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CULLMAN'S MONDAY NEWSPAPER

CULLMANSENSE

COMMUNITY MATTERS

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Cold Springs Lady Eagles crush Sulligent in title game p5

LOCAL BUSINESS

Deb's Bookstore Celebrates Ten Years p7



Get creative this Valentine's Day p10

Giving a Billion Voices to Victims of Violence

» VSOC to host 1 Billion Rising event for victimized women & girls at Depot Park Feb. 14

By: Chelsea Sparks
Local Contributor

CULLMAN - On February 14th at 1 p.m., Cullman Victim Services will be hosting the 1 Billion Rising event at the Cullman Depot Park. The 1 Billion Rising campaign started on Valentine's Day of last year drawing worldwide attention and bringing much needed awareness to an ever increasing issue of violence against women and girls.

A total of 207 countries around the world participated, peaceably gathering at areas like courthouses, town halls, parks, and government offices demanding the end to violence against women.

Though sometimes thought that this problem is secluded to other countries, violence against women occurs here in Cullman and all around the world.

Many of us have seen it at one time or another or saw the signs of a woman being abused. The victim's struggle is often silent as they are likely too afraid or embarrassed to speak out.

That is why we as a community must speak out on their behalf – to let the women and girls of this community know that they are not alone and there

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GO TEAM LEVI

» West Elementary helps fight Levi Bates' battle with cancer p7



Vinemont Eagle Tyler Boland to join UAH track & field

By: Josh McBrayer
josh@cullmansense.com

VINEMONT - It seems like the Vinemont Eagles are churning out college athletes left and right. From Izaac Yarbrough heading to Auburn via Wallace and Raven Christiansen committing to the Alabama A&M Aggies, the college ranks are filling up with Eagles.

Recently, Tyler Boland added his name to that list. The Alabama State champion (long jump) inked his letter of intent to participate in track and field for the University of Alabama-Huntsville Chargers.

"With all of the injuries I have had, it was a big deal that (UAH) wasn't scared off and still offered me scholarship money," Boland said of his decision to attend UAH.

"They told me point blank that they believe in me and that I would be able to come back and do what I have been doing."

What Boland has been doing is nothing short of exceptional.

He has shattered records and won titles at every event he has tried his hand at.

In 2012 he was the runner-up in the outdoor long jump and the triple jump and in 2013 he claimed the state title in the indoor triple jump. He also holds the Cullman County record for triple jump.

In addition to being a stand-out track star, Boland is also a star on the football field and earned All-State honors at the defensive back position in 2012.

Not only is he a terrific athlete, he gets it done in the classroom as well.

He supports a 3.8 GPA and belongs to various clubs at Vinemont.

Boland was

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Shedd unopposed in District 11 race

Contributed

CULLMAN – District 11 State Representative Randall Shedd announced recently, that as of the deadline for filing for candidacy, he is running unopposed.

He released the following statement:

"The qualifying deadline for the 2014 election cycle has passed and it appears I am unopposed in my campaign for re-election for District 11, Alabama House of Representatives.

I am humbled by this confidence and now I can aggressively focus on representing the people of Blount, Cullman, Marshall, and Morgan Counties in this session of the Alabama Legislature and the following four years.

I have thanked my God, I have thanked my family and now I thank my supporters and

p6

Getting to know the Affordable Care Act: A.K.A Obamacare

By: Sage Overton
Local Contributor

By now every American has heard of Obamacare. It is one of the most debated topics ever to grace modern politics. People either love it or they hate it and everyone has an opinion on it.

As the end of the first open enrollments in the healthcare markets draws nearer, it's important to understand exactly what the law contains, what it will cost to not have health insurance by March 31, and how all this came to pass.

On Nov. 7, 2009, the House of Representatives passed a

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PRINTED LOCALLY @ PRINTING Alabama Web Press

Homeschool series a hit at Wallace State

By: Gail Crutchfield
WSCC Contributor

HANCEVILLE - For the past three weeks, homeschool students in Cullman County and surrounding areas have learned the basics of drawing, computer graphics, and painting as part of a series of classes held at Wallace State Community College.

A Homeschool Workshop series focused on art was the first of two series being hosted by Wallace State's Community Education program. The next series will focus on music, with classes held on Friday mornings for three consecutive weeks. Only a few spots remain for the upcoming music series. The fee is $25 for a complete three-class series or $10 for a single class.

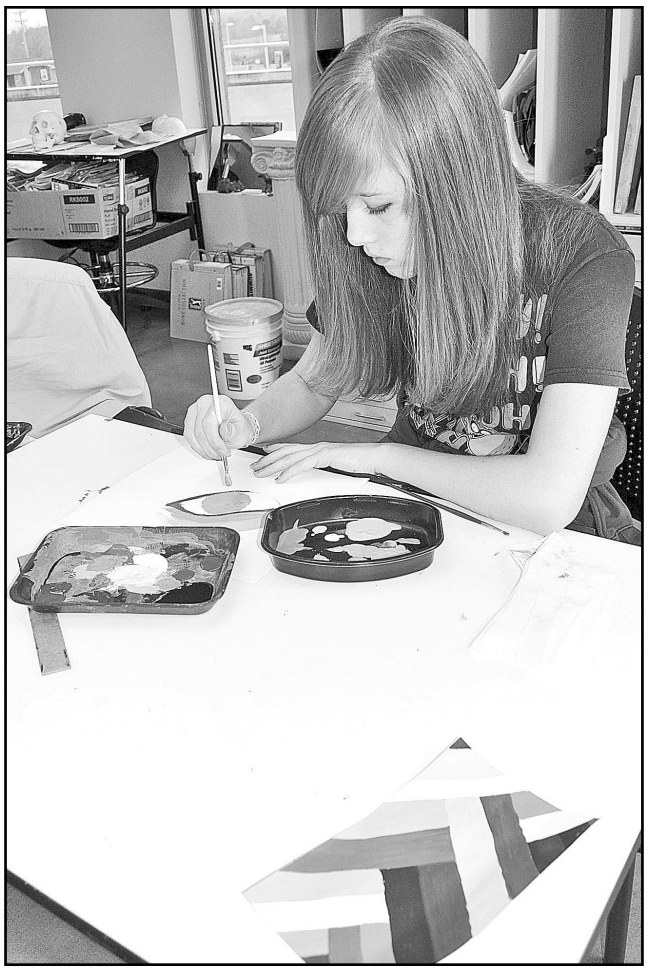
"We're extremely pleased with the series," said Melinda Edwards, Wallace State Dean of Institutional Outreach. "It's proven to be very popular for homeschool parents and students. We already have a waiting list for the next series."

Teenagers Kaitlin Stancil, Julie Newton and Anna McFerrin may be among those on the waiting lists. The three were on hand for the last class of the art series, which was the painting class.

"I love painting and drawing," said Stancil, a 15-year-old from Bremen. Her mother found out about the class and enrolled her in the series. "It's been fun," Stancil said as she added different shades of blue to a painting of an eye.

Stancil said liked learning about Photoshop in the computer graphics class the week before, where she created an image using photos of herself and a friend from Canada on the background of another photo. She said she would love for one of the next art classes to be about photography.

Next to her, Julie Newton, worked on creating shapes out of gold paint while another painting of a sunrise dried on her worktable. She said she has loved learning about different drawing and painting techniques during the series of workshops. "The teachers have been great," she said.



» Kaitlin Stancil, 15, of Bremen, works on a painting of an eye while another painting dries on the corner of her desk. Stancil participated in Wallace State Community College's series of art workshops for homeschool students.

Newton, 14, of Hanceville, plans to attend the music series that begins at the end of the month. A native of California, Newton said she was in a homeschool choir there, and is looking forward to the music series and hopes the college hosts more classes in the future.

As McFerrin, 16, of Smokerise, finished her painting by adding light pink blossoms to a tree she from her graphic design project from the previous week.

It included a photo of her made to appear as if she's holding up the moon with her index finger and a taco orbiting the moon. The project was meant to show the students how to work with layers in the photo-editing program.

Adrian Scott, director of the art department said he's been impressed with the artwork created by the students and hopes the department will be able to offer more classes for homeschool students in the future, and possibly provide WSCC students teaching opportunities.

Edwards said her department is working on planning an array of workshops given the interest in the first series of classes.

"We are looking at how other programs within the college might contribute to a series of classes," she said. "Wallace State is dedicated to helping not only the students in our traditional classes, but also members of our community who want to learn a new skill or enhance their own natural talents and abilities.

For more information about upcoming homeschool workshops, call 256-352-7826.

Pints for Paws

» Busy Bee to serve up big help for animal shelter

By: Chelsea Sparks
Local Contributor

CULLMAN - It is all too common in Cullman to see stray cats and dogs roaming the streets. There is never a shortage of animals needing a home, but there is a shortage of homes for those animals.

Fortunately, in addition to the Cullman County Animal Shelter, the county has another rescue that is helping animals in need, Cullman Area Animal Welfare Association.

CAAWA is a 501c3 not-for-profit, no kill, animal rescue that is dedicated to finding forever homes for the animals of Cullman County.

CAAWA is a "shelterless" network of volunteers that rescues, rehabilitates, and adopts dogs and cats into committed families.

Lara McDaniel has been volunteering with the organization since 2011. She is also on the board of directors for CAAWA.

She has a passion for helping animals and is very excited to have the help of the local landmark and restaurant Busy Bee to help them raise money for their organization.

"Busy Bee contacted us via Facebook about their interest in planning an event and it went from there. We were thrilled to have a fun, progressive, and compassionate business involved in helping homeless and abandoned animals in our area," McDaniel said.

The profits that they collect from the "Pints for Paws" fundraiser will go to their Spay Neuter Assistance Program.

This helps families in the community get their pets fixed at a low cost so that more puppies are not born that are often unwanted and end up in shelter care.

The other half of the proceeds will go to the medical care of animals that are already in the program.

Lara laid out some of the unfortunate and cruel realities that these animals face each and every single day all over the Cullman area.

"Thousands of beautiful and innocent animals in our county lose their lives each year because they are born in the wrong place at the wrong time. It will take the combined effort of rescue groups, shelters, businesses, veterinarians, lawmakers, and caring citizens to stop this from happening," she said.

"As a community we can no longer sit on the sidelines and wait for 'someone else' to fix this problem. We must understand the decisions we make can mean life or death for innocent animals that want nothing more than to live. CAAWA is committed to ending the killing of these amazing animals and needs your help to make it happen."

The fundraiser will take place on Feb. 15 at 8 p.m. at the Busy Bee Café in downtown Cullman.

There will be live music performed by Chris Bushey and Aaron Williams, and $1 will be donated for every pint of draft beer sold.

Good music, good food and beer all for a worthy cause. There is nothing to lose, but much to be gained.

For those that cannot attend, Lara said that there are still plenty of ways that you can show your support.

"If you can't attend the fundraiser at Busy Bee, consider adopting a homeless animal from us. If you can't adopt, foster a homeless animal. If you can't foster, donate to our SNAP fund. If you can't donate, "Like" us on Facebook and share photos of animals waiting on their forever homes."

She added that the two most important things you can do to support the local shelters and rescues is to spay/neuter your pets and to adopt locally.

Together we can help great organizations like CAAWA bring a brighter tomorrow to these animals, but it all starts with us.

Small steps lead to big changes. Let us take the first step today.

Shelby to visit Cullman County; Part of Statewide Jobs and Industry Tour

By: Jonathan Graffeo

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On Monday, February 17, 2014, at noon, U.S. Senator Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) will visit Cullman County to meet with leadership and employees at REHAU Inc. in Cullman.

The visit marks the 39th stop in Shelby's statewide jobs and industry tour, during which he will visit a business in each of Alabama's 67 counties.

Shelby issued the following statement on the visit:

"Job creation must be our top priority as a nation, and it will be the focus of my statewide travel. It is critical that I hear firsthand from job creators and workers how federal policies are affecting economic growth, and what we can do to create more jobs in Alabama. These conversations with my constituents have always played a critical role in informing how I vote on issues before the Senate, and I look forward to traveling throughout the state again this year."

Sen. Shelby will be available to the media before and after the visit in the lobby at the main entrance of the facility. Visits typically last 30 minutes to one hour.

Since 1987, the beginning of Shelby's first term in the U.S. Senate, he has held more than 1,800 county visits in Alabama. This visit will mark the 1,848th of his career.

What's Online

Tony Ray Brock Music Enhancement Fund continuing to aide young artists

Students in Mrs. Linda Bean's piano keyboard SmartMusic classes at Cullman Middle School will perform the 2nd Annual Cullman Middle School Piano Recital on Thursday...



qrne.ws/159

Cystic Fibrosis Foundation to Host Benefit Event

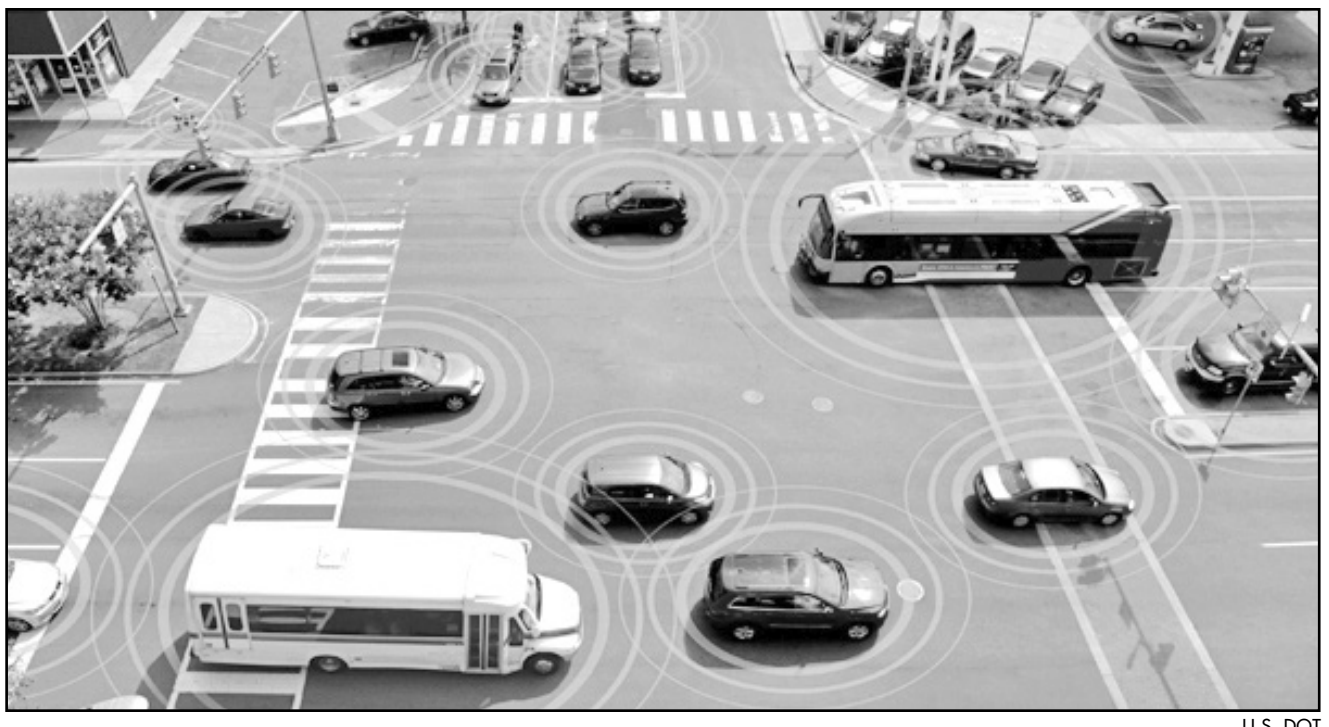
Come support the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation on May 3, 2014 at Depot Park. Vendors, inflatables, food, a dog show, face painting and the bands, Coal Rain and Vintage Cowboys, will be at this exciting family event! All proceeds will go to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

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Netflix Gold: Three New Documentaries

A good documentary makes you think. They are not always designed to change your mind. Even those that are should be finely crafted enough to challenge your perspective. A documentary hopefully illuminates a dark corner of life that may otherwise remain...

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U.S. DOT

» **Connected vehicles can help to mitigate crashes on busy urban streets.**

U.S. DOT Paves Way for Vehicle-to-Vehicle Communication

By: Nathan Naylor • NHTSA

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) announced recently that it will begin taking steps to enable vehicle-to-vehicle (V2V) communication technology for light vehicles. This technology would improve safety by allowing vehicles to "talk" to each other and ultimately avoid many crashes altogether by exchanging basic safety data, such as speed and position, ten times per second.

"Vehicle-to-vehicle technology represents the next generation of auto safety improvements, building on the life-saving achievements we've already seen with safety belts and air bags," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. "By helping drivers avoid crashes, this technology will play a key role in improving the way people get where they need to go while ensuring that the U.S. remains the leader in the global automotive industry."

DOT research indicates that safety applications using V2V technology can address a large majority of crashes involving two or more motor vehicles. With safety data such as speed and location flowing from nearby vehicles, vehicles can identify risks and provide drivers with warnings to avoid other vehicles in common crash types such as rear-end, lane change, and intersection crashes. These safety applications have been demonstrated with everyday drivers under both real-world and controlled test conditions.

The safety applications currently being developed provide warnings to drivers so that they can prevent imminent collisions, but do not automatically operate any vehicle systems, such as braking or steering. NHTSA is also considering future actions on active safety technologies that rely on on-board sensors. Those technologies are eventually expected to blend with the V2V technology. NHTSA issued an Interim Statement of Policy in 2013 explaining its approach to these various streams of innovation. In addition to enhancing safety, these future applications and technologies could help drivers to conserve fuel and save time.

V2V technology does not involve exchanging or recording personal information or tracking vehicle movements. The information sent between vehicles does not identify those vehicles, but merely contains basic safety data. In fact, the system as contemplated contains several layers of security and privacy protection to ensure that vehicles can rely on messages sent from other vehicles and that a vehicle or group of vehicles would be identifiable through defined procedures only if there is a need to fix a safety problem.

In August 2012, DOT launched the Safety Pilot "model deployment" in Ann Arbor, Mich., where nearly 3,000 vehicles were deployed in the largest-ever road test of V2V technology. DOT testing is indicating interoperability of V2V technology among products from different vehicle manufacturers and suppliers and has demonstrated that they work in real-world environments.

In driver clinics conducted by the Department prior to the model deployment, the technology showed high favorability ratings and levels of customer acceptance. Participants indicated they would like to have V2V safety features on their personal vehicle.

"V2V crash avoidance technology has game-changing potential to significantly reduce the number of crashes, injuries, and deaths on our nation's roads," said NHTSA Acting Administrator David Friedman. "Decades from now, it's likely we'll look back at this time period as one in which the historical arc of transportation safety considerably changed for the better, similar to the introduction of standards for seat belts, airbags, and electronic stability control technology."

NHTSA is currently finalizing its analysis of the data gathered as part of its yearlong pilot program and will publish a research report on V2V communication technology for public comment in the coming weeks. The report will include analysis of the Department's research findings in several key areas including technical feasibility, privacy and security, and preliminary estimates on costs and safety benefits. NHTSA will then begin working on a regulatory proposal that would require V2V devices in new vehicles in a future year, consistent with applicable legal requirements, Executive Orders, and guidance. DOT believes that the signal this announcement sends to the market will significantly enhance development of this technology and pave the way for market penetration of V2V safety applications.

"We are pleased with the direction NHTSA is taking in terms of V2V technology," said Greg Winfree, Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology. "The decision to move forward comes after years of dedicated research into the overwhelming safety benefits provided by a connected vehicle environment."

V2V communications can provide the vehicle and driver with 360-degree situational awareness to address additional crash situations – including those, for example, in which a driver needs to decide if it is safe to pass on a two-lane road (potential head-on collision), make a left turn across the path of oncoming traffic, or in which a vehicle approaching at an intersection appears to be on a collision course. In those situations, V2V communications can detect threats hundreds of yards from other vehicles that cannot be seen, often in situations in which on-board sensors alone cannot detect the threat. NHTSA has worked in close partnership in this research both with other DOT agencies, including the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology and the Federal Highway Administration, and with several leading auto manufacturers and academic research institutions, who have invested significant resources into developing and testing V2V technology. The collaboration of government, industry, and academia is critical to ensure V2V technology's interoperability across vehicles.

MADD Applauds House Committee Passage of DUI Reform Bill

By: Frank Harris

HB 381 Implements Interlock Law, MADD Calls for House Floor Vote

MONTGOMERY – Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) would like to thank Representative Farley for his leadership and the House Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee for advancing HB 381 at hearing today. This lifesaving legislation expands the use of ignition interlocks for all convicted drunk drivers to include first-time convicted drunk drivers with an illegal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08 or greater.

"HB 381 will protect the families in Alabama from drunk drivers. MADD is pleased the bill has advanced through the House Committee, said MADD National President Jan Withers. "MADD calls on House Rules Committee to schedule this lifesaving legislation for a floor vote."

HB 381 was born out of a 2013 legislative working group and will help to implement this existing interlock law by giving first-time offenders with a BAC of .08 to .14 the option of going on an ignition interlock for six months in lieu of a 90-day license suspension with no driving privileges. Currently there are 20 states that have similar all offender ignition interlock laws in place. For example, in New Mexico, Oregon, and Arizona, where similar laws are in place, drunk driving deaths have been reduced by 38, 42, 43 percent respectively.

Since 2011, ignition interlocks have been required for all repeat and first-time convicted drunk drivers with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .15 or greater. However, the law has not been implemented and drunk driving continues to be a problem in Alabama. Over two hundred and fifty lives were lost due to a drunk driving crash, representing 30 percent of all traffic fatalities in 2012.

Ignition interlocks are the most effective approach to stop DUI compared to license revocation alone. License suspension with no interlock requirement is proven to not be the best approach as 50 to 75 percent of convicted drunk drivers continue to drive on a suspended license.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), ignition interlocks, on average, reduce drunk driving recidivism by 67 percent compared to license suspension alone. Ignition interlocks help the convicted drunk driver learn how to drive sober following a drunk driving conviction. Simply taking away an offender's legal driving privilege, fails to teach sober driving behavior, but it an interlock is proven to teach an offender how to drive sober. Additionally, studies show that a first-time convicted drunk driver is not a first-time offender, but rather it is simply the first time they have been caught. First-time offenders have driven drunk an average of 80 times before they are convicted.

"Through the efforts of MADD, drunk driving is now socially unacceptable. Unfortunately, it is still tolerated. HB 381 will increase the use of ignition interlocks for convicted drunk drivers and help prevent repeat offenses, since ignition interlocks are proven to be more effective than license revocation alone," added Withers. For more visit madd.org/interlock.

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Vinemont, Hanceville to tangle for 3A, Area 13 Championship

By: Johnny Thornton
Sports Reporter

HANCEVILLE - Cullman County teams will take center stage Monday night for the title of Class 3A, Area 13.

That was set up when the Vinemont Eagles got by the Danville Hawks from Morgan County 45-42 in the first semifinal Friday.

Game two was a county battle in which the Hanceville Bulldogs dominated by taking down the Good Hope Raiders 78-49.

The Eagles and Bulldogs play at 7 p.m. Monday at Lane Horton Gymnasium with the winner to host a Sub-Regional playoff next Friday while the runner-up will have to travel.

Vinemont and Danville got locked into a tight game with the score even at 17-17 at the half.

Then the Eagles had a good third period with a 17-6 run and moved ahead by the score of 34-23.

But the Hawks battled back and closed the deficit to 41-40 with a minute to play.

The Eagles then got three free throws by Lance Stanley and one from Zach Drake to avoid a defeat and improve to 13-14 for the season.

Stanley missed two free throws with 4.9 seconds left but Vinemont got the offensive rebound and was able to run out the clock.

Stanley played well for Todd Johnson's squad with 21 points, center Garrett Sipe scored 10, Drake had eight, Riley Foust three, Tyler Tucker two, and Auston Hedgecock one.

Leading Danville who ends the season at 9-15 was Patrick Doherty with 15 and Alan Cordova with 13.

Hanceville 78, Good Hope 49

The fourth meeting on the hardwood between the Bulldogs and Raiders turned into Hanceville's favor thanks to a 16-8 lead following the first period.

Hanceville produced 21 points in the second stanza and left the floor on top of the Raiders 37-19.

Holding on to a 52-34 lead at the end of the third, the No. 1 seed from this area blew the game open with 26 points in the final 8:00 and won by a margin of 78-49.

Brontae Harris anchored a balanced scoring with 21, Keith Twitty added 12, Chris Smith hit 11, Christian Sellers and Dante' Reese scored 10, Marc Johnson five, Xavier Malcom four, Eric Flanigan three, and Marshall Johnson two.

The final game of the season for Good Hope ended with point guard Eli Marty hitting a team high 15. Chris Raper netted eight, Alex Cofer had seven, Andrew Cofer and Jonathan Grigsby six, Reese Harbison three, and Tyler Vanderburg two.

Hanceville is 21-7 on the season and has an 11-2 record in games played at Lane Horton Gymnasium with six consecutive victories.

5A State Basketball Title in Bearcat's Mirror

By: Josh McBrayer
josh@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN – When you think Cullman athletics, what comes to mind? Baseball championships, deep runs in the football playoffs, and soccer titles? All these things are true but there is one thing missing from that list: a basketball title. This is something head coach Bobby Myer is working hard to remedy.

Myer has been a winner everywhere he has coached. He guided Vinemont through some of the best years in the program's history including a county title and a run at a state title. Now he leads a talent-laden group of players, from sophomore Lawson Schaffer to senior Auston Neal, on a quest for a state title that starts with the area tournament in East Lawrence.

The Bearcats will bring their hard-nosed full court press and smothering man to man defense to the tournament as well as their run and gun offense.

Cullman relies on the defense to set up the offense as a majority of the Cats points come off of turnovers and points in transition.

Leading the attack for Cullman is 1,000 point scorer, Schaffer.

He is a dual threat, with a smooth jump and three point shot as well as the ability to drive to the hoop for the score or dishing the ball to an open teammate.

Seth Swalve also provides a spark from the outside, raining threes.

Lee Mattox controls the post, establishing the inside presence and getting easy buckets.

Neal is the bruiser inside playing lockdown defense and cleaning the glass like Windex.

As good as Cullman is individually, they play even better as a team. They feed off one another's strengths and cover up any weaknesses. This allows the Bearcats to anticipate where each other teammate is on the floor and what they are doing.

With all of the positives the Cullman Bearcats have going for them, it is no wonder that they are poised to make a run at the 5A State Basketball Title.

Auburn cleans up on signing day

By: Josh McBrayer
josh@cullmansense.com

AUBURN - Every college football fan was glued to the television and internet last Wednesday as National Signing Day left its mark on everyone and Auburn came out a big winner yet again.

Although they lost Rashaan Evans to Alabama in a shocker, the Tigers still had the ninth best recruiting class in the country.

Auburn was able to snag one of the most sought after prospect, Racean "Roc" Thomas from Oxford High School in Oxford, AL.

Thomas was 2014 Mr. Football in the state of Alabama and the #3 running back available to be signed.

Here is a breakdown of the entire Auburn class:

• Kalvaraz Bessent CB 6-0 170 St. Mary's, GA/Camden County
• Markell Boston S 6-2 200 Sharpsburg, GA/East Coweta
• Myron Burton Jr. WR 6-3 200 Lawrenceville, GA/Peachtree Ridge
• Xavier Dampeer OL 6-2 300 Mendenhall, MS/Copiah-Lincoln CC
• Deshaun Davis LB 6-0 225 Mobile, AL/Vigor
• Raashed Kennion DE 6-6 230 Jacksonville, FL/First Coast
• DaVonte Lambert DT 6-4 280 Keysville, GA/Georgia Military College
• Devaroe Lawrence DT 6-3 290 Greenville, S.C./Georgia Military College
• Chris Laye TE 6-5 240 Cumming, GA/Lambert
• Jakell Mitchell HB 6-4 215 Opelika, AL/Opelika
• Derrick Moncrief S 6-3 225 Prattville, AL/Mississippi Gulf Coast CC
• Kamryn Pettway RB 6-0 220 Prattville, AL/Prattville
• Stephen Roberts FS 6-0 180 Opelika, AL/Opelika
• Nick Ruffin CB 6-0 180 Duluth, GA/St. Pius X
• Dontavius Russell DT 6-3 300 Carrollton, GA/Carrollton
• Braden Smith OL 6-6 285 Olathe, KS/Olathe South
• Roc Thomas RB 5-11 202 Anniston, AL/Oxford
• Justin Thornton DE 6-5 230 Prichard, AL/Vigor
• Stanton Truitt WR 5-10 185 Monroe, GA/Monroe Area
• Sean White QB 6-2 200 Boca Raton, FL/University Nova South
• Andrew Williams DE 6-4 250 McDonough, GA/Eagles Landing Academy
• Tre' Williams LB 6-2 217 Mobile, AL/St. Paul's Episcopal
• D'haquille Williams WR 6-3 205 LaPlace, LA/Mississippi Gulf Coast CC

For a detailed breakdown of each player, visit CullmanSense.com/Sports.

Boyd (from Front)

approached by several schools and had other campus visits before settling on UAH.

"There were really two (schools) that I had visits on," Boland told CullmanSense, "UAH and Lipscomb. I enjoyed Lipscomb but I just felt like UAH is where I wanted to go."

CullmanSense would like to extend congratulations and well wishes to Tyler Boland for extending his career and signing with UAH.

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Cold Springs Lady Eagles crush Sulligent in 2A, Area 14 title game

By: Johnny Thornton
Sports Reporter

COLD SPRINGS – Facing the Cold Springs Lady Eagles at Jesse George Gymnasium in the postseason is very difficult to the opposition.

Just ask the Oakman Lady Wildcats and Sulligent Blue Devils who tried to cool down the No. 3 ranked team in Class 2A over the weekend in the Area 14 tournament.

The Lady Eagles ripped apart Oakman 72-24 in the semifinal round then crushed Sulligent on Saturday night in the title game 76-32.

Tammy West's ball club has won seven straight games on the home floor and is 10-1 for the season at Jesse George Gym with one game left on the hardwood.

Cold Springs will host Vincent Thursday night in the 2A Sub-Regional with the winner bound for the Northwest Regional Tournament at Wallace State Feb. 19.

The Lady Eagles went wild on scoring in the second period, producing 32 points on 10 field goals, five of them coming from 3-point range and going seven of eight at the foul stripe.

Seven players delivered to the scoring cause in this eight-minute span as a 16-6 lead at the end of the first period was up to 48-11 when the game went to halftime.

Haley Freeman, Chloe Harbison, and Keegan Johnson all scored six points in the second with Johnson getting two shots to fall from the baseline for treys. That was too much for Sulligent to handle.

Coach West played her starters for the third period with the Lady Eagles on top 65-25. Then it was time for the reserves to conclude the evening's performance of a one-sided affair with the Lady Eagles now 26-6 on the season and 8-0 against competition from 2A, Area 14.

Freeman sparked the attack with 18 points while Harbison and Emme Willoughby tossed in 11, Caitlyn Hall had 10, Johnson and Bailey West finished with eight, Camryn Crider scored five, Rilee White netted three, and McKinley Davis collected two.

In eight games against the rest of Area 14, Cold Springs was never challenged. The Lady Eagles beat Sulligent three times by a margin of 44, 26, and 35 points, Oakman three times by margins of 65 and 51, and Lamar County twice by margins of 53 and 33. No other area in girls prep basketball in the North part of the state has shown more dominance than what has been displayed by the Cold Springs Lady Eagles.

Lady Raiders 3A, Area 13 Champs

By: Jim Stinson
Local Contributor

GOOD HOPE - Good Hope used a Great defensive effort to defeat Danville 34-25 and claim the 3A Area 13 championship.

Kacy Thomas led Good Hope with 10 points, Katelyn Bishop with 9, Celest Whisenant 7, Kaylee Maddox 4, and Kayla Scott and Alex Flannigan added 2 points each.



» Bottom row: Kacy Thomas, Katelyn Bishop, Kayla Scott Middle row: Jessica King, Alex Flannigan, Celina Dillard, Kaylee Maddox, Celest Whisenant, Josie McDonald, Sadie Abbott, Jami Stinson Back row: Coach Oldacre, Coach Cofer

Area Tourneys Scoring Wrap Up

By: Josh McBrayer
josh@cullmansense.com

Thursday
GIRLS
Cullman 53 - Hartselle 42
Vinemont 17 - Danville 66

Friday
GIRLS
Cold Springs 72 - Oakman 24
Locust Fork 52 - Fairview 48

BOYS
Cullman 73 - West Point 64
Cold Springs 71 - Oakman 6
Locust Fork 38 - Fairview 37
Holly Pond 104 - Brindlee Mountain 57
Vinemont 45 - Danville 42
Hanceville 78 - Good Hope 49

Saturday
GIRLS
Cold Springs 76 - Sulligent 32
Good Hope 34 - Danville 25

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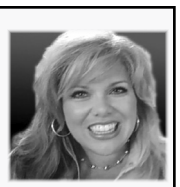
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Did you know that traditionally the most important deadline for 12th grade college funding is Dec. 1 nationally for them to receive priority, merit-based funding consideration for all (4) years of undergraduate work?

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.
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Obamacare (from Front)

bill without any Republican support in a narrow 220 to 215 victory.

That same bill was taken up by the Senate who would then turn around a little over a month later and pass a very similar bill by a 60 to 39 vote on Dec. 24.

Again the legislation passed without any Republican support. The House then took up the Senate version of the bill and passed it via the reconciliation method the following year on March 21.

That bill was called the "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act."

The vote was 219 in favor with all 178 Republicans and 34 Democrats against (212 total).

Two days later, President Obama signed the bill into law.

The following day, dozens of lawsuits were filed against the Affordable Care Act by various states, interest groups and even individuals all opposed to the law.

Eventually some of those suits made their way all the way into the chambers of the Supreme Court. On June 28, 2012, they ruled the law constitutional.

Despite delays in the law and over 40 attempts by the House to repeal it, Obamacare still stands largely as it passed. So what all is in the law and what has changed? A lot.

First, children under the age of 26 can now stay on their parent's insurance.

This has given insurance to a previous 3.1 million who did not have it (Note: I was one of those Americans who did gain insurance for 2 years under this).

The law established a series of exchanges, either run by the state or the federal government on which people could buy health insurance.

To help with the cost of these policies the law also established a sliding scale of subsidies for those who make 133 to 400 percent of the federal poverty line.

For 2013, that covered income levels between $31,322 and $94,200 for a family of four.

About 39.1 million Americans fall under the poverty line, equaling around 15 percent of the population.

Those who make under 133 percent of the federal poverty line would be eligible for an expanded Medicare and Medicaid program.

Originally the law intended for all states to expand their Medicare programs to cover those who made under 133 percent of the federal poverty line.

However, part of the Supreme Court's ruling was the federal government could not withhold funding from the states to coerce them into expanding their programs.

While the federal government would cover 100 percent of the cost of those eligible under the program expansion for three years, they would gradually reduce this amount to a 90 percent contribution by 2020.

Many states (including Alabama) chose not to expand their Medicare and Medicaid coverage, mostly because they did not believe they could afford to.

This has left a gap of about 6.4 million Americans who make too much to qualify for Medicare but not enough to receive a subsidy.

The law also includes two very controversial mandates: an employer and an individual one.

The employer mandate states that all companies who regularly have over 50 employees must offer benefits to those employees who work over 30 hours a week.

That mandate will take effect at the beginning of 2015 for employees who qualify during the 2014 tax year.

Despite statements from the Congressional Budget Office stating this will not have negative effects on the middle class, many employers, especially retail and food service industries, are enforcing hour restrictions this year to keep many part-time employees from qualifying for benefits.

Most of those limits range between 20 to 25 hours a week. Full-time managers who fail to enforce payroll restrictions are subject to termination themselves.

The individual mandate is probably the least well received part of the law and it is the very mechanism that actually allows the law to work, according to the White House.

It also was ruled constitutional by the Supreme Court in their 2012 verdict, as it was interpreted as a tax, and the Constitution gives Congress the power to tax individuals.

The mandate will be phased in over the next three years.

Those individuals without health insurance for more than three months of 2014 will be subject to a fine of one percent of their income or $95 per adult and $47.50 per child with a maximum of $285 per family, whichever is greater.

Those individuals without health insurance for more than three months of 2015 will be subject to a fine of two percent of their income or $325 per adult and $162.50 per child with a maximum of $975 per family.

By 2016, the penalty will increase to 2.5 percent of income or $695 per adult and $347.50 per child with a maximum of $2,085 per family.

Many individuals who are opposed to the law or simply unable to afford health insurance through the exchanges, even with subsidies, are opting to take the tax penalty next year.

March 31 ends this year's open enrollment. Those without insurance by then will take the tax penalty for this year and have to wait for the next open enrollment period, which begins Oct. 15 and runs through Dec. 7.

More information on how to enroll can be found online through www.healthcare.gov.

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Billion (from Front)

is help.

Leah Costello is a sexual assault counselor at the Victim Services Center in Cullman and has been working with the center for six years. She is very excited for Cullman to be a part of the 1 Billion Rising movement and hopes that others will come out and show their support.

"VSOC decided to become involved with the 1 Billion Rising movement to help bring awareness to the issues of violence against women and girls," she said.

"1 Billion Rising is a global movement and we wanted VSOC to become part of that. It's not every day we get the chance to be part of a worldwide event."

The event will be held at Depot Park and everyone is welcome to come. Participants are also encouraged to wear red or pink in support of the cause.

"It will be a fun event. Participants can dance, walk, talk, share their thoughts, and just be heard and seen as part of a major worldwide event. It is our hope that participants will realize anyone can become involved in a community awareness program and attend events that are important to them," Costello said.

"It can be as easy as dancing and just showing up to lend your support to something you believe in. Violence against women and girls is an issue that affects everyone in some way or another."

The Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center reported that of the 20,863 violent offenses reported in 2012, 14 percent were domestic violence incidents.

Domestic violence was indicated in 2,992 offenses reported: in 24 homicides; 183 rapes; 63 robberies; and in 2,722 aggravated assaults.

A total of 1,753 incidents of domestic violence were given a 64 percent clearance rate, with 45 percent of the clearances being exceptional, i.e. lack of prosecution.

That means that for most of these victims, justice is never found, even if they have the courage to report it. Every number on these statistic reports represents a person who was hit, robbed, raped, or even killed.

Coming together as a community to show our support and demanding that those who would harm women and young girls in this state are brought to justice will help to alleviate the issue.

Victim Services of Cullman offers a wide array of services to help local women and their children receive the help that they need.

Some of these services include shelter, counseling, support group, assistance with Protection from Abuse orders, 24-hour crisis line, hospital accompaniment, court accompaniment, and referrals to other agencies.

Costello had this to say about the VSOC and what you can do to help: "We also want to let people know that VSOC is here for them if they need us. It is with the support of our communities that we are able to continue to provide the much needed services to the victims we serve," she said.

"It is important for individuals to know that they can be a part of the solution to violence in our community. Become an engaged bystander by reporting abuse if you see or even feel it may be happening."

Abuse is serious and although it may not seem like our place to step in, much of the time we may be the only one that person has to help them.

The Cullman community has always been a place where neighbor helps neighbor and a wonderful way to help our neighbors who may be in this awful situation is to show our support and tell them that they are not alone. For more on the 1 Billion Rising campaign visit onebillionrising.org or call the VSOC at 256-775-2600.

Shedd (from Front)

the people of District 11 for this opportunity to serve and I take the responsibility very seriously.

I share Ronald Reagan's view when he said, "At my age, I don't have time for politics as usual."

I intend to work hard for those needing a job; those trying to making an honest living in business, including agribusiness; our retired citizens, both active retirees and those in the nursing homes; those who are employed; and my seven year-old grandson and his generation.

I kept a copy of every campaign promise I made when I was first elected and I intend to use it as a checklist until every promise is fulfilled.

I plan to aggressively stand for policies that helps create jobs in the private sector and I plan to stand against unnecessary government regulations.

I plan to caution against too much state debt and promote combining state agencies that duplicate state services or programs.

Alabama can't afford what I call "little government empires" all across this state and some aren't little.

I intend to pass legislation to establish Performance-Based Pay for those in responsible positions of state government.

It is time we expect as much from our state government as we do our football teams.

I intend to oppose tax increases.

When tax increases are proposed in Montgomery my questions is, "What are we going to do when we get to 100%?"

I intend to stand firm against unnecessary federal intrusion into our lives.

I will stand firm for our Second Amendment Rights, which protects individual's right to bear arms.

I will work hard to make sure District 11 – Blount, Cullman, Marshall, and Morgan Counties get our fair share of state dollars and state projects to meet our infrastructure needs.

I am proud that my new district now includes the "Crown Jewel" of the state's two-year college system, Wallace State Community College and I will be a strong voice in Montgomery for this important education institution along with all Pre-K through 12 educational institutions in my district.

I look forward to my work on the Alabama House of Representative's Children and Senior Advocacy Committee to put into action my philosophy.

If we take care of our children, meet the needs of our senior population and do things to provide opportunities for good jobs for those in between, then we've done our job.

I look forward to my work on the County and Municipal Government Committee in the House of Representatives. As a former mayor and former county commissioner, I understand that most good things from government that benefit people come at the local level, not from Washington or Montgomery.

I am especially anxious to continue my work on the House of Representative's Transportation, Utilities and Infrastructure Committee particularly as I work with the Alabama Department of Transportation to complete projects in my district.

This coming week, I will lead our second meeting with legislators along Highway 278 from Cullman to Gadsden (senators and house members) meeting with ALDOT officials in our efforts to develop a successful strategy to complete U.S. Highway 278.

As I serve, it is important to me that I my voting record and my legislative work reflects the thinking of the people of my district.

I ask for your prayers throughout my terms in the Alabama House of Representatives.

Team Levi

By: Kate Mullaney
kate@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN - Levi Bates is a fifth grader at West Elementary. In November 2013 at only 10 years old, Levi was diagnosed with cancer and the overwhelming amount of support Levi has received from his friends, classmates, and teachers has been truly moving.

Last week, West Elementary held a fundraiser for Levi and his mother to help pay for the gas and food they need while going to and from Birmingham nearly everyday for his treatments. Levi's homeroom teacher Robin Smith decided to organize a fundraiser selling wristbands to students and teachers to raise funds. Every bit of the profits will go to Levi and his family.

"Team Levi" is a community of supporters including Levi's friends, family, teachers, and anyone else who wants to support them, but his homeroom teacher wanted to organize a school wide fundraiser at West Elementary.

"We decided to sell wristbands for $1 each, that way all the kids could participate," Smith said. "The wristbands say We love Levi on one side and Fight like a Bearcat on the other. They were asked to give $1 but some gave $5 to $10 and only took one bracelet. Friday we added hat day. So, if you wanted to wear your hat to school, you could, but you had to pay a dollar."

Robin and the rest of Levi's teachers, were excited to organize this fundraiser and they've found that their students feel just as much love for Levi as they do.

"West Elementary is a very giving and loving school so we wanted to do something for him and his family," Smith said with a smile. "We just wanted them to know we love and care about them. It also helps the other kids know that life isn't just about receiving, it's about giving, and the kids here have done a wonderful job. They have really stepped up to the plate."

A total of 750 wristbands were ordered and Robin has a remaining supply of 25, ensuring that the fundraiser has been a success to say the least.

Levi was able to go visit his classmates at West Elementary last Friday and a child has never been happier to go to school. This was the first time he's been back to school since he was diagnosed in November.

"As he walked down the hallway to his classroom," Smith said, "the fourth graders lined up and clapped for him as he walked by. He stayed in my room and we let all the fifth grade classes come in and visit with him. His mom was here too and she said that was the first time she's seen him smile like that in a long time. He was a kid again today."

Levi's friends and classmates Cole Herfurth and Jade Norr are passionate about supporting Levi and spreading support throughout the community.

"We've bought Team Levi shirts and wristbands, and I've visited him at the hospital and at his house," Herfurth said.

Jade also offers advice on how you can support Levi and his family: "Team Levi has a Facebook page so you could follow that. And if anyone offers you a bracelet, you should buy one."

If you would like to support Levi and his family, contact Robin Smith at West Elementary at 256-734-4271 to buy a bracelet or to make a donation. Help this wonderful student fight cancer and become a part of Team Levi.

Benefit Concert Preserves Beloved Student's Memory

» Fairview High School Students pay their respects to Lewis Beam

By: Kate Mullaney
kate@cullmansense.com

FAIRVIEW - Fairview High School held a benefit concert for the family of Lewis Beam last Saturday night. Lewis Beam was a senior at Fairview High School and tragically lost his life in a car accident earlier this year.

The event took place to show support and love for his family. Mike Hays of Mad Dog Mike's Famous Bar B Que hosted the special show.

Despite the circumstances surrounding the event, the mood of the crowd was pleasant.

Several Fairview students, as well as other members of the community, attended this event to celebrate Lewis' life. The crowd enjoyed Fairview High School's FFA string band, as well as Kronis and the Stone Floor Theory.

Lead guitarist of Kronis, Desmond Farr, was excited to play at this event because he and his band members were close to Beam.

"We were willing to do anything to help his family out," he said. "We were all really good friends with Lewis."

Lewis' friends and family were present and smiling at this concert. Haley Chambers, 17, from Fairview, was happy to support the Beam family. She and Lewis had played together in the band since seventh grade.

"Lewis was a really good friend to me," she said. "It just means a lot to get to help the family. We all just get to come together to celebrate his life and show our love and support."

Lewis' parents were moved by the amount of people who put effort into creating this event, as well as the amount of people who attended.

His mother, Ann Beam, was in awe at the support her family is receiving from the community. "It's overwhelming," she said with a smile on her face. "This whole community has been great. There are so many other things I don't know how to say, so all I can say is thank you."

This was a powerful event, which served as an excellent way to support a local family, as well as celebrate the life and preserve the legacy of Lewis Beam.

Deb's Bookstore Celebrates Tenth Anniversary

By: Kate Mullaney
kate@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN - Tucked away on the corner of Highways 31 and 278 sits Deb's Bookstore, a quiet store in beautiful downtown Cullman. Deb's Bookstore has a variety of used, hardback, and paperback books, and with 90,000 books in stock, you are sure to find exactly what you're looking for.

With books lining every wall of the building and endless options for book lovers, Deb's Bookstore is more comfortable than home.

This year, Deb's Bookstore is celebrating its 10-year anniversary and owner Deb Laslie could not be more thrilled.

Deb had been working as an executive secretary for 25 years when she decided it was time for a change.

"Working for 'myself' was a little scary," she said, "but I took a chance, cashed out everything I could get my hands on, and here we are!"

She explains that the process of opening her bookstore was fun, but required a lot more physical labor than she had anticipated.

She drove all over the southeast to other used bookstores and bought their overstock as well as anything else they'd let her have.

She even crossed the Mason-Dixon line on her hunt for books.

"Boxes and boxes of books then had to be inventoried, sorted, and organized before putting them on a shelf . . . Somewhere!" she explained.

One of the most pleasing things to Deb during the process of opening her store was finding the perfect location.

"I was very blessed to have found my location near the corner of Hwy. 278 and Hwy. 31, right in the middle of Cullman, across from the Chamber of Commerce. We have street parking, and I have my own parking lot right next to the store."

Finally, she opened her store with a stock of 15,000 books and just when she thought she could relax, even more work had to be done.

"Getting set up with a distributor for new books, building all the bookshelves, and arranging them to make the most of the space was a real challenge."

Deb says opening her store was a true family project and that because of all his help, her husband is just as much a part of the business as she is.

"I never could've been accomplished without my husband Fielden," she said. "Every shelf and light and computer and music came from his hands. We have close to 90,000 books now and I'm still trying to figure out how to get a couple more shelves in here (don't tell Fielden.)"

Deb has faced a few challenges along the way.

At first, people doubted her ability to run a business because as she said, she's an English major, not a business guru.

"I guess all I can say is: the pigs are flying!" she laughed.

Another difficulty she's faced with is guessing what the next "hot" book will be, which is important so that it will be readily available for the eager readers of Cullman. Her favorite part, though?

"Putting a book in the hands of someone and knowing how much they will enjoy it. There's nothing like sharing the love of good books. I have absolutely the best customers of any store anywhere. And I get to bring my dog to work with me! DeeDawg has been here every day since she was six weeks old."

That's right. Deb brings her adorable Schnauzer to her store everyday. Deb's Bookstore is clearly the place to be for animal lovers and book lovers alike, and DeeDawg seems to enjoy reading just as much as Deb.

Cullman is lucky to have such a passionate business owner.

And when you visit her store, Deb will treat you like family. She encourages you to bring in your own gently used books and trade them for store credit.

"My customers bringing in their favorite books is what makes this store unique," she said.

She also carries the latest new releases, which are always discounted 20 percent off.

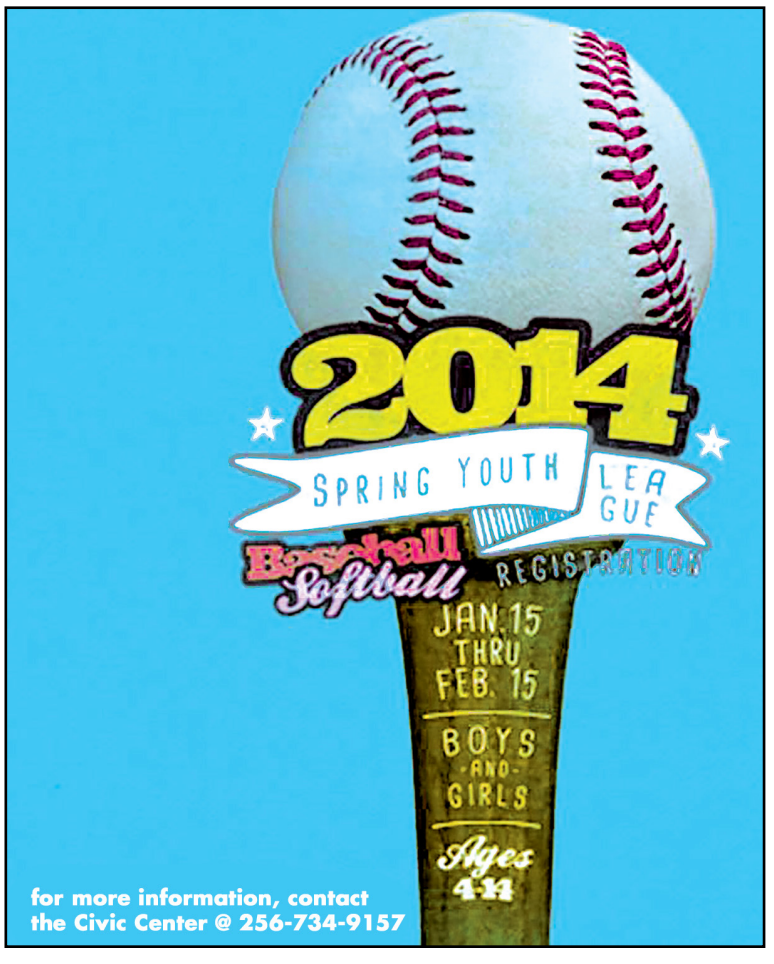
Her used books are half priced or less. Deb insists that there is something at her store for everyone, no matter your reading taste.

"I never know what's going to come through the door," she said.

"Sometimes we get some real treasures. If you don't know what you want to read, browse the shelves, and you're sure to find something. If we don't have the book you're looking for, we'll do our best to find it for you. I can order new books at 20 percent off the retail price and we can usually get them in a couple of days."

Who knew owning a bookstore could be so exciting? Deb is eager to spread her love of reading across Cullman, especially after 10 years in the business. She hopes to continue to do her best to get her customers the books they want at a good price and to keep her store as personal and friendly as she can.

"All our customers are friends and we care about each other," she said. "Kind of the way it used to be in all small towns across America. Mayberry friendly, Cullman special."



– 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.

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 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.

Northbrook Baptist Church Hosts Adult Luncheon
Everyone is invited to attend the adult luncheon sponsored by Northbrook Baptist Church starting at 10:30 a.m. in the church atrium. There will be a guest speaker, Bobby Denton. For additional information please contact Wade Maynard, 256-734-6401.

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.

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.

Chocolate Tasting Extravaganza
Just in time for Valentine's Day - treat yourselves to the annual 'Chocolate Tasting Extravaganza' hosted by the Beta Delta Chapter of Alpha Delta Kappa Honorary Teachers Sorority. This annual event will take place in St. Paul's Lutheran School auditorium from 5 p.m. until 7:30 p.m. Tickets are $5.00 per person with all funds raised going toward the scholarship fund sponsored by the sorority for a student who is earning a degree in the teaching field. While the tasting party is open to all during the listed hours, takeout plates of goodies also will be available. Don't miss out on this extremely delicious Valentine's Day preliminary treat.

American Legion Meal/Meeting
Members of American Legion Post #4 will hold their meal and meeting starting at 6 p.m. at the VFW Post 2214. The meeting is open to all and the topic will include the Post's upcoming projects and the Mid-winter conference. Don Reid has additional information by calling 256-636-1913.

Cullman County Retiree & Senior Health Fair
The Cullman County Retiree and Senior Health Fair is scheduled for today at Cullman Civic Center starting at 9 a.m. Everyone is invited to attend this free event.

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.

Baseball and softball for Good Hope Parks & Recreation Department
Those interested in playing baseball and softball for Good Hope Parks & Recreation Department need to sign up between now and February 14 at Good Hope City Hall. Hours Monday through Friday are from 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. Cost for T-Ball players (ages 5-6) is $60.00 per player; softball and baseball ages 7-14 cost $70.00 per player. Please call 256-739-3757 for additional information.

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!

Ms. Senior Cullman County Pageant
Everyone is invited to attend the annual Ms. Senior Cullman County Pageant beginning at 2 p.m. at the Betty Leeth Haynes Theatre at Wallace State College. Come cheer for your favorite contestant. For more information please contact Lilly Tucket, 256-507-3698.

Next 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.

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!

RESIDENTIAL RECIPES

Honey Mustard Slow Cooker Chicken



By: Allison Robertson • Local Contributor

I love using my slow cooker. I throw something in it before church on Sundays and it is ready by the time we get home.

The chicken turns out so moist and tender, it will literally melt in your mouth. I served it with rice, but it goes well with any sides you prefer.

Ingredients:
- 4 boneless skinless chicken breasts
- 1 cup - chicken stock
- 1 cup - water
- 1/2 cup - yellow mustard
- 1/4 cup - spicy brown mustard
- 1/2 cup - honey
- ½ teaspoon - smoked paprika

Instructions:
- Combine mustards and honey in a small bowl and microwave for 30 seconds.
- Put water, chicken stock, chicken, and paprika into the slow cooker. Add the honey mustard mixture, reserving 1/4 cup for later.
- Cook on low for 6 hours. Serve with rice or potatoes and top with remaining honey mustard mixture.

Beer Battered Pork Chops

By: Chelsea Sparks • Local Contributor

When I first got married almost seven years ago, I really wanted to impress my new husband with my cooking skills. So, I made him this dish and he has been in love with it ever since. To this day, any time I ask him what he wants for dinner, there is a good chance of him requesting this recipe. The flavor of these pork chops is amazing, especially when it is something as simple and quick as this. I love to pair this dish with fresh yeast rolls.

Ingredients:
- pork chops – I usually get 4 center cut, but you can use any kind you like.
- 1 small package – sliced mushrooms
- 3/4 cup - flour
- 2 teaspoons – thyme
- 2 1/2 tablespoons – butter
- 1 teaspoon – pepper (optional for extra spice)
- beer

Instructions:
- First, you are going to flour your pork chops on both sides. If you are going to add pepper, I usually sprinkle some on the pork chop then put it in the flour.
- Melt 1 tablespoon of butter in a skillet over medium heat.
- Place the pork chops in the skillet and brown on both sides. This should only take about 5 minutes. Take them out of the skillet and put on a plate to the side.
- Once you have browned the pork chops, take them out of the skillet and sauté' the mushrooms.
- Put 1 1/2 tablespoons of butter in the skillet along with your mushrooms and thyme. Sauté' for 2-3 minutes.
- Once that is done, add your pork chops back into the skillet. Now add the beer! You can use any beer you like. We experiment with different ones, but cheap beer does great.
- After you have added the beer, you will cover the skillet and allow it cook for about 10 to 15 minutes.

GET YOUR RECIPE PUBLISHED

E-mail submissions to:

recipes@cullmansense.com

OUTDOORS

Feeding the Birds

Agriplex holds Family Friendly Bird Seminar

By: Chelsea Sparks
Local Contributor

CULLMAN - At 9 a.m. on a Saturday, most of us are sleeping late or lounging on the couch watching cartoons with our kids. For some, however, Saturday morning was spent with their children learning and having fun feeding the birds.

At the North Alabama Agriplex Heritage Center, the first Saturday of every month is spent teaching children and parents about the world around them.

Rachel Peinhardt Dawsey, coordinator for the Agriplex, has been working with the Farm Kid's Club since its start three years ago.

"It is $5 a child and $10 a family," she said. "It is a parent and child program. This year, First South Farm Credit sponsored us, and they sponsored us so that we can keep the cost at $10. Our expenses are more than that, but that sponsorship helps to keep the cost low."

The room was filled with eager children and their parents making an assortment of items, all of which revolved around helping our fine-feathered friends. There were five stations around the room.

At one station, the children and their parents built wooden bluebird houses. At another, metal coils were used to make a wreath full of materials that birds can use to build their nests.

Pinecone bird feeders and feeders that were made into different shapes using cookie cutters were also fun projects taking place.

"I love the parent and child program because the parent or grandparent is educated about it, and they can go home and reinforce the learning topic," Dawsey said.

"To me, we are trying to connect people with the food they eat and their natural world. A lot of times, our children aren't getting out into nature much, and so this program is trying to teach kids to think more about the wild birds that live in their yard. Even if you live in an apartment, there are birds around."

Parents seemed to be enjoying themselves as much as their kids. The atmosphere was one of fun and learning.

Loucrecia Hollingsworth, a local parent, spoke about how the program has helped her daughter.

"We started coming last year. She is homeschooled," she said speaking about her daughter. "So I really like that she can come here and interact with other kids and work on projects. A lot of the things that we've come to are stuff that I don't necessarily know about. So I have learned a lot, too."

The Farm Kid's Club is a wonderful way for parents and their children to get out of the house and learn something new together.



» This month's Farm Kid's Club meeting at the Agriplex included teaching children and parents how to build a bluebird house.

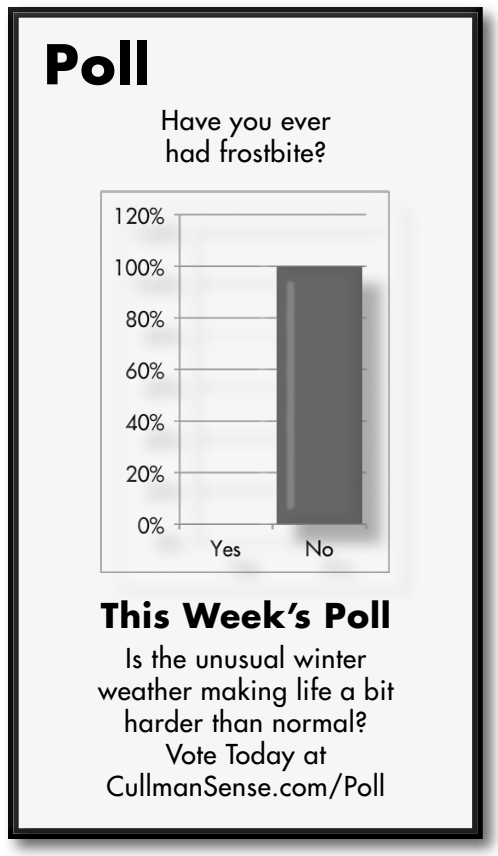
You can teach your children the value of nature and the world around us on the first Saturday of every month for an affordable fee.

It is often too easy to get caught up in the digital world of Internet, TV, and video games. The Agriplex is offering a wonderful and low cost way to get out the house and get back into nature.

The next Farm Kid's Club meeting will take place March 1st at 9 a.m. and the theme will be chick time.

Kids will be able to get an up-close look at baby chicks and learn all about how they grow and hatch. Pre-registration is required.

Call the North Alabama Agriplex for more information at 256=297-1044.



Sawmill Furniture Holds Ribbon Cutting

By: Kate Mullaney
kate@cullmansense.com

» Handmade Furniture and Décor Find a Home in Garden City

GARDEN CITY - If you appreciate handmade furniture and decor, you're in luck. Sawmill Furniture features only handmade furniture and decor, and this new shop held its exciting ribbon cutting last Friday morning. Located on Highway 31 in Garden City, this new business has all the handmade furnishings you desire.

Sawmill Furniture officially opened Saturday, January 25th. Owners Ryan Davis, Sean Davis, and Shelbi Watson are excited to announce the opening of this unique shop and encourage everyone to come check out their selection.

"All of our furniture is handmade," Watson said. "We have a guy in Missouri making it for us. He's 23-years-old and makes it all completely by himself." The store is stocked with beds, tables, chairs, cabinets and everything you could imagine, all made out of wood and detailed with an old rustic charm. You can even buy pillows and other decor in this unique new store.

The owners of this shop decided to open Sawmill Furniture because they have this type of furniture in their homes and wanted to spread this charming rustic style.

"We just decided we needed to get the word out and we wanted to sell it," continued Watson. "We know the guy who made our furniture, and we decided we wanted to sell it to other people. The furniture we sell here is half the price than in Gatlinburg, the other location that this furniture is sold." She also added that they will always sell exclusively handmade items, and if anyone in the community needs a place to sell their handmade decor, she encourages them to contact Sawmill Furniture.

"Anyone who hand makes items and wants to sell them here, we have a place for them," she said. "We know a lot of people that make quilts and pillows that aren't selling right now, so we want to put their things here, too." Several members of both the Garden City and Cullman communities were present at Sawmill Furniture's ribbon cutting. Members of the town council, members of the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce, former Garden City Mayor Herdon Davis, current Garden City Mayor Tim Eskew, as well as Cullman's Mayor Max Townson, and others were present to celebrate. Mayor Eskew held the scissors with Shelbi Watson as they cut the ribbon together and made history.

President of the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce Leah Bolin was also excited about this new addition and the growth it is sure to bring to this city. "Cullman County is experiencing growth at an exponential rate right now," Bolin said. "And it's not just the city of Cullman, it's all the counties, including Garden City with the opening of this furniture store. It's amazing, and it's a niche market, so it will definitely bring people to the area. We're very excited to do these ribbon cuttings. We're thrilled and we hope to just keep pushing forward."

This town is booming, and the owners of Sawmill Furniture invite you to their new business. "Spread the word that we've opened and come see our new store!" Watson stated.

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.

TERRAPIN MOO-HOO REVIEW

A Beer for Those Who Are Young at Heart

By: Kate Mullaney
kate@cullmansense.com

If you're a child at heart, you'll love the beer I reviewed this week. Moo-Hoo, brewed by Terrapin Beer Company out of Athens, Ga., is a chocolate milk stout and it's just like a Yoo-hoo for grown-ups. This after-dinner beer is great for dessert and will definitely leave you wanting more after just one sip.

Milk stouts originate from the practice of mixing milk and beer. This was very common during the 1800s in the United Kingdom and these "milk beers" were usually served to laborers during lunch. But that's not how a milk stout is made now.

Now, milk stouts are made by adding milk sugar to the brew during the fermentation process. Because milk sugar does not ferment, it remains in the beer creating a fuller, thicker and sweeter brew.

Terrapin's chocolate milk stout is 6 percent alcohol. They use cocoa nibs and shells from the Olive & Sinclair Chocolate Company, which give this beer its sweet, chocolaty taste. It's also made using Nugget and Willamette hops. If you love dessert, this beer is brewed for you.

It shouldn't be a surprise to you when I say this beer smells like chocolate milk. Though this sweet aroma mostly overpowers any other smells, you will notice a few others if you focus. This beer also has a light fruity hop aroma, as well as a smoky coffee, malty smell.

This chocolate milk stout is almost completely black. It's so dark you can't see any light through it. The head was a tan color and it was small and diminished very quickly. The lacing was fair and also diminished rather quickly.

Moo-Hoo tastes milky, chocolaty, a bit roasty, and was slightly bitter with a hint of a coffee flavor. It is very sweet, so it's great as a dessert. Its finish is a blend of bitter and sweet but the flavor will leave your mouth quickly.

This beer's body is a bit thinner than I expected. It's slightly creamy with a lively carbonation. Terrapin's Moo-Hoo Chocolate Milk Stout is perfect for those of you with a sweet tooth. Try one today and embrace your inner child.

Big Band Dance Keeps People Moving to the Beat

By: Kate Mullaney
kate@cullmansense.com



» The CHS Jazz Band entertained a crowd of all ages at the 18th annual Big Band Dance.

CULLMAN - The Cullman High School Jazz Band was host to hundreds of people last Friday night at the annual Big Band Dance. The Cullman Civic Center was filled with old big band music, swing dancing and fun as Band Director Christopher Smith led the band and entertained the crowd.

"This is the 18th annual Big Band Dance," Smith said proudly. "It's been going on for several years and was started by Gary Taylor years ago."

This event is much different than other events in Cullman. It was like stepping into the 1950s with big band music lingering in the air. Couples kissed in the kissing booth and tons of people could not seem to shake the urge to dance.

For the Cullman High School Jazz Band, it was a great opportunity to perform for the public. And they definitely received the attendance they deserved.

"It's a great way to feature our jazz band in the community and a great way for our community to come out and listen to music you don't get to hear everyday," Smith stated.

The band played so well, it was hard to believe the musicians were in high school. Smith noted that the band works hard to sound so good.

"We start rehearsing when school starts," he said, "and we have multiple performances throughout the fall and in the spring. We play at the Strawberry Festival, Christmas Concerts, Oktoberfest, and all those kinds of events."

"We work on the Big Band Dance some throughout that but there are other things we focus on during that time. We really start working hard on this stuff all through the month of January getting 35 tunes ready to play for the public."

That's right. The Cullman High School Jazz Band played 35 songs for the community last Friday night. That's almost two hours of entertaining and Smith admits that this is no easy task.

"It's a very taxing performance. It's tough to play two hours anywhere but especially at a high-energy event like this. So they'll be worn out by the time it's over but any time you're playing in front of people, you feed off the energy of the crowd and the crowd feeds off you," Smith said.

Spirits were high and music tickled the ears of the crowd. And with Valentine's Day so close, there was a hint of love in the air as well.

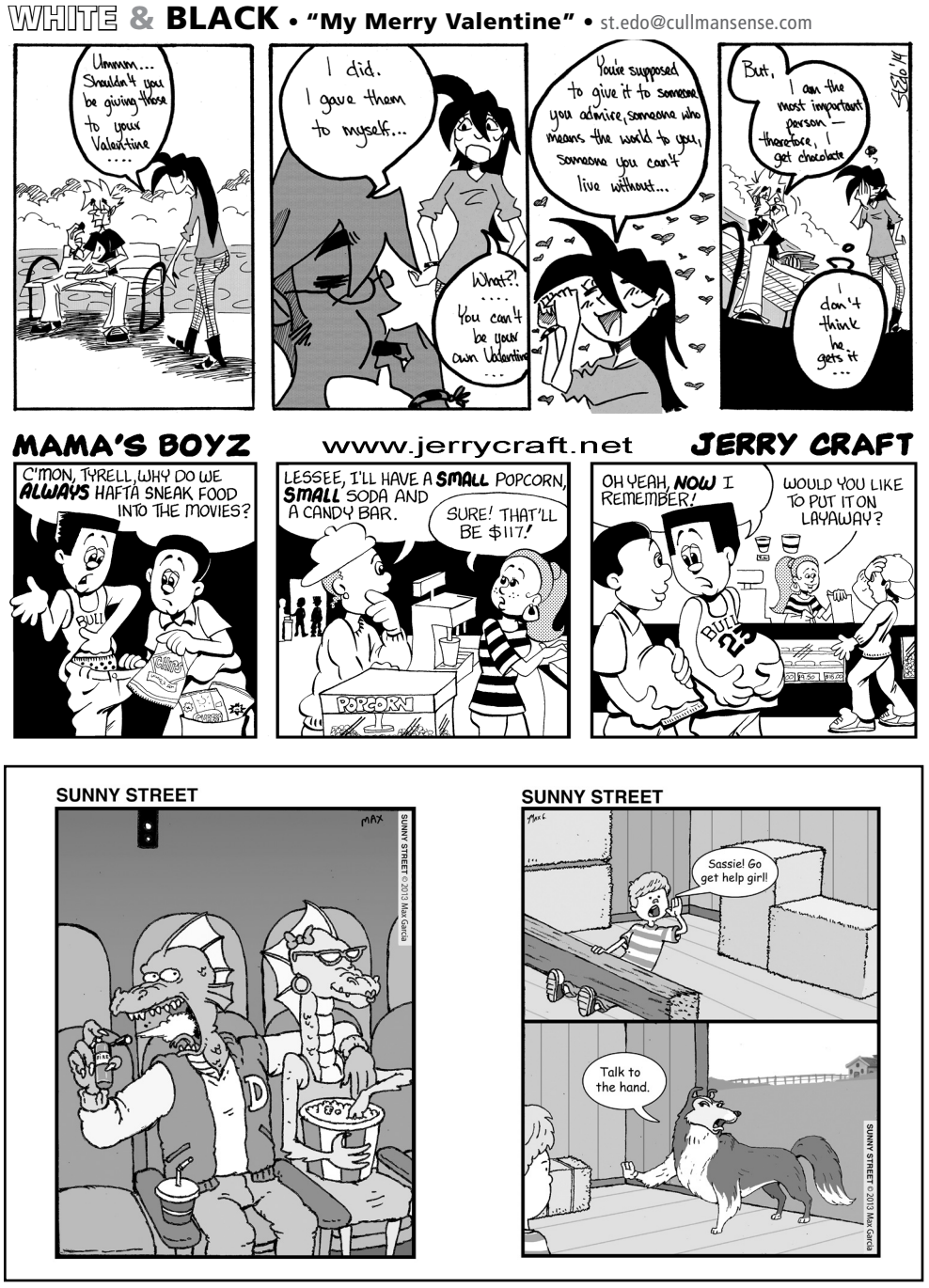
It wasn't just young love though – all different age groups attended this event and Smith prides his band on providing an event appropriate for everyone in the community.

"We've got a lot of folks here, but the great thing about this event is that people are here form all the walks of life. You can see older folks here and then young adults, teenagers, and even middle schoolers here," he said.

"All the demographics are represented and I think that's what's really cool about this dance. All the generations are here to dance together and that doesn't happen at most dances."

The Big Band Dance swept the community off its feet. It's a unique event and the Cullman High School Jazz Band knew how to captivate the audience. Those who don't like to dance had the opportunity to listen to some big band music and for those who love to dance, this may just have been the biggest event of the year.

Comics



Valentine's Day for the Lonely and the in Love

By: Kate Mullaney
kate@cullmansense.com

For some of you out there, it's your favorite day of the year. And for others, it's your least favorite. Valentine's Day is just around the corner and bitter hearts across the world are already bashing it, accusing it of reminding them of their solidarity, or taking their money.

However, Valentine's Day doesn't have to be about spending money, and single or taken, you should accept it and celebrate. There's always dinner, a movie, and maybe even an obligatory peck on the cheek for those of you who've found yourselves stuck in a dating rut. But for the rest of you, let's get creative. Here is a list of alternative ways to celebrate Valentine's Day.

1. Go on your first date . . . again. Isn't that so sweet! If you can remember your first date (hopefully you can), take your sweetheart out to reenact it. The first part of a relationship is the best. You're shy, a little vulnerable, and overly sweet to each other. Reenacting your first date will bring back all those sweet memories and remind you of why you fell in love in the first place. Maybe you can reenact your first kiss too, or even the first time your sweetheart accidentally farted in front of you. Here's another idea: if you're single, call up one of your exes and together reenact the exact moment you broke up. If you were at all unsure about your decision to split with your ex, this will solidify it.

2. Do something active together. Valentine's Day doesn't have to be about candy and flowers and teddy bears. Instead of wasting your money so that your loved one can watch a heap of flowers die, spend it on something you both love. Check out a zoo, museum, or an aquarium if you and your sweetie love science. If you're a couple of beer geeks, hit up some bars and review as many beers as your hearts desire. And if you both just want to have a little fun, go to a club and dance the night away. Whatever you do, have fun with your loved one by doing something you both enjoy. Forced romance is awkward and never works, so skip the candle lit dinner and get active with your sweetie.

3. Cook together. There are so many reasons that this is a good idea. First, working together on anything with your guy or gal is great bonding time. It's also a great way to practice teamwork. And, if everything goes according to plan, you'll have a hot delicious meal at the end of all your hard work. Cooking your own meal is much cheaper than going out to eat and could be a much healthier option as well. And cooking together, as opposed to one of you cooking for the other, is a better option because if the meal is ruined, it won't be embarrassing since you will both be at fault. No one will be serving the other a burnt meal. You'll be enjoying your disgusting slop together. Warning: this could go horribly wrong. Cooking together could spark fights, cause messes that one of you refuse to clean, or surface control issues. Proceed with caution.

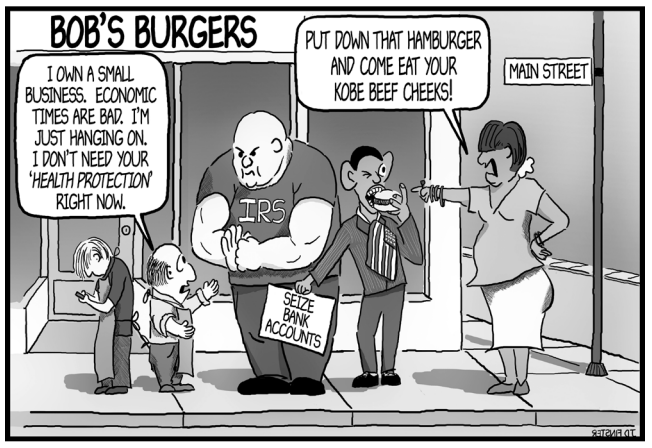
4. Stay in. This may be the ultimate way to save money this Valentine's Day. I am aware that dressing up, fixing your hair (if you have any), and wearing expensive jewelry is super romantic and sophisticated. And yes, I know, the pictures will be amazing. I can already imagine them cropped and filtered perfectly on Instagram. But think of this, what's better than sweatpants and junk food? I'll tell you. Nothing. Take this Valentine's Day as an opportunity to indulge in doing nothing. Actually set aside time to do nothing. How often do you get to do that? And your time spent being lazy will be perfectly complete with your sweetie by your side. Pick up some beer and wine, grab all the junk food and candy you can get your hands on, and make a date with Netflix. This, my friends, is quality time. Bonus: if you're single, you were probably going to do this anyways, so you don't even have to change your plans.

5. Go on a lunch/coffee date. Lunch dates and coffee dates are cheaper and more casual. Perhaps you've had your eye on someone and you're ready to ask him or her out on a date. Be bold! Ask them to go out with you on Valentine's Day. Opt for coffee or lunch, though, because a first date on Valentine's Day could be overwhelming to your new love interest. Here's another scenario for you: maybe you asked someone on a date and obliviously scheduled it for next Friday. You forgot next Friday was Valentine's Day, didn't you? It's ok, don't start to panic, there is a way to fix this. Turn your date into a lunch date, or if you want to go even more casual, a coffee date. Coffee is a great way to say "I'm not looking for anything serious" without saying "I accidentally asked you out on Valentine's Day and I wanted to cancel this date but couldn't because that would be rude."

6. Host a "Lonely Hearts Club" party. Or a "Galentine's Day" party. Or an "Anti-Valentine's Day" party. Whatever you want to call it, throw a party for you and your single friends. You can bash your exes or make a "no talking about exes" rule. You can cry over being single or revel in your freedom. Whatever you choose, remember that Valentine's Day is about love. Even if you're single, have fun this Valentine's Day with your loved ones. Celebrate Valentine's Day and celebrate love.

Editorial Cartoons





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POLITICS

Obama's State of the What?

By: Sage Overton
Local Contributor

Did you skip the recent viewing of President Obama's fifth State of the Union speech? You weren't alone. Less than an estimated 34 million viewers bothered to tune in for the event, making it one of the lowest watched SOTU in around 20 years. To put that in better perspective, it was just barely over one in five households.

An annual tradition required by the Constitution, a State of the Union speech serves as a chance for the President to tout accomplishments from the previous year, extend olive branches, whisper to foreign powers, and detail the year's upcoming agenda. Mr. President seized the opportunity to do all of the above.

The speech came at a critical time during the democrat's term. Obama took the podium with record low approval ratings and a divided Congress with vital seats up for grabs in this year's election, the result of which may officially move his second term into a lame duck position.

Pres. Obama made sure to touch on familiar themes from his administration. He talked about the economy, saying unemployment was at its lowest in five years and 8 million jobs had been created in the last four years. While technically true, the number is doctored. Just over 3 million jobs have been created during his presidency, and the total number of jobs in the economy sits around 1 million less than when the Great Recession began in late 2007.

Obama also called for continuing tax reform and closing loopholes. He asked Congress to send him bills to sign into law, but didn't specify what he would wish to see in those bills. The President focused on the rebounded stock market and near record corporate profits. He contrasted them against the small change middle class families have seen in their income.

Obama called for increases to the minimum wage law, announcing a coming executive order which would raise the amount for all federally funded employees to $10.10 an hour. The President also mentioned continuous advances in energy sources, consumption and immigration that were necessary for further recovery.

No specific action was mentioned for immigration, but Obama claimed reforms to the current system could trim the national deficit almost a trillion dollars over the next twenty years. He also reiterated his theme of energy independence for America. Obama claimed much of the success in this area lied in natural gas, and called for a four billion dollar reduction in funds given to fossil fuel industries.

As expected, the Affordable Care Act (aka ObamaCare) was also a huge focus topic of the speech. The President announced the success of the program, illustrating that 3 million Americans are now covered under their parents when the law allowed them to be carried until the age of 26.

However, the President made no mention of the flawed rollout of the healthcare.gov website last October or the lower than projected enrollment figures. Nor did the President address the 4 million Americans who lost coverage under the Affordable Care Act, a reality he promised would not happen. He did demand that Congress, specifically Republicans, stop wasting time attempting to repeal the law.

On foreign policy, Obama announced he would be making significant changes to America's drone policy. He also reiterated the promise from his first campaign for presidency to seek the closing of Guantanamo Bay. The President briefly mentioned the Syrian Civil War and that America could claim success in the reduction of Syria's chemical weapon stockpile.

The war has been ongoing since March of 2011 with over 100,000 reported casualties. The U.S. began intense diplomatic pressure on Syria after the suspected use of chemical weapons by the regime of President Bashar al-Assad on its own citizens in August of last year.

The President rounded off Middle East affairs by reaffirming U.S. support for Israel and simultaneously calling for an independent Palestinian state. He also cited progress in limiting Iranian nuclear expansion through current negotiations and promised to veto any bill from Congress increasing sanctions.

Absent from the President's speech were several domestic issues from 2013 expected to have greater impact this year. No mention was made of whistleblower Edward Snowden. Snowden fled the U.S. last year for Hong Kong and is currently granted temporary asylum in Russia after claiming the U.S. gathered personal information not only on its own citizen's emails and phone calls, but those of allies and their political leaders. The subject has been a continuous pain for the Obama administration as it handles foreign policy.

Another key domestic issue left out of the President's State of the Union was the result of the Supreme Court case "The United States v. Windsor."

The June verdict saw large parts of the Defense of Marriage Act repealed after a 5 to 4 decision. In short, the federal government granted homosexual marriages the same protections and rights as heterosexual marriages, so long as the state legalized the marriage.

One big change from previous speeches was the promise to push his agenda with or without the aid of Congress. The President said, "So wherever and whenever I can take steps without legislation... that's what I'm going to do." Issues Obama promised to act on in this manner were streamlined processes of permits for key projects, the protection of federal lands, setting new standards for fuel efficiency and preventing gun violence.

Small businesses still carrying Affordable Health Care Act question marks as uncertainty remains king

By: Tom Esposito
Political Contributor

As the Affordable Health Care Act continues to roll out, small business owners (defined as those companies having no more than 50 employees) continue to gauge the pros and the cons of their part of the plan known as the Small Business Health Option Plan or SHOP.

Setting aside the fact that the registration software suffered and still suffers enrollment difficulties, it is the air of uncertainty surrounding the plan that is still raising huge question marks in the minds of the small business owners.

Enrollments in the SHOP program have been low. In fact, the enrollment numbers are so low that the fear is that the insurers will decide not to participate.

Besides the software glitches, employers are finding that even when they find a lower cost insurance plan, the downside involves significantly higher deductibles to their employees.

They are simply not willing to shift these onerous costs to their staffs.

On top of this, the aforementioned uncertainty of SHOPs now comes into play. How will the grandfathering of current plans be affected as these plans expire in 2015?

As the AHCA continues to unravel and as some might say, evolve, will enrollments increase thereby attracting insurers who now find the plan to be more favorable?

Or will even more small businesses defer from enrollment as they discover the increase in cost(s) to their employees and to themselves?

There are also the problems that may be encountered by those companies that may be termed as "threshold employers."

These are small businesses that are in position, due to the positivity of their efforts, to grow their staffs beyond the 50 employee limits.

The uncertainty factor once more comes into play as the owners of these companies are frustrated in their attempts to expand their businesses because of the costs that they and their employees will now encounter in the SHOP program.

As one businesswoman aptly stated, "What is the point in taking one positive step forward only to be knocked back two steps by the corporate health care costs?"

CULLMANSENSE

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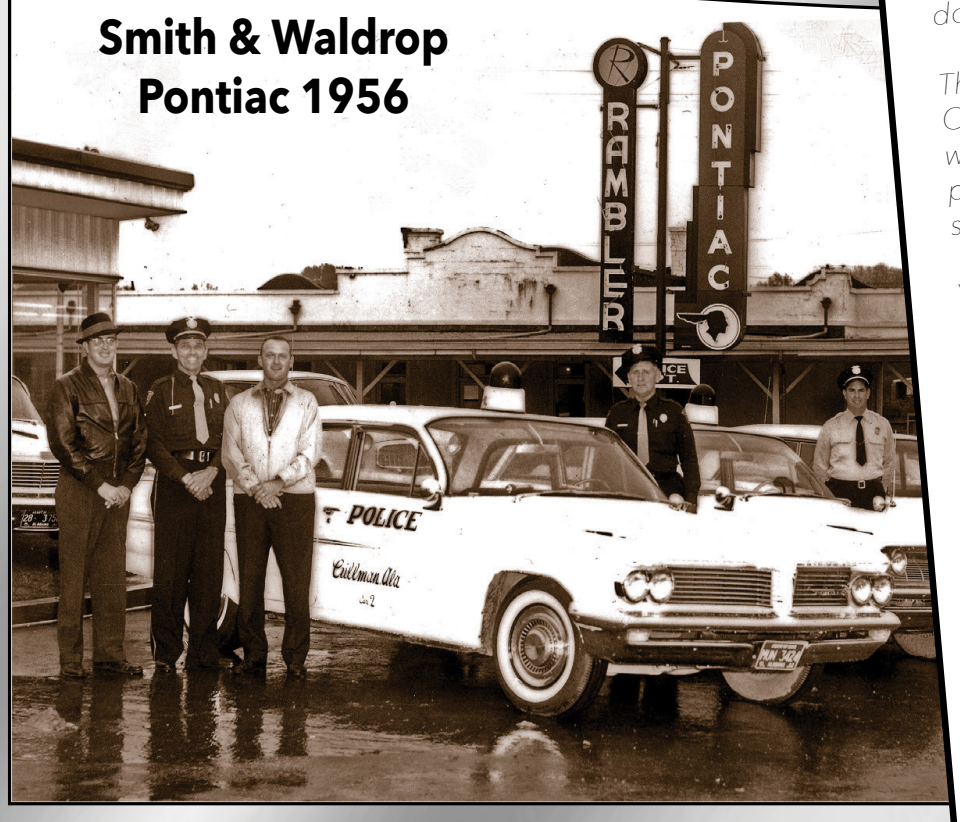
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Always Committed To Serving Cullman Better



Smith & Waldrop
Pontiac 1956



GMC TRUCKS

BUICK

BILL SMITH
Buick-GMC, Inc.
Sales • Service • Parts
1940 Second Avenue, N.W.
Cullman, Alabama 35055
Telephone (256) 734-4472 • Fax (256) 739-5457

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.

There are two reasons for my "loading up" vehicles with options. One reason is there are huge markups in options and this means we can discount our vehicles much more and still keep some profit so that we can take great care of you after the sale AND *sell you at a* **LOWER PRICE** *than cheaper models on other lots.*

Yes we do make a profit and I would advise you to not do business with anyone who claims they don't make a profit because they are probably fibbing or they aren't too bright.

Second reason we pack options on most our vehicles is when you get your new Bill Smith vehicle home we'd rather you find out you got that extra option or two than find out you didn't get something you really wanted but forgot to ask for in all the confusion of car shopping. That's why we sell more happy customers!!!

Remember, if we give you a price, we want you to go shop and compare, why do the other guys panic when you want to go shop their price?? **Don't make a $3,000 mistake just because of a some slick sales guy won't let you check with Bill.**

Bill Smith, Jr.

Bill Smith

BUICK GMC

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www.billsmithbuickgmc.com



VISIT US FOR GREAT DEALS IN 2014

*All rebates applied, must have '99 or newer qualifying trade in. Prices are plus tax, title, & fee. Colors may vary.

