

Jonesboro OCCASIONS

THE CITY MAGAZINE

JULY 2023
VOL. XX NO. 12

20TH ANNUAL
READERS' CHOICE

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SPECIAL SECTION
SELLING
JONESBORO

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photography and styling by Brittney Osborn

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RECOGNIZING JONESBORO'S BEST



Since 2004, *Occasions* has asked readers to weigh in on their favorite foods, people, places, artists, businesses, restaurants and more. Each July, we reveal the winners of our annual readers' choice poll. Our readers begin voting online in May, and after all votes have been tallied, winners are notified in June. The July issue marks the 20th consecutive year for our Readers' Choice Awards.

The *Occasions* staff has been honored to be a part of recognizing local businesses, services, venues, events and individuals who help make Jonesboro a better place. Whether you are in search of the best place for a romantic dinner in the city or the best venue for a celebration, our readers have weighed in, and we are pleased to announce this year's winners.

In celebration of this year's award winners, we asked *Occasions* Art Director Brittney Osborn to come up with a theme for this issue. She spent the next few weeks playing with Legos, designing colorful creations for the cover and inside the Readers' Choice section.

In addition to the complete list of winners in our 2023 Readers' Choice section, you'll find stories about local people, businesses and events in this issue. Read about a historic drive-in that is getting a second life thanks to its new owners; learn how one local couple began providing fresh, pesticide-free produce by creating a hydroponic greenhouse; and get a sneak peek at utility boxes that have been painted across the city as part of a local beautification effort spurred by a city employee.

As you read through the many winners recognized inside this issue, please remember to continue to support locally-owned businesses whenever possible. We are thankful for those who continue to invest their time, effort and resources in Jonesboro and hope you will find old favorites and new options among our list of Readers' Choice winners.

Whether it's the perfect place for a slice of pizza or the best place to shop for wedding gifts, we hope you will find a way to support more local businesses as we recognize this year's winners.

Congratulations to all!

Audrey Lott Poff, Publisher & Editor
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Jonesboro OCCASIONS

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OCCASIONS

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2023 HOME GAMES

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2023 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

IT'S TIME FOR

THE BIG REVEAL

PHOTOGRAPHY AND STYLING BY BRITTNEY OSBORN
 FEATURING LEGO CREATIONS BY DEREK AND BRITTNEY OSBORN AND MADALYN STANSBURY

The votes have been counted, and it's finally time to make the results of *Jonesboro Occasions'* 2023 Readers' Choice Awards official.

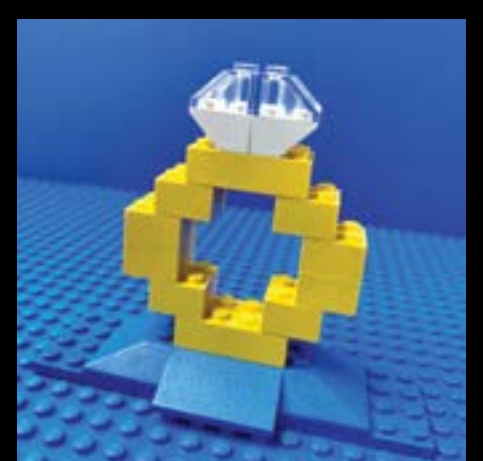
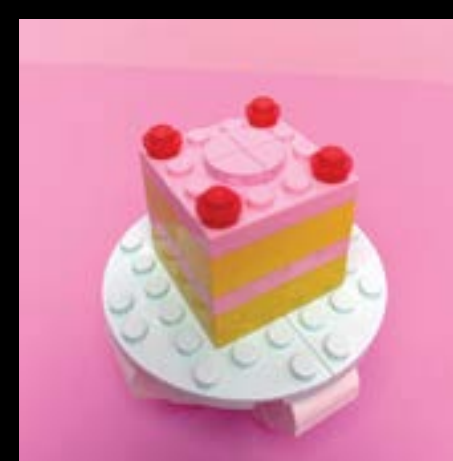
Each July, *Occasions* introduces you to the very best of everything in Jonesboro as determined by our loyal readers. You voted, we tallied those votes for days and now the winners are presented in this issue.

We are thankful to everyone who took the time to share their favorite things about Jonesboro, from top picks for the city's best food to shopping and entertainment venues and more.

We hope that our readers will use this list to help make all the important decisions in life—like where to have brunch, get coffee or see live music this weekend.

Congratulations to each of our winners!

The complete list of 2023 Readers' Choice Award recipients begins on page 29.





A CANVAS FOR THE COMMUNITY

STORY AND PHOTOS BY AUDREY POFF



Rachel Anderson

When Jonesboro's Rachel Anderson took a recent trip to Northwest Arkansas, she returned with an idea to help beautify the community by turning mundane utility cabinets into canvases for local artists.

Upon her return, Anderson, senior video analyst for the Jonesboro Police Department, said she began discussing the idea with other city officials.

"Immediately when I got back to Northeast Arkansas, I approached our traffic department (engineering department) about the possibility of even painting their cabinet boxes," said Anderson. "They were on board, so I moved forward getting permission from the mayor's office."

Mayor Harold Copenhaver also gave his approval for the beautification project.

"Jonesboro has an abundance of young artists, and they have boundless creativity and know how to use a utility cabinet as a canvas. I've enjoyed seeing the different ideas and designs these artists have come up with," said Copenhaver.

In total, Anderson says there are 87 utility boxes in the city.

"Thirty-three of the cabinets are on city property and can be painted on site," said Anderson. "Fifty-four of the cabinets must be wrapped – much like a vehicle – because they are on ARDOT (Arkansas Department of Transportation) property and they won't give us permission to paint on site ... because it is too dangerous to paint at those locations."

To date, several individual artists have painted cabinets, as well as students in three Jonesboro Public Schools EAST programs including Annie Camp Junior High School, Jonesboro High School and International Studies.



Ava Inman



Designs are approved before painting begins, said Anderson.

"There is a committee made up of members of the public, the Jonesboro Police Department, the mayor's office, the engineering department and the parks department," she said.

Each artist/group gets \$100 credit at Ditta Ace Hardware for supplies and paint. Any expense exceeding that amount is paid by the artist.

Anderson said she is pleased with the curb appeal that the utility box art project is adding to the community.

"It's such a simple way to beautify the city," she said. "Everyone benefits from beautification projects."

Although she would like for the project to be completed as soon as possible, she estimates that it could take up to a year.

"I'd like for it to take a few months, but I'd be delighted if

we were done by this time next year," she said. "The wraps will take the longest by far because I'm going to have to get separate (private) funding donations for each one."

Response from the community has been positive.

"We have heard nothing but good things from the community and are looking forward to continuing the project and getting more boxes painted," said Anderson.

The city received "a ton of submissions," she said, so they are no longer accepting artist applications. Those who would like to help support the beautification project can still contribute, however. Sponsors are needed for the utility boxes that will need to be wrapped with an artist's design instead of painted. Anyone interested in sponsoring a wrapped utility cabinet is asked to email Anderson at rachel@jonesboro.org

HYDRO HOUSE

A Green Way to Grow

BY AUDREY HANES
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELISSA DONNER

As more people today want to know exactly where their food comes from and what's in it, one couple is paving the way for their customers in Jonesboro to know exactly that. Randall and Amy Blankenship's Hydro House, a home-to-community farm that specializes in growing lettuce, herbs, microgreens and mushrooms, has a mission to serve the community with fresh, home-grown, local, pesticide-free produce year-round thanks to its hydroponic greenhouse.

"I've been here all my life," said Randall of the family home, which is also the site of Hydro House. "This is where my grandfather's cow pasture was. I've worked on farms and farmed for myself off and on my whole life. Amy is the one who has worked in greenhouses before; she came up with the greenhouse idea."

Amy has worked for several greenhouses over the years, including Rogers Greenhouse in Paragould, and loves nurturing plants of all types in a greenhouse environment. When the couple learned that the Rogers family was looking to get rid of a greenhouse structure they had over their pool, the Blankenships volunteered to remove it and repurpose it for Hydro House. Randall finished installing and redoing the greenhouse on their property in January of 2020.

Hydro House operates out of a hydroponic greenhouse, a technique of growing plants that uses a water-based nutrient solution rather than soil.

"Neither one of us knew anything about hydroponics when we started this," said Randall. "It's been a real learning curve. We use gutter downspouts to grow the lettuce and greens. The channels I looked at were \$80 each, and the downspouts were \$10 each, so that's what we used. I looked at several different ways to do it, watched a lot of YouTube videos and came up with my own plan. It's been off the cuff and a real learning process. ... The nutrients have to be checked constantly.

"We've learned a lot of ways not to do stuff. The hydroponic part of it is pretty amazing. To me, it tastes better. It's really amazing how fast stuff grows."

As for the day-to-day operations of the greenhouse, Amy takes care of the growing, planting and harvesting of everything in the greenhouse, and Randall is responsible for the mushrooms.

Hydro House grows a variety of leafy greens, including head lettuce offerings like muir, romaine, butterhead and Laliq, along with a mixed leaf lettuce. The small farm also has a greens mix that includes red and green mustard, broccoli, bok choy, Chinese cabbage, tatsoi and mizuna, along with arugula and kale, which are seasonal. There are a variety of microgreens to choose from, such as broccoli, cabbage, mustard, radish, beets, cilantro, sunflower, pea and more. Hydro House's available herbs are basil, rosemary, oregano, dill and mint.

The current mushroom selection, which is Randall's venture, includes the oyster varieties: Italian, tarragon, golden, pearls and



Amy and Randall Blankenship

blues, Mediterranean, phoenix, lion's mane, shiitake and chestnut. Customers can purchase all of Hydro House's mushrooms and greens on-site at the greenhouse or the Judd Hill Farmers' Market, or they can request a delivery through the couple's online store.

"We first started the online store in October 2021, but I found out I had breast cancer at the same time; I made my first delivery then had to close it," said Amy. "We were back at the Farmers' Market in May of 2022 and re-opened the store in November 2022 after the market ended in October. ...

"I love gardening. My mom and dad gardened; it's in my blood, it's therapy for me, it's my outlet. Being out here at night is really neat. With the water running, it's really peaceful."

Amy says that in the future, they'd like to offer ready-made salads, which would be available for pick up or delivery and would include seasonal vegetables such as cherry tomatoes, arugula and kale. She has already received her Food Service Manager Certification and Produce Safety Grower Certification, and Hydro House recently acquired its food trailer Health Department certification. A mushroom seasoning and other adventures are also in the works.

Jay Dunn, who has been a weekly customer of Hydro House since May of 2022, says she normally orders the house mix, salad mix, sandwich leaf, elegant greens and some of the microgreens.

"Two of my favorite highlights are that it's all pesticide free and local," said Dunn. "Their product selections are fresh, crisp and delicious. Their product is unbeatable, and their customer service is consistently amazing."

Another happy customer, Melody Conatser, sought out the

small farm's fresh offerings for a meaningful reason.

"We have been using Hydro House since last summer, when we met the Blankenships at the Judd Hill Farmers' Market," she said. "Being a registered nurse and also a cancer survivor, I realize the importance of feeding my family pesticide-free produce.

"We use the various salad greens, herbs, microgreens and mushrooms from them, knowing that it's all fresh, nutritious and delicious. Their home delivery service has been an added bonus during the winter months or when we are unable to get to the Farmers' Market during the regular season. It's been such a pleasure getting to know the Blankenships."

The couple cites those friendships and customer relationships as a large part of why they enjoy what they contribute to the community.

"We stand behind our products," said Amy. "Our customers know that they are getting a fresh, quality product, and they keep coming back. They tell their family and friends. Word of mouth is our best advertisement. I have had (customers) tell me they can't eat lettuce from anywhere else now that they had ours.

"We are so proud of what we do. I enjoy being a problem solver with the community and being able to offer what we do. I want to know where my food is coming from these days, and we can do that for Jonesboro and the surrounding area. I enjoy working with the community and meeting new people. We have made a lot of close friends during this."

To place an order or for more information about Hydro House, located at 1446 Highway 349, call (870) 530-3800, find them on Facebook or visit hydro-house-1.localline.ca/house-share.



LaDonya Bryant

The Return of Presley's Drive In

BY AUDREY HANES
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELISSA DONNER

As Jonesboro's West End Neighborhood and the Gee Street area continue to attract businesses and patrons, the recent return and re-opening of an iconic Jonesboro restaurant, Presley's Drive In, has been welcomed with open arms by those who frequented the eatery for the past several decades and by those who are new to supporting the growing area.

Presley's Drive In was started in the 1970s by Harold and Hettie Mae Presley and was passed along to several other owners before closing over a year ago. The restaurant's newest owners, LaDonya Bryant and Dusty Self, hope to continue to serve the community with the same all-American feel and classic diner food patrons are used to, while at the same time adding a few of Bryant's own recipes that she grew up cooking.

"I used to cook with my mom and grandmother and then started cooking at church for the youth group, which was 150 kids," said Bryant, who grew up in Powhatan and graduated from Black Rock High School before moving to Jonesboro in 2016 to work for the United States Postal Service. "I thought, 'If I could do this, I could do a restaurant.' It was far-fetched, but it's what I wanted to do."

Bryant soon learned that Jeb Spencer and his son, Jackson, along with Jackson's wife, Lindsey, were nearing the end of their year-long renovation of Presley's Drive In, a longtime restaurant space on Gee Street. After the former owners closed the restaurant, the Spencers bought the building in May of 2022 and completely renovated the diner while keeping much of its historic character intact.

"It's a legacy place; it's been around forever, and we wanted to bring something like that back to that side of town," said Jackson. "It's a classic American diner, the kind of place that's critical to have for that side of town. Because of the condition it was in when we bought it, it needed love and attention."

The Spencers replaced all of the glass, installed new floors and light fixtures, painted the interior and exterior and did electrical work.

"We brought back the walkup window, which is a traditional dairy bar aspect," said Jackson, who is one of the owners of Native Brew Works, also located on Gee Street. "We wanted to go back to the traditional style – red with some black and white – and we did certain things to maintain that diner feel. We also took out a parking area and turned it into green space. We wanted to beautify



Gee Street; the area has so much asphalt and concrete, we wanted a view of the creek and a lawn."

"Presley's is one of the most iconic buildings in Jonesboro," added Lindsey. "Of course, we are invested in Gee Street and we wanted to see it brought back to its original glory. It's a great representation of Gee Street in its heyday with its style and vibe. ... I would love to see it lit up and attracting more people again."

Bryant and her boyfriend, Dusty Self, leased the building from the Spencers and launched with a soft opening earlier this spring with plans for a grand opening sometime this month.

"The people in the Gee Street area have been so nice," said Bryant. "The customer base here is wonderful. We have really good neighbors, and they eat with us. More people need to give this area a chance; it's come such a long way."

Presley's breakfast menu starts bright and early and includes the Classic, which is two eggs, a choice of meat and biscuits and gravy or toast; the Breakfast Special, which comes with one egg, half an order of meat with toast and jelly; Hound Dog Hash, which is served with two eggs, a choice of breakfast meat, bell peppers, onions, tomatoes, cheese, shredded home fries and jalapenos; biscuits and gravy and two different omelets.

The lunch menu focuses on classic Southern diner food, as well. The hamburger steak, chicken fried steak, chicken strip dinner and single and double cheeseburger options are staples, and side options include mashed potatoes, green beans, cabbage with

sausage, corn, greens, mac and cheese, and white and brown gravy.

"A lot of the stuff I brought with me has been really popular," said the new owner. "My beef enchiladas have been a hit; it's my granny's recipe. Our customers have really loved the chicken and dressing, too. We do offer a fajita chicken salad, and that sells big time, and so does the Chicken Bacon Ranch Sandwich and the Philly, which they had before."

Many of those family recipes have made their way onto the plate lunch schedule, which is offered Monday through Saturday. Each day, diners can choose one meat, two sides, a roll and a drink. Meat options vary each day and include meatloaf, chicken fried steak, chicken and dressing, Mexican chicken, beef enchiladas, hamburger steak, pork steaks and U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish with slaw and hush puppies.

As the restaurant prepares for its grand opening, Bryant and Self have been open to suggestions and requests from the restaurant's former patrons, including the return of the Pizza Burger, a longtime favorite, and the Totally Loaded Fries, which are crinkle-cut fries with fajita chicken, ground beef, chili, bacon, onions, tomatoes and cheese sauce. Fish and frog legs are always on hand, too.

Presley's deserts have always been a favorite, and Bryant and Self want their cakes, pies, hand-dipped cones, shakes and soft serve ice cream to become a community staple once again.

"All those desserts will be coming back in July," said Bryant. "June was about getting everyone here and back in the swing of things.

"During the holidays we have a lot of catering; we can cook



a whole holiday meal. Our pies are really popular; we make chocolate, pecan, lemon and coconut cream pies. And the chicken and dumplings sell out every time I make them. ... I have no professional training, I'm just a person who likes to cook."

The menu itself is still a work in progress prior to the grand opening, partially because customers who have been frequenting the diner since the '70s want to make sure they can still order all their favorites.

"The longtime Presley's customers are very opinionated and let me know their requests," said Bryant. "They ask for certain things to be brought back to the menu, and we do our best to accommodate what they want."

"But my favorite part is the stories they tell us. I love listening to the stories; people come in and the old stories they have about Elvis Presley here at the diner are amazing. So many people in this community have something to add."

Bryant says a gentleman who recently stopped by Presley's to eat recounted a story where Elvis and Jerry Lee Lewis came by Presley's Drive In and were playing in the parking lot one evening. When Jonesboro Police Department officers came by and asked them to stop playing, they refused and kept playing for hours. Many patrons have told the new owners that Elvis would come in and regularly sit in the same corner booth.

Terry Presley, son of Harold and Hettie Presley, says his parents purchased the business in 1973.

"At that time, it was a Tasty Freeze, and before that, originally, it was a Dairy Queen," said Terry. "After about six months, my mother

decided to drop the franchise and start Presley's Drive-In. My mother was the driving force that made this adventure a success. My wife, Kelly, and I purchased the business from her in the late 1980s and we ran it until August 2000. I had a debilitating heart attack in May of that year and that's when we decided to sell."

As for the family's relation to Elvis Presley, Terry confirmed the family's connection to the music icon.

"My grandparents, Jesse Caswell and Lovie Mae Presley, moved from Mississippi in the 1940s. They crossed the river and settled in the Payneway/McCormick area just outside of Trumann. My cousin, Donald Presley, wrote a genealogy book called 'From the Rhineland to Graceland' that documents our family's kinship and the original German surname of Preslar."

To honor the distant relative of the original owners and the history of the diner, Bryant plans to have a relative of Elvis at the grand opening.

As Presley's Drive In finds its place among a revitalized Gee Street, its new owners hope it will again become a staple for families and regulars in the area.

"It's a family atmosphere," said Bryant. "The people who come in here remember eating with each other before. We have people come in and pull tables together. It's very relaxed and family oriented. They love the remodel and have just been so positive."

Presley's Drive-In, located at 917 S. Gee St., is open Monday through Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Saturday from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more information about weekly specials and special events, find Presley's Drive In LLC on Facebook or call (870) 206-8282.

SUNKEN LANDS SONGWRITING CIRCLE TO FEATURE SARAH JAROSZ

SUBMITTED BY ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY



Sarah Jarosz

Tickets are on sale for the upcoming Sunken Lands Songwriting Circle, which will take place in Riceland Hall at Fowler Center, located at 201 Olympic Dr., Saturday, Aug. 12, at 5 p.m.

The event, a benefit for the Historic Dyess Colony: Johnny Cash Boyhood Home, will feature performances from Rosanne Cash, Rodney Crowell and Sarah Jarosz, with special guest John Leventhal.

"I'm looking forward to sharing the night with Rosanne and Rodney in a part of the country I've never been to before. I'm truly honored they asked me to join them," said Jarosz.

The event features singer-songwriters who will perform sharing their talent and history through song. Jarosz said she hopes their performance can inspire future songwriters.

"I imagine it will feel full circle to share the stage with Rosanne and Rodney, who have both inspired my musicianship, so I would certainly hope it might be inspiring to other songwriters who are in attendance."

This event is one of many in the past decade that have been hosted in honor of Johnny Cash and in support of the boyhood home, an Arkansas State University Heritage Site.

"You can't talk about American music history without talking about Johnny Cash. He was a trailblazer in his music and his activism, and it's important to continue honoring his legacy because he paved the way for so many who followed in his musical footsteps," added Jarosz.

This is the first event in this series. In addition to the music, the performance will encompass the importance and meaning behind the stories of songs.

"I think it will be a poignant evening of music and the community is lucky to have such a unique event. I'm personally looking forward to hearing Rosanne's and Rodney's stories and sharing songs with them," said Jarosz.

Tickets are available through the A-State box office or at AState.edu/Tickets.



Akeem Kemp

SUMMER CONCERT SERIES CONCLUDES IN JULY

SUBMITTED BY ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

A Summer Concert Series, presented by the Historic Dyess Colony: Johnny Cash Boyhood Home and KASU, will host the final performer of the summer on July 8 from 7-9 p.m. Musician Akeem Kemp will take the stage at Native Brew Works, 515 S. Gee St. in Jonesboro.

Kemp is a singer, guitarist and songwriter originally from Sardis, located in rural Saline County.

Influenced by Albert King's string bending and soulful, smoky vocals, as well as Jimi Hendrix's overdriven amplifiers with high volume and gain, he has created his own style and unique tone.

Through inspiration from life experiences, he uses his music to connect with all walks of life. Kemp is on a journey to create memories, conceive feelings and communicate lyrics that can only be expressed through music.

A blues musician based in Conway, Kemp first picked up a guitar at age 5, but didn't learn to play until he was 12 years old. He started playing in church, following the example of other players in church, and still plays every Sunday.

A talent show winner at Morrilton High School for three years in a row, he performed but was told he could not compete his senior year so others could have the opportunity to win.

Admission to the concert is free thanks to sponsors Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas and Judd Hill Foundation. Additional details can be found at DyessCash.AState.edu or by calling (870) 764-2274.

THAT ONE THING



THAT ONE THING SUMMER ENTERTAINING



BY CINDY PAUL

On a recent trip to visit my daughter, she threw together an impromptu party to introduce me to some of her new friends. We had a “good wine, cheap snacks” party, and it was so much fun. It prompted me to remind myself that entertaining doesn’t have to be ultra labor-intensive or expensive.

As I’ve said before, I don’t entertain nearly as much as I did when I was younger; these days, when I have people in it’s primarily family. No matter what, it can be fun and inexpensive if you use what you have and get creative with menu and decor. Here are a few ideas:

Think charcuterie for your big item. Even though charcuterie typically contains meats, you can also do fruit, nuts or candies. A mixture of offerings can be interesting and fun.

Keep cute party picks on hand. When you see fun party toothpicks, pick them up and have them at home. They are notoriously hard to find when you need them, and they make a table so much more festive than plain ones.

If you use candles, consider all sizes and types of candle holders. You can place them in the center of the table or interspersed among the food offerings.

Use unconventional things for serving ware and to hold flowers. At our little get together, we used martini glasses to present gummy bears, sour patch kids and pretzels. A matching pair of pottery wine mugs held flowers and flanked our main centerpiece.

Remember that anything can be a centerpiece. Even though I have a bias for fresh flowers, a collection of pottery, a large bowl of fruit, potted plants and even photographs or personal effects can serve as centerpieces.

I think our style of living these days lends itself to spur-of-the-moment get togethers. “That One Thing” to remember is to have fun, relax and enjoy some good company. Happy summer and happy birthday, America!

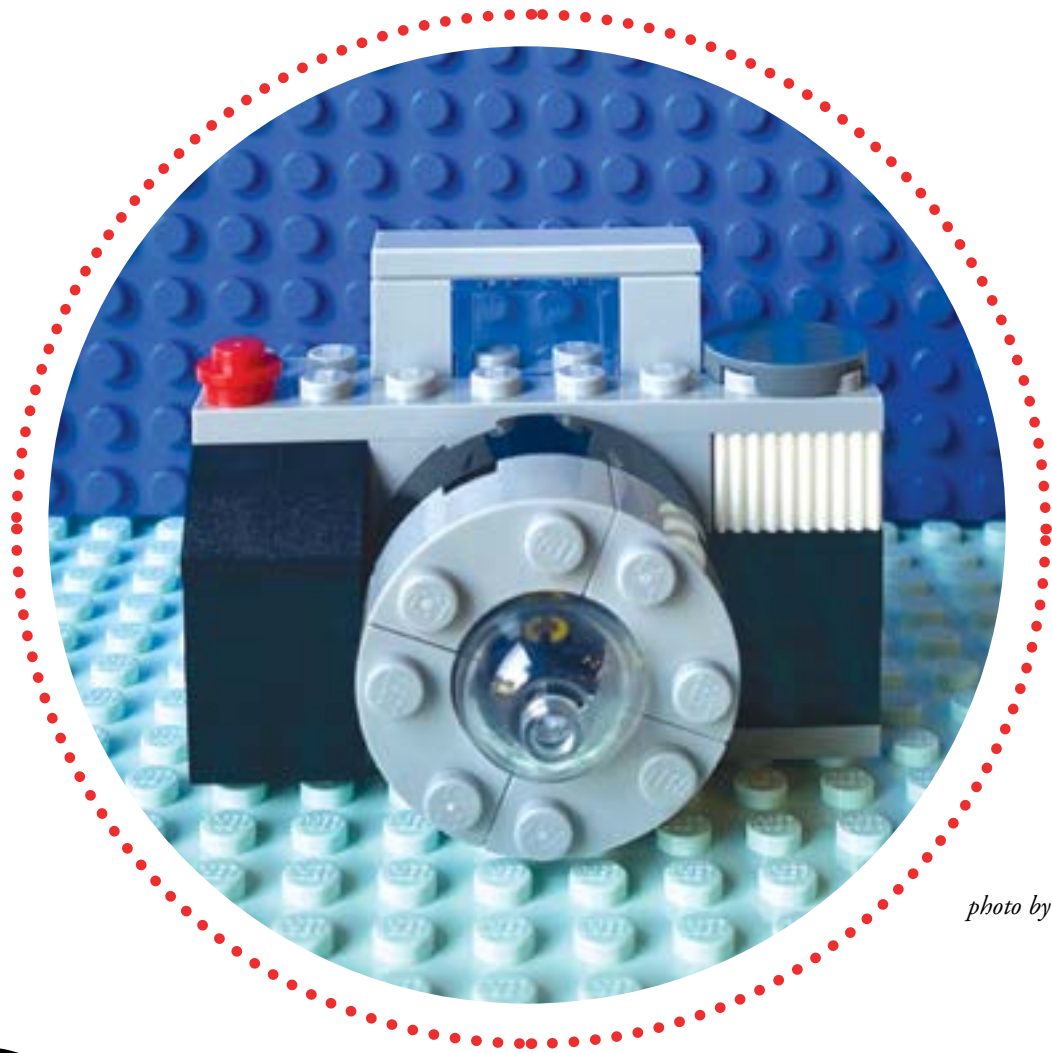


photo by Brittney Osborn

FOA The Foundation Of Arts

Open House

Tour the FOA Arts Center & meet our teachers!

Register for '23-'24 year-round arts classes!

Plus, snag a new student SPECIAL OFFER!

Drop-in!
August 12th, 10:00 am - 2:00 pm
328 S Main St. Jonesboro

OCCASIONS

EVENTS & NEWS SPOTLIGHT

- 18 : ST. BERNARDS TRIPLE SWING
- 20 : NEA BAPTIST CHARITABLE FOUNDATION'S ART SLAM
- 22 : CHEF'S CORPORATE OLYMPICS
- 23 : FOA PRESENTS "WEST SIDE STORY"
- 24 : FOA PRESENTS "ARISTOCATS KIDS"
- 25 : TASTIEST TACO WINNER
- 26 : THE UMBRELLA HOSTS PROM 2023
- 27 : SUMMER CONCERT SERIES: THE BAND TRIPPP
- 28 : NEWS: MISS ARKANSAS CORI KELLER

EVENT SPOTLIGHT

TRIPLE SWING KICKS OFF WITH BLUES EVENT

St. Bernards Advocates kicked off Triple Swing 2023 on June 23 with a Delta Blues-inspired event held at St. Bernards Auditorium. Guests enjoyed an auction, raffles, dinner, dancing and entertainment by Keith Johnson and the Big Muddy Band. Proceeds from this year's Triple Swing, which also included a golf tournament and pickleball social at RidgePointe Country Club, will support the expansion of the surgical department in the new St. Bernards tower. *For more event photos, visit jonesborooccasions.com and click on Event Pics.*

1. Bryan and Cindy Wagner, Will Edwards, Grace Ann Lile
2. Thomas Hays, Haley Stotts, Wendy and Mark McHale
3. Shelley and Chris Newkirk
4. Bethany Noto, Lauren Nunnally, Amanda Fahlberg
5. Abby Husband, Angela Deveney
6. Kila and Landon Montgomery
7. Lindsey Wingo, Thomas Williams
8. Bryon May, Graeme and Faith Gastineau
9. Laura Gunter, Miranda Reynolds, Mackenzie Thomason
10. Jill, Maggie and Simon Storer
11. Myles Copenhaver, Karli Chaney, Lauren Nunnally
12. Michael and Ashleigh Givens
13. Jon and Shelly Myers
14. Dan Beagle, Jamie Whitehead



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EVENT SPOTLIGHT

ART SLAM BENEFITS NEA BAPTIST FOUNDATION

NEA Baptist Charitable Foundation presented Art Slam 2023 on June 8 at the home of Dr. Jason and Jana Brandt. Art Slam is a unique art auction featuring artwork donated by local artists, including NEA Baptist physicians. The event included food, live music and both silent and live auctions. Sara Howell was featured as this year's signature artist. Proceeds from Art Slam support the free programs of NEA Baptist Charitable Foundation. *For more event photos, visit jonesborooccasions.com and click on Event Pics.*

- 1. Rhonda Parker, Bethany Noto, Kim Provost
- 2. Dr. Paige Parnell, Dr. Balreet Dhani
- 3. Scotty and Angie Jones
- 4. Jana and Dr. Jason Brandt
- 5. Casey and Autumn Pearce
- 6. Kristen Woods Stutts, Natalie Bari
- 7. LaKeisha Coleman, Karen Spector, Jennifer Butler
- 8. Kim Hauge, Laura Shelton
- 9. Nicole Jones, Marissa Russell
- 10. Rachel Gadberry, Anna Emhofer
- 11. Kim Provost, Holly Acebo, Nicole Frakes
- 12. Chaney and Sam Lynd
- 13. Michael and Krystal Polk
- 14. Hatton and Candace Weeks
- 15. Scott and Tamara Roberson
- 16. Shreya Patel, Dr. D.V. and Sherri Patel, Dr. Jeff and Deborah Barber



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EVENT SPOTLIGHT

**LOCAL BUSINESSES
COMPETE IN
CORPORATE OLYMPICS**

Community Health Education Foundation held its 2023 Corporate Olympics at The Trim Gym on June 2. The fundraiser included a variety of contests with local teams competing for trophies. E.C. Barton & Company received the gold medal, with Arvest Bank earning the silver medal and The Trim Gym taking the bronze medal. Games included tic-tac-toe relay, pickleball, ping pong, golf challenge, volleyball, Baggo and Jenga. *For more event photos, visit jonesborooccasions.com and click on Event Pics.*

- 1. Kaitlin Yelton, Chaterica Fletcher, Spencer Decker, Colton Golden, Dr. Carlitta Moore
- 2. Arvest Bank team
- 3. E.C. Barton & Company team
- 4. The Trim Gym team
- 5. Zach Falhberg, Selena Barber
- 6. Emily Lard, Dr. Carlitta Moore, Lisa Brannum, Cindy Crum, Linda Martin, Donna Caldwell, Chad Yancy



EVENT SPOTLIGHT

**FOA PRESENTS
"WEST SIDE STORY"**

The Foundation of Arts presented "West Side Story" June 24-26 and June 30 at The Forum Theatre. FOA Artistic Director Kristi Pulliam directed the musical, which tells the story of fierce rivalries and young love in New York City in 1957. *For more event photos, visit jonesborooccasions.com and click on Event Pics.*



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COMPETITORS**

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ARVEST

BRONZE MEDAL
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The Trim Gym

Pickleball Doubles:
The Trim Gym

Ping Pong:
ARVEST

Golf Challenge:
Nestlé

Volleyball:
The Trim Gym

Baggo:
EC Barton & Co.

Jenga:
Empower



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EVENT SPOTLIGHT

'ARISTOCATS, KIDS' STAGED AT THE FORUM

The Foundation of Arts Young Artist Theatre (YAT) presented 'Aristocats, Kids' at The Forum in Downtown Jonesboro June 9 and June 11. Based on the beloved Disney animated film, the show featured a jazzy, upbeat score with non-stop feline fun set in the heart of Paris. *For more event photos, visit jonesborooccasions.com and click on Event Pics.*



EVENT SPOTLIGHT

TASTIEST TACO RAISES FUNDS FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

The 2023 Tastiest Taco Winner was Tacos Daisy, located at 447 Southwest Dr., and owned by Raffaa Osorio. Tastiest Taco, a benefit for the Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund, raised more than \$4,300. Proceeds will go toward scholarships for single parents attending school. Tacos Daisy won 45% of the total vote. The trophy, custom designed by Lyons Engraving and Awards, will be held by Tacos Daisy until the Tastiest Taco competition returns next year. Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund provides scholarships for single parents earning trade skills certificates, associates or bachelors degrees. During the 2022-23 school year (including summer), 162 scholarships were provided to 111 students totaling \$161,100 awarded in scholarship money in Northeast Arkansas. *For more event photos, visit jonesborooccasions.com and click on Event Pics.*

1. Raffaa Osorio



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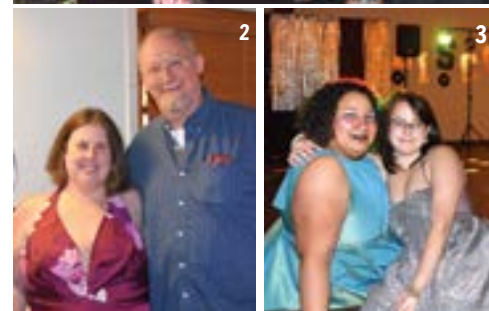
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EVENT SPOTLIGHT

**THE UMBRELLA
HOSTS PROM EVENT**

The Umbrella, a nonprofit organization with a mission of providing safe, judgement-free special events for the community, hosted its second annual prom event on June 3 at The Elks Lodge in Jonesboro. Guests attending Prom 2023: Disco Night enjoyed dinner and dancing to music provided by DJ Vista. For more information on The Umbrella, visit theumbrellacares.com. For more event photos, visit jonesborooccasions.com and click on Event Galleries.



1. Raelynn, Nathan and Christopher Baltes
2. Kimberly and Richard Owens
3. Maggie Gray, Jade Johnson
4. Jilliana Clinton, Bella and Eileen Levy
5. B. King, Lisa Perry, Callie Poole, Lisa Godsey, Traci Burgess, Alyssa Edens

EVENT SPOTLIGHT

**THE BAND TRIPPP
RETURNS FOR CONCERT**

Jonesboro natives Chaz, JD and Treyson Stafford, 22-year-old triplets who comprise The Band Trippp, performed June 10 during a summer concert series, presented by the Historic Dyess Colony: Johnny Cash Boyhood Home and KASU. The event was held at Native Brew Works. The band, now based in Nashville, features a unique country sound that includes a touch of Memphis blues, Kentucky bluegrass and Southern Rock combined with family harmony. For more event photos, visit jonesborooccasions.com and click on Event Pics.



1. Treyson (guitar) and JD Stafford
2. Chaz and Treyson Stafford
3. Chaz, JD and Treyson Stafford

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Welcome to the Team

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SVP, Operations & Chief Deposit Officer

fnbc.us **FNBC** MEMBER FDIC

A-STATE ALUM WINS MISS ARKANSAS PAGEANT

STORY AND PHOTO SUBMITTED BY THE MISS ARKANSAS ORGANIZATION

Miss Metro Cori Keller won the title of Miss Arkansas 2023 at the 85th Miss Arkansas Scholarship Pageant held June 10. The pageant took place at the Robinson Center in Little Rock in front of a sold-out crowd.

As the newly-crowned Miss Arkansas, Keller received a \$30,000 scholarship provided by the Ted and Shannon Boy Skokos Foundation and more than \$75,000 in awards, wardrobe, transportation and gifts. She will represent Arkansas at the Miss America competition and will make appearances across the Natural State promoting her personal platform of “Feeding the Future: Collaborative Solutions to Hunger” and speaking in support of the goals of the Miss Arkansas and Miss America system.

Keller was crowned by the outgoing Miss Arkansas, Ebony Mitchell, of Conway. More than \$180,000 in scholarships were awarded throughout the pageant to various miss contestants.

Keller is the 25-year-old daughter of Lynn and Tracy Keller of Stuttgart. She is a 2020 Cum Laude Graduate of Arkansas State University, where she received a degree in exercise science. She received her master's degree in mass communications (Radio/TV) from Arkansas State University in 2022. Prior to the pageant, Keller was working as a freelance sports commentator for ESPN, an account executive for CJRW and a dance coach at MKDS. For her talent, she performed a tap dance to “Workin.”

As the new Miss Arkansas, Keller also won awards for preliminary evening gown and the Bill Tarkington Overall Evening Gown claiming a total of \$33,000 in scholarships during the pageant.



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photo by Brittney Osborn

- OVERALL RESTAURANT**
501 STEAKHOUSE
FINALISTS: JTown's Grill, Omar's Uptown
- AMERICAN FOOD RESTAURANT**
JTOWN'S GRILL
FINALISTS: Fat City Steak & Grill House, 501 Steakhouse
- DELI**
MUNCHY'S
FINALISTS: The Honey Baked Ham Company, Newk's Eatery
- ITALIAN RESTAURANT**
PASTARIA 49
FINALISTS: Lazzari Italian Oven, Olive Garden
- CHINESE RESTAURANT**
ORIENTAL EXPRESS
FINALISTS: Hong Kong Restaurant, Tokyo House
- JAPANESE RESTAURANT**
SUMO JAPANESE STEAKHOUSE & SUSHI BAR
FINALISTS: Fuji Japanese Steakhouse, Rice Box
- MEXICAN RESTAURANT**
LOS ARCOS MEXICAN CUISINE
FINALISTS: Papitos, Casa Blanca Mexican Grill



FAT CITY STEAK & GRILL HOUSE
MOST FAMILY FRIENDLY RESTAURANT,
BEST BREAKFAST

photo by Melissa Martin

- ETHNIC RESTAURANT**
MAI PAI THAI CUISINE
FINALISTS: Curry Leaf Indian Cuisine, Pella Café Greek and Mediterranean Cuisine
- BARBECUE RESTAURANT**
QUE 49 SMOKEHOUSE
FINALISTS: Demo's BBQ & Smokehouse, Blue Ember Smokehouse
- FAMILY FRIENDLY RESTAURANT**
FAT CITY STEAK & GRILL HOUSE
FINALISTS: The Social, JTown's Grill
- ROMANTIC RESTAURANT**
OMAR'S UPTOWN
FINALISTS: 501 Steakhouse, Lazzari Italian Oven
- NEW RESTAURANT (OPENED IN 2022 OR LATER)**
BLUE EMBER SMOKEHOUSE
FINALISTS: Uncle Taco, Casa Blanca Mexican Grill
- COFFEE HOUSE**
SHADRACHS COFFEE
FINALISTS: IV Kings Coffee, Story Coffee House

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photo by Melissa Martin

BREAKFAST
FAT CITY STEAK & GRILL HOUSE

FINALISTS: The Parsonage, Eggcellent Cafe

BRUNCH
THE PARSONAGE

FINALISTS: Jtown's Grill, The Social

BUSINESS LUNCH
SUE'S KITCHEN EXPRESS

FINALISTS: The Parsonage, Newk's Eatery

PLATE LUNCH
SUE'S KITCHEN EXPRESS

FINALISTS: Gina's Place, Gee Street Kitchen

BUFFET
CHEF'S IN

FINALISTS: Ron's Catfish, Golden Corral

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FINALISTS: Newk's Eatery, Slim Chickens



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BAKERY
SOUTHERN CONFECTIONS
FINALISTS: Abby Cakes, Gigi's Cupcakes

HAMBURGER
JTOWN'S GRILL
FINALISTS: TJ's Burgers, BA Burrito

FRENCH FRIES
JTOWN'S GRILL
FINALISTS: Five Guys, TJ's Burgers

WINGS
WINGS TO GO
FINALISTS: JTown's Grill, Wing Stop

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SLIM CHICKENS
FINALISTS: Guthrie's Chicken, Chick-fil-A

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**BBQ RIBS
QUE 49 SMOKEHOUSE**
FINALISTS: Demo's BBQ & Smokehouse,
Blue Ember Smokehouse

**STEAK
501 STEAKHOUSE**
FINALISTS: Omar's Uptown, Texas Roadhouse

**SEAFOOD
PIER 88**
FINALISTS: Red Lobster, 501 Steakhouse

**PIZZA
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<i>Katelyn Headley & Craig Benson</i> May 6, 2023	<i>Jill Taylor & Seth Vickery</i> June 11, 2023	<i>Anna Carroll & Brock Hill</i> October 10, 2023
<i>Emily Whittaker & William Sparks</i> May 13, 2023	<i>Lenae Haley & Drew Sullivan</i> June 13, 2023	<i>Benton Rogers & Kylen Whittaker</i> October 13, 2023
<i>Madaline Boone & Jake Haynes</i> May 19, 2023	<i>Caylien Arenas & Trent Jones</i> June 17, 2023	<i>Lauren Hodge & Nicholas Jain</i> October 14, 2023
<i>Meredith Worlow & John Ross</i> May 20, 2023	<i>Avery Barnett & Chase Branum</i> June 24, 2023	<i>Lilly Jones & Alex Bernauer</i> October 14, 2023
<i>Anna Rhodes & Andrew Moore</i> May 20, 2023	<i>Tyler McMurray & Isaac Jumper</i> June 24, 2023	<i>Emily Sheets & Cade Hosman</i> October 16, 2023
<i>Kayla McGee & Duke Lipsky</i> May 20, 2023	<i>Taylor Winstead & Kaleb Hendrix</i> June 29, 2023	<i>Courtney Ross & Brady Brown</i> October 21, 2023
<i>Ansley Wixson & Avery Felts</i> May 20, 2023	<i>Tatum Glendenning & Weston McDaniel</i> July 8, 2023	<i>Alexandra Farmer & Michael Hughes</i> October 21, 2023
<i>Brianna Kiplinger & Logan Faber</i> May 20, 2023	<i>Izzy Baughn & Jacob Wood</i> July 8, 2023	<i>Katie Vincent & Gunner Pitts</i> October 28, 2023
<i>Morgan McAlexander & Kade Weatherford</i> May 20, 2023	<i>Sarah Evett & Aaron Howard</i> July 22, 2023	<i>Emily Calvert & Logan Flemon</i> November 4, 2023
<i>Kendall Case & Jacob Harper</i> May 20, 2023	<i>Gracye Cureton & Garner Hodge</i> August 26, 2023	<i>Anna Raffo & Noah Brown</i> November 11, 2023
<i>Kendall Maxwell & Will Martin</i> May 26, 2023	<i>Clayton Noblin & Loden Walker</i> August 26, 2023	<i>Molly Poe & Dillon Wilson</i> November 18, 2023
<i>Meagan Jordan & Eli Leonard</i> May 28, 2023	<i>Makayla Simmons & Jaden Osment</i> August 26, 2023	<i>Madeleine Valentine & Ross Trail</i> November 25, 2023
<i>Lunden Gibson & Dallas Moss</i> June 3, 2023	<i>Kaitlin Ponder & Colton Couch</i> September 16, 2023	<i>Molly Rogers & Dylan Molder</i> December 2, 2023
<i>Macy McDaniel & Blake Brecklein</i> June 5, 2023	<i>Valerie Bowen & Tristin Escue</i> September 23, 2023	<i>Victoria Nall & Trevor Couch</i> February 10, 2024
<i>Olivia Simpson & Sam Lyles</i> June 10, 2023		<i>Taylor Kinsey & Jake Smith</i> May 18, 2024

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photo by Britney Osborn

DESSERT
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FINALISTS: Nothing Bundt Cakes, Gigi's Cupcakes

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ANDY'S FROZEN CUSTARD
FINALISTS: Local Culture, Lolly Gourmet Pops

SUSHI
SUMO JAPANESE STEAKHOUSE & SUSHI BAR
FINALISTS: Hiro Japanese Cuisine, Rice Box

CATERER
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FINALISTS: JTown's Grill, Trauma Hogs BBQ

CHEF
OMAR BARRY (OMAR'S UPTOWN)
FINALISTS: John Myers (The Parsonage), Dana Lamel (Pastaria 49)

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FINALISTS: Target, Dillard's



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ABBY CAKES
 FINALISTS: Southern Confections, Gigi's Cupcakes

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HOUSTON'S
 FINALISTS: The Silos, The Glass Factory

WEDDING DRESS STORE
JESSICA'S BRIDAL AND FORMAL
 FINALISTS: Emma & Kait's Bridal and Formal Boutique,
 David's Bridal

TUXEDO SHOP
MEN N' BLACK TUXEDOS
 FINALISTS: Men's Wearhouse, David's Bridal

WEDDING RINGS
SISSY'S LOG CABIN
 FINALISTS: Pagan's Jewelry, Gorgeous Custom Jewelry Designs

WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER
JAMES BICKHAM
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THE EVERYDAY CHEF
BEST WEDDING REGISTRY

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FINALISTS: Knight Productions, Abby Baker

WEDDING PLANNER
SAMANTHA MCFADDEN
FINALISTS: Betsy Smith, Bridgette Arnold

PET BOARDING
HOUNDS HIDEAWAY
FINALISTS: Magnolia Dog Ranch, Bonesboro Dog Daycare & Boarding

PET GROOMING
PET QUARTERS
FINALISTS: Hounds' Hideaway, Boss Dog Grooming & Boarding

PET FOOD & SUPPLY
HOLLYWOOD FEED
FINALISTS: Petsmart, Petco

DOGGY DAYCARE
HOUNDS HIDEAWAY
FINALISTS: Magnolia Dog Ranch, Bonesboro Dog Daycare & Boarding

photo by Brittany Osborn

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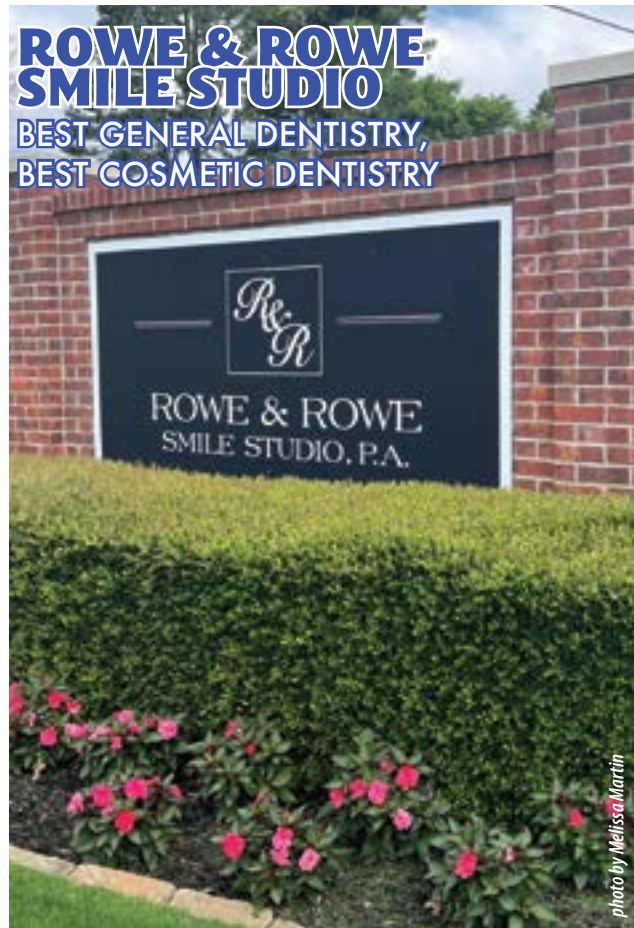
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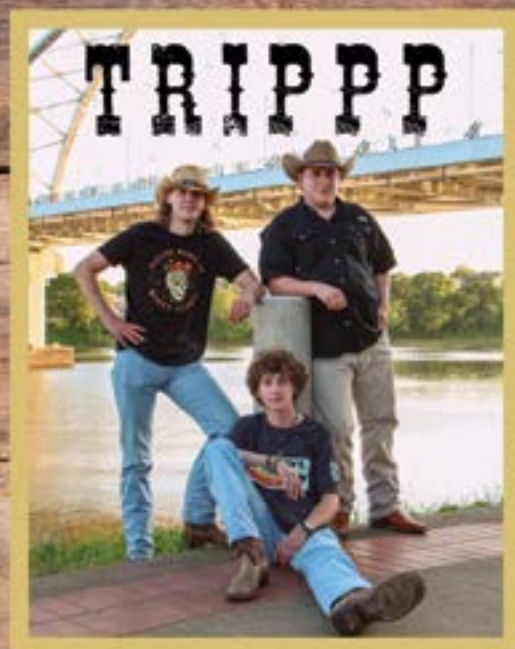
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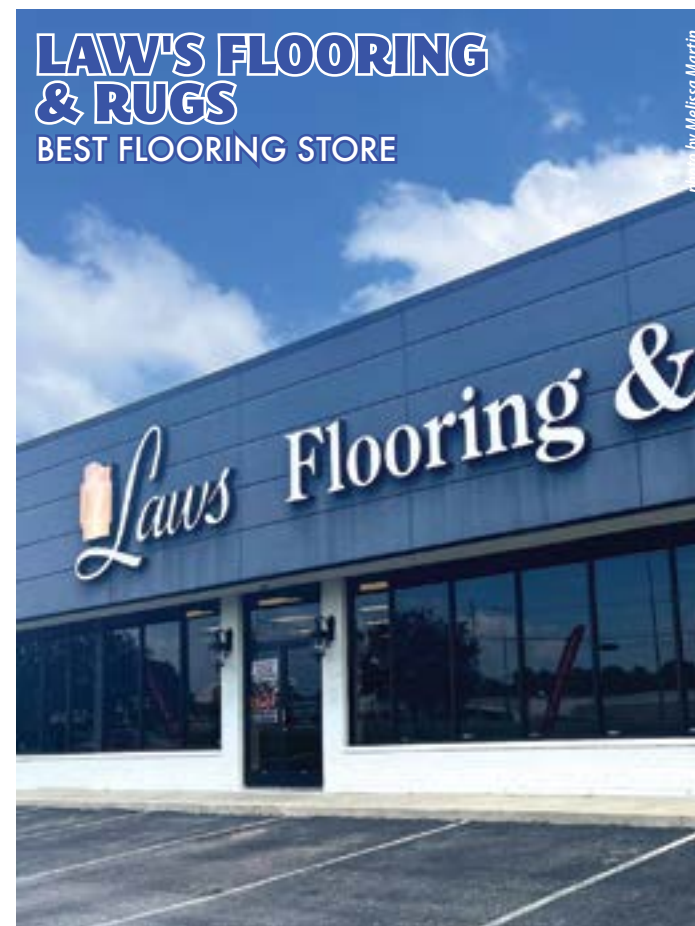


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FINALISTS: Full Sun Gifts, Cutie Patootie

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FINALISTS: Crown Trophy, Brown's Graduation

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FINALISTS: Gorgeous Custom Jewelry Design, Pagan's Jewelry

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FINALISTS: Battery Outfitters, Battery Warehouse

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FINALISTS: Play It Again Sports, Gearhead Outfitters

OUTDOOR/HUNTING STORE
DNW OUTDOORS

FINALISTS: Academy Sports & Outdoors, Gearhead Outfitters

MOTORCYCLE/ATV STORE
JONESBORO CYCLE AND ATV

FINALISTS: Harley-Davidson of Jonesboro, Big Bore Bikes

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FINALISTS: The Social, Huntington Square

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CHILDREN'S BIRTHDAY PARTY VENUE **HIJINX**

FINALISTS: Jonesboro Gymnastics Academy, The Social

DANCE STUDIO **CHRISTIE MCNEILL DANCE STUDIO**

FINALISTS: The Foundation of Arts, Erin's Dance Academy

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FINALISTS: Ralvis Training Center, St. Bernards Sports Training

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FINALISTS: TLC Tutoring, The Apple Group

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT VENUE **HUNTINGTON SQUARE**

FINALISTS: JTown's Grill, Brickhouse Grill

ART GALLERY **SARA HOWELL ART GALLERY**

FINALISTS: Perspective Gallery + Framing, Bradbury Art Museum

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FINALISTS: Fallen Within, Cory Jackson

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FINALISTS: 107.9 KFIN, 100.5 The Eagle

RADIO PERSONALITY
TREY STAFFORD
FINALISTS: Brandon Baxter, Kelly Perry

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FINALISTS: Diana Davis, Aaron Castleberry

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FINALISTS: Tina Townsley (Jonesboro Public Schools),
Paige Allen (Brookland Public Schools)

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FINALISTS: Ron Teat (Valley View School District),
Steven Hampton (Nettleton Public Schools)

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FINALISTS: Oasis Arts & Eats, Local Fest

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FINALISTS: Magnolia Mental Health, CityYouth

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FINALISTS: Make-A-Wish Have-A-Heart Wish-A-Thon,
St. Bernards Triple Swing



SPECIAL SECTION

SELLING JONESBORO

An inside look at real estate in Jonesboro and the surrounding area



This month's featured home: 3005 Casey Springs Road, Jonesboro

Listing courtesy of Paula Westbrook, (878) 740-4990, and Lindsey Reeves, (870) 273-5684,
of Westbrook & Reeves Real Estate.



Luxury Listing

\$730,000

3005 Casey Springs Road, Jonesboro

A one-of-a-kind, custom-built four-bedroom, three-bath Craftsman-style home sitting on 2.43 scenic acres awaits you at 3005 Casey Springs Road.

This luxury listing features an abundant 3,660 square feet of living space with all of the bedrooms located on the main level. Upstairs, a huge bonus room offers the perfect space that can serve as a game room, guest bedroom, playroom or office.

Discover the beautiful views this property offers from the many windows in the dining and living room. The kitchen features beautiful white inset cabinetry, a breakfast bar, gorgeous granite countertops, a gas range and ice maker. The primary suite is beautifully designed with a free-standing tub, tile shower and double vanities.

Inside the two-car garage, a safe room adds additional security and protection. Just off the driveway, a concrete pad provides space for extra parking for growing families or those who love to entertain guests.

Need a place to unwind after a long day? Relax out back on the screened-in porch and covered area that is perfect for grilling. Cool off in the gorgeous 20x40-foot inground saltwater pool featuring a diving board, tanning ledge, lights, fountains and black liner. With an existing sprinkler system that covers most of the property, this home offers an outdoor oasis that is easy to keep green and growing.

Listing courtesy of Paula Westbrook and Lindsey Reeves. To schedule an appointment to view this luxury listing contact Audrey or Rodney Poff, Century 21 Portfolio, at (870) 926-4726 or (870) 926-5224 or call Westbrook & Reeves Real Estate at (870) 273-5864 or (870) 740-4990.



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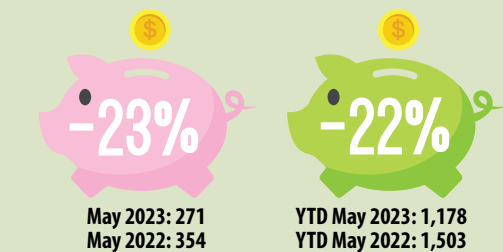
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May Housing Report

Editor's Note: The following information was provided by the Northeast Arkansas Board of Realtors. Residential housing statistics for April were released on June 6, 2023.

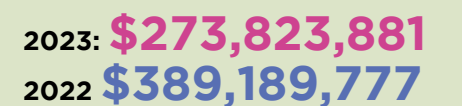
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RESIDENTIAL AVERAGE SOLD PRICE



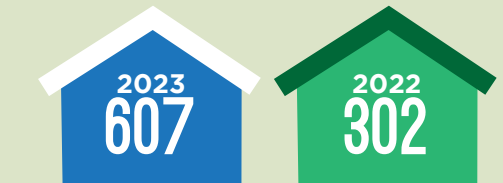
ALL CLASSES YTD MAY SOLD VOLUME



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UNDERSTANDING ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

BY LISA TEDDER

The industrialization of food production in order to feed a growing population has led to cheap, mass-produced food-like substances that are nutritionally questionable. These ultra-processed foods, or UPFs, fill our grocery stores to the point that the average American now gets roughly 60% of his or her calories from foods like bars, cereals, frozen convenience foods, fast foods and snack foods. Ultra-processed foods have totally altered the way we eat, and not for the better.

There are many health concerns that arise from eating too much of these types of foods, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, cancers and heart disease. Recent research has led scientists to believe that consuming a diet filled with UPFs is associated with higher rates of anxiety, depression and even cognitive decline. Knowing more about UPFs can help you make better choices for you and your family's nutritional needs.

Brazilian researchers developed a food classification system called NOVA that is now widely used by scientists who study food, nutrition and health. NOVA assigns food into four categories from unprocessed to ultra-processed. Group one is unprocessed or minimally processed foods - fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, eggs, milk. Group two is processed culinary ingredients like sugars, oils and butter. Group three is processed foods like canned vegetables, breads, cheeses and cereals. Group four is the ultra-high processed foods that usually are high in salt, sugar and fats while being low in fiber, minerals, vitamins and protein, such as packaged baked goods, sodas and crackers.

NOVA defines UPFs as foods that are made by extracting substances from whole foods and altering them with chemicals or additives to produce the final product. A hallmark of ultra-processed foods is that they contain ingredients rarely used at home, those unpronounceable long chemical sounding words that make you think of industrial uses, not food - high fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils, disodium inosinate, disodium guanylate, xanthum gum, etc. The more processed a food is, the less it resembles real food and the longer its shelf life.

Before eating, almost all foods are processed to some degree, except for raw fruits and vegetables. Cooking is a process and usually involves adding ingredients like oils, salts and other seasonings. But ultra-processed foods have been engineered to be very palatable, even addictive. Food scientists know that our bodies evolved to survive famine by developing an affinity for carbs and fatty foods. They have designed UPFs to contain easily digested carbs and simple sugars paired with salt and fat, the sweet spot for our tastebuds and the reward center in our brain.



When we feel happiness or joy, it's because of the release of dopamine and serotonin which are the so-called feel-good chemicals in our brain. Various things trigger the release of these chemicals, such as exercise, seeing a newborn or playing with a pet. Alcohol and drugs can also cause these good feelings, as can highly processed foods. Whole foods cooked so that they are still recognizable contain nutrients such as fiber that slows our digestion and how quickly our bodies absorb those nutrients. On the other hand, ultra-processed foods lack such additional nutrients and are full of quickly digested and absorbed carbohydrates and added fats. This gives our brain a hit of dopamine and leaves us craving more.

Why should we worry? Scientific evidence has long linked eating these processed foods like hot dogs, chips and packaged sweets with various health problems. Now there may be more cause for concern. Two studies in 2022 found that the more UPFs a person ate, the more likely they were to suffer from feelings of anxiety or depression. Another study followed 11,000 adults over a decade and found that the more UPFs a participant consumed, the more they experienced a decrease in cognitive function (the ability to learn, remember, reason and solve problems) by as much as 28%. Other studies have found that eating a healthy diet overall while eating UPFs occasionally seemed to offset any negative impacts from UPFs, but researchers don't know what amount of UPFs can be considered safe to consume.

While more studies are needed to find definitive answers, researchers believe UPFs negatively affect gut health. Our gut needs plenty of fiber to function properly, and diets high in UPFs are notoriously low in fiber and other nutrients important for gut health. Fiber is also necessary to produce short chain fatty acids, which are substances produced when your gut bacteria ferments fiber that you have eaten. These short chain fatty acids are important for brain health and protect against diseases like cancers.

It's easy to see that the only good things about UPFs are their taste and convenience, but that convenience comes with a pretty steep price in terms of your health. Children raised on a steady diet of junk can expect to have health problems at an early age and perhaps a shortened life span. Don't let package wording like "organic," "made with whole grains" or advertisements for plant-based food fool you into believing a processed food is healthy; even organic, plant-based foods have become UPFs like some oat milks and snacks marketed for babies and toddlers. Read the nutrition label. Better yet, focus your diet on whole, fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and meats that you prepare at home.

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JULY

Saturday, July 1

THE JUDD HILL FARMERS' MARKET, located at 3350 Aggie Road, offers locally-grown produce, plants and a variety of vendors including ranchers, bakers and crafters each Saturday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and on Tuesdays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Monday, July 3

Nettleton Baptist Church will host **FOOD TRUCKS AND FIREWORKS** at 7 p.m. The event will include a fireworks display and food truck vendors. The First Community Bank fireworks display will begin at 9:15 p.m. Admission is free. Info: (870) 932-4960.

East Arkansas Broadcasters will host **4TH FEST** at Joe Mack Campbell Park at 9 p.m. Families can gather for a free fireworks show synchronized to music played on EAB's radio stations. Go to kfin.com for more information.

Tuesday, July 4

East Arkansas Broadcasters will host the **RED, WHITE & BLUE COLOR RUN** at Joe Mack Campbell Park at 9 a.m. Tickets will be \$20 for adults and \$10 for kids 12 and under. A portion of the proceeds will benefit Ag for Autism. Info: visit kfin.com.

Jonesboro Radio Group will host **FREEDOM FEST** at Southside Softball Complex at 9:30 p.m. Families can gather for a free fireworks show and music broadcast by Jonesboro Radio Group. For more information, visit thefox1049.com.

Friday, July 7

The Foundation of Arts will present **FIRST FRIDAYS AT THE FORUM** featuring Ben Atkins at 7:30 p.m. and Stereo Blue at 8:30 p.m. To reserve a ticket, call (870) 935-2726 or visit foajonesboro.org.

Saturday, July 8

The **SUMMER CONCERT SERIES**, presented by the Historic Dyess Colony: Johnny Cash Boyhood Home and KASU, will host the final performer of the summer from 7-9 p.m. Musician Akeem Kemp will take the stage at Native Brew Works, 515 S. Gee St. Admission to the concert is free thanks to sponsors Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas and the Judd Hill Foundation. Additional details can be found at dyesscash.astate.edu or by calling (870) 764-2274.

Story Coffee House will host **DOG DAYS OF SUMMER** on the patio from 8-11 a.m. The event will include vendors, a pool party for dogs, live music and more. Pupsicles and pupaccinos will be available for purchase with all sales to be donated to the Northeast Arkansas Humane Society. Info: (870) 273-0788 or storycoffeehouse.com.

Sunday, July 9

The Foundation of Arts will present the **LEAP 2.0 SHOWCASE** at 2 p.m. The Learning Expression Through Arts Programming (LEAP 2.0) is designed for the FOA's adult clients with special needs. This is a pay-what-you-can, general admission event. Info: (870) 935-2726 or visit foajonesboro.org.

Thursday, July 13

Bradbury Art Museum will host an opening reception for **"TRANSIT TERRAIN AND OTHER SPATIAL NARRATIVES,"** a solo exhibition by Mary Ann Strandell. The reception will take place from 5-6:30 p.m. and is free to the public. Refreshments will be served. Viewing hours are Tuesday through Saturday from noon to 5 p.m. until August 30. Info: (870) 972-3687.

Saturday, July 15

THE GLASS FACTORY SUMMER CONCERT, featuring Marybeth Byrd, Cory Jackson and Will Wright, will begin at 7 p.m. at The Glass Factory, 313 W. Huntington Ave. To purchase tickets, visit eventbrite.com.

Monday, July 10 – Wednesday, July 19

The Foundation of Arts in Jonesboro will host **YOUNG ARTIST THEATRE: SONDHEIM TRIBUTE REVUE**. Camp dates will be July 10-19 from noon to 4:30 p.m. Students in this camp will work on theatrical and vocal techniques as they prepare for two outdoor grand finale performances. Every participant who registers will be featured in a solo or duet part and tuition assistance is available. Performance dates will be July 20-21. Info: (870) 935-2726 or visit foajonesboro.org.

Friday, July 21

St. Bernards will offer a free **COMMUNITY WELLNESS SCREENING** from 7-10 a.m. at St. Bernards Auditorium, located at 505 East Washington Ave. Participants may take advantage of numerous free screening opportunities, including blood pressure, height, weight, BMI, anemia, glucose, hemoglobin A1C, a lipid panel and a colon cancer screening. Info: (870) 207-7302 or email leguner@sbrmc.org.

Saturday, July 22

The Foundation of Arts in Jonesboro will host **METAL MAYHEM FEST 2023** at The Brickhouse Grill starting at 4 p.m. This night of heavy metal music will feature musicians such as The Delirium Effect, MunkyThumb, Pantheon, The Weeping Gate, Second Life, Tomb of Withering, Severe Headwound and Sleuthfoot. Tickets are \$15 in advance or \$20 at the door. To reserve a ticket, call (870) 935-2726 or visit foajonesboro.org.

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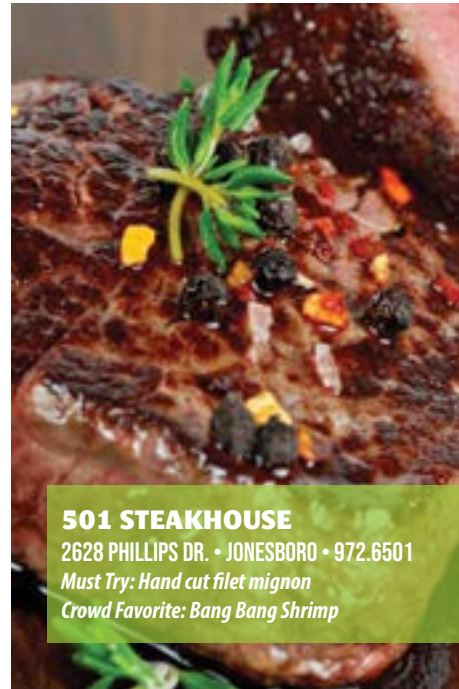
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JONESBORO OCCASIONS DINING GUIDE

Every effort is made to keep the listing current, but readers are urged to call ahead to confirm hours of operation, as schedules and menu items may change.



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2628 PHILLIPS DR. • JONESBORO • 972.6501
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Crowd Favorite: Bang Bang Shrimp



THE SOCIAL
1004 CHANCERY LANE
GREENSBOROUGH VILLAGE • 336.1134
Must Try: The Social Platter
Crowd Favorite: Thanks, Nashville



JTOWN'S GRILL
2610 E JOHNSON AVE. • JONESBORO • 275.6514
Must Try: JTown Burger
Crowd Favorite: JTown's Ultimate Dip



THE CAJUN CAFE
3228 S. CARAWAY RD. • JONESBORO • 520.6420
Must Try: Crawfish Etouffee
Crowd Favorite: Fried Boudin Nuggets



THE LOST PIZZA CO.
906 SOUTHWEST DR. • JONESBORO • 520.6227
Must Try: The Lucille
Crowd Favorite: Delta Hot Tamales



THE PARSONAGE
305 SOUTH MAIN STREET
DOWNTOWN JONESBORO • 203.6116
Must Try: Parsonage Chicken Salad
Crowd Favorite: The OMG

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Bluebirds of Happiness



BY AUDREY POFF
ILLUSTRATION BY BRITTNEY OSBORN

IT WAS EARLY SPRING WHEN I NOTICED THE FIRST BLUEBIRD IN OUR BACKYARD.

He was sitting on top of a blue birdhouse designed to look like a church that I bought last year.

We live just inside the bypass, not far from the thousands of vehicles that travel the interstate every day, so I was both surprised and delighted to see him perched on top of the small blue church.

A few days later, the female landed on top of another birdhouse that my son, Adam, had given me as a Mother's Day gift. During the next few days, we realized she was building a nest in the blue church. I think that was the moment when I officially turned into a bird nerd.

We restocked our Japanese Maple with suet that was suitable for bluebirds and watched from the deck as the male and female fed throughout the day. As the female gathered twigs for her nest, the male would fly down and sit on top of the church as soon as she disappeared inside. Once she exited the birdhouse, the male would fly back to a nearby tree until it was time to stand guard again.

We gave them their space and tried not to disturb them while they were preparing for their brood, but I would be lying if I said we did not attempt to peep inside the birdhouse once or twice to see if there were eggs or babies. After nearly a month had passed, we stopped seeing the adult bluebirds going into the blue church. We were a little concerned that something had happened to them and missed seeing them play in the backyard.

A few weeks later, I noticed the adult male had returned to the Japanese Maple and the female soon followed with her young brood. To our surprise, there were now six bluebirds making their home in our backyard – two adults and four babies. That's a whole

lot of happiness. I felt like we had won the bluebird lottery as we watched all six land in the tree or on a nearby power line.

With four more mouths to feed, we restocked the tree with suet and bought an additional birdfeeder that we filled with mealworms – a bluebird favorite. We watched as the bluebirds, cardinals and occasional pesky blue jay fed from the tree.

To my surprise, I soon began seeing the male and female working on another nest in the blue church. They barely had their first four out of the house and they were already preparing for their next brood. After a little research, I learned that bluebirds are monogamous and sometimes have up to three broods between March and August.

I may never have enough patience to go out in the wilderness birdwatching for certain species, but even I am a little shocked at how easy it was to become obsessed with our new feathered friends. With the help of a bird app on my phone, I am discovering the identities, calls and songs of the birds in our backyard. I've also ordered a pair of binoculars for better birdwatching and can't wait to get a few close-up photos of our backyard broods. Seriously, who have I become?

The sighting of a bluebird has brought joy to people for thousands of years, and many cultures view it as a symbol of joy, happiness and luck. It's been a challenging year so far, and we could use all three. Perhaps that's why they landed at our home.

Whatever the reason, it's a bluebird kind of summer at our house, and we are looking forward to watching another brood of happiness take flight in our own backyard, even if we have to help launch them ourselves.

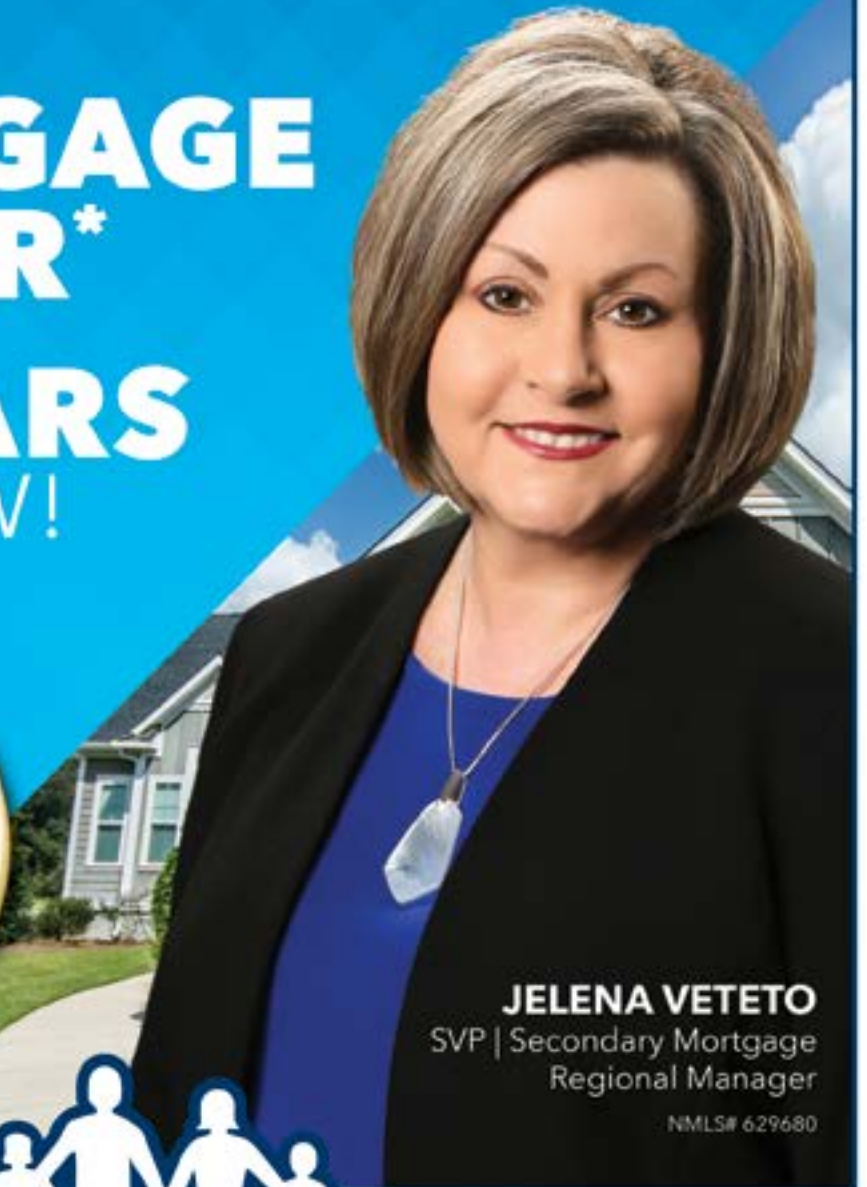
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