Alabama CURRENTS

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Fun for all at the 17th Annual LaFayette Day, Saturday, April 12

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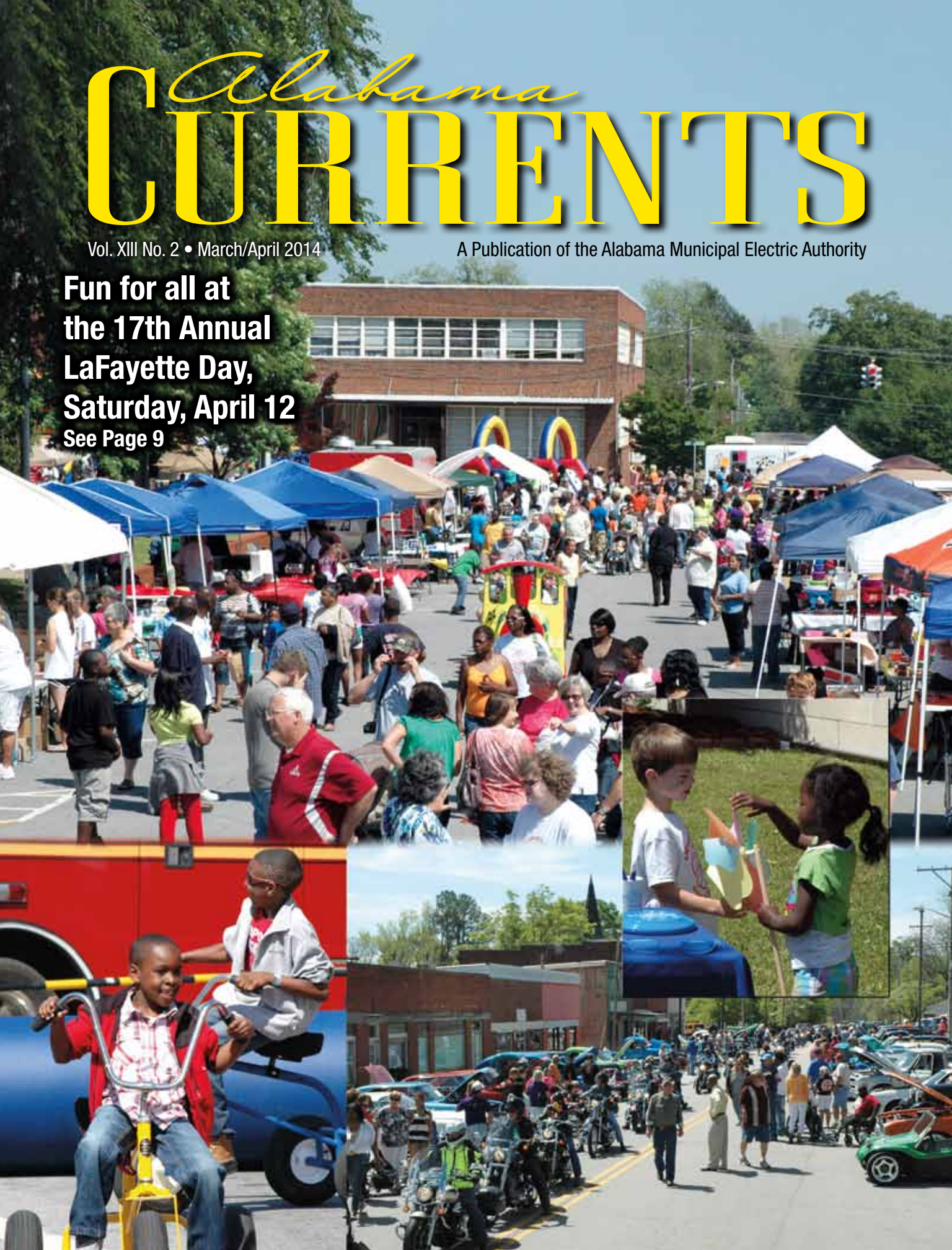

From the Editor

Tax Time 2013: Energy Efficiency Home Tax Credits

Before you press send on your online tax return or finish your last meeting with your financial advisor, make sure you are saving as much money as possible for making energy-efficient choices at home.

Energy efficiency is always a good idea for your bottom line and you can take advantage of some related tax credits on your 2013 tax return.

Here are three questions the Alliance to Save Energy has answered about energy efficiency home tax credits in 2013:

Who is eligible?

You can receive tax credits by installing specific energy-efficient home improvements between Jan. 1, 2011 and Dec. 31, 2013 in your primary residence (that you own).

What energy-efficient home improvements are eligible?

You are eligible if you have purchased and installed certain energy-efficient products, including:

- Exterior windows;
- Insulation for exterior doors or roofs;
- Central air conditioner, heat pump, furnace, boiler, water heater or biomass stove.

Just be sure to check and make sure your energy-efficient improvement meets the minimum standards so you qualify for the credit.

How much is the credit?

The tax credit, which is capped at $500, accounts for 10 percent of the cost of building envelope improvements (excluding labor costs). There is also a limit of $200 for windows, and specific dollar limits for heating and cooling equipment.

You should also know there is a cap on the credit amount for fiscal years 2006-2013 combined; if you have claimed this credit in the past, it counts against the $500 limit (but does not affect the $1,500 limit available for 2009 and 2010). So, for example, if you claimed $300 in 2007, you can only claim $200 in 2011; if you claimed $800 in 2009, you cannot claim any more credit.

Be sure to get the professional advice of a Tax Advisor. Bottom line…make sure you are getting credit for those energy-efficiency improvements you made in 2013.

Lisa Miller

AMEA Manager of Communications and Marketing

Safety You NEWS CAN USE

Know how you can stay safe and get through until power is restored

Severe storms unfortunately do happen and are devastating to homes, properties, and lives. These storms can also take down power lines — creating a dangerous situation for all of us, including the lineworkers working hard to get your power turned back on.

How long it takes to get your power restored depends on the extent of the storm's destruction, the number of outages, and when it becomes safe for utility personnel to get to the damaged areas. There are many steps in the assessment and restoration process — clearing downed power lines; ensuring public health and safety facilities are operational; checking power stations and transformers; repairing transmission lines, substations, and distribution lines; and getting power restored to customers within the various damaged areas.

Be sure to contact your electric utility immediately to report the outage.

Here are some recommended safety tips:

- Just because power lines are damaged does not mean they are dead. Every downed power line is potentially energized and dangerous until utility crews arrive on the scene to ensure power has been cut off. Downed power lines, stray wires, and debris in contact with them all have the potential to deliver a fatal shock. Stay far away and keep others away from downed power lines.
- Never enter a flooded basement if electrical outlets are submerged. The water could be energized.
- Do not turn power off if you must stand in water to do so. Call your electric utility, and have them turn off power at the meter.
- Before entering storm-damaged buildings, make sure electricity and gas are turned off.
- Do not use water-damaged electronics before properly restoring them. Electric motors in appliances should be cleaned and reconditioned before use. It may be necessary to replace some of your appliances and electronics. Have your water-damaged items inspected and approved by a professional before using them.
- If you clean-up outdoors after a storm, do not use electronic equipment when it is wet out.

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MISSION STATEMENT

AMEA's mission is to provide for our Member communities a reliable and economical source of electric power, enabling them to preserve and enhance the benefits of municipal utility ownership for their citizens and the electric customers they serve. We strive to offer services that our Members need and can adapt to provide the best value for their communities and customers.

Alabama CURRENTS

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On the Cover

On Saturday, April 12, LaFayette will once again celebrate its biggest event of the year. The 17th Annual LaFayette Day for Valley Haven School will take place on the courthouse square in downtown LaFayette from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The event has grown every year since its inception and this year will be no different. Patrons can expect a fun-filled day with games, an array of food vendors, arts and craft vendors, live musical entertainment and much more. *(Photos by Chris Busby, The LaFayette Sun).*

You have the power to control your energy bill

During these winter months, we have experienced some of the coldest temperatures in decades. Like me, I'm sure you have had to pay higher energy bills. All of us have felt the "sticker shock" with our January energy bills.

January's record cold temperatures made me start thinking about how many of us can help ourselves through some very economical energy-efficiency efforts.

The Alabama Municipal Electric Authority (AMEA) is not only committed to providing for our Member communities a reliable and economical source of electric power, we are also committed to helping our Members' customers with low-cost strategies that can reduce your home energy bill year round. In fact, we provide many energy-efficiency tips and resources for you on our web site, www.amea.com, Energy Efficiency.

Also, our Members are committed to helping you by providing an online energy audit tool on their web sites, called Energy Depot. Energy Depot® for Homes is a one-stop shop of online resources and tools to help you better understand and manage your home energy use and costs. Energy Depot allows you to analyze your energy bill and how energy is used in your home.

One area that has been of interest to me is air infiltration and how your home can lose most of its heat and cool air to air leaks (inside and out). Simply put, you may be throwing money out the window. So let's talk about how we can solve this problem.

Testing of older homes shows that approximately 50 percent of all air in a house is lost to the exterior or outside due to air infiltration. If 50 percent of the air is lost, that means that same amount of air has to be replaced with outside air, winter or summer. If you can stand at your window or door and feel cool air coming in, just imagine how much warm air is escaping your home.

This begs the question…how can I prevent heating and/or cooling the outside air and how do I keep that air inside the house?

As I researched this question, I reached out to Doug Rye, who writes for *Alabama Currents* magazine, and who has helped many of people throughout the country with energy-efficiency advice, and he told me that the three most important things affecting your utility bill and your comfort are: 1) air infiltration, 2) air infiltration, and 3) air infiltration. Fortunately, this can be economically solved by proper application of caulking, weather-stripping, and in some cases, adding insulation.

Doug recommends that you weatherize your home by caulking and weather-stripping places where cold air is coming in the house. Be sure that the locks on the windows are locked tight to help stop air infiltration. Reducing air infiltration can cut your monthly energy bill substantially. The most common places where air escapes homes are: floors, walls, ceilings, ducts, fireplaces, plumbing penetrations, doors, windows, fans, vents and electrical outlets.

Please recognize that you have the power to control your energy bill. By consuming electricity wisely in your home or business, you become part of the solution to cope with higher energy costs.

As we gear up for the spring and summer months, let's all pay attention to those economical ways in which to control our energy bills and put some hard earned money back into our pockets.

Fred D. Clark, Jr.
AMEA President & CEO

It's been cold and I'm thinking of you

Doug Rye
Host – "Home Remedies" Radio Talk Show

I started writing this column on Jan. 28. The reason that I am writing it earlier than usual is because I have been watching the Weather Channel on TV and thinking of you. As I write, the weather map shows ice, snow, and very cold air blowing across your state, as far south as the Gulf. Many have been stranded on the roadways. Our daughter called me this morning, concerned that the water pipes might freeze tonight in their family condo at the beach. On this day, I am sure that everyone in Alabama would agree that this winter may well be one of the coldest on record. And a near record winter will certainly mean that many of you have received, or will receive, near record high utility bills.

It is at times like these that it is easy to write about energy efficiency. But while writing and reading about energy efficiency may be easy, it is more difficult to get folks to take action to make their homes more efficient. Well folks, nobody likes to receive high utility bills. So what is one to do?

There are only three things that affect the amount of your utility bill. Those are weather, rates and usage. I believe that I can safely say that we will continue to have cold winters and hot summers. And I am positive that we have no control over the weather. I can also safely say that we have no control of the rates. So if we want to lower our utility bills, the only thing that we can do is to lower the monthly usage. And the only two choices that we have to reduce usage are conservation and energy efficiency. While conservation and energy efficiency are the answers, they are not the same thing.

A couple of examples of conservation would be:

1. To turn the lights off when not needed; or
2. To lower the thermostat setting in the winter.

A couple of examples of energy efficiency would be:

1. To use more energy-efficient light bulbs; or
2. To add more add more attic insulation if needed.

Please note that any and all of these solutions take action on your part. Most conservation solutions require no money, just your actions. Most energy efficiency solutions do require some money. But in many cases, like caulking, it may only be a few dollars. Simply stated, if you want to lower your utility usage, you must take action. An energy audit can tell you exactly what actions you need to take and that is the best way to know exactly what you need to do, in order to lower usage on your house. And, of course, I am willing to help you by writing this column or by taking your questions by phone at (501) 653-7931.

Remember that all energy improvements do have a payback. If the payback for adding attic insulation at your house is three years, you will recoup the cost in three years, if you add the insulation. If you don't add it, in three years you will have spent the exact same amount in higher utility bills and you still won't have the insulation.

It is now Feb. 2, and major parts of the country, including parts of Alabama, still have ice and really cold weather. Well, when you receive this column, it will almost be springtime and that is the perfect time to take action. I suggest that you take action before the hot Alabama summer. And if you do, you won't even have to worry about it next winter.

God Bless and Happy Easter!

Doug Rye, an Arkansas architect, is known as the 'King of Caulk and Talk' and 'America's Energy Expert.' Doug has helped thousands of homeowners save money on their power bills. He hosts the popular "Home Remedies" radio talk program, which has been on the air for 15 years in 14 states. Doug speaks annually at American Institute of Architects meetings to hundreds of other architects on energy efficiency. He conducts over 150 energy-saving seminars per year all across the U.S. Have a question for Doug? Contact him at (501) 653-7931, or www.dougrye.com.

Include an energy check to your spring cleaning list

Warm weather has a way of making things grow: flowers, grass, and your to-do list. So what's one more task? While you're scrubbing and inspecting your home this spring, check for energy-efficiency around the house. Making a few energy-related repairs could help lower your electric bill all year long.

- While you're cleaning the windows, check for loose or leaky panes, and identify single-paned windows. These energy no-no's allow cool air to escape from your home during the summer and steal heated air during the winter. That can raise your utility bill no matter the season. Replacing old, inefficient windows now is an investment that will pay for itself in energy savings.
- Light bulbs looking dim? Wipe them down to remove excess dust and trash those incandescent bulbs. Compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs) come in almost every size and mimic the glow of incandescents while using less energy. CFLs also last up to 10 times longer.
- Replace your dirty air filters. Dusty filters make your air conditioning system work harder.
- Open the windows. If it's not warm enough yet to turn off the heat and enjoy the fresh air, install a programmable thermostat, which automatically adjusts the temperature so you use less energy to heat your home when no one is there. The device can save you up to $100 a year on heating and cooling bills.
- Vacuum under and behind the refrigerator to remove dust buildup that decreases efficiency. If you use an extra fridge or freezer in a basement or storage room, turn it off when not in use. If you use it year round, keep it stocked or fill gaps with extra jugs of water or trays of ice so it will operate more efficiently.
- Before you scrub major appliances like refrigerators, ovens and washers, check to see if the model is ENERGY STAR®-certified. If not, consider upgrading. ENERGY STAR models use loads less energy and are worth the purchase price, even if your older, less-efficient appliance is still in working order.

Myths about Social Security

Kylle' D. McKinney
Public Affairs Specialist
Social Security Administration

Like any other successful and long-standing program or organization, there are a number of myths surrounding Social Security. Some of them are grounded in truth but just slightly misconstrued. Others are completely out of line with the truth. Let's take a look at a few.

Myth 1: Social Security is just a retirement program.

Social Security is more than a retirement program. It provides benefits to retirees, survivors, and people with disabilities who can no longer work. In fact, almost seven million disabled workers and nearly two million of their dependents get Social Security disability benefits. Six and a half million dependents of deceased workers (including two million children) get Social Security survivors benefits. Social Security is more than just retirement.

Myth 2: I don't need to save because Social Security will take care of me when I'm retired.

Social Security was never intended to be a person's sole income in retirement; it should be combined with pension income and personal savings and investments. Your Social Security Statement, available at www.socialsecurity.gov.mystatement, is a great place to get an idea of what to expect during retirement. You can also visit our Retirement Estimator at www.socialsecurity.gov/estimator.

Myth 3: If I work after I retire, I'll be penalized.

Once you reach your full retirement age, there is no penalty and no limit on the amount you can earn. You can determine your full retirement age by visiting www.socialsecurity.gov/retirecharted.htm. The earnings limit for workers who are younger than "full" retirement age (age 66 for people born in 1943 through 1954) is $15,480 in 2014. (We deduct $1 from benefits for each $2 earned over $15,480.) The earnings limit for people turning 66 in 2014 is $41,400. (We deduct $1 from benefits for each $3 earned over $41,400 until the month the worker turns age 66.) Keep in mind that if we withhold some of your benefits due to work, we will re-compute your monthly benefit amount when you reach full retirement age to account for those months that we withheld your benefit. There is no limit on earnings for workers who are full retirement age or older for the entire year.

Myth 4: To apply for benefits or do business with Social Security, I need to go to an office.

Not only is this false, but we encourage you to do business with us the most convenient and fastest way…at www.socialsecurity.gov. At our website, you can apply for benefits, use our Retirement Planner, get an estimate of your benefits, request a replacement Medicare card, and much more. You'll find it all — along with answers to your questions — at www.socialsecurity.gov.

For more information, feel free to contact me at (866) 593-0914, Ext. 26265, or kylle.mckinney@ssa.gov.

Escape Planning

Plan Ahead! If a fire breaks out in your home, you may have only a few minutes to get out safely once the smoke alarm sounds. Everyone needs to know what to do and where to go if there is a fire.

SAFETY TIPS

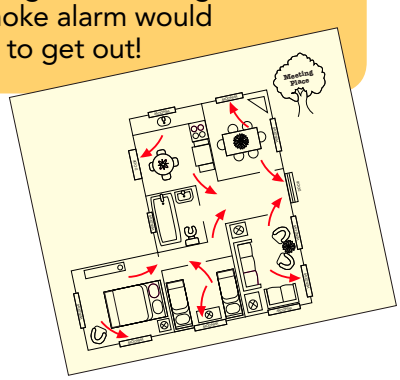
- MAKE a home escape plan. Draw a map of your home showing all doors and windows. Discuss the plan with everyone in your home.
- KNOW at least two ways out of every room, if possible. Make sure all doors and windows leading outside open easily.
- HAVE an outside meeting place (like a tree, light pole or mailbox) a safe distance from the home where everyone should meet.
- PRACTICE your home fire drill at night and during the day with everyone in your home, twice a year.
- PRACTICE using different ways out.
- TEACH children how to escape on their own in case you can't help them.
- CLOSE doors behind you as you leave.

IF THE ALARM SOUNDS...

- If the smoke alarm sounds, GET OUT AND STAY OUT. Never go back inside for people or pets.
- If you have to escape through smoke, GET LOW AND GO under the smoke to your way out.
- CALL the fire department from outside your home.

FACTS

- According to an NFPA survey, only **one of every three** American households have actually developed and practiced a home fire escape plan.
- While **71%** of Americans have an escape plan in case of a fire, only **47%** of those have practiced it.
- **One-third** of American households who made an estimate thought they would have at least 6 minutes before a fire in their home would become life-threatening. The time available is often less. And only **8%** said their first thought on hearing a smoke alarm would be to get out!



NFPA **Your Source for SAFETY Information** www.nfpa.org/education
NFPA Public Education Division • 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02169

Safety NEWS You CAN USE

Continued from Page 2

- If you are driving and come along a downed power line, stay away and keep others away. Contact emergency personnel or your utility company to address the downed power line.
- If you do come in contact with a downed power line, do not leave the car. Wait for utility and emergency professionals to make sure the power line is de-energized before exiting the car.

During an outage, turn off electrical appliances and unplug major electronics, including computers and televisions. Power sometimes comes back in surges, which can damage electronics. Your circuits could overload when power returns if all your electronics are still plugged in and on. Leave one light on to indicate that power has been restored. Wait a few minutes and then turn on other appliances and equipment — one at a time.

If you use a standby generator, it is critical that proper safety precautions be taken. Always read and follow all manufacturer operating instructions. There should be nothing plugged into the generator when you turn it on. This prevents a surge from damaging your generator and appliances. Operate generators in well-ventilated, outdoor, dry areas. Never attach a temporary generator to a circuit breaker, fuse, or outlet. Permanent generators should be wired into a house by a qualified electrician using a transfer switch in order to prevent feeding electricity back into overhead lines, which can be deadly for lineworkers.

To help you get through, have a storm kit prepared. Keep the kit in a cool, dry place, and make sure all members of the family know where it is.

For more information, visit www.SafeElectricity.org.

WATTS NEW IN Fairhope

Fairhope Triangle purchase adds 108 acres to city parks

By D. Fran Morley

The "Triangle" has officially become a part of the City of Fairhope, adding more than 100 acres of protected green space and park lands. In December, the City finalized the purchase of 108 acres of undeveloped land belonging to the Dyas family, located at the northern entrance to Fairhope, which includes 72 acres along Alabama 104 and the 36-acre "Triangle" property.

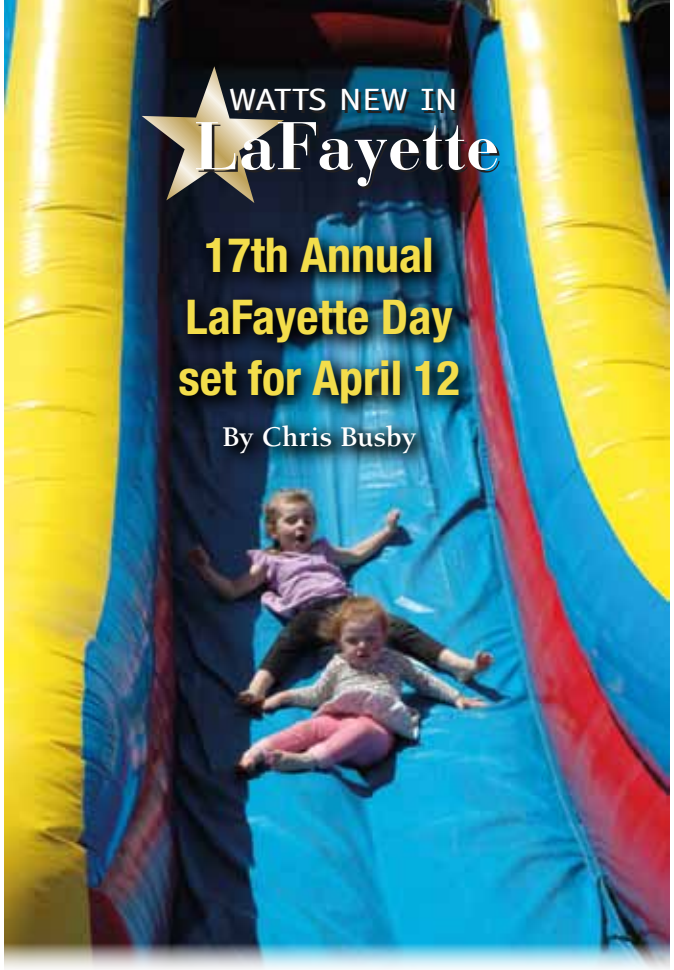
"Acquiring this land has long been a goal of the City, and I'm proud that we were able to make it happen," said Mayor Tim Kant. "Now we can guarantee that the entryway to Fairhope stays green forever, with walking and biking trails and other natural enhancements that our residents will enjoy and use. This also helps protect the important Fly Creek watershed and other wetlands in the area, which means that birds, fish, and other wildlife will benefit from this transaction forever, too."

According to the purchase agreement, the city can develop the property under its current zoning for any municipal use. However, council members have made it clear that the tract will be preserved as parkland, predominantly wild, with trails.

"This is probably the most important decision we'll make as the City Council," said council member Diana Brewer. "It will have the greatest impact on our city for generations."

"We have already begun the process, working with Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) and other entities to secure grants and funding to move forward with projects for this new park land," Kant said. "The land is a perfect tie-in with the new flower clock, on nearby property, and is something else everyone in Fairhope can be proud of. The council members and I look forward to working on this new park land."

D. Fran Morley is a contributing writer for the City of Fairhope.



17th Annual LaFayette Day set for April 12

By Chris Busby

LaFayette is gearing up for what has become the city's biggest event of the year. On Saturday, April 12, from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m., the 17th Annual LaFayette Day for Valley Haven School will take place on the courthouse square in downtown LaFayette. The city's only in-town festival will welcome hundreds of visitors from across the area, as well as vendors and musical acts, as part of a day that's purpose is to celebrate the City of LaFayette as well as to raise funds for Valley Haven. There is no admission to the event.

The event began in 1998 as a way to get the citizens of LaFayette more involved with Valley Haven's annual Hike-Bike-Run campaign. Valley Haven provides education, training, special instruction and other services for clients, pre-school and adult, who are mentally challenged and/or developmentally delayed. They serve over 100 clients and primarily cater to the Chambers and Lee County areas. The Hike-Bike-Run campaign is the single biggest local fund-raiser for the school.

LaFayette Day started out relatively small, with just a few vendors, but it has grown each year. Now hundreds of patrons, dozens of vendors, live entertainment and games highlight what has become the city's premier event.

LaFayette Day has been able to provide sizeable contributions to Valley Haven each year and gives local residents a chance to contribute to the school.

Over the past two years, LaFayette Day has seen perhaps its largest crowds in the event's history and raised nearly $20,000 for Valley Haven. Organizers are expecting those trends to continue this year.

LaFayette Day's hallmark is the many food and arts and craft vendors that line the streets of the courthouse square. But that's not all the day has to offer. There are numerous aspects of the event that make it so special and unique.

Patrons will hear live entertainment on the main stage throughout the day from local and regional artists and groups. There's a "kid's zone" featuring rides, games and inflatables, and the antique car and tractor show will return again this year. The show features classic and modern street rods, antique cars, trucks and tractors. The cars will be on display from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., and winners in different categories will be announced at the end of the day.

One of the most exciting events of LaFayette Day is the annual motorcycle ride. Last year, nearly 100 motorcycle enthusiasts took part in the ride that begins in West Point, GA, and ends at LaFayette Day. It's a thrilling sight each year to see the riders make their way down 1st Street and into the heart of LaFayette Day.

"It really is a special day for LaFayette and for the clients of Valley Haven, many of whom come out to enjoy the event," Valley Haven instructor and LaFayette Day Co-chair Craig Brown said. "It has often been said that this area's greatest asset is its people. And our residents demonstrate time and again how caring they are by their participation on this special day. That's the reason for the continued growth of LaFayette Day. People want to be a part of helping Valley Haven."

Valley's Haven's final event of the Hike-Bike-Run campaign, the actual "Hike-Bike-Run," will take place on May 3 at the school, located in Valley.

Chris Busy is a staff writer for The LaFayette Sun.

WATTS NEW IN
Piedmont

First Annual Polar Plunge held in January

By Ben Singleton

The City of Piedmont held its first annual Polar Plunge on Jan. 4 at its new Aquatic Center. Mayor Bill Baker came up with the idea and thought that it would be a great idea to help a local organization.

Proceeds from the event went to Venecia Butler's Cancer Foundation. Butler's foundation provides bags for cancer patients as they are undergoing treatments. Butler is a four-time cancer survivor and knows how it is to undergo treatments.

"This is just a small way of showing someone that you care about them as they are going through this battle", she said.

Mayor Baker and Butler were the first ones to take the plunge. Approximately 100 people took the plunge for the foundation and over 250 more turned out just to support the cause and watch.

"This was a great turnout to be our first one", said Mayor Baker. "I hope that we are able to do it again."

Piedmont Mayor Bill Baker and Venecia Butler take the plunge.

WATTS NEW IN
Dothan

Register now for the 2014 U.S.–China Manufacturing Symposium in Dothan

By Cassandra Milton

The U.S.-China Manufacturing Symposium will be held in Dothan, March 26-28. Co-organized by SoZo Group, the City of Dothan and the China Chamber of International Commerce (CCOIC), this will be an historic opportunity for the business leaders of the two countries to have a "no-holds barred" dialog on the future of manufacturing industries, leading to mutual investment, growth, innovation and deeper ties.

During 2012 and 2013, SoZo Group hosted Dothan Mayor Mike Schmitz and several other mayors in China to present the benefits and opportunities available in their communities for foreign direct investment. Leaders from southern states traveled with SoZo to China to meet with companies and learn about their opportunities, needs, and challenges as they consider globalization. These local leaders were able to represent their communities and states before literally thousands of business leaders in major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Bazhong, Chengdu, Dalian, Guangzhou, Langzhong, Nanjing, Shenzhen, and Shunde.

"During my travels to China with SoZo Group, I have seen first-hand the opportunities available for companies to locate and create jobs in the United States," said Schmitz. "This event is important not only for Dothan, but for the entire southeastern region. I believe this will be the foundation for building relationships and creating jobs for years to come."

The complex U.S.-China relationship has evolved since "ping-pong diplomacy" in 1972. But perceptions of the two countries about each other have not always kept up with that evolution. With new leadership, however, the time is right to reassess each other, learn from each other, and find areas of mutual interest. If you are interested in recruiting and creating jobs, doing business with China and understanding the latest in manufacturing advances, we all must challenge long held (and often learned) perceptions that no longer apply. To learn the latest information about the state of Chinese businesses, technology, and globalization efforts, you cannot afford to miss this important event.

Participants of the Symposium will enjoy the following benefits:

- Meet with leading Chinese company executives from clean energy, real estate, communication technology, advanced manufacturing, textile, industrial infrastructure and other industries.
- Discover which companies are considering U.S. investment and expansion.
- Learn from innovative communities already recruiting and winning Chinese projects.
- Meet with the most committed and innovative Chinese central and local government leaders.
- Coverage by international media at the event
- Free Chinese/English translation service on site
- Sit-down meetings with Chinese executives
- Pre-Symposium briefings
- U.S.-China Cultural Night

To register for the U.S.-China Manufacturing Symposium, please visit http://event.sozonet.com.

WATTS NEW IN
Luverne

"The Friendliest City" – Living up to its name

By Michael Rodgers and Regina Grayson

If you saw Cecelia Davis and Debbie Warren walking down the street together, you might not realize that the two women are best friends.

That is because their friendship goes much deeper than appearances – in fact, their friendship inspired Davis to write a children's book about friendship.

Both women attend Faith Walk Ministries, where the seed of their friendship was first planted in April 2010.

"One day, Debbie (Warren) was speaking at church about some difficult times she was experiencing, and this inspired me to want to get to know her better," Davis explained.

"She knew I needed a friend," Warren said. "I felt like I was disconnected from people. Cecelia really listened to my troubles, and it touched her heart."

It didn't take long for the friendship to bloom and grow, despite the two women's differences.

Warren is a life-long resident of Luverne, while Davis moved to Luverne all the way from Michigan just a few years ago.

And, from there, the rest is history, as they say. Davis wrote her children's book, "Debbie and Me," in 2011 based on this very close friendship between a "chocolate" friend and a "vanilla" friend, as Davis puts it in her book.

You see, Warren is disabled and has trouble seeing. But none of that matters to either woman.

"We just hit it off," Davis said. "She needed a friend, and I was just there at the time she needed me."

Debbie Warren, left, and Cecilia Davis, right, read Davis's book, "Debbie and Me," to a group of children. The two ladies talked about the importance of friendship and how true friendship goes much deeper than appearances.

While the two are different in many ways, both say they have quite a bit in common, including birthdays that are only five days apart.

"We are more alike than we are different," Davis said. "We have many of the same moral values."

Davis admits to people staring at the two friends when they are out together, but that doesn't stop either lady.

"When you read the story, you don't realize someone has a disability until the very last page," she said. "The point is that it doesn't matter about skin color or disability."

It only took Davis about 90 minutes to write the book.

"It just came to me out of nowhere," she said. "We need to get beyond our shallowness."

Davis thought this concept could be understood better through the eyes of a child.

Warren noted that when she found out about the book, she was just overwhelmed.

"I have never been an inspiration for anything," Warren said. "I cried when she read it to me."

When it came time to get the book published, everything just seemed to fall into place.

Neither woman had any experience with publishing a book, but Warren's cousin, Patti Valin Ward, did, so they gave her a call.

Ward loved the book so much, that she not only published it, but she also illustrated it.

It's just another fine example of true friendship in Luverne, AL, the "Friendliest City in the South."

For more information about purchasing a copy of the book, "Debbie and Me", please call Cecelia Davis at (334) 335-202, or write to P.O. Box 219, Rutledge, AL 36071. The cost of the book is $5 or $6.50 by mail with shipping and handling.

Michael Rodgers is the online content producer for The Gadsden Times and former managing editor of The Luverne Journal. Regina Grayson is assistant director of the Luverne Public Library and former managing editor of The Luverne Journal.

Opelika Power Services – Customer care is our #1 priority

By Jan Gunter

You might think that the launching of its new fiber service network within the City of Opelika, and expanding the services to include state of the art high speed Data (Internet), Video (TV) and Voice (Phone) services, Opelika Power Services (OPS) might be experiencing some "growing pains" which could cause some problems with delivering fast, efficient service to the community. But nothing could be further from the truth.

The OPS Team remains committed to providing excellent customer care to all of its customers. In fact, it is all about the customer experience, from the moment someone walks into the OPS office until the moment they leave the home, OPS wants all of its customers to know that they are important, and keeping their services up and running at its best, is the #1 priority.

Sometimes customer service is very noticeable, such as the smiling, friendly faces of customer representatives as they help customers with their billing for power or selecting the options that best suit their family's entertainment needs. Sometimes customer service happens behind the scenes, when procedures are put into place that deal with problems faced by the community. A prime example of this could be seen this winter when Opelika experienced below freezing temperatures, including ice and snow at the end of this past January. Normally, in the South, when wintery weather conditions such as this occurs, you can expect downed power lines and power outages. But OPS has, for the last three to four years, worked diligently at clearing trees and overgrown branches away from the power lines all over the city. The result in January was exactly what line crews had hoped for…no major outages anywhere for OPS customers and no calls out into the elements for linemen.

"When you think of customer service, this not only involves the Customer Service Department, but it goes beyond to the installation crews that come to your home," said June Owens, Manager of Marketing and Communications, OPS. "We want our customers to feel that OPS is the hometown company they can trust. After all, we have been here for more than 100 years. I believe that our most important asset is our customers."

While delivering outstanding customer service is something OPS employees talk about and work to achieve, the best proof of our achievement comes from our customers. One such customer is Lindsay Tan, who recently sent OPS Administration the following letter after making her switch to the new fiber services.

"Switching to Opelika Power Services is about more than just saving money. OPS has offered our family great hometown customer service from day one. Whether we call or stop by in person, OPS staff have always been ready and willing to help us with whatever we need. And every month when we pay our bill, it's a great feeling to know that the money is going right back into our community, where it belongs."

Since the addition of the new Video, Voice and Data services, which launched on Oct. 16, 2013, OPS has installed (as of this writing) close to 850 customers to the new services, with additional installations occurring between eight and 10 new installations every day.

People ask us why they should change to OPS? Here's why:

We are community-owned, local service and local investment.

We offer the fastest, most reliable Internet speeds in town.

We provide high quality video and crystal clear phone service.

Local Opelika programming exclusive on Community Network TV, OPS VuYou Channel 77.

Our commitment remains: Reliable, Responsive Service and Support.

Installers (L-R) Rusty Robinson, Gil Azambuja, Brad Burnette and Ryan Freeman.

WATTS NEW IN
Alexander City

Spring activities planned in Alexander city area

By Tracy Kendrick

Spring is on the way. These words are long overdue; especially considering a few months ago we were covered in snow. With a winter filled with rain, cold and snow, the need to venture outside is greater than ever. A rodeo, egg hunt and beauty pageant are just a few ways to enjoy spring.

The 8th Annual Lake Martin Area Rodeo will be held March 7 and 8. This action-packed event is sanctioned by the Professional Cowboy Association. The rodeo will be located at the Alex City Horse Riding Arena in the Charles E. Bailey Sportplex. The gates open at 5 p.m. and the show starts at 7 p.m. The admission price at the gate is $10 for adults and $5 for children. The rodeo will benefit the Tallapoosa County Relay for Life.

Alexander City's Community Wide Egg Hunt will be held April 12. This fun-filled morning will begin at 9 a.m. with face painting, bounce house and train rides. The egg hunt is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. All activities will take place at the Charles E. Bailey Sportplex.

The 5th Annual Alexander City Parks & Recreation Spring Beauty Pageant will be held on April 26 at the Charles E. Bailey Sportplex Gymnasium building. Girls, ages 0 to high school seniors, are invited to participate. Registration deadline is April 18. For more information, please call (256) 329-2910 or (256) 750-3652.

TO REPORT AN OUTAGE IN ALEXANDER CITY:
Day Time (256) 409-2080,
After Hours/Holidays – Call Police Dept. (256) 234-3421
Please do not call 911

WATTS NEW IN
Lanett

Summer work equates to winter preparedness

As Winter Storm 2014 wreaked havoc on the Southeast, Lanett residents were able to ride out the storm in warm homes due in large part to work performed in the summer of 2013.

In April 2013, Lanett Electrical Superintendent David DeLee and Street Department Supervisor Steve Crawley devised a plan called "Operation Preparation" in order to be ready for situations such as Winter Storm 2014.

During the summer and fall of 2013, city employees trimmed trees back away from power lines throughout the city. The fruits of their labor paid huge dividends for residents when the snow and ice came. DeLee reports no power outages in the city and credits "Operation Preparation" as the key. Mayor Oscar Crawley also credits DeLee's and Crawley's departments on the foresight and hard work they performed during the summer.

"We are fortunate to have department heads that work together for the betterment of our citizens," said Mayor Crawley.

Police Chief Angie Spates and Fire/EMS Chief Johnny Allen thank the citizens of Lanett for heeding the warnings of public officials and media to stay off the roads.

Spates reported few accidents associated with the storm, while Allen reported only a slight increase in non-emergency calls due in part to residents being understandably cautious of the road conditions.

Mayor Crawley said the initiative by the Electrical and Street Departments over the summer, along with Police and Fire/EMS readiness, helped Lanett residents weather the storm better than most communities.

"We are fortunate to have so many dedicated employees whose main priority is the safety of our citizens."

WATTS NEW IN
Sylacauga

Family services center selected for national initiative

By Emily McLain

Employees from SAFE Family Services Center are participating in a year-long, nationwide initiative to create an evidence-based model for substance abuse and prevention programs.

For more than 16 years, SAFE Family Services Center has provided individuals and families in Sylacauga with the right tools to build healthy relationships, advance their careers, become self-sufficient, and achieve a multitude of other goals through its varied programs.

Other communities across the state and nation could soon be following the same model used by SAFE thanks to a nationwide initiative called Service to Science.

One of 26 programs in the country selected by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SAFE will participate in the year-long study that tasks the nonprofit organization with evaluating its services to develop an evidence-based model for substance abuse prevention programs.

Several programs participating in the initiative focus specifically on preventing or reducing substance abuse by youth. However, others like SAFE provide family-centered programs that involve both young people and their parents, aiming to promote healthy youth development by teaching and demonstrating effective family management strategies.

"Such programs recognize the important influence of parents through adolescence in reducing substance abuse risk," said Service to Science chief Kim Dash in a press release. "They also recognize the potential of positive family experiences to buffer against external stressors and antisocial pressures on youth that are associated with substance abuse."

SAFE director Margaret Morton said everything SAFE does is prevention, but this initiative will allow it to specifically examine how its work prevents substance and mental health issues.

"The factors that influence substance abuse are same that influence every other choice in life," she said. "People can choose to be engaged early on in the community, in their family, in school, or they can engage in substance abuse and alcohol. We know, and research tells us, there must be certain factors to prevent from happening."

Service to Science will provide SAFE with training and technical assistance including online seminars, onsite consultations, peer networking and other tools to help it apply rigorous evaluation methods to its work, with the ultimate goal of increasing and diversifying the pool of evidence-based prevention programs available to programs across the nation.

"We already know there's not a thing we do that we don't have to select an evidence-based curriculum," Morton said. "This allows us to take the entire program model and create data that supports it."

SAFE will also connect with the Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers to share the information it learns through this initiative, Morton said, because "what we learn here is going to be used at all the other family resource centers so we have a statewide evidence-based model. It's really exciting."

SAFE was nominated for Service to Science by the Alabama Department of Mental Health and was selected by SAMHSA based on criteria including innovation in design, responsiveness to local needs, practical experience with populations served and readiness to engage in evaluation activities, Dash said.

SAFE offers more than 25 programs, serving a duplicated count of more than 25,000 each year. Morton said the organization could apply the work it will be doing through Service to Science to any type of prevention program and reach the same conclusion – that healthy families build healthy lives.

"If we can increase protection for children and families and decrease risk factors, the impact down the way is the reduction of substance abuse and mental illness," Morton said. "We could overlay this on virtually every other discipline, knowing that if you have a strong family and strong community, you're going to have positive outcomes across the board."

Emily McLain is a staff writer for The Daily Home in Sylacauga.

Places to Go & Things to Do

Alexander City

Wednesdays Story Time. 10:30 a.m. until 12 p.m. Mamie's Place Children's Library. Weekly story time begins at 10:30. All children welcome. For details, call (256) 234-4644.

Senior Activity Center. See all the senior activities planned for the month at http://www.acpr.me/senior-activity-center.php.

March 7 and 8, 8th Annual Lake Martin Area Rodeo. PCA Sanctioned Rodeo action. Alex City Horse Riding Arena located in the Charles E. Bailey Sportplex. Gates open at 5 p.m. Show starts at 7 p.m. Admission, $10 for adults and $5 for children. Call (256) 329-6736 for more information.

March 13 and April 10, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., RECYCLE Electronics. Public Works Department, behind Darwin Dobbs. Electronics recycling event, every second Thursday. CE&E Solutions will be accepting electronics for recycling and they are ADEM certified. Contact Sabrina Wood at (334) 429-8832 or Amanda Thomas at (256) 409-2020. Sponsored by the city of Alexander City and the Middle Tallapoosa Clean Water Partnership.

April 12, Community-Wide Easter Egg Hunt. Train rides, bouncy & face painting start at 9 a.m. and the egg hunt starts at 10 a.m.

April 26, 5th Annual Alexander City Parks & Recreation Spring Beauty Pageant. Charles E Bailey Sportplex Gymnasium Building. Girls, ages 0 - high school senior. For more info: (256) 329-2910 or (256) 750-3652.

Dothan

April 11 and 12, 9th Annual Tri-State BBQ Festival. Houston County Farm Center, Dothan. The event was started by the city to showcase our Southern heritage though BBQ, and has grown throughout the years to include concerts, shopping, food competitions, a Kids Cook, and one of the city's best car shows. Advance weekend passes just $10 at area Five Star Credit Unions or $10 per person per day at the gate. Info and schedule at www.TriStateBBQ.com, or call (334) 699-1475.

April 24-26, Toadlick Music Festival. Held each spring at the National Peanut Festival Fairgrounds. Featured this year will be Gary Allan, Merle Haggard, The Band Perry, Clay Walker, Joe Nichols, Colt Ford, Billy Currington, Aaron Lewis, Chase Rice, Jana Kramer, Gloriana, and Chase Rice. Tickets are $99 and available at www.toadlick.com. Children 12 and under, free.

Fairhope

May 2, 5:30-11 p.m., Under the Stars. Oak Hollow. Fifth annual signature fundraising event for CARE House (Baldwin County Child Advocacy Center). This will be a night of great entertainment with the in addition to fabulous food, silent auction, and live auction. High visibility will be given to this event in celebration of the 25th anniversary of CARE House. For more information, call (251) 937-2055 or (251) 989-2555.

Luverne

March 11, Luverne Public Library proudly presents "Agatha Christie Made Me Do It", a mystery/comedy by Eddie Cope. Luverne United Methodist Church Dei Center. It will be presented by the Lurleen B. Wallace Community College Drama Department. The Friends of the Library will host a Silent Auction at 5:30 p.m., followed by dinner at 6 p.m. Tickets are $25 each, and a table for eight is $175. For more information or if you would like to purchase tickets or reserve a table, please call the library at (334) 335-5326.

Opelika

March 22, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Ecycling & Document Shredding. Saugahatchee Square.

April 4, 5-8 p.m., "First Friday". Downtown Opelika.

April 12, 10 a.m., Cardboard Boat Race. Opelika Sportsplex.

April 17, 7:30 p.m., Flashlight Egg Hunt. Moore Stadium.

April 18, 6 p.m., Underwater Egg Hunt. Opelika Sportsplex.

April 19, 10 a.m., Easter on the Square. Courthouse Square.

Sylacauga

For the month of March, the Isabel Anderson Comer Museum will feature an abstract exhibition by Bryce Lafferty, art professor at JSU. A reception will be held on March 20, 6:30-8 p.m.

March 5, Final Lecture in the 2014 Winter Brown Bag Series. Sponsored by Southfirst Bank. Speaker Dolores Hydock, "Fools for Love: Cupid's Mischief Way Back When."

March 8, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Big Chil (1) – Chili Cook Off & Car Show. The fundraiser will benefit the Comer Museum. Teams and individuals are invited to compete for trophies. Further details are available at (256) 245-4016, Comer Museum.

March 29, 2nd Annual Blue Line Benefit – Bench Press & Deadlift Championships. J.C. Smith Community Center. Entry fee $20. Proceeds benefitting the Boys Club of Sylacauga.

For the month of April, the Isabel Anderson Comer Museum will host a sculptor exhibition as part of the Magic of Marble Festival. A reception will be held on April 17, 6:30-8 p.m.

April 5, "Market Day." The Isabell Anderson Comer Museum. The museum will host a yard sale, and the public is invited to rent space for their own yard sale.

April 8-19, The Magic of Marble Festival. Sponsored by Nemak and the Sylacauga Arts Council. Various activities will be offered during that period, including sculptors at work, marble displays featured, "Marble Mania" scavenger hunt, marble quarry tours, "Taste of Sylacauga", Nemak 5K Run & 1 Mile Fun Run, etc.

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WATTS NEW AT
Riviera Utilities

Langston receives Riviera Utilities' 2013 Employee of the Year Award

By Miles McDaniel

Riviera Utilities (RU) proudly recognizes Sarah Langston, Administrative Assistant for Gas, Water, & Wastewater, as the organization's 2013 Employee of the Year. The award, RU's highest honor, salutes employees who embody the best of what Riviera Utilities represents.

At Riviera Utilities, it is our vision to be a recognized leader providing exceptional value to customers, employees and community.

Langston came to Riviera Utilities in December 2007. She has set a positive example by providing leadership, professionalism, and a strong work ethic. Langston is a leader in her department and her work is described as meticulous and timely.

Langston

Every year, the utility honors an employee who demonstrates enthusiasm and commitment, excels in professionalism, and takes the initiative to perform beyond the expectations of regular work assignments.

Langston is highly committed to her job and Riviera Utilities' customers. Her job responsibilities include assisting the department manager and supervisors, as well as department employees, in the day-to-day operations of the department. She enjoys exercising her artistic side by creating fliers, brochures, labels, Power Point presentations, etc., for various projects. She often goes out of her way to help departments across the board and serve on various committees.

Langston demonstrates leadership and poise when interacting with others. She is an asset to Riviera Utilities.

We are extremely honored to have such a dedicated employee as our 2013 Employee of the Year.