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Dr. Kira Sims (center) and members of her Cullman County Alabama Extension team

#### CULLMAN COUNTY ALABAMA EXTENSIO

### **ROOTED IN SERVICE**

# Dr. Kira Sims and the mission of the Cullman County Extension

### **Gauge Day**

gauge@cullmantribune.com

rom tending a small home garden to earning a Ph.D. and leading agricultural education efforts across Cullman County, Dr. Kira Sims' journey in horticulture has come full circle. Today, as director of the Cullman County Extension Office, she channels that lifelong passion into helping others grow, both in their fields and in their communities.

While her "formal" education began in her high school Future Farmers of America (FFA) program, her passion was rooted in family. She gained hands-on experience working in her uncle's plant nursery and

learned the basics of gardening alongside her grandmother, planting her first garden while still in high school.

It was here, even before she knew it, that her future in Extension work was quietly taking root in her life.

"My grandfather was a researcher for Auburn in horticulture and he worked up here at the Cullman experiment station a lot," Sims recalled. "My grandfather passed when I was little, but when I applied for my current job, my grandmother was thrilled I'd be working in the same county and with some of the same people he did."

She added, "I still meet people who knew him. It is neat to have that connection."

That mix of family influence,

early hands-on work and classroom exposure propelled her toward Auburn University, where she earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees in horticulture.

"My father worked at Auburn and my uncle knew a lot of the professors in horticulture because of his business and his time as a student in the Agronomy department," she shared. "That decision was the only one that made sense. Continuing to graduate school for a master's degree was mostly because I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, but I knew what I didn't want to do: mowing grass for the rest of my life. I had an internship with Alabama Extension after graduating, and that started to steer my course into Extension."

But Sims wasn't done yet. With plans to one day return to Auburn as a professor and a Ph.D. student position opening up, she decided to take the next step in her academic journey only to realize the classroom wasn't where she was meant to stay. "As a graduate student, I taught a few classes and realized that's also not what I wanted to do the rest of my career," she said. "I love teaching, but I wanted something that gave me the freedom to teach what and when I wanted. Extension fits that desire."

She went on to complete her Ph.D. at North Carolina State University, studying under Extension specialist Dr. Katie Jennings, who » became one of her most influential mentors. "Dr. Jennings is the reason I came back into Extension," Sims shared. "She worked to serve the growers in North Carolina. She sought funding, networked, presented — all to better vegetable growers — and she loved it."

It was during her time in North Carolina that Sims' experience as an Extension agent truly took hold. The daily work of answering questions, serving her community, and learning how the system functioned from the ground up gave her a deep appreciation for the role — one she continues to carry into her work in Cullman today.

Today, as Cullman County Extension director, Sims leads a program that is as diverse as the people it serves. No two days look the same. "Some days I'm in my office writing articles or creating flyers, taking phone calls or helping walk-in clients. Other days I'm teaching a class. helping with a community event or going to 4-H Summer Camp," she explained. "This job gives me the opportunity to teach, to network and to serve. When I think back on other jobs or roles I've enjoyed, those three things were always present."

That variety and the type of role she plays also bring great responsibility. A part of Alabama Extension's mission is all about "taking the university to the people," something Sims fully believes in. "It's not just about growing gardens; it's about ensuring families and farmers alike have access to trustworthy, research-backed knowledge. There is a lot of misinformation out there, primarily on the internet," she said. "Extension is that connection between solid information and the people who need it. I am certain we have saved lives when we tell people how to properly preserve their produce, and most certainly have saved people money when we advise them on their soil reports, plant problems and financial matters in the home. The researchers do a great job, something I have been a part of before, but what they do doesn't matter if we aren't here to help apply that knowledge."

But according to Sims, the Extension's strength lies in hands-on learning. Whether teaching Master Gardeners or working with 4-H students, she makes sure people don't just hear about the work, they experience it for themselves.

"Most people are visual learners. If they can see it, hear it, do it, they get it," she said. "I can tell someone how to prune all day long, but until they get out there and cut on that rose bush themselves, they don't fully understand. Youth are the same way — they need to grow the sweet potatoes and watermelons to realize the reward of harvesting the fruits of their labor."

Through those kinds of lessons, Sims has seen students grow in confidence and skill year after year, especially through programs like the 4-H Outdoor Adventure Club. After two years together, Sims was amazed at how much the students had grown.

"They could start a fire on their own, unload and load our kayak trailer with little instruction, could take the lead on hikes and worked as a team to set up the tents," Sims shared. "I was so proud of them and how much their skills had advanced. It makes me excited to start the club over next year, bring on new members and watch them grow, then let the old members help teach."

While horticulture and agriculture remain core pillars of the Extension, Sims emphasized that the mission stretches much further. "Extension has something for everyone," she said. "We're known for our farm and garden information and our work with 4-H, but we also have resources in health and nutrition, personal finance, food preservation, family and

child development, business and community development. Our information is true, backed by science and it's free. We are the experts, and we are here to serve Alabama."

But beyond the technical expertise, Sims hopes her students and the Cullman community see something deeper. "I hope the people I work with see kindness and a servant's heart," she said.

"But I also hope they see reality and practicality. Everything doesn't need to be sugar coated; in life, we have to make hard decisions and we have to do hard things. When they have to act in those hard moments, I hope they choose to do so out of humility and think of others first."

Now several years into her leadership role, Sims sees a bright future for Cullman County

Extension. "As I settled into my role, which one can only say after being in Extension for at least three years, I look forward to strengthening the partnerships we currently have and seeking new ones that have been on my radar," she said. "I have a fantastic staff, and I want to offer them opportunities to develop and grow — both within themselves and their programs."

For Sims, the path that began in a small garden with her grandmother has fully bloomed. What started as a personal passion for plants has grown into a lifelong calling to serve others through education, outreach and community connection. "Extension allows me to do all the things I love — teach, serve and build relationships," she said. "And every day, I get to see the impact it makes right here in Cullman County."



### CCSO, CPD offer holiday safety and security tips

#### **Lauren Estes**

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ach year, the Cullman County Sheriff's Office and Cullman Police Department share ways to keep yourself and your home safe and secure through the holidays.

As the holiday season approaches, the Cullman County Sheriff's Office reminds everyone to stay vigilant and take proactive steps to ensure their safety and the safety of their loved ones.

Cullman County Sheriff Matt Gentry said at home, it's important to keep your doors and windows locked at all times, whether you're home or away.

"Consider leaving a radio or television on to create the illusion that someone is inside," Gentry said.

"Avoid placing large displays of holiday gifts where they can be easily seen through windows or doors, as this can attract unwanted attention. When someone comes to your door, remain cautious. Criminals sometimes pose as delivery drivers or couriers to gain access to homes. If you are uncertain about who is at your door, do not open it."

The sheriff advised residents to trust their instincts, and said don't hesitate to contact authorities if you feel something isn't right.

"Be especially skeptical of door-to-door solicitors," he said, "as criminals may exploit people's generosity during the holidays."

He also gave advice on staying safe while out holiday shopping.

"While driving or shopping, always lock your vehicle doors and windows, whether you are inside or not.

"If you need to shop after dark, make sure to park in a well-lit area and take note of your parking location. Be mindful of the vehicles you park next to, and try to avoid parking beside vans, vehicles with camper shells or those with dark tinted windows.

"Park as close as possible to your destination to minimize walking distance. Never leave your vehicle running while unattended, especially if there are children inside. Do not leave any valuables in plain sight," he said.

And, when you're ready to go back to your vehicle, he said, "As you approach your vehicle, have your keys ready, stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. If you notice suspicious individuals loitering near your vehicle, do not approach it. Instead, return to the store and request a security escort if needed."

In all aspects of daily life, it's important to increase your situational awareness, Gentry said

"Know where you are, where you are going and remain aware of your environment," he said. "Stay prepared, trust your instincts and take the necessary steps to ensure you get home safely. Do not let evil surprise you."

CPD Public Relations Officer Adam Clark said one of the best and simplest ways to keep your home safe is to not make "an honest man, dishonest" by keeping your home or vehicle unlocked.

## Here are some tips Clark shared regarding home safety and security:

- Lock all doors and windows
   even when you're home.
- Be cautious with holiday lights and candles unplug lights before bed and never

leave candles unattended.

- If traveling, use timers on lights and ask a trusted neighbor to keep an eye on your home.
- Avoid overloading electrical outlets — use surge protectors and check cords for fraying.

### Vehicle safety and security:

- Never leave your vehicle running unattended even for a quick stop.
- Lock your doors and hide valuables — shopping bags should be placed in the trunk or covered.
- Keep jumper cables, a flashlight and emergency supplies in your car, especially for winter travel.
- Slow down and drive carefully holiday traffic and

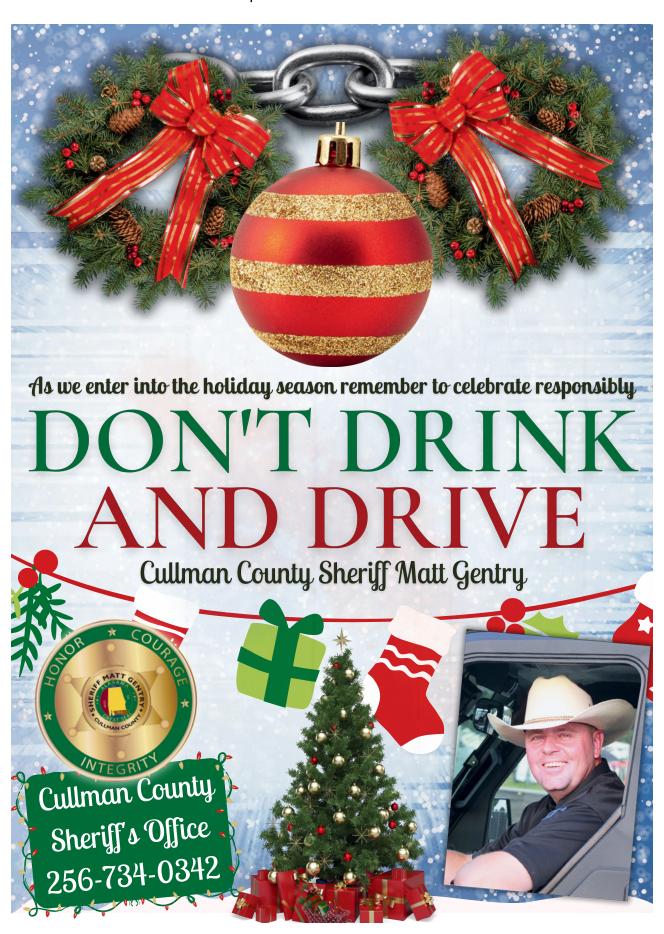
winter conditions increase the risk of accidents.

 If traveling a long distance, share your route and expected arrival time with a friend or family member.

Shopping safety and security:

- Stay alert avoid distractions like texting while walking to your car.
- Park in well-lit areas and have your keys in hand before approaching your vehicle.
- Don't carry large amounts of cash — use credit or debit cards when possible.
- When shopping online, use secure websites and avoid using public Wi-Fi for purchases.
- Beware of delivery scams
   track packages and bring them inside promptly.





# Holiday event calendar

#### **Anabelle Howze**

anabelle@cullmantribune.com

### CULLMAN CHRISTKINDLMARKT

- Nov. 20-Dec. 23
- Thursday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.
- Sundays, noon- 8 p.m.
- Open seven days a week beginning Dec. 11
- Admission: Free
- www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com

With over 40 vendors, the market features handcrafted gifts, artisanal goods and holiday treats. Traditional German food, such as schnitzel, pretzels, raclette and Glühwein, will be available alongside sweets, ornaments, toys and locally made goods. The Kinderplatz offers a festive, safe and fun option for kids, while live entertainment, street performers and parades bring even more excitement. Heated dining nooks and rentable Winterhaus tents provide cozy gathering spots to warm up. No outside food or beverages are allowed in Winterhaus tents. Tent rentals are booked in two-hour increments, and sales are final with no refunds. Dining nooks are available on a first-come, first-served basis unless otherwise reserved. Be sure to dress warmly. Though heaters and fire pits dot the grounds, most of the market is outdoors. Afternoons and weekends draw the biggest crowds. Midweek evenings are quieter and perfect for taking photos or enjoying unrushed shopping, so be sure to plan your visit accordingly. While most vendors accept cards, having cash on hand is always a good idea. If you want a private dining nook or Winterhaus, book in advance to avoid disappointment.

There will be ice skating, Alabama's largest Ferris wheel, Kinderplatz Santa's Village with kids

activities, artisan workshops, a double-decker Christmas carousel, Christkindl Express train, Winterbahn Alpine tubing and Der Schlupfwinkel heated nooks.

### 2ND ANNUAL RUN RUN RUDOLPH FUN RUN/ WALK

- Thursday, Nov. 20, at 5 p.m.
- Sportsman Lake Park
- Tickets: https://tinyurl. com/RRRtickets

Run Run Rudolph is our second annual fun run fundraiser during our Winter Wonderland Christmas Light Show at Sportsman Lake Park! This is the one and only night to run or walk thru our Winter Wonderland Christmas lights! We will also be having an ugly Christmas sweater/Christmas costume contest, so make sure you get dressed up for the holiday season! We will have hot chocolate and shirts for sale at the finish line! We can't wait to see everyone in the holiday spirit! Fun for all ages! Stroller friendly! Leashed dog friendly!

### 7TH ANNUAL CHRISTMAS AT THE GROTTO

- Nov. 20-23
- Nov. 28-30
- Dec. 4-7
- Dec. 11-23
- 11 a.m.- 9 p.m., Thursday-Saturday and noon-8 p.m., Sundays; lights on at 5 p.m.
- Ave Maria Grotto
- Admission: Adults \$12 |
   Seniors \$10 | Military/first responders \$9 | Teens (13-17)
   \$10 | Kids (5-12) \$9 | Kids 4 and younger FREE | Wagon rides (Dec 13 and 14 only) \$5

Experience the beauty of Br. Joseph's incredible work lit up at night — surrounded by glowing lights, festive music and holiday cheer at Ave Maria Grotto in Cullman!

We're teaming up with Cullman's Christkindlmarkt

and the Winter Wonderland Christmas Light Display at Sportsman Lake Park to create one massive holiday destination! All three events will be connected by tram service. Parking available at all locations. Shared dates and times (11 a.m.- 9 p.m., Thursday-Saturday and noon-8 p.m., Sundays; lights on at 5 p.m.).

Don't miss the Grotto's BIG weekend Dec 13 and 14! Live music, food trucks, horsedrawn wagon rides and Santa!

Make memories, take photos and feel the magic of the season at Christmas at the Grotto!

## HANCEVILLE CIVITANS 9TH ANNUAL TINSEL TRAIL & TREE LIGHTING

- Friday, Nov. 21, at 6 p.m.
- Veterans Park
- Admission: Free

Join the community for a magical evening kicking off the holiday season! Enjoy free cookies and hot chocolate, take pictures with Santa, stroll through the beautiful Tinsel Trail and watch as we light up the town tree! Bring your family and friends — it's a night full of holiday cheer you won't want to miss!

# 23RD ANNUAL WINTER WONDERLAND CHRISTMAS LIGHT DISPLAY AT SPORTSMAN LAKE PARK

- Nov. 21-23, 5-9 p.m.
- Nov. 28-30, 5-9 p.m.
- Dec. 3-7, 5-9 p.m.
- Dec. 10-23, 5-9 p.m.
- Dec. 26-28, 5-9 p.m. (Christmas lights only)
- Sportsman Lake Park
- Admission: \$10 per car;
   \$20 per bus

Enjoy a drive-through Christmas light display. Santa will be here, and there will be horse and carriage rides on select nights and we will have our magical Christmas Train rides!

# CULLMAN CHRISTKINDLMARKT PARADE AND TREE LIGHTING

- Nov. 21, at 6:30 p.m.
- Downtown Cullman, Warehouse District and Depot Park
- Admission: Free

Join us for a magical evening in downtown Cullman at our annual Christkindlmarkt Parade and Tree Lighting! Watch as local marching bands, community organizations and festive floats fill the streets with holiday cheer. Then follow the parade into Christkindlmarkt where ABC 33/40's James Spann and a special musical guest will lead our spectacular tree lighting ceremony. Experience the wonder as we illuminate the night with both a show-stopping drone show that will light up the sky with Christmas magic!

### 36TH ANNUAL CULLMAN COUNTY CHRISTMAS PARADE

- Saturday, Dec. 6, at noon
- Route: Michele Street and U.S. Highway 31 South to Park Street, ending at Veterans Park
- Admission: Free

Bring your family and friends to enjoy the holiday spirit as floats, bands and community groups fill the streets with Christmas cheer! Presented by the Hanceville Civitan Club.

### GOOD HOPE CHRISTMAS PARADE AND CHRISTMAS IN THE PARK

- Dec. 13, at 2 p.m.
- Route: Good Hope High School to Municipal Park
- Admission: Free

Christmas in the Park will follow immediately after the parade. This year's theme is "Country Christmas."

# CHAD WHALEY

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Highway Pickers Antique Mall & Flea Market is located at 1354 U.S. Highway 278 W, Cullman, AL 35057.

**Anabelle Howze** 

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hen you step through the front doors of Highway Pickers, it feels like tumbling down the rabbit hole. Only, instead of Wonderland, you land in three floors of antiques, vintage finds and unexpected treasures.

"Jaw-dropping," said Manager Betty Norris. "I can tell if they've never been in here before because when they walk in that door, their mouth is hanging open."

Everywhere you turn, there are hidden treasures. Mid-century furniture shares space with rustic farm tools, delicate glassware, racks of boutique clothing and just about anything you can think



A room full of treasures

ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBU

"We've got everything from antiques to boutiques and all in between," Norris said.

The beauty of Highway Pickers is its unpredictability. The back door is a constant state of activity, with vendors hauling in fresh treasures daily. For the best experience, Norris advises shoppers to treat it like a day trip. "Wear good shoes, be hydrated and plan it between meals. Folks come in when I open the door and leave when I lock the door."

It's not unusual to lose track of time here. Hours slip away as you discover retro treasures that remind you of your childhood or an old band T-shirt that looks like one your dad used to own.

While every floor has its gems, Norris said she points true treasure hunters toward the third level. "Less restrictions up there. It might be a yard sale, it might be high-end antiques. If you're not afraid to roll up your

sleeves and dig, that's where you'll find some of the best stuff."

When asked why she thinks antiquing remains so beloved in a world of fast fashion and two-day shipping, Norris said the answer is simple: nostalgia. "It brings back better years gone by," she said. "People come in and say, 'Oh, I remember that iron skillet,' or 'Papa used to have one of those.' Even if they don't buy a thing, they've had the best time."

For Norris, that sense of connection to a sweeter time is what makes Highway Pickers more than just an antique shop.

"We're all about the joy, anywhere we can get it today. If it brings somebody a memory, a little bit of happiness, it's worth it," she said.

Highway Pickers Antique Mall & Flea Market is located at 1354 U.S. Highway 278 W, Cullman, AL 35057. Find it online at Facebook/Highway Pickers.



Shelf of hats, glass and metal figurines, shot glasses and other miscellaneous items



### - HOW TO SPEND A DAY IN CULLMAN -

# Eat, play, shop!

### By: Katie Spicer | katie@cullmantoday.com

### Eat

Enjoy a taste of Cullman by indulging in meals from local restaurants! For breakfast visit The Busy Bee Cafe. Opening as early as 6 a.m. The Busy Bee offers affordable food with friendly service. The Busy Bee is located at 101 Fifth St. SE.

Treat yourself to lunch at Graves General Store & Diner, located at 11055 Alabama Highway 157. With a host of homemade goodies, Graves offers a daily menu of lunch specials made to order! Check out its Facebook page for the featured foods of the day at www. facebook.com/GravesDiner.

End the day with a truly Southern meal at Johnny's Bar-B-Q. Family owned for over 60 years, Johnny's is a proud member of the Alabama Barbecue Hall of Fame. From pulled pork, to smoked chicken, barbecue ribs and catfish, Johnny's is sure to satisfy. Johnny's Bar-B-Q is located at 1401 Fourth St. SW.

### Play

Cullman has recreational opportunities for visitors of all ages! For the solo traveler, check out historic landmarks throughout the beautiful county. History buffs might be interested in visiting the site of The Battle of Hog Mountain. The Battle of Hog Mountain was a Civil War skirmish fought on April 30, 1863, where Confederate cavalry under General Nathan Bedford Forrest attacked a larger

Union force during the night. The relentless pursuit by Forrest's smaller force, including fierce fighting at Hog Mountain, contributed to the exhaustion and eventual surrender of the Union raiders at Cedar Bluff just days later. The historic landmark is located at the intersection of U.S. Highway 278 and County Road 1145.

Those who enjoy religious studies could visit The Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament. The Shrine sits on over 400 acres, and visitors can tour the grounds and visit the on-site gift shop. During the tour, guests will see the main church, Mother Angelica's Tomb, the Shroud of Turin exhibit and much more. The Shrine is located at 3224 County Road 548, Hanceville.

For a broader view of Cullman's history, check out the Cullman County Museum located at 211 Second Ave. NE. Housed in a replica of the home of the city's founder, visitors can learn about the city's German heritage and Civil War involvement. As an added bonus, the Cullman Railroad Depot, another historic landmark, is within walking distance of the museum.

For couples out on the town, visit Ethos Craft Brewing. Along with a one-of-a-kind brewery and distillery, guests can also enjoy a meal and several forms of entertainment. With weekly events consisting of themed trivia nights, live music and special events like paint parties, Ethos is always offering something fun to do. Check it out at Facebook/Ethos Craft Brewing. Ethos is located at 1849 County

Road 222.

For families with children of all ages, check out the Cullman Christkindlmarkt. From Nov. 20-Dec. 23, enjoy authentic Germanic food, artisan vendors, ice skating, holiday-themed rides and more with free parking and admission. Get details on days, times and more at www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com.

### Shop

Get one-of-a-kind goods by buying from local shop owners. For the outdoorsman or sports lover check out Werner's Trading Company. Werner's had been Cullman's premier destination for outdoor sports gear since 1952. From sporting goods to stylish outdoor wear, Werner's has something for everyone. Werner's Trading Company is located at 1115 Fourth St. SW.

For artisan foods, home goods and kitchenware visit Mavens & Makers. Not only can you purchase ready-to-go goods, you can also get hands-on experience by attending demonstrations hosted in its Culinary Kitchen. Visit www.facebook. com/MavensAndMakers for demonstration dates and featured products. Mavens & Makers is located at 302 Second Ave. SE.

For the crafter, check out Olde Sew 'n Sew Shoppe located at 320 Second Ave. SE. Whether you are shopping for high-quality fabrics or needing machine repairs, this is the perfect place for seasoned seamstresses and budding crafters alike.



The Busy Bee Cafe is seen Monday, April 20, 2020.



**Cullman County Museum** 



Mavens & Makers is located at 302 Second Ave. SE in downtown Cullman.



### - FITNESS GUIDE -

# 5 ways to stay well this holiday season

#### **Lauren Estes**

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Anytime you're beginning a new workout regimen or program, always consult with and have clearance from your doctor, especially if you have any pre-existing cardiac or other health conditions.

re you looking to be held accountable and continue on your health journey during the busy Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons?

Here are five simple ways to prioritize wellness during the holidays, which can be as easy as creating calendar reminders on your phone.

### 1. PREPARE or prepare to fail

One of the best ways to stay on top of your health and wellness game is by scheduling the workout and planning what the workout will be.

Having an appointment with yourself and a plan once you get to the gym or workout area is crucial in showing up and being successful.

Look up or create (you can also hire a trainer or a coach) a workout structured to fit your goals.

If time is your main constraint, pick exercises that you can do easily and efficiently at home 3-4 times a week.

If you're able to create "workout splits" where you zone in on specific muscle groups (e.g., legs, back, shoulders, etc.) and you have the time — choose that route. If not, create workouts that are full body friendly.

Example: choose upper body, lower body, core and cardio exercises and rotate them for repetitions or time.

### 2. Create accountability with someone else

Having a workout or accountability partner can greatly increase the likelihood of consistency and follow-through to completion.

If this is an at-home workout regimen, include your spouse, a friend or someone who is likely to check-in on you and your goals.

Having someone to hold you accountable through communication pre- or post-workout to ensure you are consistent makes this process much more successful. Find someone that will do the workouts with you or hold you accountable in the process through check-ins, working out together or discussion.

# **3.** Make time to get the 'big five benefits' daily (SSSNR) What are the big five benefits? Sunshine, steps, sleep, nutrition and recovery.

Daily vitamin D, walking, adequate sleep, appropriate nutrition and recovery from exercises/events/stress all pair together to give you five solid health benefits. Managing them all will help in the process of building your healthy lifestyle and staying active.

Sunlight is the most natural form of vitamin D, which helps absorb calcium to build and maintain bone strength.

Getting your steps in daily (walking) is known to help with high blood pressure, diabetes, protecting against disease and strengthening muscles and bones.

Sleep is essential to creating healthy brain function and maintaining your physical health.

Nutrition is vital in building a stronger immune system and lowering the risks of



It's proven that morning walks increase mental clarity and focus, can better your mood and heighten your energy levels.

communicable diseases, as well as fat and weight loss.

Last, recovery time and reducing stress allows the body to bounce back faster and be more present in daily tasks.

Combine all five and you are on the route to creating a healthy lifestyle.

### 4. Take the stairs

It might seem small or insignificant — but find ways to increase your mobility, movement and walking each day.

It's proven that morning walks increase mental clarity and focus, can better your mood and heighten your energy levels. Choose the stairs over an elevator, take your pet for a walk, park farther back in the parking lot, etc.

Take time to stretch. Visit a chiropractor or massage therapist if you're able, use at-home remedies for joint mobility.

Find ways to increase your overall daily movement and be

well.

### 5. Prioritize protein and whole foods

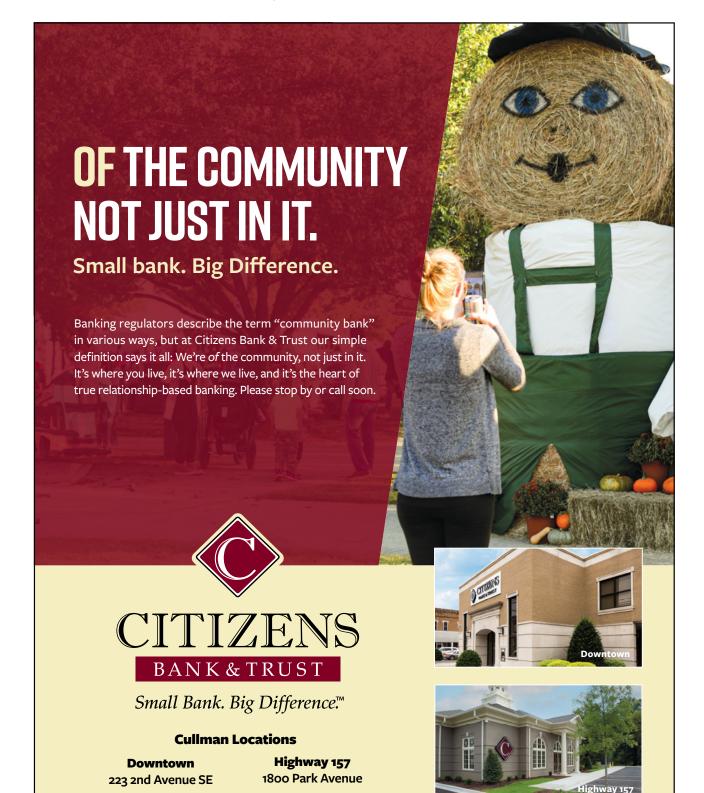
Protein is one of your body's key building blocks as it helps make your body feel full longer, can help increase muscle mass and helps your body repair itself.

Making sure to hit your personal protein macronutrient goals can help avoid late-night cravings, reduce the feelings of hunger and boost your metabolism.

Choosing whole foods over processed foods can help boost energy levels, lower blood pressure and lower the risk of obesity.

Planning out nightly dinners or meals and scheduling meal prep days can help you stay on track and less likely to binge or snack.

Try these tips to help yourself stay on track this holiday season!







256-841-6600 citizensbanktrust.com



Tally Ho Fitness is located at 719 Logan Ave. SW, in Cullman.

**Anabelle Howze** 

anabelle@cullmantribune.com

ally Ho Fitness is more than your average gym; the moment you step through the doors, you'll experience the kind of encouragement that makes even the most challenging workouts feel possible and become part of a community focused on building one another up and achieving goals. That sense of belonging is exactly what owner Cassie Johnson envisioned when she opened the gym.

Johnson began her career in a chemistry lab in Birmingham, where every day on her lunch breaks, she would gather her coworkers to go to the gym.

'One day, a coworker said, 'Cassie, you enjoy torturing us way more than you enjoy running these tests in the lab. You need to do that.' That was the push I needed," she said.

Returning to Cullman, Johnson saw an opportunity to create a space where people

didn't just show up to work out, but where they felt noticed, welcomed and supported.

"You are going to be called by your name and you are going to feel like you belong here, she said. "It's important to me that you know you matter."

Over the years, Tally Ho has grown into much more than a CrossFit gym. Classes blend strength and conditioning with warm-ups, cooldowns and skill work, all designed to fit neatly into an hour.

"I know people have families, jobs and commitments," explained Johnson. "My goal is to give them everything they need in the time they have.

Nutrition coaching has become one of the most impactful additions, making a huge difference for Tally Ho members. The programming also stays fresh with seasonal challenges and clinics, from gymnastics workshops to outdoor rucks and hikes.

'We want to be wellrounded," she said. "CrossFit

pushes you to be a little bit good at everything.'

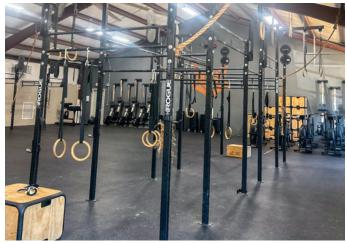
Johnson credits her staff with helping bring her vision

"The people who work here are passionate about what they do. They have a fire in them about helping people, too, and I couldn't ask for a better team," she said.

Tally Ho isn't just about

achieving fitness goals; it's also about building meaningful relationships, boosting self-confidence and becoming part of a community.

'If you're looking for a group of people that have your back, who will give you high fives for the small wins and call to check on you if you miss a class, this is the place for you," said Johnson.



ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

Exercise ria







Red Boat Event Center is a one-of-a-kind sailboat-style venue. The name is derived from the previous owner's functional sailboat that was cut in half and had a table top added to it.

### **Katie Spicer**

katie@cullmantoday.com

awson Segers and his wife Caidyn founded Red Boat Event Center in 2023 and have seen incredible growth, with more exciting additions in the works.

Red Boat Event Center is a one-of-a-kind sailboat-style venue. Segers shared, "We bought this place when it was an HVAC storage facility. The bar area was actually the former owner's man cave."

The name is derived from the previous owner's functional sailboat that was cut in half and had a table top added to it. Segers said the previous owner said the space was a great place for community to gather.

He made clear that the bar aesthetic is simply a stylistic choice for visual appeal and that alcohol sales are not permitted on the premises.

He continued, "When we bought the property we sat on it for a while, but everybody in our family wanted to come over and do their birthday party there. It was actually my sister Taylor's idea. She told me 'Y'all are sitting on gold right here, why don't y'all do an event center?' We started from a little bit of nothing and just kept adding on."

Red Boat Event Center is now complete with 2,600 square feet to comfortably host 30-70 guests indoors, with flexible layouts for cocktail parties, banquets and ceremonies. The brand-new expansion offers a separate space for games, dancing or kids' activities — making your event flow exactly how you envision it.

Other amenities available with rental include two 65-inch televisions, a pool table, poker table, a refrigerator, sound system, light and laser system, fog machine, tables and chairs.

Segers reflected on another popular selling point, "The venue is also fenced in. I didn't think that was a big deal but every single person who rents it always loves the fence. That way there is a single entry point and kids can play without wandering off."

The Segers family expressed their excitement about new

projects they have in the works. "We're hopefully going to get a floor for line dancing. We're also in the process of partnering with VIP Rentals to have party add-on packages that include inflatable rentals... Something Caidyn really wants is a wedding venue so that's our big goal."

Red Boat Event Center offers free tours and custom quotes for events. Rentals for the space start as low as \$65 an hour. The event center is located at 281 County Road 255 Cullman, AL 35057.

For more information contact Dawson Segers at dsegers8@ gmail.com or 256-636-6007. Reserve the center online at www.redboateventcenter.com or via telephone.

### - BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT -

# Weeds N Roots Herbals shares holistic healing locally

### **Lauren Estes**

lauren@cullmantribune.com

eAnn Duke's journey in herbal medicine began in 1996, when her then 3-year-old son had suffered repeated ear infections — she decided to seek out a more holistic cure, or create one.

Nearly three decades later, Duke is an herbalist and owner of Weeds N Roots Herbals.

"Looking back to my son when he was young, he has been on so many different antibiotics, and they have become ineffective," Duke said. "I then began to start learning about alternative methods for healing, and the next ear infection led me to the local GNC Store. From there, an employee recommended garlic oil for his ear, and it worked! I bought books and began learning more and more and gained confidence in my skills as I treated my family. In 2003, my third son was diagnosed with autism. As I searched for answers and help for him, I was taken down a road of deeper holistic study. Again, I was being prepared for the future."

Duke's professional herbal studies began in 2014, after losing her 16-year-old son in 2013.

"My son's death left me devastated and I knew I needed something to occupy my mind away from constant sorrow, so I signed up under Professional Clinical Herbalist Shonda Parker and dove in early 2014," Duke said. "I am trained as



DeAnn Duke owns Weeds N Roots Herbals.



Elderberry syrup from Weeds N Roots Herbals

a community herbalist, but I have always loved the medicine preparation side of herbalism. I began selling to the public in fall 2016 to my Facebook friends. The business name, 'Weeds N Roots Herbals' was born and it was just Fire Cider, elderberry syrup and cough syrup at that time.

Duke said the response from the community was great and the products she was sharing she had been making for many years.

"I started with products I created for my own family that



Fire Cider is a popular product from Weeds N Roots Herbals.

proved successful time and again," Duke said. "I quickly realized that I needed a store to get my products in, and Chambers Farm and Garden Supply, as well as, Herbs, Organics, & More in Cullman became home to Weeds N Roots Herbals, I was nervous about how the response was going to be, but the public was very receptive and the testimonials began to trickle in. Anytime you begin something new, it can be a gamble, but thankfully the people were also searching for natural remedies."

Duke's product list began mostly with cold/flu remedies like elderberry syrup, Fire Cider, cough syrup, and throat spray.

"I quickly added remedies that I had made and used with my children to treat viruses, diaper rashes, ear aches and my own teething babies," Duke said. "I had experienced five wonderful home births and had made my own postpartum kit, so now our local midwives have access to those kits and they can also be ordered online by anyone."

Fast forward to years

later, Duke's product list has expanded to salves and ointments, kidney stones, shingles, UTI relief, respiratory help, winter teas, natural facial care, perfume, sun care, insect repellent, along with all the cold/flu/immune support herbal remedies.

"Make no mistake; there are miracles in medicine and we are all so thankful and blessed to have access to it, but we also need the herbs, which have always been called the people's medicine," Duke said. "They have nourished, soothed and helped bring healing to many generations since the beginning. They have earned their place and respect in history and the traditions need to make it to our future. When I first began, elderberry syrup was the big seller, but Fire Cider quickly became a favorite, due to its congestion/sinus help. Another product that took a bit, but has made a name for itself is Luxurious Face Cream.

It smooths fine lines and moisturizes beautifully, while only containing natural ingredients."

Duke's products can be found online at www. weedsnrootsherbals.com or at Chambers Farm and Garden Supply in Cullman; Herbs, Organics & More in Cullman; J. Calvert Farms in Dodge City; and The Green House-Farmhouse Midwifery in Good Hope.

"I do one to two vendor markets each year where I offer products that are not in stores, so follow me on socials to get info," Duke said. "Let me say how very humbled and thankful I am for every customer that has purchased products, shared social posts, gave recommendations word of mouth and provided testimonials for my products. Thank you so much."

For more information visit www.facebook.com/weedsn-roots or @weedsnrootsherbals on Instagram.



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Members of the Trimble Volunteer Fire Department perform equipment maintenance.

FRIMBLE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

### **Anabelle Howze**

anabelle@cullmantribune.com

or members of the Trimble Volunteer Fire Department, service is a calling born out of love for their town, their families and for one another. Assistant Fire Chief Bruce Whitlock, Secretary Crystal Eubanks, Lt. Jonathan Eubanks and Firefighter Charles Freeman are among the heroes who keep the department strong.

Not everyone sets out to become a firefighter. Crystal Eubanks said she never expected it to happen. "I'd been in dental for nine years and had no interest in firefighting or EMS. Jonathan dragged me to a meeting, and on a whim, I joined. The first medical call we ran changed everything. I fell in love with it. Currently, I'm a full-time EMT. This department changed my life."

For Jonathan Eubanks, service runs deeper. "I was getting out of the military, and I needed something to fill that hole," he said. "I've always wanted to serve my community."

Whitlock has carried the love of serving others for decades. "I've worked EMS for 25 years, and even when I let my license go, I never let go of serving. There's always a way to help."

"Around here, everyone helps each other. This gives us more tools to do it," added Freeman.

No day in the department is ever the same, and things can change in an instant.

"Some days, it's quiet, you're at your regular job, living your life," Crystal Eubanks explained. "Then suddenly, it's back-to-back calls. One minute it's a lift assist, then a tree in the road, then a structure fire. We've always joked that calls come in threes." Calls can range from hay fires to car wrecks, from stubbed toes to cardiac arrests. "When that tone drops, you don't know what's waiting. But you know you've got work to do."

Training is rigorous, requiring 160 hours to qualify for entry into a burning structure. The

curriculum covers a wide range of topics, including hazardous materials, ventilation techniques and engine operation.

"Some people come in with no training at all. Maybe they help clean the station or maintain equipment. Others go all the way, becoming professional firefighters, divers or paramedics. We'll train you. All we need is your heart," said Jonathan Eubanks.

The fire department is a closeknit group, considering each other family.

"We eat dinner together before every meeting, and we bring our kids, we laugh, we argue. It's more than just a fire department," shared Crystal Eubanks.

That sense of family carries over to the calls they'll never forget. For her, it was saving a gunshot victim. For Whitlock, it was carrying a heart attack patient through the snow during the blizzard of 1993. For Freeman, it was feeding the community for a week after the 2011 tornadoes.

"When it's a neighbor or a kid you've watched grow up, that's when you realize why we do this," shared Jonathan Eubanks.

Like many rural departments, Trimble struggles with staffing and funding. Some calls go unanswered because there aren't enough staff members to handle them. Any form of assistance is greatly appreciated. Even small supplies, such as Band-Aids, fuel and gauze, can strain the department's budget. Grants and community support keep them going, but the need is constant.

"You don't have to run into a burning building," Jonathan Eubanks said. "Wash trucks, help with fundraising or run lift assists. Even the smallest job makes a difference."

To these local heroes, being a part of the Trimble Volunteer Fire Department means more than just being a firefighter.

"It's family helping family. It's not an obligation; it's love. We're neighbors helping neighbors," said Whitlock.



Cullman County ranked # 1 in the state in 2024 by Alabama Commerce Department for number of expanding industries.

- #5 Micropolitan in U.S. according to Site Selection Magazine
- Over \$1 Billion Capital Investment from 2014-2024
- #1 County in Alabama for expansion of existing industry

Cullman Economic Development Agency 200 1st Avenue NE, Cullman, AL 35055 256.739.1891 CullmanEDA.org



# Voices of 4-H

## Young reporters share their journeys

### **Gauge Day**

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ach year, 4-H clubs across Cullman
County elect a student reporter
whose job is to capture the story
of their year in 4-H. The role comes
with a special responsibility: writing a
final report that highlights their favorite
memories, documents the club's activities
or shares ideas for the future of 4-H.

"These reports give students the chance to reflect on what 4-H has meant to them while also practicing real-world communication skills," explained Kerri Roberts, 4-H youth development coordinator. "We announce at the beginning of the year that their reports will be submitted to the paper for possible publication, which means they'll have the chance to become published authors!"

This year, the reports were also featured at the County Roundup, an annual competition where students demonstrate their skills and creativity across a variety of categories.

Below are the (unedited) reports written by Cullman County 4-H students who took on the role of club reporter this year.

The things I enjoyed best in 4-H were the 4-H challenges. They were so much fun to do and watch. I enjoyed seeing other people, what they brought, and how they made it. It was also fun to participate in a challenge myself! Winning ribbons is exciting and rewarding!

I had fun with 4-H this year. Next year, I look forward to trying new things. I feel participating in 4-H gave me confidence to do it next year! From baking to birdhouse building, there is opportunity for everyone to participate in something they enjoy.

**Savannah Harbison** Mrs. Boyd - Fourth grade

### Reporter Task 4-H

Here's what my class has done this



4-H student reports showcased at this year's 4-H Roundup

year. First, we did the art competition and Dylan won 3rd, Zoey won 2nd and Raiden won first. Our 2nd competition, the cookie challenge Nora and Colt won 3rd Avery Burke won 2nd and Zoey won 1st. Our last competition Raiden won 1st.

Here's what my favorite thing in 4-H was.

My favorite part of the 4-H club was the chef demo. I really liked how Raiden was very fast at making the snack because the quicker you go the faster you get to eat. Also liked how Raiden explained how to make the snack so that I can learn how to make it. And another thing I liked was how we got to eat the snack because it was so good.

### **East Elementary**

4-H is so much fun. You do lots of things like art and then see who wins first, second and third or a participation ribbon. I wish we didn't only have five meetings because it's very fun and other people will enjoy it too. I've won second in two projects which is Legos and a bird house. My bird house was space so it

had stars, planets and flowers. Each spot has a different view. One has a view from down on earth, one has the earth and the moon in space, the other has the sun and the last one has the earth and stars. Also my Lego project was the twin towers.

4-H has been so much fun this year. I wish I can do it again and again. At the end of the last meeting my friends and I got invited to the county round up. So we get to compete against other schools in Cullman, AL. I just know that other kids are going to have fun with 4-H too.

### **Lillian Byers** West Elementary - Fifth grade

This year's 4h was so much fun. At the beginning of the year, we had fun making paper rockets and getting color-changing pencils. At our next meeting, we learned about the skins and skulls of a bunch of different animals. Next, we learned about food groups including dairy, poultry, meat, etc. In our second to last meeting, we got Laffy Taffies and did a sentence to story activity.

### Gabriel Bussman 4-H Reporter

This year in 4H has been so fun! Our first meeting we decided who the President, Vice President, Secretary and Reporter! The President is Noah Kessler, the vice president is Eli Carrol, the Secretary is Payton Carrol and the reporter is Emily Rogers! The second meeting we did the 15-dollar challenge and the art contest! The winner of the 15-dollar challenge was Eli Carrol and the winner of the art contest was Payton Carrol! And we got the touch animal skin. The third meeting was birdhouse and cookies. The winner of the birdhouse was Warren and the winner of the cookies were Alli! The fourth meeting was chef and photos! The winner of the chef was Eli Carrol and the winner of the photos were Payton Carrol! Mrs. Robinson gave us Latty Taffy's and told us why they are called that! This year was so fun thank you so much Mrs. Robinson!

### **Emily Rogers**

Fairview Elementary - Fifth

### grade

In the 4-H club this year I liked the birdhouse competition the most. It was very fun to make and learning how to make and do things. This is important because you will not have to watch a tutorial on how to do everything. Once you learn how to do it, it will always be faster and better. Seeing different designs and variations was very cool. So if you have a chance to join 4-h i recommend doing it. It has a lot of fun activities.

### **Genesis Garcia-Rodriguez** Vinemont - Mrs. Tapley - Fifth grade

This is the sum of 5th grades last 4-H year!

The first activity that we did was the fifteen-dollar challenge and no one participated from our class. Then another challenge was arts and crafts first place Gabby Mitton second, was Gabriella Campos tying with Kabri Graham. Carmen Parker tying with Mason Young for third place. Then next activity was birdhouses first place was Hadley Garrison, second place Caleb Chambers third place, Nathan Avilla participation awards went to Mason Young and Damien Vila. The photography activity goes to Stella Black second, place goes to Nathan Avilla and third goes to Mason Young. Baking goes to Gabriella Campos.

My favorite activity was photography because I love taking pictures. I also love this because you can become more creative, you can learn about new cultures too.

A nature project where people bring inside positives for the earth and negatives for the environment. Positives such as metal water bottles, recycling bins and small handheld plants that refresh the air. Some negatives are plastic plates, cups and plastic utensils. I am so beyond blessed to be able to write this report for 4-H!

### Stella Black

### Fairview Elementary - Mrs. Wiginton

Being in 4H was a lot of fun this year. The cookie contest was my favorite activity. I liked making and testing the cookies I decided to compete with in the contest. Who doesn't like cookies, right? I made three different kids before deciding. Baking was a lot of fun. Without the contest, I would've never found my favorite cookie.

**Sawyer Owens** 

### **Good Hope Elementary - Fifth grade**

Hi I'm Kinsley Duncan and this is my writing for my reporter task!

This year in 4-H, we have had opportunities show our talents and our interests. We've had challenges such as, art, cooking and Legos. We get challenges to learn more about each other and make new friends through shared interests. 4- H provides us with fun lessons and activities to do during school. Many students enjoy 4-H because of its exciting and engaging projects. Thank you to everyone who makes 4-H possible for our school!

## Kinsley Duncan East Elementary - Mrs. Cameron Fifth grade

This year in 4-H, our class did several fun things. We built a birdhouse out of anything we wanted. There was a photography contest where the pictures could be edited however you liked. A lot of students did the baking contest and made cookies. We ate popcorn with seasoning on it. It was always fun.

My favorite thing that we did was building the birdhouses. It was creative and fun seeing how everyone made theirs differently. In the future, it would be fun to grow plants from seeds and see what we could grow. We could water it and make sure it gets sunlight. 4-H was fun this year.

### Axel Berry West Elementary - Mrs. Meharg

What I enjoyed best in 4-H this year was the art and 15-dollar challenge meeting. We first did the presentations and judging for the art I (Gayden McCauley) won first place when I made an American Flag. Now I make lots of them and sell them. At this point I've made 500 dollars. The next thing we did was the presentations and judging for the 15-dollar challenge. Congratulations to Brantley Chaney for winning first place. This evidence tells you I loved that meeting and it highly impacted my life.

### Gayden McCauley West Point - Mrs. Welborn - Fifth grade

West Elementary School 4-H was fun. We had a great group of students this year and we had great participation in the cookie competition. It was a group favorite. Everyone enjoyed trying different

cookie recipes. The banana cookie recipe was a hit by all.

Something that should be changed is that competitions should consist of multiple rounds. It would make the elimination process easier. Participants should not be given another chance if they do something incorrectly. There should also not be a tie in any competition. Overall, 4-H was a great experience.

### **Eli Whittle** West Elementary - Mrs. File

Hi! I'm Lilli Terry and I was the club reporter for Mrs. Penns class at Good Hope.

Elementary in 4H. In our first 4H meeting, we elected our officials. Our President, Vice President, Secretary and our Reporter, At our second meeting, We had the contestants for the \$15 challenge where we went to thrift stores with \$15 dollars to spend on an outfit. We also had the contestants for the Craft Challenge where you make any craft you want to. At our third meeting we had the Cookie Contest! (This one was my favorite!) We also had the X-TREME bird house challenge. And at our last 4 H meeting we had the Blocks Rocks! Challenge and the Freestyle Demonstration Video. This year with 4 H had been so much fun and I hope some of y'all get to experience

### Lilli Terry Good Hope Elementary School – Mrs. Penn – Fifth grade

4H was amazing this year! WPI has enjoyed wonderful activities throughout the entire year. Our class loved the delicious popcorn Mrs. Gilmore popped for us. My class's favorite things we did were the freestyle and chef demonstrations. We have had many winners and losers but at the end of the day we all win. Not all of us left school with winning ribbons, but we ALL enjoyed it. I know that our teachers and family are proud of us for putting forth the effort.

4H is a global youth development organization. At the beginning of each meeting we do the pledge to the US Flag and the 4H pledge. We pledge our hands to greater service, our heart to greater loyalty, health to better living and head to clearer thinking and I believe we established doing this throughout this year. WPI 5th grade class is very sad for our 4H years to come to an end after the two awesome years we have had but are

grateful for all we have learned.

### **Selah Ruth Sutter**

West Point Intermediate School – Mrs. Johnson - Fifth-grade reporter

My class has participated in various 4-H activities. I have enjoyed all of the projects that we have completed. We have had a birdhouse building contest as well as a cookie competition, baking and cooking contest and Lego construction. All of the contests were very challenging and fun.

In all of the contests, my class brought items and they were very nice. We have had about four to five 4-H meetings this school year. Some students were very competitive and the 4-H meetings were fun and interesting. I think everybody has enjoyed participating in the program this year.

## **Levi Pettus**West Elementary - Mrs. Meharg Fourth grade

Throughout the 2024-2025 school year the fifth grade had five 4-H meetings. At each meeting there were two contests. The contests were a \$15 outfit challenge, an art competition, a bird house making contest, a cookie making contest, a live cooking demonstration, a photo contest, a how-to demonstration, and a lego contest. My personal favorite (and most yummy) was the cookie competition. Participants had to make five cookies and include the recipe they followed. They also had to include a list of all the ingredients used in the cookies. In Mrs. Hollingsworth's homeroom, Allie Johnson, Harper Logan, Harper Rodriguez, and Mary Lader all participated in the contest. Allie Johnson made chocolate chip cookies, Harper Logan made s'mores cookies, Harper Rodriguez made snickerdoodle cookies, and Mary Lader made chocolate chip cookies. Harper Logan, Allie Johnson, and Mary Lader received first, second, and third places respectively.

Our class really seemed to enjoy our 4-H meetings and with such great variety in the competitions, students were given opportunities to demonstrate their diverse interests and skills. We learned a lot as a class and hope to continue participating in 4-H activities in the future.

### Molly Scosyev West Elementary - Mrs. Hollingsworth's Homeroom - Fifth grade

# -LOCAL HEROES -Servant, teacher, giver



#### **Lauren Estes**

lauren@cullmantribune.com

f someone asked, "Who is Keenan Hollingsworth?" I'm not sure there would be enough time to explain all her hats and descriptions.

Hollingsworth, M.Ed., is a fifth-grade math teacher and Veterans Day Program director at West Elementary School. She's also Sgt. Hollingsworth with the 1/117th Field Artillery Regiment, Bravo Battery, Alabama Army National Guard.

She's been teaching for over 21 years, with 18 years at West Elementary in Cullman, and three and a half years in Savannah, Tennessee.

"In the Army National Guard, I completed Basic Training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma in 2021," Hollingsworth said.

"I've served at several duty stations across the country. including a JRTC rotation at Fort Polk, Louisiana. Each experience has strengthened my commitment to service and leadership. Nov. 16, 2025, will mark my fifth year in the Alabama Army National Guard."

Hollingsworth shared that she was fortunate to assist Jane Neal Humiston for three years before her retirement.

"In 2012, I stepped into the role of directing West Elementary's Veterans Day Program, and I've been writing and leading it ever since," Hollingsworth said.

"It is a tremendous undertaking to coordinate so many children, but every year it comes together beautifully. The vision has always been to instill pride, respect and gratitude in our students and to remind them that freedom isn't free; a veteran paid the price.

"Over time, the program has grown into not only honoring veterans, but also celebrating our great country.



West Elementary School held its annual Veterans Day Program Thursday, Nov. 10, 2022.



Keenan and Justin Hollingsworth

gym.

"This year, we are adding

a special element, a song

that will teach the difference

between Veterans Day and

Memorial Day. Many veterans

It's children lifting their voices in song, bringing our community together and expressing gratitude for the freedoms we enjoy because of those who served."

This year's programs will be on Wednesday, Nov. 5, at 1 p.m. at the OmniPlex and Friday, Nov. 7, at 8:45 a.m. and 1:15

second mother to me. I took over the West retired over 13 years ago and promised I'd KEENAN HOLLINGSWORTH fight to keep it going at West."

Keenan Hollingsworth and Mrs. Jane Neal Humiston. Said Hollingsworth, "She is a Elementary Veterans Day Program when she

p.m. in the West Elementary have expressed how much they appreciate West teaching this "There will be a reception for distinction, so I wanted to make sure all of our students underveterans at noon in the gym," stand it. Hollingsworth said.

> "We will also welcome the fire department honor guard to post the colors. My dear friend, Mrs. Katie McGee, will sing the national anthem

again.

"Our students will honor each branch of service by learning and performing their official songs, and we will include a flag-folding ceremony in honor of a Gold Star mother and the families of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice for our country."

As a little girl, Hollingsworth said, she loved playing "school" and had her own little classroom set up, complete with neatly organized supplies.

"School was always a joy for me, and I adored my teachers and the process of learning," she said.

"I believe teaching is one of the most honorable professions. It demands patience, dedication and love. Every child who walks into my classroom holds the potential to do something unique and extraordinary in this world.

"Teaching allows me to nurture that potential and make a positive impact. All students can and want to learn, and it is my responsibility to challenge, encourage and support them as they grow both academically and personally."

For nearly 20 years, Hollingsworth has devoted herself to teaching children freedom isn't free through West's Veterans Day Program.

"But deep down, I have always had a desire to serve my country," she said.

"I went straight to UNA on a scholarship after high school, and for a long time thought my opportunity had passed. At age 37, I asked a recruiter if it was still possible to join, even though I was over the age cutoff. Thanks to SFC Preston Griffin in Cullman and the Jasper RSP Unit, I was able to enlist within four months. At 38, I raised my right hand in Montgomery, and my life changed forever.

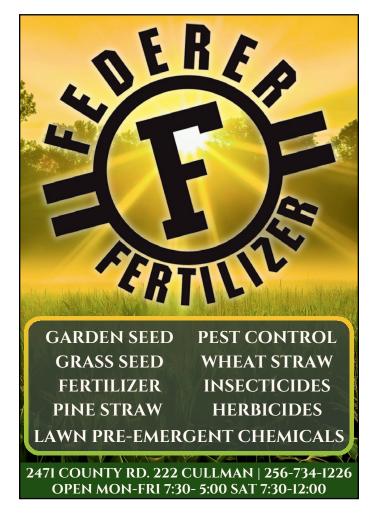
"Serving in the Alabama Army National Guard, Bravo 1/117th Field Artillery, is not just another job; it is truly a calling. I became the first female in the Fire Direction Center, and along the way, I gained an entire new family of brothers I never knew I needed. It has been one of the best decisions of my life, and I am proud to serve."

For Hollingsworth, family and faith are at the center of her life. "I love spending time with my husband, children and friends, and we enjoy traveling together," she said.

"Recently, my husband

and I purchased land where we plan to hunt and build our forever home. Staying active is also important to me. I enjoy CrossFit, rucking and target shooting with my AR. In the community, I am deeply invested in keeping the spirit of service alive.

"Each year, I take West Elementary students to perform the Veterans Program for our local veterans, previously at the Donald Green Center, and this year at the OmniPlex. My husband is active duty in the U.S. Air Force, and together you may see us at community events proudly carrying the Army and Air Force flags. I am also a member of the VFW Post 2214 Auxiliary here in Cullman, whose encouragement and support have meant so much to me over the years."





### -FAITH-

# The Bridge: Bridging the gap for young adult ministry



**Top:** The Bridge worship service; **Bottom right:** The Bridge Founders, left to right: Garrett Mahaffey, Savannah Mahaffey, Lilianna McClendon, Jon McClendon, Tyler Wix and Aubry Lovell

**Katie Spicer** 

katie@cullmantoday.com

he Bridge is a ministry outreach program designed for young adults aged 18-35. It was established by a team from Northbrook Baptist Church, including Tyler Wix, Aubry Lovell, Savannah and Garrett Mahaffey, and Lilliana and Jon McClendon.

Savannah Mahaffey said the goal of this organization is "to bridge the gap for young adults in our community to stay connected to the local church." Lovell shared her own personal experience. "When I came back to Alabama I felt really out of place. I felt a little too old for the college crowd, but wasn't a part of the young married group either," she said. "We all want a space to find community and feel connected so that's why we created (The Bridge)."

The Bridge officially kicked off its ministry at Wallace State Community College on Aug. 31, 2025. Participants enjoyed a time of worship, dinner and fellowship with fellow believers.

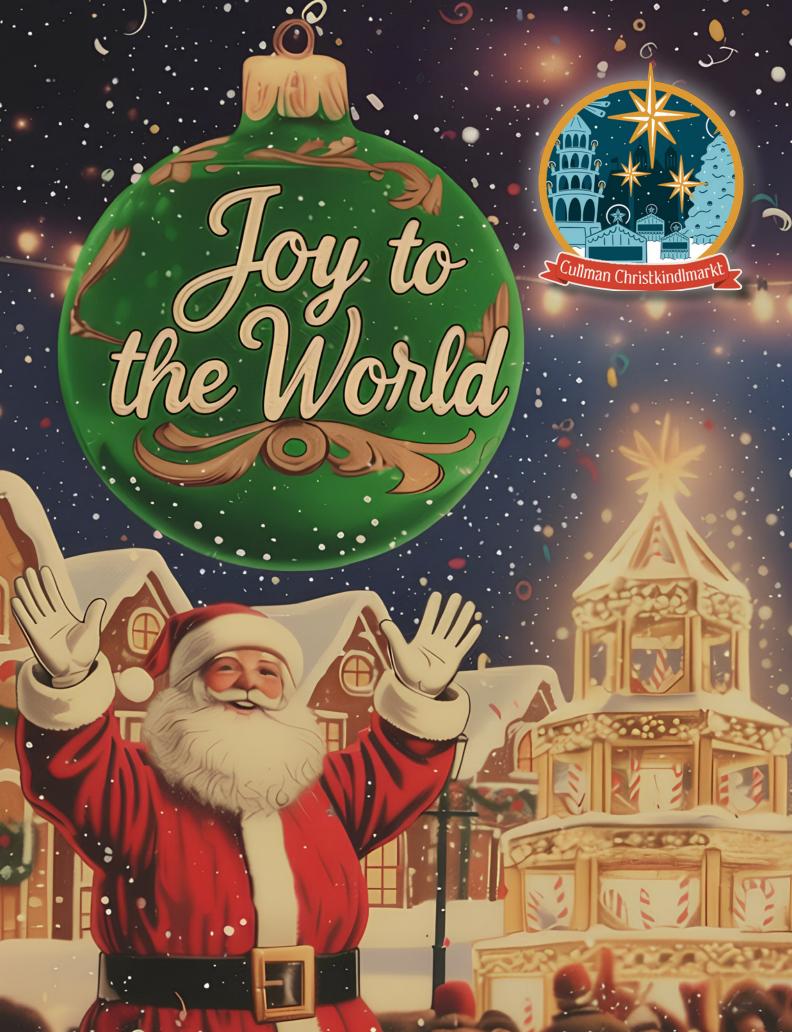
The Bridge's vision as an organization is to foster a generation of people who are deeply connected to the church and can rely on support as they navigate the unknowns.

Said McClendon, "We feel The Bridge is crucial for people our age as this is a very transient time in life. We value that people stay rooted in community, their faith and the local church."

Regardless of your phase of life, The Bridge seeks to support the local community. Its vision statement is: "Through

intentional community and age-specific discipleship, we will raise up leaders — college students, postgrads and young professionals — who mentor their peers, strengthen spiritual roots and walk with others through every season. "

The Bridge hosts events the first and third Sundays of every month from 6-8 p.m. at Cymbidium Studios, 214 Fourth St. SW, Cullman. Attendees can expect food and fellowship at each event. Connect with The Bridge by following @thebridgecullman on Instagram.



# Welcome to Christkindlmarkt!

### A season of light, tradition and togetherness

**Noah Galilee** 

noah@cullmantribune.com

nder the soft glow of twinkling lights and the scent of roasted nuts drifting through the air, Cullman's Christkindlmarkt once again transforms downtown into a winter village filled with wonder.

What began as a local celebration has become one of Alabama's most cherished Christmas traditions, uniting families, artisans and visitors from near and far in the true spirit of the season.

For Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Executive Director Nathan Anderson, this year's festival reflects both vision and gratitude.

"Each year, our goal is to make Cullman Christkindlmarkt even more magical and meaningful for visitors and residents alike," he said.

"The addition of the twostory Venetian Carousel, the expanded footprint through the Warehouse District and welcoming Käthe Wohlfahrt, one of the most famous Christmas retailers in the world, mark incredible milestones for us."

Anderson said that beyond the sights and sounds, it's the shared sense of unity that defines the event.

"We're humbled by the support we've received from across our community, region and even the state. That unity and excitement are what make this event truly special. It's more than a festival; it's a celebration of everything people love about Cullman, our hospitality, our strong work ethic and our deep sense of family and community."



The Cullman Christkindlmarkt will take place Nov. 20-Dec. 23 downtown.

Festival Director Daniel Wyatt echoed that sentiment, emphasizing how the event continues to grow in both scale and spirit.

"Every year we aim to raise the bar, and this season's expansion will give visitors more to see, taste and explore than ever before," he said.

"Extending into the Warehouse District allows us to showcase even more local artisans, international vendors and authentic European-style food that make the Christkindlmarkt so unique."

For Wyatt, the market captures something deeper than the glow of the lights.

"There's a real sense of joy in the air when you see families skating, shopping and taking in the sights under the glow of the lights," he shared.

"It's a reminder of how powerful community can be when people come together to celebrate the season."

That same spirit is what drives the City's continued investment in the event.

" C u I I m a n ' s Christkindlmarkt has become a true point of pride for our city," said Mayor Woody Jacobs. "It reflects the creativity, hospitality and teamwork that make Cullman such a special place. Each year, we see more visitors, more excitement and more reasons to celebrate what this community can accomplish together."

For Councilman David Moss Jr., chair of the Tourism Committee, the market's impact extends beyond the season.

"The Christkindlmarkt not only promotes Cullman as a year-round destination, it has brought a renewed sense of pride to our community," he said

"We're hearing more and more stories of families who once traveled out of town for Christmas now hosting their gatherings right here. There's so much excitement about experiencing the market and seeing what Cullman has become. It's a powerful reminder that this event isn't just driving tourism; it's strengthening community connections."

As the carousel turns and carolers' voices rise into the crisp winter air, Christkindlmarkt continues to embody what Cullman does best, bringing people together, celebrating craftsmanship and honoring the beauty of tradition. This season, that tradition shines brighter than

Get all the event details at www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com.



The Cullman Christkindlmarkt will take place Nov. 20-Dec. 23 downtown.

SHERRY BROWN/CULLMAN TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

### **Noah Galilee**

noah@cullmantribune.com

ach year from the end of fall and start of winter, Cullman transforms into a living reflection of its German heritage. From the lighting of the Weihnachtspyramide, to the festive Christkindlmarkt Parade and Tree Lighting to the Christkindlmarkt itself, the season is more than decoration; it's a communitywide celebration rooted in tradition.

Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Executive Director Nathan Anderson said authenticity is the foundation for every festival, including the Cullman Christkindlmarkt. He said the department has invested a great deal of time and research to ensure it.

"We lean on a committee with extensive experience visiting and studying German Christmas markets," Anderson said. "By curating the market at the vendor level, every booth and experience enhances the overall atmosphere and stays true to our German heritage."

That sense of tradition doesn't mean the festival stands still. As the Christkindlmarkt has grown, CPRST has worked carefully to introduce new attractions that feel at home alongside long-standing customs.

"The heart of the market is honoring long-standing German traditions," he said. "Any new attraction we introduce is carefully chosen because it deepens the authentic experience found in European markets. While something may be 'new' for Cullman, it's usually rooted in traditions that have been celebrated in Germany for decades, if not centuries."

Part of that growth has been about creating experiences for families. Anderson said the additions of the ice rink,



Artisan "elves" hard at work

carousel, tubing slide and Ferris wheel have been especially meaningful.

"In an age when technology consumes so much of our family time, the Christkindlmarkt provides a much-needed break," he said. "Attractions

like the ice rink, carousel, tubing slide and Ferris wheel reengage families with one another. They give parents and children the chance to slow down, share experiences and create memories that will last a lifetime."

SHERRY BROWN/CULLMAN TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

The festival also carries an impact that stretches well beyond the season's fun. Businesses across Cullman feel its effect each year.

"Each year, we hear from local businesses that they've set record sales thanks to the hundreds of thousands of visitors drawn downtown by the market," he said. "It's a communitywide celebration. In fact, we estimate the economic impact at more than \$30 million. When you hear the success stories from business owners across the city, it's easy to see how transformative this event has been for Cullman County."

That success, Anderson said, comes from a simple philosophy.

"Our guiding values are authenticity, inclusivity and hospitality," he said. "We want every guest, whether they're from across town or across the country, to feel welcomed, valued and part of something special."

Looking ahead, families can expect even more to explore this holiday season. The market is expanding by 2 acres into the Warehouse District, allowing CPRST to bring in even more authentic vendors and experiences.

"Families will still find all their favorite attractions, but this year we're adding an exceptionally rare Venetian double-decker carousel, one of only about a dozen in the U.S., identical to the carousel at the Frankfurt Christkindlmarkt," he said. "We'll also debut a new life-sized Schwibbogen gate, modeled after the iconic Dresden Striezelmarkt arch. And under the Festhalle, we're proud to introduce Käthe Wohlfahrt, the legendary German Christmas store."

For Anderson and those representing the City of Cullman, the most rewarding part is seeing the way the festival brings people together.

"This event brings out the very best in Cullman," he said. "Our community is special — full of people who value family, friendship and tradition — and I believe that spirit is a big reason the Christkindlmarkt has become so successful."

Anderson added that the festival's success depends on a wide circle of people and organizations.

"We are deeply thankful for everyone who makes it possible: our fabrication and programming teams, food and merchant vendors, entertainers, sponsors, volunteers and the unwavering support of our City leadership," he said. "Together, they've helped us create the best Christkindlmarkt in the United States."

The Cullman Christkindlmarkt will take place Nov. 20-Dec. 23 downtown. Get more details at www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com.



Revelers celebrate around the newly-lit tree in a flurry of man-made "snow" during the 2017 Christmas Tree Lighting event.



Cullman's Weihnachtspyramide is a popular attraction every year.





SCHEDULE & MAP

### Your Insider's Guide

to the Magic of Cullman Christkindlmarkt

Picture this: twinkling lights dancing against the Alabama night sky, the aroma of authentic bratwurst mingling with mulled wine spices, and the delighted squeals of children discovering a winter wonderland in the heart of Dixie. Welcome to the Cullman Christkindlmarkt, where German Christmas traditions come alive in spectacular fashion!

### What's New This Year Will Take Your Breath Away

The 2025 market has outdone itself with an expansion that's grown the festivities by an impressive 50%. The crown jewel of this year's additions? The arrival of Käthe Wohlfahrt Christmas store featuring Günther Ulbricht—a legendary name in authentic German Christmas markets. This isn't just any holiday shop; it's the authentic Christkindlmarkt experience that typically requires a passport to enjoy.

But wait, there's more magic brewing! A magnificent double-decker carousel—one of only five in the entire United States—now graces the expanded grounds. And for those Instagram-perfect family moments, the new Schwibbogen (a traditional German Christmas arch) creates the ultimate photo backdrop that'll have your holiday cards sorted for years to come.

### The Unmissable Experiences That Define the Market

Here's the insider secret: visit at twilight. As darkness falls, the Christkindlmarkt truly comes alive. The lights create a warm glow and festive atmosphere that daylight simply cannot capture. Warm your hands (and soul) with authentic Glühwein served in collectible mugs that become cherished keepsakes long after the last sip. These mugs make perfect holiday mementos to display at home year after year.

For a bird's eye view of the festivities, take a spin on the Alpine of Alabama Ferris Wheel—the largest in the state—offering spectacular views of the entire market below. Back on the ground, Alabama's largest outdoor ice skating rink beckons both wobbling beginners and graceful gliders alike.

The Kinderplatz brings Santa's workshop to vivid life, offering both free and ticketed experiences that spark wonder in young eyes. Free photos with Santa and Mrs. Claus mean you won't have to choose between memories and your wallet.

Don't miss the master artisans at work—Jason Mack Glass demonstrates the ancient art of glassblowing, while Oxcart Designs shapes copper into beautiful pieces, and Iron Bendi showcases traditional metalworking skills. And when hunger strikes? Authentic German food stalls serve up crispy schnitzel and juicy bratwurst, while Flammkuchen offers wood-fired pizzas with a European twist.

### Pro Tips from a Market Veteran

Smart visitors wear comfortable shoes and dress in layers—Alabama weather can be as unpredictable as it is charming. While most vendors accept cards, cash still reigns supreme at some stalls. Weekday visits mean more elbow room and shorter lines, especially important when catching performances by the PowerElf Skippers and Holiday Heineckes (check that schedule in advance!).

Here's a secret: those cozy dining igloos aren't just for meals. They're open all day for anyone needing a warm respite between adventures.

The Cullman Christkindlmarkt isn't just an event; it's where Christmas magic becomes tangible, where German traditions blend seamlessly with Southern hospitality, creating something uniquely wonderful. Trust me—this is where your holiday season truly begins.

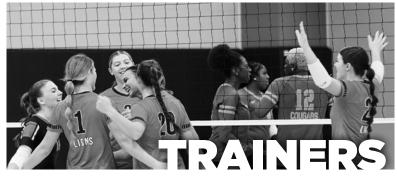






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### NOVEMBER 2025 - JANUARY 2026 | COMMUNITY MATTERS

### **Lauren Estes**

lauren@cullmantribune.com

ocally owned and healthminded Hele Bowls is a community favorite that opened May 12, 2022.

Owner and Manager Sarah Morrow shared that one of the main goals in opening Hele Bowls was to share that food can be healthy and still taste great.

"We wanted to show customers that you can eat healthy without sacrificing flavor," Morrow said. "Also, I wanted to be inclusive to people with gluten and dairy allergies to allow them to have a safe place to eat locally."

Some of Morrow's personal favorite menu options are the Korean BBQ Pork Bowl, the Huli Huli Chicken Bowl, and the Tuna Poke Bowl.

"We do have several seasonal favorites that customers look forward to," Morrow said.

"The fall we have a special of our Harvest Pork Bowl that features brown rice, maple-glazed pork ribeye, oven-roasted brussels that are roasted with cranberries, apple and bacon and topped with crushed pecans."

Other owner/operators are Stephen Gannon and Ricardo Nishumira. The three are a team who share a love of flavor and health.

"We are 100% gluten-free, sugar-free and dairy-free," Morrow said. "Also, every single bowl is customized. It is your bowl; you just tell us how you want it."

For Oktoberfest, Hele Bowls had a special bowl, and it will also have winter specials.

"We (featured) the Harvest Pork Bowl and our Col. Cullmann Bowl, which has a sweet potato German potato salad, gluten-free beer brats, red cabbage and brussels sprout sauerkraut,
grilled
onions and
peppers,
with a
gluten
free beer
mustard,
vegan German
cucumber
salad and housemade apple cider,"
Morrow said.

Hele Bowls is located at 410 Second Ave. SE in Cullman. It is carry out only. Order through DoorDash, Uber Eats, at www.helebowlsorder. com or by calling 256-841-1276. See the menu at www.helebowls.com.

Top: The Oktoberfest Exclusive Bowl: the Col. Cullmann Bowl; Right: The Pork Harvest Bowl





nn Bowl; Right: The



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# RECIPE REVIVAL Traditional English scones

### **Anabelle Howze**

anabelle@cullmantribune.com

or Elizabeth Adkins, a warm scone fresh from the oven is far more than a simple baked good.

English scones are a traditional treat from England, and often served with jam and cream, alongside a lovely cup of tea.

"I chose this recipe because my husband is from England. When we were first married, we lived in England together, and we often enjoyed going into bakeries and coffee shops to share a delightful English scone," she said. "I like to make scones for my husband and my children, as proper scones are not as easy to find in America."

Her journey with scones began when she and her husband moved back to the States. "The first scones I made were American scones, and while these scones were indeed delicious, they were not like the English scones we had enjoyed together in England. I experimented and tried a few scone recipes until I landed on a recipe that I felt represented the English scone in a traditional way," Adkins explained.

Traditionally, English scones aren't very sweet. "Scones are like an American biscuit, but slightly sweeter and softer," she said. "I added heavy whipping cream to my recipe (as many recipes simply use milk). Also, I use salted butter instead of unsalted butter. If I am in the mood for a slightly sweeter scone, I sometimes sprinkle the top of my scones with turbinado sugar before placing them in the oven to bake."

English scones carry deep meaning for her family. "This recipe evokes a nostalgic, happy feel. It takes us back to our time as a newlywed couple, where we spent time in Stratford and Bath, England, and enjoyed lovely scones in quaint English tearooms," Adkins explained. "The

recipe is appropriate for any occasion, but it is often a special treat in our home. It is lovely to enjoy a cup of tea and a scone with cream and jam on a rainy, chilly Saturday afternoon."

Her love of English heritage extends beyond baking. After her marriage and move to England, she lived there for two years and had her eldest daughter. When she returned to America, she was determined to take the experiences she had in England and incorporate them into her home and daily life.

"We do this together as a family by making traditional foods and desserts. We celebrate some of the unique English traditions with our children by doing special homeschool lessons and crafts, which teach them a bit

about their English heritage. We also enjoy thrifting and antiquing. I am often drawn to lovely pieces of China, crystal, brass or wood... as well as little trinkets that remind me of the English cottages that

Cotswolds," she said.
Adkins said her blog,
Cotswold Kitchen Mom, grew
naturally from this passion.

are located in the iconic

"Since moving back to America, I have always made it my goal to make traditional English recipes for my husband and children. I think it is important to celebrate their English heritage, as we do their American heritage," she said.

"Preserving traditional recipes is very important to me. My husband left England to come to America because he loved me. While we enjoy living in America, we also miss



Top: Making English scones from scratch; Center: Traditional English scones

the beauty of the English countryside and culture. Making English recipes is a way I can show my love to my husband and children, all

the while acknowledging the beauty of another culture."

She said she hopes her blog inspires readers to try new recipes and appreciate the lovely, ordinary things in life. "I hope it encourages people to value family time, while using creativity, and that it teaches people to look at thrifted/antique items as treasures that can make a home beautiful. I hope every reader walks away encouraged and inspired. www.cotswold-

### **ENGLISH SCONES**

### Ingredients

kitchenmom.com

- 33/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 31/2 tsp. baking powder
- 1/4 cup + 1 tbsp. granulated
- 6 tbsp. salted butter (cubed)
- 2 large eggs
- 2/3 cup milk
- 1/3 cup heavy whipping cream

### Instructions

- 1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.
- 2. To a large mixing bowl, add flour and baking powder. Stir together.
- 3. Add cubed (slightly soft) butter to the flour mixture. Using fingers, rub butter into the flour. (This will result in a crumbly texture.)
- 4. Stir in the sugar.
- 5. In a separate mixing bowl, whisk eggs well. Add the milk and the cream to the eggs but reserve 1 tbsp. milk and egg mixture to brush on the tops of the scones before they go into the oven.
- **6.** Stir the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients. (Mixture will be slightly sticky.)
- 7. Flour work surface. Flatten the scone dough with the palm of your hand (to a 1/2 to 3/4 inch thickness).
- 8. Brush reserved egg and milk mixture to the tops of the scones.
- Place parchment paper on a baking sheet. Place scones a few inches apart.
- 10. Bake scones in preheated oven for 10-12 minutes (or until the tops are golden brown and the scones have risen properly).
- 11. Enjoy scones with whipped cream or clotted cream, and raspberry or strawberry jam. Scones are best enjoyed fresh on the first day.



### - RECIPE REVIVAL -

### A Germanic Christmas Day menu

### Katie Spicer

katie@cullmantoday.com

### Enjoy a taste of Germany by incorporating these authentic German recipes into your holiday feasts!

### VORSPEISE (APPETIZER)

Grießklößchensuppe - A festive soup with clear beef broth and small semolina dumplings

### Ingredients

- 140 g semolina flour
- 2 eggs
- 30 g butter (2 tbsp.)
- 1/2 tsp. nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 2 tbsp. parsley
- 5-6 cups chicken/bouillon or veggie broth, or vegetable soup

### Instructions

- 1. Melt butter and mix with egg, butter, nutmeg, salt and parsley. Add the semolina and mix until it comes into a dough (avoid kneading). Let rest for at least 30 minutes, up to 2 hours
- 2. In pot, bring broth to a boil. Using a teaspoon, form oblong dumplings and drop into the boiling water. They can stick to the bottom so give them a stir to make sure they're "swimming."
- **3.** Let cook for 10-15 minutes on low, then turn off the heat. Let sit for 5 minutes.
- **4.** Serve, garnishing with parsley.

### HAUPTGERICHT (MAIN COURSE)

Weihnachtsgans - Roast goose with a crispy skin and stuffed with onions, chestnuts and marjoram

### Ingredients

• 1 tsp. (4.5 g) + 1 tbsp. (14

- g) butter
- 3.5 oz. (100 g) peeled, roasted chestnuts, diced
- 1/4 tart apple, peeled and diced
- 1 shallot or small onion, diced
- 1 tsp. (1 g) dried marjoram leaves (or thyme)
- 1 large Canada goose breast,
- Kosher salt and black pepper
- 1 tbsp. (15 ml) goose/duck fat or vegetable oil
- 1 tsp. (1 g) dried thyme leaves
- 5 juniper berries

### Instructions

- 1. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C, gas mark 6).
- 2. Melt 1 tsp. (4.5 g) butter in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add the diced chestnuts, apples, shallot and marjoram. Add a small pinch of salt. Cook, stirring, for about 5 minutes, or until the apple and onion are soft. Transfer to a bowl and let cool
- 3. Pat the goose breast dry with paper towels. Turn the breast so it's skin-side down. Make an incision lengthwise down the middle of the breast, being sure not to cut all of the way through. Now gently pull open the two sides and make an incision down each side of the original incision so that both sides open up like flaps. Don't worry too much about getting this right, you basically just want to cut a pocket to pack with stuffing.
- 4. Season the inside of the breast generously with salt and pepper, then pack the stuffing into the open space. Pull the sides in so they close. Use kitchen or butcher's twine to tie the breast back up into its original shape. You could also use toothpicks to put it back together, but they're not quite as reliable as twine. Season the outside of the breast generously with salt and pepper.
- **5.** Melt the goose fat or oil in a cast iron or steel skillet

over medium high heat. Lay in the goose breast, skin-side down and apply pressure down the length of it with a wooden spoon or spatula for 30 seconds. This helps it from losing shape. Cook for 5 minutes, turning with tongs so that all sides get seared, but focusing mainly on the skin side. Moderate heat if needed so that nothing burns. Transfer the skillet to the oven and cook for 10 minutes.

- 6. Take the skillet out of the oven (with an oven mitt or towel!) and add 1 tbsp. (14 g) butter, as well as the thyme and juniper berries to the pan. Once the butter melts, mix it with the aromatics and spoon it over the goose breast continually for a minute or two.
- 7. Let the breast rest for 10 minutes, then slice and serve. This recipe is for a goose breast at medium doneness. For rarer breasts, reduce oven time to 5 minutes. I don't recommend cooking wild goose breast all of the way through as it becomes chalky and livery tasting.

### **ROTKOHL**

Red cabbage braised with apples, red wine and spices

### Ingredients

- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 medium red onion, sliced
- 2 Granny Smith apples, cored and chopped
- 1 large red cabbage cored and sliced into 1/4-inch thick pieces
- 1/2 cup cider vinegar
- 1/2 cup water
- 5 tbsp. granulated sugar
- 1 tsp. fine sea salt
- 6 whole cloves or 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Instructions

- 1. Heat a large pot to medium with the butter. Add the onion and sauté until soft (about 7-10 minutes). Add the apple and cook for another 3 minutes.
- 2. Add the cabbage and mix

to combine.

- 3. Combine the water, vinegar, sugar, fine sea salt and cloves. Pour the mixture over the cabbage and mix to combine. Cover with a tight fitting lid and reduce heat to a simmer and cook until soft (about 60-90 minutes).
- **4.** Remove the lid and cook until some of the excess liquid evaporates. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Enjoy!

### **KARTOFFELKLÖSSE**

Fluffy potato dumplings

### Ingredients

- 11/2 pounds russet potatoes
- 1 stick unsalted butter
- 2 cups fresh bread cubes
- 1 pinch freshly grated nutmeg, or to taste
- 1 pinch cayenne pepper, or to taste
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tbsp. snipped fresh chives, or to taste

### Instructions

- 1. Place potatoes in a large pot and cover with salted water; bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer until just tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Drain and let cool until easily handled.
- 2. While the potatoes are cooling, melt butter in a skillet over medium heat. Add bread cubes; cook and stir until golden brown and crunchy, 4 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and use a slotted spoon to transfer croutons to a bowl. Reserve browned butter in the pan.
- 3. Peel potatoes and place into a large bowl. Mash and season with nutmeg, cayenne, salt and pepper. Add eggs and mash until combined. Stir in flour just until incorporated; do not overmix.
- 4. Bring a pot of salted water to a simmer. Dampen your hands with water and scoop

a spoonful of dough onto your palm. Shape dough into a circle, make a light indentation in the center, and place 2 or 3 croutons inside. Pull dough around croutons to seal and roll into a smooth ball. Repeat to make seven more dumplings. **5.** Use a large spoon to lower dumplings, one at a time, into the simmering water. Cook until they float to the top, 1 to 2 minutes. Cover and simmer over medium-low heat for 10 minutes. Flip dumplings and continue to cook until puffed and cooked through, about 10 minutes more.

6. Transfer dumplings to a serving plate and drizzle with reserved browned butter. Crumble remaining croutons over top and garnish with chives. Let dumplings firm up slightly before serving, about 10 minutes.

### NACHSPEISE (DESSERT)

Christollen - Fruit bread with marzipan, candied fruits, nuts, and powdered sugar.

### Ingredients

- 8 cups all-purpose flour
- 3 oz. compressed fresh yeast
- 1 pinch white sugar
- 1 tbsp. lukewarm milk
- 11/2 cups milk
- 1 cup unsalted butter
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 cup white sugar
- 2 egg yolks
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 13/4 cups chopped blanched almonds
- 11/4 cups raisins
- 6 tbsp. candied lemon peel
- 6 tbsp. chopped candied orange peel
- 2 tbsp. melted butter
- 2 tbsp. confectioners' sugar

### Instructions

- 1. Gather ingredients. Place flour in a large bowl, make a well in the center, and crumble fresh yeast into it. Sprinkle in sugar and add 1 tbsp. milk. Cover and let rise at a warm place for 15 minutes.
- 2. Heat 11/2 cups milk and 1 cup plus 2 tbsp. unsalted butter in a saucepan over low heat until butter is melted.
- 3. Pour milk-butter mixture over yeast mixture and add 1

cup sugar, egg yolks and salt. Knead until a soft dough forms. Cover with a clean dish towel and let rise in a warm place until doubled in volume, about 1 hour.

- **4.** Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
- 5. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Bake in the preheated oven until toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean, 45 to 60 minutes. Remove from oven. Brush hot stollen immediately with 2 tbsp. melted butter and dust with confectioners' sugar.

### **VANILLEKIPFERL**

Crescent-shaped vanilla almond cookies

### Ingredients

### Cookie dough

- 2 cups all-purpose flour, spoon and level
- 1 pinch of salt
- 1 cup unsalted butter, cold, cut into small cubes
- 3/4 cup powdered sugar
- 3/4 cup finely ground almonds, or hazelnuts or walnuts
- 1/2 vanilla pod, seeds scraped out or 2 tsp. vanilla extract

### Sugar mixture

- 3/4 cup powdered sugar
- 1/2 vanilla pod

### Instructions

- 1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment combine flour, salt, cubed butter, powdered sugar, nuts and vanilla seeds. Mix at medium speed until a crumbly dough forms, about 1-2 minutes. If the dough is too crumbly add 1-2 tbsp. milk.
- 2. Use your hands to press the dough together and wrap it in plastic wrap. Chill the dough for one hour in the fridge.
- 3. Preheat the oven to 350°F (177°C) and line one or two baking sheets with parchment paper.
- 4. Roll the chilled dough into a log approximately 1/2-inch thick. Cut the log into 11/2-inch pieces, form the pieces into small cylinders and taper the ends into dull points. Bend each one into a crescent shape. Place

the Vanillekipferl on the baking sheet about 1 inch apart.

- 5. Bake the Vanillekipferl one cookie sheet at a time for 12 to 15 minutes (depending on the size of the cookies) until the edges are golden. They should not brown.
- 6. Scrape out vanilla pod and combine with powdered sugar. This works great in a small food processor. Sift the mixture over the hot Vanillekipferl. Let them cool completely then give them a second dusting.
- 7. These cookies keep fresh for about 3 weeks in an air-tight container stored in a cool place.

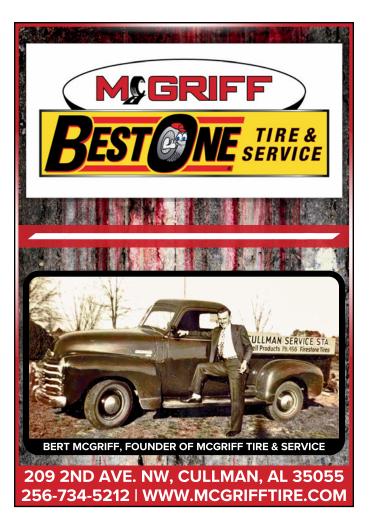
Give any recipe a local twist by shopping local! Get local ingredients from these Cullman businesses:

 Mavens & Makers - 302 Second Ave. SE, Cullman, AL 35055

- The Butcher Meat Co. 149
   Patton Dr., Cullman, AL 35058
- Haynes Farms 150 County Road 1654 Cullman, AL 35058
- Piney Grove Farm 5814 County Road 1141, Vinemont, AL 35179

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- www.allrecipes. com/recipe/261646/ german-stollen/
- www.platedcravings. com/german-christmas-baking-vanillekipferl/#wprm-recipe-container-4463







The Milky Way, seen in Bandon, Oregon: I stood on the sand in the dark listening to the waves; the sky filled with stars and seemed to part way for this beauty...the awe was breathtaking.



Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park, California: Massive, beautiful trees in the early morning light — the textures and lines of these trees was so amazing!



Coquille River Lighthouse: The wind was blowing here across my face and the grass here would change colors as the wind blew.



Starfish on the beach



Sea lions and sea gulls sunning on the rocks: I had to see sea lions while here, and after searching five beaches, I found them. They have the sweetest faces.



Secret Beach: Probably called Secret Beach because it is straight downhill, and so, of course, straight uphill coming out.

But oh what a view!



Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park



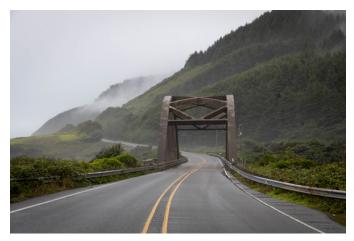
Heceta Head Lighthouse in Florence, Oregon



A beautiful boat in the harbor in Bandon



Sweet Creek Falls: This composition with the steps was so magical and inviting to me.



Roads and bridges along the way surrounded in mist



Rocks and misty cliffs



Bandon Beach



Sweet Creek Falls: Magical paths to walk along



Horseback riders on Bandon Beach: Can you imagine the sound of the waves, the rock formations and the gentle sway of the horses? Beautiful tranquility.



Seven Winds Kitchen is located at 10011 County Road 222, Logan, AL 35098.

ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNI

### **Anabelle Howze**

anabelle@cullmantribune.com

ullman is home to many unique places, shops and hidden gems.
Nestled in Logan along County Road 222, Seven Winds Kitchen is a story of a family recipe passed down through generations.

Owner Jane Gammon founded the business in 1994, but candy making had been going on long before that. Her mother, Berta Dee Gammon, had been making peanut brittle for as long as Jane Gammon could remember, giving it to friends and neighbors each Christmas.

After losing her job in corporate work, she turned that recipe (Bert's Brittle) into a business, honoring her mother's legacy.

"Christmas is still our



**Above:** Seven Winds Kitchen offers a delicious array of homemade goodies. **Opposite page:** The Famous Bert's Brittle

biggest season," she said. "But the brittle has grown far beyond what Mama made."

Seven Winds Kitchen offers peanut brittle, pecan brittle and pecan gems, which have become customer favorites. Other sweets include pralines, white chocolate drops, fudge and peanut clusters.

For those who prefer a savory bite, Gammon also makes a spicy Southern snack she calls Cheese Hooies: buttery cheese straws with pecans and a touch of cayenne.

The kitchen also produces pound cakes, tea cakes, peanut butter cookies, German chocolate cakes and more, tucked into gift baskets alongside the candies.

The family grows much of what they use in-house,

including cucumbers, garlic and dill for homemade pickles, as well as fruits like blueberries, muscadines and pears for jams and jellies.

Despite the variety, Gammon said, customers always circle back to the brittle. "We stretch the brittle thinner than most. That's what sets it apart. Many traditional brittles are poured thick, but Mama always spread hers out. People love that."

The reputation has spread far beyond Cullman County. She remembers a customer declaring, "This is the best peanut brittle in the world. I know because I've tried it in 44 countries."

For Gammon, the business means more than sales. It's about honoring her mother's love of cooking and her father's devotion to the farm.

Over the years, Seven Winds has catered events. built gift baskets for the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Hanceville and served countless customers who now feel like family.

"It means a lot to carry on what Mama started," she said. "She loved feeding people. I think she'd be proud to see it still going."

the Grand Course on now

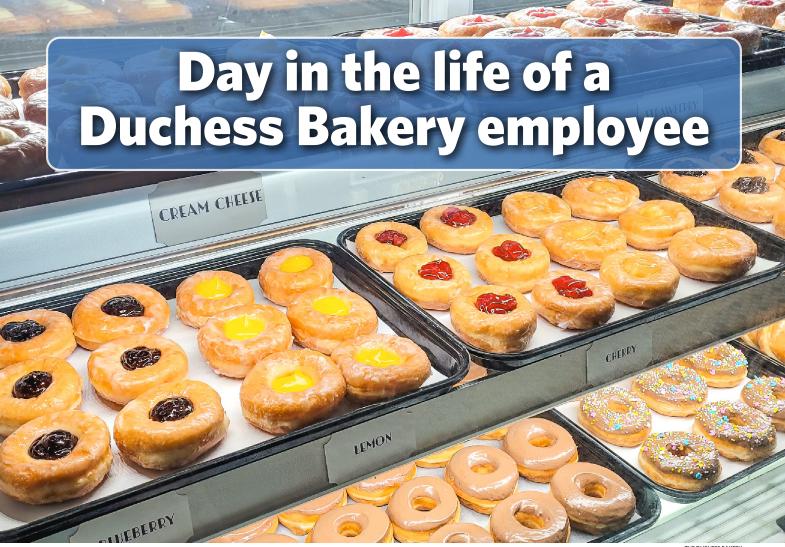
Seven Winds in ds Kitchen is located at 10011 County Road 222, Logan, AL 35098. Find it online at www. sevenwindskitchen.com.

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The Duchess Bakery offers a wide variety of freshly made donuts.

THE DUCHESS BAKERY

### **Anabelle Howze**

anabelle@cullmantribune.com

hen most of Cullman is still asleep, Duchess Bakery employees begin their day long before the first customer walks through the door.

One of those early risers is manager Samantha Smith, who has been with the company since 2020. Her workday begins at 3:45 a.m.

"The shift for everybody else starts at 3," she explained. "I come in at 3:45, and we start measuring the first batch of the day."

That first batch alone is roughly 30 to 40 dozen donuts per single batch, and when doubled, the number increases to 50 or 60 dozen.

Once the dough is mixed in

an industrial-sized mixer, it's time to shape the donuts. Some dough is run through rollers for perfectly uniform jelly-filled and glazed donuts, while others are hand-cut into cinnamon twists and Bismarcks.

"Handling the dough is my favorite," Smith shared. "But it can also be the most challenging. Weather makes a huge difference. Humidity can make the dough too soft or sticky, and sometimes the shapes come out a little...football shaped."

By 5 a.m., racks of trays are rolled into proofing boxes, allowing the dough to rise to the perfect texture. Even with the proofer's controls, outside weather conditions play their part.

"If it's rainy and humid, the dough absorbs more moisture. That can change how long it takes," Smith explained. On



The Duchess Bakery is located at 222 First Ave. SE in Cullman.

average, she said, proofing takes about 45 minutes before the donuts are ready to be fried.

Around 5:15 a.m., the fryers hiss, glaze buckets shimmer and trays of golden donuts are flipped, dipped and finished.

A couple of team members stay on the fryer, while others handle the glaze and the rest keep the dough coming. On slower weekdays, the team makes at least six batches, and on holidays or festivals, »

12."It's a three-hour process from the time we start that mixer until it goes into the fryer. It's a lot harder than you think," Smith said.

The Duchess
Bakery isn't just a
bakery; it's a historical landmark. That legacy
lives on in the recipes. The
original donut dough remains
unchanged, as do customer
favorites like the famous
chocolate surprise cake and
Bismarcks.

"We've added a few things like cinnamon bites, peanut butter cookies, red velvet cookies...but mostly, everything is the same," explained Smith.

Residents
wouldn't
have it any
other way.
For her, she
said, the best
part of the job
is seeing the
happiness of sat-

isfied customers. "I just enjoy hearing customers be so happy and excited. Sometimes I'll have people who specifically ask for my cakes, or leave reviews that mention how much they love what we do. That's what makes it worth it."

The Duchess Bakery is located at 222 First Ave. SE in Cullman.



Left: A snow man sugar cookie; Right: Donut dough is made fresh every morning.

Berry, Berry, Little & Chaney

Alex J. Chaney

ajchaneylaw@gmail.com Phone: (256) 734-6330 | Fax: (256) 734-7540

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### - COUNTY VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT -West Point sweeps Good Hope to capture county crown

### **Nick Griffin**

nick@cullmantribune.com

his year's Cullman County Volleyball Tournament concluded with the championship match on Thursday, Oct. 2 and for the first time in four years, the county crown is changing hands. West Point dominated Fairview in the semifinals, and the Warriors carried the momentum into the finals. sweeping 4-time defending champion Good Hope to capture the county title.

### West Point 3 - Good Hope O (25-13, 25-11, 25-17)

West Point got off to a fast start, building an 8-3 lead early in the opening set. The Warriors maintained a 15-9 advantage as the set went on and led 19-6 at one point before sealing a 25-13 win.

West Point's momentum carried into the next set. The Warriors led 6-2 early on and extended the lead out to 11-3. Similar to the first set, West Point led 19-6 at one point before pulling away to secure a 25-11 win in the second set.

The Raiders battled back in the third set, jumping out to a 3-0 lead before West Point climbed back to take a 4-3 lead. Good Hope was able to move back in front 10-6 but the Warriors dominated the rest of the way, putting together a 10-0 scoring run to take a 16-10 lead. West Point pulled ahead 23-14 at one point before sealing a 25-17 win and completing the sweep.

Warriors Head Coach Meagan Cagle is proud of the way her team showed up focused and determined this week and couldn't be happier for a group of girls she loves coaching.

"I'm just so proud. We've really worked on a lot of things and changed some stuff, and this is the best group I've ever coached," Cagle said. "They're just fun to be around, they're selfless, they're kind and they're always smiling and laughing and having a good time. That just



The West Point Warriors swept Good Hope 3-0 on Thursday, Oct. 2 to win this year's **Cullman County Tournament championship.** 

makes what we do so much better. It's a joy to be here, I love being around them. It makes it really sweet because I wanted it for them.'

### West Point 2 - Good Hope 1 (25-17, 22-25, 15-8) (JV Championship)

The Warriors took a 7-4 lead early in the first set and extended the lead to 14-8 as the set went on. West Point pulled ahead 20-10 at one point and went to claim the opening set 25-17.

Good Hope bounced back in the second set, jumping out to an early, 3-0 lead. The Raiders maintained a 9-4 advantage as play continued and stayed in front 16-12 midway through the set. However, West Point was able to battle back and tie things up at 16 but Good Hope regained control down the stretch and took the second set 25-22 to even up the match.

The Warriors finished strong in the third and final set. West Point led 5-1 early in and moved ahead 10-6 midway through the set before wrapping up a 15-8 win and securing the county title.

### **All-County Tournament Team**

- Charli Aris, West Point (MVP) Patton Fell, West Point
- Kenlee Perry, West Point
- Adrianna Owens, West Point
- Caselyn Whatley, Good Hope
- Campbell Koch, Good Hope
- Lexi Marshall, Good Hope
- Reagan Robinson, Vinemont
- Caroline Miller, Vinemont
- Kailyn Redding, Fairview Janet Orona, Fairview
- Bella Foust, Holly Pond
- Kelsy Wilson, Cold Springs
- Alexandria Twitty, Hanceville

### **All-County Team**

- Charli Aris, West Point
- Patton Fell, West Point
- Adrianna Owens, West Point
- Caitlee Simmons, West Point
- Campbell Koch, Good Hope
- Caselyn Whatley, Good Hope
- Isabella Guzman, Good Hope
- Caroline Miller, Vinemont
- Addison Holcomb, Vinemont
- Blakely Baggett, Holly Pond
- Sadie Nail, Holly Pond
- Kailyn Redding, Fairview
- Allie Light, Cold Springs

Eden Clements, Hanceville

### **Samantha Perdue Award Winner**

Campbell Koch, Good Hope

### **Cullman County Youth Volleyball Association Scholarship Winners**

- Chevenne Bishop, Cold Springs
- Whitney Quick, Fairview
- Emma Herring, Good Hope
- Bella McAffee, Hanceville
- Ava Thomas, Holly Pond
- Caroline Miller, Vinemont
- Kelsye Will, West Point

### **JV All-County Team**

- Kylee Smith, Good Hope
- Lakyn Burgess, Good Hope
- Ella Davis, Good Hope
- Gracie Bates, Good Hope
- Colby Aris, West Point
- Braylee Phillips, West Point
- Reese Guthrie, West Point
- Arleigh Harris, Fairview
- Sophia Sang, Fairview
- Delia Woodard, Vinemont
- Nicole Harris, Vinemont
- Lily Albright, Holly Pond
- Abby Black, Hanceville
- Braylea Prince, Cold Springs





ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNI



### **Anabelle Howze**

anabelle@cullmantribune.com

rifters Bar & Grill is a family run restaurant shaped by prayer and persistence, set right on beautiful Smith Lake.

Owners Tanya and Jason Veres said the idea for the restaurant didn't come easily, only after months of conversation, research and, as Tanya put it, "doors that weren't opened, they were all kicked open."

With Jason Veres' background in food service, stemming from his mother's work and their shared memories of life on the lake, the couple knew they wanted to build a place that reflected both quality and community. The name "Drifters" honors those evenings drifting on the water with their kids, watching the sun sink over Smith Lake.

The Vereses wanted Drifters to feel like more than a restaurant. "We strive to make everybody happy," Jason Veres said. "You're going to have a good experience at a reasonable price. Families should be able to come out, enjoy themselves and want to come back."

That commitment to quality meals is evident in the menu. Steaks are hand cut in-house, burgers are ground fresh and pork chops are prepared on-site.

Local favorites include the ribeye, redfish and pork chops, along with appetizers like gator bites and the crowd-pleasing street corn dip. Seasonal items rotate in and out to keep the menu fresh for returning »

guests, and desserts like bread pudding keep people coming back for more.

What truly sets Drifters apart isn't just the food but the culture. The Vereses said they consider their employees family, and the restaurant as an opportunity to invest in the

lives of young people. "When our kids head off to college, I feel like I've sent 15 kids off at once," Tanya Veres laughed. "They become one big family here."

The local community has continued to support the restaurant, and residents

form the backbone of business vear-round.

With live music on weekends, seasonal events like pumpkin-carving contests and catering options for private parties, Drifters continues to grow as both a gathering place and a destination.

"If you just want to get out of town, we're only 10 minutes from the interstate. Come eat by the water with us," they said.

Drifters Bar & Grill is located at 173 County Road 312 Cullman, AL 35057. Find it online at Facebook/Drifters Bar & Grill Smith Lake.



### 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 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.

## To you Laura, for giving me a place to call bome

### **Gauge Day**

gauge@cullmantribune.com

n Sept. 18, 2025, Laura Long left this world to enter her eternal home with the Lord. It was a difficult day for everyone who knew her, and the days that followed were just as heavy.

As a reporter and writer for The Cullman Tribune, I have the privilege of sharing stories about people whose lives create change — stories that might otherwise go untold. Laura was one of those people. She changed lives, especially mine.

I believe who she is and what she did for me captures perfectly the essence of our magazine, Community Matters. I mattered to her even when it didn't make sense to me.

Below, you'll find her obituary, lovingly written by her family. Following that are the words I shared at her memorial service — a small glimpse into what she meant to me and the lasting impact she had on my life.

### **Obituary for Laura Leigh Long:**

Funeral Service for Laura Leigh Long, age 55 of Cullman, will be at 2 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 22, 2025, at Cullman Heritage Funeral Home with Dr. Jeff Steele officiating; burial at Cullman Heritage Funeral Home Cemetery. Visitation will be from 6 -8 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 21, 2025, at Cullman Heritage Funeral Home.

Cullman Heritage Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Mrs. Long passed away on Thursday, Sept. 18, 2025, at Cullman Regional. She was born, Dec. 4, 1969, to Jerry Steven York and Linda Joan Dorris York.

She was preceded in death by her parents and brother, Ethan York.

Survivors include her husband of 35 years, Douglas Long; her second mom Annette Long Whitt; her children, Micah York (Kathy), Samuel Long (Dori), Stephen Long (Maeghan), JonLuke Long (Emily); grandchildren, Gia and Mal York, Ellie Mae and Gracie Long, Kairi and Noble Long; Isabelle Long (grand dog); sister, Betsy Hutson (Clint); brother, Seth York; brother in law, Robert Long (Lisa) and a host of nieces, nephews family and friends.

Serving as pallbearers will be, Micah York, Stephen Long, Gauge Day, Sam Long, JonLuke Long and Hunter Potts.

Laura was a Godly woman, a beloved wife and "Yaya" to her grandchildren and she loved her family more than anything. She will be greatly missed.

I wanted to say what an honor it was for me and Hunter to be able to serve as pallbearers and be a small part in the celebration of Laura's life. I asked Doug and the family if it would be okay if I shared really quickly before I prayed. I've never done well with grief but writing my feelings out seems to give me an ability to cope.

For those who don't know my story, there were many years in my life as a young teenager where the only place I could call home was the Longs' house. It



Laura Leigh Long, a life changer

STEPHEN LONG

was a safe place. They cooked the best foods, especially Doug's chili. I know Laura can hear me now when I say I am sorry for never trying your homemade gumbo. They gave me a place to sleep whenever I needed it and never once asked me to leave. I spent weeks and months at a time at their home, believing in my own heart that they were tired of seeing me there, even though it wasn't true. They truly treated me as one of their own, taking me on trips, buying me clothes, asking me about work and other things. They gave me a sense of normalcy.

It was in those years that I called their home my home, that I was exposed to the first, and still to this day, greatest example of a marriage built in love. They truly were the apples of each other's eyes. They were each other's favorite person and as I have grown older, I realize now how rare that can be in our world. It was something I had never experienced in my life, and I truly believe that example became a cornerstone

in my own marriage today. I'm forever grateful for that.

But before I end, let me share with you my favorite thing that Laura ever did for me.

Today, I stand before you as a youth pastor and someone who will boldly claim Jesus as my Lord and Savior before all. Jesus has changed my life. But it's not lost on me how I got here. Because of Laura and her love for her boys and how she showed me that same love, I truly believe she played a critical part in me finding Jesus.

As a youth pastor, I know what it is to open a home to someone. I know it's hard and can be uncomfortable. It has costs you don't even consider when you first let them in. Sometimes it feels like you lose a sense of privacy. And disagreements happen, and Laura and I for sure had those. She once threatened to scrub off my tattoos with a toothbrush.

Disagreements or not, though, she never ceased to love me. Those years I spent at the Longs' house, »

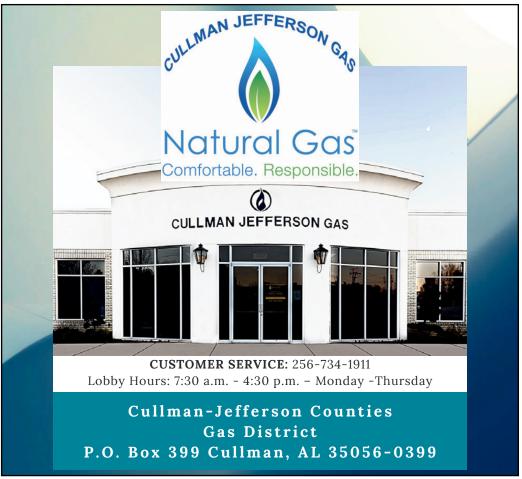
watching Doug and Laura lead a home with love, helped me realize what my own life could be like someday.

They challenged me to break the wheel in my own life.

And because Laura never closed the door to her home, or her heart for me, I was able to grow close to all of them, especially Stephen, which eventually led to him inviting me to a singing where I was saved.

Laura's legacy in my life is a home that led me to a grace I never deserved. A grace that I found in Jesus. A grace that Laura exhibited to me and many others during her time here on Earth. And while she is no longer here with us, I celebrate the fact that my soul is wrapped in eternity because a woman named Laura and her family loved me enough to give me a place to call home.

Doug, thank you for loving me as your own, just like Laura did. Thank you, brothers, for sharing your mother with me. I love you guys.





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