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WEEKLY

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In Mobile's cutthroat world of independent restaurants, owners often grapple with small profit margins and heavy competition to carve a niche of their own.
By Gabriel Tynes

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Mother of deceased toddler married four days later

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

On Dec. 31, 2014, 20-month-old Dakota Burke Everett was brought to Providence Hospital for injuries caused by apparent physical abuse. Authorities reported the child showed signs of severe trauma and bruising as well as burns on her hands, feet and face, and was later transported to the trauma center at the University of South Alabama Medical Center.

The injuries ultimately resulted in her death eight days later, and the case is now being investigated as a homicide by the Mobile County Sheriff's Office and District Attorney's Office.

Before the child's death, a search warrant was issued at the home of her mother, Summer Everett, in Semmes. County investigators were able to confirm the search of the home on Jan. 7, where Everett lived with her, then-boyfriend, Christopher Knapp.

However, in an unusual turn of events, Mobile County Probate Records show Everett married Knapp at a Mobile Courthouse in the middle of the day Jan. 12 — just four days after her daughter's death. The development led to speculation that the move was to prevent any testimony under "spousal privilege."

Common law in the United States allow spouses to be exempt from being compelled to testify against their significant other in certain cases, but according to criminaldefenselawyer.com, "the spousal privilege is not absolute and comes with several exceptions and conditions."

So far, authorities have had no comment about the marriage or its implications to the case.

Though investigators haven't released many details, they did originally use a children's expert to question the 4-year-old daughter of Santana Deanna Elaine King, who was the deceased's stepsister. Authorities originally believed she could have been a witness to any crime, but no details on the interviews have been released.

Mobile County Sheriff's Office spokesperson Lori Myles was sure to say King was not considered a suspect in the investigation.

Several Mobile County residents have been following the investigation closely through social media. A Facebook page called "Justice for Dakota Burke" has garnered 4,430 likes in just five days. A GoFundMe account has also been created to help fund burial services for the family, which had received almost \$3,000 as of Jan. 13.

According to the webpage, the fund was started by "friends and co-workers of Dakota's grandparents, who were in no way involved in her death."

Hastie trial, jury selection set for April

Attorneys for Mobile County License Commissioner Kim Hastie and Deputy Ramona Yeager appeared alone in federal court Jan. 13, and with some discussion, attorneys for the pair and the United States government are looking toward an April trial.

Hastie pleaded not guilty to charges of public corruption in December, only a few weeks after being indicted on 16 counts of conspiracy, extortion, wire fraud and mail fraud. Yeager was charged with nine similar counts of corruption in the same indictment — she likewise pleaded not guilty.

Neal Hanley, one of three attorneys mounting Hastie's defense, originally asked the trial be pushed off until May because of the "voluminous" amounts of emails, videos and audio recording the defense would have to go through. He also said the defense would require time to gather expert witnesses — though he didn't get into any specifics of Hastie's planned defense.

Hanley said the defense's portion of the trial alone could take between three to five days, and he was concerned about having adequate time to prepare.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Gregory Bordenkircher, who is prosecuting Hastie and Yeager, requested the trial take place in March for the good of the public, because Hastie still holds a position that deals with public money while facing multiple corruption charges.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Katherine Nelson presided over the preliminary hearing, and opted to split the difference and set a trial date for April. Both Hastie and Yeager will be tried together, and jury selection is slated to begin April 6 in Mobile. However, Hanley said its not yet known which judge will hear the case.

In the hearing, Bordenkircher told the judge the government had been working on its case for more than a year, and would present evidence that includes "thousands of emails" and "hundreds of witnesses including several politicians and state representatives."

Hanley, who claimed recorded audio tapes were "key to the



▲ Photo/Facebook

20-month-old Dakota Everett died from blunt-force trauma Jan. 8.

government's case," requested any recordings submitted as evidence be presented with written transcripts. However, after attorneys for the government argued it would cost more than \$7,000 to print such transcripts, Nelson agreed to allow the evidence to be submitted without them.

When asked about Bordenkircher's comments that Hastie was a "threat" to public's interest, Hanley said, "(Bordenkircher) forgot to mention that Kim Hastie is innocent until proven guilty," Hanley told reporters after the preliminary hearing.

Hanley and Yeager's attorney Jason Darley maintained both of their clients' innocence while speaking to reporters after the hearing.

"The amount of support that's been shown to Kim throughout this process has been incredible," Hanley said. "I'm glad the judge was willing to give us a little more time. We just want to be prepared."

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Mobile County reports increased graduation rate

BY ALYSON STOKES/REPORTER | alyson@lagniappemobile.com

On Jan. 8, Mobile County Public School System officials announced the system's 2014 student graduation rate was 82 percent, an increase from last year's 75 percent. According to Superintendent Martha Peek, the initial goal was to see the four-year, on-time graduation rate reach 80 percent by 2020. But she called last week's announcement "just a milestone" that puts the Mobile County school system six years ahead of the community-wide initiative.

"It's an effort from everyone," she said.

According to Rena Philips, MCPSS supervisor of marketing and partnerships, the four-year, on-time graduation rate is calculated by the Alabama Department of Education. The formula, adopted by the National Governor's Association, is currently utilized by the entire state of Alabama and counts how many students entered high school as freshmen in 2010 compared to how many graduated in the spring of 2014, she said.

The final calculated percentage for MCPSS means 82 percent of the freshmen who entered high school in 2010 graduated in the spring of 2014. But the number does not include an additional 6 percent, or about 180 students, who either graduated in December 2014 or who are still enrolled in school and working toward graduation, Philips said.

"The state switched over (to) the NGA calculation of the (graduation) rate about four years or so ago," she told Lagniappe via email. "Before then, there wasn't a real consistent way of calculating graduation rates. At one point, the state used a more flattering graduation rate calculation, which makes it difficult to go back and compare years prior (before 2011)."

While the increase represents a steady climb from 64 percent in 2011 and 70 percent in 2012, the school system has already put another goal in place — to achieve a 90 percent graduation rate by 2017.

According to numbers released by the school system, Blount High School made the biggest jump from 64 percent in 2013 to 79 percent in 2014, followed by Williamson High School with 67 percent in 2013 and 82 percent in 2014. Baker carries the highest graduation rate with 91 percent followed by Citronelle High School with 88 percent and B.C. Rain and Mary G. Montgomery high schools, both with 85 percent.

Citronelle High School Principal Thomas Campbell, who also previously served as principal at Lott Middle School, said he was not surprised by the numbers and is confident the school system will meet its next goal.

"I know the type of kids that went through and the hard work that's been going on in the feeder patterns from kindergarten on up," he said.

Murphy High School Principal William Smith credits the system's implementation of special freshmen and senior guidance counselors, a "credit recovery lab" and peer mentors for achieving an increased graduation rate.

The credit recovery lab gives students who have fallen behind an opportunity to recover credits, Smith said. Students may utilize the lab if at any time they find themselves struggling with classes.

"We try to make sure if they get behind, we try to catch them up," he said.

January Taylor, dropout prevention specialist at Murphy High School, said utilizing peer mentors is one of the school's greatest successes.

"We implement student mentors, peer mentors, that can help the students with anything they're struggling with, and so it's more of a one-on-one environment that helps out a lot with getting these students back up," she said.

According to Taylor, peer mentors are typically "hand picked" from upper-level classes.

Additionally, she said she was not surprised to hear about the graduation rate increase. In fact, Taylor said she expected it.

"We worked really hard over the last few years trying to implement this program," she said. "The students have responded so well."

The ninth grade program has been in effect for about five years, Smith said.

Looking forward, both Smith and Taylor are confident the goal of reaching a system-wide, 90 percent graduation rate by 2017 will be met.

"If Mrs. Peek says it, we're going to do it," Smith said.

Furthermore, Peek said the initiative is not just about moving students through school just to hand them a diploma, but it is to ensure they are all well prepared for the future.

"Not only do they have a diploma in hand, but students must be certified [and] ready to graduate," she said.

In order to achieve this level of certification, Peek said students could earn a benchmark score on the ACT college assessment, a qualifying score in advanced-placement college-level programs, a benchmark score in the job skills assessment ACT WorkKeys, a business industry certification or present enlistment papers for the military.

"That, along with a diploma, says they're college-and-career ready, and they graduate ready for the next step in life," she said.

Further, 7,300 students this year earned "workforce credentials," Peek said.

Being only 11 students shy of reaching an 83 percent graduation rate, Peek said all of the MCPSS schools improved their graduation rates with principals "working tirelessly" to achieve the goal through several system-wide steps starting in every elementary school, where students have access to "rigorous and innovative" pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade programs.

After elementary school, students begin career planning in sixth grade and by utilizing Data Warehouse tracking, MCPSS can provide intervention for students who may be at risk of dropping out.

Once in high school, Ninth Grade Academies ease the transition into high school by requiring all students to work with a school counselor and develop a plan of study for their high school careers.

Additionally, MCPSS schools have "Multiple Pathways to Graduation" aimed toward keeping students engaged in learning. These pathways include Signature Academies, which provide hands-on learning opportunities in various career fields, access to career-technical education programs, distance and online learning and opportunities to earn college credit through AP courses, International Baccalaureate and dual enrollment.

"The graduate rate is a culmination of everything we do from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade," Peek said.

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Conflicting reports on fire safety at Bayou school

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

Though there are still some discrepancies as to who is responsible, officials in Bayou la Batre are concerned a lack of adequate fire suppression at Anna F. Booth Elementary School has created a dangerous situation.

The Utilities Board of Bayou la Batre, which has been embroiled in legal conflict with city leaders for nearly a year, manages the area's water system. However, in July, questions about whether the management of the system required the board to maintain the city's fire hydrants were brought up in a complaint made by Fire Chief John Wiggins.

Wiggins also brought the issues at Booth Elementary before the City Council during its Jan. 8 meeting. According to Wiggins, the fire department discovered a problem with the water pressure near the school while suppressing wildfires in the woods behind the building twice in November.

"We sent a crew out to check the (fire) plugs — because the fire got closer to the school than I wanted it to — and we found there was not enough water coming out of the plug to fill our supply," Wiggins told councilors. "On Dec. 22, I spoke with Tommy Sheffield (director of operations for the Mobile County Public School System), and he advised me their subcontractor found 'the pressure coming directly from the Bayou la Batre Utilities Board's water system is insufficient to operate the school's sprinklers.'"

But Sheffield told Lagniappe that's not entirely the case. He said the school system, as it often does when it builds in rural areas, installed a "jockey pump" inside the building at Booth. According to Sheffield, the pump would energize the sprinkler system if the water pressure happened to be low, but the low pressure in the Utility Board's own force mains could cause a problem if firefighters needed to access additional water from the city's hydrants.

Wiggins said attempts to fix the safety issue before students returned to school Jan. 5 were unsuccessful, but he didn't say whether any attempt was made to bring the problem up to the Utilities Board. Addressing the City Council, he said the present situation "is not safe."

According to Wiggins, tests of the water pressure near the school indicated it was nearly 100 pounds lower than it should be.

"The city now has knowledge of this problem, so we can't do nothing," said legal counsel Kasee Heisterhagen, sitting in for city attorney Bill Wasden. "Either we have a fire watch until the facility is safe, or no kids (can go) into the building."

As a response, the council cast a unanimous vote to allocate funds for a fire watch "as long as the building is occupied," until the issue is resolved. Wiggins told Lagniappe two firefighters were on standby at Booth during school hours Jan. 9 and Jan. 12. He said the decision costs the city an estimated \$300 per day.

Several exchanges have taken place between lawyers for the Utilities Board and the city since problem with city's hydrants were first disputed in July, and those arguments remain a large part of the situation at Booth.

According to Utilities Board Executive Director Michael McClantoc, no one from the city attempted to reach out to the board about the fire suppression problems at the school as of Jan. 12.

But he also said tests conducted by Utility Board employees show the system is working as it should.

Asked about the school board's knowledge and involvement in the problem, McClantoc said he'd also spoken with Sheffield and was told everything about the fire suppression system was "adequate."

"Everything is good," he said. "I know they wouldn't let those kids in the school if there was any possibility they didn't have fire protection."

Meanwhile, Wiggins said even if the sprinkler system was op-



Photo/Google

Officials have noted fire suppression issues at Booth Elementary School in Bayou la Batre.

erational, the remaining water pressure could be insufficient to fill the trucks needed to fight a fire, if one were to occur at the school.

"We have a pre-plan for our school, so we're going to lay our lines the way we would normally, and see after the system is charged how much water we'll actually have left," Wiggins said. "For the time being, we're going to keep a fire watch while the students are in the building. We'll make a decision on whether to continue that after the next tests."

Sheffield said separate tests by the Utilities Board and the school board's sprinkler system contractor show Wiggins' concerns about the residual pressure could be valid in the event of structural fire at the school.

"They're aware they have an issue now," Sheffield said. "They have low water pressure in Bayou la Batre."

Ramirez: Mayor 'went against council's wishes'

During its December meeting, the Bayou la Batre City Council accepted the resignation of Assistant City Clerk Chad Seaman, but at least some council members think Mayor Brett Dugan went against the council's wishes when he chose not to waive Seaman's two-week notice and accept his immediate resignation in "good standing."

Though initial personnel matters are typically not discussed openly, Seaman requested to speak about his resignation during a public meeting.

Evidently, Seaman submitted his resignation Dec. 12, citing "non-self-imposed hardships," which he told Lagniappe were medically related. Because of those circumstances, he was unable to give a proper two-weeks notice, but he asked the city to waive that requirement.

According to Rule 3.12 of the Mobile County Personnel Board's laws and rules, the failure to give proper notice prohibits an employee from rehire and qualifies the resignation to be documented as "not in good standing."

In written correspondence with Lagniappe, Dugan said he advised Seaman Dec. 12 to reconsider his resignation, and said the city was willing to offer him a leave of absence, which Seaman declined.

"City Attorney Bill Wasden advised council members that Personnel Board requires two weeks notice," Dugan wrote. "Contrary to what was said at the Jan. 8 council meeting by some councilors, no vote was taken concerning Chad Seaman's two-weeks."

Dugan was referring to a comment by Councilman George Ramirez, who said Dugan's actions "went against the council's wishes." But other council members were also surprised to learn Seaman's resignation wasn't accepted in good standing.

As Dugan asked the council for a motion to adjourn, Councilmember Ida Mae Coleman said, "this is not the way to do things."

"If you're going to do something, do it decent and in order. You can't push it under the rug," Coleman said. "Chad, as far as I know you did leave in good standing."

An email from Dugan's assistant Wanda Overstreet to the personnel board Jan. 1, after the council had voted to accept Seaman's resignation, said, "the mayor does not want to waive the two-week notice. Please let me know if you need a letter stating this."

Still, the personnel board extended an option to waive the two-weeks notice, pending Dugan's approval. But Dugan said the city scrambled to manage Seaman's tasks after the sudden resignation, while Seaman said he had maintained almost daily contact with city employees to help assure a smooth transition.

"Mayor, this action on your part, in opposition of what your council unanimously voted, I feel is malicious and a personal attack that has placed additional hardships on my family," Seaman said. "I gave eight years to this job. I simply asked you for 14 days."

City cuts hours of 311 service

BY DALE LIESCH/REPORTER | dale@lagniappemobile.com

As of Jan. 1, the hours residents can file a complaint or a work order through the 311 telephone service have been cut. Originally available 24/7, the service will now take live calls only from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Saturday, according to city spokesman George Talbot, adding that the move won't require any changes to personnel.

The 12 employees in the 311 "action center" work a normal shift with one normally rotating to pick up a night shift.

"Nobody's getting laid off and nobody's being moved," Talbot said. "We were down a couple of people and I think we'll just not fill those positions."

The center, across the street from Government Plaza, averages 10,000 to 11,000 calls each month, with the vast majority received during normal business hours, Talbot said. In fact, the center was

averaging less than 20 calls after 7 p.m., he said.

"We have one guy who calls each night to see what time it is," Talbot said.

The move will allegedly save the city about \$75,000 a year in overtime and holiday pay. Residents can still use the city's website to file a complaint or work order and can still rely on 911 for emergencies around the clock, Talbot said.

The center can be instantly activated to 24 hours during natural disasters like a hurricane, or for other citywide emergencies, he said.

Councilman Fred Richardson complained that he only found out about the change after a constituent tried to call the system after-hours. At that point, he said he felt obligated to let other residents in his district know about the change, so he posted the

news to Facebook.

"It's the mayor's prerogative to change the hours," Richardson said. "I just wanted the mayor to make an announcement."

"I don't know why he changed it," Richardson continued. "We have \$19 million in surplus, it's not that we don't have money. I don't have any information on it."

Councilman Levon Manzie said the effectiveness of the new hours should be studied at a later date.

"The former composition was working," Manzie said, but "it's the mayor's call to make."

Councilman John Williams said the move was "justified" and applauded the action.

"I encourage — where we're wasting tax dollars — finding efficiencies," he said.

Council delays vote on stadium request

BY DALE LIESCH/REPORTER | dale@lagniappemobile.com

The Mobile City Council delayed a vote Tuesday on whether to transfer \$464,649.57 out of city park funding to improve playing facilities at the 17-year-old Hank Aaron Stadium, home of the Southern League's Mobile BayBears. The money would replace field lights, upgrade the audio system and install field rail padding, according to a statement released by the administration Sunday.

"Baseball has an important role in Mobile, past and present," Stimpson said in the statement. "Our city has produced more Hall of Famers than any city, except New York or Chicago. I remain committed to keeping America's pastime a part of our family-friendly community for years to come."

"For our future to be as strong as our past, we need to make sure our little league fields to Hank Aaron Stadium are safe, playable and accessible for all to enjoy," he added.

Councilwoman Bess Rich asked for the vote to be held over for one week and Council President Gina Gregory assigned it to the Finance Committee to be discussed further. Some councilors had an issue with rent the BayBears owed to the city.

Stimpson's Chief of Staff Colby Cooper said the team hasn't been current on its rent since 2013. Cooper did not specify an amount owed to the city. City spokesman George Talbot confirmed Tuesday that the team had owed the city close to \$900,000, during the Sam Jones administration.

During a council pre-conference meeting, Rich said that debt was cleared when the team agreed to make repairs to the roof of the stadium, during the previous administration. Rich asked if the city could possibly broker a similar deal with the organization for these improvements.

City Attorney Ricardo Woods said the city would bring a new contract before the council for a vote at a later time. He said the appropriation and issues with the contract are not connected.

Councilors Joel Daves and Fred Richardson supported moving forward with the appropriation.

"It seems to me that the stadium belongs to us and it's in bad shape," Richardson said. "Right now, we need to fix it."

Morgan said the team can wait a week for the council to make a decision, but if the issue is held over again they would be running into a time crunch, with the installation of the new lighting. He said the team wants to begin installing the new lighting after the conclusion of the March 6-8 series between University of Alabama and Lipscomb. He said that would be five weeks before opening day and installation could take two to three weeks, weather permitting.

Hank Aaron Stadium will become the Southern League's oldest stadium this summer, once a new venue is constructed in Biloxi, Morgan said.

The proposed improvements are among many requested by the BayBears' major league affiliate Arizona Diamondbacks.

In a letter to BayBears General Manager Chris Morgan dated Sept. 23, Diamondbacks' Director of Player Development Mike Bell suggested the Double A farm team work with the city to find funding for improvements to the drainage system and dugout flooring.

"It is our intention to establish and maintain a truly symbiotic relationship with each of our minor league affiliates and while we have consistently provided the BayBears with top-tier talent, our efforts have not been reciprocated with improvements in the facility," Bell wrote. "We

have made a concerted effort to deliver championship-caliber baseball to the city of Mobile, evidenced by five-consecutive playoff appearances and back-to-back Southern League titles in 2011 and 2012."

In the letter, Bell argued that the "antiquated" drainage system, especially in the outfield, has led to "lost games" that would've otherwise been played.

"This inadequacy has resulted in lost development opportunities — both in the form of games and pregame workouts," he wrote. "Most importantly, though, we are concerned about the safety of our players. Their safety is paramount and the current drainage system is unacceptable."

Morgan said Tuesday the drainage issue did cost the baseball team some games last season. He said 10 percent of the team's home games were called due to rainouts. He compared that to Pensacola's Southern League team, which saw no rainouts last year.

In a separate appropriation, the administration plans to tackle the drainage system next year, according to the statement. Additionally, plans to resurface the field are set for 2016. The existing playing surface be will repurposed in a city park, Stimpson suggested.

In the letter, Bell thanked the BayBears and the city for improvements made to the "club-house area" prior to the start of the 2014 season, but added that future cooperation would be needed.

Last week, the Diamondbacks announced that Robby Hammock will be the next manager for the BayBears. Hammock started his coaching career in 2012. He had played for the Diamondbacks from 2003 through 2011, hitting .254 with 30 doubles and 12 home runs.

The BayBears' season begins on the road April 9, with a five-game series against the Birmingham Barons. Mobile returns to The Hank April 15 to face its new Gulf Coast rival, the Biloxi Shuckers, formerly the Huntsville Stars.

In other business, the council reversed course and voted 6-1 to approve the vacation of a portion of Montclair Way at its intersection with Airmont Drive. The vacation, which was initially opposed at a meeting in December, allows the Airmont Property Owners Association to close that portion of the street, giving the subdivision only one way in and out.

Richardson was the lone dissenting vote.

Members of the group said they were concerned about an increase in crime and traffic in and out of the neighborhood. Residents, who opposed the move, questioned the crime statistics the group gave the council and told councilors the move would inconvenience. They also said the move would increase traffic problems at intersections near the neighborhood.

Even though the original request was denied, Gregory said it was put back on the agenda, after a member of the prevailing side — a resident who initially opposed it — asked for it to be placed back on the agenda.

The council also approved a contract with Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood to begin phase one of a long-term, comprehensive plan for the city. The first phase of the contract will cost the city about \$50,000. The other \$24,000 needed for phase one is coming from the Community Foundation of South Alabama.

The first phase will consist of partial development of the plan, including community meetings with stakeholders. The cost of both phases will be \$150,000.

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Housing Board receives another ‘substandard management’ designation

BY DALE LIESCH/REPORTER | dale@lagniappemobile.com

For the second straight year, the Mobile Housing Board received a substandard management designation from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and for the second straight year, MHB Executive Director Dwayne Vaughn blames low occupancy rates for the poor score.

A Dec. 12 letter addressed to MHB Chairman Clarence Ball from Robert Kenner, HUD director of public housing, noted that the board received a score of 14 out of 25 through the Public Housing Assessment System (PHAS), which is a failure. The board received an overall score of 68 out of 100 through the end of fiscal year 2013.

MHB was also given a substandard designation through the end of fiscal year 2012. In both years, Vaughn said the score was hurt by vacancies at Josephine Allen Homes and the Roger Williams community, which are largely blighted and unsuitable for habitation.

An MHB request to demolish 292 units at Josephine Allen is still pending through HUD, Vaughn said, adding that they’ve also made a similar request for the Roger Williams community.

“As the 292 units of Josephine Allen have been vacant for more than two years, unless HUD approves the request, these vacancies continue to count against MHB and make it difficult to achieve higher occupancy scores,” Vaughn said. “Thus, there was no real change in MHB’s position from 2012 to 2013 as HUD approval of Josephine Allen holds the key to the designation increase. If that request is approved, MHB anticipates a satisfactory designation score.”

Vaughn said the board is hopeful they’ll get demolition approval from HUD this year. If the delay continues, he said, they’d

seek appeals and waivers to keep it from counting against them.

HUD spokeswoman Gloria Shanahan confirmed in an email message that HUD is still reviewing a demolition request for a total of 599 units at Josephine Allen and Roger Williams. Approval of those requests will dramatically increase MHB’s occupancy rates.

“Mobile Housing Board is working closely with HUD to finalize the application,” Shanahan wrote. “Subject to approval from HUD, the proposed occupancy rates would increase from 67 percent to approximately 85 percent.”

Shanahan said MHB could take advantage of HUD’s Rental Assistance Demonstration program “for long-term repositioning of its public housing portfolio.”

The occupancy rate at MHB communities has fluctuated over the past three years. The rate was 64 percent in 2011, 69 percent in 2012, 70 percent in 2013 and 66 percent as of Sept. 8, 2014. Vaughn said outside of Roger Williams and Josephine Allen, MHB communities are close to 90 percent occupied.

MHB also requested and received approval from HUD for the modernization of 105 units at Thomas James and Central Plaza Tower, Shanahan wrote.

In the designation letter, Kenner provided suggestions on how to improve the low occupancy rates, outside of demolition. Among the suggestions were to evaluate its waiting list, tenant selection and initial certification processes to ensure coordination with property managers and timely preparation for move-ins. Additionally, Kenner suggested the MHB consider contracting property management of public housing to another entity or public housing agency.

Kenner’s letter also advised Ball that HUD “may initiate

actions to develop a Recovery Agreement for (MHB) ... to document and ensure recovery efforts have been put in place.”

The substandard designation also affects HUD funding, Shanahan wrote. High performing agencies are eligible for a 3 percent funding increase to use toward capital needs.

“Additionally, all housing authorities with an occupancy rate below 95 percent are subject to HUD oversight in the submission of a Standard Action Plan, which provides a detailed summary of vacant units and the housing authorities plan for re-occupation, or other HUD-approved designation,” Shanahan wrote. “The (MHB) is currently under a monthly Standard Action Plan and our office works with them to note any variance or delays in their leasing potential.”

The news comes on the heels of a decision by the board last month to choose three developers for a \$750 million revitalization of public housing properties on the city’s south side corridor. The communities affected include R.V. Taylor Plaza, Boykin Tower and Thomas James Place.

The project would turn those public housing communities into mixed-use, mixed-income developments with 3,000 to 4,000 units. Vaughn said previously as many as one-third, or 1,000 of those units could be set aside for low-income renters.

HUD requires all residents displaced by revitalization projects be relocated by the responsible housing authority. Vaughn said right now, the plans would affect about 956 households.

It will take three to six months to develop a master plan for the new developments. After that, the board will begin giving 90-day notices to the appropriate residents affected by the plans. HUD will also have to approve the development plans.

County adds parcel to \$3.6 million wetland preservation

BY JASON JOHNSON/REPORTER | jason@lagniappemobile.com

With unanimous approval from commissioners earlier this week, Mobile County added another 40 acres to the 400 it has already purchased in the Big Creek Watershed, part of a multi-million dollar wetlands acquisition project funded through the Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP).

Created by Congress in 2005, CIAP was a one-time program aimed at protecting oil-and-gas producing states by utilizing royalties from oil production companies. Alabama was one of six states eligible to receive the funding from 2007-2010, with its Department of Conservation of Natural Resources receiving \$58 million, Baldwin County receiving \$14 million and Mobile County receiving \$17.4 million.

One of the few authorized uses for CIAP funding are projects and activities for the conservation, protection or restoration of coastal areas, including wetlands.

“We purchased 400 acres of land in the Big Creek Watershed in 2009, but there was a 40-acre parcel right in the center that the seller at the time was not willing to part with,” Mobile County Environmental Services Director Bill Melton said. “The CIAP program allows for the purchase or acquisition of these properties for conservation, preservation and enhancement.”

The project was originally made possible by \$2 million in grant funding, but amendments submitted by the county later yielded an extra \$1.6 million to help enhance the environment of properties that had already been acquired.

So far, the county has used \$3.6 million in CIAP funding to purchase and maintain more than 680 acres of floodplain and wetlands in the area, including the 440 acres acquired in the Big Creek Lake Watershed, the sole source of Mobile’s drinking water since the early 1940s.

“By nature of where this property is located, it’s protecting the drinking water,” Melton said. “These are environmentally sensitive habitats, and any time you can buy a property for something that’s a little more green than what some other buyer would use it for, you’re going to do the environment some good.”

According to Melton, the lands have been acquired from multiple owners, all of whom were voluntarily sellers. The federal

grant program also requires the use of Yellowbook pricing for purchasing the properties.

Melton added that tight deed restrictions and grant requirements prevent the county from developing or re-selling property acquired with CIAP funding, protecting it from human encroachment forever.

Further, the county plans to make required enhancements to rid the property of invasive species like Kudzu, Japanese climbing fern and others that can pose a threat to plants indigenous to the wetlands of the Gulf of Mexico.

Tina Sanchez, an environmental grant writer for Mobile County, said managing invasive species is a difficult process that can take years to complete, but over time it increases the survivability of both the land and the natural species that inhabit it — like the endangered gopher tortoise, for example.

“It’s about managing and enhancing the habit where we can so that it serves its natural function,” Sanchez said. “When the Europeans first arrived here, this was a longleaf pine ecosystem.”

In the last few years, the county has also used its CIAP funding to plant longleaf pines throughout its land acquisitions.

Sanchez said any maintenance performed after the CIAP funding has been exhausted would be minimal and likely be limited to regularly scheduled controlled burns when resources can be allocated.

Melton said his department has also discussed the routine maintenance of the properties being managed by some type of county board in the future, but said that hasn’t yet been fleshed out. He also said a federal grant like CIAP opens the door to use other federal funding sources such as the RESTORE Act.

Accordingly, the county’s environmental department recently submitted a \$4 million project proposal to the RESTORE Act’s online portal that would build upon the current wetland acquisition project. Melton said, if approved, it would include the purchase of more property for conservation.

According to Melton, the county is looking at acquiring separate waterfront parcels along the delta near the Mobile River Delta Marina, Campground and Welcome Center, which itself was created using \$1.5 million of CIAP funding. Melton said if such

areas are able to be acquired, they might “better lend themselves to use by the public.”

Public use was one of the issues mentioned when the recent 40-acre parcel was discussed by commissioners last week, but Melton said the area in the Big Creek Watershed really wasn’t set up for public use. For conservation purposes, he said it could benefit the natural habitat of those wetlands to limit their public access.

Meanwhile, whether it’s the wetlands’ role in the ecosystem or in the area’s community development, a shift to a more “environmentally friendly” mindset among municipal leaders isn’t something that’s only happening in Mobile. Roberta Swann, director of the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, said disasters like Hurricane Katrina and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill have put a greater emphasis on protecting the area’s coastal resources.

“I don’t think anyone is advocating to purchase every single piece of property in the area, but we can be strategic about purchasing certain parcels just to protect the environment,” Swann said. “That area is growing, and it’s going to see more of an impact from stormwater runoff and other things. You’re not going to stop that growth, but you certainly can do it in a better way, and land acquisition is part of that.”

Swann, director of Mobile Bay NEP since 2004, said the current commissioners are “more educated” about the need for environmental projects not because they’re “tree huggers, but because they know it plays a role in Mobile’s overall community development.”

Even Melton indicated these types of environmental projects were “no priority” of the commission in the past, and said his department is thankful for the change.

Commission President Connie Hudson, who has worked to utilize CIAP funding for projects like the new Mobile County Recycling Center, said the projects are “examples of the commission’s interest and commitment to protecting the county’s natural resources.”

“People used to say they ‘had some swamp to sell,’ as a joke, but it’s not a joke anymore because it’s valuable,” Melton said. “Environmentalists like us have realized the value of these wetlands, and they have a lot of value for the environment.”

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Making one more pitch for baseball in the Azalea City

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

The last time I attended a BayBears baseball game at Hank Aaron Stadium it was a strange experience to say the least.

The team has been a winner for the past few years, regularly producing Big League talent, but you wouldn't know it from looking around the stands. By the Seventh Inning Stretch it seemed like there were more people scratching on the field than stretching in the stands. Fortunately for the fans, though, the world's most obnoxious heckler was providing a show verbally riding the other team's pitcher, deriding every pitch as lacking in masculine qualities — among other things.

The pitcher came to the plate and Mobile's finest fan started in on the guy's mother. At some point I figured that 6-foot-5 pro athlete was probably going to come into the stands and the real show would begin. But instead all I got was a chance to try to explain to my children why someone would act like such an a-hole just for kicks. ("It's kind of like what daddy does for a living, kids.")

Don't get me wrong, I enjoy baseball. I played it through my teens and might even have tried to walk on in college if not for alcohol and a lack of talent. And while I can't say I watch it much on TV, going to a game has always been a fun experience.

Prior to the BayBears landing here, Mobile had the Bay Sharks and both of my younger brothers worked at Stanky Field as part of the BS squad. I would frequently come over from Pascagoula, drop by the Brick Pit for some tasty BBQ, then hit Stanky to watch the game. Once my youngest brother even had to dress as the Bay Shark and that was an especially memorable evening.

When I lived in D.C. — prior to the Nationals — Baltimore Oriole tickets were always floating around Capitol Hill and I frequently availed myself of those freebies so we could head up there to spend \$200 on two hamburgers and six beers. So I enjoy a ballgame.

But even with a 12-year-old son who loves going to the games, I still find myself not really thinking about seeing the BayBears more than a couple of times a year. And I keep wondering why.

Actually, why is probably pretty easy. Generally I've rarely ever thought about going to a game until hearing about the score on the late news because the team has never seemed to do a very good job of getting the word out. A couple of times we have even worked out a deal to get them free advertising in the paper, primarily to help see the team do better, only to have the deal just fade away as the season began. Even free advertising didn't seem to be worth the bother.

Then former Mayor Sam Jones finally revealed the team hadn't been paying rent for several years and came up with some kind of flim-flam deal to let them trade the \$900,000 owed in exchange for repairing the roof. That probably didn't give many people the warm and fuzzies either.

So now the Arizona Dimondbacks — parent club for the BayBears and their hecklers — are practically demanding the city spend nearly half a million dollars upgrading The Hank. D-backs' Director of Player Development Mike Bell rattled off a letter to BayBears' management in September grouching about the situation.

"It is our intention to establish and maintain a truly symbiotic relationship with each of our minor league affiliates and while we have consistently provided the BayBears with top-tier talent, our efforts have not been reciprocated with improvements to the facility."

So here we sit, with Mayor Sandy Stimpson

asking the City Council to move roughly \$500,000 from the parks budget to fix up The Hank. The decision will come next week.

And despite the rude letter from Mr. Bell, who clearly seems to have overlooked the team's record as a tenant, despite the poor attendance and the even poorer marketing efforts over the past several years, I'm going to fight every fiscally conservative urge in my body and say it's worth giving baseball in Mobile one more shot.

Why would I say it's worth spending money on The Hank while at the same time questioning the proposed building of a soccer complex just across I-65 or whether GulfQuest Maritime Museum really has a shot at greatness or even goodness? There are a couple of reasons.

First, we're stuck. Like a cruise terminal, a baseball stadium is fairly mission-specific. Yes, you can have Renaissance fairs, car shows and Christmas lights out there, but it's still a baseball field. If the team leaves, it immediately becomes an empty baseball field. In that regard Mr. Bell and the D-backs and the BayBears ownership hold the cards.

But for the first time in a long time there's new management at The Hank, and from what I can tell new general manager Chris Morgan means business. Among the several media folks I know who have talked about the next year of BayBears baseball with Morgan, we've all come away expecting follow-through. Hopefully that's the case when April rolls around, but at this

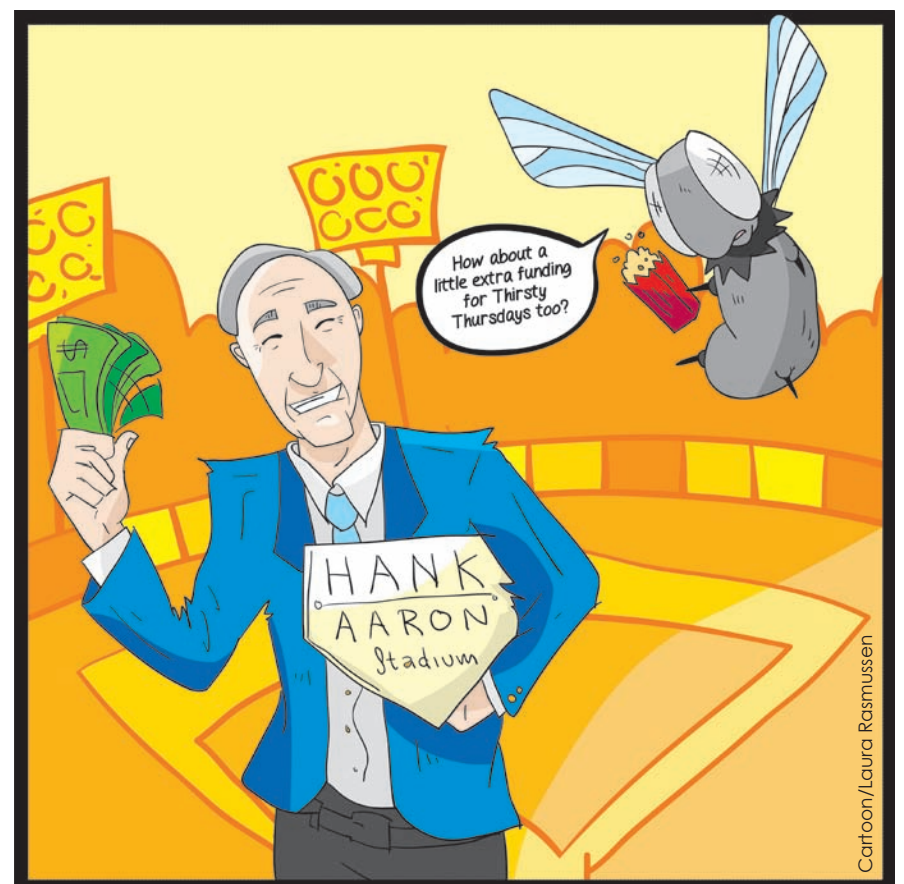
juncture there definitely seems to be a different level of energy.

It's true the relatively out-of-the-way location of the stadium is never going to help attendance, but with the birth of McGowin Park retail development nearby, The Hank may finally be in a bit more high-traffic area. Maybe families buying stuff at Costco will save enough to amble across the street and catch a game.

I'd be surprised if pumping half a million bucks into The Hank is something Mayor Stimpson and the council are excited about, but compared to the millions being tossed around for soccer complexes and maritime museums, the money isn't huge. The alternative is probably watching the team eventually move and try to find a new name even worse than the Biloxi Shuckers. (I can only imagine what our resident heckler's going to do when the Shuckers come to town. The possibilities are endless. If the Biloxi team doesn't have the players' mommas in for "Shuckers' Mothers Night," all their marketers need to be fired. But I digress.)

Begrudgingly it seems like we need to try to see if Mobile can ever become a true baseball town and The Hank can draw enough fans to let the team make its rent regularly. Hopefully if the city ponies up the dough for the improvements, Mr. Bell continues blessing us with big league talent and the team's management gets aggressive with marketing, we'll all make more of an effort to get out there this coming season and really enjoy minor league baseball while insulting the other team's pitcher's mother.

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From the A list to the D list in just one day

BY ASHLEY TRICE/EDITOR | ashleytoland@lagniappemobile.com

On Jan. 6, the city of Mobile announced MSN had named our fair burg as the 10th “hottest” city in America in 2015, and this time in didn’t have anything to do with the relative humidity.

The study said Mobile “will be booming” in 2015 “thanks to new jobs, growing industries, burgeoning art and food scenes, and affordable real estate.”

Our thriving port, expanding international trade and prime location on the Gulf Coast were also considered, according to the site.

“Mobile will become the Southern trading hub of the U.S.,” they declared.

They used factors that included job and population growth, affordability, livability and the health and well-being of residents, as well as how “innovative and cool the city is.”

Other cities on the list included the usual hipster suspects Austin, Nashville and Denver. (Wait. Are you sure affordable real estate was a factor?)

Ironically, or maybe just sadly or even comically, on the very same day I received a press release from wallethub.com on their most recent study, which had just named Mobile the “12th Worst City to find a Job.” They used similar factors as the MSN study, such as real estate affordability, employment growth, social life and also took into account median annual income, unemployment rates for high school graduates and college-educated residents.

Last month, this same site ranked Mobile as the “10th Worst City for Singles,” taking into account such things as restaurant and movie prices, number of nightlife options per capita, crime rate (because you know you don’t want to get murdered while walking hand-in-hand to the malt shop) and online and mobile dating opportunities.

The press releases from wallethub, a site which just seems to be designed to get clicks and sell advertising and/or financial products, is always sent from their communications manager, a gentleman (I presume) by the name of Raz Daraban.

You better watch out, Raz. Mayor Stimpson will fly you down here and set you up with some leftover debutante just to

prove you wrong. Ask Julie Zeveloff how “miserable” she thinks Mobile is now.

I’m not exactly sure where all these folks are getting these numbers to crunch, but I don’t think any of us really needs a study to tell us what is “best” or “worst” or “hottest” about our city.

I do agree with the MSN study though, Mobile “will be booming” very soon. There is an almost palpable energy in this city right now, like the bubbles in a pot of hot water just before it boils.

The long wait is over. Jetliners are about to be assembled right here in this city. They’ll start assembling them this year. I do believe we can fly, R Kelly. Mobile, we can touch the sky.

Downtown is hopping. The restoration of the Van Antwerp building and Barton Academy will bring these diamonds out of the rough. The brand spanking new federal courthouse will certainly be easy on the eyes and more accommodating for all of our drug traffickers and shady politicians.

And I think I am most excited about “Automotive Alley” on St. Louis Street. Even though they took our dream building for Lagniappe World Headquarters, it’s great to see Rural Sourcing, Inc and Rogers & Willard Construction renovate the old Buick Building for their offices. I really feel like we are going to start seeing a lot of cool businesses and entertainment options up and down the “The Alley.” I just love that street.

The revitalization of downtown always gets a lot of attention, while other areas are seemingly neglected, so it’s also very encouraging to see Mayor Stimpson include those underserved areas of the city in his recently announced long-range plan for capital improvements.

There are a lot of great things going on in this town. I don’t care what you say, Raz. Good to see that love being spread around. But, sure, there is always room for improvement.

Though I think the new chief of police is doing a great job and has brought transparency back to the department, it does still seem like a lot of people are shooting each other.

And the capital needs. Oh the capital needs. I know the mayor is trying to find the funding and identify the greatest areas of con-

cern, but it just seems like we have been waiting forever already to get these things done. Oh, because we have. I often wonder what will happen first: the repaving of Ann Street or the completion of the I-10 bridge. Hard to call.

But patience is a virtue, right?

Hopefully our patience will pay off in 2015 too, as we see GulfQuest finally open. I’m sure they would love to prove all of the naysayers wrong.

And maybe, just maybe, the sad reminder of economic development gone awry and symbol of taxpayer waste known as the cruise terminal will be repurposed as something else besides a place to have parties.

If ol’ Raz does a study on the Trashiest Cities in the U.S., I’m sure Mobile will take top honors. Though litter enforcement has been stepped up to the point feathers have been ruffled, the litterbugs are still a litterin’. Take a walk down the shores of Three Mile Creek and take a gander.

The city’s new ordinances on enclosing dumpsters will certainly help, but they also need to take a look at their own garbage receptacles. Many of the ones in our parks have no enclosures and are often overflowing, leading to a pile of Checkers napkins flying all over Public Safety Memorial Park.

All cities have issues and problem areas, even those “best list” hogs, Austin, Nashville and Denver. But I feel like for the first time in years, our city is really focused on addressing these issues.

And in the next few weeks, as people across the country battle post-holiday blues and the remaining seasonally depressing darkest and coldest days of the year, our streets will be brightly lit with colorful floats and filled with the sounds of marching bands and people laughing and screaming “throw me something mister.” Oh and that’s after we send the entire NFL and the best college football players in the country back home.

Julie and Raz can crunch their numbers all they want and put us on the worst of the worst and the most miserable of miserable lists, but we all know the things that make Mobile “the best of the best” to us are unquantifiable.

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Hate can manifest terror, regardless of religion

BY KEN ROBINSON/CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Once again our eyes were solemnly fixed on the television as we followed the shocking and horrific shootings in Paris last week, when homegrown French jihadists viciously targeted and assassinated staff members of the French satirical paper, Charlie Hebdo. The motivation? So-called “crimes against Islam.”

French law enforcement officials scoured Paris and the surrounding areas until the terrorists, two brothers, were eventually found and killed. Likewise, here on the other side of the Atlantic, Americans are having to relive the awful circumstances surrounding the Boston Marathon bombings as one of the surviving two brothers, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, is in the process of standing trial for his part in the sadistic plot.

I’ve listened as many pundits have spoken in fatalistic and apocalyptic terms about the threat men such as these represent, along with the movements they represent and the ideas they espouse. Some voices even seem to imply that Western civilization itself hangs in the balance. But, is the type of terror we are witnessing really something new? Do the Tsarnaev brothers, or the Paris assassins represent a violent form of humanity that we’ve hitherto never seen?

As we put these events in historical perspective, we see that America and other Western democracies have been challenged before by the rise of angry, disaffected, socially disconnected individuals in our midst. Hate — manifested in extreme violence towards vulnerable members of society — is unfortunately nothing new.

A white young male in his early 20s, Thomas Tarrants III, and his beautiful female accomplice, Kathy Ainsworth, both from Mobile, were pivotal players in a network of terror that veteran Los Angeles Times reporter and author Jack Nelson described as one of the “most savage outbreak[s] of racial and religious terrorism in modern U.S. history.”

Nelson was referring to the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan’s reign of terror in the 1960s against blacks, Jews, and those Americans who, in the White Knight’s eyes, were perverting everything that the United States and Western culture itself stood for. Unable to accept modernity, with its evolving views on race and inclusiveness, these disaffected members of American society set about on a mission of murderous bombings and cold-blooded assassinations with the intent to purge the country of its errant beliefs.

Sam Bowers, the firebrand leader of the White Knights, asserted during the summer of 1968, a time that saw the apex of Klan violence, “the events which will occur in Mississippi this summer may well determine the fate of Christianity for years to come!” His fanatical adherents felt no less so.

Bowers’ foot soldiers were made up of the dispossessed. Unskilled and semi-skilled high school dropouts, basically it were those

who saw blacks and their movement towards equality as a threat to the economic and racial status quo. Yet, this movement was also made up of those from the professional and semi-professional class as well. Mirroring what we see today as many Islamic jihadists come from not only the ranks of the poor and the marginalized, but also from the educated and well-to-do. Fanaticism, it has been proven, is not just a poor person’s fall back.

Tarrants and Ainsworth were two of Bower’s most capable. They joined the group around the time the White Knights began to shift its focus upon targeting Jews who were seen as being Communist agents bent on fomenting social unrest to undermine America.

Tarrants grew up in a middle-class neighborhood in Mobile but gravitated to extreme right-wing politics, and as a student at Murphy High School in 1963, he was a chief architect in leading student protests against integration. He dropped out in the 11th grade.

Ainsworth was a fifth-grade elementary school teacher whose death in a violent shootout with law enforcement would shock the community and those who knew her. Southern, Christian, well liked and socially amenable young, white females were considered impervious to being radicalized.

Ainsworth, like quite a few others during this time, had succumbed to a perverted form of Christianity. It was a view of the Christian faith that could adhere to an executive order Sam Bowers wrote stating, “As Christians we are disposed to kindness, generosity, affection ... As militants we are disposed to use physical force against our enemies ... If it is necessary to eliminate someone, it should be done with no malice, in complete silence and in the manner of a Christian act.”

Every generation it seems has to deal with some type of organized and lethal manifestation of hate and intolerance. Each generation has an assemblage of young men (and some women) whose minds end up becoming fertile ground for dangerous and destructive ideologies that are not intent on building up, but rather tearing down and destroying life, rather than enhancing it.

In the shootout that brought an end to Ainsworth’s life and the end of a massive manhunt for the elusive bombers, Thomas Tarrants miraculously survived. After an extensive hospital recovery and even longer time in prison, Tarrants soon came around to what his Christian faith was really all about. Tarrants has lived out his life not as an apostle of hate, but for many years now as a preacher of love, acceptance and faith.

As we battle against our generation’s purveyors of mass violence, murder and hate, let us do so knowing our society has been here before. Our true values have allowed us to prevail and I’m certain will do so again. Hopefully, in the process, some of the souls committed to destruction will, like Thomas Tarrants, come to see the life-espousing view that their Islamic faith truly holds.

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Nine years later, I told you so

BY JEFF POOR/COLUMNIST | jeffreypoor@gmail.com

WASHINGTON D.C. — In September 2005, the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published 12 editorial cartoons critical of Islam — most of which depicted the Muslim prophet, Muhammad. By February 2006, protests were erupting around the world over those dozen cartoons. Between February and May of that year, nearly 200 people died because of the outrage stoked over those cartoons.

The uprising brought to the forefront real questions about speech and the nature of free expression. Questions like whether free societies should draw boundaries around free speech and if yes, where? Why should Muslims be the only sect immune from offense? Can other protected classes be shielded from speech they do not like?

At the time of the original controversy, as the editor of the University of South Alabama student newspaper The Vanguard, my staff and I decided we would reprint one of the Jyllands-Posten cartoons as our editorial to make a statement.

We intended to promote the fact that, as Americans, our constitutional right to freedom of the press was and is sacrosanct by publishing the Jyllands-Posten cartoon depicting Muhammad wearing a bomb as a hat. Days earlier, the Mobile Press-Register made a similar declaration by reprinting one of the cartoons as well. Their effort went relatively unnoticed. But that wouldn't be the case at the University of South Alabama.

At the time all this was going on, USA was looking to boost its enrollment numbers by recruiting international students, including a considerable number of Muslims. Those Muslim students were quick in expressing disapproval and demanded an apology from The Vanguard.

We did not meet their demands and there was a great deal of consternation about the insensitivity of our decision. The administration at South handled it as well as you might expect, trying to delicately play both sides and declared it a learning opportunity for all students.

"If any place should be a place to discuss philosophy and religion and press, it should be a university," then-Dean of Students Tim Beard told the Press-Register.

The lesson I learned was that college campuses are liberal institutions that thrive on political correctness. That was the case even at USA, which is a college deep in the Bible Belt in a solidly Republican county of a solidly Republican state.

Nine years later, we have a similar international controversy underway with the terrorist attack on the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris.

Last week, two gunmen forced their way into

the offices of Charlie Hebdo and killed 12, including the magazine's editor Stéphane Charbonnier, in the name of Islam over similar political cartoons deemed offensive by some Muslims.

In a show of solidarity, leaders all over the world participated in a rally in Paris that was reportedly the biggest in the city's history. The rally was the centerpiece of the movement with the adopted mantra "Je Suis Charlie," or "I am Charlie."

But are we really Charlie? Are our media and our institutions willing to test limits of political correctness in the absurd and offensive manner Charlie Hebdo's editorial staff did?

Based on my experience, the answer is no.

We Americans pride ourselves on being a free and open society and it is often said that we set an example for the rest of the world, including the practitioners radical Islam.

If a magazine like Charlie Hebdo tried to operate on any college campus in the United States, it would be shut down a heartbeat. Or at least in the case of the University of South Alabama, it would protested without the backing of school's administration for fear it would offend a number of students and hurt the institution's long-term growth goals.

"Je Suis Charlie" makes for a good bumper sticker or Twitter hashtag, but it's just not true in a lot of cases. Most of the major mainstream media outlets have resisted showing the Charlie Hebdo cartoons, which seems like it would be integral of any news story dealing with the terrorist attack last week.

To echo something New York Times columnist David Brooks said last week, if we in the United States have the hope that someday the current elements of radical Islam in the world will learn to tolerate offensive speech, then our media and college campuses should do a much better job of embracing offensive speech. What can one expect of radical Islamists when the media and college campuses kowtow to the rules of political correctness?

There are a few scattered exceptions to this rule, but for the most part it has been just lip service paid to the "Je Suis Charlie" outcry.

Nine years later, I can say I told you so and I suspect nine years from now, we'll still be grappling with the issue somewhere in the world.

We can contort ourselves in any number of ways to show we respect other cultures, religions, etc. At some point, however, our values on our soil have to trump those of immigrants and visitors. That will never fully be realized until we're willing make bolder gestures in the name of press freedom and freedom of expression.

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Austal christens USNS Trenton

BY RON SIVAK/COLUMNIST | ron@elminfo.com | Twitter @rcvak

Last Saturday, January 10th, Austal christened USNS Trenton (JHSV 5) at its shipyard in Mobile. The USNS Trenton is the fifth of 10 Joint High Speed Vessels (JHSV) that Austal has under contract with the U.S. Navy as part of an overall 10-ship block-buy contract worth over \$1.6 billion.

The 338-foot catamaran vessel was named Trenton by Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus, after the capital of the state of New Jersey and the site of George Washington's first military victory during the American Revolutionary War.

"Trenton displays American values of community, perseverance and resourcefulness at their very best. I chose to name the Joint High Speed Vessel after Trenton to honor those values and the men and women of the city as well as the state of New Jersey," Mabus said.

"Trenton is a true testament to the successful partnership that has developed between Austal USA, the Military Sealift Command, and the Navy. We're very happy with how well this program has matured as we prepare our 5th JHSV for trials and delivery in the coming months," Austal USA President Craig Perciavalle said.

Trenton will soon join four other JHSVs which have been delivered over the last two years including USNS Spearhead (JHSV 1) which recently left on her second deployment since delivered in 2012.

"Trenton and her sister ships are innovative ships with incredible amounts of speed, volume and flexibility for their size; capabilities the Navy will be able to leverage for decades to come," Perciavalle said.

"The success of the program is the direct result of the hard work and dedication of so many incredible shipbuilding professionals here at Austal – the best I've ever worked with. We're so thankful for the support the JHSV program has received, as evidenced by the addition of JHSV 11 in the recently passed appropriations bill, and we're excited about the program's future."

The ship's sponsor, Ms. Virginia A. Kamsky, is the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Kamsky Associates, Inc. (KAI), a strategic advisory firm with offices in Beijing and New York City.

Over 300 naval and shipyard guests attended the ceremony, which was held alongside the USNS Trenton at Austal USA's Vessel Completion Yard (VCY). The Honorable Ray

Mabus, Secretary of the Navy, was the principal speaker at the event.

Three JHSVs and six Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) are currently under construction in Austal's Mobile shipyard. They will launch one ship and send JHSV 5 out on Builder's Sea Trials in the Gulf of Mexico before the end of January.

For the LCS and JHSV programs, Austal is teamed with General Dynamics Mission Systems, a business unit of General Dynamics.

For the JHSV program, General Dynamics is responsible for the design, integration and testing of the navigation and communication systems, C4I and aviation systems.

EXIT Realty recognizes top producers

Jeanice Durgin was recently awarded top producer award for 2014 by Exit Realty Lyon in Mobile. The award was based on her annual gross commissions. She was also inducted into the 2 million dollar club.

"Jeanice has worked hard and this award is well-deserved recognition of that effort," Sue Lyon, co-owner of EXIT Realty said. "Jeanice is a top notch and determined agent. Her hard work has paid off this year and this award proves that fact"

Lora Parnell was also recently given the award as 2014's top listing agent and top closing agent of the year. Parnell was inducted into the million dollar club.

"Lora has worked hard and this award is well-deserved recognition of that effort," Lyon said.

EXIT Realty Corp. International based out of Toronto, Canada, supplies systems that provide industry-specific interactive sales training. A portion of every transaction fee collected by the company is applied to a charitable fund. To date, over \$2 million has been pledged to Habitat for Humanity.

Wilkins Miller adds Hudson and Pinochet

Wilkins Miller LLC, an accounting and advisory firm with offices in Mobile and Fairhope, announced the addition of Mary-Katherine Hudson and Michelle Pinochet. Hudson and Pinochet have joined the firm's Mobile office as accountants with a concentration in audit and tax.

Hudson graduated in 2013 with a B.S. in Accounting from Mississippi State University and in 2014 with a Masters in Accounting from the University of South Alabama. She is

currently the accounting chair for the American Cancer Society's Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walk.

Pinochet graduated Cum Laude from the University of South Alabama in 2012 with a B.S. in Accounting and is currently enrolled at South Alabama in the Masters of Business Administration program with an expected graduation date of May 2015.

Pinochet was a senior research analyst for the Center for Real Estate and Economic Development at USA during her graduate assistantship and also a student member of the Alabama Society of CPAs and Who's Who among Students in American Universities and Colleges.

McDowell Knight announces new attorneys

Local law firm McDowell Knight Roeder & Sledge LLC. recently announced the addition of attorneys S. Fraser Reid III and J. Blair Newman as members of the firm effective January 1, 2015.

Reid practices in the firm's commercial and business litigation group. He regularly handles business disputes, banking related cases, and other commercial matters involving economic damages. Before joining McDowell Knight in 2012, Reid spent six years litigating complex civil matters for a Charleston, South Carolina, plaintiff's firm and two years as a law clerk for The Honorable Dennis W. Shedd of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

Reid has been named a rising star by Alabama Super Lawyers (2013-2014). He earned his J.D. from the University of Virginia School of Law in 2004 and is admitted to practice in South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama.

Newman practices in the firm's general litigation and business litigation group. He frequently handles contract disputes, shareholder and partnership and limited liability company litigation, insurance coverage matters, and product liability cases. Before joining McDowell Knight in 2011, Newman worked in the government enforcement and white collar crime group in the New York office of international firm Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP.

Newman earned his J.D., summa cum laude, from the University of Alabama School of Law and was a senior editor for the Alabama Law Review. He is admitted to practice in Alabama and New York.

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Wrastlin' with the menu at Boudreaux's Cajun Grill

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

It is a rare occasion that I get to dine with celebrities. OK, you're right. I never get to dine with celebrities. This week my luck changed and the stars aligned as I had the chance to take a few well-known individuals out for lunch.

It was a very cold day. The sun above was obscured by a thick layer of wool and there were traces of ice on the ground. Secret Agent 549 and I pulled into the parking lot of Boudreaux's Cajun Grill in Daphne right behind a fancy Mercedes SUV unbecoming of a minstrel without a cause. The passengers in this ride were a little special. I watched the door open as professional wrestler Wallace "Mayhem" Milham steps out with his wife Molly Thomas Milham, along with his kid brother and drummer extraordinaire John Milham.

You already know Molly from seeing her with alt-country phenomenon Todd Snider on the "Tonight Show" and "Late Night with David Letterman." She and I sang the classic duet "Baby, It's Cold Outside" at this year's "Charlie Brown Christmas" put on by the lovable super talent John Milham. She also fiddled with me on a couple of numbers. You may not be as familiar with Mayhem. He's a wrestler with a heart of gold, who never made it out of the minors because he's actually a pacifist. The only time he shows his killer instinct is when his road rage sets in. Get him out of the car and he's a teddy bear. He even looks like one.

Mayhem was in town briefly and we were dying to have a meal together. Since we are both big fans of Cajun food, Boudreaux's seemed like a great place.

This place has a beautiful view of the bay, but it was little too cold to dine outside. We were seated at the first table that could accommodate five, and our friendly waitress got us started with water and tea. One look at the appetizer section and I knew we were getting **Cajun cheese fries (\$7)**. What sold me on them was the tasso cheese sauce. I will order just about anything if tasso is an ingredient. In this dish the pork was shaved into tiny flakes and was delicious.

The consensus of the table was to also try **Swamp cakes (\$8)**, a battered and golden fried Boudin cake topped with crab and spinach cream sauce. We all enjoyed splitting these five ways and had no complaints.

Mayhem claims to be particular about **gumbo (\$5 per cup)**. He rattled on about some tragic story involving gumbo from when he was a boy, but I wasn't paying attention. I'm not scared of him since he retired. He gave me a bite of his gumbo and we both agreed it was good quality, medium to darkish roux with seafood. Molly tried the **crab bisque (\$5)**, which aside from being a touch salty, was very good. I went with the special soup of the day **beef and vegetable (\$5)**, made with Fairhope Brewing Company's Paint it Black IPA. It was very good as expected.

John is a fairly health conscious individual. He had his eye on **Eggplant Medallions (\$11)**. These are grilled and smothered in a balsamic reduction with sprinkles of goat cheese and served with more veggies and rice. I tried it myself and the balsamic was a little overpowering and surprisingly sweet, but John cleaned his plate.



Photos/Dan Anderson

Boudreaux's Cajun Grill offers a promising menu with a spectacular view.

partners' proteins, the slaw was pretty darned good.

Mayhem was the only one brave enough for dessert, but they brought five spoons. **Bananas Foster Bread Pudding (\$7)** was too much to resist. We all agreed the outside was a little burnt, but the inside was divine. This one has a rum butter sauce as opposed to a whiskey sauce and is definitely not a dessert built for one, maybe not even two.

I must say we did enjoy our attentive waitress. She knew the menu well and handled the ebb and flow of not smothering us. I think the complaints we had were problems easily fixed. Perhaps the slaw is best served on the side. I will be back for more traditional items such as étouffée, fried shrimp, a real muffuletta and the fried Oyster Rockefeller po-boy! Maybe the lunch items we had aren't their strong suit, but they sounded so good on the menu.

I say give the place a try, but stick to traditional Cajun fare. I like what they are trying to do. I think I caught them on a bad day.

We bid our farewells to the drummer boy, the fiddle player and as the wrestler turned to express gratitude for lunch I noticed the gray in his beard. I felt the sting of waning celebrity. I thought, "If he could wrestle one more match ..." but at our age no one wants to see him in those tights. Adieu, Mayhem.

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Agent 549 was watching the carbs and couldn't pass up the **Salmon Salad (\$13)**. It was a grilled piece of OK salmon over a bed of spinach with cranberries and pecans that dressed it up. Tossed in the same balsamic reduction and goat cheese as John's eggplant, that side of the table had a theme. As a whole, this dish was described as good but not great.

Speaking of themes, from the lunch menu Mayhem ordered **Wood-fired Yardbird (\$8)**, **Molly had Kickin' Crawfish (\$9)**, and I had **Grilled Boudin (\$8)**. What is the theme here? Every one of these is served over a bed of house slaw!

Wally's consisted of skewers of chicken thighs smothered in Bourbon and cane syrup reduction. It was good, but completely lukewarm. Molly's crawfish were the same way. They had a really great cream sauce that could have been spectacular but was also lukewarm. My boudin, however, was perfect. They must have cooked it last. Despite tragically cooling off my dining

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HIGH TIDE CAFÉ AT IP CASINO

Excitement surrounds Cajun cook off announcement

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



Photo/ www.moesoriginalbbq.com

We sat around our radios. We combed Facebook. We called and texted our friends. What could the big announcement be? Why are they announcing it while I am still at work? Unless you have been living under a media rock, Mobile will soon have its inaugural Downtown Cajun cook-off presented by Cunningham Bounds.

Jambalaya, crawfish pie, tasso maq choux, boudin balls and crab bisque are just some of the many Cajun offerings you will be sampling Saturday, March 21. The event will be held at Cathedral Square from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. and will feature 22 teams from downtown's local restaurants cranking out the good stuff while event goers sample the creations and enjoy live music from the Bud Light Zydeco stage.

Tickets are only \$10 in advance, \$15 day of event and will benefit the Child Advocacy Center of Mobile. Pick yours up at the Child Advocacy Center at 1351 Springhill Ave., Mellow Mushroom at the Loop, Mellow Mushroom at University and Old Shell, or the West Mobile and Daphne locations of Bugmaster.

Live music, cold drinks and plenty of roux-containing dishes sounds like a recipe for fun. At the very least it is a great way to start a morning. If you don't see me there call the jails and hospitals. Visit www.cacmobile.org for an in depth look.

Frios comes to Mobile in time for Mardi Gras

I first tried Gadsden-based Frios Gourmet Pops at the Windmill Market in Fairhope. It was love at first bite. I fancy myself a snow cone man, but these frozen treats could make me change my mind. The variety of flavors is very original and they have found their home on that side of the bay with an actual storefront and a walkup window from Equality Street. They can also be found at Lulu's Homeport Marina.

I've written about them before, and how they use the freshest ingredients possible from local farms. The pop flavor availabilities depend on the season. Fresh peach and blueberry pomegranate are only available in the summer months. Cranberry orange and caramel apple only appear in the fall. Gingersnap, blood orange, and grapefruit jalapeno are a few to look forward to in the winter. But some are readily available all year round, like cereal and milk. I may be wrong but I think they get their Fruit Loops from a Fruit Loop farm in Irvington.

By popular demand Frios has made its way across the bay and has opened shop not with a

bang, but a whimper in Dauphin Street's Urban Emporium. The December soft opening has been well received and an official grand opening is slated for Thursday, Jan. 22. The Mobile outfit will also feature a freezer cart for events about town. Just in time for Mardi Gras and Senior Bowl you could be seeing these at your next barn party, corporate events, weddings, funerals, who knows!

Contact the Urban Emporium at 251-441-8044 or Kari Benson at 251-581-1909 for availability. Be sure to check out www.friospops.com for more information.

Date set for final wine dinner at Italian Fisherman

Last issue we told you the sad news of the Italian Fisherman scheduling to close the doors for public dining after the Feb. 14 dinner service. Chef John Weichman's story also features heavily in this week's cover story. His final wine dinner is set for Thursday, Jan. 29 at 7 p.m. For this "Swan Song" event, think of a menu loaded with seafood, beef, truffles, and caviar for starters.

The four course meal will be accompanied by four wines from the Terr D'Oro winery, part of the Trincherro Family Estates wine portfolio. Price is \$60 per person, prepaid. I am certain Chef John will go all out on this one.

Also, New Orleans famed pianist Ronnie Cole is honoring the restaurant with one more performance, slated for Tuesday, Feb. 3.

Call 251-478-2881 for reservations.

Won't be long until West Mobile has Moe's Original BBQ

Progress is coming along and things are looking close. Facebook buzz suggests we are creeping up on an opening date for the new Moe's BBQ near the intersection of Airport and University boulevards. Fans of the popular sauce and sides are sure to use this one as a get-away from the downtown area once the Mardi Gras mayhem sets in.

Located near Diamond's Gentlemen's Club and Mosley's Meat Market, the worry is whether or not Moe's can have better luck in this locale than did Big Al's Barbecue and Little Dick Russell's. I don't think they will have a problem with the loyal fans they already have. We will let you know of an exact opening date as soon as we hear something.

Get ready for that first parade and recycle those beads!

LOOK FLAWLESS.

Carnival season has arrived, which means it's time to get ready for Mardi Gras Balls. Show off a natural, sun-kissed glow with an airbrush tan from the Spa at the Battle House. The cost for one application is \$35.

To book an appointment, call 251.338.5700.

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Cutthroat world of restaurants leaves little room for error

BY GABRIEL TYNES/ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR | gabe@lagniappemobile.com

There was a time when John Weichman, as the owner and executive chef of a 260-seat fine dining restaurant on the Beltway, sold 300 pounds of prime rib a week. That was the mid-'80s. The last time he offered the entrée, at his much smaller, contemporary restaurant The Italian Fisherman late last year, he sold just three cuts.

The Italian Fisherman, which opened in September 2011 on Old Shell Road in Midtown, will close after serving its final dinner Valentine's Day. It will join a long list of restaurants, fine dining and otherwise, that only exist in the memories of Mobilians.

Weichman, whose 40-plus year career in culinary arts may have peaked as the owner of Weichman's All Seasons from 1982 until it closed in 1995, most recently decided to throw in the tall, white, billowy, classic toque hat after watching sales decline at The Italian Fisherman for the past two years.

Weichman was a chemical engineer before he married into the Greek family that operated the former Constantine's, a storied Mobile restaurant that closed in the early '80s. Since, he's traveled the globe as an independent restaurateur and caterer, at times serving as the state's representative to the National Restaurant Association. In 1981 and 1985, Weichman catered inauguration parties for President Ronald Reagan and once, he even shook the former president's hand.

But recently, as he planned his final menu at The Italian Fisherman and before he enters semi-retirement as a personal chef and restaurant consultant, Weichman reflected on changes to the local dining scene.

"There used to not be such a discriminating palate," he said. "Forty years ago, Mobile didn't have 20 different ethnic options. It was pretty much just meat and potatoes. But these days, kids will turn their nose up at a pot roast. How many young people do you know who would order lamb off a menu?"

Weichman's All Seasons opened in 1982 with 140 seats, expanding to 260 seats by 1986. At the time, his maître d wore a tuxedo. At its peak, All Seasons served around 110,000 people per year and reported about \$1.7 million in sales. With more than 300 labels, it also boasted the largest wine selection in the state.

Then Weichman said, the Beltline and points west were invaded by corporate dine-in and drive-through restaurants. Sales steadily declined, leading to All Seasons' eventual closure 20 years ago.

"Originally, fine dining was a family affair," he said. "You'd have fathers pass their restaurants on to their sons. But the children of those proprietors, they saw the writing on the wall. Today, they are all engineers, or doctors or dentists. They didn't see a future in it. I saw, if there was one, it would have to be scaled back. Now, no self-funded restaurant is going to open with more than 100 seats, if they are smart."

Weichman spent the interim years as an executive chef for multiple restaurants at what he called the "premier retirement community of the Midwest." He returned to Mobile to open the former Old Shell Road Grill in the same building as The Italian Fisherman, before introducing his most recent establishment in 2011.

Since, Weichman has tried promotions, incentives, and TV appearances to get people through the door. Once, he mailed out



Photo/Dan Anderson

Chef Mike Devaney plates dishes at The Bull, a 6-year-old fine dining restaurant downtown.

40,000 coupons to seven different zip codes, but only a handful came back.

He admitted The Italian Fisherman received mixed reviews on social media websites like UrbanSpoon, TripAdvisor and Yelp, but also pointed out that many of the complaints were from one-time reviewers about the kitchen's expediency.

"I think the cultural expectations have changed," he said, adding that many of today's diners have no patience for an upscale meal, cooked to order.

"Some men won't even remove their hats when they come inside and rather than carry on a conversation, you see a table full of people staring at their cell phones," he said. "Many people just want to eat and leave. You would think a town of 200,000 people would be able to support 200 tables for fine dining, but I think most of those customers have moved across the bay or to West Mobile."

But other anecdotal evidence suggests a restaurant's success may not depend on how busy it is, or if it does have overwhelmingly favorable reviews. It may not even matter if it's won a Nappie Award, or if it's where you got engaged, or celebrated a promotion. The fact is, most restaurants, like the food they serve, have an expiration date.

Industry lore often suggests 90 percent of restaurants fail within their first year, but a 2006 study by a professor at Ohio State

University put the failure rate, at least in that state, at 25 percent. Within two years, the study found, about 60 percent of restaurants fail, which is in line with other startups in the service industry.

The Mobile Health Department couldn't provide exact numbers by deadline, but in the past 18 months, the area has lost such establishments such as True Midtown Kitchen, Taste of Vietnam, Little House Midtown, Samurai J, Busaba's, Shamrock, Rose and Thistle, Tacky Jacks, The Shed and Big Al's Barbeque. Many local diners were shocked when the Tiny Diny, a Mobile institution for more than 60 years, closed in 2012. But last year, even a Denny's on the Beltline closed, sadly serving its last Moon over My Hammy.

At the same time, longevity in the area isn't that unusual. Wintzell's Oyster House has served them fried, stewed and nude for more than 75 years. Queen G's celebrated 25 years last May. Comparable menus at establishments such as Heroes Sports Bar and Grille and Butch Cassidy's have flourished for close to two decades on their own. Roshell's diner on Springhill Avenue has operated continuously in the same family since 1952. Known as Mobile's oldest restaurant, The Dew Drop Inn served its first hot dog in 1924 and has been open ever since.

More recently, Lap's built a fortress of a restaurant on the Causeway, where you can also buy bait, tackle and a case of beer for the boat. Bistro Ecoffier breathed a new, French life into a long-vacant building on Dauphin Street in Midtown. Half Shell Oyster House opened an expansive new franchise on Airport Boulevard at I-65. Nearby, a long-awaited Melting Pot opened its doors after several regulatory delays.

Downtown, Moe's Original BBQ has provided a lively new anchor to the west end of Lower Dauphin Street as it prepares to open another location in the former Big Al's building out in WeMo. LoDa Bier Garten is making an impressive go of it in the former Hopjack's and Picklefish location on the corner of Dauphin and Joachim and Noble South is offering something new where Busaba's once was. Cotton State BBQ offers its own smoked meats near the federal courthouse and Union has built a reputation for fine steaks. And Bob's Downtown Restaurant is now pumping out dogs and home cooking on the corner of Jackson and Saint Francis.

Chicken would seem like a pretty safe investment, with new entries including Chicken Salad Chick and PDQ in West Mobile, Foosackly's opening a bigger dine-in restaurant on Dauphin Street with an extra-long drive-through and Chick-fil-A opening on the ground floor of the RSA Trustmark building downtown.

Other, short-term success stories include Yak the Kathmandu Kitchen, which introduced the area to Tibetan cuisine just three years ago and is currently expanding to a second location in Fairhope. The Mediterranean Sandwich Co. opened with fewer than 10 tables downtown in 2009, but recently added new locations in West Mobile and Daphne.

At the same time, Mobilians are also demanding more of their grocery stores. You can still find the generic, cost-plus options of yesteryear, but with the recent introduction of more upscale markets like Publix, Rouses and Whole Foods, shoppers have increasing access to exotic brands, organic vegetables, grass-fed beef and free-range poultry.

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Frankie Little is a familiar face to many area diners, one who currently manages front-of-house at The Bull after pulling similar duties at the on-again, off-again La Pizzeria for years before it finally closed permanently last October. While not specifically speaking of decisions that led to La Pizzeria's closure, Little said independent restaurants tend to be affected by both market and personal influences, while their small profit margins leave little room for error.

"With the cost of everything going up, it may be easier for some places to make a profit by cutting corners," he said. "Then you risk losing [customers], who aren't willing to pay the same or more for something of a lower quality."

But Little, a Baldwin County native who has also lived in Austin, Texas, said Mobile is increasingly becoming more of a dining destination, although it still lacks much of what many large cities have to offer.

"Ten to 20 years ago, there was no fine dining downtown," he said. "Now, we're trying to give Mobile what they want ... but it's kind of like survival of the fittest."

The Bull has been open six years, offering a relatively small dinner menu with entrees ranging from \$17 black bean cakes to a \$39 beef tenderloin. They are also open for lunch, but only on Fridays.

Little noted the recent appearance of local food trucks on the scene, but also mentioned downtown still lacks such simple offerings as a build-your-own burrito stand, or a noodle restaurant, or a pizza-by-the-slice window. But at the same time, downtown also lacks another important feature of similarly-sized cities; residents.

"There are only so many customers," he said, suggesting, "if [the University of South Alabama] were downtown it would be such a different city."

But recently, downtown has benefitted from an increasing number of hotel rooms and more are on the way. A new form-based development code and the introduction of the aircraft industry offer still more promise of opportunity.

Chef Osman Ademovic, who fled war in his native Bosnia to open the critically acclaimed Osman's restaurant on Halls Mill Road 15 years ago, said for him, the key to longevity has been relatively simple.

"If you open with a mind to get rich it will be the biggest mistake you ever made. If you do it right, you have a steady job for yourself and a steady income for your family," he said.

On a recent Saturday night, all 35 seats in his restaurant were reserved, and additional inquiries calling in were turned away.

"I spend lots of time saying 'no' to more customers," Ademovic said. "I'd rather serve 35 people perfectly than serve 40 people and make a mistake. Bad word can spread in no time."

Ademovic cited the small, loyal front-of-house staff led by his wife as key to his own restaurant's success and numerous accolades, which include readers choice awards from several area publications including Lagniappe.

"It's important not to have too novice employees," he said. "My people know our customers by name."

Meanwhile, he also acknowledged that his short-lived, second endeavor known as Osman's Midtown was a rapid failure in 2013.

"I couldn't be in two places at once," he offered.

Ademovic listed Ruth's Chris, Noja, The Bull, Legacy Bar and Grill and Via Emilia as places where he likes to escape the kitchen and enjoy a fine dining experience of his own. He said the news of Weichman's closure was "surprising and saddening."

Meanwhile, Ademovic said his own customers' loyalty is such that he doesn't feel threatened by the 15 new restaurants possibly opening at the 600,000 square-foot McGowin Park retail development about a mile down the road. He predicted it would be a shopping destination with convenient dining, rather than a dining destination with convenient shopping.

"I have regular clientele that have come in here for years," he said. "They come here, they know what to expect."

Back at The Italian Fisherman, Weichman believes he's gained some valuable experience and hopes future restaurateurs can benefit from the lessons learned.

"A start up investment can be tremendous," he said. "I encourage those without a lot of capital to look for a turn-key operation, to have a business plan, to try to identify every conceivable cost. Even the seasonings have value. Think about spending 3 to 5 percent for advertising and promotions and don't forget to factor in costs for maintenance, repair and even theft. Have a signature and build a reputation. A novice could get real lost — it's a minefield."

Most importantly, be prepared to work. "You're going to spend 10 hours a day shopping, prepping and serving, and that's for dinner only," he said.

At the end of the day, Weichman said he has no regrets, but he does hope to see more independent restaurants flourish in Mobile.

"I turned 71 last July and I'm probably the oldest working chef in Mobile," he said. "It's been a wonderful career, but there has been a cultural change and I'm too old to reinvent myself. If I can impart any wisdom, it's that I hope more young people take a chance going outside their comfort zone and get realistic about supporting independent operators, because that money stays here and at the end of the day, it makes the city a better place to live."

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It was the best of times, it was the worst of times

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

As noted here a few months ago, there's a lot of "feast or famine" in the column's realm. Apparently, our early Mardi Gras this year is squeezing a bunch of happenings into late January and we're heavy with a variety of news heading into Mobile's most manic time of the year.

Best news first: Congrats go out a young artist who has appeared on these pages a few times in the last year as Lucy Gafford recently accepted a marriage proposal from her longtime beau Mike Cast.

Rumor has it Mr. Cast employed his creative energies and secreted the ring within a hand-crafted turtle, then placed it in Gafford's driveway behind her car. When Gafford went to move it out of her way, she discovered the betrothal request on the bottom of the faux reptile.

Safe to assume her acquiescence didn't come at a tortoise's pace. The imagination runs wild with what this fun-loving and quirky couple might have in store for the official ceremonies.

Museum news: The History Museum of Mobile continues to wow locals with the Ark of India exhibit. The museum is taking word on the road as Curator of History Scotty Kirkland entertains and informs with a series of book talks throughout the area in late January.

Kirkland penned a book to accompany the exhibit with the breathtaking volume designed and assembled by Mobilian Tom Mason. The work explores artist Roderick MacKenzie's Indian journeys in the wider context of Britain's waning rule over the Asian subcontinent. It is loaded with not just MacKenzie's visual works but also many of his written descriptions taken from his journals and published articles on the subject.

The dates run as follows: on Jan. 22, Kirkland will meet attendees at Government Street Presbyterian Church, 300 Government St. at noon.

On Jan. 25, Kirkland will address a group at Stewartfield on the campus of Spring Hill College at 2:30 p.m. This appearance is in conjunction with the Friends of the Spring Hill College Library.

Then on Jan. 29, the curator will head back to that neighborhood when he appears at the Spring Hill/Moorer Branch of the Mobile Public Library, 4 S. McGregor Ave., at 6:30 p.m.

Meanwhile back at the museum, they have announced the year's schedule for their popular Learning Lunch series, something that will continue into the pre-Lenten merrymaking with a Feb. 11 appearance by Bernard LaFayette, Jr., a veteran of the 1965 March on Selma that is the subject of a current theatrical blockbuster. We'll have more on that and other events like a Feb. 6 African-American music festival in future issues so check back.

Speaking of the Learning Lunches, their latest event on Jan. 14 contained what might be seen as a bombshell of, well, historical proportions when author and publisher Steve Joynt was the guest. His subject aspired to put to rest apocryphal stories about the Mother of Mystics.

As was discussed in a recent Lagniappe article, Joynt took it upon himself to dig into the past of mythical Mardi Gras founder Joe Cain. The popular tale is that Cain assembled the first Fat Tuesday procession in 1866 and 1867 before being joined by the newly formed Order of Myths in 1868.

Joynt uncovered newspaper accounts of Cain's presence at New Orleans Mardi Gras in 1867. One of Cain's own accounts places him in the Crescent City in 1866 as well. Joynt maintains Cain's first appearance in Mobile processions was in 1868.

So what's the big deal? Put the pieces together.

New Orleans' first Mardi Gras society was the Mistick Krewe of Comus who paraded in 1857. They were inspired, in part, by the New Year's activities of Mobile's Cowbellion de Rakin

Society who paraded on New Year's but weren't associated with the Old World Roman Catholic tradition of Carnival.

Rumors of a Mobile-based Boeuf Gras society reaching back to the 18th century have never been verified by survey of historical documentation. Plenty have tried, going so far as perusing the Le Moyne brothers' journals but the proof just isn't there.

What is known is members of Mobile's New Year's groups — who continued to celebrate through the 1880s — went to New Orleans and helped organize Comus in the period preceding the Civil War. Eleven years later, Mobile would begin its Fat Tuesday events.

So the festivities we know in both towns have a symbiotic history. Without each other, neither would have manifested the way they did.

This underscores the silliness of the rivalry some seek to perpetuate between the towns. The whole festive affair continues for mirth's sake alone. We should follow suit.

Now the not-so-good: It appears efforts to replace the Arts Alive festival in downtown Mobile have hit a major snag. The decade-old event will relocate from Cathedral Square to the Brookley complex in the coming year.

There are also indications without an arts festival in place, South Sounds Music Festival might be in danger of evaporating as well. Nothing has been conclusively settled as yet.

Three years ago, the coordination of Temporal City Festival and South Sounds gave a needed shot in the arm to Arts Alive. It was also a big boost to the slow climb toward downtown resurgence.

Should all of this disappear, it would present another of the "one step up-one step back" happenings that have become frustrating and familiar for Mobile's ostensible arts and entertainment district. We need to see movement here since the bonds of stasis aren't healthy for individuals or communities.

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'Folk 'n' roll' rambling into Callaghan's

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

Band: Winston Ramble

Date: Saturday, Jan. 17, 7:30 p.m.

**Venue: Callaghan's Irish Social Club,
916 Charleston St.,**

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Tickets: \$7 at the door

Winston Ramble, a group of musicians from North Alabama, have been jamming around the Southeast for the past three years and steadily earning new fans along the way. Together, Drew Benefield (vocals/guitar), Justin Oliver (mandolin) and Jud Mize (guitar/vocals) have crafted a style of music that they call "folk 'n' roll."

It's familiar folk and bluegrass mixed with a Southern and roots rock attitude, then accented with impeccable three-part harmonies. While their style maintains its acoustic purity, classic rock overtones cannot be ignored. The creation of their style is a perfect example of natural musical evolution at work.

"We started off picking in our living room" Oliver said. "We've grown around more rock. We come from a classic rock style background. When we got more into the folky aspect of playing music, I think we naturally gravitated towards the more acoustic sound and still tried to maintain that rock 'n' roll edge to it too."

The musical camaraderie between Benefield, Oliver and Mize began to take shape during their high school years. Eventually, the three decided it was time to take it to the next level. When it was time to share what they created with others, the three decided to launch at legendary Birmingham venue Marty's PM, the Magic City's premiere watering hole for sampling acoustic-based, organic sounds.

As time passed, their folk 'n' roll sound demanded more depth, and the trio decided to expand their lineup. Coty West (drums), Max Millwood (bass/vocals) and Heath Simmons (Dobro) were recruited to add their own influence to the band's style. Together, they have been touring under the name Winston Ramble.

"Winston Ramble was inspired by Levon Helm's Midnight Ramble," Mize said. "We took that idea of having a bunch of friends come over and play music. That's where we started. We started doing that in Haleyville, Alabama, where we're from in Winston County. So, we put the two together and came up with Winston Ramble."

The bond between the young musicians is reflected in their songwriting. According to Oliver and Mize, creating their folk 'n' roll masterpieces is truly a group effort. Song ideas and structure tend to bounce off the members of Winston Ramble until a worthy finished product is created. Their process of songwriting allows all band members to have a hand in composition.

"Our songwriting process is a lot of give and take, most of the time," Oliver said. "One of us will come up with an idea or something to go off of, be it lyrics or something with the music. We



Photo/Winston Ramble: facebook.com/WinstonRamble/

North Alabama's Winston Ramble has been building its reputation as a live act.

send a lot of stuff back and forth to each other and play around with it, until we all find something we're happy with. We take turns working on different melodies and harmonies until we find what we like."

"You really don't ever know what the song is going to sound like until everybody in the band has got together and played it," Mize added. "You can really hear that pure sound."

Unfortunately, there are currently only two ways to experience Winston Ramble. They have been gathering fans through live performances and sharing online videos of their performances. But more recently, the band has been busy laying down tracks for their debut album.

According to Mize, the band employed the engineering services of their manager Alex Cape (Southeastern Attractions). He said Cape had the knowledge and equipment to help make their debut album a memorable experience for both the band and their fans. Currently, they are aiming for a March release, but no title has been chosen yet. Mize said the title will come after the album has been fully tracked. Oliver said recording has been a positive experience thus far.

"It's been going really well," he explained. "We've put most of it together. Starting in December, we started putting together our basic ideas and working off those. It's coming out really

well. We've got a pretty decent blend of different styles of music coming out on it. We definitely got some bluegrass sounding stuff, some rock sounding stuff and even some smoother soul type stuff."

Meanwhile, their audiences appear to thoroughly enjoy the band's folk 'n' roll in a live setting. Mize and Oliver guarantee those unfamiliar with the band will be amazed by its live delivery. Shows tend to be energetic and extremely crowd friendly. In fact, Winston Ramble encourages crowd interaction and makes it their mission to have people on their feet and moving to their "foot-stompin' style of music."

"People don't expect us to sound like we do when we first get up. I really like the look on people's faces when we sing three-part harmony," Oliver said.

"Mine is just the energy we all have when we're onstage," Mize offered. "It's what we've been doing our whole lives, and it's what we've been waiting on."

After the release of their debut, the band plans to expand its audience. In the past, they have limited themselves to playing around Alabama. In 2015, Winston Ramble will hit the road, with further plans to travel to new locales and spread their folk 'n' roll along the way.

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Hangout Fest features new, returning favorites

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

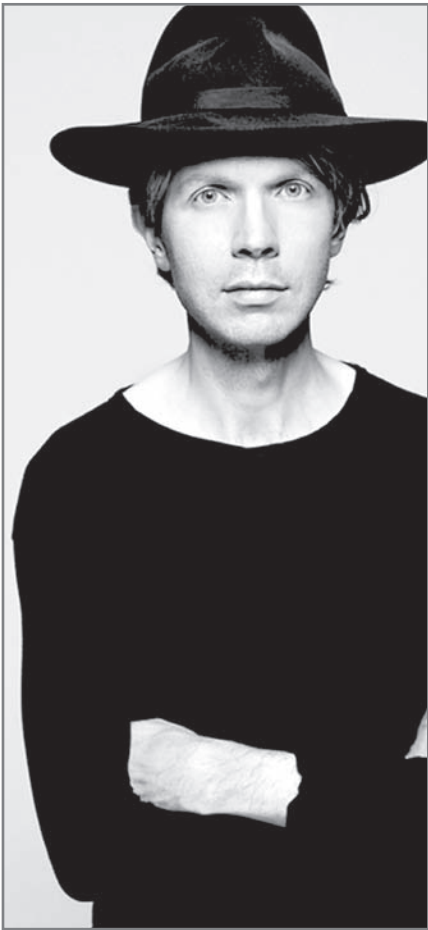


Over the years, the Hangout Music Festival has become one of the world's premiere summer festival destinations. Each year, a multitude of music and sun enthusiasts pack the beaches in Gulf Shores to enjoy a fun-filled weekend with sounds from the biggest touring bands on the road.

As each January ushers in a new year, the good people behind the scenes release the stellar lineup for the upcoming summer's installment of this world-class music event. On Jan. 12, Hangout Fest released the lineup for 2015, scheduled May 15-17. In true fashion, the festival promises to be one of the best yet.

This year will include performances from Foo Fighters, Zac Brown Band, Beck, Skrillex, My Morning Jacket, Foster the People, Paramore, Spoon, Umphrey's McGee, Major Lazer, TV on the Radio, Phantogram, Damian "Jr. Gong" Marley, Krewella, Adventure Club, Lupe Fiasco, Cold War Kids, Future Islands, Vance Joy, Galactic with Macy Gray, ODESZA, Father John Misty, Beats Antique, Trampled by Turtles, GRiZ, Drive-By Truckers, St. Lucia, Robert DeLong, Toro y Moi, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Gramatik, The Lone Bellow, Lake Street Dive, Rubblebucket, Iration, Frank Turner & the Sleeping Souls, Vintage Trouble, Charles Bradley & His Extraordinaires, Houndmouth, Xavier Judd & the United Nations, Mary Lambert, Kopecky, J. Roddy Walston & the Business, Young Fathers, The Mowgli's, Strands of Oak, Grizfolks, San Fermin, The Districts, Colony House, Joywave, Saint Pepsi, Elle King, MisterWives, Halsey, Knox Hamilton, Zella Day, Goldroom, Five Knives, Steelism and The Suffers.

Tickets are on sale now for \$249 through the Hangout Fest website, with additional VIP and travel packages available.



Photos/www.hangoutmusicfest.com (From left clockwise: Foo Foo Fighters, Zac Brown Band and Beck.

2015 Hangout line up has some old friends and new.



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Soul Kitchen cooking up a strong schedule

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



Over the past few weeks, Soul Kitchen has been busy announcing numerous impressive shows that will be coming to the large LoDa venue over the next few months. Owners Brad Young and Maggie Smith are definitely trying to make 2015 the biggest year yet at Soul Kitchen.

On Sunday, Jan. 18, 92 ZEW's "Free Concert Series" continues with two impressive acts. Bahamas is the stage name of Alfie Jurvanen, a Canadian who has reached superstar status in the Great White North through his work on Jack Johnson's Brushfire Records label. Now, he's bringing sounds from his self-explanatory album titled "Bahamas Is Alfie" to the Gulf Coast. Bahamas will be joined by Field Report. Led by Chris Porterfield, Field Report has been earning praise from critical outlets such as NPR, Rolling Stone and Time Magazine.

Soul Kitchen also recently made one of its biggest artist announcements ever. On Thursday, Feb. 19, The Flaming Lips will be making their Azalea City debut. Known for psychedelic sounds and a theatrical stage show, the band has also been a regular performer at Hangout Fest, where they tend to be a crowd favorite. Their shows are a multimedia experience filled with audience participation and enough eye candy to push the limits of sanity. Compared to their usual venues, Soul Kitchen will

provide Lips fans a much more intimate experience.

On Saturday, Feb. 28, Marc Broussard will return to Mobile. Mobile has been a regular stop for the "King of Bayou Soul" since his early career. The last time Broussard rolled through town, he was performing with the Southern Soul Assembly. This time, he'll bring cuts from his latest release, "A Life Worth Living."

Soul Kitchen has not forgotten about fans of the underground. Currently, '90s alternative metal masters Helmet are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the release of their legendary album "Betty," and they will bring the party to Soul Kitchen Sunday, March 1. Helmet fans can expect to hear "Betty" performed live in its entirety.

Drummer Jason Bonham, son of Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham, plans to bring his Led Zeppelin Experience to Soul Kitchen. The show will feature many of Zeppelin's classic tracks. Through the wonders of modern technology, the younger Bonham is also known for his live duet/battle with his father, who passed away in 1980.

Tickets for all the shows (except the ZEW's free concert) are available now through the Soul Kitchen website and various outlets including Mellow Mushroom (WeMo/MiMo). Local music junkies are encouraged to purchase tickets now and avoid possible sell-outs.



Photo/flaminglips.com by: George Sallsbury

The Flaming Lips will perform at Soul Kitchen Feb. 19, providing an intimate experience with a band more often seen at large festivals.

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The fungus among us

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

Band: Mushroomhead with special guests Like Monroe and The Family Ruin
Date: Monday, Jan. 19, doors at 7 p.m.
Venue: Soul Kitchen, 219 Dauphin St., www.soulkitchenmobile.com
Tickets: \$15 in advance /\$18 day-of, online or call 1-866-468-7630

In the twisted, enigmatic tradition of bands such as GWAR and Lordi, Mushroomhead combines graphic costumes, intense visuals and vehement sounds to create an unforgettable concert experience. Rather than synthetic bodily fluids typical of a GWAR show, Mushroomhead audiences are pummeled with a metal explosion riddled with industrial overtones. The band is touring in support of its 2014 release, “The Righteous & the Butterfly.”

This album marks the return of Jason “J Mann” Popson, who has not performed with the band since 2003.

Texas-based metalcore band Like Monroe has been lending its support on the tour. The group has established a reputation for not only their raging sound but also their lyrical talent. Like Monroe riddles their music with real-life experiences ranging from break-ups to drug addiction. Their roaring vocals and electrifying instrumental work quickly earned them a deal with Good Fight Music (Every Time I Die, The Devil Wears Prada). They are touring in support of their chaotic album, “Things We Think But Never Speak.”

The Family Ruin has come all the way from the UK to showcase their “face-melting riffs, thick grooves and rich harmonies.” Pulling inspiration from bands such as Avenged Sevenfold and Mötley Crüe, this band should have no problem creating a legion of local fans in Mobile.



Photo/www.mushroomhead.com | Mushroomhead

Industry manufacturing live music reputation

Band: Carnival Bill Carney, Sister Sniffle, Ritual Eyes, Mistake Pageant
Date: Saturday, Jan. 17, 9 p.m.
Venue: The Industry Bar, 2551 Government Blvd., 470-0820
Tickets: \$5 at the door



Photo/Facebook

Nestled off the beaten path traveling westward on Government Street, The Industry Bar has become a favorite haunt for many locals. While music is not unusual at this watering hole, it seems as if it is becoming a more regular feature, and this show will bring together four very impressive and unique musical acts.

Carnival Bill Carney is no stranger to the local scene. Over the years, the underground singer-songwriter has crafted quite a repertoire of interesting songs. Both lyrically and musically, Carney adheres to his own rules when it comes to songwriting, and his music tends to trip through a variety of genres ranging from alternative folk to blues.

Sister Sniffle will bring their sounds from the ‘ham to the Azalea City. Neeta K lies at the foundation of the band. She has crafted a sugary form of modern folks that is accented by gentle vibes and Neeta’s pristine vocal work.

Mistake Pageant is a two-piece underground rock fury. Ritual Eyes will also be lending support.

Rock ‘n’ roll all night

Band: The Red Right Hands, The Hallers, Sister Helen
Date: Thursday, Jan. 22, 9 p.m.
Venue: Alchemy Tavern, 7 S. Joachim St., www.alchemytavernmobile.com
Tickets: \$5 at the door

Even though Alchemy is under new ownership, the cozy LoDa bar across the street from the Saenger Theatre still continues to provide live music for its regulars. This show will introduce two newcomers to the local scene and one touring band out of Brooklyn.

The Red Right Hands — a four-piece delivering a bottomed-out, fat rock sound — have spent the past few months spreading their sound around Mobile Bay. They fondly refer to their sound as “big ol’ climax rock.” Those in attendance can expect a rock ‘n’ roll hybrid of Black Sabbath and Kings of Leon.

The Hallers hail from the Eastern Shore. They are a five-piece honing in on an indie rock signature.

Brooklyn’s Sister Helen will introduce the crowd to their latest release, “The Jasmine EP.” The group delivers an extremely dramatic style of indie rock where raging riffs are mingled with eclectic guitar harmonics and a wave of striking vocals.



Photo/ facebook.com/Sister-Helen | Sister Helen



JANUARY 15 - JANUARY 21

THUR. JAN 15

Alchemy— Ryan Balthrop
Bill's by the Beach— Sam Glass, 5p
BLUEGILL— Tim and Dale Duo, 6p
Blues Tavern— Deak Harp Duo, 8:30p
Celtic Irish Pub— Jacob Turner
Felix's— Grits N Pieces
Flora Bama— T. Bone Montgomery, 3p// Bo Roberts, Mark Sherrill, Chris Newbury & Friends, 5p/// J. Hawkins & James Daniel, 9p
John Word's Captains Table— Jerry Squires, 7p
Legacy— Johnny Hayes and John Cochran
Lulu's— Adam Holt, 4p
McSharry's— Kyle & Karl, 7:30p
Old 27 Grill— Songwriters Night, 6:30p
Pickin' on the Porch— Bryant Gilley, 7p
R-Life Live— Grant Dunaway
Veets— Hickfest w/ Tim Kinsey, Wes Loper, Dale Drinkard, Holli Mosley, Jeff Fidler, Thomas Jenkins, 8p

FRI. JAN 16

Bill's by the Beach— Barstool Surfers, 7p
BLUEGILL— Dale Drinkard Jr., 11a// The Deluxe Trio, 6p
Blues Tavern— Smokin' Toasters
Callaghan's— Drunker Shade of Green
Celtic Irish Pub— Jamie Hyatt & Gary Cooper
Cockeyed Charlie's— Philo Beddoe
Felix's— Blind Dog Mike
Flora Bama— LeaAnne Creswell & John Joiner, 2p// Jezebel's Chill'n, 5:30p// Perdido Brothers, 6p/// Wes Loper,

6p/// Dallas Moore Band, 9:30p/// Hart Break Hill, 10p
Fusion Sushi Bar— Bryant Gilley, 6p
Garage— Meacham Motor Co., 9p
Hard Rock (Center Bar)— Goldy Locks, 9:30p
Hard Rock (Live)— LMAO Comedy Show, 8p
John Word's Captains Table— Jerry Squires, 7p
Legacy— Gabe Willis, 6p// Glen Parker Band, 9p
Lulu's— Jeri, 4p
Main Street Cigar Lounge— Kyle and Karl
McSharry's— DJ Demps, 10p
Moe's BBQ (Mobile)— Doubleshot, 6:30p
Moe's BBQ (Daphne)— Viridian Sons, 8p
Old 27 Grill— Christina Christian, 6:30p
R-Life Live— David Chastang
Tropics— Rock Bottom, 7p
Veets— The Family Jewels, 9p
Windmill Market— Chad Parker, 6p

SAT. JAN 17

Alchemy— David Chastang
Bill's by the Beach— Sam Glass, 7p
BLUEGILL— Blind Dog Mike, 6p
Blues Tavern— Halfway Show & Band, 9p
Callaghan's— Winston Ramble
Celtic Irish Pub— Live Podcast
Felix's— Rebecca Barry Duo
Flora Bama— LeaAnne Creswell & John Joiner, 2p// Mario Mena, 4p/// Jack Robertson Show, 5:30p/// Wes Loper & Josh Newcom, 6p/// Dallas Moore Band, 9:30p/// Smokin' Elvis', 10p
Fusion Sushi Bar— Bryant Gilley, 6p
Hard Rock (Center Bar)— Goldy

Locks, 9:30p
IP Casino— Don Williams, 8p
John Word's Captains Table— Jerry Squires, 7p
Legacy— Holli Mosley and Tim Kinsey
Lulu's— Grits N Pieces, 4p
McSharry's— DJ Demps, 10p
Moe's BBQ (Mobile)— Glass Joe, 6:30p
Old 27 Grill— Melissa Joiner, 6:30p
Top of the Bay— Turbo Crab
Tropics— Jon Cowart, 7p
Saenger— Mobile Symphony Orchestra: American Masters- Aaron Copland, 8p
Veets— The Family Jewels, 9p
Windmill Market— Jimmy Lumpkin, 11a

SUN. JAN 18

Bill's by the Beach— Mel of the Foxy Iguanas, 7p
BLUEGILL— Dale Drinkard Jr., 11a// Kyle & Karl, 6p
Blues Tavern— Grant & Bayne, 5p
Callaghan's— Della Memoria
Felix's— Bobby Butchka
Flora Bama— Wayne Mills Tribute- Hal Bruni, Dallas Moore, Brigitte London, Joll Kinsey, Josh Newcom, Donna Slater, Jason Justice, Moondawg Hall, 4p
Lulu's— Greg Brow, 1p// Greg Brown, 5p
McSharry's— Trad Irish Session, 6:30p
Stir— Bryant Gilley, 8p
Veets— River Dog, 8p

MON. JAN 19

Felix's— Tim Kinsey
Flora Bama— Bat, 12p// Cathy Pace, 4p/// Kyle Wilson, 8p

Lulu's— Brent Burns, 4p
R-Life Live— Ryan Balthrop
Soul Kitchen— Miller Lite Concert Series & Steve Hall Prod Present Mushroomhead W/ Special Guests Like Monroe // The Family Ruin // Thira // Zombie Boy, 7:30p

TUE. JAN 20

Alchemy— Mishka Shubaly & Star Anna
BLUEGILL— Harrison McInnis, 6p
Butch Cassidy's— David & Karl Betts
Cockeyed Charlie's— Matt Neese + I
Felix's— David Chastang
Flora Bama— Cowboy Johnson, 3p// Perdido Brothers, 7p
Lulu's— BAT, 4p
Moe's BBQ (Mobile)— Christina Christian, 7p
R-Life Live— Brett LaGrave
Soul Kitchen— Generationals, 9p

WED. JAN 21

BLUEGILL— Ross + I, 6p
Blues Tavern— Al & Cathy, 8p
Bucky's Birdcage (Grand Hotel)— Adam Holt Piano Show, 8p
Callaghan's— Deluxe Trio
Celtic Irish Pub— Mike
Cockeyed Charlie's— Ryan Balthrop
Felix's— Lee Yankie Duo
Flora Bama— LeaAnne Creswell & John Joiner, 11a// Neil Dover, 3p// Smokin' Elvis', 7p
Legacy— Johnny Hayes
Lucky's Irish Pub— Bryant Gilley, 8p
Lulu's— Lee Yankie, 4p
R-Life Live— Brett LaGrave

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Daniel Radcliffe sheds wizardry, still spellbinding

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

I can't make a case that the quirky romantic comedy "What If" isn't somewhat formulaic, but I can make the case that the formula itself is quite pleasant, and charmingly executed. The key ingredient is star Daniel Radcliffe, who plays Wallace, a funny and under confident young man adrift after a breakup that led him to drop out of medical school.

His best friend is played by Adam Driver, playing a slightly less disturbing version of his character on "Girls," which is to say, a weird but intelligent and compelling fellow. When Radcliffe meets Driver's cousin, Chantry (Zoe Kazan) at a party, they have an instant chemistry and a rapport based on silly dialogue you will either find charming or irritating, depending on your mood. If you're a romantic, you will enjoy these two, but if you're recovering from a breakup, the flu, or a hangover, your tolerance might not last.

Despite their attraction, barriers exist to their relationship, namely that Chantry lives with her boyfriend, a handsome and successful lawyer who Wallace inadvertently shoves out an open window on their first meeting.

The film used restraint in portraying this boyfriend, Ben, as a jerk, and made it believable that Chantry would not want to abandon him for Wallace. Indeed, all of Wallace's friends point out how much more desirable Ben is than him, and advise him that he has no chance.

Through various misadventures and encounters, the film maintains a modicum of suspense as to whether these two characters will end up together. Zoe Kazan was pleasant as the conflicted animator, and occasionally her drawings fly over the action for an additional dash of whimsy. The only thing against this film is that the world of quirkiness might be reaching saturation point, and we have stared through a set of heavy bangs into the eyes of many a manic pixie dream girl at this point.

This was worth watching above all for Radcliffe, who manages to jettison his Harry Potter past, but not in that horrifying Miley Cyrus way. He shows that he can play an attractive young Muggle, er, man, by simply doing so, and he delivers as an indie heartthrob. That's not a word I thought I'd ever apply to Daniel Radcliffe.



Photo/imdb.com | "What If"

Daniel Radcliffe and Zoe Kazan are engaging in the quirky romantic comedy 'What If,' now available on DVD or streaming services.

NEW IN THEATERS



Photo/ imdb.com

"THE IMITATION GAME"

Benedict Cumberbatch stars as Alan Turing, a pioneering genius of computing who lead a group of scholars to crack the codes of Germany's WWII Enigma machine. Crescent Theater, Carmike Wynnsong 16, Carmike Jubilee Square 12, Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14, Cobb Pinnacle 14, Carmike Wharf 15

"AMERICAN SNIPER"

Bradley Cooper plays U.S. Navy Seal and sharpshooter Chris Kyle in this intense story based on real events, directed by Clint Eastwood. All listed multiplex theaters "Blackhat" A man is released from prison to help American and Chi-

nese authorities pursue a mysterious cyber criminal. Regal Mobile Stadium 18, Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14, Cobb Pinnacle 14

"PADDINGTON"

From the beloved novels by Michael Bond, this is the story of the comic misadventures of a bear from Peru, who upturns the lives of the London family who adopt him. All listed multiplex theaters.

"THE WEDDING RINGER"

Josh Gad plays a groom with no best man, who hires Jimmy Callaghan (Kevin Hart) the owner of a business called Best Man, Inc. Regal Mobile Stadium 18, Cobb Pinnacle 14

NOW PLAYING

TAKEN 3

All listed multiplex theaters.

SELMA

All listed multiplex theaters.

"The Woman in Black 2: Angel of Death" All listed multiplex theaters.

WILD

Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14, Carmike Jubilee Square 12, Cobb Pinnacle 14, Carmike Wharf 15

BIG EYES

Carmike Jubilee Square 12, Carmike Wharf 15, Cobb Pinnacle 14

INTO THE WOODS

Carmike Wynnsong 16, Carmike Jubilee Square 12, Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14, Cobb Pinnacle 14, Carmike Wharf 15,

THE GAMBLER

Carmike Jubilee Square 12, Carmike Wynnsong 16, Regal Mobile Stadium 18, Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14, Carmike Wharf 15, Cobb Pinnacle 14

UNBROKEN

Carmike Jubilee Square 12, Carmike Wynnsong 16, Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14, Carmike Wharf 15, Cobb Pinnacle 14

THE HOBBIT: THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE ARMIES

Carmike Wynnsong 16, Carmike Jubilee Square 12, Eastern Shore

Premiere Cinema 14, Cobb Pinnacle 14, Carmike Wharf 15

ANNIE

Carmike Wynnsong 16, Carmike Jubilee Square 12, Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14, Cobb Pinnacle 14, Carmike Wharf 15

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: SECRET OF THE TOMB

Carmike Jubilee Square 12, Carmike Wynnsong 16, Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14, Carmike Wharf 15, Cobb Pinnacle 14

THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY- PART 1

Carmike Wynnsong 16, Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14, Carmike Wharf 15

THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING

Carmike Wharf 15

EXODUS: GODS AND KINGS

Carmike Wynnsong 16, Carmike Wharf 15

Big Hero 6

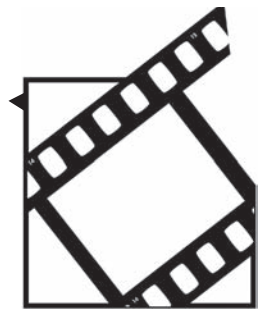
Carmike Wynnsong 16, Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14

PENGUINS OF MADAGASCAR

Eastern Shore Premiere Cinema 14

INTERSTELLAR

Carmike Wharf 15



AREA THEATERS

MOBILE COUNTY

CARMIKE CINEMAS

Wynnsong 16
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

6898 U.S. Highway 90
Daphne
251-626-6266

CARMIKE CINEMAS

23151 Wharf Lane
Orange Beach
251-981-4444

COBB THEATRES

Pinnacle 14
3780 Gulf Shores Pkwy
Gulf Shores
251-968-7444

EASTERN SHORE PREMIERE CINEMA 14

30500 State Highway 181
Spanish Fort
251-626-0352

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



Darwin's war on advertising circulars

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

WPMI's Darwin Singleton is certainly one of the Port City's best-known media stars. As a morning show host, reporter, anchor and emcee, the man wears many hats. But lately his favorite hat seems to be made out of newspaper.

Specifically it's made out of the paper being thrown in yards across Mobile and Baldwin Counties by the Mobile Press-Register. The thrice-weekly, owned by Alabama Media Group, a Newhouse Corp. subsidiary, has earned a place in Singleton's sights for its continued insistence on throwing advertising circulars — Yes and Bargain Finder — all over town, despite requests by citizens and even the mayor's office that they stop.

When the Stimpson Administration announced stepped up efforts to clean up litter in a city where people seem to consider it a God-given right to throw trash in the streets, the mayor specifically pegged the Press-Register's zealous throwing of these circulars as a major cause of litter and waterway trash. Alabama Media Group's public response was that throwing the circulars is an exercise of their First Amendment rights and they would cease throwing to anyone who requests it.

As Singleton has been vigorously covering the litter issue for the past year, the Press-Register's trash has become a point upon which he has reported a few times. Last week though, the veteran newsman says it really hit him hard after his neighbors gathered on a Saturday to clean their neighborhood of trash and debris, then the following day the streets were littered with deposits from the Press-Register.

"I expect it from litterbugs, but from a community business it's frustrating," he said.

Singleton says he has personally requested the P-R stop throwing in his yard, to no avail. Every time he posts anything about the issue on his Facebook page, Singleton says the comments he gets are dominated by people who claim they too have asked for the P-R to stop only to have the throwing continue.

"I called again, the second or third time and asked them not to throw in my yard. It doesn't seem to do any good," he explained. "If I say I don't want it, my wishes should be respected."

Singleton says any time he reports on the P-R's advertising circu-

lars, the reactions are strong.

"I usually get a good response on Facebook, but when I do this, it goes bonkers. What does that tell you?" he said.

The veteran reporter said he even started driving down to the P-R's new headquarters on Royal Street last week to throw back one of the circulars that landed in his yard, but police had blocked the road for a marathon.

"I just got in the car and was driving down there," he said.

While the Stimpson Administration has asked the P-R to stop throwing newspapers and circulars in places where they haven't been requested, pushing the issue further seems unlikely. In other cities newspapers have been able to effectively claim the First Amendment gives them the right to throw such products, even though they contain little to no news. Singleton said the shooting at the Parisian satirical publication Charlie Hebdo last week that took the lives of 12 of its employees offers a more compelling defense of freedom of speech.

"They're dying for the freedom to speak on issues that matter. This (throwing circulars) seems like a condescending use of that right," he said.

Singleton said one of the things that has been difficult in trying to report on the issue is the refusal of Alabama Media Group or the Press-Register to offer any comment. He feels as a news organization they should be the last ones hiding behind a "no comment." Lagniappe has also tried numerous times — including for this story — to ask for AMG's side of the story, but we have never received a response.

Local 15 goes big for Mardi Gras

Darwin may have to hang up his litter fighting hat for a bit soon as WPMI has announced plans to vastly increase their Mardi Gras parade coverage this year.

"Beginning with the Order of Polka Dots, LOCAL 15 will broadcast live coverage of each weeknight parade on our sister station, UTV44, WJTC. Coverage will begin at 6:30 p.m. on UTV44 and continue through the conclusion of the parade," the station announced in a press release.

Singleton will be hosting the broadcasts each evening along with iHeart Radio's Colton Bradford, and will welcome a variety of special guests. The broadcasts will take place from a balcony near the corner of Government and Conception Streets.

Weeknight parades will be streamed online at local15tv.com. Currently weekend coverage is not planned, but that may change, station management said.

Uncle Henry to do it five hours every morning

Those who've missed getting to hear the entire Uncle Henry Show weekday mornings on Newsradio 710 WNTM-AM will like changes to the lineup coming Jan. 19.

Uncle Henry, who tackles local and national issues in a one-of-a-kind way, says his program will run in its entirety on-air for the first time since 2010, going from 5 a.m. to 9 a.m.

"The biggest change is that the 'Uncle Henry Show' will be heard from 5 until 9, and 'Ask the Expert' will be moved to 9 a.m. This will provide a five-hour block of Uncle Henry that can be heard every weekday morning on AM radio, iHeartRadio and on HD radio 96.1-2. The 8 o'clock hour, which was only heard on iHeartRadio, will now be heard on all of our platforms, including am radio," Uncle Henry said. "One hour of 'Glenn Beck' will be heard at 10, and his other two hours will run from 5 p.m. until 7 p.m."

The full lineup will be as follows: Uncle Henry 5 a.m. — 9 a.m.; Ask the Expert 9 a.m. — 10 a.m.; Glenn Beck 10 a.m. — 11 a.m.; Rush Limbaugh 11 a.m. — 2 p.m.; Sean Hannity 2 p.m. — 5 p.m.; Glenn Beck 5 p.m. — 7 p.m.; America Now 7 p.m. — 10 p.m.; Clyde Lewis 10 p.m. — 12 a.m.; Coast to Coast AM 12 a.m. — 5 a.m.

In response to some of the changes Uncle Henry has a tricked-out new van he says will allow him to take the show on the road, so to speak.

"The Uncle Henry van is a response to my desire to do more shows outside of the studio. I love taking the show on the road. In 2015, I want to broadcast my show in as many different locations as often as I can. The van has a bold design and will let people know I am in their neighborhood," he said.

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CHICKEN 8-PIECE CUT

\$69.95 50 LB BOX AVERAGE

TILAPIA FILET

\$29.95 10 LB BOX



CATFISH FILET

\$46.95 15 LB BOX



SMALL PORK RIBS

\$79.95 8 SLAB BOX



SIRLOIN PORK CHOPS

\$23.95 10 LB BOX

Prices and quantities are subject to availability

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RAMP 633-2700 | M-F 8:30-5:30 SAT 8:30-2:30
We Accept Cash, Debit/Credit Cards & EBT Cards

CALENDAR OF EVENTS | JANUARY 15, 2015 - JANUARY 21, 2015

January 15
Keeping the Dream Alive

Bishop State Community College will present Keeping The Dream Alive — a Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The event will be held on the Baker-Gaines Central Campus of Bishop State, located at 1365 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Ave., in the Yvonne Kennedy Auditorium. Admission is free. For more information call 251-928-6502.

Mobile United Presents Out of the Box

Leadership Mobile is hosting its first continuing education class, "Out of the Box," on from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. at the Saenger Theatre, room 1927. The arts-based continuing education class, produced by Leadership Mobile, combines right-brain imagination with left-brain logic with the goal of teaching participants about leadership styles, communication skills and high-performance teamwork. The cost for the one-day class is \$85 for Mobile United members or \$100 for non-members and includes lunch. Applications can be found online at www.mobileunited.org. To register as a group, please contact program administrator Chris Barraza at 251-432-1638.

20,000 Leagues Under the Sea

Join Mobile Museum of Art for 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, self-described Alabama psychedelic surf rock, from a realm all its own. Drawing from southern roots influences like jazz and blues, the band infuses psychedelic pop, surf, punk and whimsy to create a visual and visceral sound and experience unlike any other. You will feel as if you are lost in a swamp, drenched in Mardi Gras beads, panning for gold. The Invisible Teardrops from Florence, featuring Jamir Barrier of The Pine Hill Haints, will open the show. \$10 at the door. MMoA is located at 4850 Museum Drive. For more information call 251-208-5200.

Spark Talks

The Gulf Coast Exploreum Science Center will be hosting a series of "Spark

Talks." Each talk will begin at 6 p.m. with light refreshments and feature an eventful evening of conversations. This week's talk will be "The Sacred Law of Hospitality" by John B. Switzer, Ph.D. For more information visit exploreum.com/events or email dcomeaux@exploreum.com.

January 16
2015 Women's Conference

Join Ebenezer Baptist Church of Cottage Hill (5051 Ebenezer Drive) for their 2015 Women's Conference. The theme for this year is "Transforming Natural Women into Supernatural Women." The guest speaker will be Patricia Ashley. The conference has one and two day packages. For more information contact Doris Jones 251-661-9341 or jones819518@bellsouth.com.

Electronics recycling

The Downtown Mobile Alliance, in partnership with May Metals, will be collecting electronics and other office equipment for recycling at its St. Louis Street warehouse Friday and Saturday, Jan. 16 and 17. May Metals is certified in hard drive destruction. For a complete list of items that will be accepted for recycling, visit www.downtownmobile.org. There will be a \$20 fee for each television set and a \$5 fee for each computer monitor. There is no charge for all other electronics collected for recycling. For questions, please contact Carol Hunter at 251-434-8498 or chunter@downtownmobile.org.

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. Admission is free.

January 17
American Masters — Aaron Copeland

Mobile Symphony Orchestra American Masters series continues with the music of Aaron Copland. Billy the Kid, Appalachian Spring, and other greatest hit make up this program of iconic works by a monumental master of American music. The show will begin at 8 p.m. at the Saenger Theatre, 6 S. Joachim St. For information call 251-432-2010 or visit mobilesymphony.org.

Mobile Mystery Dinner

Love, Death & Bingo! Join the Mobile Mystery Dinners for their next performance at Azalea Manor, 751 Dauphin St. Advance reservations are required, to make reservations call 251-865-7398. Tickets are \$59 and include dinner and unlimited wine. The fun begins at 7 p.m.

Jewish Film Festival

The 2015 Mobile Jewish Film Festival will show seven acclaimed Jewish films at venues around Mobile and Baldwin counties through Jan. 22, as it celebrates 14 years of presenting films that reflect the Jewish experience in an attempt to promote dialogue between religions, cultures and generations. Sunday Jan. 18 at 3 p.m. Ahavas Chesed Synagogue "Above and Beyond: The Birth of the Israeli Air Force" guest speaker Nancy Spielberg, Producer. Tuesday Jan. 20 at 7 p.m. University of South Alabama Fairhope campus. Encore performance of "Run, Boy, Run" with guest speaker Rabbi Steven Silberman. Wednesday Jan. 21 at 7 p.m. Ben May Library — Bernheim Hall "The Jewish Cardinal." Co-sponsored by the Mobile Public Library and the Mobile Christian Jewish Dialogue. Guest speaker, Jerry Darring, Holocaust scholar. For more information visit mobilejewishfederation.org

Greenleaf Writer's Group

The Greenleaf Writer's Group is currently welcoming new members. We meet every third Saturday of the month at the Semmes library from 10 a.m.

until noon. If you are an aspiring writer, come join us. For more information call 251-490-5199.

January 18
Coin Currency and Jewelry Show

South Baldwin Numismatic Society presents their 15th annual Coin Currency and Jewelry Show at the Foley Civic Center, 407 E. Laurel Ave. Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. For more information visit foleycoinshows.com.

The Tour Hair Expo

Beauticians and stylists looking to improve their technique or manage their own salon should register now for the 6th annual Tour Hair Expo. Featuring more than 30 classes from as many instructors, teaching fundamental hair-cutting, weave servicing, attracting clientele and much, much more. The Expo will start at 9 a.m. at the Mobile Convention Center, 1 S. Water St. For more information visit thetourhairexpo.webs.com

I Lift My Eyes to the Mountain Dulcimer

Come to Christ Church Cathedral to learn about the Appalachian Mountain Dulcimer in this combination lecture/concert with award winning dulcimer artist, Jessica D. Comeau, who will explain the history and mechanics of the instrument, as well as perform historical and modern pieces. Christ Church Cathedral is located at 115 S. Conception St. Call 251-438-1822 for more information.

January 19
Joe Cain Marching Society

If you are interested in marching in the Joe Cain parade Sunday, Feb. 15 with Chief Slac, the Excelsior Band and the rest of the wild and crazy footmarchers, we will have an informational meeting Jan. 19 at 6:30 p.m. on the deck of The Bar, 352 St. Francis St. Please make plans to attend. Please feel free to send us a message if you have any questions.

Teen Tech Tutor Program

The Baldwin County Library Cooperative

(BCLC) recently implemented a Teen Tech Tutor program at the Robertsdale Library, 18301 Pennsylvania St., Robertsdale. This program is designed to match high school age students with strong technological skills with adults and seniors who are unfamiliar with basic laptop computer technology. The program is available Monday through Friday from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. and is free of charge. An appointment is required and can be made by calling the library at 251-970-4010.

January 20
Reese's Senior Bowl Practice

The North Team will practice 12:15-2:15 p.m. at Ladd-Peebles Stadium, 1621 Virginia St., Mobile. The South Team will practice 2:30-4:40 p.m. at Fairhope Municipal Stadium, 701 Volanta Ave., Fairhope. Both practices are free and open to the public. Some players will be available to sign autographs. For more information visit seniorbowl.com.

January 21
Reese's Senior Bowl Practice

The North Team will practice 9:30-11:30 a.m. at Ladd-Peebles Stadium, 1621 Virginia St., Mobile. The South Team will practice 1:30-3:30 a.m. at Ladd-Peebles Stadium. Both practices are free and open to the public. Some players will be available to sign autographs. For more information visit seniorbowl.com.

FCA Chick-fil-A Senior Bowl Rally

Annually bringing together more than 2,000 attendees, making it the largest Fellowship of Christian Athletes Rally at a bowl game in the country! In 2014, the crowd was treated to player testimonies, live music and food provided by Chick-fil-A. The Fellowship Christian Athletes Bowl Rally will begin at 6 p.m. at the Mobile Convention Center, 1 South Water St. For more information and tickets visit southalabamaafca.org.

MARDI GRAS 2015 SCHEDULE



Saturday, Jan. 17

1 p.m. - Krewe de la Dauphine (Dauphin Island)

Friday, Jan. 30

6:30 p.m. - Conde Cavaliers (Mobile, Route A)

Saturday, Jan. 31

2 p.m. - Order of the Rolling River (DIP)
2:30 p.m. - Bayport Parading Society (Mobile, Route A)
6:30 p.m. - Pharaohs, Order of Hebe, Conde Explorers (Mobile, Route A)

Sunday, Feb. 1 (Super Bowl)

2 p.m. - Krewe de la Heron Lakes <kids> (Heron Lakes Circle)

Wednesday, Feb. 4

12:30 p.m. - Mystics of Ashland Place <kids> (Lanier Avenue)

Thursday, Feb. 5

6:30 p.m. - Order of Polka Dots (Mobile, Route A)

Friday, Feb. 6

6:30 p.m. - Order of Inca (Mobile, Route A)
6:45 p.m. - Apollo's Mystic Ladies (Daphne)

Saturday, Feb. 7

10 a.m. - Hickory Ridge Kids Krewe <kids> (Timberly Circle)
2 p.m. - Mobile Mystics, Mobile Mystical Revelers (Mobile, Route A)

6:30 p.m. - Maids of Mirth, Butterfly Maidens, Krewe of Marry Mates (Mobile, Route A)
6:45 p.m. - Knights of Ecor Rouge (Fairhope)

Sunday, Feb. 8

2 p.m. - Mystics of Children <kids> (Rosswood Drive)
6:30 p.m. - Neptune's Daughters, OOI (Mobile, Route A)

Monday, Feb. 9

6:30 p.m. - Order of Venus (Mobile, Route A)

Tuesday, Feb. 10

6:30 p.m. - Order of LaShe's (Mobile, Route A)

Thursday, Feb. 12

1 p.m. - Order of Impalas <kids> (St. Ignatius Catholic School)
6:30 p.m. - Mystic Stripers Society (Mobile, Route A)

Friday, Feb. 13

6:30 p.m. - Crewe of Columbus (Mobile, Route A)
6:30 p.m. - Mystical Order of Mirams (Orange Beach)
6:45 p.m. - Maids of Jubilee (Fairhope)

Saturday, Feb. 14 (Valentine's Day)

11 a.m. - Foley parade (Foley)
11 a.m. - Krewe of Kids <kids> (Krewe of Goats Prichard route)
Noon - Floral Parade, Knights of Mobile, Mobile Cadets, Mobile Mystical Ladies, Order of Angels (Mobile, Route A)
Noon - Krewe of Goats Parade (Prichard)
Noon - Mystic Revelers (Bay Minette)

2 p.m. - Krewe of Mullet Mates (Mullet Point)
5:30 p.m. - Mystics of Pleasure (Orange Beach)
6 p.m. - Mystics of Time (Mobile, Route A)
6:45 p.m. - Shadow Barons (Daphne)

Sunday, Feb. 15 (Joe Cain Day)

2:29 p.m. - Loyal Order of the Firetruck (Daphne)
2:30 p.m. - Joe Cain Procession (Mobile, Route A)
5 p.m. - Le Krewe de Bienville (Mobile, Route A)

Monday, Feb. 16 (Lundi Gras)

Noon - King Felix III, Floral parade (Mobile, Route A)
1 p.m. - Prichard Mardi Gras Association Parade (Prichard)
3 p.m. - MLK Business and Civic Organization, MLK Monday Mystics, Northside Merchants (Mobile, Route D)
6:45 p.m. - Order of Mystic Magnolias (Fairhope)
7 p.m. - Infant Mystics, Order of Doves (Mobile, Route F)

Tuesday, Feb. 17 (Fat Tuesday)

10 a.m. - Gulf Shores Mardi Gras Association (Gulf Shores)
10:30 a.m. - Order of Athena (Mobile, Route A)
12:30 p.m. - Knights of Revelry, King Felix III, Comic Cowboys (Mobile, Route A)
2 p.m. - Orange Beach Parade (Orange Beach)
2 p.m. - MAMGA Mammoth Parade (Mobile, Route B)
6 p.m. - Order of Myths (Mobile, Route C)

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WEDNESDAY JANUARY 21ST
6:30PM

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www.LapsontheCauseway.com



JaMarcus Russell from pigskin to tater skins

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

If you are a college football fan, I highly recommend visiting the Saturday Down South website. It has interesting stories on all the Southeastern Conference squads.

While perusing the pages last week, I came across a section titled "Living Legends: Where are they now?" When I glanced at the image, it was none other than Mobile's own JaMarcus Russell.

After a storied career at Williamson High School, Russell earned All-SEC and Sugar Bowl MVP honors while leading LSU to a conference championship. Then the Oakland Raiders selected him with the overall No. 1 draft pick in 2007.

However, matters quickly began to spiral downward. In 31 NFL games, Russell threw 18 touchdowns and 23 interceptions. After approaching a reported 300 pounds on his 6-foot-6 frame, he was released by the team. Despite losing 50 pounds while working out with former NFL quarterback Jeff Garcia and securing tryouts with a few teams, Russell has never earned a spot on another NFL roster.

Russell, though, has not disappeared. He can be found in the latest Dish satellite TV advertisements. The first episode of this series starred former college greats Matt Leinart, Heath Shuler and Brian "The Boz" Bosworth reminiscing about going back to college while in a diner.

The newest spot features the same roster, along with Russell. They are grilling out, while watching their favorite sport in the backyard with the Dish Anywhere app.

Russell brings his "famous tater skins" to the party. An actor and the Dish kangaroo mascot "Hopper" react at the arrival. "Whoa, J-Rock. That's JaMarcus Russell, be cool," the actor says. Hopper responds, "Yeah, I know. I'm calm." Russell ends the segment while watching the game by saying, "College, baby. That's more like it."

Dish has continued the theme, with Russell boasting about his potato skins (which The Boz certainly appears to enjoy) on another video. You can even get his recipe by visiting www.JamarcusRussellFamousTaterSkins.com. Both of Russell's commercials can be found on YouTube.

Russell is not quite ready to give up football for an acting career. He still has a dream of putting on the shoulders pads.

"People are always saying that I'm a bust," he said in an interview with Yahoo! Sports. "I want to show them I'm not. I'm committed to this now."

Regardless if he does ever play football again, I definitely do want to try his recipe for potato skins. They look great.

New skipper in town

The Arizona Diamondbacks have announced that Robby Hammock will be the next manager for the Mobile BayBears, their Class AA farm club. Andy Green, who won back-to-back Southern League Manager of the Year honors with Mobile, has been promoted to be the major league club's third base coach.

Last season, Hammock led the Visalia Rawhide to a 75-65 record and a wild card berth into the California League playoffs. Visalia, a Class A-Advanced club, fell just one victory shy of capturing the championship.

Also new to the BayBears staff is hitting coach Jason Camilli, who served in the same role in Visalia with Hammock. Returning as the BayBears' pitching coach for a second season is Wellington Cepeda.

Hammock started his coaching career in 2012. He had played for the Diamondbacks from 2003 through 2011, hitting .254 with 30 doubles and 12 home runs. On May 18, 2004, he caught Hall of Fame pitcher Randy Johnson's perfect game against the Atlanta Braves.

The BayBears' season begins on the road April 9, with a five-game series against the Birmingham Barons. Mobile returns to The Hank on April 15 to face its new Gulf Coast rival, the Biloxi Shuckers (formerly the Huntsville Stars). For ticket information, call 251-479-BEAR (2327) or visit www.MobileBayBears.com.

Start your engines

Thomas "Moose" Praytor of Mobile had an impressive season in the recent ARCA racing circuit, having finished seventh in the

drivers' standings. The next goal for his Max Force Race Team is to be the first full-time ARCA group based out of the Port City.

Praytor has been paired with Wayne Hixson Motorsports the last two years. His team has now acquired owner's points from Cunningham Motorsports, and will be changing the car number from 2 to 9.

"This is a huge opportunity for our race team," Praytor said.

He will continue to drive the DK-LOK Ford powered by Roush Yates engines. "We take a great deal of pride in being from Mobile," Praytor said, "and having an international firm based in Mobile — like DK-LOK (fittings and valves) — be part of our race team means a lot to us."

The Max Force Race Team is entering its 18th year of competition, which began with a single car at Mobile International Speedway.

Praytor's next turn on the track will be Friday, Jan. 16, with testing at Daytona International Speedway for the 52nd annual Lucas Oil 200. The team is also preparing for the Mobile 200 on Saturday, March 14.

Olympic icon, USSA honoree passes away

Dr. Zhenliang He, known as "Mr. Olympics" in his home country of China, passed away earlier this month at 85. A former president of the Chinese Olympic Committee, he played a key role in securing the 2008 games for Beijing.

He was well known at the U.S. Sports Academy in Daphne, after having served with its president — Dr. Thomas P. Rosandich — on the International Olympic Committee's Commission for Culture and Olympic Education. For his efforts, he was presented with an honorary doctorate from the USSA.

The academy also presents the Dr. Zhenliang He Culture Award for the Sports Artist of the Year. This is given annually to an artist who "captures the spirit and life of sport."

"He was a fervent leader who passionately contributed to sport and the culture of sport as we know it today," Rosandich said. "The world has lost one of its greatest advocates and he will be greatly missed."

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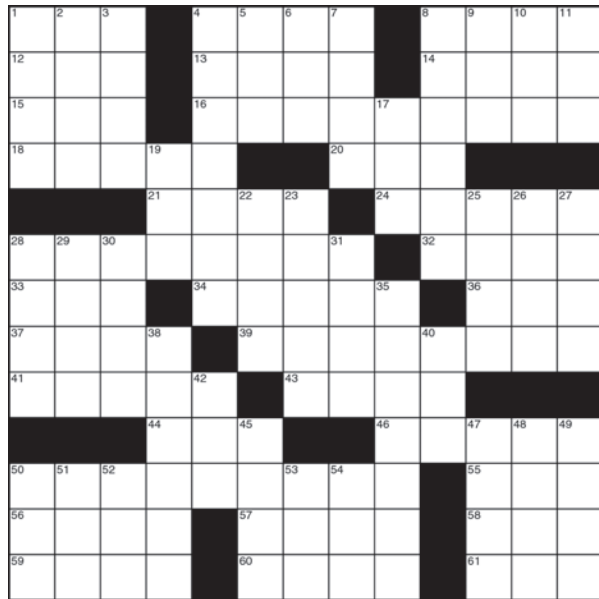
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS

1. Pantry container
4. "By yesterday!"
8. Kind of sax
12. "I see!"
13. Partake at a feast
14. Combine, as re-sources
15. Anti-prohibitionist
16. Intensified
18. Common sense?
20. Wine adjective
21. Takes one's pick
24. More than just ache
28. Pencil filler
32. Capital of France?
33. Flock member
34. Desktop pictures
36. Highland boy
37. Non-alkali
39. Ferociously
41. Journalists, collec-tively
43. Proof goof
44. Club appearance
46. Hunt illegally
50. Praiseworthy
55. Pride partner
56. Debatable, as a point
57. Grandstand section
58. Matterhorn, for one
59. Chapel fixtures
60. Many millennia
61. Abbr. on a road map

DOWN

1. Benchley classic
2. "Could I interrupt?"
3. Figure of interest?
4. Long Island university



5. Bro's sibling, maybe
6. Mandela's org.
7. Child's ammo
8. Certain helicopter
9. Filming locale
10. It tests the water
11. Worn out
17. Court call
19. Take a bough?
22. Little spasms
23. Brown ermine
25. Referee's guideline
26. Administered with a spoon, say
27. Soul mate
28. Dieter's measure
29. Heat, at times
30. In the center of
31. A deadly sin
35. Military trench diggers
38. You can count on them
40. Baby syllable
42. Make known
45. Golden ___ Bridge
47. A bit cracked
48. Revolver innovator
49. Hoopla
50. Band aid
51. Forest female
52. Do some yard work
53. Life story, in brief
54. Novelist Deighton

Answers on Page 41

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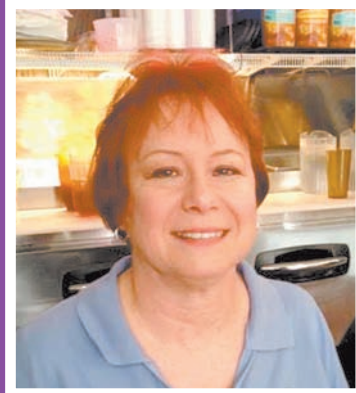
WHAT ARE YOU MOST TERRIFIED OF?

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"Honestly, death."

- Joanna



"Snakes"

- Carol



"My 4 and 7 year old boys becoming teenagers."

- Jill Conrad



Taurus' new temptress makes a mean pot pie

BY DR. ZODIAC/ASTROLOGY GUY

Capricorn (12/22 - 1/19) — Your patience will be tested when a co-worker commits to growing out his hair for “Locks of Love.” While you almost always support a good cause, you become less supportive when it starts to look like you’re sharing a divided cubicle with Howard Hughes. Finally, you’ll lose your control and attack with a pair of shears. Cutting the disheveled hairs abruptly, you’ll watch them float slowly to the ground with a smile. The bad news is, you’ll have to donate a fair amount of back hair to make up for the lost donation.

Aquarius (1/20 - 2/18) — You find the new Hangout Festival partnership with the organizers of Coachella and Jazz Fest promising. You resolve to go and have fun as always, because a weekend full of beach and bands in your backyard is still a bargain. Still, you wonder if the Gulf Shores City Council’s new “drug free” requirement exempted some of your favorite acts. All the more confusing is how Zac Brown, a talented musician but also a well-known, big-time European bath salts manufacturer, somehow slipped through the vetting process.

Pisces (2/19 - 3/20) — Feeling depressed and deprived after the first-ever college football play-offs, you join Paul Finebaum and other Southern blowhards in a warehouse full of unsold copies of “My Conference Can Beat Your Conference” to plan for the arrogance of next season. Perusing the way-too-early 2015 preseason Top 25, heads explode when the group realizes the SEC only has TWO teams in the Top 10. Clearly, the only resolution is to secede from the union, and as you draw up the borders for the new Confederate States of America, you try to convince your neighbors that as a Kentuckian, even Abraham Lincoln would support this effort.

Aries (3/21 - 4/19) — The medical community is abuzz after you exhibit the world’s first known case of tooth and ear disease, a condition caused by your refusal to ever remove the bluetooth device from your auditory canal. Reluctant to accept surgery, you argue the hands-free technology makes it easier and more sanitary to handle large volumes of sliced deli meats daily. Not to mention the miracles it does for your productivity. Thankfully, your better half will persuade doctors to proceed, and as you succumb to the influence of anesthesia, you incoherently repeat your trademark phrase, “(Your name here) Out!”

Taurus (4/20 - 5/20) — With Giada off your radar thanks to the John Mayer rumors, you’ll begin to pursue the “Barefoot Contessa.” You’ll be mesmerized by her soft, soothing voice and the perfect crust she can achieve on a chicken pot pie. You’ll fantasize about her field greens and lust after her flaky apple turnovers. You’ll decide to go after your love and you’ll plan a trip to the Hamptons (or New Hampshire, or Vermont, or wherever rich northeasterners live) to convince her to come to Mobile and live out her days with you. You’ll teach her how to make grits. It’ll be a match made in food heaven.

Gemini (5/21 - 6/21) — Your ambition to find employment in the first quarter of 2015 will drown in the burning waves of Jim Beam, as you prepare for another Carnival season. You’ll convince yourself that entering the workforce would interfere with your ability to party on the upcoming Fat Tuesday. You’ll also decide to give up the job search for Lent, so you’ll, at least, have an excuse for being a lazy, do nothing, slob.

You will promise family and friends that it’ll be a busy April. We will see.

Cancer (6/21 - 7/22) — You’ll leave D.C. without the part, but you’ll gain a new pen pal in Richard Stain, the train janitor. He’ll write to you about the vomit he cleaned up in the dining car and you’ll write back about a local commercial you booked. He will excitedly write to you about switching to lemon Pledge from regular Pledge and you’ll be just as excited to write to him about your five cats and their dietary restrictions. This awkward relationship will continue until Richard gets drunk one night and falls off the train to his death.

Leo (7/23 - 8/23) — Another subpar, straight-to-DVD movie will make its way to the Port City for filming. You’ll read about an upcoming casting call in the most amazing, wonderfully written weekly newspaper around town and determine that this could be your “big break.” After a few days of filming, you’ll have your role as an extra down pat, standing outside of a local bar for hours on end. Just when you feel like you’re the next Meryl Streep, Jennifer Lopez will show up as the lead and all your high hopes will fizzle.

Virgo (8/24 - 9/22) — An unexpected love affair will blossom in the office when your boss hires a dashing attractive assistant. You’ll soon receive a Facebook friend request from the new employee, and the seemingly innocent move will instigate a more flirtatious conversation via private message. You’ll finally work up the courage to move the chat to a local dive, but after a few Fireball shots in, you’ll embarrass yourself by climbing on the bar, cursing Nick Saban and yelling “That’s two strikes!” over and over again. Let it go. Just let it go.

Libra (9/23 - 10/22) — You’ll freak out when your significant other requests your attendance at a cat breakfast. You’ll have nightmares of bourgeois felines eating crumpets and sipping tea with the pinky finger of their paws up. But, being the good spouse you are, you’ll bite the bullet and oblige to your lover’s desires. Your coworkers will constantly haunt you with unflattering yet hilarious memes of you and the unfortunate event. Your lucky charm this month is a sardine.

Scorpio (10/23 - 11/21) — After a binge watching session on YouTube, you’ll decide that being a jazz piano player is the right move for you. You’ll leave your cushy job in the financial sector to buy a grand piano and a few books. After teaching yourself to play what is arguably the least jazzy sounds imaginable, you’ll decide to take your show on the road. At the risk of seeming uncultured, very pretentious people will feel pressured to like your music — which lends itself to a multi-decade career performing as “Sly Weasleton and the 3rd Street Boys.”

Sagittarius (11/21 - 12/22) — After hearing news of a convicted murderer’s death sentence, you’ll immediately be overcome with joy. Beyond ecstatic at the news of another human’s government-sanctioned euthanization, you’ll celebrate the only way you know how — by lashing out on Facebook. As a pro-life supporter, you oppose abortions with the fervor you typically reserve for supporting capital punishment, which gives you insight into — among other things — the will of our Lord. That being said, it would be a crime not to share the details of this “Monster’s” impending date with Mephistopheles.



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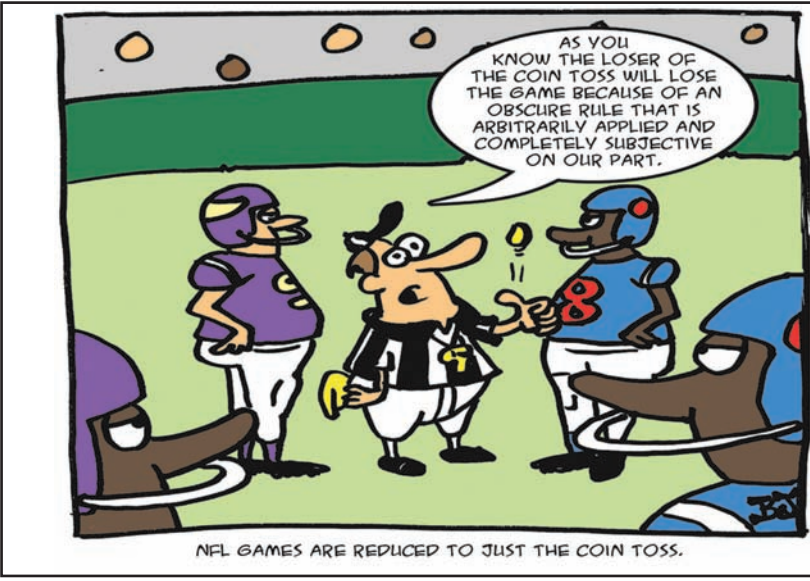
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FROM PAGE 37



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Release the line-ups! And Lt. Dan is headed to town

BY BOOZIE BEER NUES/SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

OK, so let's get real. Other than Lent, the hardest time for a Mobile gossip columnist to gather scoop is the time between New Year's Eve and Senior Bowl. It hasn't always been this way, because over the last five or so years, I've been lucky enough to have local spies and scoop from the college football National Championship games, but obviously not this year. Boo!

Alabama and Auburn football players, remember Boozie really needs you during this dark and quiet time. When you are working out, run that extra mile for her!

But I did the very best I could and scraped up what there was to scrape. So enjoy these little nibbles. No they aren't as tantalizing as they usually are, but they will hold you over until Senior Bowl and the Gras.

Line up, Line up, Everybody Line Up!

The talk of the town this week has been the announcements of the line-ups for Hangout and Jazz Fests. Hangout is bringing back some old favorites with Zac Brown and the Foo Fighters, along with a newcomer to the festival, Beck. JazzFest is going to be insane this year with The Who, Jimmy Buffett, Widespread Panic, Ryan Adams, Pitbull, T.I and Elton John. And those are just a few of the many acts at both festivals.

But there is another new festival planned and will take place even closer to home. Mobile Aerofest will take over Brookley Field March 20-21.

"Aerofest is a festival celebrating our nation's heroes: the injured military service members and veterans who have made enormous sacrifices in the name of a grateful nation," according to the festival's website.

The full line-up has yet to be announced, but none of than Lt. Dan himself, Gary Sinise, will be there with his band named —

what else? — Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band. The Gary Sinise Foundation is one of the festival's sponsors. There will also be an arts component and sports events, including cycling and an MMA Titan fight. For more info on this fest, visit mobileaerofest.com.

Dahlia's goes out in a Tase of glory

It is with a heavy heart, we report Dahlia's Piano Bar on Dauphin Street closed its doors last weekend. After eight years, co-owners Scott and Beverly Morlock are moving on. But before the last ivory was tickled, they had one final celebration. Our spy said it was still packed at 3 a.m. in the wee hours of Sunday morning Jan. 11, and everyone enjoyed performances by Scott and also 92 ZEW's Gene Murrell.

"I have no words to explain last night at Dahlia's. It was just EPIC. It couldn't have been any better. I don't think I've ever worked so hard behind the bar and had so much fun doing it... The room was full of joyful people who waited patiently to get a drink and I know it took forever, they didn't care — nobody cared. We raised the roof singing along with the band — it sounded awesome. So proud of that place, so honored at the amount of people that showed up. Blessed for the friendships born here. Really how can any ending get any better than this? It can't," wrote co-owner Beverly Morlock on Dahlia's Facebook page.

But we also hear some unwanted guests showed up late Friday — the night before their farewell celebration, according to our spy.

A few folks were sitting around the bar late Friday night/early Saturday morning when they heard a crash. They were able to ascertain two "gentlemen" were attempting to break into the apartment and storage area above the bar.

These geniuses used a chair to break out a window and it went through with such force that it broke the front window and landed

in the middle of Dauphin Street. The police were called and a chase ensued with the cops threatening to tase the intruders. One guy complied and was arrested without incident.

But as officers ordered the other gentleman to get down off of a fence, our spy said it was like you could read his mind. He sat there on the fence weighing his options until he finally decided to make a run for it. He jumped into the courtyard of neighboring bar, The Brickyard.

Our spy said his foot got caught in the fence and probably doesn't feel so great. But once he got up, he started running for the front door. The Brickyard's alert doorman had observed what was going on and was able to apprehend the suspect himself. We hear no taser was required. The cops quickly came and arrested him. Some times it takes a Village to take a bite out of crime, right McGruff?

Don't worry you can still catch Scott on the keys over at Gambino's in Fairhope, where they are transforming the lounge into a piano bar. We wish the Morlocks all the best. No word on the chair's condition.

Azalea Trail Maids unite

Grab your frilly skirt, hats and parasols! If you were an Azalea Trail Maid, the Mobile Jaycees want you to head to The Grounds on Saturday, May 9 from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. At the last reunion in 2004, over 600 former maids participated. Thank goodness it's at the fairgrounds, that's a lot of big skirts to have in one room. To RSVP or loan your dress for a display, email atmaalumni@gmail.com.

Well kids, that's all I got. Just remember, whether rain or shine, dramatic or scandalous, or some plain ol' Gary Sinise lovin', I will be there. Ciao!

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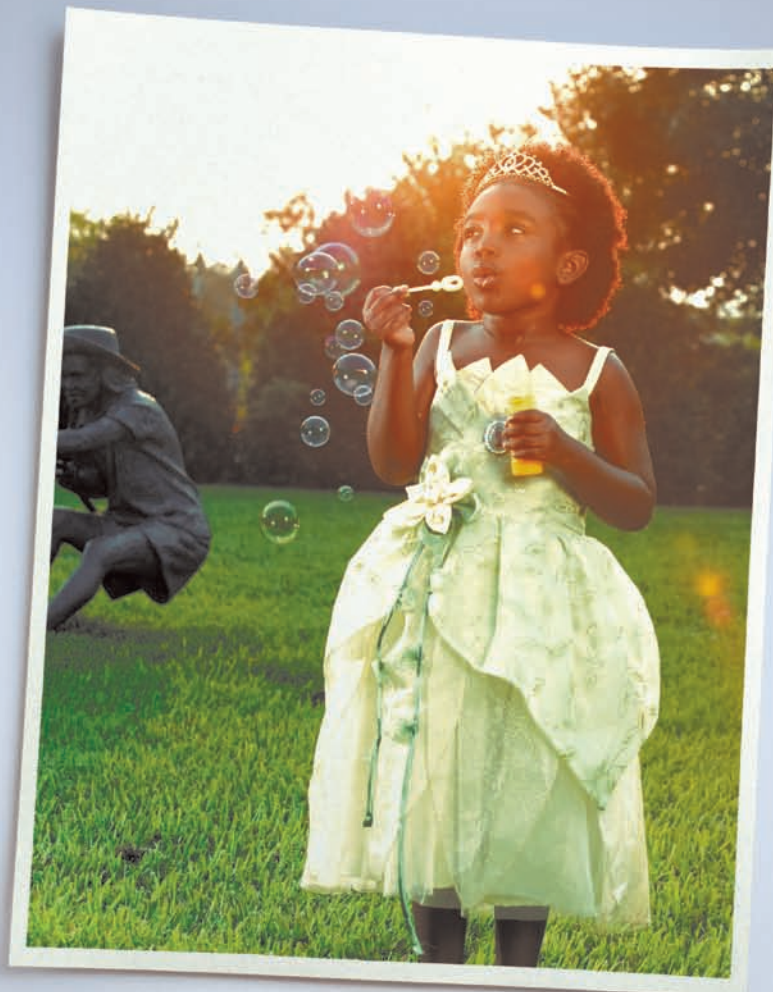
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Mon-Thu: 9:30am-9:30pm / Fri-Sat: 9am-10pm / Sun: 11am-7pm

Starla has always loved
to play like a princess...



Today she is one.



UNIVERSITY of SOUTH ALABAMA
**Children's & Women's
HOSPITAL**

251.415.1000

When Starla came to USA Children's & Women's Hospital, at age two, she was already very sick. The physicians soon diagnosed her with a rare form of leukemia. After a courageous battle, Starla is cancer free at four. Today she's still pretending to be a princess but the physicians and staff at USA Children's & Women's Hospital know what a real princess she truly is.

From diagnosis and treatment to recovery, let USA Children's & Women's Hospital care for your family.

Find out more at
usabhealthsystem.com/usacwh

