SERIES 5 • ISSUE 21 • MAY 25, 2015
CULLMANSENSE
COMMUNITY MATTERS


MARY STANDIFER/CULLMANSENSE

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SHARON SCHULER KREPS/CULLMANSENSE

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CHRISTLUTHERANCULLMAN.ORG

RELIGIOUS SPOTLIGHT

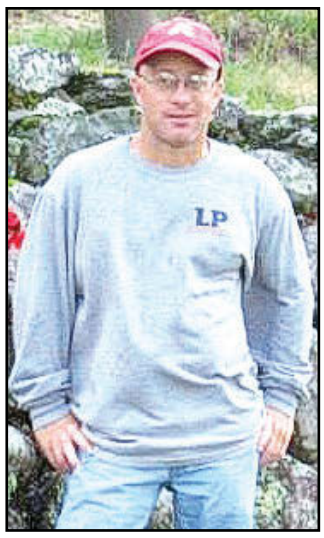
SANDY NIILER, PASTOR OF CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH P4

CCPL SUMMER LIBRARY PROGRAM IS RETURNS P9

CITIZEN OF THE WEEK

MEET LOWELL HENDERSON

MASTER WOODWORKER, MOTORCYCLE RIDER, AND FREELANCE WRITER P6




LOWELL HENDERSON

Hanceville resident Lowell Henderson is a family man and jack of all trades.





ADAM DELOHERY

Adam Delohery of Rare Water Aquatics loves Cullman and its fishing spots.

CULLMAN CONTINUES TO REEL IN TOURISTS

RARE AFRICAN FISH SPECIALIST VISITS CITY

Sharon Schuler Kreps
sharon@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN – On Thursday, May 14th, the 2015 Cullman Area Tourism & Community Improvement Awards were given and during that event, a variety of people and places were recognized for helping make Cullman the wonderful place that it is. Cullman hosts many excellent attractions and tourists come from miles around to visit them. For example, Colorado's Adam Delohery spent a whole week here in Cullman visiting the local landmarks and enjoying our great city.

Adam, a rare African fish specialist, came to Cullman with his girlfriend, Cullman native, Katie Adcock to visit family and friends. While in town, the two visited the Ave Maria Grotto, The Shrine of the Most P12


MARY STANDIFER/CULLMANSENSE

Participants move organic compost material for planting.

AGRIPLEX TEACHES 'LASAGNA GARDENING' P9

CWAC'S NEW FORTY FOOT TALL WATERSLIDE TO OPEN SATURDAY P4


RENDERING:SPLASHTACULAR

CWAC will host live music, fun, and games to celebrate the waterslide's opening.

HB19 SIGNED BY GOVERNOR BENTLEY

CASUAL PAY LIMIT INCREASED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 32 YEARS

Tara Hutchison
Contributed

MONTGOMERY – Governor Robert Bentley signed HB19 into law recently. The bill, sponsored by Representative Jack Williams (R), Birmingham, in the House and by Senator Clyde Chambliss (R), Prattville, in the Senate, increases the amount of wages an individual can earn during the week and still be eligible for unemployment compensation benefits.

Until this bill's passage, an individual could only earn $15 a week without having an impact on the amount of unemployment compensation benefits they could receive. These wages are known as "casual pay." HB19 increases this amount to one-third of a recipient's weekly benefit amount. For example, if someone is receiving the maximum weekly benefit of $265, they could now earn up to $88 with no impact on their benefits.

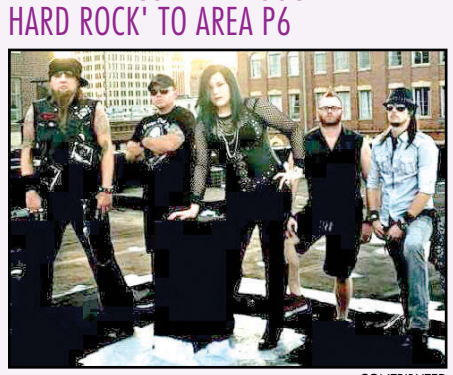
"This is much needed legislation that allows people to work at part-time jobs and earn money, while still being able to draw their unemployment benefits," said Fitzgerald Washington, Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Labor. "We know that part-time jobs often lead to full-time employment, and we don't want to punish workers for trying to get ahead."

"This bill will help put people back to work," said Rep. Williams. "We want everybody to be able to take advantage of any opportunity they may find in order to support their families. If someone is able to turn a part-time job into a full-time one because of this bill, then it's served its P10

LOCAL MUSIC

DARK BEFORE DAWN

BAND BRINGS 'DIRTY SOUTH HARD ROCK' TO AREA P6


CONTRIBUTED

The members of Dark Before Dawn come from a variety of musical backgrounds including metal, rock, jazz, and blues.

PRINTED LOCALLY @ PRINTING Alabama Web Press

TRAFFIC STOP NETS TWO FOR METH

Sheriff Matt Gentry
Cullman County Sheriff's Office

CULLMAN – Pursuant to a traffic stop by the Cullman County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) at 6:47p.m., on May 16th, 2015 near Day Gap Road for a misdemeanor traffic violation two suspects, Mr. Brian Martin and Ms. Cassandra Cooper, were identified by CCSO as having active warrants in another jurisdiction and were placed under arrest.

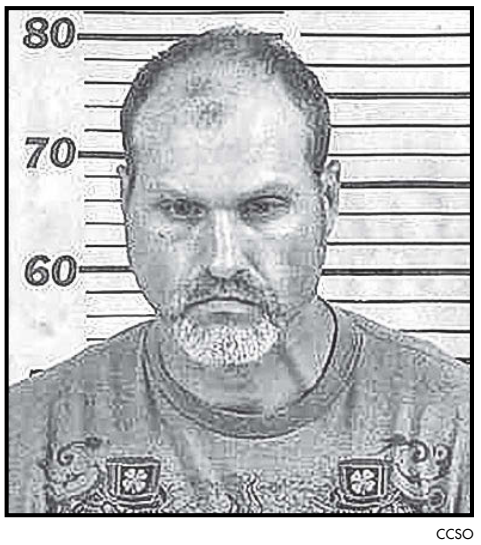
After deputies began to do an inventory of the vehicle they discovered multiple hypodermic syringes, multiple clear plastic bags commonly used for packaging illegal narcotics, as well as another bag that tested positive for residue of Methamphetamine.

Multiple other deputies as well as Cullman Narcotics Enforcement Team (CNET) arrived on the scene once further inventory of the truck's tool box led to the discovery of multiple other ingredients commonly used in the production of Methamphetamine.

"This is a prime example of proactive law enforcement by the deputies and I want to thank them for hard work in this case," said Sheriff Matt Gentry.

Martin and Cooper were arrested for Unlawful Manufacture of Controlled Substance 1st Degree.

Both are being held in the Cullman County Detention Center on a $1,000,000.00 bond. Other arrest may be pending.



CCSO

Brian Martin



CCSO

Cassandra Cooper

INMATE CAPTURED; ALLEGED GIRLFRIEND TAKEN INTO CUSTODY

Bradly Williams
Contributor

RANDOLPH COUNTY – On Saturday, May 23rd, 2015, at approximately 12:53 p.m. Inmate Joshua James Lay, 37 years old, of Vinemont, AL, was captured within 17 hours by the Cullman County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) in Randolph County, AL.

Also taken into custody was his alleged girlfriend Nona Faye Baker, 33 year old, white female, of Clay County who assisted Inmate Lay by picking him up and leaving the detention center.

"I would like to thank all the personnel of the sheriff's office and other law enforcement agencies who worked nonstop last night and earlier today to assist in this capture," said Sheriff Matt Gentry.

Inmate Lay was hiding in a heavily wooded area of Randolph County.

As CCSO and the Department of Corrections K9 Tracking Dogs began to close in on his location, Lay turned himself over to Sheriff Gentry along with deputies from CCSO and the Randolph County Sheriff's Office.

Inmate Lay will be facing a charge of Felony Escape 1st. He was currently being held in the Cullman County Detention Center for Probation Violation and Receiving Stolen Property 2nd.

Ms. Baker will also be facing a felony charge of Permitting or Facilitating Escape 1st.

Sheriff Gentry would also like to thank Sheriff David Cofield of Randolph County for his assistance.



CCSO

Joshua James Lay



CCSO

Nona Faye Baker

ROCK THE SOUTH MUSIC FESTIVAL TO RETURN JUNE 19 – 20

Mary Standifer
mary@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN – Rock the South will be returning to Cullman this year June 19 – June 20. Tickets available at this time are General Admission (two day) - $69, Platinum (two day) - $119, and VIP (two day) - $219.

Tickets can be purchased online at rockthesouth.com. Tickets are non transferable and re-entry to the festival after leaving is not permitted. There will be plenty of vendors and activities within the premises; 12 ATMs will be present for the attendees' convenience. No coolers are allowed into the festival, but plenty of food vendors will be available to serve hungry customers.

Thursday, the event posted on its Facebook page "A month from today, we will all be recovering from The Biggest Party In The South! It will be one crazy party, that's for sure!" So far, the page boasts 88,000 likes.

Rock The South has been a growing event since its' beginnings with 15,000 attendees; last year's attendance reached at least 38,000.

Friday's lineup will include Brantley Gilbert, Tyler Farr, Eric Paslay, Big Smo, Chris Weaver Band, Downsouth, and Dee Jay Silver. Saturday's lineup will see the likes of Alan Jackson, Travis Tritt, Sara Evans, Blackberry Smoke, Corey Smith, Jon Pardi, Jessica Meuse, and Dee Jay Silver.

Organizer Shane Quick was unavailable for comment, but to learn more visit www.rockthesouth.com or like the event page on Facebook at facebook.com/RockTheSouth.

TRUCK DRIVERS AND REGISTERED NURSES CONTINUE TO BE THE MOST SOUGHT AFTER EMPLOYEES ACCORDING TO HWOL DATA

Tara Hutchison
Alabama Department of Labor

MONTGOMERY – Data collected and analyzed by the Alabama Department of Labor's Labor Market Information Division shows that the most online wanted ads were for truck drivers, registered nurses, and retail supervisors, with more than 8,200 ads placed for those occupations in April. Online ads were up 8.65% from March.

The Help Wanted Online (HWOL) data is compiled from all online job postings in the state, including those posted on the state's free online jobs database, www.joblink.alabama.gov, and other sources; such as traditional job boards, corporate boards, and social media sites. There were 49,592 online ads this month, 26,723 of those were new ads.

Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers earn a mean wage of $19.91 per hour, registered nurses earn a mean wage of $27.53 per hour, and first-line supervisors of retail sales workers earn a mean wage of $20.29 per hour. (Full listing of comparable wages below.)

"Half of our top ten advertised jobs this month have average wages of more than $20 an hour," said Fitzgerald Washington, Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Labor. "These are good jobs, with good wages. More jobs were posted this month than last month, letting us know that employers are hiring."

The top employers with the most online ads placed in Alabama are: Community Health Systems, Inc. (687), UAB Medicine (432), and Lowe's (410).

The three industry groups posting the most online ads are:

- Employment Services (Placement Agencies or Temporary Help) 5,613
- Colleges, Universities, and Professional Schools 6,113
- General Medical and Surgical Hospitals 6,221
- Fifty-four percent of all online ads are less than 30 days old, and another 30% of all ads are less than 90 days old.

"We'd like to encourage anyone who needs a job, or wants a different job, to come into one of our Career Centers for assistance," continued Washington. "Our trained staff can assist you in obtaining the career you want."

A listing of Career Centers can be found at www.joblink.alabama.gov.

HWOL data for metropolitan areas and regions can be found at http://www2.labor.alabama.gov/workforcedev/default.aspx under the Reports and Surveys section. Select the region under the "HWOL" drop-down menu.

Wages for Top 10 Occupations with Most Online Ads Posted

Occupation Wages (per hour)

- Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers $19.91
- Registered Nurses $27.53
- First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers $20.29
- Retail Salespersons $12.81
- Customer Service Representatives $14.57
- Sales Representatives, Wholesale & Manufacturing $32.03
- Maintenance and Repair Workers, General $17.99
- First-Line Supervisors of Food Prep and Serving $14.69
- First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers $27.25
- Industrial Engineers $40.92

Source: Alabama Department of Labor



WSCC AND CULLMAN COUNTY SCHOOLS ANNOUNCE THE REHAU ACADEMY APPRENTICESHIP PARTNERSHIP

Kristen Holmes
WSCC Contributor

CULLMAN – This week, REHAU, Wallace State Community College, and Cullman County Schools announced a new REHAU Academy that will offer paid apprenticeship opportunities to Fast Track for Industry dual enrollment students beginning this fall.

REHAU officials from Cullman and Germany have been in intensive meetings with representatives from Wallace State and Cullman County Schools for several days to work out the details of the new partnership to ensure the curriculum achieves desired learning outcomes and also aligns with the German apprenticeship model.

"Globalization demands that if we want our students to be competitive we provide them with exposure to international corporations, diverse perspectives and technologically-advanced and innovative work environments. We are fortunate to have a number of very successful international industry partners here in Cullman, which work closely with our programs to provide a range of opportunities for our students," said Wallace State President Dr. Vicki Karolewics.

"We are grateful for this new partnership with REHAU and commend its leaders for their willingness to work with us to develop the first REHAU Academy apprenticeship program in the United States. We look forward to the development of many more such programs in the future."

REHAU's Head of Vocational Education, External Continuing Education and Training, Michael von Hertell, who oversees apprenticeships from the company's headquarters in Germany, and Hubert Förg, Head of International Training for REHAU, joined with Albert von Pelser-Berensberg, REHAU-Cullman Plant Manager, to endorse the program.

"This cooperation is a further step into the future for Cullman County and REHAU," said von Hertell.

"With this program we want to train the professionals of tomorrow in cooperation with Wallace State and Cullman County Schools. Theoretical and practical training are connected with each other in this new training course. This program is similar to the German education system. We are pleased to have found us a superb partner with Wallace State and Cullman County Schools."

Eight paid REHAU Academy apprentices will be selected each year from the Fast Track for Industry program. Students will apply for apprenticeships during their junior year of high school and begin the apprenticeship during their senior year. (For this year, since Fast Track for Industry will not begin until fall, applications will be made available to current 11th graders at Cullman County Schools who plan to enroll in the Fast Track for Industry program.)

Each apprenticeship lasts two years – the senior year of high school and freshman year of community college – during which time students will split their time between working at REHAU and attending Fast Track for Industry classes on campus at Wallace State. While at REHAU, students will receive real-world specialized training in injection molding to becomepolymer specialists. REHAU will compensate students financially for their participation in the apprenticeship.

Upon successful completion of the program, students will have graduated from high school and earned a certificate in injection molding from Wallace State. They will be eligible for fulltimeemployment with REHAU as polymer specialists.

Dr. Craig Ross stated, "I am very enthusiastic about this opportunity that is available for our students and community in this coming school year. The Fast Track for Industry program has the potential not only to have a major impact on Cullman County Schools, but also I believe it will have a very positive impact on the entire county."

Dr. Ross went on to say, "Students could actually enter this program as a junior and graduate high school with an associate degree, possibly at no cost, and be ready to transfer straight to a university and/or go to work."

"This is not just putting students to work, it's providing training and education," said Jimmy Hodges, Dean of Applied Technologies at Wallace State.

"The goal of the program is that they will be training at REHAU on whatever we're teaching."

Wallace State already has an apprenticeship partnership in place with REHAU for college students in the mechatronics and tool and die programs.

In fact, Wallace State mechatronics instructor Joe Hendrix, who will also be teaching some of the Fast Track for Industry courses, traveled to Germany last December to experience the German training model firsthand.

REHAU is among the Cullman area's largest employers. But as the company continues to experience unprecedented growth, it has been challenged to fill job openings with highly qualified personnel in a timely manner.

"Our target with this apprenticeship program is to train students for jobs," said REHAU-Cullman plant manager Albert von Pelser-Berensberg.

"Not only will students who complete the program be eligible for employment at REHAU, we would consider it a failure if they didn't work for us after the apprenticeship is completed."

Polymer specialists are among the most in-demand positions at REHAU-Cullman. Those working in this area are likely to find themselves creating bumpers for Mercedes, one of REHAU-Cullman's biggest clients. Two thousand bumpers, designed and manufactured to precision, are produced in the Cullman facility for Mercedes each day.

In addition to bumpers, REHAU-Cullman also specializes in a PEXa pipe for plumbing, geothermal heat exchange, radiant heating and cooling, and municipal water service lines.

PEXa pipe is a kind of highly engineered and environmentally sustainable polymer pipe pioneered by REHAU to withstand extreme temperatures, excessive surges in pressure and sudden impact.

REHAU's Automotive Group will soon open its first North American research and development technical center in Cullman, which will be dedicated to injection molding, paint, fabrication and supply chain processes.

The company plans to use this new space to conduct automotive component and systems design initiatives that will then be carried forth into production at the Cullman plant and throughout the world.

"REHAU has long been committed to lifelong learning," said Hubert Förg, who is in charge of international training for REHAU.

"We have apprenticeship programs and advanced training for our employees in Germany and across Europe. At our facilities in other parts of the world--in South America, for example--we have implemented programs dedicated to continuing education for our employees. This apprenticeship program completes the lifelong learning cycle of opportunities we are able to offer outside of Europe, so it is very important step for us."

Expanding industries like REHAU and increasing workforce needs make the Fast Track for Industry program especially timely.

"The REHAU Academy and Fast Track to Industry are shining examples of model programs developed by Alabama's community colleges to provide businesses and industries in our state with the skilled workforce they need and deserve," said Dr. Mark Heinrich, Chancellor of the Alabama Community College System.

Fast Track for Industry is a dual enrollment program for 11th and 12th grade students interested in pursuing career technical fields and express entry into high demand, skilled positions in the workforce.

Students in the Fast Track for Industry program will be taught by instructors from the Cullman Area CareerCenter and Wallace State.

They will attend all their classes at the Fast Track for Industry academy on the Wallace State campus.

The general studies building at Wallace State is being converted for this purpose. This early college initiative is a unique partnership, and Dr. Karolewics commends Dr. Ross for his vision.

The addition of the Fast Track for Industry program at Wallace State will allow the Cullman Area Career Center, Cullman County Schools' vocational training center at Vinemont, to expand its reach to serve career-tech students beginning in the 9th grade.

For more information about Fast Track for Industry and the REHAU Academy apprenticeship program, contact Jeff Curtis at 256-352-7862 or jcurtis@ccboe.org, or Jimmy Hodges at 256-352-8229 or jimmy.hodges@wallacestate.edu.

Cullman County high school juniors and parents of students interested in the program should contact their guidance counselors immediately.

Applications to participate are due before the end of the school year.

POSITION AVAILABLE

Program Facilitator needed for local domestic violence intervention program.

Full time, BS degree required. Send resume to: vsoced@vsoccullman.org

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May 25, 2015

RELIGIOUS SPOTLIGHT: SANDY NIILER, PASTOR OF CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sharon Schuler Kreps
sharon@cullmansense.com



CHRISTLUTHERANCULLMAN.ORG

Pastor Sandy Niiler speaks to her congregation.

"I grew up in a somewhat conservative, traditional family, so even the idea of preaching was foreign to me."

Sandy Niiler, Pastor of Christ Lutheran Church

CULLMAN – Mrs. Sandy Niiler is the pastor of Christ Lutheran Church. Always active in the church and community she continually strives to bring Christ to those around her.

Sandy and her husband Luke, an English professor at the University of Alabama, are both from Maryland and both grew up Lutheran. They have two boys, James, a junior in high school, and John, an eighth grader. Both boys play stringed instruments and are involved in sports.

"Both of our boys are very good people," Sandy said with pride as she thought about her two handsome sons.

Pastor Sandy attended Salisbury State College on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. After college she volunteered for a year with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. She was stationed in St. Louis, Mo. where she lived and worked in the inner city.

"After the Corps I attended Gettysburg Seminary," she explained. "It was an incredible experience to live and go to school on one of our nation's historic battlefields. But never be fooled about locations because about half of my seminary professors were from the South," she chuckled. "Not long after graduating from seminary, I took some counseling courses at Loyola College," she continued. "I was trying to earn a counseling degree but moved in the process."

Doing the work of the Lord takes complete dedication and tremendous love of both God and fellow man. Most all preachers have been chosen, in one way or the other to the field. After a moment of thought, Pastor Sandy told of her journey to becoming a church leader.

"I do not know if I have always been called to preach. I know some pastors who knew at a young age that they were to be pastors and preach. I admire this," she grinned.

"I have struggled! Although I enjoy people, I would rather sit and listen than get up and speak. Part of this is my personality and another part is how I was brought up."

"I grew up in a somewhat conservative, traditional family, so even the idea of preaching was foreign to me," she explained.

"It was during seminary where fellow students and professors urged me to preach. I knew they were earnest, and their public affirmation was unreal! Originally I entered seminary for a Masters in Christian Education but switched to the Masters of Divinity."

Pastoring a church can be extremely rewarding, but the rewards aren't always that easy to come by. Each pastor has his or her particular challenges and Pastor Sandy certainly has her fair share of them.

"The biggest challenge for me is getting people into church," she said thoughtfully. "I think souls need time for solitude, and they also need time to praise God together. Churches are so important, because it is where humans re-learn to forgive, pardon, give, laugh, serve, pray, sing, worship and so many things all with God's blessings."

In speaking of her congregation, Pastor Sandy lit up like a light bulb. Clearly she enjoys her work and the people in her church.

"Christ Lutheran is one of the older congregations in Cullman," she beamed.

"When you come to this church, you can still get a little twinge of Cullman's past. We offer a traditional liturgy. All ages do things together, so in some ways it really is a church family. We enjoy our Lutheran background but also enjoy borrowing and learning from other churches. Everyone has a job in the church, even if it is a small job," she explained. "We enjoy being involved in several community events and giving to local, national and worldwide charities."

"Right now I compare our church to a growing football team," she continued.

"We have some wonderful ministries in place. And yet, we are recruiting people who do not mind helping to build this church with their gifts. Sunday worship, prayer, and Bible study is where we receive our strength, joy, hope and authority to do anything and everything in God's name."

Pastor Sandy Niiler's zeal for the church and zest for God is contagious. Christ Lutheran Church is a warm place to visit for those who are looking for a church to attend. They are located at 424 2nd Ave SE, Cullman, AL 35055. They can be reached by calling 256-734-6842 or by e-mailing Pastor Sandy at niilersandy42@gmail.com. Their website is ChristLutheranCullman.org. Follow them on Facebook at Facebook.com/ChristLutheranCullman.

Waterslide (from Front)

Hannah Ward
ward@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN – Waterslides are something that most children get easily excited about, but now the Cullman Wellness and Aquatics Center has added a forty foot tall waterslide to its waterpark that is likely to have even adults lining up to take a plunge.

Waid Harbison, the Marketing and Programs Coordinator at Cullman City Parks and Recreation stated, "We started talking about adding something to the outdoor pool to make it a little more exciting. We talked about a couple of things but figured the waterslide would be best. The waterslide is pretty much the biggest thing out there."

The waterslide will open Saturday, May 30, and CWAC will host live music, fun and games all day from 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. to celebrate the opening of the new attraction. For more visit cullmanrecreation.org/waterpark or call 256-775-SWIM(7946).





BETTINA PEARSON HIGDON: A BRILLIANT WOMAN

FORMER TEACHER AND LIBRARIAN LEAVES HER MARK ON CULLMAN

Sharon Schuler Kreps
sharon@cullmansense.com





SHARON SCHULER KREPS/CULLMANSENSE

Miss Bettina Pearson was named the valedictorian of her 1938 Bessemer High School graduating class.

CULLMAN – For those of you who remember Mrs. Bettina Pearson Higdon, I'm sure you will smile as you read this. For those of you, who don't, please allow me to tell you a little bit about her. Bettina was a remarkably intelligent woman who enjoyed spreading her knowledge to everyone around her. She was a teacher who taught children of all ages throughout Cullman County. She was a librarian who ran the Cullman County Library System for a time, and she was also the wife of funeral home founder, Raymond Higdon of Higdon Funeral Home.

Little Miss Bettina Blanch Pearson was born in Bessemer, Alabama on March 9, 1920 to Arthur Richmond and Mildred Celest (Bradley) Pearson. On Easter Sunday 1932, at the age of twelve, she joined the First United Methodist Church of Bessemer. She also sang like a bird in the church choir.

In high school she was a member of the Glee Club, the National Honors Society and the A Club.

She was also a charter member of the Tri-Hi-Y and other various speech and drama groups. A smart little lady, she was valedictorian of her 1938 Bessemer High School graduating class.

In 1941 she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Alabama College, which later became Montevallo, with a major in Mathematics and minor in Latin.

In 1960 she earned a Masters of Arts degree from Alabama College and in 1971 she earned a "Double A" or six years teaching certificate from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

On June 13, 1948, she married the love of her life, Raymond Earl Higdon.

At the time, Higdon was the local tax collector in Cullman and had been for many years.

At some point in his career, Raymond had become a licensed embalmer and would later retire from his tax collector position and open up his own funeral home on St. Joseph Drive, next door to the couple's home. Higdon's Funeral Home opened its doors to the public in December of 1975.

Mrs. Higdon, as she was called by many youngsters throughout Cullman County, taught school from 1941 to 1973.

She left wonderful memories to everyone she came into contact.

"I loved her," said Pam Yancy, former student. "She was our Librarian at Baileyton Jr. High. I was an Aid. I loved her eclectic style."

"She was one of my teachers at Fairview," said Sandra Bolzle. "I still remember her saying quite frequently, 'Ask and you shall receive'."

Although she loved being a teacher, she eventually retired and became the director of Cullman County Public Library System. She was a terrific genealogist and devoted lots of her time putting together the genealogy section at the main library in Cullman. Keep in mind; this was before Wallace had their infamous genealogy collection.

"I remember her as being one of the best librarians at the Cullman Public Library that they ever had....always helpful, always friendly," Charlotte Rumore beamed.

Mrs. Higdon has been written up in the 1974-75 edition of 'Who's Who of American Women' and in 'Creative Personalities of the South'. She was named "Women of Achievement" by the Cullman Business and Professional Women's Club in 1977.

She was an organizing member of the Nathan Bedford Forrest Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and of the North Central Alabama Genealogical Society and was affiliated with numerous educational and professional organizations. In 1982 she was honored by being named in the 'Who's Who in Genealogy and Heraldry'.

She sang in the choir at Cullman First United Methodist Church and directed the singing in the Bob Sapp Sunday School Class which used to be on the radio every Sunday.

Raymond Higdon died unexpectedly on April 27, 1981 of an apparent heart attack leaving his grieving widow to learn the funeral home business. She later married Mr. James Burns of Birmingham.

Bettina Higdon Burns was a true treasure to the community. Sadly, she passed away Thursday, February 14, 2008 in Birmingham. She and Raymond never had children of their own, but thankfully there are many former students, colleagues, and friends scattered throughout the south to keep her memory alive and strong.

MIRRORING HISTORY

HANCEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Sharon Schuler Kreps
sharon@cullmansense.com

HANCEVILLE – Mr. J. R. Edmondson was the principal at Hanceville High School from at least 1948 until 1950. Edmondson Hall, a part of Hanceville High School, was named after him.

Today, Mr. Jimmy Collins follows in Edmondson's footprints as he oversees the school as Principal. Mr. Collins is finishing up his second year as Hanceville High School's principal and we hope he will be there for many more years to come.



GREG BURDEN

Mr. J. R. Edmondson



CULLMAN COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Jimmy Collins

cullman city parks & recreation

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

www.cullmanrecreation.org
256-734-9157

- **NEW Waterslide Opening at the Cullman Wellness & Aquatic Center** on Saturday, May 30. The new waterslide is over 40 feet tall with a 6 foot drop off into the competition pool going at speeds of close to 25 miles an hour. The slide is a new addition to our already existing waterpark featuring 2 other waterslides, a child's play feature, high and low diving boards, and a lazy river. Call 256-775-SWIM for additional info!
- **Camp Cullman Registration Now Open** at the Cullman Civic Center. Camp sessions will be held from June 1-June 26 and July 6-August 7. Camp will be held 5 days a week from 7:45am-5:15pm based at the Cullman Wellness & Aquatic Center with field trips weekly, swimming, arts and crafts, fun and games, activities, and much more. Spaces are limited, so signup now at the Civic Center.
- **USATF Summer Track & Field:** CP&R will host its annual USATF competitive track and field team starting with practices and meets in June. The team is open to ages 5-18 with practices on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday each week. Ages 13-18 will meet at 3:45pm and ages 12 & under will meet at 4:45pm. Call 256-734-9157 for info.
- **CP&R Arts Classes** will be offered for homeschoolers and pre-school age students in our Mommy & Me Class starting in June. Call 256-734-9157 for more information.
- **Archery Camp** will be held June 29-July 1 at the Cullman Archery Park. Registration is now open at the Cullman Civic Center; call 256-734-9157 for more information.
- **Speed & Agility Camp** will be held this summer for ages 6-14. Starts June 9; two week sessions are available for $60 or 6 weeks for $135. Camp will be taught by Steve Johnson. Call 256-734-9157 or come by the Cullman Civic Center to register.
- **Jr. Golf Clinics** are registering now at the Cullman Golf Course. Clinics will be held every Tuesday in June starting June 2. Cost is $60 for the 5 weeks and includes instruction from PGA Golf Pro Ches Harris. Call 256-739-2386 for details.
- **Cullman Gymnastics and Cheer** is registering now for summer classes in cheer, tumble, and gymnastics. Classes are filling up FAST, so stop by the gym to signup today. Summer classes start June 8. Call 256-739-5567 for more info.

SMITH LAKE PARK CELEBRATES MEMORIAL DAY

Sharon Schuler Kreps
sharon@cullmansense.com

TRIMBLE – Smith Lake Park hosted a two day Music Festival over the Memorial Day weekend, May 23rd and 24th. There were arts and crafts vendors, food carts of all kinds and live entertainment for everyone to enjoy. There were also contests and fun people of all ages to enjoy. The weekend also marked the opening of the swimming pool and putt-putt golf course as well. There was free admission to the park and most all the campsites were occupied.

"We had adult and child divisions ice cream eating and Pepsi chugging contests this afternoon," said Doug Davenport, Cullman County Parks and Rec Director. "One guy ate fifteen cups of ice cream, and then he entered the Pepsi chugging contest," he chuckled.

"We also had adult and children's hula hoop contests and then the golf cart parade. It's a good weekend for Parks and Rec."

The weather was beautiful and people had a wonderful time enjoying the park and all the great fun it has to offer.

This is our first time here," said Stacy McDowell, a craft vendor from Boaz. "I brought my kids with me and my husband, so we're having a family day. It's been a blast. This place is gorgeous," she smiled happily.

"I just found out about the festival this week and they were really nice to let me come in and set up a booth at the very last minute. It's been just like a little family vacation, while Mom sells some things," she giggled.

The music lineup was great all weekend. On Saturday, Jolly Rogers, Gerald Brown and Bama Country played away for the crowds of people who gathered to listen and Sunday afternoon, Union Grove Bluegrass and the Heaton Brothers impressed all within an earshot.

Smith Lake Park is located at 416 County Road 385, Cullman, Alabama 35057. For more information, call 256-739-2916, e-mail smithlakepark@co.cullman.al.us or visit cullmancountyparks.com. Follow them on Facebook at facebook.com/SmithLakePark.



SHARON SCHULER KREPS/CULLMANSENSE

The weather was perfect for the Smith Lake Memorial Day Music Festival.

Dusk (from Front)

Mary Standifer
mary@cullmansense.com

HANCEVILLE – With an empathetic message and a unique musical style, local band Dark Before Dawn is setting the bar high for musicians within the greater Cullman area. The group consists of vocalist Janessa Bryan, drummer Jake Gable, bassist Shawn Burgess, guitarist Scott Aldridge, and lead guitarist Michael McAvoy.

The band likes to refer to their genre as "Dirty South Hard Rock", a style that is influenced by a number of genres including rock, metal, and even country.

"We'll hear people compare us to one band, and then the next show we play, somebody will compare us to someone in a completely different [genre]," says Vocalist Janessa Bryan. "The common ones are Halestorm [and] Evanescence," continues Bassist Shawn Burgess.

While the group is often compared to other rock bands with a female vocalist, avid fans have found a variety of similarities the band has with other groups.

Each of the five members come from vastly different musical backgrounds, some of which include metal, rock, jazz, and blues. These influences create a unique and well blended mix that shines through in each of their compositions.

Dark Before Dawn has had the opportunity to share show line ups with an impressive array of well known artists including Stone Temple Pilots, Jane's Addiction, AFI, and rock legend Joan Jett.

"We're really proud to have been in the same vicinity of these people playing our music," remarks Janessa. The band has played at a number of venues across the United States including the main Coca-a-Cola stage at Alabama's Bayfest.

The message of the band is evident in every aspect of their work from their lyrics, right down to their name.

"The name sets the tone for the band...They always say it's darkest before the dawn, and we've went through that," says Drummer Jake Gable. The band has a particular affinity for their song "Bittersweet" which lyrics were written by Shawn Burgess and inspired by experiences of loss due to suicide.

"That song was nothing more than a coping mechanism for [Shawn]. The song is about suicide; he lost a good friend to that, and I lost my uncle to that," explained Gable.

"We wrote it, released it, and everyone loved it because everyone could relate to it." Friends and fans alike have revealed to the band that the song has been played at a number of suicide victims' funerals. "The real life application that people use our songs and our material to help get through a hard time...[is] what we strive [for] and want," continued Gable. "That right there in my opinion...is the ideal definition of 'making it' as a band."

To find out more about Dark Before Dawn, visit their Facebook page at facebook.com/darkbeforedawnband or visit iTunes to preview and purchase their music at itunes.apple.com/us/album/all-my-darkness-ep/id981957479.

Henderson (from Front)

Sharon Schuler Kreps
sharon@cullmansense.com

HANCEVILLE – Meet Hanceville's Lowell Henderson: a Southern gentleman, master woodworker, motorcycle rider and freelance writer. Lowell is a devoted family man. He and his wife Melanie have 3 children, 6 grandchildren, and another one on the way. He is a kind person that is always willing to lend a helping hand, while having a smile on his face.

"I work full time for Louisiana Pacific in Hanceville where I have been for 18 years," he explained. "I am considered one of the old timers at the mill. We old timers think of each other as our second family. Without these guys and the support they have given me over the years I would have never made it this far. They are a very special group."

Lowell is a biker and has been riding his Harley for many years. He rides with, and is an officer in a local club called the Swamp Ratz that formed several years ago.

"The intention of the Swamp Ratz is to show that not all bikers are the outlaw types," he smiled, "and to find ways to give back to the community in which we live. If you ride or just like motorcycles, you are more than welcome to join us. Kids are welcome as well; we try to always maintain a family friendly atmosphere."

When he's not working or riding his motorcycle, Lowell spends some of his spare time making unique tables, bird houses and other interesting items out of wood scraps he comes across.

"Like many carpenters, I started with easy projects like birdhouses and shelves," he grinned. "Now I'm finding I like building tables and things of that nature. What makes my projects special isn't the fact that I'm some great carpenter, it's the wood. I mainly use recycled wood such as pallets, old barns, and pieces that people throw out in the trash. My goal is to build this into a nice little business, but lately, my wife has developed a bad habit of saying, 'Oh, that will look good in our living room,' or some other room in our house," he smiled. "So I haven't made much money lately," he chuckled.

Lowell is quite a talented freelance writer. He maintains a two blogs, 'Just Another Day' (justanotherday-lowrider1.blogspot.com) and 'Simply Fishing' (simplyfing.blogspot.com/2015/03/hey-guys-welcome-to-simply-fishing.html).

He also has a motorcycle website called '2 Wheelz Down (sites.google.com/site/2wheelzdown).

"One of my recent blogs was favorited on Twitter by John Godwin of Duck Dynasty; it thrilled me to no end. But, when he retweeted my next blog post to all his followers, I was blown away," he laughed happily.

He is also writing a book that he hopes to have published by the end of the year.

"I am in the final stages of writing my first book call 'The Omars,'" he beamed. "The inspiration for the book came from the French Farm in Garden City where I lived for about fifteen years. The farm borders the Mulberry River, and to me it's one of the prettiest places on the planet. Every since I moved, I have missed it daily," he looked down for a moment.

Lowell Henderson is a Jack of all trades. From raising a family to writing a book, there's never a dull moment as far as he is concerned.

His love for his community and desire to help others is the quality of a truly wonderful person. To keep up with his blogs and other writings or projects, send him a friend request on Facebook or find him on Twitter @lowellhenry. For those that aren't social media savvy, e-mail lowellhenderson65@yahoo.com and he will e-mail links to his posts.



LAURA AXELROD: WRITER, FILMMAKER AND ACTOR MAKES HOME IN CULLMAN

Sharon Schuler Kreps
sharon@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN – Cullman is full of talented people. There are lots of artists and musicians, photographers and poets. Some have multiple gifts; they are just good at lots of things. Take Laura Axelrod, for example. Laura is an accomplished writer, filmmaker and actor and has honed her talents over the years in many places but now she's in Cullman – to stay.

"I was born and raised in Connecticut," Axelrod began. "I have lived in many places throughout the U.S., including New York City, San Francisco and Austin, Texas. I met my husband, Greg Richter, through our mutual love of blogging," she smiled. "Even though we were two very different people, we still enjoyed reading each other's thoughts. We started dating while I was in Austin. So we had to travel over 800 miles to date, since he was in Cullman. Despite the hassle, it was worth it and we were married in 2008."

When Laura was in high school, she auditioned at a performing arts school in Hartford, Conn. and was accepted into their acting program. During that time, she also worked as an actress in a theatre group that toured New England. Once she realized there weren't many good parts for women, she decided to become a dramatic writer.

"I went to college at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts for Dramatic Writing," she explained.

"Originally, I wanted to be a filmmaker but I got sidetracked by a love of theatre. I started working at Circle Repertory Company, an off-Broadway theatre company. They taught me how to be a stage manager. From there, I went to work on other shows in New York."

She stayed with theatre for many years. Her plays have been produced in California, New York and even in Europe.

"I also acted, though it wasn't a top priority for me at the time," she grinned.

"Greg got me back into filmmaking. He is also a writer, photographer and film editor," she continued.

"I am a writer and director. My primary influence is retro TV shows. I love watching Jim Rockford and Quincy, All in the Family, Mary Tyler Moore, Barney Miller and That Girl. Some of the storytelling seems so basic and simple, yet compelling at the same time."

Throughout her career, Laura has experienced many ups and downs. There aren't very many women in the filmmaking scene, so she has had to work hard to get to where she is. When asked what she thought her greatest accomplishment was, her answer was quite surprising.

"My career has always been important to me, but as I get older, I realize that life is really about having a positive impact on other people," she said. "One of the last things my father told me before he died was that helping other people was his greatest accomplishment. Nothing else mattered in the end. So I think my greatest accomplishment might be those small moments when I can provide comfort or assistance to others."

Helping others is a top priority for Laura and even while being interviewed, she couldn't help but offer a few words of wisdom to teenagers who are considering becoming filmmakers and actors.

"I would tell young people to take good care of yourselves, emotionally and financially," she said on a more serious note.

"It is important to learn how to deal with success as well as rejection. Having a big ego can ruin your work as well as your career. I've watched some people handle success very badly," she frowned.

"Also, understand how to handle money and finances. If you have to work 60 hours a week at your day job to finance your art, you will likely burn out. Finally, there are so many tools on the Internet. You would be amazed at the networking opportunities and technology that are free and easy to use. The old ways of moving to a big city, starting your career and paying your dues are all being redefined because of the Internet," she finished warmly.

For more information about Laura Axelrod visit LauraAxelrod.com.



LAURA AXELROD

Laura Axelrod has lived in several cities across the country but is now in Cullman to stay.

"My career has always been important to me, but as I get older I realize that life is really about having a positive impact on other people."

Laura Axelrod

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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 at the All Steak. 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.

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.

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.

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.

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 at 256-595-0515 or Rita at 256-507-0358.

Church Group Wednesday Nights at CWAC
Youth groups, Sunday School Classes and other Church groups are invited to take part in 'Church Group Nights at Cullman Wellness and Aquatic Center every Wednesday night from 6 p.m. until 11 p.m. Please call 256-775-SWIM (7946).

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.

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.

'Celebrate Recovery' at Hanceville First Baptist Church
There will be a 'Celebrate Recovery' meeting tonight starting at 7 p.m. at Hanceville First Baptist Church. Childcare will be available. Additional info Church office at 256-352-9150. Open to all!

Ageless Grace Fitness Class
Come join in the Ageless Grace Fitness Class held each Thursday evening starting at 5:30 p.m. at the Cullman Civic Center. Leader Ann Caretti will show attendees the latest fitness tips available. The event is sponsored by Cullman Park and Recreation Department. Call 256-734-9157 for more information.

Thursday Afternoon Overeaters Anonymous Meeting
Those interested are invited to attend the weekly Thursday afternoon meetings of Overeaters Anonymous which begin at 4:45 p.m. at Grace Episcopal Church's Carriage House. For additional information please call 734-376-2124 or 256-352-1143.

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.

Nimble Thimble Quilt Guild of Cullman
Members of the Nimble Thimble Quilt Guild of Cullman will gather at the Colonel Cullman Museum starting at 9:30 a.m. All interested quilters are invited to attend this meeting.

Saturday

Laughter Yoga at the Cullman Civic Center
Everyone is invited to take part in 'Laughter Yoga' classes each Saturday morning starting at 10 a.m. Donations accepted but no set fee is charged. Come start your weekend out with some great 'laughs'! Please call 256-734-9157 for additional information.

Next Monday

Bosom Buddies Support Group
The Bosom Buddies Support Group offers support to individuals affected by breast cancer. The group will hold its next meeting on Monday, March 16th from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. in Cullman Regional Medical Center's Ave Maria Room in the Community Education Center located in Professional Office Building 2 (1890 AL Highway 157, Cullman, AL 35058).

Cullman Kiwanis Club
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WEDNESDAY
- Karaoke Night at Grumpy's at 7 p.m.
- Happy Hour at Moe's from 3-7 p.m.
- Karaoke Night at Cadillac Ron's at 7 p.m.
- Ladies' Night at Cadillac Ron's from 5-8 p.m.

THURSDAY
- Open Mic Night at Brothers from 8 p.m. to close
- Happy Hour at Moe's from 3-7 p.m.
- Karaoke Night at Cadillac Ron's at 7 p.m.

FRIDAY
- Live Music at Brothers
- Live Music at Moe's
- Happy Hour at Moe's from 3-6 p.m.
- Live Music at Cadillac Ron's from 8 p.m. to close

SATURDAY
- Live Music at Brothers
- Live Music at Moe's
- Happy Hour at Moe's from 3-6 p.m.
- Live Music at Cadillac Ron's from 8 p.m. to close

NEXT MONDAY
- 79 cent wings at Rodney G's Hickory Grill from 6-9 p.m.

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SUMMER LIBRARY PROGRAM RETURNS

Will Hogue
will@cullmansense.com



CONTRIBUTED

CCPL's annual Summer Program focuses on special guests and isn't necessarily reading or book-centered.

CULLMAN – The Cullman City Public Library is starting up its annual Summer Program in June.

The program has served the children of the city "since at least 1964," according to Cullman librarian, Sharon Townson.

The theme of this year's program is "Every Hero Has a Story," and will feature various heroes from around the Cullman community, including police officers and electric company workers.

"The goal of the program is to keep the children reading throughout the summer so that they do not lose all of the reading skills they developed the previous school year," said Townson about the program.

With over 4,000 children participating in library programs throughout the year, Townson estimates that about a quarter of that number comes from the participation in the Summer Program.

The program is free to attend and is based around elementary aged children.

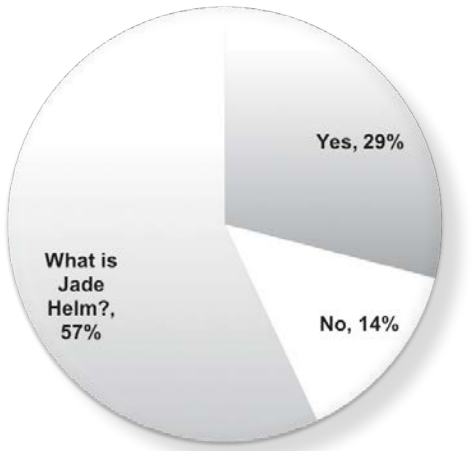
Although the program is held at a library, the events are not necessarily reading or book-centered. Instead they are meant to focus on the special guest. After that the leaders of the program relate the theme of the program back to reading.

"This is not a book club," Townson stressed to explain, "But we try to help the kids find books that they are interested in reading individually."

View the Summer Program schedule at ccpls.com. This schedule of events is for the city library location only. The events begin in June, each of which will be on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, and will all start at 10 a.m.

Poll

Are you concerned about "Operation Jade Helm 15" that begins in July?



This Week's Poll

How often do you wear a seat belt?

Vote Today at CullmanSense.com/Poll

POLICE BODY CAMERAS: THE SILENT WITNESS

Hannah Ward
ward@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN – People in public service do not have it easy. Take the Police for example; they are there when citizens need them, they protect the community while it sleeps, and they strive to keep our cities clean of drugs and crime. Still, they receive flack about almost everything they do.

Some say the issue is police brutality, and that white officers are abusive to blacks. Let us think about this for a moment. When an officer answers a call he or she has no idea what exactly they are responding to. As Sergeant Jeff Warnke in the Cullman Police Department patrol division stated, "We do not deal with the cream of the crop, either they've caused some kind of trouble or have been in some kind of trouble."

Police officers are trained to expect the worst in any situation, and many times it is the worst. In order for them to do their job, protecting our communities, they must also defend themselves. Sometimes this requires them to take down the assailant.

Unfortunately in a growing number of areas a wall of mistrust between citizens and police has been created. Police officers in many areas are now being equipped with body cameras that record every situation an officer is involved in.

"The body camera is a silent witness between the officer and whoever he is dealing with."

Sergeant Jeffery Warnke, Patrol Sergeant

The Cullman Police Department recently added this chest-worn device to their daily equipment.

Warnke explained the purpose for the devices, "A lot of times when we are talking to people they are not as truthful as they should be and they make false accusations against officers. When the officer is not wearing the camera it's that person's word against that officer's word. Then you have a silent witness that sees everything. I can tell you things that happened at a crime scene, but unless you were there when you see the results you don't know what precipitated that."

When the actions of a police officer come under scrutiny body cameras gather crucial insight that helps determine how an event occurred.

Gardening (from Front)

Mary Standifer
mary@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN – Last Tuesday, a class geared towards teaching individuals how to begin and maintain a garden using the "Lasagna Gardening" format was held at the North Alabama Agriplex Heritage Center. The process is low maintenance, long lasting, and results in a virtually weed-less garden.

Lasagna Gardening gets its' name from the layers of material that must be placed on the ground before planting. The process begins by laying newspaper down, wetting it, and then continuing to add layers of various organic materials on top of it. In the hands-on example that attendees were encouraged to participate in, newspaper was laid on the freshly rained on ground followed by organic compost material, and lastly pine straw. Small holes were then dug and plants were planted in the organic material. Lasagna gardens can have even more layers, and the exact organic compounds used may vary greatly.

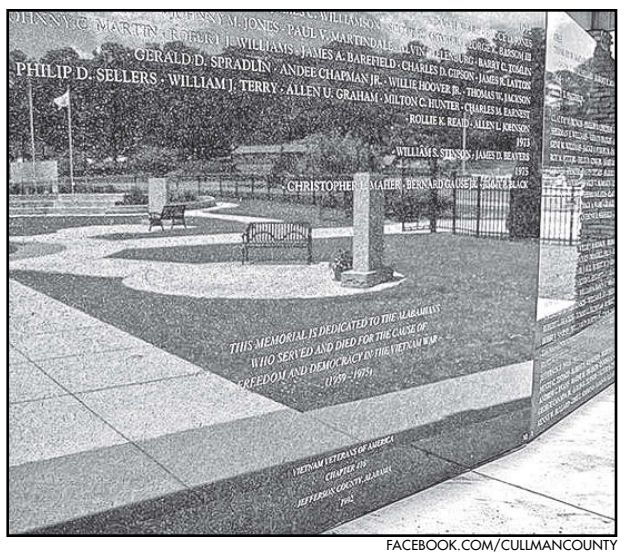
The initial layer of newspaper stops many weeds from sprouting in one's garden, however, it is not the only way gardeners who choose this method will avoid weeds. The Lasagna Garden process requires no tilling of the ground; when wanting to freshen the soil, more layers are simply added to the top. While tilling kills existing weeds, it actually brings weed seeds to the surface where they are provided with fresh nutrients from the disturbed soil, and access to more sunlight: both factors that help the seed to sprout effectively.

The North Alabama Agriplex Heritage Center hosts many classes and seminars on the grounds; events cover a variety of agricultural and horticultural topics and accommodate a wide spectrum age group.

"The mission of the Agriplex is to promote agriculture and to preserve our heritage in agriculture...So a lot of what we do is try to teach people to grow things [and] teach people where their food comes from; we do a lot of work with kids, but then also with adults," says Director Rachel Dawsey. The non-funded state agency has been operating for almost fifteen years but has only had its Agriplex building since 2012. The organization operates as a non-profit; the building was even constructed largely with help from volunteers.

With a wide range of topics and events for every age group, the North Alabama Agriplex Heritage Center has something to offer to every member of the community. To find out more, visit sites.google.com/site/northalabamaagriplex/home or e-mail Dawsey at cullmanag@gmail.com.

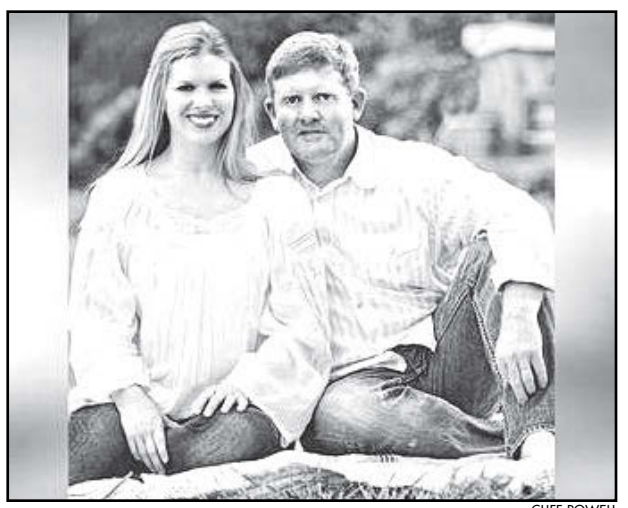
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VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK HONORS LOCAL HEROES

Memorial Day is a federal holiday and is meant to remember the people who died while serving in the country's armed forces. The holiday is observed every year on the last Monday in May. In the beginning, it was known as Decoration Day... **QRNE.WS/358**



CLIFF POWELL

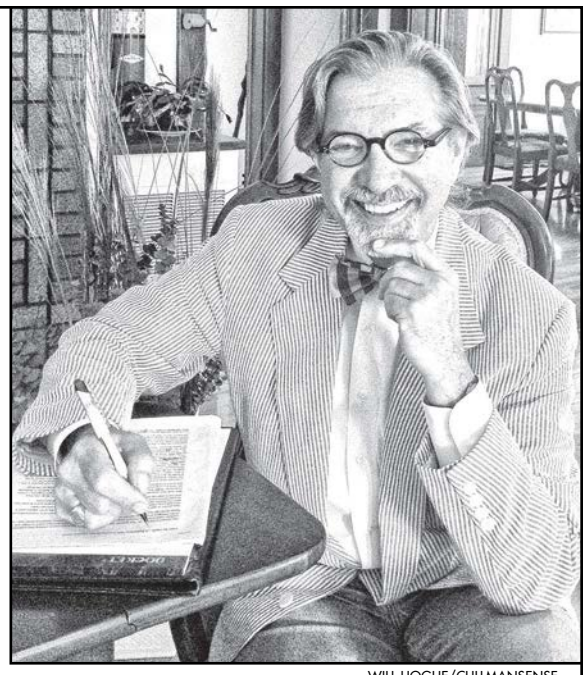
CITIZEN OF THE WEEK: CLIFF POWELL TEACHES HOW TO "PRAY HARD & SPEAK LIFE"

Meet Mr. Cliff Powell. Cliff is married to the beautiful Tamika Powell. Together they have four children: three girls and one boy, ranging in ages from seven to 15. After graduating from Cullman High School in 1995, Powell left Cullman for the... **QRNE.WS/359**

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'Y'ALL OF FAME'

BEN SOUTH'S NEW PLAY CELEBRATES SOUTHERN CULTURE



WILL HOGUE/CULLMANSENSE

Ben 'South' Johnson with the "tools of the trade".

Will Hogue
will@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN – After working on a research project for a telephone company, Ben Johnson had a lot of data. He had studied the people of the southeast, how they work and live, and had ended up with a comprehensive understanding of southern culture. In fact, according to Johnson, he is the first person to quantitatively "define what it means to be southern."

He coined the term "southernness," created a website, Southerness.Com, where he sells clothing and home furnishings described as "southern chic." He also began calling himself Ben South.

Although he says he would be passionate about any region had he been born there, Johnson's passion is southern culture and artistry.

He is a self-described lover of theatre, someone who "tests solidly as an introvert," and a vestige of high-class southern eccentricity.

Johnson is also preparing to debut the third and final play of his 'Alabama Trilogy.' He shies away from calling the shows 'plays,' and instead describes them as simply 'comedies.'

The way Johnson describes the plays seems as though the shows digress in intensity and density of content as one moves from the first to the third and final comedy.

"The plays are all stand-alone. You can watch just one of them by itself," Johnson said. "What really connects them is mood and the tone, really."

The first show, 'So Southern,' was written by Johnson six years ago. It is a one-person show, that Johnson describes as "stand-up comedy." It is in this comedy that Johnson exercised his need to relay all the data he gathered from his research, and he found a comedic way to do that.

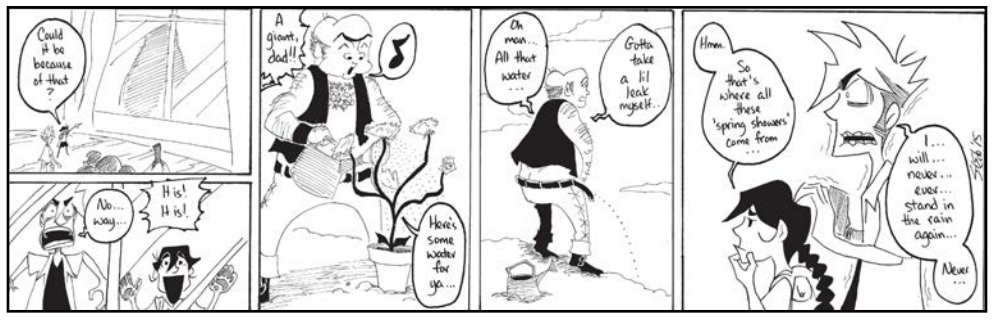
The second play in Johnson's 'Alabama Trilogy' is titled 'Yours Eternally.' It is an "epistolary play," according to Johnson, Johnson also explained that he wrote the play as a love-letter to his mother, who he lightly likens to comedian Louis C.K., in that they both have a dry sense of humor and are each "absurdists."

The third and final play will premiere on Father's Day at Wallace State in the Burrow Auditorium at 3 PM and is titled 'Y'all of Fame.' Johnson describes the final show in his trilogy as slapstick comedy. "I pumped it full of jokes," he said. And, if 'Yours Eternally' is a tribute to his mother, Johnson says 'Y'all of Fame' is a tribute to his father. The play costs $10 and tickets will be purchased at the door, with the proceeds going to Wallace Future Foundation for Performing Arts.

Johnson allows his creativity to flow into various projects, and Cullman is lucky to be able to claim a person so devoted to the revitalization of southern culture, and "southerness" altogether.

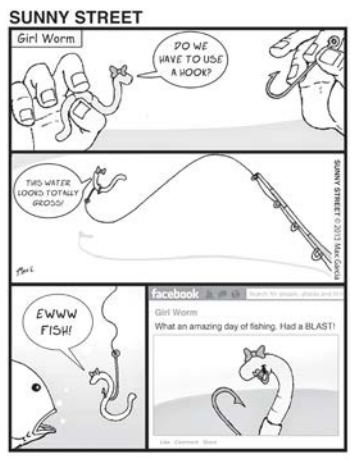
COMICS

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HB19 (from Front)

purpose."

The last time the casual pay amount was increased was in 1983.

"In raising this limit, we're bringing Alabama in line with the rest of country," added Sen. Chambliss.

"We previously had one of the lowest casual pay limits in the country. This bill rectifies that."

The bill was also endorsed by Governor Bentley's Small Business Commission.

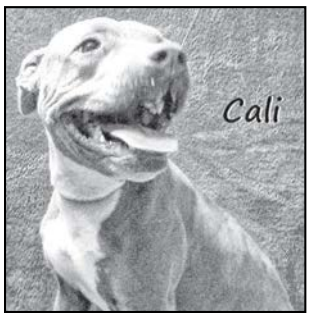
The casual pay limit increase will become effective on August 1, 2015.



PETS OF THE WEEK

CALI

Hello my name is Cali and I am about 12 months old. I am a Pit Bull Terrier mix and I currently weigh 48lbs. I am full of life, love to play and ready to meet my forever family! Please come by and visit with me. You may find out I'm an extremely lovable companion!



LADY FLUFFINGTON

Hello my name is Lady Fluffington and I am about 6 years old +/-. I am believed to be a Leonberger mix and I currently weigh 86 LBS. I am a stray but if not claimed I will go up for adoption on 5/26/15 at 7:30 a.m. I am a beautiful gentle giant. I am full of life and I love to play, so please come and visit with me! You may find out I'm a lovable companion!



ADOPT THESE PETS TODAY

Both of these dogs have an adoption fee of $90 that will include their general exam at the Vet, vaccines, wormer, rabies shot, microchip, spay/neuter, and free 45 days of pet health insurance. Pet Depot will give you a bag of food (you pay taxes) as their way of supporting adoption.

If you know the owner of either dog or if you are interested in adopting one of the dogs, please call 256-734-5448 or come by the Animal Shelter.

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OPINION

THE VIETNAM WAR: AFTER 40 YEARS

Dave Robinson
Contributor

Now, 40 years after the American war in Vietnam ended in ignominious defeat, the traces of that terrible conflict are disappearing.

Traveling through Vietnam during the latter half of April 2015 with a group of erstwhile antiwar activists, I was struck by the transformation of what was once an impoverished, war-devastated peasant society into a modern nation. Its cities and towns are bustling with life and energy.

Vast numbers of motorbikes surge through their streets, including 4.2 million in Hanoi and 7 million in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). A thriving commercial culture has emerged, based not only on many small shops, but on an influx of giant Western, Japanese, and other corporations.

Although Vietnam is officially a Communist nation, about 40 percent of the economy is capitalist, and the government is making great efforts to encourage private foreign investment. Indeed, over the past decade, Vietnam has enjoyed one of the highest economic growth rates in the world. Not only have manufacturing and tourism expanded dramatically, but Vietnam has become an agricultural powerhouse.

Today it is the world's second largest exporter of rice, and one of the world's leading exporters of coffee, pepper, rubber, and other agricultural commodities.

Another factor distancing the country from what the Vietnamese call "the American War" is the rapid increase in Vietnam's population.

Only 41 million in 1975, it now tops 90 million, with most of it under the age of 30 -- too young to have any direct experience with the conflict.

Vietnam has also made a remarkable recovery in world affairs. It now has diplomatic relations with 189 countries, and enjoys good relations with all the major nations.

Nevertheless, the people of Vietnam paid a very heavy price for their independence from foreign domination. Some three million of them died in the American War, and another 300,000 are still classified as MIAs.

In addition, many, many Vietnamese were wounded or crippled in the conflict.

Perhaps the most striking long-term damage resulted from the U.S. military's use of Agent Orange (dioxin) as a defoliant. Vietnamese officials estimate that, today, some four million of their people suffer the terrible effects of this chemical, which not only destroys the bodies of those exposed to it, but has led to horrible birth defects and developmental disabilities into the second and third generations.

Much of Vietnam's land remains contaminated by Agent Orange, as well as by unexploded ordnance (UXO).

Indeed, since the end of the American war in 1975, the landmines, shells, and bombs that continue to litter the nation's soil have wounded or killed over 105,000 Vietnamese -- many of them children.

During the immediate postwar years, Vietnam's ruin was exacerbated by additional factors. These included a U.S. government embargo on trade with Vietnam, U.S. government efforts to isolate Vietnam diplomatically, and a 1979 Chinese military invasion of Vietnam employing 600,000 troops.

Although the Vietnamese managed to expel the Chinese -- just as they had previously routed the French and the Americans -- China continued border skirmishes with Vietnam until 1988.

In addition, during the first postwar decade, the ruling Vietnamese Communist Party pursued a hardline, repressive policy that undermined what was left of the economy and alienated much of the population. Misery and starvation were widespread.

Nevertheless, starting in the mid-1980s, the country made a remarkable comeback.

This recovery was facilitated by Communist Party reformers who loosened the reins of power, encouraged foreign investment, and worked at developing a friendlier relationship with other nations, especially the United States.

In 1995, the U.S. and Vietnamese governments resumed diplomatic relations. Although these changes did not provide a panacea for the nation's ills -- for example, the U.S. State Department informed the new U.S. ambassador that he must never mention Agent Orange -- Vietnam's circumstances, and particularly its relationship with the United States, gradually improved. U.S.-Vietnamese trade expanded substantially, reaching $35 billion in 2014.

Thousands of Vietnamese students participated in educational exchanges. In recent years, the U.S. government even began funding programs to help clean up Agent Orange contamination and UXO.

Although, in part, this U.S.-Vietnamese détente resulted from the growing flexibility of officials in both nations, recently it has also reflected the apprehension of both governments about the increasingly assertive posture of China in Asian affairs.

Worried about China's unilateral occupation of uninhabited islands in the South China Sea during 2014, both governments began to resist it -- the United States through its "Pacific pivot" and Vietnam through an ever closer relationship with the United States to "balance" China.

Although both nations officially support the settlement of the conflict over the disputed islands through diplomacy centered on the 10 countries that comprise the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), officials in Vietnam, increasingly nervous about China's ambitions, appear to welcome the growth of a more powerful U.S. military presence in the region.

In the context of this emerging agreement on regional security, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, and U.S. President Barack Obama will be visiting Vietnam later this year.

This shift from warring enemies to cooperative partners over the past 40 years should lead to solemn reflection. In the Vietnam War, the U.S. government laid waste to a poor peasant nation in an effort to prevent the triumph of a Communist revolution that U.S. policymakers insisted would result in the conquest of the United States.

And yet, when this counter-revolutionary effort collapsed, the predicted Red tide did not sweep over the shores of California. Instead, an independent nation emerged that could -- and did -- work amicably with the U.S. government.

This development highlights the unnecessary nature -- indeed, the tragedy -- of America's vastly destructive war in Vietnam. It also underscores the deeper folly of relying on war to cope with international issues.

Lawrence Wittner (lawrenceswittner.com), syndicated by PeaceVoice, is Professor of History emeritus at SUNY/Albany. His latest book is "What's Going On at UAardvark?" (Solidarity Press), a satirical novel about campus life.

OPINION

DISASTER PREP: WHAT TIME IS IT?

John LaForge
PeaceVoice

When I first began writing this column I hoped to simply raise awareness that we really ought to be buying extra flashlight batteries, stocking our shelves and making plans to survive anything that would threaten our definition of "normal". With earthquakes all over the world, tornado season approaching in our nation's midsection and underwater volcanoes off the Oregon coast, now would be a great time to consider checking your supplies. Every time I hear of a disaster, I sense an uptick in the urgency meter. People die when they're unprepared!

Two years ago a storm known as a derecho developed in Ohio and moved eastward. A derecho is defined as a widespread, long-lived, straight-line windstorm that is associated with a fast-moving band of severe thunderstorms.

In this case electrical power was disrupted for a week or more in at least eleven states. The destruction was followed up by temperatures in the 106+ range. People died of heat exhaustion and millions of lives were disrupted.

One observer made the following observations: "On the first day, all the hardware stores were stripped of generators by 9:00 a.m. and by noon, almost all of the gas canisters at most stores were sold out, leaving people to form lines at gas stations in the squelching heat.

By 4:00 p.m. the grocery stores were stripped of food, water and other essentials, such as ice. Within a day, everything was gone."

He went on to say that, "Water is so much more important than most realize, I highly recommend people stock up on storable water and water filters. A portable burner is a must. You will need some sort of power to heat your food, especially since most food, even storable food requires water and is best eaten when heated."

With the summer camping season coming on, most of us have a camp stove or a charcoal grill on which to cook. (Please don't light your charcoal grill indoors!) So check out your camping gear and make sure you have a supply of fuel on hand for your stove that will get you through a couple of weeks of cooking.

The next item I suggest you purchase is a water filter. Not the kind that screws onto your kitchen faucet, but one that works independently of your plumbing.

Mine is a British Berkefeld, (Big Berkey) you can check them out online. And the next item (I would say last but there's always something else) I recommend is a NOAA weather radio.

Most emergency radios have the NOAA weather channel which gives up-to-date weather information and storm warnings. Being prepared for an emergency doesn't just happen, it does take some effort and planning, but doesn't need to break the bank. What time is it? Time to start preparing!

Send questions and comments to disasterprep.dave@gmail.com. Check out previous columns on my blog atdisasterprepdave.blogspot.com.

CHRISTINE ALKA: CHINCHILLA WIZARD

Mary Standifer
mary@cullmansense.com

CULLMAN – Christine Alka is a local resident who owns and operates a chinchilla breeding, rescue, rehabilitation, and babysitting service. Christine first began working with chinchillas after a friend asked her to help him locate one for sale to impress a girl he was interested in. When researching the general care of the pets and searching online for somewhere to purchase one, Christine noticed that resources were very limited. She finally located a chinchilla that had been abandoned at a pet shop for sale. After noting how difficult it had been to find information and places to purchase the furry creatures, Christine decided to take advantage of her Entrepreneurship degree by starting her own breeding business. "If it was so difficult for me to find anything, I was wondering who else was looking and can't find it," explains Christine.

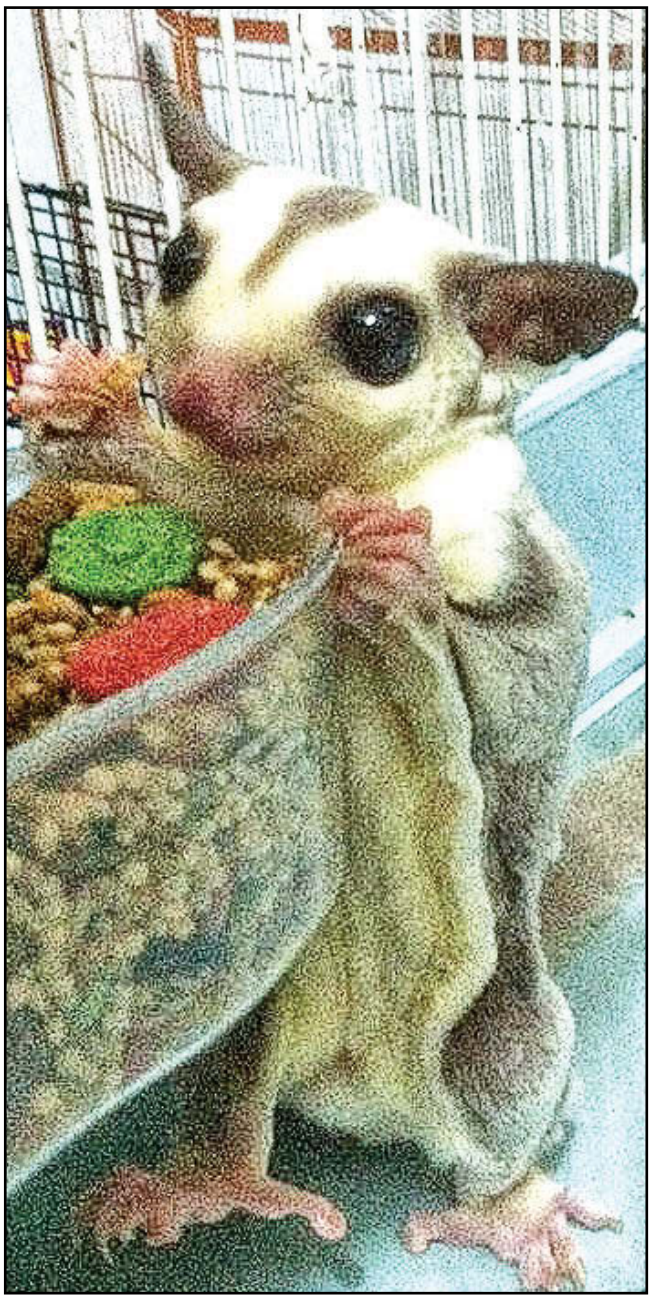
"So I started calling multiple breeders...and just learning a little bit more, and not only about the animal, but also the breeders themselves... Are they really in it for the Chinchilla, or are they in it for the money?" says Christine. Early on, Christine noticed that many breeders were unfortunately merely in it for the money. She began speaking more with breeders who seemed to truly care for their animals.

Christine was unemployed at the time of her research and was looking for an enjoyable line of work to begin. "I've always enjoyed doing stuff with animals so [I thought] 'This could work,'," she explains. Freedom Chinchillas started out with four chinchillas that were purchased from a refutable breeder as small kits. Eventually, the breeder she had been purchasing from in Tennessee informed her that she would be closing shop for good. "She let me know that she was going to sell out; she wasn't going to do it anymore," elaborates Christine. Christine used her entire tax return from that year to purchase a herd. Since then, she has purchased and housed many more chinchillas. At most she has had 100 housed at one time.

Each chinchilla is given frequent dust baths, food, water, attention, and time to play. Every week, Christine spends time replacing each habitat's bedding. The chinchillas are kept in a basement in Christine's house where it is cool to mimic their natural habitat: The Andes Mountains.

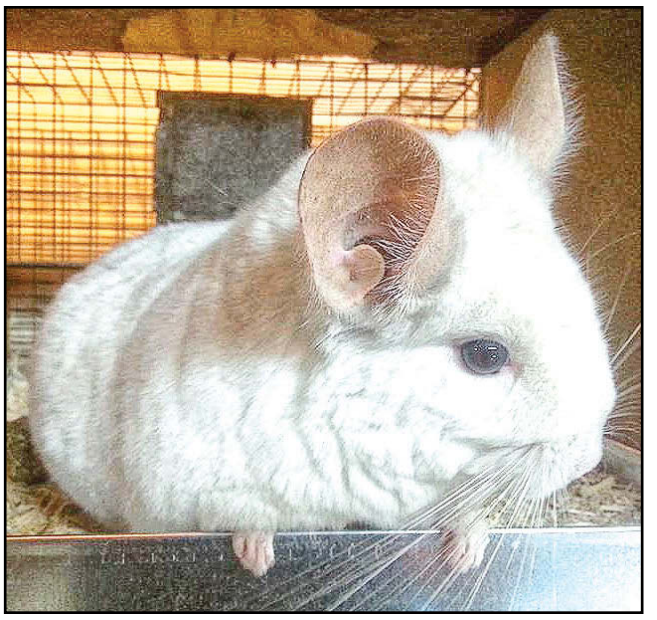
With the growing popularity of chinchillas as pets, the rehabilitation and rescue side of Freedom Chinchillas has seen a rise. Many of the chinchillas Christine takes in are products of pet stores where the chinchillas needs are not being met. "Pet stores as a general whole...run as a business, and a business only. They target the customer, not necessarily what is best for the animal," says Christine. Some chinchillas are rescued and rehabilitated from physical problems like malnutrition or fur loss, while others have simply not been handled by humans and need time and work to create trust between the animal and owner.

Aside from her work with chinchillas, Christine also raises and rescues sugar gliders, as well as breeds German shepherds. She offers assistance to all of her customers when raising animals that she sold; customers may call her at anytime if something is wrong or they have a question. For more about Freedom Chinchillas, visit facebook.com/pages/Freedom-ChinchillasSugar-Gliders/190667457616315.



IMAGES BY MARY STANDIFER/CULLMANSENSE

Christine breeds and offers services for sugar gliders.



Many varieties of fur color exists within the chinchilla species; some are rarer than others.



Christine Alka breeds only chinchillas of the highest quality.

Fish (from Front)

Blessed Sacrament, Hurricane Creek Park, and many other area hot spots.

"The people here are extremely nice," Adam said with a smile. "The land is absolutely beautiful. I love the forests and all the wildlife here. At Hurricane Creek I caught a couple of crawdads, a sun fish, a chub and some kind of sucker fish - and a snake," he laughed. "I had a great time!"

Back in Colorado, Adam works with specialized cichlids, which is a specific breed of fish. He has been working with them for the last 6 years. In doing so, he has met and worked with some of the leading breeders in Colorado, as well as several other states throughout the U.S.

"I have worked with over one hundred thirty species of fish and spawned many of them," he explained. "I have worked in large scale hatcheries in Alaska, and managed my own hatchery for 5 years. I've worked with aquarium service companies, as well as biological consultation companies. I am a certified SCUBA diver with an invitation to go to the wild in Africa next year to identify new species," he beamed. "My long term goal is to open a facility dedicated to the breeding of rare and endangered species of fish, primarily focusing on Cichlids from all over the world," he continued. "A facility as I am organizing will be in essence a wildlife refuge for these fish that have been displaced by invasive species or the many other environmental factors such as sedimentation and pollution that threaten them in the wild."

Adam's love for fish is infectious, and as ironic as it sounds; he's an avid fisherman. He enjoys eating any kind of fish he can catch. Luckily, while in Cullman, he took the opportunity to fish several private ponds throughout the county. Happy as a small child at Christmas, he had a blast and cannot wait to come back to visit his new found friends – and fish here in Cullman.

For more information about Adam and his business, Rare Water Aquatics, visit rarewateraquatics.org and follow him on Facebook at facebook.com/RareWaterAquatics.

