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Official Newsletter

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## 2017 Cullman Area Tourism Awards approaching

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center's 2017 Tourism Awards are set for May 23 at 10 a.m.

In conjunction with the celebration of the Alabama Bicentennial, this year's theme is "Cullman Places," highlighting the area's attractions and businesses that help make Cullman a tourism destination. The program will include brunch and the announcement of the winners of the categories listed below. The event will take place at the Brown Stone Centre at Stone Bridge Farms located at 281 Co. Rd. 717 in Cullman.

Here are the categories:

### The Business Awards



These awards recognize businesses and events that differentiate themselves by providing exceptional ser-

vice, anticipating customers' needs and consistently exceeding visitors' expectations.

**Exceptional Festival or Event Award** recognizes a festival or event that attracts visitors as well as locals, generates regional and/or state media attention and positively promotes the Cullman area.

**Best Attraction Award** recognizes a regional attraction (including museums, performing arts, parks, amusement parks, etc.) which attracts visitors and contributes to an outstanding tourism experience.

**Near Nature. Near Perfect Award** Recognizes a business, organization,

SEE **TOURISM**, P3

## Chick-fil-A State of Our Communities goes off without hitch

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce's Governmental Affairs Committee recently presented the inaugural Chick-fil-A State of Our Communities at the Cullman Civic Center – and it was a great day for the entire area! Major session topics included the State of Education, sponsored by Wallace State Community College; State of Healthcare, sponsored by Katherine Morgan – State Farm Insurance & Financial Services; State of Local Government, sponsored by Willow Bend

SEE **COMMUNITIES**, P4



**The Student of the Year and Career Technical Student of the Year nominees gather for a group photo with Cullman City and County Schools Superintendents Dr. Susan Patterson, far left, and Shane Barnette, far right. See the accompanying story for a complete list of nominees.**



# Year 2 in Tourism beginning with a bang

It's been a year! Wow, time really does fly when you're having fun. May 31st officially marked my one-year anniversary with the Cullman Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center, and I have been busy. First off, thank you to everyone in the community who has welcomed me and my family. It has been a blessing meeting many of you, and you have been of great assistance over this past year. Second, thank you to Chamber President and CEO Leah Bolin. A year ago, you gave me a great opportunity to visit CULLMAN, and after that day, I told my wife we're making this place our new home. Last but not least, thank you to the Chamber staff. I love coming into work every day because I know my colleagues are giving their all, which in turn

makes me do the same. Every day is a new day is what I say. With that being said, let's get down to business. This first part of the year has been very eventful for Tourism. On March 1st, I welcomed in a new Tourism board. This is a great group of folks who are Tourism-minded in their own capacities. With their help and assistance, you can expect to see growth in our area from travelers. My first order for the new year was to attend the Travel South Showcase held in Branson, Missouri. This showcase primarily focuses on motor coach groups and journalists. While in Branson, I was able to meet with my peers from across our great state and piggy back off ideas that I think might help us out. Among my appointments, I was happy to meet with 28

bus groups. Of those 28 groups, 10 have been to Alabama. And of those 10, only four have been through Cullman. This gave me a great opportunity to inform these groups of what Cullman is doing and how visiting or stopping in our area will enhance their tours. I had great dialogue with these bus tours to learn what they're looking for and better ways to service them once in the area. I truly believe our exceptional agritourism offerings will make great impressions on these groups, so I focused a lot on our local agricultural heritage and really enticed them to experience Cullman in a different way. A lot of the groups want Farm to Fork-



Newsom

style dinners, and that is something we can offer. All in all, this showcase really allowed me to put Cullman County's information out in the hands of decision-makers who determine where to take their buses. With the follow-up, I am hoping to bring some of these owners/operators in some site visits and really let them fall in love with our community. In April, I was off again, this time to Sacramento, California, for the National Association of Sports Commissions Symposium. This Symposium is the annual meeting for Sports Tourism professionals. At this event, I met with more than 30 rights holders and governing bodies in the sports industry, selling Cullman County's plentiful amenities and facilities. There are many non-tradi-

tional sports looking for communities that will make their event the best it can be. We do a great job with archery as a non-traditional sport, and my emphasis was on bringing in even more. I hope to have a couple fishing tournaments in the upcoming year, as well as USA BMX, USA CYCLING, barrel racing and disc golf. It's been a fun beginning, and I am excited about Year 2 for Cullman. Now, it's back to work in May, with the Strawberry Festival and AHSAA Class 1A-3A state track meet already come and gone, and the 2017 Tourism Awards looming later in the month. The busier, the better – not just for me, but for Cullman.

**JESSE NEWSOM** is Director of the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center

## EPIC young professionals hit trails at Hurricane Creek Park



Emerging Professionals Impacting Cullman (EPIC), sponsored by Drinkard Development, Inc., enjoyed its first-ever hike Thursday, April 27 at the beautiful Hurricane Creek Park.

Young professionals able to hit the trails were, from left, Magan Bartlett, Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce; Stanley Kennedy, Cullman Economic Development Agency; Maria Singleton, First South Farm Credit; Ben Smith, Cullman Chamber; and Rob Ketcham, Cullman

Chamber. Make plans to join us after work on Thursday, May 18th, for an EPIC takeover at Grumpy's Italian Grill.

Keep an eye out on social media or call the Chamber at 256-734-0454 for more info.

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## TOURISM: Awards event May 23

**FROM PAGE 1**

community or outdoor recreation area that has developed a tourism product/service that best demonstrates the ecological, cultural or historical assets of the region.

**Spirit of Cullman Award** recognizes an outstanding tourism- or hospitality-related business or organization that provides excellent service, exemplifies innovation and causes our region to shine.

**Rockin' Retailer** recognizes a retailer that provides an outstanding shopping experience for visitors.

**Extraordinary Everyday Eatery** recognizes a restaurant offering an atmosphere that provides an outstanding experience for visitors.

### **The Individual Service Awards**

These awards recognize hospital-ity and frontline individuals who consistently deliver warm, friendly and helpful service, exceed visitors' expectations, anticipate customers' needs, and have received written or verbal feedback about their exceptional service from their colleagues, supervisors or their customers.

**The White Glove Award** recognizes exceptional service from an individual hotel housekeeping staff member.

**The Silver Spoon Award** recognizes consistent superior service by a restaurant or food service employee.

**Superior Service Award** recognizes excellent customer service by an individual who has first contact with the public. Front desk personnel, concierges and all other guest service employees qualify.

**Savvy Retail Sales Associate**  
recognizes excellent customer service  
from a retail sales associate who has  
first contact with the public.

**Heart of the House Award** honors an outstanding individual who works behind the scenes to keep their institution, organization or business operating smoothly, creating a superior experience for the public. Hospitality Volunteer of the Year Recognizes any

hospitality industry volunteer (i.e. entertainment venues, museums, and festival and event volunteers) who has made an outstanding contribution.

**Rising Star Award** recognizes an up-and-coming leader for their exceptional efforts to serve and enhance the experience of the public. Those who have been in the tourism industry for five years or less qualify.

**Tourism Professional of the Year Award** recognizes a person who has made a significant contribution to the tourism industry through more than five years of innovation, inspiration and industry leadership.

The Community Improvement Yearly Awards will also be presented as part of the event. These awards are given on a quarterly basis with one overall annual award winner in each category including: Best Landscaping (small), Best Landscaping (large), Best Curb Appeal, Best Restoration, Best New Construction and “Building a Sense of Community.” The Community Improvement Committee hopes to inspire others to act and preserve, and protect and promote community improvement in the Cullman area. Single tickets are \$20 for Chamber members and \$25 for future members. Table sponsorships start at \$200 and include reserved seating for eight in a prime location with table signage. The presenting sponsor for the event is The Community Shopper’s Guide. Corporate sponsors are The Cullman Times and Cullman County Parks & Recreation. The program sponsor is Johnny’s Bar-B-Q. Gold, silver and bronze table sponsorships are available for this event. If you would like to reserve your tickets to the 2017 Cullman Area Tourism and Community Improvement Awards, email [info@cullmanchamber.org](mailto:info@cullmanchamber.org) or call 256-734-0454. There are a limited number of seats available, and tickets are on a first-come, first-served basis.

# MAY MORNING BLEND

**C**ome join the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce the morning of Wednesday, May 17 for delicious coffee and great discussion at our Morning Blend, held every third Wednesday of each month from 8:00 to 9:00 a.m. at Rumors Deli in the Warehouse District.

The Chamber  
staff welcomes members and visitors to attend this free event.

May's topic is Parks and Recreation. Coffee will be provided by Presenting Sponsor Karma's Coffee House. May's sponsor is EvaBank.

For more information, contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454 or [info@cullmanchamber.org](mailto:info@cullmanchamber.org).





# COMMUNITIES: Health, government, education among topics of day-long session

**FROM PAGE 1**

Inaugural Chick-fil-A State of Our Communities goes off without hitch The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce's Governmental Affairs Committee recently presented the inaugural Chick-fil-A State of Our Communities at the Cullman Civic Center – and it was a great day for the entire area! Major session topics included the State of Education, sponsored by Wallace State Community College; State of Healthcare, sponsored by Katherine Morgan – State Farm Insurance & Financial Services; State of Local Government, sponsored by Willow Bend Mortgage; and State of Public Safety.

If you missed this year's event, you'll definitely want to make plans to attend in 2018.

A brief recap of the day is below, but the biggest takeaway was that here in the Cullman area, we are Converging for Success and that Together, We Can Accomplish Anything! We are so fortunate in the Cullman area to have such exceptional city and county school systems, as well as Wallace State Community College.

The State of Education speakers – Wallace State President Dr. Vicki Karolewics, Cullman City Schools Superintendent Dr. Susan Patterson and Cullman County Schools Superintendent Shane Barnette – each addressed the need to continue pressing forward, be on the cutting edge, and keep achievements high, industry involved and students engaged.

There are some innovative ways the three collaboratively utilize the community's resources already, including the Fast Track to Industry program for high school students, the fine and performing arts programs at Wallace State offered to county students, and industry apprenticeships. The highlight of this session came in recognizing Dawson Foust, of Holly Pond High School, as Student of the Year, and Miguel Perales, of Vinemont high School and the Cullman Area Technology Academy, as Career Technical Student of the Year. Both were then presented

scholarships from the Wallace State Future Foundation. Also recognized during the program were the Student of the Year nominees (Foust; Ann Carol Braswell, Cullman High; Joshua Conway, Hanceville High; Molly Gardner, Fairview High; Jesse Lee, Cold Springs High; Marco McDonald, Vinemont High; Paul Schartung, St. Bernard Prep; Jacob Smith, Good Hope High; and Bailee Yearwood, West Point High), the Career Technical Student of the Year nominees (Perales; Dylan Long, Vinemont High; and Allie Mooney, Hanceville High), the Cullman City Elementary Teacher of the Year (Erica Rutherford, Cullman Primary), the Cullman City Secondary Teacher of the Year (Elizabeth Pylant, Cullman High), the Cullman County Elementary Teacher of the Year (Jennifer Wright, Welti Elementary) and the Cullman County Secondary Teacher of the Year (Jena Mayo, Good Hope Middle).

State of Healthcare featured an informative panel discussion led by Cullman County Commission on Aging Health Promotion Coordinator Lorri Lee, Cullman Regional CEO James Clements and Mental Healthcare of Cullman Executive Director Chris Van Dyke, and emceed by Cullman Electric Cooperative's Brian Lacy.

Topics covered included the expansion of services needed in our area concerning both facilities and programs for mental health, as well as larger societal trends such as opioid addiction, Medicare and Medicaid.

The lunch meal was dedicated to the State of Local Government, where Cullman County Commission Chairman Kenneth Walker and Cullman City Mayor Woody Jacobs each provided updates about their respective areas.

Immediately following was the Meet Your Local Mayors symposium, allowing the public the chance to ask questions and interact with their municipalities' respective leaders.



From left, Mayors Jerry Bartlett (Good Hope), Kenneth Kilgo (West Point), Bill Oliver (Holly Pond) and Woody Jacobs (Cullman) talk shop during the Meet Your Local Mayors session. Other mayors in attendance but not pictured were Kenneth Nail (Hanceville) and Donnis Leeth (Colony).

From the new fire station in West Point to Hanceville's downtown revitalization and more, it was clear that each area of our county is thriving with opportunities to make Cullman the ultimate destination to live, work and play.

Thank you to all mayors who took time out of their busy schedules to attend –Donnis Leeth (Town of Colony), Jerry Bartlett (City of Good Hope), Kenneth Nail (City of Hanceville), Bill Oliver (Town of Holly Pond) and Kenneth Kilgo (Town of West Point).

Throughout the day, guests could complete a home energy audit, learn about volunteer opportunities, review the master plans for Cullman City Parks & Recreation's Connected Parks Project, and, of course, meet the Chick-fil-A cow!

Cullman Police Chief Kenny Culpepper, Cullman County Sheriff Matt Gentry, Hanceville Police Chief Bob Long and emcee Brian Lacy closed out the day by leading the panel discussion for State of Public Safety.

Topics covered included gun permits

and legislation, traffic conditions, social media, mental illness, state prison overcrowding, local crime statistics, and Culpepper's introduction of plans to help alleviate the before- and after-school traffic congestion issues currently hampering the city system. One topic all three panelists agreed on is that area residents are supportive of their officers and take pride and responsibility for their communities. Once separate events, the Chick-fil-A State of Our Communities now serves as a single-day experience meant to inform the public about a number of far-reaching issues and topics affecting their communities.

Each community influences the other in some way, and hopefully with clear communication, thoughtful planning and synergy created by working together, we can bring real and lasting solutions to our problems, as well as successful and innovative strategies for our future.

See you again at the Chick-fil-A State of Our Communities in 2018!



# Youth Leadership & Adult Leadership classes visit Montgomery

During April, both the Youth Leadership Cullman County, sponsored by R.E. Garrison Trucking, and Leadership Cullman County, sponsored by The Final Touch, classes traveled to Montgomery for State Government Day.

The groups visited with former Gov. Robert Bentley (pictured) and tour the State Capitol.

After learning about the history of the Capitol, the classes visited the First White House of the Confederacy. The class visited with local legislators Senator Paul Bussman and Representatives Corey Harbison and Randall Shedd for lunch. Representatives Harbison and Shedd gave updates regarding bills that were being discussed during the sessions. Senator Bussman followed with a similar report. Youth Leadership visited the Alabama Department of Archives and History, and Adult Leadership walked to the Alabama State House to watch the House of Representatives' and State Senate sessions, during which Representative Shedd and Senator Bussman took the floor to debate bills. Leadership class participant Magan Bartlett, the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce's director of Membership Services, got a lot out of the joint trip to Montgomery.

"Having the opportunity to see our State Delegation in action was a great experience that most do not get to have," she said. "I encourage everyone to pay attention to what is going on in Montgomery— it affects us all."

If you would like to contact Cullman's legislators: Sen. Paul Bussman – District 4: paul.bussman@alsenate.gov; Rep. Corey Harbison – District 12: corey.harbison@alhouse.gov; Rep. Randall Shedd – District 11: randallshedd.alhouse.gov; Rep. Ed Henry – District 9: ed.henry@alhouse.gov



Members of the Youth Leadership class, top, and Adult Leadership class, bottom, visited Montgomery in April for State Government Day.

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# Culpepper Real Estate named April Small Business of the Month

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce would like to congratulate Culpepper Real Estate as April's Small Business of the Month, sponsored by Cullman Auto Mall.

Culpepper Real Estate's Broker, Neal Culpepper, is the second generation of the Culpepper family to operate the business.

Neal's father opened the business in 1971, and it's been a staple of the Cullman community ever since. Neal's son Clay is currently an agent with the firm, marking the third generation to be involved in the future of the company. Each of the company's agents strive for a low-key approach to sustaining relationships with their clients by always being available, listening to client needs, making everyone feel welcome, and putting in the hard work to get the job done. When it comes to customer retention, each agent knows that the golden rule is essential to maintaining relationships. They've found that if you treat people the way you'd like to be treated, repeat business follows. Neal states their firm has another important job – welcoming newcomers, as Culpepper Real Estate agents are often the first faces



Culpepper Real Estate Broker Neal Culpepper receives the April Small Business of the Month Award from Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce Entrepreneurship & Education representative Ben Smith.



Supporter — Cullman Auto Mall

many relocators have of the Cullman area. We all know southern hospitality as a reality in Alabama, and Cullman Real Estate takes their job as ambassadors for Cullman seriously.

Culpepper Real Estate, Inc. 601 7th Avenue, SW Cullman, AL 35055 (256) 739-1389. If you have a local business you would like to nominate for their service, please contact Ben Smith at bsmith@

cullmanchamber.org. Monthly winners are nominated for the Small Business of the Year award, presented at the Chamber's Annual Meeting & Gala.

## May Small Business of the Month



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# Broadband development topic at the May 19 Community Luncheon

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce’s Community Luncheon programming is resuming in May with a topic that affects much of the Cullman area.

Join us on the third Friday of the month, May 19, as guest speaker Kathy Johnson delivers a presentation titled “Broadband: What, Who and Why?”

Johnson is the former director of the Alabama Office of Broadband Development under the Governor. She serves on the National Broadband Leaders Committee for the U.S. Department of Commerce and the National Broadband Steering Committee for Broadband USA, is a member of the U.S. Rural Telecommunications Congress and is a national ambassador for the Internet Innovation Alliance.

Per usual, the Luncheon will be held in the banquet room at the All Steak Restaurant from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Tickets are \$15 for Chamber Members and \$20 for future members. Call 256-734-0454 or email [info@cullmanchamber.org](mailto:info@cullmanchamber.org) to reserve your seat.

Thank you to our Presenting Sponsor Shirley Quattlebaum– State Farm and to May’s sponsor, Quick Tire Sales, Inc.



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# State of Our Communities



Wallace State Community College President Dr. Vicki Karolewics, right, presents Dawson Foust, left, of Holly Pond High School, with a scholarship from the Wallace State Future Foundation after Foust was named Student of the Year.



Jennifer Wright, right, of Welti Elementary School, receives the Cullman County Elementary Teacher of the Year award from Superintendent Shane Barnette.



Elizabeth Pylant, right, of Cullman High School, receives the Cullman City Secondary Teacher of the Year award from Superintendent Dr. Susan Patterson



Miguel Perales, center, of Vinemont High School and the Cullman Area Technology Academy, receives the Career Technical Student of the Year award from Cullman County Schools Superintendent Shane Barnette, left, and Wescoat Free, right, of Knight-Free Insurance, award sponsor.



Jena Mayo, right, of Good Hope Middle School, receives the Cullman County Secondary Teacher of the Year award from Superintendent Shane Barnette

Visit [www.cullmanchamber.org](http://www.cullmanchamber.org) to see more photos from the 2017 Chick-fil-A State of Our Communities



Erica Rutherford, right, of Cullman Primary School, receives the Cullman City Elementary Teacher of the Year award from Superintendent Dr. Susan Patterson

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