

NEA'S

PREMIERE

MAGAZINE

March 2024

*National Women's
History Month*

THE POWER OF Women

Allison Hestand

LIFE, LEGACY, & LEGEND
MARY ANN RITTER-ARNOLD
SPECIAL SECTION: NEA SENIORS
ALYCIA MERILA-STROUD

A PUBLICATION OF MOR MEDIA, INCORPORATED

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RISKY vs. RELIABLE IT SERVICE PROVIDER

A reliable IT service provider ensures you can concentrate on growing your business. Knowing if your IT support is suitable can be challenging without expertise. This infographic outlines the expectations from a top-notch IT service provider, whether in-house or outsourced.



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PUBLISHER/ADVERTISING SALES
Dina Mason dina@mormediainc.com

GRAPHICS/CONTENT CREATOR
Gabby Powell graphics@mormediainc.com

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

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Richard Brummett
Gabby Powell
Caitlin LaFarlette
Chuck Long
Karan Summitt
Linda Lou Moore
Karoline Risker
Katie Collins
Vicki McMillan
Stephanie Cooper

ADVERTISING SALES TEAM
Dina Mason dina@mormediainc.com
Perry Mason perry@mormediainc.com
Brian Osborn brian@mormediainc.com
Judith Taylor-Wheelis judith@mormediainc.com

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or email dina@mormediainc.com


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From the Publisher



March cannot be here already! But, it is. So, let's celebrate that March is Women in History Month with our Premiere twist of highlighting both those who made history in our communities and those striving to "Make" history with their efforts of today.

Allison Hestand is a power to be reckoned with, for sure! You will not find anyone who is more dedicated, organized and an "out-of-the-box" thinker than Allison. She is a project master—cheerleader of teams who manages to be sweet right through some of the trying times that others would, well let's just say, "not." Paragould is fortunate to have Allison on its team as she continues to make Paragould a better place to live, work and play.

Alycia Stroud may head up a typical women owned business, home health care, but she started from the perspective of a nurse rather than a businessperson. The growth of her company has shown that this perspective and her experience working with insurances and programs that fund eldercare services has

proven positive.

If you know me, you know I am a history buff. So, the first time I heard the story of Ritter Communication being the result of a woman wanting the communities she served to have what they needed to prosper, I knew I wanted Premiere to tell its readers about Mary Ann Ritter Arnold and her leadership in an era of male domination in most all business -- but especially in agriculture and technology.

Richard brings us the story of Mary Ann Schreit and her mission to save the Greene County Courthouse. When I moved to Paragould in 1995, I met with "the white hair posse," ... I'm not sure which of the group coined the term but it was self-proclaimed at the time. Mrs. Schreit, Mrs. Cothren and Mrs. Allen were the first "preservation" group I had encountered, and they were a force to be reckoned with. I learned so much about community spirit and perseverance from them and the whole entourage of folks they garnered to help make the courthouse what it is today.

We salute all the women making contributions to growing their communities in positive ways and wish we had space and resources to honor them all. We hope you enjoy these few and are inspired to make your own efforts to be one of the "People Making the Good News Happen."

Dina Mason
General Manager & Publisher
dina@mormediainc.com



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LAKE FRIERSON STATE PARK WOMEN IN THE WOODS SERIES



Lake Frierson State Park is starting up a new women's outdoors series this year. On the first Sunday of each month, the series Women in the Woods invites local ladies to come out, make new friends, learn new skills, and grow their roots at Lake Frierson State Park. Topics and activities include backpacking, canning, Dutch oven cooking, kayaking, fishing, horseback riding, and more! Times, length, and spot availability of activities vary. Some events are free while others include a fee to cover the cost of materials or food. Registration is required one week prior for each event to prepare materials needed. To learn more about each event in the series, visit www.ArkansasStateParks.com/events and filter by Lake Frierson State Park. To register for Women in the Woods activities, visit the park visitor center or contact by phone at 870-932-2615.

March Event:
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Full Schedule:

March 3rd
Women in the Woods: Dutch Oven Cooking
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May 5th
Women in the Woods: Foraging 101
2:00pm
Women in the Woods: A Spot of Tea
3:00pm

June 2nd
Women in the Woods: Fishing 101
4:00pm

July 7th
6:30pm
Women in the Woods: Sunset Kayak Cruise

August 4th
Women in the Woods: Canning 101
11:00am

September 1st
Women in the Woods: Cache Crawl
12:00pm

October 6th
Women in the Woods: Giddy Up Cowgirls!
1:00pm

November 3rd
Women in the Woods: Campout
8:00am



Never miss out on the fun happening in NEA. Keep up with local events like festivals and live music at exploremorenea.com/community-calendar

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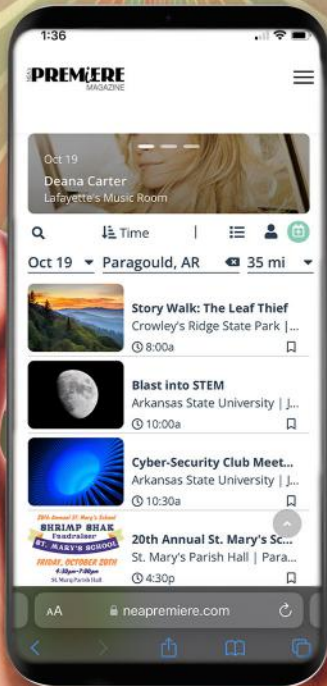
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THE GALLERY AT 120 JONESBORO ARTIST



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Jay Trotter, a Jonesboro resident, was raised in the Denver and Kansas City areas but has now resided in Arkansas (Harrison, Ft. Smith, Searcy, Jonesboro) for over 52 years. His works are now on exhibit in The Gallery at 120 in Greene County.

Jay was active in many sports in his early years, like hiking, camping, water skiing, football, basketball, golf, and baseball in Denver. He continued with those sports and added diving in the Kansas City area, winning competitions in his age groups for five years. Later, after returning from being drafted into the Army, he joined the swim team at Harding University as a diver, helping Harding win the AIC championship his junior year. Years later he has competed in sprint triathlons in Jonesboro, winning his age group for three years.

These outdoor activities have certainly influenced his love of the outdoors and landscape painting.

Jay has become an accomplished landscape oil painting artist in less than four years after retiring from a career in pharmacy. One of his works, (Jonathan Seagull), was selected in 2022 to be on display in ASU's Bradbury Art Museum and two of his paintings are finalists for inclusion in "International Artist Magazine."

Jay has completed numerous commissions of landscapes, pets, signs, etc. Working from observation and the beauty of the Rocky Mountains, where he spent his early life, is the foundation of his work, supplemented by photographs simply celebrating the joy of seeing. The desire is to present to the viewer a sense of place as well as an appreciation for the beauty of those things observed.

Today, Jay and his wife, Shelley, who was raised in Corning, live in Jonesboro. They have three children, living in Hoover, Alabama, St. Louis, and one in Jonesboro.

The Gallery at 120 is located at the Greene County Public Library in Paragould. Jay's oil paintings will be on display until May 31. For more information, visit the Greene County Public Library's Facebook page or visit it in person.

Special Olympics Arkansas POLAR PLUNGES



Weichert Realtors



Valley View Blazer Hardball



Photos continued on Page 10

NEA plungers faced the bitter cold this past month in the ASU-Jonesboro and Paragould Polar Plunges in support of Special Olympics Arkansas! Some familiar faces braved the waters for MOR Media, Inc: Judith Taylor-Wheelis and Gabby Powell.

athletes! Congratulations to Gabby Powell for receiving the Paragould award for "Most Raised by an Individual." Crowley's Ridge State Park hosted the plunge for Paragould, while the Wolf Creek Apartments provided the chill for Jonesboro plungers.

Over \$7,075 was raised at the ASU-Jonesboro Plunge, and Paragould plungers raised nearly \$21,300 in support of the Special Olympics

Thank you to all who took the plunge, raised donations, and spread awareness for this special cause. We can't wait to see you next year!

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Special Olympics Arkansas POLAR PLUNGES



THE ADVENTURES OF

BY VICKI McMILLAN

Lester



Hello, Lester, here in what should be the beginning of spring! Let's keep our paws crossed, anyway.

Well, we've made it through New Year's, Valentine's Day and Mardi Gras! Not only is the grass hopefully beginning to look greener, but everything will be green on St. Patrick's Day March 17th, a Sunday. This has been my favorite minor holiday since I purchased my green raincoat! I have tried without success to get Vicki to dye the water in my bowl green. You need to plan now how you will celebrate St. Paddy's Day. (In case you have forgotten, in the fifth century Paddy was in Ireland bringing Christianity to the Irish. I'm no canine theologian but I believe he explained the Holy Trinity using a shamrock -- Father, Son and Holy Ghost. And that about snakes, no snakes just pagans.)

Now, you can go to Boston or New York for their parades and possibly get crushed in the crowd or you can go to Chicago where the Chicago River is dyed green for the celebration or you can go to Enterprise, Alabama, for the World's Smallest St. Patrick's Day parade, with only one parade participant. But why do that?? Let's party locally.

Hot Springs has the World's Shortest St. Patrick's Day Parade at 98 feet long. Sounds cheesy, you say? Just wait.

This year's Grand Marshal is no other than Emmitt Smith, the Dallas Cowboys legendary running back! And the parade starter is

Forrie J. Smith, aka Lloyd Pierce on Yellowstone!! (I had paws crossed for Beth.) The Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders will again this year march, and The Molly Ringwalds will have a free concert. There will be Irish Elvis impersonators and a kissing contest. Did you know Arkansas has a Blarney Stone? Yes, indeed! Kiss it and you will have the gift of gab -- that is if you can stop talking long enough to kiss it.

And while you are in Hot Springs, check out the Garvan Woodland Gardens and the Anthony Chapel, the Hot Springs National Park, and the oldest bar in Arkansas -- The Ohio Club. If you have time, engage in a bath on the world famous Bathhouse Row. I can personally attest that you will never be more calm and relaxed -- makes PetSmart look lame.

Hot Springs is one of this scrappy ol' pound dog's favorite places. Visit the Gangster's Museum and find out more than you ever knew about the Hot Springs underworld. You'll even see snippets of info on my great uncle, Lester Capone!

Gotta go and get my raincoat ready! Happy Spring and Happy St. Patrick's Day.

Slainte,
Lester

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Life, Legacy, & Legend

Mary Ann Ritter Made Her Story History

When the late Mary Ann Ritter Arnold was inducted into the Arkansas Women's Hall of Fame in 2015, the program profile listed no fewer than 16 national, state and local councils, committees, organizations, boards, associations and foundations in which she had held active leadership roles.

Her professional achievements included pinnacle positions as president, and later Chairman of E. Ritter & Company, President of E. Ritter Telephone Company and Mayor of Marked Tree — the first woman in each instance to serve in that capacity.

Philanthropic efforts she volunteered ranged from large national charities and causes to her own hometown church and community.

History, in the context of Northeast Arkansas, was Arnold's middle name. It was something she made, shaped and bequeathed to succeeding generations.

Her story became history over the course of a long life that began and ended in one small town in a small section of a small state but wound up reaching well beyond the borders of all three. She was a pioneer and trailblazer for women's involvement in both business and public service, and frequently advocated and encouraged women to loftier goals.

Indeed, Arnold always emphasized objectives over accomplishments. Near the end of her ninth decade, in her acceptance remarks for the Hall of Fame induction, she talked about looking ahead, not backward.

"To me," she said, "it hasn't been important in what I have accomplished in the past. It's what I need to accomplish in the future, the goals I have to set."

Even at 88, Mary Ann Ritter Arnold had her eyes focused on her future, and was still setting goals.

Try as she did, Arnold could never escape her past accomplishments, partly because they included so many major milestones that were as inspirational as they were significant.

Life threw lots of curves at Arnold, and her instincts were to embrace the change of course with positive purpose.

When her cousin, who was president of the Ritter family business, died in 1976, Arnold had no formal business experience. But she had a degree in home economics, and a wealth of practical training managing her family's finances and raising three children.

She also had legacy on her side: Her grandfather had founded the company, her father had run it, as had her brother. Naming a woman as president of a large, successful business in 1976 was unusual. Arnold convinced her board that she was that rare exception.

To say she took to leadership is an understatement of enormous proportions. During the next 15 years, she oversaw all the far-flung enterprises under the Ritter banner, and criss-crossed the nation to maximize business connections and opportunities.

She realized the importance of supporting local vitalization efforts, reasoning that company and community growth were often connected. Arnold's legacy lives on in the company she led, the communities she improved and the lives of those she inspired.

"Life is to be lived to its fullest," she said in a media interview shortly before her death. Her life is a fine example of doing just that.



Meet Mr. & Mrs. Camp

Congratulations to Jaxson Camp and Sarah McGarity on their marriage on January 22, 2024. The two tied the knot at Bayird Ranch, with photography by Natalie Cox.

The bride's parents are Matt and Jamie McGarity of Jonesboro. The groom's parents are Jason and Eva Camp of Paragould.

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PET *of the* MONTH

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BY ALLISA CARROL



We found Binx at the kill shelter in Pocahontas. They were doing a black cat day, so I put my hand in a crate full of black cats, picked her up, and said, "You're coming with me." There is always so much stigma against black cats, but she has been such a joy. She is certainly more like a dog than a cat.

She loves to play fetch, growls at the doorbell, and begs her human companions for their food. She loves spending time in the garden and catching all the flying bugs. She hates car rides but loves walking at Craighead Forest Park on her leash. She also enjoys lots of cuddles and snugs from just about anybody. Black cats rule!!

Want to see your pet featured in Premiere? Submit your pet via our Facebook post each month! Follow NEA Premiere Magazine to stay in the know.

BEST CHILDREN'S HOSPITALS
A WORLD REPORT
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STUDENT SHOWCASE

CityYouth Ministries is gearing up for the 3rd Annual Art With Heart Student Showcase. The student art show and auction will take place on April 11, 2024, at Wildflower Event Venue. The Showcase will begin at 5:00 p.m. till 7:30 p.m. with refreshments, art displays and an art auction of both student pieces and pieces created by local artists. This event shines a light on the efforts made by CityYouth to encourage the development of fine art skills as a part of their after school program.

CityYouth's main focus is to provide life-changing opportunities that will transform the lives of youth and the Jonesboro community. At CityYouth they provide essential needs for students and families in inner city Jonesboro through their after school and summer programs. Join us at Art With Heart to make a difference in the lives of children in our community. Tickets are \$25.00 and can be purchased at www.cityyouthnea.org



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A woman with blonde hair, wearing a bright pink sweater with white pearl-like details on the shoulders and black trousers, is leaning on a blue desk in a classroom. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows rows of desks and chairs, and a doorway leading to another room.

“Everyone is
looking ahead.
We plan **today**
for the **future**.

That’s what
leadership
is about.”

Inside the Generating Innovative Network (G.I.N.) - Downtown Paragould

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Allison Hestand

BY KAROLINE RISKER

Allison Hestand is 100 percent Paragould. Born and raised here with a big family within shouting distance, she is firmly planted in her community. She is a Paragould High School graduate. Her brother, Tyler, is a football coach at PHS. She has worked with the Greene County Future Fund and the Greene County Boys and Girls Club and said it instilled in her the “desire to make our community the best it can be,” adding she thinks Paragould is “the best of all worlds.” Allison also loves taking walks on the 8-mile Creek Trail with her 11-year-old goldendoodle, Gatsby. Even when asked about her hobbies she says she likes traveling, and then follows it up with words like “to see what’s working in other communities to see how they experience success,” and you just know her thoughts are turning into how we can translate those successes into things that might work here, too. So she’s probably the perfect person to be the Director of Economic Development and CEO of the Paragould Regional Chamber of Commerce, a position she’s held for three years.

Allison uses her education, a bachelor’s degree in finance and a minor in economics, and her work background, including being Agency Manager over three locations with Block Insurance, in her position, a job she secured when she was only 29 years old. Allison felt she had an edge being from Paragould and having worked for an established business for eight years. She says she saw the good in the community and wanted to join the Chamber in a full-time capacity to be a part of that every day. “They took a risk,” she said. “They were willing to gamble with me. I hope it’s paid off.” Though young when taking on a job with so much responsibility, Allison credits God’s provision. “God has always provided and put me at the right place at the right time,” she said. Today Allison’s focus is “trying to help keep Paragould on a continued path to success. “We can make change that can be felt and seen. We have room for improvement. It’s exciting to see that. There is still room for growth,” she said.

Allison explains that the Chamber of Commerce is the voice of business. The Paragould Chamber represents almost 900 businesses and entities. She says the Chamber focuses on the improvement of life through healthcare, business and infrastructure, a nod to prior leadership and forethought from previous generations that prepared for today. We have a “forward-thinking approach,” she said, stressing there are people right now focusing on the next 20-30 years. “We are always looking out for the next generation so they enjoy what we enjoy,” she said. “We move the needle just a little each year. Everyone is looking ahead. We plan today for the future,” she said. “That’s what leadership is about.” She attributes some of the town’s success to

low-cost utilities (fifth cheapest in the state), clean water, safe schools, and good healthcare. She said some communities don’t have the luxury of looking ahead, instead having to focus on more emergent, immediate things that take that focus.

A favorite aspect of her work is seeing and being a part of the resurgence of downtown, mentioning the pavilion, farmers market, and the coming power plant park. Industry is a big chamber focus, as well. Allison said if we continue to support industries, our retail grows. Allison said the projections for Paragould are for continued growth. “We have good, safe, measured growth,” she said. “We don’t want to outgrow our infrastructure.” Right now there is growth of one citizen a day. A growing population ensures more businesses, too. Paragould hit 30,000 in population in 2019, giving us stores like Starbucks, Five Below, and Steak and Shake; the next benchmark is 40,000.

Allison also loves the 8-mile Creek Trail. “I’m a walker,” she said. “You’ll see people you wouldn’t normally see (on the trail). It’s a community place, a gathering place.”

Allison adds that making Paragould a good community to live in is everyone’s responsibility. “Everyone can play a part in the success of Paragould,” she said. “You can pick up trash and make sure it feels inviting, you can champion on social media, serve on committees. It takes everyone.”

The Chamber has been a good place to be a woman; Allison’s predecessor, Sue McGowan, served 17 years before her, and women in leadership go all the way back to the 1940s when the Chamber had a woman as board president. Allison said having diversity in important positions ensures all groups are represented when decisions are made, emphasizing that 26 languages are currently spoken in our school districts. “We are a growing and diverse community and we are showing future generations it doesn’t matter what diversity you are, you are welcome,” she said.

Allison sums up why she took the job best in her own words: “Paragould is everybody’s community and can play a part in its success. We have a lot to be thankful for. You don’t have to look far for something to be proud of.”

We think the gamble of putting Allison as CEO has definitely paid off.

PET FOODS: *Fict & Fact Edition*

WITH DR. KRISTIN SULLIVAN



I'm sure we have all experienced that overwhelming feeling when you go to the pet food store and you want to buy what is best for your pet, but there are so many options and you just don't know what is right. There is no dog food out there that is going to say, "Hey! Buy me! I'm terrible for your pet! I will cause weight gain and will not provide your pet with the essential vitamins and nutrients that they need." It sure would be easier if they did, though. I want to discuss in this article how to know what to look for in pet foods and what to avoid.

Let's first start with what to look for: complete and balanced. That is the main statement on a pet food package to look for. Complete and balanced. Pet foods that have invested in scientific studies and research and have proven their pet food to be complete and balanced for all essential components of a healthy diet are very proud of this and they market that on their packaging. If it does not say it is complete, then it is not complete. In other words, it will not have everything your pet will need for a complete and balanced diet. I would say I do not mean to be redundant, but I do. That is very important. Next on the list of what to look for are pet specifications. Say, for instance, you have a small breed puppy, you wouldn't want to purchase large breed adult dog food. It is important that you purchase a complete diet for your pet's size and life stage. Puppy foods are higher in fat and protein and other essential ingredients in order to help supply their growing

bodies with the nutrition it needs to develop strong, healthy bones and support good health. Adult foods can be purchased based on lifestyle—for example, you wouldn't want to feed a Chihuahua that spends its days holding down the couch the same food as a Labrador retriever that is working during duck season. Working and performance dogs have much higher metabolic demands; offering these animals a sport or performance diet for adult dogs is going to provide for them the calorie dense food they need in order to work without dropping an unhealthy amount of weight. Dogs that have a more sedentary lifestyle and prefer to watch sports from the sidelines do not need this food, but may actually need a weight management diet. Key word in that type of food: management. It is important to understand that if you offer this to your pet and you are trying to get your pet's weight down to a more healthy range, then you need to discuss with your vet an appropriate amount. The charts on the backs of most dog foods are based on an average metabolic rate and may assume you want to keep your pet at that weight (aka manage). So, if you have a 20 pound Shih Tzu that should ideally be 12 pounds, and you offer the suggested amount for a 20 pound dog, you may see that your pet actually gains weight. Offering the amount based on their ideal weight is typically recommended in order to achieve healthy weight loss. Again, always discuss with your veterinarian first.

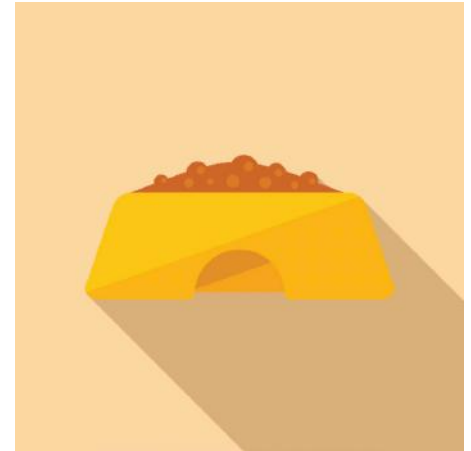
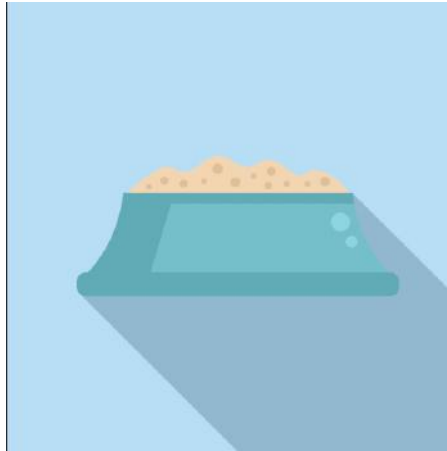
Next on the list: what to avoid. Raw food. It is not advised that humans

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eat our meat raw, thus you shouldn't feed your pet raw food either. There are marketing campaigns out there telling you raw is good because that's how your pet would eat meat in the wild. The glaring difference is that processed raw meats and live prey eaten immediately are not at all the same. Proper handling of the raw meat, and ensuring the raw meat is 100% temperature controlled until the time it is served is nearly impossible, which may lead to bacterial contamination. Furthermore, it was recently discovered that pets that are fed raw diets have been linked to causing antibiotic-resistant urinary tract infections in people, due to these pets excreting antimicrobial-resistant bacteria in their feces, especially E. coli. Another good one to avoid is "grain free" diets. Grains are an important part of a healthy balanced diet for your pet and are not considered a common food allergy as is suggested in grain free diet marketing. Studies have shown that grain free diets fed to large breed dogs have been associated with development of a heart disease called Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM) and fatalities have been reported in dogs as young as 4 years of age. If you are afraid your pet may have a food allergy, or more specifically a grain allergy, please talk to your veterinarian about means of testing for these allergies and what diet may be best to try. Next on the avoid list are trends. This is a big one. There are a large number of foods out there that say "people grade food for your pets" or "your pet is a part of the family, why not feed them like it?" This is called guilt marketing. The crazy thing is, they are marketing on guilt you didn't even know you had,

and honestly, probably shouldn't even be feeling! If you are feeding your pet a balanced diet scientifically proven from a reputable brand that has been time-tested, your pet has a healthy coat and skin, your pet seems happy and has a normal energy level, and your pet's weight is healthy, then you are doing well! Don't feel guilty about not giving your pet what social media and trendsetters are telling you that you should be doing; listen to your local veterinarian who has a doctorate degree in animal health. Okay, last topic in the "what to avoid" section is: To feed or not to feed from the table? Well, we all probably know the answer to this question, but I just couldn't help myself with that one. Best to not even start this one. When you feed your pet from the table, it often leads to a number of problems, with obesity being chief among them. If you have multiple pets in one household and they are all under the table anxiously waiting for a tiny morsel of anything to fall to the floor, a fight could ensue. I can't even tell you how many lacerations I've had to sew up over a piece of ham or bacon. Moreover, the calories in a cube of cheese are equivalent to that of an entire happy meal for your pet. It may "only be a little bit" to us, but that little bit goes much further in them. Husbands and kids, I'm looking at you! I'm just kidding ... mostly!

I hope this article helps you out when considering your pet's diet, and for any specific questions about your pet's diet, please reach out to your local veterinarian.

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MOORE on MANNERS WITH LINDA LOU MOORE



Never underestimate the power of a thank you note. This small gesture can make a big impression. Some of the most important and successful business people are known for writing thank you notes.

What are some situations that call for a thank you note?

- ◇ Gifts
- ◇ Job Interviews
- ◇ Client Meetings
- ◇ Dinner Guests
- ◇ House Guests
- ◇ When Someone Has Done Something Nice For You

Quick Tips For Gifts:

- ◇ Thank you notes don't have to be long, that's why they are called notes.
- ◇ Personalize the note.
- ◇ Use the person's name such as Dear Mr. Smith, or Dear Jack.
- ◇ Identify the gift by name.
- ◇ If possible, tell how you intend to use the gift.
- ◇ If you don't like the gift, don't complain.
- ◇ Let the person know how much you

appreciate their time and effort in choosing the gift.

Business Notes:

- ◇ If you go for a job interview, follow up with a thank you note. Thank the interviewer for their time. This is a prime opportunity to review the important points of the interview or add anything you forgot during the meeting.
- ◇ If you have secured a new account, thank the client by writing a note that shows you appreciate their business.
- ◇ When conducting business, a follow up note shows you value the importance of your client.

Thank You Notes And E-Mails:

- ◇ A follow up e-mail after a meeting is a quick way to stay in touch. However, it is important to consider the client's business environment.
- ◇ What is the business culture?
- ◇ Traditionalists may not consider a thank you e-mail quite appropriate, while others routinely correspond by e-mail. Consider your audience.
- ◇ Sending a quick e-mail followed by a traditional thank you note can often take the guesswork out of which type of correspondence is preferred.

Showing Appreciation:

- ◇ Writing a thank you note shows your appreciation for the kindness someone has shown to you.
- ◇ If you have been a dinner guest or a house guest it is always appropriate to thank the host or hostess for their hospitality.
- ◇ Whether you are acknowledging a gift, a business deal or a special occasion, a thank you note shows your appreciation. This often unexpected and surprising note adds a personal touch that others remember.

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

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Quote of the Day:

“Silent gratitude isn't much use to anyone.”

~ G.B. Stern

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Pictured is Judge Stidham at the Greene County Public Library on January 26th. The judge also donated copies to the library, so you can also find his book in their collection.



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Tim Tebow Foundation Hosts A NIGHT TO SHINE

BY STEPHANIE COOPER



It's easy for parents to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Sometimes, simple pleasures such as checking children in and out of Sunday School classes are taken for granted. Appreciation for a normal weekend routine is lost when we forget to be thankful for what we consider monotonous, normal experiences. Unfortunately, many parents of children with disabilities have to stay home from worship services or miss out on important social events because trained care isn't provided to those families.

Jordan Barnes of the Refuge Church of the Assemblies of God noticed this issue and set out to change it. She has not only obtained a formal education that will impact these sweet, special church members, but she has also made her church a welcoming, safe space for families that may have been otherwise left out. This made the Refuge Church the perfect environment to host the Tim Tebow Foundation's Night to Shine prom for NEA.

Night to Shine is an annual event sponsored by the Tim Tebow Foundation. It's a global prom-like phenomenon transforming venues into spectacular prom experiences for individuals aged fourteen and above with special needs. This celebration of life, love, and dignity aims to provide a memorable evening where every attendee is crowned king or queen, surrounded by support, and embraced by the joy of a moment they rarely experience in a room full of acceptance.

Night to Shine is no stranger to Jonesboro, but COVID-19 impacted the event negatively, just as it did most economic and social events in the United States. Jordan passionately advocated hosting the event at her church, where she already goes above and beyond for its special needs community. Refuge Church of the Assemblies of God embarked on extensive planning after confirmation it was one of the 725 chosen churches worldwide. Led by Communications Pastor Matt Smith, Sierra Cottrell, and Jordan Barnes, the church meticulously delved into the Tim Tebow Foundation's manual to bring the event to life. Discussions encompassed budgeting, venue decoration, room allocation for activities like karaoke, hair/makeup services, and respite rooms for the family. The church had to organize limousine services, a

DJ, and catering. It was a massive undertaking and came from the pure joy in their hearts. The biggest challenge was contacting volunteers for the 150 guests, each requiring a buddy for enjoyment and assistance. Ultimately, their church and our NEA community provided 230 volunteers for the 133 attendees.

The event couldn't have been possible without Jordan Barnes. She is the special needs pastor at the church, has a heart for others, and has an incredible work ethic. She graduated from Evangel University in 2011 with a double major in Elementary Education and Special Education. Jordan has been blessed with God-given energy and is also a Hodgkin's Lymphoma Cancer Survivor. Although she is busy teaching and driving a bus for Trumann School District, she also pioneers Refuge Unlimited for her church's three American locations. She is also a member of the events staff for First National Bank Arena and Centennial Bank Stadium.

Jordan believes all families should have access to the gospel and community support: "I think it is important that Night to Shine be hosted in the area because families who are impacted by disability need to have a community that helps them in their journey of life like everyone else. Over 65 million Americans have a disability; that's 25 percent of the population, and 80 percent of them are not in the walls of our church. I believe that they deserve to have access to the gospel, be able to grow in their relationship with God, and serve alongside others in the church. So Night to Shine is a great event that brings these individuals together to experience just that, the Love of God, and to have the opportunity to start a relationship with him."

Jordan somehow finds time for it all, even cheering on her favorite team, the Cardinals, while spending time with friends and family. What leads her heart to advocate and support events in NEA are the real families needing the love of Christ but without easy access to care. She is an example of the giving hearts thriving within Northeast Arkansans. She is a true disciple with the heart and healing hands to unite an underrepresented community.

LET'S TALK *Turkey!*

CHUCK LONG Avid Outdoorsman
Retired Outdoor Educator



A whippoorwill greeted us as we got out of the truck and headed up the hill on a fresh spring morning. It was clear and calm, and David Wilcox and I hoped the turkeys might respond favorably to the nice weather with some gobbling activity. We eased up in the woods, stopping occasionally to listen for a gobble that would give away the location of a turkey as he greeted the day. Finally, we heard one just down a ridge and we eased that way, careful to maintain a distance to not spook the bird, but still get within his curiosity zone.

David picked out a tree and sat down and I eased just a bit closer to the bird and took a seat. David would be calling, and I hoped to be doing the shooting. The bird gobbled a few more times and David squeaked out a couple of soft, pleading yelps, to which the bird responded. He then scratched in the leaves a few times to imitate a feeding, walking turkey and we waited. The gobbling bird became silent, often an indicator a bird is carefully easing through the woods to check out the source of the calling. Within a few minutes I caught a glimpse of a small flash of red heading in our direction. The red head was the most visible part of the turkey in the dim woods. Luckily, I had pointed my gun in the general direction and was able to limit movement.

The last few minutes of a turkey's approach is often some of the most tense in the hunting sports. My heart was beating fast, and my glasses were fogging up as he moved in our direction. I had been in this situation many times and often the bird drifted away, disappearing without a trace. This gobbler maintained his course and I was able to center the shotgun bead on the base of his red neck and took the shot at about thirty yards. As we approached the turkey, I couldn't help but be thankful God had created such a wonderful game bird. I was also thankful for the opportunity to take a bird that was part of a great conservation story.

The wild turkey is found across the United States, with populations in all lower forty-eight states. There is also a small population in Hawaii. There are four primary sub-species of the wild turkey. The Eastern is the most prevalent, being the dominant species in habitats from the plains of Kansas and Oklahoma to the Atlantic Coast. The exception to this is the southern part of the Florida, which is home to the Osceola sub-species. The Rio Grande sub-species dominates the landscape to the west, especially in the western side of states like Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. The Merriam's sub-species is also found in the western states but tends to inhabit the more mountainous areas of states like New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming and the western edge of South Dakota. There is no definitive line to divide sub-species, so there is often some hybridization and some states, especially to the west, might harbor multiple sub-species. One other sub-species, the Gould's, can be found in the extreme southern reaches of Arizona.

The prevalence of the wild turkey across the United States is not without a low point in its history. The birds were very common during the early settlement times, but loss of habitat, market hunting and a variety of other factors almost wiped the turkey off the landscape. Many sources list the estimates of the wild turkey population as near 30,000 total birds in the 1930s. Turkeys were basically extinct across as many as twenty states where they once ranged. But, with the foresight of many conservationists and concerned hunters, efforts were made to limit seasons, improve habitat and restock birds in native habitats. The population has rebounded to near seven million birds across the nation. The story is the same in Arkansas. One of the best resources for the history of wildlife in Arkansas is the book "Arkansas Wildlife, A History" that was published by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission in 1998. This book covers most game species in Arkansas, and I would highly recommend it for any outdoorsman's library. The



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book notes there were about seven thousand turkeys across the state in the 1940s. The take by hunters during those years was around two to three hundred birds. Season closures, restocking efforts and habitat management began in earnest and proved successful and by the 1990s, the turkey population had grown and the harvest had reached near 10,000.

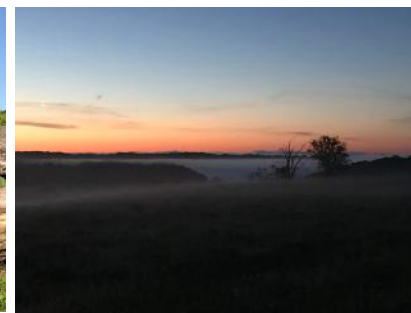
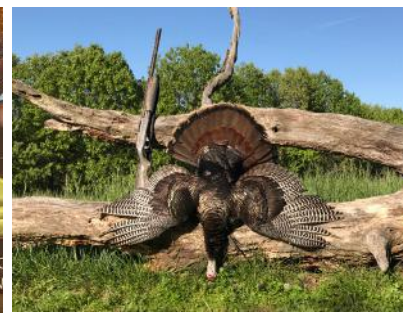
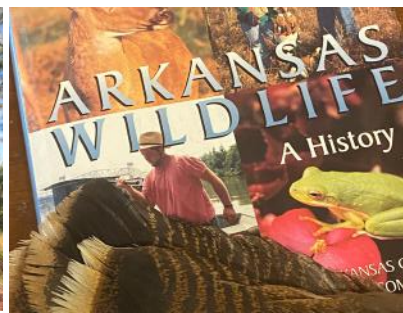
Turkeys are once again seeing a downturn in Arkansas. That has led to restricted bag limits and seasons and the take has dropped to around 7,500 birds in the Natural State. What is the driving force of this downturn? There are many theories that include habitat loss, urban sprawl, a higher predator population and other thoughts, but nailing the decline to one specific reason is difficult. There are some strong efforts being made across the wild turkeys' habitat to identify the causes and find solutions. Hopefully biologists and land managers will be able to stem the downturn.

I will admit I am not a real good turkey hunter; that is why I like to go with guys like David who are much more patient and understanding of the ways of a turkey than I am. But regardless of whether I am able

to get a turkey in range or not, there is something special about being in the woods during the spring and watching the woods come to life each day and change from a dead, gray landscape to a vibrant, bright landscape over the time frame of turkey season.

Many outdoorsmen have become involved in conservation efforts in a variety of ways, but one great way to be involved in our area is through the National Wild Turkey Federation. The Scatter Creek Fightin' Toms chapter of the NWTF has been active for over thirty years and has raised thousands of dollars for conservation and much of that money has been invested back into Northeast Arkansas. The Fightin' Toms host a yearly fundraising banquet and this year's event is on March 7, 2024, at the Paragould Community Center.

Whether you are a turkey hunter or not, I hope you will take the time to get out and enjoy the spring woods. If you get out early you might hear the call of a whippoorwill or the gobble of a turkey. Watching the woods come to life after their winter sleep is a great way to spend some time and I hope to see you out there!



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3/15 - Friday at 7:00pm, *Roast of Mayor Josh Agee* showpass.com/roast

3/16 - Saturday at 7:00pm, Collins Community Choir

3/23 - Saturday at 7:00pm, *Johnny Folsom 4 Johnny Cash Tribute* showpass.com/johnny

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for mor(e) information.

Junie B. Jones
Presented by: Act II Performing Arts



March 15th

7:00 p.m.

Roast of Mayor Josh Agee
showpass.com/roast
Downtown Collins Theatre



March 30th

7:00 p.m.

Comedian Uncle Lazer
Presented by: Mad Hatter Shows



March 30th

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*A complete listing of all Downtown events can be found under
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Lemon-icious!

BY KATIE COLLINS

Finally, it's the month when spring "officially" begins. We all know that Arkansas weather often laughs in the face of what the calendar says, but technically spring starts in March and even the groundhog said we'd have an early spring, so it's bound to happen! Seeing signs of spring – even if it's only a rodent's prediction and the date on the calendar – makes me want to start making recipes with lemons and berries and other ingredients that seem to fit the season. I love a good, tart, lemony treat year-round, but spring just seems like it's the perfect time to grab the microplane grater and start zesting! This month, if life gives you lemons ... you make Lemon Cookie Bars!

Directions:

Put butter and eggs on the counter to come to room temperature 30-60 minutes before starting.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray a 9x13 inch pan with cooking spray and set aside.

In a large mixing bowl, combine butter and sugar. Mix with a hand mixer until light and fluffy. Add eggs, vanilla, lemon zest, and lemon juice and mix well.

In a separate bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt. Stir into the wet ingredients just until combined. Batter will be thick.

Spread in prepared pan with a spatula and spread evenly. Sprinkle with the ¼ cup of sugar.

Bake 20 minutes or until lightly browned at the edges. Cool on a wire rack, then slice and serve. You can make these festive for Easter by decorating them with pastel sprinkles or frosting.

Lemon Cookie Bars



Ingredients:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 cup granulated sugar | lemons worth) |
| 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, room temperature | 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice |
| 2 large eggs, room temperature | 2 ½ cups all-purpose flour |
| 1 teaspoon vanilla extract | 1 teaspoon baking powder |
| 4 teaspoons lemon zest (about 2 large | ½ teaspoon salt |
| | ¼ cup granulated sugar (reserved for topping) |

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Photos from the 2023 Oasis Arts & Eats Festival



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The best part? Attending is completely free for everyone! Mark your calendars now for Sunday, April 7, from 12:00-4:00 p.m. to be in downtown Jonesboro!

Visit oasisfest.org/artsandeats for festival, artist, and restaurant vendor information!



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The Beauty of a Building

Courthouse Rescue

BY RICHARD BRUMMETT

The historic Greene County Courthouse stands proudly in the Downtown Paragould area, a beautiful building connecting today with yesterday. It stands mainly due to the efforts of Mary Ann Schreit, who would not let this chapter of bygone days be erased for the sake of modernization.

Mary Ann, who passed away in 2020 at the age of 93, learned in 1992 local officials were considering the demolition of the building in order to build a new facility and she did what most of us would not have: Instead of saying, "Someone needs to do something," she became "someone." Along with fellow citizens who saw the courthouse as a prized possession, Mary Ann helped form the Greene County Courthouse Preservation Society and they got busy coming up with an alternate plan.

"She just loved the old buildings and hated to see them torn down," said Mary Ann's youngest daughter, Anna Smith of Jonesboro. "Or maybe she loved the beauty of them. She had been at the beach in 1992 when the Quorum Court set an election to determine the courthouse's fate. She called Randy Philhours and others that night and started what she said was an intervention at the last minute of the last hour of the last day.

"She was a Political Science major ... I don't remember her being a history buff. I think maybe it was just that she so appreciated the beauty of it. She was never an activist, or what I think an activist is, but she truly supported things. She was really big on getting the mural in the downtown area and she wanted us to join the Main Street program. She and Dad planted Bradford pear trees, because she wanted to save downtown. She wanted to keep downtown alive and keep Paragould on the map ... with a hospital and a downtown. She just loved Paragould and its history."

Completed in 1888, just five years after the official incorporation of the city of Paragould, the courthouse stood tall on Court Square and had

been added to the National Register of Historical Places in 1976. But little had been done to preserve or maintain it after changes to both the interior and exterior altered its original look. County officials decided to cover the deteriorating brick exterior with brown stucco in 1918 and in 1968 the clock tower was removed for safety reasons. There were many who thought the old building should be torn down to make way for a more modern courthouse, but the society stepped in to secure individual donations and more than \$300,000 in federal grant money to restore the building to its original beauty. In 1995, Mary Ann and the courthouse society received the award for Outstanding Achievement in Preservation Advocacy from the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas. Five years later, she would receive the 2000 Chamber Lifetime Member Award.

Mary Ann was no stranger to adventure and challenge. She graduated from Paragould High School in 1945, then from Duke University in 1949. At Duke, she was a member of Pi Beta Phi sorority and chosen The Chanticleer Yearbook beauty queen, modeled for Mademoiselle







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Magazine and was selected as the cover girl for a national publication of Collier's Magazine in April, 1948. After graduation she made her way to New York City and worked at the National Citizens Commission for Public Schools, and later boarded the Queen Mary for a six-nation European tour.

On a return trip to Arkansas Mary Ann met Frank Joseph Schreit, Jr, an accountant who would later open his own CPA firm in Paragould, and they were married in July of 1951. According to Anna, both took great pride in their hometown. Mary Ann was an active member of the City Beautification Committee and worked tirelessly to help preserve the downtown's rich heritage. She and Frank spent countless hours decorating outdoor trees for Christmas in the downtown area. She was a huge supporter of keeping Arkansas Methodist Medical Center up and running for area residents to have local medical care. She did not want Paragould to "fall off the map," always looking for ways to improve and preserve what Paragould had to offer.

"For someone from Paragould, Arkansas, to go off to Duke in the 1940s was something," Anna said. "But that was her. Being an advocate for her own town to preserve what is good ... that was her. This cookbook was her baby, too. It was a fundraiser, the Centennial Cook Book, and she was all-in on promoting it."

So, seeing he mother spearhead the drive to save and renovate the courthouse came as no surprise to Anna or her siblings, Eva, Sara and Joe. She believed the clock tower should be put back on top, the stucco removed and the building restored to its 1888 look, all as a tribute to Greene County history. Today it stands majestically on the square and houses the Paragould Regional Chamber of Commerce.

"The funny thing is," Anna said, "I was having my first child in '92 and Mom would come down to Jonesboro to check on me and I'd say, 'What are you doing here? Aren't you needed somewhere?' and she'd say, yes, she had a courthouse meeting. And then with my second one, she said she was saving downtown and planting trees. She was not keeping my kids, she was saving the courthouse and Downtown Paragould. That was our mom; that was what made her who she was. She loved Paragould and its beauty and its history."



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“We want women to have high aspirations, but women cannot have those aspirations if the people around them do not have high expectations for them.” – Dr. Virginia Valian

Early in my medical school training, I had a patient with heart valve disease. The valve narrowing made it difficult for blood to flow between the heart’s chambers, worsening his shortness of breath. If left untreated it could have led to serious health problems, even death. Thankfully, with the help of medical intervention, the patient recovered, and I witnessed the difference interventional cardiology could make in people’s lives.

At that point, I made an easy decision. I was going to be a heart doctor. The journey, however, would prove much more difficult and likely impossible without all the support I received.

Sadly, many women avoid cardiology, or they simply do not get the opportunities to succeed. In the United States for example, women make up more than half of all medical school applicants, students and graduates. We seem to lose half of them by the time they start residency training. Today, women make up about 5 to 10 percent of all cardiologists, depending upon the subspecialty. The problem is similar where I trained in my home country of India.

Thankfully, my parents supported me every step of the way. My mother, especially, gave me all the opportunities that she, herself, did not have. She did not know English or get to finish high school, but she gave my sibling and me as many opportunities as possible to succeed. Her encouragement empowered me to push beyond what I thought possible.

Later on as I pursued further training in the U.S., I received incredible support from mentors, colleagues, peers and administration. It continues today at my work with St. Bernards Heart and Vascular, where women lead and make vital contributions to improve heart health across our region. Their success encourages and inspires me, and I want to reciprocate it for other women.

Ultimately, empowerment means we bring out the best in each other, regardless of where our journeys take us. We remove barriers. We support and create opportunities. We invest time, energy and resources. We encourage aspirations but expect much. We start early and never stop.

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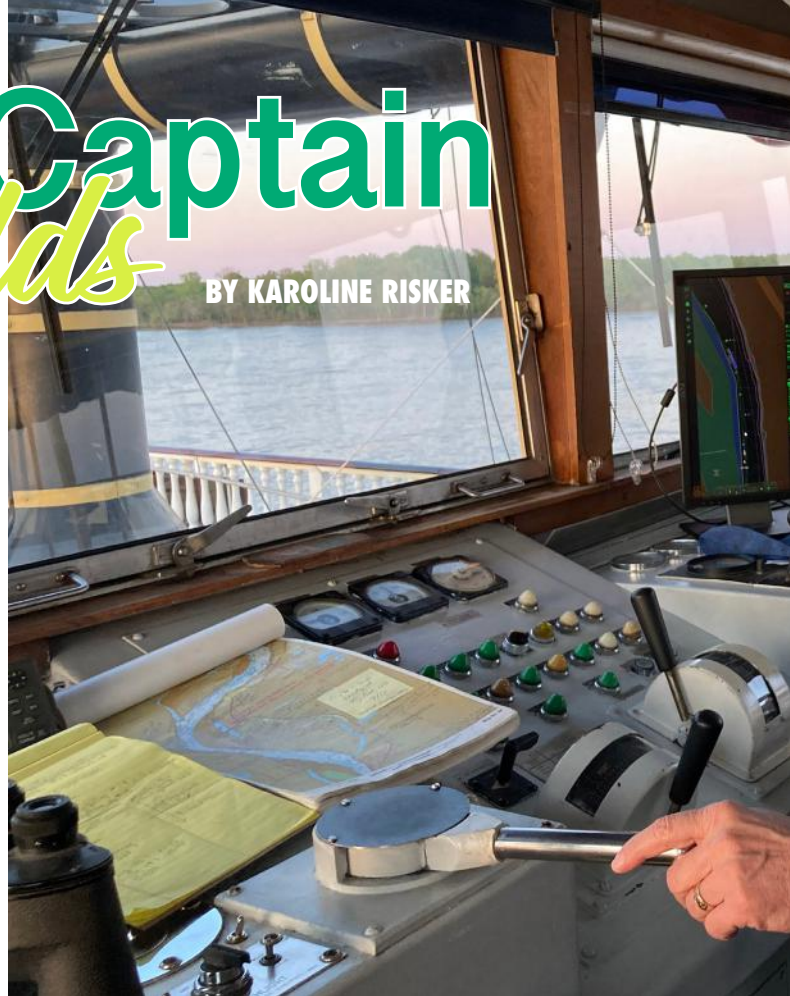
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Riverboat Captain *Bob Reynolds*

BY KAROLINE RISKER



For his entire adult life, Robert (Bob) Reynolds has made his living as a pilot on the Mississippi River, driving tow boats that push oil on inland waterways. He works 30 days straight, then is off for 30 days and starts again, a pattern he has repeated for more than 40 years.

He says it's different than a typical tow on the Mississippi River in that they push smaller tows at an average speed of 6-7 miles per hour; 10-12 miles per hour is considered flying. "You're moving 24 hours a day," he said. "You'd be surprised at how many miles you cover." The advantage to boat shipping is that it is far cheaper to move just about anything on the water if you have to do it in bulk. "It is environmentally friendlier and it takes fewer people to do it," he said.

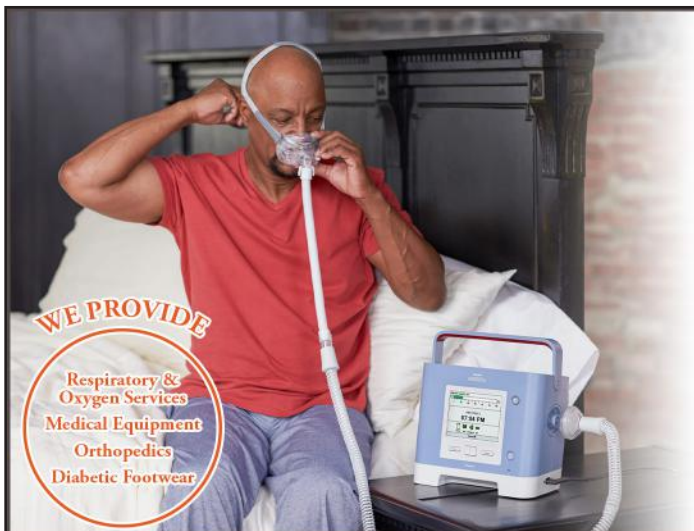
They work with a crew of seven utilizing a captain, pilot, a mate, who is in charge of the deck crew, a tankerman mate who loads and unloads the barges, an engineer in charge of the engine room and mechanical systems of the boat, and two deck hands. They used to have cooks, but stopped providing that about five years ago in a cost-cutting measure that left Bob frustrated. "I'll never get over it," he said of the cooks being let go. "The crew does it now. They do an admirable job but it's just not the same. It was the only thing we had to look forward to. That job is hard enough; it was a perk. Now you don't have three meals a day, salads, desserts, snacks. And presentation ... forget about it."

Another difficulty is getting down the river when there is a lack of water. What do you do when you're stuck? "You go to work and you deal with it," Bob said. "We sit there until we can go." Bob said they were stuck for three days once waiting on water so they could move again.

Still, Bob wouldn't do anything else. "It's a good way to make a nice living," he said. "It's great. Since I was 18 it's the only thing I've ever done. Almost." Bob mentions working for the company where his dad was employed the summer when he was 16. He knew even then a traditional job was not for him. "I knew about this kind of work," he

said, referring to working on a boat. "I knew it paid well, it involved travel and meeting people. And that appealed to me very much. I love driving stuff." So, for four decades he has driven stuff down the river using steering levers for six hours, handing the job off to the pilot of the other crew for six, then back to work again.

Bob even met his wife, Sharon, on a steamboat. He says he couldn't do what he does without her. "She handles everything at home — the finances, everything," he said. "The water heater goes out, we need service on the furnace, the car needs work. Not only does she handle it, she does a fantastic job. When I come home I don't have to do anything. She just does a great job. She is a smart, strong woman. I like strong, smart women." He adds it was tougher on Sharon than it



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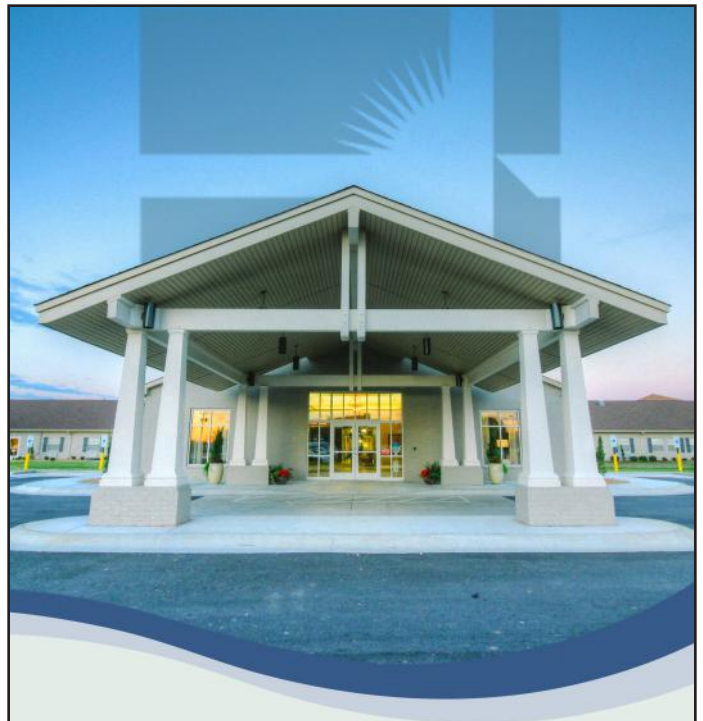
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Riverboat Captain *Bob Reynolds*

continued...

might have been with a more traditional setting when their sons, Walt and Jeff, were younger. "But even she will tell you it has its advantages," he said. "When I was home in my off-time I always picked my boys up from school and did things with them. It's not what a lot of people think it is. I tried being home every day. That does not hold that much appeal to me. It's the greatest job in the world. No one ever bothers you during home times. Nobody's calling me."

What do you see riding down the river as a pilot? "Wildlife, the changing of the seasons, sunrises, sunsets, people being stupid in motorboats, fireworks on holidays," Bob said. "There's a lot to see. There's a lot to like if you allow yourself to like it."

Bob said another perk to the job is getting to live wherever you want. He chose Paragould after a Google search led him here. He and Sharon were looking to move from Memphis, Tennessee. They had an organist at their church, Carol Thomas, who traveled from Paragould to Memphis every week to play. They inquired where she was from and she told them Paragould, so they looked up churches and schools in the area, liked what they saw, and stayed. "We just really like Paragould," he said.

Bob will retire next year but still plans to "trip," meaning he will cover for people taking off, where he can work as little as a week a year, or work six months a year as long as he keeps his license current and has his health. Even now, he does a little tripping on passenger boats, once moving rocket boosters from Decatur, Alabama, to Cape Canaveral.

Bob has varied interests and enjoys history, music, engineering, art, drawing, building models, and cooking.

If he could give advice to someone considering the profession, it would be: "Give it a try. It's not for everybody. If you can wrap your mind around being gone for 30 days and if you can do it and get used to that, there's no job like this," he said.



On the Ohio River



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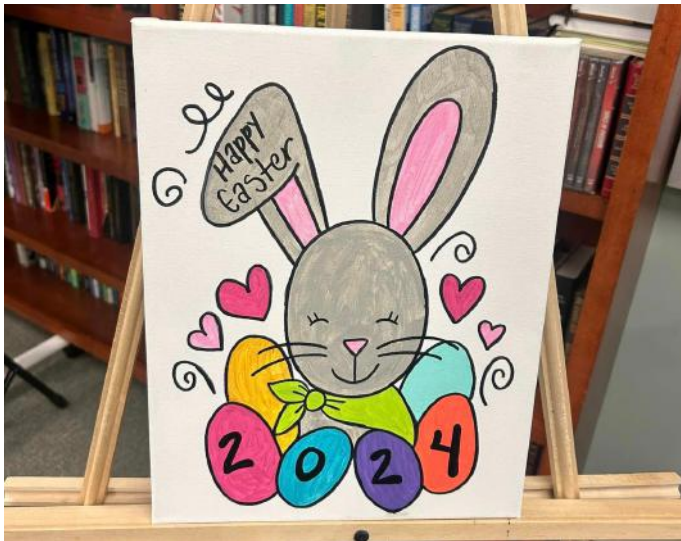
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Alycia Merila-Stroud BY GABBY POWELL



Hard work and passionate care. Those are words that flow through the 1st Choice Home Care community, and they have been cultivated from the very beginning. Owner, Alycia Merila-Stroud, is a living symbol of the success that comes from rolling up your coat sleeves and putting in the work.

One thing you know within seconds of meeting Alycia is that she does nothing unless she is 110% passionate about it. So, when she moved to Northeast Arkansas 27 years ago from Wisconsin and the medical degree she was pursuing was not offered, she decided to head into the workforce instead.

What field did she enter? Surely the NEA home health icon entered some kind of medical work? Maybe she transitioned into insurance or clerical duties? You would be wrong, wrong, wrong. Alycia would spend the next nearly 10 years as a welder. Talk about hard work!

After that season of life, she began to feel that desire to complete her degree. She gained her Registered Nursing license and hasn't left the field since. Transitioning through work into hospital to the Department of Health to the private insurance sector, Alycia learned each role that would aid her in growing

Sneak peak into the new headquarters of 1st Choice Home Care, located in the historic Rhine Building



*1st Choice Home Care
currently has 14 locations
and is growing every day!*

her home health business to 14 locations and more in the works. 1st Choice Home Health has been awarded the Premiere Home Health Agency award for three of the past four years in Paragould and broke through to the Jonesboro award category in 2023; this is evidence of the passionate care Alycia ensures is given through each branch, through each employee, and to each client.

“We take pride in the fact that we never stopped through COVID,” she said. No doubt that 2020 and the looming effects of the virus changed our world forever, but the necessity of care did not. “I sat at the table making handmade masks and Germ-X for the offices and clients for hours ... Whatever it took to make them feel safe.” While many businesses struggled through the pandemic, the leadership and motivation of Alycia helped comfort and inspire her team to survive and flourish throughout the pandemic.

For the past two years Alycia’s company has been awarded in the Premiere Place to Work category in both Paragould and Jonesboro. With roughly 100 office employees and 1000+ contracted workers, there has been an overwhelming number of votes for 1st Choice Home Health throughout the years. The owner remarked, “We take care of our people.” Whether that is through boosting attitudes or supporting dreams, Alycia has a passion for finding talent and helping it grow.

One exciting way Alycia is giving back to her company is through the expansion of its headquarters. The team expects to be moving into the historic Rhine Building in Downtown Paragould in April of this year. Their current office is bursting at the seams in result of the “controlled explosive” growth that has taken place. With this expansion, Alycia hopes her team can feel comfortable and at home so it can transfer those same feelings to the clients.

Whether it was living off the land in Wisconsin with no electricity to moving to a new area and pursuing a new goal, Alycia Merila-Stroud possesses a powerful personality that has pressed her stamp on the NEA home health industry and every person she meets. Her attitude on work and on life is one of the same: The effort you put in will be rewarded. If you are afraid to try something, then you’ll live your life on the sidelines never experiencing the feeling of success.



Alycia Merila-Stroud in the doorway of her new office

GRAND MASTER MASON

Darrell Gifford

BY RICHARD BRUMMETT

Turning the calendar page to February brought more than just a date with frigid temperatures for Darrell Gifford. On the second day of the month he was installed as the Grand Master Mason of Arkansas, a designation representing both a title and an office and one regarded highly among Freemasons.

The 1978 Greene County Tech High School graduate has pretty much grown up around freemasonry, following “my granddad, dad, two uncles, several cousins. When I was born, Dad had always been a Mason. He always wore this ring (showing his, bearing the Masons symbol) and said to me, ‘If you ever are in trouble, find a man who wears a ring like this.’ I was in the Order of DeMolay at 13 and at 21, in 1981 right there in Paragould, I joined Lodge #368. I have spent 51 years in Masons organizations.”

While the position of Grand Master is an elected one, there is a definite path one must follow to become eligible for the honor. “First, you must be a member of a lodge in Arkansas and a past Master of a lodge in Arkansas,” Darrell said at the time of the interview. “You start six years prior; it’s an elected progressive line. You start as a Grand Junior Deacon, then go on to Grand Senior Deacon, then Grand Junior Warden

and Grand Senior Warden, and then Deputy Grand Master, as I am now, for three more weeks anyway. “And then you are eligible to become Grand Master. You are not allowed to campaign; someone speaks for you. But I have run unopposed all up the line.”

He said as Grand Master he will oversee the business of the Grand Lodge, and be expected to visit as many lodges as possible. “The United States is divided into seven conferences; Arkansas is in the Southeast and I’m the chief representative of it,” he said. “Two weeks after installation my wife and I will attend the Grand Masters of North America Conference in Seattle. I went to one in D.C. once and it was a thrill to be sitting there with all the Grand Masters. More than 4,000 Masons in a parade for all the Grand Masters, on Presidents Day, and the crowd was all cheering and clapping for us.”

Freemasons belong to the oldest fraternal organization in the world, a group begun during the Middle Ages in Europe as a guild of skilled builders. Today, Freemasons are a social and philanthropic organization meant to make its members lead more virtuous and socially oriented lives.



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"In order to become a Mason you have to seek membership," Darrell explained. "There is no soliciting. After that, you must believe in God, have good character and a good reputation. All the Masons rituals remain the same. All customs are the same. All the traditions, the same, the elections ... the same. We have not changed."

Darrell said the many good works the members of the Jonesboro Lodge do within the community and around Northeast Arkansas are some of his proudest accomplishments. He said being a Mason encompasses much more than simply attending scheduled meetings. "A meeting is typical business," he said, "... go over the minutes of the last meeting, the bills, get the treasurer's report, address new petitions and committee reports, then have general discussion on things we plan on doing. We hold a Pancake Breakfast/Dinner and did a Toys For Tots drive at Paragould and gave two hundred-plus gifts to the needy. The Pancake Breakfast helps us raise funds in Jonesboro for The Learning Center. We have given more than \$120,000 over the years to them. Those are some of the things I'm most proud of. This lodge is kind of the hub for Northeast Arkansas."

Saying he has a big heart and a love for being around people, Darrell expects the additional duties of Grand Master to be a natural progression as he makes his appointed rounds. "I look forward to meeting new guys and seeing the work the lodges are doing," he said. "Getting new people in our jurisdiction, travel to other places ... this year Lisa and I will have 14 to 15 trips, Mason related. Can you believe it? Forty-two plus years as a Master Mason. It's been a long road."

The day after his installation ceremony in Little Rock, the Jonesboro Lodge hosted a reception in his honor. The new Grand Master greeted one and all while decked out in blue jeans and a cowboy hat, for him a much more comfortable ensemble than the previous day's required attire. He went from table to table, laughing and hugging and enjoying the company of his fellow Masons. "They're calling it a dinner," Darrell said, "and it may turn out to be a roast. These guys are my brothers." As for feeling any different after participating in the prestigious ceremony, Darrell's down home country humor shone through: "Well, my head's not swole too much; my hat still fits."



Darrell Gifford

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Elvis, AKA Zaden J



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Zaden J, a 12 year old Elvis legacy artist from Jonesboro, stole the show, singing several hits of the King and Happy Birthday to Mrs. Martin.

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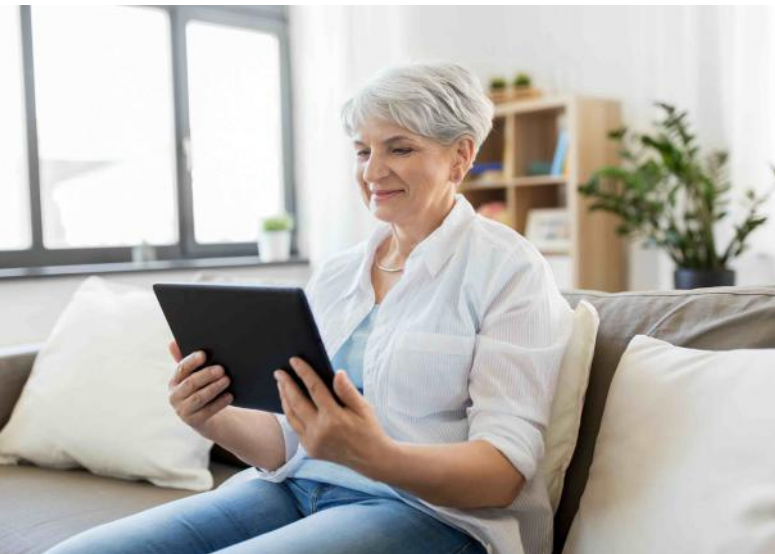
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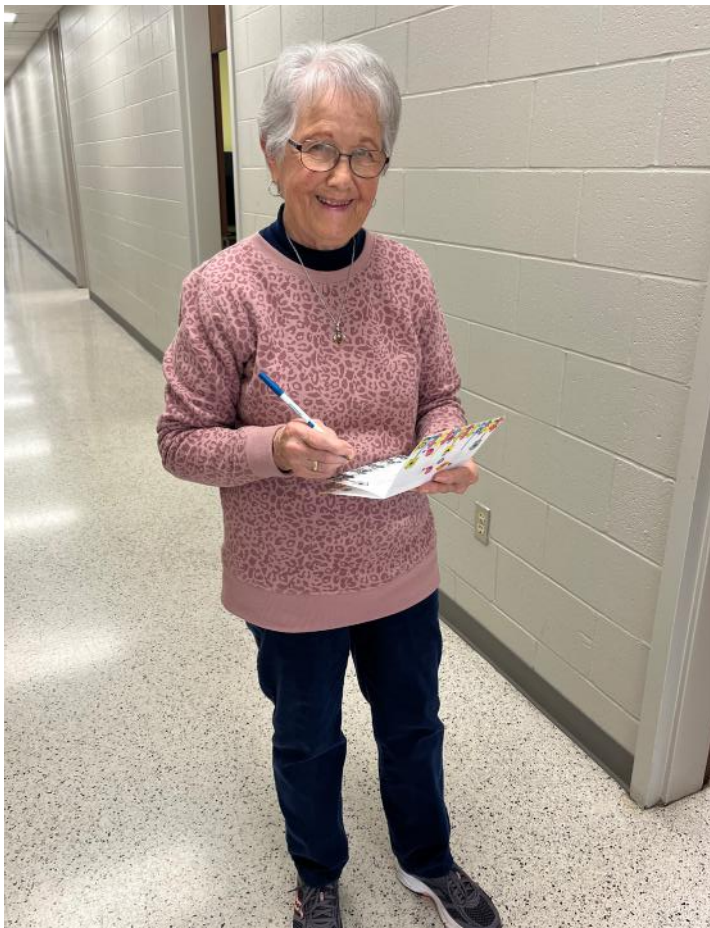
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“BEE”-UTIFUL SERVICE

Thelma Stanfill

BY KARAN SUMMITT

Long before she became a familiar and much-loved face at Paragould Senior B.E.E.S., Thelma Stanfill was investing in the lives of others. It began as it should with family members but didn't end there. Her small home was the preferred gathering place for get-togethers. Granddaughter Stacie Landrum says, “We were crowded but couldn't imagine going anywhere else.” In the years before auto-draft, Thelma was the friendly face behind PLWC's payment drop-off window. Involvement at her home church was another part of everyday life.

For many years life revolved around family, church and work. Thelma and husband Leland retired with plans to relax, travel and spend time together. Those plans were cut short by the unexpected return of Leland's lung cancer after eleven years of remission. His death in April 2012 forced Thelma to rethink life and face a truth. “I knew I had to get out and meet new people or I would just sit at home and decline.”

Doing new things without Leland at her side was out of Thelma's comfort zone, but she was determined. For a few years she stayed busy attending her great-grandchildren's sports and school activities, just as she and Leland had done for their parents. She followed her doctor's recommendation and walked each day, eventually pairing up with a neighbor that introduced her to the Paragould Senior B.E.E.S. program in 2014. For someone who “didn't know anything about the Senior B.E.E.S.” Thelma has embraced all the program has to offer. She

takes care of the Senior B.E.E.S. library, participates in Sing-a-Longs members take to area long-term care facilities, is a member of the Bean Bag Baseball team and takes the responsibility of gathering signatures on cards for fellow B.E.E.S. who are in the hospital or who have lost an immediate family member. She and three other participants have a standing appointment to play cards together several times a week. They even continued to meet in each other's homes when the B.E.E.S. Center was closed during the Covid pandemic.

Carol Fleszar, executive director of the Senior B.E.E.S., praised Thelma. “She is an unpaid volunteer who does so much without drawing attention to herself. She takes a leadership role in caring about other seniors and is always looking for ways to do little jobs that keep our facility neat, clean and organized. Thelma takes new folks under her wing and helps them get acclimated and involved. She is thoughtful without being overbearing.”

Thelma says involvement with the B.E.E.S. has given purpose to her days. “I see the good it does, keeping us involved and socializing with others who are at the same stage of life. I believe participation in the B.E.E.S. program can help people stay mentally sharp, physically active and living independently for as long as possible.”

Personally, Thelma reflects on her own challenges after Leland's death. She admits to never being much of a talker for most of her life.



Participation in the B.E.E.S. helped her become more outgoing and use the skills she honed for so many years with family. "I feel I can be especially helpful to those who have lost a spouse," she said.

Thelma calls the B.E.E.S. Center a "home away from home." She mentioned how people she may have known distantly in the past have become close friends through involvement in the program. The daily contact participants have at Senior B.E.E.S. allows them to share each other's sorrows and joys. "We may be old in years, but we are young at heart," Thelma says, "people just laughing and encouraging one another."

Thelma's commitment to the B.E.E.S. extends to serving on their Site Council, a group of involved participants who meet monthly to discuss ideas and changes that would improve the Center. She helps to raise money and makes sure the kitchen staff knows their efforts are appreciated. Fleszar said simply, "Thelma notices people."

Empowering others begins with a conscious decision to be an encourager. Stacie Landrum spoke for her entire family when she said, "My Nanny (Thelma) is so much more than a grandma. She made sure we knew about Jesus, helped us with school projects and could fix anything. She taught us to work hard and love others. She's just special and I don't know where we would be without her."

Thelma will soon be 85 years old. Blessed with good health, she plans to continue being involved in the lives of family, friends and the Senior B.E.E.S. for as long as possible. "I'd probably be in the nursing home without the Senior B.E.E.S. I would have stayed in the house and been intimidated about meeting new people and making changes without my husband. Senior B.E.E.S. has helped me be more outgoing and find a new purpose in life."

Borrowing from the title of a popular sitcom, these words from Fleszar seem to sum up the impact Thelma Stanfill has had wherever she goes. Carol simply says, "Everybody loves Thelma!"

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THE BUNGALOWS VALENTINE'S DAY PARTY

BY GENIA RUTHERFORD

The residents of The Bungalows at Jonesboro dressed in their finest for the 2024 Bungalow Valentine's Party. The parlor was festively decorated with shimmering red tablecloths and balloon centerpieces. Residents wore red, pink, and sparkly attire, perfectly complimenting the atmosphere of the party. They played "Name That Tune," guessing love songs from their era, Valentine's Day Trivia, and "Minute to Win It." Refreshments of fresh fruit, pretzel rods, marshmallows and Rice Krispy treats were enjoyed after being dipped in the delicious chocolate fountain and enjoyed with red punch. The grand finale was when the 2024 Valentine King and Queen were crowned. Congratulations to Madeline Williams and Tim Craig for being voted by fellow residents for this honor. Before leaving, each resident received a goody bag full of Valentines, chocolate, and candy.



I depended on Cornerstone Caregiving almost daily.

Robert, Tulsa

During the most difficult time in our lives, Cornerstone helped my wife, Debbie, and me with the most challenging responsibilities. As Deb's Alzheimer's worsened, I depended on Cornerstone almost daily. What a welcomed break from the routine they provided. Cornerstone was there, hands on, to the very last moment of Debbie's life, literally. God bless Cornerstone.

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GET RICH WITH RICHARD BRUMMETT

Every month has particular days or weeks set aside to recognize a person, place or thing, some of them worthy and some of them wacky. March is no different, playing host to such notable events as National Peanut Butter Lover's Day, National Dadgum That's Good Day, National Napping Day and National Popcorn Lover's Day.

I can relate to all of those but I think the day that actually seems to hit home the most with me is March 18, when we observe National Awkward Moments Day. We've all had them and I've probably had more than my share, but some of those embarrassing happenings just won't go away, hovering to this day.

There was the time in the first grade when two friends and I were playing in the giant ditch at the end of the Marmaduke Elementary School playground and we were apparently the only three people in America who didn't hear the recess-ending bell ring. I climbed out of the ditch preparing to slide down again when I noticed there were no kids on the playground and the only other human in sight was Mrs. Marie Butler, our teacher, standing next to the building and glaring our direction, hands on hips. "Hey!" I yelled to my partners in crime, "I think recess is over" and we sprinted the remaining distance between freedom and the teacher.

I was quick to point out that I came in first on that all-out dash but that didn't seem to impress Mrs. Butler, who made all three of us sit in the cloak closet.

There was also the time during my senior year of high school when I sat in Mrs. Dale's Advanced English Class, doing my best to stay awake but failing miserably. We had played a basketball game on the road the night before and got back into town well past my bedtime, and I was finding it hard to concentrate on *The Old Man and the Sea* or anything written by Dickens, or Shakespeare or George Orwell ... or anyone else. Making things worse is the fact I had told myself I definitely needed to concentrate and come out with a good grade that very day because I had already done poorly on a short essay earlier in the week. As I repeated to myself, "Stay awake. Stay awake. Stay awake," what my eyes heard was, "You are getting sleepy. You are getting very, very sleepy." Just about the time my chin bounced off my chest, I heard Mrs. Dale call my name and, thinking I was answering roll call, I loudly and proudly said, "Here!"

Problem was, we were about 30 minutes into the class period and I'm pretty sure she only called on me because she saw me snoozing. As a reward for making everyone in the

classroom break out in boisterous laughter, I got to write a five-page paper on the subject of the day.

But one of my all-time awkward moments came when I was going out with a really pretty girl and we had a weekend date at the Sunset Drive-In. Everything was going nicely -- we were actually watching the movie, even though most kids our age didn't always follow that course at the drive-in -- when we decided to make a trip to the concession stand. We walked up to the front of the property and purchased our popcorn and drinks, then headed back for my car. I had never revealed to this young lady that I didn't see all that well at night -- partly for fear she'd be afraid to get into a car with me and travel busy highways after dark -- but that fact was about to reveal itself rather abruptly.

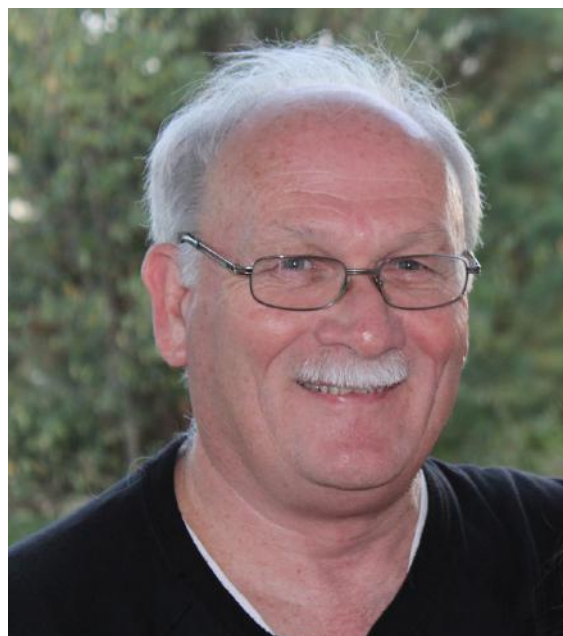
I was holding my refreshments and walking alongside her, and angled a bit to the left to go between a post holding a drive-in speaker and the car parked beside it. Just about the time my date tried to say, "Look out!" I managed to hang myself on the cord stretched out between the speaker and the car. Never saw it. Walked right into it goozle first and might have been able to pass that off as a joke had not the guy sitting on his car hood holding the speaker shouted, "Watch it!" Didn't see him either, which is why when he shouted I jumped back and sent popcorn flying.

My date, by this time, was laughing so hard I thought we might have to sit and watch the rest of the movie from the ground, because I knew I couldn't carry her, two drinks and what was left of the popcorn back to my car, and she was in no condition to walk much further, hyperventilating uncontrollably and trying to breathe.

Somehow we made it back to the car and I think she tried to be nice and not bring the high wire act back to my attention at first, but each time we looked at each other we broke out in unmanageable laughter.

She was laughing because it was one of the funniest things she'd ever seen; I don't know why I was laughing and I can tell you for certain the guy sitting on his car hood was not amused at all.

It would be easy to assume I was too embarrassed to ever ask that girl out again, but since we've been married for more than 50 years now I guess I was able to overcome the uneasiness and try for another date. We have differing opinions of exactly how funny that incident was today. Each time she relates her version she laughs almost as hard as she did on the night it happened, and sometimes even cries. I shake my head because it's one dumb stunt I just have to own.



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Lessons LEARNED IN Motherhood

BY CAITLIN LAFARLETTE



It was 3 a.m. and I was holding my nursing newborn while tucking my oldest back into bed, doing my best to snuggle her like she requested. I was exhausted but my heart was bursting and all I could think was, “My girls. These are my girls.”

In that moment I realized that even though I was having a hard time juggling both of my daughters, I was doing it. They are fed, clothed, and loved, and I’m spent by the end of each day but I’m doing my job as a mother. In the very early days after Aubrey was born, I told my husband almost every night I couldn’t do this. But here I am, months later, continuing to do it.

I didn’t know this resilience was inside of me. There have been several times when I thought I would give up but somehow, despite pouring from an empty cup, I kept going. Some days I simply exist minute to minute but I’ve learned that’s okay to do. In fact, those moments become a reality check, forcing me to slow down and just take things as they are. I’m also learning sometimes the bare minimum is just fine (washing laundry but not folding it, for example) because that allows me more time to focus on my children and enjoy them as they grow. I give myself space to grieve the fact that maybe my house isn’t the cleanest or my outfit the most put together, but one day I will get those things back. My daughters are only little once.

I know there will be more days when I struggle with a full plate. It will be hard, but I look at everything I have accomplished so far and I am confident I will be able to do it.

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THE LINK THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS INTO THE WOODS

Broadway and television veteran Jenny Powers will star as the Witch in The Link Theatre production of INTO THE WOODS. A Drama Desk nominee, Powers starred on Broadway as Rizzo in *Grease* and Meg in *Little Women*. Television audiences know Powers from her turn as Miriam Rothberg in the critically acclaimed Hulu series *Fleishman is in Trouble*.

Kevin Clay, currently starring as Elder Price in the Broadway production of *The Book of Mormon*, will play the Baker. Clay's journey with *The Book of Mormon* has spanned eight years with productions on Broadway, as well as national tours throughout North America and the United Kingdom.

Broadway veteran Joe Langworth will direct the production. Langworth's appearances on Broadway as a performer include *A Chorus Line*, *Follies* and *Ragtime*. Langworth was also the Associate Director on Broadway's *Next Fall* and the Associate Choreographer for the Lincoln Center revival of *South Pacific*.

Senior News Anchor and Emmy award-winning journalist for KAIT, Diana Davis, will

voice the role of the Giant in The Link Theatre production of INTO THE WOODS.

The limited engagement of INTO THE WOODS will take place March 7th – 10th, 2023, at the Fowler Center on the campus of Arkansas State University. Evening performances are on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 7:30 with matinee performances on Saturday at 2:00 and Sunday at 2:30.

Tickets start at \$35, and can be purchased by visiting www.thelinktheatre.org or by calling

the A-State Box Office at 870-972-2781.

Powers and Clay journey INTO THE WOODS with Alex Dunn as Lucinda, Jonathan Foresythe as Steward, Taylor Heinen as Cinderella's Stepmother, Holly Henson as Rapunzel, Harrison Herget as Rapunzel's Prince, Harper Heringer as Little Red, Janson Marsico as Jack, Brooke Melton as Baker's Wife, John Mixon as Narrator/Mysterious Man, Nancy Owens as Jack's Mother, Joshua Pryor as Cinderella's Prince/Wolf, Kathryn Tarkington as Cinderella's Mother/Granny, Sydnie Walker as Florinda, and Eden Witvoet as Cinderella.

Mary Medrick will serve as Music Director. Set design is by Jeff McLaughlin, costume design is by Claire Abernathy, and lighting design is by Caisa Sanburg.

The Link Theater, founded by Broadway couple Matt Cavanaugh and Jenny Powers, is a professional theatre company located in Jonesboro. The 501(c)3 nonprofit draws on the finest Broadway, university, and local talent to bring innovative musicals and plays to the Northeast Arkansas community.



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HEALTH

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KARAN SUMMITT
Retired Health Educator
25 years 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.

Processed Foods: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Unless you want to be like the Little Red Hen who planted, harvested, milled and baked her own bread, the convenience and cost-savings of processed foods are a good thing. Most of us do not have the time, space, energy and know-how required for taking foods from their raw state and making them edible.

While minimal processing is a good thing, too much processing can be very unhealthy, and it is important to understand the difference. Think of it like this: An orange you pick off the tree is unprocessed. Squeezing it to make orange juice is minimal processing. Adding preservatives, colors and other non-natural ingredients to give it a long shelf life is processing. Adding even more ingredients and turning the orange juice into gummy treats is ultra-processing. The more you do to the food and the further it goes from its natural state, the more likely it is to be ultra-processed.

So what's so bad about "ultra-processed" foods? These foods have not only been processed, but have also had other substances — like salt, sugar, fat, preservatives and food dyes — added to them for flavor and to make them shelf-stable. Added sugar, fat and salt in these foods means they have more calories than whole and minimally processed foods. These added ingredients also cause inflammation inside the body which is directly correlated with developing conditions like obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

The appeal of ultra-processed foods can pack a double-whammy: Not only are they convenient but the added ingredients are formulated to stimulate food cravings. Lay's chips was right — you can't eat just one! You end up wanting to eat more and more of them — and wanting to eat them more often — instead of reaching for healthier options. Many doctors, researchers and nutritionists believe the increase of ultra-processed foods in the American diet has been a major contributor to skyrocketing obesity rates.

As mentioned above, for most of us time and finances will require some food processing. The key is making sure we are knowledgeable and wise, making good choices that will help us protect our health. With a little effort, you can do just that without breaking the food budget. Here are some tips:

1. Purchase fresh (unprocessed) fruits and vegetables as much

Healthy Processed Foods



as possible. Take advantage of seasonal specials and make sure to eat/cook what you purchase. Build your diet around these foods.

2. Cook at home. Homemade items rarely have ingredients you cannot recognize or pronounce. Bulk cooking for several meals, freezer meals or to share with others is an excellent strategy. A store-bought frozen lasagna is likely to be ultra-processed. A home-assembled one is minimally processed.
3. Check the ingredient list. In general, look for fewer ingredients with names you recognize. Avoid long lists that include added salt, sugar, fat, artificial flavors, colors and chemical preservatives.
4. Don't be deceived by names that sound healthy. Veggie sticks are not vegetables, but instead are ultra-processed-salt-preservative-color-added food substitutes.

It is speculated that about 70% of the average American diet is composed of ultra-processed foods. These would include frozen pizzas, breakfast cereals, soft drinks, purchased sweets, chips and other salty snacks along with hot dogs and deli items. You probably already knew these weren't the healthiest of foods.

Centuries ago the Greek physician Hippocrates said, "Let food be thy medicine, and medicine be thy food." Taking small, but intentional steps, to reduce the amount of processed foods in our diet — especially ultra-processed foods — might be just the medicine needed for a healthier you!

Classification of Processed Food

| Group 1 | Group 2 |
|---|---|
| Unprocessed or Minimally Processed Foods | Processed Culinary Ingredients |
|  |  |
| Group 3 | Group 4 |
| Processed Foods | Ultra-Processed Foods |
|  |  |

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HAPPENINGS

“BEDS FOR THE BRAVE” PROGRAM HONORS BLYTHEVILLE FIREFIGHTERS



Gamble Home Furnishings partnered with its Ashley Outlet of Blytheville to launch the “Beds for the Brave” initiative, demonstrating its appreciation for the courageous men and women of the Blytheville Fire Department. The program’s core mission is to provide a haven for firefighters, acknowledging their unwavering commitment to the safety of the local community.

Gamble Home and Ashley Outlet of Blytheville generously furnished the Blytheville Fire Department with a thoughtful selection, including recliners, beds, desks, and more. The Gamble Team, led by VP of Marketing and Purchasing Kaula McLaughlin and VP of Sales Drew Kellums, worked diligently to transform the space. Notable additions included a wall-mounted TV and a cherished piece of puzzle art, a heartfelt gift from a special needs child over a decade ago.

Chief Carney, expressing initial skepticism, shared, “When I got the first call about this, I thought there was a ‘catch,’ and it was too good to be true. We are so thankful and appreciative of what you guys have done.” Asst. Chief Hollifield added, “Many of the items here were either built by the team or brought from our homes, and a lot of it we’ve had for many, many years.”

JONESBORO REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HOSTS AGRI-BUSINESS BREAKFAST



Brannon Theisse



Tony Bradley

The Jonesboro Regional Chamber of Commerce hosted the 2024 Agri-Business breakfast at the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas facilities in Jonesboro. The Ag Business committee headed the planning and operations for the event to help bring the agriculture community together.

The Agri-Business breakfast also helps to strengthen the future of the next generation of agricultural leaders by supporting the A-State Agri-Business scholarship.

Congratulations to Tony Bradley and Brannon Theisse for receiving the 2024 awards. Bradley received the Farmer of the Year award, and Theisse received the Agri-Business Person of the Year award.



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2024 PARAGOULD CHAMBER SHOWCASE

This year's Chamber Showcase was a blast! It was an exciting opportunity for businesses and individuals to connect, network, and explore the diverse array of products and services available from Chamber businesses.

We celebrated creativity and innovation by awarding prizes to the best-decorated booths, all in line with our sitcom theme: "Chamber Showcase: Season 17 - Where Business Meets Laughter." 1st Place went to the Paragould School District; 2nd Place - Arkansas Methodist Medical Center; 3rd Place - Greene County Farm Bureau.



Gabby Powell



Alyssa Blakeney, Allison Hestand, Teresa Branch, Robin Clark



1st Place - Paragould School District



2nd Place - Arkansas Methodist Medical Center



3rd Place - Greene Co. Farm Bureau

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Special Section



Spring means it's time to take the kids out to play, so catch up on the know with this quarter's Kids Play special section!

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