A monthly publication of the Hot Springs Village Voice

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MAY 2023



Villager recounts his years as an NFL official



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#### Publisher Jennifer Allen

#### Contributors

Darrell W. Brown Robin Raborn Burns Lewis Delavan Mary Eliades Sandy Johansen Jeff Meek

#### Advertising

Summer Benedict Stephanie Highfill Kendall Kegley

#### Design/Layout

Michael G. Fox

HSV Life Magazine is a monthly publication of the Hot Springs Village Voice newspaper. For additional copies, visit our office. Please send any questions or comments to us following our "Viewpoints" guidelines.



PO Box 8508 • 3576 N. Hwy. 7 Hot Springs Village, AR 71909

(501) 984-6224 or (501) 623-6397 news@hsvvoice.com advertising@hsvvoice.com hsvvoice.com

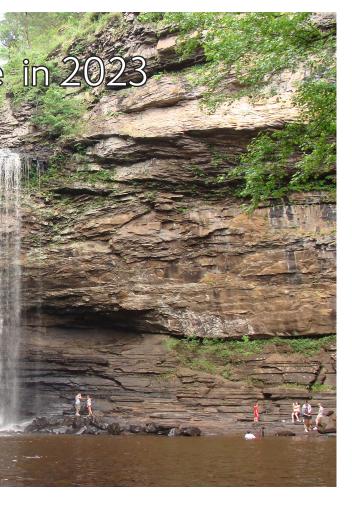
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Petit Jean State Park has beautiful views. (Jeff Meek photo)

Well, it's May in Hot Springs Village, and everything is popping with growth, even those pesky unwanted weeds. I read somewhere that May is probably named after the goddess of growth, Maia. Wherever the name originates from it sure is that. This time of year seems to me to be fresh, warm and beautiful. And May is full of interesting happenings like Cinco de Mayo on May 5, Mother's Day on May 14, Armed Forces Day on May 20, and Memorial Day on May 29. Did you also know that May 10 of this year is, believe it or not, Root Canal Appreciation Day. Yeah, you can't make this stuff up. It's just too crazy sometimes.

Historically speaking, May 4, 1970, saw the tragedy at Kent State University when National Guard troops killed 4 students, May 8, 1945 is considered V-E Day, Victory in Europe, the day WWII



ended in Europe, May 17, 1875 the first Kentucky Derby horse race at Churchill Downs and May 25, 1787 the Constitution Convention began in Philadelphia.

My memory tells me by the end of May, temperatures begin to soar and my electric bill creeps up. But I didn't care because I knew many months of outdoor fun was upcoming. So, as you are able, get outdoors and experience the many wonders of Hot Springs Village. It truly is a paradise. Lakes, golf courses, trails, bocce ball, tennis, pickleball, a dog park and much more is out there waiting for you. Nearby are a few gorgeous state parks like Petit Jean near Morrilton and Mount Nebo near Russellville. Enjoy, make memories and experience "The Natural State."

#### Jeff Meek voice correspondent

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ON THE COVER: HSV's Mark Hittner on the field as an NFL Official. (Photo courtesy of Mark Hittner)

### ALL AROUND ARKANSAS



The Shoppach House is the oldest brick structure in Saline County.

# **Brick Solid**

Shoppach House played an important part in Saline County history

### Darrell W. Brown

I he Shoppach House stands just a few blocks from the historic district of Benton, Arkansas. Located at 508 N. Main St., it is the oldest brick structure in Saline County and has quite the history.

John William Shoppach was born in Hessen, Germany, and came to America in 1834, where he eventually made his way to present-day Saline County in the newly-created state of Arkansas. In 1852, he and his wife, Sibby, whose family had come from Illinois to Arkansas in 1818, built a small home in Benton. The bricks used to build the home and a nearby well were made on site by Shoppach. The brick portion of the house was built in the dogtrot style, with two rooms on either side of a breezeway. Shortly after the family's move to Benton, Shoppach got involved in local politics and was elected county clerk. He remained in that office until his death in 1861.

During the Civil War, the small house was the home of James H. Shoppach, a private in the Confederate Army. In April 1861, the home's front yard served as the site for the presentation of a battle flag to Saline County's Company E of the First Arkansas Infantry of the Confederacy. The flag was made by women in the community and accompanied the forces to several battles including those at Murfreesboro and Chickamauga.

In August 1863, after Union troops took control of central Arkansas, Union officers used the Shoppach House as their headquarters, while troops were stationed in a hastily built fort on what is now the southeast corner of Carpenter and Military Roads. The Shoppach House was later used to house Union forces under Lieutenant Henry C. Caldwell in November of that year.

The structure stood through the Civil War and continued to be the home of five generations of the Shoppach family.

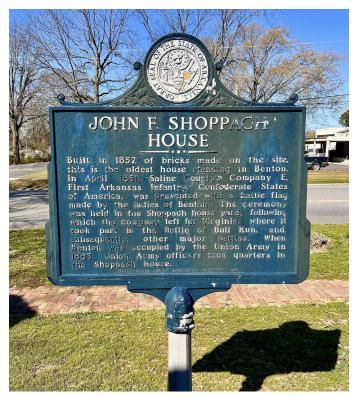
In 1959, the Shoppach House and grounds were sold to local resident David Demuth. The Saline County Art League organized events in which handmade items were sold to raise money to support the restoration of the home, as well as continued maintenance of the house and grounds. In 1962, the Saline County Art League moved the Pilgrim Rest Church building to the grounds of the Shoppach House. The church was established in 1833 along present-day Colonel Glenn Road in west Little Rock. The art league repurposed the old church building as the Saline County Art Center.

In September 1974, Demuth officially transferred ownership of the Shoppach House and property to the Saline County Art League for the price of \$10. A restrictive covenant attached to the warranty deed stated that the historic home and grounds were to be used specifically as "an art center, historic landmark and showplace," and that the house and outbuildings were to "never be removed or torn down." In October 1975, the Shoppach House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In May 1980, renovations to the Shoppach House were completed. The home was furnished with period-accurate furniture and other historical artifacts donated by descendants of the Shoppach family and other local citizens. The DeTonti Post Office, built in 1940, was moved to the Shoppach House grounds. The small building is an excellent example of a small post office in mid-20th century rural Arkansas.

Still owned by the Saline County Art League, the group has hosted book signing events, scout tours, family tours, as well as several open houses for the community to attend throughout the past few years. While the inside of the Shoppach House and other historic buildings are currently closed to the public, one can still walk freely on the historic grounds and get a sense of life in Saline County in the mid-1800s.

A proud sixth-generation Arkansan, Darrell Brown is a lover of all things Arkansas. He lives in Saline County with his wife, Amy, and their beloved Boston Terrier, Dixie. Find him on Facebook and Instagram at AllAroundArkansas.



Historical marker at the Shoppach House.



Well at the Shoppach House



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### THE VILLAGE CHORALE



Village Chorale celebrates 26 years of fellowship Some of the original members (from left), Maureen Morgan, Naomi Creasy, Mary Kasten, Pat Hightower, Jay McIntyre, Harvey McIntyre.

#### Sandy Johansen STAFF WRITER

he Village Chorale is an audition choral ensemble, founded by Pat Hightower and Jay McIntyre in 1997. Both women were professionally trained musical performers and choral directors. At that time there were only 16 vocalists and founding director, Dick Fulton. There have been musical directors over the years and Randy Lusk stepped up to director in August 2004. The group grew is size during Mr. Lusk's tenure to the current 35 - 40 singers.

Mr. Lusk resigned as director in May 2013, and Ellen Nagode was named interim director. Nagode was named permanent director in January 2014. During Mrs. Nagode's tenure the Chorale joined the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra in their annual Christmas concert in the Village. They also performed special Christmas music at Anthony Chapel at Garvin Woodland Gardens. Both of these have become annual events. In the Winter of 2014 a group of Chorale singers sang in a special concert at Carnegie Hall at the request of composer Mark Hayes. Mrs. Nagode retired as director of the Chorale in spring 2018.

During the Summer of 2018 Dr. Thomas Bolton was



The Village Chorale 2023. (Photos courtesy of Village Chorale)

named director of the Village Chorale. Dr. Bolton has raised the Chorale to new heights in terms of quality of sound. In addition our concerts at the Woodlands are now multi-media performances. The Chorale continues to grow musically under Dr. Bolton's direction.

Jim McKeand, also one of the original singers, shared his membership memories. "The first big performance we did on our own was at the Woodlands Auditorium. The Symphony Guild hired us to do a concert. The audience was quite large. I was pleasantly surprised because I didn't think there would be an audience that large in the Village interested in a choral music performance. After that we went out on our own and produced our own program at the Woodlands. We have been doing so since then 2 times per year. We have been blessed with 4 excellent directors that fit our needs at the time."

Joseph Martin is one of the most influential composers in sacred music today. His joint concert with the Village Chorale featured many of his cantatas. To date Martin has written 47 cantatas and even more anthems.

Mark Hayes began piano lessons at age 10, later earning a Bachelor of Music piano performance, magna cum laude, from Baylor University. He has performed with the Village Chorale twice and included some of his original works.

Maureen Morgan, another original vocalist, shared her vocal remembrances. "I love being a founding member and have gone through all the ups and down with Chorale. I am how thrilled with this current Chorale and with what Tom Bolton has done to revitalize this impressive ensemble." Morgan mixes her classical ranges with popular band arrangements, as she likes to be called "The Girl Singer" with the Village Big Band. At this time, the Chorale is accompanied by Dr. Elsen Portugal, accomplished pianist in addition to other keyboard instruments.

Jay McIntyre has passed but is remembered by many. Pat Hightower says "I'm happily retired."

According to their website: "Our mission statement is "Connecting Community to the Choral Art." We accomplish this by performing two major concerts a year - Spring and Christmas. In addition we do other concerts during the year including an annual appearance at Christmas with the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra. We rehearse 1 time per week during the concert season. We sing music from a number of genres including light classical, religious, Broadway, jazz, and pop."

To learn more about the Village Chorale and schedule an audition go to: https://thevillagechorale.org/



# HSV PEOPLE 101 Years Young

Villager Virginia Anderson is still going strong by staying active

#### Mary Eliades VOICE CORRESPONDENT

Virginia Anderson is 101 years young, and still manages to get to the Fitness Center several times a week. She attends classes, walks, and uses the stationary

bike – and always looks like she just came from the beauty shop.

Virginia was born on Jan. 27, 1922, in Duluth, Minnesota, near Lake Superior, and grew up during the Great Depression – "times were hard," she said.

She was always active in her church, especially the youth group. She even met her husband-to-be (Bill Anderson) at church and said, "My mother let me date on a church night."

Virginia attended junior college and married her sweetheart in 1941. After a short year of marriage, her



Virginia Anderson is 101 years young, but visits the Fitness Center several times a week, looking like a million dollars. (Mary Eliades photo)

husband went into the Army as a machine gunner. "They took all the young guys," she said, "and my husband was very healthy." Their son, David, was three months old when his father left and didn't see him again until he was three years old.

Bill saw action in the Philippines and Guam – hitting no less than five beachheads – and was never injured. While Bill was off fighting for his country, Virginia



Bill Anderson in his Army uniform and Virginia as a beautiful bride. (Submitted photos)

was a "Rosie the Riveter," working in a steel plant in Duluth. She started off doing manual labor at the plant, but eventually informed her boss that she had two years of college under her belt and felt she could be more useful in a different position. He agreed, and she moved to the lab, where she had an interesting job preparing steel ingots that were eventually made into bullets.

Virginia was lucky to have nearby family while she worked – her mother-in-law took care of her young son, along with her own young daughter. "She had a lot of diapers to do," said Virginia.

After Bill returned from the war, he worked in a grocery store. His dream was to attend a seminary, but recurring bouts of malaria kept him sick 10 days of every month. He told God in prayer that if He would take away the malaria, he would go to school to become a pastor. The malaria never returned, and Bill went to a seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, and became a Presbyterian minister. Their first church was "out in the country, and it was wonderful," said Virginia.

Virginia left her war-time job, went back to college, and became a teacher. She taught kindergarten and first grade for many years, and loved teaching. After obtaining her Bachelor of Arts degree, she accumulated 21 hours towards a master's degree.

A daughter arrived 14 years after her son, and now lives in Wisconsin.

After many years in the ministry, Bill became a professor and taught at schools in Nebraska and North Dakota.

All her life, Virginia has loved singing. Both she and her husband had beautiful voices and often sang duets. They had "special organists" and performed musical programs at various venues. She also sang at weddings and other events, including a solo in "The Messiah."





Virginia with her granddaughters on her 100th birthday; the theme was "Rosie the Riveter" to celebrate her service during World War II.

school choir to church choirs.

After Bill passed away in 1995, Virginia became a snowbird, moving back and forth between Minnesota and Florida. She got into line dancing, performing with her students and teaching older women, organized a Red Hat club, and played in the Advent Christian Village band.

Virginia moved to Hot Springs Village 14 years ago, to live with her son, Dave, and daughter-in-law,

Music was always a big part of her life, from the high Phyllis. "I love it here!" she enthused. She works out three or four days a week and is active in her church.

> Phyllis recently put together a book of poems Virginia had written, some for her school kids and others for a master's program project. Virginia is also a talented artist, and illustrated many of the poems herself.

> When asked about the best times of her life, Virginia said, with no hesitation, "I loved being a pastor's wife. I love people, and that was a very happy time for me."

Virginia is an avid Chicago Bulls fan, and a

few years ago her granddaughter wrote to the Bulls, describing her grandmother's longtime support for the team, and they sent some Bulls merchandise to Virginia for her birthday.

Asked about the secret to her long life, Virginia replied that God allowed her to live a long life. According to Phyllis, "She has always depended on the Lord to take care of her and meet her every need." Virginia is also lucky enough to eat



whatever she likes. "Well, I don't want to advertise for McDonalds, but..." she said.

Virginia lives with her son, Dave, and daughter-in-law, Phyllis, in Hot Springs Village.

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The staff and patrons of the Fitness Center look forward to seeing this beautiful woman and, as Phyllis said, "She's an inspiration to all of them."



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# COVER STORY Man in Black (& White)

Villager Mark Hittner recounts his years as an official in the NFL

Sandy Johansen STAFF WRITER

**"I** started playing football at Pittsburg State, Pittsburg, Kansas," said Mark Hittner, a recent Hot Springs Village resident. While he was there the school he had an officiating class called Officiating Rules, but it was mainly for basketball. He took the class and starting refereeing basketball in college.

He got his accounting degree in Pittsburg starting work at Phillips Petroleum in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. He was an accountant for 8 years. He and wife Rebecca have been married 40 years.

Starting officiating he thought "I just think I'll do high school," He moved on to work some small college games. He was hired by the Big 8 Conference in 1984. "If you are ever going to get into the NFL, they hire from the Big 8 Conference." In 1986 his family moved to Kansas City, working in the insurance business.

He said after about 8 years he had friends going on to the NFL and thought perhaps he would try it and so he put in his application in 1993. "I was invited to go to NFL Europe. It was a spring league there set up by the NFL. It was rather like a minor league football season. I would go for a Saturday game, leave on a Friday, fly over, work the Saturday



Always #28 Mark Hittner NFL Official. (Photos courtesy of Mark Hittner)

game, stay for the next weekend games and then fly home."

He worked games in London, Barcelona, Germany, Scotland. It was a good place to be as the NFL scouted their officials in February. "They thought I would be pretty good, so that's when NFL officiating started for me."

Commenting on today's replays he said, "The original idea was to fix any egregious mistakes, now it is so refined just about anything is up for review." He said College football has more reviews and it can be a bit cumbersome.

"In the NFL there are officials in the booth who assist us in the game. You might mark the ball at the 40 and they may come in and tell you to put the ball at the 39." He said they tried to remove pass inference the past 2 years, but it didn't work and got thrown out.

"Depending on the schedule, football season we would get only one weekend off." He said the football season starts really mid July, beginning with a clinics and training camps and active starting



January 2, 2023, Buffalo Bills Safety Damar Hamlin falls on the field. EMT's bring Hamlin back to life and rush him to Emergency. It was a miracle on the field. Hittner was an official at the game.

the first part of August with the preseason games the middle of August. "Our season would start mid July and end with the playoffs and Super Bowl."

When asked if there was something about officiating he'd like to change. "I think it is in a pretty good spot, but there are things I'd like to change about what I've done in the past," he joked. He said officiating is such a defined area now especially with TV and social media feedback.

Hittner was the referee at the January 2 game, Monday night football Cincinnati Bengals and Buffalo Bills when Bills Safety Damar Hamlin was hit by Bengals wide receiver Tee Huggins. Hamlin is the NFL player who literally dropped dead of cardiac arrest right on the football field with

Mark Hittner referee at Monday Night Football January 2, 2023, worried about the fall taken by the Bills safety.



millions watching. After the hit, Hamlin quickly bounced up onto his feet and took a couple of steps and fell backwards. He was in critical condition but with the expertise of medical staff on the field his heartbeat was restored.

"Players were watching, kneeling, praying and surrounding medics, and we told them to turn their





Mark Hittner enjoying a relaxed retirement in HSV with wife Rebecca and Annabelle, their snuggle baby. (Sandy Johansen photo)

backs around and just gather to support those looking after Damar and let medics do their job. It was a miracle what happened on the field." He said he's been in many games where "the guys" got hurt but never in a game that there was a life threatening incident.

When asked what his one of his most memorable events he said, "It was my first Super Bowl #36 in New Orleans, it was the Patriots and the Rams. The Rams were on 4th down and needed a TD on the 4-yard-line going in. Warner had the ball going in and fumbled it and the Patriots picked it up and ran 100 yards for a TD. "I was on the other side of the field and I called it defensive holding and my referee at the time had to run 100 yards for the Patriots touchdown and run back 100 yards. He let me know I'd better be right on that call. The referee huddle stayed with my call."

He said when you know the coaches, meet with them, you just have to respect what they do. "It's not just the head coaches, but all the assistants who put in so much time and effort."

What brings you to Hot Springs Village? He said he liked to golf. "Rebecca and I have looked at many different retirement areas in Georgia, South Carolina but were a little too far from our roots in Kansas City."

They started to look in Arkansas at Bella Vista and Fayetteville. After shopping around the state, Rebecca researched on line more communities and found Hot Springs Village. "We love the golf courses, our house, and this wonderful community and moved here in August 2021. We love all the interesting stories everyone has here."

### HSV NATURE

# Happy Trails

Discover the wonder of the Village's nature trails



Lewis Delavan STAFF WRITER

A short distance from Cedar Creek's parking lot A, a creek crossing lures users for further adventure. (Lewis Delavan photo)

Seasonal beauty abounds on Hot Springs Village's nature trails.

Watershed trails including Cedar Creek Trail, DeSoto Nature, Magellan Beaver Dam and Cooper Nature Preserve Trail offer unique sights and a respite from development.

New quick-reference code tags on all trails offer updated information about flowers, wildlife and birds that may be found along the trail, as well as maps and info on trails events and contests.

Cedar Creek is among the most popular trails – if not the most popular. Last year the HSV Property Owners' Association Board of Directors voted to buy land that includes Cedar Creek Trail from Village developer Cooper Communities Inc. – thus protecting the Lake Balboa watershed.

"Cedar Creek has the largest diversity of wildflowers of our Village trails and in the spring it is lit up with wildflowers," Trails Committee member Paul Barnard said. During last year's land study, Barnard developed a slide show of Cedar Creek's wonders.

The Mourning Dove Path and three loops allow

Cedar Creek users to tailor their walk to time and distance constraints.

Just across from Desoto Dog Park, DeSoto Nature Trail offers surprising diversity in a small area.

Magellan Beaver DamTrail and Cooper Nature Preserve's loops immerse walkers in a bottomland riparian environment.

Etiquette helps preserve trails for future visits. Packing out litter, keeping dogs on a leash and leaving plants alone protects each trail. The Trails Committee asks visitors: "Never dig or pick native wildflowers – take a 'pic,' don't 'pick!'"



### **HSV BAKERIES**



Hot Springs' Ambrosia Bakery opens in HSV

#### Sandy Johansen STAFF WRITER

roy and Monique Creamer purchased and started products they want and special occasion cakes created operating the very popular Ambrosia Bakery October 2022 in Hot Springs. They have recently expanded their service to just outside Hot Springs Village in Sommer Place Shopping Center.

"We wanted to bring to HSV residents their favorites as we've been asked many times to come to Hot Springs Village. We tried some offerings during the holiday season and found it very inviting. We're starting slower to make sure we're giving HSV the

and delivered to our HSV location for them," said Creamer.

According to their website: "Make any occasion special with a custom cake from Ambrosia Bakery. Choose from a wide range of flavors and decorating techniques to create the perfect treat for your family and friends.

Special breads are offered including the delicious variety of Lavash, Focaccia, and Braided Bread that can



Ambrosia, well known for delicious and decorated cakes for any occasion, above. Now in Hot Springs Village, Ambrosia Bakery is in Sommer Place Shopping Center behind Brookshire's grocery store, below.



be used in a variety of menus. The breads are perfect for breakfast, sandwiches, soups, appetizers or just as a quick snack."

"We want to create the best of the best not only in our line of baked pastries and breads, but also perfection in our bistro service and catering," said Creamer. "Each day we are open in Hot Springs Village I deliver the freshly baked goods to our HSV location. We want to continue to grow in HSV and expand our open days." At this time, HSV Ambrosia Bakery Co. is open Monday, Wednesday, Friday from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. and from 8 a.m. to noon on Saturdays.

Speaking with several HSV residents, they have ordered special cakes delivered directly to the HSV location. "Our cake was amazing, beautiful and absolutely delicious," one resident said. For more information call 501-525-4500 or visit their website at: https://ambrosiabakeryco.com/

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### Macchiatos, Carrot Cake & Art

Artfully Baked and Brewed features delicious edibles in an artsy setting

Sandy Johansen STAFF WRITER

Artfully Baked and Brewed, located mid-Hot Springs Village, offers in-house freshly baked pastries each day, along with luncheon treats, call in orders and take-outs.

Melody Edmonds, began her baking her signature carrot cake and many other delicacies at Balboa Club, Last Chance, Tranquillo, DeSoto and the Beehive.

When the owners of Artfully Baked and Brewed left HSV, Edmonds took over management of the bakery and

is now purchasing the venue. "This community is so giving and supporting, I'm proud to be a part of it," said Edmonds.

It goes without saying AB&B has many coffee varieties to choose from, including Cappuccino, Freshly Brewed, Macchiatos, Frappes, Lattes, Expressos, Smoothies, Sodas, Teas, Juices and Tussock Wines.

Distinctive baking offerings are many, including her one-of-a-kind carrot cake, fresh muffins of many flavors, fresh fruit turnovers, biscuits, breakfast



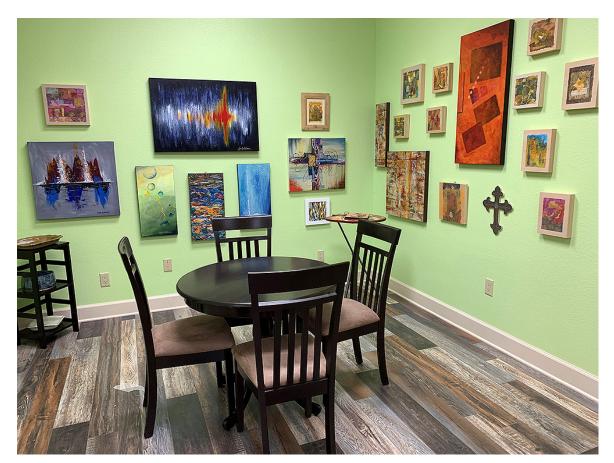
Melody Edmonds with some of her tasty treats. (Sandy Johansen photos)

sandwiches including a very meaty sausage.

Lunches offer sandwiches, soup and other goodies to eat in or take out.

"We also make special veggie chips for our vegetarians," she said. "We also offer catering, so give us a call especially for special events, birthdays, anniversaries and a distinctively decorated cake for your occasion."

There are tables inside and out to gather with friends



Enjoy lunch or a pastry while viewing artwork at Artfully Baked and Brewed.



and outside when weather permits. Edmonds freshly baked yummies go fast, so be early or your favorite muffins may already be sold out. Fresh goes fast.

Not to be forgotten is all the original art gracing the walls. Edmonds said she's just thrilled to show the beautiful creations of local HSV artists and at this time there are nearly 10 showing. "On occasion, we have one of the artists join us for a meet and greet."

Located at 1398 DeSoto Blvd. Ste A, telephone #501-777-3195 or go to the website for more information at www.artfullybakedandbrewed.com

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### Debra's -More Than Just a Bakery

Recently added to Debra's Bakery and More is the award winning Iowa Blue Bunny Ice Cream selections. (Sandy Johansen photos)

# Bread, breakfast sandwiches and more

Sandy Johansen STAFF WRITER

**"T**his is our story. We moved from Texas in 2006 with our hearts desire to put out some of the best country cooking in Arkansas. We started outside Hot Springs Village as Debra's Good Eats and was there for about 2 years. Then we moved into Hot Springs Village as Debra's Restaurant in 2009, now owned

and operated by my daughter and son-in-law," said Debra Keller.

Debra decided to continue her signature burgers and opened a small food truck, operating shorter hours, just outside HSV across from Walmart. When an adjacent building was vacated, she decided to offer some of her signature baked goods. So she opened Debra's Bakery and More along with Debra's Burgers.

Take-outs are always welcome if you want to get



Many special pastries are offered at Debra's Bakery and More as well as breakfast sandwiches and biscuits with sausage gravy.

something early to serve for your evening dinner.

The bakery offers nearly 12 pastries including donuts, fritters, and cinnamon rolls. Freshly baked bread is also offered and she recommends all to order the day before and reserve their favorite as they sell quickly. White, wheat, sourdough, cornbread, cinnamon raisin, along with hush puppies and single biscuits.

Coffee and soft drinks along with hot chocolate and cappuccino. Energy favorite are Red Bull and Monster.

Her breakfast sandwiches include Bacon or Sausage Egg and Cheese Biscuit, English muffins, croissants, kolaches, burrito, Texas toast, and biscuits covered in sausage gravy.

Chicken, tuna and egg salad sandwiches on homemade bread or croissants are popular and the salad can also be served on a bed of lettuce.

Located on Hwy 7 across from Walmart Debra's Bakery and More is open Monday through Saturday from 6:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sundays from 6:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. To order ahead, please feel free to call (501)204-1733



## European Style

Home Plate adds a bakery with an oven that can bake 50 loaves of bread

Sandy Johansen STAFF WRITER



Home Plate Owner Jason Hunt and the new state-of-the-art oven. This new oven can bake as many as 50 loaves of bread at one time. (Sandy Johansen photos)

ason Hunt and wife, Tonya Porterfield purchased the popular Home Plate Cafe February 2022 after owning Mueller's Bakery in Hot Springs for 7 years. They have meticulously replaced all the kitchen equipment and expanded to include a large baking area with the latest oven design for pastries. They welcome you now to Home Plate Cafe & Bakery. The bakery is not officially open at the time this article was written, but is expected to open in the near future.

"We are at a completely different level with our new European style oven. It is an ABS Oven, a mirror and modern image of historic stone ovens," he said. "We are proud to make pastries, breads, pies and cakes including Napoleons, Vienna Torts, Hazelnut Torts (flourless) and artisan breads. The breads will be crispy on the outside and soft and delicate on the inside," said Hunt. Not only is the oven new, but a Proofer will be used to control proper rising of yeast. He said perfect breads and pastries are not just mix and bake and he promises to offer the highest quality to his patrons.

Home Plate Cafe and Bakery is located at 5110 North State Highway 7, Hot Springs Village, Arkansas. Hours are Monday through Saturday 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. For take out or special orders, call 501-984-6969. Check out their website at homeplatecafeandbakery.com. Their email is homeplatecafehsv@gmail.com for more information, menu and catering arrangements.





Home Plate Cafe and Bakery has many varieties of cheesecakes, pies, and cakes ready to pick up, above. Inside booth seating at the Cafe, left.

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### HSV LIFESTYLES A Place Called H.O.P.E.

At Loco Bonita Ranch H.O.P.E (horses offering people encouragement) happens every day

#### Robin Raborn Burns VOICE CORRESPONDENT

**S**onja and John McCaleb, owners of Loco Bonita Ranch, in Fountain Lake, Arkansas, love horses. Sonja has been around horses all her life. She shares that she grew up in a broken home and moved around frequently, and with every move, God always seemed to place a horse somewhere in her life.

It became clear to her that caring for horses was destined to be her calling. John, who grew up in Houston, didn't

have the exposure to horses that Sonja did. "Sonja grew up on four legs, but I grew up on two," he says. It did not take long for him to become awed by the stunning creatures and to share Sonja's passion for their well-being. Sonja recalls listening to an episode of Focus on the family, a radio show hosted by Dr. James Dobson. The guest was Kim Meeder, who, along with her husband, owns Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch in Bend, Oregon. Horses who live on the Ranch have been rescued from abuse or neglect. During the broadcast, Meeder spoke of each horse's story of hope and triumph. She shared her experiences witnessing children who spent time riding and interacting with the horses. She spoke of the lasting relationships that were formed, and how children learned about kindness, trust, and the joy of caring



Sonya and John McCaleb, owners of Loco Bonita Ranch.

for and appreciating animals. Sonja says that after listening to the program she was in tears, and knew this was what she wanted to do.

Sonja reached out to Meeder, and when Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch hosted an informational clinic, Sonja and John attended. They learned everything they needed to know, and the rest, as they say, is history. They officially opened Loco Bonita Ranch in 2009, and they are listed as a similar ministry to Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch. Loco Bonita is a 501(c) (3) organization and individuals and groups who visit the ranch are never charged for riding the horses.

John and Sonja say the vision of Loco Bonita is "to facilitate an opportunity for children, families, and horses to come together to help, heal, and restore each other, through the love of Christ."

Young people from Youth Home, Inc., located in Little Rock, are frequent visitors to Loco Bonita. Additionally, Fountain Lake students have attended, as well as classes from other schools, including students from their special needs programs. Members of the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, various church youth groups, women's and men's groups, Teen Challenge, and Quapaw Children's Center have also enjoyed spending time with the horses and creating beautiful memories.

Both Sonja and John have witnessed numerous "transformations" of young people who gain confidence, demonstrate leadership skills, and develop an appreciation and respect for horses. John adds that it always seems to be "the smallest or least outgoing child in the group who finds out that he or she has what it takes to work together with peers, and show the qualities of a natural leader." Since Loco Bonitas' inception, approximately 200 horses have been saved from dire circumstances. The horses come from all types of backgrounds. Some have been



Sonya wears the H.O.P.E shirt that volunteers at the ranch wear.



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This publication was made possible by Arkansas Opioid Recovery Partnership Settlement Funding from the opioid abatement partnership between the Arkansas Municipal League (AML) and the Association of Arkansas Counties (AAC). rescued from starvation, some have been purchased from individuals, some have been purchased from horse auctions (a rescue of sorts) and some have been donated to the ranch.

The Arkansas prison has an annual horse auction and they sell a certain amount of horses that have aged out. Sonja points out a horse that is 17 and has a slight limp who was deemed not viable for the prison program. "He still has a lot of life and love in him, and he has found a good home here," Sonja says. As we walk the ranch, Sonja points out three stunning horses – the three Musketeers, she says. "Abe, Asa, Diamond, come on boys," Sonja shouts. One by one, the horses begin to walk toward the gate. "These guys are the head honchos here," John adds.

Currently, eighteen horses, one miniature horse, one donkey, two goats, seven dogs, and a cat reside happily at the ranch. Running Loco Bonita is a fulltime operation, and John and Sonja have jobs outside the ranch. John works at the Hot Springs Village POA in the Information Technology department, and Sonja, a paralegal, is an Assistant Project Manager for Jacobs Engineering.

Sonja and John view caring for the horses as a labor of love – this couple cherishes the horses and the magic they possess. That love is apparent when they describe the personality of each horse, and when they poignantly talk about the horses that have passed on that were the love of each of their lives - for John, it was Joshua, for Sonja it was Zee. Everything at Loco Bonita appears to run seamlessly. John says they are "very blessed to have dedicated volunteers who demonstrate how committed they are to this ranch, to these horses. They are a tremendous asset and they help us with our daily routine to ensure these horses are provided with the best care. There have been some lean times, but these horses have never missed a meal. I can't say enough how blessed we have been" he continues.

Volunteers at the ranch wear shirts that display the word HOPE on the back. H.O.P.E. Stands for horses offering people encouragement. Every Sunday evening at 5:00, Loco Bonita hosts the Women's Riding (or not) Fellowship. It is an opportunity for women to spend time with other women, bond with the horses, and enjoy nature. Guests do not have to ride a horse, they can simply walk with one if they prefer. Women who have attended describe the event as a restorative, spiritual, and healing event. One woman said, "It is a great place to share what is on your heart, and you discover that other women have the same feelings."



"Abe" one of the handsome "three musketeers"

Sonja and John hope that the horses at Loco Bonita Ranch help mend hurting hearts, and most of all offer hope and bring light to those dark places that can reside in the minds and souls of youth and adults. I mention to Sonja that the word healing comes up a lot and that it seems to represent what happens at the ranch. I share with her that when I looked into the soulful eyes of Diamond, Spirit, and Abe, my caffeineinfused anxiety was lowered. It was as though the horses absorbed my worry and stress. The word heal certainly feels fitting for what happens here. People who find their true purpose and calling in life are fortunate. They radiate a peace and tranquility that comes from living a life that is in alignment with their heart and faith. Those who want to share that peace and serenity with others are exceptional people. Sonja and John McCaleb, through Loco Bonita Ranch, share their ministry of hope, and they are exceptional people.

Loco Bonita Ranch, 132 Qualls Lane, Fountain Lake, Arkansas 71901 (501) 622-9819

Visit https://locobonitaranch.org/ to learn how you can become a volunteer, or to make a donation to this important and deserving organization.

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