

NEA'S

PREMIERE

MAGAZINE

APRIL 2025



mark
morrow

**MAKING A
DIFFERENCE**

HOME & GARDEN
SPECIAL SECTION: KIDS PLAY
APRIL FOOLS: ALMOST FAMOUS

A PUBLICATION OF MOR MEDIA, INCORPORATED

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ON THE COVER -

Mark Morrow is happiest when he is helping others, which he does through his volunteer efforts with several different organizations.

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Cover Photo by Gretchen Hunt

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APRIL 2025

PUBLISHER/ADVERTISING SALES
Dina Mason dina@mormediainc.com

CONTENT MANAGER/DESIGNER
Gretchen Hunt graphics@mormediainc.com

EDITOR-AT-LARGE
Richard Brummett brummettr34@gmail.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Richard Brummett
Gretchen Hunt
Shelby Russom
Karan Summitt
Karoline Risker
Madelyn McFarland
Katie Collins
Vicki McMillan
Chuck Long
Linda Lou Moore

ADVERTISING SALES TEAM

Dina Mason dina@mormediainc.com
Perry Mason perry@mormediainc.com
Brian Osborn brian@mormediainc.com

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From Us to You

Bring on Spring! But keep those storms away! This edition of Premiere was planned last October at one of our brainstorming sessions where we looked at national this and that days and months and picked "Volunteerism" as our main editorial theme. Little did we know that Northeast Arkansas would be presented with an opportunity to show up and show off its volunteer spirit like the storms of March 14th provided.

As the storms formed around all of us, text messages were being sent making sure our family, friends and neighbors were awake and aware. As we heard specific areas in the path and knew someone there, we would check on them; it is what we do in these situations.

When the storm is over and the first responders have checked that residents are physically safe, the next phase starts. Getting those who cannot stay in their homes a place to stay and their belongings that are precious out of further harm's way.

Then the morning after — where volunteers really shine! So many individuals, church groups, local restaurants, Realtors, anyone with a truck and trailer, chainsaw and tractors — show up and help with the clean-up.

We see this every time... across Arkansas

I love everything about my job putting out Premiere Magazine, but one of the neatest parts for me is piecing everything together so the stories flow, the ads are showcased and the magazine has a continuity to give readers an enjoyable experience when they delve into each month's edition. I have always loved to do puzzles and putting the magazine together is a puzzle of sorts.

This month's edition was a little extra challenging to put the pieces together with two special sections, as well as several features on volunteerism, and a little April Fool's Day bonus content just for fun.

It always amazes me how even when it feels a little chaotic as we approach our press deadlines, the pieces all seem to fall into place. I hope you enjoy all the different content, as much as we enjoyed putting it together. I promise there is a little bit of something for



and the surrounding states. I have always been proud to say I'm "Southern" and have a Southern Hospitality attitude. I see this attitude in our area a lot, but these events really showcase that spirit of community and I, for one, am proud to be a part of such a wonderful community.

Dina Mason
General Manager & Publisher
dina@mormediainc.com



everyone, and all of it is Good News about Northeast Arkansas and the People Making it Happen.

Gretchen Hunt
Content Manager & Graphic Designer
graphics@mormediainc.com

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VOTING CLOSSES ON APRIL 15TH.



For the Love of Lemons

BY KATIE COLLINS

It's no secret that I love lemons – just look back through the archives at past recipes! I didn't even set out to find a lemon recipe for April, but once I came across these lemon muffins, I figured it was just meant to be. The original recipe didn't include a glaze, but I think the glaze is what really brings home that pop of lemon flavor.

If you find that you don't have lemon extract and don't want to buy any just for one recipe, you can just increase your lemon juice by a couple of tablespoons instead. These would be a great addition to your Easter brunch table or to help cure a spring citrus craving like mine!



Lemon Muffins

Ingredients:

Muffins:	lemon juice
2 cups all-purpose flour	1 teaspoon lemon extract
½ teaspoon baking powder	1 cup sour cream
½ teaspoon baking soda	
½ teaspoon salt	Glaze:
1 cup sugar	1 cup powdered sugar
1 large egg	2-4 tablespoons lemon juice
½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened	Splash of milk to thin if needed
1 Tablespoon lemon zest	
1 Tablespoon fresh	

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line a muffin tin with cupcake liners OR spray with nonstick spray.

Mix butter, sugar, and egg together. Add sour cream, lemon zest, juice, and extract and mix until combined. In a separate bowl mix flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Combine dry ingredients with wet and stir until well blended. Batter will be quite thick. Divide batter among 12 muffin cups. Bake 20-22 minutes or until toothpick comes out clean. Let the muffins cool for a few minutes in the pan then remove to a wire rack to finish cooling.

For the glaze, stir powdered sugar and lemon juice together until it makes your preferred consistency of glaze. Add milk to thin the glaze if needed. Spoon over the muffins or dip the tops in and let dry on a rack.

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MAKE-A-WISH AND AG FOR AUTISM DINNER & AUCTION

The 12th annual Make-A-Wish and Ag for Autism Dinner and Auction was held March 8th at the Paragould Community Center. The family-friendly event raised more than \$135,000 with 100 percent of the money raised going to the community and children who are battling various illnesses.

Organizers Cliff Carter and Danny Graham expressed their appreciation to all who made the event a success. "From the donors to the volunteers and everyone who was part of this event, you are evidence of God's goodness," Cliff said. "The money raised is going to be difference making and life changing in so many lives of children and their families!"



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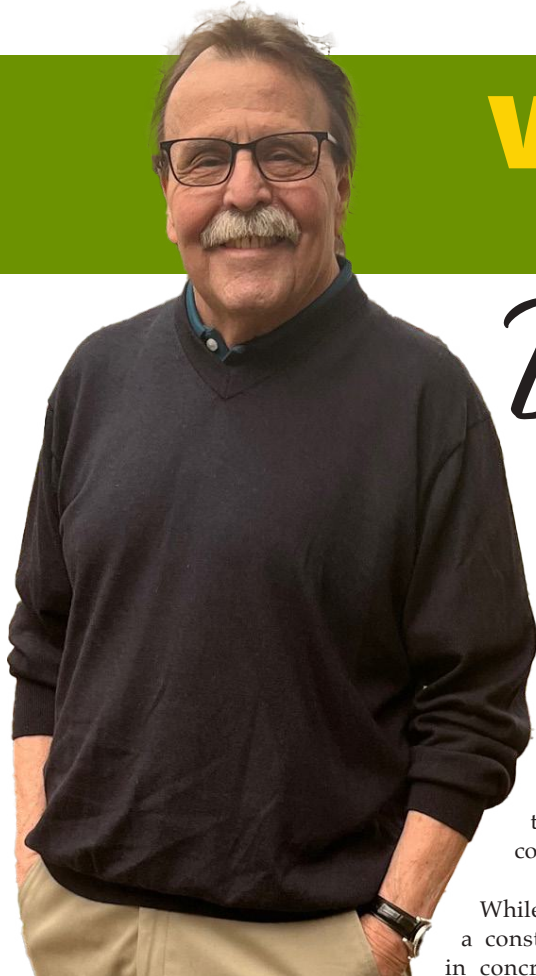


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VOLUNTEERS

Making a Difference



Dan Turner

BY KARAN SUMMITT

The desire to give back through volunteering took root early in Dan Turner's life. He credits the example of his mom, his church, participation in Boy Scouts and fraternity life for making sure those roots grew deep and strong. As a young adult Dan served on an ambulance crew in the early '80s and began participating in a Harley motorcycle riding group that emphasized giving back to the community.

While in high school, Dan was hired by a construction team to do summer work in concrete repair. This afforded Dan the

opportunity to go to Business College at Ferris State University and earn degrees in Business Marketing and Business Administration. The coursework covered a wide range of subjects that served Dan well during his professional career. While in college, a friend introduced him to the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity, something that had a side benefit of making school more affordable when Dan took advantage of fraternity housing.

Upon graduation Dan joined the Alumni Associations of both the school and the fraternity. He has continued serving on the alumni board for the fraternity, working with brothers from across the decades who are fighting to keep their 103-year-old house functioning. Alumni members also work diligently to help mentor upcoming generations into becoming principled

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young men.

Like many of us, Dan's early career days required 100 percent focus. Although busy with work, he freely admits something was missing in not having opportunities to give back. Eventually Dan found a perfect fit with the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary, a group of roughly 31,000 volunteers whose sole objective is to support the USCG's mission and help relieve them of non-military tasks. In doing so the auxiliary frees up the Coast Guard to achieve higher priority objectives. A uniformed civilian volunteer organization, the USCG Auxiliary's main mission is maritime navigation safety, marine pollution and area security, with a focus on recreational boaters' safety. Dan served with the USCG Auxiliary for 17 years.

In 2018 Dan retired from his professional career as a representative and consultant in the world of industrial instrumentation, measurement, automation and controls. Much of that time had been spent in the oil and gas world, as well as municipal water and wastewater, food and dairy controls. In his own words, Dan worked to "find technologies that help reduce the cost of producing and moving the nation's energy."

Dan and his wife Brenda relocated to Paragould in 2015. Initially, they moved to help care for Brenda's mom and only be a day's drive from Dan's mother. Years of visiting family in Paragould had allowed Dan and Brenda to build a good network of local friendships. Both of their moms passed away in 2019.

After a few years to catch their breath and settle in, Dan began exploring things he could do in Paragould and Greene County. He wanted to give back in ways that were meaningful. A few things popped up immediately. He took on a more active role in his college fraternity association, eventually serving as treasurer in 2020 and president in 2022 for Pi Kappa Alpha Alumni.

In addition, Bob Thompson introduced Dan to the Arkansas Community Foundation of Greene County, encouraging him to join the local board. The foundation's work involves a range of responsibilities that include the oversight of budgeting and spending, serving on scholarship award committees, and deciding on grants for community-focused non-profits that give back to Greene County. All Community Foundation funds are raised in Greene County and invested back into the community.

Dan cites the Mack and Vestal West endowment fund as a great example of community member endowments and how the Arkansas Community Foundation uses smart investing to create an endowment that continues to give well into the future. The original endowment was created in 1992 and has been awarding scholarships to Greene County students for 33 years. In that time the value of the scholarships

given to students has exceeded the original endowment, yet the original principal remains near the same amount. Mack and Vestal West will continue to give back for decades to come.

Kerri Watson, Executive Director for the Arkansas Community Foundation of Greene County, said she is thankful for Dan's contribution to the organization:

"Mr. Turner currently serves as the board chair of the Arkansas Community Foundation of Greene County," Kerri said. "He genuinely cares about making our community better, demonstrated by being a difference maker and a connector of people and resources in our community. He is a joy to work alongside, and he sees big picture potential in our community."

Dan's next opportunity to volunteer came when Mayor Josh Agee needed an aviation enthusiast to serve on the Paragould Airport Advisory Board. This committee makes recommendations to the Paragould City Council for airport improvements and identifies any other areas related to airport safety that need attention. The City Council then makes the final decisions on the recommendations.

Most recently Dan signed up to volunteer with Pilots for Christ. A faith-based group of aviators and aviation enthusiasts, the group raises funds primarily to help those in the community with transportation needs for medical appointments around the country. They also help with travel for mission work and other areas of need. Dan's wife, Brenda, is the vice president of the Greene County Museum. She and Doris Hagen, president of the museum, work creatively to raise money to keep the museum moving forward. Dan laughingly shares that when the two ask for help, he can't technically call it volunteering but it does come under the heading of "voluntold!"

Dan's contributions to the community stem from his enthusiasm about volunteerism in the United States and especially in Northeast Arkansas.

"The desire to help our neighbors starts at a young age here, and the choices are expansive," Dan said. "As Americans we look into the kind of organizations that we have a skill set to help or are motivated to learn. It is heartwarming to see the volunteering armies in Greene County and all the NEA community, as well as our state of Arkansas. Everyone helping each other. It begins with neighbor helping neighbor. And Greene County is rich because of this community spirit."



PET *of the* MONTH

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BY JORDAN AGEE

Buffy is my 1 1/2-year-old calico. We have had her since she was 6 weeks old. Buffy is short for Buffalo, as her brother's name is Moose (who has also been Pet of the Month for Premiere!) and I wanted to stay on theme. Buffy is the biggest scaredy cat there ever was. She does not like to be petted, held or even looked at. She loves to cuddle with her brother and look at the birds from the window. She is such a pretty girl, and I'm lucky to have her.






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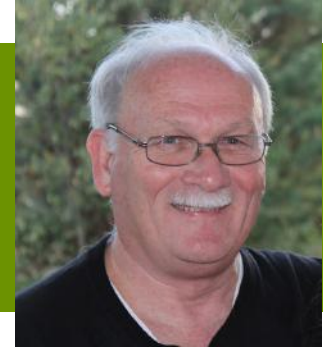
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Get Rich

WITH RICHARD BRUMMETT



Spring's arrival always brings a smile to my face and a change in my personality, because I feel life looks better when the ballpark grass is green and the skies are blue.

Besides delivering baseball to my daily routine, April also dredges up memories of my father because his birthday was on the 12th and baseball is a sport we loved and shared. I can't think of many better times than those we had in the yard, hitting, throwing and fielding.

I remember numerous instances when he returned home at the end of a workday and I already had his catcher's mitt and some baseballs ready and waiting. Even though he was dead tired, we went out back and he schooled me in many of the finer points of the game. He taught me to throw with accuracy and he taught me how to charge ground balls and throw on the run; in fact, for years he was the only instructor I had who took the time to show me individual pointers that would make me a better player, and that's because he grew up loving the sport and knew the game well.

Before I even started to school, we lived in the country and had a large yard beside the house, a space perfectly suited to hitting and fielding. At the end of the yard was a field full of weeds and on those occasions – and there were plenty – when I managed to miss a ground ball and it rolled into the weed patch, I would bravely venture into what looked like a forest to four-year-old me and nervously try to find the ball. I can admit today I was scared. Who knew what was lurking out there in the weeds that had grown taller than my head? A monster? Maybe a dinosaur?

I would look around on the ground, unable to find the ball, and I remember yelling back to Dad, "I can't find it!"

His answer was always the same: "It's right there by that weed."

"Which one?" I asked every day.

"That brown one," he would say with a smile.

"Which brown one?"

"That tall one," was always his reply, then he'd march down close to where I was, and stomp around for a few seconds until he found the ball. He'd pick it up and say, "See, I told you it was right there by that weed."

I thought he was the smartest guy in the Campground Community and we'd quickly return to his hitting the ball to me and my trying hard to keep it out of the monster patch. I figured out years later why he was always smiling on his trip back to his hitting spot.

One year when I was in Little League he served as a part-time coach

for our team; he was a traveling salesman and couldn't be around for every game but one Sunday afternoon we scheduled a game with my friends and relatives from Oak Grove. He told me that day he thought I was strong enough to start hitting the ball out of the park if I would make a minor addition to my swing and in pre-game batting practice he grooved several pitches that I did, indeed, hit into the protective screen behind the left field fence. But once the game started our team had no hits going into the last inning, until in my final at-bat I launched a ball over the right-center field fence ... my first official home run.

I was ecstatic – I think I might have run to the water fountain on the other side of the field so everyone could get a good look at me – and the following night I hit two more. I anointed myself a newfound power hitter and figured everyone on the team would expect me to carry them the rest of the way through the schedule, but later in the week Dad was back home, coaching third base, when I came up.

I looked down his way for a signal and couldn't believe what I was seeing. His right hand touched his cap bill and then his belt ... the sign for me to bunt. I stepped back and looked again, knowing he had absentmindedly given me the bunt sign because everyone knew

I was a home run hitter. I know they knew, because I told them. But as I stared him down, there it was again: Bunt.

I gave a half-hearted effort and popped up to the catcher, trudging back to the dugout mad at my dad and probably crying a little. On the trip home I asked him why he made me bunt. I halfway expected him to apologize, but instead he said, "Rich, if you're going to be a player you have to know how to do anything your coach asks you to do, because he's always going to be thinking about what's best for the team first. Tonight, a good bunt from you might have helped us score two runs. You don't know when you might be called on to win a big game with a bunt."

Even with my wounded pride I sort of got it, and I began working diligently on being an excellent bunter. Five years later, in American Legion ball, we were tied 0-0 in extra innings when we managed to get a runner to third base. Our coach called back the scheduled hitter and sent me to the plate, and on the second pitch I put down a perfect bunt to squeeze in the winning run of a 1-0 game. Patting me on the back with pride, Dad reminded me of our conversation after my Little League failure years before.

I remember stories like that and say a silent thanks to my dad every time April rolls around.

Richard Brummett is a journalist with more than 50 years of newspaper and magazine experience. He enjoys writing to help people bring their stories to life, and hopes through his monthly Get Rich column to help put a smile on readers' faces.

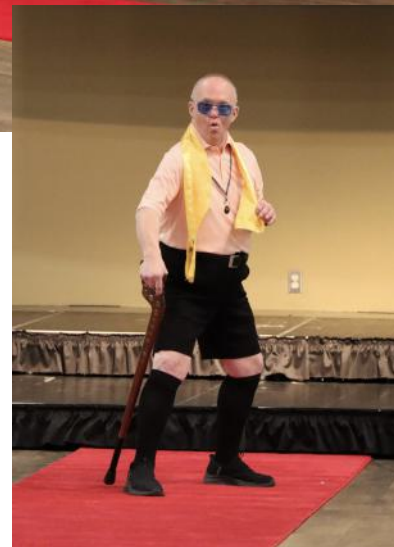


Be Your Own Beautiful

GALA SUPPORTS JHDC

Jonesboro Human Development Center (JHDC) residents and friends walked the red carpet and showed off their best outfits in a night of fun and talent on Saturday, March 15th. The Be Your Own Beautiful Gala, held in the St. Bernards Auditorium, featured a fashion show, a meal, a silent auction and a talent show. Special guests included Zaden J. and keynote speaker Vivian Hardin.

The Volunteer Council of JHDC held the event to celebrate their residents and friends, encouraging them to look within themselves and find their own beauty and talents. This coincides with their mission to support those with special needs in finding their own independence and empowering them to discover how to become their best selves and embrace their unique abilities.



PHOTOS BY SHELBY RUSSOM



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Health Matters

BY KARAN SUMMITT

NUTRIENT DENSITY



Biggest Bang for Your Food Bucks

The health status of the average American citizen is getting attention these days, with an eagle-eye focus on our food supply. Discussions about dyes, additives, preservatives and over-processed foods are making their way into the political arena. What physicians, nutritionists and health educators have advocated for years is being talked about in Washington. The numbers don't lie. Our country is in a health crisis marked by soaring obesity, chronic diseases and health-related disabilities, much of it fueled by unhealthy eating habits.

It's not as if we haven't tried to be healthy. For years dieters have weighed food, measured portions and calculated calories as if the IRS were in the business of doing weight audits. Willpower was the tool of choice when the calories ran out before appetites were satisfied. Larger portions, bigger plate sizes and super-sized menu items skewed our perception of when enough was enough.

Marketers jumped on board the dieting frenzy by offering lower-calorie options. Hundreds of food products were processed to be sugar-free, fat-free or come in 100-calorie packs. Despite all this, Americans have gained weight, bringing with the additional weight a sharp increase in poorer health outcomes. The medical field worked hard to keep up with new medications and treatments but chronic disease cases have sky-rocketed.

In 1990 no state had an obesity rate greater than 15 percent. By 2010, no state had an obesity rate less than 20 percent, and 13 states (Arkansas included) had obesity percentages greater than 30 percent. The latest numbers from 2023 see U.S. adults marching toward the 45 percent mark, with Arkansas among the top five states with the highest obesity rates. The added weight is what we see. What is worse is what the unhealthy eating habits are doing inside our bodies that we cannot see.

It is said the definition of insanity is to continue doing the same old things the same old ways but expecting different results. Perhaps that explains why the high cost of prescription drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy did not deter sales. People needed help and weight-loss medications seemed to provide an answer.

People lost weight with the new drugs, but the true test will be the same as traditional dieting -- will the weight remain off? With that truth we come full circle and are forced to admit that healthy eating and calorie management is still important. They are to your weight - whatever it is - what income is to your lifestyle. Spending more money than you earn leads to indebtedness. Eating more calories than you burn leads to weight gain. The math is that simple.

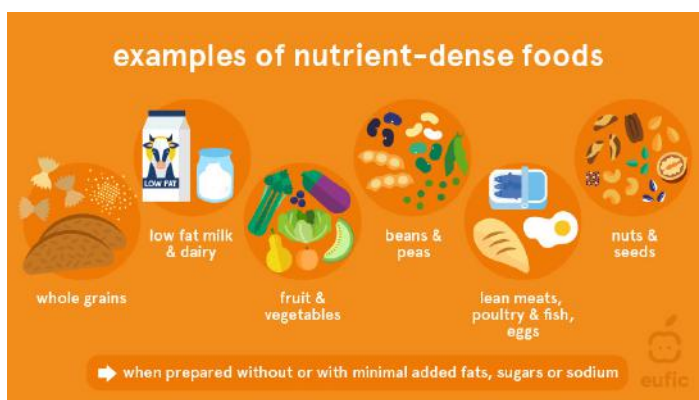
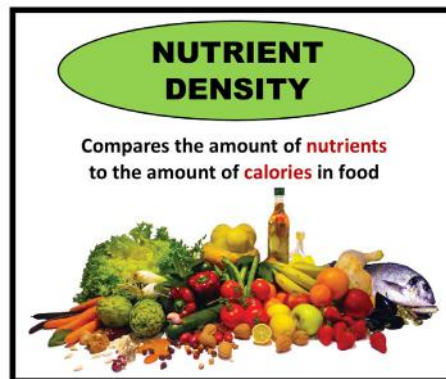
Even if tabulating calories had proved successful for weight management, it did not guarantee good health. It only takes two Big Macs, two orders of French fries and two medium soft drinks to maintain the weight of a 200 pound man. Calories are adequate to prevent weight gain. Nutrition and overall health ... not so good.

A better approach for weight and health management is to gauge foods based on nutrient density. Nutrient density refers to the ratio of good-for-you nutrients to the calories that a food contains — the nutritional equivalent of bang for your buck. Just like you shop sales and weekly grocery specials to maximize the value of a hard-earned dollar, the most nutrient-dense foods provide a powerful punch of vitamins, minerals and other key nutrients without busting your calorie budget.

Here is the best news of all. Typically, the most nutrient dense foods are the lowest in calories, and that is why fruits and vegetables top almost every category of "eat-more-of-this" foods. They are high in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fiber, providing all of these nutrients without swallowing up too many calories or adding unnecessary food dyes, additives or preservatives.

Back to those 100-calorie packs mentioned above. Most weigh in the range of one ounce, and that one ounce is pitifully poor in nutrients. Compare that to almost six ounces of fruits or vegetables plus the inherent nutrients for the same 100 calories. Sometimes a new concept is best understood by seeing its opposite. In our American food culture, the opposite of "nutrient density" is "empty calories."

Why does nutrient density matter? Despite the fact that we are in the middle of a health crisis with Americans getting more than enough calories, our nutrient density balance is way off. Too many of those calories come from foods with little or no essential nutrients, and our



NUTRIENT DENSE FOODS

FOODS THAT ARE HIGH IN NUTRIENTS
BUT RELATIVELY LOW IN CALORIES



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CALORIE DENSE FOODS

FOODS THAT ARE HIGH IN CALORIES
BUT ARE LACKING NUTRIENTS



HIGH IN

ADDED SUGARS
SODIUM
CALORIES
SATURATED FAT



health is suffering.

A shift to more nutrient dense foods will have multiple benefits. Better weight management, healthier bodies and reduced chronic disease rates will result without the tedious job of constant calorie counting. With a focus on nutrient density, you really can eat more but weigh less and be healthier.

Karan Summitt is a retired health educator with 25 years experience educating people of all ages on the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. She teaches and writes with a passion for sharing simple, doable strategies that make better health possible for almost everyone.

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PARAGOULD REGIONAL CHAMBER BANQUET

Paragould Regional Chamber of Commerce and community members celebrated progress and looked back at Paragould's past at the annual Chamber Banquet on March 18th.

The banquet, "We've Got the Power," featured mingling, hors d'oeuvres and a silent auction at the Paragould Community Pavilion. The mingling hour was followed by dinner and presentations at the recently renovated Paragould power plant now known as "The Station Powered by First National Bank."



Lifetime Achievement Award - Brian Osborn

The evening included the presentation of several awards, speaker Janet Harris from the Winthrop Rockefeller Institute and a 1920s-themed video inviting attendees to step back in time.



Ambassador of the Year - Tracey Russell



Entrepreneur of the Year - Holden Smith



Educator of the Year - Courtney Young



Volunteer of the Year - Doris Hagen



Member of the Year - Millie Wade



PEP Member of the Year - Jason Mathoney



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VOLUNTEERS

Making a Difference



Mark Morrow

BY GRETCHEN HUNT

For Mark Morrow helping others just comes naturally. For a quarter of a century he has been embedded in the civic community in Jonesboro and Northeast Arkansas.

"The thing I get the most out of is when I get to give and people are actively receiving something – goods, works or service," he said. "I'm happiest when I get to help. It doesn't matter what others receive. I get more out of it."

He gets those opportunities often through his involvement with United Way, St. Bernards Advocates, Rotary Club of Jonesboro, Crimestoppers and the Valley View Church of Christ.

Logging between 40 and 60 volunteer hours each month, Mark just received the 2024 Volunteer of the Year award for Arvest Bank for the North Arkansas Region with more than 500 volunteer hours for the year.

"It's not about me," he said. "It's about the organizations I represent and what they can do to help."

"That's what I like about United Way," he added, noting how many people United Way is able to help through its partner agencies.

Heather Coats, Executive Director of United Way, said Mark is never one to take individual credit, even if it is deserved.

"Mark is willing to help in whatever way you need him the most, but he always wants everyone to know it's a team effort," she said. "That tells me he really does it because he

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want to give back and wants the community to give back.”

Often people get involved in civic organizations to help drive their success in business. For Mark, he sees his work life as a way to help drive his life of service.

“The wider I make my network the bigger I can make my impact,” he said, giving an example of the upcoming Triple Swing event for St. Bernards, which he has been able to get people from other parts of the state to come in to participate in.

“The bigger network I have, the bigger network my organizations have,” Mark said. “I don’t have a lot of money, so I give as much time as I can. I give monetarily, too, but it pales in comparison to what I can offer in time and time is a pretty valuable commodity.”

One organization he gives a lot of that time to is the United Way, which he has served as both a donor and volunteer for 25 years. In his second stint on the United Way Board, he is currently serving as Vice President and is also the 2025 Campaign Chair.

Erin Calhoun, United Way Development Director, also noted that Mark was among the initial group of volunteers who started the Batting for a Better Tomorrow softball tournament, a group that has continued that effort each year.

Mark also serves on the United Way Regional Impact Committee (previously known as the allocation committee), which awards money to the partner organizations.

“We get to do site visits – get to see first hand both the people serving in these organizations and the people being served. It’s just amazing.”

His desire to do hands-on service is also what makes Day of Caring one of his favorite things United Way does each year, bringing together hundreds of volunteers to be in service.

“Day of Caring is near and dear to my heart,” Mark said. “We get to do actual manual labor service.”



Lydia Parkey, President of the St. Bernards Foundation, said Mark is the kind of volunteer people who need volunteers hope to find.

“Mark is a volunteer’s volunteer,” she said. “He does a ton for us here at the foundation, but I also serve on the United Way Board with Mark. I think one of my favorite things about Mark is he doesn’t help unless he is going to help. You need volunteers to say yes – but then you need them to actually help, and he does.”

Having been involved with the St. Bernards Advocates for just under 25 years, Mark is on the board and is this year’s Triple Swing Chairman. The Triple Swing event is the main fundraiser for the Advocates each year and is used to purchase equipment for some area of the hospital.

“Last year we raised \$400,000,” Mark said. “This year money raised will be used for the Heart Care Center. Our goal this year is a half million dollars.”

Triple Swing will include a June 20 dinner and dance, a June 22 Pickle Ball Tournament, and a June 23-24 golf tournament.

Alden Weeks, development manager with the St. Bernards Foundation, coordinates events for the hospital, including Triple Swing. She said while Mark is busy, he is busy doing the right things for the right reasons.

“Mark is one of the hardest working people I’ve ever met, but he doesn’t do anything he doesn’t care deeply about,” she said. “So if he says yes it’s because he sees the impact.”

Another way he has helped make that impact is through his service with the Rotary Club for the past 25 years.

He has served as president of the Rotary Club of Jonesboro, as well as assistant governor for the district. He is currently on the board for the Rotary Club of Jonesboro and is the Youth Service Committee Chairman.

His pet project with Rotary is Shop With a Cop, which the Jonesboro club has been doing for the past 15 years.

“I led the charge since its inception,” Mark said, noting the event can be life-changing for all involved. “I’ve seen them come in scared, crying,

Continued ➡

uncertain of the officers and at the end crying because they don't want to leave."

The program gives \$100 to up to 50 area at-risk youth, which they can spend how they wish.

"They go shopping with a cop, ride in a cruiser, and go shop wherever they want and buy whatever they want," Mark said. "Most of the time they will buy at least something for the house, or for siblings and especially for parents. They will almost always get some kind of candy. They are always appreciative."

He said, while the event is about what the children receive, it is more about the interactions that happen during the shopping.

"It's putting two people together," he said. "It impacts the officer more than the kid, but it impacts them both."

He noted that Rotary has also contributed to community development through Centennial Park and Fort Rotary at Craighead Forest Park and Centennial Plaza in Downtown Jonesboro.

Mark is also on the Crime Stoppers of Jonesboro Board, serving as Immediate Past President in 2025, and has been involved in the Jonesboro Regional Chamber of Commerce since 1995.

"The Chamber is what really got me connected through volunteerism and all my career choices, as well," he said.

He is a Chamber Board member, which is also a volunteer position, and is the Leadership AR class representative for the state Chamber



and serves on the Board of Directors of the Arkansas State Chamber.

He and his wife, LeAnn, have three children, Baylee, 28, and twins Lydian and Mason, 22, as well as a six-year-old granddaughter, Brantlee.

Mark is also active at Valley View Church of Christ, where he is a deacon.

Now Vice President and Commercial Banker at Arvest, a position he has held for five years, he has been in banking as a lender for 24 years.

Alden said all of Mark's experiences are what make him special.

"He is more than just a volunteer," she said. "He can see things from 300,000 feet and put things together in really meaningful ways."



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THE ADVENTURES OF

Lester

BY VICKI McMILLAN



Hello, friends; Lester here in what I hope is the beginning of spring — and that is no April Fool’s joke! Spring is a time of rebirth — fields are prepared and crops are sown, animals come out of hibernation and begin mating rituals to reproduce, and we see sprigs of weeds in the lawn.

The tulips we planted in the fall have sprouted leaves and the flowers will be showing up soon. The late, great Robin Williams thought spring was nature’s way of saying, “Let’s Party!” And with daylight saving time, we can party even later. By party, I mean clean off the porches, decks and patios; tidy up the flower beds and remulch; and plan what you’ll be planting as soon as the danger of cold weather is completely gone!

While we are waiting for warmer weather, we could visit some big-time gardens for inspiration.

Garvan Gardens in Hot Springs is a favorite of Vicki’s, and therefore, mine. In April, we’ve seen the tail end of the tulips, daffodils, and cherry blossoms. April is the prime month for azaleas and rhododendrons (in fact, part of the garden is a rhododendron forest). Toward the mid to end of April you can see lilacs and dogwoods. Of course, Mother Nature makes the blooming schedule — not your scrappy ol’ pound dog, unfortunately. If you do all of the trails, it’s a total of five miles, so wear comfortable shoes!

Another central Arkansas garden definitely worth a visit is P. Allen Smith’s Moss Mountain. He has a million daffodils planted and typically these bloom in mid-March to mid-April — again, P. Allen doesn’t let me make the schedule! Moss Mountain also has hidden rose gardens, formal gardens, farm gardens, and even Poultryville where the chickens live. You also can have a farm to table lunch while there.



If you want to make a trip out of it, head to Mobile to Bellingrath Gardens. Remember, it’s a little ahead of us here in NEA weather-wise, but still a magnificent established garden that you will totally enjoy. For the total spring package, Vicki and I can suggest some books for you to read to get into the season:

*Anne of Green Gables: A great book - I read it to the pound puppies at the Jonesboro Dog Jail - still makes me happy to think about this book.

*Alice in Wonderland: Before you roll your eyes, read it. It will put you into the spring mode quicker than going down a rabbit hole.

*Queen Bee: A feel-good book with lots of spring and nature, and LOVE.

That’s all for this month! I’ve got some seed catalogs to go through, and a brick patio to have Vicki or Mac level. (It’s hard to find good help these days.)

Happy Spring,
Lester



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The Easter Buffet

WITH LINDA LOU MOORE



Many restaurants will be offering their wonderful Easter buffet to area diners.

Whether staying with the traditional menu, or trying other delights - going through the Easter buffet line should be an enjoyable experience.

There are horror stories, however, of some buffet diners. You may have encountered them in the past and shaken your head in disbelief.

It may have been the diner cutting in line, sneezing on the food or putting partially eaten

food back on the buffet table.

Here are some quick tips to help you navigate through the buffet line. It's all about being considerate of others, and others being considerate of you.

Don't cut in line.

Do wash your hands or use a hand sanitizer prior to going through the buffet line.

Don't use your hands to pick up food. Use the serving spoon, knife or fork to transfer the food from the buffet to your plate.

Do use the serving utensils that are provided for each item on the buffet. Use each serving piece for the food that it is intended. The slotted spoon in the green beans doesn't drain well after it has been used to serve a helping of mashed potatoes.

Don't eat while going through the buffet line. Eating while going through the line is an easy way to spread germs. The food may be delicious, but wait until you are through the line before you start to eat.

Do keep the line moving. Do keep conversation short while going through the

buffet line. Be cordial to your fellow diners, but don't spend time catching up on family history, thereby slowing the line.

Don't sneeze on the food. Sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose while going through the line can contaminate the food.

Do use a clean plate when you go back for a second helping. Leave your used plate on the table and pick up a clean plate at the buffet.

Don't put food back on the buffet once you have put it on your plate. Putting food back on the buffet after you have touched it is unsanitary.

Do tip your waiter or waitress. Although you are going through the buffet line, the waiter or waitress is picking up your dirty dishes and cleaning your table.

Quote of the Day:

"Food brings people together on many different levels. It's nourishment of the soul and body."

- Giada De Laurentiis

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 llmooreparagould@gmail.com.

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Delta Ink Crawl

On February 21st, the Bradbury Art Museum (BAM) partnered with the Arkansas State University Department of Art + Design to fill downtown Jonesboro with tattoo-related activities.

The event, known as the "Delta Ink Crawl," began with the Delta National Small Prints exhibition panel talk at BAM where artists shared what inspires their work. Afterward, two tattoo-themed events simultaneously occurred, encouraging attendees to explore downtown Jonesboro by "hopping" from one venue to the next.

Event offerings included designing and printing temporary tattoos, tattoo demonstrations and an after party.



Katherine Baker



PHOTOS BY SHELBY RUSSOM



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Volunteers MAKE STATE TOURNEY SUCCESS

When Greene County Tech hosted the 5A State Basketball Tournament in March, the spirit of volunteerism was definitely on full display.

Ashley Reynolds, who is a regular when it comes to volunteering, especially with the Eagles' athletic program, said it is an opportunity to give back to the school she loves.

"GCT is home to me," she said. "I played here, my kids play here and my husband coaches here. It is an opportunity to give back to the school I love. Volunteering has not only benefited these students and

athletes but has enriched my life. I encourage everyone to take the time and let our future generations see your service."

With the state tournament taking weeks of planning involving numerous people, Ashley said GCT Athletic Director Aaron Thornton was a great leader working hands-on in all aspects of the event.

"We have volunteers from scheduling meals in hospitality to making sure parking is flowing to filling coaches bags to scheduling concession orders and making sure it is staffed to serve those coming to watch their teams," Ashley said. "It takes a village and we have the best!"

Delta Symphony Orchestra



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Aaron said the tournament also gave an opportunity to involve some of the school's student athletes.

"Our coaches wanted to get their kids involved to help serve for the state tournament," he said. "We settled on a great way they could help make it a great tournament while also helping Ms. Sheila White. They have shown up and worked so hard to help clean. We appreciate them so very much."



While hosting an event the caliber of a state tournament is a lot of work, Paragould Regional Chamber Director Allison Hestand said those efforts are worthwhile for many reasons.

"Hosting the state basketball tournament in Paragould is more than just a game — it's a win for our entire community. Welcoming teams, families and fans from across the state brings a surge of energy to our local businesses and showcases our hospitality, and creates an economic impact in our city."



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Signs of Spring

BY CHUCK LONG FISHING IN NORTHEAST ARKANSAS



Time has jumped forward one hour, the flowers are responding to the warming earth with some color and the smell of freshly plowed dirt fills the countryside. Kids are hitting the baseball or softball diamond, adults have a rekindled desire to walk or jog, and yards need attention. All these signs of spring are great, but my favorites are a floater dancing on the water, a rod tip wiggling as a finicky fish tries to take the bait and the sound of a tired drag on an old reel as a fish makes a run.

There are some folks who hit the water throughout the year, but many Arkansans focus their fishing efforts when spring blossoms around them. It's a wonderful time to be out there and the longer days provide a great opportunity to wet a hook. But where would be a good spot to try? Let's take a quick look at some good options that might lead to a few fillets for a family fish fry.

Northeast Arkansas does not have any large bodies of water, but we are blessed with a variety of lakes, rivers, ditches, creeks and ponds that can prove fruitful for an angler. Bass, crappie, catfish and bream are usually on an angler's list, but other species like drum or carp can provide a tug on the line or a fillet for the frying pan.

One of the first spots I recommend that offers good opportunities for both boat and shore fishing is Lake Charles. Just south of Black Rock in Lawrence County, this lake provides opportunities for crappie, bream and bass. Bank fishermen have some great options in the area along the dam and spillway or in the state park area. A nice pier in the park allows access to slightly deeper water.

A boat provides many more options. Focus on the lake points early and further up the banks as the water warms. The crappie will tend to be along the points near deeper water, while the bream will be in the back of the coves in relatively shallow areas. Bass can be found in either location. I like to fish quickly with live bait and a floater or a small spinner or grub and then concentrate on an area when a fish is caught.

Lake Ashbaugh provides great access for fishing from the bank. Bream, crappie and bass can be caught in the lake and live bait is usually more effective, especially fishing from shore. It might take relocating several times to find active fish, but there are enough fish in the lake to catch a good mess. Stink bait, nightcrawlers or cut bait might produce a few catfish, especially when fished in the deeper areas of the lake.

Though the fishing is not what it once was, Ashbaugh can be productive from a boat. Crappie can be found suspended in the open water or around the dead trees in deeper water. Bream can often be caught along the banks or along the buckbrush and log piles along the south bank.

Lake Frierson in Greene County is a tougher lake to fish, but if someone is after one big bass, this is the lake to target. Spinnerbaits along the brush or creature baits or plastic worms fished slowly around the edges of the timber might produce a good fish or two. Catfishing can be good along the rocky levee with worms or stinkbait.



Another option is Mallard Lake in Mississippi County. It provides easy access around the lake to fish from shore or a good launch to hit the water with a boat. Bass can be good and there are also some dandy bream.

Lake Poinsett has been revitalized with the recent renovation project and should be high on the list of lakes to try. Check regulations to see what species can be harvested. Crappie has been great since harvest began in January and the lake produced some nice bluegill and redear last year, and there will be plenty there this year.

Lake Hogue is also a good fishery. I like to stick to the south portion of the lake and look for water that might be slightly deeper. Bream and crappie fishing can be productive and there are also good numbers of bass and catfish.

Flowing waters are my favorite areas to fish, but access is a little more difficult. With the right water conditions, Black, St. Francis, Current and



Spring River can be productive. Most of the better areas of these rivers are more accessible by boat, but there are a few areas near boat ramps or along county roads that provide access. Fishing these rivers with a #2 hook, sinker and large nightcrawler can be very productive. Catfish can be caught, but drum, carp and even buffalo might end up on the end of the line. Many of the river fish species move and feed with earnest as the water warms, providing many options for a hungry fish. I also like to fish ditches in the spring, especially when the water has some current after a rain. Big Slough, Locust, Mayo and even Eight Mile can provide action while bottomfishing with a worm. It might be a variety of species, but if a tug on the line is the desired result, that can be found in many of these waters. Secure permission if access will be gained by going across private ground.

Smaller bodies of water are another great option. Many of these are private, but there are public waters like Reynolds and Craighead Forest that provide fishing opportunities. Many of these waters are stocked by AGFC during the spring and a list of these lakes and some of the stocking information can be found at agfc.com.

It is time to get out on the water, put some fish in a cooler, and then enjoy a fish fry with family and friends. Good luck and I hope to see you out there.



Chuck Long is a lifelong Arkansas outdoorsman. Chuck retired from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission after thirty plus years of service and now enjoys sharing his love of the outdoors through writing, speaking events and social media outlets. Have an outdoor question? Reach out to Chuck at cflong2002@yahoo.com.

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JA Ball



Through the Looking Glass



Community members danced the night away for a purpose at the 54th annual Junior Auxiliary of Jonesboro Charity Ball on February 22nd.

The theme of the ball, "Through the Looking Glass," invited guests to show up in their best, most magical and regal outfits and immerse themselves in a night of many activities. The event sported whimsical-themed décor, which transformed the Red Wolf Convention Center into an enchanting wonderland. The ball also featured a cocktail hour, a large silent and live auction, a game room, dinner, dessert, live music and several speakers.

The proceeds from the Charity Ball directly support the members of Junior Auxiliary in their goal to brighten the future for children, youth and families within Craighead County.



ST. PATTY'S ON THE SQUARE FESTIVAL FUN

Downtown Pocahontas was the site of St. Patty's on the Square on Saturday, March 15th. The event included live entertainment, vendors, food trucks, a kids zone and much more.

Despite rain showers off and on throughout the day, many came out in their shamrocks and green attire to grab some good luck and enjoy the community festival.



PHOTOS BY GRETCHEN HUNT



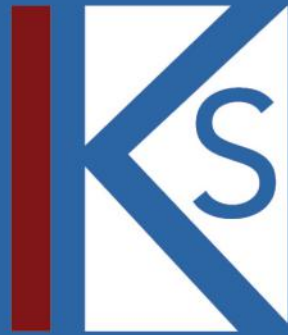
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Spring into Home Improvement

Spring is the perfect time for home improvement, and everything you need to make those improvements from new doors and paint to new fixtures to upgrading your curb appeal or even adding a pool are right here at your fingertips. Or you could get a completely fresh start by building your dream home.

Let's start with the elephant in the room — how are you going to pay for these dreams? With so many ways to finance your improvements,

new home or new construction, looking at your options is an important step.

Home equity lines of credit, refinancing your existing home mortgage or looking for the right fit with competitive interest rates and good terms will be an important step in purchasing or remodeling your home. If you are looking for a hometown lender with lots of options, Unico Bank can help you figure out what works best for your situation.

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Once you have your finances in place, it is time to get to work! To build from the ground up or do a major remodel you will need house plans. Home Drafting Services can help. Dr. Charles Coleman is a certified engineer with over 30 years of experience and can help you make your dream home a reality. Home Drafting Service delivers precise floor plans of a structure that fits your lifestyle.

If you are doing projects that do not require engineering, you might start with some shopping trips for inspiration. Shopping at a local supplier, like Gazaway Ace, offers you the opportunity to see the products in person and get an idea of what you want your improvements to look like.

While in the process of building your new home, or improving the one you have, you may decide you need new additions like beautiful marble countertops. Reddick Marble and Granite provides many choices of stone to elevate your space.

Along with refreshing your countertops, you can make your house feel both classy and cozy with a new fireplace. There are a variety of options like gas, electric, pellet and wood appliances. The showroom of Fireside Hearth and Stove contains every style from traditional to contemporary, so you're bound to find a beautiful addition that suits your home.

"When you're looking to renovate your

home or build a new one, creating a hearth and outfitting it with quality supplies from a trusted and experienced fireplace supplier should be a priority," Myron Nightingale with Fireside Hearth and Stove said.

To pair with your new fireplace and countertops, you may want to change other details of your home such as adding a new sink or bathtub. Mid-South Plumbing has

many options available and boasts a large showroom filled with everything from clawfoot tubs to vanities, ensuring every detail of your home looks perfect.

"We encourage you to come in and take your time looking at all the options," Laurie Edwards with Mid-South Plumbing said.

Continued ➔

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"We have lots to choose from right here in Northeast Arkansas."

If you are more of the do-it-yourself type when it comes to your home makeover, there are several small improvements that can make a big difference in how your home looks and feels.

Barton's has a wide range of departments to

help your home improvement needs. They even have several easy home updates that will take your home to the next level in as little as an hour.

"For those seeking an easy, DIY-friendly home update, look no further than new fixtures throughout the home. This can include kitchen and bathroom faucets, cabinet hardware, door handles, and lock

sets," Dania Reed of Barton's said. "These are projects that can be completed in a weekend and provide a new, fresh look to your space."

The outside of your home is just as important when it comes to spring cleaning and improvements. A fresh coat of paint can go a long way and is also something you can choose to D.I.Y. or have professionally done. Barton's also offers interior and exterior paint



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Perhaps you're interested in a move to the country, but you're not sure what that looks like? The good news is you have plenty of options available to make your rural vision come to life, according to Rural 1st® Loan Officer Mandy Beasley.



"Rural 1st is here to help you discover which option is right for you," Beasley said, noting that the company was founded when Farm Credit Mid-America saw a need as many Americans had a dream of living rurally, but very few businesses specialized in rural lending. "We are proud to be able to offer a variety of loan services to help meet a variety of rural living options."

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Homesteading: What you plan to do at home may be more important to you than the type of home you live in. Homesteading is a self-sufficient lifestyle that promotes living off the land and is popular amongst those interested in



owning livestock, growing their food, making their clothes and so on. Although a bit more involved than simply living on a rural property, many homesteaders enjoy the rewards reaped from their hard work.

Outdoor Aspirations: Maybe you are looking for more than just a home in the country? Maybe your rural dreams include enough space to enjoy hobbies like hunting, fishing, or off-roading. Connect with a forestry and wildlife specialist in the local area who can teach you how to best maintain the property and set yourself up for success.

Retirement Retreats: Many retirees choose to settle down in less urban settings to escape the concrete jungle and associated high costs of living there. They've come to recognize many of the things they aspire to experience post-career — peace and quiet, beautiful scenery, space — can all be found in rural communities. Although typical destinations like Florida remain popular, many retirees are coming to see the benefits of living in rural areas across the country.



Whether you're looking to retire, lead a more self-sufficient lifestyle or cast a line in the comfort of your own back yard, rural living is brimming with appeal. Rural 1st is ready to help you discover which option is right for you.

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The University of Arkansas Master Gardeners sponsor events and many activities including educational seminars, workshops, youth gardening programs, plant therapy work with hospitals and nursing homes and community beautification projects, which all help to spread more information on horticulture.

The U of A Master Gardeners also hold an annual state conference hosted by local programs. This three-day event provides Master Gardeners the opportunity to connect with nature and other Master Gardeners





throughout the state through workshops, seminars and garden tours.

To become a Master Gardener and contribute to the science and art of gardening, first contact your local extension office, sign up for your horticulture training and get planting!

For more information, visit the U of A Division of Agriculture website at uada.edu.

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Flowers. Garden plants. Strawberries. All are harbingers of spring, and they also mean the busy season is about to begin for some students at Williams Baptist University in Walnut Ridge.

Students on WBU's Eagle Farms have been prepping garden beds, as well as tending to the flowers and vegetables growing in their greenhouses. Winter covers have been rolled back from fields that will soon bear strawberries, and the first blooms are starting to appear. Other produce will soon be popping out of the ground, as well.

The flowers, fruits and vegetables that will result from all that work are headed to Williams Corner, which is also staffed by WBU students. The store is both a popular boutique -- with gift items, home décor and wedding registries -- and an outlet for the produce and flowers grown on Eagle Farms.

"This is such an exciting time of year," said Williams Corner Manager Angela Flippo. "The store has been completely restocked on the inside with beautiful home décor for spring and summer. And our front porch is about to come to life with flowers, pretty pots, hanging baskets and garden plants, not to mention produce from Eagle Farms."

Williams Corner and Eagle Farms are both extensions of the university's Williams Works initiative, which allows students to work their way to a college education. Students in the program work 16 hours per week through the fall and spring semesters to cover their full tuition and student service fees. In addition,



some students work 40 hours per week through the summer months to earn their room and board.

Eagle Farms also extends beyond fruits, vegetables and flowers. The university now runs its own meat processing plant, which processes beef and pork for farmers in the region. The facility is certified by the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, which means the meat it processes can be sold at retail outlets in the state. In the future, WBU hopes to raise its own livestock and sell meat to the public under the Eagle Farms label.

Williams Works students also operate a chicken house that produces cage-free, organic eggs, and another such house is on the way.

And the university is also moving into agriculture on the academic side. WBU is adding a bachelor's degree in agriculture business starting this fall.

The agriculture business degree at Williams will provide instruction in ag business, as well as data analysis and information systems for farming, including crop management, land stewardship, animal health, business operations and marketing. Among other goals, the degree is intended to provide workers in the growing field of precision agriculture.

Spring, indeed, is a busy time at Eagle Farms, and Williams Baptist University looks to grow more than just crops with its innovative programs in the seasons ahead.



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Farm to Table Markets Help Fill Gap

BY MADELYN MCFARLAND

Growing up my grandparents, like many other grandparents here, lived on a farm. My family moved around quite a lot, so the farm was always a refuge of sorts for me.

Cows, horses, a particularly unfriendly goat, and a couple of dogs had the run of the land. My grandpa worked that land nonstop, day and night, for as long as he had it. Eventually, it became clear my family's farm wasn't a universally shared dream. Acres were sold off, cows moved on to greener pastures, and that was that.

Many families from NEA share a similar story. As is often the case, convenience takes priority. Not many people nowadays want to devote their time to such an all-consuming career choice. After all, it's a way of life, not just a job.

Farmers Markets, like those in Paragould and Jonesboro, can offer the best of both worlds. While the markets are definitely not a new concept, they have grown in popularity over the past few years.

The Judd Hill Farmers' Market is coming up on its 19th season. Over the years, many vendors have become household names. Jamaica Williams, Judd Hill Market manager, pointed out that farming and farmers markets are not for the faint of heart.

"Many of these guys are up 'til midnight or later, trying to get the freshest displays," she said. "Then they're here at 4 a.m. setting up. They aren't getting a lot of sleep." Attendees have learned through the years that the early bird gets the worm, and arriving after 8 a.m. means missing out on some of the good stuff.

Miranda Reynolds, director of Main Street Paragould, credits a coworker with saying "if you build it, they will come" and she wasn't wrong. The Pavilion, near the Historic Power Plant Park, is now home to the Paragould Farmers' Market. Established in 2014 at the



Greene County Courthouse, it has grown exponentially over the years, necessitating a couple of moves.

While downtown has always been home, the newly constructed Pavilion became its permanent location in 2023. The move was definitely the right course of action, with the market gaining more foot traffic than ever. They had over 27,000 shoppers last season alone. Both markets usually attract a line trailing all the way out to the parking lot, waiting to get in every Saturday.

Vendors calling the Paragould Farmers' Market their home away from home range from food trucks to soap shops to art, plants, produce, flowers, coffee and more.

NEA has a diverse community of "makers" and the farmers markets are their place to shine. Both markets have kept their focus on the quintessential "Farmers Market Experience" which is produce. No one is trying to replace the big box stores, but there is nothing better than fresh, locally-grown and made products and the farmers markets of NEA are undoubtedly thriving.

Jamaica herself moved away from her family farm and lived the city life for a while. She, like so many others, found herself longing for a return to her roots. She grew up on a watermelon farm, but wasn't too keen on being a farmer herself. COVID was a reset for her, like many others. She recounted getting up early one Saturday and setting off to the farmers market. She fell in love. Waiting in line, she thought, "I'm going to work here one day" and she made it happen.

While a lot of us look forward to the weekend as a time to slow

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down, these guys are just ramping up. Saturday is market day, but that doesn't mean they aren't busy during the week. This is their livelihood. For vendors like Pollard Farms & Homestead, supporting locals is important.

"When you quit supporting your local businesses, then your community and town slowly shut down. It's the local small businesses that make a town what it is ... make people want to visit, and also keep families wanting to live there. Knowing something was handmade, homegrown, or home-baked makes it that much more special and unique," Sara Pollard said. "We here at Pollard Farms & Homestead do everything as a family. The vendors have become like a second family for us ... especially our two kiddos who come help each week and have made friends with many other vendors."

Brittany Moore of Infusion Soaps speaks about the importance of self care and community.

"Shopping local is a way to support and build connection with the community. All our soaps are infused with organic chamomile boasting creamy bubbles and enticing fragrances and colors," she said.

In our fast paced society, there is something inherently impressive about those who remain on a set course. "They never lost touch," Jamaica said, speaking about those who have been farmers their entire lives.

With the current rise in popularity among homesteading and farming content, it's not hard to believe we'll see a sort of "farming renaissance," Jamaica said. Many are trying to "tap back into a way of life that doesn't exist anymore." They are embracing the process, and we are enjoying the fruits (and vegetables) of their labor.



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Heartworm Disease

WITH DR. KRISTIN SULLIVAN

In Dogs and Cats



With the warmer weather months quickly approaching, there's no better time to discuss heartworms. Heartworm Disease is a parasitic disease process of the heart that I diagnose much more often than I ever want to. Did you know Arkansas is one of the top three states in the nation for dogs who test positive for Heartworm Disease? And it is the number one reason why veterinarians in this area always recommend keeping your dog (and cat) on year-round heartworm preventative. Heartworm disease is transmitted by mosquitoes, and, as you already know, we have plenty of those around here!

Though there are many efforts to control the burdensome mosquito population, the best method to prevent your pet from contracting this nasty and difficult to treat disease is year-round heartworm preventative. Many clients ask: "Why does my dog need year-round preventative? We don't have mosquitoes all year and they don't spend much time outside."

The reason we recommend year-round coverage is due in part to our temperate weather here in Arkansas and in part to the extremely high population of mosquitoes. I'm sure most of you saw during our "winter heat waves" that some mosquitoes started to come out even during the months of November and February. If your pet is protected year-round then you generally have no worries, but for those pets that have a break in coverage, they are at risk of exposure.

And to those who say they do not spend much time outside, I often ask them if they've ever experienced a mosquito buzzing in their ear in the middle of the night inside their home? Those pesky little mosquitoes definitely get inside the home and can absolutely infect your animal there. Unfortunately, they do not play by the rules and

stay outside like they're supposed to.

Unlike intestinal parasites which can be eradicated by means of an oral dewormer or other oral medication, heartworm treatment in dogs requires following strict guidelines and injectable medication that is to be administered by a licensed veterinarian. Heartworms do just that; they live in the heart of dogs and treatment (though it has been fine-tuned over the years) can still be difficult for some.

Something I often remind my clients is that it is so much easier to prevent a disease process from happening than it is to try to treat it later and then also have to deal with the effects of that disease process. Common effects we see result from heartworm infection are as follows: cough, chronic bronchitis, difficulty breathing, impaired cardiovascular function, which can result in liver congestion, congestive heart failure, and even a very severe and often fatal disease process called caval syndrome.

Caval syndrome is when the burden of heartworms is so large in the right atrium, ventricle, and oftentimes the vena cava that the worm clump acts like a mass and prevents the tricuspid valve from normal closure. This, in turn, impedes the normal flow of blood, and ultimately leads to cardiovascular collapse and death. This is a disease process that is rarely observed in places with a low population of mosquitoes, but is observed all too frequently in the state of Arkansas, especially along the Mississippi Delta.

Another question I often receive as a vet is: "Can cats get heartworms? Do they need to be on preventative?" Yes! Cats can get heartworms, but the disease process in cats is much different than that of dogs. Cats are termed as "dead end hosts." This means that a parasite can survive



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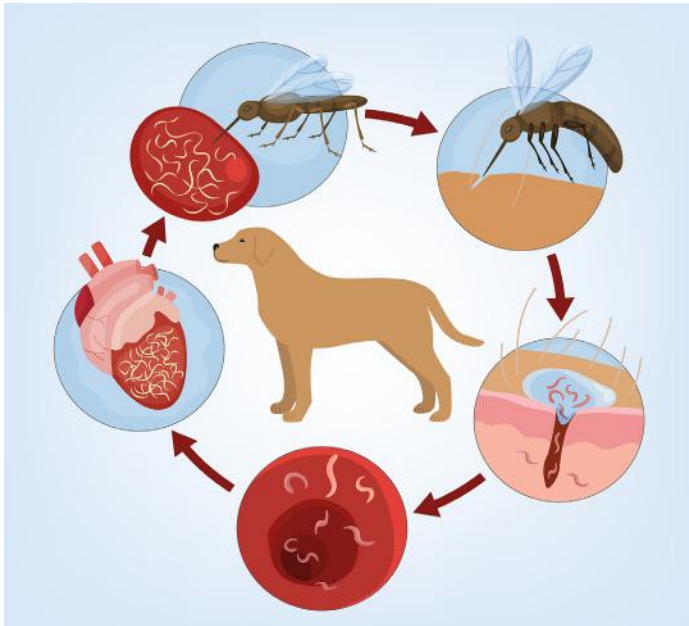


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Testing cats for heartworms is also more difficult since they cannot potentiate the disease. You can understand now why it is difficult to explain that a cat has heartworms when you cannot always reliably test for it and you cannot very well treat for it.

That is why it is always best to keep them on a preventative that will prevent the disease, then you will not have to watch your pet suffer from the harsh symptoms of this disease that can last for a lifetime.

There are a multitude of heartworm preventatives available, so it can oftentimes be difficult to determine which one would be best for your pet. I recommend you speak to your local veterinarian about what is best for your pet; some of the preventatives are very good, and some of the preventatives are not as effective as they used to be. We see this especially in this area due to the high rate of resistance against certain heartworm preventatives.

Remember, it is always easier, healthier for your pet, and more cost effective for you to prevent the disease with an appropriate preventative than to treat it!

in this host, but it cannot thrive and cannot reproduce.

Heartworm disease in cats causes bronchitis, oftentimes severe and with a cough. The cough is typically present as the heartworms are developing into adults and then again as they die off in the cat's lungs. The worst part, however, is what they do to the cat's lungs. These heartworms, because they live in cat's lungs, cause extreme inflammation of the airways often leading to heavy scarring and fibrosis. Cats cannot be treated for heartworms, unfortunately; only the cough can be treated.

Dr. Kristin Sullivan is a small animal veterinarian practicing since 2012. She owns ARPets Hospital and PAWliday Inn in Brookland, Arkansas, with her husband Michael Sullivan. She strives to provide the highest quality veterinary care, advocating for her patients, and works to educate the public in animal health care and preventive medicine, while promoting the human-animal bond.

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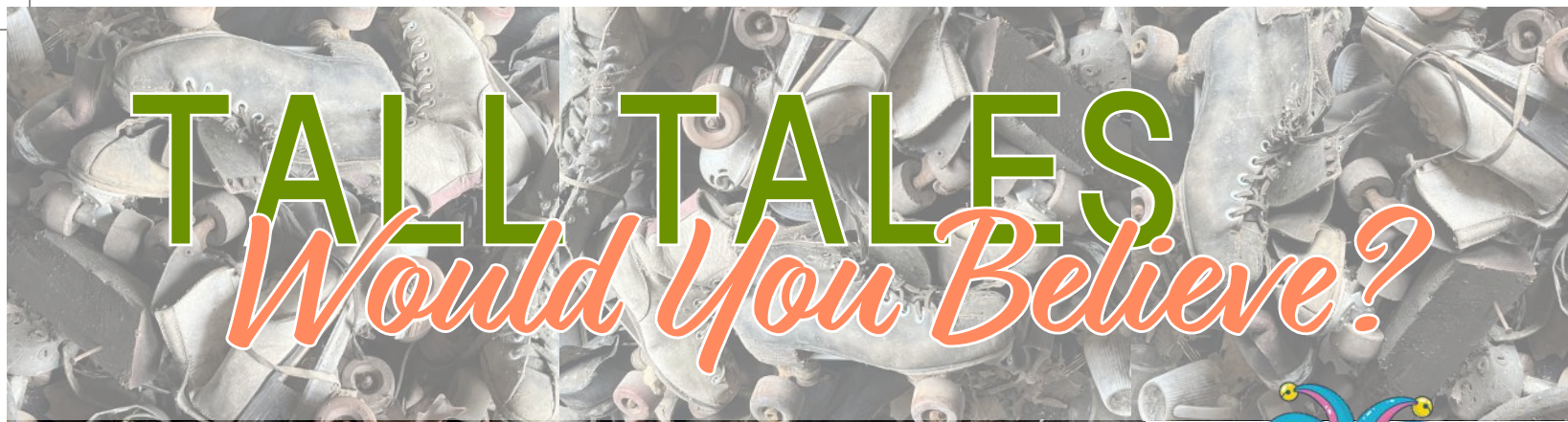
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BY KARAN SUMMITT

Most of us love April Fool's Day, a time dedicated to pranks, surprises and harmless mischief. Whether it's tricking your friends, pulling a fast one on a family member or setting up the ultimate office prank, it's all in good fun.

The origins of April Fool's Day are a bit uncertain. Some give credit to an English nobleman who sent his servant back and forth on ludicrous errands in preparation for a wedding feast. Others say it began in 1582 when France implemented the Gregorian calendar, shifting the start of the New Year from the spring equinox, which usually falls around April 1, to January 1. After the change, people who wrongly celebrated the new year in late March and early April were called "April fools."

Others take its origins all the back to the time of Emperor Constantine when a group of jesters convinced the Emperor to make one of them king for a day. The appointed jester, named Kugel, declared it would be a day of foolishness. Wherever and whenever April 1st had its beginnings, April Fool's Day has become a day of lighthearted fun, at least for the ones pulling the pranks.

Northeast Arkansas has its share of stories that seem like a good April Fool's prank. Younger generations may find them hard to believe, but newspaper clippings, old photos and abandoned sites give weight to the truth of these "tall tales." There are even a few of us still around who remember those days!



Pony Rides, Paddle Boats and Penny the Llama

Established in 1925 by J.M Reynolds, Reynolds Park of Paragould was donated back to the city in 1962 with a stipulation that all revenues be plowed back into the maintenance and improvement of the park. During those 37 years the Reynolds family worked tirelessly to develop the park into an enjoyable and profitable attraction for area residents. One such effort included a zoo with domestic and foreign-born exotic animals, including a guanaco (a type of llama),

a South American tapir, monkeys, diamond back rattlesnakes and a runaway alligator captured and donated to the zoo from the Fairview Community.



In the 1950s pony rides, paddle boats and picnics made the park a great family destination. On weekend nights adults flocked to dances held in the main clubhouse. Old newspapers report numbers that sound unbelievable - as many as 8,000-10,000 visitors on weekends from places up to 100 miles away. A pool was added in 1954, increasing the park's popularity.

In one account, Mr. Reynolds shared the story of Penny, his llama on the lam. The Reynolds were on their way home from the Nashville Zoo towing Penny in a trailer behind their vehicle. Twice Penny managed to escape, costing Mr. Reynolds an extra \$50 when he paid a local farmer the finder's fee for capturing her. The zoo existed until 1963, when three Russian bears, the last surviving animals in the zoo, were euthanized. Recently renovated, the park offers RV camping pads, pavilions, fishing and a facility for group meetings.



Fun at Funland

It wasn't that long ago folks heard the sound of lions roaring in an area adjacent to Craighead Forest Park. In a Jonesboro Sun article from June of 2021 Craighead County Judge Marvin Day dates it as 1983 when he said he first heard the chilling sound.

"Me and my dad were out in the area cutting trees," Day said. "When the chainsaw stopped you could hear the roooaaarrrrr, roooaaarrrrr," he said. "It was pretty freaky."

If you are wondering how in the world lions made their way to Craighead Forest, Tommy Williams has the answer - it was a place called Funland. Williams knows this because it was his dad, Harvey

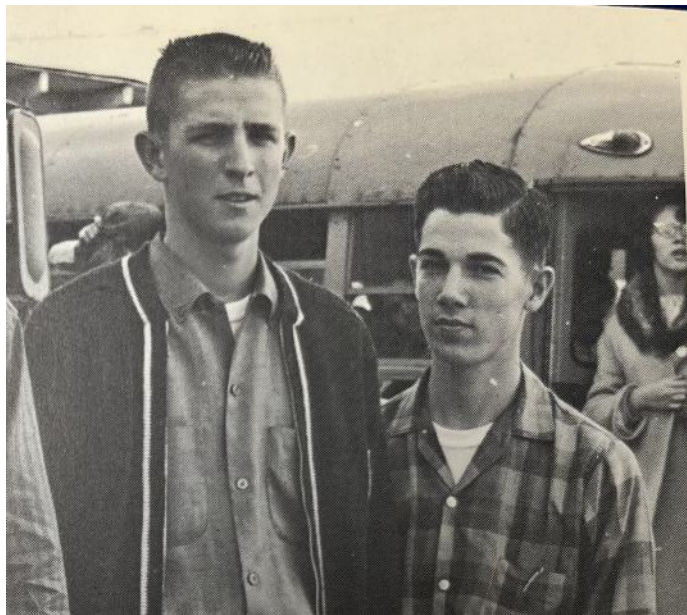
Williams, who purchased the place in the early '60s from A. D. Luster.

The Sun article quotes Tommy as saying, "Dad actually had a licensed zoo." Sam, the first lion, was a transplant from Memphis. A woman had purchased Sam as a cub to put in her back yard. Understandably, when Sam grew to an adult her neighbors were frightened and likely disturbed by those unexpected roars! When the elder Williams learned they were going to put Sam down, he offered to pick him up.

Funland zoo began with Sam the lion, but didn't end there. Harvey traveled to St. Louis and purchased Elsa the lioness, as well as a spotted lion. A bear, baboons, penguins, a bobcat and an assortment of animals for petting were acquired to add to the zoo collection.

Funland also included attractions like a Ferris Wheel, bumper cars and a bowling alley. Today, one old building on the property holds the remnants of hardwood flooring and piles of roller skates. An abandoned concession sign reminds us how far a few dollars would stretch in bygone days. Under an old canopy sits the rusty train engine and brightly colored cars that once circled the park.

Funland was open from the 1960s until sometime in the 1980s. In the Jonesboro Sun article Tommy Williams expressed a desire for the train to be restored and donated to Craighead Forest Park as a historical exhibit of days gone by. Remnants of Funland border the northeast edge of Craighead Forest Park and can be seen off Lincoln Drive.



When Your Classmate Was Your School Bus Driver

Getting a private Christian school up and running required some creative thinking, as well as many sacrifices and volunteer hours. Teachers in the early days of Crowley's Ridge Academy (CRA) remember school founder Emmett Smith arriving early during winter months to light the stoves in their classrooms. Students participated with fund-raisers that ranged from kitchen scrubbers to magazines to jog-a-thons. Teachers taught at salary levels that were far below their public school counterparts.

Administrators used that same creativity to help families with tuition costs. One tactic from the school's earliest days defies what we believe about teen drivers and insurance costs for those same teens. CRA drew students from surrounding towns like Jonesboro, Walnut Ridge and Corning, as well as Senath and Kennett in the Missouri bootheel. A solution for getting those students to school each day turned out

to be a double benefit - families with an older licensed student were offered a tuition exchange if the student was willing to drive a school bus from their hometown.

In the modern day of helicopter parenting, it's hard to believe a parent would allow elementary age children to board a bus with a teenage boy of 17 or 18 behind the wheel — or that it was even lawful! To their credit, teen school bus drivers were legal at the time, and many of these students had been driving farm equipment for years.

As responsible as the student drivers seemed to be, at heart they were still teens. Rick Watson remembers the days when Nippy Mangrum drove the Paragould route and would drop students off at Myrtle Uteley's corner store for fried pies and a soda pop. When he circled back around to pick them up, Nippy had one stipulation - they needed to board with a fried pie and a pop for him. Nippy was also known to make the bus backfire loudly when riders least expected it. That is, until the day the muffler blew off. Rumor has it that when Nippy's younger brother Tim drove for the school, he might have taken the bus cruising around town on weekends.

Following in the footsteps of his four older siblings, Tommy Wallis was among the last three student bus drivers for CRA. He remembers the arrangement his dad worked out with the school. A resident of Jonesboro, Mr. Wallis offered to purchase the bus and provide his older children as drivers in exchange for tuition costs. He also asked that his home congregation be able to use the bus in their Joy Bus Ministry. The school agreed. Over the years, of the 10 Wallis children to attend CRA, five of them drove the Jonesboro bus route for CRA.

Harrell Austin was one of the first student bus drivers and then later served as CRA school superintendent. In the 25 years of the student driving era, he remembers only one accident with a student behind the wheel. The accident was not the fault of the student driver, nor did it result in serious injuries. Student drivers were phased out in 1980, but the good memories and a healthy dose of backdoor thankfulness remains for the safety of students.





Almost Famous:

DANNY THOMAS

The Danny Thomas Show, titled *Make Room for Daddy* for its first three seasons, is an American TV comedy that ran from 1953 to the mid 1960s. It starred Danny Thomas as a successful night club entertainer and focused on his relationship with his family, and also regularly featured music by Thomas, guest stars and other cast members.

And Paragould's own Danny Thomas is very familiar with the program, its stars and more. Did he watch it in his younger days? "I'm afraid so," he said. "*Make Room For Daddy* ... as a kid growing up we watched it and I remember the characters who played his kids. ... Rusty Hamer was his son Rusty, and Angela Cartwright and Marjorie Lord. It was kind of like *Leave It To Beaver*, a good family show."

Our Danny retired as Director of Imaging at Arkansas Methodist Medical Center after 30 years on the job, saying, "I finally hung up my lead apron. I started as a staff tech and worked my way up from there. Now I go to lots of basketball games because the grandsons played and we followed the girls' team at Tech. And I work at the church a little now and then."

Being introduced as Danny Thomas often brings a reaction from the generation familiar with the TV star, and sometimes he's asked if they're related. "I have to tell them no, I'm not, not hardly, and no relation to Marlo Thomas either. And I don't have a star on the Walk of Fame," Danny said. "But there are some funny stories."

"One time when I was a kid, not real old in Flint, they opened up a new department store and we went and I wandered off and my mom thought I was lost. I knew where I was, but she thought I was lost and she went to the Service Desk and asked them to page Danny Thomas. The guy looked at her all excited and said, 'Is he

in our store?' and she said, 'Don't get the wrong idea. He's only 6 years old.'

"When I was at the hospital Mr. Rooney was dealing with the new building program and they brought a guy up from Texas as a consultant. Mr. Rooney was taking him through the departments and when he came through X-ray he said, 'This is Danny Thomas, our director here.' Then he said, 'And this is Mr. Bart Starr' and I thought how funny, two 'celebrities' here. Come to find out, yes, it was THE Bart Starr and I said to Mr. Rooney, 'Why didn't you tell me it was the real one? I could have gotten an autograph.' He didn't ask for mine."

Just like the TV celebrity, our Danny has a wonderful sense of humor and enjoys making others smile. One year at a Christmas party, when participants were supposed to give gag gifts, Danny's contribution was an 8x10 framed photo of an older couple. When the recipient opened it and asked what the deal was, Danny said, "Those are my in-laws. I've been looking at them for the last 20 years, now you can."

He chuckles when revisiting that tale and another similar party where he contributed a framed portrait of himself. He can delight an audience just as the more famous Danny Thomas could, even if he doesn't have his own TV show or Hollywood star.



DR. J

Paragould's version of Dr. J might not soar high above the rim and throw down monstrous dunks the way the original did, but he's going to have an impact on local basketball just the same.

Dr. Nick Jankoviak, Superintendent of the Paragould School District and known systemwide as "Dr. J," is well aware of the accomplishments of basketball Hall of Famer Julius Erving – the true "doctor" of the courts – and doesn't mind sharing the famous nickname with him.

"I know exactly who they are referring to. I'm a big basketball fan," the local Dr. J said. "I grew up on the other side of the lake

from Chicago, so the Bulls were my team ... Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen, Dennis Rodman. But right before MJ's time you had Magic Johnson and Larry Bird, and right before that, Dr. J. I liked to say when I was a kid, that's where I learned my moves."

Now in his fourth year as the PSD superintendent, Jankoviak is at the forefront of the process of constructing a new sports arena on the high school campus.

He beams with pride at being able to share many of the state-of-the-art features the building will showcase, moving Paragould fans from the old gymnasium that opened in 1963 into the fantastic new one.

"It's a process," he said. "We're almost done with the pad. When it's down, you'll see

things going up. You'll see a building. I'm using the bank across the street from us as inspiration. When you get the pad right, and the foundation right, then it goes up. Everyone is getting excited. Behind the scenes all the details regarding the railing, the hospitality room and what it's going to look like, things like that are taking shape. We are trying to incorporate our history into the arena. You will be able to see a part of it in the lobby."

And will there be any Dr. J highlights for fans' viewing pleasure? "Well, you might kind of see me flash across the screen for a dunk," he said with a laugh. "Maybe I'll wear a headband."

His good-natured jabs at himself in no way mean he couldn't play the game back in the

Name's the Same

WONDER WOMAN

Even though the TV star spelled her name a bit differently, Linda Turner was once our own version of Wonder Woman.

Linda's maiden name was Carter, which mimicked that of actress Lynda Carter, who played Diana Prince/Wonder Woman on the 1970s TV series. Before the series became a regular feature, ABC aired the TV film *Wonder Woman* in March of 1974, based on the character of the same name. That one starred Cathy Lee Crosby and was intended as a pilot for a potential series but ratings were not the best and ABC did not pick it up.

Warner Bros. and ABC did not give up on the idea, and instead developed another TV film pilot, *The New Original Wonder Woman*, which aired in November 1975. This one starred Lynda Carter, and its Wonder Woman more closely matched the original character created by William Moulton Marston, down to the World War II setting. That one was more successful and immediately led to production of the series *Wonder Woman*.

The first two regular episodes of the new series aired in April 1976. "Oh, yeah, I couldn't remember exactly when that was," our Linda said. "I was out of school and already working. I was at Emerson Electric from '72 for 38 years, I think."

Once the series hit the air, friends and relatives quickly picked up on the TV star's having the same name as Linda's. "Everyone that knew me did that, said something about it or called me Wonder Woman," she said. "Sometimes someone would tease me and say, 'Why don't you look like her?' and I'd say that I was in disguise."

Linda, who graduated from Oak Grove High School in 1968 and was a young adult when the *Wonder Woman* series aired, said she remembers

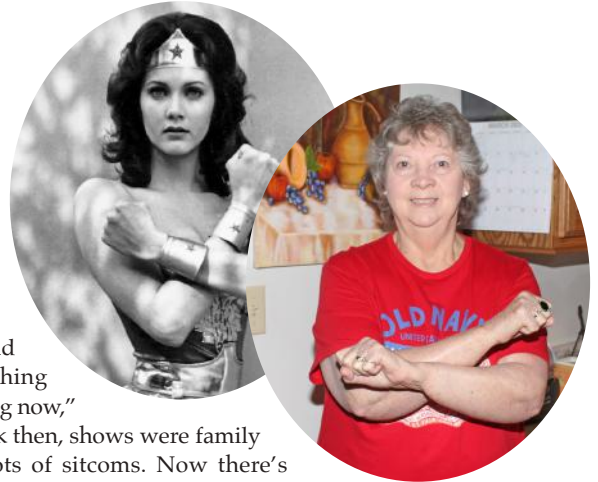
nighly television entertainment being more family-friendly at the time.

"You can't find much of anything worth watching now," she said. "Back then, shows were family oriented ... lots of sitcoms. Now there's so much, well, I call it filth. There's not much worth watching."

Linda doesn't recall ever actually referring to herself as Wonder Woman, even if others did, and just enjoyed the frequent comparisons in the name game.

"No, I never really used it that I can remember," she said. "It was just a fun thing. The closest I came to something like that was one time at work, after I was married and was a Turner, I dressed up for fun at Halloween and was Tina Turner, and they called me that. I had long hair back then and it was always curly, and I wore a fringed shirt. But I don't remember being Wonder Woman, other than sharing the name."

She obviously watched enough of the TV series to be familiar with the star's ability to deflect bullets with her bulletproof bracelets while breaking up Nazi spy rings and preserving justice, and she kindly copied that pose. "I remember some things about the show," Linda said, "but that was a long time ago."



day. While the first Dr. J scored more than 30,000 points as a pro and popularized the high-flying slam dunk style so popular today, our Dr. J says basketball has always been dear to him.

"I was sort of a player, but I was built like an offensive lineman," he recalls. "My sport was football but I secretly loved basketball. Back in the day, we played pickup games all the time. I could play a little."

As a young man he saw a need in his community for something to attract kids and keep them away from the streets and out of trouble, so he secured a number of donations and "opened up a weight room and called it Saturday Night Live and it was to keep the kids off the streets. Even some from South Bend came over and we would sometimes

have over 200 kids there in a night. A lot of them were 'too much on the streets,' if you know what I mean. We'd get some basketball games going and I would play with them and I was not bad; I could hold my own. It really did bring kids off the streets."

Now he hopes the new Paragould facility will bring folks of all ages into the arena for high school athletic events, and for an opportunity to enjoy a first-hand look at all the district plans to offer.

"It is going to be spectacular," Dr. J said. "It's slow going right now but once that pad is down and the building starts going up, we're going to be even more excited. The things we



are incorporating are going to bring so much joy to so many people. I can hardly wait."

It sounds very much like a slam dunk.

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4/13 - Sunday at 6:00pm, C. Thomas Howell "Outsiders" Presented by: Mad Hatter Shows, madhattershows.com

4/18 - Friday at 7:30pm, Conway Remembered, showpass.com/conwayremembered

4/19 - Saturday at 7:30pm, Bon Jour, showpass.com/bonjour2

4/26 - Saturday at 7:00pm, Leon Etienne Magic Rocks, magicrocks.fantaztix.com/leon-etienne-paragould-ar/2025-04-26

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April 12th

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**Spring Fling Sidewalk Sale
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Main Street Paragould Event**



April 17th

6:00 p.m.

**Singo Bingo
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*A complete listing of all Downtown events can be found under
"Events" at downtownparagould.com or
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April 19th

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**Bon Jour
Downtown Collins Theatre**



April 26th

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**Leon Etienne - Magic Rocks
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April 28th

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**Bluegrass Monday
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The Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas is proud to celebrate a major milestone in its partnership with Westside Air Force JROTC: Reaching 1 million meals packed through the volunteer program.

Since 2017, Westside Air Force JROTC has been a dedicated and dependable volunteer group at the Food Bank, lending their time each month to pack meals for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), which serves food-insecure senior citizens across Northeast Arkansas. Their ongoing commitment has played a vital role in ensuring seniors in Northeast Arkansas have consistent access to nutritious food.

“The Junior ROTC program’s mission is to ‘Develop Citizens of Character,’ and a key part of that is community service,” said Peter Mamula, TSgt. “We want our cadets to understand the meaning of

the Air Force core values: ‘Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do.’ Volunteering with the Food Bank allows them to put those values into action.”

The Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas recognizes and appreciates the dedication of Westside JROTC in the fight against hunger.

“We truly value our partnership with Westside JROTC, whose cadets consistently show up to serve their community,” said Volunteer Coordinator Elizabeth Johnson. “Their hard work and commitment each month ensure that seniors in Northeast Arkansas have reliable access to food, and we are incredibly grateful for their support.”

For more information on how to volunteer with the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas, visit www.foodbankofnea.org/volunteer

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SPECIALTY CARE CLOSER TO HOME A HEART FOR JONESBORO

Pediatric Cardiologist Sam Lee, M.D., has a heart for the Jonesboro community. In 2019, he moved from Virginia to become a full-time cardiologist for the Arkansas Children's Hospital Jonesboro Clinic. His hire added more permanence to the clinic, which was originally established in 2012.

Before Dr. Lee, the cardiology program relied on once-a-month traveling clinics from Arkansas Children's Hospital (ACH) in Little Rock. Today, the program sees more than 100 patients monthly, and its reputation has spread throughout the community.

"There's a lot of trust in Arkansas Children's Hospital. That reputation makes it a little bit easier when a patient comes into your office," Dr. Lee said. "But at the same time, I'm also trying to build personal trust with patients. When I meet them, we discuss how they're doing, and I try to be friendly and accessible."

What the cardiology program offers

The top services provided by the ACH Jonesboro Clinic's cardiology program are evaluations, echocardiograms, EKGs, Holter monitor and event monitor recordings. A traveling physician also sees adult congenital heart patients. Other physicians rotate to provide services like fetal echos.

Most patients have heart murmurs, palpitations, chest pain and syncope (fainting). The program also treats patients with congenital heart disease lesions. More complex cases are referred to ACH.

"Arkansas Children's Hospital provides a big facility to draw upon. It's one of U.S. News & World Report's best hospitals in the country for cardiology care. We have a big team down in Little Rock to assist us with everything," Dr. Lee said. "But we can provide 80 to 90 percent of cardiology care right here."

Fast technology

Telehealth, or remote appointments with a physician or specialist via video chat or phone, has become more popular since the COVID-19 pandemic. While other hospitals in the area offer telehealth, ACH Jonesboro Clinic is one of the few offering it for fetal diagnosis. The patient can have a fetal echocardiogram done in Jonesboro while a specialist in Little Rock interprets the images almost in real-time.

"They're on the monitor, and the doctor could tell the technologist, 'I need you to move this way' or 'I need you to get an image of this.' That's pretty unusual," Dr. Lee said. "Most places have you go to a separate facility for a fetal echocardiogram. But in Jonesboro, it can be done locally."

Building trust & understanding

In a rural area, trust in the medical community is vital. ACH Jonesboro Clinic has established full-time cardiology care and roughly 14 other subspecialties, a mix of full-time or traveling clinics. Being an Arkansas Children's clinic and with its partnership with St. Bernard's Medical Center across the street, patients receive quality, close-to-home care.



"I try to get back to the patients as quickly as possible. If I'm not able to, I have my nurses try to get back to them. It's not one of the situations where you call, and you get an answer from us five days later," Dr. Lee said.

For Dr. Lee, it's more than being open to his pediatric cardiology patients. It's a journey he's walked himself. As an infant, Dr. Lee was diagnosed with congenital heart disease, a bicuspid aortic valve, a fairly common abnormality. It's what drew him into cardiology, giving him a unique insight into what his patients are going through beyond just their physical condition.

"I understand what they're facing, what they're going through and so I understand some of their anxieties," Dr. Lee said.

Learn more about our expert pediatric cardiology care at archildrens.org/HeartCare or call 870-641-7424.



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Gavin Cupp

BY GRETCHEN HUNT

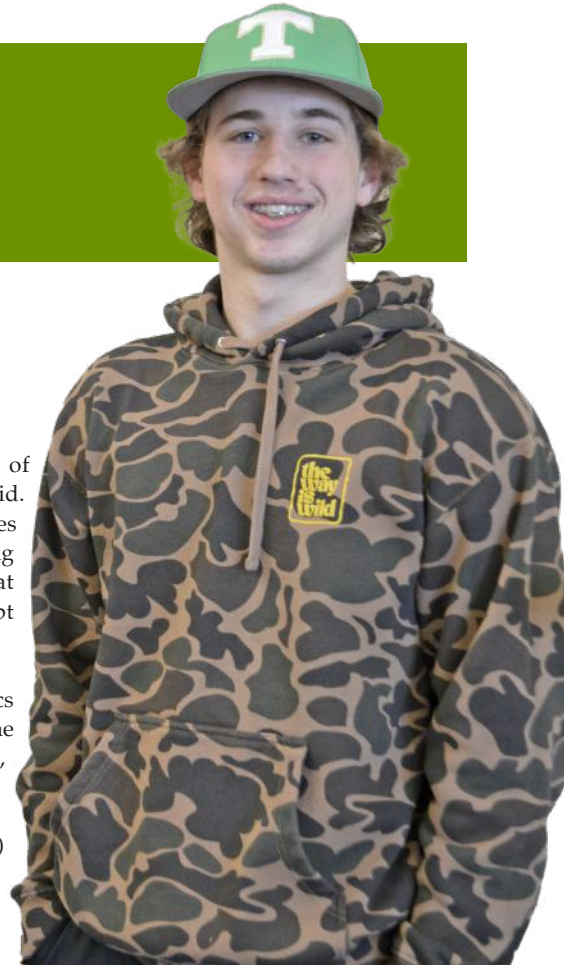
As a sophomore at Greene County Tech High School, Gavin Cupp has developed a love for serving others, especially through volunteering with the Special Olympics. A big part of that service comes with Unified Special Olympics, where Gavin both competes and volunteers.

Skip Schalk, GCT Unified Special Olympics Head Coach, shared that Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® is a program for schools that intentionally promote meaningful social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities. The program utilizes three interconnected components: Special Olympics Unified Sports®, inclusive youth leadership and whole school engagement.

"In Unified Sports, teams are made up of people of similar age and ability," Skip said. "That makes practices more fun and games more challenging and exciting for all. Having sport in common is just one more way that preconceptions and false ideas are swept away."

Gavin said when Unified Special Olympics was starting at GCT junior high he was one of two ninth-graders selected to participate, along with two eighth-graders.

"I had known Skip and Mrs. Christal (Schalk) for a long time, so it was kind of an easy transition into that," he said, noting his favorite part of Unified Special Olympics is the kids and the relationships he has built.



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"I know that's kind of broad, but I love playing sports," Gavin said. "It is so fun to see them have fun at doing something I love doing. It's a lot harder for them, but getting to watch the joy in them just doing it. They enjoy doing it with us and I think that goes both ways. I really enjoy that part of it."

Skip said Greene County Tech has been a Unified Champion School for three years, competing in Basketball Skills, Bocce, Bowling, Swimming, Team Basketball, Cheerleading, Floorball and Track and Field.

"The program is designed to be woven into the fabric of the school, enhancing current efforts and providing rich opportunities that lead to meaningful change in creating a socially inclusive school that supports and engages all learners," Skip said. "What a Unified Champion School 'looks like' can vary greatly from school to school, based on the needs, goals, schedules and other factors unique to each school; but the basic building blocks remain the same."

Gavin has competed in bowling and bocce ball, which he said is like lawn bowling, and has helped in many other areas.

"I helped put on the unified special Olympics track meet here, and I went down to Beebe with them. I'm also a part of the Area 1 Management team, which is over the whole entire Area 1," he said. "We have bigger things we want to do and bigger things we want to add here."

He said he loves to volunteer with anything Special Olympics, and recalled the GCT meet, where he served as scorekeeper for the softball throw. "I monitored that event, helped with awards and lining people up and getting all the schools situated where they needed to be and even helping some of our other volunteers get where they needed to be ... helping them out and taking some stuff off their plate as well," he said.

With plans to be a coach, Gavin said working with Special Olympics is a good fit for a lot of reasons.

"You've got to help in a lot of different areas and not just specifically the sport," he said. "You've got to really learn to just bring people along – kind of almost in a way not only like coaching, but also in a way like loving and, you know, parenting. Patience has been a big thing. Just being patient, loving and coaching in a way that makes it fun for them."

Skip, who also serves as the Area 1 Director of Special Olympics Arkansas, said Unified Special Olympics is simply about bringing people together.



"Special Olympics is dedicated to promoting social inclusion through shared sports training and competition experiences," he said. "Unified Sports joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. It was inspired by a simple principle: Training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding."

A favorite memory for Gavin was when GCT was named the Special Olympics Arkansas School of the Year in May.

"When they were talking about the school of the year, I just kind of listened ... and I was like 'this kind of sounds like us a little bit ...' and then when they said Skip's name, I was like 'Oh, my gosh, we just won the school of the year.' That's big. We all got to go up there and Skip got to talk. It was a real honor because when you put a lot of work into something, especially for the kids' side of it, it's great to see that just pay off and see all the behind-the-scenes stuff that nobody sees and for that to really end up making us the school of the year that was really special."

Gavin encourages others to be open to unplanned opportunities and unplanned interactions.

"You don't know when somebody may call you or you may walk by somebody and they may try to talk to you and you may really just want to be short with them or, hey, somebody's calling you and 'I'll call you back later' and it never ends up getting called back," he said. "Be open to that stuff because that is where the biggest opportunities come about and a lot of times we miss so many of those opportunities due to the fact that we're so busy, I can't get to that right now. Just be open to anything and everything. Don't rule anything out. Even if you're not interested in it or you don't know much about it, seek to learn. Always be open to gain knowledge somewhere in life and I think that will take you a long way."



30 Years of CASA STEPPING IN FOR CHILDREN

BY SHELBY RUSSOM

For 30 years, the 2nd Judicial District of Arkansas Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children (CASA) has served children and families within Craighead, Greene, Poinsett and Mississippi counties. During this time, they have supported over 4,500 children, helping them find safe and permanent homes.

CASA is built upon the support of volunteers like Stacey Sloas, who care deeply for children.



Stacey, a volunteer since 2013, said she believes CASA was always in her future. She had received several messages from friends and family encouraging her to find a way to be there for children. Once she heard of CASA and its mission, she felt she could no longer ignore the part of her that wanted to support children in need. She has now served 12 years, 728 hours and 17 children.

Angela Tate, the executive director of CASA, said Stacey's advocacy knowledge and her ability to



collaborate with attorneys, judges and caseworkers greatly benefit children in foster care because decisions made in these proceedings can impact their lives. As part of CASA, volunteers advocate for children in foster care during juvenile court proceedings and help them to have a better future.

"Their years of dedication mean they understand the complexities of the child welfare system and how to navigate it effectively to advocate for the best outcomes," Angela said.

Stacey said being a part of CASA has made her reflect on aspects of her life that would have been different without the support from her family and friends.

"My life had a few years of struggles – a divorce, cancer treatment, sepsis from an infected port and an emergency surgery," she said. "I made some bad decisions and had some bad circumstances happen



For the past 30 years, CASA volunteers have stepped in to advocate for children in the 2nd Judicial District. To learn more about becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate visit neacasa.org.

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to me. What if I didn't have a mom, sister, and niece to take me to surgeries and treatments, care for me and my kids?"

CASA provides children with someone who cares about their well-being and can understand what they have been through and what they need to be successful in the next part of their lives. The lives of children in the foster care system can seem uncertain and scary, but CASA can act as their support system.

"Stacey, like other seasoned advocates, brings stability and consistency to children who often experience frequent changes in placements, caseworkers and schools," Angela said.

Stacey said without a strong support system, anyone could be left overwhelmed and unable to care for their children properly. "This is why we should do what we can. We should answer that voice that tells us to help, be a friend, be a neighbor, just be kind," she said. "Stand up for children. Fill the gap. Don't look the other way. Realize we are all a few decisions and circumstances out of our control away from needing help."

Angela said volunteers are extremely important to CASA because of their experience, passion, commitment and the relationships they build with the children they serve.

An April 1st celebration presented by Arvest Bank at Embassy Suites in Jonesboro marks CASA's 30th year serving the community, featuring



Mayor Harold Copenhaver's proclamation of April as Child Abuse and Prevention Month and musical performances by Henry Cavenaugh and the Children of Elevate and keynote speaker Sylvia Harrison.

To find out more on volunteering with CASA, visit www.neacasa.org, call 870-273-5415 or email Angela at angie.tate@neacasa.org.



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AUTISM Awareness

Sally Hill

When Heart &

Action Collide

Numerous volunteers help at Children's Homes, Inc. (CHI) each year. Some come year after year, while others may only come once. Regardless of how often they come, CHI is always thankful for their help.

One such volunteer has been quietly helping at CHI for many years. Sally Hill started volunteering when her husband was a part-time employee. Wherever he went promoting CHI, she went, too. While she wasn't on the payroll, she was just as active as he was in telling the CHI story. Sally was also a natural working around the children in care. Being a retired school teacher, she understood how to interact with the children and how to encourage them.

Even though her husband is no longer an employee, Sally still shows up to help as often as she can. You can guarantee she will be in the middle of things when help is needed.

For several years, CHI traveled to supporting churches across multiple states hosting fish fry events. Sally was always first in line ready to load the van headed to wherever they were going. When Christmas rolls around each year, she is again in the middle of the sorting and organizing of the hundreds of gifts collectively given to the children in care. She is always just a phone call away when CHI is counting change for the annual Change for Children campaign, which brought in more than \$414,000 in 2024. And, she's been a volunteer for all 11 years of CHI's annual Casting for Kids Bass Classic on Lake Norfolk. Whatever the need, Sally is always ready to help.

The list of all the other small things Sally does is too lengthy to include. Suffice to say, no job is too big, too small or beneath her desire to help.

In addition to all the ways she volunteers, Sally and her husband, Arvil, try to stay connected with some of the CHI children after they leave the program. One young man stayed in the area and works as a plumber.



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The Hills intentionally call on him to help them with any plumbing jobs.

In 2024, Forbes Magazine published an article entitled "16 Desirable Qualities of an Ideal Nonprofit Volunteer." Looking over the list of qualities, Sally fits them all well. She has empathy. She is committed to serving. She is consistent and authentic. She listens and has a great ability to encourage others. There are other qualities not listed here, but you can be assured she lands at the head of the volunteer class for each one of them.



Probably the best quality of a volunteer is a caring heart. Sally wins that race every single time. Her level of caring and compassion are unrivaled. Her love for ministry and her desire to be helpful are what motivates her.

Micah Brinkley, executive director and CEO of CHI, said, "Sally hates to say 'No' when called to help. She is a wonderful example of a person who willingly stands in the gap whenever there is a need." He added, "Sometimes, we purposefully don't call Sally when there is a need because we don't want to monopolize her time. However, somehow she finds out something is going on and she shows up just to be useful and put to work."

Referring back to the Forbes' article, people may hesitate volunteering their time for a nonprofit because they fear they have nothing to offer. That's certainly not the case with Sally. What she offers is the embodiment of qualities and skills CHI wants the children in their care to see and emulate in their lives. "These children need to see people wanting to be in their lives, not running from their lives," Brinkley said. "Sally doesn't see differences or difficulties. She just sees children who deserve to have someone who knows their names and who genuinely wants to be in their lives."

Children's Homes, Inc. considers Sally to be one of their "best of the best" when it comes to volunteering with a purpose.

It's Summer Camp Season!



Crowley's Ridge Youth Camp

Crowley's Ridge Youth Camp (CRYC) has been a part of the Northeast Arkansas landscape for decades. Whether attending day camp or an overnight camp session, children enjoy days filled with high-energy, exciting fun. From wild themes and crazy games to pool time and adventure-based challenge activities, children have an experience they won't soon forget. CRYC is located at The Ridge Retreat and Adventure Center outside Walcott, Ark.



Summer 2025 Camp Sessions

Camp Name	Dates	Ages	Cost
Day Camp	June 2-5	5-9	\$100
Camp Discovery	June 8-13	9-12	\$200
Camp Adventure	June 22-27	9-16	\$200
Teen Week	July 6-11	13-18	\$200

— Early Bird Discount of \$10 Off Ends April 30th for ALL Sessions —

For information about CRYC summer camp sessions at The Ridge Retreat and Adventure Center, visit www.theridgecenter.org or contact Gary Money at 870.573.6766 or theridge@childrenshomes.org.



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The Ridge Retreat and Adventure Center is owned and operated by Children's Homes, Inc.



BY GRETCHEN HUNT

Bringing entertainment to Paragould was the goal for Chris Moyer and his co-owners when they made the decision to open Let's Roll.

"It's the one thing that every year when the Chamber asks the community what they want — bowling was always at the top of the list, laser tag was always at the top of the list, arcade was always at the top, additional restaurants were always at the top of the list," Chris said. "There was obviously a couple other things that were in there, but those were always up there ... I knew that as a local resident. I've known that for years ... We knew Paragould needed something, we knew Paragould had nothing for a long time and when we had this opportunity we took that list to heart to bring bowling, and laser tag and arcade and everything back here."

Having served as general manager of the old bowling center from 2011 to 2016, before it burned down in July of 2016, Moyer said he has been looking for an opportunity to bring entertainment and bowling back to Paragould.

That opportunity came when he and his fellow owners, Matt Gardner,



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Randy Henfling and Brent Jones met about 12 months ago.

"We all met at a Popeyes and kind of introduced each other and said hey we want to do something and within 30 days or so the opportunity to buy the cinema came up," Chris said. "We jumped on it pretty quick knowing that it was something we were all interested in bringing to the community."

He said Unico Bank was instrumental in helping them seeing their vision and then allowing them to create the vision for the center, which includes bowling, laser tag, an arcade and the Let's Eat restaurant.

"The one vision that all the owners had from right away was we didn't want to be just a typical bowling alley with chicken and french fries and combo meals and all that and we wanted to elevate our service beyond the typical," Chris said. "That meant not only having better food and higher quality appetizers and pizza and wraps and burgers and all that, but it was also being full-service everywhere all the time. It doesn't matter if you come into the restaurant or if you are at a bowling lane or you sit at a table in the arcade, a server is going to come up to you."

He said that server will take your drink order and your food order wherever you are located in the center.

"It's full-service all the time, which is a pretty rare for most bowling centers," he said. "Most bowling centers you walk in and you have to walk up to a snack bar, you have to walk up and get a drink, you have to walk up and get refills and you're always leaving the entertainment spot in order to go get food or something else, where here you don't have to leave your lane or your entertainment spot in order to get all those things. We'll bring them to you. The elevated service was a big factor in making sure that we did things a little bit different here."

In addition to dine in options in the restaurant and across the center, Let's Eat also offers to go orders and Chris said they are working to get established with services like Door Dash and Paragould Eats. Let's Eat can be accessed from the center, but also has its own entrance from the parking lot for those who are coming in specifically to enjoy the restaurant.

"Inside the Let's Eat restaurant is the darts and the golf simulator, so you can come in and eat, but also kind of like eat and play while still being in a dining environment," Chris said. "So you can come eat and

play the golf simulator, you can come eat and play darts. Something a little more fun than just a typical sit down for an hour. I think that's a little different than most restaurants to have a little something to do while you are eating and we have that here."

Another offering at Let's Roll that has been well received is birthday parties.

"We've had multiple weekends where we've been sold out on birthday parties," Chris said. "It's resonated really well with having the options to do different types of bowling, as well as the different options of having laser tag, arcade, golf simulator, so having more than just one thing to do, where Paragould's never had that even with the old bowling center, all you had was bowling, at the movies, all that you had was a movie. Now you can come here and do all those things in one package and be a one-stop shop kind of place to have a full-day of an experience for your child's birthday."

A favorite for center attendees is the two-story laser tag with a western town train station theme including a 3D train on the wall, all of which was custom-designed for the Paragould location.

"When you shoot at the train smoke comes out of the top," Chris said. "It turned out phenomenal ... There's over 40 different games that folks can do, the most popular are Teams and Free for All, but there's a lot of different games and we specialize it for birthday parties to where the birthday child becomes kind of the main person in the game so they feel a little more special, but the theming in there is just really, really unique."

The arcade also offers a wide variety of activities. "We had a small 17-game arcade in our center in Paragould nine years ago," Chris said.



"We more than doubled the size of our arcade here."

Now, the center's owners are focused on creating experiences that help the community enjoy everything Let's Roll has to offer.

"There's a lot of things that we can do with those LED walls that we have that we just started on," Chris said, noting they have shown some sports on the screens and done some interactivity with bowling. "But it can do a lot of things and we are going to expand upon that in the near future to do more with the technology that we have in this place."

Chris said they have just begun to scratch the surface of what all the center has to offer as he listed off some future plans. "Introducing golfers to our golf simulator and having true guys or gals day out golfing here versus going out to the course. Having larger parties in the center that, you know we can hold up to 600 folks, so having something that a larger group can come in and do a little bit of everything. I think it's more right now just really enhancing what we have and giving different experiences with the things that we do offer."

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VOLUNTEERS

Making a Difference

Taelor Calloway

BY SHELBY RUSSOM

At 12 years old, Taelor Calloway has dedicated her life to volunteering and sharing the stories of others, a passion that has led to the creation of her own magazine. The magazine, "The Buzz," showcases stories Taelor has written about local children, aiming to empower youth and inspire change within her community.

"Its purpose is just to feature kids all around Arkansas," she said. "They are doing amazing things, each and every one of them have, and I just want them to be recognized for that."

The idea sprung from a desire to promote herself and other Arkansas kids who volunteer across the state, as well as to raise funds for pageants and the various sports Taelor plays, like volleyball, basketball and track. Premiering in February, the first edition of "The Buzz" features the stories of 12 kids. Taelor said she hopes to continue creating as many editions as possible.

Taelor said she wants her magazine to show people the good things she and other kids have done for the community. She said she hopes it will even impact readers outside of Northeast Arkansas.

"Maybe my magazine could be promoted to all of America," Taelor said.

Tiffany Calloway, Taelor's mom, said she believes each kid featured in "The Buzz" deserves an award for their philanthropy and volunteer efforts and would love to reward them. She said they are currently looking for sponsors to make their dream of continuing to print and hosting an award ceremony for the magazine a reality.

Tiffany said she is immensely proud of how much of herself Taelor puts into everything



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"It makes my heart feel better," she said. "Even donating clothes or doing my CARE Box or doing Make-A-Wish, it's just so a person can feel happy."

A CARE Box is an easily accessible box of free hygiene products like deodorant and toothpaste intended to help students in need. Currently, Taelor has placed them in three different school counselor centers, giving students access to hygiene products without fear of judgment.

"They don't have to be embarrassed or anything," she said. "They can go to the counselor and just go take everything they need."

Recently, Taelor earned several award nominations through her volunteer and philanthropy efforts. In January, she was selected as a finalist for two Youth Excellence Awards: a grade 6-12 Oliver Fitzpatrick Jr., Social/Recreational Award and the Suzanne Ornelas Philanthropy Award. Tiffny said she was impressed with Taelor for winning not one, but two Greater Little Rock Chapter Youth Excellence Awards, seeing how she was the only contestant to do so.

Taelor said her next goal involves producing more magazines, hopefully providing copies to more schools within the community and promoting as many kids as she can. To read "The Buzz" or nominate your child to be featured, visit thebuzzforkids.my.canva.site.



she does. This dedicated mindset has even earned Taelor the nickname "Hundred Percent" among her peers and teachers. When Taelor is not spending her time and talents telling the stories of other young people, she volunteers in numerous ways throughout the community. Tiffny said the first time Taelor volunteered was around age three for the Salvation Army, helping with the feeding program.

Taelor said it is important to dedicate her time to others because she recognizes it as a privilege. "My mom and my dad have really blessed me with this life, and I want to bless other people too," Taelor said.

Averaging around 400 volunteer hours a year, Taelor said she has truly found a love for volunteering in any way possible and is always looking for new ways to help others.



Serving Others

New program pushes involvement

BY KAROLINE RISKER

A fairly new program has been implemented at area schools centered around high school students completing community service hours in order to graduate.

The requirement was set in place due to provisions of Act 237, also known as the LEARNS Act, which was passed by the Arkansas General Assembly in 2023. The program is still in its infancy, with the current sophomore class (those having a 2027 graduation date) being the first group that must complete the hours to graduate.

According to Stacey Horn, 11th and 12th grade counselor at Paragould High School, students at PHS, and others across the state, must amass 75 hours from their freshman through senior years. The terms are pretty flexible: Students donate their time to businesses and non-profits doing anything from moving things around if a business moves, to yard work, to cleaning a dog shelter.

Basically any work done through a non-profit organization or business counts toward the hours, which are then logged into an online system, according to Horn.

Some organizations have volunteer programs in place that can help students complete the required hours. For instance, St. Bernards Hospital in Jonesboro does a junior volunteer program that several sophomores have registered for because completing the program will give them almost all of the hours they need, though students are encouraged to spread their hours out over all four years.

Like at PHS, Valley View School District in Jonesboro keeps an approved list of organizations and opportunities based on the local community, as well as partnerships with local organizations.

Some organizations and opportunities include helping a neighbor with house projects, serving at a local church or serving on a mission trip, working in a government office, serving at the NEA Humane Society, The Foundation of Arts, youth sports programs and other community organizations. According to Ashton Cullum, the list is ongoing as new opportunities are presented for approval. Community organizations can contact the local school districts to let them know of a need that might qualify for community service hours.

Cullum, K-12 Curriculum Specialist for the district, said if hours are

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accumulated outside of the school campus, parents are ultimately responsible for vetting all situations, giving their child permission and going through precautionary safety protocols. In addition, service should never be in a private home or in a situation where students are alone with only one other person.

Students will also naturally gain some hours organically if they are in a club that already does some sort of volunteer work, like the National Honor Society, Key Club, or Interact Club.

Though the hours are required, Cullum sees it as an opportunity. "Teaching and providing students with volunteer and citizenship opportunities allows them to make connections and invest in their community." She noted that several of the school's clubs and organizations on campus were already requiring community service hours as "a valued student experience and pillar of their program." She adds: "As a former National Honor Society sponsor, I witnessed our students be excited about serving our community and completing service projects together. Thus, I think this allows every student to be involved in giving back."

Amanda Waln, Nettleton High School counselor, agreed saying Nettleton has always instilled a love of community and service in its students. "The new community service graduation requirement reinforces our efforts for students not only at Nettleton but in other high schools across our state," she said.

As far as how the students feel, it can be a mixed bag. "Some are loving it and some are not," Horn said. "Our more introverted students are nervous about doing it, but I think it's good to get out of their comfort zone and learn what's out there and use their communication skills."



A large, colorful graphic for Paragould School District. On the left is the school's logo, a circular emblem with a stylized 'P' and the text "PARAGOULD SCHOOL DISTRICT". Below the logo is the text "Join the RAM FAMILY!". On the right, there are two photos of students. The top photo shows a young woman in a blue marching band uniform with the number 11, next to the text "MARCHING BAND STATE CHAMPS 2016 - 2023" and "ALL ARKANSAS PREPS SELECTION". The bottom photo shows a young man in a suit and tie, next to the text "ARKANSAS BETA STATE SECRETARY". On the far right is a stylized ram head logo in blue and red.



Blackbird Fine Arts

Big City Programs in a Small Town

BY MADELYN MCFARLAND

Blackbird Fine Arts is a performance-based education program founded in 2024. It operates out of Walnut Ridge, but as music tends to do, it has captured the attention of a much broader community.

Judge Adam Weeks and his wife, Tasha, got the idea during a family trip to Little Rock. They'd taken their daughters to a show at the children's theatre. The girls were absolutely captivated. "We knew if we were living in a bigger city, our kids would be all over that," Judge Weeks said, "and that was our answer."

Walnut Ridge is on the smaller side, with a population of around 5,500 people, give or take. While the town itself is historic, with nods to its musical history scattered throughout, the downtown scene itself is still relatively new. Efforts to revitalize are popping up right and left, Blackbird Fine Arts being a prime example. While bigger cities might have a lot to offer, it's just not possible to foster the same level of community participation in a small town. Each and every volunteer dedicates their time, energy and creativity to the enrichment of those around them. And there has been no shortage of those willing to teach!

Adam and Tasha were inspired to bring a little of that theatre magic back home to NEA, thus Blackbird Fine Arts was born. They were surprised by the community's initial reaction. Right off the bat, attendance was up. They've had over 50 students at once, with most classes reaching capacity shortly after they are announced.



Adam has been musically inclined since he was young. While his day job might not immediately lend itself to closet rock star, music has always been a big part of his friends' and family's lives.

"We are the epicenter of Rock n Roll" he said, referencing the Beatles famous visit to the town, as well as various other well known artists that hail from our neck of the woods. Johnny Cash, Glen Campbell and Conway Twitty to name a few.

Lessons have gone over extremely well, with kids coming from all over NEA to learn how to rock out, bake sugar cookies, recite Shakespeare and more. Most importantly, all lessons are completely free. The volunteers rotate, offering a variety of classes.

The United Methodist Church, where lessons are held, was full of music and smiling faces. Everywhere you turned, there were kids hard at work. Their projects were in various stages of construction, but not one kid was left out.



Many were excited to share details about upcoming projects and performances. These kids are having the time of their lives with the volunteers at Blackbird Fine Arts!

There are lots of after school activities focused on athletics and extracurriculars. Unfortunately, there just aren't as many options for the kids who prefer something a little different.

They have two "rock bands" that perform at Main Street Pizza on Friday nights, an event that's brought hundreds of folks out to enjoy some old fashioned rock n roll.

"The bravery it takes for those kids to go out in front of that many people and perform is astounding," said Judge Weeks. "They practice multiple times a week, and kids as young as 8 years old are jamming out with their teachers. The music that filled the entire place was electric!"

The Weeks family, and all those involved with the program, hope to see Blackbird Fine Arts grow. "Every town has a church basement they're not using during the week ...," Judge Weeks said. "The key is sustainability. Don't burn your volunteers out, keep up a rotation."

In this day and age, it's more important than ever to be raising cool, confident, and kind little kiddos. If you can play the piano, you can do anything. Their Facebook account has a lot of information available to those interested, as well as their website. Go check them out, and rock on!



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NEACAC STRIVES TO MAKE LIVES BETTER CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month - a time dedicated to spreading awareness of child abuse and neglect while promoting the efforts of prevention. Since 1983, April has been designated as a time for communities to work together to put an end to child abuse and neglect.

The Northeast Arkansas Children's Advocacy Center (NEACAC) has taken its place in the fight to better the lives of children. The non-profit organization's mission is to serve child victims of abuse and their families by providing a haven for interviewing and examining the child. This cuts out the need for a child to be interviewed several times in spaces where it may not feel comfortable enough to tell the truth. The NEACAC believes by bringing all professionals involved together under one roof, they can avoid re-traumatizing a child who is already suffering.

All services at the NEACAC are provided for free. These include forensic medical exams, forensic interviews, education and trauma therapy sessions. In 2024, the NEACAC served 534 children who suffered from various neglect cases. Not only do they serve children, but they also work to educate individuals on child abuse.

In honor of Child Abuse Prevention Month, the NEACAC recommends that community members and businesses donate a percentage of their sales, host fundraisers and donate gift cards to help them in their fight against child abuse.



Blue and pinwheels are associated with Child Abuse Prevention Month. To show support and raise awareness, you can wear blue on April 5th in honor of nationwide "Wear Blue Day" or place a pinwheel in your yard.

The NEACAC also hosts its own Pinwheels for Prevention in which businesses and individuals can sponsor a pinwheel and sign to display in their business or home. The proceeds and exposure help NEACAC continue to provide free vital services like interviews, medical care and mental health support to children in need.

To learn more about Child Abuse Prevention Month and the NEACAC, visit www.neacac.net.



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Livi Littles

MORE THAN CLOTHES

Lauren Middlecoff, a professional baby, child and family photographer in Jonesboro for 11 years, found herself faced with many questions from her clients, such as, “What should my little ones wear?” “What brands do you recommend?” and, “What clothes photograph best?”

To help answer all of these questions in one place, Lauren created Livi Littles, named after her daughter Olivia.

Here, customers can find timeless staples for their little one’s closet that transition perfectly from events to photographs. With 16 years in retail, Lauren curates a collection of baby and child clothing that combines both comfort and style.

Livi Littles is committed to excellent customer service and aims to be the go-to baby and children’s boutique for families seeking not just clothing, but a celebration of the precious moments in their children’s lives.



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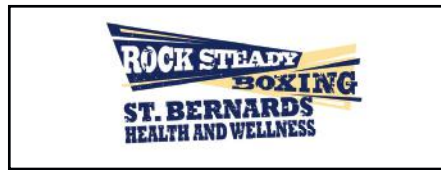
FOA Production

April 4th-7th

Noises off will be presented by The Foundation of Arts at the Forum Theater located in Downtown Jonesboro, April 4th through 7th.

Called "the funniest farce ever written," Noises Off presents a manic menagerie of itinerant actors rehearsing a flop called Nothing's On. Performance times are 7:30 p.m. on April 4, 5 and 7 and 2 p.m. on April 6. The April 5th show is a pay what you can performance.

Tickets are available at the Forum Box Office, call 870-935-2726 or visit foajonesboro.org.



Fish Fund-raiser

April 11th

St. Bernards Health & Wellness is hosting a Fish Fry fundraiser to support the Rock Steady Boxing program. The boxing program assists patients who have been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease.

Everyone is welcome to attend the fish fry on Friday, April 11th, from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Knights of Columbus Hall, located at 1103 East Highland Drive, Jonesboro.

The cost is \$15 per plate, and those who purchase five plates can get a sixth free. For more details, call 636.795.8553 or visit sbernards.info.



Arkansas Roots

April 12th

The annual Arkansas Roots Music Festival will be held at the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home starting at 1 p.m. on Saturday, April 12.

The theme of the event is "Arkansas Roots of Johnny Cash" and will feature Arkansas musicians Erin Enderlin, duo Cliff and Susan, Adam Hambrick, and Sofie Smithson. Each will perform songs made famous by Cash as well as original compositions.

Ticket prices are set at \$35 for those 18 and over, \$10 for those 13 to 17 years old, and those 12 and under get in free. Tickets are available at kasu.org/tickets



Pine Log Market

April 25th-26th

The Pine Log Vintage Market will be held April 25th from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and April 26th from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Historic Head Dairy Farm, at 922 CR 762 in Brookland.

The event will include a variety of vendors including antiques, clothing, jewelry, home decor, furnishings, unique treasures and various treats. There will also be photo opportunities, and food trucks will be on site.

Admission is \$5, with children 12 and under free. The market also partners with Marcks Recycling to promote Relay for Life and the Brookland High School FFA.

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Oasis Fest

April 26th

The 8th annual Oasis Arts & Eats Fest is slated for Saturday, April 26th, from noon to 6 p.m. in Downtown Jonesboro.

The largest and most established arts festival in Northeast Arkansas, Oasis Arts & Eats Fest is an event the whole family can enjoy. The event features visual artists and crafters, local food vendors, live music performances and kid-friendly activities.

There is no charge to attend. In the event of poor weather conditions, the festival will be moved to Sunday, April 27th, from noon to 6 p.m.



Art Exhibit

Through May

The work of Jonesboro artist Randy D. Brown is on exhibit in The Gallery at 120 at the Greene County Library in Paragould.

An Arkansas native, he graduated from Jonesboro High School and Arkansas State University. Although he has had no art lessons, he has dabbled in various types of materials and has developed his own techniques, specializing in fine-tuning the use of color and textures.

His exhibit, which includes acrylics, mixed media and glass, will remain on display through the end of May.

LOOSE CABOOSE RETURNING TO DOWNTOWN PARAGOULD FESTIVAL OFFERS FUN FOR ALL

The countdown is on for one of the most anticipated events of the year – the 25th Loose Caboose Festival! From May 15th to 17th, our community will come alive with excitement, laughter, and plenty of entertainment for all ages.

Whether you're a long-time attendee or a first-time visitor, there's something for everyone at this year's festival. Here's a sneak peek at what you can expect over the three days of fun-filled festivities.

Thursday, May 15th kicks off the festival with a classic community event – the Community Fish Fry at The Station. This delicious meal will set the tone for a weekend of local flavors and good company. Following dinner, the Iron Mountain Band will take the stage, bringing great music to the Amp Stage. It's also Armband Night at the Carnival, so don't forget to grab your armbands and enjoy all the rides and games!

Friday, May 16th is packed with events for the whole family! The Jellybean Junction Kids Pavilion opens at 10 a.m. with a fun schedule of activities, including a performance by The Kinders and Tommy Terrific's Wacky Magic. Throughout the day, you'll find vendor and community booths open, offering everything from delicious treats to unique handmade goods. Live music from talented local artists will fill the air at the Pruett Street Stage and the Amp Stage throughout the evening. You'll also be able to enjoy the petting zoo starting on Friday!

Saturday, May 17th promises to be an action-packed day! Start your morning bright and early with the Get Down to the Loose Caboose Races or the Pedal the Ridge Gravel Ride. Get ready for a full day of activities, as the vendor and community booths will be open. For the kids, the Jellybean Junction Kids Pavilion will be open, and don't miss Touch-A-Truck. And for the pre-teens they will find fun at our new Innovation Station. Music fans will be able to enjoy performances throughout the day, with everything from folk to rock to keep you moving.

Of course, there will be plenty of fun all day long for everyone in the family to enjoy.

And don't forget to snag a souvenir from this year's festival – T-shirts will be available for sale, so you can take home a piece of the Loose Caboose Festival to remember the fun!

The Loose Caboose Festival has something for everyone, from carnival fun to fantastic food, live music, and family-friendly activities. So, gather your loved ones, bring your friends, and make your way to the Loose Caboose Festival for a weekend you'll never forget!

We can't wait to see you there! For more information and a detailed schedule of events, visit our website at loosecaboose.org or follow us on Facebook!



The graphic features a yellow top section with the text "LOOSE CABOOSE 25" in large, bold, black letters. Below this, it says "Out Back By the Tracks" in a smaller, black, cursive font, and "Paragould, AR" in a red, cursive font. To the right of the text is a red and yellow cartoon illustration of a caboose on train tracks. The bottom section is red with white text. It lists "Carnival | Music | Vendors | Food | Fun" in a large, white, sans-serif font. Below this, it says "PARAGOULD, ARKANSAS" next to a white location pin icon, and "MAY 15, 16, 17, 2025" next to a white calendar icon with a checkmark. At the bottom, the website "www.loosecaboose.org" is written in white.

HAPPENINGS

GRAY JOINS AMMC FOUNDATION BOARD

Kristin Gray recently joined the Arkansas Methodist Medical Center (AMMC) Foundation board of directors. Kristin's family has a long history of service to AMMC. Her father, the late Tom Kirk, was a founding member of the AMMC Foundation and served on the board from 1991 – 2019.



Kristin Gray

Kristin is a graduate of Paragould High School and attended the University of Arkansas where she received a Master of Science in Operations Management. Kristin is the Collateral Inventory Manager and Accounts Receivable Manager at Legacy Equipment in Paragould. She is a graduate of Leadership Arkansas Class XIII.

"Kristin is an excellent addition to the AMMC Foundation," said Tori Thompson, AMMC Foundation Director. "She brings a wealth of knowledge and love for our community."

"It has been instilled in me the importance of service, especially to a community that has blessed my family so greatly. I am honored to be the newest AMMC Foundation board member," said Kristin. Kristin is married to Blake Gray and they reside in Paragould with their three children.

ARMOR BANK PROMOTES WAGNER

Armor Bank Chief Executive Officer Chad T. May has announced Bryan Wagner as Jonesboro Market President. A native of Blytheville, Wagner holds more than 15 years of banking experience spanning business development, commercial lending and agriculture lending.



Bryan Wagner

His career path has also afforded him stops in various adjacent industries that will enable him to best serve the bank's customers. Most recently, Wagner served as Armor Bank's Senior Vice President, Commercial Lending.

Wagner earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with emphasis in Real Estate and Finance at the University of Arkansas. He was a member of the Razorback golf team and subsequently played the sport professionally for nine years.

Active in the Jonesboro community, Wagner served more than 25 years on the board of the St. Bernards Advocates and chaired the Triple Swing event and various committees. He also served on the Board of Directors of the Jonesboro Country Club and coached local youth sports for many years.

GREENWAY EQUIPMENT REACHES \$1 MILLION FOOD BANK DONATION MILESTONE

Greenway Equipment, Inc. recently surpassed a major milestone, reaching over \$1 million in monetary donations to the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas, the Arkansas Foodbank and the Southeast Missouri Food Bank.

During an event to commemorate the achievement, Greenway presented a check to representatives from all three food banks for donations generated from its 2024 Hunger Hero Signature Series (HHSS) fundraiser, which contributed \$100,000 this year alone.

"Reaching this \$1 million milestone for our annual foodbank fundraiser is a true testament to the dedication of our employees and the selfless generosity of all those who have donated to help us combat childhood hunger," said Bill Midkiff, CEO of Greenway Equipment. "I am inspired by our team's commitment to support our local communities in need and for making this achievement possible. The teamwork they have all shown year after year truly embodies the spirit of Greenway, and the agriculture industry as a whole."

Since its inception, Greenway Equipment's annual fundraiser has played a crucial role in their ongoing commitment to fighting food insecurity in the region. The \$1 million milestone reflected years of dedication from Greenway employees, customers, and partners who had supported this initiative.

"Sadly, one in four children is at risk of hunger in Arkansas," said Christie Jordan, CEO at the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas.



"Greenway Equipment has been a vital partner in our efforts to feed children. We are grateful for their support in improving access to food for our neighbors in Northeast Arkansas."

Brad Nash, COO of Greenway Equipment, emphasized the importance of the partnership and the employees and customers who make it possible: "Our relationships with the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas, the Arkansas Foodbank and the Southeast Missouri Food Bank are a cornerstone of our commitment to community service. It's an honor to work with these organizations that make such a meaningful impact every day. We are excited to continue partnering with them to provide resources and support to those in need, and we deeply appreciate the generosity and dedication of our employees, customers and partners who make this possible."

Birth Announcement



Riley Kate Brown

Riley Kate Brown was born January 20, 2025, at St. Bernards Medical Center in Jonesboro to Kord and Morgan Brown. The baby weighed 8 lbs, 1 oz., and was 21.5 inches tall.

Riley was welcomed by big sister, McKinlee, and grandparents, Gary and Jennifer McCord and Jimmy and Thelma Smith.

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A FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE GROUND BROKEN FOR VET SCHOOL

Arkansas State University hosted dignitaries, students, affiliate veterinarians and area residents on March 12th for the groundbreaking ceremony for the College of Veterinary Medicine.

Dr. Todd Shields, A-State chancellor, said the CVM, which

is expected to open in fall 2026 pending accreditation approval, has been a long-standing dream for A-State.

The CVM program will be four years in length, with three years on-site at A-State and one year spent in clinical training in veterinary practices.



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Next Month

Maker's Edition



We will be shining a spotlight on some of our local makers and their unique creations.

Jonesboro Awards



Don't miss our special section announcing the winners in the Jonesboro Premiere Awards.

Happy Mother's Day



We are so grateful to all the moms who make our community a better place.

Our friendly staff is ready to assist you!

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Funding for the production of this unit was graciously provided by Chris Fowler Family.

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- LDCT Screening & Scheduling
- Tobacco Cessation
- Skin Checks

Behavioral Health/ Mental Health Screenings

- Depression, Stress, Impact on Total Health
- Addiction
- Insurance Enrollment

