



THE GROUNDHOG

“Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain”

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

Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction Returns for Another Unforgettable Evening

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

Art lovers, foodies, and supporters of arts education should get ready for one of the best nights of the year. Camp Alpine is the site of the much-anticipated Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction, set for Saturday, April 12. This beloved annual event serves as a major fundraiser for MERF, ensuring Valley Head School students continue to benefit from a strong arts program.

On the Auction Block

Inspired by art teacher Caroline Moore, students have created beautiful, imaginative works available for bidding. MERF’s Fine Arts Program plays a vital role in fostering creativity and self-expression, and this event showcases the talents of students in grades K-6. Beyond learning technique and artistic



HOSTED BY MENTONE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOUNDATION

expression, students gain valuable skills through their participation in the arts — problem-solving, critical thinking, and a sense of pride in their work.

In addition to student artwork, local professional artists contribute unique pieces to the auction, giving everyone a

chance to own one of their creations. The lineup of artists and their works will be announced soon, but attendees can expect an exciting selection of paintings, sculptures, pottery, and mixed-media pieces.

(See *Taste of the Mountain*, see Page 14)



Scenes from last year’s Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction.
Photos by Mikel Yeakle

Jan Wilkinson Approaches Life with Joy, Service, and a Sense of Wonder

BY REBECCA HENDERSON

Over the course of her life, Jan Wilkinson has taken to heart her parents’ mantra: “Don’t tell us you can’t do something until you try it.” From her childhood in south Georgia to her home in Mentone, Jan’s life has been rich with adventure, community involvement, and positivity that is contagious. At 86, she’s still embracing new experiences and reminding others, “You have to have fun.”

That tapestry of adventure began as Jan grew up in Dawson, Georgia. The family traveled quite a bit as a result of her father’s work in the peanut processing industry, igniting a passion in Jan for taking in new landscapes and meeting new people. Side note: Jan’s family knew and often intersected with President Jimmy Carter, also famously in the peanut industry. “Daddy did business with his family,” Jan says matter-of-factly.

Camp Days

At age 8, she attended Camp DeSoto for the first time and fell in love. With her typical zest, she savored the camp activities, friendships, and fostering of faith.

“One thing that the camp does is promote your love of God, and that’s



Jan in her Scouting days.

a great thing for young people to have,” she says. That summer was the first of 10 spent at DeSoto. “They made me go home at the end of every session,” she laughs, “but I just loved being up here.”

Jan jokes about having reluctantly aged out of camp. But it was time to start college. She attended the University of Georgia as a fine arts major and later earned a Ph.D. in communication disorders.

A Knock on the Door

In 1959, she married John Wilkinson, an Army officer. They had met when he knocked on her family’s door one day. “I lived in a town in south Georgia, 60 miles from Fort Benning. Everybody in town used to entertain second lieutenants at Fort Benning when they were at basic training, because they were lonesome for home. He just knocked on the door one Sunday, and Mother said, ‘come right in,’ and he just never escaped.” This serendipitous meeting was the start of a long love story.

After they married, the couple embarked on a typically mobile military life. As an Army wife, Jan lived in Germany and traveled extensively, a life that didn’t intimidate her in the

(See “Jan Wilkinson,” Page 5)

ARC Awards Matching Grant to Mentone for Renovations at Historic Moon Lake Campus

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

Major improvements will soon begin on the historic Moon Lake campus, thanks to a matching grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission.

The ARC announced last month it had approved a \$300,000 grant for the Town of Mentone. It will be matched by \$300,000 from the Town.

Mayor Rob Hammond says the Town has been pursuing this grant for two years, working through the Top of Alabama Regional Commission on Governments to prepare and submit the grant. “The money will be used for important infrastructure improvements across the campus,” says Hammond, “including electricity, plumbing, sub-flooring, attic structure, HVAC, and bathroom accessibility.”

Work must be completed by the end of 2027.

Last fall, Hammond visited the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs in Montgom-

ery to discuss the project. ADECA is the state agency that coordinates ARC grants in Alabama. Following that meeting, ADECA Director Kenneth Boswell, along with key members of his staff, visited Mentone to tour the Moon Lake campus.

“Converting a former school into the Moon Lake Village, a collection of shops and art studios, has been a major undertaking by the town of Mentone as I have personally seen, but it will be one that will pay dividends,” Director Boswell says. “ADECA is pleased to be a partner along with Governor Ivey and the Appalachian Regional Commission in this renovation project that will enhance the community’s charm and boost tourism for the area.”

The county board of education deeded the campus to the Town of Mentone in 2021 when it ceased classes there at the close of the school year. The Town has steadily made improvements to the property, creating spaces for artists, retailers, galleries,

(See “ARC Grant,” Page 3)



Photo credit: Mikel Yeakle

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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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FIND US ON 

Mentone Matters It's All About Community

BY MAYOR ROB HAMMOND

Visitors to Mentone often remark on the friendliness of our town. The people here are warm and inviting, making travelers want to come back for a visit with their families to shop, enjoy our restaurants, and take in the many outdoor recreational activities in the area.

Our people are indeed our greatest asset. They are the reason this community is such a great place to call home. I was reminded of that last month at the inaugural Groundhog Day Community Celebration, where I served as a judge in the Crock-Pot Cook-off. As I tasted and scored more than a dozen delicious entries, I looked around the Moon Lake gym at the many community members there.

Rhododendron Garden Club members were serving soups, chili, and stews, and had brought impressive centerpieces to decorate the tables. The local Scout troop was selling drinks and snacks. The Little River Arts Council was working the cake walk, which people of all ages were participating in. For many of them, it was their first cake walk ever!

And, of course, MERF was coordinating it all as publisher of The Groundhog. It was heartwarming to see people of all interests, ages, and backgrounds joining forces to create a fantastic day of fun for our community. And let's not forget the impetus of the day — a celebration of the founding of this newspaper, which we've depended on to share news and preserve our history for more than four decades.



The event also unveiled the newest addition to our town: a groundhog mascot. If you missed seeing it there, be on the lookout for the critter throughout town. It even made a special appearance at the Town Council meeting last month. No telling where it will show up next.

Elsewhere in this issue, you'll read the big news about our ARC grant to make much-needed improvements to the Moon Lake campus. And next month I'll share news about a grant we helped Fort Payne Water Works secure to improve service here. Projects like these do not happen in a vacuum. They take the work of many people — a true community — working to make things better for our town. 🐾



The new Groundhog mascot visited the Mentone Town Council meeting in February, sharing laughs and Valentine's Day treats. To help name the mascot, see Page 12 or visit readthegroundhog.com/name.

From the Editor There's a Twist to My Story

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

You're about to learn, as Paul Harvey would have put it, "the rest of the story."

The Groundhog Day Community Celebration was just that — a celebration among people throughout the area, coming together to have fun and support good causes.

Capping off that fun was a generation dance in the former gym on the Moon Lake campus. Our exceptional DJ, Brian Anderson, featured music from the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s while attendees danced for Groundhog Day trophies, proclaiming their talents.

Why a "generation dance" and not just a "dance," you ask? I'm glad you asked.

The year was 1979, maybe 1980, and I was a 5th-grader, quiet and nerdy (some things never change, right?). Against my social proclivities, I attended a generation dance at our high school. Students from most grades were there, along with faculty members, having a great time enjoying the music and fellowship.

Of course, I kept the bleachers warm and stayed far away from the dance floor.

And then it happened.

For reasons I'll never quite understand, I became the target of Mrs. Hand's attention. She was my music teacher, and I probably stood out in class for my command of the white flute-type instrument with red holes that, for some reason, was called a recorder. While other students struggled to produce smooth notes to traditional tunes, I was happily creating tones that drove away every cat and rodent within a 1-mile radius.

Back to the dance. I'm sitting there, minding my own business in my own quiet way, when Mrs. Hand walked over, took my hand, and dragged me to the dance floor. Excited and scared, I allowed myself to get lost in the music of the 50s — specifically, Chubby Checker's "The Twist."

Mrs. Hand twisted. I twisted. I twisted in ways I didn't know I could twist. As the song came to an end, I fast-walked back to my seat, a changed person for having unleashed my inner Baryshnikov upon my classmates.

As it turns out, I twisted my way into the annals of Fort Payne history. When it came time to award the trophies, Mrs. Hand and I returned to midcourt to accept the statuette for the 50s generation.

She handed it to me, and I became its proud owner. The gold-colored plastic human standing atop the stone base stretched its arms high, hoisting a wreath in celebratory victory. The engraved plate proclaimed that the trophy's recipient exceeded the performances of all others in dancing their way through the music representative of the 50s (a decade I missed entirely, for the record).

I'm certain my performance became the stuff of legends. If you've seen the movie "Napoleon Dynamite," you can draw some comparisons.

And so that is why our Community Celebration featured not just a dance, but a generation dance. I wanted to give others the opportunity to twist their way into Mentone lore. To mark their place in the world. To plant a flag and say, "I was here, and my life has made a difference." Come on, baby ...Take me by my little hand and go like this.

And that, my friends, is the rest of the story. 🐾



DID YOU KNOW? Alabama's State Flower is the Camellia.

The camellia was designated the state flower of Alabama in 1959, replacing the original state flower — goldenrod (adopted in 1927). Camellias appear on the Alabama quarter.

Sometimes called "the rose of winter," the camellia (*Camellia japonica* L) is a native of China, Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. The camellia is cultivated in the southeastern United States in many different colors and forms of flowers.

Source: statesymbolsusa.org



Take Pride in Your Groundhog and MERF

BY BEN SHURETT

Did you know you are holding a copy of the largest-circulation newspaper in DeKalb County? If you love Mentone and Lookout Mountain, take a little pride in that. Yes, The Groundhog is only once a month, but some 4,000 copies are printed and distributed for free each month in the Mentone area, including some across the state line into Georgia. No other newspaper in DeKalb County can claim a larger single edition than that.

What I love best is how people clamor to get a copy when the latest edition hits the streets. That’s because the people who live here and those who visit the area love our hometown newspaper. It chronicles so many of the good things going on in our little village and beyond.

In recognition of that, let’s show some love to MERF, the nonprofit organization that now operates The Groundhog.

Not much more than a year ago, The Groundhog was on the verge of collapse, with monthly expenses exceeding revenue. In truth, it was suffering

the same demise as many community newspapers across the county.

The leaders of MERF stepped in and took on the difficult task of righting that ship. Those big-hearted and civic-minded people included Kathryn Norris, Marsha Merrell, Tom MacMichael, Kathy McMunn, Craig Sheldon, Karen Vest, and Joel Leonard. There were trying times, but The Groundhog never missed an issue, and it’s now on solid financial ground.

Anna Mae Horn held the reins of MERF as executive director during that time and was a valuable asset. Her successor, Alyce Kenney, continued that commitment. MERF board members who have also embraced the importance of our community newspaper include Adelaide Drennen, Mary Ann Robbins, and Emily West.

I’ll give special kudos to Stephen and Michele Smith. That dynamic couple, both so very talented in the publishing world, made The Groundhog sing. They are ably assisted by the gifted Rebecca Henderson. The Groundhog is a really fine newspaper, one that would win many Alabama Press Association awards if entered.

Keep in mind MERF’s important

role in this community. For more than 30 years, MERF has impacted all ages in the area through its mission “to enrich the living and learning of the community by identifying needs and coordinating resources.”

Foremost, MERF funds an art teacher at Valley Head School. Caroline Moore teaches art to K-6 students there. She does more than provide art instruction — her most important mission is inspiring young people to embrace art in so many ways. Those children will be better in every way because of their exposure to art and the inspiration Caroline provides.

Kudos to The Groundhog and those who have made it thrive.

Now, turn back to the front page and reread the story about the upcoming Taste of the Mountain. That’s a really great event, with proceeds benefiting MERF and all they do. The auction is MERF’s major fundraising event, and your town is better because of what MERF does. Get your tickets and join us for a great evening on April 12. 🍷

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.

ARC Grant *(continued from page 1)*

and offices. Northeast Alabama Community College holds classes there, and a new restaurant opened last month in the former lunchroom.

“It was important to Mentone to preserve this historic structure that was central to our community for so many decades,” says Hammond. “But it was equally important to make it accessible to the public as a hub of community activity. It’s great to see so many people visit the campus now to shop, enjoy a meal, take classes, and participate in events like the Mentone Fall Festival and the recent Groundhog Day Community Celebration.”

In announcing the funding, Congressman Robert Aderholt (AL-04) said, “Moon Lake Village has been an integral part of Mentone’s history, and this investment ensures that it will continue to serve the community for generations to come. I am proud to support projects like this that preserve our heritage while also driving economic growth.”

The ARC is a federal-state partnership dedicated to promoting economic development in the Appalachian region. Through targeted investments, ARC helps communities address infrastructure needs, workforce development, and business expansion 🍷



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Feeling Lucky

BY DEJOLY LABRIER

Are we born lucky or unlucky? Or are we born innocent, curious, open, loving, and defenseless? As we move through life, our defenses are mustered by how our family, school, religions, governments, and all sorts of other elements begin to influence our beliefs about the world we live in. The portal of our openness to all that we could receive from God begins to grow smaller. The truth is that we are all born with the capacity to have all that exists within us and outside of us.

Sacred scriptures say that we are created in the image of God, or the All That Is. Can a sacred entity be unlucky or lucky? For many centuries, humans have seen good fortune as an external experience. If the guy next door came into some money or he won at the races, he was considered lucky, implying that he had no control over these events. It was like a fairy godmother/godfather came and waved a magic wand over “certain special” people and they miraculously came into good fortune.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) — poet, philosopher, and polymath — once said, “The winds of grace are always blowing, but it is you that must raise your sail.” It means that luck, good fortune, exists like energy. (Sound waves exist whether we see them or not.) And it is up to us to build the sail to catch the wind, so to speak.

In 1948, a movie called “Luck of the Irish,” with Tyrone Power and Anne Baxter, came out. The setting was the Irish countryside, where all sorts of “magic” occurred, including



dealings with a grateful leprechaun. All my life, I’ve heard people use the phrase, “she/he has the luck of the Irish,” without quite knowing what it meant. It implies that only certain people can become Lucky. Then in 2016, Neil Farber, MD, PhD, wrote an article in Psychology Today, “8 Habits of Highly Lucky People,” in which he made the case for having some control over how lucky we can be. He said people who seem to be lucky usually practice mindfulness, are proactive, opportunistic, insightful, flexible, optimistic, and resilient, and they think outside the box. Certain focused characteristics allow people to tap into that thing called luck.

Gay Hendricks, in his 2020 book, “Conscious Luck,” shares the four core shifts in our consciousness, and four daily practices that allow us to be lucky. These teach you how to: 1) plant the seeds of luck in your own psyche, 2) remove unlucky programming (including lifting “curses”), 3)

move at your Essence Pace, and 4) practice Radical Gratitude, and much more. It’s an amazing book that demands a high level of commitment to let go of limiting beliefs related to luck. Beliefs such as “only educated people are lucky” or “I’ll never be lucky, our family was very unlucky.” Getting rid of the generations of myths and beliefs that keep you from experiencing the “winds of grace,” as Tagore says, is a huge challenge.

I learned recently that we can only receive at the level of our feeling of safety. If we don’t feel safe receiving love because of some unfortunate experience with love in our past, then no matter who comes along who may be able and willing to give us the world, we will not be able to see it or receive it. It’s a fact that about 90% of the people who win big in the lottery don’t have much of it left within 18 months of winning. They either spend it, give it away, or lose it. Why is that? It’s possible that they had an underlying feeling of shame about having so much money, or they had attitudes about money that kept them from being able to hold onto their new fortune, like thinking that rich people are selfish, or get it in unethical ways. Not wanting to be seen as either of these, the unconscious mind can trick us into staying small, even when we know there’s a possibility of winning big if we buy the ticket.

Luck can be cultivated with practice. We can become active receivers. Like the dial on a radio, we can keep tuning in to get rid of any static, so that we are open to receiving the abundance that is all around us. Our luck can change, and we don’t have to be Irish!

Have a gorgeous day! 🍀



Free Tax Prep Available in DeKalb County

Adults of all ages will have access to free tax preparation for simple tax returns. The IRS-sponsored service is made possible in part by the DeKalb County Council on Aging. Appointments are required and can be scheduled by calling 256-845-8590 (walk-ins will not be accepted). Only those who will sign a return may attend, unless a participant requires a driver. The service will be offered at the Council on Aging office at 600 Tyler Ave. SE, in Fort Payne.

Tax preparation will take place on the following Thursdays between 8 a.m. and 12 p.m.:

- **January 30**
- **February 6, 13, 20, and 27**
- **March 6, 13, 20, and 27**
- **April 3 and 10**

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Jan Wilkinson (continued from page 1)

least after a childhood rich with new sights. “Daddy had peanut business all over the United States, and I was not unused to traveling and meeting new people. It didn’t bother me a bit.” Jan can still break into a bit of German at the drop of a hat.

Military life suited the young woman whose philosophy was and still is to make the most of wherever you happen to be in life. Her advice: “Be adventure-some, people,” she urges. “If you will smile at people and try to speak their language, if it’s just ‘hello’ or ‘thank you,’ they’ll take care of you.”

Though John, who served in the 82nd Airborne Infantry, saw a lot in the service, including two stints in Vietnam, the couple always looked at life as a glass half full. “You have to choose whether you’re going to have a good life or a poor life. There were Army wives who were miserable. I chose not to be. It was a good life. John was happy, so why not be happy?” Jan says.

Unusual Path to Mentone

After the couple visited the town where Jan had spent all those summers, John understood her attachment to the mountain. “My husband fell in love with the area, too. We used to come up in the summertime and stay at Nipper-sink Lodge.”

They came to own their property in an unusual manner.

“We were in North Carolina, and we had heard there was going to be an auction, and that was so shocking because nobody ever turned loose of their land over here.” John bid on and bought the land sight unseen. “When I moved up here, I felt like I was at camp all the time,” she says with a twinkle in her eye. Jan has lived on the scenic, wooded property ever since. Her husband passed away seven years ago.

Investment in Community

Jan hasn’t just lived here. She’s poured her heart and talents into meeting needs wherever she’s found them. For starters, she was a founding



The artist with her grandson Ben and great-granddaughter Ember.

member of the Moon Lake Library, was actively involved in the Scouts, was a member of the Rhododendron Garden Club and a Master Gardener.

Jan was a member of the founding committee that responded to the need for a library at Moon Lake School, initially providing books and developing children’s programs. “The school wanted a library, and we said we could put one together. We didn’t order books at first — we had books available, but then we found out that the school system supplied books to libraries, so we built it that way. We always had other programs like art programs for toddlers, we had a reading program, and a book club.” Ground was broken for the library in 2001 and the building was completed in 2002.

As The Groundhog reported in 2018, Jan’s extensive work with the Scouts earned her the Silver Beaver Award, which recognizes those of exceptional character who have provided distinguished service within a council. She and John both acted as advisors on the troop committee for Mentone’s Troop 106, and Jan taught several merit badge courses over the years. She even helped start a Boy Scout troop for missionary families in Burma (Myanmar). On the same day Jan received the Silver Beaver Award from the Scouts, Mayor Rob Hammond declared the date February 10 to be “Jan Wilkinson Day.”



The 2018 ceremony at which Jan received the Silver Beaver Award for leadership in Scouting. With her are sons Ed (left) and Ransom (right). Photo credit: Kelly Leavitt

The energy Jan invested in those young lives is “the kind of energy you want to spend,” she says.

Grandmommy Camp

Her own children and grandchildren gravitate to Jan’s nurturing wisdom. She has three sons, Bob, Ed, and Ransom (all Eagle Scouts, of course). Her seven grandchildren love to visit her, especially for what the family calls “Grandmommy Camp,” in which they hike, do crafts, make s’mores, stargaze, and all manner of other fun activities. Now her children are creating the same “camps” for their own kids.

“You gotta have fun,” says Jan, who embodies the French term joie de vivre, or joy for living.

An Artist at Heart

Jan remains a prolific artist, exploring various mediums, including oils, acrylics, and clay. A mural she painted in the nursery at First Baptist Church

in Fort Payne remains there today. She also painted stunning Christian icons using an antique paint-layering system, making them for her grandchildren. Of late, she has many requests to paint portraits of people’s dogs, which she does in acrylic. Learning and creating all the time, she implores people to try new things instead of assuming a can’t-do attitude.

Lasting Legacy

Jan’s legacy of grace, kindness, curiosity, and encouragement will ripple through generations of those who’ve had the privilege of knowing her. It already has — she runs into adults whose lives she touched and whose children are in turn influenced in a positive way by things Jan taught their parents. If you have a chance to meet Jan Wilkinson, you’ll come away with a lift in your step and a sense of wonder and possibility for the future. 🐿



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The Art of the Matter

BY ALYCE KENNEY

One definition of the word art is “the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.” Art likewise is expressed in other forms, such as music, photography, theater, and literature.

We are so fortunate to live in and near the artistically diverse community of Mentone. Everywhere we look, we can appreciate the “expression of human creative skill and imagination.” From unique hand-drawn murals, sculptures that echo the region’s history, and the whimsical brightly colored picket fence near the MERF House, art abounds here. Artists and musicians are regularly highlighted at the Chuck Sennett Center for the Arts. The Little River Arts Council brings terrific bands in its “Music for the People” series and various talented artists to Mentone each year through Follow Your Art. The Mentone Fall Festival draws a multitude of artisans and live performances. Moon Lake Library hosts authors, photographers, and “Little Learners” for youngsters.

Each program is a time for sharing

personal creativity with others. Art can be found in galleries and shops. And let us not forget Mother Nature’s contributions, with birdsongs, waterfalls, and sunsets on the brow. We are surrounded by extraordinary opportunities to bring art into our lives.

As you are aware, MERF’s mission is to enrich the learning and living of our community. One of the ways we do this is through art education for elementary school students. This program began at Moon Lake School and transferred to Valley Head when the school closed. Valley Head is the only school to offer art education to elementary students in the county school system. It is totally funded by MERF through grants, donations, and supporters in our local and regional communities. Today, over 250 students attend art class each week and experience the transformative experiences that art brings.

“The students are learning the joy and power of creativity,” said Caroline Moore, Valley Head’s art teacher. She loves bringing this discovery to them each week.

Why does art matter? Why is art education in schools important? A

recent article posted on the University of Florida website answers these questions. Here is a brief summation of some of the highlights in this article.

“Research has shown that when children engage with the arts it fosters creativity and problem-solving abilities. Through activities like drawing, painting, and sculpting, children learn to observe the world more closely and express their thoughts and feelings creatively. This not only boosts their confidence but also contributes to their overall cognitive and emotional development. Art education connects students with their own culture as well as with the wider world. Imaginative activities for young learners can lead to better skills in social interactions and emotional regulation.” <https://arts.ufl.edu/articles/importance-of-art-education/>

On Saturday, March 15, “Valley Head Art Night,” formerly known as “Family Art Night,” will be held at Valley Head School from 3 to 5 p.m. in the gymnasium. Everyone is invited to this free and fun event. See the many wonderful forms of art created by the elementary students. Meet the student artists, their parents, and their friends.



You will learn the stories from their imaginations. You’ll see the pride on their faces. You will bring them a sense of connection to the world outside their windows. This is the evening that student art will be selected for the upcoming Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction, to be held April 12 at Camp Alpine. We hope you will come and support the students and their talents. This major fundraising event allows MERF to bring art to Valley Head School. Tickets go on sale March 1 and are \$50 per seat or \$400 for a table for eight.

You may purchase tickets on the MERF website, merfhouse.com (credit card), or at the Mentone Market (cash or check). This evening gives you a chance to sample tasty foods from local restaurants and bid on fabulous works from local artists and students. It promises to be an entertaining evening, with Ben Shurett hosting as auctioneer once again. You won’t want to miss it. Come out and support art and have a terrific time! 🍷

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.

Vann-McCary Scholarship Applications Due April 15

BY TOM MACMICHAEL

To all local college-bound students:

Spring means time to apply for scholarships! St Joseph’s on-the-Mountain Episcopal Church is accepting applications for students planning to attend college in the fall. The deadline for applications is April 15.

The Vann-McCary Scholarship Committee continues to partner with students from the Mentone /Valley Head area. High school graduating seniors and returning college students are invited to apply. The application is simple and direct. Students will have a chance to talk about their dreams and how they would like to make them happen. Recipi-



ents often qualify for multiple years. The committee will consider: level of financial need, academic achievements to date, and clarity of educational goals as part of this application. Application packets can be downloaded online at www.stjom.church. Go to “Outreach” then “Scholarships.”

Packets are also available at Valley Head High School. See Mrs. Hulgan.

You may also pick up a packet at St. Joseph’s on-the-Mountain Episcopal Church, 21145 Scenic Hwy, Mentone, AL 35984. To get a packet in person or ask questions about the scholarship program, call the church office at 256-634-4476, or Tom MacMichael, Scholarship chairperson, at 540-797-4392. 🍷



Valley Head Art Night set for March 15

STAFF REPORTS

The Valley Head and surrounding communities are invited to come be uplifted and inspired while celebrating the creativity of local students.

The artwork of Valley Head students will be on display Saturday, March 15, at Valley Head Art Night. The event will be held in the Valley Head gym from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

The featured art was created by students of Caroline Moore, MERF’s art teacher for Valley Head. “This is a celebration of the children’s artwork,” Moore says. “The artwork the students

have been working on all year will be on display throughout the whole gym.”

Art enriches children’s lives far beyond the creative aspect. Engaging young students in creativity has been shown to improve math and science performance, enhance social skills and emotional regulation, and increase civic engagement and social tolerance.

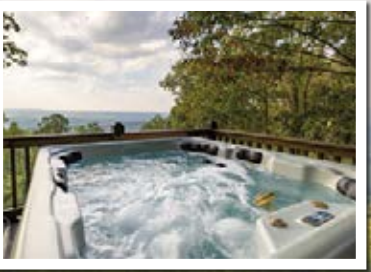
Make plans to encourage and support area students with your attendance. “Everyone in the community is welcome to come and experience the joy of children’s creativity,” Moore says. 🍷



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Is Otis at Your House??

BY KAT GRIFFITH

Otis tells me he has a full-time job. He has barely enough time in a day to get to take in the neighbor’s new smells, potential children’s hands to lick, and familiar spots in Mentone to re-mark. Those of you who have met him have known immediately he likes you! It takes a matter of seconds to communicate.

He says he is rich! Rich in the routes he takes to visit those with whom he MUST check in. Rich to know they need him behind the counter at Little River Hardware. Rich to know the new faces on the porch of Mentone Market are waiting for him. Rich to smell the smells and get some attention from Moon at The Wildflower. Rich to have tidbits outside the dumpster at The Mountain Market and always a petting person. Rich to get the occasional cat food snack at The Log Cabin Village!

He says he is especially blessed to have an alternate home and must not be deterred from visits to his lady friends and their humans. Who are his female flirts, you ask? Gumbo and Dear Abbey in the Hoot Owl Hollow! They have worked out their respective roles when it comes to entertaining the Beau Friend! Dear Abbey presides over the tennis ball game, while Gumbo and Otis politely acknowledge whose turn it is to have tennis ball mouthing privileges. He



announces his intentions to head on over at my front door with a single, directive, “WOOF!” If I dawdle, he tries the doorknob. If he’s lucky, I left it unlocked and he opens the door himself. If he is thwarted, he repeats his emphatic WOOF. Sometimes, but not always, he can be distracted and appeased by our own tennis ball retrieval game. Often, he takes the opportunity and with head down, and ears closed, runs into the woods. Invariably, I can count on him topping off his walk-about at The Hollow.

He is patient and stealthy about getting his way. He might seem to be happy hanging close while I work in my yard; however, when he notices I am preoccupied and disengaged



with him, he makes the getaway! He will be incensed if anyone suggests he is “roaming” or “running away” or “lost.” He calls it his obligatory check-in with both his territory and the humans who inhabit it. If you are a little girl human, he is especially drawn to love you and be loved by you. He will be your Annabel Lee for five minutes. Then, unless you have an ice cream cone, he must be off. If you are a visitor taking in the “down-town” sites of Mentone, Otis might greet you with a tennis ball in his mouth, with which he just left home. He would appreciate your throwing it a bit and loving on him. But if you ask him to get in your car so you can ferry him home, he is onto you and will

flatly refuse. He will quickly take his leave to continue. It is only when he is tired and ready for a thoughtful ride home that he will agree to be chauffeured.

I daily agree with him that he is a rich soul. He knows the more love he gives away, the more love comes his way. There is always a surplus and never a limit to how many new friends he can meet. If you see the travelin’ man, feel free to emphatically tell him to “GO HOME!” But don’t be surprised if he shifts his gaze away from you and yawns. Then sidles up to you and leans in for a good rub.

You can visit Otis on Facebook at the group Friends of Otis. 🐾

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Rhododendron Garden Club News

For the Love of Lavender

BY MELLANIE TUTTLE

Like any trek, the inception and realization of Lookout Lavender Farms was a tale of time, hard work, and ultimately great satisfaction. The downtrodden, forgotten property and a snake-infested homestead would have been enough to send most folks running, but the land just kept calling to Alice and Bill Marrin. They enthralled the Rhododendron Garden Club with their adventure of lavender inspiration. Why lavender? Four main reasons: deer resistance, low maintenance, reliable blooming, and fragrance. Alice told of a deer that didn't know it was supposed to resist the tender silvery green foliage or the spikes of pinky, purply flowers. It took one taste, spit it out, and lesson learned.

With its Mediterranean origins, lavender needs full sun and alkaline (7.2 pH is ideal) soil that is well drained and sandy. No heavy clay. Since most of the land in this area is acidic, with heavy clay and probably drainage issues, some adaptations must be made. Plants can be placed 40 inches apart on mounds for better drainage and limestone rocks added to the soil to adjust the pH. (test the soil). Once established, lavender requires little water. Bees love it, other insects not so much. Pruning six weeks before the frost date keeps the plant healthy and in shape for spring blooms. Seeds do not germinate well, so cuttings are the best way to propagate lavender. Those who visit the farm can attest to the heady, calming fragrance wafting from rows of purple bliss planted in the four fields.

Their copper essential oil distiller would be the envy of many a moonshiner! Lavender-infused moonshine



anyone? Fifty pounds of freshly cut lavender stems will fill the still, and then the process is similar to steaming vegetables. Magic happens, and finally the separator funnel is filled with essential oil floating atop the denser water.

For culinary purposes, the English lavenders, aka True Lavenders, are preferred. *Lavandula angustifolia* cultivars offer a variety of subtle notes when added to food. For a peppery flavor, try "Melissa." "Croxtton Wild" leaves an earthy, cinnamon taste, while "Miss Katherine" is sweet and floral. If something tastes like soap, the cook is heavy-handed or the wrong lavender variety was used. Just a soupçon is needed! Some lavenders are more tender and won't survive mountain winters, so choose wisely or plant in containers that can be moved. *Augustifolias* will produce a sweeter, more subtle smell than the *Lavandin* cultivars. French lavender plants (*Lavandula x intermedium*), aka *Lavandin* aka the common lavender,

are sterile hybrid crosses between French and Portuguese plants. Containing high amounts of aromatic oils and a higher camphor content than the English lavender makes it ideal for cosmetic purposes. It has a stronger, sharper scent. The smell associated most with lavender is produced by the *Grosso* variety.

Lavandins tend to be larger plants with more flowers that bloom once a year. Hues of its spiked flowers of lilac purple to violet blue. Foliage is grayish green. Lookout Lavender does not grow Spanish lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*). What seems like such a good buy at Trader Joe's is an annual here, one and done. It may be more suitable for areas of hot, humid climates.

Medicinally, lavender essential oil has antibacterial, anti-fungal, antioxidant, and anti-inflammatory benefits. Studies have shown it to relieve headaches, reduce stress, and improve sleep and insomnia. One article showed it equal to Valium for anxiety!



It's not just a pretty face! Lookout Lavender Farm will be open June 6-21 for its annual Lavender uPick Event: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday from 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; Friday 4-8 p.m. Admission is \$8; free for 12 and under. Each harvested bundle is \$7. Bring a picnic. Spend the day. Take photos. The Lav Shack offers all sorts of lavender goodies — essential oil, butters, soaps, jellies, infused pillows. For digging, cutting and weeding the Hori Hori Barebones Ultimate knife may be the most envy-inspiring tool a gardener can have!

The next garden club meeting at the library will be Tuesday, March 11, at 10 a.m.

Featured speaker will be the fabulous, knowledgeable Martha Wood. *Salvia* will be the topic of discussion. 🍷

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 11 and NE AL Federation of Garden Clubs.



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Class to Help Adults Evaluate Online Information

BY ANNE MCLEOD

The internet, as it has grown in popularity as a source of information, has at the same time become home to conspiracy theories, misinformation, and disinformation. In an environment where there is so much information, it's worthwhile to question how users can know if the sources they encounter are trustworthy.

Moon Lake Library is hosting a class on March 13 at 2 p.m. to help patrons develop the skills to conduct safe and effective internet searches and to assist them in accurately assessing the reliability of the information they uncover. Media Literacy: Skills for Evaluating Information Online is an in-person program created specifically for public library use to assist adults who may not have had the opportunity through formal education or professional training to develop strong skills



with technology and the evaluation of online sources.

The program will last approximately one hour and will be presented by Anna Henderson, a graduate student in the Masters of Information Sciences program at the University of Tennessee. Henderson currently works as an independent contractor for a software development company in Toronto. Her professional work focuses on researching and fact-checking bias in Artificial Intelligence (AI) chat models and effective methods of counter-speech for misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and hate speech. She completed her undergraduate studies at Troy University, where she earned a bachelor of science degree in English. Henderson is originally from Dothan, Alabama, but now calls Chattanooga home.

The program is free, and pre-registration is recommended. Please call 256-634-2127 or email books@moonlakelibrary.org to pre-register. 🐾

Check Out Mentone's New Poetry Club

Do poems stir your soul? Does a well-turned line warm your heart? Would you like to learn more about reading and appreciating poetry?

Moon Lake Library will host a get-acquainted meeting on March 6 at 3 p.m. for those interested in starting a local poetry club. Dekie Hicks of Rome, Georgia, is the organizer. As Dekie explains, "The idea is to form a

group like a book club but for poems. Everyone would bring in a poem to share and discuss with the group."

The group will plan poetry-related events like open mic evenings. April is National Poetry Month, so look for additional information in next month's Groundhog. For more information about the club, contact Dekie Hicks at hicks620076@bellsouth.net or call 706-346-8203. 🐾



POETRY Club

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MARCH 2025 AT MOON LAKE LIBRARY



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.

March 1 at 1 p.m. - Mentone Ukulele offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

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

March 6 at 3 p.m. - Poetry group is forming for anyone interested in reading and discussing poetry from any time period. Come to this "get-acquainted" meeting.

March 7 at 2 p.m. - Workshop on Creativity with Ruth Ferraz. Registrants will develop both life skills and their artistic ability in four Friday afternoon sessions based on Dr. Betty Edwards' book "Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain." Pre-registration is required. There is currently a wait list. Call the library for more information.

March 7 at 6 p.m. - Family Game Night! Bring a snack to share, and we'll enjoy board games and cards at the library.

March 8 at 10:30 a.m. - The Moon Lake Library Book Club meets for a discussion of books about pilgrimages and road trips.

March 13 at 2 p.m. - Media Literacy program with Anna Henderson. Learn how to perform safe and effective online searches and how to evaluate the reliability of information. Preregister by emailing books@moonlakelibrary.org or call 256-634-2127.

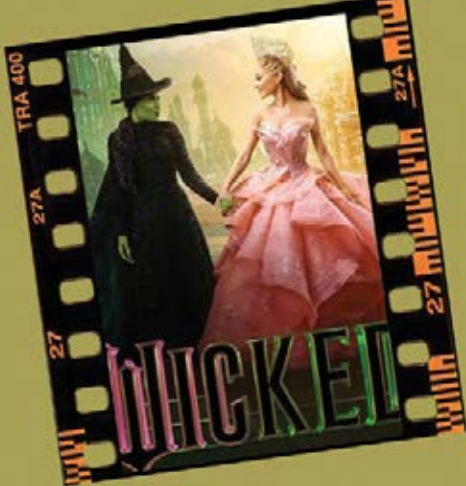
March 14 at 6 p.m. - Friday Night @ the Movies: "Wicked" (PG, 2024)

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

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

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Arts Council Gears Up for Fun First Fridays and New Works on Display



BY JULI JORDAN

First Fridays in Mentone

The Little River Arts Council is excited to introduce First Fridays, a monthly celebration of art, music, and community in Mentone! Beginning May 2 and continuing through November 7, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m., the shops at Moon Lake Village will come alive with:

- Pop-up artists showcasing their work
- Live music to set the mood
- Delicious refreshments
- Interactive art activities for all ages

Make the evening even more special by dining at Moon Lake Kitchen! The Mentone Arts Center is also joining the festivities, featuring the Porch Pickers performing live from 3 to 5 p.m.. Additionally, all Mentone shops and galleries are encouraged to participate, making this a true community-wide event. Join us for an unforgettable evening celebrating creativity and connection!

Make Your Mark on Mentone

Featuring: Northeast Alabama Community College Art Club

Starting March 19, students from the NACC Art Club will be Making Their Mark in Mentone! Stop by to witness these talented young artists at work.

Located at the corner of Highway 89 and Highway 117, on the grounds of the Mentone Inn, this inspiring public art project invites artists and community members to express what Mentone means to them. Participants will create large-scale chalk murals reflecting their personal connection to this special place. To learn more about the Make Your Mark on Mentone project and explore past artists' contributions, visit our website. Want to Make Your Mark on Mentone? Send us an email at Info@littleriverartscouncil.org

Little River Art Gallery – Featured Artist: Brande Arno

Website: www.brandearnofineart.com
Instagram: @brande.arno.fine.art
Facebook: @brande.arno
YouTube: @brandearnofineart

Meet Brande Arno, a Fort Payne-based artist whose passion for painting has grown and evolved over the years—much like tending a garden. She compares her creative journey to nurturing a studio garden, where strong, flourishing works emerge alongside the occasional “weeds” of weaker paintings. Brande candidly shares the struggles of learning to paint through trial and error, a journey that often led her to doubt her abilities. While books and studying other artists’



Brande Arno

processes provided some guidance, it was through persistent practice and dedication that she developed her own unique style and technique. To read more about Brande’s artistic journey and explore her work, visit our Artist Registry at www.littleriverartscouncil.org under the “Painting/Drawing” section.

Join the Fun – Volunteer with Us!

Our volunteers are the heart of the Little River Arts Council. We rely on community support to bring events like First Fridays and Make Your Mark on Mentone to life; expand access to

the arts; and keep the Little River Art Gallery at Moon Lake Village Campus open and thriving. There are many ways to get involved, from event assistance to behind-the-scenes support. If you’re passionate about the arts and community, we’d love to have you on board! Visit our volunteer page on our website to learn more: www.littleriverartscouncil.org/volunteer.html.

Our Mission

The Little River Arts Council (LRAC) is dedicated to enriching the quality of life in Mentone and its neighboring communities by:

- Raising funds for the arts
- Sponsoring engaging events
- Providing educational opportunities
- Strengthening cultural resources

Our efforts benefit both local businesses and residents, creating a more vibrant, creative, and connected community. We rely on memberships, individual and corporate contributions, program revenues, and fundraising efforts to sustain our programs year-round. We are incredibly grateful to our donors, supporters, and volunteers, whose generosity and dedication make our mission possible. 🍷

Juli Jordan is president of the Little River Arts Council.

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Little River

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BOOM TOWN MAKERS MARKET

March is NATIONAL READING MONTH...

... and Boom Town Makers Market is celebrating our talented local authors. We will kick off the month, Saturday, March 1, featuring authors, specials on book bundles, and more.

Saturday, March 8, Boom Town Makers Market will join other small businesses in town with a “Spring Open House”, where we will debut new art, home/cabin & cottage decor, jewelry, candle scents, and everything else our wonderful makers-make.

Watch our website for updates and other events as we usher in the month of March. www.boomtownmakersmarket.org

Located in Downtown Fort Payne's Historic Sawyer Building Circa 1890
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Mentone Arts Center Music, Art Workshop, and Sennett Social Coming to MACC This Month

BY RANDY GRIDER

Arts in Education Concert March 1

We begin the month of March with a special concert at the Chuck Sennett Center for the Arts.

Russell Gulley is bringing internationally acclaimed guitarist Hiroya Tsukamoto back to Mentone as part of the Arts in Education program. The concert will be Saturday, March 1. Stuart Douglas kicks off the show at 7:30 p.m. Advance tickets are \$25 plus tax/fee and \$30 at the door. Advance tickets can be purchased at Hiroyaforaie.eventbrite.com.

Hiroya is a one-of-a-kind composer, guitarist, and singer-songwriter from Kyoto, Japan. He began playing the five-string banjo when he was 13 and took up the guitar shortly after.

In 2000, Hiroya received a scholarship to Berklee College of Music and came to the United States. He formed his own group in Boston, “INTER-OCEANICO (inter-oceanic),” which consists of unique musicians from different continents, including Latin Grammy Colombian singer Marta Gomez. The group released three acclaimed records (“The Other Side of the World,” “Confluencia,” and “Where the River Shines”). Hiroya has released five solo albums and has been leading concerts internationally, including several appearances at Blue Note (NYC), United Nations and Japanese National Television (NHK). Hiroya is a two-time second-place winner of the International Fingerstyle Guitar Championship in 2018 and 2022.

Mixed-Media Workshop

We also are excited to offer a two-day mixed-media workshop, “Layering, Glazing and More,” March 8-9 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. each day at Moon Lake Village. The workshop is led by artist/instructor Lisa Opielinski. The class is limited to 10 students; tuition is \$195 plus a \$30 supply fee paid directly to the instructor. See contact information at the end of this article to register.

About the class: Here’s a glimpse of what students will learn:

- Layering and glazing with watercolors, acrylic paints, and media for rich mixed-media effects
- Adding texture with gel for depth and dimension



- Improving brush strokes using a brush stroke guide
- Painting birds with just a few simple strokes
- Using a soft lifting technique to create highlights
- Making a color-mixing guide for paintings
- Designing and creating stamps for unique details
- Using scratch techniques to highlight and refine elements
- And yes — wearing gloves and learning why it matters!

About the instructor: Alabama native Lisa Opielinski is a professional artist with an undying passion for her chosen career, and she has been doing it for more than 30 years. Unlike most other popular fine artists, Lisa is the product of neither a conventional university nor an art school education. Her knowledge was obtained through hands-on research and product experimentation, very much like a post-graduate student chasing a logical scientific hypothesis to prove to the world.

Lisa makes her living by creating works of art in oil, acrylic, clay, precious metal gilding, watercolor, mixed media, and media exclusive to the project at hand. Other facets of Lisa’s career include decorative finishes on walls, furniture, cabinetry, etc. If you need a plain wall to look textured or a flat door to look like a 16th century timber frame, she has done it. She is also an Ampersand Artist Ambassador. One of the distinguishing characteristics of Lisa’s abstract paintings is the multiple applications of her exclusive, innovative textures. Even on her smallest abstract paintings, there are many layers of texture; making the work more interesting. The pieces are then clear coated with an archival varnish for protection; making them touchable art.

Social and Tribute March 22

Our rescheduled Fall Social from last September to honor Charles “Soc” and Barbara Sennett will be held at the arts center on Saturday,

March 22, from 5-7 p.m. We will pay tribute to these beloved supporters 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 6 p.m. followed by Brett Sennett performing songs he has written on guitar. Drinks and heavy hors d’oeuvres will be available. 🍷

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.



Hiroya Tsukamoto



Mixed Media Workshop • March 8-9



Charles "Soc" and Barbara Sennett



Groundhog Volunteer Hero: Paul Howell

This month’s volunteer spotlight shines on Paul Howell of Mentone. A retired attorney originally from Orlando, Paul and his wife, Charlette, moved here in 2017 from Atlanta. Paul was nominated by a reader for his tireless work in service to the community.

For the past five years, Paul has given his time to the St. Joseph’s Episcopal Church Food Pantry, a ministry he joined after meeting the church’s former Rector Bill Winters. Paul and a team of other volunteers gather each Tuesday to organize loads of canned goods, produce, meats, and pet food before the food pantry clients arrive on Wednesday. They then work all morning helping get the food out the door to take home with them. Paul often helps the church respond to those who need assistance in other ways, such as utilities, and he serves in support of the church’s Sunday services.

Giving praise to all his fellow workers, Paul says the best thing about the weekly food pantry is working with a great team. The ministry is a well-oiled operation, with each person responsible for a specific task. He also volunteered at the food bank in Atlanta, and he is a past president of the DeKalb County Master Gardeners.

Thank you, Paul, for your compassion and dedication to your fellow citizens. 🍷

Is there a volunteer you’d like to recognize? Email your nomination to groundhognews@yahoo.com.

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RIVER RIDGE ESCAPE

Delivering Custom Tiny Homes Nationwide or to Our Communities



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.

Come Experience Tiny Living on Lookout Mountain!

Tours of River Ridge Escape's Tiny Homes — Mon-Fri 10-5 ET or by appointment.
8021 Highway 48, Menlo, GA 30731 RiverRidgeEscapes.com (706) 936-0007



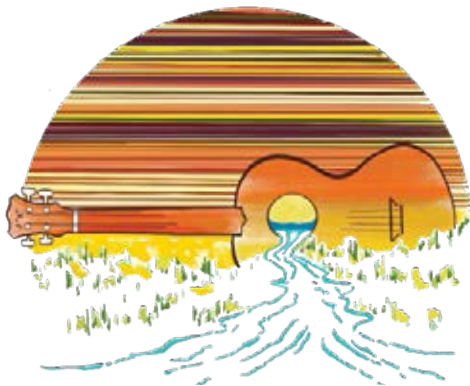
Life Is Not Always Rainbows and Butterflies...

BY DEBRA FEY AND JERRY MEGLI

...but the bright and happy sounds of the ukulele help push those dark clouds a little farther away. Anyone reading this article right now knows life can be hard at times. Sometimes we must accept a new reality; even so, there is the ukulele.

The members of the Mentone Ukes are first and foremost friends. Friends who encourage. Who celebrate or grieve alongside you. Who lift you up. We tackle challenging songs together (yes, even the dreaded Bb chord!), and our Ukes friends help see each other through those challenging songs and yes, the challenges of life.

When we moved to Athens, Alabama, about a year ago, we knew the Mentone Ukes would still call to us, like a siren, back to Mentone and our home away from home, the Moon Lake Library. Playing ukulele with our friends is what makes this group so special to us. We enjoy creating sessions and introducing new songs that work for a group our size. And then there are the performances around town that we enjoy so much: spring performances at the Farmers Market, the LRAC Big Art Pop-ups, MERF senior lunches, playing on the porch of Little River Hardware, the Mentone Fall Festival, the World's Longest Yard Sale, Holiday Open



House play-a-thons at the library, and the annual Town of Mentone Lighting of the Christmas Tree.

But we never know what's around the next corner. Trips to Mentone aren't possible for us right now due to Debra's ongoing health issues, but the ukulele and the Mentone Ukes are still a vital, daily part of our lives — albeit from a distance. Distance cannot negate friendship or the impact of the ukulele on one's spirit.

Everyone has a burden that they quietly or silently bear, but if you can lay that burden down long enough to pick up a ukulele and play it, well, it helps to lighten the load. Yes, life is not always about rainbows and butterflies, but with the ukulele, they come back, if just for a few moments. If you don't believe us, just give it a try at one of our free sessions this month! 🎸

IF YOU'D LIKE TO LEARN THE UKULELE and become a part of this fun and welcoming group, please join us at one of our next **FREE** sessions at the Moon Lake Library: March 1, 15, or 29. Newcomers and absolute beginners of all ages are always welcome to attend, and an introduction to the ukulele is offered at the same time as our regular session. Loaner ukuleles are available. Find us on Facebook: MentoneUkes or on the web: www.mentoneukes.com. For further information please contact Debra Fey (debrajfe@gmail.com) or Hank Allen (hank.d.allen@gmail.com).

Name The Groundhog Mascot!

Your favorite community newspaper now has a live mascot! If you attended the Groundhog Day Community Celebration last month, you saw the debut of our new mascot. Kids and adults alike loved dancing and interacting with the life-sized critter. The mascot also made an appearance at the February Mentone Town Council meeting, handing out Valentine's Day candies to our elected officials and attendees.

But our mascot is missing something — a name! Submit your ideas for the playful critter's moniker. If we select your idea*, you'll receive a free year's subscription to The Groundhog, plus one night's stay at the Mentone Inn Bed and Breakfast!**

To submit your idea, visit



Photo by Mikel Yeakle

readthegroundhog.com/name. We can't wait to see your submission!

*If more than one person submits the same winning name, we will draw from those submissions for our winner.

**Non-transferable; winner must use free stay themselves. 🐾

Shrove Tuesday Community Pancake Supper



Join us at St. Joseph's-on-the-Mountain
March 4 from 5-7 p.m.!

FREE to all! Any donations you wish to make will benefit the St. Joseph's Food Pantry.

NOW OPEN!

Enjoy the convenience of the First Fidelity Bank's ATM across from the Mentone Market.

Services Offered:

- Withdraw cash
- Deposit cash or checks

Drive through and walk up are available!



22 Douglas St., Mentone, AL — Across the street from the Mentone Market! The **First Fidelity Bank – Main Branch** is located at **1400 Gault Avenue North, Fort Payne, AL**





March Community Events

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

March 1 Mustang Run 5K Run – Run or walk the beautiful NACC campus on Saturday, March 1, and help us to raise money for scholarships at the First Southern State Bank Mustang 5K! The Mustang Run/Walk will begin promptly at 8 a.m. from the front of the Northeast Campus at 138 Alabama Highway 35 in Rainsville. Chip timing is provided by Pinpoint Timing. All proceeds from this race will benefit scholarships at Northeast Alabama Community College. Pre-registration until February 1 is only \$25. February 1 until day of race is \$30. Registration day of race is \$40. Students pay only \$20. To be guaranteed a long sleeve race t-shirt, please register before February 20. Register here: <https://runsignup.com/Race/AL/Rainsville/FirstSouthernStateBankMustang5KRunWalk>

March 1 Serious Skills Series: Quilt the Forest Workshop – Join fabric artist and nature enthusiast Michelle Reynolds for a creative quilting workshop inspired by the beauty of the forest. In this hands-on class, you'll design and hand-sew small blocks onto a canvas square using colorful felts, embroidery threads, and other materials. Reflect on your favorite nature scenes as you create a unique vignette, cutting out symbols, layering colors, and stitching them together to tell your story. Discover inspiration in nature; learn the art of storytelling through color, pattern, and texture; and explore applique techniques. This workshop offers a chance to connect with fellow participants while experimenting with techniques that resonate with you. All fabric and supplies will be provided, no previous experience required. 1-4 p.m. DeSoto State Park. Benefield Interpretive Center next to the Country Store on County Road 89. \$55 includes all supplies. Class space is limited to 12 and pre-registration is required. Pre-registration here: www.littliverarts council.org/quilttheforest1.html.

March 1 Killer Beaz at the Pickin Post – Celebrating his ninth season on Discovery Channel's hit series, "Moonshiners," comedian Killer Beaz is touring the nation when not filming. With decades of performing in comedy clubs, theatres, television, and radio, Killer Beaz is legendary in the comedy industry. Beaz continues to make regular stops to The Grand Ole Opry, and his outrageously funny and clean show will be onstage at Pickin' Post in Fort Payne at 6:30 p.m. Tickets and information for the tour are available at www.KillerBeaz.com.

March 1 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.

March 6 Poetry Lovers Get-Acquainted Meeting – Is poetry your jam? A group is forming for anyone interested in reading and discussing poetry from any time period. Come to our "get-acquainted" meeting March 6 from 3-4 p.m. at Moon Lake Library. For more information, contact Dekie Hicks, hicks620076@bellsouth.net phone: 706-346-8203.

March 7 Family Game Night – Come play with us at Family Game Night! Bring a snack to share if you can, and we'll enjoy Hearts, Rummikub, Mentone Train Dominoes, or whatever you like to play. Bring your own game and you may find you can introduce it to new fans. The library also has a collection of board games for people to try. The fun begins at 6 p.m.!

March 8-9 Mixed-Media Workshop – Join artist/instructor Lisa Opielinski for a hands-on, creative experience where students will explore various techniques to elevate their painting skills. Tuition is \$195 (plus a \$30 art supply fee paid directly to the instructor) for the two-day class. It is limited to 10 students. Please email mentonartscenter@gmail.com or call 256-674-3366 to register.

March 8, 10-15 Finder Keepers Consignment Sale – You will find gently used, good-quality name brand children's and adults' clothing and shoes, home furnishings, electronics, books, toys, furniture, and more, all at great prices. Sign

up NOW to become a consignor! Will be held at the VFW Fairgrounds. Special pre-sale hours for consignors. 256-632-2420 or 256-638-5998.

March 11 Women's History Month Concert – Mustang Music is in our Taylor Era...are you ready for it? Join us in the NACC Student Center for OUR version of the Eras Tour. Featuring all the hits and a special menu that's "Taylor" made just for the occasion.

March 13 and 29 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 also 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. at DeSoto State Park. 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.

March 14-16 Paula Lambert at Andiamo Lodge – We are so excited to announce a weekend with the one and only Paula Lambert. She will be back to Andiamo Lodge for a weekend full of events. There will be a book signing / Pop Up Shop, an inspiring dinner, as well as a hands-on brunch class. What a great way to spring into spring! Tickets available online. Visit <https://www.andiamolodge.com/schedule>. Space is limited.

March 15 CCC 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, approx. 2.5 miles total. Meet at DeSoto State Park Lodge and car caravan to the trailhead in the Little River Wildlife Management Area. 1-3 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.

March 16 May's Gulf Songwriter Series VIII – Don't Miss the Season Kickoff of the May's Gulf Songwriter Series! Get ready for an intimate and unforgettable musical experience. This small-stage concert series celebrates the artistry of local and regional singer-songwriters, bringing their original music to life in a unique and personal setting. Join us from 3-5 p.m. at the beautiful Little River Canyon Center for an afternoon of extraordinary performances featuring the expressive vocals and eloquent lyrics of Jessica Willis Fisher and the rich blend of southern and Americana sounds of Anse Rigby. Tickets: \$25 in advance | \$30 at the door. Coolers welcome – Bring your favorite refreshments! Rain or shine, the show goes on. Don't miss this chance to connect with the heart and soul of authentic songwriting. Secure your tickets now and be part of an unforgettable evening!

March 20 Early Spring Walk – Join DeSoto State Park staff on a walk along the Talmadge Butler Boardwalk Trail to see what species of plants are starting to grow and bloom after a long winter season. We will learn some natural history of the plants and medicinal and historical uses as well. 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Meet at the 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 hike. Contact Brittney. Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details.

March 21 Durinda Cheek Water Color Experience – Spring is a season of renewal, vibrant colors, and boundless inspiration—making it the perfect time to pick up a paintbrush and capture the blossoming world around you. Whether you're a seasoned artist or a curious beginner, this spring watercolor class offers a joyful and creative escape that brings the magic of the season to life on paper. The Gallery by Andiamo Lodge Moon Lake Village. 10 a.m.-1 p.m. <https://www.andiamolodge.com/schedule>

March 21, 22, and 28 Serious Skills Series: Archery – Hosted by DeSoto State Park. Archery is the art, practice, and skill of shooting arrows with the use of a bow. Historically, it has been used for hunting and combat and has been around for many years. Archery is becoming increasingly popular as an outdoor recreation activity. Ages 8 to adult. Activity is suitable for those who have never shot a bow, or for those with some previous experience. All equipment provided. Class times on all three days start at 10 a.m., 11 a.m., & 12 p.m. Picnic Area across the road from DSP's Country Store on County Road 89. Free & open to the public. Pre-registration is NOT required; the public is more than welcome to come at any of the posted times. Please note archery may be cancelled due to wet conditions. Email Brittney. Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov for any details. Info: <https://reserve.alapark.com/register/DSP-SSS-Archery>

March 21 Family Game Night @ the Library – Come play with us at Family Game Night! Bring a snack to share if you can, and we'll enjoy Hearts, Rummikub, Mentone Train Dominoes, or whatever you like to play. Bring your own game and you may find you can introduce it to new fans. The library also has a collection of board games for people to try. The fun begins at 6 p.m.!

March 22 Serious Skills Series: Leaf Pounding Class – Leaf pounding is a simple, stunning technique, historically used by Native American women to decorate fabric. Pounding with a rock or a hammer transfers the natural dyes of a leaf to fabric while retaining the design of the original leaf. In this class, join DeSoto State Park Naturalist Brittney Hughes on a quick walk to identify leaves that can be used for leaf pounding, then unleash your creativity to make a beautiful and unique piece of fabric to take home. Participants can also bring their own fabric, such as t-shirts, handkerchiefs, pillowcases, etc., as long as it is 100% cotton. This class is for ages 8 to adult. 3-5 p.m. Meet at the park lodge, in the pollinator garden. \$15.00 includes all supplies. Class space is limited; pre-registration is required. Pre-registration: <https://reserve.alapark.com/register/DSP-SSS-LeafPounding> This class will be held outside under a covered pavilion, so be prepared for whatever weather conditions are present. For any questions, email Brittney. Hughes@dcnr.alabama.gov.

March 27 Early Spring Hike – Join DeSoto State Park staff on a moderate meandering hike along the West Fork of Little River to see what species of plants are starting to grow and bloom after a long winter season. We will learn some natural history of the plants and some medicinal and historical uses as well. About the hike: the trail will be moderate, rugged terrain over approx. 2 miles. We will utilize the DeSoto Scout Trail & Green Trail for this hike. Meet at DeSoto's Country Store on County Road 89. Free & open to everyone; no pre-registration 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.

March 29 Writing Workshop with Anna Hartzog – Spend the day honing your craft with Village Editorial President Anna Hartzog. Retreat from the distractions of everyday life in beautiful Mentone. Take time to learn more about the publishing industry and work on your own novel, non-fiction book, or short story. The Gallery by Andiamo Lodge Moon Lake Village. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. <https://www.andiamolodge.com/schedule>

THE FOOD PANTRY

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



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

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



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[@thegroovygoatmentone](#)

Exciting Changes in the Works for Legion Post 215

BY CLAIRE BARONI

The American Legion Post 215 plans a revitalization over the coming months, not only in the form of membership renewal, but also facility improvement and additional communications aimed at providing critical information to veterans.

We are welcoming existing members to renew, reaching out to prospective members, making new connections throughout the community, and building relationships with city and state organizations. We're also updating our technological capabilities. For example, we've created a new Facebook page and archived our previous page for historical purposes. We have moved our meetings to the second Tuesday of the month and with installation of internet services, we will offer a virtual option using Google Meet. Access to the virtual meeting is by an invitation sent to your email address. A new social hour will provide an opportunity for veterans to talk about topics that are important to them, such as entitlements, health benefits, and disability compensation through the Veterans Administration.

Upcoming physical upgrades include: adding lighting to our flags, stairs, and sign; winterizing our post building; creating a space where our future veteran service officer and current post officers can assist veterans with compensation and disability claims and where training can take place; installing fencing; and better utilization of the entire property.

We'll have several surprise upgrades coming to our post this June. Also, we are in the process of clarifying the appropriate laws that we are required to follow concerning hosting BINGO at our post. Stay tuned for details of upcoming events and for chances to win items at specific events.

We thank all who support veterans in our local communities — it doesn't go unnoticed. As always, God bless America and our veterans. 🇺🇸

Find Post 215 on their new Facebook page by searching "American Legion Post 215, Mentone, Alabama." Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month. Email post officers at commanderpost-215mentone@gmail.com and adjutantpost215@gmail.com.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY AMERICAN LEGION!

★ — ★ — ★

Please join us and celebrate the 106th birthday of The American Legion.
Hotdog, chips, sides and drink \$5.00
Hamburger/cheeseburger, chips, sides and drink \$10.00

★ — ★ — ★

WHO IS INVITED: OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

WHEN: SATURDAY, MARCH 15, 2025
11:00 AM - 2:00 PM
FLAG RETIREMENT CEREMONY AT 1:30PM

WHERE: MENTONE AMERICAN LEGION POST 215
195 COVE ROAD
MENTONE, AL 35984

SPECIAL GUESTS: SCOUT TROOP 4178



Taste of the Mountain (continued from page 1)

And it's not just art on the auction block — exclusive experience packages are always a favorite among bidders. Think getaways to unique destinations, private chef dinners, and other curated offerings.

Local Flavors

Of course, the evening wouldn't be complete without sampling the incredible food prepared by a lineup of local restaurants and businesses. And their generosity extends beyond this evening, as many also support MERF's Senior Lunch program. Come hungry and enjoy meeting the folks who run these eateries.

Tickets Available March 1

Ben Shurett returns as auctioneer, bringing his signature energy and enthusiasm to the bidding. With an outstanding selection of artwork, one-of-a-kind experiences, and delicious local food, this is an evening you don't want to miss. 🍷

Tickets go on sale March 1

Individual tickets are \$50, and tables of eight are \$400. Secure your spot online at merfhouse.com (credit card) or at the Mentone Market (cash or check).



Scenes from last year's Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction.
Photos by Mikel Yeakle

Understanding the Basics of Medigaps

BY LYNN HIXON

How does Medicare Supplement Insurance (Medigap) work? The costs that Medigaps cover include deductibles, coinsurance amounts, and copays that your Original Medicare does not cover. For example, a Medigap pays for your Part B coinsurance charges, meaning that it will pay for the 20% coinsurance you normally owe when you receive Medicare-covered physicians' services. It will also pay for the deductibles and the copays on your Part A hospitalization.

It is important to know that Medigap policies only work with Original Medicare Parts A and B. If you get your Medicare benefits from a Medicare Part C plan known as a Medicare Advantage Plan, you cannot purchase a Medigap. Medigaps only pay for Original Medicare cost-sharing gaps.

Medigap policies must follow federal and state laws designed to protect you, and they must be clearly identified as "Medicare Supplement Insurance." Insurance companies can sell you only "standardized" plans, which are named by most states by letters of the alphabet A-D, F, G, and K-N. All the plans with the same letter offer the same basic benefits, regardless of where you live or which insurance company you buy the plan from. That's why you can benefit from shopping around.

Contact your State Health Insurance Assistance Program – called "SHIP" – to learn more about how to compare Medigap policy coverages. If you have any questions, please call Lynn, the SHIP counselor at the DeKalb County Council on Aging at 256-845-8590. 📞



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Mike Leath, Caleb Roberts,
Amy Justice & Ronnie Highfield



The Mountain Kitchen

BY REBECCA HENDERSON,
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Thinking back to the early 70s, I recall the excitement I felt as my mother’s station wagon bumped down the unpaved road from Hwy 117 to the cottage on Lake Lahusage where we spent many summer weekends. Martha Ann and Sanford “Bubba” Dunson were close family friends, and they loved their lake haven. My sister and I loved jumping off their dock and floating all day on inner tubes. One summer a group of us, parents and kids, swam from the cottage dock to the giant rock out where two channels of the lake intersect — a feat indeed. If you’ve been on Lahusage, you know this rock. We took a canoe out to it last year after not having seen it since 1975. Two things struck me: first, my late-50s heart and lungs couldn’t conceive of making that swim; second, the size and shape of that behemoth were just as they’ve lived in my memory for decades. It’s impressive.

Back then, we swam all day and were starving by late afternoon. Cook-outs were big events, with the men grilling in the pavilion and Martha Ann and my mother laughing and reminiscing about their shared high school days in the kitchen as they filled in the menu around the steaks or burgers soon to be brought in.

Recently, I found one of the recipes I remember eating many times at the big table in that cottage kitchen. In fact, I have a vision of my father staring at my mother as she upended a

bag of sweet onions onto the counter and announced we were having “pie” as a side dish. This recipe is so delicious, even my father asked for it over and over. Buttery and mellow, it goes with anything. The sum of its parts are sublime. Both my mother and Martha Ann have passed on, but I hear their laughter and smell the smoke from the grill whenever I think of this dish. I’ll be making it for my household regularly.

Summertime Onion Pie (Actually you can make this year-round.)

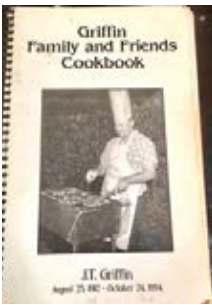
- 1.25 cups finely crumbled Ritz crackers
- 3 tablespoons butter, melted
- 2 cups thinly sliced sweet onions
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 eggs
- ¾ cup milk
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- Paprika
- Chopped fresh parsley (or dried parsley flakes)

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Mix crumbs with 3 tablespoons melted butter. Press into a lightly greased 8-inch pie plate.
3. Sauté onions over medium-high heat in 2 tablespoons butter, stirring frequently, until translucent. Spoon into crust.
4. Whisk eggs with milk, salt, and pepper, and pour over onions. Sprinkle cheese over top.
5. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or lightly browned. Sprinkle with paprika and parsley.

Dessert, please!
Recently I was reminded (because I ate one) of a classic dessert my Mentone friend Kathy Casler and her sister Linda Stephenson love to make together, splitting the batch to take a plateful home to their loved ones. Let’s face it: lemon squares can be good, and they can be a bland disappointment. THESE are the ultimate celebration of the sunny, tart citrus fruit! Kathy gave me the recipe several years ago from



Sisters Lemon Squares



Kathy and Linda’s family cookbook, with their father, Sand Mountain native J.T. Griffin, on the cover.

her family’s own cookbook (a treasure if you can get your hands on a copy). Linda and Kathy insist that fresh-squeezed lemon juice and real butter make them special.

Sisters Lemon Squares

Crust:
2 sticks butter, melted
2 cups all-purpose flour
½ cup granulated sugar

Filling:
4 eggs, beaten well
½ cup fresh-squeezed lemon juice
2 cups granulated sugar
½ cup all-purpose flour

Topping:
Powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
Prepare crust by mixing melted butter, flour, and sugar. Press into the bottom of a lightly greased 13- x 9-inch pan. Bake at 350 degrees until slightly browned, about 20 minutes.
While crust bakes, whisk filling ingredients together until well mixed. Pour over hot crust, and return to the oven to bake 20 more minutes.
Remove pan from oven and sift powdered sugar over top while still hot. Cool before cutting into squares. Serve chilled or at room temperature. 🍋

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.



Summertime Onion Pie has a hint of sweetness and a kick from sharp cheddar. The pie plate is a vintage find from Dave’s Antiques in Hammondville.

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Scenes from the

GROUNDHOG DAY

COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

Moon Lake gym was the site of delicious dishes, desserts, and dancing into the night for the inaugural Groundhog Day Community Celebration. Held the first day of February, the event brought the community together for kids games, art projects, and activities that provided fun and fellowship for all.

The event was sponsored by MERF and supported by numerous community organizations as a way to celebrate The Groundhog newspaper. The publication was founded more than 40 years ago on Groundhog Day, and has been connecting the community with news and features since. 🐾



The Cake Walk was a popular game.



The Groundhog mascot made its debut.



The Crockpot Cook-off was a tasty success.



Crockpot Cook-off Winners: Best Stew—Jessica Brown; Best Chili—Doug & Betty Perkins; Best Soup—Michele Smith; People's Choice—Pat Martin



Fred Hunter presented a storytelling workshop.



Kids enjoyed the games and art activities.



Generation Dance-off Winners: 50s – Tommy, Kelly and Pippa Daspit; 60s – Jessica Barkley Battles and Hayleigh Battles; 70s – Mike and Jan Sherwood; 80s – Mary MacMichael and granddaughter Lulu Goshorn; 90s – Mellanie Tuttle.
Photos by Mikel Yeakle and Stephen Smith

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