admitted that she feels her business also creates awareness on a different level when it comes to history and some of the problems faced in the world. With being so close and personal it strikes questions and conversations that are sometimes hard to have, but the presented moments allow an open door. She went on to describe that in a sense, some sessions with clients are almost like therapy for them, and she could not be happier to offer a business that goes just what is offered.

Boyd believes that the approach to healthier skin starts with making the right lifestyle changes, such as addressing water consumption, digestion health, and proper dieting. She prides herself on not just letting customers get a service, but educating them about the service they are receiving, the products, and how they can maintain having healthier skin. No matter the problem, whether it is skin discoloration, acne scarring, pitted scars, uneven skin tone, dry skin, acne, or other skin related issue, she has developed a series of treatments and products to cater to these concerns.

"The meaning behind Beyond Sken Studio for me is to let people know that it is deeper than the surface than just what you see. Like I firmly believe that helping clients feel good about themselves before even seeing themselves is the goal because it is a mental thing. There are times when you have to learn to be confident from the inside first, in order to be confident on the outside. Yes, I can work with anyone to help boost their confidence, but in order to be the best version outside, it takes paying attention to one's inside. Also the word Sken in my business name is a play on words, as it is a combination of both my daughter's name Skyy and Ken. I had to incorporate them somehow, and merging their names was the perfect fit."

Being a new business owner, Boyd revealed that she considered last year her building year and is still building her business up. She hopes to continue growing clients and creating awareness in the areas of health, beauty, and self care.

Beyond Sken Studio also offers waxing, microblading, vajacials, perfect peach peels, and more services. They are open Tuesday through Friday from 8 a.m to 4:30 p.m, Saturday 8 a.m. to noon, closed Sunday and Monday. For all available services check them out on Facebook, or visit them online at www.beyondskenstuido.com to book a service or purchase products.











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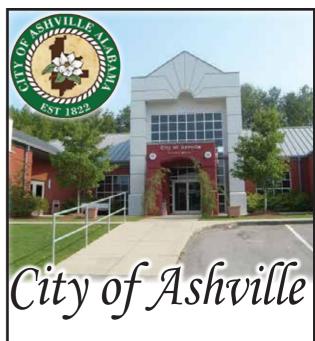
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## Daily Bagel: A welcoming atmosphere of tasty food and quality service

#### **By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

From Broadway to bagels!

Jeremy Gossett established Daily Bagel in Pell City in August of 2019 based on his love for food and wanting to bring something new to the area.

The locally-owned business is in the historic Pell City Hardware/Gossett Building that is a half a block east of the St. Clair County Courthouse. The restaurant serves breakfast and lunch daily with the options of dine-in, carryout, curbside service and delivery. The menu is more than just bagels; hot pressed deli sandwiches, daily soups, salads, coffee, espresso, pastries and gourmet half-pound cookies are also available.

"I have a background in theater," Gossett said. "I have worked around the globe as a designer and production manager for various Broadway productions; however, I have grown weary of traveling. So when an opportunity presented itself to me, I jumped on the idea. To own a restaurant of my own is something that had never crossed my mind. Outside of being a frequent consumer of food from various places, this business is one of those things that just fell into my lap. I still do a bit of design and exhibit work, but for now my artistic expres-

sion is displayed through our giant half-pound cookies."

Gossett says that what helped him decide to open the restaurant is his desire to offer more dining options in the downtown area. His dedication to his business is impeccable. When speaking to The Daily Home for this article, he said he'd been "running around getting things done" since 5 a.m. and was cooking during the phone interview. That level of commitment is one of the many factors that makes his business a success.

"We strive to keep the atmosphere welcoming, with great food, quality service, and an awesome staff. Daily Bagel allows people the chance to have somewhere to come to socialize or just get some work done, all while enjoying a bagel, coffee, or a delicious meal. I have always loved the idea of introducing bagels to Pell City. With me traveling quite a bit, this is why I choose to go the bagel route, because I knew it would be something different and unique."

Gossett and his staff aim to provide customers with something delicious and different on a daily basis. Daily Bagel is at 1910 Cogswell Avenue, open Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m to 2 p.m. and Saturdays from 8 a.m to 1 p.m. Visit its Facebook page to see the specials of the day, and visit the restaurant's website to place an order.







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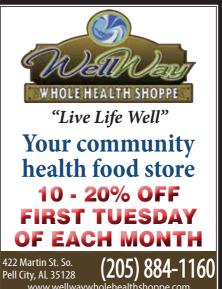
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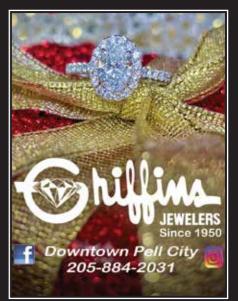


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**COMMERCE: PELL CITY** 

# Lakeshore Nutrition offers healthy alternatives to soda, energy drinks

#### **By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

Lakeshore Nutrition has been serving the Pell City area by offering healthy beverages that can boost energy and meals that can contribute to weight loss since first opening in November of 2020.

"To see my customers and hear their testimonials of how the product has helped them get through the day or is making a difference in their everyday life is one of the reasons that I love what I do. It is most rewarding," said Heather Peoples, owner and operator.

Before owning the business, Peoples was a customer who came in as a "tea tender" and gradually wanted more. She began to see results in the areas of weight loss and focus without the crash that can sometimes be caused by sodas or energy drinks. She lost 40 pounds in a year.

"The opportunity for this business came because the owner saw my potential and commitment. This led to the offer to sell it to me, and God made a way for me to be able to accept. I love what I do. I love my customers and most of all I love all the products that we offer." Lakeshore Nutrition provides the services of pick-up or delivery of their loaded teas, beauty drinks, specialty drinks, boost drinks, coffee drink options, hot shakes and hot loaded tea options and kids drinks. Each of the offered drinks can be combined with a booster targeted towards areas of energy, focus, vitamins, hunger control, collagen and more. The flavors and drink names are memorable and delicious, with something for everybody. It is not often one can get a low calorie blueberry cheesecake shake that can work as a meal replacement packed with vitamins and minerals.

"My personal favorite is the beauty line," Peoples said. "Beauty teas have about 115 mg of caffeine, vitamins A, B12, C and E with collagen to help with your hair, skin, nails and joints. Outside of the benefits and ways it helps me, I love being able to offer a healthy approach to fast food, as well as offer a healthier alternative to sodas and traditional energy drinks."

Asked what drink she would consider most popular and why, Peoples said it would definitely have to be the loaded teas that contain 200 mg of caffeine, no sugar, low calories, low carbs, vitamins and aloe to aid in digestion and absorption.

"This business could not have come at a better time," she said. "The ongoing pandemic has not affected our business at all. In fact, our customers need energy more now than ever, so it is like everything is gracefully continuing to work out."

Lakeshore Nutrition is located 1605

Martin Street S Suite C in Pell City. They are open Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 6:30 a.m.-6 p.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6:30 a.m.-5 p.m. and Saturdays 9 a.m.-3 p.m. For tips of some of the best booster combinations and the full list of flavor options and drinks, visit Lakeshore Nutrition's Facebook page.



# Cropwell art studio seeks to help adults, children develop their own creativity

#### **By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

Sundi Hawkins Art Studio has been sharing it's owners love of art with the community and for almost a year now.

"I wanted to create a place that made art accessible to the community," says Hawkins, the studio's owner, resident artist and art teacher. "The pandemic is how I started my business, from being in quarantine too long. I was concerned about my own kids' mental health and wanted them to have a creative outlet. Then after talking with others, I realized that they too needed a positive outlet, so I started offering small classes in the afternoon."

The multi-talented artist teaches at her studio at 3514 Martin St. South in Cropwell and at Heritage Hall Museum, where she provides art classes for 4th to 6th grades from the Talladega City Schools. Hawkins admits that she has always had a love for art but never thought that she would be an artist. Her artistic expression is unique, making her work popular with local collectors. One of her most recent pieces, "Majestic Marsh Morning," displays soft hues of blue, green, purple, brown, yellow and black intertwined to illustrate a lake surrounded by a forest setting. "My favorite medium to use is acrylic paint because I like to paint very fast. Acrylic dries quickly and is forgivable. As for teaching, I hope that by providing a creative outlet for kids and adults that they will be able to express themselves and grow to love art in all its forms."

Sundi Hawkins Art Studio has classes for ages 6 and older. It offers classes as well as hosts art parties. The calendar on its website, www.sundihawkins.com, lists upcoming classes for the current month, art that is available for purchase, upcoming shows and Hawkins' portfolio.

Hawkins believes that everyone needs to unleash the creative sides of their brain. It was not until her college days that Hawkins started painting in earnest, so there is no set time limit on when one can begin developing their creative niche. She says that studies have shown that children who do well in art and music are often better test takers and students. To see children thrive and unlock talents they might not have known they had is most fulfilling, she added.

The studio is open Mondays through Fridays from 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Children's classes are available Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 3:45 p.m.-5 p.m.



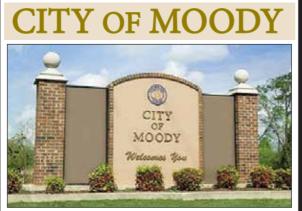




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Mayor and Council Front seated: Mayor Joe Lee & Linda Crowe Back row left to right : Nick Rutledge, Lynn Taylor, Matt Morris & Ellis Key



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## Cruise around Pell City on an e-bike from Logan Martin ElecTrek

## New consulting company brings the products to the customers

#### **By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

Darrell Spears owns Logan Martin ElecTrek, an electric bicycle consulting company based in Pell City.

"I grew up in Southern California, but I spent every summer visiting my grandparents in Alabama. I moved to Alabama permanently at 20. I was living in Fayette and joined the Army," he said.

The closeness of the community in Pell City impressed Spears during his time serving overseas.

"The community seemed really tight, and they supported my children while I could not be here. Pell City had a special place in my heart because I already felt connected to it," Spears said, "This whole area was super kind to my family while I couldn't be here."

Spears moved to Pell City following his retirement from the Army. He has recently started an electric bike consultation service, Logan Martin ElecTrek, in Pell City.

"My job in the Army was to fix the most complex electrical problems you could have, so now I'm transferring that experience over to e-bikes," said Spears.

After 20 years in the Army, Spears says that his legs and knees are not what they used to be. He wanted to continue being active with less stress on his body, so he started looking into electric bikes.

"I took an electric bike for a test drive, and I couldn't stop smiling. I felt like a little kid," Spears said.

Spears started learning about electric bikes, and thought he had learned enough.

"I ordered one. I learned I did not know nearly enough at the time," said Spears, laughing, "There are a lot of different options. What is great for you may not work for me."

Some factors that affect the kind of e-bike a rider would want include height and body composition, what you want the bike for, the environment you will be riding in and experience level, budget, riding position, age and disabilities.

"An e-bike has a battery and a motor to help assist you, but it is not a motorcycle. You will not be doing wheelies with a throttle," Spears clarified.

An aspect of Logan Martin ElecTrek that differs from e-bike retailers is that there is not a brick-and-mortar location. Spears is looking behind his idea is to go to clients. He spends time with clients to help them find the best e-bike for them. Spears visiting clients allows them to test ride the e-bikes in the terrain where they will be riding regularly.

"I don't carry inventory, so I don't try to 'sell' a thing. I try to find a fit for the customer from the hundred bikes we can get for them. We just pick the one that is perfect and order it to be delivered right to their door," Spears said.

Spears says his clients' orders typically take a week to two and a half weeks to be delivered. The e-bike that took two and a half weeks had a custom paint job.

"I am happy to help anybody—even if you aren't looking to buy an e-bike from me," he said.

He also sells electric trikes that are the size of e-bikes. Spears is steadily building accessories. He is trying to only sell accessories he has tried and knows are good.

"I am trying to breed an ecosystem of American-made equipment, but some items are not. We give people options," Spears said.

A company he is about to start working with from Austin, Texas, has e-bikes ranging from \$1,200-\$8,000. According to Spears, regular bicycles can cost that much, but the average cost of the e-bikes he has been selling is around \$3,000. Logan Martin ElecTrek offers a \$95 discount on consultations for military members, first responders and teachers.

"I live on the lake, and it is shaped how I look at the whole area and the community that surrounds it. Biking in general is a community, and e-biking is a new community. Whether people buy from me or somebody else, I want them to be part of the community," said Spears.

For more information, visit loganmartinelectrek.com.







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The Pell City Chamber of Commerce board members for the upcoming year. Pictured: (back row, from left) Doris Munkus, Kristi Edwards, Chelsea Isbell, Patrice Kurzejeski, Adam Vandiver, Zachary Gentile, Erica Grieve and Executive Director; Urainah Glidewell. Front row(from left) Rachael Herren; Treasurer, Laurie brasher; President Ex-Officio, Anna Otterson; President, Jeremiah Gilreath; Vice-President, Casey Cambron; President Elect. Not pictured: Milea Kirby, Linda Crow, Sarah Whitten, Pam Carlisle



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**COMMERCE: PELL CITY** 

## Mills Pharmacy: 'Let our family take care of your family'

**By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

#### Mills Pharmacy has been a cornerstone in communities for more than 20 years, providing over-thecounter medications, traditional prescriptions, immunizations, health supplies, compounding and now COVID-19 testing.

Since its original store was opened back in 2002 by owner Robert Mills, Mills Pharmacy has grown across the counties of St. Clair, Jefferson, Tuscaloosa, and Green to a total of 13 locations. Each location is equipped with a helpful staff, quality customer service and the personal touch of knowing customers by their names. Each staff member strives to know each person that walks through the doors.

"We provide more than just a pharmacy but attempt to create awareness where it is needed," said Randell Pickering, director of sales and marketing at the Leeds location. "We are very community-minded when it comes to being involved. It is our mission to visit schools and talk to students about the dangers of drug addiction, with several talks targeted to all grade levels about drug safety. We go into senior centers, assisted living facilities and independent living facilities to talk about the importance of taking prescribed medicines properly, as well as go into various communities and offer vaccination clinics for things like the flu or COVID. However, we do not stop there. We are also very active in Blanket For Hope, which is an organization that rescues children from sex trafficing."

Pickering enjoys being a part of a business that keeps its customers first. The value of a customer's time is considered a high priority. In an effort to limit long waits, Mills Pharmacy has the goal to be efficient and have customers out with the average wait time of four minutes. He added that since taking on his position, the biggest reward is developing relationships with people, as he is a "people person" who loves to interact with others.

Almost every location has "rave reviews" of receiving great customer service, smiling faces, the appreciation of having things explained to them when needed, questions answered and feeling like family more so than just a customer. With 16 years serving the Leeds community, the pharmacy aspires to continue to grow and be there for those that need them, Pickering said.

"I want people to know that Mills Pharmacy is a trusted business that wants to earn their business everyday. We are personal and a hometown drug store with great employees that live up to our slogan that says it all: Let our family take



care of your family."

The Leeds pharmacy is at 8420 1st Ave SE, open Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m to 6 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m to 2 p.m. For the full list of available services and other locations, visit www.millspharmacies.com.

## Visit St. Clair seeks to bring more people, more commerce to local communities

**By BUDDY ROBERTS** 

Special Projects Editor

Not unlike many young people, Blair Goodgame left her hometown to attend college and begin life as an adult. She returned a few years later, something that doesn't always happen.

"I don't know if I'm an exception, but even though I went to school somewhere else, I always retained feelings of affection for Pell City," she said. "My family was always at the lake and on the water, and I loved those memories. But I didn't fully appreciate everything until I moved back in 2010."

Goodgame started a business in Cropwell and became involved in civic and community activities, becoming one of Pell City's and St. Clair County's most vocal cheerleaders. "That's why when this job came along, it was a natural fit," she said.

Goodgame serves as tourism coordinator for the St. Clair County Economic Development Council (EDC), a role that draws on her native familiarity with the county and allows her to promote awareness of its offerings locally and throughout Alabama.

At the start of 2022, she spoke with The Daily Home about the origins of the EDC's tourism initiatives, plans for the coming year and the yearly schedule of local events and activities.

Getting started: "Previously, there had been no tourism program whatsoever, so we were basically starting from

Clair County has and creating a brand for St. Clair County. Then the pandemic hit, which complicated things because it wasn't as easy to go out for a time and so many events were canceled.

"Then CEPA held the first Black Jacket Symphony concert on the lake, which was the first time a group of people that big had been together for an event in a while. It seemed like a good time to launch our brand. Visit St. Clair has grown to 10,000 followers across social media, and we have our website, which includes a calendar of events."

How has support been for events as the pandemic has continued? "Going up. LakeFest, for example. In 2021, after skipping 2020 because of COVID-19, attendance was 35,000. In 2019, the attendance was 20,000, and it was 15,000 the year before that. The Bulls on the Lake Rodeo also had record attendance in 2021, after being canceled in 2020. People have been looking for outdoor activities, and this county is full of it: hiking, kayaking, bouldering. In St. Clair County, we're known for our good nature - the people and the natural resources."

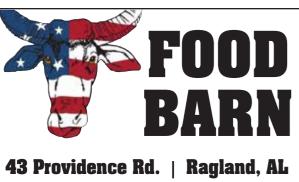
Plans for 2022: "We're working with the Alabama Tourism Department in connection with the World Games, which Birmingham is hosting this summer. They're looking for sites in close proximity to Birmingham and Jefferson County that visitors can make short trips to, and we'd love to see them over here in St. Clair County come June."

For more information about Visit St. Clair: "Our website is www.visitstclair.com, and you can find us on Facebook, Instragram and Twitter as @VisitStClair.





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#### The Daily Home

**COMMERCE: PELL CITY** 

Weekend Edition, February 26-27, 2022 Page 11A



Ragland Food Barn is 'more than just a place to shop'

> **By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

Like most small businesses, the Ragland Food Barn has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The pandemic helped us in the best way with drawing more people to come in and shop opposed to eating out as much. However, we have encountered some of the same problems as many other businesses. With having vendor delays with some of our usual merchandise with some things available one week and not the next, or staffing shortage. Staffing problems affect all types of production from us to the vendor side. This is understandable, and we just have to continue to do the best we can until things are better,"said Brandon Calhoun.

Ragland Food Barn is a locally owned family business that provides the city of Ragland a convenient location, quality food, a friendly staff, and great prices. Since fulfilling a long life dream and opening around 2006, the store has continued to evolve throughout the years. The one stop shop carries everything from the essentials to some specialty items.

The down home store for down home people has been said to provide one of the best meat markets in town. According to Calhoun, he says that they receive a lot of out of towners that come in town to shop their market, and whether new or returning, they pride themselves on earning customer's business with each visit.

"This grocery store is more than just a place to shop for groceries or needed items, but it helps the community by providing a place of employment. 13 of the employees here live in town, and we are currently hiring for all positions. This to me helps a bunch because it helps us to be able to provide food, keeps dollars



local, and helps other families no matter if it's through creating a job opportunity, or being the place they pick up their next meal."

Calhoun is keeping the tradition of family going as his Father in law is the owner. He admitted that if he had to be given an exact title, he would say that he is the butcher, but almost everyone in the store does a little of everything to help out. He added that even when he clocks out, he is taking work home with him to make sure things continue to run smoothly and that they have enough food to meet the demand of customers.

When asked what he finds most rewarding in all the work he does, he laughed slightly and said that no one has ever asked him that before.

"Coming up on the 16th year in business, I still continue to work 7 days a week and that's because I truly love what I do. The reward for me is providing the best experience possible for customers and making people happy, and here I am doing all of that and more."

To find out the sales and specials for the week, check them out on Facebook; just type in "Food Barn", visit them online at www.foodbarnragland.com , or stop by 43 Providence Rd. in Ragland. They are open 7 days a week from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m daily.



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## Pell City Chamber of Commerce bounces back from the pandemic's difficult early days

**By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

In 2021, the Pell City Chamber of Commerce started a member-to-member discount program, featuring more than 40 members who help each other shop locally.

The chamber also expanded its live videos on Facebook.

"Last year, we made 147 videos with our chamber members. One of our board members will go out and conduct a short interview with a member of the chamber. It is a good way to spread the word about businesses and upcoming events they have," said Urainah Glidewell, the chamber's executive director.

The Chamber added 54 new members last year, bringing the total member number to more than 350 members. Glidewell says the majority of members are small businesses, but they also have members in industry.

"Each business has different needs, so we try to offer programs and initiatives to meet the needs of the businesses. A small business owner will have a different need than an industry," she said.

Last year, the chamber hosted a job fair in conjunction with the St. Clair County Economic Development Council, St. Clair County Schools and Pell City Schools. The chamber will host another job fair with those groups on April 14 at the Moody Civic Center from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. Professional attire and resumes are recommended because a variety of employers will be in attendance.

Glidewell also touted the added chamber member benefit of using the chamber's online job listings to post available positions. ly. We were making sure members knew the resources that were available," said Glidewell.

One thing the chamber wants to continue from working in the pandemic is using the internet, specifically social media.

"People are doing virtual meetings a lot more, and they are ready to get back to face-to-face, but when people have time constraints, it is easier to hop on Zoom or Google Meet and communicate that way. A lot of businesses were able to better use social media. Some businesses that did not have a website before were able to get one," Glidewell said.

The director added that the chamber was glad to see the community grow and thrive through a pandemic.

"We got out info about grant opportunities to help keep businesses open. To see them come back strong and continue to grow and thrive has really been a blessing," said Glidewell.

The chamber is restarting the Business Builder Breakfasts and Lunch and Learn programs. Both events will feature a guest speaker who will address a particular topic. The first Lunch and Learn will be on Thursday, March 3, featuring guest speaker Gordon Stone with the Higher Education Partnership. The first Business Builder Breakfast will be on Thursday, March 24.

"We have also partnered with JSU for their ChamberONE program. They have about 600 courses online, and we are able to offer those to our members at a 20 percent discount. We are working more with JSU's Small Business Development Center," Glidewell said.

She added that the Small Business Development Center has so many free resources for people who are thinking about starting a business or someone who already has started one that needs some sort of advice about running a small business.

The chamber is looking forward to the 2022 Hometown Block Party on Wednesday, June 22, from 3 p.m.-9 p.m. in downtown Pell City. The block party will feature three stages with live music, a car show, vendors and kids area. This event is free to the public.

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The director is also proud of the number of career programs available at the high school level to make students ready to enter the workforce when they graduate.

Glidewell said 2020 was difficult, but the chamber was able to bounce back in 2021 and expand.

"We worked with Benjamin Moore. They made hand sanitizer, and we helped distribute that and get information out. So much information was changing constantGlidewell also enjoys the Third Thursday event in historic downtown Pell City, which features a different theme every month. She also is looking forward to the Christmas parade, which will be held Thursday, December 8, at 7 p.m.

"We appreciate all of our members and our capital campaign sponsors. They make all these events possible, and we are very thankful for them," she said.



94.1 The River is the recipient of the Pell City Chamber of Commerce's 2021 Small Business of the Year Award.

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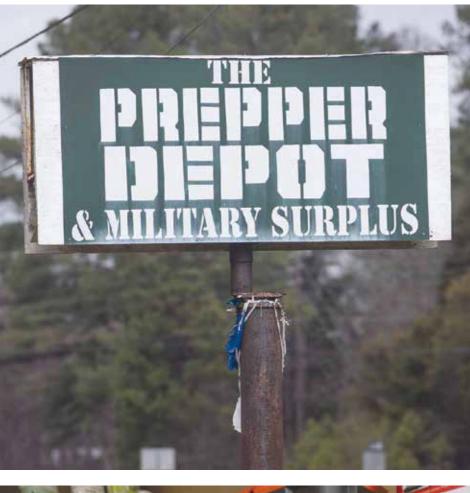
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February 2022 Special Supplement to **The Daily Home** 



# The Prepper Depot seeks to help customers be prepared for disastrous situations



#### **By FAITH DORN**

Special to The Daily Home

Chris Price owns The Prepper Depot in Sylacauga.

The store sells gear for emergencies and military surplus items.

Price, a Sylacauga native, moved back to the area from North Carolina in August 2018 to be closer to family and opened the store the following November.

"I was an elementary school teacher in North Carolina, but I could not get a job here," he said. "I applied to Honda, the paper mill—I applied all over for all kinds of jobs. They all said I had too much education and was overqualified, but I wanted to work. I had to think outside the box."

He began thinking about different business opportunities and decided a "prepper" and military surplus store would be a solid business. "There is a huge prepper community here and a big demand for military surplus. Even though both are niche markets, they are very strong."

Price says If there is a vehicle in front of the store, people see it and come in to shop.

"It is like the Field of Dreams," he said with a laugh.

Price says preppers sometimes have a bad reputation because of television shows like "Doomsday Preppers."

According to Price, although some preppers create underground bunkers for "Doomsday" or an economic collapse, most preppers are preparing for everyday events like tornadoes.

To prepare for a tornado, Price recommends getting such items as a helmet, blankets, an ax, a chainsaw with a few gallons of fuel and some fuel mix and food. Stockpiled food is useful in a variety of situations, including unemployment.

"If you have a stockpile of food, and you get hurt at your job and don't have income, you still have food," he said.

> Items available at the store include mylar food storage bags, long term food buckets, cans and bags, emergency water filters, blankets, military clothing and military-issued civilian clothing used by various branches in Europe, MREs sold individually or by the case, machetes, axes, small and large first aid kits, five gallon fuel cans and ammo.

Price says the price range at the store starts at \$1 and goes into the hundreds.

For more information, find The Prepper Depot on Facebook or stop by the store. The store is at 35890 US Highway 280 in Sylacauga.











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## Childersburg is open for business, mayor says

**By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

Childersburg is a growing city, and more people are looking to do business in the south Talladega County municipality.

Several new businesses have opened in Childersburg in the last year, including the Dairy Queen, which opened in late January. Childersburg Mayor Ken Wesson attended the grand opening and even tried his hand at serving a soft serve cone with the traditional Dairy Queen Q curl on top.

"We started working on having a Dairy Queen in 2017. Due to highway work and other things, it took a little longer than we wanted, but we are glad they are open now. Everybody loves getting their Dairy Queen," said Mayor Wesson.

Dairy Queen is best known for serving fast food items such as hamburgers and chicken tenders, as well as frozen treats, including Blizzards.

Blizzards are a combination of soft serve and particular add-ins. Certain Blizzards are on the menu year-round, while others are seasonal treats. Recently, Dairy Queen added red velvet Blizzards to the menu in honor of Valentine's Day. Soon, Dairy Queen will add mint brownie Blizzards to the menu in honor of St. Patrick's Day.

The new Dairy Queen is at 32871 US-280.

Mayor Wesson is glad to see new businesses calling Childersburg home.

In addition to new businesses, more important gains for Childersburg included the hirings of a new fire chief, Shane Phillips, and parks and recreation director, Brad Logan. Some of Chief Phillips' improvements for the town include purchasing LUCAS chest compression devices and video laryngoscopes.

More improvements for Childersburg include the new water works building and the currently under-renovation rec center. The rec center will have new ADA-compliant restrooms and bleachers, redone floors, improved air systems and a new multipurpose room. Rec center improvements are expected to be finished in March or April.

"I am grateful for an administration and city council that all want to work together for Childersburg," Mayor Wesson said.













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## 2021: A record-setting year for the Coosa Valley Chamber of Commerce

**By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

The Greater Coosa Valley Chamber of Commerce is located in Childersburg, but as the name suggests, it serves a much larger area.

Tom Roberts, chamber director, says things have been different—some good, some bad—over the last couple of years due to COVID-19, but he is looking forward to continued improvements.

One of the upcoming improvements Roberts is looking forward to in the area is the East Alabama Rural Innovation and Training Hub (EARTH). Once it is operational, the hub will provide many resources for the area, including workforce development training in several sectors, including hospitality.

"Creating training opportunities for the next generation of workers is vital for them and our businesses. Tourism and hospitality is so huge for our area," said Roberts.

He said the chamber set a record in 2021: 17 ribbon cuttings at new businesses during the year.

"We have one coming up next month, and we should have three more coming up after that. The businesses are just too busy to set a ribbon cutting. They are so busy because they don't have enough help," Roberts said.

He added that plenty of jobs are available ranging from entry level to the highest skilled positions. He admits having a surplus of available jobs is a nice problem to have, but it is still a problem. The laborer shortage has contributed to a few businesses closing in the last year.

"We lost a couple of good businesses. One owner struggled with the mandates, then couldn't hire enough people to keep the doors open. He lived out of town with his family, and driving back and forth trying to run a restaurant was too difficult," said Roberts.

Although some businesses have closed, there are new businesses in the area: boutiques, "shoetiques," restaurants and a business services center that does everything from hiring temporary workers to screening employees to accounting and so on.

Roberts says the chamber works to make sure the area has the means to attract new businesses. Part of that effort involves improving the roadways to allow for more traffic.

According to Roberts, the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) widened the bridge over the railroad and is now working on the Coosa River Bridge where US Highway 280 goes over US Highway 21 in Sylacauga.

The chamber held a job fair last year and also hosted some virtual events.

"I am trying to get us back to a more regular routine of events and activities. COVID knocked out a lot of our events. We went 12 months without our coffee meetings. The same thing happened with our leadership class," Roberts said.

One upcoming event he looks forward to is Coosa Fest 482. The festival will be held in downtown Childersburg on Saturday, April 23, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. The vendor application deadline is Monday, April 11.





A scene from Childersburg's most-recently held Coosa Fest



"The event is a big outdoor birthday party for Childersburg," Roberts said. "There will be a stage with music, and there will be food vendors and other vendors. The day we announced we were holding it again, I heard almost immediately from half of the vendors from the last event. We had about 2,500-3,000 attendees when we had to postpone our last Coosa Fest to August, but we have had up to 6,000 attendees. It all depends on the weather."

He was also impressed with the crowd that attended last year's Christmas parade in Childersburg.

"There were no gaps in the entire route of the parade. It was beautiful, and the crowd was overwhelming," Roberts said.

He wants the public to be cautious but also active in the community. "We can do more together. It is easy to break a match, but if you put a dozen matches together, you can't break them."

Roberts says there are several events the chamber is not responsible for that it still supports including the Parks and Recreation Department's Summer Fest coming up in late May.

Just like new businesses in the area, new events and activities are starting to get lined up. At least three people have approached Roberts about music festivals, he said.

"We do not have to be in charge of the events to support them. My ego retired 20 years before I will. I just want people to know about things and be able to take advantage. That always has been my job and always will be."

Creating training opportunities for the next generation of workers is vital for them and our businesses. Tourism and hospitality is so huge for our area. State Rep. Ben Robbins speaks during an event promoting the East Alabama Rural Innovation and Training Hub (EARTH).

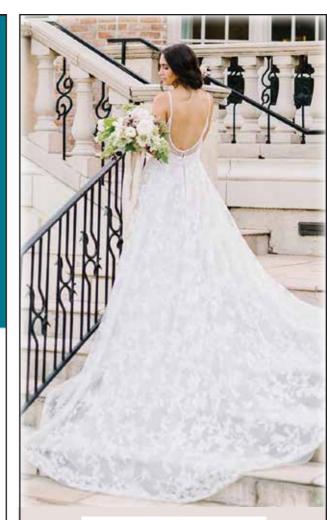
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## Sylacauga's Diamond Fitness seeks to take the stress out of staying in shape

**By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

Fitness, according to Diamond Fitness owner Megan Boggan, is about more than weight loss.

"Fitness," she said, "is very important both physically and mentally, as it is about the overall well being of a person."

Diamond Fitness is one of the latest businesses in Sylacauga. The gym and fitness center provides residents the opportunity to workout in group settings, tan, eat lunch in one of their lounge chairs or just simply come by and relax.

"I have always loved fitness," Boggan said. "I started out as a yoga instructor and things just blossomed from that point on. I wanted to provide group instruction classes and fitness groups because the option for them in the area was low. I figured it would bring a different approach to fitness in the community, but I also wanted to create a place where moms and dads could come where child care is offered. I know what that headache is like to want to workout but have to find a sitter or end up not going at all because there is no one to watch your little one. I have been there. I have two of my own, so I get it."

According to Boggan, her gym and fitness center was created for both men and women, but is targeted towards women and moms, considering that she too is a mom and wanted to create an environment where there was support and a family dynamic. There are even two rooms for youngsters with trained child care workers that watch the kids while the parents work out. One room is for kids ages 3 months to 6 years old and the other is for kids ages 6 to 12. The facility allows youths 13 and up to work out. Each room is equipped with a staff member, appropriate toys and activities to keep them busy,

Since her days in high school, Boggan has always been active, whether she was on the dance team, running track or playing basketball. Then in college she ventured more towards yoga. With working in various gyms in the area and having 14 certifications in fitness for personal training, zumba, yoga and bungee, she strongly believes she is well-equipped with the knowledge to help others get to where they want to be. She loves learning and sharing her knowledge with others to help them be their best selves.

"So many women want to get in shape but have no clue on where to start is another reason why I decided to establish my business. There are others who want to take care of themselves and dedicate more time to self care but cannot. The focus of achieving self care should not have to be sacrificed for your child each time. Even if you just want a few minutes to yourself, I have massage chairs available that can be used without having to work out. I understand how important it is to just find the time to collect your thoughts. I have had some moms just come and eat lunch here, and that is okay. Sometimes just 5 to 10 minutes can make a difference."

Boggan's understanding of moms does not just stop at offering child care. The business occupying the spaces above Diamond Fitness have created a one-stop-shop step-up for the busy mom or person who just needs a little extra pampering but is short on time. She mentioned that the businesses above her are a hair salon, nail shop, lash studio and tanning center.

"My favorite class to teach would have to be zumba. It is taught twice a day, once during lunch time and then during the night class. In our night class we have about 35 to 40 women, so I believe I am doing something right. I love to dance, plus it's a fun class to teach, so it's a win all around. My biggest reward is to see the stress melt away from people that walk through the door. I love that so much."

The pandemic, Boggan said, hasn't been a detriment to opening Diamond Fitness. She believes that most people are ready to take care of themselves, and this is the first step. Plus, it actually helps with the stress of being cooped up in the house so much.

"My advice to anyone trying to lose weight is to get up, start moving, and watch what you decide to put in your body. I am here to not just provide a service, but to help make a difference."

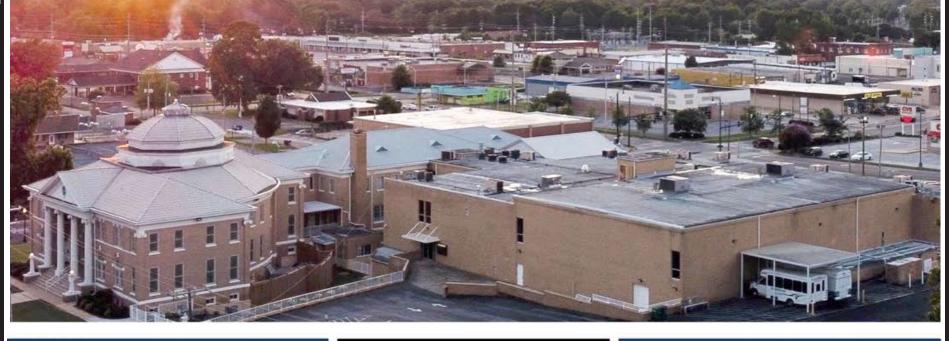
Diamond Fitness is at 2555 Forest Glen Road in Sylacauga. It is open Mondays and Thursdays from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Tuesdays from 6 a.m to 8 p.m., Fridays from 6 a.m to 3 p.m., second and fourth Saturdays from 8 a.m to 11 a.m.

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**COMMERCE: SYLACAUGA** 

## Fuller retires from longtime role as CEO of Coosa Valley Electric

#### Staff report

After 38 years, longtime Coosa Valley Electric Cooperative CEO Leland Fuller retired in January. Under his leadership, the organization were responsible for bringing in multiple new industries and businesses to central and east Alabama.

Sylacauga is one of 16 cities to which Coosa Valley Electric provides electricity services.

Jeff Lynn, president of Central Alabama Community College, and State Rep. Steve Hurst wanted to honor Fuller with a proclamation to show their appreciation for his work to help enhance the services provided to the citizens in Talladega and surrounding counties.

"Leland was one of the first people I met when I became president at CACC," Lynn said. "His leadership and guidance have meant so much to this organization and the people who are served by the Coosa Valley Electric Cooperative. Reliable electric services are crucial in the recruitment of new businesses and industries, and Leland helped ensure that this area of the state is on the cutting edge. This proclamation is a small token of our appreciation for all he has done throughout his career. I look forward to continuing our strong relationship with new CEO, Jon Cullimore" Lynn's proclamation expressed support of industry and job growth and stressed that CACC is committed to meet and support all industry in this area.

Hurst said he has known Fuller for many years and commended him for his service and dedication.

"I think the world of Leland Fuller," the legislator said. "You will not find anyone more dedicated and driven. When Leland made his mind up about a particular project, and he felt like that was the way it needed to be done, he would fight for it to the very end. I have always admired that about him, and I want to thank him for the 38 outstanding years of service to this area. "



From left are Rep. Steve Hurst, Leland Fuller and CACC president Jeff Lynn.



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The Daily Home

**COMMERCE: SYLACAUGA** 



## Prince Music: A full-service music store and recording studio

**By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

Brandon Prince owns Prince Music in Childersburg, a recording studio that offers music lessons and sells certain instruments and equipment.

"I have done music my whole life. I started playing guitar when I was eight years old. I started playing saxophone when Fayetteville started their first band when I was in eighth grade," said Prince. "I didn't start singing until I was 21 years old, just singing along with the radio."

Musical talent runs in the family. Prince's father and his side of the family have played music all their lives. In addition to his natural talent and his muDial Band after recording music for the band.

The recording studio is equipped for solo acoustic acts or an entire choir.

"I focused a lot of my time on it. There is multiple thousands of dollars of equipment in there ready for you to just come and record. You can record voice overs here, too. In fact, I just had somebody come in to record poetry with music behind it," Prince said.

The fee to record in the studio is priced by song rather than by the hour and depends on how many people are being recorded.

Music lessons offered at the store include guitar, saxophone, drums and piano.

"A lot of people want to play something. They don't realize that it is not super hard to learn; it just takes time," said Prince. "If they stick with it through the first couple months, they can do it." Prince learned something about "sticking with it" when he signed the lease for his first location—the day before everything shut down for the pandemic.



sic teachers, Prince also studied at Berklee College of Music.

Prince likes playing classic rock and blues and plays with several different bands, including the Jake Dial Band which mostly plays classic rock and some country. He started playing lead guitar for the Jake

If you want more info on Prince Music, search for Prince Productions on Facebook.







## PSI Alabama offers Sylacauga and Childersburg residents 'a place to call home'

**By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

#### **PSI Alabama is a property** management company that strives to maintain and offer quality apartments for residents to call home.

"In the years of being in this business, I have learned that we are in the background of things," said president and property manager Ron Coleman. "We work to keep everything going, and as long as we're doing our job right, we aren't noticed. It is only when something is wrong that the background gets the spotlight, but I am happy to say that I put in effort around the clock to stay in the background. I don't have to be noticed. I would rather not be because then I know I am doing my job."

Coleman has worked in the field of property management for more than 20 years. PSI has grown over the years, and he now manages seven apartment properties, including Creekside, Oaks and The Landings in Sylacauga and Pineview in Childersburg.

On a recent day, Coleman was writing up a lease for a new resident, before visiting a property to handle something there, with a list of other tasks to accomplish after that. He said it seems like there is more to do than the time he has, but he loves what he does. "I love helping people grow and being in this line of work, I not only get to see people grow, but be a part of them having a home and it allows me to offer something of value," he added.

"In doing my job, it helps protect residents' jobs, investments and keeps them in a place to call home. For instance, Creekside Apartments were built from scratch, and that complex has 98 units, which is equivalent to 98 places people can call home."

Coleman's believes his commitment and dedication has created a larger selection of properties for residents to choose from, brings more business to the community, helps with job opportunities and helps families and individuals live somewhere safe and affordable.



The Landings is one of PSI Alabama's three properties in Sylacauga

In doing my job, it helps protect residents' jobs, investments and keeps them in a place to call home. For instance, Creekside Apartments were built from scratch, and that complex has 98 units, which is equivalent to 98 places people can call home.



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## Sylacauga Chamber of Commerce moves ahead 'full force' with programs, events

### The past year sees 'exciting' growth for the Sylacauga Chamber of Commerce

**By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

The Sylacauga Chamber of Commerce welcomed 22 new members and celebrated 12 ribbon cuttings in the last year.

"We have 325 members and have added 10 since the beginning of the new year. This is exciting growth for the Sylacauga chamber," said Laura Strickland, executive director of the Chamber.

Strickland says Sylacauga has a truly diverse business community contributing to the economic vitality of the Sylacauga region, with small businesses as the heartbeat of the community.

Many of the small businesses are family-owned with multiple generations contributing to their success, and some of these small businesses have been a part of the community for over 60 years. In addition to small businesses, Sylacauga continues to experience industrial growth.

"Marble byproducts continue to be attractive for many of our industries, as well as our proximity to four major automotive manufacturers in Alabama and neighboring states. We are fortunate to have two major state highways in Sylacauga, Highway 280 and Highway 21/231. Our rail system is also an asset attracting industry. Our Highway 280 corridor continues to grow along with our historic downtown business district," Strickland said.

Strickland believes that the resiliency of businesses and industry in the Sylacauga region is a result of being a smaller community.

"Our community was extremely fortunate that we did not lose any businesses as a direct result of COVID in 2020. We actually had a number of new businesses open in 2020 at the onset of COVID," said Strickland, "We did have a couple that prior to COVID had considered retiring or selling their business and when the shut down took place, that was their encouragement to move forward with their pre-COVID thoughts."

The Sylacauga Chamber of Commerce is moving ahead full force with programming and events. Strickland says the chamber's work is outside of their building—supporting the economic growth of the region and business and industry



Laura Strickland serves as executive director of the Sylacauga Chamber of Commerce.

partners.

The chamber will begin hosting its State of Series of Quarterly Regional Updates to include healthcare, education, government and economic development.

"We are introducing a new event for the community with a touch of a previous event. This event is 'Taste and See the Marble City.' This will be a combination 'Taste Of' event where our local restaurants will have samples of their delicious offerings, along with a business expo. This will be a wonderful opportunity to see what types of products and services our business community has to offer. We have a number of new restaurants and caterers in the Sylacauga area with a diverse cuisine offering. This will be a great opportunity to sample some tasty treats! This event will be held in the fall," Strickland said.

The "Crazy Days" event will also be returning this year. Planning is underway for a weekend of fun, food, music, costumes and great deals in Sylacauga's downtown business district.

The chamber will host two jobs fairs for the Sylacauga re-

gion, one in the spring and another in the fall. The third annual ConnectHER Women's Conference will be held in October." At this event, we will present the Sylacauga Area Woman of the Year award," Strickland said.

The chamber's annual dinner, last held in 2019, returns on April 21. The chamber will recognize area business and industry achievements, as well as individuals contributing to the growth of the community.

A monthly networking event, Chamber Connections, will return on March 10 at Heritage South Credit Union. This event is another opportunity to meet and connect with other business owners in the community. It will begin at 9 a.m. at the Highway 280 location.

The chamber will continue expanding Christmas events this year, including the Christmas Open House in November, Christmas in the Park, Christmas Parade and the light pole decorating contest which Strickland says was a huge success in 2021. The chamber will expand the light pole decorating to include spring, summer, fall and Christmas.

Strickland believes Sylacauga's greatest asset is its people. "The one thing that I hear most often from those that have lived here their entire lives, those that have returned, and newcomers to the area is how friendly everyone is in Sylacauga. In addition to our amazing people, we have the beautiful outdoors with Lake Howard and the Pinhoti Trail, along with the world's whitest marble and Blue Bell Ice Cream. These attractions draw visitors from around the world to our region of Alabama," said Strickland.

Strickland added that the chamber is honored to have the opportunity to work in partnership with the region's businesses and industries, as well as local municipalities to help the Sylacauga area grow.

"Our region is fortunate to have quality educational resources, healthcare and expanding recreational facilities and programs. These are what attracts new growth opportunities. It's an exciting time to be a part of this growth."





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### New owner of That's Hot! Boutique uses her background in education to communicate effectively with customers

**By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

A little over four months ago, Lori Avery Edwards, an educator who will be retiring in May, became the new owner of That's Hot! Boutique in Childersburg.

"This is a true blessing and has been a joy so far. I am the owner of a place that I have shopped with for the past 16 years," she said.

Growing up as the child of a Deaf adult, or CODA, Edwards frequently helped her mother communicate during conversations with people who did not speak American Sign Language (ASL).

"I always wanted to be a teacher. I think it was probably because of my mother being Deaf. I was making sure she understood what was being said or helping other people understand what she was signing," Edwards said, "This was 40 years ago. There wasn't texting. I wanted to work with Deaf or special needs kids and help them see what is out there. I also wanted the teacher schedule, so I could be at home with my kids during summer and holidays."

ASL is Edwards' first language. Edwards earned a degree in special education with an endorsement in Deaf education and worked at the School for the Deaf for the majority of her career. She is currently working at Talladega High School and will soon retire at the end of her 27th year in education.

"I never thought about owning a business, but I was looking for something to supplement my retirement, and I didn't want to work for anybody else. Julie Butler owned That's Hot! for 16 years, and she told me last year she had sold the business. Then that fell through. God told me to ask her about buying the business."



Edwards, her sister and another sales representative who works at That's Hot! also use ASL while broadcasting live videos on social media.

"We are on Facebook, TikTok and Instagram, and when we go live, one of us will be signing so that Deaf people watching the video know what we are advertising," Edwards said.

Items sold at the boutique include unique jewelry and artwear with lots of one of a kind pieces, a variety of in-style women's clothing, a selection of men's apparel, clothes for newborns up to 4T, a makeup section and more.

Some items may be \$10 or so, but for the most part, the price range is \$20-\$120.

Edwards says they sell some shoes for \$175, and they have some that are \$39.

February 14 marked four months of ownership of That's Hot! Boutique for Edwards, and she says it has been stressful-but a good stress.

"I have really enjoyed the people," said Edwards, "I still could keep teaching, but I found out I will be having my first grandchild at the end of May or early June, and that just felt like another sign to retire from education."

For more information about That's Hot! Boutique or to see what is in stock, visit https://thats-hot-boutique.myshopify.com/.







## Blue Horizon Travel is 'grateful' for the support of the Sylacauga community



**By FAITH DORN** Special to The Daily Home

#### Priscilla Cleveland owns Blue Horizon Travel, a full service travel agency based in Sylacauga.

Originally, Cleveland worked in education, as did her husband, who also served as a city council member and later as mayor of Sylacauga in the 1990s.

Following her retirement from education, she eventually considered opening a travel agency. She had experience planning travel for different groups and was able to translate her experience working in education to the world of travel agencies. Cleveland took several courses and seminars to learn more about the business. "A lot of people don't realize how much work it is. Like education, you don't get into it for the money. You do it because you enjoy performing a service for others," said Cleveland.

She explained that a traveler would want to use a travel agency rather than booking a trip on their own because it saves time.

"You are using someone who already knows the product. When you have a plumbing issue, you can Google how to fix it, but you really want somebody who is already working as a plumber to fix it," Cleveland said.

Cleveland does not charge a fee to book travel. Her income is commission-based. "If you called Disney, Disney is going to give you the same price they give me, but they will give me a commission for bringing you to them."

She considers herself a helper and enjoys working with people to help them create their dream vacations. People enjoy working with her, as well, because so much of her business is repeat customers and referrals.

The pandemic affected Blue Horizon Travel in terms of cancellations and rebookings, but Cleveland says business was still good.

Prior to Covid, cruises were the most popular vacations, she said.

During the pandemic, Cleveland says that places like Disney, Florida, Las Vegas and New York became really popular because there were not a lot of restrictions, as long as travelers followed whatever requirements the locations had.

She says all-inclusive vacations and Disney vacations are very popular.

"Some agencies specifically do cruises or Disney, but I do the whole gamut," Cleveland said, adding that she helps organize a lot of reunions and class trips and senior trips, as well as trips for senior citizens.

"It can take a few days for me to respond

depending on what kind of trip you want to do, but I will get back to you," said Cleveland.

Where does a travel agent like to travel to? Hawaii.

"There are many places I've been that I like to travel to, but Hawaii is one of my favorites."

Cleveland's advice to travelers is to research the desired destination and surrounding area.

"Check the place out thoroughly. Read the resort website. Look for reviews and find out if there have been any issues. Read all the reviews, not just the first two or three."

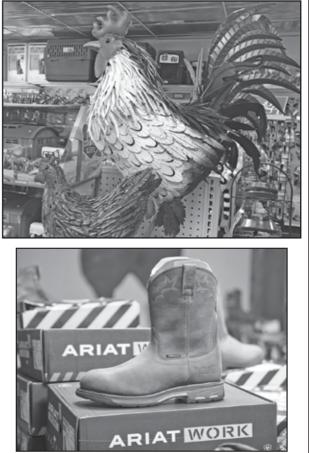
Cleveland is grateful for the support of the community. "The Sylacauga community has been so good to me. I couldn't have done this without all the help from my family and friends and students. Referrals have been the heart of my business," Cleveland said.

For more information, call (256) 245-7900 or visit bluehorizontravel.net.

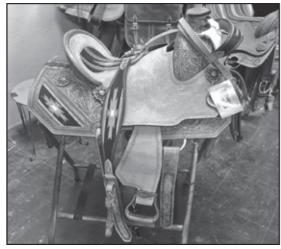
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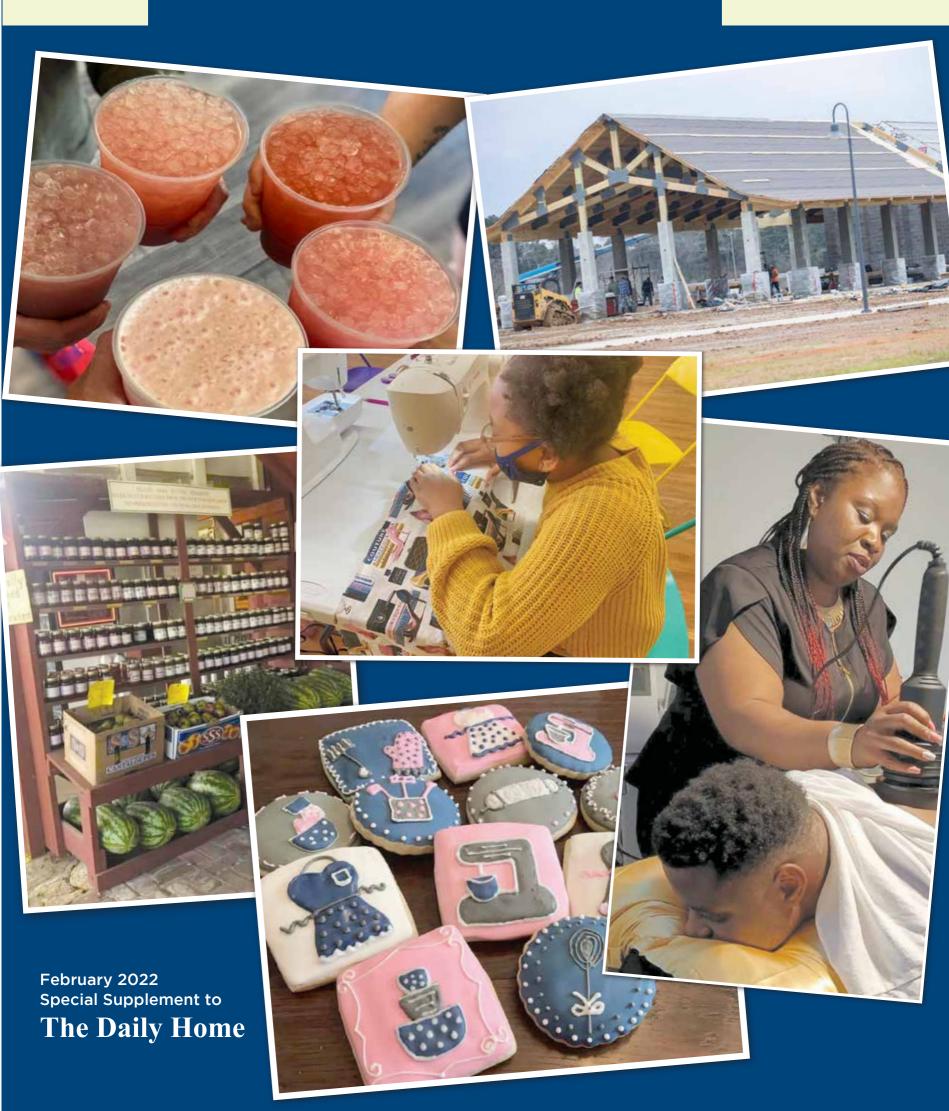






# **UPDATE** 2022

# a salute to COMMERCE Talladega, Lincoln & Munford



## **IIIUPDATE** 2022 **II**



## Cookie With a Twist opens new location on Talladega's Historic Downtown Square

**By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

#### **Craving something sweet?**

Cookie With A Twist in Talladega has a unique menu catered to pleasing your sweet tooth. The best part is that you can go in and pick up your order at its new location 119 Court Square North, or book the food truck and offer something sweet for everybody.

Tara Logel, owner, continues to keep the state on their toes with her vast selection of baked goods from iced cookies, cookie cakes, to the twist of edible cookie dough. She found her second niche while she was working in banking full time for 20 years.

"Once I hit my mid 40s, I asked myself if I wanted to retire from banking and when I reached that mark what would I do? However, I realized I was young enough to take on a second career instead of waiting until I was 65 to start. So in pursuit of my advance her baking skills, but she has always had a

second career, I went to culinary school at night while working my full time job. Upon finishing culinary school, I did some research and discovered the choices of locally owned cookie shops were few opposed to the chained ones. So that was my answer, but I wanted to offer more than just the standard cookie, cupcake, milkshake selection. This led to the creation of my edible cookie dough and unique flavors."

Logel might have gone to culinary school to





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love for baking and cooking. She mentioned that she comes from a big family, and during family events everyone would ask her to bring her delicious cookies for dessert. So her desire for a cookie based business is not out of the norm. In taking a leap of faith towards her second niche she found more happiness because she has been able to interact with customers more which led to her clocking out for good from her days of banking.

When asked how she selected which items to list on her menu for customers, she said that the concept then and now is to offer things that people do not normally see. For instance, her cinnamon roll cookie, New York Cheesecake cookie or bacon chocolate chip cookie. Yes, bacon and chocolate! She admitted that she is always searching for new recipes to offer as she likes keeping things unique. Even though her twist of edible cookie dough keeps her ranked pretty high on the list of customers who



have become her regulars.

"Before opening the food truck and the storefront, I originally opened a shop in Hoover and it was doing good but I had to close because the overhead was becoming too much. However, in a sense it worked out for the best because I wanted to reach more people so I invested in a food truck, and to me it helped generate more business with customers in various cities. After a while of driving back and forth between cities, and selling my home in October 2020, I came to Talladega, got me an RV on the lake, and it all just happened so organically. I found a shop and realized it was perfect for the area and it would give people a home base. In July of last year I made that decision to open. So there is the storefront and I still have the food truck which is quite popular and can be booked for festivities, events, special occasions, companies, and even neighborhoods."

With five years in business, Logel is determined to continue to expand by the years in her business as far as the areas she reaches, customers, and most of all an appeasing menu selection. Recently, she has added sandwiches to the menu that are made fresh daily, is working on adding seating in the store so that customers can have the option to enjoy their sandwiches, doozies, or sundaes in the shop, and eventually open the space up for parties.

Logel believes that her business benefits the community as there are not a lot of locally owned family businesses in the area that can provide personalized services, something unique, and catering. Her biggest reward in what she does is seeing the smiling faces of customers when they are satisfied, she admitted. Many customers love her hand drawn iced cookies, but her cookie cakes have led to some memorable stories that she herself will cherish and use as motivation to keep going.

Cookie With A Twist is partnered with a third party for the option of delivery and they are open Tuesday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Friday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Hours are subject to change, and the food truck location varies based on where it is booked. Stop by and grab your new favorite treat, or check them out online at *www. cookiewithatwist.com.* 

## **BUSINESSES** from decades past to decades to come. Each year brings new opportunities for continuing growth and progress. These businesses in The Daily Home coverage area have shaped our communities' future. Read about them here.



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## At Bodied By Whoosah, the focus is on health and well-being

## Talladega wellness center promotes healthy lifestyles

**By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

"Whoosah?" you might ask. "What's Whoosah?" April Davis has the answer.

"Whoosah means a state of relaxation and clarity. It means releasing negative energy, taking a deep breath, and starting over. All things you must do to achieve any goal...even weight loss," said Davis, the owner of Bodied By Whoosah in Talladega.

She is a multi-talented businesswoman determined to help people be their best selves starting with their health. Her business offers body sculpting, ionic foot bath detox, hydrating bbl, skinny wraps, waist trainers and more centered around a better and healthier lifestyle. She originally started her business online and in August made the decision to move her business into a physical location, and she could not be happier.

"When I first started this business, to move into a physical location was not a part of my plans, but the opportunity presented itself, and everything just started to fall into place. My decision to start my business comes from a place of personal experience and wanting to help others. I have been on a weight loss journey and along the way I have lost 135 pounds with about 7 pounds. to go. It has been a hard journey, but as people saw my progress and heard my story they would inquire what did I do, could I help them, and so forth. So that inspired me to want to help others beyond those that just approached me because I know others too might want help."





April Davis, center, with, from left, Brenda Rodgers, Emelia Pate, Dominic Funes, Jamie Burgess, Kandee Wills and Jessica Bryant.



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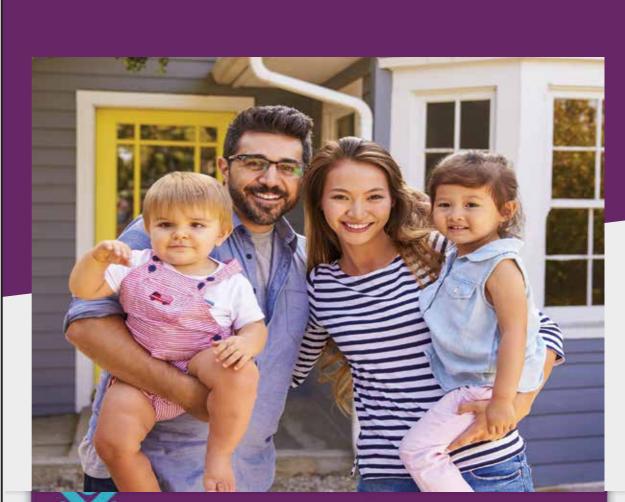
Celebrating six months in business, Davis is excited to offer a business where she can relate to every one of her clients. She believes that her business makes a difference in the community because she treats everyone like family, offers a no judgment zone, a safe environment, and has the overall goal to help clients fall in love with themselves from the inside out.

When asked what advice she would give to those who want to lose weight, Davis advises to never give up. That someone only does not make progress when they give up. All small things add up to something big, so keep going. Because if one thing is changed in the way you eat, it can make a difference.

"What makes Bodied by Whoosah so unique is that I am on the journey with every client. I can honestly relate to them within the moment of the good and bad days on this commitment. I am not selling a false hope because I too am going through the exact things they may experience of everyday not being good, some days being better than others, or looking for those results of hard work to show. I get it!"

Outside of her business targeted towards overall health and wellness, Davis works in the healthcare field part time as a technician. Being in the medical field also helped produce the idea of her second business Whoosah Wear which is her scrub line. Her line of scrubs are sold inside her Bodied By Whoosah location at 600 East Battle Street in Talladega. The hours of operation are Thursday to Saturday from 10 a.m to 6 p.m and for information or to make an appointment check out their website www.whoosahworld.com.

"To see the smiles on clients' faces from them working the program and seeing the progress they desire, makes everything that I do truly worth it and



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motivates me more."

When I first started this business, to move into a physical location was not a part of my plans, but the opportunity presented itself, and everything just started to fall into place.

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### Family-owned business continues legacy of serving the community in Munford

#### **By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

If you believe in taking on do it yourself projects, handling repairs, or simply need some home and car improvements, the hardware store is usually the first stop on the to do list.

Carter's Hardware & Auto Parts is a family owned business that has been around for generations providing the city of Munford materials and supplies for their hardware, construction, and auto needs.

Gary Carter's grandfather started this business years ago. To continue the family legacy, when Carter got out of college, he stepped into his role as owner and has continued to follow in his grandfather's footsteps of

being a service to the community.

"Working in this line of business is something that I have done forever. I can't pinpoint the exact day the business was opened, but I know it has been around for some time. I haven't been around a hundred plus years, but I believe this business has, it feels like. In working here and being a part of this community, dealing with the people is the most rewarding part year after year."

The hardware and auto parts store offers genuine care to customers that keeps them coming back, and creating generational customers. There are some customers who have grown up around this hardware store, and have had kids and now their kids shop there for their needs. The cleanliness of the store, knowledge of products, large variety of stock and the overall helpful-

ness keeps people coming back instead of going anywhere else. Whether it is reserving a U-Haul or getting propane, the people of Munford appreciate this family owned business.

"The pandemic has caused problems with some stores getting supplies and we too have encountered that problem, but it has not ever stopped business. In fact, we have continued to do pretty well and surprisingly good in spite of this pandemic and that in itself is truly a rewarding feeling."

When asked if the business received any awards in this past year, he said no, but admitted that the people of the town are the best award as they are a big part of what keeps the business going, and he could not be more grateful.



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## Northside Nutrition seeks to build relationships while serving up tasty, good-for-you treats

#### **By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

A shake without the guilt ... yes, it exists.

Northside Nutrition is a smoothie and juice bar that offers meal replacement shakes in a variety of flavors, and some of them even come with toppings. Instead of skipping out on breakfast, a Cinnamon Toast Crunch or Fruity Pebbles shake can be that meal instead. The options are endless to select, plus the shakes can help with weight loss as they are low calorie and are packed with protein.

However, the menu does not stop there as they also carry beauty teas that can contain collagen, vitamins, and energy boosters. Loaded teas can boost energy, help with focus, digestion, and are made with no sugar, but filled with a vast selection of over 100 flavors. Speciality drinks can come with protein that helps curb one's appetite. Protein coffees that can be served hot, iced, or in shakes, and Fit 5 meals have been recently added to the menu.

"We believe in our products. I myself have personally been taking them for a year now and love how they make me feel. So I love the feeling that we are doing something great for the community. Most times have a place like ours, but saw that in this small town, there was not one. My husband and I love the small town feel and being able to make a difference, and being here certainly makes us feel like that is what we are doing," said Jennifer Wallace.

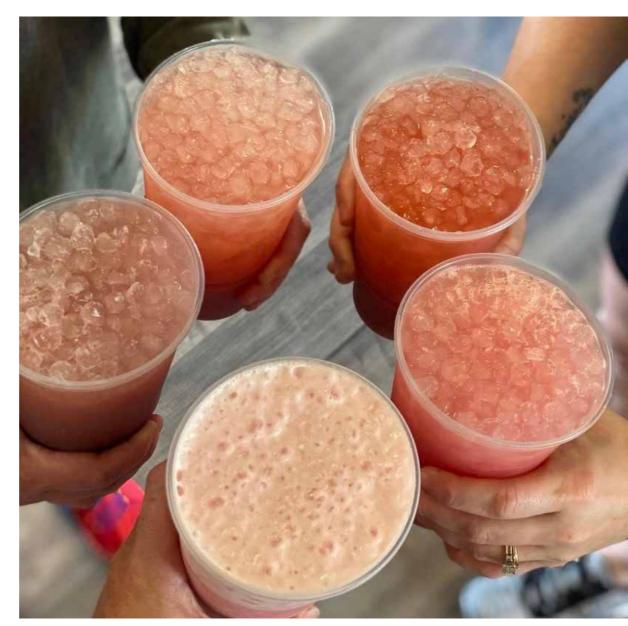
Wallace and her husband Shane are the owners of this new location in the Lincoln area who have come into the community with open arms. She mentioned that as natives of Talladega, they want to be more than just a new business in town trying to just profit off of the community. She admitted that they are fully invested and have been reaching out to the schools, working to help small businesses stay local, and support the community as a whole as much as possible.

"We are here to make friends, build relationships and not just focus on money. We truly want people to feel like they belong and they are appreciated. It's not always about the business, but the life you can touch. We just truly care for people. We greet everybody that comes in the door. There is no just walking in and not being addressed here. I strongly believe that it takes one small gesture to make someone's day by something as simple as a compliment or helpful word is the best part of what we do."

With four months in business, Wallace and her husband look forward to growing as a business and in the community. They offer special discounts to the Military, healthcare workers, teachers, and Honda associates. They are open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m, Tuesday and Thursday from 5 a.m to 4:30 p.m, Saturday 8 a.m to 3 p.m and closed on Sunday. To check out the full menu of flavors, drink options, and boosters check them out on Facebook or stop by 45269 US Hwy 78 in Lincoln



Northside Nutrition owners Shane and Jennifer Wallace



We are here to make friends, build relationships and not just focus on money. We truly want people to feel like they belong and they are appreciated.





## Lincoln's Landing is a boon to commerce in north Talladega County

**By TAYLOR MITCHELL** *Tmitchell@dailyhome.com* 

The City of Lincoln said the city is planning to take great strides in commercial development during the coming year.

Mayor Lew Watson said one of the driving factors in this will be the city's new tournament fishing park Lincoln's Landing, which opened in 2021 after the boat launch itself was finished. Work on the park will continue into 2022, with building and pavilions still a work in progress at time of writing, but Watson said the park has already been working to bring more people into the city. According to documents provided by the mayor the park hosted 37 fishing tournaments frum June 16 to Dec. 31, 2021. These tournaments featured anywhere from 15 to 150 participating boats.

Lincoln's Landing is also driving other development around the city. In Late January, the city approved the development of a master plan for development for 34 acres of land on the interchange at I-20 exit 164.

Lincoln Commercial Development Authority Chairman Matt Elliot said during the council's Jan. 25 meeting that the proximity to the exit was one of the reasons for the desire to develop the plan.

"It's less developed, you've got the fishing park traffic

The mayor said the ordinance will also give the planning board greater latitude in approving projects.

"It allows them to look at a proposed project and if this project makes sense on paper and it looks very workable and innovative it gives them the right to approve that project," he said.

"It gives them the flexibility of adopting things that may not meet some of the current standards, but it's adaptable because it makes sense."

The mayor said the idea of the ordinance is to get away from needing exact amounts of frontage or other small items and instead look at what project is the highest and best use of the property in question.

"This ordinance is designed to be a living document that evolves with the community based on the needs as the market develops," Watson said. "The core principle of this zoning is highest and best use. In other words you want people to enjoy the highest and best use of their property."

He said the idea is to look at market needs for zoning instead of just arbitrarily designating an area one thing or another.

Watson said 2021 also saw the beginning of the conversion of the former Lincoln High School Site to Carillon Oaks Lincoln, an assisted living and memory care facility. The renovations and new construction on the site is still in progress but the mayor said he thought the facility will make a great addition to the city.

"It will bring in something new to the community, something that's been needed," he said. "Not to mention 65 jobs."

Watson said that Stemley Enterprises has also begun work on a new building in Lincoln's industrial park, bringing another new business to town.

In a called meeting on Feb. 15, Lincoln also approved its part in the sale of a speculative building in the industrial park. Watson said at the time he was not at liberty to say who the buyer was, but said it was a new industrial business that will bring 100 jobs to the community.

The city has also gotten some smaller businesses like an Arby's that has opened in the Pilot Travel Center near exit 168.

Watson said next year he really wants to work towards getting more retail, hotels and restaurants into the city.

"I think that's a focus," he said. "We have a good team to help us search out more business and that's one of our goals this year is to bring in more retail. We believe that creates more jobs and revenue for the city so we can deliver more services."

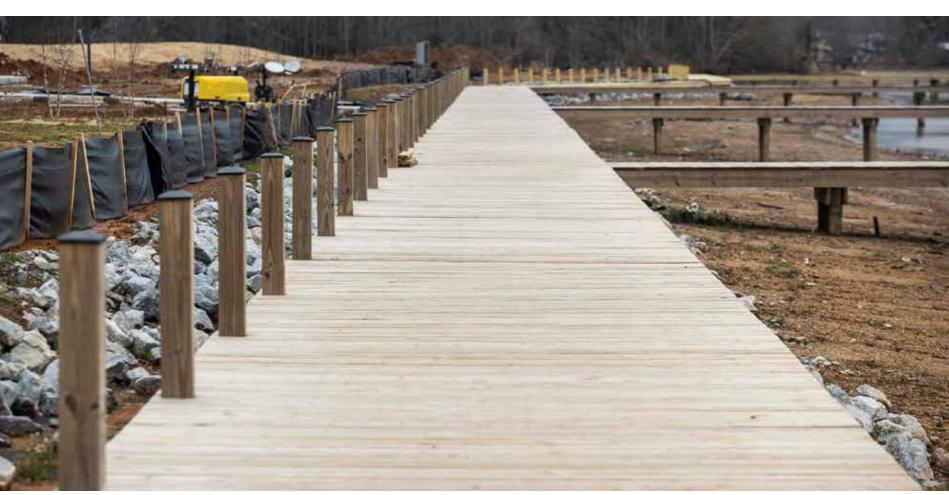
that's ideally going to come off of that exit, you've got it being a main access to Honda, so there's a lot of opportunity and a lot of potential," Elliot said at the time.

Watson said that the city has also spent the last year developing a new zoning ordinance that is meant to better serve the city's needs.

"The new one basically is a much more traditional type zoning," he said "it takes into account areas of manufactured housing and single family housing. It also establishes a new zoning that will be brought in as resort commercial, to reflect the type of activities we want to see develop on the lake."

Watson said that new classification may be put into use soon as there is currently a resort being developed next to Lincoln's Landing.







### Central Alabama Community College partners with Intel for development of artificial intelligence for workforce

#### Staff report

Central Alabama Community College (CACC) has signed a partnership agreement with technology giant Intel to help with the development of artificial intelligence (AI) throughout the southeast. This program will be the first in the state of Alabama and one of the first in the country.

The college has campuses in Talladega, Alexander City and Childersburg.

"This is a tremendous opportunity for not only Alabama but the southeast," Jeff Lynn, CACC's president said. "We consider it the highest honor to be the community college selected to lead this initiative in Alabama. We will be the leader in technology training for AI which will allow us to supply the training and qualifications to all of the innovative companies throughout the state and region."

This program, started by Intel in 2021, is designed to prepare students for the future integration of AI in the workforce and will provide the skills and knowledge they need to be hired.

"This is just the beginning," Lynn said. "The American Association of Community Colleges and Dell Technologies are also partnering with Intel to provide a network that will put community college students at the front of the line with companies across the world."

Another key to the partnership is ensuring that the programs are affordable and have the resources needed to develop virtual and on-campus labs. Currently Central Alabama Community College and one other community college in south Florida are the only two colleges that have been selected in the southeast.

Students who successfully complete

the program will receive a certificate and be eligible for hire by companies around the globe. Plans are to begin offering this program at the Prattville campus very soon.

"We are in the beginning phases of the program but we expect a huge influx of students," Lynn said. "I think it's very important to note that this initiative was started with community colleges. We have outstanding students who are ready to be the pioneers and leaders with AI and the workforce."

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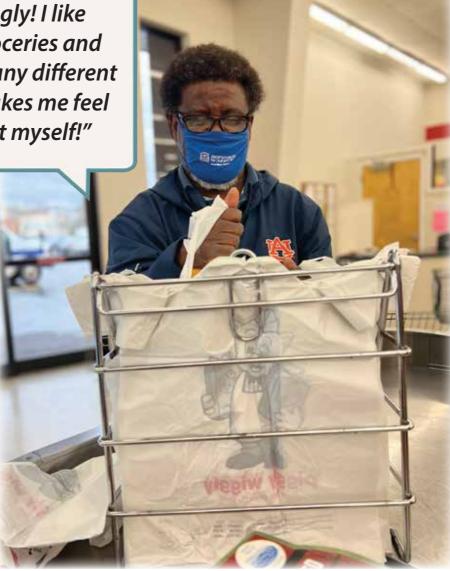
"I enjoy working at

E. H. Gentry Facility students work here at Piggly Wiggly, and other businesses throughout Talladega, in community job placements to gain real-world experience to achieve their career goals. Businesses benefit from a diversified and skilled

Piggly Wiggly! I like bagging groceries and helping so many different people. It makes me feel good about myself!"

untapped labor pool with E. H. Gentry job coaches and job development teams who work alongside the student and business.

Employment Services at E. H. Gentry Facility, a unit of Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind, work with adult students who are deaf, blind, deafblind and those with other disabilities from throughout Alabama to provide the necessary tools and technologies needed to develop and enhance their employment skills. At E. H. Gentry Facility, students combine perseverance and belief with the right training to prove to themselves and to others that they are, indeed, limitless!





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## Miss April Fashion Girl seeks to instill confidence, collaborative spirit in local youths

By Buddy Roberts Special Projects Editor

April Clark loves color, and that's evident as soon as one enters her studio at 121 N Court Street in Talladega. The walls, the chairs, the displays, the fabrics - they're all vibrantly colorful, reflecting a love that she enjoys sharing with her students.

Clark is the owner of Miss April Fashion Girl, an apparel brand for young girls, and she conducts Sew Fashionable! By Miss April sewing classes for children and adults at her studio.

On a recent Tuesday morning, Clark, ensconced in a bright purple chair in front of a sewing machine, explained the purpose of her studio, her background as a designer and what she hopes her students take away from their experiences in her classes.

Miss April the designer: "I'm self-taught, and before coming here, I was fashion stylist for one of the top models in Raleigh, North Carolina - she's also one of the top 100 models in the country and I worked on editorials for local and regional magazines. I was also a fashion expert for the CBS affiliate in Raleigh. Then I began designing clothes for adults. As I was doing that, I discovered that I loved more was designing them for kids. It's a little more fun."

The Miss April Fashion Girl Line: "The clothing line I developed is affordable for parents and stylish for kids. It's simple, but we play with a lot of colors, patterns, and prints. The apparel is available for purchase on my website, or you can come here to the studio and shop. What you'll find isn't your basic t-shirt and jeans. It's something special, for an occasion, like a birthday or Christmas, something that's cute yet still affordable."

An upcoming milestone: "April 1 is our brand's anniversary. We'll be 5 this year. When I started in 2017 - as an ecommerce brand then, strictly online - I wanted to create a brand that I as a child would have wanted to get something from. The goal has always been to keep everything affordable, so that if a child has \$20 or \$5 or \$1, they'll be able to afford something from our line."

Clark's line of products includes clothing, cosmetics, 18-inch and 14-inch fashion dolls an art supplies, some of which have been picked up by major retail stores. "The bigger partnerships like that help me to be able to do more for kids through





classes and programs."

Sew Fashionable !: Clark's studio (which opened on Coffee Street last September before moving to its current space on the Square) hosts after-school sewing classes for students ages 10-17 from 4:30-6:30 p.m. Mondays-Fridays. Craft and hand-sewing classes for ages 6-9 are held from 3-5 p.m. Wednesdays. Sewing classes for children and adults are held on Saturdays from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. and 1-3 p.m., respectively. The studio is also available for parties on weekends, and plans are underway for a spring break Fashion 101 camp scheduled for March 21-25. "The students will get to learn how to create their own textiles, put together a mini-fashion collection, start their own brand and get their products in the mall - all the things a fashion designer does in the beginning stages."



#### The Daily Home

**COMMERCE: TALLADEGA** 

More than just the fashion: "A significant part of the brand is to instill confidence in girls. Many of the students who come to my classes have never sewn before, and they're so proud of themselves when they learn the skills. I can also see the pride in their parents. One parent told me her daughter mended her pillows using the skills she learned in class. That lets me know this is working. Fashion and design teach a lot of different things: math, reading, patience. The books we use are teach everything step-by-step: colorful patterns, how fabrics lay, where to pin, where to stitch, and seam allowances. Everyone starts as a beginner, and they grow in the program.

"Another thing we're helping girls to see is that you can be collaborate in fashion even at a young

age. We have created four characters, all young girls, from different backgrounds with different skills. One is a designer, one is a writer, one is a photographer and one is a stylist. They're all different, but their commonality is fashion. That's what's happening here. We're all coming together with our different backgrounds and talents to collaborate and have fun. At this time, I think that's something that's needed in the world."

**On being in Talladega:** "I moved here from North Carolina in 2020, and I'm really excited about the potential here. The city manager has a really great vision for downtown and Talladega at large. I'm excited to be in on the beginning steps of that. It's a great time for the city. I saw the growth potential here, and how there is an entrepreneurial spirit, not just in the city but the entire area. I also noticed that there are not enough programs for kids, so I hope what we're doing here will be a part of making Talladega a destination, with people coming from Pell City, Lincoln, and Oxford to come have this experience here.

"I like the small-town feel in Talladega. My student are so polite and so sweet. The children in this area have great manners and a great work ethic. I love seeing my students take projects home to work on them outside of class."

For more information about Miss April Fashion Girl: Visit the studio, call 256-474-5788, email hello@ missaprilfashiongirl.com or visit www.missaprilfashiongirl.com and @missaprilfashiongirl on Facebook.





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Page 6B Weekend Edition, February 26-27, 2022

**COMMERCE: TALLADEGA** 

The Daily Home



# Holmestead Farm in Talladega county offers a true farm-to-table experience

#### **By VALLEAN JACKSON** Special to The Daily Home

Cut out the middleman, and get your fresh fruits and vegetables directly from the farm they are grown on.

Holmestead Farm is located at 6582 County Road 7 in Talladega county. The locally owned farmers market and country store strives to grow quality produce that customers can pick themselves. With 12 years in business, this farm continues to be a service to the community by offering fresh food without preservatives, which can help to improve the quality of life.

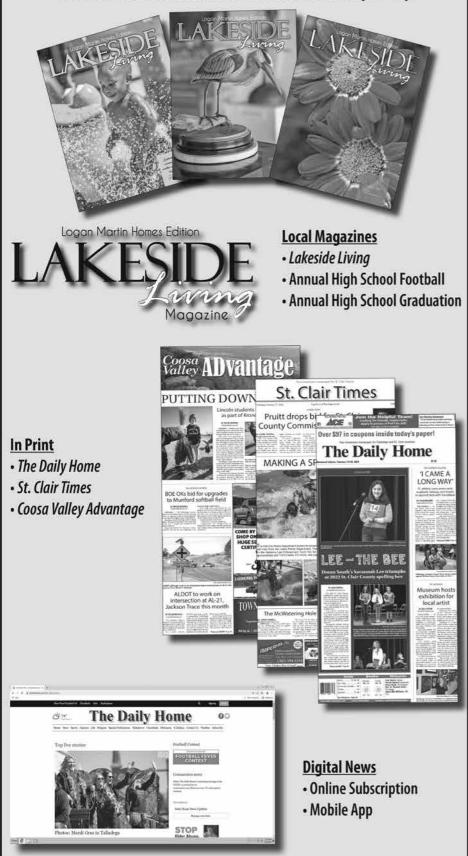
"I am no stranger to farm life as I was raised on one. So starting my own is just something that has always been a part of me. I was in the marine business for about 35 years, but I let my sons take that over and they are the owners of that business now. Once I retired from that business, I decided to live out my love for farming. I'm 83 years old now so I don't do much work, now I just manage," said Bobby Ray Holmes, owner.

Most farmers markets give customers access to produce that has been picked already, but at Holmestead Farm, people can have hands-on experience. It's a reach down, put your knees in the dirt, hands to work type of experience that one cannot get from most farmers markets. Plus the prices are affordable. In the field and vineyards, when it season blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, muscadines, scuppernongs, turnips, collards, tomatoes, corn, and more can be hand picked. Or they can be bought ready to go from their produce shed. Everything is grown with organic fertilizer and is pesticide free.

To shop at the farmers market or country store supports local business and helps the environment by keep-

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#### **COMMERCE: TALLADEGA**

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ing down excessive travel. Most importantly, you know exactly where your food is coming from and that it is naturally grown. The country store is stocked with already picked produce, cider, jams, jellies, amish cheese, butter, nuts, homemade peanut butter, over 100 types of pickled products, their famous honey and plenty more. Then there is also the option of purchasing your own trees, flowers, and plants to produce your own harvest.

Holmes has a business that is making a difference in not just the lives of customers, but throughout the community. Students and groups from the surrounding schools and organizations visit the farm and gain experience of being in the environment of where some of their food comes from, how it's grown, learn the importance of farming, and get to taste freshness that can't be bought in stores. He has donated trees to clubs and throughout the area for others to plant.

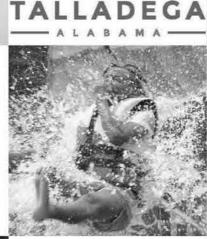
Holmestead Farm truly helps to meet the needs of the people, help people eat healthy, and possibly produce a generation of farmers that will be able to be just as much a blessing to others as well as within the community they call home.

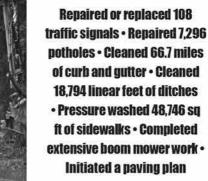
They are open Monday through Saturday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m, and closed on Sunday. Check them out on Facebook to see what is in season, call ahead to place an order as they sell out quickly sometimes, or visit them online at www.holmesteadfarm.com.



### We've been busy

The City of Talladega installed LED lighting and ShotSpotters • Established a partnership with Crime Stoppers • Increased police training • Hosted the City Manager Seddrick Hill Sr. Community and **Employee Appreciation Day at Shocco Springs** 







Partnered with neighboring communities to develop a

### restoring pride!

**Received the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) Optimization Award for** providing high-quality water • Hosted 5 free dump days and 2 E-Recycling Day events • Held 2 food drives



Purchased a Ford F-550 Rescue **Truck and a new hydraulic** tool to better protect our community • Updated pay scale and implemented incentives to better attract new firefighters and police officers





I am no stranger to farm life as I was raised on one. So starting my own is just something that has always been a part of me.



Updated computer network •

**Provided traffic control for 23** 

parades/events and projects

Building a new website and

diverse materials to enhance

communication

with citizens

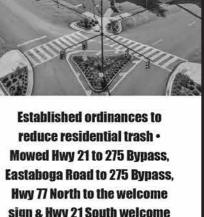
**Began bidding process to remove** 14 blighted homes via \$200K CDBG Grant • Received \$72K Assistance to Firefighters grant, \$15K Alabama Historic Commission grant, \$2,500 **Library Services Technology Act** grant & Alabama Power grants totaling \$4,500

comprehensive tourism plan Invested \$700K into nonprofits and small businesses Partnered with Career LIFE to cultivate success in students & retain local talent





**Raised over \$66K for Christmas on the Square**  Joined the Main Street **Alabama Network Community** to prepare for the Main Street application process and **Alabama Cities of Excellence** 



sign & Hwy 21 South welcome sign to 275 Bypass • Added a library drive-through window





Pictured left to right: Ward 2 Councilwoman Vickey R. Hall, Ward 3 Councilman Joe Power, City Manager Seddrick Hill Sr., Mayor Timothy Ragland, Ward 1 Councilman Dr. Horace L. Patterson, Ward 4 Councilwoman/Council President Betty C. Spratlin and Ward 5 Councilman Trae Williams



