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## Community Matters

from The Cullman Tribune May - July 2026 | Vol. 8 No. 2

219 Second Avenue SE | Cullman, AL 35055  
 256-739-1351 | CullmanTribune.com

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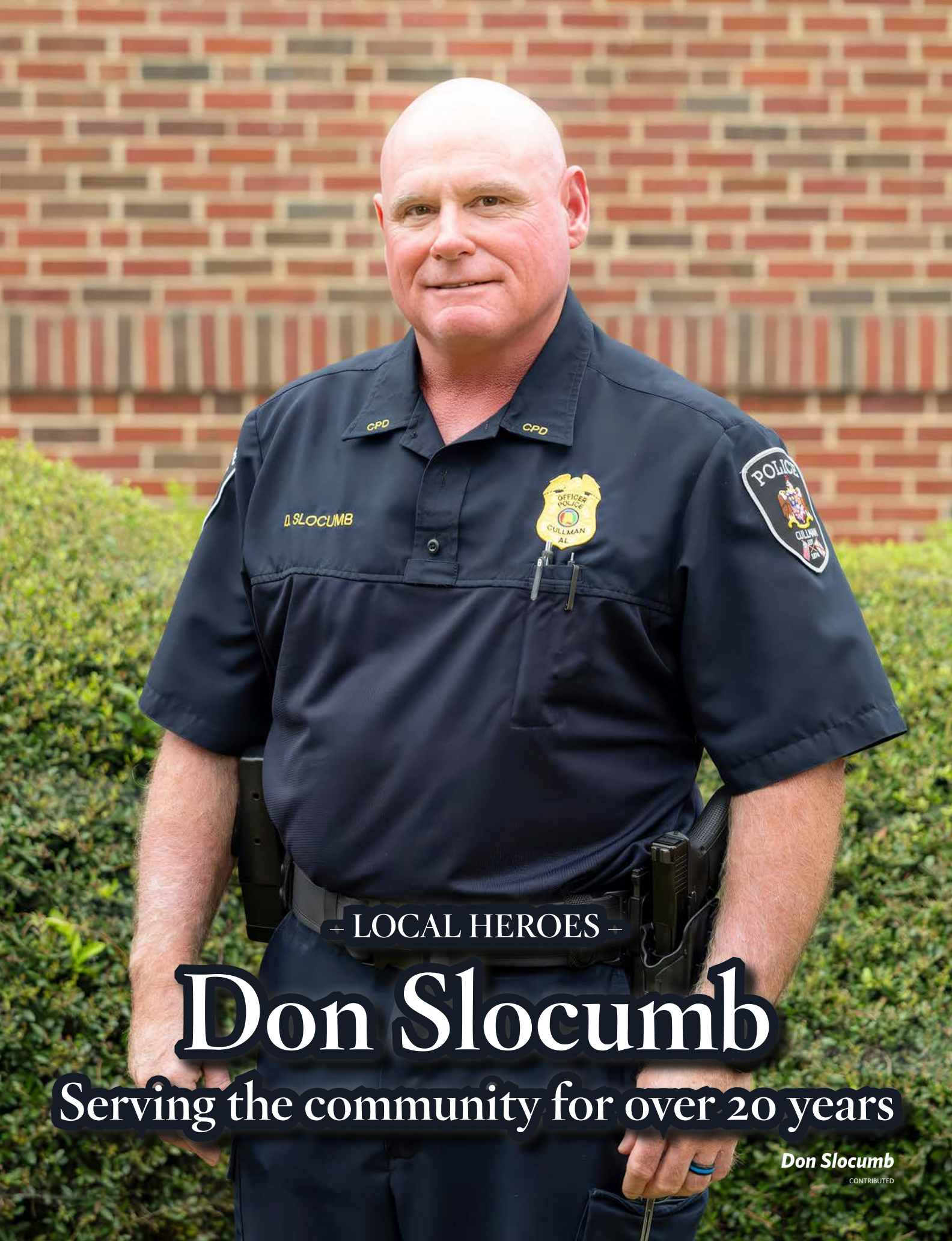
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- LOCAL HEROES -

# Don Slocumb

Serving the community for over 20 years

*Don Slocumb*

CONTRIBUTED

**Lauren Estes**

lauren@cullmantribune.com

**C**ullman Police Officer Don Slocumb has been serving the community for over 20 years — in our schools, on the streets and in harm’s way.

He’s held a variety of roles, including patrol officer, field training officer, narcotics agent, motor officer, TACT team member, park patrol officer and school resource officer.

“There are people that still come up to me in public, text me and/or call me to thank me for saving their life as a narcotics agent, but my best memories as a police officer are with the children I’ve had the pleasure of interacting with at the schools,” Slocumb said. “It means a lot to me when they come up to me and hug or fist-bump me in the hallways and when I see them in public.”

Slocumb said the most challenging time in his career was when he was involved in a shooting.

“No officer goes to work wanting to be put in that situation, and every officer wants to go home to his or her family at the end of the day,” Slocumb said.

“I will never be the same after going through that stress and trauma. Our officers truly put their life on the line each time they put on their uniform.”

Slocumb said being a school resource officer is a daily blessing because he gets the opportunity to build relationships with the students, earning their trust and teaching them that law enforcement officers are here to help them and keep them safe.

“Greeting them in the mornings when they arrive allows me to read their faces to see if they are off to a good start to the day or if they need a pep talk,” Slocumb said.

“It also allows me to read them to see if their home life is good and if they need



**SRO Don Slocumb**

CONTRIBUTED



**Officer Don Slocumb with a student**

CONTRIBUTED

any assistance. I also enjoy reading to them during the day and playing with them during recess. For me, it’s all about the students. Having a positive impact early is very important!”

Of all things that Slocumb has faced, he said, he wants people to remember him for being a good man.

“I want people to know me as someone who would go above and beyond to help a fellow brother or sister,” Slocumb said.

“My son Chase is my hero because after all I, and my career, have put him through, he never ceases to amaze me with his accomplishments, and the man he has become. I pray every morning that God gives me the strength, wisdom and courage to touch lives in a positive manner as a Christian role model and leader. To lead me and guide me throughout each day as I interact with others, especially the youth, because they are our future.”

Slocumb has been married to his wife Beth for nine years. She has two daughters, Madisen and Eryn, and he has a son, Chase.

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# Local spring and summer fun

## Chasady Woods

chasady@cullmantribune.com

In Cullman, if there's one thing you can count on it's that we're going to have plenty of events for you to attend!

Cullman is growing, and our small-town events aren't so small anymore. The town isn't so small anymore. When you are attending these events, keep these things in mind as you read through.

April showers bring May flowers, so have an umbrella ready for our first spring event - the 42nd annual Bloomin' Festival Arts and Crafts Fair at St. Bernard.

As you head onto Highway 278, keep in mind the traffic on this roadway. The Bloomin' Festival takes place from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, April 18-19. While school won't be in session, be mindful of the narrow bridge leading up to this area when you are on your way there and as you leave.

Festhalle Farmers Market will also be active at this time within the Warehouse District. This will overlap with the Bloomin' Festival on Saturday, April 18, as the market takes place on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. This market will continue through October and hours are typically 7 a.m.-2 p.m., weather permitting.

Meanwhile, the Alabama Strawberry Festival will take place Friday, April 24, from 10 a.m.- 9 p.m., continuing through Saturday, April 25, from 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at Depot Park. Depot Park is located at 309 First Ave. NE, neighboring

the Warehouse District. This is a super large event that brings live music, food, arts and crafts vendors, family activities and (of course) strawberries. Expect this to be a high-traffic event, so plan accordingly.

As we enter May and school lets out, WildWater, located at 1707 Main Ave. SW, will no doubt bring crowds. This water park neighbors a very popular, 70-acre Cullman complex park with features such as lighted softball and soccer fields, basketball courts, picnic pavilions, a 1.5-mile trail and so on.

Crosswalks are available for the public in this area, but aren't always used. Except a higher number of families with children. Be highly cautious of any speed limit decreases as well as your general surroundings. If the speed limit lowers, there's a reason and all the more reason for you to be careful. You can never be too safe.

As we get further into the summer months through August Smith Lake and Sportsman Lake Park will become more active.

Sportsman Lake Park is just off Highway 31 at 1544 Sportsman Lake Road NW. Be aware that this highway can have overflow from I-65 and Alabama Highway 157 at times. The speed limit in this particular area drops, but those coming from a higher speed may be too distracted to notice.

From spring to summer this park offers a great deal of family fun. Sportsman Lake is much smaller than Smith Lake and will peak during lunch and midafternoon hours and



CHASADY WOODS/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

## Cheers at 2nd Fridays

weekends. As per usual, the speed limit suggests anywhere from 15-22 miles per hour, but going even slower and being more cautious can't hurt! It takes only a split second for a child to slip from their guardian's hand, and with all the excitement ahead of them, it is bound to happen.

Smith Lake Park (403 County Road 386, Cullman, AL 35057) will peak throughout the summer months but especially during the Fourth of July. There are several ways to get to Smith Lake, one of them being County Road 222. Throughout this area please be careful and cautious of your surroundings.

Once on the lake, if you plan to be on the water, whether in a boat or not, scanning your surroundings and being aware of them is important. Be responsible with who you are with and what you are doing.

Throughout the summer, the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce host popular, family friendly events called 2nd Fridays on, you guessed it, the second Friday of the month. These events take place downtown, in and around the Warehouse District. Find out more at [www.cullmanchamber.org](http://www.cullmanchamber.org).

Remember to have fun and be safe!

# Summer camps for kids

By: Anabelle Howze | [anabelle@cullmantribune.com](mailto:anabelle@cullmantribune.com)

## CAMP CULLMAN

- Dates: June 1-July 31 (break June 29-July 3)
- Time: Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.
- Location: OmniPlex (beside CWAC)
- Cost: \$1,350 per camper
- \$20 discount for second child
- \$25 discount for additional children

This full-day summer program keeps kids active and engaged with a variety of activities, games and chances to make friends.

Register at [www.cullman-recreation.org/camp-cullman](http://www.cullman-recreation.org/camp-cullman).

## SUMMER STEM CAMP

- Grades: 1st-8th
- Dates: July 13-16 & July 20-23
- Time: 8 a.m.-noon
- Location: East Elementary School
- Cost: Free
- Deadline to apply: May 1

Kids can explore science, technology, engineering and math through hands-on projects, creative problem-solving and group challenges.

Register at [www.cullman-recreation.org/steam-camps](http://www.cullman-recreation.org/steam-camps).

## SUMMER ART CAMPS: SHOP AROUND THE CORNER ART SHOP

These creative camps let kids try painting, pottery and mixed media, so they can experiment with art and bring home their own projects. Register by calling 256-775-1775.

### June

#### Mrs. Maison's Art Camp (Ages 5-8)

- June 1-5 | \$175

#### Mrs. Christy's Pottery Camp (Ages 5-12)

- June 8-12 | \$225

#### Mrs. Maison's Art Camp

(Ages 9-14)

- June 15-19 | \$175

### July

#### Mrs. Christy's Pottery Camp (Ages 5-12)

- July 6-10 | \$225

#### Mrs. Maison's Discovery Camp (Ages 5-12)

- July 13-17 | \$200

#### Mrs. Christy's Pottery Camp (Ages 10-16)

- July 20-24 | \$225

## NORTH ALABAMA AGRIPLEX CAMPS

The North Alabama Agriplex is excited to host a number of summer day camps for kids ages preschool to teen. Call 256-297-1044 or email [cullmanag@gmail.com](mailto:cullmanag@gmail.com) for more information. For all camps, register at [www.agriplex.org](http://www.agriplex.org).

### Kitchen Camps

#### Sweet Pea Kitchen Camp (Grades K-2, Ages 5-8)

- July 13-17 | 10 a.m.-noon
- Registration closes July 6

#### Bean Sprout Kitchen Camp (Grades 3-5, Ages 8-11)

- June 22-26 | noon-2 p.m.
- Registration closes June 15

#### Broccoli Buds Kitchen Camp (Grades 6-8, Ages 11-13)

- July 20-24 | noon-2 p.m.
- Registration closes June 15
- Cost: \$60 per child

These hands-on cooking camps teach kids kitchen basics, safe techniques, and fun recipes, helping them build confidence.

### Touring Farms for Kids

- Dates: June 4-5
- Time: 8 a.m.-3 p.m.
- Ages: 7-13
- Cost: \$60

This two-day farm camp lets

kids visit local farms, meet animals and learn how food is grown and produced. Lunch and snacks are included.

### Garden Camp

- Dates: June 8-12
- Time: 9-11 a.m.
- Ages: 6-11
- Cost: \$60

Kids can explore gardening by planting, harvesting and doing outdoor activities. They'll have projects to take home each day.

### Nature Day Camp

- Dates: June 16-17
- Time: 8 a.m.-3 p.m.
- Ages: 9-14

- Cost: \$60

This outdoor adventure camp includes kayaking, fishing, archery and lessons about Alabama's natural history.

### Sewing Camps

**Beginning Hand Sewing**  
June 22-26 | 9-11:30 a.m.  
Ages 9+ | \$60

### Beginning Machine Sewing

- July 20-24 | 9-11:30 a.m.
- Ages 9+ | \$60 (must bring sewing machine)

These beginner sewing classes teach basic skills and let kids make their own projects.





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– LOCAL HEROES –

# Cullman County EMA

## Keeping the community safe

By: Anabelle Howze | [anabelle@cullmantribune.com](mailto:anabelle@cullmantribune.com)

While many residents may associate emergency management with severe weather alerts, officials at the Cullman County Emergency Management Agency (EMA) say their work extends far beyond the forecast in ways many don't realize.

Cullman County EMA Director Tim Sartin and EMA Specialist Brent McDonald are being recognized as local heroes for their wide-ranging efforts to keep the community safe. From hazardous material spills and missing person cases to large-scale disasters and daily coordination with first responders, nearly every major incident in the county involves EMA in some capacity.

"If it's something large that happens, some way, shape or form, it touches our office," Sartin said.

The agency plays a key role in supporting emergency response efforts, providing resources, coordinating communication and helping manage incidents as they unfold. EMA works closely with law enforcement, fire departments, EMS and local governments, often stepping in as a support system or incident command when needed.

The biggest misconception about EMA is that its role is limited solely to weather.

"That is a big part of what we do, but that is not who we are," McDonald said. "We do a little bit of everything."

That "everything" includes

maintaining emergency equipment, securing grants, housing specialized response units and ensuring the county is prepared for disasters.

The agency also manages a warehouse of resources that can be deployed across the county or even the state, from generators and lighting to command trailers and emergency supplies.

Both Sartin and McDonald bring extensive backgrounds in emergency services, including EMS, fire and law enforcement. They continue to serve part time in medical roles, which strengthens their response capabilities.

For Sartin, the role is the culmination of a lifelong calling. "Everything I've done has pointed me in this direction," he said. "This allows me to use everything I've learned to help the community."

McDonald echoed that sentiment, saying his passion for the job comes from a desire to serve others and help those he can.

Recently, the EMA has gained attention across the state and even the nation for its social media outreach, particularly regarding severe weather events and preparedness. Informational videos produced by the EMA have reached large audiences, helping educate the public and even drawing recognition from other agencies and media outlets.

Despite the high-stress nature of their work, both men say their approach to handling emergencies is grounded in

preparation and faith.

When asked how they cope with the demands and strain of the job, they simply said, "Pray."

While their work often places them in critical situations, both Sartin and McDonald are hesitant to accept the title of "hero." Instead, they believe heroism is found in everyday acts of service, whether it's a first responder saving a life, a teacher helping a student succeed or a neighbor offering support in a time of need.

"Anybody that impacts your life in a positive way can be a hero," McDonald said.

The Cullman County EMA perfectly embodies that definition by quietly working behind the scenes to protect and support Cullman County in every way.



CULLMAN COUNTY EMA  
Cullman County EMA  
Director Tim Sartin



CULLMAN COUNTY EMA  
Cullman County EMA Specialist Brent McDonald on the job

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**Cullman County Sheriff  
Matt Gentry**



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**CULLMAN COUNTY SHERIFF MATT GENTRY  
CULLMAN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE | 256-734-0342**

# A practical guide to navigating severe weather

**Lauren Estes**

lauren@cullmantribune.com

**S**pring is here, and with it comes unpredictable weather. The Cullman Police Department, Cullman County Emergency Management Agency and the Cullman County Sheriff's Office each shared safety tips.

## **The CPD shared some tornado safety suggestions:**

- Have multiple ways to receive warnings (NOAA weather radio, weather apps, local alerts)
- Identify your safe place: lowest level, interior room, away from windows
- If in a vehicle, do not shelter under overpasses. Seek sturdy shelter immediately.
- Know the difference between a watch (conditions are favorable) and a warning (take action immediately)

## **Thunderstorms and lightning:**

- When thunder roars, go indoors
- Avoid trees, open fields and metal objects
- Unplug sensitive electronics if time permits

### **Flash flooding:**

- Turn around; don't drown
- Never drive through flooded roadways

### **Heat safety:**

- Stay hydrated: drink water even if you're not thirsty
- Check on elderly neighbors and vulnerable residents
- Never leave children or pets in vehicles:

temperatures rise rapidly

- Schedule outdoor work or events earlier in the day when possible

## **Spring travel and outdoor safety:**

- Expect increased traffic during spring break and summer events
- Watch for motorcycles, bicycles and pedestrians
- Secure loads properly when hauling equipment or recreational gear
- Use life jackets when boating: Alabama law requires children under 8 to wear them

### **Water safety:**

- Supervise children at all times around pools and lakes
- Avoid swimming alone
- Be mindful of rip currents when traveling to the coast

EMA Specialist Brent McDonald said as we move from spring and summer here in Cullman County, we all look forward to longer days and warmer weather, but in Alabama, that also means the state is heading into a severe weather season.

"This time of year can bring strong thunderstorms, tornadoes, flash flooding and extreme heat. The good news is that a little preparation goes a long way," McDonald said. "We encourage families to take a few minutes now to talk about where you would go if a tornado warning is issued. The safest place is a basement or a small interior room on the lowest level of your home, away from windows. Don't wait until the sirens sound to figure it out."

McDonald said to make

sure you have more than one way to receive weather alerts.

"A NOAA weather radio, trusted weather apps and local media are all important," he said. "Sirens are meant to be heard outdoors and should not be your only source of warning. We encourage everyone in Cullman County to download our newly updated Cullman County EMA app. The improved version now includes a built-in NOAA weather radio feature, giving you direct access to weather alerts right on your phone. We also strongly encourage residents to sign up for the county's emergency notification system, Everbridge, as an added layer of protection. Having multiple ways to receive alerts can make all the difference during severe weather. Both apps are free and available on all major app stores."

When it comes to flooding, always remember: Turn around; don't drown.

"We see it every year — drivers attempting to cross water over the roadway. It only takes a small amount of moving water to sweep a vehicle away," McDonald said. "As temperatures climb later in the summer, check on elderly neighbors, stay hydrated and never leave children or pets in a vehicle — even for a short time."

Taking a few simple steps now can protect your family when storms move in. Cullman County EMA is here to help you stay prepared, but safety starts at home.

The Cullman County Sheriff's Office said severe

weather moves fast in Cullman County and here's what residents need to know.

"Stay alert and respond quickly," Sheriff Matt Gentry said. "When a warning is issued, take shelter immediately. Delays put lives at risk, and deputies may not be able to reach you until conditions improve."

Roadways are one of the most dangerous places during storms, Gentry said.

"Deputies frequently respond to fallen trees, low visibility crashes and flooded roads," he said. "If you're already driving when a warning hits, pull into a safe building and wait it out. Never drive around barricades. At home, secure outdoor items, clear driveways and make sure your address is visible. These simple steps help deputies reach you faster when every minute counts."

Gentry added to be sure to charge your phone, have backup alert methods and keep 911 lines open for true emergencies.

"If service goes out, stay sheltered until conditions stabilize," he said. "Whether at home or on the road, knowing your exact location helps deputies reach you quickly — especially when visibility is low or debris blocks normal routes. Severe weather is a fact of life in Cullman County, but with preparation and awareness, we can face it together. The Cullman County Sheriff's Office is committed to protecting our communities, and by working together we can ensure that the citizens of Cullman County are safe."

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**WALLACE STATE**  
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## 2026

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# Seasonal safety: Heat and water

By: Anabelle Howze | [Anabelle@cullmantribune.com](mailto:Anabelle@cullmantribune.com)

Photo: View of Smith Lake - Anabelle Howze/The Cullman Tribune

**S**pring and summer in Alabama are full of fun, whether you're spending a sunny day at the lake or enjoying a local festival with friends and family. Still, officials remind everyone to be aware of the risks that come with extreme heat and time on the water.

Summer fun can become dangerous if you're not careful. Extreme heat is still one of the top weather-related dangers. To avoid heat-related illness, make sure to drink water regularly, especially if you're outside for a long time. If you're sweating a lot, your body loses electrolytes, so try sports drinks or eat salty snacks like pickles and granola to help replace

them. Wear lightweight, loose clothes to help keep cool, and remember to put sunscreen on all exposed skin to prevent sunburn. Don't forget spots like your ears and scalp. Take breaks in the shade or indoors, and keep an eye on heat advisories to stay safe.

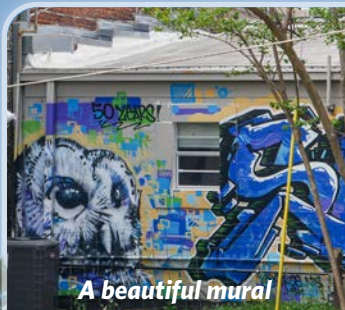
Smith Lake is a local favorite, but it's just as important to stay safe around the water as it is to watch out for the heat. Watch out for changing conditions like currents, waves and things hidden underwater. Even shallow water can be risky because of debris or sudden drop-offs. Always go in feet-first and never dive into water you don't know. Make sure kids and anyone who

isn't a strong swimmer are supervised and swim with a buddy. Life jackets are also recommended.

Boating safety is important for everyone at the lake, whether you're driving, riding or just nearby. EVERYONE on board should wear a life jacket, no matter their age or swimming skills. Check that your equipment works, bring a safety kit and let someone know your plans before you head out. Drinking alcohol while boating is against the law. Being intoxicated can slow your judgment and reaction time, putting everyone in danger. Always watch the weather, and head back to shore if you see storms coming or the wind picks up.

If you're tubing, skiing or wakeboarding, make sure to use the right equipment, have someone watching as a spotter and follow basic safety rules. Do these activities during the day, and always pay attention to what's going on around you. Watch out for wildlife and keep an eye on the weather. If you hear thunder or see lightning, get out of the water right away and find shelter. Wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder before going back outside.

As summer goes on, a little planning can help keep you and your family safe while you enjoy all the season's activities.



A beautiful mural

## - HIDDEN GEMS -

# Art in the everyday

By: Chasady Woods  
[chasady@cullmantribune.com](mailto:chasady@cullmantribune.com)



Signs of days gone by

**W**hen living in Cullman you may see its beauty as you start your morning. Perhaps the first thing you do is have a cup of coffee before the sun rises. You may bask in the silence before the day erupts. How wonderful the solitude is. While someone else may think the same as they admire the sun rising from the driver's seat. Imagine they see the sun peak over distant trees

as they enter into the city limits. The traffic lights are slowly losing their glow.

Others value the growth of their city. They have watched seemingly endless construction time and time again. Chatting to their friends or spouses of the population surge, how the festivals have ignited and drawn a multitude to their once tiny town.

Though art goes beyond these perspectives. After all, art is meant to be sought

out and found. It is to be admired. It can be in the way grass peaks through cracks along the sidewalk. A mural visible from just the right spot. Perhaps the sun gleaming onto the water flowing through a silently babbling fountain. It can be weathered paint on a local building or distant laughter from friends.

The real beauty of Cullman is our collective perception that is to be cherished. It resides in our

collective sighs of awe as we take it all in - no matter where or how. Cullman's gems are not limited to one specific place. The city in itself is breathtaking once you take a moment to notice the uniqueness as it is and respect it as such. You must look past the intangible, societal rush and learn to slow down in order to find it. Art is the pure essence of human existence and adoring it among everyday life is crucial.

# Fur baby summer safety and survival guide

Photo: Dog paw in a pond - Chasady Woods/The Cullman Tribune

## Chasady Woods

chasady@cullmantribune.com

**T**he best way to keep your pet safe in warm summer months is to be as mindful and prepared as possible.

### Fleas and ticks

As we enter warmer weather the number of fleas and ticks increases. This typically becomes an issue during spring and summer as the humid weather increases their activity, and you and your pet spend more time outdoors. Who doesn't love a sunny day with their best pal?

Pets need to be checked and bathed regularly. Some pets can get a bath with flea and tick shampoo and be completely fine, but look out for signs of increased sensitivity.

Constant grooming may indicate that a vet visit is best.

Animals, like humans, can develop allergies to fleas and ticks.

If you notice your pet constantly licking or chewing their paws, itching excessively or developing rashes/scabs, speak to your vet.

### Heat safety

It is simple to protect your animals from the heat. If you wouldn't do it - don't make them do it!

Would you walk barefoot on asphalt on a sweltering hot Alabama day? How about sitting in the car under the same conditions with no air flow? Sit in a backyard with a fur suit on? If you said "no" to any of these, then you shouldn't put your pet in those conditions.

Asphalt can get so hot it can melt the protective pad off of their paws. Cars on a hot day can reach fatal levels within minutes. Your pet deserves to be able to chill. Literally. Make sure they are well fed, hydrated and cared for during hot weather. If you want to bring them along for a ride, but can't take them inside a store with you it is best to leave them home.

Speaking of leaving them home...

### Lake safety

If your animal is not a fan of other people, animals, children, loud noises or anything that can happen on the lake during the summer season - leave them at home. Putting them in environments that make them feel

unsafe or uncomfortable can cause them to react in unpredictable ways. It is irresponsible and selfish to expose your animal to any situation that would cause them harm or put someone else in danger. Many animals that lash out at other animals or humans are often forced to be euthanized. If you are willing to risk this with your pet, you should not have one.

If your pet isn't bothered in these scenarios, you should still maintain proper safety. First and foremost, be sure that where you are going allows pets. Staying at a lake house? Make sure pets are allowed. Some vacation rentals may deny pets in a certain area for safety concerns.

Make sure that you have food and water for your pet if you aim to be on a boat. Check any laws and regulations about having a pet on a boat before taking them. Purchase a life jacket for them before bringing them and don't have them in the heat for long periods of time.

### Fireworks safety

The best way to prepare your pet for fireworks is to have a safe spot for them. This can be very similar to

crate training - except you don't have to use a crate. You need to create a safe spot or zone your pet can go to when the show starts. Find this place for them and help them know they will not be harmed here. This should be inside, ideally.

You can establish this safety by putting them in the area and giving them treats, their favorite toy, moving their beds or favorite blankets. Once the fireworks begin you can give them treats, use white noise to drown out the loud sounds, distract them with toys and so on.

If these methods have failed before, consider anxiety vests or speaking to your vet for advice. Never wait until the day of to try a new method. Use controlled scenarios beforehand to see how your pet reacts and go from there.

### Just in case

Make sure your pet has a collar on and consider a microchip. I know it can seem excessive, but if you lose sight of your pet a microchip can be the most effective way to locate them and bring them home quickly and safe.

# How to spend a day in Cullman: Stay at CAMP 222



ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

## Chairs, grill and a lake view

**Anabelle Howze**

[anabelle@cullmantribune.com](mailto:anabelle@cullmantribune.com)

If you want to enjoy the day outdoors, CAMP 222 is a great spot to experience Lewis Smith Lake and still be close to everything happening in Cullman. Located just off County Road 222, this private, 1-acre campground is owned by Dale Neel, who grew up here and knows the area well. CAMP 222 is perfect for anyone looking for a peaceful, relaxed place to camp instead of a busy public campground.

Neel will greet you when you arrive and then you're ready to begin your adventure. You can launch »



**The boat ramp**

ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE



ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

### **Smith Lake view from deck at CAMP 222**

your boat from the private ramp or relax on the floating sun deck and take in the lake views. Whether you like swimming, fishing or just cruising on Smith Lake, you can enjoy the water however you like. If you'd rather stay on land, there are hammocks where you can rest, read or nap. The relaxed pace lets you unplug and soak in the natural surroundings. In the evening, people often gather around the fire pit and grill to enjoy the quiet, make s'mores and unwind as the nearby roads get quieter after sunset.

The campground has water and electricity hookups, plus an outdoor shower with hot water. From April to November, there's a portable toilet available. In winter, guests must bring campers equipped with

restrooms or their own portable toilets.

The camp is conveniently located less than a mile from gas stations, a Dollar General and local spots like Whitlock's General Store and Cafe and Drifters Bar & Grill. Downtown Cullman is about 11 miles away, offering even more places to eat, shop and explore.

While you're there, you can make the most of your visit by checking out local attractions like the Ave Maria Grotto, The Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament, Clarkson Covered Bridge and much more. There are also local wineries, breweries and markets to explore, like Ethos Craft Brewing/Bloom Winery and Goat Island Brewing, giving you plenty of ways to enjoy your time in the area.



ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

### **The CAMP 222 shower setup**

CAMP 222 has hosted guests from all over the country, including Texas, Oklahoma, Ohio and Mississippi, as well as many locals. It's also a favorite stop for people traveling to the beach, and many guests come back again and again. Whether you're watching

the sunrise on the water or relaxing by the fire in the evening, CAMP 222 is a laid-back place to enjoy Cullman, with lakefront views and easy access to everything nearby.

To make a reservation, visit <https://tinyurl.com/CAMP222cullman>.



Jody Glover behind the wheel

ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

## - DAY IN THE LIFE - CARTS



CARTS bus

ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Anabelle Howze**  
anabelle@cullmantribune.com

**B**efore most of Cullman County wakes up, Cullman Area Rural Transit System (CARTS) drivers are already on the road working hard to help the community get where they need to go.

By 4:30 a.m., some are behind the wheel, navigating highways and quiet county roads to ensure dialysis patients

arrive at appointments on time. Others are preparing for a full day of scheduled stops, doctor visits, grocery runs and work commutes, all carefully coordinated through a system that serves many residents across the county.

For the CARTS team, the work is more than just transportation. It is a deep connection to the Cullman community with a bigger impact than most realize.

"Every morning, we start with the 'pre-trip,'" said Driver

Cindy Burgett. "We check the tires, mirrors, fluids, everything. We want to make sure it's safe before anybody gets on that bus."

Drivers inspect their vehicles daily before reviewing routes that outline who they'll pick up, where they're headed and when they need to arrive. Timing is a critical part of the job - not just for efficiency, but for the people who rely on them to get to work, appointments and more. »



ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Cindy Burgett and Jody Glover took home second- and first-place wins, respectively, from the Alabama RTAP Training Rodeo in Eufaula in March.**



ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**CSR Charles "Buzz" Paine**



ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Mechanic Barry Pommerville**

"We have to get people where they need to go safely and on time," Burgett said.

While the early shifts may end by early afternoon, the impact of those rides lasts much longer.

"Mostly, passengers are seniors who can't drive anymore," said Driver Jody Glover. "We also have a lot of disabled patrons - some in wheelchairs, some who are visually impaired. They don't have another way to get where they need to go."

Assistant Director Keith Johnson said one of the biggest misconceptions about CARTS is that it only serves elderly or disabled residents.

"It's open to the entire community. We take people to work, to appointments, to run errands, whatever they need," said Johnson.

For many passengers, CARTS is a means of independence. Drivers regularly assist riders beyond getting them to their destinations by helping them navigate daily tasks.

"Some need help getting to

the bus, or carrying groceries," Glover said. "You just do what you can."

That care grows into relationships built over time. Drivers see many of the same passengers regularly, forming deeply meaningful bonds that go far beyond a typical service. One of CARTS' most unique offerings is its shopping routes. These routes bring together residents from across the county for a weekly outing. With the county divided into sections, each section has designated days. Passengers are picked up and taken to stores, banks or other errands. They often share a meal and fellowship before returning home. This feature provides a social connection, especially for those who may otherwise feel isolated.

"It becomes like a family," Burgett said. "They bond with each other, eat together, talk about their lives."

While drivers are the public face of CARTS, much of the work happens behind the scenes. »

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Director Stephanie Childers describes the office as a constant balancing act. "It's like a puzzle. We're coordinating multiple buses, drivers and routes across the entire county every day."

Before riders can be scheduled, staff verify addresses to ensure buses can safely access homes and other stops. Services must be requested at least 24 hours in advance, but availability is not guaranteed due to schedules filling up quickly.

"Some days fill up so quickly that we just can't accommodate everyone. That's one of our biggest challenges," said Johnson.

Communication is key to smooth operations. Drivers stay in constant contact with dispatchers and office staff to handle unexpected situations, from traffic delays to passenger needs.

"We all work as a unit," Childers said. "That's what

makes it work."

Despite the logistics and long hours, CARTS employees say the most important part of the job is the people.

Said Glover, "You have to love people. You have to have compassion and empathy."

That compassion often shows up in small, quiet ways by doing things as simple as returning a lost wallet, helping a passenger on a rough day or going the extra mile, even off the clock.

As Cullman County continues to grow quickly, so does the demand for CARTS services. Drivers can log between 35,000 and 40,000 miles each month on top of navigating increasingly busy roads, all while maintaining a strong safety record.

"That's a lot of miles, but our drivers are professionals. They care about what they're doing," Johnson said.

That commitment to quality recently earned CARTS



ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Scheduler James Arnold and Dispatcher Carey Marks**

statewide recognition. During the recent Alabama RTAP Training Rodeo in Eufaula, drivers were tested on written knowledge, vehicle inspections, wheelchair securement and driving skills. CARTS Drivers Jody Glover and Cindy Burgett placed first and second. Their performance qualified them for the national competition, set for May 8 in Omaha, Nebraska.

"It shows that our training is on point," Johnson said. "What

they do every day is what's being tested."

At the end of each day is the most rewarding part. "Everybody got where they needed to go, and everybody got home safe," Childers said. "That's it. That's the goal."

After more than a decade on the job, Burgett still feels the same way.

"It's a very fulfilling job," she said. "I couldn't imagine being anywhere else."

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# TOP 10 MICROPOLITAN — AREAS IN THE U.S. —

*Site Selection Magazine, 2026*



Cullman has earned a spot among the top micropolitan areas in the United States, ranking No. 6 in *Site Selection Magazine's* Micropolitan Rankings for 2025. That's out of 542 micropolitan areas nationwide.

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# CULLMAN

Economic Development Agency

# Serving area seniors

**Lauren Estes**  
lauren@cullmantribune.com

The Cullman County Commission on Aging has many events this spring and summer for local senior citizens.

Director Stephanie Lawson helps the commission, which plays a vital role in the community by supporting and improving the quality of life for older adults.

"Many seniors rely on services provided through the Commission on Aging to stay healthy, active and connected," Lawson said.

"From nutritious meals offered through our full-time senior centers to countywide events to the helpful resources and other services we provide. It is critical for our seniors to stay socially engaged and build friendships. By attending our centers it reduces isolation, which keeps us mentally stronger as we age.

"We help maintain independence through our homebound meals program, which allows seniors to remain in their own homes longer rather than moving into assisted living facilities."

Lawson said the Commission on Aging succeeds because of the whole community effort of dedicated staff, volunteers, local leaders and supporters who care deeply about the senior population.

"Without funding from the Cullman County Commission, North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments (NARCOG), Alabama Department of Senior Services (ADSS) and United Way of Cullman County, COA would not exist," Lawson said. "Our day-to-day operations success depends on all of our office staff and center managers as well as our dedicated center and meal delivery volunteers. And without the support from local businesses, home health agencies and elected officials we would not have so

many successful countywide events."

The Commission on Aging is always in need of volunteers to help out.

"We currently have unserved homebound seniors in need because we do not have enough volunteers to deliver meals," Lawson said.

"Our current biggest need is out of our Hanceville Senior Center. Any business, agency or individual that would like to assist in bringing prizes and calling bingo is always welcome. Come lead a craft idea that you have or come introduce a new game that you think our participants might be interested in. Donations are always welcome whether it's a sponsorship for an event or providing supplies for crafts and bingo prizes."

Lawson also said the Commission on Aging needs help spreading the word to neighbors and friends who are 60 and older about the many activities and services available to them at the centers and out in the community.

"We want our senior community to feel valued, supported and given opportunities to live healthy, connected lives," she said.

"When seniors are cared for and engaged, the entire community benefits. Families have peace of mind knowing their loved ones are supported and younger generations get opportunities to connect with the wisdom and experience of older adults. We want to honor the generation that helped build Cullman County. Supporting them is a way of showing appreciation for their lifetime of contributions."

For more information, visit [www.facebook.com/coacullman](http://www.facebook.com/coacullman) or call 256-734-1241.

The next event will be Senior Day at the Alabama Strawberry Festival. That will be Friday, April 24, from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. at Depot Park. Lunch will be provided for the first 500 people. There will be bingo and live music by The Cadillacs.



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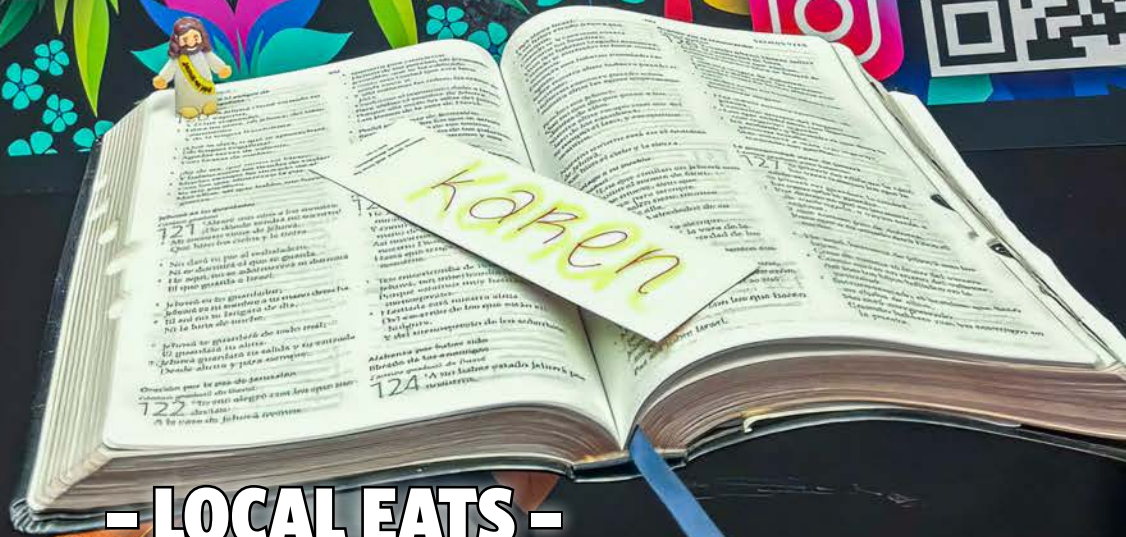
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Ag Center - Clarkson Covered  
Bridge - Sportsman Lake Park**



# K's Botanas & More



- LOCAL EATS -

# K's Botanas & More

Karen Silva reads her Bible before opening

KAREN SILVA

**Chasady Woods**  
 chasady@cullmantribune.com

Located at 1410 Second Ave. NW, in Cullman is K's Botanas & More. Owner Karen Silva said the restaurant thrives on unwavering faith, loving family values and daily devotion.

"I come in every morning at 5 a.m.," she said. "It's my moment. I don't open until 11 a.m., but I get my coffee going, I turn on my lights and I pray."

She prays for the hands that prepare the food that day and every customer who walks into her restaurant.

"I pray that every customer may feel welcome and be blessed as they walk through the door," said Silva.

She asks God to guide her every step of the way and to bless her within her work.

It has been three years since she opened her food truck in April 2023, with this upcoming September marking one year at the brick-and-mortar restaurant. Her business has drawn in the community, and she credits it all to God and those who support her.

Said Silva, "This wouldn't be possible without my family and my faith."

She recalled having overbooked her catering last summer, sharing, "I had one full event serving over 100 people and had a quinceañera! I didn't know how I did that to myself. I overbooked myself, not knowing the dates. I prayed - then my whole family showed up to help."

When she isn't working at her food truck or restaurant, Silva works as a translator for Hispanic families at local non-profit Curt's Closet.

"I like it and I love what I do," she smiled.

"It's funny how we started off with street corn," she said. "Then we added corn-in-a-cup, strawberries n' cream and we kept adding."

Her menu consists of

traditional Mexican foods such as tamales, papa esquites, elote and more, but also showcases her own spin.

She explained, "Let me tell you, I'm a big fan of potatoes! In Mexico they use a lot of French fries. I like to do a little mix and match. I try to keep it traditional because I love my culture. I just want to expand my culture."

Her restaurant offers a perfect combination of savory Mexican meals, but as we enter summer Silva recommends having their aguas frescas paired with taquitos dorados.

Aguas frescas are non-alcoholic drinks crafted from blended fruit, with water, sugar and sometimes lime juice served over ice. K's Botanas & More currently offers cantaloupe and pineapple, which can be perfectly paired with any menu item. They are made fresh every day and have fruit chunks at the bottom you can enjoy once you finish the drink.

K's Botanas & More is open Thursday-Sunday from 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Call 256-631-8410 for additional information or to place a catering order.

Find the restaurant online at Facebook/K's Botana's & More.



**Karen Silva's parents Gricelda and Damas**



**K's Botanas & More Owner Karen Silva**



**Gricelda, Karen's mother, helps with the food truck.**

- LOCAL EATS -

# Dining with Wallace State's Culinary Arts program



**Wallace State Culinary Arts student Tatanka Yellowbird holds pasta dough.**



**Wallace State Culinary Arts student Lillie Toomey shows off a fish.**



**Wallace State Culinary Arts student Justin Gurganus works tableside.**

**Anabelle Howze**  
anabelle@cullmantribune.com

The Wallace State Culinary Arts program welcomes the community to its Wednesday lunch service. Each week during the fall and spring semesters, students greet customers, take orders and deliver dishes, while the kitchen brings each plate to life from scratch.

Rotating menus keep each experience exciting, offering seasonal selections that encourage diners to try something new. For many guests, it's not only about affordability, but also about discovering a meal and service that rival those of restaurants at a much higher point.

"Guests enjoy high-quality ingredients and a dining experience that would typically cost up to 10 times more than what we charge," said Culinary Arts Director Aaron Nichols.

Behind the scenes, that experience is the result of hours of hard work and preparation. Students often arrive as early as 7:30 a.m. to begin prepping. By 11 a.m., both the kitchen and service teams are in motion, creating a space that imitates a real-world restaurant environment for diners and students and becomes a critical part of their training.

The Wednesday lunch service is built as part of the Culinary Arts curriculum, combining back-of-the-house instruction with front-of-the-house service. While some students focus on cooking and plating each dish to order, others manage the dining room, making sure guests receive attentive, efficient service from start to finish.

The program itself offers a two-year degree with multiple pathways, including Culinary Arts, Culinary Science/Nutrition Management and

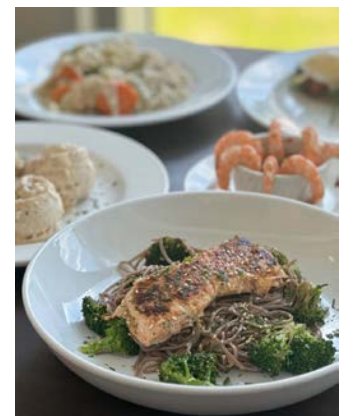
Restaurant and Hospitality Management. A Baking and Pastry degree is also expected to launch in late 2026. Students begin with core skills and certifications, including ServSafe Management, before progressing to advanced cooking techniques and live-service experiences such as the Wednesday lunches.

Nichols said the goal is to provide students with both technical and hands-on skills, something that can't be replicated in a traditional classroom alone.

The community response reflects that effort. While many first-time guests are surprised to learn about the lunch service, others have made it a weekly tradition, returning semester after semester.

"We do constantly hear guests say they've never heard of us offering this until recently," Nichols said. "But we also have regular guests who have joined

us for many years." Lunches are held most Wednesdays from 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. in the Peinhardt Conference Center at the School of Nursing and Center for Science. Meals are served for just \$8, including a drink and tax. Those interested in seeing upcoming menus or planning a visit can find more information at [www.wallaces-tate.edu/lionstable](http://www.wallaces-tate.edu/lionstable).



**Food prepared by Wallace State Culinary Arts students**

# - HIDDEN GEMS - Shirley's Place



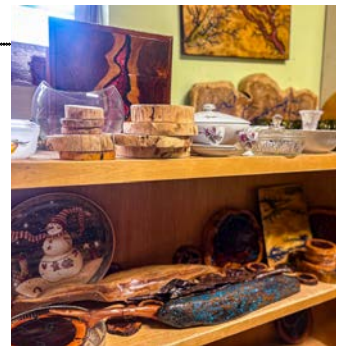
**Vintage glassware at Shirley's Place**

ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE



**Vintage containers, cornbread and jelly mold at Shirley's Place**

ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE



**Wooden artwork and vintage dishes at Shirley's Place**

ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Anabelle Howze**  
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Shirley's Place, owned by Shirley Rutledge, has been a part of the community on County Road 222 for about 14 years. The shop features vintage décor and rare collectibles. It's open at 3838 County Road 222, Wednesday through Saturday, from 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Rutledge shared that opening the shop was both a lifelong dream and a new beginning. After her husband passed away, she went back to school and earned a business degree. By the time she graduated, her son had started building the

shop for her. What started as a personal goal soon turned into a welcoming spot for locals, filled with pieces that show local history and Rutledge's passion for antiques.

Inside, there's a wide range of items, and something interesting around every corner. Rutledge especially loves her collections of antique glassware from the 1920s and 1930s. The shop's inventory comes from local consignors, and Rutledge often brings back new finds from trips to visit her daughter in Florida, adding even more variety.

She said one of her main goals is to keep shopping affordable and accessible for the community. Rutledge

believes shops like hers help keep history alive and let people find special items close to home, without spending too much.

Over the years, the store has grown into more than just an antique shop. Rutledge remembers early customers who spent whole days browsing and left with boxes piled high with treasures and happy memories.

**Colorful green glassware on display »**

She hopes new visitors feel a sense of discovery and find more than antiques - an appreciation for the history behind them.





Dirt and crew members of the B&D Construction team on what has become a regular day of work

BRITTANI COKER

# *‘Our customers are the fuel to our fire’*

## At the heart of B&D Construction Services

**Gauge Day**  
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Some businesses are built on plans and projections. Others start with a true leap of faith. For Brittani and Dirt Coker,

B&D Construction Services started with a phone call, one that would change everything.

“My husband called me out of the blue at work in February of 2020 to tell me he quit his job, was on his way to buy a mini-ex and was going to work

for himself,” Brittani said. “The rest is really just history writing itself.”

That leap came at the onset of COVID-19, when much of the world was facing uncertainty in both employment and business. But even in the face

of that unknown, Brittani knew it was never about timing. It was about faith.

“I have the most faith in that man,” she said. “I knew that owning his own company was always where we’d end up. He is the most driven »

and hardworking person I have ever met."

That same night, the dream began.

"I got home from work to see a brand new JCB mini-ex on the trailer hooked to his 1996 Ford F250," she said. "I walked in the house and immediately taught myself how to file for an LLC and got to work on marketing our new business. We stayed up all night designing business cards, creating marketing pages, sending emails and messages to everyone we knew to spread the word, making business shirts, and all the things."

"Now, here we are... six years later and we are bigger and better than we could have ever dreamed of," she added.

B&D Construction Services, owned and operated by the husband-and-wife team, specializes in a range of services, including excavation work, site preparation, underground utilities, land clearing, demolition and much more. Alongside that, the couple also runs B&D Building Development, focusing on construction projects such as decks, fencing, pole barns, lean-tos as well as remodels.

Behind the scenes, Brittani handles the business side, accounting, marketing, payroll, client relationships and day-to-day operations for both companies, while Dirt leads the work in the field.

"Let me say this, Dirt and I are best friends first, before we are husband and wife, before we are business partners, before anything else, we are best friends," she explained. "We support each other in every crazy leap-of-faith idea the other has, without question. We have faith in one another that we will always find a way to make our dreams a reality, plus we are both too stubborn to take no for an answer, so we never settle for less. Don't get me wrong, it's not all sunshine and rainbows, but we are a team that just works."

She added, "We stay in our own lane of expertise while we perfect our own skills, and we collaborate when necessary to thrive. That just works well for us."

While their relationship provides the backbone of the business, at its core, the business has always been rooted in a simple philosophy.

"Dirt always says, 'we are tryin' to make a livin', not a killin', which truly embodies what we stand for," Brittani said. "We want to provide our clients with the most affordable options while giving them the most top-notch care and attention to whatever job they hire us to do for them."

She added, "We are family-based and believe that you should treat each and every client as if they were your own family. We have made so many life-long friendships through this line of work, and we are so blessed every day to have received and still receive the abundance of support that we do from those around us. We do a lot of commercial work these days, but we still believe in our roots and love working to help our community thrive in any way that we can, as often as possible."

That mindset showed early on, especially in the long hours it took to get the business off the ground.

"Dirt never said no to a single job. I believe that is what has made us the most successful," she shared. "He didn't take a day off for the first two years we were in business — literally not one. He worked anywhere from 12 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week. People took notice of his work ethic, his ambition and they knew how dependable he was, so word of mouth spread and allowed us to continue to grow."

With that same relentless work ethic driving the duo, B&D Construction has grown from one truck and one machine into a full operation with multiple



**Dirt and Brittani Coker, the heart, mind and grit behind B&D Construction Services**

crews, trucks and more than 10 pieces of equipment, allowing the company to take on a wide range of projects while continuing to serve the local community.

And for the Cokers, that community remains at the heart of everything they do.

"Engaging with our community is our favorite part," Brittani said. "Seeing the reactions of our clients and leaving their homes knowing they are satisfied with our work is a kind of reward that cannot be explained. The more jobs we are hired for, the more services we can perfect, which in turn allows us to venture out and offer even more services to our clients. Our community is the reason behind our growth, and we are forever indebted to them."

For the Cokers, that community connection goes beyond the business. Whether it's supporting local teams, organizations or causes, Brittani said giving back is one of the things they are most proud of.

"Looking back, we are most proud of the causes and organizations we've been able to support," she said. "I hope other

small local businesses see the effort we put into supporting our community, and it inspires them to follow suit. I hope they take as much pride in their work as we do, learn to treat every client like family and never stop trying to achieve their goals."

While B&D Construction continues to grow, Brittani said the mission hasn't changed, and it won't.

"We want every single client to feel important," she said. "They are more than an invoice number or an address for us. They are the fuel to our fire. Once we work for you, we consider you part of our family, and we strive hard to make you feel heard, appreciated and satisfied with the work we do for you."

As for what's next, the answer is simple.

"Our aspirations are exponential, and the sky is the limit," she said.

And if the first six years are any indication, B&D Construction Services, helmed by the workhorses who are Brittani and Dirt, is just getting started. Find B&D Construction Services online at [facebook.com/BnDConstruction](https://www.facebook.com/BnDConstruction).

– DAY IN THE LIFE –

# Unsheltered International

**Chasady Woods**

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**U**nsheltered International is a nonprofit organization that offers help and hope to the unsheltered in our community. President and Executive Director Travis Sharpe said the nonprofit helps many people.

A day in the life at Unsheltered International can be different, well, daily. Workers maintain the tiny home village, participate in street outreach and more. Sharpe said he usually begins his days in the Unsheltered International Ministry Center.

The Ministry Center is a sanctuary through which the nonprofit provides clothing, hygiene products, food and encouragement. There, Sharpe and his Assistant and Chief Financial Officer Tara Philyaw tackle many challenges and successes. Philyaw oversees day-to-day finances and administration aspects of the business side of the ministry.

The Ministry Center is typically where the entry process for housing begins. Sharpe said the process ensures the program is a proper fit for individuals.

"We truly want them to stay with us for as long as they will, he said. "The entry process gives them time to decide if they want to commit for one to three years."

Sharpe explained the three phases of the unsheltered center. Phase one is the shortest, with a minimum stay of three months, that prioritizes stabilization and ministry. There are



UNSHELTERED INTERNATIONAL

**A home in Unsheltered International's The Village**

discipleship courses and relapse prevention courses offered that allow participants to feel stable. This is an important period because it allows them to feel safe and secure.

"One thing that's common with people who suffer on the streets, or just go through homelessness, is that it's traumatic. They go into survival mode - which we all would. It takes a while to get out of that mind space. Phase one is designed to let them breathe.

It is highly structured," he explained.

Once discipleship classes and things of that nature are completed, phase two is introduced.

"Phase two is where we try to get them employed," said Sharpe. "We don't loosen the accountability in phase two, but this is where the structure begins to loosen."

He reiterated that the goal once an individual is introduced into the program is to help them properly transition

from the program successfully in one to three years.

Sharpe clarified, "In other words, as they gain trust and as they gain, and earn, the ability to operate on their own - then the structure loosens. In phase two, prayerfully, this is where they're gaining employment and their bookwork kind of becomes more advanced, though it's less bookwork."

Phase two can take roughly 18 months. They will continuously attend church as well »

as begin with the Church Life Group before moving on to phase three.

"The third phase is when structure begins to lighten up for them. They can really begin to function like you and I would on a daily basis," Sharpe said. "That's when we're helping them simply maintain a job among everything they've learned. Now they're living here and operating within our program, still have accountability, structure, but they're able to live a day-to-day life like any normal person would live."

Sharpe explained this is when they continue to give the participants time to work at Unsheltered and remain stable. This is up to a 36-month period before they move out.

While the participants are working, they are charged a monthly program fee. Half of that expense is put back for them in an escrow account. This allows them to understand the importance of saving, but also helps them have money to work with once they're graduated from the program.

"If their program fee is \$500 a month and they're in the program for 36 months, that's \$250 a month going into their escrow account. So when they move out, they would have \$9,000 available to them for the move out expenses," Sharpe elaborated.

The Unsheltered International Ministry Center also has a food pantry. This is open on Mondays from 9 a.m.-5 p.m., except for noon-1 p.m. when it's closed for lunch. They accept volunteers to assist with preparation, stocking and serving. Sharpe said they serve an average of 50-80 families every Monday.

In 2025, Unsheltered served 1,395 households with a total of 3,516 members that totaled to \$257,472 worth of goods and services to the



**The inside of a tiny home in The Village**

UNSHELTERED INTERNATIONAL

community and over 5,000 lives touched through the ministry.

To put this into perspective, Unsheltered's blog noted that in January 2024 it provided \$5,759 of goods and services. Whereas January 2026 saw \$19,210 go to goods and services for the community.

Food isn't the only thing offered on Mondays. Service to the community can range from meals, groceries, counseling and showers. Volunteers assist with keeping these areas of use clean and much more.

The Village, as described by Unsheltered International, is not just about providing shelter, but about transformation. This is an intentional and faith-based tiny home community that uses discipleship, responsibility and education to assist program participants in achieving their goals and embracing their potential.

The Village is not limited to those who just need a house. If someone is misplaced from

a home and needs temporary assistance, Unsheltered International can operate on a case-by-case basis. This includes when pets are involved.

The Village came to fruition in 2020. There are currently five tiny homes, but the nonprofit is aiming for over 20 to be built. They typically house people anywhere from 2-3 years.

Unsheltered International may be known to the community through its ministry and word of mouth, but don't forget about its street outreach. Shape advised Unsheltered has very specific principles when working with unsheltered people.

He stated, "Instead of process - I would use the word principles. We have very specific principles."

He said processes are hard to maintain since it can be difficult to navigate sheltering and earning the trust of unhoused individuals. "We let principles guide us. One of our biggest principles is

mercy and compassion. How would we want to be treated if that was us?"

Sharpe posed the question, "How would the Lord treat someone that calls us and reaches out for help?"

He said that while it is good to lead by those principles you also have to help people learn accountability and more things beyond "band-aid help." Unsheltered does offer temporary help and relief, of course, but the goal is to offer long-term solutions by keeping the best interests of the individuals in mind.

"We want to work people toward a solution where their life can be better," said Sharpe.

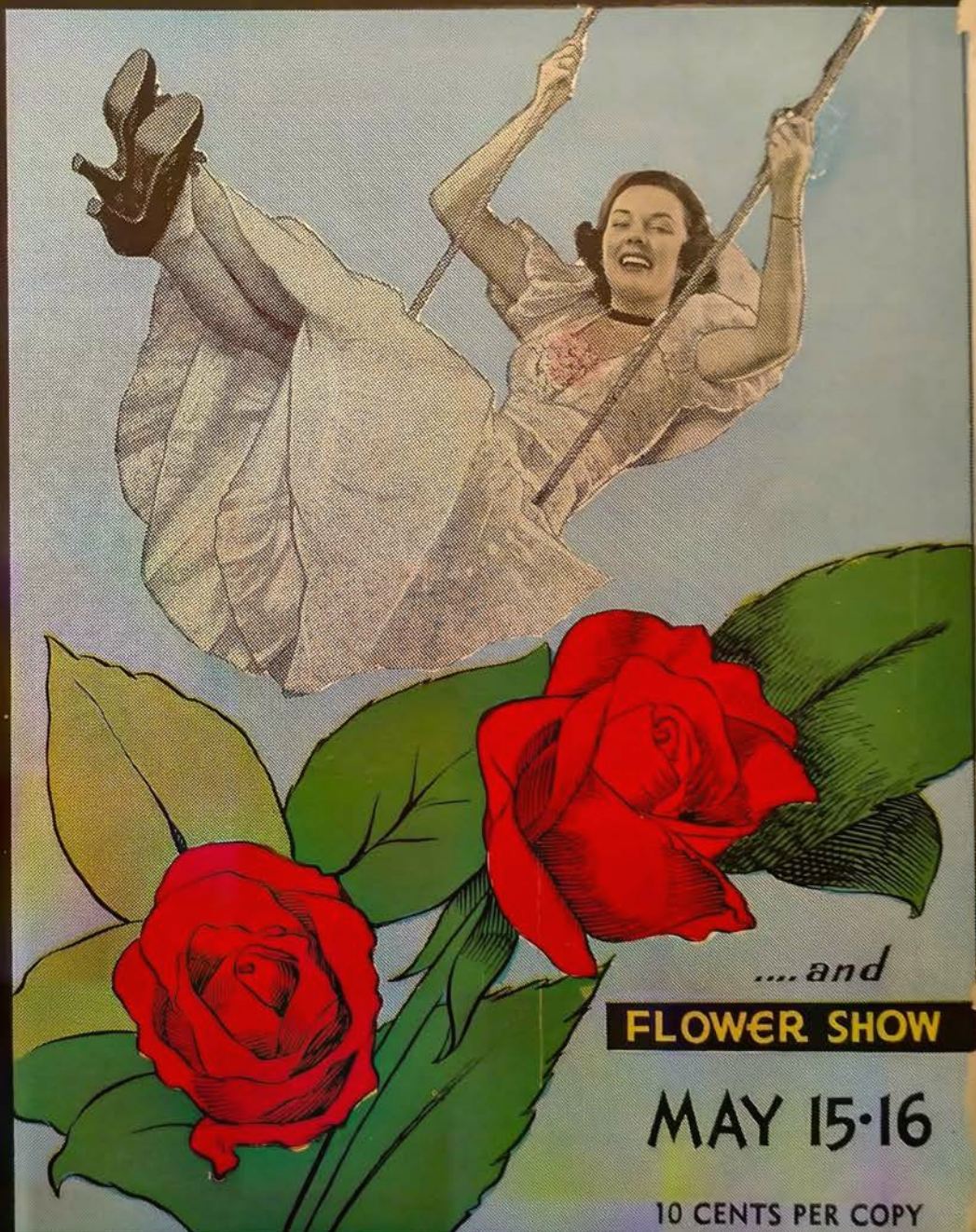
When it comes to the bigger picture he advised, "The whole point of our ministry is to reach people with the gospel and make disciples. If we can't do that we've missed our mark. It's about Christ."

Find out more about Unsheltered International at [www.unsheltered.org](http://www.unsheltered.org).

SECOND ANNUAL

CULLMAN COUNTY ||

# STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL



- Street Dances
- Fiddlers' Contest
- Juvenile Parade
- Juvenile Pageant
- Strawberry Exhibits
- Historical Pageant Spectacle
- Array of Beautiful Floats
- Grand Ball

....and

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# A century of celebration:

## History of Cullman's Strawberry Festival

— Noah Galilee | [noah@cullmantribune.com](mailto:noah@cullmantribune.com) —

**L**ong before it became a spring weekend that fills Depot Park with music, vendors and strawberry shortcake, Cullman's strawberry celebration began as a community observance rooted in agriculture and seasonal pride.

The earliest roots of Cullman's strawberry celebration trace back to the Cullman Strawberry Jubilee, first held in May 1905.

At the time, strawberries were not just a seasonal crop but a defining agricultural product for the region, supported by Cullman County's soil, climate and expanding rail connections that allowed local farmers to ship berries to larger markets.

The Jubilee served as both a celebration and a showcase, bringing residents together to mark the harvest

while highlighting the county's growing role in Alabama's agricultural economy.

More than three decades later, that early tradition evolved into what many residents recognize as the modern beginning of the festival, the inaugural Strawberry Festival held Saturday, May 13, 1939.

By then, Cullman had grown in both population and infrastructure, and the festival reflected that momentum.

The 1939 event was designed to be larger in scope, intended not only to celebrate strawberries but also to draw visitors from outside the county to establish Cullman as a regional destination during the spring season.

Contemporary accounts describe the 1939 festival as a full-scale community event extending well beyond the harvest itself. »

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FOR 44 CLUB BOYS AND GIRLS  
LUNCH AND CIGARETTE THEATRE - 1:30 P. M.

**Fiddler's Contest . . .**  
PRIZES FOR BEST PERFORMERS  
CITY AUDITORIUM - 10:00 A. M.

**Strawberry Exhibit and Floral Show**  
BLAND MOTOR CO. DISPLAY ROOM  
Begin at 10 A. M. - Strawberry Exhibit Will Be Located In Major Exhibit

**CONCINATION OF FESTIVAL QUEEN - 1 P. M.**

**Grand Parade . . .**  
2:30 P. M.  
(Commencement of Parade Begins at 1:30 P. M. at Depot Park)

**Pageant . . .**  
Including QUEEN, PRINCESS AND ATTENDANTS  
Cullman County High School Athletic Field.

**COMMUNITY SINGING AND STREET DANCE**  
3:30 P. M.  
On Third Avenue, Southeast of Cullman Courthouse.

**Dance . . .**  
5 P. M. - 10 P. M. Cullman County High School Gym  
MUSIC BY FESS WAINWRIGHT



ARCHIVE PHOTO

A large parade moved through the city, accompanied by a floral show, strawberry exhibits and an auction highlighting agricultural products and civic pride.

Music and dancing were part of the celebration, and a pageant added a ceremonial element that reflected the

traditions and presentation common to community festivals of the era.

Together, these elements helped establish a framework that would shape future celebrations.

Records from that period also indicate how quickly the festival gained attention.

According to Cullman Tribune archives, attendance increased rapidly in the early 1940s, with an estimated 50,000 visitors reported in 1941.

For Cullman at the time, the figure underscored the festival's growing regional appeal and its emergence as

more than a local agricultural observance.

The festival's history also includes periods of interruption shaped by larger national events.

The Strawberry Festival was halted for several years during World War II as communities redirected resources and »

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attention toward the war effort.

Large public gatherings were paused during that period, and the festival did not resume until after the war, when celebrations gradually returned as communities sought to reestablish familiar traditions.

Decades later, the festival faced another pause under very different circumstances.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, The Cullman Tribune reported there was no Strawberry Festival in 2020 due to public health restrictions and safety concerns.

The interruption marked one of the few times in modern history that the event did not take place. The festival returned in 2021, resuming its annual schedule following the pandemic-related disruption.

In the years since that return, the festival's footprint

has continued to evolve.

Organizers have focused on expanding programming while maintaining the core purpose of celebrating strawberry season.

Updated entertainment offerings, increased vendor participation and an emphasis on family-friendly activities have shaped recent editions of the event.

Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism has played a key role in shaping the festival's contemporary identity, particularly at Depot Park.

Live music, children's activities, food vendors and an arts and crafts component have become central features of the festival.

The park setting provides an open, walkable environment that supports both established traditions and newer additions

to the event.

The most recent chapter in the festival's history arrived at the state level.

In 2023, the event was formally recognized as the Alabama Strawberry Festival, a designation tied to Gov. Kay Ivey's recognition of Cullman's longstanding celebration and its historical significance.

By 2024, the festival entered what organizers described as its inaugural year operating under the statewide name and identity.

The change reflected the festival's expanded recognition while maintaining its longstanding connection to Cullman.

Operating under the Alabama Strawberry Festival name, the event continues to be hosted in Cullman and built around the same seasonal

celebration that has defined it for generations, while drawing broader attention from across the state.

That growth was reflected in 2025, when organizers reported record-setting attendance for the Alabama Strawberry Festival.

The event drew visitors from more than 20 states and featured more than 120 vendors, marking the largest footprint in the festival's modern history.

Expanded programming and additional accommodations were implemented to support the increased number of people.

This year, organizers are preparing for another year of growth, with plans that continue to build on the festival's established format at Depot Park.



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**405 2nd Avenue SW | Cullman, AL 35055**

# Alabama Strawberry Festival returns April 24-25

Celebrating tradition, community and a taste of what makes Cullman special

**Noah Galilee**

noah@cullmantribune.com

Each spring, as the season begins to turn and warmer days settle across Cullman, a familiar sense of anticipation returns with it.

The Alabama Strawberry Festival returns to Depot Park on Friday, April 24, from 10 a.m.-9 p.m., and Saturday, April 25, from 9 a.m.-9 p.m., bringing with it a weekend filled with tradition, community and celebration.

The festival has become more than a date on the calendar.

It is a gathering place, a tradition rooted in community and a celebration that continues to grow with each passing year.

From longtime residents to first-time visitors, the festival offers something simple yet meaningful, a chance to slow down, connect and experience Cullman at its very best.

Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Executive Director Nathan Anderson said the festival's growth reflects both its deep roots and its evolving future.

"The Alabama Strawberry Festival continues to represent what's possible when a community rallies around tradition and reimagines it for the future," he said. "What started as a beloved local event has grown into a regional destination that celebrates our heritage, supports our local economy and creates meaningful experiences for families year after year."

Held at Depot Park, the festival brings together the flavors, sounds and spirit of the season.

Rows of vendors, live entertainment and family-friendly activities fill the space with energy, while the unmistakable presence of fresh strawberries ties it all together in a way that feels both nostalgic and new.

It is an experience designed for everyone, whether you are visiting for the first time or returning as part of a tradition your family has built over the years.

Festival Director Daniel Wyatt said this year's event builds on that foundation while focusing on the guest experience.

"It's an honor to step into this role and build on the strong foundation that's already been established," he said. "This year's festival is all about enhancing the experience, bringing in great entertainment, supporting our vendors and making sure every guest leaves with a memory that keeps them coming back year after year."

Beyond the food and entertainment, the Alabama Strawberry Festival reflects something deeper about Cullman itself.

It is a community that values its roots while continuing to grow, a place where events like this serve as both a celebration and a connection point for those who call it home and those just discovering it.

Cullman Mayor Woody Jacobs said the festival has come to represent the community's identity and shared »

## ALABAMA STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

### What to know before you go

#### Dates and times

- Friday, April 25, 10 a.m.-9 p.m.
- Saturday, April 26, 9 a.m.-9 p.m.

#### Location

- Depot Park, Cullman

#### Admission

- Free to attend

#### Festival highlights

- **Friday, April 25 | 10 a.m.-9 p.m.**

Kick off the weekend with opening festivities, food vendors and live entertainment throughout the evening.

- **Senior Day: 10 a.m.-1 p.m.**

Free lunch for the first 500 people. There will be bingo and live entertainment by The Cadillacs.

- **Saturday, April 26 | 9 a.m.-9 p.m.**

A full day of family activities, shopping, live music and festival favorites from morning through night.

#### Parking

Designated public parking areas will be available near the festival grounds. Guests are encouraged to arrive early and follow posted signage.

#### What to expect

- Fresh strawberries and strawberry-inspired treats
- Local and regional food vendors
- Arts and crafts booths

featuring handmade goods

- Live music and entertainment throughout the festival
- Family-friendly activities and attractions

#### Entertainment

A full lineup of live performances is scheduled throughout both days, featuring a mix of local favorites and regional acts.

#### Vendors

The festival features a wide variety of vendors offering food, specialty items and locally made products, providing something for every visitor.

#### Family-friendly atmosphere

The Alabama Strawberry Festival is designed for all ages, with activities and entertainment that make it a destination for families, friends and visitors alike.

#### Tips for visitors

- Arrive early to avoid peak crowds
- Wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes
- Stay hydrated throughout the day
- Bring cash for vendors, though many may accept cards

Get more details, including concerts and contests, at [www.alabamastrawberryfest.com](http://www.alabamastrawberryfest.com).



THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**A young attendee eyes a juicy strawberry at the 2025 Alabama Strawberry Festival.**

spirit.

“The Alabama Strawberry Festival has become a reflection of who we are as a community, welcoming, proud of our roots and committed to creating opportunities for people to come together,” he said. “It’s a

celebration that brings families, neighbors and visitors into a shared experience that continues to grow stronger each year.”

As this year’s festival unfolds, one thing remains certain, the invitation is open, and there is a place here for everyone.

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# YOUR GUIDE TO ALABAMA STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

**F** Kick off Friday morning with a fresh cup from Karma's Coffee, then head to the Farmer's Market, where local growers bring the season's finest Alabama strawberries straight from the field. Seniors won't want to miss Senior Day presented by Premier Bank of the South, hosted by Cullman's Active Adult Center — a beloved tradition that makes everyone feel right at home at Depot Park.

**R** Work up an appetite exploring the vendor rows before stopping at Oxcart Dreams, where hands-on blacksmithing and coppersmithing workshops welcome the whole family — no experience required. When hunger hits, grab a Shatzi Brat and find a spot near the Redstone Credit Union Fresh Picks Stage, where Ashleigh Graham delivers the kind of set that makes an afternoon feel like a highlight reel. Soak up the spring energy before the main event kicks off.

**I** Gates open at 4 PM and the Coca-Cola Main Stage is alive and ready. Grab a Devil Dogs to go and a scoop from Seven Daughters Creamery before finding your spot — because Ernest closing out Friday night is exactly the kind of moment that makes the Alabama Strawberry Festival unforgettable.



**D** Start Saturday morning at Holderbeans Coffee, then ease into the day with a stroll through the vendor rows, where handcrafted goods and one-of-a-kind keepsakes are around every corner. The Redstone Credit Union Fresh Picks Stage opens with community groups and local acts setting a lively tone. Adventure seekers should head straight to the Ninja Nation Obstacle Course — or step up for the All Things Strawberry Contests and Strawberry Baking Contest on the Fresh Picks stage at noon.

**A** Mad Greek brings bold Mediterranean flavors for lunch before another lap through the vendors. Duck River Hat Co is worth a stop — watch artisans craft custom leather patch hats live and leave with something one of a kind. Save room for Wildflower Fudge, where 35 flavors — six or more of them strawberry — make the choice the hardest part. As the sun drops, fuel up with handcrafted ravioli from Bleu Basil Artisan Pasta before heading to the Coca-Cola Main Stage. Dylan Marlowe leads a stacked Saturday night lineup, and there's no better seat in the house than the Legacy Community Federal Credit Union VIP section.

**T** However you spend your weekend, the Alabama Strawberry Festival delivers great food, handcrafted goods, and live music that hits every time — so come hungry, bring your bags, and get ready for a berry good time.

**U** **PLAN YOUR VISIT NOW!**  
**ALABAMASTRAWBERRYFEST.COM**



# ALABAMA STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL 2026

SENIOR DAY  
10AM - 1PM

FRIDAY - APRIL 24



11:00AM ZACHARIAH SMITH  
 12:15PM SARAH LAKE  
 1:30PM ASHLEY GRAHAM  
 3:00PM KRISTINA MURRAY  
 5:15PM ALEX LAMBERT  
 6:30PM ANTWANE TYLER

4:30PM RHYS RUTHERFORD  
 5:50PM CODY LOHDEN  
 7:20PM LAUREN WATKINS  
 9:00PM ERNEST



\*SCHEDULE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

KIDS PASSPORTS  
ALL DAY

SATURDAY - APRIL 25

NINJA NATION CHALLENGE 9AM • KIDS FIELD DAY 10AM



9:00AM COMMUNITY CHOIR  
 10:00AM COMMUNITY BAND  
 12PM-2PM CONTESTS  
 2:30PM BURNETT SISTERS  
 3:50PM DARREN NICHOLSON  
 5:20PM MILES MILLER  
 6:30PM GREYLAN JAMES

4:30PM KALEB SANDERS  
 5:50PM KYLIE MORGAN  
 7:20PM OWEN RIEGLING  
 9:00PM DYLAN MARLOWE



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# RECIPES

## 5 German-inspired strawberry recipes

Anabelle Howze  
anabelle@cullmantribune.com

### Pork Schnitzel with Strawberry Mustard Sauce

Yield: 2 servings

#### Ingredients

- 2 boneless pork cutlets, pounded thin
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1/2 cup breadcrumbs
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- Vegetable oil, for frying
- 1 cup strawberries, diced
- 1 tbsp. whole-grain mustard
- 1 tsp. honey
- 1 tbsp. water

#### Directions

1. Season pork with salt and pepper. Dredge in flour, dip in egg and coat with breadcrumbs.
2. Pour about 1/4 inch of oil into a skillet and heat it over medium. Fry the cutlets for 3 to 4 minutes on each side, until they are golden brown and cooked through. Place them on a plate lined with paper towels.
3. Combine the strawberries, mustard, honey and water in a small saucepan. Cook over medium heat for about 5 minutes, until the berries soften and the sauce thickens a bit. If you like, gently mash the mixture.
4. Serve the schnitzel warm and spoon the strawberry mustard sauce over the top.

### Bavarian Strawberry Spinach Salad with Bacon Dressing

Yield: 4 servings

#### Ingredients

- 4 cups fresh spinach
- 1 cup fresh strawberries,



ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

### Strawberries mean summer recipes.

#### sliced

- 4 slices bacon
- 2 tbsp. apple cider vinegar
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp. sugar
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

#### Directions

1. Cook bacon in a skillet over medium heat until crisp, about 6–8 minutes. Remove and crumble.
2. Lower the heat to low. Add the vinegar, mustard and sugar to the bacon drippings and whisk everything together. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Put the spinach and strawberries in a large bowl. Pour the warm dressing over them and toss gently until the spinach is just a little wilted.
4. Sprinkle the crumbled bacon on top and serve right away.

### Erdbeerkuchen (German Strawberry Cake)

Yield: 8 servings

#### Ingredients

##### Cake base

- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- Pinch of salt

##### Topping

- 2 cups fresh strawberries, halved
- 1 cup water
- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 2 tbsp. cornstarch
- 1 tsp. lemon juice

#### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9-inch round cake pan.
2. Beat the eggs and sugar together for 3 to 5 minutes, until the mixture looks pale and fluffy. Stir in the vanilla.
3. In another bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder and salt. Gently fold this into the egg mixture until everything is just combined.
4. Pour the batter into the pan and bake for 15 to 20 minutes, or until a toothpick

inserted in the center comes out clean. Let the cake cool completely.

5. Arrange the strawberries on top of the cooled cake.

6. Combine the water, sugar, cornstarch and lemon juice in a saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring all the time, for about 3 to 5 minutes, until the mixture is thick and clear.

7. Pour the glaze over the strawberries and refrigerate the cake for at least 30 minutes before serving.

### Strawberry Bienenstich (Bee Sting Cake)

Yield: 8-10 servings

#### Ingredients

##### Dough

- 2 1/4 tsp. active dry yeast (1 packet)
- 3/4 cup warm milk (about 110°F)
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
- 1 egg

»

### Topping

- 1/3 cup honey
- 1/4 cup unsalted butter
- 1/2 cup sliced almonds

### Filling:

- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 2 tbsp. powdered sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 cup fresh strawberries, sliced

### Directions

1. Dissolve the yeast and 1 tablespoon of sugar in the warm milk in a small bowl. Let it sit for 5 to 10 minutes, until it becomes foamy.
2. In a large bowl, mix the flour, the rest of the sugar and the salt. Add the yeast mixture, butter, and egg. Stir until a soft dough forms, then knead for 8 to 10 minutes, until the dough is smooth. Cover the bowl and let the dough rise in

a warm place for about 1 hour, or until it has doubled in size.

3. Preheat your oven to 350°F. Press the dough into a greased 9-inch round pan.
4. Melt the butter and honey together in a saucepan over medium heat. Stir in the almonds and cook for 2 to 3 minutes, until the mixture thickens a little. Spread this evenly over the dough.
5. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until the cake is golden brown. Let it cool completely.
6. Whip the cream with the powdered sugar and vanilla until it forms soft peaks. Slice the cake in half horizontally. Spread the whipped cream and strawberries over the bottom half, then place the top half back on. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour before serving.

### Erdbeerknödel (Strawberry Dumplings)

Yield: 8-10 dumplings

### Ingredients

- 1 pound russet potatoes, peeled
- 1 tbsp. butter
- 1 egg
- 1 cup all-purpose flour, plus more if needed
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 8-10 small whole strawberries
- 1/2 cup breadcrumbs
- 3 tbsp. unsalted butter
- Powdered sugar, for serving

### Directions

1. Boil the potatoes in salted water for 15 to 20 minutes, until they are tender. Drain them and mash until smooth. Let them cool a bit.
2. Mix in the butter, egg,

- flour and salt to make a soft dough. If the dough is too sticky, add more flour, one tablespoon at a time.
3. Divide the dough and wrap a piece around each strawberry, making sure to seal it completely.
  4. Bring a pot of salted water to a gentle simmer. Add the dumplings and cook for 5 to 7 minutes, until they float and are tender.
  5. While the dumplings cook, melt the butter in a skillet over medium heat. Add the breadcrumbs and stir for 3 to 4 minutes, until they turn golden brown.
  6. Use a slotted spoon to remove the dumplings from the water. Roll them in the toasted breadcrumbs and dust with powdered sugar before serving.

## RECIPE REVIVAL

# Annis Powell's Veggie Salad

### Chasady Woods

chasady@cullmantribune.com

**A**nnis Rae Jacobs Powell was born May 5, 1937, and passed March 3, 2006. She was 68 when she died. Even though she has been gone for 20 years now, her daughter, Donna Schmale, remembers her through many things, but especially her veggie salad.

"It was so good," Schmale said. "She made it twice for spring and summer."

This is a perfect addition to any warm day. Have it for lunch when the day is at its hottest or at night to cool off before bed! This recipe is a perfect balance of sweet and tangy. The recipe holds Powell's

memory and uniqueness. If you notice, her spelling of cucumber is "quecumber."

### Veggie Salad by Annis Powell

#### Veggies

- 6 tomatoes
- 6 bell peppers
- 6 quecumbers
- 5 onions (white & red)
- 1 pkg. carrots

#### Dressing

- 1/2 box brown sugar
- Vinegar
- Oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

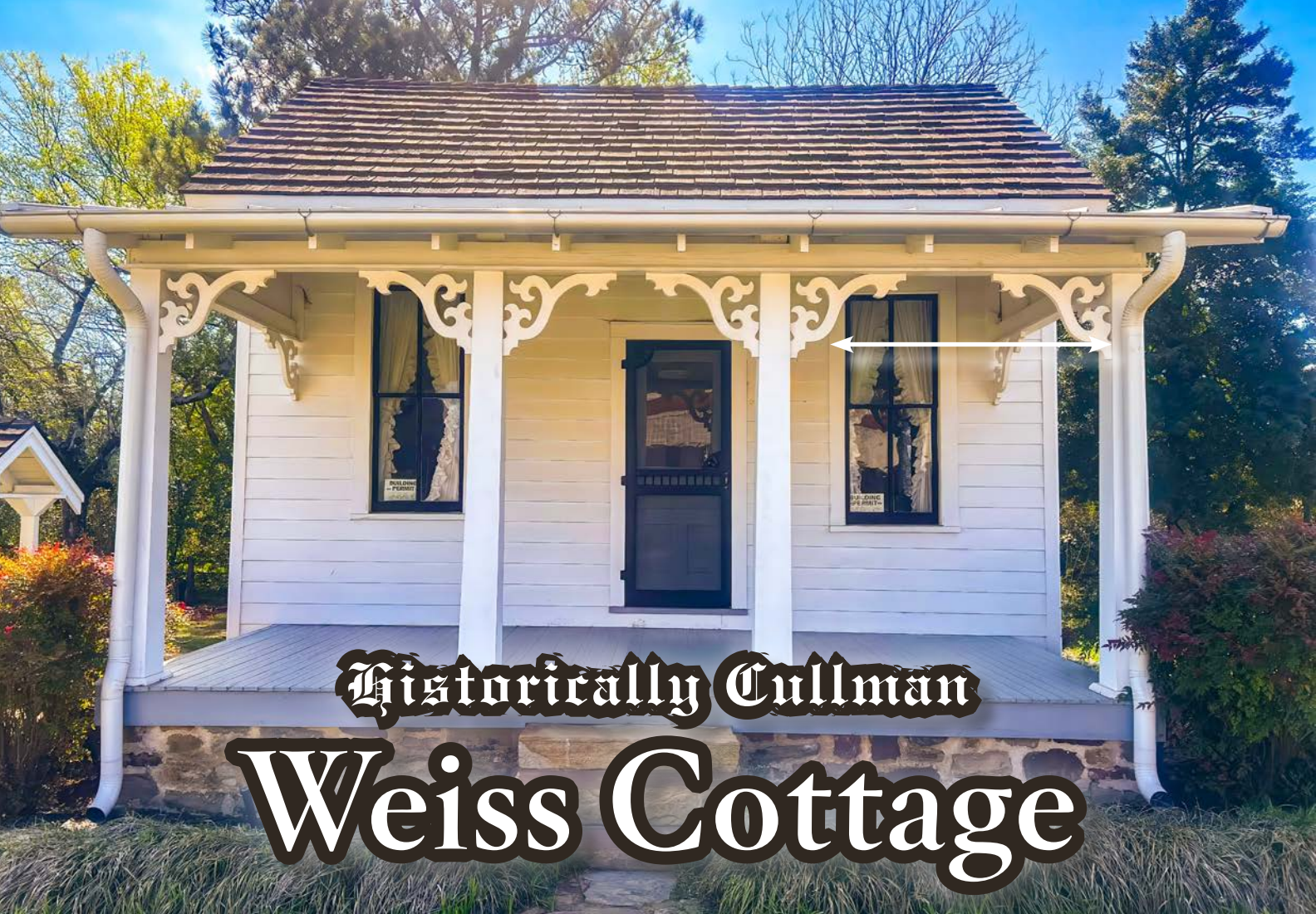
#### Directions

1. Peel quecumbers.
2. Cover in water and salt and refrigerate overnight.
3. Combine all ingredients and cover with dressing.



Annis Powell

DONNA SCHMALE



# Historically Cullman Weiss Cottage

**Weiss Cottage, the oldest house in Cullman, is located at 401 First Ave. SE.**

ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

## **Anabelle Howze**

[anabelle@cullmantribune.com](mailto:anabelle@cullmantribune.com)

In a small park along First Avenue Southeast in downtown Cullman, Weiss Cottage remains one of the city's oldest surviving structures and is its oldest house, offering a link to its earlier years.

The cottage was originally constructed in September 1873. The modest wood-framed home predates much of Cullman's development, having been built just months after Colonel Cullmann established the town in April of that same year.

Although very little documentation exists about its original occupant, the history becomes »



**Check out the beautiful details on the front porch.**

ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

clearer in 1875, when it was purchased by physician Dr. Aldo Weiss. Dr. Weiss used the one-room structure as both his residence and medical office. In the small space, he provided health care services to the growing community, even delivering babies and treating patients while he and his family lived there.

Daily life at the cottage mirrored cultural traditions brought by early settlers. The cellar under the home housed the family's goats, which was a common practice across Europe. This earned the home the nickname "Goat House."

After Dr. Weiss' ownership, the property changed hands multiple times throughout the late 19th century, passing through several notable residents. The structure was originally located on Sixth Avenue Southeast and was eventually relocated to its present site.

By the mid-20th century, the home was owned by the Ruhel family, and in 1976, Inez Ruhel donated the cottage to the City of Cullman with the stipulation that it be preserved.

That same year, a coordinated community effort led by the Cullman County Historical Society resulted in the relocation and restoration of the building as part of a bicentennial initiative.

Architecturally, the cottage reflects the simplicity and practicality of early construction methods. The structure features 1x4 pine studding, rough weatherboard siding and originally plastered interior walls. It lacked many decorative elements commonly found

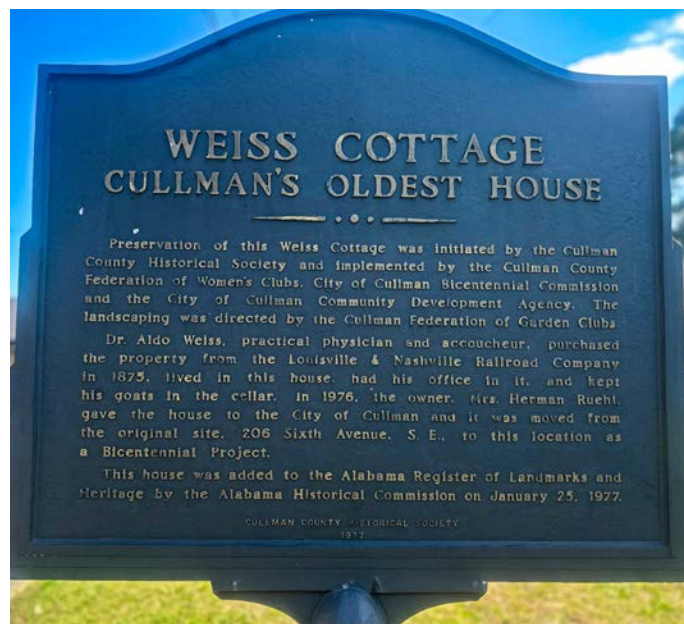
in later homes, including trim, mantels and even a chimney.

Interior restoration centered on maintaining historical accuracy. Layers of wallpaper were carefully removed to identify the original patterns. Furnishings consistent with 19th century living were also incorporated.

Additionally, a front porch was introduced during the 1976 restoration to stabilize and enhance the home while conserving its historical character. Despite these updates, the cottage retains its original form and scale.

Today, Weiss Cottage sits near Cullman's historic railroad cut, a location that further reflects the city's early development and ties to the railroad industry.

Although the interior is currently closed to the public due to storm-related repairs, the site has historically been



ANABELLE HOWZE/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

opened during special events such as the Strawberry Festival and Oktoberfest, providing opportunities for the community to connect with its history firsthand.

Structures like Weiss Cottage play an important role in preserving a

community's historical identity. Beyond its age, the cottage offers valuable insight into early construction techniques, cultural practices and the daily lives of Cullman's earliest residents.

See Weiss Cottage at 401 First Ave. SE.

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**- LOCAL HEROES -**

# **Michael Rush**

**Kindness and compassion above all**

*Moss-Service Funeral Home Funeral Attendant Michael Rush*

MICHAEL RUSH

**Chasady Woods**  
chasady@cullmantribune.com

**M**ichael Rush worked at The Foundry Ministries in The Foundry Thrift Store for many years before becoming a funeral attendant at Moss-Service Funeral Home. Those who've worked with him say he is a beacon of positivity.

One thing about Michael, you will rarely ever see him without a smile on his face. He will jokingly tell you how bad he would rather be home while grinning ear to ear. This will surely be followed by him telling you that it is good to see you and a conversation asking about your day or weekend. He will then tell you about his weekend and excitedly show you a picture of his dog, Butterbean.

A common indicator that Michael is near? The scattered handouts of his trademark orange Life Savers candies.

If you came into work at The Foundry and he was clocked in, if he didn't hand them to you himself, he left the candies at your work area, with your coworker or you had some left over from him after his previous shift.

Donna Schmale, previous assistant manager of production at The Foundry Ministries, recounted her time with Michael. "I was there when he first came through the program; he was always one of the hardest workers there. Anytime I needed help with anything, Mike was there. When he started working there the customers loved him. He was so funny and he cared about them and the

participants. He was a great friend."

His former fellow retail sales associate recounted her time working with him, saying, "He is a pretty amazing guy! He and I were coworkers for a number of years at The Foundry Thrift Store until he left to work at the funeral home. Over the years working together I saw the relationships that he had built with our customers. We were all sad to see him go, but it's almost like he never left. Michael comes to The Foundry after work three to four nights a week to talk to his old coworkers and as many of his customers that may be at the store that day as he can. That's just who he is as a person and always had room to make a new friend."

It was routine during his time working at The Foundry

for homemade cakes, pies, cookies and more to show up in the breakroom. A few times a month you could hear someone ask where the dessert came from in the breakroom. This would often be followed by Michael stating, "Me."

When asked if he made it you would always get the answer, "No, someone brought it for me."

He treated customers with kindness and respect and they rewarded him with appreciation and goodies!

Michael Rush is a perfect example that, no matter what you have gone through, you can always choose to be a good person. You can choose to wake up and smile, even if you, too, would like to be home. To this day, Michael makes sure to make everyone he meets feel at home.



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– LOCAL EATS –

# Moore's Pure Where 'hon' comes as a side



Moore's Pure is located at 2100 Main Ave. on the south end of town near Applebee's.

GAUGE DAY/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Gauge Day**  
gauge@cullmantribune.com

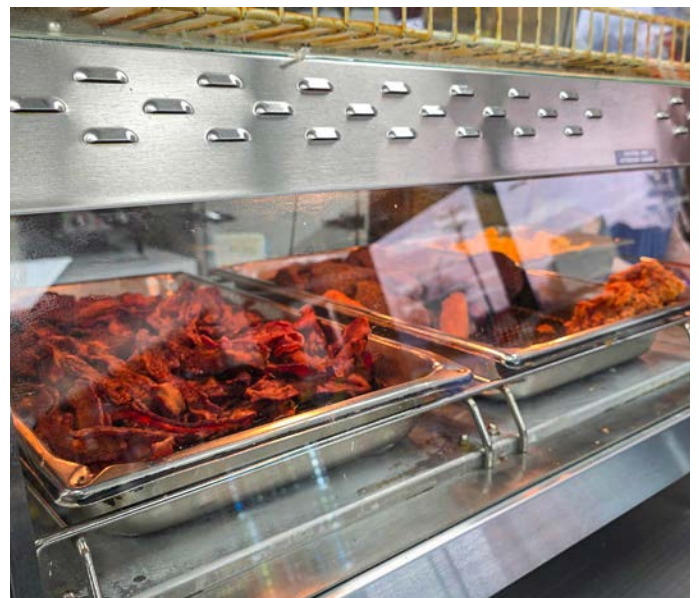
**P**ure. Pure what? Pure gas station excellence in the form of breakfast and lunch. Want bacon? The best. Bologna? The thickest. Chicken fingers? Ginormous. Take your pick.

Moore's Pure, located at 2100 Main Ave. on the south end of town, has it all. Breakfast encompasses the full gamut of a traditional Southern spread: biscuits, gravy, eggs, bacon, bologna, sausage balls, smoked sausage, cinnamon rolls and little else left to the imagination. Then comes lunch, rolling right into a lineup of classics like chicken fingers, meatloaf, Salisbury

steak, dressing, burgers, cheese sticks, mac and cheese, green beans and plenty more.

And we can't forget the desserts, or the portion sizes that come with them. Every week, a rotating selection of homemade desserts is on display, including strawberry cake, no-bake peanut butter bars, cake pops, coconut cake, no-bake cookies and so much more. And just like everything else at Moore's, they don't skimp on what they give you, the portions are generous, making it just as easy to share as it is to keep it all to yourself.

With a menu like that and portion sizes that could feed a giant or two, a single visit quickly turns into many - and »



GAUGE DAY/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

Plenty of food and fixins to choose from at Moore's

plenty of money happily spent on food that feels like it's cooked in grandmamas well-seasoned iron skillet. You know the kind, the skillet that sits on the top of the stove that has been seasoned to perfection with years of use? Yeah, that kind.

Week after week, Moore's serves hundreds of folks all across the Cullman community waking up to meet their work beats.

Sitting in a fork along Cullman's Industrial Park, it's perfectly placed to meet the blue-collar appetites of those hailing from companies such as Wal-Mart Distribution, RWC, Topre, Blocher and beyond.

And the food, well, it's just part of it.

The food itself is complemented by the homely atmosphere that the wonderful ladies, Tammy, Lawanna, Katrina, Kiana, Tishara and Brittany provide behind the food bar.

Walking in, you will almost always be greeted by some of the best southern charm and probably even a nickname to go with: "dear," "honey," "sweet-heart," or maybe even the classic, "sugar."

Whether you are there to get some food, gas or just passing through, you're treated like a favorite local who has been coming for years.

Need a quick go-to breakfast choice? Sausage balls or their thick-sliced bologna. The sausage balls are borderline baseball-sized, with the sausage outweighing the bread texture most are known for, which means they're excellent.

The bologna itself is about a half-inch to an inch thick, charred to perfection and juicy in every bite.

Not a biscuit fan like me? No problem, just ask Tammy or one of the other ladies to slap a piece of American cheese on it and you're good to go. You could probably share it, but you

won't... because it's that good. If you're looking for that "hole-in-the-wall" experience for your next meal, the kind that's not really a secret but still feels like one, Moore's is worth the stop for breakfast or lunch.

They're not trying to reinvent anything. No gimmicks, no over-the-top menu, no fancy dining space. Just consistent, good food served by some of the best people around, to folks who know exactly what they're coming for.

It's simple. It's big. It's good. And you can't beat getting called "hon" to start your day off right.

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## - HOW TO SPEND A DAY IN CULLMAN -

# An adventure for the creatives

**Chasady Woods**

chasady@cullmantribune.com

**A**rt is everywhere if you truly take the time to look. It's in the moss growing along branches on a trail, in various murals, in historical architecture scattered throughout the city and so much more! In Cullman, you can often find art within our festivals and even displayed in storefronts. Though I would like to encourage those intrigued by these things to look a little further. I will be sending you on an adventure of sorts, so let's go over what you will need and where you are going!

### Exploration essentials

I'm not sending you far, don't worry! Though I wouldn't be a good guide if I didn't advise of proper safety measures.

- Vehicle maintenance:** It is always best to ensure your car is up to date on all maintenance including oil changes and more. Have your tires checked before and be sure they are fully aired. In case of emergency, have a spare tire ready and the proper tools to change a tire or to simply air your tire if you have a flat. Don't forget jumper cables!
- Phones:** Have your phones fully charged before leaving to explore, but also have back-up chargers on your person just in case!

- First-aid kit:** To be on the safe side, have this kit in case of any unexpected scraped knees and so on.

### Items for the trip

- Waters and snacks
- A picnic blanket
- Sunglasses or a hat

Now that we've double-checked the safety standards of our modes of transportation, ensured our safety kits are within our vehicles and that our phones are fully charged - we are ready!

Step one, hook up the aux and queue up this family friendly spring playlist curated just for the occasion! <https://tinyurl.com/yc4evmxh>

First stop for go-go juice! Located at 304 First Ave. SE in Cullman is Berkley Bob's Coffee House. Grab an iced latte or beverage of your choice for the warm spring day.

Berkeley Bob's has various paintings, prints, crochet plushes and more displayed from the creative hands of the Cullman community.

You are ready for the journey ahead. Jump into your car, buckle up and head toward Highway 31 North.

At your second stop, 2038 Pear Dr. NW, is Branch Books 2. Its inventory is entirely donated, used books aside from some exceptions. There's also various media such as CDs, DVDs, "blind



CHASADY WOODS/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

### A Tribune Day Out Playlist

date with a book," a selection of kids' books and comics.

The staff is very helpful if you're looking for anything in particular. They are all readers so if you need recommendations, they are able to assist. Take a few laps and look for the book that stands out to you. Perhaps pick something you wouldn't normally read. If you're there with a friend, pick out a book for each other. I highly recommend the "blind date with a book" for your next stop.

Hopefully you've made your selection because you're going to go back down Highway 31 to Sportsman Lake Park, 1544 Sportsman Lake Road NW. Be mindful of the high volume of individuals at the park during spring and summer. Speed limits at this location can range from 5 to 15 miles per hour. There are crosswalks, but it's always best to drive slowly and scan your surroundings when looking for a spot to park.

This park has many admirable features. Of course there is a family friendly fenced-in park with playground equipment and a splashpad. Though on the pier you can watch ducks and turtles and even take a ride in the paddle boats. Stationed along the pavilions and park benches there is also a putt-putt golf course and a train ride. If you're looking for something more active, take a stroll around the lake on the park's track. A trail through the woods displays flowers and statues.

For today's festivities I would like to direct you to a park bench of your choice with your "blind date with a book." Open it with your friends or family and discuss your next read. This would be a great opportunity to read through the first chapter and fill each other in as you go. A few weeks later or perhaps a month - no rush - meet again in a place of your choice and have a discussion session.



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**Zavier Guidry and Michael Jensen**

CHASADY WOODS/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Chasady Woods**

chasady@cullmantribune.com

**G**amer Geeks has become a local hotspot for tournaments and gatherings for all ages since it opened in 2023. It can be for those who participate in the gaming or card playing community, or for those who simply want to admire it.

Owner Michael Jensen

recounted the store's annual Thanksgiving meal of 2025. "Last year we had a lady who had lost her husband and didn't want to spend the holiday alone. She came here and didn't know much about cards, but was able to watch and have a good time."

Jensen talked about the importance of events and how they bring individuals together. He said his favorite was likely Thanksgiving.

Beyond all the merchandise, tournaments and more he advised, "None of the merchandise on this wall matters. It's about the community that gathers here. Without it we would be nothing."

He also made a point to mention that all of his staff act as managers in their realm of responsibility and he is very appreciative of them.

It is truly a place that gives solace to anyone who enters,

but also offers opportunity for camaraderie and personal growth, said Jensen. He recalled many times individuals have sat in on card games, timid and unsure. Over time they get comfortable, find their group and begin socializing more and more. He said they are gradually gaining social skills and networking, but in a fun and strategic environment.

Gamer Geeks maintains a family friendly »

atmosphere suited for all ages. Before playing everyone is prepped regarding rules and guidelines in and out of the game. Not only is this suited for all ages, but there are beginner options for those who don't know where to start.

"A lot of the kids that come in here don't realize that by playing some of these games that they are actually learning math and problem solving," Jensen shared.

Pokémon, for example, can teach children math and problem solving through its numbers-driven systems. Players constantly use arithmetic to calculate damage points. It also urges strategic thinking by prompting players to analyze risks, plan and optimize their team and what is or isn't effective.

Gamer Geeks is located at

2046 St. Joseph Dr. NW Suite E in Cullman. It's open Monday-Thursday from noon-7 p.m., Fridays from 11 a.m.-10 p.m. and

Saturdays from 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Find Gamer Geeks online at [www.facebook.com/GamerGeeksCullman](http://www.facebook.com/GamerGeeksCullman) or

call 256-981-5746 or email [gamergeekscullman@gmail.com](mailto:gamergeekscullman@gmail.com) for more information.

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# STUDENT FEATURE: '4-H' BY STELLA HELMS



**Stella Helms (left) holds her first-place ribbon alongside her classmates.**

MRS. HEPTINSTALL

## Gauge Day

gauge@cullmantribune.com

Building on the showcase of the 4-H Student Reports in the last edition of Community Matters, our goal going forward will be to continue highlighting the work of local 4-H students by featuring select student reports that showcase both their writing and their experiences. The goal is to give young authors in our community a platform to share their voices while recognizing the effort

and growth that comes through programs like 4-H.

This edition, one of those students, Stella Helms, stood out not only for her writing, but also for the initiative she showed throughout the year.

"Stella took to heart her responsibility of being the club reporter," shared 4-H Development Coordinator Kerri Roberts. "She took initiative to work with her teacher to include a photograph. She was a joy to be around this club year and I look forward to what she does in 4-H next year!"

## 4-H

**By: Stella Helms**

Mrs. Heptinstall - fourth grade at East Elementary / Mrs. Roberts - 4-H

4-H is so fun! It happens once a month. If you love crafts, baking, competition or, may I say activities, you would love 4-H. My three favorite activities were the bird houses, thrift store outfit and cooking show. First, the reason why I love the bird house is because you get to design it however you want. Second, I like the thrift one because it's like a fashion show. Third, I like the cooking show because it is just like you are watching a real cooking show.

The activity I liked most so far was the butter activity. We got to make our own butter with one simple ingredient, which was whipping cream. All you had to do was put it in a little cup with a little marble, cover the cup and shake it up. After two minutes it turns to whip cream and after four minutes it is butter. Then we got a cracker and sampled the butter. It tasted really yummy.

I participated in the cookie challenge. I made my specialty, chocolate chip cookies with cookies and cream Hershey bars and M&Ms. I also did the bird house challenge. It was a triple bird house and I decorated it with crayons, glitter, wrapping paper and much more. I won first place in both of these. I like how they have first-place, second-place, third-place and participation ribbons that way everyone gets a ribbon.

I hope this inspires everyone to be involved in 4-H.



"I am honored to serve you as your Alabama state senator in District 4 (Cullman, Marion and Winston). I will continue to listen and be your voice in the Statehouse of Alabama. Thank you for your support while I continue to work with you to make our community the best it can be."

---

Sincerely,  
Sen. Garlan Gudger, District 4



# Auditions in May for Cullman Community Theatre's production of 'My Fair Lady'

**Noah Galilee**  
noah@cullmantribune.com

Cullman Community Theatre is preparing for its August production of "My Fair Lady" and has announced a full slate of audition dates for local performers interested in joining the cast.

According to Cullman Community Theatre's posted audition information, prospective cast members should attend one of three general audition time slots: Friday, May 15, from 5-9 p.m.; Saturday, May 16, from 9 a.m.-noon; or Saturday, May 16, from 1-5 p.m.

An ensemble dance call is also scheduled for Sunday, May 17, from 2-5 p.m.

Auditions will be held at the Train Depot at Depot Park, next to Festhalle.

Those auditioning are asked to prepare a 32-bar cut of a song in the style of the show, roughly one verse and one chorus, along with a one-minute monologue that may be either dramatic or comedic.

Performers should also be prepared for cold reads from the script. A speaker will be available for accompaniment tracks.

Casting is open to performers from ninth grade through adults, with limited ensemble roles available for children ages 8-13.

Cullman Community Theatre has directed interested participants to review character

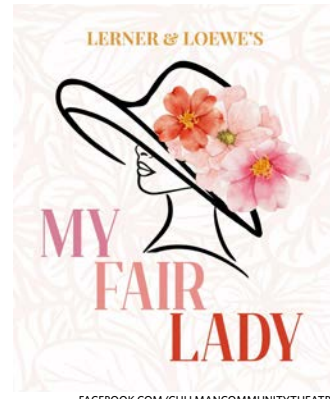
descriptions and dance materials prior to auditions at <http://Linktr.ee/mycct>.

Rehearsals are scheduled to begin June 1. The posted rehearsal calendar lists Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6-9 p.m., along with some Saturdays from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. A full rehearsal schedule will be available at auditions.

Performance dates for "My Fair Lady" are scheduled for Aug. 13-16.

Questions may be directed to director Kristy McCrickard at [kristymccrickard@gmail.com](mailto:kristymccrickard@gmail.com).

Cullman Community Theatre has remained active in local arts programming in recent months, with Tribune reporting in February noting



FACEBOOK.COM/CULLMANCOMMUNITYTHEATRE  
**Cullman Community Theatre is preparing for its August production of "My Fair Lady" and has announced a full slate of audition dates for local performers interested in joining the cast.**

the organization's production of "Roald Dahl's Matilda the Musical" as part of Cullman's ongoing community arts efforts.

## "MY FAIR LADY" AUDITIONS AT A GLANCE

**What:**  
Auditions for "My Fair Lady"

**Where:**  
Train Depot at Depot Park, next to Festhalle

**When:**  
Friday, May 15, 5-9 p.m.  
Saturday, May 16, 9 a.m.-noon  
Saturday, May 16, 1-5 p.m.  
Ensemble dance call Sunday, May 17, 2-5 p.m.

**Who can audition:**  
Ninth-grade through adult  
Limited roles for ages 8-13

**What to prepare:**  
32-bar cut of a song  
One-minute monologue  
Be ready for cold reads

**Rehearsals begin:**  
June 1

**Show dates:**  
Aug. 13-16

**More info:**  
<http://Linktr.ee/mycct>

**Contact:**  
[kristymccrickard@gmail.com](mailto:kristymccrickard@gmail.com)



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Friday, July 10th | 5:30pm  
Depot Park & Warehouse  
District



## Neon Moon



Friday, August 14th | 5:30pm  
Depot Park & Warehouse  
District

# Community Matters Q&A:

## Talking youth ministry with Clay Tankersley

### Gauge Day

gauge@cullmantribune.com

**W**elcome to the second edition of the Community Matters Q&A series, highlighting local youth pastors who continue to make a meaningful impact in and around our community. This ongoing feature offers readers a closer look into the heart, challenges and calling behind youth ministry through conversations with those leading the next generation.

In this edition, we sit down with a local youth pastor to explore their journey into ministry, the lessons they've learned along the way and the realities of guiding students through some of the most formative years of their lives. From personal calling to the challenges facing today's youth, this Q&A provides an honest and thoughtful perspective on what it means to lead, mentor and serve.

**Questions with Clay Tankersley, former youth pastor at Hanceville First Baptist and Fairview: The Grace Place and current youth pastor at CrossRoads Baptist in Hayden**

*For readers who may not know you, can you share a little about who you are and a little bit about your youth ministry?*

My name is Clay Tankersley. I have been married to my beautiful bride, Ashley, for 17 years, and we have three children.

I have been serving »



Clay Tankersley with his wife, Ashley, daughters Reese and Charlie Grace, and son, Maverick

CLAY TANKERSLEY

in full-time youth ministry for about 18 years. I have served at Hanceville First Baptist, Fairview: The Grace Place, and CrossRoads Baptist.

**What originally drew you to working with students, and what keeps you invested in youth ministry today?**

I knew at the age of 16 that the LORD was calling me to ministry. Despite my best efforts to run, God was patient with me. After a few years of being a prodigal, the LORD restored to me the joy of my salvation. Shortly after, I began serving in student ministry.

The Good News of the Gospel keeps me motivated. I know my imperfections, yet God continues to love me anyway. Seeing students from all walks of life and hearing their stories compels me to share that Good News with them. My desire is to share the love of Christ in practical ways.

**What is one word that best describes how you approach youth ministry, and why?**

Relational. The LORD calls us into community. Community can't be accomplished without personal relationships. My goal in ministry is to build relationships not just with students, but also with parents so that I can partner with them in ministry as well.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges facing today's youth?**

I believe one of the greatest challenges facing our youth today is identity and self-worth. Social media is not inherently bad; however, it has amplified the need to fit in and be perfect. This pressure then causes social anxiety for many teens. The world expects perfection, but perfection can never be attained. Christ became perfect



**A glimpse into worship at DNOW 2026, one of the many events that Clay helps shepherd for students from all across the community**

CLAY TANKERSLEY

for us and through that perfection, has reconciled us to God through His sacrifice. This allows us to have peace through our imperfections and an imperfect world.

**How do you create an environment where students feel safe, valued and heard?**

I believe that this is best demonstrated through building relationships. We do this through a monthly fellowship, weekly Bible study/small groups, and sharing meals together. There are lots of conversations that happen around the table. We learn to hear and trust the heart of each person involved.

**What role does your faith in Jesus play in helping young**

**people navigate the world today?**

My faith in Christ is the only way that I can help anyone. My life has been full of highs and lows. Each season, the LORD has been good and faithful to me. The answers that we find in Scripture to handle situations may not always be easy, but they lead to peace. As students live out their faith through obedience to Scripture, the LORD encourages and gives their hearts peace.

**Is there a moment or experience in your ministry that reminded you why this work matters?**

There have been many moments in my ministry experience that remind me why student ministry is important.

There are so many students who feel lost, unwanted, and unloved. Seeing a student recognize their need for a Savior and grasp that God loves them and has a plan and purpose for their life reminds me of why. Seeing the Holy Spirit reveal God's love to them always fills my heart with joy!

Seeing former students now discipling other students also reminds me of why this work matters. Being able to watch students who have been discipled and poured into by leaders, now pouring into the lives of others, is such a privilege and a reminder of the Great Commission. Disciples making disciples.

**If you had the opportunity to share the Gospel with a student that has never heard »**

**before, how would you do it?  
What would you say?**

I would keep it simple and short but allow space for them to ask any questions that they might have.

I would start by talking with them about their purpose. I would remind them that they are created in the image of God to have a relationship with Him, but our sin has gotten in the way. God's standard is perfection, and we all fall short of that.

I would then give them the good news! That Christ, the son of God, lived a perfect and sinless life for us - He was perfect. Because He was perfect, He became the sacrifice for our sins on the cross and rose on the third day. Through faith in the finished work of Christ, He has now

clothed us in His righteousness. He has declared us perfect through His sacrifice, and we now stand blameless and faultless before God!

**What is one thing you wish parents or the community better understood about today's youth?**

One thing that we all need to step back and look at is how overwhelmed students are. There is so much social pressure to conform to being "busy." The things we are busy with aren't necessarily bad things. However, we carry on from one activity to the next without having meaningful conversations with our children. The other thing I wish most parents understood is the need for their teenagers to be present

in their lives. I don't mean just showing up. I mean, actually being present and engaging with them. Undistracted, undivided attention for 10 minutes a day can help bridge the gap for our teenagers, who feel overlooked and overwhelmed.

**What do you hope students carry with them long after they leave your youth ministry?**

My prayer is that when students leave our youth ministry, they carry with them a deep understanding of where their identity truly lies. In a constantly changing world that pressures them to adapt just to stay relevant, I want them to be grounded in the unchanging truth that their identity is in Christ — knowing who they are and to whom they belong.

That foundation brings peace and stability no matter what season of life they face.

I also pray they remain committed to Christ-centered community, recognizing that they were never meant to walk alone. Beyond that, I hope they live with purpose — understanding that God has uniquely created them to be a light in the darkness wherever He places them.

Finally, my desire is that they model the love and humility of Christ by serving others, just as He has served us (Philippians 2).

As it says in 3 John 1:4, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." That is my greatest hope for every student.

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**Community Policing  
You Can Count On**

- More patrols, stronger local ties
- Building trust through visibility and outreach



**Safe Schools, Strong Futures**

- Dedicated School Resource Officers
- Mentorship and protection for every student



**Preserving Our Way of Life**

- Defending Cullman County's values and traditions
- Supporting families, farmers, and faith-based communities

**LEADERSHIP ROOTED IN  
COMMUNITY, SAFETY, AND PRIDE.**



EST. 1873



# CITY OF CULLMAN

ALABAMA



## CITY OF CULLMAN

Councilmember Paul Schaffer, Councilmember Jason Willoughby, Council President Pro-Tem David Moss, Mayor Woody Jacobs, Council President Kim Hall, Councilmember Chuck Shikle

### CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS STREAMED LIVE!

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YouTube   
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