

Arkansas Icons

**Johnny Cash, Daisy Bates to
join National Statuary Hall**

Page 8

Plus:

Arkansas Blackberries

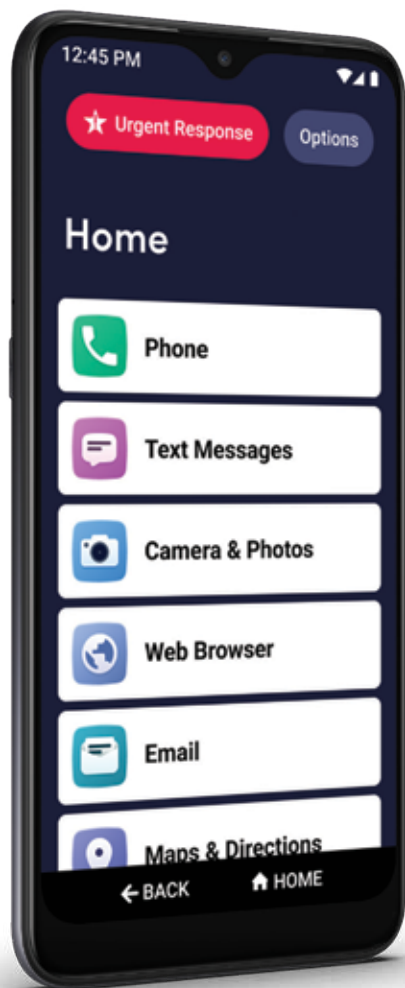
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Standing next to his statue of Johnny Cash, artist Kevin Kresse of Little Rock shows the scale of his 8-foot work.

*Photo by University of Arkansas at Little Rock/
Benjamin Krain*

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The heart of the matter

BY JENNIFER CHRISTMAN CIA

Valentine's Day was several months ago, still the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas remain very focused on hearts.

Employees recently raised more than \$4,700 for the American Heart Association (AHA). Despite a "heart-y" rainstorm on April 29 that led to the 2023 AHA Heart Walk's cancellation, a group of employees was set to wear team T-shirts and participate in memory of Chad Reed, a colleague who recently passed away.

In May, I was blessed to attend the AHA's 2023 Central Arkansas Go Red for Women luncheon, where warrior women — inspirational survivors of different ages and races — shared their stories to raise awareness of heart disease, the No. 1 killer of both men and women in America.

Here is information from the AHA that everyone should know:

Heart Attack Symptoms

Don't wait to get help if you experience any heart attack warning signs. Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but others start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Pay attention to your body, and call 911 if you experience:

- Uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain in the center of your chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back.
- Pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- Shortness of breath, with or without chest discomfort.
- Other signs such as breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is



Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas employees wear their hearts on their sleeves — and their Heart Walk team T-shirts.

chest pain or discomfort. But women may experience other symptoms that are typically less associated with heart attack, such as shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting and back or jaw pain.

While some heart attack risks, like age and family history, cannot be changed, others can. The AHA identifies smoking/vaping, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity, obesity/being overweight, diabetes, stress, lack of sleep, alcohol and diet/nutrition as factors that we have a role in managing.

And the June issue is here to help you get started! Enjoy some nutritious Arkansas blackberries (page 14) and tomatoes (page 24). Visit any of our 52 amazing Arkansas State Parks (page 18). De-stress by doing the Crossword Puzzle (page 38) or attend fun events in our Calendar (page 42).

Have a happy, healthy start to summer!

Jennifer
Jennifer Christman Cia
jennifer.cia@aeci.com

Strawberry fields forever

BY VERNON "BUDDY" HASTEN

President and CEO of Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc., and Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation



On May 6, I went to Holland Bottom Farm in First Electric Cooperative territory in Cabot and bought six flats of strawberries. We ate one, gave one away, and made 24 pints of jam with the rest. When I popped a delicious strawberry

into my mouth, it was like entering a time machine and traveling back to 1982. I have picked and eaten a lot of strawberries, and before May 6, I thought the best strawberries were from the sandy river bottoms in Montrose, Iowa, however, I must say that Holland Bottom Farm strawberries are equally good and maybe just a shade sweeter. Holland Bottom Farm strawberries are worth waiting in line for, and they are the inspiration for this month's column.

John Lennon wrote the song "Strawberry Fields Forever" in 1967, a year before I was born. Strawberry Field was a Salvation Army children's home in Liverpool, England, and Lennon would sneak off to play in the orphanage's gardens. My strawberry fields were quite literally strawberry fields, and like Lennon, I, too, have many fond memories. I started working in my first strawberry field when I was 12 years old, picking fruit for 25 cents a quart. I worked for a great man named Aaron Becker who was 83 years old and ran a small roadside fruit-and-vegetable stand. I knew Mr. Becker from church, and he offered me a summer job picking strawberries. I would ride my bike 3 miles to his farm early in the morning, and I would pick as many strawberries as I could before it got too hot. Often, he would keep me on after for other farm work, and he paid me \$3 an hour. Riding my bike home with a pocket full of money was always a great feeling.

I worked for him the next summer, but by the time I was 14, it was recommended that I try to get a job at a much larger strawberry field in Montrose, Christensen Farms, which was owned by Guerden and Sadie Christensen. I called and asked if I could work as full-time summer help but was informed that they only employed kids ages 16 and older for full-time work. Even though I wasn't offered a full-time position, I was offered a chance to pick strawberries

for the same 25 cents a quart, and a larger field meant more quarts, so I said yes. Montrose was a bit too far for my bike, so my dad, a mailman, drove me there early in the morning and picked me up after work.

I hit the field running and picked as fast as I could, and it wasn't long before I was picking faster than everyone else. I also drew the attention of an older lady who was picking strawberries. I could see that she was keeping her eye on me. It appeared as if the two of us were having an informal



Strawberries from Cabot's Holland Bottom Farm bring back meaningful memories of summers spent berry picking.

competition to see who could pick the most. The faster I went, the faster she went, and if I jogged to the truck with my flats full of strawberries to get new empty ones, I noted that she was hustling too. By the end of the morning, I was worn out and had picked a lot of strawberries. As we were cashing out, I asked the foreman, Gary, who that lady was. He laughed and said, "Young man, you have just met Sadie, and she owns this place."

My dad didn't get off work until 4:30 p.m. and had a 30-minute drive to come get me, so I had a lot of time on my hands. I had packed a lunch and brought a Louis L'Amour novel to read. I set up on a picnic bench on the farm in the shade, and right after lunch, I heard Sadie asking for some help putting a new liner in a small duck pond. All the workers were too busy to help since they had more pressing farm work to do. I put my book away and began pulling the old liner out; I went up and knocked on

COURTESY OF VERNON "BUDDY" HASTEN

Co-op representatives attend Legislative Conference

More than 2,000 representatives from electric cooperatives across the United States participated in the 2023 Legislative Conference of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) from April 16-19 in Washington, D.C.



Representatives from Arkansas' electric cooperatives meet with the Arkansas congressional delegation at the NRECA Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C.

The primary focus of messages to the Arkansas congressional delegation was maintaining reliable electricity for the American people.

"Affordable and reliable electricity is an issue of growing concern among members of NRECA," said NRECA President Jim Matheson. "American families and businesses expect the lights to come on whenever they flip the switch, and we're concerned that the reliability of the grid is at great risk."

He pointed to rolling blackouts that took place in nine states last December as evidence of "a stressed grid."

The Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas group met with the Arkansas congressional delegation: Sen. John Boozman, Sen. Tom Cotton, Rep. Rick Crawford, Rep. French Hill, Rep. Bruce Westerman and Rep. Steve Womack.

During sessions with officials, electric cooperative leaders discussed five major issues that impact reliability with policymakers. The issues were the growing demand for electricity as other sectors of the economy are electrified; decreasing electricity supply due to the retirement and insufficient replacement of existing power generation

facilities; supply chain challenges; permitting delays that prevent new electric infrastructure from being built; and ongoing issues with natural gas availability.

Recent reports by the North American Electric Reliability Corp. (NERC) underscore the risks to electric reliability, Matheson said. NERC warned last year that the U.S. is experiencing a "disorderly retirement" of older electric generating plants without replacement power coming online fast enough to meet growing demand.

"Demand is going up, and supply is going down — and that's not a good trend if you want to maintain system reliability," Matheson said.

In addition to advocating for attention to reliability issues, electric cooperative leaders pushed for robust funding for rural broadband and rural development in the new five-year Farm Bill that Congress is considering.

The bill is likely to include funding for the Department of Agriculture's ReConnect Program, which provides loans and grants to electric cooperatives and other groups to provide high-speed internet service to rural communities.

STRAWBERRY continued from page 5

the door and offered to help her put in the new one. We worked that afternoon and got the new liner in. She invited me into her kitchen and offered me some pie, and we had a great conversation. I told her that, although I was too young to work there full time, I was grateful to pick strawberries. My dad picked me up, and we went straight home to do our farm chores. That night, the phone rang, and my dad answered; he spoke for just a few minutes, and then I heard him say, "No problem, he will be there in the morning." My dad turned to me and said that I must have done something right because that was Christensen Farms, and they would make an exception to their ages 16 and older policy. I was hired full time.

I can't tell you how great a day that was. Minimum wage was \$3.35 per hour; they paid \$4 per hour, and they also worked six days a week. This represented enormous opportunity for me, and to this day, I remain thankful to

the Christensen family who truly treated me like family: Guerden Sr. and his wife, Sadie; their son, Guerden Jr., and wife, Carol; their son, Tim, and wife, Tammy (disclosure, she is my dad's niece, and I am sure she put in a good word for me); their daughter, Nancy, and husband, Gary. My first boss, Ryan Christensen, was a great leader and later became an even better friend, and his brother, Mark, became one of my best friends. I have so many memories and learned so much during those years. This foundation led to opportunities I have today.

I recently watched late-night television hosts mock Arkansas for our new law that makes it easier for 14- and 15-year-old kids get jobs. My life experience would indicate that the joke is on them. Some of the best things that ever happened to me as a kid were getting a job, making money and learning the value of hard work and teamwork at Christensen Farms.

Sen. Boozman honored with Distinguished Service Award

Arkansas Sen. John Boozman recently received the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's (NRECA) Distinguished Service Award, which honors members of Congress who make essential contributions to electric co-ops and the communities they serve.



Arkansas Sen. John Boozman displays NRECA's Distinguished Service Award, which he recently received.

"Sen. John Boozman, an electric cooperative member, has been a friend to the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas throughout his years in public service," said Vernon "Buddy" Hasten, president and CEO of the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas. "Sen. Boozman's dedication as an advocate for Arkansans clearly aligns with the mission of our state's electric cooperatives."

Boozman, the ranking member of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, said he is hopeful that Congress will be able to pass one of NRECA's top legislative priorities this year: a new five-year Farm Bill that includes full funding for rural economic development and broadband programs.

Where Is It?

Welcome back to our hidden object game, "Where Is It?"

Last month, we hid maracas for Cinco de Mayo.

Joked one correct reader who discovered it in the hot air balloon photo in our Around Arkansas Calendar: "Is 'Cinco de Mayo maracas' Spanish for 'tiny balloons?' That is what they look like next to the big balloon over Russellville picture on page 42."

In a random drawing of correct answers, the following five winners were selected to receive Arkansas Living tumblers:

Joanne and Steve Ciccotto, Bella Vista (Carroll Electric Cooperative)

Vonda Dozier, McCrory (Woodruff Electric Cooperative)

Ladonna Hodge, Camden (Ouachita Electric Cooperative)

Jeff Tinsley, Center Ridge (Petit Jean Electric Cooperative)

Tammy Harmon, Farmington (Ozarks Electric Cooperative)

In this issue, in honor of Johnny Cash joining the National Statuary Hall Collection, we've hidden this guitar pick. Good luck, and don't fret it!

Enter via the "Where Is It?" link on the homepage of arkansaslivingmagazine.com, or go directly to arkansaslivingmagazine.com/contest-where-is-it/.



Or, mail in entries to:

Where Is It?

Arkansas Living

P.O. Box 510

Little Rock, AR 72203

(We cannot accept entries by email or social media.)

Entries must be received by June 15*. Include your name, address and electric co-op (if applicable; nonmembers also are eligible), plus the correct page number.

* Due to postal delays, some readers don't always receive their magazines in time to enter. If your magazine arrives after the deadline, submit your entry by the 15th of the following month. We'll send a prize to a randomly selected latecomer! April's winner was: **Ryan Luttmer, Mena (Rich Mountain Electric Cooperative).**

- Strawberry soda is a traditional drink to celebrate Juneteenth. The red color symbolizes the slaves' struggle for freedom.
- At 42 inches tall, Arkansas native Edmond Ansley was the representative for Buster Brown Shoes. Dressed to resemble the comic strip character in a wig, short pants and patent leather shoes, he made appearances for 28 years.
- Volvo engineer Nils Bohlin invented the cross-strap safety belt in 1959. The Swedish car company patented the design and gifted it to competitors to encourage mass adoption and save lives.



Engineering students from Purdue University, the University of Michigan and Bellarmine University conducted scientific studies to determine the number of licks it takes to reach the Tootsie Roll center of a Tootsie Pop. The conclusion was a wide range of results, so the world may still never know.

- Eggplants are botanically classified as fruits, berries to be exact.
- Guitarist Eddie Van Halen asked singer Daryl Hall of Hall & Oates to replace David Lee Roth in the rock group Van Halen.
- Father's Day wasn't officially recognized as a national holiday until 1972.
- Hedgehogs, crocodiles and lemurs estivate or sleep through the summer, rather than hibernate in the winter.
- "With gratitude, optimism becomes sustainable." — Michael J. Fox, actor and activist.



Arkansas Icons

Johnny Cash, Daisy Gatson Bates to join National Statuary Hall Collection

BY JENNIFER CHRISTMAN CIA

The Man in Black is becoming the Man in Bronze. And the only female activist to speak at the 1963 March on Washington will be taking up residence there permanently.

Mr. Cash and Mrs. Bates are going to Washington.

Likenesses of music icon Johnny Cash and civil rights pioneer Daisy Gatson Bates will soon represent Arkansas in the U.S. Capitol National Statuary Hall Collection. Their installation and dedication could take place later this year or next year.

Daily, thousands of tourists from around the world view the collection of 100 statues — two contributed by all 50 states — displayed in National Statuary Hall, as well as other designated areas of the Capitol, as the collection has outgrown the hall.

For more than 100 years, Arkansas has been represented by marble statues of Uriah Milton Rose, a prominent Little Rock attorney and the namesake of the Rose Law Firm, and U.S. Sen. James Paul Clarke. Four years ago, the Arkansas General Assembly began discussing a change.

By law, Statuary Hall honorees must be deceased state citizens who were “illustrious for their historic renown or for distinguished civic or military services such as each State may deem to be worthy of this national commemoration.”

State bills were filed in 2019 to

LEFT Little Rock artist Kevin Kresse has depicted Johnny Cash holding a Bible in his right hand and a guitar strapped to his back.



UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK/BENJAMIN KRAIN

replace the statues with both Bates and Cash. There was seemingly no opposition to Bates, the Huttig native who became a civil rights activist, journalist and mentor to the Little Rock Nine during the Little Rock Desegregation Crisis. But Cash, the Kingsland-born performer with an outlaw image, was more controversial, says Shane Broadway, Arkansas' National Statuary Hall Steering Committee chairman.

"Daisy Bates was never really talked about; that was kind of a slam-dunk," Broadway says. "There were some (lawmakers) concerned about Johnny's past. But there were members who talked about how he had redeemed himself, had come back to the Lord, had gone away from the sins of his past and is a worldwide recognized figure in every hall of fame that exists in music."

Eventually, the votes were there, and then-Gov. Asa Hutchinson signed Act 1068 of 2019 to replace the current statues with likenesses of Cash and Bates.

"This is an extraordinary moment recognizing the contributions of two incredible Arkansans. We want our memories, through our statues, to tell the story of Arkansas," Hutchinson was quoted as saying at the signing, surrounded by family and friends of Cash and Bates. "I believe our story is well-represented by these two historic figures."

Taking shape

Arkansas' National Statuary Hall Steering Committee was formed to work with the Capitol Arts and Grounds Commission, chaired by Secretary of State John Thurston, and the governor's office on everything from fundraising to selecting sculptors. Broadway, a former state legislator and current vice president for university relations for the Arkansas State University (ASU) System, ➤

RIGHT Artist Benjamin Victor of Idaho poses with his statue of civil rights activist Daisy Gatson Bates.



COURTESY OF BENJAMIN VICTOR



Kevin Kresse focuses on the legs of the iconic Arkansan who sang "I Walk the Line."

was a natural fit for the committee, as the university owns the restored Johnny Cash Boyhood Home at Historic Dyess Colony (the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas has been a sponsor) and keeps in close contact with the Cash family.

After the committee issued a request for qualifications, Broadway says, "We had talented artists from all around the country — over 30 for each statue."

After studying proposals and portfolios and conducting virtual interviews, the committee narrowed it down to three finalists per statue; all had created a maquette or small model of their proposal, and prepared a presentation.

"Their presentations really sold it for both of them," Broadway says about the artists chosen. "The artist doing Daisy Bates is Benjamin Victor" of Boise, Idaho. "He's the youngest artist to have a statue in Statuary Hall. And he is the artist who has the most statues in Statuary Hall; this will be his fourth."

Selected for the Cash statue was Kevin Kresse of Little Rock.

"Obviously all of us had hoped there would be an Arkansan who would get one of the two, but it was not a guarantee," Broadway says. "We weren't going to just pick an Arkansas artist just to pick one. ... Kevin really nailed his presentation." It started with Kresse coming in with his



The final six artists competing for the rights to create Arkansas' statues submitted small models called maquettes.

maquette under a sheet and discussing his vision. "When he unveiled the maquette, we all looked at each other, like, 'There's no doubt that's Johnny Cash.'"

Beyond what the committee wants, Broadway says, every detail requires approval from the Architect of the U.S. Capitol, which oversees Statuary Hall, and the Joint Committee on the Library, which includes members of Congress. ➤

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Early learning happens through play and positive interactions.

Written by Kelli Hilburn, Better Beginnings Program Administrator

Better Beginnings is the Arkansas tiered quality rating and improvement system for child care, early childhood education and school-age programs.

Better Beginnings' star rating system helps simplify choosing a child care program for families. The more stars, the higher the quality learning environment.

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Better Beginnings is administered by the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education.



better beginnings

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They would have concerns (like the tuning keys on Cash's guitar being too low to the ground and encouraging tinkering by handsy visitors) that needed addressing. Those steps, plus realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, slowed the project at times. Still, the processes ensure the statues' excellence and endurance so these life-size works will last a lifetime.

Thurston says, "I'm incredibly proud and thankful of everyone, members of my staff, the members of the steering committee, the Capitol Arts and Grounds Commission and the artists themselves, for all the time, energy and dedication they have invested in this historical process."

Kevin on Cash

On a January morning, Little Rock artist Kevin Kresse is making a road trip with Johnny Cash. Not with the singer's music but with his 8-foot likeness that Kresse painstakingly spent more than a year sculpting. The two are headed for the Crucible Bronze Foundry in Norman, Oklahoma, for Cash's casting. While Cash was always known for country, gospel and rock, today he's going for heavy metal.

Since Kresse's selection to create the Cash statue, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock alum has been researching, working, fine-tuning and seeking feedback from those closest to Cash — the first musician to be featured in Statuary Hall.

"His kids have been very helpful," Kresse says. "No one obviously knew him better than his family. ... They were the perfect companions to work on this with me."

The statue of Cash, featuring a Bible in his right hand and a guitar strapped to his back, has been finished and ready for casting for several months. In December 2022, Kresse got the long-awaited approval from Washington, D.C.

Finally having that confirmation, Kresse says, "is a little surreal just because it's something I've been thinking about for so long. ... It's exciting because I feel good about the piece. No one's more critical of your work than you are yourself. ... When you step away from the piece for a while, you come in as more of an objective observer, almost like you didn't do the piece. I was happy with it. It's saying what I wanted it to say — what I had in my head originally about what I wanted for the emotional feel of the piece."

Essential to Kresse was capturing Cash's authenticity.

"I really see him as a hero of the everyday person



ALL PHOTO THIS PAGE COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK/BENJAMIN KRAHN



ABOVE Sculptor Kevin Kresse describes Johnny Cash as "a hero of the everyday person."

LEFT Johnny Cash will be National Statuary Hall's first musician.

because I think he was so honest," Kresse says. "I do a lot of research on the people I sculpt, and the nice thing about him, especially being from Arkansas, was throughout the process, people come up to me and might have a Johnny Cash story. All the stories, all the stones I've uncovered through my research and conversation, have been stories of generosity and kindness that no one ever knew about."

"For me, it's important that if I'm going to be spending two or three years with someone that I respect him, because you're giving a lot of your life over to this person. And I like him. My love and respect for him has just grown throughout this whole process."

Benjamin on Bates

Benjamin Victor is the only living sculptor to have three statues — soon to be a fourth — in National Statuary Hall. (His others include Native American author and activist Sarah Winnemucca of Nevada; agronomist Norman Borlaug of Iowa; and Native American civil rights leader Chief Standing Bear of Nebraska.)

He says the thrill has never gotten old.

"Each time I just think, 'This could be my last time there,'" he says. "Even on the first one, I just thought, 'I may never get to do this again. This is incredible!' You're next to all the greats of figure sculpture. It's an honor. ... Each time, I'm floored, and I'm humbled by it."

Victor says he "couldn't be more pleased" to be selected to do the sculpture of Bates, the second Black woman in Statuary Hall.

"She was just so courageous. And she changed the course of U.S. history, perhaps even world history, because there was a ripple effect from everything that happened in Little Rock. I think she's the perfect candidate for Statuary Hall because ... she was amazing during her lifetime. She was the only woman to give an official speech at the 1963 March on Washington along with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and she held leadership positions for the NAACP. In fact, Dr. King and Thurgood Marshall even visited her home in Little Rock," Victor says, referring to Bates' home that is now a national historic site and open to the public for tours. "She was an incredible icon of the civil rights movement and yet not a household name. ... This project is going to change that."

"She'll be in the National Statuary Hall where millions of people who visit the U.S. Capitol will learn about her role in the civil rights movement. It's very gratifying as an artist to get to do something like that and honor someone like Daisy."

His sculpture of a smiling Bates features her dressed in a business suit with a notepad and pen in her right hand and her newspaper, the Arkansas State Press, cradled in her left arm.

Victor explains, "She was a journalist and a publisher and business leader. Those things weren't easy to be as a Black woman in the 1950s. ... All of that comes together in a dynamic sculpture. She's striding forward because she was an activist, and she led the way."

State of the statues

Four years from the project's beginning, both statues, and their pedestals, are just about ready to make their public appearance.

Broadway says, "I think everybody is going to be excited to see them and very pleased with how these artists have depicted both of these figures in Arkansas history who made such significant contributions."

As for when Bates and Cash will make their D.C. debut, that's still undecided, Broadway says. Maybe the end of 2023. Maybe in 2024. That's up to the Speaker of the House's office.

"It's been an amazing process," Broadway says. And the entire process has been documented in a special for Arkansas PBS that will air at a future time.

Thurston says, "Arkansas is a proud state, and I feel that Johnny Cash and Daisy Gatson Bates represent the best values we hold dear. I'm excited for them to take their places alongside the other great Americans represented in Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol." ■



TOP From left: Charles King, Rev. C. E. McAdoo, Janis Kearney and Mary Louise Williams see an early version of Daisy Gatson Bates, as sculpted by Benjamin Victor (right), at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in April 2022. King, McAdoo and Williams are Daisy Bates House Board members; author Kearney was Bates' biographer.

MIDDLE Daisy Gatson Bates mingles with other creations in Benjamin Victor's Idaho studio. She will be the fourth statue by Victor on display at the U.S. Capitol.

LEFT Historical photos were used as inspiration for the artist.

ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE COURTESY OF BENJAMIN VICTOR



A vine time for blackberries

University of Arkansas advancements sweeten summer fruit



BY KAT ROBINSON

I grew up being allowed to roam free in rural Arkansas forests in the summer. The woods were a bountiful place, and where there were breaks in the glade, you could find blackberry vines in thick tangles, stretching for yards along the edges of ditches or old lumber roads.

Come June, those vines would be covered in berries, slowly turning green to red to dark purple. When enough berries had darkened, long sleeves were put on, Vaseline was rubbed around ankles and wrists, socks were tucked into pants, and broad hats were donned. Pickle buckets were taken to the brambles, and I'd wade in, using my feet to press down vines from waist high underfoot, so I could get into where berries had not yet been reached by the deer.

I know some folks used gloves, but I'd be in there with my bare hands, gently cupping each berry as I pulled, leaving behind the ones that didn't immediately fall into my palm, because those weren't ready yet. There would be those that popped their drupelets at first touch. There were always thorns, so I worked slowly to keep from pulling tracks across my skin. By the time I reached my first half-a-bucket, there would be bits of thorny vine in my clothes and hair.

Some days, I brought a transistor radio, left on the flat away from the vine, tossing tinny tunes into the

air and providing rhythm as I picked. Or I'd work at my own pace, grasping as many berries into the palm of my hand as I could before I pulled my arm out and let them thunk into the bucket. I never got more than 2 gallons in before I had to break away, walk out and reassess. Blackberry picking was hard work.

At day's end, berries would be carefully washed, gently shaken with water over the top, leaves discarded, green berries plucked out, good berries scooped into a waiting strainer over a bowl. Most would go into square Tupperware and be placed into the freezer. Some days, they might go straight to a pot to be boiled down into jelly or jam. Whatever was left over was served with Eagle brand sweetened condensed milk, consumed after the usual lye soap bath to ensure the ticks and chiggers were off. Sitting in a loose T-shirt and shorts, near the window air conditioner, hair still wet, the berries in the milk were such a sweet and wonderful treat.

At most, those wild berries were the size of the end joint of your thumb and full of seeds, and that's if you got to them before deer and other critters. I could not have imagined that day, being able to pick blackberries without thorns, or finding berries bigger than my thumb. But they exist, thanks to the University of Arkansas. ➤

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Fruitful developments

For decades, researchers at the university's Fruit Research Station in Clarksville have created new cultivars of blackberries, such as the sweet Cherokee in 1974. While this variety still had thorns, its berries were juicier and sweeter than their wild cousins. Blackberries produced in those early years were still floricane, meaning the vines had to have grown the year before and wintered before producing the next. In 2004, new varieties such as Prime-Jim and Prime-Jan were released — primocanes that could be planted and produce berries in the same year.

Over time, the berries were produced to be larger with bigger yields. Thornless varieties were cultivated and patented. Today, you'll find cultivars such as the Prime-Ark Traveler, a thornless primocane blackberry that's larger than a quarter, easy to pick and rather sweet. Farmers across the state, and even as far away as South America, are growing these delectable drupelets, sometimes on new-fangled setups

where entire rows of blackberries can be pulled gently to the ground to be covered when late frosts come into the forecast. These varieties can often produce a second crop, popping up flowers in late summer for another round of berries before the first frost of fall.

Still, there are roadside patches and brambles at woods' edges where you'll discover berries growing wild across Arkansas. I have picked alongside highways in Faulkner County, in backwoods near Alread and under the U.S. 82 bridge outside of Lake Village.

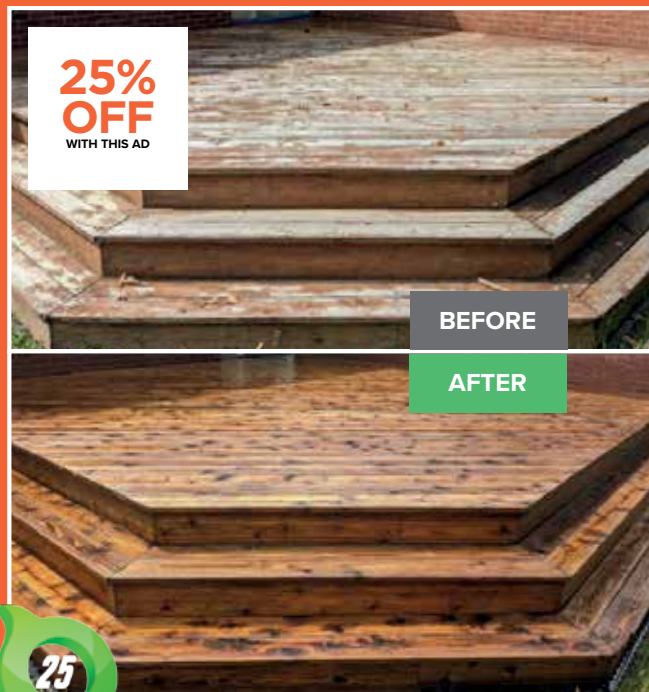
Purple smears on the palm after harvesting the berries always means something delectable, whether it's tucking fresh berries into a cobbler or pie, making jam to spread on biscuits, or just plucking them from a bush while out hiking. They are tart yet sweet reminders of all of Arkansas' natural bounty.

Kat Robinson, author and Arkansas food historian, just released her 12th book, The Great Arkansas Pie Book, available via local and nationwide retailers. ■

Find a tasty blackberry recipe on page 33!



Thanks to Arkansas research developments, blackberries are now larger, sweeter and come in more varieties.



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Quite a hike

Arkansas State Parks celebrate centennial

BY JACK SCHNEDLER

Back a century ago, when Arkansas established its first state park, driving to a mountain-top location for a day of pleasure lay beyond the reach of most families.

Only 110,000 motor vehicles (one-ninth of today's total) were registered in Arkansas in 1923, the year that the General Assembly voted to create Petit Jean State Park in Morrilton. In 2023, as the highly regarded system celebrates its centennial, Arkansas operates 52 state parks. At least one is within an hour's drive of every home in the state.

Pioneering Petit Jean is still the most visited, according to Shea Lewis, director of Arkansas State Parks. In total, the parks counted about 8.9 million visitors last year, with Mount Magazine (Paris) ranking second in popularity. Next came Pinnacle Mountain (Roland), DeGray Lake Resort (Bismarck) and Devil's Den (Winslow).

While ranking as the oldest and most visited state park, Petit Jean has the newest visitor center. The exhibit-rich 17,000-square-foot facility, opened in May 2021, is named for Dr. T.W. Hardison, whose life-size bronze statue stands outside the entrance. He was a country physician who spearheaded creation of the park, named for a legendary French maiden said to have dressed as a boy to accompany her beloved sailor to America.

Maintenance and memories

Much of the center's \$7 million cost came from the

Amendment 75 Conservation Fund, a one-eighth of 1% general sales tax passed by voters in 1996 for state parks and similar purposes.

"We are very fortunate in Arkansas to have funding through Amendment 75," says Mike Mills, secretary of the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage & Tourism, which oversees the parks system.

"This taxpayer support allows us to be in the forever business and offer free admission to all 52 parks. Most state parks elsewhere don't have such backing, which allows us to maintain our parks properly and fund new projects."

Thanks mainly to the taxpayer funding, four new visitor centers have opened in the last half-dozen years. Along with Petit Jean, they are located at Davidsonville Historic (Pocahontas), Logoly (Magnolia) and Woolly Hollow (Greenbrier). A new center is being built to open later this year at Pinnacle Mountain. For Devil's Den, a new center is under design.

"We have many visitors who are regular guests who share lifetime memories made at state parks and tell us how they are passing those family traditions from generation to generation," Lewis says. "First-time visitors are often surprised by how nice our parks are, as well as by the number of interpretive programs and events, and the fact that entry is free."

Biking, hiking, history

The focus of parks is roughly split among scenic, recreational and historic themes — including prehistoric at three sites: Hampson (Wilson); Parkin in the city with the same name; and the recently renamed Plum Bayou, formerly Toltec Mounds (Scott). Some locations serve two or all three of those aims.

It took several decades for the parks system to begin the rapid expansion that benefits visitors today. At the end of World War II in 1945, just five of the present parks existed.



Arkansas State Parks Passports, available at visitor centers, can be stamped at all locations and earn visitors rewards like stickers, playing cards and T-shirts.



Petit Jean State Park's visitor center and a bronze statue outside it honor Dr. T.W. Hardison, founder of the park and park system.

Arkansas State Parks by the numbers

1,800	total number of campsites
471	miles of trails
208	number of cabins
214	number of lodge rooms
27	parks have at least one lake
28	qualify as historic sites
13	have mountain-bike trails
11	have beaches
10	have marinas
6	have swimming pools
4	have tennis courts

Besides Petit Jean, they were Mount Nebo (1928, Dardanelle), Devil's Den (1933), Lake Catherine (1935, Hot Springs) and Crowley's Ridge (1937, Paragould).

Development began booming in the 1950s, when nine new parks were dedicated. In the 1960s, another 12 opened, many built around lakes created by Army Corps of Engineers dams. The biggest surge came in the 1970s, with the arrival of 15 more parks. Since 1980, another 11 have been added. No more are on the drawing board.

Mississippi River State Park (Marianna), which opened in 2009, is the newest unit of the park system.

Happy trails

Centennial celebrations are planned at Petit Jean and other parks this year. Visitors can earn Club 52 rewards by getting their parks passport stamped wherever they stop. Also set is a program for earning rewards by doing 100 hours of volunteer service.

Favorite memories of visits to state parks can be posted for sharing at an online video gallery. The website, which contains a variety of details on the 100th anniversary, is ArkansasStateParks.com/centennial. ■

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Take charge of charging habits

Four things to know about extending rechargeable battery life

BY PAUL WESSLUND

Many of us are so connected to our phones, tablets and laptops that we panic when their battery nears the dreaded 0% mark.

We want our device batteries to perform well for as long as possible. But taking care of them can conflict with why we have our electronics in the first place.

If you ever find yourself fretting over your device's power levels, here are a few tips on striking the right balance between battery health and how you work and play.

1. Keep your battery 20% to 80% charged

There's a lot of reasonable advice around the internet to keep your phone charged between 20% and 80%. To understand those recommendations it helps to understand how rechargeable batteries work.

Up until about 20 years ago, batteries benefitted from occasional "deep discharges" or running the battery down until the device shuts off. But because of different materials used in batteries today, that's not true anymore.

Rechargeable batteries work by containing two different materials that produce electricity when particles flow from one to the other. They flow the other direction when being recharged. That process will degrade any battery over time. Keeping both sides of the battery in balance, with the device charged at about 50%, will put the least amount of stress on the battery and make it last longer.

But that's unrealistic — no one's going to keep their phone half-charged all the time. So, the experts try to make it easier by recommending 20% to 80%. Apple devices offer even more flexibility, pointing out that modern rechargeable batteries are designed to last for years under a variety of ways you use them. They recommend rather than worrying about the battery, just focus on using and enjoying your device.

2. Overnight charging can add stress to some batteries

Charging your device up to 100% or letting it drain to 0% until it shuts down does put extra stress on the battery and can shorten its life. That's why it can make sense to charge your devices occasionally throughout the day rather than keeping them plugged in while you sleep. Newer electronics will actually stop charging at 100%. But then each time the charge drops to 99%, charging will resume.

3. Keep it cool, but not cold

One absolute in battery care is don't let your device get



To protect devices and their battery life, keep them from overheating, especially during summer months.

Charging your device up to 100% or letting it drain to 0% until it shuts down puts extra stress on the battery and can shorten its life.

warmer than 95 degrees. Keep it out of the sun, especially during summer months, and never leave it in a hot vehicle. If the device gets hot, don't go to the other extreme and put it in the freezer. Just place it in the shade or take the cover off for a while.

4. Use less power

It sounds simple, but one of the easiest ways to put less stress on the battery is to use less power. You can close energy-draining apps and functions when you're not using them, and you can activate energy-saving settings, like putting the device to sleep sooner. Another easy way to reduce battery use is to activate the "airplane mode" occasionally.

If you're the kind of person who likes to turn in their electronics every couple of years for the latest versions, these recommendations likely won't apply. But if you're someone who wants your devices to last longer, these suggestions can help prolong battery life.

Paul Wesslund writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). ■

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From Your Board Chairman Rick Love

The definition of foundation by the Merriam-Webster dictionary is “An underlying base or support. Especially: the whole masonry substructure of a building.” That’s exactly how I describe you, our members, you’re the foundation of our cooperative.

I’m going to oversimplify this example of building a house, as a way to understand the similarities between the foundation, roof/walls and general contractor and our members, First Electric employees and Board of Directors.

When building, the most important part is the foundation, because you need a strong base to support the house. Often, it’s constructed with a poured concrete footing and reinforced steel. This Old House general contractor Tom Silva takes foundations seriously. “Without a good one,” he says, “you’re sunk.” It goes without saying, without our membership – we would sink too!

I see the employees at First Electric as the essential materials that hold everything together, like the roof and walls. For example, you can’t have a functional home without them – just like you can’t have a good co-op without well-trained lineworkers and engineers. All the pieces fit together and work in harmony to make a perfect home or co-op.

Next, I see the board of directors as the general contractor. The contractor oversees the project from start to finish and uses his/her knowledge to give the homeowner the best product at the most reasonable price. I think we all know what can happen when you have a bad contractor. A few things that come to my mind are – extra costs, project delays, poor work and bad communication. Our board’s responsibilities include strategic planning, policymaking and review, oversight of the fiduciary duty to monitor the business performance and risk management. All of which are required to make a co-op run smoothly for our membership.

To sum it up, you are our foundation! You are the reason we come to work daily! You are the reason we enjoy our jobs!

Sincerely,
Rick Love

Delegates selected for educational Youth Tour



First Electric has selected five delegates to represent the co-op on the 2023 Youth Tour, an all-expenses-paid educational trip to Washington, D.C.

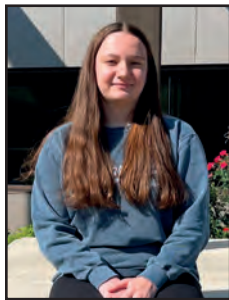
Audrey Jones of Cabot, Kayleigh Baker of Bryant, Morgan Manning of Bryant, Jude Henry of Cabot and Andre Schroeder of Bryant will explore the nation's capital June 16-22 with delegates from the other Arkansas electric cooperatives.

The group will join 2,000 students from across the United States in the nation's capital. During the trip, they'll learn about electric cooperatives; tour historic sites, monuments and museums; and meet members of the Arkansas congressional delegation.

Visit firstelectric.coop/youth-tour for more information. High school juniors may apply for the Youth Tour each year. Applications for the 2024 Youth Tour will be available Feb. 1, 2024 at firstelectric.coop/youth-tour, at co-op offices and in high school counselors' offices.



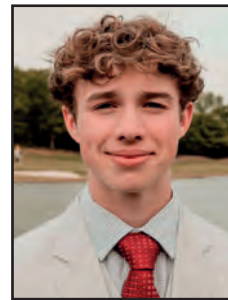
Audrey Jones of Cabot



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- Operate your thermostat efficiently. The smaller the difference between the outdoor and desired indoor temperature, the less energy you will use.
- Use a dehumidifier to remove humidity from your home to make it feel cooler and more comfortable.
- Turn off ceiling fans when you leave the room. Fans create a wind-chill effect and cool people, not rooms.
- Use your bathroom fan to remove heat and humidity after a shower or bath.
- Schedule regular maintenance of your air conditioner unit. Check and replace air filters regularly.
- Wash full loads of clothes and dishes. Do not run appliances at the same time.
- When possible, wash your clothing in cold water to avoid using the water heater.
- Avoid using the oven and stove by grilling outdoors and opting for small appliances like the microwave or air fryer.
- Turn off lights when not in use.

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Here today, gone tomato

Pink Tomato Festival honors star vegetable (and fruit!) of the season

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KAT ROBINSON

South central Arkansas was once the nation's favorite and most bountiful place to find gorgeous, vine-ripened tomatoes. With more than 80 farms producing, Bradley County became renowned for the savory fruit, and its primary varietal, the Bradley County Pink Tomato, was named Arkansas' State Fruit and Vegetable.

Whether you choose to put it into the former category or the latter, there's no doubt that tomatoes are a part of our culinary traditions no matter what part of Arkansas you live in. That is why Warren celebrates tomatoes each year with its Bradley County Pink Tomato Festival, now in its 67th year.

The lauded pink tomato begins to come into harvest right about the same time as the event, held each year on the second full weekend of June (June 9-10 this year). There's tomato eating, tomato queen pageants, a steak cook-off (because beef and tomatoes go hand in hand), a full-blown community fête and the headline event, the All-Tomato Luncheon. This singular sit-down midday repast is an opportunity to catch up with all the movers and shakers of the region, from the farmers who produce the tomatoes to the government leaders who represent them. All sit shoulder to shoulder within the gymnasium of the First Baptist Church, salivating over plates of prepared tomato feasts, as pastors say grace and politicians speak.

The distinctive dinner features tomatoes in all of its dishes, which change somewhat from year to year. I have been blessed to attend quite a few times and have enjoyed chicken-salad-stuffed tomatoes, tomato crackers, tomato salads, beans with tomatoes, carrots stewed in tomato sauce, BLT sandwiches, green tomato relish and even ketchup-flavored potato chips. It's the Heavenly Chocolate Tomato Cake, though, that I always look forward to — a rich, iced chocolate cake made with tomatojuice. It's unique and decadent, much like this awesome festival.

For more information on all the activities, visit PinkTomatoFestival.com.



TOP A Southern summer staple, the BLT sandwich, is elevated with a Bradley County Pink Tomato and a side of ketchup-flavored chips.

MIDDLE The tomato-eating contest is one of the Bradley County Pink Tomato Festival's famously fun activities.

LEFT Made with tomato juice, the Heavenly Chocolate Tomato Cake is a decadent delight at the All-Tomato Luncheon.

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ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULED

Notice is hereby given that the Annual Meeting of the members of First Electric Cooperative will be held on Thursday, June 29, 2023, in the Office of the Cooperative at 1000 South J.P. Wright Loop Road, Jacksonville, Pulaski County, Arkansas, beginning at 10 a.m. for the following purposes:

- To pass on reports for the previous fiscal year;
- To elect two (2) directors for the cooperative to serve a term of six (6) years; and,
- To transact such other business as properly may come before the meeting.

This will be a business session only. Any member planning to attend the Annual Meeting, who has special needs, is asked to contact the co-op at 800-489-7405 prior to the Annual Meeting for assistance.

Respectfully,
Karissa Rushing,
Secretary/Treasurer



Nominating Committee selects board candidates

On Thursday, March 25, 2023, the Nominating Committee of First Electric Cooperative met at the cooperative's office in Jacksonville. The purpose of the meeting was to review and select First Electric members as nominees for election to the cooperative's board of directors to serve a six-year term.

The committee selected Robert Maertens of Benton as the nominee for the Benton district, and Brock Brewer of Stuttgart was nominated for the Stuttgart district to be voted on by way of mail-in ballots. Ballots will be mailed to all members on June 2.

Committee members present during nominations: Cody Calhoun, Benton; Dearl Dixon, Austin; Ginger Hawkins, Perryville; Tommy Majors, Jacksonville; Dick Hoffman, Alexander; and Mark Sandage, Keo.

*At press time, these were the candidates selected by the Nominating Committee for a vote by the members.



Robert Maertens
Benton District
Position 1

Robert (Bob) Maertens has served on the First Electric Board of Directors since 1974. Bob and his wife, Tamara, previously owned and operated a retail business in Benton that his father, August Maertens, opened in 1921. Mr. Maertens retired from the business and turned the reins over to his son.

As a director of First Electric Cooperative, Mr. Maertens takes continuing education classes, is a Director Gold Credential, and a

Credentialed Cooperative Director, and has received his Board Leadership Certificate. He is one of two directors who represent First Electric in the Benton district.

Mr. Maertens enjoys being a director for First Electric and feels the board members are family. He believes in the importance of the cooperative form of business and its commitment to local communities. Serving on the board of First Electric allows him to give back to the community.

Bob and Tamara have been married for 53 years and have two children and seven grandchildren. The Maertens attend Zion Lutheran Church, where Mr. Maertens' grandfather was a founding member in 1882.



Brock Brewer
Stuttgart District
Position 1

Brock Brewer is a lifelong resident of Humnoke, where he still resides with his wife of 25 years, Mandy. He owns and operates 4B Planting Company, a family business he manages with his wife and his brother, Britt Brewer.

Brewer is a proud fourth-generation farmer. Their farm specializes in growing rice, corn and soybean on the family's 3,000 acres. The farming operation requires Mr. Brewer to have a wide set of business skills. He oversees the day-to-day operations and must forecast crops, review and plan the financial strategy, maintain and purchase equipment and communicate with vendors and employees.

Mr. Brewer said, "Joining the Board of Directors at First Electric is important to me, because I love our local communities and our way of life. I believe my farm management experience will be an asset. I want to do my part, and I think that helping to provide affordable electricity along with great service is a way of doing that."

Mr. Brewer added, "When I think of First Electric, I think of great service, being able to call my local office and talk with someone who understands and cares about my needs. I see these folks out in the wet, cold and heat working hard to keep our wells running and lights on. They do this so we can focus on our work."

The Brewers have two children, Lofton and Lexie. Lofton attends Carlisle School District, where Mandy serves on the school board.

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Reflections

Mary Louise with her "basket" of veggies.
Jo Henderson, North Little Rock.



Eva showing off Papa's watermelon.
Joan Pense, West Fork.



John chomping on some fresh, sweet corn.
Jesse Boggs, North Little Rock.



The thief has been discovered. It's Reeve!
Kassidy Dorrell, Jasper.



Huntley on a hot day.
Ashlyn Bailey, Leslie.



Camp is in a pickle! Teri Williams, Egypt.



Olivia bringing in the bounty.
Allen Ray, Booneville.



Grandma and granddaughter lost in the flowers. Jerry R. Langley, Jacksonville.



"Hey you, that's not your house!"
Becky Whitwell, Fort Smith.



Griffin always saves the last bite of ice cream for Duke. Kelly Harris, Jonesboro.



Butterfly on lilac. Mike Yancey, Van Buren.



Marlee J. under the "popcorn tree."
Shirley McDaniel, Antoine.

Share your photos with your fellow Arkansas Living readers! Please send high-resolution photos with detailed information about the pictures (who took it, where, who is in it, etc.) to: Dixie.Rogers@aeci.com

Or mail to:
Reflections, Arkansas Living
P.O. Box 510, Little Rock, AR 72203

Hope for hydrangeas

Helping flowers bounce back from winter's bite



BY JANET B. CARSON

Hydrangeas are a staple in many Arkansas gardens, but after the winter we had, we may not see many blooms this summer on some types. Luckily, all hydrangeas are not created equally. There are actually 23 species of hydrangeas; four species are commonly available, and some are more cold-tolerant than others.

There are varieties that bloom on new growth and those that bloom on old wood: those that will take full sun and those that need partial shade. There are bush forms and climbing forms.

All hydrangeas need well-drained soil and will benefit from water during dry periods, but water is most critical for bigleaf and smooth types.

COMMON HYDRANGEA SPECIES				
	Bigleaf	Oakleaf	Smooth	Panicle
Flowers/Foliage	Rounded mophead or flatter lacecap forms. Blooms on old wood.	Large, oak-shaped leaves and panicles of white flowers in early summer, which fade to dusty rose and then tan. Blooms on old wood.	Smooth hydrangeas have round, white flowers that bloom on new growth. Some produce large, pink flowers.	Flowers are born in large panicles, mainly in white and are produced on the new growth.
Hardiness	Most sensitive to winter damage; expect few if any blooms this summer.	Most oakleaf hydrangeas were not damaged by winter weather.	Tolerates harsh winters well.	Winter rarely affects ability to bloom.
Needs	Morning sun and afternoon shade or dappled sunlight, and ample moisture. Requires several fertilizer applications during growing season.	Protection from afternoon sun. Fertilize when fully leafed out, again in June.	Ample moisture. Protection from afternoon sun. One fertilizer application when new growth begins.	Will grow in full sun to partial shade, and are quite drought-tolerant, once established. Fertilize when fully leafed out, again in June.
Pruning	As soon as the flowers begin to fade in the summer.	As soon as the flowers begin to fade in the summer.	In late February to early March before new growth begins.	In late February to early March before new growth begins.
Varieties	Endless Summer, Nikko Blue	Alice, Snow Queen, Pee Wee	Annabelle, Incrediball, Invincibelle	Limelite, Bobo, Fire Light





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Bursting with Berries

Brie, bars and crumble deliver summer sweetness

RECIPES AND PHOTOS
BY JULIANA GOODWIN

Brie with Berry Rosemary Sauce

Makes 6 servings.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1/2 cup fresh blueberries, more for garnish | 1/2 teaspoon dried rosemary |
| 1/4 cup fresh raspberries | 1 tablespoon honey |
| 3 tablespoons water | 1 (8-ounce) wheel of brie |
| 2 tablespoons brown sugar | Handful of walnuts, pecans or slivered almonds |

In a small pot, combine blueberries, raspberries, water, brown sugar and rosemary. Bring to a boil, and mash berries with a potato masher. Lower heat, and simmer for 5-10 minutes. Stir in honey, and simmer for another minute or 2. Allow to cool. Pour sauce on wheel



of brie. Garnish with remaining blueberries and nuts. Serve with crackers or French bread.

Killer Strawberry Almond Bars

Makes 12 servings.

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Nonstick cooking spray | 1 teaspoon almond extract |
| 1 (15.25-ounce) box yellow cake mix | 2 1/4 cups powdered sugar |
| 1 3/4 sticks unsalted butter, melted and divided | 2 1/3 cups fresh strawberries, sliced |
| 3 large eggs, divided | 1/4 cup slivered almonds |
| 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened | |

Heat oven to 350. Spray a 13x9 pan with nonstick cooking spray.

In a large bowl, stir together cake mix, 1 stick butter and 1 egg until combined. Evenly spread in bottom of prepared pan.

In a large bowl, use electric mixer to beat cream cheese until fluffy. Beat in 2 eggs, one at a time. Add almond extract, remaining 3/4 stick butter and powdered sugar, and beat



until smooth. Spread cream cheese mixture on cake mixture. Top with strawberries and slivered almonds. Bake for 30-36 minutes, until almost set (it's good to have a tiny jiggle in center). Allow to cool. Slice and serve. Refrigerate leftovers.



Blackberry Cream Cheese Crumble

Makes 8 servings.

12	ounces cream cheese, softened	6	cups fresh blackberries
1	egg	1	cup quick oats
2	teaspoons vanilla extract	1/2	teaspoon cinnamon
1	cup sugar, divided	1/2	cup brown sugar
1	tablespoon cornstarch	7	tablespoons butter

Heat oven to 375. In a large bowl, beat cream cheese with an electric mixer until smooth. Beat in egg, vanilla extract and 1/2 cup sugar. Spread cream cheese mixture on bottom of cast-iron skillet.

In a large bowl, toss together remaining 1/2 cup sugar and cornstarch until combined. Toss in blackberries, and stir to coat. Pour berries on cream cheese mixture.

In the same large bowl, stir together oats, cinnamon and brown sugar. Incorporate butter into mixture, slicing it into small pieces or using a pastry cutter. Evenly distribute oat mixture on blackberries. Bake for 30-35 minutes. Serve warm.



This month's web exclusive recipe:

Easy Strawberry Pizza

More recipes on our website:
arkansaslivingmagazine.com

Juliana Goodwin is a food columnist, cookbook author and avid traveler. If you have a question, email julianalovesfood23@gmail.com.

Veggie Vibes

Readers share favorite seasonal salads

Southern Cornbread Salad

- 1 package of cornbread mix (plus ingredients to prepare)
- 1 (15.5-ounce) can red kidney beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 (15.25-ounce) can corn, drained
- 1 medium Vidalia onion, finely chopped
- 1 large green bell pepper, finely chopped
- 3 large tomatoes, chopped
- 2 cups sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 cup or more ranch dressing, bottled or homemade

Prepare cornbread according to directions. Allow to cool, and cut into 1-inch cubes.

Place cornbread cubes on bottom of a large glass bowl. Layer on kidney beans, corn, onion, green bell pepper, tomatoes, and top with cheddar cheese. Spread ranch dressing evenly over cheese. Cover, and refrigerate for at least 2 hours. When ready to serve, mix everything together, and enjoy!

Notes: This is a spin-off of Paula Deen's recipe that I get asked for and make all the time. It's more of a summer dish, but I make it year-round.

Molly Jett, Success

Molly is the marketing and external communications director for Clay County Electric Cooperative.



Southern Cornbread Salad

Aunt Regina's Garden Salad

- 1 cup green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 cup onion, chopped
- 1 cup celery, chopped
- 1 (15-ounce) can green peas, drained
- 1 (15.25-ounce) can yellow corn, drained
- 1 (15.25-ounce) can white (shoepeg) corn, drained
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can French-style green beans, drained (reserve 1 tablespoon liquid for dressing)
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can sliced carrots, drained
- 1 (2-ounce) jar pimentos, drained

Dressing

- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 1/2 cup salad oil
- 3/4 cup vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon reserved green bean liquid

In a large bowl, mix salad ingredients together.

In a saucepan, add all dressing ingredients, and bring to a boil, stirring until sugar is dissolved. Remove from heat, and allow to cool. Pour cooled dressing on salad, and toss until well-combined. Cover and keep refrigerated.

Notes: This recipe is from my husband's aunt, Regina Baltz. It's great for camping. Onion can be cooked with dressing for a milder flavor.

Ernestine Bergman, Mountain Home

Melon and Chicken Pasta Salad

- 2 cups cantaloupe, cubed
- 2 cups baby spinach, torn
- 2 cups cooked chicken, shredded or diced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 orange bell pepper, diced
- 1 yellow bell pepper, diced
- 4 cups bowtie pasta, cooked
- Mayonnaise to taste
- Salt and pepper to taste

In a large bowl, mix all ingredients together. Keep refrigerated.

Jacki Spotts, Mountain Home

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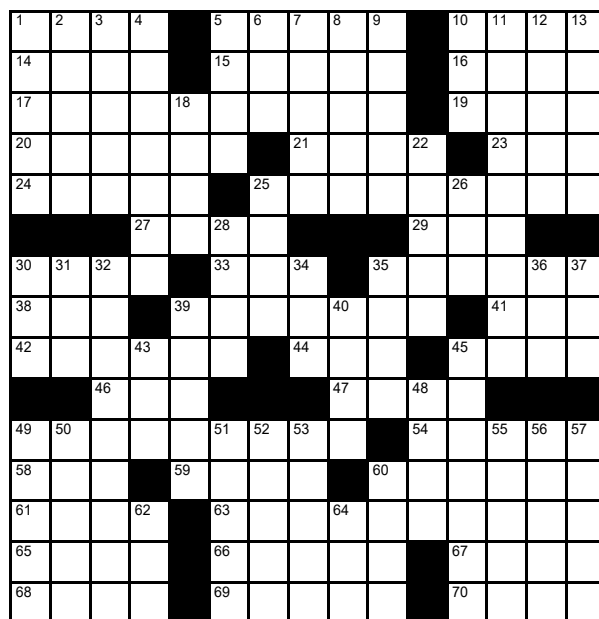
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Starts June 21 By Victor Fleming

ACROSS

- 1 Typesetting unit
- 5 Office workers, e.g.
- 10 Said who's who?
- 14 "___ be OK"
- 15 Beyond unconventional
- 16 Not medium or well
- 17 1958 Paul Newman movie
- 19 1977 Triple Crown champion Seattle ___
- 20 It might be in hot water
- 21 Fraction of a foot
- 23 Unreturnable serve
- 24 Program to, as a thermostat
- 25 1966 Lovin' Spoonful song
- 27 Meg or Irene
- 29 "You've Got Mail" co.
- 30 Camouflage

- 33 Breathtaking snake?
- 35 Rival of Cardin, Lauren and Versace
- 38 Be laid up, say
- 39 1980 ABBA song
- 41 Big boys?
- 42 Stop in, as for a visit
- 44 NPR's ___ Shapiro
- 45 Get an eyeful
- 46 Dessert from an oven
- 47 Mikhail Romanov, e.g.
- 49 1966 Ronnie Dove song
- 54 "Beau ___"
- 58 Poehler or Grant
- 59 Voice-activated aide
- 60 Vacation season ... or word missing from 17-, 25-, 39-, 49-, and 63-Across
- 61 Lower California, informally
- 63 2022 Rebecca Serle novel
- 65 Clothing brand with an alligator logo
- 66 Rainer Maria ___ (author of "Letters to a Young Poet")
- 67 Aches and pains
- 68 With "off," started a round at Glenwood Country Club
- 69 Observance at Congregation B'nai Israel



70 Arbor abode

DOWN

- 1 Elijah or ZaSu
- 2 "With this ring, ___ wed"
- 3 Anti-slip feature on a sole
- 4 "No bite" go-with
- 5 Billboard chart listing
- 6 Big jerk
- 7 Fleetwood Mac's "Walk ___ Line"
- 8 Shirt part with buttons
- 9 "Go get it" command to a dog
- 10 Tax collection agcy.
- 11 Buddhist leader
- 12 Standing straight
- 13 ___ Decimal System
- 18 Like Cheerios
- 22 Atrium site
- 25 "Are you ___ out?"
- 26 Email address ender
- 28 "What ___!" ("The price is right!")
- 30 Angry
- 31 Breathed stuff
- 32 Ground beef sandwich
- 34 In the style of
- 35 How used goods are often sold
- 36 Used alternative

37 Calligraphy need

- 39 Bends to the will of
- 40 Arkansas Museum of Fine ___
- 43 "Great Expectations" boy
- 45 Unseen troublemaker
- 48 The rain in Spain, e.g.
- 49 Acquired behavior pattern
- 50 Awe
- 51 Designer of certain fashionable frocks
- 52 Legendary Palmer of golf, by nickname
- 53 Cautioning road sign
- 55 "Candid Camera" request
- 56 Blue-green shades
- 57 "Heaven Can Wait" (1943) director
- 58 Lubitsch
- 60 End for young or old
- 62 Calculate column totals
- 64 2008 hurricane that did damage in Arkansas

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CROSSWORD ANSWERS
for puzzle on page 38

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S	T	L	I	K	E	R	D	O	Z	I		
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K	M	V	G	I	R	V	A	B	O	R	D	
N	E	W	T	S	T	R	U	O	T	I	V	
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STORY AND PHOTOS
BY ROB ROEDEL

Courtne and Bill Maness operated a successful business in Hot Springs for a few years before jumping into the restaurant business in 2018, when they opened the Red Oak Fillin' Station just outside the city.

Prior to the Maness' ownership, the location had been a gas station that had a few tables and served catfish dinners on Fridays. The building was vacant for about eight years before Bill and Courtne executed their vision of creating a diverse and ever-changing menu, so the locals, the visitors, the young and the young at heart can always come in, pull up a chair and have something great to eat.

The enterprising couple created the restaurant's menu, developed the recipes, and added tables and booths as well as a few nice touches to the building. Today, it is a nicely decorated restaurant with an open, country feel and lots of natural light. Over the past five years, the customer base has grown as Hot Springs has.

Bill said, "I enjoy the people and the fast-paced environment of the restaurant. It can be chaotic in a good way. We want to take care of the people who live in our community, but always welcome new friends."

The care is evident in the food that Bill and his team provide. The restaurant runs two large, commercial smokers overnight and throughout the day to provide excellent smoked meats.

My favorite appetizer was the Bacon Cheese Fries served with house-made ranch dressing. Visually, this dish was perfect. The large fries were topped with a tangy, white cheese sauce and applewood-smoked bacon. I used a fork but was tempted to use my fingers, as the sauce was finger-lickin' good.

The best way to try the Red Oak Fillin' Station's barbecue array is the Sampler Platter. This huge plate



The ample Sampler Platter features four types of barbecue.

features smoked St. Louis-style ribs, 12-hour brisket, sliced Black Oak smoked sausage and pulled pork. As I sampled each offering, I thought it was the best of the plate, but then I tried another and couldn't make a firm ruling. As I went around the plate again, I called it a tie because each meat was outstanding. The sampler also came with a side of Brisket Mac and Cheese, a must-try. The creamy, comfort of macaroni and cheese paired with the rich, smoked flavor of the fabulous brisket was a blue-ribbon



Manager Morgan Miller (center) and team are all smiles at the Red Oak Fillin' Station.



The Catfish Platter, with two golden fried catfish fillets served with coleslaw and hush puppies, is a classic dish.



THE EATING ESSENTIALS

Red Oak Fillin' Station

2169 Carpenter Dam Road,
Hot Springs
501-701-8051
redoakfillinestation.com

Hours of Operation

Tuesday-Saturday: 11 a.m.-8 p.m.





The Bacon Cheese Fries with white cheese sauce, applewood-smoked bacon and ranch dressing are finger-lickin' good.

winner. You will probably even want to take a quart home with you.

The Catfish Platter was a nice catch. It featured two golden fried catfish fillets, accompanied by coleslaw, hush puppies and a choice of another side dish. Walleye, available fried, grilled or blackened, is on the menu, and it is on my list for my next visit.

Have you ever had a Hickory Smoked Ribeye? If not, definitely order one when you visit the Red Oak Fillin' Station. I loved the slightly smoky flavor infused into the expertly grilled ribeye that I tried. Each bite delivered a new flavor explosion of goodness.

The Brisket Grilled Cheese was a superb sandwich option. The smoked brisket was chopped and merged with a nice amount of white cheese between two grilled pieces of bread. The result was a new twist on a family favorite.

Daily specials are also featured. Examples include steak tips and rice, tilapia tacos, brisket quesadillas and chicken salad.

Other menu items include étouffée, seafood gumbo, shrimp, smoked chicken and much more.

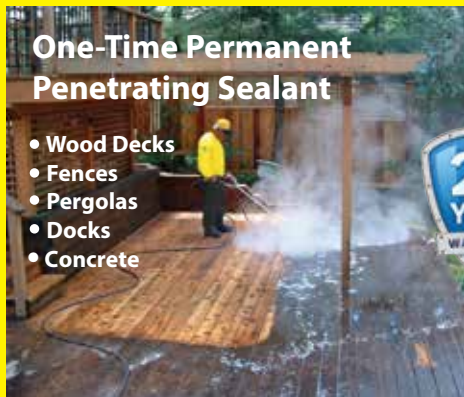
"When we opened in 2018, we had visions of families sitting around our tables enjoying all of life's greatest moments, all while enjoying our food, and that is just what has happened," Bill said. 🍴

Dining recommendations? Contact Rob Roedel at rob.roedel@aecc.com.

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SCAN TO SAVE

Calendar



Running of the Tubs



Arkansas Free Fishing Weekend



Buffalo River Elk Festival



Petit Jean Show



Juneteenth in Da Rock

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF PARKS, HERITAGE AND TOURISM

June 1-3

Farm Fest

Wynne, crosscountychamber.org/farmfest

June 1-4

Eureka Springs Blues Party

eurekaspringsbluesparty.com

June 2-3

Running of the Tubs

Hot Springs, hotsprings.org

Lum & Abner Music & Arts Festival

Mena, visitmena.com

Lowell Mudtown Days

Lowell, lowellarkansas.gov

June 3

Gassville in the Park

Gassville, facebook.com/gassville

June 5

Arkansas Country Music Awards

Conway, arkansasmusic.org

June 8-10

Hot Springs Bikefest

Hot Springs, hotsprings.org

June 8-Oct. 1

Dinosaur Explorer Exhibit

Little Rock, clintonlibrary.gov

June 9-10

Poultry Festival

Rogers, thepoultryfederation.com

Bradley County Pink Tomato Festival

Warren, pinktomatofestival.com

(See story, page 24)

River Cities Dragon Boat Festival

Maumelle, rivercitiesdragonboatfestival.com

June 9-11

Bat-A-Rama

West Fork, arkansas.com/west-fork/events

Arkansas Free Fishing Weekend

statewide, agfc.com

June 13-18

Bentonville Film Festival

Bentonville, bentonvillefilm.org

June 14-17

Petit Jean Show

Morrilton, museumofautos.com

June 15-17

Ozark Mountain Soul Fest

Eureka Springs, facebook.com/ozarkmountainsoul

June 17

Juneteenth in Da Rock

Little Rock, arkansasheritage.com/events

Fort Smith Riverfront Blues Festival

Fort Smith, riverfrontbluesfest.org

June 18

Father's Day at the Little Rock Zoo

Little Rock, littlerockzoo.com

June 23

Siloam Springs Heritage Festival

Siloam Springs, discoversiloam.com

June 23-24

Malvern Brickfest

Malvern, malvernbrickfest.com

Buffalo River Elk Festival

Jasper, buffaloriverelkfestival.com

Red, White & Blue Festival

Mountain Home, redwhitebluefestival.com

NOW Serving Little Rock and NWA Helping Macular Degeneration Patients

8 Ways We Can Help

When you've been told **"nothing else can be done"** then it's time for a low vision exam.



1 Spectacle Miniature Telescopes

Designed for tasks requiring better central vision and mobility, these glasses are used by drivers to see signs and traffic lights, by grandparents to see grandchildren playing soccer and bridge players to see cards on the table.



2 Bioptic Driving Glasses

Bioptic Drives glasses allow drivers to continue to drive when they struggle with seeing road signs. These glasses have small telescopes that allow drivers to see road signs and traffic lights. They can also be used by grand parents to see grandchildren playing soccer and other sports.



3 Spectacle Microscope Glasses

Compounded high powered prescription lenses give crystal clear images for reading. Where regular reading bifocals or lenses don't help enough microscope glasses allow reading vision.



4 Spectacle Prismatic Glasses

These moderate powered lenses are useful for near tasks like reading, writing, and handicrafts.

5 E-Scoop Contrast Enhancing Glasses

Macular degeneration and other diseases reduce contrast sensitivity. E-Scoop lenses combine 5 elements to create a larger, clearer high contrast image. E-Scoop lenses improve overall vision and reduce the risk of a fall.

6 Electronic Magnification

Portable purse size & full size magnification far superior to hand held magnifiers. Take it with you, to read menus, price tags books and newspapers.



7 Virtual Reality Wearables

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8 Testing and solutions individually prescribed

If it's one thing experience has taught me. There is no one solution for helping low vision patients. Each case involves listening carefully to the specific needs of each patient, carefully examining their usable vision and then using the best low vision solutions to address their individual needs. Prescription telescope, bioptic and reading glasses are only available by prescription.

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