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Inside *{local}* May' 24



6 **GREEN THUMBS CERTIFIED**

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14 **THE LITTLE HOUSE**

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LOCAL FOCUS

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FAITH & WORSHIP PAGE 12, 13

ON THE COVER: May brings us deeper into Spring as trees sprout leaves and flowers begin to pop up from the ground.

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Photography by Linda Williford

BALDWIN COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

LINDA WILLIFORD

If you have a green thumb or an interest in growing plants, you might count it beneficial to join the Baldwin County Master Gardeners. The group is a nonprofit organization of trained and certified volunteers who love gardening and want to share their knowledge of gardening with their communities.

The Baldwin County Master Gardeners are associated with the Alabama Master Gardeners. The mission of the Alabama Masters Gardeners Association is to assist and support the Alabama Cooperative Extension System in its educational programs to support the local Master Gardeners. They train volunteers to educate

communities with research-based information about gardening.

The Baldwin County Master Gardeners (BCMG) recently had their Annual Spring Plant Sale. Dolores Hammack, plant sale coordinator, said, "We had a huge variety of plants that sold out quickly." They do this 3-day event every year at Week's Bay off Hwy. 98 across from the Visitor's Center. This plant sale serves as a fundraiser to help replenish the group's expenses and provides scholarships for students who are interested in horticulture for a career. Hammack said, "Last year, we raised \$10,000 and provided four college scholarships."

Hammack said, "Presently, the BCMG consists of 183

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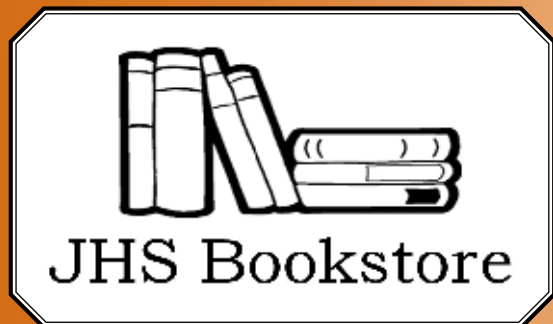
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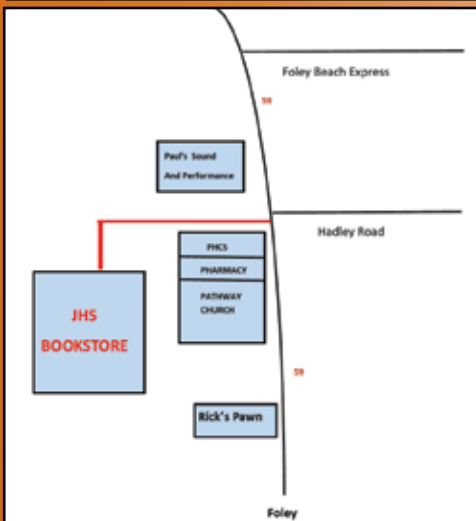
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Left to right: Jim Faulkner, Eileen Huisman, Dolores Hammack prepare for the annual plant sale held by the Master Gardeners in April. Photography by Linda Williford

< FROM PAGE 6

members.” These members have earned a Certificate of Master Gardeners after completing a training course and 50 hours of volunteer service in the community. If interested in becoming a Master Gardener, you do not have to be a gardening expert but do need a passion for gardening and want to learn and grow. The course includes research-based gardening information on topics such as home lawns, trees, shrubs, annual and perennial flowers, and vegetable gardening. The spring session for 2024 is full, but you have time to register for the fall session, which will be August 8 – November 7. Registration is June 1-30. Go to www.aces.edu to sign up.

Hammack said, “We have some members who like public speaking, and they hold seminars and speak to gardening clubs throughout the year. Sometimes the seminars are online.” She said that these events are advertised through the website and their Facebook.” This year, every Tuesday in the month of March,

workshops were open to the public prior to the Annual Spring Plant Sale.

Eileen Huisman the BCMG’s Outreach Coordinator was certified in 2019. She said, “The BCMG group is like one big family. We work hard but we love what we do.” At the plant sale, they had a huge selection of vines, fruit and nut trees, shrubs, herbs, annual, and perennials. Huisman said, “This year’s sale was monumental. We had cars backed up to get in all the way from Hwy. 98.”

Huisman coordinates Arber Day events, as well as other outreach events. She also coordinates meetings with high schools that have horticulture classes. Each county has its own Master Gardeners group. The Baldwin County group stays very busy.

Go to www.baldwinmastergardeners.com for more information, including pesticides and when to plant, fertilize, and prune. The monthly newsletters also have a wealth of information about gardening and related topics. If you have any questions or need help with general gardening or how to treat a plant with a disease, call the helpline at 877-252-4769.

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Juan Vazquez is the owner of La Casita located in Foley at 740 W. Laurel Avenue. Photography by Chris J Hinton

FRESH MEX GRILL

BY LINDA WILLIFORD

La Casita, “the little or small house,” was recently voted the best Mexican restaurant in Baldwin County. According to Juan Vazquez’s customers, this family-owned and operated restaurant has amazing food and service. Vazquez said, “We have been open for only nine months, and we are blessed and lucky to have all of our customers.”

Family is very important to Vazquez. He said that the restaurant, consisting of 11 tables, was named by his children. They said, “It looks like a little house.” Vazquez has four children, two of whom are twins.

Vazquez says, “I have been in the restaurant business since 2006, starting out as a waiter. I then worked my way up into management for 14 years.” Vazquez then opened La Casita in July 2023.

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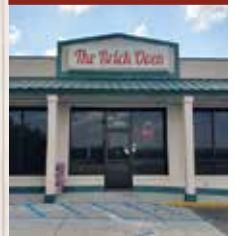
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La Casita, “the little or small house,” was recently voted the best Mexican restaurant in Baldwin County. Photography by Chris J Hinton

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La Casita offers special deals each week. Some of the specials include Mondays, “Taco Salads,” with a choice of ground beef or chicken; Tuesdays, “Taco Tuesdays;” Wednesdays, “Margarita Specials; and Thursdays, “Buy two dinners and get a free dessert.” Vazquez says, “We have many plates to choose from, but one of our most popular plates is the fajita dinner.”

Vazquez says that the Mexican food in America is very different from the authentic Mexican food. The Tex-Mex food, as we know it, is a blend of Mexican, American, and Spanish cuisines. In Mexico, he said, “They don’t know what Chimichangas are, and the soups and guacamole are very different.” Some of the differences worth noting are: Authentic Mexican food uses white cheese instead of yellow. Burritos include mostly meat, skipping the rice and veggies that American diners are so fond of, and Authentic Mexican food uses soft tortilla wraps instead of taco shells, fresh

beans instead of canned beans, and corn on the cob instead of sweet corn in the recipe dishes.

Vazquez’s commitment to the community is evident in La Casita’s Spirit Nights, held a couple of times each month for the Foley High School soccer team. This special event, which is a fundraiser for the soccer team that one of his children is part of, is a testament to the sense of community that La Casita fosters. Vazquez generously donates a percentage of all sales between 5 and 7 p.m. to the soccer team, showing his dedication to the community that supports his restaurant.

Since Cinco De Mayo is on Sunday this year and the restaurant is normally closed on Sundays, Vazquez says that they will be celebrating on Friday and Saturday with menu specials. “Everyone is invited to celebrate with us,” he says. They are open Monday-Saturday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. The lunch menu is from 11-3 p.m. They are located at 740 West Laurel Ave. (off Hwy. 98). You can follow La Casita on Facebook. See ad on page 4.

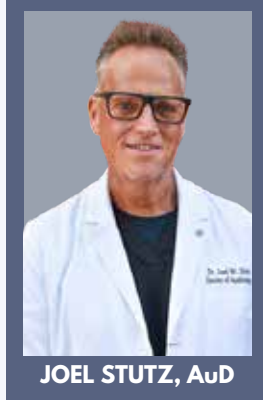


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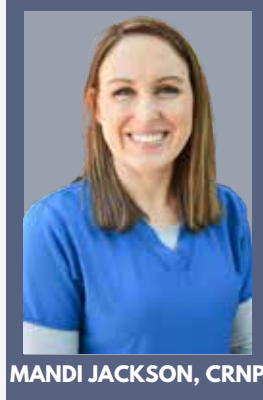
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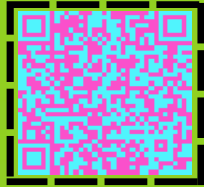
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