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LAGNIAPPE WEEKLY

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CURTAIN CALL

Dr. Leon Van Dyke ends a 40-year career in dramatic arts after retirement from USA.

By Tim Borland



City cautions board against "meddling" 8

The "Crowd Surf America" tour 34

Cardiac arrest in young athletes 45



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LAGNIAPPE WEEKLY

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CONTENTS

5 **BAY BRIEFS**
City officials cautioned the History Museum of Mobile's board against "meddling" in personnel issues.

12 **COMMENTARY**
Uniforms in school may not be necessary, but are probably appropriate.



CUISINE
Dip season is approaching and Andy has all the recipes for some perfect combinations.

24 **BUSINESS**
Developers announce plans to refurbish the Admiral Semmes Hotel.

COVER
Dr. Leon Van Dyke inspired a generation of theater actors over the past decade before ending his career at the University of South Alabama.



28 **ARTS**
Artifice looks for answers to the rumors and signs the Centre for the Living Arts is on the decline.



MUSIC
Metal-core bands Chiodos and blessthefall bring the "Crowd Surf America" tour to the Soul Kitchen Aug. 11.

40 **FILM**
"Labor Day" not ruined by clichés and a hap-pie ending.

42 **MEDIA**
Access Magazine makes physical move that underscores its growth.

45 **SPORTS**
Groups seek to flatline sudden cardiac arrest in youth athletes.

47 **STYLE**
Young tattoo artists adding "fresh blood to old pool."

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Doing what we can with what we have

To Thirsty Work columnist Susan Larsson:

I always read your column features, but somehow I missed your Perdido Vineyards Honey and Vinegar article (June 3). I am greatly indebted to you. You are a most impressive writer on the subject of beverages. I already thought that from previous articles. You surprised me with your additional research on our native American grapes. I have a good friend, Jim Lee, vineyard and winery owner, in Holks Bluff, Ala., near Gadsden, who has succeeded in growing Cabernet Sauvignon and the subsequent traditional vinifera wines.

In my case, it is too risky to attempt vinifera in lower, coastal Alabama, whereas the native American muscadine species thrive. Many improvements have occurred in development of wine grapes in the southeast United States since about 1960. In time our region will gain its place as a producer of quality wines. Alcoholic beverage laws and regulations have created a very adverse business climate for a long term investment in vineyards and wineries … much different than the scenario with brew pubs, craft beer, etc., that does not require farming in rural areas.

My business motivation for producing wine vinegars was directly related to the official effort of the ABC Board to repeal the Alabama Native Farm Winery Act of 1979 and regress back to the absolute monopoly control, now enjoyed by in-state Distributors/Importers of out-of-state. Our wine vinegars are refermented natural wine stock, not infused, as are so many products in mass food distribution, which use a base ingredient, white distilled vinegar with no nutritional food value. All for the every day, low, low, price. Antioxidants are a powerful story in healthy foods. We are having to educate the public about the use of better vinegars.

Thank you so much, again.

Jim Eddins,
Owner, Perdido Vineyards

Give soccer complex some strategy

Dear Editor:

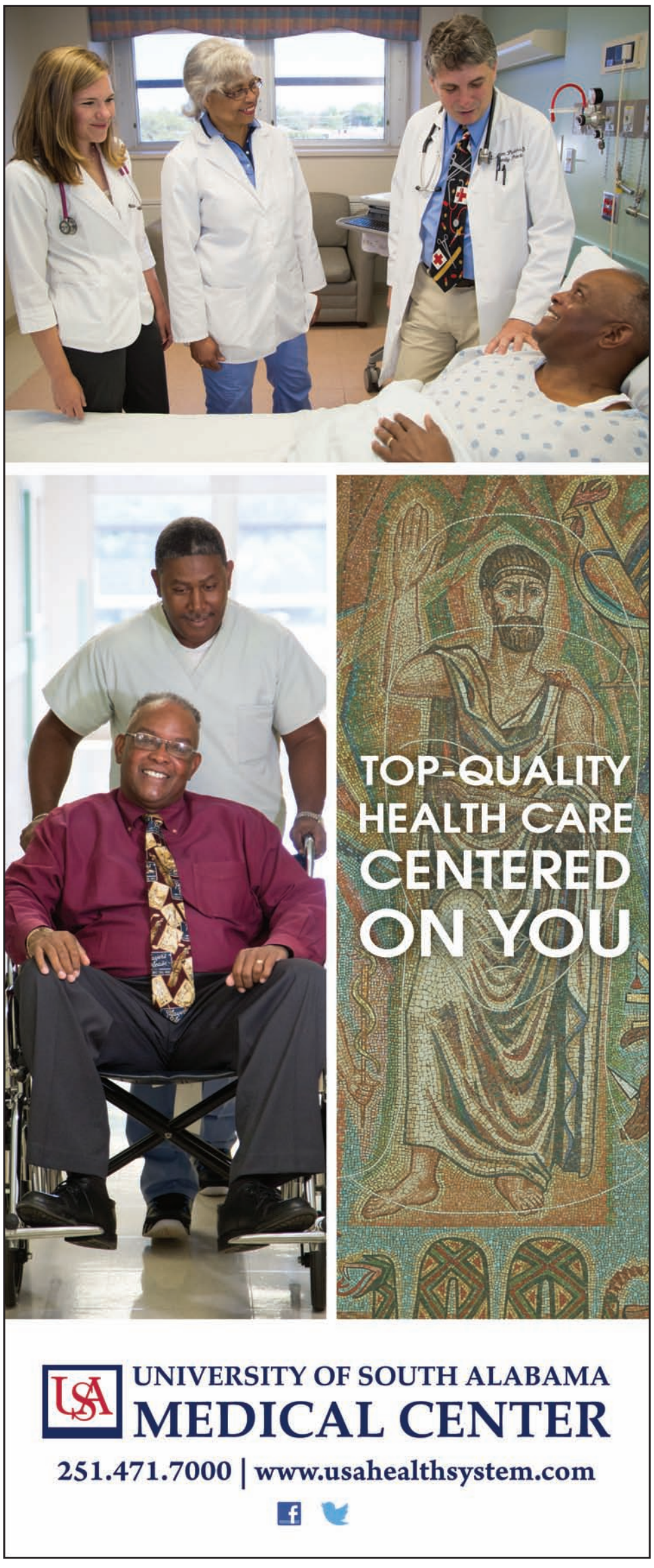
I do not speak for any soccer associations, my opinion is only offered based on 14 years of experience of school and club travel in Mobile and Huntsville. While I applaud any and all efforts to build a long overdue city/county soccer complex, the proposed locations and sizes are wrong for Mobile's soccer players and fans. Can you imagine the coaches trying to shout directions over the roar of traffic on I-65 and I-10? As soccer season is year round sport between school and club (travel) associations, the other complex will have to compete with no less than eight baseball or softball fields and four basketball courts and a future football field for parking and other services. Not to mention the fields are not uniform in size which is what is required for attaching regional tournaments.

One of the best soccer complex's in the Southeast is located in Decatur, Ala., the Jack Allen Complex which draws soccer tournaments from all over the region.

The entire soccer community and I thank the county commissioners and city council for their leadership and efforts in building a first class soccer complex. If we are to compete with Baldwin County to our east and Harrison County to our west and Birmingham to our north, to attract visiting soccer tournaments, we need to model our soccer complex after successful soccer fields and improve upon those models. Let's not reinvent the wheel.

I understand the rational for combining other areas of interest into the soccer complex, it is an easier sell for the competing tax dollars to build the facility, but it will not work to serve the soccer community nor attract regional tournaments and tax dollars. If Mobile wants to compete for the large regional soccer tournaments that bring in hundreds of families on any given weekend, let's make it a first class soccer complex where coaches and players from all over the Southeast will want to come play, stay and spend their hard earned dollars in our restaurants, hotels, attractions, beaches, fueling stations and other services.

Frederick E. Walch, IV
Mobile





Enviromental groups introduce 'litter getter' bags to City Council

BY DALE LIESCH/REPORTER | dale@lagniappemobile.com

The city's war on litter received reinforcements during the Mobile City Council meeting Aug. 5.

Representatives from Mobile Baykeeper and the Alabama Coastal Heritage Trust handed out the first of 1,000 "litter getter" bags to councilors in hopes of starting a new initiative for citizens to help pick up trash in neighborhoods.

ACHT's Hank Caddell told councilors to take the bags, purchased by the organization, on walks around their neighborhoods and spread the word about the bags with their constituents. Residents can pick up bags at the Baykeeper office, Caddell said, but they have to pledge to pick up litter.

"Litter is a blight, it's an embarrassment … and it's an environmental hazard," Caddell said. "We don't want people to take bags unless they pledge to use them."

Baykeeper Executive Director Casi Callaway said she's already begun using the bags around her neighborhood. She said she has one for trash and one for recyclables.

"Our job and our goal with the bags is to actually pick (the litter) up," she said. "This is something we all need to be doing."

Councilman Joel Daves said the bags were a good idea and agreed that everyone in the city should be doing their part.

"This problem we have with litter will have to be addressed by every citizen and every business," he said. "If everyone starts picking up litter we don't have a litter problem."

Mayor Sandy Stimpson's administration has already taken steps to address the litter problem. Councilors recently passed a new litter ordinance that beefed up enforcement on individuals and businesses found in violation. Also, as part of a settlement with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, the city will be required to purchase a litter boat and another trap for Dog River.

In other business, the city renewed the lease of the Keep Mobile Beautiful recycling center at 1451 Government St., in the amount of $2,550 per month. The city will make improvements to the center, as part of the lease agreement.

The council denied a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity for TLT Transport LLC for the operation of a non-emergency medical transportation service for patients in wheelchairs, after a brief public hearing.

Councilors had concerns with granting the license to the company out of Pace, Fla. because they didn't have a local office of their own, or an official partnership with a local company, which are two requirements in the city code. Although TLT did have a contract with Lifeguard Ambulance service to share their office, Daves said it didn't meet the right criteria for the permit because they didn't have a partnership agreement drawn up.

TLT can come back to the council at a later date with the same request, if they choose.

The council approved an amendment to the lease with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Mobile to allow for an expansion of its playground at Bush Park.

The council approved a contract with James H. Adams and Son Construction in the amount of $34,444 for traffic calming improvements in the city. Those improvements include six new speed humps in the Llanfair neighborhood and repairs to two speed humps at LeFlore Drive, repair to one at Ingate Street and one on Green Tree Road.

The council also approved a contract with General Contractor Steve Cumbie in the amount of $214,084.86 for roof truss replacement on Mobile Fire-Rescue Station 11 on South Broad Street.

Woman leads police on car chase

BY ALYSON STOKES/REPORTER | alyson@lagniappemobile.com

A woman led police on a car chase after an attempted traffic stop July 31.

According to MPD spokesperson Officer Terence Perkins, police attempted to stop 44-year-old Shelia Brown at approximately 5:40 a.m. in the area of Airport Blvd. near the I-65 service road, but she refused to stop. After a short chase, police said Brown stopped in the Marriott hotel parking lot.

Officials said Brown struck several patrol cars with her own vehicle before she eventually stopped. She was arrested and charged with reckless endangerment and attempting to elude police.

Drug bust at Beverly Motel

According to police, officers responded to the Beverly Motel at 4384 Government Blvd. July 31 for a report of a strong chemical smell coming from the hotel room.

MPD arrested 33-year-old Jason McClenton, 42-year-old John Avera and 27-year-old Amanda Black. A child was also present in the room.

Officers located the child, who was then turned over to his grandparents through the Department of Human Resources.

MPD spokesperson Officer Terence Perkins said McClenton was charged with felony possession of drug precursor chemicals, unlawful possession of a controlled substance and felony possession of drug paraphernalia, Avera, who had a county warrant, was charged with unlawful possession of a controlled substance and felony possession of drug paraphernalia. Black, who also had a local warrant, was charged with chemical endangerment of a child.

Robbery, sexual assault at Plantation Apartments

According to officials, 21-year-old Gabriel Obrien Neal was charged with theft of property, sodomy, unlawful imprisonment and third degree robbery after robbing and sexually assaulting a woman at Plantation Apartments on Old Pascagoula Road July 31.

The woman told the MPD that Neal, who she didn't know, entered her apartment, tied her up and forced her to have unwanted sexual contact. Neal then took her money, jewelry and car keys before leaving the location in her vehicle.







Mobile County parents want to try on new uniform policy

BY ALYSON STOKES/REPORTER | alyson@lagniappemobile.com

A Facebook group calling for the elimination of school uniforms in Mobile County Public Schools recently garnered attention after Baldwin County Public Schools approved a policy July 24 to allow high school students to wear open-toed shoes and blue jeans.

The group named "No More Uniforms in Mobile County Schools" calls for supporters to help do away with the MCPSS uniform policy and replace it with a dress code.

Thomasina Ayer, one of the group's five administrators, enrolled three of her five children in MCPSS this year and she thinks uniforms have become more of a burden rather than a benefit.

According to Ayer, purchasing three sets of uniforms costs her about $600. Next school year, she said will have to buy uniforms for four children.

"They said it would ease financial burdens, end bullying and help with security. It has done just the opposite on everything," she said.

However, MCPSS Superintendent Martha Peek still believes school uniforms provide for a safer environment and create less contention among students.

"When we have 90 school campuses, it certainly helps us in monitoring the school campus in making sure we don't have intruders," she said. "When they go on a field trip, when they have their school uniform on, it's a good way to find our students."

Peek also said uniforms impact behavior in positive ways, as there is less focus on current trends and more focus on learning. Uniforms also help students prepare for post-secondary success, she said.

Mobile County has had a uniform policy implemented for a number of years, and Peek said there has always been a commitment to maintaining the policy, though "anything is always possible."

"The board and I have been made aware of the (Facebook) group, and I understand that the parents have said they want to present a petition before the board." Peek said. "The board and I always listen and always consider what is being presented and would certainly do the same thing for a parent who obviously feels very strongly against this."

According to Peek, anyone can speak before the school board during regular board meetings, but up until this time, she has not heard the board discuss anything about eliminating the school uniform policy.

"I think some of the action in Baldwin is sparking interest here in Mobile County," she said.

At press time, Ayer said there were currently 4,544 members in the Facebook group and 2,500 signatures on the petition to eliminate school uniforms.

She, along with other members of the group, would like the MCPSS uniform policy to be withdrawn and replaced with a universal dress code:

For pants, "Blue Jeans or Khaki Pants. Pants, shorts, and skirts must sit at the waist and not be more than two inches above the knee. No baggy or sagging pants, shorts, or skirts allowed."

For shirts, "T-shirts, polo shirts, or button downs. No spaghetti straps, or halter tops allowed. No midriff shirt, shirts must come to the waistline. No bras should be visible."

For shoes, "They must be closed-toe. No flip-flops or any type of shoes with wheels. Middle and high school students must have tennis shoes during P.E. and any other outside activity. Shoes of all colors should be allowed."

Further, the group advocated that "no baggy or loose-fitting clothing. Jackets, of any color, should be allowed in schools during winter times. Belts should not be required, especially in elementary schools."

If the MCPSS School Board decides to implement any type of change to the existing uniform policy, Peek said it would be a decision that would happen later in the school year because schools open Aug. 7 and families have already purchased uniforms for the year. However, she said she does not anticipate any deviation from the current uniform policy, as Mobile County seems to be, in general, a "uniform type of county" in both public and private schools.

"In the near future, I don't see there would be any change," Peek said.

According to Balwin County Public Schools Communication Director Terry Wilhite, Baldwin County high school principals requested the change in their uniform policy.

"They believed extending dress code provisions to allow blue denim jeans and open-toe shoes would add to student comfort, reduce dress code infractions and make buying clothing more affordable for parents," Wilhite said.

The process from when the idea was first proposed to when it became approved took about 60 days, Wilhite said.

"Board policy calls for a 30-day input period," he said. "We had more than 7,500 complete an online survey. About 80 percent of parents were in favor of the change. We also heard from a large number of elementary and middle school parents who also want to see the change occur for those of those grade levels. The board will monitor the high school implementation and could at a later date propose the measure be extended to lower grades."

All seven Baldwin County high school principals advocated for the uniform policy change.

Because many parents want uniforms eliminated completely, the Baldwin County School Board will closely monitor the extension to see how well students handle the change before taking any further action, Wilhite said.

"We have made a steady course of revisions over the past few years, each relaxing the dress code provisions a little more," he said. "For example, a few years ago, principals were given the liberty to allow student's to wear 'spirit shirts' – that is, club and organization T-shirts. That worked out really well."

Wilhite said each individual school system must decide what works best in its own situation.

As far as uniform violations forcing students to lose time in the classroom, Wilhite believes it has created one of the most significant reasons to explore additional provisions to the dress code, as the main focus remains to educate students.

"For every argument against uniforms, there's an argument for uniforms." Wilhite said. "Uniforms will stir up debate quicker than just about any other subject."

County employees air grievances over new insurance, stagnant wages

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

More than 100 Mobile County employees gathered at Government Plaza last week to discuss the details of the new health insurance program the county adopted for nearly 1,400 retired and active personnel in April.

Commission President Connie Hudson began the discussion by saying the program was implemented because of concerns the county had about the long-term sustainability of the county's old "self insured" program.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama is the administrator of both plans, but the move to the Local Government Plan – which pools together several government entities – is eventually expected to save the county more than $2 million a year.

The county's portion of the insurance premiums was reduced in the plan switch, with monthly contributions coming down from $1,096 to $871 for family coverage and $404 to $346 for single coverage.

For employees, single coverage premiums went from $96 to $85 per month and family coverage also dropped from $257 to $218 – an annual savings of almost $500.

Retiree coverage for individuals only dropped slightly, from $286 to $284, while family coverage for retired county employees actually increased from $751 to $771 per month.

Though the premiums for some polices went down, many county employees – especially those with pre-existing health problems – say they are struggling to pay the costs of prescriptions under the new plan.

In the new plan, copays for generic prescriptions are less expensive, costing only $5 to the previous plan's $10.

However, many employees came to the meeting to voice concerns over not being able to get generic versions of the medicines they need on a regular basis.

Donna Jones, the county's director of general services, spoke at the opening of the meeting to address some frequently asked questions and review some of the plan's specifics.

"For the most part, the majority of our employees are seeing a savings," Jones said. "Their premiums are lower and most copays are lower, if they're not having to take expensive name brand drugs."

Jones did say it was "unfortunate" that employees who are the sickest and have no generic prescription options are seeing the most cost increase

"This was a tough decision," she said. "The commissioners went through the benefits and were aware it would have the affect on employees. Sometimes have to make tough business decisions."

Jones said there are several resources employees can take advantage of to help offset the cost of name brand medicine including claims for reimbursement through the insurance provider.

After meeting a $200 major medical calendar year deductible, employees will be reimbursed for 80 percent of their name brand prescription costs.

Some employees at the meeting said they were paying more than $1,000 a month to get maintenance drugs like asthma medication and diabetic testing supplies.

In the previous plan, the copays for all prescriptions were $35 for preferred drugs and $50 for non-preferred drugs. In some instances, employees were also able to purchase maintenance drugs in three-month supplies for a single copay – an option that is no longer available.

There also coupons and prescription assistance programs available to county employees. Information on those resources was also given to each employee who attended the meeting.

"I know many of you have never had to do these things, but neither have I," Jones said. "We're all going to have to take a more active role in our own healthcare."

Even with the discounts, some employees claimed they are having a hard time paying for medicines that were previously affordable.

Richard Clayton, of the Mobile County Sheriff's Office, said he's collected more than 160 complaints about the new insurance policy.

"Some employees are having to choose between household bills and drugs, and unhealthy employees can't work," Clayton said. "There many areas the county could cut the budget, instead of balancing it on the backs of its employees."

Clayton, like many employees in attendance, said the costly insurance is compounding the problem of county wages that are already stagnant.

The last pay raise for county employees was approved in 2007, and Clayton said without salaries adjusted for the rising cost of living, the new insurance coverage is "equal to a deep pay cut" for county employees.

Paul Burch, who also works with the sheriff's office, told the commissioners he has employees whose salary is less than the cost of their monthly prescriptions.

"The insurance payments are almost half of most retirees checks," Burch said. "I don't know one that I used to work with who hasn't had to take on another job."

Burch also said poor wages and bad benefits are affecting the ability of the sheriff's office to keep and recruit employees. According to Burch, there are currently 13 vacancies on the force — something he called unsafe for active offices and the general public.

Pat Pile, who retired from the sheriff's office in 2001, said even the old insurance plan was "bad," but called the new policy worse. He also said the problem started as far back as the1980s.

"The prior county commissioners made promises to the employees, and we gave up raises in order to keep our health insurance," Pile said. "When my health insurance this year surpassed my mortgage, I knew something went wrong."

Sgt. Phillip Mayo said even if prescription discount plans and reimbursements are available, it shouldn't be the county employees' responsibility to figure out how to make their health insurance affordable.

"It seems like the (salary and insurance coverage) cuts have been to produce pet projects and giveaways at our expense," he said. "Our insurance paying plan has been polluted with promises coupons."

Supporting several members of his department who were in attendance, Sheriff Sam Cochran spoke before the commission asking them to act quickly to help their employees.

"This government just needs to rethink its priorities and do more for employees because they're suffering and we're losing them," Cochran said. "We've gone from $54 for family coverage in 2008 to $218 today. We should be able to draw from the considerable savings made and maybe pay some of the these deductibles for employees or something."

Cochran said the way the insurance changes came about has been as much of a frustration for employees as the change itself.

He said other programs allow several months for employees to get health and fitness tests, but Blue Cross and Blue Shield gave Mobile County only 60 days.

"You can't do that much in that short period of time," he said. "I thought that was a pretty damn hard bargain to drive down on our employees."

The commissioners didn't directly respond to the comments made, but during her closing comments Hudson said the county was in the process of working on next year's budget. She also said the employee's concerns "had been heard."

The crowd reacted unfavorably to those remarks and many begin yelling things from the audience. Finally, Hudson responded saying, "We all have a hard job."

"Do you think it's easy to make decisions that you know are going to affect people's lives?" she asked the crowd. "Do you think we're the type of people who don't care?"

Commissioners Jerry Carl and Merceria Ludgood had no comment and the meeting was adjourned.

Former 911 director awarded 'tailored' retirement insurance

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

In the middle of a controversial shift to a new healthcare coverage plan for county personnel, a state Attorney General's opinion is pending for one Mobile County retiree who receives family insurance coverage free of charge.

In October 2012, the board of the Mobile County Communications District — commonly refered to as the "911 Board" — passed a resolution extending group health insurance to "all retired MCCD employees reaching the age of 65 who are enrolled in Medicare and to cover the premiums of employees who meet those qualifications."

For more than a year, the only employee receiving that insurance package was former director George Williams, who retired from the board in April 2013.

When asked about the details of the plan, an MCCD administrative assistant said Williams and his spouse — like other county retirees — are covered under the Local Government Plan, which the county switched to in April.

There is no cost to Williams, but the MCCD pays a monthly premium of $960.

Despite the fact that Williams was only retiree who qualified for the insurance, the MCCD got into a lengthy discussion earlier this year when a motion was made to narrow the qualifications even further.

In a June meeting, board member and County Engineer Joe Ruffer proposed an amendment to the insurance policy that would extend benefits exclusively to Williams.

After there was some uncertainty about Ruffer's motion, Attorney Bill Wasden clarified the request.

"The motion should read, 'amend the board's previous resolution extending group health insurance to all retired MCCD employees reaching the age of 65 enrolled in Medicare; such that group health insurance under this motion by Mr. Ruffer will hence forth be extended only to the immediate past director, George Williams, who is now retired and meets those qualifications,'" Wasden said at the meeting.

The board approved the motion, but not without some discussion.

"We're doing a heck of a lot for George," said board member and Mobile Metro Jail Warden Trey Oliver. "We don't want this to be a case-by-case basis. This should never come up again. We should have a retirement plan that fits everyone put in place. That's it."

During the meeting, Oliver also referred to Williams' insurance as a "special exception" and said some of the board members didn't realize how expensive it would be at the time it was initially passed.

When asked about the insurance polices in July, Oliver said he, Williams, Ruffer, current MCCD Director Garry Tanner and former Fire Chief Stephen Dean attended a committee meeting a couple of years ago and "benefits were discussed."

"We passed a retirement plan, and I think none of us realized just how expensive and how liberal the benefits were," Oliver said. "I think it's not in line with the way we should manage 911."

Oliver said he was concerned and disturbed when he found out the results didn't affect any other employee and said it seemed as if the policy was "tailored" specifically for Williams.

"I don't think that's the way the board should do business," he said. "I truly believe the majority, if not the entire board, feels that way now."

In June, Wasden told the board an Attorney General's opinion on the matter was "pending." As of Aug. 1, Wasden said he had had "yet to receive" a response from the Attorney General's office. Attempts to reach MCCD Director Gary Tanner via email were initially unsuccessful. The board meets the third Thursday of each month at 8 a.m. at 7340 Zeigler Blvd.

City cautions museum board against 'meddling' with personnel

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

Earlier in the year, the History Museum of Mobile's board of directors agreed to pay for expensive meals and massages for certain city and board employees – an expenditure that has returned to highlight a "murky" relationship between the board and the city of Mobile.

In April, $516 was charged to a board account at Zea Rotisserie and Grill and Element's Massage. According to Wayne Sirmon, who was the board's chairman at the time, the purchases were made for four employees on Administrative Professionals' Day.

"The last several years we've used board money to say 'thanks' to our staff members," Sirmon said. "There's nothing wrong with it. Some board members felt offended they didn't get asked for permission, and they probably didn't handle it in the best way. Instead of calling myself or (Director David) Alsobrook, they went to the city's finance department."

The money used for the meals and massages was not from public funds, but Colby Cooper, Mayor Sandy Stimpson's chief of staff, said the unusual nature of the board and city's public-private partnership made the purchases questionable.

"The board and city do have some shared accounts, but these were not city funds. The charges weren't made with city credit cards," Cooper said. "We're currently working to audit these accounts to better understand who has what, but because we're in a gray area, I have to question it."

Cooper said other boards in Mobile have done similar things for their employees, but some of the four administrative assistants that received meals and massages are city employees.

Keep Mobile Beautiful and the Mobile Museum of Art are two other examples of organizations governed by both the city and a separate board. Cooper said those types of boards should be directed by similar guidance, and the city shouldn't show favoritism to one set of employees.

Since the issue was raised, Alsobrook, Sirmon and acting chairman Beth Stafford have agreed to put a stop to any similar expenditures for administrative assistants in the future.

"These expenses were not presented in advance to the board," Stafford said in an email. "When the board discovered these expenditures, it consulted with the city administration about them as well. The administration's assistance has been invaluable in helping to address both the board and the administration's mutual concerns."

Though this particular issue may have been resolved, it's indicative of underlying issues between the entities. Cooper said the Stimpson administration inherited a decades old "gray area" when it came to the functional responsibilities and finances of the museum.

The Mobile City Council appoints the 21-member board and each council member is generally tasked with appointing three members. However, neither board members nor their appointing city council members are responsible for managing the personnel of the museum. The board's primary directive is to administer the budget and act as stewards of the museum's collection on behalf of the city.

"This is a city department with merit system employees reporting to the chief of staff trying to operate with a board of this nature," Cooper said. "A city councilor can't in anyway meddle in the hiring and firing of personnel."

However, that's exactly what Sirmon, who stepped down as the board's chairman last Monday, said some board members are trying to do.

"Some of the members feel they need to approve or disapprove daily operational matters at the museum," Sirmon said. "Some of the people appointed in the last year-and-a-half have never taken the time to understand what the board's purpose is and what we can and can't do."

Stafford said in an email to Lagniappe that Sirmon's resignation as chairman was "mutually agreed upon."

Sirmon, who has served on the board for more than four years, said Stafford was a part of a "well orchestrated move" to have him step down.

"Certain members of the board were discussing casting a vote of 'no confidence' against (Director) Alsobrook, and they didn't like my answer, which was that he was employed through the personnel board like any other city employee would be," Sirmon said. "They couldn't get rid of him, so they leaned on me."

Sirmon said he did volunteer his resignation as chairman during the meeting July 28, but only because he wanted to avoid a distraction for the museum and the city. In the same vein, Cooper recently discussed an email exchange about the board that caught the attention of District 1 Councilman Fred Richardson.

Late last month, board secretary Wanda Earl – a Richardson appointee – made an email inquiry to Alsobrook about a pending city-funded position at the museum.

"Please let us know the status on the Minority Curator position," an email obtained by Lagniappe read. "I spoke with Councilman Richardson and he nor I (plus several board members) were not aware of the position posting, [sic] potential candidates, etc."

After being briefed on Earl's request, Cooper responded the same day, cautioning that "the hiring of all city employees is an administrative function of the city that falls under the purview of the hiring authority, the mayor."

He also said that involving Richardson could be a violation of the Zoghby Act, Section 11-44C-2, a copy of which was attached to his response.

After reading the email, Richardson sought advice from council attorney Jim Rossler about Earl's request. He made sure to clarify in an email that he had "not spoken a word to either officials at the museum nor the Stimpson's administration, regarding hiring anyone, anywhere: nor do I plant [sic] to in the future."

Rossler's response indicated the Zogby Act wouldn't apply to Earl or any board appointee for that matter.

"I see nothing that Mrs. Earl said in her email that would warrant any concern that she is violating any laws," he said via email. "In fact the ByLaws [sic] of the Museum Board include a section for the appointment of a Personnel Committee that is vested with the responsibility of assisting the Museum Director in recruiting senior positions on the staff and making recommendations regarding such positions to the Appointing Authority."

Richardson called Cooper's email to Earl an "idle threat," but Cooper said the city was making a "good faith" effort to clarify the roles of board members and the council members who appoint them.

When asked about both situations, Cooper said the city was "looking forward," adding that the administration has continued to work closely with Stafford and museum staff.

He said developing the museum and telling the city's collective history is big part of the Stimpson administration's goals for the city.

"Over the next week or so there will be further guidance that really starts to identify the separation of assets and the delineation of roles, responsibility and finances," he said. "The city needs these public-private partnerships. I believe each city councilmember has good intentions when they appoint people to this board, but this is a 21-person board sitting near a city department. We have to really work hard to identify what that relationship is."

Several businesses to be uprooted under preferred I-10 bridge route

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

Though it's only a draft, the Environmental Impact Study the U.S. Department of Transportation recently released online suggests the long-awaited Interstate 10 bridge of the Mobile River could have significant effects on local businesses both large and small.

The environmental impact study will get fine tuned over the next six months, and the project itself will be designed over the next two years.

The EIS report shows four possible alternative paths the 215-foot tall bridge could take, which are listed as Alternatives A, B, B (Prime) and C. Three of these — A, B and B (Prime) — would add a lane to the eastbound Broad Street on ramp and carry it onto the I-10 mainline, thereby widening the eastbound section of the Interstate to six lanes.

Alternative B and B (Prime), the preferred route, would affect both Austal USA, Mobile Abrasives and Harrison Brothers. They would also require the acquisition of 13 smaller businesses near the waterfront area.

Those include:

Delta Bail Bond Company, Outlaw Bail Bonding Company, Bond Max Bail Bonding Company, James Bail Bonding Company, James Darley Esq. Law Office, Bandit Bonding Company, Blackwell's Towing Company, South Royal Street Vacant Metal Building, South Royal Street Vacant Concrete Building, South Royal Street Vacant Metal Warehouse and Southern Fish and Oyster Company.

The report mentions available space located at Mobile Metro Jail complex as a possible replacement for the affected businesses and states that "no problems finding adequate replacement locations for these businesses are anticipated."

It also acknowledges the more than 50-year history and family ownership of Southern Fish and Oyster Company.

"This site requires that business have river frontage or be in very close proximity to the river," the report reads. "The state currently owns river frontage as a protective purchase. After the alignment of the required bridge is determined, sufficient surplus state property will be available to accommodate the re-establishment of this business on the river."

Alternative B (Prime) creates only a slight shift in the path of the bridge, but it has been identified as the preferred Alternative in the report and is also preferred by the City of Mobile and Austal USA.

Unlike Alternative B, B (Prime) would not have an impact on Austal's newly constructed administration building and would cause less of an impact on the shipbuilder's parking lot – only affecting a quarter of the 1,000 parking spaces available.

"Without sufficient parking areas, Austal may not be able to meet future labor demands," the report reads. "The parking situation can be improved with the construction of an on-site parking garage with an estimated construction cost of $15 million."

The report makes no indication of how such a parking facility would be funded.

B (Prime) also avoids the Old Union Hall, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It also wouldn't interfere with any future operations that might be located at the Mobile Cruise Ship Terminal.

As for the local economy, the report suggests Alternative A would affect the least number of maritime jobs – only 78. It's projected that B and B (Prime) could cause 97 job losses, but that's still significantly fewer than the project 3,258 jobs affected by Alternative C.

If selected, Alternative C would also affect four residential houses and the following businesses:

Dyer Trucking Company, Mellow Yellow Kitchen Catering, Neptune's Daughters Float Storage 1 and 2, Refined Oil Products, Merritt Oil Company, Radio Holland USA, Liz's Bar Vacant, an Abandoned Commercial building, Gulf City Body and Trailer Works, Atlas Ship Services, Pratt's D.E. Ship Supplies and One Our Bonding.

Because there are no other warehouse facilities in the area, the report suggests under Alternative C "it's unlikely the Mardi Gras float storage for Neptune's Daughters will able to continue to operate and (its current) site."

Which Alternative is selected hinges on input from city officials, businesses, the general public and other stakeholders.

The Alabama Department of Transportation has confirmed the date and times of two public hearings for the proposed bridge project, which will also address the widening of the Bayway.

The hearings will take place from 5-8 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 23 at the Alabama Cruise Terminal and Monday, Sept. 29 at the Five Rivers Delta Resource Center at the same time.

More information is available and the full draft of the Environmental Impact Study can be viewed at mobileriverbridge.com.

County considers $235,000 increase to Plaza roof repair

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

Mobile County Commissioners are still mulling over a $235,000 change order to a roofing contract for a project that's been planned since 2012.

Though they agreed to table a decision until Aug. 11, commissioners were presented with a request from the county's engineering department to tack extra money on a contract awarded to Team-Craft Roofing for repairs to roof of Government Plaza.

If approved, the change would bring the total of the project aimed at fixing leaks in the roof of the 20-year-old building to $3,410,109. The original request would also extend the contract time by 89 days.

Tyler Martin, the county's project engineer, said the root of the problem lies in rubber couplings that connect pipes in roof drainage plumbing.

"When the building was first constructed, they used a rubber cupping in a few isolated areas and they really shouldn't have," Martin said. "Some of the drains in the center trough area are actually encased within lightweight concrete."

Martin said part of the proposed change order would remove the concrete covering on the roof and replace the aforementioned couplings with metal pipes that are welded together – ensuring leaks don't persist.

It's all part of the 20-year guarantee offered to the county by The Garland Company, the project's material supplier.

The design-build contract was awarded to Garland, TeamCraft and the design firm Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood, Inc. in 2012.

Some, including County Commissioner Jerry Carl, have questioned why the removal of lightweight concrete on the roof wasn't included in the original price.

A copy of the original scope of work was provided to Lagniappe from county officials and indeed mentioned the "removal of existing roof and lightweight concrete to structural deck."

"Originally, the scope of work included removing all that concrete, but once we got into the project, the roofer did some investigation and found all that to be in excellent shape," Martin said. "They gave us a $20,891 credit to the ordinal contract so the concrete would stay with the exception of that localized area."

Martin said there was no mention of any plumbing piping in the original scope of work and when asked, he told Carl TeamCraft's contract was $400,000 less than the next lowest bidder.

In the original $3.1 million contract, an extra $800,000 was included for additional expenses. However, Martin said that allowance was used to repair the roof on the north and south towers.

"The atrium wasn't the only part that leaked. The north and south towers had leaks too," Martin said. "Rather than develop a scope of work for the repairs, we just included an allowance to cover the investigation and repairs. So, those have been ongoing."

The main issue some commissioners took with the change order was timing and TeamCraft's history with the county.



Photo/Wikipedia

The company's work resulted in fires on the roof of Government Plaza in April and May, which Carl discussed during the commission's July 28 meeting.

"There are two add-ons as far as time extension plus an extra $235,000 and 14 additional days for fire. Does this take into consideration it's the fire they started," Carl asked representatives from the engineering department. "Should they be rewarded for a delay they created?"

Martin told Carl the cause of the fire was considered when reviewing the change order.

At the meeting Commissioner Connie Hudson said she had only known the details of the change or for two days before she was asked to vote on it.

"There where questions asked of me about why we're doing this, and I need to be able to answer them," Hudson said at the meeting. "I need a little more time to look at change orders that are nearly a quarter of a million dollars."

Martin said at the meeting and has since confirmed the $235,000 price tag is a "worst case" scenario and it could possibly be lower once the work is completed.

However, the price is also contingent upon TeamCraft being able to use the scaffolding already being used in Government Plaza by another company – a company that, according to Martin, is cleaning up after the fire caused by TeamCraft.

"The scaffolding is kind of a rolling project, and as they finish cleaning there, they'll move it to where they need it," Martin said. "Commissioner Hudson indicated they were going to try to vote on this right away. If they're able to do that and approve it this week, it shouldn't impact the cost substantially."

As of Aug. 4, Martin said he had met with one commissioner. Hudson also told a reporter the same day she had a preliminary meeting with Martin, but was anticipating a follow-up.

The commission will have a conference Aug. 7 and is likely make a decision about the change order at its regular meeting Aug. 11.



Bracy being investigated by state Ethics Commission

BY ALYSON STOKES/REPORTER | alyson@lagniappemobile.com

State Rep. Napoleon Bracy, Jr. is currently under investigation by the State of Alabama Ethics Commission because fliers and websites for job fairs he hosted for his employer Austal USA also mentioned his political title.

According to a complaint letter written to the ethics commission by former House District 98 candidate Darren Flott, Bracy has been attempting to woo voters in exchange for positions at Austal.

Flott wrote in his letter that Bracy, who serves as the workforce outreach coordinator at Austal, uses job fairs and his Facebook page to link his position at Austal with his political position. Bracy, however, says he's done nothing wrong.

"I'm hired to do a job for Austal and part of my job is to go out and speak to people about employment in underserved areas," Bracy said. "I go out and speak to people all the time, just about every day, about employment opportunities. I go to many different states and many different communities. It's just a part of my job."

In a public post on Bracy's Facebook page dated July 21, he wrote, "I'm hosting 4 job fair seminars this week in the community. We are hiring at least 100 people."

According to Austal Vice President of Human Resources Don Keeler, Austal is currently recruiting about 100 new apprentices for their apprenticeship programs, which he called a "gateway" to other jobs and opportunities, and has been using job fairs for the last few years as an avenue to increase awareness, though there is no guarantee of employment.

"That's Napoleon's job," Keeler said. "That's what he does for Austal. They are entirely hosted by Austal. They are not a political event. The organizations are multistate and are helping us set up venues where people can come look at job opportunities at Austal. We've advertised them so we can increase participation … it's clearly part of his job description and that's what is displayed on the fliers we've distributed."

Flott said he learned of Bracy's actions through the fliers, social media and individuals in the community.

"Fliers were distributed and seminars were held in District 98 only," Flott said. "It appears he is trying to make people think he can offer them positions at Austal."

Flott provided Lagniappe with two different fliers, one with job fair dates in January and one with dates in July. Bracy's name, Austal position and state representative title are not printed on the January flier. In addition, only one location in Bay Minette appears to be located outside District 98.

The July flier includes Bracy's name, Austal position and state representative title. All job fair locations listed are located in District 98, according to Flott.

According to Keeler, Bracy has hosted job fairs in Mississippi, Florida, Mobile, Bayou la Batre and Bay Minette among other locations.

"He's been in Fred Richardson's district," he said.

Austal created the distributed fliers themselves and have no objection to Bracy's state representative title being printed on them, Austal Communication and Marketing Coordinator Michelle Bowden said.

Bracy also said he does not feel there is any ethical violation with having his state representative title on the fliers.

"It doesn't change who I am," Bracy said. "Twenty four hours a day, I'm Representative Bracy. Whether I'm at home with my kids or I'm at work here at Austal or I'm sitting at my church, it doesn't change who I am. I personally benefit nothing from people being employed here. I'm just trying to do my job and trying to make sure people have an opportunity."

Flott submitted his complaint on July 24 and received a response from Hugh Evans, general counsel for the State of Alabama Ethics Commission, dated July 28, according to a letter from the commission.

In his response letter to Flott, Evans wrote the case would be assigned to a special agent to conduct an investigation into the complaint.

"They should be getting in contact with me as soon as possible to further investigate these allegations," Flott said.

Evans told Lagniappe he is unable to comment on the matter, as the case is pending. Austal has not been contacted by the state nor have they received any information that there is an ethics complaint, Keeler said.

"I do a job here and I try to do my job to the best of my ability," Bracy said. "I think for anybody to say that something is unethical about trying to make sure poor people and people from underserved areas have an opportunity to learn more about a company like Austal, with hopes of being employed here and take care of their families, I think it's just sad someone would stoop to that type of level."

Flott and Bracy have a history of conflict, the most recent being when Bracy questioned Flott's candidacy as a Democrat in 2014.

Flott was disqualified from the state House of Representatives Democratic primary race against Bracy when he failed to obtain clearance from the Democratic Party after running as a write-in candidate for the previous four years.

During the 2010 primary, Bracy allegedly had Flott jailed for accusations of harassment. Flott was acquitted in Mobile County Court.

Flott will run as an independent candidate against Bracy in the general election Nov. 4.



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Uniforms are lame, but make the most sense

BY ROB HOLBERT/MANAGING EDITOR | rholbert@lagniappemobile.com

When I was in elementary and high school what you wore to school was probably that day's biggest decision.

Make a wrong move, pick the wrong sleeveless shirt, fuchsia tie or checkerboard shoes and the day could be a total loss. Of course I was in high school in the '80s and the variety of hideous clothing choices was massive.

I was thinking about this as the debate currently rages about whether public school students should still wear the uniforms that have been standard for several years now.

Growing up in coastal Mississippi one thing I understand is that uniforms are severely uncool. Where I lived they were like a brand. It meant that you went to Our Lady of Victories in Pascagoula, located conveniently across the street from a factory that made moist, canned cat food. Not kidding. It was like going to school on a planet made of chunky, wet, barfed up fish. And we had to wear uniforms, which I'm certain trapped the smell and brought it home. That has not been scientifically proven, however.

So I have a knee-jerk reaction of disliking uniforms. They made us all feel dorky and different back then. That's probably different now, since both public and private school kids have to wear them. But when I was in middle school, wearing a uniform was about the best insurance against teen pregnancy. We poor Catholic uniform-wearing losers felt immediately inferior when we ran into public school kids who could let their freak flags fly with all sorts of groovy duds.

Having been someone who flipped back and forth between private and public school in elementary and middle school, I may be uniquely qualified to weigh the pros and cons of uniforms versus no uniforms. Then again I may just be addled by the tequila shot I had before writing this. So feel free to take this with a grain of salt and a worm.

The obvious pro of wearing uniforms is knowing what you're going to put on each morning and generally removing the issue of who has more or who has less. Once everyone is wearing uniforms the only way to stand out is to develop breasts before everyone else or to grow a cool mustache. (Doing both at the same time is not recommended, however.) But those are things not easily accomplished through willpower alone.

As much as I hated uniforms, when I attended public school in fifth and sixth grade, I must admit it became a massive chore to wear the "right" clothes each day. If you were going to wear a knit shirt, it'd better have an alligator or horse on it, not a penguin or whale. If your mother would only buy shirts bearing such lesser animals it would immediately relegate you to "spaz" status and mean you would never get to couple skate with the hot girl who lived four houses down. But I digress….

I was the oldest of five kids and my parents were children of those who went through the Great Depression, so getting a lot of cool clothes wasn't generally an option. My mother favored Sears Toughskins over any other blue jeans as youngsters.

She was right about the fact they basically wouldn't even disintegrate during a nuclear strike. But they were also kind of like wearing armor. You weren't going to try out as a dance extra in "Footloose" while wearing them. On the positive side they were completely fire, wind, earthquake and solar flare retardant.

As I got a bit older my mother would buy us jeans made out of actual material, but, of course, those occasionally suffered some sort of rip or tear, which lead to the next issue confronting those who want to get rid of uniforms – patches. When I was in elementary school, it was extra cool to have a "Keep on Truckin'" patch or some other kind of hippie holdover patch covering that hole in your knee.

Unfortunately for me, my mother didn't really care much about how cool the iron-on patches were, just as long as they covered the hole. I remember her ironing a patch of a bouquet of flowers onto my jeans when I was in sixth grade. Pretty sure the jeans were still bell-bottoms too. It wasn't easy wearing those pants.

I went back to private school for the rest of middle school, so uniforms were the rule. After having experienced the wonders of dressing the way I wanted, getting into the uniforms again wasn't easy. It felt like being sent to reform school, although the embarrassing patch issues were over.

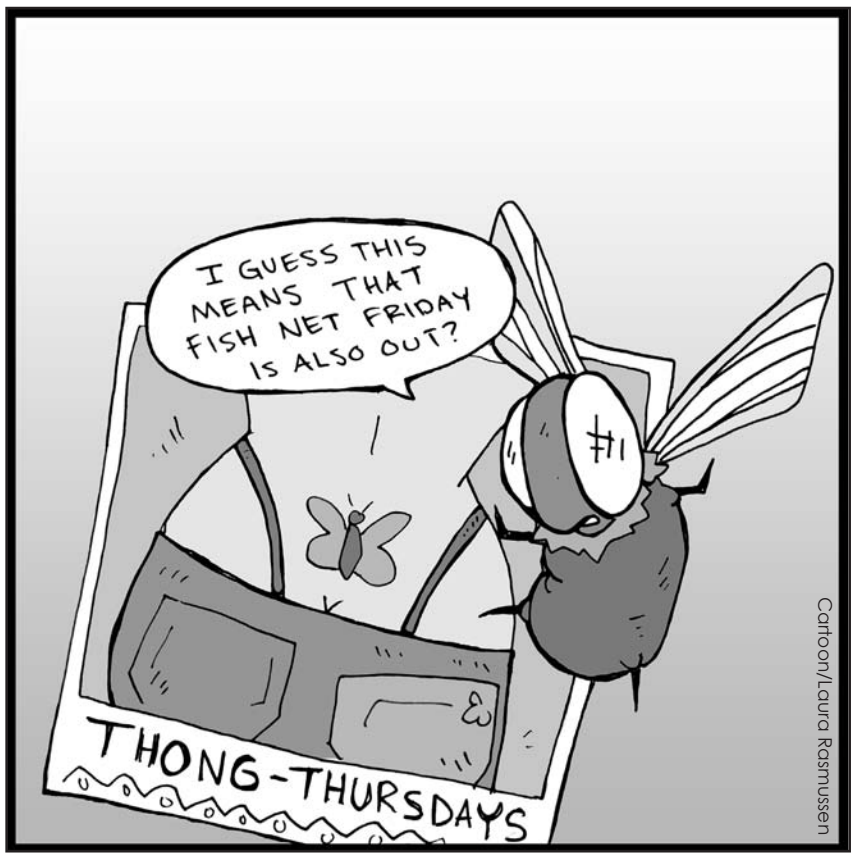
As a parent I can definitely see the upside of uniforms. There's no whining about a specific shirt or pair of pants not being clean, there's not as much worrying about clothing that may be too tight or short. (Although I do remember that some girls in middle school managed to get in trouble occasionally for having uniforms that were too revealing.)

Then there's the monetary issue of uniforms. It's not like they're really a substitute for kids' clothing, and expense is one of the main complaints parents have about uniforms in the public schools.

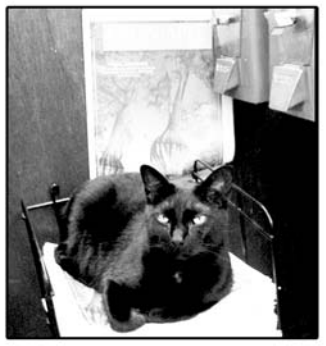
But I look back and think if I'd had to wear uniforms there's a slight chance I might not have ever worn a sock tie, which ultimately was the gateway to growing a mullet. So maybe uniforms can help protect our kids from making terrible fashion choices they'll later regret.

Ultimately though the kids are supposed to be at school to learn, not worry about who's wearing what or distracting one another with their stylistic individuality, so I guess uniforms do make the most sense. And hopefully that also helps keep the mullet from making a comeback.

The Gadfly



Failed alternative Mobile County school uniform suggestions.

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PCP and porn: An addict's road to recovery

BY ASHLEY TRICE/EDITOR | ashleytoland@lagniappemobile.com

In retrospect, it was one of the worst experiences of my life. I only tried PCP once, but that was enough for me to learn just how addictive it was. I knew I had a problem when at 5 a.m., I was still awake, sitting on the floor pathetically cutting out tiny squares of yellow paper and attaching to them cardboard boxes. One by one by one. Over and over again. Like a mindless, drooling robot.

I couldn't stop. I just needed one more "building." One more centerpiece. One more backdrop. Just one more fix and everything would be perfect.

I finally collapsed around dawn, barely even able to wake up to attend the very party in which I had spent the last few weeks, including the last 24 hours straight preparing.

I had swallowed the drug willingly, and experienced the ecstasy and agony that comes from trying to recreate one of those perfect mom, Pinterest birthday parties for my son.

Parties for Children by Pinterest (PCP) had claimed another victim.

Like any addict, I had a dealer who first introduced me to the Pinterest party poison. One of my oldest and dearest friends, Kim, whose children are a little older than mine, has always put on the most amazing birthday soirees for her kids. She thinks of everything, from clever invitations to cakes that look like works of art to themed eats and drinks and favors. She has a small army of people (her husband, mother and sister, among others) to help her transform her carport and backyard into a magical new environment.

Her daughter has had a "garden party" complete with large, colorful tissue paper flowers stuck all over the yard for the kids to run around in as if they were in a field of sunflowers and joy, followed by a "sweet shop" themed fete the next year, with giant clear jars everywhere filled with colorful candies and cupcakes.

Her son has had a "food fight" party with "spaghetti" artfully thrown everywhere, a "rock star party" that had laminated VIP passes with lanyards as the invitations and a pirate party, where they turned their swing set into a pirate ship by attaching sails and pirate flag to it. Seriously.

I would say to my husband as we drove off from one of her parties, "Gah, that was just ridiculous. She must have spent a thousand dollars and a million hours on that. Just ridiculous."

I hated her. I mean, I love her dearly, but I hated her too. Women folk (and Kim), you know what I mean. It's a compliment.

I only hated her because I was beginning to feel really inadequate about the errr, "basic" parties I had been throwing for my kids. We had not really done much of anything for my son's first two birthday parties other than stand around and watch him smash up his cakes while drinking wine. (I should probably clarify we were the ones drinking said wine, not him.)

So when it came to his third, I decided I was going to pull a Kim. Anders was really into superheroes, so I called her up and she told me to look on Pinterest for superhero party ideas.

I had never really gone on there, but once I did I knew who Kim's "supplier" had been and how she had fallen down this rabbit hole. Image after image of creative party ideas. There must have been thousands of them – one even more alluring than the next. It was kid birthday party porn, and boy, was I aroused.

We were having a water slide in the backyard because you know superheroes dig those, so I wanted a "favor" that would compliment the water element of the party. (That's the PCP talking, sorry.) And about image 612 into the party porn, I found one. Capes made of towels! Genius!

I called my dealer and told her about them. This being my first time, I didn't want to do it all alone.

"Come on over, we can knock that out in no time," Kim said.

So I took a deep breath and headed to her house one Saturday morning. She had all of her "paraphernalia" already out on the kitchen table — scissors, glue gun, felt, you know, the usual stuff.

She took the Superman diamond pattern I had printed out and she started cutting out pieces of yellow felt and told me to start gluing them to each towel (cape). Then she took my guest list and started cutting out the first letter of each of their names to put in said diamonds. Her breathing got somewhat shallow and her eyes glazed over. Then she said cheerfully, "Oh, these are going to be so cute!"

After she did a few, she slid them over to me and said, "OK, your turn."

I was a little nervous but it looked like it made her feel so good, so I did it. And it did feel good. At first. But I would soon learn it would take more and more decorations to sustain it.

After we spent a few hours at her house, she sent me home to finish them up. A Saturday was lost and then a Sunday. But boy, they were indeed cute.

The week leading up to the party is a total blur. I shamelessly begged a graphic designer friend to make signs labeling the all of the items on the food table, like "Super Fruit" and "Super Rice Krispie Treats." I don't know why they were super or why food needed signs. But I was under the influence and I thought I needed them, and I would have done anything for them. Anything.

Rock bottom came that 5 a.m. the morning of the party, I had not yet been to bed and I was making "skyscrapers" out of cardboard boxes by wrapping them with colored paper and attaching little yellow squares as the windows. My husband sweetly told me to come to bed and get some rest because we had a big day ahead. I told him to go F himself. It was a dark time and place to be.

The guests arrived and the kids and most especially my birthday boy seemed to have a blast. Though they were more impressed with the water slide than the capes and labeled super food. WTF was wrong with these kids?

The mothers gave me that look, and said things like, "You should do this for a living" and "Oh this is too much!" I knew what they really meant was "Show-off bitch."

They hated me. I hated me. I knew I had to get off the sauce. And I did. Never again, I said.

For his fourth birthday, we went to one of those bouncy places and I threw a store-bought cake up on the counter in the party room and we sang happy birthday. Easy peasy. Sweet recovery was mine.

Another year has almost gone by and I've been clean for the most part except one little hiccup around my daughter's second birthday party. But it was just a brief relapse involving the invitation.

Last week, I asked my son what he wanted to do for his party this year.

"Mommy," he said. "Remember my superhero party? We had the waterslide and the capes. That was the best birthday party ever. Can we do one just like that but with pirates?"

(Rookie move! Why did I even ask? Doh!)

"Of course we can, sweetheart," I said.

My palms started sweating. I picked up the phone and texted my dealer.

"What do you have in the way of pirate party ideas and décor?" I wrote.

"Oh, I've got a lot of good stuff," Kim wrote.

"OK, I'll take it all," I replied.

Here we go again. Arghhh!



Predictions for midterm, post-midterm elections

BY JEFF POOR/COLUMNIST | jeffreypoor@gmail.com

WASHINGTON -- The House of Representatives adjourned for its August recess last Friday after passing legislation that will be more of a symbolic political gesture than a serious policy effort. That adjournment marks the beginning of the final stretch into this fall's midterm election.

This midterm, however, won't quite have the same tectonic shift as the 2010 midterms.

There is widespread resentment toward Washington. President Barack Obama's latest approval rating is in the low 40s, upper 30s depending on the poll you're reading. Congress' approval rating is somewhere between single digits and the low teens.

But aside from handful of Senate races in swing states, nothing is going to change this November that will dramatically alter that landscape.

Regardless of one's political stripes, political leaders have for the most part let the American people down. President Barack Obama's hope and change mantra has turned out to be nothing more than a cynical political marketing campaign.

In 2010, Republicans came into power with the Tea Party wave, which saw U.S. government as bloated and called for lawmakers to get back to the basics of the Constitution.

Rick Santelli of CNBC epitomized that sentiment in his 2009 rant from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, in which he took on the possibility that the Obama administration might push a home mortgage bailout for underwater borrowers.

"How about this, president and new administration – why don't you put up a website to have people vote on the Internet as a referendum to see if we really want to subsidize the losers' mortgages," he said. "Or would we like to at least buy cars and buy houses in foreclosure and give them to people that might have a chance to actually prosper down the road, and reward people that could carry the water instead of drink the water?"

The call sounded the alarm that led to the Tea Party. Suddenly Ayn Rand and the Founding Fathers were back en vogue. And the 2010 election reflected that.

That 2010 Congress wound up being a bit of a letdown. And eventually the enthusiasm waned. This time around, there does not appear to be an overarching national theme that will drive Americans to the polls like in 2010, or 2006 with Iraq fatigue or in 2008 with the economy.

The August recess could provide some cues as to what, if anything, political parties should focus on as members of Congress host town hall meetings. But the news cycle has preempted any overarching theme.

The ideal topic for Republicans to run on would have been the failed rollout of ObamaCare. But those headlines have been buried under ones about immigration and unrest in hotspots around the world like Gaza and Ukraine.

Instead, when the exit polling is done for the 2014 midterm elections, respondents are likely to say they came out to vote because their guy is better than the other guy in power or that they voted for a Republican as a protest measure against an underwhelming Barack Obama.

Neither of those rate highly on the enthusiasm scale. Barring any sort of earth-shaking event between now and Nov. 4, turnout will be low, as is the case traditionally in midterms. But even as marginal as this midterm is shaping up to be, the GOP will likely eke out the majority the U.S. Senate.

The real political theater will begin once that new Congress is sworn in.

In 2010, when the GOP took the House, the House passed a flurry of legislation, including about a dozen measures attempting to repeal Obama's 2010 health care reform legislation. But those efforts withered on the vine because the Senate remained under Harry Reid's leadership.

Should the Senate change, it could be expected that we'd see something similar – a series of legislation passed but this time by both chambers and sent to the White House.

In nearly six years, Obama has vetoed just two bills, neither of which were particularly consequential pieces of legislation. Over the last 13-and-a-half years, presidents have used veto powers just 13 times. So, one has to go all the way back to Bill Clinton to a find a president that was prolific with the veto pen.

That's likely to change and the American public will instantly be re-familiarized with the constitutional veto.

But that means suddenly President Obama's critique of Congress, which is that it doesn't do anything, will now be reflected upon him – that is if he decides not to actively work with Congress, and there's no indication to date that he would be willing to do so.

Will impeachment be a possibility? The Democratic National Committee and other fundraising Democrat-affiliated apparatuses would like their voters to think so in order to get them to the polls. But the potential John Boehner-Mitch McConnell duo in charge on Capitol Hill won't have the appetite for that.

For those of you keeping score – headed into the August recess, expect the GOP to pick up four or five seats in the U.S. House and to take the U.S. Senate by a narrow 51-49 margin.

It will by no means be a referendum that the country has taken a giant shift to the right. But what you have to look forward to is a lot more analysis about how the back and forth between the Congress and Obama will impact the 2016 presidential race.





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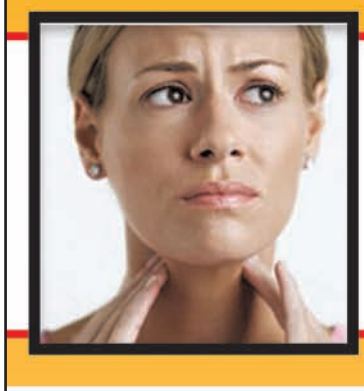
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Objects in the telescope may be closer than they appear

BY JENNIFER MCDONALD/COLUMNIST | betterdivorce@aol.com

Attention fellow earthlings and Mobilians: eat your Wheaties, get plenty of exercise and rest, maybe join a tai chi class, and for God's sake stop smoking already. If you share my curious mind and fascination with the unknown, you're going to want to stick around for at least another 20 years.

At a July 14 panel discussion held at its Washington headquarters, NASA revealed not only their continued confidence we are not alone in the universe, but their estimate that we will find alien life within the next two decades and possibly even sooner. For those who've been paying attention, this stunning prediction is hardly surprising as it comes in the wake of NASA's announcement in April that they had discovered an earth-like planet in the habitable or "Goldilocks" zone of another star.

The remarkable discovery of Kepler-186f is the closest we've ever coming to finding a planet like our own. Astronomers believe there are countless more, and according to estimates they describe as "conservative," they predict at least 100 million of these sister planets are capable of hosting complex life forms. And that's just in our own galaxy!

NASA scientists are excitedly awaiting the launch of the James Webb Space Telescope in 2018, which promises even more dramatic advances in human knowledge. The high-tech instrument will study infrared light, making scientists far more effective at spotting and studying extrasolar planets, and plans are already in the works for the development of yet another generation of powerful telescopes that will help us get a glimpse at worlds far, far beyond our own.

However, many experts, including beloved "Science Guy" Bill Nye believes the first signs of life we discover outside of earth will actually be found much closer to home. Nye and many of his colleagues feel confident our best bet for finding alien life in the near future is either on Mars or Europa, Jupiter's smallest moon, which we already know to contain two or three times the amount of water we have on earth.

At any rate, things are happening relatively quickly given the low priority our national budget gives to NASA, and it sounds like there's a pretty good chance many of us will live to see the day scientists make what will perhaps be the greatest discovery of our species in confirming that life – and probably even intelligent life – exists beyond our own planet. Holy Crappoli!

Can you even imagine what it might be like to witness such a discovery? It will change so much of what we understand about the universe and ourselves, and it will likely be an exhilarating and perhaps even overwhelming experience for a lot of us. Of course "life" doesn't have to mean "sentient beings," by any means, and a single wriggling microbe would be huge. But the thought of making contact with another species of intelligent life is simply mind-blowing.

Since we're on the subject of blowing minds (yikes!), I mean that figuratively, not literally, as I sincerely hope they wouldn't be inclined to summarily obliterate us like the insignificant little bugs that we are.

I've seen enough Star Trek to imagine there might be some "bad guys" out there, at least from our own perspectives, but I'd like to think most civilizations advanced enough to communicate with us across light-years would treat us with compassion and perhaps, at least in my fantasies, show us more compassion than we show each other.

It's very exciting to think about all the things we might learn from a far more advanced civilization. There may be much they could teach us in dealing with mankind's biggest struggles such as curing cancer, eradicating hunger and preserving our increasingly fragile planet. Perhaps they could even help us find the secret to subsisting on ribs, cornbread and ice cream while maintaining optimal fitness and health.

In the meantime there are so many decisions to be made. Firstly, who gets to greet them first if they visit? It's a pretty important job, as the chosen person or persons will essentially provide our extraterrestrial visitors with what may very well be their first clear impression of humanity. Obviously we'll want someone who's not going to embarrass us all (sorry Bieber, foiled again), and ideally I'm assuming we'd want someone known worldwide and universally loved. Maybe someone like Oprah or the Dalai Lama or Nick Saban.

And of course there will be the ginormous matter of trying to reach a consensus among nations as to how to handle the unprecedented situation. What do we do if North Korea pops off at the mouth and threatens to nuke the little green men with apocalyptic-grade photon blasters in their back pockets?

And then there's the matter of our fellow earthlings who will inevitably freak the hell out and start burning and looting and insisting the end is near. It only makes sense such an encounter would cause some instability as it's understandably frightening and also potentially disruptive to the long-held beliefs on which many of our religions are founded. It will no doubt lead humanity into a long period of reassessment about ourselves and our place in the world around us.

We'll make it through (assuming they don't blow us up after all) and hopefully come out of it with new friends and maybe even some cool new styles of music and dance that the hippest of our hipsters never even imagined yet.

There are so many exciting things in store in the coming decades. Stay tuned and stay healthy. Watch your cholesterol and stress levels, and stay away from the Ebola virus. Something tells me you're going to want to stick around for this.

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The game is on and chips are getting dipped

BY ANDY MACDONALD/CUISINE EDITOR | fatmansqueeze@comcast.com

The time has come. The first preseason game of the year hit the airwaves this week, and my life will be different until early to mid-February. Yes, different in many ways. Plans will be tailored around game times, certain hygiene practices may experience a good deal of neglect, and my grocery list will assuredly place some kind of chip and dip combination in every cart.

I go dip crazy this time of year, and I rarely, if ever, purchase already-prepared dips. I already feel the desire to slave away in the kitchen cooking and mixing up my favorite concoctions for parties, guests, and "Monday Night Football" father and sons bonding experiences and it's only preseason! This may be a pretty fattening year if I'm this excited in August, but low-brow entertaining is a big part of the MacDonald lifestyle and I shall enjoy it.

Not only are the dips important, but the choice of chips will make or break the dish. We all know someone struggling with addiction. I have someone close to me that is suffering from a chip addiction. It's not funny. Chips can take over a life.

You may find yourself driving by curb stores … that aren't on the way home. You may wake at 3 a.m. with the "chip sweats." Maybe there's a bag under your car seat, or a Ziploc in the laundry room. Your work desk has secret quarters for the vending machine. You may consider some form of therapy, maybe avoiding chips for two weeks to prove to yourself you can do it. Whatever it takes, do it now. Football is here and we are eating chips no matter what.

This week I thought we could touch on some favorite chip and dip combinations and spark some ideas before your next get together. It's dip, remember? Monkey with the amounts all you want. Have fun with it and don't have such a chip on your shoulder because we aren't measuring stuff.

It's still summer so let's start with salsa. I hope you still have tomatoes from the garden. If you grow tomatoes and don't grow jalapenos then you may have serious issues that I cannot help. I roast the tomatoes, onions, jalapenos and garlic in the oven or grill. Skin them all, chop them up. Then add lime juice, salt and cumin. Tostito's lime tortilla chips should do the trick.

This corn dip is an excellent choice for Frito's Scoops. Those big fat corn chips are perfect for shredded sharp cheddar, Mexicorn, jalapenos, sour cream and a bit of mayonnaise. You could substitute cayenne for the fresh jalapenos, but be careful. I like heat, but the pepper that made Louisiana famous can overstep its bounds.

Hummus is fun to make. I actually screw it up every now and again. Don't get cocky. For two cans of chickpeas I drain one and save the liquid from the other. Fire up the blender and get it right with kosher salt and quality olive oil. Don't scrape the sides with it running. That will never be a good idea. I prefer pita chips to pita bread. It should be great on its own before you dress it up with olive salad or sundried tomatoes.

Look out, Saints fans. Here is my Black and Gold dip. Yellow corn, yellow onions, black beans and a bit of Italian dressing make this a favorite. Crank it up with some Louisiana Hot Sauce and my go-to spice, cumin. For this I prefer a sturdier chip like Santitas or Mission Chips.

Rotel. It's low-tech and perfect. I am a fan of Tostados mini rounds for this mainstay. A Super Bowl without it is like Thanksgiving without the turkey. As a bonus the applications are endless. Put it in a broccoli casserole or a grilled cheese sandwich, but the last bit should be stirred into crushed chips and eaten with a spoon. Some folks add ground beef or sausage, but I'm a purist.

Who needs the rice when you have red bean dip? There is a difference between kidney beans and red beans, the latter of which are generally smaller and rounder, but the flavor is about the same to my tastes. I usually use dark kidneys.

Cook them low and slow until tender and mash them thoroughly. A combination of jack and cheddar cheese is the best fit for this hot dip. I, of course, add diced, grilled onions to the pot at the end. Any strong tortilla or corn chip will do, as the dip will tighten as it rests on the table.

As the weather cools off I like to heat it up. You can't live in south Alabama and not have a seafood dip up your sleeve. Softened cream cheese is the base for minced gulf shrimp and lump crab. A stick of real butter gives it the healthy kick it deserves while green onions give it pizzazz. Baked until bubbly this showstopper is best served with Triscuits. Sure, they aren't chips, but I make the rules here.

The beauty of dip making is that it can be a snack or a full meal, hot or cold, healthy or detrimental. I'm always on the lookout for more ideas, but you can bet your bottom dollar at some point throughout this football season I will make every one of these dips, some more than once.

Be mindful of the season and the game. For example when the Saints play the Falcons I always add falcon meat to the dip. Good thing the Colts are only preseason. Does anyone know where I can get some quality lion, tiger and bear meat? Oh, my.





Photos/(top) Sabra/Facebook, (bottom)tostitos/facebook







Unassuming Royal Knight serving up the good stuff

BY ANDY MACDONALD/CUISINE EDITOR | fatmansqueeze@comcast.com

It's not just a bar anymore. Royal Knight is slinging sandwiches, salads and specials like you wouldn't believe.

The unassuming spot at 3004 Government Blvd. affectionately known as "the ditch" has put together quite a menu with a thankfully predictable list of daily specials (red beans and rice, hamburger steak, chicken, pork chops, and fish in order Monday through Friday) and a more eclectic collection of poboys ranging from hanger steak and hamburger to chicken tenders or debris. Lunch is in the $8 to $10 range for specials and half poboys.

There is plenty of creativity to be found in the finger food section of the menu. Fried cheese bites, fried pickles, mini crab cakes are upstaged by "ditch dogs," which are basically bite-size Conecuh sausage corn dogs.

I don't see that as being a problem. Grab lunch prices from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. The kitchen is ready to go. Call 251-287-1220 for more information.



Photo/oysterrokefeller.net

Lunch coming to Oysters Rockefeller

There are legions of fans flocking to Oysters Rockefeller Bar and Grille at 312 Schillinger Road. One look at the pictures on Facebook is all it takes for you to see why. West Indies salad (a Mobile County creation), Gulf seafood and pasta dishes, the occasional lobster and a well-stocked bar are incentive enough without even mentioning the oysters.

Currently Oysters Rockefeller is open from 3-10 p.m. September rolls in a new school year and a return to the lunch game. What's better than that news? The price is nice. Expect a soup, an entrée and a side starting somewhere around $8!

Check out Oysters Rockefeller online at oystersrockefeller.net or call 251-607-9527.

Alabama Restaurant Week is upon us

This is just a friendly reminder about one of our most important statewide events. This year's Alabama Restaurant Week is running August 15-24.

Yes, you read that right. It's actually more than a week of locally owned and operated Alabama restaurants participating in one of our biggest marketing events.

Restaurants across the state including several in Mobile and Baldwin counties will be serving up special pre-scheduled menu items for lunch, dinner or both at attractive prices. There are no hidden fees, nor coupons to present. Simply show up to a participating restaurant and ask for the Alabama Restaurant Week meal. Prices do not include tax or beverages.

Visit http://alabamarestaurantweek.com and click on the county of your choice for a list of participating restaurants. Many have already posted the specials they are running for the event. Pro tip: pay close attention to the offerings at the Trellis Room. I am certain I will run into you at one of these fine establishments.

Back to school breakfast casserole

I can put anything on grits and be happy. Just ask my Waffle House waitresses. They don't even look at me funny anymore. With the boys returning to school I thought it would be great to share this recipe for what is actually a mock breakfast pizza rather than a grit casserole. You may have to set your alarm a little earlier. I don't mind. Lucas and Graham are worth the extra effort. A crescent roll crust makes this a little easier. I would purchase two packages of those. You may want a larger pizza or you may blow it on your first crust attempt.

1 package of 8-ounce crescent rolls
1 pound of ground breakfast sausage
1 cup shredded potatoes, fresh or frozen thawed
1 ½ cups shredded cheddar cheese
6 large eggs
¼ cup milk
½ cup onions

On a pizza pan or cookie sheet (ungreased) arrange triangles of dough to form a pizza-like shape. It's not exactly what you think. One side is squared off so you have to improvise with a little bit of overlapping. If the points are not toward the center then maybe you should reconsider this endeavor and turn off your 375 degree oven before you hurt someone. A drive thru is in your future. For the rest of you who successfully formed somewhat of a circle, press the edges together and roll up the outer ring to form a pizza crust.

In a heavy skillet brown the sausage. Remove with a slotted spoon and distribute evenly over the crust. In remaining grease cook the onions until tender.

Sprinkle the potatoes and half of the cheese over the sausage. Add the onions to half of the "pizza." Make sure you can determine which half of the pizza has onion otherwise your onion-hating spouse, girlfriend, or child will be unhappy before the day has even begun.

Beat the eggs until broken and incorporate the milk. Pour over the entire pizza within the parameters of your elevated crust. If you feel like it's too much egg, stop. You may discard the rest of the egg. Don't feel too bad about it. Total monetary waste will be about $0.25. Bake about 25 minutes or until the eggs are set, but keep an eye on it.

Offer parmesan and red pepper flakes like any other pizza parlor. Serve with a breakfast beer or full strength coffee for those of age. Put those egg shells in the compost heap. Recycle!

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Mobile's 'best wine selection' is set to get even better

BY SUSAN LARSSON/CONTRIBUTING WRITER | thirstywork@outlook.com

Red or White – at the corner of Old Shell Road and Mobile Infirmary Blvd since 2009, and winner of this year's "best wine selection" Nappie Award – has no plans to rest on its laurels, or even to rest. Owner Randy Williams is moving Red or White into a new location on Dauphin Street (in the space formerly occupied by True Midtown Kitchen), where he plans to stock more wine, expand his kitchen and host not only more tastings and but also full-up sit-down wine-pairing dinners. He expects to open in September and – listen, shoppers – he'll have lots more parking, too.

Although still in the "What have we done?" stage when he thinks about the new shop, Randy remains enthusiastic about introducing Mobile's wine lovers (and wannabe wine lovers) to new and different wines, while still keeping an eye out for amazing bargains. Overall, he plans to stock 30 percent more wine at the Dauphin Street location – and double his collection of bottles in the range of $10 and below. He'll do it by looking to New World wine regions (like South America) and to lesser-known regions in Old World stalwarts, like those parts of southern France off the famed Rhone corridor.

He may even bring in Pinot Noirs from Alsace – traditionally a Riesling region infamous for its thin, bitter reds until lately. (I toured Alsace in July was blown away by how much the Pinots had improved. I used to run from them, but they and I have turned around.) He notes that a Pinot Nero from Italy's Alto Adige region has been very well received at his original Fairhope location. Basically, Randy's mission is to "go where we can get customers the most bang for the buck," and we like a man with a mission!

Pinot Grigio remains Red or White's best-selling white wine, but Randy tries to nudge customers out of their comfort zones when he can. He's introduced a high-end, flavorful Pinot Grigio by the glass that he says makes folks "work a little bit" by being different from probably 90 percent of the Pinot Grigios they've had before.

Moving further outside the box (I saw no "box wine" in Red or White, by the way) Randy's currently excited about rosés – whether sparkling or still – which couldn't make me happier, given my love affair with rosé. He's brought in an Italian sparkling rosé (Rotari Brut, made from chardonnay and pinot noir grapes grown in northeastern Italy in the foothills of the alps, a "Wine Enthusiast" Best Buy for $14 and nothing like a cheap Prosecco); an Argentinian sparkling rosé (Reginato Celestina Rosé of Malbec, made from 100 percent malbec grapes grown in Argentina's Mendoza region, one of Oprah's favorites and a bargain at $17); and a Spanish sparkling rosé (Conde de Subirats Cava Rose, made from 90 percent trepat – an indigenous Spanish red grape – and 10 percent chardonnay grown in the Catalonia region of northeastern Spain, proclaimed a "Best Choice in Cava" by Stephen Tanzer's "International Wine Cellar" and practically free at $12).

If you noticed a repetition of "sparkling" in the prior paragraph, it's because Randy believes sparklers shouldn't be relegated to special occasions. Noting that French Champagne has priced many customers out of the everyday drinking market, he's filled the gap with delicious discoveries selling for one-tenth the price of some big name fizzes. His Italian, Argentinian and Spanish rosés are all dry, made using the traditional Champagne (Methode Champenoise) process – no corners cut. The Italian sparkler makes a refreshing aperitif while the Argentinian and Spanish names pair well with seafood and grilled meats. I took home a bottle of Reginato Celestina and it did, indeed, make me "work a little bit" (to not drink the whole bottle in one sitting). I'll devote my next rosé column to it, among others. Meantime, go ask for a glass; you won't regret it.

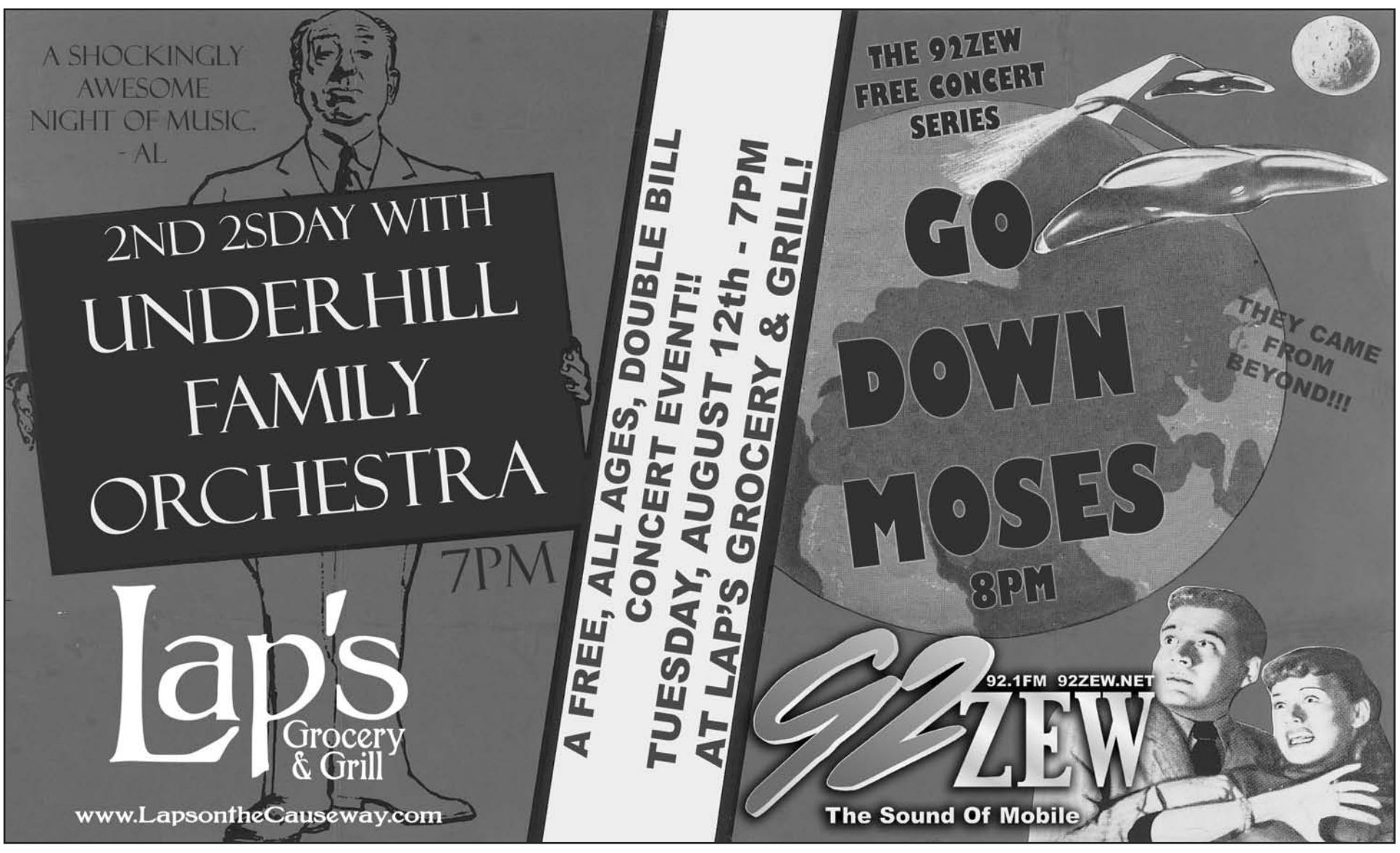
Bordeaux – my other favorite wine – is, sadly, more challenging for Red or White to stock. Randy says he's constantly changing his Bordeaux selection at the mercy of what importers choose to bring in, or the French choose to send out. He hasn't given up, though, and "in the $35-and-under area we continue to find good wines – sometimes great wines." He likes to fill the Bordeaux gap by bringing in trendier California Cabernets, which he says customers flock from far and near to buy. He's currently energized about Carpe Diem Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 (Yountville, Calif.), calling it "absolutely awesome" (possibly deserving a slot on your "Saturday-night wine" list). At only $24 a bottle, I'd call it definitely worth investigating.

Randy plans a low-key glide through the end of 2014 for Red or White in Mobile – just hoping to survive the holidays – but he plans to scale new heights in 2015. Tastings will be "fairly frequent," for one thing, while the new shop's back room will accommodate as many as 50 for sit-down wine dinners. Fans of chef Arwen Rice – who's trotted out tasty tidbits at the Old Shell venue – will be happy to hear she's staying on to produce the wine-pairing meals, too.

Mike Gibson will continue managing Red or White at its new location, bringing wine expertise honed at New York's Chelsea Wine Vault. Mike has run the Old Shell shop since it opened and matches Randy superlative-for-superlative in his enthusiasm for wine, generally, as well as introducing customers to new and unexpected bottles.

With regard to winning the Nappie Randy says, "As corny as it sounds, just 'thank you.' We're going to try to reward people's support by doing a better and better job every year."

Red or White, soon to be opening its doors at 1104 Dauphin St., Mobile. Also located at 323-A De La Mare Ave. in Fairhope.



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Historic Admiral Semmes revisits art deco past while adding modern chic

BY RON SIVAK/COLUMNIST | ron@elminfo.com

The fate of the Admiral Semmes is a mystery no longer. Recently purchased by the Hattiesburg-based Thrash family of property developers, comprised of patriarch Ike Thrash and sons Joe and Walker Thrash, in a partnership with Mobile native Bruce C. Cope, plans for one of the Port City's most historic hotels are to revisit its art deco 1940s origins while simultaneously adopting a 21st century geek-chic for the tech savvy discerning traveler.

"The Admiral Semmes is an iconic structure in downtown Mobile. Our goal is to revitalize its art deco architecture while developing a truly unique boutique hotel experience," Walker Thrash, vice-president of construction said. "We want to offer Mobile an alternative style that compliments the existing hotel options in the area. We believe the Admiral will be an excellent fit for a discerning guest wanting to experience the downtown entertainment district."

Coupled with the revamped art deco style that made the Admiral iconic – prior to a 1984 "modernization" – 21st century touches will abound to welcome young professional business types alongside families that traditionally frequent the hotel.

"Restaurants replete with flat screens accessing a full spectrum of social media, top notch Wi-Fi installed, iPad check-in/check-out services and many other amenities not even in existence 10 years ago will be part of the modern touches," Thrash said.

Assisted by architect James Flick of Dallas-based hospitality project development firm Flick Mars, the multimillion dollar renovation is expected to start in earnest by the end of 2014 with a 12 to 14 month completion horizon.

"Interior work will not be a simple 'paint and wallpaper' job but an entire repurposing of the interior – from plumbing to electrical to mechanical to structural. The Admiral has good bones, but was in dire need of an overhaul. It was apparent, however, from the first walk through of the property to our final conference call with designers that the answer of what to do with the place was leaping out at us," Joe Thrash, vice-president of operations said.

"Flick Mars is custom designing every piece of furniture, every ornament and every piece of artwork specifically for the hotel. An interesting coincidence occurred when we discovered that the original color scheme from old photos found at the University of South Alabama archives closely matched what had been independently selected for the renovation. An 'Admiral Semmes Yellow Azalea' shade named after the hotel was incorporated into the scheme afterwards. It was a happy accident reinforcing our feeling of going down the right path for this process."

Local subcontractors will be employed for the refurbishment, adding up to 100 temporary new jobs downtown. The hotel itself, staying open during the work, also has aggressive growth plans according to new General Manager Joe Langford.

"We currently have around 30 employees at the hotel, but there are openings at the managerial as well as staff level. We will hire a front office manager, a restaurant manager and a director of food and beverage (among other key positions) in the future. Ultimately, our goal is to employ upwards of 100 people at full capacity," Langford said.

The two restaurants in the hotel – Admiral's Corner and Oliver's – are not immune to the sea change. Langford is in charge of deciding what new eatery motifs may be implemented, but has yet to divulge what directions may be taken.

"For now all I can say is that the upgrades, possibly including a change of restaurants, will fill a niche from breakfast to late night dining in the area. Hopefully we will offer a unique experience versus other culinary locales downtown,"

With the discovery of restorable, original solid oak flooring underneath the 1980s carpet in the ballroom, Walker Thrash mentioned a possible increased focus on hosting wedding events after renovations. Modern signage for the hotel will also be installed.

Gratitude was expressed to city officials for assistance in the due diligence process.

"The city has been very receptive and proactively helped us in the discovery process when we initially met with Mayor Sandy Stimpson and his staff several months ago. Fred Rendfrey with the Downtown Mobile Alliance was also an asset from day one. This was a pleasant surprise from other cities we've operated in and speaks well of the area," Joe Thrash said.

HII awarded aircraft carrier overhaul contract worth almost $50 million

Huntington Ingalls Industries (NYSE:HII) announced today that its Newport News Shipbuilding division has received a $49.6 million contract to begin planning for work on the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73). The contract is for 12 months and includes planning, engineering and shipboard inspections for work associated with the defueling of the ship.

"We are pleased to be able to begin planning for the defueling of CVN 73," Chris Miner, vice president of in-service aircraft carrier programs said. "We hope this award is a first step toward the highly anticipated full award of the RCOH planning contract."

HII is the only shipyard in the country with the ability to perform RCOH (Refueling and Complex Overhaul) work on Nimitz-class aircraft carriers. This massive undertaking was described in a 2002 Rand Study as one of the most challenging engineering and industrial tasks undertaken anywhere by any organization.

The USS George Washington is the sixth Nimitz-class carrier built and will be the sixth ship of its class to undergo RCOH work.

AM/NS Calvert plant announces capital expansion plans

Production is ramping up and the AM/NS Calvert plant in Alabama.

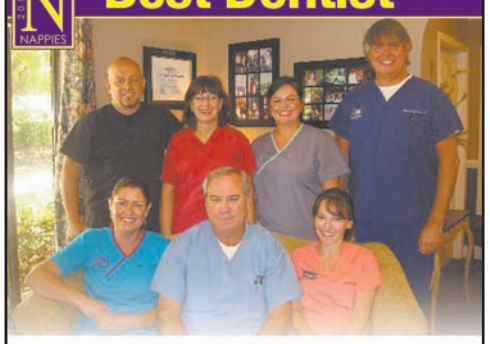
Since acquisition of the Calvert facility by the world's first and second largest steel producers, their team has steadily ramped up to full production capacity goal of 5.3 million tons annually. Currently they are at roughly 75 percent of production capacity according to Scott Posey, director of communication.

In an effort to accomplish the objective, corporate executives recently met with the Mobile Industrial Development Board and shared their intentions of investing upwards of $40 million in capital expansion that will increase steel slab staging capacity and efficiency. Apart from assurances to use local contractors for the robust investment, 16 new crane operator positions have now opened up at the plant in need of filling.

According to Posey, this and future planned expansion projects on the table are strong indicators of an ROI uptick for the state and local economy due to the company's efforts.

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Drama chair exits stage after career finale at USA

BY TIM BORLAND/Contributor

After nearly 11 years as the chair of dramatic arts at the University of South Alabama, Dr. Leon Van Dyke has given the last curtain call of his academic career. An important denizen of the Mobile community, the professor was instrumental in elevating theater at USA to new levels of excellence.

"I believe Mobile is as good a place to make drama as New Orleans, Atlanta, Nashville or Tuscaloosa or any sort of insular sort of town. Because the town itself is so much more dynamic and multifaceted than any sort of university town," Van Dyke insisted.

Van Dyke has educated countless theater students over his career, including Tony and Emmy award winners. Among the many notable former students of the professor are film actor Clancy Brown, Jonathan Smoots of American Players Theater in Spring Green, Wis., playwright Keith Reddin, New York City theater actor Greg Adelson, Artistic Director Rosemary Newcott of the Alliance Theater in Atlanta, Ga., Assistant Professor Tom Aulino of Auburn University, and Tony award nominee Kristine Nielsen.

There is no mystery as to why the former USA faculty member influenced so many during his tenure at the academic institution. Van Dyke possesses invaluable experience to supplement his teaching methods.

Van Dyke was born into a Dutch community in the aptly named Holland, Mich. He was subject to a strict upbringing in the Dutch Reform Calvinist Church. Even the local college the professor attended for his undergraduate degree was affiliated with the denomination.

"My mother did not think it was right to go to the movies. So I was pretty 'out there' in terms of what they planned. They never dreamed what I would encounter at Hope College," he explained.

Prior to discovering his calling, Van Dyke actually avoided the dramatic arts as much as possible. As a student he was much more interested in sports and band, even though he was cast in the senior play.

"I ran from drama. I was frightened of it, and intimidated by the ostracism that many drama kids get in a typically Midwestern sort of high school," Van Dyke said.

Van Dyke attended Hope College on a music scholarship, and vacillated between majors as varied as psychology, political science and English. Nevertheless, the small drama department at the school provided the biggest emotional outlet for him due the interdisciplinary nature of the dramatic arts.

"It was a kind of a natural progression from a love of music, words, argument, and personality, but I didn't love any of them enough … I realized I could have music, English, psychology and political science all in one if I became a drama guy," Van Dyke said.

Before drama became Van Dyke's primary employment, he received a bachelor's degree in English and became a teacher while pursuing graduate school in Kalamazoo, Mich. This decision proved fortuitous as he was in the process of being drafted for the Vietnam War in 1967.

"I was told if I took that teaching position I would be deferred, because English was vital for national defense," Van Dyke recalled.

Van Dyke became absorbed in theater while employed at a high school in East Lansing, Mich. The school offered him additional pay to direct the theater department. The professor found he loved coaching actors, designing sets and creating costumes. At the age of 28, he left a tenured position to pursue a graduate degree full time.

"I was getting the most money for teaching English, but all of my heart and energy was going into directing plays at night. I could not live that schizophrenic immoral life of taking money for something I am just 'doing.' I want to get paid for something I love," Van Dyke said.

> **"I always love to have my actors and my audiences think of it as something that speaks to them now. I do not like many historical versions of plays, in tights and period clothes. Big old, beautiful, blue and completely disconnected from everyone else."**
> **-Dr. Leon Van Dyke**

After achieving a master's degree in drama from Western Michigan University, Van Dyke accepted a one-year appointment at Albion College. He then received academic awards to pursue a fine arts degree at Wayne State University, accomplishing a Ph.D. in just over three years.

Van Dyke's first college production was in 1976 at Northwestern University. The experience would lead the professor to some of his most memorable productions such as "Time of Your Life" by William Saroyan.

"The cast was brilliant; the kind of play Soroyan writes is cockamaney, wacky, disjointed, funny, serious, social, in all sorts of ways a thing I identify with," Van Dyke reflected.

At a certain point during the play, the characters Joe and Kit Carson have a gum chewing contest. The actors portraying the roles decided to try it for real one night during rehearsal. The result was a group laughing hysterically as the two lead actors attempted to talk having shoved over 12 pieces of gum into their mouths.

Van Dyke can also recount stories of an actor from "Red Rider" who was richly deserving of love from the audience, an actress from "Little Shop of Horrors" who could sing Audrey's part like the wind, or a 6-foot-tall blonde actress who had a flair for charming an audience.

"In some ways I can almost remember decades or moments in my life more based on productions than years. I have no idea what year it was, but I can remember what I was working on, and in some cases who was in it," Van Dyke said.

The professor went on to other appointments at University of Wisconsin and Bradford University in Virginia. Craving a new challenge in the middle of his career, Van Dyke first discovered the Azalea City while applying for a convention.

"I was walking the streets a little bit and looking around. I thought 'boy this is a nice place, I could live here,' not really thinking there was going to be a job for me," he said.

When the department chair for dramatic arts position opened up at University of South Alabama, Van Dyke seized the opportunity.

"I was flattered to be a part of a national search and chosen to be a person to hopefully contribute to what drama could be here. That's just been my job, I loved it, and I still love it."

The professor set several goals with the intention of making the department bigger, better, and stronger. He aspired for the number of students to increase, casting to be more selective, the plays selected to be more substantive, and to encourage undergrads to dream for greater employment opportunities.

"I believe all those things are evolving and happening … I think finding work is aggressively competitive in all arts, and that might also be true in oversupplied areas like journalism, English, or history," Van Dyke imparted.

Fine arts are currently at risk in the Southeast, if not the entire United States. Many primary and secondary schools have removed art programs from their curriculum, citing budget concerns. Programs are undervalued due to a lack of understanding about the cognitive benefits of artistic expression.

"Since I have been in Alabama, I have been seriously concerned about the children. They are just not getting an opportunity to participate in drama as much as they should. It is just not getting better," Van Dyke said.

The arts help growing minds develop emotionally, ensuring children become well-balanced adults. Many scientific studies provide evidence that the arts stimulate new parts of the brain by developing linear pathways. The arts might even save one's life.

"It might have got you out of some kind of rut or a dead end path and involved with some stuff which gave you a bit of heart than just doing non-artistic classes," Van Dyke suggested.

Despite the declining status of the arts in education, Van Dyke remains optimistic about the future. The professor's impact can be felt among many of his former students at the University of South Alabama.

"He's more than a teacher. He is a man of many hats. I like how he casted parts to females that are usually played by men," 2013 graduate Veronica Adams said.

Van Dyke is more fond of modern playwrights than classical





Photo/Tim Borland

ones, having directed contemporary plays like "Dead Man's Cellphone" and "Clean House" by living playwright Sarah Ruhl. The professor was also noted for updating classical works by "Bill," his affectionate name for William Shakespeare. For "Julius Caesar," the professor inverted the genders of specfic roles and modified the setting to the golden age of radio, giving an old standard new twists.

"I always love to have my actors and my audiences think of it as something that speaks to them now. I do not like many historical versions of plays, in tights and period clothes. Big old, beautiful, blue and completely disconnected from everyone else," Van Dyke said.

Van Dyke drew a symbolic line in the sand for his full-time career as his 70th birthday approached this summer. His final classes in the spring semester 2014 included Text Analysis and Theater History from 1642 to the present. Van Dyke's final production, "The Tempest," was a fitting tribute as it was also 'Bill's' last completed work.

Even during this final semester, Van Dyke made a lasting impression on his students.

"To get to talk to him, work with him, and learn from him was a great honor. Those experiences will stick with me for the rest of my life," current USA undergrad Eli Foreman said.

Prior to his departure, Van Dyke provided support to the university during the selection process for a worthy successor who will continue the department's upward trajectory. In July, USA welcomed Dr. Lars Tatom to take Van Dyke's place.

"I am very positive about this place. It has been fun because I have been a part of having interviews with the guys who are being recruited to come in and take this job. And with each of them I have been able to easily say the university represents nothing but an opportunity right on the cusp of getting better, in drama specifically," Van Dyke said.

Retirement might not slow Van Dyke down much; he looks forward to pursuing more acting roles, having been offered a small part in a low-budget movie. He will also enjoy quality time with his wife of 25 years, who is a political consultant, and visiting his daughter who is an economics major at Westminster College in Salt Lake City, Utah. To students or adults who are interested in the performing arts, whether for professional or personal reasons, Van Dyke offers this advice:

"Do it with all your heart, do it your best … Practice. Get Cast. Work at it. Do it now and do it often with as much of your mind as you can"



WINNER WINNER TRELLIS ROOM DINNER.

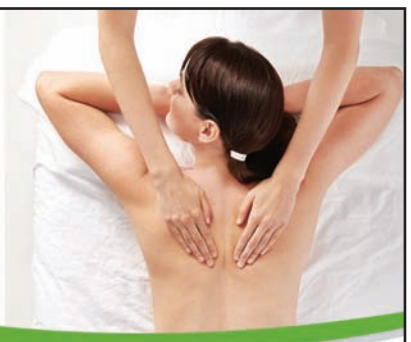
Congratulations Tim Smith, winner of the Battle House Burger Competition. Tim's Conecuh Mushroom Bacon Burger sold the most during July's Battle of the Burgers in the Trellis Room at The Battle House. His burger was one of three selected from Facebook fan submissions to compete in the Battle House's first burger competition. Each burger order counted as a vote and as the inaugural winner, Tim Smith receives dinner for two at The Trellis Room and a kitchen tour with Trellis Room Executive Chef Marty Pollock. Thank you everyone who ordered burgers. August will feature a new menu for Burger Night each Wednesday night from 5 – 10 p.m.

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Centre for the Living Arts forging through a rough patch

BY KEVIN LEE/ARTS EDITOR | klee@lagniappemobile.com

One or two passersby and the crash could have been more tragic. Now the hope is that it wasn't ominous or portentous.

Artist Kenny Scharf's graffiti mural on the exterior of the Centre for the Living Arts (CLA) was marred when stucco panels fell three stories to the Jackson Street sidewalk in June. Though it can be repaired, the damage is already done to the work created by the world-famous street artist in May 2013.

Metaphorically, the same could be said for the rumors running rampant through the rest of downtown about goings on at the contemporary arts center's future. It's the latest in rumblings commonplace since local philanthropic maven and co-founder Ann Bedsole left the board in 2010 and took with her an inroad to funding.

Come late summer 2014 and whispers have magnified. J. L. Bedsole Foundation Director Chris Lee has departed the CLA board citing a conflict of interests.

"I had been there for a dozen years and I could no longer represent their interests and others at the same time," Lee said. "It was suggested to me I submit a resignation."

The board has added Mobile ad man Rich Sullivan and Wind Creek Casino Vice President of Marketing Michael Perhaes. CLA Board Chair Mike Dow said their presence is part of new marketing and branding efforts.

Locals are also talking about attrition among the ranks. Apparently CLA is making do without a development director, an events coordinator or educational director. Even Director Bob Sain's executive assistant left July 31.

CLA has told some creditors payments won't be made until a property sale is completed, but bills would be ultimately be paid. The property deal appears to revolve the front portion of the old Press-Register building – CLA is established in the back section of the newspaper's former home between Conti and Government Streets – but recent issues have arisen with possible toxic contamination on the site.

Board members have indicated that while they have unexpectedly extended the residence of the current show, PRE-GLO, they are working on a "new, big exciting thing." It's also known they are anxiously awaiting news from the City of Mobile about funding, which sounds dangerous in light of the winnowing performance contracts to arts organizations.

Gallery hours have been trimmed to just three days a week. Sain was unavailable for comment.

Dow admitted they hit a snag in selling the property priced at $650,000. The former mayor also said they have commitments to get past the current financial slog.

"Remember a couple of years ago when the Exploreum was having those financial issues? This is like that," Dow said. "Unfortunately, arts is the first thing governments cut."

The board chair noted the long drain of managing the Saenger Theatre, a responsibility CLA returned to the city in 2013. They oversaw its $6 million-plus renovation in the previous decade.

"We took a $2 million hit on managing that theater over the last 10 years," Dow said. "It still affected us last year."

As to the environmental aspect, Dow pointed to the site's history. The Press-Register's usage of ink and solvents are possible culprits along with other former residents.

"There used to be a laundry, there used to be a service station, the Press-Register had certain chemicals," Dow said. "Like many of the buildings in the downtown area, we had to do Phase Twos to go into the historical tracts so we're still in the process of getting information of what potential uses the building can have."

Dow initially said he was due to have a report from Southern Earth Sciences in hand either Aug. 4 or Aug. 5, but later pushed that deadline back "a few weeks."

Dow said a worst-case report on the Government Street property would change its purposing. A parking garage would likely result.

The board chair said gallery hours will "absolutely" be expanded again as soon as funding becomes available. He said funding for the current year has been resolved.

"If you look at most every organization in town, relative to our attractions and that kind of stuff there has been a level of adjustments to staffing," Dow said of the vacant positions. "So we're trying to figure out the appropriate level that we can come back so we can stay within budgetary limits we're going to set for ourselves."

"The CLA can potentially survive this downtown," Lee said of the finances. He stressed his absence from the board since June as a barrier to further insight.

"We're looking to diversify our funding base, moving into the next level of corporate and business sources," Dow said. "Our aim is to build an endowment." He said Perhaes' addition to the board isn't part of an investment by the casino.

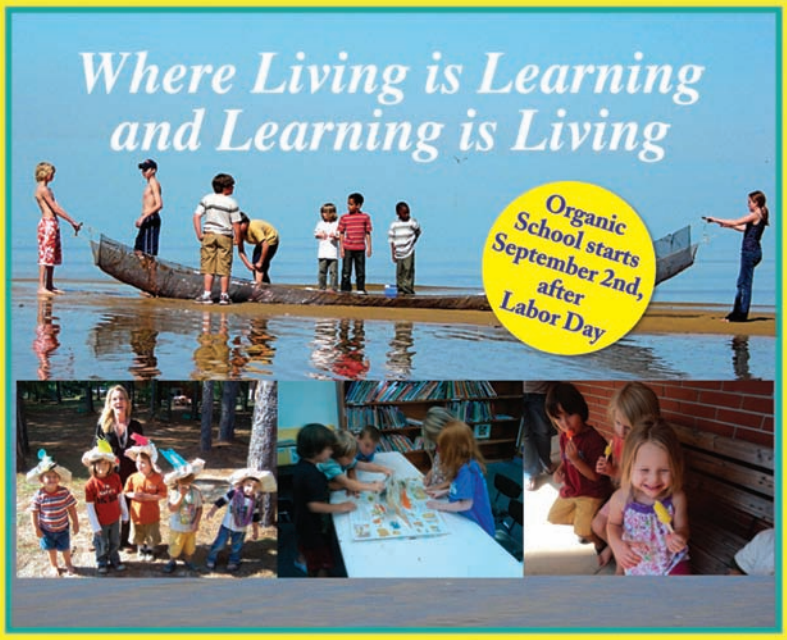
As regular readers of this column can attest, Artifice has long been a proponent of CLA and feels its contribution to downtown is essential. The decision to widen the scope of the exhibits, to try and draw tourist dollars with vaunted names was a giant step for Mobile.

We also realize our local arts realm can be fraught with blind spots, backbiting, politics, cliquishness and self-defeat. It's stirred enough eye rolling on this end to form gravitational and magnetic fields around my eye sockets.

This should be facile. If we can't see the tantamount message CLA's closure would send to our downtown and our arts community, then one has to wonder if we deserve it all.







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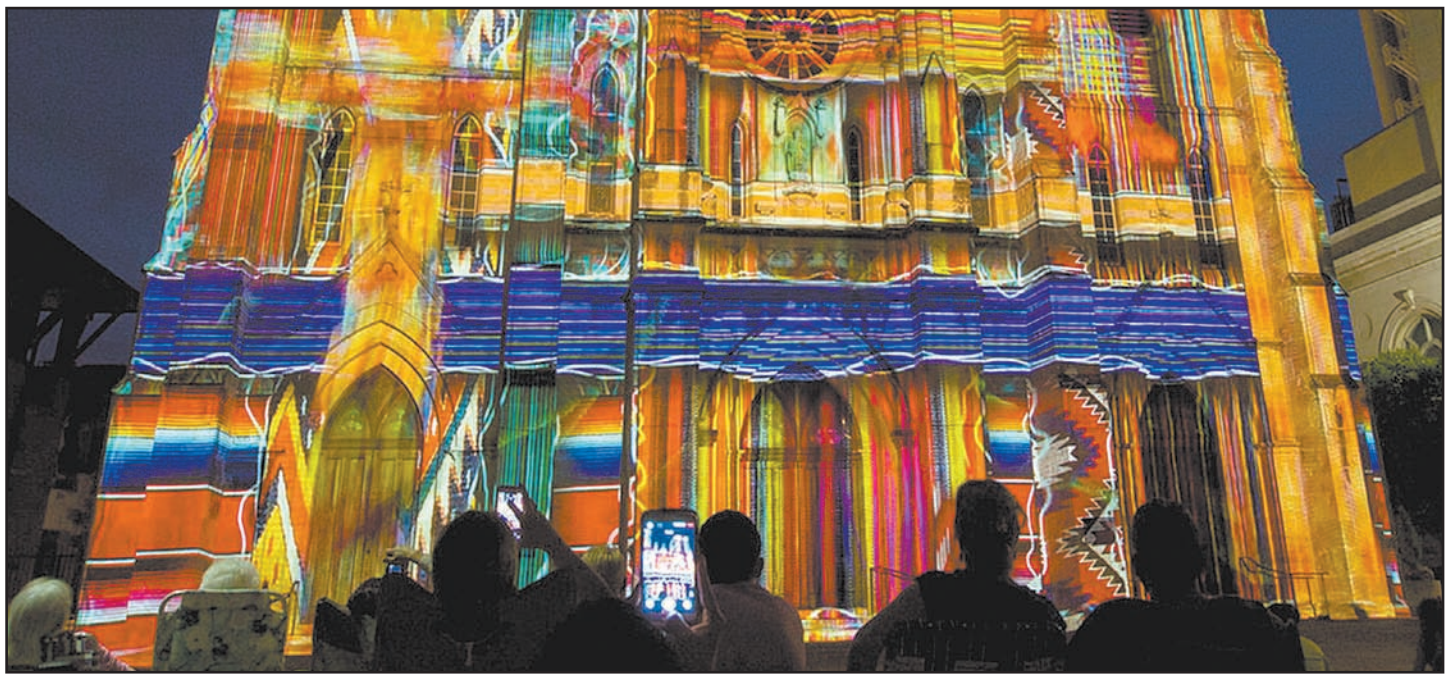


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Battleship negotiations back on track

BY KEVIN LEE/ARTS EDITOR | klee@lagniappemobile.com



Photo/mainplaza.org

Xavier de Richemont's "The Saga" lightshow on the San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas.

A member of the U.S.S. Alabama Battleship Commission has clued us in on the next step in the effort to let Xavier de Richemont employ the landmark vessel as a palette for his next noteworthy light installation. The world-famous French artist has built on the idea since his 2012 visit as part of his first American work, "Hokushima" at the Centre for the Living Arts (CLA).

A working model of his vision has been in place at the downtown showroom for the last year and a half. There have been sticking points with the commission over its content, which has resulted in some re-workings of the design at their request.

Apparently, CLA is the facilitator for negotiations between the artist and battleship stewards. CLA Board Chair Mike Dow confirmed their role and a scheduled Aug. 7 demonstration to the commission of what de Richemont unveiled in San Antonio on June 13.

"I don't know if you saw it but it was awesome," Dow said with abundant enthusiasm. He felt confident the commission would be impressed.

His excitement mirrored comments about not only Richemont's installation at CLA but worldwide. He has built the projections of animation and music on cathedrals and similar landmarks across Europe and North America and his invitation to utilize San Antonio's treasured San Fernando Cathedral for "The Saga" was highly lauded. Video of its premiere and several other showings can be found on YouTube.

The San Antonio work is a panorama of their city's history. It begins with prehistoric times, ventures through the Native American residents then Spanish rule, the Texas revolution and early statehood, the Civil War, the cattle and oil legacy and into contemporary times. The musical mix incorporates ethnic and period examples along with ragtime, blues, even a touch of Bob Dylan and Allman Brothers.

Word reached Lagniappe that one of the big sticking points in the design for the ship was Richemont's use of azaleas. We asked a commission member if the city's namesake vibrant blooms were indeed a point of contention.

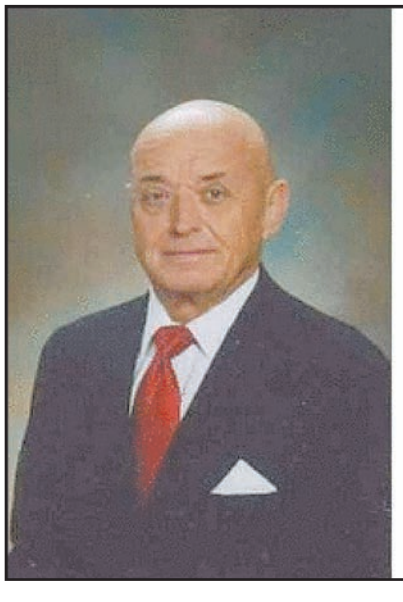
"The artist was doing a good faith job of depicting Mobile optics," Paul Wesch said via email. "The effect, though, conjured up images not consistent with a memorial to veterans. I think he has some other, better ideas now."

Naturally, questions arise at this news. If the key point here is "a memorial to veterans," what else is going to be deemed inappropriate? What about our Native American, French, Spanish and British heritage? What about Confederate history, a military force that not only fired upon American veterans but took their lives? What about the use of music? Will that cut the mustard if it's not been written for patriotic purposes?

Should more difficulty arise, perhaps Richemont could be persuaded to look at other structures around Mobile. The Roman Catholic church has shown a willingness to work with the artist in the past so maybe they would do the same with the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

If not, maybe we could move to a third choice with the Scottish Rites Temple on Claiborne. It certainly has the size needed and is even a nice neutral tone, suitable for a canvas.

Let's keep our fingers crossed.


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AUGUST 7 - AUGUST 13

AREA MUSIC LISTINGS I MUSIC

THURS. AUG 7

Baumhower's (OBA)— Jerry Powell, 6p
Bill's by the Beach— Ray "Big Dog" Coley, 6p
Bimini Bob's— Ric McArthur, 6p
BLUEGILL— Al & Kathy, 6p
Blues Tavern— Meacham Motor Co., 8:30p
Dahlia's Electric Piano Hall— Scott Morlock, Gene Murrell & David White
Felix's— Jeri
Hangout— Mojiles, 6p// Adam Holt Band, 10p
Hard Rock (Center Bar)— Brandon Green, 8p
Hungry Owl— Brent Loper, 5p
Legacy— Brett LaGrave, 7p
Live Bait— Gypsy Riot, 10p
Lulu's— Kyle & Karl, 6p
McSharry's— TJ & Marshall, 7:30p
Moe's BBQ (Daphne)— Yellowhammer Productions, 8p
Pinzones— Gram Rea and Ty Taylor
Traders— Steve Duck Varnes & the Lizards, 7p
Veets— Justin Fobes, 7p

FRI. AUG 8

Baumhower's (OBA)— Double D, 6p
Bill's by the Beach— Lisa Zanghi, 6p
Bimini Bob's— Ric McArthur, 6p
BLUEGILL— Andrew Tyler & Spencer Ross, 6p
Blues Tavern— Johnny No, 9p
Celtic Irish Pub— Eyes Like 20// Project Nile
Cockeyed Charlie's— 3HG
Courtyard @ 311— Modern Elderados
Dahlia's Electric Piano Hall— Scott Morlock, Tony Edwards & David White
DeCuba— Corey Rezner, 8p
Felix's— Blind Dog Mike
Flora Bama— Johnny Sansone Band, 10p
Grand Central— Reckless Richards
Hangout— Mojiles, 7p// Foxy Iguanas, 11p
Hard Rock (Center Bar)— Contraflow, 9p
Laps— Meacham Motor Co., 6p
Legacy— Soulshine Trio, 7p
Live Bait— Gypsy Riot, 10p
Lulu's— The Nashville Gang, 6p
McSharry's— DJ Demps, 10p
Moe's BBQ (Mobile)— Harrison McInnis, 6:30p
Moe's BBQ (Daphne)— Unseen Evidence, 8p
Pinzones— Amy True and John Cochran
Tacky Jacks (Causeway) — Crowned Jewelz, 8p
Tacky Jacks (Orange Beach) — Kyle & Karl, 6p
Tropics— Midlife Crisis, 8p
Soul Kitchen— John Martin Davis, 9p
Veets— The Family Jewels, 9p
Windmill Market— Sugarcane Jane, 6p

SAT. AUG 9

Baumhower's (OBA)— Tyler Champion, 6p
Bill's by the Beach— Mel & Melissa, 11a// Jon Cowart, 6p
Bimini Bob's— Jerry Powell, 6p
BLUEGILL— Blind Dog Mike, 6p
Blues Tavern— Ric McNaughton Band, 9p
Callaghan's— Oh Jeremiah
Celtic Irish Pub— Kennon Barton
Courtyard @ 311— Rhythm Intervention
Dahlia's Electric Piano Hall— Scott Morlock, Tony Edwards & David White
DeCuba— Greg Brown, 8p
Felix's— Sugar Cane Jane
Garage— Tuscaloosa Station, 9p
Grand Central— Strongfold
Hangout— Mojiles, 7p// Oak and Ash, 11p
Hard Rock (Center Bar)— Contraflow, 9p
IP Casino— Kathleen Madigan, 8p
Laps— Joey Abruscato and The Low Maintenance Trio, 6p
Legacy— Jimmy Lumpkin
Live Bait— Gypsy Riot, 10p
Lulu's— Sarah Percy, 1p// The Nashville Gang, 6p
McSharry's— DJ Demps, 10p
Moe's BBQ (Mobile)— Mike McCarthy, 6p
Moe's BBQ (Daphne)— Denver Hawsey, 7p
Pinzones— Harrison McInnis Trio
Royal Knight— Jerry Squires
Tacky Jacks (Causeway) — The Viridian Sons, 8p
Tacky Jacks (Gulf Shores) — Pale Moon Rising, 6p
Tacky Jacks (Orange Beach) — John and Melissa Joiner, 12p// Mickey Springston, 6p
Tropics— Vertigo Haze, 7p
Veets— The Family Jewels, 9p
Windmill Market— St. James, 11a

SUN. AUG 10

Baumhower's (OBA)— Justin Fobes, 6p
Bill's by the Beach— Mel of Foxy Iguanas, 5p
Bimini Bob's— Tony Bowers, 6p
BLUEGILL— Gypsy Riot, 6p
Blues Tavern— Bama Boys, 5p
Callaghan's— Scott Boyer and Tommy Talton
Courtyard @ 311— Jeri Trio
Felix's— Jimmy Lumpkin
Garage— Low Maintenance, 5p
Hangout— Kyle and Karl, 6p// The Perry Wall, 10p
Laps— Zach Chavers, 1p
Lulu's— Greg Brown, 1p// Delta Reign, 6p
McSharry's— Trad Irish Session, 6:30p
Tacky Jacks (Causeway) — Neil Dover, 3p
Tacky Jacks (Orange Beach) — Bud Smith, 6p
Veets— Bennie & Katrina Austin, 8p
Windmill Market— Mitch Johnson, 11a

MON. AUG 11

Felix's— Greg Brown
Hangout— Rhythm Intervention, 6p// Ellux Furor, 10p
Lucky's Irish Pub— Marcus, 8p
Lulu's— Brent Burns, 5p
Soul Kitchen— Chiodos, Blessthefall, I Killed The Prom Queen, Capture the Crown, 6p

TUES. AUG 12

Bill's by the Beach— Brett LaGrave, 6p
Butch Cassidy's— Jimmy Lee
Cockeyed Charlie's— Matt Neese + 1
Felix's— Bryant Gilley
Hangout— Banditos, 6p// DJ Sremba, 10p
Hungry Owl— Fat Man Squeeze, 5p
Lulu's— Lee Yankie and the Hellz Yeah, 6p
Tin Top— Shawna P. & Adam T yler Brown, 6p

WED. AUG 13

Baumhower's (OBA)— Mike Eagan, 6p
Bill's by the Beach— Ray "Big Dog" Coley, 5p
Bimini Bob's— Greg Brown, 6p
BLUEGILL— Ross + 1, 6p
Blues Tavern— Kenny Proulx & Maple Leaf, 8p
Callaghan's— Deluxe Trio
Celtic Irish Pub— Mike
Cockeyed Charlie's— Sammy Sixx
Felix's— Chris Powell
Garage— Jonesy Gambino Duo, 8p
Hangout— Banditos, 6p// Ellux Furor, 10p
Legacy— Amy True, Chris Spies and John Cochran, 7p
Lulu's— The Deluxe Trio, 6p
Soul Kitchen— Rittz, 7:30p

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Crowd Surf America tour rides into Soul Kitchen Aug. 11

BY ALYSON STOKES/REPORTER | alyson@lagniappemobile.com

Crowd Surf America Tour featuring Chiodos and blessthefall
Date: Monday, Aug. 11, with doors open at 6 p.m. Show starts at 6:30 p.m.
Venue: Soul Kitchen 219 Dauphin St., www.soulkitchenmobile.com
Tickets: $16 advance/$20 day-of, available at Soul Kitchen, online, Mellow Mushroom (WeMo & MiMo) or by calling 866-468-7630. Under 18 with a parent.





Photo/(left) fearlessrecords.com, (right) razorandtiepublicity.com

blessthefall (left) and Chiodos are injecting a dose of metalcore in the Azalea City Aug. 11.

From humble beginnings at local American Legion posts and VFW halls to critically acclaimed albums, sold out venues and main stage performances on the Vans Warped Tour, Chiodos and blessthefall have both proven themselves as metalcore powerhouses.

Chiodos's latest album "Devil," produced by David Bottrill (Tool, Muse, Stone Sour), debuted at number 12 on the Billboard Top 200 Album Chart and sold more than 18,000 copies. In turn, blessthefall's latest release "Hollow Bodies" debuted at number 15 on the Billboard Top 200 and gave the band their best sales to date.

Lead by two of the most recognizable and influential frontmen in the alternative music scene, Chiodos's Craig Owens and blessthefall's Beau Bokan have spent years perfecting their craft and spreading their music across the globe, garnering some of the most dedicated fans around.

"It's reaffirming to know so many people care about what it is I'm doing," Owens said. "It reaffirms all the hard work and dedication that I put in, that all the guys put in and what we collectively put in. It's exciting and I'm really thankful."

But both bands' success did not come without some challenges. In fact, both Owens and Bokan each carry two different, very interesting stories.

Former guitarist Mike Frisby, drummer Matt Traynor and bassist Jared Warth founded the Arizona quintet blessthefall in early 2004; however, it was not until 2008 when Bokan replaced original lead vocalist Craig Mabbitt, who later joined Escape the Fate.

"Our band has been around for a while, so I feel like we've garnished a great fan base and a lot of the band, even before me, [has been] around since 2006," Bokan said. "I think some bands that do switch lead singers, kind of see that the band really doesn't do as well. Where [with] our band, we switched singers and we're doing better than ever. So that's just pretty cool."

Bokan also recently experienced a monumental life-changing event with the birth of his first child, a girl named Rocket Wild. Though he appreciates days off from tour, now more than ever, Bokan said blessthefall have no plans on slowing down.

"As long as the ball keeps rolling and as long as we're moving forward in our careers and not backward, then we're going to continue," he said.

For the Michigan-based outfit Chiodos, things were a little more complicated.

In 2008, Owens struggled with personal issues that ultimately led to a departure from his band. After an alleged drug overdose, Owens took to his personal website to talk about the incident and confirm he had checked into a mental health clinic.

Turning to the interwebs once again, Owens revealed he checked himself into rehab for another time via Twitter on July 23, 2012, just months after he announced his return to Chiodos in April 2012.

"It was nothing in particular [that brought the band back together] other than the fact that we've grown up together," Owens said. "The four of us started this band in high school, and we went off and did our own thing for a while. It felt scary. It was scary. It was overwhelming. I was definitely afraid we'd naturally fall back into bad habits, not work on our communication and things like that. It was scary, but at the same time, calming in a way because it's like running into an old best friend. At first, it's a bit heavy if something happened, but it's very easy to look passed that. These guys are my brothers. We fight like brothers. But we've always got each others' backs."

During his time away from Chiodos, Owens worked on other projects including the post-hardcore supergroup D.R.U.G.S. (Destroy Rebuild Until God Shows).

"I had a really amazing opportunity," Owens said. "It was a beautiful shoe, it just didn't fit me. I was surrounded by leaders and not my family. I wasn't in the position to lead leaders at the time. It was a nice experience, just not at the right time."

In the end, Chiodos and blessthefall have come a long way, in both their personal and artistic ventures, since the days of sweaty punk kids packing into American Legion posts and starting mosh pits across the county. Now, two of metalcore's leading forces can enjoy the benefits of hard work and success. (We're pretty sure there's still moshing, though.)

"We're on a bus," Owens said with a laugh. "Which is cool. We can pay our bills, which is cool. We can eat, which is cool. We can look our parents in the eyes and tell them it's our job, which is cool. A lot has changed. As artists, as human beings, we've grown up. We're men now. We were kids when were playing VFW halls."

"It's pretty awesome," Bokan said. "We work really hard … we've toured and toured and toured, and we've really busted our ass and we've really stayed true to ourselves, to our fans and to our music. And to have a record come out with this much success and still kind of maintain our integrity and our pride in our music, it's awesome. It's amazing. We're just proud. We're proud of ourselves and proud of our fans for sticking by us. And of all the new fans that have never heard of us before and [are] giving us a chance, it's a pretty humbling feeling."

However, one thing has remained virtually unchanged throughout the years – the energy-packed live performances. Both Owens and Bokan promise an in-your-face, "very interactive experience" at any and all shows during the Crowd Surf America Tour.

"We like to get people clapping, get them moving and jumping up and down," Owens said. "Beau and I like to push the audience and get them involved because it makes for a better experience by all."

"We try to make it as much of a party as it can be where there's a lot of energy and we're in your face, we're down in the crowd and things like that," Bokan said. "We just want to feel the energy back, and we want you to have a good time and have this be a huge party where you kind of just lose yourself and forget about school or work or any of those types of things. "

As far as what is ahead for both groups, Owens said Chiodos just put the finishing touches on a video for "3 AM," a track from their album "Devil," which will be released soon, and Bokan said blessthefall are focused on touring and riding out the success of "Hollow Bodies" for a little while longer.

"We're excited to come to Mobile," Owens said. "[There are] a few spots we aren't used to playing. It's nice and refreshing to get to meet all the people that support you from different towns that don't get to really see you very often."

"I would be pretty bummed if there was no crowd surfing at the Crowd Surf America Tour," Bokan said. "I'd be really upset."

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Jane says BayFest just added a great new headliner

BY STEPHEN CENTANNI/MUSIC EDITOR | scentanni@lagniappemobile.com





Photos: (left) Jane's Addiction/Facebook, (above) 311/Facebook

(Left) Guitarist Dave Navarro of Jane's Addiction will rock the Coca-Cola Stage at BayFest. (Right) 311 performed a flawless, sold-out show at Soul Kitchen.

BayFest closed out the month by revealing an extremely welcome addition to an already popular lineup. Alternative rock legends Jane's Addiction has been selected to be the main headliner on the Coca-Cola Stage Saturday, Oct. 4. After talk of a hiatus earlier this year, Jane's Addiction's involvement in "Alabama's Largest Music Festival" is a pleasant surprise. Their eagerness to tour could be the result of the anniversary of the release of their 1988 debut "Nothing's Shocking," which contains fan favorites such as "Jane Says" and "Ted, Just Admit It …" While there has been talk of a new album, the band hasn't recorded since 2011's "The Great Escape Artist." With an addition such as this, the BayFest organizers might have a few other impressive surprises for the public. Weekend passes are on sale for $60 until Friday, Sept. 19 at area Circle K locations and through the BayFest website.

The 4-1-1 on 311

This show is being called one of the biggest in Soul Kitchen's history, and those in attendance would have no problem agreeing. On Monday, July 28, 311 took the stage at the LoDa venue in front of a sold-out crowd. The fact that this show sold out is no surprise, and social media was busy with last minute tweets and posts searching for tickets.

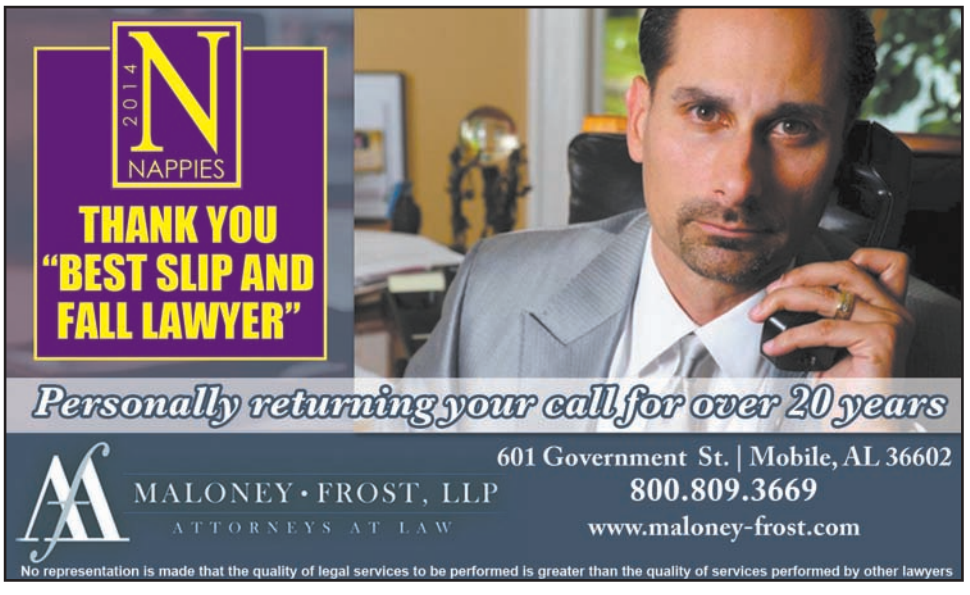
Since their breakout third release, 311 has maintained a tour schedule featuring arena and festival venues. In fact, this is one of the very few times that the group has made a stop in Alabama. However, the rock gods looked with favor on the denizens of the Azalea City as 311 stopped by to give their local fans an electrifying performance in an environment that many would find intimate, when considering the band.

311 provided a proper cross-section of their career. The crowd enjoyed classic songs such as "Feel So Good," "My Stoney Baby" and "Down," which served as part of their encore. They also introduced some in the audience to tracks from their new release "Stereolithic," with "Revelation of the Year" being the most impressive. Throughout their set, 311 flawlessly rolled through songs with a clear perfection that can only be found on a studio album.

At one point, drummer Chad Sexton was allowed to freestyle. As he played, three racks of various percussion instruments were rolled out onto the stage. The assumption would lead one to believe that Sexton was going to give a stereotypical overindulgence of beats. However, the rest of the band dispelled this idea by joining Sexton onstage for a drum circle.

Throughout their set, moments like these made this show unique. This seasoned band brought an arena/festival style show that was crafted for a multitude to a hot and sweaty crowd of a couple thousand, and both parties seemed ecstatic to be sharing this moment.







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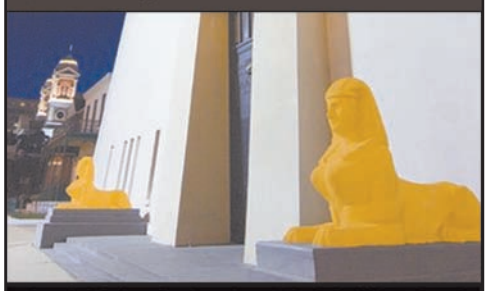
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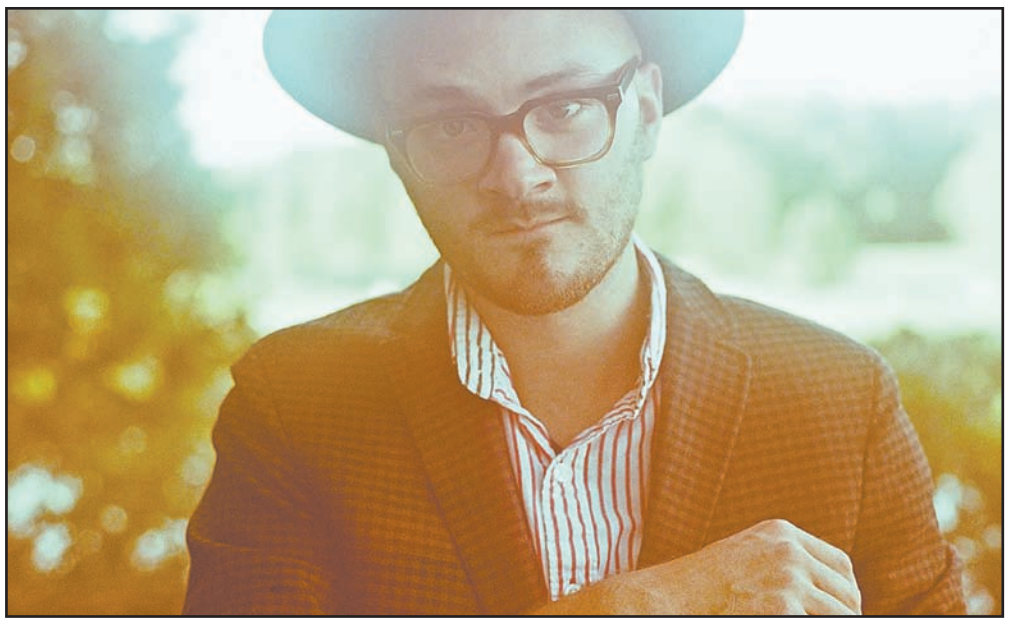
BY STEPHEN CENTANNI/MUSIC EDITOR | scentanni@lagniappemobile.com

Band: Oh, Jeremiah
Date: Saturday, Aug. 9, 7:30 p.m.
Venue: Callaghan's Irish Social Club, 916 Charleston St., www.callaghansirishsocialclub.com
Tickets: $7 at the door

Hailing from Hattiesburg, Miss., Oh, Jeremiah is a musical project from singer-songwriter Jeremiah Stricklin. Stricklin first caught the performing bug in a kindergarten talent show as a pint-size Elvis Presley impersonator. After receiving his first guitar at 11, Stricklin's love for entertaining was amplified.

Stricklin spent his teenage years honing his style and developed a formula for songs that presented a "technical complexity of music and lyrical depth." The young musician also began finding his muses in musical acts such as Shovels & Rope, Ryan Adams and Josh Ritter. Stricklin completed his Oh, Jeremiah project with a live performance that provides the best translation of his music. With consecutive EP releases in 2013 and 2014, Stricklin has embraced the modern standards that indie artists have created.

"Our Very Own Kingdom" is Oh, Jeremiah's sophomore effort. This second release shows quite a degree of musical evolution in Oh, Jeremiah's sound. Oh, Jeremiah's debut "Tall Tales & Tiny Fables" is full of tracks that have been steeped in the world of modern folks. While Stricklin still maintains a solid modern folk foundation on "Our Very Own Kingdom," indie rock influences echo throughout, giving the band a unique sound.



Photo/ohjeremiah.comk | Oh, Jeremiah

Austin acoustic favorite at Moe's BBQ Aug. 9

Band: Mike McCarthy
Date: Saturday, Aug. 9, 6:30 p.m.
Venue: Moe's Original BBQ, 701 Spring Hill Ave., www.moesoriginalbbq.com
Tickets: Free

Austin's music scene has built a reputation for being a breeding ground for a plethora of cutting edge sounds. However, Austin musician Mike McCarthy prefers to entwine his music with old school influences. Armed with an acoustic guitar, McCarthy has crafted a style that focuses on what he calls "the roots." He mingles Delta blues, hill country, Appalachian folk, country flat-picking and even a little Bolivian folk music into his original songs. He complements his setlists with an energetic performance that tends to spread through his audiences.

McCarthy's hybridized style can best be experienced through his debut album "From the Shadow of a Mountain." Each song on the 12-track album takes the listener through a variety of styles and emotions. "Fire in the Stove" is a driving ballad that drops into slide blues on a whim. "Stone Me Down" begins as an old school stomp blues track before being riddled with dirty electric guitar. McCarthy is one of American roots music's brightest students, and the crowd at Moe's will not have a problem seeing why.



Photo/reverbnation.com/mikemcarthysongs | Mike McCarthy

Puttin' on the Rittz

Band: Rittz, Raz Simone, Tuki Carter, Beamin & Timmy and Twist Up Entertainment
Date: Wednesday, Aug. 14, 7:30 p.m.
Venue: Soul Kitchen, 219 Dauphin St., www.soulkitchenmobile.com
Tickets: $12 adv. /$15 day-of avail. at Soul Kitchen, their website, Mellow Mushroom (MiMo/WeMo) and by calling 1-866-468-7630

Soul Kitchen is bringing an epic night of hip-hop to the Azalea City. The evening will begin with a set from Twist Up Entertainment. Mobile's premiere hip-hop duo Beamin & Timmy will follow. Beamin & Timmy's verbal flow has earned them a dedicated fan base as well as opening spots for bands ranging from Zoogma to Yo Gotti. Beamin & Timmy definitely made new fans with their set at the Pass the Good Festival in Pensacola.

Indie hip-hop artist Rittz will be the evening's headliner. Rittz is on his OD Tour 2014 with tour mates Tuki Carter and Raz Simone. Rittz has exploded out of the Atlanta hip-hop scene with catchy beats, memorable rhymes and a dynamic verbal flow. Rittz has been spreading his sounds worldwide with albums such as "After Mornin'" and "The Life and Times of Johnny Valiant." Rittz is preparing for the September release of his latest effort "Next to Nothing."



Photo/Raz Simone/Facebook | Raz Simone


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‘Labor Day’ not ruined by clichés and hap-pie ending

BY ASIA FREY/FILM CRITIC | afrey@lagniappemobile.com

Director Jason Reitman abandons any hint of the smirk that his previous projects, like “Juno” and “Up in the Air,” wore so well for his recent tearjerker “Labor Day.” An utterly serious drama starring Kate Winslet and Josh Brolin, this film was undeniably moving, but ultimately the plot was too carefully tied up, and some elements overshot drama and landed in melodrama.

Kate Winslet can’t really do any wrong from an acting standpoint and this was no exception. She is believable as a heartbroken, fragile woman, raising her young teenage son alone after his father divorces her and marries a new, easier to handle woman. Winslet’s son, Henry, is a very sensitive youth trying to take care of his mom, and the story is narrated from his viewpoint as an adult, by Tobey Maguire. I’m not a fan of this device.

During one of the pair’s rare shopping trips, a bloodied Josh Brolin approaches them and forces himself into their car. On the run from the police after escaping prison via the hospital, Brolin is an intimidating figure that insists he stay in their home until the heat is off. He quickly establishes himself as a rather decent fellow, and both mom and son soon begin to respond to this hunky new father figure.

Thus begins a rapid, sexy spiral into Stockholm Syndrome via home improvement projects and oil changes. This part really amused me, as it was basically like housewife porn from the Lifetime network. Winslet swoons as Brolin cooks chili, changes a tire, fixes the porch and even mops the floor. We see that the way to a woman’s heart is through handyman tasks. He’s not necessarily wrong, mind you, it’s just a little clichéd. Soon the whole family is baking a pie together, and things really … heat up.

This film is based on a novel of the same name by Joyce Maynard, also known as that girl who lived with J.D. Salinger when she was a teenager, which isn’t really important to the plot, I just think it’s an interesting fact. So I can’t blame it on the male writer/director that the female lead is rather a simplified desperate housewife character, but I take issue with the idea that she was a sad shut-in waiting for a new man to come along and change her lightbulbs.

On the other hand, both Winslet and Brolin do complement each other; we see their sad background stories and it’s clear that one of the ways in which they fulfill one another is as parents, as a family. You’re pulling for them as a couple, even as events spiral, predictably, downward. After the heartbreak shown in the movie, the film’s concluding scenes seem even sillier. The fact that the little boy grows up to be a pie baker because of that one special pie was just too much for me, but less curmudgeonly types might not object as stringently to the story’s sappy, happy ending.



Photo/imdb.com | “Labor Day”

It may feel like “Groundhog Day,” but take a few hours’ for “Labor Day” anyway.

NEW IN THEATERS





Photos/imdb.com

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES
On the other side of the movie spectrum … the name says it all. Large turtles who are also teenage ninjas fight dark forces with the help of Megan Fox and Will Arnett. All listed multiplex theaters.

THE HUNDRED-FOOT JOURNEY
Helen Mirren stars in a story about an Indian family who moves to France and opens a restaurant across the street from a Michelin-starred restaurant. Sounds like a kinder, gentler summer flick for sure, and it’s only rated PG, so you’re pretty safe even from naughty words. Crescent Theater, Carmike Jubilee Square 12, Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14

INTO THE STORM
A group of high school students document the events and aftermath of a devastating tornado. Regal mobile Stadium 18, Carmike Jubilee Square 12, Eastern Shore premier Cinema 14, Cobb Pinnacle 14

STEP UP ALL IN
After his friends move to Miami, a guy finds a new dance crew for an upcoming contest. Carmike Jubilee Square 12, Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14, Cobb Pinnacle 14

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“Dawn of the Planet of the Apes” All listed multiplex theaters.
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TAMMY
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Access joins Midtown's 'Media Row'

Tony Atchison has quietly built himself quite the media empire in Midtown Mobile, even though he doesn't own any of the businesses.

The affable owner of Atchison Home also owns the former Smith's Bakery building at the corner of Hallett and Dauphin Streets, and by the end of next week the big brick building and small grey building across Hallett will be home to eight businesses involved in various forms of media.

As Lagniappe moves offices this week across the hall, advertising and marketing firm Hummingbird Ideas will take over our current spot. They'll join two video production firms, a radio station, another marketing company and a film production firm in the Bakery Building.

In the grey building across Hallett Street, Access Magazine has also moved into what we're tentatively calling "Media Row" until one of the clever marketing folks can come up with something better. I'm feeling something playing off of baking, Johnny Gwin. Get to work on it!

Fortunately Red & White will be moving in downstairs (in the former True Midtown Kitchen space) soon to supply all these creative types – including the architects rounding out the total roster of businesses – with inspiration via the vino.

Of the new kids on the block, Hummingbird has been around longer – starting out right next door to Lagniappe in the Tower at Ryan Park. So we've been neighbors before and they even still talk to us.

For Access Magazine the move represents both a physical relocation and an arrival of sorts. Publisher Hayley Hill says after three-and-a-half years, the local style magazine aimed (mostly) at female readers, is ready to take its place among the locally owned media who have survived the often-deadly first couple of years.

"We've got our claws in," Hill said. "I feel like the first two-to-three years people were afraid of us because so many magazines fail. I don't think people are scared of us failing anymore."

Access' success and growth is a testament to Hill and her staff's tenaciousness and ability to gauge the Mobile market, as well as to adapt as they've gone along. Anyone who has started a media company in Mobile or elsewhere knows it takes advertisers, readers and customers a long time to believe you'll be around, and even after they do it takes an even longer time for them to change buying habits.

Hill says her new office is reminiscent of the type of space she worked in as an editor for Us Weekly magazine, in which all staff members add their perspective on an editorial piece.

"It's an open pit," she said. "We can all talk about what we're doing. We always say 'Why use words when you can use pictures.'"

Hill and staff have been working out of her home for the past year and the move to Hallett is indicative of the magazine's financial improvements, as readers have taken to its unique way of approaching covering the Bay area.

"We're getting more into our readers' heads. We know they are really into football and the beach, but that they also like real hero stories – cancer survivors, the Biggest Losers

. We've become a hub connecting local women," Hill says.

To her editorial content is the most important part of what Access does, and she and her staff spend hours researching so they can produce pieces that give their readers information they want on new products and services being offered locally.

Hill says the dwindling of the Press-Register as a news source in the area has opened room for Access to handle some of the features and subjects the daily once covered.

"With the disappearance of the newspaper, stories need to be told. (Lagniappe) is picking up some of the heat, we're picking up some of the heat," she said. "The newspaper turned its back on a community that has so much to give. This is such a social community."

And while dailies nationwide have been heralding the end of print media for several years now, Hill is one who believes there is still a vibrant desire for newspapers and magazines, especially in Mobile.

"Our growth shows people still like to see themselves in print. It's a very validating thing. They're excited to be in a magazine," she said.

One area in which Access has seen some real growth is among its male readers, Hill said. This year's swimsuit edition turned a lot of men's heads and led to a 20 percent increase in subscriptions from the less fair sex. Other issues, like last year's football guide, which gathered national attention for featuring University of Alabama quarterback A.J. McCarron's mother, Dee Dee Bonner, and then-girlfriend Katherine Webb.



Photo courtesy of Access

Access Magazine has settled into its new office in MiMo after more than three years publishing.

"The football issue was really big for us. I was proud for us to be able to do that," Hill said.

She says Access now averages about 60,000 readers per month, but that on some special issues, readership can swell to 200,000. As a totally home-grown publication, Hill says they still have a long way to go, but feels the new office fits their vision and dreams for the company.

"We're excited to be on the media block. We want to be with all the movers and shakers," she said.

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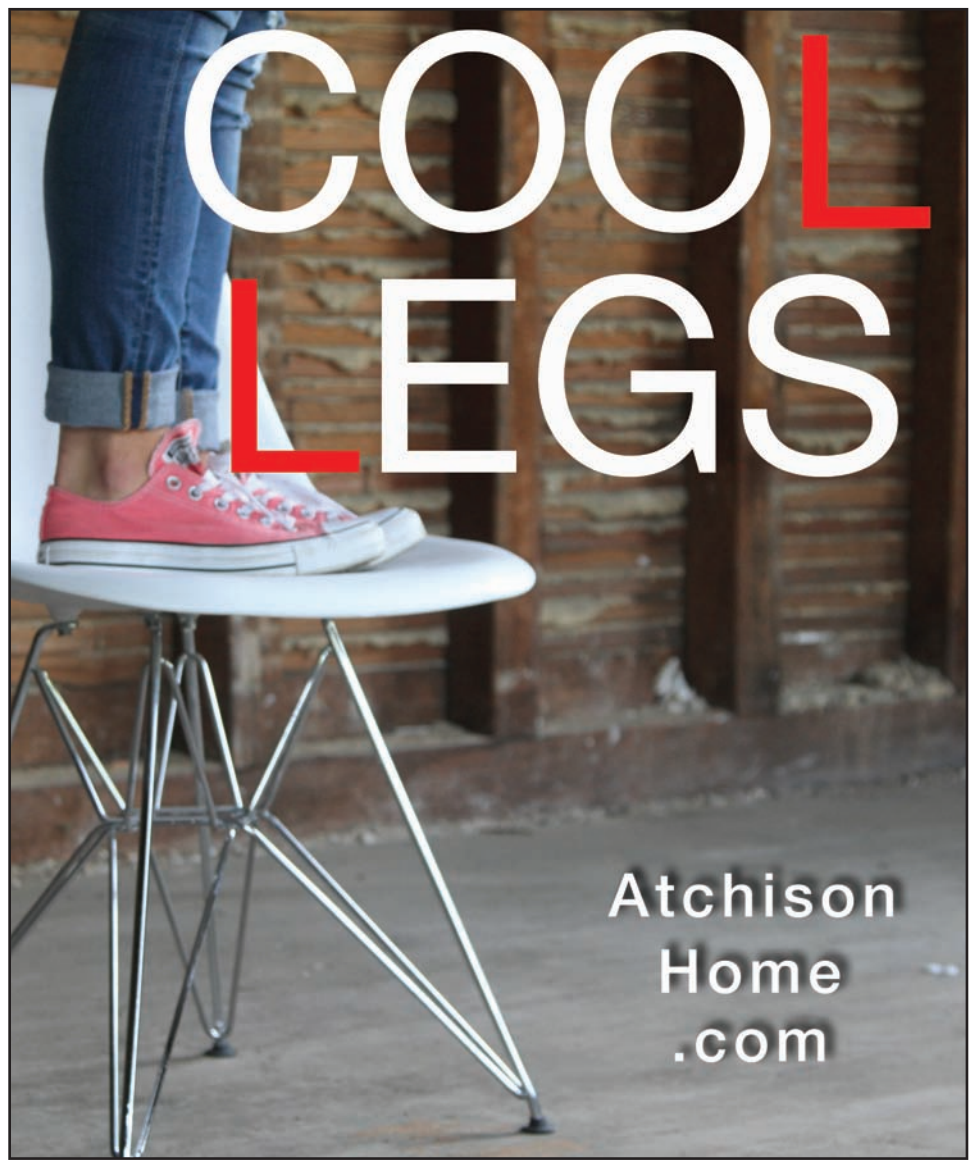
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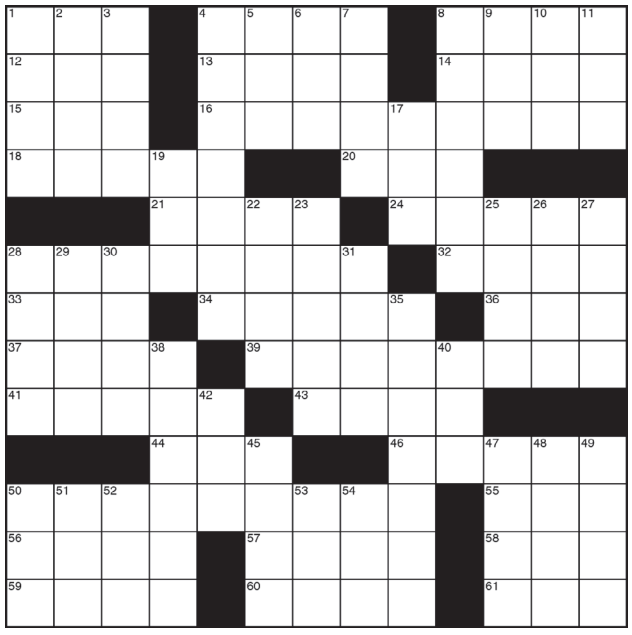
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37. Drink for Beowulf
39. Cause to explode
41. Cove kin
43. "Vamoose!"
44. Early development
46. It's acted seriously
50. Unreasonable
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56. Important statistic
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59. Book section?
60. Compass doodles
61. Lacking a match

DOWN
1. Evian, et al.
2. Cheesy lunch order
3. Content fully
4. Veteran seafarers
5. The word, if you're silent
6. An eye for the poetic?
7. Joint malady
8. Old pearls of wisdom
9. Bart, to Homer
10. Pipe material
11. "Didn't I tell you?"
17. Attorney's field
19. Miss. neighbor
22. Ran in the wash
23. Coleslaw and fries
25. "Seven Years in Tibet" role
26. "Doggone it!"
27. Construction zone
28. Final Four game
29. Drawn
30. Hardly illusory
31. Hippocratic, for one
35. Ramen soup strips
38. Do a butcher's job
40. Scand. land
42. Harbor craft
45. Met attraction
47. Certain sax
48. Humor
49. Bedazzled
50. Gremlin
51. Meadow, in verse
52. Delay
53. Company perk, perhaps
54. Mandela's org.

© Lovatts Puzzles

Answers on page 49













Groups seek to flatline sudden cardiac arrest in young athletes

BY J. MARK BRYANT/SPORTS WRITER | sports@lagniappemobile.com

Sudden cardiac arrest is among the leading causes of death among young athletes. A group of local citizens is hoping to change that by informing the public of the danger and what can be done to combat it.

Dr. Lynn Batten recently discussed the topic during a Med School Café lecture on the University of South Alabama campus. Batten, the director of pediatric cardiology at USA, has studied the issue for many years.

"When I was in med school in the 1990s, there were several big-name athletes who died," she said, referring to Hank Gathers and Reggie Lewis. "Then the American Heart Association published guidelines on the screening of athletes."

While these suggestions did not include electrocardiogram (EKG) testing for athletes, the International Olympic Committee and European Society of Cardiology both made that recommendation in the mid-2000s. In 2006, Italian doctors published an article showing an 89 percent reduction in SCA among athletes, a figure they attributed to mandated yearly screenings that included an EKG.

The AHA did update its guidelines in 2007 with a list of standardized questions, but again EKG tests were not required. "There are many causes of SCA," Dr. Batten said. "An EKG will not pick up everything."

One of the causes that might be identified by EKG abnormalities is hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM), where the heart muscle abnormally thickens. Both Gathers and Lewis were diagnosed with HCM, but each decided to continue playing and eventually died a few months later.

They were not the only stars to be struck by SCA. Pete Maravich, the all-time leading scorer in college basketball, died from coronary artery abnormality. Volleyball star Flo Hyman perished during a game, with the autopsy pointing to an aortic rupture related to Marfan syndrome.

A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention linked 2,000 deaths of those less than 25 years old to SCA, while the AHA last year connected 7,000 deaths to those 18 and younger. While a heart attack is caused by "circulation" trouble, SCA is an "electrical" problem.

Dr. Batten said there are reasons why EKG testing has not been fully endorsed. She said there is a 10 to 15 percent false-positive rate, which means an athlete could be disqualified for no reason. She said those results can read as abnormal because of training effects on the heart.

There is also the cost aspect of EKG testing. With the introduction of thousands more tests, a medical professional would have to paid to read the results.

A local nonprofit group that works with Dr. Batten in Mobile and Baldwin counties hopes to address some of these questions.

The Heart For Athletes organization has two main goals: Identify athletes, ages 13 to 18, who are at risk; and make sure people are aware of the signs of SCA, plus instructions on how to respond.

"Two of the biggest things that I would like to get across to coaches, parents and athletes are the warning signs of SCA," said Amy Cockrell, one of the group's founders. These include fainting or seizures, shortness of breath, racing heart, dizziness, chest pain or extreme fatigue.

"The fact that if an athlete falls and is unresponsive, the first thought should be SCA, and an AED (automated external defibrillator) should be made available and CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) started."

Cockrell's involvement came after her son Sam suffered from a sudden cardiac arrest at the age of 16. A highly competitive triathlete, he collapsed after swimming in a pool in Daphne in May 2013. Fortunately, Dr. Aaron Morgan, a USA family medicine resident, was present and immediately came to his aid.

Sam was diagnosed with arrhythmogenic right ventricular dysplasia, a rare form of cardiomyopathy. He has since received a defibrillator in his chest, takes medicine to control his arrhythmia and adheres to a non-athletic lifestyle.

Still, Sam encountered a second SCA. He has recovered, and is currently a mechanical engineering major at USA.

"Nationwide, if someone suffers from a SCA, they have a 5 percent chance of survival," Cockrell said. "That number could be higher if people responded appropriately and the cardiac chain of survival (call 911, AED, CPR, early advance care) were implemented."

The Heart For Athletes group will sponsor its first free heart screening on Saturday, Aug. 16, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. USA has not only offered the use of its equipment, but also the clinic space at its campus on Spring Hill Avenue.

There is no charge for athletes ages 13 to 18, but they must register by visiting www.heartforathletes.org or by calling 251-510-7263. The exam will take approximately 30 minutes, and will include an EKG and echocardiogram. A cardiologist on site will review all of the participants' tests, and result will be given that day.

University staff will also provide CPR and AED training. Dr. Batten said in 2011 that every public middle, junior and senior high school in Alabama was equipped with at least one AED.

"The conditions that lead to SCA are detectable, and deaths are preventable," Mrs. Cockrell said. "My son's miraculous survival and recovery were due to the availability of an AED at the scene of his cardiac arrest and quality bystander CPR."

For more information on future Med School Café talks, call Kim Partridge at 251-460-7770. It is a free lecture series sponsored by the USA Physicians Group.



ARTRIDE

WHEN: FRIDAY, AUGUST 8, 6-9 P.M.
WHERE: STARTING AT CREAM & SUGAR, 351 B. GEORGE ST.

ArtRide is a special edition of ArtWalk to raise awareness of and celebrate cycling in our community. A number of galleries and venues will display bike-related art, and there will be activities involving cycling, including an exhibition of bike polo, a fashion show, the unveiling of a bike mural at Delta Bike Project, and a Bike Trail featuring decorated bikes at different locations. Mobilians on Bikes will cycle to LoDa, meeting at 6:00 p.m. at Cream & Sugar Café, 351-B George St.



Photos courtesy of ArtRide

August 7

Thursdays at the Museum
Every Thursday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. the Mobile Museum of Art, 4850 Museum Drive, offers free admission to all visitors. Join MMOA each week to experience the museum in new and exciting ways throughout the year. No reservations necessary.

Movie: Say Anything
A noble underachiever meets a beautiful valedictorian and falls in love the summer before she goes away to college. Mobile Museum of Art, 4850 Museum Drive, 6 p.m. Popcorn and refreshments provided. Contact Glenn Bingham at 251-208-5205 for more information.

Mobile BayBears
The Mobile BayBears verse the Tennessee Smokies at Hank Aaron Stadium, 755 Bolling Brothers Blvd. Duck Dynasty Night. Opening pitch at 7:05 p.m. Tickets available online at www.milb.com/tickets.

August 8

ArtRide
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August 9

Pet Adoption
The Haven will hold an adoption at Petsmart in the Eastern Shore Shopping Plaza, 10200 Eastern Shore Blvd., Spanish Fort. The adoption will start at 9 a.m. with animals that are current on vaccinations, spayed/neutered and micro-chipped. The adopter receives the animal's medical records, a free bag of Science Diet food, a free pet training DVD and free 30 days of pet health insurance. $90 for dogs and $65 for cats. For more information call 251-929-3980 or visit http://havenforanimals.org.

Mobile BayBears
The Mobile BayBears verse the Tennessee Smokies at Hank Aaron Stadium, 755 Bolling Brothers Blvd. Guinness Book of World Records Night. Opening pitch at 6:05 p.m. Tickets available online at www.milb.com/tickets.

August 10

Weddings to Brag About
Bridal show featuring food, music and entertainment. Vendors and event planners on hand, with the area's best bridal and formal shops. Thousands of dollars worth of door prizes and a grand prize of a free wedding, reception and honeymoon. Fashion Show at 3:30 p.m. $10 admission at the door. Register at: http://weddingstobragabout.com

Open Studio
Come enjoy complimentary mimosas as artists work at the Cathedral Square Gallery, 612 Dauphin St. There will also be works by more than 60 area artists on display. For more information call 251-694-0278.

August 11

Line Dancing
The Springhill Avenue Community Center hosts line dancing every week throughout the summer. Mondays 4:30 p.m. - 7 p.m., Wednesdays from 5-7 p.m. and Tuesdays and Fridays from 10 a.m.-noon. Classes are free and open to all ages. 1151 Springhill Ave.

August 12

TOPS
Take Off Pounds Sensibly is a nonprofit, weekly weight loss support group. Learn how to lose weight successfully with no immediate obligation to join. Tuesday mornings, 9:30 a.m. Christ United Methodist Church, The Christ Center, Room C-201, 6101 Grelot Road, Mobile. For more information call 251-753-0755 or 251-447-2179 or visit www.tops.org.

Chickasabogue Two Mile Run/Walk
Run or walk a certified course organized by the Port City Pacers, 6:30 p.m., Chickasabogue Park. Pre-register by Aug. 12 in person at McCoy Outdoor or Run-N-Tri in Mobile or until noon Aug.11 at Running Wild in Fairhope. Race day registration on-site until 6:15 p.m. Post-race party with grilled food, covered dishes, beverages. Grand Prix, Corporate Cup, and State Record awards will be given out. For more information call 251-473-7223 or visit http://pcpacers.org.

August 13

Learning Lunch: "The Battle of Mobile Bay" Documentary
Bring your lunch and enjoy the documentary film, "The Battle of Mobile Bay." Filmmaker Michael Marr will be present for a discussion. Beverages are provided. Learning Lunch starts at noon at the History Museum of Mobile, 111 Royal St. For more information contact Scotty at 251-208-7246

Tour Space 301
Tours of the Main Gallery and Fabrication Hall are every Wednesday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. at the Centre for the Living Arts/Space 301, 301 Conti St. Tours included with the price of admission. Call 215-208-5671 or visit www.centreforthelivingarts.com for more information.

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Young tattoo artists adding ‘fresh blood to old pool’

BY TICAURIS STOKES/Contributor

Mobile is a city of artistic expression, from the graffiti covered back alleys to the art galleries downtown and flash filled walls of the many local tattoo shops. Tattooing is one of Mobile’s quickest growing artistic ventures and currently home to 10 tattoo shops.

As tattoo culture in Mobile has grown, a new generation of artists has emerged and established itself. For young tattoo artists, early recognition is often the deciding factor determining if they establish a client base and become successful.

Tyler Johnson, Dustin Moeler and Tyler Betancourt are among that group.

Just about any young person who wants to become a tattoo artist has to go through an apprenticeship, doing various tasks such as cleaning the shop, cleaning and maintaining equipment and setting up the mentor’s workstation. Apprenticeships can last from one to four years.

Every artist has their own reason for starting their apprenticeship and for Tyler Johnson it was family ties. Johnson started an apprenticeship under his uncle Chip Baskin. Baskin is a Mobile resident and is a part of the older generation of tattoo artists in Mobile. He has 17 years of tattooing experience, has traveled internationally and has worked in countries like Iceland. Baskin is a talented artist with a versatile skill set.

“I got lucky, Chip’s my uncle,” he said. “He’s really traditional, I had to go through an apprenticeship. I started it when I was 16, I graduated at 18 and started tattooing at 20,” Johnson said. Both Baskin and Johnson work at Skyline Tattoo and Piercing.

Other young people try more conventional career paths but decide to tattoo instead.

“I went to college and didn’t like it so I started an apprenticeship,” Betancourt said.

Some people really don’t have a reason as to why they started tattooing.

“I painted a shop once and got tattooed, then it was game over,” Moeler said.

Both Betancourt and Moeler work at Kaoz Tattoo and Piercing. Betancourt, the lesser experienced of the two, apprenticed under Moeler.

After transitioning from an apprentice to an artist, young artists are first faced with the issue of becoming recognized and creating a client base. Young artists have to rely heavily on word of mouth to become known and have to constantly keep tattooing to remain relevant.

“Tattooing people, word of mouth and the Internet,” Betancourt says are how he gained initial success tattooing.

“All word of mouth pretty much and passing out business cards,” Tyler Johnson said.

Despite still relying on word of mouth, tattoo artists in modern times have found new ways to promote themselves through the Internet. Most now have Facebook and Instagram pages to display their art and provide future clients with information about themselves.

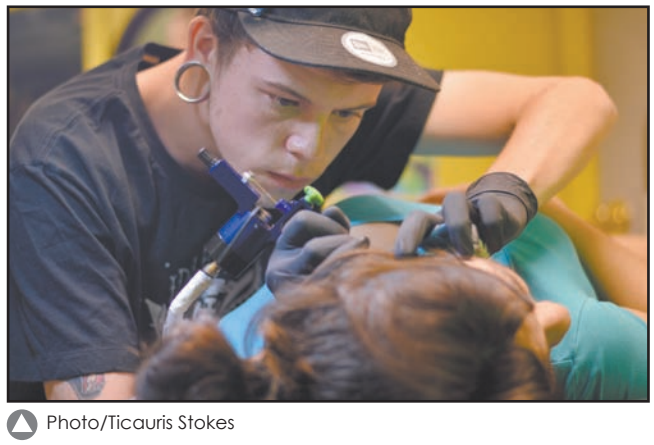
“I’ll finish a tattoo, take a picture or video and upload it onto Instagram which links to Facebook,” Johnson said.

“Take pictures and post it, it’s usually not even me. Most of the time it’s other people posting the work I’ve done,” Betancourt said.

Unlike his peers, Moeler doesn’t use the Internet or social media as a promotional tool but does recognize its potential.

“I’m really bad about keeping up at it, I don’t think about it a lot but when I need to,” he said.

Most older generation tattoo artists in Mobile use the American or Neo-American traditional style of tattooing. The American traditional style of tattooing utilizes bold black lines and a limited color palette. Younger artists in Mobile have brought a new aesthetic style to the scene, whether they are imitating the old style or innovating it.



Photo/Ticauris Stokes

Artist Tyler Johnson

Dustin feels his style is completely different than the older tattoo artists in Mobile.

“I treat tattooing as a painting instead of line, black, color. It helps me a lot but makes old people mad,” Moeler said.

Betancourt thinks there is a difference is style between the old and new generations in Mobile.

“There’s a vast difference, it adds fresh blood to an old pool,” he said.

Asked if he thinks his style of tattooing is different than older artists in Mobile, Betancourt said, “It’s not, I just use new machines.”

Meanwhile, Johnson feels like there are generational differences, but every artist has an individual style.

“Each individual tattoo artist develops their own style from different places,” he said.

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-Mark



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-Elizabeth Bass

Aries gets blackmailed by ESL Ronald McDonald

BY DR. ZODIAC/ASTROLOGY GUY | booxie@lagniappemobile.com

Leo (7/23 – 8/23) - You'll start to regret your pleasant demeanor after being asked to join another wedding party – your second such request this year. You could have repressed jealousy caused by being single, but most likely the true culprit of your indifference is the terribleness of weddings themselves. After pretending to listen to details about the required attire for a few minutes, you'll finally snap and run away to deepest reaches of the southern wild. As luck would have it, you'll stumble into an armadillo's nuptials and be asked to bear witness.

Virgo (8/24 – 9/22) - Paying attention has always been a struggle for you that will be highlighted next week when you order the wrong menu item at a local greasy spoon. Your inattention to detail will lead to what can only be described as a gastrointestinal blitzkrieg, after you order the 72-ounce steak. You hate leaving food on your plate, with all the starving kids everywhere, so you will spend three hours consuming the half-steer and longer than that on the toilet when you get back to the house.

Libra (9/23 – 10/22) - Your tropical vacation will take a horrendous turn, as you learn that age is, in fact, more than a number. The Caribbean beat carried by the steel drums will give you the courage to try to limbo. You will make it through the first few rounds with no problem, but when the bar is lowered a few inches below where a human body is supposed to bend you will sense impending doom. The answer to the question "how low can you go?" will be answered when your entire body shuts down.

Scorpio (10/23 – 11/21) - Angered by the results of a Facebook-sponsored IQ test, you will un-friend everyone bragging about their score. The resulting "friendpocalypse" will leave you with only your parents as friends on the social networking site. You knew you weren't a Mensa candidate, but you know darn well that the guy you knew in high school who ate glue and wet the bed until senior year isn't either. In a fit of rage, you will blame your computer for the unsavory results from the dumb test and throw it from your second-floor office window.

Sagittarius (10/23 – 11/21) - You will go to the nearest emergency room to get treatment for burns, after a moment of friskiness will lead your significant other to pour hot candle wax on your back. What seems like a good idea when copulation is still a possibility, quickly becomes a mistake when you begin icing down your third layer of skin. The situation will get even more awkward when the nurses roll you by gurney into the "sex injuries" ward. It wouldn't be so bad, except for the box labeled "Lost and Found" in the corner.

Capricorn (12/22 – 1/19) - After a hot afternoon filled with yard work, you will be approached by a city employee, who will cite you for leaving leaves and grass clippings on the side of the street. When failing to avoid the ticket by calming explaining that littering can't include unaltered things normally found in nature, you pick up a bag of leaves and head to Government Plaza in a huff. You release the "litter" in the middle of the building, while calmly singing the "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Aquarius (1/20 – 2/18) - You return from an outdoor event covered in sweat and wondering why anyone would name their child "August." There are far better months of the year, with much lovelier names, but every time that parent refers to their offspring you think of the severe chaffing you once experienced in the humid heat. The best way to avoid a potential conflict is with a tall glass of sweet iced tea. For maximum results, lay beneath a ceiling fan spread-eagle.

Pisces (2/19 – 3/20) - Don't let your lunch plans be foiled by a missing microwave oven. Someone has been trying to manage a strategic re-arranging of furniture and appliances, but has failed to take into account your mid-day meal needs. Now is the time to put those scouting skills to use and improvise some heat with the sun's golden rays and a magnifying glass. It's OK to temporarily weaponize the technique, because burning stuff is fun.

Aries (3/21 – 4/19) - Annoyed by the lack of quality in today's Happy Meal toys, you begin a change.org petition to convince a major corporation to give you more for less. The effort ends when a lobbying group representing Chinese plastics manufacturers sends a delegate to your doorstep. He's wearing a bright red wig, a dumb yellow outfit and clown shoes, but threatens, in humorous Engrish, to encase you and your family in polymer casks. You vow to steer all children away from Chicken McNuggets.

Taurus (4/20 – 5/20) – A very appealing display of chips and dip will lure you in next week. You'll feverishly dip the glorious wavy potato chip into the luscious glob of goodness and shove it into your mouth without a second thought. A sharp pain will immediately overtake your entire being as the chip relentlessly stabs the roof of your mouth. Your mouth will swell and cause you pain for weeks to come, resulting in an inability to drink coffee or eat anything at all for that matter. Your career will suffer, but on a more positive note, you'll lose 10 pounds.

Gemini (5/21 – 6/21) – With all the talk of the Ebola virus in the U.S., you'll decide you aren't taking any chances. You'll take note from John Travolta and develop your own plastic bubble incubator. After deciding to wear only a spacesuit-like contraption out in public to protect yourself against germs, people will start to take notice of your efforts. You'll be approached by a suspicious looking character who offers you a movie deal. He says it will be "sick," and you oblige. The film will have a modest opening weekend, ensuring you can afford to make the bubble your permanent home.

Cancer (6/21 – 7/22) – The horrible smell of paint fumes will overwhelm you when you enter your office next week. Not only will the smell cause you to have a headache and blurred vision, the new, hideous orange color on the walls will make you cross eyed. Forced to wear sunglasses inside, you'll curse whoever did this under your breath, but by the time you leave work for the day, you'll be high enough from the fumes to send mean social media insults to the people who did this to you and demand worker's compensation.









CROSSWORD PUZZLE ANSWERS

D	D	O	■	S	C	R	A	■	E	G	A	P
E	O	T	■	E	N	A	V	■	N	A	E	M
W	O	L	■	L	A	C	I	G	O	L	L	I
A	M	A	R	D	■	■	D	U	B	■	■	■
■	■	■	O	O	H	S	■	T	E	L	N	I
E	T	A	N	O	T	E	D	■	D	A	E	M
T	A	M	■	N	A	D	E	S	■	E	V	E
I	A	R	A	G	L	I	O	S	E	R	E	S
S	D	L	E	W	■	S	B	O	L	■	■	■
■	■	■	G	A	T	■	■	D	A	E	T	S
E	C	N	A	L	U	B	M	A	■	T	L	A
E	V	O	D	■	O	R	U	E	■	A	E	P
E	P	S	A	■	G	O	M	S	■	S	M	S

FROM PAGE 44



FUTURE SHOCK

Surrender or we'll fire this driftwood!

BY BOOZIE BEER NUES/SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

Well kids, we've had a long week of Civil War battle re-enactments and back-to-school shopping. It's been an unbelievably busy summer, and I can't believe it's almost over. But at least in the South, the end of summer brings the beginning of football season, so we have that. RTR! WDE!

Anyway, we have shenanigans for both history buffs and trash TV aficionados this week, so don't ever say I don't cater to er-rbody.

Enjoy!

Damn the Torpedoes … not full speed ahead enough

So our spies at the re-enactment of the Battle of Mobile Bay down on Fort Morgan observed several Confederate soldier re-enactors getting a little impatient with how long it was taking the Union re-enactors to force them to surrender.

The men, who were dressed in heavy wool coats, pants and hats, were standing in the bathwater temps in the Gulf under the blazing hot sun and apparently it was taking too long for the Union sailors to get to them. One soldier started yelling to organizers, "I don't care who you get, just find someone for us to surrender to."

Not a very plucky attitude.

Luckily, organizers were able to rustle up a few of Farragut's rogue men so the Confederate soldiers could surrender to them. Unfortunately, the rogue Yank soldiers were unarmed, but they were still happy to accommodate the Rebels by picking up some nearby driftwood and taking them hostage with it. We are sure they were happy to head to an air-conditioned Union jail. Suddenly, I think we may know what happened 150 years ago.

Jazz royalty at the Union

Jason Marsalis of the legendary NOLA jazz family and his band wanted to grab a bite after their Gulf Coast Ethnic and Heritage Jazz Festival show on Saturday, so organizers ran them down to The Union. The group of impeccably attired gents couldn't have been nicer or more gracious.

They had the place nearly to themselves as it was close to 10 p.m. by the time they arrived and were very complimentary of the service and food and seemed to enjoy themselves. The servers said the guests were easy to wait on and made it worth their while for the experience.

On the way back to the hotel, they seemed intrigued by the crowds along Dauphin Street and Marsalis in particular did a double take at the crowd gathered outside the Haberdasher for Tiki Night.

The word is getting out, Mobile is cool! Shhhh! Don't tell anyone else!

Jersey Shore meets Sweet Home Alabama

Well there is some delicious new guilty pleasure TV on my friends and it features our snobby friends to the north, in Birmingham's most elite burb, Mountain Brook, a zip code which makes 36608 look like a Third World country. I'm shocked they were even allowed to film there.

"Jersey Belle" premiered on Bravo network on Monday, Aug. 4. And though clearly, the show's star, Jaime Primak Sullivan, a New Jersey transplant, feigns surprise at some inherently Southern things, such as bridal teas, it was a pretty entertaining watch.

It is, as all reality TV shows are, a bit contrived. Primak Sullivan acts as if she was placed in a foreign land last week, when in "reality" she has lived in Mountain Brook for years, although technically she apparently lives in Vestavia (Gasp! The horror!).

But judging how her kids were decked out in smocked clothing from head to toe — even before her Southern Belle friend took her kids shopping for such attire, I'd say it's pretty safe to say an intelligent woman like herself became acclimated to the customs of her new "tribe" years ago. Conversely, the Southern girls acted like they had never heard of a cannoli. I certainly hope that was just playing it up for the camera.



Photo/bravotv.com

But still it was fun to see Southern women talk about monogramming EVERYTHING, televisions set up at wedding receptions on big SEC game days (you know that's TRUTH) and the look of polite horror one Southern girl had when Primak-Sullivan revealed she bought her wedding dress off a rack at David's Bridal. And a couple of them showed layers beyond that — talking about fertility issues, divorce and the cattiness that can occur in small towns, so it wasn't all one dimensional over-the-top Southern female stereotypes.

And while it did show some really great things Southern women have to offer, at least one woman was also portrayed as a horribly vapid and insecure social climber who finally made it to the top of the Mountain (Brook). Maybe that is just "reality" or maybe her "character" just hasn't had time to develop. Either way, I'll be tuning in to watch every Monday night. And there is an even bigger reason for folks in Mobile to watch, the show is set to feature a Mobile native named Scarlett, so be on the look out!

Well kids, that's all I got. Just remember, whether rain or shine, dramatic or scandalous, or just some plain ol' 150-year-old Civil War battle re-enacting lovin', I will be there! Ciao!





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MAGIC!



POP EVIL



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