

A woman with reddish-brown hair, wearing a bright orange sleeveless dress with a matching belt, stands in a lush green garden. She is smiling broadly and has her hand on her hip. The background is filled with various green plants and trees, creating a vibrant, natural setting.

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Living
SPRING 2014

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EDITOR'S NOTE

"In the spring, I have counted 136 different kinds of weather inside of 24 hours." — Mark Twain.



"The first day of spring is one thing, and the first spring day is another. The difference between them is sometimes as great as a month." — Henry van Dyke.



"Spring has returned. The earth is like a child that knows poems." — Rainer Maria Rilke.



Spring excites the blood of gardeners — or so they tell me. Alas, I am no gardener. But that doesn't mean I can't appreciate those who love to work in the dirt.



In this issue, take a glimpse into Sygrid Beard's garden in Alexandria, which bursts into color every spring with cheery tulips, daffodils, bluebells, redbuds and cherry trees.

Visit the sculpted gardens of Anniston pediatrician Tatiana Bidikov, and read master gardener Sherry Blanton's paeon to underappreciated blooms.

And don't miss Sherry's ode to some of the largest, most distinctive trees in Calhoun County, with magnificent photos by Bill Wilson.

Elsewhere in the magazine, you can peek inside the kitchen of Andrea O'Keefe, the chef at Prime Dining & Bar, go behind-the-scenes at Artisanal Baked Goods in Anniston and meet the backyard roasters at Southern Girl Coffee in Oxford.

As for me, I'm going to welcome spring by heading out to the porch with a good magazine, a fresh cup of coffee and a bacon-cheddar scone from Artisanal Baked Goods.

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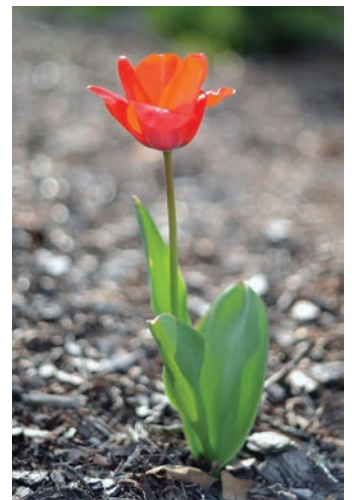
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No such thing as a typical day for congressional staffer SHEA SNIDER MILLER

by ERIN WILLIAMS

Twelve years ago, Shea Snider Miller, then a newly minted Auburn alum, came home to Calhoun County to live in her parents' garage apartment and work on the fundraising arm of a campaign for a congressional hopeful named Mike Rogers.

She had no idea that she was on her way to developing a career that would help change the country.

As press secretary for Rep. Rogers, Miller serves the 3rd congressional district of Alabama. "He represents Anniston, he represents Oxford — where I went to high school — Auburn — where I went to college — and then everywhere in between. Anything that [the congressman] is fighting for, I feel a vested interest in, because it's for the people that I grew up around."

What is a typical work-day like for you?

I get up every morning and I walk two miles and talk to my mama; that's how I start every single day. Once I get back to my house, I have coffee and I sit down and go through all the papers online for east Alabama.

Once I step in the Cannon Building, it's no holds barred. Some days are easy — there's nothing going on, I can sit back and read and catch up on some work. Some days something happens, and I am nonstop deadlines, maybe two or three things happen and I've got several reporters asking me questions. It can get very intense, very quickly.

You must receive calls daily about an issue that's bothering someone. What is your trick for dealing with constituents?

All you can do is just listen to folks. That's what our country is built around, is letting people have freedom of speech. They want to call and they want to talk or complain or whatever — that's their right. What we're here to do is to talk to them. A lot of times it may test your patience, but that's what we signed up for.



Shea Snider came home to Anniston last year for her wedding to Ben Miller

Your personal faith is very important to you. How has it evolved during your time in Washington, D.C.?

I grew up in the Methodist church in Anniston, and it still is a big part of my life. [My husband] Ben and I chose to go back to Anniston to get married instead of getting married here in Washington, because it was just really important to me. Ben and I are both Methodist and have had a hard time finding a church home in Washington, but I have found a good group of girlfriends and have Bible study with them weekly.

You have great style, and you share your fashion advice with the world on your blog, "Too Shea Style."

I have always loved to play dress-up, and the fashion scene in D.C. is just non-existent.

I work on the Hill; I don't make a lot of money, but you can take [special] pieces with a dress from Target and you can make it look expensive. It doesn't have to be expensive to look expensive.

Confidence makes you attractive to other people. As my dad always says, "Dress for success." If you feel like you look good, you're going to stand up a little straighter, you're going to smile, you're going to be confident — and people can see that come out of you.

The Anniston Star

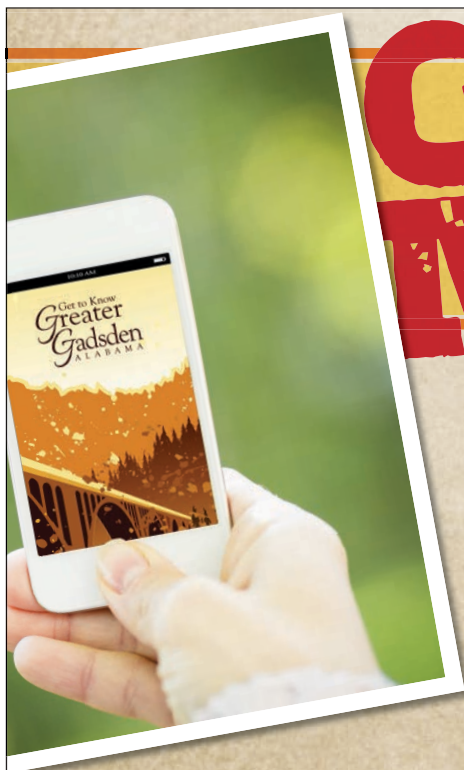
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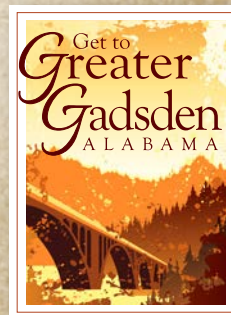


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ALABAMA ARTISTS

CARVING A NICHE

Peggy Mayo's decorated
gourds reflect her love
of nature and art

by MADASYN CZEBINIAK
photographs by TRENT PENNY
and STEPHEN GROSS

Soggy, moldy, smelly. Those are the words most people use when they see a gourd. Peggy Mayo, on the other hand, sees a canvas.

The award-winning gourd artist didn't always feel that way, she admitted. The first time she was asked to paint a gourd, she wasn't really feeling it.

"My sisters and I used to get together on Tuesday nights and do art. One night, my sister Sandra said, 'We're going to paint a gourd,' and I thought, 'I do not want to paint a GOURD!'" Mayo remembered, chuckling.

Now it's hard to catch her without one, said her husband, Howard.

Mayo has been a gourd artist for more than 12 years.

(Now that Howard is retired, she's even convinced him to get in on the act. He won a blue ribbon at a gourd show for a powder-blue windmill he crafted out of gourds.)

Mayo learned about gourd art when she and her sisters attended a craft show in Bellbuckle, Tenn.

"What really got me into it was seeing all the different things you can make with gourds. I mean, they make everything," she said.

So does she. Her workshop is filled with gourd vases, hanging gourd lanterns and stands filled with gourd wind chimes. One gourd is painted to look like a red-and-yellow gas pump, another to look like a Sprite bottle. "It looked like a bottle so I painted it that way," Mayo said. "I just look at something and I feel. Sometimes it just tells you what it ought to be."

Mayo's gourd art isn't just painting. It's also wood-burning and carving. Her work combines texture, sculpture and even pine needle weaving. After seeing handwoven pine needle baskets at an art show, Mayo decided to use pine needles to make tops for some of her gourds.

Art shows and nature are where she turns for inspiration. Her favorite piece is a mustard-yellow gourd vase embellished with carved leaves.

"I love everything carved with leaves," Mayo said, holding the vase gently in her lap. "Plus, it still looks like a gourd."

Making gourd art starts from the ground up. Literally. The process takes about 120 days, starting with growing the gourds, which the Mayos do in their back yard.

After the gourds are harvested, they are left to dry for about six months.

"We leave them on the edge of the woods on pallets to let them dry out," Mayo said.





CARVING A NICHE

“In May or June, they’re finally dry enough for her to wipe the slime off of them,” Howard chimed in.

Mayo scoops out the insides and scrapes the gourd walls smooth using a sweat scraper – a flat plastic blade more often used to scrape sweat off of horses. It was a gift from her son.

Mayo bent down and gently rapped her knuckles against a dried gourd. “When they’re done, they look like wood,” she said.

Once the gourds are clean, she can finally set to work. Some of her creations have taken her as long as seven hours to finish.

“Easy hands make heavy hearts,” she said.





WHERE TO BUY

Peggy Mayo's decorated gourds are available at Noble Gallery, 1014 Noble St., Anniston, 256-237-5921, or Hanging around Hoover, 3738 Lorna Road, Hoover, 205-987-7879. You can also visit her workshop at 335 Willingham Bridge Road, Anniston.





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TREES

OF DISTINCTION

by SHERRY BLANTON • photographs by BILL WILSON



The Anniston Museum of Natural History is home to the state's second largest loblolly pine.



In 1913, the poet Joyce Kilmer wrote that “only God can make a tree.” Amen.

Trees make sense in a community for so many reasons. Their foliage provides natural cooling and heating for the homeowner. They offer food and shelter for a variety of wildlife. They improve air quality by moderating pollution, and their roots help with water runoff. Research has even shown that trees in the landscape can raise the value of a home.

However, the effect of a beautiful tree on our emotions is immeasurable. Trees can actually make us happier. Calhoun County is blessed with many wonderful trees, some of which stand out because of their size, others because of their uniqueness, their age, or their history. Read on for the stories of five such trees.

AN ANCIENT PINE

There are thousands of magnificent trees on the property occupied by the Anniston Museum of Natural History, many of which were there long before the city of Anniston was established. One of these is the loblolly pine growing along a path on the lower trail of the museum. This huge pine towers over the neighboring trees; it is the second largest loblolly pine in the state of Alabama. Museum staff have estimated that it is more than 170 years old and 12 feet in diameter. Standing at the base of its statuesque trunk and looking up into its branches is almost like looking back in time.

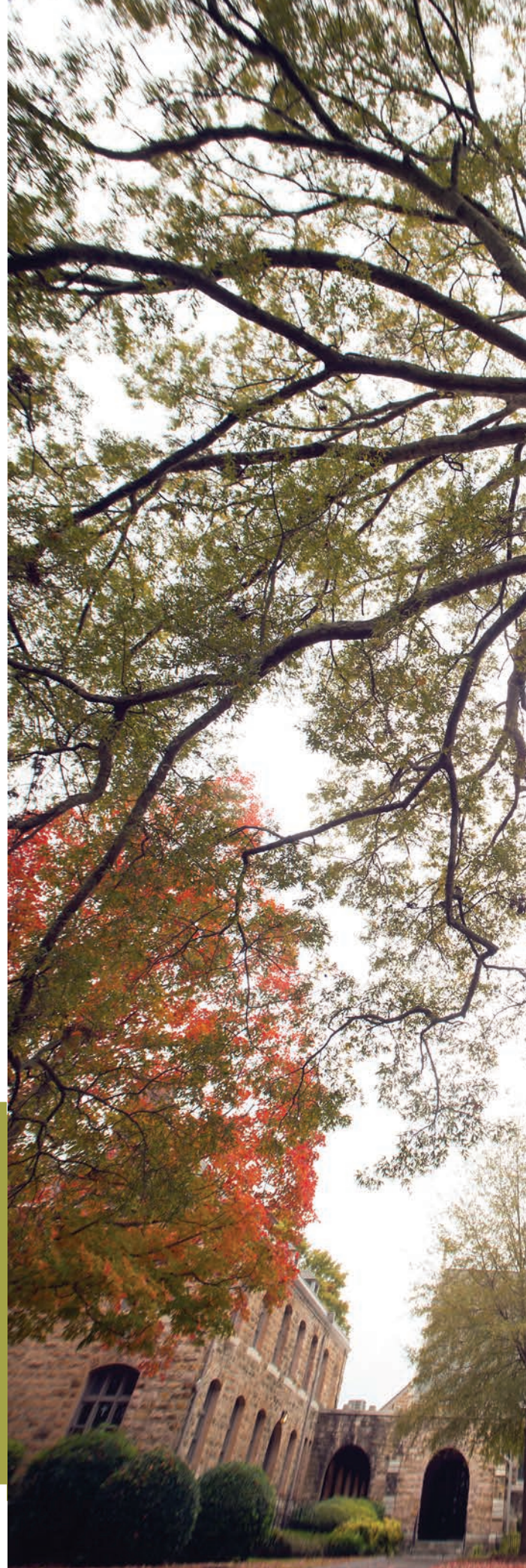


A SHELTERING WATER OAK

Visitors to the Jacksonville City Cemetery on Church Street will find the graves of the town's early residents, with tombstones bearing the names of early settlers including Pelham, Forney, Venable, Hoke and Francis. The monument for John Pelham — the Gallant Pelham of Civil War fame — stands in front of a magnificent water oak. This tree's spreading branches have guarded graves and sheltered mourners since 1838, when the cemetery was founded and the tree was small. "The graves were dug around the tree, which dates from somewhere between 1788 and 1813," according to Susan DiBiase, who wrote about the tree when the Jacksonville Garden Club gave it its Tree of Distinction Award in 2013. Although the tree measures 48 inches in circumference at chest height, it is not the largest in the state, DiBiase added. The largest water oak in Alabama is in Montgomery County and measures 150 inches in circumference. It is easy to imagine family and friends sitting under the cemetery's enormous oak, taking advantage of the shade and peace that only a tree can provide.

A PEACEFUL WILLOW OAK

The history of St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church in Anniston is closely intertwined with the trees in its landscape. The cornerstone for this historic church was laid in 1888, and the church was built in 1890. John Ward Noble, a member of the family that founded Anniston, built this glorious house of worship and filled the church grounds with willow oak saplings, some planted only 10 feet apart, according to church member Doug Ghee. "The Nobles purchased 100,000 willow oaks for the city of Anniston, some of which were planted on Quintard's median," Ghee said. The willow oak pictured here hasn't been measured, but it is about as tall as the church's 95-foot-tall bell tower, and Ghee "can't get both arms around it." This tree and the others like it have born witness to generations of worshippers, maintaining a steadfast vigil over this sacred place.





A CHAMPION MAGNOLIA

A visit to the community of Alexandria is not complete without a ride by the Variosa Clubhouse to see the magnolias. The clubhouse boasts two glorious ones, one of which is a Champion Tree. That means that the Alabama Forestry Commission has determined that it is the largest of its species in the state. This Southern magnolia is 209 inches in circumference and 90 feet tall with a spread of 92 feet (as listed on the National Forest's Big Tree Registry in 2008). Statistics aside, the members of the Variosa Club love their tree, along with probably everyone in Alexandria. The house was built in 1856; early photographs show formal gardens, including the magnolias. The home's original owner left it to the Variosa Club. Club member Linda Fields said the group has worked diligently to preserve the tree. Over the years, people have gotten married, taken photographs and had various celebrations under its branches. The foliage and the flowers are used to decorate the house, and the magnolia is the club's flower.

AN UNEXPECTED PALM

In 1994, plantsman Hayes Jackson planted a very special tree in Anniston, in the median of Eighth Street just east of Quintard Avenue. The tree is a palm, a 'Washingtonia x filibusta' hybrid. It is the most northern growing of the Washingtonia palms. Jackson ordered the tree from south Texas. It measured 3 feet by 2 feet when it was put in the ground. It is now about 22 feet tall with a massive trunk and a wide crown. It is a showstopper and a pleasure for travelers driving down this busy street. Folks travel from other areas to see this beautiful specimen, Jackson said. It makes an ordinary city street extraordinary.



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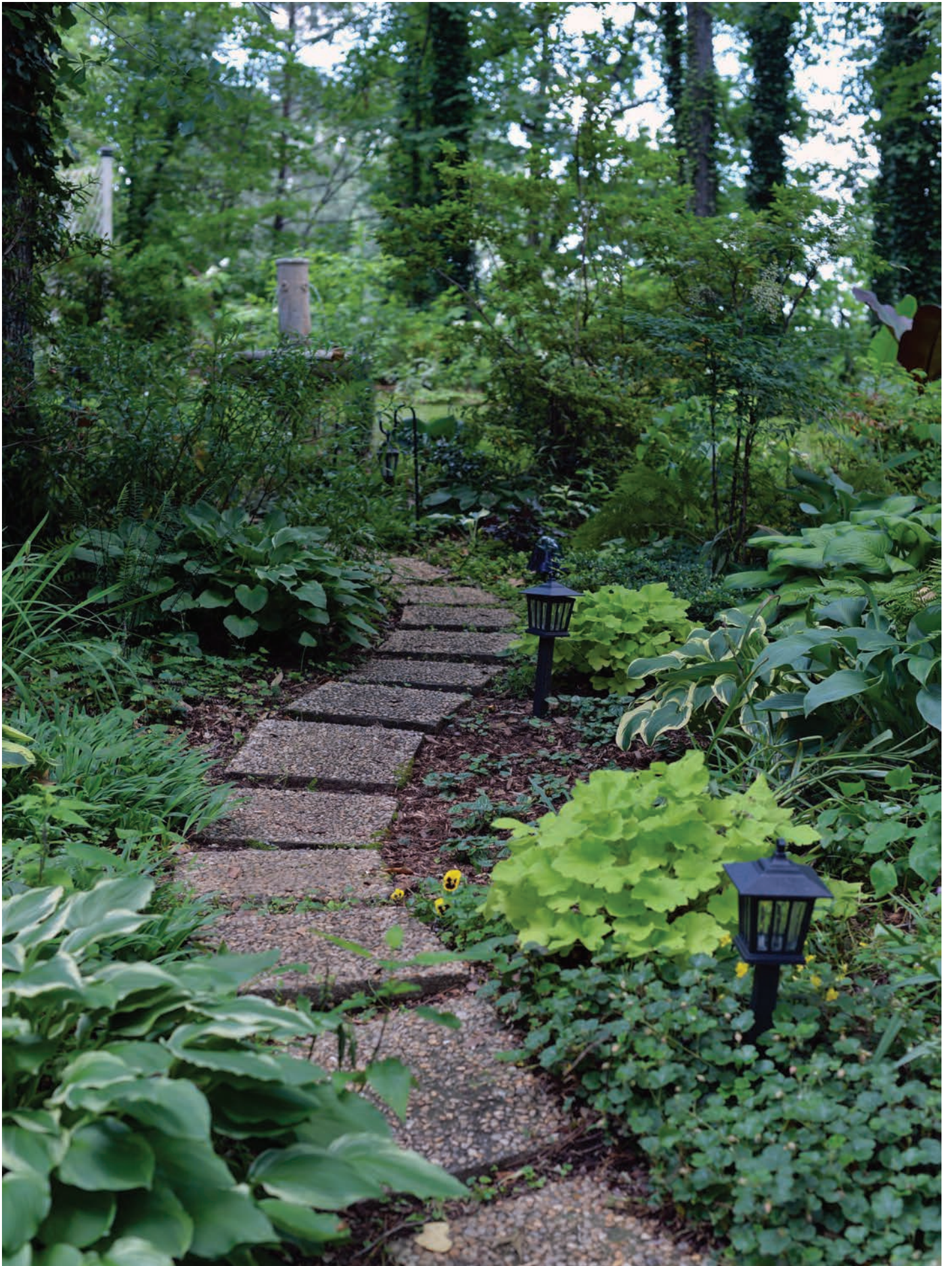


TATIANA'S GARDEN



When she's not tending children, this
Anniston pediatrician tends to plants

by SHERRY BLANTON • photographs by BILL WILSON



In the home of Igor and Tatiana Bidikov, the dining room table is conspicuously missing a centerpiece. It doesn't need a centerpiece, says Tatiana; the gardens seen through the window are centerpiece enough. She's right. The landscape outside is a glorious panorama of perennials, shrubs, trees and artwork.

The Bidikovs moved into their Anniston home in 1997; at that point Tatiana began her in-depth study of what makes a successful garden design. Although her mother was an avid gardener, Tatiana had not really been interested in having a yard. Her new home in Alabama was the inspiration for an enduring passion — landscape design. Choosing plants based on their size and color and finding the right place to plant them became a learning project.

Her interest in garden design began with the influence of Frederick Law Olmstead, considered to be the founder of American landscape design. Tatiana read books and magazines, visited nurseries here and in other states as well as beautiful public and private gardens to see what worked and what did not.

She became a regular customer at Calhoun County Master Gardeners plant sales, buying the most beautiful and most interesting plants available. She is a fixture at Master Gardeners Lunch and Learn sessions, ever eager to know more about her hobby.

Tatiana is a pediatrician and spends her days in the chaos of newborn babies, sick toddlers and children, and concerned and frantic parents. Her garden, on the other hand, is an oasis of beauty, calm and serenity. The tranquil sound of water bubbling in a fountain resonates lyrically throughout the yard, setting the stage for this very special place.

Her garden has been designed with two ideas in mind: It is "path-like," with a winding trail of stepping stones to carry visitors through the gardens, and it is "lawn-like," with a wide expanse of gently sloping grass to set off the plantings.

Tatiana's love of perennials — including hostas, ferns and heu-

cheras — stems from the lesson that perennials teach the gardener: patience. She waits for them to grow, and watches them mature. She enjoys observing how the blooms on plants change as they mature — as hydrangeas do.

She spends the winter and early spring getting her garden ready and then spends the hot months enjoying the results of her labors — or as she calls it, "the show."

Tatiana takes great pleasure in caring for her green charges. She tends the gardens herself: planting, weeding, pruning and fertilizing.

On the day we visited, she had spent the morning running a 5K and visiting her patients in the hospital. Touring the gardens that afternoon, she called the name of every plant in her yard, a feat many gardeners can only dream of doing.

The winding path is lined with Japanese maples, hydrangeas, ferns, hostas, gingers and dwarf camellias, among others. The lawn is framed by old trees surrounded by lush green plantings. During the winter, the garden glows with dozens of daffodils and tulips.

Each plant is chosen for a reason — the color, growth pattern or texture it will bring to the garden. Plants are repeated throughout the landscape. "Repetition calms the garden," she said.

Ever mindful that good landscape design has to do with "managing the viewer's eye," she also uses repetition of plants, colors and shapes to lead visitors through the garden. She loves the color blue in the garden, and has strategically placed pieces of art in blue among the plants.

Every day, Tatiana can be found walking through her garden, enjoying the peace and watching "the show." This show always has a happy ending.





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Spring forward

A gardener's fancy
turns to unusual blooms

story and photographs by SHERRY BLANTON

T. S. Eliot wrote in his poem *The Wasteland* that “April is the cruellest month, breeding lilacs out of the dead land, mixing memory and desire, stirring dull roots with spring rain.”

The melancholy feelings of false hope that some feel at spring’s rebirth, however, do not extend to gardeners. For us, spring is a season full of excitement and promise. The persistent gardener is out every day scouting for new signs of life: a hosta leaf poking its head through the mulch ... a fat bud on an azalea beginning to unroll ... a trillium in bloom ... brightly colored leaves flushing out on the Japanese maples.

The gardeners have survived another winter; not only are the cold and the dark almost behind us, the days are lengthening and the temperatures are beginning to warm. We smile a lot. We begin to prowl the nurseries as shelves of brightly colored flowers and the “newest” plants on the market appear. Those who love to tend a vegetable garden begin to grow anxious to get that first tomato plant in the ground.

Still, too many of us can be seduced by spring’s early warm days and we rush the season, installing heat-loving annuals before their time. Mother Nature can deliver a cruel freeze that can turn the azalea blossoms to mush, shrivel up the tiny new leaves on the trees and destroy the freshest additions to the garden.

It is hard to live in the South and not be mesmerized by the spectacle of masses of azaleas in bloom and rows of dogwoods covered with white or pink blossoms. Although these two practically scream “SPRING!” there are many other noteworthy charmers that begin to bloom with spring’s arrival. They may be not the stars, but they are well worth every inch of the garden space they get.

Sherry Blanton is a member of the Calhoun County Master Gardeners Association. She also writes for the blog “Gardening Goings On” at AnnistonStar.com.



SOLOMON'S SEAL (*Polygonatum*) is a dainty spring perennial. This shade lover spreads by underground rhizomes; one or two can eventually become a nice-sized patch. With their tiny, dangling white flowers, arching stems and green foliage, they make a delightful member of the spring lineup.



DEUTZIA in bloom will turn any spring garden into a magic place. Small pink or white blooms will cover this deciduous shrub. During the winter, the Deutzia will shrink into the background of the garden, where it is best allowed to be neighbors with evergreen shrubs. Deutzias are available in a variety of sizes from dwarf to very tall.



FOTHEGILLA is another spring bloomer — probably my favorite — that is underused in the garden. The magnificent colors of the fall foliage on this deciduous shrub will take your breath away, and are a reason for this plant’s claim to fame. However, the unusual white, fragrant spring flowers make it a must.



VIBURNUM is another spring beauty. There are many cultivars of this ornamental shrub, some evergreen and some deciduous. Some Viburnums have wonderfully fragrant blooms. The Chinese snowball (*Viburnum macrocephalum* ‘Sterile’), with its beautiful clusters of huge white flowers, is a must for the spring garden.



COLUMBINE: What is a spring garden without Aquilegia or columbine? I started my collection after the Columbine tragedy in memory of the precious teens who lost their lives. Columbines can eagerly spread by seed throughout the garden. Columbine blooms come in a rainbow of colors, all of which give the garden a fairy-like appeal.

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Scheduled transportation to medical appointments is provided while a local Podiatrist holds clinic, in-house, for our residents every 8 weeks, providing valuable preventive and ongoing foot care.

Our grounds include the beautiful ¼ mile Woody’s Way Nature Trail with a level walking area, cozy seating areas, flower gardens, bird houses and feeders and more. In addition, our residents enjoy the accessibility of laundry facilities and coziness of our restaurant-style dining room. All meals are provided with delicious food with ample portions that are served for all palates and fully planned to accommodate a healthy age appropriate diet. “This is where you need to come for that final point in your life when you have earned a vacation” -Maggie Aderholdt

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A CHEF AT HOME



The pots and pans are bigger in Andrea O’Keefe’s kitchen

Andrea O’Keefe, the chef at Prime Dining & Bar in Anniston, is immersed in cooking day in and day out, but she’s surprised to find that it never gets old. “I don’t get tired of it. I really don’t,” she said.

At home in her own kitchen, she prefers to make everything by hand. She can go Mediterranean for dinner, whip up a curry with ease or create a breakfast strata out of the leftovers in her fridge.

She can make do without fancy equipment, but not a sharp knife. Well, a sharp knife, tomato powder and other spices, which adorn her kitchen walls in various racks.

“Tomato powder is an amazing ingredient, and

I use it for everything from food bases to popcorn,” O’Keefe said. “I don’t have any right now, and that’s killing me.”

Tomato powder is just what it sounds like. It can be rehydrated into tomato paste or sauce, and you can make only what you need.

O’Keefe, who studied at the Kendall College School of Culinary Arts in Chicago, worked as the self-described “lunch lady” at Garfrerick’s Café in Oxford before becoming the chef at Prime Dining in January.

“In the restaurant, you hit the ground running and don’t stop until you leave. You can’t be slow. If you’re slow, there’s somebody else who will come in and do it faster than you, and then you are out of a job,” O’Keefe said.

by MADASYN CZEBINIAK • photographs by STEPHEN GROSS



Home cooking for the O'Keefes is usually more leisurely. O'Keefe and her husband, Douglas, have been cooking together for more than 13 years. Though Douglas has yet to succeed at making his favorite meal — cassoulet — he enjoys making Indian food, something he and Andrea learned how to do while living in Chicago.

Before O'Keefe started working at Prime, they had more time to cook at home. Before, when the two cooked dinner, they could enjoy music and wine and carry on a conversation. Now, instead of wine, O'Keefe and her husband drink coffee and make breakfast in the mornings. They also do the bulk of their weekly meal prep on Sunday and Monday.

"Before, we were cooking probably three to four nights a week and doing leftovers and other things on other nights," O'Keefe said. "Now, we tend to do more things that are make-ahead and easy for me to throw into the microwave if I need to heat it up, because we eat at separate times."

When it comes to the pressure of cooking beside a professional, Douglas said he doesn't feel intimidated at all. "We used

to have a little contest called 'Tin Chef' — it was kind of our home version of 'Iron Chef.' She always won, but it was a really fun thing to do."

O'Keefe doesn't have a lot of kitchen appliances. "I find that I don't really need them. I can do everything just as well by hand," she said. "I'm not anti-appliance, but I like clear surfaces."

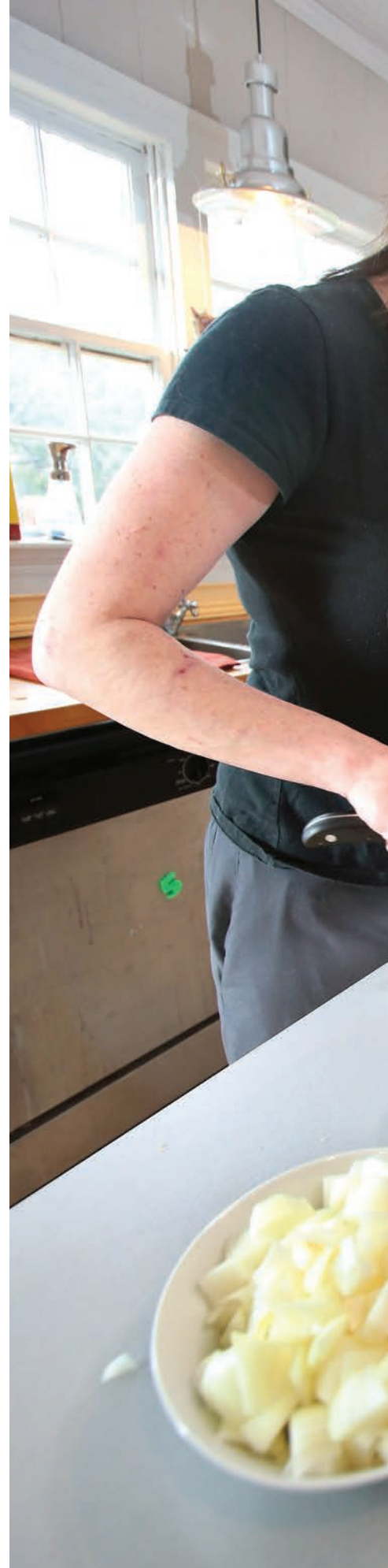
The equipment she does have is pots and pans — but bigger than most. Her favorite appliance, if she had to pick, would be her immersion blender. The great thing about an immersion blender, she said, is you can stick it in a pot to puree sauces or soups without making a mess.

The one appliance she wishes for is a stand mixer. She currently uses the one at the restaurant to make bread dough. She would make bread at home a lot more if she had a stand mixer.

She does have two vintage KitchenAid mixers. "One of them was my grandmother's, and then another person gave me theirs. I'm going to try and make them go together," she said. "I'm hoping that the parts in each one that are broken are not the same, so I can create this 'Franken KitchenAid.'"

"IN THE RESTAURANT, YOU HIT THE GROUND RUNNING AND DON'T STOP UNTIL YOU LEAVE. YOU CAN'T BE SLOW."

— Andrea O'Keefe, chef at Prime Dining





Making breakfast with Andrea O'Keefe

As the new chef at Anniston's Prime Dining & Bar, Andrea O'Keefe doesn't have much time to cook dinner at home anymore. Instead, she has been cooking breakfast. Here, she makes a breakfast strata using sautéed onions, mushrooms and spinach, layered in a casserole dish with bread cubes, bacon, prosciutto and cheese. A mixture of eggs, milk and cream is poured on top before baking.

"We had prosciutto left over from something that we made so I just put that into the strata," said O'Keefe. "At the restaurant, frequently, we do that, too. We go in and look and see we've got this and this and this to use, so what can we do with this? Does it become food, does it become a special, can it be used in a sauce? In that way, you're keeping your fridge sort of constantly rotating."





Melissa Waddle, Martin Paudrups,
Ted Paudrups and Brittney Poore at
Artisanal Baked Goods in Anniston.

A man and a woman are smiling in a bakery. The man, on the left, is wearing a grey cap and a maroon sweater, holding a round loaf of bread with dark spots. The woman, on the right, is wearing a black t-shirt with a graphic and a white apron, holding a long, braided loaf. In the background, there are shelves with various items, a white trash bin, and a large bag of flour. The floor is made of light-colored tiles.

THE bread brothers

The duo behind Artisanal Baked Goods are passionate about bread

by LISA DAVIS
photographs by
BILL WILSON

The bread brothers



"Flour, water, salt, yeast. That's it, in essence," said Teddy. "It's so simple, but you get so many different results."

"You can give the same recipe to 10 different bakers and get 10 different flavors," said Martin. "It's kind of humbling — beginning with these basic ingredients, and building flavor in that process."

Sometimes the brothers add olives to their breads, or cranberries and walnuts, or they stuff it with Asiago cheese from Wright Dairy in Alexandria. They braid it into challah, roll it into baguettes, fold it into croissants.

They load up the display cases with Danish pastries, German-style pretzels, cinnamon rolls, mini lemon cheese-cakes, huge cookies and bacon-cheddar scones that are quite possibly the best thing you will ever put in your mouth.

They just introduced jalapeno-cheddar bread. They've toyed with the idea of chocolate-bacon bread.

The brothers emphasize fresh and local wherever possible. They make their own vanilla and lemon extracts. The use homemade preserves for the strawberry Danish. They buy local honey, local fruits, local vegetables. "Once you know how to make bread, it makes you question everything else you eat, because bread is so simple," Teddy said.

Artisanal Baked Goods is a family affair for Martin, 29, and Teddy, 25. The brothers were born and raised in Michigan; they moved to Anniston six years ago to be closer to family.

The bakery is housed in the building right next to Mata's Greek Pizza, which was started by the brothers' grandparents and is now run by their aunt and uncle. Their mom, Alice, does the bakery's books and works the register. Their dad, Marty, has been known to pitch in and wash dishes.

It will be hours before the doors open to the public, but Artisanal Baked Goods is already bustling. Brittney Poore is zesting 15 lemons for a batch of mini lemon bundt cakes. Melissa Waddle is weighing almond flour, powdered sugar and cocoa for French macarons.

Teddy Paudrups — who, along with his brother, Martin, started the bakery a little more than a year ago — is about to plunge a digital thermometer into a bin of flour.

The flour is one of the ingredients in Model City Sourdough, one of the brothers' signature breads. The thermometer? We'll come back to that.

At its heart, baking is about precision. “Bakers are about tradition,” said Teddy. “Baguettes should not be messed with.”

This is why Teddy is sticking a thermometer into a bin of flour. After taking the flour’s temperature, Teddy sticks the thermometer into the levain (the starter culture), which is sitting in an industrial-sized bucket on the counter, smelling sweet and sour at the same time.

The brothers want the temperature of this dough to be 75 degrees when it comes out of the mixer. Teddy starts entering numbers into the calculator on his smartphone.

Room temperature + flour temperature + levain temperature + 26 (degrees of friction generated by the mixer) + x = 300.

That missing number, x , is the temperature of the water. That’s the variable that is easiest to control.

The ingredients are weighed into a bowl that is carried to an industrial-size mixer that looks like a KitchenAid on steroids. After mixing, the dough will be folded every 30 minutes for the next three hours. Folding — a kinder, gentler version of punching down the dough —

ARTISANAL BAKED GOODS

- 1702 Quintard Ave., Anniston (building right next to Mata’s Greek Pizza).
- Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday-Saturday.
- Orders taken anytime, 256-770-7269.
- www.ArtisanalBakedGoods.com or “ABGoods” on Facebook



The bread brothers

lends structure and flavor to the finished bread.

After the loaves are formed but before they go into the oven, the brothers score the tops with old-style razor blades, so the bread can stretch without cracking the crust. Loaves of sourdough are scored with a big curl, called an “ear” in baker’s lingo. Other loaves might get a shaft of wheat, or the brothers’ signature score, a square with an X in the middle.

When it came to commercial ovens, the brothers were limited by their current building, an old Chinese restaurant with walls in all the wrong places. The biggest oven they could fit in the kitchen can bake only 12-16 loaves of bread at a time. “It’s the Easy Bake Oven of commercial equipment,” joked Martin.

“But the smaller quantities mean we can concentrate on making the bread better,” he added. “It’s like craft beer; it’s small-batch bread.”

All told, making Model City Sourdough is a 36- to 40-hour process.

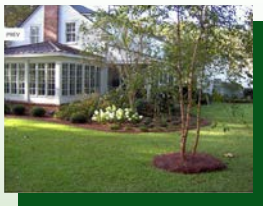
“We look at what customers deserve from a bakery,” said Martin. “We don’t think we should be using mixes.”



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JUST RIGHT AT THE END OF GREENBRIER ROAD ON 431

MADE IN THE SOUTH

MAGIC BEANS

Southern Girl Coffee roasts it fresh

by MADASYN CZEBINIAK • photographs by TRENT PENNY



The idea behind Southern Girl Coffee was ignited on the hard rubber casing of a tire swing. It was there, in her grandfather's yard more than 18 years ago, that Leah Sparks had her very first cup of coffee.

Now she runs her own business in Oxford — and her grandfather is head of quality control.

"He's pushing 80 now, but he'll still sit out there and help us pull beans and tell us if he thinks we got them too dark," she said, laughing.

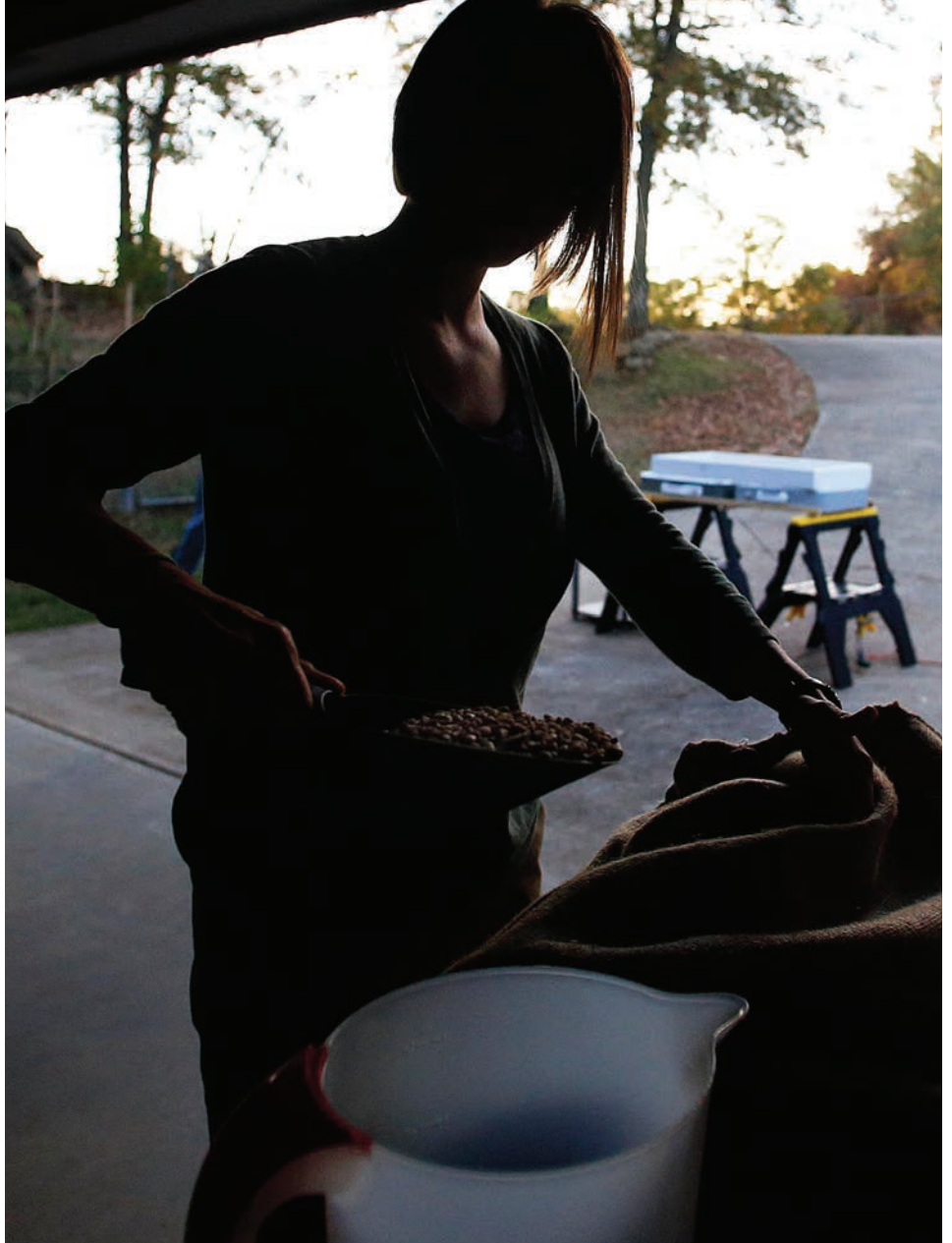
Sparks began roasting coffee beans with the help of her stepfather, Bobby Jones, more than a year ago. Since then, coffee roasting has evolved from a hobby into a calling. Southern Girl Coffee offers home delivery once a week. Sparks hopes to one day have her own storefront and coffeehouse.

Sparks and Jones use four kinds of coffee beans — Colombian, Mexican, Sumatran and Costa Rican — which they buy from an importer in Indiana.

Southern Girl Coffee offers several gourmet roasts including Colombian Supremo (a dark-medium roast, available in regular or decaf); Costa Rican Tarrazu (medium roast), Early Riser (a light breakfast blend) and Southern Pecan ("sweet like pecan pie"). Though raw coffee beans are all green to start with, that doesn't mean they all taste the same. Southern Girl Coffee offers a Mexican-Costa Rican blend for that very reason.

"We're looking for a balance," Sparks said.

Sparks and Jones currently roast the



MADE IN THE SOUTH: Coffee roasting, step-by-step



MEASURE: Leah Sparks, owner of Southern Girl Coffee, measures up raw coffee beans in her garage in Oxford.



PREP: Sparks pours the raw, green coffee beans into the roasting cage before starting the roasting process.



ROAST: Bobby Jones converted a backyard grill into a coffee roaster. Here, he checks the roasting beans.

beans in a homemade roaster in their back yard.

The converted gas grill with a drum roaster inside can hold up to five pounds of beans at a time.

"The drum roaster has a rotisserie unit in it, the kind that they cook chickens with, that turns at a certain speed," Jones said. "We have to keep the beans at a certain temperature — between 450 and 600 degrees."

Jones said the real challenge behind roasting coffee beans is knowing what to expect at all times. Things like the weather and where the beans are stored after roasting all come into play. "If it's a rainy day, you don't roast the beans, because they go through a process where they crack, much like popcorn," Jones said.

Sparks said the main way to tell when the beans are finished roasting is to wait for them to crack not once, but twice. After the second crack, the beans are pulled from the roaster and loaded onto a cooling tray. Once they're cooled, they're stored in a bucket for a few days to degas. "Freshly roasted coffee emits carbon dioxide for the first 24 hours," Jones said.

Sparks said the main difference between fresh-roasted coffee beans and mass-produced coffee beans comes down to quality. Because Sparks and Jones roast their beans in such small batches, they have more control over the flavoring.

Sparks usually sells her product as whole beans, because once the beans are ground they start to lose flavoring. "Whole bean is fresher. Freshness is key," she said.

Sparks also wants her coffee to convey a message of family togetherness and personal reflection. Not only has Southern Girl Coffee helped her family grow closer, her family has been key in terms of getting

her products noticed and out there — all the way from South Dakota to England.

"We've met so many great people through it, and I feel like we're going to meet so many more once we have a storefront and a coffeehouse," she said.

Until then, she'll stick to roasting beans at home and selling fresh-brewed coffee at local craft fairs and concerts.

"Some of my friends tell me that I'm going to get sick of it, and that I should just keep it as a hobby, but I don't think I will," she said. "My ultimate goal is to make an impact from a bag of coffee."

WHERE TO BUY:

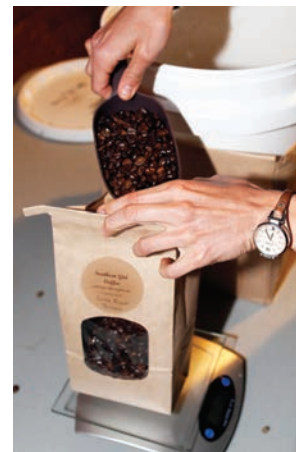
Southern Girl Coffee is \$12-\$14 for a pound, available whole bean or ground. Delivery (1-pound minimum) is available weekly. Contact Leah Sparks, 256-310-8636 or Bobby Jones, 256-310-2200, or email southerngirlcoffee@gmail.com. You can also visit Southern Girl Coffee on Facebook.



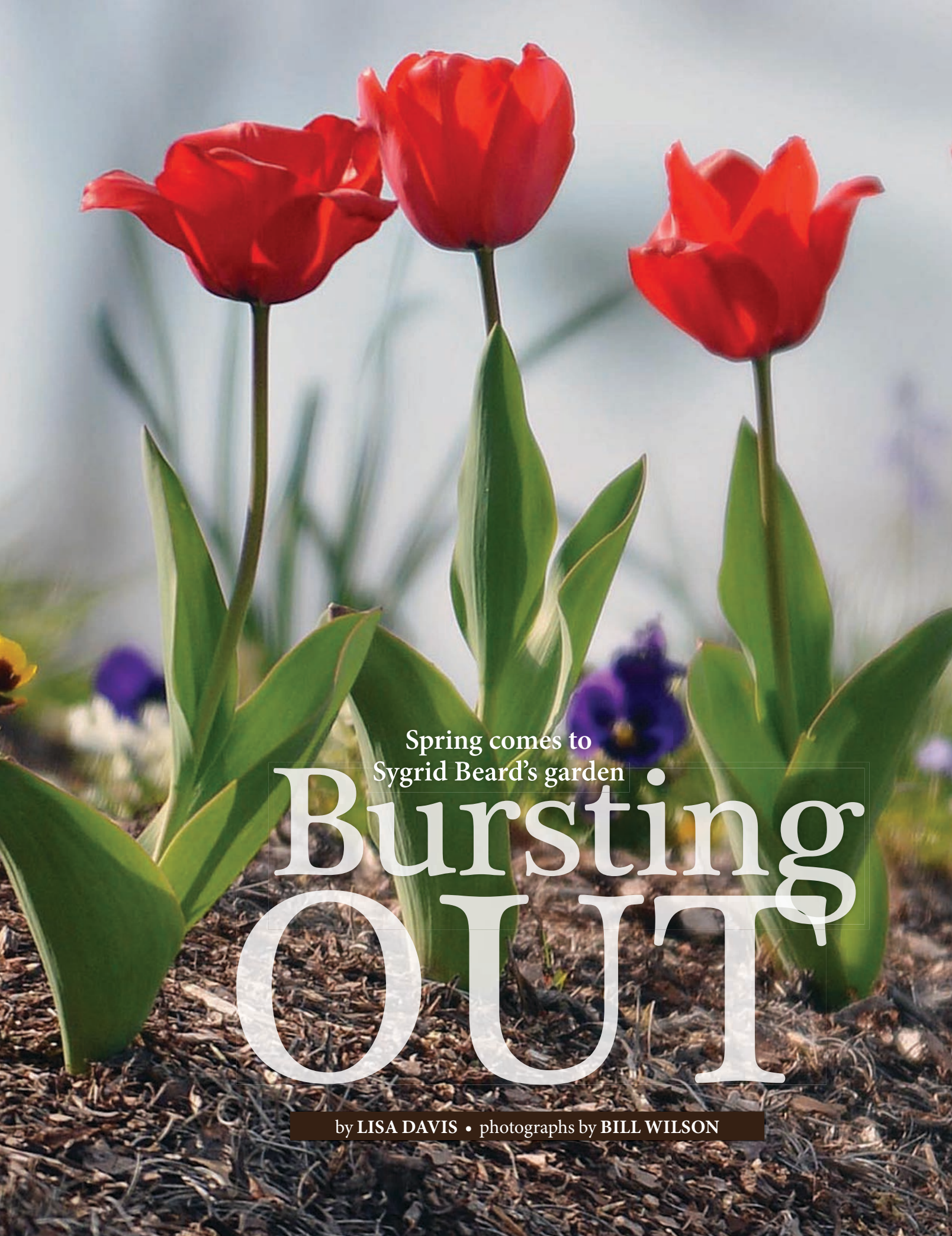
TRANSFER: Jones dumps the freshly roasted coffee beans into a box with a mesh bottom for cooling.



COOL: Sparks stirs the roasted coffee beans in a box with a mesh bottom to help cool the coffee beans. The box is sitting on two box fans that blow air over the hot beans.



PACKAGE: Sparks bags one pound of Southern Girl Coffee beans.



Spring comes to
Sygrid Beard's garden

Bursting OUT

by LISA DAVIS • photographs by BILL WILSON



When Sygrid Y. Beard moved to Alexandria two years ago, she inherited a yard planted with azaleas, a few daffodils and . . . well, that was about it. So Beard got to work. "I had to put my personality on it," she said.

Before she retired, Beard taught fourth grade classes in Anniston schools for 29 years, before serving as a parent specialist at Anniston High School for 10 years. In retirement, she has become "a traveler and a gardener."

Additions to her garden include daffodils in all shades of yellow, hyacinths, knockout roses and pansies. Not to mention the 160 tulip bulbs she planted. As she explained, "I have a big yard!"

Beard has also brought her personality to the garden with a collection of birdhouses - about 40 in all, some painted, some left natural. "I love to watch the redbirds in the morning," she said.



PARTY PIX Dancing With Our Stars



Anniston Morning Rotary held its annual Dancing With Our Stars competition at the Anniston Performing Arts Center. Proceeds benefited Calhoun Children's Organizations.

— Photos by Anita Stewart



Mike Stedham, Jon Garlick



Amber Harris, Joe Howell

PARTY PIX Sacred Heart Mardi Gras Gala



Gregory Heathcock, Monique Oblena, Mattie Norman

The annual Mardi Gras gala benefiting Sacred Heart Catholic School was held at the Anniston City Meeting Center. Highlights included black jack tables and the band Dr. Zarr's Amazing Funk Monster.


— Photos by Anita Stewart



Keith Robertson, Father Bryan Lowe




Kristen Smith, Tracie Kerper



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PARTY PIX Empty Stocking Gala



Alison Adams, Bobbi Coffey, Heather Bentley



Russell and Cindy Yarbrough

The 25th annual Empty Stocking Gala was held at the Anniston City Meeting Center. Proceeds helped to buy Christmas gifts for foster children in Calhoun and Cleburne counties, and supply indigent patients and area nursing homes with needed items.

— Photos by Anita Stewart

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PARTY PIX Knox Concerts: Sugar Plum Party



Knox Concerts hosted a Sugar Plum Party for children following the annual holiday performance of “The Nutcracker” by the Alabama Ballet.

— Photos by Anita Stewart



PARTY PIX Knox Concerts: Haifa Symphony



Following a concert by the Haifa Symphony Orchestra, Knox Concerts sponsored a reception at Classic on Noble.

— Photos by Anita Stewart

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PARTY PIX Children's Services Wine Tasting



Myra Williams, Brigitte Miller, Jennifer Yates



Wonita and Vernon Marable

Children's Services annual wine tasting dinner at Classic on Noble featured a four-course dinner and samples of more than a dozen wines. Proceeds benefited the Parris Home for Children.

— Photos by Anita Stewart

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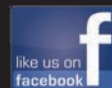
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PARTY PIX Knox Concerts: Vince Gill and Amy Grant



Following a concert with Vince Gill and Amy Grant, Knox Concerts hosted a reception at Classic on Noble in Anniston.
— Photos by Anita Stewart



Braxton Harris, Mitzi Collins, Vaughn Stewart, Millie Harris, Alicia Dunaway



Sandra and Bill Stone





Jay Walker, Dr. Rodney and Trixie Snead



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POLISHING UP THE SPITTIN' IMAGE

by HARVEY H. JACKSON

Got a call the other day from a marketing firm that was trying to put together an ad campaign designed to reach out to what the caller called “enlightened rednecks” to get them to buy a particular brand of smokeless tobacco.

Now, I won't go into the discussion that followed other than to say that my contribution to the effort was mainly to wonder aloud how they planned to appeal to what was, in the minds of most folks, an oxymoron — “jumbo shrimp,” “casual sex,” “enlightened redneck.” Our exchange ended before I could point out that if the target audience was actually “enlightened,” they probably wouldn't buy the product no matter how it was marketed.

These marketers were not the first to try to sell smokeless tobacco to folks who would not normally use that product. I recall this being done back in the 1950s, back before tobacco ads were banned from television.

And what folks were those 1950s marketers trying to reach?

Why, folks who owned TV sets.

Back then, owning a TV set, like using smokeless tobacco, had strong class connotations.

Poor folks did not own TV sets. A TV antenna on your roof was a status symbol that could not be ignored. It meant you had arrived.

It also meant that you did not dip or chew.

That's what poor did.

In my youth, I worked in a small grocery store frequented by poor folks. We sold chewing tobacco to the men — sold it by the plug or bag. Chewers stuck wads of it in their cheeks. They were men who worked all week in the fields or factories. Thin men with hard faces who looked like the captured Confederates in Civil War photographs.

We sold snuff to their wives — tobacco fine-ground to a lady-like powder that could be dipped from the can or jar

and put under the bottom lip. Snuff and chewing tobacco were for working folks who needed their hands free when they were behind a mule or in the mill, and those jobs did not buy TVs. Marketers reached them by radio.

Then someone in the advertising department of a tobacco company came up with the bright idea of taking the radio commercials, adding pictures and putting them

on TV, so TV-owning folks would start dipping and chewing.

Off after the new niche market they went.

“Bull of the Woods” chewing tobacco created a cartoon bull quartet singing the glories of that “smooth and tasty chewing treat.” Tube Rose snuff illustrated its catchy jingle:

*If your snuff's too strong, it's wrong;
Get Tube Rose, get Tube Rose!*

*To make your life one happy song,
Get Tube Rose, get Tube Rose!*

*Did it work?
Did middle class TV owners start dipping and chewing?*

Or did the effort fall flat the way I suspect the “enlightened redneck” approach is

likely to? If the marketing folks call me back, this is what I'd tell them:

A couple of years ago, a friend of mine went to a wedding, a big outdoor affair with catered this and catered that, attended by women in frocks and men in suits, college graduates everywhere. As the bridesmaids entered, my friend noticed that one of them was carrying a cup — for spitting.

“I've been to two World's Fairs,” he told me, “several rodeos, Holiness revivals, and even seen buzzards breeding, but I have never seen a bridesmaid with a dip.”

Forget that “enlightened rednecks” approach and link up with the wedding industry. A whole new niche may open up.

Harvey H. (“Hardy”) Jackson is retired Eminent Scholar in History at Jacksonville State University and a columnist and editorial writer for The Anniston Star.



Margaret Poplin

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