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LIVING



JANUARY 2024

PHOTOGRAPHY:
**A LIFELONG PASSION
FOR AMY KELLEY**

PHOTO BY FLY LEAF PHOTOGRAPHY

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DEAR RESIDENTS

Happy New Year! There's a charge in the air. The hope and desire and sincere intentions to make something different of 2024 than was in 2023. That's my absolute favorite part of this time of the year: the potential. Everything new seems possible so I send to you my fondest hope that at least one thing you'd like to accomplish this year gets crossed off the list with success. I ask of you also two small favors to start the fresh calendar. The first, please support those sponsors in this magazine if you have a need for a product or service they offer. The second, and just as important, share with us in East Athens Living. This magazine is a community magazine, so if you have an idea to feature a coach, a student, a family or if there is an event you'd love to write about that's happening around town, reach out to us. We'd love to show it off to your neighbors.



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December 10	January
January 10	February
February 10	March
March 10	April
April 10	May
May 10	June
June 10	July
July 10	August
August 10	September
September 10	October
October 10	November
November 10	December

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Creamy Mac and Cheese Bake

By Erin Vander Weele

The classic dish is a favorite comfort meal for all ages. This macaroni and cheese bake is made with gruyère and sharp cheddar cheese, but you can always personalize to your taste.

Ingredients

- 8 oz elbow macaroni
- 3 tbsp butter
- 1 tbsp flour
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 2 cups shredded gruyère cheese
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp pepper
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 cup panko crumbs (plain or seasoned)
- ½ cup parmesan cheese
- 2 tbsp melted butter for panko crumb topping
- ½ tsp paprika

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Cook macaroni noodles in boiling water. Once noodles are cooked al dente, use a strainer to drain.
3. Melt 3 tbsp butter over medium heat in a saucepan. Stir in flour and whisk until bubbly. Add milk, salt, pepper and continue stirring often until the mixture comes to a boil and thickens. Add sour cream and stir until melted. Add shredded cheddar and gruyère cheese and continue stirring until melted into a thick cheese sauce.
4. Mix macaroni and cheese sauce together in one pan, then transfer to a lightly greased 8x8 baking dish.
5. In a medium bowl, combine panko crumbs, parmesan cheese, 2 tbsp melted butter, and ½ tsp paprika. Sprinkle mixture over macaroni and cheese, spreading evenly. Bake for 30 minutes (or until bubbly) uncovered. Let stand for 5 minutes before serving.

Note: For cheese to melt properly, it's best to shred your own cheese from a block and avoid using pre-shredded cheese.



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CATS + SENIORS = TRUE LOVE

by Lucinda Hahn



Cats are a great way to add fun and companionship to a senior household. Here's why:

THEY FILL OUR NEED FOR AFFECTION. Okay, not all cats are snuggly—but most are! And who can't benefit from a little cuddling every day? My cat snuggles next to me and quietly purrs while I read. It's true bliss! Tip: Don't worry if your new cat doesn't snuggle at first. Simply provide it with gentleness and non-intrusive affection, and it likely will gain trust and become a cuddler.

THEY'RE GOOD FOR OUR HEALTH: Many studies have shown that the bond with a pet can lower blood pressure, alleviate loneliness and lessen anxiety, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

THEY'RE LOW-MAINTENANCE: Cats are famously clean, forever bathing themselves and tidying up their box after using it. And unlike dogs, they don't require multiple daily walks. They're usually just content to hang out in the same room as their "person."

THEY PROVIDE STRUCTURE: Taking care of a cat's daily need—to be fed, watered and have their box cleaned—can add a routine, and a sense of purpose, to the day. Tip: If bending down is an issue, there are even automated, self-scooping litter boxes on the market.

THEY'RE INDEPENDENT: Cats can stay alone for a couple days if you need to go out of town. (Though please have someone look in on your kitty, as cats do get lonely).

THEY'RE MORE WIDELY ACCEPTED: Apartments and assisted living facilities are more likely to allow residents to own cats versus dogs, so if you live in such a place or think you might in the future, a cat is the wiser choice.

THEY CAN ENTERTAIN THEMSELVES: But a senior can also get some exercise by "playing" with their cat. My cat loves to bat at a tweety bird attached by string to a wand that I hold. We "play" once a day, because my cat clearly loves it. If you have mobility issues, cats are also easily entertained by stationary activities, like chasing a laser pointer.

FINALLY, THE GREAT DEBATE: Cat versus kitten? For seniors, a kitten may be too rambunctious—climbing on curtains, doing "zoomies" in the middle of the night and more. There are many older cats in shelters just waiting for the type of calm, loving, stable home that a senior can provide. And, because older cats' personalities are already developed, you can gain a good sense of a particular cat's characteristics by spending time with it at the shelter. Kittens are more of a wild card.

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PHOTOGRAPHY: A LIFELONG PASSION FOR AMY KELLEY

by Mark White | photos by Fly Leaf Photography

With encouragement from her parents, Amy Kelley's love of photography goes back to her childhood.

"I always enjoyed photography as a child. My parents were great about giving us cameras. Of course, that was in the days of film, so we did a lot of exposing of film cameras. I have five siblings and we took lots of pictures of each other. As I got a little older, we had a friend who had a dark room in their

home and taught me how to develop my own film. That's when I grew a passion for it and understood it as an artform," said Amy.

In college, there were classes that allowed Amy to practice the art of photography even further.

"We had electives we could choose, and I never thought I would do photography full time, but I chose to do the photography electives just for fun," said Amy.

Her path to photography had a stop in the dental profession first.

“I went into the dental field for three years. Once I became a mom, I started taking pictures of my own child. At that time, I fell in love with photography again,” said Amy.

Others began to notice Amy’s talent and wanted her to do work for them, too.

Right off the bat, people started asking me if I would take pictures for them once I posted pictures of my own child and it snowballed into a business,” said Amy.

Amy is a lifelong resident of Athens and having a successful photography business helped keep her here.

“I’m still here mainly because I did start my business. I started it when I was young. I’ve been doing photography for about 16 years and I was in my early 20’s when I started. My family moved away to Tennessee for the most part and I was young and just decided to stay. I have not regretted staying in Athens. It has grown beautifully. I love all the events that we have. I love the hometown feel and I also love the growth. With that growth has brought me a great clientele and I love that,” said Amy.

Amy is able to maintain the passion for her work through the support and encouragement from her clients.

“I am a heavy child and family photographer. To see the moments where parents feel defeated after the stress of dealing with their child, I get to

show them what I captured through my lens in those sweet moments, moments they didn’t even see happen. To see that magic happen for them, that keeps me going,” said Amy.

Amy’s husband, Zeke, has a unique perspective when it comes to her work.

“I see her heart. That’s all I ever see when I look at her. She’s so passionate and cares so much. She’s always looking for a way to give back. It’s never about how she can make the most money. She sees opportunities to help and arranges her life to get it done,” said Zeke.

Amy’s business has grown by clients telling other clients.

“Word of mouth is about the only advertisement that I do. I anticipate my clients loving their pictures, sharing their pictures, and giving me credit for them, so that their friends will want to have the same type of memory,” said Amy.

Amy has been the photographer for this publication and she has been enjoying that work.

“It’s been fun and people are having a good time with that. I think that I have the easy part of this. I’m the part that people look forward to. We’re trying to have some good times,” said Amy.

Over the years, Amy has learned to manage her work/life schedule better.

“Years ago, I did let the business run me more. I’ve created a little bit more of a boundary, knowing that it’s better for me and my family and



COVER STORY



even my work as a photographer,” said Amy.

Amy has a message to those who are considering getting professional pictures made.

“There’s never the wrong time to take a picture. We aren’t guaranteed our days. One of the hardest things for me as a photographer is when someone gets an end-of-life diagnosis and they hurry to get pictures done. If we just did them on a consistent basis and take those opportunities when everyone is healthy and everyone is great, you’re never going to regret that,” said Amy.

Zeke has his own effort that he is getting off the ground in Athens.

“I have started a jiu jitsu gym and just became a member of the Limestone County Chamber of Commerce. It’s next to Suzanne’s Bakery,” said Zeke.

With both of their businesses, Zeke and Amy describe their love of community as a big warm hug.

“Our efforts embody a big warm hug. We have so much knowledge. Let’s just hang out and share it. With jiu jitsu, that knowledge can save your life, said Zeke.



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BY DAWN GENTRY



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A NEW YEAR, A NEW JOURNEY

by **Molly Kate Goar**

In 2024, let your home be a sanctuary not just of bricks and beams, but of connections and shared dreams. As you kick off this journey, remember it's not only about constructing a house; it's about crafting a home filled with laughter and shared memories that linger for years. Brace yourself for a family adventure...

CHOOSING THE RIGHT GUIDE: YOUR BUILDER AS THE NAVIGATOR

Embarking on a home construction journey is akin to stepping into uncharted territory. The key to a successful expedition is a knowledgeable guide. In the new year, resolve to carefully select a builder who not only understands your vision but also becomes a trusted partner in turning dreams into reality.

THE BLUEPRINT OF TRUST: COMMUNICATION STARTS AT THE FOUNDATION

Good communication is the heart of a successful family project. Actively involve your family in decisions, thus turning the construction process into a shared experience. Imagine picking out the perfect paint colors

together, selecting fixtures as a family, and watching your collective vision come to life.

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES: BUILDING RESILIENCE TOGETHER

Every building adventure has its challenges but transform these hurdles into opportunities for your family to grow closer. Imagine overcoming construction challenges as a united front, creating a resilient family bond that withstands the test of time.

HOME UNVEILING: CELEBRATING THE CULMINATION OF CONNECTION

As construction concludes, and your dream home takes shape, the unveiling becomes a celebration of more than just bricks and mortar. It's the realization of a shared vision, a testament to effective communication, and a symbol of the connections formed during the construction process.

Cheers to the new year, new connections, and the joy of building together.



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From our Engel & Völkers Limestone family to yours, we hope your holidays were joyful and wish you a prosperous New Year!

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13823 Zehner Rd • Athens: Beautifully updated brick home on secluded 6.77 acres. Kitchen w/ quartz counters, ample cabinets. Updated lighting throughout. 24x50 heated/cooled workshop. **\$699,000**

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12100 Two Rivers Dr L-1 • Athens: Luxury waterfront condo in gated Two Rivers, The Pointe. Stunning Elk/TN River views, 3BR, 3BA, gym, elevator. 1st-floor unit, 2 patios, furnished, boat slip, & more. **\$589,900**

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12261 Quinn Road • Athens: Private 2BR, 2.5 Bath Retreat on 5 Acres near Athens. Includes 30x40 insulated shop/garage, 20x20 barn, mini farm setup. Hardwood floors, s/s appliances, master jetted tub. **\$342,400**

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22157 Saratoga Dr • Athens: Must-see 4BR/ 2BA home in east-side neighborhood. Features eat-in kitchen, dining, living area w/ gas fireplace. Covered back porch; partial basement workshop. **\$339,700**

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619 Norton Dr • Athens: Wood lot, 3BR/2BA in coveted subdivision. Brick home with spacious living: living, dining, eat-in kitchen, den on main. Owner's suite on main. New flooring, & more. **\$334,900**

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21704 Daveen Dr • Elkmont: Remarkable ranch home, custom features, exceptional craftsmanship. Open floor plan, perfect kitchen w/ tiled backsplash, adjoining dining, large gathering room w/ wood fireplace. **\$288,900**

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21261 Red Clover Ln • Elkmont: 3BR, 2BA home w/ new LVP flooring in living & master. Updated fixtures, trim, moldings. Upgraded French doors to fenced backyard w/ finished accessory building (AC). **\$249,400**

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103 Clubhouse Ln • Madison: ORRB location. Charming 4BR/3 BA brick home w/ spacious sun room. Living room boasts hardwood floors, tray ceiling w/ crown molding, & gas-log fireplace. **\$339,900**

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7723 Allison Loop Athens: Starterhome on 0.5-acre lot, recently remodeled: HVAC, granite, appliances, flooring. Open living room, flex room, large laundry, oversized garage. Additional room, Stormshelter. **\$239,000**

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17856 & 17752 Zehner Rd • Athens: 7.24 & 6.83 acres outside Athens city limits, near downtown & easy drive to Florence/ Huntsville. Cleared for **7.24 • \$170,400** dev private residence. **6.83 • \$160,600**

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16266 Evans Road • Athens: 4BR, 3BA home, spacious kitchen & living room. Master suite w/ sitting area, luxurious bath & walk-in closet w/ built-ins. Dual rain heads & handheld sprayer in master shower. **\$275,000**

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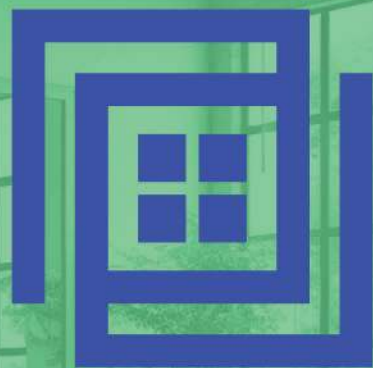
by Mark White

Next year will mark 20 years of service for the Athens-Limestone Family Resource Center. Executive Director Emmett Moore has been at the helm for nine months. During our conversation, he shared about the founding of the organization.

“A group of community members realized that there were some needs in the community, some people who were struggling and needed help. They got together and formed this organization. It has done nothing but grow since 2004,” said Moore.

A veteran, Moore has served in the nonprofit world for many years.

“I’ve been in the nonprofit sector for 25 years, ever since I left the military. I started with Big Brothers and Big Sisters. I was with them for over 20 years in four different locations, Chicago, Atlanta, Columbus (Georgia), and Huntsville, Alabama. I tried corporate for a few years, but my wife told me I belonged working with nonprofit organizations and I felt the same way,” said Moore.



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Moore believes there are some keys to success when it comes to getting assistance from the Athens-Limestone Family Resource Center.

“First, know that you can be helped. Next, be willing to accept the help that’s being given to you. One must also be open to receiving some direction and mentoring. Accepting help may seem like an easy thing to do, but it’s really tough for a lot of people. When they come in, they need to not feel threatened and know that these are people who really want to help them,” said Moore.

Those who come to the Athens-Limestone Family Resource Center for help will find a team willing to help with skills.

“We are definitely in the business of teaching people to fish.

That means we are willing to meet people halfway and we are willing to acknowledge the situations that they’ve been in,” said Moore.

The Athens-Limestone Family Resource Center is made up of a team of special people.

“I look for people who have compassion on those who come through the door. It can’t be people who look down on people when they come in. We want to see people who come through our doors as people who need help. It’s a hospital, if you will, and we are trying to help the sick. In addition to that, our team members have to be strong people and people with thick skin because the people that come in are hurting,” said Moore.

The team’s own personal experiences allow them to be compassionate and understanding with those whom they serve.

“We can all look back on our own life experiences and help us remember where we’ve been. That allows us to be even more compassionate toward those who come through the door. I’ve had my ups and downs as well. I can look at dark times in my life like my daughter passing away at a very young age. That’s a dark time that I have to reach back and remember when I am serving people who are here,” said Moore.

The main way that people hear about the services of Athens-Limestone Family Resource Center is by clients telling other people.

“People will tell other people that they were able to get help at the center and tell others that they might get help, too. Flyers are also distributed throughout the community as well as churches telling their members about our work. We’re also really big on social media, Facebook and Instagram,” said Moore.

For those who want to find out more about the services offered at the Athens-Limestone County Family Resource Center, their website is ALCFRC.org.



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DAVID TURNER, COUNTRY FINANCIAL DONATE TO EAST LIMESTONE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

by Arky Shea | photos by David Turner

In December, the David Turner Insurance Agency, a Country Financial agency, proudly presented a check in the amount of \$1,500 to the East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department. The check was accepted by Fire Chief Captain Tony Kirk as part of the Country Financial initiative "Operation Helping Heroes".

Turner said of the donation, "it allows myself to be able to help the community we live in and support and serve." Turner noted that this wasn't his first donation and he wanted to recognize the need



for expanded support. "We gave some to Athens Fire, the police department and now I'm tryin to help the local fire departments in East Limestone which has a huge area to serve."

Operation Helping Heroes was created to provide funds for much-needed equipment and supplies to first responders, medical workers and military service members in the communities it does business in. The program began in 2015 and expanded during the COVID pandemic.

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HOW TO PAY LESS IN TAXES THIS YEAR

by Sarah Christopher Simpson

This time of year I am constantly asked: “What can I do to keep more of my hard-earned money?” and “how do I keep money in my business so it can continue to grow?”. I want to share some tips for reducing how much you spend on taxes now and in the future.

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—A dependent care FSA allows you to use pre-tax dollars to pay for qualified out-of-pocket dependent care expenses such as daycare, summer camps, and before and after school care. Those who do not qualify for an HSA may qualify for a health care FSA. This account allows pre-tax dollars to pay for eligible medical, dental, and vision expenses.

ALABAMA'S 529 SAVINGS PLAN CONTRIBUTIONS

Alabama allows a tax deduction for contributions to the Alabama 529 Savings Plan. This deduction is limited to \$5,000 per taxpayer (\$10,000 for Married filing Joint). You can even rollover funds from another state’s 529 plan to get this deduction.

ENERGY TAX CREDITS HAVE INCREASED

The amounts and limits for home energy tax credits changed favorably at the beginning of 2023. Examples of items that qualify for the credit are new doors, windows, heat pumps, and home energy audits. There are also changes to the electric vehicle credit that allows up to \$7,500 for plug-in electric vehicles.

FOR BUSINESSES:

SELF-EMPLOYED HEALTH INSURANCE

Health insurance is expensive and when you’re self-employed it is even more costly. Taking advantage of the self-employed health insurance deduction is a great way to reduce your income taxes. Deduct 100% of insurance premiums up to your net income for health, dental, vision, and long-term care for everyone on your plan. This includes your spouse and family!

RETIREMENT PLANNING

Being self-employed means it is up to you to save for retirement. Being self-employed also means you can put back significantly more to retirement than you can as an employee. For 2023 you can contribute up to \$66,000 to a SEP IRA or 401(k).

PAYING CHILDREN WHO WORK IN THE BUSINESS

If you have a child who helps with your business, ensure you are paying them wages on a W-2. In doing so, you will be able to deduct the wages you pay to them from your business income. There may also be exemptions for FICA and unemployment taxes. Any wages under the standard deduction will have no federal income taxes due.



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CUSTOM FRAMING MAKES A GREAT GIFT

by Tracie Spain

The gift-giving season just began with Christmas. A new year, with Valentine's Day and more upcoming means many chances to show folks just how much you care and there's no better way to show that than to take the time to protect and display precious moments in your life. Why is it so good?

1. PERSONALIZATION AT ITS BEST: Custom framing allows you to personalize your gift like nothing else. By framing a photograph, a piece of art, or even a meaningful object, you are gifting something that has a personal touch and sentimental value and it can be given at any time of the year.

2. ENHANCES THE VALUE OF ART: A well-chosen frame enhances the beauty of its contents. It shows that you not only value the art or photograph itself but also the overall aesthetic appeal it brings when displayed.

3. LONGEVITY AND PRESERVATION: Custom frames are not just decorative; they serve an important purpose. They protect and preserve the item within. This aspect of framing ensures that your gift will be treasured for years to come.

4. REFLECTS THOUGHTFULNESS: Choosing to custom frame something shows that you've put thought and time into the gift. It's a way to show that you truly understand and appreciate the recipient's taste and preferences.



Now that you see the reasons for the value, how do you take that next step and choose the custom frame that is right for you and your memory.

1. CONSIDER THE RECIPIENT'S STYLE: Pay attention to the recipient's style and home décor. The frame should complement both the item being framed and the environment in which it will be displayed.

2. QUALITY MATTERS: Opt for high-quality materials. All wood profiles with an archival mat and UV protective glass not only look better but also offer better protection. A custom frame will protect the object from both the inside of the frame (backing materials) and from the front (conservation glass).

3. CONSULT WITH PROFESSIONALS: Don't hesitate to seek advice from framing experts. They can help you choose the right frame and matting to elevate the item you're framing.

A custom frame is a gift that encapsulates memories, art, and sentiment in a tangible form. It's a thoughtful, versatile, and beautiful way to show someone you care. Next time you're looking for a meaningful gift, remember that a custom frame might just be the perfect choice. Let us help you craft this perfect gift.



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WORD SEARCH:

TYPES OF *Candy*

by Mandi Blake

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| CARAMEL | JELLY BEAN |
| CHOCOLATE | LICORICE |
| COTTON CANDY | LOLLIPOP |
| GUMBALL | TAFFY |
| GUMMY | TOFFEE |

C T E J C G U M M Y V B L P A
P A V A O I K S N H Y P F R O
G Y R Y G D F X A I O U E S H
U R M A U Z D C Q P G W E G D
Z B H E M A O X I I Y F F A T
B B D N B E I L W T E Z F M J
D O L Q A A L K F B C I O K E
K F E L L O S J R D D X T O T
C J E L L Y B E A N E Y C N A
W K C S E G T P U C L V Q B L
I A S O B A R F K N E E G L O
T Q O C Y D N A C N O T T O C
Y F H X E D U Y A E Z S T P O
L I C O R I C E U W D V A M H
C J O H M R L B G U Q I K F C

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SATURDAY, JANUARY 6

EAT A PEACH - A TRIBUTE TO THE ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND WITH TRES LOCOS

Eat A Peach, a live tribute to The Allman Brothers Band in concert at McCandless Hall on the campus of Athens State University with opening act Tres Locos.

COST: \$25

TIME: Doors open at 6:00pm, concert at 7:00pm

LOCATION: Athens State University, McCandless Hall, 302 Bryan St.

MONDAY, JANUARY 15

ATHENS-LIMESTONE DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. HOLIDAY PROGRAM

Essay and art contest winners will be recognized during the program.

COST: FREE

TIME: 9:30am

LOCATION: Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives, 114 W. Pryor Street

THURSDAY, JANUARY 25

BOOK CLUB @ ANTIQUES ON JEFFERSON

Book Club meets on the 4th Thursday of every month.

COST: FREE

TIME: 6:00pm

LOCATION: Antiques on Jefferson, 116 N. Jefferson St.

ROB ICKES & TREY HENSLEY - FIDDLERS CONCERT SERIES

Rob Ickes and Trey Hensley, a powerhouse acoustic duo that has electrified the acoustic music scene. Known for their white-hot picking, stone country vocals with soul and world-class live musicianship, Ickes and Hensley meld together blues, bluegrass, country, rock, and other string band music.

COST: \$5-\$15

TIME: 7:00pm

LOCATION: Athens State University, McCandless Hall, 302 Bryan St.



TUESDAY, JANUARY 30

YOGA AT NIGHT

Free yoga class with certified fitness instructor Yulia Weston. Please bring your own yoga mat and water and meet in the large community room.

COST: FREE

TIME: 7:15pm

LOCATION: Athens Limestone Public Library, 603 S. Jefferson St

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We are honored to have Ginna Chittam and Shannon Elliott as a part of our Limestone shop! With more than 38 years of experience as REALTORS® in Limestone County, Ginna & Shannon are the perfect local match for our global team of expert advisors. Contact Ginna or Shannon to learn how we deliver world-class service right here at home.



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