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September 2025

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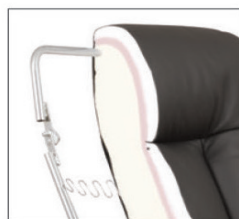
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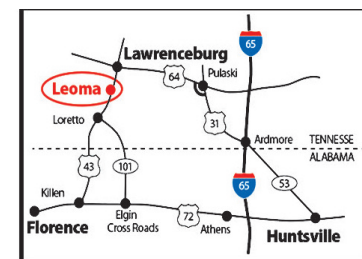
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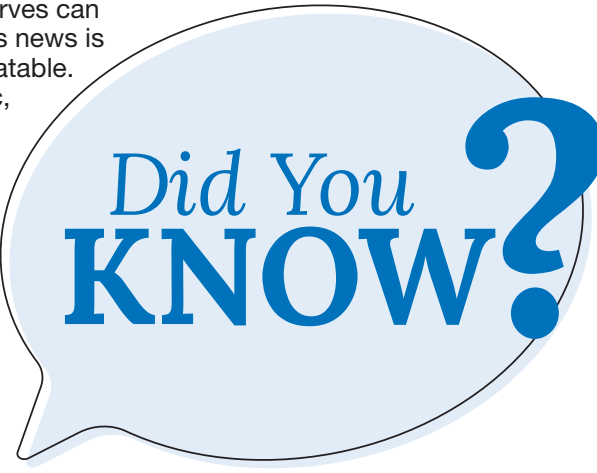
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Did you know? Pinched nerves can be debilitating, but the good news is the condition is generally treatable. According to the Mayo Clinic, most people who suffer a pinched nerve recover within a few days or weeks. Harvard Medical School notes that conservative therapies are often the first course when treating pinched nerves. An over-the-counter pain reliever like ibuprofen or acetaminophen might be recommended by a physician, who also might prescribe physical therapy to treat a pinched nerve. Harvard Medical School notes that range-of-motion exercises and strengthening exercises also may be recommended, particularly for those who want more immediate relief. The Mayo Clinic notes that if pinched nerve pain, which can be considerable, does not subside, surgery may be recommended. However, Harvard Medical School reports that surgery is



essentially a last resort when treating pinched nerves and may only be recommended if pain has not subsided after six to eight weeks, which suggests that more conservative treatments are not working. Surgery also may be recommended if individuals are experiencing increased difficulty moving or there is evidence of spinal cord compression.

PICKLEBALL makes *a racket in the Shoals*

Sport lets athletes of all levels be competitive, have fun



A.J. Benavides, left, Kelly Coleman, middle, and Matthew Jones talk strategy at a recent pickleball session at Gattman Park in Muscle Shoals.

If it's Tuesday, Wednesday, or Friday morning and you're looking for Danny Arnold, you'll likely find him in Gym 3 at Gattman Park in Muscle Shoals playing pickleball.

"It's a lot of fun, good exercise, and a good game, and it's helped me make new friends," Arnold, of Underwood, said. "It's a game anyone can play, from 10-year-olds to late 70-year-olds."

Pickleball is like doubles tennis, on a badminton court, using ping-pong paddles and a wiffle ball. And Arnold is right – it is a lot of fun.

Like Arnold, Matthew Jones enjoys the way pickleball brings people together.

"I enjoy the community aspect of the game," he said. "I have played sports all my life and pickleball is a great way to stay active and also be competitive. There's no age limit."

A.J. Benavides, newly elected vice president of the Shoals Pickleball Club, agrees.

"It's fun exercise and good fellowship," he said. "I grew up playing

tennis, and pickleball is a good way to keep that practice going. It's a great way to meet people, too."

GROWING AND GROWING

According to USA Pickleball, <https://usapickleball.org/what-is-pickleball/> the sport is beginner friendly and easy to learn. And while it may be relatively new to the Shoals, it's been around since 1965 when three dads in Washington state created a game for their families to play together. Rep. Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell, and Barney McCallum wrote the rules and pickleball was born.

In its 2023 Topline Participation Report, the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) named pickleball the fastest-growing sport in America for the third year in a row. According to the report, pickleball was up to a total of 8.9 million players in the United States over the age of 6.

Today, you can find pickleball courts across the Shoals, from the six at Gattman Park in Muscle Shoals to those at the YMCA in Florence, from Sheffield to Killen. Soon a new facility will open at Veterans Park in Florence that will have 14 covered courts and several more outside.

GIVE IT A TRY

Arnold resisted the pull of pickleball at first.

"My friend tried to talk me into it, but I was dead set on playing golf, not pickleball," Arnold said. "But I started having seizures and couldn't drive, so when my friend picked me up to play golf, he talked me into playing pickleball."

"I didn't have any equipment, but someone had an extra paddle, and I tried it and got hooked. I've been playing about three years now."

An injury also led to Jones trying pickleball.

"I broke my elbow playing slowpitch softball when I dove for a ball," he explained. "I tried to play softball again, but my elbow just wouldn't let me. I knew about pickleball and picked it up about four years ago when I lived in California."

For Benavides, a Christmas gift from his mother-in-law, led to this new passion. When he and his wife, Cassidy Counter, moved here just over a year ago, he learned about the pickleball courts in the area.

"I went to some open play at the YMCA, learned the rules, and tried lots of local places," he said. "I've met

lots of folks along the way and then got involved with the Shoals Pickleball Club."

Earlier this month, Benavides was elected vice president of the club, which aims to grow the sport and help beginners learn to play.

SPREADING THE WORD

In a nod to its popularity, even among college students, Jones, director of Student Activities & Leadership Development at UNA, helped establish pickleball as a club sport at the university last fall.

"I knew there was interest from the students, and I knew I'd have support, so I reached out via social media and filled 35 positions on the teams," he said. "We played tournaments at Auburn, Chattanooga, and Huntsville last year. We even offer small one-time scholarships for new students. And we still have a couple of open spots if anyone is interested."

This year, the UNA Pickleball team will play Alabama, UAB, UAH, and Jacksonville State.

Benavides, an assistant director in UNA's Housing department, has teamed up with Jones to play in a couple of local pickleball tournaments.



Matthew Jones, far left, and A.J. Benavides warm up with Kelly Coleman, bottom left, and Nathan Pitts, bottom right.



A.J. Benavides, bottom left, and Matthew Jones, top left, face off against Chase Urban, top right, and George Achard at Gattman Park in Muscle Shoals.

“We won the Point Mallard Classic in Decatur earlier this year. It was my first tournament and Matthew’s first one in a while. And we do plan to defend our title,” he said with a laugh.

WHY PLAY?

With the growing popularity of pickleball, now is a good time to take up the sport. Equipment can be found everywhere from Walmart to Target, from Academy to Dick’s Sporting Goods.

Jones said you don’t have to win to have fun.

“It’s about the only sport that you can lose consistently and still have a good time,” he said. “It’s good exercise in an enjoyable environment. People just go and have fun.”

Benavides said you don’t even have to be athletic to enjoy pickleball.

“You don’t have to have a background in a sport and don’t even have to be athletic,” he said. “It’s super simple to pick up and it’s inexpensive. My first paddle set was two for \$40.”

“Just buy a cheap paddle and test it out,” Arnold said. “Come over and watch us play. Just like everything else, you don’t know if you like it until

you try. It’s a cool, fun game and it’s good exercise.

“Come over and try. Someone always has an extra paddle.”

SHOALS AREA PICKLEBALL CLUB

If you want to check out the Shoals Area Pickleball group, here are some of the membership benefits:

- Organized league play, round robin, and member social events
- Beginner clinics on a regular basis
- Discounted equipment/supplies through some vendors
- Discounted entry fees on local tournaments/events
- **Ask about a family discount for families of 3+**

You can find the group on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/shoalspickleball/> or on the web at <https://www.shoalspickleball.com>.

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“THIS ISN’T 1814”

How horses have been life changing
for two Northwest Alabama natives



Attorney Nathan Johnson and his horse Cocoa. Photo by Jackson Johnson

When it comes to serving justice for the people, attorney Nathan Johnson is dedicated—but beyond the courtroom, horses have had his heart for as far back as he can remember.

“My dad bought my brother and I a pony when we were just babies. We would go months and not touch it or ride it, but it was eating grass and drinking water. Of course when young we couldn’t do much with it on our own, but the older I got the more I was able to ride. During college and law school I didn’t even have a horse because my father got rid of it, but the moment I got a chance to get a horse again, I did,” said Johnson.

Johnson recalls that his passion for horses reignited shortly after he got out of law school, got a house, and got married. He shared that he bought a five to six month old filly for his wife named Sugar who is still alive today. However, his wife didn’t have the best encounter with the horse and led to Johnson stepping in, and realizing that his love for horses never truly left.

“After the incident with Sugar running over my wife, I started taking up with the horse, broke the horse, and that became my horse. From there, things took off and I’ve had several of them since. I’m currently down to four and I have a mare who had a baby recently, but at the start of last year, I owned about 10. So I’ve had 10 at one time, but that’s not a lot compared to a lot of people. Then over the course of my life I’ll say I’ve had about 25 to 30 horses,” said Johnson.

Johnson has been in law for 28 years and with heavy case loads comes great responsibility and stress, but he expressed that work for him isn’t as stressful as one would assume. He believes that what’s helped him to be the lawyer he is today is because of the time he spends with horses. For him, the chance to ride his horse is like going on vacation every day he steps foot on the grass of his farm.

THE RIDES

“What horses do for meI would just have to say just the feel of my butt in the saddle is why I enjoy horses so much. I can’t explain it, I just enjoy it, and I don’t care about loading them up and going on a trail ride. I do trail rides sometimes, but what I love most is just

getting them on at my farm. For me it’s not a job. They’re gaited horses, not quarter horses, they don’t work cattle, I don’t rope them, I don’t win any money...it’s just out of pure enjoyment of being with my horses. My only wish is that I got to ride them more than I do,” said Johnson.

Out of the four and mare baby he currently has, Johnson disclosed that he only has two horses that he rides; one five year old mare who is his favorite- Coco and the other one, who just turned three and he calls him redhead. Redhead is his stud horse that he is still trying to figure out as he doesn’t ride him enough. Johnson has hopes that one day Redhead can too become his favorite.

TRAINING

When it comes to riding a horse, Johnson mentioned that he can be fully quoted on wanting readers to know that you can’t ride pretty! You don’t buy the first horse you see and you don’t buy a horse just because it’s pretty. You have to train that horse, and that isn’t an overnight process, he stated.

“In the past I have paid trainers to help my horses get better in which I am not opposed to, but I like the challenge of getting a horse to do what it’s supposed to do to the best of my ability. It is important to get horses trained because they can hurt you. I’ve been in the hospital twice because of horses, and both times I don’t remember anything because I had concussions. It doesn’t matter about how much experience you have, they can hurt you. Every horse is different like people in a sense. You have to be careful and honestly sometimes you have to be out right lucky,” said Johnson.

Johnson shared that his ability to keep going despite the horse incidents encountered come from a motivation of love, and learned lessons. He admits that he won’t get on a young horse first and if he raises the horse from day one he messes with the horse as much as he can. Johnson’s resilience has been a driving force with his passion and it has produced great things.

In September 2018, Johnson reflected on his favorite horse memory that always gives him the warmest smile. He shared that winning those roses at the National Racking Horse Association World Show in Tennessee is a day he cherishes deeply. He

admits that he wasn’t riding the horse and had a trainer, but that was his horse and couldn’t be more proud. Until this very day he enjoys looking back at the video of the big win.

“Horses are my thing and I’ll tell anybody that they need to do their hobby. How much you do it—depends on a lot of factors, but you need to do it because it balances your life and it can help with stress. As far as horses go, for those interested in getting one, they’re going to cost you money. The days of finding a good \$500 to \$1500 good trail broken horse are probably over. Then make sure you’re talking to people who know what they’re talking about and who can be trusted,” said Johnson.

THE HORSE VET

24 year old Cade Hall is making his way in the horse industry and building upon the foundation him and his late grandfather established. He is combining his love for horses through care, training, and shows.

In the world of horses, connecting with those who share the same appreciation and love for horses strengthens the community for the animal and their owners. This is how Nathan Johnson and Hall met one another...showing horses together, a horse purchase, and the common factor of horses being a part of their lives for as far back as they can remember.

“My love for horses started on day one. My mom and dad always claim that my first word was horse. My dad brought home my first horse.... he was a two year old buckskin paint. Prettiest horse that I ever laid my eyes on. He was nowhere near ready to be rode, but I got on him anyway, and he would throw me about every other week. He ended up making a pretty good horse, I was so excited I could hardly stand it! I always wanted a spotted horse and that’s what I got,” said Hall.

Hall’s first horse was just the tip of the iceberg as he currently has 10 and thus far have had about 100 over the course of his life. He shared that he gets to ride his horses every day and admits to having two favorites—his show horse, Rampage and trail horse Skeeter.

With a love for horses, there’s no surprise that Hall is currently living his dream of being a veterinarian tech while fulfilling his passion. For four years he has been a veterinarian tech and couldn’t be happier to help others

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Cade Hall and his horse Rampage. The horse is the world's 3rd ranked national racking horse. Photo by Jennifer Barr

continue to improve the quality of life and maintenance for their horses.

"Taking care of your horse is very important because it's beneficial to the longevity of their life. Domesticated horses have a life span of about 20 to 25 years, and I'll say 25 years max.

There have been some that have made it to 40 years, but by year 25 they're not able to do much. A common health issue seen most in horses I'd say is founder. Founder is where the bone in their hoof will rotate and it causes severe amounts of pain. When it comes to preventing it, sometimes it is just kind of bad luck, but you have to watch your horse's weight and watch their feed intake. If they break into the feed room and eat a whole bunch of feed, or get overweight, and a list of other things, can cause them to get founder," said Hall.

When pegged with the question of debunking the belief that if a horse is injured it isn't any good and should be taken off in a field and put out of its misery, Hall says that this isn't 1814 anymore. To see a horse as no good because of an injury isn't how it is nowadays. Yes, it was popular back then because veterinary care wasn't

widely accessible and technology wasn't advanced. The alternatives were limited, and that's not the case now. If it's a broken leg depending on the extent of the injuries there are things that can be done to fix that horse and get it back to work depending on what individual bone is broken. If nothing else, a lot of times we can get the horse sound to where it can go in the pasture and raise babies, or just hang out. It's not instantly just put them down anymore, he added.

LIFE LESSONS

"In having a horse I believe it teaches you patience because if you hurry and skip steps, a lot of times they will throw you, and I mean hard. They also teach you to keep trying because it may not click instantly and you have to work on it for three days, and something clicks on the fourth day. Then when it does it's like they melt in your hands because you can literally feel the moment when things start to make sense. I honestly learn something every time I get on a horse that can be applied to my life. They have taught me patience, resilience, and how to be hardworking," said Hall.



Cade Hall and Rampage competing in Cleveland, TN. Photo courtesy of Cade Hall

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Hall's hard work in the field of care, training, and show paid off big recently as he won his first championship title at the National Racking Horse Association's 2025 style speed Alabama state championship. Hall and his horse Rampage achieved this victory, and he summarizes the feeling as exciting.

"I have won a lot of lower level stuff, but with this championship title, I feel one step closer to my grandpa and my goal of having a world championship horse! For preparation leading up to the day, it was non-stop training. We worked hard at least four days a week, cold hosed, iced his legs after every ride to protect his legs, only the best feed, and a bath after every ride. To earn this win absolutely motivates me to win more championships. Every winning ride pushes me to try to get better and win the next one," said Hall.

FOR CURRENT & FUTURE HORSE OWNERS...

Both Johnson and Hall strongly encourage not getting on a horse blindly. They both suggest reaching out to someone who owns a horse, and taking note on how things are done because you don't want to buy a horse, and do not know how to handle the horse. Johnson stated that it's important to talk to someone you can trust who has their best interest at heart because if you get a horse and it hurts you, there's a chance you're not going to want to do it again. Hall added that he has seen a lot of people hurt because they think they know what they're doing. Find somebody to teach you because you need training before you can train on a horse.



Attorney Nathan Johnson and Cocoa. Photo by Jackson Johnson



Attorney Nathan Johnson and horse Sierra's New Yorker and her new foal. Photo by Jackson Johnson

What to know about eating before a workout



by METRO NEWS

Each person approaches exercise in their own unique way. Some can't wait to get to the gym every day, while others exhibit significantly less enthusiasm about exercise. Some medical professionals say the best approach to exercise is the one that inspires a consistent commitment to physical activity, but various factors, including food, merit consideration when designing a workout routine.

Food provides energy for the body, so it makes sense to eat before a workout. But eating prior to a workout may not be so straightforward for all exercise enthusiasts. An examination of the dynamic between eating and exercise can help athletes find a formula that works for them.

Why eat before exercise?

The Hospital for Special Surgery recommends eating before exercise if it's been two or more hours since your last meal or snack. Doing so can help to restore energy stores prior to an intense or lengthy workout. The HSS notes this approach is especially beneficial for individuals who work out early in the morning, before lunch or after school or work, each of which are times of day when it's typically been awhile since a person has eaten.

How much should I eat before exercising?

It's unlikely anyone is going to want to eat a large meal before a workout. Doing so will undoubtedly affect performance in a negative way, particularly if you're eating shortly before a workout. The HSS notes that the further away a

workout is from the time a person eats, the larger and more mixed that meal can be. According to the HSS, the general guideline around eating and exercise is:

- A full meal three to four hours before exercising
- A higher carbohydrate snack two hours before exercising and/or a small, easily digested carbohydrate right up until the start of a workout

What makes for a good pre-workout snack?

If you won't be eating a full meal before a workout, various mini snacks can provide energy without adversely affecting performance. Pre-workout snacks that are low in fat and fiber are ideal, as the body can digest such foods quickly. The HSS notes half a banana, a small serving of applesauce or a handful of crackers or pretzels are a good pre-workout mini snack. A larger snack eaten a little further away from a workout can include some hummus or peanut butter. The Mayo Clinic notes yogurt, a fruit smoothie or a low-fat granola bar also make good pre-workout snacks.

Should I eat during a workout?

The HSS notes it can help to consume some carbs during workouts that last 60 minutes or longer. Doing so can help individuals prolong their endurance and can even help with their timing and concentration.

The relationship between eating and exercise is complicated. Individuals who want to learn more are urged to work with a nutritionist.

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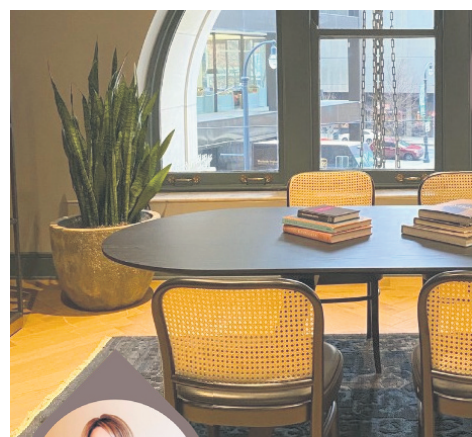
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Simple ways to get a better night's sleep

by METRO NEWS

Sleep is a vital component of a healthy lifestyle. The National Institutes of Health says good sleep improves brain performance and mood and helps reduce the risk of many diseases and disorders, including heart disease and obesity. In fact, sleep is as important for good health as diet and exercise.

Too often people do not get enough sleep or poor quality sleep. Sleep needs change as a person ages, with young children and teens requiring between nine and 10 hours per night. Most adults need at least seven hours each night. According to Dr. Kenneth Wright, Jr., a sleep researcher at the University of Colorado, a person can make up for a poor night's sleep by sleeping in the next day, but habitual loss of sleep cannot be recuperated in a weekend.

Men need to focus on sleep to feel their best. These sleep strategies,

courtesy of The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the NIH, can promote better sleep.

- **Be consistent.** The body will adapt to a sleeping schedule when you go to bed and wake in the morning at the same time each day. Try not to vary your schedule between weekdays or weekends, or even when on vacation.

- **Limit exposure to light at night.** The body naturally responds to darkened conditions by stimulating the production of melatonin, which is a hormone that helps regulate the sleep-wake cycle. Too often people keep lights on at night or look at phones or watch television, which can adversely affect melatonin production and contribute to a poor sleep environment.



- **Exercise each day.** Aim for daily exercise, which can make it easier to fall asleep at night. Avoid exercise a few hours before bed, however.

- **Spend time outside each day.** At least 30 minutes of sunlight and fresh air each day can promote a better night's sleep.

- **Watch your naps.** Naps should be short and taken before mid-afternoon.

- **Skip caffeine and alcohol later in a day.** Caffeine consumption

can impede the ability to fall asleep because it is a stimulant. Although alcohol is a depressant and can make it easy to fall asleep, the sleep that is taking place after consuming alcohol, particularly late at night, will not be quality, restorative sleep.

- **Keep meals at night very light.** Heavy meals that force the body to spend hours digesting can interrupt sleep onset and quality.

- **Maintain a dark, cool and quiet bedroom.** A dark, cool and quiet bedroom is a positive sleep environment.

If sleeping habits do not improve after making these changes, individuals should speak with a health care provider to determine if there is an underlying condition that is compromising sleep, such as restless leg syndrome or obstructive sleep apnea. Although sleeping pills can offer relief once in a while, they should not be seen as long-term solutions to sleeping disorders. Doctor can be useful allies in helping individuals get better sleep.

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