

SMOKE

SIGNAL

VOLUME 57, ISSUE 7

Serving the Smoke Rise Community since 1968

November, 2025

www.smokesignalnews.com

The Staff of the Smoke Signal Wishes You



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**Help Us Revive a Hidden Gem:
The Smoke Rise Community Garden Needs You!**

Nestled quietly along Hugh Howell Road, just across from Smoke Rise Elementary, lies one of our community’s best-kept secrets — the Smoke Rise Community Garden. Founded in 2011 by Smoke Rise’s beloved driver and community champion, Doug Reynics, this garden has been a labor of love from the very beginning — and now, it’s ready for a fresh season of revival. We just need you to help us grow again!

A Garden Built on Passion and Purpose

Doug Reynics isn’t just good behind the wheel — he had a vision for a place where neighbors could come together, grow healthy food, and build stronger community ties. He organized volunteers, secured tools, and launched the garden with unmatched enthusiasm.

Shortly after, Catherine Smith brought her expertise and green thumb, implementing an organic three-step composting system that turned kitchen scraps into black gold. Thanks to her efforts, our garden plots yielded some of the freshest, most flavorful organic vegetables around — truly a gardener’s dream!

We can’t forget Jim Sedlak, the quiet hero who maintained our food pantry beds. Every year, Jim helped grow over 100 pounds of fresh produce that was donated to NetWorks Food Pantry, feeding families in need. He also hand-built the stunning wooden entry gate — a piece of craftsmanship that still stands tall and proud today.

When Doug passed the torch, Eileen Stone stepped in as chairperson and has worked tirelessly ever since to keep the garden alive and growing. Her dedication has kept the spirit of the garden intact, even as the number of volunteers has dwindled.

A New Season, A New Beginning

Sadly, Doug, Catherine, and Jim have moved on, and without their guiding hands, the garden has become overgrown and under-loved, with just a few devoted gardeners — including Eileen — holding down the weeds.

But the roots of this place are still strong — and it only takes a few helping hands to breathe life back into it.

Why Join the Garden?

- **Be part of a meaningful project** that supports both your neighbors and the environment
- **Grow your own organic veggies** and learn sustainable gardening practices
- **Meet like-minded neighbors** and build community connections
- **Help restore a special place** that once thrived and can thrive again

The Garden Belongs to All of Us

Thanks to an angel donor, the land was purchased with a promise: when rental fees fall short of covering expenses like electricity, water, and property taxes, the Smoke Rise Civic Association would step in to help make up the difference — ensuring this space remains accessible and sustainable for our entire community.

This is a true community garden, and it’s time we brought more of our community into it.

Come Get Your Hands Dirty (In the Best Way)

Whether you’re an experienced gardener or just curious about learning, there’s a place for you here. We need help with everything from weeding and composting to building new beds and dreaming up what’s next.

Ready to get involved?

Eileen Stone is the contact person; email her at esstone@bellsouth.net or send a text to 404-583-3091. She really could use your help!

Let’s honor the legacy of Doug, Catherine, and Jim — and support Eileen and her vision — by bringing the Smoke Rise Community Garden back to life, together.

Let’s grow something beautiful.



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Place of Gratitude

by Victoria R. Crosby

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or by whatever name you call
Her, Him, or It.
When you surrender to this,
accept what is, and don’t resist.
Don’t try to change what you know you can’t change.
Let it be, as in the prayer for serenity.
Be grateful for who you are,
your accomplishments so far,
and be open to receive and believe
the blessings that will come to you,
then the vibration of your whole life will change
when you are in that place of gratitude.

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Smoke Signal

P.O. Box 1038, Tucker, GA 30085

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NOVEMBER 13

Please e-mail articles to:
staff@smokesignalnews.com

Articles and photos should be sent in .doc or .docx format. Articles sent in .pdf format cannot be edited. Photos and graphics should be submitted in .jpg or .pdf format.

Deadline for classified ads is NOVEMBER 10

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Please send in your picture and a brief article for publication in the *Smoke Signal*.

Email submissions to staff@smokesignalnews.com



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EXTRA COPIES OF THE SMOKE SIGNAL ARE NOW AVAILABLE AT THE COMMUNITY GARDEN Look for the wooden box labeled *Smoke Signal*.

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

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

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

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4818 Hugh Howell Road
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770-491-0228 Mwchurch.com

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MONDAY	7:00 p.m.	

In-person and streaming online on Facebook and 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 in Stone Mountain is pleased to present its 40th year of professional arts events. This year's theatrical season includes two musicals, two plays, and a special two-night limited engagement presentation.

The Pin-Up Girls Christmas Spectacular

December 11 - 21

By James Hindman, Jeffrey Loddin & 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. "Pin-Up" is a feel-good holiday musical with heart, hijinks and a whole lot of sparkle.

The Lucy and Ricky Musical Comedy Show

February 13 & 14

The Lucy and Ricky Musical Comedy Show stars Melody Knighton and Luis Hernandez in a fun and nostalgic trip back to a more innocent time. Join us for a Special Valentine's Celebration as the chemistry between America's favorite couple make audiences laugh and cry as they are treated to stand-up comedy, skits, singing and dancing numbers. This show is a Special Event, with a post champagne and rose reception after each performance (an additional \$12.00 fee applies to include this in season subscription)



The Hill

April 16 - 26

by Peter Quilter

Three men go on a two-day hike together up a large hill, to honor their recently deceased friend. Each brings an inscribed stone to leave as a monument at the summit. But they have to get there first, and the climb will be as challenging, unexpected and hilarious as life itself. "A brilliant comedy about male friendship...an avalanche of laughter."

The second-to-last chance

June 4 - 14

by Jessie Jones, Nicholas Hope & Jamie Wooten

Four best friends, Libby Ruth, Deedra, Monette and Charlie, own 'Occasionally Yours,' a stuffy rental business in their beloved Laurelton Oaks plantation house - hosting harmless events like bridal showers. Together, they re-imagine their rental business as a lively hotspot for gatherings of all kinds, and joyfully begin hosting raucous retirement parties, birthday parties with a male stripper - even memorial services. What could possibly go wrong? Everything. Their new ventures quickly turn chaotic, leading to unexpected and comedic mishaps which will bring endless joy and tears of laughter.

Working

July 23 - August 2

Book and music by Stephen Schwartz, lyrics by Craig Carnelia & new songs by Tony-Award Winner Lin-Manuel Miranda & James Taylor

This musical comedy follows 26 everyday-American workers. The audience meets and hears stories from workers of all walks of life - sharing their hopes, dreams, joys & challenges over a single workday. This musical showcases the routines of the often overlooked, everyday worker. Some of the characters (portrayed by 6 versatile actors) include the schoolteacher, the parking lot attendant, the waitress, the mill worker, the mason, the trucker, the fireman - and even the prostitute.

ART Station Season Subscriptions are now available for purchase.

Shows run Thursdays & Fridays at 8:00 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays at 3:00 p.m., with one Wednesday matinee at 10:30 a.m.

Box Office Hours: 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Tuesday-Friday & 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Saturday
For additional information, visit the ART Station website at artstation.org.

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Sharing the Spirit: Holiday Events at Eastminster Presbyterian Church

As the holidays draw near, Eastminster Presbyterian Church is preparing a series of occasions that encourage reflection, fellowship, and celebration. Each event offers a unique opportunity to pause, connect, and embrace the spirit of the season.



Join in prayer and praise at the **Vespers Service on Wednesday night, November 12**. Participants will experience a sacred space for renewal, where music and prayer invite God's peace into their lives. The service blends familiar traditions with contemporary expressions, helping hearts and minds prepare for a season of thankfulness.

Kick off the festive season at our **Winter Social on Wednesday, December 3**. Guests of all ages can enjoy hot chocolate, decorate cookies, and capture memories at a photo booth. Don your favorite holiday attire and share in an evening filled with laughter, warmth, and cheer.

Celebrations continue with the **Advent Concert on Sunday, December 7, at 3:00 p.m.**, featuring piano and organ duets by renowned musicians, Carole Mitchell and Susan Ray. From cherished hymns to seasonal favorites, the performance will fill the sanctuary with joy, hope, and the timeless message of love.

Experience the story of Christ's birth at our annual **Lessons and Carols service on Sunday, December 14, at 10:30 a.m.** This special service weaves together scripture readings, beautiful instrumental music, adult and children's community choir, and beloved carols, creating a meaningful journey through the nativity story.

Celebrate the wonder of the season at our **Christmas Eve Service on Wednesday, December 24, at 5:30 p.m.** We will gather in anticipation of Christ's birth, receive ornaments, join in heartfelt congregational singing, and share in the sacred gift of Holy Communion. The evening concludes with the warm glow of candlelight, as we lift our voices in a beloved carol, rejoicing in the hope and light that Christ brings into the world.

Eastminster Presbyterian Church extends an open invitation to neighbors, friends, and families. Together, through worship, community, and music, the congregation looks forward to sharing the blessings of this season.

Grief Support

Finding comfort after loss can be especially challenging during the holiday season. Memories, traditions, and the expectation to feel joyful can make this time of year feel overwhelming. You don't have to face it alone.

Join us for the Grief Support Group on **Sunday, November 16, at 5:00 p.m. in Room 308 at Smoke Rise Baptist Church, 5901 Hugh Howell Rd., Stone Mountain, GA 30087**. Together, we'll explore ways to navigate the holidays while honoring both our grief and our hope.

Led by Adam Arnold, a licensed social worker, and Jim Smith, minister at Smoke Rise Baptist Church, the Grief Support Group offers a safe, compassionate space for sharing, healing, and encouragement. This free group is open to everyone in the community—whether your loss is recent or from years past, you are welcome here.

For more information, please call the church office at (770) 469-5856.

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Fine Dining in Tucker!

Well, if you have not had the opportunity to eat at Smoke Rise Country Club in the recent months, you should make the time. Fine dining has come to Tucker! I know, I know, this might sound like a plug, but I assure you, it is not. You will see once you taste the food. Chef Gregg Herndon does a great job on Wednesday nights, which is usually more accommodating to families and casual. Come have a drink in the bar before dinner and then enjoy the buffet. The last couple of Wednesdays featured pasta with handmade meatballs and custom sauces, a taco bar with slow-roasted pork (slow-roasted for 8 hours) and all the fixings, and hand-battered Fish & Chips.

Friday nights are special. Definitely upscale; the dress code requires men to wear slacks and a collared shirt during the warm months and a sport jacket is recommended during the cooler months. SRCC has everything from a seared filet with bordelaise sauce (my choice) to glazed ginger soy salmon, to a thick, chargrilled pork filet with shallot glaze. If pasta is your forte, they have it: Chicken Marsala (Bonnie's favorite), Primavera, even creamy Shrimp & Grits. Appetizers include delicious fried shrimp, crab cakes, chicken tenders, and egg rolls, among others. We loved the fried shrimp and chicken tenders. If comfort food is your preference, our son Bob had the hamburger, and he loved it. They also have salads with different proteins to add. So there is something for everyone. The menu is seasonal. Smoke Rise is private so if you are a member and have not been to the club lately, GO! If you are not a member, find a friend who is and plan an outing with them. It is well worth the time!!

See you there, Bob Espy
(Disclosure, we are members)



SRCC Acting General Manager,
Geoff Weirich

Smoke Rise Country Club Annual Meeting

by Susan Gilbert, Staff Writer

On October 16, the Smoke Rise Country Club held its annual meeting to update members on the year's accomplishments and share plans for the year ahead. Board Chair Art Wood opened the meeting by announcing the appointment of the new Clubhouse Manager, Kourtney Nealy.

One of the most significant changes this year was ending outside bookings through the GolfNow website. This decision was made because some non-members were not maintaining the course with the same care and respect as our members.

Past Chairman and Acting General Manager Geoff Weirich reported that the course is in the best condition he can remember, noting that many players have commented

on the noticeable improvements since play was limited to members and their guests.

Membership Director, Sydney Hurst, shared results of a successful September Open House where half of the attendees solidified their membership either at the event or within days. Since joining the staff a few months ago, she has experienced success with the low initiation fees and special offers available as memberships increase. She also mentioned a new corporate membership category, where businesses receive special advantages when they sign up three or more employee.

Board member, Eric Hoffman, reported on the successes in the tennis program, where they have resurfaced four of the tennis courts and now have nine ALTA (Atlanta Lawn Tennis Association) teams.

Finally, according to Board member, Roger Orlando, who leads the Club's Food & Beverage area, the upstairs kitchen has been entirely renovated and equipped to provide fine dining and the ability to handle large events like weddings and private parties.

We encourage everyone in the Smoke Rise community to pay a visit to the Club and learn the tremendous benefits of membership in the best-kept secret in the area. It's a great place to meet friends, network, and get to know your neighbors.



SRCC members at the annual meeting





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We Need You!

Smoke Rise - this is YOUR paper! The Smoke Signal began more than 50 years ago and remains, to this day, a community newspaper created, written and produced by volunteer, Smoke Rise neighbors for the entire neighborhood.

PLEASE consider becoming a contributor, editor or joining our staff. It's a rewarding way to give back to your Smoke Rise community! Contact us today. staff@smokesignalnews.com

Smoke Rise Academy of Arts Buzzing with Excitement

There is a buzz of excitement in the air at the Smoke Rise Academy of Arts! Two new voice instructors have joined the outstanding team of music teachers. Rachel Tiemann of Smoke Rise and Jennifer Langley of Lilburn bring a wealth of experience and talent to their studios and have students preparing auditions for theater, all-state and colleges!

Our theater department presented two outstanding productions this summer, Charles Dickens' The Mystery of Edwin Drood and Disney's SHREK, JR. Our upcoming production of Jungle Book, KIDS will feature our young actors with two shows on November 7 & 8. Please check our website for details and tickets to this fun, family-friendly show written for young actors and audiences! Bring the kids!

The Academy will feature its annual Holiday Market, December 13. The Holiday Market features many of our local vendors with booths full of textiles, jams, jewelry, hand-made crafts, photos with Santa and Mrs. Claus, and much more! This year the Academy students and faculty will provide live music and dance entertainment throughout the market. Interested in being a vendor to show off your talents? Check our website for details.

The Market is a fundraising event for our Junior Theater Festival team of auditioned drama students who perform at the annual JTF adjudication event held each January. The festival in Atlanta, sponsored by Music Theater International, Disney, and Playbill is the world's largest theater festival for students, bringing in over 6,000 students from around the world. The Smoke Rise Academy of Arts has attended this festival for the past five years and has brought home Most Outstanding Performance, Outstanding Music, Outstanding Dance, and New Works Showcase awards from each year. In 2023, the SRAA team was invited to present a brand-new work that had yet to be released for student rentals, Disney's Finding Nemo, Jr. Once again, the SRAA team is being invited to perform another new work before the entire festival. The title is to remain secret at this time, but it is quite an honor to be invited and will be a showstopper performance! This performance on the New Works Showcase is in addition to their adjudication performance and requires additional resources for costumes, props, etc. The Smoke Rise JTF team has embarked on numerous fundraisers and is extending invitations to our friends to become SPONSORS and help support our young actors as they debut a new musical at the 2026 Junior Theater Festival. For information on tickets, vendor booths, and sponsorship, please visit our website: www.SmokeRiseBaptist.org/Arts

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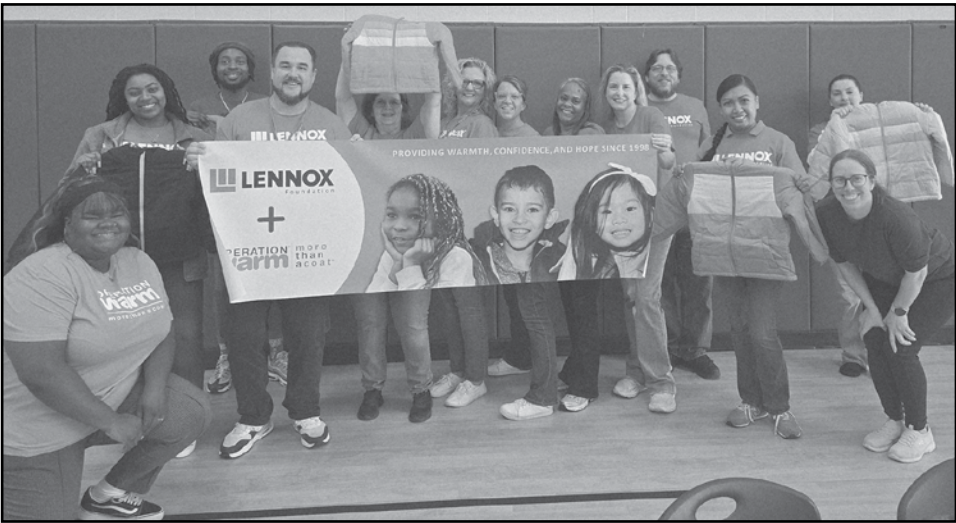
Adult Ticket (13+) - \$10

Kids Ticket (6-12) - \$5

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Get Your Tickets at

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Pictured above are volunteers from Operation Warm and Lennox

This September, Smoke Rise Elementary School welcomed Operation Warm and Lennox for a special event that brought smiles and warmth to our halls! Through their generosity, every student received a brand new winter coat to help them stay cozy and confident during the colder months. Our school community is truly thankful for this incredible act of kindness and the continued support of our community partners. On behalf of Principal Dr. Krystye Tatum, our counselors, and the entire Smoke Rise Elementary staff, we extend heartfelt appreciation to Operation Warm and Lennox for helping our students stay warm, confident, and ready to learn this winter season.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month

October was Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The GFWC Stone Mountain Woman's Club had several projects related to this. Members wore purple to the October meeting to show their awareness of this problem in our society.

Members participated in the National Day of Service by working at Wellspring Living, a partner organization that serves survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation. The ladies donated over 350 lbs. of high-end clothing and accessories to Wellspring to be used by the survivors to enhance their well-being and to be used for job interviews and work. The club members spent the morning organizing clothing donations for the closet at the facility.

Candy and costumes were given to the Women's Resource Center for use by the children of domestic violence situations for a Halloween party. Five members attended the 34th Candlelight Vigil in Decatur. It



Standing (L to R) Mary Eubanks, Marty Bryan. Sitting (L to R) Joanne Cannarella, Barbara Luton.

is held each year by the Women's Resource Center to honor the memory of all of the victims lost to domestic violence in Georgia and to celebrate the resilience of the survivors.

A fundraiser for the GA Coalition Against Domestic Violence was held in Tucker at the Tucker Brewing Co., and members attended that to show their support. A walk to support domestic violence awareness was held in Stone Mountain village at the Faith and Blue Day.

Domestic Awareness is an ongoing project of the International Federation of Women's Clubs.



National Day of Service at the Wellspring Living safehouse.

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~ 5 ~

The Not-So-Itsy Bitsy Spider

by Susan Gilbert, Staff Writer

The huge, spooky-looking Joro spider has reached north Georgia. Many of our Smoke Rise neighbors have been spotting these colorful new visitors in their yards. These large arachnids have been steadily spreading across Georgia and the Southeast, raising questions—and concerns. Are they dangerous? What should you do if you see one? How might their spread impact our ecosystem?

What Are They?

Native to East Asia, the Joro is a type of orb-weaving spider known for its large size and striking coloration. Adult females can reach a body length of an inch with a leg span of up to 4 inches. Easily identifiable by the yellow and blue markings on their bodies and the bright yellow bands on their black legs. Males are smaller and less noticeable.

Joros weave large, golden-hued webs that can span 20 feet and are often suspended high off the ground between trees, around doorways, and even between power lines. You'll see them in the lines along Lilburn-Stone Mt. Road near the Millstone entrance, where their webs look like gauze spread between the lines. The webs are unusually strong and thick compared to the webs of other spiders. Strands of it look more like a thread than a spider web. With them, they catch a variety of flying insects, like mosquitoes, flies, stink bugs, and even small butterflies.

How Did They Get Here?

It's believed Joros arrived in Georgia in 2014 via international shipping containers, most likely through the Port of Savannah. Since then, it has expanded rapidly across the state, thriving in our warm, humid climate. According to University of Georgia (UGA) researchers, the spiders are now present in most parts of the state and are beginning to appear in neighboring states of South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Their explosive spread is partly due to their unique method of travel — “ballooning”. Young Joro spiders release silk threads into the air and let the wind carry them to new locations, sometimes miles away.

Are They Dangerous?

Not to humans or pets. While their large size and vivid appearance can be startling, especially if you unknowingly walk through one of their webs, they are not aggressive and rarely bite. If they do, their bite is mild — comparable to a mosquito bite — and only occurs if they are provoked.

Some researchers say they may be beneficial because they eat many pest insects, including mosquitoes and invasive brown stink bugs. Their presence could help naturally control these populations. According to UGA biologist, Dr. Andy Davis, who has studied the Joro's spread, “There's no evidence that they're displacing native spiders or harming the ecosystem in a significant way. If anything, they seem to be fitting into the environment without major disruption.”

What Should You Do If You See One?

If you find a Joro spider you can leave it alone or remove it using a broomstick. My preferred method of defense is a long fishing pole. It's not necessary to kill the spiders, as they pose little risk and may even be helping reduce insect pests.

If you prefer elimination, University of Georgia found that Black Flag Spider and Scorpion Killer was 100% effective in killing them. However, to reach spiders in high places, I have discovered Wasp and Hornet killers to be more effective. Rather than spraying a mist, these shoot a concentrated beam that can reach 30 or more feet in the air.

Looking Ahead.

Because they are invasive, scientists are closely monitoring their spread. People can help by reporting sightings through apps like iNaturalist, which track the movement of invasive species. For better or worse, Joro spiders are likely here to stay — and will likely continue expanding their range throughout the country. For now, Georgians can take comfort in knowing these colorful newcomers are more of a curiosity than a threat.





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Book Review:
Steve Duncan’s ‘Behind The Scenes’

by Joyce Ray, Staff Writer

Steve Duncan and his wife, Quill, have lived in Smoke Rise for many years since they purchased a 1970’s custom built mid-century modern home. In addition to tuning pianos, Steve is skilled in many areas and doesn’t think twice about tackling big jobs, such as construction, plumbing, electrical and his new love of writing.

My book club chose to read Steve’s book, *Behind the Scenes*, and I invited him to come to our September meeting to expound on his experiences that he wrote about. Since he is currently avidly writing a series of fantasy books, he was happy to walk us through the writing process and explain the timeline of getting published. His first advice for novice authors is “write what you know” and his inspiration for his new books came from ideas formed during his early years. The series is themed for young adults and young at heart. One of our members asked if having grown up on Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, with “Fairyland” next door helped to formulate the fantasy theme.

His story, *Behind the Scenes* is his first book and begins with his early life on Lookout Mountain, a place where only a small



Steve Duncan

percentage of people get to call home. He recounts how music played a big part in his formative years as he played in bands and groups during high school and while he pursued an architecture degree at Georgia Tech. He later transferred to Atlanta Baptist College, with the intention of going to music school. A shopping trip to purchase a much-needed piano was his intro to

Jim’s Piano Shop on North Highland Avenue where he was hired as an apprentice, and the great adventure of his life began.

Steve’s job as a professional piano tuner for over forty years in the Metro Atlanta area took him into all the concert centers such as the Fox Theatre, The Omni, Chastain Park and the Civic Center, as well as many homes, churches and other event venues throughout the city. Between the 1970s and 1990s, Atlanta experienced a surge in musical creativity that transformed it into a newly popular destination for artists and performers. More than 36 recording studios emerged across the city. Pianos were featured both in recording sessions and on stage.

Throughout those years, Steve tuned for famous celebrities, such as Johnny Cash, Andy Williams, John Denver, Elton John, Diana Ross, Roy Orbison, Frank Sinatra, Liza Minelli, Sammy Davis, Jr. and, yes, Paul McCartney and many famous groups.

The opportunity to rebuild a special seven-foot Broadwood piano which was the brand of choice for Beethoven, gave Steve a great challenge and was a labor-intensive task. He was “into” Beethoven at the time and used that encounter to establish his working philosophy: tune every piano as though tuning for Beethoven.

In *Behind the Scenes* Steve recounts some of the interesting encounters he had with people in the music industry, but his book is also a tutorial on the piano as an instrument and the many parts and intricacies that make up that large, complicated piece of furniture. Steve tells how pianos, especially those in bars and public places, can take a lot of punishment from drinks, food spills and cigarettes. Other encounters were with water damage, mold, rodent infestations, and a surprising “find” of a woman’s ring that had been lost for over 20 years, and Steve found it in the piano!

Steve and Quill stay busy with grandchildren and community events, but he still takes any opportunity to help piano owners continue to enjoy the music their instruments are designed to produce. You can find his ad in the *Smoke Signal* Classified Ads and get your piano tuned for the Holidays!

Restaurant Review: A Taste of Life, One Bite at a Time

Excovitchez – A new gem just 15 minutes from Smoke Rise

by The Flavor Explorers

The Flavor Explorers are thrilled to launch our first review! While we aim to remain anonymous, we’ll share that we are two Smoke Rise families united by our love for good food and great company. With both young children and young adults in our households, our differing palates make for a well-rounded (and sometimes delightfully opinionated) dining experience. Every voice counts at our table.

Our culinary journey took us to Excovitchez, a vibrant new restaurant located in Briarcliff, just a quick 15-minute drive from Smoke Rise. From the moment we arrived, we were greeted with warmth and impeccable hospitality. Tamia, our wonderful server, brought fresh bread to the table right away and even asked if the baby would like some water, a thoughtful touch that immediately stood out. The atmosphere was impressive. Elegant décor, plush booths, and soft lighting gave the space a date-night sophistication, while still feeling welcoming for families. If you’re a fan of old-school Caribbean rhythms, you’ll be delighted by the nostalgic sounds of Terror Fabulous’ “Action” and other island classics. Entertainment options add to the appeal: Comedy Thursdays, live music Friday through Sunday evenings, and two large screens for catching the game, all blending seamlessly with the restaurant’s lively yet relaxed vibe.



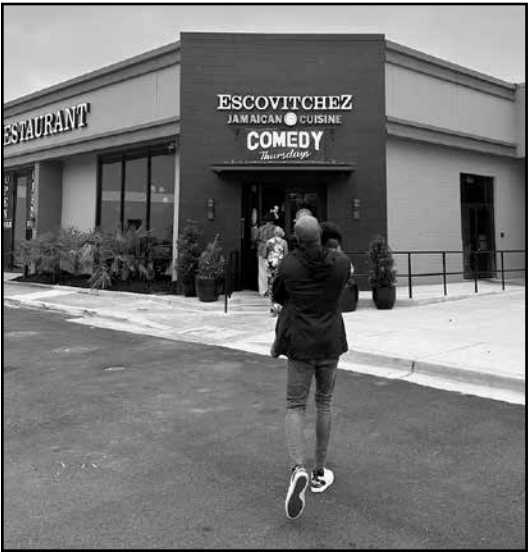
The Feast: The Flavor Explorers ordered a little bit of everything to satisfy every taste:

- Jerk Burger and Fries
- Rasta Pasta with Shrimp and Chicken
- Jerk Chicken
- Oxtail and Shrimp Fried Rice

Each dish arrived hot, beautifully plated, and bursting with bold, authentic flavor. The jerk seasoning was spot-on—spicy but balanced and the Rasta Pasta was creamy, rich, and irresistible. The Oxtail and Shrimp Fried Rice was the surprise hit of the night: perfectly seasoned, deeply savory, and utterly comforting. To complement the meal, we tried the Rum Punch, which was pure Caribbean sunshine in a glass—smooth, fruity, and unforgettable. We ended our evening with the Bread Pudding, a decadent dessert finished with a sweet cherry drizzle that left everyone at the table smiling.

The Verdict: Between the welcoming service, flavorful dishes, and island-inspired atmosphere, Excovitchez has earned high marks from The Flavor Explorers. We proudly give this new Brookhaven favorite a 4.8 out of 5. Whether you’re planning a romantic evening, a fun night with friends, or a family outing, we’ve found a new go-to spot for Smoke Rise residents.

Until next time, keep exploring, keep tasting, and keep savoring the flavor of life.



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HEALTH NOTES:

Mediating the Aging Process: What Can Be Done?

by Patricia Baumann, MD

In June of 2018, the World health Organization (WHO) released the 11th edition of its International Classification of Diseases, and for the first time added aging. The classification of aging as a disease paved the way for new research into novel therapeutics to delay or reverse age-related illnesses.

Most of you are familiar with the usual, very good recommendations made for the aging population. As a member of this aging group, and as a physician, I am familiar with the usual recommendations. All of them are made with the goal of slowing down the aging process. They include exercising, good nutrition, no tobacco, curbing alcohol use, and avoiding stress. Nutritional advice includes adopting the Mediterranean diet, a heart healthy, nutrient rich dietary pattern. Key components are fruits and vegetable, whole grains, olive oil, nuts and seeds, legumes, fish, moderate lean poultry and eggs, and low-fat yogurt and cheese. The Mediterranean diet lowers the risk of heart disease and early death, and may help with weight loss.

Other recommendations for mediating the aging process you may have not considered, but they are supported by scientific data.

INFLAMMATION

High levels of inflammation have been found to be related to advanced aging. Chronic inflammation is thought to be associated with disease, including heart disease, Alzheimer’s, and cancer. There are many things you can do to contribute to a decrease in the level of inflammation in your body.

Your microbiome, such as the microorganisms that normally live in your gut, can affect your level of inflammation. Studies are increasingly linking this to overall health. One way you can decrease your level of inflammation is by increasing the level the beneficial bacteria in your gut, such as Bifidobacterium. You can increase your level of good gut bacteria by consuming yogurt. Eating yogurt can help you in this way, and if you do not like yogurt, you can also obtain these beneficial bacteria with oral supplements.

Other dietary modification to combat inflammation include these foods: tomatoes, olive oil, green leafy vegetable, such a spinach, kale, and collards, nuts like almonds and walnuts, fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, tuna, and sardines, and fruits such as strawberries, blueberries, cherries, and oranges.

Substances such as turmeric can help combat inflammation. Many studies have proved that the active compound in turmeric, curcumin, has very good anti-inflammatory properties, among other beneficial effects. Turmeric regulates various signaling pathways and inhibits the production of inflammatory mediators. This significant anti-inflammatory activity has attracted a lot of research interest. It is one of the natural compounds with the greatest potential in the treatment of inflammatory diseases such as arthritis. Turmeric is generally considered safer for the gastrointestinal tract than NSAIDS (Aleve, Advil, Aspirin). Turmeric reduces inflammation through a different pathway that does not harm the stomach lining like NSAIDS. That is good news for those of us that cannot tolerate NSAIDS due to potential stomach issues.

Omega 3 fatty acids can help combat inflammation. They reduce the synthesis of inflammatory mediators such as cytokines and prostaglandins. Omega 3 fatty acids can be found in oily fish, flax seeds, chia seeds, and walnuts. Oral supplements are also available.

NUTRACEUTICALS

It has been claimed that wisely choosing your parents is the best way to health and long life. We may have a better chance at preserving the genetic material we have.

NMN (nicotinamide mononucleotide) is a naturally occurring vitamin B3 molecule that acts as a precursor to NAD+ (nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide). NAD+ is a

...Continued on page 10

Keeping Our Kids Safe By Joel Gilbert, Staff Writer

Having raised four daughters through adolescence and young adulthood, I learned that self-esteem was the cornerstone of their well-being and the key to maintaining stability in our household. When they felt confident in who they were and how they looked, everything else seemed more manageable. For a time, I enrolled them in a Catholic school where every girl wore the same uniform—an intentional choice to reduce wardrobe-related frustration and help them focus on what truly mattered.

Of course, kids will still be kids, and cliques quickly became symbols of social status. There’s always an “in crowd,” and it’s only natural for children to want to be accepted and liked by their peers. Unfortunately, playground bullies are a timeless reality—one that’s difficult for parents to anticipate or completely counter.

However, raising children today is a much more complicated matter. Our most significant risk with kids today is the electronic world of social media. They can be exposed to a dizzying array of temptations and real threats to their safety and emotional well-being.

I found it helpful to watch Netflix’s documentary, The Social Dilemma, which exposed the evils of social media today, featuring commentary and interviews with some of the top tech geniuses from Silicon Valley. These are vice presidents, designers, and product engineers of Facebook, Twitter, Google, Instagram, YouTube, etc.

The documentary is a journey of how social media evolved from a positive way to connect people, into a money-making machine - and most importantly, how that’s impacting our lives. The similarities to video game addiction will provoke some of you to point fingers and attempt to limit exposure... just as we did when our son seemed to be playing video games too much. However, this may no longer be a “time waster” in their lives.

Here is my short list of considerations:

1. Create screen-free times: meals together, playing cards or board games, and candid conversations about how their social lives are critical. Listen for pain, fear, sorrow, anxiety, or any other potentially traumatic elements and offer a safe place for them to share their feelings with you. This may require you to have one-on-one time rather than family conversations with other siblings.

2. Become interested in their social interactions: Look at what they post on social media and watch for warning signs, especially if others gang up with criticism. We all want to be accepted, and when we experience rejection, it hurts. Also, realize that any pictures posted can be digitally altered to imply the worst about a person.

3. Do as I say and as I do: I recently took down all of my social media posts. Anyone who had followed me knows I had lots of funny content for my audience. For instance, the nighttime video of a raccoon stealing our bird feeder by rhythmically swatting the fishing line that held it up, until he could reach it in the air and yank it off the tree branch. However, after watching The Social Dilemma I realized that any pictures you post online can put you at high risk. Additionally, I started to notice that all too many of those who wanted to befriend me were not likely to be good friends over time.

It’s wonderful to stay connected with relatives and friends, but it’s important to remember that the online world is always watching. Every click and comment is tracked, and behind the scenes, algorithms are constantly analyzing your behavior—sometimes to sell you things, and sometimes for reasons far less harmless.

Remember—if you’re not paying for the service, you are the product being sold to the highest bidder—and so are your children. The online world can be a jungle, so stay alert, stay involved, and stay skeptical. As we learned long ago, there’s still no such thing as a free lunch.

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NEWS YOU CAN USE
BY AVIVA HOFFMANN, STAFF WRITER

Scammers Are Busy During Medicare Open Enrollment Season

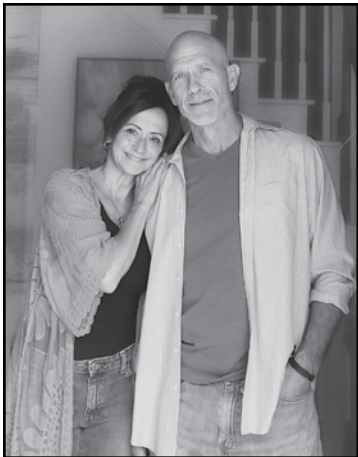
It’s that time of year again - Medicare Open Enrollment runs from October 15 to December 7. While you’re thinking about your health coverage and prescription drug plans, it’s important to be on the lookout for scammers trying to trick you.

These scammers often pretend to be from Medicare and might call you out of the blue. They can sound convincing, sometimes even using bits of your personal info to gain your trust. Their goal? To get your Medicare number, bank details, or credit card info. They might say you need a “new” or “updated” Medicare card, but here’s the truth: real Medicare cards are always free and mailed directly to you with no strings attached. And real Medicare representatives won’t call, text, or email you unexpectedly asking for money or personal information.

- So, how can you protect yourself?
- Don’t give out your info on unexpected calls. If someone calls demanding your Medicare number, bank account, or credit card details, hang up. Medicare will never call you first asking for these. They only ask for information if you reach out to them, and they won’t ask you to pay for your Medicare card.
 - Be cautious about caller ID. Scammers can fake numbers to make it look like they’re calling from Medicare. If you’re unsure, hang up and call Medicare yourself at 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) to double-check.
 - Get trustworthy help. If you want to compare plans or get advice, reach out to your State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). You can also visit Medicare.gov or call 1-800-MEDICARE for official info.
 - Report scams. If you think you’ve been contacted by a scammer pretending to be Medicare, report it right away by calling 1-800-MEDICARE. You can also file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at ReportFraud.ftc.gov.
- Stay alert, ask questions, and remember - it’s okay to hang up and double-check!

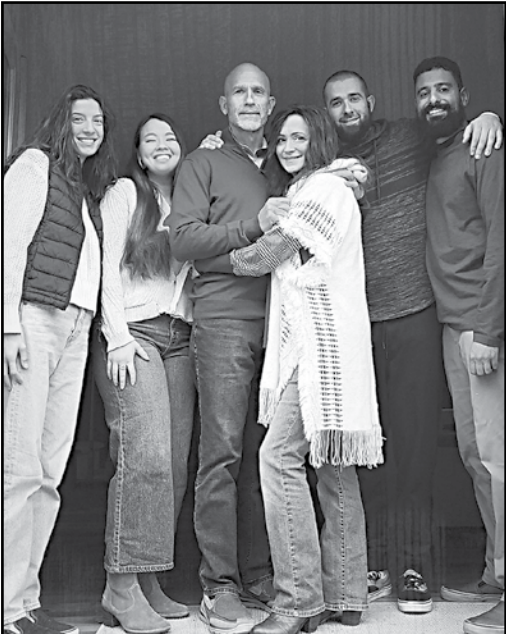
Meet Your Neighbor

Last month in our *Meet Your Neighbor* segment, we featured the Stock family from Kanawha. If you missed their story, you can catch up on page 5 of our October digital edition, now



available on our website at www.smokesignal-news.com.

Left: Mark and Andrea Stock



Right: The Stock family



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Living with Arthritis of the Spine
by Linda Karr, Staff Writer

This is the sixth article in the series on living with arthritis. Spinal arthritis is very common. Information from the Cleveland Clinic states, “Experts estimate that around 95% of males and 70% of females older than 60 have some amount of spinal arthritis”. Symptoms can vary according to where arthritis has affected your spine. And pain can also radiate to other areas such as the arms, legs, and buttocks. Symptoms may include back pain (particularly in the neck and lower back), stiffness, fatigue, decreased mobility, muscle weakness, and numbness/tingling in the arms or legs. Although arthritis is a chronic condition, you can learn to manage the symptoms so there is less effect on your quality of life.

Lifestyle changes can help. Five to ten pounds of weight loss can make significant impacts on spinal compression. Ergonomics is another area to think about. Find a supportive chair; set up sitting positions that promote neutral postures using lumbar support, and pillows. Sometimes foot stools can be helpful.

How do you sleep? When laying on the side, try using a pillow between the legs and a thicker pillow for your head so that your spine is neutral. Have someone take a picture of you laying down. You want to see a straight line from tip of head to tailbone. If you notice the spine curving, adjust your pillows until you find neutral. If sleeping on your back, put a pillow under your knees and use a less thick pillow so it does not push your head too far forward. Have someone take a picture from the side and you should see a straight line from your ears to your hips. Mattress selection is also important with a firmer mattress being the better option for someone with arthritis of the spine.

Inactivity will accelerate stiffness where motion/exercise will lubricate the joints improving mobility. Try low impact exercise like walking, biking, or water aerobics. Work on strengthening the core muscles and improving the mobility of hips and thoracic spine. Try to stay consistent with your exercise program and do a little low impact exercise daily. 20-30 minutes is a great place to start. Recognize that initially, exercise is likely to cause increased discomfort, but you should start to notice a change in symptoms within 2-3 weeks of consistent low impact exercise.

Correct, improved posture can make a difference! Upper Crossed Syndrome (UCS) and Lower Crossed Syndrome (LCS) can lead to issues with stenosis that are common with spinal arthritis in older populations.

UCS is the common hunchback look that results from the head being forward, the shoulders rounding inward, and the upper back having a hunched appearance. If you have UCS try stretching the chest and upper trapezius muscles, strengthening the back muscles and deep neck flexors. Pay attention to ergonomics of your workspaces if still working or spending a lot of time on a phone or computer. Good workspace ergonomics promote an upright posture.

LCS looks like the lower back arches inward too much, the belly may stick out, and the pelvis rotates forward, and it appears the back of the pelvis is higher than the front. To help stretch the hip flexors, hamstrings, and muscles of lower back, strengthen the glutes and deep abdominals. Spend less time sitting, get up and move around more frequently.

For pain management as with other types of arthritis, use ice for inflammation or heat for stiffness. A TENS units can be beneficial for reducing pain and can be worn while doing activities. NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) reduce both inflammation and pain. I was encouraged to use a body massager. Just using it for a couple of minutes when your muscles are feeling tight/aching can be effective. Something new I’ve tried is Deep Blue (an essential oil blend) which has helped me more than other creams such as Voltaren, Biofreeze and Salonpas.

Next month we’ll complete the living with arthritis series as we explore arthritis in the feet. Stay tuned.

Do you know of other tools that help you manage your arthritis, please share with me (lskarr50@gmail.com) and I will add them into the last article.

(Written in collaboration with Blake Hampton, PT, DPT, Owner/Clinic Director Team Rehabilitation Stone Mountain)

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

Turkey Neighbors

Lifting the bedroom window to enjoy the brisk fall air, I noticed the familiar chuk, chuk, chuk of the elusive wild turkeys visiting our wooded neighborhood. The cooler weather had encouraged them to move closer to humans in search of food and shelter for the coming winter. The variety of leaves, grass, seeds, berries, and insects offered a tasty menu for these autumn visitors.

I knew they were most likely Eastern wild turkeys. Although I rarely spotted them, I imagined their iridescent feathers shimmering in the sunlight, and the males proudly showing off their bright ruby-red wattles and beards. Daily they would wander from backyard to backyard, foraging for food and a cool drink. To stay safe from predators, the big birds would roost in the trees each evening at sunset, then descend with the daylight for their morning stroll.

As I listened to their soft chatter fading into the woods, I smiled; fall had truly arrived, and even the turkeys were joining in to celebrate the season.



Real Estate Market Notes: Smoke Rise Numbers

by Pat Soltys, Staff Writer

The real estate market throughout most of the country in 2025 has been challenging. The numbers tell the story best. A lot was blamed on interest rates. Uncertainty in the economic and geopolitical climate certainly has been a contributor.

To give perspective specific to Smoke Rise, year to date sales numbers totals only 47 properties closed. At this rate, looking at sales pending in Smoke Rise, it is doubtful that sales will equal 2024, which was the slowest year since this tracking began in 2012. All years prior, except 2023, going back to 2016 were over 100 properties closed yearly.

List-to-close days on market average to date is 83 days in 2025. Average decrease from final list price to sold price was six percent. The largest decreases were properties that had significant repairs.

Contrary to many markets, our average sales price is \$640,340 in 2025 to date very close to 2024 and significantly higher than 2023 which was \$583,022. This varies a bit year to year by the homes sold. There are currently three pending sales over 1 million in list price that will most likely tie or exceed the average for 2024.

The other notable difference in the 2025 market is that activity and sales began improving in September with few other traditional hot points in the year. In Smoke Rise, we tend to stay in our homes longer than in many metro Atlanta markets with quite a number of the original owners still in their homes after 50+ years. Average ownership is closer to 20 years, so we do not have high turnover.

Throughout the history of real estate, there are a couple of standing truths worthy of recognition.

- 1. Homeownership remains the foundation of personal wealth and stability.
- 2. There is a buyer for every home.
- 3. All real estate is local, and you cannot apply national stats to a micro market.

Health Notes...continued from page 8

vital enzyme for cell functions like DNA repair, metabolism, and cell growth. By middle age, our NAD+ levels have plummeted to half that of our youth. Numerous studies have demonstrated that boosting NAD+ levels increase insulin sensitivity, reverses mitochondrial dysfunction, and extends lifespan. Taken orally, NMN is rapidly absorbed and converted to NAD+.

NMN is found in foods like fruits, vegetable, and meat, with broccoli and edamame containing the highest amounts. Currently, you can buy NMN as an oral supplement.

The FDA ruled that NMN cannot be sold as a dietary supplement because it is also being investigated as a new pharmaceutical drug. The Natural Products Association (NPA) has successfully challenged the FDA's decision, leading to a February 2025 court order that stopped the FDA from taking action against NMN sold as supplements. This legal victory temporarily halted the FDA's enforcement.

FALLS

Fall related mortality among older adults has been climbing sharply. Those of a certain age (me) are asked if we have fallen recently every doctor's visit. Multiple age-related factors may be implicated: decreasing muscle mass and decreased senses of balance and vision.

Adults usually require an average of 60 gm of protein per day to maintain muscle mass, but as we grow older beyond the age of 50, this increases to an average of 75 Gm of protein. This can be hard to do. Beyond the high protein food consumption, protein drinks, or supplements.

An overlooked problem can be overmedicated. American older adults are increasingly taking drugs or drug doses inappropriate for older adults. As you age, drugs are not metabolized as well, and the dose that was once appropriate may now be an overdose. Many therapeutic prescription drugs have sedation and dizziness as a side effect. If you think this might be happening, make sure you ask your doctor to review ALL your medications, with a view to perhaps eliminating some, or decreasing the dose.

PHYSICIAN SUPERVISION

Always talk to your doctor before starting any new treatment or supplement, especially if you have other medical conditions or are taking other medications.

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Smoke Rise Garden Club Wins Ribbons and Prepares for the Holiday Season

In September, Smoke Rise Garden Club Member, Dee Montgomery won a National Garden Club Merit Award at the Yellow Daisy Flower Show “Cruis’in with Daisy”. The show was held in downtown Tucker in conjunction with the Tucker Cruise-in this year! Dee won with a Variegated East Indian Holly Fern (*Arachniodes simplicior* ‘Variegata’). It was a busy week for the club. Ribbons were also won for Hosta (Deb Halley), Cock’s Comb (Victoria Crosby) and a Spider Lily (Deb Halley) among other horticultural entries. Our “Judge’s Breakfast team” of Ann Dellinger, Janice Gummersal, Gina Dilley, Martha Wilton, Karen Dingler, Dee Montgomery, Deb Halley, Usha Ramakrishnan and Victoria Crosby “set a new bar” for all the homemade goodness provided to the Judges prior to the start of the event.

On 9/11, the DeKalb County Public Safety Department held its annual Remembrance ceremony. President Victoria Crosby presented her poem “Tribute to Heroes” as the Color Guard placed a wreath on the shards of the Twin Towers monument in front of the building. It was a very somber morning.

Our October meeting was held at the home of Deb Halley with co-hostesses Adrienne Holcomb and Karen Dingler providing the refreshments. Our speaker was Beth Langhorst from Avondale Estates Garden Club. Beth won the Deep South National Garden Club award for her creation of a bird habitat in her garden. Her PowerPoint program was on her decision to create a natural environment for wildlife in her urban neighborhood. She included information about several important women of history who have contributed to our knowledge



Breakfast for flower show judges

of how nature works together and inspires our decisions in gardening, making the presentation both fun and interesting. Beth’s extensive travel to England’s gardens and libraries -- including the garden and home of a beloved lady of letters and environmental awareness, Beatrix Potter-- added depth to her presentation.

Our November meeting will be held at the home of Usha Ramakrishnan. We meet on the first Monday of the month, September through May at 7:00 p.m. in a member’s home. If you are interested in joining us, 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, part of the National Garden Club organization.

Mountain Mums Garden Club News Roundup

The October meeting, hosted beautifully at the home of Colette Riefkohl, featured an enlightening presentation by speaker Connie Ghosh on Georgia native plants.

Connie, a dedicated member of the Georgia Native Plant Society (GNPS) for nearly thirty years, brought a wealth of hands-on expertise. Her background includes extensive involvement in habitat restoration, notably as project facilitator at the Heritage Park project in Mableton and as a member of the statewide Habitat Restoration Committee.

Connie shared four native plant sources: specialty nurseries, GNPS rescues (www.gnps.org), your own undisturbed land and friends’ natural areas, and along highway roads. She also reminded members that GNPS will survey your yard if requested.

The Mountain Mums kicked off the fall season by bringing warmth and cheer to the residents of ATRIA Park of Tucker! Together with residents, they crafted “Sunflower Bouquet” door hangers using recycled materials—spreading kindness and creativity.

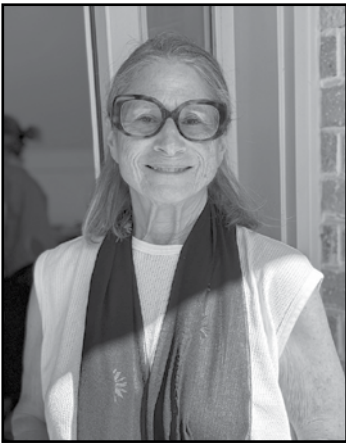
We extend a hearty congratulations to Lynn Malone, who received an Honorable Mention Award at the recent Redbud District “Cruisin with Daisy” Flower Show.

In Atlanta, the first freeze usually arrives around November 15, but it has come as early as October 18 and as late as December 18. This year, the Farmer’s Almanac predicts a colder-than-normal winter for the Southeast, so now is the time to prepare your garden. Key fall tasks include protecting roots with mulch, clearing beds to prevent disease, pruning roses, dividing perennials, and cleaning and storing garden tools to ensure a healthy start for next spring. A little effort now will help your garden weather the cold and come back strong in spring.

The long-awaited Mountain Mums Cookbook has arrived just in time for the holidays! Contact any club member to get your copy today!

The Mountain Mums Ways and Means Committee had a successful run, making and selling wreaths, swags, and handmade bows. All proceeds will be used to support the club’s community projects.

For membership information and latest news, please contact mjacob1010@gmail.com and check out our Facebook Page – Mountain Mums Garden Club.



Connie Ghosh, a member of the Georgia Native Plant Society

Morning Glories Adopt a Youth Garden Club

The joy of gardening can begin at any age but why not when you are just three or four years old? And happily, that is exactly what is happening with the children from the Mountain Park Methodist Preschool. Smoke Rise Morning Glories President Amie Walsh suggested to the club that we help the staff and teachers at the Preschool with gardening activities twice a month. The school has raised beds and gardening tools for child sized hands, and they just needed some fun activities to get the program started.

The pre-K Garden Club is called Grow with Us Little Gardeners. There are 40 in the preschool group, evenly represented by boys and girls. The church-affiliated group meets twice a month (6-8 months of the year) and plans to hold 12-16 meetings per year. Each program will last 20-30 minutes. Amie Walsh is the project coordinator and is working closely with the teacher on lesson plans. Many of the Morning Glories will participate in presenting programs. The



Beth Woodward reads to the children as Amie Walsh looks on.

Morning Glories have already had several interactive programs with the children. These programs included worms and ladybugs. Future programs planned include Leaves, Pumpkin Patch, Pansies, Spinning (cotton) Blessings from our Garden book reading, Holiday wreath-making using bay leaves and Making Pinecone Bird Feeders.

Our club’s October meeting featured guest speaker Susanne Swing Thompson who offered her unique insights into our beautiful natural world. The November meeting is dedicated to the Wellroot organization which helps foster children and teens in Georgia through a variety of supportive programs including housing. Club members will be bringing toys, clothing and other items to the meeting for the foster children’s Christmas celebrations. For information on our club and our programs, please contact President Amie Walsh at 404-729-4871.

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Out and About

The ART Station fall juried members competition and exhibition titled the 'Animal Within' is showing October 18 through December 21st in the ART Station Gallery in Stone Mountain Village. The Atlanta Mosaic Guild is also featured, and their members have some beautiful, elaborate art that is worth seeing!

The Stone Mountain Woman's Club hosted the opening reception.

Michael and Cheri Schneider of Millstone Lane with artist Wendee Van Order in front of her elaborate Mosaic work.



Food & Home Fixin's

by Joyce Ray, Staff Writer

Gather with Grateful Hearts

Cherished family gatherings during the holidays provide reconnection with those we love. They remind us of all that we must be thankful for, from the joy of spending time with family and friends and sharing cherished memories, to the abundance and the beauty of the season that captivates us. Invariably there will be stress brought on by changed schedules, an expanded diet, and lack of regular routine. Whether you are the host or the guest, everyone should play a part in making the occasions memorable, pleasant and fun for all involved.

Serve with Joy and Hospitality

Plan menus in advance and find easy shortcuts. Stock up on what you will need well in advance so that there are no last-minute shopping trips. Start the day off with a simple breakfast or brunch casserole, like The Tater Tot Breakfast Casserole that can be mixed up quickly or prepared the night before and refrigerated before cooking. Offer some favorite breads like Apple Strudel Muffins, and yogurt with fruit and granola. Note: It is important to do a test run on recipes that you have never made before. Even recipes from trusted and tested sources can be different due to oven calibration, pan size, and personal taste preferences.

For bigger groups, choose your helpers, ask for their help, and assign them a specific job.

Allow everyone to contribute. Let your host know that you are willing to help but if she/he declines, don't press the point. Some cooks prefer to have you keep them company while they do the work on their schedule. Let them know that you are available if needed. A hostess gift that can be shared could be a bottle of wine, some gourmet coffee or a jar of specialty jam/honey that she can choose to serve or save for later.

Tater Tot Breakfast Casserole

1 lb Breakfast Sausage, cooked and crumbled
32oz bag frozen tater tots
8 large eggs
1 cup milk
1 small onion (if desired)
2 cups shredded Cheddar Cheese
1 tsp garlic powder
Salt and pepper to taste
Preheat oven to 350°. Grease 9x13 inch baking dish with cooking spray. Spread half the tater tots in the baking dish by laying them on their long side. Top with chopped onion, cooked and crumbled sausage and 1 ½ cups shredded cheddar cheese. Wisk together eggs, milk, garlic powder, salt and pepper. Pour the egg mixture over the sausage mixture in the dish. Top with remaining tater tots and ½ cup shredded cheese. Bake until eggs are set (45-50 minutes) and the top is golden brown. Let it rest for 5 minutes before serving. Variations: substitute chopped chives and crispy bacon. For a heartier casserole, use chopped ham and a green vegetable such as broccoli or spinach. Complete the brunch menu with some yogurt, granola and fruit and the apple muffins listed below.

Apple Strudel Muffins

Prep time: 20 mins. Cook time: 20 Mins. Cook at 375°
Makes 12 muffins

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp baking soda
½ tsp salt
1 cup white sugar
½ cup butter
2 large eggs
1 1/4 tsp vanilla
1 ½ cups peeled and chopped Granny Smith or Honey Crisp apples.

Topping:
Mix ½ cup packed brown sugar
1 T. all-purpose flour
1/8 tsp cinnamon
1 T. butter

Set aside. Grease 12 cup muffin pan. Mix flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in a medium bowl – set aside. Beat together sugar, butter and eggs in a large bowl until smooth. Mix in vanilla, and stir in apples, then gradually blend in flour mixture. Spoon batter into a prepared muffin pan. Sprinkle topping over each muffin top. Bake in pre-heated oven until a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Let sit five minutes before transferring to a serving plate.



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