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## ON THE COVER

Kim Caudell of Toccoa captured this photo of her sons, Britt and Benjamin, showing off their festive wear at a previous Independence Day celebration at Lake Hartwell.

## Making Prescriptions More Affordable: *How MedLink Pharmacies Help You Save with the 340B Program*

As the cost of healthcare continues to rise, the 340B Drug Pricing Program offers real relief to patients who struggle to afford their medications. This federal program, designed to reduce medication costs, enables facilities like MedLink Georgia pharmacies to offer substantial savings to their patients.

### **What is the 340B Program**

Established in 1992, the 340B Drug Pricing Program allows qualified healthcare providers to purchase medications at significantly reduced prices. As a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), MedLink Georgia is eligible to participate in this program. These savings help health centers like MedLink stretch their resources and provide affordable care to more patients—especially those with limited income or little to no insurance coverage.

### **Affordable Medications Lead to Better Health**

High prescription costs can prevent patients from taking their medicine as prescribed, often leading to worsening health and higher medical expenses down the road. By offering lower prices through the 340B program, MedLink helps reduce that burden—leading to better patient outcomes and fewer preventable complications.



### **Real-Life Impact**

Take, for example, a patient with diabetes who needs daily insulin. Without the 340B program, the cost of insulin can be overwhelming. With MedLink's participation in the program, the price drops considerably, allowing the patient to manage their condition more effectively and avoid costly hospital visits.

### **Convenient Access to Medications**

Many MedLink locations have in-house pharmacies, allowing patients to fill their prescriptions on the spot after seeing their provider. In-house pharmacy services are currently available in Colbert, Gainesville, Bowman, Demorest, Commerce, and Winder, with new locations opening in Clayton and Hartwell later this year. For clinics without an on-site pharmacy, MedLink offers next-day medication delivery, ensuring patients receive their prescriptions quickly and without added stress.



## *How to Take Advantage of 340B Savings at MedLink Pharmacies*

### **To benefit from 340B pricing at MedLink pharmacies, patients must:**

1. **Verify Eligibility:** Patients must receive care from a MedLink provider to qualify. However, MedLink pharmacies also offer discounted pricing on many prescriptions not written by MedLink providers. Some restrictions may apply.
2. **Consult with Pharmacy Staff:** MedLink's knowledgeable pharmacy team can explain the program, help determine eligibility, and guide patients through the process.

# FEATURES



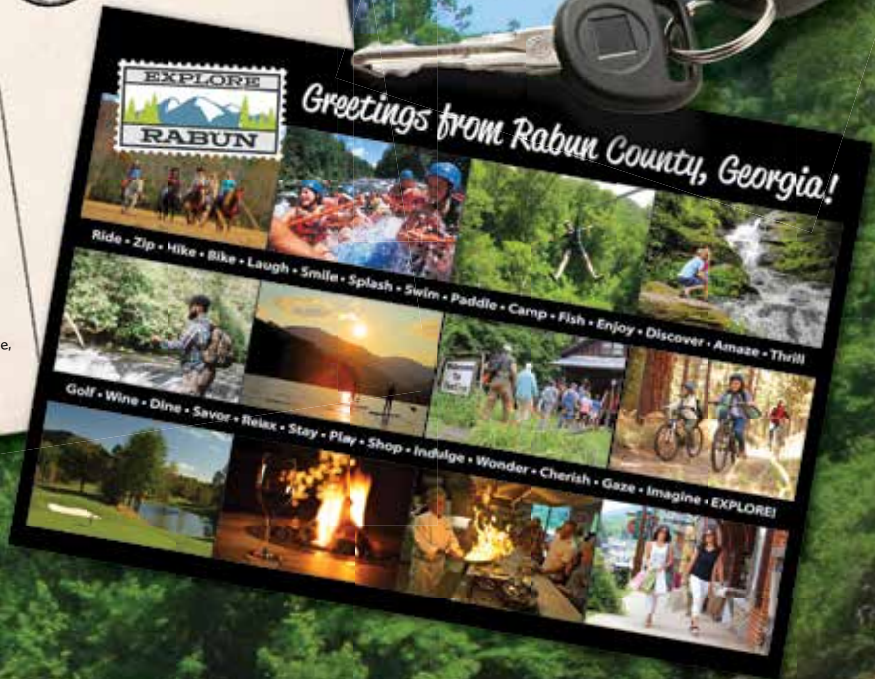
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art of tiny trees.

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Bridal Veil Falls at Tallulah Gorge State Park  
Photo by: Alan Cressler



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## FROM THE PUBLISHER

# Summer on the lake: Cool breezes, warm memories

Often, I receive picture texts from family and friends asking what type of reptile, amphibian, bird or fish they have taken a photo of and want to identify. I always enjoy receiving these photos, and love answering their questions. When I give the answer, it is typically not the scientific name, but the name I learned over the years while exploring the great outdoors.

Have you ever heard of *gyotaku*? The ancient Japanese *gyotaku* method of art was new to me, too until I read the story on page 82. I appreciate Enoch Autry introducing me and our readers to Weylon Robinson's hobby. The feature art in the photos is of a fish called a crappie, but I was raised to call the fish a white perch. And it is my favorite freshwater fish to catch and eat.

Welcome to the summer edition of *Lake Living* magazine. We're glad you are spending some time in our area and with this edition. It is already as hot as the Fourth of July in Georgia and the time of year we all enjoy cooling our heels with a deep plunge in the lake. And cold slices of watermelon sure do help, too.

In this edition, our content editor Kimberly Brown, and the staff writers have put together a good mix of stories for you to enjoy. Yes, there is a story on *gyotaku*, but there is also a great story about Donovan Layton's hobby of growing bonsai trees on the banks of Lake Hartwell. One of my favorite stories, which should be an inspiration to us all, is about Tom Hubbard and his hobby of building birdhouses at 92 years old.

As you are flipping through this edition, please take special note of our advertising partners who allow us to publish this magazine for you. These businesses set the bar for customer service and look forward to serving you. Each entrepreneur greatly contributes to the unique flavor of each of the North Georgia lake communities. Your patronage allows them to enhance the experience of your next visit.

Now back to the fish most people call a crappie. This has ruffled my feathers for a long time. And over the years, I have always told fishermen I call them a white perch. Then I ask them, how can you call a fish that is so tasty "crappie?" Through a smile most agree with me.

Here's to summertime in Georgia! Remember to keep the wet side of your vessel in the water, observe rules of safety first and have fun creating new memories on the water.

*Alan NeSmith*

PUBLISHER

anesmith@cni newspapers.com // 706-778-4215

LAKE LIVING  
EST. 1981  
LIVE LIFE INSPIRE

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Bella is a 5 yr old full blooded Bichon Frise. She has been in our shelter for 6 months. She was a breeder dog and the owner decided they didn't want her anymore. She is shy, somewhat skiddish of people, but will warm up to just the right owner. If that is you, please come see Bella today. She really wants to go to a home where she is loved.



## ROCKY:

Bernese Mountain Dog Mix – he is calm for a 70 lb big boy. He's 6 yrs old and his only requirement other than lots of love is a skin & coat diet.



## WEST THE WHITE SHEPHERD:

He is a beauty at 10 years old. West has been with us for about 6 months since he was found injured on a Hwy in Hartwell. He is super friendly and very loving and is really wanting a find a special home to live out his golden years and family to enjoy that time with.



## LOUIE :

Louie is a 3 year old Dachshund/ Chihuahua mix. He is solid black and weighs about 10lbs. He has lots of energy and loves to run. He is friendly and gets along great with other pets/dogs. Louie has been in our care for 5 months.



## HONEY:

Honey is a hound mix about a year and half old. She came to us from a bad situation having almost starved to death. She really needs a loving home that will love her and care for her.



## DUKE:

He is a 2 year old Lab/Viszla Mix. He is leash trained and loves to fetch a ball with anybody that will throw it. He gets along great with other pets, he has a wonderful personality and is good with people. Duke needs a loving family dedicated to showing him lots of attention as he has been in our shelter for a year and a half. It's time he found his forever home.



## SAVANNAH:

She is a 2 yr old Brindle Hound/Terrier/Boxer mix. She is precious, loves people, other dogs and just wants to be loved! She is leash trained and is looking for her furever home. She too has been here for over a year and is ready to leave for a better life with a loving family!



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## ANNIE:

Annie is a German Short haired Pointer. She is 10 yrs. Old and was an owner surrender. She is very sweet, very gentle, house broken, and needs to spend her golden years with a loving family.



# Richard B. Russell State Park



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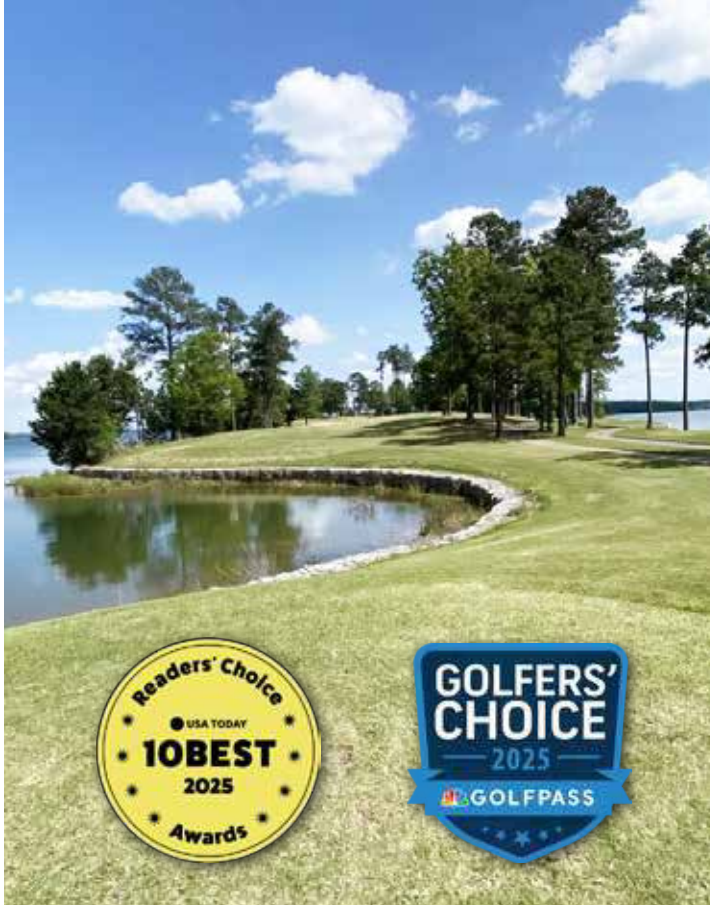


## Arrowhead Pointe

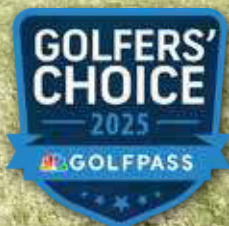
Golf Course at Lake Richard B. Russell



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# CASTING OFF

WATERCRAFT TIPS

PERSONALITIES

EXPLORE



Members of the Western Carolina Sailing Club on the Anderson, South Carolina, side of Lake Hartwell participate in a race. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WESTERN CAROLINA SAILING CLUB

Mike Bridges of Elberton takes his boat out of Lake Richard B. Russell on a late spring afternoon.

PHOTO/KIMBERLY BROWN

# RAMP READY

THERE ARE A LOT OF PLACES TO  
LAUNCH YOUR BOAT ON A NORTH  
GEORGIA LAKE

HERE ARE RAMPS FOR LAKES BURTON,  
CHATUGE, HARTWELL, LANIER, NOTTELY,  
RABUN, RICHARD B. RUSSELL AND SEED



## LAKE BURTON

**Murray Cove:** Off Bridge Creek Road on the Southeastern portion of the lake, Murray Cover Road, Tiger.

**Moccasin Creek State Park:** Chattahoochee National Forest, 3655 Georgia Hwy. 197, Clarkesville.

**LaPrade's Marina:** Chattahoochee National Forest, 25 Shoreline Trail, Clarkesville.

## LAKE CHATUGE

**Mayor's Park Boat Landing:** Boat ramp is located at 1000 Highway 76 West, Hiawassee. Features public bathrooms, pavilion with picnic tables and benches around the lake.

**Lake Chatuge Recreation Area:** Along Hwy. 288 near Hiawassee.

**East Boat Launch:** Along the eastern shoreline of Lake Chatuge near the outer edge of Hiawassee next to U.S. Hwy. 76.

**Boat Launch at Georgia Mountain Fair Campgrounds:** Along the shoreline of Lake Chatuge, within the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Hiawassee.

**Jackrabbit Mountain Recreation Area:** Along the eastern shoreline of Lake Chatuge just north of Hiawassee.

**Lloyd's Landing:** 458 Azalia Drive, Hiawassee.

**Towns County Boat Ramp:** Towns County Park, Music Hall Road, Hiawassee.



North Georgia lakes have many public boat ramps, including ramps owned by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Division. PHOTO/KIMBERLY BROWN

## LAKE HARTWELL

**Big Oaks:** Off US Hwy 29 in Hart County, about 1 mile from Hartwell Dam and the Georgia/South Carolina state line.

**Elrod Ferry Recreation Area:** Off US Hwy 29 in Hart County, about 2.5 miles north of the city of Hartwell and approximately 3 miles from the Hartwell Dam and the Georgia/South Carolina state line.

**Franklin County Boat Ramp, Lavonia:** Take Gumlog Road (GA 328) south to Franklin County Boat Ramp Road.

**Gum Branch Mega Ramp:** With fishing tournament facility, 1352 Vanna Waller Road, Hartwell.

**Harbor Light Marina:** 1476 Harbor Light Marina Rd., Lavonia.

**Hartwell Marina:** 149 Hartwell Marina Rd., Hartwell.

**Mary Ann Branch access:** Located on Hatton Ford Road, Hartwell. From Hartwell, take GA 51 (Chandler Street/Reed Creek Hwy) about 8 miles, follow brown directional signs.

**Poplar Springs Recreation Area:** In Franklin County. From Lavonia, where GA 328 crosses I-85, go North on GA 328 for 3.5 miles, follow brown directional signs.

**Spring Branch access:** In Stephens County. From the Avalon community, take GA 328 to South GA 326 North, see park on right.

**Tugaloo State Park:** Located in Franklin County at Tugaloo State Park.

## LAKE LANIER

**Multiple options:** Lake Lanier has more than 50 Corps of Engineers, state, county and city parks spread around its 680 miles of shoreline. All these parks are accessible by land and most by water and many have boat ramps. A list of boat ramps for Lake Lanier can be found at [lakelanier-boatramps.com](http://lakelanier-boatramps.com).

Mayor's Park Boat Ramp is on Lake Chatuge in Hiawassee and features bathrooms, picnic tables and benches. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CITY OF HIAWASSEE



## LAKE NOTTELY

**Nottely Dam Reservation:** Off State Hwy 325, Nottely Dam Road, Blairsville.

**Poteete Creek Recreation Area:** 1040 Poteete Creek Rd, Blairsville.

**Terry's Boat Dock & Marina:** Off State Hwy 325, Nottely Dam Road, Blairsville.

**Old Nicholson Bridge boat ramp:** Deavers Road, Blairsville.

**Jack's Creek/McClure Branch Road:** Access off of Pat Caldwell Road at Lake Cove Lodge Road, Blairsville.

**Canal Lake:** Access from Pat Caldwell Road at Canal Lake Rd, a couple miles off Murphy Highway (U.S. Hwy 129), Blairsville.

**Nottely Lake Marina:** 6036 State Hwy 325, Nottely Dam Road, Blairsville.



Fishermen use the boat ramp at the Lake Rabun Beach Recreation Area to put their boat in the lake.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF U.S. FOREST SERVICE

## LAKE RABUN

**Lake Rabun Beach Recreation Area:** Chattahoochee National Forest, 5315 Lake Rabun Road, Lakemont.

**Rabun Boathouse (also known as Hall's):** 1897 Lake Rabun Road, Lakemont.

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A fisherman uses a public boat ramp on Lake Richard B. Russell. PHOTO/KIMBERLY BROWN

## LAKE RICHARD B. RUSSELL

**Coldwater Creek:** 2784-2798  
Anderson Hwy, Elberton.

**Dry Fork Boat Ramp:** 1387 Dry  
Fork Landing Drive, Elberton.

**Richard B. Russell State Park:**  
2650 Russell State Park Dr., Elber-  
ton.

**Shuck Pen Boat Ramp:** 1575  
Bobby Brown State Park Road,  
Elberton.

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The Western Carolina Sailing Club holds biweekly races from the Friday before Memorial Day to the Friday before Labor Day and have been a staple at the club since 2019. The events offer a “low-pressure” form of sailing for experienced sailors and those new to the sport. The fleet of dinghies, or small boats, can include anything from Force Fives, Hobie 16s, Weta Trimarans, Lasers, Sunfishes and Wayfarers to Flying Scots. PHOTO/ROSE SCOGGINS



# *Sailing into summer*

**FAMILY FUN AND FRIENDLY  
RACES ON LAKE HARTWELL**



## BY ROSE SCOGGINS

One doesn't have to listen closely to hear the musical sound of halyards banging against the masts of dozens of sailboats docked at the Western Carolina Sailing Club (WCSC).

The rhythmic clanging echoes throughout the cove of the peninsula at 5200 Westwind Way, on the Anderson, South Carolina, side of Lake Hartwell, creating peaceful tones that mimic wind chimes.

"They will sing you to sleep," WCSC Commodore Tony Bolan said, sitting on a bench on a hill above the water.

As the wind continued conducting its music, members of the WCSC prepared their boats for the first Friday Dinghy Night of the year. The Friday before Memorial Day kicks off the biweekly event, which runs through the Friday before Labor Day.

Just minutes earlier, Bolan had listened as Primary Race Officer Rick Fontenot showed a dozen or so sailors the lay of the lake for the evening's race during a skipper's meeting.

The sailors would be participating in a pair of races on a fixed course, taking them around a government buoy and back to the starting line. The course is one of two options for Friday night races, the other being a windward/leeward sprint around an inflatable buoy.

Past Commodore Eric Seymour, sitting across from Bolan, said sailing is all about wind, as sails work similarly to an airplane wing.

"On an airplane wing, the wind doesn't push the airplane up," Seymour said. "The wind coming over the top of the wing is trying to catch up with the wind coming underneath the wing. ... The wind on the top of the wing is what actually is pulling the airplane up.

"[For sailboats], the wind



Anchored on the shores of Lake Hartwell since 1965, the Western Carolina Sailing Club sits on 35 acres of land leased from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The area provides room for four slip docks, 84 slips, 34 anchorages and 140 spaces for boats on trailers. The club also offers club-owned boats for members without their own boats, or who would like to try out a different kind of boat, to enjoy. PHOTO/ROSE SCOGGINS

coming on the inside is trying to catch up with the wind on the outside. ... You can decrease that slot or increase it, just like a jet engine, to propel you faster.”

Friday Dinghy Nights have been a staple at the club since 2019, offering a low-pressure introduction to sailing for experienced sailors and newcomers alike. The fleet of dinghies — or small boats — may include Force Fives, Hobie 16s, Weta Trimarans, Lasers, Sunfish, Wayfarers or Flying Scots.

Seymour said members enter the race for bragging rights, but also to help themselves and their fellow sailors improve.

“Any time you see two boats on the water, that are sailboats, they’re having a race — whether they say they’re having a race or not, they’re racing,” Seymour said.

However, the real learning, he added, begins when the boats are docked and sailors gather for a post-race social at the clubhouse.

“The real learning about racing, the real learning about sailing, is up there, not on the water,” Seymour said. “You talk to the people and say, ‘I noticed you did that move around turn two. How did you do that?’ They’re excited to tell you about it.”

Learning is a central focus of the 280-member nonprofit sailing club, founded in 1963. Anchored on the shores of Lake Hartwell since 1965, the club operates on 35 acres leased from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and features four slip docks, 84 slips, 34 anchorages, and 140 trailer spaces.

As a U.S. Sailing-certified organization, the club offers learning opportunities for all ages through its Adult Learn to Sail course and Junior Sail Camp.

Offered in spring and fall, the Adult Learn to Sail course is a three-day program that begins with basic principles and ends with participants sailing inde-

pendently. Beginners learn key terminology — like “port” (left) and “starboard” (right) — and basic navigation.

The course is open to members and nonmembers, and often serves as a pathway to club membership. This fall’s class is scheduled for Oct. 24–26.

The two-day Junior Sail Camp, offered twice each summer, introduces children ages 8 to 18 to the basics of sailing. For returning campers, intermediate and advanced classes are available.

Campers must demonstrate swimming ability and undergo safety training, including what to do if caught in rigging or if a boat capsizes.

Sailing has become a family affair for many members, with generations returning each year for the Junior Sail Camp or participating in the club’s Centerboard, Keelboat or Cruising fleets.

Bolan said the Junior Sail

The Western Carolina Sailing Club offers a multitude of events for beginning and experienced sailors including an Adult Learn to Sail course, Junior Sail Camp, a trio of racing fleets, Friday Dinghy Nights and many more. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WESTERN CAROLINA SAILING CLUB



Camp helped his once-shy son become a champion sailor. Sailing has since become a beloved family tradition that began when Bolan bought his first boat at Big Water Marina in the early 2000s.

One of the club's major annual events is the Hospice Regatta, held on Columbus Day weekend, which benefits Hospice of the Upstate in South Carolina. The event has raised more than \$1.3 million since its inception and features multiple race types, including Distance, Keelboat, Centerboard and Charity Sail courses.

The club also hosts a women's group, Women on the Water, which holds its own spring regatta. The Kentucky Derby-themed Derby Dames Race for the Roses Regatta includes two courses and encourages participation from female sailors of all ages.

For members without a boat, WCSC offers access to club-owned vessels that can be reserved for sailing.

As sailboats pushed off from the harbor to join the evening races, Bolan and Seymour reflected on how they fell in love with sailing.

Seymour, who grew up in

South Florida, first sailed with his uncle at age 8 on a reservoir near their small town. "I fell in love with it and had to do it," Seymour said.

He purchased his first boat — a Sears and Roebuck Fleetwind — at age 10 with money saved from a paper route. More than 50 years later, he still owns the boat and restored it about a decade ago.

Bolan took his first sailing trip at 24, while on vacation in Myrtle Beach.

"They were renting Hobies to go sailing on. I rented one and got on the boat and took off," Bolan said. "The sound is what got me more than anything — the boat cutting through the water and the wind hitting the sails. I was hooked."

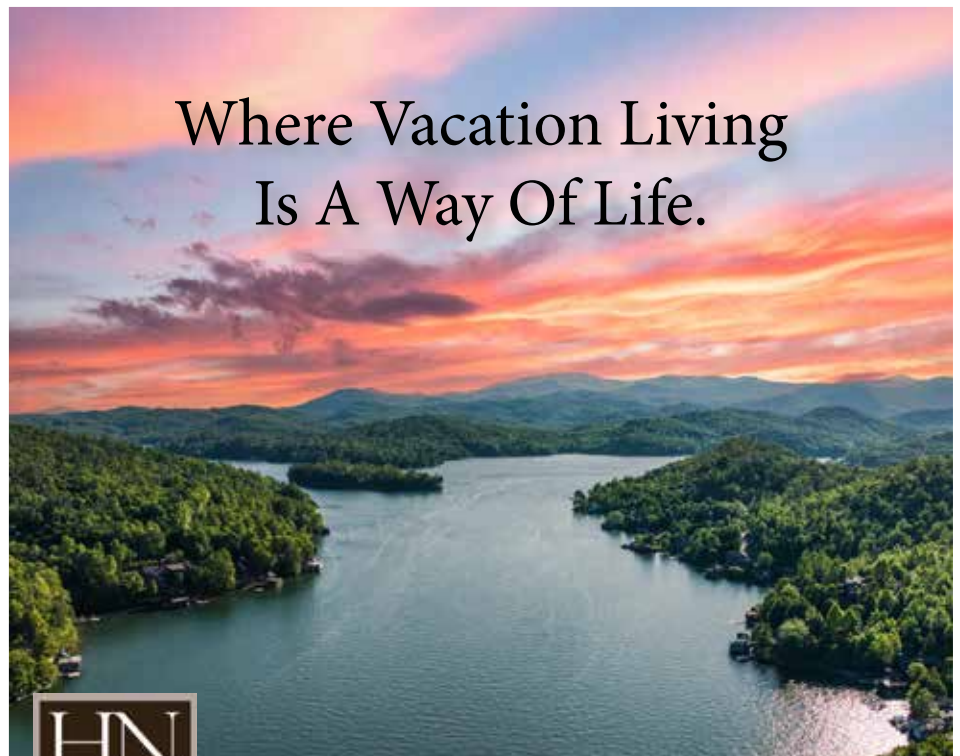
The club's 280 members represent a range of backgrounds and experiences, united by a shared love of the sport.

"You have a huge cross-section of people," Seymour said. "You walk in here, and you can guess what their politics are, but we don't talk about it. We're here to have fun and enjoy life."

He added that sailing allows for equal participation regardless of gender.

"It's not a male or female sport — it's a human sport," Seymour said. "It's pretty much the most fun you can have at five knots on the water."

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# Lakeside escapes

WHERE TO SWIM, SPLASH AND RELAX AT NORTHEAST GEORGIA'S LAKES

BY KIMBERLY BROWN

Summers in Georgia can be hot, and there's no better way to beat the heat than taking a dip in one of the area's cool-water lakes.

One way to do that is to anchor your boat and dive off. But for those who prefer to spend the day at the beach, Northeast Georgia's lakes offer plenty of white sand swimming areas.

## LAKE NOTTELY

Poteete Creek Park on Lake Nottely in Union County features a seasonal swimming beach, restrooms, a bathhouse with showers, and picnic areas. The park also offers an 88-site campground, open from April 1 through Oct. 15. It is located at 1040 Poteete Creek Road, Blairsville.

## LAKE RABUN

A scenic place to swim on Lake Rabun is the Lake Rabun Beach Recreation Area. The site offers a sandy beach and picnic areas, as well as camping, hiking, boating and fishing. The area includes 80 tent and trailer campsites and is located at 4726 Lake Rabun Road, Lakemont.



Swimmers enjoy the cool waters of the swimming beach at Poteete Creek Campground on Lake Nottely in late May.  
PHOTO/KIMBERLY BROWN





## LAKE HARTWELL

Lake Hartwell has several beach options. One of them is the Elrod Ferry Recreation Area, which includes three designated swimming areas, picnic spots, playgrounds and a volleyball court. Elrod Ferry is located at 1387 Elrod Ferry Road, Hartwell.

Another site with swimming access is Long Point Recreation Area at the end of Old Highway 29. This park also includes playgrounds and pavilions.

Tugaloo State Park in Franklin County offers a white sand beach in its day-use area, which is open from 8 a.m. until dark. Swimming is free, though a \$5 daily parking pass or an annual pass is required. The park is located at 1763 Tugaloo State Park Road, Lavonia.

The Towns County Recreational Beach on Lake Chatuge offers free beach access. **PHOTO COURTESY OF TOWNS COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

## TALLULAH LAKE

Tallulah Gorge State Park includes a sand beach and designated swimming area in its Terrora Day Use Area. The site also features a playground, a bathhouse with showers, and picnic tables.

Swimming is free, but a \$5 daily parking pass or annual pass is required. The park is located at 228 Jane Hurt Yarn Drive, Tallulah Falls. The day-use area is across U.S. Highway 441.



Tugaloo State Park offers a sandy swimming beach on Lake Hartwell. **PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGIA STATE PARKS**

## LAKE CHATUGE

Located on Highway 76 near Hiawassee, the Towns County Recreational Beach offers free beach access and parking. The area features a large playground, a white sand beach with a roped-off swimming area, a covered pavilion, picnic tables, and chair rentals.

The Towns County Beach is located about two miles from Hiawassee, across from the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

## LAKE LANIER

The largest lake located entirely within Georgia, Lake Lanier spans five counties and features many parks and recreation areas.

On the lake's northern end, Old Federal Day Use Park in Flowery Branch offers a swimming beach, three boat ramps, restrooms, a pavilion, and a volleyball court. The park is located at 6175 GC Crow Road, Flowery Branch.

Also in Flowery Branch is Van Pugh North Park, which features lake access and swimming areas, along with a boat ramp, picnic tables, grills, playgrounds and a picnic pavilion with a sheltered grill area. It is located at 6838 Gaines Ferry Road.

Farther north is Don Carter State Park, which has a large sandy beach on Lake Lanier. However, a swimming advisory is currently in effect due to bacteria levels. Before planning a visit, check [gastateparks.org/doncarter](http://gastateparks.org/doncarter) to see if the advisory has been lifted. The park is located at 5000 N. Browning Bridge Road, Gainesville.



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Among the Water Rescue Team's many capabilities is swift-water rescue. The team has a swift-water raft that can be used in Northeast Georgia's lakes. PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTIN HOBBS



The water response team includes (front row, from left) Phillip Haulk, Doug Slay, Zack Evans, Justin Hobbs, Chad Sizemore, Griffin Webb, Brian Crawshaw, (back row, from left) Ronald Mooney, David Moore, Clifford Smith and Noah Osborne, who is with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The team took this photo from the shore of Richard B. Russell Lake. PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTIN HOBBS

# LAKE GUARDIANS

*Elbert's elite water rescue team*

FROM ADVANCED DRONES TO SWIFT-WATER RESCUES, THESE FIRST RESPONDERS ARE READY WHEN SECONDS COUNT

**BY MARK WELLS**

As you float along the lakes of Northeast Georgia, the last thing you want to think about is the danger that could lurk beneath the surface. But when the unthinkable happens, an elite group of water rescue personnel is ready to help.

Chuck Almond, Elbert County Emergency Services director, said the county's water rescue team traces its roots to the 1970s, when a volunteer-only unit known as the

Elbert County Water Rescue Unit operated alongside local emergency services.

"At that time, it supported limited emergency responses — not like what we have today. It was a separate volunteer organization," Almond said. "There are several people who were instrumental in that. The late Paul McCurley, Hugh Wilhite, Jamie Waters, Ed Cartledge — many folks who have been in our community for a long, long time."

That volunteer unit con-

tinued into the 1980s and was eventually folded into emergency management, Almond said. The unit merged with the county's first responders program, which over time evolved into a fully certified and licensed emergency medical services team.

When former Elbert County Sheriff Barry Haston took office, the water rescue unit came under the sheriff's jurisdiction. Funding came from both the county and local fundraisers.

But in 2012, after Melvin Andrews became sheriff, the team was moved out of the sheriff's office and into the Department of Emergency Management. The Elbert County Board of Commissioners later passed a resolution officially recognizing the water rescue and dive team as a county service.

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that, thanks to the commissioners and the public's support through fundraisers, we've got some good equipment," Almond said. "We've got dedicated team members who respond at any given time. They go above and beyond with their training — and today, the water response team is a direct function of emergency management. Beth [Seymour] and I oversee it."

The team's structure now includes personnel from multiple public safety agencies in the county. Almond opened recruitment to all qualified fire, EMS and law enforcement staff.

"If you were a fireman and you wanted to be on the team, you could come take the training," Almond said. "If you were a policeman, deputy or EMS provider — same thing. The group became one."

While some law enforcement officers still serve, most members today are paid city and county firefighters, first responders or EMS personnel.

Almond emphasized the importance of the team's presence in Elbert County due to the Broad

Beth Seymour (far left), who leads the water response team alongside Chuck Almond, prepares her team along the borders of Richard B. Russell Lake.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTIN HOBBS



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River and Richard B. Russell Lake. But their value extends beyond local borders.

“Because of the equipment, the training, and the professionalism of the people who respond, we get called upon for mutual aid,” Almond said. “We’ve gone as far as Atlanta and up to Clayton. We’ve responded in Oglethorpe County — not because they lack resources, but because we’ve built partnerships. We have a standing agreement with Hart County. That just increases our ability to respond.”

The team operates with a wide range of specialized equipment, including:

- A pontoon boat for divers and gear
- A side-scan sonar boat for perimeter sweeps
- A wide-body jon boat for ponds and small bodies of water
- A standard jon boat with paddle for tight spaces like quarries
- A swift-water rescue raft for river rescues

One of the most advanced tools in their arsenal is an underwater drone capable of diving to 300 feet. The drone has a grabber arm that can collect evidence or assist in identifying submerged vehicles and remains.

“We have a couple of guys

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Elbert County's Water Response and Rescue Team dons their wetsuits as they prepare for a dive. PHOTO COURTESY OF JUSTIN HOBBS

who are really good at operating that underwater drone," Almond said. "We used it to locate a truck in a quarry in Oglethorpe County. We even got a picture of the tag. It helps ensure it's safe for a diver to go down."

The team also uses a pole-mounted underwater camera for inspections up to 25 feet deep, such as beneath docks, and GoPro cameras to document incidents for review.

"We can go from a large lake to a backyard park," Almond said. "We don't go into deep pressurized environments, but we're certified for a variety of conditions."

While the team usually reserves its response for critical incidents such as drownings or potential drownings, they have assisted stranded boaters when conditions pose a serious risk.

Almond said he takes pride in the reassurance his team provides.

"You come here for relaxation, enjoyment, sports — and you have an emergency services function available here to assist you, even in the worst situations," he said.



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Bowen Glas shreds through the air upside down as part of his run that won him first-place in the intermediate division at the 24th-annual Mountain Air Classic last August.



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Chase Andrews, an original founder of the Mountain Air Classic, flies backward through the wakes of Lake Burton during his strong run at the 24th running of the lake event in August 2024.



OneWake brand manager Anthony Kennedy spins over the wakes of Lake Burton during the Mountain Air Classic in 2024.

## STORY AND PHOTOS BY WADE CHEEK

The aerobatics and splash on the water of the Mountain Air Classic return to Lake Burton at Billy Goat Island in Rabun County.

This year's Mountain Air Classic, set for Saturday, Aug. 2, 2025, will mark the 25th anniversary of the event, which allows wakeboarders of all ages to have fun on the water while competing for pride and prizes.

"Being the 25th anniversary, that's pretty monumental, so we will look to do something really big with sponsors," said OneWake Marketing Director Levi Dills. "We've got a lot of great brands that support us, plus the local community. Without that support, there's no way we'd be able to continue to put these on."

OneWake hosts events like the Mountain Air Classic all over the Southeast, but this competition holds a special tie to the Lake Burton community and has since before its initial running in 1999.

According to Lake Burton's own Chase Andrews, one of the original founders of the Mountain Air Classic, it was originally a water skiing competition for nearly 20 years.

However, Andrews partnered with friends to transform it into a wakeboard-only event, keeping community and family the



Jackson Clifford nails a 360-spin during last year's Mountain Air Classic. Clifford competed in the talented outlaw division that was filled with wakeboarders who compete nationally.

main focus.

“What I love about the Mountain Air Classic is that it has always been a family-friendly tournament focused on bringing in new people, so it’s never been about the high-end athlete, but it’s more about bringing new people into the sport,” said Andrews. “Wakeboarding itself is about fun and hanging out with your friends and that’s exactly what this tournament is for.”

Last year’s Mountain Air Classic featured 35 contestants from ages 5 to 55. This year’s event includes seven different divisions based on the skills of each rider.

For the youngest competitors, there is a grom (grommet) division for those aged 10 and under.

From there, the difficulty increases from beginner to intermediate, veterans (40 years and over), advanced, and outlaw divisions. There is also a women’s division.

## MOUNTAIN AIR CLASSIC

**Date:** Saturday, Aug. 2

**Location:** Lake Burton at Billy Goat Island, Rabun County

**Check-in:** 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. at LaPrade’s Marina

**Contest Time:** Noon to 5 p.m. at the south end of Billy Goat Island

**Registration Fee:** \$50

While this event welcomes contestants of all ages and experience, the advanced and outlaw divisions are certainly not for the weak. Riders in these two divisions put on impressive performances for the many residents watching from their boats and lakefront homes.

A few notable performances from last year came from Bowen Glas (intermediate winner), Cameron Marsdon (outlaw win-

ner), and Chase Andrews (third in outlaw division). Many of last year’s outlaw division competitors travel to compete in wakeboarding competitions at the national level. At the outlaw level, the top three performers earned great prizes while splitting a \$1,000 pot.

Dills said that as the Mountain Air Classic continues to grow, he hopes the cash prizes grow with it.

Whether you are an avid wakeboarder looking for intense summer competition or simply seeking a reason to get out on the water for some summer fun, the Mountain Air Classic is a great event to attend in August.

“It was a lot of fun,” Andrews said after last year’s Mountain Air Classic. “Seeing the tournament still going and seeing the purpose of it still being about the community and family was a blast.”

A \$50 registration fee and a signed waiver are required for all participants.

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# SMOOTH SAILING

*Local experts share boat maintenance tips to keep your summer on course*

## **STORY AND PHOTOS BY ADRIANA CASCIO**

As summer approaches, boat owners are gearing up for busy days on the water. Before hitting the lake, experts Mark Haltom, a boat mechanic, and Frank Contreras, a boat detailer — both from The Dock Depot and Marine Supply Company in Hartwell — emphasize the importance of proactive maintenance to ensure a season of smooth sailing and prevent costly repairs.

Haltom and Contreras share their decades of experience to guide boaters in keeping their vessels in top condition. They warn that neglecting routine care can lead to everything from minor malfunctions to severe, irreversible damage — and even electrolysis, which can eat away at a boat's hull and ultimately cost owners significantly more time and money in the long run.

## **ANNUAL MAINTENANCE**

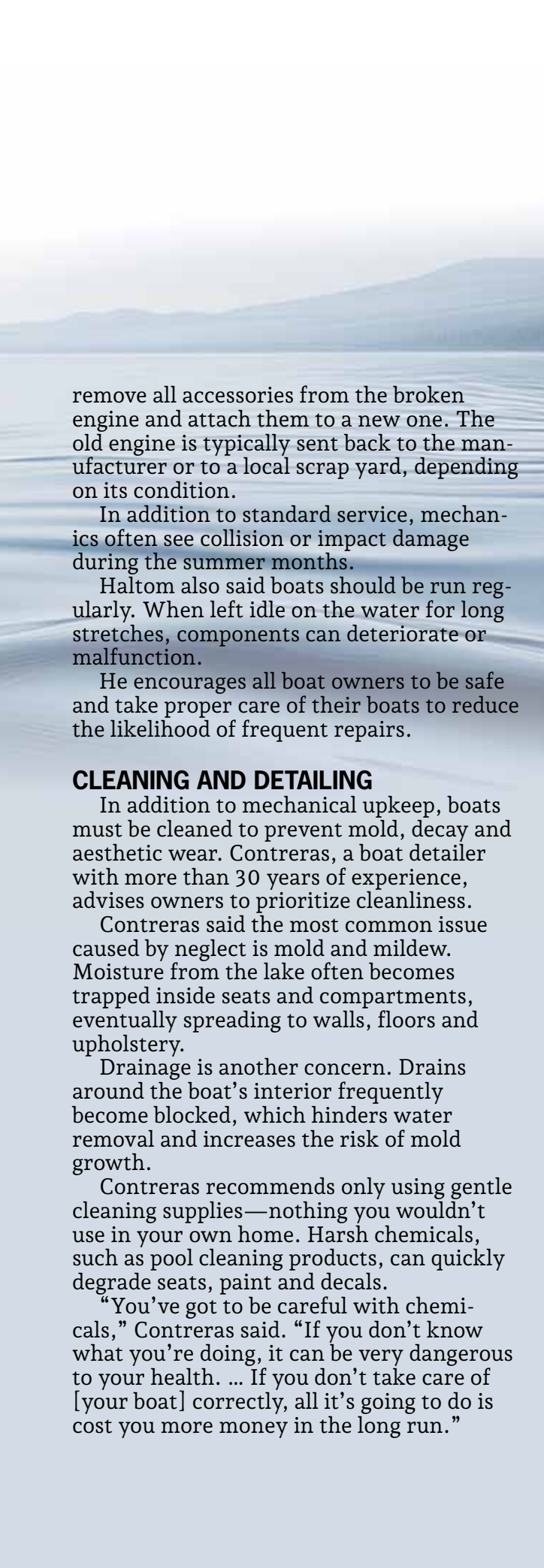
Visiting the mechanic every summer is inevitable. Haltom said every boat owner should have a trusted mechanic.

“In the summertime, something will fail,” Haltom said. “You never know. Every boat is going to break eventually. It’s a machine, like your car, so it’s eventually going to break, and we fix them.”

Boat engines require oil changes, lubrication, filters and other standard maintenance, much like automobiles. Many smaller engine issues are caused by non-critical problems such as worn spark plugs.

When the engine isn't properly maintained, it can suffer critical and irreversible damage, such as a blown head gasket. In this case, water enters the oil chamber and the oil loses its lubricating properties.

In extreme cases, the engine must be replaced entirely. Mechanics



Terrell Adams, boat mechanic, guides a broken engine out of a boat at The Dock Depot and Marine Supply Company in Hartwell. This engine was not properly winterized, causing irreversible damage, and needed to be replaced entirely.

remove all accessories from the broken engine and attach them to a new one. The old engine is typically sent back to the manufacturer or to a local scrap yard, depending on its condition.

In addition to standard service, mechanics often see collision or impact damage during the summer months.

Haltom also said boats should be run regularly. When left idle on the water for long stretches, components can deteriorate or malfunction.

He encourages all boat owners to be safe and take proper care of their boats to reduce the likelihood of frequent repairs.

## CLEANING AND DETAILING

In addition to mechanical upkeep, boats must be cleaned to prevent mold, decay and aesthetic wear. Contreras, a boat detailer with more than 30 years of experience, advises owners to prioritize cleanliness.

Contreras said the most common issue caused by neglect is mold and mildew. Moisture from the lake often becomes trapped inside seats and compartments, eventually spreading to walls, floors and upholstery.

Drainage is another concern. Drains around the boat's interior frequently become blocked, which hinders water removal and increases the risk of mold growth.

Contreras recommends only using gentle cleaning supplies—nothing you wouldn't use in your own home. Harsh chemicals, such as pool cleaning products, can quickly degrade seats, paint and decals.

"You've got to be careful with chemicals," Contreras said. "If you don't know what you're doing, it can be very dangerous to your health. ... If you don't take care of [your boat] correctly, all it's going to do is cost you more money in the long run."

## MAINTENANCE TIPS

**Have a trusted mechanic:** It's important to have a trusted, credited mechanic in case of more complicated or emergency maintenance.

**Use the right fuel:** Most outboard and inboard engines are equipped to operate with no more than 10 percent ethanol. Using the wrong fuel will damage the engine and void any warranty on the boat.

**Navigate oil and its uses:** Every boat is unique and requires its own oil specifications and maintenance schedule. Stay attentive on oil levels for inboard and outboard motors.

**Keep it clean:** Maintaining a clean boat not only ensures the boat looks and smells good, but also promotes longevity. Wash and wax your boat regularly.

**Flush your outboard:** To keep the outboard's cooling system, including its internal passages and water pump, functioning optimally, always flush it with freshwater after each use.

**Optimize battery life:** Make sure batteries are charged and well-maintained by regularly cleaning the terminals to prevent corrosion. If the batteries require it, check their fluid levels. For an even longer lifespan, consider getting a battery charger or maintainer.

**Protect the bilge pump:** The bilge pump is crucial for preventing water damage on a boat. Make sure it's always ready by testing it regularly and clean or replace the pump and strainer when needed to keep your hull dry.

**Clear drains:** Leaks from hatches, ports, and chain plates are common and should be caulked to prevent water intrusion and costly damage. Regularly clear scuppers of debris and repair any cracks to prevent water from entering the bilge.

**Distance from the dock:** Docking issues often sink boats; keep it centered in the slip with proper line arrangement. Fenders help with minor bumps, but aren't a substitute for good docking. Double lines and use chafe guards in exposed areas.

Sources: Dock Depot, Proline Marine, Discover Boating, Sea Ray, Boat U.S.

## CLEANING TIPS



Frank Contreras, boat detailer, sprays Clorox cleaning spray along the side of a boat at The Dock Depot and Marine Supply Company in Hartwell. Contreras advises boat owners to only use gentle, home-safe supplies to properly clean a boat.



Mold wiped from the side of a Sea Ray Sundancer. Mold commonly appears on boats due to high moisture from the water; it spreads quickly when the boat has not been properly cleaned throughout the season.

Recommended supplies include:

- Soft Scrub with Bleach Cleanser
- Clorox Disinfecting All-Purpose Cleaner Spray
- Dawn dish soap
- Purple Power Cleaner Degreaser

After deep-cleaning the boat, Contreras rinses the entire vessel again with soap and water to eliminate residue from harsher products. He then seals

the seats with silicone to strengthen surfaces and prevent cracking, drying or rotting.

Contreras recommends cleaning boats at least once every two weeks and ensuring the hull is thoroughly cleaned before winterization.

Boats that stay in the water for long periods may develop electrolysis, which damages the hull and can only be treated with muriatic acid. Contreras strong-

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Contreras rinses soap off of a boat at The Dock Depot and Marine Supply Company in Hartwell. Contreras thoroughly rinses a boat to remove any bleach and other cleaning substances used to remove any mold from its surfaces.



Contreras advises boat owners to only use gentle, home-safe supplies to properly clean a boat, as harsh chemicals can cause the seats to dry out, tear and rot.

ly advises having this procedure done professionally, as the acid is hazardous to skin, eyes and lungs.

“Electrolysis will eat the bottom of your boat,” Contreras said. “It’ll make blemishes on the bottom of your boat. The longer you leave your boat in water... it’ll put holes about [the size of a quarter] all over the bottom of your boat.”

When that level of damage occurs, the hull must

be sandblasted and refinished.

### FIRST-TIME BOAT OWNERS

Haltom encourages first-time buyers to carefully consider what type of boat best suits their needs—whether for fishing, family outings or water sports. However, he warns against purchasing older models.



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Several families operate their boats on Lake Hartwell over Memorial Day weekend. Mark Haltom, owner of The Dock Depot and Marine Supply Company said the time between Memorial Day and Fourth of July is the busiest season for mechanics and boat detailers.

“A caution to anybody buying a boat: don’t buy old junk,” Haltom said. “Buy the nicest thing you can afford, and if you can’t afford a nice boat, then you can’t afford a boat. ... The newer you buy, the better. The older stuff, you’re just going to be in the shop.”

Haltom recommends choosing a boat that is less than 10 years old.

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While older boats may cost less up front, they typically require more time and maintenance to remain operational.

Before purchasing a used boat, Haltom advises bringing it in for inspection—similar to a home appraisal. A mechanic can estimate both the vessel’s value and any needed repairs.

Most boats will run for more than 20 years when properly maintained, Haltom said.

### PREPARING FOR WINTER

Most boats—and some jet skis—are removed from the water and placed into storage during colder months. Haltom said failing to properly winterize a boat can result in serious damage.

“Ice is one of the most common engine killers,” he said. “It doesn’t get the attention

that it needs and you end up having to replace an engine. ... That’s a \$10,000 repair easily. Unlike your car, which has antifreeze in it, most boats do not. They draw their water for cooling from the lake. If you don’t get that water out, then when it freezes, it can cause catastrophic damage.”

Water expands up to three times its volume when frozen, Haltom added, and ice can crack or even “break an engine block wide open.”

During winterization, mechanics drain the engine and fill it with propylene glycol antifreeze. They also stabilize the fuel to prevent breakdown or residue buildup during storage.

Boats are typically stored from late September through early December and return to the water by April 1.



This engine had to be removed and replaced entirely after irreversible damage was caused by improper winterization. Water and oil had been mixed together, leaving a milkshake-like consistency throughout the engine.



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Rhianna McKim, Cali Rippert and Ava Horton enjoy a paddleboat ride on Lake Toccoa in mid-June.

# LAKE SIDE *leisure*

GOLF, PADDLEBOATS AND  
GATHERINGS AT LAKE TOCCOA

## STORY AND PHOTOS BY J. TODD TRUELOVE

Whether you're in the mood for a lakeside stroll or something livelier, like swinging a golf club, Lake Toccoa has amenities to meet your needs.

Located just off Fall Road in Stephens County, Lake Toccoa offers an 18-hole golf course, paddleboats, a walking trail with a boardwalk across the lake, fishing spots, and an event venue available for rentals.

Event coordinator Emilee Kesler encouraged a visit to Lake Toccoa.

"Every time I come out here, the golf course is full," Kesler said. "It was built in the 1940s."



Zach Richey's hoping for a big catch in Lake Toccoa, The lake's stocked with fish that include bass and crappie.



Chris and Wendy Allaway (left) are new members of The Links Golf Course. Bryan Miller of the golf Pro Shop and Tee Times assists them at the pro shop.

The Links Golf Course at Lake Toccoa offers adult golf lessons for \$60 and junior lessons for \$40.

The course is open daily from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. from April through October, and closes an hour earlier during the remaining months. Weather permitting, the course operates year-round, except on Thanksgiving and Christmas.

For \$10 (cash only), visitors can rent a paddleboat for an hour on the lake. Paddleboats are available from noon to 6 p.m., Thursday through Sunday.

"People love doing the paddleboats out here," Kesler said.

Paddleboaters often pass by those walking the 0.7-mile trail, which includes a boardwalk across the water. Along the path are six exhibits detailing the history of the lake, complete with photos.

Fishing is another popular pastime at Lake Toccoa.

Kesler said the lake is stocked with catfish, bream, crappie and bass.

"We stock it [with fish] every few years," Kesler said. "We just stocked it last year."

Event rentals abound at Reflections, the lake's event center, which includes a bar, bridal suite, kitchen and bathrooms.

Kesler said weddings are the most common bookings.

"Summer's always super busy," she said.

The pavilion, boat-house and lawn also are available for rent.

"We do weddings, birthdays, rehearsal dinners and class reunions," Kesler said.

Additional events hosted at Lake Toccoa include Tamasha and the Patriotic Pops concert by the Toccoa Symphony Orchestra, held in late June.

Dining has also been part of the lakeside experience, though as of June 6, Ping's Grill is temporarily closed. Kesler said the city of Toccoa is currently seeking new operators for the restaurant.

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Daily, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

### Closed Thanksgiving and Christmas

**Golf lessons:** Adults: \$60, Juniors: \$40

### Paddleboat rentals:

Thursday–Sunday, Noon–6 p.m., \$10 per hour (cash only)

**Walking trail:** 0.7 miles with lakeside boardwalk and historical exhibits

**Fishing:** Catfish, bream, crappie and bass (state fishing license required)

**Event rentals:** Reflections event center, boathouse, pavilion and lawn available; popular for weddings, birthdays, and reunions

**Dining:** Ping's Grill temporarily closed (as of June 6); New operator TBD

**More Info:** Call city of Toccoa at (706) 282-3309 or visit [cityoftoccoa.com](http://cityoftoccoa.com)

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Tony Yang holds real herring and his jointed herring swimbaits. PHOTO COURTESY OF TONY YANG



Big'N Outdoors, the newest fishing and hunting supply store in Hart County, held a ribbon cutting May 23, just shy of celebrating its one month in business.

# Tackle & tradition

HARTWELL'S NEWEST SHOP CASTS A LINE TO A FAMILY'S STORY

## BIG'N OUTDOORS

**Address:** 426 E. Franklin St., Hartwell

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

### STORY AND PHOTOS BY BENJAMIN LONDON

Hartwell's newest outdoor shop, Big'N Outdoors, aims to serve Northeast Georgia and upstate South Carolina with all things fishing, hunting and more.

Hartwell native Joe Carden played a key role in launching the Hart County High School and Middle School fishing teams more than eight years ago. Over time, he began to wonder why there wasn't a bait and tackle shop on the Georgia side of Lake Hartwell—an idea that eventually sparked a new business.

While passing a familiar building next to the Dairy Queen Grill & Chill in Hartwell, Carden had a moment of inspiration and wondered if Hartwell native Mark Seabolt still owned the building he envisioned for his shop.

"So you never know why God works the way he does," Carden said. "One day back in January, me and my wife, Brett, were passing by this building and I said, 'There it is.' She

said, 'What?' I said, 'That's the tackle store right there.' She thought I was crazy, but I wondered if Mark Seabolt still owned it. So I sent him a message and asked if we could meet for lunch one day."

That conversation became the foundation for Big'N Outdoors.

"Me and my wife had talked about opening a gun store here in Hartwell several years ago, but just decided that the economics and environment at the time weren't right," Seabolt said. "So we put it on hold and just let this building sit here empty. I just kept thinking at some point, I





Big'N Outdoors offers a unique variety of fishing and hunting supplies including a full bait wall, live bait, lures, guns, apparel and more. They also have plans to expand their hunting selections to include stands, gear and more.

Big'N Outdoors business partners Mark Seabolt, left, and Joe Carden opened the fishing and hunting supply store at the end of April after each having separate dreams to provide fishing and gun supplies to Hart County. The store is named after the nickname Carden's son was given throughout the fishing circuit.



want to do something because I was semi-retired at the time. So when Joe and I had lunch and he told me about the fishing and tackle store, I knew it would marry perfectly with guns, ammo and hunting gear. Then the ball just started rolling.”

The store’s name has a personal origin: it’s based on the nickname of Carden’s son, Kason, who became known as “Big’N” during fishing tournaments.

“The name started with [my son] Kason in the sixth grade on Lake Keowee in the South Carolina Bass Nation Tournament,” Carden said. “He was catching fish on the back of the island and he was saying, ‘That’s a big’n.’ I was joking around with them, and I told them that I would get him some hats made with ‘Big’N’ on it. So I went and got a dozen of them made and gave it to some friends and stuff. But then people started asking me, ‘Where did your son get that hat from?’ I got to laugh-

Big’N Outdoors offers a unique variety of fishing and hunting supplies including a full bait wall, live bait, lures, guns, apparel and more. They also have plans to expand their hunting selections to include stands, gear and more.



ing, but I told them that it was his hat that he came up with. Then people wanted to start buying them. Since then, we kept on making them and have up to 15 designs on shirts and hats.”

When Carden asked Seabolt what to name the new business, the answer came easily.

“Joe asked me, ‘What do we want to call this place?’ I was like, ‘I’m a really big fan of Big’N,’” Seabolt said. “I remember Kason growing up and calling

him Big’N, or when he would show me fish that he had caught, I’d say, ‘That’s a big’n.’ It was just a natural thing.”

### A UNIQUE MIX

Big’N Outdoors offers a full bait wall, live bait—including minnows, crickets and night-crawlers—lures, apparel, hunting supplies, firearms, ammunition and optics. Brands include Zoom, Ima, Eotech, Spyderco, Bubba, Shimano, Burlebo, Local Boys, CCI, FX Custom Rods and Holosun.

The store plans to expand its hunting inventory to include stands, gear and more.

Now open for a full month, Carden said what makes Big’N Outdoors stand out is its unique inventory.

“The best part is hearing people say, ‘You got stuff that I cannot find anywhere else,’” he said. “So it tells you that you are

doing the right thing.”

He noted that their strategy is different from big-box competitors.

“They don’t have Japanese lures or unique companies because they buy their stuff directly from major companies, and we go through different distributors,” he said. “We try to make sure that we are unique and have the right stuff as much as possible through the different seasons. A lot of people say, ‘I didn’t know they make this anymore. I haven’t seen this in a long time.’”

### ROOTED IN RELATIONSHIPS

Seabolt and Carden say community relationships are part of what makes the shop special.

“I think building relationships is important,” Carden said. “Everyone in Hartwell knows the Seabolt family and has known them for 50 or 60 years. This business was built off relationships, customer service and just a friendly smile. In my previous history, customer service is key. We want people to feel like they are just as important as the next customer, or the one that came before you, or the first one to walk in the door.”

Big’N Outdoors held its ribbon-cutting ceremony May 23. Seabolt said watching the dream become a reality has been a joy.

“The vision, the talking, walking around for hours with blue tape taping the floor and imagining where things will be and then seeing it come to light—it was pretty fun and exciting,” Seabolt said. “We don’t get hung up on the stuff. The business is more important than the stuff. But it was exciting to put it all into place and watch it take shape. I still feel like a kid in a candy store.”

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Otis Budd shows off a largemouth bass he caught using one of Tony Yang's herring swimbaits. PHOTO COURTESY OF TONY YANG



# Hooked on the craft

WITH EACH HAND-POURED  
SWIMBAIT, TONY YANG BRINGS ART  
AND PRECISION TO THE WATER

**BY KIMBERLY BROWN**

To catch a large fish, you may need a large bait – one you might call a “fatback.”

Tony Yang of Toccoa creates these lures, known as Fatback Herring Swimbaits.

Yang is the lead worship pastor at Level Grove Baptist Church in Cornelia. He grew up in Florida as a pastor’s son, with eight brothers and four sisters.

“I came to Northeast Georgia in 1998 to go to college at Toccoa Falls College,” Yang said. “I have fished since I was 10 with my brothers.

We used to fish for bream all the time when we were kids.”

Yang said he chose to stay in Northeast Georgia because of the “great community,” but also because of the great fishing.

“This area has some of the most diverse lakes and fisheries in the country,” he said. “You can fish a lake for largemouth bass one moment then pack up and fish with a friend at a trout stream in five minutes.”

Yang began creating his own lures about 15 years ago. He explained that he chose to create herring swimbaits because herring



Tony Yang works on his handmade lures, designed to mimic the blue herring that bass love to eat. Above right, he uses 220-grit sandpaper to sand a newly created, unpainted Fatback Herring lure. **PHOTOS COURTESY OF TONY YANG**

is the preferred food of the fish he likes to catch — largemouth bass and spotted bass.

“Around here in Northeast Georgia lakes, we have a blueback herring,” he said. “The blueback herring is a saltwater fish that people have transferred to freshwater, and now they’re thriving really well in freshwater. These fish are nomadic, and they’re in the middle of the lake eating plankton.”

“Our local fish, our largemouth bass, spotted bass and striped bass have gotten used to eating those herring, so they’ll be in the middle of the lake suspended,” he continued. “They’ll chase those herrings all around.”

To create one of his herring swimbaits, Yang first carves a wood master and inserts screw eyes. After that, he encases the master in silicone, leaving a cavity.

“In that cavity, I pour resin, which hardens and makes my lure,” he said.



A row of Tony Yang’s handmade herring swimbaits. PHOTO COURTESY OF TONY YANG

The resin has ballast in it, which adds weight to help the lure swim correctly. Each lure is made in two or three segments, connected by joints.

Building a lure is a multi-step process that takes about eight hours to complete.

“After I take it out of the

mold, I have to cut out slots for the joints and pins,” Yang said. “Then assemble and fit to make sure it all works.”

Next comes sanding — first with coarse-grit, then fine-grit sandpaper. It’s baked for 20 minutes “to ensure the resin is set and degassed,” Yang said.

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He washes it with soap and then acetone, dries it completely, adds an automotive primer, then sands again.

After drying, he applies several coats of paint and finishes with an automotive clear topcoat. While the topcoat cures, he makes tails from paintbrush bristles and finishes other details, such as the eyes and hooks.

Then comes the final step: "After they're all assembled, I'm off to the lake to test every single bait to make sure they're tuned and working right," Yang said.

Each master can be made into several molds, and he can get 25 to 30 casts from a mold before it needs to be repaired or discarded.

"I'll make several molds of that original master, and I carve other lures as well, so there's different body styles," he said. "I try to mimic the herring as best as I can, so I use a lot of silvers and whites.

... Everything on that lure is custom made. No two are just alike."

Like many creative businesses, Yang started by making lures for himself. "Originally, I did it because I couldn't find a lure that mimicked the herring around here," he said. "Some friends saw it, and they wanted to get some, and their friends wanted some. It kind of progressed from there."

As worship director at Level Grove, music is another of Yang's creative outlets. He plays piano, guitar, drums, cello and bass guitar. He's also created media productions for the church. Yang and his wife, Susan, have three daughters: Kennedy, Bailey and Brooklyn.

Yang participates in kayak fishing tournaments, so he mostly fishes from kayaks and boats.

Though he enjoys all Northeast Georgia's lakes, his favorite is Lake Hartwell, and his favorite kayak launch is Broyles

Landing in South Carolina. Yang also ties flies, and his favorite fly-fishing spots are the Soque River and Panther Creek.

Yang said fishing provides a break from everyday stress.

"I fish because it takes my mind off things," he said. "It's like a mindless endeavor. You're trying to figure out what the fish are doing, but you're casting, and you can take your mind off everyday stresses of life. I'm looking at the water, trying to pinpoint my cast, and that's where my mind's at — trying to find the next cast."

Creating the lures also provides creative relaxation.

"I really enjoy it," he said. "I do it when I get off work, and it takes my mind off things. You just get to it and start painting and molding."

Yang doesn't advertise, but he sells out of lures quickly. For information, find @fatbackheringswimbait on Instagram.

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# THE SAUCE BOSS

*With a culinary career and competition cred, this Hartwell chef turns heat into heritage*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BILL POWELL

“You only have one bite to impress the judge,” said Scot Howard, a barbecue pitmaster from Hartwell, describing the stakes of a barbecue competition.

Barbecue that wins awards has a wow factor, he explained. It’s not grilling—but smoking—that delivers the deep flavor, along with the right rub and a finishing touch of sauce added during the final few minutes over the heat.

“It’s an art,” Howard said.

Howard worked in the kitchen at Château Élan in Braselton for 10 years, starting as a dishwasher and working his way up to sous chef. While there, he began entering—and winning—awards in barbecue competitions across Georgia and the Southeast, developing a signature basting rub and sauce in the process.

Over the years, he spent nearly every weekend exploring barbecue joints throughout Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. He gave each restaurant a personal “squeal rating” and published his





Scot Howard, a former head chef at Château Élan and a prize winning barbecue pitmaster, now living in Hartwell, has created his own barbecue sauce. His unique sweet and tangy sauce, called Reed Creek BBQ Sauce, is the result of years of smoking and seasoning pork, beef and chicken the old-fashioned slow way. Howard is shown with Ace Hardware manager Trey Borders.



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Scot Howard's barbecue sauce is available at the Reed Creek General Store, Ace Hardware and the Hometown Butcher.

reviews online.

What began as a culinary passion turned into a small business when word spread about his barbecue. Friends and neighbors began asking him to smoke meat for gatherings, and eventually, he launched his own commercially bottled sauce: Reed Creek BBQ Sauce, named for the region of Hart County where he lives.

Now retired from food service, Howard continues to judge regional barbecue competitions as a certified judge for the Kansas City Barbeque Society. He also still fires up the smoker for family and friends.

Proper smoking, he says, begins with charcoal and wood—never direct flame. He prefers peach wood for its subtle, sweet-smoke flavor. The meat is basted in his rub, a blend of brown sugar, cumin, coriander, paprika, cayenne, black pepper and other ingredients that enhance the meat's flavor without overwhelming it.

"It's the low and slow heat that keeps the meat tender and juicy," he said.

In the final 10 minutes, Howard brushes on his original barbecue sauce, adding a glossy, flavorful finish. He smokes baby back ribs for three and a half hours; pork butt takes eight to 10 hours, depending on size. Chicken gets the same slow



treatment as ribs.

His signature Reed Creek BBQ Sauce is tomato-based, with dark brown sugar, apple cider vinegar, Worcestershire sauce and other ingredients that give it a sweet, tangy profile—with a subtle kick. He's also developing a spicier version to complement his original.

Reed Creek BBQ Sauce is available at local retailers in Clermont, Gainesville, Jackson County and Hart County. In the Hartwell area, you'll find it at Market 50, Ace Hardware, Hometown Butcher and the Reed Creek General Store.



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# Heat up your summer!

## BOLD BISON SMASH BURGERS

RECIPE AND PHOTO BY YVONNE MARINELLI

If you're looking to elevate your smash burger game, replace your ground beef with locally-sourced bison from Soque River Farms in Clarkesville. If you're like me and enjoy the bolder flavors, pickle your own red onions, opt for some spicy

dill garlic pickle slices versus the regular dill flavor, and slather one side of the bun with my family's favorite special sauce. All of this – and then some – create a merriment of flavors perfectly smashed between two pretzel hamburger buns.

### Ingredients:

Pretzel buns  
Parchment paper (a small square for each patty)  
Burger press  
Griddle spatula  
Baking sheet  
Paper towel-lined plate  
Large mixing bowl  
Small mixing bowl

### Burger mixture:

2 pounds of Soque River Farms ground bison  
1 large egg  
3 to 4 dashes of low sodium soy sauce  
2 tablespoons of A1 sauce  
2 dashes of chipotle seasoning  
4 dashes of smoked paprika  
10 dashes of garlic powder  
8 dashes of onion powder  
Salt & black pepper to taste

### Toppings:

Spring mix/baby spinach  
Sliced tomatoes  
Pickled red onions  
Spicy dill garlic pickle slices  
Black forest bacon  
Pepper jack cheese  
Special sauce:  
3 tablespoons mayo  
2 tablespoons ketchup  
1 tablespoon dill relish



In a large mixing bowl, combine all burger ingredients and mix with clean hands. Portion into 8 to 10 2-ounce balls on a sheet pan and set aside.

In a separate small bowl, create the special sauce by combining all ingredients until well-combined. Set aside.

Cook bacon according to package directions and set aside. Leave the grease on the griddle for cooking burgers.

Add the balls of bison to the griddle. Place the parchment square on top and use a burger press to smash into thin patties. The patties will shrink as you cook them, so don't be afraid to really smash them.

Add buns to the griddle, face down in the grease. These will take about 2 to 3 minutes to toast, depending on your griddle.

Cook burger 2 to 3 min-

utes until the patties develop a crust and are almost cooked through. Flip each patty, then add a slice of pepper jack cheese. Cook for another 1 to 2 minutes until burgers are cooked to your liking and the cheese has melted. Stack a patty on top of another to make double burgers!

Remove pretzel buns from griddle. I like to plate my patties directly onto the buns as soon as they get off the grill. This allows for the bottom bun to capture any escaping juices from the meat.

Finally, stack your burger high with bacon, spring mix/baby spinach, sliced tomatoes, pickled red onions, and spicy dill garlic pickle slices, then top it off with some special sauce on the top half of your pretzel bun, and you're in for a real treat! Pro tip: My family enjoys smash burgers with fresh watermelon, especially on hot summer days.

# Summer means *good food*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL O'HEARN

Summer is well underway, which means people are having parties and backyard barbecues to take advantage of the season.

If you're looking for something of a finer pedigree beyond your typical hot dogs and hamburgers, these recipes should have you covered.

The bonus is they are easy to make and elevate the standard summer fare.



## COWBOY CAVIAR

This dish costs less than \$15 and is made by mixing all the ingredients into a large bowl. This salsa-like dish is served with tortilla chips.

- 1 (15-ounce) can black eyed peas, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1½ cups diced Roma tomatoes
- 1 jalapeno pepper, chopped
- 1 yellow bell pepper, chopped
- ½ cup red onion, chopped
- ¼ cup chopped cilantro
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- ½ teaspoon seasoned salt (If you do not have seasoned salt, feel free to use individual spices such as garlic or onion powder, paprika and cayenne pepper.)
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper

## LOADED BAKED POTATO SALAD

This is a spin on your traditional potato salad, in that it includes pickles and pickle juice along with ranch seasoning. It takes longer to make compared to most potato salads, so save time to prep this along with your main entree.

4 pounds Russet potatoes  
2 tablespoons fine chopped dill pickles, plus ¼ cup juice from the jar  
1¼ cups sour cream  
½ cup mayonnaise  
1 tablespoon ranch seasoning  
2 teaspoons yellow mustard  
1 teaspoon kosher salt  
1 teaspoon ground black pepper  
8 slices cooked bacon, chopped and divided  
1½ cups shredded sharp cheddar  
¼ cup sliced green onions, plus more for serving

Preheat the oven to 400 F.

Wash and pat dry the potatoes. Place the potatoes on a baking sheet. Using a fork, prick the potatoes all over. Bake until fork tender, about an hour. Let cool for 15-20 minutes, or until able to handle comfortably.

Peel the potatoes, chop into one-inch pieces, and transfer to a large bowl. Drizzle the chopped potatoes with the pickle juice and let them sit until the potatoes have cooled completely, about an hour.

In a small bowl, stir together the sour cream, mayo, pickles, ranch seasoning, mustard, salt, and pepper until fully combined.

Pour the sour cream mixture over the cooled potatoes. Add the chopped bacon (reserving two tablespoons), cheese, and green onion and stir gently to combine. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Top with more green onion and the remaining two tablespoons of bacon until just before serving.



## GREEN CHILE PIMENTO CHEESEBURGERS

This recipe takes your standard burger and elevates it with some homemade pimento cheese made with sugar, mustard powder, and for some spice, green chiles. This dish is a perfect way to break in the grill for the summer season.

1 pound ground beef  
2 tablespoons A1 sauce  
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce  
2 tablespoons grill seasoning

Start by preheating your grill.

Combine the mayo, mustard, onion powder, and sugar in a bowl. Stir until combined and add your chiles, stirring until evenly mixed. Next, fold in your cheese until all the ingredients are thoroughly combined. Set the pimento cheese aside to let the flavors marry.

While the pimento cheese is resting, season the beef and form your patties. Place your ground beef in a medium bowl and add the A1 sauce, Worcestershire sauce and grill seasoning. Using your hands, thoroughly mix the seasonings into the beef. Form the beef into four ¼-pound patties.

Take the pimento cheese, a clean plate to put the burgers on, and your spatula and place them somewhere handy next to the grill. When the grill is raging hot, put your burgers on and grill with the lid closed for about three minutes on one side. After approximately three minutes, check to see the first side is well caramelized and flip. Immediately top the flipped patty with about a quarter of the pimento cheese. Close the grill and cook until the pimento cheese is melty, about two more minutes.

Toast some buns and grab your additional toppings, such as lettuce and tomato, and serve with sides of your choice.

## GREEN CHILE PIMENTO CHEESE

1 cup grated cheddar cheese  
½ teaspoon sugar  
½ tablespoon mustard powder  
½ tablespoon onion powder  
¼ cup mayo  
¼ cup green hatch chiles

## PINK LEMONADE MIMOSAS

Pink lemonade is a summer staple, and mimosas are the highlight of any good summer meal. But what if we decided to combine the two with some added raspberries and strawberries in the mix? Now we're talking. These take two minutes to prepare and yield four cocktails, which can be easily multiplied.

*Note: The perfect mimosa is a 2:1 ratio of champagne to juice. You can adjust that ratio to match your tastes.*

- 1 cup store-bought pink lemonade, chilled
- 2 cups prosecco/champagne/sparkling wine, chilled
- Fresh raspberries and strawberries
- Lemon slices

Divide the pink lemonade between four champagne flutes.

Top off with the prosecco/champagne/sparkling wine and garnish with the berries and lemon slices.

Time to serve!



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Hubbard's daughter, Melanie Knauff, said her father can often be found working in his garage, which has been transformed into a birdhouse workshop. PHOTO COURTESY MELANIE KNAUFF



Tom Hubbard is in his 90s, but he remains a busy man. When he's not volunteering at the gold museum in Dahlonega or teaching square dancing lessons, he's building birdhouses that he sells locally. PHOTO COURTESY MELANIE KNAUFF

# FOR THE BIRDS

## 92-YEAR-OLD STAYS BUSY BUILDING BIRDHOUSES

BY MICHAEL O'HEARN

At 92, Dahlonega resident Tom Hubbard is living like he's got no time to waste.

He volunteers at the city's Gold Museum and the Community Helping Place Food Pantry and for more than a decade, he's worked weekly with Meals on Wheels. He also teaches square dancing with the Gold City Squares at the senior center.

When he's not being an active member of society, he can be found at home building birdhouses. His work is sold at local art shows under the name Bird Brainz, which came about when a bank asked for the name of his business when he was applying for a machine that takes credit cards.

Even though he probably didn't need anything else to fill his time in his 90s, he found a few birdhouse designs from a company in Michigan and decided he would transform his garage into a woodworking headquarters.

He's been building birdhouses for three years now, and he recently sold some of his creations at the Dahlonega Arts Alliance's Art in the Park event in June at Hancock Park.

"I was taking this birdhouse as a fundraiser for Dahlonega Club and when I took



Hubbard's bird house hobby started when the president of a Gainesville square dancing club asked him to build her a bird house.

Hubbard builds his houses out of poplar or cedar, and there is a degree of math that goes into each one so as to protect birds from potential predators.  
**PHOTOS COURTESY MELANIE KNAUFF**



it to Gainesville, [the president of the Gainesville square dance club] said she'd like one for her mother," Hubbard said. "She asked, 'How can I buy one from you?' I sold her a birdhouse, and it sort of blossomed from there."

Hubbard's daughter, Melanie Knauff, is a member of the Dahlonga Arts Association, and she recommended her dad build a few more to sell. Each birdhouse sells for somewhere between \$75 and \$150.

The houses are made out of poplar or cedar, and there is some math involved when it comes to the dimensions of each house.

For instance, he said there needs to be four inches from the entrance hole to the bottom of the birdhouse so that the birds can build a nest.

"The birds need to be able to hide themselves from potential predators," Hubbard said.

The entrance hole is also just wide enough for bluebirds or smaller birds to get in the houses, he said.

He's been allowed to use some designs by the Michigan company, all animal shapes known as "tree huggers" such as a bear, a cat and a raccoon. He is not allowed to sell them online com-

mercially, so he keeps it local to Lumpkin County in an effort to avoid trouble.

During his career, Hubbard had a printing business known as Advertisers Press in West Palm Beach, Florida, for nearly

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40 years, which he started from scratch with two people. Over 38 years later, that business grew to a facility that was more than 22,000 square feet and had a team of 38-40 people.

Hubbard has always had an adventurous spirit. After he retired, he and his wife traveled for a decade to 49 states, the Yukon, and Nova Scotia as well as other parts of Canada.

It was during these 10 years that they did work camper jobs, such as working for the Bureau of Land Management where they had to extract jaw bone out of deer killed on site by hunters for biologists to study.

“My dad once accepted a position over the phone by telling the park owner in Custer, South Dakota that he had experience running a restaurant,” Knauff

said. “Stretched the truth a bit. If he found his way to the kitchen, it was to make popcorn or cookies. Halfway to South Dakota, the owner [learned] he didn’t have a clue how to work a commercial grill or fryer, but it was too late for the man to secure someone else, so he briefly trained my mom and dad. During one phone call to him, my dad said [to me], ‘Can’t talk now, I’m rolling out a new milkshake flavor today that your mother and I invented.’”

Money isn’t the reason he’s building birdhouses. It just gives him something else to do.

“I’m a plunger,” he told *The Dahlonega Nugget* in March 2023. “Anything I do, I just jump in. So, you know, I’ll probably get tired of building birdhouses. And then I don’t know what I’ll do next. But I’ll do something.”



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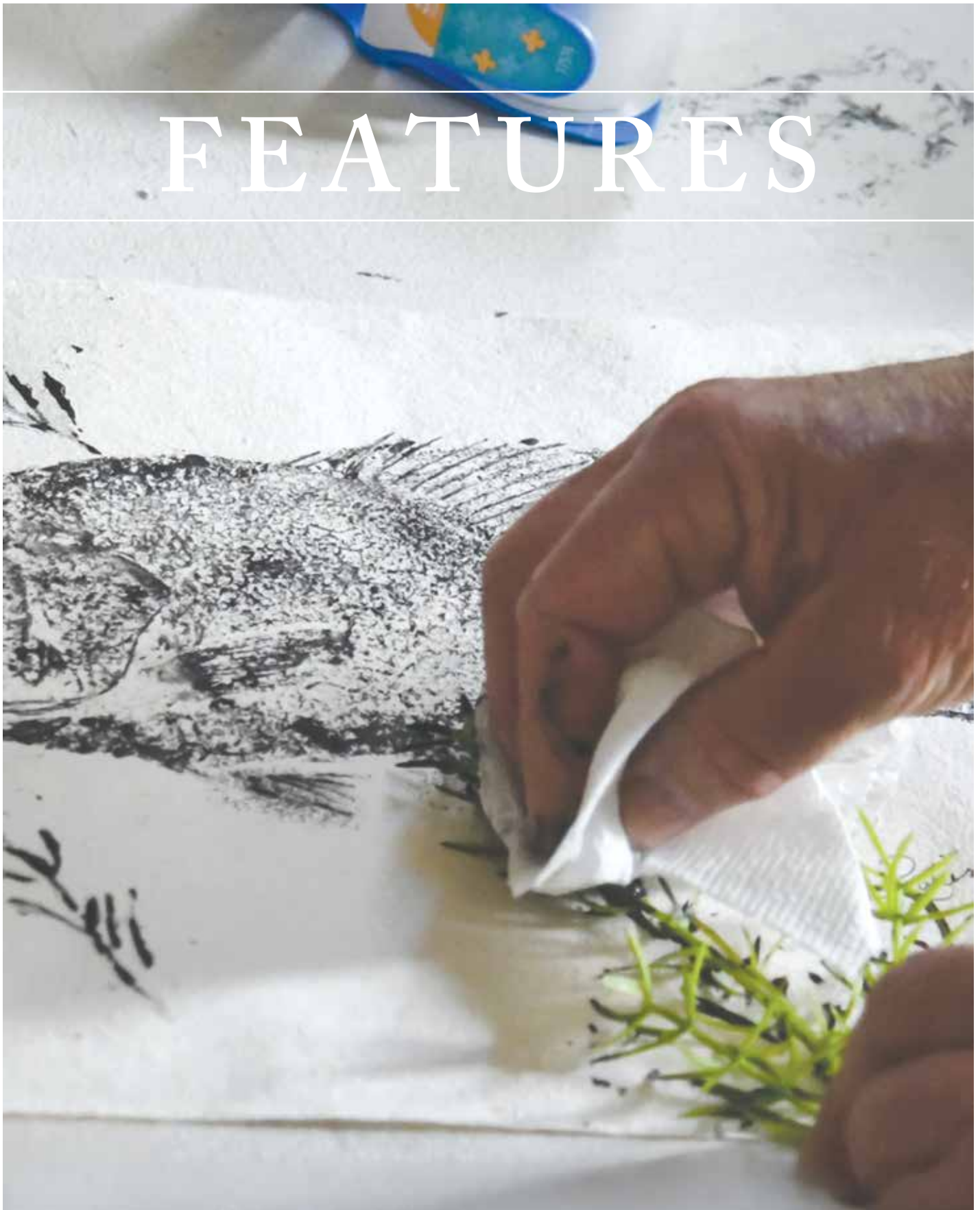
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# FEATURES



Adding definition to the artwork, Weylon Robinson coats an underwater plant with black paint to give the illusion the crappie is swimming near the bottom of a pond. PHOTO/ENOCH AUTRY

Before the waters in Wildcat Creek Cove are filled in the afternoon with boats, one boat heads out on a calm Lake Burton from the LaPrade's Marina at 25 Shoreline Trail, Clarkesville.  
PHOTO/ENOCH AUTRY

# Take stock in this dock

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## BY ENOCH AUTRY

Cool breezes wisp across the lake as patrons of LaPrade's Marina sip drinks from the Bowline Takeaway and Bar.

Nearby, others wearing colorful swimwear and T-shirts rent boats to navigate along the edge of Lake Burton.

Time spent at LaPrade's Marina, located at 25 Shoreline Trail, Clarkesville, brings a consistent flow of smiles and plenty of happy four-legged companions

"Everybody has a dog on the lake," said Katie Long, LaPrade's Marina general manager, during a busy weekend on Lake Burton. "If you want to pet a dog, come to the lake."

Long, who has spent most of her adult life at the marina, manages a team of seasonal employees. As the sole full-time employee, she juggles many responsibilities to keep visitors happy and returning.

## A RICH HISTORY

LaPrade's Marina has served



LaPrade's Marina general manager Katie Long looks out the side door of her office with her dog Teddy. Many of those who visit the marina also bring their dogs along for companionship. PHOTO/ENOCH AUTRY



An aerial view of LaPrade's Marina shows the Adirondack-round log timber frame style structure with the boats out front and mountains in the background. SUBMITTED PHOTO





as an iconic centerpiece on the 2,775-acre lake since 1925. Its origins date back to when Georgia Power, then known as the Georgia Railway and Power Company, created the lake by constructing the Lake Burton Dam. John LaPrade, a local landowner, developed a camp for workers building the dam, which evolved into a rustic fish camp with cabins, a restaurant, and a marina.

Today, LaPrade's Adirondack-style log timber frame is a key part of the Lake Burton experience. The 12-acre marina at the west end of Wildcat Creek Cove rents 14 pontoon boats seven days a week, utilizing a check-out app that replaced the old phone-in system.

Long said the marina's storage capacity has tripled to 127 sheds, and new services have emerged, including a boat sales and service neighbor, Watersports Central, which opened in 2019. Pizza from nearby Bleu Canoe will soon be available. The marina also has annual covered dry and wet boat storage available.

### AN EXCLUSIVE EXPERIENCE

"Lots of people go to Lake Lanier, but this is a little more exclusive. Here you have to have a home or friends with homes on the lake," said Long, who has become more specialized in the marina business since 2011 by spending her college summers working in the ship store at LaPrade's.


Long, who after college became office manager in 2016 and the general manager when Keel Funds took ownership in 2017, said she runs into people from Lake Burton throughout the region and beyond.

"People are spending more and more time on the lake.




LaPrade's began as a camp in 1925 for workers at Burton Dam. Above, construction before its opening in 1920.

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There are more full-time residents on the lake now," Long said. "We have lots of people from Atlanta, California and Colorado."

## A FAMILY LEGACY

The lake was created in 1920, and in 1925 LaPrade opened his camp as cabins were named for various employees. The fish camp became well known, especially for its family-style, all-you-can-eat restaurant. LaPrade's son, Buford, took over in 1945, and later sold the camp to Wallace Nichols in 1972.

Robert Nichols, who later bought the property from his uncle, Wallace Nichols, still lives at the marina.

"I still pick up trash like I own the place," Nichols said of his walks around the lake. "I live on the property. I still feel that love for the community and Rabun County. A great part is most of the people come here with a smile on their face."

Nichols said his family was handpicked by Mr. LaPrade to become the owners of the property. The Nichols family never intended to sell the marina, as they sought bids to expand into a market beyond hunters and campers, five people made worthy bids on the marina itself.

"We operated 30 years to the day from September 1972 to September 2002. We held a big going-away party. We invited employees. It was a celebration."

## A FRESH START

The Nichols family operated the marina until September 2002, when it was sold to Atlanta developers. But that venture was unsuccessful, and the owners put the property on the market.

That's when Peter Anzo stepped in. It was 2004, and LaPrade's Marina caught his eye.

"I stupidly fell in love with the



A happy Julie Phelan, third from the right, celebrates her birthday with family and friends on the deck at LaPrade's Marina on June 7. PHOTO/ENOCH AUTRY



John LaPrade's first small cabins were said to have been used to house the engineers and supervisors.



Emily Shattuck, Natasha McNeil and Will Crane serve customers at the Bowline Takeaway and Bar at LaPrade's Marina. PHOTO/ENOCH AUTRY

HISTORIC PHOTOS FROM "OUR SOUTHERN EDEN: A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF LAKE BURTON AND THE UPPER TALLULAH BASIN" BY MICHAEL E. MAFFETT MD.



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Cabins like this one housed dam workers during the construction.

property, which you are not supposed to do,” said Anzo, noting a developer should remain level-headed when viewing a parcel.

The old restaurant burned in 2005, and the marina closed in 2006. That same year, in March, Anzo closed on the property.

“Me and my wife (Tina, a local realtor) are passionate about the lake and wanted to recreate the centerpiece of the lake,” Anzo said. “We came up and fell in love with it and started looking at homes the next day.”

Months later the Anzos bought a house, and now have been there for nearly 30 years.

Since then, the Anzos have invested in the property, including building a new marina facility with local labor.

“We created something that was special for the county,” he said. “It took nine and half months to build it. They were working hard, and they worked on Saturdays. They got it done, so we all went fishing in the Chesapeake Bay. Some of them had not flown before.”

## **RUNNING AGROUND**

When the initial builder of the octagon-shaped structure developed health issues, Anthony McCracken Construction Company took over the project that would be completed in 2008, just as the housing market bottomed out.

“When the crash happened, the bank went out of business,” Anzo said. “The FDIC came in instead of another bank. There was no new financing for anybody during that time, so the FDIC sold the paper to a California hedge fund.”

Anzo said the loan got bundled in with others, which led to further demise.

“We filed for bankruptcy, and in September 2016 on the courthouse steps, the property was foreclosed,” Anzo said. “I tried to put a group together to buy it back.”

Anzo said it still hurts to think about the hurdles he had to maneuver.

“It’s hard, to be honest with you. I went into a deep depression,” Anzo said. “My wife got me through it.”

To this day, Anzo does not visit the marina much, but he treasures the local friendships he gained.

“It was fun and exciting. My wife ran the store,” Anzo said. “We made tons and tons of friends and a lot of them we are still friends with, and my wife has sold houses to some of them.”

Anzo said Nichols was an “extremely helpful and a terrific guy” through his difficult time with the marina.

## **BEGINNING, AGAIN**

After changing hands to Coastal Marina

Management of Panama City, Florida, LaPrade's Marina is now owned by Atlanta-based Keel Marinas. Partners Chris Carlton and Bill Boden have long family ties to Lake Burton, said Boden, and both have homes on the lake.

"We became a bit disillusioned with the physical downward spiral we saw in LaPrade's back in the 2014-2017 period," said Boden, managing principal with Keel Funds Advisor, LLC. "Because we both care a great deal about the lake and the homeowner community there, we felt compelled to step in and take over the property, from the then out-of-state owner, in order to restore it to what we thought it should be."

Keel Marinas has now owned the property for 8 years.

"We feel the property has physically never looked better, has a full range of services being offered to the public by a seasoned professional and has us constantly looking at ways to make the property look and perform at its best. In many ways it is a labor of love for us here at Keel, as much as a business opportunity and plan," added Boden. "We just hope to continue to do good things there going forward."

## A COMMUNITY ANCHOR

Each cabin at LaPrade's has a story. One, the Delta Cabin, was named for the Delta Crop Dusting Co., which became Delta Air Lines. The restaurant was known for fried chicken, coleslaw, country ham and a signature onion relish.

"We competed with The Dillard House and The Smith House," Nichols said. "But we didn't feel we were really competing because we were on the lake. They had to come to us."

LaPrade's was a forerunner to state tourism programs, promoting Northeast Georgia before such efforts were common. It joined local chambers and conducted face-to-face surveys.

"We really loved our customers," Nichols said.

Today, the marina remains a hub for events like the Wooden Boat Parade and the Lake Burton Fun Run. Rabun County is known as the "Wooden Boat Capital of Georgia."

Nichols started the 2-mile fun run in 1984 to support local firefighters. The 2025 event marks its 41st year, benefiting three fire departments, Rabun Search and Rescue, and the sheriff's canine division.

"It has gotten so big, the total number of participants had to be capped at 1,500," Nichols said. "The main goal is to be safe and secure."

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# Fish impressions

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## STORY AND PHOTOS BY ENOCH AUTRY

The old way of doing things just might be the best way.

Gyotaku is the traditional Japanese method of printing fish—a practice dating back 200 years. In this form of natural printing, ink is hand-painted onto fish, and paper is pressed over the catch to create a detailed image. Originally, gyotaku was a way for fishermen to record the size and shape of their catches, long before photography or refrigeration existed.

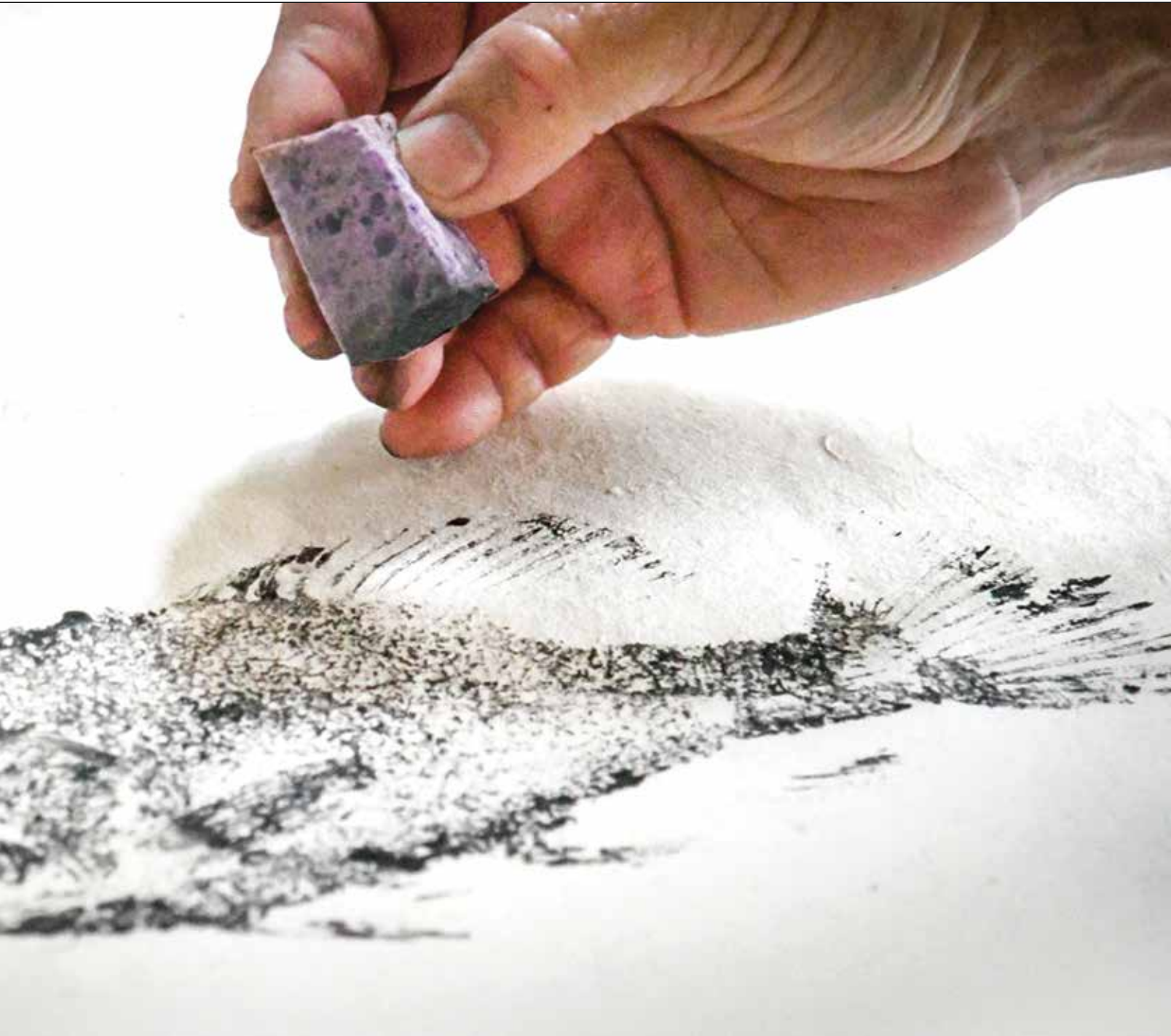
In Japan, this method is still used today, with prints often seen in tackle shops and coastal markets. Gyotaku has grown into an art form, and in Japanese culture, fish are seen as symbols of prosperity and good fortune.

Weylon Robinson of Hartwell has found a way to merge his love of fishing with this centuries-old tradition.

“I can’t even draw stick figures,” Robinson said with a laugh.

“They didn’t have taxidermy or freezers or photos to rely on. This was a way for customers to see what kind of fish they were buying. Back then, quality mattered, so they came up with an innovative way to

● Story continues on **PAGE 86**



Using a mini sponge with its natural ridges and craters, Weylon Robinson touches up a traditional black imprint of a crappie.



Weylon Robinson uses pins to keep the fins of a crappie he caught attached to a Styrofoam board. The pins also help bring out a stronger presence of ink on the paper during the gyotaku process.



With strokes of a painter's brush, Weylon Robinson of Hartwell applies black ink evenly onto a crappie. Along with being an artist, Robinson is quite the angler as he provides his own "subjects" for the Japanese fish printing known as gyotaku.



Weylon Robinson delicately pulls back the paper to reveal the image of a crappie that he coated in black paint while performing the Japanese gyotaku.

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● Continued from PAGE 82

show it.”

A former resident of Crystal Beach, Texas, Robinson spent years fishing the salt waters near Galveston. But it was a quiet day and a YouTube rabbit hole that introduced him to the art form.

“I saw a video of a Japanese lady doing gyotaku,” he said. “I thought, ‘What is she doing?’ So I watched. I was catching so many fish anyway, and if I ran out of a subject, I’d just go fishing again.”

Robinson uses the direct method—inking fresh fish and pressing them onto paper. He removes the ink from the fins before cooking the fish, so nothing goes to waste. Some fish are eaten fresh, while others are pulled from the freezer later.

Robinson is a member of the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA), a group focused on preserving marine ecosystems. While living in Texas, he fished for redfish. In Georgia, he fishes Lake Rabun, Lake Hartwell, Richard B. Russell Lake and the Chattooga River, where he and his family take annual



Working with two crappie he caught, Weylon Robinson performs the traditional Japanese method of printing fish, gyotaku, using black ink. The screen saver on the computer in the background shows some fish Robinson colored vibrantly instead of basic black.

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A group of five women standing together in front of a backdrop that says "The Northeast Georgian". One woman in the center is holding a framed award that reads "The Northeast Georgian 2025 READERS' CHOICE award presented to Cleaner Living Home & Office House Cleaner".

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Weylon Robinson has utilized the Japanese method of fish printing called gyotaku for 13 years, but recently has added wood etching to his list of artistic pursuits.



Father's Day trips for trout fishing and fun.

If he's ever low on subjects, his backyard pond—an acre in size—provides plenty.

With 13 years of gyotaku experience, Robinson has refined his process to near mastery. He credits a friend with a degree in art for encouraging him to add elements like plants, lures, or schools of fish in the background to bring each piece to life.

"I haven't run into anyone else around here doing this," Robinson said.

At one of his art festivals, an Asian woman praised his work as "the best rendition outside of Japan."

"That meant a lot," he said. "In Japanese culture, having fish in the house means good luck and prosperity. The more fish, the more luck and prosperity you have."

Though he has experimented with colorful gyotaku prints, Robinson prefers traditional black ink.

"I like the tradition," said the retired firefighter. "It's all hands-on."

At first, Robinson gave his prints away to friends. Eventually, he started selling them—his first sale was in Winnie, Texas.

Now, he donates art annually to Marcus Luttrell, a retired U.S. Navy SEAL who founded the Lone Survivor Foundation. One of Robinson's gyotaku prints once raised \$500 at a charity auction.

Robinson also does wood burning, etching logos, animals and school emblems into handcrafted pieces. He's donated work to help raise funds for groups like CCA Louisiana and Apalachee High School's wrestling team.



For gyotaku, he uses Lokta paper from Thailand, known for its coarse, textured surface. He keeps three varieties on hand—plain, minimal bamboo and extra bamboo.

“You can cut that tree to the ground, and it’ll grow back,” he said.

Each gyotaku starts with drying the fish so the ink adheres better. Robinson props open the fish’s mouth and flares the fins using packing materials, then outlines the fish on thick Styrofoam. The outline is cut out to cradle the fish and prevent it from shifting during printing.

Next, he brushes ink over the fish, tip to tail. A sheet of Lokta paper is pressed down and lightly patted to absorb the ink. Once removed, Robinson fills in any gaps with a sponge dipped in ink.

A finished gyotaku of a crappie is signed in Japanese and cursive by Weylon Robinson. The basic black color is the traditional method of gyotaku, although some people may request a more colorful hue.

Final touchups are done with a Sharpie.

He sometimes adds aquatic plants or additional fish to the scene. When finished, Robinson stamps the work with his Japanese name: “Jackie,” his middle name. His first name, Weylon, can’t be used—the Japanese alphabet doesn’t include the letter “W.”

To contact Robinson, find him on Facebook or reach him by email at [resq911\\_97@yahoo.com](mailto:resq911_97@yahoo.com) or by phone at 832-457-7955.

# Rooted in *patience*



Franklin County native Donovan Layton likes the skeletal look of his prized European hornbeam bonsai tree in winter when the leaves have fallen. **PHOTO COURTESY OF DONAVAN LAYTON**

## HOW ONE LAVONIA MAN FINDS PEACE AND PURPOSE IN THE ART OF TINY TREES



Donavan Layton works to create two bonsai trees from one, through the process called air layering. **PHOTO/CHARLIE EAVENSON**



Donavan Layton says he has doubled the value of this European hornbeam bonsai since he obtained it from New Jersey almost three years ago. **PHOTO/CHARLIE EAVENSON**



## BY CHARLIE EAVENSON

The destructive forces of nature — tornadoes, hurricanes, floods and forest fires — sweep across the landscape, unabated by human efforts. Farmers, for the most part, are at the mercy of the weather for their livelihood, having no control over drought, scorching heat or a late cold snap.

It seems that everyone longs to control nature, including vacationers headed to the beach or those planning a day on the lake.

Maybe this is why the hobby known as bonsai is growing rapidly, here in the U.S. and in many parts of the world.

“The major appeal to bonsai, for me, is it’s like manipulating and controlling nature,” said Donovan Layton of Lavonia, while trimming the

branches of a miniature trident maple at his home on Lake Hartwell. “Basically, you’re making a tree that would be 100 feet tall do what you want it to do.”

Most often, that means keeping the would-be 100-foot tree between 6 and 36 inches tall.

The Japanese word *bonsai* literally means “planted in a pot.” The idea of creating miniature replicas of nature originated in China more than 1,300 years ago.

The Chinese believed that making small landscapes — which included mountains,



Donavan Layton shows off one of the four different varieties of Japanese maple bonsai trees he is curating. PHOTO/CHARLIE EAVENSON



Layton married his high school sweetheart Brooke. They now live on Lake Hartwell in Franklin County with their daughters Lila and Bowen and their goldendoodle Honey. PHOTO COURTESY OF DONAVAN LAYTON

lakes, boulders and trees — gave them magical powers. The smaller the replicas, the more powerful they were. The Chinese term for this art form is penjing or pun-sai, which means “pot landscape.”

When the tradition was brought to Japan around 800 A.D., Zen Buddhist monks refined the idea by focusing on a single tree planted in a shallow tray or pot to represent the universe. Thus, it became known as bonsai — planted in a pot.

Layton makes it clear that he’s not into Zen Buddhism or any Eastern religion. He, his wife and high school sweetheart, Brooke, and their two daughters, Lila and Bowen, are Christians who attend

Royston Baptist Church.

“For me, bonsai isn’t spiritual,” Layton said. “My faith is very important to me. If the Lord hadn’t had his hand on me, I wouldn’t be here today. All I have is because of Him.”

Layton, who is an avid outdoorsman, admits that bonsai forces him to slow down.

He has a morning routine of watering the 50-plus tiny trees spread over his large patio and outdoor entertaining area.

“It takes me 22 minutes to water every morning, if I’ve got a coffee cup in one hand,” Layton said. “Then I spend time several days of the week working on the trees trimming, pruning, wiring and shaping them.”

When asked if he keeps

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Bonsai trees must be repotted every three to five years, and the roots must be pruned. This specially modified wagon helps Layton move the trees inside to be worked on. PHOTO/CHARLIE EAVENSON

a journal detailing the progress on each tree, Layton said he used to — but not anymore.

“There are apps you can get that you can journal and log what you do with each tree,” Layton said, “but I’ve kinda learned that the tree will tell you what needs to be done.”

To say that Layton is an outdoorsman is putting it mildly. Not only does he hunt big game all over North America, he is also a competitive long-distance runner and biker.

A few years ago, he had a serious issue with his heart, requiring surgery and insertion of the longest stent available. Just weeks before doctors discovered nine heart blockages, Layton had completed a 2-mile ocean swim while training for an Ironman competition.

“The doctor told me I had the most efficient eight-cylinder running on two cylinders that they had ever seen,” Layton said. “Now they tell me I need at least an hour a day of exercise, and I eat a very healthy diet. My body



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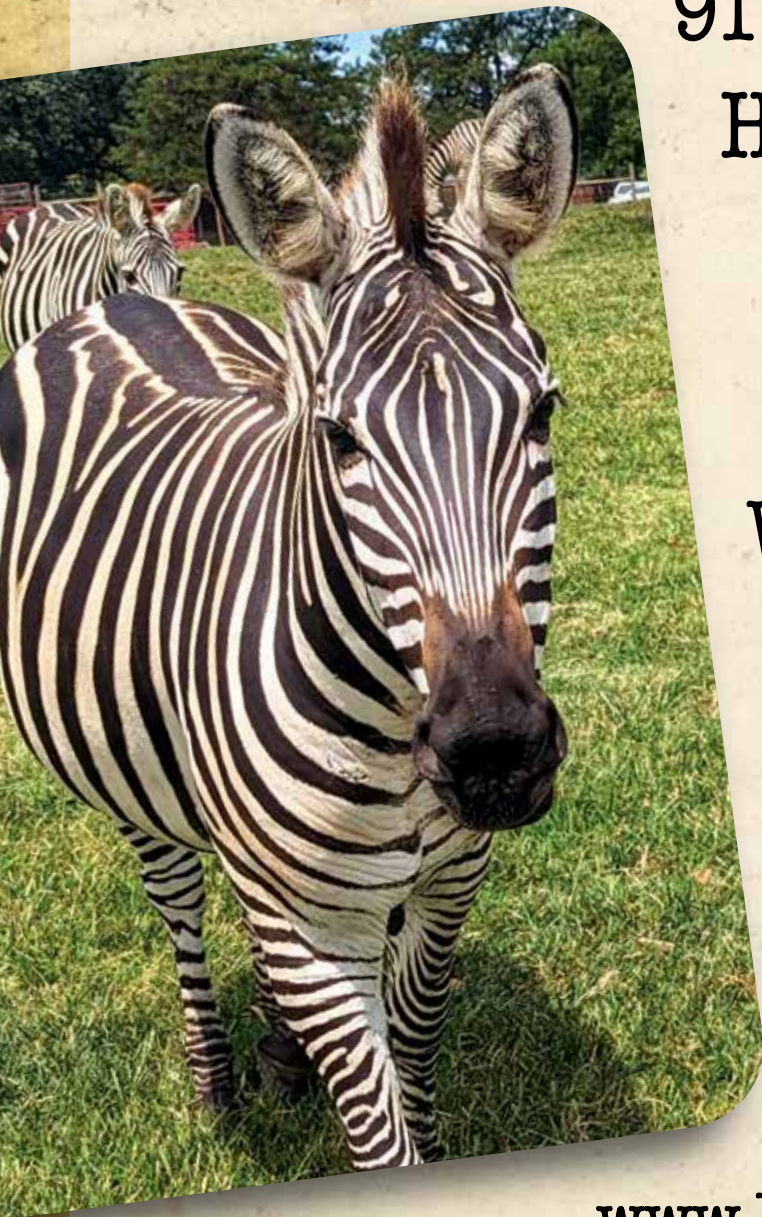


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doesn't process cholesterol well."

Surveys show many people are turning to bonsai to help deal with stress. Some of the benefits most often cited include:

- Mindfulness and contemplation — focusing on the present moment
- Patience and acceptance — bonsai is a slow process, with trees seen as 20-year to lifetime projects
- Harmony with nature — becoming up-close and personal with living trees you care for and shape
- Wabi-sabi — a Japanese term meaning finding beauty in simplicity and imperfection

Layton admits that his career as a financial advisor with Edward Jones in Lavonia can be quite stressful, and working with the trees helps him slow down and relax.

In explaining how he first got interested in bonsai, Layton said that during a break at a company meeting, the gentleman next to him asked:

"Have you seen my dogwood tree?"

"I thought that was a random question," Layton said. "Then he pulled out his phone and showed me a picture of a 14-inch-tall dogwood tree that he said had been in that little bitty pot for 20-something years. And I said, 'Tell me more.'"

That was in 2017.

A small sampling of the trident and Japanese maple bonsais that Donovan Layton is nurturing at his lakefront home in Franklin County. PHOTO/CHARLIE EAVENSON

The next weekend, the man with the tiny dogwood tree went with Layton to Plant City Bonsai in Clermont, where Layton bought his first tree.

Actually, he bought a miniature forest of four trees. They are all still alive but have since been repurposed into other bonsai projects.

"The obsession grew from there," Layton said. "I was raised on a farm growing watermelons and tomatoes, so growing stuff comes natural, but this was something totally different."

Layton said he learned almost everything he knows about bonsai from YouTube videos. Places like Plant City Bonsai have seminars to teach those new to the hobby, but it can be learned from online sources.

Bonsai is considered the perfect combination of horticulture and art. As the tree is nurtured

and shaped, the artist usually has a goal in mind for the finished product.

“For me, the process is more important than the finished product,” Layton said. “I’m not planning to enter any competitions or shows. I don’t need any blue ribbons. I do this for me.”

However, there are shows and competitions all over the world. The U.S. National Bonsai Exhibition is the largest in North America.

Closer to home, the Atlanta Bonsai Society and the Blue Ridge Bonsai Society in North Carolina hold several shows each year.

Small, simple bonsai trees can be purchased at big-box stores for as little as \$20. Bonsai specialty nurseries offer starter trees for \$50 to \$250. Well-trained trees that are 20 to 30 years old routinely sell for \$2,500 to \$5,000.

The highest price ever paid for a bonsai tree was \$1.3 million at the International Bonsai Convention in Japan in 2012.

Layton said he has no interest in turning his hobby into a business.

“I’ve sold a few trees here and there, and I’ve told the girls that they can sell some of these Satsuki azaleas on Facebook to earn some spending money,” Layton said. “But no, I don’t want to make it a business.”

The Karate Kid movies brought attention to bonsai, as Mr. Miyagi used the hobby as a training tool for Daniel-san. While many people think bonsai trees are evergreen junipers, Layton prefers deciduous trees like Japanese and trident maples.

He likes the skeletal silhouette of the maples in win-



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Donavan Layton shows off his most prized bonsai tree, a 40-plus year old European hornbeam, the day he brought it home from New Jersey almost three years ago. PHOTO COURTESY OF DONAVAN LAYTON

ter when the limbs are bare. While he specializes in trident maples, Layton's pride and joy is a European hornbeam that is more than 40 years old.

"I found it with a bonsai artist in New Jersey," Layton said. "We packed up one Friday afternoon and drove straight through to New Jersey. Picked it up Saturday morning and drove home with it. I've had it almost three years now, and when I recently sent a picture of it to the guy I got it from, he said I had probably doubled the value of it."

A common misconception is that bonsai trees are special varieties bred down to miniature versions. In fact, they are normal trees kept small by pruning and controlling root size. The small, shallow pots play a major role.

"Control the roots and you

control the size of the tree," Layton said. "If you want to let the tree grow to increase the girth of the trunk and limbs, you leave it in a bigger pot. Then when you get it to the size you want it, you prune back the roots and move it into a smaller pot."

Towering redwood trees like those in Northern California have been made into bonsai. In fact, Plant City Bonsai has a redwood forest of 15 to 20 trees that tops out at about 36 inches tall.

Some bonsai trees around the world have lived more than 1,000 years. A 400-year-old Japanese white pine that survived the 1945 atomic bomb in Hiroshima was later donated to the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum in Washington, D.C.

Locally, Plant City Bonsai has a juniper more than 140 years



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old and a Chinese elm almost 100 years old.

As for cost, Layton said bonsai is like any hobby — you can spend as much or as little as you want.

A person can buy a starter tree for \$50 to \$250. For those with limited budgets, trees can be collected from the wild and potted — a process called yamadori. New trees can also be started through air layering.

Toolkits are available on Amazon for \$25 to \$75, or on specialty websites for \$300 and up. Most supplies — potting soil, moss, fertilizer — can be ordered online or found at home improvement stores.

The special wire caddy Layton uses was 3D printed by a bonsai artist and holds several types of wire on rolls.

The so-called golden rule of bonsai is “patience and observation.” It’s a long, slow process that involves developing a relationship with a living piece of art.

New hobbyists often kill their first bonsai by rushing results. Each tree is different and should be carefully observed.

There are also aesthetic “rules,” such as the rule of three: the first branch should go left, the second right and the third to the back. These guidelines are designed to enhance beauty through form, balance and shape.

“I don’t really follow all those rules because I want a natural looking tree,” Layton said.

“Lake living and Lake Hartwell are about living the slow life,” Layton said. “Bonsai is a way to enjoy nature and slow down.”

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# COMMUNITY

EVENTS

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## ELBERT COUNTY

**July 4-6**, 4th of July weekend at Bobby Brown Park, hosted by Friends of Bobby Brown Park. Details: bobbybrownpark.com.

**July 19**, 6-9 p.m., 27th Annual Cruise-In and Classic Car Show, followed by Granite Bowl Blast fireworks over downtown. Details: cbeeb@cityofelberton.net.

**Aug 1**, 7-10 p.m., First Friday Concert Series on the downtown square in front of the fountain. Live music will be performed. The event is patriotic themed with prizes awarded for most theme-spirited attendee. Details: cbeeb@cityofelberton.net.

**Aug. 29-Sept. 1**, Labor Day Weekend at Bobby Brown Park, hosted by Friends of Bobby Brown Park. Details: bobbybrownpark.com.

**Oct. 16-26**, Elberton 12 County Fair, weekdays 5-11 p.m.; Saturdays noon-11 p.m., Sundays, 2-11 p.m. Details: elbertonfair.com.

**Oct. 24-26**, Halloween weekend at Bobby Brown Park, hosted by Friends of Bobby Brown Park. Details: bobbybrownpark.com.

**Nov. 1**, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., 25th annual Granite City Fall Festival, Elberton. Features arts and crafts and great festival food. Details: cbeeb@cityofelberton.net.

## FRANKLIN COUNTY

**Each Saturday through July 12**, Summer Movie Series at Victoria Bryant State Park, Royston. Bring chairs and blankets to enjoy a movie under the stars, 8:30-11 p.m. Admission is \$1 to \$5; parking is \$5 or an annual park pass. Details: 706-245-6270.

**July 5**, Independence Day celebration at Victoria Bryant State Park. The day begins at 10 a.m. with a Fourth of July Bike Parade. From 10:30 until noon, field day family games will be held, then Movie Night in the Pool, beginning at 8:30 p.m. Space is limited for movie night. Details: 706-245-6270.

**July 9-11**, Junior Ranger Day Camp for ages 5-7 at Victoria Bryant State Park, Royston, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Bring a packed lunch and change of clothes for swimming. \$115 plus \$5 parking or annual park pass. Details: 706-245-6270.

**July 12**, Cardboard Boat Competition at Victoria Bryant State Park, 6-7 p.m. We'll build cardboard boats and send them down sliding rock. Meet at Shelter 4. Cost is \$10 plus \$5 parking or annual park pass.

**July 17, Aug. 21, Sept. 18**, Artisan Walk in downtown Royston, 5-7 p.m. Shopping, live music, local arts and crafts.

**July 18 and Aug. 15**, Music on Main and Food Truck Friday,



These young dancers enjoy an evening of music at an Ida Cox performance. Each Saturday in June, July and August, Main Street Toccoa's Ida Cox Music Series will be held on Doyle Street, Toccoa, beginning at 6 p.m. **FILE PHOTO**

celebrating the 1990s on July 26 and the 1960s on Aug. 16, in Lavonia.

**July 23-25**, Junior Ranger Camp for ages 8-11 at Victoria Bryant State Park, Royston, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Bring a packed lunch and change of clothes for swimming. \$115 plus \$5 parking or annual park pass. Details: 706-245-6270.

**Aug. 15**, Hippiie Fest in Lavonia, 5-9 p.m. Get groovy in downtown Lavonia with live music, costume showdown, tie-dye and craft zone and more. Details: lavoniadowntown.com/events.

**Sept. 27**, Lavonia Fall Festival, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., downtown Lavonia. Details: lavoniadowntown.com/events.

**Sept. 27**, Your State Parks Day at Victoria Bryant State Park,

Royston. Volunteer with staff and Friends of Victoria Bryant to beautify the park. Meet at Picnic Shelter No. 4. Parking is \$5 or an annual park pass. Details: 706-245-6270.

**Oct. 4**, Fall Car Show, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at Victoria Bryant State Park. Details: 706-245-6270.

**Oct. 11**, A leaf change hayride at Victoria Bryant State Park, Royston. Meet at the park office and enjoy a relaxing ride around the park to see amazing fall colors. Cost is \$5 plus \$5 parking or annual park pass. Details: 706-245-6270.

**Oct. 24 and Oct. 31**, A Haunted Evening at Victoria Bryant, 7-9 p.m. Enjoy a hayride, haunted trail, campsite decorating contest, costume contest, trick or treating, a Halloween movie,

a campfire, and concessions. Details: 706-245-6270.

**Oct. 31**, from 3-6 p.m., Trick or Treating at the Gazebool, downtown Lavonia.

## HALL COUNTY

**First Friday of each month**, First Friday concerts on the Gainesville Square. July 4 features Fly Betty and includes special fireworks; Aug. 1 features country artist Mary Kate Farmer; and Sept. 5 is classic country with the Gregg Erwin Band. Pre-show begins at 4 p.m., main stage concert begins at 7 p.m.

**June 27**, Fish of Georgia Campfire Program, 6:30-7:30 p.m. at Don Carter State Park, Gainesville. Details: 678-450-7726.

**June 27**, Nocturnal

Night Hike, 8:30-9:30 p.m. at Don Carter State Park, Gainesville. Details or to preregister call 678-450-7726.

**June 28**, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Leather Making Workshop with Tom Slavicek, Quinlan Visual Arts Center, 514 Green Street NE, Gainesville. Details: quinlanartscenter.org/leather-working-workshops.html.

**June 28, July 12, Aug. 2**, Become a Campfire Chef, 6-7 p.m. at Don Carter State Park, Gainesville. Details: 678-450-7726.

**July 4**, Sand Castle Competition, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. at Don Carter State Park, Gainesville. Teams of 6 or fewer will have 45 minutes to build sand castles to be judged on creativity, neatness, details, stability and height. Details: explore.gastateparks.org/info/314264.

**July 5-6**, Beach Bash Tournament, 11 a.m. at Don Carter State Park, Gainesville. Features classic field day games. Details: 678-450-7726.

**July 9 and July 23**, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Junior Ranger Camp: Camp Sandy Shores for kids ages 7-11, Don Carter State Park. Features three days of activities such as hiking, crafts, archery, kayaking and more. Space is limited so call 678-450-7726 to register. Cost is \$85 plus \$5 parking or annual park pass.

**July 12**, Who Was Sidney Lanier? 11 a.m.-noon at Don Carter State Park,

Gainesville. Hike on the Huckleberry Trail and learn about the man Lake Lanier was named for. Details: 678-450-7726.

**Sept. 6**, Atlanta Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival at Lake Lanier Olympic Park, Gainesville. Details: dragonboatatlanta.com.

## HART COUNTY

**June 28**, Pre-4th Extravaganza, downtown Hartwell, features Arts and Crafts Festival, 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m., with fireworks show in the evening. Gates open 4 p.m., with fireworks at dusk. Admission, \$5 per vehicle at gate. Details: hart-chamber.org.

**July 5**, 4th Annual Historic Hartwell 5K, Hart County High School. Registration at 7 a.m., race at 8 a.m., awards at 9 a.m. Details: runsignup.com.

**Aug. 2-3**, Hartwell Golf Club Men's Club Championship. Details: 706-376-8161.

**Aug. 16**, Northeast Georgia Ag Expo, Hart County Charter System Agriscience Center, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Admission is free. Includes indoor and outdoor ag exhibits, a speaker panel, free activities for kids, food and an antique tractor show. New this year is a pedal tractor race for children ages 5-10. Details: hart-chamber.org.

**Oct. 1-31**, Scarecrows on the Square, downtown Hartwell. See and vote on your favorite scarecrow from local businesses around downtown Hartwell. Details: hartwellmainstreet.com.

**Oct. 18**, 18th Annual Depot Day and HartOberFest, Depot and Carolina streets, 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Details: pilotclubhartwell@gmail.com.



Runners wearing patriotic red, white and blue put their best foot forward at the beginning of a previous Rabun Ramble. This year's Rabun Ramble 5K or 10K will be held July 5, beginning at 7:30 a.m. PHOTO/ ENOCH AUTRY

gmail.com.

**Oct. 31**, Mayor's Monster Mash, Railroad Street Park, 4 p.m.-6 p.m. Music, trick or treating, games and prizes. Admission is free. Details: hart-chamber.org.

## RABUN COUNTY

**Each Saturday through October**, Saturday Night Bluegrass Jam in "downtown" Tallulah Falls at Bluegrass Square. Bring lawn chairs to watch and instruments and enjoy this Appalachian celebration of music and community. There is a bonfire, so feel free to bring a picnic dinner and s'more fixings. The music starts at approximately 6 p.m. and ends around 9 p.m. with "Amazing Grace."

**Sept. 8**, 15 and 22; Oct. 2 and 9; Nov. 2, 9 and 16: Aesthetic water releases at Tallulah Gorge State Park. Hike the rim trails to see 200 cubic feet per second water flowing through the gorge.

**Each Saturday**, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., May

through October, Community Market of Rabun County, featuring arts, crafts, baked goods, locally grown/made products. Details: georgiagrown.com/member/community-market-of-rabun-county.

**Each month**, Full Moon Hikes at Tallulah Gorge State Park. July 10 (9:25 p.m.), Aug. 9 (9:15 p.m.), Sept. 7 (8:15 p.m.), Oct. 5 (6:30 p.m.). Hike to the suspension bridge and watch the moon rise over the gorge. Meet at the Jane Hurt Interpretive Center. Must register in advance. Event is \$10 plus \$5 parking or annual park pass. Details and sign up: 706-754-7981. Details: explore.gastateparks.org.

**Each month**, beginner archery at Tallulah Gorge State Park, 9:10-30 a.m. on July 19 and Aug. 16; 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. on Sept. 20; and 9:10-30 a.m. on Oct. 18. Try archery for the first time or brush up on your skills. All ages welcome, but must be strong enough to pull a 20-pound bow. Event is \$10 plus \$5 parking or annual parking pass. Details: 706-754-

7981.

**Throughout spring and summer**, a variety of events are held at the Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center, 98 Foxfire Lane, Mountain City. Events include classes on plant identification, dyeing fiber, spinning yarn, needle felting, leatherworking and more. For a complete list of classes, visit foxfire.org/events/list.

**June 27**, two animal events at Black Rock Mountain State Park, Mountain City. From 10:30 a.m. until noon, explore the creek and look for critters. Meet the Black Rock Lake trailhead, bring water and wear close-toed shoes. Drop-in event from 6-7 p.m. Meet Park Naturalist Lou and learn about animals. Come to the Trading Post. Morning event is \$5 plus \$5 parking fee.

**June 27**, Ranger-led hike at Tallulah Gorge State Park, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Technical, challenging, rugged hike, including more than 700 stairs, river crossings and rock-hopping. Must RSVP. Cost is \$20 plus \$5 parking or annual park pass. Details or to RSVP, 706-754-7981.

**June 28**, a "Bear"ly Tri-Athlon will be from 9-10 a.m. at Tallulah Gorge State Park. This is a family event on the Shortline/McKay Trail where you will bike/ big wheel/ scooter, walk/ jog/ run, and wade across the Tallulah River at a shallow spot. The event is a loop and ends back where you start. Don't forget your helmets and towels. Every family goes home with a prize. Pre-registration required. \$15 per a family \$5 parking. Details: 706-754-7981.

**June 29**, a Flower-Works DIY Seed Cannon will be from 10-11 a.m. at Tallulah Gorge State Park. Who needs fireworks when you can shoot flower works? Try this eco-friendly seed-cannon DIY with us. The best part is, the pretty colors won't just fade, you'll get to see the flowers you grow, year after year! A \$5 park pass or annual park pass required. Details: 706-754-7981.

**July 4**, Independence Day Celebration at Black Rock Mountain State Park in Mountain City. From 10-11 a.m., enjoy an Independence Day Walk around the

lake and learn about native plants. Meet at the lake trailhead. Then from 2-4 p.m. at the Mellinger Center, enjoy star-spangled crafts and fun facts about bald eagles. A \$5 park pass or an annual pass for each vehicle is required.

**July 5**, the Sky Valley Property Owners Pancake Breakfast at the Sky Valley Country Club Pavilion from 8-10 a.m. The Sky Valley celebration begins at 10 a.m. and will go throughout the day with a parade, food trucks and fireworks to conclude the day.

**July 5**, Independence Day celebration at Black Rock Mountain State Park, Mountain City. Features line dancing, fun July 4th themed snacks and crafts, with time to get to fireworks in town afterward. \$5 parking or annual park pass. Details: 706-746-2141.

**July 5**, 39th annual Lake Burton Fun Run & Fireworks. Register for the 2-mile event at lakeburtonfunrun.com. Run begins at 9 a.m. at LaPrade's Marina at Moccasin Creek State Park. Shuttles begin at 7:45 a.m. The entry fee is \$35. Fireworks at approximately 9:30 p.m. Details: lakeburtonfunrun@gmail.com.

**July 5**, Rabun Ramble Road Race, 5K and 10K races begin at 7:30 a.m. at the Lake Rabun Pavilion. Registration at Active.com and costs \$35 until June 23; then \$45 from June 24 until July 5; and \$50 on race day. Details: rabunramble.com.

**July 6**, Independence Day Fireworks Show, 9:30 p.m., South End of Billy Goat Island, Lake Burton. View fireworks by boat or from a boathouse. Community-sponsored event; suggested donation of \$100 per family. Details:

lakeburtonfireworks.com.

**July 6,** Lake Burton Ski Patrol Salute to America, begins 11 a.m. as eight skiers will ski with American flags. The Patriots begin and end the show in Magness Cove by Billy Goat Island. The route starts at 11:30 a.m.

**July 11,** Foxfire Fridays at the campground at Black Rock Mountain State Park, from 6-8 p.m. Each event features something fun and crafty that families will enjoy!

**July 12 and Aug. 9,** meet Black Rock Mountain State Park's naturalist, Lou, at the Foxfire Museum from 10 a.m. to noon for Black Rock Saturdays! Make fun crafts out of recycled materials. This event is free with paid admission to the Foxfire Museum. The Foxfire Museum is located at 98 Foxfire Lane in Mountain City. The phone number is 706-746-5828.

**July 28-30,** Jr. Ranger Camp at Tallulah Gorge State Park for ages 8-12, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Bring water and lunch; snacks will be provided. Dress for going outside. Cost is \$30 plus \$5 parking or annual park pass. Details: 706-754-7981.

**Oct. 31,** decorate your vehicle for Halloween and hand out candy to Boys and Ghouls as they walk from car to car at Tallulah Gorge State Park, 5:30-7 p.m. There will be hayrides and other activities. Prizes will be awarded to best costumes, best pet costume and best vehicle decoration. Event is free with \$5 parking, but if you decorate your vehicle and hand out candy, the parking fee will be waived. Details: 706-754-7981.

## STEPHENS COUNTY

**Each Saturday in June,** July and August, Main Street Toccoa's Ida Cox Music Series will be held on Doyle Street in downtown Toccoa beginning at 6 p.m. The free concert series will feature a variety of musical genres including, jazz, blues, bluegrass and rock and roll.

**Oct. 2-5,** Currahee Military Weekend honors those who have given their lives to fight for the freedom of the country. During WWII, the site served as a paratrooper training camp, with more than 17,000 paratroopers trained. The weekend includes reenactments and demonstrations, a parade and a USO-style dance. Details: [toccoagachamber.com/curraheemilitary-weekend](http://toccoagachamber.com/curraheemilitary-weekend).

**Oct. 24-25,** 48th annual Toccoa Harvest Festival, features more

than 150 craft and food vendors, with an emphasis on home-made, homegrown, or home baked goods. Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. on Saturday and 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday.

## TOWNS COUNTY

**Each Saturday in summer beginning May 24,** Concerts on the Hiawassee Square, 6:30-8 p.m. Features a variety of artists. Pets on a leash are welcome. Bring a folding chair. Hot dogs will be sold. Free admission.

**Aug. 15-23,** Georgia Mountain Fair at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Hiawassee. Features food, crafts, beauty pageant, demonstrations, music and rides on the midway. Details: [georgiamountainfairgrounds.com](http://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com).

**Aug. 28-Oct. 9,** Thursday evenings, Acoustic Sunsets concert series at Hamilton Gardens at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Hiawassee, held 6:30-9 p.m. The evening features a food court, wine and beer garden and original live music. Free admission.

## UNION COUNTY

**Each Friday through the end of October,** free concerts at the Old Union County Courthouse, Blairsville. Doors open at 6 p.m.; music begins at 7 p.m. Variety of regional musicians are featured.

**Saturdays (8 a.m.-1 p.m.) and Tuesdays (9 a.m.-1 p.m.),** June-October, Union County Farmers Market. Features produce and handmade, local goods. Held at 290 Farmers Market Way, Blairsville. Free admission. Details: [unioncountygga.gov/farmers-market](http://unioncountygga.gov/farmers-market).

**July 4,** Red, White & Blairsville Fourth of July Celebration and Fireworks, 7:30-10 p.m. The skies over Meeks Park will light up with fireworks at dusk.

**July 5,** Boat Parade at Nottely Marina. Anyone with a boat is welcome to line up at 10:30 a.m. Parade begins at noon. No charge and boats can be decorated in any theme. Viewers can see the parade around the marina.

**July 19-20,** 26th annual Butternut Creek Arts Festival in Meeks Park, Blairsville, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday. This juried show features a wide variety of arts and crafts, plus demonstrations, entertainment and food. Details: [butternutcreekfestival.com](http://butternutcreekfestival.com).



This red Ferrari 250 TR is one of hundreds on display at the nonprofit Miles Through Time Automotive Museum in Clarkesville. The displays from around the country are either donated to the museum or are privately owned by people in the community showcasing their automobiles and memorabilia for everyone to enjoy. PHOTO COURTESY OF SEAN MATHIS/ MILES THROUGH TIME AUTOMOTIVE MUSEUM



Josh McCannon, colonel for Pharoahs Car Club of Clayton GA, left, and Cody Whitmire, general for Pharoahs Car Club of Clayton GA stand beside Whitmire's 1968 Chrysler Newport at the Pharoahs Drive-In Movie Car Show 2025, held June 7 at the Tiger Drive-In. PHOTO/MEGAN HORN



Cody Whitmire owns this 1968 Chrysler Newport, two door hardtop 383 four barrel and Tom Madison owns this 1957 Corvette. Both cruised-in to the Tiger Drive-In for the car show on June 7. PHOTO COURTESY OF CODY WHITMIRE

# History under the hood

## CAR SHOWS MATCH ENTHUSIASTS WITH PASSION AND EDUCATION

**BY MEGAN HORN**

Northeast Georgia is no stranger to car shows, as enthusiasts regularly travel to the area to show off their classic vehicles and connect with others who share a passion for unique rides.

The antique and classic vehicles draw crowds, but it's the stories behind the cars and the shared love of community that keep people coming back.

"The love of car clubs grew when I was young," said Cody Whitmire, general for the Pharoahs Car Club of Clayton GA.

Pharoahs Car Club is an internation-

al organization with a local chapter in Clayton that covers the Northeast Georgia area.

Whitmire said he has fond memories of going to car shows with his father, Mitch, and watching him work on cars throughout his life.

"I love going to them because it's always a good fellowship," Whitmire said. "It's always a good time."

Whitmire often showcases his 1968 Chrysler Newport in shows. He said his favorite part is hearing the stories and history behind the vehicles from fellow

owners.

That same interest in automotive stories inspired Sean Mathis, founder of the nonprofit Miles Through Time Automotive Museum, located at 583 Grant Street in Clarkesville. The museum is “where the pedal meets the past,” showcasing more than 100 years of automotive history.

Displays come from across the country, either donated or privately owned by members of the community who want to share their automobiles and memorabilia with others.

“I enjoy the stories of the cars,” Mathis said.

He said the museum’s focus is on preserving and sharing automotive history while creating a space for car lovers to connect.

Each car is “the only one with that story,” he said, making it completely unique. His passion began when he inherited a 1959 Cadillac Coupe De Ville from his grandfather — a vehicle still on display at the museum.

“I felt so privileged to own it,” Mathis said. “I wanted to create something that will outlast me.”

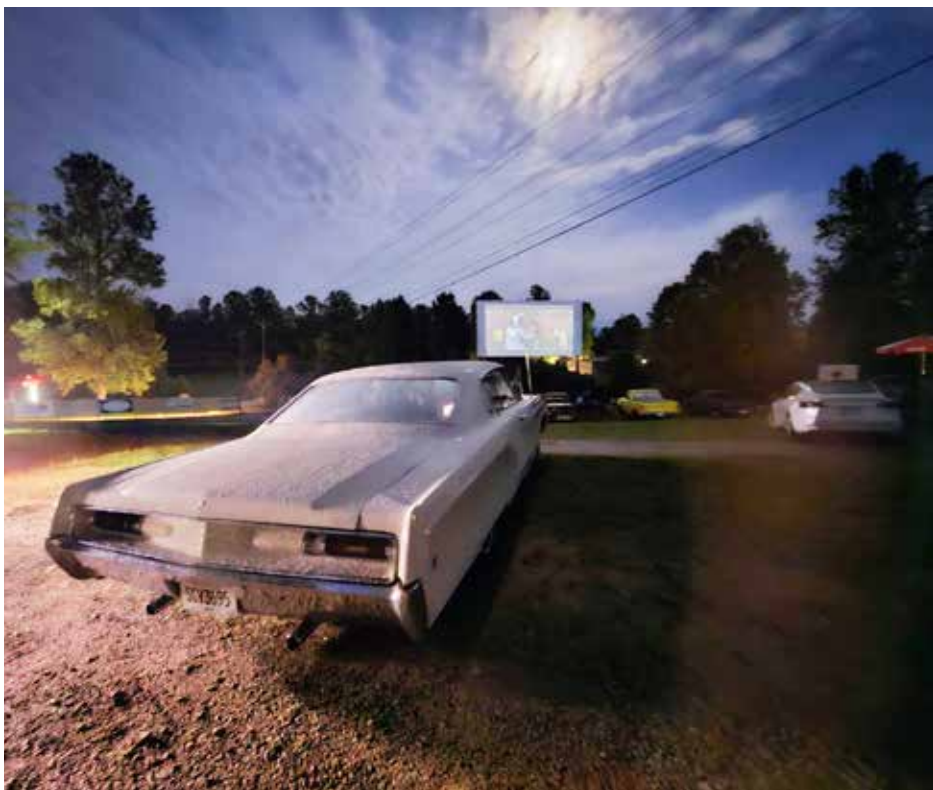
Mathis said the museum appeals to car enthusiasts and history lovers alike, as each make and model reflects the design trends and culture of its era.

## CAR SHOWS FOR A CAUSE

Miles Through Time Automotive Museum, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, hosts an annual car show to raise funds for the museum.

The ninth annual Miles Through Time Car Show will be held Saturday, June 28, 2025, from 9 a.m. to noon, rain or shine, at 583 Grant Street in Clarkesville. The museum will remain open until 5 p.m.

“This is a family fun event for automotive enthusiasts to have a good time,” according to event materials. The show is open to all years, makes and models,



This 1968 Chrysler Newport cruised-in to the Tiger Drive-In for the June 7 car show. Cody Whitmire owns the car and stayed to watch the showing of American Graffiti that evening. PHOTO COURTESY OF CODY WHITMIRE



Phil and Peggy Detore display their 1969 Camaro with a 454 motor and 5-speed transmission during Pharoahs Drive-In Movie Car Show 2025, held June 7 at the Tiger-Drive In. PHOTO/MEGAN HORN

including motorcycles.

Spectator entry is free. Vehicle registration is \$25 and includes museum admission for one and a custom-designed T-shirt.

The event will feature food vendors, music and more.

“We focus on the one main annual car show,” Mathis said, adding that the museum also supports outside groups by allowing them to host events on site.

One such event is the Pharoahs’ Ride Fest Car Show, scheduled for Saturday, Aug. 2, 2025, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Proceeds will benefit the museum and autism awareness.

Whitmire said the Pharoahs Car Club of Clayton GA hosts car shows not only for enthusiasts, but also to support people in need throughout the community.

“If we can’t help people in this world, we don’t need to be in it,” he said.

Each event usually benefits a specific person or cause. The shows also promote a family-friendly environment.

“That’s number one. Giving glory to Jesus,” Whitmire said.

In June 2023, Whitmire helped organize the



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first “Rumble in Rabun” car and bike show in Rabun County.

In March 2025, Pharoahs Car Club of Clayton GA held another Rumble in Rabun show to benefit Rabun County local and U.S. Marine veteran James Andrew Yeary, who was injured during Hurricane Helene.

“We just enjoy helping people,” said E.J. Wall, the club’s sergeant at arms.

Josh McCannon, a colonel for the club, said giving back is a top priority.

“I feel club members ought to help each other out,” said Calvin Whitmire.

While members love classic cars, they’re equally passionate about the community they serve.

“We love to band together to make this happen. It’s a family,” Cody Whitmire said.

On June 7, the club hosted the Pharoahs Drive-In Movie Car Show 2025 at the Tiger Drive-In. The evening included live music and a showing of American Graffiti, which features the parent organization, Pharoahs Car Club.

“The best thing you can do is dust your ride off, pull in and have a good time,” Whitmire said. “You’ll love the experience.”



Sean Mathis, founder of Miles Through Time Automotive Museum, inherited this 1959 Cadillac Coupe De Ville from his grandfather. The vehicle inspired the opening of the nonprofit museum, located at 583 Grant Street, Clarkesville, and is on display. PHOTO COURTESY OF SEAN MATHIS/MILES THROUGH TIME AUTOMOTIVE MUSEUM

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This 1972 Plymouth Cuda owned by Jake McCrackin was featured in Pharoahs Drive-In Movie Car Show 2025, held June 7 at the Tiger-Drive In. PHOTO/MEGAN HORN



Pharoahs Car Club of Clayton GA recently held the “Pharoahs Drive-In Movie Car Show 2025” at the Tiger Drive-In in Rabun County June 7. That evening included live music and a showing of the movie American Graffiti, which features the parent-organization Pharoahs Car Club. PHOTO/CONNER HORN



Pharoahs Car Club of Clayton GA hosts many car shows to benefit local individuals and causes. The inaugural “Rumble in Rabun” was held in June 2023. The Pharoahs’ Ride Fest Car Show will be held at the 583 Grant Street, Clarkesville, on Saturday, Aug. 2, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. PHOTO/MEGAN HORN

## UPCOMING CAR SHOWS

There are many other car shows in the area this summer for families to enjoy:

**Cruise-In with Purpose:** Hosted by Purpose Church, this show takes place at Pitts Park in Clarkesville on the second Friday of each month from 5 to 7:30 p.m.

**Hope, Healing & Horsepower Fall Car Show and Vendor Market:** Scheduled for Saturday, Sept. 27, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 583 Grant Street, Clarkesville. Proceeds benefit burn survivors and their families through the Georgia Firefighters Burn Foundation.

**The Half Dead Car Show Festival:** Presented by the Paranormal Society of Northeast Georgia and Beyond, this show takes place Saturday, Oct. 4, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 583 Grant Street, Clarkesville. Sponsored by Miles Through Time Automotive Museum.

Whether you’re a car owner or just a fan, the Northeast Georgia mountains offer a full calendar of shows. These events build camaraderie, support great causes, and preserve the unique history of the automobile for future generations.

For more information about Pharoahs Car Club of Clayton GA, visit their Facebook page. To learn more about Miles Through Time Automotive Museum, go to [milesthroughtime.com](http://milesthroughtime.com).

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The megaramp at Tugaloo State Park draws fishing tournaments in the early part of the year and has also served as a regular stop on the Pro Watercross Tour. **FILE PHOTO**

# *Hidden retreat*

FROM YURTS TO FISHING  
TOURNAMENTS, TUGALOO STATE PARK  
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## **BY SHANE SCOGGINS**

The only state park on the Georgia side of Lake Hartwell draws about 500,000 visitors a year.

That number of visitors makes Tugaloo State Park, located in the Gumlog area near Lavonia, one of Georgia's busiest.

"Even though we don't have a whole lot of acres — we're only 393 acres in size — it's just because of all the facilities and infrastructure that we have with the beach," Park Manager Josh Purdy said. "We have 20

cottages, six yurts and about 120 campsites."

Tugaloo also offers a megaramp that is popular with boaters and fishermen, and it hosts numerous fishing tournaments and other events throughout the year.

Tugaloo's acreage is on a peninsula that extends into Lake Hartwell and offers a host of activities.

The beach area — complete with sand and periodic sandcastle competitions — is a big draw in the summer, Purdy said.

"This is the season for the kids to be out of school and

The beach area at Tugaloo State Park draws a host of visitors each summer for an opportunity to swim in Lake Hartwell and sunbathe. **FILE PHOTO**



The 393-acre Tugaloo State Park is located on a peninsula on Lake Hartwell in the Gumlog community near Lavonia. **FILE PHOTO**

enjoy the sunshine right now,” he said.

In the late winter and spring, the megaramp draws a variety of fishing tournaments — both bass and crappie. The megaramp has also become a regular stop on the Pro Watercross Tour, which features personal watercraft racing described as NASCAR on water.

“That’s always a unique attraction, you know, because you don’t see that kind of stuff a whole lot,” Purdy said.

In addition to the beach and megaramp, two trails — the Sassafras and Muscadine trails — crisscross the property, offering opportunities for exercise and nature viewing.

The Sassafras Trail encircles the park and is about four miles long, while the Muscadine Trail is more of a nature hike at three-quarters of a mile.

The trails offer opportunities to spot the park’s deer population or see and hear pileated woodpeckers.

“If you’re just visiting here and you want to kind of get a good bird’s-eye view of what



Camping is just one of the options for visitors to stay at Tugaloo State Park. **FILE PHOTO**

this park’s about ... walk the Sassafras Trail,” Purdy said. “You’ll go through the campground area at one point or another. You’ll see where the cottages are, go through where the beach area is, and you’ll really kind of get a good feel for it.”

The park also offers a horse-

shoe pit, tennis court and volleyball court, as well as a miniature golf course currently under renovation.

Lodging at the park is often booked a year or more in advance, Purdy said.

The park’s six yurt sites are especially popular, he said.

## TUGALOO STATE PARK AT A GLANCE

**Location:** Gumlog area near Lavonia, Georgia, on Lake Hartwell

**Size:** 393 acres

**Annual Visitors:** Approx. 500,000

### Lodging options

**Cottages:** 20 total, 10 newly rebuilt and 10 reopening soon

**Yurts:** 6 (reservable up to 14 months in advance for Georgia residents)

**Campgrounds:** 105 sites for tents/RVs/trailers, 11 walk-in campsites, 1 pioneer campground

### Activities and amenities

- Sandy beach and swimming area
- Megaramp for boating & fishing tournaments
- Two nature trails: Sassafras Trail (4 miles) and Muscadine Trail (0.75 mile)
- Horseshoe pit, tennis court, volleyball court
- Mini golf (under renovation)
- Junior Ranger Camp, movie nights, seasonal classes (archery, fishing, kayaking)

### Contact and info

**Website:** [gastateparks.org/Tugaloo](http://gastateparks.org/Tugaloo)

**Phone:** 706-356-4362

**Facebook:** Search "Tugaloo State Park"

"Everybody loves our yurts. I mean, it's hard to find a yurt available on the weekend unless you're really booking out close to, like, the 12- to 13-month mark. And you can make a reservation up to 14 months in advance if you're a Georgia resident and 13 months in advance if you're an out-of-state resident," Purdy said.

Yurts are popular among those who enjoy "glamping," or glamorous camping.



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“Made of wood and canvas, yurts feature a private deck, picnic table, grill/fire ring and water spigot outside. Inside you will find furniture, electrical outlets, windows and locking doors,” according to the Georgia State Parks website.

Tugaloo is one of only seven state parks in Georgia that offer yurts.

The park also offers 105 campsites for tents, trailers and RVs, 11 walk-in campsites, and one pioneer campground.

The park’s 20 cottages are another major attraction and are practically brand-new after recent construction.

“We have 20 cottages, and 10 of them just got completely rebuilt about a year and a half, two years ago,” Purdy said. “And we have our other 10 that have been in the reconstruction phase for about a year and a half now. And we will be reopening those at the beginning of [July].”

The cottages are essentially small rental homes with views of the lake.

Tugaloo’s staff also organizes a variety of recreational programs and special events.

The summer calendar features movie nights, Junior Ranger Camp, hikes with rangers, crafts and programs at the park’s Nature Hut, which includes a taxidermy collection.

Classes are also offered in archery, kayaking and fishing.

Trick-or-treating is a major attraction in the fall, and July Fourth festivities include a golf cart parade and other activities.

“We’ll have more exciting programs all summer, so we encourage people to check out our Facebook page, go to our park website at [gastateparks.org](http://gastateparks.org), check out the events that we have posted, and come out and see us,” Purdy said.

The park has a large staff to help manage events and maintain the grounds.



Lake Hartwell draws boaters year round. Tugaloo State Park offers a megaramp and other boat ramps for enthusiasts to use to access the lake. **FILE PHOTO**



Tugaloo State Park offers 20 cottages where visitors can enjoy the luxury of a small home with views of the lake and access to the park’s activities. **PHOTO/SHANE SCOGGINS**



“We do have a pretty flushed-out staff,” Purdy said. “We need a pretty large staff to keep up with all the cottages. So, total, we have generally, in the season, between about 20 to 25 staff members. ... Most of them are part-time, but full-time staff include myself, my assistant manager, Celeste, who’s our administrative support. We have two full-time maintenance employees. One’s called a senior ranger and one’s called a full-time mechanic. And

we have a lead housekeeper.”

The park also employs a part-time naturalist and two night rangers.

“It’s a big operation,” Purdy said. “I think a lot of people come here and enjoy themselves. And they think that as long as we mow the grass, everything will run smooth. There’s a lot behind the scenes.”

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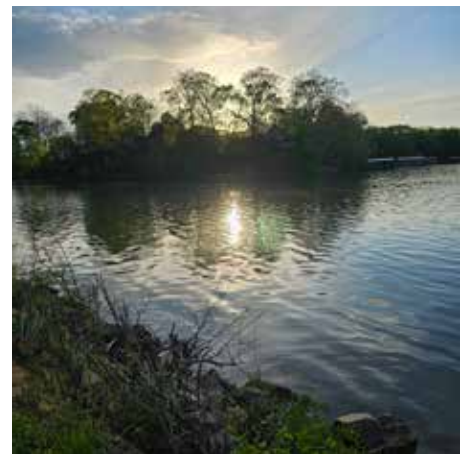
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