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CULLMAN'S MONDAY NEWSPAPER

CULLMANSENSE

COMMUNITY MATTERS

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Cullman Unemployment Rate at 4.8% p3

Hunting accident takes the life of 34-year-old Cullman resident

By: Noah Chandler
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CRANE HILL – A hunting accident Sunday afternoon on a secluded plot of land near Smith Lake, located on County Road 202, has taken the life of 34-year-old Thomas Aaron Tucker Jr.

CCSO Chief Deputy Max Bartlett said the accident occurred shortly after 3 p.m., close to the Smith Lake RV Resort. He said the area was heavily wooded and hard to access.

"The area where we located the victim was in a heavily wooded area," Bartlett said. "Both the victim and the person who shot were wearing hunter's orange, but from where they were standing they could not see one another."

Bartlett said the two men were standing on opposite sides of a small ravine, with both hillside areas heavily wooded.

"The shooter saw a deer come up through the ravine and shot, killing the deer. One round of buckshot traveled up the other side, striking the victim in the stomach. It was strictly a freak accident," he said.

By the time rescue personal arrived on the scene, Bartlett p6

Running for Fun and Fitness

» Inaugural EES Penguin Fun Run highlights school's FITT program, builds towards 5K run scheduled for May p7



Register now for Park & Rec Baseball and Softball

By: Josh McBrayer
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CULLMAN – It may still be winter, but the infield dirt was spread and the grass manicured as children lined up for Cullman City Park and Recreation's 2014 baseball/softball season registration.

CP&R baseball/softball season is a chance for many youth to get out of the house and away from video games to enjoy the fresh air, exercise, and sweet smells that a night on the diamond provides. Between 600 and 700 children from Cullman and the surrounding areas take to the baseball/softball diamonds on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday to take part in America's Pastime.

The ages of teams vary vastly as the CP&R strive to provide a friendly, fun environment for children of all ages. The ages and teams include 4 year old boys/girls (together) T-ball, 5 year old boys and 5 year old girls T-ball, 6 year old coach pitch baseball, 6 year old coach pitch softball, 7-8 year old coach pitch baseball, 7-8 year old coach pitch softball, 9-10 year old baseball, 9-10 year old softball, 11-12 year old baseball, 11-12 year old softball, 13-14 year old baseball, and 13-14 year old softball. Games are played at the Field of Miracles and Heritage Park. The older divisions will also travel to fields across the county including trips to Vinemont, Good Hope, and Fairview.

Youth Baseball & Softball Registration is open through February 15 and is also available online for the first time at http://www.active.com/cullman-al/baseball/baseball-leagues/cullman-parks-and-recreation-baseball- p4

'Dual enrollment' scholarships can provide answer for workforce needs

» Programs allow high school students to simultaneously attend community college

By: Kristen Holmes
WSCC Contributor

HANCEVILLE – In his Jan. 14 State of the State address, Governor Robert Bentley expressed a desire to expand programs that allow Alabama students to attend a community college while still in high school.

These "dual enrollment" programs, when combined with technical training offered by Alabama Community College System institutions, have the potential to transform education and workforce development in the state, according to Chancellor Mark Heinrich.

Such a move would cost-effectively accelerate the development of a pipeline of new skilled workers in Alabama, while potentially lowering the state's high school drop-out rate, Heinrich said. Figures show that students involved in technical education programs have a high rate of completion.

"Expanding dual enrollment by using scholarships for students in technical programs would be a game-changer for the State of Alabama," Heinrich said. "If we make dual enrollment even more accessible and make it free, we would give these students a head-start on pursuing a career.

Last year, ACCS schools provided 3,500 scholarships to Alabama high school students in career technical dual enrollment programs. Additional funding for scholarships p6

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Cullman High School receives new Wolfe microscope

» New high-tech microscopes are gradually replacing aging equipment from the 1970s thanks to funding from Cullman City Schools Foundation, Operation Roundup, Walmart

Contributed by: Dawn Klinger



» A student in Mrs. Donaldson's Biology class looks through a new Wolfe Contour cordless binocular microscope during a lab activity.

CULLMAN - Cullman High School students in Mrs. Jackie Donaldson's Biology class are using another new Wolfe Contour cordless binocular microscope purchased with funding from Cullman City Schools Foundation, during a lab activity.

These Wolfe microscopes are designed for students in grades 9 through college and offer the most advanced technology that Wolfe has to offer, replacing Cullman High School's outdated microscopes from the 1970s.

Cullman City Schools Foundation, along with Operation Roundup and Walmart, has been replacing these microscopes over the course of several grant cycles due to the high cost of the new microscopes.

Mrs. Donaldson now has twelve new Wolfe microscopes in her classroom.

New rule prompts WSCC to offer Medical Assistant Review Course

By: Gail Crutchfield
WSCC Contributor

HANCEVILLE — The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) recently posted a new "CMS Rule for Meaningful Order Entry" in regard to order entry by medical personnel at the direction of a physician.

According to the final rule issued Aug. 12, 2012, by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, only "credentialed medical assistants" are able to enter orders into the Computerized Provider Order Entry (CPOE) system.

In order for medical professionals to meet this rule, Wallace State Continuing Education has developed an online course called "Medical Assisting Review."

This program has been granted prior approval by the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) for 20 continuing education units. Granting approval in no way constitutes endorsement by the AAMA of the program content or the program's sponsor.

This course will assist medical offices in preparing their employees for a Medical Assistant credentialing examination and/or offer continuing education units (CEU) to keep their Certified Medical Assisting (CMA AAMA) credential current.

The course also provides each participant with necessary information required to meet guidelines set forth by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

It will review administrative and clinical functions performed in the medical office.

Topics will include those listed in the CMA (AAMA), Registered Medical Assistant (RMA), Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA), and National Certified Medical Assistant (NCMA) examination content outlines.

Only participants who meet the qualifications for completion of a medical assisting credentialing exam or recertification by continuing education for CMA (AAMA) credential are allowed to register for the course.

Review the current guidelines for CMA (AAMA), RMA, CCMA, and NCMA. Documentation will be required from your employer of your eligibility to take the course.

"This 20-hour online review/CEU course will be available online, complete with lectures and activities designed for learning," according to Connie Allen, facilitator of the course.

The online course will begin Feb. 7 running through April 11, 2014. Cost per participant is $130, plus book $32.

The deadline to register is Jan. 27, 2014.

To register, call 256-352-7826.

CCS enjoys the Fun Times of Homecoming

By: Noah Chandler
noah@cullmansense.com



» Front row: Jed Hollis, Madalynn Bartlett, and Rachael Howze (principal)
» Second Row: Emily Swader, Ava Claire Floyd, Logan Hudson, Addison McPhillips, and Braxton Floyd
» Back Row: Noah Jennings, Dylan Holland, Tori Crauswell, Evan Brothers, and Mrs. Leeanna Smith (1st grade teacher)

CULLMAN – While many of the county basketball teams were preoccupied with the Cullman County Basketball Tournament, the students at Cullman Christian School enjoyed the fun times during the school's weeklong homecoming celebrations.

"We are very proud of not just our student athletes but all of our CCS students. Each one is a blessing to the school," Leeanna Smith, first grade teacher at CCS, said.

The homecoming festivities included; Pajama Day, Disney character day, Beach day, Good ole day and Guys in ties Girls in pearls day.

"The enthusiasm and comradery between students is apparent in the pictures," Smith said.

"I would like to invite the public to come visit and see what we are all about."

34th Annual Appeal Underway at St. Bernard with $350,000 goal

By: Joyce Nix
St. Bernard Contributor

CULLMAN – During the month of November, St. Bernard kicked off the 34th Annual Appeal.

This yearly event helps maintain St. Bernard's day-to-day operation by supporting the operating budgets of St. Bernard Abbey and School.

"This annual appeal is vital for our financial well-being," said Fr. Marcus, Director of Development. "It provides an opportunity for our donors to directly affect the life of the monks as well as our ministries, especially our school."

The goal for the 34th Annual Appeal has been set at $350,000. The Abbey and the School both benefit from this fund.

"We invite everyone to be a part of the St. Bernard family and join us in our efforts to provide the best possible learning environment for our students. Because of the appeal, the Abbey will be able to educate our new monastic members, maintain a healthy fiscal environment, care for the monks in the infirmary, and help us plan for the future," continued Fr. Marcus.

A tax deductible contribution may be made through Paypal by clicking on the "Donate" button online at www.stbernardprep.com or by mailing a check made payable to:

St. Bernard Prep School
1600 St. Bernard Drive SE
Cullman, AL 35055.

Follow us on Twitter: @CullmanSense

What's Online

Loft 212: Cullman's Premiere Event Space



Loft 212 is Cullman's hottest new event venue. Located in the heart of downtown, this beautiful space is perfect for weddings, parties or corporate meetings. Owners Loni and Todd Floyd and Jodi and Jeremy Hopper are excited to offer this space to anyone hosting...

qrne.ws/153

Senate Confirms Lt. Governor Kay Ivey's Appointment to Ethics Commission

The Alabama Senate confirmed Ms. Larkin Martin of Courtland to the Alabama Ethics Commission recently. Lieutenant Governor Kay Ivey appointed Ms. Martin to the board April 17, 2013.

qrne.ws/154

Cullman Electric Cooperative members can expect high bills due to extreme cold weather

As another winter storm brings sustained sub-freezing temperatures to North Alabama for the second time this month, Cullman Electric Cooperative wants members to be prepared...

qrne.ws/155

Alabama's December 2013 Unemployment Rate Drops to 6.1%; Cullman at 4.8%

By: Tara Hutchison

MONTGOMERY—Alabama Department of Labor Commissioner Tom Surtees announced today that Alabama's December 2013 preliminary unemployment rate is 6.1%, down from November's rate of 6.2%, and below December 2012's rate of 6.8%.

December's rate represents 129,743 unemployed persons, down from 132,301 in November, and 145,613 in December 2012.

The last time the state's unemployment rate was at or below 6.1% was in October 2008, when the rate was 5.9%.

"While we are certainly pleased to announce that our unemployment rate is at a five year low, we know that we are not in a perfect situation, employment wise," said Surtees. "There are still more than 120,000 Alabamians who want a job, and we must focus our efforts on helping those people find work."

"We continue to see record numbers of job orders on the state's free online jobs database, www.joblink.alabama.gov, and I'd like to personally encourage anyone who is searching for a job to visit the site, or, for more personalized and targeted assistance, visit their local career center."

Approximately 18,000 active job orders were placed on JobLink in December, and nearly 50,000 job ads were placed online statewide over various online job sites, including JobLink.

Free services provided at Alabama's career centers include: résumé assistance, job search assistance, educational assistance, job training, and many other services. A listing of career centers can be found at www.labor.alabama.gov or on JobLink.

"Although we saw a slight decrease in the number of jobs in the economy in December, over the year, we saw a gain of more than 10,000 jobs," continued Surtees.

"Our manufacturing industry continues to grow at one of the best rates in the country, adding nearly 6,000 jobs to Alabama's economy in 2013."

Wage and salary employment decreased 1,400 from November to December 2013, but increased 10,500 over the past 12 months. The industries with the largest increases were: manufacturing (+5,900), leisure and hospitality (+5,600), trade, transportation, and utilities (+3,900), and construction (+400).

Counties with the lowest unemployment rates are: Shelby County at 3.8%, Lee County at 4.7%, and St. Clair and Cullman Counties at 4.8%. The counties with the highest unemployment rates are: Wilcox County at 14.2%, Bullock County at 11.6%, and Perry County at 11.4%.

Governor Bentley Declares State of Emergency Due to Propane Gas Shortage

By: Jennifer Ardis

MONTGOMERY - Governor Robert Bentley recently declared a State of Emergency for all Alabama counties due to the threat of propane gas shortage because of the extreme winter weather in Alabama.

"With life threatening cold temperatures expected once again, it is important for Alabamians to have the necessary heating resources available for survival," Governor Robert Bentley said. "This State of Emergency will help Alabamians have an uninterrupted supply of propane gas and other home heating fuels during this period of winter weather."

The emergency declaration enables the Governor to invoke various emergency preparedness measures, including Alabama's price gouging law.

It will also suspend the rules and regulations regarding the purchase and sale of propane gas directed by the propane gas industry, and allow propane tank owners to purchase propane from any company that sells it.

To help with the supply and demand of propane gas, the State of Emergency will lift the federal transportation motor carrier laws and allow greater flexibility in the delivery to homes, schools, and businesses.

States Try to Raise Some Dough by Taxing Uncooked Pizza-to-Go

By: Elaine S. Povich • Stateline

Call it the great "take 'n' bake" pizza sales tax dilemma.

States are grappling with whether sales taxes should be charged for pizzas or other food assembled uncooked in restaurants and sold to consumers who then cook the food elsewhere.

Is that pizza considered prepared food, like that sold by pizza restaurants? Or is it a grocery item, like the frozen pizzas in supermarkets? In most states, food that's sold ready-to-eat is taxed; food sold in the grocery store and cooked at home is not.

That sounds as complicated as the "candy" definition states had to settle. After grappling with that one for years, the Streamlined Sales Tax Governing Board, which attempts to regularize sales taxes among states, decided that candy is defined as something without flour in it, and candy-like items made with flour as an ingredient are defined as "food." Most states tax candy or snacks, but not food. So, a Twix bar is food and a Hershey bar is not, at least according to the official tax definition.

That leads back to the pizza issue and Papa Murphy's Take 'n' Bake Pizza company, which raised it. The company has stores in nearly 40 states with different policies, and wants the issue settled.

Right now, the 24 states that subscribe to the Streamlined Sales Tax Governing Board's guidelines are split on whether to tax the pre-assembled but uncooked pizza sold in restaurants, even though a board committee decided uncooked pizza is prepared food.

It may seem like a small thing. But states are seeing sales taxes decline as more purchases are made on the Internet (most are untaxed) and are looking in usual places for taxes on services or other places for revenue. The "take 'n bake pizza" debate could be the one of many potential controversial levies on goods and services.

Janet Guenzel, a Papa Murphy's 15-year franchise owner, said taxing her pizza would definitely hurt business. In her letter to the tax board, Guenzel said, "No Papa Murphy's Take & Bake pizza can be consumed in our stores. We have no ovens!! No tables, no chairs, no eating utensils, no napkins, etc. The pizza can also NOT be consumed in a customer's vehicle (such as a fast food burger) or any other premise without an oven."

Another question that hangs in the balance is whether customers can use food stamps to buy the uncooked pizzas. In general, the federal program prohibits using food stamps to pay for prepared food. Guenzel said 40 percent of the business at one of her stores comes from food stamps.

Taxing Supermarket Food

States already tax groceries to varying degrees, according to the Federation of Tax Administrators.

- Alabama and Mississippi tax food purchased in supermarkets, the only states to do so without either offering credits for the poor or lower tax rates for food.
- Six states tax groceries at lower rates than other goods: Arkansas, Illinois, Missouri, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia.
- Five states — Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Oklahoma, and South Dakota— tax groceries fully but offer credits or rebates.
- Thirty-two states and the District of Columbia don't tax food purchased in supermarkets.
- Five states don't have sales taxes at all.

The Tax Foundation, an anti-tax think tank, said the sales tax base on overall goods has shrunk from 60 percent of the U.S. economy in the 1960s, to 30 percent today. As a result, states are looking elsewhere for revenue, including taxing services and expanding the tax on goods.

According to the foundation, 21 states tax repair services, 19 tax landscaping, 18 tax cleaning services, six tax lobbying, three tax legal services, and two tax medical services. Uncooked food for purchase is one of those areas states are examining. But what falls into the taxable category and what doesn't?

"It's a very, very, very difficult line to draw," said Michael Mazerov, senior fellow at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a progressive think-tank which studies state tax issues. "I know this because 16 years ago, I was on (another) multi-state tax commission, and I tried to write a definition of 'prepared food' that made some sense. It was extremely difficult then and now, with the evolution of the food industry, it's even harder."

It is unclear how much revenue taxing uncooked pizza would bring to states due to multiple laws governing taxation of food and the varying number of "take 'n' bake" pizza outlets in the states.

Defining Pizza

The Streamlined Sales Tax Governing Board defines prepared food as that which is in a "heated state," contains two or more ingredients combined by the seller, or is sold with utensils. But the interpretation of that definition is slippery. About half the 24 states that subscribe to the board's guidelines say that definition applies to take-and-bake pizza, and the others do not.

By a vote of six to one, the Compliance Review and Interpretations Committee of the Streamlined Sales Tax Governing Board, agreed that the uncooked pizza met the definition of prepared food and should be taxed. Unsurprisingly, the one panel member who dissented, Dan Noble, director of the Wyoming Department of Revenue, represents a state that doesn't tax the pizza.

"We had conversations with Pizza Hut and some of the other ready-to-eat folks, and they asked why we would allow (uncooked pizza to go untaxed)," Noble said. "We said if you sell a raw pizza, it's not taxed either." The recommendation went to the Governing Board. It couldn't decide.

Eleven states — Arkansas, Kentucky, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, and West Virginia — consider take-and-bake pizza prepared food, according to Myles Vosberg, director of the North Dakota tax administration division and chairman of the governing board's compliance and interpretation committee.

But Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Nevada, Vermont, and Wyoming do not, Vosberg said. Ohio exempts all food consumed off the restaurant premises, while South Dakota and Kansas tax both prepared food and groceries, he said.

Of the two remaining states, Georgia's sales tax regulation appears to tax the pizza, although it does not specifically address pizza. Oklahoma taxes all food at 4.5 percent.

"The states that are looking at it as not prepared food, say it's not in a ready to eat condition," Vosberg said by way of explanation. "The other states say well, it's prepared, even if it's not ready to eat."

No Decision For Now

Because there is such as split, the board is considering a "toggle rule," which would allow states to do whatever they please. While it undermines the purpose of the board, it would appear to be the only option at this point.

"The SSTGB did not take any action on the take-n-bake pizza issue during the SSTGB's teleconference meeting held in December," said spokesman Craig Johnson. "Instead, a workgroup made up of various state and business personnel was formed to draft a proposed toggle amendment to the Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement definition of prepared food."

The toggle is anticipated to provide states with the option of including or excluding take-n-bake pizzas (and similar products) from the definition of prepared food. The rule will be reviewed at the May governing board meeting, he said.

Stateline is a nonpartisan, nonprofit news service of the Pew Charitable Trusts that provides daily reporting and analysis on trends in state policy.

West Point is 2014 Cullman County Freshman Champion

By: Johnny Thornton
Sports Reporter

HANCEVILLE – With Connor Marsh unstoppable in the low post, the West Point Warriors started championship Saturday at the 2014 Cullman County Basketball Tournament winning the freshmen crown by defeating Holly Pond 38-20 at Tom Drake Coliseum.

Marsh knocked down five field goals, all coming in the paint and was a force on the rebounding department.

He set the tone early then went to work at the start of the second half to put the game out of reach for the No. 1 seed Warriors. Scoreless in the first two minutes of the game, that changed by the 2:00 mark with the game tied on four different situations.

Cameron Moore drove to the basket and hit a shot with a minute to go to break the tie. West Point scored again before time expired and led after the opening six minutes 12-8.

The Warriors had a good first period shooting the ball, converting six of 12 attempts while the Broncos were four of 11 from the floor.

Holly Pond couldn't get a shot to fall in the second with West Point going on an 8-0 run in the quarter to extend the lead. A three-pointer by Michael Keller off an assist from Brandon Farley before time expired sent the Warriors to a 20-8 advantage at the break, the largest of the game at that point.

By the time the third ended, the Warriors maintained a double digit lead, heading to the fourth on command by the score of 27-15. Marsh scored his sixth basket on a rebound follow with 4:00 to go as West Point went up 31-16.

Marsh ended the championship game with 15 points on six of nine shooting, three of four at the line, and 13 rebounds. Moore had a hot hand too with 12 points and two baskets from three-point range. Keller had three, while David Ross and Alexis Hernadez two.

Leading Holly Pond was Michael Lambert with eight, Kelby Alexander seven, and Caleb Jones and Zach Naler two.

ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM:

West Point
Connor Marsh
Cameron Moore

Holly Pond
Kelby Alexander

Good Hope
Jesse Lee

Hanceville
Kaine Yates

Lady Broncos defeat Cold Springs to take Cullman County Varsity Girls title

By: Josh McBrayer • josh@cullmansense.com

HANCEVILLE – The Holly Pond Lady Broncos came into Tom Drake Coliseum determined to leave Cullman County champions and looked like they were well on their way in the first.

Holly Pond left the nets smoking in the first quarter, opening up on a 12-1 run that had Cold Springs reeling. Meg Gambrill had six of the first 10 Lady Bronco points.

However Cold Springs didn't roll over and quit. The Lady Eagles were able to cut into the Holly Pond lead toward the end of the quarter, but they still trailed 14-5 after one.

Cold Springs settled down in the second but Holly Pond continued to shoot well, outscoring Cold Springs 10-5 on the quarter to take a 24-10 lead at the half.

Holly Pond head coach Scott Adams could be heard saying one phrase over and over again in the third quarter, "Be patient," and the Lady Broncos took it to heart. Holly Pond showed great ball movement running an offense known as motion, to move the ball around the perimeter while looking for the open, high percentage shot.

It worked as Holly Pond upped their lead from 14 to 21 heading into the final quarter of the varsity girls championship.

Riding the great first half performance, the Holly Pond Lady Broncos cruised to a 45-25 victory over the Cold Springs Lady Eagles to lay claim to the 2014 Varsity Girls Cullman County Basketball Championship.

ALL-COUNTY TEAM

Holly Pond
- Rachel Finley
- Meg Gambrill
- Natasha Holcombe

Cold Springs
- Chloe Harbison
- Caitlyn Hall

Fairview
- Taylor Yeager

West Point
- Madison Rusk

Good Hope
- Katelyn Bishop
- Kacy Thomas

ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM

Cold Springs
- Chloe Harbison
- Caityn Hall

Fairview
- Kennedy Trimble

Holly Pond
- Meg Gambrill
- Natasha Holcombe

Good Hope
- Kacy Thomas
- Celeste Whisenant

CHAROLETTE CUMMINGS MEMORIAL SCHOLORSHIP WINNER
- Vinemont - Hanna Adamson

BILL SHELTON AWARD WINNER
- Holly Pond - Natasha Holcombe

Holly Pond claims the County Junior Varsity Crown

By: Johnny Thornton
Sports Reporter

HANCEVILLE – So much for close ball games. Holly Pond started out strong in the Cullman County junior varsity championship, clinching the crown by outgunning Hanceville 51-21 at Wallace State's Tom Drake Coliseum.

In a matchup of No. 1 vs. No. 2, Holly Pond got up on Hanceville early and started to pull away by the time the game was late in the second period.

With a 13-5 lead at the end of the first, Holly Pond moved up on the scoreboard by a 23-7 margin as the game was down to the 2-minute mark in the half.

The Broncos had contained Hanceville's power player, JJ Washington, allowing him two field goals in five tries before the half ended.

Seven Broncos had scored by the end of the half, showing a balanced attack in which they were producing points on field goals, treys and at the foul line.

The score at the half stood Holly Pond 23, Hanceville 9. Hanceville was held to four of 19 from the field with no made treys in seven attempts.

The Broncos had produced eight field goals in the half on 25 attempts.

After Hanceville had cut the lead to 26-15 early in the third, the Broncos went back to work and finished the quarter on a 16-4 and held a comfortable 42-19 lead with seven minutes left to play in this championship clash.

Matt Cahoon had a fine championship with 18 points on seven of 10 shooting, three of four from the line and seven rebounds.

Drew Jones got 13, Landen Walker six, Bailey Smith five, Dylan Basenburg and Tyler Townson four, and Dawson Foust one.

JJ Washington was tops for Hanceville with 12 points and 13 rebounds, Jose Orozoco had five, Issac Weissend three, and Jordan Peoples two.

ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM

Holly Pond
- Matt Cahoon
- Drew Jones

Hanceville
- JJ Washington
- Issac Weissend

Vinemont
- Trey Waldrep

West Point
- Justin O' Neil

AHSAA Reclassification affects county teams

By: Johnny Thornton
Sports Reporter

MONTGOMERY - Changes have been made by the Alabama High School Athletic Association when the Central Board of Control announced Wednesday reclassification for the next two years beginning in the final.

A seventh classification was added with the 32 largest schools by student enrollment making up the new setup.

This is the first time that a new class was added since 1984-85 when the AHSAA went from four classes to six.

Because of the addition Cullman County schools will be going through some changes. Cullman High School is now a 6A program and will compete in football in Region 8 with Athens, Austin, Decatur, Hartselle, Florence, and Muscle Shoals.

West Point remains in Class 5A but has a different region than from the previous two seasons.

The Warriors are in Region 8 and have Ardmore, Columbia, J.O. Johnson, Lawrence County, Pope John Paul, and Russellville to face. Columbia, Johnson, and John Paul are schools based out of the Huntsville area.

Fairview moves up to Region 7 of 5A and is joined by Boaz, Butler, Douglas, Etowah, Guntersville, Madison County, and Randolph.

Douglas and Guntersville have been the Aggies' regular region opponents for the last four years.

On to 4A is the Good Hope Raiders. The Raiders are in Region 7 with defending state champion Oneonta along with DAR, J.B. Pennington, Locust Fork, North Jackson, Priceville, and Westminster Christian. Oneonta, Pennington, and Locust Fork come out of Blount County and return to the Raiders' schedule for the first time in many seasons.

Hanceville, Holly Pond, and Vinemont are teamed together in 3A, Region 5 with Susan Moore, Winfield, Winston County, and Oakman.

This is good for three county teams with the Bulldogs getting to face the Broncos back on the gridiron while the Eagles and Broncos are playing for the first time in over half a decade.

Cold Springs gets defending state champion Tanner as part of 2A, Region 6. The Eagles resume rivalries with Addison and Falkville and will have other regional battles versus Southeastern, Sumiton Christian, and Tarrant.

Tarrant was once a solid 4A program from Jefferson County and now has dropped to 2A with a decrease in enrollment from the previous reclassification.

While the sport of football will remain regional play, the other sports will continue to compete in area games.

The area and sectional alignments that are under the new reclassification will be announced on May 1st according to a report from the AHSAA.



Lady Broncos knock off No.1 seed Cold Springs in County Finals

By: Johnny Thornton
Sports Reporter

HANCEVILLE – Upsets are part of tournament basketball. In a hard fought battle for the Cullman County junior varsity championship, No. 3 Holly Pond stunned No. 1 Cold Springs 52-47 at Wallace State's Tom Drake Colisuem Saturday afternoon.

Cold Springs had gone through the seeding process of not losing to a county opponent while Holly Pond was third best at the time of the pairings at 3-2.

For consecutive days, the Lady Broncos had upset the top two seeds in this year's event.

Shooting well in the first stanza ignited Holly Pond to a 16-8 lead. The Lady Broncos got treys from Taylor Oslin (2), Ruth Horton and Haley Higginbotham and two field goals by Adair Gillilan in finishing the first hitting six 13 attempts.

Down 19-9 in the second, Cold Springs answered with a comeback, closing the margin to 19-16 with seven consecutive points.

Holly Pond moved out to a 25-18 advantage as Cold Springs again cut into the deficit and was down 28-23 at the half.

The Lady Broncos were very productive in the third with six field goals, three from long distance as they went on a 17-7 advantage and increased their lead to 45-30 by the time the stanza ended.

Going into the fourth, 24 of the 45 points scored by the Lady Broncos had come from three-point shooting.

A basket by Kaleigh Merring off an assist from Camryn Crider brought Cold Springs back to single numbers, trailing 47-39 with 3:40 remaining.

Holly Pond suffered a big loss when Horton went out with her fifth foul with a minute to play.

Cold Springs narrow the deficit to 48-47 with 25 seconds left on a free throw by Hannah Watson.

A free throw by Tankersley pushed the lead to 49-47 then Adair Gillilan made two to increase the cushion to 50-47. Free throws in the final five seconds by Tankersley iced the upset.

Horton was the main weapon with 13 for the Lady Broncos but had support.

Gillilan and Taylor Oslin scored 11, Tankersley and Haley Higginbotham added six and Lauren Camp five.

For Cold Springs, Crider netted 15, Watson tossed in 10, Kaleigh Merring seven, Destiny Campbell six, Claire Harbison five and Rilee White two.

ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM

Holly Pond
- Ruth Horton
- Taylor Tankersley
- Adair Gillilan

Cold Springs
- Camryn Crider
- Destiny Campbell

Fairview
- Jada Golden

Good Hope
- Jessica King
- Sadie Abbott

Boys final comes down to the wire

By: Josh McBrayer
josh@cullmansense.com

HANCEVILLE - Wide open is the only way to describe the opening frame of the boys final that featured the Holly Pond Broncos and the Cold Springs Eagles. Holly Pond jumped out to an early 5-0 lead before Cold Springs came roaring back to tighten the game up.

The Broncos would then take over the quarter with the outside shooting of Gunter Morris and the penetrating drives of Colby Adams. Austin Smith dominated the boards inside and even got in on the three point action, baking in a deep three as the buzzer sounded to end the first quarter with Holly Pond up 23-11.

Thanks to the hot hand of Austin Moore and Layne Rice, Cold Springs quickly pulled to within five on the back of a 9-2 run.

Tristan Chambers added a layup to push the run to 11-2 forcing a timeout by Mitch Morris and the Holly pond Broncos.

With two minutes to go in the half, Cold Spring had closed the gap to just two points before Austin Smith went to work. Smith scored five of the last seven Holly pond points to help push the Bronco lead back to nine at the halfway point.

A 9-2 run to start the second half knotted the game a 41, pulling Cold Springs even with Holly Pond for the first time since tip off.

After trading unsuccessful possessions, Tyler Rice buried a pair of free throws to give Cold Springs their first lead with three minutes left in the third quarter.

Following an offensive foul form Holly Pond's Morris, big man Josh Freeman stripped a three point basket, extending the run to 14-2 and the lead to five. Holly Pond then outscored the Eagles 5-2 to end the quarter down just two.

The fourth quarter packed a season's worth of action into eight short minutes. Back and forth with points, the game was once again tied, 54-54, with 4:46 left in the final game of the 2014 Cullman County Championship. Big buckets at both ends, Smith for Holly Pond and Layne Rice for Cold Springs kept the game tied and very much in doubt with 2:53 left to play.

On a call that had the crowd in an uproar, Morris was called for a foul although he was the one with the ball and the one thrown to the ground. Chambers hit the one and one to put the Eagles up two.

He was fouled again at the offensive end and again hit both, putting Cold Springs up by four with 1:52 left to play. Holly Pond then scored four straight to tie the game yet again with 1:18 remaining. Out of a timeout, Rice was fouled and hit both free throws.

Holly Pond then brought the ball up the floor but missed the shot and Cold Springs secured the rebound.

Coming up the floor, the ball wound up in Adam Carney's hands and he drained a three from the left wing to put Cold Springs up by five, 66-61. Holly Pond would score one more bucket but it would not be enough as Cold Springs upset the #1 seed by a score of 66-63.

ALL-COUNTY TEAM

Cold Springs
- Layne Rice
- Tristan Chambers

Holly Pond
- Austin Smith
- Gunter Morris
- Colby Adams

West Point
- Ryder Jones
- Tristan Dubberly

Vinemont
- Lance Stanley

Fairview
- Elijah Garrison

Hanceville
- Keith Twitty
- Brontae Harris

Cold Springs
- Layne Rice
- Tristan Chambers

Holly Pond
- Colby Adams
- Austin Smith

Hanceville
- Brontae Harris
- Chros Smith

ALL TOURNAMENT TEAM **West Point**
Jones
- Tristan Dubberly

ELI THOMAS MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP
- Andrew Cofer - Good Hope

JOE SHULTS AWARD
- Colby Adams - Holly Pond

Box Scores for the week of Jan. 20

MONDAY, JAN. 20TH
County Tournament

GIRLS Cold Springs 19,46,62,67
Vinemont 2,2,2,8

BOYS Cold Springs 19,46,62,67
Vinemont 2,2,2,8

TUESDAY, JAN. 21ST
County Tournament

GIRLS Hanceville 10,14,19,31
Good Hope 9,22,38,50

BOYS Vinemont 9,23,28,34
West Point 13,39,53,66

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 22ND
County Tournament

GIRLS West Point 4,11,21,45
Fairview 9,20,28,48

BOYS Cold Springs 9,15,34,49
Fairview 10,21,26,36

THURSDAY, JAN. 23RD
County Tournament

GIRLS H. Pond 16,23,42,47 • Fairview 0,2,9,17
G.Hope 9,27,34,46 OT • C.Springs 13,24,35,46 OT

BOYS Cullman 15,40,58,77
Muscle Shoals 17,38,55,68

FRIDAY, JAN. 24TH
County Tournament

BOYS Hanceville 11,29,44,55
Holly Pond 14,27,56,66
West Point 9,17,32,49
Cold Springs 10,30,46,61

SATURDAY, JAN. 25TH
County Tournament

GIRLS Holly Pond 14,24,37,45
Cold Springs 5,10,16,25

BOYS Holly Pond 23,39,46,63
Cold Springs 11,32,48,66

Registration (from Front)

softball-and-t-ball-2014.

Youth softball and baseball is open to boys and girls ages 4-14. Registration is $90 and includes a hat, jersey, and trophy in addition to the season. Practices start in March and registration is also open at the Civic Center. For more information call 256-734-9157.

The CP&R baseball and softball programs are a great way for parents to get involved as well. Anyone looking to volunteer as a coach can check the box on their child's registration form or they can call Heritage Park at 256-739-9931.

"Cullman Parks & Recreation baseball and softball is one of our staples in parks and recreation," said Waid Harbison, Marketing Director for Cullman Parks and Recreation.

"We have several thousand people in and out of our parks on our youth league nights, with parents coaching, families watching, and kids playing. Baseball and softball brings families together for great quality time in a safe fun-filled environment. The program is also great to help build athletes for future careers in high school and beyond with hundreds of successful athletes getting their start with parks and recreation ball."

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Missoula Children's Theatre Comes to Cullman

» Cullman's Talent Lights up the Stage with Rapunzel Show

By: Kate Mullaney
kate@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN - The Missoula Children's Theatre was in town last week, bringing a refreshing taste of theatre to Cullman. A talented young group of kids auditioned for Rapunzel this past Monday, rehearsed all week, and then performed the musical on Saturday at 2 and 6 p.m.

"I've still been able to get my school done this week," says Sarah Smith, 18. Smith played Monique, Rapunzel's mother, in the play. "We just come in after school and then rehearse until 8 p.m. usually. It's a pretty good chunk of time, but we usually get as much rehearsing done as we need to and we feel really accomplished at the end of the day. It's a lot of fun."

Wendy's spokesperson Morgan Smith made a special appearance for the cast of Rapunzel. She spoke to the cast at their rehearsal on Friday and at their performances on Saturday. She also signed autographs at the end of both performances. She is a Cullman native herself and even participated in Missoula when she was young. Missoula sparked her interest in theatre. "I knew I wanted to do this at an early age," Smith said. "When I was in fifth or sixth grade, Missoula came to town. It was the very first time they came to town actually. I auditioned for Snow White and I got a part. It was my first time doing a full production and collaborating with the professionals that Missoula sends and other children in the community and tackling a role, learning lines, and doing it all in a week. It was so exciting to me, and I was hooked after that."



» Local children perform a version of Rapunzel after tireless rehearsing with Missoula Children's Theatre

Smith is passionate about offering art programs to children and was happy to come to Cullman to speak to the cast of Rapunzel about show business.

"I was so flattered that they asked me to come speak to the kids. It's so important to support these kinds of programs, especially in a small town so I jumped at the opportunity to clear my schedule and come to town in support of these children. I also hoped it would drum up just a little bit of buzz in the community so maybe they can come back more than once a year," Smith said.

"Maybe this will continue to grow. I think these kinds of outreach touring theatre companies are so vital. They're picking up the slack when funding is getting cut and art programs are getting slashed in schools. It's so nice to have this where these children can come sing and dance and put on a show."

The show itself was a hit. The Cullman Civic Center was packed with a happy audience. This version of Rapunzel was set in France and it was filled with ogres, mushrooms, wood elves, pixies, unicorns, and even a troll. Rapunzel's parents, as well as a confused prince, are determined to rescue her as she is in the grasp of Madame Gothel who wishes to make a wig out of her long, blonde hair. Although Rapunzel's friends try to help her, Madame Gothel gets the corn and potato to be her spies to help her prevent Rapunzel from leaving. Rapunzel faces the troll, billy goats, gremlins, three bears, and a beaver in her efforts to escape Madame Gothel. In the end, Rapunzel is set free and Madame Gothel even learns an important lesson in kindness and friendship.

Missoula Children's Theatre has been spreading theatre around small towns and cities for 40 years. They work with about 65,000 children per year in over 1,200 communities and reach out to all 50 states as well as 17 countries.

Local Veterans and civilians find camaraderie on the dance floor each Saturday at local VFW post

By: Chelsea Sparks

CULLMAN - Saturday night dances are a regular occurrence at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) post in Cullman. Every Saturday from 7 to 10 p.m. veterans and civilians alike can be found laughing and two-stepping their way across the dance floor. A closer look will reveal that these veterans are getting a lot more for $5 than just filling their dance card.

Jonathon Davis, 29, is an Iraq war veteran who served three tours. He has been with the local VFW post since June 2012.

He said that the VFW does many things for the community including providing scholarships to seniors and awards to public servants. But the most important thing that the post does, however, is help new veterans that are coming home adjust to their new lives and offer them a feeling of brotherhood.

"It brought back that feeling of camaraderie," he said. "It feels like I have somewhere I belong."

His wife, Robin, also talked about the transformation Jonathon underwent after he started attending meetings and gatherings at the VFW. She said that it was very difficult for the both of them. Jonathan sustained injuries in the war and was struggling with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD.)

"When he first came out of the military he was lost, literally lost," she said. "And he actually didn't come to join. When he first came here it was to get information."

She went on to say that it was after that initial visit that he told his wife he wanted to go back.

"The structure was the number one thing. I didn't realize how much he needed that," she said of what the VFW has given him. "There is a brotherhood and a sisterhood that comes with that military life, and if you never wear that uniform, you will never understand it."

"The military is a family. It is a tight knit family and when you leave, you lose that," Robin said. "He came here and everything changed. Everything he was missing, he got back. The VFW does a lot of good for their veterans."

The message that both Jonathon and Robin want people to take away from this is how important the VFW is to veterans coming home and how vital it is for the community to support it as well.

When asked if he thought the VFW was a positive place for a soldier coping with PTSD, Jonathan's answer was an emphatic and resounding, "Yes."

He went on to say that he hoped that more soldiers from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars would come and participate. Out of the many members they have, ranging from World War II to present day veterans, there are probably less than 15 active members that served in the Iraq war.



» A local couple enjoy the VFW post's weekly Saturday dances

Jonathon's story is an inspiring tale and a true testament to the work that this VFW post is doing. He and his wife really want to encourage anyone to come show out and show some support, but they especially want returning veterans to hear Jonathon's story and hopefully find the encouragement they need to come and feel that old camaraderie and brotherhood once again.

In addition to the dances that are open to the public on Saturday nights, they also host karaoke on Wednesday nights for $5 per person.

Accident (from Front)

said Tucker Jr. had lost consciousness and soon passed away. The individual who shot Tucker Jr. was transported to a nearby hospital, to be treated for emotional distress, according to Bartlett.

"The person who shot our victim will not face charges at this time," he said. "This is just a sad accident that has a whole family torn apart. We just ask people keep them in their prayers."

A total of seven individuals, five males and two females, had taken a short boat ride to access the area where they were hunting for deer. Bartlett said the shooter's identity is being withheld at this time due to the nature of the incident and the close family connection to Tucker Jr. "We are not releasing the person's name at this time, but we can say that he is related to the victim through marriage," he said.

For updates on this story visit CullmanSense.com.

Scholarships (from Front)

could result a dramatic rise in that number by removing a financial barrier for many parents who otherwise could not pursue the dual enrollment option for their child.

Today, due to limited funding, less than 10 percent of eligible Alabama high school students are able to receive career technical dual enrollment scholarships, through an ACCS institution. Expanding scholarships could result in the participation rate climbing as high as 50 percent, Heinrich said. "Dual enrollment is a great program with tremendous benefits," he added. "It's a win-win situation for the high schools, our community colleges, and for businesses across Alabama." Expanding scholarships for career technical dual enrollment is an ACCS budget priority for the upcoming fiscal year, and the system is working closely with the K-12 system to broaden participation in the program.

The Best Local Places to Stay Indoors This Season

By: Kate Mullaney
kate@cullmansense.com

Don't let cold weather keep you indoors this season. Even though it's the middle of winter, there are still plenty of ways to entertain yourself or socialize with your friends. Ladies and gentlemen, here is a list of the best places in Cullman to stay indoors.

Go to the movies. In this age of technology, Netflix, Hulu, and other websites have become the norm for watching television and movies. The art of going to the cinema is almost lost. Keep this tradition alive during the cold weather trend and go catch a movie with a group of friends.

The newest Anchorman movie is an excellent choice if you're a comedy lover and it can definitely be the next movie you constantly quote. If you're an action movie buff, go see "The Legend of Hercules" or "Lone Survivor." These are sure to quench your thirst for adventure. And, of course, there are options for families, too. Take your kids to see "Frozen" or "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." Watching a movie together can be a great bonding experience and a perfect way to stay warm. Don't forget your Coke and popcorn.

Go out to eat. There are several options for lunch and dinner in Cullman, and the only time you'll have to get out in the cold is from your car to the door. Rumor's Deli and The Blue Moose Cafe (which is now open everyday for lunch) are excellent choices for lunch. Go enjoy your favorite sandwich at Rumor's Deli or treat yourself to some home-style lunches at The Blue Moose.

Cullman also has tons of restaurants you could choose for either lunch or dinner. If you're in the mood for Italian food, Grumpy's, Carleton's, or Lombardo's are a few delicious options.

For the fans of hickory smoke, Moe's, Jim 'N Nick's, and Johnny's Bar-B-Q are just a few of the casual barbecue restaurants that Cullman offers for lunch and dinner.

The Busy Bee Cafe offers delicious and authentic German meals if you're in the mood for some schnitzel.

Of course, you can always choose a fancier option because there is nothing stopping you from getting a group of friends together, dressing up, and going out to eat. If this is your proverbial cup of tea then sink your teeth into the All Steak for a more sophisticated meal.

Have a drink. Drinks are always a great way to stay warm so lace up your winter boots and meet up with your friends, or make some new ones, at a local bar for a glass of beer or wine.

If you are looking to keep your vocal chords warm as well then find your way to Grumpy's each Wesnesday for karaoke night. Maybe you'll discover your hidden talent (but, probably not).

Weekends in Cullman are recently booming. Try barhopping this weekend (with a designated driver – stay safe this winter) and you'll have endless amounts of fun with your friends comparing bars, trying new drinks, and people watching. If you would like a more peaceful place to unwind, head to the All Steak's bar area. This beautiful new building is a great way to relax and enjoy that special drink.

Go listen to a band. Derek Sellers plays every Wednesday at the All Steak.

His acoustic performaarea overs the spectrum as he plays everything from The Beatles to Lady GaGa.

Local band Round Two is a frequent to The Blue Moose Café, and it seems that Moe's has a band just about every weekend.

Music lovers should be delighted in the fact that Cullman is producing more and more bands. So stay warm this winter and support local artists at the same time.

Have movie night at your house. Have you ever heard of a little store called Blockbuster? Me neither. Netflix or Redbox are your best bets for movie night with your best buds. Stock up on beer, snacks, and candy, grab some blankets, and call it a party. This is a cheap way to spend quality time with your friends. Try having a themed movie marathon. Scary movie night is popular, but you could also choose Marvel movies, foreign movies, or my personal favorite, Will Ferrell movie night.

Host a dinner party. Girls, here is your chance to finally prove that Pinterest isn't a total waste of time. Take action on those crafty ideas you keep pinning and then forgetting about. Although hosting a party can take more time than movie night, it allows for more conversation and can be a night to remember. Plus, your friends will love you.

There are a few ways to host a dinner party. The first way is to prepare all of the food by yourself.

Tell your guests when to arrive and how to dress. Set the table appropriately and be sure to cook more than enough food for everyone.

The second way to host a dinner party is much more casual. Prepare a few entrees and appetizers and then ask your friends to bring their favorite side dish.

Tell your guests roughly when they should arrive, and of course, never forget the beer and wine.

Stay Home. Finally, on the coldest days this winter, it's okay to stay home by yourself. But this alone time doesn't have to be spent on the couch with a bag of chips watching House Hunter re-runs.

Instead, read a book, pick up a new hobby (I suggest beer reviewing), start learning a new language, learn how to read music, paint a picture, learn to sew, or write an article.

Remember to exercise your brain this winter because there is so much more to do than watching cat videos on YouTube, watching Netflix until your eyes dry out, or reaching a new level of ugly in your Snapchats.

Challenge your brain indoors this season, under a blanket, by a fire, or with your closest friends.



EES (from Front)

By: Noah Chandler
noah@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN – With a morning temperature of 29 degrees, Penguin Fun Run organizer Amber Fox was not sure if any students would come out to take part in the inaugural fun run.

However, as the minutes ticked closer to 10 a.m., East Elementary students and parents began arriving, quickly dashing any thoughts of a poor turnout.

"I honestly thought we may only have four or five participants when we arrived this morning," Fox said laughingly.

"We definitely had more than four students come out, actually more around 200."

The fun run is part of the school's FITT Club – an afterschool program which focuses on a circuit training routine to better build overall fitness – and is the first in a series of runs.

"This run was a one-mile fun run. In February we will increase the length to a mile-and-a-half, and will continue to increase the length of runs monthly until our 5K in May," Fox said.

"Once they complete the race, the students will receive a necklace with a small charm; this month being the penguin. Each race they complete they will receive another charm, marking their progress. "

One of the students who took to the cold weather with ease was 8-year-old Nate Zills. He was able to cross the finish line first with a time of 8 minutes 10 seconds.

"I play a lot of sports, so you have to be fast to play sports," Nate said. "I think that (FITT Club) helped me get faster and prepare for this run."

Nate's mother Liz and his sister Ansley came out to cheer him on as he ran around the school's complex. Liz said her son has been practicing for his first fun run for several weeks.

"He has been practicing after school on Friday's with the afterschool program (FITT Club) for several weeks. And he has also had me time him as he ran laps around our house," Liz said.

Throughout the year, Nate plays a variety of sports, ranging from basketball, baseball, and football, and now, in part to the FITT Club, he has taken up a love for running.

"I think it's great! He tells me every day how much he loves P.E. and the afterschool program," she said. "The program has helped him find a positive outlet for his energy and it is something Nate truly enjoys it."

For more photos from the event, visit CullmanSense.com.

– Calendar –

Submit your event to calendar@cullmansense.com

Monday

Cullman Kiwanis Club
The Cullman Kiwanis Club invites all local men and women who are interested in taking part in community service along with great fellowship, fun, networking, and learning to attend their weekly luncheon meeting at 12 noon each Monday in the All Steak's third floor banquet room. Come see what Kiwanis is all about and enjoy a great luncheon meal as well.

Domestic Violence Survivor Support Group
Victim Services of Cullman sponsors a Domestic Violence Survivor Support Group meeting every Monday evening from 5 p.m. until 7 p.m. in the old County Board of Education Building with childcare available. For additional information please call 256-775-2600. CRISIS HOTLINE - 256-734-6100.

U. S. Disaster Relief Command Monthly Meeting
Members of the U.S. Disaster Relief command meet on the last Monday of each month at Good Hope Town Hall starting at 6 p.m. There is a great need for volunteers and those interested in this program are encouraged to attend. J. W. Phillips has information concerning this program and can be reached at 256-615-5644.

Overeaters Anonymous Gather at Grace Episcopal
Members of Overeaters Anonymous meet every Monday, at 9:30 a.m. at Grace Episcopal Church in the Carriage House located on Church premises. Further information is available at 256-747-6218 or 256-352-1143. Everyone is invited to attend these gatherings.

GED Classes at Desperation Church
GED learning classes are held each Monday night from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at Desperation Church. For additional information please contact Ed Oaks at 256-737-9564 or 256-735-6811. These classes are open to the public and everyone who wants to obtain their GED is welcome to participate.

Cornerstone Revival Ladies Prayer Meeting
A Ladies Prayer meeting is conducted each Monday night at 7 p.m. at Cornerstone Revival Center. For additional information call 256-796-2899. All interested women are invited to attend.

Aqua Zumba Classes at CWAC
Everyone is invited to take part in the Aqua Zumba classes that are offered each Monday at Cullman Wellness & Aquatic Center beginning at 7 p.m. in the center's indoor pool. Please call 256-775-7946 for additional information!

Tuesday

Cullman County Commission Meeting
Members of the Cullman County Commission will gather for a work session at 8:30 a.m. with the regular business meeting following at 10 a.m. This meeting is open to the public.

Cullman Caring for Kids in Need of Donations
If you are able to contribute to Cullman County's Community Food Band, the 'Caring for Kids' organization, they would be grateful. Non-perishable food items are needed, and of course cash enables them to purchase needed products to fill their empty shelves. Please call 256-739-1111 to see how to help or mail checks or money orders to Cullman Caring for Kids, P. O. Box 698, Cullman, Alabama 35056-0698. Thanks in advance for anything you can do.

Cullman County Commission on Education Meeting
Members of the Cullman County Commission on Education will gather for a workshop on the qualifications needed in the search for a new superintendent at 6 p.m. This gathering will be held at the County Board of Education building. All members urged to attend this very important meeting.

Square Dancing lessons
The Friendship Square Dance Club of Cullman will be holding free lessons on square dancing from 6:30 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. Contact Rip Johnston at 256-347-7266 or Hulda Schaefers 256-734-3566

Knifty Knitters Weekly Meeting
Members of the Cullman Knifty Knitters group meet each Tuesday afternoon at 3 p.m. in the Cullman County Library. Everyone is invited to come learn how to knit yarn and needles are free. This group is open to all ages, both accomplished knitters and those wishing to learn the art form. Crocheters also are invited to take part in these weekly meetings. Please call Lesia for more info 256-734-2720, ext. 23.

Emotions Anonymous Support Group Meeting
An Emotions Anonymous Support Group meets each Tuesday at noon at Grace Episcopal Church Carriage House. Those interested are invited to attend these group sessions. Further information is available through the Group Director's office at 256-734-3605 or 256-796-8440.

Ladies' Auxiliary VFW Dance at Post 2214
The Ladies' Auxiliary of VFW Post 2214 invites the community to their weekly Tuesday night dances at the VFW Post building. The country line dance starts at 7 p.m. each Tuesday night, with admission only $5.00 per person. Concessions are available and all proceeds benefit the Auxiliary's local projects.

Wednesday

St. Monica's Group
St. Monica's Group for those addicted to alcohol or drugs meets every Wednesday night at 7 p.m. in the Rectory Basement of Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church. All are welcome to attend who feel the need. For further information please contact Brian, 256-595-0515 or Rita, 256-507-0358.

Master Gardener Classes
The Cullman County Office of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System along with current members of the Cullman County Master Gardener's Association are offering weekly classes each Wednesday for beginner or advanced gardeners! Classes will meet on Wednesdays from 9 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. in the basement of the Cullman County Office Building on Arnold Street. Classes will meet weekly with the final session on April 23. During the course of the seminars there will be 14 different speakers covering gardening topics from growing and maintaining lawns, ornamentals, fruits and vegetables to landscape designs. For additional information and to register call the Cullman County Extension Office, 256-737-9386 by January 27.

Manna Meals at St. Andrew's United Methodist
Everyone is invited to attend the weekly Wednesday night 'Manna Meals' at St. Andrew's United Methodist Church from 5 p.m. until 6 p.m. Sack dinners will be available for carry outs. Please call the Church office for further information 256-735-0444.

Latter Day Saints Genealogy Library
The Genealogy Library at the Latter Day Saints (L.D.S.) Church is open to the public each Wednesday night from 7 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. Don Jones is available to open the Library at other times, if needed, so please contact him at 256-784-5098.

Girls & Boys Club at Spirit Life
Spirit Life Church will host a Girls & Boys Club meeting for those 12 and under every Wednesday beginning at 7 p.m. at the church. All are welcome. Please call the church for further info 256-739-3326.

Aqua Zumba Classes at CWAC
Everyone is invited to take part in the Aqua Zumba classes, which are offered each Wednesday at Cullman Wellness & Aquatic Center beginning at 7 p.m. in the center's indoor pool. Please call 256-775-7946 for additional information!

Thursday

New Vision Support Group
There is a New Vision Support Group which will meet at 10 a.m. and everyone interested in this subject is welcome to attend. The program is at Hilltop Community Center. Additional information is available by calling Linda Estes, 256-739-4653.

Friday

'Wii Bowling' at the Donald E. Green Senior Center
The entertainment for senior citizens is 'Wii Bowling' at the Donald E. Green Senior Center starting at 1 p.m. Everyone is invited. Come enjoy some exercise (but not too physical!) and fellowship with friends. They bowl every Wednesday and Friday afternoons at 1 p.m.

Retreat with Hildegard of Bingen
There will be a three day 'Retreat with Hildegard of Bingen' at Benedictine Retreat Center concluding on Sunday, February 2. Please contact the Retreat Center for additional information at 256-734-8302 or www.shmon.org. Sr. Mary McGehee, OSB, will conduct the special gathering. Open to all.

Friday Night Dance at the VFW
Cullman's VFW Post 2214 invites everyone to come to their weekly Friday night dances at the VFW Hall from 7 p.m. until 10 p.m. The cost is $5.00 per person and music by the Golden Oldies and Country with the Midnight Highway Band will be filling the air. Funds raised go toward the building rental. Get your dancing shoes on and come out for a great evening of fun and entertainment tonight.

Saturday

VFW Saturday Night Dance
The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 2214 invites everyone to their weekly Saturday night dances which begin at 7 p.m. and last until 10 p.m. The Boogie Night Band provides music on Saturday nights. Entrance fee is $5.00 for each individual. Come on out and bring your dancing shoes and enjoy an evening of great music, fun, and fellowship!

'Farm Kids' Club - Building for the Birds'
All children ages 5 and up are invited to attend the 'Farm Kids' Club - Building for the Birds' seminar this morning at the North Alabama Agriplex from 9 a.m. until 10:30 a.m. Adults must accompany children. $5.00 fee per child, with chaperones free. $10.00 is maximum fee per family. Children and adults will learn how to create birdhouses and nesters to attract birds to their backyards. Pre-registration is required - call 256-297-1044 or cullmanag@gmail.com. Come spend an interesting and learning morning with your child and look forward to a bird-filled spring and summer in your own backyard.

Next Monday

Cullman Kiwanis Club
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A Ladies Prayer meeting is conducted each Monday night at 7 p.m. at Cornerstone Revival Center. For additional information call 256-796-2899. All interested women are invited to attend.

Aqua Zumba Classes at CWAC
Everyone is invited to take part in the Aqua Zumba classes that are offered each Monday at Cullman Wellness & Aquatic Center beginning at 7 p.m. in the center's indoor pool. Please call 256-775-7946 for additional information!

RESIDENTIAL RECIPES

Peanut Butter Popcorn Balls



By: Chelsea Sparks • Local Contributor

Peanut Butter Popcorn Balls is a treat you can enjoy at any age and will make you yearn for the fair to come back to town.

The sweet and salty flavors mixed together create a combination that will titillate anyone's taste buds.

These are absolutely perfect for children's birthdays or holiday parties. They are super simple to make and look beautiful when finished.

Be prepared to get your hands sticky and have your friends and family praising your cooking prowess.

Ingredients:
- 1/2 cup of peanut butter
- 1/2 cup light corn syrup
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1 bag of microwavable popcorn
- Melted chocolate to drizzle (optional)

Instructions:
- Get your mixing bowl down and pop your popcorn. Once finished popping, remove any leftover kernels from the bottom.
- In a saucepan, combine peanut butter, corn syrup, and brown sugar. Bring this slowly to a boil. Be careful not to do this too quickly or you will scorch your mixture.
- Once your mixture is nice and creamy, pour it over the popcorn.
- Let it cool for two to three minutes. Then begin rolling the mixture into a ball shape. I suggest covering your hands in butter as it helps to keep the mix from sticking to your hands.
- Place a cake pop stick in the bottom and you're done. If you want to make these a little more festive or elegant, just drizzle some melted chocolate over the top.

Strawberry Punch Bowl Cake

By: Phillip Pryor • Local Contributor

This cake is super simple and fun to make. It's a light, refreshing treat to eat on hot summer days or something tart and filling to eat during the cold winter months. Either way, this Strawberry Punch Bowl Cake will be a hit at any party and is sure to please any picky palate.

Makes 12 to 16 servings

Ingredients:
- 1 box - yellow cake mix
- 2 - eggs
- 1/4 cup - cooking oil
- 1 container - fresh strawberries
- 1 jar - strawberry pie filling
- 1 container - Cool Whip

Instructions:
- Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
- Coat cake pan with light nonstick spray.
- Combine cake mix with eggs and oil.
- Bake in oven 20 to 25 minutes.
- Let stand and completely cool.
- Slice strawberries.
- When cake is cool, layer a trifle pan with Cool Whip, strawberry filling and strawberries. Continue to layer until pan is full.
- Chill and serve.

GET YOUR RECIPE PUBLISHED

E-mail submissions to:
recipes@cullmansense.com

REVIEWING THE ROAMING BEAR PORTER

This coffee porter can wake up any sleeping bear

By: Kate Mullaney
kate@cullmansense.com

In preparation for the Blue Moose's upcoming release of their newest brew, which is a vanilla porter and will be released February 14th, I will be reviewing porters for the next few weeks. This week I chose Roaming Bear Porter, a coffee porter brewed by Old Black Bear Brewing Company.

Porters are dark brown beers that originated in London in the eighteenth century. They are made with roasted barley producing a dark brown or even almost black beer. They usually taste moderately bitter and sweet at the same time, complimented by a malty chocolate flavor.

This delicious coffee porter is brewed right here in Alabama. That's right. Old Black Bear Brewing Company is basically Cullman's neighbor as it is located in Huntsville, Alabama. The creators of this beer chose the name Roaming Bear Porter because this is a seasonal beer and you will see it come and go.

Although it is a dark beer, it doesn't sit too heavy in your stomach like some porters. It is 5.5 percent alcohol and made with Magnum hops, packed with roasted barley and has a unique blend of malts.

Go treat yourself to a Roaming Bear Porter and put your nose to it. Now, breathe in and smell the rich deliciousness. To me, this coffee porter has a strong scent of coffee (who would've guessed?) as well as chocolate and a hint of hops. It has a malty smell, kind of like smelling cookies, and even a slight trace of cardboard. Reviewing beer just got weird.

Next is appearance. Roaming Bear Porter is such a rich, dark brown that it's almost black. Like most porters, it's not cloudy but is so dark that you can't really see through it. This coffee porter had almost no head at all, but the little it did have was an off-white creamy color and it diminished almost immediately. It also had very little lacing, maybe even none at all.

This porter has such a beautiful dark color that it almost makes you not want to drink it. Almost.



» Roaming Bear Porter is a light bodied Alabama brewed beer made with coffee.

And the moment you've been waiting for – flavor time. Roaming Bear Porter is lightly sweet and moderately bitter. It has that great bitterness of coffee, but still has the sweetness of chocolate at the same time.

It has a nice, bitter finish leaving a chocolaty, coffee flavor lingering in your mouth. The best part is the long duration of the finish. This porter is so satisfying; it will linger in your mouth as long as you would like, until you're ready to take your next sip that is.

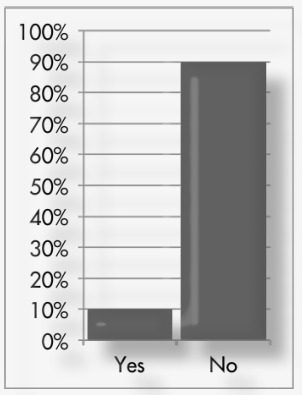
Finally, the palate portion gets reviewed. The body of the Roaming Bear Porter is surprisingly light. Because of its dark color, it looks like it will feel thick, but it's actually very smooth and quite refreshing. Its carbonation is light but lively.

Chocolaty, malty and slightly bitter, this coffee porter is delightful.

Next week, I'll review another porter to prepare for the Blue Moose's release of their very own vanilla porter. Roaming Bear Porter is delicious and easy to drink. It will definitely keep you warm this season.

Poll

Have you been involved in a crash this winter?



This Week's Poll

Should Alabama legalize marijuana for both recreational and medicinal purposes?

Vote Today at CullmanSense.com/Poll

Seasonal Home Maintenance Checklist can Prevent Emergency Repair

(StatePoint) With a little easy home maintenance throughout the year, you can prevent emergency repairs down the line. Experts recommend posting a task checklist in a convenient location, such as on the refrigerator or a corkboard. Here are six tasks HomeAdvisor recommends not to forget to complete each year:

• On a quarterly basis, test your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

• Twice a year, clean your gutters, and downspouts. To prevent damage, the downspout needs to be free of debris so it can release water three feet from your home's foundation. The average national cost of cleaning the gutter and downspout is $181. However, the average national cost of repairing the foundation of a house can cost up to 24 times that amount.

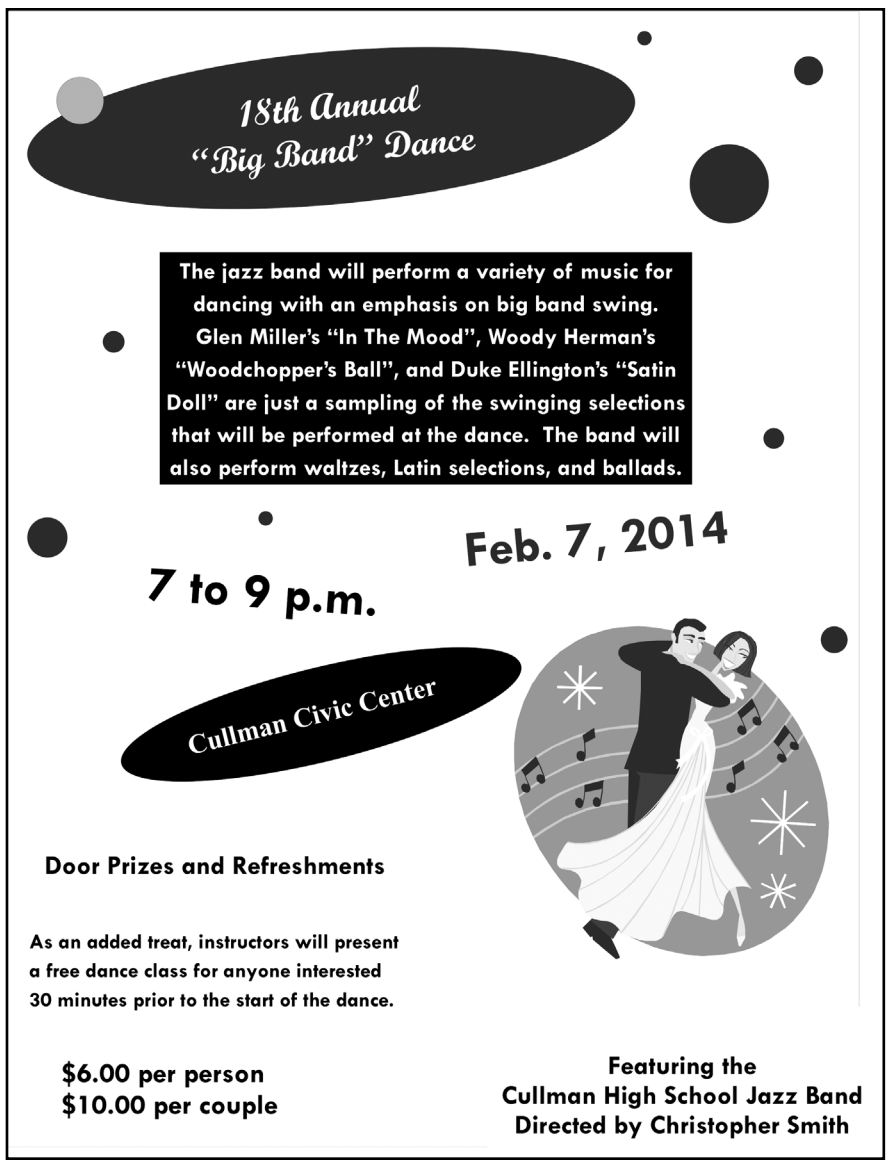
• In the cooler months, take a day each year to check caulking for cracks, especially around tubs and showers.

• Every fall complete an annual roof inspection to help prevent the need for major repairs or a roof replacement. The average national cost of hiring a roof inspector is $360, whereas the average cost of replacing a roof is nearly 19 times that amount.

• Before the dog days of summer, hire a professional to service your HVAC unit. Doing so will increase its efficiency and prevent a breakdown.

• Annually check for cracks in the grout of tile floors, which can allow water to seep into the floor and cause mold growth and rot.

For free home maintenance tips, resources and to find a pre-screened professional to help you with any of these tasks, visit HomeAdvisor.com.



cullman city parks & recreation

WHAT'S ON DECK AT PARKS AND REC....

www.cullmanrecreation.org
256-734-9157

- **Youth Baseball & Softball Reg:** Spring youth league baseball and softball will register Jan. 15-Feb. 15 for ages 4-14. Games will start in March at Heritage Park and the Field of Miracles. Cost is $90 and includes a hat and jersey. Call 256-734-9157 for details. Registration is open online at active.com by searching "Cullman Parks" or at the Cullman Civic Center.
- **Miracle League Basketball Reg:** Miracle League Basketball registration is now open through Jan. 20. Games will be played at Ingle Park Gym starting in February. All ages are encouraged to play, cost is $30. Call 256-734-9157 for details.
- **Dog Obedience Classes:** Dog Obedience classes will begin on Tuesday, January 28 at the Cullman Civic Center with a puppy class at 6pm and an adult class at 7pm. An orientation will be held Monday night, January 27 at the center for both classes. Call to reserve your spot by Monday at 5pm by calling 256-734-9157.
- **Ballroom Dance- Classes:** Ballroom dance classes will be held weekly at the Cullman Civic Center on Thursday nights with beginners at 6:30pm and advanced class at 7:30pm under instructor Mack Wilson. Cost is $10 per person per class. Call the Cullman Civic Center for details at 256-734-9157.
- **Zumba Classes:** Held at the Civic Center Mon., Wed., and Thurs. 5:30-6:30pm. $40 for 10 classes or $6 per class with instructor Monica Kugler.
- **Flag Football Registration:** Now open through February 15, cost is $350 per team which includes the season and a tournament at the end of the season. Ages 15 & up, call 256-739-9931.
- **Senior Spirit Travel:** Senior Spirit will travel to "Magnificent Michigan" May 8-14 with stops at Windmill Island, Veldheer's Tulip Farm & Delft Factory, Nelis' Dutch Village, as well as several museums and parades. Cost with motor coach travel and 6 nights of lodging is $1,349 for dbl, $1649 for sngl. Deposit payment of $75 is due by March 1, and spaces are filling up fast! Call 256-734-4803 for more information.
- **Hurricane Creek Park 1st Time Rock Climb:** Offered Saturday mornings at 10am by reservation for first time rock climbers. Cost is $25 and includes professional instruction. Call 734-2125.





Girl Gets her Game On

Cullman Gamer Finds Newfound Success Online

By: Kate Mullaney
kate@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN - Over 60 percent of households in the U.S. participate in the video game industry, which is why this elusive interest is booming. The U.S. spent almost 15 billion dollars on video games in 2012 and this number is constantly growing.

Recently, the number of female gamers has risen too. Now, 45 percent of gamers are female. Cullman's very own Alyssa White is proud to be one of these statistics and has taken gaming to the next level. From game reviews to her own YouTube channel, Alyssa just might be Cullman's biggest gamer.

Alyssa's uncle introduced her to Tomb Raider when she was five years old – the very first video game she every played.

"This was before multiplayer was introduced in gaming," she said. "So, we would have to pass the controller back and forth, but I just fell in love with it."

She credits the game L.A. Noir for her recent love of gaming and claims that this game deepened her interest in the gaming world.

"It's a murder mystery type of game. It had its problems, but it was really fun," she said. "It's made by Rock Star Games who also created Grand Theft Auto. After that, it just escalated and I started playing more and more games."

Alyssa started a YouTube channel a year and a half ago. She began reviewing video games and found that she was successful when she received over 100 shout outs from bigger YouTubers. She became friends with the people giving her shout outs and their subscribers began to subscribe to her.

"It's really about networking, talking about what you're passionate about and working hard at it," she said.

Alyssa's YouTube channel currently has 642 subscribers and these fans are called her Alycats.

"Mostly I talk about what games I currently like," she said. "Or my top 10 favorite games of the year. Just different things. If one of my Alycats wants me to review a game, then I will, and sometimes they send me mail, so I'll do opening mail segments."

Her video format varies depending on what type of video she's doing. Her most casual vlog is simply of her in front of the camera talking to her subscribers about her life. She also does monthly favorite videos where she shows her fans her favorite games, music and movies of the month so they can check them out. She also does frequent shows she calls "geeky pick-ups," which is where she shows off any games, music or movies she's recently found and wants to share with her Alycats.



» Alyssa White is an avid gamer that relates with others with mental disorders on her YouTube channel

Gaining her followers hasn't been easy though and Alyssa has had to deal with some challenges. She stated that at first she got a lot of negative feedback, which has now died down. Another challenge she's faced is a bit more unusual.

"I have an imposter that keeps making accounts and pretending to be me," she said with a laugh. "But they keep misspelling my name. I have to report them every single time. They've made about six accounts now, and I think it's the same person."

Alyssa's favorite part of her online presence is the friends that she's made.

"I've become friends with several of my Alycats, as well as some bigger YouTubers such as Rachel Moore who has over 55,000 subscribers."

Alyssa beat 51 games last year and with her current 642 subscribers, she is not far away from meeting her goal of gaining 1,000 subscribers.

"I'm just trying to make the best videos I can and to get the most Alycats that I can. And to just be the best person and YouTuber that I can," she says.

Alyssa suffers from several mental disorders, such as anxiety, depression, OCD and more, and she hopes to reach out to subscribers that are dealing with similar struggles.

"I'm very open about my mental disorders," she says. "If any of my fans need to talk or have any questions I will always talk to them about it."

Alyssa stated that many of her Alycats suffer from similar disorders and have come to her for advice or simply a listening ear. She believes that talking to someone who can relate to you can be more effective than going to therapy.

"A lot of people don't like to talk about stuff like that, but I'm open about it because sometimes people just need to talk. I know that at times it can seem like nothing is going right, but it gets better. There's always a purpose."

Gaming and reviewing games have been the best form of therapy for Alyssa. She said that anytime she begins to feel an oncoming of her symptoms, she will get in front of the camera and make a video for YouTube and it calms her down. She also uses gaming as a way to pacify her symptoms.

"That's part of the reason I got into gaming," she says. "It relaxes me."

Despite the stigma attached to gaming, which links it to violence, bad grades and depression in teenagers, Alyssa recommends it as a form of therapy.

In fact, more recent studies show that gaming can actually help fight depression.

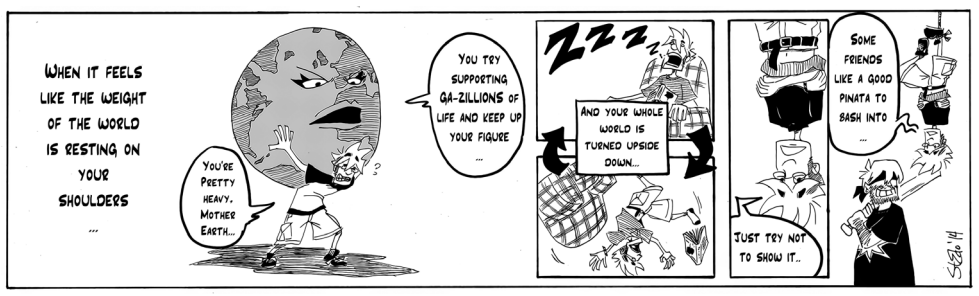
Researchers and teachers in New Zealand have created a video game specifically to help teens combat depression called SPARX. The creators of this game conducted a study to test the effectiveness of this video game using over 150 teenagers who suffered from depression.

In this study, half of the group used SPARX as a form of therapy, while the other half received normal "talk therapy" treatment. The study showed that 44 percent of those who used the video game recovered from depression, while only 26 percent of those who received traditional therapy recovered.

If you would like to be an Alycat, subscribe to her YouTube account at youtube.com/unchartedgirl88. She also has Facebook and Twitter fan pages where you can receive updates on what Alyssa is doing or what games she is playing. If you are a gamer or simply interested in the gaming world, check out Alyssa White on YouTube and become an Alycat today.

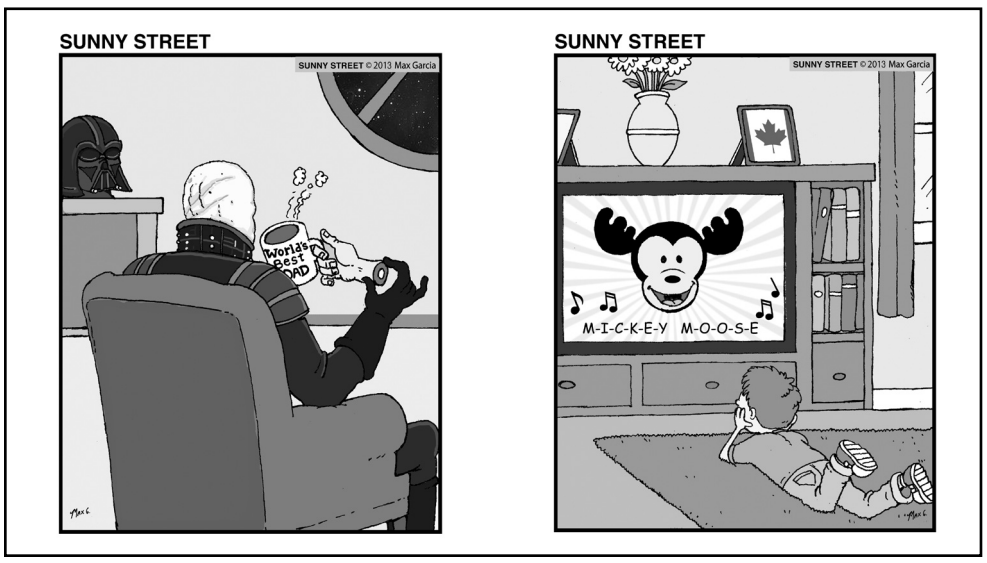
Comics

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MAMA'S BOYZ www.jerrycraft.net **JERRY CRAFT**





Tuning up for the Big Band Dance

By: Christopher Smith

CULLMAN – The 18th Annual "Big Band Dance" featuring the Cullman High School Jazz Band will be held Friday, February 7, 2014 at the Cullman Civic Center.

Admission to the dance, which is scheduled from 7:00-9:00 p.m., is $6.00 per person or $10.00 per couple.

Tickets will be available for purchase at the door.

The jazz band will perform a variety of music for dancing with an emphasis on big band swing.

Glenn Miller's "In the Mood", Woody Herman's "Woodchopper's Ball", and Duke Ellington's "Satin Doll" are just a sampling of the swinging selections that will be performed at the dance. The band will also perform waltzes, Latin selections, and ballads.

As an added treat, instructors will present a free dance class for anyone interested 30 minutes prior to the start of the dance.

Complimentary refreshments will be served throughout the evening.

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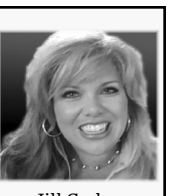
Email: info@N2College.com
Website: www.N2College.com
Phone: 256-736-5969

Did you know that traditionally the most important deadline for 12th grade college funding is Dec. 1 nationally for them to receive priority, merit-based funding consideration for all (4) years of undergraduate work?

Did you know that seniors who want to transfer from a 2-year program to a 4-year need to go ahead and prepare for transfer scholaship eligibility now?

While there are many variables that affect a student being selected for a merit-based award over another similarly academically qualified student, typically, the student's gpa & test score are the standards by which the student is entered into his/her highest "eligibility selection window":

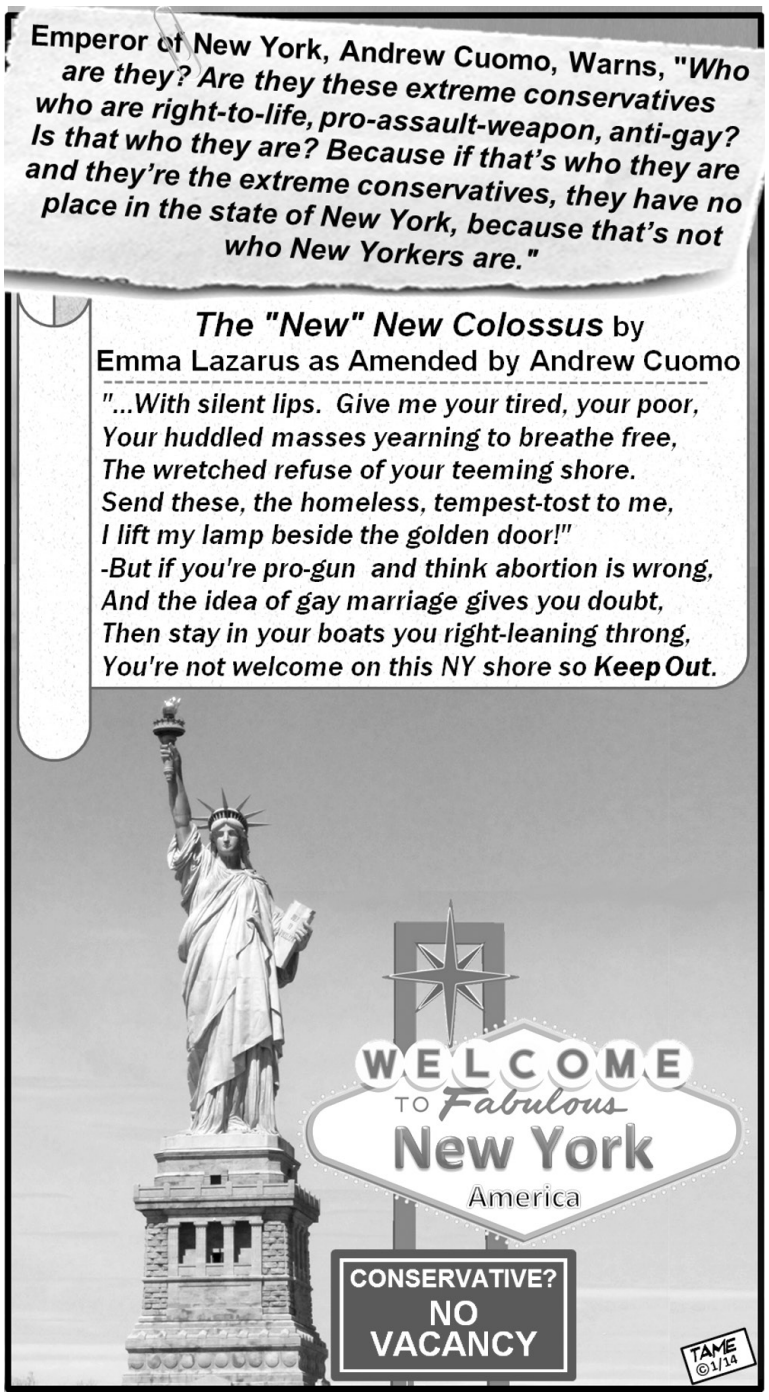
- Seniors with higher scores, let us show you how to maximize your auto-offers!
- Seniors with mid-range scores, let us show you how to maximize your remaining merit-based funding opportunities!
- Seniors with no/low scores, let us show you what you still can do to get as much funding as possible!
- Seniors with exceptional circumstances, let us show you how to help ensure that all of your additional opportunities are utilized!



Jill Gudger Howell, M.A. Ed.
President/ Developer,
PreK-12th Grade
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Editorial Cartoon



Cuomoland

By: Tom Esposito

By speaking for the entire (at least in his mind) state of New York (or, at least the left-hand side of the state), Governor Andrew Cuomo managed to raise the eyebrows as well as the ire of conservatives throughout the country. In a recent radio interview where he commented on Republicans, Cuomo queried and then stated, *"Who are they? Are they these extreme conservatives who are right-to-life, pro-assault-weapon, anti-gay? Is that who they are? Because if that's who they are and they're the extreme conservatives, they have no place in the state of New York, because that's not who New Yorkers are."*

So welcome to *Cuomoland*. That is, you are welcome if you subscribe to the Governor's brand of politics. The politics of exclusion where if you don't agree with him, you can forget about stating your religious beliefs concerning abortion, your faith in the 2nd Amendment and the conviction that marriage should be between a man and a woman. Don't attempt to express your views and forget about any type of civil discourse on these issues. As far as Cuomo is concerned, just pack up, get out and as for others of the same ilk seeking ingress, don't even bother trying to enter his sovereign nation. You are not welcome.

That goes for you, Arch-Bishop Dolan. Let's get the shutters up and board the doors on all of the 400+ churches in the state and begin reassigning the thousands of Catholic clergy and lay people who operate in the parishes.

Florida and Texas are nice this time of the year and significantly, neither of those states have income taxes as compared with New York and its 10% hit to personal income.

Oh, by the way Arch-Bishop Dolan, you may want to direct Pope Francis who has announced his possible, upcoming visit to the United States in 2015, to land in New Jersey and *for God's sake*, keep the Popemobile away from the George Washington Bridge into New York.

Own a weapons manufacturing company? Get out. -Just like *American Tactical Weapons, Kahr Arms*, and *Remington* and their hundreds of employees and millions of tax dollars have.

The SAFE Act signed by Cuomo insured that these rock solid companies would leave the state which has bled off millions of other citizens since the year 2000.

This would seem to be a questionable strategy on Cuomo's part in a state that may be running a multi-billion deficit in 2014.

As strange as it may sound, conservatives everywhere should be happy to hear Cuomo's recent commentary. There is clearly no doubt, if there ever was, about the governor's agenda for *any-and-all* whose philosophies and beliefs differ from his. There can be no misgivings.

He has definitively expressed his divisive *us* and *them* ideology that seeks to stifle the constitutional and religious rights of millions.

If New Yorkers are upset with Cuomo's statements and actions, they may deserve what they get from his Governorship. He didn't vote himself into office so it is, in fact, a shared belief system between him and his millions of constituents. For everyone else who *didn't* vote for him, well, it was sunny and 72 in Orlando on Sunday as well as sunny and 75 in San Antonio. I'm just saying.

Hold the Congratulations for Congress

By: Lee H. Hamilton

Lee Hamilton is Director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

Now that Congress has its immense, $1.1 trillion bipartisan funding bill in hand, Capitol Hill is breathing easier. They ended the specter of a government shutdown for the moment, and funded the federal budget for most of the year.

The media has been commending Congress for finally doing its job.

This praise works only in the context of recent history, however. The bill that congressional leaders produced is hardly a triumph.

Instead, it's another example of Congress's stubborn determination to deal itself out of the budgeting process. Let me explain.

In recent years, Congress has funded the federal government in one of two ways. Either it's passed a "continuing resolution," which is a stopgap measure to keep the government functioning with the same funding it had previously, or it's passed huge omnibus bills like the one it just enacted. This most recent bill runs more than 1,500 pages.

Before this current budgeting era, however, Congress used procedures that put the ideals of representative democracy into practice.

It divided its responsibilities into policy development, which was in the hands of its various "authorizing" committees; and establishing funding levels, which was done by the appropriations committees in the House and Senate.

Once the President submitted his proposed budget, the appropriations committees and their subcommittees would meet, hammer out the issues, and fund the government according to the policies set by the authorizing committees. They would hold hearings, debate furiously, accept and reject scores — if not hundreds — of amendments, and ultimately produce a series of appropriations bills generally divided along federal department lines. These would go to the floor of each chamber, where they'd be debated again, and finally to a conference committee, where each side of Capitol Hill would have a final chance to weigh in.

The process didn't work perfectly. It produced hiccups and grandstanding, and required a lot of negotiation and compromise. But it also spread the work of Congress among expert members, employed the capabilities of dedicated and knowledgeable legislators who knew the various departments and agencies of the federal government intimately, and provided for deliberation, open debate, accountability, and a reasonably democratic outcome. Rank-and-file members understood, grappled with, and took responsibility for what they produced and voted on.

No more. Continuing resolutions and omnibus bills lift responsibility from most members' hands. They produce decisions, but not in an open, democratic process.

They're basically developed in secret by a handful of leaders and their allies and staff; allow very few, if any, amendments; sharply limit debate time; severely restrict members' ability to study thousands of provisions; and require an up or down vote.

Most troubling, they're larded with policy decisions that in the old days would have been debated by the authorizing committees. This most recent measure boosts funding for Head Start, prevents the President from transferring control of military drones from the CIA to the Defense Department, and bars postal officials from ending Saturday delivery — all policy decisions that should have had a robust debate, but won't.

Of course, plenty of people in Washington like this. Congressional leaders have more power than if they had to defer to the judgment of the authorizing and appropriations committees. The White House likes it because it involves fewer people, making life simpler. Even some rank and file members like it, because it allows them to avoid making hard choices about individual programs.

Which is a problem. With omnibus bills, the truly difficult but crucial work that Congress needs to be doing doesn't get done. It isn't scrutinizing the budget of each department in sufficient detail to look for programs and line-items that have outlived their usefulness or that need more investment. It can't examine and analyze difficult policy questions carefully.

It won't question whether entire agencies and even departments still serve the purposes they were designed for. It isn't even bothering to look beyond discretionary spending to consider reforms to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, which is where most federal spending goes.

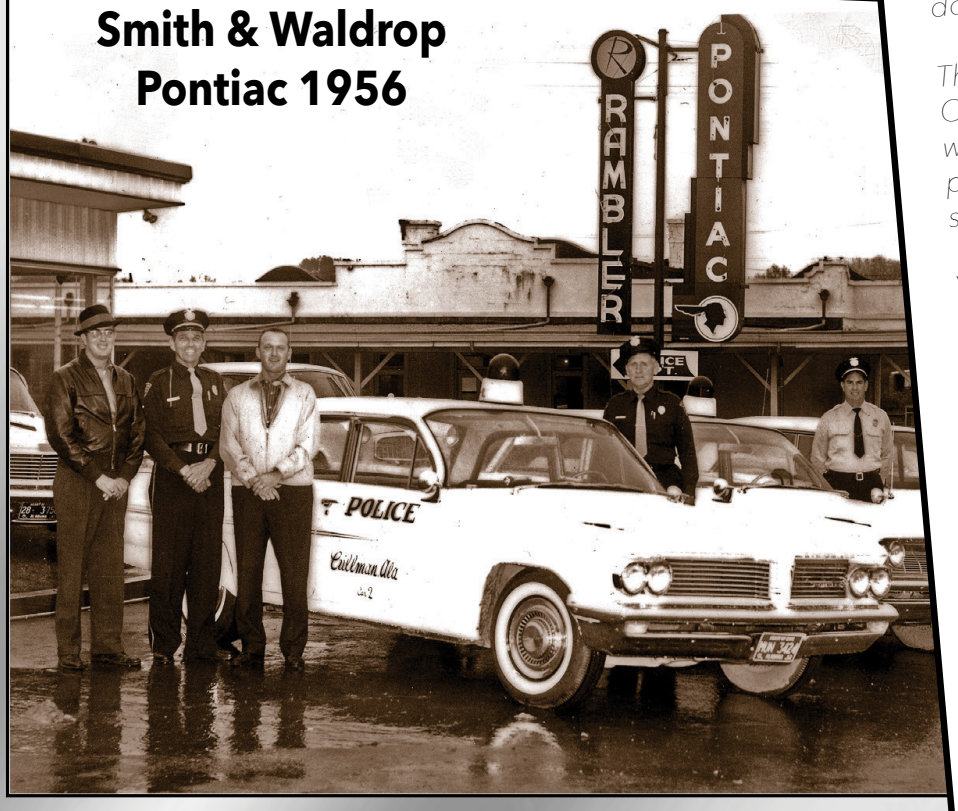
Congress no longer seems to know how to run a budget process. Most of its members have never experienced the traditional method. They just know how to hold their noses and vote up or down.

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Okay Cullman,

I do most of the ordering of our vehicles myself. I have a philosophy that may make our trucks, SUVs and cars have a higher window sticker price than other new automobile dealers in our area.

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