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INSIDE:

- Schedule of Events
- Frankie Ballard & Easton Corbin
- July 4th Recipes
- Craft Vendors

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THERE'S GONNA BE FIREWORKS

Celebrate Independence Day with a bang in north Alabama

By Catherine Godbey
Staff Writer

Get ready to celebrate America's 248th year of independence with fireworks, patriotic music and quintessential Fourth of July food.

Here are ways to celebrate the holiday in the Tennessee Valley.

FIREWORKS

Spirit of America

When: Thursday, 9 p.m.
Where: Point Mallard Park
Cost: Free

Best place to watch: For an uninterrupted view of the 15-minute show, watch from the Spirit of America field, other open fields at Point Mallard Park or from the waters of Flint Creek and the Tennessee River. If watching from the park, make sure to bring a blanket or chairs.

To know: Parking is free.

Red, White & Boom

When: Thursday, 8 p.m.
Where: Athens High School stadium
Cost: Free

Best place to watch: Central Church of Christ, 320 Old U.S. 31 North; Athens Middle School; Athens High School; Athens SportsPlex, 1403 U.S. 31; and Swan Creek Park, 98 U.S. 31. Organizers advised spectators to arrive 30 minutes early in order to find a parking space and to bring a chair or blanket.

To know: Beginning at 6 p.m., Central Church of Christ will hand out hamburgers, hot dogs, chips, canned drinks, bottled waters and desserts for free.

Festivities at Toyota Field

When: Rocket City Trash Pandas game and fireworks

Where: Toyota Field in Madison
Cost for July 4 game: Tickets start at \$9
To know: The Rocket City Trash Pandas

will host a game against the Birmingham Barons on Thursday. Gates will open at 5 p.m. and the game will start at 6:35. The night will end with a special patriotic-themed fireworks display.

Bay Village Fireworks

When: Saturday, sunset



Fireworks above Point Mallard Park provide a colorful and noisy ending to the 2023 Spirit of America Festival on the 4th of July. [JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY/FILE]

Where: Lucy's Barge, 6049 Bay Village Drive, Athens.

Cost: Free

To know: The ninth annual Bay Village Fireworks Show in Limestone County will be Saturday at sunset, weather permitting. The 20-minute show will be viewable from Lucy's Barge, or from a boat on the Tennessee River.

Elk River Boat Party

When: Saturday, 3 p.m.

Where: Elk River, from the Lee-Hi Bridge, travel north. Anderson Creek will be on the left. The party site will be on the right.

Cost: Free

To know: Come early to grab a prime spot. Approximately 3,500 people attend the 300-boat event each year, co-organizer Bridgett Jackson said. Music from country group Sipsey River will kick off at 3 p.m. The Alabama Marine Police and a rescue squad will be in attendance to ensure everyone's safety. While the boat

party will not organize a fireworks show, various homes on the river will shoot off displays viewable from the party.

Independence Day Celebration

When: Thursday

Where: MidCity District in Huntsville
Cost: Free

To know: MidCity District's Independence Day Celebration will feature music, fireworks, a mullet and mustache contest and more. The fun will begin at noon and end at 11 p.m.

Fireworks and Music Festival

When: July 4, 9 a.m.-9 p.m.

Where: Smith Lake Park in Cullman
Cost: Free admission

To know: Spend the day at Smith Lake Park for the Fireworks Festival, which will feature arts and crafts, games, music and fireworks.

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

SAFETY FIRST

Take care if shooting off personal fireworks

If you plan to use personal fireworks to celebrate July 4, follow these guidelines from TNT Fireworks and the National Council on Fireworks Safety:

- Pick a dry, flat surface such as concrete, dirt or pavement that is away from structures and vegetation, and is free of debris.
- Have a sober adult handle your display.
- Never give fireworks to young children.
- Never use fireworks with alcohol or drug consumption.
- Have a working hose and/or bucket of water nearby in case of emergencies.
- Never carry a firework in your pocket or hold a lit firework in your hand.
- Never shoot fireworks from a metal or glass container.
- Keep spectators at a safe distance and never aim or throw fireworks at another person.
- Never place any part of your body directly over a firework — even when lighting.
- Light only one firework at a time and then quickly move away.
- Never approach or try to re-ignite a firework that doesn't light the first time. Wait 20 minutes and then soak it in a bucket of water.
- Soak your used fireworks in a metal bucket overnight and outside away from anything flammable.
- Wear safety glasses when shooting fireworks.
- Know your local laws, and only use fireworks that are approved where you live. Local fire departments can provide information about what is legal in your community.
- Do not experiment with homemade fireworks.
- Know your fireworks; read the cautionary labels and performance descriptions before igniting.

July Fourth-themed recipes: Create red, white and blue treats

With colorful summer fruit and a little creativity, you can prepare holiday-themed dishes for Fourth of July get-togethers. Several recipes follow.

Flag Cake

Recipe by Alicia Carpenter
1 box of yellow or white cake mix
2 containers of Cool Whip
1 package blueberries
1 package of strawberries; cut them in half
Follow directions on cake box. After cake cools, spread Cool Whip over cake top. Use halved strawberries for stripes and place blueberries in top left corner of cake.

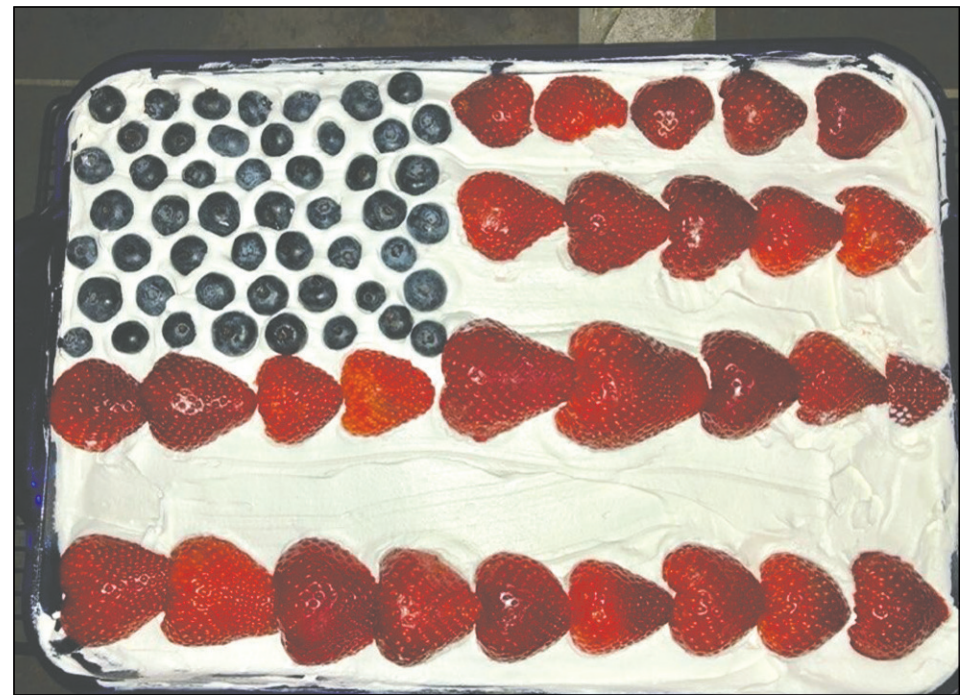
Magic Cookie Bars

Recipe by Connie Pearson
(Try your best to find red, white, and blue M&M's.)
1/2 cup of salted butter, melted
1 1/2 cups of graham cracker crumbs
1 can of sweetened condensed milk
1 cup of chocolate chips
1/2 cup of quick cook oats
1 cup white chocolate chips
1 cup red, white and blue M&M's

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine melted butter and graham cracker crumbs in a bowl until crumbly then press into the bottom of a parchment-lined 9x13 baking dish. Pour sweetened condensed milk over the graham cracker layer. Sprinkle with oats, chocolate chips, white chocolate chips, and M&M's. Bake at 350 degrees for around 25-30 minutes. Let cool then cut into serving squares.

Strawberry Blueberry No-Bake Trifle

Recipe by Connie Pearson
1 whole angel food cake cut or torn into 1-inch cubes
1 lb. fresh strawberries, stemmed and sliced
1 lb. fresh blueberries
Lemon syrup:
1/4 cup water
2 Tbsp. sugar
2 Tbsp. lemon juice
Mix these 3 ingredients together until dissolved and set aside.
Filling:
2 8-oz. blocks of cream cheese, softened
3/4 cup sugar



Alicia Carpenter and her grandchildren make a simple yellow flag cake topped with whipped cream and berries for her family's annual Fourth of July celebration. [COURTESY PHOTO]

2 cup heavy whipping cream
1/2 tsp. vanilla
For the filling, beat cream cheese and sugar together with a mixer. While the mixer is on, gradually add the whipping

cream and beat until fluffy. Add vanilla and beat a few seconds more.

To assemble, use a 4- to 5-quart trifle

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RECIPES

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dish or a 9x13 casserole dish. Start by layering a third of the cubed angel food cake. Brush 1/3 of the syrup on top of the cake. Add 1/3 of the cream mixture. Add half of the sliced strawberries, second third of the cake, second third of the syrup, 1/3 of the cream mixture, half of the blueberries, remaining cake cubes, remaining syrup, and remaining cream mixture. Decorate the top with the rest of the blueberries and strawberries. Refrigerate until serving time.

For more recipes from Connie Pearson visit her blog at theregoesconnie.com.

Red, White and Blue Celebration Salad

Recipe by Linda Gassenheimer

- 2 cups watermelon cubes
- 6 cups salad greens
- 2 cups arugula
- 2 cups blueberries
- 10 ounces rotisserie chicken breast, skin and bones removed (about 2 1/2 cups cubed)
- 1/4 cup pistachios
- For citrus dressing
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- Cut watermelon into 1-inch cubes. Add

salad greens and arugula to a large bowl. Add the watermelon, blueberries and chicken.

Mix the lime juice and Dijon mustard together in a small bowl until smooth. Add 1 tablespoon oil and mix the ingredients together until smooth. Add the second tablespoon of oil and mix until smooth. Add the dressing to the salad bowl and toss well. Divide the salad between two dinner plates and sprinkle the pistachios on top.

Yield 2 servings.

Per serving: 581 calories (42% from fat), 26.9 g fat (3 g saturated, 13.7 g monounsaturated), 126 mg cholesterol, 46.1 g protein, 43.8 g carbohydrates, 9.5 g fiber, 156 mg sodium.

Open-Face Tart

Recipe by Ginger Coble

- 1 frozen puff pastry (my favorite is Publix Greenwise brand because it uses real butter)
- 1 container of mascarpone (room temperature)
- 1/4 cup powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 jar of pie filling or jam of your choice (Gus & Grey's pie fillings are my go-to and can be found at The Cupboard in downtown Decatur)
- Fresh berries of your choice
- Heavy whipping cream

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Thaw and roll out puff pastry into the shape of your dish. Place the pastry in dish and poke holes in it with a fork. Mix the mascarpone, powdered sugar, and vanilla and sprinkle on top of the pastry. Spread the pie filling or jam on top and place in oven for 25 minutes. Whip heavy whipping cream until fluffy and spread on top of the cooled pastry. Place berries on top (if you want to get fancy).

Fruit Tea

Recipe by Geraldine Couch

- 6-quart size tea bags
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 cups orange juice
- 2/3 cup lemon juice
- 1 cup pineapple juice
- Boil the tea bags in 2 quarts of water. Cover and let sit for five minutes. Dissolve the sugar in 2 cups of water. Heat until water and sugar boils. Add juice to gallon jug. Add tea and sugar water then fill with cold water until the gallon jug is full.

Homemade Milky Way Chocolate Ice Cream

Recipe by Dianna Smith

- 6 (1 3/4-ounce) Milky Way bars cut into pieces
- 1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk (low-sugar and fat is fine)

1 (5.5-ounce) can Hershey's chocolate syrup

About 3 quarts milk (skim is fine)
Combine candy and sweet, condensed milk in large saucepan over low heat, stirring until melted. Cool, add 1 quart milk and Hershey's syrup and slowly stir together. Pour into ice cream freezer and add milk to fill line. Freeze and enjoy.

Darrell's 5th of July Chocolate Birthday Cake

Recipe by Dianna Smith

- Cake
- 1 box of chocolate cake mix
- Filling
- 1 1/2 cups cold milk
- 1 package Dream Whip
- 1 package vanilla instant pudding
- 1 small can of coconut
- Frosting
- 1 1/2 cups cold milk
- 1 package Dream Whip
- 1 package chocolate instant pudding
- Bake chocolate cake according to box directions. Freeze and then cut into four layers. Whip first three filling ingredients till thick, add small can coconut. Whip frosting ingredients until thick. Alternate cake layers with filling layers. Frost top and sides with chocolate mixture. Chill and serve thinly sliced.

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SPIRIT OF AMERICA FESTIVAL

Fireworks, car show, hot dog competition on tap

By Wes Tomlinson
Staff Writer

The 57th Spirit of America Festival on Thursday, the Fourth of July, will have an impressive fireworks display, over 3 acres of inflatables for kids, a hot dog competition, and a total of about 100 food and arts and crafts vendors, including 25 food trucks.

Officials say the festival will be a massive upgrade from recent years.

“During COVID-19, you couldn’t have so many activities for a couple of years and it just got down to the fireworks,” said Kenneth Shelton, a member of the festival’s steering committee. “There was no musical entertainment for a couple of years and just two or three food trucks and maybe a handful of vendors and no children’s activities.”

Decatur real estate agent Chase Grisham of The Grisham Group decided to change that this year after the city reached out to him about being the festival organizer.

“My passion is to bring the community together to have a good time and celebrate each other,” Grisham said. “This event just carries a rich history and nostalgia for me.”

Grisham said the hot dog contest will be for ages 10 and up and will begin around 3:30 p.m. and the festival will also feature a cornhole competition, a popular lawn game where participants toss bean bags into the hole of two raised, angled boards.

“People will be able to sign up the day of and we may do registration beforehand,” Grisham said of the hot dog competition. “We’ll have prizes and trophies.”

Grisham said there will also be a “mini” hot dog contest for children.

A car show will be hosted by Lynn Layton Chevrolet with over 100 cars on exhibit. Brock Suggs, co-chair of the festival committee, said they reached out to several local vehicle clubs and got many responses.

“We reached out to Lynn Layton first because they are the first dealership you think of when you think of Decatur,” Suggs said. “They were happy to sponsor and to headline it. We went from there and reached out to car clubs



Last year’s Spirit of America car show, shown here, will be significantly expanded this year. [COURTESY PHOTO]



Participants in the golf cart parade line up before riding in front of the judges during the 2022 Spirit of America Festival at Point Mallard Campground.

[JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY/FILE]

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ACTIVITIES

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and Jeep clubs in order to interest them and get them to come.”

Suggs said there will be a mixture of new and vintage cars, Jeeps, trucks and “a big mix of just about everything.”

The car show is free for attendees but there is a \$25 fee for participants.

“Depending on the weather, we’re going to allow day-of registration and then we’ll cut it off at the gate,” Suggs said. “If we fill up before the day of the event, we’ll make a Facebook post about that.”

Suggs said prizes will be awarded to participants for Best in Show and People’s Choice and they may open a separate category for Jeeps because of the large number of Jeep clubs that responded to the event.

“We’re working on getting some prizes donated for random draws,” Suggs said. “Everyone that is registered will have a ticket and we’ll draw for random prizes throughout the car show. It depends on the registration amount on how much we’ll be able to give away for the car awards. The prizes will come from that entry fee.”

Fireworks

Adamsville-based Pyro Shows will take over the fireworks show again this year and will begin at 9 p.m. with 15 minutes full of large and colorful three-dimensional shapes blasting through the night sky.

“We’re shooting 6-inch shells and they’ll rise approximately 600 feet and burst with a radius of 750 feet,” said Lynn Broad, a pyrotechnician with Pyro Shows. “We’ve got several new three-dimensional shapes. The standard hearts and happy faces are there, but there are some new shapes like butterflies and some other devices.”

Shelton said he expects the fireworks show to be one of the largest in Alabama on July 4. Grisham said his budget for the entire festival this year was \$110,000.

“I know the budget we had when I was on the board in 2016 and 2017, we had about \$1,200 to \$1,300 allocated for the fireworks display alone and that’s all I’m sure (Grisham) can top that with his overall working budget this year,” Shelton said.

Grisham said the awards ceremony and popular beauty pageant, which



Yoselin Hernandez rides a shark in Point Mallard’s wave pool on Independence Day last year. [PHOTOS BY JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY/FILE]

2024 Spirit of America schedule

Performances:

- 1:30 p.m.: Ally Free
 - 3:30 p.m.: The Roads Below
 - 5:30 p.m.: Frankie Ballard
 - 7:30 p.m.: Easton Corbin
- Gates open at 1 p.m. DJ J-Dawg to perform in between other entertainers.

Events:

- Lynn Layton Car Show: 1-4 p.m.
- Touch-a-truck: 1 p.m.
- Hot dog competition: 3:30 p.m.
- Fireworks show: 9 p.m.

have not taken place for several years, will be missing again this year. He and his team are working to revive the pageant for next year’s festival.

“Everybody talks to us about the pageant, but we just didn’t have time to put that on with the time frame that we were given,” Grisham said. “We’re going to try our best to see what that looks like in terms of bringing it back next year. I can’t make any promises though.”

— wesley.tomlinson@decaturdaily.com or 256-340-2442.



Izzy tries to stay cool in the shade at Point Mallard Campground as she rides during the golf cart parade during the 2022 Spirit of America Festival.

AMERICAN MEMORIES

Locals remember historical events

By Wes Tomlinson
Staff Writer

Local residents were asked what significant historical event in American history has impacted them the most during their life, and they replied with events spanning over the last 50 years, including the September 11 attacks in 2001 and the election of President Barack Obama in 2008.

Chase Grisham, 31, Decatur: For me, it would have to be 9/11. I believe I was in the first or second grade and that's the first time I've really seen adults, like my teachers, just sobbing. In the early 2000s, people held their emotions more, so I was kind of confused because everyone was so sad. It was one of the first big eye-openers that there is to terrorism and that there are bad people out there. So that definitely impacted me a lot.

Don Hurth, 66, Decatur: To me, it was the election of Barack Obama. That was a whole family experience for us. I was at my house during election night and I had all my



Hurth

kids come over to see this on TV. We've always been voters, but that time we had high hopes for something that was historically phenomenal, where we could come to an era where we had a Black person as a president. We came from a generation of "We Shall Overcome," and now we're finally at this position that Obama used as his slogan, "Yes, We Can."



Shelton

Kenneth Shelton, 58, Decatur: I remember seeing President Reagan as a kid at the Spirit of America festival. Just seeing a sitting president like that had a lasting impression on me. I realized then the impact of him being willing to come to Decatur, Alabama, while in office. I knew that had a lot of significance and it had a big impact on me and most people here. (Reagan) alluded to Decatur two or three times during his speech.

Chuck Flanagan, 52, Athens: It was 9/11 for me. I was getting breakfast at a



Siblings Keelan, left, and Kelsi Williams walk through the smoke of a grill as they spend the Fourth of July with their family at Point Mallard last year. [JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY/FILE]



Flanagan

place and I saw it on TV and didn't even think it was real. Just the fear that comes over you with the unknown, that was it for me. When the second (plane) hit, I saw it on my TV when I got home.

Jamar Echols, 21, Decatur: I would say the historical national event that's impacted me and my family the most was



Echols

the Great Migration in the 1970s. You saw a lot of Black families from the South move up North to find work, so a lot of my family was split between Chicago and Decatur, Alabama. That was a pretty big event for my family because we were trying to find economic growth in this country.

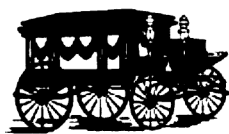
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National country music acts to perform

By Wes Tomlinson
Staff Writer

Nationally renowned country music artists and other musical acts will be on stage all day at the 2024 Spirit of America Festival playing their hit singles, and with all the activities and vendors, officials say the festival this year will be much like the ones hosted during the heyday of the festival in years past.

Decatur realtor Chase Grisham, owner of The Grisham Group, agreed to be the festival organizer this year. He said one of the biggest features of the festival will be the live performances of country music stars Frankie Ballard and Easton Corbin as well as Huntsville singer Ally Free and Nashville country music band The Roads Below.

Grisham said that real estate agent Jeanette McWhorter was instrumental in connecting him to music promoters to book Ballard and Corbin.

"The hard part was we only had two to three months to really pull it off," Grisham said. "We kind of put it together last minute, so we really pushed hard to get the best artists in the time frame that we had."

Grisham said there is no cover charge for the concert and festival, but he will be selling VIP tickets and meet-and-greet passes. VIP tickets are \$60, meet-and-greet passes for Frankie Ballard are \$125 each and the meet-and-greet passes for Easton Corbin are \$165 each.

Grisham said tickets and passes may be purchased through the Spirit of America Facebook page or in person at The Grisham

Group, LLC, located at 2355 Danville Road S.W. in the old fire station No. 5 building.

"We recommend everyone bring a chair or a blanket," Grisham said. "People purchasing VIP tickets will be guaranteed front row essentially, within a couple of feet of the artist. There will also be a large, tented area for them with complimentary Pepsi products."

Grisham said there will also be several cooling tents set up throughout the Spirit of America field with cooling mist fans.

Decatur resident Kenneth Shelton, 58, is a member of the Spirit of America committee and said he hopes to work with Grisham to rejuvenate the festival that he knew in his youth.

"I remember when President Reagan came here in the 1980s when I was a kid," Shelton said. "We've had a long list of TV celebrities, politicians and famous musicians who have played at the festival."

Shelton said country music singer Tom T. Hall performed in the 1970s and The Man in Black even showed up.

"Johnny Cash was awarded the Audie Murphy Award in 1972," Shelton said.

Shelton said country music singer Martina McBride performed at the Spirit of America Festival in 1993, singing her platinum-selling song "Independence Day" for one of the first times.

"I interviewed her for my publication in Nashville last year," Shelton said. "She said she remembered performing here."

Shelton said he appreciates Grisham's willingness to direct the festival this year because of the festival's decline over the last decade.



Frankie Ballard performs during the Still The Same 2018 Tour at the Infinite Energy Center on Aug. 3, 2018, in Atlanta. Ballard is scheduled to perform at this year's Spirit of America Festival. [PHOTO BY ROBB COHEN/INVISION/AP]

"It's sort of diminished and COVID sort of contributed to that," Shelton said of the festival. "His goal is to bring it back to its prominence that it once held. I remember when I was a kid, we had many people come in from out of state and attend the festival regularly and that's what I want to see again."

The musical performances will begin at 1:30 p.m. with Ally Free opening and Easton Corbin's performance will conclude at 9 p.m. before the fireworks show. Gates will open at 1 p.m.

Hailing from Michigan, Ballard first rose to prominence after winning Kenny Chesney's Next Big Star competition in 2008. In 2010, he released his debut single, "Tell Me You Get Lonely," which peaked at No. 33 on the U.S. Billboard Hot Country Songs charts in 2011. Ballard signed to Warner Bros. Records in 2013 and recorded his second album, "Sunshine and Whiskey" and released three No. 1 singles from that album: "Helluva Life," "Sunshine and

Whiskey," and "Young and Crazy." One of those singles went gold and another went platinum.

Florida-based artist Corbin released his freshman, self-titled album in 2010 and the album's first two singles, "A Little More Country Than That," and "Roll With It," reached No. 1 on the U.S. Billboard Hot Country Songs charts and both went platinum. The album eventually was certified as a gold record. He won three awards from the American Country Music Awards in 2010 including new/breakthrough artist of the year, single by a new/breakthrough artist for "A Little More Country Than That," and music video by a new/breakthrough artist for "A Little More Country Than That." Since then, Corbin has released 11 more singles from three different albums, with two of the songs going platinum and two of them going gold.

— wesley.tomlinson@decaturdaily.com
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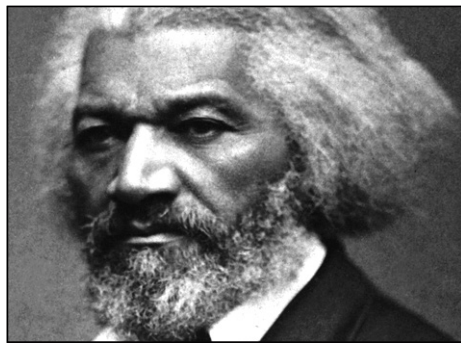
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FREDRICK DOUGLASS

'What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?' (excerpts)

Born into slavery in Maryland, Frederick Douglass escaped to become one of the leading abolitionists of the 19th century and a much-in-demand orator. Douglass gave this speech on the meaning of the Fourth of July and the U.S. Constitution in 1852:



FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? and am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar, and to confess the benefits and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us?

Would to God, both for your sakes and ours, that an affirmative answer could be truthfully returned to these questions! Then would my task be

light, and my burden easy and delightful. For who is there so cold, that a nation's sympathy could not warm him? Who so obdurate and dead to the claims of gratitude, that would not thankfully acknowledge such priceless benefits? Who so stolid and selfish, that would not give his voice to swell the hallelujahs of a nation's jubilee, when the chains of servitude had been torn from his limbs? I am not that man. ...

Fellow-citizens; above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them. If I do forget, if I do not faithfully remember those bleeding children of sorrow this day, "may my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!" To forget them, to pass lightly over their wrongs, and to chime in with the popular theme, would be treason most scandalous and shocking, and would make me a reproach before God and the world. My subject, then fellow-citizens, is American slavery. I shall see, this day, and its popular characteristics, from the slave's point of view. Standing, there, identified with the American bondman, making his wrongs mine, I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this 4th of

July! ...

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. ... I will not enlarge further on your national inconsistencies. The existence of slavery in this country brands your republicanism a sham, your humanity a base pretense, and your Christianity a lie. It destroys your moral power abroad; it corrupts your politicians at home. It saps the foundation of religion; it makes your name a hissing, and a bye-word to a mocking earth. It is the antagonistic force in your government, the only thing that seriously disturbs and endangers your Union. It fetters your progress; it is the enemy of improvement, the deadly foe of education; it fosters pride; it breeds insolence; it promotes vice; it shelters crime; it is a curse to the earth that supports it; and yet, you cling to it, as

SEE DOUGLASS, G12

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Frederick Douglass impersonator Michael E. Crutcher attends the Memorial Dedication ceremony for private Amos McKinney at Sykes Cemetery in Decatur Saturday, July 11, 2009. [JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY/FILE]

DOUGLASS

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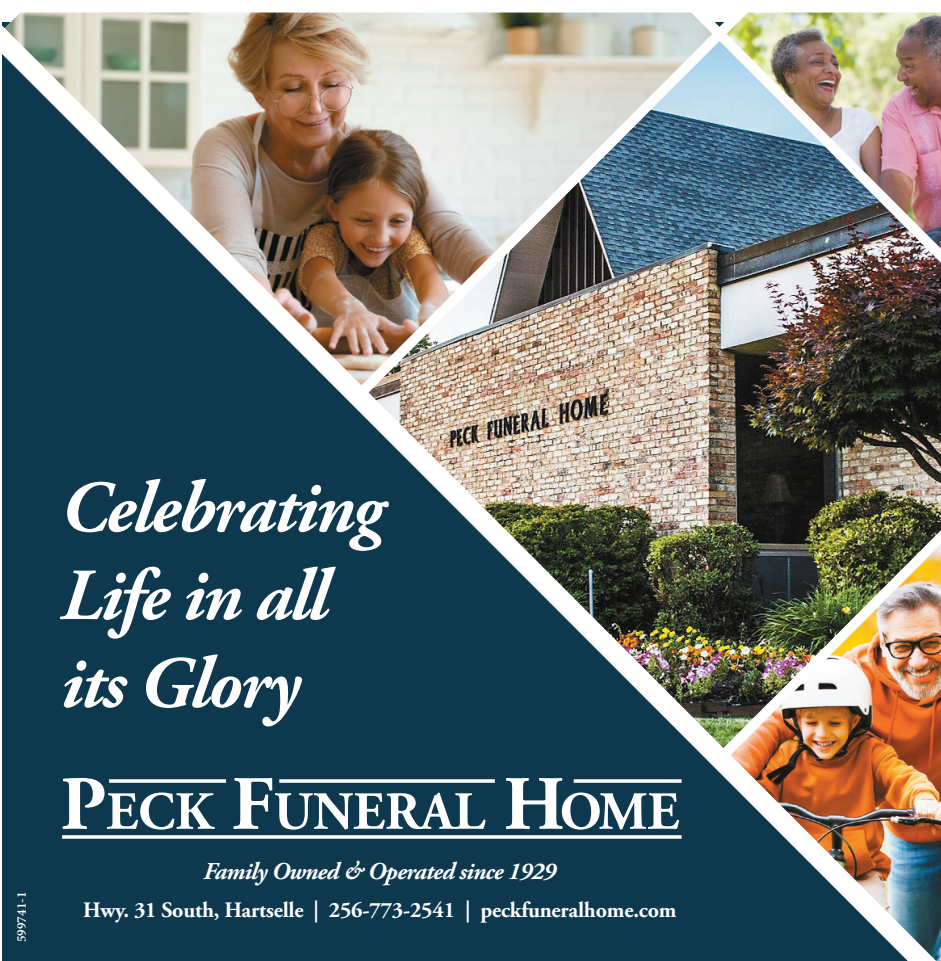
if it were the sheet anchor of all your hopes. Oh! Be warned! Be warned! A horrible reptile is coiled up in your nation's bosom; the venomous creature is nursing at the tender breast of your youthful republic; for the love of God, tear away, and fling from you the hideous monster, and let the weight of twenty millions crush and destroy it forever! ...

Fellow-citizens! There is no matter in respect to which, the people of the North have allowed themselves to be so ruinously imposed upon, as that of the pro-slavery character of the Constitution. In that instrument I hold there is neither warrant, license, nor sanction of the hateful thing; but, interpreted as it ought to be interpreted, the Constitution is a GLORIOUS LIBERTY DOCUMENT. Read its preamble, consider its purposes. Is slavery among them? While I do not intend to argue this question on the present occasion, let me ask, if it be not somewhat singular that, if the Constitution were intended to be, by its framers and adopters, a

slave-holding instrument, why neither slavery, slaveholding, nor slave can anywhere be found in it. ... I hold that every American has a right to form an opinion of the constitution, and to propagate that opinion, and to use all honorable means to make his opinion the prevailing one. ...

Now, take the Constitution according to its plain reading, and I defy the presentation of a single proslavery clause in it. On the other hand it will be found to contain principles and purposes, entirely hostile to the existence of slavery. ...

Allow me to say, in conclusion, notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented of the state of the nation, I do not despair of this country. There are forces in operation, which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery. 'The arm of the Lord is not shortened,' and the doom of slavery is certain. I, therefore, leave off where I began, with hope. While drawing encouragement from the Declaration of Independence, the great principles it contains, and the genius of American institutions, my spirit is also cheered by the obvious tendencies of the age. ...



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Remarks at the Spirit of America Festival in Decatur, Alabama

President Ronald Reagan gave the following speech July 4, 1984 — 40 years ago — at the Spirit of America Festival at Point Mallard in Decatur:

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. And thank all those wonderful young people that we've seen here in this parade. I don't know whether any of my remarks or what I'm going to say on this day can be as eloquent as seeing what really the future is all about in this great, free land of ours, and it is embodied in those young people that came by here.

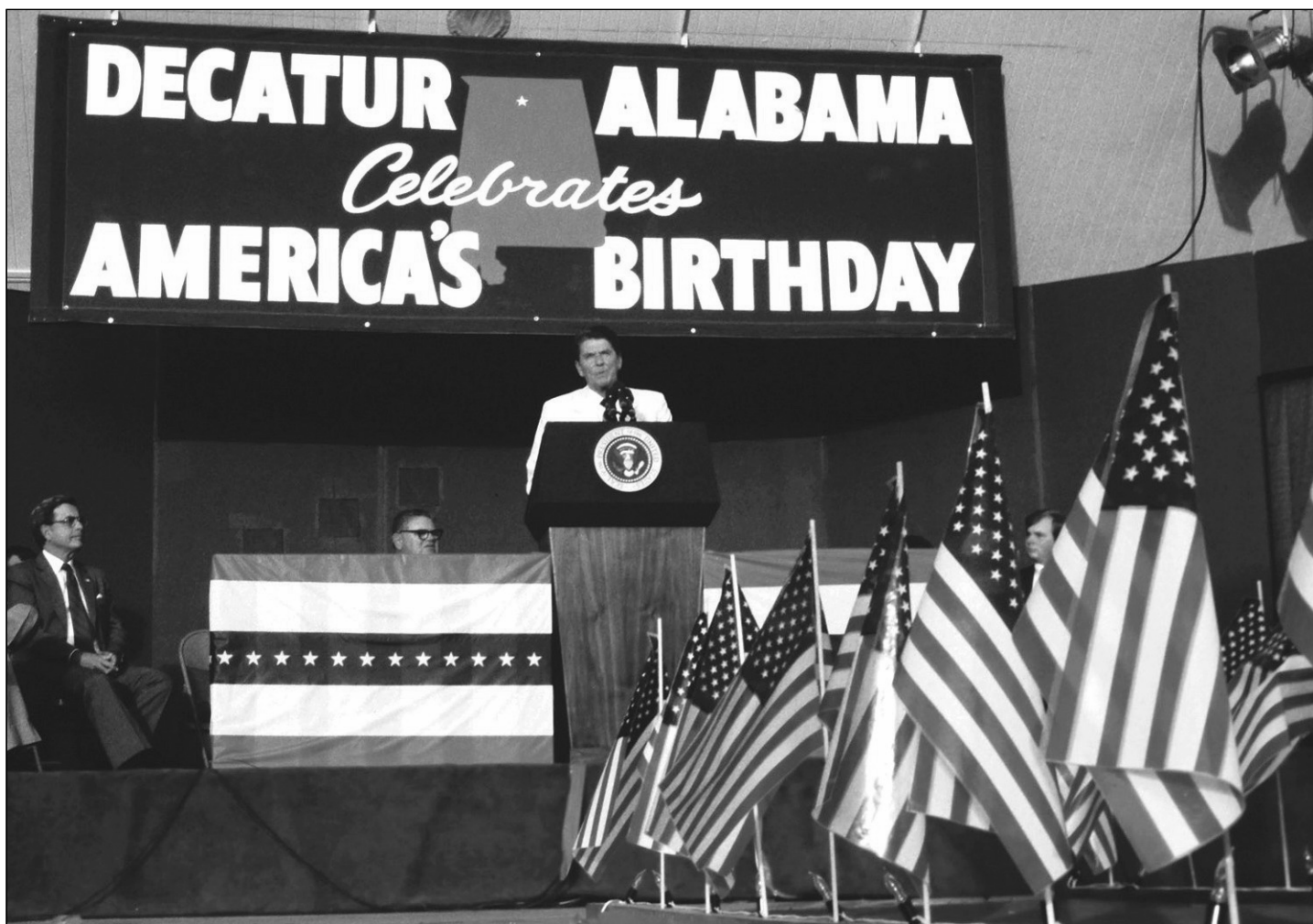
What a wonderful festival this is. And one of the most impressive things about it is that you began this annual Fourth of July celebration 18 years ago when some people said that patriotism was out of style back in that period. Well, I guess here in Decatur it never was out of style.

When other people were burning our flag, you were waving it. And I don't know if a President has ever thanked you for that, but please accept my gratitude and admiration.

It's good to be here with Senator Denton, Congressmen Edwards and Flippo, and I was hoping and thought for a time, until some things intervened in the schedule — foul-ups here — that I was going to be able to greet my friend and your Governor, George Wallace.

We were Governors together when I was Governor of California. As a matter of fact, I was looking forward to telling a little thing about him, and now I'll just have to tell it to you and somebody relate to him, that once when I was attending a meeting as Governor of California in one of the hotels in Los Angeles, somebody told me as we were breaking up that your Governor, George Wallace, was in another part of the hotel. And I thought it would only be courtesy and friendly of me to drop over and pay my respects to him. And he was there, representing the best interests of Alabama, as he always does. And I walked into a meeting where he was telling a group of California business executives the advantages of leaving California and moving to Alabama. [Laughter]

But I want to congratulate Admiral Whitmire on receiving the Audie Murphy Patriotism Award. I knew Audie Murphy. He was a good man. He's buried, as you know, in Arlington Cemetery, and there's a simple stone at his grave that says: "Audie Murphy — Texas." But it could say Audie Murphy — American — because in one of our roughest hours his



President Ronald Reagan takes the presidential podium at the 1984 Spirit of America celebration. [JOHN GODBEY/DECATUR DAILY FILE]

courage and plain decency cast a light on the entire Republic.

In World War II, a unit of ours that was routed by a superior enemy force — and Audie Murphy climbed into a World War II disabled tank, up on the turret, and turned the machine gun of that turret on the enemy, and all alone was trying to hold off the hundreds of advancing men of the enemy. At the same time, walkie-talkie radio — he tried to call for artillery support. And when the artillery commander, wanting to know what his safe range was, asked how close the enemy was to him, Audie said, "Well, if you'll wait just a minute, I'll let you talk to them." [Laughter] Well, he was actually asking them to direct the artillery fire at his own position, because that offered the best opportunity of stopping the enemy.

But I'm so happy to be here tonight. I don't get to the South often enough to suit me. Come to think of it, I don't get to California as much as I'd like either.

[Laughter] But I always feel a special affinity for this part of the country and the people in it.

And even now in these modern times when people who aren't from the South talk about it, they tend to dwell on the physical beauty of the Old South and wax poetic about moonlight on the magnolias. Well, of course the South is lovely, and that is true; but there are those — and I'm one — who feel a special affection for its people. I respect the values that took root here and the pride that's part of the southern character. I'm drawn to your good sense and decent traditions, your fidelity to God, and your faithfulness to your region. And I know that you love our country and are very protective toward it.

I mean no slight to the other parts of the country — to my heritage, which was up in the heartland there in the Middle West, or now my home in the West. But I have been struck when, now and then, on news for some reason or other — on

the TV news — there will be an occasion where the commentator is talking to one of our men in uniform, and I've often been struck by how often the young man in uniform, when he replies, you hear the lilting cadence of Charleston or Memphis or Winston-Salem or Decatur. The South was the home of patriots in 1776, when a southerner drew up our Declaration of Independence. And it's the home of patriots today, 208 years later.

We're here tonight at a great celebration, a birthday party for the Nation. And we come together to honor those who invented this country and who saw to it that it would always be a place of high ideals. And we celebrate those who, in each generation, have protected those ideals and advanced the cause of democracy.

I'm trying to smile, but if I appear as if I'm frowning a little bit, it's those TV lights up there — [laughter] — so I'm not

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really frowning at all; I'm squinting.

But the cause of democracy, that's a subject of high seriousness when, on a night like this, it's hard to be somber and full of deep thoughts, it's hard not to be happy. We have so much to be thankful for.

When I was in China recently, I was privileged to speak to several hundred students at Fudan University in Shanghai. And I talked to them about our country. I'd had an opportunity to be questioned by a number of them, and I felt that they had a great interest in us and particularly in our young people, their peers here in this land. So, in talking to them, I wanted them to understand who we are as a people, and I told them that in many ways we're a nation that loves to contend with itself. We love to argue. And we're free to argue, and that's as it should be.

But I told them that we always managed to stay united around certain things: our central belief that all men are created equal and our belief that democracy is the fairest and most honorable political system yet devised by man. And they seemed to understand. I sensed a very favorable reaction from them and was very pleased by that. And, of course, what I said was true. We are great arguers. But in spite of all our differences, we're still a united country, and we celebrate that unity today. We celebrate, too, the miracle of 208 years of freedom.

I want to talk to you about something, if I could, that I've been thinking about a great deal lately. You know, when you work in the Oval Office, a lot of problems cross your desk. We're repeatedly reminded that there's a lot to do, so many causes to carry about — or care about, and carry forward in our country and in the world. But I think what's impressed me most and what's given me a very deep feeling over the last 3½ years is how very lucky we are. We are truly blessed to live in this time and this place.

Now, I say that because there are so many people that get more attention than they deserve. They run around and survey the modern landscape and see the problems of mankind, and they say, "Oh, it's such a troubled world." We hear people say that this is a terrible century and that we live in an increasingly totalitarian age, that freedom is dead or an illusion to begin with, and man is just a powerless victim of historical forces



President Ronald Reagan's helicopter lands at the 1984 Spirit of America celebration in Decatur.

[PHOTOS BY JOHN GODBEY/DECATUR DAILY]



People filled Point Mallard to see President Ronald Reagan speak during the Spirit of America Festival in 1984.

and that history is something beyond our control, something we can't affect. Well, the counsel of these sour souls would seem to be that mankind has had it and we might as well just give up. Well, let me tell you, they aren't talking about the American people I know.

This is a wonderful time to be alive. And we're so lucky because as a people, we still have the opportunity to be patriots, and as a nation, we still stand for something.

Look at the challenges of our time. God has granted us the challenge to change our own country and to make it better by moving it closer to the intentions of the men who invented it.

We have the challenge to make America even more free than she is; to ensure greater freedom in the marketplace, where our boldness and our power and our genius can bloom. We must work for greater freedom for you so that you can benefit from your labors and so that your earnings will remain where they belong — in your pockets and purses for your families and in your neighborhoods.

We have the power and the challenge to expand freedom in all areas of life; freedom of inquiry and thought, freedom for the practice of religion, freedom in commerce. Ours is the challenge to advance the interests of the family, the challenge to protect the interests of the

smallest unit of government, the hometowns of America, where the expression of the public will is most directly felt.

You know, I've often had a feeling sometimes there in the National Government — I even had it sometimes at the State level — never in my hometown — the feeling that sometimes if we just slipped out, we in government, and closed the doors, turned the key, and disappeared for a while, it'd take you a long time to miss us.

We stand for freedom in the world. We see the gulags and the prisons, those places where man is not free to do work of his choosing and profit from his labor, places where the freedom to worship God has been extinguished and where souls have withered. But we're blessed by God with the right to say of our country: This is where freedom is. This is the land of limitless possibilities.

And you don't have to travel too far in the world to realize that we stand as a beacon, that America is today what it was two centuries ago, a place that dreamers dream of, that it is what Winthrop said standing on the deck of the tiny Arabella off the Massachusetts coast, with a little group of Pilgrims gathered around him, and he said, "We shall be as a shining city for all the world upon the hill."

It isn't so of other places and other systems. Can you think of a time when you heard of a West Berliner jumping over the wall to get into East Berlin? Can you think of a time when someone took a homemade balloon — hot-air balloon and tried to float from free Western Europe into Czechoslovakia? Or when someone took a leaky fishing trawler on a death-defying journey so they could enjoy the freedom of Havana, Cuba? Can you think of a time when any family, thirsting for opportunity, left a democracy to live in a country that was not free?

The truth is that the totalitarian world is a tired place held down by the gravity of its own devising. And America is a rocket pushing upward to the stars. Other countries see our entrepreneurial spirit and seek to emulate it. More and more, the world is reawakening to the fact that freedom is better than tyranny, that democracy is better than the iron fist of dictators, that freedom is the one condition in which man can flourish. And man was meant to flourish, was meant to be free. And that is why we were created. That's why it's been said that democracy is just a political reading of the Bible.

The world has flirted with systems other than democracy, and for a while,

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some of them were in vogue. There were those who said our problems are intractable, and we need huge government to tell us what to do. For a while, the doctrine of Marx and Lenin seemed something new and revolutionary. And some among us said, "Well, that's an idea. We should look at it." Well, all for a while. Times have changed. Man has moved on, and more and more we can see that the tide of the future is a freedom tide.

Man still thirsts for freedom. And wherever the persecuted fight for freedom, our souls and our spirits are with them. We're with the trade unionist in Krakow, Poland, marching behind a crucifix. We're with the Afghan rebel fighting the tanks with an undying ancestral will. We're with the people of Central America, who struggle each day for liberty.

And in spite of decades of troubles and sometimes self-doubt, look across the world for the persecuted and punished, for those who yearn to be free, for those who fight for the right to worship, to speak freely, to write what they want, to

enjoy the freedom God meant us to have. For all those people, America's not just a word; it is a hope, a torch shedding light to all the hopeless of the world.

You know, throughout the world the persecuted hear the word "America," and in that sound they can hear the sunrise, hear the rivers push, hear the cold, swift air at the top of the peak. Yes, you can hear freedom. It was so 208 years ago, and it's so today.

My friends, we're so lucky. We've been granted the right to stand for something. So much of our greatness is behind us, but so much of our greatness is still before us, out there waiting for us to take advantage of it. It is, in truth, a wonderful time to be alive. And those young people that I mentioned first, with those present in our country who have been trying to frighten them into believing that maybe there isn't a future for them, don't any of us who are grown up let them believe that for one moment. They're going to see things we've never seen, they're going to have advantages we've never had.

I thank you. God bless you, and may He continue to bless the Nation that has showered this land with love for more than two centuries. Thank you all. God bless you all.



President Ronald Reagan appears at the 1984 Spirit of America celebration in Decatur. Ed Rogers, the executive director of the Reagan-Bush '84 campaign in Alabama, said in an interview that summer, "It is a good event for him to attend. It is patriotic. It is his kind of event and his kind of people." [JOHN GODBEY/DECATUR DAILY/FILE]

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Prepare pets for Fourth of July festivities

Not everyone enjoys the extra noise and busy nature of July 4th parties, particularly furry members of the family. Animal control services often report an increase in lost animals between July 4th and July 6th. That's because the excitement of the holiday puts pets out of their comfort zones. While pet owners need not cancel their July 4th plans, they should take heed of the many ways to keep their pets safe during the festivities.

UPDATE IDENTIFICATION
Be sure that pets are wearing collars with current identification information. If an address or phone number has changed since the last time you updated microchip records, be sure to check the account is current.

CREATE A QUIET SPACE
Allow pets to ride out the day in their comfortable, quiet and cozy retreats. If necessary, create a space in an interior room. Cover the pet crate with a blanket and offer favorite toys or bedding to create a soothing environment.

PLACE NOTES ON DOORS & GATES
While it's best to keep pets in a locked

room away from the fray, some pets like to socialize with guests and are not bothered by noises. However, alert guests with notes posted on doors and fence gates to check to make sure pets are not trying to escape behind them. All doors should be closed firmly when entering or exiting.

KEEP AN EYE ON THE GRILL
Pets can be opportunists, and those burgers and chicken drumsticks smell delicious to pets. Pets that get too close to the grill can become injured. And if pets eat

leftovers, they may end up with digestive distress or even be poisoned by foods that are toxic to cats and dogs.



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PAYING RESPECTS



Members of the Alabama Sons of the American Revolution participate in the graveside service for WWII fallen soldier Noah Reeves at Moulton Memory Gardens in May. [PHOTOS BY JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY]

Unknown Revolutionary soldiers honored



Members of Alabama State Sons of American Revolution Color Guard take part in the grave marking and designation of Alabama's first veteran, Revolutionary War patriot John Wade Keyes, at Athens City Cemetery in June 2023.

From The Mercury (Pottstown, Pa. TNS)

EAST COVENTRY — A 100-year-old tradition in danger of fading from memory was revived this past Memorial Day weekend by organizers who held a ceremony to honor the sacrifices of 17 soldiers of the American Revolution who died after George Washington's Army lost the Battle of Brandywine on Sept. 11, 1777.

For years, the tiny Ellis Woods Cemetery was tended to by neighbors until the Civil War revived interest in honoring the nation's war dead. But as Civil War veterans who performed the duties aged, the Ellis Woods Memorial Association was formed.

Fear that a nearby sawmill's constant need for wood would result in some of

the graves being disturbed, private citizens, other organizations and even school children collecting pennies partnered with the association to buy the property and keep the graves safe, according to a short history provided by Liz Willow, who helped organize Sunday's ceremony.

In 1924, the ground was cleared and a four-ton piece of Chester County granite was brought from the top of Chestnut Hill in North Coventry. A plaque was embedded in the stone.

It reads, in part: "This burial plot is dedicated in the 149th year of American independence to perpetuate the memory of 17 soldiers who are here buried in marked graves and several



A member of the Alabama Sons of the American Revolution salutes during the graveside service for WWII fallen soldier Noah Reeves at Moulton Memory Gardens in May. [PHOTOS BY JERONIMO NISA/DECATUR DAILY]

SOLDIERS

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others who are buried near here whose graves have not been located. These soldiers were part of Washington's Army camped at Valley Forge. They died in an improvised hospital nearby during the memorable winter of 1777-1778. These were some of the men who made the 'supreme sacrifice' in defense of a principle then new to the world: that 'all men are created equal' and 'that all have an inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.' Honor their memory."

Around 1937, the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars took over care of the cemetery and held the ceremonies. Subsequently, the site has been administered by the Pottstown Joint Veteran's Council, East Coventry township and the Mahanatawny Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The special 13-star flags that were placed at the 17 graves Sunday are provided annually by the Chester County Sons of the American Revolution.

For the first time, said Willow, the Owen J. Roberts Middle School Pops



Members of Alabama State Sons of American Revolution Color Guard perform the musket salute during the grave marking and designation of Alabama's first veteran, Revolutionary War patriot John Wade Keyes, at Athens City Cemetery in June 2023.

Band, Directed by Jason Hess performed. "The music was excellent and well received," she wrote.

A local florist who grows her own flowers and runs a small business out of

her home, KC, of WhimsyBloom, provided flowers to be placed at the grave sites. Also participating was the Owen J. Roberts Navy ROTC whose members presented the colors.



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Members of Alabama State Sons of American Revolution Color Guard take part in the grave marking and designation of Alabama's first veteran, Revolutionary War patriot John Wade Keyes, at Athens City Cemetery in June 2023.



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