



THE GROUNDHOG

“Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain”

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

New Event Added to Dec. 14 Tree Lighting *Art Crawl and Holiday Open House To Highlight Local Artists and Businesses*

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

A new event will join a long-running tradition when Mentone hosts its Christmas festivities on Saturday, December 14. The first Mentone Art Crawl and Holiday Open House will begin at 10 a.m. Shops, galleries, and restaurants throughout town will host artists who will be on site to discuss and sell their work. “Locally made, unique pieces of art make wonderful Christmas gifts,” says Juli Jordan, president of the Little River Arts Council, the group organizing the event. See Page 9 for a complete list of participating businesses and artists. Even those businesses that are not hosting artists will be part of the Open House, showcasing their wares and welcoming shoppers with special deals and treats.

Activity will shift to the Mentone Inn Bed and Breakfast for the 5 p.m. Community Tree Lighting. The event will feature hot chocolate, cookies, and caroling with music by the Mentone Ukes, all held at the Linger Longer Pavilion behind the inn. The naughty-or-nice list will be checked twice as Santa himself makes an appearance. Neighbors and friends will then gather for the ceremonial lighting of Mentone’s Christmas tree. “This is a special day in the life of Mentone that involves everyone in our community,” says Mayor Rob Hammond. “We welcome residents and visitors alike to come be part of this hometown celebration. Enjoy some great food, find one-of-a-kind gifts, and share in the spirit of Christmas with our community. We hope to see you there!”



Don’t miss the Christmas Tree Lighting Dec. 14, along with the new Art Crawl and Holiday Open House.



Mentone Centenarian Reflects on Longevity, Unusual Wartime Work

BY REBECCA HENDERSON,
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

One of Mentone’s residents is in a rarified group. Helen Coutu turned 100 last September (“It was just a day,” she says dryly). Not only is she sharp as a tack, but she doesn’t look her age. Her skin is smooth and rosy, and her short, stylish hair is kept swept back by a headband. She says she feels more like 65 years old. And, while having a conversation with her, one could imagine her being that age, though she doesn’t get around as easily as she once did and she uses a walker. Having lived in her house on East River Road since 2013, Helen is known by many from her participation in the MERF Senior Lunch program, which she enjoyed for many years. Her son, Armand Jr., lives here, and her two daughters Diana and Donna live in other states. Her life has been eventful in many ways others’ have — raising children, marrying a man in the military and moving many times around the country — but she experienced a unique episode in life that few people know about. During World War II, she was what is referred to as a Radium Girl, a factory worker who painted watch and clock dials with the hazardous substance. The wartime occupation that caused illness and death among some in this group of women is the subject of books, film, and theater. Helen grew up in Waltham, Massachusetts. “My hometown was 12 to 15 miles



Helen Coutu after moving to Mentone.

from Boston Harbor, so there were things we couldn’t do during World War II. A lot of people didn’t know what was going on. They read what was in the newspaper and what came over the radio, that was it. No TV. But I think they would have been shocked if they’d known there were German U-boats in Boston Harbor.” The radio news asked that local residents keep their windows covered at night and keep car headlights off to obscure the city from enemy eyes. Like many others around the country at the time, Helen’s family did what they could to contribute to the war effort, such as saving recyclable materials like tin cans and newspapers, which were then used to produce military equipment. “I was still in high school when the war started. I graduated in ’42, and (See “Mentone Centenarian,” Page 14)

Groundhog Day Community Celebration set for Feb. 1

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

The spirit of your favorite newspaper will come to life on Saturday, Feb. 1, as “The Groundhog” hosts its first Groundhog Day Community Celebration. The event is sponsored by the newspaper and its publisher, MERF.

A Day of Food and Family Fun

The event will be held at the gym on the historic Moon Lake School campus. The fun kicks off at 10 a.m. with a variety of activities for the kids. This includes games and art activities, along with a groundhog costume contest. Calling all bakers to submit your favorite sweet creations for the Community Cake Walk. Lucky winners will go home with delicious cakes, pies, and cobblers. Ribbons and bragging rights are at stake in the Crock-Pot Cookoff. There will be three divisions: chilis, soups, and stews. The entries will be available for purchase after judging. The first half of the Groundhog Day Community Celebration will end with a discussion and workshop on community stories. This will include a talk by well-known storyteller Fred Hunter, who hosted “Absolutely Alabama” for 25 years and continues telling stories through his podcast and newsletter “Fred Hunter’s Alabama.”

Community “Generation Dance” and Contest

The day’s festivities will pick back up with the Groundhog Day Community Dance. From 5 to 9 p.m., the

gym will come alive with music and an opportunity for people to shake a leg and cut a rug. Part of the evening will be devoted to a “generation dance.” Focus will shift between different generations, beginning with the 1950s and extending through the modern era. The best dancers will be recognized for each generation. Prizes will also be awarded for best costumes from each era. The dance will be open to kids and adults alike.

More Information

To stay informed as plans come together for the event, monitor The Groundhog’s Facebook page. Visit readthegroundhog.com/ghday for the latest information. While there, complete your entry form for the Cake Walk and Crock-Pot Cookoff. Don’t miss all the fun. Make plans now to be part of this community-wide celebration!

AT A GLANCE

Groundhog Day Community Celebration

Sponsored by “The Groundhog” and its publisher, MERF

Date: Saturday, Feb. 1, 2025

Time: 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. and 5 - 9 p.m.

Location: Moon Lake Gym
5866 East River Road, Mentone, AL

Events:

- Kids’ activities
- Cake Walk
- Crock-Pot Cookoff
- Storytelling Workshops
- Generation Dance





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
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FIND US ON 

Mentone Matters Let’s Go for a Walk! Sidewalk Extension Further Connects Our Town

BY MAYOR ROB HAMMOND

The Town will open bids December 20 for the next phase of our sidewalk project. When complete, we will have a safe, accessible walking path from “downtown” to Moon Lake Library.

This project will pick up where the first phase left off. In June 2022, we held a ribbon cutting to open the section that runs from downtown to Dempsey Avenue. At just less than a mile, it has been heavily used by residents and visitors alike. It included a crosswalk at the Mentone Market.

The next phase will extend from Dempsey Avenue to Moon Lake Library and will include another crosswalk. This will bring the total sidewalk length to approximately 1.5 miles.

There are many benefits to creating a walkable environment in a town. Sidewalks support a healthy lifestyle, providing people with a safe path to walk. Whether on a mission or just on a stroll, residents and visitors benefit from the exercise these pathways accommodate.

A walkable town also generates economic activity. Just think about all the shops and restaurants that stretch between downtown and the library — from concerts, art shows, and farmers market all the way to the shops and events around the Moon Lake campus. More walking traffic means more sales for businesses along these sidewalks.

Let’s not forget the social benefits of a walkable town. Like other local gathering places, sidewalks



create occasions to see your neighbors and visitors, to say “hello,” and to spend time getting to know one another. A walkable town fosters a spirit of community.

These sidewalk projects are made possible by Transportation Alternative Program, or TAP, grants through the Alabama Department of Transportation. The first phase cost \$478,000, with the town contributing 20%. The second phase will cost \$669,240, with the grant program again covering 80% of the cost.

When the Town awards the bid next month, the contractor will have approximately 70 working days to complete the project. Read “The Groundhog” for updates on the sidewalk project, as well as dates for a ribbon cutting and community celebration. 🐾



This map from Ladd Environmental Consultants shows key points along the second phase of Mentone’s sidewalk project.

From the Editor A Guide for the New Year

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

It’s the season of change. Soon, you will write your name in a new planner and crease down the spine of its crisp, clean pages. Maybe you’ll hang a new calendar on the wall, or simply watch as your smartphone or computer displays “2025.”

The beginning of the New Year gives us pause to consider the clean slate before us. We’ve packed away the past 12 months and have 12 fresh, unblemished ones waiting for us to create memories and write new chapters of our story.

This presents us with a choice. We can drift along, allowing the current to take us to whatever shorelines might be waiting at the end of 2025. Or we can find a North Star that will help us navigate the months ahead and exercise some control over our journey.

If you know some of my story, you know that I deal with a good bit of uncertainty (you’ll find me online next year promoting Rare Disease Day, February 28). In my desire to be intentional and strategic — as much as possible — about the unfolding of my life, I’ve found it helpful to identify a theme for a New Year. Often, this can be summarized in one word.

There’s nothing magical about proclaiming, “my word of the year is...” but it does focus your mind on accomplishing goals in keeping with that theme. It provides a filter through which to make decisions that are most in keeping with your focus.

Your potential word of the year might be:

- Health
- Free Time
- Relationships
- Nature
- Finances
- Spirituality



Once I identify my word of the year, I find it helpful to elaborate on the theme. I write my thoughts on how it might play out in my life. How can I make health a priority, from the food choices I make to the physical activities I choose? If relationships are my North Star, whom do I want to develop deeper relationships with, and how might I go about that? If my word is spirituality, what practices will I put in place to foster a life of deeper connections with my Creator and with my inner self?

I also look for ways to remind myself of my word throughout the year. Excitement about fresh beginnings has a way of fading as the new year unfolds, and we can find ourselves completely off track before the Ides of March.

Handwritten notes. Calendar prompts. Pre-scheduled emails to your future self. Discussing your word with family and friends to introduce some accountability.

As I write this column, I’m still considering what my word for 2025 will be. How about you? Sure, we all want to improve in every sphere of our lives, but what one area will have your particular focus in 2025? How will that play out in your life? And what tips could you share to help us all make progress?

Find this article online at readthegroundhog.com to share your thoughts in the comments. Or see Page 2 for where to send a letter to the editor via email or old-fashioned stamp and envelope. Thanks for sharing, and here’s to a strong, prosperous, happy, productive 2025 for us all. 🐾



American Legion To Host Sunset Socials on the Brow

You won’t find better views of the setting sun than on the brow in Mentone. Why not share it with friends? Our local American Legion Post 215 organizes a social for viewing the magnificent colors that put on a show just before dark.

The dates for the socials are set:

- December 19 at 5 p.m.
- January 16 at 5 p.m.
- February 20 at 5 p.m.
- March 20 at 5 p.m.

And always the third Thursday of the month, one hour before sunset.

See our Mentone Sunset Social on the Brow Facebook group or contact Barry Morton, commander, at 334-202-8936 (cell and text).

65 Years of Family Reunions Done Right

BY BEN SHURETT

Sing along with me. You know the tune.

*“We gather together to ask the Lord’s blessing;
He chastens and hastens His will to be known;
The wicked oppressing now cease from distressing.
Sing praises to His name, He forgets not His own.”*

Aren’t the holidays fabulous? If you are old enough to remember the words of this hymn, reunions that gather the family at holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas are still meaningful to you.

Traditions are important, but I’m betting your family can’t top the holiday reunions of the families of Joan and the late Jim Byrum. They moved to Mentone more than 20 years ago, and their family does reunions right – and have for 65 years and five generations.

Perhaps more astounding is that the family includes upwards of 285 people, always around Thanksgiving. The event rotates between South Carolina and Alabama.

“We rent an entire camp every year to have room for everyone,” Joan says. “Of course, not every relative gets to come every year, but we usually have about 150 folks every year, and our family is spread out over 10 states.”

Food is pretty important with that many cousins, once-, twice- and more-removed. And don’t think it’s about women doing all the cooking.

“I come from a large family,” she says. “We have 32 first cousins. Only eight are girls, so the men play an important part in the cooking, as well. The men have a biscuit cook-off every year, and it’s serious business. Bragging rights are a big deal.”

So are the rest of the meals.

The gathering begins with a variety of soups – all homemade and brought to the campsite, of course – on Thanksgiving eve and while breakfast the next morning is certainly large, imagine how huge the traditional Thanksgiving meal is, with turkey and dressing and all that goes with it.

“That’s why we must have a commercial kitchen,” Joan says. “We have at least six turkeys, several hams, and salmon cooked on wooden planks for those who prefer fish. Everyone brings their own favorite casserole, of course. More than one table is dedicated just for desserts.”

Every camp lodge has a plethora of



what we would call church tables, so imagine a dozen or more laid end to end in an L-shaped configuration. It takes at least that many to accommodate all that meat and every side dish and casserole imaginable. The men may specialize in meat and biscuits, but you better know the women have passed down a lot of secret family recipes in more than a half-century of loving each other. They have even printed a cookbook of family recipes.

The evening meal on that special day is also unique.

“After a big breakfast and lunch,” Joan says, “we have a simple supper of turnip greens and cornbread, nothing more. It’s perfect.”

The tables are always an elaborate affair, as well.

“Every table has a centerpiece, and they all match, as does the centerpiece in the entrance hall. We have a family football game every year, the ladies have a Christmas ornament swap, a pretty impressive talent show, and photos. We have a professional photographer every year to take photos of the large group and pictures for family

units as well,” Joan says.

Food is always an important way to celebrate Thanksgiving, but this reunion goes beyond that.

“We have singing, lots and lots of singing and praying. We always begin the reunion with a prayer and singing ‘We Gather Together’ to start the event, and we recite the 100th Psalm.”

That’s not a psalm everyone knows, but it’s all about thanksgiving, worship, and praise. Look it up and it will make you want to make a joyful noise yourself.

The annual gathering is an elaborate affair, complete with much coordination and planning, followed by an after-action evaluation to see what might have been done better. But it’s all about love of family and sharing and gathering.

“We celebrate our heritage, of course, but we are really rooted in our family faith and ethics. We always said our grandfather was the rock of our family and our grandmother was the pillow. We want to stay in touch – we need to stay in touch – remembering those who came before us and honoring them as well.”

Singing, praying, feasting, and promising to return for the next reunion sounds like the ideal way for families to celebrate their special heritage. 🍁

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.

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THE HITCHING POST LOT- Remember the iconic "Hitching Post" located in Mentone, Alabama? Locals were devastated when it was lost to fire prior to grand reopening in 2023. The owner has decided to sell the grounds in order to allow someone to bring a vision of what they may desire to that main street corner lot. Commercial septic installed in 2022. MLS #21871776



The Perfect Gift

BY DEJOLY LABRIER

As a teenager, I remember my mother giving me and my siblings the Sears Catalog to pick out what we wanted to see under the Christmas tree. I always had fun flipping the pages with dreamy anticipation of getting just the right gift, the one I wanted most of all. Even though I rarely got what I'd chosen from those fragile pages, I always felt the pangs of hope for what could be.

Several years ago, I decided to get myself an artificial tree to decorate for the Christmas holidays. I went to a local thrift store and found a tree that was 7 feet tall. The clerk said the price would be \$60. I told her I needed to go home and check to see if a 7-foot tree would fit in my living room. A few days later, after seeing that it would fit, I went back to the store and found the tree spread out in the parking lot with many other items that seemed to be headed to the trash. I quickly went to the clerk and asked about the tree. Her response was, "I'll take \$20 for it." My heart jumped for joy! It was my perfect tree! And for only \$20! The clerk helped me get all the pieces into the back of my car, and I drove off with the glee that a small child has when a shiny glass ball is placed in her hands. The wonder and joy was palpable!

I'm not sure what other families' traditions are, but my family usually had a real tree, decorated just so — bright colored lights, shiny balls of various

sizes, silver tinsel, and sometimes garland, with a white sheet wrapped around the bottom of the tree. There was always a star on top, which reminded me of the star in the stories of the Three Wise Men who came to Bethlehem to honor the birth of Jesus, their King. They brought gifts — the perfect gifts for a King.

During this holiday season, many of us fret and worry about the gifts we think we need to give, holding in our minds the possible gifts that others might give us. It's a merry-go-round of searching, creating, buying, wrapping, and giving that can sometimes leave us anxious and worried about whether we forgot someone or whether we got the right gift.

Over the years, what I've learned is that the greatest gift I can give myself is to honor my desire to bring happiness into my life. To be present to myself. To honor my qualities that uplift others in my world, and honor my delight in being present to others.

The perfect gift we can give each other is our presence, showing up as the most glorious version of ourselves in the present moment, knowing that we are growing into the next best version of ourselves. Our gift of our time and attention and really listening and caring about what our loved ones are feeling and sharing with us is the greatest gift of all.

Now I want to share my Christmas tree and wish you ALL a very Merry Christmas! 🎅



Cooks Age 60 and Over Invited to Join Recipe Contest

The DeKalb County Transportation and Council on Aging invites residents 60 and older to enter the upcoming recipe contest for a chance to be included in a statewide cookbook. DeKalb will be allowed to submit one winner for each of the five categories listed below. Winning DeKalb recipes will be submitted to the Alabama Department of Senior Services for their cookbook, which will be released around May 2025.

Submissions must be from DeKalb residents ages 60 and older and are due to the Council on Aging by December 13.

The council will choose one winner from each of the following recipe categories:

- Bread/Roll/Biscuit
- Entree
- Side
- Dessert
- Appetizer/Drink (miscellaneous)



You can find a submission form here. <https://shorturl.at/8dvuz>. If you would like a paper copy, you can get one beginning November 20 at your closest DeKalb County Senior Center or the Council on Aging (600 Tyler Ave. SE, Fort Payne, AL). If you are from another county, contact your closest senior center for information on joining their contest. If you have any questions, call 256-845-8590. 🎉

CMS Announces 2025 Premiums and Deductibles for Medicare Parts A and B

BY LYNN HIXON

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has released information about Medicare costs in 2025, including the 2025 premium, deductible, and coinsurance amounts for Medicare Parts A and B.

In 2025, the standard monthly premium for Medicare Part B will be \$185, an increase of \$10.30 from the 2024 amount. The deductible for Part B services will be \$257, a \$17 increase from the deductible of \$240 in 2024.

The Part A premium is \$0 for the vast majority of beneficiaries. The full premium, which only enrollees over age 65 with fewer than 30 calendar quarters (7.5 years) of work in a job where they or their spouse paid Social

Security taxes and certain younger beneficiaries eligible for Medicare due to disability who have exhausted other benefits pay, will be \$518 a month. Some people over 65 who have fewer than 40 but more than 30 quarters of coverage will pay a reduced rate of \$285 per month.

The Part A inpatient hospital deductible will increase \$44 to \$1,676 in 2025, and the coinsurance for hospital inpatient days 61-90 will be \$419 per day, up from \$408. For skilled nursing facility stays, the daily coinsurance for days 21-100 will be \$209.50, an increase over the 2024 level of \$204.

If you have questions about Medicare changes, please call the DeKalb County Council on Aging at 256-845-8590 and ask for Lynn Hixon or DiAnne Callahan. 📞



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A Love Letter to the Town We Almost Lost

BY REBECCA HENDERSON,
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Last spring, my husband and I decided to move away. Not because we didn't like it in Mentone. But because moving to a bigger city in Tennessee seemed to have lots of checks in the pros column: being central to several family members, lots of amenities, and no labor-intensive farm business to tend to and tie us down.

So off we moved — with well wishes from friends, customers, and our church family — away from the rolling pastures and fences we'd looked out on day and night for nearly a decade.

Our new place was perfectly nice. Smaller and more manageable for the two of us. The city was nice. But from the get-go, it just didn't feel like ours.

Sitting on the front porch of our perfectly fine Tennessee house, I compared that porch sitting to the one I had had in Mentone just one week previous. I lamented that I hadn't heard the hysterical group conversations of coyotes. I hadn't heard the faint sound of a train passing through in Valley Head. There'd been no fog suddenly surround our house after an evening rain. That fog was unnerving to us when we first moved to County Road 106, but over the years I'd found it comforting, like a fleece blanket. It meant we really shouldn't get out unless we had to, and that was nice.

In this new, bigger city I could get to my choice of grocery stores and retail shops in minutes. But I missed being able to settle in and listen to a good 20 minutes of music or an audible book or just plain silence to think before reaching Fort Payne — glancing beyond the rock wall on 117 as I descended and seeing one of four views: waves

of green hills in summer; the reds, yellows, and browns of autumn; the stark, black branches in winter; and the tender leaves appearing in spring. I missed the bitter winter wind on our hill and the fact that at least one person at the Mentone Market gas pumps would wave.

The things I got sappy about seem silly now. I thought with sadness of the little old fellow who, for the entire seven-and-a-half years we'd been in Mentone, had pattered past our farm in a small, loud pickup truck, his ball cap slightly upturned. He'd never turned his head to acknowledge us or wave, but we could count on seeing him inch down our road. I wondered if he had even noticed our farm was vacant.

I found myself reading "Neighbor to Neighbor" on Facebook much more diligently than I ever had before and feeling ridiculously nostalgic about everything on the page: the almost daily security-cam photo of a black bear on someone's property, accompanied by several suggestions for how to secure one's garbage can; a tree down over 117 — whose power's out?; anyone know the owner of this dog?; did anyone else hear that big boom up on 89?; a photo of Fontana's handwritten menu for that day. All those things you get used to around here. They seemed so far away now and so dear to me. Only those of us who live here know these things. We know them. I wasn't part of any we in the new place.

I knew we were in trouble when, one weekend we buzzed down here to check on the farm and I burst into tears when I got out of the car and spotted the woodpeckers on the oak tree in back. I was fraught with homesickness. Mentone and our place were in my blood. I'd heard that said by others, but let me tell you, it's real.

The summer rolled on, and we tried



A recent meeting of the Long Meadow Farm Coffee Club

to feel at home in the Volunteer State (my native state). But we found it hard to start anew. It just didn't feel like home.

My husband is a quiet thinker, and he had refrained from making any judgments or statements about our new location. But one day, as he looked out the window onto our new road, he said,

"I believe we just belong down there." It took me approximately 1.2 seconds to open my laptop and click on UHaul.com. Even our families are happy we moved back, as though a puzzle piece had fallen into the sofa for a while and was now back in place. Things make sense again, even though the magic of this area is something almost impossible to nail down in words.

This morning I sit on the front porch of our farm, convening my coffee club (chubby cat, old dog, and me) for the first time in five months. The air is so fresh I can't wait to inhale. The neighbor is cutting hay across the road. Then I hear the rattle of the little old man's truck. As he turns left from Bankhead onto 106, I see it: an almost imperceptible wisp of a glance toward the house, then a quick return to his usual forward stare.

"He's glad we're home, too!" I said aloud to the other club members.

We left for awhile. But you can't lose what's inside your heart. 🐿

Rebecca Henderson is the associate editor of *The Groundhog*.



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A Year in the Life of MERF

BY ALYCE KENNEY

Rose Kennedy said, "Life isn't a matter of milestones, but of moments."

As 2024 draws to its end, MERF is looking at the many moments that occurred over this past year. Moments that helped us evolve as a nonprofit and improve our focus on the mission that started over 30 years ago. There have been moments that speak to the creativity and connections that happen in the many programs we provide. A grant enabled students in Ms. Cooper's science class at Valley Head School to learn about constellations in the traveling "Star Lab." And Marris and LuJean celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary at a recent Senior Lunch, the entire room filled with song and merriment for them. We know "The Groundhog" is a trusted source of information and community connection in that moment when a subscriber who lives in Missouri came by the MERF tent at the Mentone Fall Festival and said, "Hey there, I love The Groundhog. Keep it up!!" And in the moment when a new mother walked the Pathway to Community with her young one in a stroller on a quiet, sunny afternoon, confirming that our mission "to enrich the learning and living in the community" is alive and well.



Our most pressing goal is to restore the former Shigley home (also known as the “MERF House”) to its youthful and useful splendor. We want meetings, reunions, clubs, and our Senior Lunches to return to this historic building. We want it to bustle again with songs and stories of days gone by. We want folks to be able to share time with others and enjoy one another’s company under the same roof once more.

Our annual fundraising letter is being prepared to go out to our many friends, volunteers, and contributors. We hope you'll continue your support as you have in the past. We thank the many of you, individuals and businesses alike, who have shown your support to our seniors, to scholarships, to art education, and the MERF House renovation. We are a nonprofit, and your contributions are tax deductible and valuable for our continued success. As you reflect on your own year, we hope MERF provided you with at least one moment that made you feel a connection to your community. We wish you a peaceful end to the year, and we'll see you in 2025. 🍂

Alyce Kenney is executive director of the Mentone Educational Resources Foundation. For more information or to volunteer, email MERF.mentone@gmail.com, call 256-634-2122, or visit MERFhouse.org.



Student Art Show Draws Enthusiastic Crowd

BY KATHRYN NORRIS

MERF recently collaborated with the Mentone Arts Center to showcase a Native American art study created by students of Valley Head School. This unique creative effort was led by art teacher Caroline Moore. The public show drew an excited crowd of parents,

students, and local supporters. Seeing the children's joy as they led parents to see their work was both heartening and fun. Local art supporters provided refreshments for all to enjoy as they toured the gallery. MERF looks forward to hosting Family Art Night at Valley Head School next spring, an event open to the public. Stay tuned. 🐾



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3745 County Road 166, Fort Payne, AL \$265,000

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Rhododendron Garden Club News

Plan Now for a Colorful Spring

BY RHEA PIRCH

Ah yes, autumn is coming to a close, and winter is on its way! During our November meeting, after listening to the reading of Mary Oliver’s “The Swan,” we shared thoughts on spending time outside in nature, and how it helps revitalize us.

Then we shifted gears to our roll call and named the types of food we use in our bird feeders. Suet, sunflower seeds, safflower seeds, and “hot seed” were the most mentioned. If you want to keep the squirrels and raccoons out of the feeders, try the hot seed mix. The birds can’t taste the hot pepper, so they can eat without squirrel (or raccoon) interference. Make sure to keep those bird feeders clean! A thorough cleaning before each refill is necessary to save the birds from various diseases and conjunctivitis, a bacterial infection that can cause eyes to become swollen shut and leave the birds blind.

Horticulture chair Mary Shurett offered tips for November gardening. Now is the time to neaten perennial flower beds, fertilize recent plantings, and bring herbs in for winter use. Divide your hanging basket of Boston ferns into thirds and plant them into three new baskets. If you hang them in a sunny window, by spring they’ll be big enough to put outside.

I filled in for Conservation Chair Mellanie Tuttle and reported on



seed saving efforts during Hurricane Helene. An article by Helen Bradshaw in “Garden & Gun” magazine described the efforts Chris Smith (founder of the Utopian Seed Project from Leicester, North Carolina) made to rescue his saved seeds from the flooding and humidity, moving buckets of seeds from his basement to a climate-controlled trailer. Even there, the seeds were at risk as the power remained out for three days. He got lucky in the end, but many of the area’s farmers lost seeds that were collected over a lifetime. Come spring, the Utopian Seed Project’s Appalachian Seed Growers Collective and the Seed Savers Exchange will move into action to share seeds that will help farmers impacted by Helene, rebuilding farms seed by seed.

Speaking of seeds, we will host another seed swap at Moon Lake

Library in February. The date is still to be determined, so keep an eye on our Facebook page and “The Groundhog” for the announcement. In the meantime, start saving those seeds!

It’s bulb planting time! Member Martha Wood shared her expertise with a program on small bulbs. While daffodils seem to be a favorite of spring landscapes, there are also many other bulbs that will bloom colorful flowers into the new year.

Consider narcissus and mini narcissus, colchicum (naked ladies), or erantthis winter aconite (buttercup). Need something deer resistant? Try wood squill or galanthus (snowdrop). Crocus is a good choice for rock gardens, and if you’re in need of something for the shade, try hardy cyclamen. Other small bulb selections include anemone blanda, chionodoxa (glory of the snow), dwarf iris, muscari (grape



hyacinth), ipheion (star flower), and short tulips. Combinations of these flowers will leave your gardens and yards aglow with color all year round. Recommended companies to buy bulbs from include Van Engelen, Brent & Becky’s, and McClure Zimmerman.

We’ll be taking a break from our meeting in December for a Christmas gathering, but we will meet again on Jan. 14 at 10 a.m. at the Moon Lake Library. All are welcome to attend! In the meantime, follow us on Facebook or send us a line at rhododendrongardenclub@gmail.com. 🌸

Rhea Pirch 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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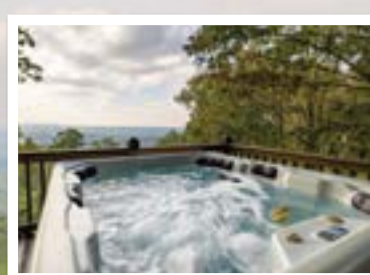
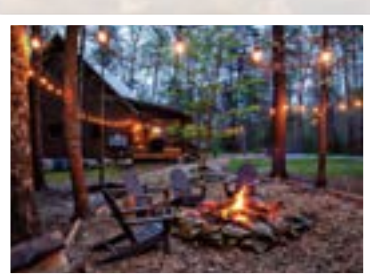
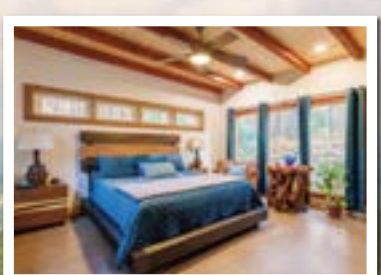




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Holley’s Song

BY ROMEY ATCHLEY

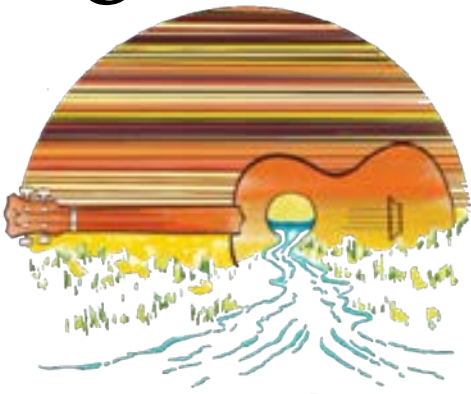
On Sunday, Nov. 3, when the community of Mentone gathered in celebration of the life of Holley Midgley, the Mentone Ukes were there to honor our friend with song. With heavy hearts, we played two poignant pieces that were full of meaning to us as members of the Ukes and friends of Holley. One of those songs, “Have You Ever Seen the Rain” by Creedence Clearwater Revival, expresses the mood of sadness and sudden loss that we are all feeling. The other song has more of a story behind it.

A week after Holley had passed, the Ukes were having a rogue practice session when Don Highfield, a member of our group, had brought along copies of the song “Going Up the Country” by Canned Heat. As he passed the sheets around to us, he told us how Holley had recently given him this song in hopes that the Ukes could learn it. Sadly, Holley was gone and we would never have the chance to play it for him.

Soon after, we found out that Ginger Beshears was going to host an event dubbed “Holleyday” for all of us who knew and loved Holley to gather and remember him. When asked if we would play a couple of songs to open, there was no question about what we would play. This would be our opportunity to learn “Going Up the Country” for Holley.

As I began to practice this song, it became a connection to Holley for me, a way to be with him. The lyrics seemed a perfect embodiment of the country boy spirit that emanated from him.

“Going to leave this city, got to get away. All this fussing and fighting, man, you know I sure can’t stay.” Every time I sang that line, I thought of



Holley moving up here to his cabin on Moon Lake, taking his boat out to spend time on the water, or heading out into the trees to look for wildflowers.

After spending some time with this song, I became curious about the history of it and did some digging. I learned that the song owes a large part of its success to its association with the Woodstock Festival of 1969. Performed on the second night of Woodstock, “Going Up the Country” is often referred to as the anthem of the hippy movement. The idea of finding freedom from the everyday troubles of man and getting out into nature to play aligned with the sentiment of those times that gave rise to such an event.

The song opens with a playful, airy flute melody reminiscent of the light feeling one might get walking off down a sunny trail with hope of discovering what beauties and wonders are hidden amongst the trees. Looking deeper into the history of this piece, I found that, in fact, this original riff as well as the music for the song was not written by Canned Heat. The music was actually passed down from an old 12-bars blues song recorded by Henry Thomas in 1928 called, “Bull Doze Blues.” And instead of a flute, the original recording was made on an instrument called the quills, which are much like panpipes made from cane tubes, a poor man’s wind instrument. Alan Wilson of Canned Heat had



taken Thomas’ song and written new lyrics for new times.

Not much is known about Henry Thomas. He was born into a family of freed slaves in Texas, and as a teenager, he took to the rails with his guitar. He lived as a vagabond, entertaining people throughout his travels. Before he passed away, he recorded a handful of songs in the late 1920s that went on to influence future generations of famous folk and blues musicians. I was delighted to find this song had already had a long, rich history before it found its way into our hands.

I am sad that Holley was never able to hear us play “Going Up the Country,” but so thankful for the gift of this song, like one last seed that Holley planted before he was whisked

away. It is a way for us to share his memory and help each other heal, for music is great medicine. As we continue to play this song at various events around the area, it will always be a reminder to us of a man we owe so much to. He recognized the role that the Moon Lake Library plays in our community and fought to preserve it not only as a place that nurtures our minds but also as a community center where our group and others may gather. Without the generosity of the library and people like Holley, the Mentone Ukes would be nonexistent. I hope that our little group, as well as all the other blossoms that have grown from Holley’s passion and dedication to our community, will continue to bloom for a long time to come. 🍀

INTERESTED IN SEEING WHAT THIS UNIQUE GROUP HAS TO OFFER?

The Mentone Ukes extends a hearty welcome to newcomers and beginners of all ages. No prior musical experience required! Join us at one of our regular sessions held at Moon Lake Library and take a free beginners ukulele class (loaner ukes provided) on January 4 or 18. Visit us on Facebook/MentoneUkes or on the web: www.mentoneukes.com.



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Friday, Saturday, Sunday • 8 a.m.–2 p.m.

Art Crawl to replace Home Tour December 14

BY JULI JORDAN

Art Crawl is a delightful event combining the best of a community open house with a celebration of local artists. It takes place across various venues, including businesses, galleries, and artists’ studios, where visitors can walk, explore, and engage with the creative process.

In this particular Art Crawl, attendees can enjoy a special blend of visual art, craftsmanship, and local talent, all while indulging in complimentary refreshments. Among the highlights are:

- **Lydia Randolph's Home Studio** – The nationally recognized artist will open her personal studio space, allowing visitors to experience her creative process.
- **Magnolia Rose** – Located just down the road from Lydia's studio, this venue features home decor pieces, offering a curated selection of beautifully crafted items. Special attention will be given to **Sunshine Girl Designs**.
- **Groovy Goat** – Inside the Log Cabin Village, this venue features the area’s grooviest artist, **Lacy Hope Dobbs**.
- **Sunflower Studio** – Mentone artist **Lisa Sulkosky**’s studio at Log Cabin Village showcases her beautiful watercolors.
- **Make Your Mark on Mentone** – Watch as artist **Katelyn Boozer** creates a large scale chalk mural on the grounds of Mentone Inn. Katelyn is a regular participant at the Sidewalk Chalk Art Contest.
- **Mentone Inn** – Saturday Farmer’s Market, plus artists, will be set up on the grounds.
- **Hummingbird at Loom** – Sylvia’s lovely handmade ponchos, scarves, and more, and Jeff’s rustic wood furniture.
- **Mentone Arts Center** – Artists will be on hand to talk with visitors.
- **Rocky Top Pottery**

- **Artisans**
- **Mentone Market** – Local and regional art with a special focus on **Scott Thomas**.
- **Little River Hardware** – Expect music and an artist or two.
- **Moon Lake Trading Company**
- **Moon Lake Village:**
 - » **Otherworld Gifts** – Watch Bill create on the 3-D printer.
 - » **Little River Art Gallery** – Artists demos including Doug Perkins' wood carving.
 - » **The Gallery by Andiamo** – Whatever they do, it’s over the top.
 - » **Cloudland Framing** – See the art of framing in action
- **The Rabbit Hole** – Prepare to be wonder-filled!
 - Watch live art demonstrations, sip complimentary refreshments, and discover pieces that capture the essence of mountain life and creativity. Whether you're a seasoned art enthusiast or a first-time visitor, this art crawl is an enchanting way to experience the culture, beauty, and talent of this magical place. Stay tuned to our social media for more information. Maps will be available at each location. This is a free event leading up to the Christmas Tree Lighting at the Mentone Inn at 5 p.m.

Artist of the Month

We would like to recognize **Scott Thomas** as our Gallery Artist of the Month.

Scott Thomas is a self-taught artist who works predominantly with acrylic paint on 3-D objects, including musical instruments and vintage cameras. Scott also paints on canvas and wooden







MENTONE

ART CRAWL

& Holiday Open House

Dec. 14 • 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Artists will be set up at businesses throughout town. Come shop for unique gifts – for loved ones or yourself!

- Little River Art Gallery
- The Gallery by Andiamo Lodge
- Mentone Arts Center
- Mentone Market
- Mentone Inn
- Little River Hardware
- Moon Lake Trading Co.
- The Groovy Goat w/Lacy Hope Dobbs
- Sunflower Studio

- Rocky Top Pottery
- Lydia Randolph's Home Studio
- Magnolia Rose & Sunshine Girl Designs
- Hummingbird at Loom
- Cloudland Framing
- Artisans
- The Rabbit Hole
- Otherworld Gifts

A map and full list of artists will be available at the Little River Art Gallery at Moon Lake Village, and other participating locations on the day of the event.

boards. Growing up in a mill village in northwest Georgia, Scott credits his grandmother's quilt making as the inspiration for his unique style. He turned to painting as a creative outlet at the age of 58 and has been passionately pursuing this art form for 18 years.

His unique style has earned him a dedicated following, with collectors from all over the U.S. seeking out his pieces. His work is also featured at Mentone Market.

Juli Jordan is president of the Little River Arts Council.





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Mentone Arts Center

Winter Brings Festive Events at the Arts Center

BY RANDY GRIDER

Winter may be on the doorstep, but that doesn't mean the arts center has gone into hibernation. We have an active slate for the next few weeks.

We kick off with our holiday version of the Music on the Mountain Songwriters Series on Tuesday, Dec. 3, from 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m. The hosts welcome all the singer/songwriters who have been part of the past series to share an original Christmas song with the audience. Guests are also invited to participate in a traditional sing-along of seasonal tunes. The organizers of the event are asking attendees to consider bringing non-perishable items that will be donated to the local food pantry at St. Joseph's Episcopal Church.

On Thursday, Dec. 12, we will play host to the official launch/book-signing for "Hidden Mentone. Vol. 2," a coffee table book that features all-new photos of some of Mentone's most treasured "secrets." The event will open to the public from 5 p.m.-7 p.m. The collaborative team of Lesa Cummings, David Cummings, Deedee Morrison, and Elizabeth Thornell will be here to sign your copies. Refreshments will also be available.

On Saturday, Dec. 14, the Mentone Arts Center will be one of many stops along the Art Crawl and Holiday Open House. Coordinated by the Little River Arts Council, this day-long event will feature artists and shops throughout town. Come enjoy holiday treats and meet the artists. For more information, see the LRAC article on Page 9.

The Winter Social will be Saturday, Jan. 18, from 5 p.m.-7 p.m. We will pay tribute to Dr. Charles O. "Soc"

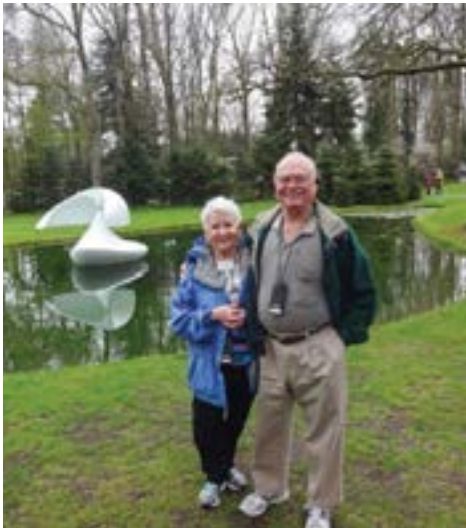


and Barbara Sennett, who have shown their generosity and devotion to the arts center since its inception. The Chuck Sennett Center for the Arts is named for their late son, a talented aerial photographer. The Sennetts have been part-time Mentone residents for decades.

We invite the public, as well as all friends of the Sennetts, to join us. There will be a presentation at 5:45 p.m., followed by Brett Sennett performing songs he has written on guitar. Drinks and heavy hors d'oeuvres will be available.

On Sunday, Jan. 19, we are excited to announce that Murray and Magill will perform at the arts center from 7-9 p.m. The Irish duo features Alan Murray and Andrew Finn Magill (who previously performed here with Anya Hinkle). For 20 years, North Carolina native violinist/fiddler Magill has been pursuing parallel careers in traditional Irish music, Brazilian choro, jazz, and American fiddle. Murray has shared the stage with such artists as Karan Casey, Niall and Cillian Vallely, Eileen Ivers, and Scotland's Battlefield Band, and has toured extensively across Ireland, England, Europe, Australia, and the United States. Tickets are \$25 and will go on sale in late December.

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.



The Sennetts



Murray and Magill

Advent/Christmas

St. Joseph's on-the-Mountain

Mentone, Alabama

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Library Open House and 22nd Anniversary Celebration

Moon Lake Library can't let 2024 get away without a holiday celebration and open house. Join us as we celebrate Holley Midgley's service and acknowledge the current staff as well as the Municipal and Friends Board members who make Moon Lake Library a reality. It's a testament to the community spirit of Mentone that its citizens support such an ambitious undertaking. Planning, fundraising, and networking pay off as the library continues to offer a broad series of activities for residents of all ages and interests. There will be treats and music by the Mentone Ukes. The event is open to the public, and we hope you'll join us for this special occasion. Sunday, Dec. 8, from 2 - 4 p.m. 🐻



DECEMBER 2024
AT MOON LAKE LIBRARY

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

Dec. 3 at 1 p.m. - Wreathmaking workshop with Destin Padgett. Email books@moonlakelibrary.org for more info. Cost is \$30.

Dec. 3 at 3 p.m. - Municipal Library Board meeting; 4 p.m. Friends of Moon Lake Library Board meeting.

Dec. 6 at 6 p.m. - Family Game Night! Bring a snack to share, and we'll enjoy board games and cards at the library.

Dec. 7 at 10:30 a.m. - Little Library Learners: Kids ages 3-6 are invited to celebrate the season with books and activities.

Dec. 7 at 1 p.m. - Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

Dec. 8 at 2 p.m. - Holiday Social: Enjoy refreshments and the music of the Moon Lake Library's house band, the Mentone Ukes. Find out about the latest programs and initiatives at the social.

Dec. 20 at 6 p.m. - Movie Night: "Elf" with Will Ferrell

Dec. 24-25 - THE LIBRARY WILL BE CLOSED for Christmas, reopening Dec. 26.

Dec. 27 at 6 p.m. - Family Game Night! Bring a snack to share, and we'll enjoy board games and cards at the library.

Dec. 31 - Jan. 1 - THE LIBRARY WILL BE CLOSED for New Year's, reopening Jan. 2.

Moon Lake Library
4607 Hwy 117 • Mentone AL • 256-634-2127
Tues-Fri 12 - 4:30 p.m. • Sat 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
moonlakelibrary.org • books@moonlakelibrary.org

Come join the fun at the

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COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

Saturday, Feb. 1, 2025
10 a.m.-2 p.m. & 5-9 p.m.

MOON LAKE GYM

.....

Kids' activities • Cake Walk • Crock-Pot Cookoff
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.....

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Valley Head Happenings

Let's Celebrate Christmas

BY MAYOR KAREN VEST

Our November council meeting was well attended, and several key actions were voted on. Among those was a \$20,000 donation to the Valley Head High School Rebuild 2025 campaign. These funds will be earmarked for the high school softball field renovation. We voted unanimously to make this donation toward their goal of raising \$130,000.

The council also voted to make a donation of \$250 to the annual Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots 2024 Christmas campaign. Last year, the DeKalb County chapter distributed 11,982 toys to 1,625 local children.

Longtime council member Jack Martin submitted his resignation due to recent health issues, and the council voted to accept his resignation. A new council member will be voted in during our December 2 meeting. You must live within the city limits of Valley Head to be considered for this seat.

The Valley Head Christmas Festival will be Sunday, Dec. 8, beginning at noon. Retail and food vendors will set up around the square and on the field across from town hall. The tree lighting ceremony will take place at 4 p.m. at the front door of the police station/town hall. The Christmas

Parade will begin at 5 p.m. at Valley Head School. Lineup is at 4:30 p.m., and the parade will wind down Railroad Avenue, across the tracks, and around the town square. This is a free family event for everyone. Santa Claus will be there all afternoon for photos with the children (and adults). Last year the Grinch, Mrs. Claus, and even Cindy Lou Who joined in the festivities. Students will create gingerbread houses, which will be displayed at the Valley Head Masonic Lodge. We will play everyone's favorite Christmas carols all afternoon. The town has purchased all new Christmas decorations and we can't wait for everyone to see them. See you all on Sunday, Dec. 8!

We have winterized and closed the restrooms in Valley Head Park. Unfortunately, this is necessary during the winter months to keep vandalism to a minimum. We apologize for any inconvenience to our local residents who frequent our park.

The Valley Head Town Council meets on the first Monday of each month at 6 p.m. Our 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 the town hall no later than four business days prior to the meeting to complete the proper paperwork. 🐻



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Julie Clark
metal work/photography

Meredith Middleton
jewelry

Georgia Pollock
oil painting

Mark Issenberg
Lookout Mtn. pottery

Nikki Oliver
wood carved Santas

Bonnie Cayce
fiber art

Anna Cayce Smit
jewelry

Jayne James
decorative gourds

Beth Bradford
acrylic painting

Lizzie Caldwell
pottery/mixed media

Connie Ward
collage/mixed media

Kate Fisher
painted textile/leather

Painting

Pottery

Textiles

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Christmas Parade OPEN HOUSE

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December/January Community Events

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

December 5 • Holiday Open House – Join us for an exclusive holiday shopping experience at The Shop at the Little River Canyon Center. We are featuring extended hours, exclusive specials, complimentary gift wrap, sounds of the season & holiday treats. Little River Canyon Center 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

December 5 • Rainsville Christmas Parade at 5:30 p.m.

December 5 • Christmas with the Isaacs Northeast Alabama Community College presents Christmas with the Isaacs. Tom Bevill Lyceum on the NACC campus. Tickets can be purchased at nacc.edu or call 256-638-4418 ext. 2248. Starts at 7 p.m.

December 6 • Junior Ranger Adventure Series: Secrets of the Forest Floor – This once-a-month series 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. DSP Naturalist Brittney Hughes will be guiding this fun hike. This program will begin with an overview of the DSP Jr Ranger Program and will hike along different trails and focus on several topics in the booklet. About the hike: the hike is considered moderate because of the uneven, rocky terrain. Each month will utilize a different trail in the park, be beginner friendly, and be between 1 and 3 miles each. We will take our time, so this hike is good for all skill levels. We will explore along the trails of DeSoto State Park and discover who lives on the forest floor. What to bring: backpack with plenty of water, lunch, and snacks; a journal with a pen or pencil. Closed-toed shoes. 4 p.m. at DeSoto State Park, Fort Payne. 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. Email us OR pre-register here: <https://alapark.itinio.com/register/DSP-JR-Adventure>.

December 7 • Picture with Santa at Back Forty Ballroom – Join us at the Back Forty Ballroom for family pictures with Santa. 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

December 7 • Christmas @ the Cabin in Henagar – The night will begin with our annual lighted Christmas parade at 5 p.m. and will finish with entertainment, pictures with Santa, train rides, and delicious food from Crossover Cowboy Church at the Henagar Park as the parade ends. Be sure to visit Henagar Park throughout the month of December to see all the beautiful Christmas trees sponsored and decorated by members of our community. See you at the Cabin!

December 7 • Civilian Conservation Corps History Hike: Morris Branch Bridge – This incomplete bridge stands as a powerful testament to the commitment of the CCC in advancing the development of DeSoto State Park. Between the mid-1930s and early 1940s, the CCC undertook various stone projects in the park, including the construction of this bridge over Morris Branch. Their ambitious goal was to establish a direct highway connecting DeSoto State Park to May’s Gulf, which is today recognized as Little River Canyon. Regrettably, their honorable mission was left unfinished when the CCC disbanded in 1942. Take the opportunity to accompany DeSoto State Park staff as they delve into the history and significance of this remarkable endeavor. About the hike: the trail will be moderate, no major inclines, approximately 2.5 miles total. Meet at DeSoto State Park Lodge and car caravan to the trailhead in the Little River WMA Hike is from 10 a.m. -12:30 p.m. DeSoto State Park, Fort Payne. Meet at DeSoto Lodge Free and open to everyone, no-preregistration required. Weather dependent; please call the lodge at 256-845-5380 beforehand to check on status of walk. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details. www.alapark.com/desoto-state-park/hiking.

December 7 • Canyon Christmas – Join us for Canyon Christmas at the Little River Canyon Center, December 7, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. The fun begins with Story Time at 11 a.m. Santa arrives at 11:15 a.m. Get your picture taken with Santa and enjoy a free 4x6 photo print to take home. Bring the entire family; even your four-legged fur babies are welcome, just make sure they are on a leash. That Puppet Guy’s Christmas Puppet Show will be at 11:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. Meet the Canyon Center’s “Teacher Creatures” and see what each animal will be getting for Christmas at 12:15 p.m. Join us anytime from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. to hike the story book trail. Create special holiday crafts, enjoy a sweet treat and more throughout the event. You don’t want to miss this special day! All activities are free and open to the public. Call the Little River Canyon Center, 256-845-3548 for more information.

December 7 • Serious Skills Series: Creative Spirit Nature Art Workshop – Explore your wild creativity and discover ancient art with nature as your muse! For thousands of years, humans

have been creating art through nature. Our ancestors’ sacred relationship with the natural world prompted them to express themselves through the materials around them, in all seasons. In this workshop, participants will create works of art using a variety of natural materials, such as clay, leaves, acorns, pinecones, etc. Nature journaling supplies will also be available to create your own unique memory of your day in DeSoto State Park. (Bring your favorite journal if you wish.) Art forms such as watercolors, leaf pounding, leaf rubbings, and clay imprints. 2 p.m. - 5 p.m. Where: DeSoto State Park Nature Center next to DeSoto’s Country Store & Information Center on Co. Rd. 89. \$55 covers all supplies. Ages 12 to adult. Class space is limited to 10; pre-registration is required for attendance. <https://reserve.alapark.com/register/DSP-Creative-Spirit-Nature-Art>

December 7 • Parade and Christmas in Ider Town Park – We’re excited to announce that we are going to do Christmas in the Park directly after the Christmas Parade. There will be pictures with Santa, cocoa, and more. Please get the word out so the kids can come and tell Santa what they want for Christmas. 2:30 p.m. Ider Town Park

December 8 • Valley Head Christmas Parade at 5 p.m.

December 12 • Hike with a Naturalist – We will be hiking Powell Trail. This is a 2-mile trail in the Little River Canyon National Preserve. This hike is a strenuous journey with varying and steep terrain into the canyon. Cell phones may have little to no reception. Please wear footwear suitable for hiking; dress in layers; bring water, hiking poles, sun protection, and a snack! WEATHER: As with all outdoor events, if it’s raining/stormy or very poor trail conditions, we may have to cancel. If the weather is questionable, please check with the Canyon Center.

December 13 • Hollywood for the Holidays – You know Dasher and Dancer and Prancer and Vixen, and now you can see them on the NACC Gym stage! Hit the Holiday Road and join us for a walk down Christmas Memory Lane. Guaranteed to soften the heart of even the biggest Grinch. Featuring the NACC Chorus, Encore, Jazz Band, & Mustang String Band. 6:30 p.m.

December 13 • Fort Payne Christmas in the Park and Christmas Parade

December 13-14 • Christmas Vendor Event at Cool Tools & More – Join Cool Tools & More for an amazing Christmas Vendor Event. Find the perfect gift for family or friends. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

December 13-15 • Walk Through Bethlehem – Broadway Baptist Church in Rainsville. We have a newly designed city! Some script and character changes, but still the greatest story ever told! Join us as you take a walk through Bethlehem to experience what it would have been like the week that Jesus was born. Reservations are required but admission is free. The link for reservations is: <https://host.tablesready.com/p/book/add/bbcwtb>. Use this link and follow the steps to make your reservation. Please do not reserve more spaces than you need. You will receive a text confirmation once your reservation is confirmed. You may contact us through that text for any changes. We can’t guarantee being able to add more spots for you but we can delete unneeded ones to free up spaces. This is an outdoor event. It takes approximately 45 minutes to complete.

December 14 • Primitive Skills Natural Cordage & Pitch Glue – The Serious Skills series is a variety of classes and workshops that provide opportunities to discover a hidden talent or learn a new skill for personal enrichment. Classes are open to local residents, overnight guests, and park visitors. Create glue and cordage using only simple, natural elements! Scientists have written that cordage (string) and glue were not merely for making the lives of traditional cultures easier; they literally held their world together. In this workshop students will learn two important skills: how to process plant fibers to create cordage and how to combine natural elements to create glue. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. DeSoto State Park Country Store and Information Center on County Road 89. The \$85 fee includes all supplies. Class space is limited, pre-registration is required for attendance in this class. Pre-registration.

December 14 • Adventure Hike-DeSoto Falls Basin – Set out on an adventure hike with DeSoto State Park staff to the bottom of one of Alabama’s tallest waterfalls, DeSoto Falls! Learn about Little River, an outstanding water source with its clear water & plant & animal life. Discover the history of the area around DeSoto Falls in DeKalb County. This hike is approximately 1.5 miles total but considered moderate to strenuous due to the mountainous terrain and elevation. Will be hiking on rocky terrain down to the West Fork of Little River and walking upstream to the view of DeSoto Falls. 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. DeSoto State Park. Meet at DeSoto Falls Trailhead on County Road 613. Free & open to everyone; no-preregistration required. Weather-dependent, please call the lodge at 256-845-5380 beforehand to check on status of hike. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details. www.alapark.com/desoto-state-park/hiking.

December 14 • Nature’s Elements in Metal Art Workshop – The Serious Skills Series is open to local residents, overnight guests, and park visitors. Unleash your creativity as you design and create your own unique metal art piece inspired by the beauty of nature. Join artist Kevin Watson from Tintations for a fun workshop that utilizes reclaimed tin and barn wood. Make your own piece of art to hang at home or give to someone special. This class is for ages 14 to adult. What to Bring: Enthusiasm (all materials and tools needed to complete this project will be provided). Wear comfortable, casual clothing and bring drinks/snacks if you wish. This workshop emphasizes the use of hand tools; students should have moderate hand strength. 1 p.m.-3 p.m. at DeSoto State Park; location disclosed at time of registration Fee is \$40 and includes all supplies. Class space is limited; pre-registration is required. <https://www.littleriverartscouncil.org/metalarts2.html>.

December 14 • Fyffe Christmas Parade 12 p.m.

December 14 • Collinsville Christmas Parade 5 p.m.

December 14 • 6th Annual Mentone Community Tree Lighting –The annual Christmas tree lighting will take place beside the Mentone Inn. There will be caroling, hot chocolate, pictures with Santa, and more.

Dec 14 • Crossville Christmas Parade & Christmas in the Park 5:30 p.m.

December 14 • Geraldine Christmas Parade 6 p.m., followed by Christmas in the Park. Christmas Tree Trail, cocoa, pictures with Santa, cookie decorating, and more.

December 18 • Pictures with Santa – Santa Claus is coming to town! Serving hot cocoa all day. PLUS treats for kids with Santa visit from at Emblem Credit Union, Fort Payne. 4:30 p.m. -6:30 p.m! It’s sure to be a jolly time!

December 21 • Sylvania Christmas Parade at 1 p.m.

JANUARY

January 1 • First Day Hike – Start the New Year with a first day hike at DeSoto State Park! Join Desoto State Park and JSU Field Schools staff on a fitness hike along several trails in DeSoto State Park. Come on out and burn those calories while enjoying the great outdoors! See Lost Falls, Laurel Falls, Indian Falls, and more water features like Laurel Creek and the West Fork of Little River. Trail weaves through hardwood forest with sandstone outcroppings, streams, and wetlands. About the hike: the trail will be moderate, rocky terrain over approximately 3 miles. We will utilize the orange and blue trails for this hike. 10 a.m.-1 p.m. DeSoto State Park. Meet at DeSoto’s Country Store on County Road 89. Free & open to everyone, no-preregistration required. Weather-dependent; please call the lodge at 256-845-5380 beforehand to check on status of hike. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details. www.alapark.com/desoto-state-park/hiking Things to bring: plenty of water and/or sports drink, snacks/lunch, hiking poles/staff (optional), sturdy shoes (open-toe shoes are not recommended). Trail may be wet. Please be sure to dress appropriately according to seasonal temperatures/weather. No age restrictions on this hike; well-behaved dogs are allowed on a leash at all times.

January 4 • Winter Adventure Hike-DeSoto Falls Basin – Set out on an adventure hike with DeSoto State Park staff to the bottom of one of Alabama’s tallest waterfalls, DeSoto Falls! Learn about Little River, an outstanding water source with its clear water & plant & animal life. Discover the history of the area around DeSoto Falls in DeKalb County. About the hike: This hike is approximately 1.5 miles total but considered moderate to strenuous due to the mountainous terrain and elevation. Will be hiking on rocky terrain down to the West Fork of Little River and walking upstream to the view of DeSoto Falls. Meet at DeSoto Falls Trailhead on County Road 613. 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Free & open to everyone, no-preregistration required. Weather-dependent; please call the lodge at 256-845-5380 beforehand to check on status of hike. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details.

January 4 • Night Skies in Oil Class – Unleash your creativity under the stars in this immersive oil painting class focused on capturing the beauty of night skies! Perfect for beginners and seasoned artists alike, this course will introduce you to a variety of techniques to create breathtaking nocturnal landscapes. No prior art experience is required – just bring your enthusiasm and a willingness to experiment. Each session will include hands-on demonstrations and ample time for practice, ensuring you leave with a solid understanding of oil painting techniques that you can use in your own future projects. 2 p.m.-5 p.m. DeSoto State Park Nature Center next to DeSoto’s Country Store & Information Center on Co. Rd. 89. The \$100 fee includes all supplies. Ages 12 to adult. Class space is limited to 10, pre-registration is required for attendance in this class. <https://www.littleriverartscouncil.org/nightskies.html>.

January 9 • Snake Tales “Jeopardy” – Join DeSoto State Park staff and a few special scaly guests as we unravel the mysteries of Alabama’s snake species through a fun and interactive “Jeopardy”-style game. Did you know Alabama is home to over 50 snake species, ranging from the northern mountains to the sandy shores? While these creatures play a crucial role in our ecosystem, they are often misunderstood and feared. We will try to turn those fears into fascination! Discover how to identify different snake species and understand their importance in maintaining ecological balance. 10 a.m.-11 p.m. Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on Co. Rd. 89. Free & open to everyone; no-preregistration required.

January 11 • Bear Tales “Jeopardy” –Did you know that in Alabama, the yearly cycle for black bears starts in February? This is the time when the female bears, known as sows, give birth to their adorable cubs snug inside their cozy dens. Black bears are native to Alabama and their population is on the rise. Historically found in the southwest area of the state, bears have been migrating into Northeast Alabama from Northwest Georgia over recent years. In their wake are myths, tall tales, and misconceptions. Join DeSoto State Park staff to learn about Alabama’s State Mammal, the black bear! Test your knowledge, learn new facts, and discover the important role black bears play in our ecosystem with a fun & interactive “Jeopardy”-style game. 4 p.m.-5 p.m. Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on Co. Rd. 89. Free and open to everyone; no-preregistration required. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details.

THE FOOD PANTRY
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Dine-in & Carry-out

Mentone Centenarian *(continued from page 1)*

when I look back, you wanted to get out and do something for the war effort,” she said. “I had a hard time getting a job, because I wasn’t old enough. You had to be 18 to do any war work. I finally did get a job in the watch factory. I gauged jewels [measured their thickness]. My mother worked in the watch factory. I heard through the watch factory that they had women who painted with radium. I just asked my boss if I could get into that. He said sure, but first you have to show me that you can paint inside the lines,” she said. “They did painting with radium during WWI, and they didn’t know how dangerous radium was. Women painted their lips with radium, so when you smiled, you were pretty ... but they got smarter during WWII.”

Helen began the job of painting clock dials, which lasted eight months. By the second world war, those who worked with radium sharpened the tips of their paintbrushes not with their lips, as had previously been the case, but by dipping their brushes into paint thinner in order to reduce contact with radium dust.

“We had what they called the radium room. It was just one big room, but every girl had her own cubicle. We learned not to point [sharpen] your paintbrush with your mouth.”

MIT in Boston monitored the women every three months, Helen said, to check their radium levels. She once had to leave work for two weeks due to her elevated level of radium. For a time afterward, a supervisor stood behind her to observe her work and deter-



Helen Coutu circa 1940

mined that she was wiping her face and spreading the radium on her skin.

During the workday, she explained, if an employee needed to take a break or use the restroom, they passed through what was called a black room, where ultraviolet light could detect radium.

“If you glowed, you washed your hands in paint thinner.”

She was not afraid of the job, she said. It was a way to help during the war.

Son Armand Jr. says that he knew as a child of the work his mother had done during the war.

“I was aware of it, because MIT used to monitor her and the other technicians years after the work,” he says. “Women used to wear eyeshadow and lipstick with radium in it. They learned later that it wasn’t such a good idea.”

Helen was married to Armand Coutu, of French Canadian descent, in 1943. Armand was training in the Air Force, so they moved around a bit, as military couples do — first to Riverside, California, then to Albuquerque, and later a handful of other cities and towns.

“That’s what we girls did, when they shipped your husband, there you went,” she said.

In fact, they moved many times due to Armand’s work. She took the big geographical shifts in stride. She had to focus on raising her children, but she always valued the people she met along the way, she says, as part of the fabric of her story.

The couple eventually separated. Armand Jr., who was living in Mentone, suggested his mother move to Mentone.

“I had been up here once. I thought it was a beautiful spot.”

Reaching the century mark has taken her quite by surprise. She credits her longevity to sensible eating.

“I never knew I was going to hit 100. Nobody in my family ever hit that age. Sometimes I think maybe it was the era I was brought up in. It was during the Depression. There wasn’t McDonald’s, there wasn’t Coke. It seems everything we had to eat was fresh. I think maybe it has to do with what I ate.”

Helen’s grandparents worked at a farm with orchards and dairy cattle. Her family ate vegetables and fresh fruits.

“I’m at an age where I could eat anything I want. But I still try to watch what I eat.”

She talked about life and her future

in a pragmatic way. She feels as though she has grown wiser over the years, matter-of-factly saying she isn’t smarter, but perhaps able to navigate whatever life brings.

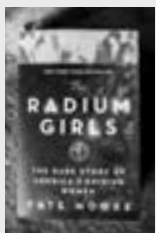
“I’ve asked the Lord, why me? Why am I still alive? Well, people say He still has something for you to do.”

“I tell all the nurses who come in: life is like a roller-coaster. It’s up and down. I tell them, one thing they need to do is stay in touch with their mothers. Visit them. Even if you don’t get along ... try.”

She advises the same for any fellow human being: If you are at odds with someone, go to them and make amends if you can.

Most important to her is the ability to remain able to remember her children growing up and reflect on what they have done as adults. She doesn’t want to lose any more independence, but she is resigned to the need to leave her home.

Since this interview, Helen moved to an assisted living facility in Gadsden. She made a point of taking the photo of her favorite dog that passed away a while back. She is doing well and receiving good care, according to her son, Armand Jr. 🐾



To learn more about the “shining women” and their battle for workers’ rights, read **The Radium Girls** by Kate Moore, available at the Moon Lake Library.

NACC’s Vocal Ensemble Is Now a Non-Credit Class

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

Education returned to the Moon Lake campus earlier this year when Northeast Alabama Community College announced plans to offer classes at the historic school. Students of various ages enrolled in the music, writing, and English classes offered there by NACC.

For the upcoming spring semester (January 7 - May 1) the vocal ensemble class will be a non-credit course.

“This will make it easier for people who want to sing in a choir but don’t want to go through the registration process and receive college credit,” says Dean of Student Services Jeff Hawes.

Admissions and financial aid representatives from NACC will be available at the Moon Lake campus on Tuesday, Dec. 10, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. to help people register for this and other classes.

Dr. Kathy Adkins will continue to teach the vocal ensemble course. She was part of the famed Forester Sisters, who charted five number-one hits and 15 total top-ten hits on the Billboard Hot Country charts in the 1980s and 1990s. The three-time Grammy-nominated group was named Group of the Year by the Academy of Country Music in 1986. Adkins has taught extensively at elementary, high school, and college levels and has received numerous awards for her service and leadership.

“We are very excited about providing these courses at Moon Lake School in Mentone,” NACC President Dr. David Campbell stated upon announcing the classes this summer. “We are starting with courses that we think will be

beneficial to traditional students and life-long learning community members as well. We will equip our classrooms on the Moon Lake campus with the education technology that is used in higher education instruction, just as we do on our campus.”

The Town of Mentone owns the campus and worked closely with NACC to prepare classrooms for the college. “This is a tremendous benefit for our community, and just the beginning of great things to come from this partnership,” said Mayor Rob Hammond. “We encourage everyone to consider these classes, especially those who want to sing in an ensemble led by such a talented and experienced instructor as Dr. Adkins.”

Below is the class schedule for the spring semester. To enroll or learn more, visit the NACC classrooms at Moon Lake on December 10, or visit nacc.edu. 🐾

Music Appreciation (MUS 101)
3 credits
Tues, Thurs from 9-10:15 a.m.

English Composition II (ENG 102)
3 credits
Tues, Thurs from 10:30-11:45 a.m.

Creative Writing II (ENG 247)
3 credits
Tues, Thurs from 9-10:15 a.m.

Vocal Ensemble noncredit (\$25)
Tuesday at 10:30-11:45 a.m.

Going Nuts for Education Valley Head Women’s Club

BY ANNA MAE HORN

Each spring, two Valley Head High School seniors receive \$500 scholarships from the Valley Head Area Women’s Club. Each fall, the women’s club raises funds for these scholarships through a bake sale and a pecan sale.

Thank you to everyone who made this year’s bake sale a success! It is held annually on the Saturday before Thanksgiving. If you missed it this year, go ahead and mark your calendar to make your holiday baking a little easier.

The pecan sale starts as soon as the pecans are delivered in early November and continues until they are all sold. These are fresh-crop pecans packaged and shipped immediately to the club. You can choose between deliciously fresh pieces or mammoth halves. If you go nuts for education, contact me at the number below.

Now you may be asking, “What is the Valley Head Area Women’s Club?” The club began in 1930 with women from the local area (not just Valley Head). For decades, it was part of a larger women’s federation. However, for the past several decades, it has

been an individual club to keep funds local. We meet once a month and have a program on a variety of local topics, including other local organizations, women’s health, and our local history.

In recent years, the women’s club fundraising has focused solely on scholarships for Valley Head School. Prior to that, funds were used for a variety of projects. Larger scholarship programs were supported. The Church Street and Council Tree signs were erected. Donations were made to the local school band and libraries, DeKalb Mental Health Association, and the Child Advocacy Center, to name a few.

In December, we gather for a joyous Christmas meal with all of our spouses. In spring, our programs will include talks from Valley Head Mayor Karen Vest, Landmarks of DeKalb, and a health presentation about osteoarthritis. Each meeting includes refreshments and is filled with chatter among friends. If you are interested in our club or want to purchase pecans, I would love to hear from you. 🐾

Anna Mae Horn is president of the Valley Head Area Women’s Club and can be reached by call or text at 256-635-8775.





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Companion Volume to “Hidden Mentone” Coming in December

“Hidden Mentone Volume 2” will debut December 12 with a book launch party from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Mentone Arts Center. The book is a sequel to “Hidden Mentone Volume 1,” a gem that has sold over 500 copies in local Mentone businesses.

Deedee Morrison and Elizabeth Thornell helped with editorial, shoot scheduling, and marketing. All photos were shot by Lesa and David Cummings, who moved to Mentone last year and were amazed at the photographic possibilities of this unique community.

These four authors wanted to capture a contemporary visual history of Mentone and surrounding areas that can be cherished for generations to come.

Buy your copy of “Hidden Mentone Volume 2” for \$28 plus tax at the Mentone Arts Center, Mentone Market, Hatter Cafe, Little River Arts Council Gallery, and the Little River Canyon Center. Copies of Volume 1 are still available as well. Share the magic of Mentone with your friends and family for Christmas! 🐻



Let's celebrate together!

THE LIGHTING OF THE PARK

Please join us for a new Mentone tradition

DECEMBER 10TH

Mason Edward Park
(across from Elevation)

Pictures with Santa: 4:30-6pm
Lighting of the park: 5:15 pm
Hot dogs and hamburgers: 6pm
(bring cash)

ALL FOOD PROCEEDS GO TO THE MENTONE FIRE DEPARTMENT

ON-FARM MARKET

Our final Friday Market dates for the 2024 season are listed below:

December 6, 13 - Open 2-5pm CT
December 20 - Final Market of 2024

Our on-farm market will re-open in the spring of 2025. Please contact us if you are interested in purchasing our products during the winter season!

(256)-674-3639 or info@thefarmatwindyhill.com

Follow us on Instagram and Facebook for our most up-to-date information.

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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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Eagle Scout Project at Moon Lake

Earlier this year, longtime Laney camper and now counselor Matthew Hough from Atlanta expressed interest in doing his Eagle Scout project in Mentone. Matthew took on the project of staining the structure around the white oak tree in front of the historic Moon Lake School. He had help from his parents, as well as Police Chief Gene

McKee and Public Works Director Paul Nail. A few Laney counselors who had worked with Matthew took their lunch break at father/son weekend to help. Matthew gave a special shout-out to local scouts Jeremiah and Jonah Gilbert, saying, “They were a huge help and super committed to getting the whole structure finished.”



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The

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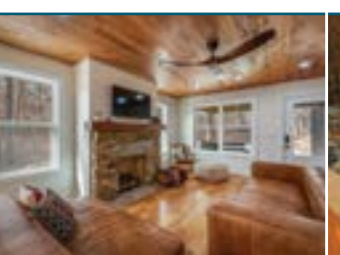
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