

SMOKE SIGNAL

VOLUME 58, ISSUE 9

Serving the Smoke Rise Community since 1968

December, 2025

www.smokesignalnews.com

*The Staff of the Smoke Signal
Wishes You Merry Christmas!*



Stars & Promises Christmas with Peter Mayer

Smoke Rise Baptist Church invites the community to join us in celebrating the season with two festive events filled with music, joy, and opportunities to give back.

On Saturday, December 7, beginning at 7:00 p.m., we welcome acclaimed singer, songwriter, and guitarist Peter Mayer for his Stars & Promises Christmas Show. This free concert is open to everyone and offers a heart-warming evening of music.

Before the concert, visit our Give More Store, open from 6:15–7:00 p.m. and during intermission. Here you can shop for unique gifts that support local and global mission partners. It's a wonderful way to give gifts that truly make a difference.

Bring your family and friends and join us as we celebrate Christmas together through music, community, and generosity at Smoke Rise Baptist Church.

Shoppers hunt for unique gifts at the Smoke Rise Baptist Church Give More Store, open during the Peter Mayer concert.



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A Place Called Tucker

By Mayor Frank Auman



My time as Mayor has mostly felt more like a sprint than a marathon. There's been so much to do, we haven't had a minute to spare, so I haven't spent much time reflecting.

But as I approach the end of my third and final term as Mayor, I've been asked a lot about what I'm most proud of, what I'd like to be remembered for, and what I'll remember as our accomplishments. And so I have begun to reflect a little about where we've been, where we are, and all that's taken place over these ten years.

When we began, we had three sets of competing priorities: We were literally starting from scratch, with no city hall or even an office to work from. We had no staff, no ordinances, no way to collect taxes or fees, nothing but seven newly elected officials and a city charter. And yet, we had the duties of any regular city to perform, starting on day one. We inherited zoning matters that were on a timetable, and we had to hold hearings and make decisions. We had public safety responsibilities (there was a murder at the old Wooden Nickel Pub overnight on the night I was sworn in), roads to take care of, and many other immediate duties.

But beyond that, we had a vision for things that needed to be attended to and improved around the city, including parks, beautification of our rights of way and public spaces, making ourselves attractive for new residents and businesses, and much more. We had no choice but to take on all three at full speed, and all at the same time.

As I look back across all we've accomplished, I can't point to one thing that I would choose as that overworked term, "legacy". Yes, we've created and restored and built some great parks and public spaces, like the Rec Center, Fitzgerald Field, and the brand-new Tucker Town Green. We've paved something like 130 miles of roads, installed several miles of new sidewalks, and built the first segments of an ambitious trail system. We've improved the look and feel of downtown and brought in new businesses all around the city. I love to hear from people who knew Tucker in years gone by, to find that those folks have been blown away when they see it anew. But I think the two greatest accomplishments, and the two that will have the most lasting impact are less tangible.

First, we have been extraordinarily successful at placemaking. That is, while many people knew of a place called Tucker previously, Tucker has now become a place where people want to be, and a place where they know what to expect when they come. My expression of that has been that we want to be a place where a person can live, work, play and pray ... for their entire life – the length of it and the breadth of it. A real hometown, where a person can choose to do all of those things with their neighbors and in a very manageable geographic area. The average age of our population has declined significantly, and that's not only a reflection of our success, but one of the most significant reasons for confidence in our future.

And secondly, we have focused from the beginning on getting the processes right. That means conducting ourselves with integrity, respecting our citizens, and establishing our character as a city in a way that will serve as an example for the years and leaders to come. We quite literally kept front of mind the fact that everything we did for the first time (which was pretty much everything!), would instantly become "the way we've always done it". We were very conscious of guiding processes in such a way that we'd be proud to follow them for the rest of our lives.

And so, as we come to one of our last firsts, that is, electing and installing a new mayor for the first time since the beginning, I hope and believe we're leaving behind a city and a government that will stand the test of time and remain a point of pride for all of us. It's been a joy and an honor, and I look forward to encouraging and cheering on the leadership that will move that legacy forward.



Smoke Signal

P.O. Box 1038, Tucker, GA 30085

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Smoke Signal Deadlines

DECEMBER 13

Please e-mail articles to:

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Deadline for classified ads is DECEMBER 10

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Smoke Rise Baptist Church

5901 Hugh Howell Road
Senior Pastor: Dr. Chris George, cgeorge@smokerisebaptist.org
Phone: 770-469-5856 SmokeRiseBaptist.org

SUNDAY
9:45 a.m. - Attend Sunday School through Zoom or In-Person
11:00 a.m. - Attend Worship via Live Stream or In-Person
WEDNESDAY
5:00 p.m. - Attend our Wednesday Dinner
6:00 p.m. - Followed by activities and Bible Study for all ages

Eastminster Presbyterian Church

5801 Hugh Howell Road
Rev. Jeanine Fulton, Pastor
Phone: 770-469-4881 [Website: Eastminster.us](http://Eastminster.us)

SUNDAY
9:15 a.m. Adult & Children's Sunday School
10:30 a.m. In-Person and Live streaming of Worship service

First Moravian Church

Pastor: Reverend Elroy Christopher
(770) 491-7250
[Website: Gamoravian.org](http://Gamoravian.org)

SUNDAY
10:00 a.m. Sunday School-Adults & Children
11:00 a.m. Worship
12:00 p.m. Fellowship Time

Mountain West Church

4818 Hugh Howell Road
Pastor: Mo Huggins
770-491-0228 Mwchurch.com

SUNDAY 9:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., and 11:55 a.m. Worship

MONDAY 7:00 p.m.

In-person and streaming online on [Facebook and mwchurch.com](http://Facebook.com/mwchurch.com)

Is your neighbor known for being an avid cyclist, a holiday decorations fanatic, an author, or the fastest dog-walker on the block? The *Smoke Signal* encourages folks in Smoke Rise to submit stories about how neighbors became friends. Submissions should be 300-500 words.

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**ART Station presents:
The Pin-Up Girls
Christmas Spectacular!**

By James Hindman, Jeffrey Loddin and Mark Waldrop

Megan, Dana, Leanne, and Leanne's last-minute stand-in brother, Joel, are lighting up the local VFW with a festive evening full of music, mischief and mistletoe. Expect a sleigh filled with holiday classics, toe-tapping original tunes, and songs that may bring a tear to the eye when you least expect it. Along the way, we discover what Santa's reindeer really get up to on the roof, the untold truth behind the Grinch's big moment, and how a Living Nativity ended in total disaster. "Pin-Up" is a feel-good holiday musical with heart, hijinks and a whole lot of sparkle.

The Pin-Up Girls features Avani Lesane, Branden Hembree, Erin North, and JoAnna Johnson. Direction by David Thomas. Musical Direction by Gamble.

All performances will be in the ART Station Theatre at 5384 Manor Drive in the historic village of Stone Mountain.

Ticket prices are \$32 for adults, \$27 for seniors & \$22 for students and Military personnel.

Performances:

December 11th - 21st, Thursdays & Fridays at 8 pm.
Saturdays & Sundays at 3 pm
with one Wednesday matinee December 17th
at 10:30am (reduced-priced tickets)

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Come Celebrate the Advent and Christmas Season at Eastminster

Eastminster Presbyterian Church invites the community to join in a joyful observance of the Advent and Christmas season with a series of festive gatherings designed to bring people together in faith, music, and merriment.

The festivities begin with the Winter Dance and Social on Wednesday, December 3, at 6:00 PM. This magical evening promises plenty of holiday cheer, upbeat music, light refreshments, laughter, and lots of opportunities to move, mingle, and enjoy the season together. Guests can visit the hot chocolate bar, decorate cookies with friends, and capture memories at the holiday photo booth. Attendees are invited to wear their most festive outfits and come ready to dance.

On Sunday, December 7, at 3:00 PM, the church will host its Advent Concert, Carols and Keyboards, featuring beautiful piano and organ duets performed by Carole Mitchell and Susan Ray. This inspiring afternoon of music will fill the sanctuary with the timeless melodies of Christmas carols and beloved hymns, expressing the joy and meaning of Advent through music that warms the heart and lifts the spirit.



Join us on Wednesday, December 10, for a Hymn Sing at 6:15 PM. Participants will choose and sing their favorite hymns and Christmas songs. It's a wonderful evening of fellowship, music, and shared joy as the church community prepares its heart for the holidays.

Our annual Lessons and Carols Service will take place on Sunday, December 14, at 10:30 AM. This cherished tradition weaves together scripture readings, instrumental music, and carols that tell the story of Christ's birth. It is a time of reflection and gratitude, inviting all to experience the hope and wonder of the Advent season through word and song.

The season culminates on Wednesday, December 24, at 5:30 PM with a meaningful Christmas Eve Service. The congregation will gather in anticipation of the birth of Christ, sharing in the sacred gift of Holy Communion and receiving a keepsake ornament. The evening will conclude with the warm glow of candlelight and the singing of a beloved carol, a touching reminder of the light and hope that Christ brings into the world.

This Advent season all are welcome to attend these events and share in the warmth, joy, and spirit of community at Eastminster Presbyterian Church!

A Special Advent Invitation from Smoke Rise Baptist Church

The congregation of Smoke Rise Baptist Church cordially invites you to join us as we celebrate the Advent Season. Through music and the spoken word, we will focus on the beloved Mother of Christ and her journey to Bethlehem. Worship services will feature children, youth and adult voices, as well as instrumentalists of our church, as we celebrate each Sunday, Waiting with Mary.

Advent 1 · November 30 · Anticipation

Sanctuary Choir, The Angel Gabriel (Basque Carol)
with featured carol, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

Advent 2 · December 7 · Affirmation

Sanctuary Choir, *Mary Gladly Told Her Cousin* and Sanctuary Handbell Choir, *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day* with featured carol, *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*

Advent 3 · December 14 · Celebration

Youth Choir, *How Great Our Joy* and *Magnificat*
Children Choristers, *Mary Rocking, Gently Rocking* and *Calypso Lullaby*

Music Friends and Weekday School, *Baby Jesus Born Today* and *Little Baby Jesus*
with featured carol, *Joy to the World*

Advent 4 · December 21 · Preparation

Sanctuary Choir, *Advent Song* with featured carol, *Love Came Down at Christmas*

Christmas Eve · December 24 · Culmination

Sanctuary Choir and Soloist, Paula Rowell, *O Holy Night* with featured carol, *Silent Night*

Christmastide · December 28 · Contemplation

Sanctuary Choir and Soloist, Fredolyn Stitt, *Mary Did You Know* with featured carol, *Angels from the Realms of Glory*



**Sing We Now of Christmas
A Celebration in Song**

**Sanctuary Choir
and Orchestra**

Join us on Sunday, December 21 at 7:00 pm for a glorious evening of music as the Sanctuary choir presents *Sing We Now of Christmas*. This festive concert features a full professional orchestra including members from the Atlanta Symphony, Atlanta Chamber Music, music educators from our community, as well as our own very talented church members. Don't miss this celebration of music. Admission is free.



Smoke Rise Elementary's Book Character Day student participants.

Book Character Day at Smoke Rise Elementary

Smoke Rise Elementary was filled with excitement and imagination during this year's Book Character Day! The day began with a school-wide parade where families and community members cheered on the students' imaginative costumes.

Students, teachers, and staff came to school dressed as their favorite characters ranging from classic storybook heroes to modern literary favorites. The hallways buzzed with laughter and storytelling as the children proudly shared the inspirations behind their books. Afterwards, teachers took the opportunity to host book discussions so students could reflect on what made their characters special.

This wonderful event encouraged students to connect reading with creativity, reminding everyone that books can transport us to magical worlds and spark endless possibilities.

Lunch & Learn:
Celebrating and Saving Holiday Food Traditions

DEKALB HISTORY CENTER

Celebrating and Saving Holiday Food Traditions with Amy Durrell and Jiffy Page

Join Atlanta historian Amy Durrell and Pixorium founder Jiffy Page on Tuesday December 9th for a lively discussion about holiday food history in the South, along with how to preserve and share your own family traditions. Come with treasured childhood holiday cooking and food memories and how you share your holiday food traditions and recipes today.

About the Presenters:

Amy Durrell, History Afoot Atlanta

Amy looks at history with a focus on the social history of Atlanta and Georgia. Since starting a job in the iconic Candler Building in 1986, she has explored Atlanta's history and led walking and biking tours since 1987. Her interests include residential stories, the origins of Civil Rights activism, changes in education, and women's contributions in the city.

History Afoot Atlanta offers historian-led walking tours that highlight the connections between past and present and foster conversations about the diverse individuals who shaped the city. Visit <https://www.historyafootatlanta.com> for more information.

Jennifer Dunn Page "Jiffy"

Jennifer Page ("Jiffy") is the founder of Pixorium, an Atlanta-based business helping families and individuals preserve their photo collections and stories. With a background in print production and decades of experience, she transforms collections of photos into lasting legacies.

Pixorium preserves family and individual memories through high-quality scanning and custom storybooks. We turn scattered photos and fading keepsakes into meaningful, shareable heirlooms—because the stories deserve to be remembered. Visit <https://www.pixorium.com/> for more information.

Tuesday December 9 • 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

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Fite Mission Circle Hosts Local Poet and Author

by Alecia Reed, Member of Fite Mission Circle

Poet and author Victoria Crosby spoke to the Fite Mission Circle of Smoke Rise Baptist Church on October 14, 2025. She told the group about her early years growing up in England, her move to Long Island, New York at nineteen years of age, and her eventual move to the Smoke Rise Community four years ago.

The delightful author shared selections from *Close Encounters of the Elvis Kind* as well as her humorous poetry collection, *PoeticVic/Hysteric*. She gladly answered questions from the audience and signed copies of her books.

Victoria has also made presentations to Sadie's Ladies women's circle at SRBC and participated at the Snellville Book Festival and the Garden Clubs of Georgia's Leading Lights event at Callanwolde.



The Holiday Season

by Victoria R. Crosby

The holiday season is a time of community, a celebration of family.

Decorations of twinkling lights and ornaments, candles with spicy holiday scents.

Children excited by thoughts of gifts to come and delicious treats for everyone.

Cookies and cakes and hot mulled cider with friends and family, the circle grows wider.

No matter which holidays you celebrate, or if there is none you commemorate.

Christmas, Hanukkah, Winter Solstice or others, remember our less fortunate sisters and brothers.

The season is one for giving and sharing, of helping, donating and caring.

May joy and peace fill your hearts as one year ends and another one starts.

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Is it REALLY Clean?

by Joyce Ray, Staff Writer

As our calendars get full of more social encounters at this time of year, good cheer is not the only thing that gets spread through our families. Nothing spoils a holiday more than becoming housebound with illness while you are entertaining visiting guests. Being on guard with regular cleaning and disinfecting can make a difference in just how many family members get infected with a shared cold or virus. It is important to invest in good disinfecting products to kill the germs that invade our homes.

The kitchen is a major landing spot where most of the germs we encounter originate and spread.

#1. The dirtiest item in your kitchen and possibly the entire house is the kitchen sponge or dish cloth. No matter which you choose, it should be thoroughly washed after each use with disinfecting soap, and sponges should be tossed out after about 2 weeks of use. Sponges can be sanitized in the microwave for about 1 minute on high, but this will also break down the fibers more quickly and provide more places for germs to collect.

#2. The kitchen sink. This area gets more use for more varied activities in both cleaning and preparing food. It should be washed well and sanitized with strong solution and hot water after all food prepping. Always wash thoroughly after cutting up meat.

#3. The Refrigerator. This rivals the kitchen sponge for most bacteria found from food spills, mold, and dirt brought in with containers that have been on store shelves and touched by many hands. Wipe down spills weekly and check for expired food on a regular basis. Deep cleaning should take place every three to four months. All fresh veggies should be washed and dried thoroughly before being stored to clean and keep out excessive moisture. The safest refrigerator temperature setting is between 35 and 38 degrees. Milk should be stored in the back of a lower or middle shelf which is the coldest part of the refrigerator and should not be stored in the door, which is the warmest area. Change air filters as required by manufacturers.

#4. Cutting boards, especially those made of wood, can harbor bacteria. The nicks and cuts in the wood are ideal places for bacteria to collect. Raw chicken has the greatest risk of contamination of any meat. After cutting up chicken make sure the counter surfaces have been cleaned thoroughly and disinfected. The new titanium cutting boards offer a strong promise for the easiest to clean and sanitize.

#5. Countertops. Use disinfectant to sanitize after each meal prep. This is also the handiest area where a lot of outside dirt and debris can collect on a daily basis from purses and school bags to grocery bags, books and the package UPS just delivered. Use a strong disinfecting spray or wipes and remember to wipe down cabinet and drawer pulls. Viruses can live on most surfaces for three days and longer on plastic and metal.

Other highly infectious places and items in the house that should be wiped on a regular basis are keyboards, cell phones, makeup areas, remote controls, toys, as well as all areas of bathrooms and laundry. Don't overlook your toothbrush that should be changed frequently, especially after you have been ill with a cold or virus. It can be sanitized by soaking in antibacterial mouthwash or 3% hydrogen peroxide for 10-15 minutes. Rinse thoroughly. Even though we moved past the multiple bottles of hand sanitizer that showed up everywhere during Covid, it is effective and convenient to keep on hand, especially in your car. Take advantage of that little spritz of gel that might keep you from getting sick.

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A Whole Lot of Christmas — Spreading Joy and Granting Wishes

The holiday season is almost here, and A Whole Lot of Christmas is once again lighting up our neighborhood with festive cheer — all for a great cause!

Since 2012, our Christmas display has raised an incredible \$115,187.33 for Make-A-Wish Georgia, helping grant life-changing wishes for local children with critical illnesses. Last year alone, with the help of a generous matching donation, we raised \$27,765.38, enough to grant two wishes!

Every single dollar donated goes directly to Make-A-Wish Georgia — 100% of your contribution helps make wishes come true. This year, Santa and Mrs. Claus will be back to greet visitors and take photos — and Santa's arriving in serious style! He just got a brand-new 2026 model sleigh, fully equipped with turbo reindeer assist, candy-cane GPS, and extra-toasty seat warmers for those long North Pole nights. He'll be bringing it right here to A Whole Lot of Christmas!

Bring your family, friends, and neighbors to enjoy the lights, share in the spirit of the season, and help us make a difference in the lives of Georgia kids. And while you're here, see if you can spot our new additions to this year's display!



Santa Claus
@awholelotofchristmas



venmo

We look forward to seeing you, spreading holiday cheer, and continuing to make wishes come true together. Please stop by, spread the word, and consider making a donation to support Make-A-Wish Georgia. Together, we can make this Christmas even brighter!



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Local Churches and Garden Clubs Help Those in Need

Submitted by Barbara Luton, member of GFWC Stone Mountain Woman's Club

Thanksgiving and Christmas are the seasons when many people think about giving and helping others. Many organizations in our Smoke Rise area are meeting the needs of those in our area who need food, clothes and other items.

The GFWC Stone Mountain Woman's Club has donated coats to the Tucker Methodist Church and to Wellspring Living, our area helper for women freed from trafficking. Members put together bags of canned vegetables for a Soup-In-A-Bag drive for the St. Vincent de Paul ministry. Food has been donated to Networks and to the Stone Mountain Food Pantry. A Christmas party and gifts are planned for The Oaks, a senior facility here in our area. Items for a yard sale and cookies for a bake sale were donated to AARF, the local animal rescue—animals are needy, too.



Marty Bryan, Jackie Cornett, Kathy Gallo, Jolene Davis, Nelda Lunsford, Brenda Price (SMWC Member)

Local churches are big contributors to the needs of others. Smoke Rise Baptist and Eastminister Presbyterian contribute to Networks and to the Lilburn Co-op. Smoke Rise Baptist put together baskets for a Thanksgiving meal for Networks to distribute. Two Sunday School classes are buying bicycles and donating money for bikes to Bike Networks. Eastminister collected gifts and food for local schoolchildren.

The local garden clubs, Mountain Mums, Morning Glories and Smoke Rise Garden, all collected toys for children. Many going to Wellroot Family Services, formally the United Methodist Children's Home. Wellroot offers innovative leadership in child welfare.

Smoke Rise neighbors helped to fill the pantry of the local Tucker fire station. If you have ever needed to help from the fire station or emergency services, you realize how important the people at the fire station are to all of us.

A big thank you to the entire Smoke Rise community for supporting these worthy causes and helping to make this a happy holiday season for everyone.

Lynn Malone, Mary Lou Still, Connie Henry, Gaye Auman

How Holiday Traditions are Made

by Cheri Schneider

Christmas has always been a creative time of year for me. Not so much for my family. While I dream of family craft projects — such as making home-made Christmas ornaments, painting Christmas Owls (no animals were harmed) and Mod Podging Christmas plates — my family is not dreaming of those things at all!

In fact, I am beginning to suspect that my family might not share my craft and artistic gene DNA. Someone should have gotten it... Oh, yeah, my daughter has a master's degree in fine arts! But why was she in the kitchen making Stollen and gingerbread instead of helping me make ornaments?

The truth is, while I was writing Christmas plays and trying to put on a family Christmas concert, the kids tried to look invisible. One year I even wrote three Christmas plays about each of the Wise Men. The plays were incredible! But no one would put on the costume I had made to portray Gaspar! There was even a cool cap!

And as the kids reluctantly read (in a monotone) all I could think of was "too bad I have long hair, I would do it myself and be a great Gaspar!" The following year I wrote a five-page on the Shepherds in the field. But even though he already sported a robe and a beard that year, even Dad wouldn't go for it.

Another year my daughter brought her new husband home for the holidays who asked, "Dad, what are some of your family Christmas traditions?" I was about to open my mouth to answer for Dad about the wonderful family plays and concerts and crafts, when he replied, "We make Reuben sandwiches with my secret sauce, sit by the fireplace and open one present." I was shocked! How could he actually lie...about our traditions...to the new son-in-law?

And now, eight years later, we still make Reubens on Christmas Eve. While our traditions have morphed from video game tournaments, marathon Christmas movie sessions and board games, the most important part is that we love each other, and laugh a lot... and embrace our new traditions together!





Full Restaurants, Full Shops, Full Park, Full Main Street, FULL HEARTS

by Gaye Auman

If I had to choose one word to describe the grand opening of the new Tucker Town Green, it would be JOY! It was an amazing night in the most beautiful new park in Tucker. The park was full of children, families, babies, elderly, community. Laughter, smiles, cheers and fabulous music on stage, plus iconic trains blowing horns and engineers waving at the massive crowd in the park. I overheard several people say, "We've entered Hallmark. Tucker has come alive!"



Smoke Rise Academy of Arts Announces Participation in the Junior Theater Festival

by Lisa Healey, Parent Volunteer Coordinator

The Smoke Rise Academy of Arts is pleased to announce that its dedicated team of 54 talented students has once again been selected to participate in the prestigious Junior Theater Festival (JTF) this January. For the second time, the Academy has earned the distinct honor of presenting a New Works Showcase, debuting a brand-new, never-before-seen theatrical production before an audience of 5,000 attendees. This is a huge milestone that requires



many hours of dedication and rehearsal from our performers. To help our students get there, we are fundraising to cover essential expenses like food, hotel rooms, costumes, props, and set pieces.

One of our main fundraising events is the Smoke Rise Holiday Market. The market will take place on December 13th from 10:00 AM to

13:00 PM at Smoke Rise Baptist Church, 5901 Hugh Howell Road, Stone Mountain, GA 30087. The market will feature live performances by Academy students, unique shopping opportunities with local artisans, and appearances by Santa & Mrs. Claus.

Join us to complete your holiday shopping and have a little fun! Please support our students as they prepare to showcase their talents on a national stage! Look for the Smoke Rise Holiday Market flyer which includes a QR code for contributions.

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Join authors Ann Litrel and Charles Seabrook for a talk about their book, 35 Natural Wonders of Georgia to See Before You Die.

Based on noted science journalist Charles Seabrook's personal bucket list and artist Ann Litrel's insightful watercolors and sketches, 35 Natural Wonders of Georgia to See before You Die offers a fresh take on Georgia's natural beauty in the tradition of naturalists such as John James Audubon and William Bartram. Each of the thirty-five sites is introduced by paintings, field sketches, artist notes, and elegant science writing that highlight its unique attributes.

The book captures the beauty and rich natural history of Georgia's biological and geological treasures—inspiring leisure travelers, nature enthusiasts, and art lovers to explore these places on their own.

About the Authors

ANN LITREL is a nationally published artist whose paintings of botanical and wildlife subjects have appeared on prints, books, stationery, and textiles. As a writer and illustrator, she has collaborated on three books and has been a monthly columnist for a range of publications on topics of art, ecology, community, and history. Litrel's passion for arts and community led her to cofound the Woodstock Arts Center, an award-winning, multidisciplinary arts center on a four-acre campus. She lives with her husband, Dr. Michael Litrel, in Woodstock, Georgia.

CHARLES SEABROOK retired from the Atlanta-Journal Constitution in 2005 after thirty-four years as a science and environmental writer. He continues to write on a freelance basis his popular weekly column, Wild Georgia, which runs every Saturday in the AJC's Living section. He is the author of three books: Red Clay, Pink Cadillacs, and White Gold: The Kaolin Chalk Wars; Cumberland Island: Strong Women, Wild Horses; and The World of the Salt Marsh: Appreciating and Protecting the Tidal Marshes of the Southeastern Atlantic Coast. He and his wife, Laura, live in Decatur, Georgia.

Details: Tuesday, December 16, from 6:00 – 7:00 p.m.
 DeKalb History Center Second Floor
 101 E. Court Square, Decatur, GA 30030

For tickets and parking, visit
<https://dekalbhistory.org/programs/>.

HEALTH NOTES:

Understanding Your Medications

by Patricia Baumann, MD

What is the difference between pill types, and which one is best for you? Your medications come in different forms for dosing. The dosage form can affect the onset and duration of action. The amount of drug (or the milligram dose) is always specified and stays with that dose no matter what the dosage form.

It is important for you to understand the appropriate way to take your medication. Be sure to discuss with your doctor about the appropriate dosing form for you.

The following describes the different pill types:

Conventional Tablets - This is the most common dosing vehicle. This form can contain medication and provides a steady and predictable rate of release of drug. Some are coated, such as enteric coated aspirin, which has a coating to prevent absorption in the stomach. This coating allows tablets to pass into the small intestines before they are absorbed. The purpose is to reduce stomach irritation and the chance of stomach ulcers.

Chewable Tablets - These are designed to be chewed, and are easier for those with swallowing difficulties, commonly used for children. They typically have a pleasant taste.

Orally Dissolving Tablets (ODTs) - These dissolve rapidly in the mouth without water, suitable for fast relief and patients with swallowing difficulties. They are rapidly absorbed for rapid onset of action.

Effervescent Tablets - These tablets dissolve in water to create a fizzy drink for those who have difficulty swallowing pills. They absorb quickly for onset of action.

Hard Capsules - A capsule contains powdered medication in a gelatin shell, which releases accurate doses of stable products.

Softgels - Softgels contain liquid or semiliquid medication with a soft gelatin shell that quickly dissolves in the stomach. These are commonly used for supplements such as fish oil. Softgels have quick absorption and onset.

Sprinkle Capsules - A capsule that can be opened and mixed with food or liquid for those with swallowing difficulties

Gummies - Gummies taste good, don't have a bad smell, and are easy to take. This dosage form is commonly used for vitamins. They can help people who struggle to swallow pills or liquids.

Immediate Release Pills - These pills dissolve quickly to release active ingredients and provide fast relief. An example would be the immediate release of Oxycodone, such as Percocet.

Extended-Release Pills - These are designed to release medication over a prolonged period of time, reducing the frequency of dosing. An example would be extended-release Oxycodone, such as OxyContin. These extended-release pills are designed to provide pain relief over a 12-hour time-frame. If they are crushed, the medication is released immediately and can result in an overdose.

Spanules (Delayed Release Capsules) - These are hard gelatin capsules with small beads or granules that release the drug at a controlled rate over time.

Sublingual Tablets - These are placed under the tongue, dissolving in saliva, and rapidly absorbing through the tongue membrane.

Buccal Tablets - These are placed between the cheek and the gum and are rapidly absorbed through the cheek membrane.

Suppositories - These are inserted into the vagina or rectum, where they melt and are absorbed. They are useful for patients who cannot take oral medications.



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Salute to Advertiser

Computer Tech Support

by Staff Writer Susan Gilbert

Is there anything more frustrating than computer problems? We are so reliant on them on them now, that when you get the dreaded "blue screen of death" or an alert about a cyberattack, it can ruin your day. Thinking this might be a pain point for our readers, I did some research into options for addressing these problems. A solution that was as close as the *Smoke Signal* classified section was for ThePCLink.com, so I called to learn more.

Owner Mike Markos answered my call and helped me understand his business of solving pesky PC problems for Smoke Rise residents. He has been in this business for more than 30 years and has been a *Smoke Signal* advertiser for more than 15 years, doing a steady business of remote and in-person problem-solving.

Mike said that people call about a range of issues, including virus removal, setting up Internet or printers, purchasing and setting up a new computer, and moving all your programs and data to the new one. Because Microsoft stopped supporting Windows 10 in October, questions about that have become common. He shared some options to extend support for 1 year, but the better option is usually to upgrade to Windows 11. He also noted that questions arise about upgrading other programs and about whether the antivirus is up to date and working correctly.

When you call Mike, he will ask you to describe the issue and can give you an idea of the best solution. While there is no charge for this initial call, he can share his hourly rate and give you an idea of the cost to fix it. In many cases, he remotely connects to your computer to have a look around. To do that, he emails you a link, and when you click it, it gives you a code you tell him, allowing him to access your computer. Most issues can be resolved using this method, but sometimes the solution requires him to come to your home. He is usually able to do that within two days but can often rearrange his schedule to get to more urgent calls.

To learn more, visit Mike's website: www.ThePCLink.com. There you will see his services, which include:

- Computer repair, support, tune-ups, and maintenance
- Virus, spyware, and malware prevention and removal
- Computer sales and equipment specification

You will also find a list of 10 questions to help you specify the type of assistance best suited to your needs. These questions can help determine what to discuss with Mike. And you will be delighted to know that he proudly professes that he "doesn't speak geek," meaning he talks in terms people can understand. Give him a call at 770-309-4735 to see if he can help you with your computer challenges.



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NEWS YOU CAN USE

BY AVIVA HOFFMANN, STAFF WRITER

Let's Bring More Peace to the Roads... and Each Other

As the holiday season moves into full swing, our neighborhood streets glow with festive lights, porch decorations, and the bustle of people preparing for family gatherings. It's a time when many of us try a little harder to be kind, patient, and charitable in daily life.

Yet, according to new research from the nonprofit AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, one place where goodwill often evaporates is behind the wheel. In a recent survey, a striking 96% of licensed drivers admitted to at least one aggressive driving behavior in the past year. That includes actions like red-light running, speeding, tailgating, honking, or cutting off another vehicle. Even more concerning, 11% acknowledged engaging in violent actions, such as intentionally bumping into another car or confronting another driver!

The study highlights a troubling cycle: aggression fuels more aggression. When drivers encounter hostility on the road, they're more likely to respond in kind, escalating tensions and creating unsafe conditions for everyone. I try to remind myself to give people a little grace when they do something... well, let's call it "less than brilliant." After all, except for the handful of new self-driving cars out there, it's humans behind the wheel - humans who will all make a mistake sooner or later. We just cross our fingers that ours isn't the kind that becomes neighborhood folklore.

The findings also shed light on who is most prone to these behaviors. Drivers younger than 60 years of age and households earning more than \$100,000 report the highest levels of aggressive driving. And while men and women are equally likely to engage in aggressive behaviors, men are significantly more likely to escalate into violence. The type of vehicle matters too. Sports cars, large trucks, and motorcycles are often perceived as more aggressive, and some drivers say they feel more powerful behind the wheel of these vehicles.

There is some good news. Compared to AAA's 2016 report, tailgating has dropped by 24% and yelling at other drivers has decreased by 17%. But cutting off other vehicles has risen 67%, and angry honking is up 47%.

This December, a month often associated with peace and goodwill, may be the perfect time to break the cycle. AAA encourages small, considerate gestures that can quickly calm a tense driving environment: use your turn signals, let others merge, offer a friendly wave. The organization's safety advice is simple but powerful: Stay calm. Give space. Protect yourself. Breathe before you react. Don't take the bait. And, (one I should follow more often) leave early to avoid stress.

In a season that asks us to be our best selves, perhaps the most meaningful gift we can offer our neighbors is a little more patience, especially on the road. After all, kindness travels just as far in a car as it does anywhere else.

Happy Holidays!!!

You can find the full Aggressive Driving and Road Rage report on the AAA FTS website at: <https://aaafoundation.org/>

techtalk

By Joel Gilbert, P.E.

What a Crappy Idea!

I must admit, I am aghast at the stupidity of anyone thinking that you and I are interested in high-tech toilets that tell us what to do or not to do. Nope, you are not reading that incorrectly ... Go to Google and search for Smart Toilet Tech on the Wall Street Journal to read it yourself.



This week, Personal Tech columnist Nicole Nguyen writes about a \$599 smart toilet camera that aims to unlock the mysteries of what lands in the commode. The Dekoda, which started shipping on Oct. 21, analyzes something that smartwatches and other wearables can't: urine and stool.

The toilet-mounted gadget, made by Kohler Health, is equipped with sensors to understand waste. The device can help determine hydration levels based on factors such as urine color and stool consistency. It sends data over Wi-Fi to Kohler Health's secure servers and offers insights in a paired app, which requires a \$7 a month subscription.

Oh please, can't we even have a moment away from our electronic leashes? Plus, can't you see how slippery this slope is when information like this gets into the wrong hands? Haven't we learned anything about informational value propositions? Do you really need a toilet to tell you if you need to drink more water? Do you think anyone will pay \$7 a month for this kind of information? You can safely take Smart Toilet off your holiday shopping list.

This reminds me of the work I was doing in Canada 30 years ago assisting industrial customers with energy efficiency. At a trade meeting dinner, I sat with Jim Hook, then head of the Canadian Department of Energy.

I thought it would be interesting to hear him talk about his world, so I asked what was going on in his life lately. He was happy to talk about the personal energy-use improvements he made at his house. Domestic water heating is an important end-use in Canada because the groundwater is so cold, so I wasn't surprised that he picked that agenda. Nor was I surprised that he wanted to emphasize conservation over efficiency. That is, using less instead of talking about how he heated and stored the hot water he used. But his story has stayed with me ever since. Here it is in his own words:

When I get home from work, after dinner with my family, I take my bath first and leave the water in the tub for my wife to bathe. Then we bathe the children and finally, we throw some more soap powder in the tub and use it as a prewash for the day's laundry.

At a loss for words, I asked how much he had saved with this water-saving practice.

Jim was prepared for that question and said that he had done a careful before-and-after analysis that showed he had saved about \$79 a year with this conservation plan. I noticed my colleague sitting next to me reached into his sports coat, removed his checkbook, and wrote Jim a check for \$79, saying, "Stop doing that."

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Out the Window Article and illustration by Beth Henson, Staff Writer

Winter Home

Looking out the den window, I surveyed the bare, gray, sullen landscape that had been a blaze of gold and orange just a few weeks ago. Squeaky, our resident squirrel, and a few of his friends were busily foraging for treats buried earlier, making small swirls in the thick layer of leaves. Darkened along the tree trunks and bases were several holes that offered the small rodents a warm winter home.

These cozy crevices not only housed the squirrels but also many of my other woodland friends. The smaller holes were perfect for woodpeckers and nuthatches to use as winter shelters, while the larger ones often became homes to screech and great horned owls. At the base of the trunks, chilly possums and raccoons could find a comfortable bed, safe from the frosty winds.

As I watched the busy little world outside, a quiet peace settled over me. Winter might be coming, but in our corner of the woods, everyone had a place to snuggle in, and that made the cold seem just a little warmer.



Bugged by Bugs? Two Tips

by Susan Gilbert, Staff Writer

The South seems to be filled with big, scary Palmetto Bugs. Being irrationally terrified of them, I have always been on the alert with a can of roach spray stashed away wherever I have ever seen them: under sinks, near the garbage, on the patio, or in hallways. I have unexpectedly found a helpful solution that is leading to their demise. We were having trouble with tiny gnats on our patio. I learned that a solution to them is putting out a bowl of water with some apple vinegar, which attracts them, and one drop of dish soap to break surface tension, so they don't walk on the water and enjoy the vinegar; they sink to the bottom. Apparently, they do not swim. After putting the bowl on the patio, the next morning, we found it full of dead gnats, and we have not been bothered by gnats since. That's tip #1.

Our big surprise was that overnight, several giant Palmetto bugs joined them on the bottom—a suicidal death by drowning. I was overjoyed and began putting out bowls of vinegar, water, and a drop of soap wherever the Palmetto bugs roamed our house.

That was until the exterminator who treats our house came. Seeing the bowls under the cabinets around the house, he asked what we were doing. When I told him, he said, "You don't have to do that; they just want the water and aren't attracted to the apple vinegar and will break the surface tension without soap." So, my job just got easier. For a few days, the bowls of water produced several dead bugs each night. That was weeks ago, and we rarely see them now, so I do believe it works. That's Tip #2.

If you hate Palmetto bugs as much as I do, give it a try! A small bowl half-filled with water is all it takes. Put one under your sinks and in bathrooms where they like to play at night. Maybe we can defeat them or at least reduce their numbers.

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Living with Arthritis in the Feet

by Linda Karr, Staff Writer

Arthritis can occur in any joint in the body. There are thirty-three joints in the feet, so it shouldn't come as a surprise that many people suffer from arthritis in these joints. I have found that activities such as gardening when I kneel and put pressure on my toes really increase the pain. By sitting on a garden stool instead of kneeling, I avoid the aggravation.

As mentioned in the past, regular consistent exercise is key to management of arthritis. Low impact exercise like swimming, water aerobics, stationary bike, or an elliptical are good options. Don't forget about strength training to ensure that your bones stay strong. It is best to utilize weight machines to ensure proper form and safety.

Strengthening your foot muscles is important, also. You want to focus on the small muscles of the foot that help support your arch. Activities such as towel scrunches, marble pickups, toe yoga, and arch lifts will help. Hip and core strengthening are additionally important for controlling forces on the foot.

Stretching and mobility exercises may help to decrease discomfort. This could include the daily use of toe spacers for 15-20 minutes, stretching of calf muscles, mobility drills for the foot and ankle, and tennis/lacrosse ball massage to the bottom of the foot.

Footwear and orthotics may provide relief from the pain. Look for shoes with good cushions but rigid support and a wide toe box (yes, they do exist). It is often recommended to have a footwear assessment at a running shoe store to determine the right shoe for the mechanics of your foot. Rocker bottom shoes can be effective to reduce stress on toe joints. Custom orthotics and carbon fiber foot plates can further reduce stress on the toes.

For symptom management, try using contrast baths, a frozen water bottle massage, a body massager, or a paraffin bath. As with other types of arthritis, topical anti-inflammatories (Voltaren, Bengay, Aspercreme) may help. Taping, padding, or splinting your feet may be beneficial, too.

This is the final article in the series on living with arthritis. (Written in collaboration with Blake Hampton, PT, DPT, Owner/Clinic Director Team Rehabilitation Stone Mountain).

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Smoke Rise Garden Club Prepares Gifts for Children in Hospital

By Victoria Crosby, SRGC President

The Smoke Rise Garden Club met in November at the home of Usha Ramakrishnan, who was installed as our new treasurer by President Victoria Crosby following the tragic loss of our former treasurer Fabrice Collin.

The meeting was a casual fun workshop format, with no speaker this month, where members brought Christmas-paper wrapped shoe boxes filled with new toys. These "Santa Boxes" were delivered to the new Arthur Blank Hospital and Children's Healthcare. We hope to brighten the children's hospital stays during the holidays.

Delicious refreshments were provided for members by co-hosts Peggy Clegg and Ann Weiss.

SRGC meets on the first Monday of the month, September through May, at 7:00 p.m. in a member's home. The next meeting will be on Monday, January 5th. If you are interested in joining us for a meeting, please contact Marisa Fernandez at marisa.fernandez0212@gmail.com or 305-590-7186.

Smoke Rise Garden Club is a member of the DeKalb Federation of Garden Clubs in the Redbud District of the Garden Club of Georgia, which is part of the National Garden Club organization.



SRGC President Victoria Crosby Installs Usha Ramakrishnan as treasurer.



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Mountain Mums Host Wylde Center Director

Submitted by Maureen Fraser

The Mountain Mums Garden Club gathered in November at the home of Maureen Fraser for an engaging presentation by Stephanie Van Parys, Interim Executive Director of the Wylde Center. Stephanie shared an overview of the Center's mission, history, and growing presence in the community, offering members a deeper appreciation for the organization's work in environmental education and urban greenspace preservation.

Stephanie, a University of Georgia horticulture graduate, spent several years at the Atlanta Botanical Garden before joining the Wylde Center, where she has served for the past twenty-two years with a brief sabbatical in 2024. During her tenure, the Wylde Center has grown from a single garden into a dynamic network of four public green spaces, and its educational programs now reach 8,000 students from 25 schools each year.

Founded in 1997 to provide opportunities for children and adults to experience nature in urban neighborhoods, the Wylde Center has evolved into a vibrant nonprofit operating Oakhurst Garden, Sugar Creek Garden, Hawk Hollow, and the Edgewood Community Learning Garden. These green spaces are open year-round and host a variety of community programs, school field trips, workshops, and seasonal events. Each garden has its own character—ranging from serene woodland trails to community vegetable beds—making a visit to each of the four gardens is essential for fully experiencing the Center's mission.

The Wylde Center also leads one of the largest youth environmental and science education initiatives in metro-Atlanta, including Decatur Farm to School, Atlanta Farm to School, and Healthy Living by Healthy Growing at the Decatur Housing Authority. Their nursery produces roughly 80,000 plants annually, providing access to quality plants for the public while also supporting underserved communities with edible and air-purifying varieties.

Continuing their tradition of community outreach, Mountain Mums members supplied materials for residents of ATRIA Park of Tucker to create charming pinecone Christmas trees, bringing creativity and festive cheer to the season. The spirit of giving continued through the club's Christmas Community Project, as members selected and donated Wish List gifts to brighten the holidays for children served by Wellroot Family Services.

For membership information, contact mjacob1010@gmail.com. The club's next gathering is a Holiday Celebration on December 10 at Smoke Rise Country Club. Follow the Mountain Mums Garden Club Facebook page for updates on upcoming events and activities.



Host Maureen Fraser and co-hostesses Kelley Samaras, Kate Graham, Joy Moseri-Cooper, and Lisa Armistead put on a festive feast that made the Mountain Mums' November meeting extra special.

Coexisting with Urban Wildlife in Smoke Rise This Winter

by Larisa Epshteyn, AWARE Board Member

As the leaves drop and the mornings turn crisp, I'm reminded how much life surrounds us in Smoke Rise. Outside my kitchen window, squirrels gather nuts, chipmunks race by with leaves for their winter nests, and a young buck occasionally visits our bird feeder. They're doing exactly what we do when temperatures fall — seeking warmth, food, and shelter. And in the buck's case, he may also be looking for a mate. Late November through early December is peak deer mating season, known as "the rut."

Here are a few ways to be good neighbors to the beautiful creatures that share our community:

1. Secure food sources

Winter scarcity drives wildlife to easy meals. Keep trash bins tightly sealed, clean up spilled birdseed, and feed pets indoors. Avoid leaving food out intentionally — it encourages dependence and brings animals too close to homes and people.

2. Slow down at dawn and dusk

Deer are most active during low-light hours. Reduce your speed near wooded areas and water sources and scan road edges for movement or eye shine. If you see one deer, expect more — they travel in groups, and during rut, bucks often chase does. Slowing down can prevent collisions and protect both you and wildlife.

3. Create safe yards

Leaf piles and brush provide winter shelter for frogs, toads, chipmunks, and other small animals. Instead of clearing every corner of your yard, leave pockets of natural habitat. When decorating for the holidays, choose wildlife-safe options and avoid net-style lights that can entangle birds or small mammals.

4. Know who to call

If you encounter injured wildlife, prioritize your safety first. Bucks can be more aggressive during rut, and some animals may carry illnesses like rabies or mange. For small animals in immediate danger — and only if you feel comfortable — you can gently move them out of harm's way. Then, contact AWARE (Atlanta Wild Animal Rescue Effort) as soon as possible. Cold weather makes timely rescue especially important. For deceased deer, contact your county's Sanitation Department.

5. Give back this season

AWARE rehabilitates Georgia's native wildlife and provides education on peaceful coexistence. We rely on donations and volunteers to carry out this mission. Supporting AWARE is a meaningful way to embody the spirit of giving and help injured wild creatures return home to the woods of Georgia.

Learn more or donate at www.awarewildlife.org.

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Susan Gilbert shared these colorful fall photos from her yard in October.



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Food & Home Fixin's

by Joyce Ray, Staff Writer

Enjoymore than once!!

The word "Leftovers" can create a negative image. I still use many of my favorite recipes that were written for five people even though I am cooking for only two. That means I can get two meals for the effort, and I don't need to recalculate ingredients to make a smaller amount.

So, my advice is to go for it! Make sure that the servings are generously proportioned and freeze what you can or just refrigerate for another meal the following day. Many times, the leftovers taste better than the original because the dish has had time for the flavors to blend.

This month's recipe is an example of using leftover turkey after the holidays. Thanks to Susan Gilbert for sharing it!

May you enjoy cooking and sharing the old faithful recipes that make a hit with your family each year, as well as something new that might become a favorite. I hope you and your family will have a very joyful Christmas.

Turkey Tetrazzini

3 T. butter
 8oz pkg. sliced white mushrooms
 1 chopped onion
 2 stalks chopped celery
 3 T all-purpose flour
 3 1/2 cups whole milk
 1/2 of 8oz pkg cream cheese
 1 T Worcestershire sauce
 1 1/2 tsp. salt
 1/4 tsp. each of ground nutmeg and black pepper
 3 cups cubed cooked turkey
 1 cup frozen green peas
 1/2 oz pkg egg noodles

Topping:

1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese
 1/2 cup breadcrumbs
 3T melted butter

Blend topping ingredients and set aside.

Bring large pot of salted water to boil. Add egg noodles and cook for 5-7 minutes. Drain and set aside.

Heat 3 T. butter in large skillet over med heat. Add mushrooms, onions and chopped celery. Sauté until tender. (5 Min.) Sprinkle flour over vegetables and stir until all are coated.

Mix milk, cream cheese, Worcestershire, salt, pepper and nutmeg. Add into mushroom mixture. Cook over low heat until cream cheese is melted and sauce is warm. Add turkey and peas. Add cooked noodles.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease 9x13 baking dish. Add turkey mixture to baking dish and sprinkle topping mixture over top. Bake for 30-45 minutes until top is brown and casserole is bubbly.

This recipe is from the Swan House cookbook, "The Swan's Palette". There is no better way to extend the Christmas ham than to serve it as an ingredient in this hearty and delicious soup.

Swan Coach House Cream of Wild Rice Soup

2 large onions, finely chopped
 2 carrots, finely chopped
 2 celery ribs, Finely Chopped
 2 cups finely chopped ham
 1 cup (2 sticks) butter
 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
 16 cups (1 gallon) chicken broth
 Salt and white pepper to taste
 2 cups, half & half or light cream
 4 cups cooked wild rice

Sauté onions, carrots, celery, and ham in the butter in a 4-5-quart saucepan over medium heat for 3 minutes until tender/crisp. Sift in the flour, in small amounts, stirring until well mixed. Add the chicken broth slowly, stirring until well blended. Season with salt and white pepper. Cook until the mixture thickens, stirring constantly. Add half & half and wild rice. Cook until heated through. Serve immediately.