



THE GROUNDHOG

“Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain”

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

Gerald Bailey Remembers the Family Store and a Slower Pace of Life in Mentone

BY JAY ROBBINS

Curious about what life was like in Mentone in the 1940s and 1950s? Just ask Gerald Bailey. Gerald was born and raised here, and when he looks back on his early years, he does so with affection, but also with a tinge of sadness about some of the old ways and places that are long gone. (Who among us doesn’t do the same?) Gerald was born on Nov. 22, 1940, in a house on Cutler Avenue. He is named after his Uncle Gerald, who was killed in World War II. “I don’t really remember him,” Gerald says, “because he was already in the service. He’d been on the front lines and got wounded, then went back to the front lines and invaded Normandy. I’ve got his two purple hearts. They had an air raid and him and two or three more guys dived under a half-track [an armored vehicle]; the half-track took a direct hit. He’s buried in that cemetery over there in Normandy.”

Bailey’s Grocery and Other Landmarks

Gerald’s father, Floyd, and his mother, Catherine, owned Bailey’s



Gerald Bailey (Photo by Rebecca Henderson)

Grocery on Hwy 117. His mother also taught school in Menlo. “It was just a country grocery store,” he remembers. “Sold gas and oil products, serviced cars. Had a feed room for feed, an oil room for all the oil, then the grocery part of it. We had a Coke machine and sold dip ice cream. It was the only store in Mentone at the time that had a fresh meat market. And back in those early days, about everything was credit business. Up here was mostly sawmillers and farmers. When it got to

where they couldn’t work, Mother and Daddy would carry them all winter, and when it got to where they could go to work, they’d come in and pay their bill. Everybody was pretty good about paying up.” In addition to the family store, other local landmarks from that era no longer exist, but Gerald offers some interesting stories about them. There was a covered bridge over Little River at that time, left over from the days when Cutler Avenue was the main road through town. (“That was before my time,” Gerald says.) He remembers walking over that bridge; but he also remembers the day the bridge collapsed. “I was about 6 years old. Some men that worked for the state and a truck were on the bridge, and it fell — the truck, men and all. They walked up to our store to use the telephone.” The historic Hitching Post in its early days holds memories for many. (The building was destroyed by fire in 2023). It used to house the local post office and a store or two. The upstairs was used as a dance hall, and Gerald chuckles as he recalls how he rode to the Hitching Post on his bicycle with his friend Guy Smith. They would

sneak upstairs, inevitably get caught, and get sent home.

An Idyllic Childhood

Many of the camps that call Mentone home were here when Gerald was growing up. “They had gyms,” he says, “and they would let us have ball games in the gyms, because we didn’t ever tear up anything or bother anything.” Life wasn’t all play, but Gerald had fun. “After I got big enough to help in the store, [Daddy would] give me two hours off every day to go to the river. We could swim down where the camps are now, where they got their docks and stuff. When the girls come down to take their swim lesson, we had to get off the dock, but they didn’t care if we used it. And we had a big, big tree down there that kind of leaned out over the river. Somebody before my time built a platform, and we had a rope probably 40 feet up in the tree. We could swing three quarters’ way across the river. It was a lot of fun,” he reminisces. It was mostly private property along the river then, as it is today, “but people didn’t care then. You could go anywhere to

(See “Gerald Bailey,” Page 14)

National Park Service to Remain at Little River Canyon Center

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

After several weeks of uncertainty, the future of the partnership between the National Park Service and Jacksonville State University’s Little River Canyon Center is no longer in question. JSU President Dr. Don C. Killingsworth Jr. posted to his Facebook account on April 23, “We have received confirmation that the previously announced lease termination has been revoked, and the NPS office located at the Canyon Center is no longer on the list of sites scheduled for closure.” The long-standing partnership was put in jeopardy earlier this year when the federal government announced it would terminate its lease with JSU as part of budget reduction efforts. NPS staff members have occupied space in the Canyon Center since the facility opened in 2009. The center is a hub

for education, conservation, research, and outdoor recreation. It features a Grand Hall, HD movie theater, gift shop, natural history library, exhibits, classrooms, outdoor amphitheater, and scenic trails for both education and adventure. It hosts concerts, workshops, hikes, lectures, and other activities year-round for students of all ages and the general public. John Dersham, executive director of DeKalb Tourism, says the renewed partnership is good news for the area in many ways. “The Little River Canyon National Preserve is the cornerstone of the tourism industry in DeKalb County,” he says, “an industry that supports many jobs and small businesses by attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. The economic impact is significant. Further, the National Park Service



(See “Canyon Center,” Page 3)

Step Back in Time: Memories of Mayberry Coming May 3rd

It’s Mayberry time again! The Town of Valley Head invites everyone to the 8th Annual Memories of Mayberry Festival on Saturday, May 3, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Held around the town square, the festival will feature live music by country rock band Stranded, pony rides and train rides for kids, a classic car Cruise-In, and appearances by Mayberry favorites like Deputy Barney Fife and Floyd the Barber. Visitors can also enjoy tasty bites from local food trucks, shop from over 20 craft vendors, and take part in fun contests like pie baking and Aunt Bee’s Homemade Dill Pickle competition. 🍷



A New Monthly Celebration of the Arts Friday, May 2nd • 4 to 7 p.m.

- The Moon Lake Campus will feature live music, pop-up art vendors, interactive art activity, and refreshments. All the shops and Moon Lake Kitchen will be open.
- Mentone Arts Center will be open, and will feature live music from 3-5 p.m.
- Fairy Tales at Brow Park by Debbie Happy Cohen.

Come celebrate every First Friday from May through November!



The Groundhog

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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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FOLLOW US ON 

Mentone Matters Brow Park Trail Study Underway

BY MAYOR ROB HAMMOND

The Alabama Tourism Department has launched the “Year of Alabama Trails,” a two-year campaign to celebrate the many outdoor activities our state has to offer. We are particularly blessed in our corner of the state with an abundance of quality trails, particularly in DeSoto State Park and the Little River Canyon National Preserve.

Trails make nature more accessible to people of all ages. They make us appreciate the creation that surrounds us, unplugging us from our daily hectic lives and plugging us into the natural world. They help us preserve the great outdoors for our kids, our grandkids, and future generations.

For a town like Mentone, trails are also an economic driver. People choose to visit and live here for many reasons, including our vibrant arts scenes, great shops and galleries, summer camps, and some of the best restaurants in the region. But our main draw is the abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities.

The Town of Mentone is considering a Brow Park improvement project that ties into all the reasons behind the Year of Alabama Trails promotion. It would give local citizens and visitors alike another opportunity to explore the beauty of our town.

Jared Carter, the executive director of North Alabama Trails and Recreation, has visited Brow Park and put together a plan to clear and clean the adjacent shelf. His organization would fund part of the project and work with the Alabama Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils to secure the remainder of needed funds. This would be the beginning stages of developing trails that go below the park on the side of the mountain, offering incredible views and a hiking experience unlike any other.

Carter’s group would also help us apply for grants for the actual construction of the trails. You may remember that Kenneth Boswell, director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, visited Mentone last year to see the work we’re doing at the Moon Lake campus. While here, he asked to visit Brow Park to learn more about potential trail development. Director Boswell and his staff were intrigued by the idea because they understand the economic importance of outdoor recreation. ADECA will be a valuable partner if we move forward with this trail.

As for next steps, Carter will visit Mentone soon to discuss the project in detail with the town council.



At Moon Lake, the gym is getting a significant upgrade with the installation of a new heating and cooling system. As we saw with the Groundhog Day Community Celebration in February, the gym can be used for more community activities — but not with an outdated and broken HVAC system. The old system was terribly inefficient, costing us way too much money to operate. A few weeks ago, it failed completely. We awarded the bid for a new system to Watkins Heating and Cooling, which has experience installing similar units in DeKalb County School System buildings.

Best of all, this project is being funded by money raised from the Mentone Fall Festival. The town received approximately \$38,000 from the festival last year. Since taking responsibility for coordinating this event, we have invested the money raised back into Moon Lake, the site of the festival. It’s a great way to continue supporting one of Mentone’s most important assets.

We are in the process of choosing an architect for the renovation project at Moon Lake, which is being funded in part by an Appalachian Regional Commission grant administered through Boswell and his team at ADECA.

Look for crews to begin the final phase of our sidewalk project before the end of May. It will extend from Dempsey Avenue to Moon Lake Library and include a crosswalk. Combined with the first phase, which runs from downtown to Dempsey Avenue, our total sidewalk length will be approximately 1.5 miles. We see heavy use of the existing sidewalk by residents and visitors alike, and believe that will increase significantly when the second phase is opened. 🍷

From the Editor Tell Me Your Canyon Story

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

What does Little River Canyon mean to you? For me, Little River Canyon is the setting of one of my earliest memories. Barely more than a toddler, I was taken by my parents to Canyon Land Park and Zoo. The history of Canyon Land is worth a full story unto itself, but suffice it to say the carnival rides, miniature golf course, zoo, and live entertainment — not to mention the chair lift carrying visitors deep into the canyon — were quite the regional attraction in the early 1970s.

This little blonde-headed kid was fascinated with the animals. As we were leaving, a lamb said “baaaa,” and Mama told me it was saying “bye!” to me. I was thrilled and amazed. That’s all I remember from our visit that day, but it has stuck with me for more than five decades.

That would only be the beginning of memories forged around Little River Canyon. So many drives around the rim. Picnics. Hikes to Little River Falls. Photos of landscapes ablaze with fall colors. Good times with friends and family.

In 1992, as a young reporter, I sat on the rim with dignitaries, supporters, and other members of the press to see our canyon become a National Preserve. I didn’t fully understand or appreciate at the time the tremendous effort it took to make this designation

happen, or the impact it would have on preserving this natural and cultural treasure.

Then there’s Eberhart Point. The hike to the base is steep with its three switchbacks, but the hike out is something the National Park Service website kindly frames as “can be very strenuous.” I have many great memories of being at the bottom, surrounded by 600-foot sandstone cliffs, soothed by the flowing river, and feeling closer to the earth than I’ve ever felt.

Little River Canyon is powerful, lasting, and ever present. It was there waiting for early explorers to the region to discover it, and to become the backdrop of so many stories, songs, adventures, and moments of pure magic in the decades since.

I’d love to hear your Little River Canyon stories. Email groundhognews@yahoo.com, and be sure to include your name and contact information. Or post it on Facebook and tag The Groundhog.

I love the sentiment captured by singer/songwriter (and Mentone resident) Pierce Pettis, whose album “State of Grace” features the song “Little River Canyon” with its chorus:

*This song is just an echo
This song is just a ripple from a stone (that was)
Tossed into the water long ago*

And thus our canyon’s story will continue reaching new generations, long after we take our last hike. 🍷



EASTER EGG HUNT WINNER!

Congratulations to Tom Emory!

He’s the lucky winner of our Groundhog Easter Egg Hunt featured in the April edition! Tom successfully found all 12 hidden eggs and scored a festive basket full of goodies.

Thanks to everyone who joined the hunt!

Possum Emporium Antique Mall Opens May 24

A new antique mall is coming to Mentone, bringing quality goods and a fun shopping experience to the community.

The Possum Emporium opens Saturday, May 24, at 10 a.m. It is located at 1774 County Road 642 in a former church building just 200 yards off Alabama Highway 117. Ray Padgett has transformed the building into a shop that will feature vendors with a wide variety of antiques, collectibles, musical instruments, and more. The store will be open

Thursdays through Sundays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The opening will kick off with the first Mentone Dicker Daze, which will run throughout the year. During Dicker Daze, pop-up vendors will be set up in tents across the lawn, along with food vendors.

To inquire about booth space in the building or tent space on Saturdays, contact Padgett at 256-634-1295.

To learn more, visit: Facebook.com/PossumEmporium. 🍷

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Healing the Land Through Regenerative Agriculture

BY BILL ADAMS

Modern American culture affects our lives positively and negatively. Our predominant food production systems share this dual nature. They provide copious amounts of beneficial foods, but they also contain considerable tripe. Many commercial operations rely on massive corporate farms, which occupy huge tracts of land. The plants and animals they grow derive from hydrocarbon-based fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. Most of these “progressive” methods began after World War II. The harmful residues from these factory farms are negatively affecting nature’s balance. Sterile soils are bathed in toxic chemicals, which require constant replenishment. The natural cyclical order found in forests, prairies, and wetlands is ignored or destroyed. Small organic farms and gardens diminish with time.

The joy of growing, harvesting,

cooking, and eating one’s own food is a relic. Some people ask, “Why would I want to do that when I can get someone else to do it for me?” Few are satisfied with locally or seasonally produced food. But it is not too late to change this way of sustaining ourselves. There is hope. Regenerative Agriculture (RA) is real and effective. RA can refer to any agricultural endeavor that maintains or improves the natural productive qualities of land used to grow food. Through natural processes, healing is possible. Combining proven ancient farming techniques with innovative modern tools and methods can lead to better foods and lifestyles. Permaculture, terrapreta, biochar, hugels, nitrogen-fixing bacteria, composting, mulching, worm beds, raised beds, swales, hydroponics, seed saving, chicken tractors, grass-fed livestock, and renewable energy projects are a few examples. These and other ideas will work in rural and urban settings.

Individuals, families, and small groups can participate in such efforts. Some large commercial farmers are realizing the benefits of regenerative practices. They are experiencing larger crop yields and higher quality products after introducing carbon and organic material to their soils. Most importantly, some farmers are seeing higher profits. Several farming associations are providing university grants to study the feasibility of adapting their farming practices. Anyone willing to work with RA assets can experience the satisfaction of doing the right thing for the environment and themselves. What might seem like toil becomes a labor of love. Several individuals in the Lookout Mountain area practice various aspects of RA, and The Groundhog will present a series of articles showcasing their efforts. Readers can become more familiar with the growing RA movement, and perhaps be inspired to participate. 🍷

Canyon Center *(continued from page 1)*

operations being based out of the Canyon Center helps support the great work JSU is doing there, which is an important part of our tourism base.” Killingsworth credited the work of Alabama’s legislative delegation, along with efforts from state and local partners, for securing the NPS lease. “We are grateful for their commitment to preserving this vital resource for education, conservation, and outdoor recreation,” he wrote. “We are especially thankful for our longstanding partnership with the National Park Service and are excited to continue our collaborative work at the Canyon Center,” continued Killingsworth. “Together, we will build on our shared mission to provide meaningful programming, research opportunities, and public engagement that highlight Little River Canyon’s unique natural and cultural heritage.” 🍷



May’s Gulf Music Fest at the Little River Canyon Center.

Mentone Is Full of Good Neighbors

BY NORM BAKER

Since I will be 90 years old on May 26, I don’t do a lot of driving. However, a few days ago I decided to take our three dogs for a short ride. Since they are all advanced in age too, they much prefer riding to walking these days. Our ride started out just fine, but due to some unexpected traffic, I found myself needing to turn around in

someone’s driveway. Unfortunately, I missed the driveway and ended up in a ditch. The angle was such that I couldn’t open the driver’s side door. Nor was I able to climb out the other side, and I had forgotten to take my cell phone with me. Three restless and anxious dogs scrambling around didn’t help matters. I was beginning to feel anxious myself until a “road-side angel” appeared in the form of a kind and competent young man. He

happened to have a chain in the back of his truck and offered to pull me out of the ditch, which he quite competently did. He then followed me home to be sure everything was okay. I was still a little shaky when I arrived home but very grateful for the young man’s kindness. There are still good people in this world, and lots of them live in Mentone! 🍷



Norm Baker, originally from Providence, Rhode Island, and his wife, Liz, who grew up in Birmingham. They met in Clemson, South Carolina, and moved to Mentone years ago from Atlanta when they retired.

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

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Play in the Puddles!

BY DEJOLY LABRIER

I often refer to May as the “greening” month. It’s when a million brilliant shades of green surround us on this magnificent mountain, and new vitality rises from every leaf and blade of grass.

It’s a time of transformation and exquisite beauty.

This applies not only to the environment, but also to our inner worlds. Sometimes caught up in the chatter of the voices around us, we forget that serenity, joy, and transformation can exist just a breath away.

Today, as I carry my coffee mug through the gardens, I see the green starts of the lilies and hyacinths. They are in the short period of transformation from green to blossoms. I also think about the times I take life so seriously that I forget to play. Admittedly, I can be too serious and need reminders to lighten up. That’s when I go to my gardens.

Playing allows joy to flow into me easily with spontaneous laughter and playful movements – like the birds and frogs that play in the trees and among my vegetable plants.

For me, one of the most important things about playing is that it allows places in my body to become free, unstuck. It allows my mind to let go of anxiety and worry. It connects me to my inner child, who so wants to stomp in the puddles after a good rain.



That child is part of each of us. We bring the gift of joy to the world around us when we allow ourselves to play. This hasn’t always been easy for me, and what that looks like for each of us may be different, but the energy is ramped-up joy!

I painted a rock as a reminder for me to find joy in the smallest things, not being afraid of getting wet or muddy. I also love yellow rubber duckies, and even have one that I named Hope, tattooed on my left forearm.

So it makes sense that I would paint a rock that says Play in the Puddles... Quack! Quack!

This is an invitation to get messy and enjoy a rainy day. Enjoy the green of May when life is blooming around you. 🐸



Our Groundhog Has a Name!

Reporters are always on the lookout for good stories, so be on the lookout for “Lookout The Groundhog,” the mascot for your favorite community newspaper!

Warren Thompson submitted the winning suggestion during our recent “name the mascot” contest. He will receive a one-year subscription to The Groundhog plus a one-night stay at Mentone Inn Bed & Breakfast.

Thank you to everyone who sent in suggestions. Now let’s look for Lookout all over town. Take your photo together and tag us on Facebook!



Accountable Care Organizations Can Save Time and Money

BY LYNN HIXON

An accountable care organization (ACO) is a group of doctors, hospitals, and other healthcare providers who accept original Medicare and work together to coordinate your healthcare.

Working as part of an ACO helps your doctors and other healthcare providers understand your health history and talk to one another about your care and needs. This may save you time, money, and frustration by avoiding repeated tests and appointments. More coordination also helps prevent medical errors and unexpected drug

interactions that may happen if one provider isn’t aware of what another has prescribed you.

Just remember that an ACO won’t limit your choice of healthcare providers. If your doctor or other provider is part of an ACO, you still have the right to visit any doctor, hospital, or other provider that takes Medicare at any time. 🐸

If you have questions about Medicare changes or you need help with the costs of your medications, please call the DeKalb County Council on Aging at 256-845-8590 and ask for Lynn Hixon or DiAnne Callahan. They are ready to assist you.



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Grit, Growth, and Gratitude Highlight Karen Vest’s First Year as Valley Head Mayor

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

It was supposed to be a birthday getaway. Karen Vest and her husband, Charley, had packed the dogs into the car and headed north from Birmingham to DeSoto State Park for a quiet weekend in the mountains. They didn’t know they were about to make a turn — literally and figuratively — that would change their lives.

“We came around the curve on 117,” Vest recalls, “and there was a For Sale By Owner sign in front of a farm. I screamed at Charley to stop the car.”

They called the number on the sign, left a message, and continued to Mentone for lunch at the Wildflower Cafe. The owner, Martha Gibson, called, “and insisted we come down and see her property,” Vest says. “Within one week, we made an offer and closed in less than 30 days.”

It wasn’t part of a carefully laid plan. The couple had actually been searching for property in Tennessee. But life had other ideas.

From City Life to Small-Town Roots

Originally from Dayton, Ohio, Vest spent most of her adult life in Alabama, working as a certified paralegal in Birmingham. Her husband, who worked for Alabama Power, took a buyout in 2016 that gave them both the freedom to consider a slower pace of life — one with more porch-sitting and less commuting.

By early 2017, they were living full time on the farm in Valley Head. At first, the transition wasn’t easy.

“I had worked since I was 15 years old,” she says. “So to be sitting on



that porch and doing nothing was very difficult for me the first year.”

Charley stayed busier, even picking up a part-time job. Vest, meanwhile, wrestled with the shift from a career-driven lifestyle to something quieter. Gradually, she began to find her place — and her people.

A New Chapter in Public Service

It wasn’t long before neighbors took notice of her energy and experience. In late 2019, citizens asked her to run for a seat on the Valley Head Town Council. She initially hesitated. Politics had never been on her radar.

She discussed it with Charley, who told her she would make a great council member. Whether in Virginia or Birmingham, her life had been marked by public service. “I’ve always served wherever we’ve been,” she says. “I was president of the American Heart Association, president of the Cancer Society. I was in an Arts Council

group. I taught Sunday school, taught Vacation Bible School. I’ve always just wanted to serve the community.”

She won the seat and quickly found herself at the heart of the town’s operations. “I enjoyed being part of making a difference in the town,” she says. “When you sit around a table and truly make decisions that affect people’s lives, it hits you that you can help make a difference in the town’s life. And that really meant a lot to me.”

In early 2024, a surprise resignation by the sitting mayor opened another door. Her fellow council members voted unanimously to appoint her to fill the unexpired term. “I didn’t realize the difference,” she says. “The responsibilities you have as a mayor as opposed to a council person are immense. At first, it was very overwhelming. And I just told myself Rome wasn’t built in a day. Just take this day by day and work with your people.”

Suddenly, Vest found herself responsible for not just shaping policy but also managing the daily challenges of a town of 579 residents. “My clerk, Miss Lora Wooten, has been a tremendous asset to me. And my police officers, Police Chief Brad Greg and Jimmy Phillips. Our volunteer fire department. Mayor Pro Tem Adele Phillips. All of my council. You can’t do it by yourself as a mayor. You have to have a team to help you along. Every day. That is what keeps me going and helps me do my job.”

The Realities of Small-Town Leadership

While some might think the mayor of a small town would have little to do, nothing could be further from the truth. The mayor is an administrator, an advocate, a planner, and a coordinator

of community services. Vest reiterates that she could not do her job without the support of a tremendous team.

Over the past year, that team has helped bring about meaningful, visible improvements in Valley Head. A long-needed handicap ramp was installed at the North DeKalb Primary Clinic. New playground equipment for toddlers was added to the park. Ditches have been cleaned out to ease flooding issues across town. Dog waste stations are now available in several public areas. A new ordinance on responsible pet ownership has been passed to help protect animals and neighbors alike. And a new “free little library” has been popular among residents.

Vest emphasizes that these accomplishments reflect the work of many people, from council members, local volunteers, and county partners to civic-minded residents who love their town.

Building Community, One Gathering at a Time

One of Vest’s favorite initiatives has been the launch of free family movie nights, held outdoors under the stars. After borrowing equipment for their first event, the town has purchased its own projector and screen to make it a regular feature.

Memories of Mayberry continues to be a popular event for the town. She has applied for a grant to build a permanent pavilion in front of town hall so Valley Head can have more events throughout the year. Citizens enjoy the annual Christmas festival, along with the faith festival held throughout town.

To keep the community informed

(See “Mayor Vest,” Page 7)

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Recent Events Have Tremendous Success, Thanks to MERF and Community Support

BY KATIE HAND

Happy spring everyone! I don't know about you, but when the sun is out, I feel happy all around. I love this time of year, because it is full of rejuvenation and growth for all living things.

The recent Valley Head Art Night was a resounding success, thanks to the efforts of MERF, art teacher Caroline Moore, and a dedicated group of volunteers from her family. The event brought together a vibrant community of artists, students, and parents, all celebrating the creativity and hard work of Valley Head's young artists. It was an evening filled with pride, joy, and excitement for everyone involved.

Caroline Moore is nearing the end



of her first year as a contracted art teacher with MERF, having made an impact on over 300 students. As the school year wraps up, Caroline is excited about the future, eager to return next year with a fresh, safe, and engaging roadmap for her students.

This month, MERF also helped fund two enriching field trips for Valley Head students. The first trip took students to the Sea Lab on Dauphin Island, Alabama, a premier marine education and research center. This hands-on experience gave students an invaluable opportunity to explore marine science in action. The second field trip took students to the DeKalb County Criminal Court, where they observed live legal proceedings and had the chance to engage with the presiding judge,

who offered valuable life advice and career guidance.

Speaking with the teachers involved in these trips was truly inspiring. Many shared how hard their students work to earn a spot on these trips, often by writing essays and maintaining excellent grades. Teachers go above and beyond, seeking out grants and organizing these life-changing experiences outside of their regular classroom duties. The field trips provide students with crucial life skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and logistics, while also offering them a chance to step outside their usual environments. As one teacher at VHS put it, "Experiences like these can change a student's entire perspective on life."

MERF is proud to continue supporting these types of educational experiences and is deeply grateful for the ongoing support of the community, which makes these opportunities possible.

The recent Taste of the Mountain Art Auction raised significant funds, as guests came together to support both the mission of MERF and the arts community. None of this would have been possible without the generosity and dedication of so many individuals. A special thank you goes to the many local artists who donated their work, adding beauty and inspiration to the evening. We also want to acknowledge the local businesses whose support played a crucial role in the success of this event.

Heartfelt gratitude goes out to the many volunteers whose time, energy, and hard work made the event possible.



Ms. Cooper and Ms. Manning gear up for the Sea Lab field trip with students.

Your efforts do not go unnoticed, and we are deeply grateful. To our board members, thank you for your leadership and vision, which helped bring this event to life.

Finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to Alpine Camp for hosting this celebration in such a beautiful and special space. It provided the perfect backdrop for a memorable evening.

Thanks to your continued support — whether through donations, volunteering, or simply attending MERF events — we are able to provide these enriching experiences for our students, educators, and the broader Mentone community. Together, we are fostering a brighter future for our children and ensuring that the arts continue to thrive in our community. 🍷

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



Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction was held on April 12 at Camp Alpine.





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May 24

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May 25

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Catfish and Cod Demo & Dine with Master Chef Jason Palin and Chef Emily Roy

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Mayor Vest *(continued from page 5)*

about Valley Head news and events, Vest frequently writes articles for The Groundhog. “A lot of people in Valley Head read The Groundhog,” she says, so it’s important that we now have an article to let people know what’s happening.”

And then there are the senior meals. Every week, the town picks up frozen meals for older residents. Volunteers from the Valley Head Masonic Lodge help distribute those meals, delivering them to homebound seniors who can’t come to get them.

It’s more than just food. It’s a point of connection. And it’s how Vest and her team stay in tune with the needs of the town’s most vulnerable.

“If someone doesn’t show up for their meals, we’ll call them or send a police officer to do a wellness check,” Vest says. “We do that quite often to make sure that they’re okay. That’s just small-town life.”

Looking Ahead

There’s momentum in Valley Head. A vacant building that formerly housed The Rib Shak is under contract and expected to be restored for commercial use. A new deli — Side Street Deli — is set to open soon. Another historic building downtown, currently used for storage, could be a prime candidate for redevelopment. Vest is hopeful.

She’s working with the DeKalb County Economic Development Authority to attract interest in retail and light industry for the town. “Working with other agencies and getting help where I can is very important to me,” Vest says. “I try to attend all the meetings I can, to make all the contacts I can, because I can’t do it alone and my council can’t do

it alone. So with all the help, I would love to see our little town grow.”

Affordable housing remains a concern — not just in Valley Head, but across the region. Vest would also like to see interest in the Shaw property from potential manufacturers.

Valley Head has applied for additional grants to pave streets and add infrastructure. The entire grant process is time-consuming, Vest says, from application to implementation and project management. This is part of what makes her time as mayor seem like it has barely begun.

A Heart for Her Town

As her first year as mayor comes to a close, Vest isn’t slowing down. She plans to seek re-election in August, though she hasn’t formally announced. “I feel like we’re on a good path,” she says. “I’ve got things going, and I want to continue. I’ve barely started. I mean, a year is nothing when trying to get things going, especially with government.”

She’s proud of what’s been accomplished during her term, and realistic about the challenges ahead.

“I love our little town,” she says, “and I’m looking forward to, hopefully, four more years of helping it grow.”

And when things get stressful, she knows she can always count on her police chief, Brad Greg, who keeps a stash of Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups in her desk drawer. Just in case.

“When I tell him I need Reese’s, he knows we’ve got problems,” she laughs.

That kind of humor — and humanity — goes a long way in a town where every neighbor, every building, and every story matters. 🍫

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Rhododendron Garden Club Rooted in Home: Why Native Plants Matter



BY MELLANIE TUTTLE

In Northeast Alabama, something beautiful is blooming — literally. More folks are giving up manicured lawns and nurturing plants that have called this place home long before any of us did. These homegrown heroes — native plants — aren’t just pretty faces. They’re workhorses for the environment, stewards of the soil, and beloved pitstops for pollinators. But what is a native plant anyway?

A native plant is one that’s been growing in a region long before lawns, subdivisions, or even garden centers. It’s one that was in place in the landscape before humans arrived, and they’re tailor-made by nature for our local climate, soil, and critters. Wildflowers are part of that family — plants that sprout without human help and brighten up fields and forest edges just by being themselves.

As for how you should decide which native plants to install or nurture, remember the saying, “location, location, location.” Trilliums like shade. Coneflowers crave sun. Pitcher plants prefer wet areas. Butterfly weed’s just fine in poor soil. You get the idea. They know where they’re most happy, and that requires no human intervention.



The invasive Bush Honeysuckle (*Lonicera tartaria*) is blooming all over Mentone and has a hollow stem. The native Bush Honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*) has yellow flowers with a solid stem and would be a good replacement.



Oakleaf Hydrangea



Black-Eyed Susan

Why Choose Native Plants?

- Several advantages are worth noting when considering natives:
- They need less water, fertilizer, and pesticides.
 - Natives offer essential food and shelter for local wildlife and pollinators.
 - Help restore and protect Alabama’s natural ecosystems by reducing erosion;.
 - They thrive in the soil and climate conditions of our region, such as limestone and clay.

They may take their sweet time establishing roots — some spend years building below the surface before showing off above it — but the wait is worth it. They play the long game, while flashy non-natives can burn out early.

Meet the Locals

- Here are just a few native show-stoppers to keep or invite into your garden:
- Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) – beloved by pollinators and gardeners alike; blooms all summer.
 - Black-Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) – cheerful and tough, great for butterflies
 - Oakleaf Hydrangea (*Hydrangea*



Purple Coneflower



Red Buckeye

- quercifolia*) – big blooms, bold fall color, shade-loving
- Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) – early spring pink blossoms
- Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) – wavy grass with fall flair and habitat benefits
- American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) – purple berries birds can’t resist.
- Coralberry & Winterberry Holly – (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus* and *Ilex verticillata*) – swap these for invasive Nandina if you’re berry-happy
- Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*) – early hummingbird magnet
- Majestic Oaks (*Quercus* spp.) – host to over 800 caterpillar species — true ecosystem anchors

Where to Find Native Plants Nearby

- Don’t dig natives up from the woods—take only photos and memories. Many natives don’t transplant well and some are protected by law. Instead, shop smart from places that grow them right.
- Huntsville & Birmingham Botanical Garden Sales – seasonal events with local experts
 - Recreative Natives (Cropwell)

- small but mighty nursery
- Reflection Riding (Chattanooga) – worth the drive
- Petals from the Past (Jemison) – Southern-grown gems
- DeKalb County Master Gardener Sale (visit their website: alabamaga.org)
- Rhododendron Garden Club Plant Sale, May 3, at Henagar Park
- Sand Mountain Seed Bank – mail-order options from the heart of Alabama
- Online Nurseries – just make sure they’re ethical, no wild harvesting!

Before buying, check the plant tags to make sure you’re getting the true native species, not a lookalike.

Bringing It Home: Converting Your Landscape

- You don’t have to rip out your whole lawn or ditch grandma’s daffodils. Just start small and build from there:
- Observe first – is your yard sunny, shady, soggy, or dry? Match plants to conditions.
 - Pick a spot – tackle one bed, border, or tree base at a time.
 - Ditch the bullies – remove invasives like English ivy, Nandina, or privet
 - Mix it up – combine trees, shrubs, flowers, and grasses like nature does
 - No-mow zones – let a little wild back in — the pollinators will thank you.

And one last tip: Focus on habitat, not perfection. Your garden doesn’t have to be “natives only,” but every native you add helps restore balance and beauty to our shared landscape. Gardens are personal creations but the natives were here first. Join in keeping Mentone a pollinator haven. 🐝

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 II, and NE AL Federation of Garden Clubs.

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Library Speaker to Focus on Green Burial Practices

BY ANNE MCLEOD

Whether you’re pre-planning your own funeral arrangements or making plans for the memorial service and burial of a loved one, Shelia Champion’s The Good Earth, in Hazel Green, Alabama, north of Huntsville, offers environmentally friendly options. Shelia will be Moon Lake Library’s featured speaker on Sunday, May 4, at 2 p.m..

At The Good Earth, the state’s first green burial ground, families have the opportunity to avoid many common (and expensive) burial options. The Good Earth offers no embalming, no vault, natural fabrics, only biodegradable vessels with no harmful paint or stains, and no artificial flowers and plants. Families may use a funeral home or not, as they choose. In fact, the funeral arrangements and burial are led by families, which is often a very personal and meaningful way to say goodbye.

The Good Earth can help decrease the high cost of funerals as well.



“By caring for your own, you can have better control over the cost of a funeral. You decide when to have the burial and how much you want to participate,” Champion explains.

It’s healthier for the environment too, when burials can take place in a meadow full of native plants that attract pollinators such as monarch butterflies.

Join us for this fascinating overview of green burial practices and Shelia Champion’s unique journey to The Good Earth. 🍀

Movie Night at the Library

Hank and Susan Van Apeldoorn Will Discuss Their Experiences as Part of the Film Crew

“Bobby Jones: Stroke of Genius”
Friday, May 30, at 6 p.m.

This month’s Friday Night at the Movies will be a very special one. As many of you know, Hank and Susan Van Apeldoorn of Mentone spent many years working in the film industry, based in Georgia. They have plenty of stories to tell about working with stars such as Clint Eastwood, Scarlett Johansen, and Matthew McConaughey. We’re thrilled to have finally convinced Hank and Susan to share what it is like to work on a movie set, doing the hard work backstage that helps make the magic happen onscreen.

Golf fans and moviegoers alike will enjoy this month’s film, about one of golf’s legendary players. Bobby Jones, who played as an amateur for his entire



golfing career, won the Grand Slam in 1930, with victories in all four major tournaments of that period. He went on to found the beautiful Augusta National Golf Club and helped design the course where the tournament he co-founded, The Masters, is played each April.

The movie, made in 2004 and rated PG, stars Jim Caviezel, Claire Frolani, Malcolm McDowell, and Jeremy Northam. Both Van Apeldoorns were part of the crew.

Hank and Susan will attend the screening, introduce the film, and after it’s over, talk about the making of the movie and their experiences on set. We hope to have them back in the future to share their experiences in the industry. Don’t miss this unique opportunity to hear about the movie from people who helped make it possible. 🍀



MAY 2025

AT MOON LAKE LIBRARY



Weekly Meet-Ups: MAH JONGG Tuesdays at 12 p.m. (beginners welcome); KNITTING and CROCHET Tuesdays at 2 p.m.; SCRABBLE Wednesdays at noon.

May 1 from 4 p.m. - 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.

May 2 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.

May 4 at 2 p.m. - Featured speaker Shelia Champion, owner of The Good Earth, on green burial practices.

May 6 at 3 p.m. - Municipal Library Board meeting; 4 p.m. Friends of Moon Lake Library Board meeting.

May 10 at 10:30 a.m. - The Moon Lake Library Book Club meets for a discussion of biographies and memoirs.

May 10 at 1 p.m. - Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

May 12 at 6:30 p.m. - Clare Donohue, “Billie Holiday Saved My Life”: Songs and Stories in celebration of National Mental Health Awareness Month.

May 17 from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. - Big Book Sale! Shop the library’s entire selection of used books!

May 23 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.

May 24 at 1 p.m. - Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

May 30 at 6 p.m. - Movie Night! “Bobby Jones: Stroke of Genius” (2004-PG) with discussion by Hank and Susan Van Apeldoorn, who were part of the film production crew.

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Clare Donohue

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First Friday Art Nights Begin May 2

BY JULI JORDAN

Mark your calendars for the first-ever First Friday Art Night, a monthly celebration of art, music, and community in Mentone every first Friday from May through November! We kick off May 2 from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

- The shops at Moon Lake Village will come alive with:
- Pop-up artists – The Vintage Sunflower, Sheila Johnson, The Cat’s Pyjamas, Pamela Atkins and Lookout Mountain Goat Ranch Originals
 - Live music by Judy Nicole Kirby!
 - Refreshments – LRAC is going with a Cinco de Mayo theme, with Margarita Mocktails!
 - Interactive art activity: Air Dry Clay Tacos!
 - All shops & galleries open for strolling
 - Other World Gifts will create something special on their 3D printer.

Make the evening even more special by dining at Moon Lake Kitchen! Be sure to stop by Mentone Arts Center for art and music, featuring the Porch Pickers performing live from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. At Brow Park, enjoy Fairy Tales by Debbie Happy Cohen: Kids of all ages will love the imaginative tales read by the author. Bring your own crayons! NEW fairy tale coloring pages each month!

Big Art Pop-Up!

Pop-Up festivities kick off on Friday, May 16, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., with live music by Will Dooley & Parker Thomas on the grounds of the Mentone Inn. Bring your camp chairs and blankets for an evening of downhome tunes. Amy’s Catering



will be on site, offering delicious dining options during the concert. This concert is the first of four free community concerts, one each month, May – August.

The celebration continues Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., with the Big Art Pop-Up art market at the same location. Browse and shop unique creations from talented local and regional artists.

Make Your Mark on Mentone (MyMoM)

Now on display: “Tale of Two Mountains” by the Northeast Alabama Community College Spectrum Art Club. Led by Jaia Chen, the art club’s vibrant chalk mural came to life in a colorful and imaginative tribute to the connection between Mentone and NACC. The composition features Sand Mountain



Top L to R: Mattie Welch, Carmella Cisneros, Carley Zmolek, Savannah Holcomb, Emma Herrin. Bottom from L to R: Kimberly Calderon-Diaz, Jaia Chen, Lee Smith, Susana Gomez



Make Your Mark on Mentone art by the NACC Spectrum Art Club.

and Lookout Mountain rising from the pages of an open book. The NACC Tom Bevill Lyceum and Mentone’s Wildflower Café add an architectural flair. The heart of the mural is Mustang, NACC’s mascot, and Roscoe, the beloved campus dog, symbolizing friendship and shared community.

Last year, many members of the art club met professional chalk artist Jessi Queen while she was creating her own mural. Students had the opportunity to ask questions about technique and tips for achieving a polished, professional look. As a participatory element, viewers are invited to sign the open book at the bottom of the mural. Stop by and leave your mark on this creative collaboration! This mural is “Otis Approved”! Otis, Mentone’s dog-about-town, stopped by to thank the art club (see photo).

MyMoM is located at the corner of Alabama Highway 117 & CR 89 on the grounds of Mentone Inn. It was made possible by a grant from the Alabama State Council on the Arts, Lesa & David Cummings, Dixie Salvage, Builder’s Supply, Lowe’s, and Pat Martin.

- Upcoming MyMoM Artists:**
- Valley Head School (June–July)
 - Lisa Sulkosky (October–November)
 - Brande Arno (December–January)



Little River Art Gallery featured artists David and Lesa Cummings.

Want to Make Your Mark on Mentone? We are looking for an artist for August 2025! This is a fantastic opportunity to showcase your work, promote yourself as an artist, or even highlight your organization. Visit our website and click the “Make Your Mark on Mentone” link to learn more and submit your application!

May-June Featured Artists at Little River Art Gallery: Lesa & David Cummings

Lesa and David Cummings are lifelong Alabama residents who moved to Mentone in 2023. After 43 years in Anniston, it was time to slow down and enjoy the mountain. Their antidote to years of hectic dental practice was to leave the country three to four times a year and see something entirely new. In the 70s, David realized that photography was a way to “see” life without wading in and trying to take over, and Lesa got in gear with photography after Craig and Lori left home and started adulting. They enjoy their trips of visual discovery in 73 countries and all seven continents so far.

They have given talks to civic groups and camera clubs about how they travel with the same gear and come home with two totally different bodies of work. Lesa sees the beauty and humanistic sides of a country, and David goes for architecture and city street scenes. They are the shooters for the popular series of “Hidden Mentone” books on sale locally. That project has been a great way to meet colorful locals and learn about their new home community.

Membership in Little River Arts Council has helped them enjoy the company of the many local artists that make Mentone so special. They are thrilled that they “got bit” by the community and had to make a life here. 🐾

Juli Jordan is president of the Little River Arts Council.



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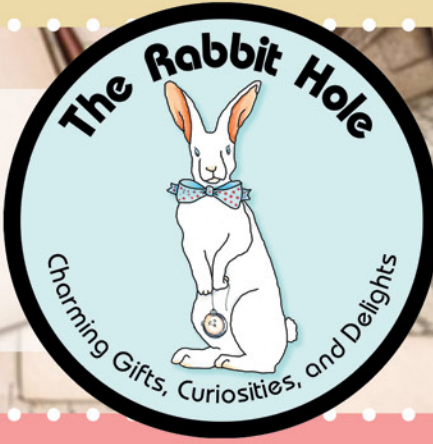
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Mentone Arts Center Art Night, Acrylics Workshop, and an Award-Winning Band

BY RANDY GRIDER

May is shaping up to be a busy start to the summer season. We begin the month joining the Little River Arts Council and other businesses and artists with a First Friday Art Nights event on May 2 at the Chuck Sennett Center for the Arts. The afternoon will start with the Porch Pickers playing at the center, starting at 2 p.m. Gallery hours will be extended until 7 p.m., and light refreshments will be available for shoppers. Be sure to check out other First Friday events at the Moon Lake Village and around town from 4-7 p.m. We will host a two-day Adventures in Acrylic Painting workshop at Moon Lake Village, May 17-18. The workshop is led by artist/instructor Bradley Wilson. Tuition is \$195. A materials list will be sent upon registration. Class is limited to 10 students. See contact information at the bottom of this article.

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION: Let go and begin making paintings that are bold, expressive, and satisfying. We'll explore acrylic techniques that open a world of creative possibilities. Learn how to paint faster than your "inner critic" can judge (which will vastly improve your paintings), and discover compositional and color-mixing secrets that will make your paintings look amazing. This workshop will inspire both beginners and those with previous painting experience. Various subject matter will be explored.

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. "Twenty years ago, I became interested in the idea of painting as an improvised performance," Wilson says. "I had grown dissatisfied with making work that was fully conceived at the beginning, worked out through studies and sketches, and then executed onto canvas. Something important was missing. I began to make paintings with no formulated plan. I let the images emerge slowly



or quickly out of the painting process itself. I began playing with color, line, texture, and shape. I embraced uncertainty as an essential element of creating," he explains. "My painting process is fluid and organic. I constantly make changes throughout the creation of a piece. I have no philosophy of painting other than to be open and responsive to the possibilities of the moment. Connecting with the present and finding the potential — this is what my work is about." We also are excited to welcome back The French Family Band for two shows, Saturday, May 31, from 7-9 p.m. and Sunday, June 1, from 3-5 p.m. Tickets are \$30 per person. There were a handful of tickets for Saturday night's show at press time and more available for the Sunday afternoon show. A payment link can be found on the Mentone Arts Center Facebook page and on The French Family Band website, thefrenchfamilyband.com. Originally from Australia and now based in Nashville, The French Family Band (core trio features husband-wife duo Stuie and Camille French and their son Sonny) takes inspiration from the country and Western swing icons of decades past, creating and performing American roots music that's most assuredly vibrant and fully alive. The group appeared on the legendary Grand Ole Opry four times in 2023, and they have had ringing endorsements from folks like Marty Stuart and Connie Smith, among other greats. Stuie and Camille and their three children moved to Nashville in 2019 after building a strong reputation back home. Over the course of nearly 20 years as the duo Camille and Stuie, they became one of Australia's best-loved musical acts. They won three Australian Golden Guitar Awards, which are equal to the CMAs, and won another one in 2023 as The French Family Band. When Covid hit, they pivoted from playing traditional gigs to doing Facebook Live concerts from home. This turned out to be a winning strategy that exposed their

music to the world. They built a Facebook following of more than 180,000 and created a new, global fan base that loves their music. 🎸 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.



Work by artist/instructor
Bradley Wilson



The French Family Band



Groundhog Volunteer Hero: Wes Pullen

This month, we recognize the dedication of volunteer firefighter and lifelong emergency service worker Wes Pullen of Mentone. Wes and his wife, Helen, a retired high school teacher, moved here from Birmingham in 2015. Not long after they built their house, Wes began volunteering with the North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District. Fortunately for our residents, Wes' dedication comes with invaluable experience and knowledge. Before moving to this area from Birmingham, he served as lieutenant and paramedic with the Mountain Brook Fire Department, just a slice of his professional career. He is a nationally certified fire investigator, and in addition to working in the field, he represents Mentone in the DeKalb County Association of Fire Departments. Wes puts in about 15 hours a month with the district, including fighting fires, administrative work, and spending time with other district volunteers assessing high-risk structures and planning emergency response in various areas within our community. He estimates the Lookout Mountain volunteers handle an average of two to three structure fires per year. "For the size of the department in Mentone, they do a very good job up here." A debt of gratitude is owed to all those who are committed to public safety. Wes' expertise and generosity have had a tremendous impact on our community. Thank you, Wes! 🙏 Is there a volunteer you'd like to recognize? Email your nomination to groundhognews@yahoo.com.



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Exploring Little River Canyon’s Top Hidden Wonders

(Editor’s Note: When exploring the outdoors, use extreme caution, know your limits, be aware of your surroundings, and never hike alone if possible.)

BY TIM EBERHART

Little River Canyon is home to some of Alabama’s most amazing sights. Every year, several thousand tourists see Little River Falls and Canyon Rim Parkway’s panoramic overlooks, both easily accessed and well-known. But the canyon also contains extraordinary sights fewer eyes have seen.



Follow Wolf Creek to hidden falls

With its waterfalls, cascades, and hardwoods, this easy-to-get-to creek bed is its own destination. There is no official trail, but enough hikers and other mammals travel the east side of the creek to the hidden Greg’s Two Falls that a trail of 450 to 500 feet in length does exist before it fizzles at the lower waterfall.

Explore the creek bed below the twin waterfalls, with its tall, layered rock face and other sandstone formations. The upper waterfall is 20 to 25 feet high, while the lower one is a little shorter, depending on the depth of the turquoise pool below.

Continue downstream to where the creek empties into the river. Hike the north side of the river in either direction. To enjoy the wonders of Wolf Creek, park on the side of the road in the wide grassy area near the bridge where the creek goes under the road.

Experience the “jungle” along Bear Creek

A hike along Bear Creek conjures



the feeling that you’re in a jungle. The creek curves sharply through its narrow gorge and sheer rock walls rise on both sides, where thick vegetation thrives. Passage is difficult unless it has been dry for several days. If the water is above a certain level, forget it.

Bear Creek is good for spotting woodland birds and small fish. Dropping from 1,150 feet to 785 feet above sea level, the 2.6-mile-long section of Bear Creek that’s inside the preserve is flatter than the canyon’s other creeks and streams. But the terrain is still difficult. The simplest routes to Bear Creek are from Eberhart Point Trail on the south end, or by sliding down a mild spot in the slope near where the Canyon Rim Parkway crosses the creek on the north end.

See bluff overhangs near Lynn Overlook

Less than 2,000 feet from Lynn Overlook, dramatic overhangs look like a peculiar family of rock behemoths. Nearby waterfalls and cascades are great if there has been enough

rainfall. Part of the easternmost stream is a trail used by kayakers to exit the Suicide Section of rapids, almost directly under Lynn Overlook.

Park in the small gravel area and head west along the bluff. Parking is also plentiful in the nearby gravel lots at Beaver Pond Trail and Lynn Overlook.

Listen for the stream near Lower Two-Mile Trail

Many hikers hear but don’t see the cascading stream parallel to the steep Lower Two-Mile Trail. The short trail provides an easy path to the river’s edge for rewarding canyon-floor views. But, although the stream is only a few yards from the trail, few attempt to travel upstream along its precipitous, rocky ramp. If you try it under wet conditions, you’ll see spectacular cascades and waterfalls of 5 to 10 feet along the way. A 15-foot waterfall is at the point where vertical rocks make travel impossible for anyone except experienced rock climbers.

Rugged and wild, Little River Canyon is one of Alabama’s top attractions for good reason. Few places offer such tranquility, mystery, and adventure all in one place. For more details on these hikes, plus links to maps, visit bit.ly/canyonwonders.

Tim Eberhart is an outdoor enthusiast whose writing and photography can be found at SouthernOutings.com. Visit to learn more about the natural wonders and historic places of the Southeastern U.S.

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May Community Events

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

May 2-3 The 33rd Annual Wildflower Saturday — Springtime at DeSoto State Park is truly beautiful, with wildflowers and trees blooming around every corner. Join park staff and guest speakers for a wonderful weekend of learning about the many species of blooming plants found on Lookout Mountain. Weekend starts off with a welcome social and guest speaker program on Friday night, a day full of hikes to choose from on Saturday, and a guest speaker on Saturday night. Free and open to everyone. No pre-registration required. We do ask that groups over 10 please RSVP to help us make everyone's wildflower experience better!

May 2 Hike with a Naturalist: Little River Falls — Join us on a guided 1.5-mile hike at the Little River National Preserve. We'll hike from Little River Falls to the wonderful Little Falls, just downstream. Please wear footwear suitable for hiking. Bring water, sun protection, and possibly a snack. Registration appreciated. This is a moderate- to difficult-level hike with varying and uneven terrain. Children and dogs may find it challenging. If it's raining or stormy or very poor trail conditions, we may have to cancel. If the weather is questionable, please check with the Canyon Center. Meet at the Main Falls Parking Lot. 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Free and open to everyone! For details, call the Canyon Center at 256-845-3548.

May 2 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. Be part of something new and beautiful in Mentone! 4-7 p.m.

May 2 PBP Trio at the Rusty Barrel Saloon — Join us at the Rusty Barrel for some food, drinks, and great music. 8 p.m.

May 2-3 Terrace Market Day — Join us for a fun day with vendors and more! Come by for more information at The Rustic Terrace in Fyffe or call 256-601-0690.

May 3 Meet a Machine 2025 — Meet a Machine at Fort Payne Airport is designed to provide the public with the opportunity to see, touch, and learn about vehicles used by public service agencies and local businesses. These vehicles include emergency response vehicles, planes, aircraft equipment, construction equipment, etc. All proceeds will benefit the DeKalb County Children's Advocacy Center. Adult tickets are \$5. Children are free.

May 3 Memories of Mayberry — The Town of Valley Head presents Memories of Mayberry as a day of fun for the whole family! There will be a cruise-in, great food, lots of fun, live entertainment, door prizes, and more. Characters from Mayberry will be featured. The festival will be held in the downtown square of Valley Head. Special guest Barney Fife. All proceeds go to events and festivals for the town. 9 a.m. 256-899-3776 or 256-635-6814.

May 3 Dixieland Delight Sale — Join us for our 41st Annual Dixieland Delight Red, White & Black Angus & Hereford Production Sale, Tennessee River Music Farm at 12 p.m.

May 3 Gene Watson at The Pickin Post — See country legend and Grand Ole Opry member Gene Watson live at The Pickin Post! Special guest to be named soon. General admission seats available (4th row back). 7 p.m. Get tickets now online or at Black's Tire in Rainsville, or by phone at 615-663-6560.

May 3-4 Wild Place Homestead Spring Plant Sale — We are excited to announce our next plant sale! This year we are hosting a two-day plant sale because... we love plants!! Swing by our little farm and shop with local vendors. We will have native plants, carnivorous plants, flowers (including cut flower varieties,) herbs, vegetable starts, fruit, pottery, soaps and skincare, breads and jams, and so much more!! This year we will be offering some workshops as well. Keep an eye out for vendor info and workshop signups.

May 3, 10, 17, 24 Sewing Course — Want to learn how to sew? Enroll now for a comprehensive eight-week course starting April 5 at Dogtown Fire Hall! Choose from two class times: 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. or 5-8 p.m. Learn from experienced instructors and complete three projects using one of our 12 classroom machines. No machine? No problem! Digital Sewing Reference Cards will be provided each week.

May 8 Design & Unwind Mothers, Daughters, Friends and Flowers! — Come spend a fun afternoon learning how to make your own colorful flower bouquet. The Blooming Flower Shop will be at Caroline's Café in Collinsville to provide everything you need, including vase, tools, and flowers for you to make a fresh bouquet. Must prepay ahead of event at the store or venmo Amanda-Godshall-1. 6 p.m.

May 8 First Meeting of the Monthly Group Concerned Citizens for Change — All Democrats, Independents, and Republicans who are concerned about events happening in America are invited to attend to discuss their concerns and to learn how to become more politically involved in speaking out as citizens of Alabama and national governments. 6 p.m. at 205 N. Gault Ave., Ft. Payne, AL (Democratic Party Headquarters)

May 10 Make Your Own Mother's Day Bouquet — You-pick flowers and strawberries! And a few local vendors will be set up that day! Plan to join us Saturday, May 10; bring your mom, your friends, family, whomever! Town Creek Field & Farm at 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

May 10 Meandering Moonlight Guided Paddle — DeSoto State Park staff offers this relaxing guided moonlight paddle trip on scenic Little River. Enjoy the peace and quiet of nature as we paddle upstream on the "Coke bottle clear" waters of the West Fork of Little River. Enjoy this flatwater paddle as the sun goes down and the full moon comes up. This trip is approximately 4 miles round-trip on flatwater; spans a 3- to 3 1/2-hour period; and includes kayak, paddle and personal flotation device. Participants must be able to paddle upstream and back (no current). Weight limits: 300 pounds for singles & 450 pounds for tandems. Ages 8 to adult. Appropriate clothing for weather (you may get wet), headlamp or flashlight, bug spray, snacks, and drinking water. 7-10 p.m. DeSoto Falls Picnic Area-Miller's Bend Paddle Shack (about 7 miles from main park area). \$30 for single kayak rental (2-person tandem kayaks are available on a limited basis for \$50; email to check availability). Pre-registration closes May 1. To preregister: <https://reserve.alapark.com/register/DSP-Moonlight-Paddles>.

May 10 May on the Mountain Bluegrass Festival in Henagar — Get ready to kick off May with a mountain of fun at the May on the Mountain Bluegrass Festival in Henagar, located on Sand Mountain! Hosted by the Henagar Park Board, this finger-lickin' and guitar-pickin' event promises a toe-tappin' good time for all. Bring your lawn chair, bring a friend, and get ready to groove to the sweet sounds of bluegrass beneath the open sky!

May 10 Charrette: Micro Festival — Join us for an exciting kickoff event leading up to Get Off the Grid Fest 2025! The Charrette is a one-day community gathering designed to introduce the festival, spark conversations about sustainable living, and bring together music, education, and local vendors — all for FREE! Live Music lineup: Dad & Company, roots rock & jam vibes; Natti Love Joys, reggae rhythms & conscious lyrics. What to expect: Workshops on renewable energy, and off-grid living, sustainable vendors showcasing eco-friendly products, food trucks featuring delicious local eats, and more! This event is an opportunity to connect, learn, and be part of the movement toward a more resilient future. Come be part of the change—see you in Fort Payne from 12 to 6 p.m. at Rotary Pavilion Downtown.

May 10 17th Annual Cody Renfroe Rod Run — Come out and have a day with us at the Crossville City Park. 1-5 p.m. There will be lots of food and prizes. No entry fees; if proud of it, bring it!

May 10 Sand Mountain Gathering at the Pickin Post — Featuring The Believers and Alliance Quartet. 6 p.m. For more info 256-657-3817 or 256-845-4115. Church groups welcome with discounts. Tickets are \$15.

May 14 Canyon Kids: May Flowers/Bloom Booms — Join us for a hands-on adventure each month in 2025! Children (age 3 years/3rd graders) will want to attend ALL of these interactive outdoor adventures! Join us to creatively learn about animals, plants, bugs, and more with JSU Field Schools. In May, join us for Wildflowers/Bloom Booms! 10:30-11:15 a.m. at Little River Canyon Center. Please dress in layers appropriate for the weather and wear footwear suitable for hiking. Free event. Limited availability. Registration required. For more details, email fieldschool@jsu.edu or call 256-845-3548.

May 15-18 US 11 Antique Alley Yard Sale — The sale is Thursday thru Sunday following Mother's Day. Follow the scenic U.S. Highway 11 from Meridian, Miss., to Bristol, Va., for more than 500 miles of yard sales! Explore charming historic communities and downtown districts like the 1889 boomtown district of Fort Payne. 888-805-4740 or 877-871-1386; www.visitlookoutmountain.com.

May 16 Fort Payne Mayor's Cup Golf Tournament — Our 18th Annual Mayor's Cup is planned at Terrapin Hills Country Club. Tee off at 1 p.m. (we have a full course for the 8 a.m. tee-off). Lunch is provided, along with cash prizes and the best goody bags (top-notch golf balls in the bags). Join us and help support the Fort Payne Chamber of Commerce. As always, Mayor Baine will be there, along with our board of directors and awesome partners!

May 16 Summer Music Series Free Concert — Summer nights + live music = perfection! 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 Will Dooley & Parker Thomas under the stars with friends & family. 6-9 p.m.

May 17 Berries & Blooms Festival — Town Creek Field is excited to announce their 2nd annual Berries & Blooms Festival at the farm! You will get the chance to pick berries, pick flowers, and make bouquets. There will be local music, vendors, yard games, and more!

May 17 Folded Bark Basket Workshop — Students will learn how bark is removed from trees, folded, and crafted into usable containers. This class is six hours of instruction, with time for lunch. Logs and tools will be supplied, and students will learn how to remove, fold, and begin to dry a piece of bark. Students will take this unfinished piece and other supplies home to complete on their own, after the bark has dried. Students will also be supplied with a pre-dried, folded bark basket to embellish with handle, rims, feathers, etc. No prior experience or knowledge of basketry is necessary. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. DeSoto State Park. \$85 includes all supplies. Adults only. Class space is limited to six; pre-registration is required: <https://www.littliverartscouncil.org/barkbaskets.html>.

May 17 Big Art Pop-Up Show — This fun event will showcase local artists and makers in a small-festival setting. Grab some good eats, enjoy art demonstrations, and browse through many original works of art on the grounds of the Mentone Inn. Hosted by Little River Arts Council and Mentone Inn. 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

May 17 Mentone Ukes — The Ukes will perform on the Make Your Mark on Mentone Stage on the grounds of The Mentone Inn for the Little River Arts Council's Big Art Pop-Up and Farmers Market. To find other performances by the Moon Lake Library House Band, or to join them for a session, find them on Facebook/MentoneUkes or on the web: www.mentoneukes.com. Email local members and group administrators Debra Fey (debrajfey@gmail.com) or Hank Allen (Hank.d.allen@gmail.com). Newcomers welcome.

May 17 Hike with a Naturalist: DeSoto Scout Trail — This hike is a challenging, steep 6.5-mile hike. The trail follows the West Fork of Little River and traverses a varied terrain of ridges, valleys, fern glades, rock formations, waterfalls, beside deep pools, riffles, through rhododendron tunnels, creek crossings, swimming holes, and sandy stretches. About the hike: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; meet at the DeSoto State Park Lodge; free & open to everyone; no-preregistration required. Weather-dependent, so please call the lodge at 256-845-5380 beforehand to check on status of hike.

May 17 Sand Mountain Miss Potato Pageant — It is time again for our annual Sand Mountain Miss Potato Pageant! The pageant will be held at Henagar Junior High School Gym. Pageant will begin at 3 p.m. Girls ages 18 and under are welcome to participate! Deadline to enter is May 9. Entry fee will be \$40 per contestant, with siblings receiving a reduced rate of \$30 each. Entry fees will cover Best Hair, Best Dress, and Prettiest Smile. An additional fee of \$10 per contestant will be required to participate in Most Photogenic. Contact Sherry at City Hall at 256-657-6282.

May 17 Third Saturday Sunset Cruise-In — The 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. 5-9 p.m.

May 17 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 at the 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!

May 18 Primitive Skills-Natural Cordage & Pitch Glue — Create glue and cordage using only simple, natural elements! Scientists have written that cordage (string) and glue were not merely for making the lives of traditional cultures easier; they literally held their world together. About the class: Part I is cordage, in which students will first learn how to refine the leaves and stalks from various plant species in order to expose the fibers. Next, students will be taught the reverse-twist method of creating actual cordage. Each student will take home the cordage strands they create, as well as extra material to process and twist on their own. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. DeSoto State Park Country Store & Information Center on County Road 89. \$85 includes all supplies. Class space is limited; pre-registration is required: <https://www.littliverartscouncil.org/primitive-cordage>.

May 18 May's Gulf Songwriter Series — 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 Dylan Leblanc and Lindy Urban. Tickets: \$25 in advance; \$30 at the door. Coolers welcome. Bring your favorite refreshments! Rain or shine. The show goes on no matter the weather! 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!

May 19 Job Fair — This career expo is hosted by the DeKalb County Department of Human Resources. It is an excellent chance to explore multiple job opportunities in one place. Minvale Life Center located at 1955 Alabama Ave. NW, Fort Payne. 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

May 21 Canyon Explorers — Join us for hands-on adventure learning! Children ages 7 to 12 will love attending all of these exciting adventures! They'll creatively explore animals, plants, bugs, and more with the JSU Field School team. Parents are welcome to stay for the class, or sign in your children and drop them off for the class. Little River Canyon Center. 10:30 a.m.-12 p.m. \$8 per child per class or \$25 per child when registering for entire spring semester. Registration required. Limited availability. Dress in layers for the weather. We plan to be outside as much as possible. For more details, email fieldschool@jsu.edu or call 256-845-3548.

May 24 Daybreak Flatwater Paddle Trip — DeSoto State Park staff offers this relaxing guided morning paddle trip on scenic Little River. What to know: This trip is approximately 4 miles round-trip on flatwater, under your own power, and spans a 3- to 3 1/2-hour period. Includes kayak, paddle, and 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. 7-10 a.m. DeSoto Falls Picnic Area-Miller's Bend Paddle Shack (about 7 miles from main area of DeSoto State Park). \$30.00 for single kayak rental (tandem kayaks are available on a limited basis for \$50 email to check availability) Pre-registration closes May 16. Pre-registration: <https://reserve.alapark.com/register/DSP-Daybreak-Paddle>.

May 24-25 The Joy of Art Journaling with Michele Stone — Ready to tap into your creativity and reflect in a whole new way? Join us for a fun, hands-on, two-day workshop where you'll combine journaling with mixed media art to create something truly personal. No experience needed — just come ready to explore! The Joy of Art Journaling is an immersive two-day experience that blends writing and mixed media techniques like painting, layering, collage, and stamping. Through guided prompts and creative play, you'll fill your journal with self-expression and emotional exploration. Walk away with a beautiful, one-of-a-kind journal and the inspiration to keep creating. 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. (lunch break: 12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.). Moon Lake Village Bill Berry Room. \$195 (includes materials & refreshments). Adults of all skill levels! To reserve your spot: <https://forms.gle/mwFB7ktBnNdoWWyK9>

May 30-31 Bio Blitz 2025 — Have you ever wondered what kind of cool plants and animals can be found in Alabama? Join us to help document the flora and fauna of the park. We will be exploring the park with scientists, naturalists, students, and professors (oh my!). This initiative is a chance to inspire and engage a new generation of stewards of our fantastic natural resources, all while taking a vast snapshot of the biodiversity that is protected by our nation's parks. We are lining up specialists to help discover fish, amphibians and reptiles, birds or any creature or plant that calls this place home. So come out, get involved, and help us document the richness of Little River Canyon National Preserve! It will be a weekend of fun! Call 256-845-3548 for more details. All outdoor activities are weather dependent. Snorkel Survey is dependent on water level of Little River.

May 31 Song Writers Contest — The Pickin Post presents a Song Writer Contest. There will be some great prizes to be given away and this is a great opportunity for our local songwriters. For more information call 256-657-3817. Show starts at 6 p.m.

THE FOOD PANTRY

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

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

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



Gerald Bailey *(continued from page 1)*

the river, swim anywhere, fish anywhere...even in people’s yards.”

Getting a little older meant increased work at Bailey’s. He pumped gas and eventually did basic maintenance on cars. He also delivered the Chattanooga paper on his bicycle, mowed yards, and worked at Camp DeSoto in preparation for summer. “When I first went to work, we got 35 cents an hour. When we got 11 years old, they raised us to 50 cents. And then when the camps opened, we’d carry their luggage and stuff to the cabin. We’d make good tips doing that.”

Gerald attended Moon Lake Elementary through the third grade. His mother, a Valley Head native, had adored her 4th grade teacher and wanted Gerald to have the same experience. He transferred to Valley Head and never left. He played high school football and was one of two boys on the team with a car. “About half the football team lived up here [on Lookout Mountain],” he says. The school gave the boys gas to take their teammates home after practice. “They had a gas pump at school for the buses, and they would give us 5 gallons of gas a week.”

Winter 1960 brought ice, cold, and snow. Gerald still recalls that winter clearly. “Sterlyn Brown and myself were going to school over at Snead [State Community College], and all the power went out over there. The next morning, they told us we could go home. I had a car and got Sterlyn and two girls from Crossville and two girls from Fort Payne in the car with me. There wasn’t a telephone pole or a light pole standing across Sand Mountain.” Gerald delivered the girls but didn’t know if he could get up the mountain to Mentone on 117. As it happened, a truck from the power company with chains on its tires had left ruts in the ice. Gerald put his wheels in those ruts, hit the gas, and didn’t stop until he reached the top.

“Nobody else for two weeks got up or down the mountain,” he says. Luckily, Bailey’s Store had a big wood-burning stove, and locals came to cook

their food and eat at the store. “Some would bring their families and sleep on the floor at night. In about two weeks, we got to go back to school. They got power down there, but some places here, it was out a month or more.”

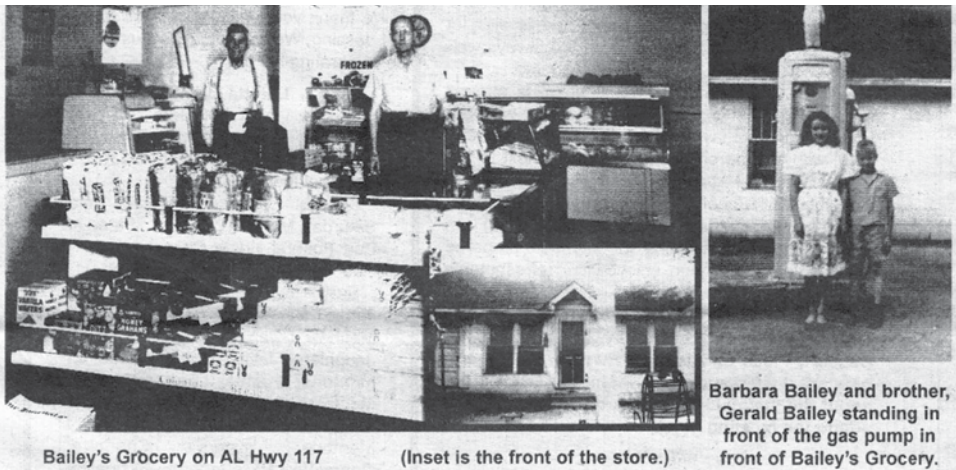
A Truck-Driving Life

Gerald’s father Floyd used his truck to deliver food and merchandise to area families, and Gerald wasn’t that old when he started helping. Apparently, he enjoyed that line of work so much he did it for the next 58 years. He drove mostly company trucks, but sometimes he drove his own (at one time he had three of them). He made runs for a variety of companies, often carrying carpet from Dalton, Georgia, to the West Coast. “I made 46 trips one year. I liked the Seattle run. I like the Northwest. I’d run back and forth and take carpet up there and bring apples or something back, because, you know, Washington’s a big apple state.” He figures he drove between 8 and 9 million miles over those 58 years.

Councilman Bailey

After living in Rainsville for several decades, Gerald retired and moved back to Mentone, where he is now heading into his 21st year on the Town Council. Serving in official capacities for the town is a Bailey family tradition. His father served on the council, and his mother was town clerk for a number of years. Gerald, Mayor Rob Hammond, and current council member John Paul were all elected in the same year. When they began their tenure, Gerald says, “the town was broke and didn’t even have money to pay the council or pay employees. We had to borrow money from banks to operate for a while. Now we’ve built up money and got the town in good shape.”

Among many other things, the town has purchased police cars and installed the sidewalk that runs along Hwy 117. The council has also been putting money into Moon Lake Village, deeded to the town by the county after the school closed in 2021. “It was just a small school,” Gerald says, but it



These photos from *The Groundhog* archives capture Mentone’s past.

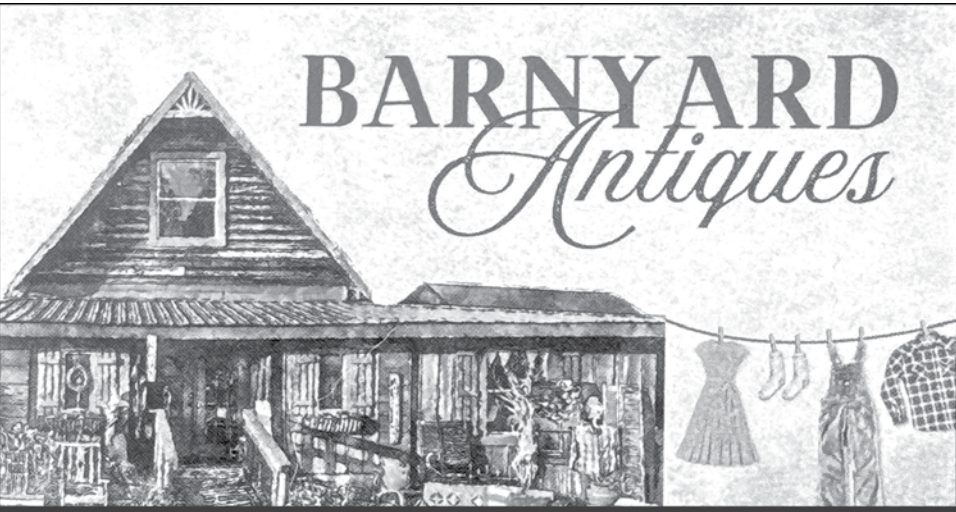
“always had a lot of community support. A lot of people think, and I kind of agree with them, that the county should have spent money and kept it going. But then the student count got so low that they were losing money. So you can see their side of it, too.”

When asked if any issues have caused controversy during his tenure on the council, Gerald mentions the 117 bridge built in front of Camp Skyline, completed a few years ago. “There were a lot of people that fought it hard for a period of 10 or 12 years,” he says. Tiny homes within town limits was another issue that drew quite a few folks to town council meetings. The council passed a zoning ordinance that says nothing smaller than 800 square feet may be built within town limits.

These Days

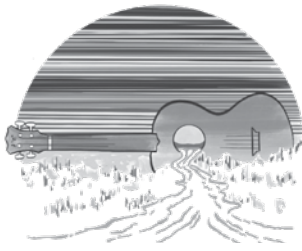
Gerald says he plans to run again in the next municipal election, scheduled for August. There are some projects he would like to see through, such as the completion of the sidewalk extension and ongoing improvements of Moon Lake Village. The town also hopes to build an observation deck and a hiking trail at Brow Park.

These days, Gerald lives right across the street from the Cutler Avenue house he was born in 84 years ago. Things have changed over the decades, he says, not all of them good, but not all of them bad either. He is mostly pleased with the current state of affairs in Mentone and always hopes for the best for the little community atop Lookout Mountain. 🍷



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Mentone Ukes Strumming at a Venue Near You

BY DEBRA FEY

Springtime means you’ll be seeing more and more of your local Mentone Ukes around town — our regular sessions as the designated House Band of the Moon Lake Library, entertaining seniors at the MERF luncheon, picking on the front porch at Little River Hardware, and performing on the Make Your Mark on Mentone Stage on the grounds of The Mentone Inn on May 17 for the Little River Arts Council’s Big Art Pop-Up and Farmers Market.

And of course we love newcomers who want to play with our fun-loving group or beginners who want to learn to play the ukulele. The ukulele is an easy instrument to learn: four nylon strings (easy on your fingers and easy to form chord shapes), and there are many songs (literally hundreds) that require only three chords to play (G/G7, F, and C). No formal musical experience required, and you don’t need to know how to read musical scores. Just attend one

of our free sessions on May 3 or 31 at 1 p.m. at the Moon Lake Library. (No session on May 17 due to our LRAC performance.) A beginner’s lesson is held at the same time as our regular session, and loaner ukes are available. We would love for you to join us!

For more information, find us on Facebook/MentoneUkes or on the web: www.mentoneukes.com. Email local members and group administrators Debra Fey (debrajfe@ gmail.com) or Hank Allen (Hank.d.allen@ gmail.com). We hope to see you soon. 🍷



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The Mountain Kitchen Flavor Is Always in Season

BY REBECCA HENDERSON,
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

New ideas for appetizers are a tall order. At least for me. While chips and salsa are always tasty, I get tired of that. Recently, we had guests coming over, and I got the idea for these toasts while staring into the pantry. A lonely jar of jalapeños jumped out at me. These little bites have an attitude, and all the guests who’ve tried them have wanted more. I don’t bake bread, so I grab a loaf of French or Italian bread at the grocery. I’m in love with these!



Hot Honey Cheese Toasts

HOT HONEY CHEESE TOASTS

(Serves as many as you care to slice
and assemble)

- 1 baguette or Italian loaf
- Pimento cheese (see Rev. Keith Cook’s recipe)
- Picked jalapeños slices (from a jar)
- Honey

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. Slice bread diagonally into ¼-inch slices.
3. Spread 1 tablespoon pimento cheese on each bread slice.
4. Top cheese with 1 slice (or two if you like) jalapeño.
5. Bake at 375 degrees for 8-10 minutes or until bread is crisp on the edges and cheese is bubbly.
6. Remove from oven, drizzle generously with honey, and serve immediately.

Extra Special Pimento Cheese

Storebought pimento cheese can be great. Homemade is better. Everyone has their favorite recipe. Reverend Keith Cook is currently serving at St. Joseph’s, and like all church folk do, that congregation loves to bring food and enjoy it together in fellowship. Recipes are discussed and swapped with almost as much enthusiasm as the word amen is said — almost, but not quite. Anyway, this recipe is great, because the pecans make the texture more interesting. Try it on Hot Honey Cheese Toasts.

REV. KEITH COOK’S PIMENTO CHEESE SPREAD

- 1½ cups Duke’s mayonnaise
- 1 (14 oz.) jar diced pimiento, drained
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon finely grated onion
- ½ to 1 teaspoon ground cayenne pepper (adjust to your taste)
- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 1 (8 oz.) block extra-sharp Cheddar cheese
- 1 (8 oz.) block sharp Cheddar cheese

1. Stir together first 5 ingredients in a large bowl.
2. Toast the pecans by baking at 350 degrees in a single layer on a shallow pan 8 to 10 minutes. Stir halfway through for even browning.
3. Finely shred the extra-sharp cheese using the small side of a box grater. Then shred the sharp cheese using the large side of the grater. The two different shreds make a nice texture.
4. Add pecans and cheese to the mayo mixture, and enjoy. Store in the refrigerator.

Fresh Corn Is Hard To Beat

Warm weather brings bountiful bushels of juicy corn, and this chowder takes advantage of its sweet goodness. This recipe is adapted from one in the book, “Farmhouse Weekends” (Gibbs Smith, 2021).

EASY CORN CHOWDER

(Serves 6 to 8)

- 8 slices bacon, roughly chopped
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 cup chopped sweet onion
- 1 pound Yukon Gold potatoes, diced large



Bonnie Henderson’s Brown Sugar-Pecan Chewies

- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups half-and-half
- 3 cups fresh corn kernels
- Hot sauce to taste
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Sliced green onion for serving

1. In a cast-iron skillet, cook bacon over medium heat until crispy. Remove from pan, and drain on a paper towel.
2. Pour off grease, keeping about 1 tablespoon in the pan. Add the butter to the pan, along with onions and potatoes. Cook while stirring frequently until onion is translucent.
3. Stir in broth, and simmer, covered, for 15-20 minutes or until potatoes are fork tender.
4. Whisk together flour and half-and-half in a small bowl until smooth. Slowly add to potato mixture, along with corn, and cook until corn is tender (about 5 minutes).
5. Add bacon and seasonings. Serve with green onions on top.

Finally Measuring Up to Mom

My husband’s mother was born and raised around here, and back in the day she could flat-out cook. I make good cornbread dressing during the holidays, but it has never been considered as good as Bonnie’s. And she had a way with garden-fresh veggies that I have yet to rival. But somehow I’ve managed to make these deeply rich chewies taste just like hers. I don’t make them often, because neither of us has any self-control when faced with an entire pan warm from the oven. So my advice is: make them when you’re having company or going to a potluck!

BONNIE HENDERSON’S BROWN SUGAR-PECAN CHEWIES

(Makes 24 servings)

- 2 cups brown sugar, firmly packed
- 2 sticks (1 cup) unsalted butter, melted
- 2 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 cup toasted chopped pecans

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Lightly grease a 9- x 13-inch baking pan.
2. Stir together brown sugar and butter in a large bowl.
3. Stir in the eggs and vanilla until combined.
4. Add flour, baking powder, and pecans (batter will be thick).
5. Spread in pan, and bake at 375 degrees for 20 minutes or until lightly browned on top and set in the middle. Try not to brown top too much, or chewies will be dry.
6. Cool and cut into 24 bars.

Note: If desired, you can add 1 cup sweetened flaked coconut to the batter before baking.

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.



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First NACC Art Class at Moon Lake a Big Success

BY CAROLINE MOORE

Last month, we finished our first class, “Art: Introduction to Mediums.” Twelve students participated, and we all had so much fun meeting every Monday and creating art together.

Working with Northeast Alabama Community College has been an incredible honor. My students and I explored many different art mediums, including acrylic, watercolor, mosaics, and clay. I was incredibly lucky to have such an amazing class of students and artists who were willing to have fun, let loose, and try out new subjects together.

Beyond exploring art, the class was a great way to build community and get

to know one another on a weekly basis, forming friendships I will always appreciate. I am grateful for NACC, what it stands for, and for the work it is doing for our community. Dr. David Campbell and his staff have created a space where education and development can continue at Moon Lake, our community’s beautiful school. The building continues to serve its purpose, and being a teacher and participant in the overall vision has been a gift and blessing.

And the work continues. NACC is hosting a homesteading class this summer and is always looking for more skills and curricula that the community might benefit from or want to experience. The college is open to suggestions and would love to hear feedback from the Mentone community. Make



Above: Caroline Moore’s art class. Right: Art created by students.



your voice heard when it comes to continuing education.

My goal is to start art classes again with the fall semester, so stay tuned to Facebook and keep reading The Groundhog for announcements and enrollment dates. I hope to see you there! 🐻



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