

FREE

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THE GROUNDHOG

“Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain”

FEBRUARY 2023

Miracle Pottery Is Lost to Fire

by Kelly Leavitt

Miracle Pottery suffered a devastating loss on January 10 when its beautiful showroom and the attached “treehouse” rental cottages were destroyed by fire. Owner Valinda Miracle was asleep in her home on the property when Skippy Mathis knocked on her door to wake her. He had been driving



Eric Middlebrooks took this photo of Ross Hester. They are both members of the Fort Payne Fire Department.

by when he saw the blaze and immediately called 911. Thankfully, Valinda’s home and adjacent studio were undamaged and no one was injured. Miracle Pottery, on Highway 117 in Valley Head, has been a prominent area business for many years and this is a significant loss to our community.

Valinda wishes to extend her gratitude to the community. “Thank you for over 30 years of faithful business,” she said. “We’re sorry that all this has happened and we’re hoping to come back in some capacity. We’re not sure what or how right now. It’s just too soon to tell. Thank you for all the years of being faithful to us, for being our great, great customers. We love you all.”

Firefighters from volunteer and city fire departments answered the “all call” page sent out at 11:32 p.m. Valley Head Volunteer Fire Department Chief Dustin Burt posted on Facebook: “I watched your local DeKalb County fire depts come together last night and work as one. Job well done guys. Everyone went home safe...We couldn’t have done it without the help of Mentone, Hammondville, Henagar, Fort Payne, Rainsville, Collinsville, Geraldine, DeKalb EMA, ALDOT, and the DeKalb Co. Sheriff Department. Thanks everyone, we appreciate it more than you know.” Foresters were also on scene to be sure the fire didn’t spread into the woods. Highway 117 was closed in both directions until about 5:30 a.m.

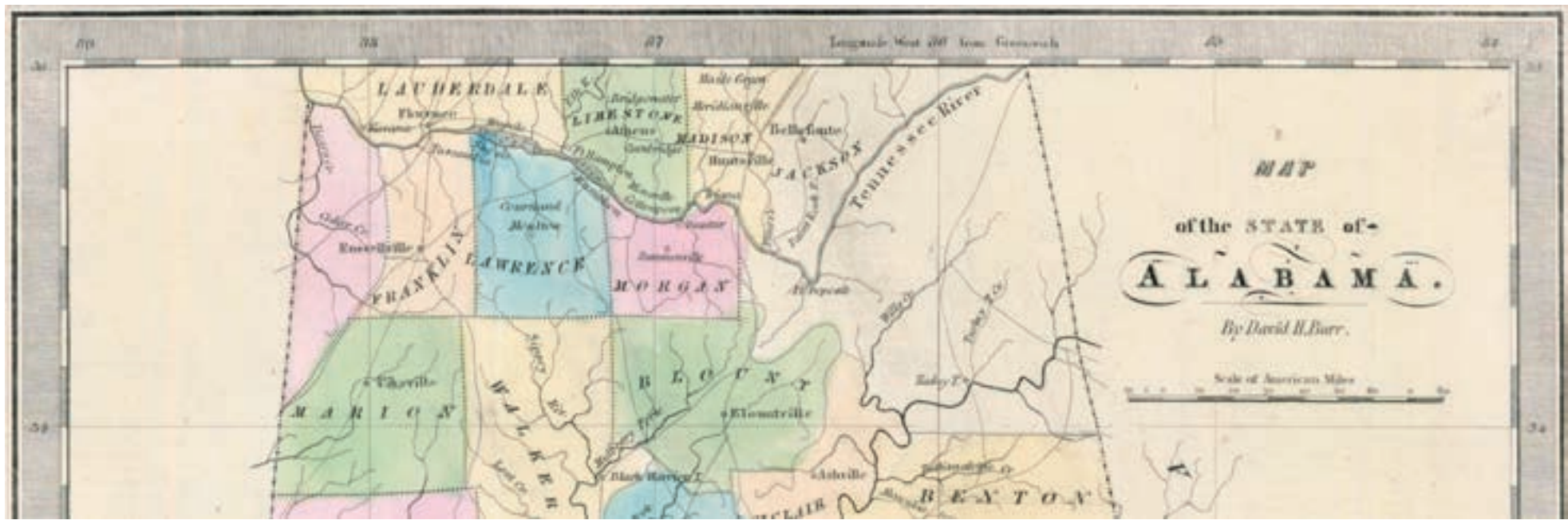
“Four tankers shuttled in excess of 75,000 gallons of



water,” said Mentone fireman Wes Pullen. “We set up a drop tank at the foot of the driveway on 117. We were filling up down the hill in Valley Head at the Dollar General. There was a hydrant that was a little bit closer, but there wouldn’t have been anywhere to turn the tankers around. I made about 20 trips myself. That’s

(continued on page 14)

Opening a Turnpike From the Tennessee River to Georgia in 1834



1834 map of north Alabama courtesy of Auburn University Libraries

Alabama State Legislature [No. 146.] AN ACT

To authorize John Baldridge and his associates to turnpike a road therein named.

Section 1. Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Alabama in General Assembly convened, That John Baldridge and his associates be, and they are hereby, authorized to open and turnpike a road to commence on the east bank of the Tennessee river at George Caperton’s ferry in Jackson county, thence through the Cherokee nation the nearest and best way by the Sulphur Springs to the State of Georgia.

Sec. 2. And be it further enacted, That the aforesaid road shall be opened eighteen feet wide, fourteen of which shall be clear of every obstruction; stumps, grubs and runners shall be taken up by the roots or cut level with the ground; sloping ground and banks of water courses shall be so worked on as to admit the easy passage of all kinds of carriages; all marshes and swamps shall be causewayed thirteen feet wide, with good and durable materials in a workman-like manner.

Sec. 3. And be it further enacted, That when the said John Baldridge and his associates have completed said road and reported the same to the judge of the county court of Jackson county, it shall be the duty of said judge to appoint three suitable persons, two of whom shall be competent to act, to examine said road and report their opinion to the said judge, and the said commissioners shall receive for their services such compensation as the said judge shall deem reasonable to be paid by the said John Baldridge and his associates.

Sec. 4. And be it further enacted, That should the commissioners to be appointed under the third section of this act, report that the said road has been opened and

is in good order, then and in that case, the said John Baldridge and his associates are hereby authorized to erect a gate on said road, the place to be designated by said commissioners; at said gate they may demand and receive of and from every person passing through said gate the following toll, to wit: for every four wheel carriage, one dollar; for every two wheel carriage, fifty cents; for every man and horse, twelve and a half cents for every loose or led horse or mule, six and one fourth cents; for every head of cattle, three cents; for every head of sheep, goats or hogs, two cents; and if any person shall pass around said gate with the intent to avoid the payment of toll, he, or she, for every such offence, shall forfeit and pay, to the said John Baldridge and his associates, the sum of fifteen dollars, to be recovered before any justice of the peace with legal costs for the same.

Sec. 5. And be it further enacted, That it shall be the duty of the judge of the county court of Jackson county on application to direct the commissioners mentioned in the third section of this act, or any two of them, who shall proceed to examine the condition of the said road and report the condition of the same to the said judge; and in case the said commissioners should report the said road is not in good order, they shall direct the gate to be thrown open, and no toll shall be received under the penalty of twenty-five dollars for each offence until said road shall be repaired in a good and sufficient manner; and the said John Baldridge and his associates shall commence the said road within one year from the passage of this act, and shall complete the same within two years thereafter, and shall have all the profits arising from the toll of the same for the term of fifteen years from the time they are authorized to receive toll on said road.

Approved, January 18, 1834

—Submitted by Larry Benefield



The Groundhog

Published monthly
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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*The opinions, beliefs, and viewpoints expressed
by the 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

Governor Kay Ivey came to Rainsville on January 11 for a ceremonial groundbreaking for broadband projects in DeKalb and Jackson counties. \$3.4 million was awarded to DeKalb County. These projects are funded, in part, by Alabama Broadband Accessibility Fund grants awarded to Farmers Telecommunications Cooperative by the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs’ (ADECA) Digital Expansion Division.

It was my privilege to join Governor Ivey (who reminded me she had worked at Camp Skyline when she was in college!), ADECA Director Kenneth Boswell, Speaker of the House Nathaniel Ledbetter, Farmer’s Telecommunications Cooperative CEO and Mentone native Fred Johnson, and Jackson County Economic Development Authority President and CEO Nathan Lee.

Over the years many people have asked me about the possibility of broadband access in the Mentone area. Broadband access will improve the lives of our citizens, help our businesses operate more efficiently,



and hopefully provide job opportunities previously not available without broadband.

During the pandemic many people escaped the cities and came to Mentone, staying in rental cabins or with friends. They enjoyed the pace of rural life and were working remotely. I feel some would have stayed had broadband been available.

Thanks to Governor Ivey, ADECA Director Boswell, Speaker Ledbetter, Senator Livingston, and Fred Johnson and the FTC team for their hard work in bringing broadband to the Mentone area.



Alabama House Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter

Mayor Rob Hammond



Mayor Hammond and Alabama Governor Kay Ivey

Farmers Tel CEO and Mentone native Fred Johnson

From the Editor

by Kelly Leavitt

It’s one of my favorite months...the month of “love,” and Groundhog Day! We’re still deep in winter, which I love for many reasons, but spring is on the way, with its budding flowers and promise of renewal.

I had the good fortune to attend a presentation by Dr. Jan Simik at Northeast Alabama Community College in late January. After summarizing the discovery of significant Cherokee writing in Manitou Cave, he spoke of syllabary that has since been found in a cave near Andrew Ross’s house in Ft. Payne, as well as in a cave near Trenton and another in northern Tennessee. To provide context, he discussed Sequoyah, Cherokee culture, spirituality, the removal, and much more. I certainly learned a lot. If the subject interests you, I encourage you to watch the video presentation at tinyurl.com/cave-syllabary.

Reflecting on the richness of the geology of Lookout Mountain prompted me to ask our Facebook followers what they love about Lookout Mountain. You can read a flavoring of the many responses on page 16. The answers are varied, but one thing is for certain—this land inspires respect and gratitude by those who live here. Winter is my favorite time to walk in the woods, and I encourage you to explore the woods and the river and its tributaries while we are able to see through the naked trees to the magnificent boulders, caves, and other features that are so abundant here on the mountain.

I really love the photo of the musicians playing together upstairs at the Hitching Post that’s on page 8. With hope, more photos will be shared from family photo albums of the past decades.

The hand-tinted photo at right from the famed Cline Studios shows the water wheel constructed by Joe



Biddle (at the direction of Colonel Milford Howard) on Little River near the old Alpine Lodge. Later this month, I’ll be discussing this intriguing man and his accomplishments (and failures) in our area; details are on page 3. I hope you’ll join us.

Have a lovely month, everyone. —Kelly

“A Light in the Forest”

Artist Trés Taylor has generously designated 50% of the proceeds of the sale of this whimsical and folksy original painting to the Mentone Area Preservation Association (MAPA) and 50% to the Town of Mentone’s Moon Lake Village.

Titled “A Light in the Forest,” the 36" x 48" painting is now on display at the Mentone Market. It’s a great artistic addition to any mountain home!

Visit trestaylor.com/product-page/a-light-in-the-forest-36-x-48 for details. Thank you, Trés Taylor!

Learn about the History of Mentone

Zora Strayhorn’s book, *Mentone, Alabama: A History*, is for sale in the MAPA office, and at Mentone Market and DeSoto State Park. \$15



Message from MAPA’s President

by Beverly Haynes

I am both pleased and excited to have been elected as MAPA’s President. I have great examples to follow of past board presidents, and Mark Hoffman will certainly be in the “recently dialed” area of my phone for all the questions I will have. As immediate past president, Mark will now serve as MAPA’s parliamentarian. Thank you, Mark, for the time you have devoted to MAPA. We are grateful.

I am glad that we also have the long-time experience and wisdom of L.C. Moon. She is ever ready with her smile

and positive outlook. I will find that invaluable as I navigate this new territory. We have new board members who you will meet soon, and they are already hard at work on business at hand. Thanks to John Kincer and our new vice president, Chris Davenport, for jumping right in. As Executive Director, Kelly Leavitt is full of ideas and on top of day-to-day business. Thanks, Kelly, for your hard work, along with your Groundhog duties.

Sadly, though, Dominic Fulginiti, recently relinquished his spot on the MAPA

board. He has been helpful to me on so many occasions when I simply did not understand a term, an idea, or a historical issue. Thank you, Dom, for educating me on so much about MAPA.

We (including anyone reading this) have a lot to do right now and future plans to finalize. We covet your input and you will not be ignored. Please let me know what you are thinking and I will follow up the best way possible. You may reach me at mapamentone@gmail.com.

Cheers, Beverly Haynes

Senior Health: “New” Medicare Card Schemes

by Lynn Hixon

Medicare beneficiaries are not receiving new cards this year, but scammers may try to convince you otherwise. For example, scammers may falsely tell you that Medicare is issuing new cards—perhaps a card that is plastic, metal, has a chip, or even a black and white COVID-19 card. The scammers may tell you that in order for them to send your new card, you will need to verify your identity, which could include your Medicare number. This is an attempt to get your personal or financial information. Here are some red flags to look for:

- Unsolicited calls from anyone claiming to be from Medicare
- Anyone needing your information so that they can send you an updated Medicare card
- Anyone saying your card is expiring, and they need to send you a new one or you will be charged a fine
- Anyone stating Medicare is issuing new cards and you need to verify your number

Contact the DeKalb County on Aging and ask to speak to Lynn Hixon at 256-845-8590 if you need help or if you believe you have experienced potential Medicare fraud, errors, or abuse.

Mentone American Legion Receives Two Donations

The Mentone American Legion Post 215 was donated a new outside propane grill by Dixie Salvage in Fort Payne and a reconditioned fire extinguisher by Gary Smith, local volunteer fireman and Legionnaire.



L to R: MAL Commander Barry Morton, John Crow (owner of Dixie Salvage) and Legionnaire Paul Vishaway



Happy Groundhog Day! February 2

MAPA News

by Kelly Leavitt

The Mentone Area Preservation Association (MAPA) is on the move! We’ll be moving our office into the old schoolhouse at Moon Lake Village. It will be a joy to be in the historic building (now 112 years old) and we will appreciate the proximity to the Bill Berry Community Room, where we host our programs. Since we’ll be busy painting the office and moving our furnishings, we will not have regular office hours this month. You may always call 256-289-2002 to make an appointment for an office visit. We appreciate those who helped paint our current office last July, and welcome any volunteers who’d like help once more.

On Thursday, February 16, I will be joined by Marcus C. Thomas as we present a program discussing Colonel Milford Howard and Granny Dollar. I will discuss Col. Howard’s impact on the Mentone area in the early 20th century, and Marcus will discuss the legend of Granny Dollar that persists to this day.



Milford Howard, 1933

Col. Howard is perhaps best known these days for the memorial chapel he built in honor of his first wife, Sally. Informally known as “the church with the rock in it” and “Howard’s Chapel,” it sits nears the northern entrance to DeSoto State Park. I’ll also discuss his influence on the Alpine and River Park communities, the Masters School, and Lookout Mountain Parkway. It will be a brief introduction to a fascinating man and much of the information can be found in Elizabeth Howard’s book, *The Vagabond Dreamer*, published by Landmarks of DeKalb County.

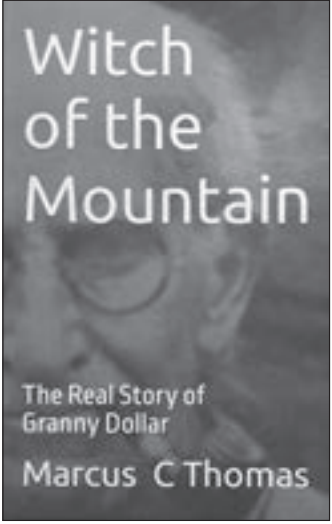
After retiring from a career as an investigator with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Marcus

Thomas decided to research the true story behind the legendary Granny Dollar, whose path crossed with Col. Howard’s in many ways. His talk will be based on his book, *Witch of the Mountain: The Real Story of Granny Dollar* (2021). Was she part-Cherokee and a diviner of fortunes? “In the past 90 years,” says Marcus, “her legend has grown to mythic proportions, but her real identity has remained unknown until this time. This book peels back that mystery and tells the story of the real woman who became Granny Dollar.” The book will be available for sale (\$25).

This multi-media program will begin at 6:30 p.m. in the Bill Berry Community Room. It is free and open to everyone.

Our January program about the Cherokee of Willstown and beyond by Larry Smith was rescheduled to Thursday, March 16. Mark your calendar now and look for more details in next month’s *Groundhog*.

Our fourth annual golf tournament is scheduled for Friday, May 5, at Lil Mole Run Golf Course in Mentone. This is always a fun event and a great way to meet fellow golfers. Details will be announced in the March *Groundhog*.



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WIDE OPEN VIEWS & A CHARMING, ONE-LEVEL COTTAGE, invite you to savor sunsets any time of year. There's no better view available on the market in Mentone right now! Once a part of a quaint "traveler's motor court," this stone & wood cottage retains much of its original character, enhanced by upgrades like new oak cabinetry w/granite counters & an excellent breakfast bar. Home is completely accessible & includes a barrier-free Master Bath. 2BR/2.5BA, dining area w/stone fireplace (gas logs); sun room/den w/mtn stone floors & a wall of windows to bring the view inside. Full, brow-side back porch. Courtyard; garage & detached 2-car carport. Plus shared guest house! \$447,000 (1821376)

LOTS and LAND

2 UNRESTRICTED ACRES IN MENTONE, on East River Road, where property lines meet upland. Includes land, power and water available at the road. High-speed internet available. \$55,000. (1795866)

TALL HARDWOODS AND PEACEFUL BROW SUNSETS. Build your special mountain dream home on this beautiful 1.2-acre lot in a choice area along the parkway between DeSoto Falls & Desoto State Park. Property lines extend over the brow so that trees may be removed for a clear view. The lots have a good setback from the road for quiet privacy. Two lots available. Lot 21, \$175,000. (1825125)



MENTONE 5.56 ACRES WITH A CREEK flowing through it. There's already power and public water in place, too. Across the creek you'll find a quaint shed/man cave that could be finished out for a sweet little getaway cabin. Nice garden spot; beautiful small woods; small footbridge to cross the creek. Unrestricted land. Two, maybe create a small farm? Or maybe? You can decide what your dreams will allow. Brush Creek is pretty much a year-round creek (except in driest summer), so you can enjoy the peaceful little waterfalls as it wends its way through the property. Something special and rare for only \$65,000. (1824880)



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MEMORIES OF LAZY DAYS FULL OF FUN ON THE LAKE permeate this one-owner property located on the private side of Mentone's Lake Lahusage. Filled with one family's nostalgia, waiting for the next family to bring it back to life & fill it with their own memories of good times on the lake. One of those rare places with easy walk down to the water; swim & fish from your dock; put in a boat at the public ramp just a short distance away. 4BR/2BA; wood floors; wood beams; mtn stone fireplace; vaulted LR/KI/DR. Screened porch on back leading to huge deck overlooking the lake. Yes, it needs A LOT of work, but it is a rare gem awaiting the right person to make it shine! \$375,000 (1786628)



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gave His only begotten Son, that
whosoever believeth in Him should
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—John 3:16



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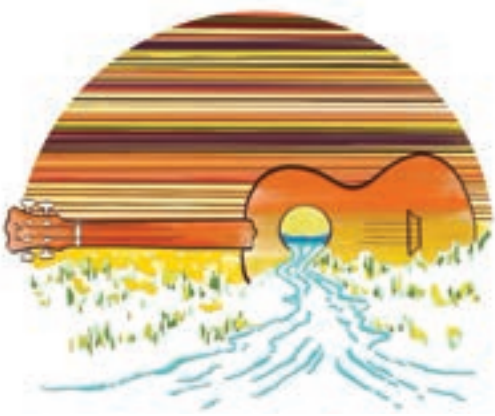
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Mentone Ukes: We're the House Band of Moon Lake Library

by Hank Allen

If Snoop Dogg did a rap for the Mentone Ukes it might go something like this:

Yo, it's your boy Snoop Dogg
And I'm here to bring the fire
About a group that's killing it
At Moon Lake Library, they're the choir

They call themselves the Mentone Ukes
And they're tearing up the stage
Bringing their island sounds
To this literary place

They're the house band of Moon Lake Library
Bringing music to the shelves
They bring a little bit of sunshine
To this place where knowledge dwells

They may not be rock stars
But they bring a smile to everyone's face
With their ukuleles in hand
They create a warm and welcoming place

So if you're ever in Mentone
And you're looking for something to do
Head on down to the library
And check out the Mentone Ukes crew

They're the house band of Moon Lake Library
Bringing music to the shelves
They're the house band of Moon Lake Library
They just can't help themselves.



(This song was generated in the ChatGPT app in the style of Snoop Dogg, pictured above thanks to AI technology.)

You can learn the ukulele! Join us at our free ongoing ukulele sessions on February 4 and 18 at 1 p.m. CST at Moon Lake Library. Newcomers and beginners of all ages are always welcomed to attend and loaner ukes are available. Connect with us on Facebook @MentoneUkes or at mentoneukes.com. Questions? Please contact Debra Fey (debrafey@gmail.com) or Jody Rhodes (jodyrhodesy@gmail.com).



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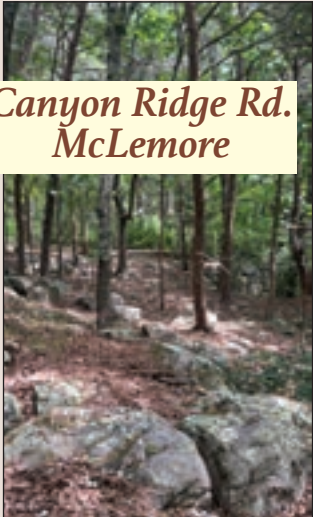
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Little River Arts Council: Pleased to Meet You

by Rhea Pirch

The Little River Arts Council, Inc. (established in 2006 as the Mentone Area Arts Council) has an extensive history of providing the arts and art opportunities to Mentone and the surrounding area. We would like to introduce you to our Board of Directors, as we enter the new year filled with anticipation of quite possibly our best season yet.

JULI JORDAN joined the board in 2020. (She jokes that it was a year before she saw the other board members’ faces without their masks.) She has served as secretary and now is president of LRAC.

As founding member and president of Friends of the Arts in Orange Beach, AL, she spearheaded initiatives that turned the Orange Beach Arts Center (now Coastal Arts Center of Orange Beach) into a thriving arts education and exhibit facility.

One of her favorite joys in life is collecting art mostly discovered at festivals and art shows across the country. She is especially honored to be a part of LRAC’s long history of service to Mentone and the surrounding area.

MIKEL YEAKLE has been a board member since 2021. He currently serves as vice president.

He started his professional photography career after graduating from art school in Atlanta in 1974 and continued it there until 2020 when he and his wife, Cyndi, moved to Lookout Mountain.

Street photography is a daily activity for Mike, who loves to explore unknown parts of the country. It is his mission to capture what is here today before it is gone tomorrow.

Mike has always been affiliated with art organizations, as he finds them enriching and inspiring. Being in the company of artists is where he feels most at home. He leads LRAC’s monthly Art Talk, held every third Wednesday at Moon Lake Library and maintains the membership list.

RHEA PIRCH has been a board member since 2014. She has served as secretary and vice-president, and is currently the treasurer and grant writer. She has participated several times as a grant review panelist for the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

Rhea’s background is in accounting, retail management, and the hospitality industry. She and her husband Don lived in Mentone and Fort Payne in the 90s and returned in 2010 after achieving her 30-year quest of earning a Bachelor’s degree (in Writing and Non-profit Management) from Lakeland University in Sheboygan, WI.

Rhea takes joy in tending her three alpacas, a tassel of cats, and a dog named Sam. She is involved in the Rhododendron Garden Club, enjoys making cards, writing poetry, and creating art journals. She is delighted to serve the artists and community through Little River Arts Council.

LACY HOPE DOBBS has been a board member since 2019. She is married to her high school sweetheart and has four children.

Lacy is a self-taught folk artist from Ft. Payne who creates bright, colorful acrylic paintings inspired by the music and art of the 1960s and 70s as well as the food, people, and culture of Southern Appalachia.

Lacy enjoys painting on canvas, wood, and upcycled objects as well as painting murals for local businesses. Her murals can be seen on the outside of the Groovy Goat in Mentone, and at Blueberry Falls Farm. She participates in art shows and enjoys leading paint and sip painting sessions. Her art is sold at the Groovy Goat and the Wildflower Café, on Facebook, Instagram, and her own website, LacyHopeArt.com.

KELLY FARLEY joined the board in 2022. After high school, she studied art at Gadsden State Community College and taught private art classes for several years.

In the late 80s, Kelly put her artistic talent to work and became the first and only female sign painter to work for Alabama Outdoor Advertising in Birmingham. In 1992, Kelly founded her own sign company, “Kelly Signs,” which she ran until 2018 when she sold the business to pursue her passion for painting her own unique style of art and started “Lookout Mountain Goat Ranch Originals.”

Kelly and her husband Richard live on Lookout Mountain Goat Ranch, where Kelly continues painting in her studio on the farm.

BRITTNEY HUGHES joined the board in 2016. She is the park naturalist at DeSoto State Park, where she establishes a connection between the park and the public. She educates park visitors and student groups about the natural bounty, history, scientific

They started WordSouth, a prominent marketing and communications company, in 1996 and sold it in 2020. They are now growing a new marketing agency, Rare Life Media, which can be seen in the social media feeds of DeKalb Tourism.

Michele continues her graphic design work, designing dozens of magazines across several states. Stephen is launching a small business coaching practice as a Certified Value Builder Advisor. Both Stephen and Michelle are excited about opening an outdoors and gift shop in the renovated Hitching Post.

Stephen and Michele look forward to becoming more integrated into the Mentone community and supporting LRAC in whatever way they can.

CYNTHIA STINSON has been a board member since 2008. She has served as president, vice-president and treasurer.

Her interest in the arts started with her first camera at the age of 10. Over the years she has worked with the Associated Press and Reuters. She



Little River Arts Council Board of Directors. L to R, bottom row: Mikel Yeakle, Juli Jordan, Rhea Pirch, Barbara Umland; middle row: Lacy Dobbs, Cynthia Stinson, Michele Smith; back row: Bill Rutledge, Kelly Farley, Stephen Smith, Deedee Morrison. Not pictured: Brittney Hughes. Photo by Mikel Yeakle

opportunities and ecological diversity of the park area.

Brittney is a basket weaver and leads several creative workshops at the state park as part of her work. She designed LRAC’s Creative Spirit Market and remains the coordinator of this event, which is held each Veteran’s Day weekend at DeSoto State Park.

Brittney also maintains the website and social media outlets for LRAC.

DEEDEE MORRISON also joined the board in 2022. She grew up in Mentone and returned in 2021 after many years traveling the country and the world. She is happy to be back in Mentone and enjoys the falls, hikes, biodiversity, and, of course, the people. She feels blessed to call Mentone home.

Deedee is a public artist working at the forefront of transforming urban landscapes into dynamic and memorable public spaces. She has worked with libraries, schools, parks, cities, and municipalities and is nationally recognized for her large-scale public art installations.

She has seen the positive impact the installations of public art have had on communities, and is eager to explore the possibility, with the help of LRAC, of having one installed in Mentone in the future.

BILL RUTLEDGE is one of the founding board members of LRAC. He served on the board from 2006 to 2012 and was the organization’s first treasurer. He returned to the board in 2017 and served as president from 2019 to 2021.

Bill is a retired educator, teaching at Parker High School in Birmingham, then for 26 years at Pisgah High School. He volunteered as a tutor at Moon Lake Elementary School until 2020 and now works with individual students.

While not an artist himself, Bill is a staunch supporter of the arts and of Little River Arts Council.

STEPHEN AND MICHELE SMITH are the newest board members. They joined us as a team in January 2023 to fill one position on the board. They have a deep-rooted passion for the arts, with live music and theatre playing a prominent role in their lives.

has photographed NASCAR and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and has been published in national newspapers and Life magazine.

Cynthia is currently the innkeeper and general manager of the Mentone Inn and in her spare time photographs local landscapes, sunsets, and community events.

She is the chairperson for the Summer Music Series, sponsored by LRAC and the State Council of the Arts. She enjoys her role in bringing “Music for the People.”

BARBARA UMLAND has served on the board of directors since 2016. She is a mixed-media artist. Her paintings are in private collections in Alabama, Wisconsin, Georgia, and Florida. In 2004, she attended an Art Colony workshop in Giverny, France. Painting daily in Monet’s garden led her toward impressionistic painting, of which florals are her favorite.

Her background includes a career in obstetric nursing with a degree from Samford University in Birmingham. After managing the lactation center at Cobb Hospital in Atlanta for six years, she returned to Birmingham and served as a part-time consultant in local hospitals until retirement.

She now resides in Mentone, where she paints, volunteers at St. Joseph’s food pantry, and makes fairy houses out of natural materials found in her own wooded back yard. She also conducts fairy house workshops at the Mentone Arts Center and sells her fairy houses at Moon Lake Trading Co.

Our mission remains the same: 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 extremely grateful to the donors, supporters and volunteers who make our work possible.



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Hammondville’s Christmas Festival

by Kimberly Johnson

The Town of Hammondville held its 1st annual Christmas Festival and Parade on December 17, 2022. Our Grand Marshall was Sheriff Nick Welden. There were 14 vehicles participating in the parade and over 40 toys were given away at the park, where the children lined up to have pictures made with Santa.

In conjunction with the festival, the

Town also sold live trees around the park and you could purchase one in memory of someone, to advertise a business or just because.

We gave away two bicycles donated by Lawrence Harrison to Easton Ferguson and Belen Hernandez. Giant teddy bears donated by Tom and Karen McCumber went home with winners Dru Hill and Wyatt Cantrell.

The community has told us how great the festival and parade were and they are excited for the one in December, 2023. We would like to invite you to participate in the next holiday festival so it will get bigger and bigger.

You can contact Hammondville Town Hall at 256-635-6374 or stop by between the hours of 8 a.m.–4 p.m. Monday through Friday for more

information. (The office is closed from 12–1 p.m. for lunch.)

The Town will hold other events throughout the new year, so “Like” our Facebook page to keep up with Hammondville Happenings! We hope you enjoy the pictures as much as we do. We wish you a very prosperous, healthy and happy new year!



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Original painting by Andrea Brandon

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Hitching Post Seeks Historical Photos, Artifacts

by Stephen V. Smith

As work continues toward bringing new life to the Hitching Post, we need the community's help to honor the building's rich history.

For decades, the Hitching Post was central to the economic and social activity of Mentone. We are searching for artifacts that honor that past, even as renovations rescue the building and prepare it for an exciting future.

In response to a recent call for photos on the Mentone Hitching Post Facebook page, Frank Brower reached out to share a scene he captured in the early 1980s. The photograph depicts a group of musicians upstairs at the Hitching Post, picking and fiddling in a semi-circle. Brower identified the upright bass player as Doc Long. Cynthia Fife commented on the post that the fiddle player was her great uncle, Mack Blalock.

Brower's image captures the social atmosphere of the Hitching Post in that era. Music and dancing were central to social life there during many other decades as well, as we've learned from comments shared on Facebook.com/MentoneHitchingPost.

We need more photos like this. With all the social gatherings that took place upstairs at the Hitching Post through the years, there must be many wonderful photos captured by local citizens and their family members. We would love to see photos of:

- Local faces • Families • Children
- Musicians • Dancing • Singing

While you are looking through your albums and shoe boxes full of photos, please be on the lookout for old scenes that capture life in general throughout Mentone and



Photo courtesy of Frank Brower

across Lookout Mountain. We would love to see old photos of summer camps, Little River, waterfalls, the canyon, visitors enjoying the area's natural beauty, and more.

Do you have something special beyond photographs? Memorabilia from a local camp? Signage? A piece of art tied to the Hitching Post from decades ago? An instrument once played for dances there? Such items would help us evoke memories while preserving the stories of bygone days that brought us to a new century.

Items shared with us will also be shared with MAPA for inclusion in the organization's archives. We will make copies of photographs if you only have prints so you can keep the originals.

Thank you in advance for helping us pay tribute to the Hitching Post's past as part of our work to create its future.

Stephen Smith is a DeKalb County native, local business owner, and lover of the arts.

Mentone Arts Center February includes music, workshop and saluting unique artist Penny Dobson

by Randy Grider

We are kicking off the month of love with a great show on Friday, February 3. Hiroyo Tsukamoto is returning to the Mentone Arts Center for a special performance at 7 p.m. His new 10-song acoustic CD titled "Little River Canyon" was recorded in Fort Payne and is his first studio album in three years.

The Manhattan-based innovative guitarist and composer fuses folk, jazz,



than that. He has the unique capability of engaging an audience through a personable and genuine approach that transfixes his audiences and almost transcends his capabilities as a guitarist. Tsukamoto plays with an effortless skill



Hiroyo Tsukamoto is returning to the Mentone Arts Center stage for a special performance on Friday, February 3 at 7 p.m.

and world music. Born and raised in Japan, in 2000 he received a scholarship to Berklee College of Music and relocated to the United States.

Tsukamoto's instrumental abilities are indeed breathtaking and astounding, but his performances are so much more

on the guitar and a repertoire that will have you traveling the world, not to mention experiencing new sounds with his own compositions.

Tsukamoto headlines concerts throughout the U.S. as well as internationally including Blue Note in

NYC, United Nations and Japanese National Television. He won second place in International Finger Style Guitar Championship in 2018.

Local singer-songwriter Stuart Douglas will open the show, which is produced by Russell Gulley/RadioVisions LLC. Advance tickets are \$20 plus tax and can be purchased at hiroyaandstuart.eventbrite.com or \$25 at the door. We are located inside the Chuck Sennett Center for the Arts building at 5951 Alabama Highway 117 in the heart of Mentone.

For additional information, call 727-308-8156.

On Tuesday, February 7, we will host a Music on the Mountain Songwriter Series Writer Workshop at 6:30 pm. (CST). If you have ever wanted to know more about songwriting or would like to just come and listen, all are welcome.

Performance-based events will resume in March on the first Tuesday of each month. Open to the public, doors open at 6, music begins at 6:30. Come and listen to the song and story of local and regional songwriters.

We recently began an artist-of-the-month recognition program. The Artist of the Month for February is Penny Dobson. Dobson is a popular, award-winning, mixed-media artist with several creations in the gallery.



Penny Dobson



alarm clock in an antique mall, and thought it was adorable. I decided to paint on it. My obsession for vintage items grew from there. I'm particularly fond of things from the 1970s. Recently, I started making my own frames. Sometimes I find antique dresser mirrors and use them for the frames. Anything that is more challenging to use

is worked on by my husband [Johnnie Dobson, who is also an artist with pottery creations in the gallery].

"One of my techniques involves placing seed beads one at a time into resin. This technique has evolved over the years. It began because I had bought a bunch of beads to make lanyards that I never made. One day I looked at the beads and had the thought to use them in my backgrounds. I am familiar with the Huichols who also use seed beads. This was not what gave me the idea. Before the seed beads, I would place small dots of paint in my backgrounds in the same patterns I now place my beads."

Dobson said her use of gold leaf came about in a similar manner.

"I had bought a bunch of it to use in my mixed media backgrounds, yet another thing I had too much of. I very much love medieval art with the gold backgrounds so it was natural that I should try this as well."

Dobson "signs" all her art in a very unique way – by attaching a 1970 penny somewhere on the body of the work.

"This is when I was born," she says. "I like the penny better than a signature. I just have never liked signing the front of my work. Maybe it is because I have bad handwriting. I do, nevertheless, sign it on the back."

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

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Little Library Learners

by Anne McLeod and Lynn Vanderhoff



On a recent Saturday morning eight kids and their accompanying adults gathered at Moon Lake Library for a Little Library Learner session with “Ms. Lynn.” The topic was Snow Day, something that tends to engage folks of all ages this time of year. After listening to stories about the fun and frustration of anticipating snowfall that may or may not arrive, the group enjoyed several hearty renditions of the song “Frosty the Snowman,” before playing a memory game. Next they built their own snowmen (on paper) and were delighted to learn their snowman’s name, like Holly McBlizzard, Jingles Sparkleton, and Twinkle Snowdinski.

Little Library Learners meets the first and third Saturdays of each month at 10:30, with a few exceptions on holiday and festival weekends. The program is free and is open to all children 3-7 years old, although we occasionally have older children attend too.

Lynn Vanderhoff has been working with children at Moon Lake for the last two years, since she moved to the area from Atlanta. A former elementary educator, she has developed learning activities for botanical gardens, schools, libraries and Road Scholars’ inter-

generational programs. Lynn reports she is on the verge of her second childhood, preparing to retire and enjoy more reading time, with kids and adults.

“Past programs have focused on astronomy, fairy tales, dinosaurs, historical figures, turtles and migratory birds, to name just a few. If your little learner has a particular interest, let us know and we’ll incorporate it into our lineup,” she says.

Coming to the library and participating in programs like Little Library learners and the summer reading program helps children build a solid foundation for literacy. They learn to handle books, how to listen and make predictions about what will happen next in a story, and how to ask questions when they need help or don’t understand something.

It’s fun and also empowering to pick out your own books to check out. Choosing books gives kids a chance to think about things they are curious about and to find out more about their interests. Reading books helps children develop vocabulary skills and also encourages imaginative thought and problem solving.

Join us on Saturday mornings and bring your friends!



Update on Covid Testing at the Library

by Anne McLeod

The last six weeks have seen a lot of activity at Moon Lake Library, beginning with the news that our application to become a state-certified public library had been approved. But wait! There’s so much more.

As many of you know, Moon Lake Library recently partnered with Color Health and the CDC to offer free, easy to access Covid-19 testing for our community. People who are symptomatic or who have been exposed to Covid recently are eligible for free testing through this program. This is a change from the past guidelines which included pregnant women and immunocompromised people.

Testing is entirely CURBSIDE on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday afternoons from 12-4:30 p.m. Park at the library, call us at 256-634-2127, and I will bring a test kit and paperwork out to your car. If you have a smartphone or tablet and are comfortable filling out the online form yourself, that will speed up the process, which takes about 15 minutes.

You’ll need to have a phone number that can receive texts because your test results will be texted to you in about 48 hours. Bring your insurance information too. If you don’t have insurance, there is still no charge for the test.

Have questions? Call the library or email me at books@moonlakelibrary.org.

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February 2023 @ Moon Lake Library

February 3 @ 6 p.m.—Family Game Night! Bring a snack to share and we’ll enjoy board games at the library.

February 4 @ 10:30 a.m.—Little Library Learners. Stories and crafts for children ages 3-7.

February 4 @ 1 p.m.—Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

February 9 @ 4 p.m.—Joint meeting of Friends of Moon Lake Library board and the municipal library Board of Trustees

February 11 @ 10:30 a.m.—Moon Lake Library book club. This month we’ll share great books we’ve read lately.

February 15 @ 6 p.m.—Art Critique and Discussion Group with Mikel Yeakle, sponsored by Little River Arts Council. Let’s talk about art. Artists, please bring a piece or two to share.

February 18 @ 10:30 a.m.—Little Library Learners. Stories and crafts for children ages 3-7.

February 18 @ 1 p.m.—Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

February 20 @ 6:30 p.m.—Featured speaker: Photographer John Dersham on his book *Changing Moods: Sixty Years in Black and White*

February 25, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.—Community Seed Exchange sponsored in partnership with the Rhododendron Garden Club



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through March 29

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Mentone Educational Resources Foundation

The Return of Great Things!

by Anna Mae Horn

Finally! Taste of the Mountain Dinner and Art Auction has officially returned—just in time to celebrate 30 years of MERF! Camp Skyline has graciously donated their dining hall for this year’s event. Join us on April 15 at 6 p.m. for a “magical” evening. Tickets for Taste of the Mountain are on sale now. Purchase tickets online through our website (MERFhouse.org), with cash or check at Mentone Market, or by contacting Anna Mae at 256-635-8775 (cell phone).

This year’s theme is the “Magic of MERF.” For 30 years, Mentone Educational Resources Foundation has coordinated resources for a

variety of educational opportunities for a wide range of ages—from toddler groups to senior citizens. A few examples include MERF moms, scholarships, Space Camp funding, and the Pathway to Community. At the January board meeting, the MERF board finalized monetary support to send fourth graders to the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra once again and help send junior high students to see a set of five short literary plays. We are honored to coordinate the resources that help these traditions continue. Your support has a direct impact!

Senior lunches are also returning this month. These lunches create

socializing opportunities for local retired people. We also provide information on topics that are important in this season of life. Please join us on February 15 and each Wednesday through the end of March at 11:30 in the Moon Lake Baptist Church fellowship hall. The church welcomes MERF elves and senior guests with open arms and big tables!

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.



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Rhododendron Garden Club

by Alyce Kenney

There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember: and there is pansies, that's for thoughts. —William Shakespeare



January's meeting of the Rhododendron Garden Club got the year started off right with a burst of fresh new ideas and energies, as well as several new faces. Five talented and enthusiastic folks joined our membership on that day! Our mission statement is: To promote the preservation and enhance the beauty of the Mentone area. Our many discussions of ideas and interests centered around this premise. We're ready to begin the planning that precedes the work ahead of us in 2023.

Our upcoming community projects include beautifying and enhancing the green spaces at the Mentone Post Office, the MERF house, and a former garden area in Moon Lake Village. We're hosting a community seed swap in the library on February 25, and you'll see us out and about when the Mentone Clean Up day is announced. There's more to come ...

February brings Valentines Day on the 14th—a day to express your love to another with greetings and gifts. Flowers, especially roses, are traditional. But don't let that be your only thought. Floriography is the language of flowers. Each flower holds a different meaning, based on the color and type. Floriography has been practiced for thousands of years in many cultures. It is most often associated with the Victorian era, 1837–1901. Ancient myths and legends contain references to flowers and William Shakespeare's



love of flowers was evident in many of his works.

This month's meeting is on February 14 and we will host a presentation by Angie Shugart, conservationist and co-founder of Little River Waterkeeper. Come join us!

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.

We meet the second Tuesday of each month at 10 a.m. in the MERF house in Mentone. Come join us to learn, participate, and enjoy! Follow us on Facebook or send any questions to rhododendrongardenclub@gmail.com.

Alyce Kenney serves as secretary for the Rhododendron Garden Club.

“If war has an opposite, gardens might sometimes be it, and people have found a particular kind of peace in forests, meadows, parks, and gardens.”—Rebecca Solnit, author of Orwell's Roses

February Community Events

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

February 2 Happy Groundhog Day!

February 3—Family Game Night at Moon Lake Library. Join us for an evening of friendly competition—Scrabble, dominoes, backgammon, chess, and more! All ages welcome. 6–8pm. Moon Lake Library, 4607 AL Hwy 117, Mentone.

February 4 & 18—Mentone Ukes. Free ukulele lessons at 1pm at Moon Lake Library in Mentone. Beginners welcome!

February 4 & 18—Little Library Learners. Stories and crafts for children ages 3-7. 10:30am. Moon Lake Library, 4607 AL Hwy 117, Mentone.

February 10—Galentine's Trivia & Create Night at Alice Circle. Join us for a fun night with your best gals. If you don't watch Gilmore Girls or don't want to play trivia, trivia is only a small part of this night. We'll have crafts, snacks, & drinks as well. Text 256-996-1181 with questions or to sign up. \$15 per trivia team. Crafts, food, and drinks will be an additional cost.

February 11—Moon Lake Library Book Club. Let's talk about books! Sometimes we read and discuss the same book. Other months, we share book recommendations. This is a great way to meet new friends and also get some good ideas about what to read next.

February 11—Hike with a Naturalist. Join the JSU Field School staff on a monthly hike as we hit the trail and explore Little River Canyon National Preserve. Join us on beautiful outdoor adventure hike to Eberhart Point. This hike is a challenging, arduous and steep 2-mile hike. Bring plenty of water and/or sports drink, snacks, hiking poles/staff

(optional), sturdy shoes (open toe shoes are not recommended). Please be sure to dress appropriately according to seasonal temperatures/weather. As with all outdoor events, if it's raining/stormy or very poor trail conditions, we may have to cancel. If the weather is questionable, please check with the park before leaving home. Please make every effort to arrive early or on time so that you do not hold up the group. 10:15am. Meet at JSU's Little River Canyon Center, 4322 Little River Trail NE, Fort Payne. 256-845-3548.

February 14 Happy Valentine's Day!

February 14—Kids Valentine, Craft & Pizza Party. Alice Circle has a fun Valentine's Night planned just for kids. Date Night for you... party for them Alice Circle will paint, craft, eat pizza, and play games, all while you enjoy your date (parents are welcome to stay if you are more comfortable with staying). Text 256-996-1181 if you have questions or you want to sign up! 5–8pm.

February 14—Alabama Ballet “Cinderella”. Join us for a beautiful performance of Cinderella by the acclaimed Alabama Ballet. 7pm. NACC's Tom Bevill Lyceum. Tickets \$10. Purchase online at showclix.com/event/nacc-alabama-ballet-cinderella/pyos. Tickets may also be purchased with a credit card by calling Heather Rice at 256-638-4418 ext. 2301 or Rachael Graham at 256-638-4418 ext. 2391. You can also purchase tickets by

Save the Date! Saturday, April 1



emailing riceh@nacc.edu or grahamr@nacc.edu. You don't want to miss this!

February 15—Art Talk. Little River Arts Council presents an evening of art critique and discussion. Mikel Yeakle leads another informal conversation about art, why we create it, and how it affects our lives. All are invited to bring their artwork and share their process and inspirations. 6–8pm. Free & open to all. Moon Lake Library, 4607 AL Hwy 117, Mentone.

February 16—History Talk: Col. Milford Howard and Granny Dollar. MAPA hosts a presentation with speakers Kelly Leavitt and Marcus Thomas. Bill Berry Community Room, Moon Lake Village, 5856 East River Rd., Mentone. 6:30pm. Free.

February 17—Winter Jazz Dinner Show. Featuring TAD of Jazz & Aubrey Itson. Doors open at 5pm for social hour & silent auction, Dinner at 6pm. Music begins at 7pm. Tickets \$75 in advance. Includes 3 course dinner featuring a local beef roast from TRM's The Market. Proceeds benefit environmental education programs at Little River Canyon Center. Reservations must be made by February 10. Coolers are welcome. JSU's Little River

Canyon Center, 4322 Little River Trail NE, Fort Payne. 256-845-3548

February 20—Featured speaker: Photographer John Dersham on his book, Changing Moods: Sixty Years in Black and White. 6:30pm. Moon Lake Library, 4607 AL Hwy 117, Mentone.

February 25— JSU Field School's Fly Tying 101 Workshop. Learn the art of tying fishing flies with Dr. Tim Lindblom. Catching a fish on a hand-tied fly that you tied can be an extremely rewarding experience! Learn basic fly-tying instruction, watershed education, and stream ecology. Participants will hone and develop fly tying skills through hands-on instruction. Each participant will create their very own flies to take home or trade. All materials provided, but you are welcome to bring your own tying equipment. Space is limited and pre-registration is required. Ages 14 and up. 3–5pm. JSU's Little River Canyon Center, 4322 Little River Trail NE, Fort Payne. 256-845-3548.



Seed Swap
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In Memoriam

RONALD SPRAGGINS

October 18, 1947 ~ January 1, 2023

Ronald Gene Spraggins, age 75, of Menlo, GA, died Sunday, January 1, 2023, at Atrium Health Floyd.

Mr. Spraggins was born October 18, 1947, in Trion, GA, son of the late Andrew and Imogene Gertrude Johnson Spraggins. He was retired from Mohawk.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by a son, Joel Dewayne Whittle; brother, William “Butch” Spraggins; and sister, Martha Spraggins.

Survivors include his children, Ronald Lamar Spraggins, Rhonda Michelle Hall, and Becky Eaton; sisters, Andrea Spraggins and Carolyn Spraggins; six grandchildren; two great-grandchildren.



WILBURN “BUSTER” LEWIS CAVIN

September 10, 1940 ~ January 3, 2023

Wilburn Lewis “Buster” Cavin, age 82, of Menlo, GA, passed away Tuesday, January 3, 2023, at Atrium Health Floyd.

Mr. Cavin was born September 10, 1940, in Chesterfield, AL, son of the late Roy and Frances Powell Cavin. He was retired from Best Manufacturing where he worked as a supervisor in the Dipping Department. Mr. Cavin was a member of Chesterfield Baptist Church and had most recently attended Menlo First Baptist Church. He was also a member of the

Best Silver Club and was an avid farmer who loved his cows, goats, and dogs. Mr. Cavin was a wonderful cook and gardener and could make the best “cathead” biscuits you’d ever tasted. He dearly loved his wife, son, and granddaughter.

In addition to his parents, Mr. Cavin was preceded in death by his brothers, Robert Cavin and Johnny Cavin; sister, Charlotte (Doyle) Chumbler; brother-in-law, Buddy Barnes; sister-in-law, Farice Cavin.

Survivors include his wife, JoAnne “Dot” Cavin; son, James Wilburn (Robin Brown) Cavin; a sister, Katie Barnes; granddaughter, Ainsley “Spedley” Cavin; special nieces, Dale Hogg Holleman and Kim Bullard; and special nephews, Drew Hartline, Jeff Barnes, Tim Hogg, and Jaden Barnes.

Mr. Cavin was interred in AMI Cemetery.



RONALD TIMOTHY WHEAT

April 1, 1950 – January 7, 2023

Ronald Timothy Wheat, age 72, of Mentone, passed away on January 7, 2023. He was born April 1, 1950 in Columbus, MS to Verlie and Bernice Wheat.

Mr. Wheat attended New Hope High School while also serving as a school bus driver during his senior year. He was a straight A student, earning many honors. He spent his summers in Mentone working with his uncle Dave Blalock learning the carpentry trade. Upon graduation, he enlisted in the United States Navy during the Vietnam War, where he served on the USS Saratoga for 8 years. He was stationed in Jacksonville, Florida as well as Meridan, Mississippi and Norfolk Virginia. He was honorably discharged on November 30, 1977 having earned the Good Conduct Award, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Navy Unit Commendation, & Meritorious Unit Commendation.

After completing his service in the US Navy, Mr. Wheat moved to Mentone, where he continued to expand his experience in the military by joining the National Guard Reserve. He attended Northeast Community College studying accounting along with forestry before returning to the carpentry trade. He worked his remaining adult life mastering the art of carpentry. In addition, he worked as a mail carrier on Saturdays in the Mentone area for many years.

Mr. Wheat was an avid fisherman. If he didn’t have a hammer in his hand, you could find him with his fishing buddy, Ralph Flynn, on a nearby lake or river. Oh, and the fishing stories he could tell! But first and foremost, he loved spending time with his wife, sons, and grandkids. He was kind to all he came in contact with and was always willing to lend a helping hand to anyone in need.

He is survived by his wife, Kathy Blalock Wheat; mother, Bernice Bishop Wheat; children, Shaun (Sally) Wheat and Greg (Nikki) Wheat; grandchildren, Allen (Erin) Wheat, Timdavid (Jodi) Wheat, Patrick Coots, and Emily Wheat; great-grandchild, Everly Wheat; and brother, Joe Wheat.

He was preceded in death by his father, Verlie Wheat.

Mr. Wheat was buried at Bankhead Cemetery in Mentone, AL with Military Honors.



WESLEY GRIFFITH

November 17, 1958—January 7, 2023

Wesley Griffith said goodbye to daily needle pokes, his glucometer, and carb-counting on January 7, 2023. We hope he was greeted by his father, brother, and sister with Chess pie, cheap beer, and Chili Cheese Fritos.

Wesley was born on November 17, 1958 in Columbus, MS. He was the second of three children born to Jean and Joe Wesley Griffith, Sr. He graduated from Mississippi State University in 1980 with a BS in Petroleum Engineering.

Together with his college sweetheart, Kat (Howell), they created enough children to sustain a rec league basketball team. Their “team” includes Tripp Griffith (Katie), Quincey Griffith Rhoades (Blake), Collie Griffith (Natalie), Livvy Griffith Kelly (James), and Chloe Griffith (Trey). He instilled in his family a love

of silly and often repeated jokes, impromptu performances, and personifying the family pets.

He will be remembered for his creative poetry, his love of a ringing cowbell, his giant bonfires, and his sense of humor. He was a reckless creator of hot sauce and home brewed beer. He was a swim club president, soccer coach, high school sports announcer, and the guy wearing khaki shorts in 32° weather. He proudly served on the Mentone Water Board and Mentone City Council for over 20 years. He was an acolyte and chalice bearer at St. Joseph’s Episcopal Church where he regularly volunteered at the food bank and also served as Junior Warden and Treasurer.

In lieu of flowers the family requests donations be made to the American Diabetes Association, St. Joseph’s Church Sacred Garden, or St. Joseph’s Church Food Bank.

He is survived by his wife, Kat Griffith, his mother, Jean Griffith, his five children, and his six grandchildren — Emmaline and Ara Rhoades, Wesley and Nathan Griffith, and Katherine and Cooper Kelly.



CHARLES LESLEY BLALOCK

November 27, 1956 – January 11, 2023

Charles Lesley Blalock, age 66, of Mentone, passed away at his residence on Wednesday, January 11, 2023.

He is survived by his mother, Barbara Blalock; wife, Mary Jo; children, Shannon (Jay) Wagner, Ashley (Jim) Phillips, Jennifer (John) Chambers, Kristen (Darren) Golden, and Paul Crabtree; brothers, Jim (Sandra) Blalock, Raymond (Becky) Blalock, and Barry (Rhonda) Blalock; sister, Barbie (Jimmy) Hester; 15 grandchildren & two great-grandchildren; and numerous nieces, nephews, and friends.

He was preceded in death by his father, William “Ovie” Blalock, and granddaughter, Laney Grace Wagner.

In lieu of flowers the family requests donations be made to Bankhead Cemetery (P. O. Box 193, Mentone, AL 35984). Mr. Blalock was buried at Bankhead Cemetery in Mentone, AL.

JO ANN BLACKMON

December 22, 1951 – January 13, 2023

Jo Ann Blackmon, age 71, of Cloudland, Georgia, passed away Friday, January 13, 2023, in a Rome hospital. A native of Chattooga County, GA, Mrs. Blackmon was born on December 22, 1951, to the late J. C. and Madelene Ledford Edgeworth. She attended the United by Faith Baptist Church and was retired from Buster Brown, Inc. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by husband, Larry Sanford Blackmon, and siblings Betty Siffles, J. T. Edgeworth, Paul Edgeworth, and Norman Edgeworth.

Surviving are her son, Michael (Alison) Blackmon; grandchildren, Christian Blackmon, Haven Blackmon, Summer Vaughn, Alicia McGill, Jamison Johnston, and Jordan Johnston; several great-grandchildren; siblings, Lois Reed, Johnny Edgeworth, Tony Edgeworth, and Alvin Edgeworth; and several nieces and nephews.



DENNIS LEON CRANE

September 17, 1954 - January 16, 2023

Dennis Leon Crane, age 68 of Mentone, passed away January 16, 2023 at Brookwood Medical Center. He was born on September 17, 1954 to J.D. and Eloise Haney Crane in Fort Payne.

He is survived by his wife of 47 years, Cheryl Blalock Crane; children, Eric (Tim Eason) Crane, Marian “Cricket” Owen, Amy

Crane, and LaShae “Molly” Jones; grandchildren, Justin Liles, Amber Liles (Chris), Autumn Reyes (Gannon), and Emerald Eason (Marcus); great-grandchildren, Amelia “Milly” Graves and Carleigh Greene; mother, Eloise Haney Crane; brother, Lonnie (Katie) Crane; sister, Linda McKenzie (Gary); and several nieces, nephews, and beloved friends.

He was preceded in death by his father, J.D. Crane.

Mr. Crane was buried at Bankhead Cemetery in Mentone.



DAVID E. UPCHURCH

September 10, 1971—January 20, 2023

David E. Upchurch, 51, of Mentone, formerly of Kings Mountain, NC passed away on January 20, 2023 at Atrium Health in Shelby, NC. Born in Cleveland, NC, he was son of the late Jack Dean Upchurch and Doris Bolton Upchurch Patrick and was preceded in death by brother-in-law, Mark Moore. David was a wonderful son, brother, uncle and friend who will truly be missed. He enjoyed every aspect of life and especially enjoyed spending time with his sisters, nieces and nephews. He worked in the trucking industry for many years.

David is survived by his sisters, Libbie Upchurch Parsons, Norma Upchurch Moore, and Penny Upchurch Hamrick; special sister, Lori Henderson; step-brother, Randy Patrick (Dawn); nieces, Michelle Grigg Short (Brad); Stephanie Moore (Zeke Shuler); Ashley Hamrick (Saul), Jada Hamrick (Anthony); nephews, Bradley Moore (Avery), Brandon Hamrick (Hidi), and Jayson Hamrick; and three great nieces, five great nephews, and a great-great-nephew.



ALLEN DEWAIN SPARKS

1935 ~ 2023

Allen D. Sparks, age 87, formerly of Mentone, passed away Tuesday, January 24, 2023 at his residence in Hinckley, IL.

Mr. Sparks was born May 31, 1935 in Cherokee County, AL, the son of the late Voy Sparks and Edgel Dockery Sparks.

He was devoted to his church activities and had been a Deacon at Central Avenue Baptist Church in Trion, GA before relocating back to Illinois to be near his family.

He worked at John T. Clark company in Geneva, IL, residing in rural Batavia, IL for over 40 years before retiring and building their home in Mentone, AL near his brothers Len Earl, Sherold and Dale Sparks, now deceased; and brother Garlis and sister Darnell Amico of Trion, GA

Mr. Sparks was preceded in death by his wife, Lauretta (Maytum) Sparks. He is survived by five children and their spouses, Lane and Brenda Sparks, Gary and Julie Sparks, Dale and Lisa Sparks, Todd and Tracy Verachtert, and Wade and Michelle Sparks; and 14 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.

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February Birthdays

- | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| 1 | John Lawton
Abby Bell
Tammy Kirby
Walter Brooks
Rindy Flannigan
Fontana Stinson
Thomas Blevins
AJ Hairston | Cayden Collins
Heath Jones
Baker Stone | Tim Henderson
Beverly Bates
Nick White
Kylie Justice
Shannon Gray Baker |
| 2 | Beverly Smith
Karen Nixon
Zeb Kincer
Elijah Rogers
Lamar King
Ben Windom | 10 | Joe McClure
Leonard Keith
Katie White
Luke Hulkan
Tim Jackson |
| 3 | Melanie Potts Garrett
Destin Padgett
Drew Jones | 11 | Cayla Wigley
Faith Nelson
Gentry Grisham
Amanda Ditmore
Elizabeth Rich
Rhett Davis
Shinice Stout
Kamden Mayhew |
| 4 | Angela Phillips
Carson Dan Frost
Sophia Blair
Brittany Daniel
Aubree Lewchuk
Cameron Norsworthy
Katie Beth Woods
Andrew Hairston
William Tyler Lee
Mandy Morton
Mark Clark
Makenzie McDorman
Rita Stutts | 12 | Elliott Floyd
Harry Ohme
Tara Kirby
Nicholas Freeman
Sydney Grider
Bubba Browder
Cooper Jones
Leanna Kurts
Petie Gatlin |
| 5 | Yon Hopper
Savannah Wallace
Cameron Collins
Mike Burt
Skye Kurts
Brylen Deal | 13 | Belle Easley
Gretchen Winder
Carol Busby
Craig Hall
Isaac Pangle |
| 6 | Amanda Blalock
Allie McElhaney
Ruthie Jane Brown
Jonathan Wilbanks
Kendall Thompson
Felicia Key Flannigan | 14 | Abbi Gifford
Lillie Moses
Eddie Manning
Baxter Austin
Sidney Ashley
Hadley Ashley |
| 7 | Jordan Sutton
Tristan Rodriguez
Haven Stone
Haley Stinson Moore
Carley Verdon
Jase Kirby
Norah Underwood
Kevin Burt | 15 | Ashley Coffman
Diane Smith
Axl Blake Jones
Brandon Davis |
| 8 | Wyatt Blackburn
Crystal Smith
Helen Brown
Annette Johnson
Sandy Tate
Leon Drown
Jay Cullen Thompson
Tavontae Harmony, Jr. | 16 | Katelyn Busby
Mary Jane Gray |
| 9 | Kara Goss
Jonnie Frost | 17 | John David Blalock
Trey Moore
Tyler Allen
Renee Peek
Tom Tate
Fay Langston
Charles Allen
Sarah Raughton |
| | | 18 | Richard Harrison
Gail Crider
Simeon Bickerstaf
Braden Villarreal
Nigel Gamsby
Caroline Windom |
| | | 19 | Danielle Powell
Aaron Goss
John Fischer, Jr. |
| | | 20 | Jon Baggett
Stella Pierce
Joan Byrum
Juanita McGuire
Adam Battles
Will Barksdale
James Ledbetter
Elizabeth White
Eddy Bolton |
| | | 21 | Wendy Manifold
Lad Steinemann
Bonita Gaston
Jim Srock |
| | | 22 | Justin Langston
Johnny Mack
Ferguson, Jr.
Corey Blalock
Derek McMahan
Jordan Bethune
Jason Newb
Beckett Hester
Hubby Forter |
| | | 23 | Dally Hairston |
| | | 24 | Michael Chambers
Tom Emory
Payton Day Lewis
Melinda Easler
Susan Collins |
| | | 25 | William Beasley
Emily Tate
Pam Bettis
Dorothy Cyr |
| | | 26 | Kylee Elkins
Johnny Battles
Kate Smith
Amina Bearden |
| | | 27 | Makayla Mullis
David Hilliard
Holden Smith
Marc Hale
Larissa Roe Allen |
| | | 28 | Derek Davis
Ethan Bailey
Russell O'Dell |
| | | 29 | Ethen Battles |

Anniversaries

- | | | | |
|---|--|----|--|
| 1 | Russell & Jan Odell
Craig & Ashley Hulkan | 8 | Clark & Genella Tolbert |
| 3 | Ray & Sandra Padgett
Ernest & Faye Ross | 10 | Danny & Sible Hopper |
| 4 | Larry & Kathy Gray
James Rhodes & Angela Eads | 14 | Joey & Melanie Garrett
Kevin & Connie McElhaney
Lauren & Jackie Brettner |
| 5 | Don & Glenda Ingram | 15 | Leonard & Amy Keith |
| 7 | Calvin & Myra Lanier
Mack & Debbie Flannigan | 17 | Vance & Patti Carden |

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River Voice

by Angie Shugart

When we save a river, we save a major part of an ecosystem, and we save ourselves as well because of our dependence—physical, economic, spiritual—on the water and its community of life. — (Tim Palmer, The Wild and Scenic Rivers of America)

In 2020, Governor Kay Ivey established the Alabama Innovation Commission to create a more resilient, inclusive, and robust economy through innovation. In order to do this, they partnered with the Hoover Institution at Stanford University to develop recommendations for policies that will spur innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the state. The AIC report released in 2021 contains a chapter about how Outdoor Recreation plays a major role in the attraction of new industry to Alabama and its overall economic impact in the state. A new Council of Outdoor Recreation was created in 2022 with Alabama DCNR (Department of Conservation and Natural Resources) Commissioner Chris Blankenship as Chairman and a 19-person advisory roundtable with a purpose to expand Alabama’s outdoor industry, enhance the state’s attractiveness to a skilled workforce, and yield returns for rural and urban communities.

This effort is an incredible opportunity for Alabama to highlight the fact that our state ranks number one in freshwater aquatic biodiversity. Alabama holds the national title for more species of freshwater fish, mussels, turtles, crayfish, and snails than any other state in the nation. That is an incredible statistic and makes our great state unique and very special in the realm of Outdoor Recreation. With this honor comes great responsibility. Preserving our natural resources is vital to maintaining our rich biodiversity and natural resource economy. When our waters are impaired, these species are threatened or become wiped out completely, which has sadly happened to many freshwater species in Alabama. We have to care enough about our environment to prevent degradation because when a species is gone, we can’t get it back. Prevention, as in any case, is key. Proper streamside protection, low impact development, responsible forest management, and native landscapes are ways to address the decline in water quality. In so many ways, preservation is more than protecting frogs or trees, it’s about protecting our own health and well-being. The saying is true that when you tug at one single thing in nature, you will find that everything else is attached, especially human life.

Our organization is working to preserve the Little River Watershed in perpetuity with a national Wild and Scenic designation. Since 2019, we have been working alongside our partners at Alabama Rivers Alliance to get our congressional leaders behind legislation for a study of Little River that

would determine its eligibility to become a Wild and Scenic River. We believe Little River has all of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values that make up a Wild and Scenic River and that study and designation would be a sure way to keep it properly managed and its water quality maintained. We believe this can be done in Congress through bipartisan support. There are a couple of great recent examples in Florida to look to, as two Wild and Scenic study bills were recently approved in an omnibus appropriations bill in December.

Republican Congressman Vern Buchanan sponsored a bill to designate the Little Manatee River as a National Wild and Scenic and was successful in it becoming a law as part of a larger legislative package. In addition, U.S. Reps. Gus Bilirakis, R-Fla., Scott Franklin, R-Fla., and Darren Soto, D-Fla., and then U.S. Rep. Charlie Crist, D-Fla. co-sponsored the bill, which passed the House in September 2022 without opposition. Protecting Florida’s beautiful lands and pristine waterways is one of my top priorities,” said Buchanan. “Designating the Little Manatee River as ‘scenic’ will ensure that it is kept in its current, pristine condition for future generations to enjoy. This bill brings us one step closer to making this historic designation a reality.”

Democrat Congressman Darren Soto (FL-09) voted to pass the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2023, that included the Kissimmee River Wild and Scenic River Act which directs the Secretary of Interior to complete a study of the Kissimmee River within three years to make it part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. “The Kissimmee River restoration was the largest river restoration on earth and cost nearly \$1 billion over many years. As part of the Northern Everglades, this project is crucial to ensuring clean water flows through the River of Grass. Now that we’ve restored the river, it’s time to protect it. This will also benefit recreation, ecotourism, and habitat for Florida’s endangered species. This new law will finally move the designation process forward and ultimately preserve it for future generations. I am thrilled that our bill was included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, and look forward to seeing President Biden sign it into law,” said Congressman Soto.

Designated as a

Wild and Scenic River in 2020, the Wekiva River in Florida flows through private, state and federal land, similar to Little River. In this case, one Congressman, Bob Graham sponsored the bill and it passed unanimously, making it Florida’s second river to earn the prestigious recognition. A Partnership W&S Model was implemented for the Wekiva River, allowing an advisory committee of local city, county, and state representatives, land managers, non-profit

organizations, and other stakeholder groups to implement a Comprehensive Management Plan.

Little River Waterkeeper and Alabama Rivers Alliance are working to convince our congressional leaders to support legislation for a study of Little River

becoming Alabama’s second Wild and Scenic River, behind the Sipsey River. Our conversations with Rep. Robert Aderholt and staff from the offices of Rep. Mike Rogers and Sen. Tommy Tuberville have been positive, and we will work to continue gaining support in the towns surrounding Little River and from the leaders of the Council on Outdoor Recreation because we believe this designation dovetails with the goals of the Alabama Innovation Commission to showcase our amazing natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities for the benefit of the entire state.

Angie Shugart is a co-founder of Little River Waterkeeper.



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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.

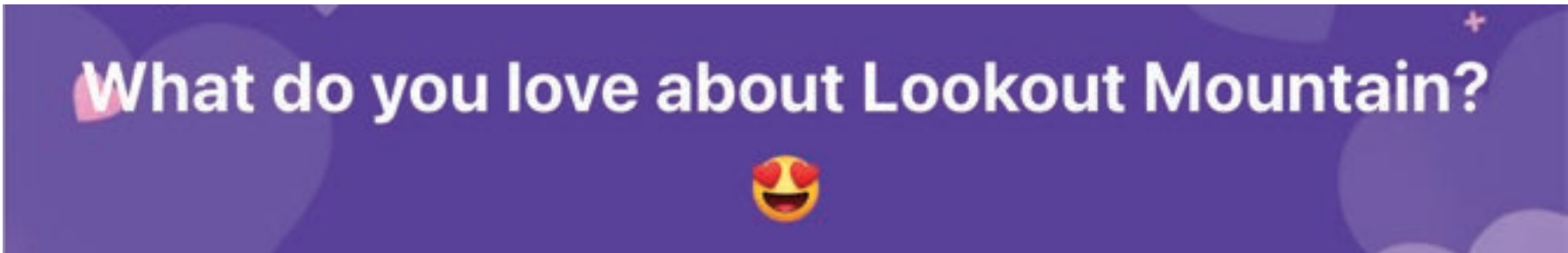
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The Groundhog asked on Facebook...



DeSoto Park
MJ Ballard

Quiet mornings...and afternoons with the birds so happy tweeting...just a happy peaceful sound...
Pamela Smith-Caudell

The nature! It's one of the most beautiful places.
Lisa Sulkosky

The people and how clean the air feels.
Marie Coalson

Hiking, pitcher plants, an abundant supply of wildflowers, the river
Destin Padgett

Climbing it!
Gene Fleming

The great people who live on it!
Paul Horridge

When all I can hear is the rustle of the wind through the tree tops.
Mary Jo Yarbrough

Everything!
Neal Whitt

Quiet Birds
Trees...
Friends
Max Mitchell

Peaceful and quiet, laid back!
Nancy Phillips

Beautiful landscape, waterfalls, slower pace of life, community, there's always a breeze off the brow. We have four very distinctive seasons. It's home!
Cynthia Stinson

Living here
Alysia Swanson

The simple life, the slow pace, the beauty of nature and the people who seem as though all have the best interest of the mountain, respect for the land and each other!
Liz Mitchell

Its people.
Dick Tindol

The people, the sunsets, the smell of the air right before it rains. Most of all, golden hour. I've been a bunch of different places on this planet, but Mentone has the most magical golden hour of them all.
Allison Leigh

Everything!
Betty Perkins

Everything! The birds and the many wildlife that grace the mountain. Peace and serenity. The glorious air and the magnificent sunsets! Many wonderful people.
Karin Resnick

Mentone!
Margaret Baldwin

The great community of people that live there and exploring all the beautiful places that God has made!
Jen Thompson

How grass smells so sweet when cut
Jesse Hemphill

What's not to love, that is the question. I fell in love at 1st sight.
Michelle Mancuso

Everything!
Stephanie Britton

**GALLERY
OPENING & SHOW**

**Friday, February 10 &
Saturday, February 11**

FEATURING:
Lydia Adele Randolph - Modern Cubism
Jerry Wilson - Natural Impressionism
Linda Lee - Abstract Expressionism
Kevin Chitwood - Mixed Media Wood Resin

Friday and Saturday:
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