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6 ABANDONED PLANTS THRIVING

Local resident's diligence and research, turns abandoned plants into thriving operation

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After moving to Foley, a new business is born



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ON THE COVER: Donnie Barrett, a native of Fairhope has invested many years of study and research learning how to grow the best tea plants to produce delicious teas.

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David Williford, Foley Local General Manager, at 615-243-3031, or email David at dwilliford@wilcolocal.com.



JOHNNY APPLESEED OF TEA

BY LINDA WILLIFORD

The Fairhope Tea Plantation is tucked away off Hwy 98 amongst the woodlands, wetlands, and agricultural fields. Donnie Barrett, a native of Fairhope and owner of the plantation, has done many years of study and research on how to grow and make tea. He has been all over the world, including China, to learn how to make the perfect cup of tea. Barrett came from an agricultural background. His father was an agricultural research scientist. Barrett's classes in wildlife biology at Auburn University have helped him with horticultural techniques for his tea.

Barrett started experimenting with tea in 1979. He was dumping hurricane debris at a Corps of Engineers dump site at the Auburn University Research and Extension Center in Fairhope, Alabama. He came across the area where the Lipton Tea Company had been conducting tea-growing experiments at a Substation. Hurricane Fredrick of 1979 caused a lot of damage, and the Lipton experiments were terminated. Lipton took all the files and data and left the area. Barrett was able to salvage some tea plants that were not destroyed and started his own experimenting with the tea plants.

Barrett says, "Today, I have 61,000 mature tea plants and thousands and thousands of little ones on my farm." He says, "I'm the Johnny Appleseed of the tea plant." Barrett sells tea plants to big farmers from all over the United States. "I'm well known in the industry for selling tea plants and am one of the most senior tea growers in the U.S."

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functional vitamins, supplements and nutrition.

Morgan works closely with her clients to provide them with high quality, individualized care. In her nursing career, she has seen many patients who have suffered with medical conditions that could not be treated by conventional care. That is why Morgan has decided to devote her time to researching and training on alter-native treatments in order to provide her patients with the best quality of care.

Morgan lives in Orange Beach with her husband, daughter, and 2 dogs. In her spare time she enjoys going to the beach, travelling, trying new experiences, and spending quality time with family and friends.

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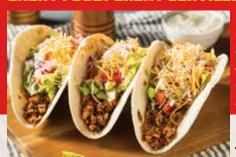


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< FROM PAGE 6

Tourists come to Barrett's farm every day to learn how to grow and make tea. His tours include a ride through rows of tea plants on his plantation, and a thorough discussion of tea growing and tea making, over a cup of tea. "I tell them the difference between black tea, green tea, and white tea. I have a bucket of tea plants with me, and I give a piece of the plants to my visitors." He also has green tea and black tea available to purchase, loose or in traditional tea bags.

He generally sells 5,000 to 7,000 tea plants to the big farmers every year. He has already sold 4,000 plants this year to farmers from South Carolina and Virginia. "I even have farmers that travel all the way from California to get my tea plants," Barrett said. "Typically, farmers purchase the tea plants in the fall. This is the best time to move the plants." The farmers and visitors must come to his plantation to get the plants because Barrett does not ship. He says, "I don't like going to the post office and standing in lines."

Tea plants can tolerate a wide range of soil. However, "There is a technique to growing tea, "said Barrett. "Originally, they come from an area where they live in cracks of rocks. Their roots run from cracks in the rocks looking for dirt." Barrett holds one-hour

classes for visitors and teaches them how to plant and grow their tea plants. The classes are free, and he sells his plants for \$1.00 each. He said, "Generally, if you go to a professional, they will charge \$650/hour for a consultation fee and then charge \$18-24 a plant. It's obvious that I get a lot of business. I help people start farms," he said enthusiastically.

Barrett says, "I'm what you call an artisan producer, not a commercial producer. I have never wanted to be a big farmer selling to shops, restaurants, and huge companies." He was adamant about that statement. He added, "I have resisted for 44 years." He explains that he just wants to sell to the people and farmers who want to learn about growing and making tea. "I sell most of my tea right here in my driveway."

Barrett retired 5 years ago after many years of service at the Fairhope Museum. He has a wide range of background experience, including being a schoolteacher and writer of many history books. A few years ago, he started writing his own book about tea growing and making tea. "I want to share what I know and how I have evolved over the years. I add a little information to my book every year." Barrett said, "I do all of this for the fun of it. It was just a hobby, but now it's a hobby on steroids." Visit fairhopeteaplantation.com.



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Maria Cazalas is our bilingual Realtor!! Maria knows the importance of efficient communication. The personalized attention and dedication to her clients makes Maria one of the favorite Realtors in the industry. She covers all of South Alabama, including but not limited to Foley, Gulf Shores, Daphne, Spanish Fort, Fairhope, Robertsdale, amongst others. Whether Spanish or English, Maria guides and helps her clients in buying and selling their properties all the way to the finish line.



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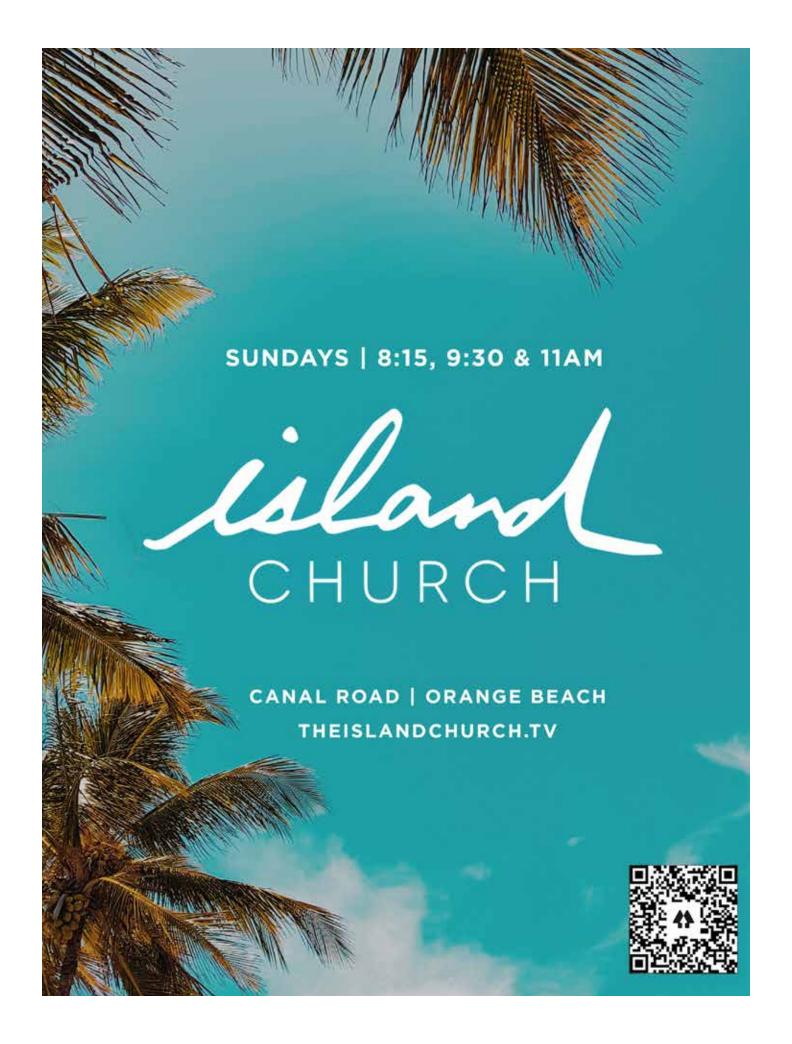
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SO MUCH JOY



I have been the pastor at Grace Lutheran Church at 491 W. 23rd Avenue in Gulf Shores since December 2022. Grace maintains a food pantry called Grace's Table. I have been curious about the three people who run our food pantry: Kathy, Kim and Dan. It takes 3 mornings a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday to make

our food pantry work. Dan goes to the local grocery stores and the Christian Service Center in Gulf Shores and picks up frozen meat, fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, breads and desserts. I wanted to know what inspires such dedication.

It's the joy. So much joy. They have fun! Serious fun together and with the folks who come and pick up the food. They share an interest in the folks, too. My advice: if you want to increase your joy, increase your service to others. This is that abundant life of which Jesus spoke. "I have come that you might have life, and that more abundantly." The most abundant lives are lived in ministry and service to others. My advice: if you want to increase your joy, increase your service to others.

Pastor Marcia Schultz is the pastor at Grace Lutheran Church, Gulf Shores, Al. She moved from Grand Rapids, Michigan. She has been in pastoral ministry since graduation from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in 2008.







FIREARMS WITH A FLAIR

BY LINDA WILLIFORD

Nick Bottjer, owner of Foley Custom Guns, has a wide range of handguns, rifles, and shotguns available for purchase at his store and on his website. His outdoors and sporting goods store has more than just guns. He has holsters, gun cases, optics, magazines, knives, ammo, and fishing equipment. Bottjer prides himself on the fact that with his custom-build business, he is one of the few gunsmiths who does cerakoting on guns (custom painting).

Cerakote is not just paint. It is a ceramic, heat-resistant coating that comes in many colors. According to Bottjer, "You can cerakote your entire gun, and throw it in the ocean and pull it out 20 years later. Other than it being covered with moss, the finish on the gun will still be intact."

More than anything else, Bottjer says, much of his custom gun business is "paint jobs on firearms." He said, "If a woman comes in and doesn't want a black gun, I can paint it pink if that's what

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< FROM PAGE 14

she wants." He added, "Sometimes a husband will come in and buy a gun as a gift for his wife. But generally, women will come in and buy their own guns." He said, "There are times people will want special writings on their guns for a holiday or a special event. I've even painted names on guns."

If you need a special gun order, Bottjer can do that too. He sells, buys, and trades guns.

He says that his business increases significantly during the hunting season. That's his busy time of the year.

Bottjer has always had a passion for guns. He was brought up to respect firearms. He has been a member of a shooting community for years. He said, "You will find it is a tight-knit community with good and respectful people."

Even though he does not have shooting classes at his store, he suggests a couple of shooting ranges near Foley. You may want to check out the Styx River Shooting Center in Robertsdale and Three Brothers Arms in Stapleton. "It's a good idea to go or belong to a shooting range or club. You can keep up with the changes and new gun laws. Bottjer said that the most common guns for home defense are 20 and 12-gauge shotguns, 9MM pistols, and the .38 special revolvers.

Bottjer and his wife moved from the West Coast of California to Foley two years ago. He opened his store shortly after. You can order a gun from his website with free shipping or come by the store. Bottjer has a Facebook page that shows off his artistic flair



of different designs with cerakoting the guns. He said, "I'm not big on social media, so coming by the store is the best way to contact me."

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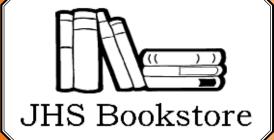
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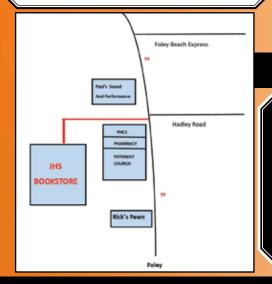
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DIRECTIONS:

Peel and mince garlic. Wash and dry parsley. Shave leaves off stems; discard stems and mince leaves.

In large bowl, whisk minced garlic, half the minced parsley (reserve remainder for garnish), olive oil, vinegar, Dijon mustard, salt and pepper.

Cut steak into cubes; transfer to marinade bowl and toss to coat.

Wash tomatoes, mushrooms and green pepper. Halve mushrooms. Add tomatoes, mushrooms and green pepper to marinade. Peel onion and cut into chunks; add to marinade. Toss beef and vegetables until well coated.

Heat grill pan, outdoor grill or skillet to medium-high heat.

Thread steak and vegetables onto six skewers.

Cook kebabs in batches until steak is browned and vegetables are tender, 3-5 minutes per side. Transfer to plate and repeat with remaining kebabs.

To serve, plate kebabs and sprinkle with remaining minced parsley.

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