November 20 - December 3, 2026

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Explore The Aerospace Systems Management Program



By Dr. Wayne McCain

With the United States Space Force now on Redstone Arsenal, along with the recently demonstrated need for upgrades in security and equipment design as well as scope in the aerospace industry, now is the perfect time to explore a degree or certificate program that is designed to prepare people for a career path that is certain to explode with opportunity in the very near feature. The program is the Aerospace Systems

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Friday, November 20th is the Grand Opening Of Market On East:

Featuring Pepper's Porch & Riff Raff



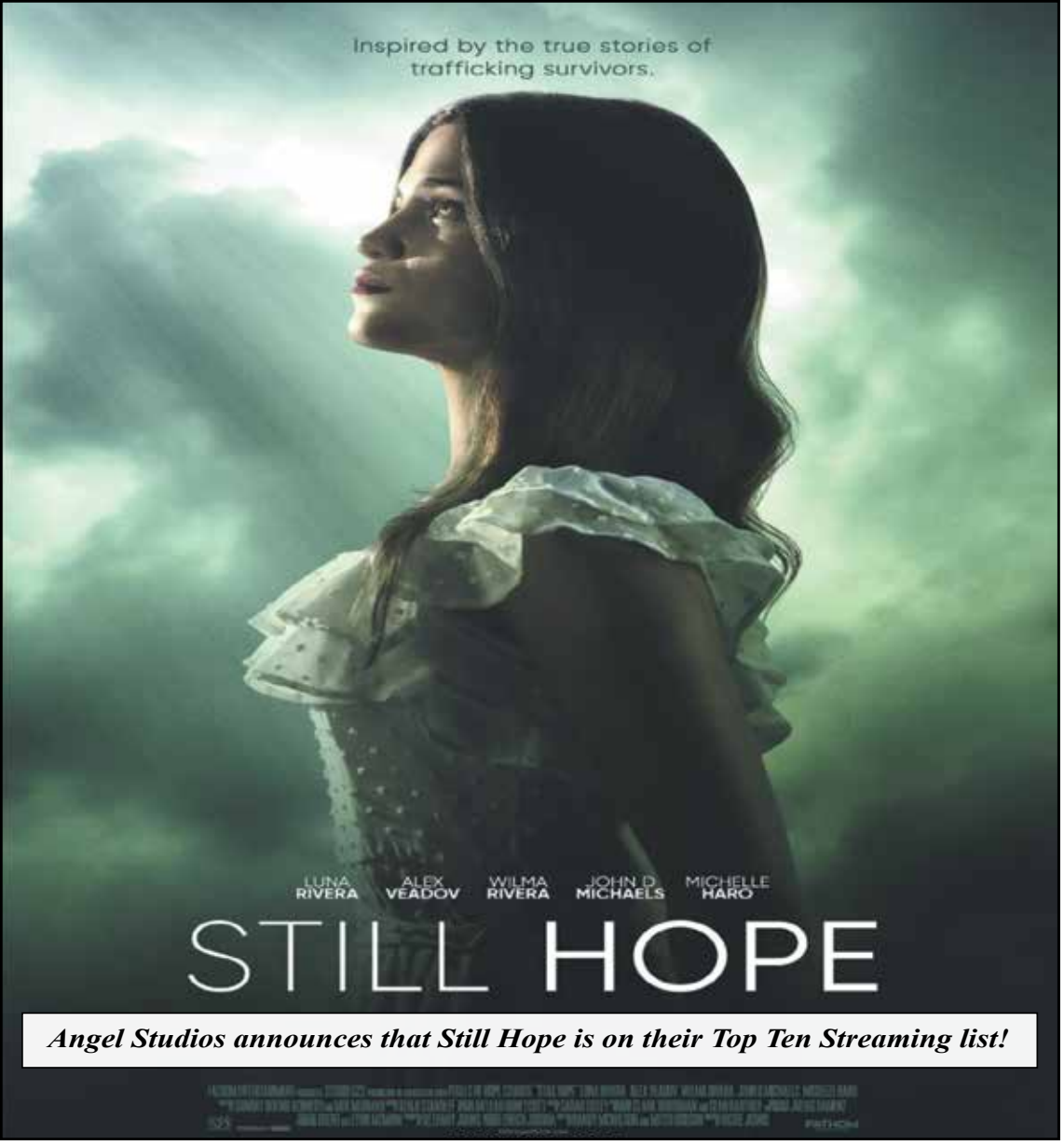
By Ali Elizabeth Turner

When Joel and Sharma Hamm were young parents, they purchased a children's shop in Athens known as the Grasshopper as a way to both clothe their son and daughter and provide stylish children's

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Publisher's Point

Terrifyingly Thankful

"Ali Turner, what a weird title," I said to myself as I started this *Point*. By now most ***Athens Now*** readers know that I have had a life-long love affair with alliteration, the writing device where you use the same first letter at least twice in a row with at least two words in sequence. (The appearance of "life-long love" above is an example of alliteration, and I have absolutely no idea why I love it so much.) And, anybody who knows me knows that I endeavor to be what I call a "gratitude guerilla," someone who is fierce about finding legitimate things for which to be thankful in any situation.

But, "terrifyingly thankful?" You taking extra "Vitamin D-for-drama" these days, Ali T? Who ya gonna terrify? If you are someone who believes in spiritual warfare, and I unashamedly do, you know the answer to that one. The enemy of your soul, that's who. I have no desire whatsoever to terrify people unless they willingly and knowingly align with the guy who, number one, loves to harm humans and hates God, and, number two, lost on Golgotha. He lost so bad that Scripture lets us know that if he had understood what was actually going to be the outcome from the death, burial and resurrection of Yeshua, he never would have killed him. It was the all-time battle blunder, and it cost hell dearly and permanently.

Still trying to figure out the reason for my title and subject, I then did what writers do these days. Yep, I googled it. I asked the machine why some people are so terrified of grateful people? AI's "observations" were surprisingly spot on. Here are a few:

People often feel uneasy or intimidated around deeply grateful people because genuine gratitude disrupts social expectations, exposes personal insecurities, and cannot be easily manipulated.



While thankfulness is universally praised in theory, encountering someone who lives in a state of genuine gratitude can trigger discomfort in others for several psychological and social reasons:

***It threatens control and power dynamics**. People in positions of power or manipulative relationships often use material rewards, status, or fear of loss to control others. Someone who is already content and grateful for what they have is much harder to bribe, intimidate, or leverage.*

***It triggers comparison and inadequacy.** Being around someone who is effortlessly appreciative can act as an unintentional mirror. For people who struggle with cynicism, envy, or chronic dissatisfaction, a grateful person's mindset can highlight their own negativity or make them feel guilty for complaining.*

***It demands emotional vulnerability.** Gratitude requires acknowledging that we rely on others and that good things in life are temporary. On Reddit, users agree that people raised to repress emotions often struggle with gratitude because it forces them to drop their guard and accept help. Similarly, users on Quora note that accepting or witnessing deep thanks requires a level of humility that can feel like a threat to fiercely guarded pride or self-sufficiency.*

There were a few more, and I am most un-interested in having AI do my writing and thinking for me, so I'll stop with that. And, I am not talking about a type of thankfulness that is phony, diminishing or dismissive. Someone who just got a cancer diagnosis does not need toxic positivity in that moment or any other, for that matter. I am talking about developing a perspective that is trained to see more than just the problem or the person who is trying to block out the sunlight of your being. It is the "seeing more" and expressing it (even if it is only to yourself) that is on the table here.

And, speaking of tables, if your family is gathering this Thanksgiving and you have a tradition of going around the table and saying something for which you are thankful, you can always start with being thankful for thankfulness. It is your friend and ally, and it will never stop fighting for you. Happy Thanksgiving to all of you.

Ali Elizabeth Turner

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Joseph George And Winning A Medal For Defying A Direct Order

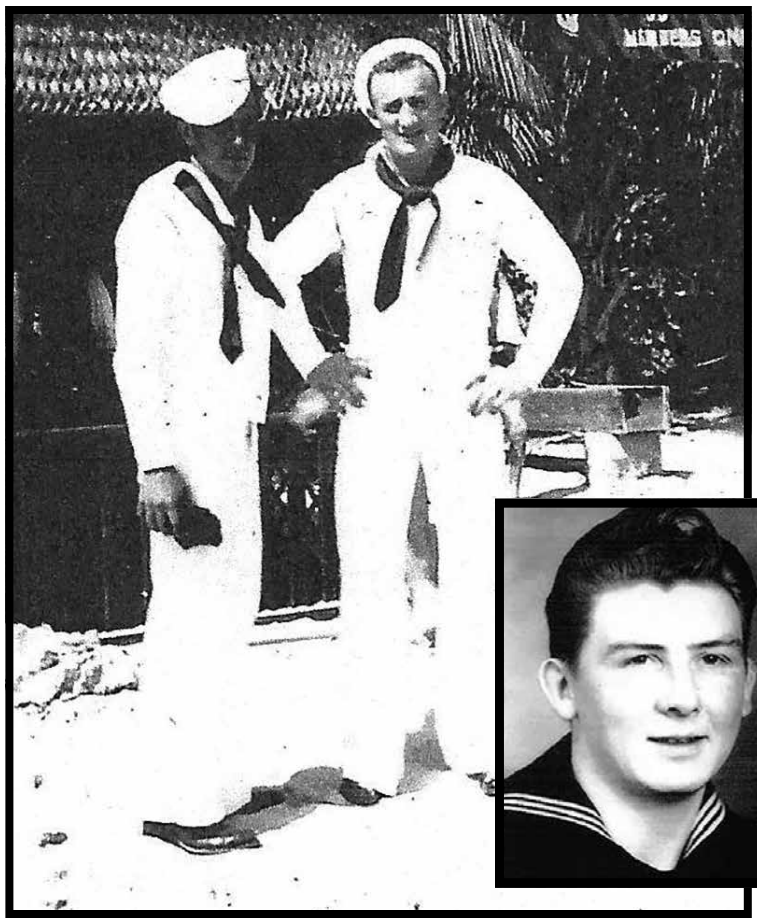
by Ali Elizabeth Turner



Soon we will be observing Pearl Harbor Day, "the day of infamy," the day that birthed the Greatest Generation. And I, for one, never get tired of hearing the stories of heroism and bravery that emerged that day and are forever captured as part of our culture. I just learned about someone who was in an impossible situation and made an impossible choice because he knew he had to. His name was Joseph George, and he went by Joe. And, because of what he did on December 7, 1941, no one except for the six rescued by him really knew what he had done until long after he was gone.

Joe was in the Navy, serving on a ship by the name of the USS *Vestal*. The *Vestal* was tied to the USS *Arizona* when the attack occurred, and Joe was literally putting out fires along with his shipmates. Soon it became apparent that the *Arizona* was going to go down, and Joe's commanding officer made the completely reasonable command to cut the line to what was going to become the most famous loss in United States naval history. However, here is where the impossible choice emerged. Joe looked across and saw that there were still six people on the deck of the ship, and they were doomed.

So, Joe threw them a line. I can only imagine what that was like for everyone. They were being rescued, and protocol would have demanded at the very least a reprimand for Joe. And, it turns out that those six were the last to



get off the *Arizona* alive. What motivated Joe? I am sure that there were many things, but one thing was that Joe had spent six months on the sinking ship, and he was not going to let his former shipmates perish if he could help it. George was commended by his captain, but he could not be awarded a medal. Serving can be a double-edged sword, and those who have been in those kinds of situations have to rest on knowing what they did, whether or not anyone else outside of their Maker was aware.

Now, it is true that while he was alive, Joe George was not recognized for his valor; in fact, he never told anyone about what happened until he was interviewed in 1978 by a newspaper out of North Texas. Even then, nothing was done, and George died in 1996. However, Randy Stratton, who was the son of one of the rescued men found out about Joe and the fact that he had never been honored. Randy contacted Senator Jeff Flake with the facts of the story, and Joe was posthumously awarded a Bronze Star in 2017. Amazingly, there were only five survivors from the *Arizona* still alive in 2017, and two of them had been rescued by Joe. There was a ceremony at the USS *Arizona* Memorial, and they attended. It was the first time such an award ceremony had been held there, and for someone who had not been on the ship that day. I am thankful forever more for people like Joe George, and may he rest in peace with our gratitude.

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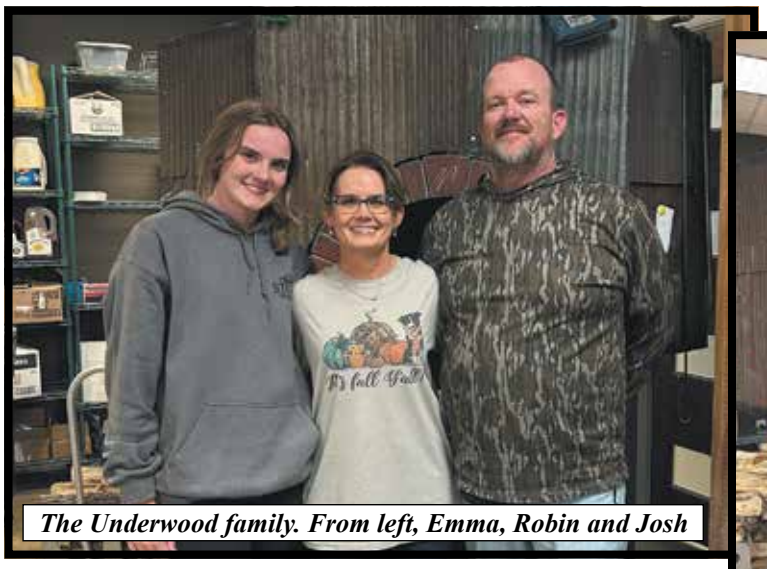
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Warehouse Pizza: *A True Labor Of Love*

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



The Underwood family. From left, Emma, Robin and Josh



Josh and Robin Underwood are like so many people in Limestone County. They love God, people, the community, and they both have worked in other professions than pizza for decades. They have a daughter who graduated from high school in 2026, and they felt a stirring to do something, but weren't sure what.

Josh always wanted to have a restaurant and is the "smoke guy and the grill master" for his family and friends. Josh is one of those guys that can "do anything mechanical," and for 20 years he was a machinist and welder. The last four years he has worked for Aviagen. Robin worked in insurance for two decades. For the last year, she has been working at Dixie Electric, and this past spring, the previous owners of Warehouse Pizza approached Josh to see if he was interested in taking over the location.

Robin had been a busy mom with her daughter Emma's involvement in sports. Josh came to Robin with one of those life-changing "What do you think?' types of conversations, and while she had a lot of questions, they both prayed "a ton" and decided to go for it. If you have ever experienced the inexplicable "We are doing what we are supposed to be doing" moments, you know what I am talking about. They took over Warehouse Pizza in July, and it has been a whirlwind ever since.

One of the things I appreciate about the Underwoods is their love for people. Both of them felt a fire in their belly to provide the people of Elkmont and Limestone County with a place where people could get great food, have a place to gather, love and be loved, and strengthen the community. Emma works at Warehouse, as does Robin's mom, Sandra. It is a true family endeavor, and while it is a lot of work, you can tell they love what they are doing. I asked Josh what motivates him to work fulltime and be a business owner. Besides the fact that he feels like it is something he was made to do, he also made a point of saying, "I like to make people happy."



And, speaking of "fire in the belly," Warehouse Pizza uses a wood-fired oven for their pizzas, and they use hickory and white oak. "It burns hot, but doesn't have a strong smoky smell. It makes for a unique flavor, and that is one of the many things that sets Warehouse apart. Another thing is the location. It is in the historical part of Elkmont, located right above the Richard Martin Rails to Trails. The place is beautiful year-round, and there is plenty of outdoor seating.

The pizza is carefully crafted, and there is every type of topping available. There are pizza bowls that include pasta if you choose, or the kind that are the "pizza without the crust." All types of wings and wing sauces await you. There is a full salad bar available, which is something you don't find in big box stores. The salad bar can be purchased by itself as a full meal, or one trip through can be added to any entrée. They also have ice cream in cake and waffle cones, banana splits, freeze outs, milkshakes, and sundaes.

In the spirit of having a safe place to gather, there is a large game room in the back with some old-school and safe video games, and a place to have birthday parties. The games include basketball, air hockey, whack-a-mole, and a boxing game. And there are several treasure seeking games, which take more skill than I have, for sure.

Speaking for self, I took part in a Limestone County Tourism 10-mile walk that ended just over the Tennessee line, and Warehouse Pizza was our half-way stopping place. It was the perfect place to rest, recharge, eat and be energized.

For this article, I met with a friend and her two kids who were traveling through on their way back to Nashville, and I chose the pizza bowl. It was great, and my friend and her family were more than pleased with their choices.

I asked Josh and Robin why, when obviously there are a lot of choices in our area when it comes to pizza, should I choose Warehouse? "It's not cookie-cutter, and it's a place to build relationships," they said. You can call in, dine in, walk in, and order online through Toast. If that is what you are looking for either for yourself or a night out with family, then come to Warehouse Pizza and sample their wares. You'll be back for sure.





Warehouse Pizza

18845 Upper Fort Hampton Rd,
Elkmont, AL 35620

256-732-2758

Hours: Wed-Fri, 3-8 p.m., Sat 11 a.m.-8 p.m. closed Sundays

Calendar of Events

Christmas Magic Is Coming To Downtown Athens! November 20-22

Skating on the Square returns, Pictures With Santa will give families a chance to capture some holiday magic, and Merry Market on Marion will bring even more holiday cheer. Presented by Dream Key, this festive weekend is made even more special with the support of our community partners! We're excited to have Fly Leaf Photography bringing Pictures With Santa to this year's celebration again! Bring the family, strike a pose, and capture a little Christmas magic to treasure for years to come. From skating and Santa photos to holiday shopping and downtown festivities, there's something for everyone. Check out the event details below and start making your holiday plans!

Worship Night at the Athens Farmers Market November 21

The Limestone Worship Collective invites you all to an uplifting evening of live worship music at the Athens Farmers Market on Saturday, Nov. 21, from 5-6PM. Bring you lawn chairs and invite a friend. 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM Athens Farmers Market at Doug Gates Park. 409 W. Green St., Athens, AL 35611.

Christmas Column Lighting December 4

Please join the Athens State community in kicking off the holiday season! Come enjoy the Athens State Community Choir followed by seasonal refreshments and photos with Santa in the Glasgow Parlor. 5:15pm. Event by Athens State University. 300 N. Beaty Street, Athens, AL.

2026 Athens-Limestone County Christmas Parade December 5

The Athens-Limestone County Chamber of Commerce invites you to come explore Gingerbread Village at this year's Christmas Parade on Saturday, December 5th! 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM. Downtown Athens

Merry Grinchmas Is Coming To Athens! December 12

Join us for our Merry Grinchmas Christmas Family Festival! A fun-filled afternoon of Christmas magic, holiday entertainment, and unforgettable memories for the whole family! 11:00 AM – 1:30 PM. Studio Rise in Athens, 25851 Walter Lee Drive, Athens.

Here's what's waiting for you...

• Live Christmas Dance Performances • Special Performance By The Grinch! • Meet & Greet with the Grinch • Live DJ & Christmas Music • Bouncy House • Face Painting • Christmas Cake Walk • Hot Cocoa Bar • Delicious Food & Lunch Available for Purchase • Local Vendors & Christmas Shopping • Christmas Activities, Photo Opportunities & more!

Admission is only $5 per person! Children ages 2 & under are free! All proceeds benefit our Studio Rise competition dance teams! Bring your family, invite your friends, and come celebrate the most wonderful time of the year with us! You don't want to miss this GRINCHTASTIC Christmas celebration!

Sippin' Cider Festival – A Downtown Athens Holiday Tradition! December 12

Get ready to sip, shop, and celebrate the holidays in downtown Athens! Join us for the 16th Annual Sippin' Cider Festival, presented by Dream Key from 3 to 7 p.m.

What to Expect:

• Festive fun with holiday music, shopping, and cheerful community vibes • Cider Showdown with complimentary tastings from participating merchants • Vote for the best cider and help crown this year's Cider Cup Champion • Shop local and find unique gifts for everyone on your list • Family-friendly activities to bring the holiday spirit to life.

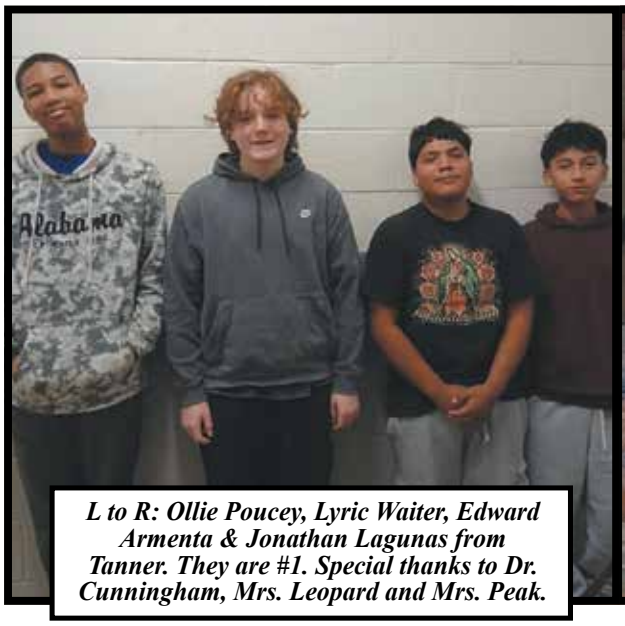
Hosted by Athens Main Street, this free event is the perfect way to shop local this holiday season. Downtown Athens, Alabama. Join us for an evening of sippin', shoppin', and holiday cheer! Carriage Ride Sponsor: Bryant Bank. Supporting Sponsors: First Metro Bank, Kings Seasonal Lighting, & Listerhill Credit Union

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.

Rattlers Rock The 2026 Community Table Canned Food Contest

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



L to R: Ollie Poucey, Lyric Waiter, Edward Armenta & Jonathan Lagunas from Tanner. They are #1. Special thanks to Dr. Cunningham, Mrs. Leopard and Mrs. Peak.



Mallory Hooker of East Limestone HS. They are #2.



Chloe Johnson of Elkmont HS. They are #3.

When Tia Payne moved from Illinois to Athens in 2020 during the middle of COVID, she thought she was going to be here for about three weeks. Her daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren had been transferred here and needed her for what Tia assumed would be a short "G-ma Op." Well… as is the case with so many Athenians, including me, Alabama ended up becoming home. Tia quickly got involved in giving back to her new community through volunteering at Community Table. Recently she told me, as well as some faculty at Tanner High, that she made a suggestion to run a food drive that she had seen work well in Illinois. The purpose was to sponsor a contest amongst high schools and middle schools to see who could bring in the most non-perishable food items in the space of three weeks, and in this case, the prize would be a pizza party.

Community Table Board President Sarah Chadwell and Director Deanna Fike green-lighted the project, and Tia was off and running. She contacted Limestone County Middle and High Schools, and Tanner, East Limestone, and Elkmont entered the contest. It is Community Table's pleasure to announce that the winner of the 2026 Community Table Canned Food Contest is Tanner Middle School, home of the Rattlers. East Limestone came in 2nd and Elkmont 3rd.

Just a quick aside, here. I know that our city and county do a good job of honoring educators. But sitting in the staff meeting room at Tanner High School, and getting a chance to be around the people who have been in the "teaching trenches" for decades and still have a sense of calling, as well as a love for the kids, was truly heart-warming. The two specific people to whom I am referring were Principal Maurice Shingleton and Dr. Stacy Cunningham. Principal Shingleton has taught Spanish in and out of the States, and Dr. Cunningham teaches ELA. Both of them are a credit to the teaching profession. Dr. Cunningham never thought she would actually request middle schoolers for her homeroom responsibilities, but she says they have "become family," and she is in the second year with the same kids.

At first Dr. Cunningham was a bit concerned that the kids would not get behind the project, and she was pleasantly surprised to see them want to focus on the needs of others and have fun while doing it. Principal Shingleton was extremely proud of the middle schoolers and hopes that this year's win will inspire all the grades to get involved and experience the joys of teamwork, friendly competition, and recognition. They disclosed the winner during morning announcements on Tanner's YouTube station, and the response was most positive. You really can't argue with the combined effect of the promise of pizza, a full tummy, bragging rights, and some media coverage! The hope is that while Tanner got on board "the fastest and fiercest," the rest of the schools will hop on next year and it will become a county-wide holiday tradition. As Principal Shingleton said, "It's always good to try and help people."

Deanna Fike discussed some of the stats that Community Table has gathered over the years as it pertains to feeding folks and families. We all know that Limestone County is growing, and that is across every possible spectrum. While business is indeed booming, there is also an uptick in food insecurity, and the needs are present year-round, not just during the holidays. In 2023, Community Table assisted 1,456 households with food. In 2024 there were 1,484, and in 2025, 1558. So far in 2026 they have served 1390 families. Regarding what Community Table refers to as "Thanksgiving Sets," and "Christmas Sets," since 2023, during the combined holidays they have averaged around 408 homes during November and December of each year.

Deanna also went on to say how thankful Community Table is for the response of the students, as well as how the whole community helps out year-round. The holiday campaign will go on until January 1st, and there are other activities throughout the year. There is a back-to-school backpack project, which gave 850 kids the things they needed to begin the school year strongly. Community Table's mission statement is as follows:

Our mission is to mobilize the churches and community of Limestone County, and to transform lives and communities in the name of Jesus Christ through providing a prayerful and organized approach to meeting the physical needs of individuals within our community.

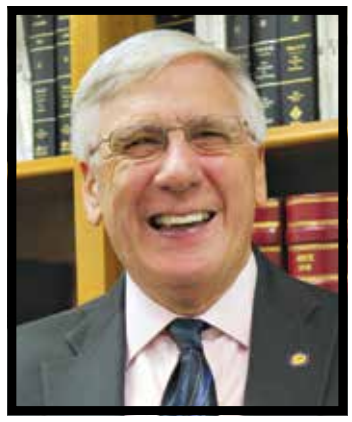
The Rattlers are currently ruling, and here's to many more years of making the holidays in Limestone County even better! If you are in need of assistance or wish to volunteer with Community Table, please call 256-262-0671.

Community Table

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Thanksgiving And The Wisdom Of Old Boss Andy



by Ali Elizabeth Turner

For once, this Monday morning could actually be described as quiet. We knew that this would be the last edition of *Ronnie* before Thanksgiving, and so we took a good bit of time to express our gratitude for all things great and small. Both of us had lived in combat zones, although the jungles of Vietnam in which Mayor Ronnie had lived from 1968-70 were considerably more difficult than the three years I spent in Baghdad during Operation Iraqi Freedom. I literally worked in what had been some of the palaces of the Hussein family. Other workplaces were tents. All of our experiences, however varied they had been, made us deeply grateful to be Americans, and that gratitude continues to this day. In fact, it has grown.

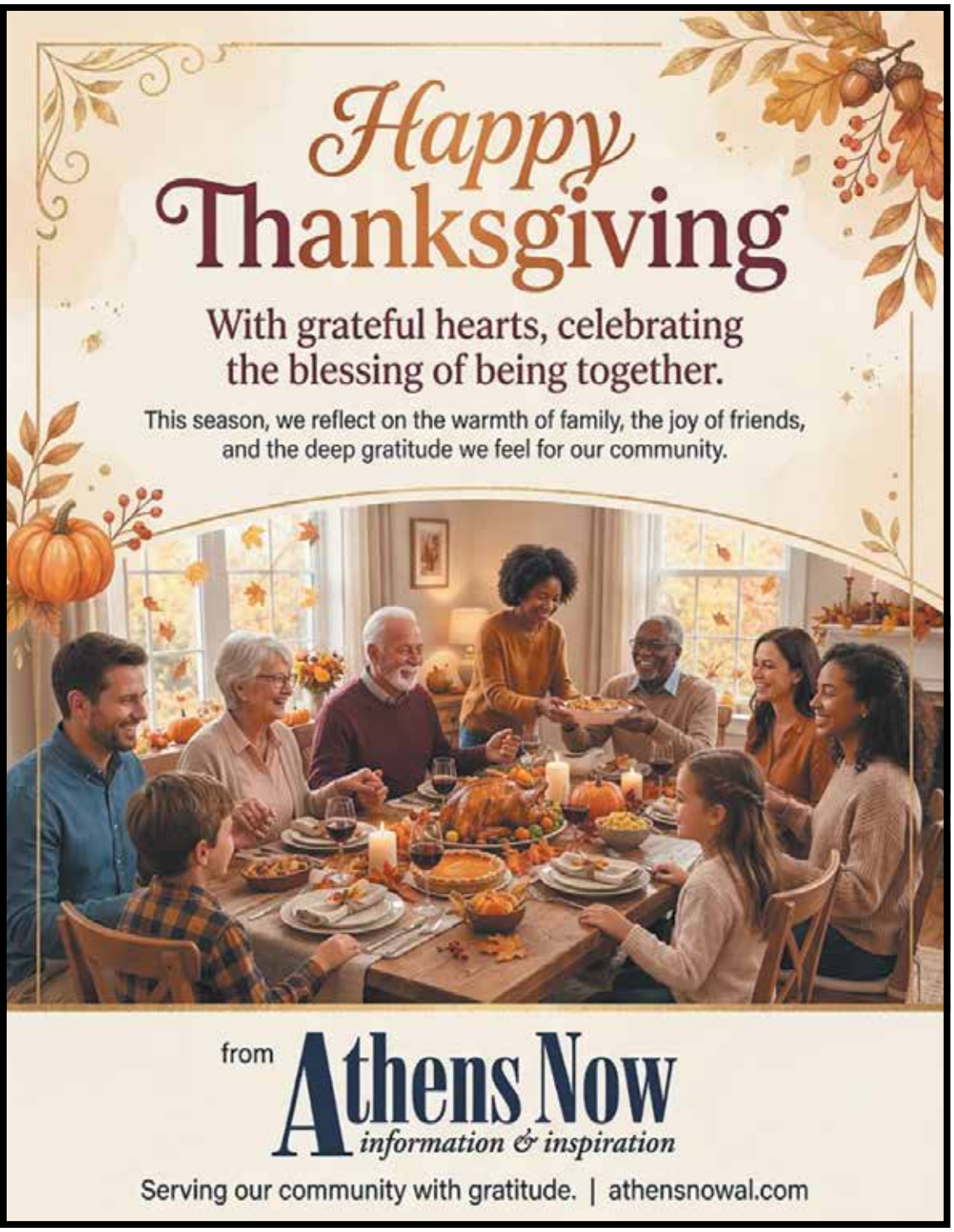
"I thank God for the men and women who work for us to keep us safe and take care of us," said Mayor Ronnie. He meant first responders of all kinds, and we gave thanks for the safety of our city. He went on to tell me about an old boss of his by the name of Andy. This was back in the day when Mayor Ronnie was spending a goodly amount of time in Montgomery working for DHR.

Andy would call it a day at the end of the day and ask Ronnie if he wanted to go get a beer. Andy would also extend the invitation to others in their office, but they would always decline. They never really said why. Maybe it was because they knew that Andy had strict rules about that hour out. There would be absolutely no talk about work. There would be no mention of employees, problems, hassles, or water-cooler gossip. When they went out for that one beer, they talked about kids, family, dreams, plans… but never, ever about work. And, they would talk about the things for which they were grateful.

Andy had an uncanny ability to know when people were "going through it," and he was all about people seeking out friends for help, and better yet, being that friend for others. Ronnie said that the next day at work, those who had been invited but had declined would try and grill him about who said what about whom the night before. These same folks would not believe Ronnie when he truthfully said, "We didn't talk about any of that." This led Mayor Ronnie to his thoughts on Thanksgiving, some of which had been part of the previous day's sermon.

"Don't let Thanksgiving get by you, and don't sit around and talk about negative things and people. We live in such a fast-paced world, and we can't afford to waste our time with negativity," said the mayor. He went on to encourage everyone to "enjoy and be with family." There had been losses of late, along with people who were fighting their final battle with various diseases. Balancing out grief along with gratitude can be tricky, and it is always the holidays, even if they are difficult, that prove gratitude to be the most powerful. We talked about a book that is going to be on our list, and you can learn more about it on page 3 of this edition.

We knew that there was only one thing left to do, and that was to pray. We thanked God for what we have and for what is ahead. And then, once again it was time for Ronnie to roll.





Cooking with Anna

A Heart Of Thanksgiving: *Living With Gratitude Every Day*

by Anna Hamilton

Thanksgiving is so much more than a holiday, a beautifully prepared meal, or gathering around a table with family and friends. True thanksgiving is a condition of the heart. It is a choice we make every day to recognize God's goodness, acknowledge His faithfulness, and give Him praise regardless of the circumstances surrounding us.

The Bible reminds us in Psalm 100:4, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!" What a beautiful reminder that gratitude should be the beginning of our approach to God. Before we bring Him our requests, before we lay our worries at His feet, we can first remember who He is and all He has already done.

Thanksgiving begins with a grateful heart. Sometimes we become so focused on what we don't have that we overlook the blessings already surrounding us. We pray for the next door to open while forgetting to thank God for the doors He has already opened. We ask Him for more while overlooking how faithfully He has provided.

Gratitude changes our perspective. It doesn't mean everything in our lives is perfect. It means that even when life is difficult, we recognize that God is still good. There is always something to thank Him for: His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His presence, and the promise that we never walk alone.

Let gratitude make room for God's peace. Colossians 3:15-17 encourages us to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts and to be thankful. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

There is something powerful about a heart that chooses gratitude instead of allowing bitterness, worry, or disappointment to take control. When we focus on God's faithfulness, our circumstances may not immediately change, but our hearts begin to change.

Gratitude reminds us that God is still working, even when we cannot see the evidence. His peace doesn't depend on everything going according to our plans. It comes from knowing that our lives are held in His hands.

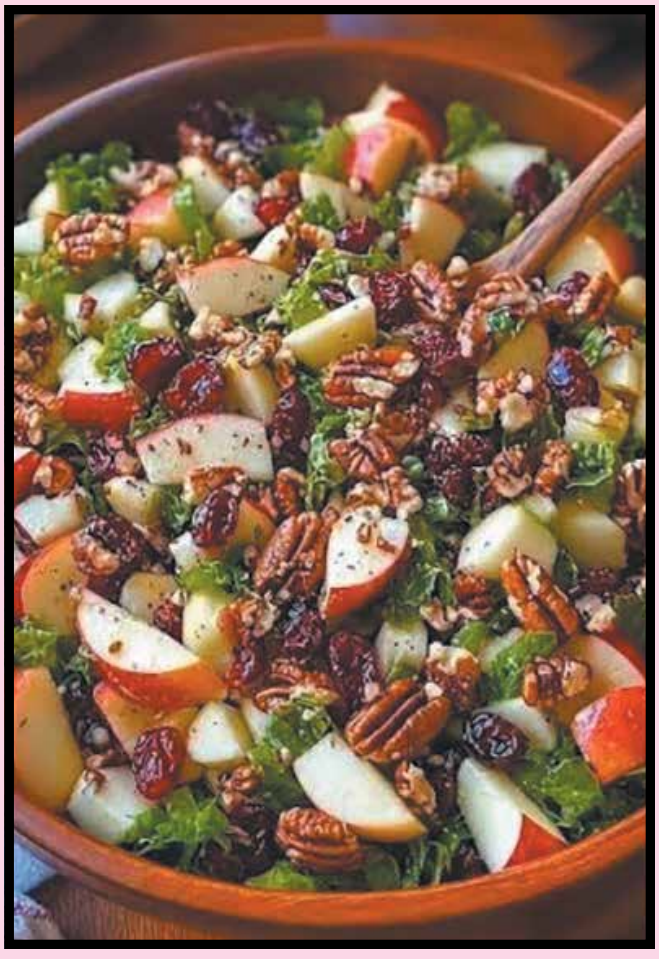
Give thanks even when life is uncertain. Philippians 4:6 tells us not to be anxious about anything, but to bring everything to God through prayer and petition, with thanksgiving. "Do not

continued on page 22

Honeycrisp Crunch Salad

Ingredients:

3 Honeycrisp apples, chopped
1 ½ cup grapes, halved
2 celery stalks, thinly sliced
½ cup dried cranberries
½ cup toasted pecans, roughly chopped
½ cup crumbled feta
Fresh parsley chopped
Dressing:
3 Tbsps. olive oil
2 Tbsps. apple cider vinegar
1 ½ Tbsps. maple syrup
1 Tbsp Dijon mustard
Squeeze of fresh lemon juice
Salt and pepper to taste



Directions:

Once your salad ingredients are all chopped, place in a large bowl. Mix all dressing ingredients well in a separate bowl. Pour dressing over salad, toss all together and enjoy! This stores beautifully in the refrigerator.



News From The Tourism Office

Polaroid Vs Instagram

by Stephanie Reynolds, Athens-Limestone Tourism Association

The days are cooler, the ballgames are hotter, and the holidays start next week.

Our family Thanksgiving promises to be a quiet one. I think it's going to be our family and two of my daughter's friends—a beautiful, sweet couple who are always ready to extend love to others, even if their lives are stressed and in turmoil. They bring people in to live with them, spend hours counseling and comforting their friends, and basically are just walking hearts in sweaters and flip flops. I want them to come to my home and feel loved, pampered, soothed. I want laughter and rest and beauty and good food. They always pour out of their cup instead of their saucer, and I want to fill them so much that they are just as overflowing with our love as the various plastic containers of food we will send back with them.

While thinking about the holidays and providing rest, I had a flashback to when I was a younger wife and mother and how stressed I would get if people were coming to visit. The morning of an event I would be flying around like a cat with a clothespin on its tail, flinging things here and there, getting lost in my perfectionism, and generally being snappish and intense. "Single Minded of Purpose" is a much nicer way of saying I was making folk miserable with my desire for Instagram perfection. My attitude set the "walking-on-eggshells" tone for the day and honestly, I think everyone was glad when the visits were over and my crazy was spent.

One time it occurred to me that no matter how beautiful the house was, how amazingly tasty the food was, even if the whole meal was done cooking at the same time (yeah, sometimes we ate in stages), it meant nothing if my family had to suffer through my anxious stress responses.

I realized that delicious food around a fretful table makes for terrible digestion. I realized that no one notices a beautiful home if they are afraid of getting in the way. I realized tears of frustration drown merriment, and that I thought I was being a good hostess but really was letting my insecurities run the show.

I was trying to make the holidays Instagram worthy—perfect and balanced and staged-- instead of Polaroid worthy—unself-conscious, unpretentious, and just capturing a moment of fun.

So, I changed my ways. I made things easy on me, tried to stay calm and upbeat even when the oven quit on Thanksgiving. I realized that those who are judging my house and food are going to judge me anyway, but those who love me just want sweet, happy, calm me filled with loving and laughter and rest.

Those people are the people I want to pour into and love on. The Judgy McJudgersons will scowl and mock and turn up their noses because deep down they are unhappy for reasons that a perfect pumpkin pie can't fix. If my being calm and loving helps them to feel safer and happier, great! If my being calm and loving irritates the living mess out of them (because honestly some folk want drama)… well, let's just say I will get a secret, perverse sort of satisfaction from not playing the game that I will probably have to repent of at some point.

Has this change in attitude made my turkey cook any more quickly or the decorations get up in better time? Well, actually… sometimes… yes. But even if it didn't, even if the spätzle was done at 10 a.m. and the turkey still needed another hour and a half, even if the kitchen is a mess and my face isn't on when the guests ring the bell, it's okay because the people who love me really want a real, authentic, relaxed, laid back, easy-like-Sunday-morning holiday with a real, authentic, relaxed, laid back, easy-like-Sunday-morning mom.

So, let's aim for a holiday that's homemade with love. Let's ball up stress and anxiety like that gross, germy, slimy, drippy torn bag the raw turkey came in and throw them out of the house before anyone gets up in the morning. Let's say our prayers, roll up our sleeves, and then -- with utmost determination -- just… sit down and have a nice cup of cocoa while we breathe deep and enjoy the moment. Let's not wait for someone to ask to help but say with a smile, "Hey my fabulous <sweetie, kid, neighbor> can you chop the onions/load the dishwasher/tidy the living room for me?" and then let them do it however they do it without correcting them or hovering. Let's have a package of ready-to-bake cookies in the fridge that we can toss in the oven for a distraction in case we need a few more minutes to change our clothes or for the turkey to finish.

Let's give our people and ourselves what we need. We want perfection, we need less pressure. We want praise, we need rest. We want to make the judgers stop judging (they probably won't), we need to take care of those who love us, including ourselves. We want Instagram, we need Polaroid.

My amazing Limestonian neighbors, I hope you have a very blessed and restful Polaroid Thanksgiving.



Explore The Aerospace Systems Management Program

by Dr. Wayne McCain,
Athens State University



continued from page 1

Management (ASM), and it is offered locally by Athens State University which is partnering with Wallace State University and Calhoun Community College for pilot training and design/manufacturing respectively. The next semester will be starting in spring of 2027.

While aviation and space systems management have a good deal of crossover, the industries are looking for people who are highly trained both in the overlap as well as the distinct components of each. Topics of study are as varied, such as Aviation Law, Airport Management, Space Law and Treaties, Rocket Propulsion, Aircraft and Spacecraft Risk Management, Mission Planning and Control, Aerodynamics, and much more, depending on whether the Aviation or Space Concentration is chosen. The mission is to *build the leadership and systems perspectives that keep both aviation and space moving forward.*

A Degree Built Around Complex Aerospace Systems - Aviation and space organizations operate through interconnected systems: people, technology, regulations, suppliers, budgets, safety processes, data, and mission objectives. The professionals who understand those connections can help teams coordinate and support the success of the entire enterprise.

What The ASM Program Brings Together - The B.S. in Aerospace Systems Management combines business leadership with aerospace systems-focused coursework. The university highlights aerospace systems, engineering concepts, mathematics, design, analytics, aviation management, and space systems. The program is designed with transfer students and working professionals in mind.

Why The Systems Management Perspective Matters - Aerospace work is multidisciplinary. A program, fleet, airport, maintenance operation, launch activity, or satellite mission depends on coordinated planning, risk controls, resource allocation, compliance, communication, and performance measurement. ASM is positioned around that organizational and systems-level perspective rather than one narrowly defined technical license.

Why The Aerospace Matters - The ASM program emphasizes regional high-technology growth and the need for professionals who can work across aviation, space, manufacturing, and management environments.

Global Aviation Workforce Outlook - Boeing's 2026 Pilot and Technician Outlook estimates that the global commercial aviation industry will need approximately 674,000 new pilots and 728,000 new maintenance technicians over the 20 years through 2045. This is a global industry forecast, not a forecast of hiring in or of ASM-specific vacancies. Space systems opportunities also abound in our area.

The Takeaway: Aerospace is a substantial regional and global economic sector, with ongoing demand across technical, operational, and leadership functions. Employment forecasts are indicators of industry conditions -- not guarantees of a job, salary, and return on tuition.

Important Career-planning Distinctions

- **Pilot careers:** The BLS states that pilots must meet FAA requirements; airline pilots generally need flight experience and typically progress through commercial or military flying roles.
- **Aircraft maintenance:** Technician work often requires specialized postsecondary training and may require FAA-approved pathways or certification. ASM should not be presented as a substitute for an A&P certificate.
- **Space Systems roles:** planning, hardware manufacturing management, spacecraft assembly, integration and test, among many others.
- **Engineering roles:** The ASM program includes engineering concepts, but the degree is not an ABET-accredited engineering degree.
- **A practical way to use the degree:** Pair it with existing aviation, military, manufacturing, space hardware, technical, or project experience and then target roles where systems knowledge and management capability are valued.

Designed For Transfer Students And Working Adults

Athens State is an **upper-division university** serving junior, senior, and graduate-level students. Its institutional model is oriented toward people completing or advancing a degree while balancing work, family, and other responsibilities. The university ASM coursework is offered online, supporting flexible participation.

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The View From The Bridge

Holding Onto God's Unchanging Hand: *The Unexpected Gift Of Spreading Joy*

by Jackie Warner

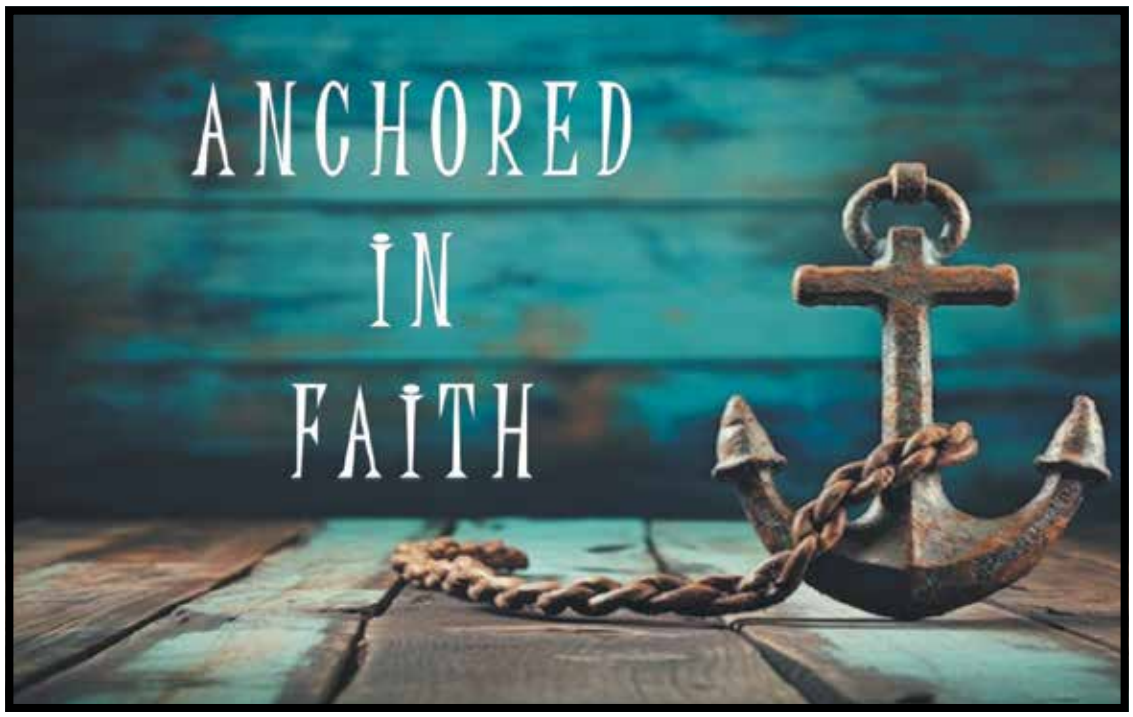
Career Development Facilitator
"Impact, Engage, Grow" Community Matters

Life has a remarkable way of weaving our stories together in ways we never see coming. When people enter our lives and share their hearts, their memories, and their love with us, we rarely grasp the full weight of those moments while we are living in them. Often, it is only later—sometimes years down the road—that we look back and recognize the unmistakable hand of God orchestrating every connection.

When someone we love leaves this earth, the ache of their absence can feel overwhelming. Yet, God has a way of leaving behind living legacies, threads of love and grace that continue to bless us long after a goodbye. Stepping into the life of someone a dear friend cherished, whether it is an aging parent, a family member, or a neighbor, is a sacred reminder that love does not end; it simply finds new vessels through which to flow. Seeing the joy, vitality, and faith of an elder who still lifts their voice in praise and embraces every day is a living testimony to a life anchored in grace.

As we move through the holiday season and into the everyday rhythms of life, we are called not just to look for cheer, but to be the cheer. Joy is rarely found in grand gestures alone; it lives in the quiet, intentional choices we make each day:

- **Listen closely:** Everyone carries a story, a memory, or a quiet burden. Giving someone your undivided attention tells them they are seen, valued, and loved.
- **Observe with compassion:** Look past the busyness of the season to notice who might need a warm smile, a phone call, a shared meal, or simply a reminder that they are not alone.
- **Show up consistently:** Love is spelled t-i-m-e. Making room for the people God places on your timeline—especially our elders—builds bridges of gratitude that bless the giver just as much as the receiver.



Anchors of Joy and Faith

When life feels unpredictable, Scripture reminds us where our true strength and joy come from, and how we are called to share that light with others:

- **Proverbs 17:22** — Remind yourself of the healing power of a joyful spirit. Scripture teaches that a cheerful heart brings good medicine to the soul, lifting both your own spirit and the atmosphere around you.
- **Romans 15:13** — Lean into the source of all peace. The Word prays that the God of hope will fill believers with all joy and peace as they trust in Him, so that they may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:11** — Make encouragement a daily habit. We are called to encourage one another and build each other up, recognizing that a kind word spoken in love can carry someone through their hardest season.
- **Galatians 6:9–10** — Stay faithful in doing good. Scripture urges us not to grow weary in doing what is right, reminding us that whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially those in the family of faith.

You never truly know what tomorrow holds or who God will place along your path next. The very person you pause to encourage today could become a cherished blessing in your own life tomorrow. Keep your heart open, pay attention to the gentle nudges of grace, and continue to pour out kindness wherever you go.

Hold tightly to God's unchanging hand—He sees the whole picture, He orders your steps, and He has got you!



Friday, November 20th is the Grand Opening Of Market On East: *Featuring Pepper's Porch & Riff Raff*

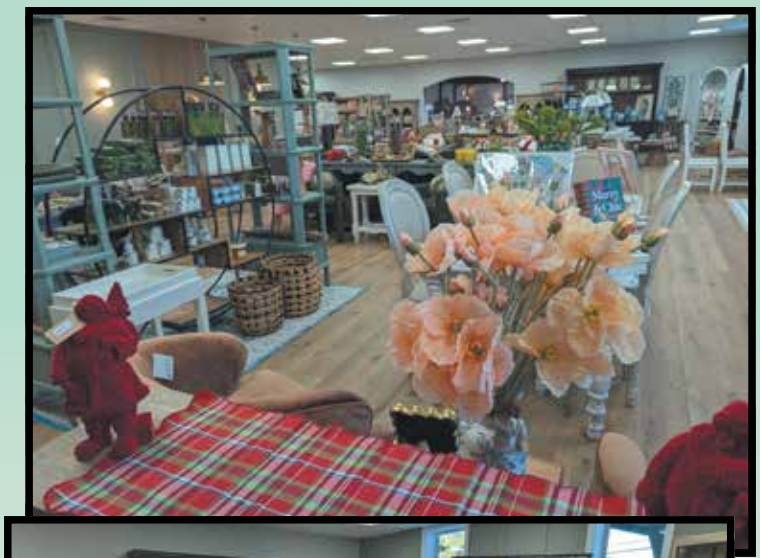
By Ali Elizabeth Turner

continued from page 1

clothing for the people of North Alabama. Joel is an entrepreneur's entrepreneur; his family started Champion Chevrolet and Joel worked in the family business for several years. The "Chevy Guy" became a children's clothing line expert. Eventually they moved the Grasshopper on to the Courthouse Square in Athens, and then they sold it when their kids were teens.

Soon, meeting a personal need in a cool way surfaced again. Joel is a guitarist and owns several different types of guitars. He couldn't find something well-made and aesthetically pleasing in which to store his instruments. He went to a furniture show in Tupelo looking for a brand that would meet his standards, and literally as the show was closing, he discovered a beautifully built line and became an exclusive rep. The Hamms opened the first Riff Raff Furniture and Home Décor in the present location of Toodlebugs. "Riff Raff" is an affectionate nod to '80s rock. Soon they outgrew that location and moved to the historic downtown Athens store at the corner of Clinton and Washington. That store has served them well, and another need arose. The doors in the historic building are not big enough to handle large pieces and suites, and Joel was also aware that East Limestone is growing like gangbusters. So, he purchased land on East Limestone and built a store that meets their needs as well as those of the residents in East Limestone. By the way, Sharma is a Pepper, and that's where "Pepper's Porch" originated.

Now, remember the little girl that grew up being dressed in clothes from the Grasshopper? Well, her name is Ragan, and all her life when her parents had the other stores, she dreamed of having a store of her own. "I played and pretended that I had a store," she told me. That dream has come to pass, and Ragan and her dad are under the same roof at Market on East. Joel has Riff Raff, Ragan has Pepper's Porch, and there will be more to come. On the day we did this interview, Ragan's wedding was a little more than 24 hours away, and Ragan was dealing with "bride jitters" in a most productive manner—by taking care of customers. On that day, Market on East and the stores housed therein had been open for about two weeks, and even though the grand opening was still waiting in the wings, there was a steady stream of enthusiastic patrons the entire time I was there. The first thing that the father of the bride told me is that Ragan gets her creativity from her mama. "And her business instincts from you?" He didn't quite roll his eyes, but he wanted me to make sure that everyone knew about the "Sharma-creative" part of his daughter's being. Ragan's last name is now Thomasson as of two weeks ago, and she was one gorgeous bride!









Here is what you will encounter when you come to Pepper's Porch and Riff Raff. First of all, you will be greeted warmly and treated with respect, and that will be the case if you are buying a candle or a couch. Pepper's Porch is high quality home décor and gifts, with the emphasis on what Ragan and Joel both described as "things you won't find anywhere else." Riff Raff has spoken for itself as a source of excellent furniture for over a decade, and the store is large, bright, airy and welcoming.

As a throwback to her childhood, Ragan has a corner armoire that has children's clothing, accessories, and a few books, and she can order anything you may need. She laughed when she said, "I couldn't help myself. I just had to have something for kids." I also discovered that melamine dishes are no longer light green things that look like the abused, inverted frisbees of old. The sets are gorgeous and look like they are made of ceramic.

Coming soon, as in the 1st of the year, Market on East is going to open another "store-within-the-store." For now it is a secret, but soon we'll have even more to look forward to!

In the meantime, be sure to make plans to attend the Grand Opening on Friday, November 20th, from 10-4 and experience what happens when a family puts its hearts and heads together to create and curate something truly special!

Market On East, Featuring Pepper's Porch and Riff Raff Home Décor

15151 East Limestone Rd, Harvest AL 35749 (just south of East Limestone High School)

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Facebook: Pepper's Porch Athens AL

riffraffhomedecor.com



Captain's Log

Biggest Bus Turnaround

by Brenda Wilkerson



Since the very beginning of the school year, there's been a particularly large and angry fifth-grader who didn't think the rules applied to him and often bullied other kids. After I gave him several chances to self-correct, I'd had my fill of his disrespectful behavior toward me and the other kids, so I wrote him up. I told admin I was concerned about how he treated me and the rest of the kids. Both the principal and vice-principal took the report very seriously and had a "Come-to-Jesus" talk with this young man. He was then assigned the very front seat of the bus until further notice.

His behavior and demeanor have improved a lot over the last two weeks. That earned him a pass to sit with his friends on Fridays from now on, as long as there are no more incidents and the improvement continues. Last Friday was his first time sitting with his friends since he got in trouble, and before the route was over, he was asking to come sit up front again.

This morning, after picking up the last student, I grabbed my mic and started talking to the kids about possible jobs for the "juniors and seniors" on my bus (my 4th and 5th graders). I opened the floor for discussion about what jobs we needed and who would be a good fit. The jobs suggested were typical things: the Nurse, the Babysitter for the pre-K, the Garbage Taker Out-er, the Magnet Mayor (who puts fallen magnets back on the walls by the pre-K seats), the Pop Topper (who pop open the bus's roof hatches for ventilation between routes), the Body Checker (who makes sure no one is asleep or left behind), the Bus Secretaries (who help limit my distractions and answer the endless questions and requests when hands go up), and so on.

But there was one more suggestion: the Chaplain. The Prayer Warrior. The one who would start our day with a few requests and heartfelt gratitude. The kids had several ideas of what to pray for, like safe travels, our families, our teachers, clear heads so we can focus, and thanks that He woke us up this morning.

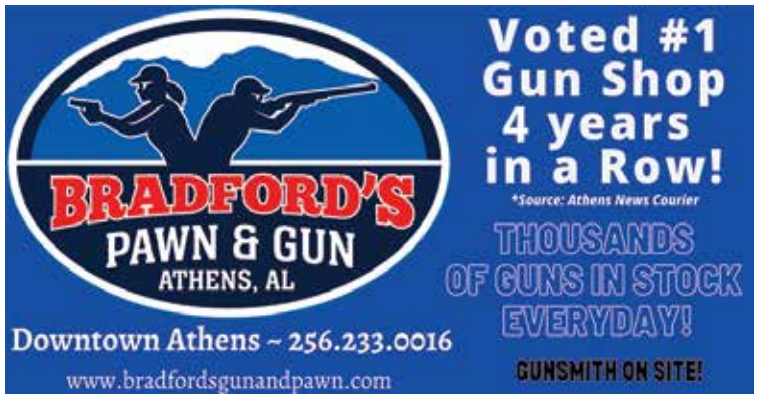
But when I asked who wanted that job, there was a long, silent pause. Then I saw it. My little angry man in the front seat slowly lifted his head. His dreads parted, and his once-angry eyes stared back at me in the big rearview mirror. He raised his hand just high enough to be noticed and gave me a solid nod. My face didn't flinch, but my heart skipped a beat as I watched and felt this precious soul transform in real time. When I asked if he'd like to start his job today, his face lit up and he nodded yes.

Since he was in the front row, the spiral microphone cord reached him easily. Y'all. He took that mic in his hands and said the sweetest, most sincere prayer I've heard in a long time. "Heavenly Father..." he began. The kids were quiet as church mice, heads bowed in respect. When he said, "Amen," the whole belly of the bus answered with a hearty "Amen!" and everyone started clapping and cheering.

As my preacher dad used to say, "If that don't light your fire, your wood is wet!" May your day be full of kindness and gratitude. I know mine already was by 7:05 a.m.!

Brenda







McGhee On Management

The Power Of Giving Thanks

by Detri McGhee - *CLU, ChFC*



Those people who want to get rid of Christmas are called Grinches. I suppose I might be called a BOO-Humbug! Or, perhaps call me a Boo-Buster. It is Halloween I would like to see disappear. I have never liked the idea of scaring children or dressing up like evil creatures.

Personally, I wish all the hoopla of Halloween would be displaced by a greater Thanksgiving. What an exciting time it could be if people spent that much time, energy, thought, and $$money$$ preparing each member of the family to spend a whole day acting extravagantly to display thankfulness and joy and gratitude.

Just imagine what an exciting and memorable time that could be! What if, for the days before, and especially the day of our newly expanded and focused season, we thought of as many things as possible to be thankful for?

Of course, there are the obvious. But what about running water? Clean, safe, hot and cold running water? Most of us have that. How often do we thank God for that?

How about clothes? Coats? Aspirin? Shoes? Kleenex? Heaters? TP? I may be wrong, but I'm thinking that those of you reading this have plenty of those things to meet all your needs, and an abundance of most of it to cover your wants. Do you have at least one person in your life who treasures you? How about a job? Friends, other family, a vehicle, electronics? Can you read? Write? Communicate? Can you talk, smile, cry and feel? Can you think? Can you move freely?

Suggestion: Today… Just TODAY… when tempted to let complaints, gripes, negative and grumbly thoughts pass from your brain through your lips and into someone else's space… JUST TODAY… take your Nike's off and "Just Don't Do it!"

Research suggests that our attitudes and actions have a direct effect on our physical and mental health. Positive attitudes and thoughts aid in beneficial sleep habits, clearer and more productive thought patterns, and the establishment of more pleasant and profitable relationships with others, whether at work, home, rest, or play.

It takes a lot of positives to offset one negative. So, a great start in developing a more thankful attitude is to STOP! Stop the negative. Then, each positive has an even greater benefit to the giver and recipient. Again: Choice.

In I Thessalonians 5:18 (WEB) it says "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you." IN EVERYTHING! Yes, everything. In Christ, we can give thanks in the midst of anything and everything that comes into our life. We aren't told to give thanks FOR everything. Some hard things wouldn't be in our life at all if all of us lived for Christ. However, whatever we are called to experience in this life, if we are God's children, He is with us in and through it, and we can find things that we choose to give thanks for, even in the bleakest trials. Once again: Choice.

Thanksgiving is a very special holiday. Giving thanks can be a 365-24/7 gift we give ourselves. It is a gift that spills over and blesses those around us. It is a CHOICE we can make every day. What will you choose for your walk today? I'm thankful for you.

Detri L. McGhee would love to hear from you.
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Clean, Green And Beautiful

In Bloom

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

The streets of downtown Athens received a fresh splash of color as the Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful (KALB) Beautification Committee recently teamed up with students from the Limestone County Career Technical Center's Advanced Agriculture class to give the downtown flower pots their seasonal makeover.

This partnership is a wonderful example of how community organizations and local schools can work together to make Limestone County a more beautiful place while providing students with valuable hands-on learning experiences.

As the seasons change, so do the flowers and plants that brighten the downtown streets. The students and Beautification Committee volunteers worked together to remove the beautiful, overflowing potato vines and other seasonal plants that had filled the pots throughout the warmer months. Rather than simply discarding these plants, the students carefully collected them to take back to the school's greenhouse, where they will be propagated and grown for use in next year's plantings. This not only makes good use of the existing plants but also teaches students about plant propagation, sustainability, and the importance of making the most of available resources.

Once the summer plants were removed, the work of preparing the pots for fall and winter began. Students helped distribute fresh soil, pansies, snapdragons, and dusty miller among the downtown planters. They also assisted with distributing fertilizer and making sure each pot received plenty of water to help the new plants establish healthy roots and flourish throughout the cooler months.

The transformation is a team effort, with students working alongside Beautification Committee volunteers to ensure each pot is properly planted and ready to brighten the downtown area. Their hard work and enthusiasm play an important role in keeping downtown Athens welcoming and attractive for residents, business owners, and visitors.

The partnership with Ms. Lauren Graham and her Advanced Agriculture students has become an especially valuable part of KALB's beautification efforts. Students are involved in much more than planting flowers. They research appropriate seasonal plants, work in the greenhouse to grow flowers from seed and propagate plants from previous seasons, organize planting days, and coordinate the students and supplies needed to complete each project. Their involvement gives them an opportunity to apply classroom knowledge in a real-world setting while making a visible difference in their community.



Just as importantly, growing and reusing plants through the school's greenhouse program helps reduce the cost of downtown plantings. Those savings allow the Beautification Committee to stretch its resources further and support additional beautification projects throughout Limestone County.

Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful is grateful to Ms. Graham and her students for their continued dedication, creativity, and willingness to lend a helping hand. Their efforts demonstrate that beautification is about more than flowers in a pot. It is about community pride, environmental responsibility, education, and partnerships that make a lasting difference.

The next time you stroll through downtown Athens and admire the colorful pansies, cheerful snapdragons, and silvery dusty miller, remember the students whose hard work helped make it happen. Their contributions are helping downtown Athens bloom, one flower pot at a time!



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Slinkard On Scriptural Success

Thanksgiving Is More Than A Holiday

by D. A. Slinkard

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

Every year, as November rolls around, Americans begin preparing for one of our most beloved holidays—Thanksgiving. Families make plans to gather, grocery stores become crowded, turkeys find their way into ovens, and tables are filled with more food than most of us could possibly eat in one sitting. I find myself wondering if we have somehow lost sight of what Thanksgiving is really supposed to be about.

After all, Thanksgiving should be more than a holiday we celebrate. It ought to be an attitude we demonstrate. The Bible tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

The Bible does not say to give thanks only when everything is going well. It does not say to give thanks only when the bills are paid, the family is healthy, the job is secure, and life is comfortable. Instead, we are instructed to give thanks in everything.

This is certainly easier said than done! It is easy to be thankful when the fridge is full, the bank account has money in it, and life is going our way. What happens when life does not go our way? Bad health report, losing someone we love, financial difficulties, or facing circumstances we never imagined?

There is a tremendous difference between being thankful FOR everything and being thankful IN everything. We may not be thankful for the sickness, the heartbreak, the disappointment, or the difficulties that come our way. However, even in those circumstances, we can still find reasons to give thanks.

Perhaps one of the greatest problems in our society today is that we have become so focused on what we do not have that we have forgotten to appreciate what we do have. We need to change our focus and in doing so, we can change our lives. Sometimes, the very things we complain about are the things someone else is praying to receive.

If we are not careful, we can become so consumed with wanting more that we stop being thankful for enough. I wonder how often we are guilty of doing the very same thing. We pray for God to provide, and when He does, we quickly move on to the next thing we want. We pray for protection, yet rarely stop to thank Him for the dangers we never encountered. We pray for another day of life, yet sometimes live that day as though it were owed to us.

The truth is, we are often much quicker to ask God for something than we are to thank Him for what He has already given us. As we approach Thanksgiving this year, I want to encourage you to do something that costs absolutely nothing but could change your entire outlook on life.

Take some time to count your blessings and name them one by one… not just the big blessings, but the little ones we so often overlook. The ability to get out of bed in the morning. The opportunity to spend time with family. The friendships we enjoy. The freedoms we possess. The memories we have made. The prayers God has answered.

And above all, let us remember the greatest gift ever given to mankind—the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Romans 6:23 reminds us, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

That is a gift that no amount of money can purchase, no good works can earn, and no earthly circumstances can take away from those who have trusted Christ as their Savior. This Thanksgiving, enjoy the turkey. Enjoy the dressing. Enjoy the fellowship, the laughter, and perhaps even a little football.

But when the leftovers are put away, the company has gone home, and another Thanksgiving Day has come and gone, don't let your gratitude disappear with it. A thankful heart should not be something we bring out once a year, like the Thanksgiving decorations. It should be something we carry with us every single day, because the happiest people in life are not necessarily those who have the most. Very often, they are simply those who have learned to appreciate what they already have. Perhaps this Thanksgiving, instead of asking ourselves what more we want out of life, we ought to ask a much better question, "Have I thanked God today for what He has already given me?"

Happy Thanksgiving, and may God bless you and your family!





Learning As A Lifestyle

Gratitude: *More Than Sentimentality*

by Eric Betts

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

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. frequently challenged the tendency to reduce love to mere sentimentality. For King, love was not simply an affectionate feeling or an emotional attachment to others. It was a moral force that demanded action, responsibility, and a commitment to the well-being of humanity. Love was not merely something to be expressed in words, but something to be demonstrated through the way we live and engage the world. I would suggest that gratitude should be understood in much the same way.

We often associate gratitude with warm feelings of appreciation, expressions of thankfulness, and reflections upon the blessings of life. Particularly during the Thanksgiving season, gratitude becomes a familiar theme in our conversations, gatherings, and religious observances.

There is certainly nothing wrong with these expressions. However, when gratitude is reduced to sentimentality, we risk overlooking its deeper significance and transformative possibilities.

Gratitude is not only an emotion to be experienced, but a disposition that should shape how we perceive the world, understand ourselves, relate to others, and respond to our responsibilities within the human community.

Extending beyond appreciating the pleasant experiences of life, gratitude deepens our awareness of what remains good, gracious, and possible amid suffering, injustice, and the imperfections of the world. Rather than limiting our attention to what we have received, gratitude broadens our appreciation of life and our responsibilities within it, yet this heightened awareness also sharpens our sensitivity to the suffering of others. Our appreciation of kindness makes us more attentive to cruelty; our experience of generosity helps us recognize deprivation; and our awareness of human dignity makes us more conscious of the circumstances that diminish it. In this vein, gratitude is not simply an appreciation of goodness, but a consciousness shaped by goodness.

In profound ways, gratitude invites us to become more attentive to the possibilities for goodness, generosity, and meaningful human relationships that remain present even amid those difficulties.

I would like to offer four reflections on gratitude that move us beyond sentimentality: perception, humility, interdependence, and responsibility.

Gratitude Shapes Our Perception

Gratitude begins with how we see the world. Our circumstances do not always change simply because we become grateful, but gratitude can change how we perceive those circumstances.

There is no shortage of suffering, injustice, disappointment, and uncertainty in our world. We need only turn on the evening news to be reminded of the difficulties confronting humanity. Yet if our attention becomes consumed entirely by what is wrong, we may lose sight of what remains good, gracious, and possible.

Gratitude widens our vision. It enables us to recognize acts of kindness amid hostility, generosity amid selfishness, and possibilities amid uncertainty. It does not demand that we become indifferent to injustice. Instead, it reminds us that the world's difficulties do not exhaust the world's possibilities.

A grateful person can acknowledge that much remains wrong with the world while also recognizing that much remains worth preserving, celebrating, and improving.

Gratitude Cultivates Humility

One of the great temptations of personal achievement is the assumption that we are entirely responsible for our own success. We sometimes hear people describe themselves as self-made, suggesting that their accomplishments are exclusively the products of their determination, discipline, and hard work. Certainly, personal effort matters. Discipline, perseverance, and sacrifice deserve recognition. But none of us is entirely self-made.

Somebody taught us how to tie our shoes. Somebody helped us learn to read. Somebody offered encouragement when we doubted ourselves. Somebody opened a door, provided an opportunity, shared a word of wisdom, or simply smiled when we needed reassurance. Even those who have overcome extraordinary obstacles have benefited, in ways both visible and invisible, from the contributions of others.

Gratitude reminds us that our accomplishments do not exist independently of the people who helped shape our lives. This recognition does not diminish our achievements. It places them within a larger human story.

Humility, therefore, is not thinking less of ourselves. It is recognizing that our lives have been enriched by people whose contributions deserve acknowledgment.

Gratitude Reveals Our Interdependence

The African philosophical concept of Ubuntu is often expressed through the affirmation, "I am because we are." At the heart of this understanding is the recognition that human beings do not exist as isolated individuals. Our identities, opportunities, and well-being are profoundly connected to the lives of others.

When we understand that our lives are connected, we become less inclined to regard the accomplishments of others as threats to our own significance. Someone else's success does not diminish our worth. Another person's recognition does not take away our dignity. We do not need to make someone else small in order to feel big.

Imagine how our communities, workplaces, churches, and institutions might change if we learned to celebrate the achievements of others without resentment or insecurity. Gratitude encourages us to move beyond the narrow boundaries of individual accomplishment toward a broader appreciation of our shared humanity.

Our lives are woven together in ways that we do not always recognize. The well-being of our neighbors, colleagues, families, and communities is inseparable from the quality of the world we inhabit together.

Gratitude Inspires Responsibility

Finally, gratitude should move beyond appreciation toward responsibility.

If we recognize that others have contributed to our lives, then gratitude invites us to consider how we might contribute to the lives of others. This responsibility should not arise from guilt or a sense of indebtedness that can never be repaid. Rather, it emerges from a gracious recognition that what we have received places us in a position to extend generosity, encouragement, and opportunity to someone else.

Someone opened a door for us. Perhaps we can open a door for another person. Someone offered encouragement when we needed it. Perhaps we can become that encouraging voice for someone else.

I often think of this responsibility through the image of a ladder. As we climb toward our goals and aspirations, we should remember those who helped steady the ladder beneath us. And when we reach a higher place, we should not simply pull the ladder up behind us. We should hold it steady so that others can climb.

This is gratitude expressed through action. It is appreciation translated into service and personal achievement transformed into relational opportunity.

Beyond Sentimentality

Gratitude is too important to be confined to a holiday, a dinner table, or a moment of reflection. It is a disposition that can shape how we see the world, how we understand ourselves, how we relate to others, and how we respond to the needs of our communities. It widens our perception, cultivates humility, reveals our interdependence, and inspires responsibility.

Just as love cannot be reduced to sentimental expressions of affection, gratitude cannot be reduced to occasional expressions of thankfulness. Both find their deeper meaning in the ways they shape our relationships and responsibilities toward others.

Perhaps the greatest expression of gratitude is not simply saying thank you for what we have received, but living in such a way that someone else will one day have reason to be thankful that our lives crossed theirs.

Eric M. Betts, PhD

Curtis Coleman Center for Religion, Leadership and Culture

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The Alternative Approach

The Foot Detox

by Roy P. Williams

Ionic foot detox has become one of the most talked-about wellness therapies because so many people are feeling overwhelmed in their bodies. We are living in a world of constant exposure—environmental toxins, chronic stress, inflammatory foods, poor sleep, and nonstop stimulation of the nervous system.

As a result, people are no longer looking for harsh cleanses or aggressive detox programs that leave them exhausted or depleted. Instead, they are seeking gentle, supportive ways to help their bodies reset, calm the nervous system, and restore balance.

During a session, your feet are placed in warm water while an array introduces a gentle electrical current. This process ionizes the water, creating a relaxing environment that interacts with the nervous and circulatory systems. The feet are uniquely suited for this type of therapy—they are rich in nerve endings, blood vessels, and reflexive connections that communicate directly with the brain and body.

A typical ionic foot detox session begins with a warm water foot bath. Warm water alone has a calming effect on the nervous system, signaling the body that it is safe to relax. Your feet are then placed comfortably in the basin, and a specially designed array is positioned in the water. This array is what allows the system to gently interact with the water and the body.

During the session, patients commonly report sensations such as deep relaxation, gentle warmth, mild tingling, or an overall sense of calm. Ionic foot detox sessions often have a powerful calming effect on the nervous system, helping shift the body out of fight-or-flight and into a rest-and-repair state, causing the healing process' function to become more effective.

What Is the Discoloration in the Water?

This is, without question, the most common and most misunderstood aspect of ionic foot detox. Many people focus on the changing color of the water and wonder, "Is that coming from my body?" It's an important question, and it deserves an honest and transparent answer.

The discoloration seen during a session is influenced by several factors, including:





• Ionization reactions created by the electrical current interacting with the water

• Environmental minerals naturally present in the water

• Sweat and skin interaction from the feet during the session

• Discoloration may be due to specific toxins leaving the body; however, water color alone is not a diagnostic tool and should never be used to determine toxicity levels or health conditions.

The value of ionic foot detox is not only about "pulling toxins out," it is also about supporting the nervous system, circulation, and lymphatic flow. In this state, digestion improves, circulation increases, and detox pathways function more efficiently. Calm is not a luxury—it is a requirement for healing.

Perhaps one of the most immediate benefits clients notice is stress reduction. The calming effect on both the body and mind can support better sleep, clearer thinking, and a sense of lightness after sessions. Stress is one of the biggest barriers to healing, and reducing it creates space for recovery at every level.

Ionic foot detox is not a replacement for the body's primary detox organs. Your liver, kidneys, gut, and lymphatic system do the real work of detoxification every single day. No external therapy can replace their function, and we never suggest that it should. Ionic foot detox is designed to support these systems indirectly by calming the nervous system and improving circulation—not to override or bypass natural physiology.

It is also not a standalone treatment for disease. Detox therapies should never be used in isolation or positioned as a cure. There are specific cleansers for colon, kidneys, and liver which Herbs & More can help you with. (No charge for their suggestions) Healing is multi-layered and highly individual. Herbs & More also uses Electro Dermal Screening to help get to the root cause of problems.

Ionic foot detox is best understood as a supportive tool within a broader integrative plan. With that said, many individuals experience noticeable results in just 1 or 2 sessions without making any other changes.

This therapy may be supportive for:

• Individuals experiencing chronic stress or fatigue, especially when nervous system overload is present

• Patients with inflammatory or autoimmune conditions who need support without immune suppression

• Those sensitive to aggressive detox programs, supplements, or cleanses

• Patients beginning a functional medicine or functional nutrition plan, as a way to gently support transition

• Athletes and high performers needing recovery, circulation support, and nervous system regulation

• Adults and children who respond best to calming, low-stress therapies

Taking small steps in the right direction can make huge differences. Foot Detox is one of those steps. Book an appointment today by calling Abbie at 256-233-0073. You will be glad you did.

Your Friend in Health,

Roy P. Williams



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GenZ With JP

2026 Election Results Call For Us To Get Our House In Order

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

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?" (Matthew 8:23-27)

As the dust has settled from the midterm elections, many on the right have jumped to blaming and infighting. Others have resorted to hopelessness and pessimism. However, I want to offer a different solution. One that is set on the solid foundation of truth: Jesus Christ. Because no matter the result of an election, the one whom the winds and seas obey still sits on the throne.

I used to sort of scoff whenever I heard that phrase. "No matter the result, we know who's on the throne." Not that I ever disagreed with the statement itself; rather, I saw it as an excuse for Christians to remove themselves from the political process. A sort of blissful ignorance of the importance of what takes place around you. Ironically, that phrase is exactly where I landed after the 2026 midterms, but not from a place of withdrawal, but of engagement.

Our Founding Fathers built our entire political system around rugged individualism. The idea is that God Almighty granted each and every individual certain unalienable rights, and it is the responsibility of each individual to govern themselves and protect those rights rather than a secular government. This inherently requires each individual to be strong and have their own house in order for it to work. John Adams famously stated, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." This is a call to action for us, the sons and daughters of our great Founding Fathers, to be strong and preserve our republic.

My high school football coach, while we would watch film from the game before on a Monday afternoon, would find a play where one of us would leave our spot during the play to do somebody else's job, and say, "Plott, take a look at your chest." I'd look down, and he'd say, "You see an "S" on it?" "No, sir," I'd reply. "That's because you ain't Superman, son. Quit trying to do everybody else's job, and just do your own."

We often exaggerate our ability to fix everything. If we just do everything right, get one more friend to the polls, or get one more soundbite out there, then we'll win. However, we are not God, and no matter what we do, His will shall be done. It's up to us whether we act according to that will or not.

For us conservatives, two weeks ago came across as a punch in the gut. It's easy to throw your hands up and quit after such a resounding result, and think that God doesn't have our back and that everything is meaningless. On the contrary. God knew the result, and it was in his will for that to happen. Perhaps it's to give the nation a wake-up call to return to him by letting those who hate him come into power for a brief period. None of us know, and it's not our job to know.

It is our job, however, to have our house in order. It's not only a call by our Founding Fathers, but by God himself.

"Thus says the Lord: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover" (Isaiah 38:1).

The takeaway from the 2026 elections is to get your own house in order, be strong, and do your job. Get right with God, get in his word. Take care of your family, take care of yourself. Be the best you can be, and be the moral and religious people that Adams referenced. If each and every one of us does our job, the rest will handle itself.

You can't make the person next to you do that; you can't control the result of an election. All you can do is what God calls you to do, and he will see exactly that. Our reward is not here on Earth, but in heaven.

Yes, Jesus Christ still reigns. Your job doesn't change after the midterms; it actually just got reinforced. There's no "S" on your chest; you're not Superman, but you can become your own Superman in Christ. Don't fall back; march forward, and do your job.



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.

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Cooking with Anna (continued from page 9)



A Heart Of Thanksgiving: *Living With Gratitude Every Day*

by Anna Hamilton

be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Notice that Scripture doesn't tell us to wait until every problem is solved before we become thankful. It encourages us to bring our concerns to God with grateful hearts.

We can be thankful while we're waiting. We can praise Him while we're hurting. We can trust Him when the answers haven't come yet.

Thanksgiving doesn't mean pretending that life is easy or ignoring our struggles. It means choosing to believe that our struggles are never greater than the God who walks beside us.

Recognize God's goodness in the everyday things. In 1Timothy 4:4-5, we are reminded that everything God created is good and can be received with thanksgiving. "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer."

Sometimes the greatest blessings are found in the simplest moments. A beautiful sunrise, a conversation with someone we love, a meal on the table, another day to begin again, or the strength to make it through a difficult season.

We often wait for extraordinary blessings before we stop to give extraordinary praise. But perhaps we've been surrounded by God's goodness all along, hidden in the ordinary moments we sometimes take for granted. When we learn to recognize His hand in the everyday things, our hearts become more aware of just how blessed we truly are.

Make Thanksgiving a lifestyle. As we go through life, may we never allow gratitude to become something we practice only on Thanksgiving Day. Let it become part of who we are.

Let our prayers be filled with thankfulness. Let our words reflect appreciation. Let our hearts remember God's faithfulness. And when life doesn't look the way we hoped it would, may we still find a reason to praise Him.

We may not have everything we want, and we may still be waiting on some of the things we've prayed for, but we have a God who loves us, sustains us, forgives us, and never abandons us. That alone is reason enough to give thanks.

Today, don't just count your blessings. Take time to recognize the One who gave them. Because thanksgiving isn't simply something we do. It's an attitude of the heart, an expression of faith, and a beautiful reminder that no matter what season of life we find ourselves in, God is always worthy of our praise.

Lord, create in us hearts that are continually grateful. Help us recognize Your blessings in the big moments and the little ones. Teach us to praise You not only when life is good, but also when we're walking through difficult seasons. May our lives reflect a spirit of gratitude every single day. Amen.

This week's recipe is a delicious salad, that is perfect for your Thanksgiving get togethers. It offers a fun salad option to spruce up your decadent buffet spread. I hope you love it as much as my family does.

"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).





Health and Fitness

Your Health Deserves A Professional

by Nick Niedzwiecki - Owner, CrossFit Athens

When it comes to our health, we all want to make the right decisions. We visit doctors when we're sick, hire accountants to handle our finances, and trust trained professionals to help us navigate things we don't fully understand. But when it comes to exercise and nutrition, we often turn to social media, the latest fitness trends, or advice from someone who happens to look like they're in good shape.

Why do we treat our physical fitness any differently?

The fitness industry is full of opinions. Everyone seems to have the perfect workout, the best diet, or the secret to getting results. But looking fit and understanding how to help someone become healthier are two very different things.

At CrossFit Athens, fitness isn't something we simply enjoy doing. It's our profession, and we have invested years into developing the knowledge and experience necessary to coach others.

Our staff includes eight credentialed CrossFit coaches with more than 20 combined years of coaching experience. Two of those coaches hold the Certified CrossFit Trainer (Level 3) credential, with eight and six years of coaching experience respectively. Our other six coaches hold CrossFit Level 1 credentials, each bringing at least a year of experience to our team.

These qualifications matter.

The Level 3 certification is earned through a comprehensive examination that evaluates a coach's understanding of exercise science, programming, movement, and the principles of effective coaching. It also requires substantial practical coaching experience.

But qualifications alone don't make someone a great coach. The ability to apply that knowledge to real people is what matters most.

A 25-year-old looking to improve athletic performance doesn't need the same training approach as a 65-year-old wanting to maintain independence. Someone walking into a gym for the first time needs different guidance than someone who has exercised consistently for years.

A professional coach understands those differences.

At CrossFit Athens, we don't expect everyone to perform the same movements, lift the same weights, or work at the same intensity. We meet people where they are and build a path toward where they want to be.

Our programs are built around established principles of strength training, cardiovascular fitness, mobility, and sustainable habits. These are the same foundational areas emphasized by major public health organizations for improving long-term health.

We also recognize that exercise is only part of the equation. Accountability, consistency, nutrition, and having someone who genuinely understands your goals all contribute to long-term success.

There's no shortage of places to exercise or information telling you what to do. What isn't always easy to find is someone qualified to determine what's appropriate for you and guide you through the process.

We're not asking people to trust CrossFit Athens simply because we claim to know what we're doing. Our education, experience, and daily commitment to professional coaching are the evidence behind that claim.

Your health is one of the most valuable things you have. It deserves more than guesswork.

At CrossFit Athens, fitness isn't our hobby. It's our profession.

Coach Nick
Owner
CrossFit Athens
www.crossfitathens.com





From The Porch...

by Amy Hogan Clem

From the porch in mid-November, I can tell its Harvest time. Fragments of "white gold" are sprinkled along the roadways. I'm not talking about an element mixed with a metal or alloy---I'm talking about cotton! Alabama is one of the leading Southern states in cotton production with cotton being grown in 59 of its 67 counties. Limestone County is the number one cotton producing county in the state. Hunter Towe of Associated Growers Co-operative, Inc. in the Reid community was kind enough to host a tour of their facility for us recently. We were able to watch the ginning process from when a round bale is brought in from the field until the process is completed and the hulls are piled out on the yard to dry.

In real estate classes, students learn that there are many uses of land. We can use it to grow crops such as cotton, but we can also grow crops for food. This is done on a large scale for selling to others or a simple garden where we raise food to provide for our families. We can use land for building our homes; barns; commercial buildings such as shopping centers, medical facilities, factories, schools and universities; highways; railroads; airports; and more. Many times farms are sold to residential developers, factories close, and the land may be reused for a school and the like. While we can re-use, recycle, and re-develop land, there's one exception. When human remains are buried on a parcel of land, that is usually the final use of that property. However, there are rare exceptions.

In the late 1960s during the construction of Interstate 65 through Limestone County, crews unearthed the remains of 194 bodies in unmarked graves. These were thought to be former residents of Cottonport, Alabama, who likely succumbed to a malaria outbreak. According to the Limestone County Archives, the bodies were removed and reinterred in Hayden cemetery in New Hope, Alabama.

This story reminds me of the Scripture in Genesis 3:19 that tells us "…for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Maybe that explains why I have such an interest in dirt. Dirt, dust, soil, real estate… isn't it all the same thing? Didn't the first human actually begin as dust from the ground? We will explore this next time.

Looking Forward,

Amy Hogan Clem

While the gin at Reid is an ultra-modern facility, Cotton production is certainly not new to Limestone County. The town of Cottonport was serving the cotton industry here as early as 1818. Limestone Creek originated in Lincoln County, TN. It served as a means of transportation for cotton and other exports from near Taft, TN to the Tennessee River at what is known today as Mooresville, Alabama.



