

the GROUNDHOG

VOL. 3 - NO. 10 JANUARY 1986 A Publication of the Mentone Area Preservation Association

Park And Canyon

*Woods, Waters,
Rocks, Animals:
Love For Them All*

Two distinctive titles have been bestowed on Doyal Benefield. Alice Woolf called him "The Pope of the Park" because of his priestly ten year custodianship of DeSoto Park, that pride of the Mentone area, with its 5,067 acres along Little River, the cathedral-like lodge, constructed in the Depression years of stone and native wood by CCC boys; its fine dining room, 25 unit motel, 22 cabins, chalets, 78 site campground, country store and nature trails, and olympic size swimming pool.

Others have dubbed him "The Keeper of the Canyon." Since the age of ten as a boy in Fort Payne, he has hiked into the canyon, studied its flora and fauna, and collected its lore. He has led groups in exploration into this deepest gorge east of the Mississippi and joined rescue missions for victims of the canyon.

Upon Benefield's retirement in 1981, James F. Lyons, Operations Supervisor of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, said: "We are all aware of your love for the fragile and beautiful things found in our natural environment and your unrelenting efforts to preserve these things for posterity. You have set an example for all of us to follow in the field of nature interpretation and your achievements in this area . . ."

No more fitting honor could have been given to Doyal Benefield than the naming for him of the new Interpretative Center at DeSoto Park. It was his own development, one of his prime interests. When the center was dedicated on May 25, 1985,

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Mentone Cable TV Decision Is Set

At the Jan. 6 Town Council Meeting, Mayor Rob Hammond and Councilmen Max Cash, Lee Davenport, Hobson Kirby, Bill Russell and Richard Meadows agreed to award a contract for cable TV in Mentone at a special meeting called for Jan. 13. Boyce Dooley and Bill Kidder were both present to answer approximately twelve questions put to them by the council.

Both Dooley and Kidder answered and also presented written answers to the questions put before them. Since the two cable TV companies represented by the two men offer essentially the same services, council members and the mayor thought that they needed another week to choose between the two. However, it is certain that before another year passes, residents within the town limits who pay for the service will be enjoying clear viewing on all networks and any additional services they wish to purchase, such as **Show Time**, **Cinemax**, and others.

Both companies promised to waive installation fees for charter subscribers. Monthly service for the basic twelve channels, including the three major networks, a public service channel, and Cable News Network, will be \$11.00. Both companies would pay the town tax of 3 percent of their gross income. Differences between the two companies involved Mr. Dooley's company already serving adjacent towns and Mr. Kidder's company being able to install the service sooner.

Visitors at the council meeting included Evelyn Kidder, Bill Light (Mr. Kidder's partner), Angelo Rosario and Jean McGehee for **The Groundhog**.

The only other business transacted was a unanimous vote to purchase two snow tires for Police Chief Colquitt Jones' patrol car. — JDM

A New Year's Message

As we enter this New Year, let us be open and receptive to new ideas, new inspiration. The successful man puts his thoughts into his work. Circumstances and other men cannot hinder him. When we have the right attitude of mind, all things work together. All our circumstances begin to move in the right direction as soon as we take the right attitude of mind. To succeed we must have no destructive thoughts, no criticisms. We must have an ideal. We must live with an object in view and measure up to our ideal. We must use imagination, visualize, see our ideal as already completed. We must work definitely and persistently. We must develop an equilibrium of understanding which makes successful men steadfast — an invincible concentration and determination.

Let us give thanks for having come to this place in time; let us know we are going to take giant steps forward in this New Year to attain our dreams. There is a strength in us that enables us to keep going forward in life. No matter how far we have come, we can go farther, finding new avenues of service, new thoughts to share, and new ways to be more loving and helpful.

This is a New Year, a new world is unfolding. Beginnings begin with letting go habits, resentments, and fears from the past. Beginnings begin with holding on to faith and giving forth good. Mentone is a great quaint small town. Let's keep it alive and interesting, all working together.

I hope the New Year finds you
With at least one dream come true,
And a better, clearer vision
Of that good you hold in view.

May the strength you've longed for
Fill your heart and mind to stay,
And the light of inspiration
Guide your thinking day by day.

May you never mind tomorrow,
Always make today your own.
May your yesterdays hold no regrets
When another year has flown.

May your purpose never falter,
May your ardor never wane.
May you be and do what's best for you
Till the New Year comes again.

A very happy new year to all!

— Amelia Brooks, Director of MAPA

Mentone Fire Dept.

The Mentone Fire Department was on call late Christmas night to fight a fire which smoldered within a trailer occupied by Richard T'shaw and his wife near Moon Lake School and the home of Brandel Jones.

Mrs. T'shaw, upon realizing the fire had started, ran to Mr. Jones' house. Mr. Jones used a fire extinguisher from his house to fight the flames, started by a wood heater which ran partially through a back wall, and buckets of water. However, as he filled one bucket after another, the fire rose up again.

"The fire department was the real hero," said Mrs. Jones. "They arrived in only about ten minutes after being phoned early Thursday morning."

Hershall Pruitt, acting fire chief, said that the damage was minimal, mostly to the back wall of the house, and no one was hurt.

Visitor To Mentone



Singer Willie Nelson
(Billboard Nov. 30, 1985)

Things pretty much came apart on Dec. 16 at The Gourdie Shop when a certain fellow with a familiar face walked into the place, accompanied by Edward Cash and two other gentlemen. Helen Turner and Cindy Strickland became almost incoherent.

"How did you know it was Willie Nelson?" someone asked Cindy.

"When I looked into his eyes."

"Did you get a photograph?" The **Groundhog** editors wanted to know.

"No," said Helen. "But we got a hug and an autograph."

Willie bought three Gourdies, apparently for his children. His associates chose another three.

While this was going on Gourdie creator Sharon Barron was in Huntsville for a crafts show at the Von Braun Center and making a presentation on Channel 13's "Country Rover." Within a short span stories were taped at Mentone by Channel 9 of Chattanooga by Don Welch (also likely to be fed to CBS) and Alicia Ames of Chattanooga's Channel 3 (NBC outlet). Willard Scott, the irrepressible weather man of NBC's "Today Show" already owns a Gourdie.

Why was Willie Nelson in Mentone? The rumors flew rapidly. He was looking at property, with some kind of development in mind. He definitely examined the beautiful spots at Eagle's Cliff. Others said he was interested in Lahusage and Battelle.

Reliable sources gave most credence to the rumor that Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson, and Waylon Jennings had decided to apply proceeds from their album "The Highwayman" to a development of some kind in the Mentone area.

While in town Willie also visited Crow's Nest Antiques in the Hitching Post.

Brow Briefs

Sam "Hoss" Whatley was named Defensive Player of the Year in the Pee Wee Football League, composed of 8, 9 and 10 year old at the Fort Payne Recreational Center. He was one of two outstanding players chosen, one offensive and one defensive. Congratulations, Sam!

At Northeast State Junior College, Mentone's Patricia Ann Cash, daughter of Councilman and Mrs. Max Cash, was on the President's Honors List. Included on the Dean's List was James A. Tate.

Charles and Helena Furgerson have leased their restaurant to Jean Seal, a newcomer from Texas. Mrs. Seal hopes to open The Strawberry Patch by the first of February. She plans to serve breakfast and lunch from 6 to 2:30. The menu will feature fresh strawberry pie, other pies, and sandwiches.

When asked about the degree of need in Mentone during the holidays, the Rev. Bob Blackwell of St. Joseph's Episcopal Church said that his church gave away six boxes of presents, food, and necessities to needy families. Because of a reluctance of people to come with requests, he finds it difficult to measure the extent of need. Other churches also help families in need. St. Joseph's Food Pantry operates year-round, accepting donations for local needy families.

According to Ovie Blalock, the community center located at the foot of the mountain in Valley Head still has another two to three weeks before completion. This center will be used for square dancing, clogging, and as a meeting facility for various community activities. The center was used for the first time for a square dance on Jan. 2.

The American Legion hosted a well-attended covered dish supper and Christmas party Dec. 19 at the Legion Hall.

American Entertainment of Mentone is searching for fantasy and science fiction short stories to be published in an anthology. Call Gregory Purvis for details, 4-4518.

Mentone Receives \$6,000 From 1985 June Jam

When the distribution announcement for the 1985 June Jam Funds of the musical group Alabama were announced on Dec. 12, the following for the Mentone area were included:

Camp Comer — \$4,000
Moon Lake PTA — \$1,000
Lookout Fire Protection District — \$1,000

Cloudmont Ski Resort Biggest Year Of All

According to Jack Jones, Cloudmont Ski Resort is having the greatest year since its founding 15 years ago. "Between 150 and 200 have been skiing daily," he says. "Christmas Day had beautiful snow."

Mentone's topmost winter attraction boasts six chalets, two slopes, equipment rentals, instruction, and night skiing.

An Artist Dies

Few people have left more imprint on Mentone than Charles W. Edwards (Uncle Charlie), who died on Christmas Day in a veteran's hospital at Gainesville, Florida. Founder of Cloudmont Camp, he was assistant director for many years following its purchase by Jack and Olive Jones. He helped found Valley View Ranch and was designer of most of the buildings constructed by the Joneses. An artist of talent, his 82 feet by 12 mural at the Chattanooga Choo-Choo is the largest in Tennessee. For 30 years he lived with the Joneses and was very much a part of their operations. It was his desire to be cremated, a wish that was granted, with his ashes lovingly placed at one of his favorite spots following the memorial service on Wednesday, Jan. 8.

New Superintendent For DeSoto Park

Earl Simpson, superintendent of DeSoto State Park, spoke at the January meeting of the Mentone Area Preservation meeting at St. Joseph's-on-the-Mountain Church. Simpson announced that he is leaving in a few weeks for Wind Creek State Park near Alexander City. Coming as director of DeSoto State Park will be Talmadge Butler, from Oak Mountain State Park. Butler, a Boaz native, has had twelve years' experience with the state parks system.

Mr. Simpson stated that from 350,000 to 400,000 visitors come to DeSoto each year. Camping rates are \$8 and \$9 year round. Visitors and residents of this area now have available the new Doyal Benefield Interpretive Center (see cover story) located in the laundry building adjacent to the Country Store. This facility features an 18 x 40 foot auditorium with equipment for showing films and an 18 x 20 foot display room. Soon a 100 gallon aquarium will be added. Each Thursday evening movies are shown, and everyone is welcome to attend.

The motel and restaurant area of the park has recently been leased to Trans-world Services. New manager will be Robert Teague. This organization has also managed facilities at Yellowstone and at the Everglades.

FEBRUARY MEETING

THE MENTONE AREA PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

What is THE GROUNDHOG'S Future?
Speaker: Charles White McGehee, editor

Presiding: Donna Buckley, Associate Director

Everyone Welcome
Refreshments follow

The Parlor

St. Joseph's-on-the-Mountain Church
Tuesday, Feb. 4, 1986 7 p.m.

The Groundhog

Published monthly by the Mentone Area Preservation Association. First conceived on Groundhog Day, 1982, and organized April 6, 1982, for the purpose of preserving and protecting the heritage, natural environment, and other unique qualities of life in the Mentone Area. Chartered as a non-profit organization by the State of Alabama.

Charles White McGehee, Editor
Jean McGehee, Associate Editor
Donna Bukley, Advertising, 634-4678
Amelia Brooks, Director
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Support The Goundhog

Now is a good time to join the Mentone Area Preservation Association to show your support for **The Groundhog**. Since MAPA's fiscal year begins on July 1, dues for the next six months are \$5 for each voting member. Send your \$5 with your name, address, and phone number to Box 50. Then you can vote on issues of importance to the community and show your support for MAPA's goals: to preserve and protect the heritage, natural environment, and other unique qualities of life in this area.

To MENTONE AREA PRESERVATION
ASSOCIATION, BOX 50 in support of the objectives of MAPA, desiring to join with others in preserving and protecting the heritage, natural environment and other unique qualities of life in the Mentone area, I enclose \$5 for voting membership for one through June 1986.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

Jeff Cook's Modern-Day Castle



The Groundhog's Donna Bukley was one of the first to explore and photograph what she calls the "modern-day castle" of Jeff Cook of Alabama band. Almost a year in construction, with four towers inspired by the Fort Payne Depot, it is built of stone from the Fort Payne quarry. Golden oak trimming is used throughout the 13,456 square feet of its 32 rooms. Jeff says that had he not formed his own construction company, the house would have cost at least \$3,000,000. Fred Hanson, contractor, was assisted in the interior decoration by Jeff's wife Josie. Downstairs is a great room, main kitchen, casual and formal dining rooms, master bedroom suite with jacuzzi, laundry room, sitting room, library, and a Japanese room with its own kitchen. Upstairs is the entertainment room with huge split TV screen, large speakers, jamming room in the tower

area, game room with bar, pool table, card table, and telephone booth. Here also is located Jeff and Josie's offices, guest bedrooms, Florida room, tanning room, and nursery. There are terraces upstairs and several murals. Unusual features include a guard house, electronic surveillance throughout, a heart-shaped tub with jets in daughter Crystal's bedroom, an outside pool, with various sitting rooms and bars in each of the towers. For maintenance of this unusual house, there are two full-time housekeepers. Entertainment will be limited to small crowds. Behind the huge garage which houses five automobiles, Jeff's workshop is situated, with shower, jacuzzi, and exercise equipment. When asked what he liked best about his new house, Jeff told Donna Bukley, "Just being there and being able to enjoy it."

For The Hunters

Hunting, particularly deer hunting, is very popular this time of year. For those of you that do hunt, please remember that deer season closes Jan. 31 for DeKalb County. One deer may be taken per day, and no dogs or buckshot are allowed. Please also remember to wear a bright orange garment, such as a vest or jacket, at least 144 square inches, or a bright orange hat or cap during the season so that another hunter will not mistake you for the target. It is not necessary to wear camouflage hunting attire, since the whitetail deer are colorblind, the hunter blends in with his natural surroundings.

A state-wide hunting license is available for \$11.00, and a county-wide license is available for \$6.00. Remember: the price of a hunting license is well worth it, considering the fines for hunting without a license.

Woodcock season ends Jan. 31, snipe ends Feb. 28. Bobwhite quail season also ends on Feb. 28. Please remember that Mentone is a Bird Sanctuary.

Whatley's General Store, in Mentone, sells a variety of hunting equipment and ammunition. — Gregory P. Purvis

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Valley Head Fire Training

On Dec. 17 an appreciation dinner was held for those completing the Certification Program from the Alabama State Firefighters Personnel Standards and Education Commission recently conducted by the Valley Head Volunteer Fire Department. The training consisted of 160 hours in such aspects of firefighting as fire behaviors protective breathing apparatus, search and rescue, fire cause determination, and prevention.

Twelve firefighters completed field experience, classroom study, and passing tests. Another course begins the last week in February. Those interested should call Fire Chief William Brill (635-6346).

The Mentone Volunteer Fire Department and Mentone citizens are urged to participate in the next program of training.

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Benefield

(Continued From Page 1)

it called attention to a principal focus of his work.

In explaining the Interpretative Center, Benefield said: "When families were staying at the park, there was need for entertaining their children. I began special tours for them, along nature trails, explaining the wildlife. One family told me that the summer following their first visit here they gave their children a choice — Disney World, the beach, or DeSoto Park; they chose DeSoto."

The Interpretative Center is now staffed, with its own structure near the country store. It implements the view of Benefield that DeSoto is a "back-to-nature park, not an action park." It is a living development of a man who is an expert in botany and biology without formal education in these fields.

After graduating from DeKalb County High School, he served in the Navy for four years. In 1954, after a year at Auburn, he went to work at DeSoto Park as a laborer. "My title changed throughout the years," he says, "but I continued to be a laborer." He was named a ranger his first summer at DeSoto.

After 15 months he was transferred to Monte Sano State Park near Huntsville, serving there until 1962. Next he was at Oak Mountain State Park, south of Birmingham. The years 1967-70 were spent at Little Mountain State Park, now called Guntersville State Park. Back at DeSoto in 1970, he served progressively as Managers I, II and III, and then became Superintendent.

Under Benefield's leadership DeSoto State Park received first place winner in the State Division of the 1978 Governor's Environmental Quality Awards Program. In 1960 he attended the Conservation Officers School at the Alabama Police Academy at Auburn, which is held in conjunction with the Alabama Department of Public Safety. In recognition of his activity in scouting, he received an award for services as a member of the Sequoyah District Committee, Boy Scouts of America.

By a previous marriage he is father of four children: Joyce Griffin's husband Rick is with the Fort Payne Improvement Authority. They have three sons. Jeryl Lynn's husband Mickey Bobo is ranger at Camp Comer. They are parents of a son and daughter. Jeff is an engineer with the state at Mobile. Jeanie is in school in Birmingham, in the process of changing careers.

Benefield is now married to the former Pauline Baker, whom he has known since they were high school classmates. Mrs. Benefield worked with South Central Bell. Since their retirements in 1981 they are thoroughly enjoying life. In their motor homes they have visited 48 states. He is serious about gardening. They scrupulously freeze adequate supplies for year-round eating and sell and give away vegetables.

Doyal Benefield, now a member of the Mentone Area Preservation Association, feels strongly about the meaning of the state park for the Mentone area. "It employs about 20 Mentone people during the summer," he says. There are many other employees from throughout the county.

GROUNDHOG: Although you've been formally assigned to four parks, you've worked at some time in all of them. How do you rank DeSoto?

BENEFIELD: It's my park, one of the better ones. It depends on what a person likes. For the beach, it's Gulf Shores. For lakes, skiing and fishing, Guntersville. But for the mountain, it's DeSoto.

GROUNDHOG: What part of your work did you enjoy most?

BENEFIELD: The nature hikes and the other things I did with children. Some of them still come by to see me.

GROUNDHOG: Do Mentone's summer camps have any affect on DeSoto Park?

BENEFIELD: Sometimes we have done programs with them, involving rafting, hiking trails and nature studies. We have found lost kids.

GROUNDHOG: DeSoto Park is dependent on tourism. What do you think about the future of tourism in this area?

BENEFIELD: There will be more and more tourism. People are going to have more time and money to go

places and see things. We need to promote what we have and prepare for the extra tourists who will inevitably come. We should go at it right — improve parking places and develop what we have.

GROUNDHOG: You are a great lover of the natural beauty and attributes of this area. Aren't you afraid an added influx of tourists will change things too much?

BENEFIELD: Added tourism will not change things. Tourists come to see, enjoy and have fun. My experience is that problems encountered in parks and recreational areas are caused by vandalism and litter, mostly by the locals.

After 31 years with the state parks system, Doyal Benefield is still involved in priestly fashion toward preservation and enjoyment of our natural environment, reverencing its beauty and respecting its life.

Henry David Thoreau lived for two years in the woods around Walden Pond, studying and communicating with the wonders of nature's constant miracle near Concord, Mass. For almost his entire lifetime Doyal Benefield has made a Walden of the woods, rocks, plants, animals and waters of the area in and around DeSoto Park and Little River Canyon. Beyond this, he has found ways and implemented means of allowing thousands of people to share this wonderland — without damaging its beauty and sanctity.

Musical Mountain Christmas



The near-zero weather caused cancellation by Coordinator Angelo Rosario of the parade from the triangle to the square. However, a cheerful fire in the huge fireplace at the Mentone Springs Hotel awaited the guests. After informal conversation, everyone gathered in the dining room, where David Mays led singing strengthened by the Moon Lake Baptist Choir and other local singers. Santa Claus (Randy Still) made a joyous appearance. So it was, the Musical Mountain Christmas went on as scheduled, enjoyed by many and anticipated in future years.

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