



THE GROUNDHOG

“Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain”

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

The Groundhog Launches New Website

Newspaper’s new home on the internet offers readers greater access, searchability

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

Your “neighborly news from the heart of Lookout Mountain” has a new home on the internet, giving readers more ways to engage with their favorite community newspaper.

The Groundhog can now be found online at www.readthegroundhog.com.

Previously, this address forwarded to the MERF website, where recent copies of the newspaper appeared in full PDF form. The new expanded website offers visitors a more enjoyable and accessible reading experience, presenting articles from the newspaper as stand-alone posts that are easily searchable and shareable.

Across the top of the page are categories to help visitors explore various subjects. At the end of each article is a set of links that take readers to other articles by the same contributor, in the same category, or from the same issue.

Sure to be a popular feature, the “Community Events” link at the top of the page provides a quick listing of all upcoming events submitted to The Groundhog.

(See “Website,” Page 14)



Moore Brings Passion for Arts, Teaching to New Role at Valley Head School

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

Everyone needs a vocation, but it’s a blessing when that work intersects with a person’s heart and skills in a way that ignites their passion. This aptly describes the new art teacher for Valley Head School.

Caroline Moore was hired last month by MERF to serve as the school’s art teacher. When speaking with Moore, it quickly becomes apparent that “serve” is the appropriate word.

“Students just soak up the goodness of life,” says Moore. “And if you affirm that and promote that in them, really the best of them comes out. That’s how I see my job as an art teacher.

“I told them, day one, ‘I’m here for you guys,’” she continues. “‘I want to expose you to a bunch of different mediums. I want to bring in watercolor and acrylic and clay and mosaics, and we’re going to do beadworking, because I want you guys to fall in love with some expression of art so you can take that outside of the classroom. You may not know that you love working with clay until it’s brought here before you, and that’s something that you can do for the rest of your life.’”

Moore studied psychology and entrepreneurship at The George Washington University in D.C. before moving to California for training as a holistic health practitioner. She also launched her studio and art career while there.



Just over a year ago, Moore moved to Mentone, where her family ties run deep. Her mother, Deedee Morrison, lives here, and her grandparents ran camps here decades ago. She opened a shop on the Moon Lake campus, and later taught several age groups at Nature’s Classroom before becoming art director at Camp DeSoto. The experience confirmed that working with children and teaching art were part of her calling in life.

This became more apparent when she was approached by MERF last month to fill a last-minute vacancy in

(See “Moore,” Page 4)

MERF Welcomes New Executive Director



BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

A local non-profit focused on life-long learning has announced the hiring of a new executive director.

Alyce Kenney has joined the staff of MERF, the board of directors recently announced. “We couldn’t be more excited to welcome Alyce to the team,” says Tom MacMichael, who leads the board’s personnel committee. “Her attitude, work ethic, and love for this community will help us continue MERF’s good work while tackling new initiatives ahead of us.”

Kenney retired from the medical profession, a career that gave her many skills that will be helpful in her new role.

Kenney and her husband, Frank, moved to the area five years ago to be closer to family. “I was a nurse,” she says, “so caring for others, educating others, and communicating were part of my job.”

She found great joy, she says, in helping others learn, grow, and heal, and she sees parallels with the MERF executive director position. “It’s sort of the same — reaching out, connecting, communicating, providing education, working with the school and with the

seniors,” she says. “It’s about supporting ... supporting growth and good things.

“I was put on this earth to do that,” Kenney adds. “I’m most happy when I’m doing something for others.

So MERF is a nice fit, as I am in a semi-retired space, and I’m enjoying my life with my husband. It’s time that I can give, but it doesn’t take up all my time.”

Kenney enjoyed teaching students later in her nursing career, so she looks forward to engaging with Valley Head School through MERF scholarships and other education initiatives. She’s also excited about MERF’s role as publisher of The Groundhog. “That was our introduction to learning about this community,” she says. “When we first moved here, we were like ‘how do we know anything?’ We found The Groundhog, and every month we couldn’t wait for the newspaper to come out to give us more information. It fed us. It was really a wonderful thing.”

The senior lunches provided by MERF also helped Kenney plug into the community the past few years. “I’ve participated in the MERF lunches through other community agencies,” she says.

“When I was in the Garden Club and Saint Joseph’s Church, we always served lunches each season. I love what happens there. It’s fun to meet people and talk with them, and just see their joy and learn about their lives. There are some cool stories to be told and there’s history in that room.”

Music lovers may recognize Kenney from local art shows, where she often sets up with her husband as he sells handmade stringed folk instruments. Billy Goat Guitars specializes in cigar box guitars. 🎸



The Groundhog

Published monthly by MERF

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

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The Groundhog is a community newspaper, and as such we encourage submissions from readers. Send story ideas anytime. The deadline for articles is the 15th of each month prior to publication month. Thank you for reading The Groundhog!

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Groundhog woodcut courtesy of
Meg Justice/Bee Spring Studio

FIND US ON 

Mentone Matters When the British Come to Town

BY MAYOR ROB HAMMOND

What better way to strengthen America’s global partnerships than with a conversation over Moon’s tomato pie at The Wildflower Cafe?

In July, I welcomed Congressman Robert Aderholt and his wife, Caroline, to Mentone, along with his communications director Carson Clark and DeKalb County Commission President Ricky Harcrow. Their guest was Lord Ross Kempself, a member of the British House of Lords. The visit was part of the U.S. State Department’s International Visitor Leadership Program, which Rep. Aderholt has participated in for many years.

The purpose of the program, according to its website, is to allow “current and emerging foreign leaders in a variety of fields (to) experience this country firsthand and cultivate lasting relationships with their American counterparts.” I’m thankful that Rep. Aderholt included Mentone in this exchange. Their other stops across the Fourth Congressional District included the Shoals, Huntsville, and Guntersville.

A special thanks to Moon and her staff at The Wildflower Cafe for accommodating the group on short notice, and for making our new friend from the U.K. feel welcomed. I’m certain Lord Kempself enjoyed his time in Mentone and came away understanding what we all know — this is a warm, inviting, wonderful part of the world, and we are blessed to call it our home.

By the time you read this, I will have traveled to Montgomery to meet with Director Kenneth Boswell of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs. The Town of Mentone continues to explore funding options for making needed renovations to the former Moon Lake



campus. These include foundation work, electrical improvements, and restroom upgrades.

Every available space is rented at the school, and we’re seeing increased activity there. With its emphasis on arts and culture, along with the addition of the fantastic sculpture garden, this property is an important economic driver with great potential for our town.

Northeast Alabama Community College classes have officially kicked off there, and the new restaurant will open next month. These will bring even more visitors to Moon Lake. While it has been a challenge for our town to save this historic structure and turn it once again into a hub of community activity, those efforts will reap all sorts of benefits for years to come.

You can be part of these efforts. The Mentone Fall Festival is coming up next month. It’s an outstanding community event that brings thousands of residents and visitors together to enjoy art, food, and live music. Beyond that, it’s a major fundraiser for the Town of Mentone, and we designate all those funds toward Moon Lake’s renovation. Read elsewhere in this issue about how you can become a sponsor and join our efforts. I hope to see you there! 🍷



L-R: Mayor Rob Hammond, Lord Ross Kempself, Commission President Ricky Harcrow, and Rep. Robert Aderholt recently visited the Wildflower Cafe as part of the International Visitor Leadership Program.

From the Editor I Prefer Our Traffic Jams

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

Five summers ago, we traveled to New York City to celebrate a few milestones in our family. It was yet a few months before the pandemic would shut down Broadway and its peripheral economy, turning the Big Apple into a ghost town. We saw a number of shows and were energized (and at times overwhelmed) by how alive and pulsing the city was around the clock.

The traffic was like nothing we had ever witnessed. Taxis and Ubers and Lyfts navigated the haphazard stream with a sense of mission and determination. Wherever their passengers were going, they were going to get there (in one piece, hopefully, but that wasn’t necessarily the top priority). Tractor-trailer rigs wove amongst the throngs, blocking traffic when necessary to deliver their loads, all the while daring drivers and pedestrians to get in their way.

It was loud. Chaotic, even. And everyone seemed to accept it as the way of things.

Michele and I found ourselves in some similar traffic situations this week as we navigated Lookout Mountain. First, there was the family of deer we had to stop for as we made our way to the Mentone

Market. A buck, doe, and fawn scampered across the road, then stood in the edge of the woods looking back to get a better view of the intruders who caused them to hurry their pace. The next day, we had to slow for a red fox who clearly had no concern for traffic laws. He did not have the right-of-way as he crossed our path, but he caused us to stop in the road (also illegal, if I recall my driver’s

ed handbook) as he stood in plain sight showing off his bold color and curious eyes just inside the woodline.

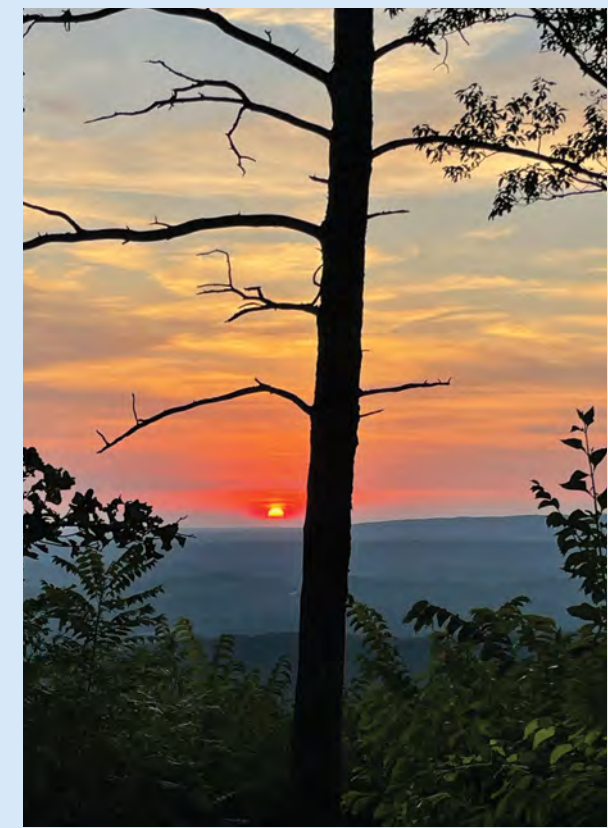
Was that a chipmunk? Yep, I think so. Again, let’s stop for a better look.

Of course, there were more deer. Three fawns had to pause their playtime, as curious about us as we were enamored by them. Passing through the same area later, we saw four of them, all being led by a doe who must have been tapped as the room mother for the day and

was clearly tired of these kids’ shenanigans.

No bear sightings this week, but I’m sure it’s just a matter of time.

We love theatre, and our 2019 visit to Broadway was a highlight for our family. But we wouldn’t trade Lookout Mountain’s slow country backroads and encounters with nature for all the playbills in Manhattan. 🍷



Meet your neighbors at the Mentone Brow Social

The Mentone American Legion is again hosting its Brow Social this fall at the beautiful Brow Park in Mentone. Join your neighbors and friends at 6:30 p.m. on **Thursday, September 19**. Bring a dessert, snack, or beverage to share. Hope to see you there!



St. Joseph’s Rector Leaves a Legacy

The Rev. Dr. Ethan Ferguson Returns to the Bahamas

BY BEN SHURETT

Mentone is losing one of its most important citizens, although the Rev. Dr. Ethan Ferguson has actually resided here only a few months. The popular rector of St. Joseph’s on-the-Mountain Episcopal Church ends his nearly two-year tenure in that capacity soon, with his final sermon on September 1.

Father Ethan is a remarkable man and an incredibly gifted speaker. He will be missed, and all who know him are fortunate that our paths crossed.

I have no need for a watch when he is preaching. There’s never a need to scratch my wrist so I can sneak a peek at my timepiece during his sermons. Oh, there have been many times I looked down, but that was because Ethan touched a nerve – one that needed to be touched.

He preaches from the Good Book each week, of course, but the passages he chooses from the selected scripture always surprise me. They are neither the obvious ones I might have chosen nor are they so obscure as to be stretched to make a point.

Ethan hears the word of God in those scriptures and is always inspired to spread the message he hears. I admire his courage, as he’s never afraid to speak out on the social issues that are important for the congregation to hear.

His tenure has been a short, albeit very important one. While studying for his Doctor of Ministry Degree in Christian Leadership and Homiletics at The University of the South, Ethan came to St. Joseph’s a couple of years ago as a supply priest, following the retirement of the beloved Father Bill Winters’ tenure of about seven or so years.



The church had a search committee doing its work looking to replace Father Bill. After one of Ethan’s first sermons, I hear the consensus was, “why look any further?”

I’m told the interview went well and, at its conclusion, the committee asked if Ethan had any questions of them. He had one. “I’m a big, black man from the Bahamas. Do you think that will be a problem? Will I be accepted here?”

How might one measure acceptance? Attendance has grown by perhaps 400 percent. Routine attendance hovered around 25-30 following Father Bill’s departure. Nowadays, a “routine” Sunday crowd often tops 100, and we’ve had more than that. We have often filled every seat in every pew and we’ve even been forced to bring out chairs to the parish hall for people to watch on our television. It has been like the Easter Sundays of

my childhood Methodist upbringing.

Another quantitative measure? New members go through the official ceremony of joining the Episcopal Church once annually, when the bishop visits. It’s a sacred ceremony, one my Mary and I took part in back in 2023. This year, our membership grew by 19 people. I bet there was no other Episcopal church in Alabama that took in that many new members on their special day.

There is no measure for love and joy and spirituality, but St. Joseph’s exudes each of those elusive qualities. All people – everyone – is welcome at our church as we try to demonstrate what Jesus exemplified. He taught us to love everybody, with no exceptions. Father Ethan lives that, as well.

Now he’s off to the next big step in his career, returning to his native Bahamas, where congregations are much larger than the entire population of Mentone. A new search committee is already at work.

God sent Ethan Ferguson to be our rector and he was an ideal fit here. It’s important to point out that our congregation was perfect for Ethan, as well. It’s critical that all at St. Joe’s remember that. We can’t succumb to the temptation of being absent from church because Ethan is gone. Ethan helped make our congregation grow and flourish in every way. Our congregation helped Ethan flourish as well. He will be missed, and our parish should continue to excel.

Godspeed, Father Ethan. You have been a great blessing in so many ways. You and Mentone and St. Joseph’s are fortunate to have been able to love on one another during your time here. ●

For more than 30 years, Ben Shurett was a newspaper publisher in Alabama and Iowa. He retired in 2014 and has lived in Mentone since.

Annual Notice of Coverage

BY LYNN HIXON

Your Medicare Advantage Plan or Part D plan sends an Annual Notice of Coverage (ANOC) with information about changes to your coverage in the upcoming year. It’s usually sent out around September, since it can help you decide whether you want to make coverage changes during Medicare’s Fall Open Enrollment period, October 15 to December 7.

There are three kinds of changes to look for in an ANOC:

- Changes to your plan’s costs, such as premiums, deductibles, and copays
- Changes to the plan’s network that might affect coverage for your current providers and pharmacies
- Changes to the plan’s formulary that might affect coverage of your current drugs or their prices

After you’ve read about the changes to your coverage coming up in the new year, you can decide if your plan will still meet your needs or if you’ll want to change it during Fall Open Enrollment.

If you haven’t received your notice by September 30th, contact your plan to request a copy.

If you need to make changes to your Medicare Advantage or Part D plan, please call and make an appointment with your SHIP (state health insurance assistance program) coordinator, Lynn Hixon, at the DeKalb County Council on Aging at 256-845-8590. ●

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Horn Retires as MERF Executive Director



Anna Mae Horn

BY REBECCA HENDERSON

MERF Executive Director Anna Mae Horn is retiring from her position beginning this month. Not many people serve their community in as many capacities as she has, and the area holds a deep appreciation for her service and dedication.

Anna Mae grew up on Sand Mountain, attending Flat Rock Elementary, Ider High School, and Northeast Alabama Community College. In 2011, she married Bill Horn, who had retired to Valley Head. Her arrival was fortuitous for the area, as she soon jumped into community service, helping revitalize Valley Head School’s parent-teacher organization (PTO) by writing articles about them for The Groundhog. All three of her children attended Valley Head at the time.

Her connection to the newspaper grew, and in 2015 the Mentone Area Preservation Association (MAPA) asked her to become editor. For the next two years, she not only served as writer and editor, but she also personally distributed the paper around the community.

Meanwhile, add to that a stint on the Moon Lake Library board and a role in organizing the 2016 debate of the county superintendent candidates.

“You never know where one little decision is going to lead. And during that time of editing and writing, I got to know a lot of people in Mentone, and I

saw all that MERF did,” Horn remembers. “Education has always been important to me. I get that from my parents. I didn’t realize it as a child, but they made educational moments out of everyday things.”

She lives out another lesson her parents taught her: If you see a job that needs to be done, jump in and help. As MAPA transitioned and needed a new president, Horn, in true form, left her position at the paper and volunteered to lead MAPA. Fast-forward to a couple of years ago, when she became executive director of MERF when the position came open.

Some years ago, she had joined the volunteer tutoring program at Moon Lake School, her first involvement with MERF. Later, she coordinated the food vendors for the annual MERF art auction, and in the past two years as head of MERF, she has loved being involved with the MERF scholarship program and making a host of other contributions to the organization.

In 2023, her service came full circle from the days of submitting articles about the Valley Head PTO. MERF

began publishing The Groundhog in 2023, and longtime editor Kelly Leavitt was leaving the editor’s position. Horn stepped in, remaining in the role until recently, when Stephen Smith became editor.

Horn’s excitement about MERF is evident as she recounts all the organization has done and plans to do in the future. Most important to her is that students know they have a resource in MERF that goes beyond scholarships. She says MERF wants them to know there are people in the community who can help, whether they’re having difficulty with a class, or they need help honing their interview skills. There are people close by who simply want to help students succeed.

Retirement for Horn will mean time with family — her children, grandchild, and husband Bill — and all their activities. But this servant’s heart still beats strong for Mentone. Don’t be surprised if you see her volunteering where there is a need. And MERF’s senior lunches will definitely be a regular stop for her and Bill. 🐻

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Moore *(continued from page 1)*

the art teacher position at Valley Head. She quickly developed curriculum and a class structure, all aimed at creating opportunities for expression for her students.

“I want to create a space where they feel encouraged to make mistakes, try new things, and just be affirmed,” Moore says. “Being an artist is just making something new, making something that didn’t exist before. You had the idea before you brought it into being. And so I’m just excited to see kids start to see themselves as artists and as creators, and to think about themselves differently, forming a new identity as people who can create and try new things and not mess up ... you can’t mess up in art.”

Moore is bringing an intentional

approach to her work as art teacher, balanced with a focus on the personal growth brought on by the creative process. “I have an entire curriculum map for each grade and where they’re supposed to be by the time they leave my class, so that by the next year they have these basic, rudimentary skills,” she says. “So I’m excited for skill development. But more than anything, I’m excited for a shift in identity and self-affirmation so that they feel loved and empowered in my classroom. And of course, skill development will also come alongside that. But yeah, for me, teaching is just affirming students.

“I’m really in love with my job,” Moore adds, “really passionate. And I think the kids can feel how much I love it and love them already.” 🐻

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Valley Head Happenings Activities and Improvements

BY MAYOR KAREN VEST

If you missed the first Valley Head movie night, you missed a fun time. Over 50 people attended our inaugural event. Adults and children alike enjoyed the movie. I certainly enjoyed the movie, but I loved all the thank-you hugs from the children even more.

Thank you to Valley Head Baptist Church, Pastor Young, Lisa Smith Powell, and their volunteers for providing free popcorn! Valley Head Volunteer Fire Department raised over \$300 that evening from their hot dog cookout. The town looks forward to hosting more movie nights and purchasing our own big screen in the future.

The town held its second monthly “Hot Rods in the Valley” event on Saturday, August 24th. It was another great success with even more vendors and cars. Be sure to join us for the remaining events of this year, set for September 27th and October 26th. Plan to eat dinner at the New Tiger’s Inn during these events. During the October event, we will also have a trunk or treat for everyone. Please call the Town Hall for more information on this fun annual event.

The look and safety of our community are being improved by the work taking place around town. Commerce Avenue curbs have been repaired. A



New Rapid Response Vehicle for the Valley Head Fire Department.



Valley Head’s first Movie Night was a big success.

handicap ramp with a handrail has been added near the office of North DeKalb Primary Health. Electrical outlets in the old football field have all been upgraded. The restrooms in Valley Head Park have received several improvements, including electrical updates and new lighting. We hope these improvements instill pride in the town and encourage respect when people use these facilities so that maintenance costs are reduced.

The Valley Head Fire Department is very proud of the new Rapid



Valley Head Baptist Church volunteers provided free popcorn.

Response Vehicle. The 2022 Chevy Silverado 2500 Custom is fully equipped with lights and sirens. It will prove useful on a variety of calls to serve the community.

The Valley Head Town Council meets the first Monday of each month at 6 p.m. A work session begins at 5:30 p.m. The public is invited to attend both. If you would like to address the council, please contact Town Hall no later than four business days prior to the meeting to complete the proper paperwork. 📄

Valley Head Area Women’s Club Like-Minded Ladies

BY ANNA MAE HORN,
CLUB PRESIDENT

Since 1930, like-minded ladies in the local area have been meeting regularly for the Valley Head Area Women’s Club. We currently have members from Valley Head, Mentone, Hammondville, and Fort Payne. We enjoy gathering for refreshments, socializing, and learning about our local community through monthly programs. Recent past programs have included learning to make wreaths, the history of Alabama state capitol locations, and a talk from a local physical therapist.

The club also awards scholarships to graduating Valley Head High School seniors annually. The 2024 scholarship recipients were Arabella Stokes and Kolby Dupree. Both students had impressive achievements. We know they will succeed in their educational journeys.

The Valley Head Area Women’s Club members would like to welcome other like-minded ladies to join us. The first meeting of the 2024-2025 club year is on September 18. Contact club president Anna Mae Horn at 256-635-8775 for more information. 📞

FORT PAYNE ROTARY

GOLF TOURNAMENT

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Mentone Arts Center Arts Center Fall Social Honors Sennetts; Debbie Bonds Brings Blues to Mentone

BY RANDY GRIDER

Fall Social

Autumn is just around the corner, and we have several upcoming events to match the season’s excitement. Each quarter for the past year-and-a-half, we have honored artists by hosting a social. Our Fall Social on Thursday, Sept. 12, will be a little different, as we honor two of our most beloved supporters. We will pay tribute to Dr. Charles O. “Soc” and Barbara Sennett, who have shown their generosity and devotion to the arts center since its inception. The Chuck Sennett Center for the Arts is named for their late son, a talented aerial photographer. The Sennetts have been part-time Mentone residents for decades.

We invite the public as well as all friends of the Sennetts to join us from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. There will be a presentation at 6:15 p.m. followed by Brett Sennett performing songs he has written on guitar. Drinks and heavy hors d’oeuvres will be available.

The Blues Come to Town

On Friday, Sept. 27, we welcome Debbie Bond and “Radiator” Rick back to Mentone for a thrilling two-hour show.

American singer-songwriter Debbie Bond has been performing for decades in the Alabama backwoods and is now a regular on the Southern U.S. and European club and festival circuits. Influenced by raw juke joint blues and the famed sounds of Muscle Shoals,

Bond’s impressive story includes years of performing with traditional Alabama blues musicians, such as Johnny Shines, Eddie Kirkland, Willie King, Shar Baby, Little Jimmy Reed, and more. Immersion in Alabama roots music has deeply flavored her guitar playing, soulful singing style, and original songwriting, giving her a contemporary and original sound, with soul, blues, and jazz influences.

Bond’s collaboration with British-born keyboard and harmonica player “Radiator” Rick has added a swampy New Orleans edge to her sound. She is a blues activist and founder of the award-winning Alabama Blues Project, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting and preserving the state’s blues heritage. She is also the recipient of numerous awards, including a Keeping the Blues Alive Award from the Blues Foundation and a prestigious Coming Up Taller Award for her blues education work with the Alabama Blues Project. She has been recognized by the Alabama Music Hall of Fame as a Blues Achiever and the national Blues Hall of Fame as a Great Blues Artist.

Admission is \$25 per person. Seating is limited, so we recommend making advance reservations.

Capture Autumn Magic with Painting Class

Our next art class, Painting Fall Leaves in Watercolor Pencil, is scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 26. This one-day

workshop taught by returning artist/instructor Redenta Soprano might be just what you have been looking for!

Using glorious autumn leaves as subject matter, come and explore the versatility of these wonderful pencils that can be employed as both a wet and dry medium. You will fall in love with their saturated colors, wide range of applications, and creative potential! Prior drawing experience is helpful but not necessary; just bring a willingness to experiment and have some fun!

Tuition is \$100 and class is limited to 10 students. A supply list will be emailed to registered students.

Redenta Soprano is an artist as well as a gardener and holds degrees in both natural sciences and art. For over 30 years, she has taught various techniques of botanical illustration at different venues, including: the New York Botanical Garden, Harry P. Leu Gardens in Orlando, and the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina.

For more information on any of the events at the arts center, please see contact info below. 🍁

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



Dr. Charles and Barbara Sennett

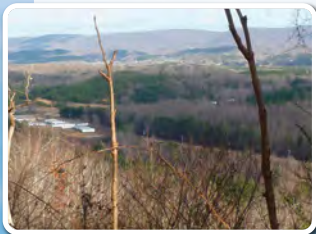


Debbie Bond and “Radiator” Rick



Learn to capture the color of autumn leaves in watercolor pencil.

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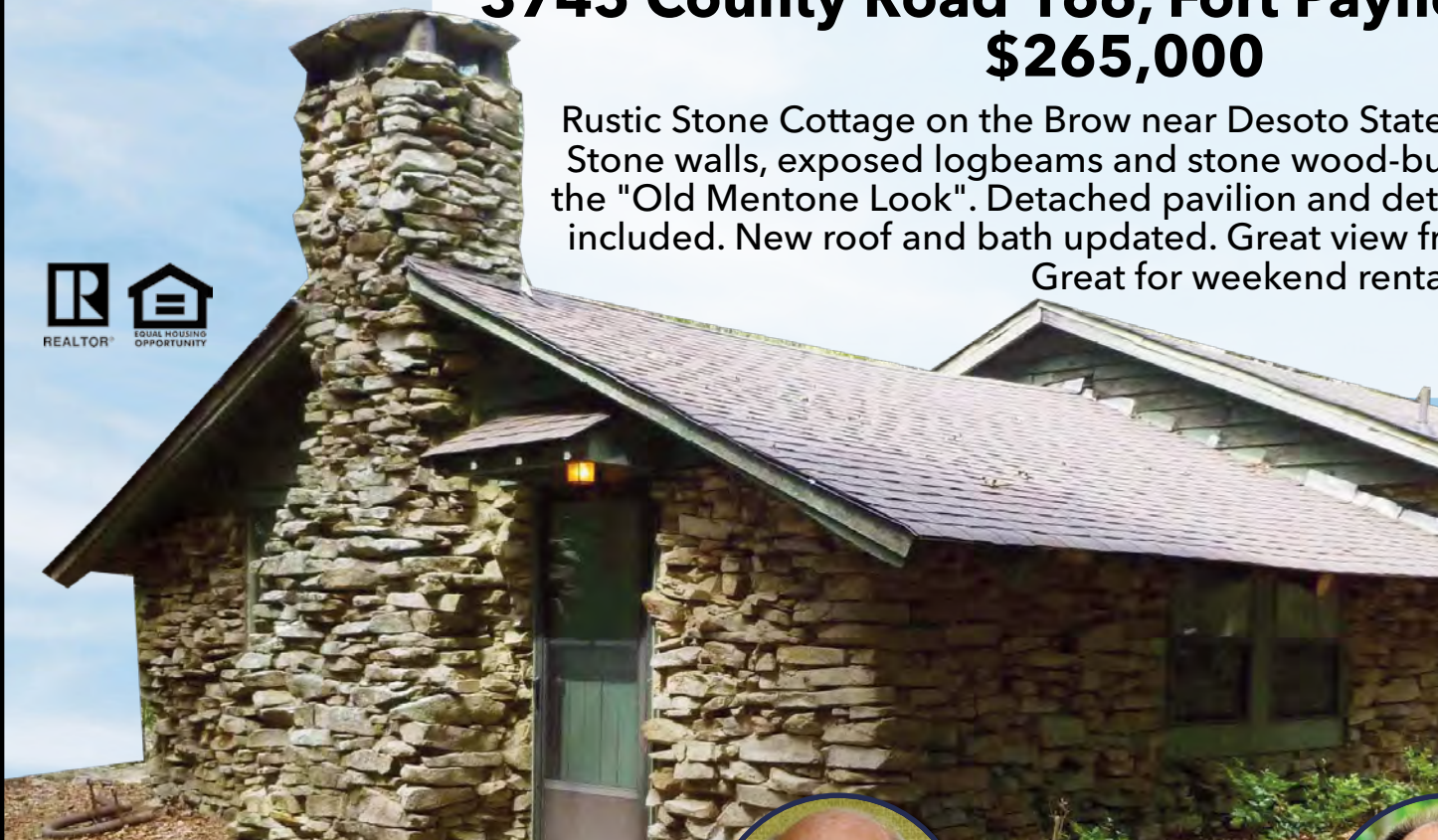
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Library to Host McCracken Poston Jr., Author of “Zenith Man”

BY ANNE MCLEOD

On Oct. 4, 1997, Alvin Ridley called 911 to report that his wife had passed out. In answer to the dispatcher’s question, he responded that he didn’t think she was breathing. First responders arrived to find a dead woman in bed. Although Ridley was well known around town in Ringgold, Georgia, as a conspiracy-minded and litigious former TV repairman, no one knew he had a wife. Months later, he would be arrested for her murder.

McCracken Poston Jr., author of “Zenith Man: Death, Love, and Redemption in a Georgia Courtroom,” will speak about the story at the library on September 9 at 6:30 p.m. The

book tells the tale of the murder trial and of Ridley’s unlikely friendship with his young attorney.

The Atlanta-Journal Constitution called the book “a highly engaging read that combines the best parts of hard-boiled true crime with a host of colorful characters, a small-town Southern setting, and Poston’s natural gift for gab.” Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Jon Meacham described the book as having “... the kinds of twists and turns that will make readers think it’s great fiction – except it all happened.”

The library will have copies of “Zenith Man” available for sale and autographing. ●

Anne McLeod is the librarian at Moon Lake Library.



Constitution Day Program: Ensuring Election Integrity with Judge Ronnie Osborne

BY ANNE MCLEOD

Join us at the library for our annual Constitution Day Program on September 16 at 6:30 p.m. Each September, we celebrate the birthday of the Constitution with an educational program about some aspect of constitutional law. This year, DeKalb County Probate Judge Ronnie Osborne will speak on “Ensuring Election Integrity.”

This is an opportunity to satisfy your curiosity about how local officials in charge

of election procedures make sure the vote is accurate. You’ll also find out how volunteers receive training to assist at the polls. We’ll offer free pocket copies of the Constitution to take with you.

The United States Constitution was signed Sept. 17, 1787, in Philadelphia. It is the oldest written national constitution still in operation and often used as a model for other countries establishing a system of laws. Join us as we find out how election law is implemented here in DeKalb County. ●

September 2024 at Moon Lake Library

Weekly Meet-Ups: KNITTING and CROCHET
Tuesdays at 2; SCRABBLE Wednesdays at noon



- Sept. 3 at 3 p.m.** — Municipal Library Board, followed by Friends Board at 4 p.m.
- Sept. 6 at 6 p.m.** — Family Game Night - Bring a snack to share, and we’ll enjoy board games and cards at the library.
- Sept. 7 at 10:30 a.m.** — Little Library Learners resumes. Kids ages 3-7 enjoy stories, crafts, and games with Ms. Lynn.
- Sept. 7 at 10:30 a.m.** — Book signing with Larry Craze, author of “Yet a Remnant”
- Sept. 7 at 1 p.m.** — Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.
- Sept. 9 at 6:30 p.m.** — Featured speaker: McCracken Poston Jr., author of “Zenith Man: Death, Love, and Redemption in a Georgia Courtroom”
- Sept. 14 at 10:30 a.m.** — Library Book Club - Our book is “Zenith Man” by McCracken Poston Jr.

- Sept. 16 at 6:30 p.m.** - Constitution Day Featured Speaker: Judge Ronnie Osborne - “Ensuring Election Integrity”
- Sept. 17 at 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.
- Sept. 20 at 6 p.m.** — Family Game Night - Bring a snack to share and we’ll enjoy board games and cards at the library.
- Sept. 21 at 10:30 a.m.** — Little Library Learners - Kids ages 3-7 enjoy stories, crafts, and games with Ms. Lynn.
- Sept. 21 at 1 p.m.** — Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.
- Sept. 27 at 6 p.m.** — Friday Night at the Movies: “Waking Ned Devine” (PG, 1999)

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with
Larry Craze,
Author of
“Yet A Remnant”

Moon Lake Library **September 7**
10:30 AM

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With Little River Escape being such a success, we have decided to embark on a new journey by creating River Ridge Escape Tiny Home Dealership. At the dealership, tiny homes are available to tour and purchase. RRE is now delivering across the nation and also developing other communities to bring more folks to Lookout Mountain.

River Ridge Escapes now has nine tiny home communities near and atop Lookout Mountain in NW Georgia and NE Alabama. There are several Airbnb Tiny Homes in our various locations to come experience tiny home living, downsizing, the community, and explore the surrounding areas.

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Thank You's, New Faces, and Exciting News

BY KATHRYN NORRIS

Have you taken a walk along the Pathway to Community beside the MERF House, or gathered for food and fellowship at our senior lunch? Maybe your children or grandchildren have discovered their creative sides through art classes at Moon Lake or Valley Head. The fact that you are reading The Groundhog now shows that you enjoy connecting with your neighbors and keeping up with community news through this newspaper.

All these activities and more express MERF's mission of "supporting lifelong learning." The impact of this local non-profit organization has been well documented through the years in the pages of The Groundhog. This month's issue features the culmination of many weeks of hard work on behalf of MERF's volunteer board, our partners and sponsors, and members of the community in general.

To begin with, it is with great excitement that we welcome Alyce Kenney as our new executive director. As you'll read in the article introducing Alyce, she has a passion for community that will serve MERF well as we strengthen existing programs and expand our impact.

A warm "thank you" goes out to Anna Mae Horn as she leaves that position. Anna Mae has made tremendous contributions to MERF and the Mentone/Valley Head area. We cannot thank her enough, and we wish her all the best as she retires from MERF to focus on other things.

We likewise wish Paula Easter well in her next chapter of life, and thank her for her terrific 22-year stretch as MERF's art and music teacher, first at Moon Lake School and then at Valley Head School. She helped MERF fill a significant gap in rural education in our community. Through art and music, Paula provided a much needed opportunity for curiosity, creativity, problem solving, whimsy, and stress relief to countless students across two decades. We admire and applaud her commitment and dedication to a community that would have otherwise gone without. The long-term impact of her classes will be felt for quite some time. Art is an important part of a well-rounded education, and Paula will always be an important part of our community. We wish her well.

Valley Head students were greeted with a new face this year as Caroline Moore stepped into the art teacher role. Her passion for working with children and for creative expression intersect perfectly in this new role, and we are so thankful she was ready and willing to join our efforts.

You will also read in this edition about MERF's work to create a stronger visual identity. And if you have ever wished for an easier way to read and share Groundhog articles online, we are excited to share the new website with you at www.readthegroundhog.com.

What's ahead for MERF? We will start work soon on a new website for MERF, making it easier to learn more about the organization, our activities, and the outstanding sponsors who support our important work. And we have new features planned for The Groundhog that will continue to forge deep connections throughout the communities we serve.

Visit the MERF and Groundhog websites. Connect with both on Facebook. Subscribe to have the printed edition of the newspaper delivered to

your home or business. Stay connected as your non-profit organization and its many volunteers work together to "enrich the living and learning," according to our mission, across the greater Mentone area. 🐿

Kathryn Norris is the president of the MERF Board of Directors. For more information or to volunteer, email MERFmentone@gmail.com, call 256-634-2122, or visit MERFhouse.org.



MERF Senior Lunch Schedule

Join us the following Wednesdays at 11:00 a.m. for food, friends, and fun learning!

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- Sept. 25
- Oct. 2
- Oct. 9
- Oct. 16
- Oct. 23
- Oct. 30
- Nov. 13



MERF Adopts Strategic New Logo, Tagline

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

After months of design work and deliberation, MERF has adopted a new visual identity. The logo and tagline are the result of work that began in January with a half-day strategic planning session wherein the MERF board of directors charted the non-profit organization's next phase.

The new logo features a circular image consisting of four smaller images that symbolize open books. These represent the learning that is central to MERF's mission. When combined in this pattern, the books give the illusion of a bloom, representing growth — another core value of the organization.

The power of this logo, beyond the imagery, is its tagline. In two phrases, four words, it captures the heart of MERF's mission: Rural Education and Community Development.

"Rural Education" reflects MERF's mission while tying it to the region it serves. This also sends a strong mes-



sage to potential grant and sponsorship sources that MERF is focused on an area typically underserved in educational support.

"Community Development" speaks to the work MERF does beyond education (such as senior lunches and the Pathway to Community walking trail) while also positioning the organization to take on projects that contribute to the greater quality of life in the region (such as publication of The Groundhog).

"MERF has done an outstanding job of enriching the living and learning of the community, according to our mission," says board president Kathryn

Norris. "While we've stayed true to the work envisioned by our founders more than 30 years ago, this community has also experienced a good bit of change."

The most impactful change has been the closing of Moon Lake Elementary School. For many years, MERF funded an art teacher for Moon Lake. When the school ceased operations at the end of the 2021 school year, MERF shifted its focus to Valley Head School, where many local students were transferred.

A final, though more subtle, change will be that MERF will phase out of referring to itself by its full legal name of "Mentone Educational Resources Foundation." This shift, again, is

related to the changes brought about by the passage of time.

"MERF is a well-known and recognized name, but the full name no longer accurately reflects the overall work we do," says board member Joel Leonard. "We now serve an area that extends beyond Mentone, and our work is more than education-based. We do more than provide resources, and we aren't organized as a true foundation."

As such, "MERF" will no longer be treated as an acronym for the longer name but the actual name by which people refer to the organization.

"The new logo and tagline do not represent shifts in MERF's focus," says Tom MacMichael, vice president of the board. "We have merely refined our focus and developed a visual identity around what has been the heart of MERF all along."

Look for the new logo and tagline to start appearing on printed materials and social media. They will also be prominent in MERF's refreshed website due to roll out later this year. 🐿

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Rhododendron Garden Club News

October Flower Show Themed “Fall Across Alabama”



BY MELLANIE TUTTLE

“Fall Across Alabama” is the theme of the Northeast Alabama Federation of Garden Clubs (NEAFGC) October flower show at the DeKalb County VFW Fairgrounds. Once again, garden club members will showcase their floral designs, hoping for blue ribbons and the coveted top award. A newish division, Botanical Arts, will highlight wreaths, collages, pot-et-fleur (fancy name for a design with potted plants and cut flowers), dried hydrangeas, unusual branches, and fairy gardens. The public is invited to enter ribbon-worthy horticulture. No garden club membership is necessary. The DeKalb County VFW Fair offers an online and a printed catalog with all the class listings (dekalbcountyvfwfair.com).

Broad categories include Arboreals, Annuals, Perennials, Cut Foliage, Vines, Bulbs, Herbs, Succulents, Container-Grown, and Hanging Plants. Horticulture can be registered on Saturday, Oct. 12, and Sunday, Oct. 13, between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. at the fairgrounds. An entry card listing the common name as well as the scientific name is required for exhibiting.

With Google and plant identification apps and websites, it’s easy to find the Latin names of plants. However, if that beautiful flower name is still unknown, bring it anyway. Our friendly, knowledgeable folks at the check-in table will help figure out that illusive identity!

Tips for preparing horticulture for the flower show:

- Cut specimens the day before the show in the morning or late evening.
- Place immediately in a gallon bucket of warm water, let sit overnight.
- Cut stem at an angle and longer than the required length so it can be re-cut later.
- Groom by trimming off spent flowers and wilted or yellowing leaves, and wipe off any dirt, webs, snail slime, etc. Leaves may be trimmed following the shape. Use pinking shears for serrated edges. A cotton swab will get pollen off petals and leaves.
- Using a product to make leaves shine is not allowed, but rubbing with a piece of wool does the job.
- Check the pot for dirt, debris, slugs underneath, ants, or roots hanging out of the bottom; many a blue ribbon has been lost for lack of due diligence.

For Transporting:

- Re-cut specimen under water to correct length, and place singly in a bottle. Multiple bottles can be loaded into a wine box for transporting.
- Potted plants can be secured by cutting a hole in a box or piece of foam and placing the pot into the hole. That box can then be placed in another for added protection.

With a youth-only division, kiddos can bring horticulture and participate in Botanical Arts. Sections are divided by age (pre-school-7; 8-13; 14-18). Classes include making a collage, decorating a gourd, or creating a fairy garden.

The August meeting was all about the club’s preparation for the upcoming Mentone Fall Festival and reviewing the schedule for the flower show. Come by the Rhododendron Garden Club (RGC) booth for purchase of member-grown plants and deliciously decadent desserts.

The “Follow Your Art” booth in August was undoubtedly a successful, fun day. Monies earned are used for scholarships and to fund the Moon Lake shade garden between the

amphitheater and the gym. Check out the amphitheater stage decorations (another RGC project) and visit the garden. The scholarship fund for students interested in pursuing an agriculture-related career is a dear and worthy cause. In 1959, the Garden Club of Alabama Horticulture Award was established and is now an endowed scholarship with the Auburn University College of Agriculture. One of the six current recipients of the endowment is a delightful Fort Payne resident.

This month’s meeting will be Tuesday, Sept. 10, at 10 a.m. in the library. Vermiculture will be the topic of the day, presented by President Rhea Pirch. Worm castings — yum. 🐛

Mellanie Tuttle is a member of the Rhododendron Garden Club.

Join us!

The RGC meets at 10 a.m. each month on the second Tuesday. For information, email rhododendrongardenclub@gmail.com and find the group on Facebook.

RGC is a member of the National Garden Club; Deep South, Inc.; Garden Club of Alabama; District II and NE AL Federation of Garden Clubs.

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Little River Art Gallery Grand Opening, New Chalk Murals and Finster Fest



BY JULI JORDAN

With another summer in the books, we breathe a sigh of relief and welcome fall with open arms and plenty of artistic expression!

Art Gallery Grand Opening, Annual Meeting, and Social

On Saturday, Sept. 14, from 5 to 7 p.m., we will host our annual meeting and social, as well as the opening of Little River Art Gallery at our new digs at Moon Lake Village, 5866 E. River Road. Meet our gallery artists and enjoy the company of our arts community while browsing the gallery and beautiful sculpture garden. No silent auction this year, but expect door prizes!



August chalk artist Caroline Moore with her mural depicting the Cherokee syllabary, Native American medicine wheel, and the natural wonders in Mentone.

Chalk Murals

August chalk artist Caroline Moore celebrated the Cherokee, depicting their syllabary, Native American medicine wheel, and the nature that surrounds Mentone. Her deep desire



to connect us to the rich history, the respect and wisdom in nature was seen not only in her mural but additionally in her narrative that gave it context. She used this quote by Chief Luther Standing Bear: "Knowledge is inherent in all things. The world is a library, and

its books are the stones, leaves, grass, brooks, and the birds and animals that share alike with us the storms and blessings of earth." September's Make Your Mark on Mentone mural is by international chalk artist Jessi Queen.

She describes the inspiration for her work this way: "The pure and simplistic life of Mentone was exemplified in the acts of kindness, pleasantries, and service of their beloved 'Flower Girl.' Ruby O'Rear was the granddaughter of the town founder, the caretaker of her beautiful gardens, her family, and the folks of Mentone," Queen says.

"By beautifying the community with flowers from her garden and care from her heart, she made an impact that will not be forgotten," she continues. "Not only was she a prominent figure, but she symbolized the heart of Mentone, where people care for each other and stay connected to the land. My drawing includes significant flora to the area of Mentone, the Sallie Howard church (where she beautified and spent her final hours), and representations of Ruby from her life."

This is the final mural for the Make Your Mark on Mentone grant from the Alabama State Council on the Arts. What a fun and engaging project this has been! And since the installation is permanent, we are looking for more artists to make their marks! Interested? Contact us at info@littleriverartscouncil.org.

Member Artists Exhibit at Finster Fest

Once again, LRAC will have two tents at Finster Fest in Summerville, Georgia, September 21 and 22 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Central (the event is in the Eastern time zone). It is an honor to be invited to exhibit at Paradise Gardens. If you haven't been to Finster Fest, mark your calendar for great art, music, and artist talks. 🍷

Juli Jordan is president of the Little River Arts Council.



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The Mentone Ukes, Moon Lake Library’s House Band

BY ANNE MCLEOD

(The following article appeared in APLSeeds, the Alabama Public Library Service’s newsletter for library directors around the state.)

It’s 12:30 on a Saturday afternoon in Mentone, and although the Mentone Ukes’ practice doesn’t start for another half hour, members of Moon Lake Library’s house band are already starting to arrive. Regulars greet one another, showing off their newest ukuleles and asking about the day’s song list.

Group leaders Debra Fey and Jerry Megli greet newcomers who venture in tentatively but who are welcomed enthusiastically by the group. While Debra sets up her iPad to use the library’s projector, her husband Jerry explains to first-timers that he’s happy to show them a few chords back in the computer lab to prepare them to join the larger group, which averages between fifteen and thirty members.

Since the Ukes were founded five years ago, they’ve come a long way from the small group of beginners who gathered at Moon Lake Library in August of 2019 with longtime library board member Mickey Luck. His Saturday sessions became a regular item on the library’s calendar. The library helped publicize the practices, but the group ran itself, using our library’s main room for practices that began immediately after the library closed on Saturdays at 1 PM.

Then just as the Ukes were becoming an established part of life in the town of Mentone on Lookout Mountain, Covid hit.

The story of the Mentone Ukes’ perseverance through the pandemic and their re-emergence as Moon Lake Library’s house band is one of resilience, community, and creativity. The story also includes a surprising dash of technology - social media, tablets, and ChatGPT. And groundhogs.

The pandemic shut down the library for months, with books available for curbside checkouts only. As the



The Mentone Ukes are a community favorite, performing at various events and providing an opportunity for learning and fellowship to people of all ages.

library re-opened in early 2021 with limited hours, programming remained suspended for quite some time. Finally in August of 2021, the Ukes asked to get back on the library’s schedule. Members came back, trying to maintain a bit more social distance and with several wearing masks.

A few of the group had purchased iPads to store their music on instead of using paper copies and notebooks. The members with iPads sang praises of their devices to their friends, and soon most of the Ukes had them.

By 2021 the Ukes had a group Facebook page, something that had helped sustain their connection during the months spent apart as administrators Debra Fey and Hank Allen, an experienced web developer, posted regularly to the group. The Facebook page helped bring new faces to the group, as visitors now drove in from Huntsville or from Georgia to learn from the Ukes.

The local monthly newspaper, called The Groundhog, invited individuals in the Ukes to submit articles about their love for the ukulele and their affection for the Mentone Ukes. Hank Allen began experimenting with ChatGPT to create AI-generated

content. The Groundhog published a rap in the style of Snoop Dogg as well as pictures of AI groundhogs happily strumming away on their ukuleles.

Over the years, the Mentone Ukes have become a part of the scene at Moon Lake Library. While the library continues to help publicize their practices, they run their own programs and appreciate the use of our space. In return, they support the library through donations, playing at programs like the library’s holiday social, and even providing sweat equity as they helped install a new screen for the projector. A breakout group, dubbed the Rogue group, pops by every now and then on Wednesday afternoons to work in another practice. The Ukes often play gigs around the area, appearing at festivals, senior lunches, and other local venues. They have T-shirts for sale, created by Jerry Megli, a graphic design artist.

Moon Lake Library is proud of its house band, an intrepid and enthusiastic company of creative people of all ages who simply want to make music. It’s no great surprise that in a town with a population of just over 300 people, the Mentone Ukes Facebook page has 318 members! 🐻

Mentone American Legion Post 215 Receives Four Awards

BY BARRY MORTON

Your Legionnaires received four awards in July from the American Legion Department of Alabama. These were:

- 1. Commander’s 100% Club:** For achieving our 100% membership goal for the 2024 membership year.
- 2. Certificate of Recognition of Annual Post Reporting:** “Your considerable efforts in achieving a 100% annual reporting are commendable, proving you and your members to be an invaluable part of The American Legion Department of Alabama.”
- 3. All-Time High Membership Department Award:** For achieving an all-time high membership of 47 for the 2024 membership year.
- 4. Commander’s All Membership Goals Club:** Certificate of achievement for achieving all our membership goals for the 2024 membership year.

The 2024 membership year ended June 30, 2024. We’re on the clock now for 2025 with the following goals set by American Legion Department of Alabama:

2024-2025 Goals

- 45% Goal July 31, 2024
- 50% Goal Aug 31, 2024
- 55% Goal Sept 30, 2024
- 65% Goal Oct 31, 2024
- 75% Goal Nov 30, 2024
- 80% Goal Dec 31, 2024
- 85% Goal Jan 31, 2025
- 90% Goal Feb 28, 2025
- 95% Goal Mar 31, 2025
- 100% Goal Apr 30, 2025
- 103% Goal May 31, 2025. 🐻

Barry Morton is Commander of the American Legion Post 215.



Left: Vice Commander Russ Cash and Alan Chambers, Division 1 Commander. Right: Adjutant Claire Baroni and Alan Chambers, Divisions 1 Commander.

COME PLAY WITH US! Regular FREE sessions of the Mentone Ukes will be held at 1 p.m. Central at the Moon Lake Library on **Saturday, Sept. 14 and 28**. Newcomers and beginners of all ages are invited to attend these sessions. A beginners class is offered at the same time as our regular sessions, and loaner ukuleles are available. Your Mentone Ukes will once again play on the amphitheater stage during the Mentone Fall Festival! Find us on Facebook: Mentone Ukes, or on our website: <https://mentoneukes.com/>.

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Gift Shop Sales Preserve a Piece of Little River Canyon

BY JSU CANYON CENTER

It was decades ago, after Little River Canyon National Preserve had been established through Congress with authorization from President George Bush, that the problem became clear.

Jacksonville State University Canyon Center Director Pete Conroy remembers the sound of a backhoe clearing land directly across from the Canyon View pullover on Highway 176. Soon a large house was constructed, and Conroy remembers the public’s reaction. “When students were dropped off to see the Canyon, their focus became the big house instead of the river, soaring vultures, or cliffs,” he says.

Although nearly 15,000 acres were already protected by the National Park Service as the Little River Canyon National Preserve, the public-private boundary along the east rim allowed for construction. Thankfully JSU partner organizations The Conservation Fund and the Nature Conservancy

of Alabama came to the rescue. They worked tirelessly to preserve the rim before more homes were built. These conservation organizations protected much of the rim, but neither had the intent to own the rim land forever.

And that’s when Conroy received a call from The Conservation Fund. “We weren’t able to transfer the land over to the National Park Service because of some technical restrictions, so I thought that Jacksonville State University might want to be a partner,” says Andrew Schock, The Conservation Fund’s vice president and regional director.

The concept was discussed by JSU’s Trustees, and President Don Killingworth signed off to accept the donation for preservation. Then, after a year of deliberation and assessment, two important parcels were transferred to JSU and the Canyon Center. Despite this being a donation, there was a need for legal work and the enactment of a conservation easement, work that added up to around \$20,000.

“All of this cost has been covered



by revenue generated in our gift shop,” says Conroy. “Anna Lindsey-Brown has done a great job establishing our store into a well-respected, unique place to shop.”

“We are thrilled to have our revenue go to land conservation and we definitely want our customers to know that their purchases really matter!” says Brown.

Conroy announced the exciting development in June during the National Park Service and Canyon Center Field School’s Annual Bio

Blitz program, where biologists come from around the state to assess and catalog the various species in the area.

During the event, Conroy said, “We’ve been responsible for some development up here, and it only seems right that we also support the conservation of our primary resource, the beautiful Little River Canyon.”

For more information about the JSU Canyon Center, visit jsu.edu/epic/canyoncenter/ or contact Director Pete Conroy at 256-282-5784.

Jeff Black to Headline May’s Gulf Songwriter Series

The JSU Little River Canyon Center welcomes legendary folk singer-songwriter Jeff Black for the next installment in the May’s Gulf Songwriter Series.

Black will take the stage Sunday afternoon, September 22. Scheduled for 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., the show promises to be an unforgettable musical experience. A GRAMMY-recognized artist with a career spanning over three decades, Black has seen his music grace indie-film soundtracks and recorded by some of the biggest names in the industry, including Alison Krauss & Union Station, Waylon Jennings, Dierks Bentley, and more.

Known for his soulful, passionate live performances, Black is a master storyteller whose songs capture the essence of the human experience. This is a rare opportunity to witness a true folk troubadour in an intimate setting.

Joining Black is local treasure James Loy Roberts. A singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist, Roberts has carved out a name for himself in the southeastern music scene. When he’s not crafting beautiful wooden pieces by trade, Roberts captivates audiences with his heartfelt performances. His dedication to his craft and his love for music shine through in every note,



making him a perfect addition to the series.

“We’re excited to host another edition of May’s Gulf Songwriter Series at the Canyon Center,” says Director Pete Conroy. “We hope our friends and community will continue to support this unique small-stage concert series that brings incredible talent to our doorstep.”

Tickets are on sale now for \$25 in advance and \$30 on the day of the show. For ticket information, visit jsu.edu/epic/canyonconcerts, or call 256-845-3548. The Little River Canyon Center is located at 4322 Little River Trail NE, Hwy 35, Fort Payne, Alabama.

May's Gulf Songwriter Series

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— ★ ★ ★ —
JAMES LOY ROBERTS
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September Community Events

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

September 1 • Beginner 101 Hike Guide for Newbies Aqua Loop • If you are new to hiking or just need a refresher, this once-a-month hiking series at DeSoto State Park is for you. We will start out with a Hiking 101 Class that covers everything you need to know to have an enjoyable, safe experience. We will touch on trail safety, the 10 hiking essentials, map reading, and Leave No Trace. Afterward, we will head out on a short, beginner-friendly hike to try out some of your new skills. What to bring: backpack with plenty of water, lunch, snacks, and closed-toed shoes. Meet at 4 p.m. at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. Free, but RSVP is required so we know how many to expect. Email us or pre-register here: <https://visitlookoutmountain.com/events/beginner-101-hike-guide-for-newbies-4/>. Due to the nature of this hike, only thunderstorms will cancel this event. Please dress appropriately for the weather.

September 2 • Labor Day Festival in Sylvania • Join the community for good music, crafts and food vendors, and the Wheels of Time Car Show. Free kids’ activities, inflatables, balloon artist, and pony rides. Sylvania Park 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

September 6 • Campfire Talk: Gardening for Wildlife • Join us for a fun campfire talk in the great outdoors! Campfire Talks are a series of educational and entertaining programs in the DeSoto State Park campground Campfire Ring. Talks are for all ages, open to everyone, and cover topics from snakes to vultures to insects, and so much more. In case of inclement weather, event will be located in the CCC Pavilion in the picnic area. Free, no pre-registration required. For any details about the talk, email Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov

September 7 • Steaks at the Station • Support first responders from Crossville, Kilpatrick, and Geraldine volunteer fire departments and get a great meal for game day! \$25 per plate includes ribeye steak, baked potato, salad, and sweet tea. Desserts will be available to purchase. Pickup at the Crossville Fire Department. They will start serving at noon (pre-orders available). Special thanks to Hilburn Family Diner and Catering for cooking.

September 9 • Enjoy the Moment: Hike & Hammock • Discover a secluded hammock spot and immerse yourself in the tranquility of the great outdoors! Let’s unwind and recharge together amidst breathtaking scenery and the soothing sway of hammocks. Hiking offers the opportunity to connect with nature, explore new trails, and get some exercise, while relaxing in a hammock allows you to unwind and enjoy peaceful surroundings. DeSoto State Park Assistant Naturalist Mirandi Watson will lead a short hike to a hammock spot. Participants will be supplied a hammock and shown how to hang it. Afterward, 30 to 45 minutes will be spent relaxing before hiking back out. The hike is considered moderate because of the uneven, rocky terrain. Each month will utilize a different trail in the park. Beginner friendly, between 1 and 3 miles each. Meet at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. Will caravan to Lost Falls Trailhead. Free, but RSVP is required so we know how many to expect. <https://alapark.itinio.com/register/DSP-Hike-Hammock> or call 256-845-5380.

September 14 • Fall Festival Vendor Event, Rainsville • Hey everyone!! We are so excited to be having a fall festival on September 14 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at the Field of Dreams! We will have vendors, food trucks, bounce house, pony rides, live music, and face painting! For registration or more details, contact Jessie Brown. We can’t wait to see everyone there. <https://www.facebook.com/events/1724584651413880>

September 14 • Members Social • Little River Arts Council will hold the annual meeting and social at our new digs at Moon Lake Village, where we have incorporated not only a lovely sculpture garden featuring the work of sculptor Deedee Morrison, but we’ve also opened a gallery inside the former Moon Lake School, presenting the work of local artists, along with LRAC t-shirts and “Make Your Mark on Mentone” notecards. Even more reason to celebrate! This gathering will serve as the Little River Art Gallery grand opening!

September 14 • Junior Ranger Adventure Series: Tree Discovery • This once-a-month hike is designed for explorers age 3 to 103! Participants will have the opportunity to earn the coveted DeSoto State Park Junior Ranger Patch while discovering the wonders of nature and the park’s historical treasures. Park Assistant Naturalist Mirandi Watson will guide this fun hike. The program will begin with an overview of the Junior Ranger program. We’ll hike along different trails and focus on several topics in the booklet. The hike is considered moderate because of the uneven, rocky terrain. Each month will utilize a different trail in the park, each beginner friendly and between 1 and 3 miles. We will take our time, so this hike is good for all skill levels. What to bring: backpack with plenty of water; lunch and snacks; and a journal with a pen or pencil. Wear closed-toed shoes. 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Register here: <https://reserve.alapark.com/register/DSP-JR-Adventure>

September 14 • Mentone Ukes • Regular FREE sessions of the Mentone Ukes will be held at 1 p.m. Central at the Moon Lake Library. Newcomers and beginners of all ages are invited to attend these sessions. A beginners class is offered at the same

time as our regular sessions, and loaner ukuleles are available. Your Mentone Ukes will once again play on the amphitheater stage during the Mentone Fall Festival! Find us on Facebook: Mentone Ukes, or on our website: <https://mentoneukes.com/>.

September 17 • Women’s Care Center Banquet • Guest speaker is Alison Centofante, child advocacy innovator; in-demand public speaker; activist; and writer with over 10 years of experience speaking on abortion, marriage, human dignity, and religious freedom. Held at the First Methodist Church in Fort Payne. Tickets are \$35; begins at 6 p.m. Call 256-845-0838 for more information.

September 18 • Meandering Moonlight Guided Paddle • DeSoto State Park staff offer this relaxing guided moonlight paddle trip on scenic Little River. Enjoy the peace and quiet of nature as we paddle upstream on the “Coke bottle clear” waters of the West Fork of Little River. Enjoy this flat-water paddle as the sun goes down and the full moon comes up. Trip is approximately 4 miles round trip; spans about 3 hours; and includes kayak, paddle, and personal flotation device. Must be able to paddle upstream and back (no current). Weight limit is 300 pounds for singles and 450 pounds for tandems. Ages 8 to adult. Appropriate clothing for weather (you may get wet), headlamp or flashlight, insect repellent, snacks, and drinking water. DeSoto Falls Picnic Area-Miller’s Bend Paddle Shack (about 7 miles from main park area of DeSoto State Park). \$30 for single kayak rental (two-person kayaks are available on a limited basis for \$50). Pre-registration closes September 14. Pre-registration: <https://forms.office.com/g/1Bh261fzZd>

September 19 • Canyon Kids: Tree ID • Join us for hands-on adventure learning. The fall semester of Young Explorers meets the third Thursday of August, September, October, and November! Children ages 7 to 12 will want to attend ALL these hands-on adventures. They’ll creatively learn about animals, plants, bugs, and more with JSU Field School’s Little River Canyon Center. 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. \$8 per class or \$25 when registering for the entire spring semester. Registration required. Limited availability. For more details, email rmtaylor@jsu.edu or call 256-845-3548.

September 19 • Movin’ for Main Street Glow 5K and & Fun Run • Thursday, Sept. 19, starting at 7 p.m. at the back of the Fort Payne Rotary Pavilion, 201 5th St. NW. Online registration is now open at <https://raceroster.com/events/2024/91922/movin-for-main-street-2024>. Event will open at 6 p.m. - 6:45 p.m. for onsite registration the day of the event. Free glow sticks, glow bracelets, and glow necklaces will be available for runners. T-shirts (\$20) will be available for purchase. Overall top three winners will receive cash prizes. 1st (\$250); 2nd (\$175); 3rd (\$75). Overall winner in each age category will receive a medal. Age groups: (13-15); (16-20); (21-30); (31-40); (41-50); (51-60); (61+). An afterparty will be at Vintage 1889 in the Back Forty Venue, with a drawing for door prizes.

September 21 • Boom Days Heritage Celebration 3rd Saturday • This annual art and musical event features citizens of Fort Payne taking a second look at their past and the heritage passed down to them through the arts and crafts of the area. Many events will take place the week prior to the celebration. The Boom Days Heritage Celebration will feature many of these facets in the presentation of musical performances as well as art displays in City Park. Call 256-845-1524. For more information.

September 22 • May’s Gulf Songwriter Series VI • Join us at Little River Canyon Center for original music from Jeff Black | Two Crows for Comfort. Tickets \$25 in advance, \$30 the day of the show. Coolers welcome. This is a rain or shine event. Limited seating; make reservations early. Purchase tickets at <https://www.jsu.edu/epic/EventCC.html>.

September 25 • Forest Tales Outdoors Storytime Hike • Join DeSoto State Park Assistant Naturalist Mirandi Watson for an OUTDOOR storytime catered toward you and your young nature lovers twice per month April to September. Enjoy captivating tales and engaging movement activities amidst the beauty of nature. Interact with the natural world around you, spotting wildlife, exploring hidden nooks, and perhaps even encountering a few surprises along the way. Hike is considered easy, perfect for little feet. Around 0.6 mile total. What to bring: backpack with water and snacks and closed-toed shoes. 10 to 11 a.m. Meet at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. Free, but RSVP is required so we know how many to expect. RSVP here: <https://reserve.alapark.com/register/DSP-Forest-Tales>. This program is for grown-ups and their children. NO PETS PLEASE. Participants are invited to stay after for time to play, explore the park, and socialize with other families.

September 26 • Nature Journey Hike • Join naturalists and artists for this creative observation hike. The focus of this walk is to reflect on your observations using a personal journaling style in many different ways! Learn how to keep your own nature journal while strolling along trails in DeSoto State Park. Hike about .5 mile to the West Fork of Little River and hang out a while, working on our journals with provided materials. Ages 8 to adult. The hike is considered moderate because of the uneven, rocky terrain. Total 1.5 loop. What to bring: backpack with plenty of water and snacks; closed-toed shoes; and a favorite journal if you have one. We will supply watercolor paper, watercolor pencils, clipboards, etc. Bring something

to sit on if you prefer. 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Meet at the Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. Cost is \$5, which includes all supplies. RSVP is required so we know how many to expect. RSVP here: <https://alapark.itinio.com/register/DSP-Journal-Journey>. Due to the nature of this hike, only thunderstorms will cancel this event. Please dress accordingly.

September 27 • Plant Discovery Hike-Fall Blooms • Join DeSoto State Park staff for a meandering journey within the forest, taking in every opportunity to learn more about the natural world. Identify many native plants of the southern Appalachians and recognize the species found in the park. Scout out rare, beautiful plants and wondrous rock formations among the natural clearings dotting Lookout Mountain’s porous cap. Bring a notebook/camera if you wish and discover what can be seen along the trails. Hike is approximately 1.5 miles round trip, utilizing the Aqua Trail and DeSoto Scout Trail. Moderate due to slightly rocky terrain. 4-6 p.m. Meet at Boardwalk Trailhead on County Road 89. Free and open to everyone. No pre-registration required. Weather dependent, so please call the lodge at 256-845-5380 beforehand to check status of hike if weather is questionable. Contact Brittney. Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov with questions. www.alapark.com/desoto-state-park/hiking.

September 28 • Valley Head Cemetery Run “In Memory Of” 5K • Get ready to run in memory of a loved one at the Valley Head Cemetery Run “In Memory Of” 5K. Cash prizes for overall male and female runners. Great door prizes. Races start and finish on the Valley Head Town Square. All proceeds go toward maintenance on the cemetery. Register here: <https://runsSignup.com/Race/AL/ValleyHead/ValleyHeadCemeteryWeRunInMemoryOf> Contact Sherryl Lewis at 256-657-1616 for more info.

September 28 • National Public Lands Day • Join DeSoto State Park staff on a beautiful adventure hike on the Desoto Scout Trail (DST). This hike is a challenging and steep 6.5-mile trek. The trail follows the West Fork of Little River and traverses a varied terrain of ridges, valleys, fern glades, rock formations, and waterfalls, beside deep pools and riffles, through rhododendron tunnels, creek crossings, swimming holes, and sandy stretches. Moderate to strenuous along rocky mountainous terrain. Meet and start at DeSoto State Park Lodge and hike downstream to the backcountry trailhead off Road 5 in the Little River WMA (car caravan back to lodge). 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Free and open to everyone; no pre-registration required. Weather dependent, so please call the lodge at 256.845.5380 beforehand to check status of hike. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details. www.alapark.com/desoto-state-park/hiking.

September 28 • Mentone Ukes • Regular FREE sessions of the Mentone Ukes will be held at 1 p.m. Central at the Moon Lake Library. Newcomers and beginners of all ages are invited to attend these sessions. A beginners class is offered at the same time as our regular sessions, and loaner ukuleles are available. Your Mentone Ukes will once again play on the amphitheater stage during the Mentone Fall Festival! Find us on Facebook: Mentone Ukes, or on our website: <https://mentoneukes.com/>.

September 29 • Hope and Remembrance Suicide Awareness Walk 2024 • A suicide awareness walk to bring hope to those suffering and to remember those lost to suicide. There will be entertainment, food trucks, and other vendors at the Alabama Walking Park behind the depot museum in Fort Payne. Registration starts at 1 p.m., and the race starts at 2 p.m.

THE FOOD PANTRY

at St. Joseph’s on-the-Mountain Episcopal Church



Open every Wednesday to Mentone/ Valley Head/ Hammondville residents from 9-11 a.m.

We do close four Wednesdays a year. (Holy Week, World’s Longest Yard Sale Week, Thanksgiving Week and Christmas Week.) We also welcome pantry volunteers and donations. For questions, call 256-634-4476.



Website (continued from page 1)

As new issues are added, the website will become an increasingly valuable community resource. In the months ahead, more content from past issues will be added, creating an archive of information about Mentone and the surrounding communities.

The website will also offer businesses that advertise in The Groundhog an additional way to reach the public with their message.

“Residents and visitors alike depend on The Groundhog to keep up with

news, along with the activities of the many organizations that contribute to our quality of life in this region,” says Kathryn Norris, president of the MERF board of directors. MERF became the publisher of the newspaper last year, ensuring the 42-year-old publication could continue serving the community. “The new online presence for The Groundhog expands the publication’s reach and helps us serve an even broader audience. This helps readers, advertisers, and the greater Lookout Mountain area,” Norris adds. 🐾



NACC Classes Kick Off With a Rousing Chorus

A crowd assembled at the Moon Lake campus last month for the beginning of the fall semester for Northeast Alabama Community College. There was particular interest in the Vocal Ensemble class, taught by Dr. Kathy Adkins. A noted educator in Georgia’s public school system, Adkins taught the last 10 years of her career at NACC in Rainsville. She came out of retirement this year to be part of NACC’s new efforts at Moon Lake. As classes began, area residents were offered a free taste of her Vocal Ensemble class. A dozen vocalists from Lookout Mountain, Sand Mountain, and parts in between attended, drawn by Adkins reputation as a teacher and her accomplishments with the chart-topping country music group The Forester Sisters. Adkins is also teaching a Music Appreciation class. Other classes available at the Moon Lake campus include English Composition 1 and Creative Writing. As reported in last month’s issue of The Groundhog, a solid start could lead to a growing NACC presence in Mentone. “We hope to build the program and one day work with the city to have a theater in town to start producing plays there,” says NACC President Dr. David Campbell.



Categories across the top organize information and help readers navigate the site. Here, a drop-down menu shows all articles filed under Moon Lake Library.

Volunteers Needed at Little River Canyon National Preserve

The park is needing volunteers to help at the front desk at the Little River Canyon Center. Do you enjoy meeting and talking to people? Come join our volunteer team and help give orientation to the preserve to visitors. Volunteers’ duties include starting the film, giving directions

to different scenic areas of the park, helping visitors finding different activities to do in the park and much more. Volunteers are needed Tuesday-Sunday 10 a.m.-4 p.m. For information, please email angela_bates@nps.gov or call 256-516-0286. 🐾





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HUMANITARIAN, DESIGNER, ENTREPRENEUR, AUTHOR.

INDIA HICKS

Friday, Oct. 11th - Saturday, Oct. 12th
Pop-up at The Gallery with India Hicks & the Sugar Mill
Saturday Morning, Oct. 12th
Book Talk & Signing “Lady Pamela”
Saturday Evening, Oct. 12th
Conversations at the Andiamo Table with India Hicks

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Camps Help Town Secure New Police Vehicle

BY GENE MCKEE,
MENTONE POLICE CHIEF

Mentone is known as the “summer camp capital.” These camps are more than just places that build up the lives of boys and girls — they are also a big part of our community. Several of our camps have helped purchase a total of five vehicles through the years for the Mentone Police Department. Our mission of serving and protecting the community includes covering several camps, and they partner with us by donating funds toward reliable patrol vehicles. One of our latest vehicles, a 2024 Ford F-150 STX, was purchased with the help of Alpine Camp, Camp Skyline, Riverview Camp, Camp DeSoto, and Camp Laney. I cannot thank them enough for their partnership and generosity. I would also like to thank Mayor Rob Hammond and the Town Council

for being good stewards of public monies and helping fund this and another truck of the same make and model through a general fund expenditure. Lastly, I want to thank Assistant Police Chief Mike Langston, who got the town enrolled in the 1033 program that allows law enforcement agencies to apply for surplus military vehicles. If awarded, you can sell these military vehicles after a year and keep the money for the town. We were successful in some awards, and money from those vehicle sales also went toward the purchase of our two new trucks. This is another example of how our community comes together to help one another. As someone who worked for a summer camp for several years, I have a deep appreciation for what they mean to the Mentone area. And, again, a big “thank you” to the mayor, council, and my assistant chief for their support and efforts. 🍂

Fall Festival to Include Area Nonprofits and New Children’s Activities

BY REBECCA HENDERSON

Excitement is building as the October 19 Mentone Fall Festival draws closer. Many nonprofit organizations will be represented again this year, so plan to stop by their tents to learn more about what they do for our community. The Little River Arts Council tent will be stocked with merchandise. The organization is also managing the vendors for the festival. Moon Lake Public Library will have a book sale in an outside tent as well as inside the library building. MERF will offer information on the organization’s programming along with merchandise for sale. Be sure to stop by and meet Alyce Keeney, the new executive director. Stop and say “thank you” and grab some food at the DeSoto Rescue Squad Tent. Learn about the organization from volunteers, who’ll be selling hot dogs under their tent and answering any questions visitors might have. They’ll also be accepting donations.

The Rhododendron Garden Club has volunteered to decorate the Shigley Stage of the amphitheater, and will host a plant sale under their tent. Visitors can stop for a warm welcome at the American Legion tent and learn more about their organization. Kids will have a blast at the festival, and organizers have added even more fun things for them to do. This includes face painting, a ball bounce, crafts, and tie-dye t-shirts. Festival hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. There is still time to pledge support for the festival, which benefits the improvement of the Moon Lake School campus. Here are ways to pledge your support:

- Enter bit.ly/3yxhr4N into your browser and complete the online form.
- Mail a check to Mentone Fall Festival, P.O. Box 295, Mentone, AL, 35984. Make the check payable to “Town of Mentone” and note “Mentone Fall Festival Sponsorship” on the memo line.
- Send funds via Venmo to @TownofMentone and note “Mentone Fall Festival Sponsorship.” 🍂



mentone

Fall Festival

October 19 • 9 a.m.-4 p.m. • Moon Lake Campus

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