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For the latest arrest and incident reports and obituaries visit CullmanTribune.com or pick up the Thursday edition of The Cullman Tribune.

WEATHER

55 35

SOURCE: WEATHER.GOV

SLIGHT CHANCE SHOWERS THEN PARTLY SUNNY



BRANDON EVANS/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

– SPORTS –

Addison downs Vinemont on the road 49-39, Lady Eagles collect 65-33 win

» PAGE 4

7 93888 98541 4

Merchants Bank gives $20K to local nonprofits

Cayla Grace Murphy
caylagrace@cullmantribune.com

CULLMAN, Ala. — For three decades, Merchants Bank has hosted its annual Charity Classic golf tournament in early October, working to raise funds for local nonprofits. This year, the donation checks totaling $20,000 came just in time for Christmas for Cullman Caring for Kids, Brooks' Place and Hospice of Cullman County.

Merchants Bank Vice President of Lending Ross West stressed the importance of giving a holiday boost to integral agencies in the community. Each nonprofit received a check for $6,000 to make serving other residents of Cullman just a bit easier in the coming months.

West said a $2,000 donation to Boys and Girls Ranches of Alabama is also in order, bringing the final total to $20,000. » PAGE 7

Three local nonprofits benefited from the 30th Annual Merchants Bank Charity Classic as they were each presented with checks for $6,000 on Thursday morning, Dec. 21, 2023. Left to right are Gail Swafford of Brooks' Place, Steven Sutter of Cullman Caring for Kids and Tonya Foster of Hospice of Cullman County. An additional $2,000 will be given to Boys and Girls Ranches of Alabama, bringing the final total to $20,000. »



CAYLA GRACE MURPHY/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

'This is my home. I felt like I could do the most good here'

Parkside Outreach Program unites community



CAYLA GRACE MURPHY/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

Key players of the Parkside Outreach Program are, left to right, Jennifer Harlow, Amy Towles, Jill Green and Jena Smith.

Cayla Grace Murphy
caylagrace@cullmantribune.com

BAILEYTON, Ala. — The Parkside Outreach Program is one of many nonprofits nestled firmly in the far reaches of Cullman County, this one serving the communities of Baileyton, Fairview and anyone else who needs it.

Founder Jennifer Harlow said while her public outreach has a private years-long history, the nonprofit began humbly in 2018 as a way to continue her late husband's legacy of giving back.

"My late husband had a motorcycle store in Arab, and we always did poker runs and fundraisers, sponsored kids and stuff like that," she said. "So when he passed away, I said 'Well, we have to do something positive."

Harlow said a few smalls acts of kindness had a snowball effect, leading to the outreach program as it is known today.

"We started out with $10,000 and a dream, and this is where we're at now," she laughed, waving to the stocked food » PAGE 3

CCSO names training center in honor of Blackwood



FACEBOOK/CULLMAN SHERIFF

Left to right are Cullman County Commission Chairman Jeff Clemons, Commissioner Corey Freeman, Sheriff Matt Gentry, Capt. Ricky Blackwood and Commissioner Kerry Watson. » PAGE 7

Flying Fifty Hotel coming to Cullman in 2024



FACEBOOK/THE FLYING FIFTY

Local artist Donald Walker painted this mural of The Flying Fifty on the side of the new hotel. » PAGE 6

2024 Arbor Day Poster Contest underway at city schools

» PAGE 6

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Cullman native James Munger sworn in as division commander with USCG Auxiliary

Staff Reports
Contributor

MACKINAW CITY, Mich. — At the 9th Central District Change of Watch ceremony, held in Mackinaw City, Michigan on Nov. 4, 2023, Cullman native James Munger was sworn in as the next division commander for United States Coast Guard Auxiliary Division 26 in Northern Michigan. He was sworn into office by Active Duty BOSN Charles Palmer, Lt. Joseph Synder and Ensign Noah Adoff from Sector Northern Great Lakes.

Prior to becoming a division commander, Munger served as the vice flotilla commander and flotilla commander for the USCG Auxiliary Flotilla in Roscommon, Michigan.

His wife Karen (Johnson) Munger is also a member of the USCG Auxiliary.

Munger stated, "It has been and continues to be an honor and privilege to serve as member of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary.

"The Auxiliary is often referred to as a 'force multiplier' as we work side-by-side with the Active Duty and Reserve Forces of the United States Coast Guard.

"It is our mission to promote and improve recreational boating safety, provide trained crew and facilities to augment the Coast Guard, enhance the safety and security of our ports, waterways and coastal regions, and to support Coast Guard operational, administrative and logistical requirements."

There are 21,000 auxiliarists serving our nation and communities in 793 local units, who contribute nearly 4 million hours in support of the USCG including in the classroom, at the ramp and pier, and operating 1,800 vessel, 160 aircraft and 1,400 radio facilities.

After taking the oath, Commander Munger stated, "I am honored, energized, and excited by the opportunity to lead Division 26 as we move forward to meet new challenges and new opportunities.

"Being sworn into office by active-duty officers from Sector Northern Great Lakes, was the ultimate step in beginning this journey."

USCG Commandant Admiral Linda Fagan recently stated, "Tomorrow looks different. So will we.

"We will be a more adaptive and connected Coast Guard that generates sustained readiness, resilience, and capability to enhance our Nation's maritime safety, security and prosperity."

Munger encourages anyone who is interested in serving their community and improving recreational boating safety to consider becoming a member of the USCG Auxiliary to contact him directly at jgmcfps@bellsouth.net or visit https://join.cgaux.org.


CONTRIBUTED
James Munger

OP-ED

Alabama's Turnaround Schools Initiative will give some of our most struggling public school students a chance to achieve their dreams

Alabama Governor Kay Ivey

As 2023 comes to a close, it naturally offers an opportunity to look back at all we have done over the last year. In Alabama, I believe we have, once again, made progress. When I was sworn in for my second term as governor last January on the front steps of the State Capitol, I promised the people of Alabama that improving our students' education would be my number one priority. I think our year reflected those efforts. A highlight for me personally was visiting our 15 Turnaround Schools.

During my visit to Hayes K-8 School in Birmingham, I was speaking with students in a kindergarten classroom when one girl raised her hand. I called on her, and she informed me she wanted to be a doctor. I asked her what kind of doctor she might want to be, and she quickly responded by saying, "a good doctor." Then her classmates started excitedly raising their hands to tell me what they dreamt of being one day. One boy told me he wanted to be a police officer. Another girl told me she wanted to be a teacher.

Hayes K-8 is one of 15 schools in my Turnaround Schools Initiative. This is a strategic program designed to transform low-performing schools and the surrounding communities. We have schools in some very rural parts of Alabama, like in my home county of Wilcox, included in this program. We also have schools like Hayes K-8 that are inner-city schools. But no matter what a child's zip code is, we must afford them the chance to achieve their dreams. The Turnaround Schools Initiative will do that.

Receiving a quality education opens doors to whatever you want to be, whether it be a teacher, a police officer or a "good" doctor. Think about what it means to be an educated person in America: We can truly do anything when we put our minds to it. This is where the American Dream begins.

I visited each of the 15 Turnaround Schools, and to say I was encouraged and inspired by these students would be an understatement. Not even a year in, the Turnaround Schools Initiative is delivering results. Almost all 15 schools have jumped off the Comprehensive School Improvement List or the Priority Schools List. A school in Huntsville, Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary, which was previously scoring an "F" on the state report card is now at a "C." Highland Gardens Elementary in Montgomery has been able to add art, music and Spanish classes, as well as a STEM teacher. I was proud to learn Wilcox County had the highest percent increase in 3rd grade reading out of any district in the state. Perhaps most importantly, we are seeing greater parent engagement. The list of progress goes on, but it all can be credited to the Turnaround Schools Initiative and these students and teachers springing into action.

The Turnaround Schools receive additional funding that is customized to that school's specific needs. And on top of the targeted support these schools receive from the Office of School Improvement, community and state partners such as the Department of Early Childhood Education, the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Mental Health, the Alabama Arts Alliance and others are all at the table and ready to help. Truly, this is an all-hands-on-deck, team approach. We all know that a quality education begins at home, carries into the classroom and expands through the community, so our wholistic approach is necessary if we want our students to thrive.

I am committed to the Turnaround Schools Initiative being an ongoing effort. We want to get this model right for both turnaround efforts and continuous school improvement.

As policies like the Literacy and Numeracy Acts take full effect, efforts like the Turnaround Schools Initiative help students become proficient in both reading and math, and most importantly, it continues to support them in the grades ahead. When we see Alabama's reading and math scores improve in the years to come, we can look right back here to this initiative.


OFFICE OF ALABAMA GOVERNOR KAY IVEY

The hard truth is that some may want to write these students off, but I choose to see Alabama's future doctors, police officers and teachers.

As I visited many of the schools, I reminded these students that they – Alabama's students – are our future and my number one priority.

This is a vital effort that will change the trajectory of the lives of thousands of students, which is exactly why I will continue championing this program in the years ahead. Our students are counting on us to help them succeed and achieve their dreams.

Marshall files brief with U.S. Supreme Court opposing Biden DOJ's request to fast-track Trump prosecution

Staff Reports
Contributor

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall – joined by 18 states – filed a brief in the case United States v. Trump, opposing the Biden Administration's "extraordinary request to short-circuit the normal appellate process and go directly to the U.S. Supreme Court on the question of presidential immunity."

Last week, the federal prosecution team, led by Special Counsel Jack Smith, asked the high court to expedite review so that the prosecution could try to take former President Donald Trump to trial "as promptly as possible" without going through the normal appellate process.

The 19-state coalition argues that this unusual request is due to be denied, given the prosecution's failure to give a legitimate reason for the Court to depart from its standard procedure.

"In November of last year, Joe Biden vowed that Donald Trump would never become president again.

"Then, in August 2023, more than 30 months after the events alleged in the indictment, the federal government indicted Trump and now seeks to rush him to trial in March 2024. But the former President is entitled to appeal the trial court's order denying him presidential immunity. Thus, worried about losing his trial date, the special counsel is asking the U.S. Supreme Court to jump into the fray. But he gives no reason why the public interest demands a rushed trial, which suggests the real reason is to swing the presidential election," stated Marshall.

"The Court should not play along. As our brief points out, in asking for this extraordinary remedy, without giving any reason for why it is warranted, the special counsel's petition itself is strong evidence of a political prosecution designed to decide the 2024 election."

The coalition's brief argues that the federal government's petition "fails to clear the Supreme Court's high bar for immediate review because the petition provides no explanation for the prosecution's urgency. Instead, the petition simply asserts that the Court's immediate review would permit Trump's trial to proceed 'as promptly as possible.'"

Trump's trial is currently set to begin March 4, 2024, the day before Super Tuesday.

Alabama's brief was joined by attorneys general from Alaska, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, West Virginia and Wyoming.

Read details about the United States of America v. Donald J. Trump at www.justice.gov/storage/US_v_Trump_23_cr_257.pdf.



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CULLMAN COUNTY, ALABAMA
LISA MCSWAIN, CLERK

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF CULLMAN COUNTY, ALABAMA

CRUMBLEY JAMES R., DECEASED, THE ESTATE OF,
Plaintiff,
V. Case No.: CV-2013-000020.00
Defendant.

NOTICE OF HEARING FOR FINAL SETTLEMENT

That on the 6th day of December, 2023, a Petition to Reset the Hearing for Final Settlement was filed in the aforesaid Circuit Court by Randy Barnett, as Petitioner, and Personal Representative of the Estate of James R. Crumbley, and that the **15th day of February, 2024 at 9:00 o'clock a.m. has been appointed as the day for the Hearing for Final Settlement**, at which time you may appear and contest the same, if you deem it proper to do so.

DONE this 15th day of December, 2023.

/s/ GREGORY A NICHOLAS
CIRCUIT JUDGE

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Submit your calendar items or public notices to wendy@cullmantribune.com

Calling All Young Singers!

Cullman Community Young Singers (CCYS) is looking for YOU! All young singers (ages 8-15) are invited to join us on Tuesday afternoons from 3:30-4:45 at the Little House at Art Park, 1031 Second St. SW in Cullman. No auditions, just come for a fun afternoon of learning music from pop to classical styles. We will rehearse and prepare to perform at a variety of events in and around the Cullman community. Bring your friends- we will have music and everything you need to get started! For more information, text or email Miss Cindy at 256-338-4404, cindypass22@gmail.com. CCYS is sponsored by Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism.

Baileyton Bargain Days

• First and third Saturday of each month from 8 a.m.-1 p.m. at the old Baileyton fire station next to the town's park. Beauty and health products, toys, home goods, pet items, food and many everyday items.

• A donation of $20 will allow a shopper to fill up a bag, and for $40 a shopper can fill a large box. Some of the items of greater value will require a larger donation.

• There will be some restrictions and product limits on the items. Cash and checks accepted. Proceeds will be used for park improvements and capital improvements for the town.

Alcoholics Anonymous

The Grace of God group of Alcoholics Anonymous has open AA meetings (all are welcome) Mondays and Thursdays from 7-8 p.m. at the Carriage House, located next to Grace Episcopal Church, 305 Arnold St. NE Cullman. Contact phone numbers: 256-347-1097, 256-841-2209 or 256-708-1340

Church Services- Spirit Life Church of GOD

• Spirit Life Church of GOD, 1650 St. Joseph Dr. NW, Cullman

• Mondays-Fridays- Free hot meals for children Mondays 11 a.m.-noon, Tuesdays 1-2 p.m. and Wednesdays-Fridays 11 a.m.-noon. Cullman Housing Authority Community Center 1545 Vine Circle SW. Please call Kristie 256-636-5362 for more information. Eat in or take out. Sponsored by Kids Loving Kids, Raising Arrows Ministry and Spirit Life Church.

• Kids Loving Kids Birthday Blessings serves children ages 1-18 in need of assistance to celebrate their birthdays. Register your child and pick up a birthday box with cake mix, icing, sprinkles, decorations and toys! Pickup is the last weekend of the month. Saturday (5100 Curry Highway Suite 100-B Jasper, AL 35504) from 3-5 p.m. or the last Sunday of the month at Spirit Life Church Cullman from 12:30-1 p.m. Birth certificate is required at the time of box pickup. Register at https://form.jotform.com/203435614640045. For more information, text or call 205-717-7478.

Alcoholics Anonymous

Sundays, 3 p.m. at Cullman First Church of the Nazarene, 5415 Alabama Highway 157. CLOSED literature study. Handicap accessible.

TOPS (Take off Pounds Sensibly) Meetings

Fridays, 9:30-11 a.m., at Cullman Housing Authority Community Center (1545 Vine Circle SW, Cullman, AL 35055). The first meeting is free. TOPS, a national program, is a hands-on/pounds-off approach to weight loss and management through weekly meetings providing information, accountability, support and encouragement where you make the changes that make sense to you.

Cullman NAR-ANON Group Meetings

The NAR-ANON family group meetings are a worldwide fellowship for those affected by someone else's addiction. We offer Help by sharing our experiences, strength and hope. We carry the message of hope by letting others know that they are not alone by practicing the 12 Steps of NAR-ANON and changing our own attitudes. We Respect Your Anonymity. Our program is not a religious one, but a spiritual way of life. Meetings will be held at The Ruehl Building (Family Life Center of St. John's Church) Tuesday evenings at 6 p.m. Contact Jamie Weathersby Smith 256-708-7122 or Don or Nancy McKenzie 256-736-3327 or 256-736-3470 for more information.

Cullman Serenity AlAnon Meetings

The Cullman Serenity AlAnon group meets each Monday at noon at 1519 St. Joseph Dr. NE. There is also a zoom meeting each Tuesday at noon. The AlAnon family groups are a fellowship of friends and family whose lives have been affected by alcoholism. For more information, call 256-708-6645, 850-323-0490 or 256-734-2231.

Master's Hand Food Pantry at The Link

• 708 Ninth St. SE, Cullman, AL 35055

• Tuesday and Thursday 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

• Closed for lunch noon-1 p.m.

Winter Wonderland at Sportsman Lake Park

• Check out a variety of still and moving light displays, then hit the concessions stand for a warm cup of hot cocoa or a photo op with Santa Claus!

• The attraction is open 5-9 p.m. through Dec. 29. It will transition to a drive-through only experience Dec. 26-29.

• Admission is $10 cash per vehicle. Attractions include the Christmas train ($5 per person), horse and carriage rides (select nights at $5 per person), snow machine, photo booth, hot chocolate and additional Christmas entertainment.

Christmas at the Grotto

The spirit of Christmas has returned to the Ave Maria Grotto. Visit and enjoy Brother Joseph's creations, completely decked in lights.

Dates

• Dec. 26-27 – 5-9 p.m. (kids' rides)

Admission

• Adults - $10

• Seniors - $8

• Military/veterans/first responders - $7

• Teens (13-17) - $8

• Children (5-12) - $7

• Children younger than 4 - free

• Wagon rides on Dec 15,16 - $5

• Kids' rides every night of event - $3

2024 Polar Bear Plunge

Saturday, Jan. 20, at 10 a.m. at WildWater and the Cullman Wellness and Aquatic Center. Prizes include four WildWater season passes and one annual family CWAC membership. Event benefits Special Olympics. You MUST be present to win! The event is FREE to enter, and we will be accepting optional donations at the event for our partner, Special Olympics! Register NOW to take the plunge: http://tinyurl.com/Polar-BearPlunge2024

Parkside (from Front)

pantry around her.

While Parkside is multifaceted in its approach to tackling real-world issues brought on by economic instability, offering a clothing closet and hygiene items to those in need, it is perhaps best known by its hunger relief efforts.

Harlow said the food pantry aspect of Parkside is currently serving upward of 200 families a week with food boxes, and 52 families every weekend through a program known simply as "the backpack program."

Backpacks are stuffed with pantry essentials to get families of students at Parkside School through the weekend.

"Our numbers are still going up," said manager Amy Towles. She doesn't expect a decrease anytime soon.

Harlow agreed, saying the growing need is evident and has been a longstanding issue in the community she calls home.

She recalled her own childhood of parents working hard to make life happen for herself and three siblings.

"I grew up in Baileyton, and we were poor. I mean, we were the poorest of the poor. My mom and dad worked all the time, but it was just hard with four kids, making ends meet," she explained. After a short stint of living in Arab, she said, she felt the call to come back to the community that raised her. "This is my home. I felt like I could do the most good here."

"She's always doing something!" Towles exclaimed, packing mac and cheese into a box for pickup.

Harlow shared that even though she may be the face of the operation, it's no solo endeavor; several churches, local businesses and even individuals keep the goods flowing through Parkside Outreach through donations, both physical and monetary.

Towles agreed, saying, "Everybody donates. We couldn't survive without all the people in the community, and even people far off from the community."

When the issue of program abuse came up, Harlow simply declared, "That's between them and the Good Lord." While some pantry recipients may shop around at other pantries, she said, she doesn't mind as long as the people who sincerely need assistance get the help they need.

There is one more need at Parkside Outreach: volunteers.

"Y'all come on!" she exclaimed, saying volunteers are needed for a variety of tasks and the team at Parkside can work with all ages and skill levels.

To volunteer or for services, call 256 683-0715 or visit www.facebook.com/parksideoutreach.

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PREP BASKETBALL

Aggies, Lady Aggies drop matchups with Madison Academy

Sammy Confer
sammy@cullmantribune.com

FAIRVIEW, Ala. — After traveling to Scottsboro earlier this week, Fairview returned home Thursday night to host a pair of varsity matchups with Madison Academy but unfortunately for the home crowd, the Mustangs were able to topple both Aggie squads. The Lady Aggies fell to Madison Academy in a 38-34 nailbiter, and the sixth-ranked Mustangs pulled away to top the Aggies 67-41.

Madison Academy 38 - Fairview 34 (Varsity Girls)
If you wanted to watch a defensive game, then this was the game for you. Fairview got a three-pointer from Lexi Golden and a made shot in the paint by Lexi Collins, but the Lady Aggies trailed, 8-5, going into the second period. Golden drilled another three in the second quarter, and Jayla Gorham and Darby Nichols each added a basket as well, and Fairview found themselves down 14-12 going into the locker room at halftime.

Reagan Dunkin hit a basket in the paint to tie the game up at 14 early in the third quarter, but a three by Madison Academy gave them a 17-14 lead. Each team traded free throws to keep it at a three-point game at 19-16, but five quick points by Davis Stidham gave the Lady Aggies a 21-19 lead almost halfway through the quarter. The Lady Mustangs, though, finished the quarter on a 9-0 run to take a 28-21 lead into the final period.

Baskets by Gorham and Collins cut it to 28-25 with less than four minutes to go in the game.

Peyton Defoor drilled a trey from the top of the key to make it a 30-28 game with 2:41 remaining in the contest, then Gorham hit a three from the left corner to trim the deficit to just one at 32-31 with 1:11 left to go in the game.

Four free throws by the Lady Mustangs gave them a 36-31 lead, but a Dunkin trey from the left wing made it a two-point game. Madison Academy, though, hit two free throws to help seal the 38-34 win.

Golden finished with eight points for Fairview. Gorham added seven points, while Dunkin and Stidham each put in five points.

Madison Academy 67 - Fairview 41 (Varsity Boys)
Jac Dunn put in a layup for Fairview's first points of the game, then later on, a trey from the right corner by Cade Yeager gave the Aggies a 5-2 lead with 4:31 left to go in the opening period. Another basket by Dunn made it a 7-4 game, but Madison Academy scored the next 11 points to take a 15-7 lead. A pair of free throws by Blake Rickard and one by Kobe Payne cut it to 15-10 going into the second period.

Payne split his free throws to make it a 15-11 game early in the second, but the Mustangs went on an 8-0 run to push their lead to 23-11. Bryson Fletcher drilled a trey from the right wing to trim it to a nine-point game at 23-14 with 5:35 left to go in the first half.

Seven straight points by Madison Academy made it a 30-14 game, but AJ Wood hit a pair of shots in the paint, and Payne put in a three from the left corner to make it a 30-21 game late in the second. The Mustangs hit one of their own on the other end, as they ended up taking a 33-21 lead into the locker room.

A trey from the left corner by Rickard cut it to 35-24, but an 8-2 run by Madison Academy increased their lead to 43-26, but three free throws by Payne and a made shot in the paint by Tyler Tankersley made it a 47-31 game going into the final period.

A technical foul was called on the Mustangs early in the fourth, and Payne hit both shots from the line to cut it to 47-33, but a 12-0 run by Madison Academy quickly pushed their lead to 59-33. A basket by Wood, plus a three each by Payne and Tankersley, made it a 67-41 game, but they wouldn't get any closer after that, as the Aggies ended up falling to the Mustangs 67-41.

Payne led the way for Fairview with 12 points. Wood added six points, while Rickard and Tankersley each put in five points.



NICK GRIFFIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE
Fairview's Kobe Payne led the Aggies with 12 points in their 67-41 loss to Madison Academy Thursday night.



NICK GRIFFIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE
Fairview's Lexi Golden led the Lady Aggies with eight points in their 38-34 loss to Madison Academy Thursday night.

PREP BASKETBALL

Addison downs Vinemont on the road 49-39, Lady Eagles collect 65-33 win

Todd Walker
Tribune Correspondent

VINEMONT, Ala. — Addison traveled to Vinemont for a pair of varsity matchups Thursday and the Bulldogs split their contests with the Eagles. The Lady Eagles raced past Addison 65-33 and in the boys' game, the Bulldogs of Addison toppled Vinemont 49-39.

Vinemont 65 – Addison 33 (varsity girls)
The Vinemont ladies came out a little sluggish as the Lady Bulldogs jumped out to a quick 5-0 lead. An Ava Bartlett bucket and a Gracie Roberts trey got the Lady Dawgs the lead. The Vinemont ladies came roaring back and played good solid basketball. Vinemont moves very well without the basketball ball and the girls make really crisp passes. Vinemont took control and outscored the Lady Bulldogs 18-6 for the remainder of the period. It was balanced scoring for Vinemont as Whitney Quick, Carley Stevens and Maggie Burks each had 4 points. Reagan Robinson and Addison Holcomb each had a three-pointer for the Lady Eagles as Vinemont took an 18-11 lead into the second period.

Vinemont controlled the second period as well, winning it 24-9 as Addison struggled to run their offense. The Vinemont ladies showed good passing and scored numerous layups off of Lady Bulldog turnovers. Addison senior Hadley Butler, coming back from injury, hit a three-pointer for one of the few bright spots for the Lady Bulldogs. Ava Bartlett had 4 points and 4 boards while Karson Wyatt had 4 rebounds for Addison in the period. Vinemont's Robinson had 8 points while Maggie Burks nailed two deep threes for her 6 points. Vinemont carried a comfortable 42-20 lead into the half.

The third period started out absolutely horrible for the Lady Bulldogs as Vinemont forced Addison into numerous turnovers and bad passes. Vinemont continued to score easy layups and when the layup wasn't there, they hit 3 threes and overall shot the ball very well in the period. The Lady Eagles blitzed Addison 17-3 in the period to go into the fourth up 59-22. Addison's lone bucket was a three-pointer by Bartlett. Robinson led the Lady Eagles with 6 points and 4 rebounds. Stevens had 4 points as well.

The fourth period had Vinemont playing everybody and the Lady Bulldogs scratching and clawing to win the period 10-6. Addison was led by Butler, Roberts and Bartlett each with 3 pointers. Butler and Morgan Lee led Addison with 2 rebounds apiece. Vinemont had Quick and Aubrey Sandlin hit a three-pointer for Vinemont's 6 points. Vinemont took the game 65-33.

Vinemont will play in a tournament in Athens on the 27th of December. Addison will play in a tournament on the 28th of December at West Morgan High School.

Unofficial stats
Addison was led by Bartlett with 14 points, 6 rebounds and 2 assists. Roberts had 9 points and 4 rebounds. Butler had 6 points, 6 boards and 5 assists. Emma Cleghorn had 2 points and 3 boards. Lee had 2 points and 2 boards. Wyatt had 7 rebounds. Kabri Dyson had 5 boards. Mattie Johnson had 2 boards. Reese Osborne had 4 rebounds and 2 steals.

Vinemont was led by Robinson who had a game high 17 points and 6 rebounds. Burks had 12 points and 5 boards. Quick had 9 points and 6 boards. Stevens had 8 points and 2 boards. Carolina Miller had 9 points and 2 boards. Holcomb had 7 points and 7 boards. Sandlin had 3 points.

Addison 49 – Vinemont 39 (varsity boys)
The boys' game was a game of scoring runs. Vinemont got off to a great start as they jumped on the Dawgs 12-0 and actually held the Dawgs scoreless until the 2:16 mark of the first period. The Eagles were led by Isaiah Jones who did whatever he wanted to do in the period. Jones had 6 in the period while Jeremy Harbison had 4 and Jackson Holcomb had a bucket. Addison's first bucket was a Jed Wilkins layup to get them on the board. Addison then had a 7-0 run of their own. Owen Pratt had a short jumper and Wilkins grabbed another bucket and a free throw. Addison trailed 12-7 at the end of the first.

The second period had Addison stepping up their defensive pressure and it bothered the Eagles. Addison won the period 19-13. Addison big man, Bradley Willette, had 8 points and 2 assists in the period. Pratt had a trey while Scout Flynn hit two threes for the Bulldogs.

Vinemont's Jones drilled two threes and Holcomb chipped in 4 points. There actually weren't a lot of missed shots in the period as there were only 6 total rebounds combined in the period. Addison went into the half with an every so slight 26-25 lead.

The third period got off to a good start for the Bulldogs as they raced to a 36-27 lead. Vinemont's Jones got into early foul trouble in the period and that really hampered the Eagles.

Addison won the period 13-7 to take a 39-32 lead into the fourth. Wilkins led Addison with 5 points. Hayden Holland and Flynn chipped in 3 points apiece for the Bulldogs. Holcomb led Vinemont with 4 points while Colton Gillis had 3.

Harbison worked hard on the glass to lead both teams in rebounding with 4.

The fourth period had Vinemont trailing at 40-34 when Gillis nailed a corner three at the 4:57 mark to cut the Addison lead down to 40-37. Addison then went on another short run with two Wilkins free throws and a Roberts layup to stretch the lead back to 44-37 with 3:05 to go in the game. This is where the game would get away from the Eagles.

Addison would hold the Eagles to only Harbison bucket for the final 3 minutes of the game. Addison would live at the free throw line on this night, and this is where the difference in the game was. Addison shot 16 out of 29 free throws while Vinemont hit 4 out of 8.

Numbers don't mean everything because Addison does drive to the basket a lot to draw the fouls, but, when a visiting team shoots 21 more free throws than the home team it is a head scratcher. Addison was able to secure the win 49-39.

Addison and Vinemont are finished for 2023 and will pick back up when the new year starts.

Unofficial stats
Addison was led by Wilkins who had 16 points, 7 rebounds and 4 steals. Willette had 9 points, 5 boards and 3 assists. Flynn had 9 points and 3 boards. Pratt had 6 points and 2 boards. Elijah Roberts had 5 points and 6 boards. Holland had 3 points and 5 boards. Kiah Lake had 1 point, 3 rebounds and 3 assists.

Vinemont had Jones with 12 points and 5 boards. Holcomb had 12 points and 5 boards. Harbison had 7 points and 8 rebounds. Gillis had 6 points. Dawson Wilhite had 2 points and a board. Jordan Eller had 3 rebounds.



BRANDON EVANS/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE
The Addison Bulldogs defeated Vinemont on the road 49-39 Thursday night.



BRANDON EVANS/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE
The Vinemont Lady Eagles defeated Addison at home 65-33 Thursday night.



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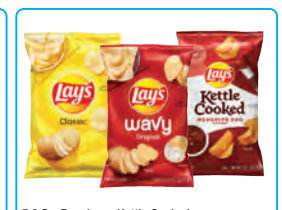
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PREP CHEER

'We're all there for each other': West Point's Makaila Wylie enjoying sophomore season

Sammy Confer
sammy@cullmantribune.com

WEST POINT, Ala. — West Point sophomore cheerleader Makaila Wylie has been cheering since the fifth grade and she's currently in her second year on the varsity cheer team. She's enjoying every minute of it so far and having three guys on the team has made them stronger and stronger each day. She has learned so much from this experience so far.

"West Point is an amazing school. The energy at pep rallies and football games while cheering is amazing. When the crowd gets involved, it's amazing. The one thing I love is cheering for a crowd that wants to be involved and stands up and cheers along with us. Cheering for West Point has been a great experience so far, and I love the new friendships I have made while cheering with the wonderful boys and girls on the team. This year, we didn't only have just one guy cheering with us; we have three, and they are amazing at what they do. Not only do they make our team stronger as one, but they know how to get the energy up. Cheering for West Point has been one of the best decisions I have made."

She added, "Having three guys on the team makes the energy better, because they use megaphones, and they have loud voices that stand out. When people watch us, they complement on how well our guys do, as well with the team. We have three incredibly strong guys on the team, and they also do amazing stunts with us. I've learned that even when you're going through a rough time, give it your all. Things might not go your way, but it's okay. You'll get over it. Never hold grudges towards people. We're all humans, trying to learn how to do life, and we all make mistakes. We just have to learn from them."

Makaila has had a blast cheering with some great people so far and has learned a couple of important things from them and has enjoyed cheering under her coach so far.

"It's been a great year, and I'm looking forward to cheering my junior year. I hope there's more amazing things to come, and I can't wait to see how much more our team can improve. I've learned that we all go through things outside of cheer, and we're all there for each other," she said.

"My coach is amazing, and we went to CGCA; that gym helped us improve a lot. She has loved each one of us, no matter what, and she does amazing as our cheer coach. She pushes us to our fullest and never lets us down. We love her. She's encouraging us and loves each and every one of us. I've learned that sometimes, we need to be pushed to be able to achieve big things."

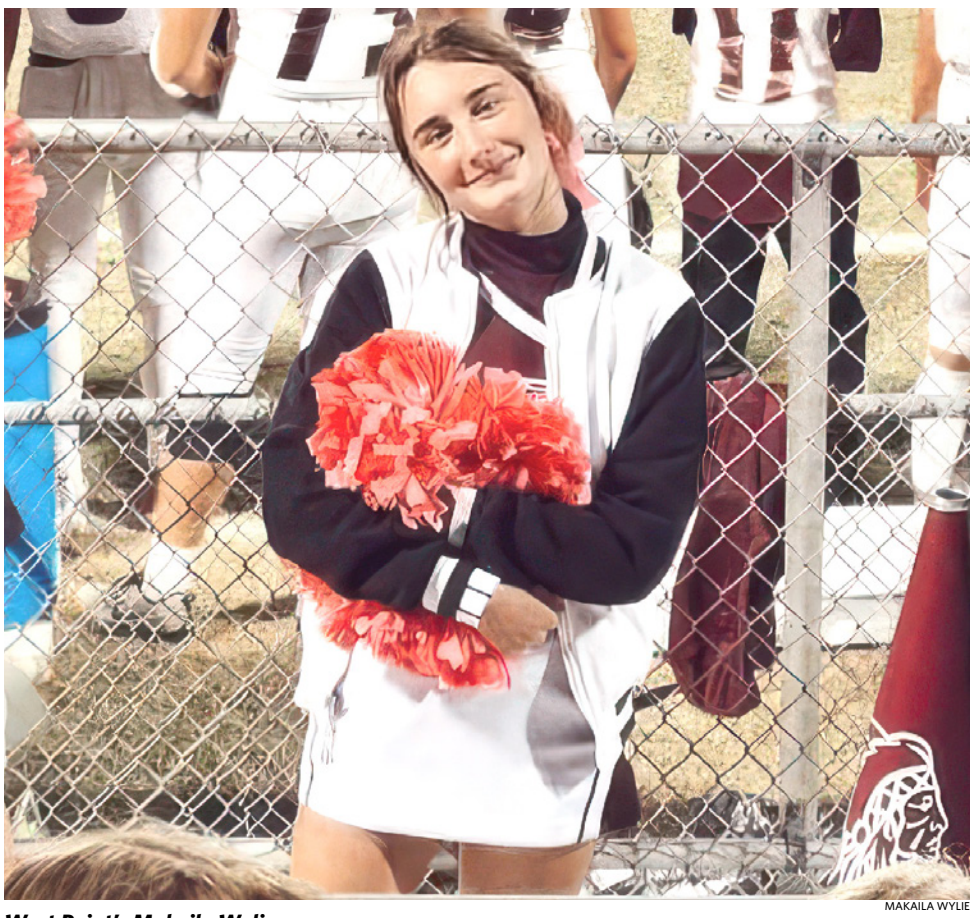
Makaila has seen a significant amount of improvement in her performance from last year until now. She's had a bunch of help from her fellow upperclassmen in helping her become the cheerleader that she is today.

"I have fixed a bunch of my imperfections, from my motions being sharp, to giving my full potential in the cheers and routines we do. When we practice our competition material, I've learned that how you do your routines at practice is how you'll do when you perform in front of a crowd," she said. "They have helped me become a better cheerleader by teaching me the right and wrong things to do. They help me fix my mistakes in our routines and teach me new cheers throughout the season. What I've learned from them is that it's good to work on cheer material outside of cheer practice to make me a better athlete and make me perform better."

West Point competed not too long ago at the state competition and finished fifth in Class 5A, and Makaila learned a very important thing from that experience. She set some goals before the season and talked about them, plus what has made this cheer squad special to be around, and the best advice that someone has ever given her.

"It felt good to be able to place that high in the Class 5A division, and I learned that there's more improvement to make. I'm hoping that we will make it to state again next year," she said.

"My goals were to enjoy my sophomore year and try my hardest to improve and be better than I was last year. I had a goal for my team to go to state and we did. I think I have achieved my goals, because I have seen improvement in myself this season, and there's definitely still room for improvement for myself."



MAKAILA WYLIE
West Point's Makaila Wylie

She added, "This cheer squad is special to me, because they are all supportive, and if you ever feel down, they know how to bring you up. I have been around these girls and guys a lot, so we all know how we each are. They know how to make you happy, and we all know how to work hard together. The best advice that someone has ever given me is to always give 100%. I only have four years of high school, and it's best if I give it my all and have fun."

Makaila talked about a couple of role models that has inspired her a lot, how important it is to be a role model for the younger girls and gave some advice to the girls that want to get into cheer themselves.

"Mary Sergi is one of them. She inspires me as a flyer, because she's amazing. My captain, Haylee Hernandez, also inspires me, because she tore her ACL last year, and has gotten stronger. She does an amazing job at flying, so I look up to her a lot," she said. "Being a role model is very important. The younger cheerleaders look up to us a lot. Sometimes, I don't realize it, but it feels special to be in that position. My advice to them is that they definitely should try it. You never know if you'll like it, until you try it."

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THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE
DECEMBER 26, 2023

988: Suicide awareness and support at the holidays

Staff Reports
Contributor

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — This holiday season, the Alabama Department of Mental Health, and our partners across the state would like to share a message of hope if you or someone you love is experiencing feelings of despair or grief or is in a suicidal crisis. It can be hard for many during this time. The holidays may be stressful and overwhelming, but there are resources available found online and by dialing 988, which is available 24/7, with a trained crisis counselor on the other end of the line.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 49,449 individuals died by suicide in the year 2022.

This was the highest number ever recorded in the United State. We must continue to connect, communicate, and work together to decrease suicide and increase mental health wellness for ourselves and our loved ones.

Reaching out, talking to peers, family, or a mental health professional can help ease some depression, stress and anxiety that come with the holiday season, or any day of the year.

While you or someone you know may be feeling lonely, afraid, anxious, lost or overwhelmed, you are not alone.

While these emotions can be uncomfortable and unpleasant, they are normal and there is no shame in feeling this way.

The Alabama Department of Mental Health encourages the continuance of the "No Shame" Suicide Prevention campaign, which strives to decrease the stigma associated with suicide and mental illness and promotes the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. 988 is for anyone experiencing a mental health crisis, substance use, or thoughts of suicide.

A qualified and trained crisis counselor is ready to assist you. It is private and is accessible 24/7. In a crisis, dial 988.

For more information about crisis care in Alabama, visit www.mh.alabama.gov/crisis-centers and for mental health providers in your area, visit www.mh.alabama.gov/providers-search. Learn more about Suicide Prevention partners in Alabama at www.sprc.org/state/alabama and www.afsp.org/chapter/alabama.



2024 Arbor Day Poster Contest underway at city schools

Cheyenne Sharp
cheyenne@cullmantribune.com

CULLMAN, Ala. — School is out and Christmas break is in full swing for students. For fifth graders in the city, between hot cocoa breaks and video game levels, now is the opportune time to brainstorm and think up ideas for the 2024 Arbor Day Poster Contest hosted by the Cullman County Extension Office and supported and judged by the Cullman Tree Commission.

Leanne West, recorder for the Cullman Tree Commission, said, "All the city schools have the information." The theme for 2024's poster contest is "Trees are terrific... in cities and towns." Students can dream up any take on the theme, as long as it fits within the contest parameters and rules. This year's theme was similar: "Trees are terrific... and forests are too!" Cullman Christian School's Marriah Hain took home first place at the state level for the 2023 competition. As with any contest, there are parameters and rules that local students must follow. Posters must be original creations of a fifth-grade student; can be made with markers, colored pencils, pens, chalk, watercolors, ink, tempera paint, acrylic or paint pens; and no collages will be accepted. Poster sizes must be between the sizes of 8.5" x 11" and 14" x 18". No collages, computer-generated art or art depicting cartoons or movie/TV characters will be accepted for submission.

Fifth-grade students from Saint Paul's Lutheran School, Sacred Heart, Cullman Christian School, East Elementary and West Elementary can submit their finished posters to their teachers until the beginning of February when they'll be taken to the Cullman County Extension Office to await judging.

The posters will be judged, and first and second place winning posters from each school will be chosen by the Cullman Tree Commission on Feb. 5, with a ceremony planned on Feb. 20 to recognize the winners. Winners will receive a cash prize, courtesy of the Tree Commission; increased from the prize amounts of previous years, first place will be awarded $50 and receive a handmade quilt in a festive arbor theme and the second-place winner will be awarded $25 courtesy of the Cullman Tree Commission. The first-place winner from each school will travel to Montgomery to compete in the state contest.

ACES: Buzz surrounding 29th annual Beekeeping Symposium and Honey Show

Katie Nichols
Alabama Cooperative Extension System

AUBURN UNIVERSITY, Ala. — Calling all beekeepers! Registration for the 29th Annual Alabama Beekeeping Symposium is now open. The symposium is set for Feb. 3, 2024. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System beekeeping team is excited to offer a packed agenda in Clanton, Alabama at the Clanton Conference and Performing Arts Center.

Jack Rowe, an Alabama Extension forestry, wildlife and natural resources regional agent, said the team is looking forward to hosting the event and has a great agenda planned.

"James Tew, a well-loved apiculture specialist, started this symposium 29 years ago, and it has remained popular with hundreds of people in attendance each year," Rowe said. "Here, we are looking forward to 2024 with excitement and anticipation."

Registration
Registration for this event is online and open until Feb.3. The cost to attend is $45 per person. To register, visit the Alabama Extension Store at www.aces.edu/go/store.

Beekeeping Symposium
This year's agenda is packed with everything beekeepers need to know — from bee nutrition and stress to planting for bee nectar and pollen year-round.

"The speakers for this year's event bring with them many years of experience in this industry," Rowe said. "We are honored to have them be a part of the symposium and are eager to learn from their wealth of information."

Symposium speakers include Auburn University Bee Lab's Amy Weeks, Dan Aurell and Jennifer Standley. Other speakers include Alabama Extension professionals, Alabama Master Beekeepers and United States Department of Agriculture professionals, among others.

Vincent Wallace, Alabama Beekeepers Association president, has been attending the Beekeeping Symposium for 11 years and recommends it to beekeepers in all stages because of the relevant information shared.

"I highly recommend attending, especially for the new beekeeper," Wallace said. "The learning curve is quite steep with beekeeping. The symposium exposes the new beekeeper to the knowledge needed to do things right and keeps the seasoned beekeeper on the right track."

Topics discussed at this year's symposium include the following:

- Landscape from the bee's point of view
- Hangry bees
- Interactions between nutrition and stress
- Feeding bees: when and why
- Nucs for profit
- Hive observation
- Queen-rearing basics
- Varroa sampling and management
- Queen loss
- Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and bioengineering in agriculture
- Planting for nectar and pollen year-round

Other topics include beginning beekeeping and an apiary inspection update and panel, as well as a personal account of the journey from backyard beekeeping to apiary manager. The symposium will close at 4:15 p.m. with a raffle of donated beekeeping items.

The full agenda — including speakers and topics — is available by visiting the 29th Annual Beekeeping Symposium web page on the Alabama Extension website, www.aces.edu.

Honey show
For the second year, the beekeeping symposium will include a honey show. This year's show will be facilitated by Brutz English, a certified University of Georgia Master Beekeeper. Brutz, also the president of the American Honey Show Training Council, will conduct honey judge training at the symposium.

English said the beekeeping community does an excellent job of educating others in the art and science of beekeeping.

However, he said there is little opportunity for beekeepers to learn what to do with their hive produce once they have become successful beekeepers.

"The honey show is the best forum to learn how to turn that raw honey and beeswax into high-quality, gourmet and artisanal finished products," English said. "We teach participants to be aware of fundamental food safety, how to produce items that meet or exceed high standards of sanitation and hygiene and how to improve their production methods and practices, so their hive produce can reach the highest quality and market value possible."


ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM

Honey show exhibits will be accepted Friday, Feb. 2 from 4 to 5 p.m. Exhibits will also be accepted Saturday, Feb. 3, from 8 to 10 a.m. Judging begins promptly at 10 a.m., so late exhibits will not be accepted.

More information
More information about the 29th Annual Alabama Beekeepers' Symposium is available at www.aces.edu. Rowe is also available to answer questions by email at wjr0001@auburn.edu.

Hotel (from Front)

Lauren Estes
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CULLMAN, Ala. — The Flying Fifty Hotel, a boutique-style hotel, is set to open in March 2024 on the southwest side of Cullman.

Owners Challie Johnson Knetter and Paul Knetter said they wanted to bring something different to the community.

"There was a need for upscale hotel options in Cullman," Challie Johnson Knetter said. "The Flying Fifty not only provides luxurious accommodations, but also showcases the unique charm of Cullman and Alabama. We've opted for a hybrid self-check-in system, similar to what you'd find in smaller boutique hotels, to keep things convenient and straightforward for our guests. Our aim is to create an experience that goes beyond just a place to stay. We want our guests to immerse themselves in the local community, experiencing the flavors and history that make Cullman special."

Many local businesses and individuals poured into this project, Knetter said, to make the hotel that much more special.

"John Riley, president of Cullman Savings Bank – without his vision and backing the hotel would not be possible," she said.

"The Added Touch by Cullman Cabinet – Amy Wood and Eidson Construction – Will Bonds. These people have been key in this project's development and planning."

Knetter shared that the building has multiple tenant spaces. The hotel is on the top floor and there are three tenant spaces on the first floor along with a Cullman Savings Bank drive-through location. There will also be seven suites at the boutique hotel.

"Each suite includes either a living area with sofa or a separate living room," Knetter said. "Six of the suites have private balconies and they each have access to the common space, which includes a large balcony, conference room and study/library. Each of the rooms will have a wet bar, but no bar in the common area."

She said the hotel will feature an array of murals and paintings, each telling a story of Cullman's rich history.

"Additionally, you can expect to find other one-of-a-kind art pieces that reflect Cullman and our state," Knetter said.

"What makes it even more special is that all this artistry will be brought to life by talented local artists. We believe in supporting and showcasing the creativity within our community – making each piece a genuine reflection of Cullman."

Each room will have a specific theme based on the region. Room names will be announced on The Flying Fifty social media accounts in the coming days.

The hotel is named after the group of men from Cullman called The Flying Fifty in the 1950s. At a time when many residents were forced to seek employment outside of Alabama, a transformative moment unfolded in Cullman.

How the Knetters recall The Flying Fifty:
"Mrs. Betty Bledsoe received a casual phone call from a friend, who had just eaten at the All Steak Restaurant and was bound for Mississippi with a group of men to locate land for a King Edward Cigar Plant. After the call, Betty alerted her husband, Dr. Leroy Bledsoe, and the Chamber of Commerce hastily convened. The following morning, a group of 48 men, self-dubbed 'The Flying Fifty,' boarded planes on a mission to meet with the board of directors at King Edward's headquarters. During this meeting, The Flying Fifty effectively persuaded Mr. Swisher to designate Cullman as the location for their plant.

"However, the agreement came with a condition — Cullman needed to develop a suitable plot of land for the plant. Undeterred, the community rallied together, raising funds and erecting a modest structure affectionately known as 'The Cigar Shack' on the courthouse lawn. Even the youngest members of the community contributed pocket change, demonstrating the collective commitment to the cause. Local radio stations joined the effort, suspending regular programming to champion the town's initiative.

"This chapter of Cullman's history stands as a testament to our community spirit and ingenuity. The Flying Fifty, with their determination and resourcefulness, played a pivotal role ensuring a brighter future for our town."

The Flying Fifty Hotel will be located at 515 Fourth St. SW, next to Hank's Sports Bar & Rumors Deli. Get more information at www.facebook.com/theflyingfifty.

Merchants Bank (from Front)

The funds were raised at the 30th annual Merchants Bank Charity Classic, held Oct. 2, 2023, which boasted a total of 136 players and 34 teams.

West said without these players and a multitude of sponsors, this level of giving wouldn't be possible.

"We cannot stress enough that this tournament is not possible without all our sponsors and players," he said, mentioning plans to up the ante for the 31st Annual Merchants Bank Charity Classic to be held in October 2024.

"We are looking forward to next year and continuing this great tournament!"

Blackwood (from Front)

Lauren Estes
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CULLMAN, Ala. — The Cullman County Sheriff's Office recently honored Capt. Ricky Blackwood for his contribution to the law enforcement community by naming its training center the James R. Blackwood Training Center.

Sheriff Matt Gentry said Blackwood has been a staple in local law enforcement for more than three decades.

"His contribution to Cullman County and the sheriff's office is unrivaled," Gentry said.

"He has served as a patrol deputy, K9 handler and a narcotics investigator. Captain Blackwood is currently the captain over the patrol division of the Cullman County Sheriff's Office."

On Dec. 18, the CCSO posted to its Facebook page: "Earlier today, Sheriff Matt Gentry hosted a Christmas Breakfast for the Cullman County Sheriff's Office. Captain Ricky (sic) Blackwood was honored at the celebration as the Sheriff's Office Training Center was named in his honor. Captain Blackwood's law enforcement career has spanned the better part of 35 years. The 'James R. Blackwood Training Center' will be a lasting reminder of his commitment and dedication."

Gentry continued, "He is a long-standing staple of the sheriff's office. His experience, commitment and love for the community continues to be an inspiration to us all. Captain Blackwood is not only a colleague and a mentor, but more importantly a friend."



SENIOR LIVING

Adopting a pet

Pets for Seniors is an organization that has adopted out more than 700 older dogs and cats, saving these pets from euthanasia in Illinois and giving them loving homes with senior citizens who had given up on having companion animals.

The organization started in 1999. Initially, it would visit shelters and become familiar with older and special needs pets. When a senior was interested in adopting, the group would bring several compatible choices to their homes for an interview. If the person met the right pet, the group would then pay most of the adoption fee, bathe or groom the animal, take it to the vet, have it microchipped and vaccinated, and deliver it to its new home.

In 2003, Pets for Seniors received a grant to build its own shelter for cats and dogs. Volunteers, many seniors themselves, come to walk the dogs daily. Even with its own shelter, Pets for Seniors continues to work with shelters around Illinois.

If for some reason a match doesn't work out, Pets for Seniors says it will always take the animal back and refund the senior's portion of the adoption fee or let them try a different animal.

The first animal is not euthanized; Pets for Seniors works to find it an appropriate home.

Pets for Seniors also provides start-up supplies for new pets including collars and leashes, beds, dog coats, toys, litter boxes, litter, food bowls and food.

The organization provides free transportation to take the pet to the vet or groomer. It will even bathe and trim nails for free or for a small donation. It will continue to drop off food and supplies for seniors who don't drive.

If the adopter has to be hospitalized or spend time in a nursing home, Pets for Seniors will take care of their pet for free until they're home. They're also available to help when pets have medical emergencies.

Pets for Seniors will stand in for the owner in any case where the owner is unable to be there, such as searching for lost pets or burying a pet that has passed on. It has been able to negotiate some veterinarian discounts for senior adopters.

SENIOR LIVING

Mental health for seniors

It's not just your physical health that you need to be concerned with as you age. There's an important mentalhealth aspect to aging, too.

Coping with chronic or serious illnesses, the deaths of friends or family and other major life changes can throw seniors for a loop.

The good news is that help is available.

Symptoms

Some symptoms of mental health disorders in older adults can include:

• Noticeable changes in mood, energy or appetite.

• Feeling flat or having trouble feeling positive emotions.

• Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much.

• Difficulty concentrating, feeling restless or feeling on edge.

• Increasingly worried or stressed.

• Angry, irritable or aggressive.

• Ongoing headaches, digestive issues or pain.

• The misuse of alcohol or drugs.

• Sadness or hopelessness.

• Thoughts of death, thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts.

• Engaging in high-risk activities.

• Obsessive thinking or compulsive behavior.

• Seeing, hearing and feeling things that other people do not see, hear or feel.

If you or a loved one experiences any of these symptoms, talk to a health care professional right away. They can help develop a treatment plan to help.

Getting help

You can also call any one of these hotlines for immediate assistance. Call 911 if you or someone you know is in immediate danger.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988 to connect with a trained crisis counselor. The hotline is free and provides confidential emotional support 24 hours a day.

Veterans Crisis Line: Call 988 and then press 1 or text 838255 for free, confidential resources for veterans of all ages.

Disaster Distress Hotline: Call or text 800-985-5990 to get help from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. This is a free, multilingual and confidential hotline for those experiencing distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster.

For friends and family

The National Institute of Mental Health offers these five action steps if you think someone close to you is experiencing emotional pain.

1. Ask: Are you thinking about killing yourself? It's not easy, but studies show asking will not increase suicide or thoughts of suicide.

2. Keep them safe: Reduce access to lethal items and places.

3. Be there: Listen carefully and learn what the person is thinking and feeling. Talking about suicide may actually reduce rather than increase suicidal thoughts.

4. Help them connect: Give them hotline information to connect them to immediate counseling.

5. Stay connected: Stay in touch even after the crisis has passed. Studies show that the risk of suicide decreases when someone follows up with the at-risk person.

SENIOR LIVING

The importance of staying social

In 2020, about 27% of older adults (over 65) lived alone. Older adults who live alone are at greater risk for loneliness and social isolation.

It's important to start by setting some definitions. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, loneliness is the feeling of being alone, regardless of the amount of social contact someone has. Social isolation is a lack of social connections. Social isolation can lead to loneliness, but people can also feel lonely without being socially isolated.

The CDC says there's strong evidence that social isolation and loneliness can be detrimental to your health. There's an increased risk of premature death from all causes, which is a statistic that rivals the deadliness of smoking, obesity and physical inactivity.

Social isolation is linked to a 50% increased risk of dementia, and poor social relationships can also lead to an increased risk for heart disease and stroke. Loneliness is associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety and suicide.

If you think you're experiencing loneliness or social isolation, talk to your medical professional immediately. They can help connect you with programs in your area to help you stay socially active.

You can also reach out to organizations such as the AARP, your local Council on Aging, the National Council on Aging, the National Institute on Aging, or find resources through your house of worship. Look for opportunities to volunteer or give back to your community in ways that will keep you socially active. This can be at a food bank, animal shelter or even your grandkids' school.

Talk to your family about keeping active in your community. Ask them for help getting you out to do things and including you in activities. They may have some ideas of how you can volunteer your time or stay active. Get out and exercise, even if it's just a walk around the block, if it's OK with your medical professional.

If you're dealing with grief at the same time, reach out to grief counselors through those same channels listed above.

Losing friends and family members can leave you feeling isolated. You're not alone. There are resources that can help.

SENIOR LIVING

Projects for aging in place

Aging in place means being able to remain in your home rather than moving to assisted living or another institutional setting. Nearly 90% of seniors want to stay in their homes and with some planning, they can.

Consider health needs

Start by talking with your medical professional about any illnesses you have and how they could affect your ability to get around and take care of yourself. Think long-term rather than short-term and make a plan that includes the effects of any illnesses you may have. For instance, you may eventually need help moving around, with household chores or with modifications to keep your space safe.

Then, talk to your family. Share your plan and get their input. They may be able to help alleviate some of your concerns or help with home modifications so you can stay in the place that you love.

Projects to prevent falls

Start with little things, like removing slippery throw rugs, especially in the bathroom. Install grab bars and grips in the tub or shower to help you support yourself. Make sure any handrails on steps or stairs are secure. Make sure pathways, especially ones you use at night, are well-lit so you can see where to place your feet.

If and where you can, remove steps and reduce their height. Rearrange and reposition furniture to make navigating your home easier.

Putting things in reach

Consider having light switches and electrical outlets either raised or lowered for ease of use. Widen the front entrance and any other doors to comfortably fit wheelchairs and other mobility devices. Add an entrance ramp if needed, along with a no-step shower or a bath lift. Lower countertops if you may have mobility issues that require a wheelchair in the future. Install a stair lift if you routinely go up and down stairs.

Switching rooms

Consider moving rooms around in your home so that you can do most or all of what you need on the first level, including going to the bathroom and sleeping.

Make sure you can get in and out of your home easily. Eliminate steps where you can, even if that means moving your bedroom or installing new bathroom fixtures.

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