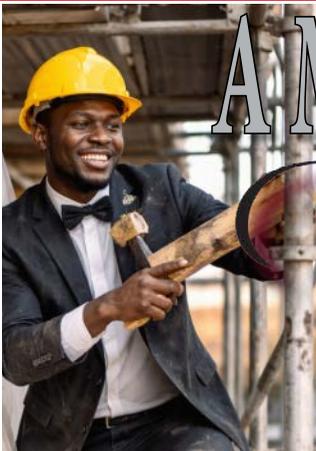




TIM ALLSTON: Jesse Jackson and the Mathematics of Power - p. 5

FREE



A Marriage That Works!" - p. 4



Friday
February 27, 2026
Vol. 12, No. 26
ValleyWeeklyllc.com



SALUTE!
Rosetta James Foundation
ELDER OF THE WEEK



Dr. Katie W. Byrd

"Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage." — Lao Tzu

Payroll Employment Rises, Unemployment Unchanged

Total nonfarm payroll employment rose by 130,000 in January, and the unemployment rate changed little at 4.3 percent. Job gains occurred in health care, social assistance, and construction, while federal government and financial activities lost jobs. - Bureau of Labor Statistics

DLC Welcomes Cohort XX

The Tennessee Valley Diversity Leadership Consortium (DLC) welcomed 14 members of Cohort XX on Tuesday, February 17, at HudsonAlpha facilities.

The cohort was greeted by Dr. Dorothy W. Huston, DLC founder, who provided a history of the organization and encouraged the group to take full advantage of the program's many opportunities.

For a decade, DLC has cultivated emerging leaders from all Huntsville/Madison County communities—empowering them to become changemakers across government, business, education, and the nonprofit sector.

DLC provides a 12-week curricula with universal topics for challenging discussions and personal growth. Its subject matter experts (SMEs) are top leaders and influencers from the community and the Tennessee Valley.

Nearly 300 illustrious alumni have graduated from the program from throughout the local community.

For additional information, call (256) 361-9474 or email info@tnvalleydlc.com.

Bob Harrison Center Welcomes New Director

The Robert "Bob" Harrison Senior Wellness and Advocacy Center has selected a new Center Director.

Brandon V. Watkins is a native of Decatur, Ala., and a dedicated public servant with a life-long commitment to youth development, education and community engagement. He has been married for 31 years to his high school sweetheart, Dr. Marcy Watkins, and together they are the proud parents



of three children: Brandon II, Ivy, and Zoe.

Watkins holds a Bachelor of Science in behavioral science from Athens State University and a Master of Science in human services from Amridge University. He is currently pursuing

a second master's degree in clinical mental health counseling while working toward licensure as a professional counselor.

Watkins' professional journey has focused on school and justice-related systems, where he has consistently advocated for the growth, accountability, and well-being of young people and families.

In his personal time, he enjoys fishing and watching football.

Black Auburn Alums Plan Reunion

The Black Alumni Council is inviting Auburnites to the Black Alumni Reunion, a two-day celebration of engaging social events and networking opportunities on April 17-18.

Tour Auburn's athletic facilities, tailgate for the A-Day Spring Football Game, honor recipients of the 2026 Black Alumni Awards and more!

All members of the Auburn Family

are welcome to attend.

Don't miss out! The deadline to register is April 11. For a complete agenda, nearby accommodation options and registration, click [HERE](#).

AKAs Hosting Founders' Day Program

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, Epsilon Gamma Omega, Gamma Mu, and Omicron Zeta Chapters, will celebrate the sorority's 118th Founders' Day Program on Sunday, March 1, 2026. It will be at Progressive Union Missionary Baptist Church, 1919 Brandontown Road, Huntsville, Ala., at 2:30 p.m.

The theme is "Elevate Their Vision, Galvanize Our Power, and Or-



chestrate Impactful Service."

The guest speaker will be Patricia Russell-McCloud, Esq. (above). The public is cordially invited.

For additional information, contact the following email address or phone number: tonya-wood1908@gmail.com or (256) 653-6728.

The Valley Weekly

INSIDE THIS ISSUE!

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Here are the top issues and events in Washington, D.C., for the week of February 23.

1. CONGRESS. The House and Senate are in session this week and met on Tuesday night in Joint Session to receive the President's annual State of the Union Address at 9 p.m. EST. Most of the 260,000 employees of the Homeland Security Department, including the Coast Guard, TSA, Secret Service, and FEMA continue to work without pay due to a lapse in appropriations (ICE/CBP operations are being funded from last year's Reconciliation/Tax bill) as Congressional and White House negotiators continue to argue on which reforms they can agree pertaining to immigration enforcement. Reps. Khanna (D-CA) and Massie (R-KY) plan to move in the next 2 weeks to force a House floor vote on a resolution to require authorization from Congress before the President can use military force against Iran. On Thursday and Friday, Bill and Hillary Clinton will sit for depositions in Chappaqua, NY ordered by the GOP-led House Oversight Committee as part of its investigation into Jeffrey Epstein.

2. EXECUTIVE BRANCH.

On Friday, in response to the Supreme Court ruling in *Learning Resources, Inc. v. Trump* and *Trump v. V.O.S. Selections* that invalidated most of his tariffs, the President issued an executive order rescinding the current tariffs, but then issued a new order under Sec 122 of the Trade Act imposing a temporary 10% global tariff that started Tuesday at 12:01 a.m. (raised by him to 15% on Saturday) that will end in 150 days — although he expected, among other goods, fertilizer, beef, oranges, tomatoes, pharmaceuticals, and autos. Last Wednesday, the President signed an Executive Order mobilizing the Defense Production Act to protect domestic production of glyphosate-based herbicides, such as Monsanto's Roundup weedkiller — that also happens to be the subject of a current Supreme Court case that will decide whether to block thousands of lawsuits alleging Monsanto failed to warn people that Roundup could cause cancer.

3. SUPREME COURT. As anticipated last Friday, the Court issued its long-awaited decision on the legality of the President's fentanyl and reciprocal tariffs, ruling in a 6-3 decision authored by Chief Justice Roberts

that the sweeping tariffs exceeded the powers given to the President by Congress under a 1977 law providing him the authority to regulate commerce during national emergencies created by foreign threats; thereby eliminating the tariffs. The Court, did not, however, weigh in on whether or how the federal government should provide refunds to the importers who have paid an estimated \$175 billion in tariffs (per Reuters). Read the 21-page decision here: Supreme Court tariff ruling. This Tuesday and Wednesday are decision days at the Supreme Court and it could issue a decision this week whether to strike down Section Two of the Voting Rights Act that effectively allow red southern states to blow up their congressional maps ahead of the 2026 midterms, putting 5 or more minority-held seats in play.

4. HIGHER EDUCATION.

The Department of Labor has announced \$65 million in available funding for the 6th round of the Strengthening Community College Training Grant (SCCTG) competition, with the potential for an additional \$65 million from FY26 funding. This round focuses on building program and

system capacity to expand access to short-term training opportunities through Workforce Pell Grants, emphasizing industry-driven strategies, worker mobility, and integration with state workforce systems such as WIOA partners. Community colleges seeking to scale statewide impact through these workforce initiatives are encouraged to act quickly, as the application deadline is May 20, 2026, at 11:59 PM ET.

5. DEI - Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. On February 20, the General Services Administration (GSA) proposed new certification requirements that would

require federal grant applicants to certify they are not engaging in unlawful discrimination, including DEI activities deemed unlawful under President Trump's Executive Orders and Department of Justice guidance. If finalized, the requirements — which would be embedded in the System for Award Management (SAM) registration process — would apply to all entities receiving federal grants, cooperative agreements, loans, and direct appropriations. Importantly, the proposal targets only DEI activities that constitute unlawful discrimination, not all DEI programs; however, the lack of legal clarity

around which activities qualify as unlawful may create compliance challenges for institutions pursuing federal funding. Stakeholders have until March 30 to submit comments to GSA on the proposal, and its implementation may face legal challenges similar to those that arose from prior Administration efforts to insert comparable provisions into grant certifications.

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The Valley Weekly

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Seasons of Uncertainty: A Call to Steady Our Hearts

Every year we look to Punxsutawney Phil for a lighthearted prediction, but lately even the groundhog seems baffled.

One week we bask in 70-degree sunshine, the next we shiver in the 30s. Our bodies feel it, too — colds and flu linger, and illnesses we thought were long gone are quietly reappearing.

Nature mirrors the confusion. Beetle bugs swarm our windows on a warm afternoon, only to lie lifeless on the patio after a sudden chill. Around us, the rhythms we once trusted feel unsettled.



Beyond the weather, there is a deeper unease.

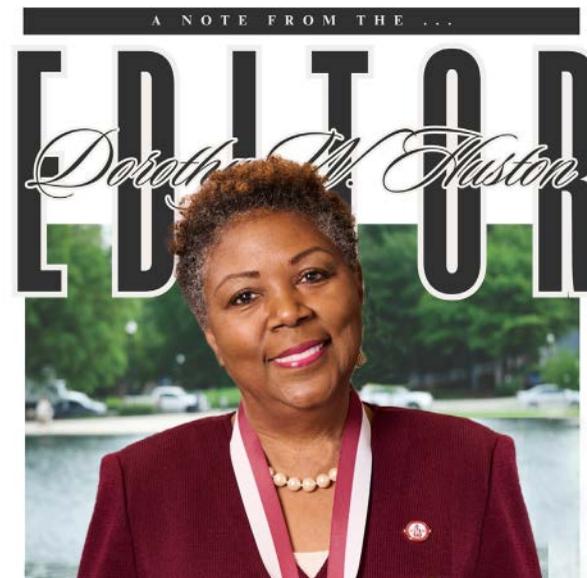
Some seem to have forgotten the difference between right and wrong, even as we profess shared faith and values. Children carry fears into classrooms. Parents carry worries into workplaces. Grocery bills climb, everyday essentials feel out of reach, and still we find ourselves bound to habits and systems rooted in another time.

Yet in the midst of this turbulence, we are reminded that faith calls us not to despair but to reflection. Perhaps these shifting seasons — in weather and in society — are urging us to rediscover compassion, to care for one another more intentionally, and to release what no longer serves the common good.

Uncertain times test us, but they also invite us to be steadier, kinder, and more courageous — together.

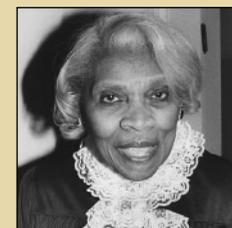
Until next week ...

Dorothy



FEBRUARY 27 - MARIAN ANDERSON - Marian Anderson was an American singer of classical music and spirituals. She performed in concerts and recitals in major music venues and with famous orchestras throughout the world between 1925 and 1965. She made many recordings that reflected her broad performance collection, such as opera and traditional spirituals. Anderson became an important figure in the struggle for black artists to overcome racial prejudice in the U.S. In 1939, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) refused permission for Anderson to sing to an integrated audience in Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. With the aid of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and her husband, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Anderson performed a critically acclaimed open-air concert. The event occurred on Easter Sunday, April 9, 1939, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in the capital before 75,000 people.

- Blackcelebritybirthdays.org



Spiritual Game Plan

Valley Weekly
PRESTON BROWNS



Today's Spiritual Game Plan:

"A Marriage That Works"

First Corinthians 13:4-6 says, "Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs."

There is a quote from a famous movie that says, "You complete me." Now this sounds very endearing. But we have to remember that only God can complete us.

In other words, we can't put that much responsibility on the person that we love, because, in the long run, it ends up being too much for someone to bear.

Now I bring this up to say, if you are going to get married, you have to be prepared to go to work, because it takes work to make a marriage successful.

For example, some people may say, "My marriage is not working," but perhaps this is because they are not working on their marriage.

In fact, if some people approached their job the same way they approached their marriage, they would not even

have a job.

Sometimes, marriage is not pretty like a picture—it needs work. Even when things are going well, it still requires work.

So many people go into marriage thinking about what they can get out of it. But when you do this, you miss the point of "giving yourself away."

So many people want the "gift" of a relationship without the giving that is required in a relationship. Remember, marriage is the best thing, but it's not the easiest thing.

So, if we understand this and we understand that only God can complete us, then we will be blessed in our marriages and live happily ever after.

Prayer: Loving Father, help us to continue to



work on our relationships the same way we work on anything that we love in life.

Question: What are some things that you do that help your marriage work?

Stay encouraged,

my brothers and sisters, and make sure you purchase a copy of my books, *Spiritual Game Plans For A Successful Life* and *A Champion Game Plan for Life*, at amazon.com.

NEXT WEEK:
"God Is in Control!"

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THE VALLEY WEEKLY
**VALLEY
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Funeral service for **MR. FREDDIE N. SCOTT** (b. 1954) was Saturday, February 21, at Pine Grove Missionary Baptist Church with Pastor C. Jermaine Turner officiating.

Funeral service for **MRS. KATHERINE FITCHERD** (b. 1955) was Saturday, February 21, at Nelms Memorial Funeral Home.

Funeral service for **MR. GLEN GARY FARRIS** (b. 1949) was Saturday, February 21, at The Fellowship of Faith Church with Pastor Troy Garner officiating.

Funeral service for **MR. JOHN WILLIAM HARDIN, JR.**, (b. 1956) was Sunday, February 15, at Nelms Memorial Funeral Home with Pastor Donald Barney officiating.

Funeral service for **MS. TERESA DIANE BRISTER** (b. 1972) was Saturday, February 14, at Nelms Memorial Funeral Home Chapel with Pastor Carolyn Baker officiating.

Funeral service for **MS. SHERIKA B. THOMPSON** (b. 1992) was Friday, February 13, at St. Rebecca Primitive Baptist Church with Pastor Perry Clark officiating.

Funeral service for **MR. KEVIN DWAIN THOMPSON** (b. 1973) was Thursday, February 12, at Union Chapel Missionary Baptist Church with Pastor O. Wendell Davis officiating.

Funeral service for **PASTOR ROBERT L. DOUGLAS, SR.**, (b. 1930) was Sunday, February 8, at Oakwood Seventh-Day Adventist Church with Dr. Carlton P. Byrd officiating.

Funeral service for **MRS. VIVIAN "BOOTS" JORDAN JONES** (b. 1934) was Friday, February 6, at Union Hill Primitive Baptist Church with Elder Dr. Oscar Montgomery officiating.

LEGAL NOTICE NOTICE OF COMPLETION

In accordance with Chapter 1, Title 39, Code of Alabama, 1975, as amended, notice is hereby given that **Apex Architectural Metal, LLC.**, Contractor, has completed the **Contract for the Reroofing and Repairs** for the **James A. Lane Boys and Girls Club**, a Stephen Ward and Associates, Inc. Project, at 103 Abingdon Ave. N.W., Huntsville, AL 35801 for the Boys and Girls Club of North Alabama (Owner), and have made request for final settlement of said Contract. All persons having any claim for labor, materials, or otherwise in connection with this project should immediately notify Stephen Ward and Associates, Inc. PO Box 6815, Huntsville, AL 35813.

Jesse Jackson and the Mathematics of Power

Rev. Jesse Jackson (1941-2026) didn't need spreadsheets to understand systems. He understood people.

- *Saturday morning Operation PUSH rallies helped propel Harold Washington into Chicago City Hall.*
- *His 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns registered an estimated two to three million first-time Black voters —*
- *Numbers so significant that Southern U.S. senators reconsidered opposing civil rights during Robert Bork's Supreme Court nomination - and it failed.*
- *That was leadership by arithmetic. Then came 1988.*
- *Given 10–12 minutes of introduction time at the Democratic National Convention, Jesse gave those minutes to his children. The moment reshaped political futures and captured a nation.*



Critics branded him a media opportunist. One biographer even called him “a solution in search of a problem.”

I saw something else. I saw a man on the outside changing the calculus on the inside.

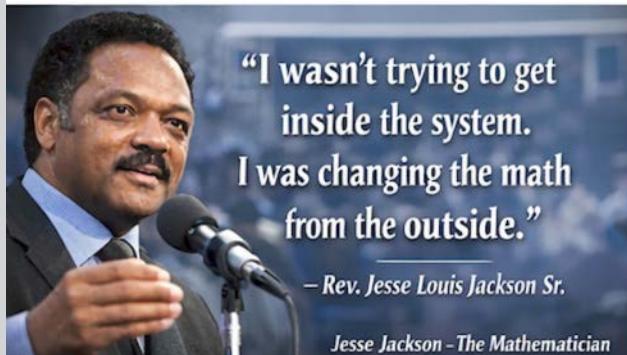
And on April 3, 1980, at Hampton Institute, Jesse personally showed me what leadership from the middle feels like — what I now call Silver-Mettle Leadership.

Sometimes leadership doesn't wear the crown.

Sometimes it registers voters.

Sometimes it multiplies voices.

And sometimes it quietly changes history.



Tim Allston

Leadership Player-Coach and Four-time Amazon Best-Selling Author, “Leading from the Middle”

Contact: (256) 212-0949 - <https://bit.ly/4aB9Lwm>

Email Address: leadingfromthemiddle.tim@gmail.com

Website: www.timallston.com

Join us Mondays through Fridays for *Tim Allston's Leadership Nuggets: Educating, Equipping, and Empowering Emerging Leaders to Manage Ego Problems in 60 Seconds* (7am, 1pm, and 7pm), as well as for *The Tim Commandments of Leadership* (4pm), all Central Time and all available on Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn.



Millennial Moment

by Gloria B. Caldwell

“You Won't, Because ...”

You stand there or sit there, debating what you're going to do. You have thoughts and ideas that seem amazing! You're excited and hyped up because you have come up with something. You've run a quick plan of what that could look like in your head ... and then BAM!! You start thinking.



Now, one might say, “What's wrong with thinking?” Clearly, there is nothing wrong with thinking. The problem is that you are thinking too much. The “what ifs” start coming, not in a positive way in which you use them to strategize and prepare for any situation, but these are the “shutdown” what ifs. Mercy! So, you lay your pen down or put your phone or computer down in defeat, getting distracted and never revisiting that

idea or moment. Even if you do, you have thought yourself out of it! So now, you won't because you've lost faith in yourself, your skills, your knowledge, and your ability.

Why are we this way? Why does that power come so abruptly and fade so quickly? Why do you stand at the threshold of promise and reject it? All because you're trapped in your head with so much negativity that you can't get out of

your own way.

You've been given so many skills and ideas. God has put so much in your hands to use. Yet you sit there, sizing it up and sizing it out, ridiculously giving up on what could be your promise.

Take a moment and think about that! Now fix that behavior!

God loves you, and so do I!

He has given you a gift; *open it!*

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The Valley Weekly

VALLEY EVENTS

HAPPENINGS, ACTIVITIES & MORE!

BLACK HISTORY MONTH
"A Century of Black
History Commemorations"

February 26-March 1

Disney on Ice
Propst Arena
Von Braun Center
Huntsville, Ala.

March 1

118th Founders' Day
Program
Alpha Kappa Alpha Soror-
ity, Incorporated, Epsilon
Gamma Omega,
Gamma Mu, and Omicron
Zeta Chapters
Progressive Union Mis-
sionary Baptist Church
1919 Brandontown Road,
Huntsville, Ala. - 2:30 p.m.

March 5

KC and The Sunshine Band
Mark C. Smith Concert
Hall/Von Braun Center
Huntsville, Ala. - 7:30 p.m.

March 6-7

Bill Bellamy
Comedian
Huntsville Levity Live
2012 Memorial Parkway SW
Huntsville, Ala.
(256) 261-3374

March 7

Spelman College Glee Club
In Concert (Ticket: \$50)
Church Street Cumberland
Presbyterian Church
228 Church Street NW
Huntsville, Ala. - 4 p.m.

March 12

Season Sips Cocktail Class

The Orion Amphitheater
701 Amphitheater Drive NW
Huntsville, Ala.
(256) 964-9556- 6:30 p.m.

Aaron Branch
Comedian
Huntsville Levity Live
2012 Memorial Parkway SW
Huntsville, Ala.
(256) 261-3374

March 13

Akeem Ali (Live)
Mars Music Hall
Von Braun Center
Huntsville, Ala.

March 15

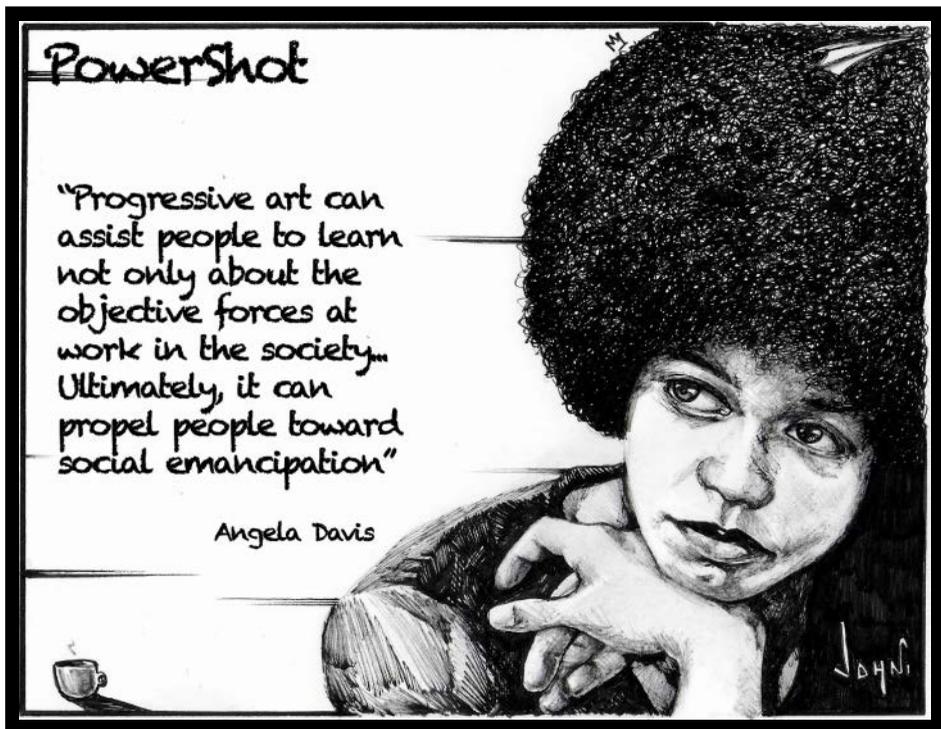
3rd Annual Rocket City
Blues Festival
Featuring: West Love, J-
Wonn, Tucka King George,
Mike Clark Jr., EJ Jones
(Ticketmaster)
Propst Arena
Von Braun Center
Huntsville, Ala.

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC CITY OF HUNTSVILLE CLOSEOUT PUBLIC HEARING

The City of Huntsville's **Community Development Department** will hold a **Public Hearing** on **Friday, March 27, 2026, at 12:30 P.M.** to receive input and discuss the **closeout of the City of Huntsville's CDBG Project**. The meeting will be held online via Microsoft Teams Meeting at: **CDBG Public Facilities - BGC Roof Rehab Closeout Public Hearing**. Meeting ID: 299 775 267 249 27, Passcode: 5QM2RR9Q.

The City of Huntsville is interested in obtaining all citizens' input on the performance of local officials, City of Huntsville staff, consultants and administrators, engineers, contractors, and the use of CDBG funds throughout the implementation of the Project. The City of Huntsville does not discriminate based on disability for the admission or access to its programs or activities. If you have any questions, or will need special accommodations, please contact Community Development Department prior to the Public Hearing at 256-427-5400 or comdev@huntsvilleal.gov.

03172025



SPELMAN COLLEGE
**GLEE CLUB
CONCERT**

PRESENTED BY
HUNTSVILLE AREA CHAPTER OF
NATIONAL ALUMNAE ASSOCIATION OF SPELMAN COLLEGE

**March 7, 2026
4:00PM**

Ticket Cost: \$50.00

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No representation is made that the quality of the legal services to be performed is greater than the quality of legal services performed by other lawyers.



Rosetta James Foundation "Spotlight on Our Elders" ... Featuring

Dr. Katie W. Byrd

Dr. Katie W. Byrd has led a life replete with extensive community volunteerism and leadership for more than four decades. Her diligent service as a Sunday School teacher spanned more than 35 years and her affiliation with worthwhile organizations and associations is legendary.

Dr. Byrd rendered service to The Normal Historic District Preservation Association at Alabama A&M University; The Mary M. Chambers Heritage Trail (AAMU); The Links Incorporated, Greater Huntsville Chapter; Delta Sigma Sorority, Incorporated; The Harris Home for Children and its Foundation; and many others.

An exemplary and revered leader, Dr. Byrd served as Board President of the Harris Home for Children, and she served on the Board for six three-year terms. Other leadership examples

are manifested by her affiliation with the Community Action Agency, for which she served as Board President and devoted two three-year terms; the United Way of Madison County, serving as Secretary to the Board and Chair of Planning and Allocations (8 years); and state recorder for the Alabama Women's Political Caucus, State Recorder.

Dr. Byrd was vice president of the Madison County Women's Political Caucus; vice president and co-founder of the Alabama New South Coalition, Huntsville Chapter; and vice president, Madison County Democratic Executive Committee, District 19. She conducted and/or participated in more than 25 voter registration campaigns; was an alumna of Leadership Huntsville Class #3 and Leadership Alabama Class 4; served on the Regional Leadership Team on Organizational Development



for Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated; and served on the National Leadership Team for the United Way of America.

Professionally, Dr. Byrd devoted 25 years to executive leadership in federal government administration and management. Her contributions to higher education were achieved through faculty assignments at The Pennsylvania State University, Alabama A&M University and Oakwood University.



"Spotlight on Our Elders" is a weekly feature sponsored by the Rosetta James Foundation to promote **volunteerism** and activism in our community among those who are 70-plus. The Foundation also provides scholarships. Learn more about us at www.rosettajamesfoundation.org. Know an outstanding elder (70+) that you would like to see featured? Send us a photo and 250-word write-up to info@valleyweeklyllc.com.



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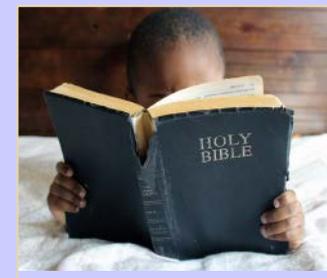
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This Sunday's Lectionary

Sunday, March 1, 2026
The Second Sunday
in Lent



(Track 2, Year A)
First Lesson:
Genesis 12:1-4a
Psalm 121
Second Lesson:
Romans 4:1-5, 13-17
GOSPEL:
John 3:1-17

THERE ARE MANY COLUMNISTS, BUT ...

They're Not Like Tim!



The Valley Weekly

"A thought-provoking and insightful take on the latest news and views. Join TIM ALLSTON every week for interesting perspectives you can't find anywhere else!"

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AAMU ROTC Alumna Promoted to Colonel

Proud Alabama A&M University Bulldog Battalion alumna Col. Amanda Watkins was recently promoted to the rank of colonel during a pinning ceremony at Bob Jones Auditorium on Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, marking 25 years of distinguished military service.



Watkins, a native of Atmore, Alabama, earned a Bachelor of Science in art with a minor in marketing from Alabama A&M in May 2005 and was commissioned into the Army Chemical Corps through the University's ROTC program. She and her husband, Maj. Quinton Watkins, met as cadets in the Bulldog Battalion and were commissioned together at AAMU. The couple has been married for 16 years and has one daughter, Elise.

Watkins enlisted in the Alabama Army National Guard in 2001. After completing basic training and returning to AAMU, her first sergeant encouraged her to join ROTC and pursue a commission as an officer. She has since served four years in the Alabama Army National Guard and 21 years on active duty.

Over the past two decades, Watkins has deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and served in a wide range of operational and strategic assignments. As an army acquisition officer, she has held several key positions, including assistant product manager, executive officer, human resources command assignment officer and policy integrator for the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-1, at the Pentagon. In 2025, she completed battalion-level command at Program Executive Office (PEO) Aviation at Redstone Arsenal. In 2024, Watkins was selected to attend senior service college at the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base for the 2025-26 academic year. She is currently stationed

in Montgomery, Alabama, pursuing a Master of Science in Strategic Studies. She is scheduled to graduate May 16, 2026.

"I currently serve as an army acquisition officer, managing defense programs in the Missiles and Aviation portfolios," Watkins said. "What I enjoy most about my profession is providing advanced technology to our service members while working alongside some of the best officers and civilians in our army. The technology we deliver not only protects warfighters while deployed but also contributes to keeping our country safe domestically."

Watkins said serving as an Army officer has been one of the greatest honors of her life. "Being an Army officer is not something I take lightly," she said. "This profession has allowed me to meet people from all walks of life, see parts of the world I never imagined, learn from remarkable leaders, and lead some of America's best and brightest soldiers and civilians."

Among her favorite assignments was serving as company commander of A/1-48, 3rd Chemical Brigade at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, during the peak of the troop surge from 2008 to 2010. "Alongside my first sergeant, drill sergeants and staff, we trained over 1,000 initial-entry trainees, transforming civilians into soldiers," she said. "My assignment at the Pentagon was also a highlight, as it allowed me to serve at the

headquarters of the Department of the Army, and gain valuable insights into how the Army operates."

Watkins credits Alabama A&M for laying the foundation for her leadership journey.

"The A&M ROTC program provided me with a strong foundation of leadership that I still rely on today," she said. "Although the program was demanding, the Bulldog Battalion invested a remarkable level of care, mentorship, and commitment into developing us. This investment continues to guide me each day."

While on The Hill, Watkins was also a member of Phi Beta Lambda Business Fraternity and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. She said those organizations helped shape her personally and professionally, offering mentorship and lifelong connections.

Those who choose a life of military service rarely stay in one place for long, often building community wherever duty calls.

"Moving every 2-3 years can be challenging, but it has allowed our family to live in various states and build wonderful friendships and connections across the country," she said. "We have been fortunate to be stationed at Redstone Arsenal twice, making our military life much easier by being near family and friends."

After completing the Air War College in May 2026, Watkins will assume her next assignment as portfolio

acquisition executive, FIRES, returning to Redstone Arsenal — just minutes from her alma mater and the Bulldog Battalion that helped launch her career. It's also where her husband is stationed.

Reflecting on her promotion, Watkins emphasized the milestone represents more than individual achievement. This promotion is not

solely my achievement; it represents the guidance, mentorship, and trust of those who have encouraged me to grow, adapt, and lead," she said. "As I enter this new level of responsibility, I see this promotion as another opportunity to serve with humility, integrity, and purpose. I will always remember that true leadership is about service, mentorship, and empowering others."

As she prepares to return to North Alabama, Watkins hopes her success reflects the promise of her alma mater.

"I hope that my journey will inspire those who may choose the military as a career and encourage any high school student to attend AAMU, where they can definitely 'Start Here and Go Anywhere!'"

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Southern Fried Film Festival Receives ASCA Grant

Funding will support the 2026 festival, showcasing culturally diverse films and bringing global filmmakers to the Rocket City for post-screening Q&As and panel discussions.



SOUTHERN FRIED
FILM FESTIVAL

The Southern Fried Film Festival has received a \$20,000 grant from the Alabama State Council on the Arts to fund programming and filmmaker travel for the 2026 festival season. With these funds, the Southern Fried Film Festival will enhance the attendee experience by facilitating direct interaction between audiences and creators, providing enriching educational panels, and expanding outreach to wider communities. This grant signifies that through this project; the Southern Fried Film Festival is making Alabama's communities stronger and our state's arts and culture sector more vibrant.

"We are incredibly grateful

for the generous support from the Alabama State Council on the Arts," said Festival Founder and Director Trevite Willis. "These grants, totaling \$20,000, are a testament to the festival's growing impact and will allow us to create an even more enriching experience for our attendees. The ability to bring filmmakers to Huntsville and provide opportunities for direct interaction with audiences is invaluable."

The 2026 festival dates are June 4-7. The event will take place at various locations around Huntsville, featuring a diverse range of storytelling and post-film screening Q&A sessions. In addition to the

state funding, the festival is also supported by a \$6,479 grant from Arts Huntsville and the City of Huntsville. The grants, awarded by the Alabama State Council on the Arts, Arts Huntsville, and the City of Huntsville enable the Southern Fried Film Festival to reach new audiences, foster community development, provide the highest quality programming, and demonstrate the importance of arts as a key component for quality of life in Alabama.

The Southern Fried Film Festival is a 4-day event that shines a spotlight on culturally diverse films and filmmakers and provides opportunities for attendees to experience a diverse range of storytelling. For

more information, please visit southernfriedfilmfestival.org.

The Alabama State Council on the Arts is the official state agency for the support and development of the arts in Alabama. The Council works to expand and preserve the state's cul-

tural resources by supporting nonprofit arts organizations, schools, colleges, units of local government, and individual artists. Arts programs, assisted by Council grants, have a track record of enhancing community development, education, cultural tourism, and overall qual-

ity of life in all regions of the state. Alabama State Council on the Arts grants are made possible by an annual appropriation from the Alabama Legislature and additional funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. Learn more at arts.alabama.gov.

A&M Board Advances Strategic Vision

The Alabama A&M University Board of Trustees approved a series of measures during its Spring 2026 meeting, advancing initiatives designed to strengthen the institution's academic profile, leadership structure and long-term strategic direction.

In his comments, President Pro Tempore Kevin Ball highlighted the success of the recently completed anniversary campaign.

"The 150th Anniversary celebration has generated enthusiasm from students, faculty, and alumni alike," said Ball. "This effort has generated record-setting support. I want to personally thank every individual who has supported the University. Although the campaign may have had an end date, the initiatives are still growing."

Among the academic affairs actions, trustees approved requests to deactivate the specializations in Fashion Communication and Communication Science within the Master of Science in

Communication Specialist Program. The adjustments align academic offerings with enrollment trends, workforce demand and the university's broader strategic objectives.

President Daniel K. Wims also touted the University's continued academic growth, citing newly released data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) that underscores AAMU's national leadership in engineering education.

"Our engineering program now ranks third among HBCUs in the production of baccalaureate degrees in engineering awarded to African American students," said Wims. "For master's degrees awarded to African American students, we are number one among HBCUs in the country."

Trustees also approved the University's Strategic Plan Priorities and Goals for 2025-2035, a 10-year roadmap to institutional decision-making, resource allocation and program development. The plan

is designed to enhance student success, expand research and innovation, strengthen community partnerships and ensure financial sustainability.

The board approved a change in title from General Counsel to Vice President and General Counsel, reflecting the evolving scope and executive leadership responsibilities of the role. Trustees also approved the university's updated mission and vision statements, reaffirming AAMU's commitment to academic excellence, access and impact.

Additional action items focused on strengthening the University's advancement infrastructure. The board approved the appointment of an assistant vice president of development and a senior director of donor engagement and advancement services. These leadership positions are expected to enhance fundraising strategy, donor relations and long-term philanthropic growth. Trustees will meet again in June 2026.

LearningQUEST to Discuss B'ham Easter Campaign

LearningQUEST will host "The Birmingham Easter Campaign: April-May 1963" on Wednesday, March 4, at the Downtown Public Library Auditorium from 1-2:30 p.m.

Civil Rights groups took to the streets in a boycott of Birmingham business during the Easter season of 1963.

The violent reaction

from Birmingham's political leaders shocked the nation. Explore the massive non-violent campaign that attacked Birmingham's pervasive segregated reality of the early 1960s.

LearningQUEST is partnered with the Huntsville/Madison County Public Library and offers a warm and welcoming environment for inquiring minds. Affordable and centrally

located, it offers a variety of courses, activities, and travel opportunities.

Programs are generally held in the Main Library meeting facilities. Some off-site locations are used when needed.

For additional information, visit www.LQUEST.org, email LearningQuest@LQUEST.org, or call (256) 529-8695.

Pink, White & Blue Children's Ball Set

The Greater Huntsville Chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Inc., will hold its annual Pink, White & Blue Children's Ball on Saturday, March 7, from 6-9 p.m. at the Stovehouse Event Center in Huntsville, Ala.

Families, sponsors, and community partners are invited to attend this formal evening of dinner, dancing, and entertainment in support of children and families in our community.

Since 2010, the event has generated significant support for local charitable organizations. In recent years, the event has raised more than \$20,000 annually to benefit youth-serv-



JACK AND JILL
of America, Inc.

ing partners, including the Boys & Girls Club of North Alabama, Girls Inc., Village of Promise, and other organizations dedicated to serving children and families. Proceeds from the 2026 Children's Ball will benefit St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the Jack and Jill of America Foundation, and additional local 501(c)(3) organizations.

The Jack and Jill of America Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Jack and Jill of America, Inc., has supported commu-

nity-based organizations nationwide since 1968.

"Our chapter remains committed to elevating excellence in all children and ensuring they have access to opportunities that help them thrive," said Richele Jordan-Davis, President of the Greater Huntsville Chapter. "The Pink, White & Blue Children's Ball allows us to celebrate our youth while investing in their dreams and future success."

Tickets are available [**HERE**](#).



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