

FREE

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THE GROUNDHOG

“Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain”

APRIL 2023



Ready, Set, Auction!

by Anna Mae Horn

After a three-year hiatus, Taste of the Mountain Art Auction is back. The Mentone Educational Resources Foundation (MERF) will hold its annual gala on April 15 at 6 p.m. in Camp Skyline’s dining hall. This is a sell-out event, so be sure to grab your tickets at Mentone Market or see our website (MERFhouse.org) for online purchases and more information.

Taste of the Mountain is MERF’s major fundraising event. It is the primary source of funding for the salary of the fine arts teacher, Ms. Paula Easter, as well as supplies for the program. MERF also coordinates resources from this event to ensure local students experience art, music, theatre performances (such as the recent one by Birmingham Children’s Theatre), and educational trips (such as the one to Huntsville Symphony Orchestra).

There has been an expansion of programs and grants for the middle and high school grades at Valley Head School. MERF financially supported a junior high trip to see five mini plays and a junior/senior class trip to Sea Lab. MERF also coordinated volunteers to practice interviews with ninth graders in February. Currently, scholarship applications are open and planning is underway for senior life skills week in May. MERF has new high school programs we would like to start in the fall which will require funding.

Senior lunches are also thriving and expanding. MERF currently coordinates over 20 gatherings per year. The first lunch of this season had almost 50 guests. These

lunches provide socialization and activities that area retirees look forward to each week.

The ‘tasty’ part of this event comes from delectable samples of cuisine donated for Taste of the Mountain. Local restaurants and chefs are giving their favorite dishes for this fine dining experience. This ‘artwork’ is always delightfully consumed. Check social media and our website for more details as they are finalized.

The highlight of the evening is the auction of art by the Valley Head elementary students. Amazing flower paintings inspired by Georgia O’Keef and lupines inspired by the book, *Miss Rumphius*, will be among the student offerings. Rhea Allen at Cloudland Framing is donating her labor for matting and framing the art. All you have to do is raise your paddle and hang your winning bid on your wall!

Local artists also generously donate their fine artwork, such as Lydia Randolph, who donated a new painting of the Hitching Post that commemorates the liveliness that once inhabited it. Victoria Pearmain, who has exhibited in multiple galleries and received numerous awards, has donated a plein air painting of the Hitching Post as it was viewed from St. Joseph’s front lawn. Barbara Umland has donated “Hydrangeas” this year. Her art is always a favorite with guests! Beverly Bates, who has had great success locally at Boom Town Makers Market, is donating a piece depicting bee hive boxes. FFA members of

(continued on page 5)

Goodbye, Gourdies

by Kelly Leavitt



The Gourdie Shop’s hand-painted sign by Jimmy Frazier from the 1980s survived the fire at the Hitching Post because it had been removed for a “freshening-up.”

The Gourdie Shop, a popular shop located in Mentone’s Hitching Post when it burned in February, had about as much of an illustrious history as the Hitching Post itself. It was named after artist and shop-owner Sharon Barron Burke’s famous “Gourdies,” dolls constructed from gourds with hand-painted faces and hand-sewn clothes.

Sharon was making Gourdies before gourd art became popular; in 1979, she registered the trademark “Gourdie” with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

In the 1970s, Sharon had taken art classes from Sue Hamilton. “Sue owned the Owl’s Roost, which I bought a couple of years ago, largely for sentimental reasons,” said Sharon. “Sue helped me become a Gatlinburg craftsman when I created my Gourdies. She was an amazing woman and a wonderful artist.

“The Gourdies were a cottage industry. I knew a lot of women who depended on their husbands for money and they needed spending money. I took the Gourdies to them. Some washed, some drilled, some made the clothes. I paid per piece. There were so many in Mentone that shared in the making of the Gourdies. I was so lucky to have so many great people helping me. I did pay well but they also loved what they did.

“I did two shows a year in Gatlinburg, then after I moved to Mentone and opened my shop in 1984, a television station from Chattanooga did a story on me. They sent it to NBC National news, who ran a story about the Gourdies in Mentone. I started getting calls from people across the country. The largest order I got from that story that was 44 dozen. That’s a lot of Gourdies.

“When I got all those orders, I had to reconfigure what I was doing. I had rolling racks in my studio that held 50 gourds on each side. I had five of those, so at any time I had 500 gourds ready to become Gourdies. They were all one-of-a-kind. I touched each one of them and figured out what they were going to look like.

“Once, some men from CNN came to my shop and asked me what I say to people when they come to Mentone. I said, “Well, I say ‘Hi, y’all.’” They asked me to stand outside my shop and say ‘Hi, y’all.’ I said, “Well, sure, if I can hold one of my Gourdies.’ All weekend long, they showed that clip during station breaks. Over the years, I was in 11 national pieces because the Associated Press had reported on me. I was very, very fortunate.

(continued on page 15)



Sharon Barron Burke with one of her wizard Gourdies in the 1980s.

MAPA Preservation & Oral History Programs

Camille Bowman 4/13 • Walt Pullen & Linda Pullen Burns 4/20

The Mentone Area Preservation Association is pleased to present two programs in April.

Our first, on Thursday, April 13 at 6:30 p.m., will focus on the importance of historic architectural preservation. This will be of interest to the general public as well as those who own historic properties.

The program will be presented by Camille Agricola Bowman. She received her Master of Science in Historic Preservation from Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Historic Preservation, following her graduation from Hollins College and Chatham Hall in Virginia. Ms. Bowman has nearly 40 years of experience in the field of historic preservation, having worked in Virginia,

North Carolina, New York City, and in her home state of Alabama. Because she is trained as an architectural conservator, her work in the field of historic preservation most often involves the understanding of building materials and how they deteriorate, solutions for their preservation, and maintenance as a prescribed prevention technique. Most recently, Ms. Bowman served as the architectural historian for the Tidewater Preservation Office, Department of Historic Resources in Virginia. Ms. Bowman wrote the *Handbook for Owners of Alabama’s Historic Houses* and the *Handbook and Resource Guide for Owners of Virginia’s Historic Properties*. The program will be held in the sanctuary at St. Joseph’s Church at 21145 Scenic Hwy in Mentone.

On Thursday, April 20, we will host another Oral History Night, this time featuring Walt Pullen and his sister, Linda Pullen Burns, both third-generation Mentonians. They will be interviewed by Walt’s daughter, Laura Pullen O’Tinger, who also grew up in Mentone. Walt and Linda’s parents were Bill and Grace Pullen, who many remember with great fondness and respect. This program will begin at 6:30 p.m. in the sanctuary of Moon Lake Baptist Church at 4671 AL Hwy. 117 in Mentone.

Both programs are free and the public, family and friends are invited. For more information, contact Kelly Leavitt at mapamentone@gmail.com or 256-289-2002.



The Groundhog

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by the Mentone Area
Preservation Association

MAPA was first conceived on Groundhog Day, 1982, and then organized on April 5, 1982. *The Groundhog* has been in publication for 40 years.

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*Birthday calendar maintained by
Kayla Worthey*

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various authors in this publication do not necessarily
reflect the opinions, beliefs, and viewpoints or policies of
the Mentone Area Preservation Association.*

*Groundhog woodcut courtesy of
Meg Justice/Bee Spring Studio*

Mentone Matters

by Mayor Rob Hammond

After the fire at the Hitching Post, the town contracted with a professional building inspector to identify any potential electrical or structural issues in the Moon Lake School building. On March 14, the inspector presented his findings to a work session of the town council.

As a result of this preliminary report, the town has temporarily closed the Bill Berry Community Room for assembly meetings until electrical and structural issues outlined in the report are remedied. The shops and offices will remain open.

The town is seeking proposals from architects, electrical and structural engineers to create plans to bring the building up to code. When plans are in place, the town will accept bids for repair work.

Design work on Phase 2 of the sidewalk project



should begin soon. A couple of weeks ago I walked the proposed route with two engineers from ALDOT and our engineers from Ladd Environmental. We started at Little River Hardware and went to East River Road. The engineers met with the business owners along the route and got their input.

Reminder: Saturday, April 1 is community clean up day. Thanks to Lyle Nicely for organizing and to all of you who are volunteering!



From the Editor

by Kelly Leavitt

I recently saw this KodaChrome postcard on eBay and couldn't resist buying it for \$5. It amuses me, because those of us who know DeSoto Falls know that, of course, a blue lagoon doesn't sit above the high falls. It's just so...60s!

Spring is definitely in the air and well on its way to full bloom. My friends often share photos of life reawakening in texts and on social media. For me, the change of seasons in Mentone never gets old. Each year, there are new beauties to discover. My desk looks through a picture window onto our front porch and yard, and each year I enjoy watching the birds on the search for material for nest-building. They are cautious yet bold, discriminate yet indiscriminate. And, maybe it's just me, but they seem to gain an extra hop to their step when they've found the perfect piece of fluff (usually cats' hair).

I haven't yet seen a hummingbird this year, but I know they're in the area and I'm ready for six months of their sometimes graceful, sometimes frantic activity before they fly south once again. I've heard that hummingbirds will sometimes return to the same feeder on their spring return. Personally, I don't recognize the ones that come feed, but I love the idea that they may have found their way "home" after their arduous journey.

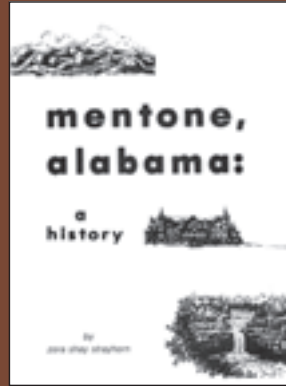
I have enjoyed seeing the colors and freshness of various blossoms outside my window while writing about the Gourdie Shop for this issue. Of course I've felt sad, like most of us, since the fire. But I had a moment when it really hit me that I'll never be able



to shop at the Gourdie Shop again. It's funny how grief touches us in different ways.

I've stopped by to look at the ruins several times. This week, most of the rubble had been cleared away and one lonely stone pillar remains. I know we all hope something equally as memorable will be developed on the empty land.

Have a lovely month, everyone. —Kelly



Learn about the History of Mentone

Zora Strayhorn's
book, *Mentone,
Alabama: A History*,
is for sale
in the MAPA office
for \$15.



Hammondville Offers Antique Alley Yard Sale Spaces

The Town of Hammondville will have yard sale spaces for rent for the Antique Alley Yard Sale on May 17–21. \$25 per space, per day or all four days for \$75 per space. Contact Clerk Kim Johnson at Town Hall, 256-635-6374, for more information. Spaces are first-come, first-served.

6th Annual Memories of Mayberry Valley Head

Saturday, May 6, beginning at 9 a.m.

Free Family Fun

Come meet Barney, Floyd, Ernest T, and Otis!

Food and arts & crafts vendors on the field
Live Music • Car cruise-in • Pony rides • Train rides • Balloons
Cloggers • Square dancing Auction • Drawings all day long

Proceeds benefit the Valley Head Fire Department.

Contact Chairman Adele Phillips to become a vendor
or learn more at adelephillips16@yahoo.com.



Message from MAPA’s President

by Beverly Haynes

Warmer weather demands that we are out and about in April. Easter is here, yards and gardens need loving attention, days are longer, and we get busier. We at MAPA are busy, too, making plans we will share soon. We are sad to have to bid farewell to board member Mark Hoffman. Thank you, Mark, for your faithfulness to MAPA these last several years. We will also miss John Kincer and his insight on

our little town. These vacancies were filled quickly by Joel Leonard and Deedee Morrison. We look forward to the new viewpoints they bring to the organization. We will see you out and about! Blessings, Beverly

Valley Head Clerk Debra Rhodes Retires



Valley Head’s Town Clerk, Debra Rhodes, has retired from a lifetime of service. Anyone who knows Debra, though, knows that she will continue to serve in valuable ways. Debra served four mayors during her 14 years as Town Clerk. Despite suffering a major heart attack six years ago, she has continued to energetically support the town, its citizens, and its school. Debra is known for her can-do attitude, and she certainly accomplished a lot. It is because of her efforts that Valley Head has been part of the Tree City U.S.A. program since 2010. Each spring, she has arranged for free trees to be distributed to community members. She also enjoyed working closely with Valley Head School’s Earth Day program each April.

In particular, Debra has had a fondness for the community’s elders, often calling them to be sure everything is O.K. She also worked with the food bank and Meals on Wheels programs to ensure those in need are provided with weekly frozen meals and monthly commodities. She worked on the town’s annual Memories of Mayberry event, and has helped several others towns train their new town clerks. Debra was born to serve. She says that as a child, she knew she wanted to be Town Clerk. Raised in Valley Head, her first job was at Citizens Bank when she was 17 years old while a student at Valley Head High School. She looks forward to spending more time with her family.

JD Trammell New Captain of DeSoto Rescue Squad



JD Trammell is the new captain of the DeSoto Rescue Squad. John Fischer now serves as 1st lieutenant and Michael Chambers is 2nd lieutenant. “We’d like to thank the former captain, Mike Stone, for all the contributions he has made to this community for the years that he led the squad,” JD said. JD is well-known as a man of service in the Mentone and Valley Head communities. He has been working for the DeKalb County Homeland Security & Emergency Management, a branch of the DeKalb County Commission, for about the past four years. He is in charge of Day-to-day Operations and Logistics.

“The Squad’s only goal is to be of service to the community in whatever aspect they may need us,” he said. “We’re not here just for first aid. We want to be a part of the community like we have been, but an enhanced version. We’re here for whatever the community may need. Whether you need help being picked up off the floor, or if a tree falls on your driveway or property, we’ll do what we can to get you back on track. “If you have a problem, let us know and we’ll go out of our way to help you, using the contacts and resources we have. If we can use the resources we have, let’s use them. That’s what they’re here for. Let’s use the resources we have to better ourselves as a community. “I want the squad to grow and be a meaningful part of the community, and not just called on when we’re needed. But be there.” All emergency calls should be placed with 9-1-1. Non-emergency calls can be placed to Captain JD Trammell at 256-635-8906, 1st Lt. John Fischer at 404-977-0455, and 2nd Lt. Michael Chambers at 256-635-8791. The Mentone and Valley Head communities are fortunate to have the DeSoto Rescue Squad at their service. To stay informed about upcoming events and fundraisers, visit their Facebook page @desotorecue and their website at desotorecue.org.

MAPA/Groundhog Office Update

Office hours in April will be on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. and by appointment. Our new location is in the old school building in the former principal’s office. We will be supporting the fire department by selling prints of a fire truck painted by Lydia Randolph, and supporting the town by selling the final edition of the Moon Lake School yearbook. We are also selling *The Vagabond Dreamer* (the biography of Col. Milford Howard) on behalf of Landmarks of DeKalb County. All proceeds will be passed on to these organizations.

Senior Health: Medicare & Second Opinions

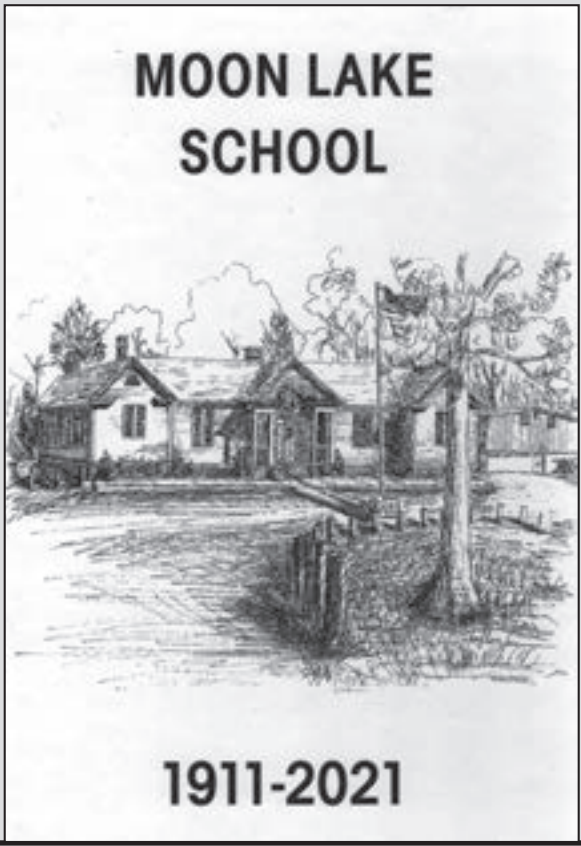
by Lynn Hixon

A second opinion is when you ask a doctor other than your regular doctor for their view on symptoms, an injury, or an illness you are experiencing in order to better help you make an informed decision about treatment options. Medicare covers second opinions if a doctor recommends that you have surgery or a major diagnostic or therapeutic procedure that is not an emergency. Medicare does not cover second options for excluded services, such as cosmetic surgery. In some

cases, Medicare will also cover a third opinion if the first and second options are different from each other. The second and third opinions will be covered, even if Medicare will not ultimately cover your procedure (unless it is an excluded service). If the first and second opinions were the same, but you want a third opinion, you may be able to see a third doctor for a confirmatory consultation. Medicare may cover a confirmatory consultation if your doctor submits the claim correctly and the services are

reasonable and necessary (even if Medicare will not ultimately cover them). In traditional Medicare, you pay 20% of the charges and the Part B deductible applies. If you are in a Medicare Advantage Plan, your plan may have different cost and coverage rules for second and third options. Contact your plan for more information. For assistance, please call the SHIP coordinator, Lynn Hixon, at the DeKalb County Council on Aging at 256-845-8590.

Moon Lake School Commemorative Yearbooks for Sale



To celebrate Moon Lake School and its history, the Town of Mentone has ordered additional copies of the school’s final yearbook, originally published in 2021. This particular issue of the yearbook features 22 pages dedicated to telling the story of the school, from its beginning in 1911 until its closing in 2021. The yearbook was compiled and designed by former Moon Lake School teacher and principal, Dr. Bill Berry, and former student and teacher, Lea Long. This is a great addition to any home’s book shelves or coffee table. It is rich with historical details, interesting anecdotes, and fond memories. It represents an important documentation of a vital chapter of Mentone’s history. The yearbooks are available for \$25 at Mentone’s Town Hall in downtown Mentone and at the MAPA/Groundhog office at Moon Lake Village. If you’d like your copy to be mailed, postage is available for an additional \$10. Email Town Clerk Kristen Emory at mentone5@yahoo.com to place your mail order.





More Hitching Post Memories

by Kelly Leavitt



Leslie Lee Priester is pictured in the center of her group of friends.

There aren't many people who are still alive who have memories of dancing at the Hitching Post, as the 1950s were a long 70 years ago. Leslie Lee Priester, 86, mailed this 1950 photo to *The Groundhog* when she heard the Hitching Post had burned. She and her friends were at the train depot in Meridian, Mississippi, on their way to Camp Skyline, where she attended camp as a camper, junior counselor, and counselor. She remembers wearing white gloves for the train ride, and then being picked up in a truck at the Valley Head train depot. "On the nights we were allowed to go to a dance," she said, "we'd dress in our Sunday best. We bought whatever we could buy to eat or drink downstairs. I remember all those steps! I remember the music and the mountain guys in their coveralls. We'd sit on the benches (could have been old pews) and one of "them there OLD GUYS" would come over and ask us if we wanted to dance. I preferred watching. But I did dance if asked. I went whenever we had a group going, and always had fun."



The above photo ran in the March issue, but the musicians were not identified. Thanks to David Rains for submitting this information from Dave Fisher:
Sitting at piano: Howard Kane (worked at Rains Chevrolet in Ft. Payne). First standing on left is Hank Smith. The bass fiddle player and guitar player are Hank's brother but their names are unknown. Names of other musicians remain unknown.



Dancers at the Hitching Post, 1950s. Courtesy of David Rains



Dancers at the Hitching Post, 1950s. Courtesy of David Rains

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BRICK RANCH HOME STATES ELEGANCE. 3BR 2BA + office/mud-room/4th BR. \$324,900. #1827404

THE PERFECT MENTONE GET-AWAY. Address is actually 123 Road 1967, Mentone. \$364,900. #1824129

2 HOMES LOCATED ON THE PARKWAY CLOSE TO EVERYTHING! \$595,000. #1808445

RARE FIND IN MENTONE. Brick basement ranch home positioned on 36.8 acres. \$425,000. #1825214

38 ACRES, stocked pond, 3 bedroom 2 bath home, and 2 chicken houses not in operation. \$599,000. #1828301

LOTS & LAND

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

200 ACRES located near historic Mentone! Mature trees, creek, paved road frontage. \$1,000,000. #1781133

BEAUTIFUL BROW property located in Lake of the Brow. Enjoy beautiful views of Shinbone Valley below. \$79,900. #1792283

MENTONE PROPERTY offers road frontage on Hwy 117 in the business/alcohol district. A rare opportunity as this is one of very few available vacant lots in this area! \$75,000. #1801221

BUILD YOUR NEW HOME with BREATHTAKING VIEWS year round! Brow property in Lake on the Brow on Lookout Mountain. \$55,000. #1798542, #1798643, #1798655, #1798657

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

BROW LOT in Mentone! Watch the seasons change from your own paradise between DeSoto State Park and DeSoto Falls. \$144,000. #1815139

5 WOODED ACRES NEAR DESOTO STATE PARK with NO RESTRICTIONS! Public Water available at the County Road. \$50,000. #1827419

BROW VIEW in Mentone! You can see for miles from your 2.3 acres!! \$72,500. #1814577

178 FEET OF RIVER FRONTAGE! The emerald green waters of the West Fork are perfect for kayaking and swimming! This property is ideal for your forever home or vacation home! Old road bed is already in place for your driveway! \$199,900. #1826674



Ready, Set, Auction! (cont. from page 1) the Valley Head Honeybee Apiary and their fans are sure to love this one! Other paintings, mosaic pieces, woodwork, and leatherwork have been donated by local artisans and craftspeople. Also, a two-night getaway at a beautiful downtown Birmingham

loft is on the auction block. Check out our website for photos of these items, artwork, dining menu, and information about our generous sponsors. It takes a village to present this event. Camp Skyline has allowed the use of their beautiful dining hall. Mentone Market is a great partner for ticket sales and food. The Mentone Community

Church is providing chairs and helping with the set-up. Sponsorships from local businesses are helpful, and it is not too late to participate. The cadre of creative spirits are truly making a magical setting for the evening. Come see returning patrons and meet new supporters. Taste of the Mountain is for a good

cause—the children and seniors of our area. It is a wonderful magic that brings all of this and us together. MERF is celebrating 30 years of this magic that enriches the learning and living of our community. It isn't possible without YOU!

A “Taste” of the Valley Head Student Artwork That Will Be Part of MERF’s Taste of the Mountain Art Auction



Mentone Educational Resources Foundation
Giggles and Gasps and Golden Locks

by Anna Mae Horn

Valley Head School’s auditorium filled with giggles and gasps of delight throughout the performance of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. Birmingham Children’s Theatre gave a stellar performance to an audience of lower elementary students last month. They really enjoyed Goldilocks racing through the aisle as she made her trek to the “big woods.” When Goldi’s mom and guitar-playing dad discovered Goldi



MERF organizes over 20 senior lunches per year to provide socialization and education for retired people. Did you know the walking track is always open to the public? The oversized musical instruments around the “Pathway to Community” are for kids of all ages to enjoy.



was missing, students wildly yelled directions while pointing the way. The performance flashes over to Three Bears’ home where things seem awry. The sped-up rewind scene brought laughter from the crowd as the bears discovered who had eaten Little Bear’s porridge and broken the chair. Even Mr. Rector, everyone’s favorite officer, had to see the entertainment. Mentone Educational Resources Foundation (MERF) is honored to bring these wonderful performances into the school. Fine arts are an important development tool for all students, and Ms. Paula makes fine art class and events fun for the students. Speaking of fun, Earth Day at Valley Head Park is April 20. Be sure to find the MERF tent for great activities, say hello, and let us know which is your favorite MERF program. Mentone Educational Resources Foundation enriches the community in a variety of ways besides the Fine Arts Program. MERF also financially supports class field trips for local students and awards scholarships.

MERF’s Carter Holland Memorial Scholarship is awarded annually to a college bound Valley Head High School graduating senior. Not taking the traditional academic route and choosing to attend a technical college? You still qualify! However, all applicants must have a B average, a strong work ethic, and a full time course load. Check with your counselor, Mrs. Dupree, and be sure to apply by May 5, 2023. You can also contact Mentone Educational Resources Foundation directly for an application or more information. Final reminder! Get your tickets now for MERF’s Taste of the Mountain Art Auction to support all these great programs! You can buy tickets at Mentone Market. For more information, email MERF.mentone@gmail.com, visit MERFhouse.org, or contact Anna Mae at 256-635-8775. Anna Mae Horn is the executive director of the Mentone Educational Resources Foundation. She can be reached at 256-635-8775 or merf.mentone@gmail.com.

The Return of Fine Arts Field Trips

by Paula Easter



As a Fine Arts teacher, one of the worst things that came out of the pandemic for my students... no field trips! Through a variety of field trips over the years, I have often seen the benefits that a live performance or a “hands on” experience provides for students. As things began to get better

see it again?” (Oh, my teacher heart!) There is also an art contest for students. The winning artwork is featured on the cover of the study program that is provided for each student by the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra. This year, three Valley Head students were finalists—Larkin Brown, Janet Brown and Jacob Morris—and their artwork was featured in the study program. Our road trip was made complete with a delicious lunch at Wendy’s and lots of yummy snacks and drinks for the trip home. Another treat for the students was that one of the new Coke machines with the many different flavors had been installed at this Wendy’s and everyone got to pick their flavor for their drink! Arriving back at Valley Head, our road trip a huge success, one student came up to me and unexpectedly hugged me and said, “I’ve never done anything like this before, thank you Ms. Paula.” There are just no words to



and we became more aware and knowledgeable, I was hoping that there might be field trips once again! (A teacher can hope, right?) This teacher is happy to report that the “no field trip” policy has changed. In February, the Valley Head 4th grade classes, Mr. Lasser, Ms. White, Dr. Harrison, and I returned to the road and traveled to Huntsville for the Young People’s Concert presented by the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra. This year’s concert was based on a favorite book of ours, Lemony Snicket’s “The Composer is Dead.” We had read the book in class and listened to the CD, but one student described it best: “Ms. Paula, it was amazing in person, can we

describe this teacher’s feelings. A huge ‘Thank You’ to the Mentone Educational Resources Foundation for providing this wonderful trip for these very grateful students and teachers. Paul Easter is the Fine Arts teacher at Valley Head School.



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Rhododendron Garden Club

by Alyce Kenney

“True wisdom consists in not departing from nature and in molding our conduct according to her laws and model.” —Seneca the Younger



According to Appalachian history (appalachianhistory.net), it was believed the family needed a good “spring cleaning” after a sedentary winter eating dried vegetables and salted meat. Each member of the family would have their dose of this mixture to purify their blood, thin or “cut” the blood, and make them feel better after the long winter. This mixture was often made with sulfur and molasses. Many of our ancestors used parts of plants in nature to create healthful tonics and tinctures

for any number of maladies. Perhaps you have a special recipe of your own that was handed down to you from a relative. Now that spring has officially arrived, it’s time to renew.

Along this line of thinking, our March meeting presentation came from the two of the proprietors and stewards of Rising Fawn Gardens located in Rising Fawn, GA. Karen Persinger and Amanda Verkest are a part of the team that honors and protects this wondrous 600-acre land conservation. They told us the history of the land, and the evolution of the careful selection of medicinal herbs and flowering plants that they chose to grow and harvest on this land, including tumeric and ginger. We had a “show and tell” of several medicinal plant specimens and learned their actions in assisting healing and promoting wellness. The gardens are referred to as a “Living Apothecary” that fosters education and wellness.



“Dedication to responsibly caring for the land is foundational to all we do” To learn more about the devotion to this land and the results of this caring relationship, visit risingfawngardens.com.

Our garden club is a part of the Northeast Alabama Federation of Garden Clubs. This “Federation” hosts a plant sale annually to raise funds for future flower show fees and other club events. The Spring Federation Plant sale for 2023 will be held on April 22 from 9–11 a.m. at the Community Center at Henager Park. The public is invited, so come find that particular plant you’ve been hoping for.

Spring is the time to refresh with new beginnings on many levels. Our club is engaged in many different plans to enhance the natural beauty of Mentone. We’re ready to roll up our sleeves and get going. Stay tuned to our Facebook page (@rhododendrongardenclub) and the

monthly *Groundhog* to learn more. Want to get involved? Join us! Have plants you want to donate? We’ll come get them. Don’t know what’s growing in your garden? Need some answers? Drop us a note at rhododendrongardenclub@gmail.com.

Our next meeting is at 9:30 a.m. CDT on Tuesday April 14, at the MERF House. We’ll be taking a trip to view the wildflowers at the Shirley Miller Wildflower Trail in nearby Chickamauga, GA. Come join the fun! Everyone is welcome!

The Rhododendron Garden Club is a member of National Garden Clubs, Inc., Deep South Garden Club, Inc., the Garden Club of Alabama, Inc. – District II, and the Northeast Alabama Federation of Garden Clubs.

Alyce Kenney serves as secretary for the Rhododendron Garden Club.

Save the Date!
Saturday, May 13
Mentone Tour of Gardens



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With a successful year, Little River Escape has 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 five tiny home communities and one down County Road 641 in Mentone, AL. There are several Airbnb Tiny Homes in our various locations to come experience a tiny home, downsizing, the community, and explore the surrounding areas.

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Grace’s Daughter *Handmade Home Decor*

Mentone Area Preservation Association/The Groundhog *Office*

Natural Light Photography *Photography Studio*

Otherworld Gifts *Handmade Soaps*

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Tracey’s Stitches *Quilts & Classes*

Zack of All Trades *Office*



Mentone American Legion Post 215 Gifted a New American Flag

by Barry Morton

A beautiful American flag has been gifted to the Mentone American Legion by the family of Raymond Larry Spiers, Sr. Mr. Spiers was originally given the flag by the Montgomery, AL Police Department after more than 20 years of service. Mr. Spiers served in the United States Air Force as a Military Police. He passed away at the age of 81 on April 4, 2021.



Legionnaire Jim Rotch, the owner of the former Mentone Springs Hotel, stands by the American flag recently gifted to the Mentone American Legion.



Post 215 will have a tent at the Valley Head's Memories of Mayberry event on May 6 for its first fundraiser and member drive of the year. 50/50 raffle chances will be sold at the MAL tent for \$5 a ticket or 5 tickets for \$20.

We have a \$20-a-ticket raffle of 100 tickets which we will pull at noon on Memorial Day, May 29 at the Post. All are welcome to attend. The winner will win \$1,000! We'll also have a hamburger lunch, open to the public, on our new grill for \$10 a plate, \$5 for hot dog, on Memorial Day from 11 a.m. until 2pm.

For raffle tickets, text Barry Morton, Post 215 Commander, at 334-202-8936 and he will come to you.

For up-to-date information, please visit our Mentone American Legion Facebook group.



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Plant Sales

Get Your Garden Gloves Ready!

DeKalb Master Gardeners will hold their Annual Spring Plant and Vegetable Plant Sale on Saturday, April 8, 7 a.m.-12 p.m. The sale will include heirloom and hybrid vegetable plants, herbs, native and evergreen azaleas, rhododendrons, ferns, hydrangeas, hollies, buckeyes, magnolias, purple beauty berry, perennials, annuals and many more plants. Proceeds from the plant sale go toward community projects. Bring your boxes and containers to fill them up at great prices. The sale (cash or check with ID only) will be located at the VFW Fairgrounds, 151 18th Street NE, Fort Payne.

The Northeast Alabama Federation of Garden Clubs will hold its annual plant sale on Saturday, April 22, 9 a.m.-11 a.m. at the Henegar Community Center at Henegar Park in Henegar. The sale will include natives, trees, shrubs, flowers and perennials.

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In Memoriam



CHRISTINE E. “CHRIS” NICHOLS
October 14, 1949—February 21, 2023

Christine E. “Chris” Nichols, age 73, of Baton Rouge, LA, passed away peacefully at her home on February 21, 2023 surrounded by family and friends. She was born on October 14, 1949, to the late Ernest W. Nichols and Janie Sneed Nichols. She was a native of Fort Payne and graduated from Fort Payne High School in 1968, later attending Jacksonville State University. While her career took her many places, she settled for 31 years in Baton Rouge, LA. Chris always kept Fort Payne close to her heart. She often hosted family and friends at her home in

Mentone and loved to share the beauty and serenity with those she loved. Chris spent her life dedicated to developing and providing quality services for those living with mental illness. She was passionate about serving others and used her own experiences with mental illness to guide her career and inspire others to do the same. She was fearless in her endeavors and was able to break barriers as a female executive, developing services for the mentally ill at Koala Centers of America early in her career. As the owner and CEO of Medical Management Options (MMO), she boldly pursued her goals and took great pleasure identifying strengths in others and helping them to recognize those strengths in themselves. She would never ask more of others than she was willing to give. When she saw a need in the community, she acted, especially with the needs of those living with mental illness and struggling with homelessness.

She recognized that housing and transportation were often great needs in the community. She founded a non-profit, Options Foundation, in 1997 to provide safe housing options rather than wait for others to address this need. She founded Reliant Transportation in 1997 to ensure that these needs were met for the most vulnerable in our community.

She moved the MMO corporate office to downtown Baton Rouge in 2000 and she was active in the revitalization of downtown through her work and dedication to the Downtown Development District.

While she experienced many successes in her professional life, her greatest love was for her sons, Robert “Rob” Miller and James “Chip” Miller. She took great joy in their successes and was happy that they too decided to live in Baton Rouge. She enjoyed reminiscing about her experiences as a mom. As she reflected on her life she would share, “Still today the greatest joy in my life is my time with my sons.”

She was preceded in death by her beloved parents, Janie Sneed Nichols and Ernest W. Nichols, and sister Charlotte Myrick. She is survived by her two sons, Robert Leland Miller and James Collins Miller; her dog, Sparky; brother-in-law, James “Jim” Myrick; many nieces, nephews and great nieces, Christy Myrick Dean and husband Leonard, Emma and Sophie Dean, Allison D. Myrick and husband Jimmy Allen, and Jonathan N. Myrick and wife Leanna; cousins, Ed McCoy and Patricia King; and many friends.

At Chris’s request, in lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Options Foundation, a 501(c)3, 728 North Blvd., Baton Rouge LA 70802 or visit optionsfoundation.com.



GLENDA BLALOCK WILLIAMS

Glenda Blalock Williams, age 79, of Mentone, passed away on Saturday, March 18, 2023. She is survived by her children, Kim Cox (Doug) and Barry Blalock (Paula); grandchildren, Josh Penney (Lexie), Hunter Blalock, Eddie Stevens (Amy), and Jacob Stevens; sisters, Joyce Brown and Debbie Baty; and several nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, Eugene Willingham and Ruby Willingham, and brother, Ralph Willingham.

The family is accepting flowers or donations to the Free Accepted Masons at Valley Head or Ruhama (mail to: 179 County Road 520, Mentone, AL 35984).



DEBORAH RENÉE GUFFEY
November 8, 1958–March 17, 2023

Deborah “Deb” Renée Guffey, 64, passed away on March 17, 2023, after several years of battling a terminal lung disease. Deb was born on November 8th, 1958, in Honolulu, Hawaii, to Joy Sims and Gerald Whitt. As a military family, she spent her childhood traveling across the world with her parents and three sisters. Deb graduated Ramsay High School in Birmingham, AL in 1977. In 1992, she received her registered nursing degree from Gadsden State Community College and practiced at Floyd Medical Center in Rome, GA, and UAB Medical Center in Birmingham, AL.

In 1991 she met her partner, Gwen Foster in Gadsden, AL, and they married on September 19, 2015. They lived in Mentone, AL, for 17 years where their home became a place for family and friends to gather and enjoy local art festivals. In 2017, the two moved to Hoover, AL.

Deb was a fierce advocate for the rights and protection of animals and the LGBTQIA+ community. She made many friends across the country through scooter and MINI Cooper clubs. Other hobbies include traveling and collecting art and music records.

Deb is survived by her wife, Gwen Foster; stepdaughter, Dina Durel; stepfather, Sam Sims; sisters, Denise Lindsey, Dana Bradley, and Dieka Rome; and many loving nieces and nephews. She is preceded in death by her mother, Joy Sims, and father, Gerald Whitt.

A memorial service for immediate family will be announced at a later date. In lieu of flowers, please consider honoring your memory of Deb by donating to one of her favorite charities: your local animal shelter, Magic City Acceptance Center, or Birmingham AIDs Outreach.

ADDIE ELIZABETH COLES
May 29, 1970 – March 22, 2023

Addie Elizabeth Coles, age 52, of Valley Head, Alabama, passed away on Wednesday, March 22, 2023 at DeKalb Regional Medical Center. Addie was born on May 29, 1970 in Columbus, Ohio and most recently worked as a truckdriver.

She is survived by her children, George Coles, Jewely Coles, and Frank Hester; mother, Sharon Waters; and siblings, William Coles, Gary Coles, and Angela Coles. She was preceded in death by her son, Aaron Coles.



STANLEY MILES MASSEY
April 2, 1952 – March 28, 2023

Stanley Miles Massey, age 70, of Mentone, passed away on Tuesday, March 28, 2023 at his residence. He is survived by his brother, Kenneth Massey (Judy); niece, Kimberly Massey Smith (Jason); nephews, Scott Massey and Brian Massey; great-nephews, Eamonn Smith, Aidann Smith, and Iann Smith; and great-niece, Coralynn Massey.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Austin Massey and Winnie Cheek Massey; brother, Dennis Massey; and niece, Nikki Massey.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to the DeKalb County Animal Adoption Center, 2601 Jordan Rd. SE, Fort Payne, AL 35968.



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02 APR

PALM SUNDAY

CHURCH | 10:30 AM

Liturgy of the Palms & Holy Communion

06 APR

MAUNDY THURSDAY

CHURCH | 6:00 PM

Washing of the feet & Eucharistic Commemoration

07 APR

GOOD FRIDAY

SACRED GARDEN | 12:00 PM

Liturgy & Stations of the Cross

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“Old Yeller” Art Prints Raise Funds

Here’s a fun way to support Mentone’s volunteer firefighters. Mentone artist Lydia Randolph painted the department’s old yellow firetruck, with the site of the former Mentone Springs Hotel as its backdrop.

The cost of the 11" x 17" prints is \$20 (plus \$5 postage when mailed). All proceeds from the sale of these art prints will be used to purchase much-needed equipment for the firefighters of the North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District (Mentone’s volunteer fire department).

The prints are being sold in the MAPA/Groundhog office in the old schoolhouse building at Moon Lake Village. Drop by on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday between 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., or call 256-289-2002 to make an appointment. Email mapamentone@gmail.com if you’d like to place an order by mail.



Free Smoke Alarms

Did you know that home fires claim seven lives every day, but having working smoke alarms can cut the risk of death by half? The Mentone Area Preservation Association is partnering with the North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District to provide free smoke alarms to local residents.

The alarms are provided by the American Red Cross as part of their “Sound the Alarm” program. We have a limited number available, so we must limit distribution to two per family, first-come, first-served.

Come to the MAPA/Groundhog office in the old schoolhouse building at Moon Lake Village on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday between 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., or call 256-289-2002 to make an appointment.

If you need help installing an alarm, let us know and we’ll see if one of the firemen can help.

Fire Safety Evaluation

The North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District offers an important free service for any in need, especially seniors. If you would like them to come look at your yard or house for recommendations on how to prevent forest or house fires, call Chief Joseph Lee at 256-899-4027.

Little River Hardware Sponsors Fundraiser for Firefighters

You can help support our firefighters while trying for a chance to make a fire...a barbeque fire, that is! Through the month of April, Little River Hardware is selling raffle tickets for a chance to win an Omaha grill set, complete with a grill, barbeque tools, charcoal briquets, and starter fluid. Tickets cost \$5 each or five for \$20 and are available at the store at 5190 AL Hwy. 117 in Mentone. Store hours are 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m.–5 p.m. on Saturdays. All proceeds benefit the North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District.

A Request from our First Responders

Our local fire, rescue, and police teams are here to help us. In return, the most important thing we can do to help them is to be certain they can find your property in the event of an emergency call. “The single most important thing is to be sure your address is easily seen from the road,” said Chief Joseph Lee. “If it’s dark, foggy, or stormy, we need to be able to find you. The best way is to mark your address with 3” or 4” reflective numbers on your mailbox. If you don’t have a mailbox, a simple stake in the ground at the entrance to your driveway will work.”



These reflective numbers are available at Little River Hardware.

“People have gotten a lot better the last few years with labeling their address, but we really need 100% compliance,” said firefighter Wes Pullen.

Ninety percent of the fire alarms that come through homeowners’ security systems are false alarms. If the responders can’t get through a

locked gate, they may need to cut gate padlocks or take other actions to get to the building. It’s imperative that residents with locked gates designate a keyholder. “It’s crucial they give a key, combination, or code to someone nearby and that they notify 911 or their alarm company of that person’s current contact information. If a combination or keypad gets changed, residents need to be sure they let their keyholder know,” Chief Lee said.

It’s also important to be certain your driveway is not overgrown and can be accessible by a large truck. Cut any low limbs that may impede their path.

In the event of an emergency, call 911. Do not call any first responders you may personally know. 911 will contact them directly. Those extra moments may save a life or property.

For general, non-emergency questions or concerns, call Chief Lee at 256-899-4027.

Spring flowers are nature’s most fragrant charms. —Angie Weiland-Crosby

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Friends of Moon Lake Library Welcomes New Board Members

by Holley Midgley

With the addition of Jody Rhodes, Tim Henderson, and Joan Byrum, the board of directors of the Friends of Moon Lake Library is again at full roster. Let’s meet them.

Jody is a retired Atlanta lawyer who was born and raised in Vicksburg, MS. She specialized in medical defense work, then retired and moved to Mentone in 2021. She is an avid member of the (nearly) famous Mentone Ukes, and a pickleball enthusiast.

Tim is a native of Jacksonville, AL and is an alumni of Jacksonville State University. He and his wife Rebecca own a Mentone horse farm known as Long Meadow Farm. He was raised around horses all his life, and has been a resident here for six years. Rebecca owned the Tip Top Bakery behind the old Hitching Post.

Joan is a Selma, AL native who’s been in Mentone for 20 years. Her late husband, Jim, served on the library board for many years. She was a health care administration professional for her entire career and was the hospital administrator for the Selma hospital. Her daughter Kristen Emory is Mentone’s Town Clerk. Kristen and her husband Tom owned and operated the Mentone Market for 17 years, and that’s how Joan has come to know so many folks in Mentone.

It’s a pleasure to welcome these three talented people to our Friends’ board.

“Unrivaled: Sewanee 1899”

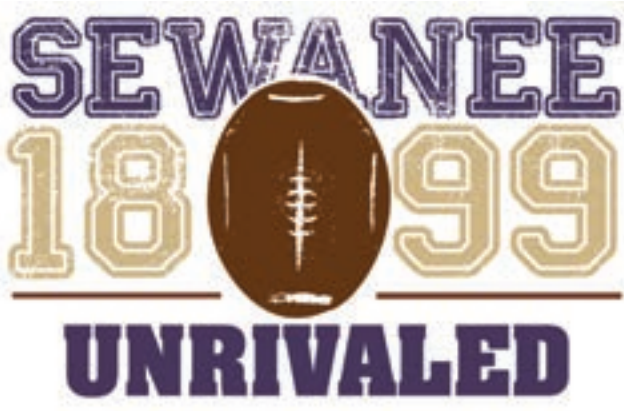
Film Viewing and Q&A with Co-Director/Scriptwriter

by Deedee Morrison

The Mentone premiere of the movie “Unrivaled: Sewanee 1899” is being presented at Moon Lake Library on April 29. There will be a reception at 6 p.m., with the movie beginning at 6:30 p.m. A brief Q&A will follow with Norman Jetmundsen, co-director and scriptwriter for the film.

“Unrivaled” tells the remarkable story of Sewanee’s 1899 football team—winning five games in six days on a 2,500-mile train trip. Sewanee (the familiar name of the University of the South), is a small Episcopal university in Tennessee, but they battled Georgia, Georgia Tech, Tennessee, Southwestern Presbyterian, Texas, Texas A&M, Ole Miss, LSU, Tulane, Cumberland, Auburn, and North Carolina. The players were all scholar-athletes who played for the love of the game and without any type of athletic scholarships.

In 140 years of college football, nothing else comes close to this team and its season. This fascinating documentary tells the compelling, historically accurate, and riveting story of the team, the season, and the rare



convergence of talent, personalities, and drive that made Sewanee’s 1899 season truly legendary.

Norman Jetmundsen, Jr., was born in Mobile, Alabama. He graduated from Sewanee as an English major and earned a law degree from the University of Alabama. He then spent two years at Magdalen College, Oxford, as a Rhodes Scholar and obtained a M.Litt. Degree in Law. “Unrivaled” has been a passion project for Norman—he couldn’t let the story go untold.

April 2023 @ Moon Lake Library

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

April 1 @ 10:30 a.m.—Little Library Learners. Stories and crafts for children ages 3-7.

April 1 @ 1 p.m.—Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

April 7 @ 6 p.m.—Family Game Night! Bring a snack to share and we’ll enjoy board games at the library.

April 8 @ 10:30 a.m.—Moon Lake Library book club. This month we’ll discuss *Cold Sassy Tree* by Olive Ann Burns.

April 12 @ 5 p.m.—A special meeting of Scrabble Club. Level up your word skills! All are welcome. We’re looking for new members. Join us for a game and a simple supper to follow.

April 13 @ 5 p.m.—Joint meeting of Friends of Moon Lake Library board and the municipal library Board of Trustees

April 15 @ 10:30 a.m.—Little Library Learners. Stories and crafts for children ages 3-7.

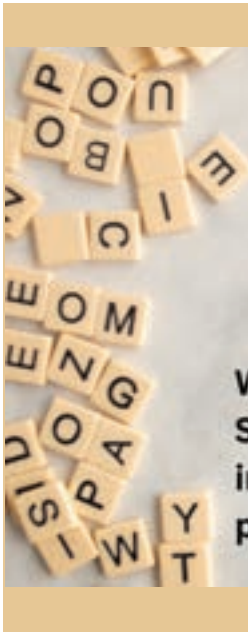
April 19 @ 6–8 p.m.—Art Critique and Discussion Group with Mikel Yeakle, sponsored by Little River Arts Council. Let’s talk about art. Artists, please bring a piece or two to share.

April 15—NO UKES today. Catch the library’s house band at their gig at the Mentone Inn’s pavilion!

April 21 @ 6 p.m.—Bring a snack to share and we’ll enjoy board games at the library.

April 29 @ 1 p.m.—Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

April 29 @ 6 p.m.—“Unrivaled: Sewanee 1899.” Film Night kicks off with a reception at 6 p.m., followed by the screening of the movie at 6:30 p.m. and a Q&A with co-director/scriptwriter Norman Jetmundsen about the documentary.

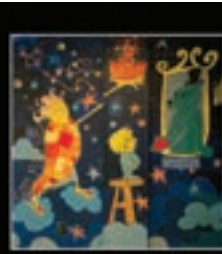


Calling All Scrabble Players!

Wednesday, April 12, at 5:00 PM
Moon Lake Library

Whether you want to level up your Scrabble game or just play for fun, you're invited to join us for an evening of games, pro tips, and supper.

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Little River Arts Council News

by Juli Jordan

The next time you visit DeSoto Falls, you will see a new plaque installed at the top of the steps that lead to the observation area. The plaque recognizes the public art collaboration between DeSoto State Park and Little River Arts Council (LRAC).

Brittney Hughes, DeSoto State Park Naturalist, dreamed of transforming the mundane concrete steps into a delight of colorful glass mosaics. Brittney’s creative idea captured the imagination of the community. With the help of mosaic artists/instructors, Linda Munoz and Jane Nuckolls, and DeSoto State Park staff member Paige Smith, along with a number of community volunteers, the project was completed in late 2019. The public art project, entitled “A River Runs Through It,” depicts the West Fork of Little River flowing down the length of the steps and a famous John Muir quote: “Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.” Over 1,000 people contributed to the project.

Public art projects like this one create a sense of wonder, an unforgettable visual memory that ties us to a place and a time. Imagine how many smiles this one brilliant idea inspired. Imagine the number of photographs taken of these steps.

To learn more about this project and see the before and after photos, click “past events” tab on our website at littleriverartscouncil.org.

Come Back Home

Did you know that LRAC began the Home Tour in 2006 under the leadership of Heather Nicely? The event began as a tour of artist studios, later becoming a home tour, with artists showing their works in the homes. We are happy to report that the event returns this year, with a few changes. The Holiday Home Tour is a one-day event on December 9, the same day as Mentone’s Christmas Tree lighting. The homes will be decorated for the holidays and artists will display their work at many of the locations.

Member Artists—Updates

LRAC member artists Lydia Randolph and Kevin Chitwood recently exhibited their work at Fairhope Arts and Crafts Festival. Wood carver Doug Perkins has branched out. You can pick one of his copper roses at Nena’s Produce and General Store. Kelly Farley, Scott Thomas, and Mikel Yeakle will be showing their paintings and photography at the Paradise Garden May Artist Market on Saturday, May 6 from 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. EDT. General admission is \$10, seniors \$5, free for Paradise Garden Foundation members, Chattooga County residents, and children 12 years and under.

We are so proud of our area artists! Artists, please tag LRAC on your social media posts and send us your schedules so that we can better promote you. The LRAC Artist Registry is part of our website and is a free an opportunity to share your work with a wider online audience. To learn more, click Artist Registry at littleriverartscouncil.org.

Art Talk

Lively, engaging conversations happen at our monthly Art Talks. The March gathering included Kathleen Wheeler, Scott Thomas, Barbara Umland, Mikel Yeakle, Betsy and Craig Sheldon, and Bill Rutledge. Art Talk is held every third Wednesday, 6–8 p.m., at Moon Lake Library and is open to anyone who creates or appreciates art.

Upcoming Events

Pop Up Art is in full gear this month, beginning with Lacy Hope Dobbs on April 1 and Rhino Studios on April 8. Each Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., a different artist or group of artists will pop up on the grounds of the Mentone



Inn. The weekly art Pop Ups will take place through the fall and are a wonderful opportunity for emerging and established artists to show their work during the bustling Farmer’s Market. Interested artists please contact Cynthia Stinson at makescynts@me.com for more information and openings.

The first annual Spring Fling Social is open to the public! Spring on over to the Mentone Inn on Sunday, April 30, from 5–7 p.m., where we will kick off our 2023 art season with light refreshments, information cards, and a sneak peek at our awesome new t-shirt designs. This is a FUN raiser, not a fundraiser.

On Friday, May 19, from 7–10 p.m., our Music for the People begins with the homegrown tunes of Will Dooley and Company on the lawn behind Linger Longer Pavilion at the Mentone Inn. The 2nd annual Big Art Pop Up follows on Saturday, May 20, 10 a.m.–3 p.m., at the same location. Enjoy a variety of arts, crafts and music. The concert and art market are free to the public.

Music for the People Continues on Second Saturdays of Summer in the Heart of Mentone

Enjoy music under the stars June through August from 7–10 p.m. at Mentone Inn’s Linger Longer Pavilion. Bring a chair or blanket, and picnic from one of our local restaurants. The concerts are free events and fun for the whole family.

LRAC was founded in 2006. Our mission is to enrich the quality of life for people in Mentone and neighboring communities by raising funds for the arts, sponsoring events, providing educational opportunities, and strengthening cultural resources for the benefit of all businesses and citizens in the Mentone area. We rely on memberships, individual and corporate contributions, program revenues, and fundraising to support our programs throughout the year. We are grateful to the donors, supporters, and volunteers who make our work possible.

If you would like to support our mission consider becoming a member and/or volunteering at one of our events. To become a member, visit littleriverartscouncil.org and click the Membership tab.

Juli Jordan serves as the president of Little River Arts Council.

Summer Music Series

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Mentone Arts Center

Spotlighting Balpha Noojin; early May class in beadmaking

by Randy Grider

April gets off to a fast start with our botanical drawing class by visiting artist/instructor Redenta Soprano on April 1 and 2. This class filled up early, but we have other upcoming classes we'll discuss below.

But first, as part of the 2023 artists recognition program, we want to salute our April Artist of the Month. Balpha Noojin is a multi-talented artist known for two distinct art forms—wire sculptures and, more recently, iconography.

Using nature as his guide and Montreal, Canada as his home base, Balpha spent many years working as a sculptor of Chinese wire sculptures. He held one-man shows from Europe to Asia to North America. Among the places he exhibited are Nena's Choice Gallery (NYC), Bellardo's Galley (NYC), Nessa Gallois (Miami), Salon des Metiers d'Art de Quebec (Montreal), One of a Kind Show (Toronto), Mikimoto Gallery (Tokyo), Bijoux 10 (Lugano, Switzerland) and The Center of Cultural Arts (Gadsden, AL). His sculptures can be found in private collections throughout Europe, Mexico, Japan, Canada, and the U.S.

In 1994, Balpha moved back to Alabama and now resides in Mentone. Upon his return, he became fascinated with the mystery of Byzantine icons. His mother was an iconographer and for 15 years they both trained and studied under master iconographer Phil Zimmerman in Pennsylvania.

For the past 20 years, he has been teaching icon workshops from his studio in Mentone. Balpha reminds us that "Icons are prayers and meditations, and are written, not painted, as we are writing the word of God with a brush." He asks us to step back and enjoy these spiritual, ancient works of art called, "windows into heaven."

Upcoming this month and beyond

On Tuesday, April 4, the Music on the Mountain Songwriter Series will take place on the stage inside the Chuck Sennett Center for Arts building from 6:30–8:30 p.m. The free event spotlights local/regional songwriters performing their original music. Award-winning singer-songwriter Craig Hendricks is the host for the round.

We still have a few spots available for our glass beadmaking class on May 6–7. Glass beadmaking, also known as lampwork, is an ancient art that is still an honored craft. In this introductory class, students will learn the amazing process of making glass beads, working with rods of beautiful colored glass that they'll melt over an open-flame torch. Students will then work on basic shaping followed by



Balpha Noojin



One of Balpha's icons on display at the Mentone Arts Center



Glass jewelry by beadmaker Terry Hale

adding dots, lines, sprinkles of color, and much more. Detailed safety instructions will be covered throughout the day. At the end of class, we'll talk about how to wear and display the beads and offer some interesting ideas for using them in non-wearable ways. This class will be a perfect first step for those interested in pursuing the art of lampwork.

Instructor Terry Hale is an artisan glass beadmaker and jewelry designer based in Madison, AL. Her skills at the glass torch began in 2003 when she took her first class in working with molten glass, studying with Marjorie Langston in Chattanooga. In 2006, she opened Hale Fire Glass, a brick-and-mortar studio that was also

a classroom and gallery for local artists. Very soon after, she was invited to teach at John C. Campbell Folk School (Brasstown, NC) where she still regularly teaches beginner to advanced classes in torchwork as well as jewelry making. She also teaches at the Alabama Folk School at Camp McDowell (Nauvoo, AL), Miami University (Oxford, OH), Appalachian Center for Craft (Smithville, TN), and semi-annually at Essence of Mulranny/Mulranny Arts

in Ireland. Together, Hale and Langston host Hot Time in the Valley, a popular bi-annual glass beadmakers' retreat, soon celebrating its 20th year in Chattanooga.

For several years, Hale was on the Board of Directors for the International Society of Glass Beadmakers, serving as Regional Director, Director of Membership, and eventually as President. Her work has appeared in The Flow Magazine's "Women in Glass" Gallery, and it has been shown in several boutiques and galleries throughout the US and Ireland. She has also shown her work at John C. Campbell Folk School's Fall Festival and Fort Payne, AL's Boom Days, in addition to many other art shows.

Tuition is \$195 and class is limited to 10 students. All tools will be provided. There will be a supply fee for materials (glass, bead release, frit, etc.) of \$35/person, payable to the instructor.

We have a makeup Bob Ross class on May 13 with a couple of spots available and a two-day beginners/intermediate watercolors taught by Virginia Urani on June 3–4, which we will discuss next month.

For more information or to register for any class, email mentoneartscenter@gmail.com or call 245-674-3366.

Randy Grider is executive director of the Mentone Arts & Cultural Center.



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Mentone Ukes... for Kids!

by Debra Fey

The Mentone Ukes is excited to offer a free Beginner Ukulele lesson just for kids! Jerry Megli and I will lead this fun, interactive session. No prior musical experience required and loaner ukuleles will be provided.

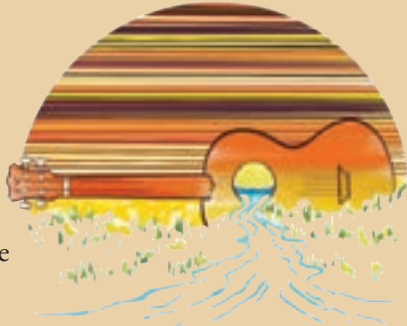
- The ukulele is an easy musical instrument to learn
- The nylon strings are easy on little fingers and the ukulele fits little hands.
- It's small, lightweight, and very easy to carry and play anywhere.
- It's affordable!
- Most importantly: It's fun to play!

Music lessons for youth are beneficial on many levels. Learning to play a musical instrument helps improve cognitive functions, such as:

- Focus and memory
- Reading skills
- Eye-hand coordination
- Concentration

We will cover:

- How to hold the ukulele
- How to tune the ukulele strings
- Identifying the parts of the ukulele
- How to strum and basic strumming patterns
- How to play a few chords and play a simple song



The class size is limited. To learn more or to reserve a spot for your child, please email debrajfe@gmail.com.

The Mentone Ukes will be participating in the Little River Arts Council Pop-Up on April 15 (weather- permitting) on the grounds of the Mentone Inn from 10 a.m.–1 p.m. Some members will be there playing informally and a table will be set up to sell our t-shirts and other merchandise. We hope to see you there! Join us at our regular FREE sessions on April 1 and April 29 at 1 p.m. CST at the Moon Lake Library. Newcomers always welcomed. Beginners are treated to a special beginners lesson that will teach the basics of the ukulele. Loaner ukes are available.

Connect with us on Facebook @MentoneUkes or at mentoneukes.com. Questions? Please contact Debra Fey (debrajfe@gmail.com) or Jody Rhodes (jodyrhodesy@gmail.com).

***Groundhog* archives 1982–2023
are available @ mapamentone.com**



Community Calendar

Mentone Town Council meets the 2nd Tuesday every month at 5pm at Mentone Town Hall.

Mentone's Planning Commission meets the 1st Wed. every month at 5pm at Town Hall.

Valley Head Town Council meets monthly on the 1st Monday at 6pm at Town Hall.

Hammondville Town Council work sessions are held monthly on the 1st Tues.. at 5pm at Town Hall. Council meetings are held on the 1st Thurs. every month at 6pm in the Fire Hall.

The North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District Board meets the 3rd Monday of every month at 7pm.

FREE FOOD for eligible persons and families. Wednesdays, 9–11am. New applicants are welcome. Joint effort between St. Joseph's-on-the-Mountain Episcopal Church (Community Outreach Ministry) and the Food Bank of North AL.



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April Birthdays

- | | | | |
|---|--|----|--|
| 1 | Michele Kincer
Angie Miller
Calvin Lanier
Kayla Cronnon
Cayson Hughes
Stan Dowiat | | |
| 2 | Milton Chambers
Ellie Cox
Jayken Lawton
Nancy Lawton
Amanda Patrick
Dee Dee Hendricks
Marcus Ledford
Riley Shae Burt | 7 | Shannon Chappell
Kansas Lee
Kyle Miller
Dori Reed
Will Stephens
Drew Ashley
Wes Pullen |
| 3 | Ray Padgett
Jessica Battles
Jalen Gregory
Sherri Watson | 8 | Angie Wright
Jackson Eli Rosson
Sharon Coots
Madissen Chitwood
Hayden Knowles
Robert Williamson
Jedidiah Lawton, Jr. |
| 4 | Jamie Vest
Sherry Barkley
Cory Powell
Cameron Thompson
Lindsay Thompson
Storm Kurts | 9 | Josh Goss
Justin Kahler
Mickey Smith
Cody West
Brenda Goggans |
| 5 | Kaitlyn Tedder
Jana Sharp
Kenny Chamlee
Steve Rhodes
Chris Black
Andi Runnels
Donna Busby
Jamie Pannell
Gene Justice
Jaxon Smith
Glenn Miller
Jess Weathers | 10 | Brittany McAdams
Newly Ingram
Paul Ethan Blackwell
Lindsey Webb
Lisa Moore
Emily McElhaney
Debra Rhodes
Stanford Carson
Conner Barkley
Robert Tillman
Pam Gibson |
| 6 | Felicia Harrison
John Chambers
Jazz Chambers
Ethel Manifold
Sydney Ingram
Jennifer Cruse
Fisher Posey | 11 | Jordan Beasley
Joey Garrett
Josie Crider Goss
Jerri Ann Tidmore
Austin Simpson
Ashton Simpson
Conner Clardy |
| | | 12 | Corey Davis
Kyle Coots
Tiffany Baker
Jeff Stephenson |
| | | | Liam Cooper
Mary Shurett |
| | | 13 | Brian Blalock
Tessa Gravitt |
| | | 14 | Zoey Chambers
Carl Tubberville
Jason Baber
Tucker Wayne Smith
Austin Frost
Jessica Chisenhall |
| | | 15 | Barbara Busby Rape
Craig Hendricks
Kailee Johnson
Donna Padgett |
| | | 16 | Preston Kirby
Danny Hopper
Al Blackburn
Sandy Johnson
Waker Moore
Shelley Williams
Abigail Yerke
Gail West |
| | | 17 | Ann Cash Harrell
Scott Guinn
Hannah Drain |
| | | 18 | Taylor Verdon
Shan Smith |
| | | 19 | Butch Manifold
Melanie Wright |
| | | 20 | Lane Ingram
Brenda Clinton
Chris Thacker |
| | | 21 | Charlene Smith |
| | | 22 | Thelma Coots
John Paul Verdon
Daxson Crow
Nolan Fowler
Mindy Chadwick
Emery Rose Smith
Fred Agricola |
| | | 23 | Lauren McGee |
| | | | Philip Cash
Coleton Phillips
KareyAnn Garner
Courtney Meadow
Taylee Keith
Adam Dupree
Mariah Shannon
Kinsley Brown |
| | | 24 | Cooper Kirby
Jennifer Hamilton |
| | | 25 | Molly Manifold
Eloise Lance
John Moore
Phyllis James
Cindy Carden
Zack Payne
Wesley Flarity
Karson London
April Mullins |
| | | 26 | Kaden Brody Johnson
Emily Bowman-Miller
Kaylee Cartwright
Tommy Stephens
Ben Shurett |
| | | 27 | Stacey Bowman
Austin Reed
Vaelyn Heinrich
Maria Moreno |
| | | 28 | Linda Stephenson
Katie Hester
Dawson Kincer
John Kincer
Ezra Underwood
Lila Dupree
Cooper Dupree
Tiffany Berry |
| | | 29 | Mandi Goza
Anita Meadows
Shane McMahan
Jaimee McGee
Doug Powell |
| | | 30 | |

Anniversaries

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|------------------------|
| 1 | Raymond & Sharon Coots | 19 | Corey & Abby Davis |
| 3 | Chris & Jennifer Collins
Steve & Sandy Tate | 20 | Josh & Brandi Rosson |
| 4 | Tim & Allie Cowart | 22 | Preston & Chelsey Owen |
| 7 | Milton & Gail Chambers | 24 | Ian & Larissa Allen |
| 11 | Robert & Bridget Arnold | 25 | Don & Dena McKee |
| 14 | Ronnie & Leslie Bowman | 26 | Ross & Jessica VanPelt |
| 16 | Nick & Shinice Stout | 28 | Todd & Angie Godwin |

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"The Golfer"

Goodbye Gourdie's
(cont. from page 1)

“Alabama Public Television did a piece in 1985. At that time, most people had never been to Mentone and they were fascinated. Someone had tried to set me up on a blind date with their friend, Claud. I said, ‘I don’t date lawyers nor men named Claud.’ He said, ‘Well, I don’t date artists.’ But once he saw me on TV, he decided to call me, and we dated off and on for four years before we married in 1989. We met at the front door of the Gourdie Shop. He died in 2021.”

An enterprising woman, Sharon said she was Mentone’s first licensed real estate broker. She started Mentone Realty, whose office was originally in what became the Gourdie Shop’s dressing room.

“I began just selling Gourdie's, mainly through mail order. I was selling a lot of real estate, and then my husband and daughter got their real estate licenses. We were busy every weekend selling real estate. My husband got the idea to go to a huge gift show in Las Vegas where they had about 6,000 vendors and manufacturers from all over the world. I started becoming more of a gift shop so I didn't have to be quite as hands-on with the Gourdie's. By then I'd started making little bitty Gourdie's, which I called ‘Biddies.’ That’s when I started making a lot of character Gourdie's. There was Vincent Van Gourd, and we had Gourdie Angels. The small Gourdie's were easier to work with, and easier to ship.

“I was still converting over to having a lot of gifts and selling things that no one else in the southeast was selling, because they were all going to the Atlanta shows. All the southeast gifts shops were pretty much selling the same things. I started carrying a lot of one-of-a-kind pieces of jewelry. I was ahead of the curve when I started selling the clothing from India. I had things in the shop that people had never seen before.

“When Mark and Andy owned the Mentone Springs

Hotel, business was unbelievable. Busloads of people would come to the White Elephant because it was on the antique trail. People would fly to Atlanta, Huntsville, Chattanooga, and Birmingham, then rent a car and drive to Mentone for the weekend to stay in this lovely Victorian hotel on top of the mountain. They would come in and spend a lot of money on clothes and jewelry.

“Mentone’s always been like a roller coaster, with its ups and downs. So many shops have been in the Hitching Post—The Dish, Magnolia Joe’s, the original Wildflower, several bakeries, a fudge shop. The list goes on and on.”

Because Mentone’s on a major route from Atlanta to Huntsville, The Gourdie Shop welcomed shoppers from all over the world. Many told Sharon they were drawn by her signature lights and the merchandise displayed on the stone porch. “I always kept guest books,” she said. “They were full of people from all around the world. It was amazing.

“I made Gourdie's until 2000. It became too difficult. I had a grandchild and I was commuting back and forth from Arab, where I lived with my husband. My priorities changed. It was just time. It became too complicated to have a cottage industry and work with so many people.

“To make a Gourdie was a lot of work. I had to be in contact with farmers to get the gourds. They had to dry, they had to be cleaned. I actually had a gourd washer made. It was like a cement mixer without paddles. There was a lot more involved



The luckiest Gourdie! Kathryn Norris at the Mentone Market asked Sharon to repair this 1984 Gourdie. It was at Sharon's house and saved from the fire.

in making a simple doll than you would think.

Sharon had kept some sentimental, collectible Gourdie's that were in the shop when it burned. “I’m heartbroken,” she said. “So many one-of-a-kind pieces burned.”

“The most important thing about the Gourdie's is that they were a way of helping people,” Sharon said. “We are all alike, but each one of us is uniquely different.”



"The Judge"

Gourdie's were signed, dated, and numbered, making them collectible to this day. A tag was attached to each one that said:

What’s a Gourdie?

A friend to tell a secret to—
To bare your soul when you are blue—
To share your dreams that can come true—
Gourdie's unique and original
JUST LIKE YOU!

The Gourdie's were created with a specific meaning and purpose. For Sharon, they are symbols of individualism. Just as there are no gourdie's alike, there are no people alike. Gourdie's are also friends to voice our inner most secrets. Sharon says, “When a person learns to voice his or her feelings, even if it is only to a Gourdie, life becomes much richer.”

The entire process for making the Gourdie is unique. The clothing was designed without an indication of male or female in order that they might become whatever their owner wanted them to be. (Because of public demand, “Special Gourdie's” were created and those Gourdie's may have an indication as to gender, hobbies, occupation, etc.) There are also several secrets to making a Gourdie and only Gourdie and Sharon know the secret. Sharon won’t tell, and neither will Gourdie. He doesn’t have a mouth!



Left: “The Wizard” 1986
Top: Gourdie Shop t-shirts were very popular
Right: The Gourdie Shop's front porch



Some of Sharon’s most notable memories...

There have been so many special moments in the Gourdie Shop. My favorite was when the Alabama Institute for the Deaf in Talladega sent a representative and a deaf child to the shop to present me with a “I love you” pin because they were using the “What’s a Gourdie?” book in their school. That was a great joy to me. Willie Nelson came to Mentone

because he was looking to buy some property. He came in the shop one day when I was on a trip with Claude, before we married. I called to check on the shop and the girls were so excited. They told me Willie Nelson had come in the shop and stayed for an entire hour and bought two Gourdie's. He looked all around my studio. Though Eddie Bauer never came

to Mentone, I did meet him with his wife at the craftsman’s show in Gatlinburg. They bought three the first day and two the second day. We became friends. They sent me postcards from all over the world and gave me a Christmas ornament that Eddie had carved by hand. He signed it. It’s one of my favorites. One year, WSMV in Nashville

paid for me to go to Nashville for an interview. I was taken backstage at the Grand Ole Opry to give a Gourdie to either Roy Acuff or Marty Robins. I decided on Roy Acuff because he is considered the King of Country Music and his wife collected dolls of all kinds.

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Son of the Mountain: Colby Baty

by Kelly Leavitt

[Editor’s note: This is the first in a series of articles featuring the lives of people who grew up in Mentone and continue to live here.]

Colby Baty is descended from a family that homesteaded in the Mentone area in the 19th century. The Baty family is still known for their sawmill on CR 642, which ceased operation over 30 years ago. Colby’s father is Ricky and his mother is Peggy Smith, who grew up in Cloudland. Colby grew up surrounded by relatives who lived on 642, where he has now settled down with his fiancée, Nickie Swanger. He is the father of two teenage girls.

After graduating from Valley Head High School, he spent time living and working in North Dakota and Florida before returning to Mentone, where he plans to stay. “My roots are planted here for good,” he said. “I love to travel and see different places, but at the end of the day it all leads back to here. I’m way happier here now. I’ve got my dream career in the works. There’s no need for me to go anywhere else.”

On March 27, Colby opened a traditional barber shop called Deez Cuts Barber Shop and Shave Parlor at the corner of AL 117 and CR 642. He learned his trade while working at Next Level Barber Shop in Fort Payne, owned by E. J. Bickerstaff. “At the end of the day,” Colby said, “I have E. J. to thank. He allowed me to come in and train to be a barber while I was working at Heil. Nickie and I eventually decided it was time for me to leave Heil and focus on barbering, and I do not regret it one bit. Everything has worked out the way that we have planned, a lot faster than we had planned. I was looking at two to five years before I could open a shop in Mentone, but it’s been just a year and a month. This has been my ultimate goal, to bring back the traditional barber shop, where men can always feel comfortable.”

When asked what he likes about being a barber, he quickly said, “The transformation and seeing the smile on people’s faces. That gets me every time. Especially with 5– to 10–year-old kids.

“I do a lot of different designs, especially for my younger clientele, 15 years and younger. The best design I’ve done was a shark. The boy absolutely loved it. Sometimes they’ll come get the design touched up, sometimes they’ll want a different design. It also depends on the season. During baseball or football season, I do a lot of team designs. I’ve done several as a memorial for loved ones who have passed away—something to show their love.”

His favorite thing about living in Mentone is the peacefulness and living near family. “I loved living here as a kid,” he recalled. “We could run around freely in the woods. When I was growing up, I was always riding a dirt bike. We had a track built near my house where I grew up near the state line. I loved it.”

Colby’s favorite teachers at Moon Lake School were his kindergarten teacher,



Miss Serette, and his 5th grade teacher. “Also my 2nd grade teacher, Miss Leeman,” he said. “I had the biggest crush on her. I thought she was the prettiest woman in the world.”

He remembers when the school’s library was a single-wide trailer with shelves of books. “I remember the smell of the books,” he said. “I always loved the book fair.”

His favorite memory of Moon Lake School was when the wooden playground was built when he was in 4th grade. “It was awesome, we loved it,” he said. “We used to go around the back side and see who was daring enough to jump off onto the ground. Looking at it now, it’s just a 6-foot leap, but back then it felt like we were jumping off a skyscraper.” He recalled that he and his friends would bring their Matchbox cars to school and play around the roots of the old tree. “Kids nowadays, you can’t get them to stop texting on their phones,” Colby said. “They don’t get out there and play with cars and dirt, sticks in the woods, or anything like that.

“Mentone has changed a lot since my childhood, especially with the loss of the hotel and now the Hitching Post. It used to be you could drive through Mentone and see nobody. Nowadays it’s always packed. I’d say that’s for the better. But the loss of the buildings has been hard. You don’t hear about any kind of violence up here. But I believe there is a point where it could probably get too crowded. We can’t become a mini-Gatlinburg.”

Colby has some concern about the future of today’s youth, and some advice for those growing up in the Mentone area. “They really need to do something big with their life,” he said. “A small town like this, I think it’s good to go out in the world and bring back knowledge. You can really do good for yourself. Work hard in school and definitely get a college education in something that’s worth it, become a professional.

“Go for something you want, don’t settle for something just because you think you have to. Chase a dream. That’s the biggest thing. If you work hard enough and put your mind to it, you can do it, no matter who you are and what you are and what you want to do. If you want to fly to the moon, work hard enough and it’ll be presented to you. If you think you can’t, that’s just in your mind. Apply yourself to your dream, something you love to do. That’s the key. Find it and apply yourself.

“I’ve had two dreams in my life,” he said. “Being a barber is one, and playing music is the other. This just happened to work out first. I’ll never give up my music dream. I live off music. It’s an emotional medicine. If you’re feeling down and heavy, if you’re feeling up and heavy, if you’re feeling mad—anything. That’s your medicine right there. Music will help.

“One day when I was 10 years old, I discovered a guitar my dad had a guitar under his bed. He said I could have it, so I taught myself how to play using tab music from the internet, and then by watching YouTube videos. I had a garage band when I was a teenager. It was called Ment1 [Mentone].

“A lot of my clients like to fiddle around on the guitar, so I’m going to keep one of my guitars in the shop that they can play while they’re waiting. I want the shop to be a social space where men can come in to have a cup of coffee, get a haircut, shoot the breeze. I want to put up a dartboard and maybe eventually a pool table.”

Colby’s cousin, Amy Kirby, owns the Clip Joint in Mentone. “Growing up, she was always my ‘barber,’” he recalled. “She’s the only one who cut my hair until I started cutting it myself.”

Colby has been working full-time at Next Level, devoting all his free time to getting this shop open. He’ll continue working in Fort Payne as his clientele in Mentone builds up. “We’ll be open Mondays and Tuesdays to start. I’m training a young woman who will be starting soon as a barber. I’m hoping to bring in one or two more barbers, with the end goal to be open six days a week.” Deez Cuts will offer traditional services such as haircuts, hot towel and steamer shaves, and beard grooming.

“I really love it up here,” he said. “I’m very proud of my new shop.”

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