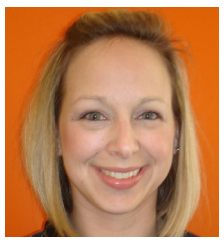
Monday December 26 2011
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Cullman's Monday Newspaper

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CULLMANSENSE
COMMUNITY MATTERS

The New Fire Truck in Town

By: Dawn Owens
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qrnews/dowens



The ladder on the E-One 100' Platform fire truck fits up to five people. *Photos by: Emily Durden*

In an attempt to give back to the community, the Cullman Fire Department took a leap of faith and designed a very special fire truck for Cullman. But they weren't alone.

Chief Reinhart wanted to get the community involved in the final design of the new E-One 100' Platform fire truck that was purchased through grant money and monetary support from City council. Reinhart thought, "What if we had a competition with the kids attending the city school to get them involved in choosing the color scheme of the next truck?"

Billy Atchinson, Manager for North Alabama for Sunbelt Fire and native of Cullman was instrumental in the Fire Department's purchasing of the truck. As a salesperson for Sunbelt Fire, the dealer for the E-One 100' Platform, he made a few drawings of the truck to be passed around to area principals of the public and private schools. They then made copies and distributed them to the children.

"Many of the trucks that we received back from the kids were red. I think it's what most people think of when they think about a fire truck," said Reinhart. "But we wanted this truck to reflect our community and our community to embrace the truck."

"We received many pictures back, with East Elementary having the most participation of any of the schools. Of the ones returned, I gave the top 20-30 to the Chief to review," explained Atchinson.

Three of the drawings returned to Atchison reflected the values of Cullman well. One of the students drew a Cullman Bearcat symbol on the side of the truck. Another drew the American flag, and yet another incorporated the black and gold onto the truck. The combination of these is what inspired the design of the current truck that now sits in Station 2 on Main Avenue.

The three elementary students: Garrett Evans, Josi Jackson, and Emma Mansour were honored at City Council for their drawings and were given a ride back to school on the new fire truck.



The new truck is a replacement for a 1986 Gromen 100' platform and a pump. Replacement parts were getting expensive and sometimes unavailable for the truck. The Fire Department applied through the Assistant to Firefighters grant to get funds to replace the truck. They were awarded $750,000 through the grant. They sent out bids and decided on a million dollar truck.

Mayor Townson recognized the need for a new truck to provide a safe environment for Cullman citizens. "Anytime we can make sure that our citizens live in a safe environment, we do it," stated Townson. "This truck replaces our old ladder truck that was over 20 years old. The new pumper truck was a necessity. Our desire is to make sure our equipment is always up-to-date and meets all local, state, and national codes and standards. Safety is our number one priority."

The city stepped in and provided the extra funds to purchase a million dollar truck for a little over $250,000.

Overall the E-One 100' Platform is a state of the art piece of equipment that will help the city of Cullman in various disasters. They'll be able to use the truck for all types of rescue: water rescue and high angle rope rescues, for example. They will also be able to remove people off from tall buildings.

"This truck has lift capability that the other one didn't," explained Reinhart. "The new truck allows for 5 people to stand on the ladder, where the old one only fit 2."

There is also additional lighting on the platform and a 100ft light tower. This will allow them to light up a scene to find people. This is critical in situations when the power has gone out, very similar to what happened in the April tornados.

Chief Reinhart commented on how very proud he was of the guys during the tornado. "I was very proud of the community and the agencies for all that they did to work together during the tornado," stated Reinhart. "Many of them brought them food and offer assistance any way they could."

"The community gave so much to us during that time, this was a way for us to give back to our community."

Sunbelt delivered the truck to the Cullman Fire/Rescue Department in November. You can see their reactions to the arrival of the new truck online at: http://qrne.ws/eone

PRINTED LOCALLY @ PRINTING Alabama Web Press

Lifestyle - Religion

Tim Herron -- Back to the Basics: Love God, Love People

By: Dawn Owens
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If one of your New Year's Resolutions is getting back to church to learn the basics of the Christian faith, you may just want to check out Spirit Life on Saint Joseph Drive Northwest.

Starting at the beginning of January, Pastor Tim Herron will be starting a new series called "Love God. Love People."

It is also the foundational principles of the church. "Love is the most important lesson that God expects us to learn, " said Herron.

"Learning to love God and others is to be our highest goal, our greatest aim, our first priority, our deepest aspiration, our strongest ambition, our constant focus, our passionate intention and the dominant life values of our lives."

It is with that vision that Herron and his wife Judy have brought the desire for people at Spirit Life to come to an understanding of what it means to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

Herron was raised in Carbon Hill, Alabama and joined the navy at age 17. He's always known that God gave him a desire to help, love, and serve people.

After a short stint in Florida and meeting his wife Judy, they moved back to Alabama. It's at that point that he felt God calling him into ministry.



Pastor Tim Herron with his wife Judy *Photo by: Emily Durden*

He was then appointed to a church in Jasper, where he preached for about 5 years. He then moved to Florida for about 10 years to preach at a beach campground.

After a few other church appointments, the Herrons made their way to Cullman in February of 2009.

"We absolutely love Cullman. It's just a great place to live," said Judy.
"People here tend to embrace what I feel about love, " said Herron.

Spirit Life loves their neighbors in a variety of ways. But one tangible way that they meet the needs in our community is by hosting a food bank every third Saturday of the month.

"We try to put into practice, 'Do for one what you wish you could do for all'".

They also had a truckload of food and clothing for people during the tornado.

For Christmas this year, they are giving gifts to 10 children in the community.

"We can't help everyone, but we want to help who we can. It's easy to get overwhelmed with it all", shared Herron.

That's why you have to trust that God loves us and that He has nothing but good for us."

Wife, Judy leads the children and youth's ministry and has done a lot to create an atmosphere that is kid friendly and fun.

"We teach them in a series and each series takes about 8 weeks to get through," said Judy.

"I like to do different themes and decorate the kid's area with that theme. Every Sunday's lessons are themed with the main point for each week. Right now the kids area is decorated with a jungle theme."

Pastor Herron is also an ordained bishop in the Church of God and a lover of golf.

"If people are looking for a place to be judged, criticized, or put down this is not the church for you," explained Herron. "All you are going to get here is love. We just want to love on you."

If you are interested in attending Spirit Life they host Discipleship classes on Sunday mornings at 9:45am and a Worship service is at 10:50am.

They also have a Wednesday night service at 7:00pm.

You can find Spirit Life Church of God online at http://www.spiritlifecog.com/. You can contact the church at (256)-739-3326.

Her Choice is Saving a Life, One Unplanned Pregnancy at a Time

By: Dawn Owens
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Her Choice is Saving a Life, One Unplanned Pregnancy at a Time

In an effort to create a life-affirming pregnancy center to meet the needs of women with an unplanned pregnancy, Her Choice (for life) North Alabama Women's Center was initiated in 2007.

Theresa Cane, the president of the board, saw the statistics of abortions In Cullman County and recognized the need for material aid, particularly around Wallace State and the college students.

According to Executive Director, Jenny Brown, "Abortion rates at that time were really high in Cullman and they wanted an opportunity to help girls see that they could keep their babies and not give them up."

Most of the time girls would travel to Huntsville or Birmingham to have an abortion, which is why they chose their current office location of Hanceville right along Route 31.

Originally the Center started at Northbook Baptist Church with a few volunteers. Then the Hanceville Lutheran Church and Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Cullman decided to get involved and helped the Center get off the ground at the current location.





Top: Clients can use Mommy Money to make purchases from the boutique. Bottom: Free ultrasounds are one of the many services provided by the Center. *Photos by: Emily Durden*

Now, Her Choice is led by Jenny Brown, the only full time paid staff member and 12 volunteers. "The volunteers are truly the backbone of this organization, said Brown. "Many of our volunteers have had experiences with abortion, adoption, and parenting."

Her Choice offers clients the ability to receive a free pregnancy testing, ultrasounds, OB/GYN referrals, private pregnancy, adoption, and post abortion counseling, video education programs, and material assistance in the form of a Mommy boutique.

Clients can purchase some of the items from the boutique with the Mommy money that they earn by watching videos, attending parenting classes, and/or being associated with certain nonprofit organizations in the area.

They can earn a maximum amount of

See Page 11

No(ah)-It-All: The Ebb & Flow of Our First Year

By: Noah Chandler
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qrne.ws/nchandler

Wow, I can't believe that we have been in business for almost a year now. It is amazing what can happen in the span of 365 days.

Between the people that breezed in to my life before blowing out, the natural disaster of multiple tornados ripping through Cullman County, combined with a host of firsts for our residents, I sit in awe at the stories told that would have otherwise gone untold.

When Dustin and I began CullmanSense the first priority was to provide a suitable and responsible platform to share some of the best untold stories in Cullman County.

As our one year anniversary approaches I can say that the first priority has remained foremost in my mind.

Thankfully this rings true with all the crew at CS. If you don't believe me, just ask any of them or the residents that they have had the pleasure of interviewing.

The second priority was to build a stable base of readers, which would hopefully saturate the area before expanding outside the county.

As of now, CullmanSense.com nets an average of 600,000 hits per month, growing from 22,000 hits in January to a peak of 816,000 hits in October.

The additions of both the iPhone and Android apps have helped us reach out to those residents who may be on the go but still want to stay informed.

That's not bad for a locally driven, owned, and operated news outlet, but then again it does speak volumes about the crew.

As the year progressed, the third priority was finally reached when we began to live cast events such as city council meetings.

The first event that was live cast was the 9/11 Memorial Ceremony, which was held at the Cullman High School Auditorium.

Since then we have seen the potential in this new avenue of providing accurate, timely information to you, the reader… or in this case the viewer.

Once we realized the third priority had been started, the next venture was this beautiful creation you are currently holding.

Yep, that's right. The wonderfully vibrant, locally authored and printed newspaper was the last stop on the priority list for 2011. And what a dandy it is, if I may so…yeah, just a tad bit biased on this one.

Now in our sixth week of print, it has become apparent that uplifting, inspiring, local stories were needed and given the response it has been made evident that this new style of news reporting has been well received.

That means you can all expect the same great pieces you have grown to enjoy along with several new ventures that we are sure will catch the eye, ear, and mind of many more.

So now that the priorities for this year have been notched there is not much left to do but to enjoy the final days of this year, reflect on the extreme ups and downs, and prepare for at least 10 priorities for 2012.

One of our top priorities beginning this week is signing residents up for subscriptions. Subscribers will have each Monday issue of CullmanSense delivered to their home.

Actually, you know what? I may just triple it and make it 12 priorities. Yeah, that just feels right.

Weather

Source: NWS

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Hi: 45 Lo: 33	Hi: 52 Lo: 33	Hi: 54 Lo: 36	Hi: 58

Monday: Mostly sunny, with a high near **45**.
Monday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around **33**.

Tuesday: Mostly sunny, with a high near **52**.
Tuesday Night: Mostly clear, with a low around **33**.

Wednesday: Sunny, with a high near **54**.
Wednesday Night: Mostly clear, with a low around **36**.

Thursday: Sunny, with a high near **58**.

Check **CullmanSense.com** for the latest weather forecast.

About Us

CullmanSense is a weekly print publication based out of Cullman, Alabama. The online site, CullmanSense.com, is a six-day a week publication, which includes arrest and incident reports from Cullman City Police and the Cullman County Sheriff's Office, Obituaries, and other timely information. The site is completely free and does include stories not found in our print edition.

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CULLMANSENSE

Community Matters

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Sports - Area Athlete Spotlight

Chayse Elliott: Cold Springs High School

By: Josh McBrayer
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qrnews/jmcbrayer

This week's Spotlight falls on Chayse Elliot from Cold Springs High School. Chayse Elliott and Head Coach Tim Burleson were kind enough to sit down and answer a few questions for this week's Area Athlete Spotlight.

Josh McBrayer: Tell our readers a little about yourself.

Chayse Elliott: I am from here in Cullman and have attended Cold Springs all my life. I'm currently 16, and I play basketball, football, baseball, and a little golf.

JM: How long have you been playing basketball?

CE: I have played basketball since I was five.

JM: What is your favorite sport?

CE: Without a doubt my favorite sport is basketball.

JM: What is your greatest accomplishment in sports?

CE: My greatest accomplishment would have to be being the number one seed for the Cullman County Tournament two years in a row. I have won over 23 games each year and made it to the regional tournament at Wallace State both years. The team accomplishments mean the most to me.

JM: Who has been your biggest inspiration in sports?

CE: My biggest inspiration in sports is, by far, my dad. He has got me to the point where I am at today and has never missed a single game. He has always been there whenever I've needed him.

Coach Tim Burleson had this to say about Chayse:

Chayse is a gym rat that works on his game year round. In the off-season he plays travel ball and AAU. He travels with this group from state to state.

He has always had very good skills, but his biggest improvement from last year in my opinion is that he is so much stronger this year.

He has put a lot of time in the weight room and it shows especially when he is rebounding the ball.

He has actually had a game in which he had 20 rebounds. Chayse wants the team to do well.

When we are not playing well you can definitely tell by his expressions. He plays with a lot of emotion.

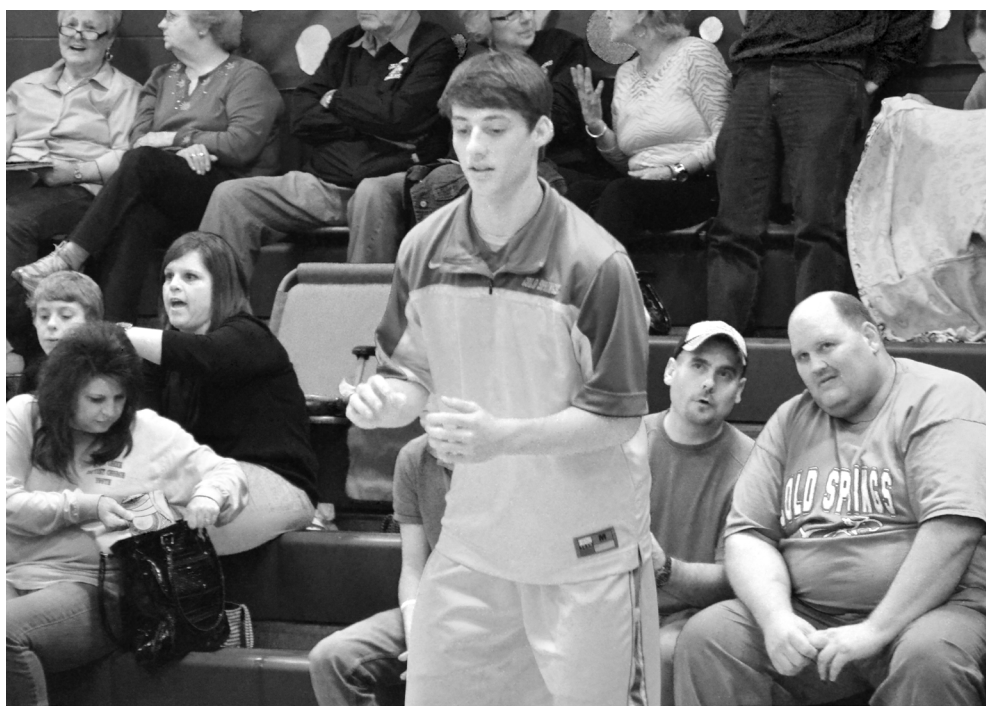
We have talked about the importance of channeling this emotion to be beneficial to the team. Overall Chayse has been a coach's dream to have on a team.

There are not many out there that are going to out work Chayse and this shows in his game. I am glad to say he is only a junior and will be back next year.





Chayse Elliott



Holiday Basketball Tournaments

Hayden Girls Christmas Tournament
December 26 through 28

Holly Pond vs. Hueytown 4:00 p.m. 1st round

Hayden vs. Homewood 5:30 p.m. 1st round

Fairview vs. Arab 7:00 p.m. 1st round

Good Hope vs. Mortimer Jordan 8:30 p.m. 1st round

Northwest Alabama Girls Tournament
December 27 through 30

Cold Springs vs. Sheffield in 1st round 1:30 p.m.

Curry Girls Christmas Tournament
December 26 through 28

West Point vs. Dora 6:00 p.m. 1st round

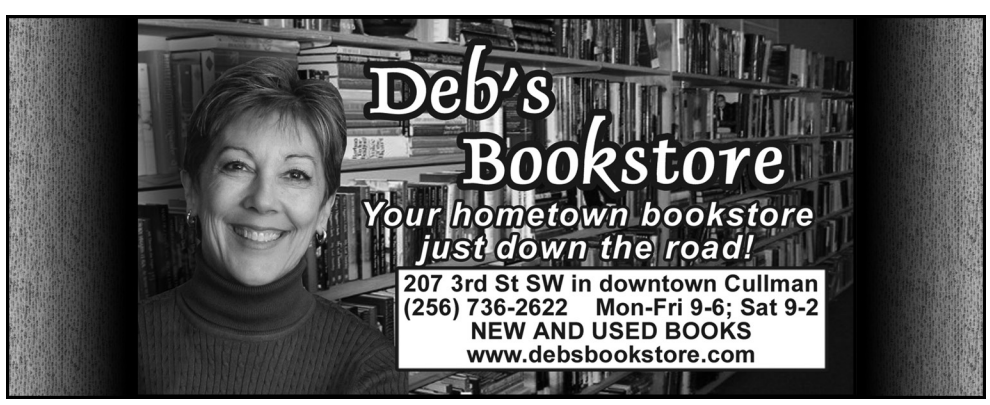
Cullman Lady 'Cats Christmas Classic
December 27 through 29

Cullman vs. Hazel Green 12:00 p.m. 1st round

Cullman vs. Walker 6:00 p.m. 1st round

West Point Boys Christmas Classic
December 26, 27 & 29

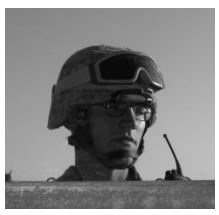
West Point, Cold Springs, Good Hope, Fairview, Holly Pond
all take to the court during this tournament.



Game and Movie Reviews

And the Award Goes to...

By: Dustin McSpadden
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qrnews/dmcspadden

I figure that since the year is about to end it is time to give out some (imaginary) awards to the fictional world(s) that continue to entertain and exhaust our free time.

That's right, Video Game Award Time!

The Hole in the Wall Award:

This award is for a game that did not make a big splash but was very fun and could parallel a hole-in-the-wall restaurant that has great food.

This year's Hole in the Wall Award goes to: *Bastion*.

Bastion, in case you missed it, was produced by independent developer Super Giant games, but was only available for Xbox and digital download for Windows.

If you like the silent protagonist early RPG's, then *Bastion* is for you.

The Dead Horse Award:

This award is for a game that was released at least twice with little or no change from the original release.

This year's Dead Horse Award goes to: *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

Nintendo uses Zelda to showcase their new technology. With the release of the 3DS, they fell back to the game that they originally released for the Nintendo 64.

Ocarina of Time is held by some to be the best game ever. Who needs to produce a new game when you can copy and paste one that already made you tons and tons of cash?

The Ctrl-V Award:

This award goes to a game that the producers rushed to the point as to re-use the same maps/dungeons over and over, since Ctrl-V is the shortcut to paste.

This year's Ctrl-V Award goes to: *Dragon Age II*.

Dragon Age: Origins was so well received that the second game was rushed into production, which resulted in a heavy dose of imagery from the first.

Most of the maps were recycled to the point that they thought that rotating it made it an all new area!

The Finally!!!! Award:

This award is intended for the game that has been sought after longer than any other game released this year.

This year's Finally!!!! Award goes to: *Duke Nukem Forever*

This game only took 15 years in production, and hailed back to the shallow games of the early 90s.

Its age was evident; the storyline was very shallow and showed exactly how far games have advanced since the last time Duke manned up to fight aliens

An Honorable Mention also goes to: *Jurassic Park*

Why Am I Dead Again Award:

This award is for a game that defies the players, killing them in gruesome and inventive ways.

This year's Why Am I Dead Again Award goes to: *Dark Souls.*

Many may think that this award would go to a first person shooter like *Modern Warfare* or *Battlefield*, but those games pale in comparison to the difficulty level of *Dark Souls*.

The game has no difficulty settings; so be prepared to die. It will kill you often, and not even care.

What Time is It Award:

This award is for a game that you can easily lose yourself in, making you ask someone else for the time quite often.

This year's What Time is It Award goes to: *Elder Scrolls IV: Skyrim.*

No one should be surprised since this game's content is so extensive that finishing it seems to be an impossibility.

Right when you think that you have slayed the last dragon you find yourself another quest to go on and of course another dragon to kill.

Those are my Year in Review Video Game Awards. There are far too many great games out there for me to be able to cover all of them, but these were the ones that I felt needed to have a light shined on them.

Some of the things are good, some are bad and one of them is just down right mean. (Don't meet *Dark Souls* in an alley. It will take more than just your wallet.)

I hope to see you next week when I take a look at *Star Wars: The Old Republic*.

Nothing Too Friendly About *Friends with Benefits*

By: Natalie Bonner
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qrnews/nbonner



4/5 Stars

Men and women can be just friends.

Right?

In this weeks movie review I take a look at this old fashioned question with a modern day twist.

When one tempts the gods of love in an attempt to mirror a relationship without the responsibilities and obligations, said person is sure to incur the wrath of stupid Cupid and his million angry arrows.

In the 2011 rom-com (romantic comedy) *Friends with Benefits,* featuring Mila Kunis and Justin Timberlake, the classic concept of friends with benefits is explored.

Kunis plays Jamie, a sarcastic, tough girl who really wears her heart on her sleeve.

Jamie is a true believer in all the hype—the fairytale ending, Prince Charming and cheesy romantic movies. New in town, Timberlake plays Dylan, a Los Angeles transplant taking on the City that Never Sleeps.

The beginning sets the overly honest tone of the movie through a combination scene that makes Dylan and Jamie appear to be having a conversation with each other.

In reality they are both getting dumped at the same time by their respective partners. Dylan is dubbed "emotionally unavailable" while Jamie is charged with being "emotionally damaged."

Despite the overt, awkward camera angles that sprout up throughout the film, the inherent chemistry present between the lead actors is enough to keep your attention.

Is it a unique approach to the dilemma? Not much at all.

At times, the film can seem like a rip-off version of the earlier 2011 release, *No Strings Attached*, with Natalie Portman and Ashton Kutcher.

Both movies address the issue from a physical standpoint and evolve into a typical touchy feely situation where the non-couple start to realize that they do, indeed, have more than friendly feelings toward one another.

A main selling point of *Friends with Benefits* is its artful use of dialogue peppered with clever quips and humorous comebacks.

In an early scene in the movie, Dylan asks, "Why do women think the only way to get a man to do what they want is to manipulate them?" Jamie comically deadpans, "History. Personal experience. Romantic comedies."

There are some creative pursuits Dylan uses to express himself in lieu of the trite declaration of love.

A flash mob is featured at one point, mirroring Jamie's desire for her life to be "just like in the movies," where anything can happen out of the blue.

By movie's end, the answer to the question is just like a math problem—same ending every time, no matter what elements are added or subtracted from the equation.

The predictable happy ending seems to come standard for all rom-coms, perhaps because the purpose is to cry and laugh.

For a self-proclaimed "anti-romantic comedy," *Friends with Benefits* may not be the most original attempt at navigating the murky waters of relationships and everything in between.

However, it does offer a fresh perspective on the complications that inevitably arise when one mixes the act of physicality with the absence of emotion.



Lifestyle

Rediscovering Cullman: It's My Party

By: Meghan Nelson
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qrnews/mnelson

If you've ever spotted a gorilla wandering the streets of Cullman, then you've very likely seen Judy Nelms from It's My Party en route to perform a singing telegram under her alias of Lulu. Knowing that not many women have the courage to sing in public, much less dress as a female gorilla and belt out a cleverly worded telegram, I decided to learn more about Judy and her shop.

Upon entering It's My Party, conveniently located on Second Avenue in downtown Cullman, I first noticed the tall shelves heartily stocked with various party supplies. Colorful piñatas hung from the ceiling and perched on shelve tops, with rows of invitations lined the back wall. I found Judy behind the sales counter amid a colorful array of balloons and asked her how she had crafted such a fantastically fun business.

Judy shared that she moved to Cullman about sixteen years ago, when her husband was looking for a new job. "I felt like this place was different," she said. "If you make a friend here, then you have a dear friend for life."

Of course, with her exuberant personality, Judy had no difficulty making friends; however, she decided that she also needed to find new hobbies to fill her time. For most people this decision would entail knitting a decent scarf or attempting to watercolor, but for Judy it meant learning how to clown from her cousin in Florida.



Judy Nelms, owner of It's My Party, can often be found preparing balloon orders, helping customers, and even delivering singing telegrams dressed as Lulu the Gorilla.



Photos by: Meghan Nelson

An Elmo piñata stands ready to be purchased as a candy-filled party decoration.

Judy quickly realized that she loved the quirky hobby of clowning and was soon hired by Deborah, who owned It's My Party at the time. "I practiced four weeks for my first job," Judy shared, "and then I started working at the shop one afternoon a week."

One afternoon quickly became three days, and when Deborah decided to sell the business in 2000, Judy immediately considered buying it. After much prayer and family discussion, she finally made the decision to purchase It's My Party and has loved running the business every day since.

"I feel like I'm here to do more than blow up balloons for people. I love all of it – seeing kids, clowning, delivering singing telegrams."

Hearing her mention singing telegrams, I instantly wanted to learn more about the laugh-inducing process. Judy shared that she started her repertoire of characters with Lulu, her feminine gorilla. "Lulu's my alter ego," she explained. "She's an extension of me."

Her aliases eventually came to include Henrietta the Chicken, who clucks quite a bit, and Dedra Death, who, as you might imagine, serves as a morbidly amusing grim reaper. Of course, Judy also maintains her clowning skills as Chloe the Clown, a persona that she describes as a tad redneck.

Not surprisingly, Judy has certainly experienced several hilariously awkward moments during her singing telegram adventures. Upon a bride's request, Lulu has jokingly interrupted a wedding in order to tease the groom and has even stopped court at the behest of a judge looking to slightly embarrass her clerk as a birthday surprise.

For her part, Henrietta has clucked her way through a high school football stadium on a packed Friday night just to embarrass a local business owner.

Although Judy admitted that she likely couldn't perform such escapades without a mask, she said that she never feels self-conscious when dressed as one of her characters. Naturally a fun-loving person, Judy described telegram delivery as an experience that allows her true personality to show without any facades, sharing that she's never been happier in her employment than she is now.

When she's not singing to unsuspecting citizens, Judy can be found in It's My Party, selling a wide variety of party supplies. Balloons are her most popular item; however, her 'over the hill' section has attracted people from as far as Decatur with its variety.

Judy also offers party favors, piñatas, solid-colored plates, napkins, utensils, and tablecloths, costume rentals and purchases, and wedding invitations. In addition, she stocks an impressive selection of themed party supplies, including Auburn/Alabama, Luau, Spongebob, Dora the Explorer, Sweet Sixteen, Hello Kitty, Batman, Spiderman, and several more.

Currently, Judy is replenishing her New Year's inventory, as New Year's Eve is her second busiest day of the year. "We have balloons, plates, napkins, hats, tiaras, six types of noisemakers, and even party kits for ten people," she shared. While It's My Party's normal hours are nine to three on Saturdays, Judy said that they plan to stay open until at least five on New Year's Eve to accommodate potential celebrators.

Though Judy admitted that competing with places like Dollar Tree and Wal-Mart can be difficult, she said she differentiates her store by offering a level of personal service that large chain stores simply can't match.

"I'll spend thirty minutes helping a customer decide and can connect them with professionals if I don't have what they need...my philosophy is to treat people the way I want to be treated."

Of course, considering her outgoing personality, it's logical that spending time with customers is Judy's favorite part of her business. She enjoys having the opportunity to talk to different people and to see kids come into her shop and get excited.

As I watched Judy take balloon orders and help party-minded customers find their festive selections, I was convinced that she truly does enjoy her business. Though places like Wal-Mart are sometimes less expensive, It's My Party brings a unique combination of party supplies and lighthearted fun to Cullman that could never be replaced by large stores.

Besides, I would much rather make my purchases from a woman willing to sing like a gorilla, cluck like a chicken, and joke like a clown than be herded through a random checkout line at an indifferent chain store.



It's My Party stocks a wide variety of party supplies, from solid colors to themed collections.

Day in the Life of: A Postman



Photos by: Jessica Norrell

By: Meghan Nelson
meghannelson@cullmansense.com

Inspired by a Christmastime shipping trip to the bustling, people-packed Post Office, I recently obtained the opportunity to spend some time in the life of a United States Postman.

Despite America's iconic image of a man in blue being chased, barked at, or otherwise harried by a territorial dog, I was certain that working as a Postman included a much wider array of activities than canine evasion.

While I was well aware that mail doesn't magically sort itself and appear in our mailboxes, I was nonetheless quite impressed to learn the process involved in delivering our letters, packages, and parcels.

It was a pleasant surprise to discover a bit more about the daily life of a Postman.

Upon arriving at the Post Office around 8 am on a cold Saturday morning, I began my day by meeting local Postman, John Roy, who began his postal career while serving in the marines.

Although I considered my arrival time to be rather impressive for a Saturday, I soon learned that John had been at work since about 7 o'clock that morning, sorting mail and preparing for the day.

As if that news wasn't enough to prick my early-morning pride, John went on to share that the mail clerks, who transfer incoming mail to the correct routes, had arrived sometime in the dark hour between 3 and 4 am.

Thinking I might need another cup of coffee, I followed John through the mysterious inner room of the Post Office to a cubicle lined from middle to top with several rows of slots.

He explained that each slot corresponded with an address on his route and that his first task of the day was to sort any first-class mail, flats, and parcels that had not already been presorted by the Post Office's automated system.

This process, which is officially known as 'casing the mail', generally takes John about one to one-and-a-half hours to complete, and seemed to be accompanied by a fair amount of joking and commentary from his fellow Postmen.

See Page 11



John Roy stands with his Mail Truck.



Postal Workers 'case the mail' every morning as they prepare for their routes.

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Mirroring History

Looking Back: Exploring Historic Cullman at Highway 31 and 4th Street Southwest

Circa 1947-51



Contributed by Cullman County Museum

2011



Photo by: Jessica Norrell

Braxton Kinsey: Local World Traveler

By: Natalie Bonner
nataliebonner@cullmansense.com



Braxton Kinsey takes a moment for a quick picture before heading off on another voyage. *Photo Contributed*

Braxton Kinsey: Local World Traveler
A colorful collection of currency hits the table. In the dim lights of the restaurant bar, I focus on the mix of figures and hues. Braxton Kinsey tells me where each bill originated from, outlining a different story for each one.

The different kinds of cash start to take on personalities via their exotic storylines. Braxton tells me about his love for travel and exploration. His career allows him to travel the world over and he wouldn't have it any other way. Upon my stunned fixation regarding the money, he suggests I pick one out to keep.

He must be kidding. He wants me to pick out a bill and keep it? His gesture is genuine and without hesitation. I'm in disbelief.

Braxton breaks into a grin. "Yes, I'm sure. Pick any one! Oh, except this one," he says, an elusive smile spreading across his face. He smoothes the wrinkled bill out in an attempt to restore it to its glory days. "This one I have to keep."

I pick up a Canadian bill in the amount of 20 dollars and kelly green in color. Strange and foreign to me, it looks more like Monopoly money than an item of real value. I consider how this is not remotely strange to him as he witnessed an incredible amount of culture in faraway lands.

A Cullman native, Kinsey is the Chief Investment Officer for an energy company called Snowmass Energy Partners, Ltd. He manages the investments.

"My company makes equity investments (money is exchanged for ownership) in oil and gas projects. Money is a dynamic substance that always has the potential for earning a better return somewhere else," he says.

"The big question I have to answer is: Are we properly compensated for the risk that we are taking in undertaking different projects?"

Braxton's job is to locate these opportunities, assess the risk and develop a return profile that will ensure that the company meets its investment goals, while staying on a sound financial footing.

Having worked for Snowmass Energy Partners, Ltd. for a year now, Braxton says one of the hardest questions he has ever been asked is, "What is money?" He says if you can answer that, then you are on your way to making loads of it.

Being largely responsible for a profit margin of this nature certainly comes at a cost. Braxton is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. No weekends off for this work warrior.

Considering his conference calls with clients in Asia and Europe often occur at 1:00 a.m., sleep appears to be the only foreign concept to Kinsey.

It's not all work and no play, however. His favorite part of the job is traveling and meeting high level decision makers from CEOs to ministers of foreign countries and finding out that they are just like us, normal people albeit with extraordinary jobs.

"I love Montreal and Prague, and London is like a home away from home. I love the energy of the cities and how there is so much going on to the point that it feels like anything is possible. And all of them are beautiful at night. Each city has a special place in my heart."

Braxton picks up his glass of merlot and swishes it around. The deep ruby color splashes against the sides and paints the clear glass a watercolor shade of melon. He tells me about his insatiable desire to experience the world.

It seems Cullman has spawned this urge. Touching on his time spent here, he addresses the issue of what little entertainment was around when he was a kid.

"Cullman is a very special town. Growing up, I asked what every young person does, Oh, my Gosh! What is there to do? But you get a little creative and get different projects going. You think hmm, what can I do with a bag full of potatoes and a bunch of PVC lying around?"

Kinsey says with a laugh, his even tone echoing throughout the cavernous room. His pitch takes on a serious note as he reflects on his youth spent in this small town.

"You move off and miss a bunch of little things that you used to take for granted. [Cullman] is a beautiful city, with amazing people (some of the greatest in the world) and it is home."

Kinsey may know the intrinsic relationship of value between risk assessment and investment opportunity, but he also knows what it means to value those around you. One of his favorite pastimes is getting friends together and spending two hours having dinner, laughing and catching up.

The self-proclaimed European when it comes to dinners, Kinsey explains, "Food and drink represent so much more than just the act of eating. It is a form of getting people together and enjoying each other's company and planning what to do that night.

You pretty much meet Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs with a good dinner: physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, etc."

Drawing in a deep breath, I am moved by his observations. He has the kind of perspective that cannot be faked and that is not available for purchase. In short, he inherited the out-of-the-box outlook on life of what most people simply dream to attain. He is certainly a product of his environment, and in this case, that would be multiple environments.

"My most favorite aspect of my job is working in a field that has a major impact on how people live! I mean imagine what the world would be like if it were not for fossil fuels. Modern civilization is built on that "black stuff," and it can be quite profound to think about," Kinsey says.

"The opportunities in the field are growing, and there is no better feeling than working with people to make things happen. And when I say things, I mean turning ideas into cash!"

Just when I thought his agenda couldn't be any more stuffed, Braxton informs me of a second night job running a solar start-up company based along the Gulf Coast. He explains the ongoing conflict of the dark side (being oil and gas) versus the light side (being renewable energy.)

I'm starting to think maybe he's a vampire, and that is why he doesn't require sleep.

In reality, it is his unrivaled drive and tenacity for success that enables him to stay ahead of the curve. His policy is to never quit learning and to not lose focus.

"Whether it is sports, being an artist, being Spiderman or a hedge fund manager, always hold on to your dreams and go for them!" Kinsey says with an affirmative nod. "In my business of energy finance, there is so much changing and so many different technologies and valuation ideas that you have to learn (synonymous with evolving) or you die off."

I mull over this statement. His words imbed in my bones, setting fire to my intentions.

When I need to remember that there is more to life than my expansive backyard, idle woods, and long, lonely stretches of highway, I just open my wallet and take a peek at the Canadian 20 dollar bill nestled in the clear pocket. And all of a sudden, I am transported elsewhere.

I have Braxton Kinsey syndrome, which can only mean one thing—the world is my oyster.



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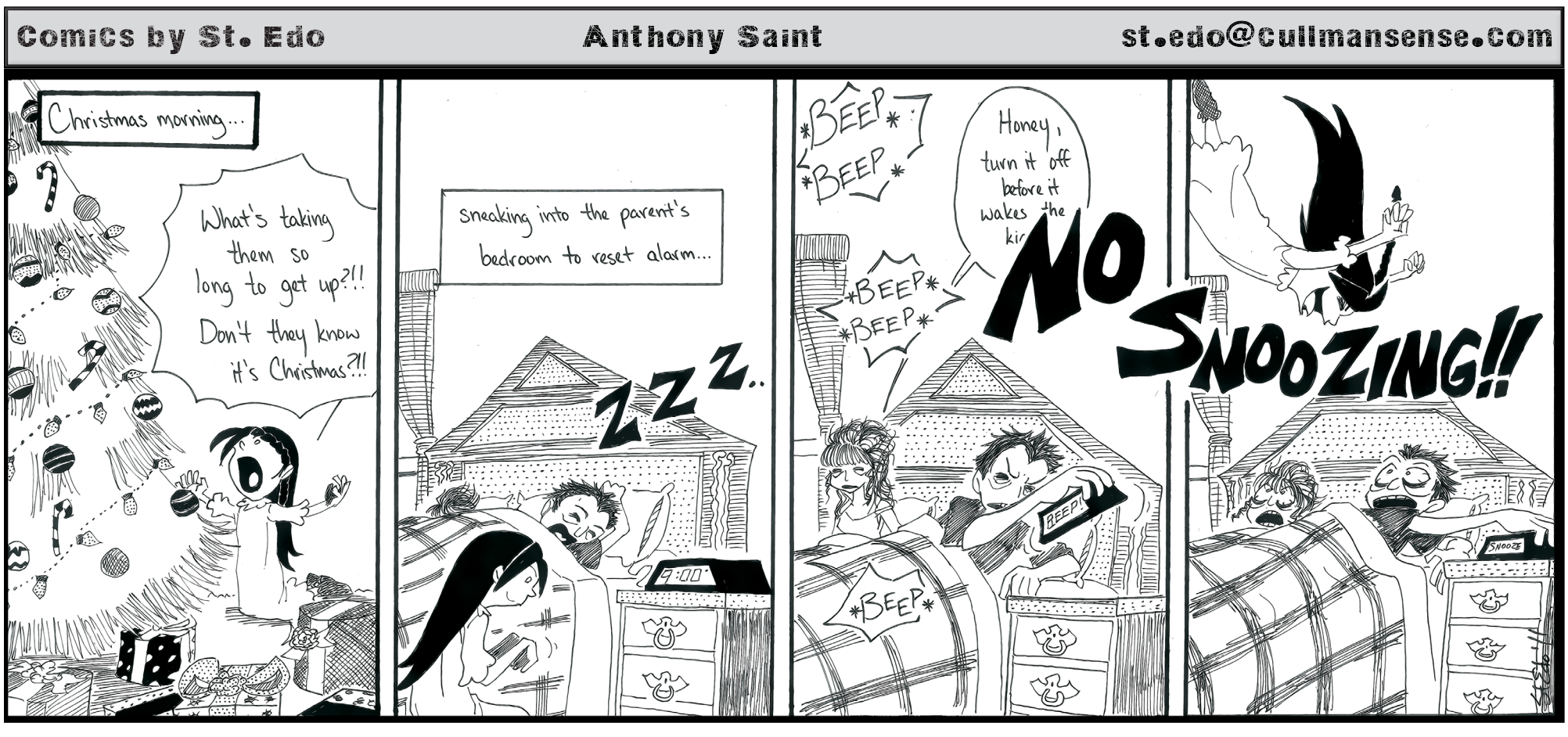
Puzzles and Comics

THIS WEEK'S WORD SEARCH TOPIC IS: NEW YEAR'S PARTY

BY: DUSTIN ISOM

J M C S Q R G F O E S N O I T A R O C E D P E Z Z
G B R S Z M P A H S N O I T U L O S E R M W E A D
N M R N S E G E X Z H L D Q M B J E U P Z W R J W
I C U O N R E W Q G Y A E F P E O D G Y N G A N D
G S F O R E E E W T Z A P N M X M V P X G Z U I Q
N R Z L O W G K R E E H C P Y U V O X H Y P Q G Q
I E S L H O M A A F I Q Z E Y S A S R F B V S W W
S N K A C V P G F M P U N C H N G O Q I L O S N M
Z N C B L Y I F E Q E W D H T T E N Y K E W E L S
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R B J S L U H A T S A J I E N E C G Y L O N I J R
P D G C O N F E T T I D K O I C M A I E D M T A E
C O U N T D O W N E Y J G M N T E Y F N A L M A A
U S E S S A L G E Y E Y L G O O G X Y I D R U N M
N X V N O I T I D A R T U W S K R O W E R I F A E
V Q D V L M N E D A R A P S G B R G B R Y X M V R
K R N O I T A R B E L E C D W B I X L M U P A M S

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banners
celebration
cheer
confetti
countdown
dance
decorations
fireworks
googly eyeglasses
Happy New Year
hats
horns
memories
midnight
noisemakers
parade
party
punch
resolutions
singing
streamers
Times Square
tradition



Community

Postman - Continued

In fact, listening to one of John's co-workers, Dusty Hayes, provide a steady flow of light teasing, I could tell that the various Postal workers shared a camaraderie with each other that is not found in all companies.

According to John, turnover at the Post Office is quite low. "Everyone here gets along. Most people have been here for quite some time, and we never have any confrontations."

In addition to his role as a Postman, John also serves as the Union Steward for the city carriers of Cullman's Post Office; so, he's certainly heard stories from other Post Offices that are not quite as pleasant as his experiences here at Cullman.

As he says, "After hearing what happens at other Post Offices, the citizens of Cullman don't have anything to worry about."

As John sorted the various envelopes and packages, I asked him about his mail route. He shared that his route is one of the eight that make up Cullman City, adding that the County is comprised of about forty routes.

John's route consists primarily of businesses located in downtown Cullman and includes about two-hundred stops.

He said that many of the routes contain seven hundred to eight hundred stops while some even include up to one thousand.

John explained that the reason for such variance is because each route is evaluated based upon completion time rather than number of stops.

For example, on his route, John stops at every block, parks his mail truck, and walks to each business in that section before moving on to the next block. By the time his route in complete, John has usually walked around ten miles.



Contrarily, a route consisting of eight hundred stops may require little or no walking and as a result can be completed in the same amount of time as John's.

Thinking about his daily route, John shared that his favorite part of being a Postman is the customers.

"I can go through my head and tell you every stop and who lives there," he says. "I get to meet and talk to a lot of people and even see their kids grow up."

John also enjoys the days leading up to Christmas. While the Post Office is exceedingly busy during the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, John informed me that those weeks are also when many businesses host their Christmas Parties.

He jokingly shares, "When one hundred businesses all offer you food in the same day...those days are fun."

John's least favorite aspect of his job is the occasional times when the Post Office's automated sort sends mail to the wrong address.
Naturally, he also dislikes when drivers speed around his mail truck without a decent amount of caution.

He pointed out that mail trucks have no rear windows – a characteristic that creates a large blind spot for the drivers and makes it difficult for them to see passing vehicles.

Embarrassingly enough, I had never before noticed this small but important characteristic of mail trucks and immediately resolved to be a bit more considerate when passing by the red-white-and-blue vehicles.

As John finished sorting his mail for the day, he began to transfer the bundles into large trays and then added the trays to an orange cart full of packages waiting to be packed into his mail truck.

Carting the assorted envelopes and packages through large exit doors and into the fenced loading area, John explained that the mail trucks are actually known as 'LLV's', or Long Life Vehicles and can run adequately for up to twenty-seven years with only general maintenance.

Although he laughingly added that such a thing rarely happens as most of the trucks already boast between 100,000 and 200,000 miles.

Regulations kept me from accompanying John on his actual route, but he shared that he generally begins delivering mail around nine o'clock and finishes his route at about 3:30 in the afternoon.

After that, he returns to the Post Office to re-sort any items that were addressed insufficiently or couldn't be delivered.

Despite my inability to actually ride with him on his route, I was able to visit several businesses to which John delivers. Each venue described John in a similar manner – friendly, positive, and cheerful.

According to Jean Parker at Margo's, "John is really a nice fellow. He's always so pleasant, and we really think of him as a friend rather than a Postman. He always has a good day...I really don't know what [the Post Office] would do without him."

Considering how well he represents them, the Post Office would likely have quite a difficult time without John. After all, it's Postmen like him who provide personal interaction and add a human aspect to their business.

While we may nonchalantly check our mailboxes and receive packages on our porches, my time with John taught me that each piece of mail, whether it is a check, a bill, or a birthday card, is hand-delivered and often hand-sorted by Postal workers such as him.

It reminded me to appreciate the hard work that accompanies the convenience of having a nationwide mail delivery service.

Her Choice - Continued

$200 in Mommy money to purchase items they may need from the boutique.

Items in the boutique are mostly new or very gently used items donated by the community. Clients can also pick up jars of baby food and formula when the Center has it on hand.

"We want to make sure that some of the things our Mom's walk away with are brand new. We can no longer accept used cribs due to recalls and we want to make sure they have a brand new car seat, for the same reason," shared Brown. These items are for purchase by clients at a significant discount to make them affordable. There are also items specifically for Moms such as pregnancy and parenting books.

Volunteers go through extensive training in order to be prepared for the counseling and/or mentoring they will do with their clients. All of their volunteers go to a training conference each year, but also will receive online training as well as one-on-one training with Brown.

"Our volunteers commit to a 2-3 hour time shifts," commented Brown. In order to keep the Center running smoothly they need about 4 more people who are able to work during the day.

Volunteers work from 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. and 12:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. Tuesday – Thursday.

They are currently considering opening up on Monday afternoons and early evenings if they can find some volunteers to help out.

The majority of the clients that the Center serves are between the ages of 15-19 years old. This year the Center served more than 80 clients, which was a large increase over last year. They surpassed the number of clients served in 2010 back in July.

"Our culture has changed so significantly. It tends to objectify women so that many girls now a days, think they have to be a certain way," commented Brown. "I wasn't even thinking about this kind of stuff when I was 14-15 years old, but now there are clients coming in here that are that age."

This month they have a 16-year-old, a 19-year-old and a 23-year-old that will be giving birth.

Funding for the Center happens through a banquet in October. That banquet helps to fund Her Choice throughout the year, though some years the budget is leaner than others.

Just like many of the other agencies in town, the economy has affected their operating budget and are therefore still in need of monetary donations.

Her Choice is currently hosting a donation drive to try and raise funds for their operational budget. According to a recent newsletter sent out by Brown, they are encouraging supporters to consider donating $10 or more each month for the next year. They are also grateful for any one-time donations they are able to receive.

Their goal is to recruit 500 faithful donors for 2012. Monetary donations can be made to Her Choice and sent to: PO Box 1343 Hanceville, AL 35077. You can also donate online at http://herchoicenorthal.org/donations.html.

Her Choice's office is located at 203 Commercial Street Northeast Hanceville, Alabama 35077. Hours of operation are Tuesday - Thursday from 9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. and by appointment after hours.

To contact the Center with questions or to volunteer call 256-352-LOVE or email them at herchoicenal@yahoo.com.

If you need to speak to someone outside of operating hours you can call the Hotline at 1-800-395-HELP (4357).

You can find Her Choice on line at http://www.herchoicenorthal.org.

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