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THE GROUNDHOG

"Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain"

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

New Garbage Collection Service Begins July 1 in Mentone and Surrounding Areas

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR



Beginning July 1, the City of Henagar will assume responsibility for garbage collection services for Mentone and much of northern DeKalb County. The change is part of a broader effort by the county government to bring garbage pickup under local control and keep more money in the area.

"We're taking over the whole north end of the county basically, from Sylvania to the Georgia line," says Henagar Mayor Lee Davis. "It's a big area, and there's a lot to do in terms of routing and logistics, but we've been preparing for this since February."

The change follows the DeKalb County Commission's decision to divide its garbage collection contract among four municipalities: Henagar, Rainsville, Collinsville, and Fyffe. Meridian Waste holds the current contract, which expires at the end of June.

What Residents Can Expect

The City of Henagar, which has long been in the garbage collection business, has purchased new trucks, hired and trained operators, and invested in new routing software. Operators are mapping the routes in the expanded area and establishing pickup schedules.

"Mentone will likely take two days to cover," Davis says. "We're still finalizing routes, but the goal is to notify everyone in advance based on their location."

Henagar is currently distributing new garbage cans to residents who have signed up for service, but that process will take some time to complete. For now, residents may continue using their Meridian Waste cans.

Residents Need to Sign Up

All DeKalb County residents are required to participate in garbage service. Henagar has mailed one round of postcards to area residents, with another round set to be mailed soon. These postcards include a QR code for easy access to the online signup form. Residents can also access the form directly by visiting cityofhenagar.com/street.

Davis strongly encourages residents to include a cell phone number when signing up to receive text alerts about service changes, holiday schedules, or unexpected delays.

"That's the best way to stay in the loop," Davis said. "If a truck breaks down or a pickup day shifts because of a holiday, residents will get notified directly."

Bear-Proofing and Early Morning Pickups

Wildlife presents a unique challenge in the Mentone area. Bears overturn cans looking for food in some neighborhoods, scattering garbage and creating a mess. The bear activity has prompted many residents to secure their cans with chains, straps, or locks, which have to be manually undone for the can to be dumped.

Henagar uses modern trucks with side-loading arms. This makes collections safe, fast, and efficient, but also requires homeowners to unlock their cans prior to pickup. "Our drivers are not allowed to exit the vehicle for safety and insurance reasons," Davis explains, "so any chains or locks need to be removed before pickup."

The trucks will likely begin their Mentone routes between 6:30 a.m. and 7 a.m. Since bear activity typically occurs in the evenings and overnight, this should allow homeowners to secure their cans then unlock them the morning of pickup prior to the arrival of the trucks.

Other options are available. Retailers such as Home Depot sell bear-resistant cans that are compatible with Henagar's trucks, such as models with gravity-locking lids that will unlock when the can is turned upside down by the truck's side arm. Some residents have discussed

(See "Garbage Collection," Page 4)

Memories from the Set:

Hank and Susan Van Apeldoorn Look Back on Showbiz Life

BY JAY S. ROBBINS



If you were to ask the average person where most American movies and television shows get made, they would likely say Hollywood — and they'd probably be right. But it's also true that hundreds of popular movies and TV shows have been made not too far from here, in Atlanta, Georgia.

Hank and Susan Van Apeldoorn of Mentone worked for decades in the film industry there. As Susan tells it, "We got into the business in the 1980s just as it was starting to take off. We caught the wave. Atlanta was popular with filmmakers because the cost of labor was much lower there than California. Atlanta could also double for New York if you needed it to, or you could go around the area and find places to fit. If you need a rural location, you can be in the country in 15 minutes."

They have witnessed enormous growth in the industry since the early days. "Back then, you were like family," Susan says. "It was a very small community. We had enough people to maybe crew two small movies, which is what we got: the 20-day, Hallmark movie-of-the-week type things. I was president of IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees) Local 479 for a time. There were 24 people in the union when it was formed in 1986. I was the sixth president in 1996, and there were almost 300 people by then. Now there's 7,500."

Hank adds, "At the beginning, we were working on projects that had as little as $250,000 in the budget to film a 30-minute TV show. At the end of our career, we were working on $300 million features. It takes a while to work your way up to the big stuff. The joke is we spent the first half of our career trying to get a job and the second half trying to get a day off."

"It's the best job you can have," Susan says, "if you like to work 14 hours a day, six days a week."

Job Variety

Initially, Hank worked as a grip. "A grip is one of the people who is on set all the time," he explains. "Their responsibilities include using filters and flags as diffusion to direct and modify the light so it looks natural. The

(See "Van Apeldoorn," Page 16)



Discovering Courage and Connection:

Valley Head Students Take on the Ropes

BY SARAH WILCOX

On April 22 and 23, Valley Head School students stepped away from the classroom and into a unique challenge — one that tested their courage, teamwork, and self-discovery. Thanks to funding from the Harland Jones grant through the Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama (CFNEA), eighth, eleventh, and twelfth graders participated in an outdoor ropes course retreat at Camp DeSoto in Mentone. DeKalb is one of nine counties where CFNEA makes a difference.

This special experience, made possible through a partnership with MERF

(See "Valley Head Students," Page 5)

The Groundhog

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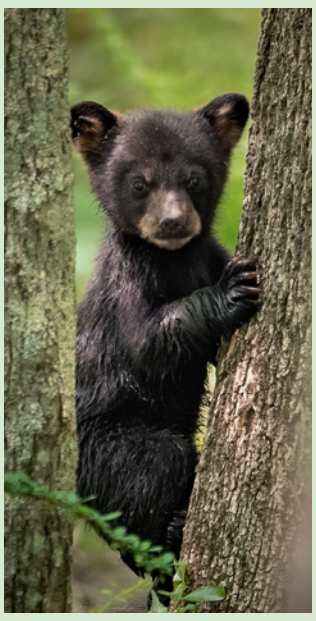
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Groundhog woodcut courtesy of Meg Justice/Bee Spring Studio

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WHAT BEARS DO IN JUNE

Yearlings leave moms and search for food, shelter and a place of their own. Adult males travel far and wide looking for mates. Nursing moms venture farther from home base searching for food. Cubs keep growing and developing. Bears that were born last spring and denned up with moms this past winter are now 18-month old yearlings.

NEVER FEED OR APPROACH BEARS

Intentionally feeding bears or allowing them to find anything that smells or tastes like food teaches bears to approach homes and people looking for more. Bears will defend themselves if a person gets too close, so don't risk your safety and theirs!

SOURCE: BEARWISE.ORG

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Mentone Matters

Let's give our campers a warm, safe welcome



BY MAYOR ROB HAMMOND

As June arrives, our town is preparing to welcome hundreds of visitors for the summer camp season. We look forward to seeing those who have been here before, and to greeting the many new faces who will experience our amazing natural surroundings and camps for the first time.

As you drive around Mentone, keep an eye out for groups of campers and counselors walking, riding bikes, and enjoying our new sidewalks. When you see them in the shops and restaurants around town, give them a friendly greeting and welcome them to Mentone. And don't forget to say "hello" to those parents who bring their children, many of whom stay a night or two in our area, enjoy the natural beauty, and shop and dine here.

Please be sure to read the lead story in this month's issue of The Groundhog regarding the new garbage collection service. To recap, the DeKalb County Commission entered into an agreement with four municipalities to take over garbage service for areas currently covered by Meridian Waste (a contract formerly held by ADSI). The City of Henagar will handle our area. As you know, we've had several problems with garbage collection in the past and this new arrangement will improve on many of them.

This will be a more efficient operation, and it will keep our money here in the county instead of sending it out of state. Of course, Mentone is unique in that we have an active bear population and we have lots of vacation rentals. Henagar Mayor Lee Davis has personally spoken with and even visited several Mentone residents who are concerned about the new service, particularly the fact that operators of the automated collection trucks do not exit the vehicles to unlock cans or enclosures. This will be an inconvenience for some people, I know, but I encourage those who are impacted to put their focus and energies toward meeting this challenge. Please share any ideas which would help the community meet the bear/garbage challenge.

Jared Carter with North Alabama Trails and Recreation visited Mentone last month to share information with the town council about improvements to Brow Park. His group has agreed to provide a $15,000 grant to help with the project, which will clear underbrush from the overlook and allow us to eventually build a trail off the side of the mountain. The council voted to proceed with a grant proposal to the Resource Conservation & Development Council for a $35,000 Community Development Grant to complete the clearing portion of this project. There is no matching fund requirement for either of these grants.

There are other phases to this project, but this is a start. The town will work with Ladd Environmental and TARCOG in applying for another grant for other improvements. As an area dependent on visitors, many of whom come here for outdoor recreation, the Brow Park trail project will create another reason for people to visit our town and enjoy nature and provide residents with an additional hiking/walking option.

From the Editor

Optimizing for Inconvenience

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

I'm working to make things a lot harder on myself.

Many of the books on my shelves, in part or in whole, focus on getting more things done in less time. Increasing our productivity is the goal, because then we can squeeze as much out of life as possible, right?

Well, I'm embarking on an experiment. What are some ways I can trade convenience for experience? Instead of getting more things done, how can I get more life done?

Let's have some fun with this. What follows isn't a comprehensive list, but here are some things I'm going to try:

- Buy as much of my produce as possible from farmer's markets. This will make me more intentional about my local trips, and I'll meet new and interesting people. My family will enjoy fresh vegetables and fruits while supporting local farmers.
- Put my phone away at night, turn off the news, and search through my bookshelves for a title I haven't thought of in a long time. Scan through the table of contents or, better yet, open it to a random page and start reading. I might rediscover something, or find an interesting passage for the first time.
- Put away my Apple Watch, with all its notifications and tracking and modernity, and start wearing a wind-up wristwatch. (Note to self: Set a daily reminder on your Apple Watch to wind your mechanical watch …)
- Rely less on text messages and email in my personal life. Pick up the phone and call people.
- Taking that one step further, handwrite an actual letter and mail it to someone. They won't be able to read my scribbling, but it's the thought that counts.
- At least once a week, give the Roomba a rest and use the push vacuum to clean the floors. All while singing, "Walking The Floor Over You."
- And speaking of music … instead of scrolling through the vast library on my iPhone every time I want to hear a tune, flip through my vinyl collection and give a classic LP a spin on the record player (I'm looking at you, "Sing Along With Mitch").
- When I have a question about something, call a friend instead of immediately going to Google. Upside: This will spark more conversations. Downside: This will quickly become annoying to my friends. ("You can look that up just as fast as I can, buddy. Stop calling me. Especially at 2 a.m.")

Author John Eldredge was a recent guest on the "The 1000 Hours Outside Podcast" (see note below about my podcast obsession). When we turn to the internet with a question, "Google answers you with three million results in less than one second," he said. "Over time, that conditions the soul to a sort of immediate response … the saints of ages past would have been horrified at that."

He concludes with, "Learning to linger, learning to be still, learning to listen is really important for human souls."

Disclaimer: I opened that podcast episode on my iPhone, viewed the automated transcript, and used the built-in search capabilities to quickly find the quote I was looking for …

I've learned over time that your Not To Do list is as important as your To Do list. So here are some things I'm definitely not trading in:

- Podcasts (I'm addicted to the wide range of insights and information they bring me)
- My coffee maker (I can still envision Pawpaw Osbourn's tall percolating aluminum kettle, but I have no idea how that thing made coffee.)
- Indoor plumbing (this remains today's best technological advancement)
- Online grocery order and pick up (I've gone too far to look back)

Optimizing for experience over convenience puts the focus on the present instead of the future. It's about relishing the journey more than the destination. My friend Jerry Ellis didn't walk the Trail of Tears in reverse so he could get back to Fort Payne from Oklahoma as quickly and efficiently as possible and write a Pulitzer Prize-nominated book. He did it to connect with the struggles of his Cherokee ancestors and to meet fascinating people along the modern Trail. It was about the next step, not the final step.

Do you have suggestions for how I can make life a little richer by making it a little more difficult? Email me your thoughts to … No, wait a minute. Write me a letter and mail it to:

The Groundhog
Attn: Inconvenient Editor
P.O. Box 107
Mentone, AL 35984

I'll write you back. Even though you won't be able to read my scribbling.

Advice From an Organic Permaculture Gardener

BY RUTH HATHORN, PERMACULTURE DESIGN SPECIALIST

This is the second in a series of articles on regenerative agriculture, featuring local residents involved in the movement.

Permaculture is a holistic design philosophy that seeks to create sustainable and self-sufficient systems by emulating the diversity, functionality, and resilience of natural ecosystems. Originating in the 1970s, permaculture integrates traditional ecological knowledge with modern scientific understanding to develop innovative strategies for meeting human needs while minimizing environmental impact. It encompasses anything from recycling, growing food organically, reusing and regenerating, to simply observing.

When applied to gardening, it suggests that not only can we grow food almost anywhere, from fruit shrubs in patio pots to vines on fences, but we can also get higher yields with less effort simply by mimicking nature.

Core Principles

Permaculture is guided by 12 design principles outlined by permaculture co-founder David Holmgren:

1. Observe and Interact: Engage with nature to design solutions that suit specific situations.
2. Catch and Store Energy: Develop systems that collect resources at peak abundance for use in times of need.
3. Obtain a Yield: Ensure that projects generate meaningful rewards.
4. Apply Self-Regulation and Accept Feedback: Discourage inappropriate activity to ensure systems function well.
5. Use and Value Renewable Resources and Services: Make the best use of nature's abundance by reducing dependence on non-renewable resources.
6. Produce No Waste: Value and employ all available resources, wasting nothing.
7. Design from Patterns to Details: Observe patterns in nature and society to inform designs, adding details later.
8. Integrate Rather Than Segregate: Allow relationships to develop between design elements to support each other.
9. Use Small and Slow Solutions: Small and slow systems are easier to maintain and produce more sustainable outcomes.
10. Use and Value Diversity: Diversity reduces system-level vulnerability to threats and fully exploits the environment.
11. Use Edges and Value the Marginal: The border between things is where the most interesting events take place, often being the system's most valuable and productive elements.
12. Creatively Use and Respond to Change: A positive impact on inevitable change comes from careful observation and well-timed intervention.

Common Practices

Permaculture emphasizes practices that enhance soil health, conserve resources, and promote biodiversity:

- No-Till Gardening: Minimizes soil disturbance to maintain soil structure and organic matter.
- Hügelkultur: Involves burying wood to increase soil water retention and fertility.
- Rainwater Harvesting: Collects and stores rainwater for irrigation and other uses.
- Greywater Recycling: Reuses household wastewater for landscape irrigation.
- Companion Planting: Pairs plants that support each other's growth and health.
- Animal Integration: Incorporates animals to cycle nutrients and assist with tasks like pest control.

In contrast to many agricultural methods, a natural growing system sustains a continuous cycle, with dead plants becoming mulch for new growth. Permaculture gardening seeks to re-create this cycle, turning food waste into valuable compost and replacing slug pellets and weed killers with natural predators and natural competition. According to permaculture co-founder Bill Mollison, it is about working with nature and not against it.

Applications

Permaculture can be applied in various settings, from urban gardens to rural farms:

Urban and Suburban Gardens: Utilize small spaces efficiently, often incorporating edible landscaping and community collaboration.

Food Forests: Create layered, self-sustaining ecosystems that mimic natural forests.

Community Projects: Engage neighborhoods in shared permaculture initiatives to promote sustainability.

Getting Started

To begin practicing permaculture, consider:

- Observing Your Environment: Spend time understanding the natural patterns and resources available.
- Starting Small: Implement manageable projects like a compost bin or a raised garden bed.
- Educating Yourself: Read foundational texts like "Permaculture: A Designers' Manual" by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren.
- Joining a Community: Connect with local permaculture groups or online forums to share knowledge and experiences.

By integrating permaculture principles into your practices, you can contribute to a more sustainable and resilient future.

Ruth Hathorn is a resident of Mentone. She is the mother of world-renowned permaculture teacher, Marcus Thomson. She has taken his certification courses and has attended many of his advanced courses and seminars.

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LOTS & LAND

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Take Time This Month To Rejuvenate!

BY DEJOLY LABRIER



The grill is hot, the pool is full, the night's stars are amazing! Fireflies rise up at dusk and remind me of the "Little People," referred to in many cultures as fairies. There is magic in the air!

And who doesn't love the magic of a June wedding? Named after Roman deity Juno, goddess of marriage, childbirth, and fertility, June is the month when wedding bells chime constantly.

This is a time of rejuvenation, when spring has wafted into summer, when our bodies and spirits can once again reclaim their youthful vigor. June brings a resurgence of passion and adventure, when exotic places around the world are full of tourists. It's a time when we can step back and assess where we've been the past six months. It's a halfway month, halfway to the end of the year. Vacations often give us plenty of time to revitalize our lives and give a boost into the coming months.

When we look back, we may judge the quality of the first half of the year to be mixed. Did we spend as much time doing the things we love to do with the people we love? Did we make spiritual connections with our deeper selves? Did we gain the confidence we needed to get out of our comfort zones and do that risky thing that brought us joy?

Those things have value in our lives. They rejuvenate us. They allow us to assess the value of our relationships with ourselves, and our spiritual foundations, as well as reach new heights in our personal development.

And if we don't do the things that light us up, what is that costing us? Some would say that it costs us our hearts, our souls, our families and friends.

At this time, we keep moving toward the things that bring us to life. Our bodies need to move, and this is a perfect time of year to keep us active in life. We go swimming and camping. We hike new and beautiful trails in the parks around us. We take cruises and delight in the stunning beauty of the vast waters and aquatic life. Spending more time in nature than in the past six months rejuvenates us. The energies of the earth and sky, water and air, are electric with spark and vitality!

I hope when you assess the past six months, you'll find you did many of the things that brought you joy and fulfillment. Celebrations are abundant in the month of June, from Father's Day to Flag Day. May you feel the vitality surrounding us. Take time to restore your body, mind, and spirit to their youthful, more connected state. Allow the positive vibes of June to wipe the slate clean of any negativity of the first half of the year. Frolic and dance your way through the month. It's a wonderful choice to make for yourselves!

Health Fraud Scams

BY LYNN HIXON

Health fraud scams refer to products that claim to prevent, treat, or cure diseases but are not proven safe and effective for those uses. Health fraud scams may be promoted in magazine ads, TV commercials, and infomercials, or promoted by talk radio hosts and social media influencers. According to the FBI, roughly $3.4 billion in total fraud losses were reported by Americans over age 60 in 2023.

Look for these red flags to spot a health fraud scam, especially those aimed at older adults.

1. A TV commercial, social media influencer, talk radio host, website or advertisement promises immediate, effortless, or guaranteed results.

2. Claims of an "innovation," "miracle cure," "exclusive product," "new discovery," or a "magical cure" are highly suspect. These words are used to appeal to your emotions and should not be trusted.

3. A product is promoted as a "natural" cure or "dietary supplement" that sounds too good to be true. Be aware of anti-aging scams and arthritis scams. There has been no treatment proven to slow or reverse aging or cure arthritis.

4. There are no science-based testimonials; instead, testimonials are from celebrities or actors pretending to be highly satisfied customers. Ask your doctor before buying nutrition supplements or health treatments.

5. The seller promises a money-back guarantee, no questions asked. Marketers of fraudulent products will make sweeping promises but not return your money.

If you have any questions about scams, please call the DeKalb County Council on Aging at 256-845-8590 and Lynn Hixon, the DeKalb County SHIP will assist you.

Garbage Collection *(continued from page 1)*

using a neighborhood dumpster to serve a number of homes.

A Better Approach

Davis has visited and spoken with several Mentone residents, including owners of short-term rental properties who expressed concern about bear control. "We've been out in Mentone talking with folks, helping them find solutions, and for the most part, people are satisfied," he says.

While the change may require adjustments from some property owners, it represents an improvement over past contracts. Instead of one company having the contract for much of the county, the new approach splits the responsibilities between four municipalities with experience in the garbage collection business: Henagar, Rainsville, Collinsville, and Powell. "Having it split up like that, each municipality won't have nearly as much to be responsible for, and I think we'll get better service out of them," says Commissioner Shane Wootten, who represents District 1 on the DeKalb County Commission.

Another benefit, he adds, is that the money residents pay for service will stay in DeKalb County instead of flowing out of state to a large company.

"Before, a lot of money was leaving the county," Davis says. "Now that money can stay here and benefit DeKalb County."

Local service also means local input. "Mayor Davis and the City of Henagar have a great track record with garbage collection, and I'm certain we'll see better service than we've had in the past," says Mentone Mayor Rob Hammond. "If we have problems of any kind, they are right here in our county, with their city hall just a few miles away. They are our neighbors, and they will be much easier to get in touch with — and to get a response from."

Wootten agrees. "It's gonna be a positive for everybody, for the whole county," he says. "We just hope everybody will be patient during the transition. There may be a hiccup here or there, but I know that Henagar will do a great job. They've been in the business a long time and know what they're doing."

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Valley Head Students *(continued from page 1)*

(Mentone Educational Resources Foundation) and facilitated by Higher Ground instructors, empowered students to push past their limits — and they didn't let a little rain stop them.

Pushing Boundaries Together

Eighth graders explored ziplining, scaling the climbing wall, and tackling team-building games. Older students took on more advanced elements like the V-swing, tension traverses, the wild woozy, and the balancing platform. Across all activities, students practiced not only physical coordination but also emotional resilience and collaboration.

Lethea Cortner from CFNEA had the opportunity to observe students blindfolded and working together to form an equilateral triangle. Her visit also included watching the exhilarating V-swing, which left students buzzing with energy and pride.

Special thanks go to teachers Brittany Gilbert, Jennifer Manning, and Sandy Hulgan, whose support and encouragement were instrumental in guiding students through the day's challenges.

Why These Retreats Matter

Over the past two years, MERF has championed opportunities like these, believing in the lasting impact of experiential learning. Reflections from teachers and students only reinforce that belief.

One teacher shared:

"Thank you again for such a wonderful opportunity! Everyone involved had a really great time. You guys were amazing at meeting everyone's needs, encouraging them, and making sure that everyone was involved. A week later and the students and I are still talking about it!"

Student feedback echoed that enthusiasm:

"Classmates and instructors helped me get over my fears."

"Seeing a classmate come down off the zipline after climbing the ladder and then asking for a second chance, and she did it, was so great."

"I do have valuable ideas and should start speaking up. When everyone listened to my idea and it worked, I gained confidence."

"After this experience, our class is getting along better."

"[We] developed new relationships."

"I was shy and lacked confidence at the beginning of the day, even though I have known my classmates a long time."

"I can push myself to do things."

On the value of the experience:

"It is a valuable hands-on experience



that gets us out of the classroom and engaged with what we are doing/learning while teaching very valuable skills in fun and interesting ways."

"It is nice to be off our phones and get to do new things."

"Fun and exciting."

"It was a good personal and bonding experience."

"My day was one of the best days and one of the scariest."

"Loved the field trip and hope we get to do more like this."

A Higher Ground instructor summed it up by invoking "The Wizard of Oz" principle:

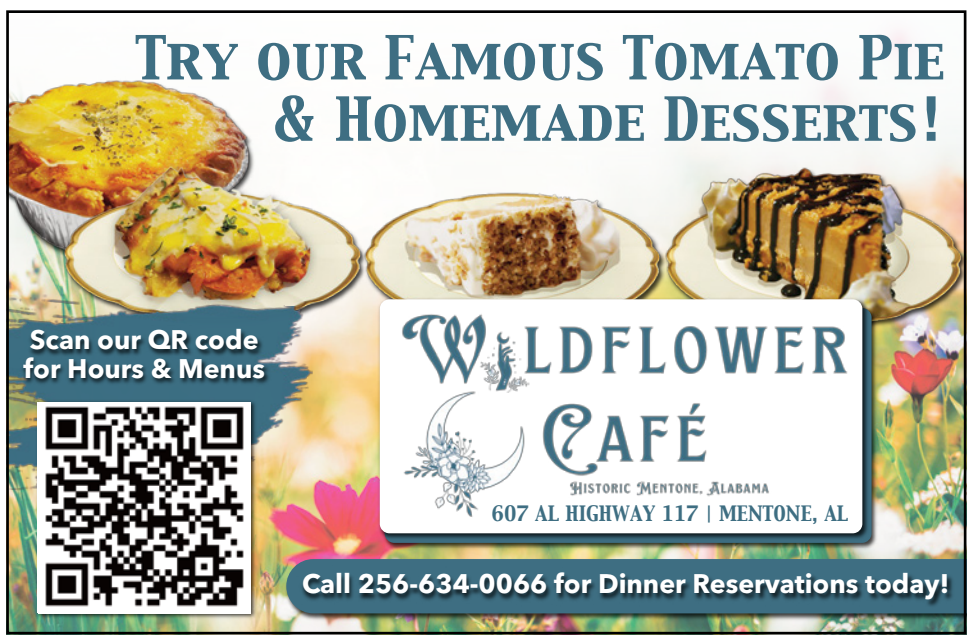
"Everyone already has what they need to be successful. They just need a journey/experience to find it in themselves and develop confidence by using it. We all observed that during the first ice breaker(s), the students had a lot of apprehension and lacked self-confidence. As the day(s) progressed, we saw the apprehension melt away on each and every accomplishment and confidence improve. As a group, we saw the students when they developed confidence, they also started supporting one another with encouragement and providing insights to others based on their success and experience."

This incredible experience would not have been possible without the generous support of:

- The Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama
- Camp DeSoto
- The Carter Holland Foundation
- Valley Head School
- Higher Ground
- MERF

Special thanks also go to Tiger's Inn for providing a wonderful lunch, and to the volunteers who helped serve and assist with the zipline: Mary Ann Robbins, Kathy McMunn, Kat Griffith, Rick Barr, Emily West, Jean Corey, Diedre Brown, Kathryn Norris, and Katie Hand.

Rain or shine, it's clear that these students discovered more than just the thrill of adventure. They found connection, courage, and confidence that will carry them far beyond the ropes course.







Giving Students the Tools To Go Far

BY KATIE HAND

After returning from a trip to Northern Virginia to celebrate the 91st birthday of my grandfather — who, impressively, seems to be getting even wittier with age — it was a joy to come back to the peace of the mountain. That transition from a hectic, crowded area to the calm of Mentone felt especially meaningful when I was invited to watch Valley Head students participate in a ropes course at Camp DeSoto.

Nearly 60 students stepped out of their comfort zones, encouraging each other with genuine enthusiasm while facing physical and mental challenges of their own. Even steady rain couldn't dampen their spirits. It was a powerful display of resilience, teamwork, and bravery — qualities that can't be taught in a classroom alone. Watching them play, connect, and unplug from screens was a vivid reminder of how important these moments are. It was experiential learning at its best.

MERF envisions opportunities like this becoming consistent and transformative parts of the Valley Head School experience. The goal is to help students recognize their strengths, set ambitious goals, and support one another as they rediscover the joy of hands-on, human-centered learning. These experiences build confidence, compassion, and problem-solving skills — an investment not only in students, but also in the future of our entire community. It's about showing them the power of their own potential and encouraging them to step boldly into the world and see what it gives back in return.

A heartfelt thank you goes to Higher Ground in Rome, Georgia, for leading the challenge and adventure; Tiger's Inn for providing delicious meals for students, staff, and teachers; and Sarah Wilcox for her steadfast support in bringing it all together. MERF also extends deep gratitude to the Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama and the Carter Holland Memorial Fund for believing in and financially supporting this vision. Your belief in our community makes experiences like these possible and powerful.

On the scholarship front, MERF recently completed the nomination process for the Mountain Spirit Awards and selected the recipients of the Carter Holland Memorial Scholarship. We were moved by the outpouring of heartfelt nominations from teachers and the genuine essays submitted by senior candidates. In an age of digital everything, it was refreshing to read handwritten applications — personal reflections filled with raw honesty and hope for the future.

Congratulations to the 2025 Carter Holland Scholarship recipients. These outstanding students include Nathaniel Maier, Makayla Gilbert, Sadie Young, Eli Day, and Lila McElhaney.

Each of these students is hardworking, determined, and full of promise. They reflect the very qualities Carter Holland exemplified: kindness, perseverance, and an unwavering spirit. Reading their stories was a reminder of why this scholarship matters, not just as financial support, but as a recognition of character and potential.

MERF is proud of their hard work and achievements, and we can't wait to see what they will accomplish in the future. Read more about these students in next month's issue of The Groundhog.

As someone who once stood bewildered at the gates of college, unsure how to begin but determined to find a way, I relate deeply to these students' journeys. That experience of pushing through doubt drives me, along with the entire MERF board, to look beyond the scholarship check. We want to build a lasting support system that empowers students not only to dream big but also to navigate the real steps required to achieve those dreams. I am looking forward to giving out these awards, and MERF wishes all students the very best in their future endeavors!

Katie Hand is executive director of MERF. For more information, visit MERFhouse.org, email merf.mentone@gmail.com, or call 256-979-4962.



The ropes course was experiential learning at its best.

Join the MERF Team as a Bookkeeper



Are you a detail-oriented individual with a passion for numbers and community service? MERF (Mentone Educational Resources Foundation) is seeking a dedicated bookkeeper to assist our local nonprofit organization for approximately two hours per week. Your expertise will help us maintain accurate financial records and ensure the smooth operation of our programs. This is a wonderful opportunity to contribute to a meaningful local cause in the Mentone area while utilizing your accounting skills.

Requirements:

- Experience with Quickbooks and/or Quickbooks for Nonprofits preferred
- Strong organizational and time management skills
- Commitment to integrity and confidentiality

Please call MERF at 245-979-4962 or email your interest to merf.mentone@gmail.com



Discover St. Joseph's New Community Playground

Nestled within the church's Sacred Garden, St. Joseph's new Community Playground is a joyful addition where all are invited to bring their little ones to enjoy the slide and swings in a beautiful, natural setting. The playground was made possible through the generosity of the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama and the vision of Taylor Baugh from Troop 304, who brought it to life as his Eagle Scout project.

Follow The Groundhog on Facebook





Valley Head Happenings

Work on Our Zoning Map, Plus a New Eatery and Movie Nights

BY MAYOR KAREN VEST

June, the month of beautiful blooms and the sweet promise of summertime. Don't let all this rain discourage you from going out and exploring our amazing area. The town is so excited to announce the opening of the Side Street Deli. Located at 74 Winston Street, they offer delicious sandwiches, pizza, and more. Be sure to stop by and give them a try. We are also pleased to announce that the town has now closed on the former Rib Shack building and we are thrilled to see what new business will soon be opening in its current location.

Our first Family Movie Night of 2025 will be Saturday, June 7, on the field in front of Town Hall beginning at 7 p.m. Bring your blankets and/or lawn chairs and come join us to watch our featured film, "Moana 2." This Disney classic is sure to be a hit with young and old alike. We will have free water and children's juice boxes and hope to have a popcorn stand. Join us for a wonderful free family adventure. We cannot wait to try out the new movie screen and equipment the town recently purchased. We hope to hold a second movie night in the fall for all to enjoy.

Our 8th Annual Memories of Mayberry Festival was a success, despite the rainy weather. We had a good crowd, and everyone appeared to have so much fun. The band Stranded provided great country-rock music all day, and several food vendors kept everyone well fed. The children definitely had a blast splashing in the puddles and running all over town. I am so very thankful that we live in such a wonderful small community where we feel safe to let our children run free. We had multiple pie entries, and this year's winner of the coveted blue ribbon was Todd Greeson, with his famous strawberry cheesecake. Second place went to Payne Stevenson for his fabulous smoked apple pie, and third place went to Jessica Harper Brown for her delicious chocolate pie. Darryl Cust won first place in the Dill Pickle Contest. Thank you to everyone for entering.

Valley Head is currently working with the planning commission and zoning board to update our master plan and zoning map, which have not been updated in over 40 years. We will be working with the mapping department in DeKalb County as well as Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG) and our town attorney, Jay Skinner. We hope to clarify several pressing zoning issues as well as plan for our future growth.

Valley Head holds our Town Council meeting the first Monday of each month, beginning at 6 p.m. The public is always welcome to attend.



Despite rainy, windy weather, the Memories of Mayberry Festival enjoyed a great turnout.





Festival visitors love to interact with characters from a past era, brought back to life every year for the Mayberry festival.

Valley Head Area Women's Club

Scholarships awarded to VHS Students

BY ANNA MAE HORN

The decision was difficult! The scholarship committee had several well qualified applicants who have excelled in academics and outside the classroom. It is truly wonderful to have this dilemma and know that Valley Head School is graduating dedicated and determined young women and men.

The 2025 Valley Head Area Women's Club Scholarships were awarded to Makayla Gilbert and Johnny Mann. Each student will receive $700 toward furthering their education. Both Makayla and Johnny exhibit the drive to make things happen. We wish them great success on their new journeys.

The club would also like to wish the very best to the other applicants who also showed great promise for a bright future. As stated before, the decision was difficult; all applicants were very deserving.

This scholarship is an annual scholarship open to all Valley Head School graduating seniors who are furthering their education in some way. We gladly support technical skills, academic pursuits, and career training that ends with certification. Thank you to all those who support our Thanksgiving bake sale and pecan sale (Going Nuts for Education).

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





VHS 2025 scholarship recipients Makayla Gilbert and Johnny Mann.

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Rhododendron Garden Club

RGC Learns About the Honeybee



BY MELLANIE TUTTLE

Thanks to Rebecca Henderson whose brilliant editing fine tuned last month's ramblings. Her name should have been in the by-line for all her efforts.

In our meeting, Lee Hudson spoke to the RGC about his adventures with the honeybee. A transplant from Indiana with training in holistic health, Lee has spent over 20 years raising honeybees. He now lives in Rising Fawn, Georgia, with his very southern-speaking wife. His own brand of honey is named Well Honey (but pronounced Wail Hunney). Lee has partnered with Derick Forester of Forester Farms and Apiary in Rising Fawn and mentors those interested in keeping bees. He also sells all things related to honeybees.

Buy local. Lee has 60 hive boxes on half an acre, but he also spreads the hives around Northeast Alabama, Northwest Georgia, and Tennessee. Have bee will travel to your property. Call Lee to arrange a delivery of bees, order equipment, or ask for advice. 423-802-6466.

Buy raw, not processed. Raw honey should never mold. China-grown honey will often have water or high fructose corn syrup added. If honey crystallizes, place the jar in warm, not boiling water. Temperatures higher than 105 Fahrenheit will destroy the antibacterial, anti-fungal, and antioxidant benefits.

Taste, color, and texture vary depending on the source of pollen. Spring honey is dark, while fall's goldenrod honey is a very light color but not the best flavor. Floral honey is said to be most effective against allergies. Clover, sourwood, or orange blossom honey (read the label) won't help allergies unless one is allergic to those plants. Eating the local honey when traveling overseas could also cause a reaction, so beware. One person's medicine is another's poison. The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly discourages giving honey to kids under the age of 1, because it can cause botulism, which is a rare and life-threatening condition that attacks the body's nervous system.



The "bees knees" for learning about the colony life of a honeybee is the Arizona State University website (askabiologist.asu.edu). Videos of the queen laying eggs or an emerging female being serenaded with the buzz-buzzing of thousands of sister bees doing their work is fascinating. Every bee colony has one queen that controls all aspects of the hive and lays an average of 1,500 eggs a day. Bees start as eggs, hatch into larvae, becoming pupae, and finally emerge as the fuzzy bee. From larva to adult takes about 21 days.

All worker bees are female. The youngest workers take care of the queen and the young larvae. Wax from glands in their stomachs produce the honeycomb structure. As they mature, jobs will change depending on what the hive needs. Indoor workers transition to outside where they forage; collecting nectar, pollen, and water. The nectar acts as the main energy source, and pollen is fed to the larvae for protein. The male drones don't have stingers, and their only job is to search for new queens looking to mate. They represent about 10-15% of the hive population.

The colony swarms when it gets too big for its space. Special wax cells are built to raise a new queen. The old queen moves out and takes half the colony with her. The new queen stays to start a new colony.

Honeybees (Apis mellifera) are not native to North America. What? Nope. The German honeybees appeared on U.S. land in the 1600s and rapidly became established across the country. Italian bees, imported in 1857 because of their docile nature, are susceptible to the parasitic varroa mite. A Russian species resistant to the mite was introduced in 1997.

Why aren't honeybees treated as an invasive species? After four hundred years, the honeybee is a domesticated species like chickens or livestock. As a $15 billion industry, honeybees are vital to the food supply, pollinating one-third of the food eaten. Declining native bee populations get overlooked in the Save the Bees campaign. Research is ongoing in the Native vs. Non-Native Bee Debate. Researcher Ron Miksha talks of compromise. "While non-natives may enhance pollination, concerns arise about potential competition with native species, disease transmission, and disruption of ecosystems. Striking a balance between agricultural needs and conservation is crucial for sustainable bee management." Amen. Bee happy!

June 10 is a clean-up day. Please note: Meeting time at the library is 9 a.m. instead of 10 a.m. BYO gloves, hats, shovels, shears, and trowels. Water and snacks will be provided. Maybe it'll rain. Just kidding.

Mellanie Tuttle is a member of the Rhododendron Garden Club.

Join us!

The RGC meets each month on the second Tuesday. We are currently meeting in the Moon Lake Library and gather at 10 a.m. Please join us for connection and conviviality. RGC is a member of the National Garden Club, Deep South, Garden Club of AL, District ll, and NE AL Federation of Garden Clubs.







Through Their Eyes:
Virtual Tour Offers a Window Into the World of Dementia

BY ANNE MCLEOD

Few illnesses are as mystifying and frustrating as dementia. Watching a loved one slip into what seems to be a bizarre fog of forgetfulness and confusion is heart-breaking to family members, who often serve as caregivers. Having helped care for my mother before she entered memory care, I often wondered what she was experiencing. Arguments were pointless. Logic was no help. She was in a place where we felt helpless to reach her.

Researchers working with dementia patients, their families, caregivers, and first responders are developing programs to help them better understand how people with dementia experience the world. On June 19 at 2 p.m., Moon Lake Library will host a Virtual Dementia Tour with Linda Bledsoe, a licensed trainer with Second Wind Dreams, an organization whose aim is to change how people think about the aging process, including dementia.

According to Second Wind Dreams, "The Virtual Dementia Tour, created by P.K. Beville, is a scientifically proven method of building a greater understanding of dementia through the use of patented sensory tools and instruction. Proceeds from the sale of the Virtual Dementia Tour support the work of Second Wind Dreams, an internationally



known nonprofit dedicated to changing the perception of aging through the fulfillment of elders' dreams."

Second Wind Dreams has worked with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Google, Facebook, Wellstar, Johnson & Johnson, and WebMD using research-based practices to help improve care.

The program on June 19 is open to the public, with a focus on caregivers, families, and first responders. The trainer will set up conditions designed to temporarily shift participants' perceptions of the world around them to approximate the experience of a dementia patient.

Sessions will take place over a period of two hours, with participants signing up for a time slot for the tour, followed by a debriefing. If you would like to sign up to experience the Virtual Dementia Tour, please call the library at 256-634-2127 or email books@moonlakelibrary.org to reserve a time slot.

Anne McLeod is the librarian at Moon Lake Library.

JUNE 2025
AT MOON LAKE LIBRARY

Weekly Meet-Ups: YOGA Mondays & Wednesdays at 7:30 a.m., free, donations accepted; MAH JONGG Tuesdays at noon (beginners welcome); KNITTING and CROCHET Tuesdays at 2 p.m.; SCRABBLE Wednesdays at noon; LITTLE LIBRARY LEARNERS (for kids ages 3-6, older helpers welcome) Thursdays at 3 p.m. in June and July, except for July 3

June 3 at 3 p.m. - Municipal Library Board Meeting; 4 p.m. Friends of Moon Lake Library Board Meeting

June 5 from 4-5 p.m. - Poetry group for anyone interested in reading and discussing poetry from any time period. Meets monthly on the first Thursday of the month.

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

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

June 13 at 6 p.m. - Movie Night: "Rocketman" (2019), a biographical musical drama film based on the life, music, and career of British musician Elton John. The film is rated R. No one under 17 admitted without a parent or guardian.

June 14 at 10:30 a.m. - The Moon Lake Library Book Club meets for a discussion of books about death and dying. These may be nonfiction, poetry, true crime, novels, etc.

June 19 at 2 p.m. - Virtual Dementia Tour with certified trainer Linda Bledsoe. This program is for the general public who'd like more information about what it's like to live with dementia.

June 21 at 1 p.m. - Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels

June 21 at 10:30 a.m. - Summer Reading Program Activities for all ages! Follow us on Facebook for details to come! The theme this year: Color Our World.

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June Highlights & Happenings

BY JULI JORDAN

Under the guidance of LRAC board member Kevin Chitwood, the very first Little River Arts Council Key Club Scholarship has been awarded to Joselyn Vega. This $500 scholarship, payable to the college of the recipient's choice, is based on academics, community service, and character.

Chitwood shared, "It was an honor to represent LRAC at awards night at Fort Payne High School. The students in the Key Club have volunteered their time at various LRAC events over the years, and I think this scholarship is a great way to give back and show our appreciation."

The LRAC Board of Directors is proud to launch this new tradition and remains committed to continuing — and growing — this meaningful scholarship in years to come.



Scholarship winner Joselyn Vega.
(Photo by Bill Miller Photography)

First Friday Art Nights: Camp-Inspired Fun on June 6 from 4-7 p.m.

This First Friday celebration spans Mentone's East to West Gateway along Highway 117, from Moon Lake Village to Log Cabin Village. This month's theme is Summer Camp, and we invite campers past and present to don their favorite camp t-shirts and join the fun.

Groovy Goat and Sunflower Studio are jumping into the First Friday fun — swing by Log Cabin Village and see what these happy campers have in store. At the Mentone Arts Center, the Porch Pickers will be picking and grinning, while just across the street at Mason Park, author Debbie Happy Cohen will be reading from "Get Fairy Tales" under the gazebo. Bring your crayons and color along as Debbie shares her magical stories! A short stroll away, Rocky Top Pottery will welcome campers, and just over the river, Moon Lake Village will host a summer camp-style celebration featuring:

- Live music by Judy-Nicole Kirby
- Pop-Up Bakery by UK Master Chef Jason Palin at the Gallery by Andiamo Lodge
- June Art Activity: Wooden Nametag Decorating at the LRAC art tent (for kids of all ages!)
- Complimentary refreshments at the LRAC hospitality tent
- 3D printing at Other World Gifts

Pop-Up Vendors at Moon Lake Village will include:

- Blooming Potentials
- EclectArt Studios
- Vintage Sunflower
- Sheila Johnson Watercolors
- Absolutely Creations
- Pamela Atkins
- Irene Milsaps
- Denise White
- Lookout Mountain Goat Ranch Originals

The following Mentone shops and galleries will be celebrating First Friday:

- Log Cabin Village: Groovy Goat & Sunflower Studio
- Mentone Arts & Cultural Center
- Rocky Top Pottery
- Author & Storyteller Debbie Happy Cohen at the Mason Park Gazebo
- Cloudland Framing
- Coming Up Violets
- Faith & Mustard Seed
- Other World Gifts,
- The Gallery by Andiamo
- Little River Art Gallery

Summer Music Series Concert June 7

The 2025 Summer Music Series continues Saturday, June 7, from 6 to 9 p.m. behind the Linger Longer Pavilion at the Mentone Inn. Returning for their fifth year, the Black Sedan Band will bring the groove with high-energy hits from the 60s to today. If you haven't danced to their set before, consider this your official





invitation. We double Otis dare you not to get up and move!

St. Joseph's will be serving chicken salad, pasta salad plates with dessert and tea for $15 as a fundraiser for Episcopal Relief & Development Fund.

As always, bring a chair, bring a friend, and enjoy dinner and music under the stars. This free event is made possible by a generous grant from the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

Here's to fairy tales, s'mores, groove-thang shaking, and a summer full of Big Art and little moments that matter. It's summer on the mountain, y'all. See you on the dance floor!

Juli Jordan is president of the Little River Arts Council.



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Mentone Arts Center

Songwriters Round, First Friday, Summer Social, and Art Class

BY RANDY GRIDER

The heat of summer is building, and so are the activities at the Chuck Sennett Center for the Arts. We kick the month with The French Family Band performing their second show of the weekend on Sunday, June 1, from 3-5 p.m. There were a few tickets left at press time. See contact information at the bottom of the article for more details.

On Tuesday, June 3, we'll host the Music on the Mountain Songwriters Series from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Mentone singer-songwriter Craig Hendricks is the official host for the round. The event is free to the public. Karen Newsum from Huntsville will be joining us as featured artist. Karen is a singer/songwriter who enjoys writing songs from her life experiences as well as whimsical songs for children. Young or old, her audiences delight in her original lyrics and music. She has published five CDs and continues to release new music. Check out her website at https://www.karennewsum-music.com/music/.

Join us and other businesses and organizations on Friday, June 6, for the townwide First Friday Art Night. We kick off at 2 p.m. with the Porch Pickers playing in the gallery, which will be open until 7 p.m. with snacks and refreshments to enjoy while you shop.

Our Summer Social will be Thursday, June 19, from 5:30-7 p.m. We invited everyone to join as we salute our wonderful customers, who have helped make the center a success. Snacks and refreshments will be available.

MENTONE ARTS AND CULTURAL CENTER

We are thrilled to have visiting artist/instructor Bradley Wilson for another exciting weekend workshop on Saturday, June 28, and Sunday, June 29. Tuition is $195 and class is limited to 10 students. A $25 supply will be paid directly to the instructor.

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION: Eco-printing is a natural dyeing technique that uses plants to create beautiful patterns on fabric or paper — perfect for a creative summer activity! In this workshop, we'll gather organic materials, explore mordants and the heating process, and create our own eco-prints. Then, we'll transform our prints into unique creative projects. Whether you're a serious student eager to master this technique or simply looking for a fun, hands-on experience, this workshop welcomes all skill levels!

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR: Bradley Wilson was born in Chattanooga in 1970. He is a visual artist and author who creates paintings, drawings, and prints. He teaches studio art and art history part time at Lee University, Dalton State College, and conducts regular painting workshops at a variety of venues. He resides with his wife and a multitude of dogs and cats in Charleston, Tennessee.

Randy Grider is executive director of the nonprofit Mentone Arts and Cultural Center. He can be reached via email at mentoneartscenter@gmail.



Come hear featured artist Karen Newsum on June 3.



The Porch Pickers will be jamming at the Arts Center gallery on First Friday, June 6.



Bradley Wilson will teach a weekend workshop on eco-printing June 28-29.



A Heartfelt Thanks to Our Distribution Heroes

"The Groundhog" is special not only because of the stories we tell, but also due to the generous people who help us bring those stories to our readers. Every edition of the paper that finds its way into someone's hands is the result of dedicated individuals working behind the scenes — and we want to shine a light on them. Big thanks to:

- Marsha Merrell
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- Alyce Kenney
- Craig and Betsy Sheldon
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From all of us at "The Groundhog": thank you.

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Treasures in Our Own Backyard

Exploring the Trails of DeSoto State Park

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

Hiking is a popular recreational activity with many benefits. It provides physical exercise, brings people close to nature, improves mental health, and creates opportunities to spend time with friends and family.

While Alabama offers an abundance of hiking trails, you don't have to travel far to enjoy miles of trails to match anyone's interests and capabilities.

Atop Lookout Mountain just minutes from Mentone and downtown Fort Payne, DeSoto State Park offers an incredible variety of hiking and walking trails — many of them hidden gems even for longtime locals. Whether you're looking for a leisurely family stroll or a rugged backcountry adventure, DeSoto has something for everyone.

A Trail for Every Type of Explorer

DeSoto State Park boasts more than 30 miles of trails winding through rich woodlands and alongside creeks, waterfalls, wildflowers, and stunning rock formations. Trails range from ADA-accessible boardwalks to steep, rocky climbs sure to challenge even seasoned hikers.

Here's a sampling of what you'll find:

- **Boardwalk Trail** – This short, ADA-accessible stroll near the Country Store is perfect for visitors of all ages and abilities. The boardwalk offers interpretive signs and scenic views of the surrounding forest. As a bonus, this site is also a stop on the North Alabama Birding Trail.
- **Laurel Falls Trail** – Just 0.3 miles one-way, this easy trail leads to a small, picturesque waterfall. Great for kids and beginners.
- **Lost Falls Trail Loop** – A 2.9-mile moderate trail that weaves through lush terrain, this one leads to the elusive Lost Falls. Depending on recent rainfall, the falls may be a trickle or a torrent. Either way, it's worth the trip.
- **CCC Quarry Trail** – This relatively short and easy trail takes you to an old Civilian Conservation Corps rock quarry from the 1930s. It's a perfect mix of history and nature.
- **Never-Never Land Loop** – This challenging 4.2-mile trail has varying terrain, narrow pathways, and forested beauty. Caution: it's not for the inexperienced hiker!

These trails can be combined in creative ways, making every outing a new experience. Some hikes begin near the campground, others near the lodge or picnic area — but all offer a connection to the natural beauty that defines our region.

Know Before You Go

Maps and trail descriptions are available at the DeSoto State Park Country Store and online at www.alapark.com/desoto-state-park/hiking.



For those new to hiking or visiting with young children, the staff at the Country Store is happy to help you choose a trail that fits your needs and time frame.

The Path Ahead

The Year of Alabama Trails reminds us that some of the best journeys begin just outside our front door. In DeSoto State Park, we're fortunate to have a trail system that rivals those found in much larger parks — without the crowds or the long drive.

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June Community Events

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

June 4-6 Grand Camp Children and their trusted adults will join us for grand adventures at the Canyon Center. Families will enjoy hands-on environmental education, outdoor fun. Activities include arts, hiking, fishing, and guided exploration of the natural world. Campers will explore the JSU Canyon Center and the Little River Canyon National Preserve. For more information, call 256-845-3548. Little River Canyon Center. 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. $50/child. Registration required. Limited availability. https://secure.touchnet.net/C20.../web/product_detail.jsp...

June 6 Hike with a Naturalist: Powell Trail This is a 2-mile trail in the Little River Canyon National Preserve. Strenuous with varying and steep terrain into the canyon. Cell phones may have little to no reception. Please wear footwear suitable for hiking, dress in layers, bring water, hiking poles, sun protection, and a snack! Meet at the Little River Canyon Center, and we will caravan to the trailhead. Free and open to everyone! Registration appreciated. WEATHER: As with all outdoor events, if it's raining/stormy or very poor trail conditions, we may have to cancel. 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. If the weather is questionable, please check with the Canyon Center at 256-845-3548.

June 6 First Friday Art Nights! Join us for First Friday Art Nights at Moon Lake Village and participating businesses throughout Mentone. Enjoy an evening of art, live music, food, and community — every first Friday, May through November. Sponsored by the Little River Arts Council. Come be part of something new and beautiful in Mentone! 4 to 7 p.m.

June 6 Congo Night Swim Come out for an epic evening of swimming, music, and fun. Congo Falls will be lit up with lights for a safe, fun environment. There will be a splash deck for extra fun and enjoyment. Reservations are required. Limit of 40 people per swim. Private groups of 20 or more have the option to request specific dates to reserve a Night Swim for your group. 7 p.m.-10 p.m. 256-996-0562.

June 7 Rainsville Freedom Run Runners from across the country will descend upon Rainsville for the 17TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RAINSVILLE FREEDOM RUN 10K AND 5K, "The Best Small Race in America." The event is for runners and walkers of all ages. The race will begin and end at the DeKalb County Schools Coliseum at 1504 Main St. E DeKalb County Schools Coliseum 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

June 7 Southern Ceramic Solutions Food, Music, door prizes, and more. Held at Southern Ceramic Solutions (1595 Main St.) in Fyffe. Everyone is invited, and the event is free for spectators. There will be a $20 entry fee for bringing a car. All proceeds go to Children's Hospital. For more information call 256-440-1520 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

June 7 Geraldine Picnic in the Park Picnic in the Park will feature Damon Johnson, along with special performances by Leah Seawright and the Average Joe Band. We have so many new additions to this year's event and we are so excited to see our community come together. Live Music by many local artists, face painting, food vendors, craft vendors, kiddie train, balloon art by Moons Balloons, inflatables, pony rides by Jesse Tatum, and fireworks to end the day. There will be a car show from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. and other festivities start at 5 p.m. Held at Geraldine Town Park!

June 7 Outdoor Event at The Pickin' Post The Pickin' Post will host an outdoor event to start the summer off right. Live music starts at 6 p.m., and a cruise-in starts at 4 p.m. Everyone is invited to attend. For more information, call 256-657-3817 or 256-845-4115.

June 7 Summer Music Series Summer nights + live music = perfection! Join us for the 2025 Summer Music Series, a free outdoor concert series at the Mentone Inn's Linger Longer Pavilion — brought to you by the Little River Arts Council! Grab some good eats, bring your favorite drink, and settle in for unforgettable evening of music with Black Sedan Band under the stars with friends and family. 6 to 9 p.m. St. Joseph's will be selling plate dinners to benefit Episcopal Relief and Development.

June 8 Weaving a Reed Egg Basket Join artist Brittney Hughes to discover how to weave a reed egg basket, learning how to set up & form the basket; weave & twine techniques; and how to add ribs as you go. Materials will be provided, as well as all tools & supplies. This class is for ages 12 to adult (please no younger children for safety reasons). Wear comfortable, casual clothing (this can get messy), and bring a sack lunch if you wish. This workshop emphasizes the use of hand tools. Students should have moderate hand strength. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. JSU's Little River Canyon Center. $130 supply fee. Pre-registration required by May 25. Space is limited to five participants. Pre-registration required by emailing Brittney Hughes (NOT via Facebook/social media). For details and to pre-register, email Southernchick888@hotmail.com.

June 12 Guardians of Hope Gala and Auction Join Guardians of Hope for a special night! There will be a cocktail hour, silent auction, dinner, and live auction. Terrapin Hills Country Club. All proceeds go to DeKalb County CAC. 5:30 p.m. Call Tracy Jones at 256-630-0688 or Neil Colbert at 256-899-3810.

June 13 Lunch & Learn Join the SAM Foundation for a Lunch & Learn event in Fort Payne, featuring a QPR Training! Lunch is at 11:30 a.m. at the Coal & Iron Building. Everyone is invited, but please register at: https://samfound.networkforgood.com/events/86775-ft-payne-lunch-learn

June 14 Bluegrass on the Rim Join the fun at the JSU Canyon Center for the 12th Annual Bluegrass on the Rim concert. This year's concert features Kristy Cox & Grasstime and Foggy Hollow Review. This is an outdoor venue, so bring folding chairs or blankets. Leashed pets and coolers are welcome. BBQ and other vendors onsite. Come out and enjoy some of the South's best BBQ & bluegrass under the stars. Adult tickets $25 in advance or $30 the day of the show. Student discounted tickets are available for $20 in advance or $25 the day of. Kids 10 and under free.

June 21 Jelly Making Workshop Learn how to make your own jelly and take home THREE jars of jelly already made for you! The Locale in Fyffe. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. or 3 to 6 p.m. Call 256-630-1916 for more information and to register.

June 21 Hike with a Naturalist: Lower Two-Mile Trail Join JSU Field School staff on a beautiful outdoor adventure hike to Lower Two-Mile. Don't let this hike fool you. It may be a half-mile, but it's steep and challenging. Extremely steep and not recommended for pets or people who have difficulty climbing stairs and steep terrain. Meet at JSU's Little River Canyon Center. We will caravan to the trail head. Time: Meet at Canyon Center at 10:30 a.m. Fee: Free and open to everyone! Registration appreciated. For details, contact 256-845-3548 (Canyon Center).

June 21 Watercolors for Beginners: Discover the Beauty of Native Bugs & Insects Dive into the vibrant world of watercolors as you explore the fascinating details of native bugs and insects! Designed for those who think they can't draw a stick figure, this course focuses on easy-to-learn techniques to capture the delicate charm of local fauna. Using simple brush strokes and basic color mixing, you'll create vibrant, nature-inspired artworks while exploring the unique features of Mother Nature. 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 to 5 p.m. DeSoto State Park Nature Center next to DeSoto's Country Store & Information Center on Co. Rd. 89. $55.00 includes all supplies. Ages 12 to adult. Class space is limited to 10; pre-registration is required for attendance in this class. Pre-registration below: https://www.littleriverartscouncil.org/insectwatercolors.

June 21 Third Saturday Sunset Cruise-In will be an afternoon of family fun activities in the Main Street District of Fort Payne. This public event will include food, live music, motorcycles, antique car show, and much more. 5 to 9 p.m.

June 21 Boom Town Opry ALL ABOARD! The Boom Town Opry will be pulling into the station for our 2025 season. Doors open at 5 p.m. Show is at 6 p.m. See y'all there! Fort Payne Opera House. For a suggested donation of $10, you can come and go throughout the performance. All proceeds benefit the restoration of the historic 1889 Opera House, so please give more if you can!

June 24-27 Canyon Camp This unique summer experience offers hands-on environmental education, outdoor fun, creative arts, and exploration of the natural world. Campers will enjoy hiking, fishing, swimming, and more while exploring the JSU Canyon Center, Little River Canyon National Preserve, and DeSoto State Park. Designed for curious minds ages 8 to 12, Canyon Camp is limited to just 12 participants to ensure a safe, engaging, and personalized experience. Little River Canyon Center. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Drop-off begins at 8:30 a.m. Fee: $150/student. Registration required. Limited availability. JSU Students and Teachers Receive 20% with Promo Code! (Must show with School ID).

June 26-28 Alabama Fan Appreciation Weekend Fan Appreciation Weekend (June 26-28) will feature a number of events this year: The Teddy Gentry "Singing with the Stars" contest, the award-winning Songwriters Concert, "Fandemonium on the Farm" at Randy Owen's property, as well as various events at the ALABAMA world headquarters in Fort Payne.

June 26 Teddy Gentry's Singing with the Stars Listen to local Student Singers in a competition and see Teddy Gentry perform with the students! Fort Payne City Hall Auditorium. Proceeds go to the DeKalb County Children's Advocacy Center. 6 p.m.

June 27 Daybreak Flatwater Paddle Trip DeSoto State Park staff offers this relaxing guided morning paddle trip on scenic Little River. Enjoy the peace and quiet of nature as we paddle upstream on the "Coke bottle clear" waters of the West Fork of Little River. Learn about this outstanding water source, with its clear water and plant & animal life, and about the history of the area around DeSoto Falls in DeKalb County. What to know: This trip is approximately 4 miles round-trip on flatwater under your own power & spans a 3 to 3 1/2-hour period. Includes kayak, paddle, & personal flotation device. Participants must be able to paddle upstream and back (no current). Weight limits: 300 pounds for singles & 450 for tandems. Ages 8 to adult. What to bring: Appropriate clothing for weather, bug spray, snacks, and drinking water. 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. DeSoto Falls Picnic Area-Miller's Bend Paddle Shack (about 7 miles from the main park area of DeSoto State Park). Fee: $30 for single kayak rental (tandem kayaks are available on a limited basis for $50 email to check availability).

June 27 Cook Castle Brunch Benefiting the Jeff and Lisa Cook Foundation, Cook Castle Brunch is hosted by Lisa Cook and features a silent auction. Cook Castle at 10 a.m.

June 27 Buffalo Nickle Coin Show The Buffalo Nickle will host a coin show at the Alabama Fan Club. Fan Club members' admission is free. For all others, a $1 donation. Proceeds benefit the DeKalb County Children's Advocacy Center. 12 p.m. to 3 p.m.

June 27-28 June Jam Songwriters Showcase The Alabama Band June Jam Songwriters Showcase will be at the Fort Payne City Auditorium, and there will be two shows. Tickets are on sale at the Alabama Fan Club. All seats are reserved, and capacity is limited. There will be a different lineup of songwriters scheduled for each evening. To purchase tickets, call the Fan Club at 256-845-1646.

June 27 Miss Freedom Festival The City of Rainsville will host the 1st Annual Miss Freedom Festival. Contestants ages 0 to 12th grade are welcome. All age groups are open to the public. Applications & fees must be turned into Rainsville City Hall no later than June 9. Entry fee is $40 for the first child and $30 for each additional sibling. Held at the Tom Bevill Enrichment Center in Rainsville. Pageant starts at 4 p.m. For more information send email to kaliedavis7@gmail.com.

June 28 Randy Owen's Fandemonium at the Farm Join Randy at the farm for food and musical entertainment. Gates open at 9 a.m. Get tickets at GOFAN.com.

June 28 Rainsville Freedom Fest Come and have some fun! There will be lots of free kids' activities from 1 to 9 p.m. The entertainment this year will be Sawyer Brown. We will end the night with some awesome FIREWORKS that start at 9 p.m.

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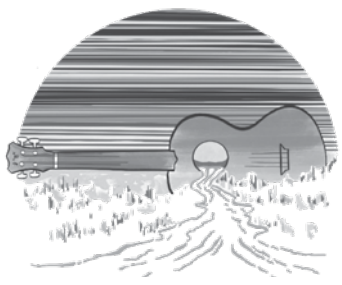
Open every Wednesday to Mentone/ Valley Head/ Hammondville residents from 9-11 a.m.

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.

Beyond Four Strings:

The Ukes Are About Friendship, Four Strings and So Much More!

BY DEBRA FEY



The Mentone Ukes are thriving, and in August we will celebrate our six-year anniversary! There must be a good reason for our continued success — in fact, there are plenty of them!

Learning to play a musical instrument can be a great hobby or pastime for the young and not-so-young alike. You can stimulate your gray matter and have fun at the same time. The ukulele is an easy instrument to learn, and it's affordable. (I've always said that if I can learn to play the ukulele, anyone can!)

If you already play, perhaps you'd like to expand your strumming technique or learn some good picking patterns. Or maybe it's time to challenge yourself and learn some new chord progressions or combinations. Perhaps you'd like to learn to play new songs in a variety of musical genres. Maybe you'd like to gain more confidence and play informal performances around town with a fun group of ukulele players. Singing songs, even if you sing off-key (as I do), is a learned trust that builds confidence.

Some of our members have gone on ukulele-themed cruises and performed in small groups or even as individual solo performers at ukulele festivals. Each of these activities expand our ukulele journey in so many ways. Wherever we are, we focus on having fun when we play, and then watch others join in the fun with us.

Finally, and this can be an important driving force, perhaps you'd like to become a part of something bigger than yourself that supports our local community and brings joy to others. Our group provides a casual, positive environment where you will be encouraged and supported as friends.

If you are a beginner to the ukulele or just haven't played for a while, we hope you will join us for a session on June 7 or 24 at 1 p.m. at the Moon Lake Library. A beginner's lesson is offered at the same time as our regular session, and loaner ukes are available. For more information, visit us on Facebook, "Mentone Ukes," or on the web, www.MentoneUkes.com. I guarantee you'll be made to feel right at home.

NACC Launches Social Dance Class at Moon Lake

Are you ready to hit the dance floor but need a course for beginners? Whether you're wanting to show off your moves at a wedding or just want to groove for fun, this Social Dance Class is for you.

As part of its commitment to extending learning opportunities for those in the Mentone and Lookout Mountain region, Northeast Alabama Community College is offering a new course to help people learn skills and to enrich the community.



This introductory course focuses on the foundational techniques of social dance, designed for beginners seeking to build confidence, coordination, and musical responsiveness in a recreational dance setting. Each week features a new dance style — from the elegant Waltz to the fiery Cha Cha, the cool West Coast Swing to a spicy Latin Fusion.

Participants will learn:

- Easy-to-follow steps
- Lead/follow techniques
- Social dance etiquette
- Low-impact cardio that's FUN!

Classes are held each Thursday from 12 Noon to 2 p.m. at the Moon Lake campus through August 7. The first class was set for May 29, but participants can register and join the series at any time.

The fee is only $25 per person for the entire series.

To register, visit: bit.ly/3H47rEN

The course is taught by Kayleigh Smith. Director of Theatre for NACC, Smith has choreographed many of the productions at the college through the years.

"I encourage everyone to join us," she says. "Whether you want to learn a new skill, discover a new dance style, or just enjoy the community experience that comes from social dancing, you'll find something to love about these classes."

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The Mountain Kitchen

Strawberries Steal the Show



BY REBECCA HENDERSON, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

When those little red gems begin to show up at farmers markets and grocery stores, our mouths start to water for shortcake, jams, pies, and savory recipes such as salads. My first memory of strawberries was a scented storybook my mother bought for me when I was about 5: "Little Bunny Follows His Nose" (Golden Press, 1971). I can still smell the strawberry jam scratch-and-sniff patch in a wooden spoon, made by Mama Mouse. The aroma of these berries evokes joy and memories for lots of folks.

Thankfully, there are endless strawberry recipes for fans of this juicy fruit. Our very own Michele Smith, designer of The Groundhog, creator of Botanical Blues, and all-around wonderful human, made this cobbler for Mothers Day recently, and it's a great way to celebrate spring's favorite berry.

STRAWBERRY COBBLER

(Serves 10-12)

1 pound fresh strawberries, quartered
1 stick butter
1½ cups flour
1¼ cups granulated sugar, divided
1 cup milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. In a large bowl, toss the sliced strawberries with 1/4 cup of sugar until they're evenly coated. The sugar helps draw out the juices from the berries, creating a syrupy sauce. Set aside.
3. Cut butter into slices, and add to a 9x13" casserole dish. Place in the oven until butter is melted.
4. While butter is melting, whisk together flour, 1 cup sugar, milk, and vanilla extract until smooth.
5. Pour mixture into the dish with the melted butter. Do not stir.
6. Add the strawberries with juices evenly on top of the mixture.
7. Bake for 35-40 minutes or until golden brown.
8. Serve hot with ice cream or whipped topping.

Strawberries can play a part in more than desserts. Their flavor complements all manner of salad dressing ingredients, from poppy seeds to mint to honey to wine. This recipe is one you can play with, adjusting the amounts in the dressing to your own taste.

STRAWBERRY SALAD WITH HONEY-SHALLOT VINAIGRETTE

(Serves 4)

Salad
12 oz. mixed salad greens, such as Romaine or butter lettuce, roughly torn
1 pound fresh strawberries, hulled and sliced
6 oz. firm feta cheese, sliced thick

Dressing
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
1 tablespoon finely chopped shallot
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons honey
Pinch of salt
Pinch of black pepper

Arrange salad ingredients in a large bowl. Combine dressing ingredients in a jar, and shake. Or whisk in a small bowl. Drizzle desired amount of dressing over salad, and serve.



Strawberry Salad with Honey-Shallot Vinaigrette

FANTASTIC STRAWBERRY FUDGE

(Serves 24)

It's always fun when you stumble upon a really delicious recipe. I had some freeze-dried strawberries from a cake recipe, my basic fudge recipe, and a hankering to depart from chocolate or peanut butter fudge.

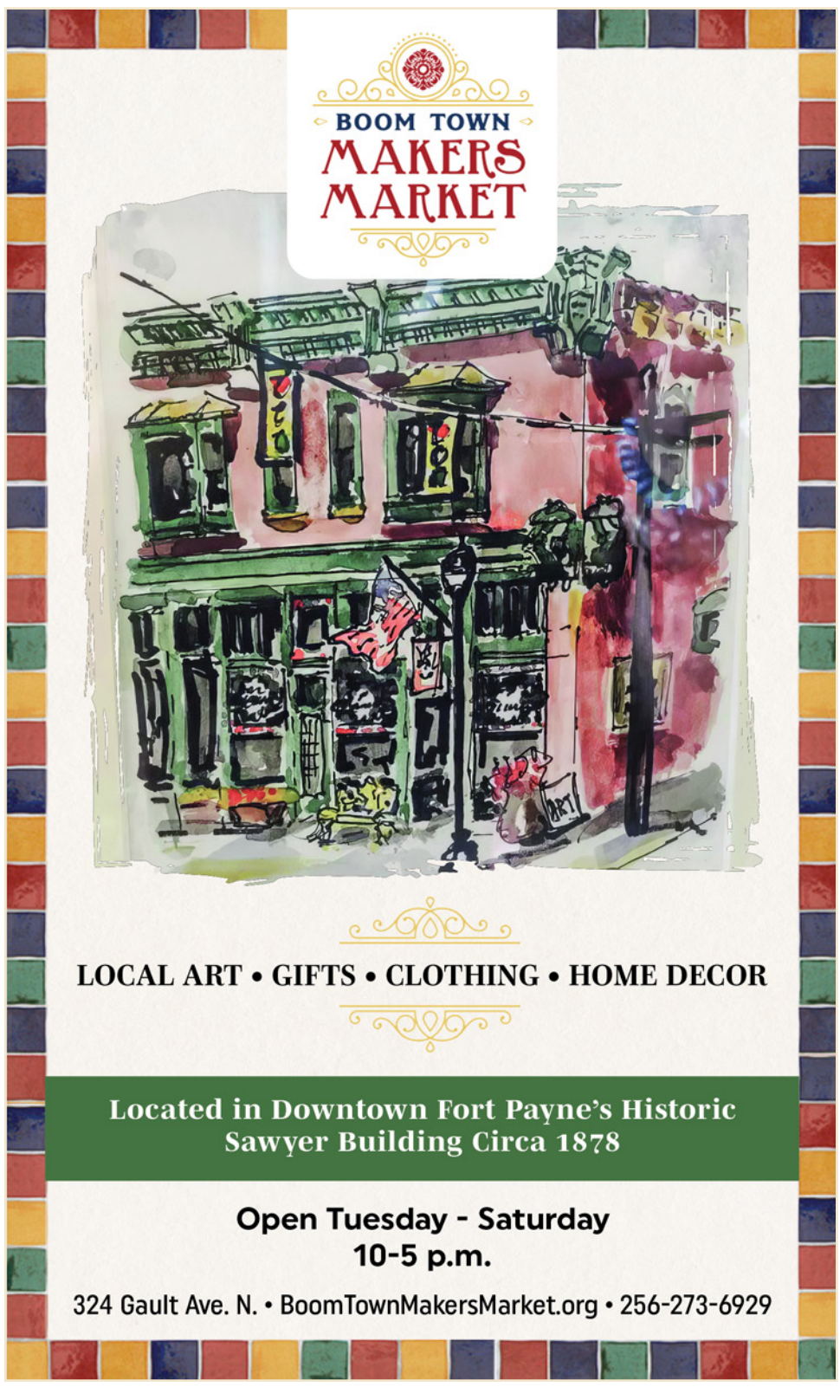
4 cups granulated sugar
1 stick butter
9 oz. evaporated milk
Pinch of salt
1 (12 oz.) package white chocolate chips
1 (7 oz.) jar marshmallow creme
¼ cup freeze-dried strawberries, crushed into fine powder (Walmart sells them)
1 tablespoon pomegranate or cranberry juice (for color)
1 tablespoon strawberry extract

1. Butter a 9x13" pan, and set aside.
2. In a large heavy pot, bring sugar, butter, milk, and salt to a boil, stirring often. Boil until a candy thermometer registers soft ball stage.
3. Remove from heat, and stir in white chocolate chips, marshmallow creme, strawberries, fruit juice, and extract. Stir until chips are melted
4. Pour into buttered dish, and cool before cutting.

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.







Van Apeldoorn *(continued from page 1)*

grip department is also responsible for everything that pertains to the camera, except for the camera itself. So whenever you see a guy pushing the camera on the dolly, that's a grip. Sometimes we would do on-set carpentry. Perhaps there is a three-sided living room set and you want to shoot from the left to the right. You take out the left "wild wall" and put it back later. That's also what grips do."

Susan worked early on as a production assistant, often on commercials. "As a PA, I did whatever I was told," she recalls. "I swept the set, I got cookies, I went to the store and bought props, things like that."

Another of her job descriptions was craft services, which "provides nourishment for the crew while they're working," she explains. "Not the meals. That's catering. Just drinks and snacks. You might be responsible for putting certain things in the actors' trailers that they requested, whether it's Cokes or avocados or whatever. If somebody wants something, you have to have it right there. You don't have time to go to the store and buy it. I knew everybody's preferences. Often at the end of the day, if someone is uncomfortable because they're hungry or needs a cup of coffee, they can't concentrate fully on what they're doing. If you can get them that sandwich or a cold bottle of water, they're more alert and can do their job better. That's the reasoning behind craft service. You're also responsible for safety issues, like making sure the set is kept clean and that there are trash cans around."

Susan and Hank both worked a lot of overtime. "We always said that chaos breeds cash," Hank recalls. "If we were employed on a production where the organization was somewhat lacking, we'd rack up plenty of overtime hours. The uncertainty was certainly stressful, but the large paychecks were welcome. Both Susan and I worked for Clint Eastwood on 'Trouble with the Curve.' I had previously worked for him on 'Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil.' Clint is ultra professional. He knows what he wants. He is soft spoken and he gets the job done in a minimum of takes. Surprisingly, people would say, 'I don't like to work for Clint Eastwood.' Why? No chaos. Hence, very little overtime! It'd be just a regular day. You wouldn't make near the money that you would working for someone else. On a chaotic production there would be long days, sometimes well after midnight, often in the cold, driving rain or miserable heat when the director was insisting he needed to capture a particular shot. All you really wanted to hear was 'That's a wrap!' but the director is doing take after take, and you just knew it was going to be the very first thing to end up on the cutting room floor."

When their work on a production ended, they were often unemployed until the next job came along. It might be a couple of weeks, or it might be a month. "We worried a lot," says Hank. "We did a lot of stuff to fill in in between. If we got a long stretch and didn't get employed, I would go out and work on pipeline jobs or deliver auto parts. I was also good friends with a guy who owned a concrete company that specialized in making septic tanks, so I delivered septic tanks to construction jobs in the area."

One exception to this on-again, off-again work schedule was Susan's seven-year run (1988-1995) with the TV show "In the Heat of the Night." She'd work on the show for nine months, then go on hiatus during the summer. To fill in, she'd pursue other productions, hoping to latch onto a commercial or TV movie.

Hank also worked on several series. He was a grip on the "Matlock" pilot in Atlanta and was certain the series would get picked up and be shot in Atlanta. Unfortunatley, the production went to Los Angeles. "I was crestfallen," he says. After that setback, he switched to the transportation department and worked two seasons on "In the Heat of the Night" and three seasons on "I'll Fly Away."

Encountering the Stars

Naturally, Hank and Susan are often asked if they ever met the stars. Hank says when he was driving trucks, he occasionally had interaction with the actors. "Sometimes at lunch I would run into them. There is a certain bond they often have with the crew. The truck driver and the camera operator, the star and the person that's preparing the food, we're all doing a job. The hierarchy is suspended. Nobody is really better than anyone else. Interaction with an actor becomes acceptable. The stars are not apprehensive about 'Is this somebody off the street and what do they want from me?' You just have normal conversations."

Susan adds, "Sometimes I would be assigned as an actor driver. When we did 'Ant-Man,' I drove a crew van, but occasionally they'd have me run over and pick up Paul Rudd. We'd chat, and he's a real sweetheart. But like Hank says, with these actors you don't approach them, you don't try to cling to them. They're working. This is a job. If you show them respect, don't try to get in their space, they're good, they'll come to you."

They say good things about Matt Damon, Reese Witherspoon, Tyler Perry, Queen Latifah, and others, including Carl Weathers (who played Apollo Creed in the Rocky movies). Susan says, "Carl came on 'In the Heat of the Night' when Carroll O'Connor had to have emergency heart surgery. They brought him in to replace Carroll during that time. We talked some, I got to know him, and he was just very kind. And I remember on the very last episode of 'In the Heat of the Night,' they had Peter Fonda as the guest star. I walked into the production office and the production secretary says, 'Susan, you'll never believe who our star is going to be: Peter Fonda!' And she and I were both going, 'Oh my God, oh my God, Peter Fonda!' I called Hank and told him and he said, 'Ask him about the Captain America bike,' which is the motorcycle he rode in 'Easy Rider.' So I talked to him for about an hour about the Captain America bike."

Personal Touches

Sometimes bits from their personal lives made it on camera. "Our dog Hamhock appeared on two or three episodes of 'In the Heat of the Night,' when they needed a dog," Susan remembers. Hank points over his shoulder to an old blue truck sitting in the carport. "That thing's been in a whole ton of movies," he says. When a director said, "Get me an old beat-up truck,' that's usually what they had in mind." They got paid a flat rate for such contributions. "The truck started out being $100 a day, and then it increased a little. If it was in a show and the show was 24 days long and the truck was in it 12 of those days, it was nice to have that extra money."

When Susan was doing commercials, if they were doing an office scene for example, she'd "just bring in things off my desk like a wire basket or a stapler and write it down. 'That's two bucks a day' or whatever."

Susan even appeared on screen once. "In one of the last episodes of 'In the Heat of the Night,' there was a scene with an actress who was supposed to be in jail. By accident they had booked a male jailer, so they needed a female. I said, 'I'll do it!.' So they put me in a uniform and did enough makeup to pass. And Charlie, who was the director of photography, a really nice guy, went to great lengths to light me properly. All I did was stand there while Carroll O'Connor talked to the prisoner."

Do they ever watch the movies they worked on? "Sometimes," Susan says, "but it can be hard to watch without remembering how they whined about the Cokes because they weren't cold enough."

"I've watched everything I've ever done," Hank says. "However, once you know how the movie magic is created, it's very hard to suspend your disbelief."

"These days we prefer foreign films," he smiles.

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