

My Hometown



July 2022

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO

THE DAILY HOME



Julie Griffis

At a meeting of the Summerville-Trion Optimist Club, when fellow reporter Jason Espy and I presented a symposium about exotic pets. Jason's holding a ball python, and that's Harry the tarantula crawling up my tie. At center is Stan Burrage, who was the club's president at the time. Stan refused to hold either creature.

Small town news back in my hometown

It was late one night in northwest Georgia, more years ago than I care to remember, that I watched through my camera lens as the florist's shop owned by my next-door neighbor burned to the

ground.

As small towns go, it was big news. Bigger news happened the following night, when the feed and seed store two blocks down (the one Mr. Hogg, my elementary school principal, bought when he retired from education) was consumed by fire.

There was as much speculation in the air that a second night as there was smoke. What caused the fires? Were they accidents or not? Was there an arsonist on the loose? Were both fires the work of the same person, or did he have an accomplice? Where would they strike next?

After exposing a couple of rolls of film for the following week's edition, ducking under the yellow crime scene tape, and coughing smoke out of my lungs, I jumped behind the wheel of my 1976 Ford Granada (with the front tag screaming PRESS in bright red letters) as Jason Espy eased into the passenger seat, his camera in tow, and we headed back to the newspaper office.

Jason's dad is the publisher of The Summerville News, an award-winning Espy-owned publication for as long as anyone can remember. I went to work there before I was old enough to drive, and Jason and I became a news team while we were both still in high school. Together, we covered Friday night football, school board meetings, elections, a deadly flood that almost displaced an entire town, the state legislature, municipal politics, crimes that are a lot worse than arson, and just about everything else that happens in and to small communities.

We had some fun. Life in a small town continued as only it can. The florist hired my dad to rebuilt his shop, Mr. Hogg retired again, and somewhere along the way, Jason and I grew up. While I was specializing in political and education reporting, he was making a name for himself as an investigative reporter. He's still at it there at The News in our old hometown, and I count it a privilege that I got my start at the Espys' newspaper.

I still remember the day I left. I stopped by David Espy's office to say goodbye on my way out. David was Jason's uncle and then the co-owner and general manager of The News. "I appreciate it, boy," he said, summing up the previous 10 years as he shook my hand. That was 25 years ago, and I still can't recall that moment without getting misty-eyed. Especially now that David's gone. His son Tracy (whom I've known since we were second grad-



Submitted photo

Detail of a collage by folk artist Howard Finster, founder of Paradise Garden in Summerville, Georgia

ers) has taken his place, and that's as it should be. As long as there are newspapers, I hope there are Espys back home to publish The News in Summerville.

If you've never heard of Summerville, I won't hold it against you. Situated in the northwest corner of Georgia, it's as far west as you can go without being in Alabama and almost as far north without being in Tennessee. Here's how it has been described by Thrillist.com, which named it one of the 11 best road trips from Atlanta:

"You'll feel like you stepped back in time when you visit this tiny, sleepy mountain town. Surrounded by scenic trees and hills, it's jam-packed with friendly locals, festivals, and park attractions and activities for the nature lover. Don't miss Howard Finster's Paradise Garden, a maze of buildings, sculptures, paintings and displays which has an international pop icon status that draws visitors from across the globe."

I consider that an accurate description of my hometown, even if I can't in good conscience recommend a visit to the late folk artist's perception of paradise. Should you decide to invest the three hours of travel time getting there, though, you will see things the like of which you'll see nowhere else on Earth. I would suggest instead a visit to the James H. "Sloppy" Floyd State Park. Even if you're not an outdoors enthusiast, you'll enjoy a drive through the park or a stroll across the boardwalk on the lake.

"Sloppy" Floyd used to be the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee in the Georgia Legislature. Besides the state park (which is a lot closer to paradise than the folk art mecca), a 20-story government office building in downtown Atlanta is named after him. Places with his name on them tend to be well-cared for.

For me, memories of my hometown are inseparably connected with my hometown newspaper. The latest issue of The News is still one of the first things I want to see when I go back home to visit my mom and sister.

The emotional connection between community newspapers and the residents of the towns and cities they cover tends to be strong and deeply rooted. That's why The Daily Home is happy and proud to present to you My Hometown 2022, a celebration of Talladega and St. Clair counties, their communities, and their

people. As you read the features in this special issue, we hope you'll be reminded of why you enjoy calling this area home. As always, we encourage you to support the many advertisers who have enabled us to prepare this special issue for your enjoyment. They appreciate and understand the value of community, and it is our privilege to join them in presenting My Hometown — a collection of stories sure to entertain, inform, uplift, and even inspire. We hope you will have as much fun reading them as we have had telling them.

MY HOMETOWN 2022

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‘It is just magical to see God’s beauty’

Amazing Grace Farm in Ragland offers new opportunities for seniors

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Amazing Grace Farm has continued to grow since recently opening its doors.

“I see the Lord’s hand with the help of others to bring this all together,” said Judy Batson, the farm’s owner and executive director. “We do not thank the elderly and veterans enough, and being able to offer this non-profit organization allows them to have a place to go. My main goal is that those that visit will leave with Jesus in their heart and be frequent visitors.”

Batson has a passion for taking care of people and encouraging them to live their lives to the fullest. Since her days as a teenager, she always knew she wanted to help people and make a difference in the lives of others. From the day she helped a neighbor recovering from surgery, she knew that she wanted to be a nurse because it gave her so much gratification to help. This led to her working in healthcare as a nurse and caregiver for many years.

“In being a caregiver, I spent a lot of time with patients, and a lot of them restricted themselves to being home. Most older people don’t want to be a burden, but I believe that just because you are sick or older that being cooped up in the house is not the way to be.”

The non-profit organization was established to be like a “bucket-list” check-off location for the elderly and veterans. Batson compares the offered activities to the fulfill-



Submitted photos

ment of the Make-a-Wish Foundation, but geared towards the older audience. She explained the list of activities available were selected as things that most seniors desire to do, wanted to do but never got the chance, or want to do but don’t have anyone to take them. Some of the offered activities include fishing, a shooting range that is handicap accessible, card games, ATVs, a trout stream in the woods, a food pit, turkey/deer hunting, bed swings, rocking chairs, and a meditation swing. With a swimming pool in progress, construction of a 1950s-themed diner coming soon, and a long term goal of adding cabins in the woods for people to visit.

“I am very passionate about this place. To me, it is just magical to see God’s beauty. I chose the older audience because I want to make their dreams come true. However, just because

I say the target is the older audience, we would not turn anyone away. If there is life left in you, live it! And if no one is around to help you do that, let me help. If you have wanted to go fishing but don’t have anyone to take you, we have someone that will come get you. We have even partnered with other farms to make sure that if there is something you want to do that we don’t provide, we can point you in the direction that does. You want to go play your favorite board games or travel, it’s here and we can make it happen. God gave us the will to live. Let us help!”

Batson has taken this once unused property and turned it into a place that visitors are now literally calling “amazing.” After days of continuing to ride past the location, her stepping out on faith and taking a chance is why these opportunities are available.

She admitted that buying a farm is something she had not planned. It is just one of those things that happened, and she believes it was given to her from a higher power, because she would just see it when visiting patients and one day decided to pull over and eat lunch there. She searched for a sign for someone to call, placed a bid, and two to three months later, she was getting the call her bid had been accepted. With money from her own pockets, she has taken her own earnings to make the dream of hers for the community a reality. No clear direction in mind, she just started. However, she accredits Craig Grigsby, the property director who works, volunteers and gets involved wherever he is needed on the farm, Larry Bell, and John Bush for their outstanding help.

“I couldn’t have pulled this off without the help of those that have volunteered and worked to get this place up and going. I want people to know that we are here and what we are working on. I want Ragland on the map and I can’t do it alone. In fact, I want this to not just be a community thing, but a state thing. I have been blessed in this life, especially health wise and that’s very fortunate, but I am putting my life savings into this, I would love the help of some sponsors and donations to help finish these projects. It would mean a lot to me to see things completed and even more to the community for those individuals whose life will be impacted.”



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Barnett receives Heart of an Eagle award

Pell City resident honored for his impact on the community

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Bob Barnett is a former Boy Scout who continues to hold his oath years later in his adult life.

With much to give, a servant's heart for his community, and dedication to make a difference he aims to adhere to the Boy Scout goal to "do a good turn daily". This may be helping to inspire the next Scout or helping with senior citizens, or whoever needs his help. He is more than happy to lend a hand.

The structural engineer and founding partner at Barnett, Jones, Wilson LLC, never got a chance to be the Eagle Scout he desired. As he got sidetracked in his adolescence from his initial focus, he always continued to hold being a Scout dear to his heart and never got over his dream. So he took the route of giving back to his community and is now known as a community leader. His countless amount of hours invested in the place he calls home, has led to Barnett receiving the Heart of an Eagle award. In which was presented to him during the Pell City Boy Scout's annual breakfast.

This award is presented to those that have made an impact on their community, demonstrated leadership, integrity, and a great character. Barnett's outgoing personality and selfless actions led him to receiving this recognition. As a man of many words, he had no problem in sharing his journey to this point in hopes his road traveled can help someone else.

Barnett had this to say in an interview about his life as a Scout and the recent award.

Q:What made you want to become a Boy Scout?

Barnett: I can't think back that far to the exact reason of why, but I know I was nine years old at the time. I guess I would say I was inspired by friends. I saw that they were all Scouts and pursued to do the same. I am glad I made the decision because I got a chance to go and see some interesting places. The older I got I started to grow more interested in perfume (girls) and cars; however, when I got older around the time of my 30's I got back into being a scout. I became active on the board and committee and have been doing that for like 30 years now.

Q: How has being a Scout helped in your adult life?

Barnett: I had such a great experience being a scout. In fact, my kids are both Eagle Scouts, so the legacy continues. As far as the influence it has had on my adult life, I gained my best leadership and management skills I have ever had from being a Scout. The program helps to teach you to be a better person, to do the right thing, and so many more great charac-



Photos by Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

teristics. The training helps with good management skills and it's something everybody can do.

Q: How do you feel about receiving the recent award?

Barnett: It was pretty cool, I think, but I feel there were more people more deserving of the award than me, honestly. The award recognizes people in the community and there are people who did a lot more than me I think. I just love helping people and am happy with what

I do. Sometimes I overextend myself but that's okay because I enjoy what I do. Overall, I'm grateful.

Q: What do you think stood out for them to select you?

Barnett: The long term service that I devoted to the Boy Scouts and the community. I served or am currently serving on the CEPA's board of directors, Pell City's Industrial Development Board, St. Vincent's St. Clair's advisory board, and several others. So I think my involvement has

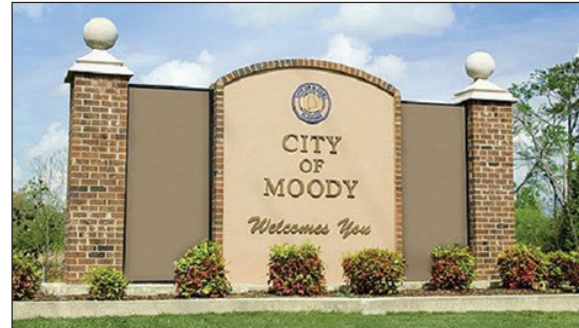
gone a long way and is what possibly stood out most.

Q: What advice would you give to someone considering becoming a Scout?

Barnett: Go to the meetings and have fun! I believe that if you have fun, the rest of it will come along. Also strive for each level from Scout to Eagle. You get tested, but it is worth the experience. It helps to teach you to grow up some in a sense, gain some independence, and how to interact with others. It is definitely an experience I recommend.

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From left, Rita Patton, Diane Kay, Andrea Ellis, Mort Moody Jr., John-Mark Freeman and Zack Lightsey at the Coosa Valley Chamber of Commerce.

‘When you love what you do, it doesn’t feel like work’

New chamber of commerce director loves the Coosa Valley community

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

The best solution to change is to put action behind the problem to find a solution.

John-Mark Freeman, 24-year-old director of the Greater Coosa Valley Chamber of Commerce has taken the initiative to be a part of the change his community needs. With less than a month into the role, he is full of ambition and dedication to make a difference.

With almost 160 chamber members, he loves how everyone has welcomed him with open arms and thinks everyone is amazing. They support his vision for the city and look forward to seeing things move forward. From residents to local businesses, the goal is to help those that need help, give them support where needed, and overall evolve as a community.

Since graduating from Hueytown High School and shortly after moving to Sylacauga, Freeman has felt that this role has always been in the plans for him. Being a youth minister part-time, the ministry has kept him well involved in the community.

This was an ideal qualification that stood out to the board and saw him as a great fit to bring on.

In being the youngest member on the board, Freeman had this to say in an interview about his position and vision for the city of Childersburg.

Q: Is it normal for someone your age to be on the board?

Freeman: No, it is very abnormal; however, I hope that it is the start of a new normal of seeing more young people involved within their communities. I would definitely love to see more of it and hope I can influence more young people to step up. My age group is so opinionated, but there are not a lot of boots on the ground to support those opinions. I believe it is important to start putting action behind your opinion.

Q: What would you say your role includes?

Freeman: A little bit of everything, if you ask me. We deal with small businesses, host events or attend them. By changing the name from Childersburg Commerce

to the Greater Coosa Valley Chamber of Commerce, it has allowed us to be able to serve those areas that do not have a chamber. We might be small in size, but we make a great impact. The intent is to help people because we care and want to see them succeed. This is why we aspire to increase tourism and do whatever we can do as a whole. I love that no day is the same for me, this role keeps me on my toes and I love it! If your community is better, business does better.

Q: Why did you feel it was important to take on this role?

Freeman: I love the community and the people. Before joining the chamber, I didn’t have much of a footprint about what they do. I learned more about them through research, and once I did, I knew then that I wanted to be a part of the change they seek to provide. So when the opportunity presented itself, I put banking behind me, and took the job.

Q: How did your family feel about your new role?

Freeman: My dad was fully supportive

of my decision and happy for me; however, he was unaware of what the chamber does or how they work. Nevertheless, he knew I was passionate about it, and he stands behind whatever I am passionate about and understood what it meant to me. He was so proud of me and that is definitely a great feeling.

Q: What’s next for you after your time on the board?

Freeman: I don’t know honestly. I am so bought into this position that I don’t want to depart from it until I feel all of what I can do for this community is done. I don’t really have a next plan. Down the road in life I want to go back to school for business administration, but the focus now is to make this work. I am so fulfilled every day that it doesn’t feel like work. It’s a lot to do and can be tiring, but it’s nothing I see myself walking away from any time soon. They have always said that when you love what you do, it doesn’t feel like work, and for me that is more than true.

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‘A good community is one that takes care of each other’

Curtis Pippin seeks to bridge the gap between veterans and the community



BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Curtis Pippin is a former soldier who understands that just because the uniform comes off, the mindset can still be present.

The Leeds native had always wanted to join the military. He desired to help protect and serve his country when the chance became available. Outside of his natural inclination to serve, he was inspired by his mother and father who both were in the Air Force.

Upon graduating from high school, he finally got his chance to join the United States Army. The idea of being a part of something greater than himself, the structure, and discipline are the things he sought. With almost seven years devoted to his country, he fought for the American people and was blessed to be able to return home, and migrate into life after the military. However, that became easier said than done as he endured his own personal battle once he got home.

Pippin's own personal journey is what has fueled his passion to give back to the community in a way that is beyond needed. With limited resources available, he understands the importance of guiding those who need direction. With everything happening for a reason, he was an active duty operational support for the Alabama National Guard for about a year, but there was a funding shortage that led to him losing his job. With a family still to provide for, he continued to search for work, and applied for a position offered by the St. Clair County Extension Office and Auburn University.

Since last October, he has been with the extension office as its veteran outreach administrator, and he could not be happier to make such a great impact throughout the community.

Q: What made you take on this position?

Pippin: I spent 6 years and 9 months active duty in the Army and left in 2015. Upon returning home, I encountered a lot of my own personal issues that bled into my family. I know what it is like to feel helpless and like no one understands what you are going through. So I am always trying to find that person that is living in survival mode because I have been there, and I want to help. It's hard, but I know with the right amount of help and resources, it can be better handled.

Q: What is the role of a veteran outreach administrator?

Pippin: Well it depends on the program, but I am an employee of Auburn University who manages the program. In this area, it is like we are taking the program to the people. Everyday is a different experience. When you are in the military, they give you a network whether you want it or not, but when veterans are no longer connected to those given resources they struggle rebuilding that network. When they run into a problem they don't know how to access that anymore and that is where I come in to help put things into perspective to fix their needs. As well as educate them on the benefits and resources available for what they need whether it's home repairs, for their health, and more.

The help is there and available. I just help to show them the way and get them back connected with the community.

Q: How does your role benefit the community?

Pippin: It helps the community get involved. A good community is one that takes care of each other. So my goal is to bridge the gap between veterans and the community. Let those veterans know that they are not alone, but it is challenging to find them to give that connection and help. There is such a need in this county, but it's not like there is an establishment I can walk into and just seek out those veterans that need help. It takes being dedicated and hard work to find them, and that's okay because I am willing to put in that work.

Q: What is the biggest reward of working in this position?

Pippin: To see the community efforts making a difference. I set clear expectations for myself and the veteran I am helping. No matter the outcome, to gain their trust in the process, for them to understand that they are not alone, my best and all is given to whatever the project may be is one of the best rewards. All it takes is one person to come along to make a difference in their mindset.

Q: What advice would you give to someone aspiring to go into the military?

Pippin: If you decide to go the military route, be intentional and know where you want to go in your career. I believe that if you have an honest desire to serve, you will go on to do great things.



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Submitted photos

Sundi Hawkins, Valerie White, and Margaret Winchester at the KidsART 2022 opening reception.

Heritage Hall showcases the talent of young Talladega artists

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Heritage Hall Museum and Art Center in Talladega has almost two hundred young artists' artwork adorning its walls for the summer from its Art in the Schools program. The KidsArt exhibition includes pieces selected from over 500 kids throughout the year from students of Talladega City Elementary schools created in art. Those selected received recognition of their art, the top 10 art pieces received museum merit awards, and Superintendent Dr. Quentin Lee chose his top three that he awarded. For a group of young minds, this event was a big deal and maybe the first step in art careers ahead.

"The museum has provided the arts enrichment program to kids for over 20 years and is a big priority of ours. We have grown it for a couple of years now. The schools around here don't have art included in their curriculum anymore, aside from our program that we offer. Since they do not, we take the art to them. Having art is important because it helps build skills and express creativity. We initially started with one grade level, but have been fortunate to add a new grade every year," said Valerie White, executive director.

Outside of the exhibits, the museum offers art classes both in person and virtually, has workshops, quilting, and offers an arts camp for kids that will run until the last week of July. For the camp, the areas of instruction will focus on drawing, painting, sculptures, music, performances, and on the last day of camp kids will have a presentation at the Ritz Theatre.

White mentioned that during art camp it gives kids the opportunity to get involved in other things and most importantly get exposed to the different mediums and variations of art. Such as with the kids art exhibit, all the projects throughout the year were different to reveal a different basic art skill whether it was oil painting, ink, working with pastels, outlines, dimensions, 3D projects and more.

As a product of her environment with parents that were performers and opera singers, White spent the majority of her life in Germany, traveling, and seeing enough productions to last her lifetime. Though she is not a performer or paints anything she has a strong attachment to the arts, fully understands its importance, and how it can be inspirational.

"Instead of taking the art route for my career, I was more into psychology. I got my MBA in consulting and financial services that I worked in for over 20 years. I actually worked inter-



nationally for quite some time, but I wanted a new start, so I came back home. Plus my family house needed to be restored and while in town when I found out the museum needed help, I stepped up to fill in and haven't left. I love artists and getting the chance to work with them, I feel I am just a natural. I'm no artist, I don't paint or anything, but I create exhibits and to me that's art in a sense. For Talladega, this place is a treasure and I couldn't agree more."

Asked how she decided what art pieces were selected out of the kids' artwork, she said that she didn't choose, but the teachers did. "A lot of details of whether the art was finished, executed

properly, and the amount of detail that went into it were determining factors. From looking at the art they had to choose from it was definitely not an easy decision. I can promise and can believe there are plenty that could have made the cut, she added."

The overall turnout was great and the best part, according to White, was that the kids were made to feel special and were celebrated.

"The most rewarding part of putting exhibits together is the chance to be a delight to your audience. I look forward to this being a place people can come to just enjoy. Art enriches your life especially in this small community, it makes a big difference."

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Youngsters work on their creations during an Art in the Schools class.

Photos by Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

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Susan Cook

In the early morning hours, before the summer sizzle sets in, Alabama farmers neatly stack their cartons of squash, strawberries, cucumber, and zucchini—nature's edible jewels.

Here under the white canopies of the outdoor market, it's about more than food. It's about community.

Growers gather to sell

their harvest and connect with the communities in Talladega and St. Clair counties. Young and old alike stroll the aisles of booths filled with fresh produce that smells like rain and sunshine, glowing without the artificial aid of chemicals or wax. Red and green tomatoes gleam in rows like Christmas in July, while the juicy flavors of watermelon and cantaloupe taste like slow, sunny summers in the South.

Somehow, knowing this bright array of food was grown in your own backyard makes you feel healthier, even if you plan to coat those green tomatoes and squash in breading and pop them in the deep fryer later.

So while some stop to smell the roses, I prefer the farmers' market, where you can stop and smell the peaches (and eat a few too).



Photos by Bob Crisp/The Daily Home





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Photos by Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

‘Everyone wants to come to the lake’

The market ‘is still hot’ for Logan Martin properties, local Realtors say

BY NICK PATTERSON
Special to The Daily Home

Homes for sale right now on Lake Logan Martin are ranging from the low \$100s to around \$2 million, as revealed by glancing at recent real estate listing. And although some Logan Martin area homes are dropping in price, the averages have remained high during the pandemic.

Housing inventories around the lake are also pretty tight these days, with relatively fewer homes on the market than in previous years.

What explains the current market conditions? Experts see trends that track with what’s happening nationally.

Realtor Nicole Anderson summed up the basic market conditions on the Lake Homes Realty website (lakehomes.com): “Logan Martin Lake real estate is the third largest market in the state for lake homes and lake lots. The typical average list prices of Logan Martin Lake homes for sale is \$326,000. On average, there are 160 lake homes for sale on Logan Martin Lake, and 300 lake lots and parcels.”

She said that people really want to live the lifestyle that only a lake like Logan Martin can provide. “Mainly living on the water has always been a peaceful and enjoyable experience for people. They love the opportunity to bring children and grandchildren back around. Or create memories with their children as they grow up. Or celebrate the golden years in a relaxing and peaceful way. There’s also the sense of community on the lake associated with its lifestyle and boating or other extra-curricular activities.”

Anderson said that various economic conditions are currently pressuring the market at the lake. “The market itself is still limited with inventory and it is still hot when a listing comes online,” she said. “We do need more listing inventory as we still have a great any buyers. The interest rates are decreasing our ability to sell homes while the pricing is remaining the same, which is pricing some people out of the market with their monthly payment, or either down into a lower bracket of home prices that doesn’t really exist on the lake right now.”

That conditions at Logan Martin reflect what’s going on elsewhere can be seen in recent comments by government authorities on the housing market and the issues that shape it.

For example, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, at a Federal Open Market Committee press conference June 15, noted how the pandemic and recent developments have impacted the economy. He was explaining why

the market needs a reset to bring down inflation, but his words touched on housing.

“We saw home prices moving up very, very strongly for the last couple of years. So that changes now. And rates have moved up,” he said. “We are well aware that mortgage rates have moved up a lot. And you are seeing a changing housing market. We are watching it to see what will happen. How much will it really affect residential investment? Not really sure. How much will it affect housing prices? Not really sure.”

“Obviously, we are watching that quite carefully. It’s a very tight market. So prices might keep going up for a while, even in a world where rates are up. So it’s a complicated situation and we watch it very carefully.”

Anderson noted that one commonly-cited element that came to the fore during the pandemic is also at force at Logan Martin. “I’ve seen more people working from home and wanting to purchase properties in locations where they can do that enjoyably without a commute since the pandemic of 2020. The need for a home office is often one of the top requests for a home now, when we hardly had that before the pandemic,” she said.

In a report on “Housing Prices and Inflation” from whitehouse.gov, authors Jared Bernstein, Ernie Tedeschi, and Sarah Robinson said that “pandemic-related market disruptions like increased demand and rising building costs as well as other long-term supply constraints in the housing market have contributed to record increases in prices.” They called the growth in home values “extraordinary.”

“In addition to supply factors, there are also potential pandemic-related demand factors stemming from increased at-home work and heightened mobility. At the start of the pandemic, there were elevated levels of migration away from city centers and into suburbs and other less population-dense areas. This created higher than usual churn in the housing market. Moreover, mortgage rates—which have declined to all-time lows over the past year—are making borrowing more affordable (for those with relatively good credit histories), thereby contributing to stronger demand for new homes.”

That report came out in September 2021, however. More recent analyses suggest that the high end housing market is cooling down now in comparison to last year — although prices are still going up for luxury homes — just at a lower rate than 2021, according to

Redfin, a Seattle-based real estate brokerage.

“The luxury-housing market, which experienced a meteoric surge last year, is coming back down to earth amid a slumping stock market, rising mortgage rates and economic uncertainty,” Redfin’s Lily Katz wrote in a June 10 report. “The luxury market is cooling as soaring interest rates, a tepid stock market, inflation and economic certainty put a damper on demand. For a luxury buyer, a higher mortgage rate can mean a monthly housing bill that’s thousands of dollars more expensive. The year-over-year cooldown is also a reflection of the market for high-end homes coming back to earth following a nearly 80% surge in sales a year ago,” she wrote.

So what will that mean for homes around the lake? One indication may be that some sellers are reducing their prices. For example, Zillow lists a manufactured home built in 1995 that has recently been reduced by \$29,000, while a similarly-sized dwelling built on the lake in 1974 has been reduced by \$30,000.

Sharon Thomas of Re/Max Hometown Properties, sees a cooling trend coming. “In my opinion, things will slow down due to rising interest rates and the increased housing costs,” she said. “I truly think the market will level off and we will see house prices drop a bit.”

There may be various reasons for some sellers to reduce prices, or for some vacant properties to remain on the market for weeks and months at a time. Those examples, realtors say, are not the whole picture.

“We see the market leveling out but still in short supply of inventory and a demand of buyers,” said Caran Wilbanks, a Realtor with ERA King Real Estate in Pell City.

She said the trend remains positive for sellers on the lake. “It’s a sellers’ market in my opinion,” she said. “Sellers are getting asking prices and more. With multiple offers in some cases.”

Where will the Lake Logan Martin market go? It’s as uncertain as it is elsewhere in the country, apparently, and outside factors may still impact the market, Thomas said. “Lakefront property is very appealing, but the higher prices may have a lot of buyers on the fence. If someone is in the market, it is a good time to buy before interest rates get any higher. If they wait for them to come down, buyers may be waiting a while.”

Anderson said that either interest rates or basic prices need to drop.

“I’m not sure where the market is headed but I know we need interest

rates to go down or home prices to go down in order for it to continue to flourish,” Anderson said. “There is such an influx of new agents at the same time as there is no inventory. So, I’m sure it’s spreading a lot of people thin as to what they can sell. I know it’s making it more competitive among agents to sell something.”

The appeal of Logan Martin as a place to live is in no danger of diminishing. “Everyone loves and wants to come to the lake,” Wilbanks said. “It’s refreshing and relaxing.”

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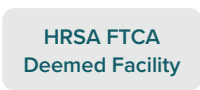


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Honoring a family legacy by investing in the future

The short life of Masie Knight started and ended in lower Talladega County.



CJ Knight

was a true advocate of the outdoors. I still remember the stories that she would tell of her childhood. Her memories as a child and young adult life centered around the banks of Kahatchee Creek and Cedar Creek, which are portions of Lay Lake in Fayetteville.

She would always speak of barefoot adventures, fishing, wading creeks and playing with the other local kids in ponds and springs near their home front. Mom and her brother Shane were quite the pair. They were very close, and they traveled and grew up together in a very tight setting.

My Uncle Shane still swears that Masie could “hold her on” with anybody her age or older. He jokes about how stern and strong she was. I am sure they were a handful for small town Fayetteville.

The kids during this timeframe relied on outside activities for pleasure and fun. Mom and Uncle Shane always said that they were very poor when it came to money growing up. They also claim that they never knew how poor they were, because they didn’t need much to have fun and enjoy childhood. Outside activities in and on creeks, mud puddles, woods, pastures and backcountry roads were all they needed.

From what I have gathered, Mom loved to help others at a very early age. She seemed to have everyone’s respect. Why, I am not completely sure. It could have been her personality, attractive looks or her demeanor. To this day, people approach me and ask if I am Masie Knight’s son. That is something that really makes me proud. I know that others loved her very much.

I truly believe she impacted the lives of so many, even on her darkest of days. Mom was well known for her musical talents locally and abroad. I can remember as a young boy traveling to Nashville,

where she would record music. Her dream was to make the big time and be a country singer, a dream that was not farfetched. She was very good. During her short musical career, she started a band called The Cutting Edge. She and her fellow band members would practice and put on shows locally. She truly loved to perform in front of others, and she was very good at it. I wish that her illnesses would have allowed her more time to pursue her dreams. I believe she could have made it.

Growing up as a kid in rural southern Talladega county had many advantages. As a family, we lived a very simple life. Both of my parents, Masie and Chris Knight, could be considered average middle class. We had everything we needed, but we were not rich by any means. My mom was a very loving person. She would always let multiple friends come over and spend the night with us. She was known as the mother to many in our area. It would not be uncommon to have 10 or 15 kids at the house at any given time.

She cooked for, disciplined and looked out for us all. She was the best mom ever. Her relationships with all of my friends gained her tremendous respect. All of my childhood friends’ parents loved Mom. She never gave up on her kids or any of my friends.

During her struggles with cancer, Mom would give testimonies to churches and other places of interest. She was very involved in her community during these dreadful times. She even published small articles in local publications that would give testimonies and hope to others during times of hardship.

She gave more than she received always, even till the end. I can remember her giving money to homeless people after she would get cancer treatments in Birmingham. She probably didn’t have much to give but she did it anyway. Those actions defined her character as a person. It was not uncommon for Mom to just stop on the street and start praying with someone, just because she had a feeling they were in need. I always felt like her godly calling was to help

Please see KNIGHT I Page 3B



MASIE KNIGHT

Submitted photos

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KNIGHT

Continued from Page 2B

others and to use her situation as an inspiration to help others. Her presence is still felt today in the lives of many people.

Masie was diagnosed with aggressive breast cancer in early 2002. She would undergo procedure after procedure for the next 3 1/2 years. These procedures included radiation, chemo, gamma knife and amputation. She was in the fight of her life.

These times were very difficult for her and for the family. I can remember as a very young kid the pressures and sadness that came with this illness. It was horrible in so many ways. Mom was a fighter and remained faithful, even after receiving news that she would have less than a year to live in 2004. She fought a losing battle for a very long time, but she never gave up. She fought for her kids, family and others until her last breath. And that is why I believe Masie Knight will forever be a local hometown hero.

This brief biography is one of the hardest things that I have ever written. All of the details bring back so many memories, both pleasurable and painful. The testaments of what she went through, in that short amount of time, was often unbearable. I can only hope that this will help others in some form or fashion in the future. It is so hard for me to muster up the words to explain my mother's legacy. As her oldest son, I feel obliged to help others in her memory and what she stood for. That's why my family and I started the Masie Knight Memorial Scholarship Fund.

The 501 (c) nonprofit was established in January. Though my family has been giving scholarships since her death in 2005, we have just recently established the nonprofit in its entirety due to growth of the organization. With the help of yearly fundraisers, our nonprofit is able to give scholarships to high school seniors in my mother's name.

Since 2005, more than \$58,000 in scholarships has been awarded. This past year, the Masie Knight Memorial awarded \$15,000 in scholarships to high school seniors from B.B. Comer, Fayetteville, and Childersburg high schools, as you can see in the accompanying photos. This is all possible due to the supporter of and participants in our annual squirrel rodeo.

You heard me right – a squirrel rodeo. I encourage local residents to participate in the next one. You might just win some awesome prizes while doing so. We will be expanding our school zones for the upcoming years, due to growth of the foundation. I will add that we are not salaried nonprofit employees. All proceeds go directly back into our communities and for the fundraising supplies. We appreciate everyone's contributions and help. We simply could not keep her legacy alive without the local communities' help.

We are very proud of the 2022 Masie Knight Memorial Recipients, and all of the graduating seniors. 2021-2022 was not the easiest of years for our high school seniors. With Covid issues still prevalent, these kids have withstood the nation's many challenges/troubles. We couldn't be prouder of them. We feel like these deserving students will represent the Masie Knight Scholarship to the fullest. In an ever-changing world, these high school students will go on to impact their society in a positive way.

Mom asked one thing from her family, and that was to never let her legacy be forgotten. We are very proud to serve high school graduates in our local community with these opportunities.

CJ Knight is president of the Masie Knight Memorial Scholarship Fund Inc.



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Another successful Hometown Block Party in Pell City

Tens of thousands come together for fun community festival

BY FAITH DORN
Special to The Daily Home

Pell City's 2022 Hometown Block Party was enjoyed more than 20,000 attendees, according to organizers' estimates.

The annual community celebration was started by the Pell City Chamber of Commerce more than 20 years ago to bring the community together for a fun event.

Urainah Glidewell, executive director of the Pell City Chamber of Commerce, believes this year's event went very well and is glad there was a large turnout.

"There were three stages of live music, and so many people were out to enjoy the entertainment and visit over 100 vendors. The kids who attended also got to enjoy the kids' area with inflatables," she said.

In addition to the live music, the event also featured an auto show with 100 cars. "Unfortunately, we had to turn some cars away. We hope that next year we will have more space to make the car show even bigger," said Glidewell.

She added that her favorite part of the Hometown Block Party was seeing families come out to the event together and enjoy it. "Whether it was listening to music or the kids playing in the kids' area or checking out the cars or sampling the foods, I loved seeing people enjoying themselves at the block party."

Glidewell said the chamber received many compliments about the music line-up, which featured such acts as The WingNuts, former contestant on The Voice Berritt Haynes, and former American Idol contestant Tristen Grissett.

In addition to the entertainment provided by the chamber, the Pell City Police Department brought a special guest to the Hometown Block Party: weather expert James

Spann.

"It was an extra bonus to have James Spann here," Glidewell said. "He was signing copies of his book, and he had a line all day. I joked all day that the weather was great because James Spann was there. It was truly perfect weather, not overly hot or humid."

Glidewell is grateful for the community's support of the event every year, as well as the support of the volunteers and sponsors who make the event possible.

"There are so many logistics, from stages to the kids' area and more. The City of Pell City, the Pell City Police Department, the Pell City Fire Department, the street department, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, and more helped make this happen," Glidewell said.

Buffalo Rock, Vulcan Tire and Automotive, and Ford Meter Box sponsored the stages and the kids' area.

Other sponsors included American Family Care, Hargray Communications, T-Mobile, Town & Country Ford, Winsouth Credit Union, APEX Vehicle Services, Fort McClellan Credit Union, Lakeside Live, Fresh Value, Insurance Planning Services, Julie Funderburg, Shine Shanty, The Realty Pros, Strides Media, Gilreath Printing and Signs, Specialty Printing, and RTL Printing. Glidewell is also grateful for the Chamber's Capital Campaign sponsors who make Chamber events throughout the year possible.

The next big event for the Pell City Chamber of Commerce is the Christmas Parade, but it will also host other events throughout the year including Lunch and Learns, Business Builder Breakfasts, and more. For more information about the chamber and its events, visit pellcitychamber.com or follow them on Facebook.

The date for the next Hometown Block Party is June 3, 2023.



Photos by Bob Crisp/The Daily Home



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Chris Norwood/The Daily Home

Shareka Lee, right, with Blair Steffens, principal of Munford Middle School, and Alex Johnson, assistant principal of Stemley Road Elementary School.

Talladega County’s new coordinator of math instruction seeks to lessen reliance on technology when solving problems

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Shareka Cook Lee is the new coordinator of assessment and math instruction for Talladega County Schools, and she could not be happier to experience what she considers to be a full-circle moment. To continue to work in the city that provided her education from elementary to high school, she feels very fortunate and sees it as a way to give back to her community.

Lee has been a principal at Sycamore Elementary School, an assistant principal at Stemley Elementary, and an elementary school teacher. She is well-rounded within the educational system and looks forward to helping to increase test scores and focus on mental math to lessen the dependence on technology.

As a parent, teacher, and leader, she is able to understand the view of students and teachers from both inside and outside of the classroom. This position is personal to her because she desires the best for the young minds of the future. To learn the basics of math is vital for everyday life, and she wants students to be prepared for that, and teachers to be equipped to provide what is needed for instruction.

Lee had this to say in an interview about her new role.

Q: When did you learn you had been selected for the role?

Lee: Well, I was at my son’s baseball game when I got the call. At the time I was still principal at Sycamore Elementary, so when I looked down and noticed it was Superintendent Dr. Suzanne Lacey, I thought nothing of it honestly. I just figured it was her calling about something pertaining to the school or a parent, the usual, nothing more. So when she told me the job was mine, it was a very humbling experience especially to receive the news from her. She’s almost like a mom to me, and for her to be able to offer me the job meant so much.

Q: What does your role involve?

Lee: The general overview includes assessing all assessments for all of Talladega County schools, analyzing data, identifying long term and short term goals for each school. I also make sure to adhere to the new numeracy law [that requires students who are math deficient to participate in at least 60 hours of learning in math during the summer]. So in a cluster I am

the resource person and to be that support the teachers need to get the job done in educating students. I strongly believe that by giving teachers, principals, and math instructors the help they need, it will improve students to be more mathematically sound.

Q: How does your role make a difference in the community?

Lee: I believe it impacts our entire system. I am living in a system that my own child attends. To give them the support and resources needed is like giving back to the community. We want and need our kids college and career ready.

Q: How important is math?

Lee: Reading, writing, and arithmetic to me are the basics of life. I developed a love for math as I taught students and it grew to become my favorite subject to teach. I noticed that those that struggled in reading generally also had problems in math

or vice versa. Nevertheless, you truly can not have one without the other. It is used daily from cooking, getting gas, balancing your checkbook, buying food, or simply at work. These core skills are the basic foundation we need. There are many components to be successful, and math is a subject that should have just as much emphasis placed on it as we do reading.

Q: What is your perspective on various methods of math?

Lee: When a child can explain to you how they can solve the problem, they own it, and that’s important and a tell-tale sign of that student that does not and needs a little more help. After all, there is more than one way to solve a math problem. As far as the changing of math methods, I think it is getting kids to explain their math tradition. It helps kids break the problem down to smaller numbers and understand the why of the problem.



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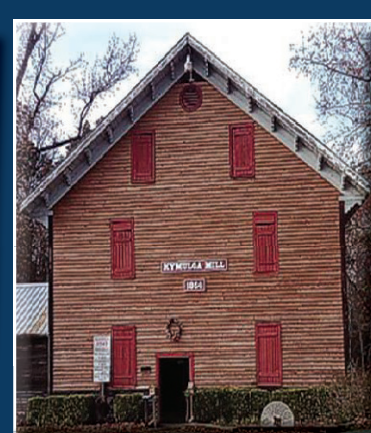
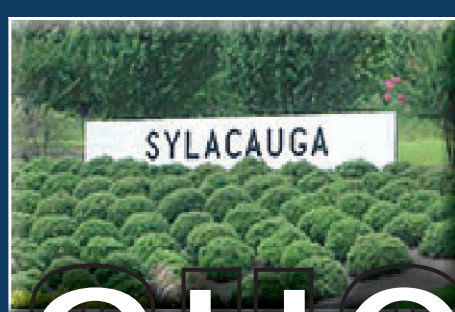
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Annual poker run helps keeps city of Riverside beautiful

BY FAITH DORN

Special to The Daily Home

The Riverside Beautification Organization, more commonly known as the RBO, hosted the 13th annual Riverside Poker Run on June 18, at Riverside Landing.

The RBO hosts at least one event per month, and the poker run is the largest fundraiser of the year for the organization. It routinely draws hundreds of participants.

This year, the RBO added games for prizes at Riverside Landing, and there were some new docks that were theme-decorated with free giveaways. Dock prizes this year included a kayak and a gas grill.

Julie Pounders, a long-time member of the RBO, says the 501c3 organization was started in 2008 as a way to promote recycling and to beautify the area around Riverside City Hall.

“We still have a lot of the same members from our first meet-and-greet. We have 22 members and meet on the last Tuesday of every month at Riverside Landing. We welcome new volunteers. There is enough volunteer work to go around,” said Pounders.

The RBO has several projects but in particular is responsible for taking care of the planting in the large area in front of city hall and has also adopted the largest pond in the 13-acre park next to city hall. The pond is

filled with lotus plants, and the RBO is planting native plants in the area, as well. The RBO also funded the welcome signs in Riverside featuring the fisherman logo.

Rusty Jessup, the mayor of Riverside, enjoys operating one of the docks for the poker run every year.

“My wife is a member of the RBO, and I try to stay involved with them. Every year, we use my pier. It has been a lot of fun to watch it grow over the years,” he said.

Mayor Jessup appreciates the RBO because of their dedication to improving the city.

“They keep city hall landscaped, and they help with Christmas decorations around Christmas time.

They help keep Riverside beautiful,” he said.

Mayor Jessup says that the Riverside Poker Run generates a lot of commerce and tourism for the town. “It is always a fun and festive event, and people enjoy doing it. They donate \$15 to a good cause. There are some really great prizes this year.”

Civic organizations are valuable for any city, but Mayor Jessup believes a local civic organization like the RBO means more than words can describe.

“Everything the RBO does and makes goes to making Riverside a more beautiful place. They do wonders: Christmas celebrations, bake sales, soup suppers, this poker run. It’s

not just that they are fundraisers, but these events are fun to do and make our city better,” he said. “They do a lot of it at their own expense which is another form of dedication they have to the city. For those soup suppers,

the members buy all the ingredients, make the soups and serve them out of the goodness of their hearts. That makes it even more important to support their efforts. They do it lovingly and willingly.”



Photos by Tucker Webb/The Daily Home

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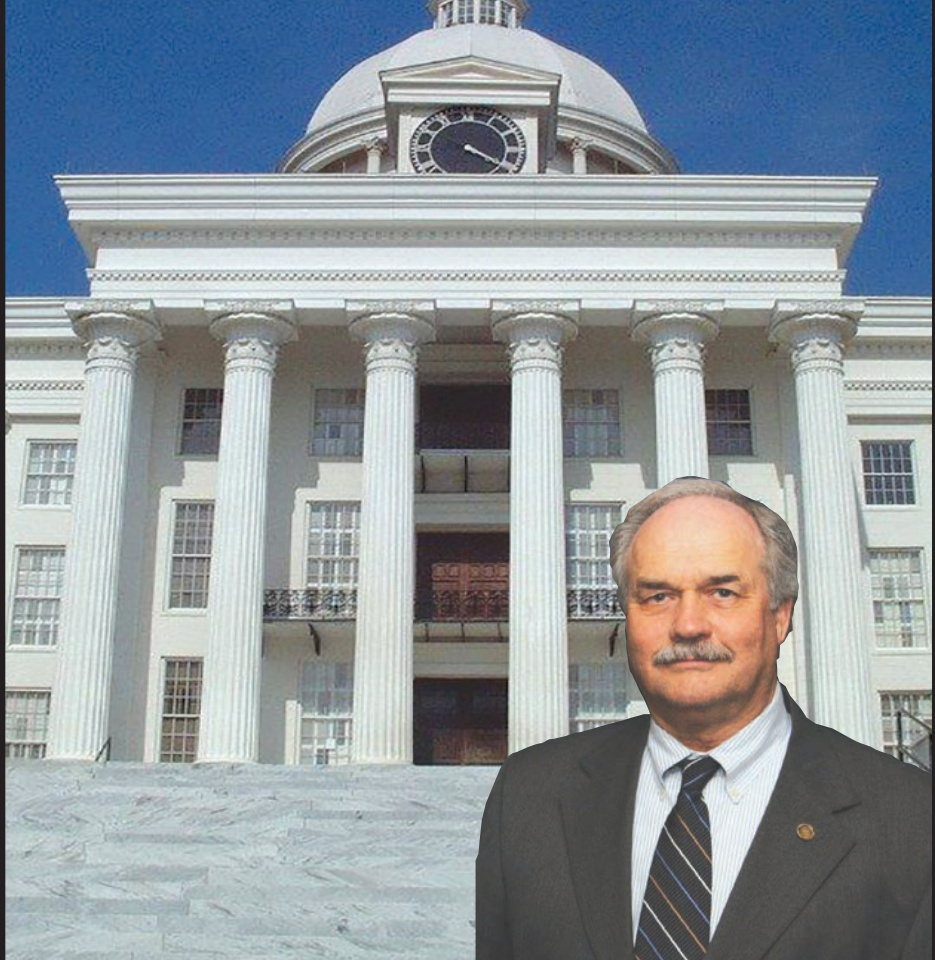
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The Houston Project honors a local legacy as it supports area veterans

BY FAITH DORN

Special to The Daily Home

Houston Tumlin was an athlete, an entertainer best known for portraying Walker Bobby in "Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby" and a proud member of the 101st Airborne Division in Clarksville, Tennessee.

His mother, Michelle Tumlin, remembers Houston as "the most gorgeous and funniest and most talented boy."

He loved dancing, and his family recalls watching him do the moonwalk at age three.

"When he was stationed in Korea, he practiced singing every day, and he became a TikTok star so quickly. They were sending him checks. He was a hot mess," Michelle said, laughing, "He loved being able to walk into a room and make people laugh. He lived 28 years, but he lived 28 full years."

"Houston was in the Army for over five years. When he got home, he struggled with several different battles: PTSD, depression, CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy) and alcoholism. He committed suicide on March 23, 2021."

Boston University reached out to the Tumlins about studying Houston's brain. His brain was studied for a year, and the researchers found that Houston had CTE from multiple concussions.

"They said it would be a very good reason for that to happen. The switch just flipped that day. It takes away your self control. The day he did it, we had made plans," Michelle said.

When Craig and Michelle Tumlin married 31 years ago, Craig took over the Nationwide office in Pell City, and Michelle was a stay-at-home mom. Once Houston and his sister, Hayden, were old enough for Michelle to pursue a passion outside of the home, she started a shop called Monkey Bizness in Pell City, focused on fashion for children and adults of all sizes.

"I loved fashion my entire life. When I was a little girl, I even made clothes for my Barbie dolls," said Michelle.

Five months after Houston died, Michelle's mother, who had been battling lung cancer, died.

"She had worked at Monkey Bizness with me."

Please see HOUSTON
I Page 11B

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HOUSTON

Continued from Page 10B

I had too much sadness, and I closed up my store in December of 2021," Michelle said, "I decided at that point that the Houston Project would become a thing."

"I knew I wanted to do something good and honor Houston. I know he would be so proud of what I'm doing. All of my customers are supporting the Houston Project," said Michelle.

March 23, 2022 was the grand opening of the Houston Project.

"My husband said we should take a sad day and make it something good," Michelle said.

The Houston Project is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization raising money for local veterans. Tumlin also works with other organizations that help veterans. She says that running the Houston Project is so rewarding.

Items that she sells include gift ideas, t-shirts, hats, candles, popcorn, body wash and wax melts.

"The popcorn line I carry is called 'Kettle Heroes'. They give money to the Pat Tillman Foundation to help veterans' spouses," said Michelle.

The shop is located at 1916 Cogswell Avenue in Pell City and is open Thursdays and Fridays 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

If you are unable to visit the shop in person, Tumlin says that you are welcome to message the Facebook page with your order, and she will ship it to you.

"In some circumstances, I have been able to pay a veteran's power bill to keep him from losing his electricity. I paid for labor, and several people volunteered time and other things to repair a veteran's home," Michelle said.

The Houston Project hosted a two-day tennis fundraising tournament in March, and Tumlin is currently planning to do a ruck march in the fall.

"We miss Houston so much, but his legacy is pretty incredible at how many people he touched in just 28 years. I want to be Houston's voice on this earth. I want to raise money and awareness about the mental battles he fought," said Michelle.



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THE MOTIVATIONAL MAGICIAN

Brian Reaves teaches others to overcome the impossible through magic

BY LACI BRASWELL
Special to The Daily Home

Imagine being able to do the impossible, no matter how challenging or daunting the task may seem.

Magician and motivational speaker Brian Reaves believes we can all accomplish this by learning to adapt to a magician's way of thinking.

"Many times people may think something is impossible when in reality, it's just really difficult," Reaves said. "In many cases, success and failure can be traced back to a simple mindset. When a magician wants to create a miracle onstage, that mindset is just the first step."

Through showcasing a magician's mindset, Reaves encourages others to face their hardships by allowing them to get up close and personal with his act, which includes a mix of close-up and interactive magic through card tricks, sleight of hand, mental illusions and more.

"If people see something they thought at first was

impossible become possible, most of the time their entire attitude changes," Reaves said.

The Pell City native said he has taken his act and message all across the Southeast, performing at a variety of corporate and private events.

Reaves said his act caters to his clients specific challenges and goals.

"There are also a variety of prepackaged topics on hand to view on my website," he said.

According to Reaves, his love for magic started in his childhood.

"I grew up watching David Copperfield, but never really seriously thought about doing it back then."

Reaves said it wasn't until years later when a coworker at a restaurant showed him a close up card trick.

"I was amazed and had to figure out how to do it myself," he said. "After work I went to a bookstore and bought the only book on magic that I could find."

Reaves said that love for magic grew into figuring out how he could help others through his act.

"Magicians don't look at a trick and say it's impossible. They assess it and ask themselves how can I figure out how to do the impossible."

Reaves noted it was when he started to adapt this way of thinking, his own life began to change too. "It has really helped me both professionally and even personally with anxiety."

One of his proudest moments was when he led a Birmingham TedTalk in 2017. "The video from the presentation is on my website, and it gives you a good

idea about my act and my message."

Reaves is the author of "Ignore the Impossible: Problem-solving with a Magician's Mindset." It is available for purchase on Amazon.

When asked the best advice he could give someone, Reaves said simply, "Don't give up chasing your dreams even if they seem impossible. You have to keep going to make things happen. Sometimes it just means taking a step back and approaching it from a different way."

Reaves also performs in traditional magic shows across the region. His new show entitled, "An Evening of Deception" will be performed at the Homewood Theatre on July 8-9. For more information, visit www.eveningofdeception.com

Reaves along with other magicians will be performing at CEPA in Pell City on Aug. 5. For more information, visit www.pellcitycepa.com "It's always good being able to perform magic in Pell City," Reaves

said. "I'm looking forward to being back"

Reaves' website is www.brianreaves.net.

brianreaves.net. Contact him at 205-677-3197 to find out how to book an event.



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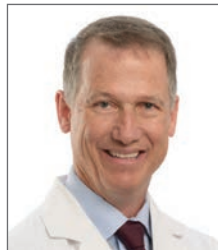
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Running Through the Jungle in Pell City: The WingNuts return to CEPA

BY NICK PATTERSON
Special to The Daily Home

A Pell City band has managed to turn a contentious period in America's history into an in-demand, crowd-pleasing, educational experience — in the form of a rock concert which will benefit the cultural arts in the community.

When The WingNuts return to Pell City's Center for Education and the Performing Arts (CEPA) on July 24 with their Run Through the Jungle show, it will be a not-to-be-missed experience, said CEPA Director Jeff Thompson.

"It really is a crazy good performance... something that's really special for our area," Thompson said.

In case you think that's hyperbole, consider that Run Through the Jungle always sells out the 400-seat venue. And that's been certified by a judge — specifically St.

Clair County District Judge Alan Furr, who also happens to be the front man for The WingNuts, which have been performing together for the last 11 years.

"Of all the shows that we've done, that particular show has been the most requested," Furr said. "I mean, every time we play somewhere, somebody asks, 'When are y'all going to do Run Through the Jungle again?'"

Run Through the Jungle is named after a famous Credence Clearwater Revival hit — which singer-songwriter John Fogerty said arose from his disgust over mass killings — a song that was huge in the Vietnam era.

The show itself, featuring several songs from that period as well as pictures and video and a context-filled narrative about the music, is a huge hit for CEPA. And that seems to be true regardless of how people feel about the conflict in Vietnam, Furr

said.

I guess there's a lot of reasons for that," he said. "A lot of the older generation lived through those years, have vivid memories of either loved ones serving or being wounded or dying in that conflict. And some, you know, were on the side of 'We're against the war. We protested,' that kind of thing. And so, it has been a very emotional experience. It's not uncommon at the Run Through the Jungle show to have folks get emotional about some of the material. It's a combination of things I think has made it so popular."

That popularity also connects to how The WingNuts put their show together, Thompson said.

"These are local people who have put together what I think is a really incredible product. Their show isn't just a concert. What they try to do is they take you through an experience that teaches you

about the music that you're listening to," he said.

"They employ a bunch of different concepts on this in the way that they tell these stories. Not only are they told through microphone — Judge Furr tells the stories of the bands and how they came to make these songs but they also have a lot of visual elements that they present. So not only do get a note-for-note recreation of these songs that many people know and love, but you also get a really educational, almost documentary style presentation of it."

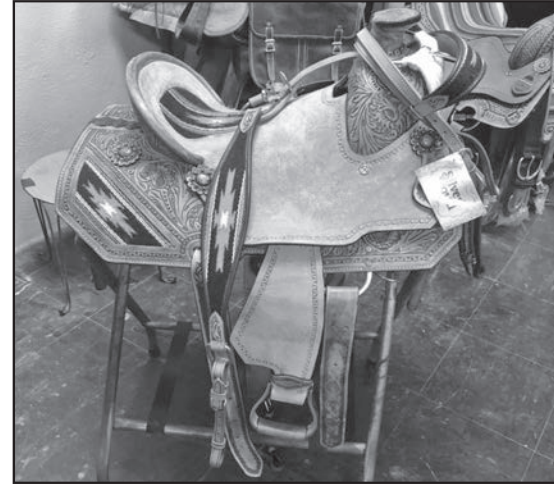
Why the WingNuts?

Furr, a lifelong musician, said that The WingNuts originally came together to play at a Civil Air Patrol event in Pell City.

"I was asked by a guy named Donnie

Please see WINGNUTS | Page 3C

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Photos by Bob Crisp/Daily Home

WINGNUTS

Continued from Page 2C

Todd who found out that I played guitar if I'd like to get together to play a few songs for this thing," Furr said. "We formed, really without a name initially, to do this one event, which we did. And then, within a week or two, somebody called and said, 'Hey I heard you got a band. Can y'all play for a private party out on the lake?' So it just kind of went from there."

The founding members were lead guitarist Todd (a former Pell City councilman); guitar player and vocalist – and sitting judge – Furr; Alabama Power engineer Glenn Wilson on keyboards, guitar, saxophone, harmonica, flute, acoustic guitar and vocal; bass guitar player Mickey Farmer, and Pell City airport manager Larry Davis on Drums.

They called themselves The WingNuts eventually because "not everybody, but almost everybody in the band was a pilot," Furr said. "We chose the name, The WingNuts and that's kind of stuck."

The band made a name playing cover songs at conferences and conventions all over Alabama, the Florida panhandle and Georgia. "And then, several years ago, the CEPA was looking for somebody to do a performance and so we did a little show at the CEPA which actually turned out to be fairly well attended and then we just sort of saw that as a way to raise money for bringing other things into the Pell City center," Furr said. "And Jeff Thompson, who is now the director, really kind of caught on to that vision."

A big part of what sets The WingNuts apart — aside from the fact that most members are in public service as their day jobs — is the educational element.

"Because we're a cover band, my personal feeling was nobody's going want to just come and sit down in a chair and listen to us play for an hour and a half to two hours. We got to give them more than that," Furr said. "So, several of the band members just kicked some things around. We came up with the idea of a show in a format that involves the performance of songs in a particular year in a particular genre, and then historical data either about the song or the group or whatever is going on at the time. As a backdrop we use the CEPA's huge video screen and we, during the performance, will have iconic photographs, some photographs that people may not have seen over the years, information about either the song or the group."

"I'm kind of a historical buff and kind of self-made musicologist from the historical standpoint. So I usually intersperse into a show, tidbits of information that maybe the general

public doesn't know. The first time we did that, really, we got great feedback and reviews from the audience, so we thought, OK we've latched on to something."

The WingNuts, now consisting of Furr, Todd, Wilson, Farmer, drummer Bobby Breed, keyboardist Sandra Furr (the judge's wife) and singer Elizabeth Money have themed shows around legendary performers (Legends 1 and Legends 2); the British Invasion of the 1960s (The British are Coming). But nothing else has equaled the popularity of Run Through the Jungle.

The biggest hit

The Run Through the Jungle show came about when Thompson asked if they had any additional material for a show – something different.

"We had already been toying with doing some music of the Vietnam era," Furr said. "We were coming up on Veterans Day... Vietnam was kind of at the forefront of the news at that point – I guess this would have been about 2018. And so, I was telling Jeff about this idea. He said, 'Oh man, that's great! What would you call it?'"

The answer was inspired by some research The WingNuts had been doing.

"We canvassed some veterans from the Vietnam War and asked them, 'Hey, were there any songs that were particularly close to you or to other troops who served?' We had a rather long list of material that we selected from," Furr said. "Run Through the Jungle happened to be one of those songs, and even though Run Through the Jungle is a song not about Vietnam, it was a song that became very popular among the troops. The concept or thought of running through the jungle kind of conjures up an image that's related to Vietnam. So that just became the show title."

The first show sold out. A year or so later, CEPA asked the band to do Run Through the Jungle again.

"We did it again and actually did a matinee and an evening performance, and my recollection is both those sold out, at least the first one sold out," Furr

said. "I think the last one was close enough that I think Jeff called it a sellout."

The upcoming July 24 performance of Run Through the Jungle was nearly sold out by press time. And that's good news for fans of the performing arts in Pell City, Furr said.

"The proceeds from the show go into the CEPA operating fund and they use that to then do other things in the community. It's kind of a win-win for us. We get a chance to play in CEPA, which we love. We get a chance to be together with 400 of our biggest fans and then raise a little money for CEPA."

CEPA is important to the community, said Furr, who still sees it as a bit under the local radar — at least more than he likes.

"Ever since the CEPA started, I just always felt like the community really needed to come together and support it," Furr said. "Unfortunately, and I don't know why this is, there are a lot of people in the Pell City area that don't even know it exists. It's really a jewel. It's a very comfortable theater. There's not a bad seat in the house. When you go to a performance there, it's really kind of up close and personal. It's a very special place and we try to do what we can to support it."

And CEPA appreciates the partnership with The WingNuts, Thompson said.

"This is a collection of people who absolutely love what they do," he said. "They love being able to provide these experiences, putting on these performances, and I have never seen them not try and pursue excellence in these shows. It is one of our most proud partnerships at CEPA, and we highly encourage people to come get the experience that this band has worked so hard on providing to this community."

Run Through the Jungle, featuring The WingNuts, presented by Hargray, will be Sunday July 24, 2 p.m. at the Center for Education and Performing Arts, 25 Williamson Drive in Pell City. Tickets are \$20. Visit www.pellcitycepa.com.



“Hey, Judge, that was a great show!”

BY NICK PATTERSON
Special to The Daily Home

District Court Judge Alan Furr came to love music by watching his grandfather.

"My grandfather lived in Crenshaw County," Furr said. "He was the guitar player. He was really the first person that I knew in the flesh that could take a piece of wood with strings on it and get sound out of it. As a kid I was always fascinated, and every time we would go to his house I was always like 'Hey, Granddaddy, can you play the guitar?' And that's probably what kind of set me on fire."

By the age of 12, Furr was playing guitar. By the age of 14, he had been invited to play on stage by the leader of a Montgomery band called the Vibrations who lived around the corner and had heard him playing.

"That kind of started my semi-professional music career – at 14, I was getting paid to play, and I thought that was the coolest thing in the world," he said.

He majored in music at Troy State University, but urged by his "practical, pragmatic" father, he went to law school to pursue a career that could enable him to make a living – while continuing to "dabble in the music scene."

With a background in bluegrass, rock, and church music, Furr has played Alabama, Georgia and Florida. And close to home he's gotten to play for some of the folks who have

appeared in his district court.

"It is interesting from time to time when we're performing and somebody who's been a defendant in my court passes by and does a double take," he said.

Case in point: "Back in the days of the Block Party before they tore the jail down — we had played on all the block party stages, and at some point in time there was a stage that they had back in the parking lot of the old jail. And one year, they put us over there, which was fine with me, because we were kind of out of the flow of the crowd and our folks usually like to come bring chairs and sit, so it was kind of convenient, comfortable place," he said.

"So, we played that first time in that parking lot and on Monday after the block party, I had a docket with some inmates. And every one of them said, 'Hey, Judge, that was a great show!' They were all excited because we were playing. I guess they came down to the little yard, it was kind of a holding area outside, and got to hear the concert. So I thought, that's pretty cool."

But do his fellow judges think it's cool? At least one of them does.

"Well, Judge Weathington is extremely supportive," Furr said. "He comes to quite a few of our shows. I don't know that I see Judge Seay or Judge Minor at them very often. I don't know that they're really into the music scene that much, but they seem to be OK with it. I don't get any ribbing from them."



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Town of Munford prepares to celebrate its 20th anniversary this fall

BY VALLEAN JACKSON
Special to The Daily Home

Do you know when the town of Munford was originally incorporated? If your answer was 1873, then no doubt you're already familiar with the town's history. But with its 20th anniversary scheduled to be celebrated in September, something doesn't seem to add up mathematically. It should be the celebration of 149 years, right? No.

It is unclear as to what happened exactly, but about seven years later in 1880, Munford's charter was lost and it then became unincorporated. Gary Carter, owner of Carter's Hardware & Auto Parts, remembers growing up in Munford before it was reincorporated.

"Munford wasn't incorporated until the early 2000s," he said. "Our business has been in my family for many generations. My grandfather started it initially and continued to pass it down. I think Carter's has been around since 1912. I am not 100 years old, but the business has been here for over 100 years. I have been here since 1978, so we have definitely been here before the recent incorporation."

2002 is the year that Munford – known as The Gateway to the Top for its nearness to Cheaha Mountain – was incorporated again. Located in Talladega County in proximity of such larger cities as Anniston and Oxford, the town needed to maintain its identity as its own community.

To celebrate its 20th year as a town, Munford plans a community-wide celebration on September 17 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m with a day full of events, such as talks by historians, food vendors, a pet show, live music, a dunking booth, a car/truck/tractor show with a grand prize for each category, and more.

"I look forward to being a spectator and celebrating the day," Mayor Jo Ann Fambrough said. She is proud of the progress and growth in Munford in recent years, and she's proud of everything the town has to offer, including Buttram Park, Buddy Stephens Field, Prestige/Gallman Field, Holcomb Field, Munford Walking Trail, Munford Recreation Center, and Munford Fitness.

"Our programs are aimed at improving quality of life," she said. "For the youth, we have baseball, basketball, and soccer. We have activities going on daily at the senior center. We recommend coming by to see if you qualify to join. Our senior center is open for lunch five days a week from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. There are many activities there, and right now we are delivering meals to 26 people who are homebound. This will be the fourth year of our annual Christmas parade, and we have Halloween festivities each year. Munford residents are friendly and welcoming, and we have great schools."

Carter agrees with the mayor that progress has been made in Munford, while allowing the community to retain its small-town charm.

"We have always been a little community," he said. "Growth is good, but we don't have all the resources that the larger cities like Anniston and Oxford have. In fact, we shouldn't want to be like them. We have what makes us unique."

As one of the oldest businesses in Munford, Carter's offers everything typically found in a typical hardware store with a mix of auto parts. Many residents of the town have used the location for small to large repairs, home improvements, DIY projects, construction materials and more. Generations of the community have grown up with the business.



Photos by Bob Crisp/The Daily Home



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Bill Wilson/Daily Home file

The watermelon patch at Watts Farm in Munford

Watermelon: The official fruit of summer in the South

“Here, have some watermelon,” said my father as he held out a large mint-colored Tupperware bowl filled with cut-up pieces of the red fruit. I was 10 at the time, and we were at the family reunion in a tiny Alabama town with its red dusty dirt roads not even a dot on the map.



Sarah Elizabeth Moreman

My fingers pressing upon the padded red-and-white gingham vinyl tablecloth covering long picnic tables, I wrinkled up my nose as I shook my head. I did not want watermelon, especially after seeing the black seeds still embedded into the mushy-crunchy texture of the red melon. I did not care for seeing the mess that spilled from slicing through the hard green shell of the watermelon.

Sticky and messy from eating watermelon while feeling the sweat roll down my skin was not what I wanted. The sun was shining glaringly bright through the leaves and limbs as we slowly moved in the shade under ancient magnolias, oaks, and longleaf pines as if we were swimming in the steaminess of the warm breezes wafting by. Cacophonous conversations among distant cousins mingle in the air as I walked away from under the tree-shaded areas to explore the grounds of the log cabin that my ancestor had built with his own hands. I walked across the crispy grass to the dirt road, where I had earlier spotted my brothers and cousins our age escaping into the woods.

After looking up the dirt road in their direction, I looked back down at my white tennis shoes. Not wanting to stain them reddish-orange, I turned and walked to my family’s station wagon to retrieve a Nancy Drew mystery novel. Inside the log cabin, I

found an empty armchair to curl up in and read, while the grown-ups holding babies were catching up over Solo cups filled with the homemade sweet tea or tart lemonade and the younger cousins were running around. It was not time for lunch yet, even though the long tables were loaded pot-luck-style with Great Mama’s peas, butter beans, biscuits, cornbread, creamed corn, green bean casseroles, squash casseroles, potato salad, coleslaw, mac-n-cheese, deviled eggs, Jello ambrosia salads, pasta salads, variety of desserts such as lemon cakes, brownies and pies. The meat was on the grill or in the smoker, the smell making our stomachs growl. We were waiting on the kids to be done with their gallivanting in the woods and return so we could say grace together.

We still have these family reunions at the log cabin by the red dirt road. We still have the same homemade Southern dishes, along with barbecued meat. We still make

our own sweet tea and tart lemonade, albeit offering the option of bottled water and cokes.

Something is different by now. I eat watermelon.

After experiencing life with its ups and downs that encourage me to let go of the propensity to be and look perfect, I gradually acquiesce to sample the fruit whenever Dad carves up a large, ripe watermelon.

The watermelon means more than its benefits of hydration and nutrients that help reduce inflammation, improve heart health and skin health, and prevent cancer.

The watermelon means a shell waiting to be carved open to pour out the summery messiness of family, tradition, and love rooted in the red Southern dirt baked with sun-drenched humidity. I even enjoy the sticky sweetness of watermelon, seeing it as a bond with my dad who takes pride in carving out and sharing the slices and pieces of the red fruit.

City of Odenville

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A man in a yellow shirt is sitting at a desk with a computer monitor and papers.

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Rodney
(Buck)
Christian

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A police station building with a sign that says "ODENVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT".

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Special to The Daily Home

Leeds was recently selected as one of four new Main Street communities in Alabama.

Leeds Main Street has appointed Amber Vines to serve as executive director. “Kristy Biddle and Tiffany Ward really spearheaded this project. I was brought on to the application team during the process of applying for the Main Street designation,” said Vines. “Kristy and Tiffany were holding meetings, and I was attending, and they asked if I would be interested in taking on the executive director position.”

Vines had been working full-time as a marketing specialist for eight years.

“I told them I had a full-time job

already, but I was honored to be asked,” Vines said. “The way the community came together convinced me this new position would be my future.”

Vines’ first day working full time for Leeds Main Street will be August 1.

The Leeds Main Street team recently held a city-wide celebration and kick-off.

“You could really see the love of Leeds from everyone. My heart is so full of joy,” Vines said about the celebration. “We had representatives from the state and Main Street Alabama at the event. It was an example of what we can accomplish moving forward.”

Main Street Alabama will be in town several times throughout the year, leading training for Leeds Main Street team and

helping the team implement more processes.

Vines is excited about what becoming a Main Street community means for Leeds.

“Leeds has such a beautiful, historic downtown with wonderful merchants. We want to complement that and help bring more foot traffic and vitality to our downtown area. We will start to see growth and revitalization in our downtown area by building on the strong bones we already have,” said Vines.

Watching the community come together has been one of Vines’ favorite parts of the application process. She says that everyone involved in the Leeds Main Street program loves Leeds and has the common goal of wanting to see Leeds

thrive. Vines is grateful to everyone who has been involved in the effort so far.

“We could not have gotten as far as we are without everyone’s support,” Vines said. “I get to serve Leeds and serve the merchants downtown. Something bigger than myself, and we couldn’t do it without the support of the community.”

Leeds Main Street invites community members to be involved in the program in whatever way they are able to volunteer.

“If you want to be part of Leeds Main Street, there is a place for you to volunteer whether you want to be on the committee or just help when you can,” Vines said. “It is a very exciting time for Leeds, and we should all be proud of the love and support for Leeds.”



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St. Clair’s DYW encourages others to ‘Be Your Best Self’

BY FAITH DORN
Special to The Daily Home

Kara Clifton is the 2021-2022 Distinguished Young Woman of St. Clair County.

The 2022 Moody High School graduate will be attending the University of Alabama in the fall, studying chemical engineering with a concentration in pre-med.

“Going to medical school is the plan. I want to be a cardiovascular surgeon,” said Clifton. “I had a mentor growing up. She was my dance line choreographer, and she is studying to do cardiovascular surgery now.”

Distinguished Young Women is a nationally-recognized scholarship program for high school girls. St. Clair County has gone to an at-large program. Those who are interested in the program can learn more at distinguishedyw.org.

“In 2020, I was asked by an upper-classman to be her little sister to sit behind the scenes and watch. I went through that week with her. The next year, I became Distinguished Young Woman of St. Clair County for the Class of 2022,” Clifton said.

In her role, Clifton is asked around St. Clair County and neighboring counties to speak about the program and the Be Your Best Self initiative. The initiative has five points: be healthy by caring for your physical and mental health, be involved by serving your community, be studious by staying in school and being a life-long learner, be ambitious by setting and achieving goals and be responsible by living by moral and ethical principles.

“Distinguished Young Woman is like your average pageant. There is a fitness portion, talent portion, interview portion, self-expression portion which is a question you get the night before and the scholastic portion looks at standardized tests, GPA and the classes that we involve ourselves in,” said Clifton.

Clifton prepared a dance routine with jumping jacks for the fitness portion.



Submitted photo

“The talent portion is 90 seconds of you,” Clifton explained. “I used a dance I had actually used in a competition. I’ve been a competitive dancer for the last eight years. It was set to Michael Jackson’s ‘The Way You Make Me Feel.’”

In winning the title, Clifton also won \$3,850 in cash scholarships and a spirit award, which she explains as similar to a Miss Congeniality award. She was also awarded full tuition to Jefferson State Community College, which is valued at \$14,000.

“The poise and the confidence that the program instilled in me is something that I will carry with me forever. Having the title has taught me grace and perseverance. Worth isn’t defined by the medallion or title or the scholarship,” said Clifton. “Stepping out of your comfort zone is uncomfortable, but it is so important.”

DailyHome.com



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Lincoln Bottle and Antique show continues to grow, offering collectibles for every history lover

BY LACI BRASWELL
Special to The Daily Home

The seventh annual Lincoln Bottle and Antique Show returned to the Lincoln Civic Center this summer to an all-aged crowd from across the country.

According to the event's organizer, Jake Smith, this year's show was a huge success.

"There was a great turnout this year," Smith said. "We had a lot of returnees and several new vendors as well. I would say we had about 400 to 500 spectators."

Smith said the event has continued to grow each year.

more."

From the region, there were vendors from Lincoln, Talladega, Springville and Clanton, along with several others.

Smith noted each show has a specific theme, highlighting a particular brand.

"This year's theme was NuGrape," he said.

The bottle and antique show not only offered a chance for the public to buy a variety of collectibles, but also for the vendors to trade.

Smith said over the years the show has really grown to showcasing more than just antique bottles but preserved history in multiple forms.

"This year we had coins, jars, pottery, Civil War memorabilia, autographed sports memorabilia, and more," Smith said.

Food trucks were also on hand to serve hungry spectators.

"The city has remained very supportive," Smith said.

Smith said the Lincoln show is not for those who are only young at heart.

"Our youngest vendor was 12 years old from Montgomery. A young man named Locke. He came to last year's show with his mom and said he wanted to have a booth of his own this year."

Smith continued, "He was quite the salesman. 'People really enjoy talking to him.'"

Smith said he has collected Alabama bottles for about 15 years.

They Sylacauga native began his hobby while walking along the streets near his house for exercise and to relieve stress, he said.

Smith said one day, he started picking up some old glass bottles when he noticed different Alabama cities were written on the glass.

"I am a big history lover, especially local history and

I just wanted to figure out more about them."

For Smith, the study led to a full-fledged hobby. He said he decided to collect a bottle from each of the cities in Alabama that had a bottler.

"I have 50 of the 56 cities so far," he said.

Smith's own extensive collection goes beyond local bottles. It includes medicine bottles, whisky bottles, along with other types of bottles.

When asked if he had any favorites in his collection, Smith said he had a few that are close to him.

"My grandmother, Betty

Culver, worked for a Sylacauga hospital and nursing home. She was a collector of all kinds of things."

Smith said a woman his mother was looking after had a husband who worked for the Sylacauga Street Department.

"While at work, he dug up a Talladega straight side Coca-Cola bottle, and he gave it to my grandmother, who gave it to me. It was a straight side mid-script Coca-Cola from Talladega. This was my first ever straight side Coca-Cola."

Smith said that particular style bottle was used from 1902-1910.

"It is still in my collection today."

Another bottle Smith said is dear to his heart is one he calls his "mistake bottle."

Smith said he was first drawn to the bottle earlier in his collecting days because it had Midland Hotel Birmingham written on it.

"I thought I had found a super rare bottle, but after a little research. I was mistaken. It was from Birmingham, England. I keep it on my desk to remind me how far I've come in learning about collecting and the

Please see BOTTLE | Page 9C



Submitted photos

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The Pell City Chamber of Commerce board members for the upcoming year. Pictured: (back row, from left) Doris Munkus, Kristi Edwards, Chelsea Isbell, Patrice Kurzejeski, Adam Vandiver, Zachary Gentile, Erica Grieve and Executive Director; Urainah Glidewell. Front row (from left) Rachael Herren; Treasurer, Laurie Brasher; President Ex-Officio, Anna Otterson; President, Jeremiah Gilreath; Vice-President, Casey Cambron; President Elect. Not pictured: Milea Kirby, Linda Crow, Sarah Whitten, Pam Carlisle

The population of Pell City continues to grow. Recreational offerings are among the best in the state. Schools are nationally accredited, and quality health care is central to the city. Local, national & international businesses are flourishing and houses of worship continue to be welcoming.

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BOTTLE

Continued from Page 8C

Smith has also written a book described as a check list of major soda brands and in which Alabama city they were bottled. He sells the book at shows for \$15, and will mail it to those interested for \$20.

“Collect what you like, and never stop learning,” he said. “I was once told, if you can’t find kindness be kindness. This is how feel about history; if you can’t find a historian, become one.”

The eighth annual Lincoln Bottle and Antique show is slated for August 12, 2023.

The show is free and open to the public.

Smith said the event has an active Facebook group and encouraged anyone who is interested to join by searching “Lincoln Bottle And Antique Show.”

More photos of the Lincoln Bottle and Antique show on page 11C

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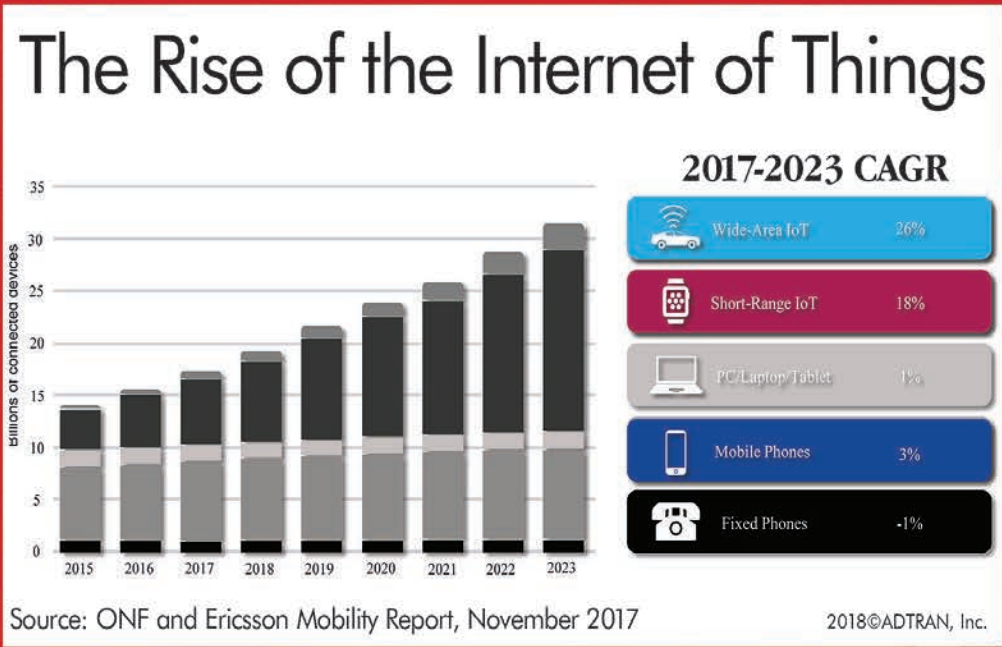
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Hometown Titleholder: Miss Leeds Area

BY FAITH DORN
Special to The Daily Home

Chandler Mordecai, Miss Leeds Area, recently represented the St. Clair County community in the 100th Miss Alabama competition. Mordecai graduated from the University of North Alabama with a Bachelor of Arts in journalism, multimedia and received a double minor in Spanish and English. She also received her Master's degree in English with a specialization in British literature from the University of North Alabama.

She is currently a Ph.D. student at the University of Florida where she works as a graduate teaching assistant while pursuing a Doctorate of Philosophy with specializations in Victorian literature, digital rhetoric and multimedia pedagogy.

"This is my sixth year competing in the Miss Alabama organization. I grew up knowing about Miss Alabama, but I really never saw myself competing in the organization. I had an incredible support team who encouraged me to do it," said Mordecai.

She says that competing in Miss Alabama has been a life-changing opportunity for her.

"Miss America is one of the number one scholarship providers for young women. This is how I have ended up at the University of Florida pursuing my doctorate because of the scholarship opportunities," Mordecai said. "I am really fortunate Miss Alabama has paid anything from tuition to rent to testing fees to help me pursue higher education."

For Mordecai, competing in Miss Alabama means access and opportunity, and she enjoys the opportunity to fellowship with so many talented women across the state.

"The mission of Miss America and Miss Alabama is to empower women. I really feel like I have been empowered through this organization, and I encourage other young women to become involved in this organization. I have reaped the benefits because of the scholarship opportunities. This organization represents success and empowerment," said Mordecai.

Her social impact initiative is Victory Over Domestic Violence, which focuses on advocating for survivor-centered policies, educating the public and empowering victims through resource-driven initiatives.

"Essentially, I work with lawmakers, businesses, school systems and civic organizations to bring attention and awareness to domestic violence," Mordecai said. "My family are actually survivors of domestic violence, so this has a really personal connection with me."

She started volunteering with the Marion County Domestic Violence Task Force in 2014 with its fall supply drive. When Mordecai became involved with Miss Alabama and realized there was a service component to the organization, she felt called to develop Victory Over Domestic Violence.

"Since then, I have been able to advocate and work with organizations and shelters across Alabama advocating for support and education about domestic violence. I do a lot of advocacy work within my degree. While teaching literature, we discuss signs of abuse or power dynamics in the texts we are reading," said Mordecai.

She tells her students that their voices are heard in her class and that her classroom is always a safe space. Sometimes students feel comfortable enough to share their own experiences with power dynamics or abusive relationships.

"One thing I tell my students is that everything you do in this class should have a life outside of this class, so I try to equip students with literary analysis, textual skills and skills they can take outside of the class, so they can recognize these things inside or outside of the classroom," Mordecai said.

She has written legislation that will be introduced in the upcoming 2023 session of the House of Representatives.

"As of right now, barbers, cosmetologists and hairdressers are not required to undergo domestic violence training, and I would like that to change. Many victims confide in their hairdressers because they have a special relationship with them. They are also some of the first people to see signs of abuse, whether it is hair missing or bruising or a change in the attitude of their client," said Mordecai, "That is why it is so important for cosmetologists, barbers and hairdressers to undergo free domestic violence training. There is already free training out there like Safe Place Incorporated and the Marion County Domestic Violence Task Force that can offer in-person or online training."

According to Mordecai, one in four women and one in 10 men will experience domestic violence in their lifetime.

So far, Mordecai has taught world literature, English literature and writing classes and is planning to pursue the tenure professor track at a university.

During our interview, Mordecai was in "full prep mode" for the competition, which includes practicing her talent every day, practicing for the interview portion and staying informed on the news and current events.

Mordecai's talent is clogging. She says it is truly a passion of hers and a reflection of her personality because it is very loud and energetic and upbeat. She has always been involved in dance.

"I actually choreographed a jazz dance for my very first title I ever won. Afterwards, my mom sat me down and said, 'You are incredible. You are talented. You are intelligent, but you are just not that good,'" said Mordecai, laughing, "That is because you are trying to force yourself into this box, and you are not showcasing who you are as a person."

The Miss Leeds Area competition appealed to

Mordecai because of its history and the history of the city itself.

"This is just a really incredible and historic town. Miss Leeds Area has a very supportive committee and a host of volunteers that really keep the organization going. That is why it is important for us to be prepared to have conversations about domestic violence and how to recognize signs of abuse or how to have conversations with survivors. I encourage everyone to become aware, involved and invested in domestic violence advocacy."

If you or someone you know is experiencing

domestic violence, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline. Call 1.800.799.SAFE (7233), TTY 1.800.787.3224, text START to 88788 or chat online at their website, thehotline.org.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline reminds you that internet usage can be monitored and is impossible to erase completely. If you are concerned your internet usage might be monitored, they recommend that you call them instead of using the online chat feature. Help is available for callers in over 140 languages with the help of a trained interpreter.

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Munford: Site of the last Civil War battle in Alabama

BY SUSAN COOK
Special to The Daily Home

Humans are fascinated by firsts and lasts, particularly when it comes to war. Maybe we're drawn to beginnings and endings because they're clear-cut. Or maybe it's because it's too easy to get lost in the messy middle.

Whatever the reason, we remember iconic first lines like Abraham Lincoln's "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." We know many last words, such as Nathan Hale's supposed remarks before being hanged for spying on British troops: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

In history class, we learned about the first shot that rang out, marking the beginning of the Revolutionary War--the shot made famous by Ralph Waldo Emerson

as the "shot heard around the world." We also know that a signal mortar shell fired over Fort Sumter launched the beginning of the Civil War and that fort is now one of South Carolina's most visited attractions.

Numerous battles have been written up as "the last fight of the rebellion." But one last battle you may not have heard about happened not too far from here, in the blink-while-driving-thought-and-you've-missed-it town of Munford. With a population of less than two thousand, most people outside Talladega County don't know where Munford is, or they probably haven't even heard of it.

While most associate the end of the Civil War with Appomattox Courthouse on April 9th, 1865, news did not travel as fast as it does now, and Civil War skirmishes continued. The Battle of Munford took place on Sunday, April 23, 1865, marking it, and a minor clash at Hendersonville, North Carolina, as the last battle of the Civil War east of the Mississippi

River.

In the then-unincorporated community of Munford in Talladega County, a small ragtag but brave company of 150 or so Confederate soldiers, convalescents, home guards, and pardoned deserters, led by Gen. Benjamin Jefferson Hill, attacked Union forces numbering 1,500, led by Gen. John T. Croxton. Croxton was commanding a detachment from Gen. James H. Wilson's cavalry, as part of Wilson's Raid, on a path through Alabama that started in Tuscaloosa. The Confederate troops fired two cannons on the Union soldiers, killing one or two, before they were defeated and forced to flee.

The short altercation has been deemed by some as the last battle of the Civil War east of the Mississippi. It was the last battle in Alabama, and with it came the last casualties of the Civil War. Lt. Andrew Jackson Buttram took his last breath on the soil of Munford, unfortunately making him forever famous as the last Confeder-

ate soldier to die in open combat.

On November 4, 1914, the United Daughters of the Confederacy placed a memorial for Buttram in the spot where he fell and was buried. The monument reads, "A.J. BUTTRAM, CONFEDERATE SOLDIER, KILLED HERE APR. 23, 1865, DURING CROXTON'S RAID—ERECTED BY VETERANS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS."

New markers have been erected through the years commemorating this last battle and the final toll the war took that day. The markers and stones of Munford stand like ghostly monuments to the past, easy to miss if you're not looking for them. Whether on the first day of battle or the last, wars claim lives with such swift force that we're often staggered by the sheer numbers, losing sight that behind these numbers are individual souls who meant something to someone somewhere, even in the tiny town of Munford.

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What’s old is new again at History Incorporated

If you could go back in time, where would you go? What would you do? Maybe try your luck at a roulette table in New Orleans in the late 1800s? Or dance to the latest hits of the 40s or 50s pulsing from the glowing jukebox in the corner of a local bar, cafe, or soda fountain?

Until they invent time travel, here’s the next best thing to satisfy the need for nostalgia: History Incorporated, where one person might consider junk is definitely another man’s treasure.

Tucked away in down-

town Leeds, History Incorporated’s showroom and warehouse are brimming with historical gems hiding in plain sight. If you’re starting to think this is just another antique or memorabilia store to add to Alabama’s ever-growing list, think again. It’s not often you get to see this much history in one place.

As I entered the showroom, my eyes spotted a Red Baron carnival ride airplane from the 1940s dangling above two WWII-era classic coin-operated shooting games, Skyfighter and Ace Bomber. A shoe advertisement display (in the actual form of a shoe) squeaked up and down, surrounded by an array of vintage gas pumps, jukeboxes, and even a couple of motorcycles. A 1908 dealership poster for Peugeot hung over two leather chairs sourced from

the Pennsylvania Library of Congress, and leaning against the wall was a set of early 1900s iron elevator doors from New Orleans.

My eyes eventually settled on the immaculately restored Nickelodeon player piano adorned with inlaid blue and gold stained glass. I had heard of them but never seen one in action until Billy Weller, owner and manager of History Incorporated, sprung it into life. Lively music filled the showroom as the keys merrily moved up and down as if a cheerful ghost had decided to tinkle the ivories. As we moved into the warehouse, the music lingered in the background, reminding me of bygone eras where entertainment was simply a coin drop away.

Crowding the narrow aisles of the warehouse was a head-high maze of histo-

ry. In this cavernous room, the decades and centuries collide. It might look like a junky mess to some, but Weller, a resident of Logan Martin Lake who is equal parts collector, librarian, and historian, has the complete inventory filed away in his head. Although Polar Bear Services (heating, air conditioning, and ice makers) is Weller’s primary business, History Incorporated is what he calls “the fun stuff.”

“So many people think of this stuff as junk and throw it out,” he says, “but there’s a surge of adrenaline when you discover something. It’s like finding treasure. You grow attached.”

But Weller has one confession to make when it comes to this business.

“To do this, you have to be part hoarder,” he admits with a quick grin. “You have

to have at least a little bit of organized hoarding in you to keep every little thing, because parts for these machines are hard to find. Take for example a jukebox that isn’t ideal for resell or restoration. We ‘part’ it out

in order to make 10 more jukeboxes functional.”

Speaking of jukeboxes, History Incorporated has a wide variety, ranging from one of the first jukeboxes

Please see HISTORY | Page 5D




Susan Cook




Photos by Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

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HISTORY

Continued from Page 4D

made in 1929 by the less well-known brand of Holcomb & Hoke to the more jazzed up versions crafted by the king of jukeboxes, Wurlitzer.

Weller's favorite? "Anything from the 40s, but my favorite jukebox is a Wurlitzer 1080. To me, that's the sexiest jukebox. It was called the Mae West because of its curves. How can you not love that?"

One key way to tell a 1940s jukebox from those of other decades is by looking for the rounded plastic sides, called catalins, that

glow like jewels when the jukebox comes alive. Since it's illegal to make the catalin plastic anymore due to the toxic fumes produced, finding pristine catalins is an thrill.

Sometimes there's even a treasure within the treasure.

Weller related a story about a Wurlitzer Victory he was restoring. "I took it apart and found silver coins in it from the 30s and 40s plus subway tokens from the 50s. And just think about this 80-year-old jukebox here. Who's played it? How many G.I.s danced with their wives or girlfriends in some little honky tonk somewhere? They get

a second life."

But it's not just jukeboxes that are in high demand these days. According to Weller, "pinballs, gas pumps, and signs are through the roof. Pinballs bring in around \$7-10,000, and a gasoline pump from the 1920s-30s era sold in 10 minutes to a guy in Louisiana."

The entire time we're talking, Weller's phone pings in the background, abuzz with potential buyers from here in the States and all over the world. Last month, a jukebox and six pinball machines made the journey to Hungary, while another shipment was headed to the Netherlands.

Facebook and Instagram have helped to turn History Incorporated into a thriving 24/7 business.

The current record for selling a jukebox on Facebook? Seven seconds.

"Everything we list here is functional, but you may need to replace a button or make some other small replacement. We even sell it with the dust still on it," says Weller with a laugh, "so you're getting every bit of history. Anything that's electromechanical doesn't like to be sitting. It wants to be used and played."

Looking around at these time capsules of the past, I find it hard not to consider each one as some living

thing. Luckily, Weller and his family-owned and operated History Incorporated are here to breathe new life into them. With their help, old Fortune Tellers have a few more fortunes to tell, pinball wizards can play the games of their grandfathers, and Wurlitzer jukeboxes still bubble to life. What's old is new, and


so the cycle repeats.

If you want to visit the History Incorporated showroom, you can find Billy Weller and his team at 1615 8th Street, Leeds. Or, call (205) 368 - 9681. Don't forget to follow History Incorporated on Facebook and Instagram, where you can discover their Deals of the Day.



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Talladega designated as a Main Street community

BY FAITH DORN

Special to The Daily Home

Main Street Alabama recently designated Talladega (alongside Demopolis, LaFayette and Leeds) as a Main Street community.

Talladega City Manager Seddrick Hill is excited about what this designation means for his adopted hometown.

"This means we are moving in the right direction. We have made moves to revitalize and bring a sense of pride to the city. To attract young families, you need a decent school system, low crime and nice places to go," explained Hill.

Hill grew up in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and came to Talladega when he attended Talladega College. During his time at the college, he received an internship in the Talladega Public Works department. After he received a Master's degree at Jacksonville State University, he worked in admissions, alumni affairs and development at Talladega College, as well as serving as the college's vice president of institutional advancement. Hill also served as the executive director of institutional advancement and AIDB Foundation at the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind before becoming Talladega's city manager.

Hill attended an Alabama Cities of Excellence conference in Huntsville and learned about the Main Street Alabama program.

"Main Street Alabama revitalizes and attracts new business. I started attending workshops, and Jimmy Williams, from a local nonprofit, was attending, and he started volunteering to help Talladega apply to become a Main Street community," Hill said.

It took volunteers and internal staff five

to eight months to answer more than 200 questions for the application. Hill said that some cities have been trying to become a Main Street community for years.

"We didn't try to reinvent the wheel," Hill said regarding the application process. "We looked at how several cities modeled their applications, including Anniston, Oxford and Gadsden. Once they became Main Street they got 20-30 new businesses over two to three years."

Talladega currently has five new businesses that are almost ready to open.

"Talladega is a very special place. It is a hidden jewel with so much history and opportunity. It is a place where property taxes are low. You can really grow and have a family," Hill continued. "This is the most diverse place I have ever lived. We have a historical Black college, the Alabama

Institute for the Deaf and Blind, the Presbyterian Home for Children, all these different institutions making this place work."

When asked to name his favorite part of Talladega, Hill identified his office in City Hall where he does things for the community.

The Main Street Alabama team came to Talladega a couple of weeks ago to lead the city's Main Street committee's first workshop. Talladega Main Street will be advertising an opening for an executive director soon.

On Saturday, July 9, Talladega will host Second Saturday, featuring food trucks, a cornhole tournament, the Talladega Main Street kickoff party and more.

Talladega Main Street is working to build the Talladega Main Street board and invites community members to volunteer with the organization.

"Come invest in Talladega," said Hill.

"We are moving in the right direction."

— Talladega City Manager Seddrick Hill



Photos by Bob Crisp and Tucker Webb/Daily Home

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‘INCLUSION’ IS THE WORD!

The Arc of North Talladega County presents Broadway production of hit musical Grease this weekend

BY LACI BRASWELL
Special to The Daily Home

An ensemble cast composed of clients from the Burton Development Center with the Arc of North Talladega county, along with several area-wide elementary students have been diligently preparing for their upcoming performances of the Broadway musical, “Grease,” at the historic Ritz Theatre on Saturday, July 9, at 7 p.m., and Sunday, July 10, at 3 p.m.

“They have all been working so very hard and they’re excited to get the chance to perform it for everyone,” Janie Curtis, executive director for the Arc of North Talladega County said.

The collaborative project has brought students with disabilities and non-disabilities together from Talladega city and county schools, along with adult clients from the Burton Development Center together through music, dance and theater.

According to Curtis, collectively, a group of approximately 50, including 34 cast members, have worked together as a team on the production since October.

Curtis said flyers were sent out in the late fall to elementary schools in Talladega city and the north region of Talladega County.

“We wanted this to be an opportunity of inclusion by allowing children and adults with disabilities and non disabled children to both participate and get to know one another,” she said. “Our youngest cast member is ten, and our oldest is 59.”

George Culver, executive director of the Ritz, has also been “instrumental in arranging the talents to help produce this upcoming production, by volunteering his theater expertise,” Curtis said.

Culver added he is thrilled the venue can help.

“Introduction of the lively arts can help build confidence and self-esteem through means of inclusion,” Culver said. “I’m really excited for them and how they will feel being on stage and seeing their name in lights. We are happy to support the Arc and the students in our area. We look forward to keeping this partnership alive.”

Brandon Crosby, who is taking on the roles of Danny and Teen Angel, said it has been a “dream come true. I love and grew up watching the movie, and it’s something I’ve always wanted to do.”

Crosby said he also loves to sing and perform at his church, Mt. Canaan Baptist in Talladega.

When asked what his favorite musical numbers have been to rehearse, Crosby named “Summer Nights’ and ‘Alone at the Drive-In.”

Crosby said he is thankful for the opportunities to take part in summer camps at Heritage Hall and the Rit through the Arc.

“Janie has been a God-send to all of us,” he said. “She’s really the best.”

Asher Christenson, who plays the role of Sandy, said she was super excited to get to perform at the Ritz.

“My favorite part of the musical is the Rydell cheer,” she said. “It’s really fun and has a lot of energy.”

Rizzo, played by Lori Anderson, said that she has really enjoyed working on the slumber party and prom scenes.

“I really like those,” Anderson said.

Curtis noted the rehearsal with the inclusive cast has helped build and form lasting friendships.

Cast member Bruce Pope echoed this senti-

ment. “I’ve really enjoyed it. We are all really excited,” Pope said. “I’ve made a lot of friends.”

Curtis said the production would not be possible without the help of the many volunteers which include: parents, grandparents and other community members.

Witnessing the progress of the production has been rewarding for Arc parent Russell Lowry.

“It’s so nice to have a place like the Arc to help our daughter Leah,” Lowry said. “We adopted Leah when she was two,” he said. “She’s from Baku, Azerbaijan.”

Lowry noted there is often a misconception when it comes to adults and children like his daughter, who is on the autism spectrum.

“Many times people think that people with disabilities aren’t capable of doing things, but that’s just not true. They often just need someone who will

take the time to work with them and listen.”

Lowry said the Arc has helped his daughter with her anxiety, and helped build her self-confidence.

“As a parent, it makes me proud, and humbles me to be able to see this type of growth first-hand with Leah.”

Lowry said providing his daughter an outlet to express herself through singing and dancing has

Please see GREASE I Page 10D

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What was it like for a teenager to experience an unhurried summery Southern Sunday afternoon without any interactive technology? My friends and I grew up without social media. Even more so, we did not think about bringing a camera for an ordinary day at the park.



**Sarah
Elizabeth
Moreman**

The trees that embraced the paved road opened to a wide grassy meadow. Our driver maneuvered the vehicle to the right where the cars were parked. Across the plateau-leveled meadow the size of three football fields, we noted clusters of people such as college students, families, and teenagers with their activities such as textbooks and spiraled notebooks open for studying, parents leaning down to guide their young, and frisbees being tossed back and forth in the air.

the occasional stereo box playing music at a volume so low as to not disturb the neighboring clusters.

My friends and I spent the morning in church and chose to spend rest of the day out here. After climbing out of the car, we claimed our spot on the meadow by putting down a large blanket, anchoring the corners with an igloo cooler and bags filled with picnicking paraphernalia. We then meandered along to the well-marked foot trail at the far end of the meadow, close to where the pavilion housed picnic tables and charcoal grills.

The rocky trail became narrower as we made our way down along the familiar path, our feet skittering loose pebbles, the sporadic leaves brushing our faces and arms. The air dampened as we followed the sound of the waterfall. We reached the banks of the pool where the magnificent 34-foot waterfall cascaded down levels of large stones of the concrete and stone dam built in 1941 by the Civilian Conservation Corps in their efforts of preserving and transforming the original swimming hole of the Wright's Mill into today's 26-acre Chewacla Lake. The sun warmed the sprayed droplets from the waterfall as they trickled down our arms when we navigated across the rocks that surfaced above the pool. My friends took their flip-flops off to feel the water swirl around

their feet. I did not own any, yet I left my Nikes on. Nevertheless, I enjoyed feeling the edges of the rocks under the thick soles of my sneakers.

Then I slipped. After being surprised, I laughed as my friends watched with “are you okay?” expressions on their faces. Good thing we had bathing suits on underneath our clothes. We went to the deeper part of the pool, my friends holding their flip flops and I still had my sneakers on. We swam in the depths for a good while before climbing back to the top.

The squishiness, along with the tightening of the laces on top of my high-arched feet, had me immediately twisting off the soaked sneakers after we plopped onto the blanket and wrapped ourselves with beach towels. Peeling off the sopping wet socks left me gasping for relief as I burrowed my now-free feet into the grass. The grass feeling soft and green due to the previous week's rains soothed my soul. I took in the blue sky with its puffy clouds while sipping from the lemonade still cold from being in the cooler.

Such ordinary moments do not need to be captured with a camera or smartphone. Such ordinary moments of a summery Southern Sunday are meant to be sensorily savored, such as relishing in the feel of grass between our toes.

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Majestic Caverns: A new name for a popular hometown attraction

BY EJ VERNON

Special to The Daily Home

Tucked away near Childersburg in the foothills of the Appalachians, the place Joy Sorensen calls home contains a cave that remains a cool 60 degrees year-round and has been in her family for 110 years.

At the age of 7, Joy began working the mailroom at the DeSoto Caverns.

"It's been a place I've loved my whole life," Joy said. "I started helping my parents, and now it is part of me."

Joy left home to attend college at Taylor University in Indiana but always loved coming home to the caverns during school breaks.

"I couldn't wait to talk to my dad about the cave, about what he was doing and what he had planned," Joy said.

Studying photography and traveling abroad only deepened Joy's love and appreciation for what she had at home at the caverns. And when Joy's husband, Jared Sorensen, expressed interest in dedicating his life's work to the caverns, Joy knew her childhood dreams of carrying on the family legacy would soon become reality.

"Working at the caverns was always a huge dream of mine," she said. "Hearing Jared say he felt called by God to work here thrilled me. I was honored, humbled."

Now, Joy, her husband and her dad, Allen Mathis, work together to continue growing a legacy that will live on for generations while still preserving history. On June 1, Joy and her family announced a name change for the tourist attraction. Formerly DeSoto Caverns, the transition to Majestic Caverns is a description that encompasses more than a historical figure.

"We needed a name that not only represented the history," Joy said. "We needed a name that also depicted the physicality of the caverns."

Tourists often confuse the name DeSoto Caverns with DeSoto State Park in Fort Payne.

"We've had people end up here who were trying to get to DeSoto State Park and vice versa," Joy said. "A lot of the locals don't even know about the confusion."

But this is not the first time the historic site has been renamed.

In 1796, a scout for President George Washington recorded the beauty of the cave, making Majestic Caverns the first cavern on record in the United States. Majestic Caverns is also known for having one of the largest accumulations of onyx in the world. And it was the onyx that caught the attention of Joy's great-great grandmother, Ida Mathis, in 1910.

Together with business partners, Ida purchased the cave with the intention of mining the onyx. But when those plans fell through, she bought out the other shares, making her the sole owner.

The site was generally referred to as the Ida Mathis Cave and then later became known as the Kymulga Cave.

"My father became the CEO in the 1970s and began to really develop the land," Joy said.

Allen Mathis lived in the back of the gift shop with his dog while he spent time working on the cave's interior, widening the cave's narrow pathways and adding lighting.

"You're not going to

MAJESTIC CAVERNS HISTORICAL TIMELINE

ANCIENT: Mastodon bone found in the caverns
MORE THAN 2,000 YEARS AGO: Woodland Indian period bones were found

1540: Hernando De Soto and his men came through the area. Robles and Freyada stayed behind and one married a local woman and settled in Childersburg, making Childersburg the first European settlement in America, with a Romeo and Juliet marriage.

1723: First cave graffiti by I.W. Wright

1796: Listed by President George Washington as the first cave on record in the United States

1864: The caverns were used to mine gunpowder during the Civil War. There is still an original trench in the caverns that was dug by soldiers back in 1864 to create a working leaching vat to get niter crystals for making gun powder

1912: Caverns Purchased by Alabama Women's Hall of Fame member Ida Mathis

1919: The caverns was used to make moonshine

1975: Al Mathis, current CEO, began working at the Caverns

see anything like this on the surface," Allen said. "You're going to have to go underground. And I think when you come down here and the way we display the cave, it really is a majestic cave. People are amazed at the handiwork of God, and I think that it can't help but impress people in a special way and create a lasting memory. That really reaches my heart to be able to use creativity to develop something that people will enjoy."

Shortly after taking over as CEO, Allen and his wife, Danielle decided the cave needed a name that would be easier for people to pronounce, so they named the site DeSoto Caverns after Hernando DeSoto, who

traveled through the region in 1540.

People who visited the cave learned about the science and history of the site, including the adventures of Hernando DeSoto, a history that is still shared on cavern tours today. The property also features more than a dozen above ground attractions.

"Describing our cave as Majestic Caverns aligns us with the heart of our land's history, our inspiration for our legend-based storytelling experiences," Jared said. "It is our goal to illuminate truth through legendary tales that have not only happened once upon a time but continue to keep on happening."

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Tennis pro and hall-of-famer Sarah Stewart finds family and an exciting future in Pell City

BY NICK PATTERSON
Special to The Daily Home

To say some endeavor is really “about family,” is often cliched, but in the case of Pell City tennis pro Sarah Stewart, that’s actually how it begins and ends.

Her father got her started in tennis, she found her passion in the family atmosphere of her college tennis team, and she’s worked hard for years to infuse that same sense of closeness in the Pell City tennis program. And that’s a big part, she says, of what got her inducted into the Alabama Tennis Foundation Hall of Fame.

“Part of it was the playing, my background growing up, in college, some of the wins I’ve had over some good players,” Stewart said. “I think the biggest part, though, would be Pell City. Our program is known all over the state. Our people go all over to compete, and they help put our name on the map.”

Stewart and her team at the Pell City Tennis Center have made the sport a major aspect of life in town, according to City Manager Brian Muenger. “Over the more than 20 years that Sarah has been employed by the city, she has cultivated a thriving tennis program that serves all ages effectively,” he said. “The level of instruction has been the backbone of the program’s growth, including group clinics for beginners.”

Muenger credits Stewart with bringing nearly \$500,000 worth of improvements to the city’s tennis program and instilling an abiding love for the sport in Pell City. “Her commitment to instruction has helped raise a generation of players, many of whom are now enrolling their own children in the program,” he said.

Stewart was a child herself, living in her hometown of Anniston, when she fell in love with tennis.

“My dad was my coach,” she said. “My dad played college tennis at Clemson. So when I was probably 4 or 5, he put a racket in my hand. He liked to go play when he was off work, so he would go to the club every weekend, and I would follow right behind him. And I’d watch him play, and then beg him, ‘Please hit with me, hit with me, hit with me’ and it kinda exploded from there.

“I was a really shy, quiet kid. I didn’t like to socialize much, just driven and very quiet. And once I got that racket in my hand, it was a whole new world for



Bob Crisp/The Daily Home

me. So he was the reason I started.”

According to The Alabama Player, Stewart was ranked number 1 in the 18 and under division in 1989, and number 2 in the Southern Section.

“Currently, Pell City credits Sarah with cultivating a thriving tennis program that has led to the continued growth of the city facility,” said the magazine article said. “Sarah’s true gift is her ability to bring the love of tennis to others reflected in the numbers of players she has sent to collegiate programs, and are lifetime players.”

During her junior year of high school, Sarah said, she was playing “amazing tennis” under the watchful eye of her father, who was “right there with me, helping me make some big life decisions about turning pro or going to college, and what tournaments to play.”

Her success in high school attracted offers from different college programs from around the country, and her dad encouraged her to chose Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. “It was the best choice I could have made,” she said.

When she played for LSU from 1989 to 1993, she earned All-American Honorable mentions for two years running (’91 and ’92), noted The Alabama Player. But more than that, Stewart found the team experience life-changing.

“The best four years of my life was spent playing tennis in college,” she said.

“When you grow up playing tennis, it’s such an individual sport and you’re out there on your own, you can’t be coached. You can’t talk to anybody. So as a junior, as a kid growing up, it was all about me and I was not a part of anything.

“And so when I went to LSU, I was on a team and had eight other girls from all over the world, really, that were my teammates. I had two coaches and an unbelievable support staff from LSU. So it’s the first time I felt like I was a part of something. I played the best tennis of my life my sophomore year. As a team we were doing really, really well.”

That’s what it’s like now at Pell City, she said.

“If you look at where we are right now as a program and the people, we’re a team. You can’t discount that because what we have here is not what you see everywhere when you see a tennis program. We’re a team, we’re a family, and that’s the way I felt at LSU.”

Her Pell City story began after college, when she had returned home.

“Basically I was going back to school to get my masters, and I was living at home with my mom and trying to decide what I was going to do. I was teaching part-time at the Anniston Country Club, looking around for opportunities, college tennis, coaching or doing what I’m doing now,” she said.

She got the call to go to Pell City, where the president of the Logan Martin Tennis Association was offering free clinics to local kids. Stewart began teaching the kids, but then started getting requests to provide lessons for moms as well. Back then, Pell City only had two tennis courts, and she would teach lessons two-three days a week.

“I got to know people in the community,” she said. “Got to, I guess you’d say, fall in love with Pell City.”

A “good nucleus” of supporters built around her lessons.

“I had a really good group of people to start this program and they helped me approach the city council and mayor about hiring me and investing in our program. And that’s exactly what happened and from there it kind of snowballed.

“The city hired me, and they immediately built four more courts, so we’re at 6 courts. It grew into something that was obviously a full-time job for me. But more than a full-time job, it was my heart, and here we are today.”

Now, after many years, she and her team, which includes her assistant Bronson Tucker and former student Clint Brewer, have maintained a team spirit around the program, she said. “When it got to Pell City it took a while to build that. We have it now. It’s not going away.” She credits the mayor, the council, the city manager, and her boss as major supporters for the tennis program.

Stewart said that the LSU team experience that means so much to her now translated well to building a tennis family in Pell City. That is something she might not have had if her father hadn’t insisted that she go to college and get a degree instead of going pro straight out of high school as she really wanted to do.

Now, she’s glad she listened.

“It’s something that I’m thankful for because this is my home now, this is my family now, and this is my team,” Stewart said.

Rather than resting on her laurels, Stewart is looking forward to the future in the Pell City program.

“Up until now, it’s been amazing with our program with Pell City in general,” she said. “We’ve got a lot going on right now. We’re really, really busy, so I’m excited about what we’re doing, with what we have to offer coming up. Our program is growing. It’s a very exciting time to be a part of our program.”

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Tristen Gressett: Hometown boy makes Idol but remembers how he got there

BY NICK PATTERSON
Special to The Daily Home

Although he's become an idol to thousands, Tristen Gressett of Pell City hasn't lost focus on what's important.

And that's why he was so excited -- even after a strong run toward the American Idol title in the most recent competition - to be back at home and reaching a goal many teens can relate to.

"Just had my last day at school yesterday," he said, with a note of pride in his voice.

Gressett was looking forward to marching out with his classmates to get his diploma but also to performing for the hometown crowd later on. But that's just the beginning. His next step?

He's going to Hollywood. Back to Hollywood, that is, where he's hoping his career will take off. First, though, he's got lots of performing closer to home. "Just getting ready for the Creekbank Festival coming up in a couple of hours," he said.

Since making it to American Idol's top 11 singers, Gressett has been busy building his professional career.

"Soon as I came back, I did a show up in Huntsville with Paul McDonald. That was a lot of fun. Then I went down to the CEPA Building and got to do my own concert. That was a lot of fun. Huge turnout. That was a blessing."

So much of a blessing, in fact, that after that CEPA Theatre concert May 7 in Pell City, Gressett thanked fans from Puerto Rico, Ohio, Georgia, Tennessee, and throughout the state of Alabama who "made my first concert unbelievably amazing."

Comments on his Instagram account before that performance also show how much of a following he picked up during his time on the long-running singing competition.

"So happy for you! So, 400 lucky people will get to watch you perform live," wrote one. "As you can tell by the comments, everyone wants you to perform in states all over the country. My

husband & I are your fans, & we live in southeast Texas."

He's been doing a lot of local shows and radio appearances. He's ventured out of town to venues in Alexander City, for instance, opening for fellow former American Idol Taylor Hicks at JazzFest in June. He was expecting to play Muscle Shoals later that month, then to open for Jefferson Starship. There were even some Canadian gig possibilities that hadn't materialized by press time. But Gressett was game.

"It has been so amazing, just the outpour of love and support from everybody," Gressett said. "Every time I go to the store or even the gas station it's like, I'm taking pictures with people, and I've always kind of dreamed of that, ever since I was young. So it means a lot."

Origin story

Gressett's musical journey really started early. He was a Boy Scout (eventually an Eagle Scout), and he traces his desire to perform largely to a Scout-related trip.

"When I was younger, they'd have this thing at Graceland, Elvis Presley's house. They would have Scout Day, so we would get in for like a discount price. So me and my mom, she would take me every year. And, oh, my gosh... I just remember looking at all the records and everything and just seeing everything that he'd accomplished in life and I wanted something like that so bad. More than anything. It really just put a spark to me to love music more than a hobby. Ever since I was little, it's kind of been instilled in me, whether it be directly or subconsciously."

Both he and his mom are "huge Elvis fans," Gressett said. "We actually went like every years since I was really little until Covid hit."

His mom is also a singer, and he inherited talent and a love of music from her. But the influences didn't stop there, Gressett said.

In the eighth grade he began doing musical theater. "My eighth



Bob Crisp/Daily Home

grade music teacher, Ms. Nixon, she inspired me a whole, whole bunch to really ... take it more seriously than I had been."

His first instrument was the piano, which he took up during a period when he was listening a lot to Elton John. Next, Gressett learned how to dance like Michael Jackson by watching videos on YouTube. "I really got into Michael Jackson. I swear, when I listened to him, it was like the first time that I felt music," he said. "That was one of the first times that I had it, like, move through me."

Wanting to move while performing - something he couldn't do with the piano - led him to learn to play the guitar in the 10th grade. Later, he picked up harmonica. At the time of the interview, he was learning to play the drums. Learning new instruments is a thing with Gressett.

But in just a couple of months after he started playing guitar, "I started getting up on stage with some local musicians," he said. "In about four months after I was playing guitar I had my own gigs. It was crazy... But you know, through those years I learned a lot about music. I picked up bass guitar, I learned how to solo... really hone in on my craft and everything to be able to learn."

A big fan of legendary singer-songwriter Bob Dylan,

Gressett started writing music in earnest when he began playing guitar.

His lessons were in watching musicians play, and his classroom was YouTube. "When my mama would go to work, I would just watch YouTube videos for hours and hours and hours, learning how to play different stuff. That was really the big part of it," he said,

He gained experience playing at local bars and restaurants before arriving at a turning point. "I did that for about three years. Then my mom was like, 'You should audition for American Idol,'" Gressett said. "And that was where that roller coaster took off."

He auditioned in Nashville for Idol, sometime around Sept. 2021 and the filming for the show took place over about eight months, he said. Even before the audition, there were Zoom calls with American Idol staffers, and executive producers. "It's a lot of work to get in front of the judges, but it's a lot of fun. And once you get to Nashville, the whole entire process takes place over a weekend.

"You wear the same outfit every day. By the time you get in front of the judges, you're smelling pretty ripe. You got a whole day of interviews, a whole day of go here and film here... B-roll of you walking down the side of the road or something. ... There is so

much that happens. They'll turn, - like, a 45 minute interview into 20 seconds," he said.

"They're constantly developing you as an artist. Vocal coaches and you're always doing interviews. You're always doing B-roll. But it's always fun," he said. "It's such an awesome experience."

The Idol process "let me and my mom experience things we would have never experience, going to Hawaii, going to Hollywood," he said. "That was just a blessing."

"It's so amazing getting to perform in front of all those amazing people. And it's nerve-wracking. I mean it's terrifying - those moments before you're about to go up. You're walking up on stage and everybody's getting set and ready for your song... and then it's like, live on national television. Everybody's watching you."

Gressett said his poise on stage comes from what he gets from the fans. "I feed off the audience. When I'm standing up there, looking at everybody's faces. It kind of washes the nerves away. You focus on giving them a good show and making them smile."

Next chapter

Getting eliminated from Idol was not a heartbreak, Gressett said. Just the opposite. "At that point, it was like, where's my next step? Because the show is a completely separate world from the music industry," he said.

"I think I was really excited after I got eliminated because, I know that sounds strange, but that was the point to where I was set free and now I'm able to go and make my moves in the industry, you know what I mean, and start getting in with people and start putting out my original music and start putting out these songs I want people to hear."

This summer, Gressett said, he heads back to the place a Golden Ticket took him already, this time to take his music career to new heights. "In August, I'll be moving out to Los Angeles. So I'm really excited for that."

But first, he's got to make a lot of hometown fans smile.

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Ashville prepares for its bicentennial celebration

BY FAITH DORN

Special to The Daily Home

This year, Ashville celebrates its bicentennial. City Councilmember Sue Price, a descendant of the founders of Ashville in St. Clair County, is grateful that people have come together to form a wonderful committee of community-minded people to make a bicentennial celebration happen. She says that co-chair Becky Staples is a great person to work with on this project.

"200 years is a big milestone. Our county just turned 200 in 2018," said Price, who wanted to join the city council to help improve downtown Ashville, work on economic development and preserve city history for future generations.

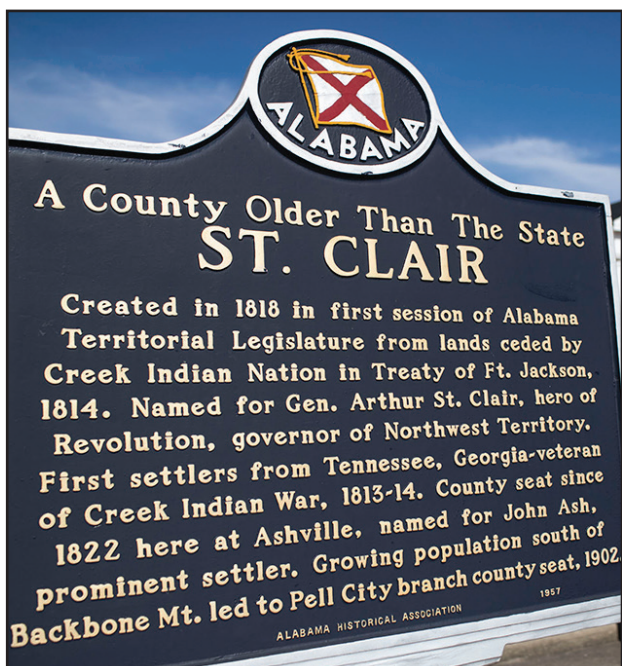
"Ashville is a small city. We are very neighborly and family-oriented. Everybody knows everybody. We have great schools. All of the communities on the outskirts of Ashville are involved with community activities," Price explained, "I love Ashville, and I think we have done a lot to improve it for everybody who lives here. We have tried to get a lot of community festivals going, and the mayor has been so great about helping make them happen."

The actual date of Ashville's incorporation is November 28, but the committee decided to celebrate earlier in the month because of the holidays.

Ashville will host multiple events all week beginning Monday, October 31, with "Sweets on the Square," where local businesses will hand out candy to children.

Thursday, November 3, will feature an awards ceremony for the winners of the coloring contest for young children, poster contest for older children and essay contest for high school students. A high school boy and high school girl will be named "Mr. and Miss Bicentennial" and receive scholarship money.

"We are excited to involve the children and



Photos by Tucker Webb and Bob Crisp/Daily Home

teach them the history of Ashville," said Price.

The event on Saturday, November 5, will begin with the opening ceremony at 10 a.m. at the courthouse featuring a welcome from Mayor Derrick Mostella, an invocation, singing, a cannon firing by a reenactment group and more. The Ashville High School Band will also perform. Following the opening ceremony, there will be food trucks, vendors, living history on

Museum Avenue and a parade featuring Mr. and Miss Bicentennial and a grand marshal with a family connection to Ashville, James Spann.

"James Spann's grandfather was Curtis Adkins Sr., Probate Judge in Ashville. James Spann's mother taught school here when my children went to school. We are very blessed he will be our grand marshal. Ashville has a lot of prominent people who

were raised here," Price said.

Two of those prominent people are Rufus Cobb, Governor of Alabama 1878-1882, and Oran Milo Roberts, Governor of Texas 1879-1883.

"Ashville's legacy is our citizens and our community's commitment to the service of our county, state and country," said Price.

Price says a lot of descendants of the town founders will be in attendance, with some giving a tour of the St. Clair County Courthouse.

"Ashville's courthouse is the oldest still in use in the state of Alabama and the center of our city," Price said.

For more information, like Ashville 200 on Facebook. The page provides an email address if you would like to contact the committee.

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REDISCOVERING EARNEST MOSTELLA

BY NICK PATTERSON
Special to The Daily Home

Alabama music historian believes it’s high time everyone knows about this St. Clair County legend


You may never have heard of Earnest Mostella, but in his day, he was a bit of a local celebrity in St. Clair County. It used to be that local newspapers wrote about Mostella, who was born in 1908. For years, he appeared, among many other places, at the Looney House for the annual Looney Days event. A local barbecue joint once had a wall filled with his homemade, hand-built, one-of-a-kind fiddles. His work is known at the Ashville Museum and Archives. Mostella died in 2003, but broadcaster, writer and music historian Burgin Mathews wants to make sure he’s honored in his own country – St. Clair County. “My goal is to document the fiddles, the art, the music and life of Earnest Mostella, who was a fiddler and fiddlemaker in Ashville, Alabama,” Mathews said. “He worked all kinds of jobs, as a miner, well digger, a grave digger. He was known in this community as a preacher and as

a craftsperson who, in addition to these fiddles which are kind of his signature creation, he made split oak woven baskets, and furniture and tools of all kinds.” Mostella made other instruments, too, banjos, guitars among them, utilizing found materials for his tools and his media, and displaying a wide-ranging set of skills. It was a tradition of instrument-making and music-making that he inherited from his own grandfather, who had been born a slave. “I got to know him, just in the last few years of his life before he died,” Mathews said. “And really, ever since I’ve been trying to figure out some kind of way to commemorate his legacy and spirit, share it with a larger audience.” The result may become a book, or some

other written chronicle, and even an art exhibit, illustrated with photos of Mostella and his instruments, including the ones that survive his passing, Mathews said. A lot depends on what information and artifacts from Mostella’s life that he’s able to find. He’s seeking help in his project from people in Mostella’s family – which includes the mayor of Ashville – and those who have his creations in their possession or collections. Mathews hopes others will see Mostella’s story the way he does - as worth telling and preserving. **History Lesson** “Part of what really drew me to him was, on the one hand, the instruments themselves and on the other hand, his

story and his family’s story, as well as just his personality,” Mathews said. “Ever since I’ve started this project, everybody that I’ve connected to about it who knew him at all, even in passing, just to buy a fiddle from him, is really excited that I’m doing this – anything to kind of keep his name and his story out there, because he made such an impression on people.” Mostella wasn’t just an interesting elderly man who made oddly-designed musical instruments. He was a practitioner of what is mostly a bygone tradition of African American fiddlers and fiddle makers, Mathews said. “The music and the fiddle making grew out of his family tradition that goes back

Please see **MOSTELLA** | Page 10E



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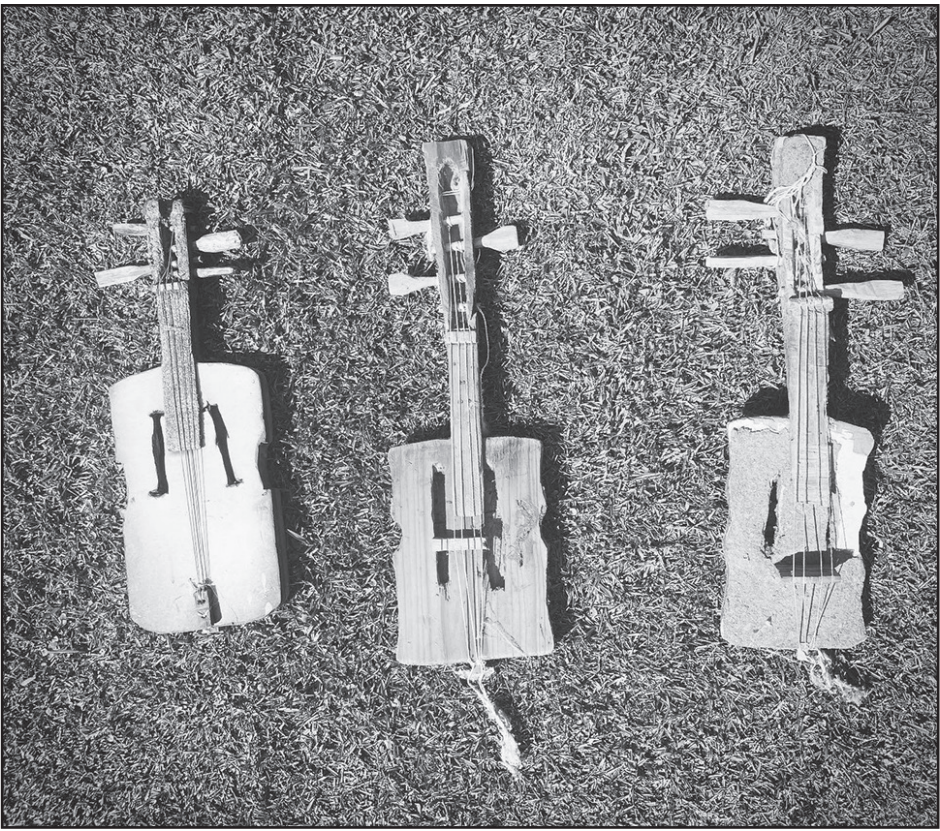
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MOSTELLA

Continued from Page 8E

to his grandfather, Gus Cochran, who was born in slavery in St. Clair County,” he said. “And the story is, he learned to play fiddle after carving a key to unlock the chest that contained the fiddle that belonged to his enslaver and on the sly taught himself to play on that instrument. In time, he began making instruments of his own and grew into this kind of legendary St. Clair County musician who played dances all over, during slavery and after emancipation.” Cochran “lived into the 20th century and knew his grandson Earnest Mostella, who learned the tradition from him,” Mathews said. “And so even when I met him, and we met in 2000, he talked all the time about his grandfather, about songs learned from his grandfather, and so on. And so, bringing this African American fiddling tradition and fiddle making tradition and this family tradition into the 21st century, in and of itself, is a story worth telling, I think.” In his lifetime, Mostella passed down some of those stories, and some of those skills to his children, according to two of them: his namesake son Earnest Mostella, and his stepson, Curtis Phillips. “He played at home. Every now and then he’d build one where he could play it,” said Earnest Mostella of his father. “He kept one, to tell you the truth. He’d take that pine rosin and put it on the strings. It made a weird sound.” “I’ve worked with him on some. I never just built one from scratch. I kind of got an idea from watching him. I built one one time, with his help.” The elder Mostella also passed the skill on to his stepson, Curtis Phillips. “I haven’t made one in a long time,” Phillips said. “I used to watch him make them all the time. He did that kind of stuff every day. He used to make violins and chair splits, and I’ve seen him make some furniture, like headboards for beds and stuff like that.” “I’ve even got a stock for a rifle, a wooden stock for an old rifle I’ve got. I’ve still got that,” he said. In fact, he said he watched Mostella carve the stock with a piece of broken glass. “A lot of people go to a hardware store and buy stuff. He would take a piece of wood and shave it with a piece of broke glass. It’s unreal.” “He made his own glue and ... some of that glue — it’s homemade, but that stuff’s still holding stuff together today.” “He didn’t have an education, but he knew how to make stuff.” And the stuff Mostella made was unmistakably his own style, Mathews said. “I don’t know what his grandfather’s instruments looked like, but Mr. Mostella’s were unlike any other fiddles or violins



Photos provided by Burgin Mathews

you’ve ever seen,” Mathews said. “Every-one of them is different. They all have a style, but some of them have 4 strings, some have 5 or 6 strings. They’re all kinds of shapes and sizes. They have these tuning pegs that stretch out, like maybe 6 inches sometimes, from the side of the fiddle head.” “And he would get the wood, he would cut down trees in the woods around and the swamps near his house. He used a glue mixture that was passed down, the recipe from his grandfather, which was yellow poplar sawdust and egg yolk. And these things would be held together with this kind of concoction and strung with twine or some kind of wire. They’re just fascinating as art objects and as artifacts as much as instruments.” Mathews said he has never seen anyone play one of Mostella’s instruments – besides Mostella. “He could tune them up and play them, but I think he may have ben the only person in the world who could really get a tune out of these fiddles,” he said. “He would say that they were made to be played, but he would kind of laugh that everyone bought them from him to hang them on their walls, which is exactly what I’ve done with mine for the last 20-plus years.” **Meeting Mostella** Mostella was also a singer, and Mathews said he was able to capture some of his performances on tape during their meet-

ings. “He also has this huge repertoire of songs that he could sing,” he said. “He had some little funny songs and things he would sing,” Phillips recalled. “And sometimes he would make up his own songs. He couldn’t write or nothing, not a whole lot. But he would sing a song and it would be like he just thought of it, but he wouldn’t forget it.” Mathews has recordings of some of his songs, going back to some of his earliest meetings with Mostella. Those meetings came after Mathews read about Mostella in a 2000 story by the late Birmingham News feature writer and author Kathy Kemp. After reading Kemp’s story, Mathews took a trip to Ashville and found Mostella’s house and met the artist himself. Later that summer, he went back with a tape recorder, hoping the capture some of Mostella’s fiddling. Instead, he got recordings of Mostella singing, talking about his grandfather, preaching “which he did spontaneously, a lot,” Mathews said. At the time, Mathews lived in North Carolina, but for the next three years, coming to Alabama to visit family, “every time I came home, I would also go see him until he passed away.” **The Project** Mathews said that bringing Mostella to a larger audience means collecting photos of fiddles, among other things. The project is to “first of all locate and photograph as many of the fiddles as I can,”

he said. “Twenty years after his death, it only will ever be harder and harder to find these instruments. So I finally have kind of woken up to the urgency of this.” The barbecue restaurant mentioned earlier in this article helps illustrate how a legacy like Mostella’s can be lost – or at least obscured. “About 20 years ago, there was a barbecue restaurant right outside of Ashville that had his instruments hanging, like, all over the walls,” Mathews said. “And that was the only place I had ever seen a guitar made by him, this enormous instrument, and maybe a mandolin and all kinds of things. And again, about 20 years ago, I went back to that restaurant, and it had been leveled to the ground. So, I have no idea to this day what became of those instruments, and they’re an increasingly endangered species.” So Mathews, assisted with a grant by the Alabama Folklife Association, has published ads in the St. Clair Times, met with some collectors, and talked with some of Mostella’s children. He has enlisted the aid of photographer Sean Pathasema to help document what he finds, “to showcase side-by-side-by-side the visual diversity of the variety of construction of these instruments. Because I think one of them is interesting but I think a bunch of them as a series is really compelling – including their bows.” He knows there are Mostella creations to be found, and not just locally. During his search, Mathews has learned that family members here and as far away as California or Texas have examples of Mostella instruments. “They’re out there, scattered around,” Mathews said, “both in the homes of family members, descendants and total strangers.” He’s hoping his project will lead to Earnest Mostella becoming a lot more familiar to more people. It’s a shame not to know him, if you listen to Philips. Mostella would “give you the shirt off his back,” Phillips said. “If he had one dollar and you wanted 50 cents of it, he’d give it to you. And if you want the whole dollar, he’d probably give you that too. He just cared for other people. That’s the way he was. He would go without so you could have, you know what I mean? He was just that way. He didn’t have a whole lot but what he had, he’d make you welcome to it. He loved other people.” “He was a good man. I’m glad his legacy hasn’t faded all the way. I’m glad somebody knows about him.” If you know something about Mostella and his fiddles and want to help with Mathews’ project, you can reach him at burgin@bhammountainradio.com or 205-335-5608.

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The Ritz Theatre is back!

Historic venue's summer season offers variety of live shows, award-winning films

BY LACI BRASWELL
Special to The Daily Home

The historic Ritz Theatre in Talladega has launched its 2022 summer season, after being forced to close its doors to the community for more than two years due to COVID-19.

"We are thrilled to have a summer filled with shows," George Culver, Ritz executive director said. "The Ritz really took a hit with Covid, but we are fighting back. This is the first time we've launched a season in the summer. Normally we would wait until the fall, but we are taking a chance and hope the community will respond."

The beloved venue opened its doors back to the community on June 30 to Southern author and raconteur Sean Dietrich.

Dietrich is known for his commentary on life in the American South. His work has appeared in "Newsweek," "Southern Living" and many more publications.

According to Culver, those who attended did so with open arms.

"We had a crowd of 400 people, which was incredible for us on a Thursday night," Culver said. "It was a bit of a risk to have our first show back on a weekday, but it turned out to be a wonderful success. I'm pleased to death with the attendance, and hope the rest of the season will have a great turn out."

This summer's lineup features a variety of both blockbuster films and eclectic live performances.

"We feel like there's really something for everyone," Culver said.

The Ritz will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the acclaimed film, "The Godfather," with two showings on Tuesday, July 12, and Thursday, July 14, both at 7 p.m.

"We are hoping these Tuesday and Thursday

shows won't interfere with everyone's summer plans," Culver said.

Directed by Frances Ford Coppola, "The Godfather" received the Oscar for the Best Motion Picture in 1972. Marlon Brando stars as the title character of Vito Corleone.

The film is based on the epic gangster novel by Mario Puzo, Culver noted.

Documentary lovers will also have opportunities to see another Oscar winning feature from 1970.

On Tuesday, July 19 and Thursday, July 21, the Ritz will present "Woodstock."

"The Best Documentary winner in 1970 features concert headliners Jimi Hendrix, The Who, Santana, Joe Cocker, Janis Joplin, The Grateful Dead, Creedence Clearwater Revival and more bands from this era," Culver said.

Next in its lineup of films the Ritz will have two showings of "The Eyes of Tammy Faye," on July 26 and 28.

"The film tells about the rise and fall of the televangelist empire of Tammy Faye Bakker and her infamous husband Jim Bakker," Culver said. "Jessica Chastain won the 2022 Best Actress Oscar for her unforgettable characterization of Tammy Faye. It's perfect for a girls' night out."

Live music will return to the Ritz stage on Friday, July 29, with "Bron-Yr-Aur," an acoustic tribute to the iconic band Led Zeppelin.

"When someone says Led Zeppelin most people would first think of songs that are epic rock anthems," Culver said. "Many of their diehard fans know that some of their best work highlighted the much softer side of the band."

Culver said in 1970, Led Zeppelin members Jimmy Page and Robert Plant retreated to an 18th-century Welsh cottage called Bron-Yr-Aur to relax and write new songs.

"Most of the songs writ-

ten there were quieter and more introspective," he said.

Culver added the show will feature four of the best musicians in the Southeast.

"I was lucky enough to see one of their shows recently and was completely blown away. They are absolutely amazing. Prepare yourself for a spell binding musical experience."

The Ritz will return to its film series with two showings of "Summer of Soul," on Aug. 2 and 4.

Universally acclaimed after winning the grand jury award at its Sundance film Festival premier, "Summer of Soul" received the 2022 Oscar for Best Documentary.

The film tells the story of a 1969 Harlem cultural festival.

"It was a very big deal," Culver said. "About 300,000 attended. It was a celebration of African-American musicians and culture."

Festival performances included Nina Simone, BB King, Fifth-Dimension, Stevie Wonder, Gladys Knight and many more.

Culver said in spite of the enormous attendance, the celebration was overshadowed by dominant media coverage of Woodstock from the same summer.

Forgotten footage is now being brought to life through the documentay.

The Ritz summer season will conclude on Friday, September 9, with a show-stopping performance by gospel group, The Isaacs.

"Across several generations, the Isaacs have been performing their signature family harmony for more than 50 years," Culver said. "They were known earlier

in their career for their style of bluegrass gospel. They appeared on Gaither homecoming videos and tours for 20 years."

Recipients of nine Dove awards and recent inductees into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame, The Isaacs offer a show that lovers of gospel music will not want to miss.

"They are one of the hottest gospel bands in American music today," Culver said. "We are so excited to have them as our summer finale. We hope the community will take the time to come out and support us this summer."

For more information and to purchase tickets visit www.ritztalladega.com, or call the box office at 256-315-0000.

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