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The Anniston Star

# Christian Corner Meats

is an answer to a prayer



By Matt Tyson  
TAR CORRESPONDENT

**D**ebbie Young, who owns Christian Corner Meats in Anniston along with her husband, David, never intended to get into the meat business, but to hear her tell it, the Lord had different plans.

“It’s not what we wanted to do,” Debbie said. “My children were grown and we were at a place where we could slow down a little bit. But the more we prayed about it, the more we knew God wanted us to do it.”

As the name suggests, faith is central to Christian Corner Meats’ mission.

“Why did God want us to start it? I don’t know,” Debbie said. “Some way, somehow that business was started to let people know that God is good.”

Debbie and David’s path to the meat business started in property management and dry cleaning. They own the shopping center on U.S. 431 where Christian Corner Meats is located. For decades, they ran the dry-cleaning service and rented their



PHOTOS BY DONNA BARTON/THE ANNISTON STAR

Debbie Young owns Christian Corner Meats in Anniston along with her husband, David.

larger space to Anniston Quality Meats.

During the 2008 financial crisis, Anniston Quality Meats shuttered their doors, leaving the couple in need of a new tenant.

“That was a hard year,” Debbie said. “People just were not certain they should branch out in

See MEATS page 7





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# Camera Inn

## A lasting legacy for east Alabama's photography community



By Bill Wilson | STAR STAFF WRITER

In an era when cell phones dominate photography, Anniston's Camera Inn, owned by 78-year-old Dave Brandsma, stands as one of Alabama's few remaining independent camera stores.

Established in October 1977, Camera Inn has not only weathered industry changes but also captured the enduring spirit of photography for its customers, from novices to advanced enthusiasts.

Reflecting on the store's survival, Brandsma points to the evolution of photography technology.

"Cell phones were the nail in the coffin for many camera stores," he explains. "For the average person, a cell phone does everything they need. The demand for beginner cameras disappeared, and with it, many camera stores."

In Alabama, only three other independent camera shops remain, making Camera Inn a unique resource for photography aficionados in the area.

Brandsma's path to opening Camera

Inn was shaped by his own journey in photography and service. Originally from Sioux Falls, S.D., he served nine years in the U.S. Army, during which he was stationed at Fort McClellan as an instructor, teaching photography to military criminal investigators.

Following his military career, he settled in Anniston, where his passion for photography led him to open the store.

Initially, Camera Inn catered to film enthusiasts, offering everything from cameras to film processing. Over the years, however, the store has adapted to changing times. In 2014, Brandsma made the tough decision to remove his film processing equipment, which once enabled him to create everything from large prints to small snapshots.

"That was the end of an era," he said. "I sold my enlargers and processors to a man who took them away in a rickety truck. It was bittersweet but necessary."

Although he no longer processes film, Brandsma maintains a large selection of film for the dedicated few who still prefer analog photography.

"We're selling more film now than a few years ago," he said.

For processing, he refers customers to nearby labs in Huntsville, like Sutherland's Photo.

Brandsma acknowledges that profitability has taken a backseat to his passion for the craft.

"I don't run this store to get rich," he says. "Luckily, I invested in this property back when times were better. Now, I just need to cover utilities and taxes."

Today, Camera Inn serves a niche but loyal clientele. Brandsma's customers are typically people who've outgrown basic digital photography and want to invest in equipment that allows them to



push their skills further. Many are sports enthusiasts who need specialized gear, as Brandsma himself has experience photographing sports events, from local games to motorcycle races.

Camera Inn has also become a gathering place for the local community. Brandsma's extensive experience and willingness to share his knowledge create an atmosphere that draws both amateur and experienced photographers.

"People come in just to chat about gear, photography tips, or the latest events I've covered," he shares. "It's part of the reason I keep doing this — I enjoy connecting with people who share this passion."

Looking ahead, Brandsma is committed to keeping Camera Inn open as long as he can.

"As long as there are people interested in learning and pushing their photography, I'll be here," he said.

Camera Inn isn't just a store; it's a reminder of the artistry and dedication that can flourish.

B.J. Franklin's journey into photography took an unexpected turn eight years ago when he stumbled upon Camera Inn in Anniston. Initially clueless about his new Nikon D7000 — purchased from Best Buy — Franklin pulled into the store, intrigued by its inviting sign. Upon entering, he was greeted by Brandsma, who became an invaluable mentor.

"I had no idea how to use my camera; it had more bells and whistles than I'd ever seen," Franklin said.

Brandsma quickly assessed his situation and jokingly suggested he return to Best Buy for help. Since that day, the two have forged a strong friendship, with Brandsma guiding Franklin through the ins and outs of photography.

"Every time I walk in, I hear, 'What the hell did you do here?'" Franklin laughed.

He credits Brandsma not only as a teacher but as a true friend in his photographic journey.



From MEATS page 4

business in 2008.”

They prayed for someone to fill that space. As it turns out, that “someone” was Debbie and David. The Youngs took little time answering the call, and in 2009, Christian Corner Meats opened its doors.

It wasn’t easy, of course, and not everyone was confident the business would be a success. Debbie said that early on, she was even told by a supplier that she would lose everything within six months.

“We knew nothing about the meat business,” she said. “But we still felt like God wanted us to do that.”

Learning the business was a challenge. Debbie and David faced their fair share of obstacles along the way — a financial crisis, obstructive road projects and even the COVID-19 pandemic to name a few. Today, however, Debbie is confident they made the right decision.

“Every step of the way, God has been faithful,” she said.

Over the last 15 years, Christian Corner

Meats has made a name for itself as a quality, local meat store with affordable prices and a wide selection of pork, Certified Angus Beef, chicken and more. They also sell smoked Boston Butts and even harder to find cuts — such as livers, gizzards, turkey necks and ham hocks — that aren’t always available in big box grocery stores.

Debbie said they work hard to find good products they can offer at a competitive price. She wants customers to be able to eat well without breaking the bank. In fact, she says she sees Christian Corner Meats as more of a service to the community than a money-making endeavor.

“If it were about the money we’d have quit a long time ago,” Debbie said. “It is a service. This is how we give back. It’s how we serve.”



Debbie isn’t sure how long she and David will remain at the helm, but she plans to keep working until God tells her otherwise. It’s something she’s happy to do, even when times are tough.

“To serve the community has been an honor,” she said. “We do that because we

love the Lord and we love the people. That’s really why we do it.”

Christian Corner Meats is located at 1002 U.S. 431 in Anniston. They are open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Wednesday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

**Spring Street Station will be a restaurant and event venue located in the Oxford Train Depot in historic downtown Oxford. Spring Street Station will serve lunch and dinner including a full bar along with local Alabama beers on draft as well as live music.**

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# Etowah Gear makes items outdoors enthusiasts crave

By Sherry Kughn | STAR STAFF WRITER

Paul Fitzner of Anniston turned his hobby into a business over a period of years. He says now he never works a day because he loves what he does.

Fitzner, 62, worked at various places throughout the years, ending with his role as a service manager at Cintas, a company that helps businesses stay safe and healthy. During those years, he was also a family man, Scout leader and outdoorsman.

Growing up in Cartersville, Ga., Fitzner enjoyed the outdoors, and when older, saw a need for his gear to be lighter and more durable. After finding store-bought

fabrics to be noisy and heavy, he began researching fabrics, and as they improved, he began making his own tarps to sleep beneath when camping. The grommets that many use to tie down a tarp often tear the fabric, he said, so he chose to sew tie-outs, a type of strap, to his tarps.

Fitzner knew the importance of traveling light, so he began looking for the light-weight backpacks, tents and other gear, and he developed an interest in the new kinds of fabrics. He learned to sew and began making his own lightweight gear using tie-outs, which are straps used to lace with a pole or rope to hold a tent.

By 2003, he had created a small company. By 2012, he began selling

his products online at paul@backpackingadventuregear.com, including tarps, breathable gloves that help hold hiking poles, ground covers, backpacks, rain gear, outdoor stoves and more. His business is called Etowah Gear.

Another line of Fitzner's products are lightweight backpacks in a variety of colors and sizes used for both long and short hiking trips. During October, Fitzner and his son, Matthew, began making and selling pickle-ball bags. They launched the product at this year's Oxfordfest.

In 2014, Fitzner and his family, which included wife Amy, moved to Kansas City, Mo., and downsized his company to care for aging parents. After returning to the South, the couple chose to live in Calhoun County to be near their children and grandchildren. They have six of both.

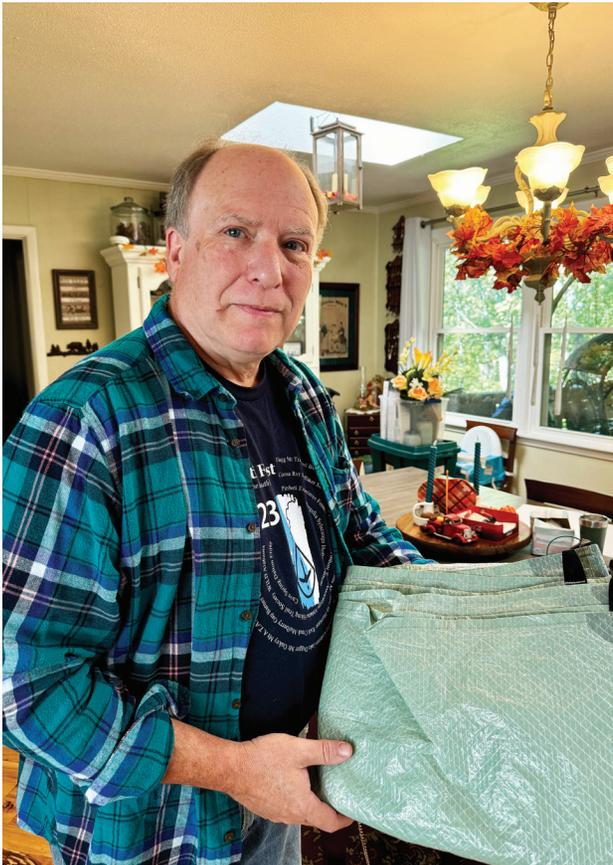
Now, he has time to help Scouts as their commissioner of the Choccolocco District, visit with his family members



The tie-outs are used to hold a tarp in place or to hang it for sleeping purposes.

and fulfill the orders for his customers, some of whom are from throughout the world.

Email Fitzner any questions about outdoor gear at paul@backpackingadventuregear.com or call 678-767-8051.



Since retiring, Paul Fitzner has turned a hobby into a career he loves. He said he feels as if he never works and gets to go outdoors and play. Since living in Anniston for the past four years, he occasionally takes hiking trips 50 to 60 miles for a few days.



These gloves are made of a two-ply upper and re waterproof and breathable. They have a sticky bottom that allows the hiker to hold onto poles.



Paul Fitzner uses durable lightweight fabrics for his products. His line of outdoor gear includes backpacks, tarps that can be converted into tents, wraps and gloves for keeping rain off hikers, trail guides, a stove kit, a stove with a windscreen and more. At the recent Oxfordfest, he launched a new product, pickle-ball bags.

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PHOTOS BY DONNA BARTON/THE ANNISTON STAR

Yvonne Boothe, owner of Evans Flower Shop, finishes work on a floral arrangement.



Evans Flower Shop is located in the alley behind the Peerless Saloon in downtown Anniston.

# The Little Flower Shop in the Alley



By Donna Barton | STAR ASSISTANT EDITOR

You would think working in a flower shop would be all sunshine and rainbows, but it has plenty of stressful moments. For every order that comes in, a clock starts ticking. Between weddings, funerals, birthdays and all other special occasions, arrangements need to be perfectly created, then delivered on time — without exception.

“We are a part of people’s lives during their happiest times and in their saddest,” said Yvonne Boothe, owner of Evans Flower Shop. “They’ve put their confidence in us and we take that to heart.”

Evans is located in downtown Anniston, behind the Peerless Saloon, tucked away on the lower floor under Nunnally’s Framing. It is a small, but bustling business that overflows with an abundance of colors and heavenly scents.

Yvonne knew from a young age she wanted to be a florist. She attended a design school in Houston, Texas, and landed a job at a supermarket that sold flowers. When her husband secured a position working in Anniston at the depot, the family settled in Alabama and Yvonne was hired to manage the floral department at Gregerson’s.

One fateful day, the owner of Evans Flower Shop stopped by and was perusing Yvonne’s design work.

“I’ll never forget it,” Yvonne said, thinking back on that time. “He said, ‘someone who does flowers like this doesn’t need to be working in a grocery store.’”

He offered her a job and she jumped at it.

“I loved it,” she said. “I was working with other designers, learning about marketing and really enjoying the atmosphere.”

When the owner passed away, she eventually purchased the business herself and carried on with the work she had come

to love.

“I know it sounds corny, but I just want to make people happy,” she said.

Her personal goal is to fulfill every customer’s vision and learn their personal tastes. Case in point. As she was designing an arrangement for a specific client, she pointed at different flowers and fillers.

“This customer won’t like to see baby’s breath in her bouquet,” she explained. “But she’ll love this white heather.”

When that particular piece was finished, in all its beauty, you’d never know it was created at the end of the work day. That, too, is one of Yvonne’s goals.

“I want the last arrangement we make in the evening to look as fresh and lovely as the first one in the morning,” she said.

Comments on the store’s Facebook page reveal how much Yvonne’s customers appreciate the unique designs and excellent quality for which her shop is known. Yvonne credits her staff.

“My amazing staff,” she said. “They work hard to achieve those high standards and I am blessed to have them with me.”

While flower shops are a dying breed across the nation, Yvonne is determined to keep her little shop going.

“There was a time when I felt I had to work with agencies like FTD or Teleflora, but I ended my relationship with them,” she said. “I want to work directly with the customer and not a middle man.”

While Evans doesn’t have large coolers with ready-made pieces, they can still accommodate walk-in business — customers who don’t mind waiting while an arrangement is created on the spot. There are exceptions, however, such as Valentine’s Day and, of course, Mother’s Day.

“It’d be better to get those orders in sooner,” Yvonne said. “You wouldn’t want to disappoint Mom.”



The new location of Foundation Fitness is 626 U.S. 278 in Piedmont.

# Piedmont gym owner encourages fitness and good nutrition

By Sherry Kughn | STAR STAFF WRITER

Derek Freeman's life story paved the way for him to become a fitness expert. He rises before dawn each day to help people who work out in his gym, Foundation Fitness. Then he goes to work helping Honda employees get healthy and stay fit. He is employed by the University Hospitals at Birmingham.

Freeman encourages residents from the Piedmont to purchase gift certificates for friends and family members for the holidays.

He teaches people how to handle their daily activities better. For instance, he asks them to reach upwards to a bar that is about the height of a bar in a clothes closet. Also, he brings in canned goods and cast-iron skillets and encourages customers to place them in a cabinet at the gym.



"These things help with

balance, mobility and range of motion," Freeman said. "It helps with cognitive ability, which works on hand-eye coordination, thinking, seeing and on customers' minds."

Foundation Fitness recently moved from downtown Piedmont to a facility on U.S. 278 next to the Piggy Wiggly grocery store.

Freeman not only doubled the space for customers, but also he has doubled the number of customers who want to get fit.

People ages 12 through 65, and even older, come in to workout. Some are members of classes that he teaches in the evenings and on Saturdays.

"A lot of 12-year-old athletes want to be explosive on the football field and want mobility, flexibility and strength," Freeman said. "Those who are 65 and older are more concerned with things like range of motion. I have some 65-year-olds who can do the same as 12-year-olds."

Craig Burt was at the gym recently to continue overcoming the effects of being shot in the leg, an injury which occurred



Cheryl Reid enjoys working out and getting a tip or two from Derek Freeman.

when he was a SWAT member.

"I come here four to five days a week," Burt said. "I love this gym."

At peak times, there will be 45 to 50 people working out in the gym that now has 8,000 square feet and lots of new equipment.

"At the other gym I had 160 total members, and now there are 310 members," Freeman said.

He works with athletes from high schools in both communities. Membership to Foundation Fitness is limited to just Piedmont. Some of Freeman's members hail from Spring Garden, Hokes Bluff, Jacksonville, Weaver and even Georgia.

Freeman is especially proud of the family-type atmosphere he and

his members have cultivated. When someone gets ill, other members take food to him or her. One member is expecting a new baby, and the members are already planning the family's meals.

"We enjoy working out and having a community like a family. We are tight and close-knit."

Freeman emphasizes exercise and teaches members how to eat well, and he sells nutrition supplements at his gym. He said that he especially enjoys seeing his customers make changes in their appearance and becoming healthier.

In addition to his work schedule, he enjoys being with his family members, Torie, who is his wife. They have two daughters, Chloe, who is 16 years old, and Harlow who is five.

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**The store is a one-stop shop. We have something for everyone, from newborn to grandparents. We also gift wrap for free with each purchase and carry greeting cards for all occasions. Our Christmas Showroom has a wide variety of Christmas Decor, trees and more.**

**We have an infant/children's section, gifts for a new bride, wine décor, all types of wall designs, lamps, and simply too much to list. We offer sales, too, on many items.**

**We welcome veterans and offer them a discount. We strive to fill each customer's landscaping needs, such as anything they need to prepare their gardens, such as rocks and stepping stones. We want each customer to have a comfy sitting area and to upgrade their lawn with one of our beautiful concrete fountains, benches, birdbaths and more.**

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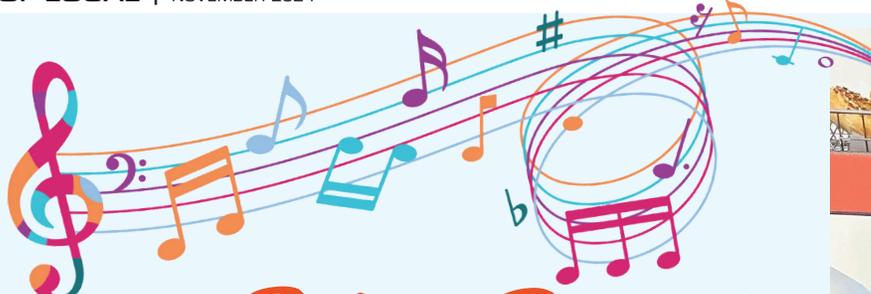
**I have always enjoyed decorating and helping my friends and family landscape their lawns and decorate their homes. I have established a business that parallels my passion, and this is what I have always enjoyed doing.**

**To me, enjoying one's job or business is the most important thing.**

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# Music City Bagels

## plays the perfect tune

By Julie Edwards | STAR CORRESPONDENT

From Palermo, Italy, to Oxford, Ala., Aldo Stassi has traveled the world and lived a full life before settling in east Alabama to own and operate Music City Bagels.

He was only 5 years old when he and his family immigrated to New York, relocating to New Jersey with his mom and siblings to go to school.

Always a lover of food, Aldo got one of his first jobs at a local meat market and made plans to be a butcher. In the meat market he learned to make true Italian sausage and other dishes.

Aldo's plans changed when he took a job as a reservation clerk for Eastern Airlines when he was 19 years old. For more than three decades he worked his way up the ladder at the airline until he was named the company's director of marketing.

Never one to get far from his foodie roots, however, Aldo purchased a deli and renovated it, making it a success. Each time the airline sent him to a different locale, he would find another deli to "flip."

When retirement from the airlines came about, Aldo found himself in Lebanon, Tenn., a suburb of Nashville. This is where the idea for his bagel shop came to him in a dream — Music City Bagels. His wife was from Alexandria, and it seemed natural to move the operation to Calhoun County to be closer to her family. (This is the answer to the often-asked question: "Why Music City Bagels in Anniston?")

The menu at Music City Bagels is very personal to Aldo. You will find dishes named after his mother, his father and old friends who are long gone. Nothing at this place is random, it all holds special meaning for this lover of baked goods.

"I can think back to the neighborhood I grew up in and remember the smells of the bagels, the ethnic foods," he said. "I have always loved food, creating it and sharing it."

Being new to the area, he found a location on Greenbriar-Dear Road in Golden Springs and set up shop in 2022. Aldo and his staff rise at 1:30 in the morning and start making bagels by 3:00 a.m. The food they make is prepared with all natural ingredients — no additives, preservatives or bromides.

When Music City Bagels opens for business each morning, Aldo says he is the "politician" of the place. He loves being out front with the customers who he knows are the reason for the restaurant's success and growth. It didn't take long to realize he needed more space and room for a drive-thru, patio and expanded menu, which is why Music City Bagels will be moving to a new location on U.S. 78 near Oxford City Hall in December.

Aldo and his staff currently make between 200 and 400 bagels a day. He expects to double production at the new facility where he will have a baking manager, a drive-thru manager and a store manager. Customers can also look for new additions to the menu that include old-fashioned floats and egg-cremes.



Aldo Stassi, owner of Music City Bagels.

PHOTO BY JULIE EDWARDS



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## LIGHTING STORE AND SO MUCH MORE

# Old building brings in new designs

By Ashley Morrison | STAR STAFF WRITER

**N**ew ownership of a historical building on South Quintard has breathed new life into the familiar space.

The unique lighting fixtures, sprawling designer furniture and high quality ceiling fans has brought the business new customers as the word begins to spread of the store's atypically low price tags.

The owner of the Lighting and Designs USA — formerly Lighting Showroom — Chris Baxter, has transformed the store, providing designer furniture, lighting fixtures, home decor, tools and hardware at prices significantly below retail.

“The people that come in and recognize the brands, they’re having to go to Atlanta and Montgomery to even remotely come close to seeing brands like that. Nobody local is carrying these kinds of brands, and especially 75 percent off retail,” Baxter said.

Asked how the store is able to take so much off of those prices, Baxter attributes these savings to their unique business model.

“We’re nuts,” he said with a laugh. “We’re a mom and pop store, not beholden to the buying groups of the big boxes. We can price items however we want and don’t need to make the margins the big guys make, as long as we get enough traffic.”

Encouraging the community to shop local, Baxter says that his hopes for the store is to provide quality home furnishings without making people drive two hours away to get good brands.

The store’s recent social media push has already made a significant impact on the traffic inside the shop, according to Baxter.

“We’re just repricing everything in the building, but we’re physically working through right now going tag by tag, repricing,” Baxter said.

Baxter said that he is cutting ties with the vendors that won’t cooperate and price items the way he is looking for.

“We’re only going to bring vendors in where we can sell wholesale to the public. Whole new structure. You’re not going to find a retailer in this area that’ll do that type of a program on this quality of a product,” Baxter said.



shop local



Unlike liquidator stores, Baxter's offers new, top-quality products, not things that have been dragged off the back of a truck and patched back together, he said. These are new high quality luxury items and designer pieces, according to Baxter.

One particular piece the store is currently featuring is a fan that retails over \$160 at other locations; which the store currently has on sale for \$28. Baxter says he wishes to offer the public "truly wholesale" options for home furnishings and tools, so much so that he can't even advertise the prices of some of the sale items because they are so significantly below retail prices.

Another item Baxter features is a wine barrel that has been repurposed and made into a table and wine rack. Similar items to the stunning piece retails for over \$1000 elsewhere, however, Baxter has priced his at \$195.

For those unable to visit regularly, Baxter said the store tries to keep its social media updated with the latest deals, despite occasional lags due to rapid inventory changes.

Though some prices can't be publicly disclosed due to pricing agreements, customers are encouraged to visit the store to see the incredible deals firsthand.

"You won't believe the prices when you walk in," Baxter added.





# Entrepreneur works her magic to bake sweet treats

By Jocelyn Gompert | SPECIAL TO THE STAR

We all deserve a little sweet treat sometimes, and in these chillier months of fall it's comforting to have your favorite flavors all in a decadent dessert. Alita Graham, a 21-year-old chef from Anniston, has a knack for making pastries.

In the heart of her home kitchen, Graham works her magic by whipping up cakes and cupcakes. While not having a store front, Graham's bakery "Moma's Little Baker" does not disappoint and offers a variety of options to choose from such as cakes, cupcakes, cookies and cake jars.

Not only does her food excel in taste but also in presentation. Graham says she chose to spell the business "Moma" instead of the "mama" as a nod to the popular museum in New York City, the MOMA.

"Moma stands for Museum of Modern Art, where I make art with my food," Graham said.

Graham has been baking since she was 12 years old, and says she creates the ideas for her confectionaries in her head.

"I've always loved baking, making things in my little Easy Bake Oven," she said.

Graham began after an unfortunate baking event when her mom left some cookies in the oven for over an hour and 45 minutes. Graham said that's the moment she wanted to start baking. With her class's baked goods burnt to a crisp, Graham was forced to run to the store and get another package of cookie dough — that was when the creative juices started flowing.

Fast forward, Graham is now a Calhoun

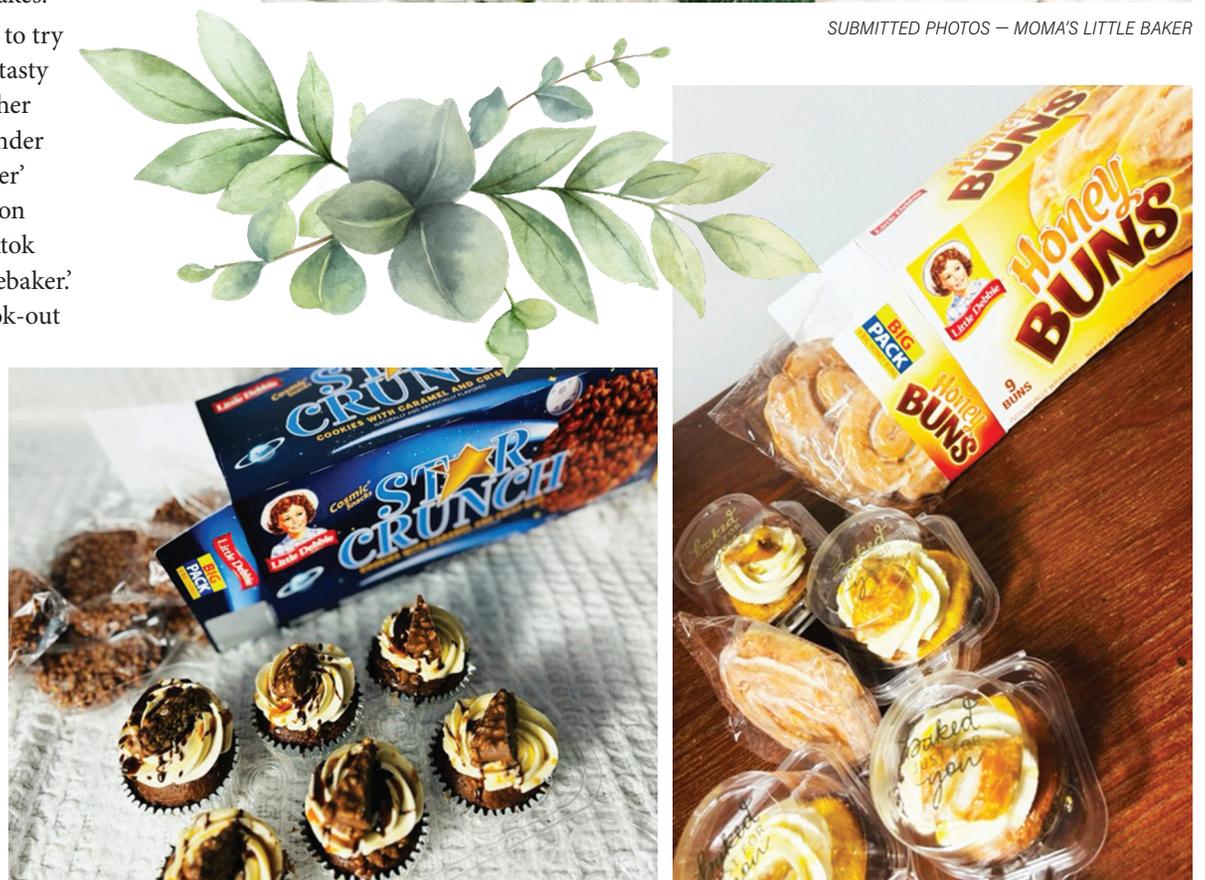
County Career Academy culinary alumni who went on to study at the Culinary Arts Institute of America in New York City. She uses her skills and knowledge to delicately craft pastries, and is an assistant instructor at the career academy she once attended.

One unique feature Graham puts into her confections are well known fan favorite flavors such as Little Debbie's Honey Buns and Star Crunch snack cakes for her cupcakes.

Those who wish to try some of Graham's tasty treats can contact her via social media under 'Moma's Little Baker' on Facebook, and on Instagram and Tiktok under 'Momaslittlebaker.' Also, be on the look-out for future farmer's markets and festival vendor booths, as Graham says she plans on doing some upcoming events to help market her product. She says she hopes to attend some winter events in December.



SUBMITTED PHOTOS — MOMA'S LITTLE BAKER





# Relationships Keep Salon Alon Thriving

By Angela Morgan | STAR CORRESPONDENT

Salon Alon has thrived in Jacksonville for 21 years because of professionalism, relationships and love.

Owner Karen Nelson, an Oxford native, relocated to Jacksonville when she married. She worked as a cosmetologist for many years, building solid relationships with her clients before deciding to open her own salon.

“The woman I had previously worked for was going to leave the industry and go into another field,” Nelson said, and that’s when she decided to take the plunge. “I didn’t want to lose what I had already built up. I jumped off that cliff and did it.”

Located at 406 Pelham Road North in Jacksonville, Nelson first opened her salon

on Greenleaf Street in April of 2003.

“We stayed there for eight years then this location came up for sale,” she said. “My husband said we should look at it and a week later we were closing on it.”

Nelson’s business strategy was simple.

“I wanted to offer more than other salons did at that time,” she said, which included creating a positive work environment for her staff who rent booths at her salon. “They have to be licensed just like I do. They worked on commission as employees. Now, they’re self-employed.”

In showing her respect for the other stylists, Nelson added, “They are an awesome group of girls and that’s really hard to find in this industry. They work really hard.”

With 38 years of experience, Nelson knows this business well.

“Within this industry, if you don’t have a client in your chair, you aren’t getting paid,” she said. “You

have to be dedicated to surviving. You have to put money back for your benefits because no one is providing that to you. You are providing it for yourself.”

It takes more than just financial planning and grit though.

“If you are withdrawn and can’t socialize with people, you can’t make it in this industry. You have to love people to do this,” she said.

It’s also an industry built on trust.

“We are a small town and everyone knows everyone. They are either kin to them or you’ve heard about them,” Nelson said. “Discretion is highly advisable.”

It’s also a rewarding industry. The greatest part of the job, according to Nelson, is “making people feel good.

“When they light up in your chair, your day is made,” she said, but it is the relationships she has with clients that

keep her going. “When you’ve made friends with your clients and they become part of your family, how can you leave that? I would miss that.”

When asked why clients should come to Salon Alon, Nelson responded quickly and again demonstrated the priority of relationships, saying, “Come because we’re going love on you and have a good time and make you beautiful.”



Salon Alon, established in 2003, is located at 406 Pelham Road North in Jacksonville.



Karen Nelson, owner of Salon Alon in Jacksonville

PHOTOS BY ANGELA MORGAN

“We’re going to love on you and have a good time and make you beautiful.”





# Something Old, Something New

## ROCK 'N' ROOSTER SALOON

brings new atmosphere to historic location

By Marleah Blades | STAR CORRESPONDENT

When the Rock N Rooster Saloon officially opened in August, it had already been the subject of conjecture for years.

Since 2021, Jacksonville residents had watched the façade of the building on the east side of the public square slowly chip away to reveal panels of old windows bordered with orange-tinted accent panes.

Some peeked in through the curtained front windows to get a glimpse of the bar or drove slowly through the back alley to spy a newly-painted sign or the uncovered edge of a patio bar lined with pressed tin.

From the outside, progress seemed to come in spurts. But inside, the owners of the soon-to-be saloon were working steadily to see a 10-year dream come to fruition.

Co-owner Cole Burgess is a construction contractor, and he did many of the renovations himself. He takes special pride in the places where he was able to bring a touch of the building's history into the present.

"This place originally opened in 1888 as Tredegar National Bank, and a mining company was upstairs," said Burgess. "We exposed the building back to its original build, including all the brick on the walls inside. The original windows in the front were still there, but they were covered up, so we exposed those too. We took up about four layers of flooring to get to the original floor. And one of my favorite things: Those doors on the front are the

original doors. We found them hidden inside a wall."

To the left of the front door hangs an enlarged image of the Tredegar National Bank, with those signature windows and those same doors. It hangs under a stuffed and mounted raccoon who keeps an eye on the balcony. The ground floor bar sits where the bank teller counter once stood.

In this part of the Rock N Rooster, saloon meets Nashville honky-tonk, with heavy, dark tables and chairs, dim lighting, and album covers all along one wall. An L-shaped balcony – the VIP seating — overlooks the main stage and dance floor. Local musicians perform Fridays and Saturdays, and there's line dancing every Thursday night.

On gameday, customers can watch football on the big screens. The saloon serves pizza and a small menu of pub snacks along with beer on tap, a full bar, and cocktail specials.

Another part of the bar has a completely different vibe. A dedicated staircase at the back of the saloon leads to the third floor, where guests can sit on red velvet couches surrounded by old Vogue covers and antiques like the Victrola sitting on the counter by the door.

This is the 1888 Cocktail Lounge — named after the year the building was erected — and it's decked out like a 1920s speakeasy. Open Thursday through Saturday nights, the lounge has a separate stage, complete with piano, and guests can order from a different menu of original cocktails dreamed up by the upstairs bartenders.

When asked what inspired this section of the saloon, Burgess was pragmatic.

"We had to install sprinklers through the whole building. We thought we might as well open up the third level to the public. We thought a cocktail bar would be cool. We like that we're able to offer the community something different."

Co-owner Jared Curvin handpicked the furniture and décor over three years, buying it bit by bit from vintage shops and antique stores.

While the long process of renovating a historic building has certainly had its challenges, Burgess said, "there was never a problem that we ran into that could stop us. And the city always worked with us to overcome it."

For the last two months, the Rock N Rooster Saloon has been open seven days a week. Starting this month, it will be closed Sundays and Mondays to give the owners and staff a chance to rest and spend time with their families.

"In a high-volume business like this, there's a lot of long nights and early mornings," said Burgess. "It can be hard to keep up with the fast pace of one night after another."

But for him, all the work is worth it.

"We feel like not only Jacksonville, but the whole county needed a place like this. It's giving the community a fun atmosphere, something different. And with the college growing, it gives the students something new that kind of clicks into a college town," he said. "Auburn has SkyBar, you know, and now Jacksonville has the Saloon."



Stage for live music performers.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

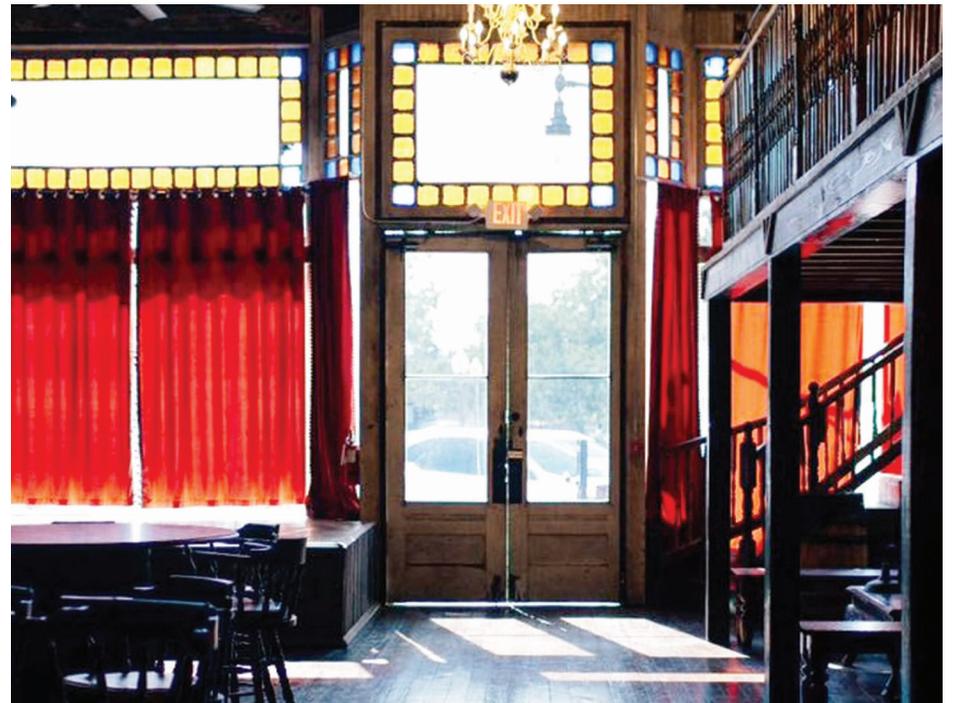


An upstairs lounge area, featuring red velvet furnishings, is reminiscent of the speakeasy days.



PHOTO BY MARLEAH BLADES

Rock N Rooster Saloon is located on the square in Jacksonville.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Doors and windows from the original structure are brought back to life.

# Anniston's Snazzy Dog Pet Spa

offers unique pet grooming experience

## From staff reports

Tucked into the heart of Anniston, Snazzy Dog Pet Spa is redefining pet grooming with its membership-based services and “fear-free” philosophy. Owned and operated by Brittney “Britt” Wingard, 34, and her wife, Becca Wingard, 34, Snazzy Dog offers a calm and welcoming environment that both pets and their owners appreciate.

Britt began her grooming career in 2013 with PetSmart but realized over the years that a corporate setting wasn't the right fit.

“I wanted an environment that was calm and relaxing for the dogs, not a conveyor-belt system,” she said. “I want to know my clients, and to me, the dogs are my real clients.”

This dream led Britt and Becca to open Snazzy Dog in May 2020, initially setting up shop in a strip mall in Saks. But soon, they sought a larger, more upscale space.

In December 2022, they moved to their current location at 1108 Woodstock Avenue, in a former dentist's office across from the Anniston High School campus. Filled with natural light and a warm, open feel, the space seems to generate a vibe that Britt describes as “positive and open.” She believes that both dogs and owners appreciate the soothing atmosphere.

One standout feature of Snazzy Dog is its membership model, which the Wingards introduced in January 2023. Instead of making traditional grooming appointments, clients at Snazzy Dog pay a monthly fee that includes a bath or haircut, along with a complimentary bath between appointments if needed.

Britt admits the concept was a shift for many customers, but it's been well-received.

“People love it. Their dogs are always clean and smelling great, and it's become part of their routine,” she said.

Snazzy Dog's approach is all about taking time with each pet. They groom only five to six dogs per day, a slower pace that allows for a thorough spa experience, including massages during bath time.

Another distinction is Snazzy Dog's “fear-free” certification, a commitment to reducing

stress and anxiety in pets. As the only “fear-free” certified grooming salon within a 50-mile radius, Snazzy Dog follows strict guidelines to ensure pets feel safe and calm. Britt explains that if a dog shows anxiety or discomfort, they will take breaks or, in cases like nail trimming, may recommend a vet for safety.

Recently, Snazzy Dog was featured in *Groomer to Groomer*, a national magazine for the pet grooming industry, marking the first Alabama-based salon to earn this spotlight. Britt described the recognition as “an incredible honor” that reinforces their dedication to providing exceptional grooming experiences.

Becca, who joined Britt at the spa and assists with bathing, shared how the experience has deepened her own love for animals. Originally hoping to become a veterinarian, her career took a different path, yet she rediscovered her passion for animals through working with Britt.

“I've always loved animals, but grooming with Britt helped me rediscover that passion,” Becca said. “It's been life-changing, not just for the dogs, but for me. I've learned patience and the importance of a calm environment.”

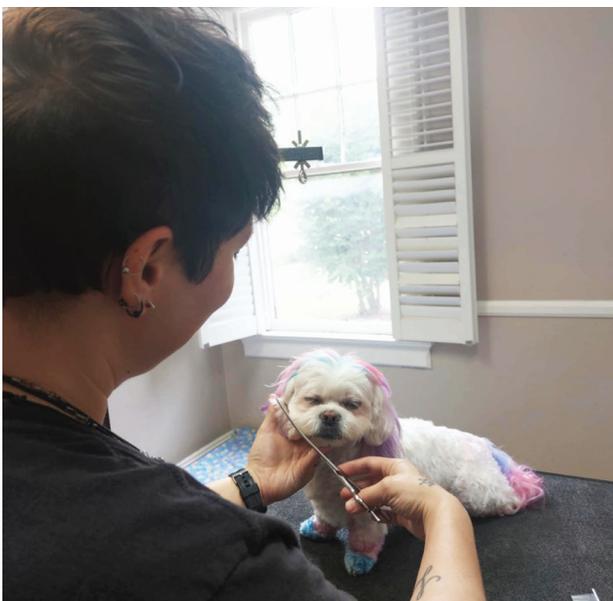
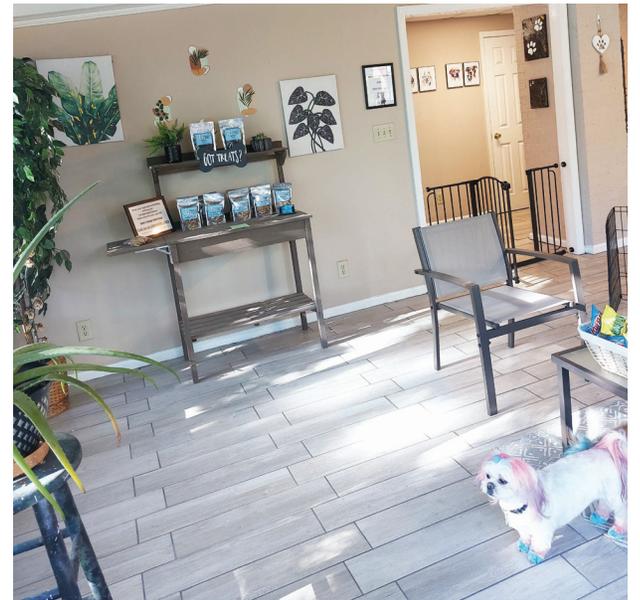
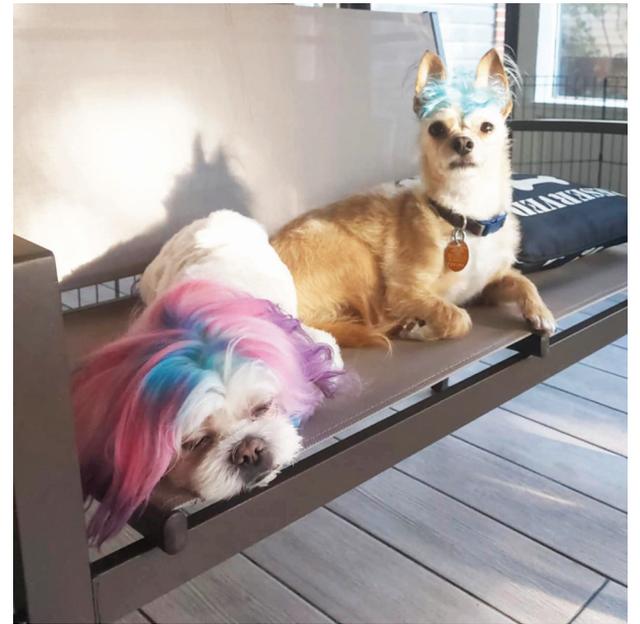
Snazzy Dog's all-inclusive memberships add another layer of appeal. Clients can choose from three different plans: a full grooming package (including haircuts), a bath-only option, or a nail-trimming service. The spa's all-inclusive approach means no extra charges for add-ons.

Additionally, Snazzy Dog's team pre-books appointments for clients throughout the year, ensuring pets are on a regular, once-per-month grooming schedule. “No more worrying about trying to remember to book your dog's appointment,” said Britt. “We've got it covered.”

The Wingards' passion for pets, their dedication to customer service and their commitment to gentle handling have enabled them to build a business that's as much about creating a supportive environment for dogs as it is about delivering professional grooming.

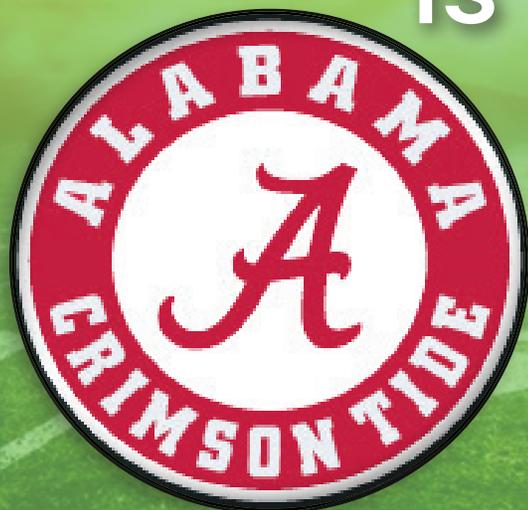
To learn more about Snazzy Dog Pet Spa membership options or to book an appointment, call (256) 201-2098 or visit its website at [snazzydogpetspa.com](http://snazzydogpetspa.com).





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