



THE GROUNDHOG

“Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain”

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

A ‘Tasteful’ Evening of Art and Dining

by Anna Mae Horn

Masterpieces of artwork from MERF’s Fine Arts Program at Valley Head Elementary School will be the talk of the town for the next month! It’s time again for MERF’s annual Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction at Camp Skyline’s dining hall. We hope you will join us on Saturday, April 6 for an evening of dining and art. Tickets will go on sale Friday, March 1. We recommend purchasing tickets as soon as possible to secure a seat at this sell-out event.

Ms. Paula Easter is a long-time area school art teacher who masterfully leads the arts program at Valley Head School. She works with the students regularly, engaging them in many creative projects. This year, the students have created individual art pieces, and also helped paint a mural in the classroom. Local artist, Lacy Hope, worked with the students to brighten up the classroom by designing a mural inspired by artist Mary Blair’s design of Disney’s “It’s a Small World.”

It has been proven that art classes provide so much more than instruction. Art inspires creativity, strengthens problem solving skills, enables thought



process development and offers an outlet for stress and emotions. At the art auction, you will be delighted to see the level of creativity unleashed by students representing grades K-6.

Local artists, such as Lydia Randolph and Barbara Umland, continue to generously contribute fabulous pieces of work for this event. MERF appreciates the support of every artist who donates their valuable work so that we may continue enriching lives through art and educational experiences. We look forward to highlighting all donors very soon.

(continued on page 2)



Scenes from last year's event

Valley Head Senior Beta Talents Shine at State Convention

by Rhonda Lasser, Sponsor

Members of the Valley Head Senior Beta Club attended the Alabama State Senior Beta Convention on February 14-16, 2024, at the Renaissance Convention Center in Montgomery, Alabama. Convention gives members the chance to interact with other Betas from across the state, to share project ideas, and to showcase their talents.

In addition to participating in convention activities, Valley Head Senior Betas competed in a variety of academic, visual arts, and club competitions. Out of 15 total competitions, Valley Head Senior Betas placed in the top three in nine, earning invitations to compete at the National Senior Beta Convention this summer on June 16-19, 2024, in Savannah, Georgia. Of the nine national convention berths, seven students placed first and earned the title of state champion.

Valley Head Senior Betas worked together to win an invitation to the national convention in two categories. A unique tshirt look tied for second place in Apparel Design. The Service Learning Showcase, which highlights both the theme and service projects for the year, won top honors.

Division I Winners (9th & 10th Grade)

- Carley Collins – First Place and State Champion, Sculpture
- Annabelle Gifford – First Place and State Champion, Mixed Media

Division II Winners (11th & 12th Grade)

- Catherine Gifford – First Place and State Champion, Drawing
- Makayla Gilbert – First Place and State Champion, Black and White Photography
- Johnny Mann – First Place and State Champion, Digital Art
- Chance Pearson – First Place and State Champion, Woodworking
- Brant Smith – Third Place, Agriscience

Club Competition Winners

- Apparel Design – Second Place
- Service Learning Showcase – First Place and State Champion



VHS Senior Beta Apparel Design - Second Place



First Place VHS Senior Beta Service Learning Showcase



First Place Senior Beta Service Learning Showcase
Front row, left to right: Makayla Gilbert, Annabelle Gifford, Charity Smith, Carley Collins, and Sadie Young.
Back row, left to right: Kolby Dupree, Chance Pearson, and Brant Smith



Congratulations to Valley Head Junior Beta

by Christi Black

The Valley Head Junior Beta Club attended the state convention in Montgomery, Alabama on February 12-14, 2024. Valley Head Junior Beta students competed in an array of events that included academics, visual arts, performing arts, and team competitions. Valley Head had eighteen students in grades 4-8 that attended the convention. Competitions at the state level are divided into an Elementary Division (grades 4-5) and Junior Division (grades 6-8). Valley Head Junior Beta did their school proud by coming home with 31 placements at the state level, with 7 of those being state champions. Each of these 31 placements will get to move on to compete at the national level this summer in Savannah, Georgia. Congratulations Valley Head Junior Beta!!

Club Competitions Winners:

- Accessorized Design Elementary – 2nd Place
- Apparel Design Elementary – Champion
- Marketing and Communication Elementary – 2nd Place
- Musicology Elementary – 5th Place
- Musicology Junior – 5th Place
- Performing Arts Trio Variety Act – 3rd Place
- Service Learning Showcase Elementary – 2nd Place

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The Groundhog

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

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Groundhog woodcut courtesy of Meg Justice/Bee Spring Studio

Oral History Night: Bob Baty

Tuesday, March 19, at 6 p.m.
at Moon Lake Baptist Church

Bob Baty, 82, is a member of one of Mentone’s oldest multi-generational families and nephew of local author John Baty. His father’s sawmill was a local landmark for decades. Bob is looking forward to sharing some of his favorite stories and childhood memories on Tuesday, March 19, at 6 p.m. at Moon Lake Baptist Church. He will be interviewed by Max Mitchell, who is the daughter of artist Lucy Mitchell and married to Rickey Baty, one of Bob’s cousins. Bob is known for his good humor, so this should be a fun evening. The event is open to the public and free of charge.

Did you know?

Alabama’s official state bird is the Northern Flicker (nicknamed the Yellowhammer)



The “yellowhammer” or Northern Flicker was designated the official state bird of Alabama in 1927. Alabama is the only state that recognizes a woodpecker as their state bird. Unlike most woodpeckers, the yellowhammer often feeds on the ground. The yellowhammer has been a symbol of Alabama since the Civil War.

Source: encyclopediaofalabama.org/quick-facts and statesymbolsusa.org

Mentone Matters

by Mayor Rob Hammond

Saturday, April 6 is the date for the annual litter pick-up in the Mentone area. Volunteers will meet Lyle Nicely at 9:00 a.m. in the parking lot of the Mentone Inn. An appreciation lunch will be served afterwards at the Linger Longer Pavilion, Mentone Inn.

Litter has become a huge problem not only in Mentone but all over DeKalb County. This makes a terrible first impression on visitors, businesses wanting to locate here, and families considering moving here. Simply, we are not being good stewards of some of God’s most beautiful creation. We are blessed to be living in area filled with natural beauty. We are not showing much appreciation for it.

To address this issue, we would urge all property owners to keep the right-of-way picked up in front of their property. We are also asking that organizations



and individuals volunteer to adopt-a-mile on AL-117 and surrounding county roads. It is not a complicated process but takes some time to get approval. If you are interested in learning more about adopting a mile, please contact Lyle Nicely 256-996-0169. 🍷

From the Editor Firmly Planted, Moving Forward

by Anna Mae Horn

“Firmly planted, moving forward.” This Moon Lake School motto encapsulates a great deal more of Mentone than the school. In fact, this motto can be seen throughout this issue.

Even as it is being transformed for the future, the treasured school building has remained firm for the businesses that now occupy it. The Little River Arts Council will install a sculpture in front of Moon Lake Village this year that will physically portray those values.

The Mentone Springs Hotel, our Grand Old Lady, stood firm for 130 years, sometimes strongly holding her own while waiting for the right owner to move her forward. The hallowed ground there anticipates just the right plans to bring it back to life.

MERF has been firmly planted for over 30 years, yet is always looking ahead to the future educational needs of the community. A move by students to Valley Head School has meant an expanded area in which to enrich lives.

The students at Valley Head School have a firm pride in their alma mater just as generations before them. Yet, they move forward toward their goals by making academic achievements.

The Mentone Arts Center is fairly new, but the root system is strong. It has good art, good programs, and good community involvement. It is expanding programs, growing artists, and encouraging musicians with open arms.

Firmly planted are the roots of the town itself. Generations have shared their lives together here, on the same soil as those who came before them. We treasure this as a community. We share our stories, and we listen to other stories, especially during oral history nights. We document our history while looking forward to what will one day become history. Newcomers who are just now putting down roots are appreciating the history while sharing new energy with those around them. All the energy blends together to propel the entire community forward while holding a fond remembrance of what has firmly established its roots.

As spring comes around, firm roots will deliver nutrients for flowers to bloom. So, too, may your roots give you growth as the year passes. May you stand firm as the strong winds of March bring forward the fresh air of new life and new things to come. 🍷

Tasteful Evening (continued from page 1)

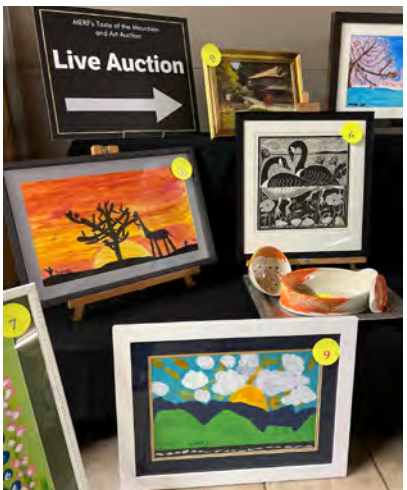
Again this year, we will offer unique ‘experience’ items for auction. How would you like to stay overnight in a storybook castle? Perhaps you prefer having a talented chef prepare a meal in your own home. There will be some unique experience offerings you don’t want to miss.

Of course, an equal highlight of the evening is our wonderful area restaurants and business food donors. Each will prepare a popular menu item or create a special item just for this event. Local food prepared by local hands and hearts never disappoints, but rather sets things up for a wonderful evening of dining with friends and neighbors, all the while supporting our local arts and educational programs. This delicious meal will be included in your ticket price. MERF greatly appreciates the tasteful art graciously presented each year by dedicated food donors and servers. Many of these area restaurants and business food donors support the MERF Senior Lunch program throughout the year. They are

steadfast in their dedication to MERF and its causes.

MERF’s mission is to enrich learning by coordinating resources. Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction is the epitome of this mission. Members of the community come together to make things happen. Artists, food providers, volunteers donating time and skills; sponsors donating goods, services, and a space for this all to take place are what it takes for MERF to reach our goals for supporting our community. The Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction event enriches both the body and soul. The result is a closer, happier, and more productive community. We look forward to seeing you there.

Tickets go on sale Friday, March 1 and are \$50 each. You can purchase online at MERFhouse.org, at the MERF house Mondays and Fridays from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., by phone at 256-635-8775 or at the Mentone Market (cash or check only). To ensure comfortable space between guests, fewer seats will be sold this year. Get yours before they are gone! 🍷



Scenes from last year’s event



Whiskers & Granny

Whiskers and Granny represent those who have lived in these parts (or places like this) all their precious lives. They are related to almost everybody around, and they surely do have tales to tell! If you have a good ol' fashion tale that's been passed down, we'd love to share it here. Please change the names to protect the embarrassed. See page two for contact information.

Fathers of young children sometimes take joy in teasing their children, and Whiskers was no exception. There were a couple of times that his daughter was terribly upset with him. When she was a teenager, she was known to stay up too late on Saturday nights... One Sunday afternoon, she went to bed for a nap and to catch up on some sleep. It was wintertime, during the school year, and Whiskers came in to wake her up at just about dark, around 6:00 p.m., because it was suppertime. But... he TOLD her that she had slept all afternoon, all night, and that it was time for her to come and eat breakfast and catch the bus to school. She couldn't believe she had slept so long! But it looked like it was getting to be close to daylight outside, so she gathered her books, got dressed, brushed her hair and was all ready to catch the bus. But when she went into the living room "Wonderful World of Disney" was on the TV. (Sponsored by Mutual of Omaha-can you hear the music?) Whiskers laughed and laughed at how mad his daughter was. Eventually, it was funny to her too, but not that day. 🐿

Working on a farm there are always chores to be done, animals to be fed and watered, gates and doors to be opened and closed, animals to be let in or out of pens and houses... One day Whiskers killed a snake in the chicken house, laid the dead snake stretched out in the trail up to the chicken house, and told his daughter to go and open the gate and let the birds out into their lot. His obedient daughter trotted up across the yard, barefooted of course, ALMOST stepped on the snake and ran screaming back to the house "Daddy, there's a snake! Daddy!" And Whiskers was sitting in the yard laughing and laughing . Daddies can be so pesky sometimes. 🐿

Linda Burns told about her jokester daddy, Bill Pullen, and the reaction he got out of her one Easter Sunday morning. People around here usually like to get a new outfit to wear to church for Easter Sunday. Well, the Pullens had staircase children, and Bill would get ready first, then go and get in the truck with one cleaned up and dressed child and as Grace got the others ready for church, she would send them to Bill in the truck, so they would stay clean until church time. This memorable Easter Sunday morning when Bill Pullen came downstairs, he had on a white dress shirt with a hideous bow tie, new overalls, and a red bandana tied on his head for his hat. When Linda saw him, she CRIED and said, "Oh, Daddy, please, please don't wear that to church! You will embarrass us, Daddy!" Bill Pullen laughed and laughed because he teased her into thinking that was his Easter Sunday outfit! 🐿

Vann-McCary Scholarship Deadline Announced for 2024

by Tom MacMichael

To all local college-bound students: spring means time to apply for scholarships! St. Joseph's on-the-Mountain Episcopal Church is accepting applications for students planning to attend college in the fall. Now is the time to get excited and motivated to do what you can to secure the education that will fulfill your goals and dreams! The Vann-McCary Scholarship Committee is excited to continue partnering with students from the Mentone / Valley Head area. You can be a high school senior, a returning student, or an adult student looking to widen your horizons. The application is simple and direct. Students will have a chance to talk about their dreams and how they would like to make them happen. Recipients often qualify for multiple years! The Committee will consider level of financial need, academic achievements to date, and clarity of educational goals as part of this application.

We invite prospective students to submit an application for the Vann-McCary Scholarship NOW. The deadline is April 25, 2024. Application packets are preferred to be completed online at stjom.church. If online submittal is not an option for you, packets are also available at St. Joseph's on-the-Mountain Episcopal Church, 21145 Scenic Hwy, Mentone, AL 35984, and Valley Head High School, 235 1st Ave, Valley Head, AL 35989. If you have questions or need more information, you can call the church office at 256-634-4476, or Tom MacMichael, Scholarship Chairperson, at 540-797-4392. 🐿



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MENTONE BLUFFS CABIN Under Construction - Check out this cabin located just north of Mentone. 1 BD, 1BA & loft area. Front porch is the perfect place to sit & see the views and amazing sunsets! \$249,900 #21842209



BROWZZING FOR SALE on the brow of Mentone atop Lookout Mountain overlooking a panoramic view of the valley! This stately home has many extras. Has a gated entrance & circle driveway. \$1,350,000. #21844207



ROCK TOP ESTATES HOME located within a tenth of a mile of Desoto State Park; 3 BD, 3 BA, 2 Kitchens & 2 Living Rooms! \$349,000. #21849988

LOTS & LAND

MIDDLE FORK of Little River. Approx. 6 acres. \$48,900. #1034997

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GREAT POSSIBILITIES WITH AN AMAZING VIEW! This 2.3 BROW lot is a great location for your dream home. \$350,000. #21844211

BROW LOT W/ A PANORAMIC VIEW Don't hesitate, just move forward with building your dream home! \$195,000. #21844213

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GREAT POSSIBILITIES! This Mentone property offers road frontage on Cove Road in the business/alcohol district. A rare opportunity as this is one of very few available vacant lots in this area. Also adjoins a lot that fronts AL Hwy 117. #1801378

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UNIQUE CABIN NEAR COMPLETION! 1 BD & 1 BA in Valley View Forest - Little River Canyon! Plus, a 10x16 solar powered bunk cabin can be used for extra guests. New split unit allows comfortable temperatures and on the cold mountain nights- warm your toes with a wood burning heater! A wet weather stream provides a seasonal waterfall and relaxing sounds from the covered front porch or side grilling porch to allow Back to Nature Living! #21842585



CEDAR TREE FARM mini farm features 13 acres of beautiful pasture, stocked pond, large barn and a whimsical cabin built with vintage style! Move in Ready! \$399,000 #21851694

NEWLY REMODELED HOME! Do you enjoy Little River Canyon? Now is your chance to live very close! Newly remodeled home including, new kitchen granite countertops, tile backsplash, light fixtures, lots of storage, interior and exterior paint, concrete sidewalk, landscaping and the list continues!! 3 LARGE Bedrooms / 2 Bathrooms with a Large Laundry Room that could be used for an office, hobby, craft or exercise room. #21842139



Is it Really the Luck of the Irish?

by deJoly LaBrier

Are we born lucky or unlucky? Or are we born innocent, curious, open, loving, and defenseless? As we move through life, our defenses are mustered by how our family, school, religions, governments, and all sorts of other elements begin to influence our beliefs about the world we live in. The portal of our openness to all that we could receive from the Universe begins to grow smaller. The truth is that we are all born with the capacity to have all that exists within us and outside of us.

Sacred scriptures say that we are created in the image of God, or the All That Is. Can a sacred entity be unlucky or lucky?

For many centuries, humans have seen good fortune as an external experience. If the guy next door came into some money or he won at the races, he was considered lucky, implying that he had no control over these events. It was like a fairy godmother/ godfather came and waved their magic wands over “certain special” people, and they miraculously came into good fortune.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), poet, philosopher, and polymath, once said, “The winds of grace are always blowing, but it is you that must raise your sail.” It means that luck, or good fortune, exists like energy. (Sound waves exist whether we see them or not.) And it is up to us to build the sail to catch the wind, so to speak.

In 1948, a movie called Luck of the Irish, with Tyrone Power and Anne Baxter, came out. The setting was the Irish countryside where all sorts of “magic” would occur, including dealings with a grateful leprechaun. All my life, I’ve heard people use the phrase, she/he has the luck of the Irish, without quite knowing what it meant. It implies that only certain people can become lucky.

Then, in 2016, Neil Farber, MD, PhD, wrote an article in Psychology Today, “8 Habits of Highly Lucky People”, in which he made the case for having some control over how lucky we can be. He said people who seem to be lucky, usually practice mindfulness, are proactive, opportunistic, insightful, flexible, optimistic, and resilient, and they think outside the box.

So certain focused characteristics allow people to be able to tap into that thing called LUCK.

Gay Hendricks, in his 2020 book, Conscious Luck, shares the four core shifts in our consciousness, and four daily practices that allow us to be lucky. These teach you how to: 1) plant the seeds of luck in your own psyche, 2) remove unlucky programming (including lifting “curses”), 3) move at your Essence

Pace, and 4) practice Radical Gratitude, and much more. It’s an amazing book that demands an elevated level of commitment to let go of limiting beliefs related to luck. Beliefs such as “only educated people are lucky” or “I’ll never be lucky; our family was very unlucky.” Getting rid of the generations of myths and beliefs that keep you from experiencing the “winds of grace,” as Tagore says, is a huge challenge.

Recently, I learned that we can only receive at the level of our feeling of safety. If we don’t feel safe receiving love because of some unfortunate experience with love in our past, then no matter who comes along that may be able and willing to give us the world, we will not be able to see it or receive it.

It’s a fact that about 90% of the people who win big in the lottery, don’t have much of it left within 18 months of winning. They either spend it, give it away, or lose it. Why is that? It is possible that they had an underlying feeling of shame about having so much money, or they had attitudes about money that kept them from being able to hold onto their new fortune... like thinking that rich people are selfish or get it in unethical ways. Not wanting to be seen as either of these, the unconscious mind can trick us into staying small, even when we know there’s a possibility of winning big if we buy the ticket.

So, luck can be cultivated with practice. We can become active receivers. Like the dial on a radio, we can keep tuning in to get rid of any static, so that we are open to receiving the abundance that is all around us.

Our Luck can change, and we don’t have to be Irish!!

deJoly LaBrier is a life coach and a writing coach, based in the Mentone area. You can find her at www.dejoly.com, on Facebook, Instagram, and Email: dejolylabrier@gmail.com

“Everything comes to us that belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it.”

—Rabindranath Tagore



Senior Health Medicare and Glaucoma

by Lynn Hixon

It is important to keep an eye on vision health. Only about half of all people with glaucoma know they have it. Glaucoma is a group of diseases that damage the eye’s optic nerve and can result in vision loss and even blindness. Some forms of glaucoma do not have symptoms, so you may have the disease and not even realize it.

You are considered high risk for developing glaucoma if:

- You have diabetes
- You have a family history of glaucoma
- You are African American and age 50 or older
- You are Hispanic and age 65 or older

Medicare Part B (Medical Insurance) covers glaucoma screenings once every 12 months. After you meet the Part B deductible, you pay 20% of the Medicare-approved amount. In a hospital outpatient setting, you also pay a copayment.

If you get a glaucoma test and start treatment early, you may protect your eyes from serious vision loss. Please call the DeKalb County Council on Aging at 256-845-8590 and ask for Lynn Hixon if you have any questions.



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Mentone Arts Center

Spring starts with art and music and honoring quarterly Artists of the Month

Spotlighting March artist Olivia Myers

by Randy Grider

We are “springing” into March with art, music, and our Spring Artist of the Month Social. We kick off the month with a Paint Like Bob Ross class on Saturday, March 2. The class, taught by Certified Bob Ross instructor Gary Grider, will be a mountain lake theme. Tuition is \$100 and all supplies are included.

On Tuesday, March 5 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., we will host our monthly Music on the Mountain Songwriters Series. The Nashville-style round highlights local/regional songwriters performing their own original songs followed by a chat with a music producer who has not been named at press time. The event, which is both educational and entertaining, is free to the public.

We welcome back award-winning wildlife artist/instructor Alan R. Young for a weekend class titled “Watercolor in Dry Brush - Wildlife and Nature’s Elements,” March 15-17. Young, who is a regular instructor at the John C. Campbell Folk School, last taught this beginners’ class at the arts center in 2020. Tuition is \$195 plus a \$25 supply fee. The class is limited to eight students.

Students will explore the technique of painting by subtraction — the lifting of watercolor paint to create highlights. They will learn the layering process for hard and receding shadows. Each step is followed by a drying period and students are encouraged to work on multiple, simultaneous projects. Using various tools, such as sandpaper and hard edges, some students may try their hand at pre-texturing the watercolor paper for interesting effects found in nature. For more advanced students, examples will be available for the Chiaroscuro effect painting (total contrast). Dry Brush Watercolor, unlike traditional watercolor, allows better control.

Young exhibits his watercolor paintings and illustrations throughout the Southern Appalachians. Primarily of indigenous birds, his works reside in private and public collections throughout the Eastern United States. These collections include Coca Cola, Georgia Power, and Atlanta Gas. Nonprofits include Georgia, Ohio, and New York Audubon Societies.

On Thursday, March 21, from 5:30-7:00 p.m., the public is invited to our quarterly Artist of the Month social. Honorees include Cal Breed (February) and Olivia Myers (March). We will have a special recognition in place of the regular January artist.



Saluting March Artist of the Month Olivia Myers:

Olivia’s journey in art began in the late 1990s when she began making hand-built pottery in college. For 16 years, this was her primary medium. In 2005, she attended school to learn calligraphy and has practiced that for years using three different hands (styles of alphabet).

Olivia’s foray into painting came more recently. “I’ve always admired abstract styles,” she said. “When I started, it was with brushes. After playing around, I was not happy with the result. Finally, I tried out a palette knife and it all came together for me. The knives achieved what I was after, and my passion has come through ever since. I have no formal training in abstract painting but have a few painter mentors that I contact on occasion for advice. My work is much trial and error, learning new techniques with almost every painting. At this point, my techniques vary greatly, and I create a variety of styles and paintings.”

An Atlanta native, Olivia grew up in Northwest Georgia and spent time living in various parts of the South. After graduating from Darlington School, she pursued a degree at Jacksonville State University in Family And Consumer Sciences. After managing restaurants for 10 years, she transitioned primarily to her artwork. For five years, Olivia served as curator and director at Vision Gallery in Summerville, Georgia.

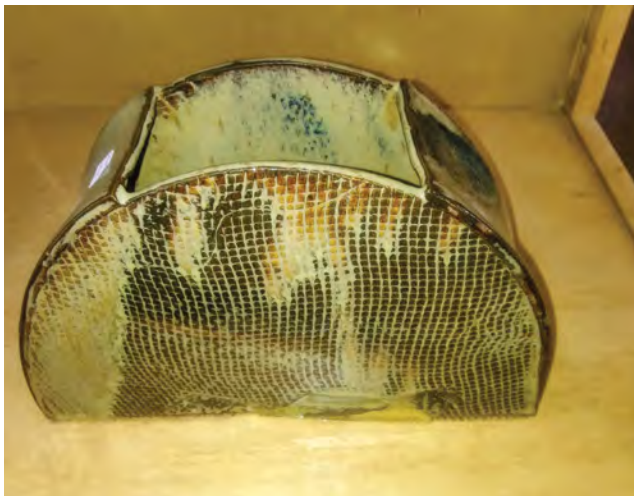
“It served as my studio space for my painting,” she said. “I also taught classes, hosted children’s art camp, and worked at the gallery. My shows are typically limited to two a year, which are at Howard Finster’s Paradise Garden.”

For more information about any of the events, see contact 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.



March Artist of the Month — Olivia Myers



Vase by Olivia Myers



Olivia Myers pottery pieces

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Fabulous February

by Anna Mae Horn



February was a fabulous month for MERF, beginning with local performances by the Birmingham Children’s Theatre. BCT entertained Vally Head students in kindergarten, first, and second grades with the lively play “Super Cat and the Reptile Robot in the Tremendous Tickle Trouble.” The students’ were captivated and attentive, laughing throughout the play.

Fourth-grade students traveled to Huntsville Symphony Orchestra for a performance of “Carnival of Animals.” The live music enthralled them and the puppets from Huntsville MET enchanted them. Thank you to the sweet donor who sponsored lunch at Wendy’s for the students and school chaperones. Six students were able to enjoy their first experience at Wendy’s and several others used a choose-your-own-flavor soda machine for the first time. The entire trip was a great learning experience for students.

Performers from BCT and HSO are always impressed with the etiquette and attentiveness of Valley Head students. Ms. Paula does an excellent job of preparing students in theatre etiquette and technique as well as background on the planned performance. MERF is honored to sponsor the Fine Arts classes at Valley Head School. We are grateful to the Alabama State Council on the Arts for sponsoring these theatre trips. The HSO performance is a free Young People’s Concert. This is a great opportunity to introduce students to live music. Volunteers conducted mock interviews with high

school business students once again. This helped students prepare for the Future Business Leaders competition. If you’d like to help financially support their trip, contact Ms. Gilbert at Valley Head School (or contact MERF for more information).

Family Fine Arts Night for Valley Head Elementary Students was a fun success. Ms. Paula and her volunteers displayed the beautiful artwork that students have been working on this year. Committee members selected some of the displayed artwork to be auctioned at Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction. (I can’t wait to see what was chosen!)

Speaking of the Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction... Tickets are on sale now! Student and local artists masterpieces along with unique experiences will be auctioned off while guests dine on exquisite cuisine from local chefs. See the article on the front page of this issue for all the details. 🍷



This project has been made possible by a grant from the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

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



Jr. Beta Winners (continued from page 1)

- Service Learning Showcase Junior – 5th Place
- Three Dimensional Design Elementary – 2nd Place
- Two Dimensional Design Elementary – 5th Place

Individual Competitions:

- Digital Art Elementary: Myles Battles – Champion
- Digital Art Junior: Hunter Battles – 3rd Place
- Digitally Enhanced Photography Elementary: Myles Battles – 2nd Place
- Digitally Enhanced Photography Junior: Addison Shoults – 3rd Place
- Fiber Arts Elementary: Zoey Chambers – Champion
- Hand Drawn Anime Junior: Kailyn Cooper – 2nd Place
- Language Arts 6th Grade: Addison Shoults – 2nd place
- Mixed Media Elementary: Kenneth Taylor – 4th Place
- Onsite Drawing Elementary: Anna Gregory – 3rd Place
- Onsite Drawing Junior: Kailyn Cooper – 4th Place
- Poetry Junior: Skye Bailey – 5th Place
- Pottery Elementary: Kenneth Taylor – 2nd Place
- Pottery Junior: Addison Shoults – 5th Place
- Quilling Elementary: Braxtin Meadows – 5th Place
- Science 5th Grade: Natalya Buffington – 3rd Place
- Science 6th Grade: Addison Shoults – Champion
- Sculpture Elementary: Abrielle DeSantis – 2nd Place
- Social Studies 4th Grade: Kensleigh Ditmore – Champion
- Social Studies 6th Grade: Skye Bailey – Champion
- Spanish 4th Grade: Zoey Chambers – Champion
- Woodworking Junior: Hunter Battles – 4th Place 🍷

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Rhododendron Garden Club News

by Mellanie Tuttle



This February 13, second Tuesday of the month, found members of the Rhododendron Garden Club (RGC) once again socializing, welcoming new members Connie, Helen, and Mary Jane, enjoying edible delights, conducting business, and viewing a power point presentation by Dianne Kuehl about all things Hummingbird. That's the morning, in a nutshell.

Hmm? Where did that phrase originate? What does it mean exactly? Why a nutshell? What kind of nutshell? After a trip down the Google rabbit hole (a phrase for another day) answers emerged. The phrase "in a nutshell" today means a brief or concise summary. It is attributed to Pliny the Elder who alleged that a copy of the Iliad was tucked in a nutshell. Walnuts, pistachio, almonds, sesame and chestnuts all grow in Greece. It was probably a walnut shell that held that infinitesimal Iliad.

Hummingbirds may be the most interesting bird species in the world. Well, in the Western Hemisphere at least, because no hummingbirds are found in Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia or Antarctica. Around 340 species exist, some are still being discovered, and others thought to be extinct have resurfaced. Fifteen species of hummingbirds grace the U.S. and fourteen have been sighted in Alabama with the Ruby-Throated Hummingbird being the most common. Cold months are spent in Mexico and northern Panama. Then, the solitary migrants make their lonesome trek to North America. Some hummers are even found in Alaska! After summer they make their way south.

With a wing rotation of 180 degrees, hummingbirds can fly backwards and hover in place.

They don't walk or hop but can use their feet to grip. Watching two males in aerial gymnastics defending their food source can be intense!

Hummingbird colors are stunning. "Each iridescent feather has tiny spikes that are densely packed with many layers of microscopic structures filled with air bubbles. These structures reflect

light," says Bob Sundstrom, a science advisor for BirdNote.org, "creating color in the manner of sun glinting off an oily film on water." The males depend on their flashy hues to attract females who, alone, build the nests and care for the young. Nest construction is five to seven days; made from lichen, moss and spider silk; and is about an inch in diameter. Eggs are the size of small jellybeans. That sounds about the same size as a walnut shell, full circle to Pliny the Elder!

The hummingbirds that arrive at your feeders this year have likely visited before. The hummers are the elephants of the bird world. They can remember feeder locations and flowers they have visited, and that number is massive! A Ruby-Throated Hummingbird eats up to half its weight while tasting 1,000 flowers in a day and feasting on insects. Their diet is 60% to 80% protein in the form of insects, with the sugary content supplying the rest.

Hummingbirds should be arriving anytime now. My friends usually show up around the middle of March. Look online for a Migration Tracking Map to pinpoint arrival times. Set out feeders. Saucer style feeders are easy to clean and refill. The water is far away from the feeding holes so wasps and bees don't engage and, best of all, your visitors can be easily seen. Feeder nectar should be one part white cane

sugar to four parts warm to hot water. No red dyes. Clean feeders once a week with diluted bleach (one part bleach to nine parts water).

WildbirdsOnline.com says: "I frequently put overripe bananas on my fruit feeder to attract tiny fruit flies, which in turn attract the hummers. The hummingbirds eat every fly and return in a few hours to feast on the next batch of fruit flies that discover the overripe fruit. What an easy way to observe hummers eating insects!"

Mellanie Tuttle is a member of the Rhododendron Garden Club.



HummingbirdSpot.com is also a great website to visit for more info on Hummingbirds.

The RGC meets each month on the second Tuesday. We are currently meeting in the Moon Lake Library and gather at 10:00. Please join us for connection and conviviality. RGC is a member of the National Garden Club, Deep South, Garden Club of AL, District II, and NE AL Federation of Garden Clubs.

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Mentone Springs Hotel (continued from previous page)

must have been in the late sixties. I think that it was about this time that a man who must have owned it used it to store organ parts.

The community did not abandon the hotel. Several groups tried to come up with enough money to buy the hotel. I was a member of the board of The Heritage Foundation. Our sole intent was to buy and preserve the hotel as a community center and a museum. With the help of donations and grants, we came up with enough to buy the hotel but quickly determined that we could not afford insurance and daily upkeep. We dropped our offer to buy, refunded what money we could, and used the rest for projects around town.

It was a happy day when I realized that someone had purchased the hotel and was repairing it. Over several years and several owners, the hotel was restored to its original state and was being used as a Bed and Breakfast. The lights were always on, and it was always a welcome sight as we came to the top of the mountain.

On Saturday, March 1, 2014, my daughter came into the room and said the words I had hoped to not live to hear — The Hotel is burning. I knew that many were going to watch as we lost our Grand Old Lady but I could not go. I could not move from my chair. Finally, on Sunday afternoon, my husband drove me up to see. A quick look was all that I could muster, and I cried.

The Lady
By Angie Carden

Having been born and raised here, I have a lifetime of memories of the Mentone Springs Hotel. I recall as a small child, riding by and being amazed



Photo by John Dersham



at her towering presence. I knew that she was the largest “house” I would ever see. She was, in my mind, the “castle” in Mentone.

When I was in elementary school, my grandfather ran the Mentone Inn. My great-grandmother cooked there. I spent so much time at the Inn, gazing across the street at my “castle”. I day dreamed that some day, I would walk right into that castle! I had plenty of time to study her from the back entrance as well. I stayed at my Aunt Ruby’s quite often, which was right behind the hotel. One day, I must have been around ten years old, I was at my Aunt’s house, playing with my cousin Connie. And the impossible happened! We were invited for a “play date” with my cousin’s friend, Julia. I was excited until I found out that her parents owned the hotel and that was where we were going, then I became ecstatic! (Thank you Ray and Sandra for having a daughter near my age!!!) As we walked across Aunt Ruby’s lawn to the parking lot of the hotel, I could not feel my legs. My stomach was full of butterflies! Julia met us out back and led us into the entrance. I have no recollection of what we girls did that day, my memory is of stepping inside and attempting to soak in everything I saw as

I stood there awestruck!

A couple of years later, while I was taking gymnastics, tap and ballet from Gail Jones, we had to change venues and every Tuesday night, we met for class... in the hotel! Once again, I was inside my beautiful castle.

Later, while I was in high school, I had a good friend named Nancy. And if you can believe it, Nancy lived in the hotel with her mother, local artist Lucy Mitchell. I was in utter disbelief! But oh so fortunate to spend many nights with Nancy in my “castle”!

In 1988, I found myself inside the

hotel once more for my Sweet 16th birthday party! That is certainly the birthday I will never forget!

Twenty-four years later, my oldest daughter had her picture made in front of the hotel before her senior prom.

I feel blessed to have had the Mentone Springs Hotel share my childhood with me and to grace my children’s lives. I will feel a great void, for the rest of my days, each time I pass her lonely hill. Thank you to the “Lady” for so many wonderful memories.

From Darlene and Jim Rotch

“Thank you to everyone for the kind words of support and sharing wonderful memories of the Mentone Springs Hotel and White Elephant. Please keep them coming — we, and everyone in our little mountain town — mourn this loss and take comfort in the stories and photos you’ve shared of great times had by all. A special thank you to all of the firefighters and police from Mentone and surrounding towns who have so much heart and tried to save an icon.”

—Darlene & Jim Rotch

Volunteers We Depend On Them
By Kayla Worthey

March 1, 2014, started out like any other regular Saturday night for us. My family and I went to dinner at the Moonlight Bistro with friends, both of whom happen to be volunteer fire fighters. After ordering our food, we enjoyed some casual conversation among ourselves and with some friends who made their way into the restaurant. Our appetizers and salads were served while waitresses scurried around taking orders, refilling drinks and conversing

(continued on back page)



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After Little River Escape Tiny Home Community was named one of the top six communities to downsize in by *U.S. News & World Report*, this community has become fully occupied and folks have come from 12 different states to live within our community.

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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Holy Week



St. Joseph's on-the-Mountain © Don David

St. Joseph's on-the-Mountain Mentone, Alabama

Schedule of Services

PALM SUNDAY 3/24
11:00am Palm Sunday Liturgy
Procession and Holy Communion

MAUNDY THURSDAY 3/28
6:30pm Liturgy of the Upper Room & Washing of Feet

GOOD FRIDAY 3/29
12pm Celebration of The Passion of Christ
6:00 pm Stations of the Cross devotion

RESURRECTION SUNDAY 3/31
6:00am The Great Vigil of Easter
11:00am Festal Eucharist & Holy Baptism





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Mentone Ukes

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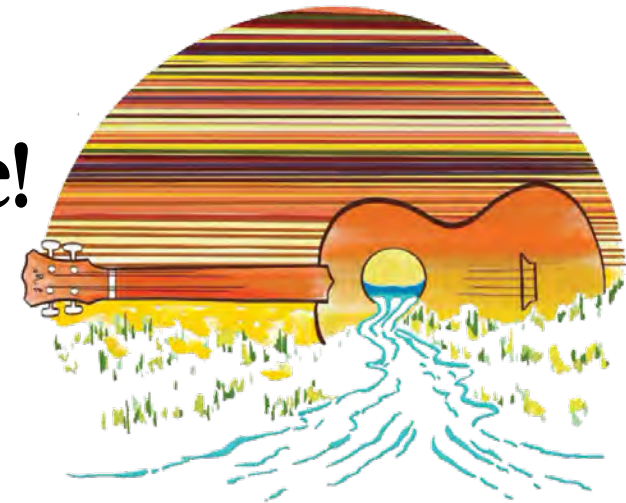
by Janet Hartline

July 22, 2023, was a lucky day for me; I was introduced to Debra Fey and Jerry Megli, the nicest couple you could ever meet, and to the world of The Ukulele.

My friend, Jim Crowe, told me he was learning to play, and I should try it. So, I thought “Why not?” Several years earlier I had attempted to play the guitar. I signed up for Beginning Guitar at NACC, bought the instrument, looked the part, went to the class, only to discover everyone in the class already knew how to play and most had their own band. I thought, what part of Beginner Guitar did I not understand? Since I had failed at learning to play the guitar, I did not really have high hopes that I would be able to learn to play the Ukulele, but I would try.

That Saturday afternoon at Moon Lake Library in Mentone, I was greeted by Debra and Jerry, who made me feel so welcomed just by their attitude. They were so willing to share their abilities with newcomers. Jerry took the true beginners to an area where they had several ukes for us to try. He demonstrated and showed us finger placement for three chords. With this lesson, we were able to play three songs. It was so fun to actually feel like I could do this! I went straight to Gadsden after the class, bought my own ukulele, and started my process of learning to play; I love it.

Debra and Jerry are always so encouraging. They are willing to help you learn and do not apply pressure. They never make you feel that if you cannot play every chord perfectly, then you cannot sit in during the session. Debra always reminds everyone to “enjoy and have fun” as learning takes place.



I was born in Fort Payne, lived in Fort Payne, went to Fort Payne high school, and taught there for 30 years. Being in close proximity to the Mentone area, I enjoyed going there and the various events that were held there. But I had never heard of the Mentone Ukes. Becoming a member of this group has allowed me to meet many new and interesting people that I would probably have never met. I have really enjoyed that part also.

When we meet and have our practice sessions, it thrills me when I can get through a song actually knowing all the chords. The times that I cannot find the chords fast enough I just omit that one and wait for the next.

HA! I enjoy these practice times because I see I can improve and that builds confidence. I have been able to attend several of the events where the Mentone Ukes perform. It is such a fun time to be a part of this group that enjoys sharing their talent and are willing to assist “newbies” as we learn.

I am very thankful to Jim for suggesting I try the ukulele, and to Debra and Jerry for being so helpful, encouraging, and welcoming in the world of Ukuleles. I would like to encourage others who have ever wanted to learn to play — this group will help you make it happen. Believe me, if I can learn, anybody can. The meeting dates, events, and more information can be found on the website. 🍷

The Post Gets New Windows

by Barry Morton

Last Veterans Day, November 11, Dr. Lynna Meadows (my wife) won the 50/50 ticket we held to raise funds for the Post. It was the second time in three \$1,000 raffles. The first one was on the previous Veterans Day in 2022. She donated her winnings, \$2,000, to replace our front windows which sorely needed it, since they were built in 1948.

The windows were replaced by Tony Goggans, having received a deep discount donation from Rainsville Glass. Over the past month, you may have seen Nolan Stinson painting them. He is working through the cold and rain to get the job done.

The Post is closed for the winter, from December until April, but the Mentone American Legion will be hosting a birthday party for the American Legion at the Brow Social on March 21. The American Legion Birthday is on Mar 15, 2024. On this day 105 years ago, members of the American Expeditionary Force Europe, awaiting passage home from World War I, convened in Paris. Since we will be in Daylight Savings Time by then, please check the Brow Social Facebook Group page for the time of the social and the birthday party. 🍷

Barry Morton is Commander of the American Legion Post 215.



Nolan Stinson paints the framing.



Tony Goggans replacing windows.



Winner being chosen.

JOIN US for our FREE ongoing sessions on March 2, 16, and 30 at 1:00 p.m. CT at the Moon Lake Library. For more information please contact Debra Fey (debrajfe@gmail.com) or Hank Allen (hank.d.allen@gmail.com) Find us on Facebook or on the web: www.MentoneUkes.com.



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Chalk, Music and More as LRAC Kicks Off a Big Year for the Arts

by Stephen V. Smith



The ARTalk series has a new spot on the calendar to accommodate more participants. Citizens are invited to the Mentone Public Library on the third Tuesday of each month beginning at 6 p.m. This year's format will feature a combination of guest speakers, bring your own art, and practical skills for artists. Keep up with ARTalk topics by following the Little River Arts Council's social media channels.

Home Tour to fund artist grants

We are still celebrating a successful Holiday Home Tour that opened homes and historic places to almost 200 attendees. The LRAC board of directors voted to earmark a portion of the event's proceeds for three grants for emerging artists from our area. Stay connected to social media and The Groundhog for more information as we establish the details.

Meet the artists who will make their mark on Mentone

As reported last month, LRAC received a grant for the public art project "Make Your Mark on Mentone." From May through September 2024, five professional and emerging chalk artists will delight the community with murals on a large chalkboard on the grounds of the Mentone Inn.

- The artists chosen by LRAC are:
- May: Ivann Garc of Clarksville, Tenn.
 - June: Sonya Clemmons of Scottsboro, Ala.

- July: Lacy Dobbs of Fort Payne, Ala.
- August: Caroline Moore of Mentone, Ala.
- September: Jessi Queen of Atlanta, Ga.

The community is invited to meet these artists on Thursday, March 14, from 5:30 to 7 p.m. at the Mentone Arts Center. Mikel Yeakle will lead a conversational discussion with the artists about their mural concepts.

"Incorporating local artists into public art projects is a powerful tool for community development, fostering shared values, and enhancing social cohesion," says sculptor and LRAC board member Deedee Morrison. "When our community engages local artists, we tap into the heart and soul of our own cultural landscape, ensuring that the art reflects the community's identity, history, and aspirations. This inclusion not only validates the artists' work, making them feel recognized and valued, but it also strengthens the bond between community members as they see their stories and experiences mirrored in public spaces."

Initially conceived as a temporary installation, the Make Your Mark project has morphed into a permanent display. LRAC is renovating the stage next to Fontastic Food Truck to accommodate a permanent installation. This opens up opportunities for other artists to make their mark on Mentone.

Stephen V. Smith is a board member of the Little River Arts Council.



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Message LITTLE RIVER ARTS COUNCIL for Application



Submissions wanted for public art display coming to Moon Lake Village

LRAC is seeking a leasable outdoor sculpture to be installed for a three-year period (May 2024 – April 2027) in front of the Moon Lake Village campus. The goal of this public art project is to activate and enliven the entrance to the former school that now houses artisans and shopping opportunities. The Historic Moon Lake Village Public Art Project is Phase II of Mentone's Greenway Vision Project and represents the East Gateway to the town. The old white oak tree in front of the historic schoolhouse served as inspiration for the school's motto, "Firmly Planted, Moving Forward." LRAC is particularly searching for submissions of a sculpture that will resonate with this motto and celebrate the natural history of the mountaintop hamlet of Mentone.

Artists can contact LRAC at info@littleriverartscouncil.org to request an application. Deadline to submit is March 15, 2024.

MAKE YOUR MARK ON MENTONE

Meet the artists!

THURSDAY, MARCH 14 • 5:30–7 P.M.

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2024 Music for the People

The summer comes alive with music in Mentone with the Summer Music Series. The dates are set, and LRAC is excited to announce that the following artists have been booked:

- **Will Dooley / Parker Thomas** — May 17
- **Black Sedan Band** (a Mentone favorite) — June 8.
- **The Locals** — July 4
- **Henri's Notions** — August 10

Look for more information about these groups in upcoming issues of The Groundhog.

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ON-FARM MARKET

Opening March 15, 2024

Our weekly On-farm Market season begins on Friday, March 15th from 2-5pm CT. We invite you to stop by and shop our 100% grass-fed and finished beef, pastured pork, pasture-raised eggs, and small selection of seasonal produce.

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445 Road 942, Mentone, AL 35984

March

A month of Celebration & Art!

REALTOR WEDNESDAYS — Every Wednesday during the Month of March Realtors are invited to visit Boom Town for Refreshments. Drop a business card in the basket for an opportunity to win all sorts of prizes which we will draw for on March 28. (Clients welcome too.) 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

FIRST THURSDAY — March 7– Artist Meet and Greet & Community get together. Drop in for refreshments, music and art. 6-8 p.m.

MARCH 25 — Jessica Haigh, Animal House Pottery Class. 5 p.m.

Jewelry Trunk Show

DESIGNER, LISA MORRIS, THE BOHO CHIC

Saturday, March 9 • 10 a.m.–2 p.m.

Delightful selection of handcrafted vintage and contemporary one-of-a-kind jewelry.

BOOM TOWN MAKERS MARKET

324 Gault Ave. N. in the Historic Sawyer Building
BoomTownMakersMarket.org | 256-273-6929



Moon Lake Library CamelliaNet, Moon Lake Library’s Source for Ebooks

by Anne McLeod

When Moon Lake became a public library in November of 2022, one of the first things people asked was, “Are you going to have ebooks?” In fact, so many people asked about ebooks that we decided to make serious inquiries and seek funding for the project.

In November 2023 the Menlo-Tillotson Charitable Foundation awarded the library’s municipal board a \$2000 grant to fund our initial enrollment in Alabama’s digital library, known as Camellia Net. The cost for each subsequent year will be \$1500, which represents a significant investment for a small library like Moon Lake. Still, if patrons use Camellia Net, it’s money well spent.

Since our account went live in late December, we have seen that our patrons are, in fact, using Camellia Net to download ebooks and digital audiobooks. At least 50 books have been checked out, and that number continues to grow.

Part of our annual fee goes to add more titles to the collection. For example, several members of Moon Lake Library’s book club enjoy the works of Wendell Berry and Janisse Ray, two writers with a deep appreciation for the environment. With our membership funds, I added several titles by each of those authors. These are now available in Camellia Net, not just to patrons at our library but to library users around Alabama.

You can read books on your phone or tablet. Many are available in a Kindle version, if you prefer to read on a Kindle. Sometimes there will be a waiting list but because there are over 55,000 books in the collection, it’s not hard to find an interesting title that’s available immediately.

Here are some instructions for accessing Camellia Net:

- First download the Libby app on your phone or tablet. It’s associated with Overdrive, the company that handles our digital titles.
- Select your library - Moon Lake Community Library in Mentone
- Sign in with your library card. Note: If the sticker on your library card has a P in front of the number, leave that off. Check the number of digits in your number. There should be eight. If there are only six, add two zeroes to the beginning of the barcode. Everyone’s password is changeme, a prompt to remind you to change it as soon as possible.

If you have lost your library card, stop by the library and we’ll give you your barcode info. If the system is not accepting your card, let us know. Your account may show an overdue library book, which will prevent an initial log in.

If you have questions, please let us know. We’ll be happy to help you get started. 🍀

Anne McLeod is the librarian at Moon Lake Library.



March 2024 at Moon Lake Library

- Weekly Meet-Ups:** CHESS on Tuesdays at 1; KNITTING and CROCHET Tuesdays at 2; SCRABBLE Wednesday at noon.
- Tax assistance** available by appointment on Saturday mornings. Contact info below.
- March 1 • 6 p.m.** Family Game Night – Bring a snack to share and we’ll enjoy board games and cards at the library.
- March 2 • 10:30 a.m.** Little Library Learners, children ages 3-7
- March 2 • 1 p.m.** Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.
- March 9 • 10:30 a.m.** Book Club – Our theme for this month’s discussion: Writing about food (fiction or nonfiction). Need suggestions? Stop by the library.
- March 12 • 6:30 p.m. –** Author talk: Karen Spears Zacharias, author of “No Perfect Mothers”
- March 14 • 2 p.m.** Featured speaker: Pat Parmelee, Ph.D., on “Pain Management for Arthritis”
- March 14 • 3 p.m.** Municipal Library board meeting; 4 p.m. Friends of Moon Lake Library Board meeting
- March 15 • 6 p.m.** Family Game Night – Bring a snack to share and we’ll enjoy board games and cards at the library.
- March 16 • 10:30 a.m.** Little Library Learners, children ages 3-7 Saturday at the Movies: Ratatouille
- March 16 • 1 p.m.** Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.
- March 19 • 6-8 p.m. –** Art Talk. Art Critique and Discussion Group with Mikel Yeakle, sponsored by Little River Arts Council. Let’s talk about art. Artists, please bring a piece or two to share.
- March 22 • 6 p.m.** Friday Night at the Movies: The Martian (PG-13)

Moon Lake Library

4607 Hwy 117 • Mentone, AL • 256-634-2127
Tuesday-Friday 12-4:30 p.m. • Saturday 10 a.m.- 1 p.m.
moonlakelibrary.org • books@moonlakelibrary.org

A Book Club for Free-Range Readers

About ten years ago, some enthusiastic readers in the subdivision we lived in decided to start their own book club. It seemed like an ideal situation for me - close to home, reading with friends and neighbors, an easy Sunday afternoon activity. I signed up and borrowed a copy of the club’s first title from a friend.

And I hated it. If the main character hadn’t rolled his own cigarettes, I thought, it would have cut the total number of pages by about half. Still, I stuck it out for the next book, a history of unusual spiritual beliefs in the United States during the nineteenth century. It was more interesting by far, but it wasn’t one I’d select for myself. I stayed for another book and then the next with little enthusiasm.

After a few months of this, I grew frustrated. I was working full time and only had so many hours to devote to reading for pleasure. If these books were not pleasurable to me, why was I spending time on them? Was I that fussy a reader? The answer to that question was almost certainly yes. While I didn’t think of myself as a curmudgeon, when it came to reading for fun, I had to recognize that I wanted to read what I wanted to read.

Fast forward to Mentone and Moon Lake Library. The Saturday morning book club was a favorite activity for library patrons. I wondered how we might make it more user-friendly for people who wanted to talk about books but might not always want to read the same title.

Then one month, instead of all of us



reading the same book, we simply did book recommendations. Everyone loved it. Each of us had at least one title to recommend and all of us enjoyed getting ideas for our next To Be Read.

Since then we have returned to this format more often than not. We’ve sometimes had a theme such as books about books or a featured author like Wendell Berry or Erik Larson. Once in a while we still opt to read the same title and discuss it, but the meetings where we recommend books to the group continue to be our favorites.

So if you want to join the company of other free-range book club members, come to Moon Lake Library the second Saturday of the month at 10:30 AM. Below is information about meetings in March and April.

March 9, 10:30 AM: The theme is books about food. These may be essays, biographies, novels set in cafes or bakeries, histories of particular food items. Books as diverse as Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World, Kitchen Confidential, The Martian, or Julie and Julia would all be great reads for this meeting.

April 13, 10:30 AM: The theme is banned or challenged books. Read a book or books that have recently been challenged in libraries or schools. Find out why it was challenged. They can be books for kids, teens, or adults. Examples are: The Hate U Give, Fangirl, The Bluest Eye, Looking for Alaska, and many more. Get ready for discussion that will focus on rights, responsibilities, and representation. 🍀

HIRING: Library Assistant for Moon Lake Library in Mentone

Duties: Provide customer service; handle circulation and cataloging; assist with public relations, including social media; collaborate with library director on collection development; place orders; assist with technology management; help with inventory; handle sales of used books and DVDs.

Requirements and skills:

- Library or book experience (volunteer or professional) required
- Dependability and commitment to the job
- Experience using computers and working with electronic databases; familiarity with library information management systems
- Strong organizational skills
- Effective communication
- A patient and friendly personality
- A degree in Library Science or a Master’s in Library Science or Information Management is a plus

Hours: Part-time work average of 4.5-7.5 hours per week, with occasional opportunities to work 21 hours per week.

Pay: \$10/hour

To apply, please email resume and cover letter to books@moonlakelibrary.org. Deadline for applications is March 15, 2024.

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March Community Events

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

March 1 • Tickets go on Sale TODAY • MERF's annual Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction returns with delicious food and fabulous artwork from local artist and students in the Valley Head School Fine Arts Program. Now is the time to purchase tickets for this exciting fundraiser! See the front page for event details. Limited tickets available. Purchase online at MERFhouse.org, call 256-635-8775, or pick up at Mentone Market (cash or check only) or at the MERF house (Mondays and Fridays 1 – 4 p.m. or by appointment).

March 1 -2 • DeKalb Shrine Rodeo • DeKalb Shrine Club is proud to present its 6th Annual Shrine Rodeo at the Northeast Alabama Agri-Business Center in Rainsville. Event starts at 7:30 p.m. each night. Tickets will be sold at the door only: Doors open at 6 p.m. \$20 for adults. \$10 for children aged 6 to 11. FREE for kids aged 5 and under. The Rodeo offers Bull Riding, Saddle Bronc Riders, Calf Roping, Barrel Racing and more! Shrine Rodeo is produced in partnership with 4L & Diamond S Rodeo Co. and the Professional Cowboy Association. The athletes competing in the rodeo are professionals here at their own expense. Sponsorships and program advertising are now available. Call 256-717-6263 for more information. Proceeds benefit Alhambra Shriners and are not tax-deductible.

March 2 • Lost Falls 10K, Half Marathon & 50K • The race is capped at 300 runners. All runners will receive a t-shirt and finisher medal as well as a hot meal post-race! Primary packet pickup is Friday, March 1 at Fleet Feet Sports Huntsville from 12 - 5 p.m. Fleet feet is located at 2722 Carl T Jones Dr SE B2, Huntsville. Packets may also be picked up the morning of the race near the Country Store / Information Center: 7104 Desoto Pkwy NE, Fort Payne from 6:30 - 7:45 a.m.

March 2 • Crafters and Creators Event • Come join us for jewelry, baked goods, gifts, food vendors, and more in the Henagar Senior Center and in the city park. Come bring the family and have a great day! 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

March 2 • The Sound at the Pickin Post • Come enjoy a great gospel concert with The Sound. Tickets are \$15 each. Show starts at 6 p.m.

March 2 • Sand Mountain Soiree • The Sand Mountain Soiree will return to NACC on Saturday, March 2 at 11 a.m.! Join us to hear guest speaker Ashley Gilbreath, and enjoy a great presentation during brunch. Tickets are \$40 and are on sale now! Contact Chasley Brown at brownchasley@nacc.edu or 256-638-4418 ext. 2248. Ashley Gilbreath is a southern-based interior designer renowned for creating casually elegant homes where the family can gather to celebrate everyday living.

March 8 • Kentucky Headhunters and Wayward Son • Join us for an unforgettable evening of rock 'n' roll at the Fort Payne Opera House! 98-3 Wild Country presents the legendary Kentucky Headhunters and the talented Southern rock band Wayward Son. An electrifying performance that will leave you wanting more. Get ready to rock out to their iconic hits and experience their high-energy show firsthand. Grab your friends, put on your dancing shoes, and get ready to have a blast! Tickets at Eventbrite.

March 8 • Book Signing: Author & Chef Sheri Castle • Come meet Sheri Castle, host of The Key Ingredient, an Emmy-winning cooking show from PBS, NC. She's also an award-winning food writer, recipe developer, cooking teacher, and storyteller. Sheri will be sharing stories and signing her cookbooks in Mentone at the Gallery by Andiamo! FREE to the public. 4 - 6 p.m.

March 9 • Throwing a Stellar Cocktail Party • ... Andiamo Style: A practical guide to a preparing and serving a memorable cocktail party. Sheri will share five delicious appetizers and a batch cocktail that's quick and easy. Beyond sharing the recipes, Sheri and Colleen (Andiamo Owner and Creative director) will show you creative ways to serve and display your delicious bites. \$125 per person 3 - 6 p.m.

March 9 • Clean-up Day at Bucks Pocket State Park • Join us for a much-needed clean-up of our surrounding wooded areas at Buck's Pocket State Park! All are welcome, and age-appropriate tasks will be offered to anyone willing to lend a helping hand. Pre-registration is appreciated but not required (email Heather.McCann@dcnr.alabama.gov). Meet at Bucks Pocket pavilion for supplies and directives at 11 a.m.

March 9 • Artimus Pyle Band • is the coming to Pickin Post at 893 Old Hwy 35 E., Fort Payne. The show starts at 6 p.m. with our

special guest, Crossroad. Tickets are on sale now at onfireconcerts.com, by phone at 615-663-6560, and at Blacks Tire in Rainsville (call Mike at 256-638-2216). Artimus Pyle is the legendary drummer for Lynyrd Skynyrd, Rock-N-Roll Hall of Fame member, and the last surviving member of the Lynyrd Skynyrd plane crash.

March 9 – 10 • Myrtle Jane's Spring Open House

March 9, 11 – 16 • Finder Keepers Consignment Sale • You will find gently used, good quality name brand children and adult clothing and shoes, home furnishings, electronics, books, toys, furniture and more, all at great prices. Sign up NOW to become a consignor! Held at the VFW Fairgrounds. 256-632-2420 or 256-638-5998. Closed on the 10th.

March 10 • Cooking Class: Rise and Shine: A Soufflé Experience • In this hands-on Andiamo Cooking Experience, Sheri Castle will lead you through two soufflé recipes that she thinks are keepers. \$100 per person.

March 14 • Meet the Artists who are Making Their Mark • The community is invited to meet five professional and emerging chalk artists who received a grant from LRAC for the public art project “Make Your Mark on Mentone.” Mikel Yeakle will lead a conversational discussion with the artists about their mural concepts for the large chalkboard. Join us at the Mentone Arts Center. 5:30 - 7 p.m. Free and open to the public. More details on page 7.

March 14 • Business After Hours • Come join us for our inaugural event of the year and be part of the celebration for this incredible venue. Expect delicious food, refreshing drinks, and even a surprise appearance from a special guest. We will also be welcoming our newest Chamber Members. We're eagerly anticipating joining in the festivities to mark the official grand opening of the Back Forty Ballroom. Plus, in collaboration with Back Forty Beer Company, we'll feature a unique beer selection.

March 15 • Wild About Bears! • Did you know that in Alabama, the yearly cycle for black bears starts in February? This is the time when the female bears, known as sows, give birth to their adorable cubs snug inside their cozy dens. Join Beth Sewell from JSU Field School to delve deeper into the world of bears, discover if they hibernate or not, and what to do to live with bears in your community. 2 p.m. DeSoto State Park at Benefield Interpretive Nature Center next to the Country Store. Free & open to everyone. Contact Brittney. Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov or rmtaylor@jsu.edu for more details.

March 15 • On-Farm Market • Our weekly on-farm market season will begin. We invite you to stop by and shop for 100% grass fed and finished beef, pasture pork, pasture raised eggs and a small selection of seasonal produce. 2 - 5 p.m. 256-674-3639 or info@thefarmerwindyhill.com.

March 15 – 17 • Watercolor in Dry Brush • Wildlife and Nature Elements. We are excited to welcome Alan R. Young back to Mentone for a weekend-long Watercolor in Dry Brush class. The class is limited to 10 students. Tuition is \$195 plus a \$25 supply fee. Email mentoneartscenter@gmail.com or call 256-674-3366 to register.

March 16 • Trail Trekker Hike Neverland Loop • Never-neverland/Vizneyland trails, as well as the Dark Side trail for a longer hike which will be approximately 7 miles round trip, moderate. DeSoto State Park. 9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m..

March 17 • May's Gulf Songwriter Series III • Join us at Little River Canyon Center featuring original music Eliot Bronson and Jordan Gillis. Tickets are \$25 in advance; \$30 the day of the show. Coolers welcome. This is a rain or shine event.

March 19 • Art Talk • Little River Arts Council presents an evening of art critique and discussion. This will be free to the public and open discussion is encouraged! Art is meant to be seen and discussed. If you are an artist or an art appreciator, this is an evening for you. Mikel Yeakle leads another informal conversation about art, why we create it, and how it affects our lives. Mikel is an art history buff whose knowledge and enthusiasm for art is engaging and delightful. Having worked as a professional artist all his adult life, Mikel has useful tips for anyone new to selling their work. All are invited to bring their artwork and share their process and inspirations. The conversation is open to anyone who is drawn to art (pun intended) not just creators of art. In 2024, we look forward to showcasing more local talent from the Mentone area. 6 -8 p.m. (CST) Moon Lake Community Library, Address: 4607 AL Hwy 117, Mentone. Free & open to all!

The Food Pantry at St. Joseph's on-the-Mountain Episcopal Church is open every Wednesday to Mentone/Valley Head/ Hammondville residents 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.

March 19 • Oral History Night: Bob Baty • Bob Baty, 82, is a member of one of Mentone's oldest multi-generational families. His father's sawmill was a local landmark for decades. Bob will share some of his favorite stories and childhood memories as he is interviewed by Max Mitchell. Bob is known for his good humor, so this should be a fun evening. Moon Lake Baptist Church, starting at 6 p.m. Free event; open to the public.

March 21 • Art In Nature • Join us as we explore art in nature at JSU field school. 1:30 p.m.

March 22 – 23 • Canyon Campout For Women

March 22 – 23 • Huey Helicopter Rides • Book your flight on a Huey Helicopter. Flight Time: 8 - 12 minutes. We will do our best to keep your time slot at the time you request. 80 Spots Available. (40 Per Day) Minimum Age: 5 years old with parent or guardian. Meet at True Adventure Sports a minimum of 30-45 minutes early! If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out. \$145 per person or reserve a private flight for \$1,450 for up to 10 people. Due to fuel cost and FAA requirements, there will be no refunds, and your flight must be paid for in full!

March 23 • Dutch Oven Campfire Cooking 101 • Demonstrations will be happening throughout the day, presented by DeSoto State Park Naturalist Brittney Hughes. 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. (stop by anytime). JSU's Little River Canyon Center. Free & open to everyone, no pre-registration required. Come by for free samples. Find us on Facebook.

March 23 – 24 • Peacefest at Tigers for Tomorrow • Peace, Love and Big Cats. Arts & Crafts show at Tigers for Tomorrow. The preserve will be field with arts, crafts, and nature. There will also be food vendors there. 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. each day. Admission will be \$10 for adults and \$5 for kids.

March 28 • Canyon Kids Young Explorers • Art in Nature

March 29 • ELVIS: In Person • Starring Matt Stone & Nick Armstrong. The Ultimate Tribute to The King of Rock 'n' Roll Starring TWO Multi-Award-Winning Elvis Tribute Artists. Fort Payne Opera House. 7 p.m. Tickets at Eventbrite.

March 30 • Early Spring Hike • One of the most beautiful times of the year at DeSoto State Park! Join DSP Staff on a moderate meandering hike along the Little River trail to see plants starting to grow and bloom. Learn some natural history of the plants, and some medicinal and historical uses as well. Wonderful views of the West Fork of Little River, Indian Falls, and Lodge Falls along the route. Things to bring: Plenty of water and/or sports drink, snacks/ lunch, hiking poles/staff (optional), sturdy shoes (open toe shoes are not recommended) Approx. 2 miles round trip, moderate along rocky terrain. DeSoto State Park. Meet at the Benefield Interpretive Center (Next to DeSoto's Country Store). Free & open to everyone, no-preregistration required. 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Weather-dependent, please call the Lodge at 256-845-5380 beforehand to check on status of hike. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details.

March 30 • Leaf Pounding Class • The Serious Skills series is a variety of classes and workshops that provide opportunities to discover a hidden talent or learn a new skill for personal enrichment. Historically used by Native American women to decorate fabric, pounding with a rock or a hammer transfers the natural dyes of a leaf to fabric while retaining the design of the original leaf. In this class, join DeSoto State Park Naturalist Brittney Hughes on a quick walk to ID leaves that can be used for leaf pounding, then unleash your creativity to make a beautiful and unique piece of fabric to take home. Participants can also bring their own fabric like t-shirts, handkerchiefs, pillowcases, etc. as long as it is 100% cotton. This class is for ages 8 to adult. 1 - 3 p.m. at DeSoto State Park Picnic Area across the road from Country Store. \$10 fee includes all supplies. Class space is limited, pre-registration is required for attendance in this class. For any questions, email Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov

In Memoriam

Please email your loved ones Memoriam information to GroundhogNews@yahoo.com. They will be printed as space allows.



Mrs. Vicki Irene Stone
October 12, 1956 – January 18, 2024
Mrs. Vicki Irene Stone, age 67, of Mentone, Alabama, passed away on Thursday, January 18, 2024, at Erlanger Hospital. Vicki was born on October 12, 1956, in Parkersburg, West Virginia to Ronald Haught & Zelma Midcap Haught. She worked as a travel agent before retirement. Vicki is a treasured member of the community. She is survived by her husband of over 49 years, Charles M. Stone; son, Michael Stone (Gwen); daughter, Jennifer Clark (Phillip); grandchildren, Alicia Hale (Robert), Michael Stone, Emily Stone, Ashley Stone, and Christina Stone, four great-grandsons, and seven sisters. The Family will have a Celebration of Life service at a later date.



Mrs. Mary Porter
December 25, 1938 – January 31, 2024
Mrs. Mary Lou Bain Porter, age 85, of Mentone, Alabama, passed away on Wednesday, January 31, 2024, at Redmond Regional Medical Center in Rome, Georgia. Mary was born in Rising Fawn, Georgia, on December 25, 1938. She was a member of the Mentone Church of God and a beloved community member. She was preceded in death by her parents, J.R. and Catherine Bain; stepmother, Evelyn Bain; son, Eddie (Edwin) Delane Porter; brother, Charles Bain; and sister, Bobbie Smith. She is survived by husband, Edwin C. Porter of Mentone; daughter, Kathy Gaglio (John) of Ft. Wayne, IN; sons, Chris Porter (Renae) of Henagar and Jeffrey Becker (Kayla) of Mentone; sisters, Ethel Manifold and Pat McKenzie of Mentone; brother: John Bain (JoAnn) of Attalla; and a host of grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, and nephews that she loved. The funeral service was held February 5, and she is buried in Bankhead Cemetery in Mentone.



Mr. Joshua “Josh” Key
July 6, 1981 - February 4, 2024
Mr. Joshua Phillip “Josh” Key, age 42, of Cloudland, GA, died Sunday, February 4, 2024, at his residence.
Mr. Key was born in Fort Payne to Kathy Darlene Palmer Brown and the late Gordon Phillip Key. He was previously a member of Chelsea Baptist Church and was a self-employed handyman. Mr. Key was also an avid Georgia Bulldogs fan. In addition to his father, Mr. Key was preceded in death by his grandparents, Gordon and Helen Key and Huston and Bessie Palmer.
Survivors include his wife, Kristin Key; sons, Malachi Key and Jacob Key; daughter, Kiley Key; mother, Kathy (Gary “Bucky”) Brown; brother, Chris (Amanda) Key; sister, Felisha Flannigan; stepbrothers, Eric (Shelley) Brown, Justin (Fonda) Brown, and Nigel (Rebeka) Brown; and stepsister, Janie (Steven) Anderson.
Graveside services were held February 17 at Mount Olive Cemetery.



**The Town of Valley Head is
accepting sealed bids for lawn
care services.**

**For more information, please call
256-635-6814 or come by
the Town Hall.**

**Sealed bids accepted until
March 4, 2024, at 12:00 noon.**



Music flows through the heart of Mentone

by Stephen V. Smith

Mentone is known for many things. Summer camps. Mountainside views. Food and shopping. A thriving arts community.

Be still a moment and listen, however, and you'll hear the real heart of this town. It's a melody comprised of the wind blowing through the trees and water rushing over rocks. Of children laughing and neighbors sharing. Of artists pouring themselves into their work. Of a community with connections that, at times, are stronger than family. Mentone is a song, constantly changing as new voices add layer upon layer of notes and harmonies to expanding refrains.

Indeed, the very name of the town means "musical mountain spring." It's a name the town is increasingly living up to with expanding opportunities to hear live music.

Local restaurants often host performers who provide an entertaining backdrop to a delicious meal.

Each Friday afternoon, a group of Porch Pickers assembles to play a variety of instruments and genres. They gather at Moon Lake Village to carry on a tradition started by their musical mentor.

(See "A Promise Kept" in last month's Groundhog.)

The Mentone Ukes has flourished as a group of ukulele players who engage in fellowship and song, becoming a staple of community events with their toe-tapping performances. Last year's Mentone Fall Festival brought hours of live music across several genres to the amphitheater at Moon Lake Village.

The Annual Summer Music Series hosted by the Little River Arts Council delivers on its promise of "music for the people" with free concerts at the Linger Longer Pavilion behind the Mentone Inn. Among this year's featured acts will be a renowned Celtic band.

In January, the Mentone Arts Center continued its focus on music by bringing Americana artist Anya Hinckle and fiddler Finn Magill to its stage. In July, rising stars The French Family Band will perform among the visual arts displays. The Center is also the site of the monthly Music on the Mountain Songwriters Series.

Be still. Close your eyes. Listen to our musical mountain. And go experience the live music opportunities that are increasing all around us. 🐾



L to R: Nelson Stallings, Max Cash, Rob Hammond

A Moment in Time

Mentone's winter of 1977-78 brought a long cold spell with subfreezing temperatures and Little River became a foot thick with ice. Former Mentone Mayor Max Cash had once been stationed in Alaska, where he learned how to ice skate. Max, current Mentone Mayor Rob Hammond, and Nelson Stallings spent a memorable day on the river's ice. "Max tied himself to an inner tube and skated from Camp Laney downriver to DeSoto Falls," said Rob. "He wanted to be sure it was safe for Nelson and me to follow. Nelson made it all the way to the Falls but honestly, I'd skate 100 yards and then fall every time. Max said that day, 'Fellas, we'll likely never get to do this again in our lifetimes.' And he has been right."

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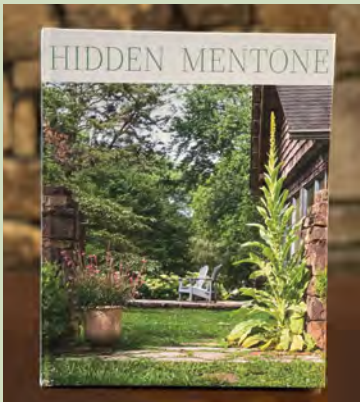
PACHYDERM PACKRAT — Come to my booth in Hammondville at Dave's Antiques for your antique shopping. Mon.–Sat. 10–4; Sun. 12–4. Intersection of Hwys. 117 and 11. "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace." –Pachyderm Packrat quoting Jimi Hendrix.

HAND-CARVED cottage signs, walking sticks, figurines, and more. Woodcarvings by Don Highfield. Contact Don at 256-634-4222 or 706-767-8321.

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Mentone Springs Hotel (continued from page 9)

with patrons. Then our food arrived and with it came a call across the fire radio. At 7:45 p.m., North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District was being dispatched to a fire that appeared to be next door to us.

The coordinated chaos that followed was indescribable.

Because the Mentone Springs Hotel and the White Elephant were both wooden structures, constructed of mostly pine, and so close in proximity, the NLMFPD had set up a pre-plan. According to Fire Chief Joseph Lee and Assistant Chief Toby Manifold, the fire department had begun planning about eight years ago, knowing that if it ever happened, they would need all of the assistance they could get. They walked through both structures to familiarize themselves with the layouts, planned truck locations in relation to hydrants, studied the surroundings, and met with many county officials, local departments and town business owners.

That all sounds very easily coordinated, but when you actually take into consideration the vast numbers that makes up those county officials, local departments and business owners, that list becomes a whole lot more complicated.

After confirming that “The Grand Ole Lady”, as she was sometimes referred, had reported the fire in its building, NLMFPD arrived on the scene within minutes and began showering the building with water. All surrounding buildings were evacuated, which was part of the pre-plan as a precaution, and additional fire departments were dispatched. Those departments that responded were Valley Head Volunteer Fire Department, Hammondville Volunteer Fire Department, Ider Volunteer Fire Department, Henagar Volunteer Fire Department, Dogtown Volunteer Fire Department, Shiloh Volunteer Fire Department, Adamsburg Volunteer Fire Department and two Fort Payne Fire and Rescue squads.

Sand Mountain Electric Co-op is always called to structure fires. This is necessary to disconnect the structure’s



The White Elephant Antiques and Mentone Springs Hotel before they burned in 2014.

power, separating electricity from the fire, making it safe for firemen to spray water on the burning building and to keep live power lines and service entrance wires from causing harm on the ground. Two SMEC crews were called to the scene.

Mentone Police, Valley Head Police, DeKalb County Sheriff’s Department and Alabama State Troopers were requested to assist with traffic control on AL Hwy 117 and connecting streets.

Mentone and Fort Payne Water Departments were contacted for assistance with water capacities and pump distribution. Both departments had men on-site for hours.

DeSoto Rescue Squad, DeKalb Ambulance Service, and DeKalb County Emergency Management Agency were all on stand-by and ready to aid if needed.

Alabama Forestry Commission was called in to handle some small fires that were started due to heavy embers blowing from the fires. They fought wood fires for many hours.

Chief Lee said, “On behalf of myself and my department, I would like to

thank every department and individual who assisted us, and to the other Fire Departments, we really appreciate everything; you were the bloodlines to our heart. I am so proud and appreciative of everyone’s effort.”

A Newbie’s Observation
By John Carr

I am a newbie to Mentone. My first visit to the mountain was December 28, 2013. Within five short weeks, I had closed on the purchase of a cabin on the western brow. When I first walked out on the property and looked over the valley below, it grabbed me, and I knew I must have this for my family and the generations to follow. And thus, my family is blessed to have it.

I could write an article on being a newbie, and my first impressions of mountain life, of the diverse group of wonderful people I have met. I could talk of how a flatlander from Florida gulf coast fell in love with this mountain, and how his Jeremiah Johnson yearnings have finally been met; but with the events of Saturday March 1, 2014, I must say something about

the tragic loss of the landmark Mentone Springs Hotel.

Since I knew of the hotel for less than a month, I can speak without a long emotional attachment. On that night, I had left Mentone headed home to the Florida panhandle. I was approaching Montgomery when I got a call from my dear friend Sandra Padgett, telling me the horrific news of the fire. In her voice I could feel the pain and loss — it was as if a loved one had died.

I immediately turned and drove back to Mentone, if for no other reason than to act as a new member of the community and help in any way possible, even if that was just to give Sandra a hug. Arriving and seeing the smoldering ashes of this proud building was disturbing. It was a sad time for this community, but as grand as the old lady hotel was, and she was grand, she did not define Mentone and this mountain community — and certainly her fire and destruction will not define this community. No, what has and will define this mountain community are the wonderful people who have lived here their entire lives and those who have decided to move here. The folks who choose to live on this mountain hear something others just do not hear.

Mentonians hear the music in the wind, feel the trees budding, search for wildflowers and wait with anticipation to hear in the valley below the late afternoon train whistle. They embrace the cold and plan festivals for the spring flowers. They appreciate the natural beauty of this mountain and willingly take on the role of being good stewards for these natural beauties. But most importantly, they especially and deeply care about each other. Following the tragic fire, the hugs were often and everywhere — neighbor seeing after neighbor. In my humble opinion, that is what defines this beautiful mountain community of Mentone.

In a brief time, I have realized that along with its natural beauty, this little town also has personal dignity and a love for their neighbor. I am proud to be a newbie member of this community. 🍷

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