

NEA'S PREMIERE MAGAZINE

February
2021

Jared Pickney
*Love in Our
Community*

THE PARAGOULD PODCAST

A Love Story About
Listening

BLAST FROM THE PAST

A Love Story
About Memories

ACTION SPEAKS LOUDER THAN WORDS

Hope Found, A Love Story
About Making a Difference

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Cover Photo: Taylor Dickinson

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NEA'S **PREMIERE**
MAGAZINE

Awards

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From the Manager



Love shows up in so many ways and often I feel as if we don't even recognize it. A smile from a stranger. A coworker buying lunch. A friend sending an encouraging text despite not having talked in months.

Love can be loud and fast, and it can be quiet and steady. Love can be easy for a moment, and it can be tiresome the next. Love can feel as if it is raining down, watering our hearts, minds and souls, and then it can feel as if it has all but completely evaporated. Love sometimes seems abundant and sometimes scarce.

Despite a world that seems to persistently find ways to divide us, many of us can likely agree that love is persistent to draw us together. Love is present in big and little ways all around us and there's hardly a better time than now, 2021, to look for signs of love and be grateful for every single place we can see it.

Here in NEA, we see love sparkle like sand on the beach in the conversations between Jared Pickney and Paragould residents in the Paragould Podcast where listeners are reminded of all the small stories that make up an entire community. We see love glimmer in the work Ian Buchanan is doing to help people put their best foot forward so they can walk down roads and up mountains they might not have imagined possible. We spot love shining like a beacon of hope for those who have suffered in our community; a flame fueled by the dedication of individuals who realized they could watch in dismay, or pick up a torch and help light the way.

I am in awe of the people featured between these pages because in a culture where it is so very easy to talk about the problems of this world on platforms full of voices, these individuals and organizations have decided to take action by loving their communities.

I hope this edition of NEA's good news reminds us we see more love when we remember to look for it, and that it inspires us to show nothing but love at every given opportunity.

Lindsey Spencer
Manager of Creative Content

A promotional advertisement for Glen Sain Ford. The background is a scenic landscape with a rocky foreground and a body of water in the distance. A silver Ford Bronco is parked on the rocks. In the top left, the name 'Glen Sain' is written in a white, cursive font. In the top center, the Ford logo is displayed. In the top right, the text 'BEST PRICE BEST SERVICE' is written in a white, blocky font. At the bottom, a blue banner contains the phone number '870.236.8546', the address '1301 US 49', and the website 'GLENSAINFORD.NET' in white text.

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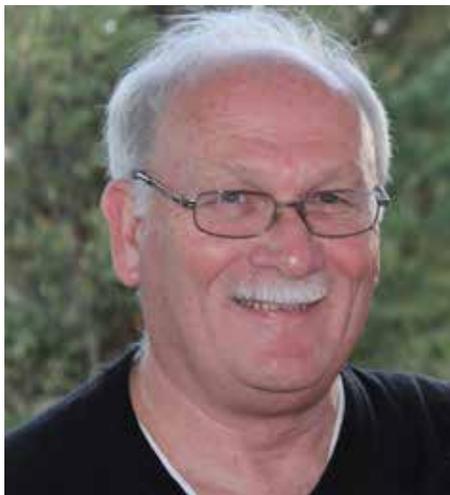
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If I've learned anything it's that life will bring people into your realm and will eventually take them away. What you do together in the middle is the important part, and that is probably what makes losing a good friend so difficult.

Connie (C.R.) Baine was just such a guy for me, a teammate, a friend, a cohort. He passed away in late December and left a giant empty spot in the lives of many, not because he was a known community activist or great spokesman or influential leader; he was a sports fan, a country boy, a kids' coach, a softball player. To say C.R. was cantankerous is doing disservice to the word cantankerous; Connie was firmly planted on one side of the fence and you needn't wonder which side. If you were over there with him -- on his team -- he was one hundred percent for you; if you resided on the other, for the longest he was against you and your family and your friends and everyone you knew. He loved his team, whichever one he might have chosen to follow in whichever sport happened to be in season.

There was a side to Connie for all to see, a rowdy booster who gave umpires and referees fits from the sidelines, a big guy who would dog an opponent verbally from the dugout, especially if he saw he had hit a nerve. To opponents he was one of those guys you couldn't

stand, but one you loved if you wore the same uniform. Never was there a truer teammate, no one born who ever believed in his team the way Connie did.

Then there was the side he let fewer people see, the kind soul with the generous heart. When we first started playing together in the 1970s few of us were on teams totally sponsored financially by a business. Much of the money needed to travel and pay for hotel bills and meals came from our own pockets or from team fundraisers, things like holding softball tournaments or raffling off something of worth. The first time our team qualified for the Regional tournament in Oklahoma City, most of us were broke after a summer of travel. Each of us solicited funding in some manner and Connie asked if it would be okay to let the local Beer Association make a donation. He knew I was a non-drinker and didn't want to cause offense, but said the organization would donate a couple of hundred dollars if we would pick up trash along a stretch of county highway.

I said, "Heck yeah" and told Connie to let me know when we needed to do it. I had not heard from him by the time we were to leave for Oklahoma and figured the deal fell through, learning later he picked up the trash by himself -- unless he made sons Patrick and Brad assist; he didn't impose upon any teammates yet shared the money with all of us, helping out with meal money when needed. He did the same when we went to Atlanta, and Lawton and Meridian and Shreveport and anywhere we played, helping anyone who was broke if our team money had run out. When we held a tournament he was there from start to finish, dipping buckets of water off rain-soaked infields, keeping a scorebook, making sure we had the personnel needed to do the job while some teammates always seemed to have something come up that kept them away on those weekends.

And the impressive part is that Connie rarely played. He coached third base, pinch-hit when called upon (in remarkable fashion) and carried the water jug, content to be a part of what we had and what we were. I couldn't tell you how many times he went to the plate in a crucial at-bat, lined a base hit up the middle and sat back down. He generally used my bat and borrowed one of my gloves if he had to play defense, and we accused him of storing sandwiches in the bat bag he carried.

I already miss the many times he comically mispronounced words, the 5 a.m. phone calls on Saturday mornings that started not with "hello" but with, "I need a ballplayer," the calls that led my wife to tell him the next time he woke us up that early he was a dead man. So the next time he would wait about fifteen minutes later before dialing.

His conversations generally started with, "Hey, feller," and ended with laughter because he was a great friend. When I first started playing on a sanctioned team I was young and not aware I wasn't supposed to play on one of Connie's throw-together weekend groups that took the field at spots like Finch, Evening Star or Light. Teammate Gary Prince and I stopped by Finch one day and Connie saw us, put us in his lineup and rubbed all the other teams the wrong way ... happily. In fact, someone turned us in and my whole team was put on probation for the remainder of the year.

Any time I reminded Connie of that episode, he would laugh long and hard and then say, "But you know what? We won that tournament, didn't we?" And then he'd laugh some more, just as we usually did. C.R. Baine was a lot of things, the most important being my friend.



LIVING A *Better Story*

BY JARED PICKNEY

I recently received a series of emails from some women who were angry with me for having a certain guest on the Paragould Podcast. These ladies were concerned that I would record a conversation with someone they considered to be so immoral. As I considered their logic, I realized why our world has gone mad.

We have lost the ability to have conversations with people we disagree with, and this is a major problem.

In the words of Jesus, we are called to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. This is the secret to seeing our world look less like hell and more like heaven.

In the words of the Apostle Paul, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). While we were opposing him and his values, while we were his enemies, Christ compelled by love, died in our place.

Do we need any more reason than this to extend kindness to those who don't see things as we do? If you have received God's grace, you have a compelling reason to be remarkably gracious, inviting, and endearing toward others, including and especially those who disagree with us.

When the grace of Jesus sinks in, we will be among the least offended and least offensive people in the world.

Do I affirm everything about my guest's lifestyle? No. Do I think these ladies were wrong for emailing me their concerns? Absolutely not.

I am simply saying the way forward for us as a society is loving conversation. To be humble. To realize that we can learn something from everyone. To start where we agree rather than disagree. And when we do disagree, to do so in a manner that honors the fact that even our enemies are made in the image of God.

Jesus gave a lot of time and attention to people who didn't sit on the same side as He did. We should consider doing the same.

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202, my fishing arsenal now consists of a vast array of rods and reels. As an aspiring young fisherman I hoped to at least have a few hooks and sinkers, but now my tackle boxes bulge at the seams with the latest, greatest lures designed to fool even the most wily of fish.



CHUCK LONG

Regional Education Coordinator Northeast Education Division Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

The rod tip jumped and then ventured into an almost rhythmic dance. The moves were very familiar and it was obvious a fish was giving great consideration into consuming the bait. The beat continued as I carefully eased my hand onto the rod, heeding the words of my granddad, “Don’t let him feel you before you set the hook.”

The thumps gave way to a pull and the fishing experience of a ten-year old told me it was time. With a sweep of the rod that would make Rayo Breckenridge proud, I set the hook.

The fight was on and within a couple of minutes a nice freshwater drum made its appearance from the murky waters of Locust Ditch. I eased the fish close to the edge and hoisted my prize up the muddy bank. I unhooked him and placed him on the stringer, alongside a couple of catfish and rebaited and cast back out to await the next bite.

I wish I knew how many times that similar event played out for me as a youngster. I truly have no idea, but I do know I was blessed to sit on many pond and river banks enjoying the challenge of getting a fish to bite. Ditches named Locust, Eight Mile and Dry Cypress were the most oft fished bodies of water as they were close to both of my grandparents’ homes, but there were also ventures to ponds, rivers and lakes all over Arkansas. Those were simple days and the simplicity of a day of fishing as a ten-year-old is something I often miss.

Just like life itself, fishing seems to have gotten more complicated. While I started with a Zebco

In the early days our boat had a motor that would start on about the third crank or thirtieth crank, depending on its mood. Loose rivets and weak aluminum meant a metal coffee can was a necessary piece of equipment to bail water. A sculling paddle eased us quietly and efficiently through the shallows and also kept the snakes at bay. One old cooler sat in the bottom of the boat holding drinks, lunch and the fish we caught. There was also a very heavy lead ball with a length of rope used to measure water depths and find likely holes where a big catfish might lay.

In contrast, most boats today have comfortable seats, carpet and efficient motors. They are equipped with trolling motors to free up both hands, livewells and all kinds of storage space to hold gear, and keep drinks and food away from the fish slime. A dash full of electronics will tell the angler valuable information like water depth, fish location and water temperature and if there is any spare time those same electronics can launch a space shuttle or thwart a nuclear invasion.

Yes, like so many other things in our world, fishing has changed. It seems to have become more complicated and gear-heavy. But fish have not changed, and therein lies the beauty of the sport. Fish are the same as they were forty-plus years ago when I pursued them as a youngster. They are simple creatures with brains the size of a BB, yet they still often confound even the most skilled anglers.

And, amidst all the changes, the simplicity of fishing remains as well. Though a boat might help access more water, fish are accessible from the shore in many lakes or rivers. I would dare say a simple pole with a piece of short line, a hook and a piece of worm could catch far more fish than a \$200 rod and reel tossing a \$10 lure. Fishing electronics are fun and offer great insight, but are just another tool in the toolbox.

One thing that has not wavered is the many life lessons garnered on a fishing trip.

I was fortunate to be blessed with many lessons that included patience, attention to detail, awareness and the basics of life and death. I also learned some tough lessons like failure, disappointment, perseverance and how to remove a fish hook. And all those have truly served me well.

I have said all the above to get to this point. Fishing can be a life changer. It provides unique opportunities that cannot be taught within the confines of a den or even on a front porch. The simplicity and life lessons that go hand in hand with some time on the water offer positive impacts for both young and old.

Not sure where to start? Not sure where to go? Not even sure how to fish? Ask the guy in the neighborhood who leaves early and has a little worm dirt on his hands. Ask the guy who has the boat and a gut bucket. Ask the lady you see at the local lake with her children. Ask me; I would truly love to pass on a little of my passion for the sport that set the tone for my life. Fishing offers a community of like-minded people the chance to fan the flames and fuel the passion.

Make plans to get out this spring and spend some time on the water with family and friends. It can be such a simple and relaxing time full of life lessons. I hope to see you out there!



PET *of the* MONTH

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BY CHRISTINA RAU COX

Lulu is simply part of the family. Her favorite people in the world are the kids. She gets so excited when they want to play a game with her. When they are sick or sad, she knows and is there lying by their sides.

Lulu is willing to try new things; although, perhaps reluctantly. She wasn't too sure about swimming, but she seemed to enjoy skateboarding.

Lulu came into our lives as a Christmas wish. The kids begged and pleaded for a dog and swore they would take care of her. Her hobbies are sleeping, eating, and chewing everything in sight.

She loves to wait under the dinner table hoping scraps might fall. Sometimes, I suspect the kids are dropping things on purpose. Lulu is not always well-behaved, but she is definitely a good dog.





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Sounds Like...

A playlist for February

Love, (Year 2!)

BY SARA BROWN



With Valentine's Day (and Single's Awareness Day) just around the corner, I thought a playlist filled with love and anti-love songs was just what the (love) doctor ordered!

1. Thirteen - Big Star

This is such a beautiful tune about young love, when everything is simple and the only thing you had to worry about was getting your homework done. If you're looking for something sweet and a bit off-the-beaten-path for your Valentine playlist, this is the perfect track!

2. So Sad (To Watch Good Love Go Bad) - The Everly Brothers

The title says it all, but this is a song about lost love. This one might speak to those of you who find yourself in the throes of heartbreak this month. Turn it up loud and proud and let those gorgeous harmonies drown your sorrows.

3. Wildflowers - Tom Petty

Nothing says love to me quite like the line "you belong somewhere you feel free." It's such a sweet song, and I've found that, to me, it can be interpreted in a couple ways. It can be a love letter the singer has written to the one he loves, or it could be a love letter the singer has written to himself. Not only are the things he's singing about something you'd want for the one you love, but they're also things you want for yourself. You, yes, you reading this, "you belong somewhere you feel free."

4. Rather Be Alone - The Rhythm Shakers

This is a track for all those strong, independent singles and those who are longing for a Valentine for the 14th, but are coming up short. With a rocking beat and killer vocal, turn this one up loud and you'll find yourself wondering why you ever thought you needed a date this Valentine's Day - all you need is you, yourself, and you!

5. Here, There, & Everywhere - The Beatles

Here's yet another beautiful lovey-dovey tune that's a perfect addition to your Valentine's playlist. No good playlist is complete without a Beatles tune, and this is a great deeper cut of theirs, at least for the casual Beatles fan. Paul McCartney's sweet lead vocal will have you falling in love in no time!

6. Love Bites - Def Leppard

Anyone in love-related agony this February will take some comfort in this track. Love can be painful, and this song tells all about it. With its heavy rock guitar and screaming vocals, cranking this one as high as you can will be cathartic, for sure.

We're celebrating Love and Community this month!

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HEALTH & THE CITY

WITH DR. BETHANY DAVIS

The season of love has arrived once again! Whenever I imagine the month of February, I picture red and pink streamers and the Valentine's Day boxes I used to decorate as a child to bring to class, hoping to impress my classmates with a box covered in glitter and meticulously cut out construction paper hearts. Saint Valentine's Day represents a depiction of love; an attempt to epitomize the extraordinary feeling in our chest that we all know and desire.

Valentine's Day originated in the third century to celebrate the coming of spring, and as this holiday transitioned into modern times our society began to commemorate it with the giving of flowers, candy, jewelry, expensive dinners, and surprises for our loved ones. Similar to Christmas and other holidays, this day of love has become excessively marketed as a merriment in which the main goal is to gift someone a physical gift or to spend money on them. I find it discouraging that we have a sole day in the year marked to celebrate something that should be celebrated every day.

As February 2021 marks almost a year of battling a global pandemic, Valentine's Day yields a different

sentiment. If you are lucky, you are quarantined in with a loved one. If you are even luckier, you are quarantined by yourself. That may sound absurd, but hear me out.

Our modern times have engrossed the idea into our brains that this holiday needs to be celebrated with another person. Society projects the notion that you need a partner in your life to be happy, but this is not true. This idea that we need someone else to complete us only sets us up to seek out a partner for happiness. In reality, you can have everything in the world: a partner, a great job, great co-workers, a grand house, a triumph of friendships, but none of that will ever be fully appreciated if you do not know and love yourself. While you may think of being alone as a bad thing, the time when we are alone is when we face ourselves, when we have to be still, and when we are forced to look inward. Most of us spend our alone time distracted by social media, busy work, and any task we can get our hands on, but being alone can be one of the most beautiful and eye-opening experiences.

During this period of time in quarantine and

isolation, we must realize it is also a rare opportunity to slow down and remember: Who am I and what do I love about myself?

I invite you to reframe the way you see Valentine's Day this year: How can I show myself more love through self-care and how can I get to know myself a little bit better?

Let's take ourselves on a date. Ask yourself questions you would ask another person if you were trying to get to know them and then answer them to yourself. These questions could be ones such as: What do you do for fun? How do you spend your free time? What brings you joy? What are ways you relax? What are your life passions? What are your goals in five years? If you could travel anywhere, where would you go? What is something you would like to learn? You already know these things about yourself, but take the time to pause and reflect on the answers, allowing a brief moment to remember the person you are. This is the person you have, more than likely, been disconnected with in our fast-paced flow of work, school, and family life.

Once you remember the things that bring you joy, the hobbies you have, and the ways you slow down, then ask yourself: What are small ways I can incorporate them into my daily life? This may include journaling or drawing for ten minutes a day, taking more baths, learning a new hobby a few times a week, or it could be as simple as sitting down with a good book, going for a short walk, watching a movie you enjoy, or just a good cup of coffee and silence (my favorite).

This month I encourage you to light a candle, prepare one of your favorite meals, and then ask yourself these questions. Take yourself on a date and get to know who you are again. A holiday is not required to fulfill the necessity that is knowing and appreciating who you are; you should do this every single day. Even if you do have a partner, self-love and self-knowledge are extremely imperative to having a successful relationship with someone, because as the saying goes: You will never be able to love someone until you love yourself.



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College Tips by a College Student



BY SARA BROWN

We're a little under a month into the semester – good for you for making it this far! This is our third semester having to do this whole college thing in the middle of a global pandemic, so be proud of yourself. Doing what you're doing is no small feat; make sure you recognize that. That being said, we've still got a long way to go to get through this semester. I'll be honest with you, I don't have all the answers. I'm still trying to figure out exactly what I'm doing, but I wanted to offer you some tips this month based on what I've learned over the past two semesters. Hopefully they'll help make this one a little bit easier!

Tip number one: Get enough sleep. Everyone pictures college as this time in your life where you're pulling all-nighters and surviving on Red Bull and junk food, but as lame as this might sound, that's not good for you. As often as you can, try and get at least eight hours of sleep. Research has shown that eight hours or more of sleep is best for college students, and better-rested students often do better work, so keep that in mind.

Tip number two: Stay organized, both physically and mentally. You'd be surprised what a clear desk and a clear head can do for you when you're trying to write that 20-page paper. Have a space you dedicate strictly to working and keep it clear of junk and distractions. As you get more used to doing your work in a specific space, your brain will be more prepared to get down to business every time you sit down.

Tip number three: Take more notes than you think you need. It can be tedious, but take notes on every PowerPoint, every Zoom and in-person lecture, and every textbook chapter (though I always just highlight my textbook). Just writing down the information or taking the time to highlight it can help it stick in your mind, and that's exactly what you want come exam day.

Tip number four: Recognize that your "best" is going to look different every day. I'm sure you don't need reminding, but this is an incredibly stressful time. Some days are just going to be harder than others. Some days, you may be able to knock out three assignments in one day. Others, you may be lucky just to get yourself to class and get a couple sentences written on that paper you have due coming up. That's okay! All you can do is your best every day, whatever that might look like.

And finally, **tip number five**, and this is one I've shared before, take some time for yourself. I know, that seems counter-intuitive since I was just talking about missing deadlines. The truth is, if you don't take a little bit of time for yourself, your work is going to suffer. It's not healthy to focus exclusively on your schoolwork; you need to take breaks and do things you enjoy doing just for fun. In times like these, doing things just for you to help you relax are more important than ever. Taking even just a short break every hour or two to play a round of your favorite phone game or watch an online video or two from a creator you enjoy can work wonders. You might even find whatever you were struggling with before you took that break isn't quite so difficult when you come back. Take time for yourself. It's worth it, I promise!

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Valentine's Day Common Toxicities

WITH DR. KRISTIN SULLIVAN

With Valentine's Day quickly approaching, many of us send our loved ones flowers or candy for the special holiday. And who doesn't love getting flowers and candy?! But certain flowers can carry some fatal toxins, as can some candies – especially the sugar free forms!

Lilies are one of the most deadly flowers to cats and dogs, however more fatalities are seen with cats that ingest any part of the lily plant. Lily plants, when ingested, cause Acute Renal Failure -- this means they rapidly cause the kidneys to fail. The damage done to the kidneys from lily intoxication is irreversible.

Unfortunately, most patients that present with symptoms of this disease process (not eating, vomiting) and have a history of ingesting the plant, even with aggressive treatment do not survive. Best to get rid of these plants or to keep them completely out of reach of all pets and watch for any leaves, pollen, and petals that may fall.

Another common plant given as a gift for home decoration on holidays is the palm plant. Palms, especially Sago Palm, can be quickly fatal if ingested. Ingestion of a palm plant, specifically the seed which carries the most potent toxin, causes rapid development of gastrointestinal signs (vomiting, drooling profusely, and diarrhea), sometimes within 15 minutes of digestion, and can cause Acute Hepatic Failure – liver failure – and then often leads to death.

Candies, especially chocolates, are one of the most popular Valentine's Day gifts. While quite delicious to us, they can cause a range of symptoms in pets. Some may not suffer at all or show any signs of eating chocolate, while in others it may cause severe GI discomfort or even death. Dark chocolate and baking chocolates pose the highest risk of complications, while milk chocolates and white chocolates are much less life threatening. Deaths associated with chocolate are not common, but always depend on that specific pet's sensitivity to it.

Many pets may just experience vomiting and diarrhea, while others may have much more severe signs including cardiac arrhythmias and neurological signs like tremors.

With a diet and sugar-conscious population, many candy gifts are of the sugar-free form. To make these foods sweet without using natural sugar, artificial sweetener is used. These artificial sweeteners come in many forms, but the most important one to remember with all pets is Xylitol. Xylitol, while it is a naturally occurring sweetener and is safe for people, is extremely dangerous and fatal to pets – cats and dogs. Very small amounts can cause hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), seizures, liver failure, and death.

This is, unfortunately, a very common toxicity that can occur because of how common Xylitol is used in food, gum, toothpaste, even some nasal sprays today. Gum is the most common form of exposure in pets, especially dogs. They smell something fruity (the sugar-free gum) from Mom's purse or in Dad's pocket and get into it. Liver failure is all too often the result and quickly leads to death. If your pets get into anything, especially something sugar-free, always contact your veterinarian as soon as possible for advice on what to do! Best advice is to purchase gums that do not contain Xylitol, and keep any product that contains Xylitol completely out of reach of pets.

For any pet owner, it is always best to check with your veterinarian or Animal Poison Control for any questions on possible toxin exposure. I hope everyone has a wonderful Valentine's Day and that this article helps to enlighten on common toxins and keeps everyone a bit safer.

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MOORE on MANNERS

WITH LINDA LOU MOORE

You may want to consider the status of your friendship or your relationship. Evaluate not only your comfort zone, but the recipient's comfort zone as well. Oftentimes an overly romantic gift, given in the first stages of a relationship, may prove to be somewhat awkward.

- Always check gift giving policies. In some instances, businesses prohibit colleagues from exchanging gifts. According to Post, giving gifts to co-workers or to your boss can make you look bad to the rest of your colleagues.

“Moonlight and roses, never out of date,” is a song lyric from the classic movie, Casablanca. The romance of Valentine’s Day brings to mind gifts that are timeless. Even in the time of COVID!

How will the other person respond? Will he or she read more into the gift than is intended? Will your gift be misunderstood or misinterpreted? Sending flowers, delivering homemade baked goods or making dinner plans can be as casual or as elegant as your relationship status.

VALENTINE’S DAY IN THE TIMES OF COVID

Valentine’s Day will be a little different this year. While out and about, the best way you can show anyone you care for is to wear a mask, wash your hands and avoid large gatherings. You can observe the CDC guidelines and can still support your local businesses. It’s easy to socially distance in your small shops and boutiques. If your favorite restaurants have seating limitations, just carry out your special dishes and serve them by candlelight in your own dining room.

We often think of the traditional Valentine gift as romantic, but what happens when you:

- (1) Try to buy a Valentine gift for someone you have just begun to date?
- (2) Wonder what the pitfalls are of reading more into a gift than intended?
- (3) Debate how to sign a Valentine card?

SIGNING THE CARD

If you have just begun seeing someone or have just begun a new friendship, signing your Valentine card with the word “love” may be a little too intense. Instead of using “love” you may want to consider signing your card with a phrase such as “Happy Valentine’s Day!” or “Thinking of You!”

KINDNESS

No matter what you decide to give on Valentine’s Day, your acts of kindness are gifts that are never out of date.

NEW RELATIONSHIPS

What type of Valentine gift is appropriate if you are in a new relationship?

Deciding to give a gift on Valentine’s Day can be as thorny as a dozen roses. What should you do if moonlight and roses may appear:

- (A) Too personal?
- (B) Too intimate? or
- (C) Too expensive?

GIFT GIVING TIPS

Before sending Valentine’s Day gifts make certain you know the rules. Here are some tips from the experts:

- Be sure and check before sending gifts. Oftentimes, schools and businesses have strict rules about accepting gifts from parents, clients, or business associates.

Linda Lou Moore is a certified etiquette consultant. She offers business professionalism and dining seminars for adults, and etiquette and dining programs for children and teens. Contact via Post Office Box 726, Paragould 72451 or at manners@paragould.net.



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- a Love Story About Memories -

BLAST FROM the PAST

BY RICHARD BRUMMETT

It started with the need to create some space in my garage and has ballooned into something I never expected. I have, in a sense, created a monster ... but a friendly one, one that seems to bring happiness to an immeasurable number of people.

One day years ago I decided to tackle the chore of moving things out of the garage. When I worked my way down through stacks of this and piles of that -- discovering some things I didn't know existed and rediscovering some I had put aside until "someday" -- I arrived at two large plastic totes and I knew exactly what they held: scores of old photographs and negatives collected in my 40-plus years as a photojournalist.

My first inclination was to just put them in the dumpster, figuring if I hadn't looked at them in several years they probably weren't too important. But as I filtered through the thousands of images I realized most had never been seen by anyone other than me and I decided to post some to my Facebook page in hopes of entertaining others. Simply put, it's one of the best things I have ever done. Over the years I have written things that meant something

to someone but posting the old photos -- which I named Blast From The Past -- has seemingly brought more joy to more people than I ever anticipated. My wife and I can rarely go out in public without someone saying, "I love your old photos. That's the first thing I look for every day."

Most of the things I post come from negatives I scan into my computer and I often have no idea who the people on the negative are, so having others identify them is as much a treat for me as it is for those viewing them for the first time. That's why, when someone says, "I wish you would put everyone's name on there," I can't. Learning how I came to have the images might help explain.

Back in my day we didn't have digital cameras; we rolled our own 35mm film in the newspaper office and then went out on assignment. I was for many years the sports guy and my editor suggested I shoot no less than three rolls of film at any game I covered ... a little over 100 shots per outing, with usually no more than a handful ever making it into print. The rest remained idle on a strip of negatives, filed away for possible future use. No print was ever made ... just images on film, moving

deeper into the archives with each new assignment that logged a hundred more ahead of them.

Sometimes during the course of a game I would see a friend or relative in the stands or on the sidelines and I would snap off a couple of candid shots of them; sometimes an acquaintance would ask if I could take a few shots of their child; and sometimes, needing to get a partially-shot roll out of the camera and to the darkroom, I would finish by focusing on whomever or whatever I found in front of the lens. Those negatives would go home with me and that's where a lot of the treasures came from; but there's more.

In my latter years I was promoted to the position of Managing Editor and one can imagine the headaches that carries. After taking a much-needed day off, the next morning I reported to work bright and early and when my editorial staff began arriving around 4 p.m. one of the team came to my office and said, "They threw a bunch of negatives away yesterday. I thought you'd want to know."

Seems management thought we needed more storage space and deemed a bunch

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of old negatives from the 1970s useless, so into the dumpster they went. I asked if I could have them and was told if I wanted to go dumpster diving to help myself, so I did. I climbed in and salvaged several armloads of negatives that contained local history. As you can imagine, after almost two days in a garbage heap, many were ruined. They had holes punched in them or giant scars where the normal fare of wood and steel items scheduled to be tossed into the dumpster did their damage. Still, I saved thousands and many of those are the ones that make the Blast From The Past; I don't know who's there until they are scanned, and seeing today's adults featured as little kids is amusing. Sometimes I might know one or two people in the photo but as others begin to identify more I go, "Well, sure, I see it now."

I get as much enjoyment out of viewers' comments as they get out of seeing the pictures; I especially like it when they say they found the faces of loved ones in the crowd or they see a picture that holds some special meaning for them. One woman commented, "Thank you so much for posting that photo today. I saw my parents in the stands and you can see them clearly. They have both passed away and I have no photos of them since we had a house fire a few years ago. If you have anything else with them in it, I will gladly pay you to have them." I made prints and sent them to her, free of charge. Knowing I made her day made my day and that was payment enough.

I smile at the images of people and places I grew up around but that are no longer with us, friends and community leaders who have passed on, buildings that have given way to the demands of progress. A school here, a store there, a ballpark turned into a building complex ... all bring back memories of times long lost. And I happen to think that's a good thing, and plan to keep posting the memories as long as I can. I love old photos, I love history, I love bringing joy to others. That's my love story.



See more "Blast from the Past" posts by finding Richard on Facebook

A-STATE PIC(K)S



The A-State Committee with the Jonesboro Regional Chamber of Commerce is hosting a monthly photo contest in which participants are invited to [pick] their favorite [pic] within a given category and submit via the post found on the Chamber’s Facebook page.

January’s theme – “Throwback” – yielded this winning photo submitted by Casey Pearce taken at a TCU game in 1999.

February’s theme is “Game Day.” Submit your photo by commenting on the post found on the Jonesboro Regional Chamber of Commerce’s Facebook page. The winner will be given a prize sponsored by a local business and will have their photo run in the March edition of Premiere.

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WORDS

HOPE FOUND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MEGAN BROWN

- a Love Story About Making a Difference -



BY LINDSEY SPENCER

In a world largely dominated by social media it can be very easy to see problems – we scroll through lists of them daily. It is also easy to voice concern – to lament our sorrow, to point out the issues, and to point fingers at the hardships around us. What is not so easy, is taking action.

Hope Found is taking action. Co-founder and Executive Director Megan Brown said the mission is to fight human trafficking by prevention and restoration.

“In order to do that, we meet survivors where they’re at,” said Megan as she explained the role of the group as both an education resource to aid in prevention, and as an ally for survivors. Morgan and the team around her understand human trafficking can, and does, happen everywhere – including in our community.

The good news is people like Megan are eager to take action. Hope Found focuses much of its efforts on keeping others safe through training and education for the community. It also extends help to victims through mentorship and advocacy.

“Our efforts are empowerment based,” Megan explained. “We want to help survivors regain control of their lives.”

Like any hard work, Hope Found takes time and money. Support comes from different places, two of which in 2020 were born from a few community members who recognized human trafficking as a problem and decided to do something about it.



ERIN HOLLAND AND MORGAN HILL

RUNNING FOR A REASON

Last summer Erin Holland was seeing and hearing talk of human trafficking often.

“I’m a mom and I’m a teacher and it just really started to weigh on me,” Erin shared. “I had nights I would just lay in bed and cry because I know there are people out there who harm kids without batting an eye.” Erin understood something important: “I can sit here and critique it or I can do something.”

She decided to do something. Erin began to research an organization to support. Recognizing there are things she can’t do, she knew she wanted to help those doing the hard work every day. “If I could go kick down doors I would but I can’t, so [I thought,] what can I do?” Erin said. Her initial efforts led to baking over 300 dozen cookies in her own kitchen, the proceeds of which she donated to the Underground Railroad.

When her friend Morgan Hill reached out, she was already ready to do something more. Morgan was ready for action, too, and told Erin she wanted to help on a local level.

“We started thinking, ‘What can we do here?’” Morgan said, adding that their

discussions reminded them that people tend to think trafficking is only a problem in bigger cities, but it happens everywhere. “The victims look just like the kid sitting next to yours in school. We wanted to help people who have been a victim in our own community.”

Because they needed to find something they could do safely – the pandemic making things tricky – the friends landed on the idea of hosting a local 5K. The Freedom 5K took place on September 5, had 50 participants and raised more than \$1,500 because the donations kept pouring in even after the event itself was closed.

Of the overwhelming generosity from those who wanted to donate, Erin said, “People care, they just don’t know how to help. People want to help, they sometimes just don’t know how.”

When given the opportunity, the community stepped up to take a stand in small and big steps, all of which help Hope Found take giant steps in serving the community. Like in a race, each step brings one closer to the ultimate goal. Sometimes, a step inspires someone else to take a step, too, or aids them in doing so in the right direction.

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PLAYING WITH PURPOSE

After seeing information shared about human trafficking through social media, Leigh Ann and Junior Gantt decided to do something. Last year the couple decided to host a co-ed softball tournament in order to raise awareness and funds in their own community. Aware of the 5K, they decided to reach out to Morgan and Erin and were led to Hope Found as the best local resource to contribute to.

Eighty participants played ball at the Paragould Community Center complex but it was more than a casual day hanging out with friends. The event raised \$350 to give to Hope Found, money that will help victims right here in NEA.

Just as they were inspired to be part of the solution after becoming aware and seeing the efforts from Morgan and Erin, perhaps someone else (or multiple people) has been inspired by their actions, too.

The chain reaction born of action to bring help and support to the community will surely not end with the Gantts, or even the next person.

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HOW CAN YOU TAKE ACTION?

There are many ways to take a step toward ending human trafficking; some are big and some are small.

“Educate yourselves on the signs of human trafficking so that if you see those, you can tell someone,” Morgan urged.

Susie Cover, on the board for Hope Found, said a new program is launching soon: Communities Against Trafficking. The goal, Susie said, “... to go into each county and find a group of people who can come together and train. They can keep it going so people know how to fight this.”

“I encourage everyone to find more information about Hope Found because their cause needs to be talked about,” Leigh Ann said. “There are so many misunderstandings about human trafficking and what it entails. I would also encourage everyone to get involved in some fashion. By finding out what the Hope Found’s mission is and how they can help. It could be by hosting an event, donation, or simply participating in an event that benefits this organization.”

“We are so grateful for Morgan and Erin, and Leigh Ann and Junior, for helping support our mission,” Megan said. “It helps raise awareness and also helps us financially. It costs money to provide these services to victims. Transportation, food, etc. It all costs money.”

Many of us consume and create commentary on the daily, but the bravest of us are ready to stop talking and start doing. If you’re looking for a way to support leaders in our community who are doing something about a problem, please reach out to Hope Found in order to help support its mission.

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PODCAST



- a Love Story About Listening -

BY LINDSEY SPENCER

Jared Pickney loves his community, and he knows there are many others who do, too. This love combined with curiosity about people and their stories has led to Jared's newest project: The Paragould Podcast.

With the desire to "celebrate inspiring stories curated from the amazing people who live in Paragould, Arkansas," the podcast team launched its first episode in January of 2021. Episodes are to be released weekly and so far have featured new Paragould Mayor Josh Agee, writer Haley Deck and her husband Blake, and Max Bishop – a real life cowboy/ninja who has worked on the bomb squad for multiple presidents and is undefeated in no holds barred MMA amongst other accomplishments. The Paragould Podcast aims to leave listeners feeling "encouraged, inspired, and proud of the city we call home."

"I've been thinking on this for a couple of years," Jared, who also contributes a monthly column to Premiere and is the pastor at The Crossing Church Paragould, shared of a new way to contribute to his community. Jared was born and raised in Paragould but lived elsewhere for years before returning home.

"I love the city of Paragould," Jared said, "I really do – I love it and want to leave it better than I found it."

Always curious and having always been a people person, Jared comes by the personality needed for an interview-style podcast naturally.

"I always assume everyone I meet has something they can teach me," Jared said. "I want to grow personally. I want to be the best version of myself I can be."

So, Jared asks questions of others and eventually realized he might as well be sharing those conversations so others might learn from them, too.

"I began to meet these people and I thought, 'These are really incredible people who live right here in our city,'" Jared explained of the journey from casual conversation to recorded interview. He found himself inspired, encouraged, and sometimes challenged by what he heard.

Jared believes that by listening to others – even if, perhaps especially if, they believe or see things differently – we can all become much better versions of ourselves.

"When you hear people's story, they're no longer a number or statistic," he explained.

Time was the issue when the idea was first conceived, but recently Jared was able to get organized, get a team, and get to work. Now others will be able to sit in and listen to conversations Jared hopes will pull others together and make us better people, a better city.

The podcast is not for profit, and if it does one day accept sponsorships of any kind, the funds will be used to grow the show and/or give back to the community.

Learn more about the Paragould Podcast at paragouldpodcast.com where you are invited to suggest guests for consideration. Or, follow along on Facebook (Paragould Podcast), Instagram (@paragouldpodcast) or Twitter (@paragouldpod).



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February 19th
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May 21
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A Very Special Day

- a Love Story About Learning and Inspiration -



BY LINDSEY SPENCER

Imagine having an astronaut – who is currently up in space, orbiting Earth on the International Space Station, who is doing work that will have lasting impacts on the future – listen to and answer your question in real time. Now consider how it might inspire not only you, but also everyone else who got to watch, too.

For students at Nettleton STEAM, they don't have to imagine. Today it's likely easy to still feel excited when they reminisce on the opportunity, but this story is one not soon to leave their lips. Years from now the kids who participated in a downlink with astronauts aboard the ISS on December 10 will be able to tell their kids, their students, their colleagues, of one very special day.

The first STEM certified school in the state of Arkansas, Nettleton STEAM principal Cathelene Gray and her staff collaborated with Arkansas State University to apply for the opportunity to speak with astronauts in a downlink event celebrating 20 years on the ISS. Downlinks (virtual conferences with the space station) are regular events for the scientists aboard the space station, but what is not common is for students to have the opportunity to participate. Nettleton's downlink was the first for the state of Arkansas.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NETTLETON SCHOOL DISTRICT



Front row: Layla Westbrook, Allison Moss, Whitley Floyd, Olivia Exum, Brenley Cossey, Karter Massey, Arina Ash-nova, Genesis Trawick, Nekavious Jackson, Sam Sawyer, Bryson Gann

Second row: Brooklyn Wheeley, Presley Floyd, Amelia Westman-Forbes, Ella McMasters, NeKenya Smith, Emily Perez, Jack Patton, Patrick Taylor

Back row: Barry Carlton, STEAM Assistant Principal, Kelli Cochran, Facilitator, Cathelene Gray, STEAM Principal

After submitting their application, the next few months were a whirlwind. Gray said the Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas STEM Coalition, Arkansas State University, and PBS were all amazing partners who made the event possible.

Streamed to schools around the state and even around the world, pre-recorded questions (in case the event was not able to take place at the school due to Covid) were aired on December 10 following a live ceremony. Astronauts Kate Rubbins and Shannon Walker were live responding to the questions as the students sat gathered (and spaced appropriately) in the Nettleton STEAM gym.

The questions asked were no ordinary ones.

“[There were] a lot of guidelines about what they can ask,” said Gray. “[They couldn’t] ask anything they can Google – so they were saying, ‘What are we gonna ask?’ and we told them, ‘Think about the work you’re doing, think about them doing those things in space in microgravity and ask about it.’ Their questions were incredible.”

Incredible is likely the best way to describe the inquiries of the third-through-sixth graders.

Questions stemmed from the yearlong NASA program the students are going through that has third graders doing a water filtration system, fourth graders building robotic arms, fifth graders

creating plant growth chambers, and sixth graders designing space suits.

Fifth grader Patrick asked, “In the future Artemis missions, how will the difference in microgravity on the moon versus on the International Space Station impact plant growth chambers?”

Emily, a fourth grader inquired, “What will be the significance of being the first woman on the moon?”

Sam, also in fourth grade questioned, “What were the challenges of sequencing DNA in microgravity?”

And Karter, fourth grade, wondered, “What skills outside of STEM/science are needed for long term space travel?”

The spotlight on Nettleton STEAM, NEA, and all of Arkansas for this monumental event will likely have a lasting impact for many students who will continue to grow and represent our community well.

“My goal was to bring some attention [here],” said Gray. “Northeast Arkansas is an incredible part of the state. For us this little, tiny school in its third year of operation, to bring some notoriety to the state twice in 2020 (first as the first STEM certified school in Arkansas and now the first in Arkansas downlink), especially in the middle of a pandemic, I mean, how incredible. I think it really speaks to all of our stakeholders that joined in and jumped in with both feet to help us, to support us.”

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Paragould PRIDE

“We [knew] we may do all this work and still not get to go to state,” Richie said about the discussion surrounding whether or not to move forward, but the answer from everyone was always a “resounding and unanimous ‘we want to do what we’ve always done.’”



BY LINDSEY SPENCER

Winning a State Championship is, in itself, quite a feat but pulling it off for the fifth consecutive year is a remarkable show of what hard work and dedication can achieve. The Paragould Pride Band displayed its hard work at the 2020 Arkansas State Championship by defending its title despite the challenges the year threw at it.

“We pushed forward and did what we always do,” said Richie Williams, Director of Bands at Paragould High School since 2008. Richie was one of few who insisted that plans needed to be kept in place in order to provide the opportunity to kids.

Rehearsal for the competition began in early July with six weeks of marching camp that didn’t include playing instruments. So, until then, band members did what they could: They marched. Most days students and staff were out all day during the summer, and afternoons through

evenings, and weekends, when school started back up. Students weren’t allowed to actually play until August 5. When they were allowed to, it had been a long time since the group had played as one. Due to the difficulties of 2020 and necessary precautions, kids were put on quarantine left and right, Richie shared, meaning they had to reteach and relearn often to adjust. Richie said despite complications and the need to play things safely, he believed overcoming would be worth it.

“With the pandemic and all of the extra guidelines, we wondered how we were going to pull this off,” Richie shared. “But even with all of that I talked to staff and the kids and said, ‘We can do this and we can do it safely.’”

The entire time they were logging hours and perfecting their performance, they had to keep in mind the day to perform might not come.

Richie said the kids don’t take it for granted, and the group brought its enthusiasm to the 2020 show called “Alpha” – a show about the wolfpacks of the great white North. Richie said the show sort of took them back to their brand with an edgy performance. As with all performances, the staff encouraged students to perform for the one person who might need to hear it and be inspired.

The Paragould Pride Band is made up of 115 members Richie describes as “a dedicated bunch” and is known locally and regionally as the “Best of Sight and Sound.” Richie said he and others have been told by many people that when they tell someone they are from Paragould they are often met with, “Oh, they have a great band!”

“There’s a lot of pride,” Richie says, and he’s speaking of the good kind of pride in doing something that means something to the kids, those listening, and to the entire community. “What they do matters.”

Coming soon to aid them in their future championship endeavors is a new 24,000 square foot building that Richie said is much needed and much deserved. “I want to thank my superintendent Debbie Smith and the school board,” Richie said. “We couldn’t do all we do without their support.”



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Winning a State Championship is, in itself, quite a feat but pulling it off for the fifth consecutive year is a remarkable show of what hard work and dedication can achieve. The Paragould Pride Band displayed its hard work at the 2020 Arkansas State Championship by defending its title despite the challenges the year threw at it.



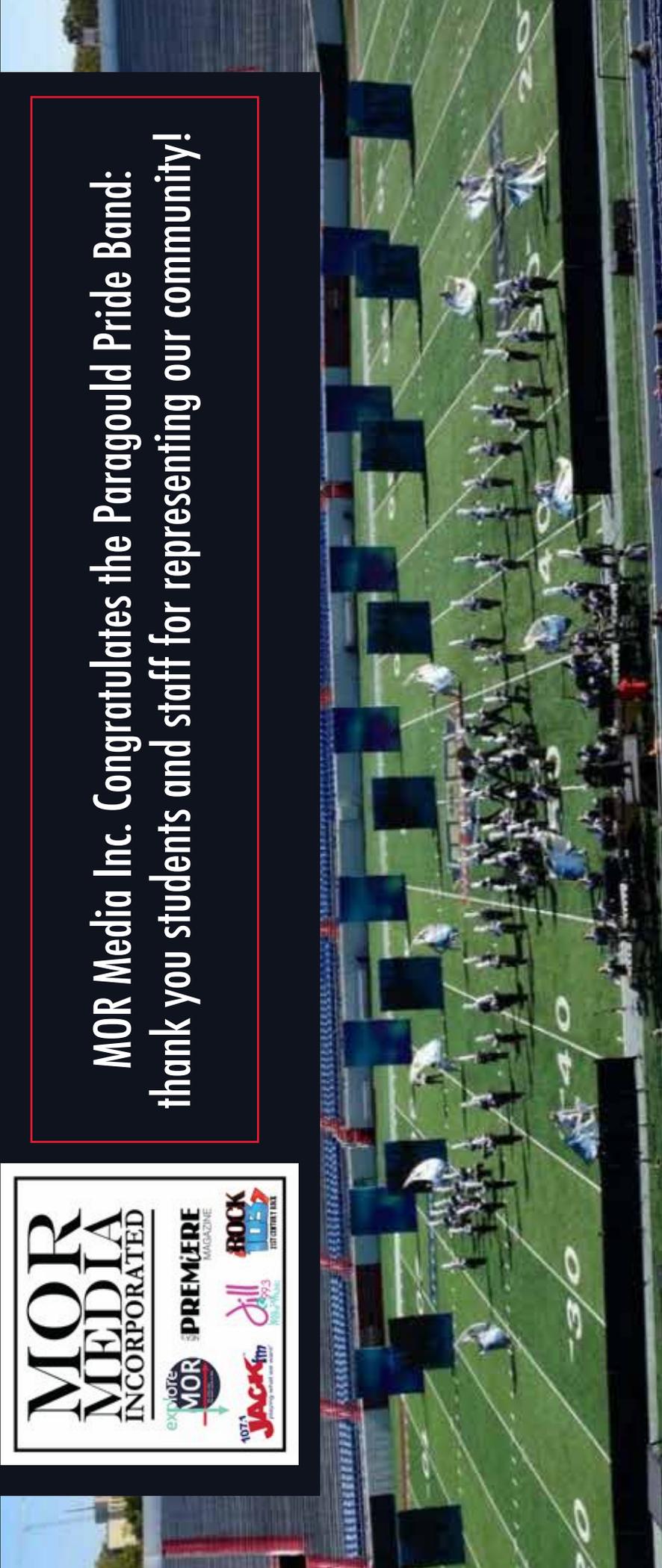
PRIDE STAFF: Logan Davis (percussion instructor), Carlos Serna (assistant band director), Richie Williams (Director of Bands), Josh Mobley (assistant band director), and Cody Ballard (assistant band director). Erin Straub (colorguard instructor) - not pictured.

THE PRIDE

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EXHALE

- a Love Story About Helping -



BY LINDSEY SPENCER

Exhale, a non-profit for single mothers, is on a mission to empower and inspire women to excel in their careers. The organization provides resources to help alleviate financial burden for women while they work to develop professional and/or educational skills.

Founder Jess Hollis understands how difficult it can be to reach for a career while raising children, especially when one has been out of the work force for some time.

"After a divorce in 2018, I was faced with the challenges of raising four children alone," Jess shared. "I had been a stay-at-home mom for 13 years."

Jess said she helped in the family business, but had no outside income of her own and had relied on her husband to provide financially. During the divorce, Jess was quickly acutely aware of how difficult it would be to provide for herself and her family.

"I had no business attire to go to an interview, no experience or formal education to speak of, and honestly, no idea where to start to get these things, especially in the midst of a heartbreaking divorce," Jess said. But Jess wasn't alone. "There were some amazing people who stepped up to help me."

Jess used the support she was given and ran with it; taking a position first after working with a local temp service, she also began cleaning houses and started personal training. Jess hustled, working hard to make the kindness shown to her worth it.

"The love and support of my family, friends and community was such a blessing," Jess said. "My kids inspired me to work hard, to make a better life for them. My support system inspired me to pass on the blessings to other single moms."

Her experience led to the creation of Exhale – still in the works of earning its 501c3

status when this article was being written – which is already working to help single mothers when it matters.

"The goal is to raise money to assist with rent, utilities, (and/or deposits for both), appropriate business attire for interviews, transportation to interviews, grants and scholarships for single mothers who are furthering their education," Jess explained of what Exhale will encompass to assist single mothers. "Also, to raise awareness in our communities of the difficulties that these mothers face raising children alone and the effect its has on the mother, the children and our community."

Jess shared that statistically, most children of single mothers are living below poverty level. These children are at greater risk of having poor physical and mental health, dropping out of school, becoming homeless, teen pregnancy, and so on.

"If we decrease the financial hardships the mothers face while they work on advancing their career or educational goals, we can promote financial stability resulting in improved health, success in school, and stronger families and communities," Jess explained.

Jess's hard work is an exceptional act of love not just for the other women and children on the direct receiving end of the contributions of her and others to Exhale's work, but for an entire community that will no doubt gain strength and hope from their efforts.

Because of the kindness and love shown to Jess when she needed it most, she now owns a healthcare management company, Helix Health, and is in school working toward a bachelors degree in nursing.

Single mothers or individuals who know single mothers who need assistance can reach out to Jess via phone at (870) 926-4738 or by email at exhale.us@gmail.com.

Exhale is also accepting donations for gently worn business attire at the Helix Health office at 2210 W. Kingshighway, Suite 7, in Paragould.

PHOTO BY JAMES BICKHAM



DRESS FOR LIFE

- a Love Story About Learning and Inspiration -

BY CAITLIN LAFARLETTE



When Ian Buchanan noticed how many men didn't know how to properly present themselves in various situations, he formulated a plan to give back to the community and teach others how to dress.

Dress For Life started in March 2019 as a workshop style class designed for small groups of men to learn about interview wear, as well as what to wear on a date night or what to wear according to different body types.

"I was seeing that there was a vast disparity in men who didn't know what black tie formal was, or even knew how to tie a tie," Buchanan said, adding that what somebody looks like is linked to how they feel about themselves.

The program grew from small groups to Buchanan's speaking to students at schools and he has since received a nonprofit corporation status. The 37-year-old is currently finalizing a nonprofit 501c3 status

and in the meantime is working on a virtual Gentlemen's Academy that teaches not just the style, but the spirit and mindset of being a gentleman.

Since Dress for Life's creation, Buchanan has gathered clothing for a men's clothing closet when he recognized it wasn't enough to teach without providing students tools to use with their new knowledge. He cleaned out his closet and reached out to others for donations. Building the professional clothing closet also helped him operate his Shirts for Seniors Program.

Earle High School counselor Christopher Conway saw Dress for Life grow from the very beginning.

"I was honored to see the establishment of his program from the planning stages to the platform of excellence it operates from now," Conway said.

Conway also worked with Buchanan when preparing senior boys for a college fair, teaching them the appropriate way to dress for different occasions and how to be measured for a suit.

"Ian's organization helped the students feel

good about looking professional," Conway said. "Many of them are most comfortable with wearing the latest fashion but uncomfortable in professional attire. Ian's organization built confidence."

He added the students were excited while trying on clothes, bragging about who looked the best. At the college fair every senior was dressed in professional attire donated by Buchanan's program.

"The colleges that attended were so impressed with the way the students dressed and carried themselves," Conway said. "Their behavior matched their outfits. It was amazing."

He added that while anyone can benefit from Dress for Life, young males especially can learn from Buchanan.

"With many fathers being absent, there are several young men who have never been taught how to tie a tie. Anyone who needs to know the appropriate way to dress in different settings and for different events should attend one of his training sessions," Conway said. "They will leave knowing 'the better you look, the better you will feel.'"

Buchanan said those who attend sessions can also leave with knowledge that perception matters, as well as gaining tools to help put into practice what he teaches.

"You can also leave with the knowledge of knowing you always have a champion in your corner that is willing to assist in any manner possible," he added.

Being that champion by ministering to the needs of others is Buchanan's favorite part of offering these services.

"It is more than a business to me," he said. "It is a calling; seeing boys become gentlemen and, seeing them flourish and change the narratives and perceptions that hold them back, and gain confidence."

To donate to Dress for Life call 870-897-8820 or email dressforlifeclases@yahoo.com. Buchanan's clothing closet is located at Fullness of Joy Ministries at 2120 Thorn Street in Jonesboro.



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Doing Good in Your Own LITTLE CORNER

- a Love Story About Giving -

BY RICHARD BRUMMETT



When discussing people whose actions are indicative of their love of community, it's hard not to conjure up a mental image of Paragould's Libby Wamock-Glasco.

Owner at Kiss the Cook Restaurant and Catering, Libby has long been known as the force behind a work crew that surrenders its tips for the common good, helping the boss give them away to those in need. Her goodwill efforts recently resulted in her nomination for The Arkansas Heritage Foundation's Proprietor of the Year, presented annually and designed to honor a chef, cook and/or restaurant owner in Arkansas who has made significant achievements in the food industry. Nominations are accepted from the public, and Libby said this recent one for her made an impact.

"It was kind of cool," she said. "It came on a day when I was kind of just hanging on. It's with the Arkansas Heritage Society Food Hall of Fame. I was nominated as Proprietor of the Year for 2021. It was the boost I needed; it reminded me to make a difference. It was great to be nominated. It means somebody thought enough of us to do it."

Making a difference is much of what drives Libby to be active in and around Northeast Arkansas with her benevolence, but the kindness is not limited to this area. When Fort Smith endured severe flooding, the tip collection headed across the state.

"I have a sense of wanting to give back," Libby explained. "We opened in 2001; our first year of business was weird because of the horrible tragedy that hit our nation,

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and there has been a lot of tragedy in our world since then. You have to start in your little corner of the world and attempt to make a difference. Then, you *are* making a difference. Your little act might spawn something in 20 directions. When you can't *do* anymore ... when the older you get you realize you can't *do* like you used to ... you have to ask, 'What is my skill set? Teaching, doing, mentoring?' There's always something you can do."

The giving spirit began in 2013 when, after watching the news late one evening, Libby and her husband Robbie felt compelled to act. They listened to the story of a Lawrence County mother whose daughter was kidnapped and died at the hands of her step-father and they collected the tip money

to send the mother's way. "The tragedy of all that ... we just looked at each other and said that *saying* we need to do something was not enough for something like that. That's how it evolved ... we wanted to help that woman. We didn't know until afterward she couldn't even afford a headstone. So the first round of money we raised went for that."

For a while she called the practice Pay It Forward Friday but said people "paid too much attention to the business instead of the ministry and sometimes got it confused with the local Pay It Forward program. When we moved out on Highway 49 it evolved into an everyday thing. Customers are used to it now; new ones we may have to tell about it, but our staff is unique. They

work for a living wage, not tip wages. When we hire them we allow them to know they will be taken care of. The more money they see go in, the more excited they get. They are taken care of, we take care of them, and others are helped because of that. They enjoy seeing that happen. The old may have to explain to the young, explain why we are doing it. But this is what God does. God is at work through our customers and the people put in our paths."

The Covid-19 issues have put a crunch on Kiss The Cook dining opportunities, keeping the dining room closed most of the time but Libby said customers making use of the drive-through window still contribute willingly.

HOSPICE SWEETHEARTS



Dierksen Hospice would like to introduce, Mr. Milton and Mrs. Dean Cooper. Milton and Dean have been married for 73 years. They were wed on January 11, 1948 at the Baptist Church in Trumann, Arkansas. Amber Nolen, Licensed Social Worker for Dierksen Hospice, asked a

few questions we would all like to know including, 'What is your secret?' They smiled and said, "There is no secret to a lasting marriage – it takes pushing through the hard times and compassion for one another." Milton added, "And never go to bed mad".

Q: How did you meet?

A: Milton was driving down the road and saw Dean walking with a friend and he had to stop. He added, "I told her I loved her first."

Q: How old were you when you got married?

A: Dean – 15!

Q: Who is the better driver?

A: Dean – 'He used to be, but now I am.'

Q: How does Milton like his

steak cooked?

A: Dean – "By himself, he cooks his own steaks."

Q: What was the first meal your wife cooked for you?

A: Milton – "Beans."

Q: What is some good advice to share with newlyweds?

A: "You've got to push to make it in this world from start to finish."

Marriage does not guarantee you will be together forever, it is only a piece of paper. It takes love, respect, understanding, friendship, and faith to make a relationship last.

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"In-house tips are down with the dining room closed, obviously," she said. "but people at the drive-through window still give. They understand we have a ministry to fulfill; we may not be able to give as much but we can still give. There's always a way, still. People are more in tune with what we're doing, I think. Sometimes it overwhelms us."

The restaurant celebrates 20 years in business this month ("It's really been fun; we call it our little rose," Libby said) but the owner's sense of community dates back much longer. "First off, my love of God," she listed as a reason for the acts of kindness. "But also because of what my community does for me. For almost 52 years I've grown up seeing need and then the generosity of this great community. People want to take care of each other. People and God have looked out for me. I can give back."

Kiss The Cook is located at 5301 Linwood Drive, Suite A, Carriage Hills Drive, in Paragould. It can be reached by phone at 870-335-2665, and the menu can be found at kissthecookyum.com. Dinner on Demand pickups are available from 11 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday.

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2021
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Wedding PLANNING



If wedding bells are in your future, you might be feeling a bit overwhelmed. In addition to the normal to-do list leading up to nuptials, the complications of the pandemic have added a number of things for brides and grooms to consider. But as always, and perhaps even more especially so during difficult times, a wedding can be a beautiful reminder of new beginnings and give cause for celebration of love and family.

2020 saw a bunch of new wedding trends: embroidered masks, hand sanitizing stations, even virtual streaming. While you might be considering some, all, or even more ideas to help keep your guests safe, we are also crossing our fingers and saying our prayers with you that at least some of these things will become accommodations of the past as soon as possible.

Whatever guidelines you are implementing for your big day, in an everchanging landscape NEA wedding vendors are available to help you make your wedding day the most magical, beautiful, and safe day it can possibly be. Whether you're planning an intimate affair or considering precautions in order to host a larger party, we have a few tips from the pros to bring this special day together.

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Pick a Date

Set the date. You'll need this for all other plans!



Set a Budget

This will help guide many of your decisions.



Engagement Photos

You'll need these for Save the Dates, Invites, wedding website, etc.

First Things First

Attention to planning is probably the most important thing the bride, groom and their team can do. The more thought and work that goes into the day's events beforehand, the more the duo can relax and enjoy the wedding when the day arrives.

Rick Steiner, owner of Steiner Event Group, likes to remind couples of taking one step at a time. "Once the engagement has occurred and the bride sits down with her mother and her fiancé, there are two important decisions to be made. First, the wedding date. Second, the budget," Rick said.

"The budget is needed for two reasons. One, the budget provides the guideline to be followed to keep spending as planned. Two, the budget determines what amount can/should be spent on the various areas of the wedding and reception."

— S E G —

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So how early is too early to start planning?

There's no such thing.

"Planning a wedding should begin as soon as possible after getting engaged," Rick advised. "This helps to make sure the venue, or wedding professionals (planner, florists, photographers, etc.) aren't already booked on the date they plan."

When it comes to some details brides and grooms should be sure to consider as they get started planning, one is the size of the wedding. Rick said it's important to be very realistic with the size of the wedding party and guest list. "These seem to be two areas that are overlooked until many plans have been made," Rick explained. "Then the plans have to be adjusted."

Rick added that 2020 has revealed to him that weddings do not have to be huge to be meaningful.

"Last summer, I had a 450-person wedding that was scaled down to 115, and it was one of the most perfect weekends ever," he shared. "We changed the date twice, and moved it from one city to another, but it all worked beautifully. A reputable, qualified planner is key to saving the bride money, securing the vendors that best reflect her personality and vision, while staying within budget, and who will relieve the bride and mother from the stress involved. The bride should be a bride and enjoy her special day, and the mother should enjoy being the mother of the bride and focused on her daughter. Let a professional take care of the details."

Plan ahead, work hard, get help from the pros, and be extremely organized up until the day before the wedding, but then: Just let the day unfold. Soak it up, admire your work, and if something goes wrong simply let it because there's nothing else to do at that point but smile at another memory with your loved ones.

Jumpstart (or play catch-up) on your wedding planning by attending the SEG Bridal Expo on February 28. Details on page 47.



FALL 2020 SEG BRIDAL EXPO,
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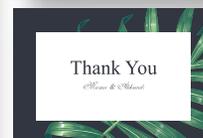
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Next Steps

There's a number of things to be done early on in the wedding planning process, and not necessarily because they will take forever to figure out, but because vendors' calendars start filling up quickly so it's important to schedule with them as soon as possible. It's also important to remember that even though it's your day, if you want your loved ones to be able to make it they need plenty of time to plan ahead, especially those who will need to travel.

Invitations

PostNet in Paragould recommends Save the Dates be sent at least four months ahead, but up to twelve months ahead. Invitations can be sent in the range of four weeks to three months in advance, saying it really depends on if most of the guests are local or "far away."

PostNet can help design and print all aspects for your wedding event including but not limited to: Save the Dates, cards/magnets/etc., invitations, RSVPs, shower invites, programs, event signage; and the "giveaways" like mints, candies, glasses, bridesmaids and groomsmen gifts and, of course, wedding photos after the event takes place!

Gift Registration

One of the best things about getting married is being showered with gifts. I mean, you're starting a life together AND throwing a party that others get to enjoy, so might as well accept the tradition of gift-giving surrounding your day. One tradition that has long since been established in the wedding industry is registering for gifts and it's no wonder, because you might as well select things you need/want!

Perfect Touch is well known for being one of the best places to register for gifts because, as their name says, they can help put the "perfect touch" on your home as well as all the celebrations leading up to the big day.

"We have gifts for all ages and every occasion," said Krista DeRoe, owner of Perfect Touch in Downtown Paragould.

When should a bride and groom start their registry?

"We recommend [registering] five to six months before the wedding," Krista said. "Most showers are three months out."



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the DRESS



One of the biggest (sometimes literally) elements of the day is the wedding dress. Often a central element the bride has dreamed of much of her life, getting the dress right is a process that leads from trying on different styles, to alterations, and often possibly another fitting (or multiple) before it makes it down the aisle.

“A bride should start shopping for a gown about ten months out from her wedding date and have one picked out no later than six months prior to the wedding,” said Crystal Baldwin of Royal Reign Boutique in Paragould. “That is, if there is that much time between the engagement and the wedding. If there isn’t, the shopping should start immediately.”

When it comes to shopping for the dress, some brides may prefer to keep their party small while others may bring a larger entourage.

“Generally, the mother of the bride comes with her dress shopping. Before inviting the future mother-in-law, I would recommend running it by the bride’s mother first. This is a special time for her as well. As far as friends, bridesmaids, and other family, I would think of who would be the most beneficial,” Crystal advises. “Anyone accompanying the bride should be supportive of the bride and her choices, assist with undressing / dressing, buttons, zippers, etc.”

Due to COVID restrictions and guidelines, the number of people might be limited so be sure to check with the store before arriving. This might be a blessing in disguise as it offers a more intimate experience for the bride and perhaps one or two others to help without the fear of hurting anyone’s feelings due to their not being invited.





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the CAKE

When it comes to the cake, meeting with the bakery should take place five to six months in advance. Something Sweet in Paragould, known for exquisite cakes for all occasions, recommends a minimum of three months for placing the order.

Owner and cake decorator of Something Sweet, Tracy Mothershed, likes to remind guests that when it comes to making the decision about what kind of cake, how big, and what it looks like: It's your day and no one else's.

"It's your day and you should get what you want," Tracy tells brides. She meets with a lot of brides to discuss flavors and design, and has seen too often clients trying to please mother of the bride, mother of the groom, bridesmaids, etc. "At the end of the day you're going to be married to your love, so the little things don't really matter. Just make decisions that make you both happy and don't worry about anything else."

Some other ideas for filling in the dessert table include cupcakes, pies, brownies, and cookies. Why limit yourself? Have all the sweet treats that make you happy!



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the RINGS



When it comes to picking out the wedding band for both bride and groom, coming to a decision is certainly influenced by both members of the party. Style and character of the rings that will be a symbol of the couple's love for years to come is important to consider, so for some, the best option is to have them custom made to suit their own preferences.

Gotay's Custom Jewelry can certainly help with that. Nelson Gotay's mission with each piece of jewelry fashioned is to create something beautiful, and for each customer, the goal is to give them something that will stand the test of time. To design based on his knowledge while also keeping in mind the requests of the couple, Nelson asks himself: "How do I bring all my years of experience to make it the correct way and also give them what they envision? Is this something they saw online? Something they imagined? Something Grandma wanted? [I'm] trying to make a piece that will last generations." When he gets to work, his goal is to make something for the couple that represents their love. And the honor to play such an important role in bringing about an item that will mean so much during their lifetime is not lost on Gotay.

"Most important to me is creating family heirlooms," Gotay explained. "Creating a piece someone gets to wear and purchase with the intent that when they're finished with it, they're going to pass it on to someone else. I've had the privilege of working with sentimental pieces and that means a lot – they trust you to create something for them. It's important for me to interpret what's important to them, what means the most to them."

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• Weddings
 • Valentine's Day
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FLOWERS

Flowers are one of the most important elements of the wedding day. Besides the role they play as part of tradition, floral arrangements bring an aesthetic to the celebration that no other decoration can quite pull off. While other things might add to the beauty flowers bring, nothing can elicit the sense of pure magic flowers do.

When working with a florist, a bride should consider her own style as well as the overall feel of the wedding. Colors, specific flowers, and season will all play a part in the floral arrangements.

A bride should consider where all she wants flowers to be – the greeting table, at the end of seating rows, as part of the backdrop, on reception tables, bouquets and boutonnieres are just some possibilities.

"My best advice is have your colors decided and an idea in mind what you want," said Judith Wheelis, owner of Alvin Taylor's Flowers and Gifts in Downtown Paragould. "Everybody has a different style and that's okay. It's also important to have a budget."

Pinterest is a good place to start for organizing your ideas on color, flower types, and other decorations. Having a "mood board" of ideas to present will help the florists coordinate their work with the other vendors in order to bring your dream to life.

When it comes time to find the professional with which to work, be sure to clearly communicate your vision with them.

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Two WEEKS, Two WEDDINGS
Three Love Stories



Two weeks, and two weddings, requires organization, planning, and hard work, especially with planning for two big family events in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. For two cousins who grew up together, family memories continue to be created and shared as they feel blessed to share their special days within two weeks of each other. Taylor Barnes Gramling, daughter of Misty and Bruce Drope and Michelle and Alan Barnes, and Caleb Lucius, son of Tony and Amy Lucius, are first cousins who got married within two weeks of each other. Caleb is eighteen months older than Taylor and they grew up spending lots of family time together; Caleb is an only child and Taylor is blessed with multiple siblings. Their mothers are sisters who are very involved with countless family activities.

From play dates, Halloween activities, homecomings, and family vacations, Caleb and Taylor have grown up to share many special moments with their families.



Caleb has often been very protective of Taylor and had a long history of having somewhat tough conversations with potential suitors, just like a big brother/cousin is often known to do. However, Caleb had a basketball teammate and close friend he thought would be a good suitor for Taylor, who was a cheerleader. He planted the seed with Taylor and eventually his close friend and teammate, Beau Gramling, son of Mark and Melissa Gramling, starting dating her in March of 2015. Taylor and Beau have been inseparable since and he proposed at her Family Birthday party/graduation from Cosmetology school on September 27, 2019, at Caleb's house. Coincidentally, their parents have known each other prior to their births; their dads played softball together and the kids were at the same softball games as babies. Taylor and Beau were married on November 21, 2020, at Cedar Ridge in Paragould.

The wedding included a lovely outdoor ceremony, where the bride wore a dress purchased from Low's Bridal Shop in Brinkley. The beautiful pictures were taken by Hailey and Alan photography and the wedding video was crafted by Knight Productions.

The Barnes/Gramling wedding was certainly a family affair. The rehearsal dinner with BBQ, ribs, and smoked salmon was catered by Charles Haring courtesy of Beau's parents. The ceremony officiant was Tony Lucius, Taylor's uncle. Her maternal grandmother, Sherry Acuff, made all of the wonderful flower arrangements and the wedding reception was catered by Lea Ann Tyler. Amy Lucius, Taylor's aunt, made cheesecakes for the dessert table. The beautiful and delicious wedding cake was made by Gail Joiner. Guests enjoyed a hot chocolate bar and Derick King served as the DJ. After a honeymoon to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, Taylor and Beau will reside in Paragould, where Taylor works at Willow Salon and Beau will be completing his student internship in the spring with Crowley's Ridge College in the areas of Physical Education and Coaching. Taylor and Beau are the proud parents to a three-year-old Australian Shepard, Maverick, who was purchased for Taylor by Beau.

Soon thereafter, Caleb and Hailey Crowder, daughter of Buster and Judy Crowder of Heber Springs, were married on December 5 at the Barn at Fawn Hollow in Quitman, Arkansas. The Christmas wedding theme was adorned with white, navy and silver. Caleb and Hailey met at Arkansas State University in Greek Life Activities. Hailey was in the Alpha

Gamma Delta Sorority and Caleb in the Sigma Chi Fraternity. Unknowingly until later in their relationship, the two discovered their paths had crossed while in high school attending the state awards banquet for placing in the top ten for the VFW Voice of Democracy Contest. They became engaged on February 22, 2020, at Caleb's house during Hailey's surprise birthday party in front of both families.

Hailey wore a lovely gown from Jessica's Bridal and Formal Shop in Bay. Caleb's wedding band was passed down from his late grandfather, James Vance. The beautiful photographs were by Hailey and Alan Photography. Several members of both sides of the family met at the venue to decorate for the wedding day and the rehearsal dinner was catered by Caleb's family and consisted of Paw's BBQ, Mamaw's slaw, Nana's baked beans, and Amy's scalloped potatoes and baked mac and cheese casserole. The wedding flowers were made by Caleb's maternal grandmother (Nana), Sherry Acuff. His paternal grandmother, Dorcia, and his mother helped with all of the numerous decorations and floral accents. Tony Lucius, Caleb's dad, served as the wedding officiant.

The wedding cake was made by Tyler Cathey, a childhood friend of Hailey's, who has opened the Wedding Ford House Bakery in Heber Springs. Tyler also created a custom groom's cake modeled from "Amen Corner" on the Master's Augusta Golf Course. The specially crafted gourmet golf cookies were made by the Sugar Act in Paragould. Special desserts were also made by family members for the dessert bar and guests enjoyed specialized coffees and cappuccinos at the Coffee Bar. Arrows Café and BBQ of Heber Springs catered the wedding dinner meal. DJ Hollywood with Timbo productions provided DJ services for the wedding and reception that followed.

After a honeymoon trip to St. Lucia, Caleb and Hailey will reside in Paragould. He is a December 2019 graduate of Arkansas State University with a degree in Agricultural Business and Marketing and works with Appraisals Inc. and Warren Real Estate Group in Jonesboro. Hailey is a May 2020 graduate of Arkansas State University with a BSN in Nursing and is an RN at NEA Baptist Hospital in Jonesboro. She is also enrolled in the doctoral of nursing program at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Taylor, Beau, Hailey, and Caleb would like to thank all of their family and friends for their support during a very special time in their lives.

Beau & Taylor





Caleb & Hailey

Happenings



Paragould Young Professionals provided Christmas in Paragould coloring books to AMMC pediatric patients. They are to be thanked for spreading cheer this holiday season.

Pictured - Tiffany Lidisky, AMMC Marketing Coordinator, Teresa Branch and Allison Hestand, Paragould Chamber.



Kindergarten students at Paragould Primary provided holiday cards for patients at Arkansas Methodist Medical Center. The students provided cards to help spread holiday cheer for patients during their stay over the holiday season at AMMC. The students were able to purchase the cards through the Ninita M. Lowey - 21 Community Learning grant. Pictured: Tori Thompson, AMMC Director of The Foundation and Marketing, Graham Hatcher, Paragould Primary Kindergarten student and Kelle Boozer, Paragould Primary Kindergarten teacher.



The AMMC Baby New Year is a boy! Congratulations to Jameson Melton Hill from Corning on being the first baby born this new year. Jameson was born January 3, 2021, weighing 7 lbs., 12 oz. He was delivered by Dr. David Shenker, and proud mother is Anna Melton Hill. Baby Jameson received a basket of diapers, wipes and gifts from the AMMC Auxiliary.

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Jonesboro Mayor Harold Copenhaver announced he has received a donation from Attorney General Leslie Rutledge of \$250,000 toward expenses for Jonesboro's Veterans Village.

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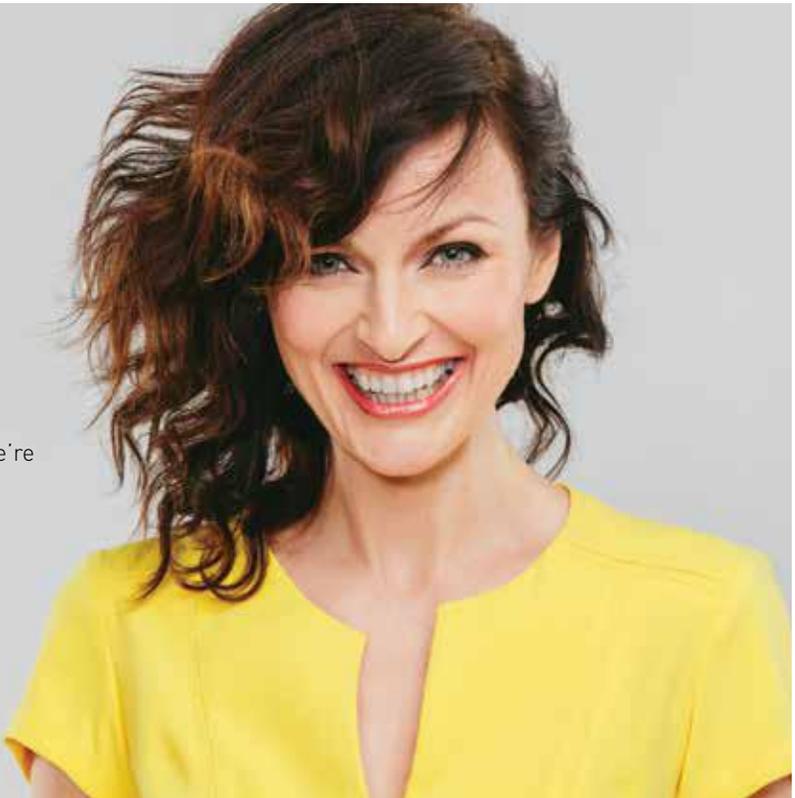
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2021 Kids' Events February

Every Tuesday

Virtual Story Time

When: Every Tuesday

Where: Craighead County Jonesboro Public Library's Facebook Page

Info: @ccjpl on Facebook

February

Take and Make Kids

When: Ongoing, while supplies last.

Based on the Victorian tradition of making dolls from household objects, each kit contains two old-fashioned clothespins, fabric scraps, and yarn.

Where: Craighead County Jonesboro Public Library

Info: libraryinjonesboro.org

Stay Tuned

As events continue to be rescheduled, canceled, and altered, please check Premiere's Facebook page or exploremornea.com for updates as we do our best to keep you informed!

With days suitable for playing outside dwindling, Kensington DeMarco took advantage of the opportunity on a recent afternoon. Kensington, 6, is the daughter of Valerie and Mike DeMarco of Paragould.



BIRTHS



Briar Lee Bo Dover

Christian and Shelby Dover of Marmaduke welcomed Briar Lee Bo Dover to the family on November 10, 2020.

Born at Arkansas Methodist Medical Center in Paragould, the newborn weighed 7 pounds, 11 ounces and was 20 1/2 inches long.

Also welcoming the new addition were big brother Kamden and grandparents Lee and Sarah Dover, Wade and Katrina Keeling and Michael Warner.

ENGAGEMENTS



Baylie Tabor and Josh Sisler

Baylie Tabor and Josh Sisler have announced their plans to be married on April 17, 2021, at The Embassy Suites in Jonesboro.

Baylie is from Paragould and is the daughter of Don and Lissa Tabor. Josh is from Salem and is the son of Carrie (Michael) Davis and the late Dennis Sisler.

Photo by Whitney Vassar Photography

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