





# OBITUARIES



**Lila Joan Mordecai**

**GLENCOE** - Lila Joan Mordecai passed away on November 29 at the age of 84. Funeral services will be at Crestwood Memorial Cemetery on December 7 with visitation from 10 - 11 a.m. with service following.

Joan was born in Hokes Bluff to Ida Susan and Eugene Gordon Marbut. She graduated from Hokes Bluff High School and later married George Wayne Mordecai. They raised their two children in Glencoe. She was an X-ray technician and worked for many years at East Gadsden Clinic and Goodyear Medical Center. She was an active member of Glencoe Church of Christ where she and her twin sister Jean taught the young children in Sunday School. Her hobbies were reading, gardening, and spending time with her grandchildren.

She was preceded in death by her husband, George, and her siblings Polly, Jean, Easel, Harold, Mutt, and Wayne. Surviving are her two children Davis Eugene Mordecai (Lisa) and Stacy Elaine Merkle (Jonathan), 5 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

Pallbearers will be Davis Mordecai, John Mordecai, Jonathan Merkle, Evan Merkle, Zach Merkle, and Wayburn Burtram.

Special thanks to Regency Pointe, Gadsden Health and Rehab, Enhabit Hospice, and Dr. Debora Reiland.

In lieu of flowers, please consider donating to Alzheimers Disease Research.

**Karen King**

**ALTOONA** - Karen M. King, age 65, of Altoona, passed away peacefully on November 18, 2024. Graveside services will be 2 p.m. Friday December 6, 2024 at Crestwood Cemetery to honor her life and legacy.

Born on September 6, 1959, to the late Thomas Earl Mitchell and Geraldine Mitchell, Karen was a devoted wife, mother, sister, grandmother, and great-grandmother. She was the beloved wife of Thomas Edgar King.

Known for her warmth and generosity, Karen opened her heart and home to everyone around her, leaving an indel-

ible mark on the lives she touched. She will be remembered for her loving spirit and steadfast devotion to her family and friends.

She was predeceased by her daughter, Contessa King, whose memory will always be cherished.

Karen is survived by her daughters: Melina King, Francesca Tozzi, and Angeleia King (Moises Juan); her treasured grandchildren: Damian King, Mindi Stancil, Kaci Ball, Nadia King, Alissa King, Zen Stocks, William Humphrey, Lillian Humphrey, Rafael King, Rogelio King, Maya King, and Joses King; and her great-grandchildren: Kole King and Kye King. She is also survived by her siblings, Susan (Mack) Gilbreath and Thomas F. Mitchell.

Pallbearers will include Rafael King, Damian King, Moises Juan, and Frankie Mitchell.

Karen Mitchell King's legacy of love and kindness will forever be cherished by her family, friends, and all who were blessed to know her.



**Charles "Shep" Shepard Midgley**

**GADSDEN** - Charles "Shep" Shepard Midgley, age 74, of Gadsden, Alabama passed away on Saturday, November 30, 2024.

Shep was born in Gadsden on April 22, 1950 to Jeanne Carleton Shepard and Charles Holley Midgley. The family moved to Auburndale, Massachusetts when Shep was four years old and returned to Gadsden when he entered Disque Junior High School. He graduated from Gadsden High School in 1968 and from the University of Alabama in 1973, where he was an officer in the Kappa Alpha Order.

Shep played in rock bands from junior high through college touring the South. He was a talented guitarist. He was retired from Philip Morris, Inc. Shep enjoyed his experiences in the Gadsden Quarterback Club and the Red Elephant Club. Roll Tide! He was a member of SCS, The Century Club and

the Holiday Club. His favorite activity was attending Supper Club which began in 1976 with wonderful friends and continues to this day. Shep was a member of First United Methodist church of Gadsden.

Shep enjoyed playing and listening to all kinds of music. His favorite place on earth was his cabin at Moon Lake in Mentone, AL which has been in the family since before his birth. He loved all animals, especially his dogs. He served on the Advisory Board of the Humane Society.

Shep was preceded in death by his parents, step mother Sue Midgley, step father, Dr. Scott Vance and his brother Charles Holley Midgley Jr. who was his best friend.

He is survived by his wife of 50 years, Cheryl Rutledge Midgley, nephew Chas Midgley, great niece Carter Midgley and brother in law Randall Rutledge, and a host of cousins and many dear friends. His fur baby Eleanor Rigby misses him terribly.

In lieu of flowers, Donations may be made to the local animal rescues, animal shelters, or your favorite charity.

A Celebration of Life will be held at a later date.

Quoting a friend of Shep's "He was a gentleman and a gentle man."

**Ericha D. Ruppert**

**GADSDEN** - Ericha Dawn Ruppert, age 53, of Gadsden, Alabama passed away on Saturday, November 23, 2024.



**Gail Reynolds Heath**

**GADSDEN** - Gail Reynolds Heath passed away peacefully on November 30th, 2024, at the age of 86. She was preceded in death by her husband of 63 years, Edward Lee Heath; and parents, Robert and Maudelle Reynolds.

She is survived by her children, Karen (Todd) Entrekin and Shane (Kim) Heath; grandchildren, Colee (Ryan) Hill, Jacob (Hannah) Entrekin, Mallori (Justin) Austin, Josh Heath, Jarett Heath; and great grandchildren, Ava-

lyn Hill, Alethea Entrekin and Asher Entrekin.

Gail was born to Robert and Maudelle Reynolds on April 17, 1938, and raised on a dairy farm in the Ballplay Community until she married the love of her life "Buddy" Heath in 1960. She then resided the rest of her life in Hokes Bluff, Alabama.

She graduated from Hokes Bluff High School in 1956, where she was Class Beauty, Class Favorite many times, a member of Beta Club, Class Officer, a cheerleader and in numerous other clubs. She attended Gadsden Business School and worked for the Department of Industrial relations as a supervisor until her retirement after 37 years. Gail was a member of Hokes Bluff First Methodist Church.

Gail had a great personality and was fun loving even during our childish pranks, but her greatest achievement was her success in her career but most of all the achievements of her family and her children. She was a wonderful wife and mother, and a role model for all of us in all areas of life. She was one of the strongest women that we have known, providing strength and knowledge in the toughest times in life. We will miss that guidance, and mothers love for the rest of our lives.

A funeral service was held at Collier-Butler Funeral Home on Wednesday, December 4, 2024. Burial followed at Young's Chapel Cemetery.

Pallbearers were Joshua Heath, Jarett Heath, Justin Austin, Jacob Entrekin, Leonard Kiser, Ryan Hill, Jim Wood and Burt Lavender.

Honorary Pallbearers, Joe Sweat, Greg Clonts, Steve Rogers.

The family would like to thank Dr. Martha Lavender for her continued kindness and support that she provided to Gail during this past year as Gail mourned the loss of our dad. Special thanks to Martha Starr for being that lifelong friend to Gail and our family.

In Lieu of flowers, the family asked that you consider a donation to the American Cancer Society or National Glaucoma Research Foundation.

**Craig E. Cantrell**

**ATTALLA** - Craig Edward Cantrell, born on May 3, 1961, died unexpectedly at his home on November 29, 2024, at the age of 63. He was born in Gadsden and resided in Attalla.

Craig was a loving husband, father, "PawPaw", brother, and son. He loved his

Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and was passionate about his testimony. Craig's humble heart was made evident upon hearing him pray. He was a family man with God being first, his family second, and himself last. Craig was a member of Siberton Baptist Church. He retired from Attalla City Public Works. His hobbies included fishing, dirt track racing, and most of all, Alabama Football.

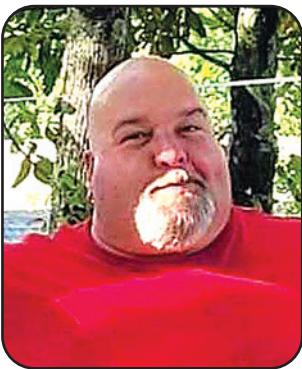
The Celebration of Life for Craig Cantrell will be Friday, December 6 at Siberton Baptist Church. Visitation will begin at 11 a.m. with services to follow at 12 p.m. Brother Sammy O'Dell to officiate and Bart Gunter with special music.

Craig is preceded in death by parents Charles and Glen-nis Cantrell and mother-in-law Carolyn Battles.

He is survived by wife Becky Cantrell, son Josh Cantrell (Sarah), daughter Heather Johnson (Jonathan), daughter Carley Smith (Kendall), son Cale Wissler, sister Sandra Payne, father-in-law Gene Ed Battles, sister-in-law Karen Harris (Jimmy), grandchildren; Kairi, KJ, and Cantrell Smith.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to Siberton Baptist Church Building Fund.

Special thanks given to: City of Attalla, Attalla EMS, and Riverview ER staff.



**Michael Anthony Lang**

Michael Anthony Lang "Big Mike" age 47, passed away peacefully on November 25, 2024.

Michael was born on January 31, 1977, in Denver, Colorado. He spent his childhood in Portland, Oregon before moving to Tacoma, Washington as a teen. There he became a Bladesmith and built his business, Lang's Custom Knives. In 2021, he moved to Alabama to be close to his extended family, Joe Kameke, Geoffrey Jones (Jessica) and Dave Newland (Brenda). He spent the last 2 years hauling Hotshots seeing the world with his wife.

Preceded in death by his mother, Sandra "Sandy" Charlene Lanphear; his fa-

ther, Raymond Eugene Lang; and best friend, Dave Ellis.

Michael is survived by his wife, Bridgett Bittles Lang; brother, Allen Ballard (Savannah); stepdaughters, Catherine Harris (Tyler) and Shaylee Bittles; stepson, Damien Bittles (Shelby); cousins, Lisa Lanphear, Trevor Brewer (Rachel); grandchildren, Ryan Harris, Kinsley Harris, Oaklynn Harris and three grandchildren on the way, Waylon and Zayden Harris, and Josie Bittles.

A Celebration of Life for Big Mike will be announced by the family at a later date.



**Wanda Jean Hall**

**GADSDEN** - Wanda Gray Hall, age 63, died December 4, 2024 in Gadsden, Alabama. She was born on April 10, 1961 in Dallas, Texas to Mavis Tucker Gray and Harvey E. Gray.

Wanda graduated from Etowah High School and from the University of Montevallo where she earned her bachelor's degree in psychology.

Wanda was preceded in death by her mother, Mavis Tucker Smith, her brother, Rodney Dean Gray, and her grandparents, Maude L. Tucker, Hazel Gray and George Gray.

She is survived by her beloved husband of 35 years, Donald "Don" Hall, daughter, Lacey Hall, sister, Rochelle Gray Keener (Donnie), brother, Charles Dewayne Smith (Leah) and numerous nieces and nephews. She is also survived by special friends Jenny and Sam Parker.

To know Wanda was to love her. She was quiet, generous, unassuming and loving. Wanda especially loved teaching children. More importantly, Wanda was a faithful Christian.

There will be a memorial service on Friday, December 6, 2024 at the Betta-View Hills Church of Christ in Oxford, Alabama with visitation beginning a 1:00 P.M and the service beginning at 2:00 P.M.

In lieu of flowers, the family is requesting that donations be made to an Education Fund at Noble Bank and Trust or donate to the Betta-View Hills Church of Christ.



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# NEWS

## Local banker joins River Bank & Trust



**Photo courtesy of River Bank & Trust**  
Local banker Sarah Kathryn Haller has joined River Bank & Trust as Senior Vice President and Relationship Manager.

River Bank & Trust's Etowah County President Jeff Allen recently announced that local banker Sarah Kathryn Haller has joined River Bank & Trust. She will serve as Senior Vice President and Relationship Manager at the Gadsden office.

With over 16 years of banking experience, Haller will help neighbors and businesses achieve their financial goals.

"Sarah Kathryn worked with us previously, and we are thrilled to welcome her back," Allen said. "She's a favorite among our customers and will do an excellent job meeting their financial needs."

Haller graduated from Gadsden High School and earned a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from Auburn University. She also completed the Alabama Banking School.

Haller serves on the boards of the Darden Rehabilitation Foundation, United Way of Etowah County, Etowah C.A.R.E.S., Gadsden Beautification Board and Eura Brown Elementary PTA. She attends First Baptist Church of Gadsden with her husband Mark and daughters Julia Ann and Kate.

"I am excited to rejoin this team and work alongside some of the best bankers in Alabama," Haller said. "I look forward to building strong relationships with clients and providing the hospitality, personal attention, and local banking expertise that River Bank & Trust is known for."

In 2006, River Bank & Trust opened with two main goals: establish a community-focused financial institution that would support local decision-making and re-circulate money back into the communities it serves. Since then, River Bank & Trust has grown to be one of the largest state-chartered banks in Alabama, with current assets of \$3.5 billion and twenty-four locations throughout the state.

### Pet of the Week



#### Malik

Meet Malik, a 3-year-old, very well-behaved mixed-breed male. He has been at the shelter for over a month now and is eagerly awaiting his forever home. Malik is a fun friend to have. For more information on Malik or other animals available for adoption at Gadsden's Humane Society and Pet Rescue Center, call 256-442-1347.

## GSCC faculty and staff win ACCC awards

Winners of the 2024 Chancellor's Awards from Gadsden State Community College were recognized during the Alabama Community College Association Conference November 24 in Montgomery.

"These individuals exemplify the very best of what it means to go above and beyond in service for our students and to each other," said Gadsden State Executive Vice President Dr. Tera Simmons. "Their dedication, selflessness and unwavering commitment to excellence enrich our college community and inspire us all to do our best. We are truly fortunate to have such outstanding individuals among us."

Winners were recognized locally in September at the Spring Convocation held at Gadsden State-Cherokee. Two members of the faculty were selected for the award - Patricia Wilborn and Hollie Bonds. The support staff award went to Wes Wood, and the administrator award winner was Andy Robertson.

Wilborn is the 2024 Chancellor's Award winner for academic faculty. She is currently the division chair for Languages and Humanities and serves as the director of the Alabama Language Institute, the oldest English language institution in the southeast. She began her career at Gadsden State in 1999 as an ALI instructor and went on to teach courses in English Composition, developmental reading and writing, humanities and German.

Wilborn earned a Bachelor of Arts in German in 1994 from the University of South Alabama. Two years later, she completed a Master of Arts in German at the University of South Carolina. In 1998, Wilborn maintained a 4.0 GPA in her pursuit of a Master of Arts in Teaching English

to Speakers of Other Languages from the University of Alabama.

Wilborn presented at the 2024 National Organization of Student Success Conference in Las Vegas and has served as a member of the national search committee for the Fulbright Fellowship Program. She was awarded the 2015 Adjunct Faculty Member of the Year of the Alabama Association for Developmental Education.

Bonds is Gadsden State's Chancellor's Award winner in the technical faculty division. She is the Mechanical Design Technology instructor on the Ayers Campus in Anniston. At Gadsden State, she has been instrumental in doubling the number of students in her program. The Mechanical Design Technology Program currently has the highest enrollment among technical programs. An advocate for females enrolling in STEM programs, Bonds has seen female enrollment increase in her program by 30 percent. In addition, the number of Machine Design dual enrollment students has increased by 833 percent from the spring semester 2022 to the fall semester 2023.

A Magna Cum Laude graduate of Gadsden State, Bonds spent a decade working in industry as a CAD designer, machine shop supervisor, manufacturing engineer and advanced PC&L analyst before becoming a college instructor in 2022. Bonds was honored in 2023 by the Gadsden State Alumni Association as the Outstanding Technical Faculty Member of the Year.

Wood, the Supervisor of Facility Maintenance, is the 2024 Chancellor's Award winner among staff members. Wood served as the building maintenance supervisor at the Ayers



**Photo courtesy of Gadsden State**  
Pictured from left are Gadsden State Chancellor's Award recipients Andy Robertson, Patricia Wilborn, Hollie Bonds and Wes Wood.

campus since 2021. Prior to working at Gadsden State, Wood worked as an electrician for St. Vincent's Health System and three other electric companies. At Gadsden State, Wood is responsible for overseeing a team of maintenance and custodial technicians, managing repair schedules and implementing preventive maintenance programs. Wood earned an Associate of Science in Industrial Automation Technology from Gadsden State in 2013.

Robertson, who started his Gadsden State career in 2015 as an instructor of Electronic Engineering Technology at the Ayers Campus, is the Chancellor's Award for Administration winner. In 2020, he was named workforce development coordinator for the college and serves as the division chair of Applied and Engineering Technologies on the Ayers Campus.

Robertson has been instrumental in the development and success of two apprenticeship-style programs at Gadsden State

- the Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education and the Consortium of Machining Education Training. Through FAME and CoMeT, students receive valuable hands-on experience with world-class industry partners while receiving education and training at the college. Robertson also added several short-term certificates to Gadsden State's available credentials, including Additive Manufacturing and Mechatronics Advanced Automation.

Robertson earned an Associate in Applied Science in Electronic Engineering Technology from Gadsden State in 2003 before transferring to Jacksonville State University, where he received two Bachelors of Science degrees - one in secondary education and another in math. He is a graduate of the Faculty Development Institute, the Gadsden State Leadership Academy and Leadership Calhoun County. He also won the Eugene Prater Exceptional Achievement in Teaching Award in 2019.

### Etowah County Commission



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## Salvation Army seeks donors for annual Angel Tree program

As the Christmas holiday approaches, the local chapter of the Salvation Army is urging residents to make a difference in the lives of forgotten angels - children and seniors in need - by participating in its annual Angel Tree program, which has long provided an opportunity for individuals, families, and groups to spread holiday joy to those who might otherwise go without gifts. However, each year, some of these angels remain without sponsors, highlighting the need for the community's renewed commitment.

"The spirit of Christmas is about giving, and through the Angel Tree program, we ensure that even the most vulnerable members of our community - our children and seniors - can feel the love and warmth of the season," said Major Jim Edmonds of The Salvation Army. "Our goal is to have no angel left behind this year. We invite everyone to open their hearts and adopt an angel, making their holiday truly special."

At certain locations, participants can select an angel from local Angel Trees that contain details about a child's or senior's specific wish list and needs. Donors are then asked to shop for gifts based on the provided information and return them to the designated drop-off point.

Despite the outpouring of generosity in past years, some angels have gone unadopted, especially seniors who may be without family support. This year, The Salvation Army is calling for a unified effort to ensure that no one is forgotten.

"It is heartbreaking to see names left on the Angel Tree as Christmas approaches," said Edmonds. "Sponsoring an angel is more than just giving a gift; it's about giving hope, connection and a sense of belonging to someone who needs it most."

For more information on how to participate in The Salvation Army's Angel Tree program or to donate, please call 256-546-4673.



### The Women's Club of Gadsden

2024 HOLIDAY TOUR OF HOMES

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**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, FROM 1 P.M. - 5 P.M.**

#### Homes to Tour

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862 Chestnut Street

\*LIGHT REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED.



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\*Tickets may also be purchased day of event, at The Woman's Club or any Tour Home.

**Call 256-546-4673 for more information or to donate to Salvation Army's Angel Tree.**



## GRMC: Stroke risk increased around holidays

In the midst of all the gifts and good times, the holidays also come with a higher risk for medical emergencies, including stroke.

Celebrations often include rich foods and alcohol and busier social calendars can leave less time for exercise and sleep. Added stress from holiday preparations, shopping for gifts, increased expenses or traveling, along with millions of other holiday activities can affect the body. Cold weather can, too. When mixed together, these elements can increase blood pressure or development of heart arrhythmias and blood clotting disorders – all of which could trigger a stroke.

“During this busy time of year, it’s important to give yourself time to sleep and relax and to be mindful when eating and drinking to reduce

your risk of an unexpected visit to the ER,” said Dr. Tapan Abrol, Neurologist with Gadsden Physician Clinics. “Balance the indulgent treats with healthy choices, make time for physical activity, connect with friends and family, and make sure you know the signs and symptoms of stroke.”

Stroke risk increases with age, but strokes can happen at any age. The most important thing to do is recognize the symptoms and get help without delay. Stroke symptoms can be remembered with “F. A. S. T.”

- Face drooping
- Arm weakness on one side
- Speech difficulty/slurring
- Time to call 9-1-1

“If you or someone you love experiences these symptoms – take action to get help quickly,” Dr. Abrol said. “Even if you’re not certain, get to

the emergency room for evaluation by a medical professional. Stroke is a time-sensitive medical crisis and timely diagnosis helps to save your brain and life.”

Every second makes a difference, according to Dr. Abrol. He also stresses the importance of calling 9-1-1 rather than driving to the emergency room yourself. The paramedics and emergency medicine technicians can begin assessment and treatment and communicate with the emergency room staff while on their way.

Stroke remains the fifth leading cause of death and the leading cause of long-term disability in the U.S. Early detection and treatment are key to improving survival, minimizing disability and accelerating recovery.

*Submitted by Will Mackey, Gadsden Regional Medical Center*

## Rainbow Middle students perform at Disney



Rainbow Middle School students Anleigh Minton, Ella Loyd, Reese Beebe and MeiLeigh Mintz (pictured, from left) recently performed with the Varsity Spirit All-Americans at the 2024 Thanksgiving Tour at the Walt Disney World Magic Kingdom in Orlando, Florida. Individuals invited to perform are part of a select group of cheerleaders cho-

sen as All-Americans during Varsity Spirit summer camps across the U.S. All-Americans are selected by way of a tryout based on superior cheerleading skills at camps operated by Universal Cheerleaders Association (UCA). Only the top 15 percent of the cheerleaders from Varsity Spirit camps earn the chance to perform in a holiday parade of this caliber. Submitted photo.

## GSCC launches ‘12 Days of Giving’ campaign

The Cardinal Foundation has launched its annual 12 Days of Giving fundraising campaign. The support organization of Gadsden State Community College is providing an opportunity for donors to make a meaningful, tax-deductible contribution to the college during the holiday season.

The 12 Days of Giving campaign encourages year-end donations to support specific campuses, departments and programs that directly benefit students and employees at Gadsden State. Contributions will be accepted via check or online donation throughout the month of December.

“Donors have the unique opportunity to direct their gifts to areas they are most passionate about,” said Hillary Folsom, Director of Advancement and Alumni Relations. “The Days of Giving campaign is a chance to come together as a community and support Gadsden State’s mission of providing quality, affordable and accessible education.”

Along with Gadsden State’s five campuses, eight other programs and departments can be supported during the 2024 fundraising initiative. They include:

- Academic Division
- Athletics

- Ayers Campus in Anniston
- Gadsden State Cherokee in Centre
- Wallace Drive and East Broad Campuses in Gadsden
- Valley Street Campus in Gadsden
- Community Outreach
- Fine Arts Division
- Health Science Division
- Student Emergency Fund
- Student Engagement and Activities

• Workforce Development Division  
“Contributions to the Cardinal Foundation can help create new opportunities and experiences for our students, improve facilities and support cutting-edge programs that prepare them for success in their careers,” Folsom said. “Whether it’s helping a student complete their nursing degree or funding technology upgrades in our classrooms, your support directly impacts the lives of those who walk through the doors at Gadsden State.”

Tommie Goggans III, president of the Cardinal Foundation Board of Directors, said Gadsden State is a catalyst for workforce development that provides essential educational opportunities to students from all walks of life.

“Contributions to the Cardinal Foundation make a significant differ-

ence in the college’s ability to maintain and enhance its programs, offer scholarships and ensure students continue to receive the highest quality education,” he said. “Every donation – large or small – makes an immediate and lasting impact on the lives of Gadsden State students.”

Folsom said supporting Gadsden State is an investment in the future of the communities it serves: Calhoun, Cherokee, Cleburne, Etowah and St. Clair counties.

“As a community college, we provide students with the skills and education they need to succeed in a wide range of careers,” she said. “By giving to the Cardinal Foundation, donors are helping shape the future of our workforce and enhance the quality of life in our region.”

Donors can choose the area they wish to support, ensuring that their contribution is directed toward the cause they care about most. Donations are fully tax-deductible. Checks should be made to the Cardinal Foundation and sent to P.O. Box 227, Gadsden, AL 35902. Online donations are accepted at [www.gadsdenstate.edu/CardinalFoundation](http://www.gadsdenstate.edu/CardinalFoundation).

For more information, contact Folsom at [hfolson@gadsdenstate.edu](mailto:hfolson@gadsdenstate.edu) or 256-549-8377.

## Dr. Murphy honored with prestigious recognition

Dr. Kathy Murphy, president of Gadsden State Community College, recently earned selection into the highly respected Leadership Alabama program.

As one of 77 leaders across the state, Murphy joins an elite group in the Leadership Alabama Class of 2024-25. Leadership Alabama offers established leaders unique insights into the broader landscape of the state, fostering a collaborative environment of understanding Alabama’s most pressing challenges and priorities.

“Leadership Alabama encourages its members to act, individually and in concert, to move Alabama forward to help our state reach its full potential,” said Ashley Kaplan, executive director. “It’s a pleasure to have Dr. Murphy as a member of the current class. She is truly an asset.”

Murphy said she is grateful to participate in Leadership

Alabama, noting the importance of collaboration in her work.

“To be a part of Leadership Alabama is an incredible opportunity to learn, connect and contribute toward a brighter future for our state,” she said.

Murphy began her career in public education in 1984 at Auburn Junior High School. During her four-decade career, she has served as a teacher, principal and superintendent at multiple school systems. She was named Gadsden State’s president in January 2021.

Murphy holds a bachelor’s degree from Troy University, a master’s in education from Auburn University at Montgomery (AUM) and a doctorate in education from Auburn University. She also holds a master’s degree in educational leadership and an educational specialist degree from AUM.

## Challenger Learning Center secures funds

- From 1A



DR. FARRAH HAYES

This funding will allow the center to expand its innovative STEM programs and hands-on learning opportunities for middle-school students from the 12-county service area. Working with the school systems to address learning gaps, Challenger

Learning Center experiences ignite students’ interest in STEM learning and encourage the pursuit of STEM careers. With the support of the Alabama Power Foundation, Challenger Learning Center of Northeast Alabama aims to create engaging and interactive educational opportunities that will inspire the next generation of scientists, engineers, inventors and leaders.

“We are incredibly grateful to the Alabama Power Foundation for their support,” said Tony Smith, Chair of the Advisory Council for Challenger Learning Center. “This grant will enable us to further our goal of making STEM education accessible and exciting for all students. We are committed to fostering curiosity and a love for learning, and this funding will help us achieve

that goal.”

The future Challenger Learning Center will be located in Rainbow City and will join a network of more than 30 Challenger Learning Centers across 24 states that has reached more than six million students worldwide. Challenger Learning Centers offer a variety of hands-on STEM programs,

with the core being its simulated space-themed missions in the fully immersive learning environment. Challenger Learning Center of Northeast Alabama will serve students in Blount, Calhoun, Cherokee, Clay, Cleburne, DeKalb, Etowah, Marshall, Randolph, St. Clair, Talladega and Jefferson counties and surrounding areas.

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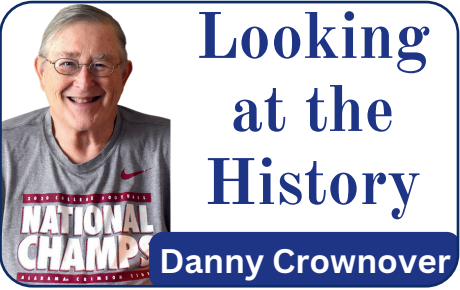
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# LIFESTYLE

## Steamboat excursions were all the rage in late 1890s Gadsden



In the 1890s, Gadsden residents enjoyed more excursions than any other town in the state because of the numerous steamboats on the Coosa River. In 1897, four railroad excursion lines operated into Gadsden each

week during the summer season. Several incorporated companies ran the excursions. The usual round-trip price to Chattanooga was \$1.50 to Atlanta. The same rates applied from Atlanta and Chattanooga to Gadsden. From Birmingham to Gadsden the usual fare was \$1. The advertised magnet was the Noccalula Falls. Sunday schools and other organizations in Rome, Anniston, Talladega and Birmingham came here for their annual picnics. The Alabama Club, a popular social organization out of Birmingham, made a trip to the Falls an annual event, as did that city's Amalgamated Association of Iron

and Steel workers. The latter organization always brought a trainload of visitors. There were times when two trains were necessary. The old dummy line with tracks running from Alabama City to the Falls along the Black Creek gorge was used to get the crowds to the mountain and usually did a very good job of it. The line included a large number of open cars with the seats cross-wise in order to carry quite a number of people on each trip. A large pavilion for dancing stood on the mountain near the Falls. Gadsden residents caught the excursion fever each summer during this time. The firemen, the Knights of Pythias, the Sunday

schools and individuals annually chartered boats for trips up and down the Coosa River. All but one of the excursion boats were equipped to provide a barge for dancing for overflow crowds. *The Magnolia* had a sharp prow and could not be used as a barge, although that boat was big enough to accommodate quite a number of people. One of the special attractions on the river was the trip through the locks at Greensport. Springs were located up and down the river that were also used for picnics and the like. Moonlight excursions on the Coosa River were also very popular. Contact Danny Crowover at [dkcrown@bellsouth.net](mailto:dkcrown@bellsouth.net).

## Of fairy tales, gumball rings and enduring love



November 27 was my momma and daddy's wedding anniversary. It was just 27 days after she went to Heaven. It would have been my parent's 54<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Normally, about three weeks before this day arrived, I would have received a phone call, and a plot would have ensued. You see, Momma was an elaborate schemer; she would always make sure that her honey had something to open on their anniversary. I was always her accomplice so that she could keep the gift a surprise for my dad. This year, however, I did not get that phone call. So, without "the plan," I had to go off-script a little bit. But, with Momma's complete approval, I will tell you how their love story began (cue fairytale music). Once upon a time in the southeastern city of Columbus, Georgia, there lived a fair maid happily engaged to a handsome soldier. This unnamed soldier (to protect the innocent) had a best friend named Rickey. The soldier was getting ready to deploy, so he enlisted the help of his good friend to watch over his pretty maid in his absence. Rickey, a confirmed bachelor who, ac-

cording to the fair maid, had "all the girls," was all too willing to embark upon this blessed assignment. He diligently honored his friend by checking on the pretty maid. Rickey knew that this brown-eyed beauty was very special, and he soon felt something stir in his heart. Still, Rickey wanted to perform his responsibility dutifully for the unnamed soldier. So, when he heard that the fair maid was hospitalized on her birthday, what else could he do but take her flowers? However, he did not take his signature black orchid to this extraordinary girl. Instead, he took 24 long-stem, yellow roses. The young beauty was perplexed. She had never been given roses by any man, not even her betrothed. It was at this moment that the bachelor's heart knew what he must do. So, like any good friend would do, he kissed the girl. A few days later, the two would find themselves at a car dealership looking for a new car for the sporty bachelor. The salesman gave his final price. Excitedly the young man was just about to shake on the deal when the fair maiden grabbed his hand, stood and told the salesman, "No thank you. I am sure we can get it cheaper down the road." Confused, Rickey went along with the girl, and just as the they turned to walk out the door, the salesman relented and came off of his "lowest price" by another \$1,000. The bachelor was beside himself! This woman was not only gorgeous but savvy with money. His heart could no lon-

ger contain itself! They had just gotten in the new car to drive home, when, without warning, Rickey asked the girl to marry him. Speechless, she sat staring at him. "Is he joking?" she wondered. They were stopped at a red light, so he said, "I'm not moving this car until you answer me." As the light turned green and the cars behind them began to honk, the woman of Rickey's dreams said, "Yes!" Legend has it that Rickey stopped at the first drugstore they passed to get his now-fiance a ring from a gumball machine until he could buy a suitable one the next day. The rest, as they say, is history. However, if you asked either of my parents the secret to an almost 54 year-long marriage, their unwavering response would be: "Put God first and each other second." My mom and dad's enduring love is a testimony to those practices lived out every single day. Not perfectly, but intentionally. They could not have known in 1970 all that their life together would hold, but they held on to Jesus, and He held on to them. What became of the soldier? It is unknown. He probably went on to marry and

live happily ever after. The once-confirmed bachelor in this story will tell you to this day that he carried out his assignment to fidelity and loved his fair maiden all the days of her beautiful life. I would agree. Sandra Mullins Bost's 17-year career in education includes working as the system-wide Speech Language Pathologist for Attalla City Schools, teaching English at Etowah High School for four and a half years, teaching fourth grade at Coosa Christian for three years and teaching high school English at Ashville High School for one and a half years. She recently published her first book, "Real Sisters: A Sisters' First Story of Adoption," a heart-warming children's story that explores the concept of family through the lens of love and adoption. Sandra and her husband of 30 years, Jeff, live with their deaf dog and have two married children who have blessed them with five adorable grandchildren. When she is not teaching, Bost enjoys time with her family and sipping coffee while porch-sitting to the happy sounds of nature. Visit [www.sandramullinsbost.com](http://www.sandramullinsbost.com) for more information.

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# Volunteering your time and services

This week, I had the opportunity to help with a project that has been going on for years and years at my church: making cheeseballs to sell. Each year, a group of men and women gather in the church kitchen with enormous amounts of cream cheese, spices and various mix-ins to create some beautiful and tasty cheese balls that are sold as an annual fundraiser to make other volunteer and community support projects possible throughout the year. This was the first time I have participated in this experience, and it is one I look forward to repeating.

When I walked into the parish hall to help, I noticed how festive and full the mitten tree is. This is another project where members bring winter items like mittens, gloves, warm socks and scarves and cover a Christmas tree with them. The items are then gathered off the tree and volunteers deliver them to their new owners. Another program our church facilitates is a monthly food pantry called Rice and Beans. Programs like these and the volunteers that make them possible are a bright spot in a world full of division.

Charles Dickens reminded us, “No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another.” Volunteers truly do lighten

burdens every day, even with small everyday acts.

Volunteers and volunteering is nothing new. There have always been “helpers,” and documentation of the concept of volunteering actually dates back to medieval England when many monasteries and other religious organizations were counted on to help the sick, the poor and those without any support system.

Often the motivation was religious in nature — after all, the Bible tells us that faith without works is dead, and that helping others is helping God — but even though it was considered an important part of faith and life, there was no term for this type of help.

The verb “volunteer” came along much later, first when the American Revolution began recruiting “volunteers” to help fight. A little later, the word entered the lexicon in the mid 1700s when Benjamin Franklin founded the first volunteer firefighters. Originally, the term specifically referred to military service, then firefighter service. It was not the more common definition now that encapsulates generally helping those in need in the community. So, how did we end up with the “armies” of community service volunteers

we have today?

I was surprised at how relatively young this term is, and it looks like it began to morph into the definition we use today in the mid-to-late 1800s with the establishment of the first YMCA and the Red Cross — although the Red Cross was still firmly related (at least in the imaginations of citizens) to the armed services. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson created Volunteers in Service to America, or VISTA, as a program to combat poverty. Then, an annual National Family Volunteer Day was established on the Saturday before Thanksgiving in 1991. Suddenly, we had troops of volunteers.

I’m sure there are many theories and studies and scientific reasons why we have those who are willing to help — but I think most people who volunteer have themselves experienced times when they needed help, or have known a loved one who has, and many of us instinctively know to be true what Rumi said: “You need more help than you know.”

I’ve often heard people slip phrases like “but by the grace of God” into conversations, and I think on some level we know that at any moment life can throw us a curve ball. Volunteering and helping others gives us hope that



when we need it someone will be there for us, as well.

I remind my children that giving is even better than receiving a lot this time of year, with all the birthday and Christmas all bundled together in our family. We take them to shop for siblings, and try to find new ways to volunteer time, or crafts or labor each year. They have opportunities for service at school and church and have made many memories.

If you’d like to find out about local volunteering opportunities this holiday season, I encourage you to get in touch with The United Way, or a local church, school, assisted living facility or hospital and ask how you can help. Above all, never assume that it’s too late to get involved.

Tabitha Bozeman can be reached by email at [tabithabozean@gmail.com](mailto:tabithabozean@gmail.com).



## Santa’s Whiskers, Chocolate Rice Krispies Balls, Christmas Coffee Cake

Baking in my kitchen has always been such a significant part of my holiday season. I love the smell of fresh cookies cooling on a rack or seeing the steam escape from a pie just out of the oven. But most of all, I love discussing recipes, which somehow always brings people together. That’s what the holidays are really all about.

### Santa’s Whiskers

- 1 cup real butter (salted)
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup red and green candied cherries, chopped
- ½ cup pecans, chopped
- ¾ cup coconut

Cream butter with sugar until fluffy (use a mixer). Add milk and vanilla. Beat until smooth. Stir in the rest of ingredients except coconut. Shape into two logs and roll each in coconut. Cover and chill for one to two hours. Slice and bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes or until slightly brown around the edges. Coconut needs to be a little brown. Do not over bake. Bake these on parchment paper.

Andy’s Note: This is a wonderful cookie to carry to a Cookie Swap. This cookie tastes like Christmas to me. It is delicious and so pretty on a tray. I usually put the dough together one day and bake the following day.

### Christmas Morning Coffee Cake

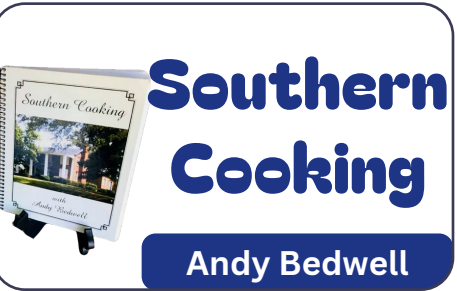
- 1 yellow cake mix
- ¾ cup Crisco oil
- 1 (3-ounce) package of instant vanilla pudding
- ¾ cup water
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 4 eggs

### Sugar Filling:

- 1/3 cup powdered sugar
- 1/3 cup chopped pecans
- 2 ½ teaspoon cinnamon

### Glaze:

- 1 cup powdered sugar



- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 teaspoon milk

Combine cake ingredients and beat with mixer for two minutes. Pour 1/3 of cake batter into greased tube pan. Sprinkle ½ of sugar filling over batter. Pour 1/3 more of cake batter into tube pan. Top with remaining sugar filling. Pour remaining cake batter over it. Bake at 325 degrees for 45-50 minutes.

Andy’s Note: This cake is so good to serve on Christmas morning. It can be baked now and put into the freezer.

### Chocolate Rice Krispies Balls

- ½ cup peanut butter
- 3 tablespoons soft butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup Rice Krispies
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- 1 cup shredded coconut

Mix together, refrigerate for ½ hour or longer and then form into balls. Return to fridge and let chill at least an hour. Melt chocolate almond bark and a touch of paraffin wax together in a double boiler. You can also add some semisweet chocolate chips.

Drop balls into chocolate mixture one at a time using a fork to roll them so that the chocolate covers the entire ball. Place on a waxed cookie sheet and chill.

Happy holiday baking to you all!  
Andy

“Southern Cooking with Andy Bedwell” can be purchased at the Messenger on Rainbow Drive.

## THE MESSENGER’S PICK FOR EVENT OF THE WEEK

### Miracle on 34th Street hosted by TOG

**DECEMBER 6 – 15:** See “Miracle on 34th Street” hosted by Theatre of Gadsden at the Ritz Theatre. Show times are Friday, Dec. 6 at 7 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 7 at 7 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 8 at 2 p.m., Friday, Dec. 13 at 7 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 14 at 7 p.m. and Sunday, Dec. 15 at 2 p.m. Tickets prices vary between \$13-\$20. For more information, call 256-547-7469.

## The Messenger’s COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Submit events by email to [khoskins@gadsdenmessenger.com](mailto:khoskins@gadsdenmessenger.com).

### December 6

Join the City of Gadsden for a Christmas tree lighting event at 344 South 1st Street at 6 p.m. Music from the Theatre of Gadsden Christmas Carols will begin at 5 p.m. and music from Gadsden Christmas Brass Band will begin at 5:15 p.m. The event is free to attend.

The 2024 Coosa Christmas Boat Parades will be held on Friday, Dec. 6 in Gadsden and Sunday, Dec. 8 in Rainbow City/Southside. Both parades start at 6 p.m. To participate, call Randy at 256-490-5959 or visit NeelyHenryLake.org.

### December 6 – 15

See “Miracle on 34th Street” hosted by Theatre of Gadsden at the Ritz Theatre. Show times are Friday, December 6 at 7 p.m., Saturday, December 7 at 7 p.m., Sunday, December 8 at 2 p.m., Friday, December 13 at 7 p.m., Saturday, December 14 at 7 p.m. and Sunday, December 15 at 2 p.m. Tickets prices vary between \$13-\$20. For more information, call 256-547-7469.

### December 6 – Jan. 4

Christmas at The Falls will run through Jan. 4. The exhibit will be closed from December 24 -25. Come see millions of Christmas lights! Tickets are on sale now. Call 256-549-4663 or visit NoccalulaFallsPark.com

Get ready for the 2nd Annual Christmas on the Coosa ice-skating experi-

ence. The ice rink returns on November 29 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. The real ice rink near Moragne Park will close for the season on Jan. 4. For more information, call Janet Tarrance at 256-549 4658 or Valerie Galbreath at 256-549-4643.

### December 6 – 30

Plaid Friday and Small Business Saturday are coming to downtown Gadsden November 29 – 30. Wear your plaid with pride and shop local. Visit downtown Gadsden for Plaid Friday and shop and dine with our small businesses. Avoid the rush of Black Friday and spend an enjoyable day with friends and family instead. Santa will be walking around too.

### December 7

The third annual Christmas in Keener is bigger than ever before. Make plans to join at the Vintage Christmas Market featuring 40 plus shopping vendors, food trucks, kids zone, classic cars, live music and so much more. The event will be held between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. at 2817 Little Wills Valley Road in Attalla.

The Etowah County Fairgrounds and American Legion Post 71 will sponsor a Day with Santa on Saturday, Dec. 7 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Etowah County Fairgrounds located at 201 Griffith Street in Attalla. There will be free food. Bring your camera and take pictures with Santa!

For more information, call 256-490-5432.

Santa is coming to Smoke-neck Farm in Southside. Visit with Santa from 12 – 3 p.m. Grab photos with Santa before he heads back to the North Pole. The event is free. Smoke-neck Farm & Garden is located at 2191 Hwy. 77 in Southside.

### December 10

Enjoy a free concert by Kings of Swing Orchestra from 6 – 9 p.m. at Mary G. Hardin Center for Cultural Arts located at 501 Broad Street in Gadsden.

### December 14

Join the City of Southside for the Southside Christmas Village from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event will take place at Southside City Hall. The event is free to attend. There will be food trucks and arts and crafts vendors. If you would like to be an arts and craft vendor, register at [cityofsouthside.recdesk.com](http://cityofsouthside.recdesk.com).

Join Imagination Place for the annual Snacks with Santa event from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. The free event will be held at 501 Broad Street in Gadsden. Children can visit with Santa while enjoying free snacks provided by Downtown Gadsden, Inc. Parents are welcome to take pictures. Visiting with Santa and the snacks are free thanks to Downtown Gadsden, Inc. All Hardin Center members and those purchasing regular admission may stay and enjoy Let it Snow and Imagination Place.

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# DEVOTIONALS

## What would our response be?



While reading in the Book of John this past week, the Lord took me on a little journey of which I am still processing, meditating and praying over. I would like to share a bit of that journey with you.

In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, John the Baptist recognizes Jesus and calls out to all those around him, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is the One about whom I told you, ‘He who comes after me is above me, because He was before me’” (John 1:29-30). To provide context, John the Baptist had many followers and several committed disciples who assisted him as he traveled and preached about the coming Messiah. As I continued reading, I was intrigued by how John the Baptist managed his disciples and how Yeshua/Jesus picked up where John left off. This reflection prompted me to consider my own heart and actions.

**How quick am I to follow Yeshua/Jesus?** John 1:35-37 says, “Again the next day, John was standing with two of his disciples and watched Yeshua walking by. He said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’ The two

disciples heard him say this, and they followed Yeshua.” These men had obviously heard about this “Messiah that was to come” for many years. Now that Jesus was passing right in front of them, Scripture tells us that they immediately followed Him. I had to ask myself these questions: am I as excited about following this same Messiah as the two disciples were? Am I as quick to obey Jesus and trust Him daily? How excited am I to follow the Messiah and to even share Him with others?

**What is my demeanor?** In verse 37, we read that when John the Baptist announced that Jesus was passing by, two of John’s disciples immediately left John and followed Jesus. It made me start thinking about Jesus and His demeanor. When we read about Jesus in the Gospels, we don’t see Him as being angry, unapproachable or always causing fights. Instead, we read that many people were drawn to Him; even little children wanted to come and sit on His lap. This raises a few questions for me: what is my demeanor? Am I approachable? Do I walk humbly and demonstrate gentleness in my actions and speech? How would others describe my demeanor?

**What am I looking for in Jesus?** John 1:38-39 says, “Yeshua turned around and saw them following. He said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said to Him, ‘Rabbi’ (which is translated Teacher), where are you staying?’ ‘Come and see,’ Yeshua tells them. So, they came and saw where He was staying, and they spent that day with Him.” As I follow Jesus, what am I looking

for? Do I follow Him for selfish motives, or do I follow Him out of “I have to” attitude versus a “I want to” attitude? Jesus gave a simple reply, which was to “come and see.” This is the same reply He gives to each of us today. Come and see for yourselves who I am, what I do and if I am who I say I am.

**Am I a skeptic or an “all-in” type when it comes to following Jesus?** In John 1: 43-51, Philip finds Nathanael and excitedly tells him that they have found the one Moses and all the prophets spoke of - Yeshua of Nazareth. Nathanael responds, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Soon after, Yeshua approaches and begins to speak with Nathanael, who is astonished by how much Jesus knows about him and starts to realize that He must truly be the Messiah his friends have mentioned. Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see even greater things if he chooses to believe in and follow Him. This raises a personal question: When it comes to following Yeshua, am I hesitant or do I quickly obey because I truly believe and trust Him wholeheartedly? When it comes to His Word, do I question or hesitate while wondering if it is really true, or do I accept His Word as it is written?

Lord, today we thank You for Your Word and how You have challenged us to look within at our own hearts. I ask You to purify our hearts and make us more and more like You. Thank You for Your grace and mercy towards us in this process.

*If you would like continued prayer, feel free to email me at [tonif77@gmail.com](mailto:tonif77@gmail.com). I would love to pray for you!*

### Bible Verse of the Week



“**Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.**”

- Philippians 4:8  
King James Version



### Verse for Kids

“**In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.**”

- Genesis 1-2  
King James Version

## Even amidst the wreckage, God is with us

I once was an angry young man, and with good reason.

My brothers and I exited the school bus one fateful afternoon while not realizing our lives had forever changed, a fact in which we were the last to know.

Our home was located at the end of a long and bumpy dirt road driveway out on a 70-acre farm. The school bus let us off at our neighbor’s house and we would walk home. My mom’s best friend was waiting for us at our neighbor’s mailbox.

“Boys, I need you to come inside with me, please,” she said.

My mom’s best friend lived all the way across town, so why was she here? I also noticed that she’d been crying.

We walked into our neighbor’s farmhouse to the shocking sight of my mother sitting rather oddly in a chair. Her head was swollen to twice its normal size, both eyes were black and swollen shut, whole plugs of hair were ripped from her head, her arm was in a splint, several broken fingers were in braces, busted lips were cracked and swollen and her neck was in a brace. Keep in mind that I’d never seen my mother injured before.

Needless to say, the earth stood still for me.

I assumed that my mom had been caught in some kind of stampede or injured in a car crash. Nothing else made sense to my sixth grade mind. Never in a million years did I expect to hear her say these words:

“Boys, your father hit me.”

My mind cracked. There is no way that my mother and friend (which is truly what my dad was to me) had become the enemy. To quote the apocalyptic language

of Joel 2:31, Matthew 24:29 and Revelation 6:12, “the stars fell from the sky, the sun grew dark and refused to give its light and the moon turned to blood.” I became “very angry and my countenance fell” like Cain in Genesis 4:5. A rage rushed in, mixed with fear, dystopia, a deep anxiety that everything good could be lost in an instant and pain that allowed me to hurt myself and others in my search for peace.

*Author’s note: before I continue and to honor both God and my dad, there has been a miraculous and full spiritual and relational restoration of my father. But that’s another story for another time.*

This particular story has a purpose. I “got saved” when I was eight, and since that day, I had taken my faith seriously and enjoyed church very much. But this horrible day had allowed evil a stronghold into my young heart. Cute little Bible stories no longer carried weight for me. I was angry and wounded, and needed a religion that could meet and beat the horrible side of life.

I could no longer smile and sing and say my prayers like a good little boy. Instead, I needed a visceral faith that could handle the times when I hurt like you-know-what.

I desperately needed the great story about Jesus cleansing the Temple, which rang in my ears and lifted my head back up to Him. I needed to know the Jesus that exploded with rage in John 2:13-16, screaming, threatening, menacing, and as I like to say, “slinging spit and throwing stuff.” I needed to see *this* Jesus in “His Father’s house,” driving out pretentious liars and thieves while He “cast down their idols.” I needed the God with a whip in His hand



and lightening in His eyes daring trained Temple guards with swords to challenge Him. Yes, I sought the “Lion of the Tribe of Judah” who was so fierce with holy rage and righteous indignation that those armed men cowered in fear. In effect, I needed to know there was a place for anger in a religion of peace.

I needed the One who looked kings dead in the eye and said, “No one takes my life from Me; I lay it down willingly.” I needed a hard Man and a holy Man, not a “nice” Man. I needed an “Angry Young Man” who was strong enough to save the world. And I needed to remember that the God who was beaten more severely than even my mother, who bore more pain than I ever could, still loved me amid the chaos. I needed to hear “peace, be still.”

Beloved, He is with us, even in the wreckage.

*Brian Cook is a Cropwell native and a graduate of Pell City High School and Gadsden State Community College. He is active in the Catechetical training of children and adults. His book “The Devotion to Christ” can be found on Amazon. He may be contacted at [thedtc@protonmail.com](mailto:thedtc@protonmail.com) or [thedevoitiontochrist@gmail.com](mailto:thedevoitiontochrist@gmail.com).*

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# SPORTS

## Roundups & Rundowns

### Boys basketball

Kylen Johnson scored 24 points to help Coosa Christian post a 79-54 victory over West End on Tuesday, Dec. 3 in Walnut Grove. The Conquerors (2-0) jumped out to a 28-6 first quarter lead and finished the fourth quarter with a 30-13 run. Jaxon Peek added 17 points for Coosa, while Jaylen Jones chipped in 14.

Four players scored in double figures in Westbrook Christian's 62-50 win over Gaston on Tuesday, Dec. 3. For the Warriors (3-1), Brady Carden had 13 points and eight rebounds; Gavin Slocum had 12 points and three rebounds; Titus Jones had 11 points, seven assists, four rebounds and three steals; Bo Kilgo had 10 points, four assists and three rebounds; and Case Burton had five points and six rebounds.

Grant Smith and Davis Honeycutt scored 25 and 24 points, respectively, in Glencoe's 70-54 victory over Ohatchee on Tuesday, Dec. 3. Wade Segrest added 14 points for the Yellow Jackets.

Hokes Bluff improved to 6-1 on the season with a 66-42 win over Saks on Tuesday, Dec. 3. Five players scored in double figures for the Eagles, led by Anthony Gooch and Ronan McFadden with 14 each. Bryce Whitaker added 11 points, followed by Logan Carr and Drew McCarver with 10 each. McCarver grabbed nine rebounds, followed by McFadden with seven and Whitaker and Anderson Morgan with four each. Morgan also distributed eight assists, while McCarver had five and McFadden four. Gooch had four deflections.

Mason Stephens' double-double of 19 points and 12 rebounds helped Southside post a 45-33 victory over Etowah on Monday, Dec. 2 in Atlanta. Drew Clark finished with 12 points and six rebounds for the Panthers (6-2), while Cayden Reason contributed 11 Points and nine boards.

Drew Whitaker scored a game-high 26 points to lead Hokes Bluff to a 63-29 win over Gaston on Monday, Dec. 2. Also for the Eagles, Anderson Morgan finished with 16 points along with six rebounds and three assists. Noah Johnson collected 12 points, five rebounds, four steals, three assists and three deflections. For the Bulldogs, Devon Green had 18 points, six rebounds and two blocks; Mica Merriman had 13 points, seven assists and six rebounds; and Kodie Bogle scored 10 points.

### Womens basketball

Gadsden State improved to 5-4 on the season with an 84-51 victory over Faulkner on Tuesday, Dec. 3 in Montgomery. For the Lady Cardinals, Ciniya Mullens had 16 points and four assists; Khaleyah Jones had 14 points, five steals and four rebounds; and Jaedyn Speights scored nine points.

## Southside runners top all-area cross country



## Lydia Kay, Evan Christopher named runners of the year

By Chris McCarthy  
Publisher

Lydia Kay accomplished quite a bit during her first year of competitive long distance running.

In nine cross country meets this past season, the Southside High seventh grader finished in the top 10 five times, including first at the Etowah County Schools 5K in October and runner-up the Vinemont Invitational. The Lady Panthers' 2024 Etowah County Schools championship was the program's sixth out of the last seven seasons.

Kay came in fourth out of 49 runners to help the Lady Panthers win first-ever sectional title and placed 33<sup>rd</sup> out of 254 competitors at the AHSAA state meet at Oakville. Her season PR of 20:06.84 was almost 25 seconds faster than the next closest local runner, teammate Marlee Tucker, making Kay the runner of the Year for the All-Messenger girls cross country team.

"Lydia is a very talented young athlete," said Southside cross country coach Kim Nails. "She has a lot of natural ability and is very competitive. Although she is young, she doesn't mind working on her own and made tremendous progress throughout the season. Before Lydia was in seventh grade, she would come and run while her brother was practicing, so we knew early on that she had the potential to become a very good distance runner. Our upperclassmen demonstrated a love for the sport and provided tremendous leadership for Lydia, and their character and work ethic were good examples for her to emulate. We're looking forward to see the results of her continual commitment, hard work and self-discipline."

*Editor's note: Selections to the All-Messenger cross country team were based on season PRs. Not all schools in The Messenger's coverage area had runners who qualified.*

By Chris McCarthy  
Publisher

Evan Christopher isn't used to running from behind.

Out of 10 meets this year, the Southside High senior finished in the top 10 eight times, including three first-place showings. The two races in which he failed to break into the top 10 were the Southern Showcase and Jesse Owens Classic. Christopher came 11<sup>th</sup> out of 271 runners at the latter competition and 20<sup>th</sup> out of 275 runners at the former race.

He won his third straight Etowah County Schools championship in October before finishing first at the Class 5A Section 3 Meet and placing sixth out of 250 runners at the Class 6A state meet. He currently holds the school 5K record with a time of 15:29 and is a three-time AHSAA All-State selection.

Christopher's production was rewarded with his third straight selection as Runner of the Year for the All-Messenger boys cross country team.

"Evan has been a tremendous runner for us for several years," said Southside cross country coach Kim Nails. "For many years, we have been blessed to have had some pretty strong cross country runners, but Evan has set the bar. His passion for the sport and his work ethic are contagious, and his hard work, commitment and determination have given him the opportunity to reach so many milestones during his high school career. Evan has truly been a leader, and to say we will miss him is an understatement. What he has brought to the team is hard to replace. We can't wait to see what he does on the next level with the opportunities he has been presented."

*Editor's note: Selections to the All-Messenger cross country team were based on season PRs. Not all schools in The Messenger's coverage area had runners who qualified.*

## 2024 All-Messenger cross country team

### Boys

**Runner of the Year:** Evan Christopher, Southside  
**Coach of the Year:** Kim Nails, Southside

#### First team

Evan Christopher, senior, Southside: 15:34.30  
Ethan Patterson, senior, Hokes Bluff: 16:55.94  
Tanner Griggs, junior, Southside: 17:10.10  
Dakota Ensminger, sophomore, Glencoe: 17:45.60  
Levi Kay, freshman, Southside: 17:59.03

#### Second team

Jackson Brown, senior, Southside: 18:13.90  
Luke Pilotte, junior, Westbrook: 18:26.36  
Coby Caswell, junior, Ashville: 18:29.78  
Braxton Jones, sophomore, Sardis: 18:37.71  
Aidan Pierce, junior, Sardis: 18:43.71

#### Boys third team

Adam Ghomin, junior, Gadsden City: 18:51.02  
Joseph Minkin, sophomore, Westbrook: 18:51.17  
Jonathan Russell, senior, Southside: 18:54.20  
Keaton Yingling, junior, Southside: 19:01.64  
Pranjal Sharma, senior, Southside: 19:20.00

#### Honorable Mention

Owen Beason, sophomore, Glencoe: 19:22.00  
Drew Gargone, freshman, Ashville: 19:26.36  
Freddy Hernandez-Perez, junior, Gadsden City: 19:32.74  
Justin Smith, sophomore, West End: 19:34.62  
Mason Borgersrode, eighth grade, Southside: 19:40.01

### Girls

**Runner of the Year:** Lydia Kay, Southside  
**Coach of the Year:** Kim Nails, Southside

#### First team

Lydia Kay, seventh grade, Southside: 20:06.84  
Marlee Tucker, freshman, Southside: 20:31.30  
Allie Cone, freshman, Ashville: 21:03.26  
Payton Ridley, senior, Southside: 21:07.52  
Taylor Dortch, senior, Southside: 21:16.08

#### Second team

Sarah Ponder, sophomore, Glencoe: 21:21.81  
Emma Godfrey, freshman, Hokes Bluff: 21:45.16  
Karlee Tarpley, junior, West End: 21:57.94  
Luci Valentine, eighth grade, Southside: 22:06.72  
Kennedi Nix, eighth grade, West End: 22:34.94

#### Third team

Mallory Tucker, junior, Southside: 22:50.54  
Adalyn Phillips, senior, Southside: 22:57.66  
Emma Franklin, eighth grade, West End: 23:08.27  
Riley Hulsey, freshman, Southside: 23:15.36  
Madelyn Chandler, sophomore, Southside: 23:16.97

#### Honorable mention

Jada Wright, junior, West End: 23:20.52  
Kenzli Nix, seventh grade, West End: 23:54.83  
Tensley Young, eighth grade, West End: 24:00.36  
Carolina Rainey, eighth grade, West End: 24:08.76  
Avery Whiteman, seventh grade, Ashville: 24:15.11



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# Coosa Christian wrestling sets priorities for first season

By Chris McCarthy  
Publisher

Coosa Christian wrestling coach Eric Rhoden is not too concerned about results on the scoreboard during the program’s first season.

Rather, he will measure progress on how hard his players compete and how well they represent the school over the next few months.

“God never wants anyone to be lazy, and I promise you that we’re not going to be lazy,” he said. “Wrestling is by far hardest to compete in than any other sport. It’s close-up combat with another man, and we’re going to wrestle hard and we’re going to wrestle tough. We might not be the best ones out there, but we’re going to give nothing less than 100 percent every time we go out there.

The Conqueror roster consists of just five players, nine short of what is required for a match - 8<sup>th</sup> grader Lucas Crane at 145 pounds, sophomore Halen Palmer at 157 pounds, sophomore Logan Burnette at 165 pounds and juniors Zayden Franklin and Chase Bynum at heavyweight. Jackson Dupree is the team manager. Due to lack of numbers, Coosa must forfeit several weight classes at each match this season.

“We have only one kid who has wrestled before, and that was in a youth league so it’s a building year, for sure,” said Roden, a 2024 graduate of Coosa Christian. “A first-year program is not supposed to win a whole lot, but we expect to beat whoever we can. We play up, just like our football team does. We’re going against some great competition in Southside, Weaver and [Walter] Wellborn, which will only make us better. We’re not going to go out and win every match, because the other teams will have 14 kids and we have just five. But if we win the matches we’re competing in and get more points, I’m going to call it a win for us.”

Roden promised that his wrestlers be in superior shape once the season gets rolling.

“Being in football condition and being in wrestling condition are two totally different things, and our kids are finding that out. Football is running springs and having five-second plays, while wrestling is going all-out for three minutes straight three times in a row. Tournaments are where are bread and butter will be at, because that’s where we’re going to get the most work in and get most of our wins.”

Roden who is the offensive line coach for the Coosa Christian football team, did not have to do much in the way of recruiting.

“They’re all football players,” he said. “I’m fortunate that they decided to come out and wrestles for me.”

Roden wrestled at Southside High for four years before transferring to Coosa prior to his junior year. He qualified for the AHSAA state tournament in the 195-pound weight class both his freshman and sophomore seasons.

Roden credits SHS coach Wynn Knight for teaching him the finer points of the sport.

“He’s a great coach and a great person,” said Roden. “He taught me everything I know about wrestling, and I ow a lot to him for the position that I’m in.”

The Conquerors will compete in Class 1A-4A North Section, which also includes Etowah, West End, Ashville, Alabama School of Cyber Technology &Engineering, Alexandria, Brooks, Central-Florence, Cherokee County, Curry, Deshler, Hamilton, J.B. Pennington, Lauderdale County, Madison County, New Hope, North Sand Mountain, Ohatchee, Piedmont, Pleasant Valley, Randolph, Shoals Christian, Southeastern, St. John Paul II Catholic, Susan Moore, Vinemont, Weaver, West Limestone, Westminster, White Plains and Wilson.

Roden shared that he and his wrestlers intend to give thanks to God before and after every match.

“It’s important to do that, because He is the one who does it all for us. We want to fight every day for His word/ That’s why the school’s name is Coosa Christian, not Coosa.”



Chris McCarthy/Messenger

Coosa Christian’s Halen Palmer (right) faces off against Southside’s Peyton Adams in the 157-pound weight class in high school wrestling on Tuesday, Dec. 3 at Southside.



Chris McCarthy/Messenger

Southside’s Julian Salazar (pictured standing) attempts a move against Coosa Christian’s Logan Burnette in the 165-pound weight class in high school wrestling on Tuesday, Dec. 3 at Southside.

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### Local Sports Schedule

**High School Basketball**  
**Friday, Dec. 6**  
Hokes Bluff at Glencoe  
Douglas at Sardis  
Jacksonville at Ashville  
Wesbrook at Oneonta  
Etowah at Piedmont  
West End at Susan Moore

**Saturday, Dec. 7**  
Hazel Green at Gadsden City

**Monday, Dec. 9**  
Southside at Glencoe  
Asbury at Sardis  
Huffman at Gadsden City

**Tuesday, Dec. 10**  
Etowah at Southside  
Hokes Bluff at Gaston  
Alexandria at Glencoe  
Cullman Chr. at Coosa Christian  
West End at Southeastern  
Westbrook at Oatchee  
Sardis at Crossville

**Gadsden City at Pell City**  
**Thursday, Dec. 12**  
Ashville at Hokes Bluff  
Pleasant Valley at Coosa Christian  
St. Clair County at Etowah

**Wrestling**  
**Saturday, Dec. 7**  
Gadsden City at Lincoln Tournament  
Southside at Hewitt-Trussville duals

**Tuesday, Dec. 10**  
Gadsden City at Cherokee County  
Southside at Gardendale  
West End at Ashville duals

**Thursday, Dec. 12**  
Pleasant Valley at Gadsden City  
Southside, Hartselle at Pell City  
West End at Susan Moore duals

**Bowling**  
*All home matches played at The Alley at the Gadsden Mall*  
**Friday, Dec. 6**  
West Point at Gadsden City

**Tuesday, Dec. 10**  
Southside at Oxford  
Gadsden City at Clay-Chalkville  
Coosa Chr., Etowah at Center Point

**Wednesday, Dec. 11**  
Lincoln at Etowah  
Clay-Chalkville at Gadsden City  
Southside at Hewitt-Trussville

**Thursday, Dec. 12**  
Coosa Chr., Center Point at Etowah

**College**  
**Womens Basketball**  
**Monday, Dec. 9**  
Gadsden State at Wallace-Selma

**Wednesday, Dec. 11**  
Chattanooga State at Gadsden State

**Mens Basketball**  
**Monday, Dec. 9**  
Gadsden State at Wallace-Selma

**Wednesday, Dec. 11**  
Enterprise State at Gadsden State



**In & Around SEC**

Cole Frederick

### Playoff preview

**Iron Bowl Recap**

Alabama kept its playoff hopes alive with a 28-14 home victory over Auburn in the 89<sup>th</sup> Iron Bowl. Despite losing the turnover battle 4-2, the Crimson Tide never trailed and outgained the Tigers by a 457 to 399 margin. Alabama rushed for 201 yards, including 104 yards and three touchdowns from quarterback Jalen Milroe. Germie Bernard caught seven passes for 111 yards for Alabama, while KeAndre Lambert-Smith had eight receptions for 116 yards for Auburn. Cam Coleman, who caught Auburn's lone touchdown from quarterback Payton Thorne, finished with seven catches for 78 yards as Auburn's season ended with a 5-7 record. Head coach Kalen DeBoer's first regular season ends with a 9-3 record, and Alabama is in decent position to receive the final at-large bid to the inaugural 12-team playoff. UA checked in at No. 11 in this week's rankings, and while they can't improve their position this weekend, they also can't hurt themselves.

**SEC Championship Game Preview and Prediction**  
**Last week: 8-2; season: 97-31**  
**Texas vs. Georgia (+2.5).** The Longhorns, who made the SEC title game in their inaugural season in the conference, get a rematch with the only team to beat them this year. Georgia dominated Texas, 31-15, in Austin in October, and the game was never really close. Steve Sarkisian's team had the benefit of a rel-

atively light schedule by SEC standards, but the Longhorns took care of business and locked up a playoff spot with a rivalry win at Texas A&M last week. Both Texas and Georgia are in the playoff field, and Saturday's winner receives a first-round bye. The loser will almost certainly host a first-round game, and since both teams are capable of winning a national title, there is a decent chance they will meet for a third time in the playoffs. *Prediction: Texas 27, Georgia 24.*

**College Football Playoff Preview**

The College Football Playoff picture is much clearer now, and the 12-team field will be finalized on Sunday, Dec. 8. The top four conference champions will receive a first-round bye in the playoffs. The next conference champion in the rankings is guaranteed a spot in the field but will likely play on the road in round one.

Texas and Georgia square off in the SEC title game, and the winner will earn a first-round bye. The loser is going to make the playoffs as an at-large, and they will likely host in the first round. Oregon and Penn State are meeting for the Big 10 championship, and the loser will also likely earn a home game round one.

The other three conference championship games are far less cut-and-dry. Clemson and Southern Methodist University meet for the Atlantic Coast Conference title game. If SMU wins, the Mustangs will be the No. 3 seed and Clemson misses the playoffs. If Clemson wins, the Tigers are guaranteed a spot but not a first-round bye. That will depend on their ranking compared to the champions of the Big 12 - who will receive an automatic bid - and likely the Mountain West Conference championship between Boise State and UNLV. The high-

est-ranked Group of 5 champion is guaranteed a playoff spot, but not a bye. However, if Boise State wins, the Broncos are currently ranked No. 10 and will likely be ahead of Clemson if they beat SMU, which would grant Boise State a first-round bye.

If SMU loses to Clemson, it's possible the 11-1 Mustangs drop out of the playoff field altogether. SMU is currently ranked No. 8, and the committee would evaluate the resumes of 11-2 SMU and 9-3 Alabama. One team would get in, while the other would not. Playoff committee director Warde Manuel said it's possible that SMU does not make it if they lose, leaving the door open for Alabama to be the final at-large team in the playoff field.

**Playoff Predictions**  
**First round byes**  
Oregon (13-0), Texas (12-1), Clemson (10-3), Arizona State (11-2)

**First Round**  
Notre Dame (11-1) vs. No. 12. UNLV (11-2)  
Ohio State (10-2) vs. No. 11. Alabama (9-3)  
Penn State (11-2) vs. 10. Indiana (11-1)  
Georgia (10-3) vs. 9. Tennessee (10-2)

**Quarterfinals**  
No. 8 Georgia over No. 1. Oregon  
No. 5. Notre Dame over No. 4. Arizona State  
No. 6. Ohio State over No. 3. Clemson  
No. 2. Texas over No. 7. Penn State

**Semifinals**  
No. 8. Georgia over No. 5. Notre Dame  
No. 6. Ohio State over No. 2. Texas

**Championship Game**  
No. 8. Georgia over No. 6. Ohio State



Submitted photo

## Lady Lions at 7-2 so far this season

By Chris McCarthy  
Publisher

Sardis improved to 7-2 with three victories and one loss over the past week.

On Friday, Nov. 22, Jacee Holcomb finished with 17 points and eight rebounds and Mya Glass and Vada Willmore each scored 11 points as the Lady Lions beat Geraldine, 61-38. Sardis led 18-14 after one period, 33-28 at halftime and 44-34 after three quarters.

On Monday, Nov. 25, Sardis built a 43-14 halftime lead on the way to a 73-26 win over Ashville. Lynlee Wright had 18 points and nine rebounds for the Lady Lions, while Mollie Brock contributed 10 points and nine assists. Delaney Lee added 10 points, followed by Willmore with nine and Jordyn Knight (pictured above) with eight.

Despite Knight's double-double of 19 points and 10 rebounds, Sardis lost to Moody, 74-69, on Nov. 26.

"We just turned the ball over way too much in the first half to give a chance for a road win against a very good team," said Sardis head coach Heath Cullom. "[Moody has] two guards that are as good as we will play against all year, and they gave us problems all night. Jordyn had a huge game and gave us a chance late with her shooting and defensive pressure. We outscored [Moody] 32-17 in the fourth quarter, but it wasn't enough to overcome a terrible first half."

Brock added 14 points for the Lady Lions, followed by Willmore with 13 and Wright and Shelby Abernathy with eight each.

Sardis rebounded with a 56-40 victory over Susan Moore on Wednesday, Dec. 27.

Willmore paced the Lady Lions with 11 points along with eight rebounds, while Wright added 10 points and seven boards. Emily Zavala chipped in eight points, followed by Holcomb and Knight with six each.

"We had some dead legs and just didn't shoot the ball well, but we scored 40 points in the paint, so all of my bigs played very well," said Cullom. "Knight, Glass, and Lee had huge defensive games for us and did a great job guarding Susan Moore's best players."



Chris McCarthy/Messenger

## ACCC adding women's flag football

The Alabama Community College Conference (ACCC) recently announced the addition of women's flag football to its athletics offerings.

"This is up there with one of the most exciting program additions we've had over the past decade," said ACCC Commissioner Dean Myrick. "It's a good day when we create more opportunities for our female student-athletes. Flag football has exploded across the state at the high school level, and we want to capitalize on that. It's a discussion we've had for a few years, and I'm proud it's come to fruition."

Women's flag football is among the newest athletics offerings sanctioned by the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). The ACCC will offer the sport to female student-athletes, beginning with the 2025-2026 academic year.

NFL FLAG Executive Director

Izell Reese, who has served as National Football League referee for the past seven years, commended the ACCC for creating an extra avenue for female athletes to potentially advance in the sport.

"Women's flag football is the fastest growing sport in the United States and arguably ever. It is skyrocketing. At one time, females did not have a path to continue to play flag football beyond high school. It's phenomenal to now hear of the opportunities that are going to come at the community college level. I can tell you the four-year colleges are thrilled about the opportunity you'll provide."

Northwest Shoals President Dr. Jeff Goodwin was instrumental in implementing girls flag football in 2021 at Oxford High School and is now excited about the opportunity for his college and the conference.

"It's certainly something we have

been looking forward to at the community college level, and we're committed to it," he said. "Alabama Community College System Chancellor Jimmy Baker and the Board of Trustees do their best to support and provide the best opportunities for our students, including with extracurricular activities."

RC&D, an ACCS partner, is donating \$50,000 to assist with the flag football launch.

"This initiative promotes inclusion, empowers women in sports and creates new opportunities for community college student-athletes," said RC&D Executive Director Katie Conner. "We are so proud we can be a part of something new and exciting for our state."

Once competition begins, the Alabama Community College Conference will feature the largest flag football conference in the NJCAA.

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