

Shoals WOMAN

August 2020

Shoals Woman *of the* Year

Mary Day
Smith

Sunflowers 101

How to grow, care for,
and use sunflowers

Food

Say cheese, waffle board
and nacho platter

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ON the COVER



Photograph by Heather Sherrill of Create Portraiture

When there's a crisis in your life, it's easy to dream about a rescue that immediately rushes to your side, determined to clear the crisis and put you and your family back into a good place.

That's exactly what Mary Day Smith did for a local veteran. Though he had a job, he and his family were living in tents in a Florence park. The family had been denied assistance from several programs. Desperately, they sent an email to the American Legion Post in Florence. Immediately after reading the email, Smith got in her truck and took off for the family's campsite. She found them help and housing, and continues to check in with them.

That's the kind of spirit that brought Smith to our attention and earned her the 2020 Shoals Woman of the Year award.

Each year, the selection is just as difficult as the year before because when nominations are whittled to the final five, it becomes obvious how many wonderful women we have living here in the Shoals who go beyond the responsibilities implied in her career title or business name. We are so proud and humbled to again bring you profiles of five of the finest, not just finalists, who embody a giving and generous character that makes the Shoals the best place to live.

That hasn't changed as we deal with the grips of this COVID-19 pandemic.

But because of the pandemic, many changes have been made to events and plans that usually carry us through the rest of the year. Much of the 2020 events we normally highlight in our Planning Companion and Out and About features of the magazine are absent this year as we live through this new abnormal – a borrowed phrase, but so apt for our current situation.

There will be no awards luncheon this year to formally recognize these wonderful finalists, but we want you to meet them within the pages of this magazine and know that we are proud of them for reaching out to help families, children, veterans and the many people they encounter each day, pandemic or no pandemic.

Keep safe during these trying times and please adhere to the guidelines doctors and other health experts are advising. Caring for each other's health and safety, and having compassion for those directly and adversely affected by COVID-19 will help us emerge from this global crisis as a stronger, wiser and more unified community.

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Top row from left: Emily Russell, DNP, FNP-C;
Liz Davis, MSN, CRNP, NTP; Danielle Elliott, MSN, CRNP

Bottom row from left: Mike Marino, DC; H. Douglas Woodford, MD;
M. Tyler Melson, DO; not pictured: Russell Bien, MSN, CRNP

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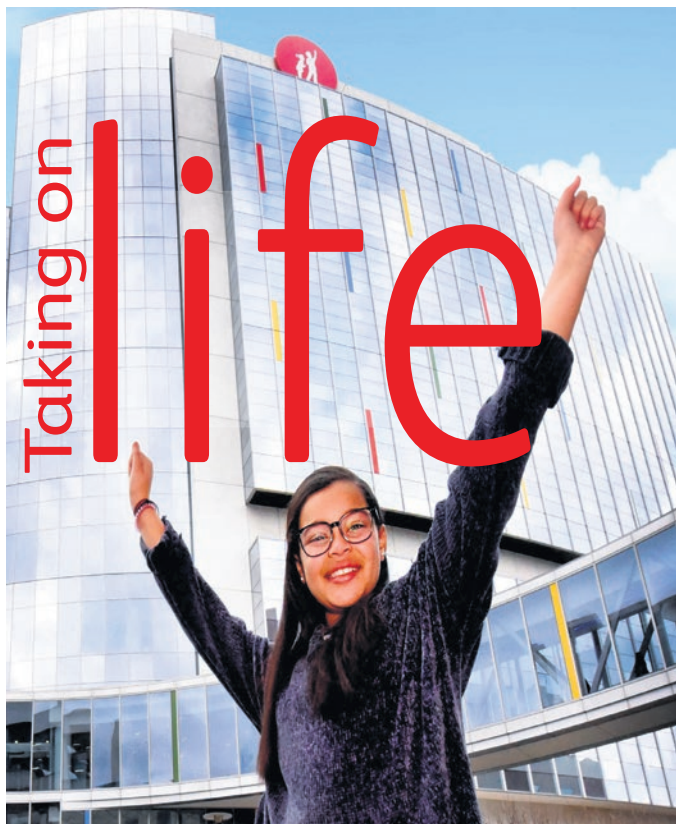

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MARY DAY SMITH

a passion *for* service

by SHERHONDA ALLEN

Photos by HEATHER SHERRILL of CREATE PORTRAITURE

He was a veteran in desperate need of help.

From August through November 2018, the U.S. Army veteran, though employed, and his family were homeless. They sheltered in tents at McFarland Park in Florence and had reached out to various programs and organizations for help. They faced denial after denial.

In what his wife calls, “one last Hail Mary attempt,” he contacted the local American Legion.

Within an hour of sending that email, a black Ford pickup with a flag banner across the tailgate backed up to their campsite. Out steps Mary Day Smith, the adjutant and past commander of American Legion Post 11 in Florence. Her commanding presence and drill sergeant demeanor when there’s work to be done – or help to offer to a fellow veteran – was the beginning of getting that family the help they needed to find housing. She personally drove the family to look at houses and talk to people who could help them.

It’s that kind of hands-on, all-in help that elevated Smith to become this year’s recipient of the Shoals Woman of the Year award.

This veteran’s wife – who nominated Smith for the award – said by the end of the introductions, “we knew the rough and tough exterior was protecting a very soft and squishy heart. ... She and my husband alone moved every item we had out of storage. She procured the items we had most when we lost our previous home. She’s had our backs ever since too.”

Having a veteran’s back is how Smith rolls.

Smith is an Army veteran, too, having served 15 years, including during the Korean War (“The coldest place I’ve ever been in my whole life.”) She has a degree in sociology with a psychology minor from the University of North Alabama, is her Neighborhood Watch block captain, past post commander of both the VFW and American Legion, is a member of the auxiliary, and a

member of the Korean War Veterans Association and the local Elks Lodge, which helps give grant money to veterans and the children’s home (“That’s one reason why I’m a member there.”).

And being adjutant means simply she is the administrator (“I also scrub the toilets!”) and do what it takes to keep the building operational and promote its programs, with the veteran always in the forefront.

The American Legion building in Florence is the second oldest in the state and is there is help the more than 8,500 veterans in Lauderdale County alone. That number grows when you add in veteran’s children who qualify for scholarships or family members who might be eligible for benefits.

Getting those benefits, even for veterans, is not simple or easy.

“The paperwork is extremely daunting for our veterans,” Smith said. “They get it (and) they don’t understand why it’s not more simplified. A lot of times we have to prove our case to Veterans Affairs that there’s issues, and a

lot of our veterans don’t know where to start. They don’t realize all the medical documents that they have to have and don’t know where to begin. They get pages and they don’t understand what it all means. So that’s some of what we do.”

Helping veterans one on one is what Smith loves most about her involvement with the American Legion, and bringing a veteran’s dilemma to an end. “(That) veteran that is upset, can’t get his benefits going – doesn’t know where to start. And you help them take it step by step. Every time they get something in the mail, they bring it to me. And then when they get their benefits, when they get back-paid because they’ve been trying for five years, and they end up getting a back paycheck for \$52,000 and they start drawing \$1,000 a month check from the government from Veterans Affairs for their service and from being hurt on active duty or suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and you’re helping them get into the system,

**2020 SHOALS
WOMAN OF
THE YEAR**
Mary Day Smith



navigate the system, and then it changes their lives.”

She was on active duty for the Alabama National Guard on Helton Drive when fellow Korean War veteran Ralph Dula visited her there and became her mentor. He recruited her to join the American Legion.

“When I first walked in at the American Legion, there were a lot of guys. And I slowly went up the chairs and I became the first female commander for this area. A lot of people know me as ‘there goes the Legion lady.’

“A lot of the guys didn’t know how to take me because I’ve been told I have a very strong personality – I can be intimidating because I’m very passionate about what I do.”

Her first project was working a booth at the fair with past post commander Carmel Olive.

“Carmel said, ‘Let’s give

her a chance’ and that was a big endorsement.”

She got involved with the Post’s Boys State and Girls State programs and is now Boys State coordinator for Lauderdale County.

“A lot of the kids will drive pass my truck and they’ll be doing the Boys State symbol and waving. It’s just hilarious. I just love what I do.”

That American Legion emblem with the flag on the back of her truck was designed by her “and a young kid” and acts like a “rolling billboard,” she said. “It’s proved to be very helpful.”

There are many aspects of a veteran’s life that Smith said needs community focus and understanding. For instance, the suicide rate among veterans.

“Statically, 21 to 22 veterans a day are killing themselves. There’s a suicide issue from Desert Shield, Desert Storm all

the way up to the 911 veterans. Our younger veterans are having different problems from the Vietnam veteran that got spit on (after returning to America).

“So a lot of times having us networking as a group and having the spirit and mouthpiece to say, hey we need to get this person off the side of the river, whatever it takes. We need to make sure that we walk on Oct. 22 for the veterans that have already killed themselves. We’ve lost some of our own members at the American Legion because they don’t reach out when they need to. When we see someone struggling, we reach out to them and let them know we care.”

That’s important because the structure of serving in the military can be challenging to veterans as they return to civilian life.

“My post commander...

he’s a former combat medic from Vietnam, Purple Heart recipient – you wouldn’t know it unless you knew him, but you can understand him when he gets in crowds, and it gets too noisy, he’ll step off, take a break. We understand that because we know where he’s been.

“When you become a civilian you might need therapy, you might need medication ... sometimes you’re physically challenged as well. You have trouble sleeping. You have panic attacks. Loud noises (can trigger) flashbacks. We as veterans try to avoid those trigger moments, but sometimes it’s unavoidable. When you’re around other veterans, you can hug each other and say it’s going to be OK, calm down, take a breath. It’s all right.

“Someone that’s lived and stayed around Lauderdale County their



Mary Day Smith said part of what she does is to keep the American Legion Post 11 in good operational shape.



This is a display of pins Mary Day Smith has acquired over the years.

whole life and never lived in the Mojave Desert or never been to Pakistan ... how can they understand about the guy that you saw half of him go out the window (during an explosion) – the impact and the compression of that event. PTSD is a major issue. Depression, anger issues, the way they speak – veterans like myself ... can be intimidating sometimes to the public. But veterans are loyal, dedicated workers that can make your business successful (because) most veterans are very dedicated to what they do – their jobs and what they do volunteering in the community.”

She doesn’t seek thanks for anything she does, but Smith said sometimes the thanks come to her in unexpected places, like the wife who came up to her “at Walmart – you don’t even know her, but she knows you – and she’s wrapping her arms around you, she’s hugging you, telling you thank you for what you did for my husband.”

The Legion’s slogan is “Veterans Still Serving” and Smith said that means service to country and community. She never forgets that service or those who served. Every Memorial Day she visits her mentor’s grave to remember him and place a flag there.

She agrees when she hears people say she “bleeds red, white and blue.”

“If we change one life at a time, I’ve done my job.

“I know I have a very intimidating personality sometimes, but it’s all going to the right place.”



Mary Day Smith looks over a wall of photographs on display at the American Legion Post 11 in Florence.



SHEILA JOHNSON

Mentoring forward

by SHERHONDA ALLEN

Photos by HEATHER SHERRILL of CREATE PORTRAITURE

Sheila Johnson never forgot what it was like in her early years as an educator to have mentors help show her the way.

In high school, she excelled at math – something her teachers noticed and nurtured to the point they allowed her to substitute teach on occasion. She said she didn't think of her future in education at the time but that quickly changed.

"I've always loved children. I enjoy teaching," she said. "I always had that desire even though that's not what I thought of being."

There was a little red school house in Tuscumbia where she was substitute teacher and where the full-time teacher there took Johnson under her wing.

"And I found that to be enjoyable and I learned a lot (from the teacher)," Johnson said. "She was a very good mentor to me."

When the need for a preschool was discussed because kindergarten teachers in the area believed children would benefit from early exposure to socialization before taking on a full schedule of school, Johnson taught the children three days a week in the mornings.

From 1970-'79 she honed her teacher skills. One day her mother told Johnson about a Kiplinger letter that forecast the next big thing needed was going to be in child care. Johnson opened her first center in 1979 and operated it five days a week. There were only two centers at the time that she knew of – one in Tuscumbia

at Calvary Baptist Church and Little Angel in Florence. Directors at both those centers mentored Johnson.

"So I had some wonderful mentors," Johnson said. It was something she never forgot.

"Mentoring is important because . . . a lot of adults and prospective owners considered child care a really money making business," Johnson said. "And it's really not, if you're doing your job correctly. But the rewards are great. I truly never feel like I've worked a day in my life. If you enjoy what you're doing . . . and feel like you can make a difference in children and baby's lives, then it's worth it."

Johnson has made a difference in the lives of women she has mentored who now either own a day care center or who teach at the preschool and kindergarten levels.

"She has provided many young women with an opportunity to better themselves throughout their careers in early childhood education by offering teaching positions in her day care classrooms and scholarships to attend our local community college," one woman wrote in nominating Johnson.

"Sheila Johnson is more than willing to help surrounding day cares with questions they may have about becoming state licensed or applying for grants for first class pre-K programs.

"I would not be a seasoned pre-K teacher or have the knowledge that I do about early education if it were not for her."

Johnson said she advises teachers and day care owners that they must "learn that everything you think is not perfect and correct. You have to learn as an employer yourself, that you have to sit back and let the teachers to their thing. You learn from each other.

"And it's so important that we teach children at a developmentally appropriated time. All children do not learn the same, all of them do not retain it at the same age, so you do a lot of repetition."

She also said to be prepared for children at that pre-k and kindergarten age to be brutally honest.

"You can have a bad hair day and guess what? 'What happened to you hair today?'" she said with a laugh. "They notice everything. You have to be able to laugh at things whether you laugh out loud or under your breath."

She said early childhood education is important because children "learn social skills, they learn how to get along. There's no division in a child care center, and children learn that from the beginning."

And though all of her children didn't return when she reopened her center after the spring shutdown, she said she and her teachers were amazed at the discipline in their young charges.

"They understood a mask and they understood things because they had been taught at home," she said.





ANNE HOWARD

Mama lion from beginning to end

by SHERHONDA ALLEN

Photos by HEATHER SHERRILL of CREATE PORTRAITURE

They weren't the bundles of joy most parents expect in newborns, but Anne Howard said it was love at first sight and they were brought into her life because, she says with a laugh, "I married the right guy."

Howard's husband, Dan, was vice president for advancement at the University of North Alabama when the decision was made to seek out two African Nubian lions to replace Leo II, who died in 2000, as the university mascot. A lion habitat was built two years later, and Dan found a brother and sister, Leo III and Una, born in a New Hampshire wildlife park, and brought them home.

"One was 8 pounds, one was 10 pounds," Howard said. "They were so tiny that they were easy to handle and as they grew up, I was 'mommy.' I became the surrogate mama at six weeks old.

"They had to be bottle fed every three hours, so we kept them until they were totally weaned and on solid food . . . about three and half or four months."

When Howard said "we kept them" she means that literally. The cubs lived with Anne and Dan. The lions moved into their habitat in 2003.

But don't think Anne's care for them ended. She and Dan knew they were now part of Leo III's pride – his family unit – along with Una and continue to be the primary caregivers.

"They're my babies," she said. "I will take care of my babies. My normal routine is I get to the habitat about 7 (a.m.). We put

them in the sand box. They're potty trained, believe it or not. There's a big sand box back there. We would put them in the sand box and clean the playground. When the playground is clean, we put them in the playground and clean the inside.

"Seven days a week, every area they touch is sanitized with a (safe) ingredient that . . . is safe if they were to lick it. I'm usually there most of the day, at least six hours a day. And then I'm there at feeding time, which is about 4:30, and I put them to bed."

Leo III and Una draw crowds of visitors to their habitat during a birthday party that's held in April to honor UNA's first mascot. Their 17 years together included appearances at ballgames and road tours.

Then, on June 30, Una, who had developed a carcinoma in her lung, was euthanized at the habitat when it was learned the illness was terminal.

Anne, who had held bottles for Una as a cub, was there to hold Una's head in her lap as she eased away.

"She was the most loving creature I have ever had," Anne said. "I've had cats, dogs, gerbils, you name it. Lions are the top of the food chain. They're the ultimate predator, but she was the sweetest, most loving creature. She never tried to bite me or scratch me. She would always put her head against the fence to have her ears rubbed, or her chin scratched.

"Leo is a sweet boy, but as my

husband says he's got some rough edges. If he'd get too cranky with me, she would put herself between me and him. She never gave me a moment's problem.

"She was a predator, yes, I understand that. But with myself, my husband and with a few other people, she was just a big, huge kitty cat."

Anne said she and Dan kept a close eye on Leo after his sister's death. The lions had been together since birth and Anne was afraid Leo would stop eating.

"He's really in heaven when we both are there," Anne said. "He has to know he still has a pride – he still has a family."

Since Una became sick, she and Dan have been at the habitat anywhere from 10 to 14 hours a day.

"The first few days (Leo) would lay outside in the playground and just stare at the night house, waiting for Una to come out. He got over that. Now he calls her. And he's developed what I call that 100-mile stare. He just looks off into space. But he's eating well. That was my main concern. He is eating. So, my husband and I are hanging on to him."

She would tell other people who are considering volunteering for anything to "do it. You're paying back whatever goodness you've received in your life. You will feel better for it, and I think the big guy upstairs will smile on you, too."





VIOLET THOMPSON

Taking care of fractured families

by SHERHONDA ALLEN

Photos by HEATHER SHERRILL of CREATE PORTRAITURE

North Alabama Visitation Center was founded by Violet Thompson and her husband as a safe place for family members that have consequences in their lives from making what she calls bad choices.

"We all make bad choices in our lives and so by having the facility, we're hoping that those choices are corrected to where these children can go home with their family members and have normal healthy lives. Unfortunately, it doesn't always happen. But that's what we're hoping for."

It's a nurturing place where it's OK to confess if you have no idea what to do as a new parent.

"I had a case where the dad comes in and when he first comes in he's like, 'hey,' and he's holding this baby like this," she stretches her arms in front of her body as if holding a baby under both armpits in front of her, "and the baby starts crying and he's like, 'how do I know what to do?'"

Thompson said taking those moments to show a panicked parent how to cradle a baby against his chest is often the beginning to easing that young adult into the confidence of being a parent.

"We teach them how to hold them, how to change their diaper, how to love them and how to give them affection and how to mix their bottles."

One of her first cases was with a mother of three boys who had never "put a puzzle together with her children. She had never sat and colored with her children or built or played cars or trucks. She didn't know how. So we just got in the floor with them and (played together)."

Thompson grew up in domestic violence and said her life was "so dysfunctional as a child. ... Drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, physical, verbal – I tell everybody you can name

it all and I can give you an example."

She met her husband when she was 18 and the two of them made a commitment to each other "that our children would never, ever have to hear their mom and dad fussing and fighting, and they would never observe us hitting each other, or feel like they weren't wanted or weren't loved, or whatever, because sometimes adults say some really awful things and they have no idea what that does to a child," Thompson said.

In 2008, Thompson was thrust into the position of supervising visits between a father and child who were her family members. An attorney she was familiar with told her if she could supervise one visit, she could do others and said she needed her own center.

"My husband and I started researching (and touring) visitation centers, and we'd make lists of pros and cons, what we liked and what we didn't like.

"(We) talked to our children, because we knew that it was going to demand a lot of our time and that it wasn't going to be an 8 to 5 job because there's people who work days, there's people who work nights."

They opened North Alabama Visitation Center in May 2009.

Thompson continued with her job in Huntsville the first three years after the center opened, offering services on Saturday and Sunday. Then, she cut her days back so the center could be open on Thursday nights and Fridays.

"It was really, really playing a toll on me," she said. "I just kept praying about it. I tell everybody my center is God's place and I just run it for Him. Because I prayed. I was just getting so tired I didn't know what to do. I was afraid to quit my job because ... we're 100 percent privately owned."

Then came the day that Thompson finished a big project at work and sat

still a moment with her eyes closed. When she looked down, she was holding her hand-written letter of resignation.

"I walked outside and I called my husband and said you're not going to believe this. And he said well you know who that is? And I said, it's God. I've got to follow his lead."

After her last day, when she was driving back to the Shoals, she was stopped at a red light and prayed, "God please don't make me rich. Please just let me help the families and keep these children safe and if there ever comes a day when I'm not doing your job, take it away from me."

She had three referrals on her fax machine the next day.

"Ever since that day, when I lose a case – that means they no longer have to come to my center for whatever reason – within a few days I get three more to take its place. I tell everybody it's God. It's not me."

There was obvious gratitude in the letter submitted for Thompson's Shoals Woman of the Year nomination from a man who said her center was where he visited his daughter during the custody battle with his ex-wife.

"Mrs. Violet showed me how to rock a baby, because I had no idea about children," he wrote. "She gave me great advice. Mrs. Violet also prayed for me during my situation. I can't thank her enough for (her) kindness. She (had) never met me (yet) treated me with the utmost respect and still to this day she checks on my daughter."

"We're like a speed bump," Thompson said. "You come up to a speed bump, you've got to slow down, and then ease over it and go on. We're the ease over. You do what you need to do, then you can go on with your life and you no longer need us."

"I'm just grateful for the families that we've been able to help."





COURTNEY TATE AKINS

Helping kids see their field of dreams

by SHERHONDA ALLEN

Photos by HEATHER SHERRILL of CREATE PORTRAITURE

Autism awareness is personal to Courtney Tate Akins.

She and her husband have two sons, Eli and Luke. Eli, the oldest, was 2 years old when she noticed he still wasn't talking.

"That was our first sign," she said.

They got speech therapy and occupational therapy for Eli who they also noticed had some sensory issues. But it was Eli's "mother's day out" teacher whose observations made them seek more answers after she told them Eli didn't really play with other children and other signs she had noticed.

"Once we learned more about autism, we could look back and say, 'Oh, OK, we remember when this transition was hard and that was a sign,'" she recalled.

"You can get into early intervention, you can also hire a private speech therapist . . . outside of the school system, and we did all of those things and received a lot of really great services but as far as activities and extra things that give those children an opportunity to participate, there's not a ton of that, really in the state and in north Alabama, and that's what I'm really passionate about creating," she said.

There already had been vague mentions of developing a Miracle Field in Muscle Shoals, but it wasn't until Akins got involved that the idea made progress. She immediately made phone calls, reached out to city officials and did her research before coming back to them and asking, "What's the

hold-up?" she recalled, laughing.

When it opened, the Miracle Field, which is designed for children with special needs, was a huge success despite not having a season this year because of the coronavirus pandemic. But there still was a problem.

Luke is active in sports and Akins said Eli accompanied them to Luke's sporting events.

One day Akins noticed Eli, who is high-functioning and smart, was exhibiting signs that he felt left out.

"I just watched Eli and I noticed that he was noticing we were going to all these games for (his) brother and 'I don't do anything.' And that broke my heart in some of the things that he said, the way he expressed that, and so I thought you know what? That's not fair. So there needs to be something for him. There's so many kids like him."

Akins said she knew Eli would not be able to handle an organized sport, "just because, whether it's the noise level or sensory issues, or just processing the rules - there's just different things that would make that complicated.

"I just came up with this idea and met with a couple of people who helped me, and we called it Shoals United Stars....and basically it's a sports team for a kid with any type of need."

They started with basketball and paired each child with a buddy who helped them with basic skills like dribbling the basketball.

"Every child that's participating had a buddy (who) showed them

what to do, they reiterated what my directions were, so we just did basic basketball skills for probably several months until we knew the Miracle Field exhibition was coming," she said. "Then we switched to practicing some baseball, just with how to run the bases and things like that. We had some very generous donations from ... my church and a family from my school system ... and we were able to get uniforms. We looked like a real team. I wanted the kids to feel like my goal was for them to feel like they were a part of a team."

Shoals United Stars is open to any child with a special need. If the child can't run the bases, they'll find a buddy to throw the ball with that child.

"There's something for everybody," Akins said. "My goal is to feel like they're part of a team, to get some exercise, and also to give the parents a break (to have) just that hour in the day where they can hand them over to me and their buddies."

Some of the buddies are as young as 9 years old and some are 15 and 16. Akins said the buddies get as much from helping the children as the children themselves.

Those who nominated Akins for the Shoals Woman award described her as a "warrior" for children, and a woman of faith.

And in the words of one person who submitted a nomination for Akins: "This is a woman that makes the Shoals a better place to live."



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Say CHEESE

by CECILIA BRUMLEY

Photos by HEATHER SHERRILL of CREATE PORTRAITURE

Building a dinner party-worthy cheese board can be an overwhelming task.

Cheese and charcuterie boards are an art form that involves much more than throwing some cheeses and crackers on a plate and serving it to guests - it's more than just a meat and cheese board. While any sane person will still love whatever you serve, I'm going to help you impress your guests. Here are a few tips and tricks to creating your own masterpiece in your kitchen.

-There is such a wide variety of cheeses out there it can be hard to narrow down my choice to just one. My number one rule when putting together a cheese plate is to offer a variety of styles of cheeses. Try finding a combination of aged, firm, soft, crumbly and creamy cheeses. If you are serving any hard cheeses, cut them into slices ahead of time to make it easier for guests to eat.

-Add fruits of different shapes. Aim for two to three types of fruit with different shapes. Think grapes, one or two round fruits like sliced apples or citrus, and small berries like raspberries or blueberries to fill in the gaps.

-Don't forget the carbs! Think beyond crackers and try slices of bread.

-Balance out all the salty cheese on the board by adding some dried fruit.

-Cheese is best served at room temperature. Remove cheeses from the fridge about a half hour before serving.

-Have a serving knife for each cheese so flavors don't mingle.

-Fill in blank spaces by scattering around candied pecans or a mixture of your favorite nuts for added crunch.

With a cheese board, there's bound to be something to make everyone at the table happy!

Waffle BOARD

by CECILIA BRUMLEY

Photos by HEATHER SHERRILL of CREATE PORTRAITURE

A build-your-own Waffle Board with all the toppings to choose from is a fabulous and fun way to serve breakfast, brunch or brinner!

Board meals are my favorite meals and breakfast for dinner (aka brinner!) is one of our weeknight regulars, so this build-your-own Waffle Board makes an appearance quite often. We'll also make it for breakfast or brunch on the weekend. The excitement that brews as we're building this board and the enjoyment that we all experience as we're eating off of it is truly the best!

For a build-your-own Waffle Board, sometimes I'll go with French Toast Waffle Sticks, or Blueberry Cake Waffles for some added variety with still lots of yum. However, the people at my house don't like to get too far away from the norm so a classic waffle is always a hit. Add scrambled eggs, sunny-side-up eggs or bacon to the board for a good protein option.

We also enjoy mixing up the toppings. Of course, butter and maple syrup are a must have on a Waffle Board. Some of our other favorite toppings are fresh fruit, peanut butter, Nutella, honey, pecans, chocolate chips and whipped cream.

How would you top your perfect waffle?! I love strawberries on my waffles and sometimes I might get a little crazy and add some chocolate chips! Dust some confectioners sugar on the top to give it an extra bite of sweet and it makes it pleasing to the eye too!









-EPIC- NACHO PLATTER

by CECILIA BRUMLEY

Photos by HEATHER SHERRILL of CREATE PORTRAITURE

Serving an epic nacho board is one of my favorite ways to serve a simple appetizer! In all the years of hosting parties and small gatherings, we know that everyone LOVES chips and dips! This is such a perfect summertime snack or appetizer for by the pool, at your next cookout, or any summer get-together! The best part is that there's ZERO cooking involved (unless you count chopping a few things and opening some cans!) yet this is a spread that is sure to impress all your guest AND be super delicious as well. I love that guests can mix, match, and customize their own selections and taste ingredients as they please.

This easy nacho board contains just a few ingredients but options are endless....

-A variety of tortilla chips-I choose a blue corn tortilla, a classic restaurant style, and Aldi had an interesting black bean tortilla chip so I added those too!

-Salsa-there are too many to choose from so pick your favorite, I prefer one with black beans and corn.

-Guacamole-is one of those appetizers that we love to change up and make our own. Here is a quick and easy recipe.

3 Avocados Large, Ripe, Peeled, Pitted
1 Jalapeno Finely chopped, remove the seeds
1/2 cup Onions Finely chopped
1/4 cup Cilantro Finely chopped
1-2 tbsp Lime juice Fresh, Or lemon juice
Salt To taste
1/4 tsp Cumin powder
1/2 tsp Garlic powder
1/4 tsp Red chili flakes

-Queso-Restaurant Style, White Cheese, or Velveeta and Rotel tomatoes. Is there even a bad cheese dip?!

Garnish your dish with fresh avocados, lime slices, peppers and cilantro for a picture perfect spread!

Sunflowers 101:



Sunflower field at Bradford
Farm & Venue, Town Creek, AL

How to grow, care for, *and* use sunflowers

by CECILIA BRUMLEY

Photos by HEATHER SHERRILL of CREATE PORTRAITURE



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I feel that sunflowers are the happiest flowers in the world, and learning how to grow sunflowers is a super enjoyable gardening activity! Often used in big bold arrangements, these beautiful plants bring an assortment of benefits for your home. Learning how to grow sunflowers is easy, and finding new ways to incorporate them in your garden is a lot of fun. Whether for their aesthetic look or for practical benefits, the sunflower is a popular choice among gardeners and one of the most widely recognized flowers. With their golden color, the full sunflowers give a sense of joy and warmth. If you would ask any gardener who has already grown them, their eyes will light up with great excitement.

PLANTING

If you plan to start growing sunflowers in your garden you have to decide first on their best location. Sunflowers like the sun and develop best in a sunny location. Alabama summers can be brutal. The sunflowers don't mind – in fact they seem to thrive on neglect. As a general rule, it is best to

pick a spot for growing sunflowers where they can receive at least six hours of daily sunlight. If you plant them in a shady or windy area, your sunflowers will require additional staking support as they will stretch to reach the sun. Plant sunflower seeds about an inch deep in loose soil; the roots like to grow deep and wide. Sunflowers can grow in poor soil but richer soil will produce larger blooms. The amount of space to leave between plants depends on the size of the flower. Small blooms can be spaced about six inches apart, but the largest blooms need about three feet between each plant.

If you choose to plant the taller varieties of full sunflowers you will need to take into consideration how they may block wind and sun from other garden plants. This can negatively impact other sun-loving plants, but can also be a good thing in case you are trying to shelter particular garden plants from too much wind or sun. In doing some recent studying on these cheerful flowers I read that planting cucumbers, corn, peppers, tomatoes, and soybeans near





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sunflowers bring these other plants benefits and make their harvest more plentiful.

GROWING TIME

Most of the sunflower varieties reach maturity after 75 to 110 days. You can grow sunflowers in your garden from the last freeze until the next winter season. If you want to insure enjoyment with staggered blooms throughout the whole growing season, consider planting a few each week. Stop planting your sunflowers with 75 to 100 days before the time when its expected the first winter freeze in your location.

HARVESTING

Yes, you can harvest sunflowers! Just like the sunflower seeds you can buy for a baseball game. When you grow them yourself, you can either let the birds and the squirrels eat them (they LOVE and devour them!), save your seeds to plant for next season, or roast, salt and enjoy!

If you decide to let the birds and squirrels eat your sunflower head, there's nothing extra you need to do. They know when they're ready and they won't be shy!

Timing is everything, however, if you are hoping to harvest for your own use. When the sunflower heads start to droop and nod downward, harvesting time is soon. If you notice the animals are getting to them before you, we recommend covering the heads with a brown paper bag if you aren't ready to harvest yet.



Kinley Sutton
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Harvesting sunflowers is best early in the morning.

MAKING SUNFLOWER BOUQUETS

For indoor bouquets full of sunflowers, it is recommended to cut the main stem close to the flower bud. This way you encourage the side blooms to open. It is best to harvest your flowers early in the morning, as the heat during middle of the day can cause flower wilting. You can expect that your bouquet full of sunflowers will last in water at room temperature at least one week. Just change their water daily in order to keep them fresh. Due to their heavy heads, sunflowers are suitable for tall containers.

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Make a Statement

by CECILIA BRUMLEY

Photos by HEATHER SHERRILL of
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Not since the '80s have such loud ear accruements been so prevalent. But today the rules are different. Whereas once costume jewelry was excessively piled on with a full face of make-up and bouffant hair, today it is an accent to oversized shirting and distressed denim. It's no longer just costume jewelry that veers towards bold statements, but the most traditional of fine jewelers too. Across the board, the styles are bigger, brighter, flashier and more sculptural than ever, and some of them even extend way below the shoulder. They could

be architectural sculptures in mismatched colors, sizes and stones, made of fringed shoulder-grazing chainmail, singular hammered-gold shapes, or ornate hoops of huge proportions. Restrained diamond or pearl drops they are certainly not.

Earrings make a huge statement. They're one of the first things anyone notices when someone looks at your face. An independent jewelry consultant once told me that if you wore hoops larger than a quarter it took 10 pounds off your face. I say "give me the biggest set of hoops you got!"

Here are a few ways to incorporate a statement earring into your wardrobe...

Style statement earrings with complementary colors:

If the thought of wearing lots of color overwhelms you, then here's a trick: find a patterned piece you like and pull the colors in your outfit from there!

Soften an edgy black and white look with statement earrings:

I tend to be someone who goes for a simple monochromatic or black and white look. When thinking about my statement earrings, red really pops against the black and white. And there's nothing better than adding an edgy kelly green or summer's brightest colors.

Spice up a T-shirt and jeans with statement earrings:

Who says a T-shirt and jeans are boring? Depending on how you style them, denim and a graphic tee can be a lot of fun!

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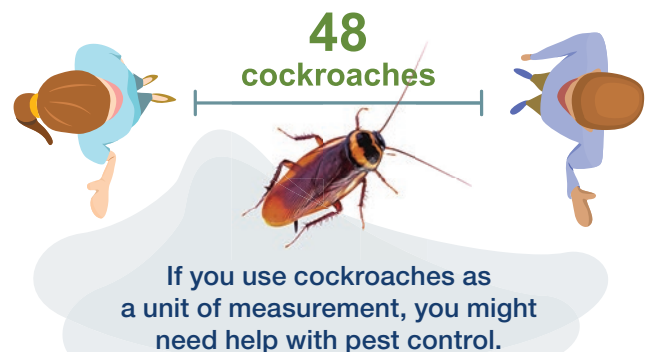
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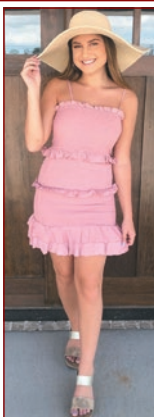
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Who will be the 2021 Shoals Woman of the Year?



The Shoals Woman of the Year award honors women who have made significant, unique, and lasting contributions to their community. Nominees must be residents of one of these North Alabama counties: Lauderdale, Colbert, Franklin, or Lawrence.

There are many women in the Shoals who are good people, great moms and hard workers for their employers. The Shoals Woman of the Year committee is looking for women who go beyond the norm. Women who have been chosen for Shoals Woman of the Year have all volunteered to lift some aspect of daily life in others who are struggling. Now in its 16th year, the award, sponsored by the TimesDaily, recognizes remarkable women who don't just speak of problems in the community, but actively become part of the solution.

Our committee wants to know why your nominee deserves to be the next Shoals Woman of the Year, how they have impacted your life, the life of others and the entire Shoals area. The TimesDaily accepts nominations starting March 1st and they remain open until May 20th of each year. Nominations can be made by email to swoynominations@timesdaily.com or mail nominations to: TimesDaily, Attn: Shoals Woman of the Year, 219 W. Tennessee St., Florence, AL 35630.

Once nominations close our SWOY committee meets and has a tough job of sorting through all the remarkable women

that are put in front of them each year. Nominees are narrowed down to five finalist and contacted to congratulate them, notify them of being selected as a finalist and we always want to make sure these ladies are comfortable and accept the nomination. Then the fun begins! We set up in person interviews, videos, and photos and get to spend time with these ladies and see what they are all about. Nominations are always a gateway into what these remarkable women are doing in our area but no one can tell their story, their heart, and their desires quite like they can. Once videos are done our committee again has a tough job to select who should be deemed as the Shoals Woman of the Year. In our many years of this selection process, it has never been easy and it has always seemed appropriate that we just award them all. Finalist are honored at a luncheon in August where the Shoals Woman of the Year will be announced. Coverage of all five of our finalist can always be found in our August edition of Shoals Woman.

For more information on Shoals Woman of the Year nominations or the event please contact Cecilia Brumley, Event Coordinator at 256-740-5802 or Cecilia.Brumley@timesdaily.com



2017 SWOY
Mercy Winters



2018 SWOY
Jessica Davenport



2019 SWOY
Ginger Willingham



2020 SWOY
Mary Day Smith





NOMINEES

for the 2020
Shoals Woman
of the Year

Courtney Tate Akins
Melissa Hickman Bailey
Rebecca Banks
Carolyn Beckwith
Mary Carton
Patti Prescott Chrisman
Glenda Colagross
Fran Davis
Michelle Rupe Eubanks
Andrea Thompson Glover
Tonya Gourley
Laura Hardeman
Amberly Harris
Lekeva Harris
Jessica Hill
Anne Howard
Rebecca Hovater
Gerline Hughes
Kim Jackson
Sheila Johnson
Karen Landers
Susan Looney
Sandy Goode Lynch
Brittany Lopp Michael
Rachel Elizabeth Pochop
Mary Day Smith
Kaytrina Simmons
Nancy B. Smelser
Tiffany Smith
Vicky Stanfield
Della Taylor
Ashley Terry
Rosalind Thatcher
Violet Thompson
Mildred Thornton
Baylee Tiffin
Denise Woods
Heather Wright

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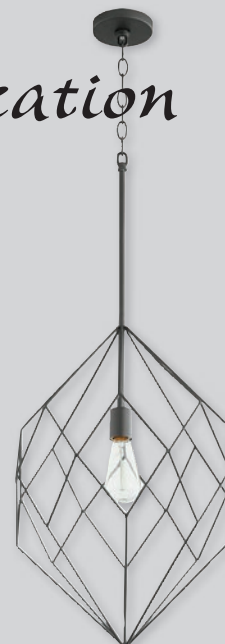


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past WINNERS



2005 | SHERRY FOWLER

Fowler was chosen for her work with the North Alabama Head Injury Foundation. Her daughter, Mary Darlene, sustained a debilitating head injury in 1986 when she was struck by an intoxicated driver. Fowler was advised to place her daughter in a nursing facility. She refused. She received the training necessary to care for her 19-year-old daughter at home. Fowler continued working with the foundation after her daughter's death in 2005.

2006 | NATALIE GORDON

Gordon was 24 years old when she battled cancer and underwent a life-saving surgery: the removal of her left arm and shoulder. She was mother to a 7-month-old and a 3-year-old and Gordon said she was not prepared to lose parts of her body. More importantly, however, she said she was not prepared for her children to lose their mother. She said the surgery was traumatic and depressing, but Gordon adjusted and became an inspiration to others. She vowed not to let her loss stop her.



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2007 | KAY PARKER

Parker and a friend, Sharon Scogin, developed the idea for The Healing Place after Parker saw a television report about a grief support center in Portland. She believed a similar center was greatly needed in the Shoals. The Healing Place became a haven where adults and children learn to work through their grief after a loved one's death. Parker's goal was to give people a place to be heard and to learn healing thoughts, including learning how to cherish memories and keep them from being debilitating.



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2008 | BETTY BURDINE

Burdine has spent her life helping people, first as a nurse, then as coordinator of the Lifewise Seniors program for Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital in Florence. She didn't stop there, but volunteered in several community endeavors. She helped raise money for the American Heart Association and was instrumental in procuring the monument for Lillian Diebert in Diebert Park in Florence. Burdine's caring nature extended to Lillian Diebert, who she would look in on before Diebert's death in 2011.



2009 | FELICE GREEN

Green retired from the University of North Alabama in 2003 but didn't sit still. She has a special love for children and will don costumes to read to children at various outlets across the Shoals. Green also expressed her love of art and dance and became a member of the Poza Dance Troupe while remaining active in Delta Sigma Theta sorority, which she helped charter at UNA. She is a known organizer of events during the W.C. Handy Music Festival including the ABCs of Blues & Jazz. She is a volunteer with the Salvation Army and St. Vincent De Paul Society at Our Lady of the Shoals Catholic Church in Tuscumbia.

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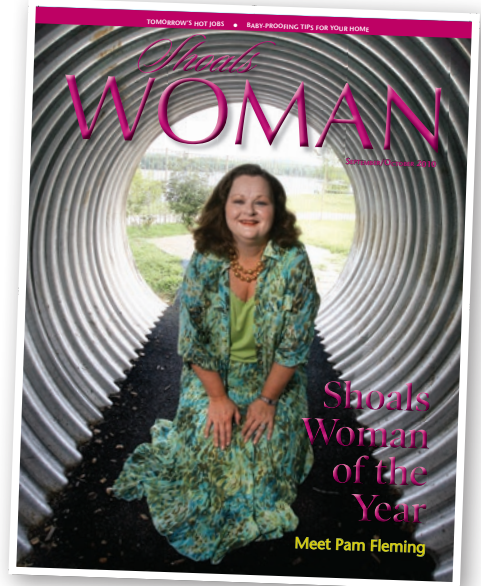
Edward Jones

To register and find more
information, go to alz.org/walk.

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END
ALZHEIMER'S
alzheimer's association

2010 | PAM FLEMING

Fleming's outgoing personality helped her carry on a tradition she first learned from her parents: help people in need. She was honored for her work in helping to create the boundless playground at Riverfront Park in Sheffield. The playground is play-friendly to any child, regardless of his or her abilities, with a sandbox that wheelchair-bound children can roll up to and play in. Fleming also was instrumental in getting a new home for the Ealy family when their daughter, Shanteki, was diagnosed with leukemia and was told she could not return to her home because of its condition.



2011 | DEBBIE RAPPUHN

Rappuhn took her daughter to the Florence-Lauderdale Animal Shelter for a school project but soon returned to offer her services as a volunteer. She painted and scrubbed and initiated improvements that included a cat habitat room, a puppy room and a laundry room with a sink for bathing animals. She was appalled at the number of animals euthanized and dedicated countless days to finding homes for those unwanted pets – even if it meant sending them to other shelters and homes across the country.



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2012 | ELBA BARNES

Barnes needed to care for her ailing parents and moved from Birmingham to Florence to be near them. She soon realized there was an important gap in available services in the area: there was no place where adults like her parents could go for social interaction, exercise and art activities. Such a place would also offer respite for caregivers. Barnes brought an idea for an adult day care to Westminster Presbyterian Church. In July 2009, Westminster Interfaith Caring Place opened, initially as a Sunday-only program. By November, it was offering a mid-week break so caregivers could go Christmas shopping. Eventually the nonprofit center would operate Monday through Friday.



2013 | SARAH JENNIFER THOMPSON

After Thompson's sister, Sidney, died in January 2006, Thompson honored her sister's memory and founded Sidney's Safe! Foundation. It was a place where other women could learn how to stand strong against domestic abuse and how to seek recovery from addiction. The foundation has branched out to help children, too. It is an outreach that provides hundreds of bags of food a week to local schoolchildren who otherwise would go hungry.



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2014 | SUSIE MARTIN

Susie Martin was only required to spend four hours a month with the girl who became her "little" at Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Shoals, but she and 13-year-old Sabrina Carles are together every weekend, all weekend. The program allows Sabrina to be Martin's Little until she is 15, but Martin jokes she will keep her until Sabrina gets married.



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2015 | ANGIE HAMILTON

Angie Hamilton presented the idea for a one-stop center that could streamline help for victims of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse and physical abuse, and elder abuse – cases she saw regularly as an assistant district attorney in Lauderdale County. The idea was immediately well received, and One Place of the Shoals was born.

2016 | NINON PARKER

Ninon Parker grew up on the front lines of celebrating the history of the Shoals, including as a member of Ivy Green's first cast of "The Miracle Worker" – the stage play that celebrates the awakening of Helen Keller to the world around her. Parker's community involvement is one of historical preservation and business promotion that keeps the Shoals a vital place that recognizes its important past, as well as its exciting future.



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2017 | MERCY WINTERS

A member of the Salvation Army Women's auxiliary, Mercy Winters was instrumental in bringing the successful Empty Bowl Luncheon to the Shoals as a fundraiser for the Salvation Army each year. She is hands-on in her volunteer work, not only in helping to plan the luncheon each year, but leading her "clay mates" group to meet at her and her husband's ceramic business to make the bowls that are featured at the luncheon. She has even gotten her neighborhood involved in community charity work by organizing an Iron Bowl event that benefits a different charity each year.

2018 | JESSICA DAVENPORT

Jessica Davenport's children, Kruz and Paizlee, were born with Schimke Immuno-Osseous Dysplasia, or SIOD. In simple, dire terms, the children have a rare form of dwarfism that brings with it renal failure and a weakened immune system. It's also fatal, with a life expectancy of 9 to 11 years. Instead of falling apart, Davenport founded Kruzn for a Kure Foundation and has raised the \$1 million needed to get the attention of wealthy philanthropists who can raise the \$6 million needed to kick researchers into finding a cure for the rare disease. In the 12 months since Davenport received the Shoals Woman of the Year award, she and her husband Kyle have moved to California where Kruz has not only received his mother's stem cells, but one of her kidneys as well. Paizlee is being prepped to receive the same from her father. Keep abreast on these remarkable children and their parents through Jessica Davenport's Facebook page or the Kruzn for a Kure Foundation Facebook page.



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2019 | GINGER WILLINGHAM

Ginger Willingham has always had a heart for service, and in 2014 learned there were children in the community whose only opportunities to eat were at school. After much prayer and discussion, she was inspired to establish Isaiah's Call, named for Isaiah 58 in the Bible. She and a bevy of volunteers pack food bags with enough food for the children and their families to have during the weekend. They started with seven families at one school and now serve more than 200 families at schools in Colbert and Lauderdale counties, as well as Safeplace, a local shelter for women and men and their children who are fleeing domestic violence.

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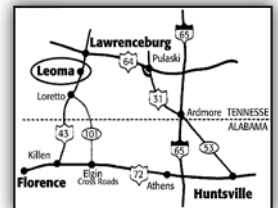


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