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Arts & Humanities Council  
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*Jubilation Magazine* is published  
semi-annually by the Arts & Humanities  
Council of Tuscaloosa County, Inc.  
23rd Edition  
WINTER/SPRING 2012  
Arts & Humanities Council  
of Tuscaloosa County, Inc.  
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Rodney Clark as Paul "Bear" Bryant in the Alabama Shakespeare Festival production of Bear Country.  
Photo by Phil Scarborough.

## ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

**Margaret Clevenger** is a writer and photographer whose work has appeared in numerous magazines and newspapers including *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Birmingham Post-Herald*, *Mississippi Magazine*, *The Montgomery Advertiser*, *Pennsylvania Magazine*, *Southern Lady*, and *The Tuscaloosa News*. She is a frequent contributor to *Jubilation*.

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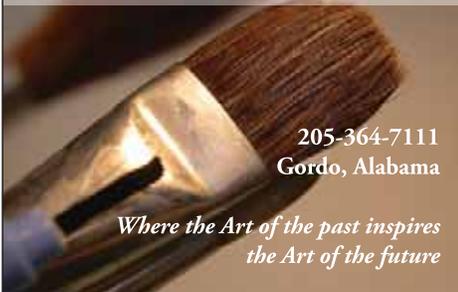
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*Dance Alabama! Spring Concert, 2011*  
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# Doing Better

## THE PAUL R. JONES ART GALLERY

By Bebe Barefoot

Photography by Porfirio Solorzano

Dean Robert Olin, at podium,  
welcomes the crowd of people who came to  
the ribbon cutting of the new Paul R. Jones  
Gallery at 2308 6th Street in downtown  
Tuscaloosa Saturday, August 13, 2011.



**T**he Mary Harmon Bryant Special Collections building on the University of Alabama campus houses some of the institution's most treasured possessions. On one floor, rare books, manuscripts, letters, diaries, film, music and other items spill the secrets of the state's storied past to anyone taking time to explore. On another floor, a stroll through the scientific facility reveals a large herbarium, a herpetology room and, right next door, the space holding the Paul R. Jones Collection of American Art at the University of Alabama. Storing such a significant collection with only a wall separating it from racks and racks of pickled reptiles might seem odd to the casual observer, but the juxtaposition captures perfectly the spirit of the late Paul R. Jones's generous gift to the University's College of Arts and Sciences. Donated in 2008 and valued at nearly \$5 million, it includes one of the largest collections of African American art in the country. Jones died in 2010.



*Above: Miriam Norris looks over some of the Paul R. Jones art collection at Mary Harmon Bryant Hall on the University of Alabama campus.*

*Right: From left, Dean Robert Olin, Jim Harrison III, Donna Northington and Samory Pruitt cut the ribbon during the ribbon cutting ceremony*

As part of his negotiations, Jones made clear his wish that the artwork become an education tool, and not just in classrooms. He specified that the University do two things: integrate it into curricula and share it with diverse communities in Alabama and the region.

“He wanted us to always display the work somewhere, but the curriculum aspect was more important to him,” recalls Robert Olin, Dean of UA’s College of Arts and Sciences.

Olin himself became a student during the process, and fondly recalls Jones as both a shrewd negotiator and cherished friend.

“This has been a really intriguing educational experience for me,” he says. “It hasn’t been work. It’s been fun.”

Olin’s first priority was to create a collection facility, so he learned as much as possible about the proper way to care for and preserve artwork. He visited several well-known museums, including the Smithsonian. His homework resulted in a world-class space in the heart of the University’s campus, and Jones lived to see it.

“Paul was tickled pink,” Olin remembers. “He loved each piece of art as if it were his own child, so he needed to know that they all would be preserved with care.”

But even as he said goodbye to his 1,700 “children,” Jones saw the big picture.

“Paul was thinking long-term, and it has been a pleasure to help him achieve his goals,” says Don Hays, Olin’s executive assistant for external affairs, adding that Jones also continually reminded him, Olin and others involved with the collection that they should always make an effort to





*Donna Northington, grand-niece of Paul J. Jones and chairman of the Paul J. Jones Gallery, sits with the audience during the ribbon cutting ceremony.*

“do better.”

Hays helped oversee one of these efforts, the most recent result of Jones’s inspiration: the Paul R. Jones Gallery of Art in downtown Tuscaloosa. If the collection space on campus represents the harmonious blend of art and science necessary for a solid education, then the gallery certainly symbolizes a marriage of “town and gown” that will surely take learning beyond the ivory tower.

“A gallery was not part of the formal deal with Paul, but it kept nagging me that there wasn’t a permanent spot to showcase the art,” Olin says, adding that he always hoped for a performing arts center with gallery wings. He finally realized he focused too much on campus when seeking a venue, so decided to rent a space to share with the community. After a month-long search, his team settled on a building at 2308 Sixth Street, owned by local businessman Charles Spurling. This provided two of the three components needed to get to the next level: there was magnificent art and a gallery space, but no curator. This “problem” presented a wonderful opportunity for the collection to be incorporated into curriculum in a way that only a few universities can do. Graduate students from UA and UAB served as the curatorial team for the inaugural exhibit. The project became part of their professionalization, and the work they did was tied to an art history course taught by Lucy Curzon, an assistant professor in UA’s Department of Art and Art History.

The resulting exhibit, aptly named “Icon,” opened as part of the gallery’s dedication ceremony in mid-August and spectacularly showcased not only select pieces but

also the tremendous educational potential Jones’s gift presents.

“Students are hungry for curatorial experience,” says Curzon, “and now that we have the exhibition space, we can move toward more teaching activities.”

She considers the gallery to be an auxiliary classroom, and the students who curated “Icon” marvel at the unique scholarly opportunity and behind-the-scenes experience.

Amy Feger, an MFA candidate concentrating on painting, says it is invaluable for an artist to see and work closely with a collection in this way.

“Published reproductions and the internet are hollow substitutions,” she emphasizes, “and learning about storing, maintaining and cataloguing the artwork helped me recognize the importance of working with archival materials.”

Angela Scott plans to teach art history at the college level, but says the experience made her aware of just how many other options she will have with a graduate degree in art history.

“It was just a neat experience to step out from behind the keyboard and dig my nose out of the stacks of books and work in a real gallery with actual artwork,” she says. “Putting together this show and working with a team helped me to bloom and develop my own ideas more fully.”

Brandi Moore hopes to use her art history degree in the museum or gallery field and appreciates the opportunity to learn about the fine details that make a show successful.

“You tend to not think of minute things like insurance

and press releases when you're just assisting, so being thrown head-first into the process was a real lesson," she says. "It helped having Dr. Curzon and Miriam Norris leading the way!"

Norris came on board in 2009 as collections manager and oversees loaning and installing the art. She says the gallery is an important step in not only raising awareness of the collection but also making it more accessible.

"For the few years following the donation of the Jones collection, the works have in some ways remained a mystery to many students, so the gallery space allows for more interest and engagement that will expand into the community," she says.

Norris considers the collection's strength to be its diversity, pointing out that Jones collected not only from established artists but also emerging and even student artists.

"We have a wealth of work from artists you find in art history books and some that may never make it to those pages, but they sit side by side in the collection. It provides a wider perspective of the art world," she says.

Graduate student April Livingston got a first-hand idea of just how obscure some of the artists are. Al Blackman created the one piece of sculpture featured in the "Icon" exhibit. Livingston, also a sculptor, selected the piece and, as part of the curatorial process, researched it and interviewed Blackman. This proved to be a lesson in

persistence.

"It took me the better part of a year to track the man down!" she says.

Her efforts paid off because she not only got her interview, but Mr. Blackman came to the gallery opening.

"I was so happy for him to be there," says Livingston. "He was smiling from ear to ear."

This obscurity paradoxically presents another dream of an opportunity for aspiring scholars: they can be the first to research and write about some of the artists and their work.

"Usually, I look at other scholarship about works and then piece together my own theory," says Scott. "With the art in the Paul Jones collection, there is sometimes nothing out there. With the 'Icon' exhibit, we had to apply our general knowledge about art and art history and critically think about the works and develop completely original interpretations."

In addition, the gallery will give students hands-on experience with day-to-day gallery operations. Working closely with gallery manager Katie McAlister, they will acquire training that will give them an edge when they go on the job market.

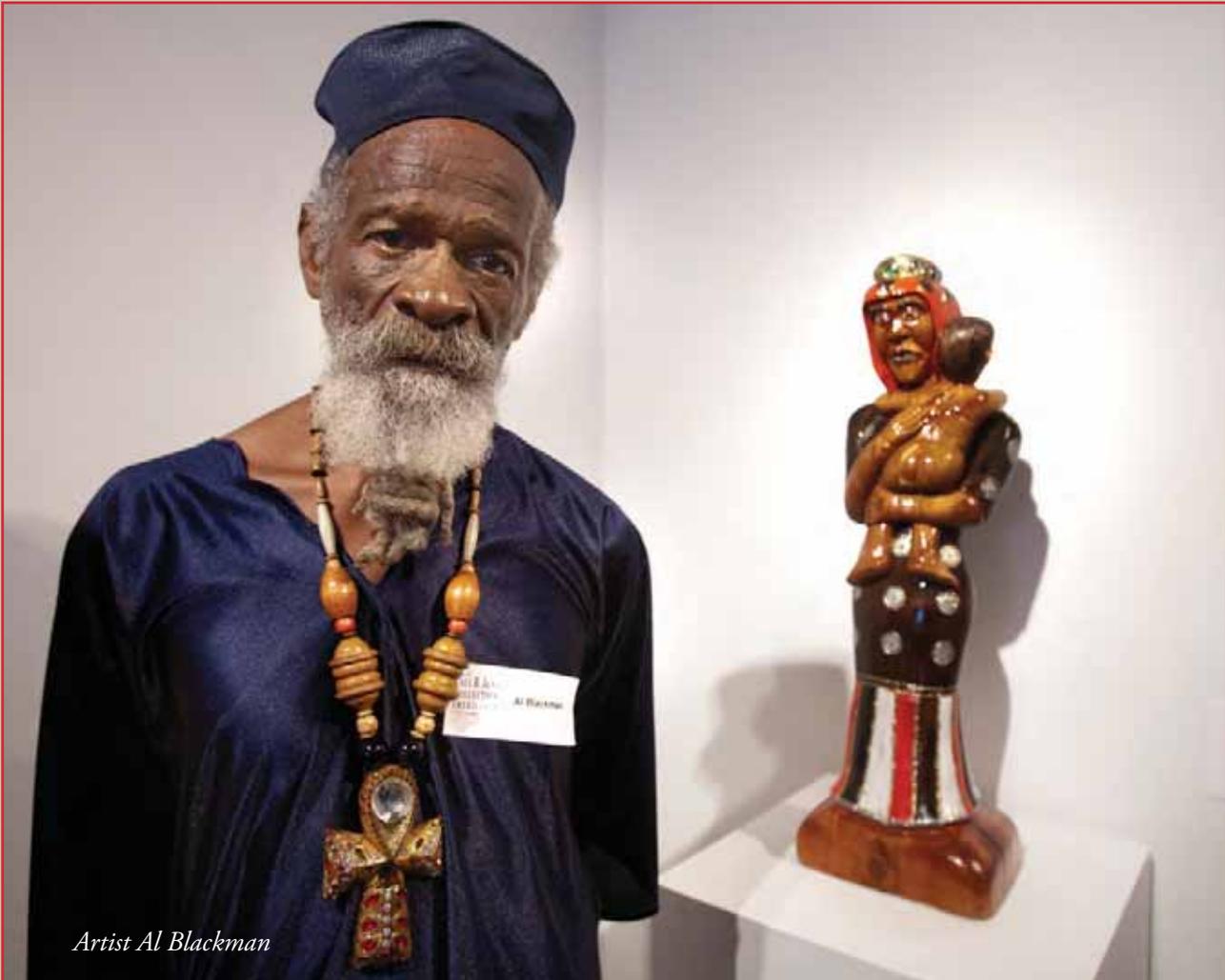
Other educational efforts include plans to invite K-12 students to the gallery, and a boardwalk allows easy access to the adjacent Harrison Galleries. In addition, loft space available for visiting artists presents even more



*Stephen Smith, a graduate student in Art History at the University of Alabama Birmingham, looks at the exhibit.*

“We’re doing better by erasing the boundaries between the campus and the city, and we want to make sure people know that this isn’t just for the University. It will not be sequestered. It’s for everyone.”

– Lucy Curzon, an assistant professor in UA’s Department of Art and Art History.



*Artist Al Blackman*

opportunities. Curzon emphasizes that the curriculum component will be comprehensive and is always a work in progress. She sees it as a way to integrate cultural events into classes and to help all students see that art has connections to popular culture, anthropology, the sciences and even business.

“We’re doing better by erasing the boundaries between the campus and the city,” says Curzon, “and we want to make sure people know that this isn’t just for the University. It will not be sequestered. It’s for everyone.”

During 2010, various works were on exhibit at the Alabama State House in Montgomery and the Birmingham Museum of Art. The Birmingham show featured photographs by P.H. Polk, who co-founded in Chicago

in 1968 AfriCOBRA, a community of artists dedicated to defining an African American aesthetic in visual art.

In 2011, more art traveled around the state when the Montgomery Museum of Art exhibited a series of print portfolios and the Safe House Museum in Greensboro showcased pieces.

A photography exhibit at the Tuscaloosa gallery followed “Icon” and featured works by Sheila Pree Bright, who presented a talk on campus as part of a lecture series integral to outreach efforts. Other lecturers have included Wadsworth Jarrell and Howardena Pindell.

A current curriculum project began in Spring 2011. Based on a conversation he had with Jones, Olin invited several UA faculty members to his home and recalls a



*Sherrie Jackson,  
a news anchor at  
Channel 42 TV in  
Birmingham, Ala-  
bama, looks at some  
of the art exhibit*

room filled with biologists, mathematicians, gender and race specialists, political and social scientists, and English, psychology and history professors. This seemingly disparate group had a commonality: research and teaching interests related to African American culture and issues. Olin asked them to brainstorm and agree on a theme. Trudier Harris, Scholar-in-Residence in the Department of English, suggested “Migration,” and everyone agreed within 10 minutes and set in motion a plan. Olin told them he would hire a professional curator for Fall 2012 to create an exhibit around their theme, and they would then integrate it into their classes by Spring 2013.

“Paul would have loved this,” Olin says

The heart of the “Migration” exhibit will come from the University of Alabama’s Paul Jones collection, but some art will be borrowed from the University of Delaware. Jones donated several hundred pieces to that institution 10 years ago, with the same stipulations he made to UA. Olin established close ties with Delaware, so this will likely be the first of many collaborations.

Hays thinks that the art collection inspires unity and says Jones knew he was preserving important American art that was ignored for a long time. He began collecting work by African American artists early on, when he discovered that there was so much talent not getting recognition and support.

“He realized many of them were under-represented in galleries and museums, so he did his part to change that,” Hays continues. “He said he built his collection by buying maybe five pieces by an artist and selling two of them. He once said with a wink, ‘I think that’s called capitalism,’” Hays laughs.

Jones’s efforts placed important art in the world, work that would not otherwise have made it out of sometimes makeshift studios. It was a lifelong labor of love, and he spent his final years making sure his collection would not only be preserved but would also “do better.”

Olin thinks that Jones probably could have had surgery to treat health problems he experienced, but it was risky and he could have died in the process.

“I think he chose the other option to make sure he would have time to think about exactly what he wanted to do with the art,” Olin says. “He knew he was dying. He never said so, but looking back...I think he knew it. That was why he had such a sense of urgency to put the collection where he thought it belonged.”

Born and raised in Bessemer, Jones liked the idea of the art being just a few miles from his childhood home.

“Paul was, above all, most passionate about the personal,” Olin says, and everyone who met him echoes this description. Hays says he was a “giant,” but simultaneously unassuming and humble.

As a study in juxtaposition himself, it’s likely Jones would have been most interested in how his very valuable and public gift reverberates not just in the spaces and courses created to preserve his larger-than-life legacy but in the hearts and souls of those who grow to love the works and get to know the man himself through his “children.”

“I was struck by the personal nature of examining another person’s collection,” says Feger. “I never met Mr. Jones, but I sensed that the objects and images he selected throughout his life revealed his character and made him real to me.”

# A L A B A M A

# Art Kitchen

**A** little over a year ago, in September 2010, University of Alabama graduate students Claire Siepser and Allison Milham renovated a circa 1890 Victorian house in downtown Tuscaloosa and christened it the Alabama Art Kitchen. Since that time many local artists have gathered there to make and display their artwork.

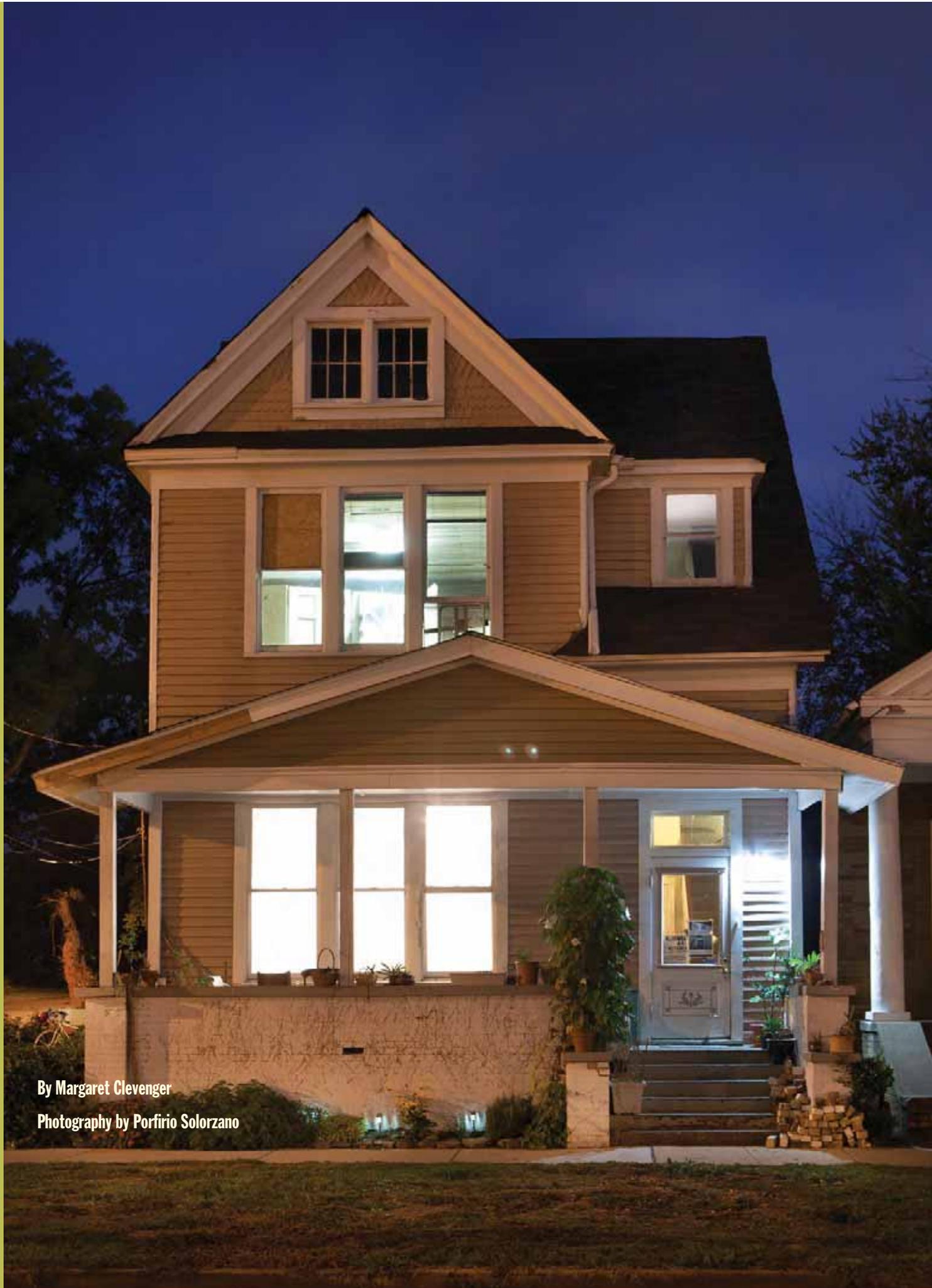
“The idea was to create a space where artists can get together and share equipment, supplies, and talk about their work,” says Siepser. “It’s a place where people can afford to do art. All the equipment is really expensive so if you can have a couple of people share it, and if there is a place to all share it, then it helps distribute the costs and maybe helps you be more successful as an artist.”

Co-founder Allison Milham accepted a residency artist position in Florida and has moved away from Tuscaloosa but still serves on the advisory board of the Art Kitchen

One of the basic objectives Siepser and Milham espoused when they first started the Alabama Art Kitchen was to create a

community, a place where artists could gather to work but also be supportive of one another; a place to bounce ideas off each other and not be forced to work in a vacuum.

The Art Kitchen has both private and communal studio space. Private studio space comes with the \$100 per month membership fee. General membership is \$45 per month which includes access to open space and participation in events but also requires service hours every month. Siepser says that most of the members are not full-time artists. “We are catering to a much larger group of people who are working toward being professional artists or are on their way in that direction but are not quite there yet,” she says.



By Margaret Clevenger

Photography by Porfirio Solorzano



*Holly Kennedy, left, and Greg Randall work on different projects in one of the rooms in The Art Kitchen studios located in an 1890 Victorian house at 2626 University Boulevard in downtown Tuscaloosa.*

Much of the equipment housed in the art collective was donated by artists who were eager to help the organization get on its feet. There is a darkroom set up and 35mm cameras, screen printing facilities and materials, book binding, a small blacksmith studio, and plans to have a paper-making area. Many local artists have donated materials and grants have been obtained to buy even more materials and to bring in professionals for workshops.

“We have offered and will continue to offer workshops that are composed of a range of skill sets,” says Patricia Davis, membership coordinator for the Kitchen. “We are trying to fill the holes that Kentuck and the university can’t. It is a little more economical and ever-changing.” Some of the classes and workshops offered are beginning letterpress on a Platen press, beginning screen printing, extreme Origami, crocheting, spinning and dyeing, figure drawing, book binding, pin-hole photography, and polyester plate lithography. “We are going to do some tutorials on digital camera usage,” Davis says. “That’s a big one because many people have these fancy

cameras and they don’t know what to do with them. We are also trying to come up with more ideas; whatever the members want or whatever there is a need for.”

Davis, a 2009-2010 UA McNair Scholar originally from Gulf Shores, has been on the executive board of the Kitchen since May, 2011. She graduated from UA with a Bachelor of Fine Arts with concentrations in printmaking, sculpture, and digital media. “It is nice to be a part of the community that is the Art Kitchen,” she says. “It is nice to have studio space available to me.”

Once a month a class is offered just for kids with an emphasis on reusing objects. “The classes are different every month,” says Siepser. “But the consistent theme throughout all of them is sustainability and making things out of recycled objects.” Recent classes for the young featured pot painting and seed planting.

Charges for the classes and workshops vary. The low tech classes that are less formal and use fewer materials might run between five and fifteen dollars while the more involved workshops run from forty five to sixty five dollars for one or two sessions. The staff will trade classes

to people who are willing to work around the building and sliding scales are available. “We want to make it possible for people,” Siepser says. “Someone might work for an hour helping us clean or manage an event, something like that,” she says.

New artwork is exhibited every month in the gallery and calls for submissions, often for theme-based shows, go out frequently. The gallery shows range from individual artists to group offerings. A recent show featured twenty five emerging book artists. There have also been mixed media group shows as well as installation sculptural pieces. The monthly exhibits open every first Thursday in conjunction with Art Night in Northport. There is no charge to attend.

Wednesday night is craft night and is open to the public. The time is specific, from 6p.m. until 8p.m., but there is no set agenda. Siepser says it is a time where people can get together and make whatever they want to make. There is no charge to participate.

Other activities at the Art Kitchen include a one night a week writers’ gym where would-be authors can flex their writing muscles and receive feedback from others in the group.

If a more physical workout is desired, Tuesday nights feature Power Flow Yoga led by Katy Jung. Jung is a 200-hour Registered Yoga Teacher through Yoga Alliance and trained through the Asheville Yoga Center in North Carolina. “Power Flow Yoga will increase your energy levels through strength and flexibility building while getting a cardiovascular workout, too,” Jung says. A five to ten dollar donation is requested for the yoga classes.

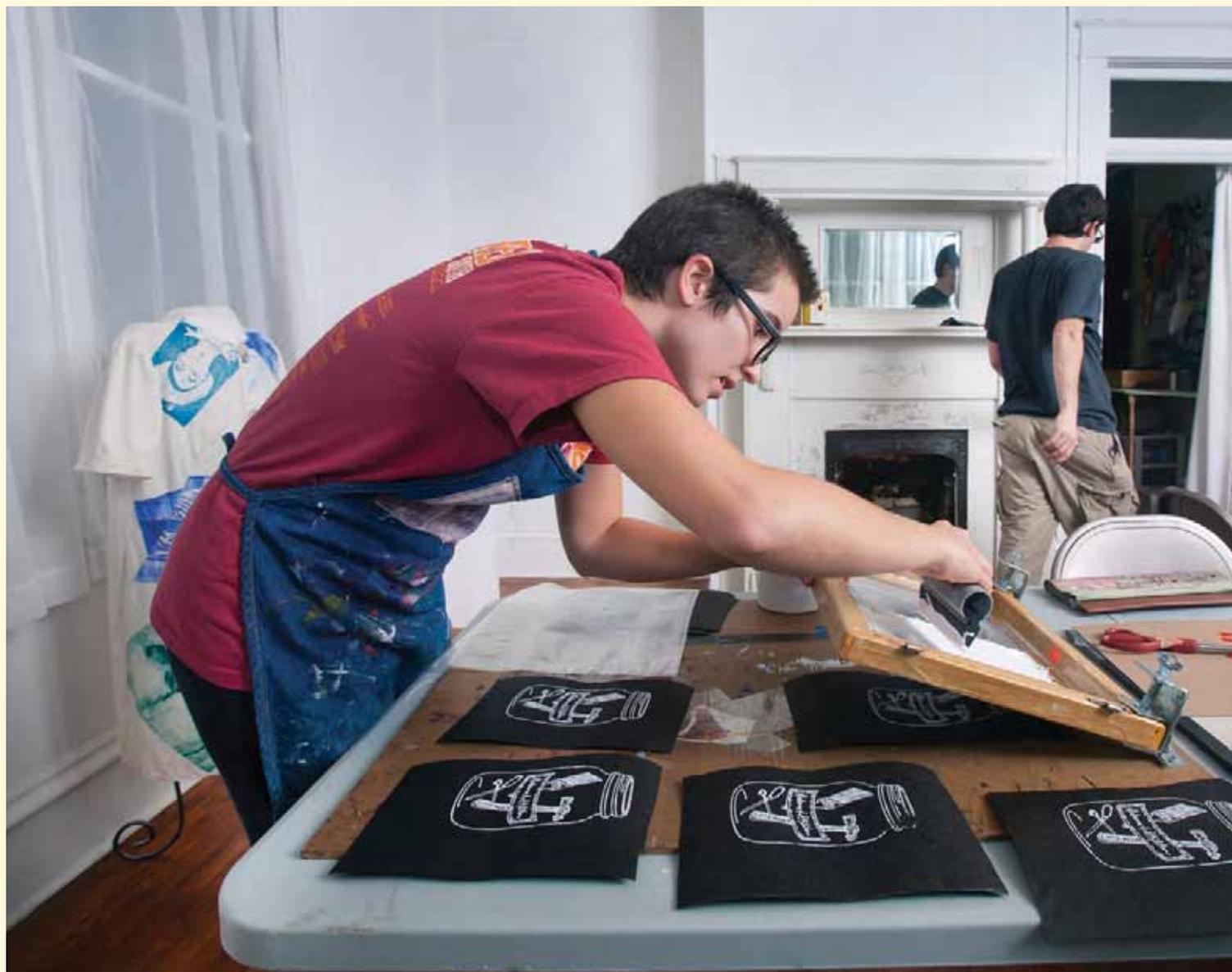
The Alabama Art Kitchen has



*Claire Siepser works on screening t-shirts to prepare for the Kentuck Festival.*



*Amanda Moore, a Senior in Art History at the University of Alabama, reads by the moon to a crowd in the Art Kitchen in downtown Tuscaloosa.*



*Holly Kennedy works on screening t-shirts to prepare for the Kentuck Festival.*

played host to several musical acts over the last year. “Andrew Dewar, a professor at the university, has a lot of really talented musical acts that come through Tuscaloosa after visiting him or on their way to another city,” Davis says. “He often would suggest the Art Kitchen and we would have these great acts who would come in and play. It has been very contemporary mixed with nontraditional.” In July the Chicago-based duo of percussionist Tim Daisy and clarinetist/saxophonist Ken Vandermark entertained with their avant-garde jazz improvisation. And in September the Kitchen hosted Killick, featuring an

18-stringed H’arpeggione and a 38-stringed harp guitar.

While many of the artists who patronize the Art Kitchen are from the University of Alabama, Siepser points out that all interested parties are welcome. “We really wanted to try to reach out across the community and we’ve tried incredibly hard to have the biggest mix possible,” she says. “The range of people is really wonderful to see.” All ages are welcome and you do not have to be a college student.

“There is this myth in the world that you are born with artistic ability,” Siepser says. “That’s ridiculous.

**The mission of the Alabama Art Kitchen is to provide studio space and equipment to local artists as well as exhibitions, classes and workshops for the community at large. We are committed to passing on our creativity, volunteerism and experience in art and strive to increase interest and involvement with the local Tuscaloosa arts culture. We believe that making and sharing art is a great way to connect people and to support and inspire community.**



*Katy Jung, left, teaches a yoga class at the Art Kitchen one late afternoon.*

It is insanely hard work and you learn how to do it. And you risk and you do it that way. Obviously, you have different ability. But absolutely every artist that I have ever spoken to that is exceptional, had to work their butt off to do it, to get the skill of the craft. You're not born with that. I think actually everyone is born with the desire (to create art) and it is completely squished. I've rarely met a child who didn't like to make things."

The old house at 2626 University Blvd has served the Art Kitchen well in its first year but the space is limited and the desire to expand is great.

"We've done a lot of work on the house and it needs a lot more," Siepser says. "It is a fantastic location but it is quite small. It is perfect for us now but in the future we are hoping for a larger space."

"The Alabama Art Kitchen, or AAK as we lovingly refer to it, is a great addition to the arts community and overall culture of Tuscaloosa," Davis says.

For more information go to [www.alabamaartkitchen.wordpress.com](http://www.alabamaartkitchen.wordpress.com) or email [alabamaartkitchen@gmail.com](mailto:alabamaartkitchen@gmail.com)

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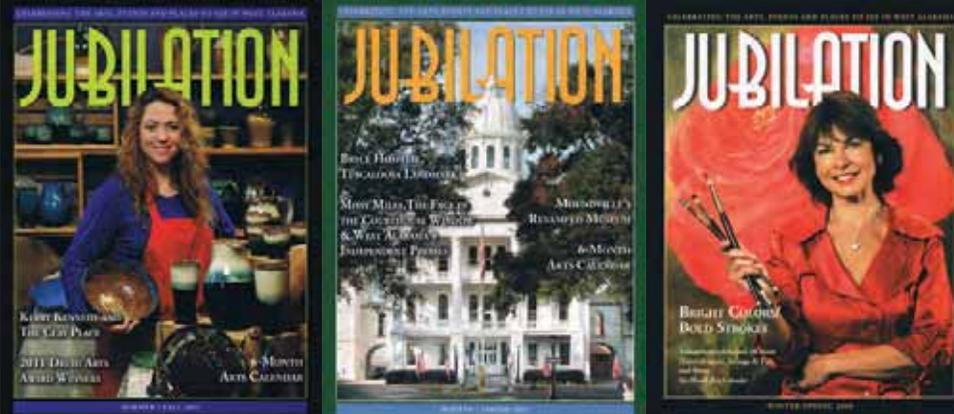
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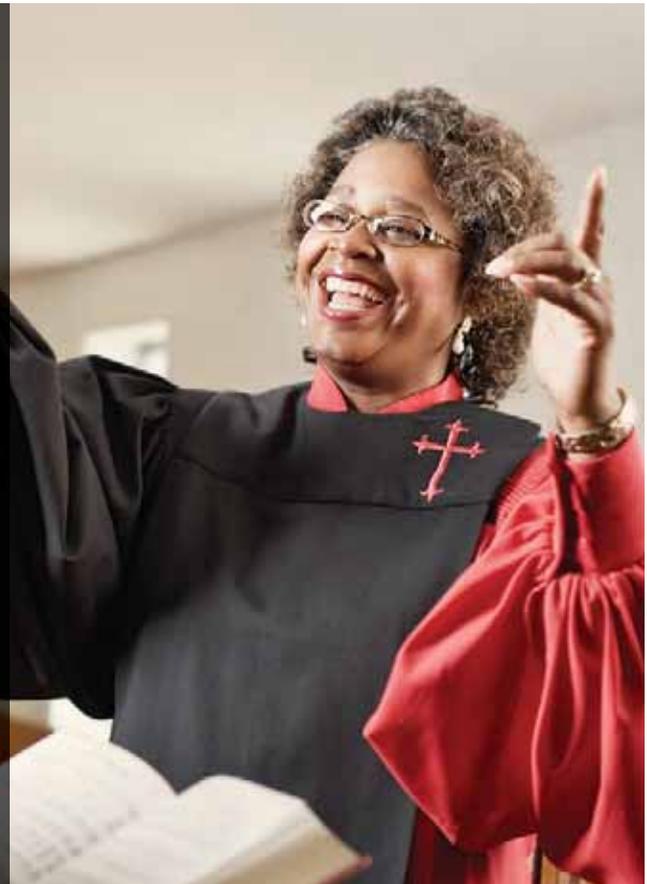
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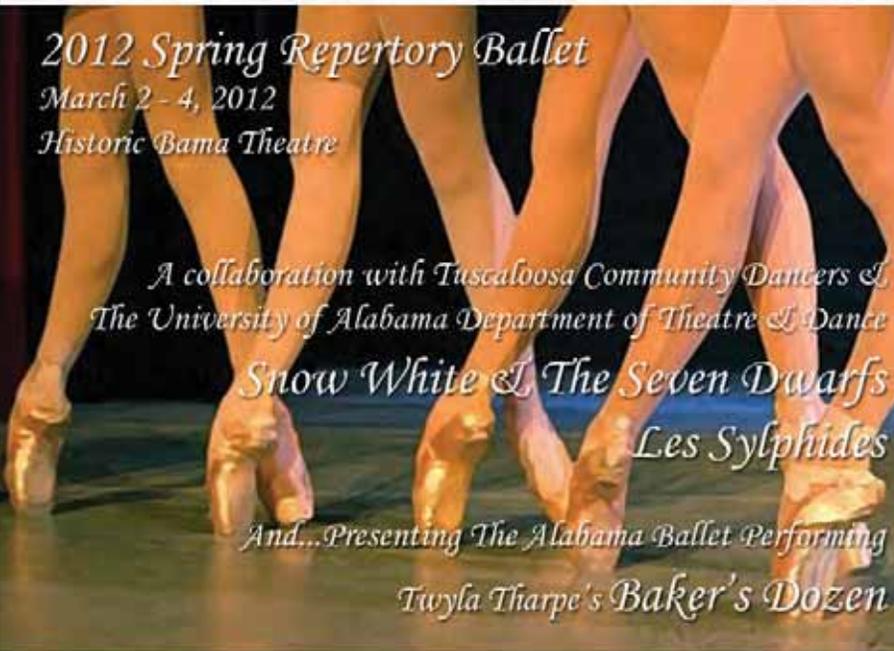
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# calendar of events

compiled by Kevin Ledgerwood

## January 5

**Art Night**, open house at local galleries in downtown Northport and Tuscaloosa, free, first Thursdays 5pm-9pm, [tuscarts.org/artnight.php](http://tuscarts.org/artnight.php)

## January 5-28

**Mixed Media by Claire Lewis Evans and "The Music Lives On: Folk Song Traditions Told by Alabama Artists"** presented by the Kentuck Center in downtown Northport, free, Tuesday-Friday 9am-5pm; Saturday 10am-4:30pm, 758-1257 or [kentuck.org](http://kentuck.org)

## January 6-8

**Ring of Fire: The Music of Johnny Cash** presented by the ACT at the Bama Theatre, \$13 Student, \$15 Senior, \$17 Adult, Friday 7:30pm; Saturday 2pm & 7:30pm; Sunday 2pm, 393-2800 or [theactionline.com](http://theactionline.com)

## January 10

**Bama Art House Movie Series: *Melancholia*** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre, \$5-\$7, 7:30pm, 758-5195

## January 10, 17, 24, 31

**Terrific Tuesday Concert Series** presented by Shelton State Community College at the SSCC Recital Hall, free, 1:15pm, [sheltonstate.edu/fine\\_arts](http://sheltonstate.edu/fine_arts)

## January 11-February 10

**Bob Jones High School Exhibition 2012** presented by the UA Department of Art and Art History at UA's Sella-Granata Art Gallery-Woods Hall, free, Monday-Friday, 10am-4pm, 348-5967, [art.ua.edu](http://art.ua.edu)

## January 12-February 17

**2012 Faculty Biennial Exhibition** presented by the UA Department of Art and Art History at UA's Sarah Moody Gallery of Art-Garland Hall, free, Monday-Friday 9am-4:30pm & Thursday 5pm-8pm, 348-1891, [art.ua.edu](http://art.ua.edu)

## January 14

**Museum Madness: "Chinese New Year"** presented by the Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 10am-4pm, 349-4235 or [chomonline.org](http://chomonline.org)

## January 14

**23rd Annual Realizing the Dream Concert** Honoring the Life and Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. presented by Realizing the Dream at UA's Moody Concert Hall, admission charged, 7:30pm, 348-7111

## January 17

**Bama Art House Movie Series: *Martha, Marcy, May, Marlene*** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre, \$5-\$7, 7:30pm, 758-5195

## January 17-February 19

**Double Exposure Juried Photography Exhibit** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre's Junior League Gallery, free, gallery hours Monday-Friday 9am-12pm and 1pm-4pm; also during Bama events, Closing Reception February 19 from 2pm-3:30pm, 758-5195 or [tuscarts.org](http://tuscarts.org)

## January 18

**Norman Fischer-Author Reading** presented by Creative Campus at UA's Gorgas Library Rm. 205, free, 2pm, 348-7884 or [creativecampus.ua.edu](http://creativecampus.ua.edu)

## January 19

**"National Popcorn Day"** presented by the Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 3pm-4:30pm, 349-4235 or [chomonline.org](http://chomonline.org)

## January 20

**The Fab Four: The Ultimate Beatles Tribute** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre, \$33 reserved floor seats, \$25 balcony (general), 7:30pm, 758-5195 or [bamatheatre.org](http://bamatheatre.org)

## January 21

**Kentuck "a la cARTE" Art Fair/Demo** presented by the Kentuck Center in downtown Northport, free, 4pm-8pm, 758-1257 or [kentuck.org](http://kentuck.org)

## January 23

**Quartet for the End of Time:** Yosuke Kawasaki, violin; Wolfram Koessel, violoncello; Vadim Serebryany, piano; with Osiris J. Molina, clarinet presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or [music.ua.edu](http://music.ua.edu)

## January 24

**Faculty Recital with Jenny Mann**, bassoon, presented by the UA School of Music at the Moody Music Building, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or [music.ua.edu](http://music.ua.edu)

## January 24

**Bama Art House Movie Series: *Bellflower*** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre, \$5-\$7, 7:30pm, 758-5195

## January 26

**Mock Audition Workshop** presented by Tuscaloosa Children's Theatre at First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa, free, 5pm-8pm, 310-8010 or [tuscaloosachildrenstheatre.com](http://tuscaloosachildrenstheatre.com)

## January 27

**The University of Alabama Church Music Conference Organ Concert** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or [music.ua.edu](http://music.ua.edu)

## January 28

**Grand Opening for the Paul R. Jones Gallery of Art** presented by The University of Alabama College of Arts and Sciences at 2308 6th Street, downtown Tuscaloosa, free, 2pm, [art.ua.edu](http://art.ua.edu)

## January 28

**The University of Alabama Church Music Choral Concert and Honor Choir Concert** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 4:30pm, 348-1477 or [music.ua.edu](http://music.ua.edu)

## January 30

**Faculty Chamber Music** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or [music.ua.edu](http://music.ua.edu)

## January 31

**Bama Art House Movie Series: *The Other F Word*** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre, \$5-\$7, 7:30pm, 758-5195

## January 31

**"Skin and Bones"** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or [music.ua.edu](http://music.ua.edu)

## February 2

**Art Night**, open house at local galleries in downtown Northport and Tuscaloosa, free, first Thursdays 5pm-9pm, [tuscarts.org/artnight.php](http://tuscarts.org/artnight.php)

## February 2

**Alabama Symphonic Band** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or [music.ua.edu](http://music.ua.edu)

## February 2-3

**Auditions for *Willy Wonka*** presented by Tuscaloosa Children's Theatre at Tuscaloosa Academy, free, 5pm-8pm daily, 310-8010 or [tuscaloosachildrenstheatre.com](http://tuscaloosachildrenstheatre.com)

# calendar of events

## February 2-5

**Alabama Honor Band Festival** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, schedule varies, 348-1477 or bands.ua.edu

## February 2-25

**Fiber Art by Antze Magruder and "The Music Lives On: Folk Song Traditions Told by Alabama Artists"** presented by the Kentuck Center in downtown Northport, free, Tuesday-Friday 9am-5pm; Saturday 10am-4:30pm, 758-1257 or kentuck.org

## February 3

**17th Annual Graduate Student Symposium in Art History** presented by the UA and UAB Joint Program for the M. A. in Art History at the UAB Humanities Bldg, free, 10am-6pm, art.ua.edu/site/resources

## February 3

**"Senses of Creativity"** presented by Creative Campus at the Grace Aberdeen Habitat Alchemy, free, 7pm-9pm, 348-7884 or creativecampus.ua.edu

## February 4

**Super Bowl Saturday** presented by the Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 10am-4pm, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

## February 4

**Honor Band Spectrum and Alabama Wind Ensemble Concert** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## February 5

**Alabama Honor Band Concert** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 12:30pm-2:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## February 7

**Bama Art House Movie Series: Blackpower Mixtape** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre, \$5-\$7, 7:30pm, 758-5195

## February 7

**Faculty Recital with Noel Engebretson**, piano presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## February 7, 14, 21, 28

**Terrific Tuesday Concert Series** presented by Shelton State Community College at the SSCC Recital Hall, free, 1:15pm, sheltonstate.edu/fine\_arts

## February 8

**"Jazz and More"** with UA's Tom Wolfe, Chris Kozak, and Beth & Danny Gottlieb presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## February 9

**The Huxford Symphony Orchestra of The University of Alabama** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## February 9-10

**Waxwing-Contra Dance** presented by UA's Creative Campus, free, time/place TBA, 348-7884 or creativecampus.ua.edu

## February 9-12

**Alabama All-State Orchestra** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 1pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## February 11

**Museum Madness: "Be My Valentine"** presented by Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 10am-4pm, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

## February 11

**"What TO Wear"** presented by the Tuscaloosa Belles/Tuscaloosa County Preservation Society at First Methodist's Chitwood Hall, admission TBA, 2pm, 345-8087 or historictuscaloosa.org

## February 11

**"Got the World on a String: An Entertaining Evening of Barbershop Harmony"** presented by the Tuscaloosa Crimson Pride Chorus at Central High School Auditorium, admission charged, 7pm, 349-2430

## February 12

**Alabama All-State Orchestra Concert** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 1pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## February 13

**"Cheers 'n Chat"** presented by Tuscaloosa Symphony Orchestra Guild at UA's Moody

Music Choral Opera Room, \$10 donation per person requested, 6pm, 752-5515, tsoonline.org

## February 13

**"Let's Fall in Love!"** Valentine's Pops Concert featuring Paul Houghtaling and the UA Opera Theatre presented by the Tuscaloosa Symphony at UA's Moody Music Building, \$20-\$40, student discounts available, 7pm, 752-5515

## February 14

**Singing Valentines** presented by The ACT, Call for pricing, 393-2800 or theactonline.com

## February 14

**Bama Art House Movie Series: Carnage** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre, \$5-\$7, 7:30pm, 758-5195

## February 14-18

**Dance Alabama! Spring Concert** presented by the UA Department of Theatre and Dance at Morgan Auditorium, admission charged, Tuesday-Thursday at 7:30pm; Friday at 5:30pm; Saturday at 2pm, 348-3400 or theatre.ua.edu.

## February 16

**"Otherness in Black and White"** featuring University of Alabama Press authors Wayne Flynt and Richie Jean Sherrod Jackson presented by the Rosa Parks Museum and University of Alabama Press at 252 Montgomery Street, Montgomery, AL, free, 6pm-8pm, (334) 241-8615 or montgomery.troy.edu/rosaparks/museum

## February 16

**Alabama Chamber Jazz** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## February 17-26

**Noises Off** presented by Theatre Tuscaloosa at SSCC's Bean-Brown Theatre, \$17 Adults; \$15 Seniors (60+); \$12 Students/Children, Thursday-Saturday at 7:30pm; Wednesday & Sunday at 2pm, Pay-What-You-Can Preview February 16, 391-2277 or theatretusc.com

## February 18

**Kentuck "a la cARTe" Art Fair/Demo** presented by the Kentuck Center in downtown Northport, free, 10am-2pm, 758-1257 or kentuck.org

**February 18**

**“Mardi Gras CHOM Style”** presented by Children’s Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 10am-4pm  
349-4235 or chomonline.org

**February 18**

**Endowed Chair in Musicology** presented by UA’s School of Music, free, 8pm,  
348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**February 19**

**Pacifica String Quartet** presented by the String Quartet Society of Tuscaloosa at UA’s Moody Concert Hall, \$15 per ticket and free for persons 18 years old and younger and for students with valid IDs, 4pm, stringquartetsofatuscaloosa.org

**February 19**

**Faculty Recital featuring Raymond Chenez**, countertenor and Kevin Chance, piano presented by UA’s School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 2pm,  
348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**February 20**

**Music and Poetry of the Black Diaspora** presented by the Voice Area and English Department of Stillman College at the Wynn Fine Arts Center, free, 7pm, 366-8943 or stillman.edu

**February 20-26**

**Wonder of the World** presented by UA’s Department of Theatre and Dance at the Allen Bales Theatre, admission charged, Monday- Saturday at 7:30pm and Sunday at 2pm, 348-3400 or theatre.ua.edu

**February 21**

**Bama Art House Movie Series: A Dangerous Method** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre, \$5-\$7, 7:30pm, 758-5195

**February 21**

**Alabama Percussion Ensemble and Alabama Jazz Standards** presented by UA’s School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**February 22-23**

**Alabama Bandmaster Association Convention** presented by UA’s School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, times/ activities vary, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**February 25**

**Instrument “Petting Zoo”** presented by the Tuscaloosa Symphony Orchestra Guild in the lobby of UA’s Moody Music Building, free, 3pm-3:45pm, 752-5515 or tsoonline.org

**February 25**

**“The Magic of Mozart”** Family Discovery Concert presented by the Tuscaloosa Symphony Orchestra at UA’s Moody Concert Hall, \$5 students and children; \$15 adults, 4pm, 752-5515 or tsoonline.org

**February 27-March 4**

**An Italian Straw Hat** presented by the UA Department of Theatre and Dance at the Marian Gallaway Theatre, admission charged, Monday-Saturday at 7:30pm and Sunday at 2pm, 348-3400 or theatre.ua.edu.

**February 27-March 19**

**Visual Art Achievement Awards Exhibit** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre, free, gallery hours Monday-Friday 9am-12pm & 1pm-4pm and during Bama Theatre events, 758-5195 or tuscarts.org

**February 29**

**“UnFROGetable” Leap Year Party** presented by the Children’s Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 3pm-4:30pm, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

**March 1**

**Art Night**, open house at local galleries in downtown Northport and Tuscaloosa, free, first Thursdays 5pm-9pm, tuscarts.org/artnight.php



Alabama Art Kitchen. Photo by Porfirio Solorzano

# calendar of events

## March 1

**Seasonal Exhibits** presented by the Tuscaloosa and University Painters at UA's University Medical Center, free, Monday-Friday 8:15am-5pm, 752-2800

## March 1-2

**"Anthology: Sculpture and Drawings by Ann Norton"** presented by the UA Department of Art and Art History at the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art and Sella-Granata Gallery, free, Monday-Friday 9am-4:30pm; Thursday 5pm-8pm, 348-1891 or art.ua.edu

## March 1-30

**Mixed Media by Festival Artist Suzan Buckner, "The Music Lives On: Folk Song Traditions Told by Alabama Artists," and Student Art from Northport Fine Arts Initiative** presented by the Kentuck Center in downtown Northport, free, Tuesday-Friday 9am-5pm; Saturday 10am-4:30pm, 758-1257 or kentuck.org

## March 2

**Dr. Seuss' Birthday Party** presented by Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

## March 2

**"Journey in the Life of a Fabri-Holic" Lecture and Trunk Show** by quilt artist Peggy Barkle presented by the West Alabama Quilters Guild at Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Tuscaloosa, free, 7pm-8:30pm, waqq.com

## March 2 & 4

**Mozart's *Così fan tutte*** presented by the UA School of Music Opera Theatre at the Moody Concert Hall, \$20 general; \$5 students, Friday at 7:30pm and Sunday at 3pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## March 2-4

***Snow White & The Seven Dwarfs***, The Alabama Ballet performing Twyla Tharp's *Baker's Dozen*, and collaborating with UA's Department of Theatre & Dance in *Les Sylphides* presented by the Tuscaloosa Community Dancers at the Bama Theatre, admission charged, Friday & Saturday at 7pm; Sunday at 2pm, 752-4220

## March 3

**"Blendable Curves"** Quilt Workshop with Peggy Barkle presented by the West Alabama Quilters Guild at TDOT, \$35, 9am-4pm, waqq.com

## March 3

**Museum Madness: "Hometown Heroes"** presented by Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 10am-4pm, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

## March 3

**Faculty Recital with Daniel Sweaney**, viola presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 8pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## March 3-4

**Jerry Brown Arts Festival** presented by the Northwest Alabama Arts Council at the Marion County Airport, 465 Airport Road, Hamilton, AL, free, Saturday 9am-5pm; Sunday 10am-4pm, (205) 921-9483 or jbaf.org

## March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31

**Sakura Festival** in Creation Station presented by the Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, Saturdays 10am-4pm, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

## March 5

**Alabama Jazz Combo and Alabama Jazz Band** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## March 6

**UA Brass Choir** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## March 6, 20, 27

**Terrific Tuesday Concert Series** presented by Shelton State Community College at the SSCC Recital Hall, free, 1:15pm, sheltonstate.edu/fine\_arts

## March 7

**Alabama Symphonic Band** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## March 8

**Shelton Singers Spring Showcase** presented by Shelton State Community College at the Bean-Brown Theatre, free, 7:30pm, sheltonstate.edu/fine\_arts

## March 9-14

***The Color Purple*** presented by The ACT at the Bama Theatre, \$13 Student; \$15 Senior; \$17 Adult, Friday 7:30; Saturday 2pm & 7:30pm; Sunday 2pm;

Monday-Wednesday 7:30pm, 393-2800 ortheactonline.com Thursday?

## March 17

**Kentuck "a la cARTE" Art Fair/Demo** presented by the Kentuck Center in downtown Northport, free, 10am-2pm, 758-1257 or kentuck.org

## March 17

**"Search for Shamrocks"** presented by the Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 10am-4pm, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

## March 20

**Alabama Wind Ensemble** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## March 21-22

**American Choral Director's Association Invitational Choral Festival** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, times/concerts vary, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## March 21-May 3

**Exhibit of Works by Helen Shapiro** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre's Greensboro Room Gallery, free, Opening Reception April 5 at 3:30pm, Monday-Friday 9am-12pm & 1pm-4pm and during Bama events, 758-5195 or tuscarts.org

## March 22

**DA Powell** presented by the UA Bankhead Visiting Writers Series, free, time/location TBA, english.ua.edu/life

## March 22 & 23

Skippyjon Jones (Grades K-3) presented by The Arts Council's Bama Fanfare Series at the Bama Theatre, \$5 per ticket, 9:30 a.m. and 12:30 a.m., Teachers call 758-5195, x4

## March 23

**DCAF Music Crawl** presented by UA's Creative Campus at multiple locations throughout Tuscaloosa, admission TBA, 6pm-2am, 348-7884 or druidcityartsfest.com

## March 23-24

**Mid-South Flute Festival** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, times/concerts vary, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu



Scott's Happy Art. Photo by Porfirio Solorzano

**March 24**

**Druid City Arts Festival** at Government Plaza, Downtown Tuscaloosa, free, 11am-7pm, [druidcityartsfest.com](http://druidcityartsfest.com)

**March 24-27**

**Jewish Film Festival** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre, admission charged, times/screenings TBA, 758-5195 or [bamatheatre.org](http://bamatheatre.org)

**March 26**

**Baylor Brass** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 5:30pm, 348-1477 or [music.ua.edu](http://music.ua.edu)

**March 27**

**Horn Studio and Trumpet Studio** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or [music.ua.edu](http://music.ua.edu)

**March 27-31**

**Alabama Repertory Dance Theatre Spring Concert** presented by the UA Department of Theatre and Dance at UA's Morgan Auditorium, admission charged, Tuesday-Thursday at 7:30; Friday at

5:30pm; Saturday at 2pm, 348-3400 or [theatre.ua.edu](http://theatre.ua.edu)

**March 28-April 6**

**Faculty Art Exhibit by Keyser Wilson and Leonard Dawson** presented by Stillman College at the Wynn Center, free, Monday-Friday 9am-5pm, 366-8956 or [leodawson@stillman.edu](mailto:leodawson@stillman.edu)

**March 29-30**

**The ACT presents The Annual Murder Mystery Dinner Theatre: *Caught in the Act*** presented by the ACT, \$16 Individual and \$25 Couple; Group Rates, 7pm, location TBA, 393-2800 or [theactonline.com](http://theactonline.com)

**March 29**

**University Singers** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or [music.ua.edu](http://music.ua.edu)

**March 30**

**African Drumming** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or [music.ua.edu](http://music.ua.edu)

**March 31**

**Fundraiser featuring the Williams Collection** presented by the Tuscaloosa County Preservation Society at UA's Gorgas Library, admission/time TBA, 758-2238 or [historictuscaloosa.org](http://historictuscaloosa.org)

**April 1**

**Easter Egg Hunt** presented by the Tuscaloosa Belles/Tuscaloosa County Preservation Society at the Battle-Friedman House, \$5 per adult; children – first two free, \$2 for every other child, time TBA, 758-2238 or [historictuscaloosa.org](http://historictuscaloosa.org)

**April 2**

**UA Trombone Choir and Tuba Ensemble** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or [music.ua.edu](http://music.ua.edu)

**April 3**

**"One Night Only: An Annual Evening of Broadway and Pop Favorites"** presented by the UA Opera Theatre at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or [music.ua.edu](http://music.ua.edu)

# calendar of events

**April 3, 10, 17, 24**

**Terrific Tuesday Concert Series**

presented by Shelton State Community College at the SSCC Recital Hall, free, 1:15pm, sheltonstate.edu/fine\_arts

**April 5**

**Art Night**, open house at local galleries in downtown Northport and Tuscaloosa, free, first Thursdays 5pm-9pm, tuscart.org/artnight.php

**April 5**

**Dan Beachy-Quick and Jenny Bouilly**

presented by UA's Bankhead Visiting Writers Series, time and place TBA, english.ua.edu/life

**April 5**

**"Less Is More"** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**April 5-28**

**Wood Work by Emily Williams and**

**Women's Resource Center Art** presented by the Kentuck Center in downtown Northport, free, Tuesday-Friday 9am-5pm; Saturday 10am-4:30pm, 758-1257 or kentuck.org

**April 9-15**

**Fefu and Her Friends** presented by UA's Department of Theatre and Dance at the Allen Bales Theatre, admission charged, Monday-Saturday at 7:30pm and Sunday at 2pm, 348-3400 or theatre.ua.edu

**April 10**

**University Chorus** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**April 11**

**Alabama Symphonic Band and Concert Band** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**April 12**

**Percussion Ensemble** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**April 12-13**

**Alabama Vocal Association District 2 Choral Competition** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, times/events TBA, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**April 12-June 22**

**"Commingling Contemporary": Selections from the Permanent Collection** presented by the UA Department of Art and Art History at the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art and Sella-Granata Gallery, free, Monday-Friday 9am-4:30pm; Thursday 5-8pm or 348-1891 or art.ua.edu



*The Paul R. Jones Gallery of Art. Photo by Porfirio Solorzano*

**April 13-14**

**Zelpha Wells Guest Artist Piano Recital** presented by the Fine Arts Department of Stillman College at the Wynn Fine Arts Center, free, 7pm, 247-3401 or stillman.edu

**April 13-22**

**Smoke on the Mountain** presented by Theatre Tuscaloosa at SSCC's Bean-Brown Theatre, \$17 Adults; \$15 Seniors (60+); \$12 Students/Children, Thursday-Saturday at 7:30pm; Wednesday & Sunday at 2pm, Pay-What-You-Can Preview: April 12, 391.2277 or theatretusc.com

**April 15**

**J.S. Bach's B Minor Mass** presented by Prentice Concert Chorale at First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa, \$15 adult; \$5 student, 3pm, 535-8576 or prenticeconcertchorale.com

**April 16**

**The Huxford Symphony Orchestra of The University of Alabama** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**April 16-22**

**Chicago** presented by the UA Department of Theatre and Dance at the Marian Galloway Theatre, admission charged, Monday-Saturday at 7:30pm and Sunday at 2pm, 348-3400 or theatre.ua.edu.

**April 16-May 7**

**National Tea Bowl Invitational Exhibition** presented by the UA Department of Art and Art History at UA's Sella-Granata Gallery – Woods Hall, free, Monday-Friday 10am-4pm, 348-5967 or art.ua.edu

**April 17**

**The Alabama Jazz Ensemble** with Guest Artist presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**April 18**

**Early Chamber Music** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 5:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**April 18**

**17th Annual Big Band Concert** featuring Alabama Jazz Ensemble presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**April 19**

**Alabama Wind Ensemble and University Singers** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**April 20**

**Alabama Contemporary Ensemble and Electronic Music** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7:30pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**April 20-22**

**Willy Wonka** presented by Tuscaloosa Children's Theatre at the Bama Theatre, tickets \$4-\$21, Friday at 7pm; Saturday at 2pm and 7pm; Sunday at 2pm, 310-8010 or tuscaloosachildrenstheatre.com

**April 21**

**Double Reeds Day and Concert** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, all day with performance at 4pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**April 21**

**Kentuck "a la cARTe" Art Fair/Demo** presented by the Kentuck Center in downtown Northport, free, 10am-2pm, 758-1257 or kentuck.org

**April 21**

**Museum Madness: "Lovely Ladybugs"** presented by the Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 10am-4pm, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

**April 21**

**Cayenne Trio** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, 7pm, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**April 23**

**"Cheers 'n Chat"** presented by Tuscaloosa Symphony Orchestra Guild at the Moody Music Choral Opera Room, \$10 donation per person requested, 6pm, 752-5515, tsoonline.org

**April 23**

**"Ode to Joy"** Tuscaloosa Remembers and Re-builds presented by the Tuscaloosa Symphony Orchestra at UA's Moody Music Building, \$20-\$40, 7pm, 752-5515 or tsoonline.org

**April 24**

**Spring Concert** presented by the SSCC Music Department at Shelton State Community College's Bean-Brown Theatre, free, 7:30pm, sheltonstate.edu/fine\_arts

**April 24-May 3**

**Exhibit by UA Graduate Student Roger Jones** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre's Junior League Gallery, free, Opening Reception April 26 at 7pm, Monday-Friday 9am-12pm & 1pm-4pm and during Bama events, 758-5195 or tuscarts.org

**May 3**

**Art Night**, open house at local galleries in downtown Northport and Tuscaloosa, free, first Thursdays 5pm-9pm, tuscarts.org/artnight.php

**May 3-26**

**Clay by Bryce Brisco and Wood Work by Dale Lewis** presented by the Kentuck Center in downtown Northport, free, Tuesday-Friday 9am-5pm; Saturday 10am-4:30pm, 758-1257 or kentuck.org

**May 4 & 5**

**Spring Concert** presented by the Alabama Choir School at UA's Mood Concert Hall, free, 7pm, 758-0927 or alchoirschool.org

**May 5**

**Kid's Derby Day** presented by the Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 10am-4pm, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

**May 12**

**Museum Madness: "Water World"** presented by the Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 10am-4pm, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

**May 19**

**Kentuck "a la cARTe" Art Fair/Demo** presented by the Kentuck Center in downtown Northport, free, 10am-2pm, 758-1257 or kentuck.org

**May 22-30**

**Druid City Opera Workshop** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Music Building, all day, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu/departments/opera

**June 1**

**Jazz Cavaliers Reunion** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Concert Hall, free, all day, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

**June 1-5**

**The Wiz** presented by The ACT at the Bama Theatre, \$13 Student; \$15 Senior; \$17 Adult, Friday-Saturday and Monday-Tuesday at 7:30; Saturday & Sunday at 2pm; 393-2800 or theactonline.com

# calendar of events

## June 1-29

**Smokey Joe's Café** presented by the UA Department of Theatre and Dance at the George C. Meyer Performing Arts Center, Gulf Shores, admission charged, 8pm, summertide.org

## June 2

**Jazz Cavaliers Reunion and Concert** presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Music Building, all day, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## June 2

**Water Safety Fun Day** presented by the Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 10pm-4pm, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

## June 2-3

**"Stitching Homes & Hearts"** 2012 Quilt Show presented by West Alabama Quilters Guild at Holy Spirit Catholic High School, 9am-5pm, waqq.com

## June 4

**Wild and Crazy Starts** presented by the Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, time TBA, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

## June 7

**Art Night**, open house at local galleries in downtown Northport and Tuscaloosa, free, first Thursdays 5pm-9pm, tuscarts.org/artnight.php

## June 7-10

**Crimson Music Camp** (Jazz and Double Reed) presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Music Building, admission charged, all day, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## June 7-30

**Festival Best of Show Artist Joachim Knill and Mixed Media by Lindsay Mouyal** presented by the Kentuck Center in downtown Northport, free, Tuesday-Friday 9am-5pm; Saturday 10am-4:30pm, 758-1257 or kentuck.org

## June 9

**Museum Madness: "Sensational Spiders"** presented by the Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 10am-4pm, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

## June 10-15

**Crimson Music Camp** (Concert Band and Piano) presented by UA's School of Music at the Moody Music Building, admission charged, all day, 348-1477 or music.ua.edu

## June 11

**Gordo Artists Exhibit** presented by The Arts Council at the Bama Theatre's Greensboro Room, free, Monday-Friday 9am-12pm & 1pm-4pm and during Bama events, 758-5195 or tuscarts.org

## June 16

**"Fairytale Breakfast"** presented by the Children's Hands-On Museum, free with membership, 8:30am-10am, 349-4235 or chomonline.org

## June 16

**Kentuck "a la cARTE" Art Fair/Demo** presented by the Kentuck Center in downtown Northport, free, 10am-2pm, 758-1257 or kentuck.org

## June 18-23

**Summer Kids Production Camp** presented by The ACT, location/time TBA, 393-2800 or theactonline.com



*Mentone Springs Hotel. Photo by Porfirio Solorzano*

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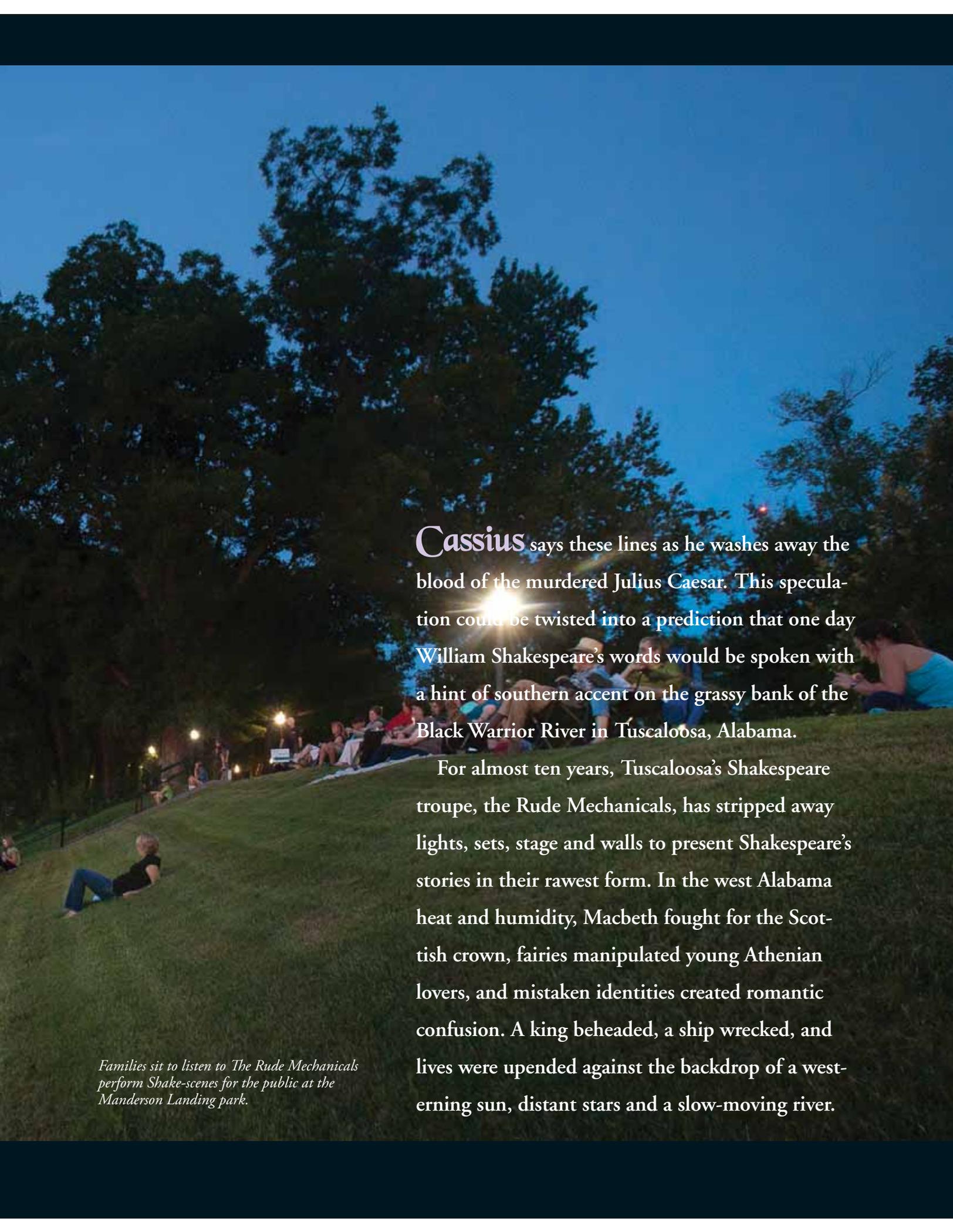
# Rude Mechanicals

*How many ages hence  
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,  
In states unborn and accents yet unknown!*

Cassius "Julius Caesar" Act 3, Scene 1

By Lynn Oldshue

Photography by Porfirio Solorzano



**Cassius** says these lines as he washes away the blood of the murdered Julius Caesar. This speculation could be twisted into a prediction that one day William Shakespeare's words would be spoken with a hint of southern accent on the grassy bank of the Black Warrior River in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

For almost ten years, Tuscaloosa's Shakespeare troupe, the Rude Mechanicals, has stripped away lights, sets, stage and walls to present Shakespeare's stories in their rawest form. In the west Alabama heat and humidity, Macbeth fought for the Scottish crown, fairies manipulated young Athenian lovers, and mistaken identities created romantic confusion. A king beheaded, a ship wrecked, and lives were upended against the backdrop of a westerning sun, distant stars and a slow-moving river.

*Families sit to listen to The Rude Mechanicals perform Shake-scenes for the public at the Manderson Landing park.*

“The Rude Mechanicals is not about a perfect, polished production with lights and a soundboard. It is about rough, sharp edges and finding a truth beyond the edge,” says Andre LaSalle, a former theater student at the University of Alabama who talked friends into joining the first performance. He also directed the first two seasons. “Storytelling and sharing human experiences are more important than special effects. It is a group of people standing under the night sky with their feet planted on the dirt of earth, not on a carpet or foundation, and telling a story to another group of people.”

The Rude Mechanicals found their name in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” where the original rude mechanicals are six blundering, untalented Athenian tradesmen who put on a play at the king’s nuptial celebration. “The rude mechanicals are the comic aspect of ‘A Midsummer Night’s dream,’” says Mark Hughes Cobb, one of the founders of The Rude Mechanicals and an actor in each play. “They are rude because they are spare, rough, and not refined. They are mechanical because they work with their hands. It is a comedy of terrible actors, and that fits us. We do rough, bare bones plays with a low production value and simple costumes, but we do it for the love of the people. That is as rude as it gets.”

“The Rude Mechanical performances continue because

there is a real interest and yearning for Shakespeare here,” says Steve Burch who collaborates with Cobb in artistic direction. “We are filling a niche. 500-700 people show up over the course of a run. People plan major picnics and bring their food and wine.”

There is no ticket or advance reservation. Just sit down and drop a donation in the hat as it passes by. Wear comfortable shoes. Bring the kids and stay a while. You can even laugh and respond to the action.

The primitive theater is informal, but intense preparation is needed to convert plays written when Elizabeth I was Queen and England defeated the Spanish Armada into words that are still filled with emotions and still in the moment.

In the winter, Cobb and Burch select the play, and Burch edits the script. Cutting Shakespeare’s words may seem irreverent, but trimming a two-hour play is for the comfort of the audience. The park does not have air conditioning or restrooms, so a Rude Mechanicals show can last no longer than 90 minutes.

“There is no one way to do a Shakespeare play,” says Burch. “Shakespeare allows actors and directors to find their own responses to material. This varies by director and it even varies each time that the same play is performed. I cut the material that gets in the way of telling the story so



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nuptial celebration.**



*Natalie Hopper of The Rude Mechanicals performs a sonnet.*

the play can move and have action.”

Shakespeare’s stories are strong enough for these alterations. Creative casting and development form characters that are slightly bent out of shape, but still recognizable. As long as the actor understands the character, the audience will understand the character.

“We do some gender-bending and make sure the cast is multi-racial,” says Burch. “Non-traditional casting can lead to greater richness.”

In “The Tempest,” Deborah Parker played Prospero, a male role that she always wanted to play. “Gender-bending works because the role is not about gender, it is about people,” says Parker, a regular member of the cast and also co-ordinator of many production details for the Rude Mechanicals. “Prospero is about being a parent and seeking revenge.”

The play is cast in

the spring, but the troupe does not hold open auditions. “We invite people we know and allow the people we don’t know to come in and start small,” says Burch. “The cast is typically 12 to 15 people and about half of these have been in multiple shows. One-third has been in every show. Students make up about half of the cast, and the rest of the cast is from town.”

“We have different levels of performers,” says Burch. “Some are professional actors. Some just want to be in a show. My job is to work with each actor’s strengths and find a place for that strength in the scene. We showcase actors at their best.”

Production begins with table work that allows actors to meet and explore their characters. Rehearsals run four to six weeks, three hours per day, six days per week. Lead roles take additional time to absorb their lines.

“I do this because I love wrapping my



*People sit on the lawn to listen to The Rude Mechanicals perform Shake-scenes.*

mouth around Shakespeare's words," says Parker. "The Elizabethan language can be difficult, but once the actor keys into what the character is feeling, the language barriers disappear. We are as a group passionate about Shakespeare. We would do anything to be a part of his plays."

Shakespeare's language is poetic and musical, which helps actors express emotions. He used hard, choppy words for anger and softer sounds for romantic words. Speaking naturally and clearly in Shakespearean verse is more demanding on an actor than contemporary plays. Wavering or uncertain Elizabethan English is hard for the audience to understand.

"We work hard to make these plays listenable," says Cobb. "We want the words to be beautiful, but you have to be understood and clear in your intentions. It has to be as intense as if it is happening for the first time."

In a stripped-down Rude Mechanicals' performance, the words must be strong enough to carry the meaning, color, and action of the show, without the support of costumes and props. Costumes wilt in the summer heat.

"Since we have limited costumes, we utilize the audience's creative imagination," says Burch. "They become our co-playmates and fill in what isn't there. We use tunics in basic colors and they can be converted to capes or ponchos. In 'Comedy of Errors,' we used matching ball caps to show the two sets of twins."

There are actions, like sword fights and beheadings, which demand more than imagination or a fake prop. "We used real swords in 'Macbeth,'" says Cobb who played the

title role of Macbeth. "Two guys banging sticks together wouldn't cut it. We needed the clang."

Shakespeare used music to set the mood of comedy, grief, internal struggles, love, and desire. The original music disappeared but Shakespeare's lyrics survived. The Rude Mechanicals sing these lyrics set to new melodies written by Cobb. "These songs are not for distracting the audience," says Burch. "All songs are integral to the story." Each performance begins with 30 minutes of pre-show music of cover songs and familiar tunes to help the audience relax. Musicians Koji and Laurie Arizumi, and other musicians as needed, play the harp, flute, guitar, mandolin, percussion, and horns.

"The audience is a part of the performance," says Laurie Arizumi. "We don't want the audience to be quiet. We want them to laugh and make noise. That gives performers more energy. We like feedback."

"You can feel when an audience is with you," says Parker. "You can feel when they are

uncomfortable, or that you are pulling them in and charming them. They are feeling what you are feeling. We are on an emotional journey together."

In an outdoor theater, the mood can be interrupted by inventions that Shakespeare never imagined, like a passing speedboat or helicopter. "Sometimes the Bama Belle comes by playing party music," says Cobb. "We try to ignore it and keep going."

Next summer, the Rude Mechanicals celebrates its 10th season as a Shakespeare storyteller. Some of the original cast members will return to perform the two productions from the first season in 2003, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" on May 30-June 2 and "Twelfth Night" on June 27-30. The dates are still tentative. For more information, visit the Rude Mechanicals on Facebook or



*As night falls, an audience watches Wescott Youngson perform while, seated from left, Austin Whitver, Nic Helms and Jerrell Bowden wait. The Rude Mechanicals performed Shake-scenes for the public at the Manderson Landing park.*



*As night falls, The Rude Mechanicals sing and perform Shake-scenes for the public.*

email Burch at [sburch@as.ua.edu](mailto:sburch@as.ua.edu) or Cobb at [markhughescobb@gmail.com](mailto:markhughescobb@gmail.com).

Each production runs for at least four performances at the Park at Manderson's Landing. Most seasons the group also performs the lighter "Scenes, Songs, and Sonnets" during the second weekend of August.

The physical world has changed since the death of Shakespeare, but people haven't. Shakespeare gave his characters real personalities that even today reflect our flaws, our decay, our messiness, and our vulnerabilities. Through the Rude Mechanicals, we watch others choose self-defeating paths. We cringe when their lives crumble. We recognize ourselves in the tensions and the tragedy.

"Shakespeare wrote 400 years ago, but he still connects to our human spirit and what is eternal," says LaSalle. "His works will continue to live on past us."



*Steve Burch, center with back to camera, briefs the company as The Rude Mechanicals prepare to perform Shake-scenes for the public at the Manderson Landing park.*

by Margaret Clevenger

## Jeanie Thompson, Executive Director, Alabama Writers' Forum

**F**or this issue we had a chance to talk with Jeanie Thompson, executive director of the Alabama Writers' Forum. Thompson has authored four poetry collections: "White for Harvest: New and Selected Poems;" "How to Enter the River;" "Witness;" and "The Seasons Bear Us." She has also published three chapbooks and co-edited an essay collection "The Remembered Gate: Memoirs by Alabama Writers." She teaches in the Spalding University brief-residency MFA Writing Program in Louisville, Kentucky. Thompson has won several awards including a 2011-2012 Individual Artist Fellowship in Literature from the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

### What is the Alabama Writers' Forum?

The Alabama Writers Forum is a partnership program of the Alabama State Council on the Arts. We are a nonprofit statewide literary service organization. Our mission is to support writers and writing in Alabama. The Forum is a motivator, an instigator, an energy builder. If your readers want to find out more they can go to [writersforum.org](http://writersforum.org).

### What do you teach at Spalding?

I am on the poetry faculty. It is what is called a Brief Residency Master of Fine Arts in creative writing. The ones I teach have an emphasis in poetry. Each semester is six months and I go up there for ten days, twice a year. After that ten-day residency we work through e-mail and I mentor the students one-on-one.

When you were a student at the University of Alabama you helped found the Black Warrior Review and you were the first editor. What was that experience like?

That was a great example of on-the-job training. I didn't know a thing about what I was doing. I'll never forget sitting in Drake Printers with Mr. Strickland and he looked at me and said "What kind of paper would like to print the magazine on?" And I said, "Paper?"

Then he said "What typeface would you like to use?" And I said "Typeface?" That's how little I knew about it.

### In 1997 you started Writing Our Stories, a creative writing program for juvenile offenders. Are you still active with that program?

Oh yes. That program is actually in the school district of the Alabama Department of Youth Services. When a young person is adjudicated for an offense and sent to one of the DYS campuses, they're in school. We, a nonprofit arts organization (Alabama Writers' Forum), have been in partnership with the Alabama Department of Youth Services for going on fifteen years now to bring creative writing to the therapeutic experience of youth in the custody of the state through youth services. In Alabama, on both the youth and adult level, there is work between the arts community and the criminal justice system, which is a good model. When people are incarcerated, they are going to come back out into society. If we can give them ways to develop skills and help them heal their own wounds and learn how to make amends for what they've done through the arts, this is a really valuable thing for everybody in society.

A sense of place is strong in your poetry but your poems also cover subjects as varied as cornbread to the trail at

Wheeler Wildlife Refuge.

### What is your writing process like?

For me writing poetry is a way of understanding and filtering what is happening to me and the world and understanding it in a way so that I can cope with it. And I don't mean that I write poetry as "self-help" but poetry is like a lens to me that makes the world clearer and sharper. And sometimes it makes it more palatable. And sometimes it makes it survivable.



**In your essay “Where the Spirit Moved Me” you wrote “Knowing is what drives us. To know ourselves, the world, the other. The divine.” Is that what you are looking for in your poetry? To know yourself?**

Yes. In terms of knowing who I am, I have written about myself as a mother; I’ve written about myself as a wife or a girlfriend or a lover; I’ve written about myself as a daughter; I’ve written about myself as a Southerner. In “The Seasons Bear Us,” I am also writing about myself as a traveler in Italy. There is a poem in that book where I am picking blackberries on the road to Colonnata, where the man gives me blackberries. You know that is me being an American talking to someone who is an Italian. And I feel like that is almost a political poem because it says hey, we’re offering each other something without any thought of what our differences or similarities are; we’re just two human beings.

**What are you working on now?**

Right now I am working on a book-length persona sequence about Helen Keller. I read her biography when

I was living close to the house that her sister, Mildred Tyson, lived in for a very long time on Felder Avenue in Montgomery. I learned when she was thirty six Helen tried to elope from her sister’s house and it was thwarted by her family. The scene is very dramatic. Helen gets up in the middle of the night; she gets dressed and gets her suitcase and goes downstairs and sits out on the porch, alone in the dark, waiting for Peter Fagan to come get her. And he never comes. And I thought this is too good not to write about. And it’s in all her biographies so it’s not a secret but I decided I wanted to do something with it. They are persona poems which means that they are poems told where I am speaking as a poet but in the voice of Helen at different ages. And some are in the voice of Annie. Right now I don’t have anybody else’s voice but I might need to balance it out. There is a bit of poetic license. It is different from a collection of poems because the dramatic narrative aspect of this needs to flow more. I’m really having a great time with it.

To read Jeanie Thompson’s blog go to <http://jean-iethompson.blogspot.com>



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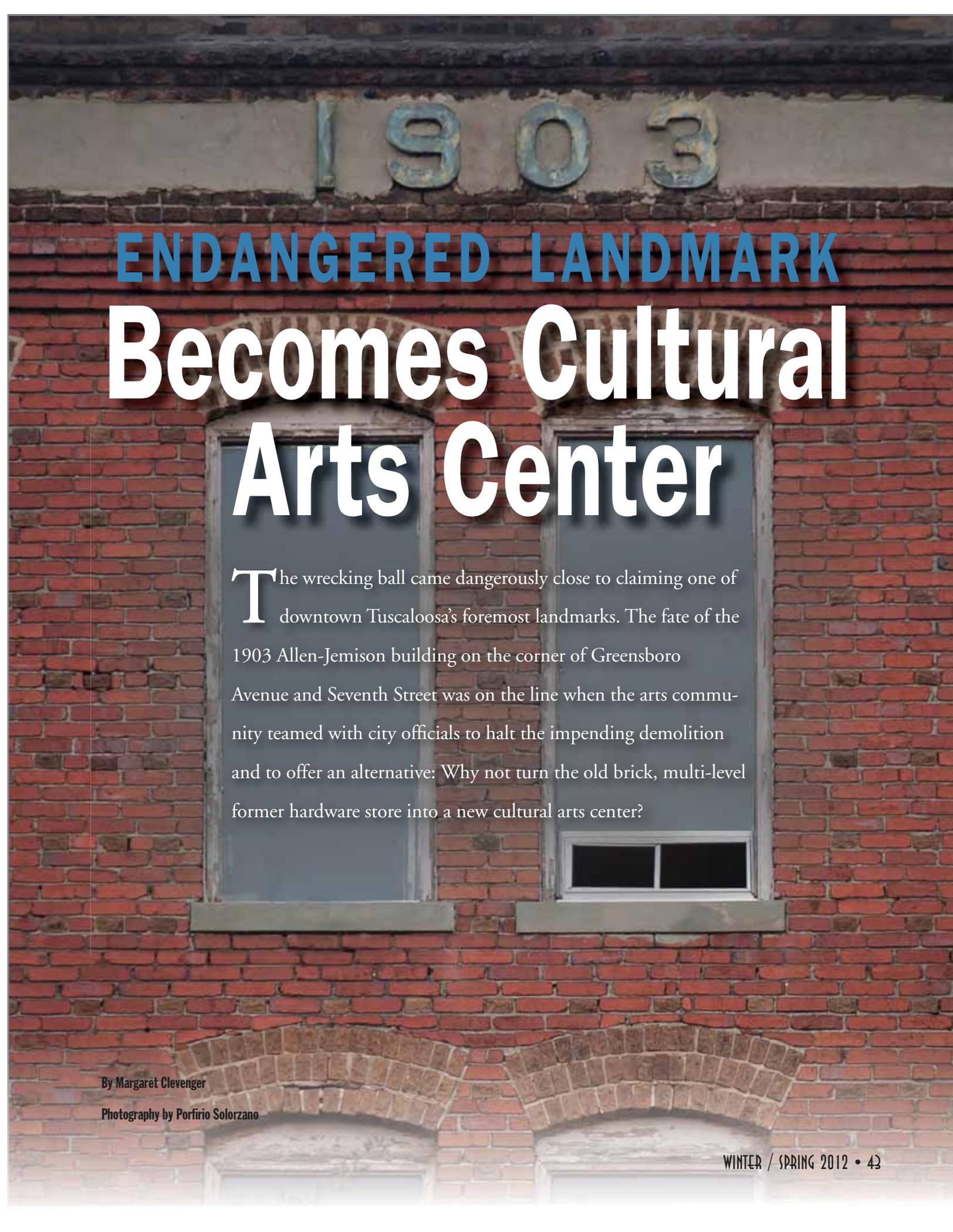
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**ENDANGERED LANDMARK**  
**Becomes Cultural Arts Center**

**T**he wrecking ball came dangerously close to claiming one of downtown Tuscaloosa's foremost landmarks. The fate of the 1903 Allen-Jemison building on the corner of Greensboro Avenue and Seventh Street was on the line when the arts community teamed with city officials to halt the impending demolition and to offer an alternative: Why not turn the old brick, multi-level former hardware store into a new cultural arts center?

By Margaret Clevenger

Photography by Porfirio Solorzano

**“Tuscaloosa is the only city this size in Alabama with no cultural arts facility,”** says Sandra Wolfe, executive director of the Tuscaloosa Arts Council. Soon the city will be able to lay claim to the Dinah Washington Cultural Arts Center, one of the newest and most beautiful arts facilities in the state. “This will be an art destination and we are really excited about it,” Wolfe says. The new center is expected to open in the fall of 2012.

The Allen-Jemison building was constructed on the foundation of the 1826 Tuscaloosa courthouse. It has four floors and a basement and its 50,000 plus square feet made it at one time the largest hardware dealer in Alabama. Train tracks through the warehouse behind the store eased the delivery of buggies, plows, and boxes of sporting goods. A pneumatic tube system running along the ceiling delivered payments for purchases on the first floor to an upstairs office. For those living in Tuscaloosa and surrounding communities, the Allen-Jemison building was the place to go for hardware.

One area resident has vivid memories of the old store. “In the 1930s the Girl Scouts of Tuscaloosa county were invited to decorate their tall front windows,” recalls local author Aileen Kilgore Henderson. “It was for some occasion in the fall. The Brookwood Girl Scouts wanted me to do it. Most of them had no way to go to town. I went with the principal of our school who had business to tend to. I collected all the arrowheads and Indian artifacts our family had found and used fall leaves and cornstalks. And I drew pictures of activities our troop had been involved in to earn our badges. My daddy

let me have a beautiful, perfect spearhead he’d found. We won third prize. But we never got back our Indian treasures. I remember my daddy never said a word of complaint but I knew he was disappointed not to have his spearhead returned.”

In 1975 Spiller Furniture Gallery moved into the space and later the building was turned into an antique mall where the brick walls and wood floors made a nice backdrop for rare treasures and collectibles. Christ Episcopal Church purchased the property in 2002 for \$1.5 million and tore down an addition to the building so the church could expand. But that still left the original structure, empty and of no use to the church. Different business proposals were floated for the building but none panned out. Church leaders were set to tear it down and leave the area as green space.

“The building was deteriorating rapidly because of leaks in the roof and other things and the church wasn’t equipped to handle that,” says Bill Snowden, Tuscaloosa’s director of economic development. “They were taking bids on the demolition when I met with several members of the vestry and said ‘What would you think about a cultural arts facility here on a twenty-year lease?’ They told me they would consider my idea because it met their outreach program.”

With the church open to the idea of a cultural arts building but still taking bids on demolition, Snowden approached Mayor Walt Maddox who solicited opinions from depart-

ment heads. “We discussed the pros and cons for a while, then the city council made the decision that we would apply for the Section 108,” Snowden says. The city received the sought after federal loan of \$1.5 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Out of that amount \$1.33 million is slated for the building renovations with the rest going toward architect fees and other contingencies. The loan will be repaid over twenty years





*Photo courtesy of the Tuscaloosa Preservation Society.*

from the city's annual proceeds of Community Development Block Grant money. "From the council's standpoint there was no money coming out of the general fund coffers and they were helping save a historic building," Snowden says.

Snowden first got involved with the effort to save the building in 2008 and Tuscaloosa received the

federal loan in 2010. It was an all-consuming project for him. "I've been a historic preservationist because of what it does for a city from an economic standpoint," Snowden says. "I'm tired of looking at 1940s and '50s pictures of University Blvd and Greensboro and having parking lots where historic buildings were. The clock was ticking every day we

were working on this thing. We knew if you took a day off you were a day closer to the wrecking ball so none of the team took any time off. I'm sure I was driving my wife crazy. There would be nights when she would say 'We're not talking about it. Go talk to the dog. You're possessed with this thing.' And I was."

Renovations on the Allen-Jemi-



*Jim Harrison, III speaks during a press conference in the Greensboro Room of the Bama Theatre.*

son building started in May and are expected to take approximately eight months. During that time two staircases will be installed, a new roof added, wiring and plumbing replaced. Brick and wood must be repaired and openings in the rear of the building closed. New air conditioning and heating systems will be added.

With the city funding the renovation of the building, the Tuscaloosa Arts Council has been busy doing its part to raise money to create the

space within. “We have received a Cultural Facilities grant of \$60,000 from the Alabama State Council on the Arts,” says Wolfe. “And we have raised \$385,000.”

Jim Harrison and Margaret Wilson are co-chairs of the fund-raising campaign. “We have been trying to build some support in the foundation area,” Harrison says. “We are working with folks at the university (of Alabama) and we also hope to secure some additional support from various corporate and philanthropic

foundations, some of which are not located in Tuscaloosa. I think we are well on our way. We will be knocking on every door we can.”

Harrison is enthusiastic about the impact he foresees the new arts facility having in town. “It’s a great opportunity to add to the mix of cultural venues in downtown Tuscaloosa. And I hope that it acts as a catalyst to the cultural activity in downtown and certainly the community and the county at large,” he says. “I think it is one of the most



Dinah Washington (Ruth Lee Jones) was born in Tuscaloosa on August 29, 1924. She moved away when she was a child and was singing in clubs in Chicago by the time she was fifteen. The legendary R&B singer had many crossover hits into jazz and pop. In 1959 she won a Grammy Award for “What a Difference a Day Makes.” Dinah Washington died on December 14, 1963, at age 39. The city of Tuscaloosa named a street, Dinah Washington Avenue, in her honor.

*Portrait of Dinah Washington by Ronald McDowell, courtesy of the Alabama Music Hall of Fame.*

exciting things we've had going on in downtown in quite some time."

As funds are being raised, the Arts Council is deciding how the new space will be used. A sizable portion of the first floor of the renovated building will be black box space, which Wolfe defines as "flexible space with rigging and everything that is needed to put on productions." Seating can be moved in or out as needed. The space is similar in size to the stage at the Bama Theatre, making it an ideal spot for the Children's Theatre to rehearse before moving into the Bama which is located a mere one hundred or so steps down the street.

The front corner of the first floor will be the University of Alabama's gallery for their MFA shows. "This will give the community a place to easily come to see the art of UA," Wolfe says. There will be a second gallery, for community artwork, located at the back corner. A small kitchen, suitable for on-site catering, will separate the two galleries. Plans also include six artist's studios located on either the first or second floor.

The second floor will not only provide storage space for the costumes of the Children's Theatre, but it will also be a costume workshop. "They will build their costumes here," Wolfe says, "using heavy duty sewing machines."

The third floor of the building will be left empty for now, with an eye to future expansion. The fourth floor is attic space with an access to the roof.

Bill Snowden has a photo of himself superimposed on a wreck-



*Photo courtesy of the Tuscaloosa Preservation Society.*

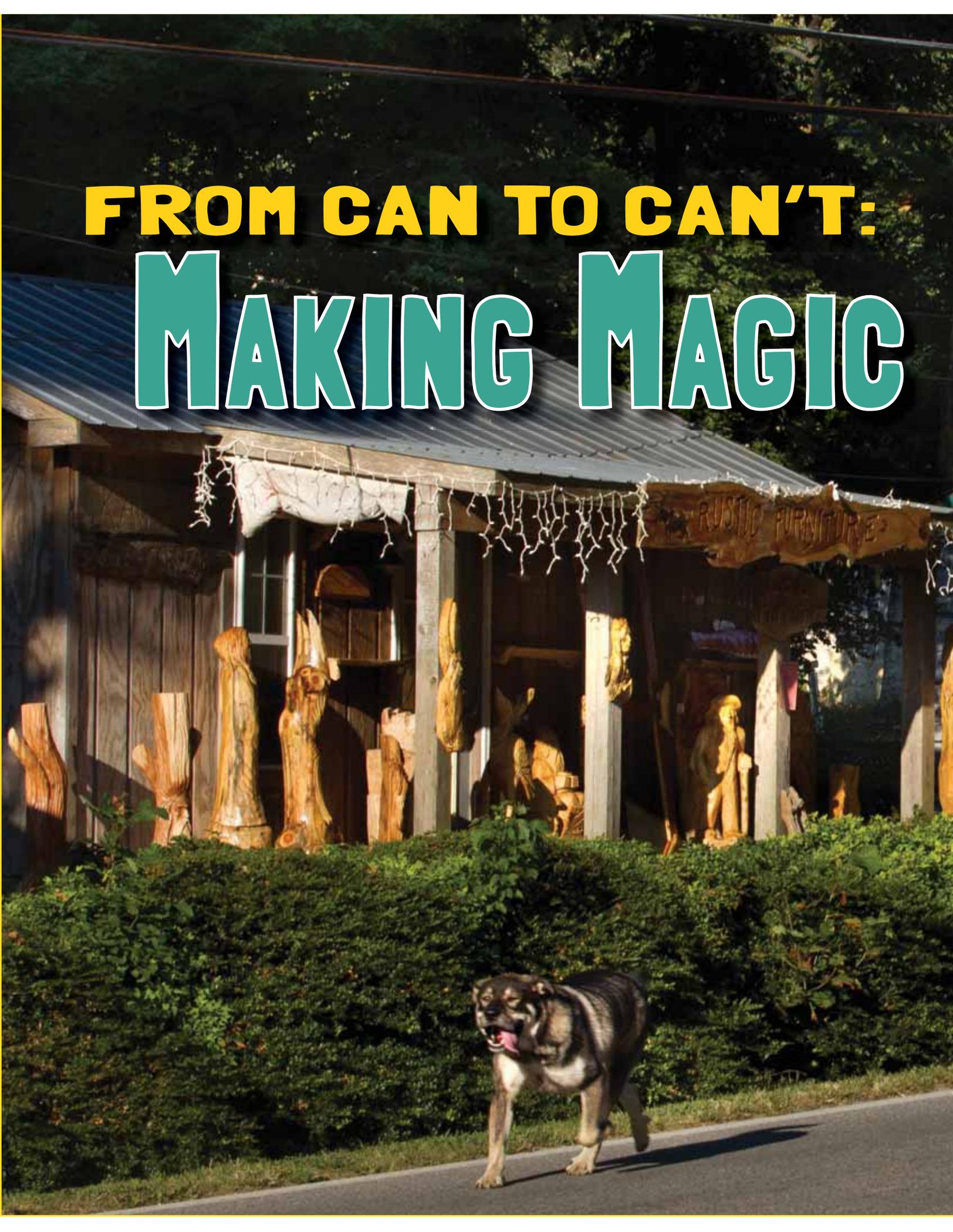


*Board members, as well as members of the media and the general public, walk around the Greensboro Room at the Bama Theatre after a press conference took place announcing the Dinah Washington Cultural Arts Center being renovated.*

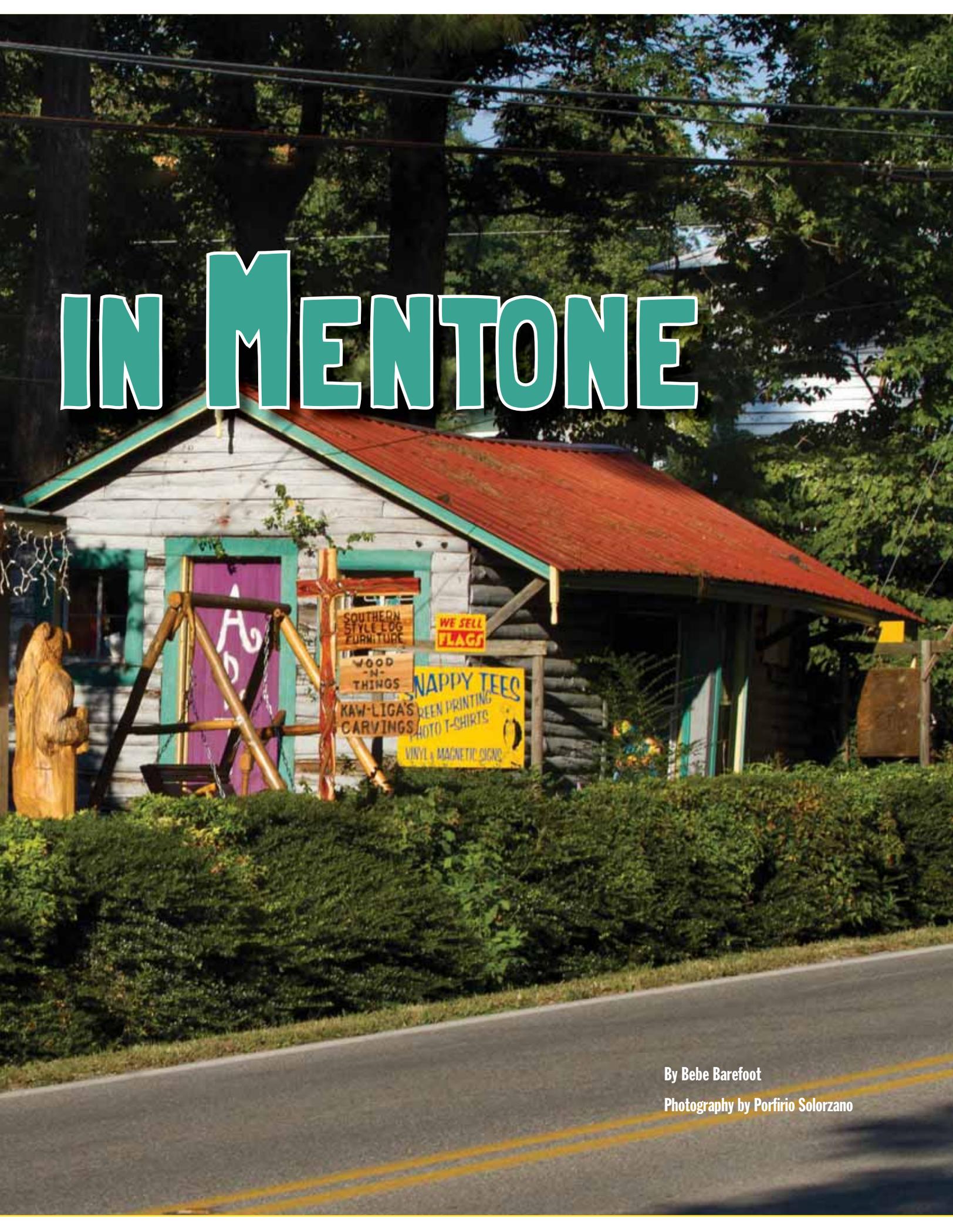
ing ball going from the courthouse to the Allen-Jemison building. The photo hangs on the wall in his office to remind him how close the city came to forever losing the historic structure. "I was just one of a team, probably the most stubborn one of the bunch, but I'll be damned if I was going to let a 1903 building that had so much charac-

ter to it, not only in its architecture but also in its history, come down," he says. "Perseverance paid off. We had a good team with Pam (Penick, former executive director of the Tuscaloosa Arts Council), Sandy (Wolfe), Jim Harrison, the mayor and the council. We got it through and we're just waiting on the grand opening."

# FROM CAN TO CAN'T: MAKING MAGIC



# IN MENTONE



By Bebe Barefoot

Photography by Porfirio Solorzano



*Artist Sunny Carvello sits and paints on the porch of Mentone Realty while her daughter Bailey sings and plays guitar.*

**IMAGINE** a place where business hours are from “can to can’t,” a troubadour serenades you while you eat tomato pie, and the local real estate office doubles as an art gallery. Fairie clothes and altered gourds share boutique space, a piano stands surreal in a courtyard, and the local market doubles as an art gallery. A tree branch morphs into a chandelier, a woman named Moon makes herbal magic, and the local restaurant doubles as an art gallery. Think such an emphasis on the arts exists only in a parallel universe? Think again, because you don’t have to fall through a rabbit hole to get to Mentone. Less than three hours from

Tuscaloosa, its beauty enchants visitors and inspires artists in the mountains of northeast Alabama.

The former mining town turned creative community attracts painters, sculptors, writers and musicians as if some siren song only they can hear were wafting from its legendary spring. Some came just to visit and stayed.

Others divide their time between weekend homes in Mentone and the mainstream “nine-to-five,” dreaming weeknights of art as life and life as art in this bustling yet laid-back city of can to can’t.

“This is the most wonderful place because there’s an active arts community,” says Scott Thomas, an artist and owner of Scott’s Happy Art.



“It’s organized. You just don’t see that in small Southern towns.”

Two groups work tirelessly to support Mentone’s businesses and arts community. The Mentone Area Preservation Association (MAPA) and The Mentone Area Arts Council (MAAC) both promote the town and the surrounding areas. MAPA formed in 1982, and MAAC in 2006. For years, MAPA organized non-juried arts festivals in Mentone. The artists who founded MAAC did so to bring in juried shows and festivals. MAPA and MAAC recently collaborated for the first time on Mentone’s 27th annual Colorfest, a Fall festival held the third weekend of each October. This year’s event had nearly 80 vendors and included a

Business Festival designed to highlight the intricate relationship among art, culture and economic development.

Mentone’s other major arts event, The Rhododendron Festival, happens the third weekend each May, and a midsummer festival takes place in July.

“Mentone is the right combination of lots of things,” says resident Rhonda Howell. “The beauty and central location draw people, but I think artists come because they get peace of mind.”

Howell’s husband, Walter, is a master forger who makes stunning ironwork. They moved to Mentone from Georgia, and own and operate The Forge Gallery. They originally opened it to showcase Walter’s work, and eventually expanded



*Joan Byrum sits with her dog Claude Monet in the living room of her home in downtown Mentone, Alabama. Built in 1939, the home was a one room coal miner’s cabin. Rooms were added on as years passed. The Byrums remodeled it to suit their retirement plan which was to live in the little village of the town. The loft was built for “grandchildren sleep-overs.” Byrum is an accomplished painter and gallery owner.*



*Above: Tony Goggans sings during lunch time at the Wildflower Cafe owned by Benjamin Keener and Laura Catherine Moon.*

*Below: Crochet tops hang from the wall of The Wildflower Cafe in downtown Mentone, Alabama. The restaurant features the work of local artists and craftsmen.*



by merging with The Crow's Nest, an antiques shop owned by Doreen Waters. The Howells sell pieces by a wide range of artists, most of them from within a ten-mile radius. Some moved to Mentone from other states, but just as many have never left the hills of north Alabama.

"Mountain natives are 'life skills' people," says Howell. "They don't call what they make 'art.' They call it 'life skills.'"

Delray O'Rear is one such "life skills" practitioner. Her handmade pin cushions are miniature log cabin quilt squares and sell as fast as they're placed on the Forge shelves. Howell recalls having to convince O'Rear that people would actually pay for her handiwork.

The Forge carries horsehair pottery and hand-thrown violet pots by Karen Britt, and other paintings, sculpture and textiles round out the offerings.

A couple of doors down, The Gourdie Shop & Boutique's quirky "Gourdies" peer at visitors, their mystical countenances softened by racks of faerie clothing, dolls and jewelry. Sharon Barron is the owner/artist who created the now-patented "Gourdies," one-of-a-kind sculptures made from gourds. Barron calls them symbols of individualism, which makes them right at home in Mentone.

In addition to the Gourdies, clothing and imported jewelry, Barron sells woodwork by local artists, one of whom might well be sitting outside Southern Style Log Furniture carving away on any given day. Southern Style's owner/Artist Jeff Rymer lives in Cleveland, Tennessee, and comes to Mentone on weekends. He moved south from Detroit seeking work, and used a tax refund to buy tools and start his business. Rymer handcrafts every piece, from the smallest, intricately detailed wooden earrings to massive, Paul Bunyan-style four-poster beds.

Across the street at Scott's Happy Art, Thomas makes and sells re- and up-cycled pieces that he picks up at yard sales. He lays his hands on hopelessly dated home décor from the 1970s and 1980s and resurrects it into funky and fabulous freshness. The least likely junk becomes Thomas's canvas for sometimes amusing and always amazing objects. Just one example: a giant circuit board from an ancient computer re-imagined as a wall clock.

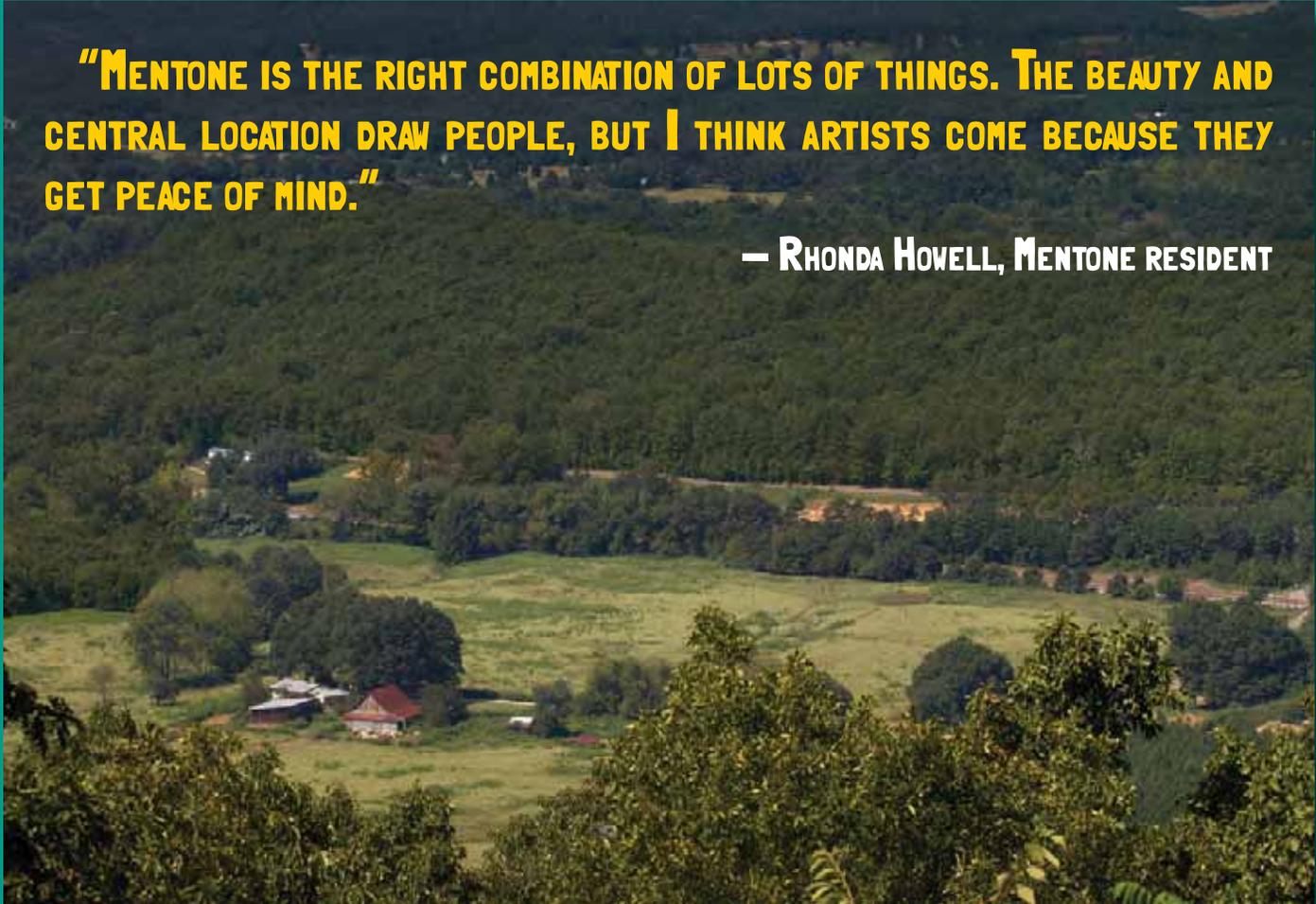
A strong do-it-yourself spirit



*Some of the carved wood pieces being exhibited at one of the cabins lining highway 117.*



*Owners of the Wildflower Cafe in downtown Mentone, Laura Catherine Moon and Benjamin Keener, pose by a section of the restaurant where L.C. Moon sells her herbs and soaps in Mentone, Alabama.*



**"MENTONE IS THE RIGHT COMBINATION OF LOTS OF THINGS. THE BEAUTY AND CENTRAL LOCATION DRAW PEOPLE, BUT I THINK ARTISTS COME BECAUSE THEY GET PEACE OF MIND."**

**— RHONDA HOWELL, MENTONE RESIDENT**

and unwavering mutual support punctuates Mentone's creative energy. Barbara Patrie opened Silent Springs Botanicals to help the whole community. She sells homemade soaps, herbal products and fruit preserves at both her shop and the Mentone Farmer's Market. Patrie tries to buy all ingredients from local farmers, and anything she doesn't buy locally she grows herself.

Joey Smith grows his own as well—his own goats. He raises them and uses their milk to make luxurious soaps that he sells at his shop, Artistic Creations. Smith

makes candles, too, and sells Kat Frey's hand-tooled leather as well as the wind chimes and bird baths Frey makes with another local artist, Rick Hall.

One cannot live by art alone... or maybe one can in Mentone, where food is surely also creative expression. The Moonlight Bistro's fried green beans serve as a metaphor, symbolizing the simultaneously down-home traditional and radically progressive Mentone spirit. Homemade desserts on covered cake plates beckon from a countertop as a stuffed bobcat peers from the rafters, his gaze

seeming to stop on the silk lampshades and little caned tables that are themselves works of art. This contrast reflects the eclectic menu, which offers everything from elegantly prepared trout and salmon to hamburgers. More exotic fare such as quail, elk and buffalo might be offered in the future.

There is more "moonlight" just down the street at The Wildflower Café, where Laura Catherine Moon personifies lunar magic. A Birmingham native, Moon moved to California for a few years and when she came back home, she chose to live in Mentone and calls

it her “mini Northern California.”

Moon owns the Wildflower with her husband, chef Ben Keener, and a meal there makes for a complete artistic experience. Most days and some nights, Tony Goggans, “The Mentone Troubadour,” plays acoustic guitar and sings for diners, often moving from table to table.

Moon and Keener collaborate on recipes, and they apparently do it very well because the place is always filled with locals. The sweet potato biscuits alone keep folks coming back.

“Everything on the menu is Moon’s and mine,” says Keener, “except the tomato pie.”

Other signature selections include Moon’s French onion soup, Keener’s spicy gumbo and a Venetian grill made to order. Sunday brunch is an “extravaganza,” and they will cater any occasion. The menu proclaims that “Wildflower’s Chef can create most any dish you can dream of.”

Keener says “creating art in the kitchen” is one of his passions and music is another. A mandolin player, he built a stage in the courtyard area and books live music regularly. Guests enjoy everything from mountain bluegrass to jazz while they enjoy Keener’s culinary creations under the stars. The centerpiece of the performance space is an antique upright piano, beautifully weathered and flanked by huge old windows—a surreal still life right at home in the middle of Mentone.

The restaurant’s “country store” is a full-blown gallery that sells work by 35 different artists. Pottery, jewelry, textiles, paintings, and collage and assemblage pieces create an ambience that reflects Moon’s and Keener’s free and creative spirits.

Moon considers her art form to be herbs and native plants. She lends her expertise in the restaurant kitchen, and at home makes teas, soaps and other products, all for sale at the café. Other items include artist Sunny Carvalho’s textiles, handmade jewelry and “love dolls.”

Carvalho lives in Pinson but comes to Mentone as many weekends as possible. In addition to the textiles and jewelry, she makes original paintings and, each Spring teaches at Artfest in Seattle. She also makes Dollandia Girls, dolls with ceramic heads, wooden bodies and arms and legs of clay.

“They’re Tim Burton-ish, and weird,” she says, “and the Seattle market loves them. I always have a waiting list.”

On this particular day, Carvalho sits and paints on the porch of Mentone Realty while her fifteen-year-old daughter, Bailey, sings, plays guitar and eventually gives an impromptu performance of “Fly Me to the Moon”—truly a Mentone moment.

“I think artists are attracted to Mentone because they feel accepted,” says Carvalho. “Acceptance, promotion and a loving spirit. We

all lift each other up. It’s a very supporting community.”

Charlotte Gentry, owner and broker of Mentone Realty, exemplifies this support. Because most Mentone galleries are closed on weekdays, she created space so artists could have exposure Monday through Friday and maybe sell their work. The entire second floor of her real estate building became Studio 117. Gentry does not charge commission.

“I just wants to give artists a weekday venue,” she says.

She featured Heather Nicely’s work during the summer. Also a real estate agent, Nicely works with oils and pastels, pen and ink, cast iron and mosaics. Outsider artist Tony Blansit’s show at Studio 117 garnered great interest, as did Lyn Cox’s stained glass.

Gentry has a different view of why there are so many artists in Mentone. She thinks the area brings out the artist in people and that many don’t realize they’re artists until they get there. Pointing out that it’s unusual for a small town with so much history to be so welcoming, Gentry emphasizes that an open-minded atmosphere is crucial for a flourishing arts scene.

“Mentone is a great equalizer. Anyone can feel at home here, because the whole place embraces art and new ideas.”

Take a day trip to Mentone and find your inner artist. Get there at “can,” and don’t leave ‘til “can’t.”

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**We** saw it coming and it was huge. The tornado that dropped on Tuscaloosa on April 27 twisted and churned as it ate up everything in its mile-wide path. When the winds calmed, my battered house still stood, but fallen trees blocked the roads and we had no electricity, phone service, or water.

During that first week after the storm, at the end of long days of hauling debris to the curb, we sat around the battery-operated radio at night, the glow of candlelight soft in the background. We listened intently for news, trying to find a connection with the outside world. That is what it had become: those out there living a normal life and us, hunkered down here, still in a daze but trying to sort through the mess and restore order to our upended lives.

One evening on a local radio show, an older woman called in desperate for someone to remove a tree that was blocking her car. "If someone would just move this tree, then I could get out and help myself," she implored of the DJ. "And then I'm going to help someone else." We heard on a later broadcast that the tree was removed and she was able to get her car out. I do not know if she helped someone else, but I like to think that she did.

We had uplifting interludes in the crazy turned-on-its-side world where those of us who lived through the beast of 190-mile-per-hour winds and its aftermath resided.

An oak at the edge of my yard once reached upwards of a hundred feet. It was a beauty especially in winter when no leaves obscured the fine sculpture of its long elegant limbs. Many a day I was entertained by squirrels chasing each other up that tree. The oak was still standing after the tornado but the top twenty five feet had been blown away leaving a twisted mass of dangling spikes.

"A widowmaker," said Mike of Baptist Disaster Relief from Texas. Mike is a pastor in Port Arthur. He described his church as being in the "hood," his congregation as four per cent white, as is he.

Mike had three chainsaws: Bubba, a twenty-five-inch Husquavarna; a smaller Stihl named Bertha; and a fourteen-inch saw that he used when climbing a tree because it could be operated with one hand. "This is Baby," he said holding the small saw. "Or Bebe as I call it when talking to my Hispanic parishioners."



Mike studied the damaged oak and surrounding area carefully; cutting down the widowmaker was a risky undertaking that required skill and planning.

It was a two person job. The men cut through the bark and into the meat of the tree but not all the way through. They then placed one after the other five fluorescent green wedges into the opening they had created. The duo took turns hammering the wedges until only a sliver of green remained visible and the tree began to lean. Finally, it toppled over with a mighty crash that shook the ground under our feet. The tree dropped precisely where it needed to go. "Good job," I said.

"Well, actually, I wanted it to land there," Mike replied as he pointed to a spot about four feet away.

Close enough, I thought.

I put a tape measure to the stump and found it to be more than twelve feet around and hollow inside, big enough for the Keebler elves to reside in comfort.

Pastor Mike and his team of a dozen came back the next morning and worked until lunch. They would not accept money but told me that they were "the hands and feet of Jesus."

Many things have changed in Tuscaloosa since April 27. Fifty of our residents lost their lives because of the tornadoes that day. Buildings and homes are gone and formerly wooded landscapes are barren.

But good people are still good and those that are less so, are well, still who they were before the storm. My sweet across-the-street neighbor who helped clear the broken sweet gum from my driveway, is still generous and kind and looks out for me. Others who did not lift a finger to help themselves or anyone else, are still lackadaisical. Such is life.



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