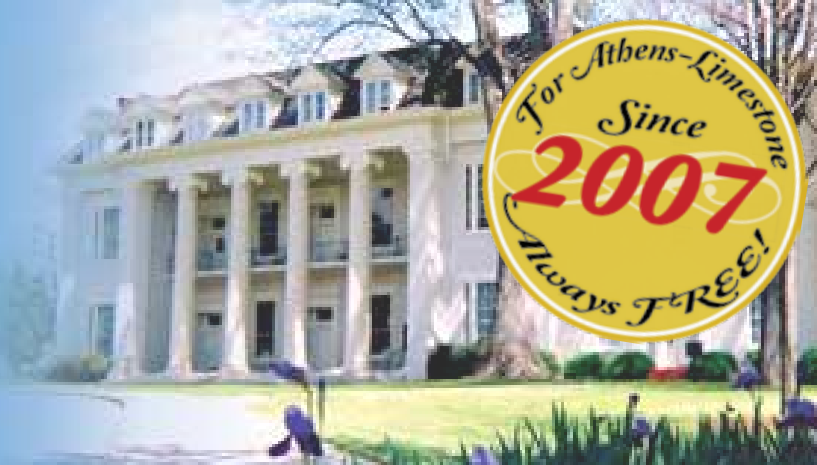


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IN THIS ISSUE:

Publisher's Point

The Hearts Behind Houdini...
Let me take you back to October of 2025, when Athens, AL was delightfully invaded by a film crew and a kangaroo...
Page 3



Special Feature

K & L Property Solutions: We Would Love To Help You Prosper With Property!...
Les and Kaz Ehart tied the knot this year on Valentine's Day, after having both been widowed...
Page 5



Carissa's Corner

Where Can I Go? A Patriotic Reflection...
Last year, my Word Weavers writing critique group took on the task of creating a...
Page 7



Clean, Green And Beautiful

Come Together...
Now that we have gotten through the hustle and bustle of spring, and we took a breath, we have kicked off our 2026-2027 Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful Membership Drive...
Page 16



Register Today For the 3rd Annual Fortify Alabama Anti-trafficking Conference On July 17



By Ali Elizabeth Turner

As this edition of *Athens Now* appropriately showcases the 250th birthday of our nation, I can think of no better way to “celebrate” than to tell our readers about an event that is coming up in just 14 days. It is

Continued on page 11

BNI Celebrates Over 40 Years Of Helping People Grow Their Businesses

By Ali Elizabeth Turner

In 1985, Dr. Ivan Misner, who is the founder of Business Network International (BNI), found himself in a situation that most entrepreneurs face at one time or another, and that is that he lost his most important account -- the one that paid for his mortgage and fed his kids. The word “pivot” came into play, and Ivan quickly contacted (what was back
Continued on page 13




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Contents

- Publisher's Point** 3
- All Things Soldier** 4
- Special Feature** 5
- Calendar Of Events** 6
- Carissa's Corner** 7
- What Makes Ronnie Roll** 8
- Cooking With Anna** 9
- From The Tourism Office** . . . 10
- Cover Stories** 11 & 13
- Captain's Log** 14
- McGhee On Management** . . . 15
- Clean Green And Beautiful** . . 16
- Slinkard on Success** 17
- Learning As A Lifestyle** 18
- Alternative Approach** 19
- GenZ With JP** 21
- Health And Fitness** 23



Publisher's Point

The Hearts Behind Houdini

Let me take you back to October of 2025, when Athens, AL, was delightfully invaded by a film crew and a kangaroo. They filmed a holiday film entitled *A Kangaroo Christmas*, which will be aired during this upcoming 2026 season, and they managed to make the Courthouse steps look snowy when it was too hot to be wearing winter clothing. Mayor Ronnie Marks played himself and actually held the kangaroo, whose name was Scarlett. In a word,

Athens fell in love with the Richmond Family Films folks, and they with us.

Fast forward a few months, and right smack dab in the middle of Red, White and Boom our friends have returned, and we are beyond glad. In the Hawaiian culture, there is a word that is difficult to translate, and it is *ohana*. "Family" doesn't begin to really cover it—it's more like unconditional love, chosen family, friends, community, mutual support, and more. Well,

the Richmonds are back, and I have seen "*ohana*" on overdrive.

Branscombe Richmond is a 4th generation movie maker, and has either been in or been involved in a zillion projects. From 1992 to 1997, he was in the action series, *Renegade*, and now produces films that have kids and animals as the stars, and his own kids have joined him in the craft. His son, whose name is Marouo just finished up *Moana* along with *Jumanji*. He goes by "Bro," and is not afraid to break a sweat helping people out. Daughter Leiohu is also an actress, but for the purpose of this project, she is tenderly running herd on everyone and everything, and keeps things calm and gentle. She also gives remarkable hugs. There are two more Richmond kids that are involved with the family business, Fairai and Terani, who are not here in Athens, nor is Branscombe's wife, Lei. They all embody "*ohana*," and truly expand their family everywhere they go.

Branscombe asked me to come hang at the set and interview various people involved in this project. It makes for a glorious and warm crazy quilt of backgrounds, and the love they have for each other is pal-

pable. There is just one downside: I couldn't get to everyone, and I hate the idea of not giving honor where honor is due. So, if you are a part of *Houdini* on any level, please know that we as a city and I as the publisher of *Athens Now* greatly appreciate you.

What's this movie about? In a word, a kid, a dog, and a magic show. Roger's Portraits has been converted into Cobblestone's Magic Shop, and the Woodruff building on the corner of Marion and Washington is part of the backdrop. You will see Big Spring Park, and the Domino room of the Tourism building is a school room. Athens resident Ashley Chewing's Ledges subdivision neighborhood and house have become a set, storage facility, transportation center, chow hall, and more. She told me, "I asked the neighborhood, and they were all for it as long as the mailboxes didn't get blocked." Ashley is originally from Mobile,

Continued on Page 12

Ali Elizabeth Turner

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For the film, Roger's Portraits on Washington Street has been temporarily converted into Cobblestone's Magic Shop



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Going Gold With America's Greatest Generation: A Girl Scout's Gold Award Story

by Ava Slinkard



All my life, I have had a deep love for God, country, and history. Growing up in Athens, Alabama, I was surrounded by a community that values its heritage, and during my fourteen years as a Girl Scout, my appreciation for local history has only grown stronger. From an early age, I understood the importance of preserving history and taking pride in my hometown. I was also taught to have the utmost respect for the men and women who have served our nation, and that admiration has continued to deepen over the years.

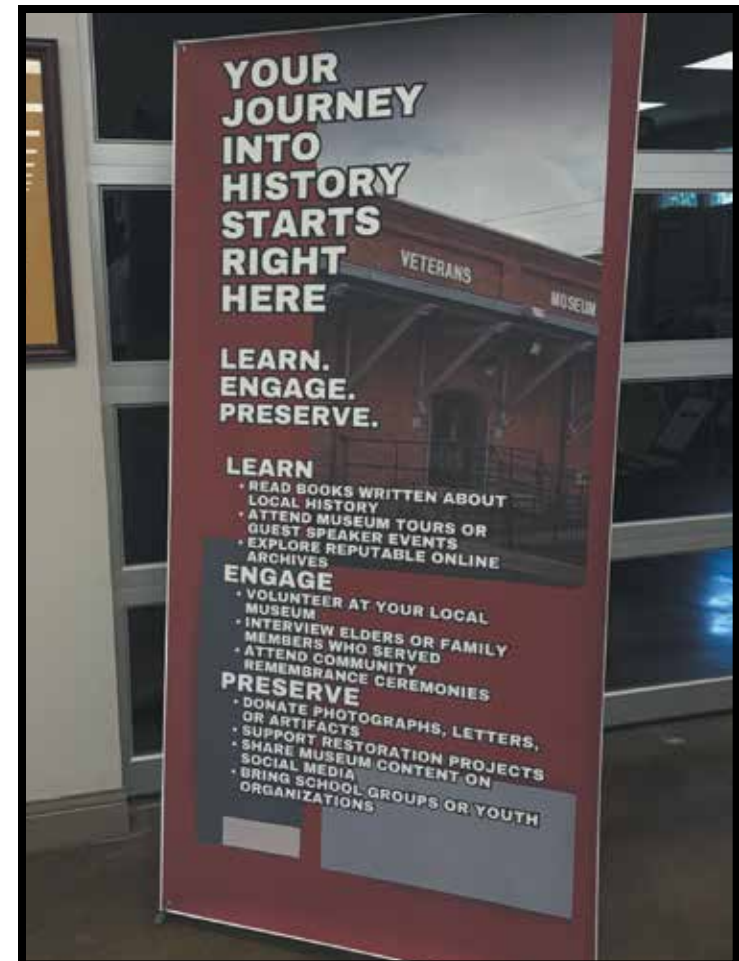


My love of history began with my great-grandfather, Francis Urhahn, who served as a military policeman during World War II. My grandfather and mother shared his stories with me, sparking a lifelong fascination with World War II and the generation that sacrificed so much to preserve freedom. When it came time to choose my Girl Scout Gold Award project, there was never any doubt that it would focus on World War II history.

As I began planning my project, I discovered something that deeply concerned me. Many people my age knew very little about World War II—not obscure facts, but basic historical knowledge. I met students with excellent grades and high ACT scores who could not identify when World War II took place, the countries involved, or major events that shaped the course of history. As I researched further, I found statistics that confirmed my concerns. Surveys showed that many young

adults could not explain the significance of Pearl Harbor or D-Day, identify the Allied and Axis powers, or estimate how many lives were lost during the Holocaust. These findings convinced me that educating my generation about World War II was a meaningful and much-needed mission.

Through partnerships with the Alabama Veterans Museum & Archives, the Athens Historical Society, the Daughters of the American Revolution, Girl Scouts Troop 11922, and Athens Bible School, I was able to create five audio tours highlighting the lives of local Limestone County veterans. Those stories became educational presentations that I have shared with members of our community, as well as scripts for the annual Athens Cem-



etry Stroll. I encourage everyone to attend this October and experience these remarkable stories firsthand.

The project also allowed me to design educational banners now displayed at the Alabama Veterans Museum and to produce short social media videos that teach World War II history in under ninety seconds. I have written, filmed, edited, and produced a promotional video for the museum, along with another honoring Alabama veterans. I am also completing my children's book, *Lily's Victory Garden of Hope*, which will soon be available in the Alabama Veterans Muse-

um gift shop.

This Gold Award journey has taught me far more than history. It has introduced me to incredible people, allowed me to preserve the stories of local heroes, and given me the privilege of sharing my passion with the citizens of Athens. Our community is truly one of Alabama's greatest treasures, built upon a rich heritage of faith, patriotism, and service. I am forever grateful to everyone who supported this project, to the veterans whose sacrifices made our freedoms possible, and above all, to God, who made every opportunity possible. To Him belongs all the glory.



K & L Property Solutions: *We Would Love To Help You Prosper With Property!*

by Ali Elizabeth Turner

Les and Kaz Ehart tied the knot this year on Valentine's Day, after having both been widowed, enduring the weirdness that was COVID, and in Kaz's case, facing the challenge of inheriting thousands of dollars of debt about which she knew nothing. It had been racked up by her late husband, and she found herself with a credit score of 375. There had been abuse of all kinds, and Kaz is not afraid to talk about it, or be a resource for people who have experienced what she did. She had started to dig out and rebuild her life essentially from the ground up, and Les was a big help. By contrast, Les had a fascinating career involving rockets that among other things took him to the Marshall Islands for five years, and lived a successful life full of adventure. He also served in the U.S. Navy. They are both dog lovers, and Les will tell you that their granddaughter is his "pride and joy."

Les has become an entrepreneur's entrepreneur, loves to garden, buy and sell on E-bay, tinker, design, build, and can fix just about any-

thing. Kaz describes herself as an "arts-and-crafts" gal, and Les taught her how to do what he was doing. "Kaz took off like a rocket," Les said with pride toward his bride. They both love to "find finds" and then turn them into tidy profits.

One day, they were out visiting yard sales, and heard a message with regard to a real estate private investment school offered by Ron LaGrand out of Jacksonville, Florida. Kaz was sure it was a scam, and Les texted the number to get more info. It was an opportunity to go to what Ron LaGrand calls his Quick Start program, was held at an Embassy Suites hotel, and it was free. Kaz described it as a "working vacation," and the training was intense. They were hooked, not in the sense of having been fleeced, but rather with the understanding that this was a program that could first help Kaz with her financial goals, and then help others. Kaz landed her first deal in Athens, and made \$20,000. Since then, they have taken further training in attracting solid in-



The Eharts on their wedding day



vestors that want to make between 8-10% while helping others get into a house that is their own.

Kaz told me, "There are people who are good folks who for many different reasons are not able to get a loan with a bank. When we put them together with a property, they are able to get in, have a couple of years to get their situation cleared up, and then, if at the end of that time they have not gotten the situation taken care of, they forfeit their deposit, and they have to move out. Everything is spelled out in a contract, and it's all above board." Jay Conner also works with Ron LaGrand, and offers further education on the buying, selling, and investing planks of

the program

It is not that there is no risk, because any investment involves risk, but this is a tried and proven system that has been vetted by the legal profession and found to be a solid approach that benefits everyone involved. Ron makes sure that people understand the different types of investments that can be made and are profitable. Les told me that they are described as what he calls "pretty houses" and "ugly houses." "Pretty houses" are in good shape, need minimal repair or upgrade, and are more often along the lines of what is thought of as a lease/option to buy. "Ugly houses" are just that—they are distressed, need a lot of repairs (which requires a pool of cash and someone skilled in doing the work), and are most often purchased for pennies on the dollar and then flipped. They are more likely to be considered for quicker returns, and a well-rounded business has both in their portfolio. Both have different exit strategies

as well as tax advantages, and the training that is involved is extensive and includes educating and protecting the investor as well.

Buyers, sellers, and investors are motivated by different kinds of things. When it comes to "pretty houses," the needs are more often tied to things like divorce, job relocation, debt reduction, or other factors that are not quite as desperate. "Ugly houses" are more often tied to sharper financial distress, endeavoring to avoid foreclosure, or needing to get out from underneath a property that has become a real weight. No matter what your situation may be, Kaz and Les are "lit up" by the prospect of being able to help you. Get in touch with them today, and start your property solution journey with people who genuinely care about the people who need guides on that journey.

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Calendar of Events

Traveling Exhibit “My Wild Backyard” at EarlyWorks Children’s Museum

Through August 31

404 Madison Street in historic Downtown Huntsville. The popular exhibit helps children get up close and personal with nature living in their own backyards this summer. A.A. Milne, creator of the cuddly teddy bear Winnie the Poo once quipped, "Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them." Children will have the opportunity to get to know the secret lives of critters, bugs, and plants found just outside their own backdoor this summer as the “My Wild Backyard” interactive traveling nature exhibit has arrived at EarlyWorks Children’s Museum. “My Wild Backyard” features hands-on, immersive experiences for children to "peer inside wildlife dens, crawl along the forest floor and swim along the pond bottom” all with a focus on the hidden world of insects, spiders, and creatures that live in yards, gardens, and urban spaces. Not only is “My Wild Backyard” an exciting living adventure, but it is an educational experience as well, aimed at teaching families about ecological changes that take place across seasons. The exhibit is included in general admission with prices ranging from \$10 to \$12.

NO VVA/AVVA Chapter 511 meeting

There will be NO VVA/AVVA Chapter 511 meeting in July. The next meeting will be Monday, August 3.

Coffee Call July 4

The next Coffee Call, free breakfast for veterans and their families, will be on July 4, at 8am at the Alabama Veterans Museum, 114 W. Pryor St., Athens.

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.

2026 State of the County ft. Chairman Collin Daly July 9

The Athens-Limestone Chamber will provide Limestone County Commission Chairman Collin Daly a forum to present his "annual report" on the County's progress and challenges from the past year, and an outlook for the year ahead at the 2026 State of the County Address at the Alabama Veterans Museum. 8AM - 10AM. Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives, 114 W. Pryor St.. Athens, AL.

Light Up The Square Worship Night July 17

Free event open to the public were everyone is invited to be apart of a great evening featuring a great message and worship music. 5:30PM - 9:30PM. The Square at the Limestone County Courthouse, 200 W. Washington St.

Athens Lions Club Annual Summer Kiddie Carnival Through July 25

309 E. Forrest Street Athens, AL. Thursday-Saturday nights, 6:30-9:30 pm from June 11th-July 25th. This year we will be closed July 2nd-4th weekend. Free Admission. Tickets: 50 cents per ride, cash only. Concessions available.

3rd Annual Downtown Athens Culinary Month Entire month of August

Athens Main Street is thrilled to host the 3rd Annual Downtown Athens, Alabama Culinary Month. Calling all foodies and local food enthusiasts! It’s that time when Downtown Athens comes alive with flavors and culinary delights during the highly anticipated week. During August, you’ll have the chance to indulge in a delectable array of dishes and explore downtown Athens’s diverse culinary offerings. Downtown Athens Culinary Month isn’t just about delicious food; it also celebrates the local community and the hardworking chefs, restaurateurs, and staff who make dining in downtown Athens an unforgettable experience. So, please support the local restaurants that bring flavor and creativity to our town’s vibrant dining scene. Invite your friends and family to join you on this culinary adventure. It’s the perfect opportunity to try out new restaurants or revisit old favorites.

Where Can I Go? *A Patriotic Reflection*

by Carissa Lovvorn

Last year, my Word Weavers writing critique group took on the task of creating a devotional in honor of America's 250th birthday. Eight North Alabama authors, including me, set out to write 31 devotions inspired by things such as patriotic songs, the American flag, fireworks, and national landmarks.

At first, I was a little overwhelmed by the assignment. How does one draw a spiritual connection from monuments and apple pie? Let's just say, I racked my brain for several weeks. However, this challenge proved to be one of my favorite projects in my writing career thus far. It gave me a new perspective on our beloved country. If you look around, you can see God's presence woven throughout it.

Coffee with God Volume 6: 31 Red, White, and Blue Devotions was dedicated to family members who received awards for their exceptional service in the United States military. My older brother, Tyler Behel, was one of those honored, and he became the inspiration for my first patriotic-themed devotion.

Throughout this devotion, I reflected on our family's faith that my brother would return home safely from his Afghanistan deployment during Operation Enduring Freedom and how our spiritual walk is built on a similar faith. Scripture states, "Now faith is

the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1 [KJV]). God calls us to trust in things that have yet to come to fruition. He reminds us that our faith can move

mountains because, through Him, nothing is impossible.

Speaking of impossible, what once seemed like a difficult writing challenge soon became a floodgate of ideas. God's

presence is everywhere and in everything, if we train ourselves to see it. I found inspiration when I remembered my children's love of sparklers and thinking back on a time that I performed

the "Star-Spangled Banner" for an Athens State University graduation. My fellow authors found glimpses of God while visiting national parks, enjoying ice cream with family, and helping a neighbor.

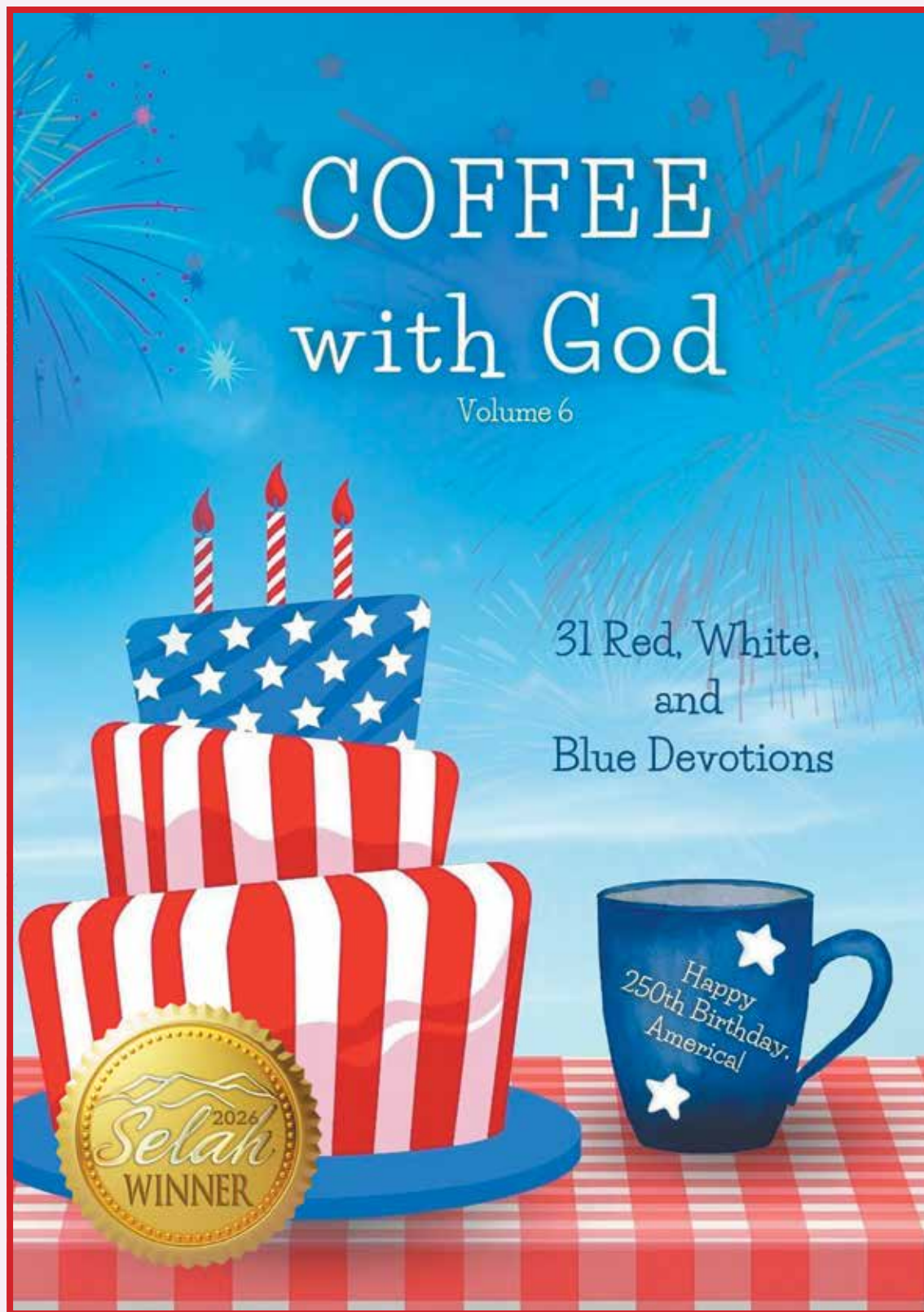
I believe these verses in Psalms say it perfectly, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast" (Psalm 139:7-10).

Whether it is a worn-out American flag or a red and white striped tie, I hope you will be inspired by our great nation. As you enjoy your BBQ, cold lemonade, and fireworks this summer, I challenge you to look for spiritual reminders of God's faithfulness and draw a deeper connection to Him.

Happy 250th Birthday America!

*Blessings,
Carissa Lovvorn*

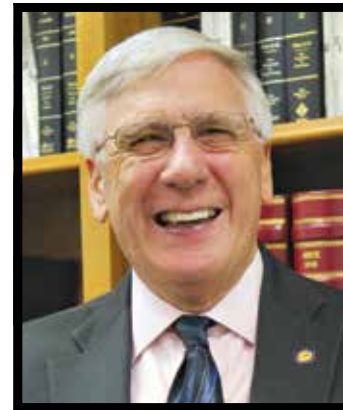
*If you'd like to read more patriotic devotions, Coffee with God Volume 6 is now available on Amazon. Along with 31 devotions, you'll find patriotic recipes and special contributions from guests, including a flag maker and Miss America.



What Makes Ronnie Roll

In Pursuit Of Happiness

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



What was unusual about this particular day was that it is the only time in our lives that we will be celebrating the 250th birthday of our nation, and we did so by swapping video stories that had spoken to us over the weekend. So, over my coffee and Mayor Ronnie's Sun Drop, we laughed, got misty-eyed, and literally thanked God together that we are alive, still kickin', and have been brought to the Kingdom "for such a time as this."

At a Chicago White Sox game, 103-year-old Sgt. Steve Silosky was honored by tossing out a ceremonial first pitch. He had to be helped out of his wheelchair, but he stood and delivered an underhand pitch, and yes, "the crowd went wild." He served in the U.S. Army in the Pacific Theater, and was part

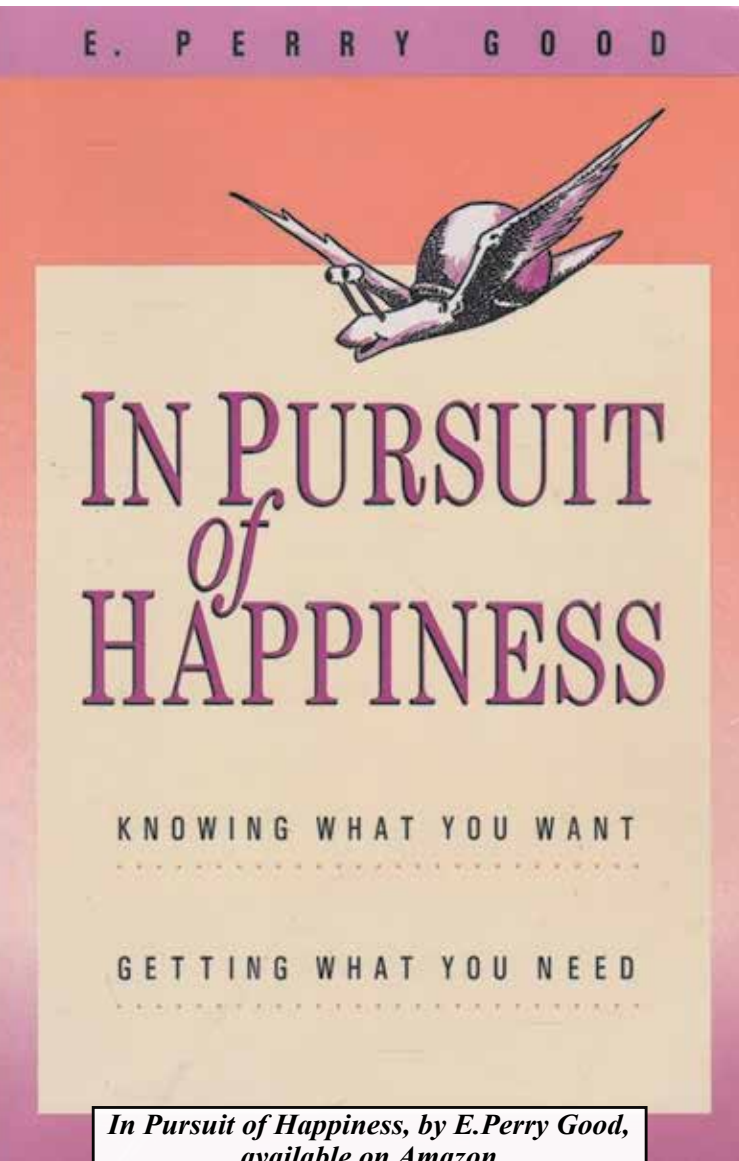
of an Amphibious Tractor Battalion. By contrast, the story of Marion Horn, which was recorded in 1995 illustrates that kindness was ultimately more powerful than cruelty. She was just a kid in what was then Yugoslavia when the Germans were leaving and the Italians were coming. The Nazis had been ordered to kill everyone and had the machine guns set up and ready to fire. The Italians arrived, and essentially said, "You go, we'll take care of them." The word "care" had two completely different meanings in that moment. Little Marion, not knowing what was going to happen, went over to the truck marked "cucina," and told the cook that they were all so hungry. "Little one," he said as he tousled her hair, "I'll cook you spaghetti." Marion came to

America, the land of the free, the home of the brave, a place where Italian food is part of the Great Melting Pot, and here in Athens we will soon have our own Olive Garden Restaurant.

The mayor had attended the 100th birthday celebration of Robie Daly, a woman who is fun, kind, still lives at home by herself, and he assured me that she gets checked on three times a day. She also received a proclamation stating that June 27, 2026 had been designated as Robie Daly Day. Again, another once-in-a-lifetime celebration.

We are in the midst of the filming of *Houdini*, which Mayor Ronnie with a satisfied grin described simply as a "fun story about a magic show, a boy and a dog." (To learn how Athens has gotten behind this family-friendly film project, see page 3.)

Over the years, as part of the *Ronnie* column, we have read and discussed various books, and it's one of my favorite parts of doing the paper. For our next se-



ries, the mayor reached back to an old favorite that was first published in 1987 and is going to be our next "book club" selection. It's called *In Pursuit of Happiness*, and I'll finish with this quote:

It's risky to write a book about happiness. Happiness is out of style. Happiness is superficial. Happiness is for little kids. Happiness is not serious enough for anyone over the age of 12. And yet, our forefathers (and mothers) thought it was serious enough to include in the Declaration of Independence.

Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness, that is what we thanked God for when we prayed, and then it was time for Ronnie to roll.

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Joy Down in My Heart

by Anna Hamilton

As a child, attending Vacation Bible School was a highlight of my summer. I loved the arts and crafts, playing with the Bible characters on the felt board, the lessons, and of course, all the fun songs. One of my favorite songs from VBS is “Joy in My Heart.” You know the one, “I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart...” The song is a light-hearted and fun reminder that you should always have joy in your heart.

But what does it mean to have true joy?

Joy is gladness not based on circumstance. If you are placing your happiness, your joy, on what is happening to you or around you, you will never truly be joyful. In 1 Peter 1:8-9 it says, “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

continued on page 22

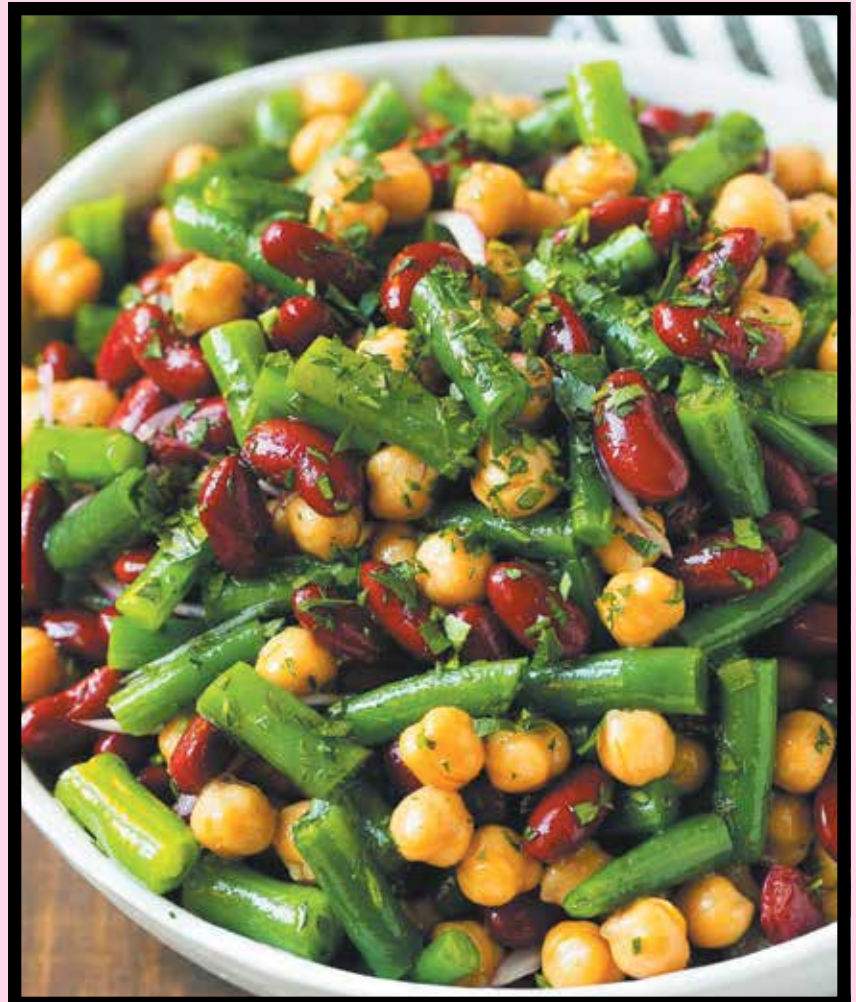
Three-Bean Salad

Ingredients:

- 1 can green beans, drained*
- 1 can wax beans, drained*
- 1 can kidney beans, drained*
- 1 cup green bell pepper, chopped*
- 2/3 cup green onions, chopped*
- 2/3 cup apple juice*
- 1/3 cup apple cider vinegar*
- 2 tsp honey*
- 1/4 tsp dry mustard*
- 1/4 tsp paprika*
- 1/8 tsp oregano*
- Salt and pepper to taste*

Directions:

Combine green beans, wax beans, kidney beans, bell pepper, and green onions in a large bowl and toss gently. Combine apple juice, vinegar, honey, and spices and whisk until completely combined. Pour vinaigrette over bean salad and toss to coat. Cover and chill for at least two hours before serving.



We're *HERE!* (Part 1)

by Stephanie Reynolds, Athens-Limestone Tourism Association



It's summer travel season! The sun is shining, the birds are singing, and the road (and family) is calling our name.

This is prime "travel to visit grandma/auntie/college roommate" time. And of course we are always reasonable, our children are always well behaved...we are the easiest, most amenable guests ever, am I right?

But we want to make sure our visit is a delight for the folk we're staying with, not just for us. We want to hear "Awww! Can't you stay longer?" instead of "Hate-to-see-you-go-here's-your-hat."

Here are a few tips to be such an incredible house guest that they secretly want to add a wing to their house for you to move into. (Ok, they probably won't go that far...but they might).

1. Understand that they LOVE you but that doesn't make having a houseguest any easier. Those are two COMPLETELY SEPARATE things.

Let me say that again: Their love for us and the strain of having guests in the house are two VERY DIFFERENT THINGS. It isn't personal. It is just hard to have a routine changed, to have to budget for extra groceries, to not be able to wake up or go to sleep or do the things you always do out of consideration for your guests.

So if the person you're

visiting acts like your visit is difficult for them, it is because it honestly is. Again, it isn't YOU (unless you're being ugly, but I know you aren't), it is change. Change is often the enemy. So please be patient and don't take it personally.

2. Consider staying only 2-3 days max at one house. This is especially true if the people you are going to visit are older, if they are introverted, if you have very active kids, or if you are visiting your grown children (especially with new daughters-in-law or if there is a new baby). Be mindful that while they love you, almost any guest is stressful. A whole family is even more so.

3. If you have kids or are super active people, remember that the people you are visiting may not be used to the level of noise or activity. Take the kids out to run off steam. Give them ample activities or resort to letting them use electronic devices (desperate times, folks, desperate times). Enforce company manners strictly—it is much better for your host to say to you, "Oh, just let them be kids, it's fine!" than for them to mutter behind closed doors, "Those kids are headaches! When are they leaving?"

4. Likewise, if you are an introvert and the people you are visiting are eager to show you all the things all the time, remember that they are



pouring out to you what they love. They are treating you how they would like to be treated (and that 3-day visit limit is great). You can be open with, "That drive made me so tired! But I can't wait to see what we can do tomorrow!" or "You know what I have been longing to do since we planned this trip? Just sit on the porch and hear you talk. I have missed your voice."

5. Establish any dietary needs WAY ahead of time. And it's on YOU. Remember how long it took to learn all the pitfalls of various allergies, etc. and how hard it was to make sure you were doing everything right? So don't expect your hosts with no food allergies to suddenly spool up on the synonyms for "gluten." Firstly, it isn't very wise to trust severe allergies to someone else.

Secondly, if they love you (and they don't want to kill anyone or make them sick) they will be freaking out the whole time, "What if I missed something? We had peanuts at Christmas and I washed the counter at least twice since then but what if there was peanut dust? What if there was flour on the conveyor belt and it got on the produce bag and then some fell into the stem area of the apples and I washed but not enough and Bobby eats the apple and gets terribly sick?? What if they die because I forgot something?!" It seems extreme, but, again, remember how freaked out you were to do everything right at the diagnosis.

Thirdly, specific eating is expensive eating. They will have to buy a box of x-y-z that they never eat or don't even

like and will only use one cup of while you are there. Traveling with dietary restrictions is hard for us but also hard for our hosts.

So try this: In the SAME conversation where you have talked about coming to their house, say: "You are such an amazing cook, but Bobby has severe allergies and Joe is diabetic. I don't want you wasting time or money with what we can't eat. We will bring our own food and here are a list of places we can eat at if we want to go out. That way no one has to stress. Don't worry, this is what we do everywhere we go." That is the gracious and SAFE thing for everyone. Food is a love language for many, but not the only love language!

So there is our first set of ideas for being a GREAT houseguest. Stay tuned for more!

Register Today For the 3rd Annual Fortify Alabama Anti-trafficking Conference On July 17

by Ali Elizabeth Turner

continued from page 1

the 3rd annual Fortify Alabama Anti-trafficking Conference to be held once again in the Jackson Center in Huntsville, on Friday, July 17, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., and I know it will serve to light a fire to see freedom finally “ring” for those who are caught in the most damaging and dangerous form of slavery there is.

I have personally attended several Fortify Alabama events, and will say from experience that this anti-trafficking conference is challenging, inspiring and worthy of your time. As Nicole Wilson, founder of Fortify said recently, “Whether you're a parent, educator, healthcare professional, social worker, law enforcement officer, ministry leader, or simply someone who wants to better understand this issue, this conference is designed to provide practical knowledge, meaningful conversations, and actionable resources.” This is a heavy topic, to be sure, but one that is genuinely and professionally filled with hope, and that hope shows

up at the conference. If you are a professional in need of CEUs for yourself or your organization, they are available. You will have the opportunity to both learn from and interact with people who are pilots who take huge risks to fly people to freedom, law enforcement members who have done undercover work to bust perpetrators, cyber-specialists that fight especially for kids both online and off, parents who have walked through the nightmare, caregivers who help put people back together, and the most inspiring of all, the “sur-thrivers” themselves.

Here is a lineup of the speakers:

Jessica Lamb, Founder of Atlanta Redemption Ink

Jessica is a “sur-thrivers” of 6.5 years of trafficking, and is an expert on how traffickers use tattoos and branding to deepen the psychological “captivity of captives” of trafficking as well as gang members. She also started an organization that can remove “tats,” repurpose them into other forms of body art, and bring redemption within and without.



Matthew Hackey, Executive Director, FLT 316

Matthew is a commercial pilot, and FLT 316 flies the rescued to safety. His stories are riveting and his commitment to this cause is deep.

Stacy Lane, Director, FLT 316

Stacy left the corporate world to become a pilot and use her new skills to rescue as well as empower. Sometimes for someone who has just been rescued, the sight of a woman in the pilot's seat begins the healing process. Stacy also is a recognized and empowering conference speaker.

Corey Buckner, Founder and Executive Director of Always Endure

Corey is a cancer survivor, a pastor, and a fierce advocate for foster kids, foster parents, and those seeking to adopt.

Samuel Day, Detective, Murfreesboro TN Police Department

Detective Day has 30 years of experience with MPD, and is highly decorated. He has been with the Criminal Investigation arm of the force and is an expert with regards to all things trafficking.

Gregory Zarzaur, Attorney At Law

Gregory's firm is located in the Birmingham area, and much of his practice has been devoted to advocating for victims of sexual abuse and trafficking.

Jared Miller, Founder, Still Waters

Jared has more than 15 years in the anti-trafficking movement which include founding Freedom Aviation Network, and currently is focusing on the often overlooked and unique needs of boys and men who have been trafficked.

Nick Lembo, Executive Director Street Grace in Arizona

Nick disrupts the demand for trafficking through engaging with would-be consumers. He largely focuses on

online activity and is dedicated to the restoration of both consumers and the consumed.

Nicole said further, “Throughout the day, you'll hear from nationally recognized speakers, survivor leaders, law enforcement professionals, and nonprofit experts covering topics that matter in our communities today. We don't want you to miss this opportunity to learn from experts, connect with others in the community, and leave equipped to make a difference.”

The day includes morning coffee, lunch, vendor and resource tables, a breakout session, prayer, networking opportunities, profound educational content, and CEUs for which you can register. The cost is \$40, and seating is limited. Register today at <https://fortifyalabama.com/anti-human-trafficking-conference/> I can unequivocally say, “You'll be glad you did!”



The Hearts Behind Houdini

By Ali Elizabeth Turner



has lived in Hawaii, is an awesome dancer, and has been *Annie* in the play of the same name. She has also appeared in *Hawaii Five-O*.

Barbara Ann Klein is one of the executive producers, and spent 35 years as a stunt woman. She was in *The Hand That Rocks The Cradle*, *Death Becomes Her*, and the scariest stunt she has ever performed was to be pitched off the side of a bridge in Louisiana with her feet literally tied to a cinderblock. She found out later that at times the waters below the bridge have alligators.

Brian Herzlinger is the director of *Houdini*, and also directed *Kangaroo Christmas*. He grew up loving movies, and was originally going to be a small-animal vet. Instead, he went to film

school in New York, worked with Steven Spielberg, spent several years on *Chicago Hope* working with Mark Harmon of *NCIS* fame, and absolutely loves doing pictures that are family friendly and involve kids and animals.

Kathlene Robinson is an accomplished young actress, and for this film is functioning as a production assistant. She is on the run from morning 'til night, as is the case with everyone, and has a beautiful spirit. She especially loves doing faith-based films.

Ramona Fleetwood got her first make-up job on *Nightmare On Elm Street* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, but there is nothing scary about this woman as I watched her get the two young stars of the film ready for a



Veteran movie hair and make-up artist Ramona Fleetwood getting Mke, (played by Rhett Morgan) and Izzy, (played by Gabby Kae Davis) ready for their next scene

take. The part of Izzy is being played by Gabriella (Gabby) Kae Davis, and Mike is played by Rhett Morgan. Ramona met Branscombe on the set of *Renegade*, and they have worked together ever since.

J Spencer was a cop for the Huntsville Police

Department and now has a 5400-sq.-foot sound stage in Huntsville. He is another one that is enjoying helping any way that is needed. Young actor Thorbjorn Reed is from Arab, AL and met Branscombe at an acting class. He loves to help in any way he can, and hopes to do a series on

Vikings and the Viking culture. He calls Branscombe "Uncle B," and is grateful for the opportunity to be mentored by him.

So, who is *Houdini*? *Houdini* is a dog that is a gorgeous Husky named Kilo, found and trained by Josh Ward, a zoo-keeper at the Kentucky Down Under Zoo, and happens to be a rescue. He is the escape artist of the film, and tends to be one in real life as well. And, I can say that this "star" of the show is incredibly sweet.

These are the hearts, this is *Houdini*, and I say, "Hallelujah" for the chance to tell their stories. I can hardly wait 'til it comes out!



Downstairs at the Tourism Office is now a school, and the kids are receiving instructions for the take



Monitors are the oxygen of a film and protecting the content is paramount

BNI Celebrates Over 40 Years Of Helping People Grow Their Businesses

By Ali Elizabeth Turner

continued from page 1

in the day) his people written on his Rolodex file, and they all came together in an effort to drum up new business. There was one other thing that Ivan did not want to have to do, and that is cold call. So, this tiny group of pioneers in the Gold Rush State began an approach that involved listening to people, identifying their needs and if appropriate, basically say, "I know a guy (or gal) that can help." We now call it referral marketing, and it has become a global going concern.

What started out as one chapter in California has grown to 11,600 active chapters in nearly 80 countries, and has a membership of over 355,000. BNI has generated \$215 billion by members passing referrals to each other, and continues to upgrade and grow with the times. They managed in a couple of weeks to help the Global BNI world go virtual through Zoom when COVID broke out, which was no small task. We were all relieved when COVID was over and we could get back to meeting in person, because face to face interaction is just plain better for everyone.

The reason why the concept has flourished is that local chapters are small and provide fellowship as well as financial strength through referrals and building relationships. In Athens-Limestone County, a chapter was formed in 2016, and Limestone Leaders is happy to report that millions of dollars have been generated, and we are looking to help you grow your business. There is a central value by which BNI operates, and it is called Givers Gain.® We know from the Good Book as well as from life that giving in order to get does not work, but true giving has a way of coming back to you when

you least expect it.

One of the unique features of the BNI organizational framework is that if you are, for example, a cabinet maker, then you alone hold that seat or chair. Anyone else who is in the same trade would need to join another chapter in the region or start their own. This ensures that the person holding that seat becomes the "I-have-a-guy/gal" person for that specific type of business, and it is not at all uncommon for people who get too much business to refer out to fellow BNI members that are technically competitors in other chapters. One other thing: BNI members have come to understand that being in BNI is a privilege. Potential members who wish to join are vetted as to their reputation in the community.

Now, I am going to talk about our members so you can get to know them and their businesses, and I am also going to invite you to come check us out. We at Limestone Leaders have been described by the regional BNI leadership as being "small but mighty," and we are both looking to grow as well as help Limestone County entrepreneurs prosper in every regard.

Amy Fiscus, Vollara

Amy is a founding member of Limestone Leaders, and represents the Vollara Company. She holds the Health and Wellness seat in the chapter, and her excellent products include whole food supplements, air and water purification systems, a laundry system that does not require the use of detergents, and most recently, a state-of-the-art surge protector. 256-233-5727/ amymso-well7@aol.com

Ali Turner, Athens Now and the TN Valley Spotlight Radio Show

I hold the Media Services seat

in our group, and I will happily say that since 2019 I have been a glad member of Limestone Leaders. 256-468-9425/ ali@alturner.com

Austin Duran, CPA Machen McChesney

Austin holds the Legal and Accounting seat, and seems to thrive on being able to keep people out of financial hot water through accountability and relationship while keeping his sense of humor! 334-332-4241/ aduran@machen.cpa

Bill Downs, D&D Agri

Bill is an Athens native, and his business is crop insurance. His good nature and gentle spirit are a welcome addition to all of us at Limestone Leaders, and farmers appreciate his knowledge, experience, and work ethic. 256-431-1780/ Wcd3bama@gmail.com

Boston Muse, River City Roofing Solutions

Boston is the son of River City Roofing Solutions co-founder Michael Muse, and River City is known throughout North Alabama for their boots-on-the-ground-go-the-extra-mile service especially during storm season, as well as their willingness to help clients deal with insurance companies. 256-701-6908/ boston@river-cityroofingsolutions.com

Clay Parris, Edward Jones Financial

Clay holds the Financial Advisor seat, and got his start in investments along with learning the world of finance while still a teenager. He has taught English, has worked in farm equipment sales, and found his purpose in helping make finance understandable to the average person -- while helping his clients build for their future. 423-244-8629 /clay.parris@edwardjones.com

Darla Bunker, Crye-Leike Realty

Darla is another founding

member of Limestone Leaders, and holds the Property Management seat in Limestone Leaders. She works especially hard at helping people find housing in the area who have come from other places and are not ready to buy yet. 256-497-3297 / darlalbunker@gmail.com

Katie Mucci, Alfa Insurance

Katie does Property & Casualty insurance, and spent 17 years working for a major cell phone company. A house fire and all that went with dealing with the insurance company is one of the things that inspired her to become an agent and serve her clients well. She is protective and thorough, and treats her clients like family. 256-658-2619 / kmucci@alfains.com

Les Ehart, K & L Property Solutions

Les partners with his wife Kaz in real estate investments, and is the newest member of Limestone Leaders. He absolutely loves helping people by getting them into properties to live, invest in properties to keep or sell, and giving investors opportunities to make solid, safe returns on their investments. 913-371-7123 /thisandthat913@gmail.com

Mona Marcy, Cypress Building & Construction

Mona is a Builder/General Contractor, and grew up living in several countries in Europe; Italy being the longest. She speaks English, Spanish, French, and Italian, and I have seen her in action with her customers when I went with her on a ride-along. She is thorough, hard-working and has an eye for detail. She also makes a real point of seeing to it that projects are completed on time and under budget. 256-738-8956/mmarcy@cypressroofingandexteriors.com

Robin Gerrish, Crye-Leike Realty

Veteran realtor Robin Gerrish holds the Residential Real Estate seat in our chapter, and has a special heart for making the buying and selling of a home as smooth as possible for her clients. She also has a grateful heart for veterans and compassion for those who are having to uproot their families in order to move. She is passionate about making it possible for people to get a piece of the American Dream through home ownership, and works hard for her clients. 256-374-9139/ robin.gerrish@charter.net

Stephanie Reynolds, Athens-Limestone County Tourism

Stephanie holds the Non-Profit seat for Limestone Leaders, and is our chapter's president. She is always hard at work to make our county a better place to visit as well as live, and has gone above and beyond to help our county celebrate our nation's 250th birthday by heading up Red, White & Boom tomorrow. 256-232-5411 / stephanie@visitathensal.com

Wes Atkinson, Attorney At Law

Wes specializes in title work and real estate closing, but is also familiar with criminal defense work as well as evictions. While the real estate side of law is his true joy, he is glad that he has had a goodly amount of experience with other aspects of the profession. 256-651-8336 / wes@jwesleyatkinson.com

We invite you to come visit us on Tuesday mornings at 8 a.m. in the downstairs portion of the Tourism office, located at 100 Beaty Street North, Athens, AL. See if we are a good fit for each other, and remember, we would love to help you grow your business, and will celebrate with you when you do.



Captain's Log

Farm Story From Papa

by Brenda Wilkerson

One of my evening chores is to make sure all hens are in before the auto door closes. I have nine hens, five older ones and just four young pullets.

Tonight as I was counting, I came up with only eight! I quickly discovered that Speckles was missing. Not like her because she is not generally the last one in, as my two black pullets like to use every bit of daylight before roosting.

But tonight, I was so surprised and began thinking the worst.

I looked in all the usual places they could hide in the covered run. Using my phone light, I checked the pampas bush but no Speckles.

I came inside to get a brighter light and to tell Marti that I was going hunting.

Each possible place was empty. I headed back to the barn thinking she might be inside with the sheep. I have found an occasional egg close to the inside hay bunk.

No egg and no Speckles. Then it hit me. I have found eggs underneath the outside hay feeder. I shined my heavy-duty light underneath that bunk and behold, I saw the body of the speckled little hen. She wasn't moving but then I saw her red comb move just a tad.

I immediately felt relief. I found the lost chicken. She didn't think she was lost. She was proudly transitioning from a laying hen

to a sitting hen. I found twelve eggs in a very warm and dry nest, close to the sheep's feet as they stood not 10" from her, munching on their hay allotment. They had no idea that my fav little hen was trying to become a momma, using their feeder to shelter and protect her new sit-down project.

I lifted her up and tried to explain very carefully that she could sit on those eggs for five months or five years, but nothing was going to happen. By the time we arrived to her roost in the hen house, we had covered the biological reasons why those non-fertile eggs would never hatch. No rooster, no baby chicks.

She is so gentle. When I eased her onto the roost, she shook her feathers and assumed her sitting position right beside her black sibling. As I watched her settle in, I got to thinking that since she was in last night's count, she had only been sitting for a few hours today.

The daily egg count has been down to four or five instead of the seven or eight for a few days. Other hens have been contributing to the growing egg count.

Another chapter in the FEATHERS 'N' BERRIES book I might write when I retire someday.

Papa (Bob Felgar)
6/14/26

~Brenda



Papa and Speckles



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 Telling It Well
 Protecting Your Story

EI Conquers The Faucet Problem

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



At our last visit, I asked you to develop your own definition of criticism. Remember, just like beauty, the true personal vision of criticism is in the eye of the beholder. I promised to give you my definition of criticism and an example of the difference developed CM skills can make. Well, here we go!

My personal applicable working definition for criticism – just for me – is any word, deed or situation that causes a negative immediate response in me, and demands that I think about it and deal with it wisely. My examples of criticism have changed dramatically through the years. What once was hurtful or immediately made me want to justify myself will now often affect me only in that I can look at it objectively and determine if I need to respond openly to it, respond inwardly

because of it and/or gain any profit from it, and let it go.

Life is so much less stressful and more pleasant now. My heavy stress experiences are saved for truly important things. And, really, aren't there truly very few REALLY IMPORTANT things in life?

EQ (emotional quotient) is a measure of your EI (emotional intelligence) like IQ (intelligence quotient) is used to measure your mental intelligence.

A great way to improve your EI and IQ is to look at ordinary events and draw analogies, spiritual/mental analogies from them. Simple example: Yesterday my sister-in-law returned from a few weeks with her daughters and granddaughters. I stopped by to deliver her day-late birthday card and gift. She had liter-

ally just gotten home, so as we visited, she put up groceries. Then, she turned on the sink faucet, and it spit out air and a tiny bit of dark water making us both jump a little. Then... nothing. No water. No hot water, no cold water.

Perhaps, like me, you know some people who would have reacted negatively. "Well, isn't that great! Plumbing problems right off the bat! What a welcome home!" But no! She checked the other house faucets and found the water flowing normally. We checked under the sink and outside to see if anything looked suspicious. All fine. She decided to take off the spout. The water flowed perfectly. Ah! Little problem – quick fix! It turns out that a very tiny bit of sediment had completely blocked the whole flow of the desired and needed blessing of water into her

life. Now, if that faucet had remained unusable, her life would have still gone on. Inconvenience until fixed, sure. But no life-threatening events would result.

A tiny bit of dirt had stopped the flow that was important to her life. I wondered, what tiny bit of dirt do I need to clean out to get my energies flowing freely again?

She wisely wasted no time with anger or frustration that would have hindered her finding the solution and may have made our visit tense. Her wise EI level let her solve the problem quickly, easily and with no frustration or anger or pity-party banter. Just a level-headed assessment of a problem, checking possible solutions, and finding the one that works. That's high EI at work.

What's that got to do with criticism? Everything.

She did not allow herself to criticize a simple situation, turning it into a gripe-fest that upset her or anyone else. She saw the event as what it was: A simple common problem that needed to be solved. So she did. She is a widow. No pity-party around how she has to handle these things alone, or "What a welcome home!" or "Why ME?" Or the equally lame question people ask far too often: "Why does it always happen to ME?"

Had she given into the possible negative responses, it could have even triggered a depression, reviving her senses of loss, loneliness, frustration. It is often the little "straw that breaks the camel's back."

What situations in your life do you view as criticisms, negativities, problems, or reasons to send you in an angry or depressed spiral? Really? REALLY? Maybe it is time to reassess your reactions and promote them from the status as "criticism" or "anger-worthy" to just everyday life that you need to work on without marring your attitude and the life of those around you. Will you please think about it?

Detri would love to hear from you.

Email: detrimghee@gmail.com

Facebook:

Detri Atkinson McGhee

Free outline for Criticism Management available at www.criticism-management.com



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Clean, Green And Beautiful

Come Together

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

Now that we have gotten through the hustle and bustle of spring, and we took a breath, we have kicked off our 2026-2027 Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful Membership Drive. Since we are a nonprofit, we rely heavily on donations from our community. From businesses to individuals, we are thankful and proud of every dollar we receive. We take great pride in being good stewards of the funds we receive, and we hope we are making you proud as well.

In case you don't know much about our organization, Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful (KALB) is an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful and Keep Alabama Beautiful. Our mission is to empower citizens of Athens and



Limestone County to take greater responsibility for enhancing their community environment. We focus on litter abatement, environmental education, and recycling education. We provide many volunteer opportunities throughout the year, and

our volunteers have made our mission successful.

We host several big annual litter cleanups each year including the Tennessee and Elk River TVA Trash Attacks, and we co-host the Ardmore Spring Clean with Lookout Pest Control. We have many smaller cleanups such as the Athens First Methodist Church's Vacation Bible School Cleanup, our Athens Renaissance School Cleanups and many other smaller groups. Since I became the director in 2023, we have removed over 10,000 pounds of litter and illegal dumps from within Limestone County.

The Earth Day Expo is our favorite event. The Expo is our annual celebration of Earth Day and our natural environment. Thanks to local businesses and donations, we are not only able to host this event, but we are able to offer every show and exhibit for free! Over the past few years, we have had an assortment of entertainment such as Steve Trash, The Bubble Circus, Rise Raptors, Wild Adventures,

the Bat Lady, the Science Guys, and more. We have also been adding local vendors of art, locally sourced products such as honey and tinctures, and more. We try to add to our vendor list every year to make sure there is something for everyone.

The Household Hazardous Waste Collection is another service we take great pride in providing. Thanks to a wonderful and generous partnership with the Limestone County Commission, we have been able to host an annual collection for the past seven years. We have serviced over 1,100 households, taking in harmful chemicals to be ethically disposed of or recycled. This is a much-needed ser-

vice for Limestone County Residents, and we are proud to be able to continue to offer it free-of-charge to residents. We hope that we can expand the event in the years to come.

If you are interested in becoming a member of Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful, we have several ways to donate. You can donate via PayPal on our website, www.kalbcare.com, you can mail a check to us at P.O. Box 1007, Athens, AL 35612, or you can stop by the office at 125 East Street. If you want more information, or to be added to our e-newsletter, send us an email @ KALBCares@gmail.com.



Become a Fan



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May God Bless America

by D. A. Slinkard

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



I hate being lied to, yet we live in a world that is becoming more and more dishonest every day. We do not know whether or not we can believe the news, if it is real news or fake news; and sometimes, no news is better than anything out there. As America celebrates its 250th birthday, it is worth asking not only where we have come from as a nation, but also what truths have made us strong—and what lies threaten to weaken us.

Recently, I was asked what I thought were some lies the world would like us to believe and why I think these lies hurt us. I came up with three lies most often used that can lead to a person's demise and they are: Give 110% effort; As long as you try; and Listen to your heart. These things sound good, but they are deceiving.

As for giving 110% effort, this is probably most often quoted by many people. Sadly, this is the farthest from the truth. In fact, I would say the people that say they give 110% are the same ones in society who are barely giving 30% of their maximum effort. Yet, here we go asking for people to give their commitment, and they tell us they are 110% committed. Completely asinine. Why? Grab a water bottle and put 110% water in that bottle. You cannot do it, and neither can a person give more than they are capable of giving. The people who use this cute little quote do not even

mean it, and I guarantee they could not show you what just 75% effort looks like. Do not fall for the fake news of 110% effort.

The next lie is what we often hear parents tell kids, "As long as you try..." Who even says this? You got it — the parents that have their 30-year-old kid living at home in the basement filled with all the participation trophies they won growing up. We need to stop pretending it is okay for people to just show up and give any amount of effort. To be successful in life takes more than just putting forth any kind of effort. You need to have the mentality of showing up with the intention of giving everything you have.

Sadly, though, we do not know what it means to give

maximum effort because we have raised an entire generation of kids who are satisfied with getting a participation ribbon. As a kid, I wanted to be the best; I would not settle for anything less. And as an adult, not much has changed. I still want to be the best at what I do. If it is playing sports, I want to be the best. If it is doing my job, I want to be the best. We need not settle, and we need to raise up a generation that does not settle for just any kind of effort.

The third lie I hear is, "Listen to your heart and you will never go wrong." Sadly, I have been guilty of saying this lie. It was not until I started reading my King James Bible that I realized what God says about listening to the heart.

Did you know the Bible tells us the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked? I will never forget the first time I read this Scripture, and I felt ashamed. I had been telling the same lie that had been passed down to me from whomever, but I wish I would have been wise enough to have known the truth.

If you tell a lie with enough conviction and tell it often enough, this lie will eventually become truth. This has happened to the world we live in. As a society, the lies we told ourselves have now become the truth. We, as a country, are headed down a slippery slope, and we need to get ourselves back on track. As we celebrate **250 years of American independence**, there is

no better time to recommit ourselves to truth, personal responsibility, and the biblical principles that helped shape this nation. For two and a half centuries, countless men and women have sacrificed so that we could enjoy the freedoms we often take for granted. We have people who are ashamed to be Americans, and yet here we are celebrating **250 years of freedom and independence**.

Freedom is not free, and I hope after reading this you will take the time to reflect upon some things. As we celebrate America's 250th birthday, may we never forget that a nation is only as strong as its commitment to truth, character, and God. May God bless the U.S.A.





Learning As A Lifestyle

Reading the Room: *The Quiet Skill Every Leader Needs*

by Eric Betts

Assistant Director, Curtis Coleman Center for Religion Leadership and Culture at Athens State University

Leadership is often described in terms of vision, strategy, and decision making, but one of the most consequential skills rarely gets named: reading the room. This is the leader's ability to sense the emotional and relational temperature of a group before speaking, deciding, or moving forward.

In civic life, ministry, education, and community leadership, this skill determines whether people feel seen or steamrolled. Leaders who read the room well understand that communication is never just about content; it is about climate. Effective leaders pay at-

tention to three layers of group dynamics: the surface, the social, and the emotional. The surface layer is what people say. The social layer is how they say it, which involves tone, pace, interruptions, silence. The emotional layer is what people feel but don't articulate. When leaders track all three, they notice hesitation before it becomes resistance, confusion before it becomes frustration, and tension before it becomes conflict.

This awareness allows leaders to adjust in real time, creating space for clarity, honesty, and trust. Reading the room



is also an ethical responsibility. When leaders

ignore emotional cues, people often retreat into silence, not because they agree, but because they don't feel safe.

Ethical leadership requires slowing down when the room tightens, asking clarifying questions when faces show uncertainty, and naming tension gently when it threatens to derail progress. In a community where relationships are the backbone of civic and congregational life, leaders who read the room become stabilizing forces. They help groups navigate difficult con-

versations without losing dignity or direction.

The good news is that this skill can be learned. Leaders sharpen it by showing up fully present, observing before acting, listening for what's not said, and adjusting their pace when the emotional climate shifts. These practices transform leadership from a top down exercise into a relational craft. When leaders read the room well, people don't just hear the message, they trust the messenger.

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The Alternative Approach

"What Should We Be Teaching Our Children?"

by Roy Williams

Hello, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, and all the ships at sea. This is Roy Williams, the Guru of Good Health, the Superintendent of Supplementation, bringing you another newsletter from Today's Health Update.

Today I want to ask a question that may be one of the most important questions any parent, grandparent, teacher, pastor, employer, or citizen can ask. What should we be teaching our children if we truly want them to succeed in the world that is coming? Not the world of yesterday. Not the world we grew up in and, especially, not the world our parents grew up in... but the world that is arriving right now.

Of course, I believe almost all my readers would say, first and foremost, is that our children should learn about the Bible and our Christian faith. Because whether we like it or not, the world is changing faster than at any time in human history, but the good news is that our Father in Heaven is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He and His

word are the foundation that we can always count on.

With that said, artificial intelligence is changing jobs. Technology is changing. Communication is changing. The economy is changing. Healthcare is changing. Business is changing. So, the question is simple: Are we preparing our children for the future, or are we preparing them for a world that no longer exists?

Now don't misunderstand me, reading matters, writing matters, mathematics matters, history matters. But if all we teach is information, we are missing the most important thing. Information has become cheap while wisdom remains priceless. When we were kids and wanted information, we had to go find a book. Today our children can ask a phone almost anything.

The challenge is no longer finding information. The challenge is knowing whether the information is true. Jesus told us plainly, that only the truth will set us free. American citizens have more freedoms than any other nation on earth; so making sure that what our

children are being taught is correct and truthful is more important than ever before. Remember, if the truth sets us free, the lies we believe will hold us in bondage.

How do you know something is true? Where is the evidence? What are the incentives behind the information that is being distributed? In other words, who really benefits? What are the consequences if what we are being taught is false? Can the information be tested? Can it be observed in action and can it be repeated? These are the questions that protect people from scams, propaganda, manipulation, and poor decisions. When it comes to health, what good is all that knowledge if your body falls apart at forty-five? By that age the average American is already on four or more prescription drugs. What good is intelligence if your brain doesn't have the nutrients it needs to function properly?

Unfortunately, many children today are overfed and undernourished. Think about that. They consume plenty of calories while they are starving for nutrition. Most children in America eat more processed food before noon than their grandparents ate in a month. Then we wonder why they struggle with energy, concentration, focus, and performance.

The human body is built from raw, organic materials. If the organic materials are missing, the



structure suffers. Not one cell of the human body is dependent on synthetic foods or drugs for replication, and the body's ability to replicate at a cellular level is everything when it comes to being and remaining healthy. It's really that simple.

That's one reason we developed **Ultimate Fruit & Veggie** at NEWtritional Health Care. Most children do not consume enough fruits and vegetables every day. Of course, most adults don't either. **Ultimate Fruit & Veggie** was designed to help bridge that nutritional gap by providing concentrated plant nutrition that supports the body every single day. We decided to use **Ultimate** in this product's name because there is absolutely no other fruit and veggie product

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GenZ With JP

250 Special: *What Is America, And Why I'm Proud To Be An American*

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

This weekend, we celebrate our 250th birthday as a nation. A landmark that deserves a proper celebration, even though, relatively speaking, we are still very young compared to other nations. Even so, we have accomplished that of the greatest empire this world has ever seen. There's a reason for that. There's a reason why God has allowed us to succeed so greatly in a short period of time. Those reasons are not up for debate. We can bicker about minor details, but the core foundations of our country have been set in stone and are responsible for our greatness. These same foundations are under attack today, and the only way to preserve them is to nail down specifically what those core items are. They span from the physical all the way to the eternal, and I plan on covering such ground here in this column. So, what is America, and what exactly does it mean to be an American?

First, let's delve into the physical realm of what exactly makes America, America. I've heard some argue that America isn't really tied to the land that we stand on, and if you dropped the Constitution in any place in the world, then that place would be America. I believe that this couldn't be farther from the truth. The fact of the matter is that we stand on the most beautiful continent on the face of the Earth. If you took the Constitution and placed

it just anywhere, that place still wouldn't have the Appalachian Mountains. It wouldn't have the ever-winding Mississippi River. It would be missing the gorgeous plains of the Midwest. There would be no awe-inspiring Grand Canyon or the mesmerizing features of Yellowstone. There would be no black bears roaming the woods, bald eagles swooping down to snag a trout, or even just a jack rabbit munching on shrubs. You see, the physical beauty of America is just as crucial to our identity as anything. Dare I say, it's essential. The landscape of our nation is what dared our founding fathers to be great. It's what forced them to expand west and manifest destiny all the way to the Pacific. It sprang up greatness from its inspiring beauty alone. When you think of America, it's not just an ordinary place on the map. It is the most amazing and indicative spot you could find.

Now, let's jump to the eternal realm. America was founded as a Christian nation. No, it wasn't founded as an exclusively Christian nation, but the Christian God and Christian doctrine were solely responsible for the ideals set forth to establish America. John Quincy Adams once said, "The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity." The Declaration of Independence, the most important docu-

ment in our nation's history, starts by stating, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Do you think this was a mistake by Jefferson to place this in the preamble of such a foundational document? Absolutely not. Jefferson, with the stroke of a pen, declared that our nation was one that held firmly to the one and only true God, and that this was the entire basis of their fight for independence. George Washington led his men into battle with flags that said, "Appeal to Heaven," and he himself prayed for victory during his most daunting test in the woods at Valley Forge. It is undeniable that the faith of our founding fathers was the predominant motivator to kick-start the greatest nation there's ever been.

The culture and heritage of America are, of course, an ever-so-important centerpiece of our identity as well. Just as much as the physical and eternal realms dictate our identity, this is just as important. One cannot overlook the role of Anglo-Saxonism in our nation's founding, and it's a phenomenal example of how each piece of this puzzle called America is not the same without the other. Because on this same piece of beautiful land, Native Americans roamed. What transpired was tribal savagery ridden with violence, rape,

rival factions partaking in constant warfare, and a lack of innovation towards what America is now. This, however, has nothing to do with skin color. But it has everything to do with beliefs and values as a culture. The Anglo-Saxon culture was that of Christendom, bravery, intellectualism, and a hatred of tyranny. Now, by no means am I claiming that these men were perfect. Slavery is a perfect example of the contrary. But their culture and system of beliefs are what propelled them forward to conquer and birth this nation. This same Anglo-Saxon culture is under attack today. Globalists seek to destroy our nation by flooding us with the Third World. We are being invaded by those who are antithetical to our values and what has made America so great. If our culture wasn't so immensely valuable to our identity, then it would not be under attack by our adversaries.

Lastly, America is where my ancestors called home. It's where my grandfathers, great-grandfathers, and great-great-grandfathers all fought in every major war. It's where they came as settlers in the 1600s. It's where they won the Revolutionary War. It's where they started families and carried on their traditions. It's where they fought each other in the Civil War and came together afterwards as brothers. It's where they won both World Wars and participated in the rise of the post-WWII American empire. It's where they

went to church, married their wives, raised their kids, went through struggles, and lived many adventures to tell their kids later on. America is not an idea. America is not "in the eyes of the beholder." America is a distinct place, with a distinct faith in Christ, with a distinct heritage and culture. Like I said, these are not up for debate, nor are they able to be substituted. Without each and every one of these, America would no longer be America.

On our 250th birthday as a nation, I urge you to reflect upon this and thank God that you were blessed to be an American. But most importantly, consider how you can help preserve this great nation for your kids and grandkids to enjoy later on. I, for one, am proud to be an American and will do whatever it takes to keep it the greatest nation on Earth.

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)

Joy Down in My Heart

by Anna Hamilton

Having and placing our full faith in Christ will bring true joy. Happiness is a choice. Joy in a choice. Not allowing the small inconveniences of life to make you upset is a testament of faith. When the car in front of you takes 3-million years to make a right turn or when the person behind you in line at the grocery store stands too close, you don't get upset, you remain calm and joyous. When you are able to be joyous in the small problems, the big problems will be easier. Your faith will just become stronger and stronger.

The link between deep faith and joy is one that goes hand-in-hand. Most of us want a deeper faith in Christ but don't always realize that choosing joy in all circumstances will cultivate a life full of faith. Your life will become a testimony of faith and will help bring others to Christ. When you find joy in all, does this mean that everything in life will become easy? Of course not, but it does mean that the hard times will be easier.

Joy is rooted in who God truly is. The world places happiness/joy in possessions, accomplishments, and people in our lives, jobs, and status. But the Bible teaches us that the source of all joy is Jesus. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Romans 15:13).

North Alabama is in the middle of a sweltering heat wave, and we need recipes that don't require turning on the oven or standing over a hot stove. This week's recipe is a fantastic side dish that pairs well with all proteins, can be eaten for an

afternoon snack, and itself is loaded with protein. Bonus points, it keeps for days in the refrigerator! Make it one morning and enjoy it all week. We love it and I hope you do as well.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:1-3).



Don't Hide From The Heat — Learn To Work With It

by Nick Niedzwiecki - Owner, CrossFit Athens

If you've lived in Alabama for more than a week, you know summer doesn't mess around. Temperatures well into the 90s, humidity that feels like a wet blanket, and air so thick it can make walking to the mailbox feel like a workout. It's tempting to stay inside until September, but the truth is our bodies were designed to adapt—and that's exactly what they do when we give them the chance.

The first step is hydration.

Water isn't just something we drink after a workout. It fuels nearly every process in our body. It regulates our temperature, keeps our joints moving, supports our muscles, and even helps us think clearly. During the summer months, dehydration happens much faster than most people realize. You don't have to be running or lifting weights to lose fluids. Working in the yard, taking a walk, coaching your kid's ballgame, or even sitting outside for an extended period can leave you dehydrated before you know it.

One of the biggest mistakes people make is waiting until they're thirsty to drink. Thirst is your body's way of telling you it's already behind. Instead, make it a habit to sip water throughout the day. Carry a reusable bottle with you, refill it often, and if you're sweating heavily for long periods, don't forget to

replace your electrolytes as well.

Hydration is only part of the equation.

I often hear people say, "It's just too hot to go outside." While I certainly don't recommend doing a marathon at two o'clock in the afternoon, avoiding the heat altogether may actually work against you. Just like your muscles adapt to exercise, your body adapts to warmer temperatures. Spending even 10 to 20 minutes outside each day helps improve your body's ability to regulate temperature and become more efficient at cooling

itself.

There are other benefits too. Natural sunlight helps regulate your sleep cycle, improves mood, and supports vitamin D production. A short walk around the neighborhood, drinking your morning coffee on the porch, or playing outside with your kids gives your body something it simply can't get sitting in an air-conditioned office all day.

The key is respecting the heat, not fearing it. Go outside during the cooler parts of the morning or evening when possible. Wear light-colored clothing, use sunscreen, and

listen to your body. If you begin feeling dizzy, nauseated, or unusually tired, it's time to cool off and hydrate. Common sense always wins.

At CrossFit Athens, we talk a lot about preparing our bodies for real life—not just for one-hour workouts. Life doesn't stop because it's hot outside. Whether you're working, hiking, coaching, traveling, or simply enjoying time with your family, you want a body that's prepared for the demands of everyday life. That preparation starts with simple habits: drinking enough water, mov-

ing your body consistently, and getting outside regularly.

Don't spend the entire summer hiding from the weather. Grab a bottle of water, step outside for a few minutes each day, and let your body do what it was designed to do. Small habits practiced consistently are what build healthier, stronger, and more resilient people. That's a lesson we live by every day at CrossFit Athens.

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