

My Hometown

July 2023
Special Supplement to
The Daily Home

Nostalgia in the hometown news

When I started by first newspaper job (more years ago than I care to remember), one of my assignments was to compile information for a weekly feature called From Our Early Files.



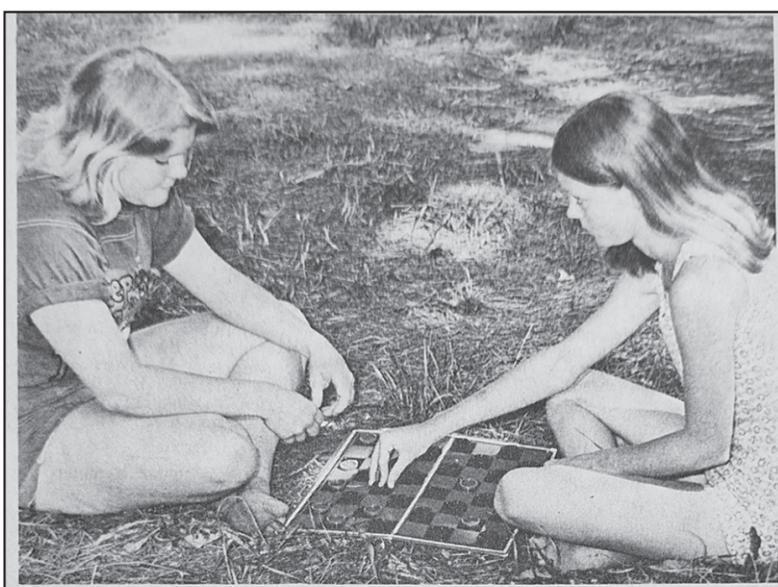
Buddy Roberts

I'd spend a couple of hours with the bound volumes of newspapers past, going back to the 1930s or 40s and selecting four or five news items to summarize. They often included reports about servicemen home on leave from World War II (or leaving home for it), how great a time everyone had at the community ice cream social, the latest movies that were showing at the old Tooga Theatre, and what prices were at the corner grocery.

I looked forward to my time with the archives each week, and I missed it when I eventually moved on to other assignments and From Our Early Files was discontinued altogether. Such features used to be popular in community newspapers but have since fallen out of fashion as the demographic of newspaper readership changed. Which is kind of a shame, because they were a glimpse (albeit a small one) into a community's history. I know I learned a lot about my hometown during those happy hours spent leafing through those crumbling foxed pages.

So, for this year's My Hometown, I thought it might be fun to bring From Our Early Files out of mothballs and present a Daily Home version from July of 1973, 50 years ago.

Our hometown newspaper looked quite different back then, and its pages were filled with weekly features that, not unlike From Our Early Files, have been lost to history. Features such as Better English, Modern Etiquette, and Beauty at Home (one entry of which described "a good bust-developing exercise" and explained how to turn fruit juice concentrate cans into an "extra big" hair rollers set. Other regular columns were Eastaboga News, Childersburg Personals, Bemiston News, and weekly lists of admissions



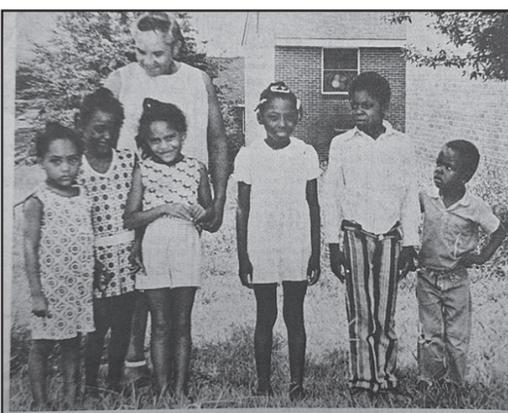
CHECKERS IN THE PARK — These girls are taking advantage of the planned activities at Salter Park by enjoying a game of checkers. They are Dorothy Hurst, left, daughter of Mrs. Lucille Hurst, and Debbie Martin, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jimmy Martin of Talladega.

From the July, 1973 pages of The Daily Home

and discharges at Sylacauga Hospital.

Following are some of the top local headlines during that month:

- Avondale Mills Present Predicts Textiles' Comeback
 - Man Arrested For Allegedly Threatening Childersburg's Mayor
 - Property Owners Protest Annexation at Lincoln
 - Pork Shortage, Higher Prices Felt in Talladega, Sylacauga
 - County Jail Being Vacated While Remodeling Goes On
 - Draft Beer Sales Legal In St. Clair
 - Lightning Damages Speedway Boulevard
 - Goodwater Gets a Medical Doctor
 - Mobile Home Dispute Disrupts Council Meeting
 - Three Newborns To Same Sylacauga Couple
 - Talladega Gets Funds To Equip New High School
 - Man Charged With Stealing Corn
 - 36 Brood Cows Found Dead Near Choccolocco Creek
 - Cattle Deaths Still Mystery (two days later)
 - Death of Cattle Blamed On Poison (later that week)
- The cattle killer apparently got away with it, as I could find no report about his capture.
- Alongside the local news 50 years ago was a host of national news items that included reports about Sen. Ten Kennedy's visit to



COUSINS VISIT — Left to right, Angie and Vicky Pitts of Chattanooga, Tenn., and Yvette Dorchester of Boston, Mass., are visiting their grandmother, Mrs. Elsie Pitts at her home in Mountainview in Sylacauga. To their right are Lisa and Marty Pope and Gregory Todd of Sylacauga.

Alabama to support George Wallace, the death of actress and World War II-era pin-up girl Betty Grable, and Billie Jean King's tennis triumphs at Wimbledon.

Following are some more intriguing national headlines reporting the current events of a half-century ago:

- Politician Seeks 'Honest Employment' ("A liberal Democrat who now makes \$23,000 a year as a New York State assemblyman inserted an ad in the New York Times Sunday asking for 'honest employment,' saying he's 'fed up' with politics.")
- Nixon Refuses to Produce Subpoenaed Telephone Tapes
- Watergate Committee Member Says Nixon Should Cooperate In Probe
- Who's A Liar? (Sen. Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii apparently didn't believe John Ehrlichman's testi-

mony during the Watergate hearings)

• 93-Year-Old Californian Believes in Complaining (he'd been arrested 235 times for protesting at the State Capitol)

- FBI Agents Kill Man In Case of Mistaken Identity
- Slayings Blamed On Roaming 'Freak' (about a serial killer in San Francis-

co)
 • Sinatra's Yacht Destroyed By Fire
 Returning to the present, though, we here at The Daily Home hope you enjoy this year's edition

of My Hometown. It is our privilege to present it to you, and, as always, we encourage you to support the advertisers who have made it possible for us to do so. Happy reading.

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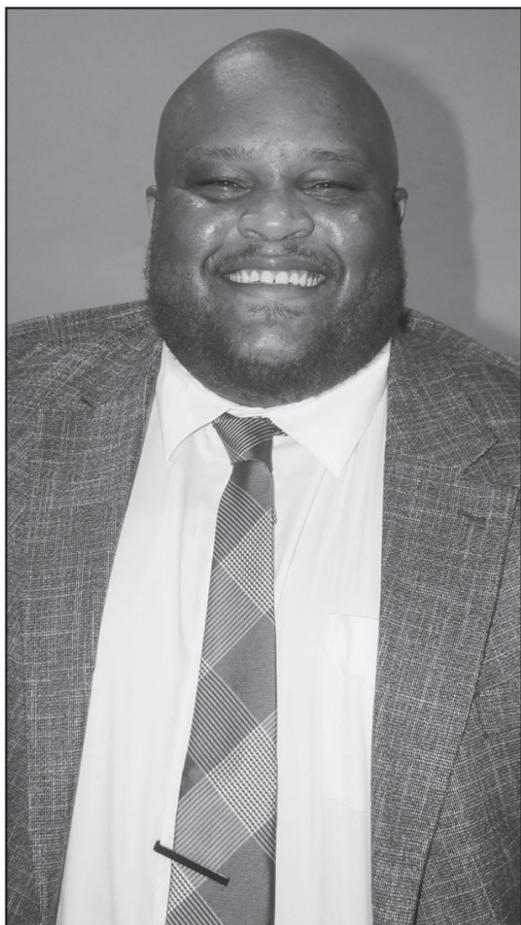
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“Coach Shepard took command of the room”

Ashville High School has a new, history-making head football coach

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Kirakias Shepard has made history at Ashville High School and achieved a long-held dream of his own at the same time. He is now the first Black head football coach the high school has ever had, as well as the first-ever in St. Clair County.

Since he was four years old, he has always been a part of a team, Shepard said. “I was playing tee-ball in the dirt and running around with a glove bigger than I was. Then by age 9, I fell in love with football and played inside linebacker and running back throughout high school.”

He decided not to pursue athletics in college. “When I graduated from high school, I went to UAB to study medicine and thought I was done with sports,” the coach said. “But in 2011, I was asked to be a volunteer coach at Pell City. I agreed, and I loved it so much that it made me change my course of study from medicine to education and coaching.”

Shepard has never before served as a head coach, not because he didn’t want it, but because “I kept being told that I didn’t already have head coaching experience. But you have to be a head coach before you can have head coaching experience, so I continued to try.”

Ashville High’s new principal, LeAnn Ford, was a day into her new role when she began the process of selecting a new head football coach. She describes it as “initially overwhelming,” but after a long day of interviews, the panel of seven narrowed down the candidates to about six to select from.

“Coach Shepard took command of the room and was confident, and that stood out to me,” Ford said. “The way he’s going to hold kids accountable on the field and in the classroom is something we definitely need. I also think that he will be a good support for the teachers, as its important to work together in order to get the best

results in the classrooms and on the field.”

Shepard said he got the call from Ford relatively quickly after his interview, which prompted him to think that it was a call to that Ashville had decided to go in another direction with someone else.

“When Ford called, she asked how I would feel about being an Ashville Bulldog. It was a very surreal moment when she told me I got the job. I had been praying for this. I was filled with so many emotions to finally get the chance to lead the program and live in the reality of what I had been dreaming of. I told her in my interview that this is something I have waited for a long time.”

Given the Bulldogs’ record in recent seasons, the coach says he and his staff have to “hit the ground running. Offensively, I want to spike kids’ imagination and find ways to get them excited. Defensively, I want them to play tough with effort and energy. We lost a lot of our seniors last year. We had a meet-and-greet already, and the turnout was big. I believe the key to more wins and better outcomes is working to build the program from the ground up.”

Shepard says that what he most looks forward to is “seeing the kids have success on the field. I love the competitive aspect of football, but I love the togetherness most. It is important to me to instill in these players that respect for the person beside them and building those relationships that can last a lifetime. I have friendships I made when I played sports that I still have until this very day. It’s a brotherhood and I pride myself on building these young men.”

Winning, he continued, is not what all the game is all about. “When it’s all said and done, nobody will remember how many games we won but the impact that was made on their lives. Yes, I want us to win, but I also want to help build and mold these young people.”

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Submitted photo

Renovation of one of five science labs at Talladega College will be complete this summer.



Submitted photo

A scene from Talladega College's 2023 commencement ceremonies



Submitted photo

Dr. Gregory J. Vincent assumed the role of president of Talladega College last year.

Talladega College continues to expand programs, sports and its campus

BY VALLEAN JACKSON

Special to The Daily Home

Talladega College has been a pillar in the community for more than 100 years, fulfilling the faith-based mission that began with founders William Savery and Thomas Tarrant, both former slaves.

"It is an absolute joy and honor to serve as the 21st president of Talladega College," Dr. Gregory Vincent said. "We have the best origin story. During my time here, I want to continue to follow in the footsteps of that faith-based mission and work to faithfully fulfill the sacred mission accredited by our founders," said Dr. Gregory Vincent.

As the oldest private historically Black college in Alabama, the institution offers the opportunity of earning an education that is affordable through 17 degree programs. It also offers 20 athletic programs, 12 intercollegiate teams, and an elaborate campus that has undergone renovations and upgrades.

The year is only half over, and the following are just some of the highlights that the college has already achieved.

At the end of 2022, Talladega College's Marching Tornadoes accepted an invitation to participate in the 2024 London New Year's Day Parade. Since being established in 2012, the band has made quite a name for itself, and this opportunity will be its first-ever overseas performance.

In January, the esteemed institution partnered with Brown Girls Do Gymnastics to launch the nation's second HBCU women's gymnastics team and hired former SEC champion Aja Sims-Fletcher as head women's gymnastics coach.

During February, the college was awarded more than \$2.9 million to establish a broadband network for the benefit of the campus and the community. The network helps to provide the campus extensive internet services that extend into the city and county of Talladega.

Sports continues to expand as Talladega joins six Division II schools in the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference in offering a men's volleyball team. This new program is said to broaden access to a sport that is viewed primarily for women. As many as 20 males are looking to be recruited in the 2023-2024 academic year.



Submitted photo

Talladega College's Great Tornado Band has accepted an invitation to perform in London, England.

In continuation to expand opportunities for female athletes to compete, Talladega launched a women's acrobatics and tumbling program in March. Recruitment is ongoing, and competition is expected to begin next spring.

In April, under the leadership of Tamira Rounds, assistant director of intercollegiate academics programs and recruiting, intercollegiate acad-

emics resumes a new-found dominance. Rounds has the intent to develop and implement new competitive programs that include the Honda Campus All-Star Challenge, Model United Nations, speech and debate, chess, esports, cybersecurity leagues, HBCU Battle of the Brains, and more.

In May, Talladega College celebrated its largest graduating class ever at

its 148th commencement. Within the graduating class were 41 graduate students and 10 Talladega College staff members. The keynote speaker for the graduation was speaker Nikki Finney, a renowned poet and Talladega alumna.

Before the spring semester came to an end,

May ended on a high note with the college signing an agreement with Grand Valley State University in Michigan. The agreement provides qualified education graduates the chance to earn postgraduate degrees in curriculum, education, instruction, instructional technology

and school counseling at GVSU.

Renovations are ongoing to five research and laboratory spaces in Silsby Hall that are expected to be completed by summer's end, and several STEM students have been selected for summer internships at UAB.

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It's all in the family at Smith Tomato in St. Clair County

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Smith Tomato is a family-owned business that has provided fresh-grown produce to the town of Steele and across the country for 35 years. The business began with the late parents of current owners Kista Lowe, Chad Smith, and Phillip Smith. The three siblings carry on the family tradition and hope that they are making their parents proud.

The farm specializes in vine-ripe tomatoes but also offers cherry tomatoes, blueberries, bell peppers, peppers, cabbage, onions, squash, jams, jellies, and more to the public and distributors. According to Lowe, they plant between 100 to 120 acres of tomatoes a season and pick about a quarter million of the fruit for their 25-pound boxes.

"There's more to growing tomatoes than just putting them in the ground," she said. "I would say in fact there is a certain level of science to growing them. I have had people come in and say that they just prefer to buy them from us because growing them themselves is something they haven't figured out or do not have much luck with. The key to a successful harvest is that you have to know what they need. Do your research. Sometimes the problem can be the need for water, pests, or the plant could have some bacteria - the possibilities are endless. This is why you have to know what they need in order to see success."

Lowe believes the green thumb possessed by his family is something that was instilled in them as children. They grew up working on the farm, so it's nothing new or unfamiliar for them. Alongside the secret that their heart is in it and they find it as a good way to honor their parents, they are also continuing the tradition by keeping the business family-owned and operated.

"Almost everybody that works here is family except the contractor workers, and they have worked here so

long that they have become family. My kids work here, Phillip's kids work here, and even our spouses work here. I do believe that our parents would be proud. My dad definitely used to love seeing the kids out on the farm, and to know that we are still continuing that means a lot to us."

Smith Tomato's harvest season is between July and October. They begin putting plants in the ground in March and April, and

the market opens in July. In August, the farm hosts a "U-pick" that allows the public to harvest their own tomatoes. The going rate is usually \$5 for a five-gallon bucket.

"So it is like \$1 a gallon," said Lowe, adding that it is "truly a great deal that just involves doing a little of the work yourself, but it's well worth the it, and we usually have quite the turnout. We

Please see SMITH | Page 11E



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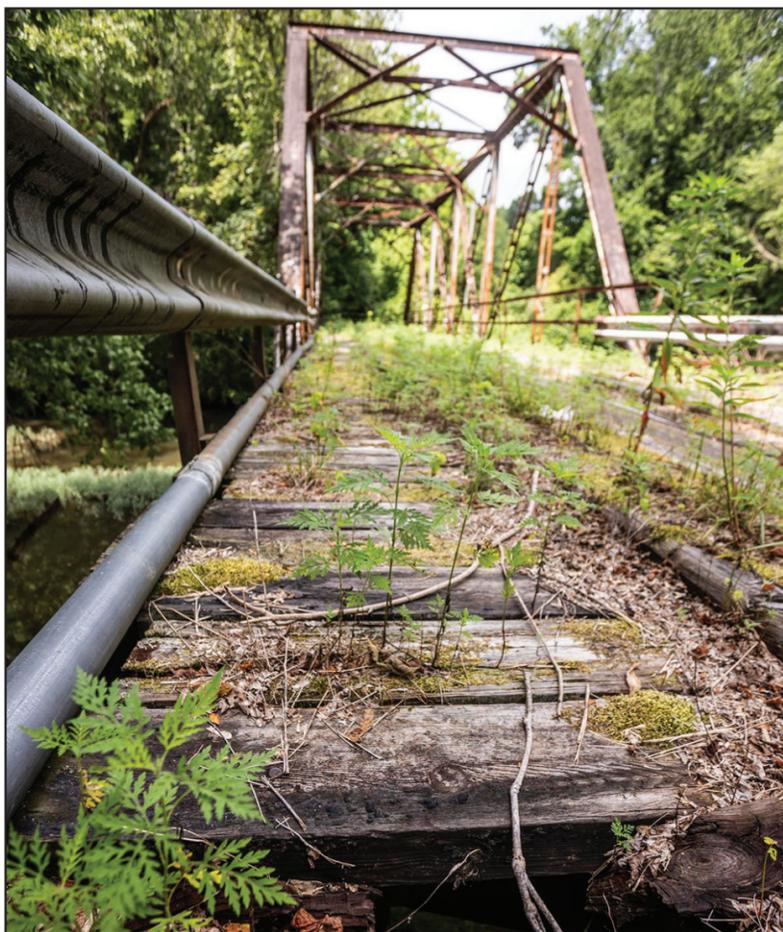
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The Bridges of Talladega County

We ask a lot of bridges. Every day, we walk, bike, and drive across them, trusting them with our lives



Susan Cook

without a second thought. While I don't know who constructed the first bridge in history, I'm fairly certain a near-by log

and good balance were involved. But the first real evidence of bridge-building technology can be traced back to Babylonian society in 4000 BC. A single brick arch a little over 700 feet wide spanned the river that flowed through the center of the ancient city.

These remarkable marvels of human ingenuity not only span rivers and gorges but also vast expanses of time, connecting civilizations and helping to shape the course of history. Bridges in all parts of the world have witnessed the footfalls of armies, the migration of peoples, and the plodding progress of trade.

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We ask a lot of bridges. These physical symbols of our inventiveness, strength, and perseverance serve as more than a mere means to safely cross. Maybe they hold the answers to all of life's problems.

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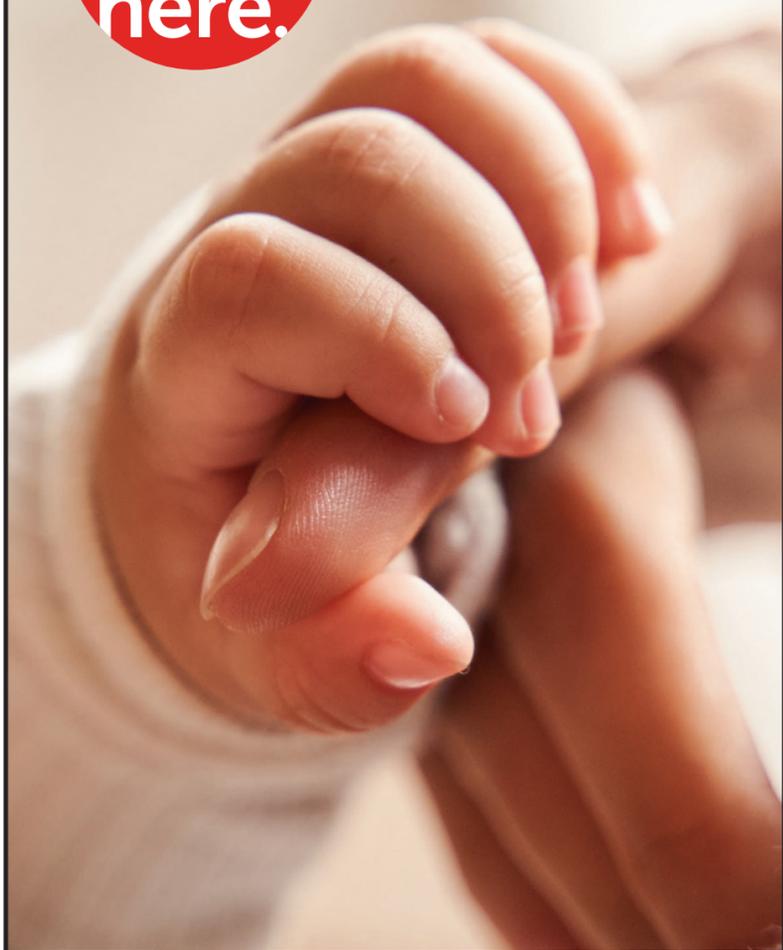
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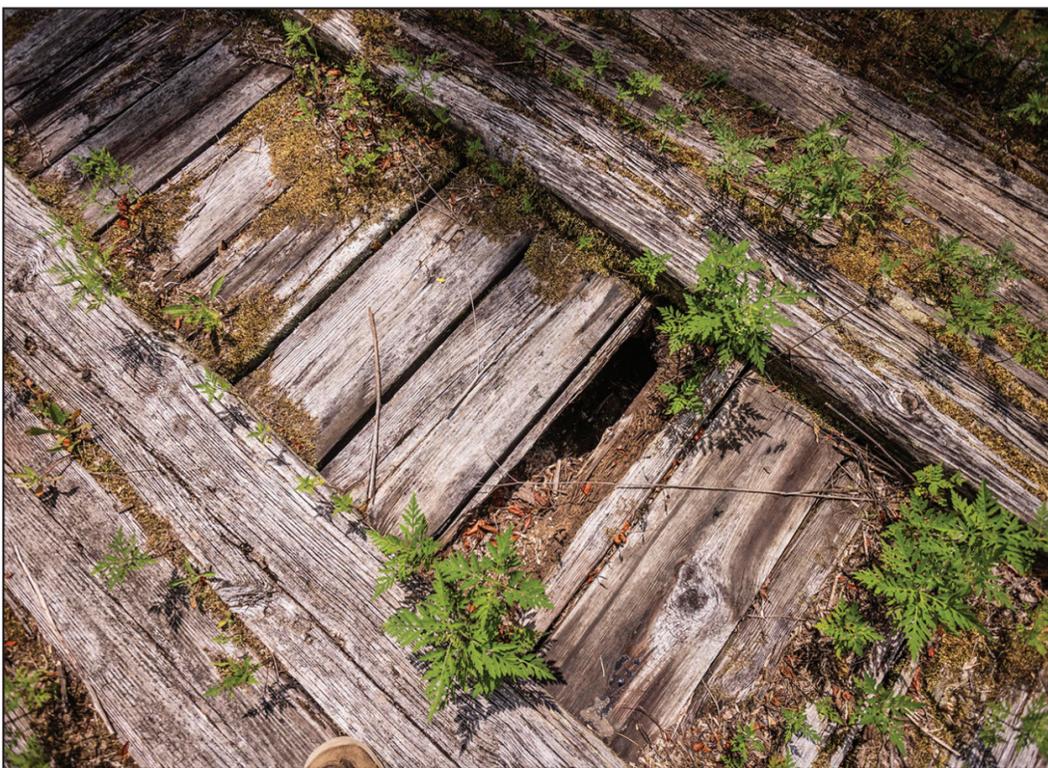
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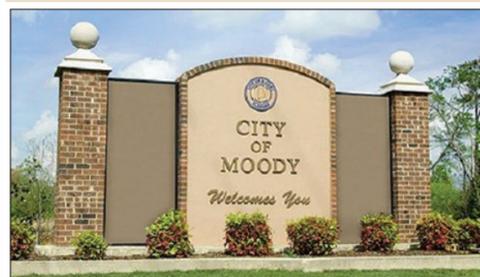
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The Bridges of Talladega County

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Submitted photo

The great-great-grandchildren of Mary Frances Stephens are, from left, Carter and Caroline Pressley, Audrey Johnston, and Creed and Cal Pressley.

‘Munford is our home’ Family celebrates 5 generations of mothers and daughters

BY SHERRY KUGHN
Special to The Daily Home

MeMaw, Grammy, Gran-Gran, and Mommy celebrated family together this Mother’s Day.

Mary Frances Stephens is MeMaw, the great-great-grandmother of the five youngest members of her family. She is 94 years old and proud of all her family members, including the subsequent generations of females starting with her daughter, Linda “Grammy” Galbreath, 73.

“I never thought from one daughter I’d have all this,” said Stephens as she swept her hands outward toward those who sat around her. She also has a son, Scott, who is 62 years old. Stephens has a grandson named Houston, 16, son of Scott and his wife Sherry.

All of Stephens’ family members live in Munford. Besides her and Galbreath in the five generational line, there are Andi “Gran-Gran” Johnston, 53; Jerica “Mommy” Pressley, 32; and the two little ones, Caroline, 8, and Carter June, who is one-and-a-half years old.

Each of the women has worked or currently works at jobs in addition to home-making.

Stephens was a seamstress at Palm Beach, a Talladega manufacturing company that once made men’s suits. She sewed waistbands on pants. After work each day, she would come home to her husband, Dink, who died 17 years ago. They raised their two children and gardened. Stephens canned and froze foods and cooked for her family.

Currently, she cooks and enjoys riding in the family’s golf cart and sitting in her recliner.

Galbreath, who is married to James or “Pop,” worked at International Enterprises in Talladega, which makes wiring systems for military airplanes. Next, she went to Honeywell, located then in Oxford. The company makes parts for repairing commercial airplanes. At home, she sewed her daughter’s Barbie dolls and made dresses for her daughter and grandchildren. She also gardened, and canned and froze foods from her garden as her mother had done. Currently, she cares for her home and gathers her family there after worship services each Sunday to share a meal she has prepared.

Johnston works for Hubbell Power Systems

of Leeds, a foundry that makes the connectors that hold the cables to power poles among other things. She and her husband Russell raised Tyler, who is married to Tesa, and she has another granddaughter, Audrey, age 5. Johnston said her grandchildren are her hobbies, and, besides spending time with them, she likes to read, but she has changed the tradition of gardening and processing foods. She likes to bake, travel, and enjoy her “luxuries,” such as having her hair and nails done.

“I am high maintenance,” said Johnston. “I believe I take after MeMaw, who often has her hair done.”

Pressley, whose husband Avery works at Honda Manufacturing in Lincoln, is a speech therapist who owns a practice in Anniston. The couple is raising

their four children.

Caroline plays softball and is a second grader who likes math, her friends, and church activities.

Carter June likes to play and has her own way of breaking tradition. She has given her Grammy the name of Nonna, at least for now. She has a fascination with one of her older brothers named Creed, who is four years old, and she copies everything he does. Her other brother is named Cal, age 6.

Pressley summarized the sentiments of having a loving family that lives close by.

“It is so special to see my babies have the opportunity to know their grandmothers the way I have,” she said. “We’ve always had a close-knit, loving family, and no matter where we travel, Munford is our home.”



Submitted photo

Mary Frances and Dink Stephens grew up in Munford and raised their family there. Mary Frances is 94 years old and has seen four additional generations of daughters. Dink died 17 years ago but is still remembered as a hard-working husband and father. The family said he would have enjoyed the younger generations of his grandchildren.



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Submitted photos

Members of the Smith Tomato family include, from left, Delaney Franklin, Skylar Glass, Braelyn Smith, Mandy Smith, Kady Franklin, Jon Lowe, Kista Lowe, Phillip Smith, Esther Smith, and Chad Smith.



SMITH

Continued from Page 5E

want to make sure the public is satisfied, and we know that some people enjoy the opportunity to pick their own produce. The U-pick is possible because we plant our fields in stages. When one field is finishing up in July, we can move to the next one and be able to make it through our entire season.”

As the tomato season comes to an end, Smith Tomato hosts its annual Fall On the Farm event. This year will be the seventh year, and it is something the family started as a way to interact and give

back to the community. “Our Fall On the Farm is like a fall festival,” Lowe said. “It’s the first Saturday in October, and it’s free to the public. We will have vendors, bouncy houses, activities, and more. It’s a one-day event. We still sell our tomatoes, but during that time, pumpkins, mums, sweet potatoes, and all of the typical fall items are available as well. Since we started this event, it has continued to grow each year, and we could not be more thankful.”

Smith Tomato is open seven days a week at 4575 Loop Rd. in Steele. For information about special deals or inventory, visit the farm’s Facebook page.

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St. Clair County Extension coordinator looks forward to new opportunities

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

“If you take the chance and get your foot in the door, you never know what doors it will open for you.”

Lee Ann Clark firmly believes that’s true. Since 2005, she has served as coordinator of the St. Clair County Extension Office. This fall, she’ll walk through a new door that has opened for her, taking on the role of assistant director of field operations for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System’s central region. She will oversee St. Clair County and eight other counties, including Autauga, Bibb, Chilton, Elmore, Jefferson, Lowndes, Montgomery, and Shelby.

“When the position became available, I applied for it but was initially hesitant because I enjoy what I do now,” Clark said. “However, I figured the knowledge and experience I have developed over the years I could take me into another role, even though I will miss what I am doing now. As for the interview process, it was

intensive. It was a six-hour interview that took place in Auburn. It started at breakfast and involved a questionnaire and a presentation. There are some people that said if it were them, they could not have done it, but I was determined to see it through despite the lengthy process.”

The old saying of hard work pays off continues to hold true for Clark as she counts down her days in her present role. A lot of the specifics of what she’ll be doing exactly are still being worked out, but one of the best aspects for her is that she will still be based in St. Clair. Her new office will be in the St. Clair Arena.

“The beauty of what we do is being able to address issues in our community,” she said. “Since I was in the sixth grade and the lady came in from the 4-H Club, I knew that was what I wanted to do. I can still remember the things she said when I was at age 10. In being exposed to the 4-H Club, I knew I wanted to work at the extension office one day. I love teaching in

this aspect. I could teach in a classroom, but I prefer this way.”

When asked what the extension office has taught her personally, Clark was speechless for a moment. After reflecting back on the past 18 years, she said, “Working at the extension office has taught me how to work with others and given me the chance to help people. As a hands-on learner, it has made so many opportunities available to me, and one of the biggest things I have learned is that a lot of people still are unsure what the extension office does or what it is exactly.

“One of my biggest goals has been to educate people more on who we are and what we do. We’re an extension of Auburn University and Alabama A&M University. We are full of resources that can benefit everyone, and we are more than just for people in agriculture. I strongly believe that we can accomplish the mission of our organization, and that is to continue to improve the quality of life.”

Submitted photos

Left: Lee Ann Clark demonstrates a recipe during an Extension-sponsored community program. Above: Clark enjoys visiting with friends while touring a local farm.

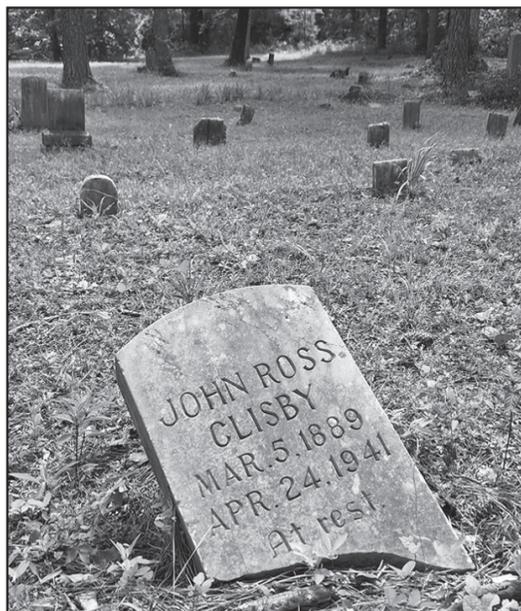


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The Cemeteries of Talladega County

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You're probably thinking, "Oh, it was just a trick of the light on a dark, cold evening."

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My ghost made its daring appearance in the bright bold daylight of a cloudless summer afternoon.

While I don't typically make a



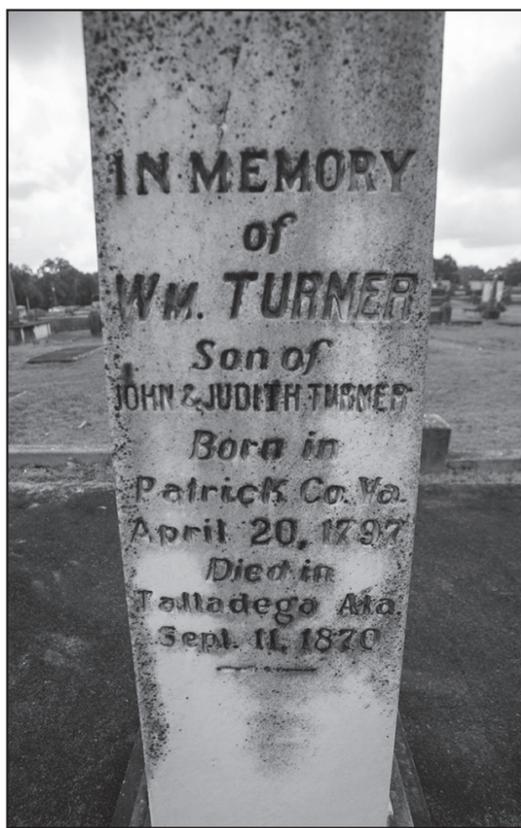
Susan Cook

habit of walking through cemeteries, the time or two I've found myself meandering among the gravestones has been an oddly soothing experience. Maybe it's the air, heavy with the weight of time and buried secrets. A cemetery is one of the rare places on earth where past and present intertwine like a climbing vine, where the whispers of the dead mingle with the whispers of the living.

The headstones tell a brief story of these strangers' lives. Beginnings and endings, connected by that all-important dash in the middle—a lifespan etched into a crumbling stone. Each monument has its tale to tell. Perhaps there's a tragic love story here or a life cut short by sickness or war. But it's the forgotten graves, the ones

obscured by time and encroaching nature, that hold the most intrigue. Here lie the remains of those who've been left behind by the march of progress, their stories slowly and silently erased from the collective memory.

If I linger too long among the tombstones, I feel the wavering fear of my own eventual mortality, and I go a little cold in the toes. The veil that separates us from the other side grows thin, and maybe my eyes play tricks on me. While I don't know if I truly saw a ghost that day or even if I believe the spirits of the dead sometimes glide among us, I'm never more alive than when I feel the tingling wonder of life's strange beauty and mysteries—the wonder of the unknown.



Photos by Bob Crisp, Tucker Webb, and Buddy Roberts/The Daily Home

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HOMETOWN MAYORS: Ashville *Derrick Mostella*

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Who better to lead a city than someone that was born there, raised there, and calls the city home?

Mayor Derrick Mostella is proud to call Ashville home and loves everything about it. He considers it the best place to live in St. Clair County. Since being elected in 2016 he has enjoyed being able to watch what he describes as “a city that’s a diamond the rough” grow. As a former city council member, running for mayor was an extension of his desire to promote progress for a better Ashville.

While working in his father-in-law’s hardware store (a community meeting place for many Ashville residents) in college, Mostella said he would overhear conversations about what could be different or what people wanted to see happen in Ashville. He would offer his opinion, but felt the need to do more than just talk. For him, dialogue did not deliver enough action. Ashville needed a plan and it to be executed, and he was willing and ready to get the ball rolling.

“In order to make the impact and difference we needed here, I knew we could not just wait for something to fall into our lap,” he said. “So after one term on the council, I decided to run for mayor and be a part of the solution. I love the people here, and being mayor is better than I could have imagined. It has been a pretty good run thus far, and we have made progress. In fact, we recently received a donation to go towards our parks and recreation project.”

Ashville is a small and close-knit community. With a population of about 2,000, it is one of two county seats of St. Clair County, was officially incorporated in 1822, and was home to the only courthouse in the county until 1907. In an interview for My Hometown, Mostella had the following to say.

Q: Why were voters prompted to cast their ballots for you?

Mostella: For one, mostly everyone knows me. Some people even address me by nickname. I shop at the local

Piggly Wiggly, let people have access to me, and I hear them out. They have my phone number, and many even know where I live and stop by. Nevertheless, I would say my educational background of my accounting degree might also have played a factor in the decision. My degree and experience spoke to the issues we were having and the familiarity of knowing me gave a level of trust, I would say. I went into the position with no promises of anything but to put forth the best of effort. The best part about being mayor is that I’m no big time politician that doesn’t live here. I live here and am a part of the community. I care about Ashville as much as any other resident. I have four kids under the age of 12, so parks and recs are near and dear to me. Wanting the best for Ashville is personal.

Q: What is the best thing about Ashville?

Mostella: Simply put, the people.

Q: What is the biggest challenge you have encountered as mayor?

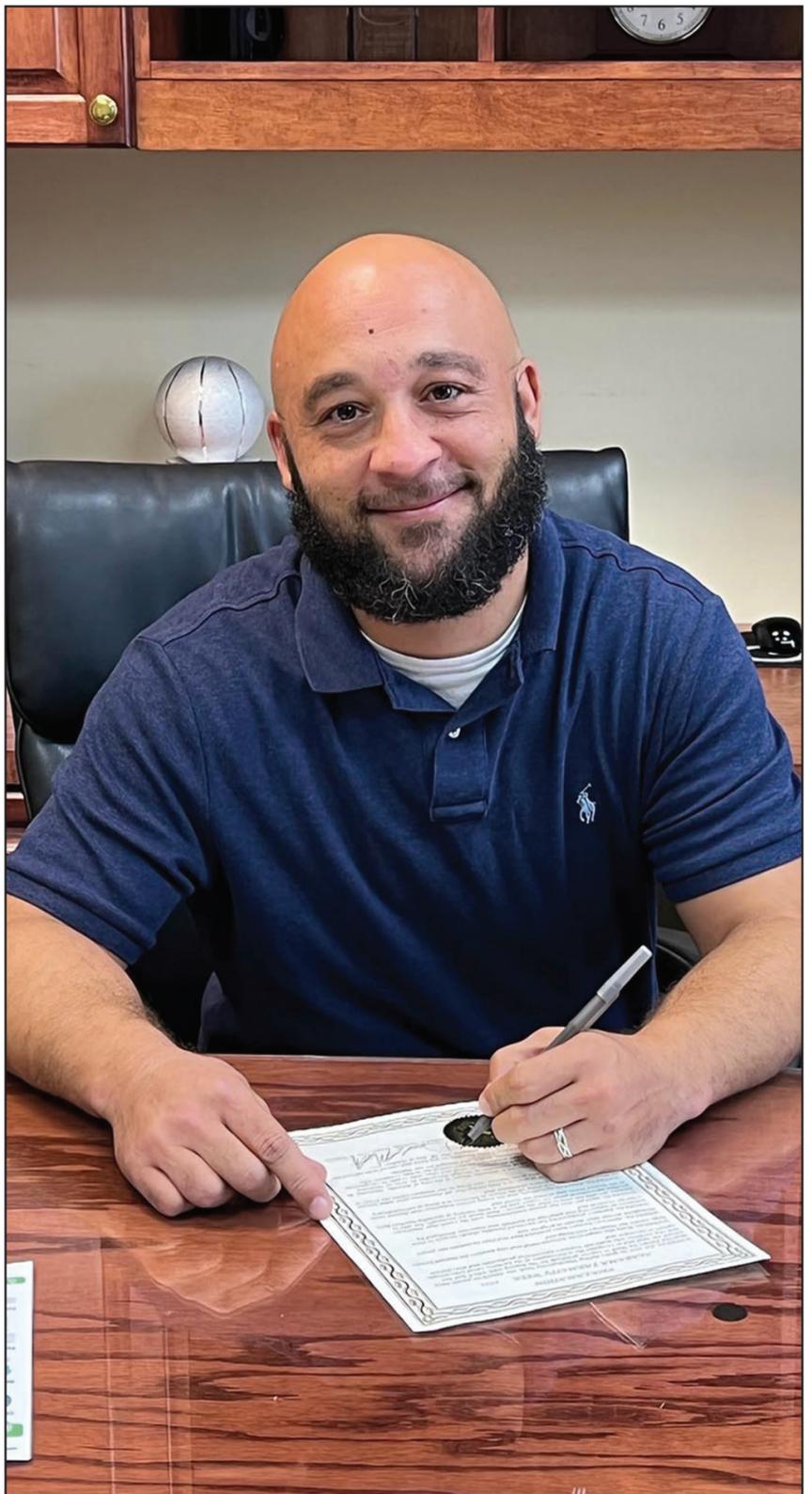
Mostella: Growing expectations. The more we do, the more that is expected of us. Sometimes there is a disconnect of time of delivery. Yes, we are making progress, but certain things take time to develop and to be established. So getting that understood can be challenging at times.

Q: What would you like to see happen in Ashville during the next five years?

Mostella: I would love to see expansion of our park and rec areas, new ball fields, and multi-use facilities. Our sports complex is not ideally located. So outside of the parks and rec project, the next project on the agenda is purchasing land for the complex.

Q: Will you be running for another term?

Mostella: As of today, my answer is yes, I love and truly enjoy what I do. Also, I haven’t quite completed the job I have set out to do. The goal is to make it to the finish line and stabilize this city. I feel it’s going to take one more term, and I hope that Ashville believes in me for another term to get it done.



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Chris Norwood/The Daily Home

Maggie Johnston is the executive director of Wild Alabama, a nonprofit group that encourages volunteerism in maintaining and protecting the public's natural spaces.

WILD ALABAMA

Continued from Page 2G

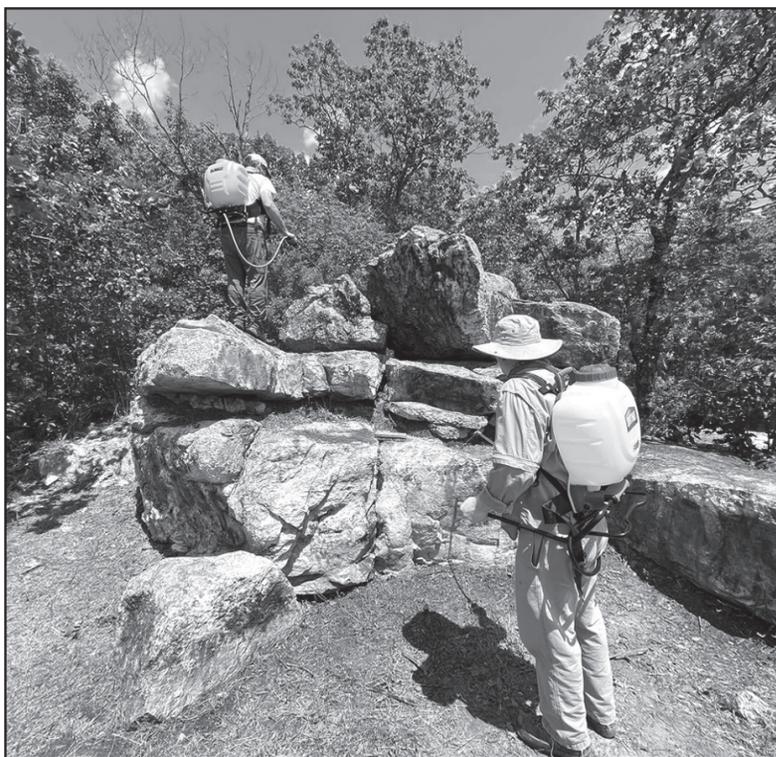
the future. Also, even though maintained, it is to be unchanged by man. One of the ways that the land is safeguarded is by not allowing mechanized equipment to be used for clearing trails that might cause woodland animals to leave the area or interrupt someone's meditation. Traditional tools, such as crosscut saws, are used to do the work.

Wild Alabama trains volunteers to use such equipment and then leads workdays, with volunteers called Helping Hands, to clear trails of downed trees, keep the brush trimmed back along trails, and clean campsites left less-than-tidy by

hikers. Johnston and the Wild Alabama staff of five travel the state to speak to school groups, educator workshops, and civic organizations. They lead interpretive hikes along forest trails and offer family outings as well. They seek ways to educate and share the love of wild places, as well as recruit volunteers to give back to places that have meant so much to them.

Other activities happening throughout the summer, other than more graffiti removal, include workdays on Cheaha and Dugger Mountain, clean-ups at several shelters along the Pinhoti Trail, as well as guided hikes such as Family Fun Friday hikes to waterfalls in the area.

Those wishing to know more about Wild Alabama activities or who want to volunteer or donate, visit www.wildal.org. Check out the "events" tab for dates.



Chris Norwood/The Daily Home

Grffiti removal, before and as the work neared completion

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Submitted photo

Members of the St. Clair Lamb Club during their annual show at DeLoach Strawberry Farms in June.

St. Clair Lamb Club strives to teach youngsters lifetime lessons

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Courtney Wrenn and Patrick Shirley have taken the saying of "counting sheep" to another level in St. Clair County and across the state.

The St. Clair Lamb Club was created to give people in the community an agricultural experience they didn't know they needed. The organization officially began in April 2021.

"Patrick and Judy had been showing lambs for a couple of years, and I decided to try it with my kids," said Wrenn. "Within one lamb season, I noticed the change in my kids from being better at making eye contact, better in their chores, their level of care, and taking ownership in their responsibilities. It blew me away. So in seeing the difference it made with our kids, we got together and decided that other families and kids should know about this experience and see what all it can do for them. It is more than just showing lambs. It teaches kids traits they can carry with them for a lifetime."

According to Shirley, the youngsters in the organization are homeschooled and are mostly under the age of 9, which makes them unable to join 4-H, the largest youth development organization in America that helps young people develop skills through projects involving the subjects of agriculture, civic engagement, health, and science in a positive environment.

Both Wrenn and Shirley agree that learning should start early on in life rather than later. By the age of 9, a child will already start to venture into something like a video game or sports, and there's more to life than those things, according to Wrenn.

"Aside from the experience and life skills it teaches, we created this organization for the kids that aren't 9 years of age, for the ones that are 4 and 5 years old. Starting them early teaches them how to be responsible, how to talk to people, manners, how to take care of an animal, and how to make eye contact. I love to see when a child knows how to make eye contact. That's a life skill that will take them far," said Shirley.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What is the difference between a lamb and a sheep?

The age. Sheep are considered market animals. Lambs are typically considered such between until 12 months old, but in shows lambs can be up to two years old. Keeping it simple, lambs are babies, and sheep are their parents.

Q: How can someone acquire a lamb?

"If someone is interested in raising lambs, I recommend them to attend our meetings," Wrenn said. "We cover various topics, including what we call our Sheep 101, which covers how to groom, feed, properly care for the lamb, house it, and more. Some people think you have to have a big barn to house a lamb, but it's more about having a safe place to house them."

Q: Should you own just one lamb?

"You can't have just one," Wrenn said. "They are flock animals. They depend on each other for security."

With about 35 members and growing, the St. Clair Lamb Club is starting to get the attention from other counties. Wrenn says that they intentionally left the word "county" out of their name so as to not limit the reach of their organization.

A variety of things takes place at club events, such as animals parades, nativity scenes, and preparation of lambs for showings.

"Once the kids get the lambs ready, they present the animal to the judges," Shirley said. "The kid and the animal are judged on showmanship, how the kid presents the animal, and how much they have worked with

the lamb. Then there's the market portion, where they weigh the animal and the judge measures how developed the lamb is, and lastly is the breeding ewe class, where the judge determines the best breeding ewe. The top five are selected and are able to be shown all year long, and there is a champion drive where the kids receive prizes. At the end of the year, some lambs are sold to farms, kept, or used to breed."

He added that working with lambs has benefited his entire family.

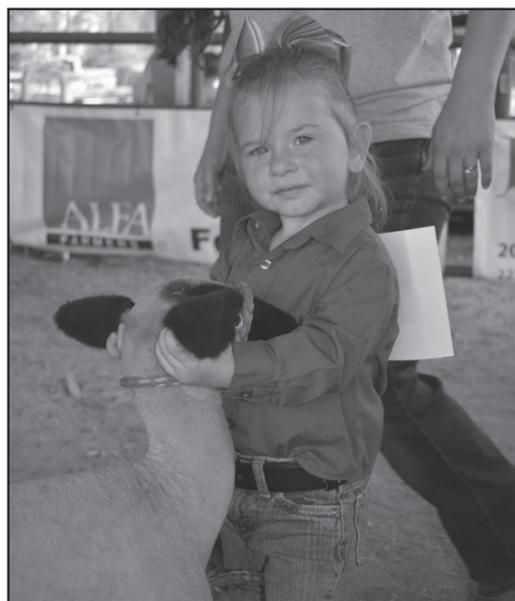
"It's a great way of building memories, spending time together, and making friends as you connect with other families. My daughter and I have been showing for the last seven years, and she's currently 10. Lambs and sheep have taught me and my family how to be patient, how to work through things, how to solve problems, how hard work pays off, and even how to deal with losses."

"To take care of these animals requires a lot of work. You have to build trust with them, be proactive, and learn them. They are not the easiest animals to work with, as they have to be groomed, work to keep them alive, and they wonder off sometimes. So working with them and spending time with them is essential. We used to have 21 animals, but now we are down to 11. We do breed, but not largely. With five kids and 11 lambs and sheep, we have quite the handful."

When Shirley was asked what he loves most about being a part of the club, he said that watching the kids grow up and get better each year is his greatest joy. For Wrenn, she loves able to promote a side of agriculture that people know little about.

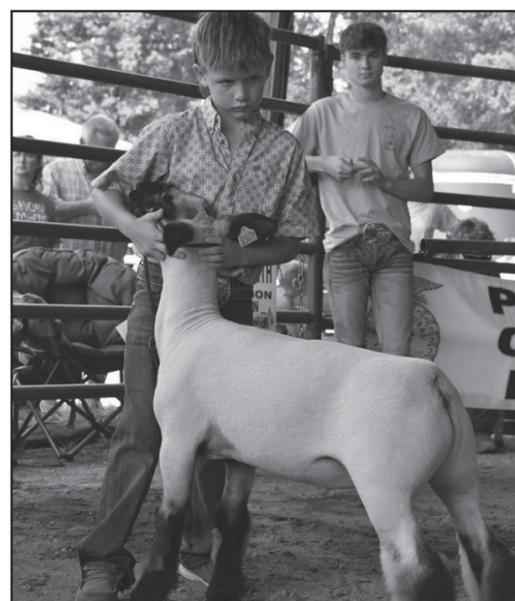
"We are truly amazed how far this has grown and taken off," she said. "The amount of community support we have backing us is incredible. We are just so grateful to be making such a great impact by simply doing and sharing what we love to do with others."

There is no membership fee and no special qualifications to join. Everything is free. For more information, visit the group's Facebook page.



Submitted photo

Esther Wrenn



Submitted photo

Jaxon Stephens



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Josie Shirley



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Gideon Wrenn and Lynleigh Stewart

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HOMETOWN MAYORS: Lincoln *Lew Watson*

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Mayor Lew Watson has served Lincoln for more than 40 years with the goal of improving the quality of life for all residents.

Currently in his 11th term, Watson says it will be his last. "This is all she wrote. Your age catches up with you and other things become a priority."

Watson may not have been born in Lincoln, but it has been home for him since he can remember. "It is truly a great feeling to see the changes that have come over the years and to serve here," he said. "To be able to deliver services and work to refine the community is something that everyone works for, and to be a part of that growth has been rewarding."

Lincoln has a population of almost 7,500 and is well known for being home to Honda Manufacturing of Alabama, one of the area's major employers. According to the mayor, a city is what you make of it, and the goal is to create a community where people want to live. In an interview for My Hometown, he had the following to say.

Q: What motivated you to serve as mayor?

Watson: My father was a council member, so I was familiar with some of the things going on in the city. After coming back from the military, I noticed our town had experienced growth, but it needed to be followed up. I took notice of other communities getting grants, and people wanted to take advantage of the loans and grants in hopes they could make a difference for us. Also during my time in the military, I lived on two other continents. I saw how they were run and

I wanted to use some of that structure in Lincoln and help our growth. Since being in office and gaining that structure, we went from not having public parks to having them, expanding our water system, and more.

Q: What do you believe has prompted voters to cast their ballots for you?

Watson: I believe that they saw and realized the growth I was creating for Lincoln. It's all about service, and recognizing the needs of the community is important. For instance, the need for more commercial properties which can create more growth for the city that benefits almost everyone. Like the Lincoln's Landing that has been created, and it has already generated a lot of success. It is being developed as a fishing tournament site, picnic area, and a great place for family activities. The facility is the largest public site on Logan Martin Lake. In fact, we are already booking events for 2024 up to 2025 for some of the fishing tournaments we have coming.

Q: What would you like to see happen in Lincoln during the next five years?

Watson: We are working on the roads and a new park. This one will be more like a community park with playgrounds and walking trails.

Q: What is your hope for the future after you leave office?

Watson: I hope the goal is a continuation of doing what they can to help our people, provide services, continue building, and continue making Lincoln a better place to live.



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Stately Southern homes mark Talladega County's landscape

On late summer evenings throughout the South, the front porch beckons. Friends gather, their laughter mingling with the clinking of glasses filled with refreshing iced tea, as the relentless heat of the day surrenders to a soft, hazy breeze. Others find solace in the embrace of the house's solitude, stretching out on weathered furniture with a favorite book, succumbing gradually to the lull of a creaky swing.

A Southern home is where the world comes to slow down. Here, the flow of time is not tethered to the ticking of a clock but reckoned by the unhurried rhythm of the rocking chair.

As the evening darkens, the scent of summer wafts on the breeze, a heady mix of magnolia, jasmine, and a whiff of apple pie cooling in a kitchen window. Amidst the profound stillness, the only audible companion is the ebb and flow of the cicadas' serenade hidden somewhere in the surrounding trees, their melody entwined with the tranquil essence of a Southern home.

Each house has its own style reflecting an era of architectural philosophy—Greek Revival, Victorian, Craftsman. They all have their charms, but a home is shaped by more than the architect's design and the capable hands that originally built them. Each dwelling possesses a character as unique as the people who've lived there through the years. Weathered paint tells the stories of countless sunrises and sunsets while creaking floorboards bear witness to generations of footfalls. Age and imperfections only add to their charm.

Although we often restlessly yearn for the unknown, venturing far from the familiar hearth in pursuit of elusive greener pastures, our absence, it seems, is never too long. The want for home, an ache that runs deep, becomes our compass, leading us back to the familiar embrace of the yard, the steps, the porch, and the gentle sway of the swing, drawn irresistibly by the warm, beckoning glow that spills from the windows of the place we proudly call home.



Bob Crisp and Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

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Stately Southern homes of Talladega County

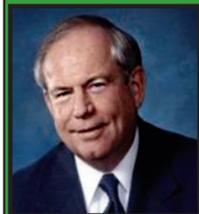


Bob Crisp and Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

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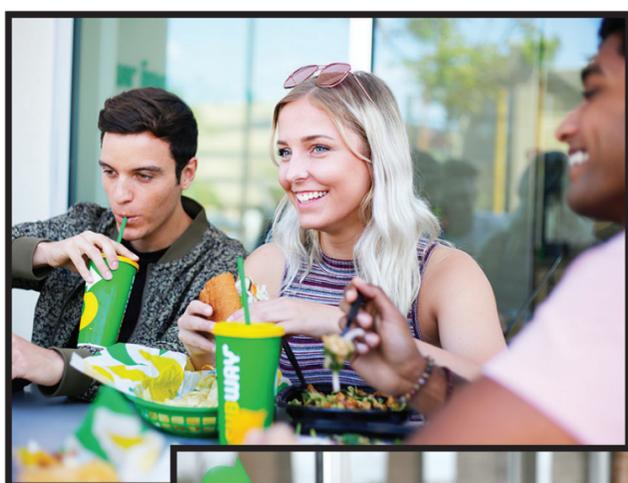
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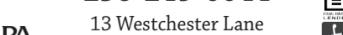
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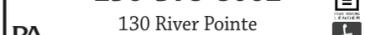
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Chris Norwood/The Daily Home

David Strickland highlights his unique hometown through murals

BY MICHELLE LOVE
Special to The Daily Home

To outside eyes, the city of Talladega may not seem like an “artsy” type of town, but local artist David Strickland wants to change that.

Strickland is responsible for the town’s newest mural on North Street W, and he said he hopes to bring more artistic beauty to the downtown area. Currently a tattoo artist at Karma Tattoo, Strickland said he’s always loved doing art, even as a little kid.

“My mom showed me how to draw simple little people. I just really enjoyed it, and I started drawing anything I could,” he said. “I did my first mural ever when I was a youth pastor when I was like 15 years old, and after that I’ve done a few here and there in various places.”

Strickland said he originally initiated the idea of a mural project for Talladega about 10 years ago after he was struck with inspiration.

“I had this idea original-

ly to do a mural over on that bridge over by the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and the Blind, to paint a big ‘Welcome to Talladega’ sign over there,” he said. “I was going to do it for free and just have the city pay for supplies. I spoke with a city council member, and he really loved the idea, so we started getting stuff in place to present it. We took it to the city manager at the time, and she shut it down and said it wasn’t something the city needed or would want.”

The idea ultimately got tabled at a city council meeting, but that didn’t stop Strickland. He continued to push the issue and present ideas he had for murals around the city, though he said “it kept getting handed to other people” and he was never given the opportunity by the city. Not one to get discouraged, he found a different opportunity in the form of a naked wall on North St W in between the old apothecary building and the

buildings on the square.

“I reached out to Blake Harris and Steve Camp, who own that building, and I asked them if I could do a mural on the side of their building in the alleyway,” Strickland said. “I saw this spot on the wall that looked like a polaroid photo and I thought, ‘I can do something with that.’”

The mural is of the old Martin Theatre, now the Historic Ritz Theatre, in the style of a polaroid photograph with “Talladega ‘80” written underneath. The painting highlights the unique architecture of the building and the signature green paint so many people associate with the theater. With each stroke, Strickland has created a snapshot of sorts that brings forth a feeling like a strong nostalgic hug.

Strickland said the Martin Theatre mural is the first of a series he has planned that highlights the beauty and nostalgia of old downtown Talladega.

“At the moment, I’m try-

ing to find building owners that have walls in alleyways or that are maybe a little bit hidden, because I want to do a series of what I’m going to call ‘The Polaroid Project,’ which is a series of murals in alleyways or hidden spots that look like big Polaroid photos of different historic locations or people from Talladega. It will kind of give people a chance to walk around town and do like a scavenger hunt looking for all of the murals.”

Strickland said he ultimately wants to be able to have an app that allows people to scan a QR code that he’ll put beside the murals, and people can collect all the murals on the scavenger hunt app. He said he also wants to try and partner with local businesses that would be willing to offer discounts or coupons for people who complete the whole Polaroid Project. Other ideas he said he’s thinking of painting are the original Talladega hospital, the front of the first AIDB building, and

historic figures from Talladega.

“It’ll be a fun project for families to do around town together,” he said. “So not only are you getting people walking around downtown and enjoying it, you’re getting them into local businesses and helping them out, too.”

Murals across Alabama have garnered significant attention in the past 10 years due to social media apps like Instagram and TikTok, which are more visual and allow people who aren’t from the state to get a taste of the art it has to offer. Strickland said this could be used to bring new life to towns like Talladega.

“I know people now, as far as families and things, they are becoming more visual, and they’re noticing things like dilapidated

buildings and old businesses that are shut down, but they’re also noticing these murals that are standing out and giving new life and a new picture to the town — literally and figuratively,” he said.

Strickland is still in the process of getting his visions and locations for the Polaroid Project mapped out, but he said he’s very excited at the potential the project holds.

“I hope people have a lot of excitement about it,” he said. “Overall, there’s a lot of historic places and events located in Talladega. A lot of time when you tell someone you’re from Talladega they go, ‘Oh, yeah you have the race track!’ And there is so much more history and more iconic things than the race track. They deserve to be seen too.”

“At the moment, I’m trying to find building owners that have walls in alleyways or that are maybe a little bit hidden, because I want to do a series of what I’m going to call ‘The Polaroid Project,’ which is a series of murals in alleyways or hidden spots that look like big Polaroid photos of different historic locations or people from Talladega. It will kind of give people a chance to walk around town and do like a scavenger hunt looking for all of the murals.” — David Strickland

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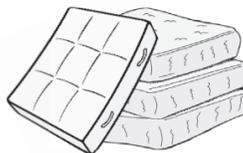
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HOMETOWN MAYORS: Oak Grove Tony White

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Oak Grove is small in size but big on community.

Mayor Tony White believes that the best thing about the town is its people. He moved from Sylacauga to Oak Grove in 1993, and it has been home for him ever since. The town, he says, welcomed him with open arms as if he had been there his entire life. First elected mayor in 2012, he has enjoyed watching the town and its residents grow. With a population just more than 500, coming together as a town for such events as fall festival and the Christmas tree lighting is something many residents enjoy.

White's career in public service began at the turn of the century.

"In the summer of 1999, Charles Rogers was running for mayor and thought I would be a good fit to run for his seat on the city council," he said. "I thought he was pulling my leg, but he was serious. He said he believed in me and believed I had what it takes. Rogers was like my hero. He was on the council, we went to the same church, and he meant a lot to me. In fact, we are still really good friends. But after thinking about his suggestion and praying about it, I decided to go for it. Later, I decided to run for mayor."

He plans to seek another term in 2025, and in an interview for My Hometown, he had the following to say.

Q: What has prompted voters to cast their ballots for you?

White: I think it's because I am doing a good job, honestly. Since being elected in 2012, I have had no one

run against me. So that is my guess, and the possibility that people also see my passion for the town and my desire to see it grow.

Q: What is the biggest challenge you have encountered as mayor?

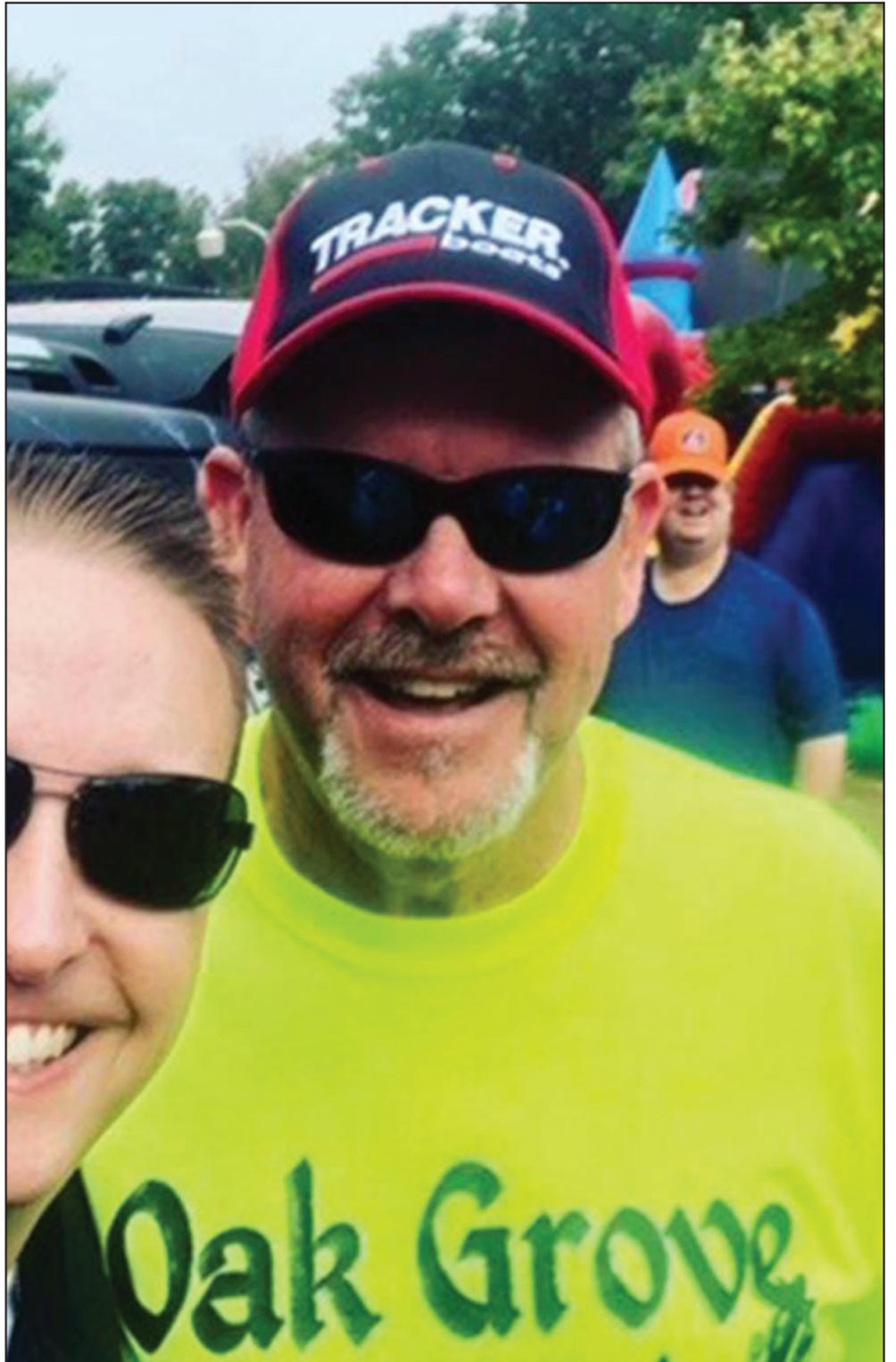
White: Getting businesses and industries in the town. Oak Grove is in between two bigger cities, Childersburg is on one side, Sylacauga on the other, and Oak Grove is stuck in the middle. It's hard to find land for business to come to. Those that have some available do not want to let go of it, despite the benefits it offers, such as that we don't have property tax, which is really great in terms of business, plus we are right next to an airport. To me, bringing business here would be a no brainer, but it's unfortunately still a struggle and something we are working on weekly.

Q: What would you like to see happen in Oak Grove during the next five years?

White: I hope in the next five years that Oak Grove has new businesses to come in, which will generate more revenue, and that we can build a new town hall. This town hall is due for an upgrade. It was a general store, then a fire department, and now the town hall and a senior center.

Q: What legacy do you hope to leave as mayor?

White: That all my efforts went into people and the employees here. For any time I make a decision, I want it to be the best for everyone. And just overall that I did my best to build Oak Grove to be great.



Submitted photo

Tony White with FOX6 chief meteorologist Wes Wyatt at the Oak Grove Fall Festival

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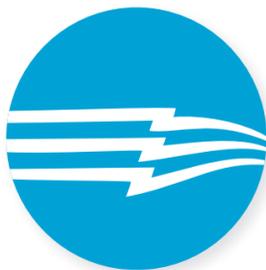
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The local cattlemen's association has awarded six scholarships during the past year.

St. Clair Cattlemen's Association helps keep an industry alive

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

If Patrick Shirley had to watch cows jump over the moon, he would probably be counting them until the early hours of the morning.

But that's to be expected of someone who's been a member of the St. Clair County Cattlemen's Association for more than a decade. For him, cattle isn't just a hobby or business but a way of life.

"I have such a love for animals because I was raised around them," he said. "I grew up on a farm, and it's what I have known all my life. I don't do it for profit. I actually have a 40-hour job. Taking care of these animals is a hobby for me and something I love. When it comes to the financial aspect of things, I probably spend more effort taking care of them than making money on them. And don't get me started on the amount of time I spend with them. I can almost guarantee that my family and I spend the majority of our time taking care of and tending to them. This is an industry that is dying, and a lot of the old timers are selling their cattle because of the money and work that has to go into them. So what I do is definitely done out of love."

Shirely owns four bulls and 80-plus cows, and they all have calves. He owns 80 acres, leases 500 acres, and cuts and bales his own hay. He's been a member of the St. Clair County Cattlemen's Association for 12 years, serving as its president since December.

The local organization is a chapter of the Alabama Cattlemen's Association (ACA), which has been around for more than 70 years. Before ACA was formed in 1944, it was known as the Alabama Livestock Growers Association (ALGA) and worked to protect the cattle industry in the state. The ALGA became inactive in 1943 but former leaders, members, and county extension agents created a new organization, the ACA.

The ACA awards scholarships every year to students planning to study agriculture.

Organized to be a voice for cattlemen, membership is open to anyone who is interested. In fact, one does not even have to have cattle to join. According to Shirley, the purpose of the organization is to promote agriculture industries, help educate farmers, support local children in agricultural endeavors, and give back to the community. To support the current generation and those to come, ACA awards scholarships every year to students planning to study agriculture.

"We put on a rodeo every year to raise money for these scholarships and to help fund agricultural events," Shirley said.

"In this year alone, we have been able to give out six scholarships in total. Four of the recipients were high school students, and the other two were in college. The cattlemen's association is very powerful and is truly a large association with members who all work together with the common goal of being there for one another and working to keep this industry alive and growing."

The St. Clair County association has about 130 members, both men and women. The president describes the organization as "a group that sticks together and understands the passion" that goes into raising and taking care of cattle.

"I really enjoy being a part of this organization," Shirley said. "I have met so many farmers and made so many connections. It's like we all help each other out in any way we can. Then as far as life with cattle, that's how I met my wife. She worked at a vet's office and I had some sick calves, went in, saw her and I felt like I knew her already. As far as the upkeep of cattle, I think it's pretty simple. You do their vaccinations, keep them healthy, give them hay in the winter because there's no grass, and keep up your fences so they don't get out. It's not much to it, in my opinion. And no matter how many cows, calves, and bulls I have, seeing the babies being born is something I enjoy the most and never get tired of witnessing."

"In this year alone, we have been able to give out six scholarships in total."

— Patrick Shirley



Submitted photo

Patrick Shirley serves as president of the St. Clair Cattlemen's Association.

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HOMETOWN MAYORS: Odenville *Buck Christian*

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

“It’s a privilege and service to be able to serve Odenville,” says Mayor Rodney “Buck” Christian. “I look at my role as a way to give back to the community. I moved here in 1986 from Jacksonville after graduating high school at 17. To grow up here in my late teen years has given me an advantage to have certain relationships within the community. I think it’s a true uniqueness to have familiarity with citizens.”

Christian has served as mayor since 2004, and most of his constituents call him Buck — a nickname he’s had since childhood — rather than Rodney.

Odenville has a population of a little more than 5,000, filled with residents who are friendly and proud of their community. The city is known for the Mustang Museum of America, a utilities board provides water to about two thirds of St. Clair County, and a chamber of commerce that hosts an annual car show that has become quite a hit. Then city’s current mayor and council members who were elected in 2004 have all been re-elected in each election since. “Those who I came in with are still the same people serving with me today,” the mayor said, adding the following in an interview for My Hometown.

Q: What motivated you to serve as mayor?

Christian: I was a volunteer firefighter for 16 years. Aside from my parents, the fire chief had a great influence on me to give back to others. The chief pulled me to the side one day and said that I made rational decisions and thought I should run for a council seat. I thought he was trying to stack the deck so he could get some favor in his direction, but that wasn’t the case. He was serious, and that inspired me to run for city council. In

my decision to run for mayor, I saw the opportunity for growth, potential, to make a difference, and I wanted to act on that.

Q: What motivated voters to cast their ballots for you?

Christian: One word, passion. I displayed a passion to serve. I was and am passionate about the community. Odenville is a good place to call home. When it comes to the people of Odenville, it doesn’t take long to feel like home.

Q: What is the biggest challenge you have encountered as mayor?

Christian: I would say continued residential growth, because it needs to be at a pace where Odenville can keep up. I’m an action-reaction type of individual. I want the growth for the city, but I had to realize how, if the growth happens too quickly without the right preparation, it can be overwhelming.

Q: What would you like to see happen in Odenville during the next five years?

Christian: I believe that we are going to have a surge in population. Odenville does not have zoning. We’ve had discussions about it; however, with residential and community growth without zoning and planning, we are setting ourselves up for failure. So I strongly recommend for residents to stay familiar with the city council and the minutes because that topic is one that is definitely a priority. Also, the community property at I-59 will continue to develop. I want it to be strongly noted that the community growth at I-59 will be the economic future for Odenville.

Q: Will you be running for another term?

Christian: Yes, it is my utmost intention to run again in 2025. Nevertheless, when the time comes that I step down, I hope to leave the legacy of honesty, integrity, and a willingness to serve.



‘Horses are some of the most amazing teachers,’ owner says It’s always sunny at Talladega County equestrian farm

BY LACI BRASWELL
Special to The Daily Home

A new horse riding center in Talladega is now open to the community.

Sunny Days Farm offers horseback lessons, training, and even birthday parties. Situated on Bernie Station Road, it is owned and operated by Chelsey Batchelor, who expanded her family farm into an LLC, after taking a break from school during the Covid outbreak.

“I wanted to provide something for the youth who may not necessarily play sports or do extracurriculars like band and art,” she said. “They need an outlet too.”

Despite the farm only being open to the public since August 2021, it has a roster of 65 students. “We currently have all ages and skill sets. The youngest student is 3, and the oldest is 68, so we are all learning different things. We start with the basics and try to have a good foundation.”

The farm is home to 40 horses, all with unique personalities. “Each of our students gets acquainted with the horses and rides the one that works best for them,” Batchelor said. “They really form a strong connection and bond with one another.”

Students travel from surrounding communities for lessons, including Lincoln, Pell City, Sylacauga, White Plains, and Talladega.

Sunny Days Farm also serves as the base for a traveling rodeo team.

“We compete in timed events and trail competitions across the state,” said



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FIELDS OF DREAMS

Baseball has been described as symbolic to American culture, part of a trifecta that also includes hot dogs and apple pie.



Buddy Roberts

It's called America's pastime and the perfect sport. Its terminology has become part of the national vernacular. It's played in venues that range from massive Major League stadiums to recreation league diamonds in small towns from Long Island to Pasadena.

It is on those small fields that many believe the best baseball is played - baseball that isn't played for millions of dollars in compensation or lucrative endorsement deals, but simply for the fun of the game and being with friends.

Talladega County is home to many such venues, and this year The Daily Home's chief photographer Bob Crisp and sports writer Chris Fernsler were on hand to document the beginning and end of the spring youth baseball season in the town of Munford. Bob's photos were taken on opening day, and each image tells a story

in itself. The looks on the youngsters' faces, the intensity in their eyes, the eye black stains on their faces, and the dirt stains on their uniforms attest to how much they're enjoying themselves.

When Chris attended Munford's 6-and-Under championship, the players were happy to tell him how much fun they had.

"We play hard and catch the ball," a five-year-old second baseman said.

"We hit the ball and throw fast," the youngster's counterpart on third added. "I know how to throw the ball to first base."

"We have a lot of players who can hit good," the team's catcher proudly told Chris.

While most who take the field in youth leagues will later occupy Major League stadiums as fans rather than players, that's okay. It's been said that sometimes you don't know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory, and baseball continues to provide memories that last a lifetime. For many who are now adults, a part of them will always be squinting into the sun, sliding into second, and celebrating with their friends on the baseball fields of their youth.



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FARM

Continued from Page 3F

Batchelor, who added that starting the riding center and growing up around horses has been a learning process.

“My family and just being raised on this farm has taught me so much. My family has worked hard for generations, so a little bit of hard work, dirt, and sweat doesn’t scare any of us. I feel like this way of life is a dying breed. I wanted to share it with kids who aren’t able to grow up like I did. I think this farm, horses, and hard work can keep one grounded. I wanted the younger generation to have the opportunity to come out and give it a try.”

She believes being around horses is something everyone should experience.

“Something magical happens when I see my students lay their hands on these horses,” she said. “There’s nothing in this world like these animals. Horses are some of the most amazing teachers I’ve ever had. They teach so much more than just how to ride or compete. They teach hard work, grit, compassion, selflessness, and so many other things I feel can’t be taught the same as it can on a farm.”

Horses, she continued, are incredibly instinctive.

“I can have the worst day ever, and I feel it all drift away as soon as I step out in the barnyard. Horses are different from a machine. They feel and they know when a human is off, and they try to help on the bad days. There’s nothing like the feeling of a thousand-pound animal coming up and giving you the sweetest kindest touch because they know you don’t feel good, or have had a bad day.”

Batchelor finds it equally rewarding to work with her students.

“I love watching my students grow and become amazing riders,” she said. “It’s an indescribable feel-

ing to see a kid start from scratch and then have a first place ribbon in the show pen. I wouldn’t trade the long hours for anything. It’s the best decision I’ve ever made.”

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HOMETOWN MAYORS: Talladega

Timothy Ragland

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Mayor Timothy Ragland is the youngest person to serve as mayor in Talladega in this century. As the first Black mayor of the city and almost four years into his first term, he is a product of the very community he serves, finding it an honor to have the opportunity to give back to the city that raised him.

"I was born and raised in Talladega, and I have a deep connection to this city," he said. "I graduated from Talladega High School in 2009. This city has a rich history and a strong sense of community. As a child, I witnessed the unity and resilience of the people of Talladega. It's a place where neighbors know and support one another and where people come together in times of need. My experiences and understanding of the community's strengths and challenges have helped guide my leadership decisions and initiatives. I am committed to working tirelessly to improve all of Talladega residents' quality of life and ensure a prosperous future for our hometown."

Talladega has a population of more than 15,000 and it is expected to increase. The city is home to the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind (an educational institution that provides specialized education and services to individuals with sensory impairments), as well as Talladega College, a historical Black college that has been a pillar for education and cultural heritage for more than 150 years. For entertainment, the city is associated with the renowned Talladega Superspeedway, one of the most famous NASCAR tracks in the country.

"As the mayor, I am committed to preserving and showcasing our city's distinctive qualities," Ragland said. "We will continue to invest in initiatives supporting education, fostering inclusivity, promoting tourism, and ensuring that Talladega remains a city known for its esteemed institutions, thrilling races, and rich his-



Submitted photo

Timothy Ragland with Talladega High School students who participated in the Mayor's Summer Internship program.

...tory for generations to come." Ragland had the following to say in an interview for My Hometown.

Q: What motivated you to serve as mayor?

Ragland: Leadership is not about personal gain but about serving others and working toward the betterment of the community as a whole. I wanted to be a voice for the people, to advocate for their needs and concerns, and to bring about positive change. As mayor, I have the privilege of collaborating with community members, local organizations, and government entities to address our challenges and seize opportunities for growth. Every day, I wake up motivated by the idea that I can make a difference in the lives of the people of Talladega. Talladega is more than just a place to me; it's a part of who I am. That deep connection, combined with my passion for service and dedication to our community, motivated me to step forward and take on the role of mayor.

Q: What enabled you to

serve as mayor?

Ragland: I believe a few aspects stood out to the residents and contributed to their decision in my election. First and foremost, the fact that I am the city's first Black mayor holds significant symbolism and represents a milestone for our community. It signifies progress, inclusivity, and a step towards equal representation in our leadership. Being the youngest mayor in over a century also caught the attention of the residents. It demonstrated a fresh perspective, energy, and a different generational outlook. The younger generation saw in me someone who could understand their concerns, aspirations, and the evolving needs of our community. Moreover, my deep roots in Talladega played a crucial role in resonating with the residents. Having been born and raised here, graduating from Talladega High School, and being an active member of the community, I had firsthand experience and a personal connection to the challenges and opportunities we face. This familiarity and shared

experience built trust and relatability with the voters. Ultimately, the residents of Talladega saw in me a candidate who represented diversity, fresh perspectives, and a deep understanding of our community's needs. They entrusted me with serving our city, and I am honored to have their support.

Q: What is the biggest challenge you have encountered as mayor?

Ragland: Recognizing that, despite my passion and dedication, I do not have the authority to do everything I believe needs to be done. As much as I would like to solve all the challenges facing our city single-handedly, the reality is that decision-making involves collaboration with other government entities, community stakeholders, and limited resources. Balancing the various interests and finding common ground can be a complex task. However, I remain committed to working tirelessly and engaging with others to address our challenges, seeking innovative solutions, and striving to impact our

residents' lives positively.

Q: What would you like to see happen in Talladega during the next five years?

Ragland: First and foremost, I would like to see sustainable population growth. We can strengthen our community and create a more vibrant and diverse environment by attracting new residents and retaining our talented workforce. Economic development is another crucial aspect I am focused on. I want to foster an environment that attracts new businesses, promotes entrepreneurship, and provides opportunities for our local workforce. By strategically investing in infrastructure, supporting small businesses, and collaborating with regional partners, we can stimulate economic growth and create a thriving business ecosystem in Talladega.

Q: Will you be running for another term?

Ragland: I am delighted to announce that I will be running for another term. I am deeply committed to the continued progress and prosperity of Talladega, and there is still much more work to be done. Running for another term allows me to build upon the foundation we have laid during my current tenure. Over the years, we have made significant strides in economic development, community engagement, and infrastructure improvements. However, there is still more to accomplish to ensure our city's sustainable and thriving future. I am motivated by the positive changes we have witnessed and the potential for even greater achievements. I am passionate about serving the residents of Talladega, and my experience, dedication, and vision will continue to benefit our community. I firmly believe in the power of consistent leadership to drive long-term change. By seeking another term as mayor, I am making a commitment to our residents to continue working tirelessly, listening to their concerns, and advocating for their needs..

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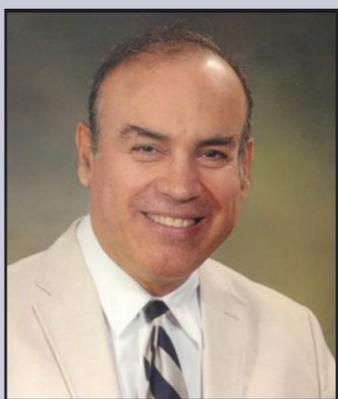
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Pell City's 24th Hometown Block Party is another success

BY FAITH DORN

Special to The Daily Home

The Pell City Chamber of Commerce hosted the 24th annual Hometown Block Party in June.

Urainah Glidewell, the chamber's executive director, believes attendance was 15,000-18,000 people, with steady crowds all day.

"We were very excited about the Block Party this year," she said. "We had great bands and over 100 vendors. The car show was great, and our kids area was super fun thanks to C&M Southern Midlands Eastaboga and Foam Zone Parties from Odenville. We had a DJ, Cory O'Neal Jr., in the kids area."

There were only two stages for music this year, but Glidewell says the chamber

is looking to add a third stage again next year. Music acts included The WingNuts, Kudzu, and Greg White Band.

Glidewell credits many people and organizations with the success of this year's event.

"Our chamber board of directors are wonderful at helping out and so are our chamber ambassadors," she said. "The sheriff's department was able to help with heavy lifting. Of course, the Scouts helped pick up trash and keep everything clean: Cub Scout Pack 199, Boy Scout Troop 4199, and Girl Scout Troop 5199.

"Our capital campaign sponsors are wonderful," she continued. "We would not be able to do all the events we do without them. They support the Pell City Chamber of Commerce throughout the year, but especially with the Block Party.

It is the biggest event we do, so of course, that incurs the biggest cost when you think about stages, electrical and insurance."

Platinum sponsors this year were Alabama Power, AOD Federal Credit Union, America's First Federal Credit Union (AmFirst), Buffalo Rock, Complete Health, Coosa Pines, Federal Credit Union, Ford Meter Box, Specialty Printing, and Vulcan Tire & Automotive.

Gold sponsors were Gilreath Printing, Metro Bank, Rausch Coleman Homes, and WinSouth Credit Union.

Silver sponsors this year were Alabama GlasTek, Bill Hereford, Lakeside Hospice, the Law Office of Blair & Parsons P.C., Pruet Realty Group, Signature Realty, Union State Bank, and Webb Concrete.

This year's bronze sponsors were Allied Mineral Products, Chemscape Lawn

Services, Engineered Cooling Services, Extreme Detailing, LLC, Goodgame Company, Inc., Harmon's Electrical Services, Inc., Hwy 78 Tires & Automotive, JDIT Plumbing, Jersey Mike's Subs, Kirkpatrick Concrete, Logan Martin Wealth Management, Southland Golf Carts, Town & Country Ford Pell City, and Triple G's Deli & Food Store.

The car show at the Block Party served as a fundraiser for a good cause: Demetria June Boggs, a local woman fighting cancer.

"Casey Cambron is with the Five 16 Foundation, and he helps organize the car show portion. Every year, he'll choose a nonprofit or local cause or person to help with the car show. We raised \$1,442 through car registrations, sponsors and

Please see PARTY | Page 51



Photos by Bob Crisp/The Daily Home



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‘Made with 100 percent love’

Local food truck serves up fresh seafood favorites

BY LACI BRASWELL
Special to The Daily Home

Since 2019, Sea Life Food Truck has been serving crowds of hungry customers across Talladega and Calhoun counties.

The seafood and Cajun style cuisine is cooked to order by Lincoln native Kevin Story.

Sea Life serves a variety of seafood favorites including butterfly shrimp; fried catfish; Cajun style gumbo; red beans and rice; potatoes, corn on the cob, boiled eggs, along with shrimp, lobster and crab boils.

Story said he got the idea for a food truck after stepping away from his job in sports medicine. "I've always enjoyed cooking and really wanted to start my own business."

He added that the decision to offer seafood came as he traveled across the area, making note of what types of cuisine were lacking. "I noticed there weren't a lot of seafood places around, so I catered my menu to fit that need." Story believes an upside to having a food truck is being able to travel and take his business on the go. "I've set up a good customer base here in Talladega," he said. "I also make routine stops in Munford, Sylacauga, Piedmont, Alex City, Gadsden, and Lincoln."

Story said he owes a lot of his inspiration to his late friend Wayne Wilde. "He really encouraged me and told me that whatever I decided to serve had to be made with 100 percent love." His popular lobster boil is named in memory of Wilde.

According to Story, the shrimp, crab and lobster boils are some of the truck's most popular dishes. "We tend to sell out of those, so come early."

Story added he hopes he can help overcome the stigma of food trucks. "A lot of people see food trucks as unclean or think that we don't serve fresh food. We have to go through the same food inspections as any brick and mortar restaurant."

Serving high quality and fresh food is something Story takes pride in.

"I normally cook my potatoes, corn, and eggs all separately and before I open that day," he said. I don't cook everything together for my shrimp and crab boils due to those with shellfish allergies. My shrimp is cooked fresh every morning."

Story cooks about 60 pounds of shrimp each day. "I get my shrimp and crab from Bayou La Batre near Mobile. The business is called Graham's Shrimp Company."

Story said his wife Kristen cooks the gumbo, along with the red beans and rice, and he offered some words of wisdom to those potentially interested in starting up their own food truck.

"My advice to anyone starting a food truck would be location, and to make sure you have great customer service," he said. "It is also good to communicate with other food trucks. Crowds are more likely



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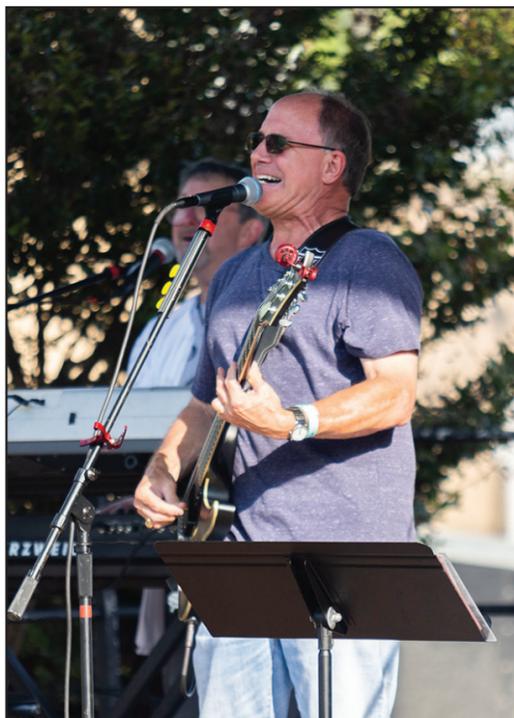
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PARTY

Continued from Page 31

donations," Glidewell said. The event featured around 25 food vendors with different kinds of specialties from hibachi to barbecue to snow cones.

"Usually with the event, I am running all over the place, so I don't get to sit and enjoy it, but one of my favorite moments of this year's Block Party was getting to watch the kids and adults play in the foam area and have fun," said Glidewell. "That's why we do this, so people can come out and bring their family and friends and enjoy themselves."

Although the chamber's focus has shifted to planning for its upcoming annual business awards then planning the Christmas parade, the date has been set for the Hometown Block Party 2024: Saturday, June 1.

"Each year, we try to make it even better, so if you have been coming for the past 20 years, you know it is always something new and different. C&M Southern Midlands will have even more rides next year, and we will have even more bands next year. We are so excited about what we can do," Glidewell said.

"We love our Pell City community, and we are so glad that they support the Block Party by coming out and supporting our local bands and businesses and having a great time. We are so grateful for them. Without people attending and helping it grow each year, it would not be a success."

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Meet Our Board

The Pell City Chamber of Commerce board members for the upcoming year. Pictured: Back Row (L-R) Doris Munkus, Shirley Kujan, Nicole Anderson, Jacob Compton, Jean Speer, Urainah Glidewell Front Row (L-R) Caran Wilbanks, Casey Cambron, Anna Otterson, Erica Grieve, Zachary Gentile (board members not pictured: Alana Centilli, Adam Vandiver, Ken Pate)

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HOMETOWN MAYORS: Sylacauga Jim Heigl

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Sylacauga has been the hometown of Mayor Jim Heigl for 74 years. Aside from his time in the military, he's always lived in the Marble City, witnessing and being part of changes that have improved quality of life for the city's residents.

In November, Heigl will begin his seventh year as mayor, having sought the office after his retirement from the paper industry. "In my time as mayor, I have always believed that nothing is achieved without the support and hard work of those around me. That support is truly the best and greatly appreciated."

Sylacauga's population is a little more than 12,000, and the city is known for its white marble. It annually hosts the Sylacauga Magic of Marble Festival, during which live marble sculpting can be viewed in Central Park and guest sculptors from partnering communities in Italy come to Sylacauga to participate and showcase their marble artistry.

In an interview for My Hometown, Heigl had the following to say about the city and serving as mayor.

Q: What has enabled you to serve as mayor?

Heigl: Three things have played as key factors in my elections. First of all, I am a longtime resident who is rooted in the Sylacauga community, and I raised my family here. Secondly, I worked alongside many Sylacauga community members and eventually retired from Kimberly Clark, a significant long-standing employer that has since changed names but maintained operations in Childersburg. Lastly, I have been engaged in the city government for decades. I served as a city council member for District 1 before being elected mayor. That has provided me with a unique perspective in

which I have witnessed the city's growth firsthand and oftentimes participated in pivotal decision-making for Sylacauga.

Q: What is the best thing about Sylacauga?

Heigl: The people of this community, undoubtedly, are the best thing about Sylacauga. No matter the hardship or difficulty, the people of Sylacauga have a reputation for stepping up to find ways to help our neighbors and find solutions for problems we face. We truly are better together.

Q: What is the biggest challenge you have encountered as mayor?

Heigl: Our greatest challenge continues to be ensuring that we can secure funding for the needs of the City of Sylacauga. Our city's drainage infrastructure has undergone significant updates and continues to be evaluated and addressed. Paving both along our main roadways and in communities is always a topic of discussion to prioritize and address. Finding ways to entice industry, retail, lodging, and other businesses to come into Sylacauga is a continual effort. While our citizens have faced the exorbitant inflation on their goods and services, the city faces the same increase but hope to find a way to minimize that expense being passed on to our citizens. Trying to achieve progress while having limited resources and using those resources in ways that are fiscally responsible will continue to be the biggest challenge serving as mayor.

Q: What would you like to see happen in Sylacauga during the next five years?

Heigl: Increase in new homes and garden apartments is a must.

Q: Will you be running for another term?

Heigl: Yes, I plan to run again, as there is much more to do.



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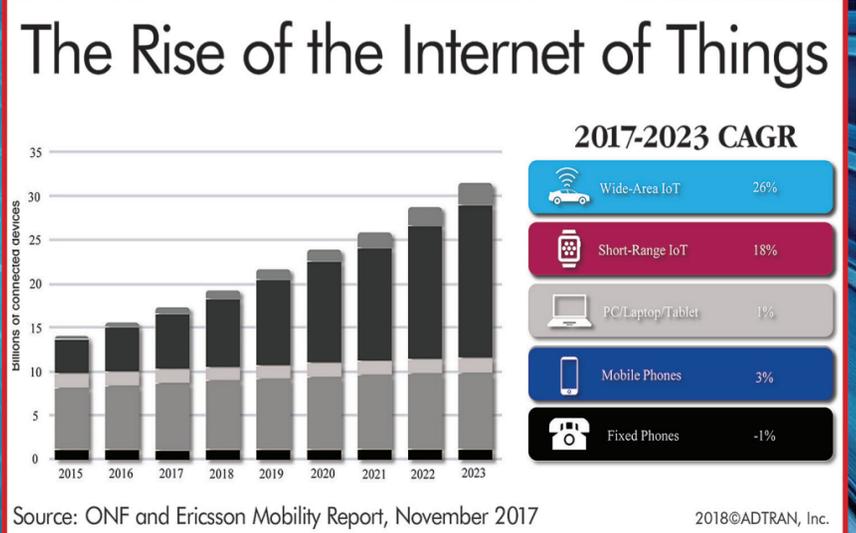
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Submitted photos

At top left are Jayme Anderson and Alayna Jackson of the St. Clair County 4-H program. In the other three photos are local youngsters who participated in 4-H livestock competition and summer camp.

Local 4-H program seeks to provide guidance, opportunities for youth

BY FAITH DORN

Special to The Daily Home

The St. Clair County 4-H program is part of the St. Clair County Extension Office. The Extension Office offers services regarding family, agriculture, farming, gardening, food safety, and more.

"4-H is the largest youth-serving organization in the country," said Alayna Jackson, 4-H agent for the St. Clair Office. "We focus on youth development through hands-on learning. Here in the county, we offer free to low cost activities through a variety of opportunities. During the school year, our stuff is 100% free."

Jackson married into a local 4-H legacy family. Her husband's grandfather, W. D. Jackson, worked with the 4-H program for years, and his wife, Betty J. Jackson, also worked with the 4-H program.

Jackson says she does a lot of in-school programming for the school systems and homeschool clubs. "This year, I was in nine schools, so I would meet with those schools monthly. Some of our project clubs, like youth leadership club and livestock club met monthly. I worked with 4th-12th graders this year. For the fourth-sixth graders, participation was part of their classroom curriculum. High school students have a choice."

The 4-H program focuses on science, engineering, technology, math, leadership, and communication. Participation in the program helps students learn independence, generosity, community service, knowledge, leadership, belonging, and the ability to pursue whatever interests they have.

"4-H definitely wants to develop youth. We have the youth thriving model. We tell them to find what we call their 'spark' and hone in on that. We encourage them to go on experiences to work on that skill and have mastery of it. That leads to a successful adulthood," said Jackson.

Part of that success comes from the scholarships that are offered by the 4-H program that can be used in higher education or trade schools in all 67 counties in Alabama.

"We are giving the youth the opportunity to engage

and learn and practice and work with adults," Jackson said, "Last year, I went to Washington, D.C. for the national 4-H conference. I enjoyed hearing about the projects they work on, like public speaking, gardening, and working with animals. Those all guide what they want to do with their lives and help them use their voices to be able to make a difference."

Currently, the St. Clair County 4-H program is reaching more 1,200 young people. According to Jackson, the program has the potential to reach close to 20,000 young people, but it needs volunteers.

"We are always looking

for volunteers. Historically, 4-H is built on volunteers. I can help align them with a club. I provide the curriculum and resources. I just need adults who are willing to engage with youth and are willing to push them. We are also always looking for donations," she said.

The community recently helped out with donations for a joint project with the Boys and Girls Club.

"We needed a lot of paper towel rolls, and the community helped us by donating. There are also churches that let us use meeting rooms for our clubs," Jackson said.

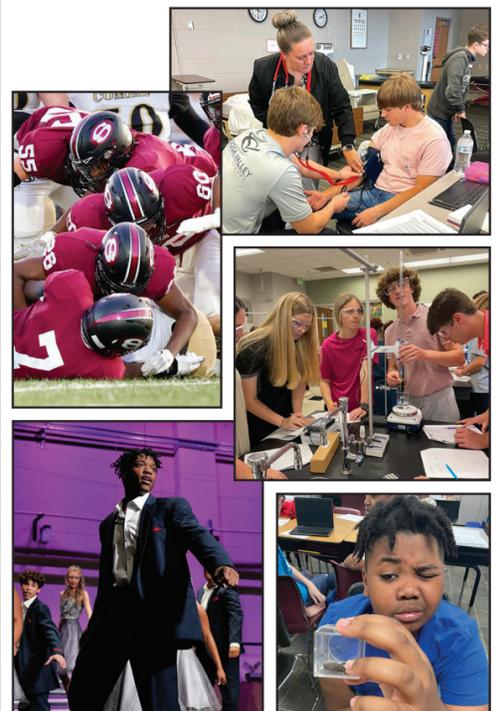
If you are interested in volunteering, donating, or

learning more about the 4-H program in St. Clair County, contact Jackson at 205-338-9416 or anj0038@auburn.edu .



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HOMETOWN MAYORS: Ragland *Richard Bunt*

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Mayor Richard Bunt hopes that future generations will consider themselves proud to be from Ragland.

"I am originally from Miami, but my dad was from Ragland," he said. "I moved here when I was in the second grade. Being here has been a blessing. There are so many great people here, and having the chance to help the town grow and move forward is pretty exciting."

Bunt served on Ragland's town council for almost eight years before he made the decision to run for mayor. He saw it as an opportunity to help the town move forward. Ragland's population is about 1,700, and it's known for being home to the National Cement Company, which distributes construction products across the country. Ragland Clay Products is another of the town's industries, manufacturing pavers, bricks, and similar products for residential and commercial projects.

In an interview for My Hometown, the mayor had the following to say about Ragland and its future.

eral, the people are what make the town.

Q: What is the biggest challenge of serving as mayor?

Bunt: I would have to say learning to be patient has been the biggest challenge. I had to learn that government projects don't work at the same speed as private sectors do.

Q: What would you like to see happen in Ragland during the next five years?

Bunt: Biding out to get a builder for our first responders project.

The goal is that the first responders project will include having the fire department, rescue, and police department all housed in one building. We are also in contact with businesses to bring them to Ragland in hopes of expansion and for more growth.

Q: Will you be running for another term?

Bunt: That is up to the Lord. All I can attest at the moment is that we have projects on the table that we are focusing on, and that is my priority. As for running again, that is all depending on my calling.



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Q: What is the best thing about Ragland?

Bunt: It might sound cliché, but it's the truth, and that is that our people are the best. Our parks are good and well maintained, especially for a town this small. We get a lot of compliments on our upkeep, and that says a lot. In gen-

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HOMETOWN MAYORS: Munford Jo Ann Fambrough

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Mayor Jo Ann Fambrough found her niche after retirement and says she is more than grateful for the opportunity to give back and make a difference.

Fambrough is in her second term as mayor and is enjoying what she is able to do for her hometown. As a native of Munford, she loves being able to help the small community she has always called home.

"During my working years, I moved away for about 30 years, but when I retired I moved back to Munford," she said. "I just remember how great it was growing up in a small community and how children could play outside with no supervision because everyone looked out for one another. Between the support of the community and having a close family, growing up here was definitely a good experience for me."

Fambrough continues to work to make Munford great as she knows it can be. She is determined to make the town a place people are happy to call home and one they can feel safe in and create memories they can carry with them for a lifetime.

Munford has a population of more than 1,300, and city officials are expecting more growth in coming years. The small town is known for its importance in the American Civil War, Cheaha

State Park (the highest point in Alabama), and for the 60-acre Watts Farms.

In an interview for My Hometown, Fambrough had this to say.

Q: What motivated you to serve as mayor?

Fambrough: That is a very good question. With my experience as a plant manager for many years, I felt like my life was over when I retired. I wanted to get back into something where I felt could make a difference as opposed to just sitting home and doing meaningless tasks.

Q: What is the biggest challenge you have encountered as mayor?

Fambrough: Money — always money! There is never enough to do the things you would like to do for the community.

Q: What would you like to see happen in Munford during the next five years?

Fambrough: I would like to see the community grow larger — not ever to be a metropolitan city but large enough to offer more things to our citizens

Q: Will you be running for another term?

Fambrough: I do plan to run again, if my health continues to be good. I have not completed everything I want to do for the community. When the day to retire does come, I hope to leave behind a job well done.



HOMETOWN MAYORS: Childersburg Ken Wesson

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

There's nothing like growing up and being able to give back to the very city that helped raise you. Mayor Ken Wesson has felt that way since serving as Childersburg's mayor since 2016.

"Childersburg is my hometown," he said. "It's where I made many wonderful friends while growing up that are very special to me, learned so much, and created wonderful memories. It was a great city to grow up."

During his terms as mayor, Wesson has worked to give the residents of Childersburg a city they can be proud of, a place to build friendships, generate business, socialize, start their families, and so much more. The city's population is about 4,900, and the community offers a host of attractions.

According to Wesson, Childersburg has been recognized by Congress as the oldest settlement in the United States, dating back to Hernandez De Soto's visit in 1540, when settlers were left behind. Childersburg is home to Majestic Caverns, Kymulga Grist Mill Park, Covered Bridge Park, and is near for four premier sports shooting sites: Red Eagle, Selwood Farms, Farmlinks, and Talladega Marksman-

ship Park.

In an interview for My Hometown, Wesson had the following to say.

Q: What motivated you to run for mayor?

Wesson: I have a love and passion for the Childersburg community. When I retired, I wanted to commit to make a difference in Childersburg. My wife Trisha and I feel that positive steps have been made during my terms, but I will continue to work along with the council to accomplish more positive

changes.

Q: What is the biggest challenge connected with serving as mayor?

Wesson: One of the biggest is business recruitment. There has been some success in recruitment, but we will remain committed to the process. Another challenge would have to be balancing the budget.

Q: What do you hope will be your legacy of public service?

Wesson: A positive difference and change.



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Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

The Museum of Pell City is inside the Pell City Municipal Complex at 1000 Bruce Etheredge Parkway, Suite 200. Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays and 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturdays.



Buddy Roberts/The Daily Home

"I grew up on Mulberry Street in Pell City," docent Julia Skelton says, pointing out where her childhood home can be seen in a period photograph in one of the museum's exhibits.

'A community treasure' for Pell City New museum showcases hometown history

BY BUDDY ROBERTS
Special Projects Editor

Julia Skelton is proud to be a lifelong resident of Pell City. "My family lived on Mulberry Street," she said, pointing out that thoroughfare on an original map of the Avondale mill village, now framed and on display in the Museum of Pell City, which opened this spring. "All of the streets were named after trees. And if you'll look at this old photograph," she continued, directing a visitor's attention to the framed image, "I'll show you the house in grew up in."

Like many who call Pell City home, Skelton remembers how much life in the small town was influenced by Avondale Mills in decades past. "We lived a block from it," she said. "My daddy worked for the mill, my mother's family worked for the mill, and my grandfather was chief engineer for the mill in Sylacauga."

Skelton has seen it all - the Avondale Mills baseball teams, the old Rexall soda fountain, the development of Logan Martin Lake, the tornado that roared through town and caused \$5 million in damage in the late 1960s - and she's glad that it's documented and preserved in the city's new history museum.

Docents such as Skelton enthusiastically guide visitors through the museum's 4000-square feet of exhibit space showcasing vintage photographs, scale models, and displays recognizing diverse people, places, and events from the city's 133-year history. Photos of Cropwell School's graduating class of 1926, the Coosa River Ferry, the H.L. Davis Store in Easonville, the Mountain View Hotel in Cook Springs, the Coal

City Lightweight Championship Boxing Bout, the Wattsville Coal & Iron Co., and outdoors enthusiasts noodling, swimming, fishing, and skiing on Logan Martin Lake can be seen alongside exhibits honoring local military veterans, artists, musicians, and sports figures.

"We all realize Pell City is such a great city and a great place to be," Mayor Bill Pruitt said on the museum's opening day. "We have a very long, long history of people who put us in the position to be where we are today, and this museum honors that. While I knew it was going to be good, I did not realize the amount of work and attention to detail that has gone into it."

Carol Pappas, president of the museum's nonprofit board, attributed that to project designer Jeremy Gossett and "the effort of many who worked tirelessly to make sure that we carry out this mission. For generations, we have let so much history slip by without being preserved. This museum helps fill that void and will be a remembrance of people, places, and events that make this city such a special place. We are proud to be able to create this museum for our community."

Pappas thanked Pell City officials for supporting the project since its beginning.

"The city has been a terrific supporter of this museum," she said. "We couldn't ask for better partners than the mayor, city manager and council. They provided us the space, infrastructure, and, best of all, moral support. Without their support, none of this would have been possible. Their vision is to be commended, and the legacy it creates will last for generations."

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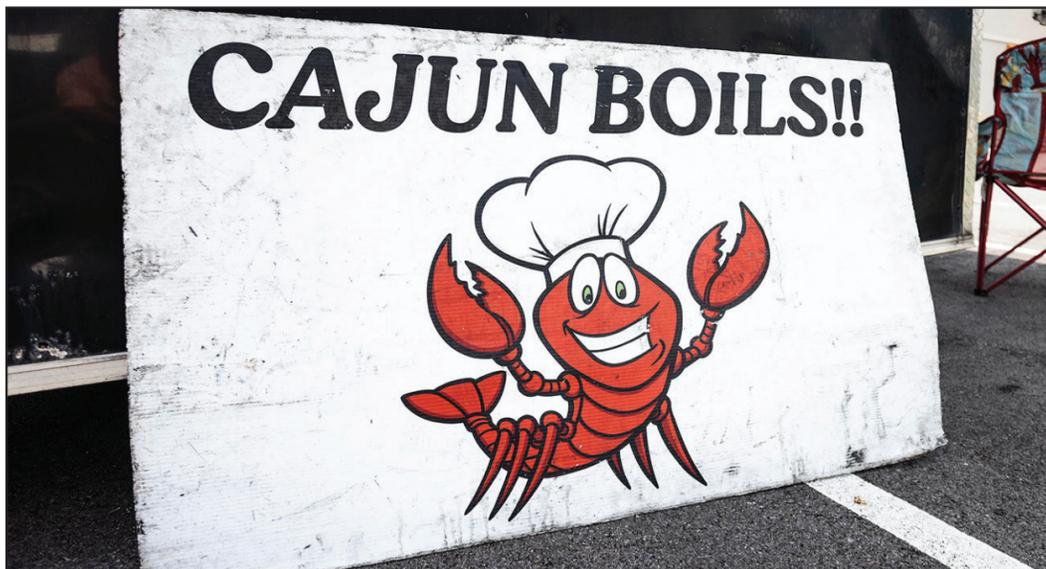
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Bob Crisp/The Daily Home
Kevin Story is the owner of Sea Life food truck.



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FOOD

Continued from Page 41

to stop and check out the menu if they see more than one truck parked."

Story said he owes a lot of his success to other food trucks and their community of encouragement. "I want to say thanks to Bell's BBQ for showing me a lot before opening my truck."

Story's next project will be a brick and mortar restaurant in Talladega.

"Hopefully I can open in Talladega soon and stay local. I would definitely bring a lot more to the menu, such as shrimp and grits; catfish and grits; lobster pasta; shrimp etouffee, catfish courtbouillon, jambalaya, — and of course, our original menu.

For Sea Life schedule updates, visit Story's Facebook page.

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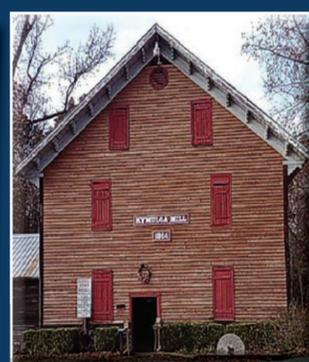
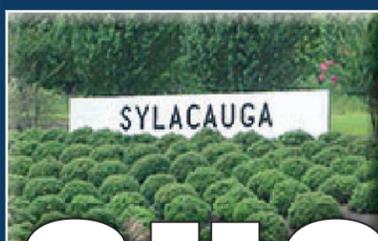
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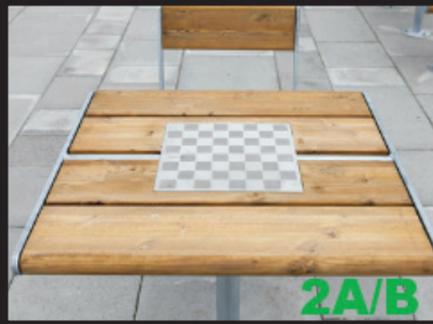
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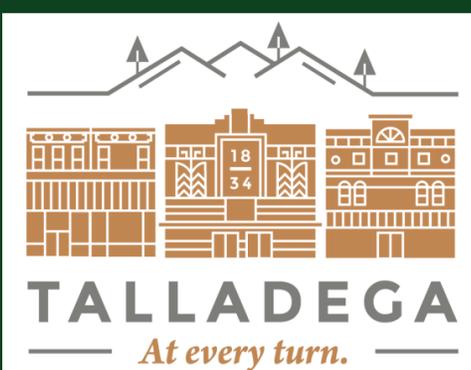


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For more information or to make a donation, please contact Talladega City Manager Seddrick Hill Sr. or Public Information Officer Mary Sood at msood@talladega.com.

HOMETOWN MAYORS: Riverside

Rusty Jessup

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Mayor Rusty Jessup has been at the helm of Riverside for 17 years, helping make sure the city's residents have a clean and safe place to call home.

Jessup refers to Riverside as "a small bedroom city community of about 2,500 people, sandwiched between Pell City and Lincoln." With more than 12 miles of shoreline within the city limits, the population fluctuates with people coming to visit on the weekends and holidays to take in the amazing views. The Coosa River, in fact, is one of the reasons Jessup moved to the city.

"I graduated from Shades Valley High School and later Jacksonville State University," he said. "My wife Sandra and I moved to the area from Anniston. We were attracted here by Logan Martin Lake and had a small weekend place for a number of years. We fell in love with all things about the river and the people, and we moved here permanently in 1990."

Since taking on the role of mayor in 2006, he has enjoyed watching the city grow and working to maintain a high quality of life for residents. He believes that one of the best things about Riverside is its convenient interstate access. Aside from the river that attracts many, the quaint city is also known for its six-acre city park with walking tracks and observation attractions and The Ark restaurant (well known for serving some of Alabama's best fried catfish for more than 50 years).

In an interview for My Hometown, Jessup had the following to say.

Q: What motivated you to want to serve as mayor?

Jessup: My motivation to run for public office was probably very normal, I would say. I just wanted to help. If you care about something — I mean, really care about something — enough to act, to sacrifice time, effort and



Submitted photoar

Mayor Rusty Jessup with local youngsters during a Kids Quest reading event.

money, the answer is very simple: you must get involved. While cheering from the sidelines can be beneficial, nothing will really happen until someone gets involved on the field. I also had some good friends, family and neighbors around me for encouragement — and still do.

Q: What is the biggest challenge you have encountered as mayor?

Jessup: The most disconcerting thing I learned when I got into public office was the shocking financial condition of our country. Almost every government agency out there is in financial straits. So many of the cities and

counties are almost broke, the state is struggling, and the feds are really broke. It is an absolute statement to the resilience of our leadership over the years to keep this thing afloat. Amazing! I say this with my tongue firmly planted in my cheek. The demands of the public are so far out of the reach of the government's ability to pay for them that it is scary. Yet, the public still demands. This is my biggest challenge as a mayor. It is our biggest challenge as a country. Any elected official will attest to this — money and taxes.

Q: What would you like to see happen in Riverside during the next five years?

Jessup: We have a grant application in process now to expand our waste water treatment along the north side of Highway 78 to the interstate and continuing up Depot Street to City Hall. This sewer line will greatly enhance our ability to grow commercial value on Highway 78 and residential value in our downtown area. This is a \$1.2 million project. We also have appropriated money to pave the entire length of Depot Street within our city limits. This is a \$630,000 project, and we hope to get started this year. We also need some major renovation work done in our city hall. I do not know if this can or will happen in the next five years, but it is

a looming need. We also would like to have a fresh water source for our city park, to not only have drinking water but fresh water for our ponds to keep them fresh, healthy, and full. This will involve a new well, pumping station, and piping infrastructure. This would add many nice features and value to our city park and the surrounding area.

Q: Will you be seeking another term?

Jessup: The mayor's position is up for election in August of 2025. However, I have not made a decision yet about if I will be running for another term.

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Abandoned Houses of Talladega County

In the absence of humanity, nature again takes hold. Its wildness reclaims the land, gradually erasing all traces of human intervention. Vines creep up the crumbling walls, their tendrils snaking through broken windows, weaving a tapestry of life against a backdrop of decay. Nature carpets what remains with soft moss and lichen, adding a touch of vibrant green to the muted tones of forgotten homes.



Susan Cook

Birds return to claim their dominion. The wind, unhindered by walls or panes, whistles through the empty spaces, carrying seeds that find fertile ground in neglected gardens. Over time, the abandoned houses become enveloped

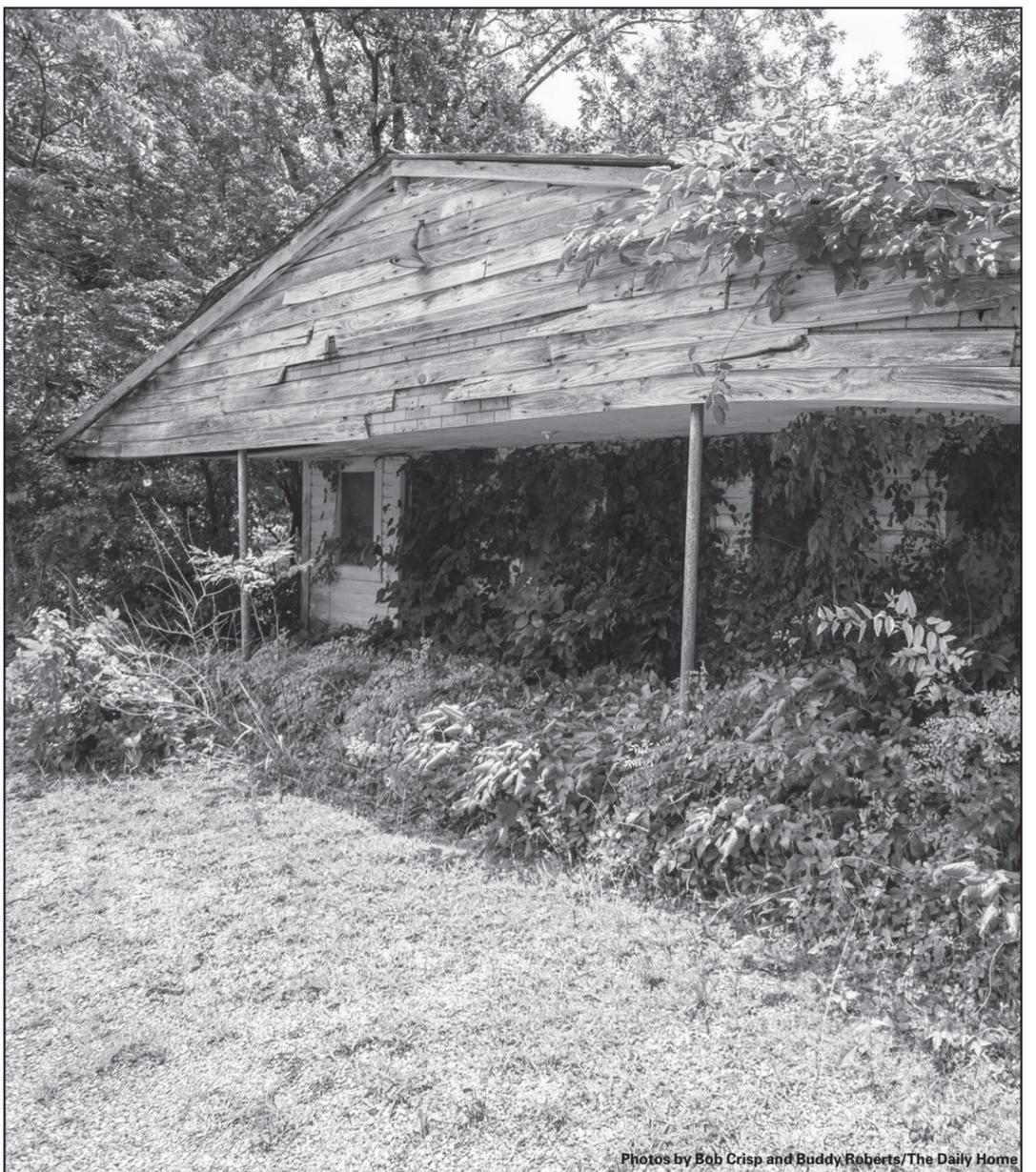
by a lush wilderness. Trees, slender and resilient, emerge from cracks in the pavement, their branches reaching toward the sun. They cast dappled shadows on the overgrown lawns, where wildflowers now bloom, painting the once plain green patch with bursts of color.

Squirrels scurry along the sagging fences, amassing a network of secret pathways. Rabbits burrow into the earth, creating cozy homes within the forgotten foundations.

As the seasons pass, nature reclaims its throne with patient and persistent grace. The abandoned houses become interwoven with the surrounding ecosystem, an integral part of its ever-changing tapestry. These dwellings stand as silent spectators to the resilience of nature, a testament to its ability to mend and restore.

In a sense, abandoned houses find a new purpose. They become havens for biodiversity, ecosystems unto themselves. Each cracked crevice teems with life, fostering a delicate balance between decay and regeneration. Amidst the solitude, there is a quiet harmony between the remnants of human existence and the forces of nature. Even in our absence, nature's relentless spirit persists, reclaiming what was once ours and transforming it into a strange and wild beauty.

And so, the cycle continues. These abandoned houses, though a little sad in their forgotten state, become a testament to the eternal rhythm of life, a reminder that even in the face of impermanence, nature finds a way to flourish.



Photos by Bob Crisp and Buddy Roberts/The Daily Home

Abandoned Houses of Talladega County



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Pell City mother, daughter combine to form real estate 'dream team'

BY FAITH DORN

Special to The Daily Home

Julie Luker started her professional life by opening a salon in Pell City when she was 20 years old. The relationships she made during the following 30 years were invaluable when she changed careers.

"Being from Pell City and working as a hairdresser are really what sparked my real estate career," she said. "I had years and years of connections within the community. Eventually my body started giving me pains from working on hair, and I knew I needed a second career and income. Real estate had been my plan from the beginning."

When Luker says real estate was always the plan, she means it.

"When my sister and I were young, Mom would let us get one magazine a month when we went grocery shopping. My sister would always get 'Tiger Beat' because of Donny Osmond. I would always get house plans," she said, laughing.

She credits all those years of viewing house plans with being able to walk into a home and have a precise visual of what it needs. This year, she is celebrating her 13th year as a Realtor. She works out of the Pell City Keller Williams office.

"Hollyann was still living at home, and she saw me studying like crazy for that exam," Luker said, referring to her daughter, Hollyann Bemis.

Bemis is newly licensed and working as an assistant to her mother, with the goal of making a "dream team" to better help their clients. As an assistant to Luker, Bemis helps with showings, open houses, and messaging with clients.

"I studied marketing at Troy University, and I have always been such a people-oriented person. Mom always encouraged me to get my real estate license, and now I get to assist her and follow in her footsteps," said Bemis. "I think this

mother-daughter team is perfect. This time is so important, and I get to learn from the best — the best being my mom."

"I don't look at myself as being the best, but I always give 110%," her mom said, adding that she's excited about being able to work with her daughter and show her the ropes.

"You can't get time back, so spending time with Hollyann and teaching her how to be a Realtor is so important to me. You choose people over profit and not profit over people. It doesn't matter if it is a \$100,000 home or million dollar home. Pick people over profit, and your heart will be blessed every time," Luker said.

In addition to giving guidance to her daughter, she also takes younger clients under her wing.

"We are not home inspectors, but I get so close to my clients, especially the younger ones. They look up to me to help them through the home addendum items and repairs," explains Luker.

The biggest lesson Bemis has learned from Luker is to never give up. "She puts relationships before profit. Always. I am really excited to pursue this real estate career and learn from my mentor."

Bemis will have plenty of opportunities to learn this summer, because Luker says March-July are the busiest months due to families trying to get settled in time for school in August. Although Luker says every deal is unique, some things are universal.

"You work to build and continue relationships. We are still in a very competitive market. You need extremely smart negotiation strategies. Read all your different info from lenders. Hang in there with these rates. You are not married to the rate. When you get the house, there are always refinancing options."

If you would like to discuss buying or selling a home, contact Julie Luker at 205-369-0852 or Hollyann Bemis at 205-381-1121.



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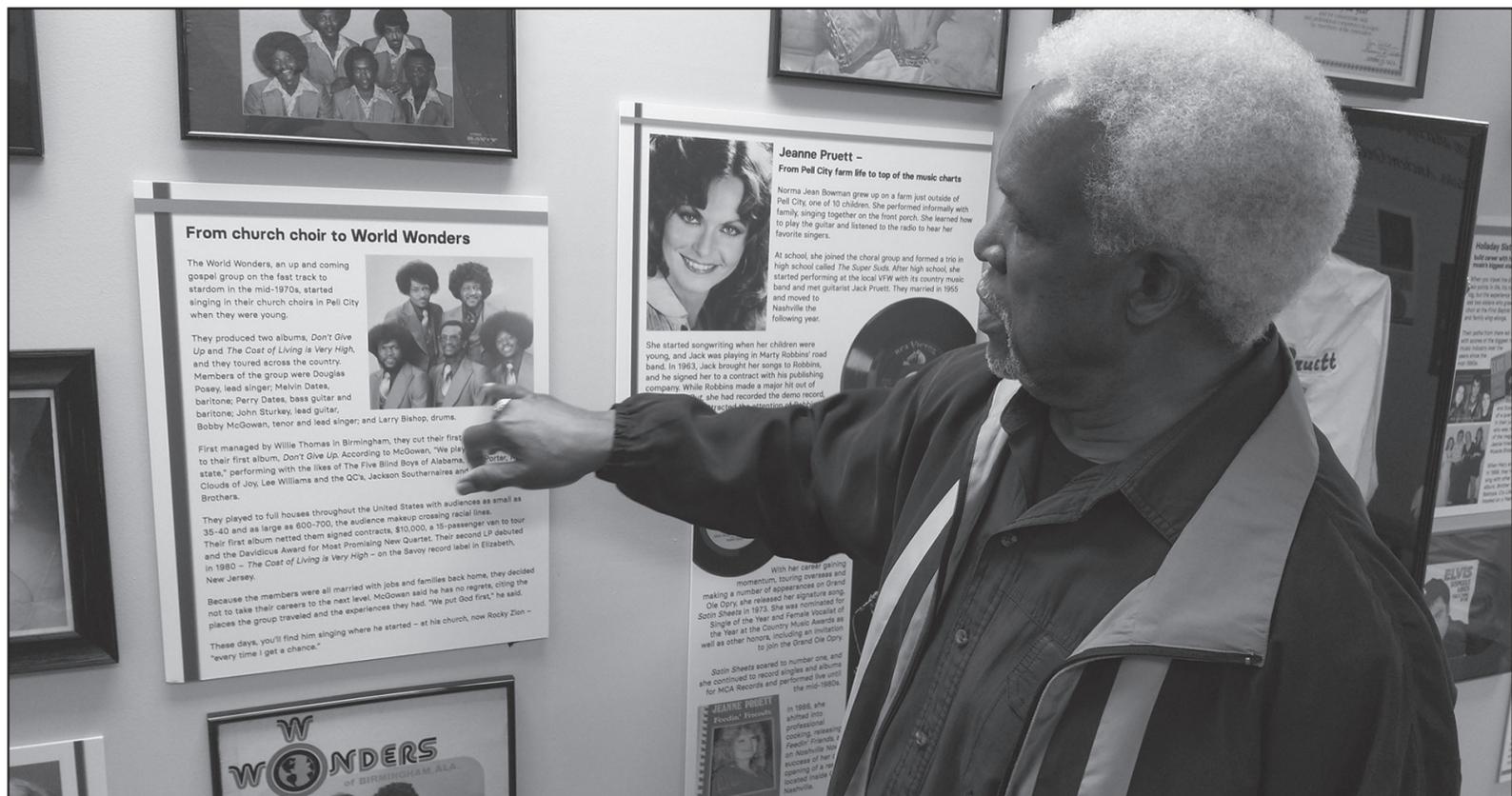
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Buddy Roberts/The Daily Home

Bobby McGowan points himself out in a photo of the World Wonders displayed in an exhibit at the Museum of Pell City.

Pell City resident recalls his days a member of the World Wonders

BY EJ VERNON

Special to The Daily Home

At 77, Pell City resident Bobby McGowan still enjoys playing Gospel music.

His fascination with Gospel music started when he was a boy when his mother sang in the church choir.

"I couldn't have been more than 10 or 11 years old," he said. "I used to stand with my mom while was singing. She went to church every Sunday."

McGowan loves all kinds of music, but these early experiences influenced his decision to perform in a Gospel music group, the World Wonders. The group took shape in the mid to late 1970s with Douglas Posey, lead singer; Melvin Dates, baritone; Perry Dates, bass guitar and baritone; John Sturkey, lead guitar; Bobby McGowan, tenor and lead singer; and Larry Bishop, drums.

The group began playing and rehearsing in their houses and garag-

es. "We played any time we had the opportunity," McGowan said. We were all passionate about it, and we all made decisions as a group."

The group was first discovered by Willie Thomas in Birmingham, who took on the role as the group's manager.

"I don't know where we would be without Willie's influence," McGowan said. He was good to us, you know."

The World Wonders began recording their songs. The group recorded their first album, Don't Give Up, in 1979.

Traveling across the United States, the World Wonders play in front of crowds as small as 35 people to packed houses of 600 or 700 people. Initially, the group performed at local and regional venues in Pell City, Talladega and Birmingham.

"The first time you are on stage, it's frightening," McGowan said.

In 1980, the World Wonders recorded their second album titled,

The Cost of Living is Very High.

Members of the World Wonders performed alongside other musicians when they traveled, including: The Five Blind Boys of Alabama, Mighty Clouds of Joy, Paul Porter, Lee Williams and the QC's, Jackson Southernaires and the Williams Brothers.

"We had fun traveling and playing together," McGowan said.

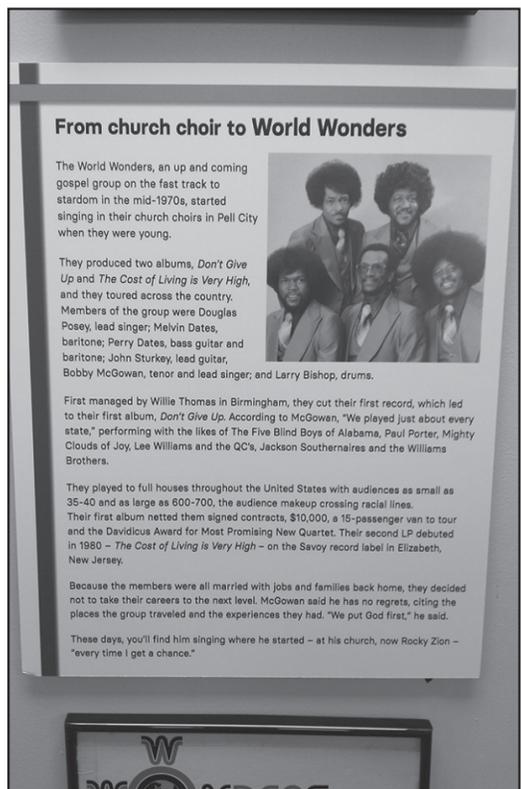
McGowan said the biggest challenge every member faced was leaving behind their families when they traveled.

"We always wanted to put God first," McGowan said.

Dedication to families and jobs influenced the group's decision not to take their musical careers to the next level.

"I don't regret that decision at all," McGowan said. "It was the right thing to do."

Today, he still performs when asked. "I still love it. I have always loved Gospel music."



HOMETOWN MAYORS: Pell City Bill Pruitt

BY VALLEAN JACKSON

Special to The Daily Home

Mayor Bill Pruitt proves that someone doesn't have to be from a city to serve as mayor.

A Louisiana native with roots in Alabama, he has always felt like Pell City was home for him, and the chance to give back to it is something he is more than happy to do.

"I have no actual ties to Pell City," he said. "I relocated here in 1992. I visited Cullman and Gadsden often to see my grandparents for the holidays and vacations, but outside of that, I just one day found my way to Pell City, which in my opinion, should dispel that belief that someone has to be from the city in order to run it. I believe that you just have to have the heart for service and desire to make a difference."

Pruitt took office in 2016. Pell City has a population of about 14,000 and is known for Logan Martin Lake, a big attraction for water sports, fishing tournaments, boat shows, and a host of recreational opportunities. The mayor had the following to say in an interview for My Hometown.

Q: What are your thoughts about Pell City's government?

Pruitt: I think that the greatest thing that happened to Pell City was former Mayor Joe Funderburg's decision to switch the position of mayor from full-time to part-time with a city manager. I believe that opened up the opportunity for new faces and for different people to get involved. As for me in particular, I think my age at the time played a part in the decision, my different perspective on things, my way of thinking, and my background. Between the city manager, the

council, and myself, we bring so many perspectives to the table, but we all share the common goal of doing the best we can to help provide the ideal place to raise a family and call home.

Q: What is the best thing about Pell City?

Pruitt: I would have to say the people. Pell City is a community that cares. We are growing at such a rate, but despite the growth we are a tight-knit group but not exclusive. We have a lot of amenities, can still offer a smaller town feel, and it is just a great place to live.

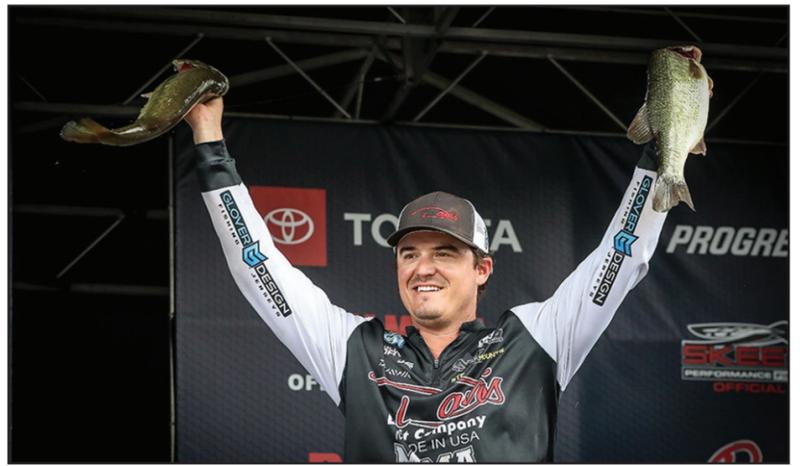
Q: What is the biggest challenge connected with serving as mayor?

Pruitt: We're at a point of growth where we are starting to get new retail opportunities, restaurants, etc, and some people want things to move quicker. I can get the excitement and not understanding how things work and just wanting them to go how you think they should, because I used to think like that before I learned, but that's not how it works. I get the misconception about the time frame, but there are steps to natural progression. It's a process that takes patience.

Q: What would you like to see happen in Pell City during the next five years?

Pruitt: We have some planning to do for future growth. Nevertheless, in the next five years, we have in mind to have a new fire department and a new civic center, as the current one is busting at the seams. When I first came into office, about three of the five council members that came in with me at the time, we had a lot of things to focus on, and we took on a project at a time. Now those things have been tackled and we can plan for future growth.





Hometown angler reels in Bassmaster Elite Series championship

Hometown superstar and Bassmaster Elite Series Professional Will Davis Jr. struck gold at his fifth stop on the Bassmaster Elite Series, held on Lay Lake May 11-14. He claimed the prestigious series championship in his first year as a professional angler.

A native of Sylacauga, Davis was certainly no stranger to Lay Lake. When the Elite series schedule was announced, the Bassmaster Elite Series rookie was the surprising favorite amongst the field of anglers on Lay Lake.

Prior to that event, Davis had been making quite a name for himself. He consistently found himself cashing tournament checks during the past year. His recent wins include Alabama Bass Nation Championship, Bass Nation Regional Championship, Bass Nation National Championship, and now the Elite Series Championship. With that win, Davis has surpassed \$140,000 in bass tournament winnings for 2023 and is sits in sixth place overall in the Angler of Year (AOY) standings.

He's also leading the Rookie of the Year (ROY) race. He is truly on fire. Coming into the Lay Lake tournament, David was generating excitement in the local community. He proved that local knowledge and adaptation were key, as he won the competition by just two ounces. With a total catch of 62 pounds, 12 ounces, he outlasted the field of more experienced professionals and solidified his name into Bassmaster history.

The four-day event showcased the

absolute best fisherman in the world. Known as the oldest impoundment on the Coosa River, Lay Lake is a powerhouse for bass fishing enthusiasts. The lake offers diverse habitats for both species of targeted bass, largemouth and spots. From native water willow to rocky ledges, beautiful Lay Lake truly has it all. Unfortunately, it had been fishing very tough and stingy due to post-spawn conditions. As the largemouth and spotted bass finish their annual spawning cycle, they begin to transition into their early summer patterns.

This transition from late spring to early summer can be some of the toughest fishing conditions of the year. The bass are spread out and very unpredictable, to the extent that only 68 out of 104 professionals caught the full five-fish limit throughout the event. These particular bass fishing conditions are very abnormal for this fishery, because Lay Lake is known for its abundance of big aggressive largemouth and spotted bass. Davis said that conditions such as weather, time of year, and river current schedule all played a part in the tough fishing.

As the tournament progressed, Davis had to continuously change with the fish to grab the big blue Elite Series trophy. His ability to adapt with the fish raked in a monstrous \$100,000 payday.

He managed to keep his composure by fishing both heavy current for spotted bass spawning largemouth. His main damage was done up the river in current seams, but key largemouth throughout the event propelled him to victory. His arsenal of lures included such baits as the Shaky Fish and Shaky Head, both of which were designed and distributed by William Davis, Will's father and the owner of Davis Bait Com-

pany. Will's main targets in the river included rocks piles and current eddies, both high percentage targets that can yield large numbers of spotted bass. When targeting post spawn and spawning largemouth, he relied on a white swimming jig and a Big Bite Baits fighting frog. He had a simple approach, relying on the spotted bass for the bulk of his weight and targeting the bigger largemouth as his main kicker fish. That approach worked to perfection.

Davis found himself at the top of the leaderboard in all four days of the event, as he never dropped below seventh place overall. After day one, with a weight of 15-pounds, 14-ounces for his five bass limit, he was setting the tone for the rest of the event. Day 2 proved to be even better, as Davis boasted one of the biggest bags of the tournament, an 18-pound, 5-ounce stringer of bass. Day 3 seemed to be a slower, but still productive, as he weighed in 14-pounds, 7-ounces. Davis found himself in third place after Day 3, and less than three pounds behind the leader.

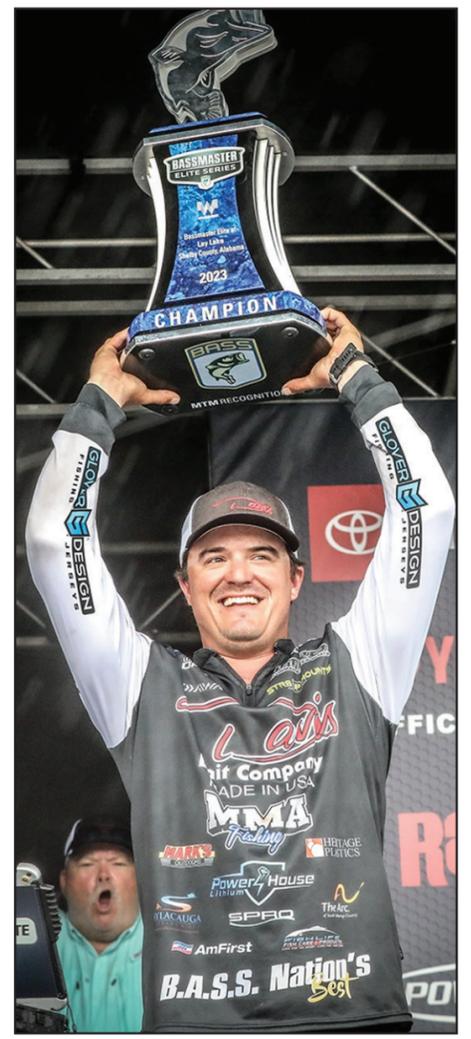
Consistency killed the competition, and there was a slight calm before the storm. Davis weighed in 14 pounds, 2 ounces and was able to hoist the Elite Series trophy for all to see at Beeswax Park.

As the crowd erupted with joy and excitement, a local thunderstorm turned into a heavy downpour. Humbled and thankful, Davis gave all of the glory to his family, friends, and sponsors. As the rain drenched the spectators, he soaked in every minute of his victory.

The Elite Series rookie had done the impossible, a true David-vs-Goliath story that locals will speak of forever.



Cj Knight



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