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THE GROUNDHOG

“Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain”

JANUARY 2023

Community Is the Focus of the Hitching Post’s Future

by Stephen V. Smith

The passenger window of the SUV rolled down as the vehicle pulled to the stop sign at Highway 117. “Hello,” shouted the lady toward myself and Jerry Clifton as we stood outside the Hitching Post discussing its future. “Are y’all gonna bring back the dancing?” Since word began to spread that Jerry had bought the century-old building, this has been the main question. The comments on the Mentone Hitching Post Facebook page are filled with memories of the community dances that took place upstairs in the historic building, now the oldest commercial structure in Mentone.

The memories are never about what band played or what type of music was heard. The comments are always about time spent with family, with friends, with neighbors. I’ve come to realize that those dances symbolize the deep sense of community that runs throughout the Mentone area. And that’s what people are longing for.

The suffering our world has experienced the past two years has taken such a toll on people. Certainly, families have been devastated by the loss of loved ones to Covid and related health issues. But even those of us who have been spared have nonetheless lost something. Months spent in isolation to protect our physical health have highlighted a truth about our human nature — we need one another.

Someone recently recommended a book to me that I hope to read in the New Year. “Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect,” is written by Dr. Matthew Lieberman, a neuroscientist and the director of UCLA’s Social Cognitive Neuroscience lab. In it he outlines neurological findings suggesting that a sense of community is the greatest predictor of happiness, and that “our need to connect with other people is even more fundamental, more basic, than our need for food or shelter.”

That helps explain the excitement we’re seeing around the future of the Hitching Post. The concept of a community dance is not about dancing at all, but rather about connecting with one another. About coming together to celebrate a moment in life. About being part of something that involves other people.

It’s about community. And that’s what we hope to foster at the Hitching Post. Several pieces of the puzzle are still being finalized, but one thing is for certain — community will be at the heart of its future.

When Jerry first called me in the spring to tell me the building was back on the market and asked if I’d be interested in helping create a new vision for it, I immediately understood the tremendous responsibility such a project would involve. “We don’t want to remodel an old building and put new stuff in it,” I told Jerry. “We want to bring this structure back to life and create opportunities that will honor its history and the significant role it has long played in the the life of Mentone.”

That is our goal. The Hitching Post is central to this town, both geographically and figuratively, and we are working hard to ensure it lives up to its full potential.

A great deal of work has been done, and much more is yet to come, but Jerry’s experience with historical renovation is being put to great use. Structurally, the Hitching Post will be in the best shape it has seen in decades. The vision continues to evolve alongside the construction work. You can sign up for email updates at www.mentonehitchingpost.com. And be sure to follow www.facebook.com/MentoneHitchingPost and leave your ideas in comments there.

In the meantime, dust off those dancing shoes and let us know your favorite tunes ...

Stephen and wife Michele are DeKalb County natives, local business owners, and lovers of the arts. They own cabins in Mentone, and were recently elected to the Little River Arts Council board of directors.



Chattooga: Former Capital of the Cherokee Nation

by Larry Smith

In June 1830, the State of Georgia prohibited the Cherokee Nation from holding assemblies at their capital in New Echota. A new location was needed where the Nation could conduct tribal business, and an unlikely spot was selected not far from Mentone, in Alabama’s Cherokee County.

The little village of Chattooga, near what is now Gaylesville (about 20 miles from Mentone), became the temporary seat of government for the Cherokees. The new capital was a log cabin which had been used by the Cherokees as a courthouse since 1820, when their nation had been divided into eight districts.

Among those who appeared in court here was Sequoyah of Willstown, who had recently invented his famous syllabary. It is speculated that he was summoned to court for suspicion of being a witch. Sequoyah had written what he planned to say in court, and when he read his speech, the audience was stunned and became convinced he was not a witch, due to his “talking leaves.”

Chief John Ross addressed a meeting of the Cherokee Council on October 24, 1831. His entire speech, in which he blasted efforts to remove his people to the West, was printed in the Cherokee Phoenix newspaper.

A historical marker was recently placed in the area where the capital was located. Jim Lewis, official historian of Cherokee County, spearheaded the



Erin Medley (left), manager at Red Clay State Park near Cleveland, TN and Cleata Townsend (right), of Chattanooga, TN, were among the earliest visitors to see the new Chattooga marker.

project after securing a grant from the Tillotson Foundation in Menlo, Georgia. The marker is located next to Oak Bowery Church on CR-97, just off AL-68.

According to historian Lewis, the marker is already drawing attention and interest. Representatives from the National Parks Service

in Washington, D.C., Chickamauga National Battlefield, Red Clay State Park, the Trail of Tears Association, the Cherokee Nation, and the Guntersville Historical Society have already visited the site.

The project did not happen overnight. It began with an inquiry in 2007 from historian

Mike Wren of Atlanta, who wanted to know more about the log cabin that was used as a courthouse and later doubled as the Cherokee capital.

Among those who began researching the subject were Cleata Townsend of Chattanooga, TN, a member of the national board of directors of the Trail of Tears Association, Dr. Brett Riggs of Western Carolina University, Larry Benefield of

(continued on page 3)



The Groundhog

Published monthly
by the Mentone Area
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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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Groundhog woodcut courtesy of Meg Justice/Bee Spring Studio

Mentone Matters

by Mayor Rob Hammond

In the New Year, the town will be working with our engineer, Adam Lea, Ladd Environmental, and ALDOT on design work for Phase 2 of the sidewalk project. It is too early in the process to project a date for start of construction.

Paul Nail has done an outstanding job of getting Moon Lake Village up and running. Work remains to be done. The town must put in an engineered grease trap system before the restaurant can be opened in the former cafeteria. The plans have been submitted to the county health department for approval. So far, donations have paid for improvements to the amphitheater. The steel beams are up and most of the materials are on site for the roof. The town will complete the roof and Paul will to continue to ask for donations for these improvements. Moon Lake Village is a work in progress and we will continue to work with



our tenants to help make the village an important part of destination Mentone.

The recent frigid weather caused some problems with frozen water lines. If you own a second home in Mentone, it is always a good idea to leave some heat on and turn your water off at the meter when you are not here. The good news is Cloudmont was able to make snow and be open for several days.

Best wishes for a happy and healthy New Year!



Photo credit: Jared Fager

From the Editor

Happy New Year! I am looking forward to this year, with equal parts curiosity and excitement. MAPA's programs will continue to grow, and I hope they attract folks with all kinds of different interests. The citizenry in the Mentone area is quite diverse, and we aim to serve everyone. If you'd like to suggest a program that would interest you personally, please let me know!

In December, we lost a great member of our community—Jim Byrum. I got to know Jim during my time at Moon Lake Library and I appreciated his gentle, engaged demeanor. I always enjoyed seeing him around town as he walked his beloved dog, Penny. His dedication to the food bank at St. Joseph's will have lasting impact. He will be deeply missed by many.

On the Friday before Christmas, that frigid day, I had the blessing of taking a train ride with my grandson Tripp, who's now almost four years old. We embarked at Chattanooga's Tennessee Valley Railroad depot and when we reached the "North Pole," Santa came on board for a visit with each of the children. For an hour, all of the world's challenges fell away, as I joined Tripp in seeing (and feeling) the magic of Christmas. It's a day I'll forever remember.

I noticed the photo above which Jared Fager posted

on Facebook, and was struck by its sheer beauty. It reminded me of an article from our September 2021 issue that announced "Goose Island." Wyatt Thornton, who was 18 at the time, considered the land feature in Lake Lahusage to be prominent enough to be deserving of a proper name. After seeing Canadian Geese hatch eggs on the rock island over the course of two years, he decided to call it "Goose Island." After doing some research and paperwork, Wyatt was able to have the name be officially recognized by the U.S. Geological Survey. Thanks to Jared for the use of his stunning photograph.

MAPA and *The Groundhog* had planned a holiday open house in December, but I was recovering from the flu and many others were experiencing various viruses, so we postponed the event. We will be hosting a "New Year's" open house on Saturday, January 7, and I hope you'll drop by. The shops at Moon Lake Village will be open, so if you haven't yet visited them, this will be a great opportunity. You'll also have an opportunity to meet some of MAPA's board members and see what we have to offer in the office.

May we all have an inspiring new year, filled with new experiences and fresh outlooks, and with wellness and prosperity. —Kelly

Moon Lake School Yearbooks

When Moon Lake School closed in 2021, the final yearbook was lovingly edited and produced Dr. Bill Berry and teacher Lea Long. This final yearbook quickly sold out, but if you missed out on this collectible yearbook, you

still have a chance to buy one. Dr. Berry has made a few minors edits to the original text and added a page to reflect the school's transformation to Moon Lake Village. The yearbook features a history of the school, and a helpful index to all of the photographs which are included. A limited (and final) run of the yearbook is available for sale at Mentone Town Hall. The cost is \$25. This yearbook is a great addition to your home or rental cabin's bookshelves!



mapa & THE GROUNDHOG invite you
TO a new year's OPEN HOUSE!

SATURDAY, JANUARY 7
2 – 4 P.m.

mapa OFFICE @ moon Lake VILLAGE

LIGHT REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED



Message from MAPA’s President

by Mark Hoffman

From all of us at MAPA, we wish for you and yours a healthy, safe, and wonderful upcoming year. Love, listen to, and nourish your family, your neighbors, and all

other folks who you may come in contact with each day. That’s a simple message we hope to foster and enhance through our many upcoming community programs, activities, and donations to local charitable

organizations. Let’s bridge the gap amongst the old and the young, the “old” Mentone and the “new” Mentone. Let’s all do this together, for ourselves and for Mentone.

Chattooga Historical Marker *(cont. from page 1)*

Henagar, Laurie Brockman of Tucson, AZ, and Larry Smith of Guntersville. The entire project was coordinated with the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma. A formal dedication of the marker is planned for early spring. Oak Bowery Church is located in a historic area of Cherokee County. It was the site of a school/mission for the Cherokees in 1820. Established by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the facility folded unexpectedly after being in existence for only a few months. The Methodists then opened a similar facility and it remained operational for several years. The area was also the location of large religious summer camp meetings. There have been at least three buildings that have housed Oak Bowery Church, dating back to the 1830s. One of the buildings was burned by Gen. William T. Sherman’s troops during the Civil War. A cemetery is located behind the current church. The earliest known grave is that of Margaret Parks, who was born in 1831 and died in 1837.

Four Chaplains Memorial Service

by Don Donaghy

In commemoration of the dramatic sacrifice of Four Armed Forces Chaplains during World War II, the American Legion Post 89 in Fort Payne will observe religious emphasis week, February 5–11. A memorial service for the Four Chaplains will take place on Sunday, February 5, at 2 p.m. at the Fort Payne City Auditorium located at 100 Alabama Ave. N.W., Fort Payne, AL 35967.



Legion officials and clergyman are planning special programs throughout the nation to observe the 80th anniversary of the sinking of the USAT Dorchester, highlighting the heroism demonstrated by four valiant chaplains. Of the many incidents of World War II, probably none stirred the nation more than the story of these four men of God whose selfless sacrifice were credited with saving more than 200 lives. A rabbi, a priest, and two Protestant ministers calmly issued life belts to American servicemen aboard the troop transport after it was torpedoed on February 3, 1943, off the coast of Greenland. When the supply of life belts was exhausted, the Four Chaplains removed their own life belts and gave them to four soldiers and then stood bravely on the sinking ship, arms linked together, and heads bowed in prayer. Inspired by the heroic deed of these four Chaplains, the American Legion each year marks the anniversary of their supreme sacrifice through special services and programs. This annual observance is part of the Legion’s “Service to God and Country” program, helping to bring new emphasis to the religious aspects of our American heritage and the need for continuing adherence to the basic religious concepts upon which America was founded. If you have any questions please contact Commander Donald Donaghy, Jr. at 256-717-3350.

Pearl Harbor Memorial Service

by Anita MacDermid

Jacksonville State University’s Little River Canyon Center hosted a Pearl Harbor memorial service on December 7. American Legion Post 89, Post 39, Honor Guard from Valley Head and Trenton, and Fort Payne High School JROTC remembered the well over 2,000 lost that fateful day in 1941 when the Japanese conducted a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The Pearl Harbor memorial was begun by John Keller, Army, Vietnam who has passed away.



Following the remembrance, WWII Veteran Eugene Monroe, US Navy Retired, tossed a wreath into Little River Canyon Falls.



General Sparks and Adjutant Mark Abrams read the names of December 7th victims.

North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District

by Kelly Leavitt

Mentone’s volunteer fire department (formally known as the North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District) is in need of volunteers. “Volunteers are needed at any and all times, for anything from cutting trees off of the road to running fire calls,” said Mentone’s fire chief, Joseph Lee. “We need folks who can respond when we get a call. 80% of the time, it’ll be a tree across the road.”

Alabama state law does not require any type of training to be a volunteer fireman. “We ask anyone who’s curious to come to a few meetings,” said Joseph, “and if it seems like something you might be interested in, to continue coming and we’ll do some training. We welcome anybody to come and talk with us about it.” Anyone who is interested can attend the department’s weekly meeting on Monday at 6 p.m. at main fire station in downtown Mentone, or contact Joseph Lee by phone or text at 256-899-4027. The ISO fire rating has improved for most homeowners in the Mentone area. This rating is provided by the Insurance Services Office and is often used by insurance companies to determine how well a fire department can protect a home. “We redid our ISO rating evaluation last year,” Joseph explained. “It takes some time for the new rating to take effect, and it is now in effect. The new evaluation means that a lot of our area has gone from a 9 to a 6. Everybody in our coverage area, within five road miles of one of our three fire stations, is now a 6,” said Joseph. “If you’re outside those five miles, you will be a 10.” The station addresses below will help you determine if your home is within the North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District coverage area for insurance purposes. “Most homeowners’ insurance goes by the ISO rating,” said Joseph, “but there are a few who do not. Look at all your options if you’re not within the five miles.”

North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District Stations

5907 AL Highway 117 • 2041 County Road 165 • 25298 County Road 89

Mentone American Legion Post Available to Rent



- 195 Cove Road, Mentone, AL 35984
- Great for family gatherings, meetings, receptions and more
 - Working kitchen with refrigerator, microwave, and oven
 - Tables and chairs for groups up to 50
 - Wood-burning fireplace
 - Newly renovated auxiliary room and bathrooms
 - Catering partnership with Elevation Bistro and Mentone Market
- To learn more, text Commander Barry Morton at 334-202-8936.





River Voice

by Angie Shugart

Why is streamside protection so important to maintaining pristine water quality? Because Little River is sourced by groundwater, keeping the river free and clear of stormwater runoff is vital to the health of the watershed. Sedimentation (soil runoff) is a pollutant and damages fragile ecosystems. A streamside buffer (riparian zone) reduces runoff. It also lessens flooding by slowing runoff down that is entering a waterbody. Last, it protects the integrity of the soil, native plants and trees that keep the river or streambank in tact.

Every homeowner on Little River and its tributaries have a choice of maintaining good water quality or contributing to degrading water quality. As the population grows in and around Mentone, the river could be negatively impacted when there are no streamside protection practices implemented.

The Little River Watershed consists of over 125,000 acres! That's a lot of land! Mentone is the only town in the watershed that has a river flowing through. The rest of Little River flows through Dade, Walker, Chattooga counties in Georgia and DeKalb and Cherokee Counties in Alabama. There is also a LOT of water perched on top, making streamside protection an essential part of maintaining the mountain lifestyle. Even those that don't live directly on the river but have a stream on their property, that stream is most likely making its way to Little River. Every landowner in the watershed has a responsibility to help keep Little River clean and pristine.

As you begin to think about making a New Year's resolution, consider making a commitment to learning how to develop or manage your land in a way that keeps sediment out of nearby streams and Little River. Our organization will work on our end to educate and encourage our elected officials to implement streamside protection ordinances to further protect our natural resources.

Here are a few examples of states that have Riparian Buffer requirements and Tree Retention

recommendations:

- The Lake George Association in Lake George, NY has a Low Impact Development Certification. lakegeorgeassociation.org/waterkeeper
- Fayetteville, Arkansas implemented a Streamside Protection Ordinance and creating a Best Management Practices Manual for homeowners. fayetteville-ar.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1556/Streamside-Protection-Best-Management-Practices-Manual-PDF
- Alabama created a Low Impact Development Handbook. adem.alabama.gov/programs/water/waterforms/LIDHandbook.pdf

You can help us stay afloat by becoming a member (\$25 Individual / \$50 Business)! Our mission is to foster and protect the pristine resource through awareness, education and monitoring. We work on campaigns to conserve the natural beauty of Little River, promote access to Little River and encourage implementation of Low Impact Development in the watershed to preserve water quality.

Send membership or donations by mail
215 Grand Ave. SW Ste. A Fort Payne, AL 35967.

To make a one time or recurring online donation, visit littleriverwaterkeeper.org

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

"A river is more than an amenity, it is a treasure." —Oliver Wendell Holmes



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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 creek. Nice garden spot; beautiful small woods; small creek. Unrestricted land. Two, maybe create a small farm? Or maybe a stream? 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)



.....
LOTS and LAND

2 UNRESTRICTED ACRES IN MENTONE, on East River Road, where property seldom comes up for sale. Beautifully-wooded land is level, zoned Rural Farm, paved road frontage, power and water available at the road. High-speed internet available. \$55,000. (1795866)

TALL HARDWOODS & PEACEFUL BROW SUNSETS. Build your special mountain dream home on one of these beautiful lots along the DeSoto Parkway. Property lines extend over the brow so that trees may be removed for a clear view; good setback from the road for quiet privacy. One lot SOLD in December, so now there are ONLY 2 LOTS available @ \$175,000 each. (1811069))



SOUTH COOL STREET COTTAGE. Just the right size for a cozy home, personal getaway or rental. 2BR/1BA, 600 sq ft. Low-maintenance exterior with metal roof & cement block construction. Interior is a "moment in time," with original, mid-60s simple-mountain-retreat vibe still intact. Reminiscent of the old Florida homes that have all but disappeared. The location is perfect for those who want to be in the heart of Mentone, but away from traffic. Farmers Market & downtown shops/eateries are only a pleasant walk away. Sit on the porch in late afternoon & watch the sunsets. Nice storage building w/electricity for handyman shop or craft room. It's a cute little package in a COOL location. \$229,900. (1818317)



CUTE LITTLE COTTAGE, TUCKED IN THE WOODS, offers big possibilities for full-time, part-time, or even as a rental. And, it comes fully appointed with exquisite furnishings (YES, the dishes, linens, EVERYTHING stays!) Hardy plank exterior w/front & back composite decks. Interior features nice details like antique iron molding; stone fireplace (gas log); built-in line appliances (even the cookware is stainless!) & granite countertop. King-sized master BR suite w/huge, walk-in closet & wall of windows to give you that "tree house" feeling. Located just off the DeSoto Pkwy, adjoining state park ROW. Try it on for size...it may be the perfect fit! \$319,900 (1812980)



GREAT PRICE, GORGEOUS VIEWS & 2.2 ACRES, on the brow with sunrise & sunset views possible. All the site has been developed. Level, elevated cabin in a wooded area for detached workshop, too! There is even a septic tank already in place! The best price for a brow-front property in the Mentone area. \$75,000 (1804042)

BEAUTIFUL HOMESITE IN A PEACEFUL VALLEY! Situated in a valley farm setting that has a large portion of the farmland in a permanent conservancy. This tract is not under the conservancy and is a home site that has beautiful sunset views across the valley. \$72,000 (1809242)

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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)



*May your blessings be many.
Your troubles be few.
May the Lord give you peace
As this year begins new.
We wish you a happy,
healthy & blessed 2023!*





Fragile and Fleeting... Ice Flowers in the Forest

by Dan Green

Editor's note: Dan Green is a volunteer fireman in Mentone and recently retired from his position as DeKalb County's Forestry Management Specialist with the Alabama Forestry Commission. Thanks to Treasure Forest Magazine for permission to reprint the following article which Dan wrote for the spring 2016 edition. The photos were taken during the winter of 2015/2016 in the Wills Creek Valley, primarily near Hammondville off US Highway 11.

If you can get out early enough in the late fall or early winter, when the temperature is hovering around freezing or below and the air is still, you might get to see some ice flowers. These phenomenal attractions are rather rare and fleeting. When the sun fully rises, they often melt! Besides getting the timing down, the conditions must be right. The ground must be still unfrozen, yet the air above has to be cold enough to form ice. If you get down to ground level, you'll see that some 'leaves' are as thin as onion skin and quite fragile.

Ice flowers, ice ribbons, ice fringes, ice filaments, and (very commonly) frost flowers are names describing the beautiful frozen formations found at the base of just a few plants in North America. The two most common plants in our area are dittany (*Cunila origanoides*), sometimes called wild oregano, and white crownbeard (*Verbesina virginica*), also known as wingstem or frostweed. 'Ice flowers,' the term coined by Dr. Bruce Means, an adjunct professor of Biological Science at Florida State University, is actually the most appropriate name as these structures are a product of freezing water and not frost. Dr. Robert Harms, a professor emeritus of linguistics from the University of Texas, proposed the scientific name *Crystallofolia* from the Latin *crystallus* (ice) and *folium* (leaf).



Ice segregation is the process which best describes how ice flowers are formed. First, cold (but not frozen) water is brought up axially by root pressure and capillary action to the base of a (usually dead) plant. With freezing temperatures above the ground, the water freezes and expands in the stem forming very small longitudinal cracks. The water then exits tangentially (as ice) through these openings and begins to form crystals. As the water freezes, it pushes previously formed crystals outward and draws more water to the openings by molecular cohesion. The continuation of this process forms the characteristic leaves or ribbons or petals we see.

You might ask, "Why just late fall and early winter?" The simple answer is, before that time the temperatures generally aren't cold enough for freezing above ground, and in late winter the ground is often frozen, preventing water from moving through the soil. Also, by late winter we've usually seen multiple freezes and thaws which literally tear up the structures (stems) that produce the 'flowers.' There are always exceptions though, so be ready on those bitter cold, calm mornings.

If not for my wife, I may have never seen these little treasures. She's been a jogger for 46 years and since I have to keep in shape for the AFC's yearly pack test, I regularly go with her in the mornings . . . and when I say 'morning,' I mean 5:30 a.m. out the door. This means going to bed earlier than most, but watching the sun come up, hearing the birds get cranked off, being fully awake when I go to work, and seeing things such as ice flowers make it all worthwhile.

Dan Green is the retired DeKalb County Forestry Management Specialist with the Alabama Forestry Commission. He lives in Mentone with his wife, Amy.



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Hannah Leeper Moves North

by Kelly Leavitt

Over the course of nearly four years, Hannah Leeper became known in the Mentone community for her research work with black bears. In mid-November of last year, she moved home to Grand Rapids, Minnesota, where she is working as a wildlife research biologist. She is primarily studying black bears and, to a limited degree, moose and wolves.

“I’m enjoying my new job and settling in,” Hannah said. “Minnesota winter hit me with a bang. When the Arctic blast came through before Christmas, we had four days with a -40 wind chill, and we’d just gotten two feet of snow before the cold hit. It was painful. It literally hurts your skin. Things break, and anything with a battery doesn’t work. It has been an adjustment to be back!”

Unfortunately, the frigid weather coincided with scheduled visits to bear dens. “We were out in the field. We just did the best we could and dressed as well as we could. That’s about as cold as it gets. It was unusual that it lasted that long. Usually it’s just a day or two. But we had hand warmers and toe warmers.”

Much like her work in northeast Alabama, her current job involves refitting collars, taking general measurements, securing hair samples, and drawing blood. “It’s very similar to the work I did in Alabama during trapping season,” she said. One big difference is that now, rather than trapping, she’s visiting bears who are hibernating in their winter dens.



A frosty photo of Hannah Leeper taken while recently visiting bear dens in Minnesota

“My work in Alabama was an invaluable experience,” said Hannah. “It set me up really well for what could be the rest of my career. It was a big part of my life, and part of my heart is always going to be there.”

In 2015, the bear population in northeast Alabama was estimated to be 34 bears. “During the four years I was there, I handled 76 bears,” Hannah said. “So we know the population is growing, and it appears to be growing pretty quickly. But we don’t know how quickly. In the next couple of years, an updated population estimation will help give an idea of where it stands now.”

While she is no longer an employee of Auburn University, she considers the project she worked on to be a “passion project.”

She will be returning to our area for a week in the month of March to collar, measure, and count cubs. “I’m committed to it and I enjoy it, so I would love to see it through,” Hannah said. “The cubs that I collar this spring will be the last cohort.”

With an emotional voice, Hannah said, “I miss a lot of people there. I’m looking forward to seeing both the bears and the people.”

In 2021, Hannah earned her master’s degree in wildlife sciences from Auburn University. You can read her thesis on “Resource Selection at Different Spatial Scales of Black Bears in Alabama” at etd.auburn.edu/handle/10415/7641.

To read more about Hannah’s research in Alabama, visit the Groundhog archives at mapamentone.com and look for the July 2019, July 2020, and August 2021 issues.

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Mentone Arts Center

Artist recognition program and songwriter workshop kick off start of new year

by Randy Grider

Happy New Year! We begin 2023 by launching a new artist recognition program. Each month, we will honor an artist or art team in some cases. Each quarter, we will have an artist recognition social event at the gallery to pay tribute to the three honorees for that quarter.

January’s honorees are the late Carl McCleskey and Betsy Scott. With beautiful bronze sculptures in public settings, museums, and private collections around the country, the talented duo definitely has left their mark as renowned bronze sculptors. Teaming up more than four decades, they honed their talents into artistic magic. Often the husband-wife team collaborated on a project, while other times they worked independently. Carl’s sense of structural balance and Betsy’s keen eye for detail was the secret to their success. Betsy’s other passion is nature photography, which can be seen and purchased in the gallery, along with a couple of the bronze sculptors.

Sadly, Carl passed away November 15, 2022 at his Cloudland, GA home. Look for more information on Carl and Betsy on our social media pages in January.

The “Music on the Mountain Songwriter Series” ended 2022 on a high note. Event co-host/coordinator DeeDee Cooper said she “would like to thank all who came out in December to share original and holiday favorites, donated canned goods to the local food pantry, and shared in some holiday treats.”

We will kick off 2023 with a songwriter workshop on January 3 at 6:30 p.m. CST. This workshop is free and open to anyone who would like to learn the art of songwriting. You do not have to currently be a songwriter.

The performance-based songwriter series will resume on March 7 at 6:30.



Mark your calendars for this event that will be filled with original music with audience participation with the songwriters.

“Thank you to Randy Grider and the Mentone Art Center for allowing us to use the center for this educational music event,” Cooper said. “Thank you to all the songwriters who shared their music in 2022 and to all of those who came out to listen. These events are open to the public and are family-friendly. Look forward to seeing you all in 2023.”



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



Carl McCleskey and Betsy Scott at the 2020 unveiling of the Sequoyah sculpture they created and donated to the Mentone Arts Center. Also shown are (far left), Executive Director Randy Grider and (far right) past president and current board member Ben Shurett.

Also, a quick save the date for a performance in early February. Hiroyo Tsukamoto is returning to the Mentone Arts Center stage for a special performance on Friday, February 3 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, 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 than that. He has the unique capability of engaging an audience though a personable and genuine approach that transfixes his audiences and almost transcends his capabilities as a guitarist. Tsukamoto plays with an effortless skill 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, the United Nations, and Japanese National Television. He won second place in the International Finger Style Guitar Championship in 2018.

Local singer-songwriter Stuart Douglas is scheduled to open the show, which is produced by Russell Gullett/RadioVisions LLC. Details on reservations will be released soon via social media.

For more on any of the events, please see contact information below.

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

Native American Occupation in Present DeKalb County

Larry Smith of Guntersville will trace the evolution of the Indians from pre-historic times to the removal of the Cherokees in 1838 at a free talk hosted by the Mentone Area Preservation Association (MAPA) on Thursday, January 19. The program will begin at 6:30 p.m. in the Bill Berry Community Room at Moon

Lake Village. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Smith recently co-authored *New England Missions and Schools to the Cherokees in Northeast Alabama 1820-1838*, and previously prepared a study on Wills Valley for the Alabama Historical Commission.





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Mentone Educational Resources Foundation

by Anna Mae Horn



What a way to end the year! In December, MERF chose three recipients of the Sue McLaurin Henry spring semester scholarship. Sue Henry was a founding member of MERF. Memorial donations in Sue's honor started the scholarship fund in 2010 to reflect her passion for helping local students. MERF appreciates all the memorial gifts that support the continuation of this scholarship.

Ellie Cox is attending NACC and majoring in psychology. Before graduating high school this past spring, Ellie was very active in social and academic clubs. Her involvement is now more community-centered and planned around her classes and working at The Gourdie Shop. She looks forward to giving more back after she finishes her education.

Julie Smith is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Health Care Management at UAB and looks forward to working in a doctor's office or assisted/independent living facility. She enjoys working with the youth at Valley Head Baptist Church, including teaching music and dance at VBS, and volunteering with Over the Mountain Miracle League. Julie is a member of the Pre-Occupational Therapy group at UAB.

Connor Cash majors in physical education at

Huntingdon College. He distributes his time between classes, studying, football, and weightlifting. Connor plans to someday be teaching students in the classroom and on the field.

All of this year's recipients mentioned looking forward to a time when their education will make them able to give back to their community. Congratulations to this year's Sue McLaurin Henry Scholarship Recipients!

Another big event in December was a visit from that jolly guy in red. MERF's Christmas lunch was very merry. Bingo was a blast! Elves served lunch that had been prepared by the giving hands of St. Joseph's. Santa made his appearance. Mike and Cindy Yeakle took photos of Santa and the guests. Kristen Bergeron and Zack of all Trades had a cute little helper distributing gift bags of items donated by the community.

Senior lunch will resume in February! We are targeting the 15th as a start date, but need to confirm a few details. Follow our social media pages and expect a phone call with the exact date. If you aren't on our list, give me a call at 256-635-8775.

In January, we will begin planning the 2023 Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction which is scheduled

for April 15. This large event is a fundraiser primarily for the elementary arts program. It is a big event, both in excitement and in execution. Please consider donating a little time to help make this happen. We will have a meeting on January 17 at 5 p.m. to discuss the event. No obligation—come and see what it's all about. Free snacks!

Also, MERF is conducting mock interviews for Valley Head High School ninth grade students. These one-hour interviews will be on January 30 and 31. We need volunteers for 7:45 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. each day. Questions and a feedback/grading rubric will be provided. Anyone who can give an hour to do interviews, please reach out to me.

If you are interested in volunteering or have questions about MERF, please don't hesitate to contact me personally, through our website at MERHouse.org, or on social media. Mentone Educational Resources Foundation is a 501(c)3 established in 1993 to enrich the learning and living of our community.

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.





Rhododendron Garden Club

by Alyce Kenney

“There are two days in the year that we can not do anything, yesterday and tomorrow” — Mahatma Gandbi



Think of this new year, new month, as a gift that has found its way to you. A new month named January, with origins in ancient Roman culture. Jānus was a god of doorways, beginnings, and the rising and setting of the sun. Grab a fresh page from your notebook and begin anew. Whether you write resolutions for personal or practical reasons, January is the month to get revitalized.

At this point of the winter season, most seasoned gardeners are already getting a bit itchy to get back in the dirt. Here are some interesting facts on gardening:

- The Covid pandemic created 18.3 million new gardeners, most of whom are millennials.
- Global online sales of gardening goods doubled during the Covid pandemic.
- A survey commissioned by the National Wildlife Federation, in partnership with the National Gardening Association, found more people are gardening for wildlife by purchasing native plants and landscaping that help pollinators like at-risk butterflies, bees and birds.

Source: nwf.org

Researchers have begun publishing their results of studies on mental health and gardening. For example:

- Gardening can relieve human stress and boost nature connection during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: Urban for Urban Green, February 2022.

- Gardening can cultivate better mental health.

Source: University of Florida, July 2022.

Want to learn how to garden? This is your time! Visit your local library for books on all subjects related to gardening. Get online and search. Visit your local Extension office website.

Here are some more facts and notes to keep you motivated:

RECYCLE

We’ve all been hearing a lot more about sustainable living and protecting our natural environment. Play a part by “re-purposing” your Christmas tree as a natural bird feeder and secure resting place for small outdoor inhabitants. Or cut it up for firewood or mulch. See the arbor day blog for more useful information at arbordayblog.org/holiday/8-sustainable-ways-to-recycle-your-christmas-tree.

CREATE

Start “mapping” out your garden. If you have been gardening for a long time, you probably have some idea of what plants should go where and what has grown well. If you have never gardened, begin to keep records of your garden spaces. Learn about the amounts of sun and shade you receive. What has been thriving in your yard already? Where are the trees and well-established shrubs? Check out the helpful information on the Farmer’s Almanac website: gardenplanner.almanac.com

CATALOGS

This is the time when seed catalogs start to arrive in the mail. Consider your plans when looking through them and deciding what you want. While you are spending more time inside, it’s a perfect time to read up on the plants, flowers, bushes, and trees you think you might want to put into your garden and landscape. Many catalogs are fully on-line. Two of the many excellent sources are brecks.com and springhillnursery.com.

TOOLS

It is time to give your well-loved tools a good cleaning. Keeping the grime off protects them from soil-borne diseases and prolongs their life. Have you been lazy and left them in a mess? No worries, you can still make them almost like new again. You need a few basics like soap and water, white vinegar, steel wool, and some protectant oil. There are many great videos and websites that show you how to clean tools. Go to gardening.org to see some more information and visit the Fresh Exchange site at freshexchange.com/garden-tools-list to see which tools are the most useful.

FITNESS

Gardening is a physically active hobby that requires some strength and endurance. Hibernation is for the bears, but not us humans! Begin now to get your body ready for the labor ahead. Gentle daily stretches will ease your muscles into shape. Dedicate some time each day to being more aware of your physical self. And while you are being more body-aware, think about the footwear, gloves, and hats you will want to wear to protect you from the sun. Visit aarp.org/home-family/your-home/info-2021/exercises-for-gardeners for tips.

The Rhododendron Garden Club met at the Mentone Inn for our end-of-the-year pot-luck luncheon meeting on December 13. Thanks to Cynthia Stinson for hosting. It was a festive feast and celebration as we celebrated

the many successes of the past year with one another and looked towards new and different opportunities in 2023. Come be a part of the fun. You don’t have to be an experienced gardener to 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. 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.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKEL & CYNDI YEAKLE



What It Means to Be a Public Library

by Anne McLeod

On November 17, the Alabama Public Library Service (APLS) officially approved Moon Lake Library’s application for state aid at its executive board meeting in Montgomery. With that decision, Mentone became the smallest town in the state to have its own public library. The Town of Mentone’s commitment to the library and our twenty-year-long record of community support made for a successful application.

The process was a long one, but becoming a public library will pay off for our patrons in terms of increased access to resources. It also increases the library’s sources for revenue, helping to ensure the long term sustainability of Moon Lake Library. Finally, it means the library and its board become a part of a professional community, with training and resources available through APLS as well as the DeKalb County Library System.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES Increased Hours

In December of 2021, Moon Lake Library increased its hours of operation from 11 hours a week to 16.5 hours. The reason for the change was the requirement that public libraries in

towns of fewer than 5000 people be open for at least 16 hours a week. It gave the board a chance to see how the change would be received by our patrons and also to make sure they had sufficient funds to meet the required number of hours.

The library, with its collection of books, and community resources, is a major asset for the town that the board and the town were paying to maintain anyway. The board decided that opening on Wednesday afternoon made sense, as that was when people were at MERF’s senior lunches and could stop by the library afterwards. Part of the library’s long-term plan is to assess the feasibility of increasing our hours more in the future.

Inter-library Loan

Several people have asked if this means we can offer inter-library loan, that is, if we do not have a particular book up here, can we obtain a copy from the Fort Payne Library for our patron to check out? The answer is yes, and we hope to have this in place in January.

eBooks and Audio Books

These are also in our future. We are in the process of setting up an account

with Libby, the e-reader app and will have more information on this soon.

Book Club Sets

Alabama Public Library Service has well over 100 sets of books that can be loaned out to library book clubs. It can be a challenge for small libraries to provide multiple copies for book clubs, so this is a cost saver.

FUNDING SOURCES Funds from the Town of Mentone

This summer Town Council agreed to pay certain expenses for the library, including insurance and the librarian’s salary. Please let our elected officials know how much you appreciate their support for Moon Lake Library! They stepped up to make this happen.

Friends of Moon Lake Library - The library board which had served the administrative side of Moon Lake Community Library when it was partnered with the school has now become Friends of Moon Lake Library, a fundraising organization, while the municipal library board has assumed administrative duties. The Friends of the Library will continue to raise money with used book sales, the community calendar, and other projects.

DeKalb County Commission

The County Commissioners give each public library in DeKalb County between \$3,000 and \$4,000 annually. Moon Lake is now eligible for these funds. For larger libraries, these amounts may be a drop in the bucket, but for us, they make a considerable difference.

Alabama State Aid

The state awards money based on the population of the town or county which established the library. Because the number of people living in the Mentone city limits is just over 300, Moon Lake will receive about \$320 annually from the state. Every little bit helps!

Federal Funds

The federal government appropriates money to libraries through Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and the E-Rate program. The DeKalb Library system uses its LSTA money to pay for member libraries’ automation

software, that is the online catalog and circulation system. The cost of these systems is close to \$1000 a year, which the Friends of the Library has covered in the past.

The E-Rate program will provide the library with free or inexpensive internet service, the cost of which has been approximately \$1500 a year and covered by the Friends board. With those expenses covered by federal dollars, money from Friends of the Library can be used for other purposes.

Grants

By becoming a public municipal library, Moon Lake expanded its potential sources of grants. Some are available to public libraries, others to non-profits. With both a municipal board and a Friends of the Library organization, Moon Lake is eligible for both types.

Expanding our sources of funding means the library is better able to withstand any lean years and to prepare for major projects like new carpet, which will be necessary before too many more years.

BECOMING PART OF A PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

By becoming part of APLS and the DeKalb County Library System, we are eligible for professional training and technology support. The state has a number of library consultants who can answer questions and make referrals to additional help. APLS also provides materials such as posters, reading logs, and stickers for libraries’ summer reading programs. We’re on a listserv where librarians around the state brainstorm solutions to problems and share ideas for programming.

Moon Lake Library has a rich heritage. Developed twenty years ago by an inspired group of citizens and friends of the Mentone community, it’s grown and expanded in the two decades since. With the development of Moon Lake Village, we look forward to more exciting opportunities over our next twenty years.

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In Memory of Jim Byrum

by Holley Midgley

When Jim Byrum passed away on Sunday, December 4, 2022, the Moon Lake Library lost a key board member and friend. He was the senior member of our board, and for many years he graciously and selflessly gave his time and creative energies in a dozen ways towards making the library a success. In fact, his was a life of service to his fellow human beings, and his loss will be felt by our entire community.

We all know that in Mentone volunteerism is the gas that fuels the engines of so many of our organizations. The DeSoto Rescue Squad, MERF, the Library, MAPA, the Little River Arts Council, St. Joseph’s Food Pantry, and other public spirited groups enrich our community in almost countless ways. Quite simply, these organizations are able to do what they do because of their volunteers. In a tiny town with limited financial



resources, so many things would not be possible without the active, enthusiastic service of folks who step up to the plate and get things done. And Jim Byrum was at the top of the list.

It’s hoped that Jim’s example will move others to pitch in, lend a hand, and do what must be done to move the needle forward. Thanks for your years of exemplary service to our library and to this community, Jim. We will miss you, but we won’t forget what you did while you were among us.

News from Moon Lake 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.

First of all, the annual Holiday Open House in December included a celebration of Moon Lake Library’s 20th birthday, complete with cake and a reunion of planning committee members and early board members. Around 60 people passed through the library the afternoon of December 11, enjoying the music of the library’s house band, the Mentone Ukes, catching up with old friends and meeting some of the newer folks in the area.

Among the founders, previous directors, and early library volunteers in attendance were Bill Berry, Karen Prestwood, Tonya Lasseter, Lynne Wagner, Sarah Wilcox, Sue Schwarz, Dianne Kuehl, Mickey Luck, Jerome Stephenson, and Jane Faile. Apologies to any I have left out. There was a bit of a crowd.

At one point, I asked Bill Berry what in the world had made them think over twenty years ago that they could pull off such a project? Developing a library in a small, scratch that, tiny town, is a major undertaking, requiring big bucks, multiple areas of expertise, an incredible amount of coordination, and the cooperation of personnel from the school district and members of the community, and all of that had to be sustained over a period of years before the doors even opened.

Bill didn’t hesitate: “Because it was Moon Lake,” he said.

Those words said it all.

This can-do attitude is the hallmark of a healthy community spirit. It’s easy to despair in this era of national political polarization, but it’s also easy to look around your own town, find a project to get involved in, and then work with your neighbors to make it happen. As library board chair Holley Midgley noted, Mentone has an extraordinary number of nonprofits that rely on the work of volunteers and donors. They

all make this community a better place to live.

Anna Mae Horn is one of those volunteers, who, even after being hired as executive director of the Mentone Educational Resources Foundation, has continued to assist the library with special projects, the latest being our community calendar for 2023. It takes a lot of time and tech know-how to prepare the calendar for printing, and Anna Mae gladly took it on. Thanks, Anna Mae, for heading up the library calendar fundraiser.

Friends of Moon Lake Library are happy to announce that they have secured a \$5000 grant from the Menlo-Tillotson Foundation for the second year in a row. The purpose of the grant is to upgrade our presentation technology and to purchase books. Soon we will have a new LCD projector with a mounted screen, plus a camera for video streaming.

Our new status as a public library doesn’t change the day-to-day operations of the library. Behind the scenes, there’s a bit more paperwork. My conversations with librarians around DeKalb County over the past year made me realize that there were benefits to being a public library that made that increased paperwork worth it. Our talks also made it clear that the libraries in our system are independent entities, run by their local library boards, not the state. The character of each local library reflects its community and seeks to meet their needs.

Twenty years ago citizens of Mentone made the decision to invest in Moon Lake Library. It was an investment that has paid off. I wish that you all could hear the comments made by people coming to the library for the first time: “This is a great library.” “You have a wonderful collection.” “Wow! This is so much nicer than I’d even expected.”

If you haven’t been to the library lately, we hope you’ll stop by. Come in out of the cold for a cup of tea, a book, a DVD, or a game of Scrabble or chess. Library cards are free so please join us for Moon Lake Library’s next chapter.

January 2023 @ Moon Lake Library

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

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

January 7 @ 1 p.m.—Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

January 12 @ 4 p.m.—Joint meeting of Friends of Moon Lake Library board and the municipal library Board of Trustees

January 14 @ 10:30 a.m.—Moon Lake Library book club. This month we’ll share great books we’ve read lately.

January 18 @ 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.

January 21 @ 10:30 a.m.—Little Library Learners. Stories and crafts for children ages 3-7.

January 21 @ 1 p.m.—Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

January 23 @ 6:30 p.m.—Featured speaker: Cartographer Frank Kenney on “How I Spent My Summer Vacation: Antarctica in 1991.”

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In Memoriam



“BUD” “PAWPAW” ATKINS
January 12, 1940 - December 2, 2022
Flavil Leon “Bud” Atkins, 82, of Valley Head, passed away Friday, December 2, 2022. He was born January 12, 1940 in Chattanooga, TN to the late Aubrey Leon Atkins and Nora Lee Hurst Atkins. He was a veteran of the United States Army. Mr. Atkins was a hard worker and enjoyed life and making people laugh. He was known by many as “PawPaw.” He loved his family, especially his grandchildren and was their biggest fan in all their activities. Recreational aviation became his favorite hobby and he received his pilot’s license. He was

a member of EAA and supported the Young Eagles Program. He also enjoyed camping at Lake Guntersville State Park.
A family member wrote this about him: “Bud lived a lawless life like the Wild West. He lived by his own rules. He did what he wanted, how he wanted. He was truly a free man. He made life interesting and loved to argue just for the sake of it. He loved to camp and reminisce on his days flying. He loved his family more than anything and was always the person to call when you needed a hand. He was a fixer and a helper. Known to his kids and grandkids as Superman.”
He is survived by his daughter, Tammy Cooper (Randy); son, Steve Atkins (Patty); grandchildren, Zac Cooper, Cody Atkins, Andrew Cooper, and Casey Bradberry; great-grandchildren, Kailyn Cooper, Aiden Cooper, Ivey Atkins, Jhett Atkins, and Addison Bradberry; brothers, Al Atkins and Randy Atkins; and sister, Mickey Atkins.

He was preceded in death by his son, Greg Atkins; brothers Bill and Tommy Atkins; sisters, Helen Slaton and Dorothy Atkins; two infant siblings; and an infant great-grandchild.



JAMES “JIM” EDWARD BYRUM
January 1, 1949 - December 4, 2022
James “Jim” Edward Byrum, age 73 of Mentone, passed away early Sunday morning on December 4, 2022, at his residence. Mr. Byrum was born January 1, 1949 in Madison County, AL to the late Robert and Dora Hill Byrum. He is the first graduate of the Master’s of Social Work Program at the University of Alabama. He worked as a social worker, later being the director of the United Methodist Children’s Home in Selma, AL until his official

retirement. After moving to Mentone, he chose to finish his career in front-line service and worked at the DeKalb County Health Department as a social worker. After his work at the DeKalb County Health Department, Mr. Byrum continued to serve his community by being on Mentone’s Moon Lake Library board and managed the Social Service Outreach Program, including the Food Bank and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program, at St. Joseph’s-on-the-Mountain Episcopal Church.

Mr. Byrum is survived by his wife, Joan Bell Byrum; children, Kristen Emory (Tom) and Hill Davis Byrum; grandchildren, Byrum Emory, Saddler Emory, Morgan Byrum, and Addison Byrum; sisters, Patsy Perez (Andy), Beth Walton (Jimmy), and Ann Moore, along with several nieces, nephews and cousins.
He was preceded in death by his parents and brother, Bobby Byrum.
In lieu of flowers, the family requests memorial contributions to the Food Pantry or Emergency Food and Shelter Program of St. Joseph’s-on-the-Mountain Episcopal Church, 21145 Scenic Hwy, Mentone, AL 35984.



DOYLE BROWN
May 17, 1941 ~ December 5, 2022
Doyle Matthew Brown, age 81, of Menlo, GA, died Monday, December 5, 2022, at his residence.
Mr. Brown was born May 17, 1941, in Summerville, GA, son of the late Elgin and Jewell Phillips Brown. He was a member of Menlo First Baptist Church, and prior to his retirement, was employed as a supervisor with Continental Baking.
In addition to his parents, Mr. Brown was preceded in death by brothers, Dewey Brown and Tom Brown; niece, Patty Sneed; and nephew, Sammy Goodridge.
Survivors include his wife of 60 years, Joyce Pritchett Brown; daughter, Robin Faith Brown (James Wilburn

Cavin); grandchildren, Ainsley Cavin, Rhett Love; nieces, Lori Patterson, Angie Benton, Beverly Wilson, Julie Willingham, Hannah Goodridge, and Ashley Dendy; and nephews, Jackie Pritchett and Matthew Willingham.



RICKEY L. ST. JOHN
November 14, 1945 - December 7, 2022
Rickey (Rick/Donut) Lynn St. John, 77, of Valley Head, passed away on December 7, 2022.
Rick was born in Gadsden, AL on November 14, 1945 to the late Homer and Bea St. John. Rick graduated from Fort Payne High School in 1964 and later served in the United States Marine Corps. He also attended Northeast Alabama Junior College and Jacksonville State University.
Over the years, Rick worked at numerous places: EarthGrain Bakeries, C.S. Hosiery in Fort Payne, Woodmen of the World, residential construction (brick layer), Bama Green Nursery, Pye Motorsports, and Caddis Motors.

Rick was an avid hunter and always loved deer season and loved to golf.
He is survived by his loving wife of 17 years, Cindy St. John; his daughters, Abby White (Fish) of Sand Rock and Lindsey St. John of Fort Payne; stepson, Matt Ward (Jenny) of Pekinston, MS; stepdaughter, Shannon Ward of Cocoa, FL; brother, Larry St. John (Pat) of Fort Payne; eight grandchildren, Lauren, Hailey, Mackenzie, Cameron, Tucker, Jase, Charlee, and Mays; one great-grandson, Isaiah; and several nieces and nephews.
He was preceded in death by his father Homer St. John, mother Bea St. John, and sister Linda Walker.



LULA MARIE GOAN
March 19, 1934 – December 18, 2022
Lula Marie Goan, age 88, of Mentone, passed away on Sunday, December 18, 2022. She was born on March 19, 1934 in Friendswood, Texas to Calvin & Lula Feazle. Marie worked as a Lab Tech before her retirement.
She is survived by her husband, John Michael Goan; children, Brenda Watson (Larry), Linda Baker (Steve), James Fotheringham (Edie), Keith Goan (Brittany), and Lisa Acebo (Al); grandchildren, Heath Watson (Chrissie), Matt Watson (Tiffany), Karli Fotheringham, Braxton Goan, Brayden Goan, Brody Goan, Alexia Acebo, and Austin Acebo; great-grandchildren, Ashelyn Watson, Tayler Watson, Isaac Watson, and Bella Stokes; and numerous nieces and nephews.
In lieu of flowers the family requests donations be made to Valley Head Baptist Church (265 Church St., Valley Head, AL 35989).



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With a successful year, Little River Escape has decided to embark on a new journey by creating River Ridge Escape Tiny Home Dealership. At the dealership, tiny homes are available to tour and purchase. RRE is now delivering across the nation and also developing other communities to bring more folks to Lookout Mountain.
River Ridge Escapes now has five tiny home communities and one down County Road 641 in Mentone, AL. There are several Airbnb Tiny Homes in our various locations to come experience a tiny home, downsizing, the community, and explore the surrounding areas.
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*Mike Leath, Caleb Roberts,
Amy Justice & Ronnie Highfield*



January Birthdays

- 1

William Blackburn
Alexis Reed
Brittany Harrison
Harold Carden
Kathy Carson
April Hurst
David Tucker
Andrew Campbell
Abby Mitchell
Jeannie Woods
- 2

Donnie Bell
Kristen Adams
Amber Wilson
Rickey Williams
Gideon Grisham
Thomas Worthey
Kelly Floyd
- 3

Stacy Howard
Aiden Logan
Owen Izell
Lance Elkins
Cameron Hunt
Tressiz Thomas
- 4

Ed Ringer
Tyler Blansit
Kaleb Underwood
Emma Goggans
Aiden Justice
Brynna Justice
Cooper Justice
- 5

Aidan Dupree
Angela Chambers
Tiffany Wallace
Gage Gelfenstein
Steve Sharp
Hayden Williams
Kay Bryan
- 6

Sharron Hatfield
Laiton Keith
Amanda Dyar
Emily Guin
Ryker Chester
Bush Kerby
- 7

Kristen Emory
Madisen Smith
Jace Carden
Hoyt Ashley
Ronnie Hulgan
Lolah Claire Coots
Gina Martin
- 8

Tyler Carden
Zachary Wallace
Emily Stallings
Jerry Boatwright
Ryker Abernathy
Jessica Chester
- 9

Dallas Lee
Ellie Shugart
Kristy Sweatman
Ashley Jones
- 10

Neal Whitt
Stacey Painter
Nancy Frost
Heath Miller
Eli Durham
Layton Williams
- 11

Josh Shoults
Robert Green
Kandis Lawton
Preston Owen
Allen Powell
Freda Pike
Ryan Wooten
Avah Poe
Annabelle Ferguson
Shawn Bullock
Brett Justice
- 12

Beverly Henry
Aaron McKenzie
Bud Atkins
Thad Heinrich
Christina Wise
Chris Collins
Nola Kay Pilotte
Isaiah Avila
Donna Arnett
- 13

Paulette Manning
Anita Johnson
Erin Dean
Alayna Wright
- 14

Eric Kirby
Isabella Chaney
Larry Johnson
Emily Wheat
Haleigh Battles
- 15

Anna Bailey
Alice Shanklin
Mickey Luck
Fawn Kitchens
Cody Smith
Amanda McDonald
Tim Bryan
- 16

Wynston Keith
Trent Smith
Sarah Chastain
Tyler Godwin
Geiger Guin
- 17

Olivia Bowman
Jim Poe
Joseph Brown
Michael Owen
Caiden West
Naomi Chandler
Shaun Wheat
Margie Collins
Ainsley Wright
Addison Wright
Carolyn Ann Wester
- 18

Nicole Goldsmith
Bobby Blalock
- 19

Candace Perkins
Jacie O'Tinger
Olivia Elkins
- 20

Calee Ann Owen
Spencer Smith
- 21

Ryley Smith
Tiffany Gatlin
Justin Smith
- 22

Kyle Carden
Anna Garrett
Rosetta McGee
Alvin Durham
Flor Chasity Battles
- 23

Jaden Turner
Bence Chambers
Scott Gifford
Melissa Couch
Dowe Foreman
Kent Kerby
Anita Hester
- 24

Sandy Sharp
Marysa Wigley
Darrin Smith
Tommy Harrison, Jr.
Lucas Elkins
Grayson Booker
Zakk Johnson
DeLeslyn Stephens
Giovanni Nasoni
- 25

Shannon Tolbert
Sarah Wilcox
Larry Sonsil
Hudson Grider
Dennis Lewis
Lauren Brettner
- 26

Shirley Burton
Seth Norman
Shane Grider
Brandi Justice
- 27

Kaie Facticeau
Jessica Heinrich
Lindsey Frazier
- 28

Ruth Battles
- 29

Allie Baker
Lacey Byrum
- 30

Stephanie Roberts
Gunner McGinnis
Donna Hairel
- 31

Tyler Cooper
Bill Battles
Ashton Carpenter
Nate Bain
Axel Clark

Little River Arts Council



by Rhea Pirch

The Little River Arts Council welcomes the new year with good news. The Alabama State Council on the Arts has awarded us matching grants for two of our yearly events.

The Summer Music Series was awarded \$3,300, which will allow us to bring the community another summer of free concerts from local and professional bands, one per month in May, June, July and August. The Black Sedan Band, an audience favorite, has already been scheduled to perform on Saturday, June 10. We'll keep you posted as more bands and dates are scheduled in 2023.

Follow Your Art received a grant of \$2,100. This event, which will occur on September 2 this year, includes a judged art show, sidewalk chalk art contest, music, storytelling, and art-making tables, all of which makes it truly a day of art for the community.

Art Talk, our monthly discussion of art led by board member Mikel Yeakle will resume on January 18 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Moon Lake Library. Artists are encouraged to bring their work to share with the group, and all are invited to engage in this lighthearted conversation about art and the artistic process.

The Board of Directors will gather in January for an innovative workshop designed to stimulate new program and event ideas and review programs and events already established. You're invited to share your ideas with us, or if you're an artist interested in leading a class, drop us a line at info@littleriverartscouncil.org or message us on our Facebook or Instagram pages.

It's time to renew your membership! We welcome your support and have made it easy by clicking on the membership link on our website www.littleriverartscouncil.org or by sending a check to LRAC, P.O. Box 370, Mentone, AL 35984.

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.

Wishing you all a fun and creative New Year!

Rhea Pirch serves as treasurer for the Little River Arts Council.

“One kind word can warm
three winter months.”
—Japanese proverb

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Anniversaries

- 2

Jim & Cynthia Connor
- 10

Tony & Cindy Tipton
- 12

Darius & Hope Turner
- 13

Kenny & Doris Chamlee
- 19

Bill & Donna Carman
- 23

Kevin & Ashley Gifford
- 24

Taylor & Nancy Brown
- 25

Greg & Nikki Wheat
- 28

Robert & Annette Johnson
- 29

Bubba & Martha Browder



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Free Tai Chi Class Begins in January

by Emily McCamy

Are you interested in improving your health, your balance, and your mind? Consider tai chi, a series of movements performed in a slow, focused manner. Don't confuse tai chi with hard martial arts. Tai chi is an ancient Chinese tradition that today is practiced as a graceful form of exercise. It involves a series of movements performed in a slow, focused manner. Tai chi will teach you patience, give you confidence, and inspire you.



Tai Chi Instructor Frank Kenney

DeKalb County Council on Aging offers free classes taught by certified Tai Chi instructor Frank Kenney. Learn a simple form of tai chi that will improve your balance, assist you in falls prevention, and perhaps help you to deal with a chronic condition such as arthritis, depression, and neurologic conditions like Parkinson's and multiple sclerosis. This class is also a great way to make new friends and expand your social network.

The class will begin on Tuesday, January 17 and meet each Tuesday morning for 15 weeks. No experience is necessary. You'll learn a routine that consists of 21 moves. Sound like too much? It's not. You can do it!

The class begins at 9:30 a.m. at the DeKalb County Council on Aging at 600 Tyler Ave. SE in Fort Payne. Call 256-845-8590 to register.



Retired Christmas tree farmer Earl Ragsdale asked the DeKalb County Democrats to help him give Christmas trees to families in need in DeKalb County. Despite the short timeframe and the rainy, cold weather, they were able to cut and deliver more than 65 trees. They partnered with existing charities like St. Joseph's on the Mountain in Mentone.

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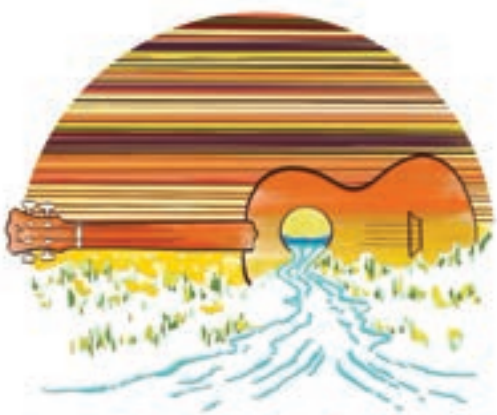
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Mentone Ukes

by Don Highfield

I was reluctant to take up the ukulele initially because I was busy working my way through a lifelong guitar lesson that I inflicted on myself. Ukuleles and guitars don't mix. They are entirely different creatures. It just felt like it would be too much to learn and downright confusing.

What I had not expected was the complexity, diversity, and nuance of the ukulele instrument itself. Also they are cute and fun.

It's a small thing, the ukulele. It is attractive to people who are kind of mellow, mostly, and pleasant to be around. With the instrument's resurgent popularity, there is plenty of music out there now, mostly published by diehard uke fans for free.

Beginner players are introduced into our group with a certain joy and acceptance. They soon learn that with some basic strumming and a few chords, they can sit in on sessions with a dozen or so folks who started



Don Highfield

right where they find themselves, learning to play and sing along with others. This definitely checks off your "Works and plays well with others" box!

Playing can seem like a foreign concept to those of us who grew up working, working, working. But I'm getting used to the idea—the idea of what time is and what it is for. I know that now.

The day of our family Thanksgiving dinner, as one of those whose duties involve eating and not cooking,

I was tasked with entertaining our one-year-old grandbaby. He was a bit fussy. As we sat there on the floor, I handed him a uke, positioned properly, and plucked a note: C. He stared at the strings in complete silence for several seconds. Then reached out a finger and began to play. And smiled.

Before closing, I'd like very much to say a word about our newest little public library in Alabama, the home of the Mentone Ukes. A heartfelt thanks to all of you who love Moon Lake Library enough to make it happen and keep right on happening everyday. The Ukes are made to feel welcome there. In fact, it feels so much like coming home, you just want to take your shoes off.

by Debra Fey

Mentone Farmer's Market, Colorfest, Mentone's Lighting of the Christmas Tree, and the Moon Lake Library Holiday Open House—four great performances in 2022! The Mentone Ukes is going strong heading into 2023 and we anticipate another great year. We'd love for you to become a part of this vibrant, fun-loving, community-centered and diverse group. Yes, you can learn to play the ukulele! Free ongoing ukulele sessions will be held on January 7 and 21 at 1 p.m. CST at the Moon Lake Library. Beginners and newcomers of all ages are welcomed to attend and loaner ukes are available. Connect with us on Facebook: @MentoneUkes or on the web: mentoneukes.com. Questions? Contact Debra Fey (debrajfeey@gmail.com) or Jody Rhodes (jodyrhodesy@gmail.com).

[In the interest of full disclosure, Don's wife, Anne McLeod, is the librarian at Moon Lake. And no, she does not in fact allow him to take his shoes off at the library.]

Climbing the Mountain at 82 Years of Age

by Kelly Leavitt



Jane Arnett at the top of Halls Gap

Jane Arnett moved to Mentone in April 2021 to be near her sister, Donna. She knew she wanted to join an exercise class and discovered the SAIL class offered by the DeKalb County Council on Aging in Fort Payne. That class has changed her life.

"We have a wonderful instructor named Gene Fleming who volunteers at the senior center," said Jane. "He analyzes people before they join the class to see how strong they are and how stable they are on their feet to be sure they don't get hurt. Many people have been helped, including some who have had surgeries and one who is recovered from cancer. We do aerobics, stepping and lifting our knees. After about 20 minutes of aerobics, we do balance work and weight lifting. They have three- and five-pound weights that we can use. Gene plays music and we move to the beat."

Gene also offered the participants what Jane calls "extra-curricular" activities. "We trained at the cemetery in Fort Payne," she said. "We walked up that hill, up and down it, up and down it, as many times as we could physically do it. We walked all around the cemetery to strengthen our legs and hips until he felt we had enough training. Then in September we walked a 5K in Valley Head."

The next month, Jane and others bravely climbed up Lookout Mountain at Halls Gap in Collinsville. "Ranging in age from 60 to 82, they tackled a feat not normally associated with seniors when it comes to fitness or recreation," said Gene. "We're very proud of each of them — they inspire us all!"

"SAIL" stands for "Stay Active and Independent for Life." The free hour-long classes focus on cardiovascular health, balance, strength, and endurance. SAIL is specifically designed for people 60 and older. Fall prevention is a major goal. Most exercises are adaptable for people with disabilities or specific physical limitations and participants may do the exercises while sitting, if necessary.

"I'm the oldest in the advanced class," said Jane. "There's a gentleman in his 90s in the beginner class. Gene helped one of our classmates, Deborah, lose 140 pounds. Deborah actually helped me. She walked at my speed and she said, 'I want you to walk as much as you can walk and when you can't walk anymore, just stop.' She was very good to me and urged me

along. I've never had anybody be that attentive and courteous. Though there's 20 years of difference between us, we still have fun together."

In addition to the physical benefits gained by the class, Jane has enjoyed making friends. "It's a great, fun place for me to be with people," she said. "We've gotten to know each other outside of class. Some of us have a little club and after Wednesday's class we spend time together and eat or just talk. We've had a pot luck at one of our classmate's homes, and we had a brunch at Winston Place in Valley Head. There were about 17 of us. We didn't get any games played, but we just talked and talked."

A new SAIL session will begin Wednesday, January 4. The class meets on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 9 a.m. at the DeKalb County Council on Aging, 600 Tyler Ave SE, in Fort Payne. Space is limited for this popular class. Call 256-845-8590 to sign up.



"After 9 months of SAIL exercise classes, Jane Arnett tackled her very first 5K race. Most people in their 80s think a foot race would be out of the question, but Jane was ready for Saturday morning in Valley Head! She covered the 3.1 miles in an hour and 4 minutes. She took home a First Place medal as well. The crowd roared when she crossed the finish line! It was a beautiful moment we're unlikely to forget." —Gene Fleming

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