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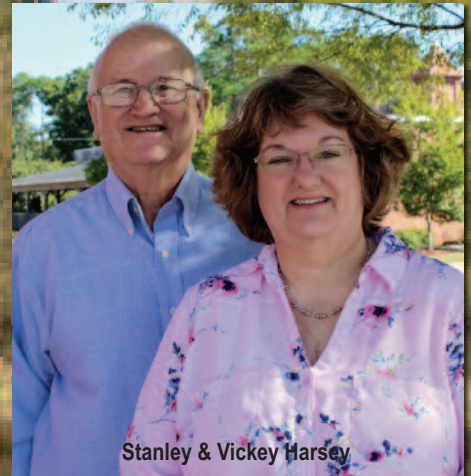
Spring 2017

Christy Hulsey
Parrish House
KB Horse Camp
The New Sheriffs
Miss America
Teens & Tweens

Spring Beauties

\$3.00

My Georgia Magazine *Hometown*



Stanley & Vickie Harsey

New Beginnings

It is the end of March, and here I sit wearing a sleeveless dress while listening to the groaning of the air conditioner. It is a balmy 85 degrees outside, and did I mention it's March? I'm new here. Up until October 1, 2016, I lived in southern Minnesota. Running the air conditioner in March is unheard of, and 85 degrees is rarely seen before the end of June.

Today, I reside in south Georgia where the days are warm, the accents are thick, and the tea is so sweet it makes my teeth hurt. I live next to a beautiful pond full of fish and can toss in a line whenever I feel like it, even in the winter – without drilling a hole in the ice! Having family down here makes the holidays memorable.

Speaking of holidays, don't forget Easter is on April 16. From the Cross, to the lilies, to the eggs, Easter is a symbol of new life, hope, and renewal. It is a wonderful time to celebrate new beginnings. And don't forget to buy your mama (or daddy) one of those delicious chocolate bunnies.

When I think chocolate, I also think strawberries, and it is strawberry season in south Georgia! In this issue of *My Georgia Hometown*, we have a delicious trifle recipe using fresh, Georgia-grown strawberries. In fact, we have recipes for an entire meal using locally grown produce. What a perfect meal to make on Mother's Day, May 14 (hint-hint). And don't forget your dad on Father's Day, June 18. Treat him to a game of golf, some smoky sweet Bar-B-Q or a dinner of fried catfish, which I heard is a delicacy down here.

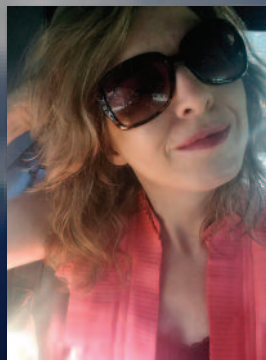
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Happy Easter, Happy Mother's Day, and Happy Father's Day from MGH.

-Samantha, Advertising/Design



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A Tragedy Remembered

During World War I, 372 American soldiers lost their lives in the tragic sinking of the troopship, *HMS Otranto*, while transporting troops overseas. It has since been largely forgotten in history.

In October 2016 and 2017, the American Legion Otranto Post 115 plans to preserve history and honor veterans with memorial services. These events will mark the 100-year anniversary. They are reaching out to all the families who had someone on the troopship when it sank on October 6, 1918.

"It is important that we tell the stories of our military and our wars so it doesn't get watered down, white-washed, and swept under the rug like it didn't happen and is not part of the history of this great nation," said Larry Osheim, Sr. Vice Commander.

The troopship was a commercial liner converted for use as an Armed Merchant Cruiser in the Royal Navy. It made its final voyage from New York bound for Glasgow and Liverpool with a convoy of thirteen ships. Captain Ernest W. G. Davidson and his 362-crew had 699 American troops aboard, some of whom were from rural Georgia.

As the convoy approached the North Channel between the Scottish and Irish coasts, rough seas and poor visibility caused a collision with the steamer, *Kashmir*, of the same convoy. The only vessel which made an attempt at rescue, the British destroyer, *Mousey*, saved 310 American soldiers, 236 crewmen, 30 French sailors, and one British officer, at great risk to its crew.

When the men came back from the war, they realized they needed a place where they could be around other veterans that

understood them and what they were

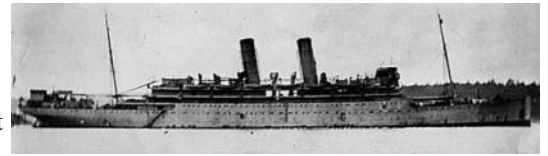
going through. So, they formed the Otranto American Legion Post here in Nashville, Georgia.

Osheim wants the public to know that they want to include personal articles for display in both events. They don't want to keep your valuable memories, but would like to glean some of the information for use in these events. If you want to donate your memories and preserve them for history, the Legion will pass them on to the Berrien County Historical Society for permanent display in their World War I room located in the old courthouse on the square.

"If anyone can come to Nashville for one of the memorials, we would love to have you. We would like to introduce you, tell you which Doughboy you are related to, and include your name in the memorial," Osheim concluded.

Please submit photos, biographical information, and service details to the American Legion Otranto Post 115. If you have any old letters, newspaper articles, pictures, or remembered stories passed down through the years, they would appreciate hearing from you.

Contact Gene Mollisee, Commander, and Larry Osheim, Sr. Vice Commander, via email: oldford2n@gmail.com or mail: American Legion Otranto Post 115, Inc., P. O. Box 971, Nashville, GA 31639.✿



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Hard Work Perseveres

By Carmen Statham & Vickie Harsey

From veterinary science, to agriculture, to film making, Reese Johnson has his life mapped out. He is even running for president—of Georgia's Future Farmers of America. Currently, he is actively serving in his local chapter at Berrien County High School. He is also getting ready to graduate with the distinctive honor of being named STAR Student of 2017.

Winning the STAR distinction means that Johnson had the highest SAT scores of his graduating class. He scored 1400 out of 1600. Johnson says his motivation comes from his parents, Scott and Leigh, his teachers, especially Jonathan Garner who Johnson chose as STAR teacher.

The awards were presented to Johnson and Garner during a meeting of the Berrien/Nashville Rotary Club where Johnson commanded the room with his strong speaking skills, which he attributed to the discipline learned in FFA.

Johnson later told *My Georgia Hometown*, "When I was younger, I talked really fast and slurred my words a lot and stuttered. My mom said it was because my brain was moving too fast for my mouth to catch up."

Thanks to Creed Speaking for FFA and his tremendous self-discipline, Johnson was able to overcome the obstacles and improve his ability to communicate.

Being self-motivated, Johnson took on high school at full throttle, enrolling in all Honors classes his freshman year. By his junior year, he was in a year-long Advanced Placement US history class. Now, he is in the MOWR (Move On When Ready) program, studying college-level English and Algebra under a group of Wiregrass Technical College professors.

Although he has been on the education fast-track, Johnson admits that, in the beginning, he did not fully understand or appreciate the role of the simpler, repetitive practical skills of courses like math and English or even life basics.

"It's all going to be important one day," said Johnson, noting the realization that came as he used basic applications as key components of complex ideas and formulas. He now understands how the "unimportant" classes affect his life, the economy, and his career.

STAR teacher, Jonathan Garner pointed out how Johnson's desire to achieve his goals helped him to push through his difficulties, revealing the type of student he is. Garner also noted

Johnson gained "a lot of his strengths" from his parents, who are both educators.

To become a STAR student, Garner said, "[I]t takes having an individual who wants to be exposed to as wide of a range of experiences and knowledge as possible. Reese has exposed himself to so many different avenues of knowledge. And I think being a STAR student is an accurate reflection of a complete body of work."

For Johnson, Garner's fairness and his flexibility to work with him as he pursued various programs, helped him learn about being "a good steward of [my] own time and ...[having] a good work ethic."

Garner said, "Even though I try to keep things light [in class], one of the things that I take very seriously are the classes that are designated as rigor courses,"

These classes is to prepare students for college. Once students understand the importance of meeting deadlines in his classroom, they are better equipped to meet the expectations of college.

While Garner knows these things are critical, he also understands that it's not just about getting ready for college. It's about getting ready for a career. Time management is a simple skill needed to run a successful business.

On continuing his career paths, Johnson plans to attend Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College to study animal veterinarian sciences and agricultural education. He has seen the value of the latter and its impact on people and nations. It's his goal to pass that knowledge along to the next generation.

His other interest is film directing and writing for television and movies, "...so I can explore what makes a leader a leader," he said. He is interested in themes of determination, perseverance, and redemption, and how the imaginary can become something real.

STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Recognition) is sponsored by PAGE (the Professional Association of Georgia Educators), the Chambers of Commerce, and the Berrien/Nashville Rotary Club. ✨



Reese Johnson and Jonathan Garner

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Irwin Teen Serves as Georgia's 4-H State President

Judging Chickens and Deliberating Forums

By Brett Fountain

While most sixteen-year-olds are focused on the dramas of high school life and preparing to take control of their very own vehicle, James Hancock has been pushing the boundaries of what a teenager can achieve before setting foot into an adult world.

His highest achievements so far include receiving a Master status in the Veterinarian Science project at 4-H State Congress in 2015. In the same year, he became the Southwest District Senior Board President; and finally, in 2016, he became State President of Georgia 4-H.

"The [state] 4-H staff members have mentored me and given me so many opportunities," said Hancock. "I have been able to meet and learn from some of the leaders in Georgia, such as Agriculture Commissioner Gary Black." Along with meeting Georgia's leaders, Hancock has used his position to speak to the Georgia Senate and House of Representatives on behalf of 4-H.

As president, he focuses on encouraging potential members to join 4-H. He regularly attends club meetings at various Irwin County schools and shares the opportunities 4-H offers, emphasizing that agriculture is the number one industry in Georgia and that 4-H plays a large role.

"I feel that my job as president is to serve and reach out to...4-H members..." Hancock said.

His passion for 4-H and agri-businesses is a family affair that took root after his two older brothers, Guy and Ben, competed in a district Project Achievement. As the boys' parents watched their sons in the speech competition, they realized the importance of 4-H.

"From then on, we were a 4-H family."

Following in his brothers' footsteps, the youngest Hancock became a 4-H member.

At nine-years-old, he began competing at Project Achievement where students give presentations in their area of interest. His area was Veterinarian Science. Poultry judging was an opportunity for him as it taught critical thinking skills, extemporaneous speaking, and the importance of paying attention to details.

In seven short years, Hancock has logged an incredible amount of achievements. His favorite competition involves chickens. He is a member of the Irwin County Poultry Judging Team where, in 2014, his team won First Place at state and Second Place at nationals.

"[My family] has always had chickens, and poultry judging has fascinated me,"



Hancock said. "For the past two years, I have helped coach our 4-H poultry judging team."

After Hancock graduates from high school, he plans to attend Abraham Baldwin Agriculture College and then the University of Georgia. He plans to study science, math, agriculture, and business,

and possibly major in agriculture economics, or poultry science, or accounting.

Aside from 4-H, Hancock enjoys leading the singing at his church and working on his family's farm, Hancock Kiko Farm. "We have raised registered [Kiko] goats since I was one year

old. I personally own a few," he said.

He added, "My family is very close and I enjoy spending time with them." When Hancock has free time on his hands, he occupies it with weight lifting or fishing.

Hancock said that his parents, John and Lori, have been his greatest influence on his life. "They have always been supportive and have taught me the value of hard work," he said. "They have taught me the importance of...integrity...kindness, and putting everyone ahead of myself. They have always tried to follow the Lord and trust in Him."

For anyone that has not made up their minds about getting involved in 4-H, Hancock has an encouraging message. He

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Georgia Museum of Agriculture Gallery Wins Two Statewide Awards

Recognized locally as a fascinating place with timely exhibits on a regular basis, the Gallery at the Georgia Museum of Agriculture and Historic Village at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College has been honored with two statewide awards by the Georgia Association for Museums and Galleries.

Polly Huff, assistant director and curator at the Museum, said the Gallery received the Top Museum/Gallery institution in the state award and the Top Special Project award at the recent meeting of the GAMG in Augusta. She said the GAMG awards selection committee was quite effusive in its praise of the work going on at the Gallery in Tifton.

"The GMA Gallery has become a leading institution in Georgia with a record of accomplishments and is acting as an important cultural resource in the community," according to comments from the selection committee. "The Gallery has taken an active role in promoting communication and cooperation among other Georgia museums and galleries and has provided on-site outreach programs which have extended the GMA's mission while educating student and adult audiences."

Huff said the Gallery's honors came in recognition of over 30 significant exhibits and numerous local and regional partnerships as well as dozens of outreach events which have been hosted in the Gallery since its inception in 2010.

One of those exhibits was an unprecedented partnership in the spring of 2016 between the Gallery, the ABAC School of Liberal Arts, the ABAC School of Nursing and Health Sciences, the Tift Regional Heart and Vascular Center, and a private art collector. Honored by the GAMC as the Top Special Project of 2016, that collaboration resulted in the Heart to Heart event which educated the community about heart disease while showcasing an exhibit of art inspired by the miracle of medicine, all while giving a springboard to over a dozen college art students into the world of juried shows and gallery exhibits.

"The Heart to Heart event presented by the GMA Gallery followed a multi-prong design," Huff, who coordinates activities at the Gallery, said. "It featured a gallery exhibit spotlighting a

collection of Georgia Master Lamar Dodd's Heart Series, six of which belong to Gallery patron and ABAC alumnus C.L. Morehead, Jr., of Athens.

"Mr. Morehead is a renowned collector who owns over 800 of Dodd's works. A juried exhibit of work inspired by medical events and created by students in ABAC's Painting, Drawing, and 2-D Design classes was showcased with the wonderful paintings by Lamar Dodd."



Georgia Museum of Agriculture Assistant Director and Curator Polly Huff displays the awards from the recent statewide convention of the Georgia Association for Museums and Galleries.

In conjunction with the contest, Huff visited all the college art classes at ABAC and gave lectures on Dodd and his Heart Series. She also shared with the students the intricacies of entering a juried art show and a gallery exhibit. Additionally, the Tift Regional Heart and Vascular Center hosted a sold-out heart-healthy supper and a cooking demonstration featuring well-known local cardiologist Jonathan Tronolone, who is also a terrific and entertaining chef.

Tift Regional Medical Center also hosted a hands-on children's corner in the exhibit where young visitors could try constructing a heart or pumping "blood" through a heart model. In that corner, the youngest visitors to the exhibit engaged in several learning activities focused on art, heart health, and nutrition.

The last part of the partnership involved the ABAC School of Nursing and Health Sciences, which utilized the exhibit's opening to showcase the skills of over a dozen

nurses-in-training and provided to the public several free screenings and advice on heart-healthy nutrition and exercise.

The Heart exhibit opened to the public on Valentine's Day 2016 with a lecture on Dodd and the Heart Series by Dr. William Eiland, Georgia Museum of Art Director. GAMG praised the project, calling it "a special project of note which demonstrated scholarship and originality. It was an example in excellence in planning, effectively reached and broadened the gallery's audience, and contributed to the cultural fabric of the state."

Huff was one of the presenters in two statewide roundtable workshops at the conference, which was attended by more than 120 museum and gallery professionals from across the state. ❧

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New SHERIFFS in Town

By Shelby Evans

Arresting bad guys, dramatically reciting the Miranda rights, and putting people behind bars is what being in law enforcement seems like. But, according to two of our region's newly-elected Sheriffs, the role of law enforcement can be summed up more accurately: To help people.

From a young age, Ben Hill County's Lee Cone and Berrien County's Ray Paulk both saw law enforcement in their future and worked their way up to helping people in their communities.

"...Educating and developing a close relationship with local youth is imperative to ensuring the future of a community."

—Sheriff Cone

For Cone, law enforcement was a dream of his since childhood—a dream that was influenced by his family, many of whom worked in law enforcement. He said that watching his



"Law enforcement is actually detouring crime before it happens."

family help people made him want to do the same. He has been working in law enforcement for more than 20 years.

As Sheriff, Cone stated his main responsibility is to “be there for the people.” He then continued, “I’m the type of person that wants to help you if it’s possible, if it can be done.” Helping people includes crime prevention and keeping a close relationship with the residents of Ben Hill.

But the job is more than just answering phone calls. “Law enforcement is actually detouring crime before it happens,” said Cone.

Detouring crime means staying involved in schools, allowing children the opportunity to interact with law enforcement in a learning environment, and educating children on why laws exist and how they help people.

Cone called detouring crime his specialty, having worked specifically in this field for more than ten years. He believes that educating and developing a close relationship with the local youth is imperative to ensuring the future of the community. To emphasize this point, Cone refers to Ben Hill’s young community members as the “future leaders of tomorrow.” He wants to give children and youth a role model, and the understanding that the members of law enforcement are people they can rely on for help.

As a proud representative of the Ben Hill community, Cone bragged on the giving nature of its residents—people, he says, put life before money. Cone has seen people with ten dollars, give away five, and then buy something else for a neighbor in need. With the recent storms, local churches and civic groups banded together to give as much as they could to those in need.

“Who wouldn’t want to be a part of that community? Who wouldn’t want to be a sheriff in a town like that?” Cone asked.

The role of a Sheriff goes beyond arresting people; it means being a compassionate ally to the community. —Sheriff Paulk

Paulk has similar sentiments on his role as Sheriff. He too believes that the primary role of law enforcement is to help and protect the community he serves. Paulk has been in law enforcement for more than 22 years, exclusively serving the Berrien area. Becoming Sheriff was an achievement he dreamed of and worked for. When he found out he was officially Berrien County’s Sheriff, he said it was an emotional moment; but it was time to embrace the role and do it right.

“This is my home and my family,” he said of the Berrien community. “I want to see good things for our area.”

For Paulk, being in law enforcement means being accessible to the community 24/7.

“I do want the community to understand that we’re here to help,” he said. The role of a Sheriff goes beyond arresting people; it means being a compassionate ally to the community.

“We’ve changed people’s lives without arrests,” said Paulk. Through compassion and understanding, he has seen lives changed with the assistance of law enforcement officials.

Paulk attributed the success of the Sheriff’s department to all of the people that work there, from the front desk to the officers



“I do want the community to understand that we’re here to help.”

on patrol. He also said it is the Berrien community that makes being a member of law enforcement rewarding.

“We’ve been fortunate in our community because we have a lot of support,” said Paulk.

Like Cone, Paulk took a moment to recognize the outpouring of support from the local community in response to the recent storms that passed through Berrien and surrounding counties.

“You’ve got to have a strong community,” Paulk continued, “As law enforcement we depend on the community. As much as they depend on us, we depend on them.”

Sheriff Cone and Sheriff Paulk are both proud of their communities’ ability to help and give during trying times. They both believe that a Sheriff should have an open-door policy for the people they serve. They both work with a staff that is close-knit and supportive. While being in law enforcement may mean they have to make arrests when necessary, they both recognize their unique position to help people. ✂



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The Real Miss America:

Standing Strong in Spite of Life's Obstacles

By Shelby Evans

Miss America 2016 Betty Cantrell, now living free from under the sash and crown, recently made a special visit to Tiftarea Academy in Tifton, Georgia. She was invited to

speak on her experience as Miss America 2016 and her transition into pursuing her dream of becoming a country music star. Before singing in front of the sold-out crowd, Cantrell told the story of her ascension to the crown, a rise, it turns out, riddled with mistakes.

When Cantrell started out, she was not interested in pageants. At 18, she competed for the first time against young women who had been competing their whole lives.

The audience in the well-dressed and tulip dotted Tiftarea Gymnasium skewed young and female. Cantrell knew her audience well and focused on the young girls who see her as a super hero, as someone they would like to be one day. She asked the audience to list stereotypes they associate with girls who compete in pageants. After a notable pause, Cantrell encouraged the crowd. The suggestions started off innocent—"big hair," "makeup," "beautiful dresses," "really pretty"—and then made a dramatic turn—"intimidating and unapproachable." Cantrell took the time to explain what intimidating means which she described as scary and as someone you don't want to talk to. Cantrell then asked with a smile, "Am I scary?" A few giggles and quiet "No's" sprinkled throughout the crowd. Cantrell then listed some more stereotypes: bossy, airheaded, blonde, sassy.

Cantrell explained her hesitation to start competing, "I did not want to compete in pageants because I did not want to deal with those sassy girls. But," she says, "I'm so glad I decided to compete."

It took Cantrell four times to win a local pageant and twice to win Miss Georgia. It was one of the most stressful times in her life, but she finally made it to the Miss American competition. Cantrell remembers thinking, "This is going to be the craziest, awesome-est, craziest experience of my life." She was one of 52 girls competing for the crown and title as Miss America 2016. The girls she met were nothing like the stereotypes she knew.

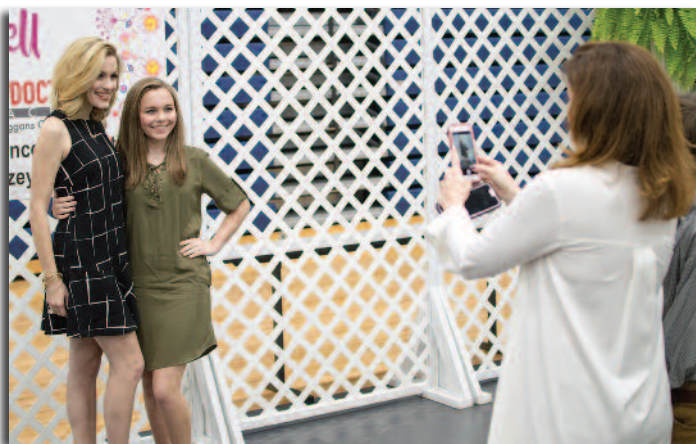
"In the Miss America organization, [...] the girls are some of the nicest most determined, smartest young women that I've ever come in contact with," Cantrell said, noting that now she has a friend in every state. "They're not mean or airheads," she told the crowd. "One of the girls I competed with is already a doctor." She explained that even if she didn't win, she still had the incredible

consolation prize of watching one of her friends win.

When she asked the audience if they watched the pageant. Hands flew up across the gym. Cantrell admits that the final night was rough for her. She was number 13 of the top 15. When they announced her name, she came to the front of the stage to wave, overcome with excitement. "And my earring falls off," she told the crowded gym.

In the moment, Cantrell was baffled as to what to do. Should she pick it up or leave it? If she leaves it, what if another girl trips on it? Picking it up, she waves with her fallen earring in her hand—on national television. Next, was the swimsuit competition. "And luckily, the bad part of my story is not in the swimsuit portion of the competition," Cantrell joked. She had made it to the top 12.

During one of the most elegant portions of the competition, evening gowns, where the women are meant to display poise, grace and beauty. She tripped. Twice. She found herself thinking,



"This was not supposed to happen. Miss America is supposed to be perfect!"

She can't help but laugh at herself while still on stage. She knew that if anyone was going to trip in the Miss America pageant, it was going to be her. With her final pose, she looked at the judges thinking, "You know what just happened."

Cantrell made it to the talent portion of the competition. "My talent is everything to me," Cantrell says. Her classical training shone through in spite having a sinus infection. She performed a song from the opera *Madame Butterfly*.

Afterward, she was chosen for the top ten. Then she and her opponents had to prove themselves to be well spoken, knowledgeable members of society. The contestants have no idea what the questions are beforehand so they meticulously study current

events. Cantrell was excited to find out that Brett Eldridge would be asking her question.

On stage, her happiness quickly faded. She explained, “Because Brett Eldridge has this really thick country accent, and I’m really not sure why he has a thick country accent because he’s from Illinois,” the Tiftarea-crowd laughed, “I can’t hear what he’s saying.” All she can hear is the name Tom Brady. As soon as his name was said, the audience at the pageant erupted. Cantrell went on, “And I think, ‘I can’t hear the rest of the question and he’s got this fake accent going on.’ And so, I ask him to repeat the question. I’m not even sure if I’m allowed to do that.” But she decides she can’t answer a question when she doesn’t even know what was asked. Again, she couldn’t hear the first part of the question and only heard, “Did Tom Brady cheat?” She thought to herself, “How would I know that?” None of her preparation helped her in this moment. She examined Syria, Iran, the political climate of the time, but neglected to research current events in football. Cantrell says, “This is the way my answer kind of went: ‘Well, I don’t know. Maybe. Yes, he definitely cheated.’” Even though it wasn’t the worst answer in pageant history, Cantrell admits, it was still pretty bad.

She walked off stage and began to cry. The other contestants noticed and tried to console her. “Betty it’s okay, that was a stupid question,” they told her. Between the sobs, she said, “Okay. Whatever you say. I’m not going to win now.” Then she said, more seriously, “I just know it’s not going to be me because of everything that has happened to me on this night.”

She made it back on stage surrounded by her competitors, by her friends. They held on to each other, excited to see which one



takes I made, after how perfect everyone else was all night – I just didn’t understand.”

The judges told her she was “real.” That’s why she won. They said they could talk to her. That she was not pretending to be perfect. “I was really encouraged to hear that,” Cantrell says, “I was really encouraged that the judges wanted somebody real.”

Cantrell then told the crowd, “Just because you make mistakes doesn’t mean you can’t be Miss America. It doesn’t mean you can’t be anything you want to be in this world. Never let someone tell you that you can’t. That’s my favorite thing to tell people. Don’t ever let anyone tell you that you can’t because I fully believed that I couldn’t and I did.” This was the message for the night, for every person in the crowd, anything is possible.

Cantrell continued, “I can’t tell you how many people told me that I would never be Miss America. That I would never be Miss Georgia. I wasn’t good enough. I actually had one person tell me that they saw my inevitable failure.” A heavy silence fills the room. “So, if anybody bullies you, [...] it’s not an excuse. Get that person out of your life and do what you want to do.”

Miss America 2016 then sang “I dreamed a dream” from *Les Miserables*, “Let it go” from *Frozen* and finished with her own song “Soldier on” which tells the story of a woman going off to war. It is her first single as a country music artist.

Miss America was not the only pageant queen invited to speak. Miss Georgia 2017, Patricia Ford also got the chance to address the audience. Ford told the crowd about overcoming her shyness and fear. One way she broke through her timidity was through dancing and then through participating in pageants. She knew to be successful she had to overcome her fear. “And I did that by setting goals, working hard, and having an amazing support system around me to help me get there,” she said.

Ford motivated the audience to set goals for themselves and to work to achieve it. “Whether I won the crown or not I still gained the skills, experiences and resources that would allow me to succeed even as I got older,” Ford said. Ford emphasized Cantrell’s point, by admitting that she never thought that she would be Miss Georgia and that if she could do it, anyone could.



of them would be taking the crown and the title. While they anticipated the announcement, Cantrell’s earring falls out—Again. She shifted and hid it under her dress. She cannot believe that this has happened for the second time.

Then they called her as Miss America 2016. Cantrell describes that moment, “I am just so befuddled. How did this happen? After all the mis-

Continued on page 12

“So, I encourage all of you young girls out there to dream big, bigger than anything you thought you could accomplish because if you set that as a goal, if you work hard and you gain that confidence and you have your support system around you, [...]”



really, anything is possible.” She then acknowledged the power a good support system can have. When Ford thought she could not do something, her support system reminded her that she could do anything. She addressed the families in the room, “Ignite a passion that you see inside your child.”

Finally, Miss Georgia Outstanding Teen 2017 Miss Kelsey

Hollis spoke and performed. She reminisced on her experience in pageants and admitted that she too was convinced to compete in pageants, but did not necessarily want to. Hollis learned how to walk in heels the night before her first pageant. At tryouts for the pageant, another girl walked over to her and told her she would make it, but wouldn’t win. The girl told her she wasn’t pretty enough. Despite that, she competed and she kept competing, maintaining what she called an “open mind set.” Hollis reminded the crowd that they should remember what they are capable of and no matter what anyone says, to remember that. “And most importantly, God knows what you are capable of,” said Hollis. She then sang a few verses from Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah.”

The message of the night was empowerment. The girls in the crowd, some wearing their own tiaras and crowns, lined up to take photos with Cantrell, Ford, and Hollis.

Revenue for the event will go to improving technology services across the Tiftarea Academy campus. Cantrell expressed her gratitude to be able to be one of the first women invited to speak at a special event and to be able to empower the young women in attendance. ✕

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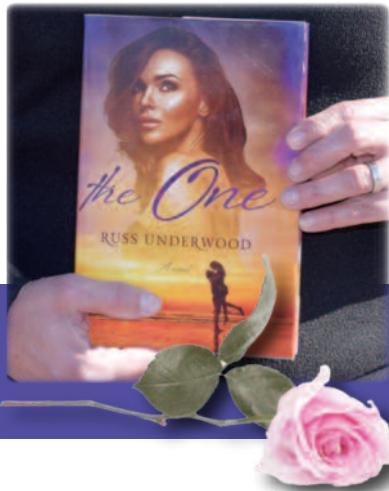
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Proving Romance is not Dead:

Author Russ Underwood and *The One*

By Josh Clements

Russ Underwood glanced at the walls around him and shuddered with awe and fear. “I was just looking around, and all you could see were books, just books. Then you realize you are competing against so many other voices,” he stated about the experience of his book signing at The Bookshelf in Thomasville. In this “aha” moment, he wondered if his voice would be heard among the myriad.

The way Underwood came to be a writer is nothing short of inspiring. A native of Tifton, he spent nearly two decades working in public and corporate accounting as an accountant; eventually, he decided to open his own tax service. It was after he finished his first tax season with his new business that the idea for the book came about. He had previously written poetry and holiday cards for his wife, Mary. Believing he was more than just a hopeless romantic, she recognized his potential as a writer and encouraged him to try writing a book. He did just that, one chapter at a time. His wife would review each chapter and give her approval or critique. After several months of this process, Underwood had over 100,000 words and a finished product.

Underwood’s novel, *The One*, follows Ethan Phillips, a happily married businessman who uncovers his wife’s unfaithfulness. Swearing off love for good, he attempts to

His wife Mary is his best support. She believed he was more than just a hopeless romantic writing poems and cards.

embark on a new path. Through divine intervention and a few unlikely helpers, he stumbles onto the journey of his life, one filled with desire and excitement. Amid the intrigue is a reluctance to open his heart up to being broken again. The question looms, has he found “the” one?

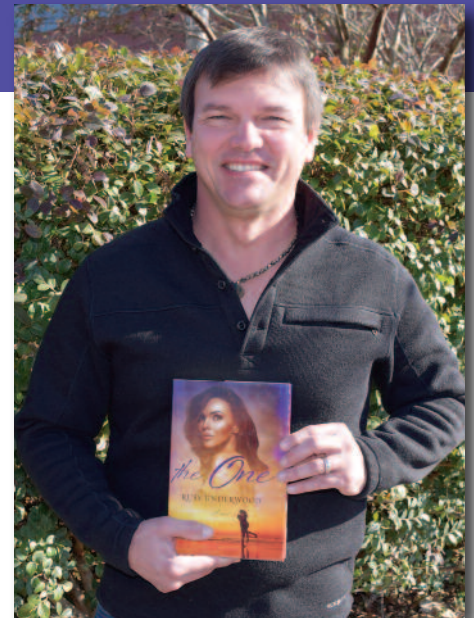
Underwood used Valdosta and Thomasville as settings for the story and also included Rosemary Beach, Florida. While the places in the story are actual places, the people are drawn from Underwood’s imagination. When asked about how he came up with the characters, he stated, “They just appeared.” He came up

with the characters as he went along, knowing that a riveting story begins with a bang and ends with happily ever after. Much of the story was spontaneously written, though he commented he has wanted to write about two main characters for some time.

He acknowledged he didn’t gloss over the steamy details in the story. Whereas many authors may leave intimate scenes to the reader’s imagination, Underwood wanted them to experience it like he saw it and have the same emotions he envisioned for the story. He said, “I feel like I am cheating somebody if I do that. They are looking at me to give them a story and I am trying to give them a story they can jump right in.”

Underwood believes the reader will realize there is hope that there is someone out there for everyone. Even if things are rocky, there is hope to reignite and rekindle those old flames. “Even with so much static, the one is out there,” he stated. Currently, he is gearing up for tax season, while still finding time to do book signings and festivals. He is also working on a draft for a second novel with new characters.

If you enjoy romance novels, be on the lookout for Russ Underwood and *The One*. You can order his book on Amazon and check out his website, russunderwoodauthor.com. ❧



First Annual VETERANS' WINTER CHARITY RUN



Grand Opening of a new facility



Sebastopol Geese

Anything but Ordinary

By Carmen Statham

What is more delightful than a pastoral scene with a gaggle of geese? A lap full of a big, fluffy, loving goose named Baby.

Baby and her fellow Sebastopol geese live among the guinea fowl, chickens, and other four-legged critters that run around Patricia and Ronnie Brogdon's Lakeland farm. The Brogdons breed and raise the elaborately plumed waterfowl as pets. Their decision to breed them is partially based on the friendly nature of the goose.

"Our goal is not to breed and make money. Our goal is to love this breed," said hobbyist, Patricia Brogdon. "We just want people to love them and give them good, sweet homes."

Brogdon has a special place in her heart for the exotic geese, especially for her lovable but nosy Baby.

Upon my first meeting with Baby, she kept a watchful eye as I tried to capture a picture of her with my camera. It wasn't until I was kneeling down to get a close-up that she waddled over to curiously pluck at a flower on my shirt.

The Sebastopols are anything but ordinary. Known for their elegantly curled feathers, these sweet-tempered, affectionate geese are quite a sight to behold. At first glance, they look like any other white geese, but the coiling feathers appear as if the goose is wearing a wedding dress. Patricia commented that they

look like angels when they run with their wings spread.

The Sebastopol goose is considered an ornamental, flightless breed. They originated from southeastern Europe, possibly

from the region around the

Black Sea. The adults, generally weighing 12 to 14 pounds, are white with curly or smooth-breasted feathers. Their beaks and legs are orange, and their eyes are dazzling blue.

According to Brogdon, male geese play a significant role in raising the young.

The gander is vigilant over and defensive of females while they are incubating and brood rearing.

Both male and female raise their young in a family unit. Should one of the mated pair die, the other rears the goslings alone.

To anyone interested in owning a Sebastopol, the geese make excellent pets, efficient lawn mowers, and noisy watch dogs.

Caring for the geese is relatively simple, provide them with fresh water and a kiddie pool to encourage bathing and preening. Entertain them by hanging a baby car seat toy in the pen. If the birds are kept inside, Brogdon suggests bird diapers to protect carpets and furniture.

They look like angels when they run with their wings spread.

The Brogdons plan to sell the goslings as pets; however, they currently have only one breeding pair and a limited number of goslings. Anyone interested in raising Sebastopols can contact the Brogdons at 229-569-1918

"We ain't that big of a breeder, but we know our breed and we love them," said Brogdon. ✕



Baby gives Hunter, Patricia's grandson, a squeeze.



A gaggle of yellow goslings follow a pair of uniquely beautiful Sebastopol geese across a grassy field.





Tough Enough

KB Horse Camp Kids Go the Distance

By Carmen Statham



Kim and Brian McGhee along with their son, Bronc, own and operate KB Horse Camp, a Christian-based organization in Hahira, Georgia. Together, they work to raise awareness of childhood cancer while living and breathing the sweet scent of horse sweat and leather.

This year, as in every April, KB Horse Camp will again sponsor the Ride for Life Rodeo to help raise money for local families who have children with cancer. Any profit made is given back, 100 percent, to the local children. The slogan, along with gold ribbons, printed on bright banners and shirts reads: “R U Tuff Enough to Wear Gold?” Tough is what it takes to ride in this rodeo.

“We started [the rodeo] to give the children a fun day at no cost to them. It wasn’t for them to watch one. It was for them to be the rodeo,” Kim McGhee said. Each year, families come out for a fun day of activities and food and to cheer the children on.

“Last year at the rodeo, we had around 20 kids fighting cancer,” she said. They were not alone. Family members of children who lost their battles also participated in the rodeo to show their support.

McGhee’s connection with the children and families she is helping is unmistakable, standing with them throughout the heartbreaks and the joys.

Her passion is the driving force behind giving these children joy in their difficulties. It has also brought her a long way from school days spent dreaming of horses and rodeos to community-filled arenas wrangling for awareness of childhood cancer.

Although the McGhees started KB Horse Camp in 2000, it wasn’t until six years ago that Kim’s passion redefined itself. A chance meeting with a young, horse-loving cancer patient sparked the realization that she, Kim McGhee, had a “God-given talent” to put a smile on a child’s face. Savannah Dallas won Kim’s heart. Compassion drove the



Lamar and Loretta Bennett and Kim, Brian and Bronc McGhee make rodeo dreams come true for kids with cancer.



This year’s rodeo will be in memory of Reginald Corbett, II and Brody Shivers. The t-shirt will bear Shivers’ image and the slogan, “R U Tuff Enough To Wear Gold?”

McGhee and her family hope promoting the gold ribbon for childhood cancer will lead to more funding for a cure and better treatment for pediatric patients. Less than 3 percent of research funding goes to childhood cancer research. Right now, over 20,000 children in the US are fighting cancer. To sponsor the Rodeo, visit their website at www.kbhorsecamp.com.

to Wear Gold

**“So many kids have come through KB’s doors and they ALL mean so much to me,”
McGhee said.**

McGhee family to put on rodeos to raise funds that would help the families of pediatric cancer patients like Savannah. The goal was to meet the financial needs for medical, travel, and other expenses.

As the McGhees go forward to meet their goal, they are not alone. The riding students and volunteers at KB and Kim’s mother, Loretta Bennett, are by their side offering support and assistance whenever and wherever it’s needed.

“Without all of us working together, KB would not be open,” McGhee said, appreciative of the help she receives from family and volunteers.

Bennett and her husband, Lamar, help in any way they can. She is always there to make sure the children are safe and loved and have plenty of sweet tea. “You can’t help but get close to the kids,” Bennett tearfully said.



For Kim McGhee and her family, providing a place for kids to come and have a good time means they are making a difference. Throughout the year, KB Horse Camp also gives pediatric patients in the surrounding neighborhoods horseback rides. The KB rodeo team often invites the children and their families to real rodeos or to a family trail ride.

“So many kids have come through KB’s doors and they ALL mean so much to me,” McGhee said. ✂



TUFF ENOUGH

Holly Sullivan is a seven-year-old who has been fighting cancer for over a year and is now in remission. She has come a long way since her first day as a student at KB. Though her father, David Sullivan, walked her around the barrels at her first rodeo, today she rides unaided.

“After I met Savannah Dallas, Holly Sullivan came into my life and she loves horses, too. Holly is now on KB’s rodeo team and has won her very FIRST belt buckle and this season is close to winning a saddle. She is an amazing rider,” Kim McGhee said.



A Birthday Salute

Reflecting on 90 plus years of life in rural South Georgia is a feat best delivered by those who lived it. The stories and tales shared by our birthday honorees are anything but small and can fill numerous scrapbooks. In their lifetimes, they have become icons of their respective communities, while both making and observing history and effecting change.

My Georgia Hometown salutes these notable personalities.

Nell Roquemore at 93

Ever the effervescent socialite, Nell Roquemore greeted her guests and waltzed gracefully around the ballroom stage of the Threatte Centre. The formal affair sparkled from her collection of life gems (her family, her friends, and her community) all gathered together to celebrate her birthday. ❁



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Ed Gaskins at 95



The tall, genial birthday boy laughed and stuck out his tongue, mimicking his baby picture on the top of his cake. Although Ed Gaskins has lived his life as a humble man, he has a legacy that is larger than life as evidenced by the family gathered at his Alapaha home. His sense of humor is a wonderful compliment to his repertoire of stories that range from eloping with his very young bride, to serving in World War II, to raising a family in a general mercantile store.

Gaskins also has the unique claim to have spent his entire life in one small Georgia town. The Gaskins' family farms and businesses have been home to eight generations. However, according to his daughter Dona G. Fields, Ed Gaskins could care less about all the land he owns.

"He's never been materialistic," she said. "He would rather his legacy be that his descendants all have a relationship with Jesus Christ." As for her father's greatest accomplishments, she said, "He is a man of God and gives all the credit to Him."

Gaskins started adult life with plans of own. At 16, he graduated high school and attended Georgia Tech where he studied engineering. He also eloped with his best girl, Marguerite, an act that upset their parents. Gaskins dad put his foot down and put the young couple to work in the family store. According to the family, he had a choice: the store or working the farm and the timber with his brother. Ed and his bride took over the store and ran it until the 1980s. The rest is Berrien County history.

Gaskins Grocery, which was started by Ed's grandfather as a commissary for the local turpentine industry, quickly became "kinda the first Walmart" his daughter Dona joked. It sold anything that could be considered general merchandise.

Gaskins' children and grandchildren agree that Edwin Gaskins has lead a very blessed life. ✿



Margie Tygart at 90



"I saw a man walk on the moon. I saw electricity come to the country and saw farms mechanized," Tygart said. She remembers her father using mules to plow the land and keeping the cows well fed. During her life, she said that she has seen many remarkable things.

Mrs. Margie (as she is known to the community) grew up in Nashville where she spent her life actively involved in many civic and social events.

"I've always liked people very much and was interested in my community," said Tygart. She attended city council meetings and got to know her community well through civic groups, like the Nashville Woman's Club where she served several terms as president.

Because she loves her community so much, she made sure that her birthday party was well announced in the local paper and open to anyone who wanted to help her celebrate. "So nobody can say they weren't invited," she said, laughing.

"Life's been good to me. I haven't always had everything I wanted, but what would I do with it now?" She laughs. "I've got enough of it now."

She offers this advice to those who follow behind her: "If you don't put yourself out there, you have no one and nobody." ✿



Finding a Use for a Black Thumb:



I like to lift other people up. I just think of people's strengths and put them there, so they can shine."

-Christy Hulsey

At first meeting, Christy Hulsey seems like a sweet, somewhat bashful, little country girl; but hidden inside that petite frame is a dynamic entrepreneur whose thumb is greener than she thinks. It seems that everything she touches nowadays blossoms into success. No black thumbs here.

Currently, she is traveling around the country with her team from Colony House of Flowers (CHOF [Statesboro]) giving design workshops for Mayesh. It seems that the wholesale floral giant was rather impressed by her "unconstructed," natural floral arrangements; so much so, they awarded her the title of 2017 Mayesh Design Star.

"It is insane. It's so exciting though," said Hulsey, owner and creative director of Colony House.

On being selected for the award, Hulsey said it was humbling. They had entered on a whim, not really expecting to win. Her sister and design assistant, Amanda Currier, said winning was a "Whoo-Hoo!" moment for the whole family.

Hulsey and husband Brian took on the challenge several years ago to revive his family's dwindling flower shop. Her enthusiasm and marketing skills and Brian's craftsman and business skills soon had the small shop flourishing and in full bloom. Both are University of Georgia graduates and have received multiple honors and awards for their leadership and entrepreneurial skills, including the Bulldog 100 award given to the fastest growing businesses owned and operated by UGA graduates. This year, Hulsey won for Red B. Power; she has also won for CHOF in past years.

One of Hulsey's success secrets is her commitment to the personal touch. This is found in every arrangement at CHOF. She believes that the designer should put in a little something that represents their signature. For Christy and Amanda, that something usually comes from their grandmother's yard in Nashville.

Just last December, Hulsey was commissioned to design a piece for the attendants of the Wholesale Florist & Floral Supplier Association conference held in Miami. She constructed, along with the help of her family, friends and coworkers, an 8-by-12 foot "Stars and Stripes" flag. Hulsey and her team used nearly

The Entrepreneurial Spirit of Christy Hulsey

By Shelby Evans & Vickie Harsey

10,000 stems to create the billowing flag, which included hand-cut boughs of golden rain tree and pine cone ginger lilies picked from Grandma Margie Tygart's yard.

The Tygart yard is rustic with patches of color and ornate nature-made sculptures, like the gnarled black locust tree near her house. Mrs. Margie has always found beauty in the wild. She has a knack for creating beautiful arrangements from things she finds, such as an oddly curled pine knot or a cotton branch. It is a knack that she passed on to her granddaughters. Her pleasure and pride are apparent as she tells about the attention her lilies and raintree received after Hulsey used them in a Colony House design. Noted florists Holly Chapple and Francoise Weeks added to the excitement with their curiosity about the odd-looking plants.

Hulsey explained that the plant is actually called a Beehive Ginger (zingiber zerumbet). "They're very exotic, and they're grown in Hawaii and, apparently, Nashville, Georgia," said Hulsey.

The plants can often be found in South Georgia growing next to the back steps of old farmhouses. According to Mrs. Margie, the farmers would grab a cone and squeeze out the aloe-like liquid to wash their hands. It can also be used as shampoo.

"It smells amazing," added Currier.

Hulsey, who got her degree in journalism from UGA, considers herself a storyteller. Besides her informative blogs on *CHOF*, *Pottery Barn*, and *Camp Makery*, she also creates stories with flowers. Hulsey said that she's "not really a great florist," but her designs are intended to tell the story of her family.

"There may be like a misplaced red pine cone lily, but there's a reason that I put that in there," she said. "It's because my 90-year-old



**“It doesn’t have to be perfect
to be beautiful.”**



grandmother has hand collected it and found some way to get it to us. I just feel like there’s always a story, and I like to tell that to people.”

Hulsey feels that “your arrangements are really a story of you,” and designers should embrace that. At CHOF, each designer has a signature in every piece they create. For Amanda Currier, it is magnolia or olive. Hulsey likes the raintree and pine cone lilies. She also believes designers should not fear imperfection in their designs. Her motto is “It doesn’t have to be perfect to be beautiful.” She often has to repeat the motto to herself when designing, a reminder to be proud of the unique qualities of her own design, her own story.

Hulsey’s style is a huge contrast to traditional design techniques which are often calculated and regimented. Her style, and the new style in general, is less conformist and “allows everyone to be a florist.” This new wave of design is meant to feel natural and effortless, although it isn’t.

“It’s often not effortless, but I want it to appear that way.” Hulsey said, “I don’t want it to be perfect or wrong or even right. Just real.”

For one Manhattan couple planning a southern destination wedding, the arrangements by Colonial House of Flowers were



Amanda Currier

“breathtaking.” By using foraged and local species to create their arrangements, they provide a new perspective to the natural landscape Southerners see every day. Currier put it simply, we just “use our resources.”

Using their resources includes each designer’s natural talent. “I like to lift other people up,” said Hulsey, “I just think of people’s strengths and put them there, so they can shine.”

At CHOF, they know and embrace their strengths as designers. They do what they are good at and push themselves to refine those strengths to create striking arrangements.

Their arrangements often incorporate flowers and foliage in all stages of life not only because it is more natural, but because it reflects the narrative of every life cycle.

Hulsey believes there is beauty in every stage of life. For brides who use Hulsey’s arrangements, she tells them that in marriage there are moments of

Continued on page 22

Margie Tygart & Christy





blooming, of dying, and of budding. They should find beauty in every one of those circumstances.

"If you do," Hulsey said, "I think you'll have a strong mar-

riage." She then laughed, "Hopefully, they are excited and not bummed" to find turning leaves or dried flowers in their bouquets.

Besides incorporating what's in their backyard, Hulsey also encourages buyers to use Slow Flowers. Slow Flowers is a movement that recognizes and celebrates American grown flowers, where seasonal flowers take priority. Most flowers are purchased overseas making the carbon footprint of an average bouquet astounding. The team at CHOF is conscientious about what they buy and how it gets to their doorstep. Some flowers travel across the country before making it to Statesboro, but there are a special bunch that are only a few hours away being tended to by Grandma Margie.

Hulsey is acutely aware of narratives and why they are important to her, her family, and customers.

"I think the exciting thing is that we're able to do it as a family," Currier and Hulsey said simultaneously. Hulsey's father was a forester. So, they grew up with a familiarity of the natural landscape and with their grandmother's interest in the natural world.

She wants her family to be involved for their own reasons and to use the tools they have to express themselves. Whether it's reviving a business or starting something new, the Hulseys are there to help design, create, and support one another. The success of Colonial House of Flowers is not just about one woman and fresh flowers. It's a family and a philosophy for life. ✕





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The Parrish House

By Carmen Statham

Far-flung wedding locales are romantic. But, if you're looking for something smaller that's closer to home, then you couldn't find a quieter, quainter southern wedding destination than the Parrish House. Here, the theme of the Old South and a sweeping stairway offers a romantic garden venue.



Here, the theme of the Old South and a sweeping stairway offers a romantic garden venue.

Located on South Hutchinson Avenue in Adel, Georgia, the Parrish House and Sister's Florist & Bakery opens its doors to all, serving the community with a large helping of Southern hospitality. The three-in-one business has everything you might need from a dream-wedding destination to good home cooking, desserts, and floral arrangements. Brides-to-be can choose a beautiful garden wedding and reception or move the celebration indoors to the banquet room. The Parrish House also provides dressing rooms for the bride and her wedding party.

The gracious two-story, plantation-style house is adorned by large pillars at the front entrance. Outside, a curved, brick stair-

way leads to the second floor and lends to the house's romantic ambiance. Inside, there is evidence of the sturdy heart pine/peg-and-beam construction and the beautiful Georgia brick used in the fireplaces and pillars. The house, like many of its era, was constructed from local materials—heartwood from the Longleaf yellow pine and red clay brick from the Puddleville Brick Kiln.

Built in 1868 by David Golden Hutchinson, the spacious Parrish House not only housed the family, but also the seasonal tobacco buyers. Cottages and two upstairs apartments were added by the Parrishes. Other renovations were conducted by the

Continued on page 25



has seen firsthand the impact that 4-H makes on a student's life. Adults have come up to him thankful for 4-H and how the skills benefited them throughout their life.

According to Hancock, members live out the 4-H motto, "To make the best better," to the fullest by involving themselves in community

service and molding students into future leaders.

"4-H will open so many doors, and one learns so much all while having fun with friends," He said. "It has given me many lifelong skills. 4-H builds leaders for the future of our state." ❁



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PARRISH/Statham, Continued...

house's most noted entertainer, Perry Parrish.

"She was quite a lady from some of the stories I've heard," Owner Sonya Joiner said.



Donated by her grandchildren, the portraits of Parrish and her late husband hang side-by-side at Parrish House.

Perry Parrish was a classic, the very image of the Silver Screen come to life with her beehive hairdo and scarf blowing in the breeze as she cruised in her convertible Cadillac.

Joiner pointed out, "This was the place to be back in the day. This is where everybody wanted to stay. She [Perry Parrish] had it fixed up very nice for entertaining."

The long-standing reputation of this historic house is a testament to southern Georgia's strong sense of community and culture. Visitors have always been welcomed and greeted by the kind and friendly people one might expect.

Today, the Parrish House Restaurant is a dining gem with true southern cooking. It offers a pleasant atmosphere, an excellent staff, and real tablecloths. The food, a variety of meats and vegetables, is prepared from scratch and served with "cracklin'" cornbread or rolls. The dessert is often banana pudding (with real meringue). There is also a salad bar for the lighter appetites.

Joiner, who has owned the house since 2010, continually ensures that the food and service are as perfect as she can make them.

"We are committed to offering only the finest floral arrangements, homemade bakery items, and gifts, backed by service that is friendly and prompt," Joiner said. "Because all of our customers are important, our professional staff is dedicated to making your experience a

pleasant one."

The Parrish House is available for family reunions, meetings, and all other special occasions. ✻

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The Heart will Find a Way:

The Art of Jessica Pisciotta:

By Carmen Statham

Sitting down with Tifton artist Jessica Pisciotta on a chilly morning—her hair up in a disheveled chignon, her clothes relaxed and comfortable—it's easy to see she's an artist at ease in her own skin.

Being at ease with herself and her art was not without its trials. Her much-treasured talent did not emerge until after a horrific, near-fatal, car accident involving herself and her sister. Their hearts stopped beating, and Jessica lost four years of memory. For a long time after the accident, she struggled to recall people who knew her.

"They say you're your worst critic, so anything that I would see that was wrong... other people would see it, and they would say there's nothing wrong..."

—Pisciotta

"Anybody that I met or anything that I did—I don't remember any of it," Pisciotta explains the impact of her memory loss.

Although the loss was troubling to her, her artistic emergence was a pleasant surprise. The paint and canvas helped Pisciotta find a pathway to self-discovery. She remembered that, as a child, she had often watched her grandma turn the blank

canvas into beautiful works of art. At that time, Pisciotta's own skills were lying dormant, refusing to cooperate when she tried her hand. She said that it was frustrating wanting to create beautiful works but was restrained by a lack of talent. The accident became an awakening for her, one that carried her into self-expression.

Today, she uses her art as a form of expression, especially during trying times. This might be why most of her paintings evoke peaceful and calming emotions with restful blues and greens.

Pisciotta had this to say about what influences her art: "A lot of it is just in my head and then other things will inspire me, so I'll start with something. And then, throughout a few days, I'll see other things and it influences what I put on [canvas]."

This young, vibrant artist focuses on spray-paint art and acrylic paintings with glow-in-the-dark undercoats. The words "spray paint" automatically causes one to think "graffiti," but that's not what Pisciotta does. She creates real works of art on a canvas. Sometimes she adds dramatic 3-D elements like tree branches extending from a tree trunk. Many of her works share similar themes depicting nature and bodies of water. The galaxy, with its shades of blue, grey, and black, has also found a place on her canvas.

These are "my babies" she said. And each has a name, courtesy of her mother Mary Pope. Pisciotta said she is pleasantly surprised when people ask about her paintings by their titles. A surprise that eased her doubts about her work.

"I had been so scared to let anybody see [my paintings] because I didn't think [they were] any good," she recalled about her first time showing her work.

"They say you're your worst critic, so anything that I would see that was wrong... I was afraid to let anybody see it [the work]." She was amazed by the response of others,



"... other people would see it, and they would say there's nothing wrong with it."

And truly there is nothing wrong with her work. It is different, dramatic, and deeply expressive.

Jessica Pisciotta's story is proof that, even after a tragedy, the heart will find a way to beat again, sometimes with brand-new rhythm. Maybe this is why art is an extension of the mind and heart together as one.

Although she said it of art, Pisciotta's comment offers a reflection on life: "I don't think you're ever finished with a painting." ✨



Art as Ministry

The Mission of Linda Butler

by Carmen Statham

It was a moment that etched itself into Linda Butler's memory as she stepped into the waters of the Sea of Galilee. The connection she felt with her Savior and His disciples who had walked there many years before was overwhelming. She had to capture it on canvas.

"I think this is where Jesus stepped and that's why this is so special to me," Butler said of the painting which she signed "Butler, Mark 1:16-17."

*"I think all paintings
should have feeling—passion."*

The Sea of Galilee is just one of the amazing landscapes that Butler has captured on canvas. Her other travels inspired numerous other landscapes, such as a castle in Scotland and the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

"It [the Sea painting] has feeling, and I think all paintings should have feeling—passion. I don't worry about everything being exactly correct as much as getting the feeling," she said, describing the motivation behind her work.

Butler's signature also reflects her motivation. She signs every painting with her name and a scripture. It's her way of carrying out Christ's mission to the world. Art allows her the freedom to witness in any way she wishes.

Before embarking on her mission to become an artist and teacher, Butler, a Nashville native, spent 31 years as a special education teacher where the virtues of patience, kindness,



Mark 1:16-17 - 16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother

Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."

encouragement, and teaching were honed. After retiring, she knew she wanted to keep teaching and that her subject would be art.

Retirement turned into a brand-new canvas waiting to be stretched and cured. Butler enrolled in the workshops at Valdosta State University where her skills were refined under the direction of professors Harry Hailey, Karin Murray, and Clyde Edwards.

The next step was to decide where to hold her classes. Husband Wyman had the solution: build her own studio.

*"...paintings should reflect beauty
rather than the bad things."*

From 2003 to today, Butler has been engaging, inspiring, and teaching aspiring artists. Every Monday and Wednesday, she embraces the differences among her students and encourages them to express themselves, whether with architectural detail or with truthful representation as seen through the painter's eye. Her approach is appreciated by her students.

"Without Linda's help, I would have never attempted it," student Gayla Crosby said.

Butler, who refers to her own style as "painter realism", ascribes her influence to artists like Tony Van Hasselt and Judi Wagner. Among Butler's favorite compositions are landscapes and barns. And, she pointed out, each of her paintings mean something to her, especially the portraits of her seven grandchildren.

"The world is so full of bad things today, and I think paintings should reflect beauty rather than the bad things," she said. ✕



Butler's students, like Gayla Crosby, right, benefit from her encouragement and instruction. They often experiment with their watercolor paintings to discover the effects their techniques provide.



Tornado Relief Efforts



T. Graham Brown (center), who was raised in Arabi, headlined the relief concert along with (clockwise, left to right) John Berry (formerly of Tifton), Cyndi Thomson (native of Tifton), Ray Scott and Buddy Jewell.

Thanks to all of you who turned out to help the victims of the January tornadoes that destroyed homes and lives in South Georgia. To the First Responders and the volunteers, to the musicians and Michelle's models, to the Georgia Defense and the Red Cross, and to those who are too many to name, *My Georgia Hometown* sends a great big thank you for all that you did. God Bless You All!

Fashion show



The ladies of Michelle's Formal Wear in Adel walked the runway to raise funds for the relief effort.

Tornado Recovery a Success



Ashburn, Turner County – On behalf of the citizens of Turner County who were affected by the recent tornado and storms, Stevi Thompson with the Ashburn Chamber of Commerce said “Thank You” to Tim Floyd and Sconyers Gin and Warehouse for the use of their facilities to keep everything under one roof.

With 31 homes destroyed in the area, the community pulled together to make recovery a success. The Georgia State Defense Force was enlisted to help the operation run smoothly. Lynwood Yates, native of Morven, Georgia and member of the unit involved, said, “This is what it’s all about. It’s what we are here to do, to help the citizens of Georgia.”



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Thyme to Garden

By Samantha Reese,
Southern Seasons Landscape/Nursery

Give your garden a tropical touch with Zingiber zerumbet, commonly called pine cone or shampoo ginger.

Native to southeast Asia, this rhizomatous, clump-forming perennial will become the highlight of your garden!

Growing up to 3-4 feet tall (occasionally up to 7 feet), pine cone ginger's arching, reed-like stems covered in long, narrow leaves add an exotic feel to any garden planting. Its most striking feature,



Photo courtesy of: Hawaii Horticulture blog.

a pine cone-like inflorescence, appears in mid-summer from the underground rhizomes.

The floral bracts, which give the inflorescence its unique appearance, are initially green and gradually mature to red while filling with a creamy, ginger-scented, liquid. Emerging from between the floral bracts are 3-petaled yellowish-white flowers.

Once flowering is completed, the bract are a beautiful bright red — making the inflorescences unique, long lasting additions to cut flower arrangements

Cold hardy to zone 8, pine cone ginger is an easy to grow pass-along plant that performs best in full sun to partial shade,

in moist to fairly wet, but well-drained soils. While not considered invasive, pine cone ginger can form a large clump from a single rhizome and thus should be given plenty of room to grow.

Once the temperatures start to dip in autumn, it will die-back but re-emerge the following spring. Although pine cone ginger makes an excellent landscape plant and beautiful cut flower, it is more commonly grown for the milky substance in the “cones.” Interestingly, the sap is used as a shampoo in Asia and Hawaii and is even incorporated as an ingredient in several commercial shampoos, thus its most widely known name, “shampoo ginger.” Plus, the rhizome is also used as a culinary flavoring in various cuisines.

From landscape plantings to cut flowers to shampoo — the uses of this plant seem never-ending. So, if you are looking for a conversation plant for your garden, think pine cone ginger and enjoy the unique features this tropical has to offer. ✨

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Photo courtesy of: Hawaii Horticulture blog.

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From Harvest to Table

Recipe Spotlight

Mimi's Chicken Breasts

INGREDIENTS

Marinade:

- 1 cup Grey Poupon Dijon mustard
- 1 cup Griner's Honey
- 1 ½ Tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 Tablespoon lemon juice

- 4 chicken breasts, we use 8 oz. breasts
- 1 Tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 cups sliced mushrooms
- 2 Tablespoon butter
- Salt & Pepper
- 8 slices cooked bacon
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese

Mix the ingredients for the marinade in a mixer or food processor. Blend well. Pour two-thirds of the mixture over the chicken breasts and marinate them, covered, in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours. Refrigerate the remaining marinade until later. After the chicken has marinated, pre-heat the oven to 375 degrees. Heat a large skillet on the stove, add 1 tablespoon of oil. Remove the pan from the heat. Sauté the mushrooms in a small frying pan in the butter. Pour a little of the reserved marinade on top of each chicken breast. Top with salt, pepper, mushrooms, bacon and cheese. Bake in the oven for 7 to 10 minutes or until the cheese begins to bubble. Garnish with parsley.

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Recipes courtesy of
Mimi's Cafe Cookbook
Photos by Emily Carter

Green Beans with New Red Potatoes

INGREDIENTS

2 ½ pounds green beans, snap beans or pole beans
¼ pound ham, bacon, or ham hocks
1 Tablespoon salt
12 small new potatoes or red potatoes, scrubbed or unpeeled

Snap beans (we snap them into one to two inch lengths. For special occasions or more formal affairs we remove ends and leave them whole for a more elegant presentation!)

Combine all ingredients except potatoes in a large pot. Beans should be covered with water. Boil for 30 minutes or until beans are tender but not mushy. Add potatoes, cook until potatoes are done. If seasoning meat (ham or bacon) is very lean, it may be necessary to add some bacon drippings for extra flavor.

Oriental Salad Dressing

Add toasted pecans from Little Duck Farms at the Nashville Farmers' Market.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup onions, finely chopped
2 cups sugar
1 cup white vinegar
½ cup vegetable oil
2 cups mayonnaise

Blend together in a food processor or blender for 3-4 minutes or until well blended together. Store in refrigerator. Note: Mixture will thicken after it is chilled. This is one of our favorite dressings. *For lo-carb:* Use Splenda instead of sugar. We use 8 to 10 individual packets for this recipe. Adjust to your taste.

Strawberry Trifle

This dessert needs to be made the same day it is served. It may become too soggy if made too far ahead of time.

INGREDIENTS

2 (3.5 oz) packages instant pudding mix (vanilla or cheesecake)
4 cups regular cold milk
1 block (8 oz) cream cheese, softened
3-4 cups (24-32 oz) Cool Whip or fresh whipped cream
1 pound cake (angel food or white cake mix, two layers)
3 pounds fresh strawberries from Southern Grace Farms
½ cup granulated sugar

Rinse strawberries. Save a few whole strawberries for garnish if desired. Slice strawberries and sprinkle with sugar. Stir gently to coat with sugar. Let stand for 30 minutes.

Mix together pudding mix, milk, and cream cheese in electric mixer bowl, blending well. Chill for 30 minutes, remove from refrigerator and add Cool Whip or whipped cream, blend well.

Break cake into bite-size pieces. Using a large glass bowl or trifle dish, put down a layer of cake, followed by a layer of pudding mixture, a layer of berries and repeat. Top with extra berries and whipped cream.



AGAINST ALL ODDS:



The Art of the Highwaymen

The Highwaymen are a group of African American artists who, against all odds, became successful selling landscape paintings in Florida when Jim Crow laws prohibited most blacks from realizing their dreams.

Shunned by art galleries, the artists traveled along highways into small towns selling their work from the trunks of their cars or by going door-to-door in white neighborhoods and businesses.

Paintings such as the Highwaymen's exhibit can be seen at Fitzgerald's Carnegie Center located in the historic Carnegie Library. For a list of exhibits, please go to www.fitzgeraldbenhillartscouncil.org/exhibits.html



For Your Kind Perusal: From The South Georgia Writers Guild

An Introduction by E. M. Knowles

Writing is often a lonely art. Quiet introspection and contemplation manifests onto a page and the writer sits alone, in doubt, in wonder, in awe. The writer sits and does. Sometimes the writing is with purpose and determined in a firestorm of complete unity with the intent. Then, clarity is a boon, and the fresh, clean spring words, meanings, and message can seem endless. But that only *seems* endless. Other times, most times, the words can play games of illusion with the confidence and goals of the one who would record them down. A disquieted fear of one's own ability may then grow. The toil can be painful; it can be terrifying. Yet, the writer sits and does.

The point comes at which the writer, like all animals, begins to seek out their own kind. It is a curious longing: the writer, a solitary creature by nature and habit, looks into the world with eyes aimed at like minds. The world from which all good tales, songs and stories are born surely must house others like me, the writer will admit to themselves. That search can spark from the trigger of morose vanity, in the belief that none like the writer could ever truly be found. There is some truth in that sad conclusion, but the truth, once found, is wonderful.

No two writers will write in the same way. Some will take long roads to the point, while others opt for compact, yet lush detours. Words manifest differently for different scribes, poetic liberty holds different weight, and the structure, function, rules, and regulations of the art ebb and flow in importance from one writer to the next. They are solitary creatures, writers, yet each writer sits and does.

I received an email in February of 2015 from the illustrious Mr. Robert Reid Goodson. He was putting together an ensemble of regional authors, in Tifton at the Myon, and had heard from Beth Hallman, a creative non-fictionalist and successful blogger in Nashville, that I may be both available and interested. As an acquaintance of Mrs. Hallman, I felt compelled to attend: it was a professional kindness on her part that I could not

ignore. Like all author events I had ever (and since, have) attended, I was honored, but labored under the pressure of a public event. Writers are solitary creatures, remember?

But, at that event at The Myon, I met Brenda Sutton Rose, Raven H. Price, Tracey M. Cox, Janie Hopwood, and a few others. The night set the stage for all that followed. Janie phoned me and expressed that there was no good reason that such a concentration of talent should be left to languish in isolation. She --suggested that we come together in creative fellowship and form a constructive community. The result of the conversation was the establishment of The South Georgia Writers Guild. We quickly grew and found that we didn't ever have to feel so alone in our craft. In keeping with the mission of being a community, I petitioned the assistance of the illustrious Kid Lit author, Tracey M. Cox to head-up administrative duties with me. No two schools of style are arguably further apart from hers to mine: Kid Lit to Psychological Horror. That variation in approach serves the interests of the whole: everyone has peer advocates and supporters in the Guild.

Today, The South Georgia Writers Guild is home to over forty manifold regional voices. We feature excellence in most any genre imaginable, including poets and screenplay writers and are enthusiastic to add new writers as they come. Our range is from traditionally published, Indie houses, self-published, to those not-yet published. We gather twice monthly in meetings to discuss works-in-progress, and offer a mentoring program and free workshops. Writing is often a lonely art, but The South Georgia Writers Guild was formed to let writers know: we don't have to weather the storm alone.

Thank you and we hope you enjoy all we have to offer with our contributions here at *My Georgia Hometown*. Keep reading if you are a reader, keep writing if you are a writer, and never forget: there is something incredibly medicinal in the love of the written word. ✨

Souls Unaware

The angel looked at God's creation milling aimlessly around. The mall, this conglomeration of stores selling various and sundry items, seemed to beckon humans from their reality into some type of coma that numbed their daily stress. Sadly, few sought the True Cure.

The angel had never spoken the name given to him. That was the rule; he couldn't speak unless spoken to. He knew no mirror, but he was aware of his appearance. He appeared as a man, with dark skin, fiftyish. His clothes were haggard. His teeth were broken, chipped, missing. His form was scattered with tattoos and piercings. The look of him spoke of loss and subtle desperation. But if someone would only look at him, into his eyes, they would see that all was not lost. He had hope, waiting to be ignited by someone—anyone who would speak to him. He had a blessing, ready to give, but so far, no one who found him was willing to receive. He sighed deeply. These people so desperately needed to be blessed, but they didn't seek it.

Malachi, the name he would excitedly share, eagerly seized his daily post—the bench outside the principal entrance of the mall. He prayed and waited, waited and prayed.

The first soul approached in a slouching gait, eyes cast to the sidewalk. The man was painfully conscious of Rage clawing at his insides desperate to get out. Rage was busy attacking the soul, blowing violent wind into the cyclone of hate that started long ago. Malachi sensed the source of the spirit—deep rooted rejection. The Master laid the soul's name on Malachi's heart—Ezra. An ancient name. An old soul. A tired soul. Ezra's eyes darted from one end of the bustling parking lot to the other, looking for someone, searching.

Eventually, Ezra's eyes grazed Malachi's face. For a moment, Malachi saw a glimmer of what could be—hope. The messenger prayed that Ezra would speak, just one word.

Just then Deceit approached, attached to a sinister being with eyes that reflected numbness caused by abuse. Malachi lowered his head but watched the exchange of money and a package. The human covered in Deceit sauntered away, while Ezra sat beside Malachi, staring at the unopened bundle. Malachi prayed as he observed Ezra's shaking hands and clenching fists. Sweat beaded on Ezra's forehead and dripped onto the creases of his fingers. The internal battle was taking place before Malachi's eyes, unseen to all in the earthly realm, visible to all in the heavens. The stench that accosted Malachi's senses reeked of decayed potential. Malachi could feel the pull of The Spirit on his heart. He prayed for Ezra but wept as the young man succumbed to the desire of the flesh. Malachi stared at Apathy as it wrapped Ezra in a suffocating bear hug, strangling the motivation out of him. Ezra rose and drifted away, ignorant of the blessing left behind.

Malachi waited as time passed.

Malachi didn't know who he was waiting for; he didn't fully understand his purpose. It didn't matter. The Creator knew. A young man, around 35 years of age, approached seemingly talking to himself, but then Malachi noticed his ear piece. Jordan. Hurried talk of a program, advertising, food and beverage arrangement, a speaker, and the seating capacity of the sanctuary flooded Malachi's ears. Somewhere—deep inside—a light shone. He could see this one belonged to The Master. Surely he would speak, at least make eye contact. However, Distraction covered Jordan's eyes and was causing restlessness in the young man's being. As a result, Jordan had no direction or intent. Malachi was shocked at the busyness that plagued Jordan and then realized that his growth had been stunted by a desire to do rather than sit at The Master's feet and be still. Jordan finished his phone call and sat beside Malachi, silent, obviously distressed. He placed the phone on the bench beside him and put his head in his hands. A sigh had escaped before he picked up his phone and punched another button.

"Honey, yeah. I'm going to be late tonight. Yeah, I know. Something came up at church. It's not just another meeting. I have to arrange the dinner."

Malachi observed unshed tears in the man's eyes. Frustration. Trapped. Confusion. No peace. The Power was there, but unused, ignored, and forgotten.

Jordan winced at words said on the other end of the conversation. "Tell her I'll make it next time. I promise."

Jordan ended the conversation and ran his fingers through his short, cropped hair. He cast a sideways glance in Malachi's direction. Maybe . . . Hope dissipated as Malachi received the pamphlet that Jordan reached into his pocket and gave him. By the time the messenger looked up, the man was gone. Malachi shook his head as he glanced at the religious tract describing the love of Jesus.

Malachi dozed. More time passed. The sound of tears brought his attention back to the surroundings. On the other end of the bench was a woman in her fifties—distressed. She had a tissue and was twisting it as if she were trying to squeeze some semblance of joy from the thin slip of cotton. Depression. This woman, Leah, was covered in darkness. She couldn't see the light of day because her soul had been eclipsed by a physical



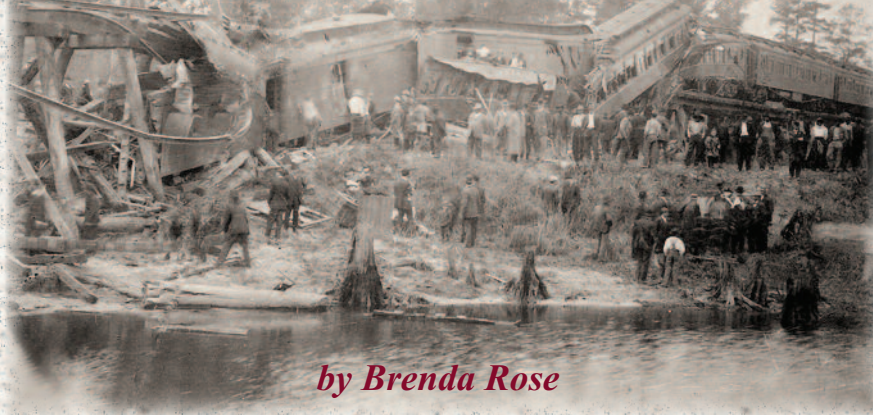
Amanda H. Williams

I'm a member of the South Georgia Writers Guild because I'm from Ocilla and graduated from Irwin County. Currently, my husband and I are residents of Ocala, Florida but we also own a home on St. Simon's Island in Georgia. (www.amandahwilliams.com)

Continued on page 36

"There seemed to be neither a beginning nor an end to the destruction and wounded."

A TRAIN OF SECRETS



by Brenda Rose

The train chugged away from the Chicago station, hustling toward the future, snaking South, shedding the cold of the Great Lakes region. The Dixie Flyer #95 would push through Evansville, through Nashville, through Atlanta, boarding passengers at every stop, a monstrous machine that would whistle through small towns and zoom across vast landscapes along the route, weaving its way to its final destination: Jacksonville, Florida.

The year was 1911, the month March. And 16-year old Ruth Ann Merritt, fresh faced with fair skin and wide blue eyes, pressed her face against the window for a last look at the city, her journal clutched in her hands. She was dizzy with loss and fear and excitement, emotions that hit her in waves.

Traveling alone, Ruth Ann was bound for Florida, a state she'd read about but had never visited. Born on a snowy night near Chicago, she had always lived near the city, always been a good girl, always made her parents proud. Until recently. In recent weeks, certain events had altered her path in life, and she was being sent away, discarded like a stained handkerchief. In Florida, she would meet her mother's family and share a bedroom with her cousin Louisa. For years, she had hoped to see the Atlantic Ocean, collect seashells, and build sandcastles. And here she was, heading South, wondering if her mother's family would be kind enough to take her to the beach. Ruth Ann put a hand to her stomach, as though a mere touch could calm her nerves, yet her insides continued to quiver. A blurred and unpredictable future faced her as she walked through the valley of her fate. Her only comfort was her journal, a book of brown leather. Her handwriting fluttered across the pages as she wrote.

I met a man from Georgia today. Mr. Culpepper, short and stocky with blue eyes, is polite and well-mannered, a fine gentleman. He speaks of his family, but they aren't travelling with him. He lives in a town called Tifton and works with lumber. Mr. Culpepper told me to expect sunny days in Florida. He described alligators and beaches of white sand.

At the St Louis stop, Ruth Ann dropped her journal, and it slid away, past the feet of passengers boarding the Dixie Flyer. Pan-

icked, she crouched between two seats and cringed when a man's foot kicked the diary out of his way and out of her sight. Fearful of reaching under every seat and making a fool of herself, fearful that someone had already snatched the book and would soon read it, fearful she would be named as the author of the words hidden on the book's pages, Ruth Ann's eyes filled with tears. Standing, she unfolded her body to full height and came face to face with a dark-haired lady with a smooth, ivory-colored face. Handing the book to Ruth Ann, the lady laughed softly and said, "You wouldn't want to lose your diary. I keep one, too. I hide all my thoughts on its pages." Ruth Ann clutched the book to her chest with both hands. Before she could express her gratitude, the lady moved down the aisle. A man stood and let her in to sit by the window. They exchanged words and he reared his head and laughed with pleasure. Ruth Ann returned to her seat.

Heart racing, hands trembling, Ruth Ann squeezed her eyes shut, trying to calm her pulse. The lady had mentioned her own journal, yet Ruth Ann's writings were scandalous. She had written of things that must never be exposed. When her father, Reverend Merritt, had put her on the Dixie Flyer, his face drawn and tired, his voice tinged with anger, his intent was to send Ruth Ann and her secret far away from his church and his neighborhood. And her mother, standing beside the reverend at the train station, wearing a dark blue hat and a navy and white dress, tears swollen in her eyes, had known of the journal and had ordered Ruth Ann to leave it behind. But in the rush of leaving, Mrs. Merritt had not checked to be sure Ruth Ann had left the journal on her dresser. Ruth Ann knew she had been wrong to sneak the journal into her bag. Her mother would discover it was gone and worry. But Ruth Ann needed the diary. She needed to write about her fears, about the train ride, about nature, about the people she met. She needed to write about the man who had seduced her with lies wet on his lips. She needed a witness to her life.

In Florida, Mother's family know about me. Aunt Geneva, Uncle Jonathan, and my cousin Louisa understand that I'm a blemished girl, yet they agreed to take me into their home. Mother wrote to her sister, asking a great favor, begging for help. I heard her discussing the letter with Papa. My aunt and uncle agreed to

This is a work of fiction based on a true event. Ruth Ann Merritt was not a passenger on the Dixie Flyer #95 when it crashed in Alapaha, Georgia on March 25, 1911, killing ten people and injuring many more.

take me and conceal the truth that I am unmarried. Mother says they will love me, but I don't know. Who can predict love? They've made preparations for my arrival and concocted a story about my life. The fictional tale will cover the truth of my past like a dark veil. I'll be a recent widow and will wear a wedding band, a golden lie on my finger. Instead of sixteen years old, I'll be eighteen. I must act the part. The secret I bear grows bigger and more frightening every day. I fear my finger will swell as fat as a sausage until the ring no longer fits; I fear the day when I can no longer hide the swelling of my waist. And the secret won't stop ballooning at the baby's birth. Deception has claimed me. I feel as though I'm suffocating under the weight of deceit. My past will forever be a lie; my future will be a lie. The only thing that doesn't lie is my journal.

Later, as the train throttled along, the lady who had rescued Ruth Ann's journal came and sat in the empty seat beside her. "I'm Elizabeth Shippey," she said, smiling, crossing her long legs. "I noticed you're traveling alone, and I want you to know I am here if you need anything," said Miss Shippey, speaking as if she knew the two would become tight friends. "I'm with my fiancé, Mr. Watson. We will be married in Jacksonville."

Miss Shippey insisted that I call her by her first name: Elizabeth. Every muscle in her face moves with genuine pleasure when she smiles. Her hair is darker than mine. She piles it high on her head in a thick and stylish bun, leaving a few stray curls to hang down like charms. Her voice is soft, gentle. If sounds were colors, her voice would be pink. Pale Pink. I suspect that when she pulls the pins from her hair it reaches to her waist. She is wearing a practical yet fashionable skirt and jacket. Elizabeth said we must exchange addresses before we get to Jacksonville. She wants to keep in touch. But how can I become familiar with her? When I get to Florida, I will be another person.

Elizabeth showed Ruth Ann her engagement ring and spoke with excitement of her upcoming marriage. The memory of why she was going to Florida settled in Ruth Ann's stomach and she felt sick. Her future would never glow like Elizabeth's. She didn't know how her mother's family would treat her. And she was afraid of childbirth. Never had she felt so alone.

Mr. Watson came for his fiancé, approaching them where they sat together, and Elizabeth introduced him to Ruth Ann. A Wisconsin native, he was pleasant, asking where she was headed and what she thought of the Dixie Flyer. As they left, Ruth Ann heard Mr. Watson teasing Elizabeth. He said, "You are easy to lose. If I take my eyes off you, you disappear. I suppose I'll spend the rest of my life searching for you." He touched her cheek, a signet ring on his finger, and said, "But I love you, my lost girl."

The coach traveled the rails with rhythm. When Ruth Ann rested her head on the window, the cadence of the Dixie Flyer rushed through her body like a dance. She thought about Elizabeth and wondered how she had found the courage to travel so far from home. Ruth Ann tried to imagine California, but soon felt the urge to write about the passengers. If she didn't record everything

around her, she might forget the fine details.

We stopped in Atlanta for more passengers. The train terminal is large, magnificent. It is surrounded by high-rise buildings. Mr. Baumwart told me the terminal was built in the Beaux-Arts style. Mr. and Mrs. Baumwart are from Kentucky. They speak a lovely language, drawing out their syllables with a southern accent. The terminal is an ornamental design, rich and classical. It resembles many of the buildings in downtown Chicago.

As we slowed, rumbling out of Atlanta I embarrassed myself by squealing out loud with delight at the sight of huge trees, tall and wide, with white blooms as large as a man's hands. Mr. Culpepper said, "Those are magnolia trees. The blooms have a lemony scent. Georgia boasts of some of the most magnificent magnolias in the country."

Chicago will feel winter's icy breath for at least another month, yet Spring has popped up all over Georgia. I want to memorize nature's palette of brilliant colors. I wish Mother could only see these things. She would be mesmerized by the different shades of green that have painted the landscape. The newlywed Mrs. Fletcher said she feels magic in the air. I suspect the magic is simply Spring. We left Chicago's bare winter landscape to travel into a warm southern paradise.

Mr. Culpepper told Elizabeth and me to watch for Spanish moss hanging from the crooked arms of oaks and cypress trees, when we travel through the deep South. "It will resemble witch's hair," he said. "Gray, tangled, and long." He described something that sounds mysterious.

Mrs. Klein, from St. Louis, introduced herself to me. She is traveling with her husband and two young daughters. I was surprised when she told me Mr. Klein owns a saloon. Papa would be appalled. He often warns of the evil of strong drink in his sermons. But Mrs. Klein is exceptionally kind and funny. She told me I look like a fairy because of my large eyes and my small bone structure. I laughed at her description of me. The Kleins plan to spend two full months with family in Florida. Mr. Klein left the bartender in charge of his saloon. I've never been in a saloon, never tasted any type of alcohol. I'm meeting all manner of people on this amazingly fast and fantastic Dixie Flyer. I wish the journey would never end. On this train, with these people, I feel safe. In Florida, I will be thrown into a painful role. I'm afraid a storm faces me there. I'm afraid I will never again experience the magic of this trip. The train zooms, and I feel I'm moving into the soul of America. We don't have many stops left. The end is near.

Ruth Ann fell asleep in the berth, hoping to see Spanish moss

**"You wouldn't
want to lose
your diary."**

Continued on page 36

Alapaha was the site of a famous Atlantic Coast Line train wreck on March, 1911, when the Dixie Flyer derailed there, killing ten and injuring many, including wealthy Northern socialites who were traveling to the coast, receiving extensive coverage in national newspapers. Photos courtesy of Berrien SmugMug Historical Photos



before the trip ended. The rhythm of the train filled her body, a comforting cadence. In her sleep, she dreamed of Florida, of witch's hair, of beaches, of a newborn baby.

An hour later, Ruth Ann stood alone on the banks of a river. Screams sliced through the air. Men and women rushed about, screaming, calling names, searching for loved ones. Children cried. Ruth Ann and Elizabeth had been searching for Mr. Watson who was missing among the twisted cars, but they had parted ways, Elizabeth saying she wanted to recruit others to help in the search. Ruth Ann prayed softly, teardrops rolling down her face, slipping over her words, dropping from her chin. She could not hear her prayers above the cacophony of the crash.

Ruth Ann spotted the newlywed Mr. Fletcher, his arm injured, as he watched the lifeless body of his wife removed from a car. She was the gentle woman who had talked of magic in the air. They had been married three days. Ruth Ann wanted to comfort the man, but what could she say that would ease his pain? There were so many injured and missing. There seemed to be neither a beginning nor an end to the destruction and wounded. She spotted Elizabeth among a group of men, most likely urging them to search for Mr. Watson. Elizabeth touched her engagement ring as she spoke. Ruth Ann turned away, unable to bear her new friend's pain.

The train was a tangled mess of twisted steel, at least one Pullman car, a coach, and perhaps the dining car in the shallow water below the broken trestle. It appeared to Ruth Ann that a first-class coach had sliced through a sleeper. How had she survived? Why had she been spared?

People streamed in from surrounding towns, racing to help in the rescue, tend to the injured, and comfort the men and women who had survived the crash. Good Samaritans came from

Waycross, Alapaha, Nashville, Enigma, and Tifton, working fast among the destruction, saying rain was headed their way.

Ruth Ann stood with her hands in her mouth and watched a group of angry men surround a looter who had cut open a mail bag. She recognized one of the men from the train, though she didn't know his name. He and others, furious that anyone would take advantage of the chaos of the wreck to steal, bound the looter by his hands and feet to a tree. Ruth Ann suppressed the urge to stomp over to the tree and slap the crook with as much force as she could muster. She hoped they left him tied to the tree in the rain when it arrived. Anger and fear pulsed through her.

Turning her eyes upward, away from the terror that surrounded her, Ruth Ann focused on the moss in the trees, beauty dripping like stalactite and hanging low over the river, gray curly hair swaying eerily in the wind, moving like a slow dance over the tea-colored water. Realizing her journal had likely sunk to the bottom of the stream or drifted away, she heard someone say, "This is the Alapaha River." ✕

A list of the dead:

Mr. W. W. Culpepper, Tifton, GA with many relatives in Moultrie, GA
 Mr. A. F. Baumwart, Henderson, KY
 Mrs. W.D. Fletcher, Roland, IL and Tampa, FL
 Mr. John T. Watson, WI and Kissimmee, FL
 The Conductor, Mr. Charles Parnell, Savannah, GA
 Fireman, Mr. Lucius Ellis, Waycross, GA
 Train Porter, Albert Simmons, Waycross, GA
 Train Porter, Mr. C.B. Whidden
 Express Messenger, J.P. Woodward, Jacksonville, FL
 Baggage Master J. Powell, Jacksonville, FL, formerly of Cairo, GA

SOULS/Williams, Continued...

imbalance. She contained a unique kind of love—perhaps only the kind that a mother or a grandmother can have. She was alone and questioned her worth. She had lost the love of her life, not to death, but to sin. She was searching for something, anything to hold on to. Malachi closed his eyes, praying she would speak. Depression had internalized her focus and despair had taken over. Malachi watched as the woman rose from the bench and left without a word or a look. Silence.

Then, a guttural sound came from the messenger. He wept for God's creation, absorbing the blindness most of them embraced. He didn't understand why The Master continued to wait for them. Malachi opened his eyes and for a moment thought he was back in heaven. A beautiful child of around six or seven stood before him. Her face was framed by a head full of dark corkscrew curls. Gracie. Malachi smiled as he observed the complete innocence reflected in her large, brown eyes.

She whispered, "What's your name?"

Malachi couldn't help it; the tears began to flow. He had waited and prayed, and his prayer was answered—by a child.

He replied with a smile, "Malachi."

Gracie looked down at the sidewalk and then lifted her heart shaped face to his expectantly. Her voice became a whisper, "You know Jesus, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

Gracie's face lit up with an unearthly light. She confided, "I know Jesus, too."

Malachi raised his old brows. "You do?"

Curls bobbed. "Yes, I pray to Jesus every night. I pray for Mama and Daddy and Gammy and Papa and Uncle..." She paused. "Did you know Jesus hears my prayers, Mister?"

The years peeled off of Malachi's form as he enthusiastically replied, "Yes, Gracie. Jesus does hear your prayers. And He will answer them. Do you trust Him, Gracie?"

She nodded with wide eyes. And just then a veil lifted and Malachi saw Gracie knelt beside her bed—a young woman knelt beside her. They prayed together. They prayed for Ezra, her uncle, Jordan, her daddy, and Leah, her grandmother. Gracie and the woman prayed for them to know God's peace. Malachi then realized his purpose and the blessing he was supposed to give. ✕

Upcoming Events

ADEL

Daylily Festival
Fri.-Sat., May 19-20

FITZGERALD

Daryle Singletary
@ the Grand Theatre
Thurs., May 4

TIFTON

The Great Race
Downtown Tifton
Sat., June 24, 6-10 pm

Gee Haw Whoa
Back Rodeo
@ ABAC

Fri.-Sat., April 7-8
7:30 pm

Folklife Festival
@ ABAC

Sat., April 8, 9 am-4 pm

NASHVILLE

The Veterans Memorial
Charity Run
Sat., May 29, 8:30 am

2017 GA Recreation &
Park Association
8 & Under Flea Baseball
Pitching Matching State
Tournament
Tues.-Sat., July 11-15

ALAPAHA

Passion Play
Alapaha Gym
Sun., April 9



Festivals & Events

DADDY *daughter* Dances



Fitzgerald



Swinging Medallions



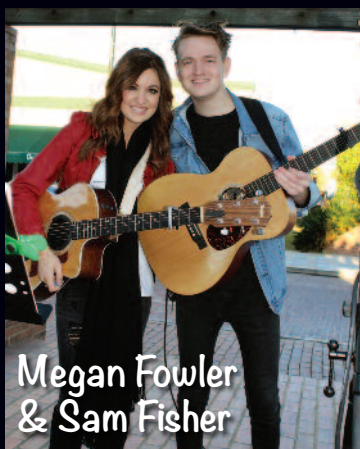
Swinging Medallions



Joel Jones & Tanner Strickland



John Anderson



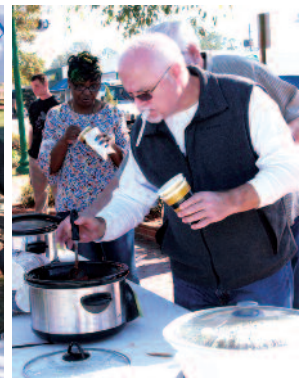
Megan Fowler
& Sam Fisher



Nashville's Chili Cookoff



Hahira's Chili Cookoff



Congratulations Tift County GHSA State 7A Champs



Congratulations to the Tift County Boys Basketball Team for another State win! Good job, boys!
Photo by Ty Freeman

Berrien County FAIR April 13-16 at Berrien County Saddle Club

The Berrien County Chamber has partnered with Modern Midways to host the **Berrien County Fair** with rides and games for all. Advanced tickets (\$10/sheet of 18) and all access wristbands (\$45/four days) are on sale at the Berrien County Chamber, located at 201 North Davis Street inside the Berrien County Administrative Building.

Love and Kindness Fellowship Ministries presents
Autism Awareness Bicycle Ride
Starts at: Perry Dorsey Memorial Library
Saturday, April 22 • 10 am
To Register: Latonya Daniels: 904-566-3053
Shontina Brinson: 229-507-6497



Wild Chicken Festival



FRIENDS HELPING FRIENDS

Friends Helping Friends, a non-profit Christian-based group founded in the '80s, recently held the 3rd Annual Friends Helping Friends Night Out at the Parrish House in Adel. The benefit helped to raise funds for families in need of minor financial help related to serious, long-term illness with respect to obtaining ongoing care.



Back Row (left to right): Donna Grady, Beverly Garden, Ed Gardner, Hilda Spell, Ruth Noles, Sharon Royals, Wes Noles, Tommy McClain, Betty Joiner, Jack Joiner, Franklin Luke, and Render Folsom. **Front Row** (left to right): Nancy Smith, Rheda Mcnamara, Bennie Jennings, Betty McClain, Sherrell Luke, Fredda Folsom, and Gene Hamner. *Not pictured: Ann Cuppy, Janie Mackie, Latrelle Mobley, April Giddens, Roy Sumner, and Janice Miley.*



The pleasant melody of blue grass gospel music wafted through the dining hall of the Parrish House as the band, Lost Dogs Found, performed songs like, "Blue Ridge Mountain Girl" and others.



Hangin' with the Folks at South Central Primary Care Center

by Jayden Futch

I found some people who worked with the South Central Primary Care Center who were doing an event to help kids get involved with eating nutritiously. They had games, food, and snacks to show citizens what they were doing. I spoke with them at their Betty Dupree Primary Care Office located at 201 North Bartow Street in Nashville.

They were doing this to gain the public's attention because not very many people know where they are. They also wanted to show people how to eat yummy foods that are healthy. I felt like a celebrity when I took a picture with Mickey Mouse and a nice, young lady whose name was Lesley Leyse. ✨



Ray City Plow Day

By Jayden Futch

Ray City Plow Day is celebrated one day out of the year. Different kinds of people come from everywhere to see the demonstrations and the many artifacts on display.

As I was looking around, I saw some Vietnam Veterans. I asked them many questions. One question was what they think about our president's military beliefs. They said that they think they like our president's beliefs but they think that it would just take some time to adapt to it.



Next, I interviewed some citizens with their old antiques. One of them was Frank Lynch. He said that he was a friend of the magazine editor, Vickie Harsey, and her husband, Stanley Harsey. Frank Lynch and his wife had an antique corn sheller. It takes the



corn kernels off the cob when you push the cob through it. They also had a very rare artifact that was called a peanut sheller. It molds the peanuts together and pushes them out, shells and all.

Last, I interviewed some actual plowers. The business works by a mule pulling a turning plow. It costs about \$300 for one



team of mules to last one month. It also takes them over a day to plow one big field.

Overall, Ray City Plow Day was a nice event to experience. ✨

Jayden Futch, 10 years old

Jayden is a student at Berrien Elementary where she is in the Gifted Program. She takes journalism and writes for her school paper. She also takes ballet, tap and jazz at the Dance Arts studio in Valdosta and loves playing soccer at BCPR. Her mom is Nina Futch and her step-dad is Miles Johnson.

Area Chamber News



Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County Chamber Awards: (left) The 2016 Business of the Year Award was presented to My Flower Basket & Bridal Shop, Ms. Joann White and Angie Day, owners

(above): Judge Bobby Chasteen received the 2016 Lifetime Achievement Award. Judge Chasteen was joined by his wife Margaret, their two daughters, a son-in-law and three grandsons.



Berrien County Awards Banquet: (left to right) Lyle Hendley, Hayley Postell, Buck Pegg, Jane Knight, Barry McMillian, and Dr. Lilli Drawdy.



Adel-Cook Chamber Members: Back row (left to right) Jerry Connell, Ron Mitchell, Trevor Hand, Brent Dickson, Mayor of Adel Buddy Duke, and Jeff Taylor Front Row: (left to right) Brian Harrell, Mary Sue Ward, Martha Darden, Shonna O'Quinn, Pat Bush, Holly Greene, and Randy Connell.



Tift County Chamber Awards: Amanda Brack accepted the J. Lamar Branch Award; Mayra Contreras was awarded with Ambassador of the Year award; The Prince Business Woman of the Year winner was Christy Kunes; Dr. Joe West was presented with the Stafford Award; Syd Blackmarr was awarded with this year's Wall of Fame award; The John Hunt Entrepreneur of the Year winner was Harold Harper; Curtis Packing and Curtis Foods were the winners of the Rotary Ethics in Business Award.

Right: During the Chamber's annual meeting, 2016 Chamber Chairman Morris Tankersley passed the gavel to incoming Chairman Tyron Spearman (far right).



Cook County Chamber Award Winners: Front row (left to right) Steve Williams, Williams Investment Company - 2016 Entrepreneur of the Year; Michelle Meadows, Michelle's Formal Wear - 2016 Small Business of the Year; Michael Dinnerman - 2016 Man of the Year and Service to the County Award; Heather Gray, Quick Consulting - 2016 Ambassador of the Year; Valera Clements - Lifetime of Community Service Award; Dwight Purvis, DEP Farms, Inc. - 2016 Grower of the Year; Larry White, City of Adel - 2016 Volunteer of the Year; Lynne Allen and Kim Boling, Pike Creek Turf - 2016 Company of the Year; Jeanne Dixon, Cook County Schools - 2016 Woman of the Year.

Back row (left to right) Representing Williams Investment Company - Paul McNeal, Debi McNeal, Charlie Wiggins, Lynn Williams, Emily Williams, Rick Williams, John Williams. Representing Pike Creek Turf - Reyn Boling, Jaimie Allen, Autumn Boling, and Dake Boling.

Spring

New life pushing upward out of the deadness of winter.

Photo by Wenda G. Bailey

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