

# Community Matters

MAY-JULY 2024

PRESENTED BY

# The Cullman Tribune.

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## STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL PLANS DEVELOPING RAPIDLY

### Festival Parade Route

The Ninth Annual Strawberry Festival Parade route has been mapped out for May 6. The parade will begin at the corner of Werdt's Grocery Store, 100 East St. It will travel north 1 to the Southern Bell Tele- turn right and

### Prize Winning Floats In Strawberry Festival Parade



### Debt Of Howard To Be Wiped Out By Ala. Baptists

IAM — Baptists of buckled down in task of wiping out ge of the \$65,000 of Howard College, reports reaching Ford, president of tional Life Insu- and prominent race, who has ac- pe manship of the raise this sum. Gymist churches. He have literal- 'armor' in this stated today, s are enterasti- ally into cent session Convention convention, to 10 dis- and two t. show a in Ho- tists, a hat Ho- herance pe state se during at the vall'll be Gray. THE s her ate Mrs. I res- Sunde- Church, to B. Y. F. Service Dt. You a.

### Effort Beir Improve

AUBURN— purbed s here the foundation dairy production of Alabama was work by F. W. chairman of the hnic Institute. Burns said f behind the calf be to develop an bred cattle in the to increase the average herd. He said how, to be accomplish- 500 pounds of ri- of hatterfat man high production, 11 than type from Av- the man who s d- bred animals. sions for the ese obtained from Bush club" bill, given a o i in- ment of s di- and s clean named f a old the the possi- er works old of the s arated to avoid The can be sture or ds follow- Count to be push already, round. full feed on the graz- ar pounds of



Strawberry Time In Cullman This cash crop of the Spring bringing \$300,000 to Cullman County this year.

Center: Miss tempted.

### Local Man Designs And Builds Modern Strawberry Grading Plant

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MISS BETTY BUCHMANN, beautiful daughter of Mrs. Buchmann, was the Princess of the first annual Strawberry Festival.



A FIELD OF THE FAMED CULLMAN COUNTY STRAWBERRIES on the farm of strawberry grower Aldredge on the Double... Eleanore Mitchell and Martha Kate Nash industriously g...

Walsh Tr...  
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Mrs. Elizabeth...  
Mrs. B...  
The...  
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ing your...  
connections with Northern...  
Best Prices, pack your berries in g...  
MAN HATCHERY AND PK...  
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**Church News**

**CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
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Bible School, 10:00 A. M.  
Worship and Preaching, 11:00 A. M.  
Preaching, 7:30 P. M.  
Tuesday Service

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# Advertiser Index

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**SATURDAY, MAY 13th, 1939 10 A. M.**

MAKE APPLICATIONS AT LYRIC THEATRE  
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ATTEND

**CULLMAN STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL**

- Alex Chaney - 19
- Ballet South - Brooke Desnoës Ballet Academy - 29
- Carlton's Italian - 54
- Citizens Bank & Trust - 23
- City of Cullman - 11
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**ANOTHER STAR FALLS ON Alabama...**

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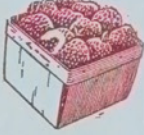
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## Community Matters

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# Be a local tourist

## How to spend a day in Cullman

**Cayla Grace Murphy**  
caylagrace@cullmantribune.com

**Y**ou don't have to drive to Huntsville or Birmingham for a fun-filled day with great meals and experiences; between the busy Warehouse District and peaceful parks, upscale dining and meat-and-threes, along with plenty of spaces for indoor or outdoor recreation, there's an abundance of opportunity to experience our community in a new way.

This summer, think like a tourist and bust out of your hometown box to experience Cullman with fresh eyes. Check out the guide below for some ideas to make the perfect date night or self-care day - no matter what your budget!

\*Price ranges are based on two people and are subject to change.

### \$15

#### ICE CREAM SOCIAL AT SEVEN DAUGHTERS SCOOPS

In the dog days of summer, you can find yourself begging for relief from the thick humid heat, and few things are more refreshing than a sweet scoop of creamy, delicious ice cream. If you're on a budget, but still want to support a small business, take your date to Cullman's newest ice cream shop, Seven Daughters Scoops!

With a chiller packed full of rotating flavors like peanut butter cookie dough, banana cream pie and espresso Oreos,

and even sugar-free options like pomegranate swirl and cashews and caramel, you're sure to find a flavor to please!

Seven Daughters Scoops is located at 1600 Second Ave. NW.

#### Shopping list:

- Ice cream for two, approximately \$15 with tip

### \$50

#### HISTORICAL TOUR OF CULLMAN

If you and your partner are more for the historical and educational side of things, consider a tour of museums in our area! First, stop by the Cullman County Museum to learn about Cullman before it was known as Cullman.

With exhibits showcasing Native American artifacts, pieces of pioneer life and relics of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras, you will be well informed of the historical significance of the community.

Next, stop by Cullman's historic Ave Maria Grotto, known for its landscaped hillside of 125 miniatures of historic places and shrines from around the world crafted by Brother Joseph Zoetl, a monk of the Abbey for almost 70 years.

You're sure to find yourself a bit peckish after a morning of learning, so stop by Busy Bee Cafe, Cullman's oldest restaurant, established in 1919. Their signature "bread burgers" are a welcome treat on a hot summer afternoon!

The Cullman County Museum is located at 211 Second Ave. NE.

The Ave Maria Grotto is located at 1600 St. Bernard Drive.

The Busy Bee Cafe is located at 101 Fifth St. SE.

#### Shopping list:

- Admission to the Cullman County Museum, \$10
- Admission to the Ave Maria Grotto, \$20
- Lunch for two at Busy Bee Cafe, approximately \$20 with tip

### \$75

#### FARMERS MARKET AND MERCANTILE

It's almost summer, the sun is shining and fresh produce is rolling in faster than local farmers can set it up at the Feshhalle. Take a Saturday morning stroll and soak up the sights and sounds of the Feshhalle and up the ante by preparing brunch with ingredients sourced from local farmers!

Colorful yard eggs and fresh herbs make delicious omelets, and fresh baked sourdough bread makes a great toasty accompaniment.

Consider picking up a colorful bouquet of florals while you're at it for the table! After the shops in the Warehouse District are officially open, pop into Ashley Mercantile for a fun condiment like locally made hot sauce or honey, then grab a couple of to-go coffees from Karma's Coffee House located just a door down.

Your Saturday morning brunch is complete! Keep in mind that most vendors at the Feshhalle only accept cash, so bring cash or be prepared to use the ATM located onsite.

The Feshhalle Farmers Market is located at 209 First Ave. NE.

Ashley Mercantile is located at 105 First Ave. NE.

Karma's Coffee House is located at 103 First Ave. NE.

#### Shopping list:

- Fresh eggs, produce, bread and flowers from Feshhalle market vendors, approximately \$40
- Two to-go coffees from Karma's Coffee House, approximately \$10 with tip
- Fun and fancy condiments from Ashley Mercantile, approximately \$25

### \$150

#### PISTOLS, PASTA AND PINOT

Maybe you and your date are a little more on the extreme sports side, but still want to enjoy some air conditioning in the harsh summer heat? Enjoy an afternoon at the (indoor) shooting range of Cullman Shooting Sports!

After an hour of sharpening your shot and working up an appetite, head on over to Carlton's Italian Restaurant in downtown Cullman, which is just a five-minute drive from the shooting range.

Carlton's offers a range of pastas, sandwiches and »

salads sure to satisfy any hunger!

After lunch, stop by Cullman's newest purveyor of pinots and all things wine related: Gervais & Lulu. Owner Vincent Desnoes will be happy to walk you through his offerings of European vino to make the perfect selection for your nightcap.

Cullman Shooting Sports is located at 593 Alabama Highway 69 N.

Carlton's Italian Restaurant is located at 208 Third Ave. SE.

Gervais & Lulu is located at 402 Fifth St. SE.

**Shopping list:**

- One hour reservation for pistol range lane, nonmember, \$25
- Extra person for pistol range lane, \$15
- Lunch for two at Carlton's, approximately \$60 with tip
- Bottle of wine from Gervais & Lulu, approximately \$50

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# Summer fun in the Cullman sun

**Cheyenne Sharp**  
cheyenne@cullmantribune.com

**W**hen deciding on a summer vacation, plans can hinge on a variety of contingencies such as exactly how much time off of work is required and how much money can be budgeted. Exotic and far away vacations can be thrilling, relaxing and mostly a good time; however, "staycations" can be just as fulfilling.

Cullman County is home to dozens of parks, campsites, attractions, water parks and more. There is an incredible number of staycation options for you to make the most out of your sweet summertime - you might just discover a good time in your own back yard.

## CAMPING

The campgrounds throughout Cullman County range from primitive to full-on glamping in cabins and decked-out RVs. No matter the outdoor proclivity of each camper, one of the facilities is sure to make everyone happy while exploring the great outdoors.

**Smith Lake Park**  
Smith Lake Park is a county park that may be spotted in this article multiple times, as the offerings and amenities are plentiful. However, when it comes to camping, Smith Lake Park offers three choices for campers: primitive tent sites for those who truly want to "rough it," private cabin rentals and, for the ones who bring home with them, RV camping sites.

The tent sites are situated on grassy knolls, surrounded by trees and located in close proximity to the public bathhouse. These sites run \$28 each night,

or \$158 for a weeklong visit. Smith Lake's RV sites are a little different with gravel pads and water/electric hookups. Rates for an RV site are \$42 nightly or \$252 for one week. Any one of the park's nine cabins ranges in price; rates from March through October are \$65 a night, and from November to February rates drop to \$45. Visit [cullmancountyparks.com](http://cullmancountyparks.com) or call 256-739-2916 for more information.

### Palomino RV Resort

This cozy newer resort is located on County Road 222, very near to Exit 305 off Interstate 65. The historic property was home to the Evelyn Burrow Museum until its transfer to Wallace State Community College. With 110 acres of hills and green grass, Palomino may feel more like home than home does.



**Beating the summer heat doesn't have to be expensive or a long journey away. Cullman County has many options available to make the most of summer break.**

The RV sites on the grounds of the Palomino are gravel lots with water/electric hookups, and \$49.50 a night will grant

you access to the park as well as the amenities it offers. This park offers "glamping" as well, a modern spin on traditional

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tent camping. The Palomino has taken the comforts of home and added them into a tent setting, making even the most high-maintenance person one with nature. Glamping site rates are \$109.50 each night. Visit [palominorvresort.com](http://palominorvresort.com) or call 256-737-0220 for more information.

**Arrowhead RV Park**

This park offers RV sites with gravel lots with rates set at \$50 nightly. Arrowhead RV Resort is located at 761 County Road 941. Visit [arrowheadrvsmithlake.com](http://arrowheadrvsmithlake.com) or call 256-747-2519 for more information.

**Cullman Campground**

Located at 220 County Road 1185, Cullman campground offers RV sites as well as tiny cabins that are available for nightly and weekly rentals. Rates at Cullman Campground fluctuate; booking information can be found by calling the park at 257-734-5853 or visiting [cullmancampgroundal.com](http://cullmancampgroundal.com).

**SWIMMING AND WATER PLAY**

**Smith Lake Park**

For the second (but not last) time, Smith Lake Park landed on our list, this time as a swimming destination to beat the summer heat. In addition to the public beaches and waterfront areas that accommodate swimmers, picnickers and sunbathers, Smith Lake Park is also home to one of Cullman’s public swimming pools.

The pool is open from Memorial Day until Labor Day (at the time of publication, anticipated daily hours of operation were not available); shallow and deep portions along with two diving boards are certain to entertain swimmers of all ages. Admission for any swimmer aged 5 and older is \$5, with the little fishes aged 4 and younger admitted to the pool for \$3.50. Visit [cullmancountyparks.com](http://cullmancountyparks.com)

or call 256-739-2916 for more information.

**Hanceville Pool**

The Hanceville city pool is located at C.W. Day Park at 100 Michelle Street. The pool is home to a rock climbing wall that overlooks and overhangs the deep end of the pool, a diving board, diving platform, small slide, a shallow section and a separate toddler/child pool set to the side. Admission is \$5 for guests aged 13 and older, \$4 for children ages 6 to 13, and \$3 for children under 6, seniors over the age of 60, Wallace State students and military and first responders. Visit [cityofhanceville.net](http://cityofhanceville.net) or call 256-352-1205.

**Cullman Wellness and Aquatic Center**

CWAC boasts an Olympic-sized swimming pool for recreation and scheduled classes such as water aerobics and swimming lessons. While CWAC is a membership-only pool, guests are welcome to purchase a day pass for \$10. CWAC is located at 1636 Field of Miracles Drive SW and more information can be found by calling 256-775-7946 or by visiting [cullmanwellness.com](http://cullmanwellness.com).

**Splash pads**

Some of Cullman’s other community parks have amazing water features and free splash pads to help make the most out of a summer break. Find them at Heritage Park (1705 Lee Ave. SW), Nesmith Park (311 McNabb Dr. SW) or Sportsman Lake Park (1544 Sportsman Lake Road NW).

**WildWater**

WildWater is one of Cullman’s newer additions; beginning as an expansion to CWAC, the park has exploded into a full-blown water theme park with a wave pool, lazy river, high diving boards, a children’s pool/slide area and an amazing eight slides. WildWater is located at

1707 Main Ave. SW. Children can enjoy the water park for \$29.99 and adults for \$34.99. Visit [wildwatercullman.com](http://wildwatercullman.com) for more information.

**Palomino RV Resort Slippery Summit Aqua Park**

Palomino boasts one of the largest inflatable aqua parks in Alabama: the Slippery Summit Aqua Park, with inflatable slides, obstacles and a launching pad, all for \$15 for an hour session (\$10 if you’re staying at the resort). Slippery Summit is open Friday-Sunday from Memorial Day until Labor Day. Visit [slipperysummit.com](http://slipperysummit.com) or call 256-737-0220 for more information.

**PARKS**

Many of the local parks in the

city of Cullman and Cullman County are an excellent backdrop for hours and afternoons of adventure. With volleyball courts, football fields, dog parks, miles and miles of trails, concession stands and even a train or two, it’s easy to find a park right for you and your family.

**Find a list of:**

- Regional parks at [www.cullmanrecreation.org/community-parks](http://www.cullmanrecreation.org/community-parks)
- Community parks at [www.cullmanrecreation.org/regional-parks](http://www.cullmanrecreation.org/regional-parks)
- Neighborhood parks at [www.cullmanrecreation.org/neighborhood-parks](http://www.cullmanrecreation.org/neighborhood-parks)
- Cullman County parks at [www.cullmancountyparks.com](http://www.cullmancountyparks.com)

**THANK YOU**  
**FROM DR. SHANE BARNETTE**

**CULLMAN COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT**

**I am excited about our school system's future!**

# WILDWATER:

## A successful cannonball for the community

### Gauge Day

gauge@cullmantribune.com

Since the grand opening in 2022 of WildWater, a massive expansion of the outdoor recreation area at the Cullman Wellness and Aquatic Center, the water park has not only offered an escape from the summer heat, but also fostered a space where families can create lasting memories.

Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Executive Director Nathan Anderson shared the inspiration behind this beloved local attraction, saying, "The inception of the expanded WildWater Park Cullman was driven by a unified vision from City leadership and community stakeholders to enhance outdoor recreational experiences for local families. Inspired by Cullman's ideal location and strong regional interest in water parks, it was clear that we needed to look at expanding our water park to further elevate the refreshing escape that WildWater has provided every summer for more than a decade."

At the heart of WildWater lie the core values of safety, friendliness and fun. With a powerful vision statement to match, "For every person to have the opportunity to get out and live," this has allowed WildWater to be a success. With safety at the forefront, this commitment ensures that every visitor, regardless of age or ability, can enjoy the park's attractions with peace of mind.

The local community has



CULLMAN PARKS, RECREATION & SPORTS TOURISM

**An aerial capture of WildWater and the unique, compact footprint of all the fun attractions the water park has to offer.**

largely embraced WildWater since its inception.

"Since our grand opening, WildWater Cullman has been warmly embraced by the local community. We've witnessed an outpouring of support, with families flocking to the park to create lasting memories together.

"Moreover, our presence has had a positive economic impact, boosting tourism and creating job opportunities for residents.

"With over 85,000 visitors each season, this marks a remarkable 450% increase over the previous water park's best year," Anderson shared, explaining the impact that the park has already had in the community.

While other water parks are not too far away for those willing to drive to them,

WildWater offers a unique experience for the whole family with its compact footprint, allowing families to be close to all the action without having to hike long distances to the next attraction.

Seen from a distance with its complex twists and turns, the Slide Tower has an impressive seven different slides branching off the main structure, elevating the efficient design within a smaller footprint.

There are plenty of slides and attractions for attendees to take part in, but WildWater General Manager Michael Schwitek expressed his fondness for his favorite attraction, the Rally Racer.

"My favorite attraction is the Rally Racer because it allows you to race your friends going head-first down a twisty water-slide to the finish line," he said,

"and it even shows your race time at the bottom for an extra competitive edge."

With lots of fun to be had, ensuring the safety and accessibility of its attractions is paramount at WildWater. All lifeguards are Red Cross certified in water rescues, CPR, AED and basic first aid. The park collaborates with industry professionals to meet or exceed safety standards, offering a range of attractions from kid friendly to thrilling to ensure accessibility to all.

The park prides itself on providing a safe, family friendly atmosphere.

Feedback from visitors, especially those traveling from other cities, highlights WildWater as a "safer, newer and more friendly" experience compared to regional alternatives. »



When asked about the future of WildWater and the possibility of new attractions, Schwitek hinted, "Yes, but we aren't quite ready to release

the levee on that yet. Just know that we are always working to make the park better for our guests!"

For those interested in

learning more about WildWater Cullman or planning a visit, information is available at [www.WildWaterCullman.com](http://www.WildWaterCullman.com). Additionally, the park is hiring

for over 100 positions for the summer. For those interested in becoming potential team members, visit [www.wildwatercullman.com/jobs](http://www.wildwatercullman.com/jobs).



**Thank you, Cullman, for the best 80 years of our lives.**



In 1943, when the Paul R. Knight Insurance Company opened its doors in downtown Cullman, there was no way of knowing what the future would bring. Paul Knight was a 30-something father of three, registered for the World War II draft, with no idea that his new venture would not only succeed but would ultimately pass down through three generations of his family. Then his son-in-law Elliot Free joined the business in 1970, the agency was re-named Knight-Free, and the rest is history.

But it's a history that wouldn't have happened without you, Cullman. We never forget that. For 80 years, you've trusted us to insure your homes, your cars, your businesses, your lives. You've become our friends, our neighbors, and our reason to turn up at the office every day. You're also the reason that, after all these years, Elliot's son Wescoat Free is still running the independent insurance agency that bears his family name. And, for that, we can't thank you enough.



Your agents. Your neighbors. Your friends. For three generations.

# Mark your calendars!

## Cheyenne Sharp

cheyenne@cullmantribune.com

Cullman is the place to be this time of year, with a range of entertainment options for families and people of all ages. Choices range from fun festivals to date-night-worthy galas. Not many days go by during the warmer months when the streets of downtown or surrounding areas aren't bustling with excitement and laughter. So grab your walking shoes, sunscreen and camera, and get out there!

### ALABAMA STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

- Date: Friday-Saturday, May 3-4
- Time: See [www.alabamastrawberryfest.com](http://www.alabamastrawberryfest.com)
- Location: Depot Park and Cullman Festhalle
- Admission: Free (Tickets required for some live entertainment – see [www.alabamastrawberryfest.com/tickets](http://www.alabamastrawberryfest.com/tickets))
- More info: [www.alabamastrawberryfest.com](http://www.alabamastrawberryfest.com)

The Alabama Strawberry Festival is one of Cullman's largest gatherings. Known for decades as the Cullman Strawberry Festival, the event is now a state festival due to its popularity and attendance. The recently expanded festival spans two days with a full calendar of events and more than 80 unique vendors. There will be tons of activities for all ages, along with live music, with a full lineup

including headliners Niko Moon and the Eli Young Band. VIP Experience and Premium General Admission tickets are available for the live music portion of the festival.

### VINEMONT'S FARMERS AND MAKERS MARKET

- Date: Saturday, May 11
- Time: 10 a.m.-2 p.m.
- Location: Vinemont Community Center
- Admission: Free
- More info: [www.facebook.com/townofsouthvinemont](http://www.facebook.com/townofsouthvinemont)

The inaugural Vinemont's Farmers and Makers Market will take place May 11. The one-day market will showcase some of the town's local artisans and growers; the area is rich with small, family owned farms. The market is an avenue for farmers and makers to showcase their goods. There will be around 60 vendors, including locally grown produce, sweet stands and food trucks.

### DINNER ON FIRST

- Date: Saturday, May 18
- Time: See [www.cullmanrecreation.org/dinner-on-first](http://www.cullmanrecreation.org/dinner-on-first)
- Location: First Avenue in the Cullman Warehouse District
- Admission: Tables and seats available for auction at <https://cprs.betterworld.org/auctions/dinner-first-2024>
- More info: [www.cullmanrecreation.org/dinner-on-first](http://www.cullmanrecreation.org/dinner-on-first)

Hosted by the Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Foundation, Dinner on First

is an elegant affair held each year along First Avenue in downtown Cullman's Warehouse District. Guests will enjoy fine dining under the sparkling lights, with a special meal prepared by Dyrone's Lowcountry. The event will also feature complimentary table wine as well as a full cash bar. The evening is a fundraiser for this year's CPRST Foundation project, expanding the playground and splash pad at Heritage Park to create a more inclusive space for the community. The expansion will allow more families to enjoy the facilities together and include additional accessible

features, ensuring that everyone, regardless of age or ability, can join in the fun.

### SMITH LAKE MEMORIAL DAY FESTIVAL

- Date: Saturday, May 25
- Time: 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
- Location: Smith Lake Park
- Admission: Free
- More info: [www.facebook.com/SmithLakePark](http://www.facebook.com/SmithLakePark)

Smith Lake is Cullman's largest outdoor recreation area, with a public beach for swimming and kayaking to a full boat launch for those who want a day on the water – and »

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\*Mini- Intensive: June 10 -June 20 (ages 9 & up )

\*Strictly Ballet Workshop: July 8-July 12 (ages 9 & up)

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Open to the Public

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July 12 @ 12:30 p

Showcase Performance Location: "The Performance Center " (Logan Street)

not just a dip. Smith Lake Park holds this festival yearly, featuring vendors, food trucks, children's activities and fun for all ages, including the popular golf cart parade. There will also be live entertainment on stage.

**HANCEVILLE GRILLED CHEESE FESTIVAL**

- Date: Saturday, May 25
- Time: 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
- Location: Commercial Street downtown
- Admission: Free
- More info: [www.visitcullman.com/event/hanceville-grilled-cheese-festival-2024](http://www.visitcullman.com/event/hanceville-grilled-cheese-festival-2024)

This festival is filled with gooey, cheesy goodness. There will be several food trucks with cheesy treats, and live entertainment will be provided by local favorites Junction 231. Children can enjoy face painting, balloon twisting and other activities geared toward kids.

**2ND FRIDAYS**

- Date: Second Friday in June, July and August
- Time: 5 p.m.
- Location: Downtown Cullman/Warehouse District
- Admission: Free
- More info: [www.cullmanchamber.org/homepage/2nd-fridays-cullman](http://www.cullmanchamber.org/homepage/2nd-fridays-cullman)

2nd Fridays are community-wide events hosted by the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce. Attendees flock to the Warehouse District and the surrounding area to shop vendors and businesses, as well as enjoy family friendly entertainment, rides and

activities. These evenings are a summertime favorite.

**SECOND ANNUAL HIPPIE FEST**

- Date: Saturday, June 15
- Time: 10 a.m.
- Location: Arrowhead RV Park
- Admission: Free
- More info: <https://tinyurl.com/ArrowheadHippieFest>

Arrowhead RV Park had such amazing success in 2023 with its first festival, it's throwing the second annual Hippie Fest June 15. The summertime festival will be a hot spot for local vendors and makers looking to sell and showcase their creations. There will be live music from local artists like Jesse Priest and games and activities for children.

**SPORTSMAN LAKE PARK SUMMER YARD SALE**

- Date: Saturday, June 15
- Time: 7 a.m.-3 p.m.
- Location: Sportsman Lake

Park

- Admission: Free
- More info: [www.facebook.com/SportsmanLakePark](http://www.facebook.com/SportsmanLakePark)

This sale is a community favorite, with tons of people set up in the park selling their goods. As a bonus, the park also boasts a splash pad, children's train and miniature golf course, as well as a newly renovated playground.

**SMITH LAKE PARK 4TH OF JULY FIREWORKS FESTIVAL**

- Date: Thursday, July 4
- Time: 9 a.m.-9 p.m.
- Location: Smith Lake Park
- Admission: Free
- More info: [www.facebook.com/SmithLakePark](http://www.facebook.com/SmithLakePark)

A summertime classic, Smith Lake Park Fourth of July festivities are a staple of Cullman County. This annual festival will kick off in the morning, featuring food vendors, arts and crafts vendors, entertainment and more. It will wrap up

with the highly anticipated, dazzling fireworks display over the water. This festival is a full day of fun.

**ROCK THE SOUTH**

- Date: Thursday-Saturday, July 18-20
- Time: See [www.rockthesouth.com](http://www.rockthesouth.com)
- Location: York Farms, 1872 County Road 469, Cullman, AL 35057
- Admission: Varies (See [www.rockthesouth.com/tickets](http://www.rockthesouth.com/tickets))
- More info: [www.RocktheSouth.com](http://www.RocktheSouth.com)

Rock the South is Cullman's largest live music event and a regional favorite, drawing fans from all over the country and even the world. This year's three-day event boasts big names like Eric Church, Hardy, Jelly Roll, Nelly and more. Tickets vary widely in price. Visit the event website for more details on admission, attractions, RV and car camping and more.

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# Drifters on the Lake coming to Smith Lake

**Lauren Estes**  
lauren@cullmantribune.com

**A** new bar and grill, Drifters on the Lake, is set to open on Smith Lake in location formerly known as Brothers on Smith Lake. As of printing, it is tentatively set to open to the public on May 2, 2024.

Owners Jason and Tanya Veres said the name translated from their love of the lake - drifting down the water and watching the sunsets.

Drifters will have a full menu with some local favorites, along with several new items.

"Our menu will have items from steak, chicken, fish, several different types of seafood, sandwiches, salads and more," Tanya Veres said. "We haven't released the full range menu yet, but we are so excited for what's to come."

Veres said the goal for the new restaurant is simple: provide an atmosphere you want to come back to and food that guests will love.

"We want to be a place where people can come and eat and have a good time with family and friends, whether it be by land or boat," she said. "We want to be known for good food and a pleasant, welcoming

experience well worth any drive to get here. Also, we are about 12 minutes from I-65."

Veres said the couple has owned a couple of businesses in the past, so the business world and being entrepreneurs isn't new to them.

"We have lived on the lake in the past and always wanted to have a restaurant on the water," she said.

"We work very well together, and this has kind of just been a thought, or really dream, and we are excited and grateful for the opportunity to be able to serve here on beautiful Smith Lake."

Veres said Drifters on the

Lake will be a great getaway for fun and good food for anyone looking for something different.

"We don't have a target audience at Drifter's - we want to cater to everyone while maintaining a wholesome family atmosphere where people feel welcome, want to come eat and enjoy the view," she said. "We will have a whole new menu and bar list for guests to enjoy."

Karaoke and live music are also on the menu.

Drifters on the Lake is located at 173 County Road 312 in Cullman. Find out more by going to "Drifters Bar & Grill" on Facebook or calling 256-814-1515.

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# ON THE RECORD

## Neil Watts keeps legacy of vinyl alive in Hanceville

**Cayla Grace Murphy**

caylagrace@cullmantribune.com

Nestled on the historic main street of Hanceville, Blue Moon Records stands out from the aged brick and concrete with a bold blue banner that beckons passersby to check out the wares. Entering the shop is like time traveling back to the grooviest decades of music. Shirts and collectibles line the walls and shelves leaving hardly a blank space, and the floor is well stocked with thousands of records catering to every music genre imaginable. Owner Neil Watts sits in the front of the shop, happy to answer any questions and give recommendations to budding vinyl enthusiasts and seasoned record collectors alike.

"I was always collecting records, and have been since I was probably 12 years old. I started in the 60s, and it's still my favorite music, probably '69 to '74," grinned Watts, gesturing to a shelf behind the counter housing vintage gems like Black Sabbath and Grateful Dead records.

Watts said while he's always been a collector, being exposed to used records in the late 70s is really what set the gears in motion for being a future record shop owner.

"I could probably tell you the exact day," laughed Watts. "In 1977, Charlemagne in Birmingham opened in Five Points. A friend took me and my life was changed! I could



**Blue Moon Records Owner Neil Watts shows off one of his newest offerings, patches for denim and leather jackets.**

CAYLA GRACE MURPHY/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

buy a record for less than half price. That's when my collecting really took off."

Watts said those collections eventually headed to storage through the years as he focused on his jewelry business, then buying and selling CDs.

The records were pulled out once again on a whim when his wife mentioned giving them a try as CD sales were dwindling with the rise of digital music libraries like iTunes.

"We put those (records) in there, and within two weeks we had made enough just off of record sales to pay the rent

for the month," smiled Watts. "It worked, and it just mushroomed after that, kept getting bigger and bigger. We ended up with four booths in that place, finally felt like we were making some money!"

He mentioned that as the booths kept taking off, a solo storefront was looking more and more reasonable, and with a prime spot in Hanceville's main street area coming available, the choice was a no-brainer.

"I had been looking at this building forever because my jewelry store used to be down

here on the corner in the 80s," said Watts, explaining that the big move finally came in October 2019, right before the world shut down as COVID-19 spread the country.

"We were deemed unessential, but COVID did help us in a way. The price and demand of records went up substantially during those couple of years," Watts said, explaining that with many festivals and concerts set on the back burner pending a flattened curve, buying recorded music became a gap filler for many music enthusiasts, »

once again bolstering the vinyl industry and bringing records back into the mainstream.

Watts explained that while physical customers were few and far between during the shutdowns, there was no shortage of folks trying to get rid of their collections, and he was happy to take them off their hands, explaining that most of his shop stock still comes from buying entire collections.

"I get better deals buying by collections or in bulk, but I do also get online and buy them," Watts said, saying that while Blue Moon offers a wide variety of genres, classic rock remains in highest demand.

By keeping the genre in stock, fresh and rotated, Watts has put himself on the map

and has become a go-to in the region for those seasoned vinyl enthusiasts seeking out the classics.

"Part of my niche here is really the top 100 of classic rock, like Led Zeppelin, The Beatles, Lynyrd Skynyrd," nodded Watts, saying that if he comes across a record from that golden age of rock, he'll always snatch it up.

Watts says his client base varies widely in age and class: from kids who get a turntable for Christmas, teenage hipsters branching into collecting counter-culture vinyl and adults soaking in the nostalgia of a record store reminiscent of shops past.

"Everybody has different reasons," Watts shrugged, but he said a big spike in record

sales can be attributed to many consumers feeling disenchanted with streaming platforms.

"Watts emphasized that even with digital downloads, consumers are at the mercy of the technology staying relevant in an ever-changing world of software updates and outages.

With the rise of records, comes the rise of purchase price of records.

Watts recalled the good old days of securing a prized vinyl for very little, but suggested for those wanting to get into collecting vinyl these days to be prepared to spend a little more - especially for those high-demand classic rock albums.

"This is going to sound bad, but it can be very expensive. A

typical purchase here, maybe three or four good records, can be over \$100," he noted, stating that despite a rocky economy, business remains booming for Blue Moon, and he hopes to keep the flow going to meet demand.

"I've probably bought over 2,000 records this year alone, since Jan. 1," he laughed. "It's keeping me busy!" Watts said he's excited to see the future growth of the record industry, and he hopes to remain a mainstay for collectors in the Southeast

He encouraged music and nostalgia enthusiasts to come visit the shop, located at 108 Main St. SE in Hanceville. The shop is open Wednesday through Saturday from 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

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# 'Find what you love - and give it your all'



BARRY EGE

**Barry Ege, 71, said if he gets four more races of the marathon distance or longer, that will give him 100 races at the 26.2-plus distance, and that is the goal he is working on now.**

**Lauren Estes**  
lauren@cullmantribune.com

**A**t 71, Barry Ege has been running for fun and competitively for three decades, and it seems he has only got better with age.

"I started running in 1993, 31 years ago," Ege said. "I try to run two races a month. And to keep my current running streak going since May 18, 2019, I've only missed 43 days. My current streak is 413 days of running.

Ege said his running adventure began because of his father being put on hospice.

"My wife took care of my dad during the day and me at night," he explained. "We moved out of our house and moved in with him for about a year to care for him. I just started exercising in the house just to help pass the time during this part of my life. After he passed I just started walking. Then my old running buddy told me about the midnight run that was coming up in a few

months. So I started adding jogging to my walking. In about three months I did my first 5K. After the first 5K I was hooked and I haven't stopped racing since then."

Over the years, Ege has definitely had some racing highlights, including running the 101st Boston Marathon.

"I qualified on my second marathon for the Boston Marathon," Ege said.

"When I qualified, I over-trained for the race for about six months. I knew something was wrong with my leg, but I had already registered and paid - so I went. I ran the 101st Boston Marathon on April 21, 1997, with a time of 3:52:57 - one of my slowest marathons. And boy did I pay for it the next day, I could barely walk

"I went to the doctor when I got home and had a bad stress fracture. I still had a great time in Boston. The people in the whole city are cheering for you every step of the way.

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Ege said he has done 270 races, including 5Ks, 10Ks, 10-milers and odd trail races. He has completed 66 half marathons and 96 marathons or longer distances.

"Another race that stands out above the fold is the Umstead 100-miler," Ege said. "I ran it on April 5, 2003. My running buddy kept trying to get me to do Massanutten Mountain Trail 100-miler, but I would never commit. He went on and won the race. I

decided to run one and I found and registered for Umstead. It is a 10-mile loop you run 10 times.

"It was my first 100-miler and I was really nervous, not really knowing what to expect. My training was going well for a few 60-mile weeks.

"I liked the running the loops, the weather was great except for the pine pollen. It was like running in a yellow fog all night. It was great to see my wife Joanna on each loop.

"She fell asleep and missed my finish but by far Umstead was easier than my two other 100s. I guess it was the runners high on my first 100. I felt great the entire race."

Ege said if he gets four more races of the marathon distance or longer, that will give him 100 races at the 26.2-plus distance, and that is the goal he is working on now.

"My advice to myself and others - just keep doing the hard things," Ege said.

"And an old runner friend used to say, 'Your body is like that old antique truck - you just gotta keep cranking it up every day.' To the brand new runners: go to a running store and figure out what shoes are right for you.

"And don't increase your running mileage more than 10% a week. No matter what you do, give it your all. I just want to keep doing what I love. Find what you love - and give it your all."



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# 'Y'all come see us!'

## The Downtown Grill celebrates another year of serving Cullman

**Cayla Grace Murphy**

caylagrace@cullmantribune.com

The sound of laughter mingles with a soft backbeat of classic rock. Servers file in and out of swinging doors, refilling glasses of sweet tea with a smile and setting down plates of deliciously spiced hot wings and juicy burgers. Nearly every table has at least one order of the locally famous "ranch fries" - crispy fries topped with melty cheese, creamy ranch and signature Cajun seasoning. It's officially lunchtime at The Downtown Grill.

A real "hole in the wall" type of restaurant in the heart of the city, The Downtown Grill has been serving Cullman for years. Owners Justin and Sara Lee purchased the restaurant in 2014, and while an electrical fire in September 2021 put a pause to the legacy, the Lees put their blood, sweat and tears into renovating the space that is happy to be booming once again.

The Downtown Grill seems to be its own brand of sports bar; while it does have a full bar and frosty taps, the family atmosphere is what you'll notice first when you walk in. The Lees are extremely proud to have been able to cultivate this family-first feeling, and credit strong community ties for the friendly vibes you soak up as you enter; you're not just a guest, you're family, and they like it that way.

"We love to have a place



TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO.

**Downtown Grill Owners Sara Lee, left, and Justin Lee**

that people can come together to enjoy a nice meal and each other's company," smiled Sara Lee. "It is such an honor to be able to serve this community!"

While the Lees hold down the ownership fort, General Manager Ty Moses is one of the mainstay faces that customers see when dining at the Grill - an experience he describes as a "full circle" moment for someone who used to wash dishes at the same joint as a teenager.

"I worked here when I was in high school for Wayne Smith; I was 17 years old. I was just scrubbing dishes. Now I'm back here 20 years later, managing

the place," he smiled. "It feels nostalgic."

Moses said he hopes to continue bringing that same welcoming ambience that the Lees have strived to bring to the table, and said customers who frequent the Grill make it that much easier. Even with economic strain impacting much of the community, Moses said the restaurant has been busier than ever.

"The customer base and regulars we have, it keeps us going. Not just afloat, either - we stay consistently busy across the board," he said, but noted that it's not his glory to claim; he credits both the

kitchen and front of house staff for providing top-tier, fresh and fine service that keeps customers coming back.

"We're not a corporation, so the level of service you get is different here," he explained. "We can really go above and beyond."

Moses said being locally owned by genuine folks like the Lees who are earnestly involved in the community is truly the secret sauce to the success the Grill has enjoyed. While Cullman continues to grow, and new restaurants in the same niche continue to plant, he said The Downtown Grill intends to rest on its humble, local »



«  
**"All the way" burger**  
 »  
**Ranch fries**

PHOTOS: CAYLA GRACE MURPHY/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE



laurels and continue serving the community like it always has - with a few innovations here and there.

"We're standing 10 toes over here!" he joked as he hinted at new menu possibilities, including heartier, stick-to-your-ribs fare like pastas. In the meantime, Moses encouraged those who haven't been to The Downtown Grill, or maybe haven't been in a while, to stop in for lunch or dinner with the fam and enjoy the cuisine that

made the restaurant a mainstay. For those who may be first-timers, Moses had just two suggestions: whether you're going for a lighter lunch like a salad or slaying an order of wings, definitely order the ranch fries, and make sure to save room for their signature deep-fried banana pudding for dessert.


A final note from Moses? "Y'all come see us!" The Downtown Grill is located at 108 Fourth St. SW.



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# Pop's Cafe, where fine dining meets small-town comfort food

## Gauge Day

gauge@cullmantribune.com

In the charming city of Hanceville, Alabama, a culinary gem named Pop's Cafe has become the place where customers can experience the incredible fusion of a fine-dining style married with beloved hometown dishes. Founded by Craig Parker, a chef with a roving background in fine dining and a heart firmly rooted in his hometown of Hanceville, Pop's Cafe is more than just a place to eat; it's a homage to his father, known affectionately by the community as "Pop."

"I opened up the restaurant in his memory. He loved people. He loved food. When I retired from what I was doing, I opened this place. My sister opened the one in Moulton for the same reason. She has tons of pictures of Dad in her restaurant. I have pictures throughout the restaurant of my dad hanging out. We did it for him, something to keep him alive," Parker shared.

Parker's culinary journey began like many before him; he served as a waiter and bartender in local restaurants in Birmingham, eventually finding his passion in the restaurant business. Parker began to chase that passion, which led him to Atlanta, where he worked the next three years at a well-known establishment, Gordon Biersch, a higher-end German-style brewery restaurant.

It was here where Parker was given his first opportunity to help open a fine-dining restaurant, known as Bluewater »

Grille in. From there, Parker eventually make the jump to Chicago, continuing his culinary journey in a brand new location. Ten years passed before Parker decided it was time to head home, after learning that his father's health waned.

Parker made the move closer to home, landing in Mobile, working at the fine-dining establishment called Dauphin's, owned by the renowned restaurateur Bob Baumhower. It was during this time when Parker's father's health really began to decline, and he made the decision to return home to be beside him. Soon after, his beloved "Pop" passed away.

Parker returned to work for Baumhower, running five different restaurants at that point. After spending many years working for him and having learned much about the culinary world in that time, it was time to rest, and Parker's heart led him home for good.

Not being the type to sit still, the process of creating Pop's Café began.

"I was looking for a place in Cullman to open a small restaurant. I wanted to stay small. My sister had already opened hers at this point. So, we kept riding by this place which had been closed for quite some time, and I just kept coming back to this," Parker said. "Everyone around me kept telling to go to Hanceville, 'there's nothing there' and they kept saying 'meat and three, meat and three.' After about six weeks of just looking around and deciding what to do, this



**Craig Parker stands beside the iconic Pop's Cafe logo, which has an uncanny resemblance to the man himself.**

place just called our name."

Now, having been open for nearly two and a half years, Pop's Café has seen incredible success. With Parker's treasure trove of culinary expertise garnered from the many years spent in the restaurant business, Pop's Café has become a one-of-a-kind experience. A blend of the sophistication of fine dining with the warmth of a hometown diner, his unique vision is on full display.

Upon stepping into Pop's Cafe, patrons are enveloped in a casual, welcoming atmosphere that immediately feels like home. Photographs line the walls, with many of them showcasing his late father. Waiters and waitresses are abuzz with activity, ensuring each guest is welcomed and seated. Parker himself is usually manning the grill, working alongside his crew to help them learn and grow while adding his style to each dish. »

Dishes ranging from comfort classics to innovative creations reflect a fusion of high-end culinary art with the simplicity of local flavors. Pop's Café serves breakfast and lunch, with the traditional arrangement of meat and two or meat and three specials. Club sandwiches and many of the other usual café style food choices, influenced by Parker's unique style, line the menu. A standout menu item among these is the Katrina Fries, a dish that transcends the ordinary with its visually appealing presentation and mouth-watering flavors, embodying Parker's dedication to excellence in every aspect of his cooking.

"I named my fries after my nephew's wife, Katrina. She is the potato nerd in the family and she loves potatoes," he laughed. "Anytime I have new potato dishes, she comes out and approves them, and she

approved those."

The cafe has quickly grown from a new establishment to a local staple, with many customers becoming regulars, drawn in by the food's quality and the sense of community Parker has fostered. He encourages his staff to mingle with patrons, building relationships that extend beyond the dining table. This sense of belonging extends to the menu itself, with Parker often accommodating requests for dishes not listed, like the fried pork chop for a customer named Brenda.

"In the beginning, I didn't do pork chops. There was a little lady that comes in here, her name was Brenda, who has since passed away, and she says, 'Can you cook me a pork chop?' and I said, 'Yes I will,'" Parker said.

With the task at hand, he said, he started to gameplan in his head the various seasonings



CRAIG PARKER

*Pop's Cafe captures the essence of a small-town diner, inviting everyone in for a homemade dish of their choice.*

he might use or the way he would like to cook it.

"So, I cooked it and gave it to her, and she said, 'That was the best pork chop I have ever had in my life,'" he smiled.

Since that day, Parker has ensured pork chops remain a

staple on his menu in memory of Brenda.

Parker's commitment to quality extends to the ingredients he uses, with a strong emphasis on locally sourced produce. Spending hours each day visiting local »



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CRAIG PARKER

**Pop's Café's famous club sandwich, utilizing fresh ingredients daily**

markets after the cafe closes, he works to source as many of the freshest ingredients he can find to make their way into his kitchen. This dedication extends from daily market visits to sourcing tomatoes from Florida, ensuring that each dish served is a celebration of taste and freshness.

Pop's Café stands as more than just a restaurant; it's a place where people come to relax, enjoy each other's company and leave with not just a satisfied belly, but also a lighter heart.

For those looking to experience the magic of Pop's Cafe, the doors are open from 7 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday through Friday and 11 a.m.-3 p.m. on Sundays, ready to welcome anyone looking for a delicious meal or a place to call home. Whether you're craving the famous deep-fried apple pie, the hearty and potato nerd-approved Katrina Fries or the unique fine dining of the garlic butter salmon with wild rice, Pop's Cafe promises an experience that's as heartwarming as it is delicious.

Parkers's vision is simple

yet powerful: "We're here to create a great environment for everybody to come to enjoy

breakfast and lunch with some good food, good conversation and to go home happy. That's

what it's all about."

Pop's Cafe is located at 814 Main St. NE in Hanceville.

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# Kingdom Coffee, home of the 'dancing, preaching baristas'

**Cheyenne Sharp**

cheyenne@cullmantribune.com

**K**ingdom Coffee is a small, locally owned coffee shop. Owners/Operators Michael and Shalace Lake take every opportunity to get to know their customers, becoming friends and family in the process. It's an experience unlike one you'd get in a big chain establishment.

"We get to share the love of Yeshua with many whom we wouldn't be able to otherwise," Michael Lake said. "My wife even tells people sometimes, 'We are dancing, preaching, baristas.'"

Years of prayer and hard work came before Kingdom Coffee. The Lakes were deeply involved in their church, holding various evangelical roles throughout the years.

The couple opened The Kingdom Center, a place to share their testimonies and encourage all who enter to forge a close relationship with their savior. Eventually, The Kingdom Center was merged with the pair's home church, hoping to expand its outreach.

After a while of ministering from a leadership standpoint, they said, a prophetic calling from God led the family to a new church in North Carolina.

The problem was, the family resided in Cullman, hundreds of miles away from their new congregation.

Even from states away, the couple threw themselves into their new ministry roles through sporadic visits and live-streaming messages and sermons. Soon, the family began to prepare to uproot and move to North Carolina.

After series of questions from the Lakes and what they said were callings from the Lord, the Lakes started pulling away from that church in North Carolina; after years of multistate ministry, the Cullman natives once again felt the calling to relocate their ministry; this time, the relocation was home.

They said the lord was calling them to suspend plans to move and plant roots in their own backyard.

"It got so bad that at one point my wife posed the question to me, 'What if we are supposed to re-open The Kingdom Center?' I didn't want to do this; I didn't think we should," Lake said.

"A few weeks later, I went to the altar to pray. I was frustrated, asking the Father, 'What do you want me to do? Do you want me to reopen The Kingdom Center?' I heard in reply, simply, 'Yes.'"

And The Kingdom Center was born again. The Lakes began to hold services in their home's front yard; their first service was held, aptly, on Resurrection Sunday.

The spring, summer and early fall provided a comfortable and open environment for the outdoor sermons, but when the winter rolled around and the weather began to change, the Lakes had to get creative and invite their congregation inside their home to continue their ministry.

Things were growing increasingly uncomfortable and overcrowded in the couple's living room, so it was decided to search for a facility to house the parishioners each service.

While running errands in town, Shalace Lake stopped to admire an old building that



SHALACE LAKE/CHEYENNE SHARP

**Michael and Shalace Lake are the owner/operator duo behind Kingdom Coffee, a branch of their church.**

was once a diner, noting that a coffee shop would thrive in the storefront; a small dream of owning a coffee shop one day danced in her head. The very next morning, while Michael Lake was in prayer, he said, the ever-present voice of the Lord spoke to him once more.

"The next morning, I was in my prayer time and the voice of the Lord came to me and told me to 'Open the coffee shop first; it will support the ministry,'" Lake shared. "The Father led us to a building on the west side of town that was the site of the first coffee shop in our town several years ago, and the old owners were some ministry friends we had made when we first moved back. We knew none of this until later; nevertheless, Yeshua was in every detail."

Those details are what led the ministering couple to the coffee provider, Send Me Refuge, a similar ministry involved couple from Vinemont - Annette and

Archie Hand. Each bag of Send Me Refuge Coffee purchased aids in lifting families out of poverty, providing them with basic necessities and jobs to sustain those needs. The beans are harvested in Mexico and roasted by the Bergeron family in Selma.

Shalace Lake takes pride in the shop's ability to serve Send Me Refuge Coffee, saying, "We love the blueprint the Lord has given us because it's ministry here and ministry abroad."

The small coffee shop serves traditional favorites like iced lattes and drip americanos; specialty milkshakes and a substantial kids' menu, as well as a selection of pastries and croissants, make it the perfect stop for families and those who may not be coffee drinkers.

Kingdom Coffee is located at 100 Main Ave. NW. It is open Tuesday through Friday, from 6 a.m.-5:30 p.m. and Saturdays from 7 a.m.-3 p.m.





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---

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# HEALTH IS WEALTH:

## Eating healthy on a budget

**Lauren Estes**

lauren@cullmantribune.com

Looking to eat healthier but don't want to break the bank in the process? Here are a few recipes that can feed your family, help you hit your protein goals and save a few dollars along the way.



TASTEOFHOM.COM

### Modern Tuna Casserole

#### MODERN TUNA CASSEROLE

Source: [www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/modern-tuna-casserole](http://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/modern-tuna-casserole)

#### Ingredients

- 3 tbsp. butter, divided
- 4 medium carrots, chopped
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 medium sweet red pepper, chopped
- 1 cup sliced baby portobello mushrooms
- 2 cans (5 oz. each) albacore white tuna in water, drained and flaked
- 2 cups fresh baby spinach
- 1 cup frozen peas
- 3 cups uncooked spiral pasta

- 1 tbsp. all-purpose flour
- 2/3 cup reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1/3 cup half-and-half cream
- 1/2 cup shredded Parmesan cheese
- 3/4 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. pepper

#### Directions

1. In a large skillet, heat 1 tbsp. butter over medium-high heat. Add carrots, onion, red pepper and mushrooms. Cook and stir until tender, 8-10 minutes. Add tuna, spinach and peas; cook until spinach is just wilted, 2-3 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, cook pasta according to package directions for al dente. Drain pasta, reserving 1 cup pasta water. Place pasta and tuna mixture in a large bowl; toss to combine. Wipe skillet clean.

3. In the same skillet, melt remaining butter over medium heat. Stir in flour until smooth; gradually whisk in broth and cream. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly; cook and stir until thickened, 1-2 minutes, adding reserved pasta water if needed. Stir in Parmesan cheese, salt and pepper. Pour over pasta; toss to coat.

#### TURMERIC-GINGER MARINATED CHICKEN

Source: [www.bhg.com/recipe/turmeric-ginger-marinated-chicken](http://www.bhg.com/recipe/turmeric-ginger-marinated-chicken)

#### Ingredients

- 1/2 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 tbsp. grated peeled fresh turmeric\*

- 1 tbsp. grated peeled fresh ginger
- 1 tbsp. lime juice
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. coriander seeds, toasted and ground
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves (11/2 lb.) or 11/2 lb. skinless, boneless chicken thighs
- Cooked basmati rice
- Lime wedges
- Fresh snipped fresh cilantro

#### Directions

1. For marinade, in a small bowl whisk together the first

eight ingredients (through salt). Place chicken in a resealable plastic bag. Pour marinade over chicken. Seal bag; turn to coat chicken. Marinate in the refrigerator 2 to 24 hours.

2. Remove chicken from marinade; discard any marinade remaining in bag. Place chicken on a well-greased grill rack. Grill, covered, over medium heat 12 to 15 minutes or until done (165°F for breasts, at least 170°F for thighs), turning once. Serve chicken with rice and lime wedges. If desired, sprinkle with fresh cilantro. »

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TINYURL.COM/SPAGHETTIRECIPEHEALTHY  
**Spaghetti with Charred Tomato Sauce**

### SPAGHETTI WITH CHARRED TOMATO SAUCE

Source: <https://tinyurl.com/spaghettherecipehealthy>

#### Ingredients

- 400g cherry tomatoes
- 1 red onion, halved, thinly sliced
- 2 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 tbsp. brown sugar
- 375g spaghetti
- 60g low-fat feta, crumbled
- Small fresh basil leaves, to serve

#### Directions

1. Heat a barbecue chargrill or chargrill pan over medium-high heat. Combine tomatoes, onion and half the oil in a bowl. Cook, turning tomatoes, for 4 to 5 minutes or until blistered and blackened, and start to collapse (see note). Transfer to a heat-proof bowl. Add vinegar and sugar to tomatoes. Toss gently to combine. Cover. Set aside for 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, cook pasta in a saucepan of boiling salted water, following packet directions, until tender. Drain, reserving 1/4 cup cooking liquid.

3. Return pasta to pan. Add tomato mixture and reserved cooking liquid. Toss over low heat for 2 minutes or until heated through. Serve sprinkled with feta and basil leaves, and drizzled with remaining oil.



TASTE.COM.AU  
**Healthier Chicken Breast and Zucchini Linguine**

### HEALTHIER CHICKEN BREAST AND ZUCCHINI LINGUINE

Source: [www.taste.com.au/recipes/healthier-chicken-breast-zucchini-linguine-recipe/e9zx0vxx](http://www.taste.com.au/recipes/healthier-chicken-breast-zucchini-linguine-recipe/e9zx0vxx)

#### Ingredients

- 450g chicken breast fillets, halved horizontally
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 500g zucchini noodles
- 125ml (1/2 cup) light cream
- 80ml (1/3 cup) Massel chicken style liquid stock
- 1 tbsp. fresh dill leaves
- 2 tbsp. chopped fresh chives
- 30g baby spinach, to serve
- 30g parmesan, finely grated

#### Directions

1. Spray a large non-stick frying pan with oil and heat over medium-high heat. Season the chicken well and cook for 2-3 minutes each side or until golden and cooked through. Remove from the pan and keep warm.

2. Heat oil in the pan. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Add the zucchini noodles and cook, stirring, for 1-2 minutes. Add the light cream and chicken stock. Simmer for 1-2 minutes or until the zucchini noodles are just tender but not soft.

3. Slice the chicken and toss through the sauce along with the dill and chives. Divide

among serving bowls. Sprinkle with the spinach and parmesan, to serve.



### Vegan Pot Pie

#### VEGAN POT PIE

Source: [www.feastingathome.com/spring-vegetable-pot-pie](http://www.feastingathome.com/spring-vegetable-pot-pie)

#### Ingredients

- Vegetables: fennel bulb, leek (or onion), garlic, potatoes, carrots, asparagus, peas
- Herbs: tarragon, lemon thyme, chives
- Almond milk or cashew milk
- Lemon juice
- Vegetable bullion
- Whole grain mustard
- Salt and pepper
- Flour
- Vegan butter or olive oil

#### Directions

1. Chop up your veggies and measure all ingredients out.

2. Blanch potatoes and carrots in salted water for about 10 minutes or until just fork tender. Save 1/2 cup water as you drain potatoes and carrots.

3. Dissolve bullion in the saved potato carrot water.

4. Sauté leeks, garlic, fennel and asparagus.

5. Use an oven proof 10-inch pan (about 2 1/2-inch deep), or after cooking on the stove, transfer completed filling to a baking dish.

6. Add blanched veggies to

the sauté and mix. Push to the sides and melt butter in the center, add flour and mix as best as you can.

7. Add bullion broth and milk, stirring all the while, switching from the whisk to stirring with a spoon.

8. Add mustard and let the sauce come to a gentle boil. Turn off the heat.

9. Add in peas, lemon juice, lemon thyme, tarragon and chives.

10. Let the filling cool a bit while you prepare the crust.

11. If needed, roll your puff pastry out to 1/8 inch thick. Cut into the shape of your pan and lay over the cooled filling. The pastry will shrink a bit as it bakes, so roll a couple inches bigger for full coverage.

12. Score the pastry with a sharp knife, cutting halfway into the dough. Do any design you like! This lightens crust, allowing it to lift more and bake evenly.

### EXPERT TIPS FOR THE ULTIMATE FLAKEY PASTRY TOP

1. Preheat oven and keep at temperature for 15-20 minutes before you place the pot pie in the oven. Puff pastry needs even heat to rise and puff.

2. Let the filling cool before topping with the crust. If it is too hot it can start melting the layers before the crust has a chance to heat up and rise.

3. If you are working in a warm kitchen, chill the whole pot pie with the pastry lid on, for 10 minutes before baking.

# 5 ways to spring into your fitness goals

**Lauren Estes**  
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**W**armer, brighter, longer days are here, as spring has sprung and summer is on deck in the South.

There's no better time to start or maintain an active lifestyle, especially with the welcoming weather.

Please consult with your physician before beginning any new fitness regimen. Please consider all health risks when utilizing any new health exercise, movement or activity.

Here are five ways to help you spring into your fitness journey outdoors.

## 1. Gardening

According to many sources this is a great way for people of all ages to stay fit and healthy. Most can expect to burn around 300 calories per hour during typical gardening activities.

Gardening will help improve your cardiovascular health and also has an array of other wellness and health benefits.

Along with assisting your physical health, there are many mental health benefits, including a better mood boosting, reduced stress and less anxiety.

This is the perfect time to get outdoors and get your garden ready for summer.

## 2. Walking

One study found that regular aerobic exercises, such as walking, can reduce belly fat and potentially help people manage obesity.

Walking is known for helping lower blood pressure, reduce your risk of chronic diseases, boost your immune system and strengthen your joints and bones.

Walking also can boost your mood and help sharpen your brain.

## 3. Racket sports (Tennis/pickleball)

Pickleball is one of the fastest growing games that is played by all ages.

Developed in 1965 by three dads in Bainbridge, Washington, the sport was originally designed as a backyard game that the entire family could play. Plus, you cannot beat the fact that pickleball offers a number of health benefits, too.

Playing this fun sport improves your flexibility, can help lower your blood pressure and can also improve your cardiovascular health and your hand-eye coordination.

"Racket sports, such as tennis, paddle and pickleball, offer a unique combination of physical activity, mental stimulation and social interaction that can have profound effects on brain health and overall well-being."

Research has shown that regularly participating in racket sports can provide a wide range of benefits for the brain, potentially leading to a longer and healthier life.

## 4. Swimming

Swimming is a great low-impact exercise that has a wide variety of applications no matter your goal.

Whether you swim competitively, to stay in shape, or to help you recover from injury, a workout in the pool can leave you with phenomenal gains in many different key health areas.

Like any form of physical exercise, swimming releases feel good hormones called endorphins.

Being surrounded by water, you won't feel yourself sweating because the water will actively cool you down.

Swimming is low impact, decreases stress and can help with joint pain, heart health and weight loss.

## 5. Hiking

Hiking is one of the best ways to get fun, stress-free exercise. No matter what type of trail you find yourself on, hiking is a great whole-body workout - from head to toe and everything in between.

A few benefits of hiking include building stronger muscles and bones, improving your sense of balance, improving your heart health and decreasing the risk of certain respiratory problems.

Whether you find yourself scrambling up a steep incline or walking on a winding dirt trail or path, hiking is an opportunity to get an outdoor workout in!

Other healthy outdoor activities could include strength training,

yoga, exercise classes, running, biking, spring sports, golfing and more!

## Sources

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INAUGURAL

# Alabama State



Strawberry Festival  
2024

# The sweet taste of success

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**A**s we gather for the inaugural Alabama Strawberry Festival here in Cullman, Mayor Woody Jacobs set the tone, expressing the festival's significance beyond its delicious offerings: "It's not just about the delicious strawberries or the exciting festivities; it's a celebration of our deep agricultural roots, a tradition that has sustained our community for generations."

Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Executive Director Nathan Anderson extended a warm welcome to all attendees, emphasizing inclusivity, stating, "We are thrilled to extend a warm welcome to

each and every one of you attending this year's festival - whether you're a familiar face from our local community or joining us from afar."

Anderson encouraged exploration beyond the festival grounds, highlighting the richness of local businesses and attractions. "As you immerse yourself in the abundance of attractions and experiences our festival has to offer," he said, "we also encourage you to venture beyond our grounds and explore the vibrant tapestry of local businesses that enrich our community."

Kelly Pulliam, festival manager, shared the dedication behind this year's festivities, saying, "We've dedicated ourselves to ensuring that this year's

Alabama Strawberry Festival becomes an unforgettable chapter in our history."

Pulliam emphasized the collaborative effort that made the festival possible when she said, "Our ongoing commitment to enhancing and expanding the festival experience each year is only made possible through the generous support of our sponsors and invaluable partnerships with local businesses."

With these sentiments in mind, we welcome you to the Alabama Strawberry Festival in Cullman, where Jacobs, Anderson, Pulliam and our residents invite you to join in the celebration of tradition, community and the sweet taste of success.

# Meet 2024 Miss Alabama Strawberry Festival Queen, Siddalee Drake

**Cheyenne Sharp**

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**C**ullman High School's Siddalee Drake was crowned 2024 Miss Alabama Strawberry Festival Queen at the Alabama Strawberry Festival Pageant on Saturday, April 13, at the Desperation Church Student Center across from Depot Park. The annual pageant is a showcase of the area's sweetest beauties, in preparation for the statewide summertime staple, the Alabama Strawberry Festival, which will take place May 3-4.

As part of her "Queen" duties, Drake will participate in many local ventures hosted by Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism, including festivals and community events, representing Cullman County and Alabama Strawberry Festival.

Alabamastrawberryfest.com lays out the expectations, responsibilities and duties of the reigning Strawberry Queen, stating, "The Queen may be responsible for participation in all events scheduled by Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism, such as Strawberry Festival 2024, Fair Parade, and Oktoberfest until a new queen is selected. The queen shall portray good conduct, good morals, and good manner. They will conduct themselves with dignity and always be a credit to Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism." The site adds a conduct clause, ensuring that the reigning queen will always represent Cullman with grace and dignity: "Failure

to follow this rule will be considered cause for dismissal. If actions or behavior are inconsistent with Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism, disciplinary action or removal of title will be at the sole discretion of Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism."

No stranger to pageants and beauty contests, Drake has been competing since "before she could walk," at the behest of her mother, the late Amy Drake. Pageant after pageant garnered the budding queen titles, tiaras, sashes and crowns. Mostly, they were bonding moments with her mom. While practicing a talent, perfecting a walk and finding the perfect dress for each event, the pair spent countless hours together preparing for the many pageants.

"I've been doing pageants since I was a baby," Drake laughed. "Whatever the youngest division there is, that's where I started."

Her father, Jimmy Drake, ever the doting patriarch, stood near to his daughter, beaming with pride. He recalled the memories made between mother and daughter through pageants and beauty competitions, sharing, "The pageant world was her mother's dream. She loved them very, very much. She started Siddalee in them when she was a tiny little infant. Siddalee has entered every pageant she could to remember all the fun times at pageants with her mom."

Pageants help hold the past close, always keeping the memory of her mother at the forefront of Drake's



CHEYENNE SHARP/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Cullman High School senior Siddalee Drake was crowned 2024 Miss Alabama Strawberry Festival Queen on Saturday, April 13.**

life and mind. Pageants also often usher in a bright future; many beauty contests and pageants offer scholarships to winners. Drake has been a proud recipient of those titles and funds, notably a \$2,000 scholarship earned when she was named first alternate in the 2023 Miss Cullman County Fair Pageant, after clinching the tiara as Cullman High School's 2023 Miss Cullman County Fair Pageant representative.

The blonde beauty is more than her looks. The senior plans to travel to Mobile after graduating in May, attend the University of South Alabama, where she hopes to earn a

degree in nursing to ultimately spend her career as a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) nurse.

The once-shy and soft-spoken teen said pageantry has helped prepare her for college, a career and beyond in numerous ways. Drake said participating in pageants strengthened her interviewing skills and helped her gain confidence in public speaking.

"My interview skills have improved so much. I used to never do interviews; I was scared to talk to anyone," she smiled. "It's just helped me speak better and it's helped my confidence and everything."





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# Celebrating Alabama's sweetest summer crop

**Cayla Grace Murphy**

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**W**hile there might be a million and one ways to serve sweets in the South, we've taken the liberty of sharing four simple recipes for you and your family to try in celebration of one of Alabama's sweetest summer crops: the humble strawberry.

## STRAWBERRY CHIA SEED JAM

A classic method of enjoying strawberries, this recipe takes a twist with the added health benefits of chia seeds, which lend the perfect jammy texture. This recipe is perfect for spreading over toast, topping yogurt or even ice cream! Note: this recipe is not a traditional water bath canned jam, so it will need to be refrigerated after preparation. This recipe yields about a pint of jam, and will last in your refrigerator for about two weeks.

### Ingredients

- 1 cup diced strawberries
- 1 tbsp. chia seeds
- 1/2 tbsp. lemon juice
- 1-2 tbsp. honey to taste

### Directions

1. In a small sauce pot, add strawberries and lemon juice and bring to a boil until foamy, approximately 3-4 minutes.
2. Reduce heat to low and begin mashing mixture. Taste with a spoon, and add honey to desired sweetness.
3. Remove sauce pot from stove and sprinkle chia seeds evenly over mixture. Stir well.
4. Allow jam to cool and thicken completely before transferring to jar.

## STRAWBERRY SIMPLE SYRUP

A mixology staple, this classic syrup will add a berry boost to

your favorite tea, lemonade or cocktail. For kiddos, try adding a dash to a glass of milk for a fun summer drink! This recipe yields about half a pint of syrup, and will last in your refrigerator for about two weeks.

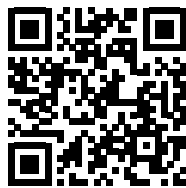
### Ingredients

- 1 cup diced strawberries
- Juice from 1/2 lemon
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup water

### Directions

1. In a small sauce pot, combine berries, lemon juice, sugar and water. Bring to a boil until foamy, approximately 3-4 minutes.
2. Reduce heat to low and mash well with a muddler or potato masher.
3. After the berries have been mashed, remove the pot from the stove and allow mixture to cool completely.
4. Strain with a fine mesh strainer into a half-pint jar and enjoy.

## WATCH IT ONLINE



[YOUTU.BE/9U2ME0UGXU](https://youtu.be/9U2ME0UGXU)

## STRAWBERRY WHITE CHOCOLATE MUFFINS

This decadent twist on a classic breakfast treat is sure to please! Fresh strawberries add a pop of color and brightness to this traditional muffin batter while white chocolate chips add a subtle creamy sweetness. This recipe freezes well, allowing you to make as many batches as you like as the berries are at their peak ripeness to freeze



CAYLA GRACE MURPHY/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

## Strawberry Simple syrup

and enjoy later – that is, if they last that long! This recipe yields about a dozen muffins.

### Ingredients

- 1 cup diced strawberries
- 1/2 cup white chocolate chips
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tbsp. baking powder
- 1/8 tsp. salt
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 cup milk
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1 tbsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. lemon zest

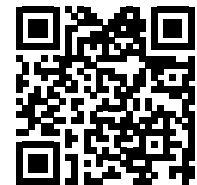
### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 355F and line two small muffin trays with paper liners.
2. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together all-purpose flour, baking powder and salt. Set aside. This is your dry mixture.
3. In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together milk, sugar, vegetable oil, vanilla and lemon zest until thoroughly combined. This is your wet mixture.
4. Pour wet mixture into dry mixture and whisk well to combine.
5. Toss diced strawberries in a bit of all-purpose flour to coat before adding to muffin batter; this will prevent berries from sinking to the bottom of the muffin.
6. Fold floured berries and white chocolate chips into muffin batter.

7. Distribute batter using measuring cup or ice cream scoop into lined muffin trays.

8. Bake for 25 minutes, or until an inserted toothpick comes out clean. Let cool before removing from muffin tray.

## WATCH IT ONLINE



[YOUTU.BE/SRGN\\_OMRDEK](https://youtu.be/SRGN_OMRDEK)

## STRAWBERRY DUMP-AND-GO COBBLER

This easy take on a classic Southern dessert, berry cobbler, is a great way to use up any strawberries that are almost past their prime. By incorporating a no-mix, dump-and-go method, this cobbler comes together quickly and will be a new favorite for Sunday lunch. This recipe yields one 8x8 dish of cobbler.

### Ingredients

- 1 clamshell strawberries, quartered
- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup oat flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/4 cup white sugar
- 1/4 cup brown sugar

»

- 3/4 cup milk
- 1 tbsp. vanilla extract
- Optional: vanilla ice cream, to serve

**Directions**

1. Preheat oven to 375F. Place 4 tbsp. unsalted butter into 8x8 dish and allow to melt in the oven as it preheats.
2. In a large mixing bowl, whisk

together all-purpose flour, oat flour, baking powder, salt and sugars.

3. Add in milk and vanilla extract; whisk well to combine.

4. Remove 8x8 dish from the oven once butter is melted and pour the cobbler batter over it. Do not mix.

5. Evenly distribute your quartered strawberries on top of the cobbler batter and melted butter. Optional: sprinkle with a bit of granulated sugar to promote a caramelized appearance.

6. Bake for about 45 minutes, or until batter is golden brown.

**WATCH IT ONLINE**

[YOUTU.BE/IJVTBG0FP4](https://youtu.be/IJVTBG0FP4)

## 2023 Alabama Strawberry Festival recipe winners

### MIMI'S STRAWBERRY CRUNCH CAKE

Adult Division Winner:  
Natanya Baker

**INGREDIENTS**

- 1 box strawberry Jell-O mix
- 1 box vanilla pudding mix
- 1/2 cup flour, divided
- 5 sticks unsalted butter, softened and divided
- 1 strawberry boxed cake mix
- 1 white boxed cake mix
- 4 cups powdered sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 2-3 tbsp. heavy whipping cream (strawberry filling)
- 1 cup strawberries
- Squeeze lemon juice
- 5 tbsp. sugar
- Sprinkle of cornstarch, as needed

**DIRECTIONS****Crumb coating**

1. In a small mixing bowl, add half a stick (1/4 cup) butter, strawberry Jell-O mix and 1/4 cup flour. Use a fork to mix until you get a sand-like consistency.

2. In a separate bowl, add half a stick (1/4 cup) butter, vanilla pudding mix, and 1/4 cup flour. Use a fork to mix until you get a sand-like consistency. (Feel free to add additional flour if necessary.)

3. Preheat your oven to 350F and prepare a cookie sheet with parchment paper.

4. Pour both bowls onto the cookie sheet and gently toss both mixtures until they are evenly mixed. Gently use your hand to press down and form a disc with the two mixtures.

5. Bake for 11-12 minutes or until

slightly browned. (Be very careful; they burn quickly.)

6. Remove from the oven and allow to cool completely. They should harden up as they cool.

7. Once completely cool, break up the disc and add to a food processor and pulse until you have a course crumb. Set aside in an air-tight container.

**Cake layers**

1. Prepare both cake mixes according to the instructions on the back of the box and bake 2 8-inch cakes of each flavor. (A total of 4 cake layers)

2. Allow to cool completely on a wire rack.

**Frosting**

1. Meanwhile, add 4 sticks softened butter into the bowl of a stand mixer with a paddle attachment and cream for 2-3 minutes or until smooth.

2. Add vanilla extract and mix well.

3. Add the powdered sugar one cup at a time being sure to completely combine after each addition.

4. Last, add in the heavy cream and whip on high speed until you get a "whipped" consistency.

**Assembly (After your cakes are**



cooled and leveled)

1. Start by stacking a strawberry cake layer on a cake stand or serving tray and top with about 2/3 cup of frosting and smooth.

2. Add a vanilla cake layer on top and continue alternating cake flavors. (May add strawberry filling inside if desired.)

3. Once the cakes are stacked, smooth the remaining frosting over the outside of the entire cake.

4. Cover the sides of the cake in the strawberry and vanilla crunch topping and top with whipped cream if desired and serve!

### STRAWBERRY CHEESECAKE DESSERT TACOS

Junior Division Winner:  
Kendall Bussman

**INGREDIENTS**

- 58 inch tortillas, about 20 rounds
- 1 cup graham cracker crumbs
- 1/4 cup butter, melted
- 1 cup strawberries, chopped
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 2 tbsp. water
- 1 tbsp. cornstarch
- 1 tbsp. cold water
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 cup cream cheese, softened
- 1 tsp. lemon zest
- 1 tsp. vanilla

- 1/4 cup powdered sugar

**DIRECTIONS****Shells**

1. Preheat oven to 400F.

2. Cut 4-5 rounds out of each tortilla shell with a cookie cutter to get about 20 shells.

3. Dip each into melted butter then coat in graham cracker crumbs.

4. Flip a muffin tin upside down. Place the tortilla pieces in between muffin cups. Bake 10 minutes until golden brown. Let cool in pan.

**Strawberry filling**

1. In a small pot pour water, add sugar and strawberries. Bring to a boil and reduce to a simmer to soften the strawberries.

2. Dissolve cornstarch in water and pour into the strawberry mix and bring to a boil, stirring constantly (mixture will be slightly chunky). Remove to cool completely.

3. Beat cream cheese, heavy cream, powdered sugar, lemon zest and vanilla for 2 minutes, using medium speed, until it thickens.

4. Chill in the fridge for 30 minutes. Transfer to a piping bag.

5. Fill the taco shells with cream cheese filling and top with 1/2 tsp. strawberry filling.

6. Sprinkle with additional graham cracker crumbs, optional. Enjoy!!

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# Hidden gem in plain sight: Dixie Duds & Decor

**Lauren Estes**

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Local fashion and accessory one-stop shop is nestled in the heart of Cullman— Dixie Duds & Decor is a legacy in the making.

Seven years ago, owner Melia Martinez Mead opened the doors of Dixie Duds to the community, but she never celebrated a grand opening.

Now – with her envisioned plans for a future where her passion for style and entrepreneurship is seamlessly woven into the lives of her two daughters, Hannah (Wiley) Mead and Sophia Mead – she has taken steps to update, rebrand and share with the community all that is to come.

Dixie Duds hosted a grand reopening Friday, March 29, complete with a ribbon cutting with the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce.

“With an eye for trends and a heart for family, I dream of passing down the keys to my beloved boutique, nurturing a tradition of creativity and community for generations to come,” Mead said.

“As I look ahead, my hope is not just for business success, but for the enduring bond shared between a mother, her daughters and the timeless art of fashion.”

Mead graduated from Fairview High School and earned her bachelor’s degree from Birmingham-Southern College.

She moved back to her hometown in 2015 and opened



**The boutique's grand reopening included a ribbon cutting with representatives from the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce.**

LAUREN ESTES/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

Dixie Duds & Decor on March 17, 2017, recently celebrating her seven-year anniversary.

“In the beginning years of my business, my daughters were both away at school and unable to be as involved with the store,” Mead said.

“They recently found availability and that has allowed Wiley and Sophia to play a central role in the business.”

Her daughters’ involvement in the boutique sparked the vision for a grand reopening with fresh ideas and inspired energy.

“Dixie Duds & Decor was created with the slogan, ‘a style for every story,’” Mead said. “I aimed to create a boutique where affordability met style,

welcoming customers from all walks of life to indulge in a taste of luxury without compromise.

“What sets Dixie Duds apart is not just its affordability, but the warm embrace of its atmosphere. I take pride in fostering a friendly environment, making every visit a personable experience.”

Drawing inspiration from her worldly travels, Mead brings a touch of global flair to the community.

“From vibrant prints to timeless classics, Dixie Duds showcases an eclectic array of styles curated with care and passion,” Mead said.

“This women’s boutique offers clothes for a range of ages, spanning from teenage

girls to retired ladies.”

Dixie Duds has earned its reputation as the ultimate destination for concert-ready outfits, trendy dresses, cowgirl boots and statement jewelry. Mead said she loves the constant flow of new items in her store, keeping it fun and exciting for shoppers.

“We’ve been pleased to see new local customers visiting our boutique nearly every day,” she said.

Mead aims to expand the business within the community and online.

Dixie Duds & Decor is located at 300 Second St. SE and can be found online at [www.dixiedudsanddecor.com](http://www.dixiedudsanddecor.com).

# Shotlifters LLC, Mary Carter Store and Jeff Young's dive into the art of FPV drone cinematography

## Gauge Day

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In the heart of Cullman, Jeff Young stands out not just as the co-owner of the cherished Mary Carter Store but as a visionary exploring the skies through the lens of high-altitude videography. This Georgia Tech graduate, with a hobbyist drive that borders obsession, has charted a path that is as high flying as it is grounded in his desire to innovate and capture the beauty of the world from unseen vantages.

Young's journey into the realm of aerial videography began with a curiosity for photography. Having dedicated countless hours and dollars to the hobby, his passion grew outside the usual grounded style of photography, as he began to look upward at the capabilities available to him in the skies.

YouTube, being the place of learning for many, drove Young from doing small-town photography to a new obsession dedicated to drones.

"YouTube is where I learned. When I was really into photography, I was buying lenses and camera bodies and going around town and taking photos, really just for personal enjoyment and to try and get good at something. That's what I do with any hobby, is it ends up becoming an obsession and I try taking it to the next level," »



**Mary Carter Store Co-owner and Shotlifters Owner Jeff Young stands with his custom FPV drone setup as he prepares for a day of flying.**

PHOTOS COURTESY JEFF YOUNG



Young shared about the beginnings of his drone journey.

Starting with DJI Phantom 4 Pro, Young quickly grasped and lost his new love for photography in the air. At the time, that style of drone only afforded users the capability to hover and perform basic maneuvers, and paired with the necessity of having to constantly watch the controller's screen, it left him wanting more.

This craving for a deeper, more immersive experience led to a faltering interest as he sought something that could truly satisfy his aspirations.

Time passed, but Young's curiosity didn't fail him. After more research, he found the answers that he had been seeking all along.

The world of first-person view (FPV) drones became the focus of his exploration into aerial cinematography. The discovery of a community dedicated to drone racing and flying, which felt underground at the time, immediately captivated him, redirecting him back on the path from where he left.

Young's immersion in the world of FPVs transformed from hobby to passion as he began building and racing his drones. While his Georgia Tech degree was originally planned for electrical engineering, Young understood that a business degree would better serve his family and the store he knew he would one day run back home.

He swapped to business and completed that degree, but his knack for building and understanding electrical systems never left him.

Diving headfirst into the world of FPV drones and how to build them through countless YouTube tutorials, Young absorbed knowledge shared by enthusiasts and professionals



**Top:** As with all great flyers, Young spends practice time in one of the many simulators available on the market today. **Bottom:** Soldering in action, as Young works on one of the many custom drone builds that he has created.

alike, including notable figures like Alex Vanover and Joshua Bardwell.

He began his first drone build in the back of the Mary Carter Store, taking advantage of all the knowledge gained.

Young quickly realized that this self-taught journey was not to be without its hurdles.

"The first drone I built I built right in the back of the Mary Carter Store. I took it over to the Weiss cottage, just in that little lot over there.

"I armed it, flew it straight up, I pulled it back down and it came down, bounced and bounced, flipped and went straight out into the street and the props broke.

"I only had one set of props,

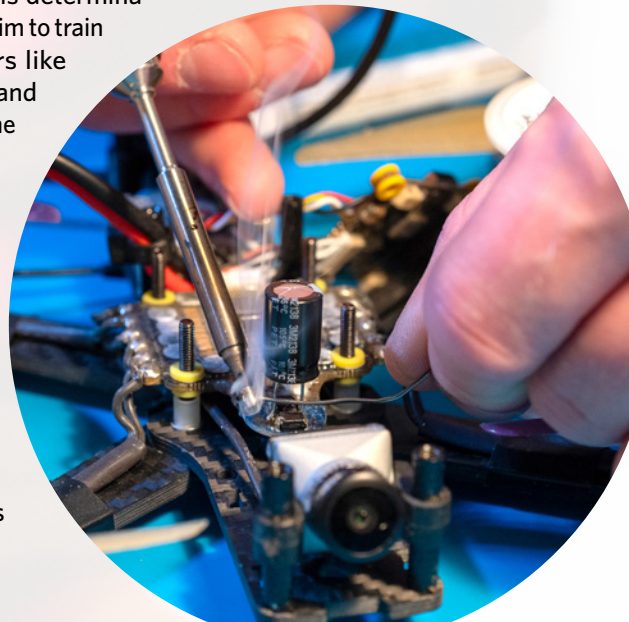
so the first lesson was to make sure I had more than one set of props," Young humorously recalled about his first flight.

This early failure, however, only fueled his determination, leading him to train on simulators like VelociDrone and truly master the art of drone flying.

Having overcome numerous setbacks in practice and simulator training, Young discovered his

niche through extensive learning. His time became consumed with custom builds, meticulous tuning and relen-

l e s s



practice, as what began as a hobby evolved into a profound passion. For Young, drone flying emerged as a vital escape, offering solace and fulfillment he hadn't realized he needed.

Despite never engaging in formal mental health therapy, Young recognized the significant, positive impact this pursuit had on his well-being.

"I have always felt like I was probably OCD or have generalized anxiety or something, but drone flying in general, this whole hobby has given me a different way to approach that and has been like cognitive behavioral therapy," he said.

"Just constantly telling myself that there's no perfect way to do this, but it all works. Everybody has their own style and every single aspect of it is unique."

Young shared his experience about entering the state of flow that many in the drone community and sports community experience.

The state of flow is the experience of deep immersion or focus in an activity, creating a sense of complete involvement and engagement.

"That's what I love most about the drone. Just when I put the goggles on, it's a whole different time and place," he said. "You're transcending everything almost like you are in a parallel universe."

Drawing from his childhood love of video games, Young found similar escapism and freshness in the world of FPVs.

This digital playground provided him not just an escape, but also a new reality to explore and capture. This playground has enabled him to fully embolden his creative capabilities with a new creative challenge in every flight.

Young's creativity didn't stop at piloting; he ventured into

customizing his builds, from software tweaks to creating over 10 custom drones.

His most recent build was a completely waterproof drone, tested in his bathtub by submerging it and flying it out of the water.

The addition of a 3D printer to his toolkit allowed him to custom print parts, further personalizing his flying experience and allowing quicker turnarounds on new builds.

His vision didn't stop at hobbyist building or flying, however, but elevated to the next level as he shared that he tends to do.

He founded his own LLC, Shotlifters, aimed at harnessing the cinematic potential of Cinewhoops, drones designed for agile indoor filming and dynamic outdoor shoots.

The first step to elevating his new venture was legitimizing himself in the commercial space as a pilot.

In 2021, Young pursued and achieved the FFA Part 107 certification, certifying him as a commercial drone pilot, while laying the cornerstone for the future success of Shotlifters.

With his new certification in tow, Young set out to create the foundational philosophy of Shotlifters as a business.

Young's goals for Shotlifters are straightforward: to deliver dynamic content that goes beyond conventional videography by offering a bird's-eye perspective that captures the scene's beauty in an unparalleled manner.

Unlike typical drone footage, which often relies on panning shots or preset camera functions, Shotlifters promises a fully FPV experience, bringing a fresh and dynamic perspective to the footage for its clients.

Moreover, Shotlifters' goal will be to ensure reliability and





«  
**Custom builds line the walls in Young's workspace, with each different drone an iteration upon itself or designed with a specific need or style, a testament to Young's growth in drone building.**

safety in its operations, being a licensed LLC committed to safety and excellence.

With inspirations like JayByrdFilms on YouTube, who shot the viral drone flythrough of the bowling alley, Young intends for Shotlifters to offer a similar FPV format to the Cullman community.

His goal is to provide a unique perspective, whether it's through indoor footage that highlights the details of a local store's interior or outdoor captures that bring a fresh viewpoint to weddings or drag races, offering clients a novel way to experience their events.

Although Shotlifters is in its early stages, Young has already experienced success with his FPV endeavors, particularly when his freestyle session during the icy conditions of Jan. 16 captured widespread attention.

Accompanied by the iconic "Ice, Ice Baby," Young's footage showcased his skills in the air, flying around Cullman landmarks with ease, set against the picturesque winter scene of Cullman draped in ice and adorned with lingering decorations of Christmas.

With viral success at his side, Young's ventures have

already attracted attention, with opportunities arising from a local rap artist and other retail businesses eager to see their work and spaces captured through his innovative lens.

Despite diving headfirst into the world of FPV drones and aerial cinematography, Young remains deeply rooted in his community through the Mary Carter Store, a landmark of local commerce and family tradition.

The store stands as a testament to Young's dual commitment: to his family's legacy and his hobby-turned-enterprise, Shotlifters LLC.

For those interested in the unique blend of tradition and innovation that Young embodies, the Mary Carter Store welcomes visitors, while Shotlifters promises dynamic videography from an entirely new perspective.

Those not familiar with the Mary Carter Store can expect a diverse array of products, from brewing and fishing supplies to custom framing, guns and ammunition, and a well-stocked hardware section.

Additionally, the store provides fully licensed locksmith services, ensuring a full suite of offerings under one roof.

At the end of the day, Young will still be running the beloved Mary Carter Store. While ensuring his family's legacy continues to provide to the local community, his new venture with Shotlifters provides new freedom, to himself and to those who want to see the beauty hidden from the ordinary perspective.

"Beauty is everywhere around us, and sometimes you just need a little help seeing it from a different perspective," Young said.

# Lady Raiders race past Prattville Christian, T.R. Miller to capture 1st state championship

**Nick Griffin**

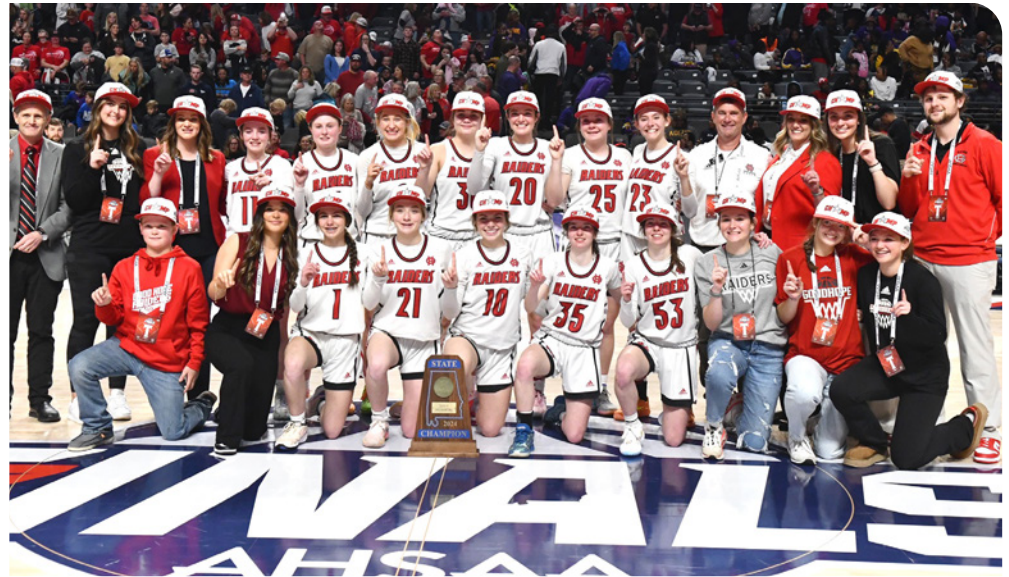
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**GOOD HOPE, Ala.** — This season was a historic, emotional campaign for the Good Hope Lady Raiders. After falling short of their postseason goals the last two years, the Lady Raiders dominated Deshler and Priceville to claim the Northwest Regional title and they didn't slow down when they got to Birmingham. Good Hope handled Prattville Christian to move on to the 4A state finals and after a slow start against T.R. Miller, the Lady Raiders found their rhythm in the second half and pulled away to capture the school's first state championship.

## **Good Hope 59 - Prattville Christian 29 (4A State Semifinals)**

Good Hope jumped out to an early lead and never looked back, securing a spot in 4A state title game with a dominant, 59-29 win. Good Hope led by 20 at halftime and continued pulling away in the second half.

The Lady Raiders held Prattville Christian to just 32% shooting from the field and Head Coach Justin Aby was excited to see his team



NICK GRIFFIN & CATHY MCSWAIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

continue to play their game on a bigger stage and impose their will on the defensive end of the floor.

"It's great to finally be able to perform here in Birmingham. I feel like we've been so close in the years past and we got over that hump this year.

"To be down here has been a goal since day one and these girls have been chasing it for three or four years," Aby said.

"It's great to be down here and as far as the game we had some girls that just wanted to show out and I think that's exactly what they did.

"We focus a lot on the

defensive end, and we held them in the 20s so I'm very proud for them for working their tails off on the defensive end."

The Lady Panthers won three consecutive state titles coming into this season, but they ran into a wall Tuesday. Aby knows he has a talented team of scorers but he's even more proud of the pride they take in their performance on the defensive end.

"Prattville Christian is a great team. They've won the last three, so he's had some great players, but we have a talented group of girls who take pride on the defensive

end just as much as they do scoring the basketball," Aby said.

"This team will wind up going down as one with three girls scoring over 2,000 points and another one scoring over 1,000 but for them to not just worry about the offensive end and take pride in guarding their girl and locking up on the defensive end is special."

The Lady Raiders have started games fast all season and Good Hope seniors Bailey and Heather Tetro credit those fast starts to their team's skill and unselfishness.

"I'm super excited. It's »

been a long four years and there's a lot of anxiety when you don't make it until your senior year because any game can be your last game at this point. So, I'm super excited for the game Friday," Bailey said. "We play a super selfless game; I love this team for that. We want each other to be great and the goal was just to come out and play hard and do what it took to win. I think that's all of our goals."

"I feel like we were able to get off to a hot start because like Bailey said we share the ball. We're very selfless. Every single one of our girls can score the basketball, that's not even a question," Heather said.

"The fact that we're able to move the ball around and make it hard for defenders to guard us and keep us from scoring allows us to get off to our quick starts."

As they have all post-season, the Lady Raiders got off to a fast start. Three-pointers by Heather Tetro and Ava McSwain put Good Hope ahead 6-3 early in the first and after Charly Johnson laid one in, Ivey Maddox knocked down another three to make it an 11-3 game.

It was Bailey Tetro's turn after that, and she scored the next seven Good Hope points to stretch the lead to 18-5. Heather Tetro drilled another three later in the opening period and the Lady Raiders went into the second quarter leading 21-10.

Shots continued to fall for Good Hope in the second. Bailey Tetro hit a three and McSwain sank a pair of free throws early in the quarter. McSwain scored through a foul and tacked on the free

throw to give the Lady Raiders a 29-13 lead and later in the period, Johnson buried a three from the right wing to make it 32-17 with just under four minutes remaining in the first half.

Baskets by Heather Tetro and McSwain extended the lead to 36-17 and Heather split a pair of free throws just before the end of the second quarter to give the Lady Raiders a commanding, 37-17 lead at the break.

Bailey Tetro scored the first five points of the third to make it a 42-17 game. Maddox hit a pair of free throws with around a minute to play in the period to help stretch the lead to 48-23 and Bailey Tetro drained another three just before the end of the third quarter to put Good Hope in front 51-23 at the start of the fourth.

A pair of McSwain baskets made it a 55-26 game and Jordan Sanders and Lucie Adams came off the bench to score a pair of buckets and cap an impressive, 59-29 victory for the Lady Raiders.

Bailey Tetro led Good Hope with 20 points in the win. McSwain added 16 points, Heather Tetro finished with nine points and five assists and Johnson (eight rebounds) and Maddox (seven rebounds) each scored five points.

The Lady Raiders enjoyed a great send off from their fans before they hit the road Tuesday morning and Aby believes the more the community shows its support for the Lady Raiders, the harder they want to play for them.

"We were at Good Hope this morning doing a walk through all the schools and

we saw kids of all ages making signs, drawing the girls' pictures, each varsity girl and manager got a huge laundry basket just full of goodies and the community support is just so awesome. It's not just us out there chasing this dream, it feels like it's everybody in the community. You look up there and it's just a red sea. I feel like half of Good Hope was out there," Aby joked.

"These girls come out with a ball of energy to start the game and I have to give credit where credit is due, a lot of that comes from the fans. They just feed off the atmosphere and when they look up and they have a student section going crazy and it's just a sea of red, these girls want to play hard for them."

### **Good Hope 63 - T.R. Miller 35 (4A State Championship Game)**

March 1 was a historic and emotional day at Legacy Arena for the Good Hope Lady Raiders. After coming up short of their goals the last few seasons, the senior-led Lady Raiders broke through in a big way Friday night, defeating T.R. Miller 63-35 to cap a stellar season with the first state title in school history.

Good Hope trailed T.R. Miller early in the second quarter and even though they're not used to falling behind early, the twin backcourt of Bailey and Heather Tetro knew once they settled into the game they'd be in good shape.

"I think we started out with a little bit of nerves; I know I did," Bailey said.

"We're used to having fast starts and being on top by

the end of the first quarter, so I think we just needed to settle down and get into our groove and I think we did that. I think our defense is really what got us going."

"Even when we get down, we have so much trust in each other when we go out there and play," Heather said. "We got down a little bit and it shocked us at first because like (Bailey) said, we're used to having quick starts, but we trust each other and once we get going, there's no looking back for us."

Good Hope head Coach Justin Aby shared the Tetros' confidence, knowing his team has put in the work to get to this point and would do what they needed to do to take control of the momentum and earn the win.

"It's a special group. It really is. This is year number five for me in coaching and some of them have been starting since their eighth-grade year and to see all the hard work and everything they've done, it's really special to see them get that blue map. I don't even know what I'm going to do next year," Aby joked.

"I don't know how I'm going to break the press without having two Tetros running around out there getting open and Ivey doing everything she does and Charly, Emma and Lillie. They're a great, great group of girls who just totally bought in from day one."

Bailey Tetro sank a pair of free throws and turned a steal into an easy basket to give the Lady Raiders a 4-0 start.

Another Bailey Tetro basket made it 6-0 early in the opening period and »

Charly Johnson split a pair of free throws to keep Good Hope ahead 7-2.

Bailey Tetro's next bucket made it a 9-5 game later in the first, but T.R. Miller was able to tie things up at 9 by the start of the second.

The Lady Tigers pulled ahead 15-9 early in the second quarter but after Johnson hit another free throw, Maddox scored a tough basket inside to cut the lead to 15-12.

Bailey Tetro hit two more free throws and Maddox buried a three to put the Lady Raiders back in front 17-16 with three minutes remaining in the period.

Ava McSwain laid one in, and Bailey Tetro converted an and-one play to stretch Good Hope's lead to 22-17.

Bailey took another steal the other way for two more points and Maddox drilled another three with just over a minute on the clock to give the Lady Raiders a 27-19 lead at halftime.

Another Maddox score put Good Hope on top 29-21 at the start of the third and a pair of McSwain baskets made it 33-21.

Maddox drained a three and Johnson scored inside in to give the Lady Raiders a 38-23 advantage and they continued adding to their lead as the third quarter went on. Johnson laid one in just before the buzzer to make it a 48-25 game with just one quarter remaining.

Lillie McCluskey knocked down a three and Johnson and Bailey Tetro each drove and scored to put Good Hope in front 55-29.

Maddox finished an and-one play to make it a 58-32 game and the Lady

Raiders (33-2) cruised the rest of the way to put the finishing touches on a 63-35 state championship win.

Maddox led Good Hope with 20 points in the win. Bailey Tetro finished with 17 and McSwain added 12. Bailey Tetro, Maddox and McSwain earned All-State Tournament honors and Tetro was selected as Tournament MVP.

For seniors Heather Tetro and Ivey Maddox, the moment is made even more special by the fact they reached their ultimate goal with the teammates they've grown up playing with for years.

"There are so many emotions going on right now for me at least.

"This is my last game, but I wouldn't want to end it any other way, it's amazing to win with this group of girls," Heather said.

"I've been playing with these girls for a long time so to have a game like this and to be able to come out on top is so special and it's definitely a moment I will remember the rest of my life."

"It's more than just basketball to us. For so long we've been playing together, since travel ball and everything," Maddox said.

"There have been so many times that we were counted out or overlooked and now that it's our time it's just even more special."

Senior Bailey Tetro was honored to be named Tournament MVP but wishes she could share it with her teammates and the community that came to support them.

"It is an honor but there are so many girls on this team

that deserve it, honestly, I think more than I do.

"I'm just so proud of everyone, I could not win it without these girls and it's a blessing just to be here right now.

"I think the MVP of this game would have to be our community," Bailey said.

"It's been four years that people have expected us to go so far and it's ended early.

"I remember last year I was so upset after the Sweet 16 because I thought, 'Man, they're going to give up on us'

and they did not give up on us. They believed in us even harder this year."

"That's just a prime example of the unselfishness we have on our team," Aby said.

"You address the girl that won the MVP and then she gives it to her teammates and her community.

"It's a special, special group of girls and that's just one example of who they are, not as basketball players but as people."

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# 'Keep God first, and everything else will fall into place'

## 'Vinemont's Maggie Burks recaps her Eagle career

**Sammy Confer**

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**VINEMONT, Ala.** — Vinemont's Maggie Burks will wrap up a great career as an Eagle when she graduates in May and she's made a lot of memories on and off the court she wanted to share.

"Although this year did not finish the way we hoped, I think back to my eighth and ninth grade years and see how far we have come. We made so many great memories, winning games that we had not won in a long time. One of my favorite memories was my freshman year. We beat Hanceville and won our first county game in over 10 years," Burks said.

"Since then, we have won many more. My absolute favorite game was our first game in the area tournament my sophomore year. We were not supposed to beat Danville, and we came out and won. That was something we had not done in a long time."

Burks learned so much during her time at Vinemont and got to play with some young, talented young players and learned a lot from them as well.

"In my time playing at Vinemont, I learned how to work together through adversity for the same goal. I also learned that you have to work hard for the goals you want to achieve," Burks said. "I enjoyed playing with the younger girls. Since they started playing on varsity

so young, we had plenty of time to grow together, and I think that helped us overall. I learned that we all need to work together and be on the same page to win. This group of girls taught me to relax and enjoy basketball. I put a lot of pressure on myself early on, and the current underclassmen kept me laughing this season."

Burks took away a very important thing from head coach James Brown. She also talked about what she will remember and miss the most about being an Eagle.

"He cared about his players beyond basketball, and he wanted us to succeed in all areas of life. He was always willing to help us in any way he could. He stressed mental toughness," she said.

"I will remember my teammates and the impact they had on my life more than anything else. We made a lot of good memories together. I will miss the friendships I made and the sport itself so much."

A lot of younger players were watching Burks play on the basketball court a lot during her career, and she talked about how important it is to be that role model for them. She also talked about her favorite role model in her life.

"It is extremely important. When I moved up to varsity in middle school, I was so scared. Fortunately, there were some older girls that made me feel welcome. I wanted to be that



NICK GRIFFIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

### **Vinemont Senior Maggie Burks**

person for them, because it can be very intimidating. My dad was my biggest role model. He taught that you have to work hard to succeed."

She was around a special group of girls during her time at Vinemont. She talked about the best piece of advice that someone has ever given her, and she gave some advice to those younger players that want to be where she's at

right now.

"They all wanted to change the culture of our girls' basketball program. We all worked hard, and we came a long way," she said. "The best piece of advice I have been given is to keep God first, and everything else will fall into place. I would tell those younger players to keep working hard, and it will pay off."



# 'Everyone is family'

## Vinemont's Isaiah Jones reflects on Eagle playing days

**Sammy Confer**

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**VINEMONT, Ala.** — Vinemont senior basketball player Isaiah Jones finished his Eagles career with a great senior season and he shared some of his favorite memories from his time on and off the court. He feels blessed to have played alongside some great teammates and learned a lot from them and his coaches.

"My favorite memories were definitely the practices: the hard ones and the fun ones. My favorite games that I was a part of was Senior Night and the first game of the area tournament," Jones said. "It felt good being pushed in practice. Having your teammates push you to be the best version of yourself is a great feeling. I learned that sometimes, you have to do things you don't want to do, whether it's saying something to someone for their own good or doing things for your own."

Jones had a blast playing for head coach Preston Boyd and talked about his favorite memory playing for him. He talked about what he will remember the most about playing with this team.

"It was great. He was always there for me on and off the court, and I learned not only what it takes to be a better basketball player but to be a better man. I love him to death, and I couldn't have asked for anyone better. One of my favorite moments were before and after the games,

we always had a prayer, no matter what," Jones said. "What I will remember the most about playing with this team are definitely the moments that everyone didn't get to see. I will remember the bonding before and after the games and the feeling of knowing they got your back.

Jones got to play with a lot of great seniors during his time as an Eagle, and that helped him become a great leader his senior season. He played with some amazing seniors this season and learned an important thing from them.

"It's a good feeling to have people care about you, and I feel like that's one of the most important aspects of being a leader," he said. "It was great playing with them, because we got to bond a lot more this year than ever. We all had our moments, and we had to step up and do what had to be done. I learned that sometimes, things are going to get hard, but we have to stick together."

He talked about an important basketball role model that he watched a whole lot; plus how important it is to be a role model for the younger players that watched him play during his career.

"My role model is Kobe Bryant. For as long as I can remember, it was always him. I loved how he always found a way when it seemed like there wasn't one. I learned that a true leader doesn't care about what other »



NICK GRIFFIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Vinemont senior Isaiah Jones**

people think when it comes to being successful," he said. "I think it's huge. I always try my best to help them when I can, and it's a great feeling when I can."

He talked about the best advice that someone has ever given him, his advice to the younger players that want to be where he's at right now, what he will remember the most about playing at Vinemont, and what does he want people to remember about him.

"The best advice that

someone has ever given me is that you always have to try and be the best version of yourself, because someone is always watching when you don't know it. My advice to those younger players is that you have to be willing to work hard, even when no one is around," he said. "What I will remember the most about being an Eagle is probably the feeling that everyone is family. I want to be remembered as the guy you can always lean on and who will be there for you when you need him."

# 'It's been a blast'

## 4A Coach of the Year Justin Aby talks state championship season

**Nick Griffin**

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**GOOD HOPE, Ala.** — What a season it was for the Good Hope Lady Raiders. After falling short of their postseason aspirations in 2022 and 2023, the Raiders bounced back in a big way in 2024. Good Hope claimed its third straight county championship in January, cruised through the Area 13 tournament once the postseason tipped off and hammered both Deshler and Priceville at the Northwest Regional to advance to its first final four in 12 years. The Lady Raiders didn't slow down when they got to Birmingham. Good Hope handled Prattville Christian 59-29 to advance to the 4A state finals and defeated T.R. Miller 63-35 to win its first state championship in program history and put the finishing touches on a historic season.

This year's Good Hope team was an experienced, talented group of players hungry for a state title and the man that's been helping prepare them for this year's dominant run is Head Coach Justin Aby. This season was Aby's fifth at Good Hope and he has been watching this group of seniors develop together over the course of their varsity careers so he wasn't surprised to see them hoist the blue map this year.

"It's been a blast! Just so much talent on one team.

Most teams would be thrilled to have half of the talent that we have. Not only are they talented but they are leaders. They hold each other accountable and expect everyone's best each day," Aby said. "Ever since this group put on a varsity uniform, I thought they were capable of winning state. Most people don't realize how tough it is to win it all. Not only do you need to have a talented team but you need to avoid injuries, be selfless, and be playing your best at the right time of the year."

Aby was awarded 4A Coach of the Year honors by the Alabama Sportswriters Association this season after leading the Lady Raiders to a 33-2 record and their first state title. Aby was excited to receive the recognition but gave most of the credit to his players, praising them for their leadership, decision-making and unselfishness out on the court.

"Great players make coaches look good. This award is a testament to the coaches on the floor. Heather and Bailey Tetro break the press, set up the offense and strategize defensive schemes. They are two of the top point guards in the state (coaches on the floor) and I've had the privilege of having them for the past five years," Aby said. "Some of the best teams never reach their full potential due to not playing together. That wasn't the case for this team. They



NICK GRIFFIN & CATHY MCSWAIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

### Good Hope Head Coach Justin Aby

always looked for the extra pass and seemed to get more excited over an assist. Four of these ladies scored over 1000 career points so scoring points was not an issue. One thing they mastered was to turn down good shots for better shots."

After dominating quality teams on the biggest stage in Birmingham, one of the things the Lady Raiders were most excited about was the support their community showed them. Aby is proud of the way the Good Hope

community rallied around his team and knows this year's championship squad has left a lasting legacy for generations of Raiders to come.

"The community was amazing all season long. They were able to provide financially and always made it a priority to cheer for this team each and every game," Aby said. "These girls will always be remembered as superstars by this generation of young raiders. It showed that anyone is capable of reaching a goal if you work your tail off for it."



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# 'Have confidence in yourself'

## Fairview's Kobe Payne recaps Aggie career

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**FAIRVIEW, Ala.** — Fairview senior basketball Kobe Payne put together a great career during his Aggie years and talked about some of his favorite memories and what it was like to play alongside some great teammates.

"Me and some of the team got to stay at my grandparents' house on our summer play-day game at UNA. We also went on a trip to the mountains last year, and we won a lot of close games at home.

"What I learned during my career is new offenses and defenses from the coaches I had, and I have also learned how to play with pressure and how to play when I'm tired," Payne said.

"Playing with my teammates was a lot of fun, and it gave me opportunities to get better and test my abilities. I learned how to be able to play with new people, try to be the best teammate, and adapt to the way my teammates play for us to succeed.

"What I will remember the most about playing with my teammates is the confidence and the trust they put in me and the way they encouraged me to be the best player and person I can be."

Payne learned a lot from his coaches and talked about his favorite memories of playing for them. He talked about what he will remember and miss the most about playing at Fairview.

"They were coaches with a lot of different philosophies on how the game should be played, and since they all had different offenses and defenses, I got to learn how to kind of learn on the fly and be able to adapt to different situations.

"Some of my favorite memories with the coaches were after I made a great play or something, and I look at the bench, and the coaches would go crazy and get excited," Payne said.

"I'll definitely remember the teammates and coaches and just the feeling before the games. I will miss my teammates and how fun they made the game for me. I'll also miss the feeling before the games, the atmosphere getting to play for Fairview, and during the county tournament."

Payne talked about some of his favorite games at Fairview. He had a lot of younger players watching him perform in a lot of games, and he quickly became a great role model for them. He talked about his role models growing up.

"I would have to say when we played Arab at home, and it was a close game. We ended up winning by two points. Another great game was against Scottsboro at home this year, and that was a close game too, and also, when we played against Haleyville on Senior Night," he said.

"I think it's really important to be a good role model, because when I was little, I always looked up to the varsity players. I want to be a good



NICK GRIFFIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

### Fairview senior Kobe Payne

role model for them, because I want them to have someone to look up to, and hopefully impact their lives in a good way like the varsity players did when I was little."

He added,

"At Fairview, my role model was definitely Bryson Fletcher. I remember seeing him get his 1,000-point ball and I was thinking, I want that, so that gave me a goal to get that. My favorite NBA player is Kevin Durant. Watching him play made me love the game

more and more."

He talked about the best advice that someone ever gave him, and he gave some advice to those younger players that want to be where he's at right now.

"The best advice that someone has ever given me is to always have fun and enjoy being able to get to play the game you love," he said. "To those players that want to be where I'm at right now, my advice to them is to have confidence in yourself."

# 'Good Hope is such a special place, and the people in it made it 100 times better'

## Ivey Maddox recaps Raider career

**Sammy Confer**

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**GOOD HOPE, Ala.** — What a historic season it was for the Good Hope Lady Raiders. Good Hope powered its way through the postseason to win this year's 4A state crown and capture the first state title in school history. It was a great way to cap a great career for senior Ivey Maddox and she shared some of her best favorite memories from her Lady Raider years.

"My best memories were winning the state title for the first time in school history, beating Deshler in overtime as the underdogs in 2021, and going to the beach as a team and just playing basketball, but also doing things outside of it," Maddox said.

"We still can't believe it to this day. The support from everyone was major motivation going into it.

"We were told to play for each other and for everyone who believed in us. After the game, we couldn't stop crying. It just meant that much to us."

She added, "Winning the state championship with this group of girls meant the world.

"I've played with them for over five years and to see it all unfold the way it did, from when we doubted ourselves, to holding the trophy

together, I just can't believe it all worked out. We deserved it. We worked so hard, day in and day out. Nobody could question our work ethic and determination.

"That's what set our team apart. We don't give up; we're family. They kept me humble. They showed me the definition of a real teammate. Any time I was down, they would lift me up. They shaped me into the player I am today."

Ivey had a great relationship with head coach Justin Aby and took away so much from playing for him. She shared her favorite memory playing for coach Aby.

"We had a unique relationship (laughs). He believed in me big time and was always doing his best to get me exposure. Some people could say we hated each other, but I always saw it as he believed in me, and I believed in him that it almost got us riled up sometimes.

"We trusted each other. He's made a big impact on my basketball career and my life. He taught me to believe in myself and never back down from the moment. I think my biggest take away from him would be to not be too hard on myself, but always hold myself accountable, to know what kind of player I am, and believe in what I can do. »



NICK GRIFFIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Good Hope senior Ivey Maddox**

There's been plenty of times he has pulled me aside and told me to remember who I am and that I don't have to stress about missing shots or low percentages.

"He always picked me up when I needed it. My favorite memory playing for coach Aby would be when we finally beat Deshler in the Regionals this past year, and I came off the court and gave him a hug. I'm pretty sure he was trying not to cry."

She shared some of her favorite games, what she will remember and miss the most about playing at Good Hope, winning the state title in front of an amazing student section and an amazing crowd, and winning a state title alongside Ava McSwain, the newest member of Good Hope's basketball team.

"Of course, the state championship game and the Deshler games. But also when we played in the county championship. We were on fire and just being able to play in front of the community together one last time for the championship was special.

"Another game, I would say, would be the West Morgan game. I say that game, because we came together that day. We cried together, laughed together, and told each other we had each other's backs, no matter what.

"As sad as it was in the moment, it made us stronger and closer," she said.

"I will definitely remember the atmosphere, the fans, and the bond our team had. There was nothing like it.

"Good Hope is such a special place, and the people in it made it 100 times better. Nothing will ever top playing

with that team on a Friday night at Good Hope. It was truly amazing to be supported and play for each other."

She added, "I felt like we owed it to them. Even though we had let them down so many times, they keep coming back stronger every time.

"They are the reason we had so much motivation and confidence. I remember looking around the arena at the BJCC in the state championship game and just crying.

"It was amazing. Ava's an amazing player and person. She fit right in when she joined.

"It was like she had been there all along. She put up major stats for us this season. We couldn't have done it without her."

She will deeply miss playing at Good Hope next season and talked about her role models growing up, plus how important it is to be a role model for the younger players that watched her play her whole career.

"I loved being a Raider because of the people I was surrounded by. I've went to Good Hope my whole life, and to look back through the years and the memories, it's just so hard to watch it come to an end," she said.

"When I was growing up, my role models were my brother and sister. I would go to every single one of their games.

"I loved watching them compete, and their love for the game inspired me at a young age, whether I was playing basketball with my brother in the laundry room of our house or playing volleyball with my sister outside after school.

"They really did have an

impact on me and my career. When I first started playing on varsity in seventh grade, I was so scared, and I remember crying, but my brother told me I could do it, and that I was just as good, and I had to believe in myself.

"My sister is my biggest supporter. She's always been in my corner, no matter what. I also love watching my cousin Cole play.

"His work ethic is unmatched, and that's one thing I have always admired about him.

"That's one thing that helped me keep my composure every game: knowing I had little eyes on me. The adults were also watching

as well. I wanted them to see what kind of player I was, and hopefully, they want their kids to be the same way: calm, collected, and composed."

She gave some advice to those younger players that want to be where she's at right now, and she talked about how she wants people to remember her.

"My advice to them would be to keep working, and you will only get out as much as you put in. They have to want to get better, and it's a mindset. They have to believe they can do it," she said.

"I want people to remember me for my competitiveness, my love for the game, and my determination."

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# 'The muddier I got, the more I liked it'

## Meet Frankie Greer of Cotton Pickin Pottery Co.

**Cheyenne Sharp**

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The delicate act of throwing pottery is a talent that few have naturally, and fewer take the time, or have the patience and perseverance to hone the skill and become an artist who can create beautiful trinkets and keepsakes with their own hands. Frankie Greer uses her talent – shaped by years of practice and mistakes – almost daily. Her family pottery business, Cotton Pickin Pottery Co., is the fruit of her labor put on display.

Greer's artistic side began to shine through in her youth when the Arab native began taking a course that was a new addition to her high school's curriculum. It was a class intended to introduce students to the world of pottery wheels and kilns, glazes and dirty, muddy clay.

"I started in high school and I still have the first piece I've ever done. It was 1970, 1971 and 1972. The dirtier I got, the muddier I got, the more I liked it," chuckled Greer. "It was something I absolutely loved."

When her high school career ended, Greer believed that to be the end of the road for her pottery career as well. She married her high school sweetheart, Joe, and the couple began their new journey together.

Greer's new husband was enlisted in the United States Air Force, requiring the young couple to move their home

base location frequently. From destinations in Alabama to Massachusetts and all the way to Alaska, the family stuck together, adding three sons into the mix along the way. The couple's oldest son, Christopher, was born in Massachusetts and is the only one of the children to live in Alaska with his parents, even if for a short while.

"Cool is not the word; the word is cold," Greer laughed. "Joe was stationed in Alaska for a year and he was there for about two months before Christopher and I joined him. It was such a remote base in the interior of Alaska so there was no base housing or anything. Accommodations were very hard to come by."

With no base housing and limited rental options, the young family weathered the frigid weather in a small camper trailer.

This was obviously not the ideal environment for the family's now 4-month-old son; when Joe Greer's time at the Alaska base ended, Greer said, the family was more than ready to return to sunshine and home in Alabama.

Returning to Hartselle upon her husband's honorable discharge, the family settled and planted roots, adding two new sons, Derek and Brett. Raising their sons in a small town and fully immersing herself in the role of motherhood, Greer let her hobbies and passions like pottery fall to the wayside, overtaken by the tasks of daily



KRISTY GREER

**Frankie Greer stands at a craft show with one of her handmade masterpieces.**

life.

The family's reprieve to their home sweet home lasted a while, long enough for their children to graduate high school. Her husband held various jobs and titles throughout the years in Hartselle. One of those jobs set the family on end. Joe Greer was employed by the railroad after his military retirement, and the family was once again

uprooted, sons and all, and sent states away from their hometown, this time to North Carolina.

Greer recounted, "We were up there for 17 years. He was transferred to Charlotte, North Carolina, and we lived just across the border in South Carolina."

When a transfer was approved for the family to relocate once again to »



their home state, the Greers felt it was a dream come true. Those transfers were extremely rare and hard to come by; Greer wasted no time lining up the plans and making sure everything was in order - they were coming home. This time, the move was different, there were no children to tend to and limited homemaking to be done now that the pair's children were all adults and self-sufficient. One day, Greer said, her husband stopped her on a random day to ask her a question that would significantly change her future.

"I didn't get back into it (pottery) until after I was back home in Alabama, about eight years ago, I guess?" she recounted. "My husband really encouraged me and said, 'You always loved doing this, why don't you buy a wheel?'"

That wheel was the reemergence of the passion that Greer was missing throughout her years of child-rearing and family travels; her artistry was calling for an outlet. Beginning to throw pottery again after so many years was no easy feat. Greer said the challenges were difficult to overcome at first, but eventually it all came back, like riding a bike. This time, her youngest son, Brett, took interest in the messy activity.

"I called Brett and asked him to come over. I said, 'There's something I got that I want you to see.' So, he came home and I took him in the basement and we spent hours down there. We stayed down there the whole time and laughed and made some of the god-awful things you've ever seen," Greer laughed. "He's got these long guitar-picking fingers and he

can get down in there and make the best things."

The crafts began to flow out of the Greers' basement like fluid works, and eventually, Greer bought a small kiln to fire and finish her projects. Then another kiln followed, and another followed that. With each kiln and wheel upgrade, the duo's art was becoming more and more popular within the community.

"Brett and I, we tossed it back and forth and he just said, 'Well, let's start a company,'" said Greer. "We named the company Cotton Pickin Pottery Co. after my dad - they picked cotton."

And so Cotton Pickin Pottery Co. was born, giving Greer an outlet for her creative needs and dreams. The company debuts new items at craft fairs, festivals and shows all across

the state, with Frankie Greer, her son Brett Greer and his wife, Kristy, preparing months in advance to create the perfect pottery pieces.

The years of perseverance, practice and patience came in handy for Greer. One class in high school set her on a path that would shape not only her own life, but also the life of her son, who now shares her talent and passion for the art of creating pottery. The years helped hone Greer's skill, but she still studies her first throwing and looks back at the journey that landed her where she is today.

"I've got the first piece I ever made for my Mama - she passed in 2020 - to look at it now and to see how far it's come. It's like, 'Wow, I've accomplished something,'" smiled Greer.




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# 'Teamwork is everything, and every job means something'

## Brian Bradberry talks new role as public safety director

**Cheyenne Sharp**

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**O**n Feb. 19, 2024, the Cullman City Council approved an ordinance to create a first-of-its-kind position for the City: public safety director. Moments later, it passed a resolution naming then-Cullman Fire Rescue Chief Brian Bradberry to the post. Deputy Fire Chief Darren Peoples was then appointed interim chief.

Bradberry has spent more than two decades in Cullman, marrying his wife, Jill, and raising their three children while he climbed the necessary ladders to eventually land the title of director.

"We truly love Cullman and I have lived here for about 23 years. We have raised three wonderful children - twins Kate and Reid, who are about to graduate from Cullman High School, and my oldest son Will, who attends Auburn University. My wife Jill currently serves on the Cullman City School Board, and I am so very proud of all of them," Bradberry beamed.

"I am honored that our mayor and city council has confidence in me to help build on the already great public safety departments we have here in Cullman. From our outstanding 911 telecommunicators to our police officers and firefighter/EMTs, I can assure you we have some of the best."

The position was created to streamline emergency processes between dispatch, the Cullman Police Department, Cullman Fire Rescue and

emergency medical services in Cullman. At the council meeting in February, Cullman City Council President Jenny Folsom explained the coordination efforts between the organizations will lead to stronger services and stronger overall safety for the public.

Bradberry, as he moves closer to eventual retirement, explained how he's tackling his new role.

"I am in the twilight of my career in public safety, and I truly want to retire at some point, but I want to make sure that when I do, I have done everything that I can to help our community and our first responders," he said.

"I plan to work closely with our police chief, fire chief, City 911 director, City department heads and outside agencies to bridge any gaps, build relationships and assist in improving our emergency preparedness and long-term planning for our city emergency response."

Moving from fire chief to public safety director was an easy shift for Bradberry. With years of experience in the department, he was named chief of Cullman Fire Rescue in 2018, after the retirement of longtime Chief Edward "Junior" Reinhardt.

But Bradberry's career in public safety began long before that - he also worked in Jasper and Hoover.

"I worked both departments, 48 hours on and 24 hours off. That was pretty rough on a family those days, but I learned a lot.

"I saw a lot of different



**City of Cullman Public Safety Director Brian Bradberry sits behind his desk.**

CHEYENNE SHARP/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

departments and saw how a lot of them do things. I learned how to lean on those folks that know better than me," Bradberry shared.

"There are so many folks that have great ideas you've never even thought about. There are three divisions - we have the City 911 dispatch and telecommunicators, Cullman Police Department and Cullman Fire Department. In this role, to stay on top of all of that and know the best, newest, greatest procedures and to be proactive, you have to listen to people."

As the central point of contact and administration for Cullman's emergency service personnel, Bradberry said he hopes to increase communication between departments regularly, instead of the typically scheduled meetings around festivals and large community events.

He said evaluating each department's budget, tactics and efforts will lead to evolving, more efficient services. Streamlining processes, policies and procedures, Bradberry said, could help with recruitment and retention, leading to more staff available in the event of emergencies or catastrophes.

"Teamwork is everything, and every job means something. If you fail in your chain of responsibility, it could really be catastrophic," he said.

"We have great department heads and chiefs, and they really do communicate with one another.

"What I plan to do is meet with them regularly, of course, but also arrange maybe biweekly or monthly meetings to bring all of us together in a room. If there is an issue, we can resolve that and just make everything stronger."

# Finding fulfillment in your golden years

The importance of volunteering, as told by Don and Nancy McKenzie

**Cayla Grace Murphy**  
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Cullman residents Don and Nancy McKenzie are riding a second wind in their lives after hitting the illustrious retirement milestone. Far from the stereotypical vision of birdwatching, bingo and AARP memberships that retirement inspires, the McKenzies are packing food bags, organizing intake forms and hauling dollies of banana boxes packed with pantry staples to the Master's Hand food pantry. They've found the simple solution to retirement ennui: volunteering.

"When we were younger, we worked our tails off. I used to have this vision of retirement as this sort of happy paradise, where the 9-5 rat race ends, and I just sit in the backyard under an umbrella... but it was boring!" Don McKenzie exclaimed, saying that by the time Nancy McKenzie joined him in the retirement club, he was starting to get stir-crazy. He posed the idea that it might not just be the 9-5 to schedule he was missing - it was the simple act of feeling fulfilled.

"It's our time to pay it back, and pay it forward," agreed his wife. After much prayerful consideration, the McKenzies landed on The Link of Cullman County - more specifically, its Master's Hand food pantry, which they have been »

volunteering at faithfully for over a decade, managing everything from intake to logistics.

"It's the mindset. You have to have a passion. And my passion is for these people," explained Nancy McKenzie, who helps with the check-in process at the pantry. She's often the first point of contact for neighbors seeking services at The Link, and makes a concerted effort to learn the names of clients she serves, hoping to show a little kindness and restore a little dignity in what can be a low point in someone's life.

"You just can't imagine what other people may be going through," she said, shaking her head.

Don McKenzie shared that over their 14 years of making good in the golden years of their lives, they've seen considerable growth in the needs of the clients they serve.

They hope by sharing their story, they can encourage others who may be in the same walk of life as them - retired, bored, itching for a sense of fulfillment or to give back - to help meet that need.

"As we grow in population, the demands are greater," he explained. "We need people that are willing to come a couple hours a week, and those who can help us plant that seed and help it grow.

"People come and they say, 'Just put me wherever.' So we ask people, 'What's on your



Don and Nancy McKenzie smile for the camera.

CAYLA GRACE MURPHY/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

heart?' Others don't realize how talented they were, or are still. When you've put in 50 years as a teacher, that's your passion, that's your gift."

Nancy McKenzie expressed that over the years, they've noticed that more than just warm bodies, local nonprofits have a growing need for volunteers to utilize the skills and experience from their time in the workforce - something retirees ought to have plenty of - to keep bettering the community. That skill, she says, combined with passion, is the key to really making a difference.

The McKenzies believe that no matter your talent or gift, there's a way to make an impact

with it, and that impact has no age limit. Just ask any of the other daily volunteers who work with them.

"I joke, we sometimes look like the Cullman geriatric center!" Don McKenzie chuckled, gesturing to several other regular volunteers who are also in their 60s and 70s.

Don and Nancy McKenzie are proof that an active life doesn't end at retirement... or, it doesn't have to, at least.

And, if after the glee of retirement wears off, and you look up and find yourself disenchanted with a life of birdwatching, bingo and AARP memberships, they're always looking for more hands on deck at Master's Hand.

# WildWater

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