



THE GROUNDHOG

“Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain”

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

Snow Turns Mentone into Winter Wonderland

Readers Share Their Photos During a Weekend of White

BY REBECCA HENDERSON

Just as the forecasters predicted, a band of snow fell across our state the weekend of January 10, followed by slush and wintry mix as temperatures rose during the day, and ice set in at nightfall, forcing roads and many businesses to close. By most measures, some 2 to 3 inches of snow blanketed our part of the state, and it showed no signs of a quick melt over the weekend. Cloudmont Ski & Golf began making snow at sunrise on Friday the 10th, bringing eager skiers and snowboarders out to test their mettle. And as of press time, the slopes were in full swing due to consistently cold weather. Luckily, folks relished the chance to capture the frozen scenes with their cameras. We asked and you delivered your unique perspectives of the frozen scenes around you. Thanks for sharing your snow memories with us! ❄️



Photo by Timo Antero Onjikka



Photo by Rebecca Henderson

(For more snow photos, see Page 5)

Mentone Native Receives Lifetime Achievement Award

GROUNDHOG STAFF

Fred Johnson’s remarkable life began with his upbringing in Mentone and led to a career that has connected thousands of Alabamians to world-class broadband. Along the way, his influence has helped shape telecommunications policy at the state and national levels. Johnson, the son of Mentone’s James and Betty Joe (Jones) Johnson, was honored in January with the Fort Payne Chamber of Commerce “V.I. Prewett Lifetime Achievement Award.” This award honors individuals whose extraordinary vision, leadership, and dedication have profoundly shaped their communities. Much like its namesake, this award recognizes those who have driven transformative change, fostering growth, employment, and prosperity in their region. Fred Johnson has dedicated over 42 years to advancing rural utilities and communications, with 23 years as CEO of Farmers Telecommunications Cooperative (FTC). Under his visionary leadership, FTC has evolved into a nationally recognized provider of cutting-edge rural broadband services, pioneering advancements such as Alabama’s first widely deployed gigabit internet service. His career began in public accounting and financial roles in rural utilities, culminating in his transformative tenure at FTC. Taking the helm during a pivotal period, he reshaped the cooperative’s strategy, guiding it from traditional telephone services to a forward-thinking telecommunications enterprise with



a 100% optical fiber-to-the-premise network. A respected industry advocate, Fred has served on numerous boards, including as chair of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association and a member of the Alabama 9-1-1 Board, where he drove significant policy reforms. Known for his ability to inspire and connect, Fred’s influence extends beyond FTC to state and national arenas, where his expertise is frequently sought by policymakers. Johnson’s dedication to community growth, innovative leadership, and unwavering commitment to improving lives through technology make him a deserving recipient of the V.I. Prewett Lifetime Achievement Award. His legacy is one of transformation, resilience, and profound impact on the people and communities he serves. The Chamber was set to award the V.I. Prewett Lifetime Achievement Award to Johnson at its annual awards banquet on January 28, 2025. ❄️

Jones Remembered for Love of Family, Football, and Horses

GROUNDHOG STAFF

Ronnie Jones, a friend to so many in the community and a beloved husband, father, grandfather, son, and brother, passed away at his Mentone home on December 4 at age 70. He leaves a legacy of family known and loved by many and a life blessed with passion for his work, his farm, and his hobbies. If he loved it, he excelled in it. He was preceded in death by his father, Edward Daniel Jones. He is survived by his wife of 44 years, Gail Sprayberry Jones, and their daughters, Kristen Lee Jones, Candace Lynn Jones McKelvy (Chad), and Jessica Elaine Jones. Also, his mother, Dean Jones, sisters Amanda Shirey (Mike) and Tricia Martin (Jay), and grandchildren Clay and Parker McKelvy. Ronnie Jones was a graduate of Auburn University, where he earned a B.S. in business administration. He went on to work in the sale of industrial and special gases for Selox Corporation in Chattanooga — an industry he would remain in for 42 years before retiring from Airgas last June. Jones played offensive tackle for the ‘72-’76 Auburn Tigers football squad. His love of the gridiron didn’t stop there — he went on to officiate in the game, first with the Alabama High School Sports Athletic Association and eventually with the powerhouse Southeast Conference. Not only did Jones love horses,



but just as he had with the game of football, he served as a leader in that sport as well. For several years he was head trail boss for the Alabama Wagon Train, an annual trek from Boaz to Montgomery by horseback and wagon, which drew enthusiasts from across the nation. He also served several terms as president of the Alabama Quarter Horse Association, receiving the Pioneer Horseman Award in 2023. Jones’ late father, Ed Jones, was president of Bankhead Cemetery until his death 20 years ago, and son Ronnie assumed that position when his father passed away, Gail Jones said. Gail and Ronnie have supplied camp horses to Riverview Camp the past 17 years, as well as raising registered Polled Hereford cattle on their family farm. Above all, Ronnie Jones loved spending time with his family. He will be missed by all who knew him. ❄️



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 Work Continues on Infrastructure Projects

BY MAYOR ROB HAMMOND

We are one step closer to finishing our sidewalk project in Mentone. As I shared in the previous issue of The Groundhog, December 20 was the date set for opening bids for the sidewalk project’s next phase. The low bid was from Avery Landscaping and Associates, LLC, at \$519,303.

This project has been made possible by Transportation Alternative Program, or TAP, grants through the Alabama Department of Transportation. These are 80/20 grants, which means the Town of Mentone will pay \$103,860 for the second phase.

The latest phase will extend from Dempsey Avenue to Moon Lake Library. It will include a crosswalk and bring the total sidewalk length to approximately 1.5 miles.

The first phase, measuring just less than a mile, ran from downtown to Dempsey Avenue. It included a crosswalk at Mentone Market. It has been heavily used by residents and visitors alike.

Speaking of grants, we continue to work on securing a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission to make much-needed improvements to the Moon Lake Village campus. I’ll keep you informed on our progress through the pages of The Groundhog.

On January 14, the Fort Payne Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon cutting for Moon Lake Kitchen, the newest business to join the Moon Lake Village



campus. This Creole and Cajun restaurant has been a popular attraction for locals and visitors alike since its opening.

Having a good restaurant as an anchor tenant is important for the campus, which is owned and operated by the town. A restaurant draws more people to the campus, who in turn spend time visiting the shops and galleries there. This also, of course, helps the town’s tax base. Everyone wins. I hope you make a point to visit with Robie and his family at Moon Lake Kitchen soon, and visit everyone across the campus while you are there.

By the time you read this, the Groundhog Day Community Celebration will be getting started or wrapped up. Set for Saturday, February 1, it will feature games and art activities for kids, a Crock-Pot Cook-off, and an old-fashioned Cake Walk. 🍪

Ribbon Cutting for Moon Lake Kitchen



Moon Lake Kitchen: Gathered on January 14 for the official ribbon cutting ceremony of Mentone’s new Creole restaurant are owners Robie and Amanda York and their son Carson, joined by Mayor Rob Hammond, members of the Fort Payne Chamber of Commerce, and local residents. The Yorks offered samples from the menu to all who came to support them

From the Editor Why I Believe in Living a Rare Life

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

Ten years ago, I did what few patients do — I walked upright, of my own volition, into the neuro intensive care unit of a Birmingham hospital. My legs were not the problem. Mobility was not the problem (not yet, anyway). I was there because the rare disease I had been diagnosed with a few months earlier was shutting down my ability to speak, chew, and swallow.

And things were about to get a lot worse. I had been diagnosed a few months earlier with the neuromuscular disease “myasthenia gravis.” The coming weeks would find me in ICU, on a ventilator, and released with a feeding tube dangling from my stomach after almost two months in the hospital. This would not be my last ICU visit, intubation, or myasthenic crisis.

But here I am, 10 years beyond diagnosis and ready to celebrate Rare Disease Day. Held annually at the end of February, it’s designed to raise awareness of rare diseases and advocate for equal access to care for those affected by them. This year’s date is February 28; and you can learn more at rarediseaseday.org.

I have a saying that serves as a mantra for me: “Live Life Rare!” It has a double meaning. It acknowledges that I’m making the most of a life with a rare disease. It also reminds me to never settle for the mundane, the boring, or the ho-hum.

After all, even a dead fish can float downstream, right? Why be ordinary when you can live a rare life? You may have limitations (don’t we all?), but “live life rare” encourages us to find a way to squeeze joy from the little moments, make big moments happen, and choose to find the blessings in every day we are given.

I have learned much about living with a rare disease since my diagnosis, and have much to learn still. But beyond that, I hope my story can help others who are in the early stages of navigating a challenging journey, whatever it may be.

We all have our battles, health-related or not, and we all have a choice to make. Are we going to let life happen to us, or are we going to be intentional about living a life of uncommon adventure, love, and fulfillment? Those are personal questions that every person has to answer. 🍪

KNOW A VOLUNTEER HERO?

Our community stands out as a place where people care about their neighbors, about their natural surroundings, about people in other communities who have suffered in crisis, and about fostering a richer culture for all to enjoy.

So many give their time and talents selflessly, and The Groundhog would like to recognize them as Groundhog Volunteer Heroes. But we need your help! We invite our readers to nominate someone who donates their time and talents, no matter how small or large the cause may be. Nominations will be accepted anytime, and we hope to highlight one in each issue.

Our area is rich with inspiring people — help us spread the word about what they’re doing!

Thanks in advance for your support of those who support others!

Come join the fun at the

GROUNDHOG DAY

COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

Saturday, Feb. 1, 2025

Moon Lake Gym

10 a.m.-2 p.m. (Cook-off & Kid's Activities) & 5-9 p.m. (Dance)



Then and Now — Proud to Be a Camp Laney Boy

BY BEN SHURETT

It’s hard to outrun your shadow, not that I’d want to in this case. It was midsummer of 1960, and I was 9 years old, still sporting the then very stylish hairstyle we called a flattop. (See the photo for proof.) I’m front row, center, a proud member of the Possum Hollow Crew. It’s incredible to realize that I was at Camp Laney one year before current owner Rob Hammond began his 50-year tenure there. The camp, founded and run by Coach Malcom Laney and his wife, Louise, has been part of my DNA for 64 years, but that’s not news. The camp experience becomes a part of who you are, even if you were there for one year, like me, or if it becomes your lifetime endeavor, like it is for Rob Hammond and his wife, San.

Coach Laney was a legendary high school coach at Birmingham’s Woodlawn High School. He has been inducted into several sports halls of fame. Winning five state championships in 10 years will bring some plaques your way, and each was deserved. I was fortunate to cross paths with him at my hometown church in Tuscaloosa. He had founded Camp Laney in 1959 and had quite a few fellows from Tuscaloosa attend in those early years. Coach Laney used his coaching connections all across the state to find the best counselors. They, in turn,

recruited kids from their own towns to fill up cabins such as Possum Hollow, Skunk Bunk, Kangaroo Sac, and Hawk Haven. I still cruise by Possum Hollow numerous times each year. I tell my buddy and Mentone Mayor Hammond I’m doing a welfare check on Possum Hollow when my Mary and I ride through the Laney campus. We can only do that when camp isn’t in session, of course, and everyone knows it’s not a welfare check. It’s a time when I can leave the present outside the gates of Camp Laney and cruise back to 1960 for just a moment or two, remembering camp activities such as Capture the Flag and other games. The boys of the camp then were divided into two tribes – the Apaches and the Commanches. I was a sneaky Apache, trying to grab the flag of those stealing, lying, no-good Commanches.

These drives to reminisce a bit spur such great memories, and there are times I can almost smell chicken frying like it did every Sunday – the day we wrote letters home to our parents and told them how good the food was. I only attended one summer. By the summer of 1961, I had already embarked on a newspaper career – I had a paper route and worked every summer thereafter until I was 63. But Camp Laney continues to touch my life. About four years ago, one of those no-good Commanches, Eric Sieb,



Rob Hammond, left, and Eric Sieb

made a return trip to Camp Laney. Eric brought his wife, Claudia, all the way from Phoenix to see Camp Laney. He’d told her the same types of stories I’d told Mary for so many years, and Eric and Claudia both wanted to see if the magic was still there. It was and it still is. The Siebs and the Shurett family have become great friends since their first trip here together, and that’s just another blessing Laney has brought us. And our Phoenix friends have fallen in love with this part of Lookout Mountain, so much so that they will break ground on their new home in McLemore in a couple of months. It’s another gift from Camp Laney. Camp Laney has given me much in



Author Shurett, center of the front row

the past 60+ years. It taught me that homesickness isn’t fatal. I learned that a 9-year-old lad could fall in love at a camp dance with Camp Skyline. I knew I should have asked her name when we danced because I couldn’t find her when we had a second dance. Mentone is so blessed to have a number of camps for boys and girls here atop our beautiful mountain, and everyone who has ever spent part of their youth here has many special memories of the Mentone Magic. It lasts forever. 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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Be Patient. Love Wins... Always!

BY DEJOLY LABRIER

I participate in a yoga class twice a week at the Presbyterian church in Cloudland, Georgia. We're mostly seniors, but everyone is welcome to play with us. It's a fun activity, and it has given me the opportunity to build relationships with other women my age. We care for each other. The class helps me maintain my peace of mind when the world "out there" is swirling in chaos and negativity.

Last summer, three kittens appeared from under the meeting hall as we arrived for our afternoon class. A grey torti, an orange, and a solid grey. My experience as the assistant director of a humane society with a spay/neuter clinic told me that we were looking at a female torti and two males. They were very shy and looked to be around 12 weeks old.

We watched them play and grow and become less afraid of us and our yoga mats. They often came close enough to almost touch their heads. And the caretaker of the hall came daily to feed them. By late October, I began to voice my concern that the church would be overwhelmed with more cats if they didn't catch them and get them spayed and neutered. At the same time, I said that if the grey cat were neutered, I would gladly adopt him.

Well, Earl Grey (Mr. T) became my new companion a few days before Christmas. He was actually my invisible companion for a few days, because as soon as I opened the carrier to let him out in my house, he quickly disappeared without a trace!



I only knew he was there because I could see he was eating the food in his dish and the litter box was being used (thankfully).

I practiced patience and continued to feed him and clean his box. I remembered that he was semi-feral and it might take some time for him to come around.

Several years ago, I was dog sitting a Great Pyrenees that charged the door with excitement whenever anyone came to visit. Even his owners were struggling with how to handle this challenging situation. Instinctively, I began to patiently read to him each evening, and he began to trust me to train him to sit and stay. It was a big success, so I tried the same technique on my little Earl.

Soon he came out of hiding and peeked around the corner of my bed as I sat on the floor reading aloud to him. Each day of reading brought more progress. Earl began spending more time out in the open. I moved

his food to the kitchen from the bathroom. After a couple weeks, his curious nature helped him get the courage to lie beside me on the sofa. Methodically, I began to stroke him with the brush, and he loved it!

Here we are a month later, and my love for him and his trust in me has grown. Earl now finds my lap to be a comfortable place to sleep and has even greeted me in the morning with a head bob while I languish in bed for a few extra minutes.

My learning is that love always wins, in the smallest of situations and in the larger scheme of things. Love brought Earl around to trusting me, and with patience, love will transform the most seemingly impossible situations.

This Valentine's Day, I will celebrate with a special tribute to the love of a cat.

May you know that you are loved and appreciated. 🐾

January Meeting Recap: MERF and More

BY ANNA MAE HORN

The January meeting of the Valley Head Area Women's Club enlightened the attendees of the many contributions that MERF makes to the local community. MERF Executive Director Alyce Kenney was the speaker for the program in the newly renovated Hazel Huntsinger Community Room at Moon Lake Library. The room is very convenient and comfortable, with plenty of space. Children's artwork from previous MERF auctions line the wall.

Alyce gave a wonderful talk about all things MERF and how long the arms of MERF stretch around the community. MERF provides Senior Lunches with an element of education and a place for socialization. They also provide local scholarships, introduce students to live productions, and support educational enrichment in a variety of ways. MERF funds provide an art teacher and supplies for the local elementary school. The MERF Pathway to Community is always open for everyone. Alyce also informed the club members that the MERF House is under renovation and, once completed, will fulfill the need for community space and activities. We appreciate all that Alyce and MERF do for the community.

After the program, the club held its regular meeting. Club members were excited to have several visitors this month. Everyone present introduced themselves, which led to lively conversation enjoyed by all.

Members voted to donate funds for a MERF luncheon on March 26 and supply brownies for dessert. This is a great opportunity for the club to support the community. Members also voted to increase the two annual scholarships for graduating students from Valley Head School. The 2025 scholarships will be \$700 each. Applications will open in April.

Mayor Karen Vest will be the speaker for our next meeting, scheduled for February 19. We look forward to hearing about everything that is happening in Valley Head. If you would like to join or be a guest at a meeting, we would love to hear from you. 🐾

Anna Mae Horn is president of the Valley Head Area Women's Club and can be reached at 256-635-8775.



Meeting attendees use beautiful art as a backdrop. Standing L-R: Lethea Cortner, Marsha Merrell, Guest Speaker Alyce Kenney, Anna Mae Horn, Judy O'Daniel, and Nena Fellger. Sitting L-R: Sarah Chastain and visitors Karen Vest and Bonita Gaston.

Northeast Alabama Seniors To Save on Prescriptions in 2025

Some 3,237 people in northeast Alabama will collectively save more than \$3.4 million in 2025 on their Medicare insurance premiums and prescription medications, thanks to the Alabama State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) administered through the TARCOG Area Agency on Aging. TARCOG is an acronym for Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments.

This year, the program served 488 more people and saved almost \$1 million more than last year during the Medicare Open Enrollment period between October and December, said TARCOG's Director of Aging Programs Sheila Dessau-Ivey.

SHIP is an important program, because change is inevitable in people's lives. For example, one client faced \$282,000 in medication charges under his existing prescription plan

for 2025 because of a recently diagnosed condition. The client's 2024 prescription plan didn't cover any of the new medications he needed. After he met with SHIP Resource Coordinator Teresa Hazzard, she found a plan that dropped his total medication cost for the year to \$2,000.

There are many plans out there, and they all offer different coverages. Hazzard said she and the other coordinators compare a client's medication list across the different plans and find the most cost-effective option.

"I love it, because when you look at that savings number, that's money that is going back into our clients' pockets that they can spend on other needs," Hazzard said.

The TARCOG region team responsible for helping with open enrollment included: Hazzard, who works out of TARCOG's headquarters in Hunts-

ville; Kathryn Kestner from Studio 60 Senior Center in Huntsville in Madison County; Veronica Woodall in Jackson County; Lynn Hixon and Emily McCamy in DeKalb County; Tammy McElroy, Susan Bishop, and Kennedy Cooper in Marshall County; and Heidi Stinnett, Carla Sims, and Helen Carter in Limestone County.

Together, the regional counselors met or talked with 3,237 seniors during the 2024 open enrollment period. The total savings for those clients during 2025 will amount to \$3,404,862.06. The next opportunity to take advantage of the free service offered by TARCOG will be during Medicare Open Enrollment, Oct. 15 through Dec. 7, 2025. If anyone has questions before then, they can reach Teresa Hazzard at 256-830-0818. 🐾

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Dine-in & Carry-out



Fun Times at Cloudmont

BY DAVID CUMMINGS

After a January snow, everyone in Mentone wondered when Cloudmont Ski Resort would open. Since the 70s, Cloudmont has been an occasional winter tradition that delights locals and visitors from other states who enjoy Alabama’s only ski resort.

Facebook had rumors of a Friday opening. Then a Saturday 1 p.m. opening. At noon on Saturday, scores of folks started trickling in, dressed in all sorts of ski gear. There were new outfits, old ski clothes, blue jeans, and sweaters. Some folks brought their own ski gear, while others planned to rent the odd-lot assortment of skis and boots that this tiny operation had accumulated over the years.

Cindy Jones, the resort’s owner, had been making snow since Thursday night. It was a good base, but Friday’s snow made a difference. Evan Thibaud led a group of volunteers who had come to pitch in and run the day with no expectation of pay, just for

the love of helping friends ski. The atmosphere was great.

The first skiers up the rope tow dealt with an icy crust over the “made” and “natural” snow. It was called “an icy mess” by experienced skiers, and “how stinking cool” by excited first timers. First-time skiers were expected to take a short lesson to the side of the main hill, with explanations of the “pizza and french fry” angles of skis used by beginners. On the main hill, seasoned skiers were schussing down with parallel skis and relaxed form.

After an hour, the surface got better as the skiers crushed up the icy crust and mixed it up some. Parents of young children showed an almost religious zeal as they helped them learn.

At 4 p.m., the hill closed for two hours. The 6 p.m. night session would be a different mood under the lights of a cold winter night.

Interested observers noted a unique spirit of sharing and mutual enjoyment, and Mentone skiers rejoiced over this delightful local treasure. 🍷



First-timers are encouraged to take a lesson in basics and safety matters.



(L to R) Haley, Hemree, Reece, and Andrew Graham of Chattanooga. Andrew and Haley are lifelong skiers.



The rental shop was warm and busy. A varied selection of vintage equipment was available for rent.

Snow Photos *(continued from page 1)*



Photo by Rebecca Henderson



Photo by Juli Jordan



Photo by Mikel Yeakle



Photo by Cynthia Stinson



Photo by Mikel Yeakle

RIVER RIDGE ESCAPE

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After Little River Escape Tiny Home Community was named one of the top six communities to downsize in by *U.S. News & World Report*, this community has become fully occupied and folks have come from 12 different states to live within our community.

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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MERF Looks Ahead to a Busy February

BY ALYCE KENNEY

In a few short weeks, folks near and far will know if the Groundhog saw his shadow, therefore predicting the arrival of spring. But as I write, I am enjoying a purely beautiful winter wonderland outside the windows. The sunshine illuminating ice-covered branches, crystals glistening in the snow like diamonds, and pureness of white covering the land.

Winter like this gives us all the time to pause and rest for a reason. Before we know it, life will begin buzzing again with new obligations and plans and lists of “to-dos” that may or may not be crossed off. MERF has its own list for 2025. Here is a view of some of it.

February brings the start of the much-needed renovation of the MERF House.

When complete, the house will be ready to welcome all kinds of groups back to work and to play. Senior Lunches, board meetings, local clubs, and families will return to a safe and sturdy building. This is an exciting

venture for 2025, and we are eager to see it through. Last fall’s fund-raising newsletter brought us closer to our goal of securing some of the needed funds for construction. We thank each of you who generously contributed to MERF during the fall campaign. If you have not had an opportunity to donate yet, no worries — we welcome donations any time.

February also brings a trip to the Huntsville Symphony for the fourth-graders at Valley Head School. Each year, the symphony conducts Young People’s Concerts and offers free admission. This year’s show is titled, “Carnival of the Animals.” Providing field trips like this is one of the ways MERF brings music education to students who might not otherwise receive it.

Senior Lunches return in February on Wednesdays at Moon Lake Baptist Church. Businesses and individuals alike helped make last fall’s season of lunches a terrific success. This spring

season is planned to be just as wonderful. The seniors of our community come together to connect, to share their stories with friends old and new, and to enjoy a delicious meal while learning a bit about an interesting topic.

Senior Lunches began in the early days of MERF, and it is still happening because of the commitment and caring of our local businesses, camps, churches, and volunteers.

February also brings the MERF board and others together to plan Family Art Night at Valley Head School, which is being held March 15 this year. This evening brings the students, their families, and the public together to see the beautiful art created in teacher Caroline Moore’s classroom during the school year. Her passion and dedication has developed the inner artists in her students. It promises to be an amazing night. Providing an art program in Valley Head School is one of MERF’s most important programs.

And to wrap up the month, MERF

is launching its first-ever sponsorship campaign, which aims to achieve the financial goals of our non-profit organization for the foreseeable future. This is a new and exciting opportunity to have long-term financial support from our local corporate businesses and benefactors. We look forward to sharing more about this plan with you as the year continues.

A new year full of possibilities awaits all of us. We at MERF will continue to provide valuable programs and events for you, our local community and friends. We are only able to provide these programs with the dedication of time and energy from our many longtime volunteers. Whether you call it a list of resolutions or a “to-do” list, getting involved in your community in some way is a fantastic opportunity to do good and feel good. Give it some thought. MERF has a place for you. 🐻

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.



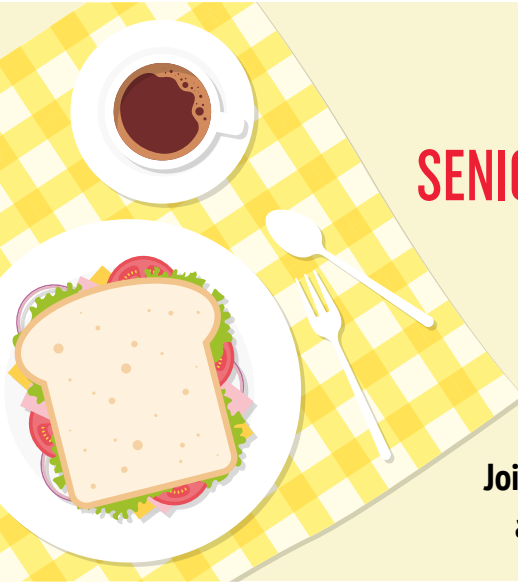


WE'RE LOOKING FOR YOU!

MERF needs volunteers to help with our annual Taste of the Mountain & Art Auction and help distributing The Groundhog to area businesses each month.

*Want to be a part of the excitement?
We need many hands to make it happen!*

▶▶ **TO VOLUNTEER or to learn more about opportunities to help, contact MERF at merf.mentone@gmail.com.**



Spring SENIOR LUNCH SCHEDULE

• February 12	• March 5
• February 19	• March 12
• February 26	• March 19
	• March 26

**Join us Wednesdays at 11:30 a.m.
at Moon Lake Baptist Church**



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Executive Director Job Search



MERF is in search of a new Executive Director. This is a great opportunity for a community-minded individual looking to apply their skills and experience to improving the quality of life and supporting life-long learning for citizens of all ages in the Mentone/Valley Head area.

MERF Executive Director Job Summary

The MERF Executive Director will direct all phases of the Mentone Educational Resources Foundation. This will include preparing for and attending monthly Board meetings, planning MERF activities, being present at MERF public events, and assisting the Board with raising funds. This is a part-time position that typically requires approximately 20 hours per week (some months will require more, some less).

The successful candidate will be a self-starter with the ability to work independently and within teams of volunteers and Board members. Bookkeeping experience is preferred, with an ability to manage financial records.

Other Key Duties:

- Monitor and report on MERF sponsored educational services performed at Valley Head School, including frequent communications with the MERF art and music teacher (contractor).
- Maintain office hours at the MERF House in Mentone; manage access to the MERF House and administer all maintenance needs
- Maintain a calendar of events available to Board members and other key volunteers
- Purchase MERF merchandise and distribute to retail locations
- Plan and manage MERF events, including fundraising events and community festivals, as directed by the MERF Board
- Maintain MERF online presence, including the MERF web site, Facebook page, and other social media as needed

TO APPLY: Please send your resume along with three references to Board President Kathryn Norris at merf.mentone@gmail.com. and Vice President Tom MacMichael at tcmacm1980@gmail.com. Include “Executive Director Job Search” as your subject line.



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Valley Head Happenings

A Christmas Festival to Warm All Hearts

BY MAYOR KAREN VEST

The Valley Head Town Council met January 6. Our first order of business was the swearing-in of our new council member, Nathan Owen, who was unanimously voted in last December. He will finish out the term for former member Jack Martin, who resigned in November. DeKalb County Circuit Clerk Todd Greeson performed the oath of office while Owen’s friends and family looked on.

Our town Christmas Festival was a hit! Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus, the Gingerbread Man, and the Grinch posed for photos with the children (and adults). We had over 20 vendors with all types of beautiful crafts and retail items. The two hot chocolate stations proved to be very popular with the young and old alike! Valley Head students displayed their gingerbread houses at the Masonic Lodge. Lea Long’s kindergarten won 1st place in the decorating contest, and Cindy Bethune’s second-grade class won 2nd place.

Both classes were treated to a pizza party provided by Valley Head Discount Food Mart. Bealey’s Signs won 1st place in our business Christmas window contest, receiving a fabulous gift card for our very own Tiger’s Inn restaurant. Second place was awarded to North DeKalb Primary Care, who received a beautiful pink poinsettia. The Christmas parade was well attended. Numerous floats and multiple first responders took part in the parade, along with members of the Valley Head football team, cheerleaders, and other school groups. It was a chilly, windy



Scenes from the Valley Head Christmas Festival.

night, and we appreciate all who participated and everyone who came out to watch.

The council voted unanimously to adopt an amended dog ordinance at the January 6 meeting. The public is welcome to ask for a copy. The new ordinance imposes penalties and fines for dog owners who violate the ordinance.

Also, a unanimous vote adopted an ordinance deeming the former Rib Shack building no longer needed for the town’s use. The building will be put on the market for sale in the very near future.

The Valley Head Volunteer Fire Department has received two new sets of turnouts to replace old sets. The new sets were funded by an \$8,000 grant



Valley Head Volunteer Fire Department received new sets of turnouts.

awarded by the Alabama Mountains, Rivers & Valleys RC&D Council. We would like to thank the council and Lester Black for funding this grant. We hope to raise additional money and apply for further funding to replace the eight additional sets of worn-out turnouts for our volunteers.

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 Town Hall no later than four business days prior to the meeting to complete the proper paperwork. 📧

TAD of Jazz

Returns to JSU Canyon Center

Get Ready for an unforgettable evening at the 8th Annual Winter Jazz Dinner Show! On Friday, February 21, 2025, the Little River Canyon Center will come alive with the smooth sounds of TAD of Jazz, back by popular demand to deliver a dazzling performance of contemporary and traditional jazz hits.

Doors open at 5:30 PM CST, with dinner served at 6:00 PM CST and the music kicking off at 7:00 PM CST. Treat your taste buds to an indulgent meal catered by Sweet T’s Event & Catering, featuring locally raised beef roast, savory sides, and decadent desserts. Bring your favorite beverages to elevate the experience.

Tickets are \$65 for adults and \$45 for students—available online, at the Canyon Center Gift Shop, or by phone at (256) 845-7213. Gather your friends and reserve a table for eight or more for a truly special evening. Don’t wait—reservations close on February 15, 2025, and this event sells out every year!

Admission includes both the gourmet dinner and electrifying live entertainment. Seating is first-come, first-serve, so arrive early for the best spot.

For more details, visit www.canyoncenter.org or call (256) 845-3548. Don’t miss the chance to make unforgettable memories—this is the Valentine’s gift everyone will love!. 📧



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Rhododendron Garden Club News

The Seed Swap is coming soon



BY MELLANIE TUTTLE

February may be the best month of the year as far as gardening goes. The hard work of planting in the fall is so worthwhile when those bulbs transition into their glory. The daintiness of purple, pink and white crocuses, and the showiness of daffodils truly support the theory “February is the border between winter and spring.” (Terri Guillemets)

The Seed Swap is back. Bring seeds, exchange seeds, buy a gardening book, and share ideas at the library on Feb. 15 between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Any seed and seed saver is welcome! Invasive plants that take over the natural habitat are discouraged, but one person’s weed is another’s treasure. Seeds should be portioned in bags or envelopes with the common name listed. Adding the Latin name provides a solid identification; one person’s buttercup may be a daffodil to another. A photo of what the seed should be when it grows up is helpful but not necessary. Sunlight, water, or soil pH requirements could also be listed.

National Invasive Species Awareness Week is February 24-28. Kudzu, privet, honey bush shrub, Arum Italicum, and Boston ivy have invaded Mentone. The RGC invites, encourages, begs one and all to don base layers, gloves, and woolies and go forth to battle these



Seed Swap is Feb. 15th

interlopers! The RGC Facebook page will have more info on specific battle-ground sites and dates and times for attack. One way to help on the invasive front is to go native.

Also, if boating, be sure to clean the boat before moving to a different body of water. If hiking, clean boots before trekking to a new site. Check pets for tag-a-long seeds and don’t release aquarium fish, exotics, or plants into the wild.

Mellanie Tuttle sneaked in a botanical artistic crafts project as a program, briefly demonstrating how to apply alcohol dye inks to gourds. The porous gourds were pre-treated with a coat of Formula 99, which kept the inks from being absorbed. Tablecloths down, gloves donned, gourds chosen, and

the fun began. A drop or two straight from the alcohol ink dye bottle was the easiest application, but adding ink to a cotton swab or cotton pad allows a more subtle effect when rubbed onto the gourd. After putting on the ink, a spray with rubbing alcohol allows the colors to flow and blend. Twenty-four color choices and six metallic options allowed for unique combinations.

Members sped the drying process with the use of hair dryers. Applying a coat of clear finish completed the project. Krylon UV-Resistant Clear Acrylic Coating was recommended by those in the know, but a clear spray from DG worked just fine. Another blast of the hair dryer, and voila! Folks were pretty pleased with themselves.



Alcohol ink dye-stained gourds

Alcohol dyes would make lovely Valentine’s Day cards. Drop the dyes on cardstock. Cut out a valentine shape or two, glue on a card, and add a heart-felt note like, “I know loving me isn’t always easy, but I’m so worth it!”

So are you! Happy Valentine’s Day! RGC’s next meeting is set for 10 a.m. on February 11 at Moon Lake Library. Alice Marrin, owner of Look-out Lavender Farm, will be our guest speaker. 🍷

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 rhododendron-gardenclub@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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My Ukulele Story

BY HALEE O'DELL

My name is Halee, and this is my ukulele story. It all started by watching a few videos of artists who play the ukulele. One year, my mom and I took my daughter and niece to see Jeremy Camp in concert, and he played a song that I really enjoy on the ukulele. Another celebrity, Colleen Ballenger, had her own Netflix special, and I was surprised to see that she played the ukulele as well! These artists and others inspired me to learn to play the ukulele.

In 2019, my husband at the time bought me my first learner ukulele and promised that if I got good at playing it, he would buy me a better one. And so my ukulele journey began! I started looking up ukulele videos on YouTube to get some basic chords and strumming. I was off to a good start. Soon after, I saw a post on Facebook for free ukulele sessions in Mentone and I just had to check it out. My first session, six years ago, was great. I met many wonderful folks who wanted to learn ukulele just like me. Our teacher at the time was Mickey Luck (we call him our Fearless Leader). Sessions were and continue to be held at Moon Lake Library every other Saturday. Mickey taught us many chords, different strumming patterns, and a little bit of music theory, and soon we were all playing our first beginner songs. My heart was full! I was so excited, and to this day I do my best to attend every session.

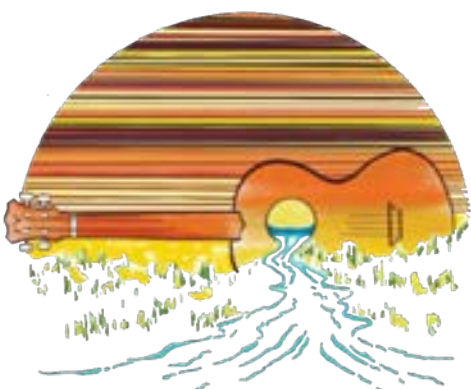
I have met so many great people along the way who have become very special to me. Over time, the Mentone Ukes have become the designated house band of the library, and we enjoy performing at local festivals, church events, farmers' markets, front porch strummings at the hardware

store, the Town of Mentone Christmas Tree Lighting, and the library's Holiday Open House. I have been so blessed to become part of such a wonderful ukulele family and part of something big that makes my heart smile. Our group has also started a spin-off called the Rogue group. Some of us get together to play informally in a small group. Recently, some of us have started bringing our guitars to play at Rogue, and it made me want to learn the guitar as well.

I have a fan who is no longer living — he was my best friend and stepdad. He wanted to learn the guitar, so he bought a Yamaha acoustic guitar. He piddled around with it but never got around to really learning to play. So I stepped in and started learning a few chords on that very same guitar using the book that came with it. After he passed, I didn't really want to play the guitar anymore. Not until after my divorce in 2023 did I want to pick it up again, and the Rogue group was the inspiration for it. Once I learn a new song, I share it with my family and friends,



FREE SESSIONS OF THE MENTONE UKES will be held at 1 p.m. Central at Moon Lake Library on Saturday, February 8 and 22. Newcomers and beginners of all ages are invited to attend these sessions. A beginners class is offered at the same time as the regular sessions, and loaner ukuleles are available. Find us on Facebook: MentoneUkes; or on the web: www.mentoneukes.com



who lift me up and tell me how awesome I am becoming on the instrument. It makes my heart smile even more!

My life has changed so much over the years. I've gone from dating to being married, then divorced and single, raising two beautiful children who mean more than the world to me. In my free time, I pick up the ukulele and play around with songs I know or see what new things I can learn. One day I hope to be great and have my own band!

At our ukulele sessions, we have learned how to fingerpick in addition to strumming, and several there have told me how I've become amazing at it, and it makes me feel so good inside! I have even demonstrated new songs for the group to learn.

I want to say thank you to everyone in the Mentone Ukes who have made me feel like family, and to all my friends and family who lift me up and inspire me to keep learning music every day. God is so good! I thank Him for all of you, and for showing me the way into such an amazing group of people whom I get to see every other weekend and strum with.

Strum and be happy!! 🎸

Changes in Medicare set for 2025

BY LYNN HIXON

With each new year come changes in Medicare costs and coverages. This year the changes are:

Part A (hospital insurance) premium is free if you've worked 10 years or more, \$285 per month if you've worked 7.5 to 10 years, \$518 per month if you've worked fewer than 7.5 years. The Part A hospital deductible is \$1,676 each benefit period.

Part A hospital coinsurance is \$0 for the first 60 days of inpatient care each benefit period and \$419 per day for days 61-90 each benefit period. The lifetime reserve is \$838. The lifetime reserve days are only to be used once and they are not renewable. Skilled nursing facilities are \$0 for the first 20 days of inpatient care each benefit period and \$209.50 per day for days 21-100 each benefit period.

Part B (medical insurance) premium is \$185. If your annual income is higher than \$106,000 for an individual (\$212,000 for a couple), you will pay a higher Part B premium. The Part B deductible is \$257 per year. The Part B coinsurance is 20% for most services Part B covers.

Part D (prescription drug coverage) has a national average of \$36.78 per month, and the Part D maximum deductible is \$590 per year. The out-of-pocket limit is \$2,000.

If you have any questions about Medicare or need help with your name brand drug costs, please call the DeKalb County Council on Aging and ask for Lynn Hixon or DiAnne Callahan at 256-845-8590. 📞



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Grants Support Arts Council’s Summer Music Series and Follow Your Art



BY JULI JORDAN

The Little River Arts Council (LRAC) proudly received grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts to support the Summer Music Series and Follow Your Art! This generous funding ensures that the Summer Music Series remains a free, vibrant community event and provides vital resources for Mentone’s only judged art festival, Follow Your Art. The Summer Music Series features monthly concerts from May through August, offering an unforgettable celebration of music and community on the grounds of Mentone Inn.

Membership Matters

Mentone is not only celebrated for its natural beauty but also as a hub where creativity thrives, warmly welcoming creators and collectors alike. At the heart of this artistic spirit is LRAC, which has been nurturing creativity since 2006. Membership plays a vital role in sustaining this mission. By joining LRAC, you contribute more than just financial support for its projects — you make a powerful statement

that echoes throughout the community, affirming the belief that “art is for everyone.” As you consider becoming a member, the following are some common questions:

What are my membership dues used for?

Membership dues are the foundation of LRAC’s operation. This money covers the non-profit organization’s normal operating expenses.

Why are membership numbers important to an arts council?

More members means a more active, engaged community. Further, it signals to potential grant funding sources that the council is a thriving organization with widespread community involvement — and grant funding is critical to LRAC’s programming.

Do I have to be an artist to join LRAC?

Not at all! If you enjoy the arts, please join us! We believe strongly in our slogan, “art is for everyone.” Your support will help LRAC continue to foster the visual, performing, and literary arts in the Mentone area.

Is LRAC only for residents of Mentone?

No. Our mission is to “enrich the

quality of life for people in Mentone and neighboring communities.” Plus, many of our members are property owners and visitors to the Mentone area.

And how do you accomplish that?

The rest of our mission statement reads, “by raising funds for the arts; sponsoring events; providing educational opportunities; and strengthening cultural resources for the benefit of all businesses and citizens in the Mentone area.”

What are the available membership levels?

Dues are reasonable to make membership available to everyone, with higher levels for those who want to provide greater support to LRAC: Student: \$10; Individual: \$25; Family: \$40; Supporter: \$100; Patron: \$250; Sustainer: \$500; Benefactor \$1000 +

Does membership benefit artists directly?

Absolutely! Membership with the LRAC provides artists with several direct benefits. Member artists are invited to showcase their work at the Little River Art Gallery, gain early access to information about upcoming events and grant opportunities, and

enjoy discounted fees for participating in festivals. Additionally, they are featured in the Artist Registry section of the LRAC website, offering greater visibility within the community and beyond.

Any other reasons to join?

Still on the fence about becoming an LRAC member? Your membership plays a vital role in supporting the arts by providing essential operational funding for local artists and arts organizations. It also enables the creation of innovative arts programs for children and adults in our community. Plus, as a member, you’ll enjoy exclusive invitations to fun social events and the annual membership meeting. You’ll also stay in the loop with the latest arts news and events through our email newsletter. Joining LRAC is more than a membership — it’s a way to make a meaningful impact!

As we begin the new year, we’d like to say a special thank you to our current members (the list below is current as of 1/15/2025). We’d love to add your name to our list! 🍷

Juli Jordan is president of the Little River Arts Council.



Our December/January Make Your Mark on Mentone artist, Katelyn Boozer. Katelyn said that she chose this image because she and her family like to bake over the Christmas holidays.



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- FTC
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- Betsy & Craig Sheldon
- Kathleen Smithson
- Jerome & Liz Stephens
- Layne & Rob Stone
- Lisa Sulkosky
- Cyndi & Mikel Yeakle

COUPLES/FAMILIES \$40

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- Leah Brumbeloe
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- David & Laura Flint
- Sheila & Bill Horne
- Juergen & Nancy Haukohl
- Juli Jordan & Pat Martin
- Sandra Jusak
- Alyce & Frank Kenney
- Kevin & Navy Leeser
- Lisa & Bill Mathews
- Anne McLeod & Don Highfield
- Steve & Jeanine O'Brien
- Pat Parmelee & Chris Carmichael
- Tina Pendley
- Doug & Betty Perkins
- Sandra & Ken Perry
- Rhea & Don Pirch
- Connor, Kerri & Everitt Read
- ReNEWvenate
- Meg & Al Richardson
- Mary Ann & Jay Robbins
- Kris Blitz Shelledy & Kevin Shelledy
- Jan & Mike Sherwood and Harlee Oliver
- Ben & Mary Shurett
- Stephen & Michele Smith
- Denise & Steve Soares
- Imogene & Scott Thomas
- Kevin Watson
- Marni Willms & Rebecca Brown

INDIVIDUALS \$25

- Brande Arno
- Amy Bluekat
- Jeremy Clark
- Mary Clemons
- Sonya Clemons
- Randy Cochran
- Debbie Happy Cohen
- Elizabeth Cook
- Sam Cordle
- Lacy Hope Dobbs
- Adelaide Drennen
- Margaret Duke
- Laurel H. Elliott
- Andrew Frazier
- Sharon Habin
- Pamela Hancock
- Anne Heppenstall
- Dekie Hicks
- Lori Honig
- Brittney M. Hughes
- Meg Justice
- Courtney Kinneman
- deJoly LaBrier
- Sherryl Lewis
- William Mathis
- Torie McAllister - Blooming Potential
- Elliott McElrath
- Network for Good
- Kenna Newman
- Susan Noel
- Caroline Nuckolls
- Jessica Nunn
- Victoria Pearmain
- Erika Prater
- Carol Reynolds
- Mindy Roepke
- BobbieJo Salyers
- Beverly Smith - Snappy Tees
- Kayleigh Smith
- Theresa Sterling
- Mary Alice Stout
- Randell Summerford
- Sweet T's Catering
- Tiny Bear Paw
- Hibernation Haven
- Bee Lee Tullos
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Mentone Arts Center Arts Center Heats Up February with Workshop and Winter Social

BY RANDY GRIDER

After a brutally cold January, things are heating up this month as we move closer to spring. We begin with our first workshop of the year on Saturday, Feb. 1, from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at Moon Lake Village. Tuition is \$100 plus a \$15 supply fee. Class is limited to 10 students. There were a couple of spots still available at press time. To check availability, please see the contact information at the bottom of this article.

UAB artist and professor Gary Chapman will lead the workshop titled, “A VALUE STUDY: The Anatomy of Light and Shadow.” Students using oil paint will create a simple value study exploring the anatomy of light and shadow. This exercise will help students understand and better utilize the properties of light and its effects, thereby empowering them to create more accurate and expressive representational work in any 2D medium.

After students complete the value study assignment, they will create a second painting of a simple object of their choice, employing what they have learned. The workshop will include slide presentations, work examples, and critiques.

About the instructor: Gary Chapman is an artist and professor of painting and drawing at The University of Alabama at Birmingham. He has had more than 80 solo exhibitions with institutions such as The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts;



The Arts Center of St. Petersburg, Florida; University of Cincinnati; and the Indianapolis Art Center. He has also participated in numerous group and invitational exhibitions at regional, national, and international venues.

Chapman was named a Joan Mitchell CALL Legacy Artist in 2013 and has received numerous grants and fellowships, including a 1996 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Painting from the Southern Arts Federation and 2002 and 1994 Individual Artist Fellowships from the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

Winter Social

We will host a Winter Social Thursday, Feb. 6, from 5:30-7 p.m. to honor two local artists: woodworker Jeremy C. Clark and photographer Mikel Yeakle. The public is invited to attend this free event and learn more about these two impressive artists.

About Jeremy C. Clark: Clark was born and raised in the small community of Jumbo in Chilton County. He and his wife have six children and two grandchildren. They moved to the Mentone area eight years ago to work for the local telephone company.

“My telephone career ended, and I

decided to take a hobby of 10 years and make it my full-time profession,” Clark said. “I believe God has a plan and path for all of us, and I have been blessed to create things for people to enjoy and use every day.

“I have been a woodworker for a decade, making mostly things for my family and friends. I consider myself a mid-century organic artist. I let the piece of wood show me what it wants to become. I hope to bring joy to people that see my work, and that I can bring out the natural beauty within each piece.”

About Mikel Yeakle: Yeakle is originally from Indiana but spent his career as a professional photographer in Atlanta. In 2005, Yeakle started downsizing into retirement; after a process of minimalism, he and his wife moved into their present home on Lookout Mountain.

“Photography is what I chose to create interpretations of what I saw,” Yeakle said. “My life is my art... and the pure result of my frustration and humiliation within it. My philosophies are simple and to the point. I shoot pictures as a way of stopping time. Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication, and I try to make it look easier than it is.”

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.



Light and Shadow Workshop



UAB artist and professor Gary Chapman



Woodworker Jeremy Clark



Photographer Mikel Yeakle

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Library to Host Workshop on Creativity

BY ANNE MCLEOD

On Fridays in March, Ruth Ferraz will offer a series of classes in her Workshop on Creativity, focusing on the work of Betty Edwards, author of “Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain.” The classes will be held at Moon Lake Library each Friday at 2 p.m.. Pre-registration is required, as there will be a limited number of seats.

Ferraz was born in Sao Paulo, Brazil, where in 1994, she took a course on the methodology of Betty Edwards. She credits that course with unlocking her gifts as an artist, as she soon began to practice drawing and oil painting.

Already a physical education teacher with a master’s degree, she studied Edwards’ work on creativity and drawing, as well as texts such as Paul Dennison’s work on the “Brain Gym” and other physical exercise to connect the



Ruth Ferraz

brain hemispheres and the body. Out of this study came her workshop.

Ferraz believes that “the main goal of art should be to bring to mankind the good, the beautiful, and the pure.” She invites those who connect with this idea and who want to develop both life skills and their artistic ability to participate in the course at Moon Lake Library.

All classes are free and open to participants 13 years old and up. Call the library at 256-634-2127

to register or email books@moonlake-library.org.

Class Schedule:

- **March 7** - Hemispheres of the Brain and their Functions
- **March 14** - The Importance of the Eyes and Body Coordination
- **March 21** - Inner Child and Childhood Artistry
- **March 28** - Perceiving Edges and Spaces

Library Hosts Film Series Highlighting Alabama’s Rivers

Moon Lake Library and the Alabama Rivers Alliance (ARA) will sponsor a showing of the 2024 Southern Exposure films about the state’s rivers on Sunday, Feb. 23, at 2 p.m. ARA is a state-wide network of groups working to protect and restore all of Alabama’s water resources through building partnerships, empowering citizens, and advocating for sound water policy and its enforcement.

Each summer, the alliance hosts a fellowship program, airing the resulting films in locations around the state. These five short films aim to raise awareness about Alabama’s remarkable biodiversity and natural resources.

Jack West, ARA director of special projects, will present a short program prior to the showing of the films and will be available for questions and discussion afterward. West joined ARA in 2020 and brings legal experience from corporate private practice, as well



Jack West

as an entrepreneurial background, to ARA. He is a Birmingham native and grew up camping in Cheaha State Park, fishing in Lake Guntersville, and backpacking Alabama’s Pinhoti Trail. He and his wife, Emily, live in Mentone.

The following films will be shown at Moon Lake Library:

- “Alabama Roots” - Directed by Kaleb Manske and Hannah Schoettmer
 - “The Cost of Forever” - Directed by Charlie Connell
 - “Forces of Nature” - Directed by Olivia Hall
 - “Saving Seagrass” - Directed by Robert Boyd
 - “Philopatry” - Directed by Jermaine Thompson
- The program is free and open to the public. In addition to parking in front of the library, there is parking at Moon Lake Village off East River Road and also in the grass beside the library just off the driveway between the library and the MERF House.



Author Talk

HIDDEN MENTONE, VOLUME 2
BY DAVID AND LESA CUMMINGS,
DEEDEE MORRISON,
AND ELIZABETH THORNELL

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Weekly Meet-Ups: KNITTING and CROCHET Tuesdays at 2 p.m.; SCRABBLE Wednesdays at noon; TAX PREP available on Saturdays, beginning Feb. 7. Call 256-634-2127 for an appointment. All programs are free and open to the public.

Feb. 1 at 10:30 a.m. - Little Library Learners: Kids ages 3-6 are invited for books, crafts, and activities with Ms. Lynn.

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

Feb. 2 at 2 p.m. - Author Talk: The authors of “Hidden Mentone, Volume 2,” will share a presentation about their new book. Copies will be available for sale and signing.

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

Feb. 7 at 6 p.m. - Friday Night at the Movies: “Dirty Dancing” (PG-13, 1999)

Feb. 8 at 10:30 a.m. - Moon Lake Library Book Club meets for a discussion of “small things” - books of essays or short story collections.

Feb. 13 at 2 p.m. - Tech Program: Getting Familiar with Gmail. Library volunteer Patrick Mayes will demystify the popular email application. Find out what your Gmail can do.

Feb. 15 at 10:30 a.m. - Little Library Learners: Kids ages 3-6 are invited for books, crafts, and activities with Ms. Lynn.

Feb. 15 at 1 p.m. - Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

Feb. 21 at 6 p.m. - Family Game Night! Bring a snack to share, and we'll enjoy board games and cards at the library.

Feb. 23 at 2 p.m. - Join us for a mini film festival as we watch the Alabama Rivers Alliance’s Southern Exposure short films about Alabama rivers. Jack West, director of special projects for the Rivers Alliance, will take questions and lead discussion.

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

Tax Preparation Assistance at Moon Lake Library

Saturdays 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

Feb. 8, 15, 22 • March 15, 22, 28 • April 12

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Valentine’s Day Dinner

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



February Community Events

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

Feb. 1 Groundhog Day Community Celebration – The spirit of your favorite newspaper will come to life Sat., Feb. 1, as “The Groundhog” hosts its first community celebration. The event is sponsored by the newspaper and its publisher, MERF: Mentone Educational Resources Foundation in Mentone, Alabama. 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. Don't miss all the fun. Make plans now to be part of this community-wide event! 10 a.m.-2 p.m. & Dance 5-9 p.m.

Feb. 3-4 Loomis Bros. Circus – Join us for an all-new family-friendly Country and Western themed adventure as the award-winning Loomis Bros. Circus rolls into town! With a captivating blend of classic charm and modern thrills, the circus promises a mesmerizing experience for audiences of all ages. From their menagerie of exotic performing animals to the fearless daredevils, every act is crafted to create a sense of wonder and excitement. Bring the whole family and immerse yourselves in a world where the extraordinary becomes the norm, and where the magic of the circus comes alive. Loomis Bros. Circus is “Simply the Best”. Northeast Alabama Agri-Business Center in Rainsville. Get tickets here <https://lbctix.com/lbc/rainsvl25/>

Feb. 3, 10, 17 & 24 Yoga Mondays with Courtney – Join us for Yoga Mondays from 5-6 p.m. at Northeast Alabama Community College's brand-new Entrepreneurial Center! Whether you're a beginner or a seasoned yogi, come stretch, breathe, and find your zen in this stunning new space. It's fun and open to the public – don't miss out.

Feb. 6-8, 10, 13-15 Children's Advocacy Center Dinner and Play – Children's Advocacy Center presents their 31st Annual Eddie McPherson Memorial Dinner Theatre. The featured play is titled, “Ten Little Chipmunks.” Get ready for nonstop laughs, frights, and twists as the rapid-fire, double-crossing, laugh-out-loud murder mystery comedy unfolds! The play will be held at the First United Methodist Church Life Center. Ticket prices vary and are by reservation only. For more information or tickets, call 256-997-9700.

Feb. 7 Plant Discovery Hike–Winter Foliage – Join DeSoto State Park staff for a meandering journey within the forest, taking in every opportunity to learn more about the natural world. On this hike, we will identify many native plants of the southern Appalachians and will teach you how to recognize the species found in the park. Scout out winter 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. About the hike: approx. 1.5 miles round trip, utilizing red trail and blue trail; moderate due to slightly rocky terrain. 3:30-5 p.m. Meet at DeSoto's Country Store on County Road 89. Free & open to everyone; no preregistration required. Weather dependent, so please call the lodge at 256-845-5380 beforehand to check on status of hike. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for details. www.alapark.com/desoto-state-park/hiking

Feb. 8 Dutch Oven Campfire Cooking 101 Serious Skills Series: Dutch Oven Cooking 101 – Dutch ovens have been in use for hundreds of years; especially when our country was expanding, and families were on the move. Unable to bring their large cook stoves with them, women learned how to cook entire meals from stews & soups to bread & desserts in their Dutch ovens. Learn the basics about Dutch ovens, how to clean and care for your cookware, AND cook (& eat!) dinner and dessert at the same time. The best time to swing by is when food is just coming off the fire! Come by JSU's Little River Canyon Center. Free & open to everyone; no pre-registration required. Come by for free samples!

Feb. 8 Gals' Spa Day – Join us for a fun-filled day at the spa at Sierrenityskin in Fort Payne! Light bites and fun drinks. Bring your gals and let's have some fun! Must RSVP to get a \$60 flash deal for lash lift & brow lamination. Pierce by kaid will be there, but no appointment needed. 10 a.m.-2 pm.

Feb. 8 Landscape Watercolor Class – Hosted by DeSoto State Park & Little River Arts Council. Discover different techniques to paint skies, clouds, grass, mountains, etc. to learn skills to create your own landscape paintings. Designed for those who think they can't draw a stick figure, this course focuses on easy-to-learn techniques. Using simple brush strokes and basic color mixing, you'll create vibrant, nature-inspired artworks while exploring unique features. No prior art experience is required – just bring your enthusiasm and a willingness to experiment. By the end of the class, you'll have a collection of small watercolor paintings and newfound confidence in your artistic abilities. 2-5 p.m. Nature Center next to DeSoto's Country Store & Information Center on Co. Rd. 89: \$55 fee includes all supplies. Ages 12 to adult. Class space is limited to 10; pre-registration is required: <https://visitlookoutmountain.com/events/landscape-watercolor-class/>

Feb. 8 New Ground at the Pickin Post – The Pickin Post presents a gospel concert with “New Ground.” Show starts at 6 p.m. Tickets \$15. 893 Old Hwy 35 East, Fort Payne. For more info, call 256-657-3817 or 256-845-4115.

Feb. 8 Bluegrass at The Cricket – Performances by Heritage and Wiley Bailey YouTube Jam Band. Tickets are \$20 for general admission seating. All proceeds will benefit the continued renovations of The Cricket Theatre. Purchase tickets at Collinsville Public Library, Collinsville Museum, Graves Hardware, Caroline's Cafe or Wilson Funeral Home.

Feb. 8-9 Fort Payne Gun and Knife Show – Held at the DeKalb County VFW Fairgrounds and promoted by A.G. Gun Shows. All federal, state, and local firearms laws and ordinances must be followed. There will be 250 tables of guns (new & used, antique & modern); knives; ammo; military surplus; tactical gear; and more.

Come check us out! Saturday 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sunday 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Feb. 13 Pearl Girl Galentine's Night – We are tickled pink to invite you to our Pearl Girl Galentine's Night at Pearls and Plaid! We will have refreshments, late shopping hours for all new arrivals and event exclusives, photo backdrop with fun props, custom hat bar, permanent jewelry from Everweld by Kagan, and ear piercings from Everpierced by Tia! It's going to be so much fun! 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Feb. 14 Freebird at Back Forty Ballroom – Will you be ours? Valentine's Day Party! Freebird hits Fort Payne this Valentine's Day. Bring your sweetheart out for some sweet classic Skynyrd! More details soon! 8 p.m.

Feb. 15 Longleaf Pine Jeopardy – Did you know the Longleaf Pine is Alabama's state tree? Historically, Longleaf Pine forests dominated the landscape, but much of this ecosystem has been lost due to land development and fire suppression. In Alabama, Longleaf Pine ecosystems are critical for biodiversity, supporting a wide range of plants, animals, and insects, some of which are rare or endangered. Join DeSoto State Park staff for a unique trivia experience where you can test your knowledge and learn new facts! 10-11 a.m. Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on Co. Rd. 89. Free & open to everyone; no preregistration required. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details.

Feb. 15 Winter Outdoor Observation Hike – Have you ever seen a plant, mushroom, or critter and wondered what it was? Even in the Winter there are some cool things to see, so join DeSoto State Park staff to discover what can be observed & recorded using iNaturalist! iNaturalist is a free app that can be used to record observations of all sorts of things – plants, animals, and even fungi. Learn how to use the simple app to help contribute to park species lists and about species seen in the park. About the hike: Moderate hike along mountainous terrain, some rocky terrain. Approximately 2 miles round trip. 12-1:30 p.m. 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.

Feb. 15 Nature's Elements in Metal Art Workshop – 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. 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. 1-3 p.m. DeSoto State Park. Location disclosed at time of registration Fee: \$40 includes all supplies. Class space is limited; pre-registration is required. Pre-register here: <https://www.littleriverartscouncil.org/metalarts2.html>.

Feb. 15 The Essentials at Mater's – Come see Chattanooga's Best of the Best for the second show in Fort Payne! Classic rock, grunge, Southern rock, and a touch of country. You'll know every song! 8 p.m.

February 15 – 10 a.m. Annual Seed Swap at Moon Lake Library co-sponsored by Rhododendron Garden Club.

Feb. 16 Longleaf Pine Needle Basketry – Learn the basics of pine needle basketry, an old craft with a long history. Join artist Brittney Hughes to learn the basic steps to making a coiled basket from Longleaf Pine needles. Take home your very own creation. The art of coiling baskets is universally common to indigenous peoples. Coiling is the technique of creating baskets and art from pine needles and was a part of pre-Columbian Native American crafts. Today, pine needle baskets and art are made primarily for decorative purposes. All materials (pine needles, thread, and small center for basket) will be furnished. Ages 10 and up. Pre-registration is required, as participation is limited. JSU's Little River Canyon Center in Fort Payne. 10 a.m.- 3 p.m. \$55 supply fee due day of class. Pre-registration required by emailing Brittney Hughes (NOT via Facebook). For details and to register email Southernchick888@hotmail.com. Call the Little River Canyon Center for more information, 256-845-3548.

Feb. 20 Winter Outdoor Observation Walk – Have you ever seen a plant, mushroom, or critter and wondered what it was? Even in the Winter there are some cool things to see, so join DeSoto State Park staff to discover what can be observed & recorded using iNaturalist! iNaturalist is a free app that can be used to record observations of all sorts of things – plants, animals, and even fungi. Learn how to use the simple app to help contribute to park species lists and about species seen in the park. About the walk: along the Talmadge Butler Boardwalk Trail, with multiple rest spots if needed. Less than half a mile walk total. 12-1:30 p.m. Meet at DeSoto's Talmadge Butler Boardwalk trailhead 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 walk. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details.

Feb. 21 Civilian Conservation Corps History Hike: The CCC Quarry The Civilian Conservation Corps was one of the better known and most successful of the New Deal programs following the Great Depression, one that did a lot of good for forests, recreation, and the men for whom it provided short-term jobs. Between 1933 and 1942, an average of 30 camps operated across Alabama. CCC boys helped fight fires, reforest lands, protect the state's then newly acquired national forests, and build roads and recreational facilities in Alabama State Parks. Join DeSoto State Park staff on a moderate hike to the CCC Quarry from the 1930s. Learn how the corps constructed the original structures that you can still see in the park today. About the hike: moderate along mountainous terrain, some rocky terrain. Approximately 2 miles round trip. 3-4:30 p.m. 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.

Feb. 22 Park After Dark Jeopardy – Dive into the mysteries of DeSoto State Park after dark with a trivia game! Join us for a unique trivia experience where you can test your knowledge of the park's natural history, starry skies, and nighttime wildlife. 10-11 a.m. Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on Co. Rd. 89. Free & open to everyone; no preregistration required. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details.

February 22 Trail Trekker Hike: Waterfall Hike – Join DeSoto State Park staff and volunteers for a fun day of hiking throughout the park to see some of DeSoto's waterfalls, big and small. See Lost Falls, Laurel Falls, Indian Falls, & more water features like Laurel Creek and the West Fork of Little River. About the hike: the trail will be moderate, rugged terrain over approximately 3 miles. We will utilize the orange and blue trails for this hike. 12-3 p.m. 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.

Feb. 27 Junior Ranger Adventure Series: Secrets of the Forest Floor – DSP Naturalist Brittney Hughes will guide this fun hike, geared toward all ages. 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: 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. Explore along the trails, discovering who lives on the forest floor. What to bring: backpack with plenty of water, lunch, snacks, and a journal with a pen or pencil. Closed-toed shoes. 4 p.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. Email us OR pre-register here: <https://reserve.alapark.com/register/DSP-JR-Adventure>

Feb. 28 Bear Tales Jeopardy – In Alabama, the yearly cycle for black bears starts in February, 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. Following in their wake are myths, tall tales, and misconceptions. Join DeSoto State Park staff to learn about the black bear while testing your knowledge and discovering the important role black bears play in our ecosystem with a fun & interactive Jeopardy-style game. 4-5 p.m. Benefield Nature Center next to the Country Store on Co. Rd. 89. Free & open to everyone; no preregistration required. Contact Brittney.Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details.

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Foundation Board Honors NACC President Dr. David Campbell at Dec. Holiday Gala

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

Northeast Alabama Community College is a state- and nationally-recognized institution, noted for its support of culture and the arts as well as its dedication to economic and community development. The man leading this mission was honored in December by the school’s Foundation Board.

Dr. David Campbell was chosen as the Honoree of the Year, and his career was celebrated at the Foundation’s Holiday Gala held on campus in December. "It was such an honor for the NACC Foundation Board of Directors to recognize me for my career at Northeast," stated Dr. Campbell. "There is no better feeling than to be appreciated by your friends, colleagues, and the community, and to be introduced by my son Jeremy was just icing on the cake!"

The NACC campus is situated on Alabama Highway 35 where DeKalb and Jackson counties meet, attracting students from both areas and beyond. Last year, NACC expanded its footprint by establishing classroom space in Mentone at the historic Moon Lake Elementary campus. Traditional and nontraditional classes are being taught there.

The college is also working with local and state elected officials to determine the feasibility of transforming Moon Lake’s gym into a performing arts center.

"It has been my pleasure to serve as the president of Northeast Alabama Community College," Dr. Campbell told the crowd gathered for December’s



Dr. David Campbell, President of NACC

event. "I have been here at the college in some capacity 48 of the college’s 59 years of existence. I started out as a Saturday adjunct instructor at a young 31 years old, which I would now describe as a kid."

Dr. Campbell has served as president of the college for 24 years. "I still have such fond memories as a teacher here and cherish so many great friendships and memories I have with students," he said. "Becoming president of Northeast in the very community that I was born and raised in has made it even more special."

He was quick to acknowledge the "talented, dedicated, and special people" who comprise the NACC staff. "Whatever we have accomplished, we have done it all together."

Dr. Campbell expressed gratitude to his wife, Carol, and their son, Jeremy, for their support. Jeremy was honored by the NACC Foundation in 2018. His career in television news has taken him to many major markets, including

Atlanta, Tampa, and New York City. Today, he lives in Austin, where he serves as Senior News Director, Texas, for Spectrum News.

Coincidentally, it was in Austin several decades ago that Dr. Campbell’s career took a turn. He was working on his doctoral degree at the University of Texas, planning to go into a writing field. "But life can change on a dime," he told the crowd. "One of my fellow students got a Fulbright Scholarship, and he was teaching a course on the American South. I was the only full-fledged Southerner in the program, so I was asked to take his place to teach it. I fit the typecasting, I suppose!"

Although many of his family members were teachers, Dr. Campbell had never considered the profession himself. His experience in Austin changed that. "I wound up loving the teaching process and the students," he said. "That was the beginning of my education career. You often hear it said that you never know what direction your

life is going to take — my venture into education is a good example. And it has been such a fulfilling and rewarding journey."

Dr. Campbell shared a powerful life lesson with the crowd. "As president of Northeast, I have strived to make the college the best it could possibly be and make Northeast as good or better than any in the state and nation," he said. "I was never one to lack ambition. When I first started out as president, I felt that some people in our region had internalized some of the negative stereotypes about Appalachia and the South. I wanted to show that we have the capability, will, determination, intelligence, and ingenuity to do anything anyone in America can do."

This attitude has yielded strong results. The Aspen Institute has named NACC a top American community college six times, out of 1,200 community colleges. "A number of ranking services have named Northeast the top community college in Alabama on numerous occasions," Dr. Campbell said. "We recently finished our SACSCOC reaccreditation with no findings – a perfect score!" Again, he credited the NACC staff for the hard work to make these things happen.

A drive across the NACC campus reveals several new facilities built during the past few years. The two newest are the women’s softball stadium and the Workforce Skills Training Center, both state-of-the-art facilities completed in 2024.

To learn more about NACC’s impact and its offerings for area residents, visit www.nacc.edu. 🐾

Valley Head Graduates Earn Small Business Recognition

GROUNDHOG STAFF

C&H Discount Drugs has been named the 2025 Small Business of the Year by the Fort Payne Chamber of Commerce. Co-owners Richard Hammon and John Carr are both graduates of Valley Head High School.

After completing their education at the Harrison School of Pharmacy at Auburn University, Richard and John decided to return to Fort Payne to be closer to their families. Richard was a partner at a local drug store, and John worked relief. The opportunity arose for the two longtime friends to partner and open their own pharmacy. In 1990, C&H Discount Drugs opened its doors, with the North Fort Payne location launching on July 1 and the South Fort Payne location following two weeks later. Today, C&H stands as a trusted, locally owned and operated pharmacy, providing essential healthcare services to the community.

The Small Business of the Year award is a nominated honor, voted on by the community. It recognizes a local business that demonstrates outstanding service, dedication, and a strong commitment to the area it serves. C&H Dis-



count Drugs’ selection by the community is a testament to their appreciation of its unwavering commitment to the Fort Payne area.

C&H Discount Drugs is dedicated to meeting the needs of its customers, offering extended hours and remaining open seven days a week to ensure families have access to the medication and care they need, especially in times of urgency. Beyond pharmacy services, C&H is a proud supporter of several local organizations, including the DeKalb County Children’s Advocacy Center, the Fort Payne Police Department, the “We’ve Got Your Back” program, Harrison School of Pharmacy, and numerous local sports teams. 🐾



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The Mountain Kitchen

BY REBECCA HENDERSON,
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

In this new column, we’ll share special recipes from residents, delicious seasonal dishes, and reviews of restaurants that are within a half-day’s drive.

The holidays are gone, and you’ve eaten the last candy cane, scrounged the last chocolate snowman from your stocking, and thawed that leftover slice of ham to finish it off once and for all. So now what? These chilly, dark February evenings are so much better when you can look forward to good dishes that’ll have you in and out of the kitchen and in your PJs well ahead of bedtime.

Honey-Pecan Baked Salmon

This recipe, with its perfect combination of flavors, has never failed and is extremely simple! It’s great to cook just for yourself (you can easily use one fillet), or to satisfy the most expectant guests.

- 1-2 Tablespoons vegetable oil
- Honey (local is great, of course, but any honey will do)
- Salmon fillets with skin (one per person)
- Finely chopped pecans

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Place the oil in a glass dish big enough to separate your fillets. Heat the dish in the oven for 5 minutes. Place fillets in the dish, skin side down and not touching each other. Sprinkle fish generously with crushed pecans, then drizzle honey evenly over fish, covering the nuts. Cook at 450 degrees for 10 minutes or until done. Adjust cooking time to preferred doneness. Fish should flake easily with a fork.

“Not So Plain” Red Potatoes

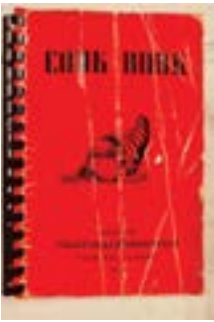
This side dish isn’t exactly a recipe, but a reminder that you don’t have to have aggressive flavors, glazes, or cheeses on potatoes to enjoy them. Try a minimalist take on the spud to balance out the rich honey and pecans in the salmon entrée. Makes enough for four people.

- 2 pounds small red potatoes
- Desired amount of melted butter
- Chopped fresh parsley to taste (dried if you don’t have fresh)
- Chopped fresh dill to taste (dried if you don’t have fresh)
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Juice from half a lemon

Place potatoes in a large stockpot and add water to cover the potatoes. Bring to a boil and continue cooking until potatoes are tender but not falling apart, about 20 minutes (test by inserting a fork in one of the potatoes). Turn off heat, drain potatoes, and cut them in half. Return them to the stockpot. Stir in butter, herbs, and pepper, and squeeze lemon half over potatoes. Gently stir, and serve.

And now for a delicious slice of local food history.

Over the holidays, Susan Van Apeldoorn sent me a photo of a pie she was making for her family gathering. While I did not get a piece (next time?), I was intrigued by the story behind the pie. Susan tells it like this:



This is my Aunt Neddo’s (Nelda) recipe from the 1951 Valley Head Women’s Club

The cover of the 1951 Valley Head Women’s Club Cookbook

cookbook. I inherited the cookbook when we bought my aunt and uncle’s home in Mentone in 1987.

Aunt Neddo was known for her cooking and was a well-regarded hostess in the Mentone area. When she and Uncle Hal owned The DeSoto Hotel (now The Mentone Inn), she and one helper cooked three meals a day for the guests.

I have made this recipe one time and got many compliments and no leftovers. I am going to try adding two cups of whipped cream to the chocolate mixture next time, as it seemed very dense to me. I think that just reflects changing palates over the years. It would be a treat for your Valentine this year!

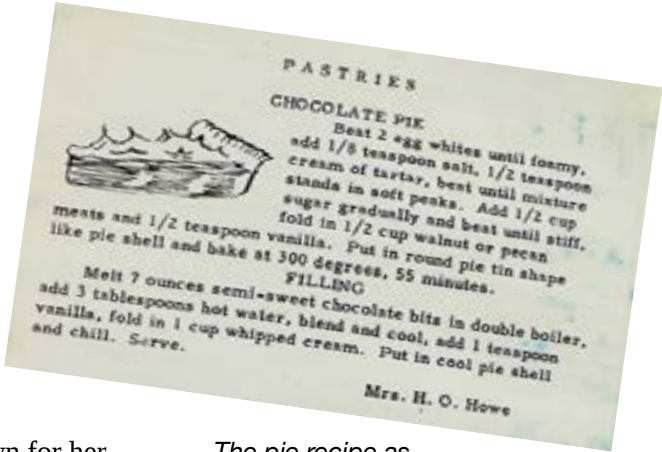
Susan Van Apeldoorn
Chimney Corners

Aunt Neddo’s Chocolate Pie

- Meringue Shell:**
- 2 egg whites
 - 1/8 teaspoon salt
 - 1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar
 - 1/2 cup superfine sugar*
 - 1/2 cup chopped walnuts or pecans
 - 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Filling:**
- 7 ounces semi-sweet chocolate morsels
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 - 1 cup whipped cream

**You can find superfine sugar in grocery stores, or whiz 1 cup + 2 teaspoons granulated sugar in a food processor to make 1 cup superfine sugar.*

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Beat egg whites until foamy. Add salt and cream of tartar, and beat until mixture stands in soft peaks. Gradually add sugar, and beat until stiff. Fold in nuts and vanilla. Spread into a pie plate, and



The pie recipe as it was originally published.

bake at 350 degrees for 55 minutes. Cool before filling. Melt chocolate in a double boiler. Stir 3 tablespoons hot water into chocolate; blend and cool. Add vanilla, and fold in whipped cream. Pour into cooled meringue shell, and chill before serving. 🍪

Step Into the Kitchen

Do you have a recipe to share, either because it has dear memories associated with it or it’s just plain yummy? Email it to **Groundhognews@yahoo.com**. We will try to include it. If you know of a restaurant within a half-day’s drive, let us know about it and we’ll put it on our list to review!



The 1952 Chambers stove Aunt Neddo and Susan used to make the pie. The stove can also be seen in “Hidden Mentone, Vol. 2.”

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Northeast Alabama Foundation Offers 2025 Scholarships

The Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama will award more than \$223,000 in scholarships this year. All applications are open until March 1. By visiting <https://www.cfnea.org/receive/scholarships>, you can click on your county, find a list of available scholarships in the nine counties served by the foundation, and begin the application process. The website also provides an instructional video for how to apply.

The foundation and its donors establish a multitude of funds to benefit various charitable purposes. For more information, contact Lethea Cortner 256-231-5160 ext. 24 or email lcortner@cfnea.org.



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