



THE GROUNDHOG

“Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain”

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“Firmly Planted, Forward Moving” Public art project on Moon Lake campus captures spirit of the community

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

It was a big day for Mentone as upwards of a hundred citizens, community leaders, visitors, and elected officials gathered at the historic Moon Lake campus June 18 to celebrate the public art project “Firmly Planted, Forward Moving.”

Carrying the motto of the historic campus, the 10-foot-tall white oak leaf aluminum totem reflects the narrative of the 240-year-old white oak tree that stands in front of the school. It was created by Mentone resident and nationally recognized artist Deedee Morrison, who as a child played under the tree and attended classes at the school 50 years ago.

Dating back to 1928, the schoolhouse today is a center for shops, artists, and art galleries. Morrison says the public art piece is intended to create a uni-

fied narrative of the community that includes the former school being transformed into a celebration of the arts.

“Public art can bring everyone together in a community and can create an environment where we cross pollinate,” Morrison said of the sculpture that features bees, butterflies, and other pollinators indigenous to the area. “When you do a public art project like this, creative things happen. Hope happens. Growth happens. Economic development happens. There’s tremendous benefit from it across multiple platforms.”

Morrison said that in every region she has worked across America, “the local community has benefited from the process of exploring how art can heal within a community.”

Healing is certainly part of the narrative of the Moon Lake campus. The

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Mentone celebrated the “Firmly Planted, Forward Moving” public art exhibit with a ribbon cutting on June 18 at the historic Moon Lake campus. Photo by Mikel Yeakle

Education returns to the Moon Lake campus Northeast Alabama Community College announces campus extension in Mentone

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

Three years ago, students walked the halls of Moon Lake Elementary School in Mentone for what appeared to be the final time, following the county board of education’s decision to close the campus at the end of the 2020-2021 school year. This fall, the historic school will once again be a center of learning for Lookout Mountain and beyond.

Northeast Alabama Community College will begin offering classes at Moon Lake in the fall. College President Dr. David Campbell made the announcement on June 18 before a large crowd gathered for the ribbon cutting of the sculpture garden in front of the campus.

“We are very excited about providing these courses at Moon Lake School in Mentone,” Campbell says. “We are starting with courses that we think will be beneficial to traditional students and life-long learning community members as well. These courses include creative writing, music appreciation, vocal ensemble, and English 101.”

Campbell credits Mayor Rob Hammond, his staff, and community leaders for “working very hard and cooperatively to accomplish this.”

The town and college began discussing the project in mid-spring. During this relatively short period, NACC has pursued the many approvals necessary to host classes on a site away from its main campus on the DeKalb/Jackson County line near Rainsville.

“Our staff has touched all the bases necessary in higher education to set up an off-site center, including those of the Southern Association of Schools Commission on Colleges, the Alabama Commission on Higher Education,



Dr. David Campbell, President of Northeast Alabama Community College, recently announced that NACC will begin offering classes on the Moon Lake campus this fall. He is shown here at the June 18 ribbon cutting for the public art project “Firmly Planted, Forward Moving.” Other speakers at the event included, left to right: Juli Jordan, Little Rivers Arts Council President; Mentone Mayor Rob Hammond; Alabama House Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter; and Deedee Morrison, Mentone sculptor and creator of the art piece. Photo by Mikel Yeakle

and our own system, the Alabama Community College System,” says Campbell. “All their regulations are being finalized.”

Meanwhile, the Town of Mentone converted the Bill Berry Community Room into two classrooms to accommodate NACC. These classrooms will be well-appointed. “We will equip our classrooms on the Moon Lake campus with the education technology that is used in higher education

instruction, just as we do on our campus,” says Campbell.

The instructors will also be top-notch. Campbell says Dr. Kathy Adkins will teach a vocal ensemble class and music appreciation. She was part of the famed Forester Sisters, who charted five number-one hits and 15 total top-ten hits on the Billboard Hot Country charts in the 1980s and 1990s. The three-time Grammy-nominated group was named Group of the Year by the Academy

of Country Music in 1986. Adkins has taught extensively at elementary, high school, and college levels, and has received numerous awards for her service and leadership.

“Cindy Bowden, an experienced and very talented English instructor, will teach creative writing,” Campbell adds.

NACC’s presence on the Moon Lake campus will have a significant impact on this whole region, says Mentone

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The Groundhog

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Birthday calendar maintained by
Kayla Worthey

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

Set Your Words Free

We have a wonderful poetry submission this month from James Ball, a 10-year-old who loves baseball and being a camper at Alpine Camp.

Pitch me the ball
I’ll hit it over the wall
Hit it with the bat
It will make the sound, smack!

You better throw strikes
Or the batter will walk
Steal a base
And slide in safe.

You get three strikes and then you’re out
If you lose you will probably pout
Whoever scores the most runs wins
So play baseball and jump right in!
–James Ball

Thanks for sharing your poem with us, James!

August’s Theme: My Moon Lake

What are your favorite memories of being a Moon Lake Elementary student, faculty member, or volunteer? How do you feel about the future of the campus? Share your thoughts with us in a poem! Send your poem or haiku, along with your name and connection to the area, to: groundhognews@yahoo.com.

Adults and kids alike are encouraged to submit. Set your words free for others to enjoy!

Mentone Matters A day to remember

BY MAYOR ROB HAMMOND

Hopefully June 18, 2024, will long be remembered as a pivotal day in the life of Mentone. Many of our citizens gathered at the historic Moon Lake School to celebrate the new Sculpture Garden, and while there we heard a major announcement about the future of the campus.

The sculpture is an amazing piece of public art by Deedee Morrison, who was a student at Moon Lake 50 years ago. I was actually her 4th-grade social studies teacher before Deedee moved to the mountain. However, I can’t take any credit for the accomplished person and sculptor she became! After working across the country for years, I’m thankful she returned home to live in Mentone and to give back to her hometown in powerful ways.

I want to thank the Little River Arts Council, led by their president, Juli Jordan, for their work on this project. They created the vision and secured major funding. The totem Deedee designed is perfect for this installation, carrying the motto of our school: “Firmly Planted, Forward Moving.” I encourage everyone to stop by and spend some time with this artwork. It’s especially powerful when you see it lit up at night.

It was my honor at the June 18 ribbon cutting to introduce Alabama House Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter. He has represented us well in House District 24 since the day he was elected in 2014. As he’s risen in leadership in Montgomery, he’s not forgotten his home county or our small mountain town. When Mentone needs help, we can turn to Speaker Ledbetter to help us find solutions.

Next, I welcomed Dr. David Campbell, president of Northeast Alabama Community College. He officially announced that NACC will begin offering classes on the Moon Lake campus this fall. What an incredible opportunity for students who live in Mentone and Valley Head, but also for those in north Fort Payne and the Henagar/Ider area. Even our neighbors across the state line will have an opportunity to attend classes here.

It’s exciting that, in addition to offering traditional classes, NACC will also offer courses that anyone in the community can take. NACC is beginning its



presence in Mentone with classes such as creative writing, music appreciation, and vocal ensemble. That tells me they understand the artistic nature of this community and want to be an integral part of it.

There are so many people to thank for their work to improve the Moon Lake campus. Moon Lake alumnus and local builder David Hilliard and his crew rebuilt the wall in the Bill Berry Community Room to create two classrooms for use by NACC. Outside, the big oak tree had grown into the surrounding deck. David reframed the deck to take it off the tree and put in additional support underneath. This not only protects those who use the playground, but also protects this historic tree that is estimated to be 240 years old.

Public Works Director Paul Nail has done an outstanding job with all the projects we’ve tackled at the campus. Now he’s adding some additional parking spaces between the library and rescue squad building using a grass reinforcement mesh. He’s also working to secure a permanent power source for the Ken Shigley Pavilion at the amphitheater.

Countless meals have been served in the Moon Lake lunchroom, and those days are returning with a new restaurant. The town has signed a lease with Robie York, and we can’t wait to have our first meal from his menu.

You can read the details about these projects elsewhere in this issue. I’ll close by announcing that Mentone has two new police vehicles. The cost of one was covered in part by the sale of some surplus vehicles. The other vehicle was purchased with the help of these local camps: Alpine, DeSoto, Laney, Riverview, and Skyline. The Town of Mentone is grateful to these camps for their support of the town and their commitment to public safety. 🍷

From the Editor Our future depends on how we respond to change

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH

Change can be wonderful. Change can be painful. It can be embraced or ignored, defended or fought.

Regardless, change is inevitable. And how a community responds to change can have a tremendous impact on its future.

The decision to close Moon Lake Elementary School in 2021 was a financial one, made by a board of elected officials charged with being good stewards of DeKalb County’s public education dollars. The history of the school wasn’t a factor. Nor were the decades of stories from people who attended classes and worked there. The high standards and performance metrics were secondary. It was simply no longer fiscally sound to continue operating a school there.

Unwelcomed change came to Mentone. But what happened next made all the difference. The Town of Mentone received what may go down as the most expensive “gift” in Lookout Mountain history when the board of education deeded the campus to the town. The structural and infrastructural needs have cost quite a bit of money. What has that netted?

First, let’s look at the alternative. The campus could have ended up in private hands. It could have been developed into a private space no longer accessible to the public. It could have been transformed into a commercial endeavor with such changes made that we would no longer recognize the school for what it was. It could have been abandoned, left for decay and vandals and the elements to slowly destroy the landmark.

Instead, Mentone Mayor Rob Hammond and the

Town Council took on the challenge of not only saving the structure, but also of ensuring that it would continue to be accessible to the public. By transforming it into a space for artisans, shops, and galleries, it is in keeping with the creative spirit of Mentone.

And now look at what’s happening. The campus has become home to the Mentone Fall Festival (another change to talk about at another time). A new restaurant is coming so that the community can once again enjoy a meal and fellowship in the former school’s lunchroom. The public art exhibit in front of the school will draw visitors from miles around while encouraging citizens to reflect on our history and ponder our future (and our roles in it).

And education is returning to campus. As you’ll read in our Page One story, Dr. David Campbell, president of Northeast Alabama Community College, announced that NACC will begin offering classes at Moon Lake in the fall.

None of this would have happened without the efforts made by the town’s leadership and the countless volunteers who saved the school. To do so, they had to face the challenges brought by change in order to turn bad news into a positive future.

I had lunch recently with a new friend who said something profound. It’s not a matter of whether change is going to come, he said. Every town faces change. The question is, what will the town do with that change? The answer to that question determines its path forward.

That truth is illustrated in what we’ve seen at Moon Lake. And I join the many others who are excited about the future of the campus and Mentone as a whole. 🍷

Coming Next Month ...

A new restaurant for Mentone! Are you ready for some Creole and Cajun cuisine? How about beignets and coffee in the morning? Don’t miss our interview with Robie York, the chef who is bringing **Moon Lake Kitchen** to the campus. Get your tastebuds ready for a projected fall opening!



A 50th class reunion reminds us that togetherness matters most

BY BEN SHURETT

Fifty years is a long time. People change a lot in 50 years. There’s weight gain and hair loss, some careers flourish while others flounder. Some achieve their dreams and others are left to wonder what might have been.

In the course of half a century, too many marriages fail. Worse, much worse, are the marriages that end with the death of a spouse. All that is important, but none of it seemed to matter at my Mary’s 50th class reunion.

The Fort Payne Wildcats Class of 1974 gathered to celebrate that milestone in early June. Almost half the seniors who graduated that year – and a few who didn’t graduate for one reason or another but were an important part of that class – came together to reminisce.

It’s no exaggeration to say they did that to love on one another. It was remarkable.

High school isn’t a great experience for everyone. Kids can be cruel to each other along the way. Some children can be pretty good at making others feel “less than” in some way. Bullying is not a new phenomenon. It has thrived for years.

I’ve heard too many people say, “High school wasn’t fun for me. Why would I want to go back and see people who mistreated me back then?”

That’s a good point, one easily understood. But a 50th reunion is different. People are beyond caring what car you drive or what clothes you wear. At age 68, these alums were happy to be alive and see each other again.

Genuine joy and love was obvious among the

graduates – let’s be less formal and call them old friends. My Mary and I have been to six of her reunions, and they do a couple of things I really admire.

The class officers preside and, of course, there’s a fun PowerPoint presentation for all to enjoy. Photos from school days are shared, as are pictures from past reunions. The highlight of the evening is when each graduate takes the microphone and tells a bit of their life story for all to hear.

We heard quick stories of life and death, of children and grands, of past trials and future plans. No one mentioned a big house or promotion but everyone – almost to a person – spoke of the closeness of the group.

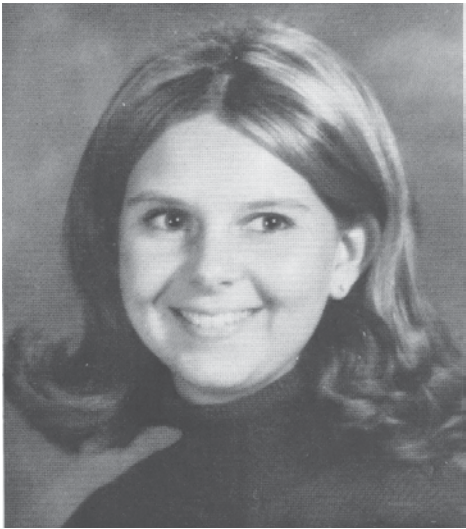
It went from, “I wouldn’t miss one of our reunions for anything,” to “I haven’t been back in 50 years and I’m so glad I’m here.” Virtually everyone closed with, “I love you guys,” and each declaration was sincere.

It wasn’t just a Saturday night affair. Each reunion

closes with a Sunday morning worship service at a local church. Two of the 1974 grads are gifted ministers, and the closing moments of each reunion are spent together in worship before last hugs and “see you next time” promises are made, and will be kept – Good Lord willing.

The Fort Payne High School Class of 1974 was special, but so also are they all, your class and mine. As we age, even as our eyes falter, our vision becomes more keen and we affirm what is really important after all. 🍷

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.



Mary Shurett

Novelist to discuss Valley Head-based historical fiction at July ARTalk

BY MIKEL YEAKLE

Fans of Christian historical fiction, and well as local history, are invited to the Moon Lake Library Tuesday, July 16, at 6 p.m. for the monthly ARTalk, sponsored by the Little River Arts Council. Larry Craze, an author based in DeKalb County, will discuss his latest novel, “Yet A Remnant.” The book takes readers back almost 150 years for a story of adventure with a local twist — including a look at Winston Place and Valley Head.

Following is an overview of the novel:

From his base of operations in Valley Head, Alabama, Special Agent John Wager investigates a Civil War widow’s claim in the mild winter of 1877 and 1878. In the course of his investigation, he learns the fate of Lucy’s boys, her four sons and three grandsons, who were soldiers. Likewise, the citizens of the area discover the agent’s contribution to Reconstruction in postwar North Alabama and his family’s part in the nation’s history. Could his family really have owned and controlled an entire town?

Accompany the agent as he deals with the day-to-day life of his host family and the remnants of their vast plantation. Discover the contribution of the Winstons to the development of the Wills Valley Railroad and industry in the area. Participate in their at-home church service and social gatherings in the valley.

In the course of his month’s stay, the agent helps doctors thwart a mysterious epidemic, and he assists a patient in his spiritual quest. In the conduct of his depositions, Special Agent Wager rehearses the area soldiers’ Civil War adventures. He wrestles especially with the source of one of the mountain soldiers’ survivor remorse and his own post-traumatic stress disorder. Can the reader guess the cause and cure?

“Yet A Remnant” can be purchased through online retailers such as bookshop.org, Amazon, and Barnes and Noble, or at select bookstores. Locally, it is available at Ider Discount Drug. 🍷



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Valley Head coaches inducted into the DeKalb County Sports Hall of Fame

Two Valley Head coaches were honored for their careers and contributions last month when they were inducted into the DeKalb County Sports Hall of Fame.

Bobby Holloway and Jamie Phillips Vest were part of the Class of 2024, inducted on June 15 during a ceremony at the DeKalb County Schools Coliseum in Rainsville. Other members of the class included Paul Benefield, Ronnie Crabtree, Curtis McDaniel, DeWayne Patterson, Hillary Phillips, and Mickey Willingham.

The profiles below appear courtesy of the Southern Torch and were originally published in the April 2024 issue of DeKalb Living magazine. The Groundhog appreciates the Southern Torch for allowing us to share these memories with our readers.

BY MALARIE ALLEN

BOBBY HOLLOWAY

Basketball is a matter of the heart for retired Valley Head basketball coach Bobby Holloway. Holloway coached varsity boys and girls basketball for 16 years, but he said he has played “for as long as I can remember.” Holloway played on the Grove Oak junior high team as a fourth grader. He



Bobby Holloway coached countless players through the years, earning many titles while shaping lives. Photos courtesy of Southern Torch

then competed on the team at Fyffe High School. Holloway also played on the Fyffe baseball and football teams. He was voted most athletic his senior year. Holloway carried his love for basketball with him after high school and even joined an independent basketball league. “I love the competition and strategy in basketball, he said. “I was fortunate to be able to coach. I just love the game.” Holloway credits his high school coach Don Traylor, who was also his neighbor, with inspiring and motivating him to succeed.



“(Traylor) had a huge impact on my life,” he said. Holloway tried to pass along his love for the game to all his players and always encouraged them to “work as hard as you can and never quit.” Last month he was inducted into the DeKalb County Sports Hall of Fame alongside

one of his former players, Jamie Phillips Vest. “I enjoyed the opportunity to help players reach their full potential,” he said. “I was blessed to be able to make a career out of something that I loved.” During his coaching career, Holloway’s teams recorded 506 wins from 1989 to 2005. His girls team won the DeKalb County Championships in 1992 and 1993. Holloway’s basketball teams are part of Valley Head High School history with many memorable plays and wins, but Holloway’s personal favorites were always when Valley Head won as an underdog. “One of the more meaningful moments in my career was going 9-0 against Fort Payne,” he said. “It was 1A versus 6A and a game we always looked forward to playing.” He also cherishes the memories of winning the county tournament by beating the 2A state champions; defeating New Sight, which ended that season with a 35-1 record, in the 1993 Super Eight tournament; and competing in the state final four 11 times. He was also honored to be named Coach of the Year in 1993. Holloway’s coaching career didn’t stop with the basketball court, though. He also led the Valley head track

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Making memories

BY DEJOLY LABRIER

The grill is hot, the pool is full, and the night’s stars are amazing! Fireflies rise up at dusk and remind me of the “Little People,” referred to by many cultures as fairies. There is magic in the air! July is a time of rejuvenation, a time when spring has wafted into summer, when our bodies and spirits can once again reclaim their youthful vigor. June brings a resurgence of passion and adventure, when exotic places around the world are engorged with tourists. July sizzles with expectation of abundance in our gardens, activities, and lives. Last month, we stepped back and assessed where we’d been the past six months, with memories of the winter lingering into the delights of June. Did we spend as much time making memories and doing the things we love to do with the people we love? Did we make spiritual connections with our deeper selves? Did we gain the confidence we



needed to get out of our comfort zones and do that risky thing that brought us joy? Those actions have value in our lives. They rejuvenate us and allow us to assess the value of our relationships with ourselves, return to our spiritual foundations, and reach new heights in our personal development. But now we move toward the things that bring us to life. Our bodies need to move, and this is a perfect time of year to stay engaged. We celebrate the birth of our country with firecrackers and family gatherings. We make memories that will endure through generations. We go swimming and camping. We hike new and beautiful trails in the parks around us. We take cruises and delight in the stunning beauty of the vast waters and aquatic life. Spending more time in nature during this season rejuvenates us. The energies of the earth and sky, water and air, are electric with spark and vitality! Celebrate yourselves with firecrackers and sparklers! Frolic and dance your way through the month. It’s a wonderful choice to make! ●

SenioRx and Medicare Part D

BY LYNN HIXON

There are times when Medicare Part C or D can work with SenioRx to help you get your needed medications. If you are in the Gap or “Doughnut Hole,” there could be options available to assist you in getting those medications free or at low cost through the SenioRx program. Most of the time, the medications must be the more expensive name-brand drugs. SenioRx is a prescription drug assistance program that helps eligible clients receive free or low-cost prescription drugs from the drug companies. The program is for people 55 and older AND

people with disabilities of any age who have a chronic medical condition and need name-brand medicines. The program is brought to you by the Alabama Department of Senior Services and the 13 area agencies on aging, serving as Aging and Disability Resource Centers for Alabama. There are income requirements. Certain Medicare Part D insurances are accepted. To see if you qualify, or for other prescription drug assistance, call your local SHIP (state health insurance assistance program) counselor, Lynn Hixon, or the Senior Rx coordinator, DiAnne Callahan, at the DeKalb County Council on Aging at 256-845-8590. ●

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Rhododendron Garden Club News

BY MELLANIE TUTTLE

At the June meeting of the Rhododendron Garden Club (RGC), 14 members welcomed Beth Milam Sewell from the environmental education program at Little River Canyon to teach the group about all things black bear. Beth brought show-and-tell items, cleared up some common misconceptions, and shared findings about the bears in Northeast Alabama.

A Google search indicated that a group of bears can be called a “sloth” because they tend to be shy and solitary. However, “sleuth” is the preferred nomenclature. In Middle English, the word sleuth meant “the track or trail left by an animal or person.” Anyone who has traveled County Road 89 or Highway 117 on trash day cannot miss the garbage trail of the opportunistic eaters. With a nasal cavity structured like a honeycomb and the olfactory bulb five times the size of that of humans, a sleuth can pick up aromas a mile away. A friend says she puts ammonia around her garbage and has had no break-ins so far.

BearWise.org has excellent info about black bears and directions for modifying trash cans and dumpsters. Trash is an easy meal for a bear, but purple scat shows grubs and berries are staples in the diet. Unexpectedly, bears are delicate eaters, using their lips to gently pull berries off branches.

For years, black bears roamed Alabama, and then humans destroyed their habitats and hunted them to extirpation. Gone for 100-plus years, now they’ve returned. In 2012, Auburn set hair traps and estimated 30 bears were Alabamians, and they were great-grandparents of the current population of over 100 bears.

No, bears were not brought in from other areas and dropped by helicopter into the Little River Canyon. Although bear claws are long and adapted for



climbing, the canyon is deep, it floods, and the bears prefer flatter ground with heavily wooded areas for sleeping, climbing, and eating.

Using a safe corridor into Alabama, bears from Georgia are now found in DeKalb, Etowah, and Cherokee counties. Genetically, our sleuth, *Ursus americanus americanus*, is a subspecies of the American black bear and is considered petite compared to other black bear populations. Our ladies weigh around 130 pounds, and males average 250 (no, you are not seeing a 500-pound male in your trash can). Most of that bulk is taken up with a soft underfur with coarse guard hairs.

Beth was fortunate to be able to shadow biologist Hannah Leeper while doing research on the Northeast Alabama bears. Sadly, Hannah’s grant ended, and she moved on. This past spring she returned to remove tracking collars that were reaching the end of their two-year battery life. The much-too-large collars had to be altered to fit by drilling holes and adding foam and duct tape, which negated their warranty. Beth described how they trapped, sedated, weighed, and tested the ladies, then collared and ear tagged them before releasing them. Tracking only the female population, Hannah learned about home ranges, mates, cub survival rate, and diet. We hope the

data Hannah collected will be published soon and have lots of photos.

The bears in our area do not live in caves or go into true hibernation, since our winters are mild. Mom lives in brush piles or tree falls in the woods. If she has had a bad season and is undernourished, her body will not produce cubs. Fortunately, our area has abundant resources; our bear cubs have a survival rate of 99%, with more cubs born per litter than the national average. We are seeing three and four cub births, so moms are doing well. At birth, cubs are the size of a hand and have eyes and ears closed. When the cubs are Lab puppy size, mom teaches them to climb trees and search for food. Their back feet are backward, with the toes pointed out, so it’s easier to climb trees. Male cubs are booted out on their own at one year, but female cubs stay longer. With a national range for females of 50 miles, our petite ladies only range 6 miles. With typical Southern hospitality, relative females will share and overlap ranges.

They move at dusk and dawn and spook easily. If you see a bear, don’t run or curl up in a ball. They can run 30 miles an hour but not for long. Back away slowly. Do not shoot them. It is illegal to kill the black bear in Alabama, and hefty fines or perhaps jail time may result. A black



bear would rather run from you than toward you. If startled, it may stand and vocalize. Avoid direct eye contact. Make yourself look bigger, make noise, and wave your arms. With sensitive noses and ears that are shaped to capture sound and located on top of the head, bears usually smell and hear you before you see them. Make sure the bear has a free direction to escape. Never purposely feed a bear. Bring in bird feeders at night and put out trash the day of pickup. There have been no reports of bears attacking domestic animals in the area.

Who puts out big food containers with tempting odors? Not the bears. It is our job to discourage their hunt for easy dining and to advocate for them. After all, humans are the mammals with higher intelligence.

At our next meeting, Tuesday, July 9, Lula Lake Land Trust representatives will present the Plight of the Hemlocks. Come at 10 a.m. at Moon Lake Library for interesting information, comestibles, and conviviality. 🐻

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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Little River Arts Council has exciting things in store for the summer



BY JULI JORDAN

Summer is in full swing, and the Fourth of July will be filled with art & music on the grounds of the Mentone Inn. From noon to 5 p.m., artists will showcase their work at the **Big Art Pop Up**, followed by the **Summer Music Series** concert. This month’s band is The Locals, a DeKalb County favorite rocking cover band. Curtis Strange, Dr. Rob Bouchard, Paul Crawford, and Brian Hechler bring hits from the 70s to today! St. Joseph’s will serve barbecue and fixings from 5-7 p.m. as a fundraiser for their Episcopal disaster relief outreach. Children can get creative at the **Kids’ Art Table**. Bring your camp chair and enjoy music under the stars from 6-9 p.m. behind the Mentone Inn at the Linger Longer Pavilion. This event is free to the public.



Make Your Mark on Mentone’s July artist is Lacy Dobbs. Lacy is known for her groovy art and murals at Blueberry Falls Farm, the Groovy Goat, and Lookout Mountain Creamery in Fort Payne. Her subject is Tinker Hollow, an enchanting home that served as a mountain residence. The home also provided accommodations for guests considering the purchase of surrounding properties in a community planned to cultivate and nurture artists



Lacy Dobbs will make her mark on Mentone in July.

and artisans. As Lacy describes her concept, “In the mural, I will fill out the landscape around the home with trees, plants, flowers, and mushrooms, including local species. In the yard, I will draw artists painting and playing instruments, etc. Tiny fairies will be hidden around the scene in a ‘Where’s Waldo’ fashion. How many fairies can you find?”

- **August Artist:** Caroline Moore
- **September Artist:** Jessi Queen

Visit Moon Lake Village’s new **Sculpture Garden**, “Firmly Planted, Forward Moving.” The sculpture, by Moon Lake graduate Deedee Morrison, is a totem to the grand old oak and its pollinators. During installation of the sculpture, as if on cue, butterflies became increasingly animated and plentiful. Having pollinator approval is a very big deal. We believe art is for everyone, and that includes bees and butterflies!

The June ribbon cutting began with entertainment by the Mentone Ukes and was attended by House Speaker Nathaniel Leadbetter; representatives from the Lyndhurst Foundation; NAAC President Dr. David Campbell; representatives from Farmers Telecommunications Cooperative and Sand

THURSDAY, JULY 4 • 6-9 P.M.

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Alabama State Council on the Arts

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

Mountain Electric Cooperative; Mayor Rob Hammond; the Mentone Town Council; and many supportive community members.

While you are visiting the Sculpture Garden, stop by **Little River Art Gallery** in the old schoolhouse and pick up our latest t-shirt featuring the oak leaf sculpture, plus other LRAC merchandise, and enjoy the member artists’ work. The gallery is open Thursday through Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. and by appointment.

4th Annual Follow Your Art returns to the MERF Community Walking Trail Saturday, Aug. 31. Mentone’s Sweetest Little Art Festival includes a judged art market with \$900 in awards, Emerging Artists Exhibit from Northeast Alabama

Community College, Storytelling by Debbie Happy Cohen with special helpers Hannah & Havannah Barber, local musicians, and the Sidewalk Chalk Art Contest!

Artists: Deadline for submission is July 31. Booth cost: \$35 for nonmembers, \$20 members.

Remember to register for the **Chalk Art Contest!** This is fun for all ages and all skill levels and is a great way to promote your organization. It’s also a fun family or team building project. We want to see your chalk masterpiece! Some lucky chalk artists may win the opportunity to create a mural on the Make Your Mark on Mentone chalkboard! 🎨

Juli Jordan is president of the Little River Arts Council.



The Artlady, Sonya Clemons, working on her June chalk mural.

BIG ART

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Valley Head Happenings

New event, signage, and public servants mark progress for Valley Head citizens and visitors

BY MAYOR KAREN VEST

I am excited to announce that Valley Head business owners will be hosting a monthly Fourth Saturday Cruise-In which starts on Saturday, July 27. Everyone is invited to join us for a relaxing evening filled with fantastic vehicles. This is a free community event and our Valley Head restaurants will be open for your enjoyment. Come on out and see what’s happening in Valley Head on the fourth Saturday of each month!

Recent council meetings have been very productive. Mr. Easton Bailey has been sworn in as the new council member, taking the seat I vacated when I was sworn in as Mayor. Easton is a long-time active community member who looks forward to serving the town. His family was present for the ceremony.

We recently hired Police Officer Austin Peppers as a part-time officer. Officer Peppers will be patrolling Valley Head on night shift to keep our town safe after hours. Officer Peppers is a full-time officer in Leesburg, Alabama. We are very happy he has joined our department. Please welcome him if you see him.

Sidewalks and curbs around the square have all been pressure washed and it has really improved the appearance of our town. New trash cans with tethered lids will soon be installed at Valley Head Park. The town is working with the State of Alabama to help install the new street and road signs around town. Many of the signs were faded and some were even missing altogether. One new stop sign has been added at

the intersection of Winston Street and Commerce Avenue. This new two-way stop will make this intersection safer.

The Town Council voted in John Breithaupt and Brittany Reyes to fill seats on the Zoning Commission. Bill Horn has been appointed to fill a vacant seat on the Planning Commission. Both boards will be meeting soon to review and update our zoning regulations if needed.

The Valley Head Water Works board has announced a vacancy. Scott Jarmin has given his resignation and the Council will soon vote to fill his seat on the board. The board is comprised of both Hammondville and Valley Head residents. You must live within the city limits of either town to be considered for a board position.

During the June council meeting, I let the board know how much I enjoyed the Alabama League of Municipalities conference that I attended. It is hosted annually by the League for all elected officials in the State of Alabama. I made wonderful new friends and gained insight into my new position. During the roundtable discussion, I learned about some grant opportunities for our town, two of which I have already applied for to purchase some much-needed equipment for our volunteer fire department.

Council member Adele Phillips gave her final report from Mayberry Days and declared it a success. Funds were raised and so much family fun was had. We all met so many kind people, including a couple who had traveled from Florida just to enjoy our town and this festival.

Whether you live far or near, we

would love to see you at the Fourth Saturday Cruise-In. We also welcome volunteers who want to be more involved with our town. For more details on any of these items, contact me or our Town Clerk, Lora, at Town Hall. Great things are happening in Valley Head! 🐻



Easton Bailey was sworn in as a Valley Head town councilman. His wife, Anna, and their boys, Ethan and Mayson, attended the ceremony. Bailey was sworn in by DeKalb County Circuit Clerk Todd Greeson.

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Frank L. Mason was a business and civic leader who loved Mentone, Lookout Mountain

Frank LaFayette Mason passed away on June 18, 2024, at age 100. He was born May 7, 1924, to Ruth Jacobs Mason and Samuel LaFayette Mason. He was a lifelong resident of Birmingham and later Mentone, Alabama.

Mason attended Phillips High School, the University of Alabama, and Auburn University. In 1943, he joined the Naval Aviation program, where he flew the F6F Hellcat and was trained for aircraft carrier landings. His Navy experience birthed a love for flying and he piloted his own aircraft into his late sixties.

In 1948, Mason married Bess Powell Cooper and they had a wonderful marriage that lasted 59 years. They had two children, David and Ann.

In 2008, he married Betty Dominick Smith, who passed away after five years together. In 2013, he married Betty Aldridge Bostwick, and they enjoyed ten years together.

In 1947, Mason and his father, Sam, started Southeastern Tool and

Die Company, which in 1970 would become Mason Corporation, a national manufacturer of building products using aluminum and steel. He was actively involved in Mason Corporation until he retired in 1991. Aside from running a successful business, he was involved in numerous business, civic, and charitable organizations.

Mason served as Chairman of the Board of the Business Council of Alabama. He was a member of the State Ethics Commission of Alabama, and was Chairman of the Alabama Delegation to the White House Conference on Small Business in 1980 and 1986. In 1996, Mason was inducted into the Alabama Business Hall of Fame.

In addition to his involvement with the business and the many organizations he served, Mason was actively involved in the Republican Party in Alabama and also nationally, begin-

ning in 1956 as a candidate for Congress. He was a delegate for Ronald Reagan at the Republican National Conventions in 1976 and 1980.

Mason's real passion, however, was his Little River Farm atop Lookout Mountain near Mentone. During his working career, he and Bess would spend most weekends there hunting, fishing, farming, and raising cattle. In 2009, Mentone became his permanent residence. He would often say, "There is no place I would rather be."

Mason was preceded in death by his parents and sister, Eunice Mason Walters, and his wives. He is survived by his son David LaFayette Mason (Marcia) and Ann Mason Chambliss (Russell), as well as his 6 grandchildren: Alan L. Mason, Russ Chambliss, Jr. (Rebecca), Sarah Beth Cain (Matt), Mary Margaret Chambliss, Jane Drennen (Daniel), and Frank



"Beau" Chambliss (Mary Russell). His beloved great-grandchildren are Mary Elizabeth Cain, Julia Russell Chambliss, Russell William Chambliss, Ann Margaret Drennen, Matthew Scott Cain, Charlotte Etta Lee Chambliss, Charlotte Ann Chambliss, Daniel Felix Drennen, Alligood Carlisle Rogoff, Louis Frank Rogoff, William Edward Drennen, and Lucy Barboro Chambliss.

Memorial services were held on Tuesday June 25th at Canterbury United Methodist Church with visitation and reception at the The Country Club of Birmingham following. Services were under the direction of Ridout's Valley Chapel in Homewood.

Mason's family offers special thanks to his wonderful caregivers Brianna Rayford, Lakeitha Hicks, and Benjamin Lee.

In lieu of flowers, please send donations to Canterbury United Methodist Church, Grace Presbyterian Church in Ft. Payne, Alabama, or your favorite charity.☛

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With Little River Escape being such a success, we have decided to embark on a new journey by creating River Ridge Escape Tiny Home Dealership. At the dealership, tiny homes are available to tour and purchase. RRE is now delivering across the nation and also developing other communities to bring more folks to Lookout Mountain.

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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NACC (continued from page 1)

Mayor Rob Hammond. “Moon Lake School was the heart of this town for so many years. It was a devastating blow when it closed, but look where we are now. This news proves that with hard work, faith, and dedication to improving our town, Mentone will always find a way to move forward.”

Dr. Bill Berry, a former Moon Lake student who served as principal of the school from 1994 to 2007, notes that “this partnership is an exciting continuation of the campus’s rich tradition of educational excellence. The vision of Dr. Campbell meshes perfectly with Moon Lake’s motto ‘Firmly planted, forward moving’ – and I see great learning opportunities ahead for the people of Mentone!”

While the announcement is big news for Mentone, Campbell is already looking ahead. “I can really see a great future with this partnership with the Mentone community,” he says. “We hope eventually to sponsor more in the arts, particularly with music concerts, theater presentations, and art shows, activities that are a great fit for the Mentone community. All this is contingent upon being able to secure the right venues, of course, but if we can reach that level, these activities would add some economic development to Mentone, which of course already is one of Alabama’s most popular towns to visit. As I said, we are excited!”

NACC will have a team on the Moon Lake Campus to help students with all parts of the registration process:

Wednesday, July 10 and Thursday, August 1 • 9 a.m.-4 p.m.



NACC staff joined the community to celebrate the opening of an NACC presence on the Moon Lake campus. Left to right are: NACC’s Olivia Dodd, Jennifer McCurdy, Jeff Hawes, Brenda Stringer, and President Dr. David Campbell; House Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter; NACC’s Chad Gorham and Kerry Wright; Juli Jordan, LRAC President; Benic M. “Bruz” Clark III, Lyndhurst Foundation President; Deedee Morrison, artist; Mentone Mayor Rob Hammond; and Groundhog Editor Stephen V. Smith. Photo by Mikel Yeakle

NORTHEAST ALABAMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Moon Lake Campus

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES



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

MUS 101 - Music Appreciation: This course covers a minimum of three stylistic periods, provides a multicultural perspective, and includes both vocal and instrumental genres. Music Appreciation requires no previous musical skills. (3 credit hour course)

MUL 182 - Vocal Ensemble: This course provides an opportunity for students to participate in a performing ensemble. Vocal Ensemble is excellent for those who love to sing with others. (1 credit hour course)

Instructor: Cyndy Bowden
Tuesdays & Thursdays
ENG 246: 9:00-10:15 a.m.
ENG 101: 10:30-11:45 a.m.

English 246 - Creative Writing: This course provides instruction and practice in the writing of critical analysis of imaginative forms of literature. Emphasis is placed on originality in the creative writing process. (3 credit hour course)

English 101 - English Composition I: This course provides instruction and practice in the writing of at least four extended compositions and the development of writing strategies, analytical and critical reading skills, and basic reference and documentation skills in the composition process. (3 credit hour course)

REGISTRATION FOR FALL 2024 IS NOW OPEN!

First Day of Class for Fall Semester 2024: August 20, 2024
Last day to register for classes: August 23, 2024.

For complete registration information, visit:
www.nacc.edu/admission-financial-aid/admissions

A team from Northeast Alabama Community College will be onsite at the Moon Lake campus in July to help anyone with the registration and financial aid processes. Continue to monitor The Groundhog Facebook page for details.

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Mentone Arts Center

Pastels class, French Family concert, and receipt of a Challenge Grant

BY RANDY GRIDER

Possibilities in Pastel

We are super excited to host our first pastels class this month. Possibilities in Pastel will feature visiting artist/instructor Micah Goguen. Students will explore the fundamentals of pastels with an immersive experience of practical application. All materials are included (students only need to bring paper towels and an apron). No previous experience is required. The class will be held in one of the classrooms at Moon Lake Village on Saturday, July 20, and Sunday, July 21, from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuition is \$195 and limited to 10 students. Call 256-674-3366 to register.

Class Description: This two-day workshop will cover mark making, color blending, and layering, followed by putting it all together to create your own landscape. Day one will focus on a series of small exercises to create samples while learning technique. The class will experiment with different surfaces and grounds that can be used as substrates. Students will learn about the different types of pastels, including soft, semi-soft, and hard pastels, and when to use each one. We will also have an exercise with PanPastels to learn how they can be used, as well as mixed media. Day two will focus on creating a landscape using the techniques learned. Framing and sealing the work, as well as how to adapt the pastel techniques to match your own personal style, will conclude the class.

About the Instructor: Micah Goguen grew up in central Georgia and obtained his bachelor's in art and master's in art therapy from Georgia

College & State University in Milledgeville. Residing currently in Atlanta, he focuses primarily on bringing art to the community and using art as a form of communication for those struggling to understand and cope with life situations. Goguen produces work while teaching art to both adults and children. He also volunteers time at the local community center and works with adults in alcohol and substance recovery, as well as uprooted and traumatized children. Using mural work, art for entertainment, and art therapy for healing, Goguen collaborates with school systems, local shops, and nonprofits to help unify and most importantly "spread a message."

His own artwork conveys his interest in people, as he uses mixed media techniques to show the blending of cultural and societal consciousness. Goguen loves connecting artists and working with local community venues to promote the arts. The overall focus is to rededicate efforts toward a "buy local, shop local" mentality that strengthens community through unity and purpose.

The French Family Band to Perform

We welcome The French Family Band on Friday, July 26, for an exciting show from 7 p.m.-9 p.m., featuring Stuie, Camille, and Sonny French. The show is sold out, but we do have a waiting list in case of late cancellations. Please see MACC contact info below to be added to the waiting list. The French Family Band is originally from Australia, but they now live in Nashville. They rose in popularity by



performing live shows on Facebook from their home during the pandemic and have now appeared multiple times on the Grand Ole Opry. For more information, check out their website at thefrenchfamilyband.com.



MACC Receives Challenge Grant

The Daniel Foundation recently awarded the arts center a \$20,000 Challenge Grant, an operational support grant for 2024 operating expenses. The foundation will match dollar for dollar all donations up to \$20,000. Tax-deductible donations in the form of checks can be mailed to P.O. Box 515, Mentone AL 35984 or by credit/debit card by clicking on the support tab at mentoneartscenter.org.

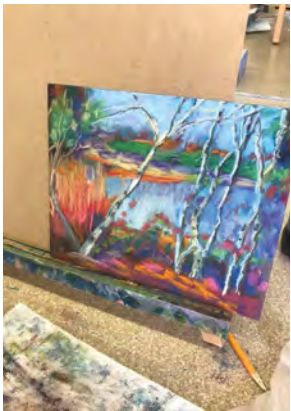
For additional information about any of our events or to register for a class, please see contact info below.

For additional information about any of our events or to register for a class, 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.



Our first pastel class, Possibilities in Pastel with Micah Goguen, is July 20 and 21.



French Family Band to perform on Friday, July 26.



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July library speaker to present living history

BY ANNE MCLEOD

Dr. George W. Cobb will be Moon Lake Library’s featured speaker on July 8 at 6:30 p.m. Cobb will present a living history portrayal of the Rev. Samuel Doak, who addressed several Patriot Frontier Militia groups during their muster at Sycamore Shoals near the historic Watauga Settlement in the Colony of North Carolina (modern-day Elizabethton, Tennessee) on Sept. 26, 1780, during the Revolutionary War. Doak was an 18th-century Presbyterian missionary pastor who established several frontier churches and was a member of the local militia. He also performed the wedding ceremony for the better-known John Sevier (Nolichucky Jack) and his bride, Bonni Kate.

Cobb is a retired Methodist minister and living historian whose extended ministry includes serving as volunteer chaplain for a variety of historical organizations: Little River Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution in Fort Payne; the Overmountain Victory Trail Association (O.V.T.A.); and the Nathan Bedford Forrest Camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans in Rome. He is a graduate of Birmingham-Southern College (bachelor’s); Candler School of Theology at

Emory University (master’s in theology); and the Universal Bible Institute (doctorate of divinity).

For more than 17 years, he and his wife, Betty, have participated in the annual re-enactment of the 1780 March to the Battle of King’s Mountain, sponsored by the O.V.T.A., and in which they often portray the Doaks at Fort Watauga at Sycamore Shoals State Park in Elizabethton. In addition to Doak, Cobb portrays several other 18th-century clergymen, such as John and Charles Wesley and Bishop Francis Asbury. He has written and presented several historical articles for various historical organizations and library clubs.

The Cobbs recently celebrated their 59th wedding anniversary. Their family includes two married sons, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. After retiring in 2004, they moved to Cedar Bluff, Alabama, where they remain active in church and community activities. He is beginning his 17th year as pastor of Hebron Methodist Church off U.S. Highway 411 between Centre, Alabama, and Cave Spring, Georgia. 🍷

Anne McLeod is the librarian at Moon Lake Library.



July 2024 at Moon Lake Library

Adventure Begins at Your Library

- Weekly Meet-Ups:** CHESS on Tuesdays at 1; KNITTING and CROCHET Tuesdays at 2; SCRABBLE Wednesday at noon.
- July 6 • 1 p.m.** – Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.
- July 8 • 6:30 p.m.** – Featured speaker: Dr. George W. Cobb, retired Methodist minister and living historian whose ministry includes serving as volunteer chaplain for a variety of historical organizations. Cobb will portray the Rev. Samuel Doak, an 18th-century Presbyterian missionary pastor who established several frontier churches and was a member of the local militia during the American Revolution.
- July 11 • 3 p.m.** – Municipal Library Board, followed by Friends Board at 4 p.m.
- July 12 • 6 p.m.** – Family Game Night - Bring a snack to share and we’ll enjoy board games and cards at the library.
- July 13 • 10:30 a.m.** – Moon Lake Library Book Club - Our theme for July’s book share is America. Read a book, fiction or nonfiction, about American people, places, or institutions.
- July 13 • 10:30 a.m.** – Little Library Learners will learn about preventing wildfires with this special session about Smokey the Bear.
- July 16 • 6 p.m.** – Art Critique and Discussion Group with Mikel Yeakle, sponsored by Little River Arts Council. Larry Craze, an author based in DeKalb County, will discuss his latest novel, “Yet A Remnant.”
- July 19 • 6 p.m.** – Friday Night at the Movies “Independence Day” (1996, rated PG-13)
- July 20 • 1 p.m.** – Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.
- July 26 • 6 p.m.** – Family Game Night - Bring a snack to share and we’ll enjoy board games and cards at the library.
- July 27 • 10:30 a.m.** – Summer Reading Celebration for all ages!

Moon Lake Library

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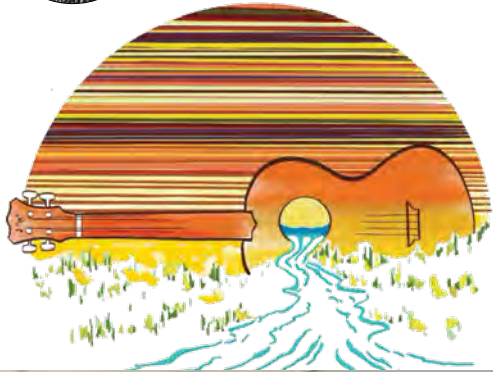
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Mentone Ukes Embracing Banjoleles



BY SANDRA MONK

(Reprint of an article submitted to the duke.com banjolele blog in Russell, New Zealand)

We are the Mentone Ukes from Mentone, Alabama, USA. In the welcome section of our web page, we declare ourselves to be “a small but enthusiastic amateur ukulele ensemble group. We meet to play, sing, and socialize together every other Saturday at 1 p.m. at the Moon Lake Community Library.” There are ukulele players of all ages, experience, and backgrounds. We always welcome newcomers and beginners to attend our sessions. We offer an individualized, hands-on introduction to the ukulele and a Beginners Packet to quickly get folks playing. There is no pressure, and we play all types of music, with members suggesting new songs. In addition, we have a growing collection of songs arranged by our group members on our website.

Members of Mentone Ukes play a variety of ukuleles, including soprano, concert, tenor, baritone, and an occasional bass. Over the past couple of years, a growing number of players have brought banjoleles to our group sessions, along with their standard ukes. We are up to six banjoleles in the group and usually have three to four players who play these instruments at the sessions. We enjoy playing folk, bluegrass, country, and gospel music, which lends itself to a banjo type of instrument. One of the group’s founders, Jerry Megli, was the first to begin playing a banjolele with the Mentone Ukes. Others followed suit with the purchase of this unique and fun old-time sounding ukulele over the past year and a half. Another member, Hank Allen, has developed a contagious picking pattern on the banjolele using arpeggios and syncopated rhythm as an introduction to some of our songs or a solo. Sandra Monk uses the rhythm of Kelly Trafford’s Paint Brush or Bluegrass Strum gleaned from the Four String Strummer Facebook



and YouTube instructional videos to back up other ukuleles on select songs. Ray Gower recently ended his blues session leading the group in a blues song with his banjolele. In our “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” themed session, Halee Odell played her banjolele with the twangy sweet harmony of a banjo and Lila Roberts added to the spirit of the session with enthusiasm for picking and strumming the banjo-sounding uke. As a diverse, inclusive group, we are incorporating the banjolele sound into our repertoire. It is remarkable how a variety of similar instruments with distinctive sounds can come together to make beautiful music.

It is an honor to play as an ensemble in the community upon request for festivals, senior luncheons, and farmer’s market concerts. Picking on the porch of the local hardware store has been a group and community favorite. The past three years, Mentone Ukes have provided traditional Christmas music for the town Christmas Tree Lighting event at the Mentone Inn. The tree lighting is a nostalgic event, with the town mayor and many of the residents in attendance. It is something like a Christmas movie, complete with Christmas

cookies, hot cocoa, cider, singing, and ukuleles of course.

The small town of Mentone has around 350 citizens. Twelve to twenty ukulele players show up for our Saturday sessions from Northeast Alabama, Northwest Georgia, and Southern Tennessee. Facebook and YouTube have been excellent sites to communicate and to stay up to date with the ukulele community in our area, as well as around the world. Jerry Megli stated that if all of our 312 Facebook members showed up at the library at one time it would be somewhat crowded. If a crowd should gather, the Mentone Uke players will move over some, make room to include everyone, and as our motto goes “strum and be happy.”

REFERENCES:

- » Four String Strummer. “Learn to Play Bluegrass Banjolele.” 13 January 2024, YouTube. Learn to Play Bluegrass Banjolele - Banjo Ukulele (youtube.com)
- » Coen, Joel, et al. O Brother, Where Art Thou? [Burbank, CA], Touchstone Home Video, 2001
- » Mentone Ukes. “Welcome.” Facebook 31, May 2024. mentoneukes.com

Cotton’s First Summer Vacation

BY C. G. “COTTON” RUNNELS

As I trotted down that mountain trail, I could hardly believe that only six months ago I was a motherless child living in the red clay under a Georgia stoop. All that changed when a kind couple collected me and fetched me to my new home in Montgomery.

Soon I was on vacation in Western North Carolina. I got up each morning and was allowed to run in the meadow, hunting for the critter friends that lived there. I would end my run down by the stream where I barked at the water as it rushed over the rocks. Sometimes my daddy drank his coffee by the stream and rubbed my belly as the birds chirped their soothing reveille.

After breakfast each morning, my folks planned the day’s adventure. Sometimes we went sightseeing and some days we hiked. We traveled to many waterfalls. Often humans stopped viewing the waterfalls and directed their attention to me. Daddy said I was a showstopper. Mother reminded me to be humble, that I was crafted by God just like all the wonderment that surrounded me. I liked it best when little children patted and hugged me. Their touch was different from anyone else’s. It was full of the wonder that I shared with them.

The best days were the ones when we went hiking. My mentor, A.B. Bear, taught me all about trail hiking. He made sure I seldom got more than a few yards ahead of my folks and always stayed on the trail. Bear encouraged me to look back often to make sure my humans were OK and to scout the trail ahead for any danger. We hiked along streams and often found waterfalls. I loved to drink the cold, clear mountain water, and it felt so good on the pads of my feet. Bear and I would leap from one slippery stream rock to the next until we had crossed the water. I tried to catch the water as it rushed between rocks but always ended up with a mouth full of nothing.

My folks always packed a trail lunch, and we all ate before we started the hike out of the woods. Bear and I got to eat Vienna sausages off a fork and drink bottled water from a dish. I am glad we rested, because my little legs were tired. The hike out was mostly uphill, but I soon forgot how tired I was as I embraced all the smells, sights, and sounds of the mountain woods.

In the evening I lay on the porch and listen to Mother and Father talk. Their voices were a comfort to me. The mountain air felt so cool on my face, and I heard sounds that I never heard during the daylight. The night was darker than any I have ever known, and I snoozed off as the fireflies twinkled. I dreamed each night of another full day with both my folks and my best friend, Bear. It was a wonderful holiday. Next year, I’ll be 1 year old and a big hound. I can hardly wait.

Everyone is invited to join in the fun! Our regular sessions in July will be held on Saturday, July 6 and 20, at 1 p.m. CDT at the Moon Lake Library. Newcomers and beginners of all ages are welcomed to attend. For more information, please contact Debra Fey (debrajfe@gmail.com) or Hank Allen (hank.d.allen@gmail.com). Find us on Facebook (Mentone Ukes) or on the web (www.mentoneukes.com).



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Summer Stories and Socials



BY ANNA MAE HORN

What a beautiful start to summer on the mountain! Plenty of people are taking advantage of the walking track during the cooler hours. Have you noticed the new flag? The Mentone Educational Resources Foundation (MERF) appreciates the Mentone Cub Scout Pack 4178 and Cubmaster Nathan Austin for replacing the flag at the Pathway to Community.

An exciting new feature is headed to the walking area this summer: StoryWalk, a series of interactive, educational digital panels that visitors can use to learn more about our natural surroundings. A StoryWalk will also be installed in Valley Head. If you have experience with StoryWalk or would like to be involved with this project, you're encouraged to contact MERF to volunteer in building and installing the podiums and other tasks. The StoryWalk project was created by Anne Ferguson of Montpelier, Vermont, and developed in collaboration with the Kellogg-Hubbard Library. Partial

funding for MERF's StoryWalk project supplies has been provided by the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

Seniors, join MERF for two more summer social/lunch events at Moon Lake Baptist Church from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., July 24 and August 21. Be there or be square!

On a personal note, over the past



(almost) two years, I have grown close to all the seniors at the lunches and made many new friends in my role with MERF. Working at Valley Head School and helping the teachers provide hands-on experiences for the students is dear to my heart.

Like MERF, my life has many layers and chapters in its story. I will soon be bookmarking this chapter

and moving on to the next. Notice, I did not say closing. MERF holds a special place in my heart, and I am honored to be part of it. I look forward to flipping back to the bookmark and occasionally volunteering and writing for "The Groundhog." Serving as executive director of MERF is a rewarding experience, and I appreciate the MERF board of directors for their help, patience, encouragement, and friendship along the journey.

In this issue, you'll find a MERF application for the next executive director. If you love enriching lives, helping students achieve, and chatting with local seniors, please apply. MERF has always accomplished great things, and even more wonderful opportunities are just around the corner. 🐻

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.



Cub Scout Pack 4178 replaced the US flag at the Pathway to Community. Left to right: Myles Battles, Baxter Austin, Hawkins Brown, Larkin Brown, Sawyer Brown, Cutter Battles, and Hunter Brown.

MERF welcomes new board members

BY KATHRYN NORRIS, MERF BOARD PRESIDENT

MERF is excited to announce the addition of three new members to our board of directors. These individuals bring various backgrounds and talents to the board, and are committed to our mission of supporting life-long learning in Mentone and Valley Head.

Adelaide Shamburger Drennen was a lifelong resident of Tuscaloosa before she and her husband moved to Lookout Mountain in May 2020. Adelaide is a landscape designer and consultant, having practiced in Tuscaloosa for 16 years before moving here. She loves plants, hiking, fishing, spending time with family, and cool mountain air. She and her dog and two cats live in Cloudland overlooking the Shinbone Valley.

Karen Vest has called Alabama home since 1994, and moved to a farm in Valley Head in 2016 with her husband, Charley. A retired Certified Paralegal, she was elected to the Valley Head town council in 2020. Vest was sworn in as Valley Head's first female Mayor in April 2024. An avid gardener, Karen loves the outdoors along with hiking and kayaking. She loves her family and enjoys her children and grandchildren visiting the farm.

Stephen V. Smith joined the board after months of supporting MERF's efforts with The Groundhog and is now its editor. His career spans more than three decades of publishing and marketing, including owning agencies with his wife and longtime business partner, Michele (who has designed The Groundhog since MERF acquired it). A native of DeKalb County, Stephen enjoys music, the arts, and spending time with his family (especially the couple's adorable grandson).

While welcoming these new board members, we want to acknowledge the contributions of recent outgoing board members. Kelly Wright offering valued insight as a Valley Head PTO parent. Carol Hazell brought MERF years of support and professional expertise. Walt Pullen served wholeheartedly while also faithfully volunteering to maintain the MERF grounds for years. Their contributions to MERF's work will always be appreciated. 🐻



Adelaide Shamburger Drennen



Karen Vest



Stephen V. Smith

Executive Director Job Search



MERF is in search of a new Executive Director. This is a great opportunity for a community-minded individual looking to apply their skills and experience to improving the quality of life and supporting life-long learning for citizens of all ages in the Mentone/Valley Head area.

MERF Executive Director Job Summary

The MERF Executive Director will direct all phases of the Mentone Educational Resources Foundation. This will include preparing for and attending monthly Board meetings, planning MERF activities, being present at MERF public events, and assisting the Board with raising funds. This is a part-time position that typically requires approximately 20 hours per week (some months will require more, some less).

The successful candidate will be a self-starter with the ability to work independently and within teams of volunteers and Board members. Bookkeeping experience is preferred, with an ability to manage financial records. The MERF Executive Director will be responsible for entering financial information into Quickbooks for Nonprofits and running financial reports as needed.

- Other Key Duties:**
- Oversee MERF educational services performed at Valley Head School, including coordination with the MERF art and music teacher (contractor)
 - Maintain office hours at the MERF House in Mentone; manage access to the MERF House and administer all maintenance needs
 - Maintain a calendar of events available to Board members and other key volunteers
 - Purchase MERF merchandise and distribute to retail locations
 - Plan and manage MERF events, including fundraising events and community festivals, as directed by the MERF Board
 - Submit grant applications and administer successful MERF grants to ensure performance and reporting requirements
 - Maintain MERF online presence, including the MERF web site, Facebook page, and other social media as needed

TO APPLY, please send your resume along with three references to Board President Kathryn Norris at knorris521@gmail.com and Vice President Tom MacMichael at tcmacm1980@gmail.com. Include "Executive Director Job Search" as your subject line.

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News and Upcoming Events

Mentone American Legion Post 215

BY BARRY MORTON

Convocation of Eagles

The New Oxford American Dictionary defines convocation as a large formal assembly of people. This is also what a large group of eagles is called, and our post has our own convocation. Here are Barry Morton's 1999 and 2002 Civilian Employee of the Year Awards from the Department of the Air Force computer organization in Montgomery, as well as the award that our Adjutant Claire Baroni won for completing the American Legion Basics Course. Congrats, Claire!



June 29

The post will set up a booth at the Rainsville Freedom Fest and hold a \$5 raffle for a \$250 Cabela's gift certificate.

July 4

Members will represent the post in the Henagar Parade and Car Show.

For up-to-date information on post activities, please visit our Facebook group page: Mentone American Legion.

Barry Morton is Commander of the American Legion Post 215.



St. Joseph's on-the-Mountain Fundraising Supper*

July 4, 2024
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July Community Events

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

July 3 • Fort Payne Fireworks Show • The show will be viewable from the Fort Payne Sports Complex and Fort Payne High School. Fireworks show only – no other activities taking place. Show should start around 8:45 p.m.

July 4 • Sand Mountain Potato Festival • Sand Mountain is well known for its rich diversity of agricultural products, including potatoes. Celebrate our heritage with live music, arts and crafts, entertainment, games, and fireworks. Event begins at 10 a.m. and culminates with a beautiful fireworks display. Call 256-657-6282 for information.

July 4 • Big Art Pop Up • Little River Art's Council will host an art show featuring local artists from 12-5 p.m. on the lawn of the Mentone Inn.

July 4 • Music for the People: The Locals • The 2024 Summer Music Series is a free event on the lawn at the Mentone Inn's Linger Longer Pavilion. Grab some good eats from the Fontastic Foods truck, bring your beverage of choice, and enjoy music under the stars with friends & family! 6-9 p.m. on grounds of the Mentone Inn.

July 5, 19 • Family Game Night • Moon Lake Library. Let's play games! We have people interested in Rummikub, Mexican Train Dominoes, Hearts, Scrabble and more. You're invited to bring a family favorite or try a new game. Bring a snack to share if you can. We also have some on hand, so don't let that stop you if you want to try Game Night!

July 5 • Congo Night Swim • Come out for an epic evening of swimming, music, and fun. Congo Falls inside Congo Falls Park will be lit up for a safe, fun environment. There will be a splash deck for extra fun and enjoyment. Reservations required. Limit 40 people per night swim. Private groups of 20 or more have the option to request specific dates. From 7-8 p.m. Call 256-996-0562 for reservations and information.

July 5, 6 • DeSoto State Park's Annual Independence Day Events • This free event is fun for both children & adults! Celebrate Independence Day and enjoy good old-fashioned fun. Participate in the Splish & Splash Pool Party and Flag-Making Contest, plus enjoy a chilly treat at the annual Ice Cream Social. For more information visit www.alapark.com/DSP-IndependenceDay

July 6 • Hike with a Naturalist • Hike with a Naturalist on Lower Two-Mile Trail in the Little River Canyon National Preserve. This hike is a challenging and steep half mile, not recommended for pets or those with difficulty climbing stairs and steep terrain. Bring plenty of water and/or sports drinks, snacks, hiking poles/staff (optional), sturdy shoes (open-toe shoes are not recommended). Meet at JSU's Little River Canyon Center on AL Hwy 35 at 10:30 a.m. We will caravan to the trailhead. Free and open to everyone! For details, call 256-845-3548.

July 6 • Beginner 101 Hike Guide for Newbies, Aqua Loop • If you are new to hiking or just need a refresher, this 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. Afterward, we will head out on a short, beginner-friendly hike to try out some of your new skills. Bring backpack with plenty of water, lunch, snacks, closed-toed shoes. 4 p.m. at DeSoto State Park. Meet at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. Free, but R.S.V.P. is required, so we know how many to expect.

July 6 • Yoga on the Brow • Begins at 9 a.m., weather permitting, at Brow Park. Donation class, no reservations, bring your own mat. Relaxing class for all levels. Taught by certified yoga teacher Janie Hale of Soul Shine Yoga Studio.

July 9-12 • Canyon Camp • Join us for Canyon Camp for hands-on environmental education, outdoor fun, arts, and the exploration of the natural world. Campers will explore the JSU Canyon Center, Little River National Preserve, and Desoto State Park. Registration is open to all 8- to 12-year-olds. For more information call 256-845-3548. Little River Canyon Center in Fort Payne. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Drop-off begins at 8:30 a.m. \$150/student. Registration required.

July 10, 24 • 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 mile total. Bring backpack with water and snacks. Closed-toed shoes. 10-11 a.m. at 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 here: <https://reserve.alapark.com/register/DSP-Forest-Tales>. This program is for grown-ups and their children. NO PETS, PLEASE.

July 10 • Ribbon Cutting – Avid Hotel • Join us as we celebrate the Grand Opening of Avid Hotel & Candlewood Suites. You can expect entertainment, a variety of food, beverages and amazing door prizes. 4-6 p.m.

July 12, 28 • Cherokee Ways of Knowing Ancestral Walk • Join DeSoto State Park Assistant Naturalist, Mirandi Watson, an excursion to learn about the Cherokee people and their cultural tie to the environment. Although the hike is considered moderate (because of the uneven, rocky terrain), we will be taking a slow walk through the woods. This program is perfect for beginners. 2-4 p.m. DeSoto State Park. Meet at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. Fee: Free, but RSVP is required. Due to the nature of this hike only thunderstorms will

cancel this event. Please dress accordingly.

July 12 • Music on the Mountain • Please join us for Music on the Mountain 2024 with Jason Crabb. Seating is General Admission for this event. Doors open 30 minutes prior to the show. Tickets are \$20. Show starts at 7 p.m. at the Tom Beville Lyceum on NACC campus <https://www.showclix.com/event/music-on-the-mountain-jason-crabb>

July 13 • 2nd Annual Blueberry Festival • There will be live music, food trucks, art vendors, kid crafts and farm tours. Blueberry Fall Farm, 331 Road 944 in Mentone. 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

July 13 • Daybreak Flatwater Paddle Trip • DeSoto State Park staff offers this relaxing guided morning paddle trip on scenic Little River. This trip is approximately 4 miles round trip on flatwater, under your own power and spans a 3- to 3.5-hour period. Includes kayak, paddle, and personal flotation device. What to bring: Appropriate clothing, 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 (tandem kayaks are available on a limited basis for \$50.00) Pre-registration closes July 9, 2024 at 5 p.m.

July 13 • Birding Hike 101 • Join JSU Field School Instructor Wess Everett, for an exciting journey on the Path to Learning, taking in every opportunity to learn more about the birds around. Bring a cell phone and download the Merlin app if you wish and discover what can be heard along the trails. All ages welcome. 10:30-11:30 a.m. Meet at the Littler River Canyon Center. We will hike the Path to Learning behind the Canyon Center. Free and open to everyone! For details, contact 256-845-3548.

July 13 • Nature Journey Journal Hike • Join naturalists and artists for this creative nature observation hike, combining art and nature! Learn how to keep your own nature journal while strolling along trails in DeSoto State Park. Will hike about a half mile to the West Fork of Little River and hang out for a while working on our nature journals with provided materials. For ages 8 to adult. The hike is considered moderate, because of the uneven, rocky terrain. Total 1½ mile loop. DeSoto State Park. Meet at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. Fee: \$5.00-includes all supplies. RSVP is required. 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

July 13 • 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. Meet at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. Free, but RSVP is required.

July 14 • Traditional Chair Weaving Workshop • Participants will discover how to weave a simple chair bottom, while learning the herringbone pattern using flat reed. This class is for ages 12 to adult. All materials and tools needed to complete this project will be provided. Wear comfortable, casual clothing (this craft can get messy), and bring a sack lunch if you wish. This workshop emphasizes the use of hand tools, students should have moderate hand strength. 10 a.m.–4 p.m. JSU's Little River Canyon Center-Fort Payne. \$150 supply fee. Pre-registration required by July 18. Space is limited to five participants. Pre-register by emailing Brittney Hughes at southernchick888@hotmail.com.

July 19 • Think Like a Naturalist Walk • Join DeSoto State Park Naturalist Brittney Hughes for an easy walk along the ADA-accessible Talmadge Butler Boardwalk Trail. Discover what can be observed and recorded using iNaturalist, a free app that can be used to record observations of all sorts of things – plants, animals, and even fungi. 10 a.m.-12 p.m. DeSoto State Park. Meet at DeSoto's Country Store on County Road 89. Free and open to everyone, no-pre-registration 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.

July 20 – 21 • Possibilities in Pastel • Join visiting artist/ instructor Micah Goguen as we explore fundamentals of pastels with an immersive experience of practical application. All materials are included (students only need to bring paper towels and an apron). No previous experience is required. Tuition is \$195 and limited to eight students. Call 256-674-3366 to register.

July 20 • Third Saturday Sunset Cruise-In • Join us for 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.

July 20 • Civilian Conservation Corps History Hike: Trailside Shelter Along Little River • Join DeSoto State Park staff on a moderate hike to the trailside shelter located on the West Fork of Little River. Learn how theCivilian Conservation Corps constructed the original structures built in the mid 1930s that you can still see in the park today. Moderate hike along rocky terrain. Approximately 1.10 miles round trip. Meet at DeSoto's Country Store on County Road 89. Free and open to everyone, no pre-registration required. Weather dependent, please call the Lodge at 256-845-5380 beforehand to check status of walk. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details.

July 20 • Meandering Moonlight Guided Paddle • DeSoto State Park staff offers this relaxing guided moonlight paddle trip on scenic Little River. Enjoy this flatwater paddle as the sun goes down and the full moon comes up. This trip is approximately 4

miles round trip on flatwater, spans a 3 to 3.5-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 & 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) \$30.00 for single kayak rental (2 person-tandem kayaks are available on a limited basis for \$50.00) Pre-registration closes July 16th. Pre-registration: <https://forms.office.com/g/pF4Td672Ks>.

July 20 • Brother Cane at The Back Forty Ballroom • Brother Canes 30th Anniversary Tour is coming to the Back Forty Ballroom on July 20th at 7 p.m. with special guest Jon Player. Don't Miss It! You can purchase your tickets now at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/.../brother-cane-concert....> Vintage 1889 Fort Payne Alabama

July 20 • Park After Dark Night Walk • Join DeSoto State Park staff to get to know the park after dark! Terrain is rocky and moderate, closed toed shoes are preferred. Approx. 1 mile. More suitable for ages 8 to adult. Meet at DeSoto's Country Store on County Road 89. Free and open to everyone, no pre-registration required. Weather dependent, please call the Lodge at 256-845-5380 beforehand to check the status of the hike. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details.

July 20 • Yoga on the Brow • Begins at 9 a.m., weather permitting, at Brow Park. Donation class, no reservations, bring your own mat. Relaxing class for all levels. Taught by certified yoga teacher Janie Hale of Soul Shine Yoga Studio.

July 21 • May's Gulf Songwriter Series V • May's Gulf will be at the Little River Canyon Center featuring original music from Grace Pettis and Robby Hecht. Tickets \$25 in advance, \$30 the day of the show. Limited seating so make reservations early. Coolers welcome. This is a rain or shine event. 2 to 4 p.m.

July 25 • 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. Bring water and/or sports drink, snacks, hiking poles/staff (optional), sturdy shoes (open toe shoes are not recommended). If the weather is questionable, please check with the park before leaving home. Please make every effort to arrive early or on time. 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

July 26 • Windows to Nature: Fairy Houses • “Build them and the fairies will come!” Join Renee S. Raney, Alabama State Parks Chief of Interpretation, and the author of the book Hairy, Scary, but Mostly Merry Fairies: Curing Nature-Deficit Disorder through Folklore, Imagination, and Creative Activities for a workshop filled with fairy stories and “leave in the woods” natural fairy house building. All children must be accompanied by an adult. Space is limited. Time: 10 a.m.-noon. DeSoto State Park. CCC Pavilion in Picnic Area, across from the Country Store. Fee: \$10 per participant. Ages 7 to 107. Pre-registration is required, as space is limited. Info: <https://reserve.alapark.com/register/DSP-Fairy-Houses>

July 26 • Plant Discovery Walk • July Blooms Plant Discovery Walk in the H. Stanley Sims Native Plant Area. Join DeSoto State Park Staff for a meandering walk in the park, taking in every opportunity to learn more about the natural world. All ages welcome. Easy terrain, approx. 1 mile. 4-6 p.m. DeSoto State Park. Meet outside DeSoto's Lodge. 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.

July 26 • The French Family Band • The French Family Band will perform at the Mentone Arts Center on Friday, July 26, 7-9 p.m. Seating is limited. Admission is \$30 per person and must be purchased in advance. Call 256-674-3366 to reserve your seats!

July 26 • Campfire Talk: Winged Wonders: Moths • DeSoto State Park Campground 8 p.m.

July 27 • Fourth Saturday Cruise-In • Come to Valley Head for this first monthly event. Cruise in with a vehicle to show off or bring a chair to sit and watch them cruise in. This is a free community event; restaurants will have food available for purchase. Come on out and see what's happening in Valley Head.



THE FOOD PANTRY at St. Joseph's on-the- Mountain Episcopal Church is open every Wednesday to Mentone/ Valley Head/ Hammondville residents from 9-11 a.m.

We do close four Wednesdays a year. (Holy Week, World's Longest Yard Sale Week, Thanksgiving Week and Christmas Week.) We also welcome pantry volunteers and donations. For questions, call 256-634-4476.



July Birthdays & Anniversaries

1 JohnTyler Lawton Marilyn Slaton Patrick Coots August Shanklin Patrick Long Nicholas King Allie Cowart Terry Hutcheson Jessica Hartline	Marcus Crider LaShae Jones Zoe Moon Cassie Battles Corey Powell	Jeffrey Hopper Park Nelson Michele Walsh Paul Crawford Teena Bain Bella Harrison Ava Harrison Dylan Flannigan Sheila Meadows Courtney Stone Owlan Headrick Jessi Hairston Johnny Yarbrough Audrey Baber	Danny Cross Anna Bush Avery May Kilgore	Austin Cuzzort Jenny Lewchuk Tyler Filmore Martha Harris Lane Owen Josephine Blalock	1 Casey & Tracy Cartwright
2 Karen Potts Byrum Emory Virgil Battles Corey Wilbanks Jenny Gak Kayleigh Smith	8 Daniel Phillips Kathy Gray Eian Bain Doug Kiker Donna Bailey Sheila Smith Stacey Clark Nina Sizemore	15 Jason Dean Tatum Lanier Paul Zulker Will Battles Chelsea Stephenson Lana Harris Lexi West Chasity Williams	20 Becky Langston Lindsay Black Bailee Carter Jeff Clure Craig Hulgan Paul Whittle Jason Cyrus James Rhodes Judy Dowiat	26 Claire Wilkinson Gracie Carol Butler Megan Smith Maggie Chaney	2 Ladon & Donna Willingham
3 Nick Black Jared Webb Allison Powell Josh Rosson Craig Hughes Mason Tubberville Reba Coleman Johnnie Lewchuk Randy Fowler Luke Milford Kobe Hill Sarah Koering Jerry Lewis Holli Helms	9 KayLee Kilgore Skylor Dutton Mia Woods Braylie Callahan Eli Goggans Mike Goggans Herbie Thorpe	16 Nathan Hargrove Margie Daniel Tricia Shankles Kendall Shankles Johnny” Dennis Lewchuk	21 Kevin Cash Blake Woods Tonya Hilyer Paxton Harper Brianna Powell Peggy Johnston Tony Hammonds Gwen White Randy Mitchell	27 Dexter Smith Kelley Money John David Nelson Johnny Eberhart Kailey Cameron Brooks Tarvin Harrison Hairel Hudson Hairel	3 Brooks & Haley Moore
4 Jack Carden Bennett (BJ) Browder Deb Smith Ashley Hulgan Lana Miller Corey Dupree	10 Steve Lanier Addison McClure Ryan Tramel Caroline Baty	17 Elijah Collins Christopher Black Valerie Burt Justin Battles Waylon Burton Nolan Stinson Kristen Wilborn Hannah Carden Donna Spears Ruby Stalvey Annabelle Shankles Harper Ashley	22 Linda Clark Ian Hilyer Emily Norman Charlie Runnels Jordan McGinnis Marquetta Dobbins	28 Debbie Flannigan Kelly Owen Sam Shanklin	7 Charles Robert & Angie Hammon Justin & Jamie Shankles
5 Steven McElhaney Chris Underwood Seth Williams Donna Smith Harper Brownfield Thomas Wright	11 Kanissa Young Brooklyn Carroll Lacie Keith Kori Willingham Dylan Carter Garrett Collins Moses Sharp Bodie Smith	18 Loy Langston Lily Cash Kaye Kiker Stone Cross Laura Catherine Moon Nicki Barksdale	23 Amanda Smith Taylor Blalock Logan Chambers Emmie Chambers Reid Davis Marc Pardue Chris McMahan Sandra Ward Jim Pullen Bayle Money Jack Goss Emma Spraggins Marian Owen Ashlee Vaughn	29 Jax Cyrus Eli Shanklin Trip Battles Kayla Hamilton Regina Boatwright	9 Al & Vickie Blackburn Tim & Kay Bryan
6 Dawson Crow Nikki Wheat Dustin Burt Corey Powell	12 Charles Gray Cindy Harrison Abby Boatwright Juliegh McKenzie John Walters	19 Coleton Reed	24 Phyllis Bailey	30 Zack Dean Zach Bain Rachel Collins Corey Baker Hunter Battles Matt Lee	10 Corey & Brandy Dupree
7 Jim Blalock	13 Jordan Goza Sissy Crider Brody Battles Myles Battles Tracie Totherow Ronnetta Bullington John Luke Durham		25 Rylee Richey Bill Berry Jeremy Webb Kali Haynes	31 Paige Hill Gunnar Elkins Koopar Elkins Bella Smith Ed Porter	12 Jimmy & Maci Gibson
	14 Will Blackburn Dave Vest				13 John Paul & Teresa Verdon
					14 Ryan & Kristy Pridmore
					15 Nick & Kelly Floyd
					16 Anthony & Morgan McKenzie
					18 Zach & Tamara Bain
					20 Charles & Amanda Gray
					21 Cleve & Ann Chisenhall
					22 Eddy & Karan Bolton Larry & Sally Johnson
					23 John & Alisha Lawton Craig & Greta Hall
					24 Jamie & Gequetta Darwin Don & Yvonne Brock Jerry & Darlene Floyd
					25 Donald & Karen Saferite
					27 Trey & Allison Kincer
					29 Heath & Amy Jones



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Firmly Planted, Forward Moving (continued from page 1)



Artist Deedee Morrison shared her vision of the new sculpture “Firmly Planted, Forward Moving.” Photo by Rhett Bentley, Thrive Regional Partnership



A large crowd gather at the Moon Lake campus to celebrate the ribbon cutting for the new Sculpture Garden. Photo by Mikel Yeakle



Alabama Speaker of the House Nathaniel Ledbetter said public art projects can be important economic drivers, and congratulated Mentone and LRAC for their efforts.

schoolhouse was central to life in Mentone as an elementary school until the county school system closed it in 2021 after enrollment no longer supported operating costs.

“We’ve seen our fair share of trauma in Mentone,” Morrison said. “And I think public art gives us the ability to transcend language in a way. When you attach a narrative and an understanding of where the art came from, it deeply impacts the response of the community towards the art, because they’re invested and they’ve understood the narrative and development of it.”

The project was coordinated by the Little River Arts Council and funded in part by the Lyndhurst Foundation. “The essence of our arts and culture program at Lyndhurst is to assist our neighboring communities in identifying and celebrating those assets that are unique and authentic, and speak to the character and quality of their people and place,” said Benic M. “Bruz” Clark III, president of the foundation. “The interconnectedness of the historic elementary school, the iconic oak tree, the arts center, and Morrison’s sculpture with its symbolism of stability, change,

and symbiosis exemplifies how public art can provide meaning, wholeness, and joy to the human experience.”

Juli Jordan, president of LRAC, thanked the Lyndhurst Foundation for its generous grant, as well as Pat Martin, who created the overall plan and guided the landscape company and sub-contractors to achieve LRAC’s vision.

“Our Mayor Rob Hammond personifies the motto of this campus,” Jordan said in thanking the Town of Mentone. “He is firmly planted in the history of Mentone, while being a forward-moving leader who works hard to bring stability and progress to our town. We are likewise grateful to Public Works Director Paul Nail, who can do just about anything and do it with a smile on his face.”

Hammond introduced Alabama Speaker of the House Nathaniel Ledbetter, who was on hand to support the Arts Council on the project. Ledbetter acknowledged the impact public art has on tourism, economic development, and a community’s quality of life.

To cap the celebration, Mentone Mayor Rob Hammond introduced Dr. David Campell, President of Northeast Alabama Community College, who

announced that the college would begin offering classes at the campus this fall.

The crowd enjoyed refreshments provided by LRAC and a tour of the shops and galleries located on campus. This included the new Little River Art Gallery, a space recently renovated by LRAC to highlight and sell works by local artists along with Arts Council merchandise.

“What a fantastic day,” Morrison said. “When you study our oak tree, it’s a community of species. That tree shelters and protects all of these various species that benefit from it. And so it’s an ecosystem, which is exactly what Mentone is trying to create on the Moon Lake campus — an ecosystem that benefits all species in the surrounding environment.

“Pollinators require plants and flowering species to exist,” she added. “One can’t exist without the other. So it’s an incredible, balanced relationship creating a closed-loop system where everyone in the system benefits. That’s an imperative part, I think, of what public art can bring to a community, a collaborative environment that brings everyone together.”



The sculpture “Firmly Planted, Forward Moving” features pollinators indigenous to the region. Photo by Rhett Bentley, Thrive Regional Partnership

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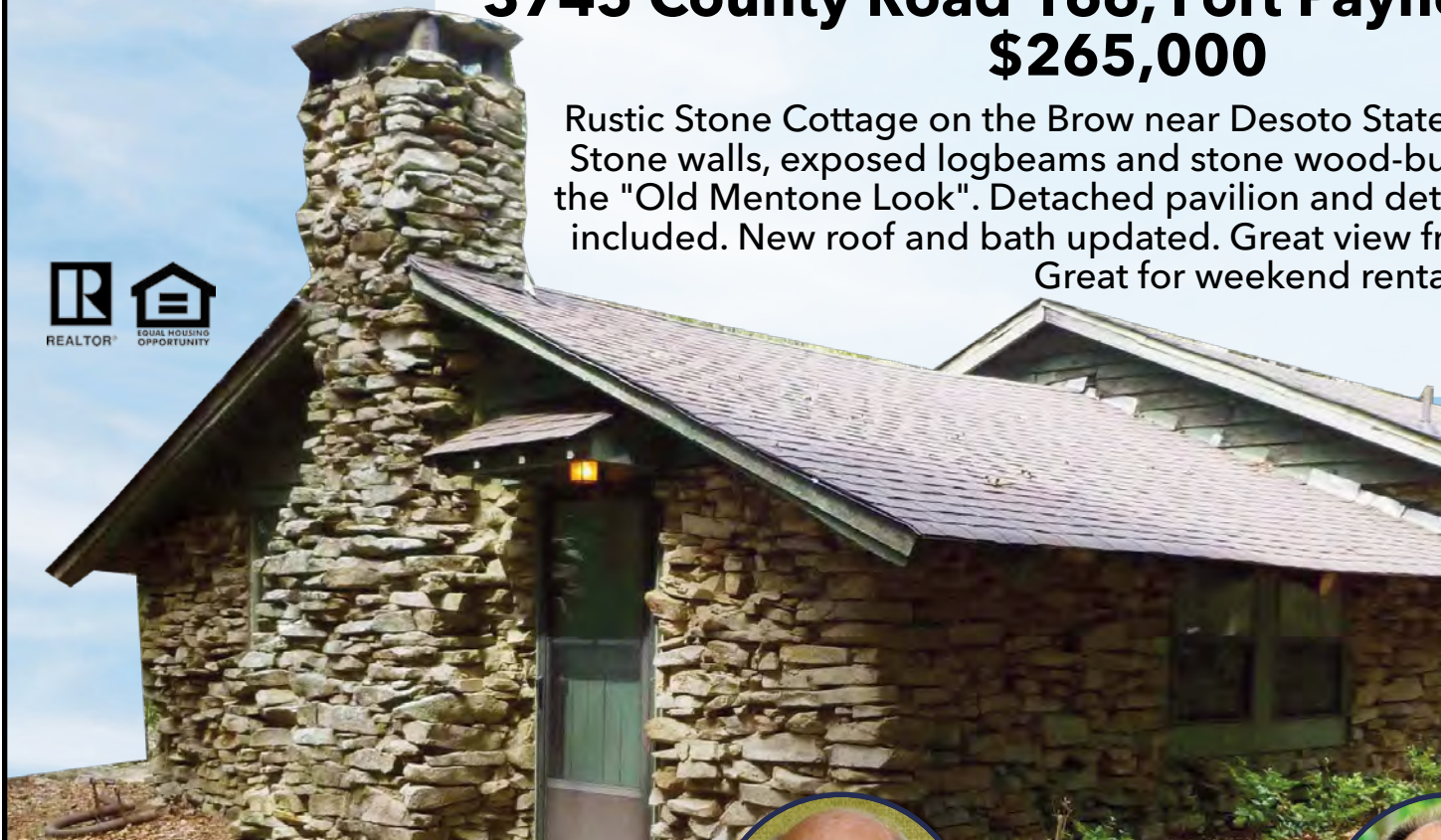


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Valley Head Coaches (continued from page 4)

team to the state finals four times, including a bronze medal in 1997, and guided the volleyball team to the state playoffs in 1995 and 1996.

Despite all the wins and accolades, Holloway said the best legacy he can leave is “to make my kids, grandkids, and great-grandkids proud.”

JAMIE PHILLIPS VEST

Through dedication and determination, 1994 Valley Head graduate Jamie Phillips Vest proved small beginnings can lead to big accomplishments during her basketball career.

Vest grew up in a sports-loving family. In elementary school, she often practiced with her older sister’s basketball team, which their father coached. Even at a young age, she found herself always drawn to basketball.

“I wanted to do anything my sister did,” she said. “My dad and the lady that helped him coach always talked about how good I could be. I was always shooting basketball in my spare time. So, through getting to practice with the high school team, I realized this was my dream. I knew what I wanted to do before I reached seventh grade, and I was determined to make that happen no matter what it took.”

Vest played any type of ball she could



Jamie Phillips Vest was a powerful player. Photo courtesy of Southern Torch

in her younger days, from “baseball with the boys” to soccer with girls from other schools. However, she said, “my heart was always with basketball.”

Vest helped her junior high team win the area championship in seventh grade and the Junior High DeKalb County Championship in eighth grade. She also played on the varsity basketball team starting in seventh grade. She became a starter in her first year by a lucky draw. Only four girls showed up for practice the day before a game against Fyffe. The coach named those four as starters and the other girls drew to be the fifth starter. Jamie had been sick the day before, but she drew the right paper and received the chance to start for the first time.

During her junior year, the Valley Head varsity girls basketball team won the DeKalb County Championship for the first and only time in school history. Through high school, Vest also excelled at softball, volleyball, and cheerleading. However, legendary basketball coach Bobby Holloway encouraged her during her junior year to focus on basketball.

“Whatever coach told me to do, I was going to do it,” she said. “Bobby Holloway saw something special in me from the first time he came to Valley Head, and he helped me become the ballplayer



Bobby Holloway and Jamie Phillips Vest at the 2024 DeKalb County Sports Hall of Fame induction ceremony. Photo courtesy of Southern Torch

I became. He was very hard on me and pushed me outside my comfort zone. Now I see how much it helped me not only in basketball but also in life. I will forever be thankful that Coach Holloway coached me throughout my high school years.”

Vest was inducted into the DeKalb County Sports Hall of Fame last month alongside Holloway.

During her senior year, the Valley Head varsity girls basketball team narrowly missed winning the state championship.

“I will always think we should’ve won that game, but we fell short,” she said. “It was a heartbreaker for sure.”

Nevertheless, she remembers her dad waiting for her after the game with a big smile and a hug. She is thankful for her parents’ support over the years.

“My parents always pushed me to work hard and never made things easy for me,” she said.

Vest also credits God with her success and said she leaned heavily on the Bible verse from Phillippians 4:13 as motivation. 🙏



Jamie Phillips Vest Photo courtesy of Southern Torch

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