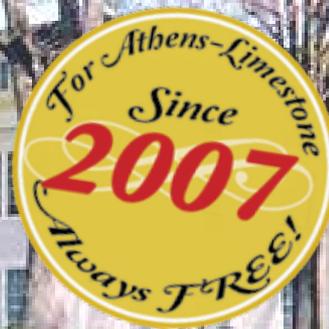


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David Ruf Is Running For Limestone County Commission, District 1

By Ali Elizabeth Turner

In the early 1880s, David Ruf's ancestors settled in Limestone County, and have been a part of life in District 1 ever since. His people brought with them a Bible printed in German that they were given in 1882 as a wedding gift, and to this day, that Bible remains a family treasure. It reminds David of where he came from, who he is, and why he does what he does. It was with his hand on that Bible that David was sworn in as Limestone County District 1 Commissioner in the presence of his family and friends, shortly after Governor Kay Ivey appointed David to the position in



David and Allison Ruf, (l) to (r) Ashlyn Ruf Newby, Hunter Newby and Avery Ruf

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Publisher's Point

The Shepherd

We are coming up on the time of year when we celebrate the most extraordinary demonstration of “crazy love” that has ever or will ever occur in the history of humankind: the choice made by Yeshua to lay His life down for His sheep. It was a gruesome, disturbing, chaotic one-man Holocaust, and in the final moments, only the Father knew what the ultimate, world-changing outcome would be. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who is described as the Shepherd in Psalm 23 poured His “shepherd-ness” into His perfect Son, who then exemplified the unique qualities of shepherding in all that He did, including giving everything for us lost sheep.

Ahhh, sheep; now there’s an analogy. Easily frightened, utterly dependent, and who possess no way to defend themselves. It is not a way humans typically want to think of themselves, and indeed, it is not the only description in the Best Book of what it is to be human. There are lots of references to images that are much stronger—warriors, builders, sojourners, planters, reapers, sowers, lovers, parents, teachers, children, and more. But sheep? No one wants to be thought of as a creature that is without a way to protect itself and yet thinks it’s

smart to wander off, get lost, get stuck in brambles, perhaps fall in a rushing stream and have the very wool that keeps it and others warm serve to be a source of death by causing us to get water-logged and drowning. And the Shepherd? He values His sheep so much that He will do anything to rescue and restore creatures who have only a plaintive bleat to signal their distress and their location.

I think it’s safe to say that most of us are familiar with Psalm 23. It typically is what is printed on funeral bulletins, and one of the earliest Scriptures put to memory in Sunday school. If AI can be trusted, (and we won’t go there in the body of these musings) Psalm 23 is the second most popular Scripture on the planet, bested only by John 3:16, which matches the entire scenario of Psalm 23. That being said, I don’t know about you, but I have spent way too much of my life treating Psalm 23 the same way I have at times treated the Lord’s Prayer or even the Pledge of Allegiance—something I am readily able say but am not necessarily connected to in the moment.

However, I am in a season where Psalm 23 has come alive in a whole new way, and it has become my “go-to” weap-



on when I experience the particularly grueling mind-and-prayer battles that famously hit sometime between 3 a.m. and 5 a.m. The declaration that I am a sheep who has a Shepherd that will see me through; who feeds me extravagantly and makes my defeated enemies watch; who is with me even when I am traveling through a valley that is named Death; who sends goodness and mercy to chase me down even when it feels like my very wool is so sodden that I am going un-

der. And I have a deeper appreciation of the Shepherd’s job description: the Restorer of my soul. Remember this: your soul has to take a serious hit if He is going to do His job. And, I can say from experience that no one can do it better.

Ali Elizabeth Turner

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All Things Soldier

Alabama Veterans Museum & Archives Director Retires

by Yvonne Dempsey



Executive Director Sandra “Sandy” Thompson is retiring after 17 years of dedicated leadership of the Alabama Veterans Museum & Archives, marking the end of an era for the our museum and the community it serves.

A proud veteran of the U.S. Air Force, Sandy retired as Master Sergeant after serving from 1986 to 2007, with assignments at various locations around the world. Her military career spanned pivotal moments in history, including the Cold War, Desert Storm/Desert Shield, and Operation Enduring Freedom eras. Over the course of her service, she earned numerous medals and awards, including the Air Force Commendation Medal and the National Defense Service Medal—recognition of her dedication and commitment to her country.

That same spirit of service defined her nearly two decades at our museum, where she worked tirelessly to preserve military history and ensure that the stories of veterans were honored and remembered. Sandy was the first director hired for the museum a few years



after it opened. Under her visionary leadership, our museum has become one of the top tourist attractions in North Alabama and the #1 tourist attraction in Limestone County. Through Sandy’s tireless dedication and devotion to our veterans, the museum strengthened its role as a place of reflection, education, and community connection.

Sandy and I have shared many unforgettable moments through the years, including the task of moving the museum’s exhibits from the origi-

nal site in the L & N Railroad depot to the more spacious building across the parking lot...through which we shed blood, sweat, and tears. The museum’s tremendous growth and success in its new site was in large part due to Sandy’s vision of what it could be and her endless hours working to make it happen.

Sandy and I have had several conversations this last year during which she considered retiring. One of the deciding factors was her recent battle with cancer. As is usually the case, she was blindsided by this revelation. Although treatments were tough and she had some rough patches both emotionally and physically, she still worked and made sure all ran smoothly at the museum...and that’s dedication!

Sandy shared with me that deciding to retire



was not easy. “This was a difficult decision,” she said. “My heart is in this museum and in the lives of all the veterans whose memories are held within its walls and grounds.”

While Sandy’s retirement marks a transition, she emphasized that she is not stepping away entirely. She plans to spend time traveling and enjoying retirement, but she will remain a familiar face at museum events—and may even return as a volunteer from time to time.

All of her colleagues, community leaders, and museum patrons alike describe Sandy as a passionate advocate for vet-

erans and a steady, guiding presence. Her impact can be seen not only in the museum itself, but in the many lives she has touched along the way.

Though she is stepping down from her role as director, her connection to the museum will remain strong, ensuring her legacy will continue for years to come.

Sandy -- Athens, Limestone County, and your museum family extend heartfelt thanks to you for your years of service—both in uniform and at our museum—and we wish you all the best as this next chapter of your life unfolds. WE LOVE YOU, SANDY!

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FEBRUARY 5, 2026

Calendar of Events

Swamp John's

March 26

4:00pm – 7:00pm. Sheriff's Rodeo Arena, Athens. The Sons of Confederate Veterans is having a Swamp John's supper to raise funds to purchase a new historical marker. Plates are \$15 and include fried fish, shrimp, or chicken, (or any combination) along with slaw, french fries, hush puppies, and tea. Carry out or eat in. Presale tickets are available. Walkups are encouraged and welcome! Cash, check, or credit cards. Call Daveen Stanford at 256-777-2199 with any questions. Email camp768@alsev.org for more information.

3rd Annual Singing River Smoke-O-Rama BBQ Festival

March 27

Fire up the grills and sharpen the knives! The Singing River Smoke-O-Rama BBQ Festival is officially returning to Athens, Alabama, on March 27th and 28th, 2026. 6:00 PM. Limestone County Sheriff's Rodeo Arena. 18118 SR-99 Athens, AL.

Community Easter Eggstravaganza

March 28

You're Invited to our Community Easter Eggstravaganza! 3:00 - 5:00 p.m. Friendship at Ripley Campus, 11327 Ripley Rd., Athens, AL. Gates will open at 2:30 p.m. for the special needs community. There will be eggs, inflatables, games, music, food trucks, and more! This is a FREE event; however, you may want to bring cash for the food trucks. We look forward to seeing you there! 256-232-4906 | friendshipchurchal.org

National Walking Week

April 1 - 7

Athens-Limestone Visitors Center, 100 N Beaty St, Athens. National Walking Week hosted by AVA_America's Walking Club is a great time to get out and about on Athens-Limestone's trails, tracks and treks including the AVA Athens Historic Volksmarch (you can explore trail options more here) to explore and take steps to benefit your heart, mind and spirit. Trail brochures are available at the Athens-Limestone Visitors Center 100 North Beaty Street in Athens Monday-Friday from 8:00AM-5:00PM and a selection of guest favorites are available on the porch in the covered boxes year-round.

Good Friday on the Square

April 3

Community worship even to celebrate Good Friday and Easter weekend. 5:00 PM-7:00 PM. Limestone County Courthouse. 200 W. Washington St., Athens.

Taste of Athens-Limestone

April 13

The Taste of Athens-Limestone is a food festival celebrating the diverse restaurants and dining experiences across Athens and Limestone County. This exciting new event will bring together many area restaurants for a night of food, fun, and community connection. Come taste your way through the many flavors of our local dining scene and sample the signature bites from all the participating restaurants. 6:00 - 8:00 PM. First Baptist Church Family Life Center, 201 Hobbs Street East, Athens, AL. TICKETS: \$25 each. Tickets can be purchased from the following:

- <https://www.zeffy.com/.../ticke.../taste-of-athens-limestone>
- Athens Florist & Gifts, 105 South Clinton Street, Athens
- Refine Chiropractic, 22099 US Hwy 72E Suite G, Athens, AL (in the Hwy 72 Publix shopping center)

2026 Fridays After Five Concert Series

April 24

Athens Main Street's highly-anticipated Fridays After Five Concert Series will return in 2026 for another year. Don't forget your lawn chairs. East Side of the Courthouse.

2026 APD Sporting Clay Shoot

May 8

Calling all sharpshooters and supporters of law enforcement! We're gearing up for our 2026 Sporting Clay Shoot, and we already know it's going to be a blast. Get your teams ready now and join us at Old South Clays. Every registration and sponsorship supports our APD Tactical Team! 8AM. Old South Clays. 27246 Wooley Springs Rd Athens.

DMAC Fest

May 9

Live music, food trucks, free admission. All proceeds benefit the DMAC Foundation Trade School Scholarship fund. 5:00PM-9:30PM. Limestone County Courthouse Square.

Digital Literacy Classes

Athens-Limestone County Public Library will host a series of Digital Literacy Classes in conjunction with Calhoun Community College & Drake State Community & Technical College. Classes will boost your digital confidence & provide you with skills and training needed in today's job market. Courses include: Computer & Internet Basics, Email, Windows OS, & Microsoft Word®. M-W 9:00 – 12:00 or M-W 1:00 – 4:00. Classes start January 24th. Call us at (256) 306-2830 to learn more.

What you need to know about AI scams

courtesy Brandpoint Content

(BPT) - You've probably heard about the amazing things artificial intelligence (AI) can do, from quickly creating written content and images to making videos that appear real, even when they're fake. Unfortunately, this easily accessible technology is also used by fraudsters to fool people into sharing personal information, investing in fake schemes, or giving scammers their money.

When AI technology is so good at faking - and personalizing - scams, what can consumers do to protect themselves?

"From AI-generated emails and texts to cloned voice messages, calls, and deep-fake videos, today's scammers have many tools at their disposal," said Chief Postal Inspector Gary Barksdale. "But if you're alert and understand fraudsters' typical methods, you can stay one step ahead of them."

Take steps to learn more about fraud schemes that use AI to protect yourself and your family. The U.S. Postal Inspection Service is sharing some red flags that can help you avoid AI-generated traps and what you or a loved one can do if you are a victim of fraud.

How to spot a scam that uses AI

AI is being used in many different types of fraudulent schemes including quick phishing attempts in the form of emails or texts supposedly from a reputable company, "long cons" like romance, investment, or cryptocurrency scams, and even scams claiming to be "tech support." If you get a text, email, call,

or voice message requesting or demanding your response, watch for these things:

- * Skimpy social media. The "person" contacting you has an inconsistent or thin social media footprint - few friends, recent account creation, comments that don't seem natural, or images that don't match name/profile details.

- * Odd website/email address. Tiny misspellings, weird fonts, non-secure websites asking for login information, or a return email address that doesn't match the website domain asking for information (Example: john.doe@USPSUS.com when USPS.com is the actual domain name).

- * Requests to communicate off-platform. Does the message sender insist on speaking via WhatsApp, Telegram, or a separate, private email address? If so, platform security protections won't apply.

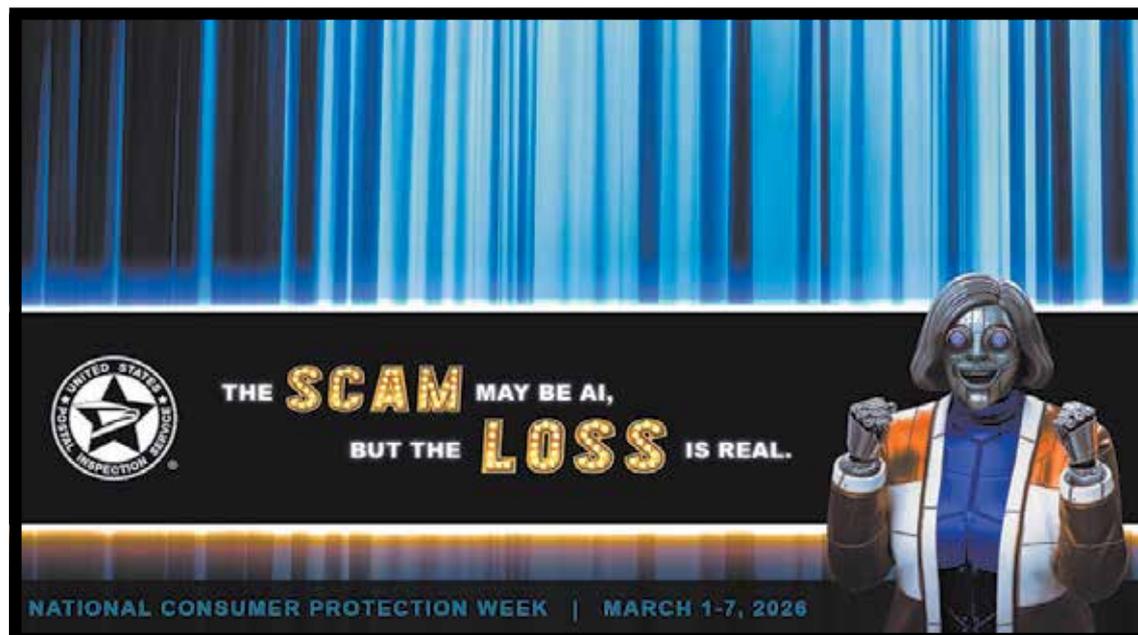
- * Audio/video inconsistencies. Lip-sync timing seems off, weird lighting/jerky motion, or a voice that doesn't quite match the person you know.

- * Too-good-to-be-true offers. Does the sender promise guaranteed high financial returns or "exclusive" private opportunities? They likely won't pay out.

How to protect yourself

Even if you think the person or company contacting you is legitimate at first, always double check by going straight to the source.

Go directly to the company website, or contact the person the way you normally



contact them, rather than clicking a provided link or responding to the text, email, or call.

Follow these tips to avoid falling prey to scams:

- * Never send money to someone you know online only, especially via cryptocurrency, wire transfer, gift cards, or prepaid reload methods.

- * Beware of financial requests. Requests to "loan me money to buy a ticket" or "invest via this private wallet" are warnings to STOP and verify.

- * Enable multi-factor authentication (MFA). Protect your email, social, and financial accounts.

- * Use payment methods with buyer protection. Credit cards and escrow services are safest when transacting with unknown parties.

- * Avoid sharing personally identifiable information. Providing your full date of birth, Social Security number, photos of IDs, or home address can enable identity theft.

- * Keep devices and software updated. Also use

antivirus software plus a password manager for strong, unique passwords.

- * Be cautious with "too helpful" strangers. If someone offers to set up an investment account or "help" you sign up, slow down and verify.

- * Inform your contacts. Warn friends and family if you see a suspicious contact pretending to be you.

Actions to take if you're the victim of a scam

If you or a loved one falls victim to a fraudster, take immediate action:

- * Stop communication with the scammer. Preserve all messages and transaction records.

- * Contact your bank/payment provider immediately. Ask them to help you stop or trace transfers.

- * Change passwords and enable multi-factor authentication (MFA), especially if you shared login information.

- * Place fraud alerts and a credit freeze with the three main credit bureaus. Also place alerts with your bank and credit cards if you shared sensitive financial

data.

- * Contact local police. If you lost significant sums of money or were threatened, the police need to be notified.

- * If you used cryptocurrency, contact law enforcement immediately. Tracing is difficult, but reported early, there may be a chance of recovering your funds.

Most importantly, report fraud. You can report it to the Postal Inspection Service, the Federal Trade Commission, or the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3). You should also report the profile and messages to the platform where the contact occurred.

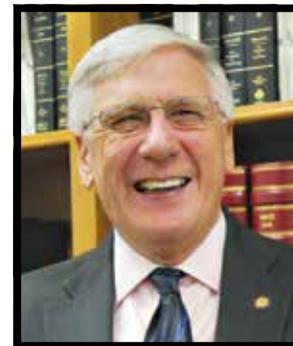
Finally, seek support! Scams also cause emotional harm, so talk to trusted friends, family members, or a counselor.

If you believe you've been the victim of any scam connected to the U.S. Mail, contact postal inspectors at 877-876-2455 or www.USPIS.gov/report. For more information on fraud prevention, visit www.USPIS.gov/ncpw-2026.

What Makes Ronnie Roll

Wind, Sprinter, And Turning 250

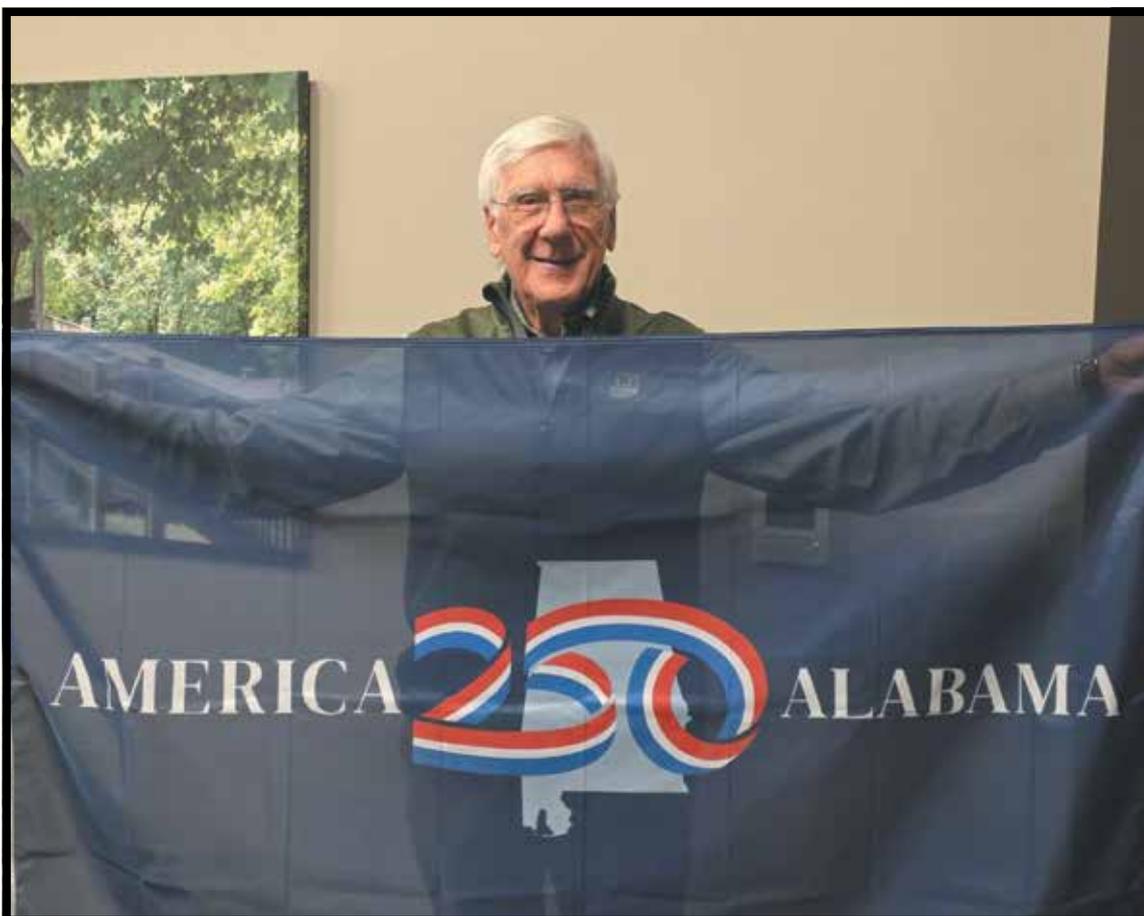
by Ali Elizabeth Turner



We met after a weekend where people actually got sunburned for the first time in 2026, thought we might blow away in the middle of the night on Sunday, and in the one hour that we spent for our usual Monday interview, enough unexpected snow fell with a brisk accompanying swirly wind that windshields were covered over. To top it off, my national weather app on my iPhone said that it would get to 63°F, while the bottom hour-by-hour indicated it would barely leave the 20s all day, and the only icons that showed up were the ones indicating wind—not a snowflake or precip icon anywhere to be found. “You need to get a different weather app,” Mayor Ronnie said matter-of-factly. “Welcome to Wing in Alabama, or Sprinter, depending on your perspective,” I replied. “Wing” is my unique designation for

the wild fight between winter and spring when winter is in beast mode, like it was on Monday morning; “Sprinter” is also my unique designation when spring seems to be warmly and firmly ushering winter into the archives. Wing or Sprinter, you decide what’s going on, and understand that if you wait five minutes, it will change yet again.

The weather prompted a brief discussion about the storm shelter that is planned for North Jefferson in the same location as the recycling center. It would be where the old L & S Grocery stood, and the paperwork with EMA and FEMA have been in order for a good while. And so, we wait. When it is completed, it will shelter around 180 people. “There’s been good cooperation between the county and the city,” said the mayor, and added, “We’re just waiting



on EMA and FEMA.”

The mayor also happily mentioned the fact that we were going to have a special Saint Patrick’s Day Parade called “Luck of the Wee Ones,” and all kinds of baby supplies had been collected out in the City Hall lobby for Family Resource Center.

We moved on to the announcement that Athens had been chosen as one of 40 “celebration cities” in Alabama

for the upcoming 250th birthday of these United States. “How did we get chosen?” I asked. “We’re just so good,” was his dry and chuckling tongue-in-cheek reply. Truth be told, Holly Hollman had applied for our town to be picked, and it is an honor to be chosen. Holly also made sure that the selection committee knew that Athens Arts is going to be highly involved with contests such as “My American Inspiration”

Art Contest, and there will be music, lots of patriotic events, and more.

There will certainly be more articles and info about the semiquincentennial, (fancy-ese for America 250) but for now, some of the high points include the art contest; the Art After Hours event on July 3; the Red, White, and Boom fireworks display and battle of the bands on July 4; and the Athens State University’s presentation on July 7, entitled “John Adams: Architect of our Democracy,” featuring Brian “Fox” Ellis.

We both had to bundle up and head out, and there was one thing we needed to do: pray. So we did, and once again it was time for Ronnie to roll.

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Bitterness Is Poison: *Uprooting The Roots And Choosing Grace*

by Anna Hamilton

Life inevitably brings moments of hurt, disappointment, and betrayal. When we experience pain, it is natural to feel wounded. But if those wounds are not addressed with grace and forgiveness, they can take root in our hearts and grow into something far more destructive: bitterness.

Hebrews 12:15 reminds us that a root of bitterness can grow and cause trouble, poisoning many. Bitterness rarely stays contained. Like a toxic root beneath the soil, it spreads quietly beneath the surface, affecting our thoughts, attitudes, and relationships. "See to it that no one falls short of

the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

There is danger in letting bitterness grow. Bitterness begins subtly. It often starts with a remembered hurt or an unresolved offense. But when we revisit the pain again and again, we unknowingly "water" that root. Over time, it grows to harden our hearts.

Instead of seeing clearly, bitterness clouds our vision. Instead of responding with compassion, we respond with resentment. What once was a single wound can grow into distrust, anger, and

continued on page 22

Beef Tips in Mushroom Sauce

Ingredients:

*2 lbs. lean sirloin beef tips
1 large onion - thinly sliced
16 oz. mushrooms - 2 packages sliced
1 can cream of mushroom soup
1 cup beef broth
1 package dry onion soup mix
Salt and pepper to taste*

Directions:

Place beef tips in crock pot and season with salt and pepper. Cover with onions and mushrooms.

In a bowl, whisk together the mushroom soup, the onion soup mix, and the beef broth.

Pour over beef tips and cook on low for 6-8 hours. Serve over mashed potatoes, rice, or egg noodles.



Step, Step...

by Stephanie Reynolds, Athens-Limestone Tourism Association



“There isn’t anyone left on the trail besides the lady who was just hiking, right?” the gentleman engraving finishers’ coins asked the race timer.

“No, there’s one more—The Pirate.”

“Yeah, that’s my wife,” The Wonder Sweetie said to the two gentlemen manning the finish line at this week’s trail race. He was patiently waiting for me to limp my way to the end of a very long day and had overheard their conversation. The two men, flustered to be “caught,” started apologizing for the “pirate” comment, but he assured them that it was fine, that he referred to me that way too, and I wouldn’t be offended.

He was right; I chuckled when he told me this story. I truly don’t mind—pirates are epic and, except for the fact that I would rather have a toothache than be on a boat in the ocean AND my mama

raised me right, I could see me considering that line of work in my younger years.

So, I was a pirate in name only this past Saturday’s race. The temps were perfect, in the low 70s. The sun was shining, the humidity was low(ish), and there was a gentle breeze. After the 50k the previous Saturday, this 25k race promised to be a cruise, a fun jaunt in the woods. I knew I could do 25k easily on flats—that is often my training run—and these hills should just be a smidgeon harder, right?

No. This was a race I was woefully, laughably unprepared for, but I didn’t know it. At the time, it sounded like fun: “Hey! I like trails, and 25k will be half of the 50k I am doing the previous week, so I’ll be *fine!*” *Oh poor, sweet, naïve 1-month-ago-me. How precious is your enthusiasm for things you have no reasonable confidence in doing!*

Seriously, what was I thinking? Probably something like “OOOH! I wonder what goodies will be in the race swag bag?” and definitely not “Steph, will you be recovered from the 50k?”

For So. Many. Hours on that beautiful day I picked my way over fallen trees and down gullies, gazed into deep, leg-breaking crevices in the sides of what are adorably considered “mountains” in Alabama and tried not to DNF (The short form of “did not finish”).

Last month I told you how a different trail walked me back gently, sweetly to my childhood and rest. This trail was a punishingly different story. Without proper training, fueling, earbuds, and other racers (when you’re at the back of the pack, you get the whole mountain to yourself), the trail was a gut-check for my body and a proving ground for my soul.

Where is the line between “fabulously hard” and “physically impossible”? (FYI, on Saturday, it was about mile 8). What do you do when you cross that line halfway up a rocky slope with no one around for miles and a growing realization that you actually might not finish?

Step, step, breathe. Step, step, drink. Step, step, pray.

When you have already seen one much younger, healthier racer get injured yet still had to hobble down a hill to get to



a gravel road where his crewman could pick him up?

Step, step, breathe. Step, step, drink. Step, st—whoa, that’s a slick spot!

When you are coughing with every breath for no reason.

Step, step drink. Step, step, pray.

When your ambition wrote a check that your body couldn’t hope to cash?

Step, step, dri—Great. I’m out of water. OK then, step, step, pray.

When you’re thoroughly tapped out and it takes a whole minute to go 5 steps?

Step. Step. Pray.

And then do it again, because your body is wearing thin, but your spirit is growing stronger.

And again, because there is a beautiful little white moth with the most per-

fect orange dot on each of its wings put there just for you.

And again, because it’s just 4 more miles...2.5 more miles...1.7 more miles.

And again, because you have gotten to the end of ambition, strength, self, and even hope, and found that keeping your mind on things above makes you strong when you are broken.

And again, because you now know that you don’t have to play safe, you can be outrageously, prayerfully bold because there is never-ending strength for you when your own runs out.

And again, because the flint grey sea of rock will give way to an ocean of grass and a finish line, and The Pirate will finally be able to dock her ship and go home.



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David Ruf Is Running For Limestone County Commission, District 1

by Ali Elizabeth Turner

continued from page 1

January. He never had any intention of getting involved in politics, but after serving as honorary pallbearer at the funeral of the late Daryl Samett, David had the strong impression that he needed to step into the gap left behind by the District 1 Commissioner, and to continue the work.

Prior to his appointment, David was interviewed by Governor Ivey's office, who opened up the conversation by asking him what he was passionate about. Here is his response to that question and some further thoughts:

- *Doing the very best that I can in every-*

thing. My name and my reputation [is] the only thing I will be remembered by.

- *Teaching kids about the negativity of drug use. Taking the fight to the classroom and field days. The youth of our community and country are our future.*

- *I believe in transparency in our local government. I am not saying it is not at the moment, but want to ensure that it is.*

- *I am for the good of my district, my county, and my state.*

- *I am confident of God's plan and purpose for my life.*

In order to understand what the statements above actually mean and what makes Da-



David being sworn in on the 1880s German Ruf family Bible by Judge Charles Woodruff

vid tick, here is a bit of background. He has always been involved in farming, and has also bought property as well

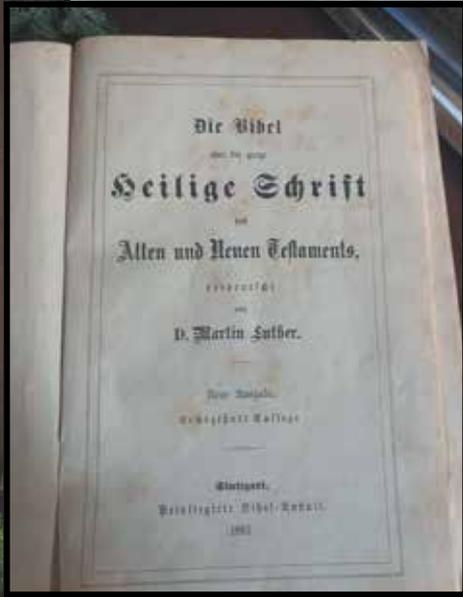
as farms, helped to start businesses, worked in fabrication, been employed by Redstone Arsenal, and more. His wife's name is Allison (Gilbert), and her people have been here a long time as well. The Ruf's have two daughters, Ashlyn and Avery, and Ashlyn recently married Hunter Newby.

David and his family have raised prize-winning Angus cattle and have a diversified farming operation, which includes corn, cotton, soybeans, cattle, poultry houses, and a trucking company. The Rufs

have weathered literal storms and personal ones, and it has been the "root structure" of faith, family, community, hard work, and perseverance that has kept them going. "Honestly, I was content just with farm life. Life was good and I felt blessed," he told me. But something happened inside when he was asked to take the position that caused him to realize that he wanted to do all he could to help prepare us for the future. That meant managing growth well and investing, especially in the



The family Bible





lives of kids.

As a commissioner, David knows that roads and infrastructure are at the top of just about everyone's list of things that need to be improved. "At some point we moved away from the number of roads along with their actual mileage in our district, and on to population numbers when it comes to appropriations for roads." He showed me that even though District 1 has nearly one hundred more miles of roads in it than another district, each district gets the exact same amount of money for maintaining them. If elected, he is planning on going to Montgomery and Washington, D.C. to try and secure more funding for roads. This includes both maintenance and repair, along with building new roads as needed.

David said further, "I believe we are called to be good stewards of the taxpayers' money, and that's what I pray to do. I don't ever want to be tied to anything that

is not good." Roads are complex, and building them from the ground up in order to handle increased traffic takes time. "I would rather build them well than have to turn around and go back and fix them," he said. Infrastructure goes hand in hand with roads, and because David knows that growth is coming and is unstoppable, there has to be not only a plan but action taken if we are going to get ahead of it.

David understands the impact that programs such as 4-H can have on kids. The 4-H program teaches life skills, and he knows it works. He is happy that the Limestone County Sheriff's Office is going to be able to bring back the D.A.R.E. program, and while we were conducting this interview, David showed me a text he had received from a constituent that said that his wife was grateful for having the program when she was in school. There is actually "opioid money" that we have available to bring back the D.A.R.E. educational services, have a D.A.R.E.-logo

wrapped Tahoe to get the message out, the special training for the officer, and have a second officer available in the summer time when school is out.

We took some time to talk about a passion of mine, which it turns out is one of David's, too, and that is human trafficking. He wants traffickers to be brought to justice, and is 100% behind Operation Millstone, which is our county's inter-

agency program to find and prosecute traffickers and trafficking in all its forms.

"I want law enforcement, the Sheriff's Department, first responders, fire fighters, and volunteer fire fighters to have everything they need," David said, and went on to his third point: Efficient government. David has two daughters, and he has worked hard, while teaching them to work hard, to live by

sound economic principles. "I want my daughters to have what they need from me when I pass, and I don't want our county to leave them a mess. I used to tell them, 'What you do today you'll sleep with tonight.'"

If these sound like the values and experience you want for the District 1 Commissioner, then David Ruf would appreciate your vote on May 19.



Captain's Log

Sucker! I'm Such A Sucker

by Brenda Wilkerson

I am SUCH a sucker!

I don't know why, but I immediately caved to the timid request of the love-bug butterflies dancing in Gentleman P's tummy. Gentleman P is a quiet 3rd grader whose presence is loud even though you don't ever hear a peep out of him. He is the perfect rider. He always lets the girls go first and draws me beautiful artwork from time to time.

Two days ago, Gentlemen P quietly requested a seat change so he could be with a brother/sister friend duo instead of two girls -- his neighbor and sister. Request granted little man! I am usually pleased to grant the requests of my

quiet riders.

Assuming he wanted to sit with the brother, I put the girls in the other seat across the aisle. The following morning, Gentleman P again waited to be the last one to unload at the school. He stopped beside my Captain's chair. I knew this meant he requested a conversation with the Captain.

"What's up buddy? How do you like the seat change?" I asked, expecting a grateful thanks.

Gentleman P bravely spoke, "Could I sit with the sister instead?" Ahh-hhhh, the clouds are beginning to clear. I think there is a crush happening on this ol' bus. "Sure bud-



dy, I will change it tomorrow." And I did.

So this afternoon at Gen-

tleman P's stop #20, I asked again how he liked his seating arrangement. "She didn't ride today," he said with his eyes looking at the floor. I'm sorry buddy. "She had Good News Club after school...I'll be fine." His voice trailed off

as he turned and quietly descended down the three big steps to the sidewalk. My. Heart. Broke. Hang in there Gentleman P. Maybe fate will be on your side tomorrow. Until then ...

~Brenda

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Criticism Happens

by Detri L. McGhee - CLU, ChFC, B.Min



It is not possible to stop criticism. It is not wise to even try. Neither is it fruitful to wish we could change the fact that criticism happens. Some of it is going to be leveled at US. Some, we deserve and some don't. Some will be given with love, some with hate, and some is not even really criticism, nor meant for us. (Criticism just simply HAPPENS.)

However, how you choose to let that criticism affect you is 100% up to you. Perhaps one of the greatest tools available to propel ourselves into a more productive, enjoyable, peaceful, sane day-by-day life could be our conscious choosing to develop the skill of harvesting the precious, productive, powerful, immensely valuable benefits of proper management of criticism and all its "relatives," such as suggestions, complaints, correction, instruction, opposition, reproof, teaching, gripes, counsel, questioning, rebuke, guidance, alternative/opposing views, rules, bullying, negativity, etc.

Criticism means different things to different people. Unfortunately, unless we have developed our inborn traits and character to attain a high level of EI (Emotional Intelligence), we likely fall in one of two equally cumbersome areas: 1. We take criticism too seriously and let it negatively affect us, or 2. We ignore criticism, and waste all the maturing

and profitable benefits that can be ours with just a little work.

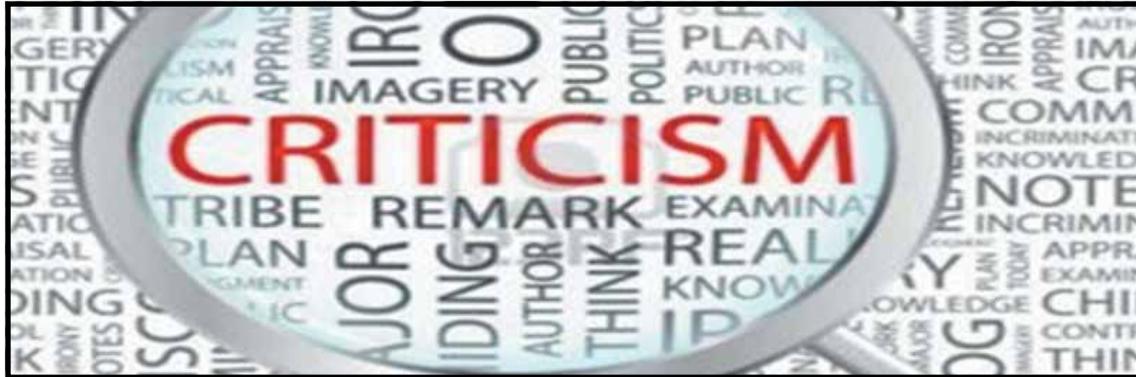
What do the following people have in common?

- Eleven and 13 year old boys ambush innocent teachers and classmates
- Postal employee guns down fellow workers, then kills himself
- Estranged husband murders wife and 3 small children
- Depressed teen attempts suicide when rejected by girlfriend
- Jessica Savage, once famous newscaster, hid severe emotional problems from childhood difficulties because of this

What did they all have in common? They never learned to handle criticism and rejection. Thankfully, those are severe reactions, but in today's world where there is an over-abundance of thoughtless complaining, criticizing, careless, ugly opinions put on public and powerful sites, it has become more and more important that we GET A GRIP on just how much we are willing to let other people dictate how we will react to their negativity.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned came from the wise attitude and filter-less comments of a precious little girl with Down syndrome. One Sunday morning I noticed that she was very downcast. I was determined to cheer her up.

'Gabrielle, you look sad.



Is something wrong?"

"I'm mad!"

"What's wrong?"

"It's raining! I can't go swimming this afternoon!"

So here I go in my (probably too sugary-sweet manner!) attempt to cheer her up with how important the rain is, bringing the flowers, filling our water supply, cleaning the trees, and on and on!

Gabrielle looks right into my eyes, places her hands on her hips and says in a very controlled, yet authoritative manner, "Ms. Detri... Get a grip!"

I have used that memory many times to remind me that we need to constantly be aware of the importance of having a firm grip on our words, attitudes and deeds. I even developed magnets and a Women's Retreat format called Get Your GRIP – Find God's Rich, Impeccable Plan

May I share a few hints on how to profit from criticism rather than letting it delay or defeat us?

* Learn to ACT rather than REACT to negative events/words/people.

* When you are rightly criticized, do all within your power to correct the problem as quickly as possible.

* When you are unjustly criticized learn what to ignore and what to address.

* Refuse to let other people, their attitudes, words, or actions, control your attitudes, words and actions. No one can make you mad, sad, frustrated, or hateful without your permission.

* Learn how to forgive quickly and move on.

* Criticism is not a four-letter word.

* When criticism comes to you from an enemy, remember that opens a great opportunity to enable you to become a better person. Take the valuable parts and use them for your benefit. It will drive them crazy to

realize they helped you! Take any parts meant to hurt or damage you and refuse to let them affect you. That is the best punishment you can give them! And, it doesn't require you to stoop to their level of meanness!

* Realize that if you attempt anything of real value, you will face criticism. The more important the work is, the more you will receive increased opposition.

I read somewhere decades ago, "To determine the value of a project, analyze the opposition."

Detri would love to hear from you. Email: detrimcghee@gmail.com or Facebook, Detri Atkinson McGhee. Free outline for Criticism Management available at www.criticismmanagement.com

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Clean, Green And Beautiful

What A Wonderful World

by Claire Tribble - Executive Director,
Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful

It's finally spring, and spring means it's time for our favorite event of the year... the Earth Day Expo! This year, since the Carter Gymnasium is under construction, it will be held in the Sandridge Student Center and ballroom located just a little west of the gymnasium at 402 Pryor Street. We'll be spread out inside and outside, you won't miss it! Parking will be across the street at the Athens State KARES Library, and the Hobbs Street entry, which is handicapped accessible.

We have a fantastic lineup of shows, exhibits, vendors, and activities. Thanks to Limestone County Water and Sewer Authority, we will be able to have two Steve Trash shows in McCandless

Hall. We love his shows, and so do the kids! We'll have Rise Raptors with all their amazing raptors on display. These birds are truly majestic. We even have some new things this year to shake things up a bit. We'll have Wild Encounter's Spider Monkeys roaming through the event, and Lash LaRoux, a caricature artist. Lash can draw a portrait in 3-4 minutes, but I would expect there will be a line! Athens State Biology Department will be leading historic tree tours and a scavenger hunt game.

We have a great lineup of vendors as well. Some of our amazing vendors will be returning, such as Lucas Ferry Flower Farm, Positive Vibrations Rocks & Gems, BluBailes Farms, and Greenhouse Candles.

Our new vendors include Black Orchid Farm, Moonflower Bizarre, Deeded Oaks Farms, The Vintage Gourd, Make Like a Tree, Beautiful Alabama Honey, the Potter's Hand, and Limestone County Master Gardeners will be back with Q&A and plants! We are so excited to offer such a varied group of local artists and artisans.

Our Education Station lineup is top tier this year. Damien Simbeck, a local TVA native plant and animal expert, will start off the day with a guided nature walk through Marbut Bend. He will kick off at 7:30 a.m. We've added several new stations and added to some of the staples. We have the new Limestone County Beekeepers Club with their awesome 3-D printed hive



and bees, Forest Families of North Alabama exhibit, and Forest Bathing - a writing exercise with Wild Alabama. ASU Teach will be there with new games, as well as ASU Biology. North Alabama Zoological Society, Limestone County Recycling, AMSTI, and the Athens-Limestone Beautification Committee will be back. And you won't miss our kid's crafts tables - we have so many new crafts this year.

And don't forget the TBA-KI Earth Day Art Contest!

It is open to all students within Limestone County. This year, the theme is "You Belong Among the Wildflowers." So, get creative - we want to see it all! You don't draw? No problem! Take a picture, sculpt, or make a collage - whatever you want! We have an amazing set of prizes this year; check out our Facebook page to see them all.

We hope to see you on April 25. We'll be at the doors waiting!



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Learn To Live Life With Purpose

by D. A. Slinkard

D.A. Slinkard would love your feedback. You can contact him at da.slinkard@gmail.com



If I could tell you how to achieve everything in life that you wanted to achieve, would I have your attention? If you could know how to succeed in every area of life you wanted to, would you take notes? I have found that far too often in life we get what we did not want because we were unclear about what our actions should be to obtain our heart's desire.

Too often in life, bad things happen to good people simply because of their inability to act fast enough. Businesses go under because they cannot sell products fast enough in quantities great enough to keep the creditors at bay. Success in life is all about taking the right action to achieve that which is important to us.

I'm going to ask you, "What is it that you are wanting to achieve with your life?" Go ahead and think about this one question and really dig deep for your answer. Now with the answer firmly within your mind, I want to ask you, "What has been holding you back from achieving your desired outcome?"

Studies from the Napoleon Hill Institute suggest that 95% of the world's population is comprised of people walking around in life with no purpose. I was taken aback by this number, but then it made sense why the richest 1% of the world holds as much wealth as the rest of the world combined.

This is not an article bashing the 1%, because hon-

estly who would not want to be in that category for financial wealth? Regardless though, the secret to separating yourself from the 95% walking around without a purpose is to learn how to find your purpose through this article. I want you to think about your life and the energy it takes to make it through each day.

Now I want you to picture a rudder on a boat, and if that rudder becomes lost while out in the Tennessee River, the boat begins circling around. Eventually you're going to run out of fuel. But keep in mind that you initially had enough energy (fuel) to get back to shore; however, because your rudder (purpose) was lost, you were unsuccessful in obtaining your goal. Your boat and your life were just going in circles.

What you need to do to find your "definite purpose" in life begins by answering the following four questions. Your answers should be deliberate and purposeful because otherwise you are doing the same thing you have always done, and you will get the same results you have always gotten. Here we go:

- 1.) Decide your definite purpose in life.
- 2.) Write out a clear statement of this purpose.
- 3.) Write a plan for how you will obtain the object of your purpose.
- 4.) Create an accountability group of like-minded individuals, which is also known as a "mastermind" group, to help you achieve your goals.

You have two options

when it comes to answering these questions: You can fly through them and see how quickly you complete the assignment, which will have you walking away feeling much the same way you did prior to the exercise. You rush through it and miss the entire purpose, seeing no benefit. The alternative way to handle this is to take some time to really reflect upon the questions and be sincere in answering the questions listed.

I say sincere because after all, this is your future self you are writing this for. This exercise is for who you will become, not for who you are at this very moment. The hardest part is truly finding what that definite purpose in life is because we have too many external factors that dictate what we think we should be going after.

Your definite purpose in life only holds meaning for you. It holds no weight for your parents, for your spouse, for your brother or sister, just you. Be honest with yourself when you write out the answers to these questions.

You want to write the answer to the first question and keep it in a place you can see it every day. You will need daily affirmation of what your purpose is to help achieve it. You will want to utilize your mastermind group to help you stay on course. You want to allow them to be your rudder when yours gets lost along the journey. You will find your true self when you find your definite purpose, and in doing so, you will separate yourself from the other 95%.

How to find your
PURPOSE
IN LIFE

The View From The Bridge

Honoring The Women Who Paved The Way: Tribute To The Legacy

by Jackie Warner

Career Development Facilitator

“Impact, Engage, Grow” Community Matters



Women’s History Month invites us to pause, breathe, and look back at the extraordinary lineage of strength that stands behind us. As I reflect on my own journey, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for every woman who has blazed a trail before me — women who walked with courage, prayed with power, and lived with a conviction that shaped the path I now walk. Their sacrifices, their resilience, and their unwavering faith have watered the soil beneath my feet.

I thank God for the many chapters He has allowed me to navigate. Some chapters were smooth, others were marked with tears, stretching, and unexpected turns. Yet when I look back over my life, all I can say is, “Thank



You, Lord.” Thank You for being the Author and Finisher of my story. Thank You for giving me strength to stand in rooms I once felt unqualified for. Thank You

for molding me, shaping me, and preparing me to execute with excellence when the moment required it.

The road less traveled — the narrow path — has never promised ease. But it has always promised purpose. As followers of Christ, we understand that the journey is not meant to be effortless; it is meant to be transformative. Every valley has taught

me endurance. Every mountain has taught me trust. Every season has revealed another layer of God’s glory working through me.

Today, I pay tribute to the women who poured into me and paved the way: **my mothers, sisters, grandmothers, aunts, daughters, mentors, and every woman whose life has touched mine.** Their prayers covered me. Their wisdom

guided me. Their example challenged me to rise higher.

As we honor the women who came before us, may we also commit to being women who pour into those coming behind us. Let us continue to be **living waters** — refreshing, restoring, and reflecting the love of Christ everywhere we go. May our lives be vessels of His glory, our words carriers of His truth, and our presence a reminder that God still works wonders through willing women.

This month, and every month, we stand in gratitude, strength, and purpose. To God be the glory for the great things He has done — and the greater things He will continue to do through us.

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The Alternative Approach

The Missing Piece

by Roy Williams

When it comes to a long healthy life, protecting your circulatory system and guarding your weight can make a huge difference. For many the missing piece can be two **NEWtritional Health Care** supplements that address both issues without interfering with medications, starving, or doing extreme exercise.

If you are fighting your weight, worried about your heart, or both, you already know this truth: doing nothing is not an option. Every month you delay, habits set deeper, arteries stiffen more, and energy slips a little further away.

Right now, in North Alabama, people are working hard on diet plans, gym memberships, and even prescription drugs like Ozempic. Yet many of them still feel exhausted, hungry at the wrong times, and afraid that heart disease is catching up with them anyway.

That is exactly why we created **Dieter's DeLite** and paired it with **HEART** from **NEWtritional Health Care**. Together, they are designed to support metabolism, control your appetite, and support cardiovascular health in a way most "single focus" approaches simply can't come close to. This combination is not optional. It is strategic.

Most diets fail for three main reasons:

1. The metabolism is already slowed down.
2. Blood sugar

swings hijack willpower.

3. Energy drops so low that people cannot stick with it.

When the thyroid, adrenals, and blood sugar system are under stress, the body fights to hold on to every calorie. You can cut food, count calories, and skip dessert, yet the scale barely moves. At the same time, a sluggish metabolism and poor circulation put extra load on the cardiovascular system. That is when blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglycerides start to climb. In other words, if you do not address metabolism and the heart at the same time, you are trying to push a car uphill with the parking brake still on.

Dieter's DeLite works because it provides:

- A more active metabolism
- Better appetite and craving control
- More consistent, natural energy

Dieter's DeLite targets the systems that control how your body uses food rather than simply trying to suppress hunger with harsh stimulants. When your metabolic "engine" is encouraged to run properly, your diet plan finally has a chance to work the way it should.

This means:

- If you are already on a diet plan, **Dieter's DeLite** helps your body respond better to it.
- If you are just getting started, it gives you a much stronger founda-

tion than willpower alone.

Many people are using Ozempic or other GLP-1 medications. These drugs reduce appetite and can lower food intake dramatically. The problem is that with less food often comes less energy, less nutrition, and in some cases a tired, flat feeling that makes everyday life harder.

Dieter's DeLite is not a prescription and does not replace your doctor's care. What it can do is **complement** your program by supporting:

- Metabolic activity while calories are lowered
- Natural energy so you can function, work, and even exercise
- A more balanced appetite pattern instead of wild swings

If you are already on a medication, you know you cannot afford to feel weak, foggy, or burned out. When used correctly, **Dieter's DeLite** can be the difference between "just getting by" on a drug and actually building a healthier metabolism underneath it. Supporting weight loss while ignoring the heart is short sighted. Extra weight, poor circulation, and nutrient deficiencies are some of the same factors that contribute to cardiovascular problems.

Our **HEART** formula is formulated using the most effective, all-natural ingredients to support:

- Healthy arterial walls



• Better circulation and blood flow

• Overall cardiovascular function

When you combine **HEART** with **Dieter's DeLite**, several important things happen at once:

• As circulation improves, oxygen and nutrients reach your cells more effectively.

• As metabolism picks up, your body becomes more efficient at burning stored fat.

• As energy comes up from inside, it is easier to move, walk, exercise, and live with purpose.

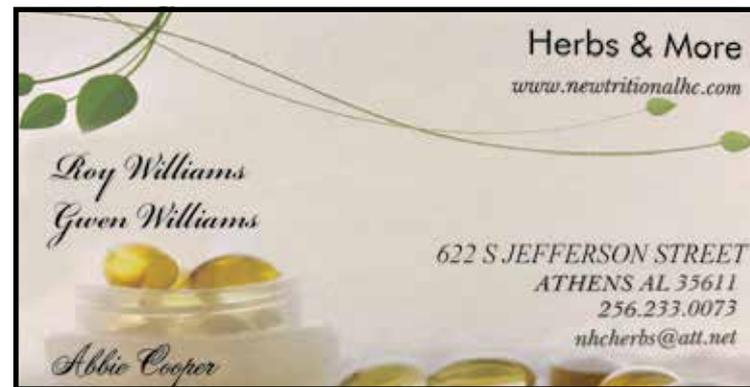
You are no longer just trying to make the scale move. You are working

to protect the system that keeps you alive.

Ask yourself a serious question: If you keep doing exactly what you are doing now for the next 12 months, where will your weight, your labs, and your heart be? Most people already know the answer. That quiet fear is the early warning you should not ignore.

To learn more, go by Herbs & More in Athens, NHC Herb Shop in Killen or go online to order at www.nhcherbs.com. Take this article to either location and get 15% off your first purchase of these two amazing products.

Your friend in health,
Roy P. Williams



Abscess

by Deb Kitchenmaster

Spring is coming around the corner. Yes, it's time to get the shedding blades out and relieve our horses of their winter coats and provide our nest-building feathered friends with threads of our horses' hair. Yet, in the midst of lengthened light in our day and warmth on our backs, we can have noticeable limps occurring right before our eyes. In the notice, questions come to mind like, "What is causing my horse to be unwilling or unable to put weight on a particular leg?" You can be picking out one of your horse's hooves and notice an increased level of heat in the hoof and question, "Where is this coming from?" You may be running your hand down the horse's leg between the coronary bands and the fetlock and feel an elevated digital pulse and question this awareness. The digital pulse is important because it can



tell you what's happening in the hoof. It may be as simple as a stone bruise, or it can be an issue with laminitis or an abscess discovery.

To find your horses' digital pulse, move your pointer finger and your middle finger towards the back of the pastern, applying some pressure until you find a little groove.

(At this point, you can start singing "groovy" and feel good about yourself that you are using your middle finger in an appropriate way... Just kidding). The groove will be roughly over the outer edge of the heel bulbs. You can roll your fingers over this area until you find a slight pulse. Note to self: if you press too hard, you will pinch

it off, and not enough pressure, you won't find it. Each leg will have two little groovy areas to find a pulse. Be sure to check both sides on each hoof. Always do this when your horse is secured in the crossties or someone is holding him. Here is a simple safety note, as you squat down, don't put your knee on the ground, just in case you need to jump up and move quickly out of the way. Another way to locate the digital pulse (a little higher) is the fetlock area.

Let's say you find out that your horse has an abscess. What is an abscess? How do you treat an abscess? A hoof abscess is an infection that gets trapped in the foot and forms a pocket of pus. This builds up pressure and brings discomfort to the horse. Remember the hoof is a fixed structure that has limited expansion. The hoof is made up of an outer hoof wall which is visible to the human eye and the tis-



sue layer (laminae) that connects the hoof wall to the coffin bone. A horse hoof abscess can form when bacteria enters cracks or gaps. You will most likely see this limp due to an abscess in springtime and in the fall season. Developing proper hoof care routinely, seeing a good ferrier every 8 weeks, will help prevent hoof abscesses.

Once the diagnosis is clear, first of all, it will be necessary to de-shod the horses' foot. If the abscess is ripe, the vet or ferrier will be able to dig out the horn to the abscess. Once the abscess is pierced, a black foul-smelling pus pocket will spill out and give the horse instant relief. If not ripe, apply poultices to the foot. The most common poultice is made from linseed. This poultice helps to mature the abscess and soften the horn. The poultice needs to be changed daily until break through. Once the abscess has broken through, antiseptic solutions should be applied daily to clean the wound. Some horse people will use a bleach bath on the hoof because the bleach removes the bacteria causing the infection.

Enjoy your spring. Enjoy your horse. Enjoy your Creator, yourself, and each other. Simply enjoy.

*Your NEIGHbor,
Deb Kitchenmaster*

horsinaround188@gmail.com





GenZ With JP

The Iranian Trap

by JP Plott, Co-host of *Rightside Radio*

We are at war with Iran. It's hard to even believe that statement is true. However, was this predictable? Absolutely. It was evidently clear from Trump's actions as of late that this was coming. The strikes last summer were just a prelude. Regardless of the predictability, this is still a tremendous betrayal considering the origins of the MAGA movement.

When Trump came storming into the GOP in 2016, one of the main pillars of his platform was criticizing the foreign policy of the old Republican guard. There was the now-infamous clip of Trump's back and forth with Jeb Bush, discussing how the Bush administration lied about WMDs to get us into Iraq. He called it a "big, fat mistake." Trump symbolized a new era of the GOP. No more forever Middle Eastern wars that don't advance our national interests. On the flip side, there are also clips dating all the way back to the 80s of Trump claiming that we needed to be harder on Iran, and he also stated after coming down the escalator that he would not allow Iran to get a nuclear weapon. One may see said statements and conclude that Trump is simply acting upon what he said he would do all along. Isn't he just keeping his promises? Not necessarily, and here's why.

First, we must ask the question: Was Iran about to get a nuclear weapon? No. Yes, the Iranians were enriching uranium up to 80%,

which is only 10% short of what is required for a bomb. But, they have no delivery system, and there were no signs that they were actively on track to reach that 90%. This appears to have been a negotiating card. I'm no Iranian supporter by any means. But from a rational perspective, if Israel and the United States had toppled all of your surrounding neighbors and declared you to be next, wouldn't you want at least the threat of a bomb to protect yourself? The question of whether it would be in our best interests for the Mullahs to have a nuke is separate, to which I would say probably not. But there was no imminent danger last June when we struck their facilities, and even less weeks ago when we launched this war.

Trump also stated that his presidency would be only "America first." This war is the exact opposite. Whenever I've raised concerns over this war, I'm often met with comments by those older than me referencing the 1979 hostage crisis or the Beirut barracks bombing. As if this is justification to launch a preemptive war in 2026. If your justification for launching a war is events that happened almost 50 years ago, then I'm afraid you have no justification. I understand it's the same regime, but this doesn't mean there was an imminent threat requiring intervention. The country that was in immediate danger, or at least more than the United States, was Israel. Frankly, the only justification stated by this administration has been that Israel

was going to attack Iran regardless, and we had to be involved as well, or Israel was in imminent danger, and we had to act. How exactly is that America First? I prefer that the elected officials of my country consider the best interests of America solely while conducting foreign policy, and not the best interests of a nation on the other side of the world. This is not an anti-Semitic position, nor does it attack Jewish identity. I simply believe that Israel should be allowed to handle its own problems without the price tag of dead American soldiers.

Lastly, the lack of coherent messaging from the administration, as well as Republicans as a whole, will make you dizzy. When Republicans speak about this war, they will either say that we're winning the war, Iran declared war on us, or that there is no war at all. All while Lindsey Graham gets

on Fox News and does somersaults. The constant contradictions reveal a lack of justification from the outset. Or, they're aware that the justification is so unpopular that they would rather tie themselves up in knots than just be honest and upfront with the American people. If you're going to launch a war for all of the wrong reasons, at least give us enough respect as American citizens to be honest about it.

Meanwhile, the Iranian regime is still intact, the Strait of Hormuz is effectively closed (causing oil prices to skyrocket), the Iranian protests have effectively stopped, and 13 U.S. service members are dead. No matter how you spin it, this is a nightmare for the Republican Party. This tremendously unhealthy relationship with Israel is leaving many young conservatives wanting to just burn the entire GOP down. It didn't have

to be this way. All Trump had to do was stick to his promise of putting America first. This current war, however, is reflecting a lack of a plan, messaging, and justification. How does this end up? I'm not sure. What is clear, though, is that this isn't slowing down anytime soon.

Justin "JP" Plott is the production manager for Rightside Media, and Producer for Rightside Radio. JP joined the Rightside team in late 2024 after working at WVNN in Huntsville, Alabama. He quickly became a top-notch, multi-media producer and a voice of Gen-Z conservatism.





Cooking with Anna (continued from page 9)

Bitterness Is Poison: *Uprooting The Roots And Choosing Grace*

by Anna Hamilton

isolation.

Scripture reminds us that bitterness binds, but forgiveness brings freedom. Holding onto offense might feel justified, but it ultimately keeps us chained to the pain of the past. “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Bitterness blinds, but grace opens our eyes. When bitterness takes hold, it narrows our perspective. We become focused on the wrong that has been done to us rather than the grace that has been given to us. But grace has a way of changing our vision.

Grace reminds us that we are all imperfect people in need of mercy. It allows us to see beyond the offense and toward healing. As we shift our focus from the hurt to God's love and forgiveness, our hearts begin to soften again.

Grace doesn't deny that we were hurt. Instead, it releases the power that hurt holds over us. “The Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous” (Psalm 146:8).

Prayer is the antidote to bitterness. When bitterness knocks at the door of our hearts, prayer is one of the most powerful responses we can choose. In the Gospel of Matthew 5:44, Jesus teaches us to pray for those who have wronged us. “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?” (Matthew 5:44-46).

At first, this may feel difficult—even impossible. But prayer shifts our hearts in ways we cannot accomplish on our own. When we bring our pain to God, He begins the process of healing what feels broken. Prayer replaces resentment with peace and slowly transforms bitterness into compassion.

Learn to let it go before it takes root. One of the most

important spiritual disciplines is learning to release offenses early. Ephesians 4:31–32 encourages believers to put away bitterness and instead embrace kindness, forgiveness, and tenderheartedness. When we let go quickly, bitterness never has the chance to take root. Forgiveness becomes a protective guard for our hearts. Letting go does not mean pretending the hurt didn't happen. It means choosing not to allow that hurt to define our future.

Remember the cross, not just the hurt. Bitterness tells us to replay the offense over and over. It keeps the wound fresh in our minds. Grace tells a different story. Grace reminds us to look to the cross—to the ultimate act of forgiveness and love. When we remember the sacrifice of Christ, we are reminded that forgiveness is not weakness. It is strength rooted in love. Forgiveness frees the one who offers it just as much as the one who receives it. “Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’” (Luke 23:34).

God has called each of us to run our race freely, not weighed down by the heavy roots of bitterness. When we carry yesterday's wounds into today, they slow our steps and steal our peace. But grace offers another path.

By choosing forgiveness, embracing prayer, and remembering the depth of God's love, we can uproot bitterness before it poisons our hearts. The healing may not happen overnight, but God's grace is stronger than any wound.

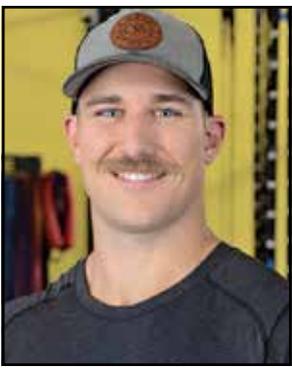
Bitterness may try to take root, but grace always has the power to pull it out. And when grace fills our hearts, peace begins to grow in its place.

This week's recipe is a crowd pleaser and best of all, you throw it all in the crockpot and let it cook! It is delicious beef tips! We enjoy it served over warm, creamy mashed potatoes, but it is equally delicious over rice or egg noodles. Serve with a warm crusty roll and a side salad for a complete meal!

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13).

Crossfit Legends Class

by Nick Niedzwiecki - Owner, CrossFit Athens



At CrossFit Athens, we believe that health and fitness are not reserved for the young—they are essential at every stage of life. That’s why we’re excited to introduce our newest program: the Legends Class, beginning April 6. This class will be held every Monday and

Wednesday from 10:00-10:45 a.m. and is specifically designed for individuals ages 55 and older who are looking to build strength, improve mobility, and take control of their long-term health.

As we age, it’s easy to believe that slowing down is

inevitable. Many people accept stiffness, loss of strength, and decreased energy as part of the aging process. But the truth is, much of what we associate with “getting older” is actually the result of becoming less active. Muscle mass naturally declines with age,

and without intentional effort, that loss can accelerate. Strength and mobility are two of the most important factors in maintaining independence, preventing injury, and continuing to live life on your own terms.

The Legends Class is our answer to that problem.

This is not a watered-down version of a typical workout, nor is it a one-size-fits-all program. It is intentionally designed to meet individuals exactly where they are right now. Whether someone has been active their entire life or is just getting started, this class provides a safe, supportive, and structured environment to move well and build strength over time.

Each session focuses on simple, functional movements that translate directly to everyday life—things like sitting and standing, carrying objects, maintaining balance, and improving posture. We emphasize proper technique, controlled movement, and steady progression. The goal is not intensity for the sake of intensity, but rather consistent improvement that leads to real, lasting results.

Mobility is another key component of the Legends Class. Tight joints and limited range of motion can make even basic tasks feel difficult. By incorporating targeted mobility work into every session, we help participants move more freely, reduce discomfort, and improve overall quality of life.

Perhaps most importantly, this program provides guidance. Walking into a gym

can feel overwhelming at any age, but especially for those who may not know where to start. In the Legends Class, our coaches take the guesswork out of the process. Every workout is led, explained, and adjusted as needed to ensure each individual feels confident and capable.

We also understand that community plays a major role in long-term success. This class creates an environment where individuals can connect with others who share similar goals, challenges, and experiences. It’s not just about exercise—it’s about building relationships and enjoying the process along the way.

At CrossFit Athens, our mission has always been to help people live healthier, stronger lives. The Legends Class is an extension of that mission, tailored specifically for a demographic that is too often overlooked in the fitness industry.

If you or someone you know is 55 or older and looking for a place to start—or a place to continue—the Legends Class is the perfect opportunity. It’s never too late to build strength, improve mobility, and take control of your health.

Please reach out to us by scanning the QR code provided or through email at info@crossfitathens.com or call me directly at 256-777-8275 to get started.

- Coach Nick
Owner / Head Coach
CrossFit Athens
256-262-7884

www.crossfitathens.com

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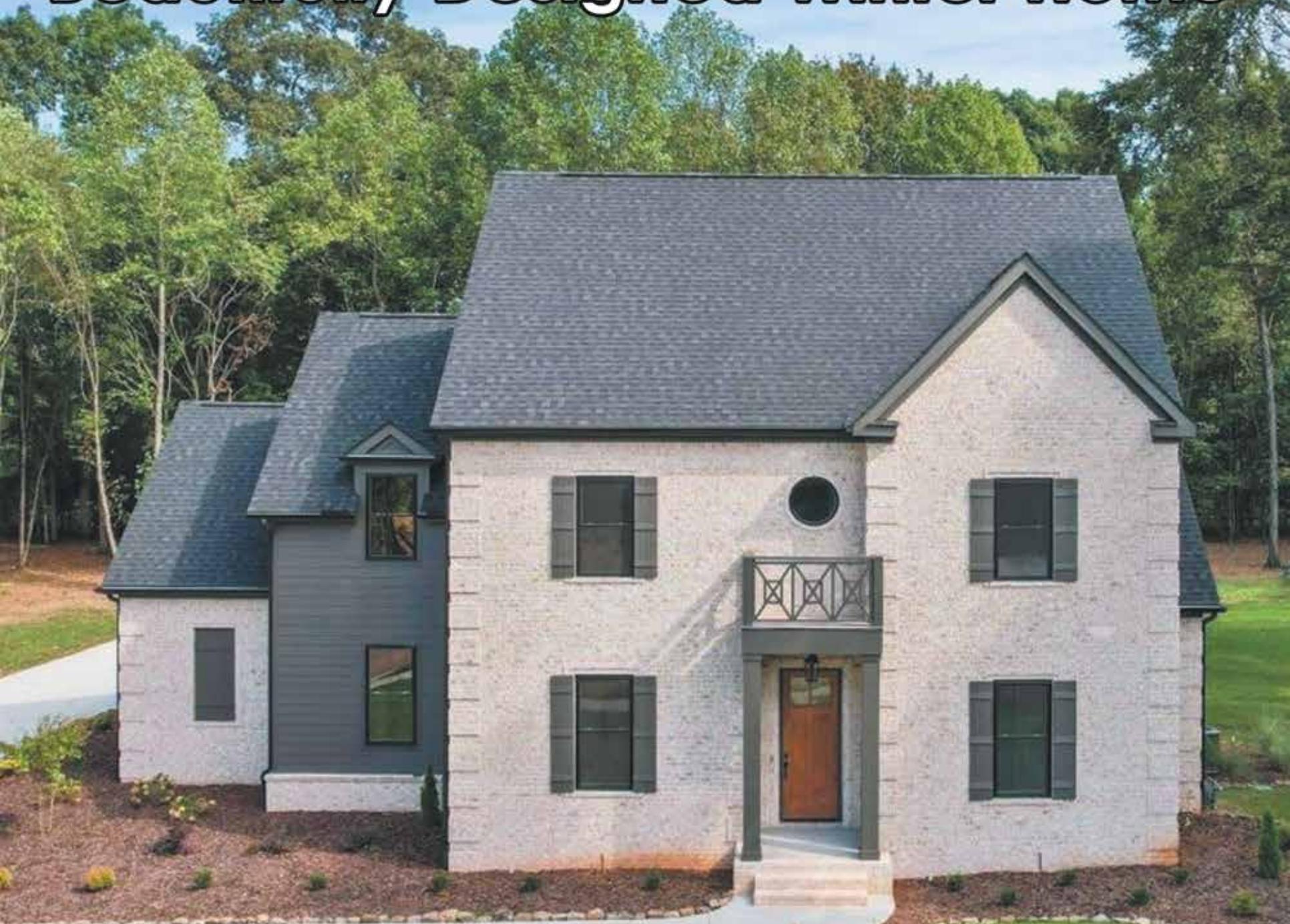
10:00 - 10:45 AM

OUR LEGENDS PROGRAM AT CROSSFIT ATHENS INCREASES INDEPENDENCE, STRENGTH, BALANCE, FLEXIBILITY, AND COORDINATION IN A FUN ENVIRONMENT AMONGST THOSE OF A SIMILAR AGE.

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