



THE GROUNDHOG

“Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain”

Serving the Mentone, Valley Head, Hammondville, Cloudland & Menlo Communities since 1982

Funds secured for new Mentone fire station

Ledbetter, Forestry Commission present \$250,000 check to Mentone’s fire department

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH

Citizens of Mentone and the surrounding communities are one step closer to a new fire station, thanks to careful planning and a substantial grant from the State of Alabama.

Alabama Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter and officials with the Alabama Forestry Commission visited Mentone last month to present a check for \$250,000 to the North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District. The funds will be used to purchase land and build a new Station 1 for the volunteer department.

The current station, located on Alabama Highway 117 in the heart of Mentone, is “in bad shape,” said Chief Joseph Lee. “The septic system hasn’t worked in ten years. It’s in a floodplain, and there’s no room to add to it.”

Plans for the new facility include four bays for parking fire protection



The community was on hand last month to celebrate a grant that will help build a new fire station in Mentone. Pictured left to right are: (first row) Chuck Lawley, Mayor Rob Hammond, Charlie Runnels, Bob Crow, Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter, Chief Joseph Lee, Alabama Forestry Commission’s Scott Rouse, volunteer Dan Greene, (second row) volunteer Eli Durham, volunteer and educator Wes Pullen, volunteer Issac Bottomlee, (third row) volunteer Gary Smith, Asst. Chief Kaleb McMunn, Larry Hooks, volunteer Ken Trowbridge, volunteer Will Blackburn, Alabama Forestry Commission’s Nick Jordan, (fourth row) Arleigh Beard, and Dylan Lee.

vehicles, compared to three bays in the current station. It will feature a kitchenette, bathrooms, and a space to accommodate firefighters overnight when the need arises.

“The Mentone area has experienced a lot of growth, and it’s essential for the fire department to have a new main station,” said Ledbetter. “They run a great department, working really hard to protect Mentone and Lookout Mountain, and we’ve been looking for ways to bring funds back to help them.”

That help came through a budget allocation to the Alabama Forestry Commission, which certifies the almost 1,000 volunteer fire departments across the state. “We depend on the volunteer departments,” said Scott Rouse, general counsel for the commission. With less than 200 firefighters statewide, the commission focuses

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Performing arts center could be next for NACC on Moon Lake campus

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH

If community support exists for college courses at Moon Lake, the historic school may have more exciting news in its future.

Northeast Alabama Community College announced last month that four classes will be offered at the campus for the fall semester. The initial offerings are focused on the humanities. Geared toward both traditional and nontraditional students, the classes will earn college credits.

This will not only benefit students in the short term, but it could also lead to a growing NACC presence in Mentone. “We hope to build the program and one day work with the city to have a theater in town to start producing plays there,” says NACC President Dr. David Campbell.

Mentone Mayor Rob Hammond toured the school gym in June with Campbell and members of his staff, along with Alabama Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter. Discussions are ongoing regarding how to bring this vision to

life. “If we can transform the former school gym into a performing arts center to host plays, music, and other cultural events, it will bring people to our town and to the campus, which in turn supports our local shops and restaurants,” says Hammond.

The prospects are equally exciting for those connected to the school but who no longer reside here. “This is something those of us living in the 1980s when that gym was built never envisioned for the place,” says Dr. Bill Berry, former Moon Lake student, teacher, and principal. “The possibility of music programs, drama, and other kinds of arts activities there is so exciting.”

The first step, however, is to establish some basic classes on campus. Learners of all ages can register online at nacc.edu or call 256-638-4418 for more information. They can also visit the campus Thursday, August 1, when NACC staff will be on-site to help with registration and financial aid.

“We’re very excited, and appreciate all the support from the people of Mentone,” says Campbell. “We have great, positive expectations for what the future holds there.”

Mentone Fall Festival to benefit Moon Lake campus

Sponsors needed to continue success of event, set for Oct. 19

BY DEEDEE MORRISON

The Town of Mentone and citizen volunteers are building on last year’s success to host the second Mentone Fall Festival. Businesses, individuals, and organizations are encouraged to support the event by becoming a sponsor.

Last year’s festival drew more than 5,000 visitors to Mentone. Officials estimate the event’s economic impact exceeded \$134,000. It was centered at the former campus of Moon Lake Elementary School, where visitors encountered pottery, original art, crafts, food, and live music. Beyond the festival site, the entire town welcomed visitors, from the shops along Highway 117 and within the Log Cabin Village to restaurants, stores, and the Mentone Inn.

The town used direct profits of more than \$25,000 to help renovate the former Moon Lake campus. Improvements to the historic schoolhouse have been ongoing since the county board of education closed the school in 2021 and deeded the property to the Town of Mentone. With proceeds from last year’s festival, the town invested in foundation and porch repair, a major cleaning effort, a vapor barrier, and an HVAC system for the community room.

These efforts are reaping dividends. Every available space on the campus is occupied by a tenant, from retail shops and an architectural firm to art galleries and a vacation cabin rental/real estate office.

Earlier this year, the town developed a partnership with Northeast Alabama

(continued on Page 16)



Rand Hall was the first to register for NACC classes at the Moon Lake campus in Mentone.

Register now for fall classes at Moon Lake Campus

CLASSES AVAILABLE:

MUS 101 – Music Appreciation
9 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.
MUL 182 —Vocal Ensemble
10:30-11:30 a.m. (Tuesdays Only)
Tuesdays & Thursdays
Instructor: Dr. Kathy Adkins

ENG 246 – Creative Writing
9:00-10:15 a.m.
ENG 10 – English Composition 1
10:30-11:45 a.m.
Tuesdays & Thursdays
Instructor: Cyndy Bowden



TO REGISTER:

NACC will have a team on the Moon Lake Campus to help students with all parts of the registration process: **Thursday, August 1 • 9 a.m.-4 p.m.**
Or register online: www.nacc.edu/admission-financial-aid/admissions



The Groundhog

Published monthly
by the Mentone Educational
Resources Foundation

The Groundhog has been in publication since 1982. MERF is honored to continue this community tradition.

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The Groundhog is a community newspaper, and as such we encourage submissions from readers. Send story ideas anytime. The deadline for articles is the 15th of each month prior to publication month. Thank you for reading The Groundhog!

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Groundhog woodcut courtesy of
Meg Justice/Bee Spring Studio

Did you know?



The Official Alabama State Insect is the MONARCH BUTTERFLY

Alabama designated the monarch butterfly as the official state insect in 1989. Alabama also recognizes an official agricultural insect (queen honeybee) and an official state butterfly (eastern tiger swallowtail).

The migratory monarch is a native butterfly well-known to Alabama. Both caterpillar and adult butterfly are brilliant in color as a warning (the Monarch butterfly ingests toxins from the milkweed plant which are poisonous to predators).

Source: statesymbolsusa.org

Mentone Matters Partnering for Progress in Mentone

BY MAYOR ROB HAMMOND

Mentone’s citizens, businesses, and visitors heard some great news last month. As you’ll read elsewhere in this issue, our fire department received funding from the Alabama Forestry Commission to help build a new fire hall in the heart of town. Our dedicated volunteer fire-fighters provide an invaluable service to our community, and they’ve worked hard to build one of the best departments in the region. In addition to the state funds, the department has been raising funds for years for this project. The department is fully equipped with vehicles, equipment, and gear — all debt free — and now these volunteers will have a modern Station 1 that will allow them to serve us even better.

Last month, volunteers, board members, and guests gathered at the current station to enjoy food and fellowship and to welcome Alabama Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter. He was joined by officials from the Alabama Forestry Commission to present a check for \$250,000 to our fire department for construction of the new fire hall. As our local representative in Montgomery, Speaker Ledbetter has been a tremendous help to Mentone and all of this district; as speaker of the house, he’s a champion of the issues that impact rural Alabama. This is another example of his efforts to support the great work that groups like the North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District are doing in our communities.

Later this month, education will return to the Moon Lake campus for the first time since the school closed in 2021. Northeast Alabama Community College will begin holding classes this fall — a huge development for our area. Not only does it mean local citizens can advance their education right here in Mentone, but it also positions the campus for future opportunities.

If the community support is there, NACC hopes to work with the Town of Mentone to convert the gym into a performing arts center. Imagine plays, concerts, and other types of performances in a renovated center. The facility would also be available for community events. The possibilities are endless.



This could have a major impact on Mentone, creating cultural events for our local citizens while attracting visitors who will come to enjoy our town, support our local businesses, and contribute to our tax base. The arts may be cultural at their core, but they are also an economic driver.

In order for this to happen, however, we need to show support for NACC today. Take a look at the classes being offered, outlined elsewhere in this issue. Enroll online, or visit the campus August 1 when staff will be there to answer questions, register students, and help with financial aid applications.

Speaking of Moon Lake Village, the new public art display there is getting lots of attention. The Little River Art Gallery is now open on the campus, with new local artists being added every week. This fall we will see the opening of a new Creole/Cajun restaurant called Moon Lake Kitchen. In October, the campus will host the Mentone Fall Festival, bringing thousands of visitors to town for music, arts, and food. Now sponsored by the Town of Mentone in partnership with citizen volunteers and the Little River Arts Council, this event promises to grow and have a significant impact on our town. The money raised from the festival goes into a separate town account and is used to pay for improvements to the Moon Lake campus.

We need more sponsors to make this event a success. See the story about the festival elsewhere in this issue for full details on how to partner with the Town of Mentone on this great event. ♡

From the Editor Get involved, make an impact

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH

Mentone and its surrounding communities are blessed with people who want to make a difference. The fact that you’re reading this newspaper means you are interested and invested in sustaining the quality of life here.

There are always opportunities to give back, but this month’s issue highlights some significant developments in Mentone. First, the Mentone Fall Festival is a major undertaking that has already brought significant benefits to the town. When the long-standing tradition known as ColorFest came to an end, the Town of Mentone, a group of volunteers, and the entire business community jumped in to keep it alive. Not only were they successful, but they also raised much-needed funds to help preserve this historic school. Sponsors and volunteers are needed again for this year’s festival.

TAKE ACTION: Enter bit.ly/3yxhr4N into your web browser, or stop by Mentone Town Hall to sponsor or volunteer.

On that very campus, Northeast Alabama Community College will begin offering classes this month. If you’ve ever thought about taking college

courses, now is the perfect time. If NACC sees community support for its presence, bigger things could be in our future — like a performing arts center for theater, concerts, and more!

TAKE ACTION: Visit nacc.edu or call 256-638-4418 to learn how to register and apply for financial aid.

As highlighted in our cover story, the North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District is doing a fantastic job serving area citizens and businesses. But beyond donations, they need physical help, too. If you have the time and ability, volunteering as a firefighter might be just the role for you!

TAKE ACTION: Attend a department meeting on Monday nights at 6 p.m. at Station 2 in the Alpine Camp area, or contact Chief Joseph Lee.

Lastly, did you have a career that involved writing? We are working on some fun projects at The Groundhog that will require us to expand our stable of writers. Do you have experience writing (feature stories in particular) and would like to contribute?

TAKE ACTION: Send your information with some writing samples to groundhognews@yahoo.com. Use the subject line “Groundhog Writer.” ♡



Word of Encouragement This loving community is a pretty good place to get sick

BY BEN SHURETT

I have a great memory of becoming ill when I was a child, maybe seven years old.

Yes, that’s strange, so you are due a bit of an explanation.

My mother’s dear friend and bridge partner – I called her Mrs. Wilda – was a wonderful cook, as well as a generous person, despite living way across town. It was fully a 20-minute drive from her house to ours.

Food is a love language in the South, so death, dying and even a bout with the stomach flu was cause for Mrs. Wilda to crank up her kitchen and spread some love.

Mrs. Wilda learned at the Tuesday afternoon bridge table that I was ailing. Nothing serious, just a stomach bug. But unbeknownst to me, Mrs. Wilda sprang into action.

The next day, she showed up at our back door with some homemade chicken gumbo and her specialty – a three-layer white cake with caramel icing.

It might have been a year before the flu bug rolled around, but I remember telling my Mom, “Tell Mrs. Wilda I’m not feeling well.”

Mentone is a great place to be sick. This is a community that loves on one another. We have too many love languages to count.

I can cite numerous friends and neighbors who show up with homemade soups and breads when either my Mary or I am sick. It’s part of the

Mentone Magic, and it’s another reason why this is such a wonderful place to call home.

It’s not just food when we are ill and it’s not just love for us. A closer look atop this part of Lookout Mountain will fill your hearts with the feel-goods.

Sure, it’s my church, but it’s wonderful how the Saint Joseph’s Food Bank relieves thoughts of food insecurities for about 40 families each week. To the casual observer each Wednesday, it may appear to be an easy effort to make it happen. But there’s more the eye can’t see.

A team of as many as 20 volunteers works hard at tasks you don’t see. Someone has to drive to Huntsville regularly to get food at ridiculously low prices from a generous non-profit there. Volunteers spend a good portion of Tuesday afternoon getting the items

ready for distribution. Funds are donated to the church to support the effort. And there’s so much more.

The word love is a very versatile one, and those who volunteer love offer their labor, their funds, and their dedication. Simply put, they like to love on people.

This is one example. I’d love to hear other examples of how Mentone loves on people. The Groundhog would love to hear other ways Mentone Magic is made tangible. Let us know. ♡

For more than 30 years, Ben Shurett was a newspaper publisher in Alabama and Iowa. He retired in 2014 and has lived in Mentone since.



Care at Home: What Does Medicare Cover?

BY LYNN HIXON

Medicare covers home health services under Part A and/or Part B. Medicare also covers medically necessary part-time or intermittent skilled nursing care. A doctor or healthcare provider must order your care, and a Medicare-certified home health agency must provide it. Your doctor, or other healthcare provider (such as a nurse practitioner), must assess you face-to-face before certifying that you need home health services such as:

- Skilled nursing services provided up to seven days per week for generally no more than eight hours per day and 28 hours per week.
- Skilled therapy services, such as physical, speech, and occupation therapy home health aides, as long as you require skilled care as well.
- Home health aide, as long as you require skilled care as well.
- Medical social services to help with social or emotional concerns related to your illness.
- Certain medical supplies, such as wound dressings and catheters.

- Certain durable medical equipment (DME), such as a wheelchair or walker.
- Note: Medicare should pay for these services regardless of whether your condition is temporary or chronic and regardless of whether your condition is improving or not.

You can recognize and prevent home healthcare fraud by remembering the following tips:

- Carefully read your Medicare Summary Notice (MSN) and/or Explanation of Benefits (EOB) to ensure they accurately reflect the services you received.
- Work with your doctor to enroll in home health services and determine your plan of care; do not enroll in home health services with a doctor you do not know.
- Do not accept gifts like money or groceries in return for home health services.

If you have any questions or suspect Medicare fraud or errors, please call your SHIP (state health insurance assistance program) coordinator, Lynn Hixon, at the DeKalb County Council on Aging at 256-845-8590. ♡

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Letter To The Editor I miss Mentone

I understand that change is inevitable, but how you change is not. I have been here a long time and really know what Mentone means to all that are homegrown. Mentone is not a magical place. It is a place that has left the world behind because we want to live as neighbors and enjoy a simple life.

In the last ten years or so I have watched as people have moved in to enjoy what we have and to get away from the stress of city life. Once they settle in they start wanting to change our town to like the place they moved away from. I can’t speak for all of us but I can speak for a lot. Mentone didn’t just happen to be this way. The people from Mentone have always kept it this way.

Let me tell you what you don’t see about Mentone. This is just a small list of people that make this place so enjoyable.

I have seen people like Jesse Crabtree and others take the old weapons carrier from the rescue squad building and work all day into the middle of the night going to different houses and plug the generator into people’s freezers to let it run so things wouldn’t spoil when the power was out then leave for another neighbor and do the same.

I have seen Bobby Brown do the same and pull people up the mountain that couldn’t make it home on the snow and ice. I have seen, and they still do it today, Danny and Tater Hopper spend long days cutting and splitting wood just to take to folks in need. I have seen neighbors sit up with sick neighbors and the community cook and carry food. I see the fire department go out in the middle of the night and clean fallen trees out of the roadway. I have watched Don Brown at Bill Russell’s station leave to carry gas to someone in need and do it just because.

I miss when you could go to the market and see Willis Blalock’s Bass mounted on the wall and LM Flanning’s rocker chair that nobody else sat in. Seeing old friends and sharing gossip and yes greeting travelers or any new folks to the area. We could go to the market and buy groceries from William Blackburn while Brutus laid between the counters. Leave messages for anyone at any of the places and know it would be delivered. This is the reason Mentone was the place everyone wanted to flock to.

Well all of those days are gone but the memories remain. Now we offer very little for our old folks in way of service and now we have the eyesore of ATM machines right in the middle of our town complete with a cross way with lights and paint all over the road.

Mentone is still the best place in the world to live but it was much better when neighbors were neighbors and helped each other and loved each other. I have two sons that were raised here and I hope they retire here when their working years are done. I just hope some of Mentone still remains.

I guess I’m just an old man who doesn’t want to change a way of life, the life we had here before all of this change. I know some of you will not agree, but I will say this — we had a very special place here that will soon enough be forgotten and our quiet and serene place will be gone forever.

Thank you so much for your time.
—Larry Smalley

The Groundhog accepts letters to the editor in response to articles that appeared in the most recent issue. We will publish submissions based on available space and appropriateness of content. Submissions may be lightly edited for clarity, style, grammar, and length. Send your letter to: groundhognews@yahoo.com.



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Transitions of August

BY DEJOLY LABRIER

The Wal-Mart parking lot is way too crowded for me in August! Shopping carts overflow with back-to-school items, including new shoes, a nice first-day outfit, or a gift for the teacher. Shelves are crammed with colorful backpacks, pencils, crayons, notebooks, and all sorts of other items that make going back to school easier. Parents begin to feel a mix of relief and sadness for the start of another school year. Even though they may enjoy the initial quiet of a house no longer bustling with the sounds of children, they also might feel the loss of the energy that was alive in their homes during the first part of the summer. As they watch their children get on the bus, or drop them off at school, they may also be heading to their workplace, where they will continue to process the transition from summer vacation to the start of a new school year. Parents now begin their journey of finding a balance of these emotions. August is the eighth month. It's also a period signifying balance, reverence, or admiration...as the other pronun-



ation of the word (au -'gust) indicates. Throughout the world, and throughout history, numbers are said to carry certain vibrational frequencies that can influence and guide our lives, like the sun and moon are known to do. If the number 8 is turned on its side, it is the symbol adopted by many religions to mean infinity, or infinite possibilities of the universe. In Christianity, as in other major religions and cultures, the number 8 is often associated with new beginnings, hope, and divine intervention. It also holds a significant place in the qualities of abundance and prosperity, balance and harmony, inner strength, and resilience. These qualities of life come into focus as we ease into August, entering a new learning cycle, shopping at Wal-Mart, and flowing toward the end of the year. We bring our awareness to the fullness of the sometimes-chaotic frenzy of getting ready for the new school year. That is the time to breathe deeply and rely on your inner strength for assurance that balance is returning to your mind and life. You got this! 🍎

New Fire Station (continued from page 1)

mainly on deep woods fires while relying on the assistance of volunteers, who also keep their communities safe. The Mentone department's patience and financial planning have paid off. Lee said the department has been struggling for five years to find property and funding for the project. Working out of a main station without a restroom, the department has continued to serve the community while maintaining a sound operation. "By being conservative and financially responsible, we have three stations full of equipment, and we don't owe anybody anything," said Lee. The department's other stations include Station 2 in the Alpine Camp area and Station 3 in the Ponderosa Camp area. Lee expressed appreciation to Ledbetter for helping find a way to make this substantial project a reality. "We started working a year or so ago with legislators to get help," Lee said. "He came through in a big way for us." Lee said the fire department is currently in negotiations to purchase land on Highway 117 to build the new Station 1. "They've been working and saving for years for a new fire hall, and I'm proud to see this moment come," said Mentone Mayor Rob Hammond. The boost from the state is money well spent, he said, considering the work the department does for the region. "This town couldn't run without them," Hammond added. "Through fires, storms, and accidents, they are the first responders out there. Our police rely on them. Our citizens and business owners depend on them. We enjoy reliable fire protection and lower insurance ratings because of their efforts." Hammond said the local volunteers are highly trained, and they work well with other fire departments in the area. "This is a rural community with lots of wooded areas, and things are spread out widely," he added. "We've got to have them. They do a great job serving us."

Vicky Patrick, treasurer for the department, said she has enjoyed watching the department grow over the past several years and achieve a strong financial position. She credits the love and generosity the community has shown through donations, a growing property tax allocation, and grants. "We've been able to buy a new fire engine, turnout gear, and other equipment without all those monies coming out of our pockets," she said. "We'll be upgrading in a few years, but our equipment is in good shape," said Lee. "We have plenty to operate safely with for now." Those wishing to make a donation toward basic operations or future equipment purchases can stop by Station 1 or mail a check to North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District. P.O. Box 154, Mentone, AL, 35984. While being financially sound with exciting plans ahead, the department has one overriding need: volunteers. "A lot of us work full-time jobs during the day and are not around," Lee said. "If you're retired and able to get out and help, you should look into becoming a volunteer firefighter." Lee encouraged anyone interested to contact him directly or to attend one of the department's meetings on Monday nights at Station 2 at 6 p.m. "There are no difficult requirements for volunteering," he said. "The training is done in-house, most of it on the scene." The need for volunteers extends beyond Mentone. "It's the biggest challenge we have right now for fire departments across the state," said Ledbetter. "The number of volunteers has decreased over the last decade. We've done some things to help out, as far as insurance and the taxes they pay, but we want to do more." He said the state is considering starting some type of firefighting course at technical schools and community colleges to entice younger people to become involved in firefighting. 🍎



August packed with music, art, and more



BY JULI JORDAN

Music for the People: Henri's Notion and Mustang String Band
A mix of traditional Celtic and American music, with original tunes reflective of our Southern heritage! Saturday, Aug. 10, 6-9 p.m. Behind Mentone Inn at Linger Longer Pavilion 6139 Hwy. 117, Mentone • Cost: Free

Follow Your Art
Saturday, Aug. 31, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Judged art show, storytelling, music, and face painting Food trucks: Jammwich, Pappi's Roasted Corn, Frothy Dog Coffee, A Little Something Extra Ice Cream

Sidewalk Chalk Art Contest
Saturday, Aug. 31, 8 a.m.-1:30 p.m. MERF Community Walking Trail Cost: Free Artists can check in and begin as early as 7 a.m.

BE A PART OF CHALK ART HISTORY!
Become a Mentone Modonnari. In 2020, Little River Arts Council board member Kelly Leavitt initiated our first Sidewalk Chalk Art Contest as a way to get outside and create art during an uncertain time. We were not the only ones taking to the pavement with chalk. As a reaction to lockdown, all ages were creating chalk art, much of it as a morale booster. Little did we know that chalk art would become such a staple of Mentone, with the addition of Make Your Mark on Mentone's chalk mural installation on the square. It seems chalk has become a thing here. Before American artist Kurt Wenner popularized 3-D chalk art in the 80s, we typically associated sidewalk chalk with hopscotch and children's art. Yet the art form has a rich history, dating back to the Stone Age use of limestone. But it was in 16th century Italy, when beggars looking to catch the attention (and coins) of pilgrims visiting cathedrals, that artists began to use charcoal to sketch religious images, especially those of the "Sistine Madonna"



Kurt Wenner's 3-D chalk art, Flying Carpet, Corpus Domini, Bettona, Italy

by Rapheal. These beggars-turned-artists became known as the Madonnari, and their tradition continued for centuries and spread throughout Europe. In Germany, the artists were called strassenmaler, or street painters. 🍎 Juli Jordan is president of the Little River Arts Council.



Artist Lacy Dobbs and her July "Make Your Mark on Mentone" chalk mural of Tinker Hollow. Our next featured artist, Caroline Moore, will make her mark this month. Be sure to go by and check it out!



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Valley Head Happenings

Students compete at state, national Beta Club

BY MAYOR KAREN VEST

In Valley Head school news, the Junior Beta Club elementary students competed in five areas this year. The competition began at the state level in Montgomery and continued up to the national level in Savannah, Georgia.

Students Myles Battles, Hunter Battles, Braxtin Meadows, and Zoey Chambers attended the national competition in June, along with chaperones Jasmine Chambers, Karissa Meadows, and Jessica Battles.

Zoey Skye Chambers won 1st place in Fiber Arts for her beautiful planet rug. Braxtin Meadows placed 2nd in Accessorized Design for his backpack, scrunchie, hairbow, and clutch.

The students also came home with 9th place in 2D Art for their banner.

Hunter Battles was the only Valley Head student to compete at Nationals for Junior Beta in the category of Woodworking and Digital Art. Hunter placed 3rd in Digital Art and 4th in Woodworking at the state-level competition.

Myles Battles also placed at State for Digital Art, and Braxtin Meadows placed for his beautiful quill art. Several other Valley Head students competed at the state level but did not attend the national competition.

The town council approved the purchase of multiple heavy-duty trash receptacles at Valley Head Town Park. Installation is complete, and the hope

is that these will keep animals from removing the lids and making a mess.

Also, Doggie Waste Stations have been installed at the park and in front of the town hall for the convenience of all dog walkers. Please utilize these, and let's keep our park and streets clean!

Our inaugural 4th Saturday Hot Rods in the Valley took place Saturday, July 27, 2024. We hope to keep building this event with even more vendors and activities. Join us around the town square on the fourth Saturday of each month through and including the month of October. If you love classic cars, rock and roll, and a free family activity, you'll become a regular.

Valley Head will host a Family Movie Night on Saturday, Aug. 17, 2024. The movie, "IF," will begin at approximately 8 p.m. This is a FREE event, and popcorn and drinks will be provided. Bring your own blankets and/or lawn chairs to the field directly across from Town Hall.

Finally, at its July 1, 2024, meeting, the town council voted in two new board members for the Valley Head Water Board.

Congratulations to Sonny LaRock of Valley Head and Ben Windom of Hammondville. Thank you both for your willingness to serve our community.

The Valley Head Town Council meets the first Monday of each month at 6 p.m. The public is welcomed to attend. ●



Congratulations to members of Valley Head School's Junior Beta Club, who competed in both the state and national competition and won several awards.

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Mentone Arts Center

Songwriters Round in August; Debbie Bond to Perform in September

BY RANDY GRIDER

Music on the Mountain

Several exciting events are slated for late summer and early fall. We kick it off with the Music on the Mountain Songwriter Series on Tuesday, Aug. 6, on the Padgett Stage inside the Chuck Sennett Center for the Arts. Cliff Abbott and Jon Kinsey will co-host the free Nashville-style songwriters round.

Since 2014, Abbott has introduced six collections of his original music, including two bluegrass-themed albums, a Gospel collection, and, most recently, three singer-songwriter-style albums with minimal instrumentation. He keeps his creativity alive as a journalist for The Trucker Media Group and, of course, writing and performing. He appears regularly on the Dee Ford Show on WOTM TV throughout Alabama and has been the featured songwriter at the Music on the Mountain series. He mentors aspiring songwriters through Sugar Creek SongCrafters, meeting on the second Thursday of each month at the Sugar Creek Music Club in Hayden, Alabama.

Kinsey is Southern born and raised in the hollers of Northwest Georgia. He brings a unique sound to the stage. With a nice blend of traditional country and a bit of edgy rock vocals, he wows audiences on any stage. From smoky dives to classy dining establishments and a bit of everything in between, he has taken the stage

and unleashed his own blend of music across multiple states.

Now with several charting hits, including Dirt Road, Close to You, and others, Kinsey has cemented himself as a legit writer and performer.

The night will begin with two to three songwriters sharing their original stories and songs, followed by a performance mixing Abbott and Kinsey to entertain the audience and answer questions.

The next scheduled songwriter series is scheduled for Tuesday, Oct. 1, with the return of host Craig Hendricks.

Fall Social on the Calendar

Our Fall Social will be Thursday, Sept. 12, from 5:30-7 p.m. More details will be announced soon.

Debbie Bond and "Radiator" Rick to Perform

On Friday, Sept. 27, we welcome Debbie Bond and "Radiator" Rick back to Mentone for an exciting two-hour show. American singer-songwriter Bond has been performing for decades in the Alabama backwoods and is now a regular on the Southern U.S. and European club and festival circuit.

Influenced by raw juke joint blues and the famed sounds of Muscle Shoals, Bond's impressive story includes years of performing with traditional Alabama blues musicians, such as Johnny Shines, Eddie Kirkland, Willie King, Shar Baby, Little



Jimmy Reed, and more. Immersion in Alabama roots music has deeply flavored her guitar playing, soulful voice, and original songwriting, giving her a contemporary and original sound, with soul, blues, and jazz influences.

Her collaboration with British-born keyboard and harmonica player "Radiator" Rick has added a swampy New Orleans edge to her sound.

Bond is a blues activist and founder of the award-winning Alabama Blues Project, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting and preserving the state's blues heritage. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including a Keeping the Blues Alive Award from the Blues Foundation, and a prestigious Coming Up Taller Award for her blues education work with the Alabama Blues Project. She has been recognized by the Alabama Music Hall of Fame as a Blues Achiever and the national Blues Hall of Fame as a Great Blues Artist.

Tickets go on sale in the near future and will be announced on our Facebook page.

For more information on any of the events, please see contact info below. ●

Randy Grider is executive director of the nonprofit Mentone Arts and Cultural Center. He can be reached via email at mentoneartscenter@gmail.com or by phone at 256-674-3366.



Cliff Abbott



Jon Kinsey



Debbie Bond and "Radiator" Rick

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3745 County Road 166, Fort Payne, AL 35967 \$265,000

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Going Digital: Ebooks and Audiobooks at Moon Lake Library

ANNE MCLEOD

Last fall, Moon Lake Library applied for and received a grant from the Tillotson-Menlo Charitable Foundation to fund the introduction of ebooks into our collection. Alabama public libraries participate in a consortium, Camellia Net, which is a collection of over 50,000 ebooks funded by libraries around the state.

Each library pays a sliding fee to join the consortium, depending on its size. For a small library the size of Moon Lake, the cost is \$1,500 a year, \$1,000 of which is set aside for books we select to add to the collection. This is a significant part of our book budget, so we hoped that enough people would use it to justify the cost.

Now, eight months after enrolling, we've been pleased to see how many patrons are accessing ebooks and digital audiobooks, using the Libby app. As of this writing, 255 books have been checked out through Libby, which means Moon Lake patrons are using this resource daily. If you have not yet checked out an ebook, I encourage you to try it. If you're not sure of the process, just stop by the library and we'll be glad to help you get started.

Part of the fun of being in Camellia Net has been selecting books to add to the collection. The library book club has been one source of ideas, recommending authors we've read for our book club discussions, like Janisse Ray

and Wendell Berry, authors whose books had not previously been part of the collection. I recently purchased "Zenith Man: Death, Love & Redemption in a Georgia Courtroom," a true crime book by McCracken Poston, whom we plan to schedule for an author talk this fall. It's gratifying to help introduce authors to new audiences. I admit I like to check the records of books I've added and see how many people have placed holds on them.

I frequently hear patrons say, "I like the feel of an actual book in my hands." You'll get no argument from me. But ebooks are great for travel, as multiple books can be loaded onto a personal device or Kindle ereader. Some people like the ability to adjust the size of the print — with ebooks, any title can become a large print book.

I've played digital audiobooks in the car on trips. And the collection is large enough that you can probably find something related to your destination in Camellia Net. Download a Carl Hiaasen for that trip to Florida or a Robert Parker if you are driving to Boston.

Ebooks may not replace hard copies any time soon, but they are a good option for avid readers. Thanks to the Tillotson-Menlo Foundation for helping us introduce these at Moon Lake. We have already re-upped our subscription for next year! 🍷

Anne McLeod is the librarian at Moon Lake Library.



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State Archaeologist Stacye Hathorn to discuss the Slave Ship Clotilda

BY DR. ELIZABETH SHELDON



State Archaeologist Stacye Hathorn

Stacye Hathorn will be at Moon Lake Library August 5 at 6:30 p.m. to talk about the research methods used to identify the slave ship Clotilda and ongoing studies to preserve its underwater archaeological site.

In 2019, a comprehensive assessment and a year of research by SEARCH, Inc., sponsored by the Alabama Historical Commission and the National Geographic Society, confirmed the identity of the Clotilda, a wooden-hulled sailing ship that brought 110 enslaved Africans from Benin to Mobile Bay in 1859. Initial locations of submerged 19th century shipwrecks in the Mobile Delta were made by Ben Raines and researchers from the University of Southern Mississippi. Subsequent details revealed by SEARCH's study point to one of those being the Clotilda. These include confirmation of the schooner's pre-1870 construction methods, unique size, dimensions, and building materials composed of locally sourced lumber and "pig iron" that are an exact match to the vessel's specifications in historic ships' registries.

Finding this wreck has opened

an important chapter in the history of international slave trade by making it tangible. More than 50 years after the United States government banned the importation of enslaved persons to this country, Timothy Meaher and Captain William Foster conspired to evade authorities and destroy evidence of their criminal voyage by scuttling and burning the vessel and dividing the kidnapped Africans among themselves. The former passengers remained in slavery until the end of the Civil War. After the war, a small group of Clotilda passengers reunited with hopes of returning to their homes. When that dream was not realized, they and their descendants established a community north of downtown Mobile. Today, this community is called Africatown, where the Heritage House Museum brings history alive by sharing stories about the 110 captives' journey from

Africa and exhibiting artifacts from the shipwreck.

Hathorn is the Alabama state archaeologist. She is the lead project manager of the investigation that identified the Clotilda and continues to assist in the ongoing efforts to preserve the shipwreck. She holds a bachelor's and master's from Auburn University, where she studied archaeology and sociolinguistics. She has more than 25 years of experience in historic preservation in Alabama and in early Christian Ireland. Her research interests include cultural persistence as revealed by material culture and native language. Daughter of a millwright and a homemaker, Hathorn grew up in Gadsden and currently resides in Tallassee.

The presentation is free and open to the public. Additional library parking is available at Moon Lake Village. 🍷



August 2024 at Moon Lake Library

Weekly Meet-Ups: CHESS on Tuesdays at 1; KNITTING and CROCHET Tuesdays at 2; SCRABBLE Wednesday at noon.

Aug. 1-2 from 12-4:30 p.m. – During the World's Longest Yard Sale, the library will hold a Big Book Sale.

Aug. 3 from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. – The Big Book Sale continues, plus the Mentone Ukes will be strumming along from 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

Aug. 5 at 6:30 p.m. – Our featured speaker Stacye Hathorn, Alabama's state archaeologist, will present a session on the Clothilda, the last slave ship.

Aug. 10 at 10:30 a.m. – Moon Lake Library Book Club will meet. Our theme for August's book share is Alabama history — fiction, nonfiction, or biography.

Aug. 13 at 3 p.m. – The Municipal Library Board will meet, followed by a meeting of the Friends of the Library Board at 4 p.m.

Aug. 15 at 6 p.m. – All are welcome for Family Game Night. Bring a snack to share, and we'll enjoy board games and cards at the library.

Aug. 20 at 6 p.m. – Art Critique and Discussion Group with Mikel Yeakle, sponsored by Little River Arts Council. Let's talk about art! Artists, please bring a piece or two to share.

Aug. 24 at 1 p.m. – Mentone Ukes will offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

Aug. 31 from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. – The Big Book Sale will take place during Follow Your Art. We'll also have Tie-Dye with Ms. Lynn.

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Thank you for supporting MERF!

BY ANNA MAE HORN

The Mentone Educational Resources Foundation (MERF) appreciates all the support from individuals, businesses, and organizations both near and far. Our mission to enrich the local community is fulfilled only through the combined efforts of our supporters, board members, and staff. It is a group effort, a labor of love.

Church Street Wine Shoppe is well known in the Huntsville area for supporting the arts and nonprofits. Recently, they exhibited work by artist Gary Pritts, who chose MERF to receive funds raised during the exhibit, including the silent auction of a painting. Dorma Hutcheson, long-time MERF supporter and former board member, was the lucky winner of "Kit Foxes." MERF appreciates Dorma, Gary, and the Church Street family, especially downtown manager Hannah Clough, for working together and raising funds to advance our mission.

In July, girls from Camp DeSoto's Phoebe community service project hosted MERF seniors for a fun social at The Farm at Windy Hill. Songs were sung, refreshments were enjoyed, and bingo was played by many! MERF appreciates everyone who helped make this happen.

On August 21, MERF will have another summer senior social at Moon Lake Baptist Church. We invite all local seniors to join us for a fun time. There are no costs and no income requirements. These socials and lunches are provided for relaxation and for educational activities relevant



Church Street Wine Shoppe manager Hannah Clough hands off artwork to winner Dorma Hutcheson.

to this age group. We always look forward to this time together.

Once again, thank you to all those who help MERF enrich the community and enhance rural education. MERF is a 501(c)(3). Visit our website at MERFhouse.org. 🍷

Anna Mae Horn is the executive director of the Mentone Educational Resources Foundation. For more information or to volunteer, email MERFmentone@gmail.com, call/text 256-635-8775, or visit MERFhouse.org.



Nineteen people from DeKalb County, age 55 and older, recently participated in the Masters Games of Alabama. This nonprofit organization is dedicated to promoting healthy lifestyles for active adults ages 50 and older through social, mental, and physical activities. All local competitors qualified to compete in one or more events that will be held at the State Masters Games in Valley (near Auburn) this September. DeKalb County had a total of 83 event qualifications for this year's State Games. These included activities such as shuffleboard, basketball free throw, table tennis, bowling, and frisbee throw. Pictured, left to right, are DeKalb County competitors Christine Ashley, Debbie Daniel, Bobbie Lingerfelt, Dorothy Berry, Janet Hood, Dot Twilley, Debbie Busby, Janine Sims, Denis Harris, Patsy Griggs, and Wanda Henderson.

Photo and information submitted by Emily McCamy, Director of DeKalb County Transportation and Council on Aging, and Masters Games of Alabama Board Member

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Summer camps have tremendous impact on young lives and the region’s economy

BY REBECCA HENDERSON AND STEPHEN V. SMITH

Mentone has been synonymous with summer camps for a century. And the impact of these unique businesses is as far-reaching as the mountain they’re nestled on — not only changing lives but also bolstering the local economy.

Shaping young lives

The activities, the atmosphere, the lasting friendships, and the mentoring relationships come together to create a positive impact on campers.

Glenn Breazeale, director at Alpine Camp for Boys, emphasizes that the staff they hire is critical to the experience.

“As a Christian camp, we feel that the most important way we have an impact on campers is through our staff hiring. The 80 cool college guys we hire represent Alpine to our campers,” he says. “Boys need to catch a vision of what they could be like in a few years. They need mentors. We hope that our counselors provide that and show them what it looks like to be a Christian, not just in what they say but in how they live out their life daily in front of the boys.”

Alpine campers who’ve gone on to higher education often come back to camp as leaders.

“We have many campers who return to be counselors once in college,” Breazeale says. “Almost all of them mention wanting to give back to their campers what they were given at Alpine. And like any opportunity in life, when you serve others, you end up gaining just as much or more as the one you serve.”

Susan and Larry Hooks have been the owners and directors of Riverview Camp for Girls since the late 1990s, and their campers are eager to share how the summers in Mentone have strengthened them.

Emily Sontag of Louisiana is the mother of Riverview camper Taylor Ann. She sought a summer camp that could foster independence and pro-



ABOVE: Young campers often return to be future camp leaders. Photo courtesy of Riverview Camp

RIGHT: Local businesses such as Brown’s Cleaning and Laundry are creating jobs to serve the camps.



vide a nurturing environment for her daughter. Taylor Ann began attending Riverview at age 6 and is now one of its leaders. She “grew up” there, her mom says.

A counselor introduced Taylor Ann to archery and a love of Auburn University, and she pursued both with a passion. She enrolled at Auburn, but did not leave Riverview behind. “Now she’s on the camp leadership team,” her mom says. “This is where she found her faith, partly from Susan and Donna (Bares, assistant director). This place is magical.”

Taylor Ann adds, “The camp gives girls a chance to become strong, independent women ... to have a love for themselves and their community through learning to collaborate and be exposed to the word of God, along with activities like horseback riding, archery, and swimming.”

Ainsleigh Campbell of Tuscaloosa is in her thirteenth year at Riverview and is now on the leadership team. She recently graduated from The University of the South, Sewanee.

“I did not have self-confidence as a child,” Ainsleigh says. “After being at the camp, I began walking with my head held high. This place allowed me to become comfortable with myself and know that there is a place for everyone.

the experience. So often, the girls say their time at camp has brought them closer to God, she says. And so many return year after year. In fact, at each session’s end, the camp hosts a celebratory banquet, in which those who have attended for 10 years receive a toast in the form of a poem about their lives and accomplishments at camp. The number of these longtime campers speaks to the deep connections formed there: 25 to 30 10-year campers are celebrated each summer.

“It is truly humbling,” Susan adds. Taylor Ann and Ainsleigh are just two of an untold number who look back to their camp experience as transformational. This includes a young lady who would go on to hold several statewide elected positions, and who currently leads the state.

“For generations, Alabama’s summer camps have had a profound impact on young people,” says Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey. “I can personally attest to this, because for me, there was nothing better than being at Camp Skyline during the summer. I had the opportunity to be on staff and teach horseback riding, which was a wonderful experience. From teaching girls how to walk closely with God to getting in the saddle of a horse to fostering lifelong friendships, Camp Skyline continues offering that same high-quality experience it offered me

(continued on Page 14)

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River Ridge Escapes now has nine tiny home communities near and atop Lookout Mountain in NW Georgia and NE Alabama. There are several Airbnb Tiny Homes in our various locations to come experience tiny home living, downsizing, the community, and explore the surrounding areas.

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Rhododendron Garden Club News Lula Lake Land Trust – Saving Native Hemlocks



BY MELLANIE TUTTLE

Socrates died from drinking poisonous hemlock. However, the hemlock given to Socrates was the deadly *Conium maculatum*, indigenous to the Mediterranean, not from the native Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) or Carolina Hemlock (*Tsuga carolinus*). Same common name, but one genus is a killer and the other is the victim of the invasive Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA, *Adelges tsugae*). Stately Hemlocks have become silver ghost trees in the Blue Ridge Mountains, with 80% of the native population gone.

In June, the Rhododendron Garden Club hosted Cody Roney and Patrick Kelly from the Lula Lake Land Trust. Thanks to the foresight of Robert M. Davenport Sr., the Lula Lake Land Trust (LLLT) was established in 1994 from his land buys.

Their website explains: “From this solid foundation, LLLT began working to protect the properties now known as The Cloudland Connector, Five Points, and Moonshine Trail systems. These acquisitions, and others, have increased LLLT’s land holdings from the original 750-acre Core Preserve to over 4,000 acres, adding 3,000 acres to Cloudland Canyon State Park and 2,000 acres in Johnson’s Crook on Lookout Mountain.”

With conservation a priority, limited access and low-impact recreational activities are offered. The hemlock forest along Rock Creek is critical to the ecosystem. A foundation species, the roots stabilize the stream banks and cool and filter the water that is vital for brook trout survival. The trees provide shelter for wildlife, nesting sites for



warblers, nourishment for white-tailed deer that forage on the foliage, and the seeds from the tiny cones feed smaller critters (nature.org).

A Japanese import first reported in Virginia in the 1950s, the aphid-like HWA was first noted in Georgia in 2002 and discovered on LLLT property in 2013. First-generation eggs laid in the spring number around 175. A second, fall generation numbers 300. The eggs are found on the underside of branches in a waxy, white “wool” sac. The adelgid feeds on the sap at the base of the needles, disrupting nutrient flow, with death to the tree occurring in three to five years.

LLLT had to determine best practice (cost, time, efficiency) and consider the ethics of chemical treatments. Working with a private contractor in 2014,

application of Imidacloprid directly into the soil using hand-powered soil injection reduced run-off into the creek.

Taking about a year, the insecticide is absorbed by the tree root, moves through the cambium layer to eventually reach the needles. Treatments last five to seven years. The trees were treated in phases, targeting those in the 20-foot range having diameters of less than 7 inches.

A natural predator beetle (*St. Sasajiscymnus tsugae*) has been imported from Japan to feed on the HWA. The beetle’s life cycle parallels the HWA, and with the adelgid its only food source, repetition of the Godzilla kudzu disaster is unlikely. LLLT has set aside several 5- to 7-acre sites for the St beetle release. The hope is that the biocontrol method will eventually replace the need for chemicals.

Socrates stated, “If I can assign names as well as pictures to objects, the right assignment of them we may call truth, and the wrong assignment of them falsehood.”

The LLLT is the right assignment for responsible stewardship and conservation. For information on our neighbor to the north, visit lulalake.org.

For more information, check out Wild Alabama. One of their projects is to locate Alabama’s hemlocks and monitor their health. You can download the iNaturalist app, take a photo of a hemlock in Alabama, and upload it to the app. The tree’s location will be added to their map. iNaturalist is useful when you’re outdoors and wish to identify other plants, bugs, and animals. If you don’t have service on the trail, you can snap a picture to upload later. There is also a web version of

this tool: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/save-the-alabama-hemlocks>

After reading last month’s “Groundhog” article about this month’s meeting, Will Lance reached out to us about donating St beetles for release in Mentone. He attended our meeting this month but refused reimbursement for his purchase from Tree Savers.

Thank you, Will, for your passion and encouragement for folks to take action. One person, one tree. Thanks to our librarian, Anne McLeod, for agreeing to receive the package.

The August 13 meeting is always about preparations for the upcoming Federation Flower Show at the VFW Fairgrounds. This year’s show, Fall Around Alabama, will be judged on October 14. Meetings are held in the library and start at 10 a.m. ♡

Mellanie Tuttle is a member of the Rhododendron Garden Club.

Join us!

The RGC meets at 10 a.m. each month on the second Tuesday. For information, email rhododendrongardenclub@gmail.com and find the group on Facebook.

RGC is a member of the National Garden Club; Deep South, Inc.; Garden Club of Alabama; District II and NE AL Federation of Garden Clubs.

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Local artists feel the love of their community

Mentone area supports furniture maker Jeff Rymer following heart attack

BY REBECCA HENDERSON,
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Jeff Rymer is known to many for his artistry with rough-cut wood and for his friendship to so many in the area. He and his wife Silvia Costantino create original works of art — she with woven wares and he with log furniture. Their work can be found in Hummingbird at Loom, a their shop on Highway 117 in Mentone.

Rymer recently suffered a heart attack and was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. One of the couple’s many friends, Debra Fey, started a GoFundMe campaign to help. Fey says the left side of Rymer’s heart was operating at 15 percent efficiency, and the right side at 30 to 40 percent.

He underwent surgery to place several stints on the left side in order to save his life and give him time to heal sufficiently to withstand additional surgeries as needed. Although his breathing is better, he is weakened and being careful not to exert himself.

“My health is going to determine what I do next, but I love what I do,” Rymer says.

The town of Mentone and Rymer’s customers love what he does, too. Rymer and Costantino are beloved members of the community, and not surprisingly, the town was ready to help.



“Our thought was to create a fundraiser to help Jeff get through the next few months,” Fey says. “Daily needs are the greatest challenges for them right now. Jeff’s medical debt will just have to wait. Erlanger Hospital has a charitable organization that patients can apply to that will assist them with medical bills. They are looking into this. But the fundraising efforts are to help them pay for the necessities.”

Rymer was one of the first artists Fey met when she moved to Mentone in 2011 with her first husband, Rick. “When Rick became ill in 2012 with a rare and disfiguring head/neck cancer, we were already in the process



of establishing our little shop, The Graceful Giraffe, in one of the small wood buildings along Highway 117,” Fey recalls. “Jeff’s shop was right next door, and we became friends.”

Fey says Rymer was always helpful and supportive during the five years of Rick’s illness. “After Rick passed away in 2017, Jeff and Silvia were always there for me, helping keep me distracted and offering to assist in any way they could,” she says.

“I have several of Jeff’s pieces, including a yard swing, a meditation bench, a tabletop, a stump bench, a cedar mantle we turned into a Native American flute stand, and a surpris-

ingly dainty table that has a cedar top and a burlwood base,” Fey adds.

Rymer was born in Cleveland, Tennessee. A friend told him about Mentone in the early 2000s and suggested it would be a good place to live and start a rustic furniture-making business. He fell in love with small-town life and found a shop for his wood-working. He met Costantino in 2015.

When told that the fundraiser had collected almost \$1,000 a day for three days running, Rymer told Fey, “All of your love is making me feel better inside and out.” Costantino added, “My life moment is changing again, but I live in love and gratitude.”

According to Fey, Rymer and Costantino are doing their best to tend to their shop, and patrons are supporting them by purchasing their creations.

“I greatly appreciate all the support we are getting from our friends and family — near and far — and even support from people we do not know,” says Rymer. “But then, you all are my family. Thanks to those who are contributing to the GoFundMe, and to those who will contribute. Silvia and I love you all for everything, including your prayers.”

To donate to the Buying Time to Heal campaign, go to gofundme.com and type Jeff Rymer in the search field. ●



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August Community Events

All times are central unless otherwise noted.
Calendar entries are subject to change.

August 1 • Canyon Kids – Jr Adventures: Reptiles • Join us as we learn about reptiles! 0:30–11:15 a.m. at Little River Canyon Center. Please dress in layers appropriate for the weather and wear footwear suitable for hiking. Free event. Registration required. Limited availability. For more details, email rmtaylor@jsu.edu or call 256-845-3548.

August 1 • Living with Black Bears in Alabama • Interested in learning more about black bears in Alabama? Come join us! Be sure to visit BearWise.org for additional resources on responsible bear coexistence and what to do in case of an encounter. 6 p.m. at Little River Canyon Center. This a free public seminar presented by Landon Johnson, AL DCNR-Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries.

August 1 – 4 • World's Longest Yard Sale • Travel the scenic byways of America for more than 450-miles of yard sales and unique treasure finds. Follow the Lookout Mountain Parkway from Gadsden, Alabama to Chattanooga, TN for the southern portion of the sale. Connect with the U.S. Highway 127 in Chattanooga for the remainder of the route to Hudson, MI. 888-805-4740.

August 2 • Congo Night Swim • Come out for an epic evening of swimming, music and fun. Congo Falls will be lit up with lights for a safe fun environment. There will be a splash deck for extra fun and enjoyment. Reservations are required. Limit of 40 people per night swim. Private groups of 20 or more have the option to request specific dates to reserve a night swim for your group. 7-8 p.m. 256-996-0562

August 3 • Pete the Cat Day • Join us Sat. Aug. 3, 9 a.m.-12 p.m. at the Coal & Iron Building in Fort Payne. Tickets are free and are available at Katherine's Framing and Gifts from July 29-Aug. 2 or until they are all given out. One ticket per person for one item to be signed. There will only be 100 tickets available. Activities are free. Face Painting, story time, Pete the Cat Boogie, games and crafts. Pete the Cat will be there for photos and to interact with the children. There will be give aways from Katherine's Custom framing & gifts. Many merchants will be offering Pete the Cat activities or a special Blue Cat discount.

August 3 • Lookout Mountain Craft Festival • Join us Saturday, August 3 for some amazing music, vendors, and food at the Fisher Rescue Squad. A portion of the sales from vendor proceeds will go to our local rescue squad. 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

August 3 • Birding Hike 101 • Have you always wanted to learn more of the basics of bird identification? Join DeSoto State Park staff for an early morning walk on the boardwalk and along some of the trails around Azalea Cascade. Easy, staying on and near the boardwalk. 1/2 mile total. 6:30 a.m. at DeSoto State Park. Meet at Boardwalk Trailhead on County Road 89. Free and open to everyone, no preregistration required. Weather-dependent, please call the Lodge at 256-845-5380 beforehand to check on status of walk. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details. www.alapark.com/desoto-state-park/hiking

August 3 • Beginner 101 Hike: Guide for Newbies • If you are new to hiking or just need a refresher, this once-a-month hike series is for you. We will start out with a Hiking 101 class that covers everything you need to know to plan and have an enjoyable and safe hiking experience. Afterwards, we will head out on a short, beginner-friendly hike. Bring backpack with plenty of water and snacks. Closed-toed shoes. 4 p.m. DeSoto State Park. Meet at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. Free, but RSVP is required. Email us or pre-register at: alapark.itinio.com/register/DSP-BeginnerHike10. Due to the nature of this hike only thunderstorms will cancel this event.

August 7 • Forest Tales Outdoors Storytime Hike • Join DeSoto State Park Assistant Naturalist, Mirandi Watson, for an OUTDOOR story time catered towards you and your young nature lovers. The hike is considered easy, perfect for little feet. Around 0.6 miles total. What to bring: Backpack with water and snacks. Closed-toed shoes. 10-11 a.m. DeSoto State Park. Meet at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. Free, but RSVP is required. RSVP at: reserve.alapark.com/register/DSP-Forest-Tales.

August 9 • Campfire Talk: Cherokees: The Way We Were • Join DeSoto State Park Assistant Naturalist, Mirandi Watson to delve into the rich history and cultural heritage of the Cherokees of Lookout Mountain, Alabama. DeSoto State Park Campfire Ring at 8 p.m.

August 10 • Enjoy the Moment: Hike & Hammock • Discover a secluded hammock spot and immerse yourself in the tranquility of the great outdoors! DeSoto State Park Assistant Naturalist, Mirandi Watson will lead a short hike to a peaceful hammock spot. Participants will be supplied a hammock to use and shown how to hang it. 30-45 minutes will be spent relaxing in the hammocks before hiking back out. The hike is considered moderate, because of the uneven, rocky terrain. We will use the orange trail for this hike. 2-4 p.m. DeSoto State Park. Meet at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. Free, but RSVP is required, so we know how many to expect. Email us or pre-register at alapark.itinio.com/register/DSP-Hike-Hammock. Due to the nature of this hike only thunderstorms will cancel this event. Please dress accordingly.

August 10 • Junior Ranger Adventure Series: Tree Discovery • DSP Assistant Naturalist Mirandi Watson will be guiding this fun hike, geared toward all ages. The hike is considered moderate, because of the uneven, rocky terrain. We will take our time, so this hike is good for all skill levels. Bring backpack with plenty of water, lunch, snack, and a journal with a pen or pencil. Closed-toed shoes. 11 a.m.-2 p.m. DeSoto State Park. Meet at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. Free, but RSVP is required. RSVP at <https://reserve.alapark.com/register/DSP-JR-Adventure>

August 10 • Sunset Simmer Down Paddle Trip • DeSoto State Park staff offers this relaxing guided sunset paddle trip on the scenic Little River. This trip is approximately 4 miles round trip on flat water, spans a 4-hour period and includes kayak and personal flotation device. Must be able to paddle upstream and back (no current). What to bring: Appropriate clothing, headlamp or flashlight, bug spray, snacks, and drinking water. Time: 4-8 p.m. Where: Meet at DeSoto Falls Picnic Area-Miller's Bend Paddle Shack (about 7 miles from main park area of DeSoto State Park). \$30 for single kayak rental (tandem kayaks are available on a limited basis for \$50) Pre-registration closes August 6th. Pre-registration: <https://forms.office.com/g/vE4EV6xLAB>

August 10 • Music for the People: Summer Music Series: • Join us for this free concert featuring Henri's Notions. Bring your own chair or blanket and enjoy some food from Fantastic Food Truck. 6-9 p.m. at the Linger Longer Pavilion behind Mentone Inn in Mentone, AL. Free and open to everyone! For more information: www.littliverartscouncil.org. Sponsored by Little River Arts Council, made possible in part by the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

August 11 • Longleaf Pine Needle Basketry • Learn the basics of pine needle basketry. Join artist Brittney Hughes to learn the basic steps to making a coiled basket from longleaf pine needles. Each participant will take home their very own creation. All materials will be furnished. Class is for ages 10 and up. JSU's Little River Canyon Center in Fort Payne, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. \$45 supply fee, due day of class. Pre-registration required. For details and to register email Southernchick888@hotmail.com. Call the Little River Canyon Center for more information, 256-845-3548.

August 16 • Nature Journey Journal Hike • Join naturalists and artists for this creative nature observation hike, combining art and nature! Will hike about half mile to the West Fork of Little River and hang out for a while working on our nature journals. Ages 8 to adult. The hike is considered moderate, because of the uneven, rocky terrain. Total 1.5 mile loop. What to bring: Backpack with plenty of water and snacks. Closed-toed shoes. A favorite journal if you have one, and we will supply watercolor paper, watercolor pencils, clipboards, etc. 11 a.m.-2 p.m. DeSoto State Park. Meet at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. \$5 fee for supplies. RSVP is required. RSVP at <https://reserve.alapark.com/.../DSP-Nature-Journal-Journey>

August 17 • Hike with a Naturalist • Join JSU Field School staff on a beautiful outdoor adventure hike to Little Falls. This hike is a moderately challenging 1.5 mile hike. This hike has 140 uneven, stone steps that are steep. It is not recommended for pets or people who have difficulty climbing stairs and steep terrain. Things to bring: Plenty of water and/or sports drink, snacks, hiking poles/staff (optional), sturdy shoes (open toe shoes are not recommended). As with all outdoor events, if it's raining/stormy or very poor trail conditions, we may have to cancel. Please check with the park before leaving home. Meet at the picnic area at Little River Falls at 10:30 a.m. Free and open to everyone! For details, contact 256-845-3548

August 17 • Third Saturday Sunset Cruise-In • An afternoon of family fun activities in the Main Street District of Fort Payne. This public event will include food, live music, motorcycles, antique car show, and much more.

August 17 • A Night with Hannah Dasher • Join us at the Back Forty Ballroom for an unforgettable evening with Hannah Dasher. Experience a spectacular show and indulge in delicious beverages with us! Tickets are on sale now at backfortyballroom.com.

August 17 • Boom Town Opry ALL ABOARD! • The Boom Town Opry will be pulling into the station for our third show of the 2024 season at Fort Payne Opera House. For a suggested donation of \$10, you can come and go throughout the performance. All proceeds benefit the restoration of the historic 1889 Opera House, so please give more if you can! Doors open at 5 p.m. and the show starts at 6 p.m.

August 17 • Park After Dark Night Walk • Join DeSoto State Park staff to get to know the park after dark! About the hike: we will hike slowly on the orange trail from the campground, seeing what we can see and hearing what we can hear. Terrain is rocky and moderate, closed toed shoes are preferred. Approx. 1 mile. More suitable for ages 8 to adult. DeSoto State Park. Meet at DeSoto's Country Store on County Road 89. Free and open to everyone, no preregistration required. Weather-dependent, please call the Lodge at 256-845-5380 beforehand to check on status of hike. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for more details.

August 20 • Meandering Moonlight Guided Paddle • DeSoto State Park staff offers this relaxing guided moonlight paddle trip on scenic Little River. This trip is approximately 4 miles round trip and spans a 3 to 3 1/2-hour period and includes kayak, paddle, and personal flotation device. Must be able to paddle upstream and back (no current). Weight limits: 300 pounds for singles and 450 for tandems. Ages 8 to adult. Appropriate clothing for weather (you may get wet), headlamp or flashlight, bug spray, snacks, and drinking water. DeSoto Falls Picnic Area – Miller's Bend Paddle Shack (about 7 miles from main park area of DeSoto State Park) \$30 for single kayak rental (2 person-tandem kayaks are available on a limited basis for \$50). Pre-registration closes August 16. Pre-registration: <https://forms.office.com/g/1Bh261fzZd>

August 21 • Forest Tales Outdoors Storytime Hike • Join DeSoto State Park Assistant Naturalist, Mirandi Watson, for an OUTDOOR story time catered towards you and your young nature lovers. The hike is considered easy, perfect for little feet. Around 0.6 Miles total. What to bring: Backpack with water and snacks. Closed-toed shoes. Time: 10-11 a.m. Where: DeSoto State Park. Meet at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. Free, but RSVP is required, so we know how many to expect. RSVP at reserve.alapark.com/register/DSP-Forest-Tales This program is for grown-ups and their children -NO PETS PLEASE.

August 24 • UFO Day • Hot Air Balloon Rides showcase this unique family outing! Arts and crafts, children's games, food vendors, antique tractors, live entertainment, street dance and much more make this event fun for the whole family. Fyffe Town Park. Gates open at 9 a.m. and music starts at 10 a.m. 256-623-2222.

August 31 • Follow Your Art • The Sweetest Little Festival in Mentone! Music, Storytelling, Children's Art Projects, Face Painting, and Food Trucks. Art vendors will line the winding walking trail near the MERF House on Highway 117, just east of Mentone. Around 30 of the areas favorite artists and makers will have work for sale. One of the main attractions of Follow Your Art is the return of the popular Sidewalk Chalk Art Contest. The contest is open to all ages, individuals or groups, interested in creating works of art along the track. Prizes will be awarded! Exhibiting Artists: Awards for Best of Show; 1st and 2nd places. PLUS awards for Best Chalk Art (Adult); Best Chalk Art (Youth); and a People's Choice Award. Little River Arts Council will provide the chalk or participants can bring their own. Chalk artists can arrive as early as 7 a.m. on Saturday morning, so that their creations are completed or nearly completed when visitors start to arrive. Time: 10 a.m.-3 p.m. at MERF's Pathway to Community Walking Track in Mentone, AL, 4561 AL HWY 117, next door to MOON LAKE PUBLIC LIBRARY. For more information, visit www.littliverartscouncil.org/fya . Sponsored by Little River Arts Council and the Mentone Educational Resources Foundation.

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American Legion Post 215 Elects Officers and Forms Auxiliary

BY BARRY MORTON

Pizza and drinks kicked off our monthly meeting at the post. The new membership year began in July (there are 16,000 members in Alabama), and it was also time for new leadership to be sworn in. We held a silent election for commander, vice commander, adjutant, and financial officer. Officers were sworn in by District Commander C.J. Craft. Sandra Plummer was the winner of our \$250 Cabela's gift certificate raffle. Of course she asked if the post could use anything with the certificate. New Auxiliary Group Forms

Vickie Thrower from the Alabama State American Legion Auxiliary briefed members on how to start an auxiliary, a separate organization from the post and made up of spouses of veterans. Since the discussion, we've had the minimum 10 senior members sign up to join the group, as well as four junior members. Their goal is to be up and running this month. Stephanie Otto will serve as auxiliary president. To find out about meetings, dues, and planned activities, contact her at 256-516-2652 or email her at americanlegionunit215@gmail.com. If you want to have your signature on the charter, please contact her and be part of Mentone history!

One of the first events they are going to help with is the inaugural Mentone Annual Car Show this October, the week before the Mentone Fall Festival. Post 215 will host the show, located at the Moon Lake Village parking area. We're working on the details, but we know we'll have three trophies and plenty of fun!

For more information about the American Legion Post 215, please follow our Facebook page. ●

Barry Morton is Commander of the American Legion Post 215.



Sandra Plummer, financial officer; Claire Baroni, adjutant; C.J. Craft, district commander; Russ Cash, vice commander; Barry Morton, commander.

Summer Camps (continued from page 10)

and so many other girls. It is truly a good-spirited camp, and I would recommend it and Alabama's other fantastic camps to our young people."

Supporting the economy

Summer camp is so ingrained in the region's culture that it is easy to overlook the economic impact of the season. While it only encompasses the months of June and July, the effects are felt throughout the year.

"It would be difficult to maintain year-round services without the boost from summer camp traffic," says Mike Norris, who owns and operates Mentone Market with his wife, Kathryn. He points out that businesses in other towns that rely heavily on tourists often close for the winter entirely.

"We are able to sustain a level of service throughout the year," Norris adds. That is good news for the local citizens who are employed by the market, along with the community that depends on the store as a convenient location for food and necessities.

Kevin Dunlap sees a similar impact. He has created a business model at Elevation Bistro that offers a unique dining experience particularly attractive to couples looking for a nice evening out. Add to that his focus on locally sourced ingredients, and it is the perfect destination for parents visiting the area in the summer.

"With our Elevation concept, we see a flux on drop-off days," he says of the



Counselors play an important role because "boys need to catch a vision of what they could be like in a few years." Photo courtesy of Alpine Camp.

weekend when parents visit Mentone to bring their children to camp. "When the parents are settled and the kids are scheduled at camp, they are often looking for a date-night spot." The influx of business to his restaurant has a ripple effect throughout the region, as Dunlap relies on local farmers for meat, vegetables, and fruits for his menu.

The economic impact is also felt by the camps themselves. "To get through the winter, the camps have to make their living in the summer," says Rob Hammond, who owns and operates Camp Laney and also serves as Mentone's mayor.

"Summer camp is a seasonal thing, but it has a year-long impact," he explains. "All camps keep full-time people in the winter, and they depend

on the summer season." Hammond adds that some camps conduct retreats in the fall, bringing in school groups for special events. This would not be possible without the influx of campers during the summer.

The economic impact extends to support services that may not readily come to mind. "We average 10,000 pounds of laundry per week over the summer," says Philip Baxter Brown, owner of Brown's Cleaning and Laundry in Fort Payne. Brown's team uses a unique system involving mesh bags, key-cut metal pins, and numbered identifiers to process tons of laundry for several summer camps in and around Mentone, returning clean clothes to their rightful owners in quick fashion.

Brown says the influx of work comes at a time of year when dry cleaning services tend to drop off, helping the business maintain a steady workflow. The laundry from camps creates 10 local part-time jobs at Brown's alone. "Summer camps help other suppliers, as well as hotels and restaurants," he says.

"Our numbers rise significantly when camps are in session," says John Dersham, executive director of DeKalb Tourism. "Our lodging fills on those weekends when parents deliver their kids and pick them up. They spend the night and make a mini vacation out of it."

This drives up lodging taxes, Dersham says, but sales tax collections also go up in Mentone and Fort Payne. "Our lodging occupancy goes up to the 90 percent range during camp season," he says. While it is not known how much of that is directly attributed to summer camp traffic, since it is DeKalb County's busiest season for tourism, the state reports that visitors who paid for lodging in DeKalb County last year spent \$159 million.

"This includes lodging, food, gas, retail shopping, and event spending," Dersham says. "It does not count sales tax collections by local municipalities.

The area's camps form a vibrant life cycle in Mentone, transforming young lives with supporting an economically viable community they can return to as leaders and even residents. ●



Donald Ray "Scrooge" Morgan Aug. 16, 1943 – May 5, 2024

BY KELLY LEAVITT

Once in a great while, there is someone who impacts your life in a way that is unforgettable ... I do not know anyone who has been any kinder and more caring than Donald 'Scrooge' Morgan." Evelyn Graves wrote these words in an article for "The Groundhog" in 2006, when Scrooge retired as the pharmacist at Morgan Drugs in Valley Head. He passed away on May 5, 2024.

If you didn't know Scrooge, you likely knew of his and wife Edna's cows at the Morgan Hereford Cattle Farm on County Road 177 in Mentone. Edna is the daughter of Dewey Smith, who once owned hundreds of acres of land in Mentone and supplied the horses to eight local summer camps. Scrooge grew up in Valley Head. He and Edna were high school sweethearts at Valley Head High School, where they graduated in 1961. As well as being voted Mister and Miss Valley Head, they were each voted "Most Likely to Succeed."

Scrooge went to Jacksonville State University, and Edna went to Auburn University. The following year, he transferred to Auburn's pharmacy school. After marrying in 1963, the couple returned to Valley Head, and Edna began her 25-year career teaching home economics at the high school. Scrooge began working as a pharmacist for Coleman Drugs, owned by L.M. Coleman. In 1973, Scrooge and "Doc" Coleman became partners, and in 1978 Scrooge bought Coleman's half



Pharmacist Scrooge Morgan on his retirement day in 2006

of the business and changed the name to Morgan Drugs. He had customers come from as far as Summerville and Gadsden, because they appreciated the personal attention he gave them.

The name "Scrooge" might seem a misnomer, given the actual character of the man. His niece, Melanie Morgan Horton, explained that when her father, Wayne, and young Don were growing up in Sylvania, their father owned the movie theater. He put his sons to work when they were very young, scooping up popcorn, pouring sodas, and cleaning the floors.

"Scrooge always had money in his pocket," she said, "and one day my daddy wanted to borrow some money from him but he wouldn't let him. So Daddy said, 'Well, you're an old scrooge!' The name stuck for life."

Scrooge and Edna had one son, Coley, born in 1978. At age 4 or 5, he was diagnosed with a medulloblastoma, a brain tumor. The family flew to Boston, where Coley underwent brain surgery. Although complications from the radiation therapy caused strokes and meningitis, Coley graduated from Valley Head High School with honors. In 2009, he took a tumble and hit the back of his head. He did not survive the injury.

"Scrooge and Edna's devotion to Coley was unbelievable," said Mentone's Mayor Rob Hammond. "When they took Coley to Boston, my sister Rosie was a nurse practitioner working for Harvard Health Services. She knew the family, so she started going to the hospital to see Coley, Edna, and Scrooge. They were already friends, but that helped them be even closer."

Avid Auburn football fans, the Morgans held season tickets for over 50 years. As a fullback, Scrooge had been captain of Valley Head's football team. He was also an All-County Athlete.



Clockwise from top left: L to R: Coley, Scrooge and Edna Morgan celebrating Scrooge's retirement from Morgan Drugs

Sweethearts Scrooge Morgan and Edna Smith were named Valley Head High School's "Most Likely to Succeed" in 1961

Devoted Auburn fans Scrooge and Edna at Jordan-Hare Stadium in 2011

Four-month-old greatgrandnephew Banks Morgan Bowen sits on "211," Scrooge's beloved freckled bull

Along with football, he played basketball (he stood 6 feet, 4 inches tall), and baseball. His love for Valley Head football never ceased. He was instrumental in replacing the school's original football stadium and often hired football players to work on the farm during the summer months.

The Morgans began cattle farming in 1983. Edna retired before Scrooge and began managing the farm. At one point, they owned 300 head of registered Hereford cattle and held large cattle sales on the farm. The herd is significantly smaller now. Since Scrooge's death, the next generation has declared they will try their hand at raising cattle. His niece Melanie's son-in-law is a pharmacist in Auburn and is particularly interested in learning the cattle business. Both he and Melanie's son have had a head start.

"My son worked for Scrooge every summer since he was 13," Melanie

recalled, "and my son-in-law worked every summer since he was 19."

Scrooge was meticulous, and they learned the ins and outs of how he and Edna ran the farm.

"We hope to be able to continue his legacy," Melanie added.

This year, 11 calves were born. One was born on the day Scrooge died.

"He was an exceptional man in everything that he did," Melanie said. "Truly a selfless, humble soul. He did so many things for people that people didn't even know about. He was so intelligent that he still remembered his patients' prescription numbers. Scrooge had countless friends and genuinely enjoyed being around people. He was the most generous person I've ever known. He was right the opposite of a scrooge." ●

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Fall Festival (continued from page 1)

Community College, which will begin offering classes on campus this month for the fall semester.

“It’s been our goal from the start to once again make Moon Lake a viable part of our community,” says Mentone Mayor Rob Hammond. “Proceeds from the fall festival went a long way toward making that happen. Not only is the festival an important cultural and tourism event for our town, but it’s also part of a larger plan to preserve that property and restore it to its rightful place as a central part of our community.”

Organizers say the goal for this year’s festival is to generate \$35,000 for the Town of Mentone to invest in Moon Lake. “There’s still much work to be done,” says Hammond, “and we need everyone’s help to make it happen.”

Future improvements include making the bathrooms and hallways ADA-compliant, fortifying the foundation on the north side of the building, and repairing the attic.

There are four ways to pledge your support:

- 1. Enter bit.ly/3yxhr4N into your web browser and complete the online form
- 2. Mail a check to Mentone Fall Festival, P.O. Box 295, Mentone, Alabama, 35984. Make the check payable to “Town of Mentone” and note “Mentone Fall Festival Sponsorship” on the memo line.
- 3. Send funds via Venmo to @Town of-Mentone and note “Mentone Fall Festival Sponsorship”
- 4. Use the QR below to sponsor via Venmo



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