Christmas Sweater Party set to be more EPIC than ever!

It’s the most wonderful time of the year! Time to reach into the back of your closet — or ask your grandmother to borrow a lovely (or tacky) Christmas sweater. That’s right, it’s time to get festive for this year’s EPIC Christmas Sweater Party.

The EPIC Christmas Sweater Party is always a great event to come have fun and network with other young professionals in the Cullman area. Talking business and meeting new people is far less awkward while wearing a sweater with a reindeer on it!

If you’re a young professional in the Cullman area between the ages of 21-39, then this is the Christmas party for you. Same goes for anyone over that range, too, because this is the one EPIC event each year open to absolutely everyone. The more, the merrier!

This year’s EPIC Christmas Sweater Party is slated for 7:00 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 14 at All Steak Restaurant.

The event will feature live music from Trick Zipper, gobs of awesome giveaways, party games, food, drinks and ... Christmas sweaters, of course!

Party-goers will have the opportunity to play “Christmas Chimney Plinko” and “Peace, Love & Punch-A-Bunch” as many times as they like for $1 per game.

Both will pay out raffle tickets and increase your chance to win some seriously awesome prizes from a handful of gracious area businesses. Winners will also be crowned in a couple of fun categories — Best Overall and Tackiest — for the Christmas sweater contest. Proceeds from the raffle will go to EPIC Helps, the group’s new philanthropic program funded through Chamber for Charities.

Those who pre-register by Friday, Dec. 7 will receive five free raffle tickets. Registration is free for EPIC members and $25 for future members.

Pre-registration is highly encouraged to help determine food and attendee counts.

For more information or to register, please contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454 or info@cullmanchamber.org.

EPIC (Emerging Professionals Impacting Cullman) is presented by Drinkard Development.

This year’s EPIC Christmas Sweater Party is brought to you by our 4th Quarter Sponsor, St. John & Associates.
Fishers of Men organizers praise Cullman area after district tourney

Smith Lake has long been considered one of Cullman County’s biggest tourist attractions. Yet, due to limited ramp access, attracting major fishing tournaments has often been a difficult task.

However, all of that changed this past spring when the county completed a six-lane boat ramp expansion at Smith Lake Park. Now, attracting major tournaments will become much easier as lake access at the park has tripled in capacity, which is essential for enticing larger events to the area.

Realizing the potential of the expanded facilities, the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center has been hard at work contacting tournament organizers across the country with the goal of hosting numerous competitions over the next few years.

The first results of this new initiative were seen Nov. 6-10, when the Fishers of Men National Tournament Trail held its 2018 District 2 Championship on Smith Lake. More than 80 teams participated in the five-day event featuring over 160 participants.

This marked the first time the Fishers of Men (FOM) organization, based out of Chapin, South Carolina, has held one of their district championships on Smith Lake.

“We came over here this past spring and looked at the new ramp and everything else the Cullman area had to offer our folks,” said FOM Sr. Vice President Bobby Eads. “We knew pretty quickly that the improvements at the park, along with the shopping, hotels and other amenities in the area would be a really good fit for our organization.”

Anglers started arriving in the Cullman area early in the week for three practice days to acclimate to the fishing on Smith Lake and to get out and enjoy the restaurants and shopping in Cullman.

“Many of our members bring their wives and family,” said Eads. “Cullman was a great place for us to enjoy ourselves while we were here.”

All the preliminaries culminated in the district championship banquet held at the Cullman Civic Center the evening of Nov. 8. More than 210 tournament participants and their families attended the festivities.

The two-day tournament kicked off the following morning at Smith Lake Park. Although the weather wasn’t perfect, the fishing was great. Kent and Emily Ware hauled in a total of 24.55 pounds to take the District 2 Championship crown.

“Considering the weather wasn’t ideal, everything went well,” said Eads. “We are very pleased with all aspects of the event, and I will definitely be calling the Cullman Chamber again for future events.”

The Chamber and its tourism board will continue to build on the momentum of this event and work hard to bring other major tournaments to our area. The best is yet to come.

Youth Leadership class tours local non-profits in November

The Chamber’s 2018-19 Youth Leadership Cullman County class spent November’s session touring the area for “Quality of Life Day,” sponsored by Dr. Tracy Neal – Cullman Regional Cardiology Clinic.

Students were greeted at the Chamber for breakfast by United Way of Cullman County Executive Director Becky Goff before departing for morning visits to the Good Samaritan Health Clinic, Knapsacks for Kids at First United Methodist Church, the Margaret Jean Jones Center (Cullman County Center for the Developmentally Disabled) and The Link of Cullman County.

The class was treated to lunch and a tour at Cullman Regional and ended the day with a trip to Hope Horses, Inc.

Knapsacks for Kids Program Coordinator Melissa Betts expressed her support for Youth Leadership and recalled how Good Hope’s representatives went back to their school and church three years ago and helped start the Knapsacks program now serving Good Hope Primary.

“Thank you for investing in our newest community leaders,” Betts said. “Each year I am impressed by the students selected for this program. Thank you for allowing us to share about Knapsacks for Kids.”

This year’s Youth Leadership program is presented by R.E. Garrison Trucking. November’s breakfast was sponsored by Cullman County Youth Advocacy Programs, Inc., and lunch was sponsored by Cullman Regional.
Career Awareness Fair gives 8th-graders early look at area job options

The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center put its annual emphasis on workforce solutions on November 8, welcoming more than 1,000 eighth-graders from the city and county to Wallace State Community College for the 2018 Career Awareness Fair.

The educational fall event is organized by the Cullman Chamber in partnership with the Cullman Economic Development Agency, Cullman County Economic Development, and host and sponsor Wallace State.

Students spent the morning and early afternoon on the acclaimed Hanceville campus, receiving hands-on experience and exposure to endless career options.

“We’re really excited, because over 100 different occupations are represented today, and every eighth-grader in Cullman County — from Cullman County Schools to the city schools to the private schools — is here to be able to see these different occupations,” Cullman County Schools Superintendent Shane Barnette told The Cullman Tribune. “I’m hoping in my mind that it’s going to plant a seed in their mind of what they want to do one day, or at least what all jobs are available here in Cullman County. A lot of our students go through school and they don’t realize how many jobs are available right here in Cullman County.”

Exploring career options ranging from welder to athletic trainer to photographer to public servant, students were led by volunteer tour guides through 11 different “career clusters” scattered throughout Wallace State’s Tom Drake Coliseum, Wellness Center and outdoor areas.

The career clusters represented were:
- Business, Finance & Marketing
- Arts, Technology & Communication
- Construction Trades & Architecture
- Manufacturing & Industry
- Government & Human Services
- Agriculture
- Tourism
- Health
- Safety, Fire & Law Enforcement
- Transportation, Automotive & Logistics
- Interactive Zone

“It’s pretty cool to get to learn about all these jobs and what they do,” Cullman Middle School student Luke McGill told The Cullman Times.

The Cullman Economic Development Agency and Cullman County Economic Development; Hospitality Sponsor, River Valley Ingredients (Tyson); Lunch Sponsors, Cullman Electric Cooperative and Kentucky Fried Chicken; and Beverage Sponsor, Coca-Cola.

Career Awareness Fair organizers would like to extend a huge thanks to all tour guides, volunteers and area agencies that committed their time to making the event another success. Thank you as well to Presenting Sponsor, Wallace State; partners, Cullman Economic Development Agency and Cullman County Economic Development; Hospitality Sponsor, River Valley Ingredients (Tyson); Lunch Sponsors, Cullman Electric Cooperative and Kentucky Fried Chicken; and Beverage Sponsor, Coca-Cola.

District Attorney leading December Morning Blend

Christmas is coming early for those who love attending our monthly Morning Blend!

Come join the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center on Wednesday, Dec. 12 — a week earlier than usual — from 8:00 to 9:00 a.m. at Rumors Deli near the corner of Main Avenue and U.S. Highway 278.

The Chamber staff welcomes members and visitors to attend this free event, which features great discussion and delicious coffee and snacks.

Cullman County District Attorney Wilson Blaylock will lead December’s discussion.

Coffee and snacks will be provided by Presenting Sponsor Karma’s Coffee House. December’s sponsor is Smith Squared Photography.

For more information, contact the Chamber at 256-734-0454 or info@cullmanchamber.org.
The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center hosted its 4th Quarter Industry Tour at WestRock on Thursday, Nov. 15. The tour was sponsored by REHAU.

Formerly MidSouth Packaging, WestRock is the second-largest paper company in the world. The company touts more than 300 manufacturing facilities, design centers, research labs and sales offices around the globe, including two manufacturing plants right here in Cullman County.

WestRock’s primary Cullman location, housed just off Old Hanceville Highway near Goat Island Brewing, is 179,000 square feet and specializes exclusively in corrugated packaging. The second site is a 100,000 square foot building close to REHAU dedicating 85 percent of its efforts on automotive assembly packaging.

The most prominent product manufactured at Cullman’s biggest plant is WestRock’s ComboPac bulk container. It’s sold mostly to poultry suppliers and is durable enough to hold up to 2,200 pounds of wet chicken.

The local site also has designing, four-color printing, finishing and shipping capabilities, among others. Additionally, all corrugated scraps are collected, reprocessed and recycled right back into paper.

WestRock employs close to 200 between its two Cullman plants. The primary location is home to a weight room and spacious break room.

WestRock runs three shifts five days a week and emphasizes safety in everything it does. The company’s local customers include Reliance Worldwide Corporation/Cash Acme.

Thank you to Phillip Cone (Safety & Environmental Manager), Mark Harbison (Superintendent) and Orlando Brown (Plant Manager) for being such exceptional tour guides, and to WestRock for contributing to the vitality of the Cullman area. Dates and locations for the Chamber’s 2019 Industry Tour series will be announced as soon as they become available.
Where do you attend school? What is your major and why?
I graduated from Lanett High School in 2017. After graduating high school, I chose to attend Wallace State Community College because I knew it would better me as a person and help me reach goals I’ve always wanted to achieve through athletics under the leadership of Athletic Coordinator Deborah Spann.

My major at Wallace State is Business Administration, which I chose because it can provide a large sum of knowledge in numerous fields. It can also be used in several jobs.

What business skills have you acquired at the Chamber?
I can honestly say I’ve learned more than expected while working at the Chamber. I’ve acquired numerous skills, such as being able to work on multiple major projects, working with Chamber directors to help meet their daily duties and, most of all, communication. I’ve had the chance to contact individuals of all levels to discuss different events and Chamber programs.

What have you learned about the Chamber and its position in the community?
I have learned that the Chamber is a very important resource to Cullman area citizens. Each day I’m at the Chamber, there are many people calling to get numbers of various area businesses or just to see what we have to offer in the community.

I really feel that without the Chamber, many would be lost or feel unconnected. To me, the Chamber is a warm-hearted gateway for community members to enter for success or help.

How will this internship affect your future plans?
This internship will be a very big asset to my personal and professional life. I truly feel I’ve met some of the best people in the world here in Cullman County.

For example, one of the first questions Mrs. Leah Bolin asked me during my interview was what my plans were for the future and what I’d like to do after graduating from Wallace State.

It really warmed my heart knowing she was genuinely interested in knowing what my future may hold because she could possibly be a gateway for my future.

What can you take away from this internship and apply to your career of choice?
One of my biggest takeaways from this internship is that connections are the key to success. I honestly feel that I have met many successful individuals who I could possibly contact in the future for a job or even advice.

It only reaffirms my belief in the words of personal development authority Paul J. Meyer that “communication — the human connection — is the key to personal and career success.”
The Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center would like to congratulate the Mary Carter Store as November’s Small Business of the Month, sponsored by McSwain’s Pharmacy.

If you think the award is long overdue for one of Cullman’s most iconic businesses, then you’re in great company. “It only took me 55 years to win this,” owner Raymond Young joked after accepting the plaque.

By always doing everything with the customer’s experience in mind, Mary Carter’s staff of five provides customers with the type of small business atmosphere that was commonplace when the store was established in 1964. They ensure superior customer service by stocking and ordering hard-to-find products and parts. If a customer asks for something that’s not in stock, Mary Carter doesn’t hesitate to help find the product or even order it at cost from a retail website if it can’t be found by any other means.

Trying to always have a little bit of everything and something for everyone, the small business has increased its inventory steadily over the last year. One of its fastest-growing categories is high-tech automotive keys and remotes. Heating supplies are another growing specialty category that requires much knowledge and patience as each customer’s needs must be understood.

As if all that weren’t enough, for the last 50 years, the Mary Carter Store has offered custom picture framing, a service that’s helped the small business be a part of some of their customers’ most cherished memories and belongings.

“Our persistent and consistent approach of ‘customers first’ helps us maintain a steady and predictable experience for our customers,” said Jeff Young. “Kindness and empathy toward every customer sets us up for success … a success that is only measured by their happiness with us, our gratitude for them, and our love of what we do.”

The Mary Carter Store is extremely involved in the Chamber and the community. The small business proudly sealed its story in the Chamber’s 75th Anniversary time capsule, observed specialty hours for each 2nd Fridays event, and supports the Chamber’s #ShopLocal and #WoofLocal campaigns.

Each month, a sponsoring business helps celebrate and acknowledge the Small Business of the Month winner. If you have a local business you would like to nominate for their outstanding service, please contact Brian Poole at bpoole@cullmanchamber.org. Monthly winners will be automatically nominated for Small Business of the Year, which is presented at the Chamber’s Annual Meeting & Gala.

Mary Carter Store
104 4th St. SE
Cullman, AL 35055
256-734-7908

Supporter - McSwain’s Pharmacy

Mary Carter Store named November Small Business of the Month

Supporter - College Tire

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Acton Title Services | 206 9th St. SW, Suite 103, Cullman, AL 35055 | 256-737-9953

A Touch of German | 218 1st Ave. SE, Cullman, AL 35055 | 256-747-5737

Wallace State Community College Technical Education Center for Welding and Entrepreneurship

Elements Health & Wellness Spa | 111 S 1st St. NE, Cullman, AL 35055 | 256-841-6151
The Cullman area truly knows how to get in the Christmas spirit! Several Chamber member businesses hustled and bustled to ensure their storefronts were festively decorated by Christmas in Cullman Open House, making for a customer-competitive Window Display Contest.

For the first time, judging duties were handled by representatives from a neighboring chamber of commerce. The contest was also expanded to include a Home Décor category. The only requirements were that displays be Christmas-themed and incorporate lights.

Congratulations to the winners and runners-up in each category, and thank you to every business that participated! Make sure to window shop (and venture inside, too) at their businesses to see their festive Christmas decorations for yourself! Pictures from the check (winners) and certificate (runners-up) presentations can be viewed on the Chamber’s Facebook page.

**RETAIL**
Winner: Doug Doggett Jewelers
Runner-Up: Lavish Boutique

**SERVICE**
Winner: Cullman Florist
Runner-Up: Cullman County Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.

**HOME DÉCOR**
Winner: Margo’s Antiques & Gifts
Runner-Up: The Added Touch Too

**FOOD & BEVERAGE**
Winner: Karma’s Coffee House
Runner-Up: Carlton’s Italian Restaurant

**PARTICIPANTS**
Ashley Mercantile
Better Than Before
Book & Barrel Outfitters
Fancher Education Center
From the Heart
Jennifer’s Treasures
Jeweler’s Cut Jewelry & Pawn
Monograms Plus
Tre Belleze Boutique
Urban Grace
Vintage West on 2nd
What A Girl Wants
White Willow