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FREE



THE GROUNDHOG

"Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain"

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

Festival Brings Thousands of Visitors to Mentone

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

It was a sunny day filled with arts, food, music, and good times as the town hosted its annual Mentone Fall Festival.

With an estimated crowd of between 3,000 and 4,000 people, the event drew visitors from across the region on the third Saturday of October. Some 80 vendors displayed everything from paintings and pottery to jewelry and wood-crafted items. A kids corner kept the young ones busy, along with an art show featuring the work of Valley Head students.

Music was a major feature of the event. In front of the main building on Moon Lake Campus, visitors enjoyed Mountain Hippie, Lisa Crow, The Vegetators, and Judy-Nicole Kirby. On the stage of the Shigley Amphitheater, the day began with Average Joe, followed by the Alabama Music Hall of Fame group Three on a String and singer-songwriter Pierce Pettis.

The festival serves as a fundraiser for the town, with proceeds going to preserve, maintain, and improve the historic school campus. Between sponsorships, vendor registration fees, parking fees, and festival T-shirt sales, this year's festival raised over $45,000 before expenses.

Visitors had more to do in town beyond the Moon Lake Campus site. Businesses throughout town, including those at the Log Cabin Village and Moon Lake Trading Company, hosted music, food, and special events to create a festival atmosphere throughout Mentone.

"The festival is a cultural event, but it's also an economic development driver for our community that relies so much on tourism," says Mentone Mayor Rob Hammond. "It takes a massive effort on the part of our business owners, volunteers, and sponsors to make this weekend a success. We appreciate everyone's efforts."

Next year's Mentone Fall Festival is set for Saturday, October 17, 2026.


David Cummings


David Cummings


Lesa Cummings

(See more pics on Page 2)

Joey Smith Puts Love into Every Scoop at the Village Ice Cream Shoppe

BY JAY S. ROBBINS

At the Village Ice Cream Shoppe in Mentone, Joey Smith has been serving up ice cream to those in need of a cool treat since 2010. If you ask him about his job, there are two things he wants you to know right off.

First, he loves it. "I'm more at home here than I am in my own home," Joey says.

Second, he believes in being generous with his product. "I don't do these itty bitty servings. That's one thing I take pride in. I don't want it done to me, I don't do it to other people. I do it the old-fashioned way. I love the look on people's faces when I hand them that ice cream, because they get that surprised look like 'Oh wow!' Especially the kids. And I get the five-star ratings for my banana splits. You can ask anybody. They're huge. Two people can sit down and eat one." In addition to the cold stuff, Joey sells classics such as Nathan's hot dogs, Bavarian pretzels, and nachos and cheese.

The Village Ice Cream Shoppe is in the Log Cabin Village on Hwy 117. The Village houses a handful of other stores that sell gifts and the works of local artists and artisans. The Village was developed by Jack Jones, a man of wide-ranging influence in the area. He loved log cabins and had a few moved intact to the site. Others he obtained from around the state, disassembling them and then reassembling them onsite. Joey says his ice creamery is in a building that used to be a smokehouse in Georgia.

"Jack and his wife, Olive, used to come up here in their later years and get ice cream," Joey recalls. (Jones died in 2012, his wife in 2019.)



Joey Smith at his Village Ice Cream Shoppe

Not a Job, But a Joy

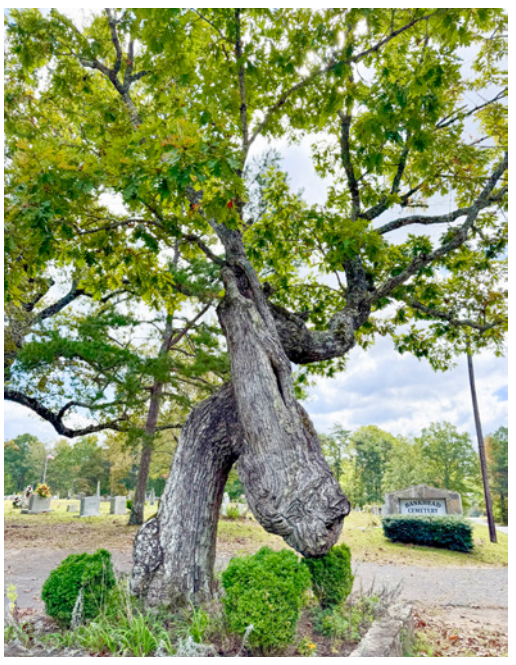
Before buying the Village Ice Cream Shoppe, Joey ran a store called Artistic Creations, also in the Log Cabin Village. He sold candles, which he made himself, as well as the eclectic works of area artists. "As time went on, I got to know the owner of the ice cream place. They were thinking of moving on, and I had a chance to buy it. I thought, 'Why not?' So I did. And I've loved it ever since. This is my escape."

People from around the world have stopped in for ice cream, he says. "Czechoslovakia, India, Canada, and of course Ireland, which is one of the places I'd love to go before I kick the bucket. Switzerland, Germany, Australia, Italy, France, and some from Greece. Getting to talk to these people and find out a little bit about their cultures, it has been fascinating. It's a thrill for me."

Family Roots and Resilience

If you stop by and Joey's not there, you'll get your treats from his cousin, Steven Mitchell, but Joey will be nearby — not five steps away — in the next building in a little shop called MawMaw's Mountain Treasures. "My mother loved collecting things, buying and reselling, and this was her store for years. She passed away the summer before last. I still keep the store open. She was a very strong woman. We were extremely close, me and my mom. I really miss her." He still makes candles, which he sells in the shop. "I hand-make them. The Mountain

(See "Joey Smith," Page 4)



Bent Trees as Silent Guides

BY DOUG PERKINS

If you live in or around Mentone for more than a few days, you will become infatuated with the rich role DeKalb County played in the development of the South. Trails were cut across ridges and connected in valleys where settlements formed. Many of these trails would someday become the roads we use today. Trade was one of the main reasons for this in the 1700s and 1800s.

Commerce was sparse, and needs were many for the pioneers of Alabama. Boundaries were also a reason for many of these trails. Indians needed them, and later pioneers had to know them well in order to keep early travel safe. Trail marking was accomplished by several means. Stones were sometimes piled along the way to show if a trail was going left, right, or straight ahead. The piles of stones were

(See "Bent Trees," Page 14)

The Groundhog

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Groundhog woodcut courtesy of Meg Justice/Bee Spring Studio

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Mentone Matters

Many Reasons to be Thankful

BY MAYOR ROB HAMMOND

We are entering the season of thankfulness. November is a month of family, food, and a focus on the things we are grateful for. With that in mind, I want to say "thank you" to several people for the success of our recent Mentone Fall Festival.

The festival would not be possible without the work of numerous people — too many to name. But I particularly want to highlight: Town Clerk Kristen Emory for keeping everyone organized and on the same page; Police Chief Gene McKee and Assistant Chief Mike Langston for coordinating public safety; Public Works Director Paul Nail for getting Moon Lake Campus in great shape and the roadways throughout town clean for the event; Juli Jordan and the Little River Arts Council for coordinating all the vendors and kids activities; and Deedee Morrison for leading the fundraising efforts.

The festival is more than a community celebration. Money raised from the event is reinvested into Moon Lake Campus to preserve and promote this historic property. Through the support of area businesses, elected officials, and volunteers, we are bringing new life to the campus so future generations can continue to be enriched by it.

The graphic below is the banner that appeared on the Shigley Amphitheater stage during the festival to highlight our sponsors. I particularly want to thank the DeKalb County Community Development Commission, Rep. (and Speaker of the House) Nathaniel Ledbetter, and Sen. Steve Livingston, whose support helped us bring some of the best musical entertainment we've ever had to the stage. First Fidelity Bank was also a major sponsor for the event. We appreciate all who supported. If you do business with or know anyone whose name is listed here, please tell them "thank you" for their support!

In other news, work continues on the sidewalk project. Crews have moved across the highway and are working in front of Camp Skyline. The new signage for Moon Lake Campus has been installed on Highway 117, at the intersection of East River Road and at the entrance road just east of Moon Lake Library. Director Kenneth Boswell of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs is planning another visit to Mentone to discuss our grant for the Brow Park trail and overlook project. And we will soon be advertising for bids on renovations to the main Moon Lake building, bringing it up to code and ensuring it will continue to serve our community for generations to come.

I recently attended a workshop entitled "Local Economic Development Training for DeKalb County Municipal Officials." It was presented by the DeKalb County Economic Development Authority and its new executive director Dr. Brett Johnson, along with the Northeast Alabama Community College Entrepreneurial Center. It covered everything from incentives and infrastructure to site selection and workforce development. It's great to see this strong countywide emphasis on economic development, which is certain to benefit all communities in the area.

The coming year promises to be one of progress and preservation for our town — more reasons why Mentone is the greatest little community in the South!

mentone Fall Festival

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Scenes from the Mentone Fall Festival


Lesa Cummings


Lesa Cummings


David Cummings


David Cummings


Rebecca Henderson



Lesa Cummings

From the Editor

Finding Your People

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

People need community. I'm not talking about your physical address, where you get your mail and lay your head down at night. A true community springs up wherever you find yourself surrounded by others who care about similar things and have similar ideals. You share a vision for what a happy life looks like, and a passion for the same interests and activities.

Community is about those common threads woven between people who may not otherwise have much in common. Further, community is not a singular concept; you can find acceptance and belonging in several communities that might otherwise appear to have nothing in common.

October was a month of community for me. The most dramatic example was the Mentone Fall Festival. To see thousands of people visiting town to enjoy the day was gratifying, but the real story has been unfolding for months. There's no way to track how much time and energy it takes from so many people to pull off a successful town-wide event of this magnitude. Think about what's involved: coordinating art and food vendors, staking vendor tent spots, putting up signs, taking up parking fees, coordinating entertainment, coordinating social media and other promotions, reaching out to sponsors for support, greeting people at booths, arranging activities for kids, keeping the trash cans empty, maintaining public safety … and the list goes on.

Those efforts come from people who care about Mentone, who want to celebrate it and share with others its natural wonders and focus on the arts. That's a true community.

Also in October, we visited Huntsville for our first show at the Orion Amphitheater. This spectacular entertainment venue is rated among the best outdoor amphitheaters in the world, and we immediately saw why. We'd had tickets for months to see the Red Clay Strays. As fans of their music, we had heard that their live shows were special events. Before the night was over, we understood why. We weren't in a crowd of concertgoers; we were among friends who shared a love for their music and story, along with an appreciation of their faith and message. We were in a community.

A week later, we returned for a very different kind of experience. It was a classic impulse buy to snag some last-minute tickets to one of the three consecutive sold-out Billy Strings shows. I've never seen so much dancing — or smelled so much "happy smoke" — in public. Billy Strings led a bluegrass jam band that felt like a mix of the Tony Rice Unit and the Punch Brothers plus Led Zeppelin and the Grateful Dead. Yes, it's as confusing and gratifying to the musical senses as it sounds. And at the center of it all was that same sense of community. Everyone there loved everyone else, regardless of background or status.

When I think about community, I'm reminded of the song "Find Your People" from the album "Strangers No More" by Drew Holcomb and the Neighbors. Here's a sample:

You gotta find your people
That put the needle in the groove
When you're together, you got nothing to prove
When you're together, you got nothing to lose

Have you found your community?

Cover Crops for Healthy Soil, Crops, and Customers

BY BRIAN SIMPSON

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

My wife, Liz, and I own Mountain Sun Farm and grow organic fruits and vegetables in the sandy soils of Mentone. We've farmed organically now for 11 years as our sole household income and sell our produce nearly year-round to individuals locally and in Chattanooga.

When we bought our farmland here in 2017, the first thing we did was plant winter cover crops — some fields in rye and hairy vetch, and others in oats and peas. Cover crops, or "green manures," are crops planted to improve the soil before and after "cash" crops. Instead of being harvested, they're incorporated into the soil to feed soil microorganisms. Their benefits are lengthy, but mainly they:

- sequester carbon and nitrogen from the air
- "cover" the soil to protect from erosion
- scavenge nutrients deep in the soil

It took years for us to understand how to grow them to full maturity, yielding maximum benefits within the strict deadlines of organic vegetable production.

Zero Fertilizer

Timing, species, and seeding rate are all important. Early on, we used granular fertilizer (made from organic hen manure) in addition to our cover crops to feed our vegetable crops. In 2023, we began reducing fertilizer rates down to 50%, and this season all crops were fed solely with cover crops and zero fertilizer. But why would we do this?

Albert Howard, a pioneer advocate for organic agriculture, wrote in his 1940 book An Agricultural Testament:



Liz Simpson at Mountain Sun Farm

"The wheel of life is made up of two processes — growth and decay … Agriculture must always be balanced. If we speed up growth we must accelerate decay. " This insight was our first inspiration to work toward relying solely on "decaying" organic matter from cover crops for fertility. It was in line with observations we'd experienced over the years — like how vegetables that followed mature cover crops seemed to always yield and resist disease especially well and how the high organic matter, or humus, in our compost piles seemed to generate miracles. The pile could grow volunteer tomato plants that survived frost, while the tomatoes in the field died. Or you'll find volunteer squash plants that never became diseased. Finally, we realized the more fertilizer we used, the more foliar diseases occurred.

When I was a college student 15 years ago, eagerly taking every microbiology course available, the far-reaching importance of the human gut microbiome was still mostly underappreciated. We now understand that the microbes in our gut impact our mental health, immune systems, risk of cancer, and even our offspring's health long after birth. Whether you have "healthy" or "harmful" gut microbes is directly impacted by your diet. "You are what you eat" really is true. If you eat lots of carrots and apples, you'll feed the healthy bacteria that we've always relied on to digest high-fiber whole foods. Yet, if you eat ultra-processed foods like snack crackers and most white breads, you'll outsource the microbes' job to machines on food manufacturer assembly lines. Those foods are essentially already digested, leaving healthy gut microbes without a food source and causing their decline or extinction.

While we've finally begun to appreciate the role of microbes in our stomachs, the microbes in soil (the "stomach" of a plant) are still underappreciated. Even many agricultural scientists still believe that chemical fertilizers alone can carry a wholly healthy crop. I think in another 15 years, we'll widely accept what Albert Howard was observing — that the immune system of a plant, and even the health of those who eat it, are significantly dependent on the plant's partnership with soil microbes, which require a continual supply of organic matter to thrive; that tomatoes grown in the absence of mycorrhizal fungi do not convey the same nutrition as those grown with organic sources of fertility like compost or green manure (or mulch or wood like our neighbors who wrote previously in this series are using). While synthetic fertilizers provide nitrogen, they ignore the need for organic matter; it's an unbalanced diet.

Currently, our favorite warm-season cover crop mix is 100lbs/acre sunn hemp, 10lbs/acre sunflower, and 1lb/acre buckwheat. We seed fields in this from May through August.

It's ready to be mowed and incorporated in 60 days. In excellent stands, we've measured 6,000lbs/acre of dry biomass and >200lbs/acre of nitrogen. That is the sunn hemp's achievement through its partnership with rhizobia bacteria that live in little nodules on its roots (all legumes fix nitrogen from the air in this way). The buckwheat provides pollen and nectar for beneficial insects, and the sunflowers are mainly there to capture any already-present soil nitrogen before rains flush it deeper than the root zone.

For cool-season covers, we rely on crimson clover, now at 30-40lbs/acre. We seed this August through November. It reaches maturity at flowering in April or May.

If you read modern publications on cover crops from the USDA or universities, you might come away thinking it's a new method or one that may have potential but requires more research. Even my favorite book on the topic, Managing Cover Crops Profitably (free online at Sare.org), describes the use of sunn hemp as "up and coming," yet Albert Howard described seeing it used by farmers in Sri Lanka in 1938 and green manure in general used all across the Indian subcontinent. After traveling Asia in 1909, F. H. King wrote in Farmers of Forty Centuries: "the growing of legumes in rotation with other crops very extensively for the express purpose of fertilizing the soil is one of their old, fixed practices." Cover cropping was only recently forgotten. Before the 1950s, farmers across Alabama still relied on crimson clover, winter peas, and blue lupin to provide soil fertility, as documented in USDA bulletins like "Winter Legumes for Green Manure in the Cotton Belt" (1942). Unfortunately, when you drive through the row crop fields of North Alabama today, it is rare to see a green manure planted. But the practice is slowly being re-adopted nationally, with an explosion in interest the past five years. With luck, I think the times they are a-changin'.

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LOTS & LAND

THE HITCHING POST LOT– Remember the iconic "Hitching Post" located in Mentone? Locals were devasted 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

WATERFRONT BUILDING LOT in West Fork Subdivision, Mentone! 3.30 +/- acre lot (#54) offering approx. 167' on Little River. You may want both... Cabin in the woods and a screen room down by the waterfront. You choose. Act now to make your dream a reality. 2 lots available priced at $95,000 each #21869486 #21869487

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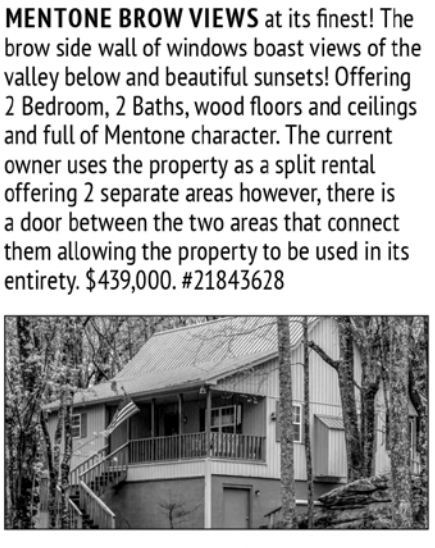
BEAUTIFUL BROW PROPERTY located in Lake of the Brow. Just minutes from Little River Canyon. Enjoy beautiful views of Shinbone Valley below. $79,900 #1792283



BLUEBIRDS NEST – Tucked away in Laurel Creek Lakes, this charming cabin sits on a wooded corner lot with a peaceful lake in the backyard. Ideal as a full-time home, weekend getaway, or rental property. Enjoy the screened front porch, open living/kitchen/dining with custom touches, and a cozy gas log fireplace with stone surround. Main level master features vaulted ceiling and sitting area. Upstairs loft bedroom with half bath. Relax on the back deck overlooking the lake. A must-see gem! $360,000 MLS#21895665



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LITTLE RIVER VENUE is ready for your viewing! This previous restaurant with kitchen equipment, seating, and grills. Located on DeSoto Parkway. $449,900 MLS# 21870315

Joey Smith *(continued from page 1)*

Kudzu's my number one seller."

Joey was born in Florida and moved to the tiny community of Central, Alabama, when he was a baby. He attended Rosalie Elementary School in Pisgah. When he was 12, "maybe 13," he moved to Rainsville after his parents bought a few acres there. "My mother lost a daughter before I was born, my sister, so she was overprotective of me. It was unreal. I couldn't breathe without her knowing about it. She worked in the lunchroom at Pisgah High School, so that's where I went to high school. We rode up together. My father was a welder and a full-time Baptist minister. Then he started a lawn-mowing business. He had 40 or 50 yards."

Joey lost his own daughter, Bethany, to diabetes. "That was seven years ago. She was only 36. Dad died three years after that. So of all the adults in my family, it's just me and my grandson. He's 17 and 6'4" and does his own thing. We're supposed to go and get dinner sometime or another. That boy can eat."

Witness to Local History

He remembers when the Mentone Springs Hotel burned in March 2014. "They called me and said the hotel was on fire and that the whole Log Cabin Village was in danger, so I rushed over. They evacuated everybody. We stood and cried and watched the hotel burn to the ground. They couldn't do anything to save it — 130-year-old wood. Thankfully, the wind changed direction, and that saved the Village."

In addition to running his ice cream business, Joey loves to create candles and spend time during the week watching over the couple of acres he owns in Henagar. "I'm a big animal person," he says. "I used to have a horse. I have three dogs now. One of them I took in after Jimmy Rogers (co-owner of the now-closed Green Leaf Grill) passed. He was like a brother to me."

The Village Ice Cream Shoppe is hard to miss, as there are usually groups of people placing their orders or sitting out front with plenty of napkins and smiles on their faces. The shop is open Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays between April and the end of November, so there's still plenty of time to experience one of Joey's banana splits or a big scoop or two. Stop in and say hello next time you're around the Village.

"I love meeting people," Joey says. "This has been an amazing journey so far."

Supplemental Benefits for Chronic Conditions

BY LYNN HIXON

Medicare Advantage plans can cover supplemental benefits that are not primarily health-related for beneficiaries who have chronic illnesses. These are sometimes called Special Supplemental Benefits for the Chronically Ill (SSBCI). SSBCI can address social determinants of health for people with chronic disease. A social determinant of health is a part of someone's life that can affect their health in some way, such as not having access to transportation. Examples of the kind of benefits that plans can cover are:

- Meal delivery
- Transportation for nonmedical needs
- Home air cleaners
- Pest control
- Heart-healthy food or produce

To be eligible, you must be chronically ill. If you meet the criteria, a Medicare Advantage plan may offer you one of these benefits. If you want to make a change this year, please remember that Open Enrollment is October 15 through December 7. You can call the DeKalb County Council on Aging at 256-845-8590 and make an appointment with Lynn Hixon with the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) for help comparing plans.

Café Pilates To Blend Coffee and Wellness

A new business is brewing on Highway 117 in Mentone — one that aims to blend energy, relaxation, and community all under one roof. Café Pilates, currently under construction, will combine a coffee shop and yoga studio. The vision belongs to Kandis Lawton, who is launching the business alongside her parents, John and Alisha Lawton. Drawing on her passion for wellness, Kandis plans to create a space where movement, mindfulness, and good coffee come together.

"The idea is to create a cozy, welcoming spot where people can get their workout in, grab a coffee or breakfast, and just relax," said Kandis.

The café will feature drive-thru service and a menu of specialty coffees, teas, seasonal drinks, fresh-pressed juices, and pastries, with more items planned as the concept evolves. On the wellness side, the yoga studio will offer infrared heated yoga sessions. Though final details are still being refined, Kandis and her family are aiming for a springtime 2026 opening.



Valley Head Cemetery Holds Final 5k and 10k

BY SHERRYL T. LEWIS

September 27 marked our 10th annual Valley Head Cemetery 5K and 10K races. It is with deep regret that this was our farewell run. The Valley Head Cemetery Association wants to thank everyone who helped make our race a success through the years. The sponsors, the memorials, the runners, the walkers, and the volunteers. A special thanks to Sign-O-Mite in Ider for doing such a great job with the graphics and printing of our race shirts; Gary's Warehouse for donating a compact refrigerator or a freezer for our grand prize every year; Town of Hammondville; Town of Valley Head; Valley Head Police Department; and Robert Johnson for letting us have the use of his construction office for the race. We could not have done it without every single one of you.

I've always heard it takes a village to raise a child. Well, I've found it takes a village to have a successful race. I want to thank everybody for all your support through the years. Thank you to everyone who came to run or walk one final time "In Memory of Our Loved Ones at The Valley Head Cemetery."

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Crafting Hope:
Locals Join Effort for Abandoned Babies in Kenya

BY JEAN COREY

Thirty-three years ago, our family moved to Mentone and established Little River Hardware. Our four oldest children enjoyed an excellent education at Moon Lake Elementary. We were active members of St. Joseph's on-the-Mountain. After 12 happy years, we made some big decisions to sell the hardware store and adopt our two youngest children, Rob and Maya, from New Life Homes in Nairobi, Kenya. They are now 22 and 23 years old, and we are empty nesters, thrilled to be spending our retirement back in Mentone. Although we have retired from our full-time professions as educators, we continue to remain connected and fundraise for the amazing work of New Life Homes.

New Life Homes' story began in Nairobi's Kenyatta Hospital in 1993, where baby Clive was lying in a baby crib with three other abandoned infants: without sheets, without diapers, without any hope of survival. Mary, a nurse with three children of her own, noticed Clive and asked if she could take him home with her to care for him in his last hours. She wanted him to die in someone's arms.

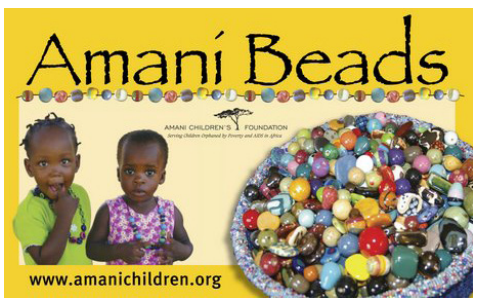
Clive made it through his first night in Mary's arms… and the second. He refused to die.

And Mary refused to let him die.

Clive is now a 32-year-old graphic designer in love with life. Mary and her husband adopted Clive soon after he came to live with them, and their guest room has expanded to become New Life Homes Trust, a network of four beautiful baby homes across Kenya. Since 1993, more than 2,500 abandoned babies have been rescued from hospitals, police stations, and roadsides. Many of the babies are HIV+, many have special needs, and many weigh only 2 or 3 pounds. They arrive tiny and frail, and they leave as robust toddlers with their own Kenyan families!

We are thrilled to find companions here in Mentone to join us in our fundraising efforts for New Life Homes. This fall, volunteers are gathering to create one-of-a-kind jewelry and "gratitude beads" with beautiful Kazuri beads in preparation for a Holiday Sale at St. Joseph's. The beads are made from the clay of Mt. Kenya at a fair trade organization outside of Nairobi. Every day, 300 women shape, fire, and paint each bead with tiny brushes, then fire them again in the Kazuri kilns. The women sing and laugh as they work together — at the end of each day, they have the deep satisfaction of a job well done and a salary that provides for their large extended families. Theirs is a labor of love in an atmosphere of great transformation.

Volunteers here in Mentone choose each bead with care and love, knowing that they are creating gifts that last a lifetime — and give a lifetime. They are excited to share the labor of their love with Mentone during the holiday season! Please join us for our first holiday sale at St. Joseph's on Sunday, Nov. 16, from 12-5 p.m. Through the Amani Children's Foundation, the proceeds will go back to Kenya to provide everyday care for the babies at New Life Homes.



You can learn more about New Life Homes and Kazuri Beads at newlifehometrust.org, and kazuribeads.com

If you or your organization is interested in hosting a sale, please contact jeantcorey@gmail.com.



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BOOM TOWN MAKERS MARKET

HOME for the Holidays
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Saturday & Sunday, Nov. 1 & 2: "Welcome Home Weekend"
Celebrate the Season at Boom Town Makers Market with locally-crafted gifts and art, hot apple cider, and cozy cabin charm. FREE gift wrap. Open 10 am – 5 pm Saturday / 12 – 4 pm Sunday.

Thursday, Nov. 27: Thanksgiving Night, 7 – 9 pm: "Holiday Prelude"
Begin the season at Boom Town Makers Market, where handmade still matters. Look for specials from our Makers throughout the store.

Friday, Nov. 28 – 30: "The Hometown Holiday Market @ Boom Town"
Skip the chaos—shop small, shop local, shop handmade. Shop Boom Town Makers Market.

Thursday – Saturday, Dec. 4 – 6: Participating Merchants: "Fort Payne Main Street Shop Hop" Customers can purchase a $10 passport at Tiger Lily, Alice Circle, Kathrine's Gallery, or the Main Street Office. Each participating merchant gives passport holders a free gift (no purchase required) and stamps their passport. Fully-stamped passports are entered into a drawing for up to $1,000 in prizes.

Thursday – Sunday, Dec. 4 – 7: "Santa's Studio Holiday Open House"
Where Santa meets the Makers! Enjoy art, music, Makers, and FREE gift wrap. (Sunday, Dec. 7, 12–4 pm: Meet & Greet book signing with Mark L. Brooks, author of Laying Autumn's Dust.)

Friday, Dec. 12: "The Homecoming Parade & Holiday Market"
Celebrate community, tradition, shopping, and local craftsmanship at Boom Town Makers Market—all in one joyful evening! Also, enjoy a front-row seat to the one-and-only Fort Payne Christmas Parade.

Holiday Hours Starting Thanksgiving Weekend:
Monday – Saturday, 10 am – 5 pm | Thursday, Open Late until 8 pm | Sunday, 12 – 4 pm

Located in Downtown Fort Payne's Historic Sawyer Building Circa 1878
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MERF: Preserving the Past and Investing in the Future

BY KATIE HAND

This year's slide into autumn finds us preparing to move back into the MERF House, keeping the gears turning, and looking ahead to what's next. The art program at Valley Head School is running strong, with Sherryl Lewis carrying MERF's mission into her classroom. After visiting for just a day, it's easy to see why this program matters so much. Students come as they are, translate their thoughts into creativity, and take ownership of their learning. So far, Sherryl has used all sorts of materials and media to get creativity flowing. From suncatchers and self-portraits to artwork submitted for the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra program, this art program gives students a place to explore, express, and build resilience through creativity.

As a parent, the future can sometimes feel uncertain. Yet, standing in contrast to that uncertainty is the heart of resilience — creativity and authenticity. Art and music nurture those qualities in a world that often feels superficial.

MERF is proud to continue providing a program that's been going strong for 30 years. Our community helps keep it alive; our hearts and minds build its future. Programs like this remind us that something as simple as cutting and gluing can lay the groundwork for confidence, imagination, and the ability to create from nothing.

That same spirit of preserving the past while investing in the future is at the heart of something else that touches young learners — the Sue Henry Scholarship Fund, which is open to students in their first semester of college who need assistance to continue their studies. The memorial fund was created to honor loved ones and support the dreams of Valley Head High School graduates. Through this scholarship, community members can give in memory of someone dear to them — transforming remembrance into opportunity.

For Brooke (Moore) Leps, a 2017 Valley Head graduate, scholarships like this made all the difference. Active in numerous organizations, from Future Business Leaders of America to National BETA Club, Brooke learned the value of involvement and leadership early on. After graduation, she earned a bachelor of business administration degree in finance and accounting from the University of North Alabama, then completed a master of business administration with a concentration in federal contracting and procurement management, all while launching a career as a financial analyst in Huntsville.

"None of this would have been possible without the educational support I received while at Valley Head High School," Brooke shared. "Scholarships like the Sue Henry Scholarship exist to help you take that first step. Valley Head may be a small town, but it can take you big places. Take advantage of every opportunity, apply for scholarships, and believe that you are capable of more than you think."

As we settle into a new season, please consider donating to MERF, so that we can continue to provide meaningful and rich opportunities to 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.

The Ukes at Mentone Americana Nights

BY JERRY MEGLI AND HANK ALLEN

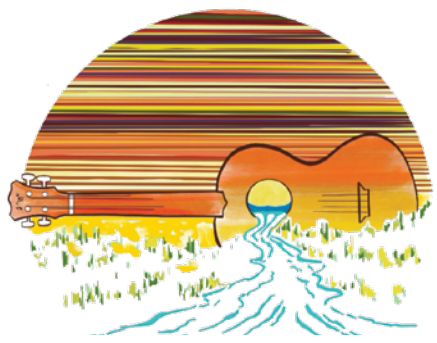


All artists who reside in any music hall of fame once touched a musical instrument for the first time in their lives without knowing where it might lead. The Mentone Ukes had a very humble beginning. Many of our members had never played a musical instrument before coming to our group. Many do not know how to read music. But over the years we have gelled into a musical group, and the catalyst that holds us together is the ukulele.

We practice hard and have fun with no expectations of where it might go other than having a good time. When we perform, it is always well received. So here we are, having been the opening act for the last performance of the Mentone Americana Nights series. In a "pinch-me" moment, we were invited to open for two bona-fide professional musical acts. We've earned our chops and we have not yet reached our full stride. We don't even know what that is. But when the opportunity to perform arises, we prepare and we take seriously our role of representing Mentone and being the House Band of the Moon Lake Library.

This opportunity to play at Americana Nights only happened because Ukes member Don Highfield heard a couple of people mention playing at the Shigley Amphitheater behind our home base on a weekend when it was not in use. Don's wife, Anne McLeod, the librarian at Moon Lake Library, knew Stephen Smith, the manager of the amphitheater. Stephen not only let us play at Shigley but also offered us the opening slot for the last concert of the year, headlined by Dennis Parker with his tribute to James Taylor. Inspired amateurs getting our shot at the big time — or close to it.

The Americana Nights set gave us new experiences in addition to opening the show for serious professionals. We got to do an actual sound check to attempt to balance out the sound of nine people singing and strumming ukuleles. And during the sound check, we realized it's nice to have use of a top-notch sound system with monitors that enabled us to hear each other. That's a luxury we never had before, and it helped us sound our best. There was a decent-size crowd that showed up early enough to see us. I think we were a little in shock that we got such an enthusiastic response from the audience. All the work we put in the weeks before the show was worth it.



We can now go back to the library and take what we learned from the concert and put it to use at our normal performances at the farmer's market at Mentone Inn, senior luncheons, pop-up art festivals, and charity events and remember we did get to play in the big leagues at least for a day.

The Mentone Ukes will hold practice sessions at the Moon Lake Library on November 8 and 22 at 1 p.m. A free introduction to the ukulele is offered, and loaner ukuleles are available. Newcomers and beginners of all ages are welcome to attend! For more information, you can find us on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and on our website, www.mentoneukes.com. Strum and be happy!

Advertise in The Groundhog | email: groundhogads@yahoo.com

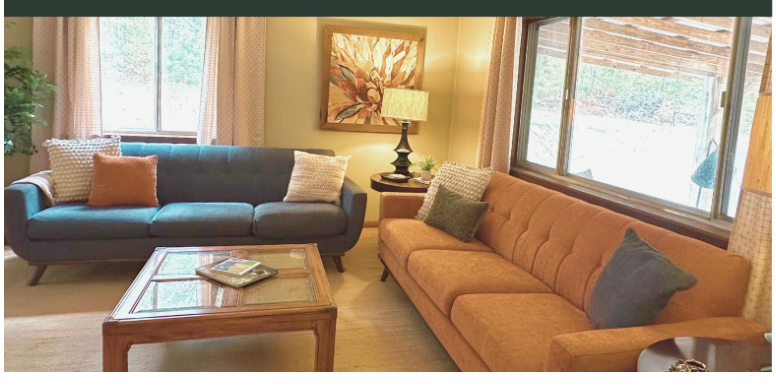

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In The Woods







Groundhog Volunteer Hero: Rand Hall

This month, The Groundhog proudly celebrates Rand Hall as our Volunteer Hero. Originally from New York, Rand spent 35 years in Florida, where she served as editor and publisher of The Gazette, a news magazine on Florida's west-central coast. For the past 20 years, she has called Mentone home — and has become a cornerstone of its caring community.

For the last three years, Rand has volunteered as a server at the MERF Senior Lunch Program, one of her favorite activities. "I love meeting new people," she says. "It's a great way to get to know folks and cater to them — and everybody needs that, right?" Her joy in feeding and connecting with others truly makes her a nourisher of the community.

Rand has also lent her helping hands to the Monday Meals Program at Mentone Community Church and serves faithfully at St. Joseph's Episcopal Church, where she's an active member of the Episcopal Church Women and a regular volunteer in church ministries.

At home, Rand enjoys the companionship of her beloved Siberian Forest cat, Grayson. We thank Rand for her generous heart, nurturing spirit, and dedication to making Mentone a warmer, more caring place for all.



Food Pantry Needs Donated Items

The food pantry at St. Joseph's asks for support in serving those most in need. This ministry provides essential nourishment to local families who may be struggling to make ends meet, ensuring that no one in our community goes hungry.

Donations of canned goods and other nonperishable foods are appreciated. The pantry is in particular need of canned vegetables and soups. A donation can is now conveniently located in the Mentone Post Office for easy drop-offs, or you can bring your contributions directly to the church on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Your gifts will go a long way in keeping the pantry shelves stocked for those who depend on this vital outreach.



ON-FARM MARKET

Our final Friday Market dates for the 2025 season:

November 7, 14, 21 - Open 2-5pm CT
November 28 - Closed for Thanksgiving
December 5, 12 - Open 2-5pm CT
December 19 - Final Market of 2025

You can call or email us if you have any questions or are interested in purchasing our products outside of our market hours.

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Rhododendron Garden Club

Lessons in Ikebana Arrangements



BY MELLANIE TUTTLE

Well the Mentone Fall Festival was festive, ribbons were received at the county fair, and now it's time to gear up for the opportunities to overeat! Last month's article challenged folks to visit Moon Lake Campus to see how many projects were completed. The wattle fence looks good. Lots of ferns were planted and most survived, but as Michael Garofalo says, "Despite the gardener's best intentions, Nature will improvise," and she did. Torrential rain creates its own issues that must be addressed. The mural is still in the works, so it's hits and misses in the planning and execution. That's gardening in a nutshell.

Marsha Merrell's presentation on Ikebana was a success! The history of the hows and whys of Ikebana is fascinating but much too involved for this article. The Korean influence of Buddhism and placing flowers on the altar around 538 A.D. started the practice of Ikebana. Originally, the priests were the flower arrangers and all were men. In the 1500s, rules were simplified so all people could learn the intricacies of the art of Ikebana.

Unlike typical Western floral arrangements with masses of flowers and foliage, Ikebana stresses simplicity. Less is more. And Marsha stressed an Ikebana arrangement should let the breeze come through. She explained: "We arrange plants cut and removed from nature so they are filled with new beauty when placed in a new environment. Rather than recreate the shape the plant had in nature, we create with branches, leaves, and flowers, a new form that holds our impression of a plant's beauty as well as the mark of our own spirit. Ikebana should suggest the forces of nature with which plants



live in harmony — branches bent by winter winds, a leaf eaten by an insect."

The choice of container determines the arrangement of items. The moribana style uses a shallow container filled with water and a kenzan. The kenzan (needlepoint/pin holder/frog in our world) is integral to Ikebana. Arrangements last longer, and the kenzan can be used repeatedly (unlike Oasis, which is bad for the environment and one use only). Quoting directly from Marsha's handout, "The name moribana suggests mounding or piling up of the materials. The line material [stems or branches] you have chosen should be placed in a triangular pattern in the kenzan (pin holder). The main or strongest line is called the Shin. Shin is 1.5 vase width + height of the vase added together. The next branch is called the Soe; it is two-thirds as long or tall as the Shin. Tai is the third branch and is one-third the length of the Shin. The line material will be arranged in an unequal triangle. The strongest line will be the Shin. The flowers in this arrangement will accent the three lines. Use large blossoms to follow the basic lines, then use smaller ones to fill in and accent. Moribana arrangements may be upright, slanting or hanging."

Ceramics, pottery, metal containers can all be used in Ikebana. The other style demonstrated was nageire. "The word nageire means "tossed in a pot." These arrangements are done in a tall pot or vase. Kenzans may or may not be used. Often the bending of the end of branches to anchor the stem or a grid made from flexible strong stems are used to stabilize your plant materials. Although there are suggested rules, there is a very free feel to nageire arrangements. The rules are more or less guidelines.

In an hour's time, Marsha completed several Ikebana designs. Of course she has been practicing the art for years (even serving as President of the Ikebana in Richmond, Virginia), so she makes it look so easy.

Every 10 years, the government requires an update to their conservation plan to be eligible for grants. The site outdooralabama.com has published the draft of the 2025-2035 Alabama Wildlife Action Plan. There are 29.5 pages of plant species with the greatest needs. Alabama is ranked 4th in the U.S. in its level of biodiversity, and has more than any other state east of the Mississippi. This report is comprehensive and should be a must read by anyone concerned about conservation in Alabama, especially the Little River Canyon.

Next month, Lesa Cummings will present on Garden Photos. The RGC meets on the second Tuesday of the month (Nov. 11) at 10 a.m. in the library.

Mellanie Tuttle is a member of the Rhododendron Garden Club.

Join us!

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



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

With Little River Escape being such a success, we have decided to embark on a new journey by creating River Ridge Escape Tiny Home Dealership. At the dealership, tiny homes are available to tour and purchase. RRE is now delivering across the nation and also developing other communities to bring more folks to Lookout Mountain.

River Ridge Escapes now has nine tiny home communities near and atop Lookout Mountain in NW Georgia and NE Alabama. There are several Airbnb Tiny Homes in our various locations to come experience tiny home living, downsizing, the community, and explore the surrounding areas.

Come Experience Tiny Living on Lookout Mountain!

Tours of River Ridge Escape's Tiny Homes — Mon-Fri 10-5 ET or by appointment.
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State and Local Books Added for Moon Lake Library's Future Holley Midgley Collection

BY JAY S. ROBBINS

If you are one of those curious life-long learner types — no matter your age — or if you are a newcomer to the area, what treats await you at Moon Lake Library in Mentone! Thanks to the efforts of the Friends of the Moon Lake Library Board, the library recently received a grant from the Tillotson-Menlo Charitable Organization and has purchased dozens of books of local, state, and regional interest and added them to its State and Local Collection, soon to be renamed the Holley Midgley Collection. Holley, who passed away last year, was one of the library's most ardent supporters and is still greatly missed by all who knew him.

There are many choices for the curious traveler. Before your next visit to Rocket City, check out the book *100 Things to Do in Huntsville* and take it with you. If you feel like going somewhere but you're not sure where, let *Perfect Day Alabama: Day Trips, Weekend Getaways, and Other Escapes* or *Alabama Bucket List Adventure Guide* help. *Alabama Curiosities* will point out the oddball quirks wherever you go in the state, as will *Roadside Geology of Alabama*, which is similar in a geological sort of way but layman friendly and full of photos. If you check out *Birds of Alabama* and *Best Tent Camping: Alabama* together, you're guaranteed a great weekend. Headed to the Gulf? *The Rise and Decline of the Redneck Riviera* by Harvey H. Jackson relates the history of the Florida-Alabama coast as a tourist destination from the late 1920s to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010. *Why We Are Here* is a photographic exploration of Alabama's port city of Mobile, with short essays by Alabama's own E.O. Wilson, who grew up there.

We just missed Halloween, but it's never too late to be afraid. The library has Katherine Windham Tucker's classic *Jeffrey's Favorite 13 Ghost Stories*, but adults and children will find lots more to frighten them in three more new books: *Haunted North Alabama; Eerie Alabama: Chilling Tales from the Heart of Dixie; and Ghost Stories & Graveyard Tales: Alabama*.

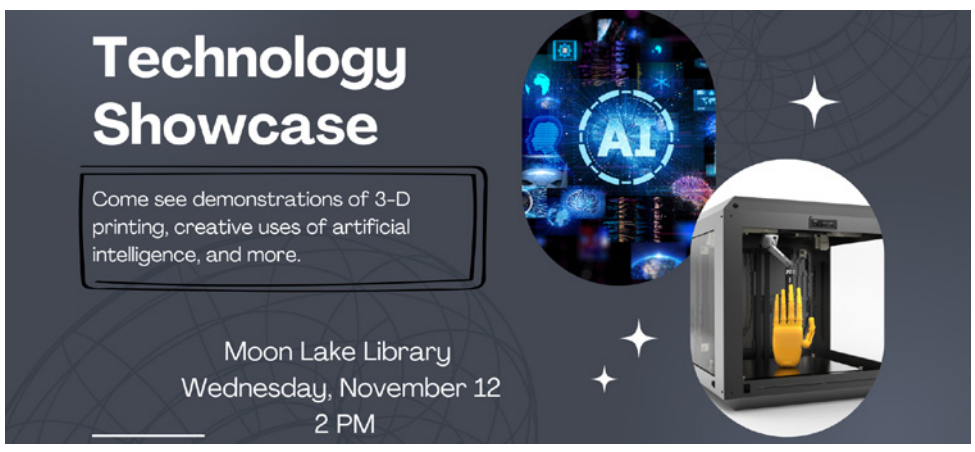
Also new to library shelves are books about food. *The Story of Alabama in Fourteen Foods* is one. There's also a delectable history of Alabama barbeque and cookbooks by Alabama's own Katherine Windham Tucker and Stacy Lyn. Sports are covered, too, with a history of America's oldest baseball park, Rickwood Field (in Birmingham). *Iron in the Blood* is a history of the Alabama/Auburn football rivalry. The book *Fourth & Goal Every Day* by Phil Savage takes a close look at the Alabama football program and the coaching style of former coach Nick Saban.

Just the titles alone of the new children's books will be enough to entice your child to crack them open: *Can I Touch Your Hair?; If a Bus Could Talk; Blast Off to Space Camp; The Museum on the Moon; and Nine: A Book of Nonet Poems.*

Alabama writers are well represented in the future Holley Midgley Collection. There is fiction from Robert McCammon (*Boy's Life*), Fannie Flagg (*Standing in the Rainbow*), and Mark Childress (*Gone for Good*) as well as Zelda Fitzgerald's only novel (*Save Me the Waltz*). Can Alabama claim Zora Neale Hurston as one of its own? She was born in the state but moved when she was 3 to Etonville, Florida, which she actually considered home. No matter — Moon Lake Library has her first novel (*Jonah's Gourd Vine*), as well as several of her collections containing dozens upon dozens of African-American folk tales, stories, myths, and other lore. *Blessings and Disasters* is a memoir by a Nigerian Alabamian, Montgomery native Alexis Okeowo. *Out of the Dark* is a collection of essays, letters, and speeches by Helen Keller. In Fort Payne, John Dersham looks at the history of that city through dozens of period post cards.

There are new books on the Civil Rights movement (*The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*); music (*Music and Mystique in Muscle Shoals*); biographies of Zelda Fitzgerald and Werner Von Braun; histories of Alabama's Phenix City and Tuskegee (*I Wanted to Be a Pilot: The Making of a Tuskegee Airman*); as well as a collection of biographical essays titled, *Alabama Women: Their Lives and Times*. There are two new books by Florence, Alabama-based fashion designer Natalie Chanin (*Alabama Studio Style: More Projects, Recipes, and Stories Celebrating Sustainable Fashion and Living* is one). Yvonne Wells is a self-taught folk artist and storyteller from Alabama. Check out her creations in *The Story Quilts of Yvonne Wells*.

These are just some of the library's many new books. When you borrow a book from Moon Lake Library, it's yours for two weeks. If you need it longer, you can renew it in person or over the phone. If you return it late, no problem, the library exacts no fines. Anyone who lives wherever this *Groundhog* newspaper is distributed (including Georgia) is welcome to come in and get a library card. We hope to see you soon!











A Season of Art and Gratitude

BY JULI JORDAN

CREATIVE SPIRIT MARKET

The 9th Annual Creative Spirit Market returns to DeSoto State Park on Saturday, Nov. 8, and Sunday, Nov. 9, from 10 a.m.–3 p.m. each day. Hosted by DeSoto State Park and the Little River Arts Council, the market is set amid the park's breathtaking autumn scenery. This open-air art fair blends creativity and community in one unforgettable weekend. Visitors enjoy live acoustic music, browse locally and regionally made fine and folk art, and watch artists at work — from chair caning to weaving to metalworking. The market also features interactive art stations for kids and adults, inviting everyone to get creative. It's the perfect spot for early holiday shopping, with unique, handcrafted gifts and original artwork available for purchase. Warm up by the stone fireplace in the CCC pavilion, bring a camp chair, and stay awhile to enjoy the music. Dogs on leashes are welcome.

Location: Near DeSoto State Park's picnic area across from the Country Store on County Road 89.

Parking: $2 per vehicle in the picnic area; no admission fee for the market.

Live Artist Demonstrations

- Patti Baird – Fabric Weaving
- Keena Graham – Finger Weaving
- Laurel Hudson – Copper Forging
- Layne Stone – Chair Caning
- Cassilda Brown (Willow Gypsy Rustic) – Bent Willow Craft & Chair Caning

Live Music Schedule

Saturday

- 10:00 – Judy Nicole Kirby
- 11:15 – Lisa Crow
- 12:30–3:00 – Elisha Tatum & Derek Whisenant

Sunday

- 10:00 – Linda Arthur
- 11:15 – Lisa Crow & Jim Wallis
- 12:30 – Judy Nicole Kirby

Made possible in part by the Alabama State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and members like you.



Lisa Sulkosky Makes Her Mark on Mentone

The newest chalk mural on the grounds of the Mentone Inn invites passersby to pause and notice "the small things that take our breath away." Artist Lisa Sulkosky explains, "This design reflects my love for Mentone — such a tiny gem of a town — and the beautiful little wonders you can discover in the woods when you take time to look closely." Make Your Mark on Mentone is located on the grounds of the Mentone Inn on the corner of AL Hwy 117 and County Road 89.

Giving Thanks to Our Volunteers and Members

Did you know LRAC is 100% volunteer run? From our hands-on board of directors to those who staff the Little River Art Gallery, our programs thrive because of a dedicated team of helpers. This month, we celebrate the heart of LRAC — our volunteers:

Helen Allen, Brande Arno, David Cummings, Chris Davenport, Kathy Dyleski, Sharon Morris, Tiffany Parnell, Sandra Perry, Rhea Pirch, Mary Ann Robbins, and Barbara Umland.



Your time, talent, and spirit make everything we do possible. Thank you! We're equally grateful to our annual members, whose support keeps LRAC financially strong and fuels the arts in our community. Membership dollars provide vital resources for programs that serve artists, families, and visitors of all ages. Membership is open to everyone. You don't have to be an artist to join. Our members come from across the Southeast, united by a shared belief that art is for everyone!

Moon Lake Arts Collective

We're deeply grateful for the generous community helping bring the Moon Lake Arts Collective to life! So far, we've raised $108,425 — including $63,350 in grants and $46,075 in community donations. Fundraising continues, and momentum grows as excitement spreads through Mentone and beyond.

Thank you to our generous donors:

Lesa & David Cummings • Pudden McArthur • Sandra & Ken Perry • Ken Shigley • Cynthia Stinson • Adelaide Drennen • Ginger Beshears • Sharon Bienert • Susan Freeman

Recognition & Giving Levels

Every donor will be recognized on our Donor Wall inside the new studio. Gifts of $2,500+ will be honored with a metal oak leaf on the outdoor Donor Tree, symbolizing the deep roots of Moon Lake School and the creative growth now taking root here. Add your leaf today! Visit littleriverartscouncil.org and click on Moon Lake Arts Collective!

Juli Jordan is president of the Little River Arts Council.







Mentone Arts Center

Help the Arts Center and Elevation Bistro Celebrate Fifth Anniversary

BY RANDY GRIDER

Five years ago, the Mentone Arts & Cultural Center purchased the former Kamama building from the Town of Mentone. We signed the papers in June, did some upgrades, and solicited local and regional artists. We opened our doors on Oct. 22, 2020. Elevation Bistro had opened a few months earlier and was well on its way to being a much-loved and award-winning restaurant in the heart of Mentone.

We officially dedicated the building as the Chuck Sennett for the Arts shortly afterward. We're proud to note that since that year, which was in the middle of the Covid pandemic, we have paid off the building (last summer) and sold more than a half a million dollars in local art — serving more than 70 artists and artisans. We have also held almost 50 art classes/workshops that drew hundreds of students locally and from across the Southeast.

We have played host to numerous musical acts and even an award-winning foreign film. Among the acts were two Grammy winners (Gary Baker and Kathy Louvin), The French Family Band (multiple Grand Ole Opry appearances), Japanese guitarist Hiroya Tsukamoto, opera singer Lee Farrah Bailey, and many others.

On Wednesday, Nov. 19, 5:30-7:30 p.m., we will host a joint celebration with the Elevation staff at the arts center. Highlighting both businesses and the overall property, which includes two gardens, we invite the public to join us for beverages and heavy hors d'oeuvres. The format will be much like our quarterly artists of month socials, with the exception of having access to Elevation's space as well.

We look forward to seeing you there to celebrate with us and learn more about our story!

Randy Grider is the 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.















Over the past five years, the arts center has held nearly 50 classes and workshops, served more than 70 artists and artisans, and hosted celebrated musicians. Elevation Bistro continues to draw adoring guests and has garnered awards for its fare.

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Julie Clark *metal work/photography*
Jayne James *decorative gourds*
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Lizzie Caldwell *pottery/mixed media*
Connie Ward *collage/mixed media*
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Valley Head Happenings

G2 Supply to Move into Former Shaw Plant

BY MAYOR KAREN VEST

Our November council meeting will take place Monday, Nov. 3, at The Side Street Deli at 74 Winston Street. The deli is gracious enough to host our meeting since we anticipate a larger-than-usual crowd for our swearing-in ceremony for myself as mayor and our town council for the next four years: Easton Bailey, John Chambers, Nathan Owen, Lyndall Elkins, and Scott Pepper. Please join us for our regular meeting, including this ceremony, an awards ceremony, and a reception following the meeting.

As many of you may have read in local papers or seen on Channel 48 news, we are pleased to share that G2 Supply LLC has purchased the former Shaw plant in Valley Head. Ryan Griffith, G2 owner, attended our October council meeting and shared their vision to become part of our



Ryan Griffith, owner of G2, with Mayor Vest

community. They will consolidate multiple warehouses in Fort Payne for their move to Valley Head and bring approximately 60 employees in the December move. G2 is a leading single-source provider of packaging, shipping, and industrial supplies.

"This investment marks a major milestone in our company's history and a long-term investment in DeKalb County," said Griffith.

We are very excited to welcome G2 and all of their employees to our community. We look forward to a long and prosperous relationship with them.

Our annual Trunk or Treat was a big success! We handed out over 200 bags of treats to area children. We would like to thank all the Hot Rods in The Valley participants for also handing out treats, as well as Valley Head Baptist Church, and all other participants.

Our last Family Movie Night of the season was held that same evening. It featured the Disney classic, "Hocus Pocus." It was a chilly evening, but so much fun was had.

Christmas in Valley Head will take place Sunday, Dec. 7. We will have the tree lighting, caroling around the square, multiple vendors selling arts and crafts, and our annual Christmas Parade. The festivities will begin at 4 p.m. The parade will start at 5 p.m. and travel from Valley Head School, through town, and around the town square. Naturally, no Christmas festival is complete without Santa and Mrs. Claus! We are hoping the Grinch and Cindy Lou Who make an appearance this year as well. Plan to join this free family event, and let's kick off the holiday season together.

The Valley Head Volunteer Fire Department continues to grow. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer fireman, please call Town Hall at 256-635-6814, and we will give you Chief Dustin Burt's contact information.

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

Valley Head Women's Club:

Sweet and Savory Scholarship Support

BY ANNA MAE HORN

Delectable homemade breads and desserts, along with fresh Alabama pecans, will be on sale during November as fundraisers for Valley Head High School graduating seniors. Two $700 scholarships were awarded to Makayla Gilbert and Johnny Mann from the Class of 2025.

The Valley Head Area Women's Club annual bake sale is the Saturday before Thanksgiving (November 22 this year) at White Hall Methodist Church, starting at 9 a.m. Come early, because most items sell in the first hour or two. If items remain, the sale will last until 1 p.m.

This year, the bake sale offers the option of pre-ordering some items, digital pay, and limited Christmas orders, along with local delivery or meet-up.

Freshly harvested and shelled Whaley's pecans are typically available from members in early November. Your choice of mammoth halves or medium pieces is only $12 per 1-pound bag. As always, local meetups are available in the area. This year, that includes Rainsville, Sylvania, and Henagar, in addition to the usual Mentone, Valley Head, and Fort Payne.

Purchase Pecans at:

- Tiger's Inn
- The Package Store
- Directly from women's club members

For ordering information, Women's Club membership details, and other questions, call Anna Mae Horn at 256-635-8775.

At our October meeting, Valley Head Mayor Karen Vest enlightened us on all the great happenings around town. New businesses, free movies, car shows, and lots of clean up around town. We learned that Valley Head Football players and other volunteers are a big help to disabled residents. Be sure to catch the Christmas parade in December!

Anna Mae Horn is president of the Valley Head Area Women's Club.





Club members at luncheon, clockwise from left: Marsha Merrell, Shirley Shigley, Sharon Harris, Sarah Chastain, Helen Hawkins, Nena Fellger, Melody Sellers (visitor), Judy O'Daniel, Debbie Johnson, Anna Mae Horn, and Lethea Cortner.





Johnny Mann, top, and Makayla Gilbert receiving their scholarships from Valley Head Area Women's Club.

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November Community Events

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

November 1 Canyon Fest: A Celebration of Arts and Nature — Little River Canyon Field School and Interpretive Center want you to come and enjoy live music, nature and arts activities, arts demonstrations and sales, great food, vendors, children's activities and more. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. 256-782-5697.

November 1 Watercolors for Beginners – Autumn Brushstrokes — Hosted by DeSoto State Park & Little River Arts Council. Perfect for anyone who's ever said, "I can't even draw a leaf!"—no prior art experience needed. Learn simple watercolor techniques to capture the rich colors and textures of autumn leaves, trees, and cozy fall landscapes. With easy brush strokes and approachable color mixing, we'll bring the beauty of the season to life on paper. Along the way, you'll gain confidence, relax into the creative process, and leave with a collection of several autumn-themed paintings you'll be proud to share. Just bring your curiosity and a love for fall! Nature Center next to DeSoto's Country Store & Information Center on Co. Rd. 89. $55 includes all supplies. Ages 12 to adult. 2–5 p.m. Class space is limited to 10, pre-registration is required. www.littleriverartscouncil.org/autumn-watercolors.html

November 1 Cruisin for Kids — Rev up your engines for a scenic charity ride for DeKalb CAC. Open to all riders who love the open road and giving back. Call the DeKalb CAC to sign up or for more information. 256-997-9700.

November 1 Dark Skies & Starry Nights — Join the Buck's Pocket State Park naturalist for an evening under the stars as we explore the connection between stargazing, light pollution, and migratory bird conservation! Learn how artificial light affects our view of the night sky — and the incredible journeys of birds that rely on it to navigate. This all-ages program will include guided stargazing, hands-on activities, and discussions on simple ways you can help protect both our skies and wildlife! Meeting location: Point Rock Overlook parking lot. 7 p.m. Fee: $5 per person. Register here: https://reserve.alapark.com/.../dark-skies-starry-nightsbpsp

November 1 Ghost Walk — Tales of local mayhem and mysteries are coming back to Downtown Fort Payne with your spectral hosts Dr. Bloodsworth (Bill Potter) and Wysteria Gravely (Cassie Wigley)! Tickets are on sale for another chilling chapter, this time not just digging into Fort Payne's history, but branching out to DeKalb County as well! Our hosts will lead you on a moonlit stroll from the Opera House through the Downtown Historic District as you learn about our area's exciting past. Refreshments available for a donation before and after your tour. Tickets must be reserved in advance. Route covers about a mile with hills. Tickets: https://www.eventbrite.com/o/landmarks-of-dekalb-county-49043174813

November 1–2 Fort Payne Main Street Holiday Open House — Get ready for the most magical time of the year in Fort Payne! Join us for the Holiday Open House in downtown Fort Payne! Local merchants are all set to make this the ultimate shopping weekend with fantastic sales and delightful refreshments all around town. Mark your calendars, call your friends, and explore the festive charm of Fort Payne. While most merchants are participating, don't forget to check their hours and keep an eye out for extended hours and specials.

November 2 Annual Meeting 2025 — Join us for Landmarks of DeKalb County's Annual Meeting at the Fort Payne Opera House with refreshments to follow in the Richard C. Hunt Reception Hall. 2 p.m.

November 6–9 & 13–16 "Dearly Departed" — NACC Theatre presents "Dearly Departed." Support the arts and join us for a night of laughter and heart with this Southern comedy classic! Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 7 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. Phone: 256-638-4418 ext. 2218 or online: https://www.showclix.com/tickets/dearlydeparted

November 7 and 9 "Speak of Me As I Am" is presented at St. Joseph's Episcopal Church in Mentone. Prominent basso profundo singer KB Solomon presents this one-man show as a tribute to actor, singer, and activist Paul Robeson. Nov. 7 at 7 p.m. and Nov. 9 at 3 p.m. Both performances will be followed by a reception to meet the artist. Tickets can be purchased at the Mentone Market or by calling the church at 256-634-4476.

November 7 Main Street Movie Night "Jurassic World – Rebirth" — Your support helps us bring families together for a fun night at the Historic DeKalb Theatre. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Movie starts at 7 p.m. Concessions available for purchase. Tickets are FREE but must be reserved in advance! Stop by the Main Street office at 509 Gault Ave. N or call/text 256-996-2131 to reserve your seats.

November 7–8 Pottery Retreat at Andiamo Lodge — Nurture your creative spirit at our fall Pottery Retreat at Andiamo Lodge. This exclusive two-day, one-night immersive experience will introduce you to the practice of hand-building with clay, a uniquely creative technique that's incredibly easy to learn and enjoy. Instructors: Senior Food Editor Josh Miller and Lauren Scott of Wild Goose Gardens + Pottery. Includes: all supplies for two projects, a welcome cocktail, gourmet dinner, yoga class, and brunch.

November 8 Collinsville Historic Turkey Trot — Join us for food, fun, and games! An antique car and tractor show, turkey shoot, cake walk, and historic "turkey toss" from the roof of a building make this event fun for all ages. Sponsored in part by the Collinsville Historic Association. Downtown Collinsville. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. 256-524-2788.

November 8 Hands-On Wild Workshop at Tigers for Tomorrow — A day of creativity, fun, and animal enrichment! Participants design enrichment toys that will be given to animal ambassadors. From colorful cardboard creations to larger projects built with PVC and tools, there's something for all ages. Tickets: $50 for children (ages 4–11), $75 for adults. Includes all materials, lunch at the Dragonfly Café, and a guided tour of the preserve. 10 a.m.– 4 p.m.

November 8 The Pickin Post Open Mic Night – Bring your own music or guitar and join the fun! Keyboard available. $10 admission. Call for more info 256-657-3817.

November 8–9 Creative Spirit Market — Open-air art fair with live acoustic music, local and regional art, handcrafted goods, and live artist demos. Interactive art stations for kids and adults. 10 a.m.–3 p.m. each day near DeSoto State Park's picnic area (across from the Country Store). Rain or shine event. Dogs on leashes welcome. Parking $2 per vehicle.

November 8–9 Florals and Negative Space — Join artist/instructor Lucy Thomas for "My Five Favorite Flowers: Florals and Negative Space," a fun acrylic painting class at the Mentone Arts Center. Learn expressive floral painting using negative space techniques. Class limited to 10 students. Tuition $195. To register, email mentoneartscenter@gmail.com or call 256-674-3366.

November 12 Fly Tying 101 — Learn the art of fly tying and experience the thrill of catching fish with flies you've crafted yourself! Hands-on workshop with Dr. Tim Lindblom. Location: Little River Canyon Center. 5–8 p.m. Ages 14+. $35 supply fee. Info: 256-845-3548 or fieldschool@jsu.edu.

November 14 Hernando's Adventure Storytime Hike — Join DeSoto State Park staff for a meandering hike along the Azalea Cascade Interpretive Trail as you follow Hernando the raccoon's adventure. Trail is approx. .7 mile (not suitable for strollers). 4 p.m.; $2 per person; Ages 3–103. Pre-registration required.

November 15 2nd Annual Pumpkin Popup Vendor Fair Local vendors, artisans, food trucks, games, bounce houses, karaoke, and music. FREE parking (donations for Toys for Tots or Food Bank accepted). SonRise Retreat. 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

November 15 Sean of the South — Author and humorist Sean Dietrich returns to the historic Fort Payne Opera House. Music, stories, and laughter! Doors open at 4:30 p.m., show starts at 5:30 p.m. Tickets $40. Meet & greet after the show.

November 15 Hike with a Naturalist — Join the JSU Field School for a guided 2-mile hike on the Eberhart Point Trail at Little River National Preserve. Learn about local flora and fauna. Meet at 10 a.m. at the Canyon Center. Leashed dogs welcome. Register: https://jsuweb.wufoo.com/forms/zhqhi5f0xyl6nd/

November 15–16 Gun and Knife Show VFW Fairgrounds — 250 tables of guns, knives, ammo, military surplus, and tactical gear. Saturday 9 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday 10 a.m.–4 p.m.. All firearm laws apply.

November 16 May's Gulf Songwriter Series — Little River Canyon Center featuring Ordinary Elephant and Stuart Douglas. 3–5 p.m. Tickets $25 advance, $30 day of show. Rain or shine event. Coolers welcome.

November 28 Black Friday Sales — Join Fort Payne Main Street for Black Friday shopping and specials throughout downtown.

November 29 Small Business Saturday — Shop local and support your area's small businesses!

NOVEMBER 2025
AT MOON LAKE LIBRARY

MAH JONGG Tuesdays and Fridays at noon - beginners welcome.

KNITTING and CROCHET Tuesdays at 2 p.m.

SCRABBLE Wednesdays at noon.

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

Nov. 6 at 3 p.m. - Poetry Club with Dekie Hicks

Nov. 7 at 4 p.m. - Join us for First Friday at Moon Lake Campus. The library will serve mocktails with a literary twist. Donations accepted.

Nov. 8 at 10:30 a.m. - The Moon Lake Library Book Club - This month, we're reading and sharing books recommended by a friend.

Nov. 8 at 1 p.m. - Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

Nov. 12 at 2 p.m. - Tech Showcase - Come see 3-D printing in action as well as fun and practical uses for AI.

Nov. 14 at 6 p.m. - Friday Night @ the Movies - "Superman" (Rated PG-13, 2025)

Nov. 18 from 10 a.m.-12 p.m. - Children's crafts at the library with Ms. Lynn

Nov. 22 at 1 p.m. - Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

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

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Open every Wednesday to Mentone/ Valley Head/ Hammondville residents from 9-10:30 a.m.

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

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Bent Trees *(continued from page 1)*

called cairns. You can still find them in many parks, reminding us of less sophisticated navigation. Slash marks on trees also indicated the continuation of the trails, water sources, and directions of travel.

But what we are focusing on here is trail trees. The most iconic trail tree in Mentone has to be at the entrance to Bankhead Cemetery. The exact age of this oak is difficult to determine, but it has seen a couple hundred sunrises for sure. This tree probably marked the cemetery, but it also could have been a marker for the Old Summerville Road from Mentone to Summerville, Georgia. This road is still visible but not usable between Mentone Community Church and the tree.

Burial places were often marked by trail trees, as were ceremonial sites. Ridges were favorite trails, because travelers didn't have to forge streams. Walking a ridge will bring you to some older trees that may not have been cut over. A visit to our library might yield old maps that others have already traveled. Books such as Indian Trails of the Warrior Mountains by Ricky Butch Walker and Lamar Marshall give illustrated maps and references to North and Central Alabama. Mentone is not mentioned by name, but you can see maps of the area.

As late as 100 years ago, vehicles were scarce on the mountain. Trails for wagons and such were still the main means of transportation. Most modes of transportation had a critter pulling it, and that critter needed water. Marking trails and showing where you could water them and refresh yourself was critical. Still, the similarity of multiple bent trees on our property, each pointing toward springs or ridge trails, invites deeper investigation.

Other names for trail trees, such as signal trees and Indian marker trees, shine a new light on their importance — locating campsites, food sources, natural medicines, and boundaries, to name a few.

How were these trees formed? A young tree was bent over at an angle to identify what was being marked. The bent portion was lashed to a stake in the ground and left to naturally mark what you wanted. The lashing decayed with time, releasing the tree to continue to grow up again, but with a crook in it forever.

As you can see, these bent trees served a lot of purposes, and you can find them if you do your homework. There are several groups across the country that search out trees in their areas, and a couple even chart them across the entire country. An example is Mountain Stewards / Indian Trail Tree Project. This organization (based in north Georgia) maintains a database of "Indian marker trees" (also called trail trees) and invites public submissions. Maybe someone from our area could start documentation around Mentone. Submissions of coordinates, photos, compass orientation, and descriptive notes all assist in assessing whether a bent tree is likely intentional or merely a natural oddity.

I have only been interested in these for a few years, and I suspect others have preceded me. I hope I might stir some new interest.









— READER SURVEY —

We want your thoughts on The Groundhog!

1. Where do you get your copy of The Groundhog?

☐ I have a subscription

☐ I pick it up in the community:

Where do you pick up your copy of The Groundhog?

_____

2. Which best describes you?

☐ Full-time resident of Mentone

☐ Part-time resident of Mentone

☐ I visit Mentone often

☐ Other (please specify) _____

3. Complete this sentence: "The best thing about The Groundhog is ..."

_____

4. Please rate The Groundhog's content:

	I never read this	I glance at this	I read this occasionally	I look forward to reading this	This is one of the best parts of reading The Groundhog
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RHODODENDRON GARDEN CLUB	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
MOON LAKE LIBRARY	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
LITTLE RIVER ARTS COUNCIL	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
MENTONE ARTS CENTER	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
MENTONE UKES	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
THE MOUNTAIN KITCHEN	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
MENTONE MAYOR'S COLUMN	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
VALLEY HEAD MAYOR'S COLUMN	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
COMMUNITY EVENTS	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. Please check all that apply:

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☐ I follow The Groundhog on Facebook.

6. Any suggestions? Something you'd like to see more of in The Groundhog? Less of? Thanks for sharing!

_____

If you would like to be entered into a prize drawing, please provide your contact information below:

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If you'd rather complete the survey online, please scan the QR code.

Thank you for your input!

The Mountain Kitchen
Tread Lightly on Thanksgiving Traditions



BY REBECCA HENDERSON, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Personal food preferences and traditions seem stronger at Thanksgiving than at any other time of year. Heaven forbid we introduce any new side dishes, desserts, or versions of the dressing (a.k.a. stuffing) to unwitting family and friends. It's a bold move often met with resistance. I don't advise it unless you present both the old favorite and the new option (no more than one per year) side by side and nonchalantly mention you've made something extra — don't announce your exciting new option and NEVER present it as an improvement over what they've been eating every Thanksgiving! Just set it down and don't call attention to it. If they like it, it needs to be their idea.

We love sweet potato pie, and that's what my husband's mother always cooked at Thanksgiving (and she always served a baking hen instead of turkey, which she thought was too expensive). I'm onboard with a sweet potato pie; however, I do adore a certain pumpkin pie recipe that came from a long ago coworker whose name I can't recall. It's rich and has more than a hint of spice. And while I do love homemade piecrust, my tradition for this recipe is a frozen one.

GO-TO PUMPKIN PIE

The cream gives this pie a velvety texture. Dress it up with a dollop of whipped cream in the center after the pie has cooled, sprinkled with ground nutmeg. Store this pie in the refrigerator. It is actually better the next day.

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
½ cup sugar
⅔ cup packed light brown sugar
⅛ teaspoon ground ginger
⅛ teaspoon ground clove
¾ teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon allspice
½ teaspoon salt
3 tablespoons molasses
1½ cups canned solid pumpkin
3 large eggs
1 cup heavy whipping cream
1 (9-inch) frozen piecrust

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees, placing a baking sheet on middle rack to preheat.
2. In a large bowl, blend first 8 ingredients with a whisk.
3. Whisk in remaining ingredients, ending with whipping cream.
4. Pour into frozen crust.
5. Bake 10 minutes, then reduce oven to 325 degrees and bake another 40 minutes or until just set in the middle.

An Intriguing New Favorite

My friend and fellow Mentone resident Pam Hudson cooks good things. If she says something is delicious, I know I'll love it. Here's one of her autumn favorites that I had never seen before. Pam says, "It's been an appetite appeaser and crowd pleaser. It doubles as a side dish or dessert with ice cream on top."

APPLE-CHEESE BAKE

(Recipe from the famous Gift Horse restaurant in Foley, Alabama)

2 cans Lucky Leaf sliced apples (not pie filling), drained
2 sticks butter, softened
1½ cups sugar
1 pound Velveeta cheese (cut into 1-inch cubes), room temperature
1½ cups self-rising flour

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Grease a 9- x 13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
3. Place drained apples in bottom of baking dish.
4. Cream butter, sugar, and cubed cheese with an electric mixer. Beat in flour in several additions.
5. Spread mixture over top of sliced apples, and bake at 350 degrees until top is golden brown. Don't overcook.

Maple Never Disappoints

Mentone's Jay and Mary Ann Robbins contribute so much to our town. They're always ready to lend a hand. When I asked them if they had any favorite autumn or Thanksgiving recipes, they sent this lovely, flavorful, yet light cookie. I love the fact that no mixer is required.

MAPLE-PECAN COOKIES

1½ sticks butter
2 cups all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon baking soda
⅓ cup maple syrup
1 egg
2 tablespoons orange juice
1½ teaspoons maple extract
1½ teaspoons vanilla extract
⅔ cup granulated sugar
½ cup brown sugar
2 cups chopped pecans

1. Position the shelves in the upper and lower thirds of the oven. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. In a 3-quart, heavy-bottomed saucepan, melt the butter and set aside to cool to tepid.
3. Whisk together the flour, salt, and baking soda.
4. Using a wooden spoon, mix the maple syrup into the melted butter. Blend in the egg, orange juice, and extracts. Whisk in the sugars until well combined and free of lumps. Stir in the dry ingredients in three additions, then fold in the nuts.
5. Drop mounds of dough the size of large walnuts onto the cookie sheets, 2 inches apart. Bake for 12 to 14 minutes, until the edges just begin to brown. Remove from the oven, and let stand for 2 to 3 minutes before transferring to wire racks to cool.

Happy Thanksgiving to All!

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Hit a Mountain Bike Trail Adventure at DeSoto

BY TIM EBERHART

Mountain biking may seem to be for thrill seekers and risk takers, but four DeSoto State Park trails are perfect for those with a more casual approach to the sport.

Gilliam Loop and Chalet Trail share a trailhead on the road that leads from the Lodge to DeSoto's rental cabins and chalets. Running parallel to the paved road, the 0.7-mile Chalet Trail provides a way through the woods from the trailhead to a spot near the lodge parking lot.

Gilliam's Loop literally loops around the CCC Road. About 1.8 miles of the loop are on the east side of the road, and about 1.4 miles are on the west side, for a total of 3.2 miles.

The CCC Road is an out-and-back bike ride of about 3.5 miles. Sometimes referred to as Unfinished Bridge Road, it goes from the trailhead to Straight Creek, where tall rock bridge components built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the late 1930s are found.

This is a beginner-friendly trail because of its lack of difficult turns and obstacles. It's easy to walk your bike if you find the steep section too tough for riding.

The Family Loop is a surprisingly flat path. The trailhead, called Lost Falls Trailhead on Google Maps, is on higher ground on the northwest side of the park. The name is fitting, as the 1.9-mile trail features mostly smooth surfaces. Children who are good at riding a bicycle can make their way around the loop. However, that doesn't mean it's not a fun trail for bikers of any skill level. Both hikers and bikers use it to get to the fabulous White Trail.

Remember, while mostly smooth, the Chalet Trail, Gilliam Loop, CC Road and Family Loop still have rock- and root-filled areas. So wear a helmet, and take it easy on your first loop or two. And to prevent erosion, avoid mountain biking on any trail when it's muddy.

For links to maps and more details, visit https://southernoutings.com/deso-to-state-parks-beginner-friendly-mountain-biking-trails/

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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