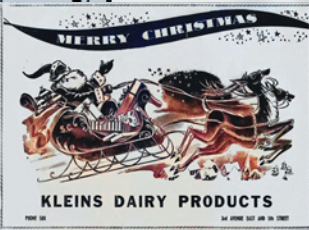




# Advertiser Index



*A Merry Christmas*  
from all of us at the  
**Cullman and Ritz Theatres**  
*The Ritz Theatre*  
Saturday - Sunday & Monday -

in any race the  
**last lap's the toughest**

this is especially true when your  
husband has a chance for the  
big job and the last lap belongs  
to the man who can promote him.

Would you sit on the boss's lap if you were



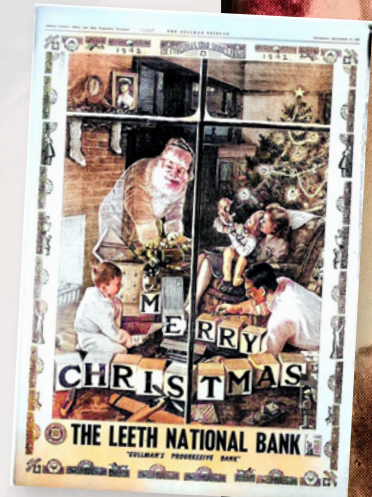
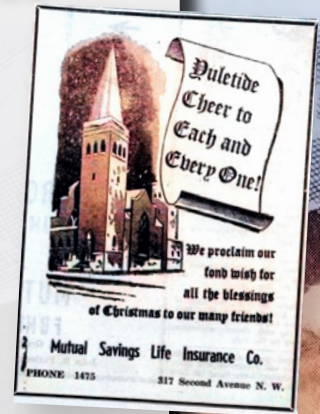
Would you sit on the boss's lap if your man was



Would you sit on the boss's lap if it belonged to



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founded upon the Golden Rule.

Bless Our Land...

the mountains and lakes and rivers

world grown cold with greed and selfish-  
ness the spectacle of great strength made  
greater by adversity.

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# Community Matters

from The Cullman Tribune Nov. 2024 - Jan. 2025 | Vol. 5 No. 1

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*Christmas In*  
**CULLMAN**

CULLMAN AREA  
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**CHRISTMAS**  
*AT THE GROTTO*  
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# Festivals and craft shows to scratch that holiday itch

**Cheyenne Sharp**  
Contributor

Festivals and craft shows have a way of bringing out the holiday spirit – from finding the perfect handmade item to finish off a Christmas list or taking in the sights and lights of a festival scene, Cullman is the place to be. Here are a few happening this year.

## The Christmas Market at Cornerstone Revival Center

- Saturday, Nov. 16
- 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
- Cornerstone Revival Center
- 3151 Alabama Highway 69 N

Gifts and handmade artisanal wares will be in no shortage at this annual craft show. The event will feature more than 40 vendors with a wide variety of items. Door prizes, ticket raffles and gift card drawings will happen throughout the event.

## Festus's Bluegrass in the Ridge Festival

- Saturday, Nov. 16
- Doors open at noon
- Cullman County Agricultural Trade Center
- 17645 U.S. Highway 31 N

This event will feature performances by Ashton and Gavin

Johnson, Joe Hott and Short Mountain Boys, Remedy Tree, Cotton Pickin Kids, Billy Wise and Mountain Time and the Tri State Ramblers. Tickets will set attendees back \$10 at the door (\$5 for service members with a military ID), and children 5 and younger get in free. This annual indoor event will also welcome amateurs and jammers to the stage from 10 a.m.-noon. Food trucks will be on-site, and no pets or alcohol will be admitted inside the center. RVs can park in the gravel lot free of charge; however, there are sites with electric hookup available for \$35 a day. To reserve a site or for more information, contact Festus Loyd at 256-339-9266 or visit [Festusbluegrassintheridge.com](http://Festusbluegrassintheridge.com)

## Cullman Christkindlmarkt

- Nov. 21-Dec. 23
- Times vary
- Depot Park
- 309 First Ave. NE

See standalone story on Page 31.

## Vinemont Band Booster Winter Craft Show

- Friday, Nov. 22, 9 a.m.-7 p.m.
- Saturday, Nov. 23, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
- Cullman Church of »



TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO


**Cullman Christkindlmarkt is a great way to spend the day getting into the holiday spirit.**

**Small Business Start Ups • Including Corporations & Partnerships • LLC • Farms & Non-Profits**  
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**Martha Drake**  
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In the South Cullman Shopping Center, between Foundry and Christian Bookstore



Christ

- 4345 Alabama Highway 157

This show is a gathering of nearly 100 vendors year after year, making it one of the area's largest shows. Raffle drawings

and door prizes, along with concessions will be offered throughout the two-day affair, with proceeds supporting the Vinemont High School Band.

**Jones Chapel Merry Market**

- Saturday, Dec. 7
- Doors open at 9 a.m.
- Old Jones Chapel School
- 192 County Road 940

The Jones Chapel Merry Market is a fresh new collective

of Christmas goods and gifts, conveniently in one space; curated by booth owners and vendors, the festive handicrafts and baked goods are sure to please any hard to buy for on your list.



**Thank you, Cullman, for the best 80 years of our lives.**



In 1943, when the Paul R. Knight Insurance Company opened its doors in downtown Cullman, there was no way of knowing what the future would bring. Paul Knight was a 30-something father of three, registered for the World War II draft, with no idea that his new venture would not only succeed but would ultimately pass down through three generations of his family. Then his son-in-law Elliot Free joined the business in 1970, the agency was re-named Knight-Free, and the rest is history.

But it's a history that wouldn't have happened without you, Cullman. We never forget that. For 80 years, you've trusted us to insure your homes, your cars, your businesses, your lives. You've become our friends, our neighbors, and our reason to turn up at the office every day. You're also the reason that, after all these years, Elliot's son Wescoat Free is still running the independent insurance agency that bears his family name. And, for that, we can't thank you enough.



Your agents. Your neighbors. Your friends. For three generations.

# Cullman's holly jolly social scene

**Cheyenne Sharp**  
Contributor

The holiday months have arrived and with them a bustling social calendar.

## 21st Annual Winter Wonderland Christmas Light Display

- Through Dec. 29
- 5-9 p.m.
- Sportsman Lake Park, 1544 Sportsman Lake Road NW

The event will run Nov. 16 through Dec. 29. Admission is a cash donation of \$10 cash per vehicle.

In addition to over one million lights, there will also be a Christmas train, horse and carriage rides, snow machine, photo booth, hot chocolate and even a few visits from Santa himself.

### Dates of operation include:

- Nov. 20-24, 29-30
- Dec. 1, 4-8, 11-15, 18-22
- Drive-through only Dec. 26-29

## Christmas Pyramid Lighting

- Thursday, Nov. 21
- 6-7 p.m.
- Depot Park
- 309 First Ave. NE

Cullman Christkindlmarkt comes to life with the lighting of Christmas Pyramid. The grand opening of the Christkindlmarkt is a celebration of the Christmas season, led by the Cullman Community Band and joined by family and friends from Cullman and beyond. For more, visit [www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com](http://www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com).

## Cullman Christkindlmarkt

- Nov. 21- Dec. 23
- Through Dec. 16: Thursdays-Saturdays, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sundays, noon-8 p.m. (closed Thanksgiving Day)
- Dec. 16-23: Every day, same times
- Depot Park
- 309 First Ave. NE

In the heart of Cullman, Alabama, a cherished holiday tradition finds new life in the form of the Cullman Christkindlmarkt. This enchanting event draws its inspiration from Germany's historic Christmas markets, infusing them with the unique spirit of southern charm. Much like the early markets that fostered both trade and festive celebrations, the Cullman Christkindlmarkt seamlessly marries tradition with community spirit, creating a one-of-a-kind experience for locals and visitors alike. [www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com](http://www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com)

## Christkindlmarkt Parade and Christmas Tree Lighting

- Friday, Nov. 22
- 6:30-9 p.m.
- Warehouse District and Depot Park

One of Cullman's favorite traditions, the Christkindlmarkt Parade is filled with local organizations, businesses, bands and more! Help us welcome in the Christmas Season with seven-block parade extravaganza. Immediately following the Christkindlmarkt Parade is the South's largest tree lighting show, featuring

a mesmerizing light show and fireworks. Join us for this free event with James Spann, Santa Claus, The Grinch, Buddy the Elf and special musical guest as we light the Christkindlmarkt Christmas Tree. For more, visit [www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com](http://www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com).

## "The Nutcracker" Presented by Ballet South

- Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 23-24
- Betty Leeth Haynes Theatre at Wallace State
- 801 Main St. SW, Hanceville

Get into the holiday spirit with "The Nutcracker." Shows are Saturday at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$30 and can be purchased at <https://tinyurl.com/NutcrackerBalletSouth2024>.

## 6th Annual Christmas at the Grotto

- Begins Nov. 29
- 5-9 p.m.
- Ave Maria Grotto
- 1600 St. Bernard Dr. SE

Christmas lights return to the Grotto! Come and experience the beauty of Br. Joseph's work at night surrounded by lights and music! We have expanded this unique holiday experience to include a Christmas Tunnel at entry and also Santa's Workshop! We've also have added more dates!

The weekend of Dec. 13-14 will feature even more to see and do, including musical performances, food trucks, kids' rides and horse-drawn wagon rides around St. Bernard's campus. Plus, Santa Claus will be here! Refreshments will be available every night.

## Dates

- Nov. 29-30, Dec. 1
- Dec. 5-7
- Dec. 12
- Dec. 13-14 (food trucks, kids' rides, wagon rides, Santa Claus)
- Dec. 19-23
- Dec. 26-28

## Admission

- Adults - \$10
- Seniors - \$8
- Military/Veterans/First responders - \$7
- Teens (13-17) - \$8
- Children (5-12) - \$7
- Children 4 and younger - free
- Wagon rides on Dec. 13-14 - \$5
- Kids' rides on Dec. 13,-14 - \$3

## 4th Annual Berlin Volunteer Fire Department Pancakes with Santa

- Saturday, Dec. 7
- 7-10 a.m.
- Berlin Community Center
- 3309 U.S. Highway 278

Breakfast plates and meetings with Santa are for donation only; however, the department encourages the whole community to fellowship and enjoy this fun event, regardless of ability to contribute. The breakfast will also feature a drive-through and all proceeds will benefit the department's Christmas program, serving local children in their service area.

## Jones Chapel Merry Market Vendor and Craft Show

- Saturday, Dec. 7
- 9 a.m.
- Old Jones Chapel »

School

- 192 County Road 940

The Merry Market is a collective of Christmas goods and gifts, conveniently located in one space.

**Cullman Ballet Theatre School Presents "The Nutcracker"**

- Saturday, Dec. 7 at 6 p.m.
- Sunday, Dec. 8 at 2:30 p.m.
- Hartselle High School
- 1000 Bethel Road

Cullman Ballet Theatre School will present its annual production of "The Nutcracker" at Hartselle High School. Get tickets online at [www.cullmanballettheatre.com](http://www.cullmanballettheatre.com).



**The Cullman Community Band plays at the lighting of the Christmas Pyramid in 2023.**

TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

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# Practice safety awareness this holiday season

**Lauren Estes**

lauren@cullmantribune.com

**T**he Cullman County Sheriff's Office has some seasonal safety tips for the community to help with safer driving, shopping and overall home preparedness this holiday season.

## While driving and/or shopping:

- Keep doors and windows locked at all times, whether you are inside or out of your vehicle. Don't make it easy for the bad guys!
- Pay more attention to your surroundings than your phone.
- Remember where you park! Park in well-lit areas at night.
- Pay attention who you are parking beside; avoid vans, camper shells or vehicles with dark tinted windows.
- Park as close as possible to the building.
- Never leave your vehicle running while unoccupied (or with children inside)!
- Do not leave valuables in plain sight.
- Have your keys readily available as you approach your car.
- Be especially aware of your surroundings as you are approaching your vehicle.
- Do not approach your vehicle if there are suspicious people loitering around the area.
- Ask security or store personnel to escort you to the vehicle if you are apprehensive. At home:
- Keep your doors and windows locked at all times!
- If you are leaving for an extended period of time, have neighbors or family members check on your residence and pick up your mail.
- Leave a radio or TV on

to give the appearance that someone is home.

- Large displays of holiday gifts should not be visible through the windows and doors of your home.

## If someone is at the door:

- Be aware that criminals sometimes pose as couriers delivering packages or gifts.
- You are not required to open your door. Never open the door if you are uncertain.
- Do not hesitate to call the sheriff's office/police department if an issue arises.
- Be skeptical of door-to-door solicitors. Criminals will take advantage of people's generosity during the holiday season.

## Here are a few tips that will

## help with Christmas trees:

- Make sure fresh trees have green needles that do not fall off when touched. Before you put it in the stand, make sure there are 2 inches cut off the bottom. A lot of local sellers will do it for you.
- Keep your trees 3 feet away from any power sources. Radiators, HVAC systems, candles, high-voltage lights don't need to be within reach of your tree. Three feet of separation is a good rule of thumb. Also, make sure your trees aren't blocking the exit of the house.
- When using lights, ensure they're labeled and show they were tested by a third party, such as Underwriter's Laboratory (UL), and meet

safety requirements.

- Make sure to use indoor lights inside the house and outdoor lights outside the house. When purchasing lights, read the label for the location in which the lights are to be used. Many are marked as indoor/outdoor use and have been tested as such. Please don't use real candles as decorations and make sure to turn off all lights before going to bed.
- It's not common for Christmas trees to catch on fire — but they will light up a house in a heartbeat. With pre-wired trees, the plastic covering over the wires can break down causing the wires to short out. Make sure there are no broken or exposed wires before plugging into an outlet.

# Shop Local @

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**MAY YOUR HOLIDAY**  
**be blessed with the love and**  
**warmth of family and friends!**



*Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year*  
*From: SENATOR GARLAN GUDGER, DISTRICT 4*

**Edward Jones**<sup>®</sup>

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# WE'RE INVESTED IN CULLMAN'S BRIGHT FUTURE

*Cullman County ranked # 1 in the state in 2023 by  
Alabama Commerce Department for number of expanding industries.*

- **#2 Micropolitan in U.S. according to Site Selection Magazine**
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*Cullman Economic Development Agency  
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256.739.1891  
CullmanEDA.org*

EST.  1873

CULLMAN

Economic Development Agency



## Duchess Donuts and Cullman Christkindlmarkt

**Cheyenne Sharp**  
Contributor

### Duchess Donuts

Begin your morning in Cullman with a stop at one of its most beloved stops – Duchess Bakery. The iconic blue and white striped bag are often associated with nostalgic memories for most longtime residents.

Under new ownership since it's presumed-to-be-permanent closure in 2020, Duchess is now owned and operated by Stephanie and Jason Neal and Roger Rich, who have kept the recipe and nostalgia exactly the same.

With an array of morning treats like Bismarcks, donut holes and cinnamon twists, along with a nice offering of cookies, cakes and cupcakes, the shop has kept up with the demands of the community, keeping its beloved hot glazed donuts at the forefront of the storefront.

Duchess Bakery is located at 222 First Ave. SE.

**Cullman Christkindlmarkt**  
Cullman's downtown and Warehouse District transform



CULLMAN TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

**Customers line up in 2020 at the reopening of Duchess Bakery.**

into a Hallmark movie during the holiday months, with hanging lights and poles festooned with garland and wreaths.

Christkindlmarkt in Depot Park is a one-stop shop for all things Christmas. The annual expo of holiday cheer kicks off Nov. 21 and runs each Thursday through Sunday until Dec. 16 (closed Thanksgiving day), then seven

days a week through Dec. 23, allowing ample time to choose the perfect gifts or for loved ones.

More than 40 vendors will gather in Cullman's Depot Park to share the German and Christmas spirit, bringing joy, cheer and holiday laughter. The market will feature a carousel, ice skating and so many more fun activities for the whole family, including

the Kinderplatz with activities like letters to Santa, toy making with Santa, painting with Emily Bussman, cookie decorating and making snow globes, bracelets and toy trains with Mrs. Claus, and a chance to make ornaments with The Grinch. Find a full schedule of events at [www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com](http://www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com).

Depot Park is located at 309 First Ave. NE.

## Winter Wonderland, Christmas Market, Lost Creek Turkey Trot

### Katie Spicer

katie@cullmantoday.com

**H**ere are some of the best ways to make the most of the holiday season in Cullman!

#### Sportsman Lake Park Winter Wonderland Christmas Light Display

This annual event runs certain days through Dec. 29. See over a million lights and new displays! Returning this year are Christmas train rides, horse and carriage rides,

a snow machine, a photo booth, hot chocolate and much more!

Admission to the event is \$10 cash per vehicle. Event hours are 5-9 p.m. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/SLPWinterWonderland2024> for more info.

#### The Christmas Market at Cornerstone Revival Center

Shop til you drop at the Christmas Market at Cornerstone Revival Center! Held on Saturday, Nov. 16, 2024, from 10 a.m.-4 p.m., the event will be complete with specialty gift vendors, sweet treats and food trucks

galore!

The event will be hosted at 3151 Alabama Highway 69 N in Cullman.

Visit <https://tinyurl.com/CRCMarket24> for more information.

#### Lost Creek Turkey Trot

The Lost Creek Turkey Trot will be held on Thursday, Nov. 28, on the beautiful campus of St. Bernard Prep School.

Both the 5K and 1-mile courses begin close to the gate. They flow through finely manicured trails taking the race along a serene and enchanting journey through nature's embrace. This trail

system is private property and therefore it is very common to see deer, turkey, all sorts of birds and other wildlife.

Race registration opens at 6:30 a.m. the day of the event. The 1-mile race will begin at 8, and the 5K at 8:20. The cost to enter the 1-mile event is \$20. The cost to enter the 5K race is \$35. Medals will be awarded to the top three finishers for both males and females in each age division.

For more event information visit <https://runsignup.com/Race/AL/Cullman/LostCreekTurkeyTrot5K1MILE>

## Nomadic Threads

### Lauren Estes

lauren@cullmantribune.com

**L**ocal store owners and Cullman cheering squad for all things unique, fun and school specific opened their doors in the Warehouse District in 2022. Nomadic Threads is a custom apparel store — but truly offers the community so much more.

Owners Zac Yow (chief operating officer) and his wife Audra Yow (chief executive officer) said although their specialty is custom T-shirts, you never know what you're going to find in their little shop.

"We have some unique items you can't find anywhere else," Audra Yow said. "We have handmade earrings from another local maker, sometimes you'll find hand-burned hats, handmade pens,

and the list goes on and on. We love nothing more than seeing your smiling faces come through our door. We have made life-long friends from meeting people at our shop. Come by and see us for a custom tee, design or specialty item."

Yow shared that some of their greatest selling items are the hand-drawn designs of Cullman, especially the skyline design, as well as unique local school mascots and branded apparel for local businesses on T-shirts, sweatshirts and long sleeves.

"Many of our designs and ideas for items come from the community itself," she said. "The landmarks, the things that make Cullman a unique town, and the people — that's where the majority of our ideas come from. We love to give people that live here or are visiting a little piece of our town, so they

can collect the memories."

If you're looking to order a shirt or other items — the process is pretty simple!

"There are multiple ways to order with us," Yow said. "You can come to the shop and look through our designs on the kiosk, pick a blank tee, and have it printed. You can also follow our Facebook or Instagram and look through our photos and send us a message to order."

Nomadic Threads' website is [www.nomadicthreadscullman.com](http://www.nomadicthreadscullman.com) and its phone number is 256-962-1789.

"Some of our favorite memories we've had being a small business in Cullman is having the festivals so close," Yow said.

"We have met so many amazing people and reconnected with people from our childhood just because of the festivals. Also seeing a shirt we made, out and about in the



NOMADIC THREADS

**Nomadic Threads can create unique items like this sweatshirt featuring Cullman's weihnachtspyramide (Christmas pyramid)**

community years later makes us so happy and brings back so many memories."

Nomadic Threads is located in the Warehouse District in downtown Cullman at 106 First Ave. NE. Store hours are Tuesday-Friday 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. The store is closed Sundays and Mondays.

# Holiday hosting on a budget

**Katie Spicer**

katie@cullmantoday.com

The holidays are a time for gathering with loved ones; however, hosting can add unwanted stress to the holiday season. Whether you are cooking for family or entertaining an assortment of guests, you can alleviate the stress with some creativity and strategic planning!

### Set your budget

Start by determining how much you can comfortably spend on the event. List out all the essentials, such as food, drinks, decorations and entertainment. Once you have a clear understanding of your budget, prioritize items that are most important to the atmosphere of your gathering, like food or music. Also, you can look for coupons and discount codes online on by searching sites like Groupon, Flipp and Rakuten.

### Decorations

You don't need to buy expensive holiday decorations to set a festive mood. Opt for DIY décor to add a personal touch.

- Natural elements: Use pinecones, evergreen branches and holly from your yard or local park to create beautiful centerpieces or mantel decorations.
- Repurpose old decorations: Get creative by upcycling last year's decorations or giving them a new look with spray paint or glitter.
- Thrift or coupon: Many local thrift stores are home to vintage holiday décor waiting to be rehomed. Furthermore, craft stores like Hobby Lobby offer a weekly ad with discounts available.

### Food

Food often takes up the biggest part of the budget, but there are ways to provide a delicious spread without overspending.

- Keep it simple: Serve a few signature dishes instead of a large variety. Classic, hearty meals like casseroles or slow-cooked meats can feed many guests without requiring gourmet ingredients. Grocery stores like Publix often have meat on sale around the holidays. Check their weekly ads online or in store for updated sale dates.
- Potluck-style: Don't be afraid to ask guests to contribute! You can create a theme (like international dishes or family recipes) and have everyone bring one dish, reducing your food costs while involving your guests in the event.
- Purchase family meal deals: Skip cooking all together by picking up a pre-made family-sized meal from your favorite restaurants. Restaurants such as Cracker Barrel, Johnny's Bar-B-Q and Kentucky Fried Chicken offer affordable fixings to feed the whole family!
- Entertainment: Keep your guests engaged by providing affordable activities and entertainment!
- Create a playlist: Curate a holiday playlist that suits the vibe of your gathering. You can use streaming platforms like YouTube, Spotify and Apple Music to find free, ready-made playlists or personalize one based on your guests' preferences.
- Holiday games: Engage guests with simple, fun holiday games like charades, Pictionary

or holiday trivia. Look up charades and Pictionary topics or trivia questions online. These activities require little to no cost and are a great way to break the ice.

- Cookie decorating station: Provide basic sugar cookies, icing and sprinkles for guests to decorate their own holiday treats. Many stores such as Walmart, Publix, Hobby Lobby and even Tractor Supply offer pre-made cookie/gingerbread kits as well!
- Photo booth: Set up a DIY

photo booth with props (like Santa hats, reindeer antlers or holiday-themed backgrounds). Guests can take fun pictures without the need for a professional photographer.

### Gifts

If your holiday party involves gift-giving, consider low-cost gift exchange ideas.

- Secret Santa or White Elephant: Set a small budget limit, such as \$10 or \$15, for each gift. These games bring an element of fun without pressuring guests to »



**Lauren Estes Fitness**  
NOVEMBER GROUP FITNESS CLASS SCHEDULE

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<b>MONDAY</b> DATES: 4, 11, 18, 25	HIIT 2 FIT- 6:30PM - \$8   THE OG HIIT STYLE CLASS- CARDIO MOVEMENTS- HIGH REPS- LOTS OF FUN	<b>WEDNESDAY</b> DATES: 6, 13, 20, 27	RIDE AND SHINE- 5AM (SPIN CLASS) - \$12   INDOOR CYCLING TO MUSIC- PARTY ON A BIKE
<b>TUESDAY</b> DATES: 5, 12, 19, 26	BOOTY BY LAUREN (BBL)- \$8   5:30PM BANDED GLUTE AND CORE TRAINING CLASS	<b>THURSDAY</b> DATES: 7, 14, 21, (28TH-AM*)	TABATA TURN-UP- 6:30PM- \$8  CIRCUIT STYLE HIIT CLASS FOR TIME (20/10)

**Back-to-Back Class Challenge- Thurs., Nov. 28 at 687am - \$16/both or \$12-Spin; \$8-BBL, respectively.**

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spend a lot. Stores like Five Below, T.J. Maxx and Ross often have affordable gift options. Stores like Belk typically offer special holiday discounts both in store and on the app during the holiday season.

- DIY gifts: Homemade gifts, like baked goods or DIY

ornaments, are thoughtful and personal without being expensive.

**Add a special touch**

Make your holiday party stand out by adding a simple special touch.

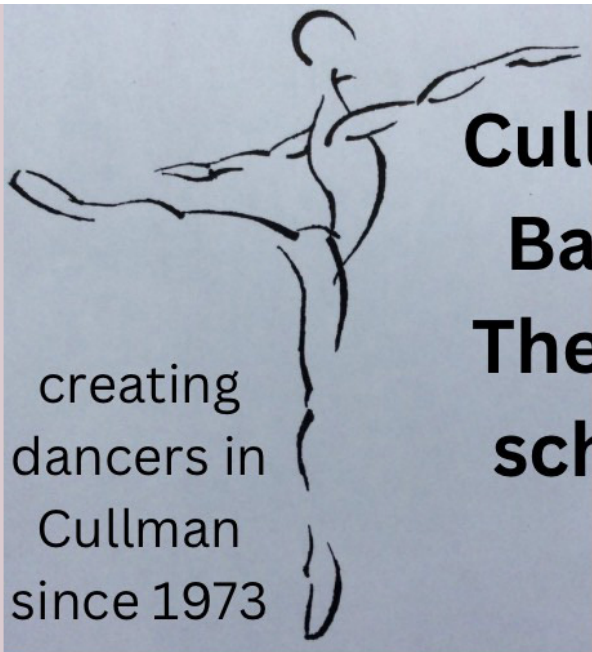
- Create digital invitations

using online platforms such as Evite or Canva. Not only is this eco-friendly, but it also allows for easy RSVP tracking and event updates.

- Small, thoughtful details like handwritten place cards or a thank-you note for each guest can leave a lasting impression,

showing you care without costing much.

By using these budget-friendly strategies, you can host a holiday party that feels special and memorable without the stress. The key is to focus on creativity, community and the simple joys of the season.



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# Healthy holiday recipes

## Lauren Estes

lauren@cullmantribune.com

**H**olly, jolly, healthy and hearty is the way to go with meal options this holiday season.

Looking for a change-up for your normal Thanksgiving and Christmas dishes? Try something a little off-the-cuff with healthy, clean and fresh alternatives that are sure to impress the relatives and be a little easier on the macronutrients and calories!

### BACON, CHEDDAR & SPINACH STRATA

Source: [www.eatingwell.com/recipes/recipes/heart-healthy-maple-spiced-pecans](http://www.eatingwell.com/recipes/recipes/heart-healthy-maple-spiced-pecans)

#### To make ahead:

- Prepare through step 4 and refrigerate for up to 12 hours.

#### Nutrition:

- Serving size: About 1 cup
- Calories 249, Fat 13g, Saturated Fat 7g, Cholesterol 146mg, Carbohydrates 19g, Total Sugars 5g, Added Sugars 0g, Protein 13g, Fiber 3g, Sodium 455mg, Potassium 282mg.

#### Ingredients:

- 3 slices center-cut bacon, chopped (about 1/3 cup)
- 1 1/2 cups chopped yellow onion
- 5 oz. frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
- 8 oz. crusty whole-wheat sourdough bread, cubed (1-inch; about 4 cups)
- 3/4 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese, divided
- 1 1/2 cups half-and-half
- 5 large eggs
- 2 tbsp. Dijon mustard
- 1/2 tsp. ground pepper
- 1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg
- 1/8 tsp. salt

#### Directions:

1. Coat a 2-quart baking dish with cooking spray. Cook

bacon in a large skillet over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until crisp, about 6 minutes. Transfer to a paper-towel-lined plate, leaving the drippings in the pan

2. Add onion to the drippings in the pan; cook over medium-high heat, stirring often, until softened and translucent, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in spinach.

3. Layer half the bread cubes in the prepared baking dish. Top with half of the spinach mixture and 1/4 cup cheese. Repeat the layering with the remaining bread, spinach mixture and 1/2 cup cheese.

4. Whisk half-and-half, eggs, mustard, pepper, nutmeg and salt together in a large bowl. Pour the egg mixture over the bread mixture; top with the reserved bacon. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 12 hours.

5. Remove the strata from the refrigerator. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Bake the strata, uncovered, until puffed and golden brown all over, 40 to 45 minutes. Let stand for 10 minutes before serving.

### WINTER FRUIT SALAD

Source: [www.foodnetwork.com/holidays-and-parties/packages/holidays/holiday-central-how-tos/holidays-made-healthy-smart-indulgences](http://www.foodnetwork.com/holidays-and-parties/packages/holidays/holiday-central-how-tos/holidays-made-healthy-smart-indulgences)

#### Nutrition:

- Per serving - 301 calories/ 2 grams of fat/ 76 grams of carbs/ 11.5 grams of fiber

#### Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1-inch piece ginger, peeled and thinly sliced
- one vanilla bean, split lengthwise and seeds scraped out
- 1 lemon
- 5 large navel or blood oranges

- 2 mangoes, peeled and diced
- 2 firm bananas, peeled and diced
- 5 kiwis, peeled and diced
- 12 kumquats, very thinly sliced crosswise, seeds removed
- 1 cup pomegranate seeds (from 1 pomegranate)

#### Directions:

1. Combine the sugar, 2 cups water, the ginger and vanilla seeds and pod in a saucepan.

2. Use a vegetable peeler to remove wide strips of zest from the lemon and 1 orange, add to the saucepan and bring to a boil over medium-high heat.

3. Reduce the heat and simmer for five minutes.

4. Refrigerate until cold.

### MAPLE-SPICED PECANS

Source: <https://recipes.heart.org/en/recipes/heart-healthy-maple-spiced-pecans>

#### Nutrition:

- Per serving - 214 calories, 3 grams of protein, 3 grams of fiber

#### Ingredients:

- 1 egg white
- 2 tbsp. pure maple syrup
- 2 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- 1/2 tsp. cayenne
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/2 pound pecan halves
- Cooking spray (optional)

#### Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F.

2. In a large glass or metal bowl, whisk the egg white until frothy.

3. Whisk in the maple syrup.

4. Whisk in the cinnamon, ginger, cayenne and salt.

5. Using a spatula, gently fold



**Bacon, Cheddar & Spinach Strata**

the pecans into the egg whites, coating them evenly.

6. To prevent the nuts from sticking, line a baking sheet with a silicone baking mat, or lightly spray the baking sheet with cooking spray. Spread the pecans onto the baking sheet in a single layer, separating any nuts that stick together.

7. Bake for 8 minutes.

8. Remove the baking sheet from the oven. Using a spatula or spoon, break up any clumps. Bake for 7 minutes.

9. Remove the baking sheet from the oven. Stir the nuts so they do not stick together. Cool the nuts completely before storing them in an air-tight container.

### ONE-POT WHITE BEAN, SPINACH & SUN-DRIED TOMATO ORZO WITH LEMON & FETA

Source: [www.eatingwell.com/one-pot-white-bean-spinach-sun-dried-tomato-orzo-with-lemon-feta-8415910](http://www.eatingwell.com/one-pot-white-bean-spinach-sun-dried-tomato-orzo-with-lemon-feta-8415910)

#### Nutrition:

- Serving size 1 cup
- Calories 496, Fat 23g, Saturated Fat 1g, Cholesterol 4mg, Carbohydrates 60g, Total Sugars 14g, Added Sugars 0g,



Protein 17g, Fiber 11g, Sodium 480mg, Potassium 895mg

**Ingredients:**

- 1 1/2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup chopped red onion
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup whole-wheat orzo
- 1 cup chopped sun-dried tomatoes
- 2 3/4 cups vegetable broth
- 2 (15-oz.) cans no-salt-added cannellini beans, rinsed
- 1 tsp. lemon zest
- 3 tbsp. lemon juice
- 3/4 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 (5-oz.) package baby spinach
- 1/4 cup crumbled feta cheese
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh basil
- 1/4 cup toasted pine nuts

**Directions:**

1. Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add

onion; cook, stirring often, until aromatic and translucent, about 8 minutes. Stir in garlic; cook, stirring often, until aromatic, about 1 minute.

2. Stir in orzo and sun-dried tomatoes; cook, stirring often, until the orzo is toasted, about 1 minute. Add broth, beans, lemon juice, salt and oregano; bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover and simmer until the orzo is al dente, about 15 minutes.

3. Stir in spinach. Cook, uncovered and stirring often, until the spinach is wilted, about 1 minute. Remove from heat; top with feta, basil, pine nuts and lemon zest.

**HEALTHY VEGETABLE SOUP**

Source: [www.loveandlemons.com/vegetable-soup](http://www.loveandlemons.com/vegetable-soup)

**Ingredients:**

- 2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, diced
- 1 tsp. sea salt, more to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 medium carrot, diced
- 1 small sweet potato, diced
- 1 (14.5-oz.) can fire roasted diced tomatoes
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 2 tsp. dried oregano, or 2 tbsp. chopped fresh thyme or rosemary
- 1/4 tsp. red pepper flakes, plus more to taste
- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 cup halved cherry tomatoes
- 1 cup chopped green beans
- 1 zucchini, diced
- 1 (15-oz.) can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 2 tbsp. white wine vinegar
- 1 1/2 cups chopped kale

**Directions:**

1. Heat the oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add the onion, salt, and several grinds of pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, for 8 minutes. Add the carrot and sweet potato, stir and cook for 2 more minutes.

2. Add the canned tomatoes, garlic, oregano, and red pepper flakes. Stir in the broth and bay leaves. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to a simmer and cook, covered, for 20 minutes.

3. Stir in the cherry tomatoes, green beans, zucchini, chickpeas, and cover and cook 10 to 15 more minutes, until the green beans are tender.

4. Stir in the vinegar and the kale and cook for 5 minutes, until the kale is wilted. Season to taste and serve.

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# 4 simple ways to stay healthy this holiday season

**Lauren Estes**

lauren@cullmantribune.com

**A**nytime you are beginning a new workout regimen or program, always have clearance or consult with your doctor if you have any pre-existing cardiac or other health issues.\*

If you are looking to stay focused and accountable during the holiday season on your health and wellness journey — you are like many who might need an extra push when it comes to your nutrition choices, workout commitments and overall preparation.

In a study done by innerbody.com, more than 90% of people said they gain weight over the holidays, 18.3% of them stating 7-9 pounds from Halloween to New Year's Day each year because of a lack of planning and accountability during the holiday season.

Here are four ways to help you stay active during the holidays, which can be as easy as setting alarm reminders on your phone, writing out weekly goals or hiring someone — like a trainer — to hold you accountable.

## 1. Plan out your week's nutritional and fitness goals

I've always been told that the battle is won in the general's tent the night before. Preparation is always key in staying accountable and healthy during the busy seasons of life. Take time to lay out your clothing the night before a walk, run or workout. Download meal plan recipes or write down your food plan for the week. Set aside times to do these things so you are held accountable to follow through and there won't be an excuse to grab take-out or miss an exercise session. Write your goals down, set alarms and

reminders. Do what you need to do to stay accountable.

## 2. Once your goals are planned out, take the time to meal prep each week

Meal planning is key in preventing unnecessary unhealthy eating, grazing or eating out. If you take time to prep your meals for yourself and your family you will always have something to fall back on instead of grabbing something fast.

You can also look into healthy meal prep company options that offer home delivery or pick-up locations that are catered toward helping you stay aligned with your nutritional goals. Downloading meal prep recipes and planning those with your family gets you a support system on board for the process also.

## 3. Hire a personal trainer

One of the best ways to maintain accountability when your discipline is lacking is to hire someone to lead you, and be your safety net to show up for workout sessions, classes or runs. A trainer will have workouts scheduled, meal planning assistance and be that extra push, listening ear or support system to hold you accountable to your fitness and health goals even when life is fast moving.

## 4. Get the big five benefits daily (SSSNR)

What are the big five benefits? Sunshine, steps, sleep, nutrition and recovery.

Daily Vitamin D, walking, adequate sleep, appropriate nutrition and recovery from exercises/events/stress combine to give you five solid health benefits. Managing them all will help in the process of building your healthy lifestyle and staying active.

Sunlight is the most natural

form of Vitamin D, which helps absorb calcium to build and maintain bone strength. Getting your steps in daily (walking) is known to help with high blood pressure, diabetes, protect against disease and strengthen muscles and bones.

Sleep is essential to creating healthy brain function and maintaining your physical health.

Nutrition is vital in building

stronger immune systems and lowering the risks of communicable diseases.

Lastly, recovery time and reducing stress allows the body to bounce back faster and be more present in daily tasks.

Combine all five and you are on the road to creating a healthy lifestyle. Doing these things daily and habitually are a sure way to hold you accountable in a healthy holiday season.

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- BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT -

# Elements Health & Wellness Spa

**Lauren Estes**  
lauren@cullmantribune.com

**E**lements Health & Wellness Spa opened its in downtown Cullman’s Warehouse District on Sept. 18, 2018, and has since made it a goal to make people feel better and be well.

Owner Melissa Oblawski said she had always been interested in holistic health, which went along with her massage career at the time, and the idea of a spa felt right.

“I had experienced success with raising my children when allopathic medicine failed and simple natural remedies worked very well,” Oblawski said. “My children recovered with no side effects to worry about. It’s truly a passion of mine to help people feel and be better.”

Elements offers a variety of therapies including red light, far infrared sauna, BEMER chair, SALT Chamber with Halotherapy, ionic foot detox, TrueRife therapy and a lymphatic drainage machine.

“We have many different programs offered here as well such as Nutrition Response Testing which is a noninvasive system of analyzing the body to determine underlying causes of illness and non-optimum health,” Oblawski said. “When these are corrected through safe, natural, nutritional needs, the body can repair itself to attain and maintain more optimum health. The body responds to the procedure reliably and consistently. This feedback is so precise it opens the door to a safe and lasting recovery, even in cases where everything else has failed. We test for common food challenges, immune challenges, metal toxicities, chemical



Left to right are Traci Hite, Alicia McConaughy and Brenna Fleming.

ELEMENTS HEALTH & WELLNESS SPA

toxicities and post-pandemic factors.”

Elements also offers NutriMost which is its personalized and supervised weight-loss and wellness program using personal health coaching, a personal meal plan and personal supplements.

“This program is a safe and effective weight-loss regimen

with natural supplements that improve cellular hydration, boost metabolism, detoxifies and helps cut visceral fat,” Oblawski said. “NutriMost uses weight-loss technology to determine your personal weight loss plan and how to sustain weight loss.”

Elements staff member McKinna Duke said of Oblawski

that she cares for anyone who walks in the door like they are a part of her own family.

“She is the best boss and friend,” Duke said. “She is an amazing woman of God and will do absolutely anything she can for you even if it means giving you the shirt off of her back. Elements is Melissa’s amazing creation that »

goes about healing and maintaining your health through all natural means. I've never been at a better place."

Massage therapist and Elements staff member Suzy Doty said Oblawski is more than a fantastic therapist and business owner, saying, "She exemplifies a Christ follower in the way she cares for everyone that walks into Elements Health & Wellness Spa. She is a gracious hostess and a devoted friend. What Melissa has created with Elements is an oasis of healing in a turbulent world."

Co-worker Brenna Fleming said Oblawski is the most compassionate person she has ever worked for and has a heart as big as Texas for her clients.

Elements recently celebrated six years in business in the Warehouse District. It can be reached at 256-841-6151 or through its Facebook or Instagram pages. It is located at 111 First St. NE, Suite A. Hours are Tuesday-Friday, from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

For more information, visit [www.elementshealthandwellnessspa.com](http://www.elementshealthandwellnessspa.com).



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# Third Place: The best place

**Cheyenne Sharp**  
Contributor

Nestled on U.S. Highway 31 South in Hanceville sits Third Place, a small and unassuming burger joint tucked inside a building that previously housed the area's Dairy Queen. The locally owned eatery is a testament to the old adage "never judge a book by its cover," while the exterior of the building is plain and unassuming, the offerings and menu of Third Place make mouths water and bellies grumble for more.

Trey Jordan, the master behind the hole-in-the-wall, started the restaurant as a new beginning - a creation all of his own that the community could enjoy and take pride in. His menu is reminiscent of retro diner fare, with each item kicked up a notch to add to the experience and keep patrons returning for more.

Jordan's previous restaurant resume includes stints at places like Dairy Queen itself and a partnership that helped bring 412 Public House. Then an offer arose that Jordan couldn't pass up.

"When the opportunity presented itself to open a burger joint, I was a little apprehensive and honestly still am even with the doors open. Food is hard. Anyone in the business will tell you plainly," shared Jordan.

The name of the restaurant came from a theme Jordan holds close to his heart: redemption - redemption for an old building, redemption for a community and its pride. Jordan shared that in his personal life, the restaurant represented somewhat of a redemption for himself.

"The idea of redemption is what has really led my path lately. I believe it always will for more personal reasons," he

said. "The name played a part in that. Third places are akin to local watering holes where people can come together and enjoy a good conversation and connection to help recharge their efforts towards home (their first place) and work (their second)."

Aiming to be that local watering hole for friends, families and lovers to visit and enjoy each other's company and have great conversation over a great plate of food, Jordan said, "I don't want this place to be an escape. I want it to do the opposite. I hope it reinvigorates the love for good discussion and friendships over a milkshake."

Jordan's menu at Third Place is short and sweet, loaded with familiar favorites with a twist. The Classic - a single or double handmade cheeseburger, The Midway - a foot-long carnival-style corn dog, traditional chicken baskets and original conies with any available topping included are a few of the items available. Sides like chili cheese fries, onion rings and cheese curds are available to complete a meal, and desserts are always on the menu, including signature spinner shakes and peanut parfaits.

The beautiful and juicy burgers are the shining star of Third Place, each one grilled with intention and pride.

"The burger is really great. It's what I enjoy making. It seems dramatic, but I look at every burger as a chance to show respect. Each one I cook is an exercise in focus and attention to detail. Something I never valued until harder lessons came along and taught me," smiled Jordan. "People deserve those things from one another now more than ever. I just hope people will give us a chance to show it to them."



TREY JORDAN

**Third Place is a locally owned restaurant in Hanceville owned and operated by Trey Jordan.**



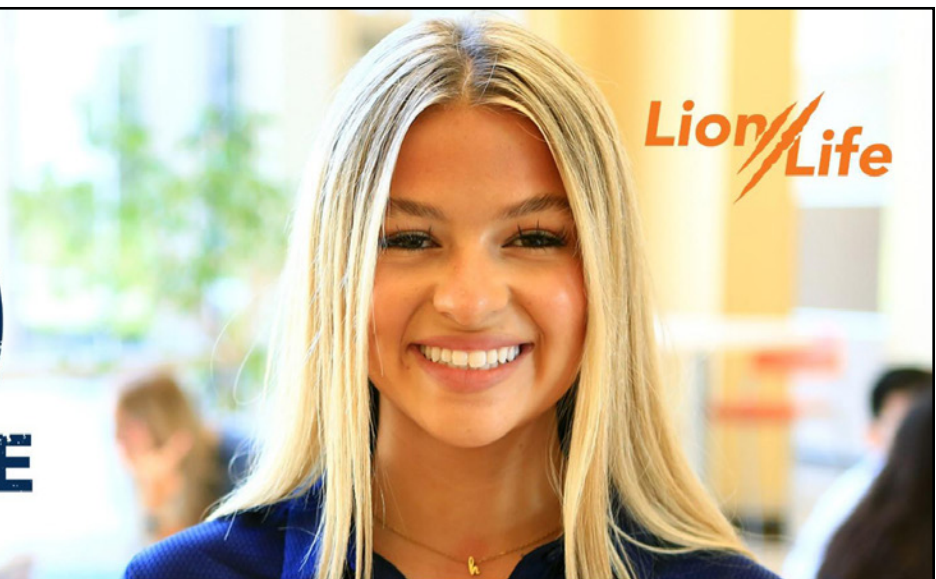
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## - SENIOR SPOTLIGHT -

# 95 years of living life to the fullest

**Lauren Estes**

lauren@cullmantribune.com

**M**ilitary veteran and Vinemont man Robert Doty, lovingly known as Mr. Bob in his neighborhood, shared his knowledge and experience from his 95 years life.

"My name is Robert Doty, but everyone calls me Bob," Doty said. "I turned 95 on Sept. 6. I live in South Vinemont with my daughter and son-in-law. I have lived a full life."

Doty shared that he ran away from home at 16-years-old and joined the Army Air Corps (before it became the Air Force) in 1946 after the end of World War II.

"I was almost in a year until my mother found out where I was and contacted my commanding officer," Doty said. "Because I was under age, I was given an honorable discharge. In 1952, about a year after getting married, I was drafted into the Army and was sent overseas to Korea where I served in the 40th Infantry Division. I was stationed in the area called the Punch Bowl between White Horse Ridge and Heartbreak Ridge. I got too close to an incoming mortar shell in 1953 and was sent to Tokyo, Japan to the 80/59th Army Hospital. I served the remainder of my time working for Commander Samuel Trask from 1953 to 1955. During this time, I served as Military Police and escorted Marilyn Monroe to the stage for a USO tour."

Even having so much life under his belt at such a young age, Doty said his best memory is the day he met his wife.

"I was standing in line at the movie theater in Joplin, Missouri," Doty said. "I met a young lady that asked me to

sit with her. Being single and unattached, I agreed. We took our seats and while we waited for the movie to start, the most beautiful girl I ever saw said, 'Excuse me, sir, can I get to that seat?' She was pointing to the seat next to the young lady I met in line. I was so taken by her beauty and her sweet voice. When the movie was over, the young lady I met in line asked me if I wanted to walk her home. I told her, 'No, I'm walking Red here home' motioning to the young lady that stole my heart. I asked her to marry me that night. She said, 'No, we just met.' But she did ask her mother if she could date me. I asked her to marry me many, many times over that first year of dating her. I followed her when her family moved from Missouri to Iowa for her father's work. And after about a year and a move, she said 'Yes.' We spent 62 wonderful years together."

I asked Mr. Bob, "If you could give one piece of advice to your 30-year old self, what would it be?"

"Take time each day to pray and read your Bible," Doty said. "I have read my Bible through at least 14 times since picking it back up again in 2011 when my wife passed away. It helped me get through tremendous grief. I only wish I'd started sooner."

Mr. Bob's day-to-day routine sounds like that of a dream: Easy like Sunday morning.

"I wake up early, anywhere from 5-6:30 a.m.," Doty said. "I get my coffee, read my Bible and take my first walk of the day, if the weather allows. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I exercise with weights. Most days, if the weather is nice, I take at least two walks a day. I mow our 2 acres and weed-eat. On Wednesdays I like to go to karaoke to see Danny (Frasier) and dance with my daughter



SUZY DOTY-VOIGT

**Robert Doty**

and the other nice ladies that go there (Grumpy's Down Under)."

His daughter Suzy Doty-Voigt shared and reiterated a few facts about her father.

"When he was in Korea, he was Military Police and escorted Marilyn Monroe to the stage for a USO tour," Voigt said. He spent the majority of his life as an auto mechanic. He was with his last boss for 45 years. They worked on classic cars manufactured from 1932 to 1980. He worked on the car Jay Leno drove onto set on his first night as the host of 'The Tonight Show.' He retired at 86-years-old. He is also hugely loved in our neighborhood. Everyone calls him Mr. Bob and one of the neighbors, who's become a good friend, made him a bench that says 'Mr.



SUZY DOTY-VOIGT

**Robert Doty when he served as Military Police in the U.S. Army**

Bob's Bench' with an American flag on it and a flag in the fence by it so if he gets tired while walking, he had a place to rest."





*As we enter into the holiday season remember to celebrate responsibly*

# DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE

*Cullman County Sheriff Matt Gentry*



*Cullman County  
Sheriff's Office  
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# - SENIOR SPOTLIGHT - Cooking for Christ

**Katie Spicer**  
katie@cullmantoday.com

**W**ade Maynard is a well-known name in the culinary world of Cullman County. After serving as kitchen manager for over 20 years at All Steak and as head of the Food Service Ministry at Northbrook Baptist Church, Wade has broadened his horizons while reflecting on his past accomplishments.

Wade recalls having a meager upbringing. His first experience in employment came at the young age of 13. He began his career at All Steak

only three years later, where he quickly rose through the ranks. Most people who know Wade know of his skill and passion for cooking; however, not many know his history.

After marrying his beloved wife, Marie, in 1981, she encouraged him to start attending church. As a young man and nonbeliever, he recollects trying to avoid attendance. However, when he did attend the occasional service he remembers feeling both a sense of peace and simultaneous conviction. It was not long before Wade accepted Jesus Christ as his lord and savior. From there, the sense of conviction persisted,



Wade Maynard

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and he realized he was being called into ministry.

Wade served in a number of ministry roles while also maintaining employment at All Steak. His first pastoral position was offered to him in 1995 at Mission Grove Baptist Church in Simcoe, Alabama, where he was paid only \$25 per week.

In 2008, he accepted a position at Northbrook Baptist Church, starting out in a part-time position as the leader of Adult Ministries. While serving in this role, the church was unable to find a proper fit for a long-term kitchen position and Wade offered his services. In 2011, he took on both roles full time.

Said Wade, "God has given me these abilities and I want to use them for his honor and his glory."

As the leader of Adult Ministries, he assumes the responsibility of pastoral care, nursing home and assisted living ministries, and checking in on senior adult members in the community. He also leads a weekly Bible study at The Neighborhood senior living community on Monday evenings. He says his priority is "to love on people and check on people."

Wade agrees with the age-old adage - people don't care how much you know until you know how much they care - and he strives to make this idea the heart of his service in the community.

As the head of the Food Service Ministry, Wade's mission is to offer a welcoming environment for visitors. He shared that one of the main reasons Northbrook offers a meal before service on Wednesday nights is to help people connect.

Especially for visitors, he said, "People feel more comfortable talking to somebody over a meal. I want people to enjoy their meals and be satisfied - that means a lot to me. That is my ministry."

Wade said if he could offer one piece of advice to the community, it would be, "Speak less, listen more and you will answer a lot of life's questions."

As a result of his community commitment and a high volume

of requests, this year Wade enlisted the help of his daughters, Katie and Chelsea, to start a catering business, Wade's Catering. His business motto is "Allow my family to cook for yours!" Over the course of the

past year, Wade's Catering has serviced a number of birthday parties, weddings, funerals, family reunions and more.

Contact Wade's Catering at wadescatering62@gmail.com or 256-347-8638.

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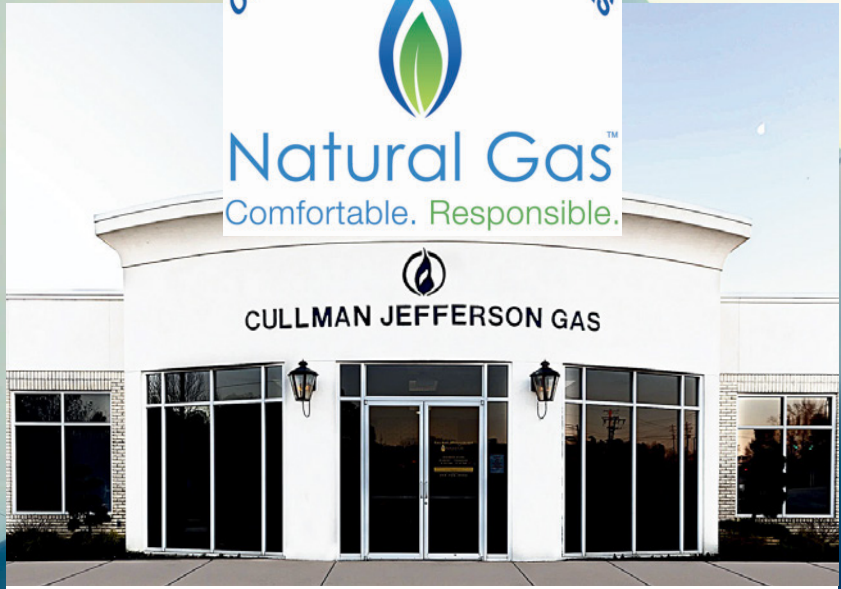
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## - SENIOR SPOTLIGHT -

# The dream of a lifetime

## Evelyn Stevens' journey to all 30 MLB stadiums

**Gauge Day**

gauge@cullmantribune.com

**A** dream born from the love of a husband. An unwavering dedication from a widowed mother and wife. Two daughters determined to honor both. Evelyn Stevens, at the remarkable age of 89, embarked on a once-in-a-lifetime journey that took her to every corner of the United States to visit every Major League Baseball stadium, accompanied by her two cherished daughters. Together, they set out to complete a dream that spanned years, miles and family memories that would mean the most of all.

Evelyn, born in 1935, has been a devoted member of First Baptist Church for nearly 88 years. Her family moved to Cullman when she was just 8 months old, quickly finding a home within the congregation at First Baptist Church. The church became a cornerstone of her life, one that has remained constant through the decades.

"My mother, sister and her aunt and their families were all established at First Baptist, so we naturally went there. I have been there 88 years now," she shared with fond memories in her eyes.

As a young girl growing up in church, Evelyn was deeply involved in various ministries. She participated in Girls in Action (GAs), where young girls learned about scripture, prayer and giving. She also served in the Young Women's Auxiliary (YWA), which emphasized evangelism and mission work.

Beyond these roles, she attended summer camps, sang

in the youth choir, toured with the choir and stayed active in the youth group, all while strengthening her relationship with God.

Remembering back to the most defining moment of her journey, she recalled the day that she was saved.

"It was in Bible school, the commencement part on the last day. The preacher was Bill Piper and there was a tent revival at the time. The tent was where the courthouse is now. The school building that had been there burned, and it was a vacant lot. And so, we had tent revival."

She continued, "The preacher spoke to all of the kids in Bible school and I learned the books in the Bible in Bible school, and I can still say them. It stuck with me. That was in '44. I was 9 years old," she said, smiling at the memory.

Her life, deeply rooted in both faith and Cullman, led her to meet her soulmate, Milton "Bud" Stevens.

The two crossed paths at Davis Lumber Company, where Evelyn worked, and Bud, at the time, was a truck driver.

He later transitioned into a truck mechanic, a career that would become his lifelong work.

"I was a junior in high school, and he was eight months older than I. They said on my first day there that I said, 'Who's that curly-headed boy?' I don't remember that, but they accused me of that," Stevens shared with a cheerful laugh.

When asked about her first impression of Bud, she smiled and said, "He was tall, dark and handsome."

Bud, standing 6'3, an avid baseball lover and a lefty



AMELIA STEVENS-SUTTER MOYER

**Amelia Stevens-Sutter Moyer, Evelyn Stevens and Renita Stevens Rigney stand before the last stadium they had left to visit, Comerica Park, home to the Detroit Tigers.**

pitcher with that natural curve only a southpaw can produce, was the package deal that would win Evelyn's heart.

It took just four years for them to tie the knot. After high school, Evelyn spent a few years at Sacred Heart, a junior college during the 1940s and '50s.

Although she initially planned to attend Auburn, life took an unexpected turn when dorms weren't available. Instead, she made a deposit for a dorm at the University of Alabama, setting the stage for the next chapter in her life.

However, love won out in the

end. With a deposit already in place and life moving quickly, they decided that marriage was the priority. The couple married at Evelyn's favorite place, First Baptist Church.

For Evelyn, the church had always been a cornerstone of her life, but it was different for Bud. Raised in the country, he grew up attending a Methodist church in his community.

After their marriage, Bud agreed to attend First Baptist with her, though Evelyn recalled that he had not yet accepted Jesus into his heart.

"I remember that the »

first year we were married, we just went to church. The next year, when Renita was born, I thought, he may not go to Sunday school, but this girl's going to be in Sunday school. So, we started going to Sunday school, and eventually, he did too."

Years later, Bud would finally accept Jesus into his heart. But even before that, Bud was already known for his honorable character. "Bud was always an honorable person. You did not lie to Bud. He was honest as the day is long, and he expected everybody else to be," Evelyn shared.

With marriage came children. Two girls, Renita and Amelia, would bless the Stevens household. Renita came first in December 1956 and Amelia would follow years later in June 1960.

Evelyn's work life shifted as the needs of her family changed. She adapted to what was necessary at the time, whether it meant staying home with a newborn or working to save for a down payment on a house. She spent 10 years doing bookkeeping for Holiday Motors, an Oldsmobile dealership that has since closed. She then worked for another decade in the tax assessor's office.

Eventually, she found her true calling, serving in the district office of an Alabama congressman, a position she held and cherished for 34 years.

It was in that office that she would work for Congressman Tom Bevill for 17 years, followed by another 17 years for Congressman Robert Aderholt.

During her time in these roles, she handled West Point appointments and had the opportunity to visit various military academies, including the Naval Academy. After a remarkable career, she finally retired at the age of 79.

"I worked a long time, but I enjoyed it. I still read the newspapers and go by the office

weekly. I'm still included in all the fun things, the Christmas party, his birthday fundraiser, just all of the fun things," she shared.

From kids, to work, to all of the adventures in between, Evelyn and Bud shared 39 years of life together. It was during these cherished years that a simple thought turned into a real dream - to visit all the Major League Baseball stadiums in the U.S. This shared passion would soon become a goal they both wanted to achieve.

In 1994, Bud felt it was time to start making this dream a reality. Both Evelyn and Bud, passionate baseball fans, began discussing how they could visit every stadium.

However, their plans hit a snag when the MLB went on strike from 1994 to 1995, leading to the cancellation of the remainder of the season, including the World Series.

Not long after, on July 11, 1995, Bud passed away just shy of their 40th anniversary at the age of 61.

That dream, conceptualized by Bud, would lie dormant for the next 10 years. Ten years later, the dream resurfaced, sparked by a thoughtful idea from Evelyn's daughters, Amelia and Renita. With their mother growing older, they searched for something truly meaningful to give her - a gift beyond material possessions.

"Renita and I were struggling. This was in 2005. We were trying to come up with something to give Mother. I told Renita, 'You know what, we can run into Belk, buy tons of things for her to open, and make sure she has gifts. But you know what we really need to give her? It's our time,'" Amelia shared, recalling the moment that reignited the dream.

"Renita and I had a long conversation about it - Daddy's dream. Daddy loved baseball and we would live out his dream for him, especially because

Mother knew that was something he had wanted to do. We had been to many Braves game when the Braves weren't cool or winning. We'd gone to an Astros game with him. This is how we decided that was what we would do. We would live out Daddy's dreams that he didn't get to do."

The plan, crafted by Amelia and Renita, was simple: to give their mother the gift of undivided attention during their trips. "No husband, no kids, just mother and her girls. And so, we set off for Tampa Bay," Amelia said.

Each year, Amelia and Renita would carefully plan these trips with their mother. Weekends were filled with long days of travel, laughter, shopping and Evelyn's favorite pastime - beating her daughters in cards. When they weren't at the ballpark, they made the most of their time by exploring each city, soaking in the unique culture and scenery that every destination had to offer.

Stadiums were selected strategically. For instance, when both New York teams, the Yankees and Mets, were at home, the trio would plan their trips to catch both games on the same weekend. If they knew a stadium was in its final season, it became a priority to visit before it closed.

In 2023, the realization hit Amelia that they were closer than ever to fulfilling her father's dream.

"We knew we had four stadiums left at that point," Amelia shared. "So, we went to Kansas in June and drove to Kansas City for that game. We started talking about the fact that we had four left. Hypothetically, if we could catch three of the four at home, we could finish this by the end of the year."

Amelia continued, "In August, we flew from Nashville to Arizona and went to the Cardinals game that night. Got up and flew to Los Angeles the

next morning and went to an Angels game. Flew to Seattle the next morning and went to a Mariners game. Flew home the next day. Three stadiums in four days and we were down to one: Detroit."

Detroit held the final stadium on the list, and it was intentionally saved for last. After encountering a few sketchy scenarios in previous cities, safety had become a concern for their mother, and the idea of visiting Detroit brought some apprehension.

"But then we went. It was a beautiful stadium. The city has been working to revamp and rebrand themselves. The riverwalk was named the best riverwalk for the past three years. It was a beautiful place. And by waiting, Detroit had recreated itself and we were safe," Amelia explained.

When asked about her favorite stadium, Evelyn shared, "Detroit. The last one. It was the newest and the most unique. It was a beautiful stadium."

At 89 years old, Evelyn Stevens achieved something many only dream of. With her two daughters by her side, she found herself passing the finish line of her late husband's dream.

Her daughters, motivated not to let her "grow old," have become her inspiration to keep on achieving and doing.

As Evelyn reflected on the adventure, she shared her favorite part of the experience, "The main thing has been the time we spent together."

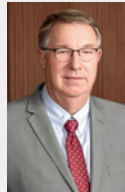
For Evelyn Stevens, this journey was more than a series of stadiums; it was about creating moments with the people who mean the most, proving that the best part of any adventure is the company and the memories that are made along the way.

For Evelyn, Bud's dream from 1994 had come to fruition through the love and efforts of their daughters, a testament to the family they built together.



# Welcome to the 2024 Cullman Christkindmarkt!

**A**s the mayor of Cullman, and on behalf of the city council, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to our annual Christkindmarkt celebration.



Christkindmarkt is inspired by Germany's historic Christmas markets, and Cullman's roots run deep in German heritage. This event reflects our shared history while embracing our hospitality that defines our city.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Event Team for their tireless efforts to ensure that this event continues to thrive and bring joy to all who attend.

To everyone joining us — whether you are a longtime resident or visiting for the first time — I invite you to explore all that Christkindmarkt has to offer. Don't miss the chance to stroll through our beautiful downtown and experience Cullman's hospitality. This celebration is an excellent opportunity to support our local merchants and restaurants.

As we gather in celebration, let us warmly welcome all visitors from near and far. Your presence enriches our festivities and reminds us of the joy that cultural heritage brings during this season of giving.

Enjoy the festivities, make new friends and create lasting memories. Let's embrace the holiday spirit, and look forward to a season filled with warmth and joy!

"Cullman Christkindmarkt is not just a celebration of our heritage; it's a gathering of our community, where friendships are formed and memories are made," said Cullman City Council President Jenny Folsom. "I am thrilled to see so many families come together to enjoy this beautiful event."

Councilman and Tourism Committee Chair Clint Hollingsworth added, "This market represents the heart of Cullman. It showcases our commitment to preserving our cultural traditions while also fostering a sense of unity and joy among our residents and visitors alike. I invite everyone to join us in this festive celebration."

# Cullman Christkindmarkt introduces Ferris wheel, expanded attractions

**Noah Galilee**

noah@cullmantribune.com

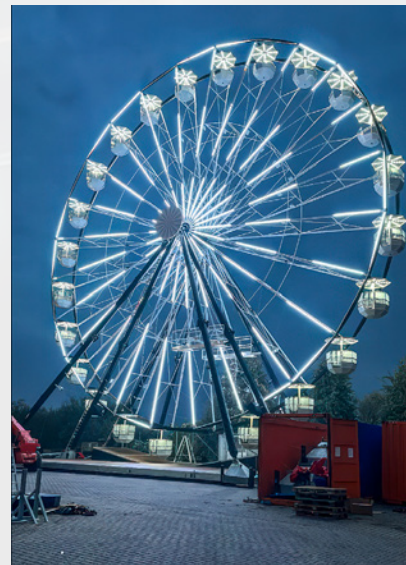
**T**his holiday season, visitors of the Cullman Christkindmarkt can experience the festivities from a new perspective - nearly 110 feet above the market on a giant Ferris wheel. The addition aims to elevate the holiday experience, attracting residents and tourists alike to one of the region's top seasonal destinations.

"The recent addition to the Cullman Christkindmarkt is a giant observation Ferris wheel that towers nearly 110 feet over the market, offering panoramic views of the city," said Nathan Anderson, executive director of Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism (CPRST). "The driving force behind this addition was to build on the unique and memorable experiences created for our visitors last year, further enhancing the festive atmosphere and making our Christkindmarkt a premier holiday destination within our region."

Equipped with 24 gondolas, each accommodating up to six people, the Ferris wheel can hold up to 144 riders at a time. Anderson emphasized inclusivity in the design, noting, "The wheel includes ADA-compliant gondolas, ensuring that all our guests, including those with physical limitations, can enjoy the ride comfortably and safely."

The Ferris wheel installation is the result of a partnership between CPRST and Coca-Cola, with operational support from Ride Worx.

"The Ferris wheel, sponsored by Coca-Cola, is part of a revenue-sharing partnership with Ride Worx," Anderson said. "After an extensive vetting process by both parties, we both agreed that the wheel would be a perfect addition to the Cullman Christkindmarkt. Ride Worx is known for its exceptional amusement rides. The setup of the Ferris wheel takes approximately five days, and the breakdown and pack-out require about the same amount of time."



CULLMAN PARKS, RECREATION & SPORTS TOURISM

**A 108-foot Ferris wheel will be featured at this year's Cullman Christkindmarkt.**

Beyond the Ferris wheel, visitors to this year's Christkindmarkt will find new culinary options, a larger vendor space and additional entertainment.

"In addition to the Ferris wheel, we've introduced several new features to enhance the visitor experience, including more diverse food options, an expanded vendor area and additional entertainment programs," Anderson said. "The ice rink doubled in size, now making it the largest outdoor ice rink in the state. We've also added a Neveplast Tubby Slide, over 100 feet in length."

He added, "Each year, we strive to keep the Christkindmarkt fresh and exciting. We are thrilled to see all the hard work and support from our team, vendors and sponsors come together to make this happen."

Cullman Christkindmarkt will take place at Depot Park Nov. 21-Dec. 23, Thursdays-Saturdays, from 11 a.m.-9 p.m. and Sundays from noon-8 p.m. It will be open seven days a week beginning Dec. 16 (closed on Thanksgiving Day). Get more information at [www.cullmanchristkindmarkt.com](http://www.cullmanchristkindmarkt.com). Depot Park is located at 107 Arnold St. NW, Cullman.

# Cullman gearing up for expanded Christkindlmarkt and holiday celebrations

Noah Galilee

noah@cullmantribune.com

Cullman's Christkindlmarkt, now a major holiday attraction, is set to welcome visitors from Nov. 21 to Dec. 23. With its vibrant mix of traditional German Christmas market elements and family friendly activities, this year's event promises to be bigger and brighter than ever. The festivities kick off on Thursday, Nov. 21, at 6 p.m. with the lighting of North America's tallest Weihnachtspyramide (Christmas Pyramid) at Depot Park.

Cullman Parks, Recreation & Sports Tourism Special Events Coordinator Kelly Pulliam highlighted some exciting changes for this year's Christkindlmarkt.

"The festivities will kick off with the lighting of the tallest Weihnachtspyramide in North America on Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024. Then, on Friday, Nov. 22, we'll host the newly renamed Cullman Christkindlmarkt Parade, followed by the lighting of the Christmas tree and a live performance by Taylor Hicks," she shared.

According to Pulliam, the decision to align the tree lighting and parade with the market's opening weekend was a thoughtful response to visitor feedback.

"Last year, we received feedback that people were confused the Christmas tree wasn't lit for the first couple of weekends of the market, and we completely understood. By aligning the tree lighting and parade with the market's opening, we're creating a more cohesive experience that will feel even more festive from day one," she said.

Throughout the season, the market will feature daily entertainment to keep visitors engaged, including live concerts, figure skating shows, dance performances and special appearances by church choirs and street performers.

"It's all about creating a vibrant, festive atmosphere that will keep people coming back for more," she said. "We encourage everyone to follow us on social media and check our website for the full schedule of events."

This year's expanded Christkindlmarkt will be open Thursdays-Sundays through Dec. 16, after which it will be open daily to allow more time for holiday shopping and festivities. The market will be closed on Thanksgiving Day, giving staff and families time to celebrate.

Mayor Woody Jacobs expressed pride in how the event has grown into a treasured holiday tradition for Cullman.

"The Cullman Christkindlmarkt has become a cherished holiday tradition for our community, bringing together families, visitors and businesses in a way that truly captures the spirit of the season," Jacobs said. "I'm proud to see Cullman continue to shine as a top destination for holiday celebrations. This year's expanded market promises even more opportunities for people to experience the magic of the season right here in our city."

With the success of last year's Christkindlmarkt, which welcomed over 200,000 visitors, the event has been lengthened to accommodate even more holiday enthusiasts.

"We've embraced the extended holiday season after receiving incredible feedback from our visitors last year," said Pulliam. "After studying other successful Christkindlmarkts in cities like Carmel, Chicago and Atlanta, we saw that they all opened the week before Thanksgiving, giving us the perfect opportunity to do the same."

CPRST Executive Director Nathan Anderson emphasized the spirit of collaboration that has made the market such a success.

"We are proud of the incredible support we've received from local businesses, civic groups and our sponsors," Anderson said. "The growth we've seen is a result of everyone working as a team, and that's something truly special. Together, we've built something that not only brings joy to our community, but also puts Cullman on the map as a holiday destination!"

Families can expect new additions this year, especially for younger visitors.

"We're really excited about our new additions for the little ones!" Pulliam said.

"The ice rink has doubled in size, making it the largest outdoor rink in Alabama," she said. "We've also added a 100-foot dry tubing slide and street curling, along with expanding the Kinderplatz area for more kid-friendly fun. It's going to be an unforgettable experience for families!"

Cullman's Christkindlmarkt offers a unique opportunity for residents and tourists alike to experience the joy and warmth of the holiday season.

**CULLMAN  
CHRISTKINDLMARKT**

- Depot Park, 107 Arnold St. NW, Cullman, AL 35055
- Nov. 21-Dec. 23
- Thursdays-Saturdays, from 11 a.m.-9 p.m. and Sundays from noon-8 p.m. | Open seven days a week beginning Dec. 16 (closed on Thanksgiving Day)

## CHRISTMAS PYRAMID LIGHTING

- Thursday, Nov. 21, at 6 p.m.
- Cullman Christkindlmarkt comes to life with the lighting of Christmas Pyramid. The Grand Opening of the Christkindlmarkt is a celebration of the Christmas season, led by the Cullman Community Band and joined by family and friends from Cullman and beyond.

## CHRISTKINDLMARKT PARADE

- Friday, Nov. 22, at 6:30 p.m.
- One of Cullman's favorite traditions, the Christkindlmarkt Parade is filled with local organizations, businesses, bands and more! Help us welcome in the Christmas season with this seven-block parade extravaganza.

## CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING

- Friday, Nov. 22, at 8 p.m.
- Immediately following the Christkindlmarkt Parade is the South's Largest Tree Lighting Show. Featuring a mesmerizing light show and fireworks that is always one of the most memorable events of the year. Join us for this free event with James Spann, Santa Claus, The Grinch, Buddy the Elf and special musical guest as we light the Christkindlmarkt Christmas Tree.

Get more information at [www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com](http://www.cullmanchristkindlmarkt.com).





# Where German Tradition Meets Southern Charm

Nov 21 - Dec 23 • Cullman, AL



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# Christkindlmarkt Daily Highlights

A Calendar of Daily Entertainment Highlights.  
The Full Market with Attractions & Vendors is Open All Market Days.

November	Pyramid Lighting & Christkindlmarkt Grand Opening 6:00 PM 21	Christkindlmarkt Parade & Tree Lighting 6:30 PM 22	Music City Strings 4:00 PM 6:00 PM 23	Music City Strings 3:00 PM 24
	Closed for Thanksgiving All Day 28	Holiday Heineckes Band 12:00 PM to Close 29	Jump Rope Toy Soliders Holiday Heineckes All Day 30	Jump Rope Toy Soliders Holiday Heineckes All Day 1
December	Strolling Musicians All Day 5	Elves Story Chairstacking Good Bellows Band All Day 6	East & West Elementary Choirs Strolling Musicians 11:00 AM 7	Good Bellows Band 2:00 PM 6:00 PM 8
	Doll on a Music Box 4:00 PM 6:00 PM 12	Jess & Cole Holiday Variety Show 4:00 PM 8:00 PM 13	Powerskip Eleves Good Bellows Band All Day 14	Good Bellows Trio Strolling Musicians All Day 15
	Doll on a Music Box 4:00 PM 7:00 PM 16	Heinecke Horns All Day 17	Jess & Cole Holiday Variety Show 3:00 PM 7:00 PM 18	Heinecke Horns All Day 19
	Music City Strings 1:00 PM 7:00 PM 20	Jump Rope Toy Soliders All Day 21	Jump Rope Toy Soliders Holiday Heineckes All Day 22	Holiday Heinecke All Day 23

Schedule is subject to change. Check out the full schedule at [CullmanChristkindlmarkt.com/schedule](http://CullmanChristkindlmarkt.com/schedule)



# A Guided Tour

## Plan Your Perfect Day at Cullman Christkindlmarkt

Picture yourself stepping into a winter wonderland where the spirit of an authentic German Christmas market comes alive in the heart of Alabama. Welcome to Cullman's enchanting Christkindlmarkt, where old-world charm meets Southern hospitality. Let me guide you through the perfect day at this festive marvel.

### Starting Your Journey

Begin your journey with a photo session at our designated photo spot, where our professional team captures your first moments of wonder against the backdrop of twinkling lights and festive decorations. To warm up, make your first stop at Holderbeans Coffee. Clutch your steaming cup of artisanal coffee as you follow the irresistible aroma of freshly baked Chimney Cakes and roasted nuts wafting through the crisp winter air. Trust me—you'll want to sample these traditional treats that taste like Christmas itself.

Now that you're properly caffeinated and have a sweet treat in hand, it's time for a truly spectacular experience. Climb aboard Alabama's largest Ferris wheel for a breathtaking aerial view of the entire market. From this towering vantage point, you'll see the full scope of our winter village, with its wooden stalls, twinkling lights, and bustling pathways stretching out below.

### Artisans and Adventures

Back on solid ground, prepare to be mesmerized by our master glass blower, whose skilled hands transform molten glass into delicate works of art. This is where Christmas ornaments come to life before your eyes—a must-see spectacle that connects you to centuries-old German craftsmanship. What's a Christmas market without meeting the jolly man himself? Stop by Santa's cottage for a heartwarming photo opportunity. Then, make your way to what has become our crown jewel: the largest German Christmas Pyramid in North America. This towering masterpiece of traditional German craftsmanship makes for an impressive selfie backdrop that will have your friends back home green with envy.

By now, you've worked up an appetite. Head to our authentic German food stalls for a hearty lunch of bratwurst or schnitzel. Whether you're in the mood for a full meal or just want to share a quick bite, these traditional favorites never disappoint. After lunch, warm your spirit at the Tannenbaum Tavern with a glass of traditional Glühwein (mulled wine) or, for those preferring non-alcoholic options, a steaming cup of spiced apple cider.





### Exploring Culture and Crafts

Take a brief detour to explore the Cullman County Museum, where you can discover the rich German heritage that makes our community so special. Afterward, retreat to one of our cozy dining nooks or igloos—available on a first-come, first-served basis throughout the market. These charming spaces offer the perfect spot to rest and watch the world go by while planning your next move.

Continue your journey with visits to our copper smith and iron smith demonstrations. These skilled artisans showcase traditional metalworking techniques that have been passed down through generations, creating unique pieces that make perfect Christmas gifts. Speaking of gifts, no visit is complete without browsing A Touch of German, where you'll find authentic German Christmas decorations, crafts, and keepsakes to take home.

### Evening Enchantment

As day turns to dusk, the market takes on a magical glow. Watch skilled ice skaters glide across our rink (or join them if you're feeling adventurous!), and don't miss the entertaining performances by our PowerElf Skippers or the delightful Holiday Heineckes. For dinner, treat yourself to a crispy Flammkuchen from our wood-fired pizza station. This traditional German-style flatbread is the perfect light evening meal. Cap off your magical day with a ride on our festive Christmas carousel, where vintage horses prance beneath twinkling lights.

### Pro Tips:

- Wear comfortable walking shoes and dress in layers
- Bring cash, though most vendors accept cards
- Visit during weekdays for smaller crowds
- Check the performance schedule in advance for the PowerElf Skippers and Holiday Heineckes
- The dining igloos are open throughout the day—feel free to pop in whenever you need a cozy break
- Consider twilight visits for the most magical atmosphere and best photo opportunities

The Cullman Christkindlmarkt isn't just a market—it's a full-day adventure that captures the magic of a traditional German Christmas celebration right here in Alabama. Whether you're a first-time visitor or making this an annual tradition, each visit brings new discoveries and creates lasting memories. Welcome to our little piece of Germany in the Heart of Alabama!



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## - FAITH -

# SHERRY STEELE

## THE MINISTRY OF A PASTOR'S WIFE

### Gauge Day

gauge@cullmantribune.com

The pastor's wife — a pedestaled role in ministry, yet it remains one of the most under-appreciated positions in the church. It's a position often overshadowed by the pastor's spotlight or hangs aside as a trophy on display. The pastor's wife can be seen as a supportive figure standing quietly in the background, or as an active partner in ministry, depending on the church.

To the congregation, she is a symbol of balance, standing beside her husband as he leads. She carries herself with grace, often dressed impeccably, her smile a calm and cheerful presence that reassures those around her. There's a distinct quality in how she moves through the church — an aura that sets her apart. It's often easy to recognize the pastor's wife, but much harder to truly understand the depth of her role and the sacrifices that frequently come with it.

What are the sacrifices that come with such a prominent, yet often undervalued role? What challenges does she face that the congregation may overlook?

From managing the emotional toll of supporting her husband's ministry to balancing her own identity within the church, the role of a pastor's wife can be complex and demanding. She often has to navigate the expectations placed upon her — sometimes unspoken but always present — of being a perfect example, an ever-present

supporter and a leader in her own right, all while handling the personal strains that come with that unvoiced requirement of perfection.

What parts of her position do we take for granted?

The countless hours she invests behind the scenes, offering hospitality, providing counsel and sometimes acting as a bridge between her husband and the congregation, often go unseen.

What impact do these responsibilities have on her sense of self, her family life and her spiritual journey?

Understanding these aspects reveals the deep emotional and spiritual labor that pastors' wives endure, and the sacrifices they make for the sake of ministry — sacrifices that are rarely acknowledged, but deeply felt.

The best way I knew to tell this story was to speak with the pastor's wife who has profoundly impacted my life: Sherry Steele.

Wife of Pastor Jeff Steele, a mother to three children, a proud Granna to many grandchildren, as well as a successful gospel music artist and a dedicated leader in our church, Sherry has worn many hats throughout her life.

Sherry knew from an early age that her path in life would be rooted in ministry, though she wasn't always sure what form it would take. Her early years were filled with music, particularly gospel, a passion and talent that would eventually blossom into a successful career on the road as a gospel



**Sherry and Jeff Steele - 42 years of marriage and ministry**

singer. But life, as it often does, had more in store for her than she could have imagined.

"I kind of always knew that ministry was for me. I started singing young and I knew the kind of direction that my life would take through music, mostly gospel music. Never did I think I would be a pastor's wife though," she reflected.

Although Sherry felt as if she knew the direction her life would head, tragedy and destructive circumstances would shape her journey again and again. At the age of 12, Sherry would lose her father, setting in grief that would take many years to settle. Her mother, left with four children to support, while also working a full-time job, was struck with a burden that would take its toll on the family.

With limited options on the table, the opportunities that would present themselves to Sherry felt like her only path forward. A traveling job as a singer with a Pentecostal group would present itself to Sherry and her mother. Her mother would agree to the arrangement for the summer, setting the stage for her first steps in ministry.

However, grief would fester for her. Immersed in a Pentecostal life she had no prior experience with, she found herself forced to adapt while grappling with the loss of her father and a sense of abandonment from her mother.

"I was grieving my dad. I was angry at the 'Why?' because he was my everything," Sherry shared. "So, I kind of ended up in a rebellious place. Instead of

»

seeing them as my providers, they became more of my enemy because I didn't want that from them. It was like, 'Why y'all? Why doesn't my mother care about me?'"

As the summer came to a close, the traveling group offered her mother a new proposition: to take Sherry in and meet all of her needs.

"We can take her in and buy everything for her so that'll take the financial pressure off of you.' That sounded appealing to my mom at the time because she was like, 'They can give her what I couldn't,'" Sherry recalled. "So, she kind of turned me over to them out of desperation, but it felt like rejection to me. I was just trying to sort out all of my feelings. Why doesn't my mother want me? Why can't she make changes to provide for me?"

It was then that Sherry's life would take a pivotal turn. She was isolated from her family, and her mother had no clue about the dark circumstances invading Sherry's life. While that part of Sherry's testimony remains her personal story to tell, she carried the weight of darkness and shame for years — a burden she referred to as "her cross to bear."

Amidst the grief and forced adaptation, however, a glimmer of hope would emerge. While working on an album, Sherry met her future husband, Jeff Steele.

At the time, Jeff was a DJ for a local radio station, and Sherry's group approached him for help with the project.

"I didn't really know him. I knew him from a distance," Sherry shared. "We started getting together in preparation for this project, and in doing that, it was like my first outside interaction that wasn't an acquaintance or someone I had ties to. We were usually in, out and gone, with no one knowing what was going on in my life.

"But, and I don't know why,

he saw something in the situation that wasn't right. He was picking up on things I was saying about the way the other person was treating me," she reflected. "So, he started to reach out to me without them knowing, just saying a word, giving me a compliment, sending me little notes to the studio. I was like 'Wow, there is someone who cares.'"

Jeff would become the catalyst that would break the chains surrounding Sherry's life. With her group planning a move to California and the isolation between Sherry and her mother growing deeper, Jeff encouraged her to visit her mother — a visit that ultimately became her way out. It was during this visit that Sherry broke the silence on her situation, finally opening up to her family about what she had been enduring.

Life changed quickly for Sherry then. With her silence broken and her family having been involved from a protective side, Sherry would begin to lean closer to her only attachment to the outside world: Jeff.

"When I finally got away from all the mess, we kind of got together and continued talking," she recalled. "I was a kid. In essence, he was a kid. Still lived at home with his parents, not a whole lot of difference between where I was and he was in maturity. So, we kept talking and it became my security blanket."

Those conversations would grow past the security blanket, and set the foundation for 42 years of a marriage that continues to grow today.

Her past would shape her present, allowing her to value even deeper the thing she has grown to treasure most: her family.

"Because of all that I have been through, my family has become my trophy," she stated. "I feel like when I look at my kids and grandkids, I feel like God is saying 'See, you could get through it all. You have made

it. It may not have been ideal for you, but look what you are to them. You can overcome.'"

It was these transformative years that Sherry believes allowed her to be who she is in ministry today.

"If we could see the future, what decisions would we make? I'm so glad I didn't know. Have I been perfect? Absolutely not. But I think it has driven me as a minister's wife to think differently than the average," she continued. "Most pastor's wives that I knew growing up were everything I knew I didn't want to be as well. I could have fallen into the trap that so many of them have, being too hard on themselves."

When Sherry began to realize that her life would soon become that of a pastor's wife, the pull to be something she didn't identify as bore down on her.

The expectation to be perfect, or at least portray the picture of such, was something she had seen in churches all across her travels. It was the very trap she wanted to avoid.

"So now I'm in this role and now I've got to be perfect. I can't let people see me as me. I have to hide myself, hide my feelings, like I had done all of my life, right?" she shared. "I started trying at first to mold myself into that image of what I thought people expected of me. And I did it for a little while, but the pressure got so great on me.

"I finally said to myself that I'm going to bring myself to the table. I'm going to bring who I am and I am going to trust God that he's going to sort it out where people can see through the position and see the person I am and say, 'I can identify with some of those hurts that »

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she has been through, or identify with her as a mother, as a wife, as a woman.”

Although her story cultivated how she interacts in ministry today, she never allowed it to define who she was. In her journey, Sherry reflected on what it means to open up after learning to trust again, to the hurt that comes with ministry and the human politics involved, and the grace required to make it all feel worth it. Learning to balance what is personal and what is her ministry has been one of her hardest challenges, especially when held to such a high expectation.

“I had to realize these are human beings. That I am a human being. These are human beings with a real family. Their children matter. Our children matter. So, give me the same grace that you’re asking me to give to you. Because if you can see me in the same way that you see yourself, then you will understand that I am everything that you are. A human being who struggles and carries many of the same things that you do.”

Her self-realization pushed her to fight for something deeper, to move past the surface level of what people saw as her position, the fishbowl that people stared at her through.

“I could see it on people’s faces that they were putting me in a box, saying, ‘Man, what a perfect life, what a great thing she has,’” she expressed. “They saw what they wanted to see, the glamorous part of it, but never behind the scenes. They had no idea who I was, where I came from or what I’d been through.”

Time would once again bring her to the crossroads where her testimony would begin to make sense to her.

“We were doing a singing event at a church with a huge platform. They called all of the artists to the stage. And then, this little girl came. She didn’t really know my testimony or who I was, but out of all of the

artists on stage, she approached me. I saw so much of myself in her. She leaned in and whispered to me, ‘Please help me.’

“It was then that I realized – don’t ever be so shortsighted to think that people don’t need to hear my story. If nothing else, it gives them the courage to keep on. Maybe it gives them the courage to leave. Maybe it gives them the courage to reach out to somebody.

“I realized then that my platform was bigger than I ever imagined,” Sherry stated.

From then on, Sherry began to share her story with resolve. Not out of victimization, or a need for pity, but as her ministry and who God called her to minister to.

Sherry gave up what the church deemed her position to look at during that time, and pursued a true, reflective part of who she was and who God called her to be. She presented the broken parts of herself, that she was still healing, knowing that there were others like her out there.

Others, who her voice would represent.

To Sherry, her role as a pastor’s wife has allowed her many times to not only carry her burdens, but also to help carry those of the people she has been called to minister to. For Sherry, her role as a pastor’s wife is a ministry, ordained by God himself as a platform to share her story to the little girl in the crowd, to the woman who is lost in darkness and to the person who feels isolated and judged.

For the greater part of 42 years now, Sherry has served in that role faithfully. She does so without the burden of needing recognition or a reward for her efforts. She does it because that’s what she feels called to do. When I set out to tell just a glimpse of her story, I began to realize how many things we trivialize in a role such as hers.

The greatest thing I can say about Sherry is that she is

intentional in all that she does. All of the cleaning she does has purpose. She cooks large meals every Wednesday for our entire church, with purpose. She seeks out those with internal conflict, to be an ear, with purpose. She has stood beside her husband in his battle with MS, as his balance, the clarity to his voice when he struggles with it, all with intention and purpose.

She labors on days when many feel called to rest. She seeks the corners that have the dust that many would just pass by, intent to leave it without blemish. She will tell you on Sunday that she loves you “more and more each day,” affirming who you are even when you feel empty. She plans and stewards everywhere that is lacking organization. She embodies purpose.

Purpose, driven from a story that never seemed fair, but one she overcame. Purpose formed from a testimony that gives courage to those without a voice in the crowd. Purpose, that the enemy stripped from her, that she would one day reclaim in the name of Jesus.

Purpose that is evident in the lives that would be changed because of her ministry.

Sherry has long stood as a steadfast presence in our church, her community, her family and in the lives of many across the nation.

Her journey, marked by gospel music, local pastoral roles alongside her husband and a heart for selfless service, has been a testament to who she is. Now, with 42 years of experience behind her, Sherry reflects on the most significant lessons she’s learned in her role as a pastor’s wife.

“Being a pastor’s wife is trial and error. Try to be a better version of yourself. That role is a platform in itself, so we have to take the role seriously. Yes, we are to live up to some of the expectations, but we can’t get so caught up in them that we fall into the trap of not being ourselves or isolating ourselves

to where we have no one to talk to.

“That isolation can get to you. Find positive outlets to go to. Pray to God to guide you into the areas He wants you in, and to pull you back where you needed to pull back,” she continued. “My biggest mistakes in ministry were bottling things up and letting things out. How much do I let out? How much do I keep bottled up? I can’t fight every battle. I can’t do it alone. So I say, ‘Lord, help me.’

“There are things I would change if I could go back: reacting less, saying less and just letting God handle it. I didn’t have to defend myself so much. But I came from a place where I couldn’t tell anyone anything, and I will never be that again. You’ll never do me that way again. And in that, I have learned balance. I wasn’t taught it, I learned it, through trial and error.”

I posed a final question to Sherry, asking her to share the greatest bit of wisdom she holds dear in her ministry: “Love unconditionally. Love with no bounds and know that any stipulation you put on the mat is man-made. To love like Christ is to love everyone.”

Her words reflect the heart of her journey, one of grace, humility and a love that mirrors the teaching of Jesus.

Sherry’s story invites us to challenge how we view the role of a pastor’s wife in the church. It encourages us to move beyond the pedestal of thought that says a pastor’s wife must be perfect, when in fact, Jesus came to save the broken and imperfect.

Her role, often behind the scenes, involves tasks that might seem small — cooking, cleaning, stewarding — but they carry immense value in the kingdom of God, a kingdom full of intention and purpose. Her story in ministry reminds us to love mercy, to always show grace and to embrace the broken people God calls to serve, just like you and me.

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## - FAITH -

# 'No matter what you go through, God is always with you'

## Cold Springs' Avery Gerstman talks relationship with God

**Sammy Confer**

sammy@cullmantribune.com

**BREMEN, Ala.** — Avery Gerstman is a senior at Cold Springs High School this year and in this interview, she discussed the different ways that God has played a role in her life and how she wants to spread that impact to others.

"God has meant so incredibly much to me. He has gotten me through some of the toughest times of my life. Since ninth grade, I have struggled with my mental health, and I wouldn't be here today without God's love and grace for me through my toughest times. These past few months, He has led me to create my Fair Queen platform, "Shine a Light." Shine a Light is a faith-based resource for teens who struggle with their mental health and to bring awareness to that. I want to show others how much God's love and grace can pull you through some of your toughest times," Gerstman said.

Her platform has definitely changed her life, and she shares some of her favorite Bible verses.

"It has changed my life knowing that I'm not alone in this battle. It has made me gain confidence in sharing my story, because I know that others struggle too. I know that through this platform, others that struggle with their mental health can have a sense of relief knowing that they're not alone. Mental health awareness in teens is something that I'm an advocate for. It means so much to me, and my goal is to raise awareness and shine a light on mental health awareness in teens," she said. "One of my favorite Bible verses is Psalms

139:12, and that verse means a lot to me. It shows that with the Lord, darkness will be nothing to you, because you are secure in Him. This verse is near and dear to my heart, and I love to think about it when I feel down. Another one of my favorite Bible verses is Romans 12:10. It shows how important it is to honor others above you, and act with love. Whoever is in Christ are brothers and sisters. God adopts us and welcomes us into His family, and we should do the same."

She wants to help other people, especially kids, find God and one of her favorite things to do is help at Field of Miracles.

"I believe that it's important to help kids find God, because He is the only true joy you can receive in your life. I want every single person to experience God's love, because it truly is the best you can get. Kids especially try to fill that void with worldly things. It may work temporarily, but those can never compare to the love you can feel with God. I want everyone to know how it feels to live with God," she said. "I loved volunteering at the Field of Miracles, and I also loved seeing the joy that it brings each player."

She added, "It is such a great feeling to get to be a part of something that they look forward to every week. I can remember on several occasions leaving the field in tears. It makes me so truly happy to see how much a small aspect of their life can bring so much happiness. I can specifically remember when they all received rings at the last game of their season. That was very emotional for me. I remember



MIKE WITCHER/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Cold Springs' Avery Gerstman was crowned the winner of this year's Miss Cullman County Fair Competition on Oct. 8.**

getting in my car and tearing up because of how genuinely excited they were."

Avery wants to be a Godly example for so many people and has so many great Godly role models in her life that she looks up to.

"It is extremely important. Someone is always watching. God brings so much joy to me, so I want to set that example for them so that they can experience that joy as well," she said. "Some Godly role models in my life are my parents. They have led me to where I am today. They truly are the reason I am close to God like I am. As a family, we have grown tremendously in our faith. My youth pastor Jason Brakefield has also been an excellent role model. He explains things so well and shows how important it is to stay close to God."

She gave advice to those

people that want a relationship with God, and she has taken away so much from her journey so far.

"My advice would be to be as consistent as possible. Surround yourself with Godly people. My dad has always said, 'Your friends can influence you more than you realize. Form a bubble of Godly people that you can count on.' I will save anyone a seat at my church. I can find/offer transportation to anyone, no matter how far. I'm willing to talk to anyone," she said. "I have learned that no matter what you go through, God is always with you. When all hope seems lost, He will give you hope. I have had to learn from many mistakes in the past, but I believe they have helped shape me into who I am today. Surround yourself with people who build you and your relationship with God up."

- FAITH -

# Focus on Faith: Northbrook Baptist Church

**Katie Spicer**

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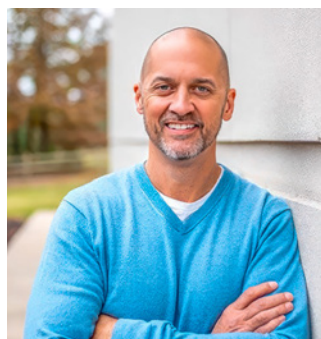
This year marked the 20th anniversary of the very first worship service held by Northbrook Baptist Church. To celebrate and continue growing in ministry the church has chosen to dedicate the year 2024 to Relational Evangelism.

Senior Pastor Keith Warden shared, "Our goal as a church for the year is to have at least 500 gospel conversations with people in the places where we live, work and play."

By reaching this goal, the church hopes to meet their overall mission of equipping the religiously saturated to become investors for the Lord's kingdom.

**Meet the team**

(printed as submitted)



CONTRIBUTED

**Keith Warden**

"My name is Keith Warden and I have served as the Senior Pastor at Northbrook for the last six years. I was born in Huntsville, AL and I have served churches in Alabama, Mississippi and Texas. Northbrook seeks to equip you as a follower of Jesus by helping you discover your personal calling and develop as a faithful servant in his kingdom...If you're looking for a place to follow Jesus by doing life together, we would love for you to connect with us this Sunday!"



CONTRIBUTED

**Baxter Bentley**

"I'm Baxter Bentley and I am the Executive Pastor, which means I handle all things administration and facilities. I also have the opportunity to lead our cross-cultural missions program. I would love Cullman to know that at Northbrook, we want to make disciples who come together weekly to fellowship and worship, but also go into the community Monday-Saturday to be the hands and feet of Christ."



CONTRIBUTED

**Dave Wright**

"Hi, I'm Dave Wright — husband to Jill and dad to four boys: Grayson, Griffin, Graham, and Grady. I have the privilege of serving as the Discipleship Pastor at Northbrook Baptist Church. It's such a joy to walk alongside the families of Northbrook and be part of loving and serving our community. My heart is that we would be a church where anyone can find a place to belong in biblical community, where we're all growing to become more like

Christ through accountable discipleship, and where we're living on mission to bless our community with the truth and love of Christ through service and radical generosity. In short, we want to equip kingdom investors for kingdom impact in Cullman and beyond—all for the glory of God and the good of others."



CONTRIBUTED

**Jeremy Samplaski**

"My name is Jeremy and I am the Worship Pastor. I am married to Mary Lauren and we have two daughters, Norah and Katie Mae. Northbrook is a place that is passionate about an authentic pursuit of God. We are intent on developing and equipping Kingdom Investors who live to glorify God in everything they do and who seek to make the name of Jesus famous in our community and beyond."



CONTRIBUTED

**Josh Piper**

"My name is Joshua Piper and I am the Student Pastor at Northbrook. I have only been here at Northbrook since February 2024, but in my short time here, I have learned that the Northbrook community is

a family, and whether you are a first time guest or someone who has been coming for years, they want you to be part of that family and community."

**Plan a visit**

Join the Northbrook community for service on Sunday mornings. Life Group hour for children and adults begins at 9, with worship to follow at 10:30. Wednesday intensive courses are held at 6:30 p.m. The church is located at 3691 Alabama Highway 157 Cullman, AL 35058. For more information, visit [www.northbrookbc.com](http://www.northbrookbc.com) or call 256-734-6401.

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## - FAITH -

# 'I try to give God the glory for everything': West Point's Patton Fell discusses relationship with God

**Sammy Confer**

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**WEST POINT, Ala.** — Patton Fell is a junior at West Point High School this year and in this interview, she discussed some of the challenges she's faced in her life up to this point and how her relationship with God has helped her overcome those challenges.

"Towards the end of 2022, I started to struggle with bad anxiety. I didn't tell anyone, because I didn't want to be a burden to others. It continued and wouldn't quit, and I couldn't figure out why. In the middle of 2023, I started to question my faith. I didn't feel like I was saved, and I didn't feel like I had a true relationship with God. I decided to stay quiet about it, because I didn't want people to think that I was faking being a Christian. My anxiety got worse and worse, but I felt like I could get over it myself.

"In November of 2023, I went to church with a friend, and his dad, who was the pastor, said this: 'You can know who Jesus is but not truly believe in Him and have a true relationship with Him'. That was an eye-opener for me, and at that point, I knew I wasn't saved. I knew who Jesus was, because I grew up in church, but I never fully surrendered my life to Him. So, on November 15th, 2023, I gave my life to Jesus, and it was the best decision that I ever made." Fell said. "Ever since that day, I have had

a peace in my heart about things I used to stress over. I have been a much happier person, and He has delivered me from all of my shame. I am now free from sin, and I have the desire to live for the Lord. Even though I know I will still go through hard times, the Lord has proven to me that He will always be by my side and will never leave me."

Patton took away so much from that experience. She shared some of her favorite Bible verses and has been working to help out more people who are looking to find God in their lives.

"I learned that God will never leave my side, and He will provide for me, no matter what. In times of trouble, He will always be there, and He will protect me and my walk with Him. I also learned that He would give me strength when I need it, and empower me to do things for His glory," Fell said. "2 Timothy 1:7 says, 'For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.' In times of fear, this verse helps remind me that God has given me the power to overcome fear.

"Also, Psalm 23 has helped me remember that the Lord will lead me and guide me. I don't have to worry about what is around me, because He makes a way for me," Fell said. "I try to be a light to others and share what God has shown me from the messages at church to others who need encouragement. I



PATTON FELL

## West Point junior Patton Fell

try to give God the glory for everything He has done for me, and I try to make others feel loved by Jesus just from being around me. I try to do what He would want me to do in different situations, so others can see that He can, and He will, change the way you walk, talk, and think."

Patton is a part of Mission Blitz at her church and has touched so many lives during

her time there. She shared some memories from her favorite mission she has participated in while working there.

"My serve group built a deck for our DMD house. The Mission Blitz experience is always so incredible. You get to fellowship with new people and make new friends that love the Lord just as much as you do. My favorite »



part of Mission Blitz is always the message and worship. Every year, we get to see God move in ways we wouldn't have thought was possible. This year, I got to see two of my best friends get saved, and it was so wonderful to watch them give their life to the Lord. Knowing that I will be going to heaven with my friends makes me so happy, because not only do I get to live eternally in heaven, but they will too," Fell said.

"My favorite mission that I took part in was helping a lady clean up around her house last year at Mission Blitz. We got to sit with her and talk about what God has done for her and her family. She had a granddaughter that was in a bad wreck, and the doctors weren't sure she would make it. Sure enough, that little girl was alive and well, and we got to meet her the day we went to

help. I loved this experience, because it helped me see that God was working and is still working, not just in my life, but other people's life too."

Patton wants to make an impact and help as many people as she can find God in their own lives.

"I try to help my friends and their walk with God or anyone else that needs it. Doing this means so much to me, because God has given me the opportunity to shine His glory and live for Him. I love being able to help others with the power that God has given me to use for His glory. It means a lot to me, because I know that one day, as these kids grow up, they will know the Lord and have a relationship with Him. I will get to see them in heaven with me. I also love knowing that these kids will be a light for the Lord and will help give God the glory

for all the things He has done in their life."

Patton gave some advice to those people that want to have a relationship with God but don't quite know how to do that. She talked about some great role models that she looks up to and what she has learned the most about her journey so far.

"I would first tell them that they need to realize that they are a sinner, and they need to confess their sins to God. Then, they need to believe that God sent His one and only son to die for our sins. To build a relationship with God, you have to talk to Him, read the Bible, and do the things that He has called you to do.

"Once you are following Jesus, He will always be there for you through your difficult times, and He will always be right beside you. My advice would be to stick as close as

you can to Jesus from the moment you get saved until the end of your life. He is the only way, and He loves you so much."

She added, "My parents have been my biggest role models, but I've always looked up to Marli Powell. What I like the most about Marli is that she is always smiling, and she is so loving. She never fails to brighten up a room anytime she walks in, and you can see that Jesus is within her just by how she does things. What I've learned the most about my journey so far is that no matter what, you are accepted by God, and He loves you so much. He will never leave you, and He will always be there for you. He wants the best for you, and He will always provide for you. You're not alone, no matter what circumstance you are in, and you are always protected."



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# - FAITH - Service, worship, loving

**Lauren Estes**

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**D**esperation Church was founded in 2010 when Pastor Andy Heis said his heart was heavy for planting a place of worship in Cullman County.

"There is so much to this story, but I will give you the short version," Heis said. "I was working at Gardendale First Baptist, which was a great church and a great job. I loved what I was doing and loved the people I was working with. We had a college and young professional service on Thursday nights called The Generation, where God was moving strong. Students and young professionals were coming from everywhere; they were coming from all over north and central Alabama. There were young people radically getting saved, falling in love with Jesus and growing spiritually.

"Around 2008-2009, God started speaking to me and just really moved in my spirit that he wanted me to plant a church. I had lots of questions for God, like, God, why would you want me to plant a church? We are seeing great things happen here, we are seeing ripples of a movement. What are you doing? I started asking him where would you want me to plant and then asked Him to please not call me to a place like Boston because they would make fun of my accent. I had questions about what I would name it? How would I do this? I have never done anything like this before in my life. I had many more questions. I knew I had to make sure I heard from God to answer all these questions, so I went on a 21-day fast and prayed throughout it with these questions.



**Left to right are Luke Davis, Pamela Hulse, Angela Holmes, Ronnie Holmes, Francine Koenig, Suzanne Allred, Dawn Wagnon, Anna Simonsen and Breanna Glass.**

"On the last day of the fast there was an explosion in my spirit to plant a church in Cullman, Alabama."

Heis thought, he said, "Are you serious God?" He said he knew absolutely nothing about Cullman besides it had a lake he liked to visit.

"All I knew was I had a ton of kids come from Cullman every single week to The Generation service and they would often ask me to pray with them for a movement in Cullman, Alabama," he said. "These kids were hungry for Jesus and revival. Me, my wife and kids drove to Cullman and just started praying over it and

asking God how He wanted us to do this and when He wanted to do this. I was scared to death, but also excited about it."

Heis said he had many people tell him he was crazy for following through with this.

"I had many people ask me why I am planting a church in Cullman since there were already enough churches in Cullman," he shared. "All I could tell them was that God told me to and I didn't want to be disobedient to what I felt God was saying and I didn't want to go the rest of my life asking, 'what if.' What if I plant there, what would it be like? The only way I would know would be to

go and do it. If it fails, it fails, but I would know and I would never have to ask that question."

Heis shared that he was blessed with a church planting ministry called ARC (Association of Related Churches) that taught him and equipped him on how to plant a church.

"They helped me so much," he said. "I look back at all the hard times I had in my life spiritually and all the people that God put in my life, even as a little boy, even people I didn't like very much and how God used every one of them for such a time as this in Cullman, Alabama. Now we also »

have campuses in Jasper and Hayden and prayerfully other campuses will be planted one day in cities that God calls us to."

Still, Heis shared, he doesn't know exactly why God called him to Cullman, but he said he's so thankful He did.

"My wife and I say our biggest mistake in life was not moving to Cullman sooner," he said. "We love this place."

When Desperation Church began, Heis said, he felt that "nondenominational" churches were still understood by the community — instead of the pressure of putting on a title or division, it was about the relationship between people and Jesus.

"After lots of prayer we decided to go nondenominational because we knew that people already had their minds made up about what denominational churches look like, which by the way isn't fair to those churches because I came from a fantastic Baptist church," Heis said.

"I have always said they were 'Baptical,' and I have also been to Church of Gods and Assembly of Gods that are great churches. I went to Presbyterian Bible College. So I know that a lot of these denominations have incredible people in them and God is moving, but some won't try them out because of a certain denomination. So we went nondenominational because if they saw a denomination title on a new church, they wouldn't come in and try it because they will think they already know what flavor it is, so with us, they will have to come in and try it."

Desperation Church's main focus is, and always has been since before it was planted, prayer because, said Heis, prayer produces the presence of God.

"I learned this from my spiritual mentors at Gardendale First Baptist," he said. "Their

thought process was, we will pray and we will invite God into our church and when people walk in they will sense something that maybe they have never experienced before. The things I learned from these men and women of God is we are chasing after the heart of God; we will pursue Him. Our thought process was that Jesus is the centerpiece of everything we do here. Jesus is the centerpiece of worship. He is the centerpiece of the message. He is the centerpiece of how we welcome people and treat people when they walk through the doors. So we have prayerfully adopted that at Desperation Church. It's not about anything else here but Jesus. We know if the presence of God is in the house then He is going to radically change people's lives."

Desperation hosts a prayer service every Wednesday night.

"I tell our people that prayer is our baby; we will not replace it with anything else," Heis said. "We won't do Bible studies on these nights. These are nights that we pray as a church for our community, for our world. Prayer is the boiler room of our church."

"We are crying out to God and asking Him to come and move because we know that without Him in our services and in our lives that church is pointless. It doesn't matter how good the worship is or how good the sermon is — if the Holy Spirit is not in the house and meeting people in the parking lot all the way to their chairs and then back out to their cars after service then church was pointless."

Heis said the church's belief is the presence of God is needed to convict and change lives.

"Only He can do that," he said. "That's why we named our church Desperation Church. There are times honestly that I have thought about changing the name and I've said maybe

I shouldn't have named our church Desperation Church because I really believe that it has kept a lot of people from coming in the doors that need freedom because their thought process is that is a weird name which makes them a weird church. The reason why we named it Desperation Church is because I wanted a name that described who we are and who we want to be. When you look in scripture and you see the people who experienced the power of God and the presence of God the most, they were always desperate people and I could give a laundry list of all these people. So I have always said I want to be desperate for Him, longing for more of Him."

Desperation Church hosts serve days and gives back to the community through a monthly work day.

"I have always said that we want to be a church that gets outside the four walls and ministers to the people in our communities," Heis said.

"There is so much pain in our communities, that if we can just put a smile on their face or something inside them that says that people care, God cares — we want them to see Jesus in some way, form or fashion — then it has been worth it. We want to serve the globe, but God has called us to Cullman first so we do everything that we can to minister to our backyard first. We are not perfect; I am sure that we have missed people and made mistakes but we really do everything we can to help people take a next step towards Jesus and physically help however that may be.

"We try to do small acts of kindness all through our cities and county, but we also do what we call 'First Saturday Serve.' The vision of First Saturday Serve is to go into our communities and be the hands and feet of Jesus, to be the local church mobilized, and to build bridges with people who may not trust

the church, one brick at a time that will be strong enough for the gospel to cross. The greatest way to grow a church is to reach the lost, see them to come to Christ and disciple them after they have started their relationship with Christ. First Saturday happens every first Saturday of the month at 8 a.m. at all of our locations."

Community groups are relationships built in the church and Desperation Church believes it is key to the church.

"We believe that spiritual growth happens through relationships," Heis said.

"The times I grew the most throughout my almost 30 years of being a believer have always been around being with other people who love Jesus and learning from them and what God is teaching them through scripture and through their walk with him. We believe that the church is not just about a service of worship and preaching. The church is the body of believers and the church is really about each other; it's about a Christian family that takes care of each other, that loves each other, that serves each other. They are strongly unified and Jesus is the thread that runs through the church that keeps us unified."

Desperation Church's community groups fulfill part of the vision which is to experience life change.

"In the book of Acts (Acts 5:42) we see that teaching and discipleship happened home to home in small groups," Heis said. "Our groups provide a space for people to belong before they believe and believers to grow in their walks with Jesus."

When asked to define what "the church" is, Heis said he believes when done right, the local church is the hope of the world.

"If the mindset of people sitting in the chairs or pews is, 'what can this church do for me,' then that church will »

not be effective in the world and community they live in. If the people in the church pews have the mindset of, 'what can I do for this church' that church will set the world on fire," he said. "We don't need any more selfish churches; we need selfless churches. The way Jesus has called us to live. Jesus has called us to live surrendered lives to Him, we are to yield our rights to Him, we are to die to our ways and pick up His ways. When our focus as churches is on God and others, that church is marked by God for revival! They will change the world in ways they never thought they could be a part of."

When asked about people looking to visit for the first time, or who have been de-churched, hurt by the church and so forth,

how he would encourage them to get involved, Heis said, "There is no such thing as a perfect church. Churches and church people can hurt you. A lot of times they can hurt you and not even know they hurt you. I would say, find a church that when you walk in, you feel something different in that place, like the presence of God and then how the people treat you when you walk in. Do you see the love of Jesus in those people? Do you leave there saying that those people are different, in a good way? Number one, those people aren't perfect, but number two, they are really trying to seek the heart of God and have a passion for you and for you to know the beauty of Jesus. You will be able to tell the difference.

"I would say don't stay away from other believers. Let them be your strength, your care, your family when you need it because in the world we live in, we need other people to walk with us through life, because life is hard. Life is too short to miss out on what God has for you because you have been hurt by a pastor or a church member or deacon or just a church body. Church hurt is real, and I'm sorry you are going through it, but there are Christians and churches out there that will love you, not judge you, and will help restore you back to the joy of the Lord."

Desperation Church currently has two other locations in addition to the Cullman campus.

"Our Jasper campus

currently has services at the Jasper Civic Center and our Hayden campus holds services in the Hayden High School," Heis said. "Both of these campuses have a 9 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. service. The Jasper campus meets for Converge, our midweek prayer service, on Wednesday nights at 1401 Jones Dairy Road, and the Hayden campus travels to the Cullman campus for Wednesday night Converge."

Desperation Church's Cullman campus is located at 510 Fifth St. SW. It can be reached at 256-255-5979. Sunday service times are 8:30 a.m., 10 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.

Visit Desperation Church Facebook, Instagram or [www.desperationchurch.tv](http://www.desperationchurch.tv) to learn more.

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A promotional poster for the Nutcracker ballet performance. It features five young ballerinas in light blue tutus and white pointe shoes, holding white floral arrangements. The background is a dark green with white snowflakes. The text includes the title 'NUTCRACKER THE', the dates 'NOV 23/24', the company name 'BALLET SOUTH' with 'BROOKE DESNOES ARTISTIC DIRECTOR', and a QR code for ticket purchases. Sponsors listed at the bottom are Wallace State, Budget Blinds, Karma's, Gervais & Lulu, and Luna's.

Get into the Holiday spirit with a magical ballet performance. A marvelous treat for the entire family! Scan the QR code to buy your tickets online. Adults \$17 | Children \$12

The Betty Leeth Haynes Theatre  
Saturday 2:00 pm & 7:00 pm  
Sunday 2:00 pm



A red background with white text. The text describes the Nutcracker performance as a magical treat for the family and provides ticket prices: Adults \$17 and Children \$12. It also lists the performance times at The Betty Leeth Haynes Theatre: Saturday 2:00 pm & 7:00 pm, and Sunday 2:00 pm. A QR code is located in the bottom right corner of the red area.



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A photograph of the storefront of Gervais & Lulu, a wine and champagne shop. The building is brick with a large window on the left displaying the shop's name 'GERVAIS & LULU' and a window on the right displaying 'VINS FINS & CHAMPAGNES'. A woman in a black top and white skirt stands in the doorway. A dog is sitting on the sidewalk in front of the shop. There are several pumpkins and potted plants in front of the shop. A QR code is in the top right corner. The text at the bottom reads 'Two Frenchies who know their wine!' and provides the address and phone number: 'Gervais & Lulu | 117 4th Street SE, Cullman 35055 | 256-338-4637'.

## - MIDDLE SCHOOL FOOTBALL -

# Bearcats fall to Florence in TVFL championship game 24-22

**Nick Griffin**

nick@cullmantribune.com

**CULLMAN, Ala.** — After finishing the regular season 7-0, the Cullman Bearcats hosted Florence for the Tennessee Valley Football League (TVFL) Championship Game at Oliver Woodard Stadium on Oct. 17. The Bearcats led 22-12 at halftime but the Falcons outscored them 12-0 in the second half to come from behind and win this year's TVFL championship 24-22.

After Cullman fumbled on the game's opening play, Florence took over possession with great field position and capitalized with a touchdown to take an early 6-0 lead. The Bearcats responded on the ensuing possession when quarterback Wynn Shannon hit James Short over the middle and he broke through a pair of tacklers to reach the end zone and tie the game at 6. On the following two-point conversion attempt, Short took a handoff and threw the ball to a wide open Nelson Hollingsworth in the corner of the end zone to give Cullman an 8-6 lead with 41 seconds remaining in the first quarter.

The Falcons answered with a scoring drive of their own, pulling ahead to take a 12-8 lead with five minutes to play in the first half. However, the Bearcats dominated the rest of the half, starting with a 10-yard touchdown pass from Shannon to Jon Luke Witcher that put them in front 14-12. James Short punched in the



PHOTOS: NICK GRIFFIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Cullman Middle School's eighth grade team fell to Florence in the TVFL championship game 24-22.**

two-point conversion and Cullman led 16-12 with 2:42 on the clock. The 'Cats defense forced Florence to punt a few plays later and Cullman took possession with just under two minutes remaining in the second quarter. The Bearcats put together a methodical scoring drive, capped by a 26-yard touchdown run by James Short that made it a 22-12 game with just 12 seconds to play in the first half.

The Falcons got the ball to start the third quarter and were able to drive down the field and find the end zone midway through the period to cut the lead to 22-18. On the ensuing possession, Cullman managed to move past midfield and into Florence territory but eventually turned the ball over on downs, giving the ball back to the Falcons early in the fourth quarter.

Florence's offense stayed hot, keeping the chains moving and finishing another drive in the end zone to take a 24-22 lead with 2:36 remaining in the game. The Bearcats picked up a couple first downs to cross midfield on the following possession, but an interception cut the drive short and gave the ball back to the Falcons with just over a minute to play. Florence finished the game in victory formation and claimed this year's TVFL championship with a 24-22 win over Cullman.

Shannon completed 17 of his 24 passes for 136 yards,

two touchdowns and an interception in the loss. James Short finished with 44 yards and a touchdown on the ground and four catches for 36 yards and a touchdown through

the air. Hollingsworth caught seven passes for 52 yards and Witcher caught three passes for 34 yards and a touchdown. Sutton Meyer added 35 yards on four carries and Jon Short picked up 20 yards on two carries.

After finishing 8-0 as seventh graders a season ago, this year's class of eighth graders finish their middle school careers with an impressive, 15-1 record.





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**- COUNTY VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT -**

# Good Hope captures 4th consecutive county crown; Lady Raiders win JV championship

**Nick Griffin**  
nick@cullmantribune.com

**HOLLY POND, Ala.** — This year’s County Volleyball Tournament finished up with a pair of championship matches on Oct. 3 and for the fourth consecutive season, the Good Hope Lady Raiders claimed the county title. Good Hope swept West Point 3-0 in the finals, led by tournament MVP Carley Adams. It was a good night for Good Hope in the JV division as well. The Lady Raiders topped West Point 2-1 to earn this year’s JV championship.

**Good Hope 3 - West Point 0 (25-22, 25-17, 25-12)**

The opening set between the Raiders and Warriors was a tight one. Neither team could build more than a 2-point lead early on and the score was still knotted at 11 midway through the set. Trailing 20-19 late in the set, West Point was able to rally and pull ahead 22-21 at one point but Good Hope outscored the Warriors 4-0 the rest of the way and took a hard-fought first set 25-22.

The Raiders jumped out to a 4-1 lead to start the second set, but West Point battled back to tie things up at 10 as the set went on. That’s when Good Hope took control, putting together a 9-1 run to pull ahead 19-11. The Raiders moved in front 23-14 and closed out the second set 25-17 to take a 2-0 lead in the match.

Good Hope was dominant in the third set, finishing



PHOTOS: NICK GRIFFIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Top: The Good Hope Lady Raiders defeated West Point 3-0 to win their fourth consecutive county volleyball tournament championship. Bottom: The Good Hope Lady Raiders defeated West Point 2-1 to win this year’s JV county volleyball tournament championship.**

strong with the county title on the line. The Raiders led 7-1 early on and stretched their lead to 17-8 later in the set. Good Hope continued pulling away and completed the sweep with a 25-12 win, collecting its fourth straight county championship.

**2024 Cullman County All-Tournament Team**

- Carley Adams, Good Hope (MVP)
- Campbell Koch, Good Hope
- Jolee McHan, Good Hope
- Caselyn Whatley, Good Hope
- Caitlee Simmons, West Point
- Charlie Aris, West Point
- Laklin Shadix, West Point
- Carley Stephens, »





**Vinemont**

- Morgan Flanagan, Vinemont
- Whitney Quick, Fairview
- Kailyn Redding, Fairview
- Sadie Nail, Holly Pond
- Zoe Pitts, Hanceville
- Cloe Shelton, Cold Springs

**2024 All-County Volleyball Team**

- Caselyn Whatley, Good Hope
- Campbell Koch, Good Hope
- Charli Aris, West Point
- Laklin Shadix, West Point
- Patton Fell, West Point
- Abby Kuykendall, Vinemont
- Carley Stephens, Vinemont
- Morgan Flanagan, Vinemont
- Caroline Miller, Vinemont
- Kailyn Redding, Fairview
- Anna Strane, Fairview
- Allie Light, Cold Springs
- Makenzie Twilley, Hanceville
- Blakely Baggett, Holly Pond

**2024 Samantha Perdue**

**Award winner**

- Karys Henderson, Hanceville
- 2024 Cullman County Youth Volleyball Association Scholarship recipients
- Cameron Baty, Cold Springs
- Anna Taylor, West Point
- Jolee McHan, Good Hope
- Carlee Stephens, Vinemont
- Alyssia Mitchell, Holly Pond
- Olivia Stallings, Hanceville
- Josie Earl, Fairview

**Good Hope 2 - West Point 1 (26-24, 18-25, 15-10) (JV)**

The first set was a back-and-forth affair between both teams. It was tied at three early on, but West Point was able to break it and take an 11-8 lead. That would be the biggest lead for either team in this set. The Lady Raiders went on a rally and ended up take a 14-12 lead, but the Lady Warriors scored the next four points to get the lead right

back at 16-14. West Point held a slim 18-15 lead, but Good Hope tied things up at 18. It went back-and-forth in the last part of the set. The Lady Warriors took a 24-23 lead late in the set, but the Lady Raiders collected the final three points to help seal the 26-24 win.

The second set was like the first one. West Point held onto a 6-4 lead, but Good Hope would tie things up at seven. Both teams traded points for most of the set. The Lady Raiders cut it to 13-12, but the Lady Warriors scored the next four points to take a 17-12 lead. The Lady Raiders made it a 19-16 game later on in the set. West Point, though, went on a 6-2 run to close out the set, as they tied the series up at one with a 25-18 win over Good Hope to force a tiebreaker set.

Good Hope got out to a 3-1 lead in the third set. West

Point, however, came back to tie it up at five. The Lady Raiders broke the tie in a big way, as they went on a 6-1 run to take an 11-6 lead. They stretched their lead to 14-7 and held off a late West Point rally to win the set, 15-10, and the JV county championship.

**2024 All-County JV Team**

- Maggie O'Neil, Good Hope
- Calleigh Granger, Good Hope
- Kloe White, Good Hope
- Gracie Garmon, Good Hope
- Alaina Riggs, West Point
- Braley Phillips, West Point
- Chloe Hale, West Point
- Natalie Foell, Vinemont
- Lexi Link, Hanceville
- Josie Jones, Hanceville
- Mali Gregory, Fairview
- Acelyn Cruce, Fairview
- Anna Olinger, Holly Pond
- Ava Olinger, Holly Pond

**Sammy Confer contributed to this article.**



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**- PREP CROSS COUNTRY -**

**Cold Springs Eagles, Lady Eagles win 21st, 19th consecutive county championships; Fairview's England, Cold Springs' Whitlow claim individual titles**

**Nick Griffin**  
nick@cullmantribune.com

**BREMEN, Ala.** — This year's Cullman County Cross Country Championships were hosted at Cold Springs High School's Kudzu Hills on Oct. 22 and the hometown Eagles raced past the rest of the field to claim county titles. The Eagles finished 12 points ahead of Fairview to win their 21st consecutive county championship and the Lady Eagles put together a dominant performance, finishing 54 points ahead of the Lady Aggies to earn their 19th straight county title. Individually, Fairview's Alex England placed first in the varsity boys' race with a time of 16:13.47 and in the varsity girls' race, Cold Springs Paizley Whitlow finished first with a time of 20:21.20.

In the JV division, the Good Hope Raiders and Fairview Lady Aggies collected team championships and individually, Good Hope's Logan Collier (13:46.32) and Hanceville's Mikahela Johnson (16:49.34) placed first in the boys' and girls' races, respectively.



**The Cold Springs Lady Eagles captured their 19th consecutive county championship at Kudzu Hills.**

NICK GRIFFIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE



**The Cold Springs Eagles captured their 21st consecutive county championship at Kudzu Hills.**

NICK GRIFFIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

- INDIVIDUAL RESULTS**  
**Cold Springs Boys**
- 3rd - Sage Nelson: 17:00.07
  - 6th - Drew Dykes: 17:09.36
  - 7th - Logan Perdue: 17:50.94
  - 13th - Blaize Anderson: 19:00.78
  - 16th - James Baggett:

- 19:32.70
- 17th - Blake Belcher: 19:36.52
- 22nd - Harlis Eddy: 20:21.73
- 29th - Samuel Hunt: 22:12.17

**Cold Springs Girls**

- 1st - Paizley Whitlow:

- 20:21.20
- 2nd - Macie Huffstutler: 20:28.95
- 3rd - Reese Swidecki: 21:09.54
- 4th - Claire Huffstutler: 21:10.02
- 6th - Ally Mavericks: 22:42.31
- 7th - Daisy Mavericks: 22:42.54

- 9th - Hayla Watson: 22:57.58
- 10th - Kynzlie Myrex: 23:24.69
- 15th - Leslie Jones: 25:15.18
- 16th - Ryleigh Wright: 25:42.17
- 21st - Alana Smith: 27:01.25
- 34th - Conellie Philbeck: 32:55.07

»

**Fairview Boys**

- 1st - Alex England: 16:13.47
- 11th - Parker Guterrez: 18:36.28
- 12th - Carlos Medina: 18:52.52
- 18th - Jackson Haynes: 19:54.55
- 19th - Danny Martin: 20:08.47
- 24th - Konnor Dunkin: 21:22.70
- 27th - Steven Heredia: 21:43.54
- 28th - Colin Nelson: 21:45.95
- 30th - Tucker Kimbrough: 22:18.76

**Fairview Girls**

- 13th - Xana Wester: 24:05.77
- 14th - Zoey Wester: 24:08.52
- 17th - Molly Lindsey: 26:14.89
- 18th - Lola Haynes: 26:31.15
- 19th - Shelby Mitton: 26:32.59
- 24th - Emma Buckelew: 28:52.26
- 25th - Yadday Medina: 28:59.83
- 29th - Dakota Byer: 31:11.70
- 30th - Daniela Castaneda: 31:17.33

- West Point Boys
- 2nd - Rene Moreno-Tovar: 16:52.92
- 10th - Thomas Ferster: 18:08.06
- 14th - Jesus Tovar: 19:02.84
- 15th - Jakob Salter: 19:21.09
- 21st - Teagan Heaton: 20:19.61
- 26th - Wyatt Lindsey: 21:37.47
- 33rd - Zeth McCain: 24:11.57
- 34th - Miles Fairchild: 24:53.54
- 35th - Carson Jones: 26:13.30

**West Point Girls**

- 8th - Dorothy Salter: 22:51.83
- 20th - Lilly Patterson:

- 26:39.56
- 22nd - Maggie Warren: 27:54.12
- 26th - MJ Kaser: 29:48.93
- 27th - Hollie Salter: 29:59.04

**Holly Pond Boys**

- 8th - Joshua Putman: 17:54.58
- 9th - Matthew Putman: 17:59.01
- 32nd - Bryson Mullins: 24:00.44
- 36th - Carter Brewis: 30:58.11

**Holly Pond Girls**

- 5th - Mila Edmondson: 22:05.92
- 11th - Bella Gambrell: 23:33.01
- 12th - Kynleigh Wood: 23:46.91
- 28th - Jayden Persall: 30:31.73
- 32nd - Peyton Reed: 31:58.18
- 35th - Joplin Grimes: 36:01.77

**Good Hope Boys**

- 5th - Drake Nichols: 17:08.49
- 31st - Oliver Horvath: 23:48.24

**Good Hope Girls**

- 23rd - Aubrey Scott: 28:46.21
- 31st - Brylee Benefield: 31:44.19
- 33rd - Evelyn Quinn: 32:30.56

**Vinemont Boys**

- 4th - Brady Johnson: 17:03.28
- 20th - Anakin Powell: 20:09.66
- 23rd - Clark Johnson: 20:48.81
- 25th - Andrew Landreth: 21:28.26
- 37th - Nolan Dyer: 38:54.69

**Good Hope JV Boys**

- 1st - Logan Collier: 13:46.32
- 2nd - Roger Miller: 14:20.85

- 4th - Lee Dickerson: 15:18.61
- 8th - Jeremy Higgins: 18:24.41

**Good Hope JV Girls**

- 2nd - Sara Self: 17:00.99
- 3rd - Veronica Horvath: 17:27.98
- 13th - Maya Caudle: 22:00.15
- 14th - Isabella Charland: 23:13.75

**Fairview JV Girls**

- 7th - AnnaBelle Smith: 18:50.96
- 10th - Naveah Horton: 19:51.32
- 11th - Violeta Castaneda: 19:53.65
- 12th - Paisley Hopper: 21:06.27
- 15th - DiAnna Peralta: 24:23.78

**Hanceville JV Boys**

- 5th - Ely Stinson: 16:27.41
- 9th - Zeke Barnett: 20:20.63

**Hanceville JV Girls**

- 1st - Mikahela Johnson: 16:49.34
- 6th - Crimson Watts: 18:44.73

**Harmony JV Boys**

- 6th - Kollin Knighten: 17:02.60
- 7th - Collin Clark: 18:06.84
- 10th - John Lombardi: 23:48.08
- 11th - James Lombardi: 32:54.86

**Harmony JV Girls**

- 4th - Harleigh Long: 18:23.38
- 5th - Judy Salter: 18:33.57
- 8th - Alison Boatright: 19:00.90

**West Point JV Boys**

- 3rd - Griffin Jones: 15:00.53

**West Point JV Girls**

- 9th - Lyric Antone: 19:29.64



NICK GRIFFIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Fairview's Alex England placed first at this year's Cullman County Cross Country Championship with a time of 16:13.47.**



NICK GRIFFIN/THE CULLMAN TRIBUNE

**Cold Springs' Paizley Whitlow placed first at this year's Cullman County Cross Country Championship with a time of 20:21.20.**

*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!*



*From left: Council President Jenny Folsom, President Pro tem Johnny Cook, Mayor Woody Jacobs, Clint Hollingsworth, David Moss, Jr. and Brad Smith*  
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