



THE GROUNDHOG

“Neighborly News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain”

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

Miracle Pottery Returns with a Renewed Vision



BY REBECCA HENDERSON
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

After a 2023 fire forced its closure, Miracle Pottery is reopening its doors, bringing renewed energy and its unique artistry back to our community. The pottery shop, owned by Valinda Miracle, is

making a fresh start after the tragic loss of the property’s Tree House Cottages and the pottery showroom. For Jess Goggans, beloved local musician and the shop’s marketing and expansion coordinator, the reopening is more than a business milestone — it’s a story of resilience and community. “It’s really just one of those things,” Goggans said. Goggans had run into Miracle at the New Tiger’s Inn recently. “She’d [Valinda] had a stroke and now she’s starting to feel better. She said, ‘I sure would like to open my pottery shop back up.’ And I said, ‘Well, I’d love to help you.’ And so we did.”

A Careful Rebuild

While the reopening celebration has already taken place, Miracle Pottery is still in the process of rebuilding its full showroom and expanding its offerings. Regular hours are expected to begin in April, likely the first

weekend of the month, with the shop open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. Behind the scenes, production is underway. Each piece of pottery takes roughly two to three weeks to create, making the rebuilding process both hands-on and time-intensive.

Old Meets New

The reopening will feature a blend of past and present work. Some pieces that survived the fire are being preserved as part of what Goggans calls the “Resurrection Collection,” offering customers a tangible connection to the shop’s history and survival. At the same time, Miracle Pottery is introducing new work, including a “Hemlock Series,” representing the next generation of the brand. Not all previous designs will return, as certain glazes and techniques are being retired in favor of new creative directions.

(See “Miracle Pottery,” Page 5)



Miracle Pottery owner Valinda Miracle speaking with some of her customers. PHOTOS BY WILLIAM PITCHER



Rhea Allen & Cloudland Framing: A Perfect Fit

BY JAY S. ROBBINS

As the owner of Cloudland Framing in Mentone, Rhea Allen is one of those lucky people whose hobby is their work. “I started framing in college, in a shop in Atlanta,” she says. “That was back in 2010 or so, and it definitely made an impression.” Over the years, even as she pursued other lines of work, she’d stop in a frame shop to see if they needed help. If she was lucky, they did. Then in 2022 Tom Emory, owner of Mountain Framing just outside Mentone, posted on Facebook that he was selling his business. “My mother, who has a house up here, sent me the Facebook post and said, ‘Do you want to do this?’ I was living in Atlanta, post-Covid, trying to figure out how I wanted to make my life look different, and I thought, you

know, this could be the perfect opportunity. So I did it. I moved up here, bought Tom’s inventory, and started Cloudland Framing. I studied art in college and feel like this is a good creative outlet for me.”

One day last month, her work table was covered with drawings and paintings that were headed to the Taste of Mentone auction, an annual fundraiser for MERF (Mentone Educational Resources Foundation). The pictures are donated. Sometimes the artist who donates the piece of art comes in and picks out a frame from her inventory, or they bring in their own frame. Rhea donates her time to readying the works for sale and contributes any materials she can. Otherwise, materials are offered at cost. “This is not a money maker for me,” she says.

(See “Rhea Allen,” Page 11)

Get Inspired! Join Spring and Summer NACC Classes at Moon Lake

Northeast Alabama Community College is bringing a wide range of engaging community classes to the Moon Lake Campus this spring and summer, offering opportunities to learn new skills, explore creative hobbies, and connect with others in a relaxed setting. Registration for summer classes begins April 1, and space is limited. To register, visit <https://www.nacc.edu/moon-lake>.

The spring season continues with the Mahjong for Beginners Series, taught by Rachael Graham. The three-week course meets April 10, 17, and 24 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. and introduces participants to Mahjong, the classic tile-based game that originated in China in the 19th century. The class provides all supplies. Cost is \$25, payable by cash or check on the first day of class.

Photography enthusiasts can sharpen their skills in Smartphone Photography, taught by David Haynes. The six-week class will meet Thursdays from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., May 7 through June 11. Students will learn techniques for photographing people, landscapes, and nature close-ups, along with simple photo editing using tools already available on their phones. Participants will take photos each week and review them together during class, concluding the series by selecting and printing a favorite image. Cost is \$25, payable by cash or check on the first day of class. Examples of Haynes’ iPhone photography can be viewed at <https://gsbs.smugmug.com/IPhone-Samples>.

Summer Classes

Summer offerings begin June 5 with a free Vegetable Gardening class, taught by Billy Day from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The class covers how to start a vegetable garden from scratch, what vegetables grow best locally, and when to plant them. Creativity takes center stage with the Summer of the Living Land Art Series, taught by Caroline Moore. The six-week series meets Thursdays from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., June 18 through July 30 (no class July 2). Participants will create nature-inspired projects, including large paper flowers, mini paintings of native pollinators, clay leaf impressions, and simple wooden frames, ending with a reflective mandala activity using natural materials. Space is limited to 12, so registration is suggested. Cost

(See “NACC Classes,” Page 5)





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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Groundhog woodcut courtesy of Meg Justice/Bee Spring Studio

FOLLOW US ON

Mentone Matters
Saying Goodbye to a Mayor, Leader, and Friend

BY MAYOR ROB HAMMOND

On the last day of February, DeKalb County lost a true public servant with the passing of Collinsville Mayor Johnny Traffanstedt.

Johnny was more than a mayor for the Town of Collinsville. He contributed to his community in many ways, from organizations such as the athletic club to the Jaycees. He earned the trust of the citizens, who elected him to serve as their mayor for 17 years. He had the town’s best interests at heart, and Collinsville benefited from his leadership.

There was another side of Johnny that few people saw. For almost the entire time he served as mayor, he was also president of our DeKalb County Mayor’s Association. This group includes the mayor of every town and city in DeKalb, from the smallest to the largest. As you can imagine, the needs and concerns of these municipalities vary greatly. When issues arose affecting all the municipalities, Johnny helped us reach a consensus and speak with one voice.

As president of this eclectic group, Johnny led us with common sense, humor, understanding, and a forward-looking attitude. He encouraged

us to share our common problems and solutions.

We all respected Johnny. We will miss his leadership, but most of all we will miss his friendship. Our prayers go out to his family and community.

You will soon see some changes taking place at the Moon Lake Campus. In the coming weeks, the trailer that sits behind the Moon Lake Library will be moved to make way for a new project. The Town of Mentone had an agreement with the DeSoto Rescue Squad for the past few years, allowing them to use the trailer at no charge to store equipment and related items. That agreement ended last year, and the rescue squad is making other arrangements for its storage needs.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the DeSoto Rescue Squad for the important work its members do in Mentone and the surrounding area. This is an exceptional organization, and we have been proud to support their work through the years. We encourage all citizens to consider supporting their efforts; contact Captain Michael Stone at captain@desotorecue.com to learn how.

When the space is cleared, it will make way for the new project I mentioned. You will read in the coming weeks about the groundbreaking for a

new addition to the Moon Lake Campus, to be built in the area behind the library. The Moon Lake Arts Collective will be a large public access pottery and arts studio, designed for education, workshops, and community connection. A project of the Little River Arts Council, it will have a major impact on our community. It will provide many arts-based opportunities for our residents, while also giving visitors more reasons to come to Mentone and support our economy.

In other Moon Lake Campus news, the Town advertised for bids in February for renovation work on the main campus building. Through grants and local dollars, this project will improve access to the building, which houses shops and galleries. Improvements to wiring, plumbing, bathrooms, and other infrastructure will ensure the building remains open to the public for many years to come. It’s important that we preserve this historic structure while making it available for practical purposes today and well into the future.

As the deadline for this issue of The Groundhog neared, the Town Council was set to open bids from interested contractors. I hope to announce the winning bidder in next month’s issue, along with a potential schedule for the renovation. 🐾

From the Editor
What If It All Goes Right?

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH, EDITOR

It has happened to me countless times, and probably happened to you as well. A major decision lies before you, and your mind goes to every possible negative outcome it can find.

“What if I make the wrong decision and everything goes terribly wrong?” you ponder. Your mind takes you to all sorts of dark places, unsettling outcomes, and negative possibilities.

What does this do to our decision-making ability? To begin with, it robs us of clarity. When we focus on the potential negatives, we have difficulty seeing the big picture. We hone in on the bad “what ifs,” and our minds become cloudy.

Further, it prevents us from having a balanced view of our decision’s

impact. Dwelling on the negative potentials fills us with dread and can even lead to decision paralysis. Failing to make a decision at all is, in and of itself, a decision, right?

What if we reframe this process and ask ourselves, “What if it all goes right?” We should never ignore the potential downsides of a decision gone wrong, but starting with the positive can have a significant impact on how our minds view the stakes we are dealing with.

I read an article on this topic recently by writer and entrepreneur Josh Spector. He says, “It’s easy to fall into the trap of thinking only about what might go wrong when you make a decision. You focus on what will happen if your decision fails and obsess over how that failure will feel.”

When we start by imagining what could go right with our decisions, those feelings of failure shift to feelings of success, power, and accomplishment. And we all know that positive feelings can impact how we view our circumstances, how we think, how we build relationships, and how we approach life in general.

- Here’s a recap of Spector’s article:
1. Assume success, not failure.
 2. Look for reasons you can, not reasons you can’t.
 3. Trust you won’t fall off a cliff.
 4. Believe in others.

How can focusing on the *powerful possibilities* instead of the *potential problems* impact a decision you need to make today? Drop me a note or comment when this article appears on readthegroundhog.com. 🐾

March 16 Snowfall
Blankets the Mountain



Photos by Cynthia Stinson



ONE SMART PUP: Reader Rita Chapman’s dog Maggie is apparently an avid Groundhog fan. Maggie particularly enjoyed last month’s regenerative agriculture piece. Maggie, tell all your canine friends to subscribe! (Photo submitted by Rita’s daughter Anna Chapman)



Experience Spring’s Glory at Little River Canyon

BY REBECCA HENDERSON
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Spring arrives gently on Lookout Mountain, first in flashes of green along the canyon rim, then in a full chorus of birdsong, wildflowers, and rushing water. At the edge of Little River Canyon National Preserve, the Little River Canyon Center becomes both a gateway and a gathering place where a simple afternoon outdoors can turn into something richer.

April is when that energy peaks and the Canyon Center’s calendar offers plenty of ways to enjoy it.

For details on each event, such as fees, registration information, and supplies, please visit Jacksonville State University’s calendar page: <https://www.jsu.edu/epic/EventCC.html>.

Hike with a Naturalist:
Bridge Trail to Little Falls
Friday, April 3 | 10 a.m.–1 p.m.
A guided 3-mile hike with the JSU Field School through Little River Canyon

National Preserve, exploring local plants, wildlife, and natural history.

Canyon Kids: Insects
Wednesday, April 8 | 10:30–11:30 a.m.
A hands-on outdoor program for children ages 3 through third grade, focused on learning about insects through exploration and activity.

Canyon Explorers:
Earthwise Explorers
Tuesday, April 14 | 10 a.m.–1 p.m.
An interactive outdoor learning experience for ages 8–12, centered on building confidence, curiosity, and environmental awareness.

Canyon Explorers:
Earthwise Explorers
Wednesday, April 15 | 10 a.m.–1 p.m.
A second opportunity for ages 8–12 to take part in this hands-on program exploring nature and practical outdoor skills.

Hike with a Naturalist:
Little Falls Trail
Saturday, April 18 | 10 a.m.–12 p.m.
A shorter, guided 1.5-mile hike offering



an accessible way to experience the canyon’s spring landscape.

Fly Fishing 101 at the Canyon Center
Sunday, April 19 | 2–5 p.m.
An introductory workshop covering gear, knots, fly selection, and casting, with hands-on instruction for beginners (ages 14+).

All of this unfolds during one of the most fleeting and beautiful windows of the year. How fortunate we are to have this natural resource so near. 🐾



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A TRUE TREASURE ON THE LAKE! This home on Lake Lahusage in Mentone offers 2 BR 2 BA with newly refinished hardwood floors, a wonderful kitchen with granite countertops. The large primary bedroom showcases an expansive rock fireplace. Enjoy relaxing days on the covered porch. Fish off the custom rock retaining wall. \$490,000 MLS#21907460



WELCOME TO MENTONE’S FERNWOOD WEDDING CHAPEL AND RECEPTION HALL! The chapel offers vaulted ceiling with so much charm, dressing area and restroom. The reception hall offers a full commercial kitchen, grand open space, loft, restroom and dressing area. Fully furnished! Detached storage building. \$375,000 MLS#21903719



READY TO MOVE IN! This charming 2BR/2BA cedar & stone cabin offers the perfect mountain retreat on 1.23± wooded acres. This one-level home features a beautiful all-wood interior, an eat-in kitchen with granite countertops and new appliances, and a cozy fireplace. The property also includes a fenced yard with a fire pit, a detached two-car garage/shop, and a separate detached carport. \$425,000 MLS#21911937



RARE FIND! 1 acre in Crestline Subdivision, adjacent to the Boy Scout camp in Mentone. Property includes a Forest River Cedar Creek Cottage 40CBAR—luxury destination camper with high ceilings, large windows, full kitchen, bath, and residential-style comfort. Two spacious outbuildings. Live stress-free in the camper while you build. A unique chance to own land and ready-to-use amenities in a sought-after location! \$299,999 MLS# 21905345



MENTONE BROW VIEWS at its finest! Offering 2 Bedroom, 2 Baths, wood floors and ceilings and full of Mentone character. The current owner uses the property as a split rental offering 2 separate areas however, there is a door between the two areas that connect them allowing the property to be used in its entirety. \$439,000. #21843628



WHITETAIL ON THE PARKWAY— named WHITETAIL for a reason — Deer are frequently seen at this 3 BR, 2 BA cabin centrally located to downtown Mentone, DeSoto Falls, and DeSoto State Park. Covered patio with hot tub and the wildlife that enjoy the area. Sold furnished for your immediate enjoyment! \$349,900 MLS#21910412



LITTLE RIVER VENUE is ready for your viewing! This previous restaurant with kitchen equipment, seating, and grills. Located on DeSoto Parkway. \$350,000 MLS# 21870315



NESTLED IN THE HEART OF MENTONE, this charming 3BR/2BA home sits on a beautifully landscaped 1.5-acre lot with seasonal views of the brow. Come experience mountain living at its most magical. \$397,900 MLS# 21901861



ESCAPE TO THE WOODS. This secluded cabin retreat is nestled among towering trees and features 3 BR 2 BA, an open-concept living space with exposed wood, and a fully equipped kitchen. Walking distance to downtown Mentone. \$359,900 | MLS #21903598



The Falls of Spring

BY DEJOLY LABRIER

I stand at the metal railing overlooking the Little River Canyon waterfall, energized by the scene before me. From this high overlook, the water plunges into the canyon below, echoing against ancient rock walls that have shaped this landscape for generations.

The clean, damp air drifts upward, and I breathe it in deeply, filling my lungs with the sweetness and power of the water rushing over the rocks.

Life springs outward from the water, spreading into the surrounding grasslands and forests. In its wake, the earth produces abundance — wildflowers, moss, and even delicate Chanterelle mushrooms that quietly thrive in the damp soil. Water nourishes everything it touches, creating an environment where life can flourish.

Across cultures and traditions, water has long been associated with purification and renewal. It is often used in rituals meant to wash away what no longer serves us — symbolizing rebirth, transformation, and the promise of beginning again. Water cleanses not only the land, but something deeper within us as well. Perhaps that is why a long bath or lingering beneath the shower can feel so restorative, as if the water carries away more than the dust of the day.

Children instinctively understand this connection. They splash joyfully in puddles after a rain, delighting in the simple magic of water falling from the sky.

Lingering at the various falls in the area brings an awareness of both the life-giving nature of water and its immense power. There is a quiet kinship we feel with these falls — a reminder that the same forces that nourish life can also reshape the land with tremendous force.

Whenever the spring rains arrive, my first thought is always the same: the falls must be spectacular right now, roaring with renewed life. More often than not, I find myself clearing my schedule and heading toward the nearest overlook, drawn by the desire to experience its beauty firsthand.

Sometimes I go simply to listen.

Standing there, I close my eyes and imagine the water pouring over me, washing away the clutter of thought and worry. In those quiet moments, a sense of clarity arrives — gentle, steady, and deeply restorative. The falls remind me that renewal is always possible. Sometimes all we need is to pause long enough to hear the water rushing past and remember that life, like the river, is always moving forward. 🍃



Medicare and Emergency and Urgently Needed Care

BY LYNN HIXON

You never know when an emergency will arise, but you can be prepared. Learn the difference between an emergency medical condition and an urgently needed care situation. Medicare covers emergency ambulance services. (In limited cases, it covers non-emergency in any situation when your health is in serious danger and you cannot be transported safely by other means.) If your trip is scheduled when your health is not in immediate danger, it is not considered an emergency.

Please note that the ambulance is only covered if it takes you to and from certain locations. For example, from any place where need arises to the nearest appropriate hospital.

Emergency Medical Condition – Symptoms severe enough that someone with an average knowledge of health and medicine could reasonably expect your health to be in serious danger if you don’t get medical attention right away.

Urgently Needed Care – Medically necessary and immediately required as a result of an unforeseen illness, injury, or condition. Not reasonable for you to wait to get needed care.

These definitions are especially important if you have a Medicare Advantage plan! There are certain protections for you if you need emergency or urgent care outside of your plan’s network. Original Medicare covers emergency room services anywhere in the U.S. Medicare Advantage plans must also cover emergency room services anywhere in the country. Your plan cannot make you see an in-network provider or get a referral. It must also cover needed follow-up care related to the medical emergency if delaying it would endanger your health. You have the right to appeal if your plan does not cover your emergency care.

Please call Lynn Hixon, state health insurance assistance program (SHIP) coordinator at the DeKalb County Council on Aging, at 256-845-8590 if you have any questions. 🍃



ALL Kids Insurance Program Marks 25 Years

As Alabama’s ALL Kids program marks its 25th anniversary, it continues to serve as a critical source of health coverage for children in DeKalb County.

Part of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), ALL Kids provides low-cost insurance to children under 19 whose families earn too much for Medicaid but still need help affording care. In rural communities, the program helps fill gaps in access to regular checkups, prescriptions,

dental and vision services, and hospital care.

Health officials say programs like ALL Kids are especially important in areas with fewer healthcare providers, helping ensure children can receive preventive care close to home.

To qualify, children must be Alabama residents, uninsured, and meet income guidelines.

More information or applications are available online at: <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/allkids/> 🍃

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Miracle Pottery (continued from page 1)

Expanding the Experience
The vision for Miracle Pottery extends beyond its previous scope. Goggans said the shop plans to incorporate live music and a food truck called Easy as Pie, expected to launch in May. The menu will feature a variety of sweet and savory pies, adding another layer to the visitor experience. “We’re going to be introducing music and doing all kinds of different things. So it’s going to be really fun,” she said.
Additionally, Miracle Pottery plans to offer an online platform where shoppers can browse the catalog and purchase pieces beyond the physical storefront.
The reopening represents more than the return of a business. It is a symbol of resilience characteristic of our mountain. Fire has claimed a handful of beloved structures and businesses over the years. As Miracle Pottery begins its next chapter, the focus is not only on rebuilding what

was lost, but on creating something new that is rooted in craftsmanship, creativity, and community. 🍷

MIRACLE POTTERY
7871 AL-117, Valley Head, AL



A vibrant example of the shop’s creations. PHOTOS BY WILLIAM PITCHER

NACC Classes (continued from page 1)

is \$25, payable by cash or check on the first day of class.
Also beginning June 18 is the Moon Lake Dance Series, taught by Kayleigh Smith from 10 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. Each week introduces a new style of dance, including cha cha, waltz, swing, foxtrot, rumba, and tango. The six sessions will be held June 18 and 25 and July 9, 16, 23, and 30. No prior experience is required, and dancers of all levels are welcome. Cost is \$25, payable by cash or check on the first day of class.
Additional workshops include Cheesecakes, taught by Taylor Young on June 26 from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Participants will learn the basics of making cheesecake, including ingredients and baking tips. This class is free.
Garden lovers can also attend Container Gardening on July 10 from

10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., taught by Riley Holland. Participants will learn how simple and enjoyable container gardening can be. Attendees should bring a 10–12-inch container, while soil and flowers will be provided. Cost is \$25. Cash or checks due the day of class.
The summer series concludes July 31 with Alabama Cottage Law & Food Safety, offered by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and the DeKalb County Extension Office. Meeting from 10 a.m. to noon, the course explains the requirements for producing and selling certain non-hazardous foods from home under Alabama’s Cottage Food Law. Cost is \$25, payable to the Extension Office. Cash or checks due the day of class.
For more information about NACC classes at Moon Lake Campus, contact Dr. Julia Everett at everettj@nacc.edu or 256-228-6001, ext. 2226. 🍷

EASTER EGG HUNT

SATURDAY, APRIL 4
2PM TO 4PM

MENTONE COMMUNITY CHURCH
90 SUMMERVILLE RD

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Sponsored by Mentone Community Church, St Joseph's Episcopal, and Moon Lake Baptist

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

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

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

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MERF: Still Enriching Lives After More Than 30 Years

BY KATIE HAND

Sometimes when you return to where you're from, you end up receiving far more than you ever expected.

One of the things I appreciate most about living here in Mentone is the quiet. The absence of big traffic and airplanes is something I truly cherish. When I lived in Virginia, the constant hustle and bustle eventually became part of my nervous system. After a while, I hardly noticed how much it affected me. Up here on the mountain, that noise is replaced by birds, the wind moving through the trees, and the long echo of the train down in the valley.

I was thinking about this the other day while my son, my mom, and I were cleaning out the secret garden at the MERF House. At that moment I felt extremely blessed to be able to give my son this kind of childhood. There have certainly been sacrifices along the way, but the reward is something that can never be taken away. I say all of this because MERF has been adding value to people's lives for more than 30 years now. Good energy has a way of creating a lasting impact. In this strange world we're living in right now, it's comforting to know that there are still good things happening that create positive change close to home.

Our recent Taste of the Mountain Art Auction was another reminder of how



special this community is in so many ways. The evening was fun, lively, and full of generosity. Guests enjoyed an array of artwork and unique experiences generously donated by talented artists and local supporters.

The food was amazing, with authentic flavors that made the evening feel warm and welcoming from start to finish. It was also meaningful to know that every bid and contribution benefits our local community and helps MERF carry on the good work. A big thank you to ALL the volunteers, businesses, and artists that made this event possible!

Proceeds from the auction help support a variety of important programs. Funds go toward supplies for our art classroom so students can explore their creativity, field trip expenses to help expand learning beyond the classroom, and teacher grants that support experiential education. The auction also helps fund our senior lunches, ensuring we can continue providing a space for fellowship and joy for members of our community. In addition, these funds help us maintain and care for our newly restored historic home so it can continue serving the community for years to come.

We're also excited to share that starting May 1, the MERF House will be available to rent for gatherings such as parties, business meetings, and other events. It's a beautiful space for bringing people together. Anyone interested



Josiah Hand, son of MERF Executive Director Katie Hand, and Katie's mother, Karen Norton, help give the MERF grounds a spring spruce-up.

in renting can reach out using MERF's contact information.

Another opportunity currently open is the Carter Holland Scholarship. High school seniors from Valley Head High School, Fort Payne High School, and Cornerstone Christian are encouraged to apply. The scholarship awards \$1,000 to selected students who demonstrate the same qualities Carter exemplified: leadership, kindness, strong character, and authenticity in their community. Applicants must be residents of Mentone or Valley Head. Students interested in applying can contact their school counselor for more information about the application process.

As always, we are grateful for the support of our community. Your participation and care go far. May this spring bring new life to all! 🌱

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

▶▶▶▶

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April 1 at MERF House 11:30 a.m.

April 29 at MERF House 11:30 a.m.

May 6 at MERF House 11:30 a.m.

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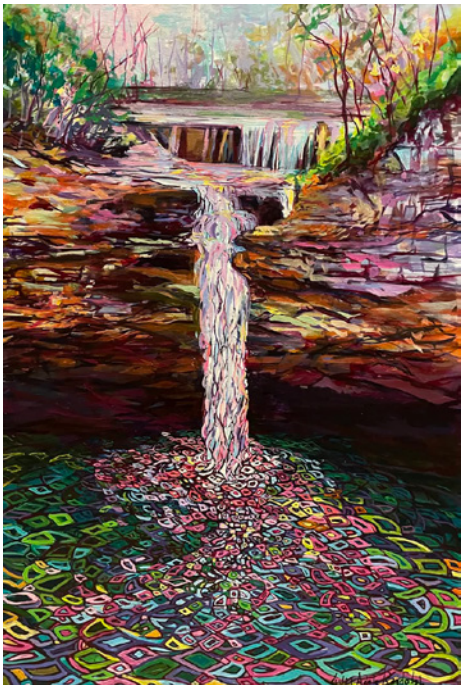


MERF Auction Reaches Goal with Spirited Night of Art, Food, and Generosity

The 2026 Taste of the Mountain and Art Auction not only helped MERF meet its fundraising goal, but it did so in a way that left attendees lingering, laughing, and already anticipating next year’s gathering. The sold-out event at Camp Alpine for Boys resulted from the hands of many volunteers who put in their time to make the night well organized and the perfect venue to showcase the generously donated auction items.

The evening’s momentum owed much to auctioneer Ben Shurett, whose presence was equal parts entertaining and strategic. Shurett kept the room buzzing, weaving humor and timing into the bidding process so seamlessly that, at times, a few enthusiastic participants found themselves nearly bidding against themselves. The many tempting pieces and other items, such as destination packages, made it easy for everyone to pick out a favorite. A standout moment came with the sale of the top-selling piece of the evening, a painting of DeSoto Falls by Mentone artist Lydia Randolph, inspired by a foggy evening walk with her dog.

The array of food from local eateries drew rave reviews. And if the savory offerings set the stage, the desserts



Painting by Lydia Randolph

seemed to work a kind of magic of their own, sweetening the mood and perhaps the bids as well.

Proceeds raised by MERF will directly benefit local art education and other community-centered programs supported by the foundation, ensuring that the creativity celebrated that evening continues to thrive in our area for generations. 🐻



Auction attendees had so many great pieces to browse.

My American Experience A New Alabama Home and Freedom to Explore



BY MARIA SHOCKLEY

“I am Miss America!” I said as I stood on the porch of my parents’ newly purchased home, surrounded by my childhood gang on tricycles and bikes. I proudly held a salute to the sky. We were free to roam and dream of being heroes in our own lives. We were still too young

to get on the yellow bus but we were aware we had something ahead of us and were part of it. We could be loud and laugh. We could explore the woods and creeks, find sticks with markings, maybe bug trails. We had imagined they were native maps.

And early lessons still resonate: be brave and do not take what does not belong to you. Always make sure your dolls are safe while you’re off to build a fort. Avoid lying, because you will always get in trouble. Parents tell you to ask God when they don’t have the answer. There was a fearlessness in us because we felt safe, and the stories told to us were of people who fought their fear to find a new home.

A Place to Keep Dreaming and Roaming

I came to Alabama almost three years ago, and I am still playing in the

woods. I have a gang of ladies I call the “Fabulous Alabama Bingo Gals.” Just yesterday, I was at Buck’s Pocket State Park instead of finding sticks. I find photographs to take. The history here, such as the story of Granny Dollar, reverberates through the wood trails. I found myself stopped by a flooded road. A couple came by me, also taking photos of foaming water washing over the road’s surface.

I love that people here are open and kind to strangers. Plus, with my gray hair I’m not likely to be mistaken for a black bear. We so easily fell into conversation. When they learned that it was my first visit, they offered and were so kind to let me follow them for miles to the other entrance to the park. Another adventure. I made new friends whom I will be happy to see at our Mentone events.

I feel that I have come to an area that

has safely preserved its values — freedom to explore in a land where residents take pride in their faith, community, and history. 🐻

The goal of the “My American Experience” essay project is to collect the thoughts of those in our communities about what it means to be an American.

To participate, email your essay to groundhognews@yahoo.com

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Rhododendron Garden Club Hitting the Wildflower Trail

BY MELLANIE TUTTLE

Last month, members of the Rhododendron Garden Club (RGC) and guests carpoled to the Shirley Miller Wildflower Trail (a.k.a. “The Pocket”). After heavy rains, the road into the park can be an adventure, but the trekkers prevailed. They were rewarded with views of showy spring ephemerals, as trout lilies and trillium popped through layers of wet leaves. Snacks also seemed well appreciated. Next, the redbuds along Tutwiler and Highway 117 gave an amazing display of magenta. The bright greens of nearby deciduous trees were ethereal. Northeast Alabama shines in spring beauty.

The Pocket’s trout lilies offer delicate, nodding yellow flowers with petals and sepals bent back to expose the bronze undertones. The maroon markings on the leaf also lend themselves to its Greek-inspired Latin name, *Erythronium americanum*. The genus name is from the Greek *erythros*, meaning red; *americanum* declares the trout lily a native species. The leaf’s resemblance to the brook trout inspired its common name, and sure enough, there are similarities between the leaves and the fish. Leaves occur in pairs. A single, unmottled leaf indicates the plant is young and not yet ready to flower; a pair of mottled leaves indicates a mature, flowering plant. They thrive in colonies in forest understories and can have a lifespan of more than 150 years.

Trout lilies have a symbiotic relationship with ants. Myrmecochory is the dispersal of seeds by ants—say that word fast three times! A nutritious, fatty coating on the seed, called an elaiosome, attracts the ants. Seeds are carried back to their nests and eaten.



Trout Lily



Trillium

This aids in germination and new colony formation. Ants may be the James Brown of the insect world.

Plant trout lilies in the fall, 4 inches deep and 4 inches apart, in a partly shady woodland setting. They prefer acidic soil—damp in spring but not completely dried out in summer. They do well under trees and shrubs and will pop up before hostas, ferns, or other shade-loving plants.

The redbud tree blooms before its heart-shaped leaves appear. *Cercis canadensis* is in the pea family, and upon closer look, the seed pods resemble bean or pea pods. The flowers are

edible, and some people even use them to make jelly. The bark of the tree has been used as a treatment for whooping cough.

The redbud is a North American native and does grow sparingly in the wild in Canada, so the species name is justified. But why “redbud” when the flowers are obviously not red? Evidently, the unopened buds appear as a deep reddish-purple color. When the leaves first sprout, they are reddish before turning green. It’s the bud that’s red, not the flower. Redbuds can be planted in either fall or spring. They are an understory tree, so plant them along the edge where they can get morning sun and afternoon shade in well-drained, slightly acidic soil. Don’t plant too deeply. Since they are such early bloomers, they serve as an excellent nectar source for early-season insects. If planted in full sun, they will “lollipop” out. Mature height is 20 to 30 feet.

Trillium *grandiflorum*: the genus name comes from the Latin *trillix*, meaning three; the species name



grandiflorum means “large-flowered.” Trilliums have three petals, three sepals, and three leaves—a trifecta of perfection that is unmistakable among native plants, and the flower is indeed quite grand.

These spring ephemerals can live for decades and are slow to mature, taking four to seven years for a seed to grow into a flowering plant. They also use ant dispersal (myrmecochory). DON’T PICK the flower—it prevents the plant from producing food for the following year. Trilliums are an indication of a healthy ecosystem. Their rhizomes run deep, so deer are deterred from digging them up in winter. With more than 38 species in North America, options in color, form (trailing or upright), scent (pleasant or not), and size are numerous. The toadshade trillium emits a faint, unpleasant odor that attracts its main pollinators—flies and beetles. The “Sweet Betsy” variety lives up to its name, wafting a pleasant fragrance.

To grow trilliums, plant rhizomes 2 to 4 inches deep and 12 to 24 inches apart in moist, humus-rich, well-drained soil. They thrive in partial shade with dappled light and plenty of leaf mulch. Be patient with growth.

Next month, the RGC will meet at the MERF House on April 14 at 10 a.m. The program on native shrubs will be presented by horticulture expert and Master Gardener Martha Wood.

Did you know we have a Facebook page? Follow us at www.facebook.rhododendrongardenclub.com to receive gardening tips, get updates on our activities and “like” us! 🍷

Mellanie Tuttle is the Secretary of the Rhododendron Garden Club.

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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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Poetry Open Mic Event April 12 at Moon Lake Library

BY ANNE MCLEOD

Last year, Dekie Hicks, a writer and editor from nearby Rome, Georgia, approached Moon Lake Library about the possibility of developing a poetry club that would meet monthly. “Like a book club, but for poetry,” she explained. Poetry enthusiasts could share their own work, but it would also serve as a place to discuss the work of published poets, taking a close look at their writing and discussing what made it effective (or not). Now, a year later, the club is hosting the library’s first open mic event in celebration of April as National Poetry Month. On Sunday, April 12, at 2 p.m. at the library, poets and poetry fans can gather to share some of their favorites. This event will be in lieu of the poetry club’s regular monthly meeting on the first Thursday of the month.



To participate in the library’s first open mic event, please bring at least one poem, which can be your own work or a published poem. Sign-ups will be at the door. Readers will have up to five minutes to share. Depending on the number of participants, there may be additional time available for

those who’d like to read more. We also welcome audience members who may not choose to read but who appreciate poetry and enjoy hearing it read. Readers of all ages are welcome. We invite children and teens to participate in this open mic event. People can read individually or in pairs or small

groups. All we ask is that you take no more than five minutes — shorter is fine too — so that the next reader has time to share in this supportive community space. Need a poem or two? Come to Moon Lake Library and check out the 811s in nonfiction. There you’ll find Wendell Berry, Mary Oliver, Nikki Giovanni, Billy Collins, and many others. PoetryFoundation.org also offers a wealth of resources for aspiring writers and fans. Do you journal daily? Challenge yourself to focus on poetry during April. Try to write a poem as part of that practice. Observe small moments closely, use language in creative ways, and show us a new way of thinking about the ordinary. We look forward to hearing from you on April 12 at Moon Lake Library. Anne McCleod is the librarian at Moon Lake Library.



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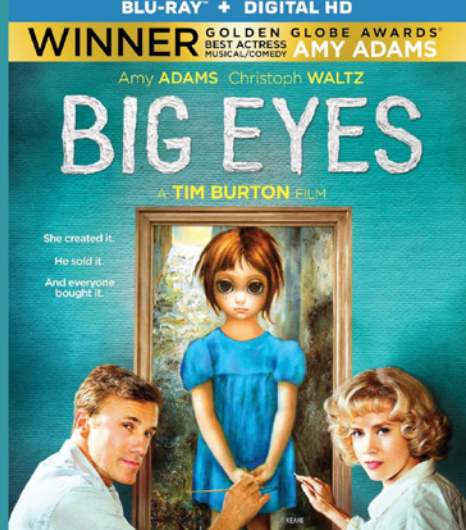


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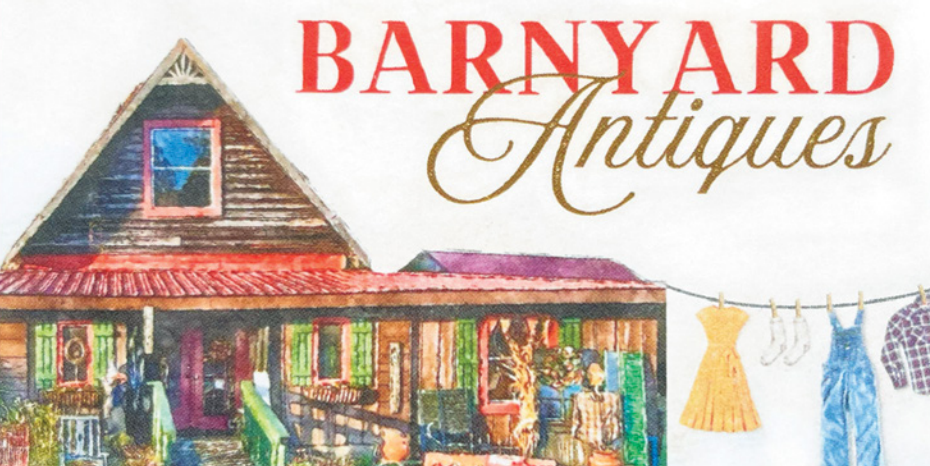
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Your Place in Mentone’s Creative Story

BY JULI JORDAN

Mentone has always been a place that draws creative souls. But a thriving arts community doesn’t happen by accident. It is built by people who choose to support it. For nearly two decades, the Little River Arts Council has worked to nurture Mentone’s creative spirit. We support local artists, host vibrant events, and create opportunities for people of all ages to experience the arts. And at the very heart of that work is our membership.

When you join the Little River Arts Council, you are doing much more than paying annual dues. You are making a statement that creativity matters in our town. You are affirming our guiding belief that art is for everyone.

Membership dues provide the critical foundation that keeps LRAC running. They cover essential operating expenses and provide the matching funds required to secure larger grants. From the Summer Music Series and the Creative Spirit Market to gallery exhibitions and arts education, it is membership support that brings these experiences to life.

We are currently in a season of incredible momentum. Alongside our regular events, energy is building around the Moon Lake Arts Collective, a new public art studio and community gathering space being developed by LRAC. When complete, this space will be a true community resource: home to art classes, yoga, workshops, and meetings for neighbors, organizations, and visitors alike. We are proud that it will also serve as a creative home for programs offered by the Mentone Arts & Cultural Center, whose gallery and music events have added so much to this town since 2020. In Mentone, the arts community grows stronger when we grow together.

Projects of this scale are made possible through a combination of grants, donations, and the steady, reliable support of LRAC members. In fact, membership numbers are one of our most powerful tools. A strong, growing membership base signals to outside grant organizations that the arts are deeply valued here. Your membership literally opens doors to additional funding that allows us to invest in new ideas.

You do not have to be an artist to join. Our members include collectors, volunteers, business owners, and neighbors who simply love living in

a creative community. Many of our members live outside Mentone but maintain deep connections here as property owners or frequent visitors.

We have designed our membership levels to keep participation accessible to everyone:

- Student: \$10
- Individual: \$25
- Family: \$40
- Supporter: \$100
- Patron: \$250
- Sustainer: \$500
- Benefactor: \$1,000+

As we step into another exciting year, we extend our deepest gratitude to the individuals and families whose support makes LRAC’s work possible. Our current membership list appears below. If your name isn’t on it yet, we invite you to help us build Mentone’s creative future. Join us today at www.littleriverartscouncil.org or by mailing your membership to P.O. Box 370, Mentone, AL 35984. 🐾

Juli Jordan is president of the Little River Arts Council.



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Mentone Inn

Little River Art Gallery
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Mentone Arts Center Folk Duo Ordinary Elephant Comes to the Arts Center

BY RANDY GRIDER

We are excited to welcome Ordinary Elephant to Mentone for a show on Friday, April 24.

The duo has spent the better part of the past decade on a never-ending tour that has earned married couple Crystal and Pete Damore widespread critical acclaim and made fans of luminaries like Tom Paxton and Mary Gauthier.

“There is nothing at all ordinary with this elephant. They are smack dab in the tradition that I have always loved but have both (all four?) feet in the 21st century. This is rich ground. Listen,” said Grammy-winning singer-songwriter Tom Paxton.

“Crystal and Pete, Ordinary Elephant, are an extraordinarily well-matched duo whose music seems to pour out of a singular place, like Buddy and Julie Miller, Dave Carter and Tracy Grammer, Gillian Welch and Dave Rawlings,” boasts Grammy-nominated folk singer-songwriter Mary Gauthier. “Two become one, in song. Stripped down, intertwined clawhammer banjo and guitar and hand-in-glove harmonies surprise the listener with focused intensity and musical mastery. Songs are pouring out of them, and I suspect their rise will be steady. I’m a fan.”

In 2017, the pair took home the International Folk Music Award for Artist of the Year on the strength of their breakout album, “Before I Go,” and two years later, they returned with the similarly lauded “Honest,” which the Associated Press hailed as “one of the best Americana albums of the year.”



Ordinary Elephant Accolades:

- 2024 International Folk Music Awards - Album of the Year Nominee
- Folk Alliance International Official Showcase Artist (2018, 2023, 2024)
- AMERICANAFEST Official Showcase Artist (2018, 2019, 2022)
- 2019 NACC Folk Chart (Year-end) - No. 2 Album
- 2019 May Folk DJ Chart - No. 1 Album, No. 1,2,4 Songs, No. 2 Artist
- 2018 International Folk Music Awards - Artist of the Year (2017)
- 2017 Kerrville New Folk Finalist
- 2017 Falcon Ridge Folk Festival Emerging Artist
- 2017 NewSong LEAF Festival Finalist - Top 3
- 2017 Southwest Regional Folk Alliance (SWRFA) Official Showcase Artist
- 2017 Southeast Regional Folk Alliance (SERFA) Official Showcase Artist
- 2017 Folk Alliance Region Midwest (FARM) Official Showcase Artist
- 2017 January Folk DJ Chart - No. 2 album (Before I Go), No. 3 song (Best of You)

Tickets for the show, which will take place from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. (Central Time), are \$25 per person. You can purchase online through our Facebook page, at the arts center or by calling 256-674-3366. 🍷

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.



Ordinary Elephant. PHOTO CREDIT: OLIVIA PERILLO

Rhea Allen *(continued from page 1)*

Framing as a Form of Artistic Expression

Cloudland Framing is the only option if you want something framed in Mentone, but there are several more such shops in the greater surrounding area. Does she worry about competition?

“It’s funny, I don’t see them as competition,” she says. “There’s enough framing to go around. Different shops do different things. It’s all framing, but different people have different eyes for the design. I don’t think there’s one correct way to frame something. What I think looks good is different from what someone else might think looks good. I do everything by hand. I build the frames, I cut my mats by hand. But in Rome, there’s a shop that has a computerized mat cutter, and she helps me out if there’s something I can’t do by hand. It’s really good to have that collaborative aspect. There’s also a huge framing community on Facebook, where if you have a question, there are framers all over the world who will offer their suggestions or their perspectives,” Rhea explains.

“There are a lot of women in this business. There’s a women’s framing group. We were having this conversation recently, about how the majority of frame shop owners are women. I think every single one around here is.” Rhea keeps up with publications about the framing trade, but she hasn’t felt compelled to write about her expertise. “I know what I know and I think I have really good knowledge, but I don’t feel the need to impart it.”

Rhea (pronounced RAY-a) has lived most of her life in Atlanta. Her mother, Helen, has a house on Lookout Mountain, just inside the Georgia state line, where Rhea spent a couple of her childhood years. She went to college at Georgia State in Atlanta and got a degree in Studio Art, thinking at first that she wanted to be an art teacher. She later realized that was not her dream. She got into restaurant work for the next decade or so, waitressing, bartending, and managing. Then came COVID, which up-ended that industry, as it did so many others. She felt that her life had reached a tipping point, that she was stagnating, that she needed to make some kind of change. That’s when her mother sent her that Facebook post that a framing business in Mentone was for sale.

“This was exactly what I needed,” she says. “I’ve been really happy with the change, because since I bought the shop, I’ve been able to buy myself a house. I got married.”

Unique Expertise

If you’ve ever had something custom framed, you might have wondered what’s involved and even raised your eyebrow a bit at the price.

“I look at it [as] when you get custom framing, it’s like a custom piece of furniture,” Rhea says. “A lot of it is the materials. That means acid-free



materials. There’s a lot of chemistry that goes into that, whether it’s cloth or paper. If it’s cloth, is it cotton? Is it wool? Is it silk? Because if you have a protein-based cloth, you frame it completely differently than if you have plant-based cloth. Different substrate, different glazing. So not only are you paying for the materials, you’re paying for all that knowledge that comes along with it. I’ve learned a lot over the years. I’m still learning. I’ve taken courses with the PPFA (Professional Picture Framers Association). But I’m not offended if someone wants to bring me a frame from Amazon. The frame is really the least part of it. I have frames that are a couple dollars a foot, and I have frames that are \$20 a foot. If you have the right frame for the piece and you bring it in, absolutely, I’m more interested in doing what’s right for the piece than making a sale. I may have to cut down the frame or put it back together if it’s not put together well, so there are some factors there. Or often someone will bring me something that can’t even go in a frame. It has to be in an acrylic display box or something, which I’m more than happy to do, but it’s not your typical framing job. Every job is unique.”

Framing is just one activity Rhea enjoys. Sewing is another hobby, mostly upholstery-type projects. “My husband, Josh, is a little annoyed that the sewing has taken over the house a bit, but he likes the stuff that I sew. He’s supportive.” She also enjoys going to the gym to work out and lift weights, something that started during COVID and that she and Josh do together. “I’m really bad at getting hobbies and not letting go of them,” she says.

Cloudland Framing is one of the vendors in Moon Lake Campus in Mentone. Rhea is in her shop Fridays and Saturdays, though you might catch her there on a Thursday. She is always available by phone at 256-634-0406. 🍷

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Valley Head Happenings

Valley Head to Host Rails and Roots Festival

BY MAYOR KAREN VEST

We are excited to announce that our spring festival has been renamed the Town of Valley Head Rails and Roots Festival. It will be held on Saturday, May 16, and Sunday, May 17. We have an incredible lineup of musicians from Nashville, Chattanooga, and from right here in DeKalb County. The full schedule of performers will be featured in my May article. Local band TPS Report will kick off our street festival with a free concert, Friday, May 15, at 6 p.m. Mi Pizza will be on Commerce Street selling fresh pizzas and delicious wings.

The Valley Head Volunteer Fire Department will be hosting a corn hole tournament all evening.

Sign-up for the tournament begins at 5:30 p.m. in front of the Masonic Lodge. All proceeds from the corn hole tournament benefit our volunteer fire department.

Among our many incredible artists for the weekend-long festival is Grammy-nominated and award-winning triple-threat writer, artist, and performer Brandon Maddox. Brandon has received multiple Josie Music Awards, toured with Monster Truck, and has shared the stage with country stars such as Brett Eldredge and Blake Shelton. Brandon's second single, which reached #58 on the Music Row Chart, "Good Side," was featured in

the latest season of top Netflix drama "Virgin River." Brandon will be featured on our main stage on Sunday, May 17, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Also performing Saturday will be up-and-coming country stars Carter Pinholster out of Chattanooga. Double Portion is composed of Seth and Sam Swafford, identical twins based in Centre. They fell in love with music when they received their first piano and guitar as children. Growing up in Alabama, with parents in the ministry, they have always loved music, especially Christian music. They will hit our main stage on Saturday, May 16, at 2 p.m.

Our festival will also include pony rides, a children's train ride, blow-up obstacle course, and a dunk tank. All children's activities are free this year, thanks to the very generous donation by Fritz Structural Steel. We thank Stephanie Fritz for always supporting the town! There will also be numerous food trucks, food vendors, and numerous craft vendors. We still have several vendor spots open. If you would like to be a food or craft vendor for our event, please stop by Town Hall for an application, or email me at vhmayor@farmerstel.com.

Chief Brad Gregg and I are so very pleased to announce that the Valley Head Police Department has been awarded over \$48,000 from the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant through ADECA.

We plan to use the entirety of the grant to purchase a much-needed new patrol car for our town. We would like to thank ADECA for this opportunity to keep our community safe and up to date with the best patrol car.

The Valley Head volunteer fire department is always looking for new volunteers. 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. Our next meeting is Monday, April 6.



Brandon Maddox, left, will be performing at the festival, along with Double Portion.



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17 May	Sunday 2-4 pm	May's Gulf Songwriter Series Feat. Kelli Johnson Reese Burke
13 Jun	Saturday 6:00 pm	Bluegrass on the Rim Feat. Three on a String Foggy Hollow Review
12 Jul	Sunday 2-4 pm	May's Gulf Songwriters Circle Wyatt Espalin Mia Matthews Reno Roberts Micah Robertson
13 Sep	Sunday 2-4 pm	May's Gulf Songwriter Series Feat. The Glass Hours Kat Hunter
24 Oct	Saturday 5:00 pm	May's Gulf Music Fest Feat. Adam Hood Gage Cowart & Special Guest Mia Matthews

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April Community Events

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

April 2 Sweet Repeats Reopening – Come shop with us as we offer a new store with spring arrivals! First 10 shoppers receive a free gift. See you there! 11 a.m.

April 3 Hike with a Naturalist – Bridge Trail to Little Falls Come with us on an easy guided .75-mile hike on the Bridge Trail to Little River Falls at the Little River National Preserve. Please wear footwear suitable for hiking. Bring water, sun protection, and possibly a snack. As with all outdoor events, if it's raining/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 Little River Canyon Center. Free and open to everyone! Registration appreciated. For details, contact 256-845-3548.

April 4 Flapjacks at the Firehouse – Join Geraldine Volunteer Fire Department for Flapjacks at the Firehouse! Breakfast will include 2-3 pancakes, bacon or sausage, and coffee or orange juice (other drinks available for purchase). \$8 per plate. A great breakfast for a great cause! 7 a.m. to 10 a.m.

April 4 Wildflower Watercolors for Beginners – Spring Blooms Discover the beauty of native wildflowers through the art of watercolor in this beginner-friendly class. Designed for those who think they can't draw a stick figure, this course focuses on easy-to-learn techniques to capture the delicate charm of local flora. Using simple brush strokes and basic color mixing, you'll create vibrant, nature-inspired artworks while exploring the unique features of native wildflowers. No prior art experience is required. Just bring your enthusiasm and a willingness to experiment. By the end of the class, you'll have a collection of small watercolor paintings and newfound confidence in your artistic abilities. 2-5 p.m. DeSoto State Park Nature Center next to DeSoto's Country Store & Information Center on Co. Rd. 89. \$55 includes all supplies. Ages 12 to adult. Class space is limited to 10; pre-registration is required for attendance in this class. <https://www.littleriverartscouncil.org/springwildflowerwatercolors.html>

April 10 Ribbon Cutting at Roughstock Hat Co. – The Fort Payne Chamber of Commerce is excited to host a Ribbon Cutting for Roughstock Hat Co.! Join us as we welcome them and celebrate their unique western style and craftsmanship. If you arrive early, you'll have the chance to see their hat shapers in action, with steam flying as they hand crease hats into the perfect shape just for you. They also offer some of the best designs of western ball caps in the area! Come out, show your support, meet the team, and help us celebrate this exciting business in our community. We hope to see you there! 11:30 a.m. Located at 436 Gault Ave. N, Fort Payne.

April 10 Movie Night – “Song Sung Blue” Grab your friends and family and save the dates for a series of new and classic films all summer long. Concessions available. As always, admission is FREE, but seating is limited. Call or text 256-996-2131 to reserve your seats. Let's fill the theatre and celebrate a hometown legend together! Doors open: 6 p.m. Movie starts: 7 p.m.

April 11 Moon Lake Library Book Club – Meets the second Saturday of each month at 10:30 a.m. While we occasionally read the same book, more often we talk about what we've read lately or discuss books on a particular theme, genre, or by a single author. For example, we've read works by Wendell Berry and Janisse Ray; mysteries; books about food; and horror (loosely defined). We look forward to a great discussion. We hope you can join in the fun!

April 11 Fish and Chicken Fry – Come and join Kilpatrick Volunteer Fire Department for a Fish & Chicken Fry. Plates include chicken (\$10) or catfish (\$15) with french fries, cole slaw, and hushpuppies. Serving starts at 11 a.m. and continues until they sell out. For more information, call 256-558-1924.

April 11 RCG at The Pickin Post – Rose Colored Glasses delivers a true classic country sound that feels like the golden days of the Grand Ole Opry – rich harmonies, honky-tonk heart, and songs that linger long after the last note. Blending time-honored originals with beloved country favorites, this is more than a show – it's a memory in the making. If the music of Patsy Cline, Hank Williams, Tammy Wynette, Buck Owens, Merle Haggard, Loretta Lynn, and Bob Wills still gives you chills, then Opry Nights is the show for you! Grab a ticket, bring a friend, and come hear country music the way it was meant to be played. 7 p.m.

April 16-26 “Little Women” – NACC Production Northeast Alabama Community College brings the beloved classic to the stage with a heartwarming production presented by the NACC Theatre Department. Audiences are invited to experience the timeless story of the March sisters as they navigate family, friendship, and finding their place in the world. Performances are held in the Tom Beville Lyceum on the NACC campus. Show Times: Thursday - Saturday @ 7 p.m. & Sunday @ 2 p.m. Tickets \$8. Appropriate for ages 13+.

April 17 Bingo Night Sponsored by Leadership DeKalb Class 2026 – Join in for a great night of BINGO with prizes and some great food, all while supporting DeKalb Animal Shelter. Help raise money for spay/neuter services and dog park improvements for our local animal shelter. Guests are welcome to order food and drinks while they play. So come hungry, bring friends, and have fun! Back Forty Ballroom 6-8 p.m. Doors open at 5:30 p.m.; \$5 per BINGO card per round. Cash only.

April 18 Hike with a Naturalist – Little Falls Trail Please 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. Free event. Registration appreciated. This is a moderate to difficult, level hike with varying and uneven terrain. Children and dogs may find it challenging. As with all outdoor events, if it's raining/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. Free and open to everyone! For details, call the Canyon Center at 256-845-3548.

April 18 Third Saturday Sunset Cruise-In – Come for 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.

April 18-19 Gun & Knife Show – This event will be held at the DeKalb County VFW Fairgrounds in Fort Payne. It will house 350 tables of rifles, shotguns, handguns, knives, edged weapons, modern & antique weapons, and related items. 256-845-7140.

April 19 Fly Fishing 101 – Join Dr. Tim Lindblom at the Little River Canyon Center for Fly Fishing 101! Learn the basics to get started on your own fly fishing adventures! We discuss gear selection, knots, fly selection, and casting instructions. Participants will get hands-on experience and the opportunity to make that first catch! Ages 14 and over are welcome. Register today! Spots are extremely limited! \$50 per participant. Please call the Little River Canyon Center, 256-845-3548, or email fieldschool@jsu.edu for promo codes. No refunds after April 6. Please bring water, sun protection, and a snack. All equipment will be provided, but you are welcome to bring your own.

April 24 Boys in the Band at the Back Forty Ballroom – Bring your dancing boots and your best pair of hometown socks and join us for a Back Forty Ballroom BASH! Tickets already on sale. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Table seating is first-come, first served, or you can call Vintage 1889 to reserve a table.

April 25 Lost Falls 10K & Half Marathon – Welcome to the 2025 Lost Falls Trail Run! Desoto State Park is a magnificent 3,500+ acre park with over 30 miles of single-track trails! Desoto State Park is one of the most beautiful state parks in the entire Southeast. There are TONS of waterfalls, creek crossings, bluff views, and more. The race is capped at 300 runners. All runners who sign up for the Lost Falls 10K & Half Marathon will receive a t-shirt and finisher medal, as well as a hot meal post-race! Get signed up now!

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MAH JONGG Tuesdays and Fridays at noon - beginners welcome.

KNITTING and CROCHET Tuesdays at 2 p.m.

SCRABBLE Wednesdays at noon.

April 7 at 3 p.m. - Municipal Library Board Meeting; 4 p.m. Friends of Moon Lake Library Board meeting.

April 11 at 10:30 a.m. - The Moon Lake Library Book Club will discuss books about American music or musicians, fiction or nonfiction.

April 11 at 1 p.m. - Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

April 12 at 2 p.m. - Open mic poetry reading. Sign up at the door to share your original poems or a published piece in celebration of National Poetry Month. This event is in lieu of the poetry club's regular monthly meeting.

April 17 at 6 p.m. - Friday Night @ the Movies: “Big Eyes” (2014-PG-13): Tim Burton film about Walter Keane (Christoph Waltz), whose paintings of big-eyed children made him a darling of the art world and embroiled him in scandal when a big truth came out.

April 18 at 10:30 a.m. - Little Library Learners

April 21 at 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m. - Blood Drive with Blood Assurance; free t-shirts and snacks for blood donors.

April 25 at 1 p.m. - Mentone Ukes offer free ukulele lessons for all experience levels.

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The Art and Symbolism of the Merchant Marine Flag

BY BARRY MORTON

This is the seventh of 12 articles about the flags on the Legionnaire Park fence.

The concept of a dedicated Merchant Marine flag dates back centuries, as nations recognized the need to distinguish their commercial vessels from military ships. Over time, these flags evolved, featuring unique symbols, colors, and insignia that reflect each nation’s legacy and maritime aspirations. The United States Merchant Marine flag, for instance, was officially adopted in the early 20th century, embodying the rich tradition of American seafaring and commerce.

Design Elements and Artistic Features

This flag is notable for its striking design. The standard version features a deep-blue field bordered by a golden-yellow fringe, symbolizing the ocean and unity. At its center lies a prominent emblem: a spread eagle grasping an anchor, shield, and a ribbon bearing the inscription “In Peace and War.” This arrangement fuses symbols of strength, vigilance, and patriotism, translating national ideals into visual form.

The eagle, a classic American icon,



conveys courage and sovereignty, while the anchor underscores the maritime nature of the service. The shield typically incorporates elements of the U.S. flag — stars and stripes — further linking the merchant fleet to the nation it serves. The gold and blue palette resonates with the ocean’s majesty and the honor of maritime duty.

Cultural Significance and Symbolism

Beyond its aesthetic qualities, the Merchant Marine flag encapsulates

the essential role these mariners have played in both peacetime and conflict. Merchant ships have delivered vital goods, carried troops, and supported national economies and military operations. The flag’s motto, “In Peace and War,” speaks to the dual civilian and auxiliary military role the Merchant Marine fulfills.

In art, the flag often serves as a motif in paintings, memorials, and maritime museums, representing adventure, resilience, and the global reach of commerce. Depictions of the flag fluttering

at a ship’s stern evoke movement, purpose, and a connection to a broader narrative of exploration and enterprise.

Contemporary Artistic Interpretations

Modern artists continue to find inspiration in the form and meaning of the Merchant Marine flag. Its bold graphics and layered symbols lend themselves to a range of artistic media, from acrylic paintings on canvas to digital illustrations and installations. Events like National Maritime Day and Merchant Marine Memorials frequently feature artistic representations of the flag, underscoring its continuing relevance.

The Merchant Marine flag is more than a signal of civilian shipping; it is a work of art rich in symbolism and national identity. Through its design and cultural resonance, the flag honors the contributions of merchant mariners and celebrates the enduring spirit of maritime adventure. As both an artistic subject and a storied symbol, the flag continues to remind us of the vital connection between art, history, and the open sea. 🐻

Contributed by Barry Morton, Mentone American Legion Past Commander with the assistance of MS Co-Pilot.



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The Mountain Kitchen Plenty of Flavor for Your Buck

BY REBECCA HENDERSON,
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Lately, I’ve been on the hunt for meals that are affordable, packed with flavor, and generous enough to leave me with tomorrow’s lunch. That doesn’t seem like too much to ask, right? I’ve been rediscovering some grocery store basics and giving them new life, layering in flavor with my favorite herbs and spices. These recipes are meant to be flexible, so don’t be afraid to experiment by swapping in different cheeses, trying new spice combinations, or even swapping the main ingredients (tuna for salmon, broccoli for cabbage, etc.). A little creativity can turn simple ingredients into something seriously delicious.

CHEESY SALMON-RICE BAKE

(Makes 4-5 servings)

- 1 ½ cups cooked brown rice
- 2 cups milk
- ½ cup shredded cheddar cheese
- ½ cup Monterey Jack cheese
- 4 tablespoons flour
- 3 tablespoons softened butter
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ curry powder
- ½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon dried dill weed
- 2 (7½-ounce) cans salmon without skin and bones

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 2-quart baking dish.
2. Melt butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Stir in flour and salt, and whisk for 1 minute or until flour is cooked and mixture darkens to a roux.

3. Remove pan from heat, and gradually whisk in milk. Return pan to heat and stir with a spoon until sauce thickens enough to coat the back of a spoon.
4. Add curry powder, Worcestershire sauce, lemon juice, and dill weed.
5. Fold the salmon into the sauce, breaking it up into large pieces. Add rice.
6. Spoon mixture into greased baking dish, and top with cheese.
7. Bake for 30 minutes or until cheese is bubbly.

Cabbage is not just economical. It’s also a flavor chameleon, able to take on so many flavors — Italian, Asian, or the Southern treat of bacon grease and chopped bacon. This recipe is a last-minute lifesaver because it uses cupboard staples.

GARLIC-GINGER CABBAGE

(Makes 4 servings)

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 6 cloves fresh garlic, finely chopped
- ½ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes
- 1 head green cabbage
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger

1. Wash cabbage and coarsely chop.
2. Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat.
3. Add garlic, and sauté for 30 seconds (do not brown garlic). Stir in pepper flakes.
4. Add cabbage, and stir constantly for 1 minute or until just wilted.
5. Stir in soy sauce and ginger.
6. Serve hot.

In the spirit of cooking good things while minding my budget, I tried a



Bubboo’s Secret Pineapple Pound Cake

recipe that a lady gave me years ago in my hometown church. I’d stashed it away and forgotten it. Maybe it was the name that made me hesitate. I have no idea who Bubboo was (a grandmother of someone), and the secret recipe was divulged freely. Anyway, the cake turned out to be delicious.

BUBBOO’S SECRET PINEAPPLE POUND CAKE

(Makes 10 servings)

- 1 cup butter, softened
- ½ cup vegetable shortening
- 2¼ cups granulated sugar
- 6 large eggs, at room temperature
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup milk
- 1 teaspoon butter extract (optional)
- ½ teaspoon pineapple extract (optional)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¾ cup crushed pineapple with juice
- Glaze for Warm Cake (see below)

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

2. Grease and flour a 10-inch tube pan, and line the bottom with parchment paper.
3. Mix butter and shortening in an electric stand mixer until fluffy.
4. Add sugar, and mix well.
5. Add the eggs, one at a time, until well combined.
6. Stir flour, baking powder, and salt together in a separate bowl.
7. Add half the flour mixture, then the milk, then the other half of the flour mixture.
8. Add extracts and pineapple and juice, and mix just until blended. (Do not over mix at this stage).
9. Bake for 1 hour and 15 minutes or until a wooden pick inserted into cake comes out clean. Cool cake in pan for 10 minutes, then turn out onto a plate and pour glaze over top.

Glaze for Warm Cake:
Whisk together 1 cup crushed pineapple in juice and 1½ cups sifted powdered sugar, and pour over warm pound cake. 🍷



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A Local’s Guide to DeSoto State Park

Part 1: The River Trails

BY TIM EBERHART

Hikers who cherish forests filled with small waterfalls, streams, and wild rivers will discover many treasures in the mountain terrain at DeSoto State Park.

The park is sandwiched between the crest of Lookout Mountain and the West Fork of Little River. It’s easy to consider it the state’s best state park for getting a close-up look at cascading streams and creeks as they plunge through the highlands.

This installment focuses on the trails that bring you closest to the water, where the park feels most alive.

Experience the sights and sounds of a wild river on the DeSoto Scout Trail

People who like to explore the banks of big creeks or small rivers will love this trail, which is marked by yellow blazes. The path stays very close to the river for long stretches, with dozens of spots where you can stand on a boulder or rock layer directly on the water’s edge. The sound can be the best part.

It would be difficult to find a path where you would see more rhododendron and mountain laurel than on the DeSoto Scout Trail. From late May to mid-summer, the blooms and leaves can be so thick in places that they seem to form a tunnel. Tulip poplar trees can also be found in bloom around the same time of year, and birdwatchers should remember to watch and listen for kingfishers.

I live close enough to this state park to often come up with an excuse to take a hike there. And because of the

river, this trail is the one that draws me back most often.

Only about 1.35 miles of the DeSoto Scout Trail is within the state park boundaries, but the trail itself extends well beyond. To the north, it follows the river through the woods toward the Camp Comer Boy Scout Reservation. To the south, it continues into the backcountry portion of Little River Canyon National Preserve.

Hikers should be aware that venturing too far beyond the park may lead them to overgrown sections or remote terrain where the trail becomes difficult to follow.

A short companion: The Aqua Trail

For those looking for a shorter, more accessible option, the Aqua Trail provides an easy loop behind the swimming pool. This short path winds along the Sharp Branch, a mountain stream, and passes through dense rhododendron and mountain laurel growth.

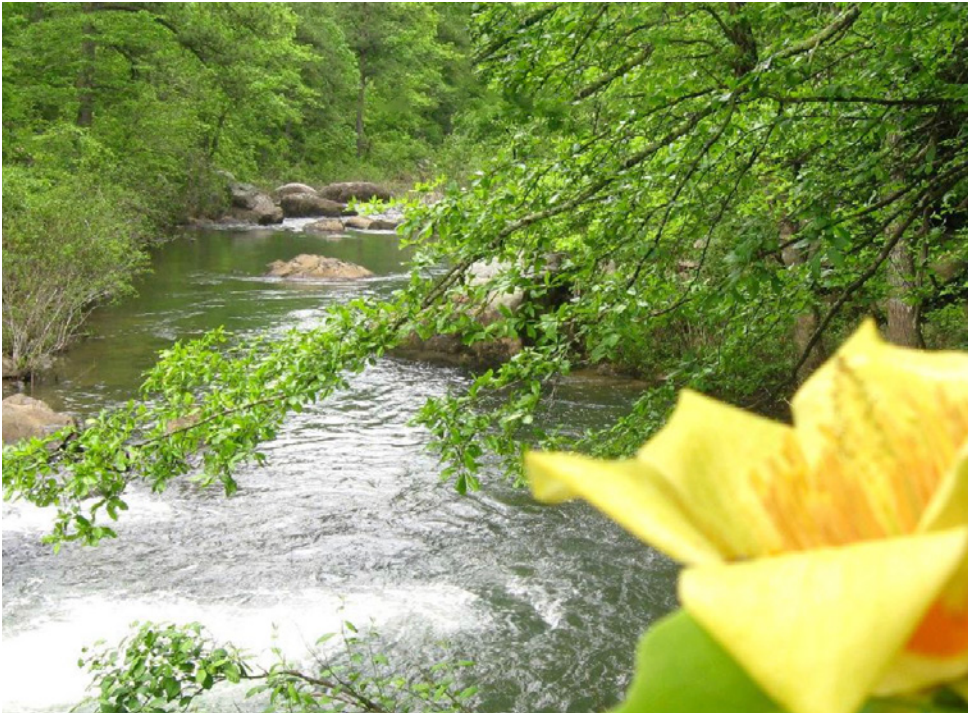
There’s also a rock shelter along the trail, and the path serves as one of the easiest access points to the DeSoto Scout Trail.

If you go

The DeSoto Scout Trail offers one of the most immersive hiking experiences in the park, especially for those drawn to the sound and movement of water. The Aqua Trail provides a shorter option that still captures much of that same beauty.

Next month, we’ll explore the park’s waterfall corridor, one of the easiest ways to experience multiple waterfalls in a single hike. 🍷

For more trail guides, photos, and maps, visit Tim’s website at southernoutings.com.



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For Sale

Just Bluffin’

Turnkey studio cabin on Lookout Mtn with stunning multi-state and valley views. Active vacation rental featuring FP, indoor jacuzzi, full kitchen and dining for 2. Spacious tub, fire pit and swing. Near hiking, waterfalls, shopping and dining.

New Listing!

Eagle’s Crest

Beautiful mountain cabin on Lookout Mtn with breathtaking views. Features exposed wood, great room with FP, open dining and full kitchen. 3 Bed/2 Bath—main-level primary + 2 BR upstairs (king + twin in each). Expansive deck and fire pit. Near hiking, waterfalls, shopping and dining. \$589,000

New Listing!

The Lookout

Charming restored log cabin on Lookout Mtn with beautiful views. Active vacation rental featuring exposed logs, FP, window seat, galley kitchen and breakfast nook. Loft with king bed, 1 Bath + sleeper sofa. Deck, hot tub, porch swing and fire pit. \$489,000

New Listing!

Suite Retreat

This charming 1 Bed/1.5 Bath cabin on 1.45 wooded acres, features open living/dining/kitchen with gas log FP, plus 2nd living area and half bath. Upstairs queen BR with full bath. Screened porch with hot tub, fire pit and grill. Laurel Creek amenities: trails and lakes. Turnkey rental near Mentone. \$315,000

New Listing!

Browfront Lot Along the Parkway

Brow-front 1.2-acre lot along the Parkway, between Desoto State Park and Desoto Falls. Hardwood-covered with ~107’ frontage, private setback, and stunning mountain and valley views. Build your dream home or getaway. \$200,000

New Listing!