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ON the COVER



What's Christmas without decorated cookies? Michelle Ray has mastered this skill and shared a few for our lovely cover.

Photo by Heather Sherrill
of Create Portraiture

Remember when neighborhoods had open house at Christmas and you could walk through rooms filled with holiday decorations?

By the tour's end, you're really in the Christmas spirit and your holiday decorating juices are primed to turn your own home into a Christmas wonderland.

Holiday home tours have become scarce, but we found one in the historic little town of Courtland in Lawrence County. There are ideas galore, thanks to the generosity of homeowners who opened their doors to the public for a bit of holiday cheer and a peek inside some of the town's most historic residential dwellings.

While we were in Lawrence County anyway, we stopped by Red Land Cotton to drool over the stunning and high quality, luxurious linens, all American made, and gets its start – and finish – right here in north Alabama. The family grows their own cotton to spin and weave into cloth for bed sheets, duvet covers, and towels that are then sewn right there in town. They would make ideal Christmas gifts (hint, hint) and are not only made locally, but are sold from the most charming boutique.

And then there are the merchants of the Shoals, who once again this year offered us a sample look at the best gifts anywhere around, including a good look inside The Carriage Wine Market in Florence. It is a beautiful wine store that makes you want to slow down and linger as you peruse the wide selection offered here. Remember: wine makes a fabulous gift! Our gift section is a favorite feature of the holiday issue. You're sure to find the perfect gifts for everyone on your list.

So grab a Christmas cookie (don't you just love the ones featured in this issue?) and a hot drink and enjoy this edition of Shoals Woman Holiday.

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Holidays 2018



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HEATHER SHERRILL



Heather Sherrill is the owner of Create Portraiture located in Historic Downtown Courtland. She has been a professional photographer for 11 years and specializes in wedding portraiture. Heather's creative talent, adaptability, and attention to detail make her one of the most successful photographers in northwest Alabama and have earned her the 2017 TimesDaily Reader's Choice Wedding Photographer Award. We have had the honor of working with Heather on this Shoals Woman Magazine as well as the past four. Heather has brought our ideas to life through her photography, capturing the spirit of both the people and holidays featured each season. Furthermore, she is an absolute delight to work with. Check out more of Heather's work at createportraiture.com.



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IDEAS GALORE

This small town's tour of homes will keep your decorating ideas fresh, fun and festive

The best ideas can come from what others have done and at Christmas, if you feel in need of inspiration, we found a home tour that offers fresh ideas inside and out. Courtland offered a tour of homes in 2017 that was filled with ideas that can brighten your Christmas décor this year and for years to come.





LITTLE TOUCHES

Have a room filled with heirloom furnishings? Borrow a tip from this dining room. It has antiques that would lose center stage with fulsome decorations. Instead, minimal additions – a silver garland resting on a shelf, a filigree Christmas tree centering candles in antique stands on a table, is all that's needed.



SIMPLE ACCESSORIES

If you have one beautiful statuette, allow it to be the focal point. Here, cotton batting for snow, a couple of carved reindeer and simple evergreen "trees" allow this Father Christmas figurine to show off his opulence.



GOING LARGE

There are just some rooms, and furniture, that are large enough to still shine on its own with wow-factor centerpieces. The nontraditional arrangement on this mirrored breakfront complements it without obscuring its beauty. And instead of going up with an arrangement, try going wide like this arrangement that set of a glass-topped table.




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ROOM TO ROAM

In spacious rooms that will be central to holiday entertaining, resist the urge to fill it with holiday overload. This dining room remains festive and elegant with the tree tucked in a corner. A buffet supper could be presented on the table, leaving plenty of room for guests to linger and mingle without fear of knocking over a treasured ornament.



SHARED TREE

If you're fortunate to have double French doors separating dining from living rooms, take advantage of it to place the tree at an angle to enhance both rooms. The doorway isn't blocked and the tree, as well as the Christmas touches in both rooms can be shared.



TRADITIONAL COLORS

Red and green are classic Christmas colors that work even in a red room. The greenery from the pine boughs offsets this dining table arrangement that echoes the theme in the holiday china pattern.



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TREAT BAR

Punch and goodies can be arranged on a separate counter. An open shelf is an added bonus. Instead of trees, ornaments and garland taking up valuable surface, use Christmas dishes (even if they're paper!) to bring décor to the space. The lower shelf could hold plates and cups for serving if surface space is limited.



SHOW IT OFF

Bring out your Christmas-themed china and glassware, and even those gold charger plates – it's the only time you can use it, after all! The table is immediately festive and ready for guests, or just to give yourself enjoyment, when it's adorned with all the serving pieces you save for this time of year. The classic pattern in the table runner is all that's needed under a simple, yet elegant glass jar filled with leftover ornaments setting on a holiday tray.



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POP OF COLOR

If your room is neutral most of the year, choose Christmas to give it a pop of color. Table linens are the perfect way to bring color into an area, not only for the dining table, but any accent tables. The color doesn't have to match, but notice how the pattern in the dining tablecloth reflects the fabric pattern in the chairs.



ELEGANT INTIMACY

You don't have to have dozens of guests if there's no room or if entertaining on that scale is too overwhelming. An intimate table for two or four is just as welcoming and reflects holiday elegance with a simple centerpiece. The matching Battenberg cloth and napkins are a classic, elegant complement.



COFFEE BAR

Sure they're usually in small spaces, but like this coffee bar, they can still reflect holiday cheer. Mugs and a cake help bring Christmas to this corner.

MANTLE-LESS

No fireplace is not a problem if you love elaborate displays like this one. Use a floating shelf or picture hanging attachments with hooks to hold garland adorned with ornaments, ribbons and Christmas stockings.



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SNOWY BOUGHS

There are all kinds of ideas for Christmas trees. This one has the look of snow to brighten the green.



CASCADING RIBBONS

This children-themed tree uses different widths of ribbon that cascades from treetop to tree skirt. The ribbons' iridescence doesn't hide any of the trees ornaments.

CANDY CANE

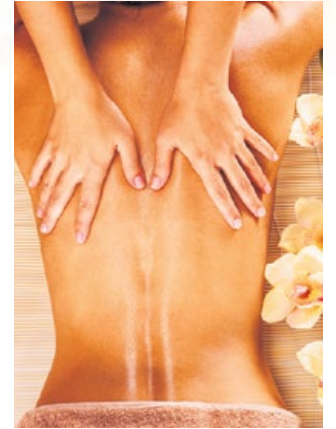
And speaking of ribbon, a brightly patterned one can fill in spaces if it's tucked into the boughs.



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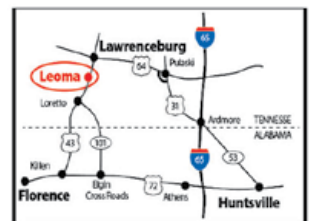
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CRIMSON AND CREAM

Yes, you can still stay true to your favorite football team and have a tastefully decorated tree. This clever idea uses a white artificial tree to showcase the crimson ornaments. A little pop of silver is all that's needed as accent – well that and the subtle addition of a pompom at the treetop.




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TOP HAT DELIGHT

A wider tree is the perfect background for over-large ornaments, like the glittery red top hat and super-size red and green orbs. It can't be overwhelmed by the large wrapped gift in the back, either!



DRAWING THE EYE

This idea is helpful if you have 'that kind of den' in your home. Draping a deer head doesn't quite work, but what about draping the wall behind the tree, and bringing seating at an angle to keep the focus on those festive boughs?



NO WINDOW NEEDED

A tree doesn't have to be placed before a window. This tree transforms an otherwise plain corner – perfect if you rent and can't hang anything from the wall or don't have an accent table.

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ROOM FOR THEM ALL

A long sideboard is the perfect surface for a new or heirloom Nativity. The simplicity of this one – without “ground cover” – allows the depiction of Christ’s birth to be center stage.



HOLIDAY GARLAND

Mantel garland can be elaborate and can even take the place of a Christmas tree if your living space is tight. Use your most ornamental accessories and ribbon to fill the garland – including first wrapping it in twinkling lights.



ANGELS AND ART

Mantel garland doesn't have to hide that absolutely favorite piece of valuable artwork. Keep it simple and don't allow any ornaments or figurines to overlap the canvass.



SPEAKING OF ARTWORK

Don't hesitate to change out artwork over a mantel to reflect the season. The trees at each end of the mantel echo the lighted tree in the framed print.



NO GARLAND

Branches and boughs are not rule of thumb. This Nativity and angel are the focus and will take practically not time to pack away at the end of the season.



NO ORNAMENTS NEEDED

Evergreens and snow give a holiday vibe just as well as fulsome decorations.



FRAMED FOR THE HOLIDAY

If your décor harkens back to a time gone by, so can your decorations by keeping them as natural looking as possible.

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Southern GROWN LUXURY



Anna Yeager Breakfield stands in Red Land Cotton linen boutique in Moulton.



RED LAND COTTON PROUDLY MANUFACTURES ITS QUALITY LINENS WITH A RESPECTFUL NOD TO ITS FAMILY HERITAGE

by SHERHONDA ALLEN

Photos by HEATHER SHERRILL of CREATE PORTRAITURE

When it's the season of harvest, the country on either side of Alabama 157 showcases the lush fields of snowy cotton, boles open, ready to be baled and transported to the gin.

For the Yeager family, not only is their cotton ginned onsite, but they have turned their cotton operation into a sustaining business that produces beautiful, luxurious linens. The entire production of their heirloom inspired fabric is sourced and manufactured right here in the Southeast.

It begins with planting cotton seeds in almost five thousand acres of rich, red soil in Moulton, Alabama. Patriarch Mark Yeager Sr., and his daughter Anna Yeager Breakfield, head the manufacturing business with family support. And on any given day, the newest generation, Katherine, born this year, might make an appearance at the shop in downtown Moulton.

Cassandra Yeager said having family running the business together – they farm produce and raise cattle in addition

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to farming cotton – is an exciting dream come true for this home-oriented matriarch.

“Farming is not a job, it’s a whole lifestyle,” she said as she cuddled her granddaughter while sitting in the back room of the storefront where towels were being folded and prepared for shipping.

“(Anna) was a dancer, she was an artist, and I had no idea if she would ever find her way back to the farm. When she went to Auburn and she went into graphic design and bounced right ... into an advertising firm in New York City and stayed there for a couple of years ... I thought, well, that’s it, she’s never coming back to the farm.”

Anna said she, too, was a bit surprised. After her stint in New York City, she moved to Nashville to work in marketing, and married her husband.

“We both met at Auburn – he finished pharmacy school. I was working in advertising (in Nashville) and just wasn’t fulfilled, didn’t really feel like I was doing what I wanted to do,” Anna said. “And my dad approached me with this idea over the holiday season in 2015. He’s been growing cotton since the ‘80s here. He started with a few hundred acres when he was just starting out and now we’re farming around 5,000 acres. And he approached me with this idea about maybe taking our cotton and maybe making a consumer-facing good with it, and I was kind of in a point in my career where I was just like, why not? I tried working both for a while until it just got to a point where I just needed to quit my old job and go full time into this.”

They thought of sheets as a product to



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concentrate on after a comment from a family member.

“Dad first thought of sheets when his sister commented on an Instagram post and said she would love some sheets made out of good looking north Alabama cotton,” Anna said. “That spawned the idea, and then we were also thinking about a textile that would consume a lot of cotton.

“Sheets just seemed like something that would consume a lot (but it) turned into something that would be the hardest thing to manufacture in the States, because there are very few weavers and finishers that are running wide goods. There are still some that are running narrow for apparel and stuff like that but a lot of that wide manufacturing has gone overseas.”

There were two primary weavers in the Carolinas “that were weaving wide cloth, and one shut their doors (this summer). That has truly been one of the more difficult things that we’ve had to deal with is putting together a supply chain that sticks and works,” Anna said.

They found a way,





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much to the gratitude of consumers who love the luxurious quality linens found in their store and online.

They farm and gin the cotton in Lawrence County, then send the fiber to South Carolina for it to be spun into yarn. That yarn is then sent to be woven. The woven gray cloth goes to either Sumter, South Carolina or to Flintstone, Georgia to be finished – they wash it, put a softener on it and treat it so it can “go through your laundry at home and not turn into a wrinkled mess,” Anna said. And then it comes right back to Moulton, right down the street from the storefront to the women at Southern Sewn.

“When we first started this in 2016, we were

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Left to right: Mary Margaret, Ella Grace, Lawson, Anna, and Claire

The employees at Southern Sewn put the finishing stitches to Red Land Cotton linens.





sending it to a woman in New Jersey to be cut and sewn," Anna said. "These ladies here saw a (news story) and they contacted us and they said, hey, we have a cut-and-sew operation here. I think they offered to make us some shirts, and we were like, well, we're not really interested in shirts, would you be interested in making sheets? They've been able to add seven to

10 employees to their operation. It's not a lot of big machines. They're hand rolling and hand tearing and cutting and sewing all right there.

"It has been really great to find someone here in our hometown to kind of take that operation. We can work really close with them, so we're not having a lot of loss in fabric, we're



Linens, including bath towels, are folded on site at Red Land Cotton.

not wasting a bunch. We have a collaborative relationship that's beneficial to both parties."

The drive to Red Land Cotton's retail site is

worth it to see in person the lovely linens that still retain the calm, earthy look of its origins. That means you won't find hues of brilliant colors and patterns that are the

result of chemical dyes.

A favorite is the duvet cover with blocks of ticking as well as the signature white and natural fabric.

"We got a lot of

requests for a different color, something different than the white or natural," Anna said. "I found this old ticking fabric and sent it to our finisher in South



By working closely with the employees at Southern Sewn, there's very little waste in fabric.

Carolina and asked if they could replicate it with a print, and that's how it came to be, and it's been extremely popular.

"That's really a great example of us working with so closely with our cut-and-sew partners here. They came up with that idea. Every time we make a fitted sheet, there are four squares we have to cut out, so instead of letting that fabric go to waste, they put together these patchwork duvet covers. We thought it was absolutely beautiful, so we started selling those and they've been a big hit."

The family's hope is that Red Land Cotton will continue, and that they will continue to keep their heritage



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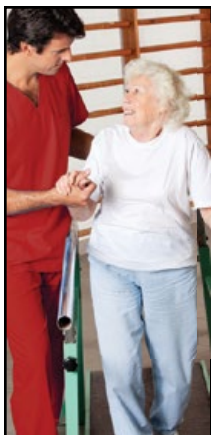
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Food



custom COOKIES

MICHELLE RAY'S WHIMSICALLY DECORATED COOKIES ARE A CROWD PLEASER DURING THE HOLIDAYS

by SHERHONDA ALLEN

Photos by HEATHER SHERRILL of CREATE PORTRAITURE

The beautifully decorated cookies on the cover of this year's edition were baked by Michelle Ray, owner of The Cookie Jar. But don't look for her in a local storefront.

The cookies are so expertly done, it's incredible to know Ray only started her cookie-baking venture a few years ago.

"Around September 2015 is when I had my first official order," Ray said. (She had only been making cookies since the beginning of that year.) "We actually made cookies for my bridal shower. I decided I wanted some cookies, so (my friends and I) made some. And then I started after that and I really enjoyed making them and I thought: I feel like this is something that I would be good at, so I just started doing a lot of research online, a

lot of YouTube videos, blogs..."

And the rest is cookie heaven history. She is on Facebook, Instagram and has website. Orders are taken through the website with many customers reaching out to her via Facebook Messenger. Ray has an Alabama Cottage Food License and bakes from her home.

"The baking part is probably my least favorite. It's like the prep work to get to your canvass."

Ray has one delicious base cookie – a sugar cookie.

"Some people branch out with different flavors," she said. "But the icing is really rich, so when you start getting to chocolate or things like that you have to play with your icing (recipe) to make sure it complements each other."

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The other challenge is finding a recipe that is the ideal dough for cookie cutters and that will retain its clearly defined shape while baking.

“To keep that good shape, the recipe kind of has to be just right,” she said. “I haven’t really branched out into other (cookie) flavors, especially when you’re doing so many of them. It’s just easier to stick with one.”

That’s understandable when you’re talking about orders totaling 15 dozen cookies. She didn’t do Christmas orders last year because she was “finishing up my master’s. I graduated last

December.”

She has a “day job” working in information technology for IBXP in Decatur. Still, the orders roll in. Each is a custom order. Just a couple of months ago, she did a large order for a Muscle Shoals business that was celebrating its 45th anniversary. The cookies featured the company’s logo and were served at the corporate party. Ray had to hand design each individual cookie, using a projector to overlay the company’s logo over each one.

“Just the writing on the cookies took me 13 hours,” she said.

But she doesn’t refer to the work as a burden.

"I really enjoy doing it. It's gotten almost to the point where I can't keep up. I'm having to turn down a lot of people, and I hate saying no."

She has been generous with her talent. Ray teaches cookie decorating classes at Studio 23 in Florence with the help of her good friend, Samantha Hayes, who also has a busy day job as an accountant.

"We try to do two each holiday or season, so we try to hit Valentine's Day,

Easter, ... we did one at the start of football season and we let them pick their teams, and we had Halloween and Christmas," she said. "We really enjoy doing it. They almost always sell out. We only have a limited amount that we can do. I'll keep doing them until no one comes."



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JASON ALLEN WILL PUT YOU AT EASE WHEN CHOOSING YOUR HOLIDAY WINES

by SHERHONDA ALLEN

Photos by HEATHER SHERRILL of CREATE PORTRAITURE

Trust and confidence. Those are not the words that immediately come to mind in anticipation of choosing your holiday wines, but that's exactly what Jason Allen wants you have when you come into The Carriage Wine and Market.

He immediately puts you at ease, inviting your trust, and in a cheerful, matter-of-fact manner gains your confidence with his knowledge of wines – and with his simple acceptance that you know nothing about choosing a wine and are embarrassed to admit it. He is immediately Jason, a friend, there to help.

“We’re here to sort of take away the intimidation of wine shopping because this can be very overwhelming and very intimidating,” he said. “One of reasons the

majority of people shop ... the grocery store is because ... no one's watching you. But where the fault is, is you end of sticking to only what you recognize or what you've seen before. In here, we try to make it as inviting as possible because we want to be able to show you other things that we know you're probably going to like even better than what you're used to, and hopefully save you some money in the long run.”

Jason is the perfect host to The Carriage on East Mobile Street in downtown Florence. Wine bottles have their own beauty, but combine shelves of them with wood floors and the historic yet relaxed vibe emanating from The Carriage, and you've got the makings for one of the best shopping

excursions of the season.

Where to begin in choosing a wine? Tell Jason a few details and let him help you from there.

“We would ask, what the situation is, what you're hosting, we'd ask how many people and if you had any knowledge at all of what the people you're entertaining prefer to drink. And if not, that's OK, too.”

He can start you with wines that are general crowd pleasers.

“We sometimes try to be a little fun and throw people for a loop and pick out things that people wouldn't necessarily know but that we know are crowd friendly, so that they are not already judging it when they see it,” he said. “A lot of people, if you just put a Chardonnay out for

your guests, they might come out and say, well, I don't like Chardonnay, because they had one particular Chardonnay that they didn't like.

So sometimes ... we'll throw in some real French blends, or Italian blends – something that are nondescript – and that seems to work better for people that are entertaining.”

As hostess, tell Jason a bit about your event. Is it a come-and-go, or a sit-down dinner? And how do you know how many bottles to buy? The worst thing that can happen to a hostess is to run out of food and drink during a party.

“The rule for a conservative estimate is about a glass an hour per person, and you're getting approximately five glasses per bottle – so that's sort of the



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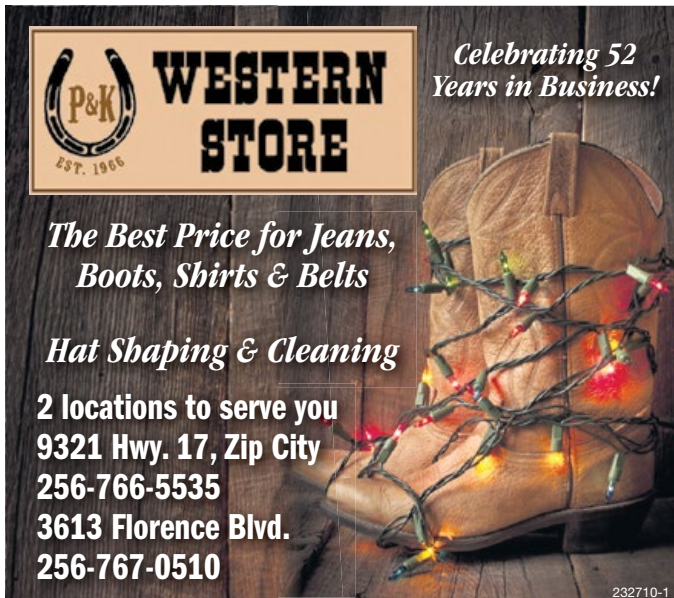
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equation you would use,” Jason said. “During the holidays because it’s a more festive time, I normally tell people to calculate 1.5 to 2 glasses per hour per person and that would give you a better estimate about how many bottles you would need.”

For New Year’s Eve entertaining, the obvious choice is to go with Champagne – a decision Jason approves.

“I always recommend Champagne – every day of the year, not just New Year’s,” he said, laughing. “We have one of the better if not the best selection of bubbles around. It’s a favorite of mine. Things from domestic to international, sparkling wines and of course lots of options of true Champagne. And they run every price point.”

There are even sparkling rose’ wines that are not the super sweet brands that many

have come to expect. And all of us novices can be excused in thinking when it comes to wine, price equals quality. Jason is understanding about that, too.

“I always start out with what are you comfortable with, because, really, it runs the gamut. There are beautiful things that I drink on a daily basis that are as little as \$10 – and they go lower than that – and they can run all the way into the hundreds of dollars a bottle.

“We’re very dedicated to ... constantly looking for things that are not everywhere else, but are still very ... affordable,” he said. “We actually have access to a lot more than the bigger stores do. We’re able to work with smaller distributors who are not going to be in the big chain stores. So that’s actually a great thing





for us. It's actually a privilege for us because we get to pull in small boutique... production, but imported in by these distributors, and the prices are fantastic and can pretty much beat all the bigger stuff."

The Carriage is the perfect place to begin your education, and comfort, in wine selection. It has a full wine bar with a large list of house wines. The feature board is changed each week to introduce

new wines.

"The more frequently you do things like that – looking at labels or looking at descriptions, then when you're out to dinner, if by yourself or with friends, or whatever, and you're looking at a wine list, you don't get so frustrated. It doesn't look so daunting, because you're more likely to recognize quite a few things except just one thing."

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knowledge takes time, patience and exposure.

“We all started out in the same place,” he said. “I started out knowing absolutely nothing. I challenge myself in addition to everyone who works here, and the customers who come in, to just live a little. This is supposed to be an accompaniment to life. So explore. Just try new things. ... There’s just an infinite amount of options out there, and all we’re trying to do is discover new things

that we think are great and we get it out for the customer to see.”

“We’ve developed a customer base that knows they can come in and trust that we’re going to put something wonderful in their hands, and that they’re going to like it.

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1-3 p.m., Sunday
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The Helen Keller home is decorated for the holiday season. The decorations were in conjunction with the Dickens Christmas Y'all.



Dancing at Bell Mont Mansion in Tuscumbia during the Plantation Christmas event.

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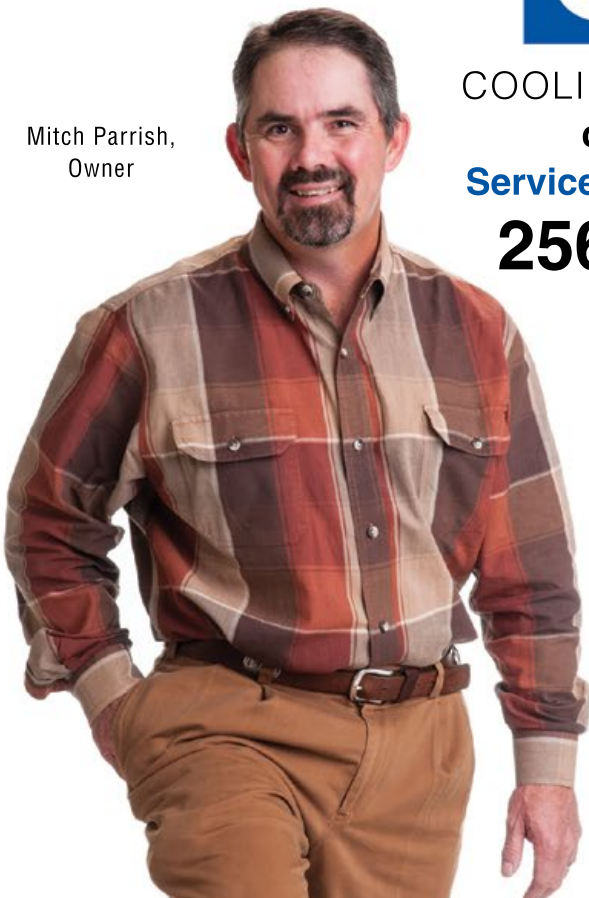
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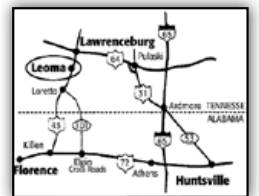
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