

2020 READER'S CHOICE AWARDS



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Choice**



The Anniston Star

Reader's Choice

Every year since we began our Reader's Choice awards in 2010, it's gotten bigger and better, and this year proved no different. With more than 35,000 submissions, our readers voted for their favorite plumbers, doctors, nurses and of course, where to get the best barbecue. We thank our readers for their continued support of this annual publication and look forward to seeing it grow even more next year.

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Gordon Hardy

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Amedisys
Kindred at Home
ProHealth Home Health & Hospice

PEDIATRICIAN

1st place - Jose Caballero
Chase Thomas
Lewis Doggett
Andrea Branch
Elizabeth Patrenos

MASSAGE THERAPIST

1st place - Katie Beecham (Anniston Orthopedics)
Kasey Timmons (A Touch of Grace Day Spa)
Amy Leahey (Oxford)
Alysha Gilfus (All about You)
Susan Castleberry (Creations Salon)

MEDICAL LABORATORY SERVICE

1st place - LabCorp (Anniston)
The Surgery Center
Oxford Primary Care & Weight Loss
Regional Medical Center
LabCorp (Oxford)

PARAMEDIC / EMT

1st place - Evie Waddell (Anniston EMT)

Randy Garner (Piedmont Rescue)
Bruce Rollins (Oxford EMT)
Austin Key (Anniston Fire)
Darby Heard (Oxford EMS)

PHARMACIST

1st place - Johnnie Ellis (Downey Drug)
Paul Graham (Downey Drug)
Dana Collier (Downey Drug)
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Kai Martin (Martin's Pharmacy)

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Weight Watchers (Parker Memorial Baptist Church)

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Ryan Huff (ATI Physical Therapy)
Doug Strautman (CORE Orthopedics)
Katherine Davidson (NHC)
Joseph Mogill (ATI Physical Therapy)

PHYSICAL THERAPY ASSISTANT

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FIRST PLACE FITNESS / HEALTH CLUB

Oxford Taekwondo shows students the benefits of exercise

BY BEN NUNNALLY

bnunnallystar@gmail.com

There are five tenets that students learn at Oxford Taekwondo, and any one of them is worth knowing.

Chad Smith, instructor and co-owner of the Barry Street martial arts studio, opens many of the school's events and tournaments by quizzing students about the tenets: Courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self control and indomitable spirit. The youngest students, not even out of third grade, giggle as they try to remember what each tenet means. The older students explain the value of each, something Smith said they learn to do in and around lessons filled with kicks and combinations. There's something about the activity and unity with other students that grabs kids, Smith explained.

"A lot of kids come in because mom and dad want them exercising and out from in front of the TV, but they're not interested in stick and ball sports," Smith said. "Then they come in and they try it and they fall in love with it."

Smith runs the Oxford studio, while his wife, Paula, runs a sister location in Heflin. Chad said the two locations are one school, and both studios operate under the Smith's Martial Arts banner.

Taekwondo runs in the family; Paula began taking instruction when she was 13, and became an instructor by her senior year of high school. She stepped away from martial arts when she sent to college, and later met Chad while the two worked — of all places — in hospital-

ity for NASCAR in North Carolina. She taught taekwondo to Chad and their children. Paula brought the family to Calhoun County in 2009 and she was teaching again by 2010, she said, after years away from regular practice. Fortunately, taekwondo isn't a "use it or lose it" skill.

"It's like riding a bike; a little wobbly at first, but you can get back on the bike and ride it," Paula said. "We're training our muscles to feel a certain way, and muscle memory kicked back in."

The schools host a variety of clients, ranging from children as young as 4 — in Little Dragons classes, along with 5-year-olds — to teens, adults and the elderly, with one student over the age of 70.

"They see the benefit of the exercise more," Chad said. "For every student, it's a personal journey."

Both of the Smiths said the family atmosphere at their studios might be why Oxford Taekwondo was recognized by readers in this year's Reader's Choice Awards. Though COVID-19 kept students from learning together in-person, the Smiths orchestrated remote lessons through online meeting software — in groups for the younger students, with a focus on cardio and combinations of techniques, and one-on-one sessions for older students — along with activities such as scavenger hunts and hangouts.

"I found out our students really do support us and have our backs," Paula said. "They participated any way they could for a long time. They didn't want to sit around at home."



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Chad Smith works with his students at Oxford Taekwondo, which won favorite Fitness Club in the Reader's Choice Awards.



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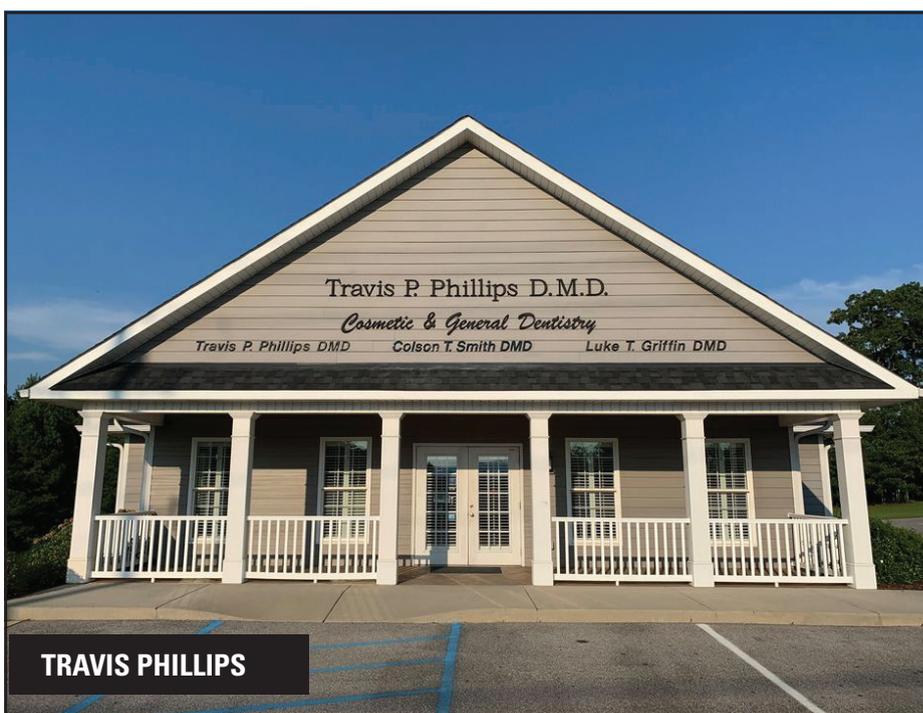
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BARBER SHOP

1st place - Envy Salon

BEAUTY SHOP

1st place - Envy Salon
Creations Salon
All About You

TATTOO SHOP

1st place - Tat2Tyme
Artistic Addictions
Infinity ink
Skin Deep
Wicked Game

FIRST PLACE BEAUTY SHOP AND BARBER SHOP

At Envy Salon in Jacksonville, customers are treated like part of the family

BY ASHLEY PHILLIPS

Star Staff Writer

On a recent Tuesday afternoon, Niky VanHatten opened the door to Envy Salon in Jacksonville to a client waiting on her porch steps.

VanHatten asks her customers to wait in their cars once they arrive for their appointment due to state guidelines for COVID-19. That doesn't dissuade the community from waiting all the same, as the salon is unlike any other in Calhoun County.

The vibe in Envy isn't one typically seen in full-service salons. Road signs and traffic lights, not photos of hair, adorn the walls, and '90s R&B streams through the salon's speakers.

The clients don't come for the music or funky decor, though; they come for the friendly warmth and talent Envy offers. Readers of The Anniston Star recently chose Envy as their favorite beauty shop and favorite barber shop.

Asked what she believed her customers liked about her business, VanHatten said she thought her customers gravitated toward the interaction they received at her salon.

"Whenever you come in the salon, we treat you like you're part of the family," VanHatten said. "It doesn't matter to us any status. We're gonna treat you like we've seen you all of our lives."

VanHatten has been a stylist for 18 years and had worked in the salon herself prior to taking ownership in 2012. Nestled just off of Pelham Road in Jacksonville, the salon itself received her personal touch as she remodeled and redesigned it and renamed it Envy.

VanHatten said her clients are diverse in age from the first haircuts to their last. To ready her staff for that kind of responsibility, VanHatten doesn't just take stylists right out of school and throw them to the wolves.

According to Envy stylists Faith Batchelor and Kelsee Detton, Envy provides training that cosmetologists can't get from most employers. Many stylists, like Detton, had only worked with manikins and had not had much training before working with real clients.

Batchelor and Detton said to work there, stylists must complete a trial period during which they assist another stylist — typically six to eight weeks.

"She teaches you everything," Batchelor said. "Hair cutting, colors, she doesn't let you out from under her wing."

Batchelor said her experience at Envy has surpassed the relationship between boss and employee.

"She's your boss, your teacher, your friend, your mom," Batchelor said, "whatever you need in that moment she does that."



Ashley Phillips/The Anniston Star

The stylists at Envy Salon in Jacksonville, the Reader's Choice winner of favorite beauty shop and barber shop.

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FIRST PLACE ELECTRICIAN/ELECTRICAL SERVICE

A sense of partnership with their fellow neighbors keeps J&J Electric in the public's favor

BY ASHLEY PHILLIPS

Star Staff Writer

John Payne and his wife, Stephanie, sat in their quiet office at J&J Electric on a recent Thursday afternoon, their dog Gracie guarding the door.

It's a family-run business, with words from his late father painted the wall close to Payne's desk. The couple were by themselves on this day, their employees being generally out of the office on job sites. They're a clean-cut, honest and hard-working crew, according to Payne, offering his belief that they're why his customers voted for his business to win the 2020 Reader's Choice Award in the Electrician/Electrical service category.

"They are really a great group of people," Payne said. "And many customers ask for them by name to return on another job months later."

The firm's sense of partnership with its fellow neighbors that has kept J&J Electric in the public's favor, Payne suggested. He and his wife have always given back to their community wherever possible, he said.



Ashley Phillips/The Anniston Star

John and Stephanie Payne of J&J Electric with their dog, Gracie.

When a tornado devastated the community of Jacksonville 2018 and most of its residents were without power, J&J Electric was there from sun up until the late hours of the evening helping restore power to the homes — sometimes not knowing whether they would be paid for their ser-

vices at all.

"It wasn't that it was a big money-maker. It was not. We did it because we felt obligated to help our community," Stephanie Payne said.

Payne said his business does everything from "Lightning Bugs to Lightning Bolts" — meaning he takes on the small and the large. His work fluctuates from the small electrical tasks around a home to the larger contract jobs of the Army Depot.

Payne started electrician work in the late '70s at Acker Electric after his father introduced him to Acker.

"They called him Snake for a reason. He was a big huge growly gravelly bear of a man," Payne said. "He put me the first two weeks mid July on a jackhammer in FMC parking lot and when we got through with that job, he said 'you'll make it.'"

This is what introduced him to the field of electrical work. In 1993 he applied for his Master Electrician license. When Fort McClellan closed in 1999, he had a substantial list of clients so he set out on his own — and J&J electric was born.



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RADIO STATION

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FIRST PLACE LOCAL RADIO / TV PERSONALITY

DJ Steve Stevens lives his dream at WVOK-FM

BY BILL WILSON

wwilson@annistonstar.com

Steve Stevens is radio. Stevens has been an on-air personality at 97.9 FM in Oxford since 1996 with a booming voice, caring heart and a whimsical outlook on life.

Stevens has been the morning DJ since 2001, something he has always wanted to do ever since he began his radio career at age 14.

"It's all I've ever wanted to do, morning radio, because it's so fun," Stevens said.

Stevens said his listeners are his life.

"Without the listeners I would not have a job," he said as he twiddle sliders and knobs at the control board at the radio station on a recent morning.

Stevens can be heard weekday mornings on WVOK from 6-9 a.m. during the Steve and Julie Show, a show he co-hosts with another longtime 97.9 DJ, Julie Daniels.

Instead of the mindset of "big me, little you," his motto is, "little me, big you," as he credits his longtime listeners for his success.

"Being able to get to know them when I

first started working here when they were younger and now they are all grown up and they have kids," said Stevens, "they're bringing them to remotes and stuff and it's a feeling like you can't describe."

Stevens said the relationship he has with his listeners is like a family.

"I love it," said Stevens.

Stevens said the last time he actually cued up a vinyl record to play was back in 1995 and a lot of changes have happened since.

"Everything in the radio business is computerized except for me," Stevens said.

Besides the huge changes in technology Stevens said the music has changed too. Having previously worked at a rock station before coming to 97.9, Stevens said the musical acts today don't have the longevity of acts from years ago.

Steven said he has won the reader's choice designation twice in the past but was humbled that he was chosen once again.

One of Steven's trademark slogans typically uttered at the end of each broadcast sums up Steven's adoration for his listening audience: "Love ya, mean it."



Bill Wilson/The Anniston Star

Reader's Choice favorite DJ Steve Stevens at 97.9 WVOK in Oxford.

"It's all I've ever wanted to do, morning radio, because it's so fun."

— DJ Steve Stevens



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Alexander's at Noble
Rosa Lee Boutique
Kolectic Treasures Antique Market
Wakefield's

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Mike's Romac Cleaners
Mallory Cleaners
Nu-Kleen

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1st place - Valley Florist & Gifts

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Pinson's Florist
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FUNERAL HOME

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1st place - Couch's Jewelers

Rosa Lee Boutique
Kolectic Treasures Antique Market
Miller Florist & Gifts
Yim Creations

PAWN SHOP

1st place - Mike's Treasure Chest

B&B Pawn
Wildcat Pawn
Quintard Pawn
144 Pawn

PET / PET GROOMING STORE

1st place - Head to Tail

Scruffy to Fluffy Mobile Grooming
Dog Daze Salon
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PHOTOGRAPHER

1st place - Mark Hicks Photography

Kylee Wilson Photography
Susan Weathington Photography
Stefanie McGuffey Photography
Courtney Crenshaw Photography

SPORTING GOODS STORE

1st place - Exile Armory

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TRAVEL AGENCY

1st place - R & R Travel

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VETERINARIAN

1st place - William Brom (Greenbrier Animal Clinic)

Tracy Whitaker (Rolling Hill Veterinary)
Bill Berry (Berry Animal Clinic)
Tim Lusk (Lusk Animal Clinic)
Eric Clanton (Clanton Animal Hospital)

CONSIGNMENT / THRIFT SHOP

1st place - Center of Hope

Abundance Consignment
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Sonja's Second Hand Shop
Helping Hands

GUN SHOP

1st place - Exile Armory

Duggar Mountain Fudge and Gun Shop
Shotgun Sports
Wildcat Pawn
Chief Ladiga Trading Post

CHILDREN'S CLOTHING

1st place - Martin's Family Clothing

Children's Place
Blessed Mess
Pink Rubies Boutique
BabyBou

JEWELRY STORE

1st place - Couch's Jewelers

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Rosa Lee Boutique
Sisters Treasures
Jewelry Express

WOMEN'S CLOTHING

1st place - Martin's Family Clothing

Rosa Lee Boutique
Madi Lou's Boutique
A Dream Boutique
Frey Boutique

MEN'S CLOTHING STORE

1st place - Martin's Family Clothing

On Time Fashions
Wakefields
CD Cellar
Kolectic Treasures Antique Market

LOCAL BOUTIQUE

1st place - Alexander's at Noble

Rosa Lee Boutique
Madi Lou's Boutique
A Dream Boutique
Frey Boutique

SALESPERSON

1st place - Mike Alexander (Alexander's at Noble)

Dara Murphy (Rosa Lee Boutique)
Alexis Johnson (Frey Boutique)
Leigh Ann Parton (Rosa Lee Boutique)
Ashlyn Harrell (Rosa Lee Boutique)



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#1 Best Salesperson
Mike Alexander

08/29/20
I want to personally thank each and everyone of you who voted for me. You'll never know how much it means to me and what an honor to be chosen as your favorite salesperson. I was up against some tough competition with some amazing ladies at local boutiques! On behalf of all who were nominated we want to thank you all for supporting our small business! Many of you know I almost closed my boutique last year. Because of you we are still here. Because of you I am humbled to be voted as your favorite salesperson. Because of you we will continue to "keep going" love you all! Mike Alexander

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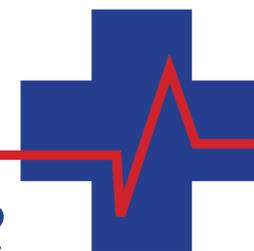
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FIRST PLACE VETERINARIAN

Dr. William Brom of Greenbrier Animal Clinic says spending time with clients is important

BY SCOTT YOUNG

Star Staff Writer

Dr. William Brom, a veterinarian and founder of the Greenbrier Animal Clinic in Anniston, has been taking care of the community's fur babies for over 38 years and he's seen it all.

"I've seen porcupines," Brom said. "I've seen skunks. I've seen 30-foot boas. I've seen baboons."

Many of these animals are brought to him by one client in particular, who he said does school shows that educate students on different types of wild animals.

"You never know what he's gonna bring to you," he said.

Brom decided in his second year of college that he would pursue veterinary medicine, so he transferred to Auburn University to pursue his undergraduate degree in veterinary education in 1980. In June 1982, he opened Greenbrier Animal Clinic.

Readers of The Anniston Star voted Dr.

William Brom as their favorite local veterinarian.

When caring for clients, Brom said he always encourages his staff to try their best to put themselves in that client's position.

"You can buy vaccines at all kinds of places," he said. "You can buy horse wormer, cow wormer, dog and cat wormer just about anywhere you want to, but for them to feel like that we're trying our best to help them as if their pet, their patient, their person is important to us as it is to them."

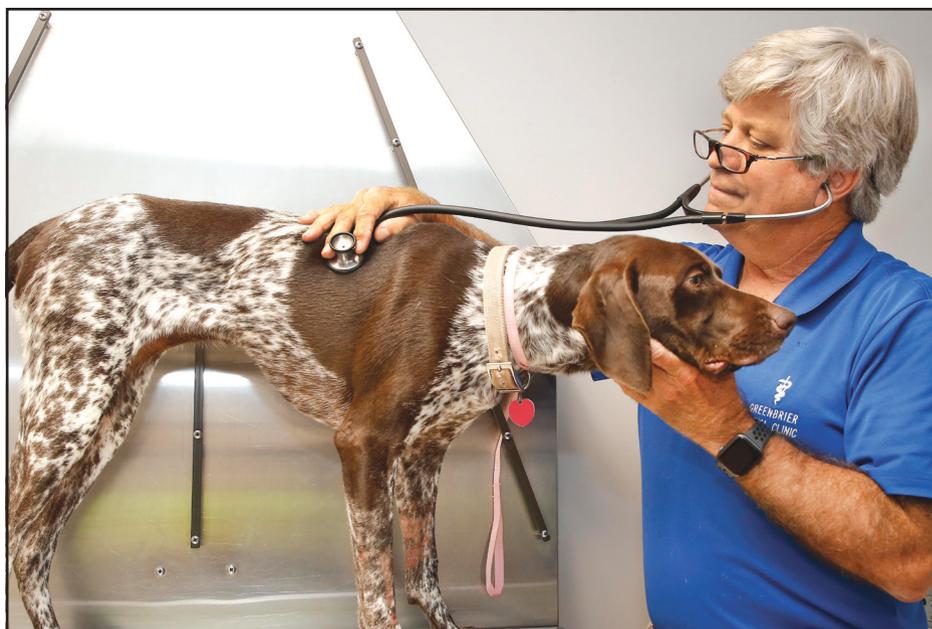
Brom explained that he does his best to communicate with each client and that he couldn't do anything without the help of his staff. Spending time with clients, he said, is important and he wants to make sure that they don't feel like they're being rushed out of the clinic.

"If the folks here don't treat people right, it doesn't matter what I do," he said. "I have a great bunch of folks around me."



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Dr. William Brom — voted by Star readers as favorite veterinarian — treats Millie at Greenbrier Animal Clinic in Anniston.



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star



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FIRST PLACE PHOTOGRAPHER

Photographer Mark Hicks appreciates those who let him document their special events

BY BEN NUNNALLY

bnunnallystar@gmail.com

Mark Hicks has been capturing special days like weddings, birthdays and gatherings in photos since 2016, but this year he captured the hearts of Anniston Star readers.

Hicks took top honors as Calhoun County's favorite photographer in the Reader's Choice awards this year, after taking a runner-up spot in 2019. Hicks, a 36-year-old photographer in Weaver, was appreciative of having won the award, but even more appreciative that people trust him to document their big events.

"I just want to say thank you for allowing me to capture your special days," Hicks said.

He started taking photographs in 2015, but had been an artist for years before that, working in graphic design and other creative outlets. His background let him adjust to editing photos quickly, and helped him create his photographic style, which involves using camera flash, even on sunny days, to fill in scenes with light.

"You see so many photos that are blown out in white and with no details," Hicks said. "I make my photos pop with the flash."

In the years since starting his business, Hicks has also done commercial work, taking photos for various products, and in his spare time he enjoys taking landscape shots — waterfalls, beaches, sunsets and the Milky Way galaxy in time-lapse photos. He keeps a

"I just want to say thank you for allowing me to capture your special days."

— Mark Hicks, photographer



portfolio of his work online at markhickspotos.com.

Here on Earth, he said he believes it's his use of flash, his level of involvement and his high-quality work that earned him recognition from his clients.

"I think they feel I've captured their moments," Hicks said.



Submitted photo

Mark Hicks, pictured here with his wife, Jannette, started taking photographs in 2015, but had been an artist for years before that.



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PEOPLE & PLACES

ATTORNEY

1st place - Justin Wilson
Bill Miller
Wendy Draper
Laura Alexander
Jerry Sills

PUBLIC OFFICIAL

1st place - Bill Partridge
Matthew Wade
Tim Hodges
Wayne Willis
Kim McCarson

CHILD CARE

1st place - The Children's Place
Kids First Childcare (Anniston)
New Adventures Learning Center
Westwood Wee Care
Home Away From Home

INSURANCE AGENCY

1st place - Reaves Insurance Agency
Model City Insurance
Farmers Insurance - Jarod Mitchell Agency
Insurance Planning Services
Dorman & Reynolds

WAITER / WAITRESS

1st place - Paul Langley (The Peerless)
Demi Peck (Top O' the River)
Tonya Morphis (Struts Oxford)
Natalie Couch (The Peerless)
Laken Haynes (Logan's)

COMMUNITY EVENT

1st place - Oxfordfest
Rosa Lee White Bag Christmas Event
Weaver Heritage Day
Noble Street Fest
Boys to Men Male Empowerment Seminar

POLICE OFFICER (NOT ELECTED OR APPOINTED)

1st place - Josh McKenzie (Oxford PD)
Michael Webb (Anniston PD)
Patrick Mitchell (Calhoun County)
Jordan Shekels (Calhoun County)
Stephen Garmon (Calhoun County)

BAIL BONDSMAN/BAIL BONDER

1st place - Kenny Bunn Bail Bonds
Steve Williams Bail Bonding
Speedy Bail Bonds
4 Him Bonding
Big Easy Bail Bonding

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Summer Greenwood (Coldwater)
Tiffany Holliday (AMS)
Ivonne Millirons (CEH)**PRIVATE SCHOOL***1st place - Faith Christian School*Donoho School
Jacksonville Christian Academy
Sacred Heart
Trinity Christian Academy**PRIVATE SCHOOL TEACHER***1st place - Monica Baker (Sacred Heart)*Kristy Stone (Donoho)
Cindy Fair (JCA)
Suzanne Haney (Donoho)
Marie Milner (JCA)**GOLF COURSE***1st place - Cider Ridge*Pine Hill Country Club
Silver Lakes
Anniston Country Club
Cane Creek**PARK***1st place - Choccolocco Park*Oxford Lake
Germania Springs
Weaver Park
Elwell Park**LOCAL TOURIST ATTRACTION***1st place - Cheaha State Park*Anniston Museum of Natural History
Choccolocco Park
Coldwater Mountain Bike Trail
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FIRST PLACE ATTORNEY

Local attorney Justin Wilson represents all kinds of clients

BY TIM LOCKETTE

tlockette@annistonstar.com

Justin Wilson says his law partners often describe him as their pit bull.

"I've had judges and colleagues call me tenacious," Wilson said. "I've heard opposing counsel call me unrelenting."

Pit bulls usually don't win a lot of popularity contests, but when you're selecting someone to represent you in court, a fighter may be what you want. Wilson, a partner at the law firm of LaPlante, Merritt, Faulker, Wilson and Clay, is the winner of The Anniston Star's Reader's Choice award this year.

Born in Calhoun County, Wilson is an Oxford High graduate, and says he's lived in the county for most of his life. That's not

counting, of course, the time he spent in Auburn getting a bachelor's degree and Tuscaloosa getting a law degree.

His practice focuses mostly on criminal defense and family law cases such as divorce and child custody, though he has begun to branch out into personal injury cases as well.

A young person with a law degree has plenty of choices, and Wilson chose to stay in his home county. He says staying close to family is important to him, and he says there's no want of variety in his work here: he's represented clients accused of everything from speeding to murder.

"Every case is different and something new to figure out," he said. "I'm lucky enough to go to a job I enjoy every day."



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Anniston Star readers voted Justin Wilson for favorite attorney.

FIRST PLACE CHILD CARE FACILITY



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Riliegh Martin, director of The Children's Place at the First United Methodist Church in Anniston.

The Children's Place still plugging along during pandemic

BY TIM LOCKETTE

tlockette@annistonstar.com

If you didn't already know the value of good child care, 2020 was the year you learned.

With schools and many businesses closed due to the pandemic, many grownups were stuck at home for weeks. For some, that meant working at home while teaching the ABCs on the side. For others child care was something they had to find before going back to work.

Reliable child care is what The Children's Place, the child care ministry of First United Methodist Church, has been providing for nearly 30 years in the heart of downtown Anniston. It's been picked by the Anniston Star's readers for a Read-

er's Choice Award.

Director Riliegh Martin said there's no particular secret to the day care's popularity, other than providing good faith-based learning.

"We strive to make a positive atmosphere for all of our children and families," she said.

The day care now has 55 children, though like all other child care organizations, it was closed completely for weeks during the initial COVID-19 shut down. Martin said Children's Place will soon take on more students — accepting school-age kids up to 7th grade.

It's a response, she said, to the fact that many kids are no longer in school on a full-time schedule.



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FIRST PLACE WAITER

Paul Langley knows many Peerless customers by name



Bill Wilson/The Anniston Star

Star readers have selected Paul Langley, a part-time waiter at the Peerless in Anniston, as favorite waiter.

BY BILL WILSON

wwilson@annistonstar.com

Paul Langley has been waiting tables part-time at the Peerless Saloon & Grill in Anniston for seven years and in that time he has gotten to know his customers on a first-name basis.

"I have a lot of people come in here, not just to see me but to eat, I can call them by name, I can go table to table to table," said Langley, 52.

"There was a new girl the other night and she said, 'My God, do you know everybody that comes in here?'" said Langley.

Maybe not, but he knows enough of them that it likely contributed to Langley's winning the coveted distinction of being everyone's favorite waiter, according to the Reader's Choice awards.

Langley also works at Couch's Jewelry as an office manager but looks forward to his hours serving up the

fine cuisine the Peerless has to offer.

Langley said some of his customers' favorites include tacos and shrimp & grits.

"Our tacos are so different from everybody else's because it's like one big taco cut into two and it comes with chips and salsa," said Langley. He said a twist to the traditional ingredients to the taco is stuffing them with blackened tilapia.

"They love our wings, they love our hamburgers, we go to the extra effort to make our food extra fresh," Langley said.

The COVID-19 has affected the normal occupancy of the restaurant, according to Langley.

"It's not as crowded, we're limited on seating, too, and before the pandemic we'd have bands on Friday and Saturday night, this place would be packed out ... now it's just a typical day," he said.

A recent state order from the governor's office now prohibits the sale

of alcoholic beverages after 11 p.m. in bars.

"Now everybody goes home early," said Langley.

It is rumored that a ghost named Lucinda resides at the Peerless and Langley said he had an encounter with it.

"One night we were closed and we were rolling silverware. My cousin was going to come by here and have a drink and I felt something tap me," said Langley.

Langley said he thought it was his cousin tapping him, so he didn't turn around.

"There was another server on the other side and we were facing one another rolling, and I felt it again and I thought, 'I'm just going to pretend I don't feel it,'" Langley said.

After feeling the tapping on his shoulder a third time he called his cousin's name.

"I turned around and there was nobody there," said Langley.

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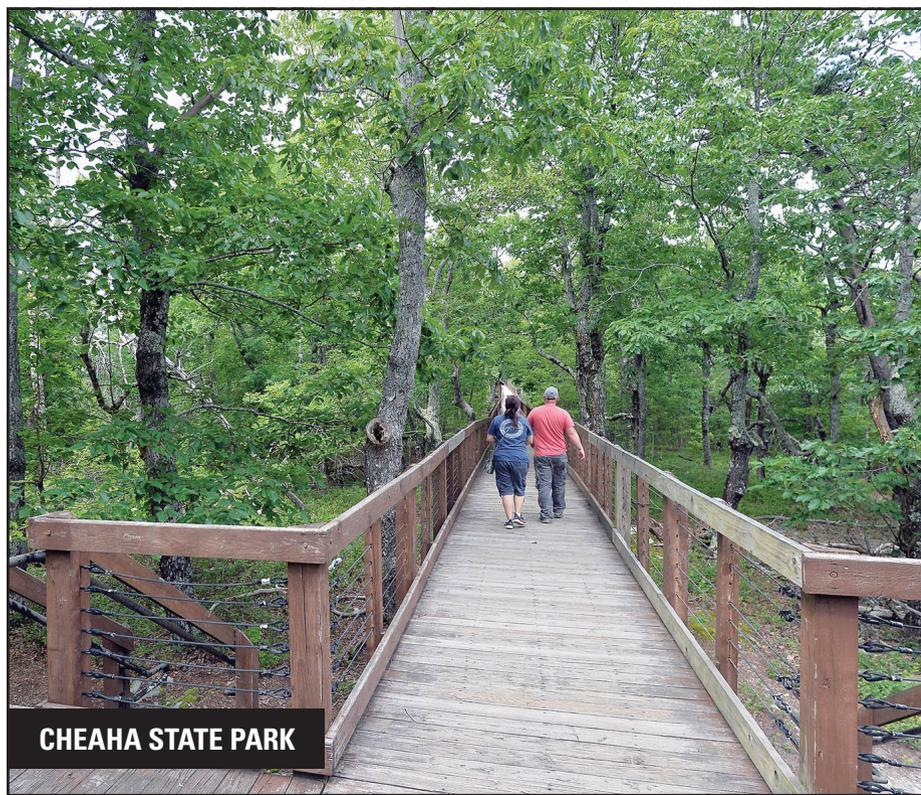
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BUTCHER / MEATS

1st place - Christian Corner Meats
Dorsey's
Edwards Grocery
Food Outlet
Ohatchee Discount Grocery

PRODUCE

1st place - Pickett's Produce
Anniston Farmers Market
The Produce Wagon
Foodland
Dorsey's

BAKERY

1st place - Artisanal Baked Goods
Lickin Good Donuts
Bonnie Ray's Bakery
Mad Hatter Cupcakes
Foodland

BAR / LOUNGE

1st place - The Peerless Saloon and Grille
Heroes
Rack N Roll Billiards
Dark Horse Saloon
Blu's

BARBECUE

1st place - The Rocket
Dad's BBQ
Cooter Brown's Rib Shack
Smoke-N-Hot BBQ
Brad's BBQ

BREAKFAST

1st place - Lickin' Good Donuts
Chef T's
Classic on Noble
Elevated Grounds
Main Street Cafe

BUFFET

1st place - Classic on Noble
Western Sizzlin
M & J's Country Buffet
China Luck
Li's Place

CATERING

1st place - Alexander's the Great Event
Classic on Noble
Top O' the River
The Peerless Saloon and Grille
Hubbard's Off Main

CATFISH

1st place - Top O' the River
Brad's BBQ
Betty's BBQ
Hubbard's Off Main
The Peerless Saloon and Grille

CHICKEN WINGS

1st place - Coop de Ville
Struts (Oxford)
Jeffersons (Oxford)
Jeffersons (Jacksonville)
Struts (Jacksonville)

COFFEE SHOP

1st place - Southern Girl Coffee
Dugger Mountain Fudge and Coffee Co.
Elevated Grounds
Main Street Cafe
Called Coffee Company

DESSERT

1st place - Bonnie Ray's Bakery
Mad Hatter Cupcakes
First Class Ice Cream
Dugger Mountain Fudge & Coffee Co.
Classic on Noble

FINE DINING

1st place - Classic on Noble
Effina's

Hubbard's Off Main
Calhoun Steakhouse
Garfrerick's

FRIED CHICKEN

1st place - Betty's BBQ
Johnson's Giant Foods
Hubbard's Off Main
Brad's BBQ
J&E's Place

HAMBURGER

1st place - The Rocket
Big Daddy's Cafe
The Peerless Saloon and Grille
Struts (Oxford)
Chef T's

FROZEN TREAT

1st place - First Class Ice Cream
Tasty Dip
Dugger Mountain Fudge and Coffee Co.
Elevated Grounds
She Shed Shaved Ice

PIZZA

1st place - Mata's Greek Pizza
Cutter's Pizzeria
First Class Pizza
Effina's
Pizzeria

LUNCH

1st place - Dad's BBQ
Rosie's Gourmet to Go
The Peerless Saloon and Grille
Noble Street Deli
Main Street Cafe

RIBS

1st place - Cooter Brown's Rib Shack
Dad's BBQ
Smoke-N-Hot BBQ
Brad's BBQ
Chef T's

STEAKS

1st place - Calhoun Steakhouse
The Peerless Saloon and Grille
Hubbard's Off Main
Top O' the River
Rosie's Gourmet to Go

SANDWICHES

1st place - Dad's BBQ
The Peerless Saloon and Grille
Rosie's Gourmet to Go
Noble Street Deli
Main Street Cafe

ITALIAN RESTAURANT

1st place - Mata's Greek Pizza
Effina's (Jacksonville)
Effina's (Anniston)
Pizzeria
Calhoun Steakhouse

ASIAN RESTAURANT

1st place - Yume
Fuji
Thai One On
Ono Grill
Jasmine's

MEXICAN RESTAURANT

1st place - Los Mexicanos
Margaronas
Baja California
Mexico Lindo
Tacos & Tequila

PLACE FOR A ROMANTIC DINNER

1st place - Classic on Noble
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Hubbard's Off Main
Garfrerick's
The Peerless Saloon and Grille

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FIRST PLACE STEAKS

Calhoun Steakhouse offers patrons comfort food and comfortable vibes

BY BEN NUNNALLY

bnunnallystar@gmail.com

There's hidden history at Calhoun Steakhouse in Jacksonville, a bit of restaurant memorabilia that's been in the Kappis family for five decades.

It's not the same, clever kind of hidden as the pig in the restaurant's logo — look again when driving up Pelham Road; there's some pork hidden between the sign's more apparent beef and chicken — it's just waiting for you to ask restaurant owner Sokratis Kappis about it. Kappis is a second-generation restaurateur; his father owned a steak place in Tennessee

back in the 1970s, the same place Kappis got his start in the business.

Some of that restaurant lives on at Calhoun Steakhouse: The tables are from there, and so are the lantern sconces that flank the doorway into the dining room's second half.

"It's all from his old place," Kappis says, standing among the dining room tables during a slow moment.

Kappis opened the steakhouse in October, and works there along with his son, parents and brother-in-law. Kappis has worked in restaurants for years, and opened his first restaurant in Columbus, Ga., about 20 years ago. He sold steak

then, too, but also Italian food, a staple set of menu items that are part of the Calhoun Steakhouse oeuvre, like spaghetti and chicken parmesan.

The obvious items are the ones that won Kappis and his steakhouse the award, though; ribeyes, sirloins and New York strips. The barnyard menagerie on the sign isn't a coincidence, either; "the Calhoun" is a dish designed to beat any hunger, with beef, pork and chicken stacked together beside two sides (or a side and a salad, notes Kappis' son, Takis). Sides include homemade favorites like mashed potatoes, sweet potato fries and white cheddar mac and cheese, among nearly a dozen

others.

The comfort food is made to match the restaurant's comfortable vibe, one Kappis says is meant to be inviting for families.

"It's nice, but it's not too expensive and not too fancy to come into," Kappis says. "You can come in with jeans and you don't feel uncomfortable."

Kappis thanked readers who voted for the restaurant, and especially loyal customers who helped keep Calhoun Steakhouse active during the rough months of early 2020.

"We want to thank them for keeping us afloat and in business," Kappis said. "Without them, we couldn't do it."



Photos by Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

LEFT: Owner Sokratis Kappis and his son, Takis. Calhoun Steakhouse in Jacksonville has won a Reader's Choice award for favorite steak.

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FIRST PLACE CAR WASH

Dirty Dog's Car Wash was built with the customer in mind

BY SCOTT YOUNG

Star Staff Writer

If you ask Martin Emmett what the essence of his company is, he'll tell you it's "giving back."

Customers who visit Emmett's car wash — Dirty Dog's Car Wash — to get a fresh shine on their vehicle have the opportunity to buy a premium wash package called "The Helping Heroes," where 10 percent of all proceeds are donated to local first responders.

Emmett, a native Alabamian, has been the managing partner of Dirty Dog's since the company's Oxford location debuted in July 2019. Only a year later, readers of The Anniston Star voted Dirty Dog's Car Wash as their favorite

local car wash.

"One of the things we did when we came up with the initial concept is we built this, not from a car wash perspective, but from the consumer's perspective," Emmett said about the architecture of the car wash structure itself.

Often, Emmett explained, a car wash is built "based on the ego" of whoever is building it, who he said often wants bells and whistles installed.

"That's not necessarily conducive for what's gonna work or flow well from the customer's standpoint," he said. "So, we built the place with the customer in mind."

Emmett said that the car wash includes glass that runs down the driver's side portion of the tun-

nel to "feel more open" and avoid the typical dark, damp tunnel that some car washes employ.

Emmett noted that he and his business partner are "always" at the facility.

"We're always present," he said. "We're not absentee owners ... We like to know our customers by their first names and engage them and welcome them back when we recognize their vehicles."

Asked why he believes his business was voted as readers' best car wash, he said he believes it's his business's commitment to excellence and identity as a company of giving back.

"That's just who we are," he said.



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Dirty Dog's Car wash in Oxford.

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“We’re always present. We’re not absentee owners ... we like to know our customers by their first names and engage them and welcome them back when we recognize their vehicles.”

— Martin Emmett, owner, Dirty Dog’s Car Wash



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

A motorist drives their car through the wash bay. Dirty Dog’s Car Wash on US Highway 78 in Oxford was voted favorite car wash by Star readers.

A clean car leaves the wash bay.

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