

LAGNIAPPE WEEKLY

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A year in REVIEW

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GOING POSTAL

Personnel board changes encourage inequality

Politicians and the media's constant portrayal of black people as helpless, defenseless, victims of circumstance is appalling. We do not need your perpetual supervision as a reminder of the trauma imposed upon our wretched souls by the government, brutal police forces and a biased judicial system.

Your need for self-gratification and self-substantiation has made us hopelessly dependent upon the very institutions you condemn for causing our plight. Your constant badgering has convinced everyone including ourselves that we are unable to compete without preferential treatment, an advantage or outright favoritism.

Any changes to the personnel board application process to create diversity in city employment are an insult to every black person who applies because it implies we cannot compete on equitable terms. What is wrong with you?

You are representing us as juvenile and feeble children who most constantly hold an adult's hand so we do not wander in to the street. During a recent "race relations" conference, Mayor Stimpson suggested changing business license application requirements to stimulate minority business ownership — again suggesting we must have an advantage — and you reiterate that insult to all black people's ingenuity, creativity, character and determination.

When the terms "fairness" and "equality" are used, it means a fair and equal opportunity to succeed or fail and regardless of the outcome of our endeavor. We are allowed to attempt them with the dignity that can only be derived from self-determination and independence.

Attaining an education, choosing an honest career, working hard and persistence were once the tenets of American families but have been replaced with handouts, favoritism and excuses which are perpetuated by public "leaders" and media driven by sensationalism. Perhaps city departments lack the desired diversity because of unqualified applicants or perhaps young educated people do not want low paying municipal jobs. You are not talking about the cause, only what you have decided is the solution.

A diverse workforce cannot be created through legislation or a dumbed down hiring process. Adequate public education creates intelligent individuals from which an employer may choose the most qualified candidate whose desire is to work for a municipality and not through fear or intimidation, malice or ill will.

John C. Young,
Mobile

Fund projects focusing on economic and environmental health as a whole

At a public meeting in Spanish Fort Wednesday, Dec. 17, the Alabama Gulf Coast Recovery Council announced it will direct the first round of oil spill penalties under its control toward economic and infrastructure projects, using RESTORE Act money from the fines paid by Transocean — a cash amount that will reach \$56 million by March 2015.

Jimmy Lyons, director for the Alabama State Port Authority and vice chair of the state council, said the decision to put the first round of funding toward economic projects was based, at least in part, on the majority support already expressed for ecological projects. But, further research into how much money has been poured into economic endeavors reveals quite the opposite of the state council's assertions.

According to BP, over \$2 billion has been paid to Alabama in claims, advances, settlements and other payments — the majority of which has gone to fund various economic projects, such as business and government claims, tourism promotion and seafood testing. To date only \$52 million has been spent on ecological restoration in Alabama, which includes living shoreline, watershed planning and fisheries data collection projects.

Ocean Conservancy would like to encourage the council to reconsider their position and fund projects that achieve a triple bottom line of a strong economy, healthy environment and safe communities. It's short-sighted of the council to solely focus on projects with an economic or infrastructure benefit. There is a finite amount of money available and an infinite amount of projects to be funded. Therefore, the council should focus this funding on projects with multiple benefits to the Alabama Gulf Coast.

It is also important to remember the RESTORE Act was passed through Congress in the wake of the largest environmental disaster in the United States. If nothing else, the BP oil disaster taught us that Alabama's economic stability and environmental health are intrinsically linked. Let's hope we don't have to be taught this lesson again for it to hit home.

Kara Lankford,
Interim Director, Ocean Conservancy Gulf Restoration Program

POLICE DISPATCH

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

Two arrested for capital murder following Foley house fire

The investigation into a Dec. 14 house fire in Foley quickly escalated after police began to suspect arson. Inside the home authorities found the body of the home's owner, 70-year-old Thomas Burdette.

On Dec. 19, Foley police arrested two in connection with the fire, which authorities say began as a burglary but escalated into a murder. According to the Baldwin County Correction Center's online records, Brandon Bledsoe, 33, of Elberta and Heather Raftery, 21, of Foley were arrested and charged with capital murder and burglary after investigators were tipped off to their involvement.

Police say Bledsoe confessed to the crimes and was known to the victim. Burdette died from multiple gunshot wounds from a rifle.

Police still searching for Chickasaw man

Timothy Javon Williams of Chickasaw was last seen Dec. 16 in the Gulf Village community of Prichard, where he was allegedly dropped off by his cousin Dewon Dewayne Jenkins.

Authorities have been searching for Williams since his disappearance was reported and have unsuccessfully attempted to speak with Jenkins about the incident. Police initially said they do not suspect Jenkins of any foul play in connection with Williams' disappearance but Monday, Prichard officials said foul play couldn't be ruled out.

Williams, 20, is described as an African American male, 5-feet, 1-inch tall, weighing 150 pounds. Jenkins, 19, is also African American and is described as 5-feet, 6-inches tall and 125 pounds.

Anyone with knowledge of the case is asked to call 251-452-2211.

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CHANCE OF RAIN 0%	CHANCE OF RAIN 20%	CHANCE OF RAIN 60%	CHANCE OF RAIN 10%	CHANCE OF RAIN 30%	CHANCE OF RAIN 30%	CHANCE OF RAIN 40%
WIND: WNW AT 7 MPH	WIND: SSE AT 10 MPH	WIND: SE AT 10 MPH	WIND: N AT 12 MPH	WIND: ENE AT 7 MPH	WIND: N AT 10 MPH	WIND: NNW AT 11 MPH

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INSPIRED WORK

‘Not even one member’ supports lodging tax increase

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

An informal proposition to members of the Mobile Area Lodging Association yielded mixed responses to a proposed 2 percent hike in Mobile County’s lodging tax, aimed at funding the much-debated soccer complex near the intersection of Interstates 65 and 10.

County Commission President Connie Hudson said she met with Retirement Systems of Alabama CEO David Bronner Dec. 4 to discuss the scope of the proposed soccer facility, which is expected to cost \$20.7 million in its first phase of construction.

RSA owns and operates the Renaissance Riverview Plaza and Battle House hotels downtown, both of which are represented in the lodging association.

Hudson stressed the discussions were informal and said no funding source or sources had been agreed to by anyone and multiple funding options were being considered. However, she did say Bronner was very supportive of the commission’s plan to build the 14-field soccer and aquatic facility.

“I presented the project scope to him and I think extremely enthusiastic would be the description that fit him after seeing the project,” Hudson said. “He immediately understood the vision, and understood what an impact it would have on our whole region.”

Bronner told Lagniappe the idea was “enticing,” and said facilities for soccer and other sports have been very beneficial to other communities, including Montgomery. However, Bronner didn’t say exactly what role, if any, RSA would play in developing this project.

“Anytime you can get that many people into your city, it has a real impact,” Bronner said. “In Montgomery, we learned through the (Emory) Folmar soccer complex that it can really be beneficial for a city.”

Though hotels in Mobile would most likely benefit from the increase in soccer-related tourism the county is anticipating, it doesn’t seem like a 2 percent increase in lodging taxes has their support yet.

Kent Blackinton, president of Mobile Area Lodging Association and RSA employee, said he and another member met with Hudson informally to discuss what kind of support hoteliers might have for raising lodging taxes to help fund the project.

“While everyone agreed a facility would be helpful, there was an overwhelming disapproval to add a 2 percent lodging tax to fund it,” Blackinton said in an email to commissioners. “In fact, I did not get even one member that supported it.”

Blackinton said Mobile’s lodging tax is already high for the city’s size, and a 2 percent increase would put hotels at a competitive disadvantage when trying to attract conventions, conferences and general tourism.

Alabama has a 4 percent state tax on lodging, but when municipal and local taxes are added in, Mobile’s total tax is currently at 17 percent as of 2013. The majority of that is made up of the city’s 8 percent lodging tax.

According to a study by HVS Convention, Sports and Entertainment Consulting, Mobile’s lodging tax rate is already higher than New Orleans (13 percent), Las Vegas (11.5 percent) and Honolulu (13.7 percent). In the state, Mobile’s lodging tax rate is second only to Birmingham’s and Tuscaloosa’s.

An additional 2 percent would put the city well above the national average of 12.6 percent, though it would most directly affect businesses

and tourists as opposed to full-time residents.

Bronner himself said it was important to make sure an area’s lodging tax isn’t “way out of line with everybody else.”

“How do I compete with Biloxi or New Orleans? What you’re really looking for is conferences,” he said. “Because of the size of the hotels in Mobile, you have a nice ability to really entice middle-to-large sized convention groups.”

Hudson dismissed the concerns expressed in the email from the lodging association, saying there must have been “some sort of disconnect” given the support for the project Bronner expressed.

According to Hudson, Bronner even offered to help the county make contacts with developers to partner with the county in the later phases of the project — plans to include an aquatic center, walking trails and a water park.

“It would strike me as a little more than surprising that, with the investment RSA has in this community through its hotels, that (Bronner’s) hoteliers would speak out in opposition to something that he is very much favorable toward,” Hudson said. “I would also question, given the informal nature of this, that there’s been any kind of vote taken by the hoteliers. There’s certainly not been a presentation by my office.”

Hudson said she was admittedly surprised to get an official letter about the association’s opposition to the proposal, when the discussions about it were “basically all done as hearsay.”

District 3 Commissioner Jerry Carl, who has been at odds with Hudson’s proposed soccer facility since a proposal of his own was voted down by the commission earlier this year, said Hudson acted on her own regard. In an email response to Blackinton, Carl said he “wasn’t aware of any discussion the commission had about raising the lodging tax to pay for the soccer complex.”

“In fact, personally I feel our lodging tax is at the point of becoming a negative point to conventioners looking at Mobile County,” Carl wrote. “No sir, raising taxes is not an option as far as I am concerned.”

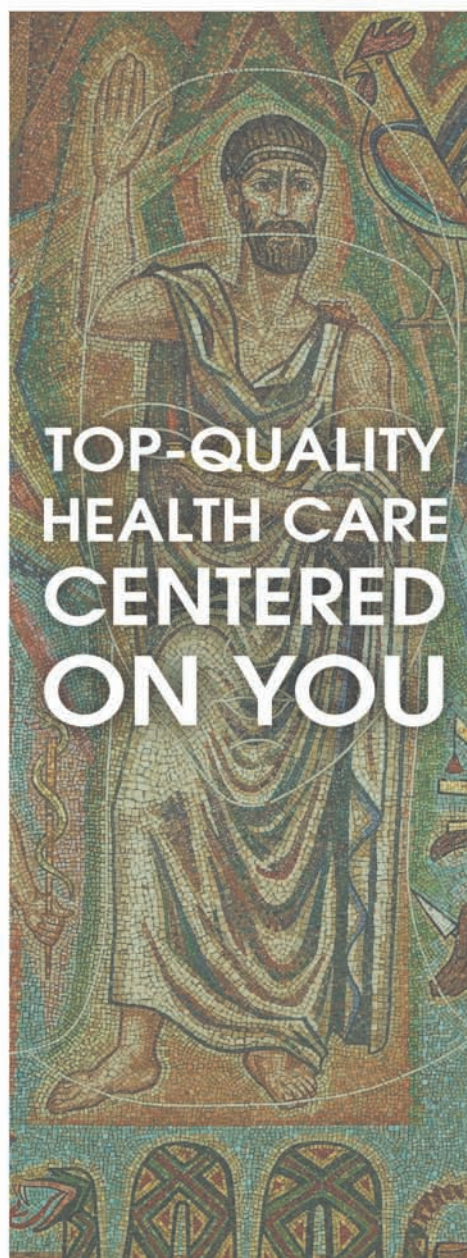
The lodging tax in Mobile County hasn’t increased since April 2003, when the county added a 2 percent increase. Set up to fund tourism marketing for the Mobile area, those funds are received annually through a contract between the county and the Mobile Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau (MBCVB).

However since then, the funding level has fluctuated and was even completely eliminated from 2008-2010. According to MBCVB President Al Hutchinson, the highest the funding ever reached was \$1 million in 2006. After being reinstated in 2011, the annual funding has remained constant at \$280,000 per year for the past three years.

As a requirement of contract, 85 percent of the money received by MBCVB must be spent on marketing for “specific events that attract tourism to Mobile County,” but the \$280,000 the MBCVB receives is only about 12 percent of the \$2.3 million the tax is estimated to bring to the county.

The changing nature of the first 2 percent tax may have an effect on how the most recent proposal was viewed, but in his email and interview with Lagniappe, Blackinton said he nor the other members of the lodging association are opposed to adding a soccer complex. In fact, most would be in favor of it, unless it comes with an increased lodging tax.

“It’s something we need and it will bring visitors, but we don’t want to raise lodging taxes to get there,” he said.



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School board monitoring staff travel expenses

BY ALYSON STOKES/REPORTER | alyson@lagniappemobile.com

During last week's Mobile County public school board meeting, some concerns were raised about employees' out-of-county travel expenses and what was being done to monitor their costs.

After some discussion, the board ultimately voted 4-1 to approve out-of-county travel for 64 trips, totaling \$74,071.89, with Commissioner Dr. William Foster voting against the measure.

Foster, who represents District 5, presented several questions related to the travel expenses prior to the vote.

"He had just a couple of things he looked at on the travel and he wasn't real sure that he had gotten full answers on what he wanted," Superintendent Martha Peek said afterward.

While Foster noted employees from the MCPSS central office travel out-of-state "quite frequently," his major concern appeared to lie within the discrepancies between each employee's individual travel costs, which range from \$600 to \$2,300.

However, Peek explained that some employees are required to attend pre-conferences and other workshops during their trips that cause individual expenses to fluctuate.

"We do try to monitor that," she said during the meeting.

In November, \$64,967.45 was spent on out-of-county travel, compared to \$63,320.71 in October. Further, \$50,887.07 was spent in September and \$13,321.96 in August. April topped out-of-county travel expenses at \$236,162.98 with 115 federally funded trips for \$212,516.30, 11 locally-funded trips for \$19,896.68 and one state-funded trip for \$3,750.

With June ringing up \$62,470, the average monthly out-of-county travel costs appear to be between \$50,000 and \$70,000.

According to Peek, these numbers present a "normal average," considering MCPSS has a roster of about 7,500 employees and all of those employees, whether teachers, administrators or other faculty members, are currently eligible for one in-county and one out-of-county professional development trip per year.

"With the number of employees we have, that's pretty much average," she said.

Currently, the board must approve any out-of-county travel exceeding \$600, and for a number of years, each employee is allowed one out-of-state trip per year, Peek said.

However, because there are a number of programs and special training, different people involved require some out-of-state or out-of-county travel and may require more than one trip, a new procedure is set so ongoing professional development is not limited, Peek said.

"What our procedure now simply will be is that we will evaluate each request based on need, that it won't just be a standard, one in-county [and] one out-of-county trip, but it will be based on need," she said. "We won't just have that hard and fast rule. We will evaluate each one based on the need, the merit of the travel and the availability too."

Foster also suggested employees group

together for travel, which may lower the out-of-county travel costs, and mentioned the idea of bringing workshops to Mobile.

"We certainly would like to bring people in as much as possible," Peek said during the meeting.

Further, Peek added if there is a workshop or professional development program being offered in Mobile that is equivalent to an out-of-county trip, the board would suggest the employee look at that opportunity rather than incur the cost of traveling. However, hosting a workshop is oftentimes just as expensive or even more expensive than traveling to a conference, she said.

"The thing about it too is that when you try to bring some of the renowned speakers, presenters and professionals into town, it would range that much or more at times," Peek said. "We're just going to have to watch it and take it on a case-by-case basis ... when we can, we do bring those services and those people into Mobile and we will continue to make every effort to do that. We'll just have to look and consider the costs ..."

While the new procedure for out-of-county travel may actually allow for more employee trips, Peek said there will be no official standard or policy in place to gauge the number or cost of trips. The board will be the ultimate decision makers, she said.

"Certainly, we will watch that very carefully, but there's not a particular limit," she said. "But, like with anything, if it becomes that we know that there's an excessive amount of travel or cost, then we certainly will address that at the time."

Funding for out-of-county travel comes from two sources: Title I and Title II funds. With both, a portion of those funds can be used for professional development. Federally allocated funds include guidelines regulating how they can be spent and include professional development, Peek said.

"In order to enhance teaching and learning, people have to stay abreast of current practices and programs in education, so those funds can be used," she said.

According to Peek, local school funds are funds schools have earned and generated on their own by means like fundraising and PTA contributions. For the out-of-county trips, they may use a combination of Title I funds and local school funds, she said.

According to the December out-of-county travel report, \$69,802.51 was spent in federal funds, compared to \$4,269.38 in local funds.

Despite the recent concerns and future changes, Peek said she expects no opposition from the board, adding the board works very consistently and will make sure to watch the issue "very carefully."

"It's a procedure, and I think that it will be fine," she said. "That's the good thing with working with the board is that they look at things with a different set of eyes ... I think that it was just a good time to pause and refresh on it and say maybe we need to look at this a little bit differently now."

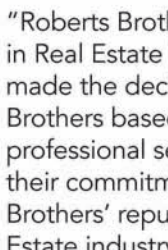
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Board member: GulfQuest won't 'make March date'

BY DALE LIESCH/REPORTER | dale@lagniappemobile.com

Although crews are finishing up its fit-out, the GulfQuest National Maritime Museum grand opening may not be held until late spring, according to members of the museum's Board of Trustees. If so, it would put the museum opening almost three years behind its original schedule.

The latest reports pegged the museum opening in March, but Alabama Port Authority CEO and GulfQuest board member Jimmy Lyons said it would most likely open later than expected.

"It's probably going to be later in spring," Lyons said. "It's getting close, but I don't think it'll make the March date."

Lyons said GulfQuest would probably open to the public in May or June, but it would be a "spectacular museum" when it does.

He said a lot of exhibits are already in and crews are finishing up punch list items.

"Nobody's more anxious than those of us on the board of trustees," Lyons said.

The GulfQuest building was issued its certificate of occupancy from the city in July. At the time, Executive Director Tony Zodrow put the opening date at six months from the issuance of that certificate, which would've put the date near the end of the year. City spokesman George Talbot said previously the museum would have a soft opening this month before ramping up to a grand opening in March.

Talbot said Monday the city is currently paying about \$20,000 a month for the building's utilities and will continue to do so until it opens. The operating agreement between the city and GulfQuest states the museum will reimburse the city for "services provided to the nonprofit for the operations of the maritime museum."

The city is also on the hook for any capital repairs on the building's roof, structure and major systems, Mayor Sandy Stimpson's Chief of Staff Colby Cooper said. The agreement states GulfQuest will pay for "normal" repairs.

The building did host three holiday parties this month, including one for the Alabama Port Authority.

Zodrow called word of the late spring opening "hearsay" in an email message over the weekend. He wrote there wouldn't be any further details at this time, but added that a media announcement was in the works.

"Right now, we're not providing any media tours or new information relative to GulfQuest's opening in 2015," he wrote. "We will announce the museum's opening date at a news confer-

ence after the first of the year."

Board member Mike Lee said the museum plans to have a soft opening with students from area schools in February or March. He said a grand opening would occur after that.

Lee confirmed that crews were still working on punch list items, as well as building out the cafeteria and the gift shop.

The gift shop, designed by a group of Auburn University graduate students, will look like a sunken Spanish ship, Lee said. The ceiling will be painted to look like water and the cash register area will be built out to look like the ship's crew's nest, Lee said.

"Exhibits are still being installed," Lee said. "There will be 92 exhibits in total in the museum."

Every time I go in there are a couple more," Lee said. "It's getting exciting."

The museum's board has raised \$11 million in private funds for the project, Lee said, surpassing a \$10 million goal. The goal for private funding has been raised to \$12 million, with a public fundraising phase slated to begin after the first of the year, Lee said.

Lee said the city has invested \$28 to \$32 million in the project and he estimated that the finished product would be a \$62 million asset.

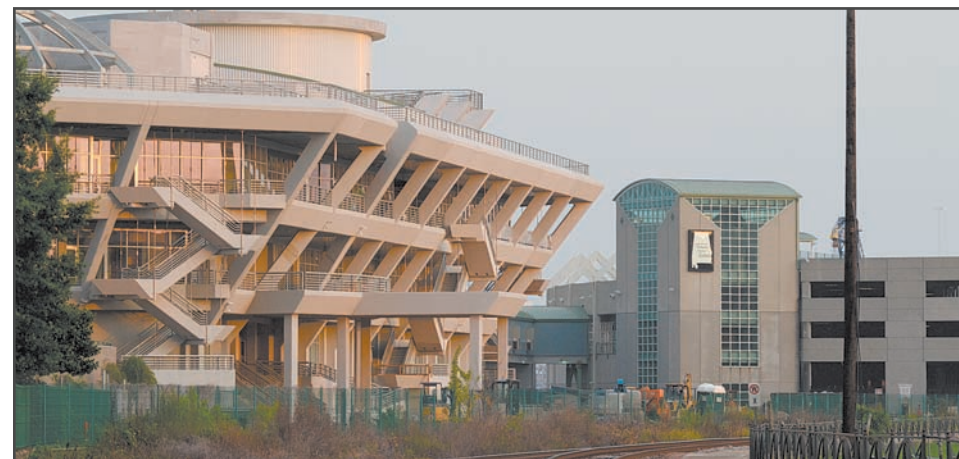
GulfQuest has been under construction since 2009 and was originally slated to open in July 2012.

Board member Barry Vittor said trustees are anxious to open the museum to the public, although he added he wasn't sure if an opening date had been determined.

"It's going to be spectacular," Vittor said about GulfQuest. "I think it'll be a tremendous asset."

Despite numerous delays since construction began, Mayor Sandy Stimpson previously told Lagniappe he believes GulfQuest will be successful once it's open.

"I do think it's a world-class facility based on my walk-throughs of it," he said earlier this year. "I think the question marks everybody has in their mind are things we won't know until we hit the deck running, and that's will we get people to attend? Not just our citizens, but can we get the visitor to stop and go there? Can we divert some of the traffic off of (Interstate) 10 to go there, like they do the Battleship? That's one of those things that they have a plan for, they did some research on and they think that it can be done. I'm pulling that they're right."



Photo/Gabriel Tynes

GulfQuest, nearly three years beyond its initial 'substantial completion date,' may not officially open for visitors until summer 2015.



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DA seeks impeachment of Mobile County constables

BY ALYSON STOKES/REPORTER | alyson@lagniappemobile.com

The Mobile County District Attorney's office last week handed down an order against Mobile County Constable Larry Sheffield, who was charged with murder in Baldwin County after allegedly shooting a man in the head outside a Causeway bar July 20.

After reviewing the case, a grand jury Dec. 18 issued an article of impeachment against Sheffield, Assistant DA Keith Blackwood said.

According to authorities, Sheffield, 68, and Jeffrey McMillan, 53, got into an argument inside Trader's bar on Battleship Parkway, commonly known as the Causeway, before moving the confrontation to the parking lot, where Sheffield shot McMillan in the head.

McMillan was dead when police arrived on the scene, officials said.

At this time, Sheffield has the option to resign and vacate his office, ultimately terminating the impeachment process, or he can appeal the impeachment by way of a jury trial, Blackwood said.

Though Blackwood noted the impeachment is "not a criminal matter," he said Sheffield should not be allowed to hold the office of constable after being charged with murder.

"Constables have police powers," he said, noting constables are elected to serve the individual precincts in which they live, but actually have police powers within all of Mobile County.

"They are peace officers," Blackwood said. "It's a very historic office."

While he admitted the office of constable is "modernly disorganized," Blackwood said there are many constables who do a good job and assist other law enforcement agencies with their duties.

Roughly two-thirds of Mobile's precincts have constables, while the others remain vacant, he said.

Sheffield was elected constable for Precinct 24, serving the Semmes area, according to the Mobile County Constables website.

In addition to Sheffield, the DA's office also filed a petition to remove Mario Yow from his position as constable within Mobile County, Blackwood said.

"We think they need to vacate their office," he said.

In 2012, just months before being elected as constable, Yow was arrested for trafficking cocaine; however, because the arrest occurred before he took office, Blackwood said his office filed a "quo warranto" petition, a slightly different process that renders the same results.

"It's similar to an impeachment but [with] procedural differences," Blackwood said. "It's the same result — it's a way to get him out of office."

Leo Bullock, a Mobile County Constable who has served 30 years, recognized some recent problems with constables, pointing to Sheffield and Yow in particular. However, he said the Mobile County Constables work hard to ensure these issues are being properly addressed.

In fact, Bullock said he and the Constable Office prompted the district attorney's investigation into Sheffield and Yow. According to Bullock, he met with Attorney General Luther Strange and requested an opinion on how to re-



Photo/BCSO | Sheffield

move them from office.

More specifically, Bullock said anytime the constables have a question about law and how to interpret it, they request an official opinion from the attorney general. In this case, Bullock said he requested an opinion about removing an elected official who had been convicted of a felony crime or misconduct, or conduct unbecoming of a law enforcement officer.

After being "totally in agreement" with the attorney general's response, Bullock said he sent a letter to the Mobile County DA's office, requesting they move forward with the cases against Sheffield and Yow.

"We do have a check and balance. We're no different from any other law enforcement," Bullock said, citing the district attorney's impeachment articles.

Despite the recent controversies, Bullock said constables are "big benefits" to the county, as they provide assistance and manpower for local law enforcement agencies to combat criminal activity such as home invasions and robberies.

"That continues to go on," he said. "The best chance you have against all that is a visible officer in a uniform and a marked car."

Bullock also reiterated that constables are no cost to taxpayers and receive no salary for their duties.

"We work on fees established by the legislature," he said.

Furthermore, Bullock said constables serve a lot of court orders, alleviating the duty for sheriff's deputies.

"I do hold myself accountable to the public that entrusted me to this office," Bullock said. "We are concerned that [this] happened to be two individuals within our ranks, but we assure the public we work hard to police our rank."

However, after these high-profile incidents, many wonder who or what other entity oversees them.

"They don't really answer to us," Blackwood said of the constables. "They are elected officials in their precincts, but the district attorney's office is certainly tasked with making sure that they are eligible to hold their office ... that goes for any elected official in Mobile County."

According to Blackwood, a trial date for Sheffield has not been set, though he anticipates it will take place sometime in January. Judge Charles Graddick will preside, he said.



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Father arrested for September murder of Hiawayi Robinson

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

After nearly four months without public developments, reactions were mixed when Hiawatha Robinson Jr. was arrested Dec. 16 for the murder of his 8-year-old daughter, Haiwayi Robinson in September. Robinson is also charged with an additional count of first degree sodomy in the case. A day later, he was indicted with separate federal firearms charges.

Hours after his arrest, Mobile County District Attorney Ashley Rich held a press conference on the case.

Many questions regarding details of the investigation and evidence that led authorities to arrest Hiawayi's father went unanswered, as Rich said discussing them would be "inappropriate at this time."

According to Rich, both sodomy and felony murder carry punishments of 10-99 years in state prison, respectively. Without a capital murder charge, the death penalty will not be an option in the event of a conviction.

"Her disappearance and murder resonated with our community," Rich said. "The autopsy report has now been finalized, and the cause of death is homicidal violence and the manner of death is homicide. The facts will show that, while engaging in sodomy in the first degree, Hiawatha Robinson Jr. caused the death of Hiawayi Robinson."

When asked, Rich wouldn't say whether the sodomy was an ongoing activity. According to the Mobile Metro Jail's database, Robinson has a lengthy criminal history, but none of his previous charges are sexual in nature. Still, previous felony convictions prevented him from possessing firearms. When search warrants were executed at his home in October, investigators discovered Robinson was in possession of a 12 gauge shotgun.

When asked about the case's length and publicity, Rich said it "wasn't a simple case," referencing the efforts of officers from the Prichard Police Department, the FBI and Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, each of which were represented during the press conference.

"The people behind me are a testament to the sheer manpower and man hours that have been put into this investigation," she said. "This is something that was a collaborative effort between all these agencies that took quite a significant amount of time. We're pleased to finally be at the point where we've made an arrest, and we're moving forward in prosecuting him for her murder and for the sodomy."

Bond hearing

On Dec. 17, District Judge Bob Sherling granted Robinson a \$250,000 cash bond on each charge, saying the prosecution's unwillingness to present evidence tied his hands on the matter.

Sherling said the Alabama Constitution requires anyone who is arrested and not charged with capital murder to be granted a bond, with few exceptions. For clarity, he also held up a enlarged sign containing the specific language he was referring to.

"Even though he's not charged with capital murder, the Supreme Court has said if it could possibly become a capital murder charge, then I can deny bail," Sherling said. "Is there evidence to support that?"

Rich said there wasn't evidence to suggest capital charges currently, and said the prosecution wasn't yet prepared to discuss the details of the case. The same response was given when Sherling asked if the "sodomy directly resulted in

the murder."

Sherling did allow prosecutors to take more time before the bond hearing proceeded, but Rich denied the offer saying, "During the course of the sodomy, the death occurred. That is exactly how the complaint is charged, but we're not prepared to go into a hearing on that matter at this point."

"If you don't want to offer the evidence to support that, then I'm going to be in a position where I have to set a bond," Sherling said. "I would have to have some kind of evidence to connect the two (in order to deny a bond)."

With no evidence offered, the state requested a \$250,000 cash bond for each charge, which Sherling granted.

Following the hearing, Assistant DA Jill Phillips said the state didn't want a bond to be granted because they consider Robinson to be a danger to the community and a flight risk. However, Phillips did say, "if a bond is going to be set, that's certainly a high one."

As for the lack of evidence, Phillips said her office didn't want to jeopardize the case by disclosing facts at such an early stage.

"Today was a day for a bond hearing and not for testimony to be taken," Phillips said. "This has been an extensive, ongoing investigation, and it is still ongoing. There is still investigative work that's being done as we speak, and because of that, we're not going to comment on the facts of the case until it's required of us at the preliminary hearing."

A preliminary hearing for the murder case has been set for Jan. 5 in Mobile. He pleaded not guilty in federal court for the firearms charges Monday, where the judge also approved a motion for his detention, should he make the state's bond.

Family on both sides

Immediately after the hearing, Hiawatha Robinson's mother told Lagniappe she is sure her son was not involved in 8-year-old Hiawayi Robinson's murder.

"I know he's innocent," Merline Howard said. "I know he didn't do it."

Howard wouldn't comment other than to defend her son, saying she was "too emotional" over the situation.

Following the bond hearing, other members of the family — including Hiawayi's mother Yosha Populus — provided statements through Disaster Victims Services, acknowledging Robinson's alleged involvement in Hiawayi's death for the first time.

"Please pray for us, and give us privacy as we now must deal emotionally with the facts of what was done to Hiawayi and knowing now that it was a member of our family who did this to her," the statement reads. "We would also ask that the community pray for the District Attorney's office as they prepare to prosecute the killer to the full extent of the law."

According to Tony Dickey, a chaplain with Disaster Victims Services, the family is "devastated" by the situation.

"This has been very traumatic to the family," Dickey said. "It's very emotionally traumatizing that a member of a family can do this to another member, and it's traumatizing to the entire community that anybody could do this to a child."

Dickey said the family plans to participate in the court process and is supporting the District Attorney's office "100 percent." He said Disaster Victim's Services has been with the Robinson family since Hiawayi went missing and would continue to do so throughout the phases of the trial.

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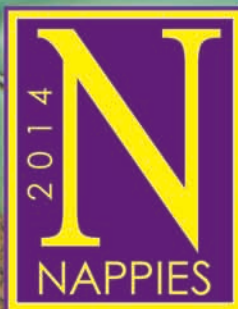
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Blanket indictment of police officers is foolish

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

Unfortunately for those who make their livings off fostering divisions between social, ethnic and political groups, it always seems to take very little time for the pendulum of discord to swing back and shatter the illusions they've propped up.

In the case of those who have been foolishly blasting police across the country as a group simply out to kill and hurt minorities, while also justifying looting and destruction as a reasonable protest, the killing last week of two New York police officers is precisely the result was bound to come of such ridiculous attitudes.

Officers Wenjian Liu and Rafael Ramos were assassinated while sitting in their car by a nutjob reacting to the irresponsible behavior and attitudes expressed during some of the recent protests following the police shooting of Michael Brown in Missouri and the death of Eric Garner in New York from a chokehold by an officer.

I'm certainly not saying people aren't entitled to their opinions as to whether these and other high-profile incidents were racially motivated police brutality or not, but the blanket hatred being spewed towards all police officers was bound to lead to offer cover to someone mentally deranged enough to do something like the murder these officers. Too many times in recent weeks I've heard people include in a discussion of the Brown or Garner cases by saying, "I hate the police."

Maybe that seems like the cool thing to say, especially among people who find racial motives behind just about everything, but I wish they would stop and think about exactly what they're saying. True, most of us don't like authority figures telling us what to do, and because the vast majority of us only have contact with police over petty issues such as traffic violations, it's easy to wonder why "the man" is coming down on you for going a little too fast.

But try imagining a society without police officers out patrolling the neighborhoods at 3 a.m. If we were all left to protect and serve ourselves I wonder how many "questionable" shootings there would be?

As a reporter I've had probably been able to meet more cops than the average bear, and I can say just as in any profession they run the gamut from great to terrible. Some get into law enforcement for the power and badge, others do it for the excitement and to help others and their community. Some are quick to get physical, others are much more patient than you would ever believe.

But one thing they all have in common is — on a daily basis — dealing with people and situations the rest of us can't really imagine.

You want me to get out of my car at 2 a.m. and chase a guy with a gun through an abandoned building? No thanks. You want to walk up to a car full of guys suspected of having just robbed a store? Um, no.

Police might be forgiven if they start noticing similarities in the people they're dealing with. Spinner rims, loud rap and blunts might raise more hairs on the back of a cop's neck than an "I Love My Wife" bumper sticker and Barry Manilow pumping out of the sunroof. That's not racial profiling, but it's definitely behavioral profiling, and we all do it.

This isn't a blanket defense of every cop in existence. I know there are some bad police officers. We've run plenty of stories about cops who've done crappy things, and we haven't run enough about the good things they've done — because that's what's expected.

I don't doubt there are some officers in this great land of ours who are prejudiced, but the concept that police are just sitting around waiting to kill black men is pretty far-fetched.

My son asked me a few weeks ago what happened in the Michael Brown case and I told him Brown robbed a store then got into a fight with a police officer and was shot while allegedly approaching the officer again. His response was, "Well you can't get into a fight with the police." That's right.

He's only 12 but I've taught him the same thing my father taught me — when dealing with police officers be respectful and don't ever get physical. Brown, at 6-foot-5-inches tall and nearly 300 pounds would probably be frightening to most men. He certainly scared the storeowner and if he was coming at the officer as witnesses said, he was bound to get shot. I sincerely doubt the officer would have just stood there if Michael Brown was a huge white guy who had robbed a store, punched him in the face and was running at him. It seems ridiculous to think the officer just decided to shoot Brown because he was black, given the circumstances.

The rioting and looting — along with burn-

ing the store Brown robbed — was hardly a reasonable protest by reasonable people.

In the Garner situation it does seem the officer shouldn't have been using a chokehold, and thoughtful protests make a lot more sense to me. But these are separate situations — just as the shooting of Gil Collar, an unarmed USA student, was, although no one burned or looted anything in Collar's name.

Maybe some feel the murder of the two N.Y. cops is justified in a sense because they feel police can get away with mistreating citizens. And the truth is, some cops do get away with mistreating people — at least for a little while.

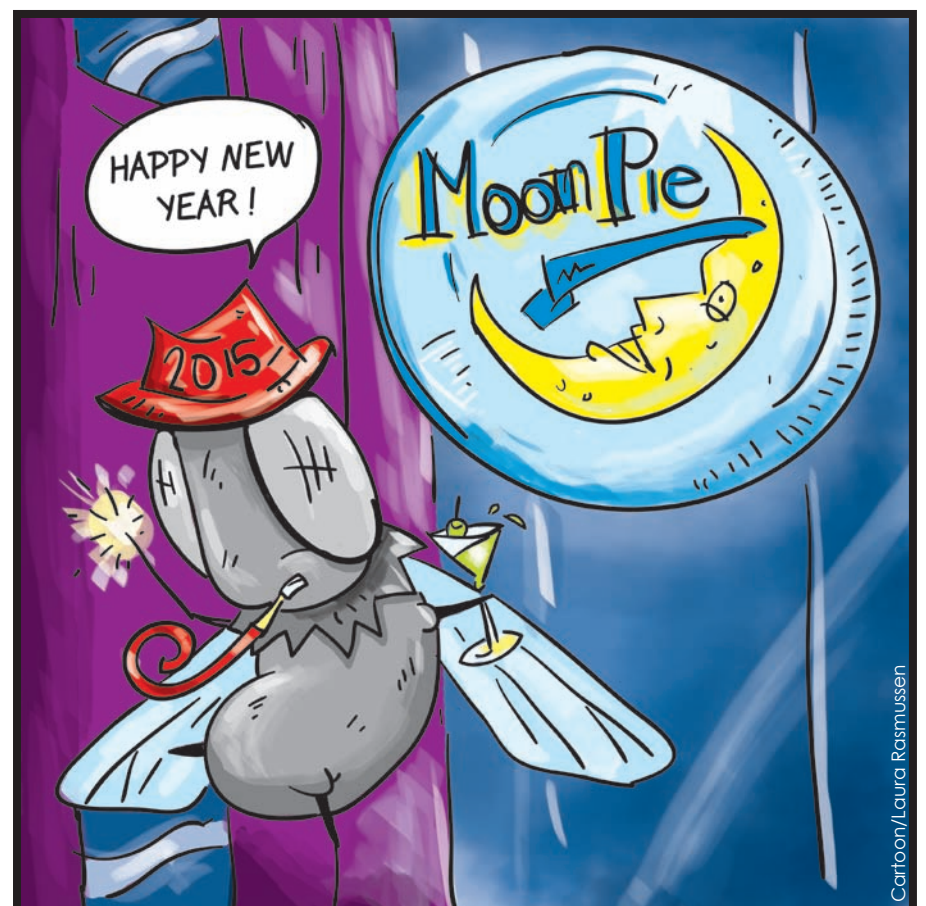
But let's not lose sight of the fact the vast majority of police are doing the job they were hired to do. As in any profession some do it better than others, but I would imagine the number of officers sitting around waiting for an opportunity to abuse people is microscopic.

If you're someone who dislikes police officers or thinks they're too heavy-handed, take a few minutes and just consider the amount of drunken, idiotic behavior common on almost every night of the week in this town alone, not to mention criminal. Think about how you'd deal with it.

I hope those who are expressing so much disdain for police will stop and really think about who's out there in the dark every night trying to keep the worst society has to offer from washing over the rest of us.

Maybe a little respect is due.

The Gadfly



Cartoon/Laura Rasmussen

The Gadfly looks forward to 2015.

There is no such thing as a perfect Christmas

BY ASHLEY TRICE/EDITOR | ashleytoland@lagniappemobile.com

I blame it on the seasonal advertising of luxury cars, coffee, grocery and jewelry stores. They paint the holidays with such strokes of happiness and magic, it is impossible to live up to such perfection.

The tree is always magnificently lit and not one needle has hit the floor. A light snow is always falling outside as well-behaved children make perfectly shaped Santa and snowmen sugar cookies for their grandpas without even creating a mess or caring if they get presents from Santa. The turkey is moist and golden and ready to be cut and placed on the exquisitely set table.

Women wake up on Christmas morning with perfect hair and make-up and like they might be about to go horseback riding or cheering on a rousing game of touch football between teams of male models in the backyard. Husbands are gracefully draping diamond necklaces around their wives' necks at 3 a.m. College kids are coming home from school and acting like they actually want to see their parents more than their friends — even bringing them coffee. “Oh Peter, you're home!” Entire families dressed in cashmere sweaters are always together and smiling and laughing and everyone's life is perfect.

But in reality, the tree is balding and the kids and/or cat and/or dog have “rearranged” the lights and/or ornaments a dozen times at this point. Snow? Around here? Please. We are more likely to be hit by a tornado. Oh wait.

The cookies always turn out to look more like red and green sugar-coated amoebas and parameciums rather than Santa and Frosty. The turkey is dry. Moms wake up looking like strung-out junkies with bedhead wearing 10-year-old tattered flannel pajamas who desperately need a cup of Peter's coffee, but he is still asleep because he stayed out all night long.

Your husband is more likely to hand you any one of the following items than a diamond anything or a Lexus with a big red bow on it: (A) a dirty diaper to throw away (B) a dust pan with a broken ornament swept into it (C) a tiny shirt covered in red and/or green icing (D) his phone so you can tell his mom you will not be coming there for Christmas this year (E) All of the above

No one in your family is wearing cashmere sweaters and some branch of the family tree is definitely not smiling or laughing or happy with you at all because you've hurt their feelings so badly once again because you just can't make it to their holiday gathering because you are already over with that other branch of the family who you ALWAYS spend Christmas with and you care, but you just can't do anything about it because you are so over-scheduled that your kids aren't even going to have time to play with their toys and at some point you have to run into work for a bit and then go see a friend who you haven't seen in years and who is only going to be here for one hour and you have to make

three casseroles and a pot of gumbo and find a partridge in a pear tree. Deep breath.

And when you do finally sit down around the table with said family, decades of past hurts and jealousies hover right under the surface and the only thing passed around the table with the dry turkey is the aggression.

GRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR!

And this is if you are lucky. Yep, as exhausting as it all is, I have to remind myself such chaos is a beautiful thing to have in your life — something I absolutely physically craved when I didn't have it.

We all go through periods in our lives when we are lonelier than others — and that feeling is exacerbated at Christmas.

I remember sitting with my mother in the hospital one Christmas. It would be her last and

“For those of you out there who may be feeling a little lost or alone, just know it can all change on a dime. And it will. I promise.”

we both knew it. I remember driving home that night feeling so sad and alone. I didn't have any siblings; I wasn't dating anyone; I didn't have any children and I knew I was about to be without the only parent I had ever had. As I drove past driveway after driveway full of cars, I imagined all of those cashmere-clad families with perfect teeth and hair, drinking eggnog out of punch bowl glasses and talking about raises and football and new houses and babies and other things that seemed nice to talk about. I walked into my empty apartment and felt really sorry for myself, thinking this is just the way Christmas would be from now on. It's really hard to see beyond our present situation. But one thing is for certain, change always comes.

A few months later, I started dating the man who would become my husband and by the next Christmas I was pregnant with our first child and trying to figure out how to go to all of our family gatherings. It's crazy what a difference a year makes.

For those of you out there who may be feeling a little lost or alone, just know it can all change on a dime. And it will. I promise.

And for those of you who like me have started to resent just how busy and how much is required of you during this time of year, take a moment to relish in the chaos and think about the alternative. And know the whole holiday isn't going to be as perfect as a Lexus or Publix ad, but there will be some pretty spectacular moments in between the messy ones.



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The great “Un” Christmas

BY JENNIFER MCDONALD/COLUMNIST | betterdivorce@aol.com

Winston, the brainiest elf in the North Pole, put down the political science book he was reading and watched with concern as Santa paced nervously across the North Pole Library. His beloved boss was always anxious in the days before Christmas, but this year was different.

Just hours before, Santa had stood before an exhausted Elf Council and dropped his head in defeat.

“I guess that’s it then,” he said forlornly. “There’s no other choice. Christmas is cancelled.”

Winston recalled this was not the first year Santa had cancelled the big day, in fact, there had been countless close calls throughout the centuries. In 2010 the holiday was nearly ruined when Santa refused to endure a humiliating TSA pat-down before flying over American airspace.

As recently as 2012, Christmas was briefly cancelled when Santa became obsessed with predictions of an impending doomsday coinciding with the ancient Mayan calendar, which allegedly ended Dec. 21, 2012.

Santa had been so frightened by the all the hysteria he encountered on the Internet he became an overnight “prepper,” abruptly shutting down toy production and directing the elves to build a bunker and stockpile the essential sweet treats. Fortunately Winston had been able to reason with Santa enough to convince him to resume his normal holiday rituals, just in time to save Christmas.

This year, however, the situation seemed truly hopeless. It all began last week when Santa gathered the Elf Council before him in the Snoval Office, where he delivered the shocking news that the North Pole had been the victim of a vicious cyber attack. A team of highly organized hackers had infiltrated the North Pole database and stolen a large amount of data, some of which had already been released to the rabidly awaiting Internet.

Thus far, the international media had already been having field day with North Pole personnel records, several sets of dollhouse blueprints, some embarrassing elf emails, and the full text of the Naughty and Nice List from 1987. However, the limited data release was followed by a frightening message in which the hackers promised far more damaging information would be released and elves would be harmed unless Santa agreed to cancel his 2014 Christmas delivery.

According to the most recent North Pole intelligence, the attack was prompted by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s recent discovery that once again, he was on Santa’s naughty list. Although this was his 32nd consecutive appearance on the list, he was especially disappointed this year as he was holding out hope for a Frozen Snow Glow Elsa doll.

The Elf Council convened for hours each day, discussing the various implications of giving into the foreign leader’s demands, but by North Pole law, in the end it would be Santa’s call. After careful consultation with his American attorney, Ed Knogg, Santa called a final meeting of the Elf Council and sadly announced his decision to cancel Christmas 2014.

Winston was heartbroken as he watched a defeated Santa turn and leave the room, retreating to his private office after mumbling a request to be left alone. Later that afternoon in the library, Winston was pleased to see Santa out and about,



Illustration/Laura Rasmussen

Do you want to build a snowman?

and he wondered if it was too late to change his mind.

“Santa, I still want to go through with Christmas,” Winston said. “I think it’s the right thing to do. So what if they release our data? Could it possibly be any worse than all those ridiculous, narcissistic “elfies” my colleagues are always posting on Facebook?”

“Oh, there’s plenty more damage they can do,” Santa said. “And I’m responsible for making sure nobody gets hurt. They threatened our lives!”

“Oh, come on,” Winston replied. “Those guys threaten to kill everyone. That’s what bullies do. And we don’t give in to bullies, especially when they’re on the naughty list. If you’re going to let some brutal dictator from across the world run the North Pole, you may as well wrap up that Snow Glow Elsa he’s been wanting with a big red bow and send it on over. In fact, just go ahead and hand over the reins to your sleigh because he’s never going to stop pushing you around.”

Santa was quiet for a long while, and he finally sighed and looked at Winston. “Well, what do all the other elves think? Do they feel the same?”

“Just look behind you Santa,” Winston said.

Santa turned to see his elves begin to flood the halls with hopeful, smiling faces.

“Santa,” they called. “Just give us the word. The reindeer are ready and the gifts are wrapped. We can get that sleigh loaded and off the ground in an hour.”

Santa gazed at the brave little creatures all around him and grinned. “Let’s do it,” he said. “Ho Ho Ho! Merry Christmas and Happy Freedom to all, and a HAPPY NEW YEAR!”



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7:30 – 9:00 PM
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8:00 PM
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8:30 PM
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Discretion urged before condemning Obama's new Cuba policy

BY JEFF POOR/COLUMNIST | jeffreypoor@gmail.com

WASHINGTON — Last week, President Barack Obama announced moves toward normalizing U.S. relations with Cuba, a dictatorship that has been on the outs with the United States for 50 years.

Obama argued after five decades of a policy intended to isolate the Caribbean island nation, nothing has changed, calling the strategy “a failed approach.”

The changes seem to be mostly cosmetic, the exception being re-establishing diplomatic relations. But the gesture itself is a sign of an effort to deviate from the hardline stance of the last half century.

The announcement has already caused strife within each of the political parties. Almost immediately, Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) criticized Obama. On the Republican side, potential 2016 presidential candidates Sens. Rand Paul (R-KY) and Marco Rubio (R-FL) engaged in a public back-and-forth about the wisdom of opening Cuba — pitting the libertarian-leaning junior Kentucky senator against Rubio, the son of Cuban refugees and a vocal opponent of Obama's new Cuba policy.

Those political battles will sort themselves out over the next two years of Obama's presidency, with a more definitive idea of America's long-term standing toward the Cuban regime coming in the term of the next president of the United States.

The Obama administration's change of policy is problematic because it is somewhat premature and naïve in that it assumes the natural goodness of American ideals will win over the Cuban people and somehow that will be reflected by Cuba's political leadership once the Castro brothers lose power or die.

It doesn't, however, seem like this is a fight worth taking to the mattresses, even if you're an ideological opponent of Obama or just if you're vehemently anti-communist and anti-Castro.

There could be something in it for Mobile if U.S.-Cuba rela-

tions are indeed ever normalized.

It will probably not be in the form of Carnival Cruise Lines. That ship has sailed, literally. Bringing back a cruise line to the port city will require more changes locally and little to do with our national foreign policy.

By now, I'm sure it's been pointed out there is a history between Mobile and Havana, going back to 1500s.

The pair are sister cities that feature identical statues of French-Canadian explorer and naval hero Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville and a history of trade going back through the 18th century up until the Cuban Revolution in the 1950s.

Long before Obama's announcement, companies with business interests tied to Mobile have been laying the groundwork for reopening U.S. relations with Cuba. It started with former Mobile Mayor Mike Dow, who made multiple trips to the island nation and seemed to have a fascination with the — at the time unlikely — event of an end to the embargo.

In 2003, Dow, along with a delegation that included then-Lt. Gov. Lucy Baxley, RSA chief David Bronner, former Rep. Sonny Callahan and State Docks director Jimmy Lyons, put on a full-court press with a trip to Cuba seeking business relations.

Then-Mobile City Councilman Stephen Nodine was very outspoken against the Cuba trip, maintaining that Cuba was broke and that there was enough to deal with here stateside.

Cuba is still broke. And they're still controlled by a communist regime, but the Castro brothers seem to be just barely hanging on.

In the event that the embargo with Cuba actually is lifted — a move that literally requires an act of Congress — Mobile will be a few steps ahead of other U.S. ports.

Rep. Bradley Byrne spoke out against Obama's actions last week to the Alabama Media Group, arguing the president had

made it more difficult by acting unilaterally. That's a strikingly similar argument some proponents of immigration reform made regarding the president's executive actions on immigration.

The difference is, however, that U.S.-Cuba relations weren't on Congress' radar until last week, whereas immigration has been a consistent theme in Congress for at least a decade.

For now, Mobile's all-Republican congressional delegation doesn't have much to gain in going aggressively after President Barack Obama for his Cuba policy. Let the outspoken opponents like Marco Rubio, Ted Cruzes (R-TX), and — on the House side — Reps. Mario Díaz-Balart (R-FL) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) take on Obama for overstepping his perceived constitutional authority.

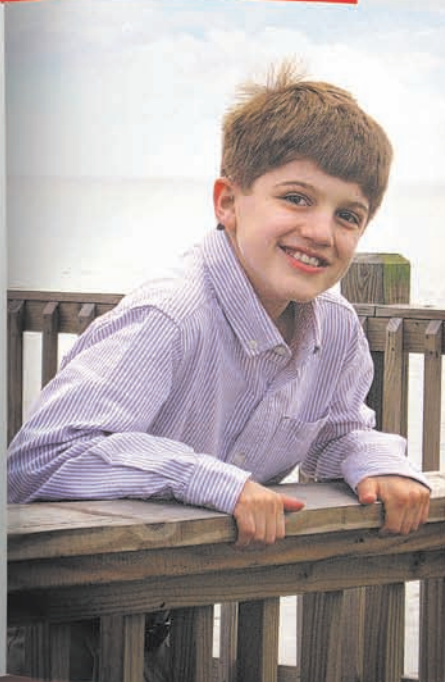
If Rubio, who is the son of Cuban refugees, or any of the others holding power in Tallahassee or Washington involving the state of Florida want a higher bar for the opening of U.S.-Cuba relations, let them fight that fight. Floridians appear to have their reasons, be it for fear Cuba could undercut their sugar or agricultural commodity prices or the fact that there remain many constituents who fled Cuba.

For now, it's not in Alabama's direct interest to take up an ideological fight over Cuba policy when there are much more serious threats to the United States than the Castro regime.

Florida's loss would be Alabama's gain. The closest non-Florida U.S. port to Havana is Mobile, edging out Gulfport, Mississippi by 10 nautical miles and Savannah, Georgia by 50 nautical miles.

Inevitably, the Castro brothers will pass and the United States and Cuba will have to bury the Cold War-era hatchet. Whether that is in the next two years or longer, it would make sense to exercise discretion when sounding off about Cuba.

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Bienville Business Center opens downtown

BY RON SIVAK/COLUMNIST | business@lagniappemobile.com | Twitter @rcvak

According to a recent news release the Bienville Business Center, located at 127 Dauphin St., Unit 103, is now available for leasing white-collar workspace in downtown Mobile. The office suite environment is geared towards budding entrepreneurs wanting turn-key executive facilities. It offers consultants, freelancers, sole proprietors and other professionals a simplified office platform.

Monthly rent covers office space, office furniture, electricity, water, heating/air conditioning and the use of a common conference room. Access is available to a high-speed, business-grade IT network with bandwidth necessary to handle most needs. High-speed printing services are also available.

"The Bienville Business Center is located in a restored, turn of the century building that formerly housed the McCrory Department Store on Bienville Square. This is the epicenter of the downtown business community. It is in the heart of downtown near courthouses, financial institutions and office towers and designed to make opening an office as painless as possible so that entrepreneurs can focus on what makes them successful," Fred Rendfrey, Downtown Mobile Alliance's economic development director said.

Commercial Real Estate Moves

John Vallas of Vallas Realty, Inc. recently sold three acres on Halls Mill Road, near Rangeline Road, for \$455,000 to **Robert J. Isakson, II** with **Lafayette Land Company**. The local contractor will break ground at the site building a new property for an undisclosed national company moving into the area early 2015. The 3 acre section is also part of a larger 84 acre tract that has parcels under contract for a new retail development, movie theater and medical office building, according to Vallas.

The **Red Door Salon** has leased a 1,198-square-foot stylist space at the **Staples Retail Center** located at 1802 U.S. Highway 98 in Daphne. It is located near the intersection of Highway 98 and County Road 64. The hair salon relocated from its previous spot near the Eastern Shore Centre. **David Dexter** with **NAI Mobile** handled the transaction.

Noted local neurologists, **Dr. Christopher Eckstein**, **Dr. Charles S. Markle**, **Dr. Timothy P. Hecker** and **Dr. Ozgur Oztas** have joined **Coastal Neurological Institute (CNI)**, located at 3280 Dauphin St., Suite A. CNI is known

throughout the region for its collection of experts in neurosurgery, as well as specialization with medical problems centered on the back and neck. Dr. Eckstein arrived from Providence Hospital while doctors Markle, Hecker and Oztas all relocated from Mobile Infirmary.

MAAR installs 2015 officers and Board of Directors

The Mobile Area Association of Realtors (MAAR) installed new officers and Board of Directors for 2015 at their annual installation luncheon at the Country Club of Mobile on Nov. 20, according to a press release.

Cy Cain with Cain Real Estate was installed as the 2015 MAAR president. Kelly Cummings, with The Cummings Company, will serve as 2015 president-elect. Serving as Treasurer will be Jeremy Milling with Milling Commercial Realty. Deborah Robinson, with Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate Generations will serve as the secretary.

Julie Minto, with LLB&B Real Estate and the 2015 Alabama Association of Realtors (AAR) President, installed the new officers.

The newly installed MAAR Board of Directors for 2015 include Pratt Thomas with Merrill P. Thomas Company, Libba Latham with LLB&B Real Estate, Daniel Dennis with Roberts Brothers, Josh Tanner with Better Homes and Gardens Generations, Marie Dickinson with Berkshire Hathaway Home Services Cooper & Company and Karen Singleton with Keller Williams Realty Mobile.

MAAR's goal is to promote the real estate industry and its realtor members along the Alabama Gulf Coast. The association represents over 1,200 professionals and ensures a high standard of service that all affiliates are expected to follow as issued by the National Association of Realtors Code of Ethics.

Alabama Coastal Foundation hosts sustainability Summit

The Alabama Coastal Foundation (ACF), through their Green Coast Council (GCC) initiative, is hosting the 2015 Sustainability Summit Friday, Jan. 30. The event will offer builders, planners and architects educational sessions on sustainable development.

The GCC is a forum for business and industry leaders who practice and promote environmental sustainability principles. Through conferences, the council provides proactive environmental leadership throughout coastal

Alabama.

Goals for council members include: collaborating on ways to cut waste, reducing transportation costs, lowering impacts on the environment via efficient use of electricity/water and improving employee pay equity and benefits.

The Summit will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the University of South Alabama's Student Center and in Shelby Hall at the College of Engineering. More information about the summit can be found at the Alabama Coastal Foundation's website.

Andy's Music inaugural holiday food drive collects five tons of donations

Andy's Music's first annual "Drumming Out Hunger" food drive raised more than its goal of five tons of food for the local Bay Area Food Bank.

According to a press release, this year's inaugural fundraiser devised the idea of creating a friendly rivalry between local University of Alabama and Auburn University fan bases to determine which group could bring in the most meal donations.

Additionally, participants each entered a sweepstakes to win a unique, custom designed Alabama or Auburn-themed Mapex drum set. Andy's Music special-ordered these from the manufacturer with a retail value of roughly \$2,000 apiece.

"Thanks to the generosity of our local community, our first ever food drive was a great success," Jim Andrews, president and CEO of Andy's Music said. "We achieved our goal of 10,000 pounds of food — which is more than 7,500 meals — for the food bank. The unselfish giving was overwhelming and represented the true spirit of generosity during this Christmas season."

Drumsticks and guitar strings were donated by D'Addario, a world renowned musical string manufacturer headquartered in Farmingdale, New York, to attract those with a musical bent for walk-in donations.

Local Starbucks coffee shops donated holiday gift baskets as an incentive to non-musicians for in-store contributions.

Other provender amassing events included: three food drives at various Wal-Mart supercenters; one food drive at a Winn-Dixie Grocery and a food drive, fundraiser, and concert at Moe's Original BBQ with the Clark-Shaw Jazz Band, Davidson High School Jazz Band, and the Stereo Dogs.

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Chestnuts roasting on an open ... wait, what?

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

Yes, we sing of these beauties every holiday season. With apologies to Mel Tormé, we usually just blindly follow the words and melody without much thought to the actual chestnut. I would wager that very few of our readers have actually roasted a chestnut. I myself found a sack in a grocery store and tried to make the classic song come true with poor results. I blamed it on faulty nuts. I am certain I was the problem, but I only had one shot at this. Next time I will buy three sacks — one to screw up, one to tweak and one to perfect.

So in this review I decided to learn a little more about what is surprisingly a healthy nut and possibly expose why it is not very common to practice what we preach, er, sing, rather. So take a few notes and maybe you and I can crank a little life back into a tradition of roasting those chestnuts on an open fire.

My first bag of chestnuts is not to be forgotten. I remember the little bag made of red mesh holding a couple handfuls of the odd nuts. They were dark, fairly dense and hard as rocks. The smooth shell was often shiny, and they were pretty large. These were round and at least an inch or more in diameter with one side a little flat. I could imagine a few of these have historically made their way into the leather pouch of a slingshot.

The chestnut we are speaking of comes from the genus *Castanea* and excludes the similar looking but poisonous horse chestnut and the star of Chinese cuisine, the water chestnut, which is actually not a nut at all, but an aquatic vegetable (genus *Eleocharis*). No, the chestnuts we are examining today actually grow on trees and can be cracked open like any other nut to reveal meaty edible parts.

These beauties can be found growing in North America, and once were extremely common to our homeland (*Castanea dentata*). It was an early 20th century blight that took out most of our crop, and the mighty chestnut has struggled to return to such popularity since, making a slight comeback here and there. This blight paved the way for the United States to become the chief importer

of chestnuts from the European Union (*Castanea sativa*, or sweet chestnut). China ranks highest among chestnut export (*Castanea mollissima*), but their biggest client is Japan.

Chestnuts are amazingly healthy when compared to other nuts. They are high in starch, low in fat and calories and are a good source of dietary fiber at 8.1g per 100g and can help lower bad LDL cholesterol and raise the good HDL cholesterol. Very rich in



Photos/Wikipedia Commons

Although vast forests of American Chestnut (above) were obliterated by an early 20th century blight, the Christmas roasting tradition continues with the help of comparable imports from Europe and China.

the all-important vitamin C as well as folates, the health benefits of chestnuts are very similar to those of green leafy vegetables. Actually it is wise to treat these guys as such.

If you are lucky enough to have a choice, always go for the large fresh nuts. It just so happens that the peak season is December, but you may find them from October through March. Yes, choosing the right chestnut is

important. Though they are nuts, they can spoil rather quickly like vegetables. If you manage to get your hands on fresh ones store them in a Ziploc bag or other sealable container in your refrigerator, and expect a couple of week's worth of shelf life.

Roasting the nuts is an art itself. There are many pans on the market for fire roasting that involve holes on the bottom and a long handle for safety purposes. You could make your own make-

shift roaster by poking holes in a long sheet of aluminum foil and use a rack over coals. But let's be honest, even the Velvet Fog himself might cheat and take advantage of the modern oven.

The temperature you are looking for is about 350 degrees, easily achieved in your kitchen. For best results we must score the chestnuts. Some recommend an X mark on the flatter surface of the nut, others say cut through the surface almost all the way around the circumference. Soak the scored nuts in warm water to help them steam during the cooking process.

If you are using an oven, a cookie sheet or rimmed pan will do fine. Cook for about a half an hour giving the pan a nice shake every now and then to ensure even heat distribution. Once the cooking is done, cover the hot nuts with a heavy towel, or even wrap them and allow them to cool down enough to handle. The place you scored will open up and peeling your chestnuts will be a cinch.

I think I'll do better next time if I can only find a fresh crop.

Now sing it with me, boys and girls. "Although it's been said many times many ways, merry Christmas...meet the Flintstones...merry Christmas...to you."



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Haberdasher gets jump on New Year by opening kitchen

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

I know where I always go when I need to get schooled on the art of mix-ology. They basically put on a clinic every night with the drinks they serve at Haberdasher. Aside from being a hot spot for incredible cocktails, the place just opened the kitchen, and the food menu is as elegant as the drink menu.

Think South American as the inspiration for this new endeavor. House made tortillas and arepas (corn cakes) are the basis of the menu full of signature tacos and proteins such as spicy pork, chicken, Conecuh sausage and lamb. Head chef Zane Phillips, formerly of our fallen beloved La Pizzeria, is putting together a fantastic initial menu with some eclectic twists. A vinegar based jalapeno slaw and shrimp ceviche are sure to please. What about a vegetarian taco with refried sweet peas with yellow corn and black bean relish? How does a Conecuh sausage with pico de gallo and Creole mustard sans tortilla but wrapped in naan bread sound? These guys have my attention.

Here is the best part. It is an a la carte menu starting at \$2 and maxing out at \$7. I anticipate weekly specials and frequent additions and changes, but it sounds great as it is. Thankfully they are open seven nights a week at 5 p.m. until 11 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, and until midnight or later Friday and Saturday. Don't forget, they have fantastic cocktails. I am sure Roy could pair something for you.

Moon Pie Moonshine rings it in with two flavors

I have an awful job. Every now and then something shows up to the office, and in some official capacity I am encouraged to sample the item. This week the items happened to be two jars of Moon Pie MoonShine (www.moonpie-moonshine.com) from Limestone Branch Distillery.

It's the story of fifth generation moonpie bakers of Chattanooga meeting seventh generation distillers of Kentucky who managed to create a liquid dessert with a kick. We southerners know our moonpies, and we also know our moonshine. Think of this as two great southern traditions in a jar with a label that boasts, "Only the finest grain-neutral spirits and natural flavors crafted by hand in our family's time-honored way."

I received one jar of banana and one jar of chocolate, and I will say I enjoyed both of them. Tasting side by side I preferred the banana flavor straight, but I could see how the chocolate could make a splash in some fancy recipe. Speaking of recipes, the website is chock full of ways to doll up the shine, and not just for cocktails.

Don't be afraid of the hype that moonshine often receives. I've heard horror stories where someone takes a pull off of pappy's corn liquor and ain't been right since. This product will not be the subject of some ABC after school special anytime soon, and weighs in at a very drinkable 53 proof. This is a great idea for those nights when you need a little longevity to maybe mix yourself a drink with this as opposed to much higher proof vodkas. I have to say the flavors are very convincing.

Maybe this could be your New Year's Eve



Photo/Limestone Branch Distillery

Banana and chocolate flavored Moon Pie MoonShine.

or Mardi Gras drink this year. I received a note that Boo Radley's and The Brickyard will both be carrying this as we drop the giant MoonPie next week. Others are sure to follow. This spirit will spread like wildfire.

Kitchen on George announces NYE menu

You know you have to take your sweetheart out for something fancy on New Year's Eve. Why not a four course wine dinner at Kitchen on George?

The teaching restaurant in the OGD is hot right now with lunch daily and impressive dinner menus. This wine dinner doesn't sound any less promising than what you've come to expect. The condensed version is prosciutto wrapped asparagus with Belstar Prosecco followed by linguini with clams and fennel paired with Chamisal Chardonnay, pan-seared pistachio crusted sea bass with Veuve de Vernay Brut, and the evening capped off with almond cream filled orange crepe washed down with Saracco Moscato.

I spared you a bit of the hyperbole, but the long version of the menu is very convincing. Just take my word for it. Price per person is \$75, and though reservations are not required I wouldn't chance it. Call 251-436-8890 or stop by George and Savannah streets to reserve in person. While you're there you could peek into Cream and Sugar for some last minute holiday cake balls.

By the way, if you are looking for just the right gift certificate Kitchen on George and Cream and Sugar have paired up to meet your needs. A \$30 gift certificate combo pack comes with a \$20 card for Kitchen on George and a \$10 card for Cream and Sugar. Sounds like breakfast and lunch to me!

Keep those trees up until the New Year, then recycle!

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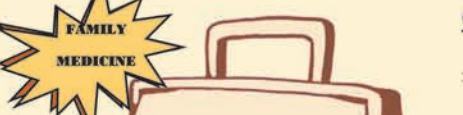
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Champagnes and Crémants make for parties that fizz, not fizzle

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

The French invented Champagne and I think we owe it to ourselves to revisit the source for our most special occasions, like the December holidays — and maybe a random Tuesday in January when those credit card bills roll in. Oceans of excellent French fizz have washed into Mobile Bay and, believe it or not, you can enjoy most of them without exacerbating your January credit situation. There may not be any priced less than \$10, but holidays with family and friends deserve a bit better — don't cha think?

I've got a list of reputable recommendations after a few instructive explications. Champagne, as we know, is a legally protected word denoting sparkling wine made in a strictly defined region of north-central France. It's traditionally made from Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier grapes — either blended or bottled individually (an all-Chardonnay Champagne is a "blanc de blancs," for example). It comes in a variety of sweetness, ranging from ultra-dry "zéro dosage" or "brut nature," through brut and extra dry (brut is drier than extra dry) and on to demi-sec, moelleux and doux (half-dry, tender and sweet, respectively). Demi-sec is too sweet for me and doux belongs on pancakes, but you can ignore my glib generalizations if you like sweeter wines or want a decadent dessert fizz.

All Champagnes are further labeled in two broad categories: vintage and non-vintage. "Vintage" simply means the vintners decided their Champagne was good enough to attach a year to it. This tradition started eons ago, when Champagne makers would harvest their grapes, make their wine and then taste it to collectively determine whether it was good enough for the region to "declare a vintage." If so, they'd print the harvest year on the Champagne's label. (These days, Champagne houses tend to decide individually whether to declare a vintage.)

"Vintage Champagne" does not, therefore, mean "old Champagne;" it can mean "better Champagne" because it's worthy of having its harvest-year called out. Non-vintage (NV) Champagne, on the other hand, is decent — often very good — wine, but either is deemed not sufficiently special to warrant citing its year or is a blend of wines from various years, formulated to maintain a consistent house style. (Remember that "better" can be relative. Krug, which is to Champagne what Maserati is to cars, sells NV fizz for \$150 a bottle and you can bet it's better than some vintners' vintage bubbly.)

Crémants are sparkling wines made in eight regions of France outside Champagne, and can be outstanding fizzes with budget-friendly prices (you don't have to go to Tiffany's to buy a flawless diamond, after all). Crémants usually name their region of origin on their labels, as with Crémant de Bourgogne, Crémant d'Alsace or Crémant du Jura (Crémants from the Burgundy, Alsace or Jura regions, respectively). They are more often non-vintage wines, generally made in accordance with the "Champagne method" and in a range of sweetness from brut to doux. Crémants may also be produced from grapes prominent in their region — such as Riesling in Alsace — rather than exclusively from traditional "Champagne grapes."

For your festive shopping, let's start with **Duval-Leroy Classic Brut NV Champagne** — a true Champagne from the region's southern quadrant, comprising as many as 15 different Pinot Noir and Chardonnay-based wines from a year's new harvests, as well as wine reserved from several prior years. It's the color of 10-karat gold with well-distributed bubbles rising throughout the glass and citrusy aromas popping above the rim. Among its flavor layers are toast and raisin, but don't mistake "raisin" for "sweet," because this is a dry, palate-cleansing fizz with mouth-watering acidity. Drink it alone or with lighter meats like chicken or fish. (Available at Domke Market and other local wine shops; 12 percent ABV; \$40-\$45.)

My second choice is **Henri Abelé NV Brut**, another true Champagne made in Reims since 1757. It has everything you'd want in a fine glass of fizz, with silky harmonious flavors — not shouting one thing or another. Fruit and toast and honey are perfectly melded. It has loads of tiny bubbles and a rich body — so you can drink it solo or with appetizers or seafood (such as caviar, which happily sits in both food groups). Some folks claim Champagne gives them a headache, but I'd virtually guarantee you no morning-after regret from this bubbly. (Available at various local wine shops; 12 percent ABV; \$45-\$49.)

Next up is **Domaine Hubert Clavelin "Brut-Comté" NV Crémant du Jura**, from an eastern region of France whose name is more often associated with Alps and cheese. That doesn't stop this 100 percent Chardonnay fizz from excelling, though, with soft fragrances of ripe peach and gentle little bubbles. Its pear and red-apple flavors linger longer than with some Champagnes, probably because its bubbles don't scrub. I'm thinking it's a good partner for lightly battered fried shrimp — hold the sauce. (Available at wine shops on both sides of the Bay; 12 percent ABV; \$20-ish.)

In the rosé category, I like **Louis Bouillot's "Perle d'Aurore" NV Rosé Crémant de Bourgogne**. It's a pale-salmon blend of Pinot Noir and Gamay Noir with inviting floral aromas, very fine bubbles and mostly strawberry flavors. This is smooth bubbly, medium bodied, with just enough acidity to be interesting; some folks may find the finish slightly less than dry. Critics have called it everything from "subtle" to "simple," but I think it's an accessible, pleasant wine I'd happily invite to any party.

Louis Bouillot also makes a **"Perle d'Ivoire" NV Blanc de Blancs**, blended from 95 percent Chardonnay and 5 percent Bourgogne Aligoté grapes grown in northern Burgundy, near the town of Chablis. An all-white-grape composition gives this fizz a crisper, more minerally quality with predominantly citrus and green-apple flavors. It's fresh and bright, but substantial — not sour. The fact that it's aged 24 months before release tells you it's a serious wine, and a great value. (Louis Bouillot's bubbly is widely available at "big box" stores — that is, the store is a "big box," the wine doesn't come in one — on line and at wine shops; 12 percent ABV; \$15-\$20, depending.)

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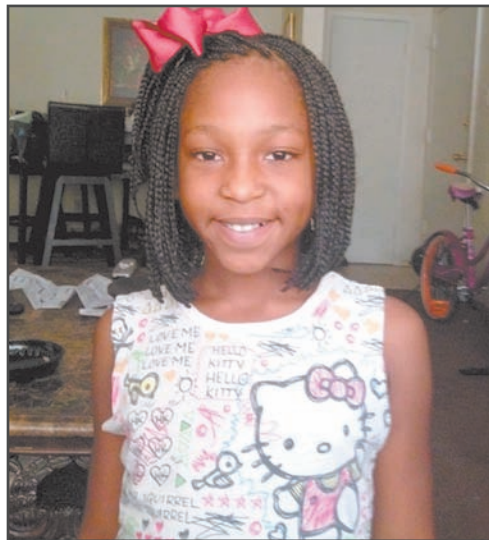
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2014: A year of heartbreak and hope

BY GABRIEL TYNES, JASON JOHNSON, DALE LIESCH AND ALYSON STOKES

Perhaps no story is as tragic as a child's death, but the circumstances surrounding the Sept. 16 disappearance of 8-year-old Hiawayi Robinson gripped the community like no other in the past year. A massive statewide alert and community search effort ended Sept. 18 when Hiawayi's body was discovered behind an abandoned warehouse on Rebel Road in Prichard. Rumors about a motive and possible suspects swirled as Prichard Mayor



Photo/dps.alabama.gov

The murder of Hiawayi Robinson captivated news audiences in 2014.

Troy Ephriam announced the person of interest in the case was not suspected of the crime. Subsequently, few details were revealed even as prosecutors served search warrants at the home of the victim's father, Hiawatha Robinson Jr., and his girlfriend on Oct. 9.

It wasn't until Dec. 16 that state law enforcement officials arrested Hiawatha, charging him with sodomy and murder in the case, alleging he caused the death of his daughter during a sexual assault. The arrest warrant indicated Hiawayi had died of suffocation. The next day, Hiawatha was granted a \$500,000 cash bond, but also hit with a two-count indictment for federal firearms charges.

Serving search warrants in October, officials had allegedly discovered Hiawatha, having previously been convicted of felony burglary and assault, was in illegal possession of 12 gauge shotgun. Robinson is expected to face the

federal firearms charges first. He remains in jail at press time.

Printed below, in chronological order, is brief review of other notable stories of 2014. See this list on lagniappemobile.com for archived links to these stories.

Jan. 1 — City budget changes and negotiations: Mayor Sandy Stimpson passed substantial budget amendments in 2014, but not without concessions to the Mobile City Council. An audit performed shortly after Stimpson was sworn in revealed a \$15.8 million operating deficit, he announced Dec. 30, 2013, while also canceling pay raises promised by the previous administration, scheduled to take effect just two days later.

On March 13, Stimpson released a revised budget, trimming \$21.6 million in expenditures while predicting \$8.6 million in revenue over projections. The cuts primarily targeted unfilled budgeted employment vacancies, unnecessary overtime and the elimination of fee waivers. At the same time, the revisions allowed for the city's overall workforce to decline along with natural attrition. Citing the threat of steep cuts to city services and employee benefits if the revisions were rejected, the Council unanimously adopted Stimpson's revised budget April 1.

The administration's proposed 2015 budget went further with cuts, targeting nonprofits aided by taxpayer money. Proposing to quash so-called "performance contracts" with organizations such as the Exploreum, the Mobile Bay Visitors and Convention Bureau and BayFest, the \$2.1 million tradeoff would be a total 5 percent cost-of-living adjustment and pay raise for city employees, and a 400 percent increase in capital expenditures. At the same time, employees, including retirees, would have to pay for a larger percentage of their health care plan.

Later, the mayor attempted to veto council amendments allowing for the three-year extension of the "penny tax," as well as a plan to move \$2.5 million from capital expenditures to the general fund to offset health care increases for retirees.

On Sept. 16, having overridden his vetoes, the council passed the mayor's budget with revisions, including one restoring funding to some nonprofits by taking money from capital expenditures and public safety.

Jan. 10 — Dustup over coal terminal ignites: A proposal by Walter Energy to build a new coal terminal at the foot of Virginia Street near downtown raised alarm bells from neighborhood groups and environmental organiza-

tions, primarily concerned about the threats from coal dust. After several hearings and concessions in the facility's design, the company eventually agreed to sell the property to the Alabama State Port Authority and negotiate an arrangement to ship coal through the port's existing McDuffie terminal.

Jan. 14 — Government funding bill means new federal courthouse for Mobile: U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby secured \$69.5 million in federal money for a new federal courthouse in Mobile. A project to design and construct the new courthouse is expected to take at least five years, and the existing courthouse will also be renovated. The total project cost is estimated to be \$118.5 million.

Jan. 17 — Guilty verdicts returned in drive-by murder: Trayon Washington and Pat Brown were both found guilty of the July 2012 murder of Wendy Fisher, who was shot after she yelled at the men for speeding through her West Mobile neighborhood. In March, the half-brothers received sentences of life and 30 years in prison, respectively.

Jan. 22 — Officials hope to stop leaks in Government Plaza: A \$3.2 million project began to repair a perpetually leaky roof in Mobile's 19-year-old Government Plaza. As the work continued, the building was evacuated twice due to fires started by workers, and a job that was initially expected to be complete by May stretched well into the fall. A \$235,000 change order was authorized for the project in August.

Jan. 24 — Environmental groups sue Corps over pipeline permit: The Southern Environmental Law Center filed a lawsuit on Jan. 24 on behalf of Mobile Baykeeper, challenging a permit issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the Plains Southcap, LLC pipeline routed through the Big Creek Lake watershed. A federal judge would dismiss the case in October, citing the lax nature of the Corps' permit requirements.

Jan. 29 — Unique and historic winter weather freezes Mobile: Schools, offices and airports across Mobile and Baldwin counties were closed as temperatures dipped to below 20 degrees and a blast of arctic air caused an otherwise normal precipitation event to leave a layer of slick ice on the roads. However "Winter Storm Leon," as it was dubbed by some media outlets, spared the Mobile area of worse effects seen elsewhere in the Southeast.

Feb. 4 — Council takes to the road, but brings along the division: Despite a 6-1 vote of approval, division over Councilman CJ Small's nomination of Barbara Drummond to the

MAWSS board led to heated rhetoric. Months later, tension would rise again as Councilman Fred Richardson nominated former Mayor Sam Jones to the MAWSS board. The divisive nomination led to a tug-of-war between Mayor Sandy Stimpson's administration and a faction within the council. The stalemate ended after Stimpson supported the nomination and urged the City Council to approve it in June, but not before he and other members of the administration dramatically walked out in the middle of a council meeting in protest of the division. Because the council's vote was initially split along racial lines, the mayor would later recommend a series of "community conversations" on race relations.

Feb. 6 — USA names Waldrop president: The University of South Alabama named just the third president in its 50-year history in Dr. Tony Waldrop, previously the provost and executive vice president at the University of Central Florida. Waldrop succeeds Founding President Dr. Frederick Whiddon and Gordon Moulton, whose 15 years at the helm of the university oversaw a dramatic expansion.

Feb. 27 — Joe Cain traditions upended: Organizers of the Joe Cain Parading Society ordered its traditional footmarchers to complete applications and pay registration fees for the privilege to march, threatening to end the procession's decades-old stature as the "people's parade." In December 2014, the foot marchers obtained their own parading permit, allowing them to carry on the tradition without the governance of the parading society. But in a technicality, the police department opted to place the footmarchers behind the more contemporary floats, possibly ending the decades old tradition of Chief Slacobamorinico leading the procession.

Feb. 28 — Mayor Stimpson declares 'War on Litter:' In an attempt to fight back against the ubiquitous bottles, cans, plastic bags, illegal curbside signs and cigarette butts that litter the city's ditches and clog stormwater drains, Mayor Sandy Stimpson drafted an updated litter ordinance to tackle the problem at the source. The ordinance was approved by the end of the summer, and stepped-up enforcement began in the fall.

March 20 — Commission can't agree on price, location of proposed soccer complex: Two members of the Mobile County Commission revealed dual plans for a proposed soccer complexes March 20, with Commissioner Jerry Carl proposing a \$5.5 million, 10-field facility in Irvington and Commission President Connie Hudson initially proposing a \$12.1 million, 10 to

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Photo courtesy of Mobile County Commission

Commissioner Connie Hudson's proposed soccer complex.

12 field facility with hiking and running trails near the intersection of Interstates 10 and 65.

In April, Commissioner Merceria Ludgood joined Hudson to approve an \$18,000 master plan on the property while in May, the two, without the endorsement of Carl, exercised an option to purchase the \$2.9 million property.

On Oct. 8, Hudson attached a \$40 million price tag to her total proposal, which built in phases, would eventually include a water park and a 25,000-square-foot building for an indoor pool. At the same time, Hudson and Ludgood also submitted an application to the state's RESTORE Act council to fund the project with the state's share of civil penalties resulting from BP's Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

In November, the \$18,000 study was complete, indicating the first phase of the project's development would cost more than \$20 million.

April 16 - Mobile Housing Board receives 'substandard' designation; \$750 million plan revealed: As the Mobile Housing Board received a failing score on the federal Public Housing Assessment System (PHAS), the board also revealed what was then a \$439 million plan to redevelop three of its communities for mixed-income families and commercial development. By November 2014, the costs had soared to \$750 million and included a plan to use three separate developers for the project, which will displace thousands of existing residents to eventually construct a mixed-use, mixed-income community consisting of 3,000 to 4,000 housing units and commercial retail facilities on the 330 acres where R.V. Taylor Plaza, Thomas James Place and the Frank W. Boykin tower currently sit.

April 17 — Jockisch convicted of attempted child sex charges: A jury found former Mobile County Commissioner Freeman Jockisch guilty of attempting to lure a child for unlawful sex in federal court. After a day-long trial, the jury spent close to three hours

deliberating. On July 15, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison and ordered to register as a sex offender. His case is currently on appeal.

May 6 — Court order closes store after spice sale: Mobile police took aggressive tactics against spice, or synthetic marijuana, this year, after a spike in related visits to local emergency rooms. In addition to multiple seizures and arrests, the MPD also successfully sought and obtained court orders to close businesses or condemn properties where spice was sold.

May 14 — Residency of Prichard council president in question: Mobile County District Attorney Ashley Rich filed a complaint against Earline Martin-Harris, alleging the Prichard City Council president actually lived in Daphne. The three-page document alleged Martin-Harris had a home in Daphne, worked in Daphne, sent her kids to public school in Daphne and did her routine shopping in Daphne. Martin-Harris resigned shortly after and unsuccessfully fought a petition to be stripped of her Mobile County voting rights. She still faces criminal charges of perjury related to case.

May 14 — Same sex couple prepared to take adoption case to Supreme Court: Cari Searcy and Kimberly McKeand, who were married in California but reside Mobile County, named Gov. Robert Bentley, Attorney General Luther Strange and others in a 2014 complaint seeking an injunction allowing Searcy to legally adopt McKeand's son. McKeand gave birth to her son in 2005, and she and Searcy have raised the 9-year-old as equal parents. Bentley was later dismissed, but Strange remains a key defendant in a case both parties are prepared to appeal no matter what decision U.S. Magistrate Judge Katherine Nelson recommends.

June 11 — Questions raised as to whether a Western artist's works, among others, were copied by a local: A June 11 Lagniappe cover story explored complaints against heralded local watercolor artist William C. Morris, who was suspected of copying the works of West Coast artists and attempting to pass it off as original.

June 17 — Dispute over License Commissioner's newsletter 'resolved': Mobile County Revenue Commissioner Marilyn Wood wrote an email to License Commissioner Kim Hastie complaining that Hastie's recent newsletter was "misleading" and "took shots" at Wood, as Hastie led a PR campaign for legislation to consolidate the offices. As Hastie took a step back from the newsletter, Wood later said the issue was "resolved," but Hastie was indicted over the campaign in November.



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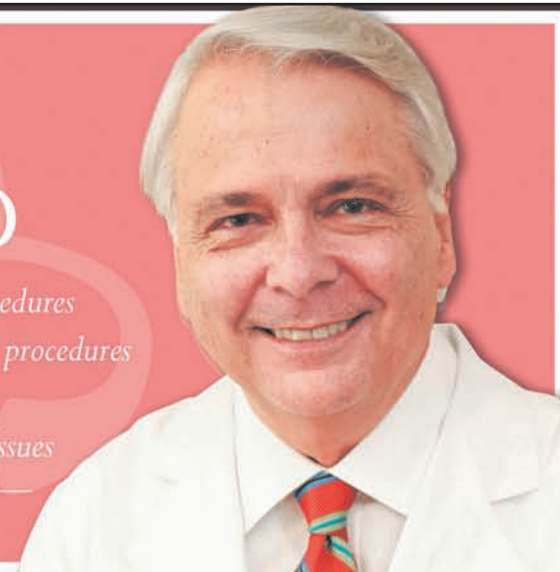
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Cover Story Continued

June 30 — City reaches agreement with ADEM, includes \$135,000 fine: The city of Mobile reached a settlement agreement with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management over violations of the Alabama Water Pollution Control Act. As part of the agreement, the city admitted no fault, but agreed to pay \$135,000 in fines to ADEM, to purchase at least one litter boat in 2015 and to replace its 2012 stormwater management plan with a new plan implemented by September, according to the settlement filed in Mobile County Circuit Court.

July 3 – Prichard police chief resigns for New Jersey job: Prichard Mayor Troy Ephriam was surprised to learn through the media that the city’s Police Chief Jerry Speziale had taken a new job in his native New Jersey, effectively resigning his post. Speziale also cited his wife’s death as a reason for his departure after only nine months on the job. Prichard native and former Bay Minette Chief of Police Michael Rowland was announced to replace Speziale on an interim basis. On Nov. 9, less than a week after accepting Rowland’s resignation, the city of Prichard named Bernard Parish as its new chief of police.

July 9 — Council travel records boomerang around the globe: A snapshot of years-old travel records for the Mobile City Council confirms the long-rumored suspicion that District 1 Councilman Fred Richardson is the most routine traveler of the group, taking an average of four-and-a-half trips per year on the city’s behalf. At the time, Richardson had been on a total of 83 trips approved by the City Council since he was first elected in 1997. On 16 trips he took between 2005-2008 for which Lagniappe was provided expenditures records, he spent an average of \$1,744.86 per trip, for a total of \$27,917.77 in the three-year period.

July 9 — New public safety director to decide fate of fire chief: The appointment of Richard Landolt as executive director of public safety opened speculation about Interim Fire Chief Randy Smith’s appointment, but the administration initially said Landolt would advise Mayor Sandy Stimpson on the right time to bring Smith up for confirmation. In September, Stimpson would rescind Smith’s nomination while Landolt proposed the closure of three fire stations. The department remains without a permanent chief today.

July 11 — GulfQuest issued certificate of occupancy: The GulfQuest National Maritime Museum received its official Certificate of Occupancy after taxpayer investment exceeding \$45 million and delays exceeding 24 months. Previously, GulfQuest Director Tony Zodrow suggested the opening date of the national maritime museum was dependent on the certificate, saying a soft opening may occur as soon as six months after its receipt. Since, the opening has been extended to at least March 2015.

July 23 — Constable charged with murder: A Mobile County constable faces a murder charge after allegedly shooting a man in the head outside a local bar just after midnight July 20. Spanish Fort Police said Mobile County Constable Larry Sheffield, 68, and Jeffrey McMillan, 53, got into an argument inside Traders bar on the causeway. According to Spanish Fort Police Chief David Edgar, the confrontation began inside the establishment and carried on outside, where Sheffield shot McMillan in the parking lot. McMillan was dead when police arrived on the scene.

July 28 — Costco opening scheduled for 2015, officials say: With shovels in their hands and smiles on their faces, local officials broke ground on a huge new retail development near Hank Aaron Stadium. The ceremonial movement of dirt meant the McGowin Park project

was officially underway. Jeff Smith, president of real estate and development firm Hutton thanked the city and county for their support. McGowin Park will be a 600,000-square-foot complex, anchored by Costco, but also including Dick’s Sporting Goods, Field & Stream and Ross Dress



Photo courtesy of ALDOT

The proposed \$750 million bridge over the Mobile River.

for Less, among many others.

July 30 — With environmental study, a new momentum on I-10 bridge: After years of delays, plans for a new project to replace the congested George Wallace Tunnel on Interstate 10 with a soaring new bridge may finally be underway. Vince Calametti, Alabama Department of Transportation regional engineer, called the release of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Draft Environmental Impact Statement a “significant step” toward the construction of a bridge over the Mobile River. Later, the Coastal Alabama Partnership released a study indicating the \$750 million bridge could have a \$1.5 billion economic impact statewide. Proponents also believe the expedited route, which would eliminate the bottleneck at the Wallace Tunnel, will also have ancillary benefits for the regional economy and emergency evacuation.

Aug. 21 — 600 employees file grievance against county over insurance costs: A grievance addressing problems with new health insurance policies was filed with the Mobile County Commission on behalf of 600 employees. The majority of employee concerns dealt with the rising costs of prescription medicines, especially for retired employees of Mobile County.

Sept. 2 — MAWSS declines takeover of Prichard water system: Even though a countywide ballot initiative in July effectively approved the dissolution of the Prichard Water and Sewer System and the transfer of its assets to the Mobile Area Water and Sewer Service, MAWSS announced in September it would decline the takeover, citing a last-minute \$32 million management contract approved by the Prichard board that MAWSS would not be able to terminate. The vote resulted from ongoing complaints of high rates and poor service in Prichard.

Sept. 24 — Orange Beach voters defeat school split referendum: Orange Beach voters responded with a resounding “no” to a 5-mill ad valorem tax increase intended to fund a new city school system. Initial results for the ballot measure, which had a record turnout for a referendum in Orange Beach, showed a clear victory for those opposed to the city’s plan to create its own system with 1,842 residents voting against a new school system and only 928 supporting the new tax. On Nov. 19, the Baldwin County Public School System announced a large capital campaign for new schools in Orange Beach and elsewhere.

Oct. 8 — Mayor’s ethics inquiry prompts utility board resignations: In October, Bayou la Batre City Council members George Ramires and Kimberlyn Barbour opted to step down from their paid positions on the city’s utilities board due to an inquiry from Alabama Ethics

Commission. It was confirmed a week later that the Ethics Commission had been notified by the office of Mayor Brett Dungan, who said he was “required by state law” to notify the commission once he was made aware the pair had voted for themselves to placed on the paid utilities board in 2012.

Oct. 14 — Former County Commissioner Stephen Nodine freed from jail: Controversial public figure, convicted felon and former Mobile County Commissioner Stephen Nodine was released from prison after serving a two-year sentence. Nodine who was charged and went to trial for the murder of his longtime mistress Angel Downs — which resulted in a mistrial after a jury couldn’t reach a unanimous decision. After pleading on lesser charges, Nodine went to jail on perjury, ethics violations and harassment. Nodine will be on probation for another 34 months.

Oct. 17 — Museum board members resign amid legal dispute with city: After more than of a month of turmoil between members of the History Museum of Mobile and the Mobile City Council, three members of museum’s Board of Directors resigned in protest. David Smithweck, Wayne Sirmon and Lisa Young each resigned after a majority of the board voted to hire an attorney to fight the city for financial information and for the waving of the facility’s admission fee. Earlier, the city cautioned the museum board against “meddling” with personnel after it was discovered the board 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. 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.

Oct. 21 — Speaker of the Alabama House of Representative Mike Hubbard indicted: After months of speculations and leaked details from a Lee County grand jury, the indictment of State Rep. Mike Hubbard of Auburn sent political shockwaves throughout the state. The 23-count indictment alleged Hubbard used his positions as the chairman of the Alabama Republican Party and as speaker of the House for personal gain. He was reelected in November, has pleaded not guilty and has vowed to fight the charges.

Oct. 23 — Lawsuit filed against state’s hotel and convention center project: After Gov. Robert Bentley gave the final approval to move forward with the \$58.5 million hotel and convention center project at Gulf State Park in Baldwin County, an environmental group filed a lawsuit in federal court to halt further progress. The Gulf Restoration Network filed the suit because the state was pledging more than half of the initial Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) funds it gained in response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill toward the project.

Nov. 5 — Friends remember NOW founder Noble Beasley as ‘courageous leader’: One of Mobile’s civil rights icons and co-founder of Neighborhood Organized Workers, Noble Beasley passed away from an apparent heart attack Oct. 26. Community leaders City Councilman Fred Richardson and Mobile County school board member Robert Battles weighed in on his legacy in the port city, which included a conviction for drug trafficking.

Nov. 19 — Baldwin schools seek tax increase for capital plan: Baldwin County school officials presented a \$350 million plan to construct several new schools in the public school system, pushing for an 8-mill increase in ad valorem tax. A countywide referendum on

the plan is likely to be seen on ballots in March. Officials said the \$28.6 million in additional annual revenue from the proposed increase would stay in Baldwin County and be used solely for building and maintaining facilities to accommodate the rapidly increasing number of students in its school system, which has seen a 25 percent increase in 10 years, representing about 6,158 new students.

Nov. 26 — Hastie indicted on corruption charges: Mobile County License Commissioner Kim Hastie was indicted by a federal grand jury Nov. 26 on 16 counts of public corruption,



Photo courtesy of Mobile County

Mobile County License Commissioner Kim Hastie.

including charges of conspiracy, extortion and wire fraud. Deputy Commissioner Ramona Yeager was also named in the indictment. The charges stemmed from Hastie’s year-long lobbying and public relations campaign to merge the offices of the license and revenue commissioner.

In doing so, the indictment alleged, Hastie buried expenses for the effort — which would have resulted in her promotion and pay raise — in professional contracts with Victor Crawford, a software consultant.

In July, Lagniappe reported Hastie’s office had been raided by the FBI after she could not account for expenses related to the merger campaign. The indictment later alleged a shakedown scheme, where Crawford and certain License Commission employees were intimidated with threats of retaliation. The indictment alleges Hastie ordered Crawford to pay for public relations expenses related to the campaign, as well as TVs and electronic notebooks as gifts for her office Christmas party, or possibly lose his lucrative software contract.

The felony charges come with sentencing guidelines of up to 85 years in jail and \$1.25 million in fines for Hastie and 60 years and \$750,000 in fines for Yeager, but attorneys for both parties have disputed the charges and on Dec. 10 entered a plea of not guilty. Jury selection is tentatively scheduled for February 2015.

A separate claim filed by two citizens in September alleged employees of the License Commission, at the direction of Hastie, provided the Sandy Stimpson campaign with personal information of 30,000 Mobile County residents. Hastie publicly endorsed Stimpson in 2013.

Dec. 17 — State council agrees to economic focus for first RESTORE Act projects: After two years of planning, the money allocated through the RESTORE Act got closer to coming to fruition mid December. However, some in environmental community were shocked when the council — mostly consisting of local mayors and commissioners — chose to almost exclusively set aside the first \$56 million for economic development projects. Council members said the decision was reached after considering the “economic restrictions” on future monies expected to flow into the state from the BP settlement.

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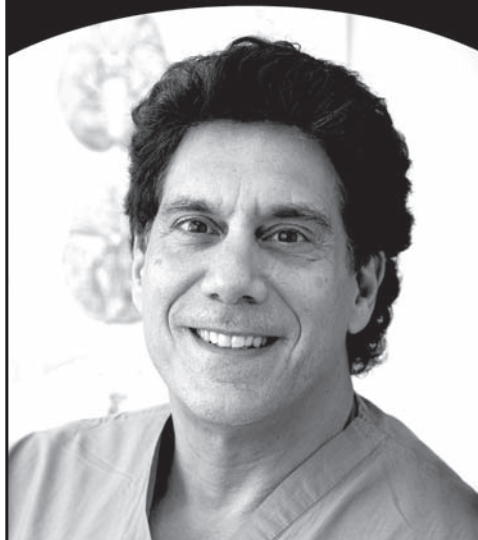
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Mobile arts folk talk to Santa

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



Artifice posed the following question to various arts/cultural denizens: If you could ask an omnipotent being with a white beard and red suit for one granted wish for Mobile's arts community in 2015, what would it be?

The most obvious answer of straight cash was off the table. Here are their replies:

Bob Burnett, executive director of the Mobile Arts Council

"So much of what we have in our community is taken for granted, from artists on the streets to garage bands and slam poets, from museum collections to what is on our walls at home, from church choirs to temple cantors, high school bands and second-line brass bands to classical musicians and opera singers.

Our community needs to take stock and invest in Mobile's quality of life. If the people of our great city recognize the treasure trove of cultural riches, then none of our cultural organizations would be struggling for survival. Financial contributions are certainly important, but we also need participants, behind the scenes and in the spotlights. We need collectors and patrons. We need more creative people to help push each other to become the best that they can be."

Deborah Velders, executive director of Mobile Museum of Art

"The creation of a public art advisory commission comprised of qualified, experienced visual art professionals in the field to go along with bold initiatives supporting art and culture programs and projects in Mobile. I would like to see more support for challenging contemporary art (and artists!) — visual, music, theater, film, dance, literature — all the arts. That would have to include more of the sense of humor, mischief and irreverence Mobile is known for — applied to the arts!"

Scott Wright, general director of Mobile Opera

"For Christmas I wish Santa would bring Mobile Opera the magic words and the delivery platform to convince the public (as well as the private) sector of the importance of the arts in the educational, cultural, and even the financial health of our

community. It is a vision we are losing. If we could regain it, I believe the appreciation and support we all need would follow quite easily. The arts make our little town a great city."

"That and a Red Rider BB Gun with a compass in the stock and this thing which tells time."

L. Craig Roberts, architect, author and historic preservationist

"My wish is that all public high schools should have required art appreciation classes which would emphasize, painting, sculpture, architecture as well as all aspects of the art and design of Mardi Gras."

Lucy Gafford, artist, instructor for the ChARTing New Directions program

"This Christmas, I wish for enthusiastic participation and support for the arts in the community (from the creative community and the 'normies'). Help beautify your surrounding area in your spare time, go see local artists' work, encourage new and interesting ideas. Work where your passion lies, and figure out a way to spread happiness through it. Money is always nice, and many of us are 'starving,' but regardless of the profit, I want us to work together this coming year and complete some large scale projects that really rock Mobile."

Danielle Juzan, author, columnist, actress and playwright

"Well, theater is very much on my mind right now, so I'll ask Santa for live theater downtown, whether that be intimate pop-up events in an empty storefront or something more ambitious in a dedicated space."

Tom Perez, author, playwright and founder of South of the Salt Line

"In my stocking I'd like Santa to leave 10,000 new residents to Mobile from more active art scenes such as Houston, Atlanta, and Charleston, businessmen/women and entrepreneurs who realize the arts cost money to produce, who are willing to pay top dollar for quality arts, who volunteer to support the arts, who teach our current populace that when a German automaker is

looking for an American city to build their new assembly plant, they don't give a damn who won the last Iron Bowl or which debutante is presented at the Camellia Ball as the next Queen of Mardi Gras."

Gideon C. Kennedy, filmmaker, head programmer for South Alabama Film Festival

"While the list is long for improvements in the arts in Mobile, I'm happy to say that most of what we don't have immediately I see us working toward. Namely, better connection and support between organizations, less cliquishness, more venues, etc.

"The biggest thing I could ask for would be advertising, marketing and PR support across the board. Many artists and organizations here are making great works and putting on great events but the true shame is that too often the final push, getting the word out about that event or taking that artwork to market seems to get the least attention.

"Also a non-profit ad council, run by local experts in the field and used as a school-credited training ground for those pertinent departments at our local universities. This would then be made available to eligible organizations, venues, artists, etc. to help yell it from the rooftops and gather the crowds that would come out, if they only knew."

Celia Mann Baehr, CEO of Mobile Symphony

"My wish would be for everyone to recognize the value of teaching music to children beginning in Pre-K. The U.S falls further behind the rest of the world in academic achievement each year. More music instruction — in some cases any music — would help solve many of the problems that schools currently spend large sums of money trying to remedy. It would be wonderful if everyone recognized that learning music boosts academic performance, helps children with learning disabilities and improves school attendance. The study of music involves processing sound, which is the key to language, reading and focus in the classroom."



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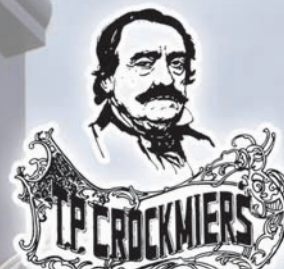


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Holiday plans to relieve the visitation blues

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

It's been said "having company" and fish both grow malodorous after a couple of days, but that doesn't have to be the case. Just like you can throw fish in the freezer, you can keep visiting kin and friends chilled out by taking them on field trips of the area. Show off your hometown.

Long-term exhibits to which we've grown accustomed in our daily lives can provide assistance for weary hosts. Shows we've long since forgotten about are fresh and exciting to visitors.

The History Museum of Mobile, 111 S. Royal St., is a facility of which we should all be proud and right now the entrance fee is perfect: zero. Their "Ark of India" exhibit is something you would never expect to find in the Azalea City, a spellbinding trip to another world on the second floor of the old City Hall and marketplace. The History Museum of Mobile also runs Fort Conde, located diagonally across the intersection of Church and Royal. They are also in charge of the Phoenix Fire Museum near the Mobile Civic Center.

The museum is closed on Mondays but open the rest of the week. Fort Conde is open seven days a week. The fire museum is open Tuesday and Thursday only.

On the same block as the history museum, the Gulf Coast Exploration science center, 65 Government St., is still featuring their IMAX presentation of "Jerusalem," something that dovetails nicely with the religious tinge of the holiday season. Though closed on Mondays, they are open the rest of the week.

The Centre for the Living Arts at 301 Conti St., still has their PRE-GLO show up, featuring Los Angeles artist Mario Ybarra's "Barrio

Aesthetics" in gigantic scale. Combined with Tom Leaser's video presentation and Xavier de Richemont's world-class vision for the U.S.S. Alabama, it could be perfect for those guests who might like their art on the contemporary side. The facility has limited hours through the week so call 251-208-5671 for more info.

Drop into the Mobile Arts Council offices which double as one of the town's most accessible galleries. Say "hi" to Bob, Charlie and Hillary; tell them Klee sent you. They are open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The variety of other galleries and shops downtown are a good place to spend a gorgeous December afternoon. On Dauphin Street alone there's Bienville Books across from Bienville Square, Artology across from Cathedral Square and Cathedral Square Gallery across from no square at all. Elsewhere on Dauphin, Urban Emporium and Gallery 450 have unique combinations of experience thanks to their innovative approach to storefront presence. Then head over to St. Louis Street to meander into Koch Gallery, Innova Arts and Portal Studio.

The Carnival Museum at 355 Government St. is conveniently located near the aforementioned institutions but if you want to show your guests a new twist on pre-Lenten happenings, head to the Mobile Museum of Art at 4850 Museum Drive in Langan Park. Their show on the artistic craftsmanship behind the three-week spectacle can open up a whole new realm of appreciation.

MMoA is open Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Hours are extended until 9 p.m. on Thursdays and free all day. Call 251-208-5200 for more info on entrance fees.

Music Sacra proceeds to Epiphany

For 27 years now, Musica Sacra has marked the holiday season with their annual Epiphany Procession with Lessons and Carols. Under music director and conductor Christopher Uhl, the group is preparing for a pair of the sacred traditions just after the entrance of 2015.

Varied readings from Biblical Creation to the birth of Christ will be followed by carols accompanying the text. Led by cross and candles, the chorus is divided into two choirs who travel to various "stations" around the church, singing carols from the front, from the back, and from the side aisles antiphonally across the church. They will be accompanied by organist Jeff Clearman.

The Feast of the Epiphany — also known as the Twelfth Day of Christmas or Three King's Day — is one of the oldest Christian feasts.

Celebrated Jan. 6, the Feast of the Epiphany is also the legendary arrival date of the Three Kings to Bethlehem.

The described epiphany procession is a symbolic representation of two journeys: a journey in time from the fall of man to the coming of a messiah, and a geographic journey of the visiting Wise Men.

The first performance is Jan. 3, 7 p.m. at St. Margaret of Scotland Catholic Church, 601 W. Laurel Ave. in Foley.

The second is Jan. 4, 4:30 p.m. at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (2 S. Claiborne St.) in downtown Mobile. Donations are welcome at the door.

Musica Sacra asks fans to visit their Facebook page. For more info, contact their president, Sally McKenna, at 251-610-1931 or ssmckenna@msn.com.

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Evelyn King, The Village People promise over-the-top MoonPie drop

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

Band: MoonPie Over Mobile 2014

Date: Wednesday, Dec. 31, 7 p.m.

Venue: Downtown Mobile

Tickets: Free

On New Year's Eve, people around the world hold epic celebrations to welcome the coming year. The revelers of the Azalea City are no exception. In fact, the MoonPie Over Mobile has become one of the city's biggest celebrations. A multitude of locals and tourists alike flood the streets of downtown Mobile to watch as the city's patron pastry descends into 2015. As with all celebrations in this fair city, music is a very important factor.

The event requires the perfect lineup to keep the celebratory vibes going steady into the midnight hour. For this year's MoonPie Over Mobile, organizers have recruited two headliners from the days of disco. Those in attendance will be able to boogie into 2015 with the soulful '70s grooves of Evelyn "Champagne" King and the disco sounds of The Village People.

Modern times have allowed labels and the public to discover bands through social media and audio or video websites like SoundCloud and YouTube. Many have forgotten how musical acts were discovered in the past. With this in mind, stories such as the discovery of Evelyn "Champagne" King could be considered one of the classic legends of modern music history.

The Philadelphia native began singing in vocal bands at the age of 14. Meanwhile, her mother worked as a receptionist/janitorial worker (with help from her older sister) at Philadelphia International Records alongside her father, who worked maintenance. One day, King's sister took ill, and she went with her mother to assist at her work.

"I started cleaning," King explained. "I cleaned the men's room. I came out of the men's room and started vacuuming. I just started singing. Nobody was supposed to be there, according to my mom. She said, 'You just get in, do our thing, and get out.' I was singing 'Change Is Going to Come' by Sam Cooke. T Life (Theodore Life), the producer that discovered me, he came out of one of the rooms while I was cleaning. He asked, 'Was that you singing?'"

At first, her initial reaction was to deny that she was singing. After Life went around the office and found she was the only one there besides her mother, he knew that King was the origin of the beautiful sound he had heard. He approached King and promised her that one day he would make her a star. Life took King to meet with songwriters John H. Fitch, Jr. and Reuben Cross.

The song she sang was her 1978 super hit "Shame." Her teenage years were filled with touring and performing alongside bands such as Sun, Parliament Funkadelic, The Bar-Kays and Teddy Pendergrass. As with most young artists, the road did not come without complication, but her passion for her singing trumped any desire to quit.

"Honestly, for me, being in the business so early and so young was very tough," King said. "I was young. I was only 15 when I started traveling on the road. You're out there with giants with



Photo/Evelyn Champagne King/Facebook

It'd be a "shame" to miss Evelyn "Champagne" King's New Year's Eve performance downtown.

other artists who have been on the map. I was out there all the time on the road. I travelled six months out of the year."

King has continued to have an extremely productive career filled with touring in support of 11 albums, and penning such memorable tracks as "Shame," "Love Come Down" and "I'm in Love." King also made her presence known in the modern dance scene with the 2011 track "Everybody," which was produced by deep house producer Miguel Migs.

"Miguel is such a cool guy," King said. "When I was introduced to Miguel, he knows what he wants, and he knows what the artists can bring. We wrote together, and it felt like I was reborn in the dance market."

The Azalea City is full of Evelyn King fans, and she is thankful for each one of them. She guarantees that she will "give it her all" at the MoonPie Drop and leave locals knowing they had a good time

indulging in her R&B dance hits from the past and the present.

Before the strike of midnight, one of the most prolific groups of the disco era will take the stage to help usher in 2015 properly. The Village People's mark on music history can still be seen in modern music. Donning costumes ranging from a biker to a construction worker, this group has spawned hits such as "Macho Man," "Y.M.C.A." and "In the Navy." For members such as Eric Anzalone (the biker), the longevity of the band is partially due to the nature of the music.

"I think one of the main things is that our music isn't political, and it's not religious," Anzalone said. "We're not up there trying to make a statement. Our music is just about having a good time. It's fun. There's nothing negative about it. It's a party. Who doesn't want to have a good time?"

Anzalone replaced original biker Glenn Hughes almost 20 years ago. His entrance into the band seems almost by random chance. Before The Village People, Anzalone already had a successful career as a performer. After moving to New York, Anzalone was looking for a job in a band to fill in the time it took for him to find an agent and start his career in the Big Apple. He answered a classified ad in The Village Voice, which asked for a singer with a passport. Anzalone sent in his demo, promo shot and résumé. A couple of months later, he was touring with The Village People and loving every minute of it.

"After 20 years, it's part of my life," said Anzalone. "When you step out of the box and look at it, I think, 'Oh, my God! I'm the biker in The Village People.' It still makes me giggle. I think you might even get the same answer from some of the other guys in the group, including some of the original members."

The Village People entered the studio in 2013 with Harry Casey (KC and the Sunshine Band) to record "Let's Go Back to the Dance Floor." According to Anzalone, it was a great experience to get back in the studio and "get those creative juices flowing." He also explained that Casey was a natural choice to act as producer and songwriter for this project.

Anzalone calls Casey "the hookmeister," because of his talent with songwriting. The group has really enjoyed performing the new material for their audiences.

"We do try to keep it fresh and change the show from year to year," Anzalone said. "When you've been touring non-stop for almost 37 years and you get a chance to bring something new in, there's nothing better, especially if it's new. For us, it's a lot of fun. The song pumps, man."

Anzalone explained that they view their New Year's Eve performances as the "Super Bowl of concerts." Each New Year's Eve celebration is special for The Village People, and Anzalone said that the band feels honored to celebrate with the denizens of the Azalea City and promised to bring their "A-game" to the streets of downtown Mobile.

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

Band: LuLu's 10th annual Noon Year's Eve Celebration

Date: Wednesday, Dec. 31, 10 a.m.

Venue: LuLu's, 200 E. 25th Ave., Gulf Shores, www.lulubuffet.com

Tickets: Free

While many have plans to ring in 2015 in the streets of downtown Mobile, some may want to spend some time with the family before their champagne-fueled revelry at the MoonPie Drop. For the past 10 years, Lucy Buffett has provided her family friendly Noon Year's Eve Celebration that provides fun-filled activities and musical entertainment for both children and adults. One of the best parts about this celebration is the party is done way before bedtime. In fact, LuLu's will close at 4 p.m. for LuLu's employees to spend time with their own families.

The celebration begins at 10 a.m. The kid-centric event will feature face-painting, a plethora of games, a petting zoo, arts and crafts and a sandcastle contest. The event will reach its apex with a beach ball drop countdown to noon, which will be followed by a "kid-safe" fireworks display.

Kathleen Rees and Pelican 212 will be providing the soundtrack for Noon Year's Eve. Rees acts as the conductor of this family band, which features members ranging in age from 8 to 12. One of the more impressive aspects of this group is the talent of its young horn section. The crowd can expect party favorites ranging from "Soul Man" to "We Are Family."



Photo/youtube | Kathleen Rees and Pelican 212

Go with the Flow

Band: Flow Tribe

Date: Saturday, Dec. 27, 10 p.m.

Venue: Plow, 96 Plantation Pointe, Fairhope, 251-410-7569

Tickets: \$10 at the door

The Gulf Coast will be in a holiday limbo in the days between Christmas and New Year's Eve. In order to keep the party vibe going, Flow Tribe is traveling from NoLa to provide an evening of jams at one of the Eastern Shore's most popular watering holes. The six-piece group of talented Crescent City musicians has crafted a festive hybrid of genres and a matching stage show that has earned them a legion of dedicated fans.

The Plow crowd can expect to fall into a sonic spiral of funk, soul, zydeco and whatever else they feel like mingling into their set. Flow Tribe will be performing in support of their latest release, "Alligator White." The album is filled with irresistible brass-infused grooves. Flow Tribe also throws in some Latin flair on "Alligator White" with songs such as "Ooh Yea." The album concludes with the versatile "Won't Be Long," which Flow Tribe uses to stretch their rock muscles.



Photo/flowtribe.com | Flow Tribe

Annual Coltrane Christmas returns

Band: John Coltrane Christmas Party

Date: Sunday, Dec. 28, 9 p.m.

Venue: The Brickyard, 266 Dauphin St., 219-6488

Tickets: Call 219-6488 for more info

The denizens of the Azalea City fill their Christmas holidays with a seemingly endless list of traditions. Local musicians are no exception. The annual John Coltrane Christmas Party will bring together both local and regional musicians to pay tribute to one of the most iconic names in jazz. The free-flowing nature of Coltrane's music is perfect fodder for the six musicians featured at this show to tackle.

Chris Spies (keyboardist) and his son Christopher Spies (saxophone) will be representing Mobile at this holiday party. With numerous musical endeavors, this pair maintains a busy schedule both inside and outside the Azalea City. With a lengthy resume' that includes Highly Kind and The Church Basement Band, Kevin Scott will be pulling bass duties for the evening. Drummer Mark Raudabaugh of Donna the Buffalo will be stopping by for the evening. Randall Bramblett Band's Nick Johnson will bring his guitar into the mix. Finally, percussionist/vibraphonist Mike Dillon of Garage a Trois will round out this tribute band.



Photo/johncoltrane.com | John Coltrane



Tell 2014 to 'Peace Out' on the beach

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

New Year's Eve will bring a variety of celebrations to the Gulf Coast, especially at the beach. The Hangout in Gulf Shores has established a reputation for having one of the biggest New Year's Eve celebrations in the area. This year, The Hangout will usher in 2015 with a huge party, and they are inviting the public to "Peace Out" on the beach.

The party will start at 9 a.m. with those in attendance receiving party favors as they enter. Then, the musical entertainment will ensue with three local favorites taking the stage. Kristy Lee & Dirt Road Revival will headline the evening. With her mix of soulful originals and captivating stage presence, Lee will have no problem getting the crowd ready for the midnight countdown.

The Mulligan Brothers will be lending support. Their dedicated fan base has been spinning the band's sophomore effort, "Via Portland," and they will be performing cuts off of the album as well as their self-titled debut. The crowd will also be entertained with sounds from Down Under. Finally, Hussy Hicks is returning to help ring in the New Year.

At midnight, there will be a champagne toast and a balloon drop, which will give the audience a chance to win two general admission tickets to Hangout

Fest 2015. When the early morning munchies appear, The Hangout will provide a late-night breakfast buffet for all in attendance.

Tickets are on sale now at The Hangout. Advanced general admission tickets are \$35 and VIP tickets are \$50.

Transitions

Mobile is mourning the loss of two well-loved local musicians. Drummer Brock Ralph Barackman was taken from the music scene on Sunday, Dec. 14. He was 47. From high school to the time of his death, Barackman remained a prominent figure in the Mobile music scene. Many enjoyed his beats and rhythms with bands such as Johnny Barbato & the Lucky Doggs, Velvet Jones, Cynthia Drives and The Jay Williams Band. Barackman's family is asking that instead of flowers, friends should make donations to the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation in his name.

Mobile also lost guitarist/bassist/singer-songwriter Christopher Edward Browning on Monday, Dec. 14. He was 50. Browning was a founding member of one of the Azalea City's legendary punk outfits The Hormones. In addition to his time in The Hormones, Browning was also an active member of the band Buffalo Roam.



Photo/kristyleemusic.com

Kristy Lee and Dirt Road Revival will headline New Year's Eve on the beach at The Hangout.

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**DEC 28:
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DECEMBER 25 - DECEMBER 31

THUR. DEC 25

Beau Rivage— Santa & Friends, 7p
Brickyard— Ross Newell & Josh Ewing
Dahlia's Electric Piano Hall— Scott Morlock, Gene Murrell & David White
Flora Bama— Big Muddy, 8p// Smokin' Elvis', 10p
McSharry's— Fobes 4 Some, 7:30p
Traders— The Lizards, 7p
Veets— Veet's Chistmas Party, 5p

FRI. DEC 26

Beau Rivage— Santa & Friends, 7p
BLUEGILL— Dale Drinkard Jr., 11a// Les Hall, 6p
Blues Tavern— Ric McNaughton, 9p
Brickyard— Charlie Muncaster
Cockeyed Charlie's— MT Pockets
Compleat Angler (The Wharf)—
Cowboys & Angels—
Dahlia's Electric Piano Hall— Scott Morlock, Tony Edwards & David White
Fairhope Brewing Co. — Grayson Capps and Friends, 7p
Felix's— Rebecca & Britt
Flora Bama— Jack Robertson, 5:30p// Hung Jury, 10p
Legacy— Eric Erdman and Ross Newell, 6p// Peek, 9p

Lulu's— Adam Holt, 4p
McSharry's— DJ Demps, 10p
Moe's BBQ (Mobile)— Tim Kinsey, 6:30p
Moe's BBQ (Daphne)— Big Muddy, 8p
Montwgos— Bryant Gilley, 6p
Old 27 Grill— Gretsch Lyles & The Modern Eldorado's, 6:30p
Tropics— Thee Groove, 7p
Soul Kitchen— EMCEE 2 FACE// TWIST UP ENT // D JUDGE // ILA, 10:30p
Veets— The Family Jewels, 9p
Windmill Market— Kyle and Karl, 6p

SAT. DEC 27

Beau Rivage— Santa & Friends, 7p
BLUEGILL— Ben Leininger & Josh Ewing, 6p
Blues Tavern— Fortunate Few, 9p
Callaghans - Eric Erdman
Dahlia's Electric Piano Hall— Scott Morlock, Tony Edwards & David White
Felix's— Soulshine
Flora Bama— Jack Robertson, 5:30p// Cat Rhoades & The Truth, 10p
Fusion Sushi Bar— Bryant Gilley, 7p
Lulu's— CoolRayz, 4p
McSharry's— DJ Demps, 10p
Moe's BBQ (Daphne)— Adam Holt Duo, 7p
Top of the Bay— Grand Theft

Audio
Tropics— Robbie Seller and Emily Stuckey, 7p
Veets— The Family Jewels, 9p

SUN. DEC 28

Beau Rivage— Santa & Friends, 7p
BLUEGILL— Dale Drimkard Jr., 11a// Songwriter Night
Blues Tavern— Art & Lou, 5p
Brickyard— John Coltrane Christmas
Butch Cassidy's— Trivia, 6p
Callaghans - Grayson Capps
Felix's— Brandon Bailey
Lulu's— Greg Brown, 1p// Greg Brown, 5p
Old 27 Grill— Lisa Zanghi, 11:30a
Picklefish— Bordello Rhythm, 11:30a
Stir— Bryant Gilley, 9p
Veets— Micah Hare, Joe Dueitt & Buddy Diemert, 8o

MON. DEC 29

Brickyard— Matt & Sherry Neese
Felix's— Grant Dunaway
Flora Bama— Cathy Pace, 4p// Elaine Petty, 8p
Lucky's Irish Pub— Marcus, 8p
Lulu's— Brent Burns, 4p

TUE. DEC 30

BLUEGILL— Tim Kinsey, 6p
Brickyard— Justin Wall
Butch Cassidy's— Mike Eagan

Felix's— Bobby Butchka
Flora Bama— Cowboy Johnson, 3p// Perdido Brothers, 5p
Lulu's— Delta Reign Duo, 4p

WED. DEC 31

Beau Rivage— Molly Ringwalds
BLUEGILL— Ross + 1, 6p
Blues Tavern— 61-49, 8p
Brickyard— The Investments
Bucky's Birdcage (Grand Hotel) — Adam Holt Piano Show, 8p
Butch Cassidy's— Jerry Powell
Callaghan's— Deluxe Trio
Cockeyed Charlie's— DJ Chill
Felix's— Grits N Pieces
Flora Bama— New Years Eve Party: Brian Hill Band, 2p// Whyte Caps, 6p// Smokin' Elvis', 6:30p// Jack Robertson Show, 7p// Ben Bradford Band, 10p// Hung Jury, 10:30p// Hurricane Warning, 10:30p
Hangout— New Years Eve Party: Kristy Lee & Dirt Road Revival, The Mulligan Brothers and The hussy Hicks
Lulu's— New Years Eve Party: Kathleen Rees
McSharry's— New Years Eve Party, DJ Demps, 10p
Pirates Cove— Kelly Poole and the Swingsets, 8p// New Years Eve Party
Top of the Bay— 12 Sharp
Tropics— Halfway Show Band, 9p
Soul Kitchen— GlowRage, 9p
Veets— Veet's New Year Bash w/The Family Jewels & Special Guests, 9p

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grandcentralmobile.com
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Liquid

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Loda Bier Garten

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www.royalscammobile.com
72 S. Royal St. | 432-SCAM (7226)

Royal Street Tavern

26 N. Royal St. | 338-2000

Saenger Theatre

www.mobilesaenger.com
6 S. Joachim St. | 208-5600

Saddle Up Saloon

www.saddleupmobile.com

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www.veetsbarandgrill.com
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[MIDTOWN]

Ashland Midtown Pub

www.ashlandmidtownpub.com
2453 Old Shell Rd. | 479-3278

Blues Tavern

www.bluestavern.com
2818 Gov’t Blvd. | 479-7621

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www.buthcassidys.com
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28850 Bayline Dr. | 626-0158

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Gumbo Shack

www.guysgumbo.com
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McSharry’s [Fairhope]

www.mcsharrys.com
101N Brancroft St. | 990-5100

Moe’s Original BBQ [Daphne]

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[Daphne]
www.rosiesgrill.com
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www.windmillmarket.org
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3692 Airport Blvd. | 414-3000

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www.moes.com
280 McGregor Ave. S. | 342- 5233

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www.satori-coffee.com
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850-492-0611

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101 Gulf Ct. | 948-3030

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Pink Pony Pub [Gulf Shores]

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Pirate’s Cove [Elberta]

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[Gulf Shores]

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[Gulf Shores]

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www.handlebarpensacola.com

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The Wharf [Orange Beach]

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[AROUND AND ABOUT]

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Blue Gill Restaurant

www.bluegillrestaurant.com
3775 Battleship Pkwy. | 625-1998

Bottoms Up

2605 Halls Mill Rd. | 287-7781

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973-1120

Burnout’s Bar & Grill [Saraland]

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4901 Chicot St. | 228-938-6800

Ed’s Seafood Shed

www.edsshed.com
3382 Battleship Pkwy. | 625-1947

Felix’s Fish Camp

www.felixsfishcamp.com
1530 Battleship Pkwy. | 626-6710

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www.mscoastcoliseum.com
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[Mt. Vernon] 19170 Hwy 43.

829-9227The Oar House

[Dauphin Island]
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1102 DeSoto Ave. | 861-7180

Pelican Reef Restaurant

11799 Dauphin Island Pkwy.

| 973-2670

Tacky Jacks [Spanish Fort]

www.tackyjacks.com
1175 Battleship Pkwy. | 621-8988

Trader’s

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626-5630

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(under Dog River bridge)

443-7318

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Rd. 10 | 251-949-5086

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244 Old Telegraph Rd. | 679-1188

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Grand Casino [Biloxi]

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280 Beach Blvd.
228-436-2946

IP Casino Resort & Spa

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800-436-3000

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303 Poarch Rd., Atmore
866-946-3360

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Time-lapse gimmick doesn't mask lazy writing of 'Boyhood'

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

I hate to be negative with my superlatives but now that you've all seen it for yourselves, I can admit that I consider Richard Linklater's "Boyhood" to be the most overrated movie of the year. Beaming from every major end of the year best-of list, I feel I must disagree. It was far from the worst movie of the year, to be sure, but it was not the best either.

I'll admit that it was a cool idea to shoot the movie over a long period, but the innovation begins and ends with that concept. Take a moment and think about this movie, and admit to yourself that, if it weren't for the time-lapse gimmick, the story was pretty average. Search your feelings. You will know it to be true.

I don't have to go past the first scene to find an example. Star Ellar Coltrane sits in the backseat as his mom drives and they discuss his problems at school. She says that the teacher says he looks out of the window instead of paying attention. Said every mom of a special kid in every movie, ever. Can't they write something more specific for him to do? That's just lazy writing.

The slacker dad and the mom getting remarried to an abusive jerk so she can find some financial and moral support — a tried and true storyline that isn't enlivened or enlightened here. I just spent a few minutes Googling which awards Patricia Arquette was nominated for in her role as the mom of the boy in "Boyhood," and I realized what everyone is really talking about when they described her performance as realistic and brave. They're talking about her looks. She looks less than Hollywood svelte and honestly kind of mom-ish. And I suppose that is brave and somewhat revolutionary, even though it shouldn't be.



Photo/imdb.com | "Boyhood"

Richard Linklater's film "Boyhood" filmed actors over an 11-year period.

I must admit though that the casting of that kid was insanely lucky — how could he have known that Coltrane would grow up to look so much like Ethan Hawke? Like with Arquette, the physical facts of the characters were the film's innovation.

It's a "Boyhood" boy's club, and the film was so lopsided in the quality of its writing and representation of the parents. For every nice, naturalistic scene between Ethan Hawke and Ellar Coltrane, there was an equally cartoonish scene with Patricia Arquette. I love Richard

Linklater, but I would put his "Before Sunrise/Sunset/Midnight" trilogy ahead of "Boyhood" as an example of his ability to put real life onscreen.

My favorite film of the year, obviously, was "The Grand Budapest Hotel," which is the polar opposite of "Boyhood." Ornate, theatrical, meticulous, and totally unrealistic, the elaborate storyline gave Wes Anderson the perfect material for his dollhouse style. Ralph Fiennes was unforgettable as Gustave H. Now, if someone will just get me an actual Wes Anderson dollhouse.

NEW IN THEATERS



BIG EYES

Tim Burton's latest is stylistically related to his earlier works, because the subject matter, those now-campy Walter Keane paintings with of waifs huge eyes, certainly informs Burton's own visual signature. This is a biopic of the outrageous truth behind the paintings, which is that they were actually painted by Keane's wife, played by Amy Adams. The only other Burton film based on a true story was "Ed Wood," so this should be interesting. Carmike Wynnsong 16.

INTO THE WOODS

This is a film version of one of the most



Photos/ imdb.com

rightfully beloved Broadway musicals, at least of semi-recent history, but to make it PG by Disney will Bowdlerize at least one costume that I can think of off the top of my head. The cast is great, but why don't they sing in the previews? Can't wait to find out! Crescent Theater, Regal Mobile Stadium 18, Carmike Wynnsong 16, Carmike Jubilee Square 12, Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14, Cobb Pinnacle 14

"THE GAMBLER"

A literature professor (Mark Wahlberg) with a gambling problem runs afoul of gangsters. Regal Mobile Stadium 18, Eastern Shore premiere Cinema 14

NOW PLAYING



Photo/ imdb.com

"THE HOBBIT: THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE ARMIES"

All listed multiplex theaters.
"ANNIE"

All listed multiplex theaters.
"NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: SECRET OF THE TOMB"

All listed multiplex theaters.
"EXODUS: GODS AND KINGS"
All listed multiplex theaters.
"THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY, PART 1"

All listed multiplex theaters.
"PENGUINS OF MADAGASCAR"

All listed multiplex theaters.
"THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING"
All listed multiplex theaters.
"TOP FIVE"

All listed multiplex theaters.
"BIG HERO 6"

All listed multiplex theaters.

Information accurate at press time; please call theaters for showtimes.



AREA THEATERS

MOBILE COUNTY

CARMIKE CINEMAS

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785 Schillinger Road S.
251-639-7373

CRESCENT THEATER

208 Dauphin St.
251-438-2005

HOLLYWOOD STADIUM 18

1250 Satchel Paige Drive
251-473-9655

BALDWIN COUNTY

RAVE MOTION PICTURE JUBILEE SQUARE 12

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Daphne
251-626-6266

CARMIKE CINEMAS

23151 Wharf Lane
Orange Beach
251-981-4444

COBB THEATRES PINNACLE 14

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Gulf Shores
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MOONPIE OVER MOBILE

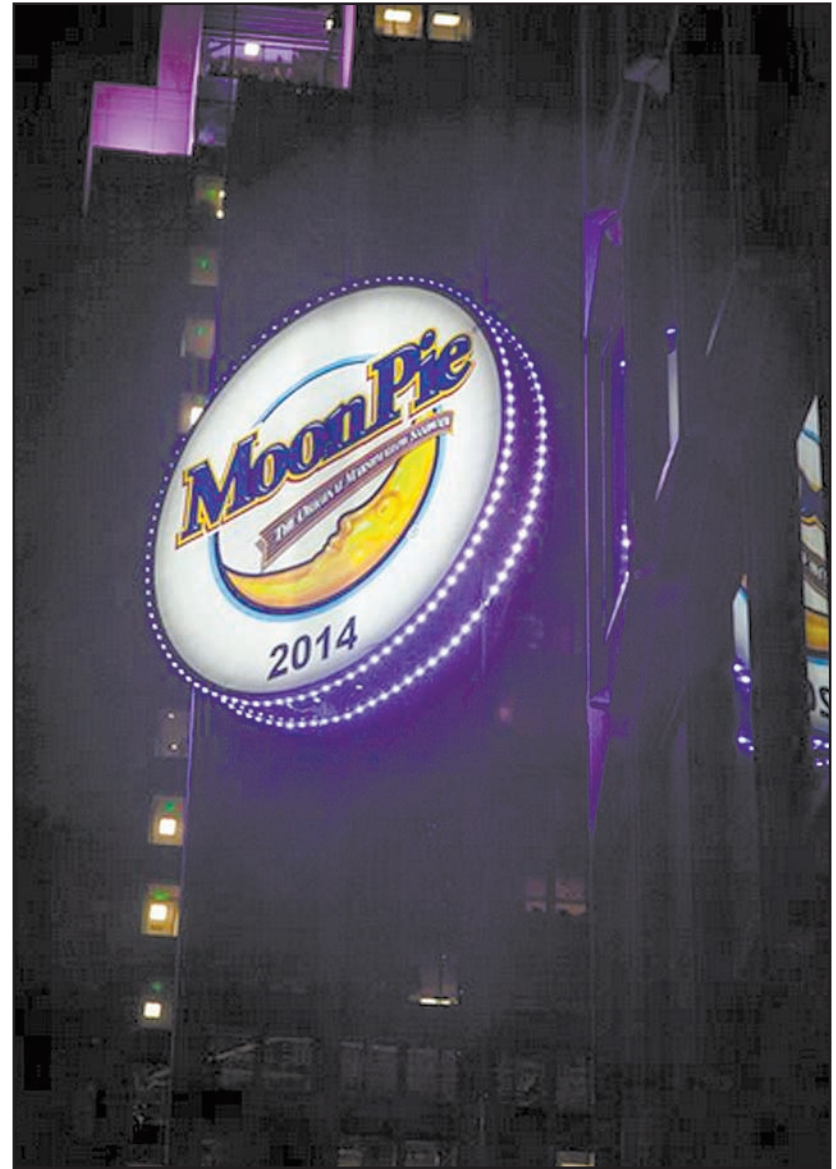
WHERE: DOWNTOWN MOBILE

WHEN: BEGINNING 7 P.M.

Celebrate the end of 2014 in downtown Mobile with a parade, fireworks, live music from The Village People and Evelyn “Champagne” King and of course, our infamous electric MoonPie drop. For more information visit mobilenewyear.com.



Photos/Moon Pie Over Mobile/Facebook



December 25

Christmas Nights of Lights

Through Jan. 3, hundreds of thousands of LED lights, driven by more than 1,000 computer channels, synchronized to both traditional and new rocking Christmas music playing through your car radio. Pack your vehicle full of friends and family to enjoy the show as you begin a new Christmas tradition. The fun doesn't stop after you drive thru the mile and a half Christmas show — afterward you can visit Santa's Village. Christmas Nights of Lights invites you to celebrate Christmas with us at Hank Aaron Stadium, 755 Bolling Brothers Blvd. The show is nightly at dusk until 10 p.m. Admission is \$6 per person.

Bragg Mitchell Holiday Decorations

Through Dec. 30, the Bragg Mitchell Mansion will be decorated with traditional holiday decorations. Tours available Tuesday through Friday, on-the-hour from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Adult admission is \$10 or \$7 for groups of 10 or more. Please call to arrange group tours. Visit www.braggmitchellmansion.com for more information.

December 26

HoLODay Art Extravaganza

Azalea Manor, Port City Media

Productions and Prime Suspect Productions have joined forces to present the one and only Azalea Manor HoLODay Art Extravaganza. We have invited some of this area's greatest talent to join us in celebrating and to introduce you to their wonderful work, from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. From paintings to projection mapping, music to metal works, only the limits of imagination will be left out this exhibition. If you are an artist, we are giving out a limited amount of space for artists to show and sell their work. There is no fee to participate, but reservations are required. Email dustin1183@yahoo.com to make your reservation. The Azalea Manor is located at 751 Dauphin St.

December 27

Make-It-To-The-Line run/walk

The Flora-Bama will host its 27th annual “Make-It-To-The-Line” 4.2-mile run/walk and 1-mile “fun run” at 10 a.m. Awards will be three deep in 13 age categories with male and female for both runners and walkers. Registration is \$25 through Friday and \$30 race day. It includes a long sleeve T-shirt for first 400 and plenty of healthy food, drink (including a couple of beers) with music on all three stages. Register online at active.com or pick up a registration form at the



Photo/florabama.com

Flora-Bama. A portion of the proceeds will benefit local volunteer fire departments.

Elements of Color, Style, and Technique

A new art exhibition currently showing at the University of South Alabama Marx Library. This collection of art features a variety of techniques and mediums including acrylics, hot wax painting, mosaics, and multimedia. The display

showcases the talent of local artists Tutta Greer Cone, Gordon House, Lynda McDonald, Shery Polansky and Linda HallTenhundfeld. The exhibit will be on display in the Mary Elizabeth and Charles Bernard Rodning Gallery of Art on the third floor of the Library through February 2015. For more information call 251-460-7021.

Magic Christmas in Lights

Visit Bellingrath Gardens and Home during its 19th season of Magic Christmas in Lights. Magic Christmas in Lights runs until Jan. 3 and is closed on Christmas and New Years Day. The gardens are open during Magic Christmas in Lights from 8 a.m. until 9 p.m., and the holiday lights are on from 5-9 p.m. each day. Home tours run every half hour until 8 p.m. throughout the season. Bellingrath Gardens and Home is located at 12401 Bellingrath Road, Theodore, Alabama. Call 251-973-2217 for more information.

December 28

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.

FAIRHOPE'S NEW YEAR'S EVE FAMILY CELEBRATION

WHERE: DOWNTOWN FAIRHOPE
WHEN: BEGINNING AT 8 P.M.
 The City of Fairhope host their annual New Year's Eve celebration in the streets of downtown Fairhope. Residents and visitors are invited to bring their families and ring in the New Year dancing to the band Fly-by-Radio. The band will begin playing at 8:30 p.m. at the corner of Section and Church streets. Other entertainment will include DJ Wade Wellborn, face painting, fireworks and a ball drop at midnight. Many downtown restaurants will be open for those who wish to eat in downtown and then just hangout until midnight. For more information on the Fairhope New Year's Eve Celebration, call 251-929-1466.



Photo/City of Fairhope Planning

December 29

Ark of India

"Ark of India: An Alabama Artist Explores Southern Asia" is an exhibit about personal discovery and exploration. It is an account of late 19th and early 20th century India as seen by Alabama artist Roderick D. MacKenzie, using his paintings, drawings, sculptures and most importantly, photographs and writings. The exhibition is organized by the History Museum of Mobile at 111 S. Royal St. and is on view until Sept. 1, 2015.



Photo/Official Village People/Facebook

December 30

Tea for Two

The Fairhope Museum of History will host "Tea for Two" at 2 p.m. The speaker will be Mildred Stephens of Ingersoll Dairy. Her parents founded one the first dairies in Baldwin County. Each Tuesday afternoon at 2 p.m., the Museum hosts a tea where guests enjoy a cup of delicious Baldwin County tea, cookies and a lecture on an interesting aspect of Fairhope history. These very popular afternoon events are sponsored by the Friends of the Museum group. For more information on the upcoming "Tea for Two" programs, call the Fairhope Museum of History at 929-1471.

BINGO

Join The Haberdasher at 451 Dauphin St. every Tuesday beginning at 9:30 p.m. for Bingo, with prizes every round and drink specials. Free to play. For more information call 251-287-1976.

December 31

MoonPie Over Mobile

Celebrate the end of 2014 in downtown Mobile with a parade, fireworks, live music from The Village People and Evelyn "Champagne" King and of course, our

infamous electric MoonPie drop. For more information visit mobilenewyear.com.

Inaugural Daphne Mayor's New Year's Eve Ball

Attendees will celebrate the first-ever Mayor's New Year's Eve Ball from 8:30 p.m. until 1 a.m. at the Daphne Civic Center, 2603 U.S. Highway 98. The Tip Tops will provide live music and entertainment. Tickets are \$100 per couple and include beer, wine and hors d'oeuvres. VIP tickets are available. Tickets can be purchased at Bryant Bank in Daphne, the Bounds Family YMCA, the Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce and online at themayorsball.info. Attire is black tie or dark suits for men and ladies may wear festive cocktail. For more information call 251-929-4870.

Fairhope's New Year's Eve Family Celebration

The City of Fairhope host their annual New Year's Eve celebration in the streets of downtown Fairhope. Residents and visitors are invited to bring their families and ring in the New Year dancing to the band Fly-by-Radio. The band will begin playing at 8:30 p.m. at the corner of Section and Church streets. Other

entertainment will include DJ Wade Wellborn, face painting, fireworks and a ball drop at midnight. Many downtown restaurants will be open for those who wish to eat in downtown and then just hangout until midnight. For more information on the Fairhope New Year's Eve Celebration, call 251-929-1466.

Flora-Bama New Year's Eve Party

The Flora-Bama, 17401 Perdido Key Drive, Perdido Key, Florida, really gets down on New Year's Eve. Blow it all out before making those pesky resolutions. Live music on all three stages will be rockin' until the party stops. Food, party favors and champagne flow all night help bring in the New Year the Flora-Bama way. You won't regret it. Party starts at 7



Photo/thehangout.com

p.m. For more information or tickets, visit the gift shop or www.florabama.com.

New Year's Eve Hangout Peace Out

John the Hangout as they ring in the New Year with Kristy Lee & Dirt Road Revival, The Mulligan Brothers and special guest The Hussy Hicks. There will also be a midnight buffet, champagne toast and balloon drop with a chance to win tickets

to the 2015 Hangout Music Fest. Tickets start at \$35 and can be purchased at thehangout.com. The Hangout is located at 101 E. Beach Blvd., Gulf Shores.

Live Bait

Don't miss the party of the year featuring the Buck Wild Band. Join Live Bait for a lavish dinner buffet and start the evening and New Year out on the right foot. The buffet also includes



Photo/lulubuffet.com

party favors and a champagne toast at midnight. Reservations for the buffet are recommended, make yours today by calling 251-974-1612. For more information visit livebaitrestaurant.com. Live Bait is located at 24281 Perdido Beach Blvd., Orange Beach.

LuLu's Noon Year's Eve

LuLu's annual Noon Year's Eve party is pure excitement around every corner. The delicious food, sandcastle building contest, arts and crafts, live music, zoo animals and face painting lead up to a countdown to noon as we celebrate with kid friendly fireworks and a huge beach ball drop. Party starts at 11 a.m. at 200 E. 25th Ave., Gulf Shores.

SEND YOUR EVENTS TO EVENTS@LAGNIAPPEMOBILE.COM

Finebaum making his way to Mobile again

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



The man deadspin.com once described as “The Biggest Little Man in the SEC” is making his way to FMTalk 106.5 at the beginning of the year.

FMTalk General Manager Sean Sullivan announced last week “The Paul Finebaum Show” would begin airing on his station Jan. 5. While Finebaum has been played in the Mobile market before it was in a truncated format. That won’t be the case this time.

“He’ll be running four hours, no cut,” Sullivan said.

In past interviews with Lagniappe Finebaum has expressed disappointment his show wasn’t running in its entirety in one of the state’s largest markets. It originates in Birmingham and has become very popular around the state and the Southeast. Finebaum also works with ESPN.

Though the new show is primarily sports-driven, Sullivan said this is not a departure for his station in terms of format, but simply expanding the palate of what’s being offered.

“This is putting my efforts into being as representative of the audience as we can be at every step,” he said. “This is a chance to add something. While he is syndicated, he is a regional product, and we’re excited to get his show on.”

Sullivan said Finebaum was interested in getting back into the Mobile market.

“Paul came to us early on. This is where Paul wants to be. It’s the biggest market in the state where his show wasn’t played, and we’re the biggest talk station in the market,” he said.

The addition of Finebaum will come with some other changes for devotees to FMTalk. Finebaum will run from 2 p.m. – 6 p.m. each day, followed by iTalkSEC, from 6-8. These changes will kill off “The Drive,” a local talk show hosted by Sullivan each weekday afternoon.

Sullivan says he is also moving back to co-hosting “Mobile

Mornings” with Wayne Gardner and hosting “Midday Mobile” around lunchtime.

Finebaum started his career as a reporter and columnist for the Birmingham Post-Herald. In addition to his radio career and TV work with ESPN, he also writes a column for Sports Illustrated. His radio show has affiliates across the Southeast.

Sexual healing?

One of the most active “posters” at al.com over the past several years is facing time in jail for making terroristic threats, but he believes some time with a sex surrogate will clear up the whole misunderstanding.

In a motion submitted to Mobile County Circuit Court last week, Chase Anderson Romagnano told Judge Robert Smith a \$25,000 session with a sexual surrogate would show that he did not make terroristic threats against Spring Hill College employees. An indictment against him was filed in 2013.

“The defendant is beyond embarrassed that (it) is going to come to this but the defendant believes that participating in such sessions and releasing the details of such sessions to the court would conclusively prove that the state has no case and that this whole endeavor has been a waste of this honorable court’s time,” the motion read.

He doesn’t explain how a sexual surrogate would prove his innocence. A sexual surrogate is typically a member of a therapy team and often engages in intimate physical contact or even sexual activity with the patient.

Romagnano was well known among al.com readers for his wide assortment of posts, as well as frequently complaining about how powerful individuals were keeping him from achieving his goals. He no longer posts under his own name.



Photo/Facebook

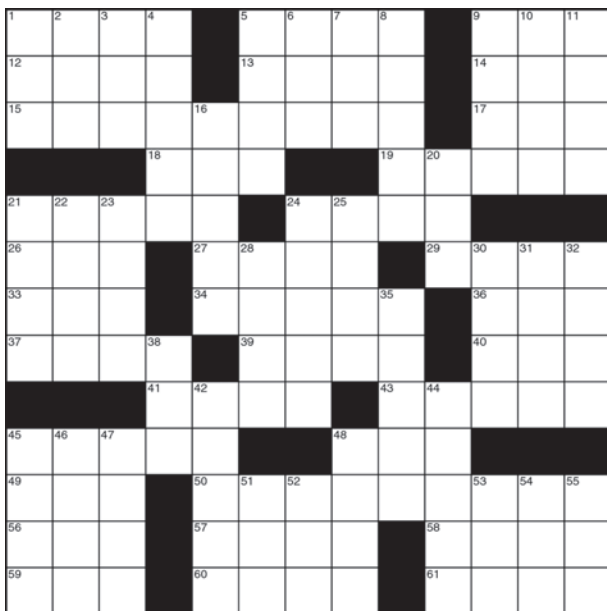
Paul Finebaum returns to Mobile market on FM Talk 106.5.



CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS

1. Some trophies
5. Slant
9. Hit in the ring
12. "Carmen" selection
13. Poor, as excuses go
14. Outback runner
15. Pulmonary problem
17. Child occupier
18. Collar, as a perp
19. Puts on the line
21. Staff of life
24. Unexciting
26. Salad topper
27. Miles off
29. Application blank
33. Classified material?
34. "The Pirates of Penzance" heroine
36. Smidgen
37. Prepared to drive, with "up"
39. Curious, plus
40. "No ____"
41. Grand Canyon-esque
43. Out of practice
45. "Peter and the Wolf" bird
48. Oregon ____
49. Haul
50. Impassively
56. Start and end of the Three Musketeers' motto
57. Has
58. In ____ of
59. Layer
60. Versifier
61. Kind of cell



4. Hot spot
5. Amorphous mass
6. First name in spy fiction
7. Who or where follower
8. Browns
9. Fleet components
10. Crazy
11. Acquires
16. Palindromic title
20. Charge carrier
21. Bridge site
22. Fair feature
23. In addition
24. Wooden shoe
25. Mining finds
28. Clappers
30. Mall conveniences
31. Spar
32. On pins and needles
35. Songlike
38. Deep vein thrombosis (abbr.)
42. Ancient fabulist
44. Asia/Europe divider
45. Hoo-ha
46. Downtime
47. Like a crone
48. Pugilist's weapon
51. Enough to tango
52. United
53. Turned on
54. Ang or Spike
55. Compliment to the chef

Answers on Page 49

THE LOADED QUESTION

WHAT IS THE BEST THING THAT HAPPENED TO YOU IN 2015?



"The birth of my daughter Olivia."

-Sarah



"Graduating from South in PR."

-Calyn Sutherland



"The success of the 'Yellow Day' premiere, even with the weather everyone had a great time."

-Jude Galle

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Special gifts for sports fans with empty stockings

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



Did you end up on the “naughty” list this year? The pickings a little slim under the tree? Well, that does not mean you do not deserve something nice this holiday season.

Being a sports fan, what better gift than some game tickets? Mobile has many athletic events from which to choose, including the upcoming GoDaddy Bowl and the Senior Bowl at Ladd-Peebles Stadium.

Down the road, we cannot forget about the Mobile BayBears, who have made the Southern League playoffs five straight seasons — including a pair of league championships. And there is also the LPGA tournament at Magnolia Grove golf course; that is if the issues putting it on the “tentative” schedule are resolved in time.

Glancing at the Internet turns up a plethora of great ideas. For the Who Dat Nation, there is the Saints Superfan Poker Deck from Big Easy Mafia. Pulling for the Saints has always been a gamble, just like this card game.

Auburn is offering a football fantasy camp next year for males, at least 21 years old, on May 1-2. The event is for “football gurus” to “Sunday morning quarterbacks” who are interested in spending two days with Coach Gus Malzahn and his staff for a weekend of fellowship and story-telling plus offensive and defensive meetings. Be ready to open the checkbook, though, as the event can cost up to \$3,700 when the hotel and golf packages are added.

All fans like to tailgate. Kraft Foods is offering Jell-O molds featuring numerous NCAA team logos. These can be perfect for the kids, or for those special “adult” Jell-O shots.

For the jewelry lover, the Uncommon Goods website is offering cufflinks made with University of Alabama football helmets that were used in games. The description said finishes may vary because of the age and uniqueness of each Crimson Tide headgear.

Do you like to get down and dirty? Or do you just like dirt? If you go to MLB.com, you can purchase dirt used at the 2014 All-Star Game at Target Field in Minneapolis. If you prefer another all-star game, you have your choice back to 2009. Also for baseball fans is a reproduction of the infamous “10-cent Beer Night” T-shirt that honors the 1974 drunken riot that erupted at Cleveland Municipal Stadium when the Indians played the Texas Rangers.

Other interesting items are the Garmin Edge 1000, the latest bike computer that offers mapping, directions and live tracking; the GoPro HERO4 Silver, the latest edition of the popular action camera that features an LCD touch screen; and the Sony Waterproof Walkman, which is certified to 2 meters in depth.

For the ladies, there are the Adidas Climacool Rocket Boost Shoes, which feature a midsole to add an unseasonable spring to your step and insulated uppers for the toes; and the Nike Elite Lightweight No-Show tab socks, which are sweat-wicking, friction-reducing, snugly fitting apparel. Especially good if your Christmas stocking won’t fit your foot.

The gift of giving

As Bob Hope once said, “If you haven’t any charity in your heart, you have the worst kind of heart trouble.” Fortunately, several groups have stepped up during the holiday season to help their fellow citizens.



Photo courtesy of Brett Whiteside, Auburn University

Buy that War Eagle fan in your life a fantasy football camp with Auburn staff. Retail price, \$3,700.

Last week prior to the Camellia Bowl, USA President Tony Waldrop, members of the university’s Board of Trustees and the executive administration volunteered at the Montgomery Area Food Bank. They helped to prepare food for distribution at the group’s warehouse.

Earlier this year during the first USA National Alumni Association’s “Jaguars Care” day of service event, faculty, staff, alumni and students helped to prepare food for distribution at our own Mobile Bay Area Food Bank.

Spring Hill College’s Student Athlete Advisory Committee has made a difference. The entire roster of varsity SHC student-athletes collected canned goods to stock a local food pantry. They got more than 1,000 cans of vital foodstuffs that were delivered to the Catholic Social Services Food Bank.

The University of South Alabama’s SAAC group has also been busy with service projects. They collected complimentary shampoos, conditioners, body wash, lotions and other hygienic and household items from Jaguar teams that had been on the road, and from campus and neighborhood donations. The items were all turned over to L’Arche Mobile, a Christian community started in 1974 that shares life with people who have intellectual disabilities.

Another great cause

Speaking of L’Arche Mobile, the 14th annual First Light Marathon sponsored by ServisFirst Bank is taking place Sunday, Jan. 11, in downtown Mobile. The event, which is presented by the Mobile Sports Authority, is coordinated by and benefits L’Arche Mobile.

The schedule includes a 26.2-mile race, a 13.1-mile run and a 5-person relay, starting at 7:30 a.m. at Government and Claiborne

streets. The 1.2-mile fun run starts at 2 p.m. at the corner of Conception and St. Francis streets.

The finish line for all races is at Bienville Square. During the last 13 years, this event had had more than 22,000 participants and 6,500 volunteers, with visitors from all 50 states and 15 countries. For more information, call 251-438-2094 or visit www.firstlightmarathon.com.

Sports physicals set

The Baldwin Bone & Joint orthopedic group is preparing to provide sports physical exams to more than 500 middle and high school athletes on Saturday, Jan. 10, from 8 to 11:30 a.m.

This service, provided annually for all student athletes, will take place at their Daphne office, located at 1505 Daphne Ave. (County Road 64, corner of Daphne Avenue and Pollard Road).

The schedule is as follows: 8-9 a.m., Daphne High; 9-10 a.m., Daphne Middle; 10-11 a.m., Baldwin County High; 11-11:30 a.m., Baldwin County Middle; 11-11:30 a.m., open to all other schools.

These exams are mandatory for students preparing to play in competitive sports during the 2015 academic year. The cost is \$15, and payment may be made in cash or by credit card.

Certified athletic trainers from Baldwin Bone & Joint provide sports medicine coverage to several local school athletic teams. The physicians, fellowship-trained and specializing in sports medicine, serve as team orthopedic doctors, as well.

Athletes interested in the exams should contact their athletic director for information on their school’s allotted times. For more information, call 251-625-BONE (2663).

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The 2014 year in review: Boozie style

BY BOOZIE BEER NUES/SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

Our cover story this week, features all of the most notable “hard news” stories of the year, but I know you guys want a little recap of this year’s hottest gossip too, so I put a little something, something together for you.

So without further adieu, I present the 2014 year in review, Boozie style.

January

January always means **Senior Bowl**. And Senior Bowl always means NFL coaches and staff filling all of our downtown watering holes. Rex (Jets) and Rob (Saints) Ryan were spotted at Win-tzell’s, Callaghan’s, The Bike Shop and Veet’s. Rumors swirled that Rex bought drinks for the house at The Bike Shop.

Cowboys coach Jason Garrett had dinner with Mobile mayor Sandy Stimpson. City Council president Gina Gregory did the gator chomp with her fellow University of Florida alum WR Soloman Patton. New Orleans Saints head coach Sean Payton also made a stop in Callaghan’s, as did Auburn head coach Gus Malzahn.

February

The Gras got going. The **Krewe of Phoenix** ball was a big hit at Fort Whiting. King Carl’s train descended from the ceiling and attendees were impressed by the elaborate costumes, especially “Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett.”

The **Order of Osiris** Ball’s theme “Magical Mythical Places” took guests to places like to Xanadu, Wonderland, Cloud 9, Neverland and Asgard.

The **Dragons** held their ball at the Cruise Terminal with the theme “Cruising Around.” The Prancing Elites performed and held up giant fans at the end, which they lowered to reveal the MCA Mardi Gras queen Madeleine Maury Downing.

The **Comic Cowboys** poked fun at former county commissioner Freeman Jockisch, who was arrested for electronic solicitation of a child for sex, including one that said “Impotent until Proven Guilty.” Jockisch had told a WPMI reporter he couldn’t be guilty because he was impotent. They also poked fun a couple of sex scandals going on the Mobile Police Department ... “Crime is not the only thing going down in Precinct 69.”

March

Folks traded in their Mardi Gras beads for shamrocks and headed to Callaghan’s in the OGD to see St. Paul and the Broken Bones and also to O’Daly’s to see the Mulligan Brothers and Sister Hazel, as well as participate in their Green Dress Run.

April

On April 1, local talk radio host **Sean Sullivan** read a press release on **FMTalk 106.5**, saying the Mobile Police Department would be setting up roadblocks to check people’s cars for excessive trash paraphernalia as part of the new anti-littering campaign. Sullivan’s delivery was so spot on, several “fools” fell for the prank.

Lagniappe becomes a weekly newspaper on April 3, celebrating with a launch party at the USS Alabama. Shenanigans ensued and many staffers went “overboard,” if you know what I mean.

Former **University of Alabama QB AJ McCarron** proposes to girlfriend reality star/model **Katherine Webb**.

The **Prancing Elites** appeared on “**Tosh .O.**” Ronald McDonald House’s **Little Black Dress Event, South-Sounds, Arts Alive, Temporal City** and **Erin Go Paw** festival were just a few of the events folks attended during a **very busy April**.

The **death of “another Fred Richardson”** started rumors that city councilman Fred Richardson had died. Councilman Richardson said he had received about 30 phone calls asking him if we was dead. He confirmed he was not.

May

Street parties and Kentucky Derby parties, along with **St. Mary’s Casino Night** were the big events in early May.

The **Alabama Shakes** stopped by **Callaghans** to party on their way to the Jazz fest gig.

The **Nicolas Cage** flick “**Tokarev**,” which was filmed in the Port City, was leaked online before its release in the US. The film

was ultimately re-named “**Rage**” and though the movie was not loved by critics, Mobile looked pretty fabulous in it.

The **Hangout Festival** turned out to be another huge success in Mid-May. “Lord of the Rings” star **Elijah Wood** was in attendance. There were several folks sporting really weird bathing suits, including one lady who had on a one-piece bathing suit with a shark’s mouth coming out of the “crotch area” and a man with a gorilla mask on.

Amos Lee had a gospel choir from Mobile accompany him. **Diarrhea Planet** had a bunch of inflatable doughnut rafts and the lead singer even had a solo while crowdsurfing in said doughnut. There was an altercation in front of the **Queens of Stone Age** set. A man hit a woman and lead singer **Josh Homme** saw it. He asked security to come escort him out and lead the crowd in a chorus of “Nanananana Nanananana Hey Hey Asshole.”

“**The Great Food Truck Race**” which airs on the Food Network made a stop downtown with their three remaining trucks. Lines were crazy long with producers of the show saying they were seeing the most folks they had seen all season.

June

The inaugural **Dragon Boat Festival** took place at Five Rivers on June 7. The unique event featured Chinese-style rowing boats, each manned by teams of folks from area schools, businesses, churches and other organizations. They raced down the Mobile River Delta, as one designated member tapped on a drum, as the others rowed their way to victory. We hear the drummer position was the most desirable.

Rumors were flying that **Martha Stewart** was in town for a local couple’s wedding.

US World Cup Team Striker Aon Johannson got some play in the game against Ghana. He also got Mobile some worldwide nods. Johannson was born in Mobile to Icelandic parents and the announcers mentioned this fact a couple of times.

July

AJ McCarron and **Katherine Webb** tie the knot at Orange Beach Methodist Church.

The **Nappies** took place at the Saenger on July 25. The Nappie Video included area restaurants and professionals reading “Mean Social Media” posts about themselves. The after-party was at Moe’s BBQ, where folks partied to the wee hours of the morning.

August

At the reenactment of the **Battle of Mobile Bay** down on Fort Morgan, our spies 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.”

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.

A Mobile native **Scarlett Coggin Simmons** appears on the Bravo network show “**Jersey Belle**,” The show revolves around a New Jersey publicist, Jaime Primak Sullivan, who married a Mountain Brook man and who is gradually adjusting to life in the South.

An estimated 40,000 folks went to the **Kenny Chesney** concert at the **Flora-Bama** on Aug. 16.

Videos of just about everyone in town, “celebrity” or otherwise, doing the “**Ice Bucket Challenge**” for ALS research made their way around social media at the end of August.

September

BayFest said “ceeya” to **CeeLo Green**. The artist was originally scheduled to play at the October festival, but after tweeting out insensitive comments about a woman who had accused him of

sexual assault, BayFest canceled his performance.

USA plays **Mississippi State** to a sold out crowd and there was tailgating galore.

The “**Great Food Truck Race**” featuring Mobile aired Sept. 21 on **Food Network**. There were plenty of sightings of familiar downtown spots, as well as the Bragg Mitchell mansion and the USS Alabama.

October

Bayfest took place on the streets on downtown Mobile. The **Jane’s Addicton** show was much talked about as it featured a suspended burlesque show. They flew out of Mobile the next day (I’m told not even in first class), but before boarding the plane, they had their shoes shined by the Mobile Airport’s famous shiner, **Nelson Easterling**.

Legendary actor **Robert de Niro** films the flick “Bus 657” in town. He is spotted at NoJa and Ruth’s Chris and was said to be very nice. **Kate Bosworth** who is also starring in the film was spotted at The Bike Shop and The Royal Scam.

Luke Perry aka Dylan McKay on “Beverly Hills 90210” fame, was in town with his girlfriend who is from Mobile for a wedding.

Halloween highlights included the **Circus to Hell** party in the OGD, featuring lots of creepy clowns, the “**Hot Crazy Matrix Guy**” at the Garage and a dance-off between **Princess Buttercup** and **Snow White** at Callaghan’s.

November

On Thursday, Nov. 6 the **Mobile Museum of Art** celebrated its **50th anniversary** with a gala and the kick-off of its new exhibit “**The Art and Design of Mardi Gras**.” My spies said this was the hottest ticket in town and was just fabulous. As you walked in the door, you were greeted with champagne and oysters and there was a giant birthday cake. The even had fire dancers as performers.

The **Oyster Cook-off** took place at The Hangout in Gulf Shores and was a huge success. Celebrity chefs were running around on Saturday, including the Food Network’s Martie Duncan, Ippy Aiona, Linke Marals, Michala Ragussis and Nikki Martin, as well as chefs from some of the top restaurants from New Orleans to New York.

Native Mobilian and documentarian **Margaret Brown** presented her latest work, “**The Great Invisible**,” which explores the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and its aftermath, at the Saenger Theatre on Thursday, Nov. 20. Brown’s 2008 documentary “The Order of Myths” also hit close to home, as it looked at the racial divide among Mobile’s Mardi Gras societies. Many audience members were moved to tears as survivors and the families of those who perished told their harrowing stories and the demons they have had to fight since the tragedy.

Just when you thought it was safe to turn your cable television back on, unfortunately the **Investigation Discovery** network decided to do a piece on former county commissioner **Stephen Nodine** and the tragic death of his mistress Angel Downs for a series called “Love the Way you Lie.”

December

I had numerous reports that a person dressed in a **skin-tight Santa suit** and very short pink shorts was spotted roller blading through Midtown and the OGD on Sunday, Dec. 7. This suave Santa even had a boom box on his shoulder that was playing Christmas music. With that suit, I think it’s safe to say, his bells were not jingling, if you know what I mean.

Mobile is named the “**10th worst city for Singles**” in the country by Wallethub. The metrics used in the study included the percentage of singles, the number of nightlife opportunities per capita and mobile dating opportunities.

And of course, **The Village People** will play at the **MoonPie over Mobile** celebration, along with **Evelyn Champagne King** on **New Year’s Eve**. There will certainly be much gossip from that performance in the next issue of Lagniappe, the first one of 2015.

Just remember, whether rain or shine, dramatic or scandalous or some plain ol’ year in review lovin’, I will be there. Ciao!

Pisces protects online identity after suspected hack

BY DR. ZODIAC/ASTROLOGY GUY

Capricorn (12/22 - 1/19) — Preparing for your New Year’s resolution, you’ll commit to lots of drinking, eating and calling in sick at work this week — knowing you’ll have to put it all behind you in 2015. After a few consecutive days of going to the Brickyard and Taco Bell, you’ll realize the year and date are only a number, and that happiness is journey, not a destination. You’ll also realize quesadillas are ridiculously good when you’re drunk — a theory that remains unquestioned in coming year.

Aquarius (1/20 - 2/18) — Things get awkward around the house after your kids encourage you to adopt “Santa,” confusing a bearded homeless drifter with the jolly old elf. Despite your good intentions, the magic is lost after “Gus,” a veteran of Grenada who fell on hard times after losing his 27-foot live-aboard sailboat in 1997, makes a habit of leaving “tidings” in the yard, along with the family dog. The kids return from a play date to find Santa has returned to the North Pole, and a Megabus receipt on the kitchen counter.

Pisces (2/19 - 3/20) — When your iPhone begins to curiously lose power more swiftly than before, you suspect it’s been targeted by North Korean hackers. Preparing for a counter attack, you ask a member of the Geek Squad if an effective firewall can be constructed by sewing together several layers of American flags and draping them over your computer. You begin to write your emails with an ink well and quill, but your boss reprimands you after you stain the screen. Someone recommends you use a Tor browser, and you literally plug your Ethernet cable into a Vidalia onion.

Aries (3/21 - 4/19) — Now that travel restrictions are being lifted, you begin to plan a spring vacation to Cuba. Hoping to also make a quick buck and spread capitalism abroad, you also apply to open the communist country’s first Yeti Cooler and Big Green Egg retail outlet. Little do you know that the sanctions of the last five decades have led to human ingenuity on the island, and locals realize your upscale merchandise is superficial. You eat the best pork roast of your life on the island, and it was cooked in an open pit.

Taurus (4/20 - 5/20) — Having survived the crazy cult experience the week before, you’ll overdo it celebrating MoonPie Over Mobile. Your enthusiasm will reach critical mass and you’ll feel “Shame” after jumping on stage to mouth-kiss Evelyn “Champagne” King. You’ll come down from your vodka-induced state, but not before getting on stage with The Village People and doing the “YMCA” dance to “In the Navy.” The embarrassment will be caught on camera for everyone in the central time zone to see. The sight will not help your job prospects. The arrest won’t help either.

Gemini (5/21 - 6/21) — Your spouse and kids will leave you upon hearing the new budget you’ll force upon them. You’ll be sad for about a week, but you’ll soon embrace life without the anchor of those money-suckers pulling you down to the depths of the fiscal ocean. It will truly be a happy 2015, as you’ll stuff your face with all the Cammie’s Old Dutch ice cream you

can stomach. Who knew not having to worry about feeding children could be so liberating?

Cancer (6/21 - 7/22) — Family and friends will be confused by your choice for a new name — Bigelow Cumberpatch. They’ll tell you it doesn’t fit you, but you couldn’t care less. You’ll begin to become Mobile’s most famous extra and you’ll begin to amass a very small fortune because of the fame. You’ll use the job to accidentally bump into A-listers like Natalie Portman and George Clooney. The fame will go to your head and your demands will become too great. You’ll get fired.

Leo (7/23 - 8/23) — After a week long ordeal of stuffing your face with ham and sweet potato pie, you’ll realize you received many undesirable Christmas gifts. What is a person to do with a Clapper light switch and two Nerf dart guns? Sure, they seem like perfectly good ideas when you’re full of eggnog, but come on. You’ll feel a high adrenaline rush when returning gifts, and you’ll become addicted to the act. You’ll soon be robbing Christmas gifts from across two counties in return for store credits.

Virgo (8/24 - 9/22) — A late-night trip to a local gas station will turn weird when you notice two men filling 2-liter soda bottles with gasoline. You’ll try to mind your own business, though you’ll be fearful that the station might burst into flames. Despite your incognito efforts, one of the men will attempt to give you marijuana in exchange for gas money. You’ll ponder on the idea for a moment, but decide it’s a bad idea. You’ll give him five bucks anyway.

Libra (9/23 - 10/22) — You’ve been incredibly fed up with the Elf on the Shelf, so now the holidays are pretty much over, you’ll be grateful you won’t have to see anymore annoying photos on Facebook. However, you’ll run into a popular, real life version of Elf on the Shelf at a local shopping center. Out of nowhere, you’ll tackle the red-unitard-wearing grown man. A video of you wrestling the elf will go viral. You’ll be an Internet sensation, but not without a restraining order and lawsuit.

Scorpio (10/23 - 11/21) — This weekend you’ll still be waiting for the Christmas gifts you at the last minute online. Avoiding your family will become difficult, so you’ll attempt to train the family pet to sign for a Fed-Ex package. Finally, after days spent hiding in the closet, your package will arrive just in time to be stolen by some neighborhood thugs. Luckily, your kids are so anxious for their memorabilia from Disney’s “Frozen” that they catch the suspects on foot and “Let it Go” on his ass.

Sagittarius (11/21 - 12/22) — You’ll finally get the Christmas present of your dreams — a brand new Volvo delivered with a giant red bow. In your incoherent excitement, you’ll kiss your spouse and blast out of the driveway with the bow still perched atop the sporty, midsize family sedan. After it blows off your roof, you’ll be promptly pulled over by a Mobile police officer. You get a littering ticket and DUI from all the breakfast champagne you had in honor of Christ’s birth. A “December to remember” indeed.



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FROM PAGE 45

AFTER RUNNING OUT OF CITIES, THE CSI FRANCHISE HAD TO FIND NEW VENUES FOR THEIR SHOW RESULTING "CSI: YOUR CAR'S BACK SEAT"

Fairhope Airport Academy prepares for takeoff

BY DALE LIESCH/REPORTER



The hallways are empty and smell like wet paint now, but in a few short weeks “The Academy” at Fairhope’s Sonny Callahan Airport will be filled with Baldwin County high school students.

Construction crews are currently putting finishing touches on the building, while equipment remains wrapped in clear plastic. The academy will be open to students in January.

In the building’s three classrooms and labs, students will be better educated in welding, aviation and industrial maintenance, Fairhope Airport Authority board member Charlie Bassett said.

Plans for the academy have been in the works since 2006, with construction beginning last year. It is a joint project between the school system, the airport authority and the city of Fairhope.

“We discovered there was a need for this kind of thing,” he said. “We feel like there’s a huge demand.”

The demand is so great that there’s room on the property to add another building and expand in the future, Bassett said. While the airport authority owns the land and the building, Baldwin County Public Schools leased it for a lump sum payment of \$2.7 million, which paid for the building’s construction. Bassett said the authority was just

looking to break even on the deal.

“We’re not trying to make money,” Bassett said. “We’re trying to provide a service.”

Faulkner State Community College and Enterprise Community College will teach the three courses provided at the school, through a dual enrollment agreement. Students who attend class at the academy will be eligible to receive both high school and college credits.

Enterprise will teach the aviation class, while Faulkner will teach the industrial maintenance and welding classes.

Bassett said the school would be beneficial to Airbus, BAE, Austal and other employers in the area. Bassett said Faulkner has shown an interest in holding adult education classes at the location, in addition to dual enrollment for high school students.

“This facility and the trained workers who come out of it will help attract business here in the future,” Bassett said. “This is career training for students who ... for whatever reason, won’t be able to go to a four-year college.”

Future development is a goal for the authority, as the group still has 70 undeveloped acres to the west of the airport where because of the topography, can’t be used for future taxiway access, Bassett said.



Photo/ Dale Liesch

The Academy at the Fairhope Sonny Callahan Airport is set to open in January.

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