

Explore

Decatur-Morgan



Cook Museum amazes

page 44

See more inside on the adventures,
food, festivals and fun this area offers

VISITORS AND NEWCOMERS GUIDE



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Decatur-Morgan

2022-23

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Welcome to Decatur and Morgan County

Whether you're visiting Morgan County or moving here, you'll find plenty to do, from experiencing modern science and exploring the outdoors to learning more about the Civil War and railroad history.

In Decatur, it all starts with the Cook Museum of Natural Science, which celebrates its third anniversary this year. The \$32.4 million facility contains 62,000 square feet of exhibit galleries that include a 15,000-gallon saltwater aquarium, an immersive cave, an interactive sand table and live animals.

For fun and cooling off during the summer months, it's hard to beat Decatur's Point Mallard Aquatic Center. It includes one of the nation's first wave pools, water slides, a lazy river attraction and children's play area.

If you prefer simpler pursuits, immerse yourself in Decatur's natural beauty that revolves around the Tennessee River. The city also has a burgeoning arts community. Visual arts exhibits are open throughout the year at the Carnegie Visual Arts Center and Alabama Center for the Arts (ACA).

History buffs will be interested in Decatur's Historic Railroad Depot and exhibits at the Morgan County Archives.

Have fun exploring

About the cover

Tiffany Dauber visits the Cook Museum of Natural Science's Rivers & Streams exhibit with her four children, from left, Jasmin, Liberty Rose, River and Kiran. Photo by Jeronimo Nisa. Design by Stephen Johnson.



Explore

Decatur-Morgan

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POINT MALLARD WATER PARK

Making a splash in Decatur for 52 years

By Catherine Godbey, Explore Magazine

Six decades ago, a 33-year-old visionary's dream of transforming an undeveloped tract of land along the Tennessee River into a water park made a splash in the tourism scene.

Leafing through bins containing early blueprints of the water park, Decatur attorney Gay Blackburn Maloney recalled the efforts of her father, J. Gilmer Blackburn, in the development of Point Mallard Park.

"We lived on Stratford Road and would ride our bikes to the end of the road, which bordered the woods that is now Point Mallard. My daddy was always curious about those woods and how it could benefit Decatur," Maloney said.

Ten years later, in 1970, the Point Mallard Water Park, with an Olympic-sized swimming pool, diving platforms and one of the first wave pools in the country, opened to the public and became one of Decatur's most popular tourist attractions.

Now, 52 years later, Point Mallard Park, which, along with the original features, includes speed and flume slides, pro



J. Gilmer Blackburn

bowl slide, a children's area and lazy river, and connecting campgrounds, tennis courts, archery range and baseball and soccer fields, is a destination for thousands during the summer.

More than 136,000 people visited the water park, officially known as the J. Gilmer Blackburn Aquatic Center, in 2021. Along with visitors from Alabama, the water park entertained people from Alaska, Michigan, Oklahoma, Colorado, Texas, Louisiana, Illinois, Virginia, Tennessee, Mississippi and other states. Those numbers include many visitors who return to the park annually.

Point Mallard Park Manager Stephanie McLain attributed the park's success to the variety of attractions.

"Making memories with family and friends is the number one reason so many return annually. From the wave

pool to the lazy river there is something for everyone," McLain said.

Creating a recreational space for all people motivated Blackburn, who served as Decatur's mayor from 1962-68, to pursue the development of the water park.

That pursuit included convincing the Tennessee Valley Authority, which owned the property, to use the land for recreation rather than industry.

"Looking at recreation as a viable industry was a new concept at the time. He had to convince the TVA and city officials how recreation could attract people to the area and improve their lives," Maloney said.

Blackburn and his close friend Jack Charlton, who visited every Sunday, would walk around the property and discuss its future — a future expanded on by Charles M. Graves & Associates of Atlanta, which created the park's comprehensive plan. Through the company, Blackburn first learned of wave pools.



While visiting Europe, Blackburn toured an indoor wave pool in Germany. Maloney said the wave pool and a trip to Callaway Gardens inspired her father's vision for Point Mallard.

"Callaway Gardens, in his mind, was a model of what Point Mallard Park could be," Maloney said of the Georgia attraction, which features gardens, hiking and biking trails, a beach and golf course.

Saturation celebration

As for the name of the park, credit goes to Blackburn's wife, Phyllis.

"We were in our station wagon, parked on a mound of dirt and facing where the wave pool is now. My dad said, 'What do you think we should name the park?' My mother said, 'How about Point Mallard?' That's how the name, in my memory, came about," Maloney said.

To commemorate completion of the wave pool, the park's staff started the waves and threw Blackburn into the pool.

"I remember my dad coming in the door and his tie had shrunk up from being thrown into the wave pool. It was really a great moment for him to see all he had worked for come to fruition," Maloney said.

Since its opening, Point Mallard, anchored by the wave pool, has become a staple of Decatur's summers. The most popular features are the wave pool, lazy river and slides, McLain said.

The water park's opening and closing days, which coincide with Memorial Day in May and Labor Day in September, signal the unofficial beginning and end of summer for many parkgoers.

Park keeps evolving

To keep Point Mallard competitive over the past five decades, the park has added attractions and features.

Recently, the park received a grant from the Alabama Tourism

Department to draw up plans to renovate the children's area.

"My dad knew there was always room for improvement and growth," Maloney said of her father, who died in 2009.

"Every year, he would go and check on the park."

For his work on Point Mallard, Blackburn received the 1971 Award of Merit from the American Parks & Recreation Society.

"He was a real visionary. He was well known in recreation," Maloney said. "My father was very proud of Point Mallard and its growth. It's part of Decatur's personality. It helps make the community a better place in which to live."

Address: 2901 Point Mallard Drive S.E.

Website: pointmallardpark.com

Telephone: 256-341-4900, option 1

Hours: From May 28-Aug. 5, the park is open from 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Monday to Saturday, and 1-6 p.m., Sunday. From Aug. 6-Sept. 5, the park will open only on Saturdays, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., and Sundays, 1-6 p.m.

Admission: Daily ticket prices are \$28 for ages 12-61, \$23 for ages 3-11 and 62 and older, and free for ages 2 and younger. Half price admission days are Monday through Thursday, excluding holidays.



ALABAMA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

The modern style of the Alabama Center for the Arts complex makes it one of the jewels in Decatur's growing downtown arts scene. The complex includes one building for the performing arts, including theater and music, and a separate building for visual arts from painting to pottery to computer design. Windows along the visual arts business on Second Avenue Northeast offer passers-by a glimpse at exhibits on display in its gallery. The center's displays range from national watercolor exhibits to life-size sculptures to creations by the area's youth. Along with the gallery, the Alabama Center for the Arts' performing arts building houses the Alabama Arts Hall of Fame. The permanent exhibit pays tribute to actors Dean Jones and Nell Carter, musicians the Drive-By Truckers and Emmylou Harris, composer Henry Panion III, author Truman Capote, photographer Tillman Crane, artists Nall Hollis, Richard Zoellner, Mildred Nungester Wolfe, the quilters of Gee's Bend and Bruce Larsen and dancer Wes Chapman.

Alabama Center for the Arts

Address: 133 Second Ave. N.E.,
Decatur

Telephone: 256-260-4293

Website: alabamacenterforthearts.org

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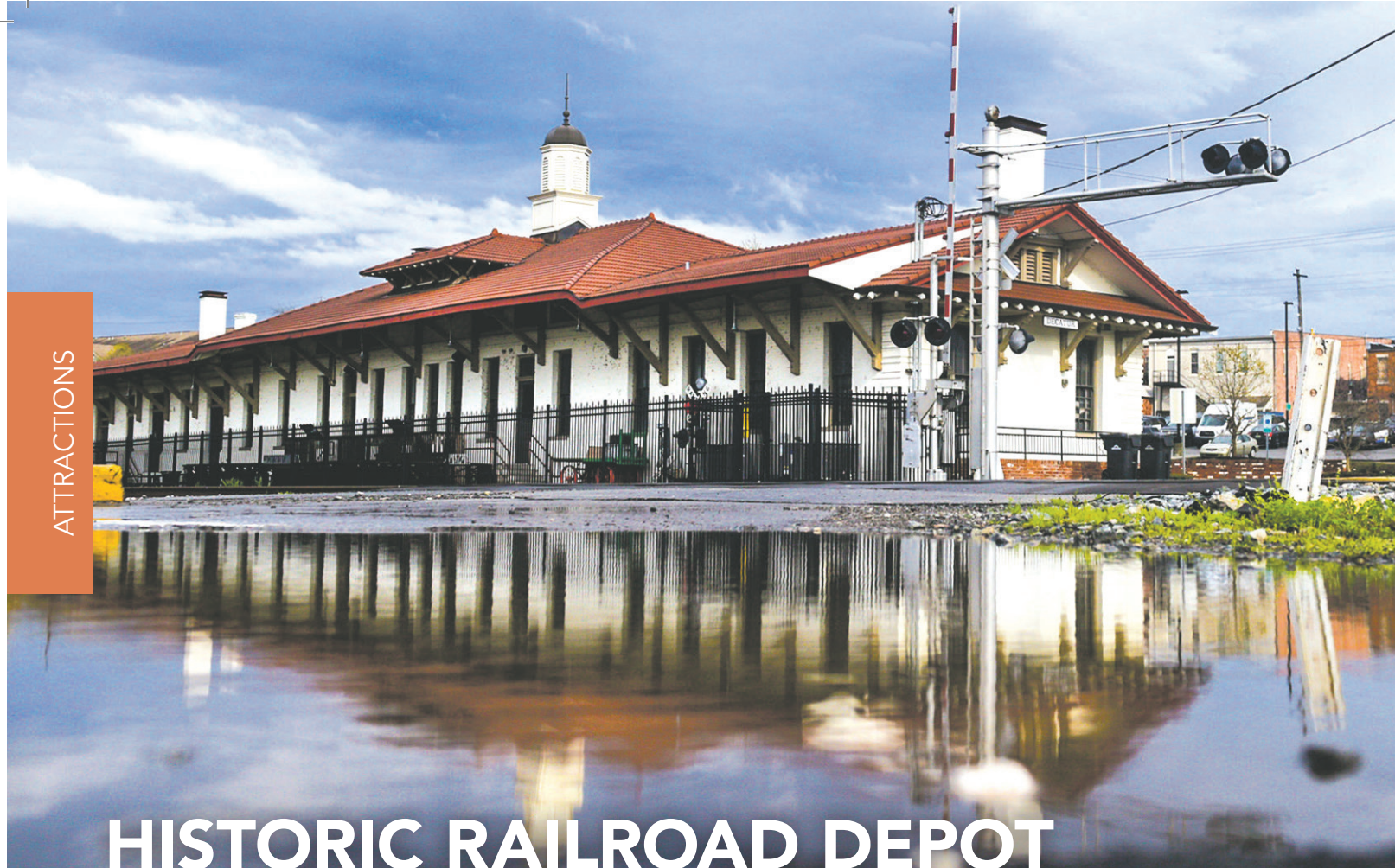


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HISTORIC RAILROAD DEPOT



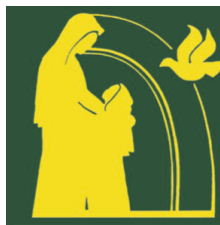
Decatur has turned its historic depot into a museum that includes a model train layout depicting the city. It's also what's known as a hot spot for watching real trains because both CSX and Norfolk Southern have tracks behind the depot where their trains operate. Built by Southern Railway in 1905, the restored depot also features railroad memorabilia, artifacts and photographs. Notable pieces include the original depot superintendent's desk, the baggage cart and benches, all from 1905. Restored in 2015 and 2016, the building's original features include the doors and brick and plaster walls. The museum celebrates Decatur's railroad heritage, which dates back to the 1830s when the first railroad west of the Allegheny Mountains, the Tuscumbia, Courtland and Decatur railroad, was built.

Address: 701 Railroad St. N.W., Decatur

Website: decaturparks.com

Hours: Tour times: 1:30 p.m., 2 p.m., 2:30 p.m., 3 p.m., 3:30 p.m., Monday-Friday; 10 a.m.-noon, Saturday. Weekday mornings will be open for scheduling group tours.

Admission: Free



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MORGAN COUNTY ARCHIVES

The Morgan County Archives is a hidden jewel. It has professional exhibits about the area's role in the Civil War, the Scottsboro Boys Trial and the county's development from post-Reconstruction to the creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority. The Scottsboro Boys exhibit includes rare photographs of one of the trials in the case that produced landmark changes in the nation's legal system. Located in the 1927 Tennessee Valley Bank Building, the archives also serves as a repository for county records and is an invaluable resource for area historians.

Address: 624 Bank St. N.E., Decatur

Website: co.morgan.al.us/archivesindex.html

Hours: 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday

Admission: Free



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Address: 12280 Alabama 20, Hillsboro

Hours: 9 a.m.-noon and 1-4 p.m., Wednesday through Saturday

Website: ahc.alabama.gov/properties/pondspring/pondspring.aspx

Admission: Fee charged

The former home of Gen. Joe Wheeler, who served as a lieutenant general for the Confederacy during the Civil War and as a general for the U.S. Army during the Spanish-American War, sits on Alabama 20 between Courtland and Hillsboro. The 50-acre Pond Spring plantation includes the general's home, a log cabin built before 1818 and later used as slave quarters, a log barn, a 19th century icehouse, family cemeteries and gardens.

Address: 2211 Sem-
inole Drive S.W.,
Huntsville


Website: lowemill.art

Hours: 11 a.m.-7 p.m.,
Wednesday-Saturday

Lowe Mill in Huntsville can please your senses of sight, smell and taste. It has more than 200 artists and artisans and 152 working studios, including some serving food and refreshments. Housed at a former textile mill, Lowe Mill has cigar box guitar makers, ceramicists, painters, printmakers, jewelry makers, musicians, sculptors, woodworkers, book binders, distillers, tea makers and more.



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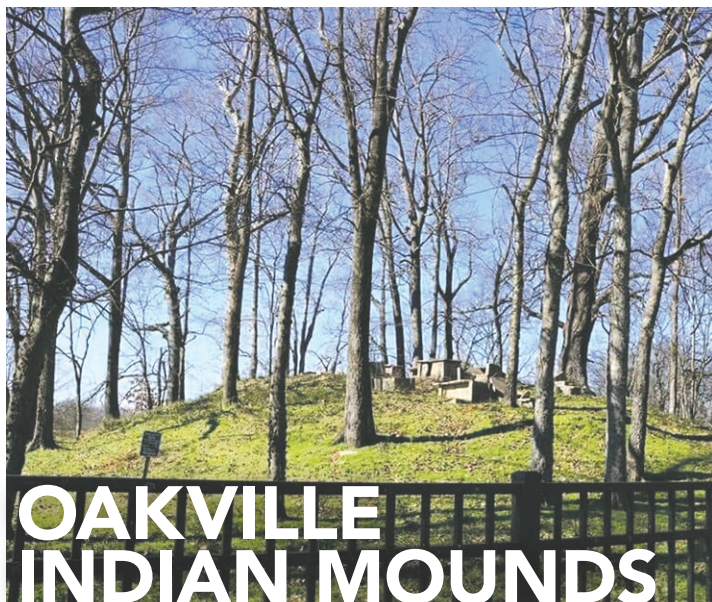
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Oakville Indian Mounds

Address: 1219 Lawrence County 187, Danville

Telephone: 256-905-2499

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Admission: Free



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PRINCESS THEATRE CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Known for the art deco styling and neon marquee at its entrance, the Princess Theatre in downtown Decatur offers large-scale concerts, live plays, intimate singer-songwriter sessions and screenings of movies. It has served as an entertainment center for north Alabama and neighboring states for more than a century. Founded as a livery stable in 1887, the Princess Theatre transformed into a vaudeville playhouse in December 1919. The 677-seat theater has hosted George Washington Carver, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Tony Randall, Cloris Leachman, the Count Basie Orchestra, Arlo Guthrie, The Blind Boys of Alabama, St. Paul and the Broken Bones, the Secret Sisters and Roseanne Cash.

Princess Theatre Center for the Performing Arts

Address: 112 Second Ave. N.E., Decatur

Telephone: 256-350-1745

Website: princesstheatre.org

Admission: Fees charged for shows



CARNEGIE VISUAL ARTS CENTER



The Carnegie Visual Arts Center houses rotating exhibits featuring paintings, sculptures, photographs and fabric art created by local, regional and national artists. Past exhibits included works by folk artist Mose T, the Gee's Bend Quilters, David Gordon, who worked on "SpongeBob SquarePants," biophilia artist and visual ecologist Doug Baulos, Smithsonian Institute's traveling "Water l Ways" and mixed-media artist Arthur Price. Built in 1904, the building that houses the arts center originally served as Decatur's first public library. Focused on expanding beyond the arts center's walls, the Carnegie installed exhibits at the Somerville Public Library and the Huntsville International Airport. The center also oversees Carnegie Carnival, one of Decatur's premiere events.

Carnegie Visual Arts Center

Address: 207 Church St. N.E., Decatur

Telephone: 256-341-0562

Website: carnegiearts.org

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MURAL, MURAL ON THE WALL

Take an outdoor outing and view works of art covering building exteriors across the area.

Across north Alabama, works of outdoor art – over-sized butterfly wings, a Native American design, veteran memorial and celebration of women’s suffrage – cover area buildings.

To view the public art, follow this guide of murals in Morgan, Limestone and Lawrence counties.

DECATUR

Tribute to Jimmy “Yellowhorse” Webster

113 Sixth Ave. N.E.

Completed in July 2020, the artistic tribute to Decatur

icon Jimmy “Yellowhorse” Webster stands 15 feet tall and 40 feet long. Internationally-known artist Michael McPheeters, better known as “Mister Mural,” painted the multi-colored war horse surrounded by geometric designs on the side of Webster’s Karate on Sixth Avenue.

The mural, which celebrates the Native American culture in north Alabama and the influence of Webster, a Cherokee descendant, represents the first project created by the Decatur-based Chasing Art.

“Public art has a responsibility to the community. If it doesn’t inspire the community to want to be better, it’s just paint on a wall. Each piece, I pray, lets us all

realize the one thing we have in common is this town. We all want to live in a community we are proud of. I hope the murals create some pride in our community and connect us all,” said Glenn Mitchell, founder of Chasing Art.

“Welcome to Decatur”

253 East Moulton Street

Another mural in the Chasing Art project is at the corner of East Moulton Street and Fourth Avenue. Decatur High fine arts students painted the mural to celebrate city’s welcoming atmosphere.

“What Lifts You” Wings

219 Second Ave. S.E.

For an interactive mural, stop by the “What Lifts You” art piece on the back of the Shops on 2nd Avenue in downtown Decatur.

Painted by noted muralist Kelsey Montague, the large-scale 15-foot-tall delicate wings feature peacock feathers with hints of pink, green and blue. Position yourself within the wings



and let somebody take your photo getting ready to fly.

The mural, completed in nine hours in October 2020, was the second project organized by Chasing Art.

“Homecoming”

206 Second Ave. S.E.

Depicted on the side of Pineapple’s Home Décor on Second Avenue, “Homecoming,” which features a young girl holding a flower, pays tribute to the artist’s sister.

Adam Stephenson, a Decatur native, used a photograph of his sister, Lara Chandler Whitehead, as a flower girl at a wedding, to create the mural, which covers the wall.



"I've had this photo of my sister for a long time. I've kept it with me in my sentimental belongings. I knew I always wanted to do something with it. I like her pose in it and the innocence of it. This is how most of us who knew Lara remember her," Stephenson said.



Stephenson and fellow artist Yehimi Cambron completed the mural in the fall of 2019. The mural represents the debut project of the Foundation for the Alabama Center for the Arts' Urban Art initiative.

"A Stitch in Time"

624 Bank St. N.E.

Measuring 24 by 8 feet, the mural on the Morgan County Archives building on Bank Street depicts Decatur's history.

Images representing the Spirit of America Festival, Rhodes Ferry Landing, Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, Cherokee heritage, architecture of Albany and the state bird and flower adorn the piece designed by Las Vegas artist Markus Tracy.

Elementary students at Walter Jackson, Frances Nungester and Austinville assisted Tracy with the quilt-like folk art design.

Other outdoor art

While in downtown Decatur, stop by the Alabama Center for the Arts, 133 Second Ave. N.E., where a 30-foot-tall metal owl sculpture created by Fairhope artist Bruce Larsen stands. Larsen's sculpture features found and reclaimed material, such as gears and scrap metal. Two

of his pieces, a dragonfly and heron gateway, appear at Delano Park's Riverwild Garden, on Gordon Drive Southeast between Eighth and Ninth avenues.

For outdoor art on a smaller scale, search for the turtles on the Downtown Turtle Trail. Envisioned by Lucy Orr, a 2021 graduate of Decatur Heritage Christian Academy, the trail features 10 bronze sculptures of turtles. From the turtle holding a microphone outside the Princess Theatre to the turtle playing the saxophone at Jones Park to the turtle wearing a top hat outside the former Cotaco Opera House, the trail tells pieces of Decatur's history. For more information, visit decaturcvb.org/things-to-do/activities/trails/downtown-turtle-trail.

ATHENS

Merchants Alley

Merchants Alley is a public space off Jefferson Street where people can relax, listen to live performances in warmer months and enjoy ever-changing art, such as a mural of Limestone County musician Brittany Howard.

There are five art components to the alley. The first is the large mural on the left as you enter the alley, featuring a violin on the side of Terranova's building. It is the only permanent art feature of the alley.

The second component is the tribute board, which will change every two years. Right now, it features Howard, lead singer and guitarist for the Alabama Shakes. It was done in six hours with two cases of spray paint.

The third component is "Passages" created in partnership with the Alabama Center for the Arts. There are doors attached to the alley walls that when opened, reveal murals. College

students created the paintings, and they will be changed yearly.



The fourth component are murals that are taken from high school students' designs and painted on by volunteers of the Athens Arts League. Enlarged copies of the designs were used to make tracings on the wall, and then paint was applied, sometimes after modifications by the volunteer artists to fit the space.

The fifth component involves early childhood art. They are called art windows because one piece of art goes in each windowpane of the wall on the right side of the alley.



Alabama Veterans Museum

Local artist Jamie Adams, along with Athens State University students, began a mural in honor of area veterans in the summer of 2020. The mural, through portraits, tells the story of hundreds of Limestone County active duty military members and veterans.



"This is a way to honor those individuals who we need to remember, honor and celebrate," said Adams, an assistant art professor at Athens State. "A lot of people don't get the recognition they deserve, especially men like my two uncles who passed away. Having a way to honor their memory, having their portrait where thousands of people see it as they drive by, keeps their memories and sacrifices alive."

The 40-foot-long by 15-foot-tall mural features three soldiers in front of an American flag consisting of a mosaic of 200 photographs of Limestone County servicemen and women.

MOULTON

"Be the Difference" Court Street

In April 2020, on the first anniversary of a fire that destroyed four buildings in downtown Moulton, volunteer artists transformed the site on Court Street into a piece of art.

Painted on the plywood wall separating the fire damaged area from the street, the mural depicts interactive scenes and sites iconic to Lawrence County, including the Jesse Owens Museum, Bankhead National Forest and Oakville Indian Mounds.

The mural also includes the motto "Be the difference in your community" – the motto of the Moulton Lions Club, which organized the art project.



ALABAMA VETERANS MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

Veterans Jim Watson, left, Donnie Owen, center, and Eddie Craig chat in 2021 while at the new Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives in Athens. [JERONIMO NISA]

By Tim Nail, Explore Magazine

ATHENS — The military medals retired Army veteran Jim Ripley has viewed at the Alabama Veterans Museum & Archives hold special meaning to him. Some of them are his own.

Ripley was one of many who donated memorabilia to the museum, which veterans say is unique in that it focuses more on individual soldiers than on U.S. wars at large.

"I'm proud of this museum," said Ripley, of Harvest. "The people who worked the hardest to make this happen were people who were ... with people in the military, dependents and family members that really pushed to make this happen. It's amazing what they do for the veterans around here, making sure that people come in and see the equipment we used."

Photos of Ripley on horseback and on an all-terrain vehicle in the Middle East as well as his Combat Infantry Badge and Bronze Star Medal are just a few of the items in the Alabama Veterans Museum's larger collection at its new facility, which opened its doors in mid-2021.

"This is a very patriotic community," said Jerry Crabtree, president of the museum's board of directors.

Retired Army Lt. Col. James Walker also contributed to the museum's collection for the new space — gifting his treasured uniform, now on display clothing a mannequin — and said he was pleased to see the final product of the expansion.

"It is an amazing upgrade," said Walker, who was a JROTC instructor at Austin

High School in Decatur for 23 years before retiring. "This represents Alabama well, and in fact to be truthful it represents the nation well. It's a hallowed ground, a place where we can celebrate our heroes."

Kent Davis, commissioner of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs and an Army and Navy veteran said he hopes the museum will be not just a tourism stop but a destination for visitors to Athens because of improvements in the new facility.

"It's important to have a museum like this and talk about the sacrifices that some of these folks made, some of them with their lives," Davis said. "I know (the original location) was getting a little cramped so this is nice that they've got more space, they can spread out a little bit and they can actually expand. It's a great example of so many groups coming together to make this happen."

The new location will also feature a virtual reality experience placing museum guests on the battlefield, which Crabtree hopes will capture the interest of younger guests.

Crabtree, an Alabama National Guard veteran who served from 1971-74, said the response to the upgraded museum has been one of "shock and awe."

"We exhibit what the soldier wore on his back in battle, the letters he got from home or wrote to home," he said. "People can relate to that and ... it brings back memories."

— tim.nail@decaturdaily.com or (256) 340-2437. Twitter @timnail

Alabama Veterans Museum & Archives

Address: 114 Pryor St. W. (former Limestone County Event Center), Athens

Telephone: 256-771-7578

Hours: 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Monday-Saturday

Website: alabamaveteransmuseum.com

Admission: Donations accepted


ATTRACTIONS



Veteran Tink Haney, left, and Limestone County Honor Guard member Louis Mitchel look at one of the displays in the relocated and expanded Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives in Athens. [JERONIMO NISA]



Randal Jennings, left, Tennessee Valley Chapter of the Sons of America Revolution color guard commander, salutes Alabama Veterans Museum & Archives Director Sandy Thompson after presenting her with a flag that flew on George Washington's Mount Vernon estate. The presentation came during the grand opening of the museum's new location in 2021. [JERONIMO NISA]



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**EARLYWORKS
CHILDREN'S MUSEUM**

EarlyWorks specializes in interactive exhibits. Created and designed to connect children with the history and heritage of north Alabama, the museum features giant-sized instruments, a Kidstruction zone and a talking tree. Children can explore a 46-foot Keelboat, try on clothing from the 1800s and trade wares at the General Store and get a glimpse of how popular toys, such as the Etch-A-Sketch; Hungry, Hungry Hippos; and jack-in-the-box work. The museum recommends that kids 10 and older bring along a companion to maximize their fun.

EarlyWorks Children's Museum

Address: 404
 Madison St. S.E.,
 Huntsville

Website: earlyworks.com

Hours: 10
 a.m.-4 p.m.,
 Tuesday-Saturday

Admission: Fees
 charged



JOE WHEELER STATE PARK

By **Bernie Delinski**
Explore Magazine

When Phil and Shar Roos heard about the tornado damage at Joe Wheeler State Park in Rogersville, they pointed their recreational vehicle that way.

The Rooses, who created a movement called “A Year to Volunteer,” headed to the park where they and fellow RVers provided help with renovations and repairs.

The Arizona couple came up with the idea for “A Year to Volunteer” in 2018.

“Phil retired from the Navy and I was unfulfilled in my work, so we decided to hop in the RV with a little bit of purpose and take a year to volunteer,” Shar Roos said.

That idea has turned into a much larger goal. They ultimately want to help with a volunteer project in all 50 states.

The couple came to Joe Wheeler in 2020 after the December 2019 tornado left a path of damage through much of the park. Efforts by the Rooses, other volunteers and paid workers has the park looking like its old self for 2022. The campground, with two sections completely renovated, was the last part of the park to recover

from the tornado, reopening Feb. 25, 2022.

“We did all kinds of work there,” Shar Roos said. “We remodeled the campground store, cleared trails and built bridges.”

They also waxed the marina store floor, and painted rocks with the hashtag #JWSProcks. The rocks were placed throughout the park in hopes that people would post photos on social media of the rocks they find along the trails.

Their efforts got the attention of Alabama State Parks, which honored the Rooses with the agency’s Eagle Award in 2021.

“It was great to have Phil and Shar help us out, because they would just take the lead and be in charge of the volunteer group,” said Chad Davis, district superintendent of Northwest Alabama State Parks. “We would just have to talk with them about the things the park wanted done and they would take the ball and run with it.”

The couple also has done work on Buck’s Pocket State Park in Grove Oak.

“We’ve got a soft spot for Alabama State Parks,” Phil Roos said. “Let me tell you, on this journey, have made friends for life. They’re all just great people.”



Shar and Phil Roos placed rocks on Joe Wheeler State Park trails to make hiking fun for kids. [COURTESY PHOTO]



Phil Roos gives a thumbs up for the work Linda and Joe Fritcher did in completing a new trail bridge at Joe Wheeler State Park. Volunteers helped the park recover after a December 2019 tornado left a path of damage through much of the park. [COURTESY PHOTO]

Shar Roos cleans the ceiling of the campground store at Joe Wheeler State Park. [COURTESY PHOTO]



Joe Wheeler State Park

Address: 4401 McLean Drive, Rogersville

Telephone: 256-247-5466

Website: alapark.com/parks/joe-wheeler-state-park

Admission: No charge for trails, and rates vary for golf, dining and marina.

The park’s campground, with two sections completely renovated, reopened Feb. 25, 2022, a little more than two years after suffering tornado damage. Now, Joe Wheeler State Park is completely back to normal operations, offering everything from golf and boating to accommodations and lakeside dining in its picturesque wood and stone lodge. The park also offers hiking and biking trails, cabins, cottages, RV campsites, fishing, boat slips, a marina, boat rentals, and convention and banquet facilities.



Players line up their putts on one of several scenic holes at Burningtree Country Club.

NEARBY GOLF COURSES

The options are varied for those looking for a round of golf in Morgan County and the surrounding area.

Point Mallard, a public course, offers 18 holes covering 6,988 yards close to the waters of Wheeler Lake. The course, designed by John LaFoy, is part of the Point Mallard Park complex that is operated by the City of Decatur.

Burningtree Country Club is a private club that offers special opportunities to golfers wanting to test their skills on the 7,000-yard course across 180 acres. The course was

designed by prolific golf course designer George W. Cobb, who wanted to create attractive layouts that the average golfer would find enjoyable.

The course is home to the annual Spirit of America Classic. It has also hosted qualifying rounds for the U.S. Amateur Championship.

Quail Creek Resort in Hartselle features a par - 71 course that covers 6,500 yards. It was co-designed by John C. Eyster Sr. and Matthew L. Nail.

MORGAN COUNTY

Point Mallard Golf Course

2600A Point Mallard Drive, Decatur
Pro shop: 256-341-4925

Burningtree Country Club (Private)

2521 Burningtree Drive, Decatur
Pro shop: 256-355-5982

Quail Creek Resort

233 Quail Creek Drive, Hartselle
Pro shop: 256-784-5033

LIMESTONE COUNTY

Southern Gayles Golf Course

22230 Mooresville Road, Athens
Pro shop: 256-232-9888

Canebrake Club (Private)

23015 Founders Circle, Athens
Pro shop: 256-232-2412

MADISON COUNTY

Hampton Cove Course

450 Old Highway 431, Owens Cross Roads
Pro shop: 256-551-1818

Sunset Landing

346 James Record Road SW, Huntsville
Pro shop: 256-464-5050

CULLMAN COUNTY

Chesley Oaks Golf Course

1035 County Road 1583, Cullman
Pro shop: 256-796-9808

Terri Pines

700 Pine Hill Drive, Cullman
Pro shop: 256-739-0738



MOORESVILLE

Mooreville, the Limestone County town “older than the state”, is home to a church where James Garfield, the 20th president of the United States, preached in 1863, a post office built in 1840 and the Stagecoach Inn and Tavern built before 1825. Andrew Johnson, the 17th president of the United States, worked in Mooreville while serving as a tailor’s apprentice. The town also served as the filming site of Walt Disney’s “Tom & Huck.” The quaint town currently houses a bike shop, a candy store, a coffee house and a farm. Created by Laurence and Natasha McCrary in 2011, the three-acre 1818 Farms — a nod to the year of the town’s formation — is home to Southdown Babydoll sheep, chickens, pigs and goats. 1818farms.com.

Mooreville

Website: Moorevilleal.com

Admission: Free



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DECATUR PARKS

DELANO PARK

Sixth Avenue Southeast to Somerville Road and Prospect Drive to Gordon Drive. delanopark.org



Stop and smell the roses before jumping in the splash pad and playing on the playground at Delano Park, the oldest park in the city. The 28-acre park features a rose garden, splash pad, tennis courts, playground, trail of history, one-mile walking/running trail and picnic shelter. Alabama's first licensed female architect, Carolyn Cortner Smith, designed the park's stone structure in the 1930s.

RHODES FERRY PARK

100 Market St. N.E. decaturparks.com



Set on the banks of the Tennessee River, Rhodes Ferry Park offers visitors a chance to play and learn. Along with the playground and pavilions, the park features historical markers about the Trail of Tears and Benson Field, Decatur's football stadium from 1931-47.

FRAZIER PARK

309 Cherry St. N.E. decaturparks.com

Celebrating Decatur's southern heritage and Japanese influences, the calm and serene Frazier Park includes a Japanese Tea



Garden, a Southern garden, a fountain and small stream.

ARCHERY PARK

2900 Point Mallard Circle S.E. decaturparks.com



Calling all Robin Hoods and Katniss Everdeens, this is the park for you. Archery Park includes a 20-target course, a 12-foot-high platform and targets ranging from 5 to 50 yards. Archers, 16 to 65, must have a valid hunting or heritage license.

HOSPITALITY PARK

4799 U.S. 31 North decaturparks.com



A popular spot for anglers, Hospitality Park sits along the north side of the Tennessee River and also features a birding trail.

A.C. BANKS PARK

705 McCartney St. NW decaturparks.com

With two playground areas, a baseball field and



pavilions, A.C. Banks Park is a centerpiece of the northwest Decatur community, often host to gatherings and reunions.

WILSON MORGAN PARK

Beltline Road, between Central Parkway and Sandlin Road SE decaturparks.com

Situated next to a lake, Wilson Morgan Park features softball fields, a walking trail, the city's dog park and the Adventure Park playground. Make sure to bring food to feed the birds.

DECATUR DOG PARK

6372 Beltline Road SW decaturparks.com



Opened in May of 2019, the two-acre Decatur Dog Park offers an area for large dogs, 25 pounds and over, and one for small dogs, 25 pounds and under. The dog enclosures are part of Wilson Morgan Park.

ADVENTURE PARK

Beltline Road, between Central Parkway and Sandlin Road SE decaturparks.com

A wooden castle playground greets visitors to Adventure Park. The playground includes swings, slides, climbers and exercise



stations. The playground is part of Wilson Morgan Park.

JACK ALLEN RECREATIONAL COMPLEX PLAYGROUND

2616 Modaus Road SW decaturparks.com



Housed at Decatur's premier soccer complex, the playground's highlights include a balance beam, ladder, rock wall, slides, climbers and more. The park also is home to a Flying Dragon disc golf course. The 18-hole course spans 13 acres.

PINES PARK

1612 Fifth St. NW decaturparks.com



With swings, slides, benches, picnic tables, multi-purpose court with bleachers and a one-half mile walking trail, Pines Park attracts visitors, young and old.



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Hartselle Parks

SPARKMAN PARK

1102 Main St. SW
hartselle.org

A centerpiece of Hartselle, Sparkman Park features baseball and softball fields, picnic areas, playgrounds, a walking trail and disc golf course. The park sits next to the city's Aquatic Center and SNAP Playground for all children.

HARTSELLE AQUATIC CENTER

406 Nanceford Road SW
hartselle.org; admission charged

Open starting on Memorial Day weekend, the Hartselle Aquatic Center offers an escape from the summer heat with a pool, slides, diving boards, splash pad and lazy river.

JOHN MARK STALLINGS S.N.A.P. PLAYGROUND

406 Nanceford Road SW
hartselle.org

Named after the son of former University of Alabama football coach Gene Stallings, the John Mark Stallings S.N.A.P. Playground was built to be accessible by all children, specifically individuals with disabilities. Features include slides, climbing bars, musical instruments, a periscope, sensory panels, elevated sand pile, pulse tennis table, seesaw and more.

Moulton Parks

H.A. ALEXANDER PARK

13550 Court St.
cityofmoultonal.com

H.A. Alexander Park, an entertainment staple of the Moulton community, features baseball fields, softball fields, tennis courts, walking track and playground.

MOULTON SPLASH PAD

College Street
cityofmoultonal.com

Located next to H.A. Alexander Park, the splash pad, open Memorial Day to Labor Day, includes seven water features to entertain young children.

ALEXANDER MINI PARK

Byler Road and College Street
cityofmoultonal.com

Just south of the splash pad sits Alexander Mini Park. A celebration of nature, the 10-acre park features mature hardwoods, a creek and an amphitheater, where Moulton's Music in the Park concert series takes place during the summer months.



This is the opportunity to experience the work of Frank Lloyd Wright from inside the walls of one of the homes he designed. The 1,540-square-foot home is the only Wright-designed building in Alabama. It was created in a Usonian style that incorporates organic simplicity by bringing in the outdoors.

The Rosenbaum House

Address: 601 Riverview Drive, Florence

Telephone: 256-718-5050

Website: wrightinalabama.com

Hours: 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday; 1-4 p.m., Sunday

Admission: Fee charged

August 3rd, 2020

My name is Jesse Swire. Born in Virginia, my family moved to Columbus, Ohio when I was 5 where my dad taught at the Ohio State Law School. I was always the fastest kid in my class, all the all the way through high school, and sprinting was my specialty. In grade school I did a book report on Jesse Owens and felt a passion for this kindred runner who shared my name. Even then I knew that my family had been murdered by the Nazis in the Shoah, the Holocaust. My Jewish grandparents had fought for civil rights here in the states. The story of Owens at the 1936 Berlin Olympics moved me in a way nothing else has since – the triumph of Owens soul and heart over the hatred of the Nazis is one of the greatest stories of the 20th century. He is my personal hero – not just for his accomplishments and talent, or the context of his triumphs, or the grace and class with which he lived his life. He is my hero because in him I see the beautiful, expansive potential of each individual. I see what discipline and determination can do. I see myself, my namesake, my inspiration.

At 29 years old, I'm returning to university to become a social worker. My reach won't be global like Owens, but I know that through personal connection and the undying belief in the infinite potential each person has help that I, too, can help repair the world.

With much love and admiration,
Jesse Swire

Jesse Swire, a visitor at the Jesse Owens Museum, wrote a letter to the museum after an emotional experience. [COURTESY PHOTO]

JESSE OWENS MUSEUM AND PARK

Olympic legend rose from humble origins

By Emily Griffith, Explore Magazine

Along a winding backroad in Lawrence County, a bronze statue of an athlete running through the Olympic rings marks the location of the Jesse Owens Museum and Park.

Established in 1996, the museum lies in the birthplace of Owens, complete with a replica of the home where the Olympic legend grew up.

The museum chronicles the life of Owens, who became a world-wide symbol of freedom when he won four gold medals in the 1936 Berlin Games and in the process disproved German leader Adolf Hitler's theory of Aryan supremacy.

Guests from Germany, England, and Russia have come to experience Owens' legacy in the small community of Oakville.

"People are amazed when

they walk in the door of that museum," said Joyce Cole, former museum director. "They have come through the countryside not expecting the state-of-the-art museum that we have there."

The museum includes images, exhibits and a documentary narrated by Owens. With admission, guests are free to roam the grounds of the museum and park as well as attempt his broad jump in a sand pit in front of his statue.

One young man traveled from his home in Ohio to visit his namesake's museum and had a very emotional experience. Jesse Swire cried while watching the documentary and wrote a letter to the museum afterward telling the story of his family members who had been killed in the Holocaust and how the museum had inspired him to return to school.





Many of Owens' relatives have visited the museum over the years, including his granddaughter, Marlene Dortch, who visited this July.

"I think when you see it, it just inspires you, and how could you not want something like this to continue," Dortch said.

Visitors don't have to be named after or related to Owens to enjoy the museum, however. Museum Director Nancy Pinion said many visitors cry during the documentary and some stay for an entire day to read every plaque and examine every artifact in the museum.

"I think it's really important that we realize what we have here in the birthplace of Jesse Owens and perpetuate that because his life really speaks to children and really demonstrates that regardless of the circumstances that you come from, you can achieve what your goals are in life if you work hard and take advantage of the opportunities that come your way," Pinion said.

Owens is known internationally for his performance in the 1936 Berlin Games, but his legacy continued long after the Olympics with his humanitarian work, including as an international sports ambassador for the United States.

Born in Oakville in 1913, Owens was the 10th child to Emma and Henry Owens. As sharecroppers, his family lived on a portion of a landowner's property and was tasked with farming the land. The

landowner would take half of the crops and the Owens family would live off the other half.

He was a sickly child, constantly fighting off pneumonia and boils on his body. His family could not afford to buy medicine, so they wrapped him in blankets in front of the stove and even performed surgery in their home to remove the boils. By the age of six, he was well enough to begin walking to school with his siblings.

His family eventually moved to Cleveland, Ohio, and Owens began training with coach Charles Riley. Owens immediately broke school records and led his track team to the state championships twice.

As a member of the track team at Ohio State University, Jesse was not awarded a scholarship but was promised a job for him and his father. He and his other Black teammates were also not allowed to live in the one men's dormitory and had to live in a house off-campus. At the Big Ten Freshman Meet, Owens set conference records for all three events he competed in.

Qualifying for three events in the 1936 Berlin Games, Owens competed in front of Hitler just a few years before the outbreak of World War II and events of the Holocaust. One legend from the 1936 Olympics is that Hitler refused to congratulate Owens on his first gold medal because his "superior race" was bested. Other historians say Hitler had been told to quit congratulating only German athletes and to congratulate all champions or none. Hitler chose none.

After going on to win four gold medals, Owens returned home and accepted a job as a playground instructor for



Jesse Swire was named after Jesse Owens and had an emotional visit to the museum.
[COURTESY PHOTO]

underprivileged youth in Cleveland. He had many endeavors in the latter part of his life including as a bandleader, owner of a basketball team, and the owner of a public relations company.

"Most people don't realize that not only was he an outstanding athlete, but he was very involved in humanitarian pursuits after the Olympics," Pinion said.

Owens died from lung cancer in 1980 at the age of 66 having received a Medal of Freedom, Living Legend Award, and the Congressional Gold Medal.

The museum honors an athlete who demonstrated the power of the human spirit to overcome the racism Owens faced in his life and prevail against evils such as represented by Hitler.

"It's a real tribute to Jesse Owens and his family and it's something we're real proud of in Lawrence County and Moulton," Mayor Roger Weatherwax of Moulton said.





PERFORMING ARTS

Dream Weavers Children's Theatre: The troupe for children and teens, which reorganized after a 10-year hiatus, began offering acting experiences for young thespians and introducing newcomers to the stage in 2017. The casts, which number 100 and more, have staged "Sleepy Hollow," "Moana, JR," "Charlotte's Web," "Beauty and the Beast, Jr.," "The Wizard of Oz," "Frozen, Jr.," and more. dreamweaversct.com.

Bank Street Players: Since re-forming in 2012, Bank Street has performed sold-out productions of "1776," "Fiddler on the Roof," "Oklahoma" and "Hairspray," brought plays to local coffee houses, schools and arts centers and premiered "Humbug!," a creation by local actor and playwright Chuck Puckett. bankstreetplayers.org.

Orchestra Sul Ponticello: In 2014, Viljar Weimann created Decatur's first orchestra, Orchestra Sul Ponticello. In recent years, the orchestra's members have performed compositions by Bach, Mozart, Raid, Beethoven, Vivaldi, Verdi, Prokofiev and Handel and selections with singers, from "Barber of Seville" to "La Boheme." facebook.com/orchestrasulponticelloAL/.

Decatur Youth Symphony: Created in 1998 as a way to teach the violin to all third grade students in Decatur City Schools, the Decatur Youth Symphony expanded to include other string instruments and drum circles. The group performs a free winter and spring concert every year and is





often a featured performer at Decatur's summer concert series Concerts by the River. decaturyouthsymphony.org.

College Street Players: The Hartselle community theater group appeals to both youth and experienced actors. The group's offerings range from "Aladdin Jr." and "Seussical JR." to "The Lion King, Jr." and "Mr. Popper's Penguins." collegestreetplayers.org.

Curtain & Lights Theater Company: Based out of First Baptist Church in Decatur, the Curtain & Lights Theater Company, headed by Heather Anderson, stages two shows a year. Past shows include "Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Christmas Goose," "Little House on the Prairie: The Musical" and "Charlie Brown Christmas."

The Athenian Players: Headed by Hugh Long, The Athenian Players of Athens State, which calls the Alabama Center for the Arts in downtown Decatur home, staged productions ranging from Greek tragedies to Shakespearean comedies to modern dramas. The theater group's resume includes "Hamlet," "Log Cabin," "A Comedy of Errors," "Clue: Stay-At-Home Version" and more. Playwright Jim Beaver, an actor known for his roles as Bobby Singer in "Supernatural," Whitney Ellsworth in "Deadwood" and Sheriff Shelby Parlow in "Justified," attended a performance of The Athenian Players' "Verdigris."



Calhoun Theatre Department: Headed by Calhoun Community College faculty member Lauren Cantrell Salerno, the Calhoun Theatre Department performs at the Black Box Theater at the Alabama Center for the Arts. The theater group has staged "Legally Blonde," "Doubt," "The Diviners," "The 25th annual Putnam County Spelling Bee," "The Comedy of Errors: A Pop Musical," "Romeo and Juliet" and a musical version of Shakespeare's "Two Gentlemen of Verona," complete with a live six-piece band and aerial performers.

Dancers Inc.: The studio in Decatur teaches students ages 4 through high school styles of dance ranging from jazz and tap to modern and ballet. Attending Dancers Inc.'s annual production of "The Nutcracker" at the Princess Theatre has become a holiday tradition for many Decatur residents. Telephone: (256) 355-2996

Huntsville Symphony Orchestra: Under the direction of Gregory Vajda, the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra brings to life the music of classical composers, popular bands and more. The orchestra's 2021 season includes a tribute to 1980s music, The Beatles, Mozart, Mahler and more. hso.org.

Huntsville Ballet Company: Directed by Phillip Otto, the professional ballet company typically stages three to four productions a year. Past productions include "Peter Pan," "Romeo and Juliet," "Cinderella" and "The Nutcracker." huntsvilleballet.org.





W.C. HANDY MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

W.C. Handy became famous in the music world for his compositions such as “Memphis Blues” and “St. Louis Blues” and as a band conductor and author. He is heralded as the “Father of the Blues.” But before his famous life, he was born in a small log cabin in Florence on Nov. 16, 1873. The museum in his honor houses a collection of memorabilia, including his famous trumpet and his personal piano, as well as personal papers and original sheet music.

W.C. Handy Museum and Library

Address: 620 W. College St., Florence

Telephone: 256-760-6434

Hours: 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday

Admission: Fee charged



A drawing by G. Bavara of W.C. Handy inside the W.C. Handy Museum in Florence.

A vibrant, cartoon-style illustration representing the Alabama Music Hall of Fame. The central focus is a yellow classic convertible car with a small white dog on the hood, driven by a smiling man in a cowboy hat. Above the car is a large sign that reads "FAME RECORDING STUDIOS" with musical notes. To the left, a man in a suit holds a large yellow star. The background is a collage of musical elements, including a rainbow, a guitar, and portraits of famous musicians like Elvis Presley and Ray Charles. The text "ALABAMA MUSIC HALL OF FAME" is written in large, bold, white letters at the bottom. On the right side, there is a vertical orange bar with the word "ATTRACTIONS" written vertically in white.

This is the place to learn the rich history of music in Alabama, and especially the renowned Shoals music scene. Exhibits include a 12-foot jukebox, a wax figure of Nat King Cole, recording equipment used in Sam Phillips' Memphis Music Service, apparel and instruments from many artists.

[illegible]



IVY GREEN

The site of the birthplace of Helen Keller features the home and grounds, including the famous pump where teacher Annie Sullivan showed a young Keller how to spell w-a-t-e-r in sign language. That single lesson opened the outside world to the child. For two weeks in the summer, Ivy Green serves as the backdrop to productions of “The Miracle Worker,” a play about Keller and Sullivan.

Ivy Green: The Birthplace of Helen Keller

Address: 300 N. Commons St. W., Tuscumbia

Telephone: 256-383-4066

Website: helenkellerbirthplace.org

Hours: 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday-Saturday

Admission: Fee charged





HUNTSVILLE MUSEUM OF ART

The Huntsville Museum of Art features a permanent collection of more than 3,200 objects, including pieces of American art from the 19th and 20th centuries, pieces by Andy Warhol, James McNeill Whistler and Robert Rauschenberg and contemporary works in wood, glass, metal and clay. The museum also hosts traveling exhibits.

Huntsville Museum of Art

Address: 300 Church St. S., Huntsville

Telephone: 256-535-4350

Website: hsvmuseum.org

Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday;
10 a.m.-8 p.m., Thursday; noon-5 p.m., Sunday

Admission: Fees charged



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Ave Maria Grotto

Address: 1600 St. Bernard Drive, Cullman

Telephone: 256-734-4110

Website: avemariagrotto.com

Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Saturday; 11:30 a.m.-5 p.m., Sunday

Admission: Fee charged





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HUNTSVILLE BOTANICAL GARDEN

Covering 112 acres, Huntsville Botanical Garden features an open-air butterfly house, a Biblical garden with plants mentioned in the Bible, perennial, aquatic, herb, vegetable and daylily gardens, dogwood trees and a nature trail with black tupelo, red maple, sycamore and sweetgum trees. Two of the garden's most popular events are the Scarecrow Trail in the fall and Galaxy of Lights in the winter.

Huntsville Botanical Garden

Address: 4747 Bob Wallace Ave.,
Huntsville

Telephone: 256-830-4447

Website: hsvbg.org

Hours: April to September - 9 a.m.-7 p.m.,
Monday-Thursday; 9 a.m.-6 p.m., Friday
and Saturday; 11 a.m.-6 p.m., Sunday

October to March - 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Mon-
day-Saturday; 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Sunday

Admission: Fee charged





Learn about the history of human space exploration or visit the stars yourself in the INTUITIVE Planetarium, one of the U.S. Space & Rocket Center's newest features. The center also has interactive simulators, a Saturn V Rocket and thousands of rocketry and space artifacts. A Smithsonian affiliate, the U.S. Space & Rocket Center is about a half-hour drive from Decatur and easy to find — just look for the rockets along Interstate 565. North Alabama has a rich history in space exploration. In Huntsville, Werner von Braun and his team developed the Redstone Rocket, which put the first U.S. astronaut, Alan Shepard, into space. The center also hosts traveling exhibits.

U.S. Space & Rocket Center

Address: 1 Tranquility Base, Huntsville

Telephone: 1-800-637-7223

Website: rocketcenter.com

Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Friday; 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Saturday; 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Sunday

Admission: Fees charged



U.S. Space & Rocket Center. [JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY]

COOK MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCE

ATTRACTIONS



The saltwater aquarium at the Cook Museum of Natural Science is 28 feet long and 6 feet deep.
[PHOTOS BY JERONIMO NISA AND JOHN GODBEY]

Under the Sea: 15,000-gallon aquarium is popular because of its size, diversity and colorful residents

By Catherine Godbey
Explore Magazine

Cassie Worlund watched as a little girl ran up to the aquarium searching for the Cook Museum's unofficial mascot — Kale the sea turtle.

"I'm looking for the sea turtle. I'm looking for the sea turtle," the girl repeated, eventually finding him in the corner of the tank — his typical sleeping spot.



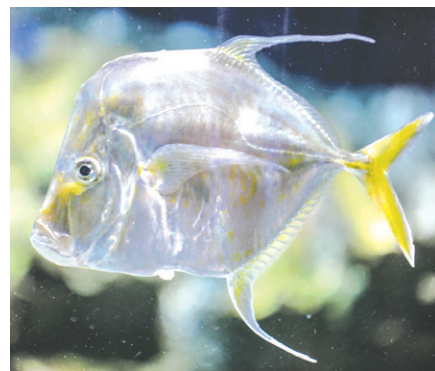
Teira batfish can change color from a dark black to silver.

"There you go," Worlund laughed.

As the live animal manager at the Cook Museum in downtown Decatur, Worlund experiences the wonder and amazement the museum's saltwater aquarium brings to children of all ages.

Holding 15,000 gallons, the 28-foot-long and 6-foot-deep aquarium houses approximately 100 fish representing about 30 species. Along with the fish, visitors can find Kale, a Kemp's ridley sea turtle classified as critically endangered by the Endangered Species Act of 1970 and the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species. Kale had to be temporarily moved off-site for medical treatment, which isn't unusual for rescue animals, but was expected back as early as the summer.

"Because Kemp's ridley sea turtles are critically endangered, they are a great ambassador. They also nest sometimes on Alabama beaches, so it is really the perfect turtle to educate people on in



It's easy to see how a lookdown got its name.



The lookdowns swim in a group to appear to predators as one large fish.



Cassie Worlund, live animal manager at the Cook Museum.

Alabama. And, if we're being honest, Kale is adorable and people love him," Worlund said.

Another favorite, particularly of children, is the palette surgeonfish, better known as Dory thanks to the animated movie "Finding Nemo."

"I let the kids know when they walk in that they're not necessarily seeing Dory because she's too expensive to have, but they are seeing all of her cousins," Worlund said.

For Worlund, the teira batfish, which she watched transform from juveniles into adulthood, represent two of her favorite fish in the aquarium.

"It's been really cool to watch them transition into their adult phase. They started off with long fins and, as they have aged, their fins have gotten short and their bodies have gotten bigger. They can also change their color from a dark black to a beautiful silver. This is the transformation they would make in the wild before they would start swimming out into the open ocean," Worlund said.

Scott Mayo, executive director of the Cook Museum, credited the saltwater tank's popularity to the size and diversity.

"Its physical size, taking up almost two full walls, is visually impressive.

Because of that size, it is able to successfully house a large variety of species. With so many different colors, body shapes and sizes, and behavior patterns among the fishes, there is something in there to fascinate everyone," Mayo said.

Among the fish that fascinate Mayo are the coral hind and harlequin hind, both members of the grouper family.

"While their markings are beautiful, it is their personalities that catch my attention when I walk by. They each have their favorite spots in the aquarium to hang out and seem quite put out when their tankmates introduce on their territories. They remind me of grumpy old men in that regard," Mayo said.

When considering what fish to house in the aquarium, the museum considered the personality of each species and what species would live well with a sea turtle.

"Angelfish are known for being very territorial, so we only have two angelfish in the tank," Worlund said. "We also only have one butterfly fish because they are known to pick at algae and sometimes algae is found on sea turtles. We didn't want anything that might harm Kale."

Caring for the aquarium and the animals requires divers to clean the tank once a week. The two-hour procedure includes washing the gravel and removing algae from the coral.

Over the last two years, Worlund watched as the fish adjusted to the presence of the divers.

"In the beginning, when we would dive, people would walk in and ask what I did with all the fish. It's because the fish would be hiding. They were terrified. Now, the fish come up to the divers, like they're telling them, 'Hey, this is my spot.' They'll also play with them. They love the bubbles the divers exhale," Worlund said.

Feeding takes place twice a day — once in the morning and once at night. The morning feeding includes a pellet, which Worlund compared to dog or cat food, specifically formulated for saltwater fish.



An orange shoulder surgeonfish swims in the saltwater aquarium at the Cook Museum of Natural Science.



Children love the palette surgeonfish because it reminds them of Dory in "Finding Nemo."



An emperor angelfish is another aquarium resident.



A Thompson's surgeonfish hangs out among the corals.



Two foxface rabbitfish are among the brightly colored fish in the aquarium.



A sailfin tang swims in the museum's aquarium.



Aria Thompson, 6, watches fish in the saltwater aquarium during a visit to the museum.

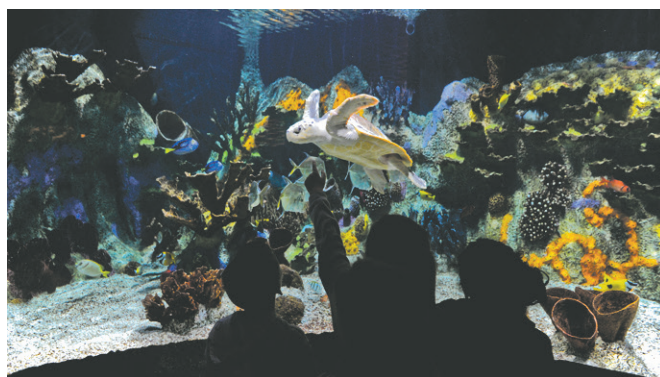
"It's like their vegetables. They have to eat their vegetables before they get the good food they want," Worlund said.

The second feeding features a mix of frozen fish and shrimp.

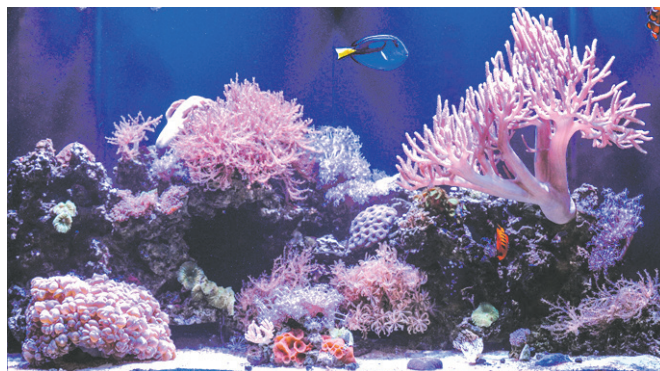
Along with Kale the Kemp's ridley sea turtle, the palette surgeonfish, teira batfish, coral hind, harlequin hind and angelfish, the aquarium's inhabitants include lookdowns, the barred flagtail, blackbar soldierfish, blue-lined rabbitfish, bristletooth tang, foxface rabbitfish, freckled hawkfish, orange shoulder surgeonfish, Pakistani butterflyfish, powder brown tang, regal demoiselle, sailfin tang, scopas tang, squareback anthias, Thompson's surgeonfish, two spot surgeonfish, Vlamingii tang, yellow and blueback fusilier and the yellow tang.

The majority of the fish, about 75%, are native to the Indo-Pacific region, which consists of the tropical waters of the Indian Ocean, the western and central Pacific Ocean and the seas connecting the two. The museum opted to focus on this region because of the high diversity and the bright colors of the fish.

Along with the aquarium, popular features of the 62,000-square-foot state-of-the-art science museum includes an interactive kinetic sand table, a climbable tree modeled after The Big Tree in the Sipsey Wilderness, and an explorable cave.



Second graders from Moulton Elementary School look at Kale, the Kemp's ridley sea turtle at the Cook Museum. Kale had to be temporarily moved off-site for medical treatment, which isn't unusual for rescue animals, but was expected back as early as the summer.



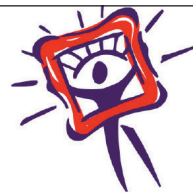
Corals are part of the Cook Museum of Natural Science saltwater aquarium.

The museum, 133 Fourth Ave. N.E., is open Monday-Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission is \$20 for ages 15-64, \$17 for ages 65 and older and military members with a military ID, \$15 for ages 3-14 and free for ages 2 and younger. cook-museum.org.

— cgodbey@decaturdaily.com or 256-340-2441. Twitter @DecaturLiving.



The saltwater aquarium at the Cook Museum of Natural Science houses approximately 100 fish representing about 30 species.



CARNEGIE
VISUAL ARTS CENTER

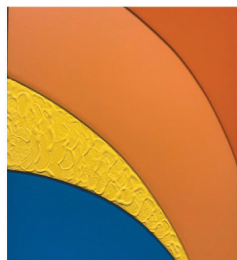
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WELCOME TO MORGAN COUNTY

How to set up utility service, register to vote, sign up kids for school, get a driver's license and buy car tags

OBTAIN UTILITY SERVICE

Decatur Utilities

You can set up service in three ways, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

1. In person. Schedule an appointment by calling 256-552-1400, option 4, or follow the link at decaturutilities.com

2. Do the entire process by telephone. Call 256-552-1400, option 4.

3. Start service by emailing csr@decaturutilities.com, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

What you need

- A photo ID such as valid driver's license, non-driver's photo ID or an identification card issued by a state or federal government entity.

- A second form of ID such as Social Security card, Medicaid or Medicare card, certified birth certificate or original government or payroll check.

- Your purchase contract, warranty deed or settlement statement if a homeowner.

- A copy of your lease (with address) in the name of the person applying for service and the owner/landlord's name if renting.

- Funds for the applicable deposit.

Residential deposit amounts

- Electric: \$125
- Natural gas: \$35
- Water: \$20
- Wastewater: \$20
- Total for all four services: \$200



Hartselle Utilities

The easiest way to begin the process of setting up a new residential account is to email inquiries@hartselleutilities.org. New customers also can call (256) 773-3340 or stop by the office at 1010 Sparkman St. N.W.

Office hours: 7:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday

Residential deposits range between \$25 and \$435 depending on the number of services and meters at the location.

Hartselle Utilities bills for garbage service, but the service is provided by the city (256-773-2643).

Joe Wheeler Electric Membership Corp.

The utility that provides electricity to areas of Morgan County not served by Decatur Utilities or Hartselle Utilities has offices at 25700 Alabama 24 in Trinity and at 700 Sparkman St. N. in Hartselle.

For new service, call 256-552-2300.

Office hours: 7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The account origination fee for the primary account is \$75.

Deposits based on credit history. There is also a pre-pay option that doesn't require a deposit.

Deposit amounts

- Excellent: No deposit
- Good: \$100
- Fair: \$250
- Poor: \$500

SET UP GARBAGE SERVICE

City of Decatur

Garbage and recycling pickup is provided by the City of Decatur's Department of Street and Environmental Services, but Decatur Utilities handles billing. For questions about garbage service, to obtain carts or to initiate service at a newly built house, call the city at 256-341-4740. For questions about recycling, call 256-341-4770.

City of Hartselle

Call Public Works to set up an account at 256-773-2643.

Morgan County

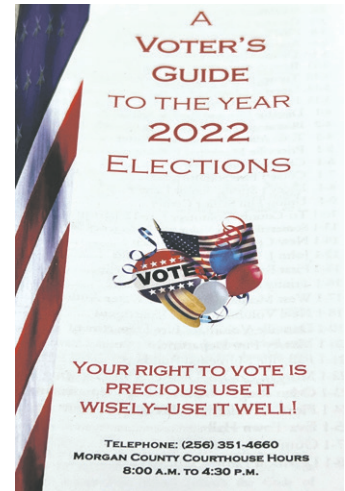
Morgan County Environmental Services handles garbage pickup and recycling outside of Decatur and Hartselle. Billing is handled by Joe Wheeler EMC. If new customers have set up an account with Joe Wheeler EMC, they just need to call (256) 773-3887 to set up garbage service.

Office hours: 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday-Thursday

The Environmental Services office is at 1316 Industrial Dr. S.E., Hartselle 35640

REGISTER TO VOTE

Go to alabamavotes.gov to register online. You may also request a registration form by calling 256-351-4660 or visit the Board of Registrars' office at the Morgan County Courthouse at 302 Lee St. N.E. in Decatur.



BUY AN AUTOMOBILE TAG

Morgan County License Commissioner offices

Telephone: 256-351-4770

Three offices help residents buy automobile license tags and can renew Alabama driver's licenses.

Main office: Morgan County Courthouse, 302 Lee St. N.E., second floor. Hours, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday-Friday.

Hartselle satellite office: Crestwood Shopping Center, 231 U.S. 31 South, Suite A1. Hours, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday-Friday.

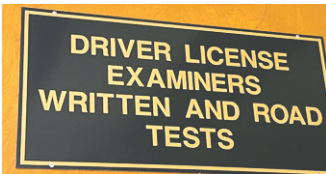
East Morgan County: District 4 County Office, 423 Union Hill Road, Somerville. Hours, 6 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday-Thursday.

Documents needed to apply for a car tag for those moving into Morgan County:

- Two pieces of mail with name and Morgan County address
- Copy of last vehicle registration
- Proof of insurance in paper form (for scanning purposes)
- Driver's license

OBTAIN A NEW DRIVER'S LICENSE

Renewals or transfers within Alabama can be handled at the License Commissioner's office. If transferring from out of state, motorists will need to go to an Alabama Law Enforcement Agency driver's license office. Bring current driver's license, birth certificate or passport and a Social Security card.



The driver's license office is at the Morgan County Courthouse, 302 Lee St. N.E., Decatur, first floor.

Hours: 7:30 a.m.-4:45 p.m., Monday-Friday.

Telephone: 256-351-4665.

REGISTER FOR SCHOOL

Decatur City Schools

To enroll new students, go to the Central Office building at

212 Fourth Ave. S.E. in Decatur. Bring student's birth certificate, proof of address, an Alabama Immunization Form or a Certificate of Exemption, and a state issued photo ID.

Custody Papers are required if the parent is divorced or if they are not listed on the student's birth certificate and transcript papers from previous schools, if they are available.

Telephone: 256-552-3000.

Website: dcs.edu

Hartselle City Schools

Go to the Central Office on 305 College St. N.E.

"Everyone that is new and moving to the district will

go to the Central Office to enroll," said Superintendent Dee Dee Jones. "It's a one-stop, one location."

Jones said that pre-K enrollment is determined by a random selection of applications.

"Parents have to put in their applications if they want their child to go to Barkley Bridge, Crestline, or F.E. Burleson Elementary," Jones said. "Then we do a random drawing for the student to see if they get in."

Jones said students going into kindergarten will have to go to the central office to take an assessment and are required to attend a learning camp in July.

"At this camp, (students) will take a tour of the school and they learn where everything is located," Jones said.

Telephone: 256-773-5419

Website: hartselletigers.org

Morgan County Schools

New and returning students enroll online.

"All you have to do is go to the school with a proof of address and that's really it," said Jeremy Childers, spokesperson for Morgan County Schools. "We do enrollment online because we do not have a Central Office location."

Morgan County schools also hold camps in July for students entering kindergarten.

Telephone: 256-309-2100

Website: morgank12.org

Returning students to all three school districts apply online through PowerSchool rather than go to the central office.



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ALABAMA JUBILEE

Dozens of hot-air balloons take to the air above Decatur during the Alabama Jubilee Hot-Air Balloon Classic on the Saturday and Sunday of Memorial Day weekend.

The free two-day festival features a Hare and Hound Race, key grab, balloon glow, tethered rides, antique tractor display, car show, arts and crafts, live

music and fireworks. The balloons plan to take to the sky for the 45th annual festival on May 28-29 this year. Admission is free.

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CARNEGIE CARNIVAL

The Carnegie Carnival — Decatur's Mardi Gras celebration — brings parades, festival royalty, costumed canines, kids' activities and art to downtown. It's held the Saturday before Fat Tuesday, which will be Feb. 18 in 2023.

The all-day event features a children's parade, dog parade, half-marathon run, bluegrass music and an

art creation station. The celebration culminates in the evening with the main parade that includes floats and revelers dressed as pirates, flappers, sirens and more. Admission is free.

In the weeks leading up to the parade, look for unique events, such as a drag queen bingo, mystery dinners, trivia nights and more. carnegiecarnival.org.



3RD FRIDAY

Classic cars, musicians, line dancers and artists descend on downtown Decatur every third Friday of the month, from April to October. Started in 2009 as a way to attract people to downtown, the 3rd Friday street festival brings in hundreds of visitors every month. Admission is free.





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DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL

More than 1,000 paddlers propelling 46-foot-long dragon-headed boats compete in the annual Dragon Boat Festival at Point Mallard Park. The event, which raises money for the Decatur Morgan Hospital Foundation, attracts teams from area high schools, gyms, churches and businesses.

An opening ceremony kicks off the races and features the dotting of the dragon's eye and a performance by the Daikin drummers. The races typically take place the second Saturday in May, and the 2022 race was scheduled for May 14. Admission for spectators is free.



SPIRIT OF AMERICA

Community leaders started the Spirit of America Festival in 1967 in an attempt to overcome the bitter feelings generated by the Vietnam War, and the July 4 event continues as a way to let Morgan County express its patriotism. Much of the community turns out for the annual fireworks program that lights up the sky above Point Mallard

Park and is reflected by the waters of the Tennessee River.

The free celebration also includes music, arts and crafts vendors, a golf tournament and classic cars, tractors and motorcycles. Community servants and patriotic individuals are recognized in events related to the festival. Admission is free.

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RIVER CLAY FINE ARTS FESTIVAL

Named for the material used to construct some of Decatur's oldest structures, the River Clay Fine Arts Festival features more than 70 sculptors, painters, photographers, jewelers and carvers creating art from wood, fiber, clay, oil, glass and stone.

Along with artists, the two-day festival held on Decatur's City Hall lawn showcases music, children's activities, student art exhibits and artist demonstrations. This year's festival is scheduled for Oct. 22-23. Riverclay.org. Admission charged.





OTHER CELEBRATIONS AND FESTIVALS

Enjoy a festival that coincides with your visit, and plan return trips to savor even more special events.

Racking Horse World Celebration: Dozens of the country's top racking horses vie for the title of world champion at the annual Racking Horse Breeders Association of America's World Celebration in Priceville every September. It's scheduled for Sept. 16-24 this year. The four-day Spring Celebration at the Morgan County Celebration Arena will take place April 27-30. Rackinghorse.org. Admission charged.

Fiddlers Convention: Nicknamed the "Granddaddy of Midsouth Fiddlers Conventions," the Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention attracts more than 15,000 music lovers and 200 musicians from 30 states to Athens State University every year. The three-day convention with competitions in buck dance, banjo, fiddle and old-time singing, culminates with a "fiddle off" between the junior, intermediate and senior division fiddle winners. This year's celebration is scheduled for Oct. 6-8. Tvtotc.org. Admission charged.

Athens Storytelling Festival: Weaving together folk legends, tall tales and exaggerated truths, award-winning tellers entertain audiences from across north Alabama during

the Athens Storytelling Festival. Along with the professional storytellers and musicians, the festival, held on the square in Athens in October, features a competition for amateur storytellers. Athensstorytellingfestival.com. Admission charged.

Kiddie Carnival: A staple of summertime in Athens, the Kiddie Carnival features rides, from a roller coaster to swings to a Ferris wheel, and games for children. Open Thursday-Saturday during the summer, proceeds from the 50-cent per ride event go to the Athens Lions Club outreach programs. e-clubhouse.org/sites/athensal. Admission charged.

Concerts by the River: A staple of Decatur's summer, Concerts by the River is an outdoor concert series held on Mondays from May to August. The music ranges from classical to country to jazz. Concerts take place at Rhodes Ferry Park and Founders Park. Admission is free.

Hartselle Depot Days: A tribute to the railroad industry, Hartselle Depot Days, with music, a truck and motorcycle show, arts, crafts and games, attracts more than 19,000 people to downtown Hartselle every September. This year's





festival is planned for Sept. 17. hartsellechamber.com. Admission is free.

Eva Frontier Days: A down-home celebration, complete with greased pig-catching, frog jumping and pig-calling skills, highlights the Eva Frontier Days in Eva every year. The weeklong community celebration in September includes a parade, antique tractors, car show, crafts, baking contest, hayride, community singing and music. This year's event is scheduled for Sept. 17-24. Admission is free.

Holiday parades: More than a dozen parades, including one on the water, bring the Christmas spirit to Morgan, Lawrence and Limestone counties every year. The parades in Decatur, Hartselle, Priceville, Athens, Courtland, Moulton, Trinity, Mount Hope, Elkmont, Hatton, Ardmore, Hillsboro and Town Creek feature marching bands, floats, Santa and more. In the Parade of Lights, boats adorned with Christmas lights and decorations float down the Tennessee River between Riverwalk Marina and Rhodes Ferry Park in Decatur.

Tinsel trails: Expect to see trees topped with glittered bows, a Santa hat, Mardi Gras mask and angels and decorated with sunflowers, magnolia leaves, pine cones, race medals and "Caution Buried Electric" tape at Decatur's Enchanted Forest at Founders Park. Other tinsel trails are held in Hartselle, Eva, Moulton, Athens, Ardmore and Huntsville. Most trails stay open from early to mid December to early January.

Historic Decatur Christmas Tour of Homes: Every December, residents in the historic Decatur neighborhoods



of Albany and Old Decatur open their homes to visitors. The Historic Decatur Christmas Tour of Homes, scheduled for Dec. 10, typically features six to eight homes, several churches, public spaces and more. decaturchristmastour.com. Admission charged.

Helen Keller Festival: The weeklong festival scheduled for June 23-26 celebrates the life and accomplishments of Helen Keller. The festival includes music, runs, a car and truck show, golf tournaments, arts and crafts, parade and performances of "The Miracle Worker." The festival takes place at Spring Park and other parts of Tusculumbia, Keller's birthplace. helenkellerfestival.com.

W.C. Handy Music Festival: The 10-day music extravaganza in July honors W.C. Handy, Father of the Blues. Bands come from all over to perform in every nook and cranny in Florence. This year's festival is planned for July 22-31. wchandymusicfestival.com.





PLACES TO STAY

Decatur and Morgan County offer visitors a variety of convenient places to stay

Lodging facilities in Decatur and Morgan County include:

Best Western River City

Beltline Road at 1305 Front Ave., Decatur
256-301-1388
bestwestern.com

Decatur Inn & Suites

2212 Danville Road S.W., Decatur
256-355-1999

Comfort Inn

3239 Point Mallard Parkway, Priceville
256-355-1037
choicehotels.com

Courtyard by Marriott

1209 Courtyard Circle S.W., Decatur
256-355-4446
marriott.com

Doubletree by Hilton Riverfront

1101 Sixth Ave. N.E., Decatur
256-355-3150
Decaturriverfront.doubletree.com

Hampton Inn

2041 Beltline Road S.W., Decatur
256-355-5888
hampton.com

Holiday Inn Express & Suites

2407 Beltline Road, Decatur
256-822-2800
ihg.com

Home2 Suites by Hilton

807 Island Way N.W., Decatur
256-822-1030
home2suites.com

Laquinta Inn by Wyndham

918 Beltline Road S.W., Decatur
256-355-9977
wyndhamhotels.com

Quail Creek Golf Resort

233 Quail Creek Drive, Hartselle
256-784-5033
quailcreek.com

Quality Inn

2120 Jameson Place S.W., Decatur
256-355-2229
choicehotels.com

Residence Inn by Marriott

1213 Courtyard Circle, S.W., Decatur
(256) 280-2666
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WHEELER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE AND FESTIVAL OF THE CRANES

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, which is centered in Decatur, is a regional treasure that will soon be better than ever.

The refuge is most popular from November through March when thousands of birds winter on its 35,000 acres in Morgan, Limestone and Madison counties.

The Festival of the Cranes lures visitors to the refuge every January. Created to celebrate the more than 10,000 sandhill cranes and the dozen or so endangered whooping cranes that winter in North

Alabama, the festival features music, art, nature walks, birds of prey shows and more. The whooping cranes started wintering at Wheeler in 2004. More than 5,000 people attend the free festival each year. fws.gov/refuge/wheeler. Admission is free.

The birdwatching paradise also is popular for hiking, biking, fishing and boating. It is home to more than 115 fish species, 75 species of reptiles and amphibians, 47 mammal species, 38 species of freshwater mussels, 26 species of freshwater snails and 300 species of birds.

The refuge's Visitor Center in Decatur will be closed through Oct. 31, 2022, as part of a \$5.4 million project that will add an outdoor classroom, upgrade exhibits, build a birdwatching blind, improve a multi-use trail and renovate existing buildings.

Other parts of the refuge remain open. Hiking and biking trail guides and refuge maps are available at a kiosk at the entrance of Visitor Center Road. The kiosk board will also have the most up-to-date trail closings posted.

The Flint Creek Trail and the fishing pier on the north side of Alabama 67, across from the Visitor Center, will remain open.

Truck Trail (a driving route) is one of the refuge roads south of the Tennessee River that parallels the refuge boundary from Old River Road all the way to Bluff City Road. It is bordered by stately hickory and oak trees along the river. The trail is accessible at the end of Old River Road Southeast.

Wheeler, which was created in 1938 as a result of the Tennessee Valley Authority's construction of dams to control flooding from the Tennessee River, attracts an estimated 650,000 visitors annually, according to the Alabama Tourism Department.



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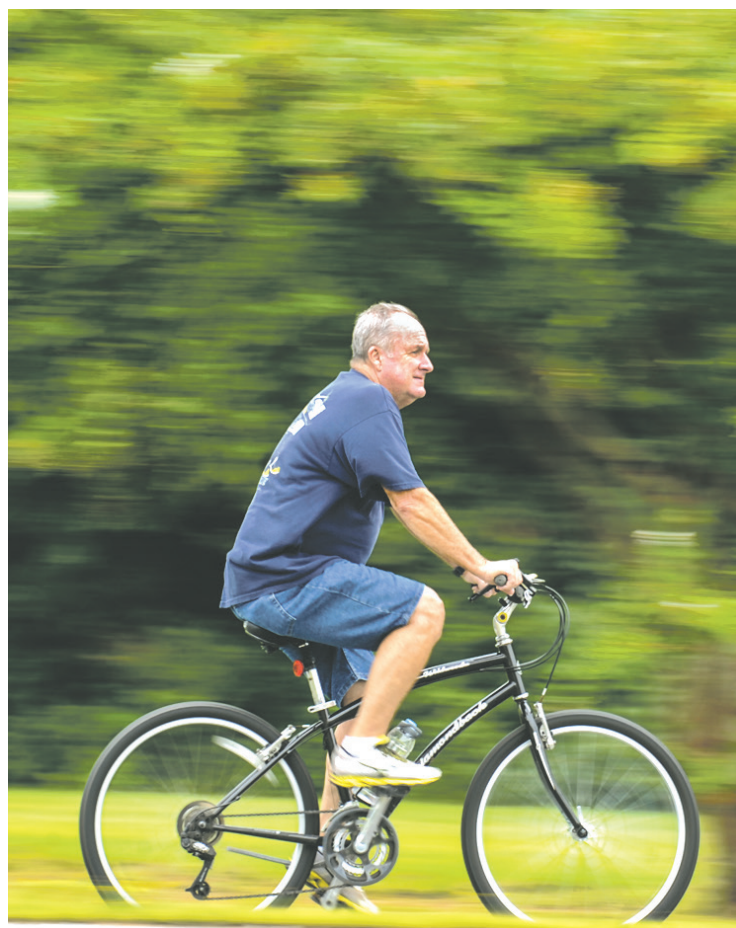
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OUTDOORS



GO FOR A RIDE

Where: Decatur and Athens

Cost: Free

Throughout north Alabama, trails exist for bicycle lovers to go on two-wheel adventures. Explore the trails at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, Bankhead National Forest, the Dr. Bill Sims Bike Trail and Richard Martin Rails-to-Trails.

The 12-mile Bill Sims Bike Trail

The Bill Sims trail's main path runs from Point Mallard Park to Rhodes Ferry Park and then through downtown Decatur to Wilson Morgan Park using dedicated walking/biking paths and side streets. That route is 10 to 12 miles, depending on where the trail is accessed at Point Mallard, and includes scenic views of the Tennessee River. decaturcvb.org/things-to-do/activities/outdoors/hiking-biking/dr-bill-sims-bike-trail,

Limestone Trails

A popular family-friendly spot for bikers and horseback riders, the 11-mile Richard Martin Rails-to-Trails, visitathensal.com/richard-martin-trail.html, connects Piney Chapel to Veto in Limestone County and features covered bridges, a refurbished railcar, waterways, wetlands and a Civil War battle site. The relatively flat trail accommodates strollers and wheelchairs.

The Swan Creek Greenway Trail at Athens Sportsplex features views of a covered bridge and creeks.



BANKHEAD NATIONAL FOREST

Where: Lawrence County

Cost: Free in most areas, \$3 per car at Brushy Lake and Sispey recreation areas

An outdoor playground for nature enthusiasts, Bankhead National Forest covers 181,230 acres in Lawrence, Winston and Franklin counties, offering trails to hike, waterfalls to visit, caves to explore and creeks to paddle.

“Sometimes you’ve just got to stop and look up. We are here to

appreciate this beautiful place,” said Janice Barrett with Wild South, an environmental conservation organization. “There are so many special things to see.”

If hiking with children, Barrett recommended visiting the two-mile round-trip wheelchair-accessible Brushy Lake trail, which winds beneath the bluffs and serves as a prime spot for bird-watching, and Caney Creek Falls, a two-mile round-trip that ends at a waterfall.

Also check out the Sipsey Picnic Area. Developed as a recreation area by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s, the half-mile Sipsey Trail winds along the lake and in and out of coves with waterfalls.

During the summer, Wild South leads family-friendly hikes on Wednesdays.

For more trail recommendations, visit the Wild South office, 552 Lawrence St., Moulton. wildsouth.org.

WALKING TOURS

Construction of the McEntire House began in 1824 and was completed in 1836. Also known as the Burleson Home for its earlier owners, it is on both the Civil War and Historic Decatur walking tours. Eight days after President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, a band that was connected with the Union's 102nd Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry played a memorial concert from atop the home.

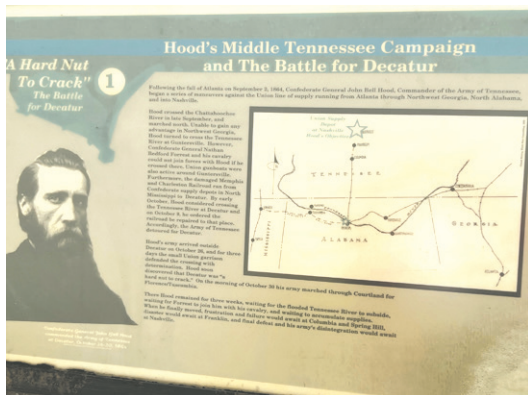
EXPLORE HISTORY OF DECATUR AND NATION

Three walking tours allow visitors to learn about Decatur's historic structures and the city's roles in the Civil War and Trail of Tears. Download brochures at decaturcvb.org or pick up printed brochures at the Old State Bank, 925 Bank Street, or Decatur Morgan Tourism's office, 719 Sixth Ave. S.E.

Trail of Tears Walking Tour: On this tour, a visitor can stand on the banks of the Tennessee River and imagine what it felt like for Native Americans to come ashore in Decatur during their forced removal by the U.S. government. They were brought to Decatur in 1837-38 by steamboat from East Tennessee and boarded trains here to continue their journey westward.

Walking Tour of Historic Decatur: This tour allows walkers to view the exterior of homes, churches and an old library built in the 19th and early 20th centuries. See an English cottage style house, a clapboard Victorian cottage and homes built in the Second Empire and Colonial Revival styles.

Civil War "Battle for Decatur" walking tour: The self-guided stroll includes 11 historic markers and covers about 13 blocks. The tour traces the four-day clash in 1864 between Union and Confederate forces for Decatur, a key transportation point. Walkers on the tour will pass by three structures — the Old State Bank, Burleson House and Dancy-Polk House — that were built before the Civil War and still stand.



Historic markers on the Civil War walking tour tell the story of the Battle for Decatur.

If you have thirty minutes or more to listen, ask Antonio what he dreams of being in ten years.

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OUTDOORS

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WONDERS OF THE WATER

WHERE: MORGAN, LIMESTONE, LAWRENCE AND WALKER COUNTIES

Cost: Free

Explore the natural wonders of north Alabama with adventures along the area's rivers, creeks and streams.

In Morgan County, the 20-mile Flint Creek trail serves as a prime spot for kayakers and canoers. The trail winds from Alabama 36 near Hartselle to Point Mallard Park and crosses

through parts of Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge. The trail is accessible at Alabama 36 near Hartselle, Vaughn Bridge Launch 5 miles from the start of the trail, U.S. 31 Boat Launch across from the WaterWorks Center for Environmental Education, Osprey Point Landing at Alabama 67 and Hickory Hill Boat Launch with access from Hickory Hill Road off Alabama 67.

In Limestone County, Limestone Bay, accessible off Arrowhead Landing Ramp in Mooresville, offers views of birds, including geese and the

occasional bald eagle, and deer in the late fall. Also explore the Alabama portion of the Elk River, which winds 22 miles from Veto, Tennessee, at the state line to Elk River Mills Road in Athens. For uninterrupted views of the tree line, paddle the 10-mile section from Veto to Easter Ferry Road.

Other recommendations include the Tennessee River from Lake Guntersville to Wheeler Lake, Sipsey River and Brushy Creek in Bankhead Forest, the Sipsey Fork River in Walker County and the Flint River in Madison County.



EXPLORE WATERFALLS

WHERE: LAWRENCE COUNTY AND MADISON COUNTY

Cost: Free

Make sure to bring a camera to capture the beauty of north Alabama's waterfalls.

In Lawrence County's Sipsey Wilderness, head to Turkey Foot Falls, which is a 30-minute walk from the Sipsey River picnic ground. Turkey Foot Creek, which runs through a sandstone canyon, empties into the Sipsey Fork. After seeing Turkey Foot Falls, head west to 15-foot Kinlock Falls in the Bankhead National Forest. northalabama.org/trails/waterfalls.

In Madison County, visit Bethel Springs Nature Preserve on the Land Trust of North Alabama. The preserve's Carpenter Trail, Falling Sink Trail and Mill Trail create a 1.3-mile round-trip to the waterfall. landtrustna.org/properties/bethel-spring-preserve.

SIMP MCGHEE'S OFFERS WIDE RANGE OF DISHES IN OLD-FASHIONED CHARM

A family enjoys dinner at Simp McGhee's. [JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY]

By Michael Wetzel
Explore Magazine

It's a step back into history for patrons eating at Simp McGhee's restaurant at 725 Bank St. N.W. in Decatur.

The hardwood floors, oak tables and chairs, quiet-spinning ceiling fans and nostalgic images along the walls of the two-story eatery provide an atmosphere reflecting the early history of Decatur and one of its outlandish, yet legendary river boat captains from the turn of the 20th century.

A recent Saturday evening visit to Simp McGhee's found the 35-year-old restaurant near capacity with a mix of clientele ranging from families to seniors. Most customers appeared to be young professionals in their 20s and 30s. Dress was blue-jean casual to formal as a group of high school students were eating there on prom night. Seating was plentiful inside, and the pet-friendly sidewalk cafe seating out front has five tables available.

Second-floor seating also is available for private parties.

Three minutes after being seated, our waitress Ashlyn greeted us and took our beverage order. The menu has something for everyone, ranging from soups and salads to sandwiches and meaty entrees.



Patrons have a dinner at Simp McGhee's.

[JERONIMO NISA]



Grilled salmon with home fries, onion rings and barbecue sauce is a popular entrée at Simp McGhee's.

[MICHAEL WETZEL/DECATUR DAILY]

We tried Simp's Pizza appetizer (\$11), which consisted of four small, freshly baked slices of pepperoni pizza.

Steaks (market price), seafood (\$21 to \$29), Rhodes Ferry Duck (\$23) and Tucker G's Pasta (\$16) are among the 21 tasty entrees hard to pass up.

The 12-ounce ribeye grilled cut of prime beef entrée (\$30) came with a salad and choice of fries or potatoes.

The grilled salmon entrée (\$24) included a salad, potatoes, onion rings and barbecue sauce. The food arrived within 20 minutes of ordering.

Desserts started at \$7.

While we ate, music from the 1960s, '70s and '80s played softly through the speakers. Some nights, live musicians entertain the restaurant's guests two or three hours at a time.

The restaurant is on the corner of Lafayette Street and Bank Street in historic Decatur, and the building is on the National Register of Historic Places designated by the U.S. Department of Interior in the 1980s.

Robert and Jenny Lind Riddle turned the building, constructed in the early 1900s as a furniture store, into the original Simp McGhee's restaurant in 1986. Christy Hayes Wheat purchased the restaurant about 17 years ago.

Restaurant hours:

5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday.

5 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

Closed Sunday and Monday.

— mike.wetzel@decaturdaily.com
or 256-340-2442.
Twitter @DD_Wetzel.

RESTAURANT GUIDE

TIME TO EAT

Please note that restaurant hours of operation are subject to change.

ASIAN

Canton House

Where: 609 14th St. S.E., Decatur, 256-350-8868, ezordernow.com/cantonhouse

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday and Sunday; 10:30 a.m.-9:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday

The oldest authentic Asian restaurant in Decatur, Canton House has been family owned and operated since 1995. The menu offers everything from its Hawaiian Five "O" specialty dish to staples like Sweet and Sour Pork or Chicken and General Tso's Chicken. The lunch buffet starts at 10:30 a.m., and the dinner buffet begins at 3:30 p.m. You'll love the generous portions with takeout meals.



BARBECUE

Big Bob Gibson Bar-B-Q

Where: 1715 Sixth Ave. S.E., Decatur, 256-350-6969; bigbobgibson.com

Hours: 9:30 a.m.-8:15 p.m. daily, the drive-thru remains open until 8:30 p.m.

2520 Danville Road S.W., Decatur, 256-350-0404

Hours: 9:30 a.m.-8:15 p.m. Monday-Saturday, the drive-thru remains open until 8:30 p.m.

When you walk in to the main location on Sixth Avenue in Decatur, you'll see many of the trophies that Big Bob Gibson's award-winning barbecue has earned. Big Bob's, as it's known locally, has been serving up barbecue since 1925 and has been featured on Food Network, the Travel Channel and more. The restaurant's food is described as "quintessential Alabama Southern cooking."



Canton House has been family owned and operated since 1995. It offers a buffet and menu ordering.

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TIME TO EAT

Chief and Snookie's Hickory Pit

Where: 23419 Alabama 24, Trinity, 256-351-9904; chiefandsnoogiebbq.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Sunday

Stop in for barbecue at Chief and Snookie's in Trinity. With pork, turkey, ribs and more that are smoked daily, you'll find lots to choose from. Try their BBQ Nachos and grab a dessert while you're at it.

Holy Smoke BBQ

Where: 900 U.S. 31 N.W., Hartselle, 256-751-2000

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-8 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday

Holy Smoke is a small, family-owned barbecue restaurant that is dedicated to cooking fresh foods daily, the old-fashioned way. The restaurant is best known for their smoked chicken wings and barbecued ribs, but you can also get juicy pulled pork and deliciously smoked beef brisket, and all the homemade sides you could imagine.

LawLers BBQ

Where: 725 Beltline Road S.W., Suite A, Decatur, 256-822-1006;
and 1506 U.S. 72 E., Athens, 256-233-1818; lawlersbarbecue.com

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Saturday

LawLers BBQ was started by two brothers from Athens, Alabama. LawLers uses old-fashioned recipes and every bit of the hickory smoked, pulled pork is still picked by hand. You can get barbecue by the pound, St. Louis style ribs, or maybe try a "stuffedie" — a baked potato stuffed with cheese and your choice of barbecue meat.

Moe's Original BBQ

Where: 202 Moulton St. E., Decatur, 256-686-4112

Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday-Wednesday, 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Thursday, 11 a.m.-midnight Saturday

3524 Deere Road, Priceville, 256-686-1462

Hours: 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Sunday

200 Main St. W., Hartselle, 256-502-8092

Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday-Saturday

Moe's has three Morgan County locations to choose from, including a new one in Hartselle. At these restaurants you will find pulled pork, stuffed potatoes, ribs and Southern-fried catfish. At the Decatur location, you will find a full bar and live music on the weekends. The locations also cater.



Moe's Original BBQ often has live music on the weekends, as well as pulled pork, stuffed potatoes, ribs and Southern-fried catfish.



Big Bob Gibson BAR-B-Q has been family operated for five generations. [JERONIMO NISA]

BIG BOB GIBSON BAR-B-Q

Restaurant's tasty barbecue earns national following

In 1925, a 6-foot-4-inch, 300-pound railroad worker named Bob Gibson started serving barbecue, slow-roasted in a hand-dug pit, with a distinct white sauce from the backyard of his Danville Road home.

Quickly, word of Big Bob, his tangy white sauce and Brunswick stew spread. Now, 97 years and five generations later, the legacy of Big Bob Gibson's BBQ, a culinary staple of Decatur, the state of Alabama and the United States, continues to grow.

Led by Don McLemore, Gibson's grandson, and Chris Lilly, who married Gibson's great-granddaughter, Big Bob Gibson's BBQ has appeared on the Food Network, earned 15 World BBQ Championships, five Memphis in May grand championships, appeared on NBC's "Today Show" with Al Roker and participated in the South Beach Food & Wine Festival and Aspen Food & Wine Festival.

McLemore credited the restaurant's success and longevity to the friendly atmosphere and, of course, to the food.

"Pretty much everything is the same

as when my grandfather made it," McLemore said. "We have added items, but we haven't messed with the sauce."

Created by Gibson, that signature white sauce formed the foundation for the award-winning barbecue joint.

"I think that's why his barbecue restaurant became so popular with everybody. He had something a little different, something that appealed to folks," McLemore said.

People loved the white sauce so much, they followed Gibson as he moved the restaurant from his home to Old Moulton Road, Moulton Heights, downtown Decatur and Alabama 67. In 1987, the restaurant moved into its current location on Sixth Avenue and, in 1992, opened a second location on Danville Road.

All five of Gibson's children, including McLemore's mother, followed in the family business.

"My mom went to see my grandfather, who liked to hunt and fish, in the early 1950s. She told him she would run the restaurant and he could do whatever he wanted," McLemore said. "Many days, he'd sit up on the chair next to the cash register and give kids bubblegum."

In 1977, three years after his grandfather's death, McLemore started working at the restaurant. In addition to Lilly, the five generations of the Big Bob Gibson family also include McLemore's

two grandsons.

"My grandsons made me so proud. It feels good that they liked what I did enough that they wanted to do the same thing. I'm very proud of them," McLemore said.

For their contributions to the culinary world, Lilly was inducted into the American Royal World Series of Barbecue's Hall of Fame in 2016 and McLemore received the Pioneer of Barbecue award from Jack Daniel's World Championship Barbecue in 2015.

The Alabama Department of Tourism's "100 Dishes to Eat in Alabama" recommends eaters try Big Bob Gibson's pies and barbecue chicken with white sauce.

McLemore agreed, but also offered other options.

"I should say my favorite food is the chicken with the white sauce. And I do love that, but I'm more of a pork man than a chicken man. Then you've got to remember we've got pies. But that's a different thing than barbecue, so I can say I love the pork and I love the pies too," McLemore said.

For a taste of Big Bob Gibson's, stop by 1715 Sixth Ave. S.E., from 9:30 a.m.-8:15 p.m. dine-in (8:30 p.m. drive-through) every day of the week, or 2520 Danville Road S.W., from 9:30 a.m.-8:15 p.m. dine-in (8:30 p.m. drive-through) Monday to Saturday.

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Founded in 2012, the Alabama Center for the Arts is a partnership between **Calhoun Community College** and **Athens State University**, with collaboration from the City of Decatur and Morgan County. The campus, located in beautiful downtown Decatur, consists of two state-of-the-art buildings, where students can take several types of courses in art, theatre, graphic design, visual communications, and music. College courses taught here can lead to Associate of Science and Bachelor of Arts degrees.

The 43,000 square foot Visual Arts Center houses painting, drawing, and sculpture studios, graphic design labs, as well as state-of-the-art gallery spaces.

At 44,000 square feet, the Performing Arts Center features a 150-seat recital hall with a digital projector for films and lectures, a 300-seat black box theatre, a recording studio with two booths for sound engineering, sound-proof rehearsal rooms, a space for set construction, a music lab, computer lab, dressing rooms and smart classrooms.



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Pigskin All Sports BBQ

Where: 400 Nance Ford Road, S.W., Hartselle, 256-754-5055

Hours: 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Saturday

Pigskin All Sports BBQ offers a variety of barbecue plates, sandwiches, melts and much more. On Fridays, in addition to their usual menu, they offer fried pies. Get a slice of homemade pies for dessert, or take a whole one home for the whole family to enjoy.

Scrugg's BBQ

Where: 1315 Alabama 20, Decatur, 256-351-7937; scruggsbbqdecatur.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-5:30 Tuesday-Friday

Located near the Tennessee River, Scrugg's BBQ is making a name for itself. Local patrons declare that they have the best brisket on the planet, not to mention their fried catfish or stuffed taters. Stop in and see if you agree.

Smokey C's Bar-B-Que & Wings

Where: 3075 Alabama 20, Decatur, 256-353-7787; smokeycsbbq.com

Hours: 10:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. Monday - Friday

Located on the western edge of Decatur, this family-run barbecue restaurant is known for more than just its award-winning white sauce. Stop in on a weekday for a great lunch of signature pork loin or a BBQ Tater Bowl and be sure to get a serving of their much-loved homemade banana pudding.

Whitt's BBQ

Where: 2532 Spring Ave., S.W., Decatur, 256-350-2748; whitts3.com

Hours: 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Tuesday, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday

Whitt's BBQ has several locations to choose from in Decatur and Athens that are locally owned and operated by the Whitt family. Check out their website to find a location nearest to you, where you can get barbecue by the pound and all the sides you'd want, or a family pack to take home and enjoy.

PIZZA/ITALIAN

Alfonso's Pizza & Italian Restaurant

Where: 725 Beltline Road S.W., Suite E, Decatur, 256-350-0211; thealfonsospizza.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Afonso's has been a family-owned restaurant since 1977 with three generations having been a part of it. Alfonso's is best known for its brick oven pizzas with the thin, crispy crust with freshly made dough and sauces. Other options on the menu include shrimp alfredo, spaghetti bake and many more things to choose from.



Alfonso's Pizza and Italian Restaurant is best known for its brick oven pizzas with the thin, crispy crust with freshly made dough and sauces.



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at



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TIME TO EAT



With a wooden decor and "River City" theme, Mellow Mushroom has an easygoing atmosphere.

Francesco's Italian Restaurant & Pizzeria

Where: 2613 U.S. 31 S., Decatur, 256-584-6770; francescositalian-restaurant.org

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, 10:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 10:30 a.m.-8 p.m. Sunday

Francesco's is an Italian restaurant and pizzeria located in southern Decatur. On their menu, you'll find classic Italian dishes such as fettuccini, lasagna or calzones. All of the dishes are made to order with fresh ingredients. Try their famous pinwheels.

Mellow Mushroom

Where: 202 East Moulton St., Decatur, 256-355-5161, mellowmushroom.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday-Thursday; 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

A cornerstone of Decatur's downtown restaurant scene since opening in 2013, Mellow Mushroom has a natural feel with its wood décor inside and covered patio outside. The eatery with a "River City" theme specializes in stone-baked pizzas and has gluten-free and vegan options. The menu also has munchies, calzones, salads, hoagies and burgers. People interested in an alcoholic beverage can try Mellow's "Liquid Karma Cocktails" or one of 36 draft beers.

Pizza Ed.

Where: 305 Main St. W., Hartselle, 256-502-9959; thepizzaed.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Sunday

Pizza Ed offers New York Style, brick oven pizza in the heart of downtown Hartselle. In addition to fresh-made pizza, you can find a variety of offerings, such as fettuccini alfredo, lasagna, calzones, strombolis, salads and more. You might even like to try a slice of lemoncello mascarpone cake for dessert.

Terranova's

Where: 105 N. Jefferson St., Athens, 256-800-8016; terranovas-restaurant.com

Hours: 4 p.m.-8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

This is Terranova's second location and is on the historic square of downtown Athens. At Terranova's you will find savory Italian dishes like pasta Portofino or eggplant Parmesan to enjoy, while taking in the ambiance of Italian antiques and "spunky memorabilia."

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The Village Pizza

Where: 15728 East Limestone Road, Athens, 256-232-3388; thevillagepizza.org

Hours: 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday-Saturday, 4 p.m.-8 p.m. Sunday

This restaurant has been creating handmade pizzas since 1989. You can find pizzas, pasta, wings and more in this family-friendly and locally loved pizzeria.

Village Pizza

Where: 222 W. Market St., Athens, 256-233-7627; villagepizzaathens.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m. Sunday-Wednesday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Thursday-Saturday

This family-owned restaurant serves pizzas cooked in a brick oven and has a lively atmosphere for those dining onsite. Village Pizza's Fire and Ice Wings are one of the most popular items on the menu, and it also offers a selection of craft beers.

MEXICAN

Camino Real

Where: 2504 U.S. 31, Decatur, 256-353-6727

Hours: 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday and Sunday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Opened in 1985, this decorative Mexican restaurant on U.S. 31 offers traditional cuisine including margaritas. An authentic Mexican atmosphere adds to the dining experience. The restaurant offers dine-in, takeout and delivery service. It has family seating up front and long tables in the back that can accommodate teams and other large groups.

Don Alejo Mexican Restaurant

Where: 800 U.S. 31 S.W., Suite D., Hartselle, 256-778-3325; don-alejo-mexican-restaurant.business.site

Hours: 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Don Alejo Mexican Restaurant is a family-owned restaurant offering classic Mexican cuisine in a welcoming environment. You'll find many things to choose from on their menu, from fajitas and chimichangas to flaming cheese. Try their xango for dessert – fried cheesecake with ice cream, and be sure to stop in for "Taco Tuesday."

El Portal Mexican Restaurant

Where: 1901 U.S. 31 S.W., Hartselle, 256-751-1159

and 1315 U.S. 31 N.W., Hartselle, 256-751-2962

Hours: 11 a.m. - 9:30 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-10:00 p.m. Friday and Saturday

El Portal has two locations to choose from. At their locations you will find lots of variety on their menus, from fish tacos to a "Speedy Gonzales." You will also find a vegetarian section and kids portion of the menu.

La Monarca International Food

Where: 2528 Spring Ave. S.W., Decatur, 256-686-4447

Hours: 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Daily

La Monarca is a restaurant tucked in the back of a Mexican market. Locals and visitors alike come in to get what they consider authentic Mexican foods like Diablo shrimp, an agua fresca – or you'll even find grilled cactus.

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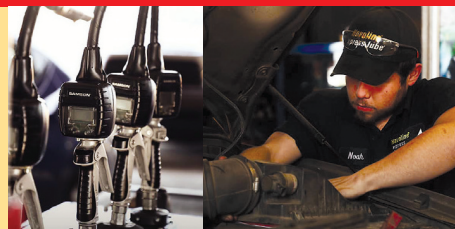
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Las Vias Mexican Grill

Where: 1000 Beltline Road S.W., Suite Q, Decatur, 256-552-7772

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-9:30 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, 10:30 a.m.-11 p.m. Friday and Saturday

2224 Sixth Ave., S.E., Decatur; 256-686-3344

Hours: 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday

and 711 Nance Ford Road, Hartselle, 256-751-1402

Hours: 11 a.m. – 9 p.m. daily

lasviasmexicangrill.com

Las Vias offers classic Mexican foods in three convenient locations — two in Decatur as well as one in Hartselle. Stop on in to see why people love their delicious food and Southern hospitality.

Tio Juan Mexican Grill

1318 Sixth Ave. S.E., Decatur, 256-306-9992

Hours: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Wednesday through Monday. Closed Tuesday

Tio Juan offers typical Mexican fare with tacos, enchiladas, nachos, salads. Its specialties include steak quesadilla, shrimp fajitas and lunch combinations. Margaritas, mixed drinks and Mexican beer are among the beverages.

DELIS/BREAKFAST/LUNCH

Eatin' in the Attic

Where: 117 Main St. W., Hartselle, 256-502-9017

Hours: 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Monday-Wednesday; 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursday; 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday-Saturday

Website: eatinintheattic.com

At Eatin' in the Attic, formerly Cahoot's, you'll find daily specials such as Meatloaf, Chicken on the Ritz or Salmon Patties. Check out sandwiches like The Attic, Fried Green Tomato BLT or Jam Ham and Cheese.



Tio Juan Mexican Grill's specialties include steak quesadilla, shrimp fajitas and lunch combinations. [JERONIMO NISA]

TIME TO EAT



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Let's Do Lunch near the Cook Museum of Natural Science was featured in the "Alabama Tourism 100 Dishes to Eat Before You Die."

Carl's Deli

Where: 3151 Alabama 67, Somerville, 256-606-3465

Hours: 5 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday-Saturday

Stop on in for an early morning breakfast of country ham and biscuits, or order pancakes and sausage at Carl's Deli in Somerville. They also offer daily lunch specials and classics like burgers or grilled ham and cheese sandwiches.

Let's Do Lunch

Where: 435 Holly St. N.E., Decatur, 256-340-1317; letsdolunchdeatur.com

Hours: 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Friday

Just as the name indicates, this is a great place to stop in for a tasty lunch. Everything is made fresh and has no preservatives or additives. Try their turkey bacon berry wrap or strawberry pretzel salad! This restaurant was featured in the "Alabama Tourism 100 Dishes to Eat Before You Die."

Nature's Table Café

Where: 133 Fourth Ave. N.E., Decatur – inside the Cook Museum, 256-898-6301; cookmuseum.naturestable.com

Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday

Nature's Table, located inside the Cook Museum, offers a blend of traditional and new foods with fresh ingredients. You'll find Acai bowls, smoothies, sandwiches, protein bowls and more.

Westside Coffee Place & Café

Where: 2699 Sandlin Road, Suite B5, Decatur, 256-353-2025; westsidecoffeeplace.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Friday

Westside Café has been serving homemade soups, salads and sandwiches since 2001. They also offer hot daily specials and whole frozen casseroles to go.

Wildwood Deli

Where: 113 W. Market St., Athens, 256-206-9384

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Monday – Thursday, 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m. and 5 p.m.-8 p.m. Friday

Here you can enjoy fresh, made-to-order deli fare and gourmet salads. As well as Southern favorites like a pimento cheese sandwich with homemade soup. Wildwood Deli is located just a stone's throw from the Limestone County Courthouse.

FAMILY

Chick-Fil-A

Where: 2502 U.S. 31 S., Decatur, 256-822-1014

1809 Beltline Road S.W., Decatur, 256-355-3035

and 1291 U.S. 72 E., Athens, 256-233-8900; chick-fil-a.com

Hours: 6 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 6 a.m.-10 p.m. (9 p.m. at U.S. 31 S. and Beltline locations) Friday and Saturday

Chick-fil-A offers all things chicken – from sandwiches and tenders to fresh-made salads. There are two locations in Decatur as well as a location in Athens. You might also like to stop in for a frosted lemonade. The lemonade is made fresh each day.

The Freight House

Where: 200 Railroad St. S.W., Hartselle, 256-773-4600; freight-househartselle.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Sunday-Wednesday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday

The Freight House is located in the historic, 1915 L&N railroad freight depot and offers classic Southern cooking at its finest. You will find classics from hand-cut prime rib to slow-cooked pinto beans. Enjoy a great meal, followed by a slice of their famous strawberry cake, as you watch the trains roll by right outside the windows.



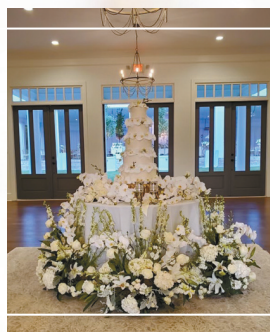
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JW Steakhouse

Where: 45 Marco Drive, Decatur, 256-355-5560; jwsteakhouse.com

Hours: 4 p.m.-9 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday, 4 p.m.-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday

JW Steakhouse is conveniently located just off of Interstate 65 in the Priceville area. JW Steakhouse offers hand-cut, aged steaks, homemade cheesecake and much more. They have a new bar with a wide selection of beers and wines. They offer catering and event hosting, as well as monthly wine tasting events.

Krab Kingz

Where: 107 Second Ave. N.E., Decatur, 256-686-2304

Hours: 11:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday and 11:30 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday.

A newcomer to Decatur's downtown dining scene in December 2021, Krab Kings specializes in garlic butter flavors and its Cajun crab boils. Fried shrimp, oysters and crawfish also are on the menu.

Libby's Catfish & Diner

Where: 1401 Alabama 67 S., Priceville, 256-353-9767

Hours: 5:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday

If you have a craving for catfish, that is what Libby's is best known for. But in addition to catfish and seafood with homemade tartar sauce, you can also find steaks, burgers and a variety of country style breakfast sandwiches.



Nick and Tracy Nicholson have dinner at Krab Kingz Seafood, the newest downtown restaurant in Decatur.

Mr. Henry's Neighborhood Restaurant

Where: 701 Nance Ford Road S.W., Hartselle, 256-773-8101

Hours: 6:00 a.m.-2 p.m. Sunday-Friday, 6 a.m.-11 a.m. Saturday

Mr. Henry's is a beloved restaurant in Hartselle, offering home style cooking such as ribeye steaks or meatloaf sandwiches and daily specials. With their early hours, it is a favorite go-to location for a hearty breakfast as well.

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Oh! Bryan's Family Steak House

Where: 727 Main St. W., Hartselle, 256-773-8788; ohbryans.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Oh! Bryan's Family Steak House offers hand cut, flame broiled steaks cooked to order. You'll also find a salad bar with over 30 items to choose from. Come find out why this restaurant is so beloved, with the iced tea glass that never runs empty.

Ramona J's Restaurant

Where: 1212 U.S. 31 S., Athens, 256-444-4005; ramonajs.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Friday

Ramona J's Restaurant offers "good food to go," with a great variety and all made to order. Whether you choose a Caribbean Jerk Cheese Steak Burger or a catfish with wings, you're going to love every bit of it. And don't forget the candy bacon deviled eggs or pound cake for dessert.

Ro's Grille

Where: 300 E. Hobbs St., Athens, 256-230-2716; rosgrille.com

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 10:30 a.m.-3 p.m. and 4-9 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 10:30 a.m. - 2 p.m. Sunday

Ro's Grille is a casual restaurant featuring a twist on traditional grilled foods. You'll find Caribbean chicken, ribeye, Cajun salmon, 9-ounce burgers and more to choose from. The restaurant also offers daily specials. Ro's Grille has a second location near the Publix in Athens.

St. John's Episcopal Church

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Worship Schedule**Sunday**

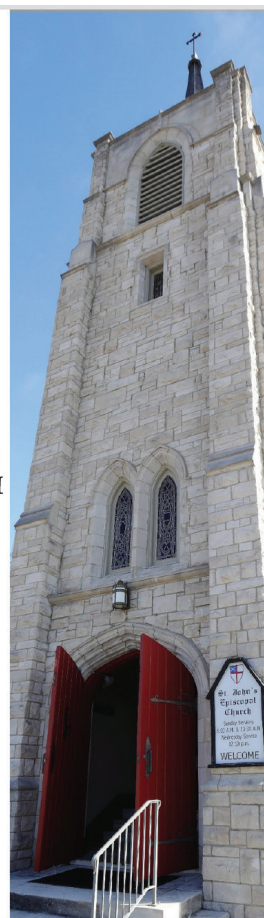
8:00 a.m. The Holy Eucharist, Rite I
9:30 a.m. Sunday School for All Ages
10:30 a.m. The Holy Eucharist, Rite II

Wednesday

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sunday evening.....5:45 pm
wednesday night house of prayer service.....6:30 pm

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Smith's Seafood Company

Where: 1102 U.S. 72 E., Athens, 256-998-5078; smithsseafood.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

When it comes to seafood, there's no place like Smith's Seafood Company. You'll find Louisiana style cooking, loaded shrimp fries, catfish, and even gator bites. Stop for some fresh seafood take-out. How fresh? They have their own seafood market.

Such-n-Such Burgers and Tacos

Where: 2614 U.S. 31 S., Decatur, 256-686-3598; suchnsuchburgersn-tacos.com

Hours: 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursday-Friday, 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Saturday

Such-n-Such Burgers and Tacos has something for everyone. No need to choose between a burger or taco place when they offer both. But these aren't your typical burgers or tacos. With things like brisket burgers or mahi-mahi in a taco, you'll have a hard time picking your favorite. Saturday mornings Such-n-Such also offers a great breakfast selection, where you'll see things like a "Get Meaty" – a brisket, bacon and pepper maple jam biscuit.

Sweet Thymes

Where: 407 N. Clinton St., Athens, 256-444-4142

Hours: 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday-Friday

Sweet Thymes gets their name for their signature desserts, but you'll also find great entrees for lunch as well. Their menu offers things like honey pecan chicken and toasted ham subs alongside their sweets.

The Old Cookstove

Where: 89 Reeder Road, Danville, 256-462-1151; oldcookstove.com

Hours: 4 p.m.-7 p.m. Thursday, 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Friday and Saturday

This off-the-beaten-path restaurant is a rustic little gem nestled in the countryside of Danville. The Old Cookstove is known for hosting a "Seafood Friday" and serving homemade dishes just like your grandma used to make. Take a drive in the country, enjoy the scenery and stop in for a meal of comfort foods like country fried steak or pot roast and maybe some peach cobbler with homemade ice cream.

Whisk'd Café

Where: 115 Johnston St. S.E., Decatur, 256-580-5909; whiskdcafede-catur.com

Hours: 7 a.m.-1 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday

This is a breakfast café that features farm-to-table, seasonal Southern favorites with a New Orleans flair. You might choose from a funnel cake with raspberry jam, biscuits with chocolate gravy, or even a carnitas omelet.

BAR AND GRILL

Bank Street Grill

Where: 719 Bank St., Decatur, 256-686-4202; bankstreetgrillal.com

*Hours: 5 p.m.-9 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

At Bank Street Grill, you can enjoy hand-cut filet mignon, freshly ground Angus burgers. Or maybe you would prefer unique starters like bacon-wrapped quail breast, or buffalo fried okra and fried green tomatoes.



Sunday Class: 9:00 am
 Sunday Service: 10:00 am & 5:00 pm
 Wednesday Service: 7:00 pm

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B.B. Perrins Sports Grille

Where: 608 Holly St. N.E., Decatur, 256-355-1045; bbperrins.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Decatur's first local sports bar and grille was established in 1988 by Benny and Braxton Perrin. The restaurant has a tradition of creating delicious barbecue that is hickory smoked and served with homemade sauces. Try their "seafood-less" gumbo, their Glover special or their PB Fudge Pie. There's lots to choose from.

Brick Deli

Where: 112 E. Moulton St., Decatur, 256-355-8318; brickdeli.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday and Tuesday, 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 11 a.m.-1 a.m. Friday, 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Saturday

The Brick Deli offers a selection of original sandwiches like the Father Guido or 5 Finger Banjo Picker. You'll also find live music and a full-service bar with 25 beers on tap. Prior to 9 p.m. it is a very family-friendly environment.



B.B. Perrins Sports Grille has a tradition of creating delicious barbecue that is hickory smoked and served with homemade sauces.



The Brick Deli & Tavern in downtown Decatur offers a selection of original sandwiches. [JERONIMO NISA]

Decatur-Morgan

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Crossroads Steak & Grill

Where: 5828 Alabama 36 W., Danville, 256-751-2722

Hours: 11 a.m.-6:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., Sunday

Crossroads Steak & Grill is a family-owned restaurant offering local favorites like fried catfish, shrimp and of course steak! This cozy restaurant does not accept "plastic," so bring cash and enjoy a great meal.



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Located behind Logan's Roadhouse on the Beltline

399240-1

COFFEE HOUSE

Warehouse Coffee

Where: 315 Main St. W., Hartselle, 256-227-8220

Hours: 7 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday, 7 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday

Warehouse coffee is an inviting coffee shop located in the heart of Hartselle. You can find classic coffee shop breakfast and lunch offerings like muffins or sausage balls as well as lunch items to fill you up. Of course, specialty coffee drinks are a must, or even an ice cream milkshake. Warehouse offers free Wi-Fi and plenty of space to relax, enjoy your coffee and recharge – with plenty of outlets available for your devices, too.

UPSCALE CASUAL

The Railyard

Where: 209 Second Ave. S.E., Decatur, 256-580-5707; www.facebook.com/therailyarddecatur/

Hours: 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Friday and Saturday

The Railyard offers a seasonally changing menu of "farm-to-fork" comfort foods that highlight locally grown and harvested ingredients, in addition to their selection of craft beers and seasonal libations. The restaurant is located downstairs from the Second Avenue Southeast entrance and can also be accessed from parking lot level off of First Avenue Southeast.

TIME TO EAT

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398962-1



Simp McGhee's is located in a building on the National Register of Historic Places.

Simp McGhee's

Where: 725 Bank St. N.E., Decatur, 256-353-6284; simpmcghees.com

Hours: 5 p.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Friday, 5 p.m.-9:30 p.m. Saturday

Located on historic Bank Street, Simp McGhee's serves up a variety of Cajun offerings such as crawfish egg rolls, crab Florentine, lobster ravioli and Rhodes Ferry duck. If the weather is nice, you can take advantage of their pet-friendly outdoor seating as well.

MEDITERRANEAN

Josie's Mediterranean Café

Where: 109 Second Ave. N.E., Decatur, 256-822-2229

Hours: 4 p.m.-11 p.m. Wednesday, 4 p.m.-midnight Thursday, 4 p.m.-2 a.m. Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Sunday

Located right in downtown Decatur, Josie's has classic Mediterranean dishes, such as paella, steak marsala or flatbreads. They offer daily specials made from fresh, seasonal ingredients. Of course, in addition to a delicious meal, you can also choose from their wines, cocktails and tapas.



Patrick and Nicole Vaughn enjoy some tapas at Josie's.

SPECIALTY

C.F. Penn Hamburgers

Where: 214 Sixth Ave. S.E., Decatur

Hours: 9 a.m.-6 p.m. (or until they run out) Monday-Saturday

C. F. Penn's Hamburgers is an iconic restaurant that touts deep-fried burgers that even the king loved. Yes, that king – Elvis Presley. C. F. Penn's Hamburgers has been featured on Food Network. They've been serving up burgers since 1927. Try their famous Slugburger.

Downtown Dawgs

Where: 1820 Sixth Ave. S.E., Suite C, Decatur, 256-345-3796; downtowndawgsdecatur.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday

Everyone loves a classic hot dog and Downtown Dawgs takes them to a whole new level. From the Cool Rancher with nacho cheese and crushed cool ranch chips to the Mac Daddy with Mac-and-cheese, there's something for everyone to choose from.

Freddy's Frozen Custard

Where: 2804 Spring Ave., Decatur, 256-686-0746

Hours: 10:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday-Thursday; 10:30 a.m. to 11 p.m., Friday-Saturday

Freddy's is an American fast-casual restaurant chain based in Wichita, Kansas. The Freddy's menu features steakburgers, beef hot dogs and chicken sandwiches. The famous frozen custard comes with a variety of specialty sundaes and mixtures of fruits, candy, cookies, nuts.

Whataburger

Where: 1621 Beltline Road S.W., Decatur, 256-274-8258; whataburger.com

Hours: 24 hours a day

A popular fast-food eatery, which opened in spring of 2021, features burgers, chicken and fish sandwiches, salads, fries and shakes. Breakfast is served from 11 p.m. to 11 a.m.



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Decatur Locations

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7-days 9:30 am - 8:30 pm

2520 Danville Road, SW
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Mon-Sat 9:30 am - 8:30 pm