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## February hosts many special days



In February, winter weather conditions can include ice and snow. (Jeff Meek photos)

**A**s I was giving thought to what to write about the month of February, several events popped into my mind. First, Valentines Day, this year on Friday, Feb.14. One source I looked at said American's will spend close to \$25 billion on gifts for their significant others, friends, co-workers and pets. Pets?

Flowers, chocolates, cards, dinners, jewelry, perfume and teddy bears seem to be some of the favorites.

A fun happening on Feb. 2 is Ground Hog Day. I can't say that without thinking of the movie. What a hoot. From what I read, the Day began in 1887, and Punxsutawney Phil has been right 39 percent of the time. Seeing his shadow means more dreary weather.

Black History Month comes in February. It's celebrates the history and achievements of African Americans. February was chosen as the month because it was on February 12 that President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. In 2025, according to a website, the theme for this year is "African Americans and Labor."

Some see February as a time to prepare for spring and the longer days soon to come.



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Oh yes and there is the Super Bowl on February 9. At present when I write this the Kansas City Chiefs, Buffalo Bills, Philadelphia Eagles or Detroit Lions have a good shot at the title.

President's Day, this year on February 17 is a time we honor George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and the contributions of other U.S. presidents.

February is the only month with 28 days, 29 days every 4 years. Known as "Leap Year" the next one comes in 2028, then 2032, etc. I've wondered about folks born on a February 29 so I did some digging and learned that those people's birthday technically would observe their birthday after 11:59 p.m. on February 28 or March 1 on non-leap years.

And there are the February Zodiac signs of Aquarius and Pisces.

Whatever your sign, whatever your plans are for February or any other month this year, the Hot Springs Village Voice wants you to experience good health, happiness and safe travels. After all, those are all signs of a wonderful HSV Life.

**Jeff Meek**  
VOICE CORRESPONDENT

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**ON THE COVER:** Donny and Tammy Benedict enjoying the beauty of nature during one of their RV excursion at Talona Ridge RV Resort in Elijah, GA.



# ALL AROUND ARKANSAS

Welcome to  
Marked Tree,  
AR, a place to  
come home to.



## Thinking about Marked Tree



Darrell W. Brown

Recently, I wrote a column about the community of Bruno (Marion County), which got me thinking about how Arkansas is filled with cities and towns with intriguing names. One such noteworthy place is Marked Tree (Poinsett County).

Marked Tree is located in the northeastern part of the state near the convergence of the St. Francis and Little Rivers. Its distinctive name and historical significance make it a noteworthy part of Arkansas's cultural and geographical tapestry.

The origins of Marked Tree date back to the early 19th century, during the era of Native American presence and early European exploration in the region. Legend has it that the town derives its name from a tree once located on the bank of the St. Francis River that had been blazed to mark a section where Native

Americans could walk about 120 yards across the land to reach the Little River and avoid paddling 12 miles.

Another theory on how Marked Tree got its unusual name is that an oak tree on the bank of the Little River was marked in the 1830s by a member of John Murrell's band of outlaws from Jackson, Tennessee. They stole horses and sometimes even slaves from Kentucky and Tennessee and brought them through Arkansas to Oklahoma and Texas.

During the 19th century, the area that would become Marked Tree was primarily rural, with agriculture playing a central role in the local economy. The fertile soil of the Mississippi River Delta made it an ideal location for farming, and crops such as cotton and rice became staples of the region. As settlers established homesteads and farms, the need for infrastructure



and transportation became evident. The railroad's arrival in the late 19th century was a turning point for Marked Tree, facilitating the transportation of goods and people and spurring economic growth.

The establishment of the railroad brought with it increased commercial activity and population growth. Marked Tree officially became an incorporated town in 1897. The development of railroads not only enhanced the local economy but also connected Marked Tree to larger markets and urban centers, fostering a sense of progress and opportunity.

In the 20th century, Marked Tree continued to grow and adapt to changing times. Like many small towns in the United States, it experienced periods of economic fluctuation, influenced by the agricultural industry's ups and downs. The mechanization of farming practices and shifts in crop demand impacted the local economy, but the community's resilience and resourcefulness allowed it to endure.

Marked Tree's tight-knit community has long shaped its cultural and social life. Churches, schools, and civic organizations have played integral roles in fostering a sense of belonging and continuity. The town's residents have preserved its history and traditions while embracing progress and modernization.

One of the city's unique aspects is its geographical location at the intersection of the St. Francis and Little Rivers. This convergence has historically made Marked Tree susceptible to flooding, but it has also contributed to the area's ecological richness. Efforts to manage and mitigate flooding, such as the construction of levees and other flood control measures by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, have been an ongoing challenge and priority for the community.

Today, Marked Tree remains a testament to the enduring spirit of small-town America. As of the 2020 census, Marked Tree's population was 2,286. While



Main Street in Marked Tree, Circa 1935

its population has declined from its mid-20th-century peak, the city continues to be a place of historical significance and community pride. Efforts to celebrate and preserve its heritage are evident in local events, historical markers, and community initiatives aimed at revitalization.

From its origins as a navigational landmark to its growth as a railroad town, Marked Tree reflects the resilience and adaptability of its people and stands as a reminder of the important history and enduring legacy of such small towns located here in the Natural State.

*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 Boston Terrier puppy named Tucker. Find him on Facebook and Instagram at AllAroundArkansas.*

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# VILLAGE PEOPLE



## Creating Expressions in *wood*

Steve Angel, with a variety of his projects. (Lewis Delavan photos)

Lewis Delavan  
STAFF WRITER

Retirement to Hot Springs Village led to opportunities for expression in wood for two Villagers.

Two former Midwesterners, Steve Angel and Ken Koepp, pass on their love of woodworking through building toys year-round for HSV Woodworkers' Club's annual toy drive. Steve and Ken both said their fathers were handy with tools and could build anything!

Steve grew up in a home built by his father and grandfather from a Sears & Roebuck kit, and his father enjoyed woodworking as time allowed. Two years of high-school woodworking honed Steve's familiarity with woodworking tools.

Both Villagers enjoy passing on skills to others. Ken shared his love of woodworking by teaching an evening woodworking class at National Park College for seven years.

Tools interface the individual to the wood. "I'm kind of a tool freak," Ken says.

And a Sears home kit connects both Villagers. The mother and grandmother of Ken's wife, Jan, both lived in homes built from the retailer's kit. He recalled that the fancy home kit of Jan's grandmother cost \$14,000. Her mother's standard Sears home kit was a mere \$8,000. Hard work then transformed a huge stack of site-delivered lumber into a finished home. Imagine buying all the materials for a home including a spiral staircase and fancy doors for \$14,000 today.

The Koepps met while attending the University of Minnesota and were both math teachers. Ken also was a school principal several years in Minnesota. The couple then taught at privately operated American curriculum schools around the globe.

The private schools cater to children of Americans working abroad. Ken added that there are around 350 privately operated American-curriculum schools, while the U.S. Department of Defense runs another 250 American-curriculum schools.

"We have traveled in dozens and dozens of countries," he said.



Before retiring, Ken served as a programmer analyst for a small company. "That was really fun," he says.

Steve graduated with a criminal justice degree and was a private investigator and later as manager of loss prevention for all of the Zayre and TJ Maxx distribution centers. Then he began managing the operation of distribution centers including national networks. Prior to retirement he was the national distribution manager for Sid Harvey's.

Steve has been married to Colleen Angel (Tiny Angel Gowns founder) for 46 years. They have two children, six grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren. Colleen grew up on a Wisconsin farm and taught home economics. Steve & Colleen met in student government in the Wisconsin state university system. Upon graduation she took a teaching position in Illinois.

Steve is in his 4th year as president of HSV Woodworkers, which meets the second Wednesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. in Ouachita Activities Building, Ponce de Leon Center.

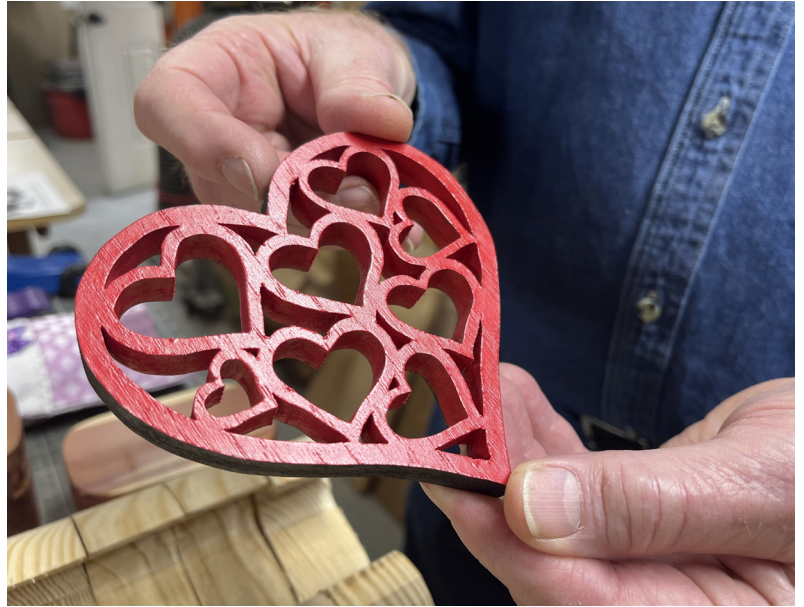
The club welcomes individuals interested in learning woodworking. Having one's own shop is not required. Club activities include building bookcases for students in three area school districts. Bookcases are awarded to students who improve the most in reading.

HSV Woodworkers conducts an afterschool program at Fountain Lake – students build projects from kits the club members create.

Building toys is a year-round activity for club members.

"This past year 815 toys were built and given to kids in foster care, shelters and the Head Start program," Steve said.

Woodworkers have enjoyed field trips to sawmills,



Steve Angel expressed love for his wife through this heart.

cabinet manufacturers, custom woodworking shops and the Innovation Hub.

To further expand the knowledge of members, skillbuilding workshops followed by contests and challenges for Woodworker members. "This past year there was a mystery box build," Steve said. Teams of members were challenged to build toys from the wood contained in their box.

Steve is also a member of HSV Anglers Club.

Ken has served as a Woodworkers officer and is a member of Hot Springs-based Central Arkansas Woodturners. About half that group's membership are Villagers.

Learn more about HSV Woodworkers at <https://villagewoodworkers.org>. Or ponder a new direction in wood through the Woodturners site at <https://caw.clubexpress.com/>.



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# LAKE CATHERINE STATE PARK

## Winter Wonders at Lake Catherine State Park

Lewis Delavan  
STAFF WRITER

Winter is a good time to visit Lake Catherine State Park, with interpretive activities, trails and an absence of bugs.

Here's a sampling of winter programs at the park, located on Lake Catherine's south shore. From Hot Springs, the park may be reached from Highway 290, then turn onto Highway 171 North at the park signs.

- Area author Ashlyn Ohm will lead the two-hour Writing in Nature Workshop at 9 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 25. "The workshop will teach you how to truly connect with nature among the forest and lakeside at Lake Catherine State Park," says interpreter Carrie Balkman. "You can experience writing your own pieces along the shores of Lake Catherine. From the Nature Cabin we will be hiking short sections of trails and the park."

Registration is \$10 and ends at 5 p.m. Friday, Jan. 24. Sign-up by calling the visitor center at 501-844-4176 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.; payment is due at the time of registration.

- Learn about knots and navigation in a half-hour program at 9 a.m. Sunday, Jan. 26 at the nature cabin. "The difference between a great experience and a sour experience at Lake Catherine State Park may rely on your knowledge of knots and navigating the park,"



Author Ashlyn Ohm.

Balkman says. The event is free.

- Sample Lake Catherine fishing from 4-5 p.m. Friday, Jan. 31, next to the marina boat ramp. A limited number of participants are allowed; sign-up is required and free. Call the visitor center at 501-844-4176 to reserve a spot.

- Interested in "finding Woody?" Balkman will present information about woodpeckers at the amphitheater at 10 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 1 and also at 3 p.m. Friday, Feb. 7. After her talk she will lead a walk in search of the birds. Good shoes and drinking water are suggested for the free program.

- Search for clues: At 1 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 1 and 1 p.m. Friday, Feb. 7, Balkman will lead "Operation Eurycea" in a program aimed for children. "There are unique discoveries to make along the Slunger Creek Trail. See if you have what it takes to solve the clues." The 30-minute program will begin at the Slunger Creek Nature trailhead.

- "Canvas on the Water" – Adults and children alike can capture the beauty of Slunger Bay at 4 p.m. Friday, Feb. 7. Sign up at the visitor center by 5 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 6; registration is \$18 for ages 12-older;



\$15 for ages 6-11. Spots are limited; reservations are first-come, first-served.

The park offers trails, winter activities, along with a launch ramp, pavilion, picnic sites, and playgrounds. The well-marked Falls Branch Trail leads to a waterfall.

The park has 20 fully equipped cabins, including one two-bedroom cabin with a patio overlooking the water and private lake access from its own fishing pier. Many native stone and wood buildings were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s.

The park offers 70 campsites, six "primitive" tent sites and one Rent-A-Yurt. Many sites are on the lakeshore. Park interpreters offer hikes, lake tours and programs year-round.

The park offers the lake's only full-service marina; however, the marina is closed for construction through March 15. No fuel is available for sale until it reopens.

Contact Lake Catherine State Park at 501-844-4176.

## Want to explore further from Hot Springs Village?

A unique historical park in southwest Arkansas is celebrating its 200th anniversary.

The town of Washington was established in 1824 in the Arkansas Territory. Sited on the Southwest Trail Military Road that connected St. Louis to Texas, it witnessed people eager for a new life in the frontier.

In the 20th century, Washington used heritage tourism and historic preservation to help the town survive.

Now in its third century, Washington's artifacts and historical information are displayed at historic Washington State Park in a special exhibit open through Saturday, May 24. The exhibit is in the 1874 Courthouse, 100 SW Morrison St.

The nearby Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives, a unit of Arkansas Heritage, offers a research room for the public to study archives.

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# HS/HSV SYMPHONY GUILD



Ouachita Baptist University Music Department's performance will be May 1.

Sandy Johansen  
STAFF WRITER

Winter may still be in the forecast, but don't miss the early ticket sales for the upcoming HS/HSV Symphony Guild Spring concerts.

The HS/HSV Symphony Guild is delighted to present "Scott Carrell in Concert" as part of our Classic Concert Series. The concert will be held on Sunday, March 2 at 3 pm at Presbyterian Kirk in the Pines. General admission is \$10 per person. You may register in advance on our website (your email confirmation is your ticket) or pay at the door.

Carrell's concerto performances feature works from Bach to Prokofiev and include appearances with the Austin Symphony Orchestra, the Pine Bluff Symphony Orchestra, the Southwestern University Orchestra,

the Plainview Symphony Orchestra, the Fort Worth Civic Orchestra, the Little Rock Wind Symphony, the New York Classical Players, the Russian String Orchestra, and twice with the Harding University/Community Orchestra. He co-founded and performed in the Searcy Chamber Music Series as well as 242 Strings, a faculty piano quartet at Harding University. Other chamber music recitals have been performed with members of the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra and the Austin Symphony Orchestra. He currently teaches piano, piano related courses, and music theory at Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas. Carrell is in demand as a soloist, collaborative artist, teacher and adjudicator.



On Sunday, April 27, at Woodlands Auditorium, after a short A S / A S O Guild meeting scheduled for 3:00 p.m., both the ASO Arkansas Academy and ASO Youth Orchestras will be performing. Tom McDonald is a violinist with the ASO and conducts the Academy Orchestra. The Academy Orchestra is the intermediate level ensemble with a full complement of strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion.



**Tom McDonald, violinist with the ASO and conductor of the Academy Orchestra.**

The Youth Orchestra is conducted by Gabriel Bruce. Bruce currently serves as orchestra director at Mills University Studies High School and Mills Middle School in Pulaski County, and has previously taught orchestra in the Pine Bluff schools in Arkansas, where he also served as music director of the Pine Bluff Symphony Youth Orchestra.



**Gabriel Bruce conducts the ASO Youth Orchestra.**

Thursday, May 1, scheduled for dinner and show at the Balboa Baptist Outreach Center will be the Ouachita Baptist University Musical Theatrical Department dinner starting at 5:30 p.m. and

show at 6:45 p.m. Dinner is \$35 per person and concert only \$20 per person. Ticket sales begin March 3.

The evening begins with a wonderful dinner catered by Riverside Catering. Following will be an outstanding performance by the Ouachita Baptist University Music Department performing 2 or 3 vignettes of the best songs from “Hello Dolly,” and “Best of Tiger Tune Productions,” along with other musical treats



**Scott Carrell’s concert performance will be held March 2.**

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## COVER STORY

# From Empty Nest to Open Road

*Donny and Tammy Benedict embrace the RV life*

Donny and Tammy Benedict relax with a campfire outside their RV. (Photos shared by Tammy Benedict)

Robin Raborn Burns  
VOICE CORRESPONDENT

Meet Donny and Tammy Benedict, a teacher and her semi-retired hubby who live and travel in their RV. The Benedict's have been RV'ing since 2018 and living full time in their RV since 2021. They became empty nesters, and realized that they no longer needed their family-sized home. So, they sold it, and purchased a smaller abode. That was definitely easier and more practical, but there was still something missing. They engaged in on-going soul searching on what life style could help them find their inner Zen. They knew the house thing just wasn't working. Tammy shared that one night they were each watching TV in different rooms of their home. As it turned out, they were each watching different shows about people living



and traveling in their RVs. Whether it was a quirky coincidence or a celestial assist, the Benedicts were intrigued. They bought an inexpensive RV and tried the camping life for 30 days. They loved it, and realized as individuals, and as a couple, that an RV life was what they wanted. Their next chapter began. Extreme downsizing! Tiny house on wheels! Trading stuff for freedom! Their new home is a Keystone Cougar 316rls.

Donny works part time during the school year while Tammy teaches. They are stationary in the RV during the school year in their hometown of Benton - but on school breaks and long weekends, they hit the road for new adventures that help them check off the items on





Cozy RV living room.

their bucket lists. To date, the Benedicts have visited over 26 states, 13 National parks and close to 80 state parks.

As they quickly acclimated to their new lifestyle, and through their travels, they became “RV ambassadors.” They have befriended owners of numerous RV parks, and when they stay at these sites, they share their experiences on their instagram (2benedicts) to inspire and encourage others to live the life they dream of. They are now well-regarded social media influencers. The 2Benedicts are the ultimate duo for anyone seeking inspiration, advice, and practical tips on life’s big and small RV adventures. Known for their approachable and engaging style, they deliver content that’s not just relatable but deeply helpful. Whether they’re sharing travel hacks, offering heartfelt advice on navigating transitions like empty nesting, or showcasing innovative ways to embrace full-time RV living, the 2Benedicts have built a reputation for being both informative and genuine. Their posts resonate

because they’re rooted in real experiences, sprinkled with humor, and always crafted to leave their audience feeling uplifted and empowered. Following them isn’t just about learning - it’s about finding a community that supports and inspires.

Tammy says “It is our goal to educate our followers about the benefits and realities of this RV life. We want to be a trusted travel resource.” They have become so popular that different locations (nationwide) contact them to stay for free and do a review! They were 1 of 10 ambassadors in 2024 for THOR, the world’s largest RV manufacturer. They have been ‘cherry picked’ for a great job opportunity coming up next year for 3 months in Glen Arbor, Michigan. Donny’s favorite experiences so far have been staring at the scenic Montana Mountains, riding horses in Wyoming and visiting the Football Hall of Fame.

His bucket list of activities yet to come includes seeing a game in each NFL stadium and caravanning to Alaska with friends.

Tammy’s favorite experiences thus far have been hiking in the snow in Glacier National Park, watching

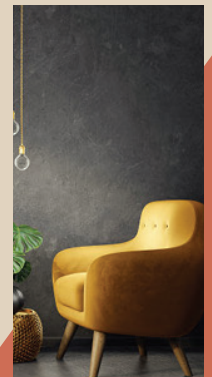
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**On the road with the Benedicts.**

the wildlife in Yellowstone, and having their kids join them on trips.

Tammy's future bucket list activities include caravanning to Alaska and Baja.

Have you considered an RV lifestyle? The 2Benedicts

suggest you try RVing for a weekend, and work your way up to 30 days to get a full and realistic picture of RV life.

Remember to check 2Benedicts - it is chock full of content relating to the RV life that you simply should not miss!





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# VILLAGE PEOPLE



## Overcoming Challenges

*Villager Sharon Tyler deals with Charles Bonnet Syndrome*

Jim and Sharon Tyler. (Submitted photo)

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Jeff Meek  
VOICE CORRESPONDENT

When Hot Springs Village resident Sharon Tyler went to bed on June 17, she had no idea that soon her life would change. You see on that date she unintentionally rolled over and fell out of bed, hitting her right eye on the corner of her nightstand. Her immediate thought was, "I was angry that I did it. I was too close to the edge of the bed," Tyler said.

She went to St Vincent's emergency room in Hot Springs for an examination and analysis, then was transported by ambulance to UAMS for surgery. "The incredible medical team was resolute, skilled and compassionate," Tyler told the Voice. Her doctor was Michael D. Kaczowski.

As the days passed, she encountered hallucinations of white, fluffy puppy dogs and dancing ballpoint pens. "It was frightening. The hallucinations moved, were in color and lasted several minutes and they still occur occasionally," Tyler said.

The issue turned out to be what's known as Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS), a condition that causes



hallucinations in people who have lost some or all of their vision. “The hallucinations occur because the brain is trying to make sense of the lack of visual input, essentially trying to fill in the gaps with images.”

CBS is more common in older adults and those with conditions like age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma or diabetic retinopathy. “There is no cure but talking about the hallucinations and understanding that they are the result of vision loss can help manage the condition,” Tyler explained. “I knew what I was seeing was not there.”

On Sept. 30, after 3 months of healing, Tyler was referred to Alloplastic Reconstruction, Inc. to begin a 6-week process for an eye prosthesis. The process involves the engineered combination of computer pigment printing, innovative transparent laying process and artistic hand painting techniques customized for the patient.

The iris is filled with ultra fine stroma detail and 3-dimensional depth. The sclera with the polychromatic wash of color and vascular depth appears as living tissue.

“Prior to receiving my prosthesis, I felt the need to be proactive and search for programs that would help me adjust. My depth perception and peripheral vision had changed. Simple tasks like pouring a drink, eating and navigating a crowded room required that I learn to adapt to new ways to do things,” said Tyler.

She contacted Lake Forest Senior Living at Hot Springs Village Outpatient Therapy and Wellness Center, participated in 8 one-hour classes which facilitated a path to empowerment and helped her regain her independence. “I was taught eye exercises which made my good eye stronger. The staff was very competent and warm-hearted,” Tyler said.

“My goal was to learn more about FOCUS, a program for Villagers experiencing low vision. The program is designed to learn alternative ways to do daily tasks so one stays safe and independent. Their mission statement is, ‘We step in where your eye doctor leaves off.’”

The program’s classes meet twice a week for 3 weeks in the fall and spring and there is a small registration fee to cover supplies.

Tyler told the Voice that numerous topics are discussed during well prepared presentations by an all-volunteer group. “Suggestions like contrast,



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lighting, marking, labeling, magnifiers, canes and other optical aids and safety in our homes. We were taught to use our hands to follow along walls going up and down stairs. The most important lesson was how to instruct someone who has offered to help assist me as a guide.” That instruction involves reaching for the helper’s arm right above the elbow, so you are in control of movement.

Tyler is impressed with FOCUS. “My hope is to be involved with FOCUS. FOCUS engages with our community to raise awareness and collaborates with other organizations to enhance the group’s impact. It’s a dynamic support group with a shared passion,” she said.

Summing up the loss of an eye Tyler said, “Emotionally this journey has had its difficulties, but it is manageable with time and patience. You cannot face these trials alone. Give yourself permission to ask for help and reach out to others. I have been gifted by those who have extended their hand to me.”

Those people include her husband Jim, her safe

harbor. “Jim provides stability and comfort amidst my confusion and moments of helplessness, and he offers me a sanctuary of love and care.” Friends like Shirley, who Tyler sees as a mentor, Toni, Tyler’s inspiration, Judy, who Tyler calls her kindred spirit and C.J. who she deeply cherishes. “These dear friends not only supported me through the loss of my vision but also my 2-year battle with breast cancer while enduring surgery, chemo and radiation.”

Tyler’s purpose in sharing her story is simply this. She wants her experience to be helpful and informative to others that may deal with eye injury. It hasn’t been easy, and Tyler still struggles somewhat with her right eye accepting change. But talking with her on the telephone, I can tell Sharon Tyler is determined to continue with a full exciting life and is very grateful to others who have helped her along this journey. In an email to me Tyler wrote, “Friends are there when your hopes are raveled and your nerves are knotted; talking about nothing in particular, you can feel the tangles untwist.”

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# From One End to the Other

SCAT moves residents around the Village and beyond

Tom Grasse shows off the new Ford Escape SUV, the fifth car in the SCAT fleet and bought with donations from the HSV community. (Suzanne Sweeten photos)

Suzanne Sweeten  
VOICE CORRESPONDENT

Face it: Hot Springs Village’s geographical layout would present challenges for a public transportation system. Covering 26,000 acres and 486 miles of paved roads, it is home to approximately 17,000 residents, with reports indicating that the average age of these residents is around 65 years. Meeting the transportation needs in such a unique context is no small task, but South Central Arkansas Transportation (SCAT) rises



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to the challenge and surpasses expectations.

SCAT was established in 2007 to offer affordable, reliable, and efficient transportation for residents within Hot Springs Village (HSV) and near the East and West gates. When driving is no longer an option, SCAT, along with its over 66 volunteer drivers, provides Villagers with a valuable option for reaching their appointments and running errands at an affordable cost of \$4 one way.

Lynda and Tom Grasse lead SCAT, and both are dedicated to maintaining its quality customer service. Tom provides some interesting input, “SCAT is financed by the Central Arkansas Development Council (CADC). We have five cars in our fleet. Recently, we purchased a new 2024 Ford Escape SUV through donations from the HSV community. We are excited to add it to our other vehicles. The organization (SCAT) owns four cars; one is on loan from the CADC.

In October, we sought help from our volunteer drivers, and within three months, we had large donations. One couple sent in a \$1000 check. They knew their neighbors used our services and thought it a worthwhile donation. HSV residents and their generosity made our new car purchase a reality.”

In 2024, SCAT provided over 5,000 rides per month, resulting in approximately 50,000 rides for the year. This service is managed entirely by an all-volunteer organization. The typical profile of a rider includes senior citizens, some of whom may use a wheelchair or walker. Moreover, adults who are unable or uncomfortable driving due to vision or physical disabilities, as well as those undergoing rehabilitation, can experience a sense of freedom. Some riders utilize



Lynda and Tom Grasse are featured in the SCAT offices. Lynda helped found SCAT in 2007 and watched her brainchild grow to capacity.

the service to participate socially in various events. Riders must be capable of entering and exiting the van independently, and those who require a wheelchair must have a companion with them.

“We can keep people in their homes, and when they can’t drive for various reasons, we’re there to take them. For example, we transport six women to the McAuley Center for lunch and some activities four days a week. All or some of them go every week, and this Christmas, they brought in a large sack of candy to thank all their drivers and the staff in our office.” He pushes back his hat and laughs. “Everyone appreciates us, and nobody is mad at us.”

SCAT drivers arrive at the passenger’s home and

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wait 10 minutes. If no one comes out during that time, the driver will call the passenger. If there is still no response, the driver will go to the door and ring the doorbell. After that, the driver will contact the SCAT office, which maintains an “In Case of Emergency” contact number on file.

“We contact the emergency person, which usually resolves the issue. However, if that’s not the case, we call the police. There is a problem in some situations, and officials take the necessary steps,” Grasse explained.

Grasse is incredibly proud of Lynda; she was the driving force behind the formation of SCAT and has worked tirelessly to grow the organization. Lynda and Tom appreciate the years of support from the

HSV community and the volunteers who have made it all happen.

Grasse concludes, “We’re at a point where we can’t grow it much more. Our customer census varies, and that affects everything else. We’re working at maximum capacity, and I don’t know what the answer to that is.”

SCAT ride hours are from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Appointments must be made by noon the day before your scheduled ride. To make a reservation, please call 501-915-0087 or leave a message. A scheduler will return your call. SCAT is a 501(c)(3) organization and all donations are tax-deductible. For more information, visit [VillageSCAT.com](http://VillageSCAT.com).

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# VALENTINE'S DAY



## No chocolate? No Valentine!

Valentine's Day is a day of love nestled in the middle of February. Sweethearts use Valentine's Day as an opportunity to show the people they care about just how deep those feelings run. A 2024 survey from the National Retail Federation found consumers expected to spend \$25.9 billion on Valentine's Day, up from \$23.9 billion in 2023. Forecasters suspect spending is likely to increase this year as well.

Valentine's Day is awash in many different customs. Here's a deep look at some of those enduring traditions and others that some may feel should be brought back into favor or adopted entirely.

### Handwritten cards

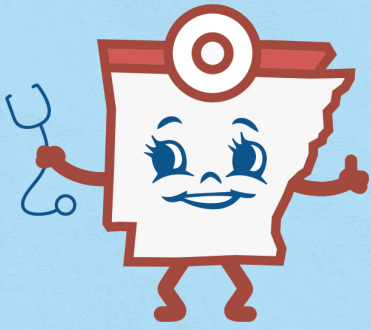
It's a common scene each year in card retailers and pharmacies: people three-deep in the aisle trying to pick out Valentine's Day cards in the eleventh hour.

People can save themselves the hassle of fighting the crowds if they make their own handmade cards. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sweethearts created unique cards from scratch, according to *Country Living*. And prior to products produced by Hallmark and other greeting card companies, people used to send one another cards customized with personalized messages.

### Pampering gentlemen

It is common in North America for Valentine's Day celebrations to lean significantly toward favoring women, who are often on the receiving end of flowers and chocolates. However, in South Korea and Japan, it is the men who are pampered with such gifts. Women purchase chocolates for their male partners, family members and coworkers as tokens of





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appreciation and affection. Never fear, a month later on White Day (March 14) men reciprocate with candy, cake and flowers.

#### Bouquets

These days a dozen long-stemmed red roses might be the norm for Valentine's Day gifting. However, roses weren't always the preferred flower for the holiday. History.com reports that, in the nineteenth century, bouquets might contain all sorts of flowers, each chosen to convey certain messages. Individuals can research the meanings behind certain flowers and put together a Valentine's Day gift this

year that expresses exactly what they are feeling.

#### Puzzle purses

Sweethearts in Victorian England created puzzle purses, which were a series of love letters that could be read separately, but also fit together to create a design and message. These intricately folded sheets of paper had parts of messages or verses written on different corners and were meant to be read in a specific order.

#### Heart-shaped chocolate boxes

British chocolatier Richard Cadbury is credited with creating the first heart-shaped box for Valentine's Day. The boxes were intended to be so beautiful they would be kept to hold trinkets or love letters. Ornate chocolate boxes are not quite as common today, although the gifting of chocolate for the holiday is still strong.

#### Celebrating in June?

Many Brazilians skip Valentine's Day in February and choose to celebrate Saint Anthony, the patron saint of marriage and matchmaking, on June 12. Celebrating both is fine for those who prefer to shower affection on loved ones multiple times a year.

Valentine's Day traditions are still strong and can add a little something extra to celebrations this February.



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# 4 Facts About St. Valentine

Saint Valentine is the patron saint of lovers and engaged and married couples. He also is the name behind the holiday that inspires images of red hearts and rose petals in the middle of February.

Not much is actually known about St. Valentine because records are sparse. However, these facts have emerged.

St. Valentine could be one of at least three individuals who were martyred. In fact, some believe there were about a dozen St. Valentines.

Of course St. Valentine is known for presiding over lovers. However, he's also the patron saint of epilepsy, watching over those who experience seizures associated with the disease.

Visitors to the Basilica of Santa Maria in Rome can find the flower-adorned skull of St. Valentine on display. Other parts of St. Valentine's skeleton are on display in the Czech Republic, England, France, and



Ireland.

Some people think Geoffrey Chaucer may have invented Valentine's Day. In his 'Parlement of Foules', he speaks of a tradition of courtly love with the celebration of St. Valentine's Day. This association became more established after Chaucer's poem received widespread attention.



## Dr. Albezargan

Dr. Fatin Albezargan is accepting new patients at the Healthcenter at Hot Springs Village. As a primary and family care doctor, Dr. Albezargan offers wellness visits, acute illness care, treatment for chronic diseases, and more. She is fluent in English and Arabic, and is an excellent choice for patients seeking a compassionate and knowledgeable family physician.

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# RECIPE CORNER



## GREEN CHILE BREAKFAST BURRITOS

Makes 6 servings

- 6 eggs
- 3 egg whites
- 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced
- Dash cayenne pepper
- 4 breakfast turkey sausage links, casings removed
- 3/4 cup shredded reduced-fat Mexican cheese blend
- 1 can (4 ounces) chopped green chiles, drained
- 6 whole wheat tortillas (8 inches), warmed
- 6 tablespoons salsa

1. In a small bowl, whisk the eggs, egg whites, jalapeno and cayenne; set aside.

2. Crumble sausage into a large skillet; cook over medium heat until no longer pink. Drain. Push sausage to the sides of pan. Pour egg mixture into center of pan. Cook and stir until set. Sprinkle with cheese and chiles. Remove from the heat, cover and let stand until cheese is melted.

3. Place 1/3 cup mixture off center on each tortilla. Fold sides and end over filling; roll up. Top with salsa.



## CHERRY PIE BARS

Yield: One 9-by-13-inch pan

- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 4 eggs
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 21-ounce can cherry pie filling

Preheat oven to 350 F. Line a 9-by-13-inch pan with parchment paper.

In a stand mixer, or with a hand mixer, cream sugar and butter on low. Add the eggs one at a time. Beat until just combined.

Add the flour, baking powder and salt. Spread a little over half the cake batter into the pan. Evenly spread the pie filling over the top, and spoon the rest of the cake batter over the pie filling. It's fine if the cherries show through.

Bake 35 minutes or until the top has turned slightly golden. Do not overbake. Allow to cool and slice into squares. Enjoy!



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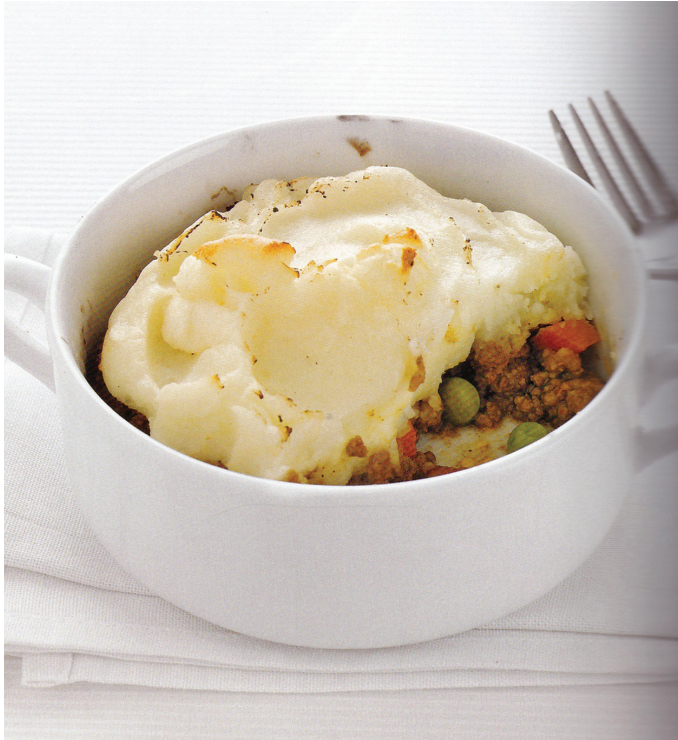
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## COTTAGE PIES

February may be known as the shortest month of the year, but it also can be among the coldest. When cooking during this time of year, whether it's a family meal or a romantic dinner for two on Valentine's Day, foods that take the cold weather into consideration are the best bets.

Cottage pie is a meal traditionally served in areas of Great Britain and Ireland. The name is sometimes used interchangeably with shepherd's pie, but that's a mistake. While shepherd's pie uses lamb in the recipe, cottage pie contains beef. Cottage pie features a layer of meat and vegetables topped with potatoes.

1 1/2 pounds Yukon gold potatoes (about 3), peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces

- Kosher salt and black pepper
- 1/2 cup whole milk
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 pound ground beef
- 1/3 cup ketchup
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 1/2 cups frozen peas and carrots

Heat oven to 425 F. Place the potatoes in a large pot and add enough cold water to cover. Bring to a boil and add 2 teaspoons salt. Reduce heat and simmer until just tender, 15 to 18 minutes. Drain the potatoes and return them to the pot. Add the milk, butter, and 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper and mash to the desired consistency.

Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the beef and cook, breaking it up with a spoon, until no longer pink, 5 to 6 minutes. Stir in the ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Fold in the peas and carrots.

Transfer the beef mixture to 4 individual baking dishes and top with the mashed potatoes. Bake until golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes.

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# FEBRUARY EVENTS

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Northwoods Trails, 300 Pineland Drive  
Saturday, February 1 at 8 a.m.

**US 97 Home and Outdoor Show**  
Hot Springs Convention Center  
February 7 - 8 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

**Land Navigation at Lake Catherine**  
Lake Catherine State Park  
February 8 at 8 a.m.

**HSV POA Candidate Forum**  
Woodlands Auditorium  
February 10 at 2 p.m.

**Valentine's Dinner and Dance**  
Coronado Center  
February 12 at 5 p.m.

**Murder Among Three's Company**  
The Porterhouse, 707 Central Avenue  
February 14 - 15 at 6 p.m.

**Sara Evans Unbroken Tour**  
Oaklawn Racing Casino Resort  
February 16 at 7 p.m.

**HSV Chamber Awards Banquet**  
Coronado Center  
February 18 at 5:30 p.m.

**Broadway Our Way**  
Woodlands Auditorium  
February 20 at 7 p.m.

**Sofie and the New Relics**  
Woodlands Auditorium  
February 22 at 7 p.m.

**Rebel Stakes**  
Oaklawn Casino Resort Racing  
February 22

**Tulip Extravaganza**  
Garvan Woodland Gardens  
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**Rebel Stakes**  
Oaklawn Casino Resort Racing  
February 22

**Hot Springs Concert Band Winter Concert**  
Woodlands Auditorium  
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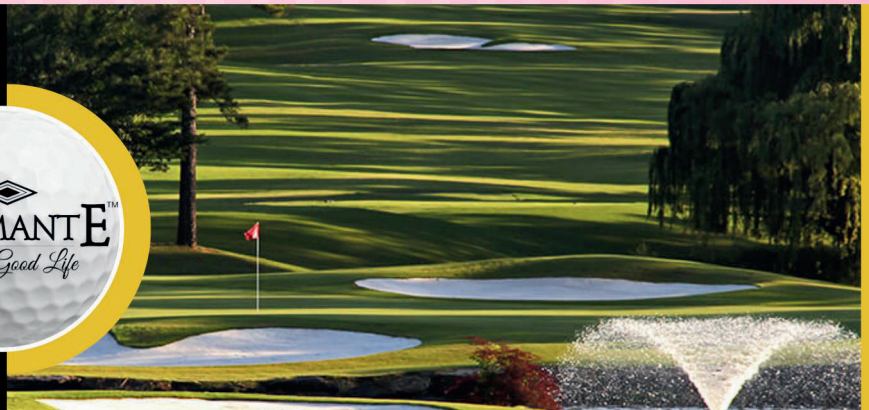
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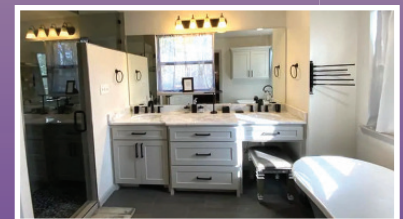
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