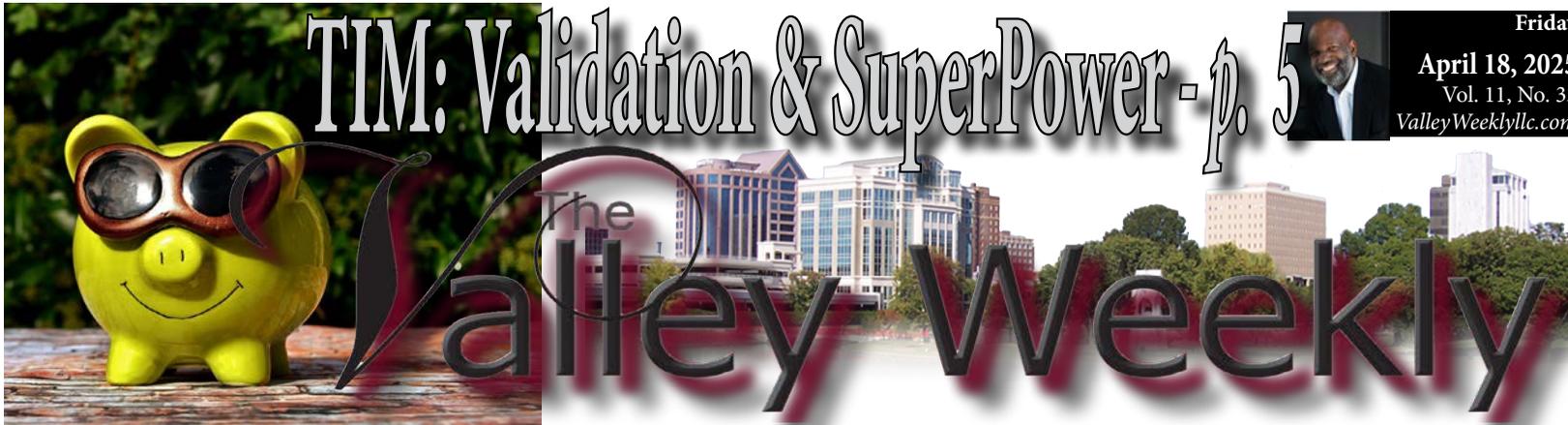


A Few Smart Ways to Budget that Refund - p. 8

FREE



Friday
April 18, 2025
 Vol. 11, No. 33
 ValleyWeeklyllc.com

SALUTE!
 Rosetta James Foundation
 ELDER OF THE WEEK



Mrs. Effie Gaines

"Imperialist enterprise draws political consequences." - C. L. R. James

Growing AAMU Department Enters New Era

The Department of English and Modern Languages at Alabama A&M University marked a significant milestone recently with a celebratory ribbon cutting, unveiling its new name and honoring the progress that has propelled the department into a new era of academic excellence.

Held in the McCalep-McIntosh Vocational Building, the event brought together students, faculty, staff, and alumni to commemorate the renaming of the Department of English and Foreign

Languages. The new title – Department of English and Modern Languages – reflects a forward-looking vision aligned with evolving academic trends across the nation.

Dr. Charlotte Teague, department chair, shared the story behind the name change, noting the thoughtful consideration and collaboration that led to the decision.

"As I interacted with faculty from other campuses at conferences, I noticed a shift – many departments were moving away from the term 'foreign,'"

Teague said. "I brought the idea back to our faculty, and after thoughtful discussion between 'modern' and 'world,' the consensus was 'modern.' We voted, submitted it through the proper channels, and in February, the University approved the new name."

The timing, she explained, couldn't have been better. Over the past few years, the department has undergone a transformation – revising major programs, introducing an honors speech course, launching a pre-law track, and

expanding its reach through the University's dual enrollment program.

"We're proud to be the largest academic department at Alabama A&M, with 32 full-time faculty and 33 adjuncts," Teague said. "That's 63 faculty members committed to shaping the next generation of leaders. In addition to offering 70 plus sessions of Composition 101 each fall, we've also improved our DFW rates, helping boost retention and student success across the University."

Teague praised

the dedicated faculty, staff, and students who have contributed to the department's growth, and she paid tribute to the department's legacy by recognizing former faculty and chairpersons in attendance. She also announced the retirement of Dr. Jarrod Patterson, celebrating his 26 years of service.

Dr. Peter Eley, Dean of the College of Education, Humanities and Behavioral Sciences, joined Teague in cutting the ceremonial ribbon.



College Students Offered Free Bus Rides April 21-26

In celebration of Earth Day, all Huntsville college students, faculty and staff with a valid school ID will be able to ride Huntsville Orbit free of charge.

The offer will remain in effect between April 21-26.

City transit services will be open to students attending (alphabetically) Alabama A&M University, Calhoun Community College, J. F. Drake State Community and Technical College, Oakwood University, and Univer-

sity of Alabama in (Huntsville).

College participants are urged to also download the official app Route-shout for real-time updates, bus location and service updates.

Band Prison, Doug Shaw Prepare for Huntsville Show

Prison, simmering and crackling with the heat of their second album, Downstate, are leaving the tall grass once again to herd up with "Sleepy"

Doug Shaw (White Magic, Highlife) for a run of U.S. shows next month! They'll perform in Huntsville on May 7 at Gold Sprint, 2515 9th Avenue

SW, before heading to Nashville and points North with a group-jam uppercut.

Doug Shaw's fresh off a tour with Ge-

ologist, celebrating the release of their new record, "A Shaw Deal." Doug's strain of guitar mastery is nothing short of mesmerizing, so

here's a chance to catch him on a roll with the Prison cohort! Tickets are on sale now from www.brownpapertickets.com.



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Valley Weekly Washington One Minute

by Ron Hamm



Here are the latest top issues and events in Washington:

1. CONGRESS. The Senate and House are in recess for the next two weeks and will reconvene on Monday, April 28. In a close vote, the House approved the FY2025 Concurrent Budget Resolution last Thursday with a tally of 216-214 (having narrowly passed the Senate two weeks ago by a similar margin of 51-48) ... The Budget Resolution directs House committees to identify a minimum of \$1.5 trillion in spending cuts over the next ten years, while also approving a \$5 trillion increase in the nation's debt limit – currently hovering around \$36 trillion – to fund the \$7 trillion cost of reauthorizing the 2017 tax cuts. Last Saturday, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) launched the next phase of their “fighting oligarchy” tour at a rally in downtown Los Angeles that drew an estimated 36,000 attendees ...

2. U.S. DOGE SERVICE. According to an article published on Saturday by The Washington Post, Elon Musk's U.S. DOGE Service has taken control of the main federal grants website – grants.gov – and has recently deleted many federal officials' permissions to post grant opportunities without informing them of being removed. Agency officials are now required to email their proposed grant notices to a DOGE-controlled inbox

(grantreview@hhs.gov) for review. Each year, about 5,000 notices of funding opportunities are typically posted by federal agencies on grants.gov, which attracts more than 10 million visitors. Wired magazine reported on April 9 that the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the investigative arm of Congress, started an audit in March of DOGE's handling of data at several cabinet-level agencies, including the Departments of Labor, Education, Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, Treasury, and the Social Security Administration, as well as the U.S. DOGE Service itself. The audit follows requests from several Democratic lawmakers, including Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA), for the GAO to review DOGE.

3. GOVERNMENT RELOCATION PLANS. Monday (April 14) was the deadline for federal agencies to submit plans to the DOGE-controlled General Services Administration to relocate offices out of the National Capital region to “less costly parts of the country.” The Washington Post reports that state officials around the na-

tion have stepped up lobbying the administration to get these agencies moved to their states, most aggressively by Ohio, Texas, and Florida. Some agencies that have already announced plans to shutter their DC-area presence include NASA, HUD, and Agriculture. Approximately 22% of workers in D.C. are employed by the federal government.

4. SUPREME COURT. On Monday, the Supreme Court ruled that the administration may pursue deportations of alleged Venezuelan gang members using the 1798 Alien Enemies Act that historically has been employed only in wartime, but with certain limits. On Tuesday it blocked a judge's order that would have compelled the administration to rehire thousands of fired probationary employees ...

5. LAW FIRM BANS. On Friday, the President announced a series of agreements with 5 mega law firms, in which the firms agreed to do \$600 million in pro bono work for conservative causes (making 9 big firms that have chosen to take a deal). Kirkland & Ellis, A&O Shearman, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, and Latham & Watkins signed a deal to provide pro bono work to the tune of \$125 million each in exchange for the administration withdrawing letters from the EEOC questioning their hiring practices. A 5th firm, Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft, pledged

\$100 million. Another firm, Susman Godfrey (that helped Dominion Voting Systems win a \$787 million settlement from Fox News), sued the administration on Friday in response to an executive order banning its lawyers from entering government buildings and representing parties that have cases with the government. It joins other firms ... that are challenging the President's bans as arbitrary and unconstitutional.

6. MARCH INFLATION REPORT. Last Thursday, the Labor Department reported that the consumer price index fell a seasonally adjusted 0.1% in March, putting the 12-month inflation rate at 2.4%, down from 2.8% in February. Excluding food and energy, so-called core inflation ran at a 2.8% annual rate, having increased 0.1% for the month. That was the lowest rate for core inflation since March 2021. Slumping energy prices helped keep inflation tame, as a 6.3% drop in gasoline prices helped drive a 2.4% broader decline in the energy index. However, food prices climbed 0.4% on the month, with egg prices rising another 5.9% (up 60.4% from a year ago). Shelter prices, among the most stubborn components of

inflation, increased just 0.2% in March and were up 4% on a 12-month basis, the smallest gain since November 2021. Used vehicle prices were off 0.7% while new vehicle costs increased just 0.1%, ahead of tariffs that are expected to hit the auto industry hard. In related news, the average rate on a 30-year fixed mortgage surged 13 basis points Friday to 7.1%, which is the highest rate since mid-February.

7. HIGHER EDUCATION. On Friday, April 11, two months after the National Institutes of Health unilaterally capped indirect research cost reimbursement rates at 15 percent—an action that a federal judge has permanently blocked—the Department of Energy (DOE) announced a similar plan explicitly aimed at higher education institutions. The DOE allocates over \$2.5 billion annually to more than 300 colleges and universities, part of which covers indirect costs such as laboratory space, waste disposal, and utilities. In a memo, Energy Secretary Chris Wright stated, “The purpose of Department of Energy funding to colleges and universities is to support scientific research—not to cover administrative costs and facility upgrades.”

8. EXECUTIVE BRANCH. On Friday, the President had his annual physical at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, which he said included a cognitive test ... According to a “Clarification of Exceptions” posted last Friday by the White House, smartphones, along with routers, chipmaking equipment, wireless earphones and certain computers and laptops, are now exempt from the new tariffs, including the 145% levies the administration imposed on Chinese imports (reportedly, 80% of Apple iPhones intended for the U.S. are made in China) – however, over the weekend the President said that this exemption is temporary until he levies a tariff on semiconductors. Last Wednesday, the President announced a 3-month pause on all reciprocal tariffs that went into effect at midnight, with the exception of China, with countries that were subject to reciprocal tariff rates seeing rates go back down to the universal 10% rate.

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HMBCC Meetings

The Huntsville Metro Black Chamber of Commerce promotes, creates and fosters economic development opportunities. HMBCC meets monthly on the 3rd Tuesday at 12 noon. Call (256) 427-2650 or e-mail info@hsvblackchamber.org. VISIT

ON THIS DAY

Alice Walker, an internationally celebrated author best known for her award-winning 1982 novel *The Color Purple*, on April 18, 1983, became the first African-American to win a Pulitzer Prize.

- BET.com



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Embracing Spring in the Tennessee Valley: A Season of Safety, Celebration and Community

As the flowers bloom and the sun stretches its rays a little longer each day, spring reminds us that renewal is always possible. Here in the Tennessee Valley, this time of year brings more than just beautiful scenery—it offers us the chance to reconnect, reenergize, and rejoice in the power of community. But with this season also comes a reminder: we must stay weather aware.

Spring in our region can be unpredictable. We’ve all seen how quickly the skies can turn, and it’s important that we prepare ourselves and our families for severe weather. Pay attention to alerts, make sure your emergency kits are stocked, and take care of your neighbors—especially the elderly or those who may need an extra hand when storms roll in. Preparedness is not panic; it’s love in action.

And while we stay ready, we also have so much to look forward to. One of my favorite things about spring is seeing our communities come alive. This weekend, join State Representative Anthony Daniels, Representative Laura Hall and Rocket City Innovator for a joyful Community Easter Egg Roll on April 19th from 2 to 6 pm. Bring your little ones, your big kids, and your inner child too. These moments of fun and togetherness remind us of the simple joys that tie us together. The address is 3001 Oakwood Avenue, NW.

Just down the road, Alabama A&M University is stepping into this Spring season with pride. With Spring Graduation (May 9th), Founder’s Week (April 25 - May 2), and the Black Tie Scholarship Gala (April 25th) and Gospel Celebration (April 27th) activities on the horizon, let’s take a moment to celebrate the bright young minds who have worked tirelessly to reach this milestone. Their success is our community’s success. And if you’re looking to add a little elegance to your spring calendar, don’t miss the upcoming Black Tie Event—an evening of excellence, achievement, and unity.

As we enjoy these moments, let’s not forget to care for ourselves, too. After a long winter of hearty meals and cozy evenings, it’s time to shake off those extra pounds—not for vanity, but for vitality. Step outside. Walk a little longer. Dance a little more. Play with your children/grandchildren. Garden with your neighbors. Move your body not because you have to, but because you can. Health is a gift, and spring is our invitation to unwrap it.

So as we step into this vibrant season together, let’s do so with open hearts, active bodies, and a deep commitment to each other. Our strength lies in our unity, our joy, and our readiness—for both the sunshine and the storms. Until next week ...

Dorothy

APRIL 18 - ROBERT HOOKS - an American actor, producer, and activist. He is most recognizable to the public for his more than 100 roles in films, television, and stage. Most famously, Hooks, along with Douglas Turner Ward and Gerald S. Krone, founded The Negro Ensemble Company. The Negro Ensemble Company is credited with the launch of the careers of many major black artists of all disciplines, while creating a body of performance literature over the last thirty years, providing the backbone of African-American theatrical classics. Additionally, Hooks is the sole founder of two significant black theatre companies: the D.C. Black Repertory Company, and New York’s Group Theatre Workshop.

- BlackCelebrityBirthdays.org



A NOTE FROM THE ...

The Valley Weekly

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Spiritual Game Plan

THE VALLEY WEEKLY
PRESTON BROWN'S



Today's Spiritual Game Plan: "It's Written All Over Your Face"

In Numbers 6:24, we find the passage that says, "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord makes His face to shine upon you."

Our faces should reflect the God that we serve. So we can't have Him shine upon us and not change the way that we look. Our facial expression says a lot about the condition of our heart. So if you're happy and you know it, your face tells the story. So many people go through life with a cheerless countenance.

They may not mean anything by it; perhaps they just look that way for whatever reason. Now I realize that in life, not every circumstance is going to make us happy, but if we are sons and daughters of the living God, our facial expressions should resemble that of our heavenly Father. The way you look at life is written all over your face.

I believe that if you stay in the presence of God, which means praying daily and staying in His word, He will turn your frown upside down. So if you are saved, look like it. If you are blessed, look like it. If you are redeemed, look like it. Remember that you don't have to say a word, because it's written all over your face.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to let our lights shine

so that others can see the good works that You have done for us.

Question: Does your personality reflect that you are a child of God?

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:
"A Spiritual Test"



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Funeral services for **MS. ARNETTA WHATLEY** (b. 1932); **MR. ORLANDO LACEY** (b. 1979); **MR. JOHN FLETCHER** (b. 1945); and **REV. DR. MOLLIE BRANCH** (b. 1952) will be announced at a later date.

Funeral service for **MR. CLARENCE SMITH** (b. 1932) was Saturday, April 12, at Chelsea Cumberland Presbyterian Church of America, 3123 Johnson Road SW, Huntsville, Ala.

NELMS MEMORIAL FUNERAL HOME

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Funeral service for **MRS. PINEY JORDAN** (b. 1943) will be Friday, April 18, at Progressive Union Missionary Baptist Church, at 12 noon.

Funeral service for **MR. JOE B. KING, III** (b. 1950) was held on Saturday, April 12.

Funeral service for **MR. TERRY L LESLIE** (b. 1972) was Friday, April 11, at Saint Bartley P.B. Church.

ROYAL FUNERAL HOME

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Funeral services for **DEACON THEODORE "NIP" FRANKLIN** (b. 1939) and **MS. BETTYE POOLE** (b. 1940) will be announced at a later date.

Funeral service for **MR. PIERRE RASHAD HINTON** (b. 1991) was Saturday, April 12, at the Royal Chapel.

Memorial service for **MR. CALVIN O'NEAL HAYNES** (b. 1973) was Saturday, April 12, at Grady-Madison AME Church, 129 Gooch Lane, Madison, Ala., with Pastor William Slade officiating.

Funeral service for **MRS. WILLIE MAE BATTS** (b. 1942) was Friday, April 11, at Blackburn Chapel, 507 Plummer Road, Huntsville, Ala., with Pastor Tremaine D. Snodgrass officiating.

The President and the Paige (Bueckers): Why Validation Is a Leader's Superpower

"Honor and enjoy your Creator while you're still young, before the years take their toll and your vigor wanes ..." - Ecclesiastes 12:1.

Have you ever followed a leader who lacked empathy? One who never acknowledged your value or your journey?

Now flip that—have you ever been led by someone who uplifted others, validated both those above and below them?

Last week's leadership case study contrasts two public figures in the spotlight: President Donald Trump and UConn women's basketball star Paige Bueckers.



Trump, by 2025, had issued 111 executive orders—many prioritizing exclusion over inclusion. A leader who skipped the fires of struggle, rising swiftly on celebrity and inherited wealth, he often invalidated those not on his payroll. *The result?* A golden seat without a silver foundation.

Contrast that with Paige Bueckers, an emerging or silver-mettle leader—someone who's been refined through adversity. After leading her team to the NCAA championship on April 6, her postgame speech didn't glorify herself. Instead, she honored God, credited her coaches, uplifted her teammates, and named the unseen contributors—assistants, strength coaches, even the masseuse.

That's leadership. That's validation.

Silver, biblically, symbolizes refinement. Gold represents glory. But if gold isn't built on the fire-forged foundation of silver, it tarnishes quickly. Paige's humility is proof that you can rise with gold-level impact while rooted in silver-mettle service.

Here's today's leadership truth: "You haven't truly led until you've truly lifted." Validation isn't optional; it's essential.

And remember this: "If you skip the fire, you forfeit the future." True leaders are tested, not just titled.

In Luke 14:11, Jesus says, "Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Paige's humility has elevated her. Trump's pride has isolated him.

So, what kind of leader are you becoming? One who uplifts—or one who overlooks?

Because in the end, the Paige will always outlast the President.



Tim Allston

Leadership Player-Coach & Four-time
Amazon Best-Selling Author
"Leading from the Middle"
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Millennial Moment

by Gloria B. Caldwell

Hibernate ...

Get away.

Free yourself. Spend some one on one time understanding what your needs are now. Lock yourself in. Look in the mirror. Rest. Write. Dance. Pray. Meditate. Hibernate.

So, let's look at this. Hibernation is how animals conserve energy to survive adverse weather conditions or lack of food. It involves physiological changes such as a drop in body temperature and slowed metabolism. This is what the research says. Now, of course, I am using this metaphorically. I don't want you to go into a state of depression. I'm saying getaway, stay out of the streets, break your usual pattern, relax, relate, release, and revamp yourself. Conserve the good energy you have. Purge the folly. Get yourself prepared for the storms that WILL come in your life. Be honest about who you are, where you're headed, and



why. Observe and evaluate yourself. Rework your goals, and cross off the ones you have obtained. Please take a look at the failures, and look at what you have learned from them. Evaluate your behavior during that time. Take note of your mindset. Get serious about this.

When you stop and take alone time with yourself, and God, it opens up many possibilities. Ward off all of the distractions and bad energy, and just be. Open your ears, soften your heart, deepen your

relationship with Him, and listen. He heals, delivers, and bestows blessings upon you when you spend time with Him. When I am in those seasons of alone time with myself, and God, I rediscover who Gloria is. Her purpose. Her value. Her path. It's an empowering feeling. Hibernate.

Go forth today, and make it unforgettable. Take each obstacle that comes your way and hand them over to God for understanding and peace.

Plan your hibernation.

The Valley Weekly

VALLEY EVENTS

HAPPENINGS, ACTIVITIES & MORE!

April 18-20
"Swan Lake"
Huntsville Ballet Company
Mark C. Smith Concert
Hall
Von Braun Center
Huntsville, Ala.

April 21
Girls on the Run
Fern Bell Recreation Center
107A Sanders Road
Huntsville, Ala.
4-5:30 p.m.

April 22
"Chicago Stepping"
Ballroom
Robert "Bob" Harrison
Senior Wellness and Advocacy Center
6156 Pulaski Pike NW
Huntsville, Ala. - (256)
519-2040
4 p.m.

April 24
The War and Treaty Plus
One Tour

Princess Theatre
Decatur, Ala.
princesstheatre.org

April 25-27
Comic & Pop Culture Expo
Featuring Mario Lopez
Von Braun Center
Huntsville, Ala.

April 26
Arbor Day 5K Race & 3K
Sapling Fun Run
Huntsville Botanical Garden
4747 Bob Wallace Avenue
Huntsville, Ala.
8 a.m.

April 27
Gospel Celebration featuring
The Clark Sisters
Alabama A&M University
Event Center
TICKETS - \$100
(Deadline: April 1)
(Clear Bag Policy Enforced)
4 p.m.

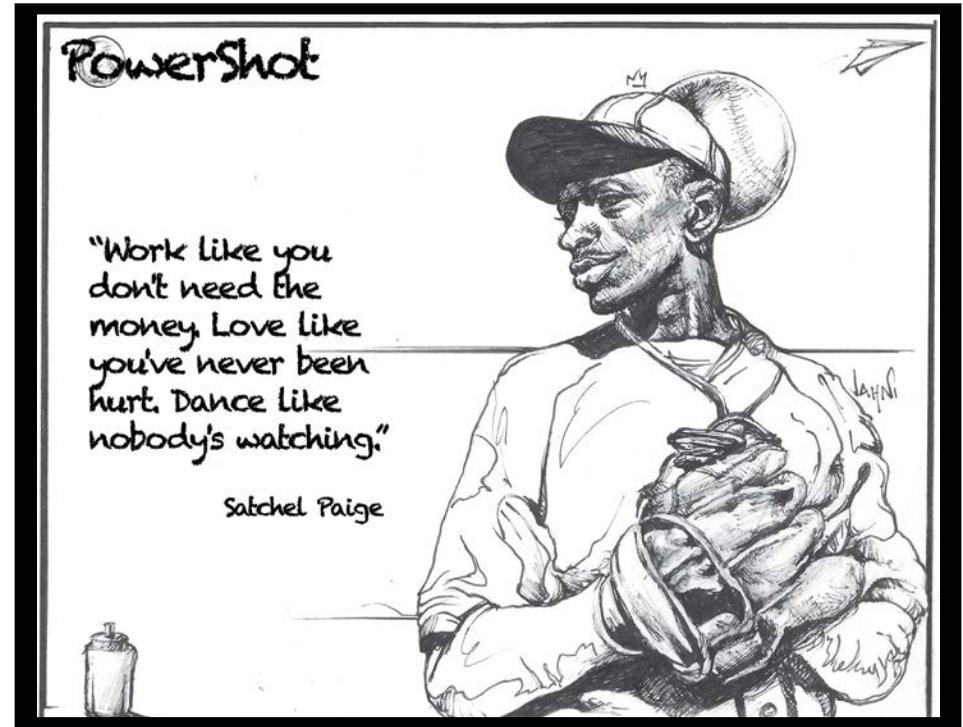
April 28
Girls on the Run
Fern Bell Recreation Center
107A Sanders Road
Huntsville, Ala.
4-5:30 p.m.

April 29
"Chicago Stepping"
Ballroom
Robert "Bob" Harrison
Senior Wellness and Advocacy Center
6156 Pulaski Pike NW
Huntsville, Ala. - (256)
519-2040
4 p.m.

May 1
Spring Hat Luncheon
Huntsville Botanical Garden
4747 Bob Wallace Avenue
Huntsville, Ala.
10:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

May 2-3
Comedian
"Earthquake" (4 Shows)
Huntsville Levity Live
2012 Memorial Parkway SW
Huntsville, Ala.

May 3
The People's Patch Power Stroll
Sponsors: The Madison County Commission and The 100 Alabama Miles Challenge
The People's Patch Community Farm



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*"We must accept finite disappointment,
but never lose infinite hope."*

- Martin Luther King, Jr.



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

Mrs. Effie Gaines

One of Huntsville's local heroines is known to many as Mrs. Effie Gaines. Effie is also affectionally known throughout the church community as "Mother Gaines," and she is known to her family and close friends simply as "Madea," and "Mu"; and "Aunt Effie" to everyone else.

Effie is the youngest child of the late Al and Laura Douglas. She was married 39 years to the late Mr. Ruben Gaines, and she is the mother of their five children. Mrs. Gaines has extraordinarily juggled being a wife, mother, musician and chef with a warm smile and a soft "Yes, I will." Many know that all it takes is a request for a cake, pie, or homemade rolls for holidays or "just because," and Effie is the one to go to for a heavenly dessert. While Effie was just a small child, other church members began to take notice of the little girl singing her heart out with a voice and fervor beyond her years. She showed great musical promise and taught herself to play the piano at the age of 8 years old. As a result, she is recognized as a gifted soloist and pianist with a voice

that exudes feelings from its spiritual roots.

Over the years, hundreds of grief-stricken families have called Effie to perform during home-going celebrations. A true servant, this very gifted and humble lady answers whenever she is called upon to deliver her heart-felt and soothing music. Her music transforms the heaviness of mourning to a place of hope and peace.

The sheer number of performance requests for weddings, funerals, and other church engagements are enormous and performed without an expectation of compensation. Effie's commitment to serving her Father in Heaven is the reward that keeps her going. Mrs. Gaines does not consider herself a great pianist or soloist. She will only say, "I owe it all to God for the gift I have, and I do my best to give it back to Him through songs and praises. Whatever way I can be a servant as I travel this road, I reach out and I extend that helping hand, for I am walking in His will."

Her musical career began in 1953, when she became the pianist at "The Big Brick"--St. Bartley P.B. Church.

that exudes feelings from its spiritual roots.



The historic St. Bartley Church is recognized as the oldest black church congregation in the State of Alabama, and this year celebrates its 205th anniversary.

Mrs. Gaines was the primary pianist at St. Bartley for over 40 years and became the music director for Bethel CME Church. Bethel CME, St. Bartley and many other churches, and individuals throughout the Tennessee Valley have presented Mrs. Gaines with Awards of Excellence for her superior performance and dedication to serving others through her ministry of music.

Gifted, humble, spirited, eloquent, and virtuous are words used when one describes Mrs. Gaines.

Whatever and whenever she is called, she answers and continues to serve the community with love and grace.



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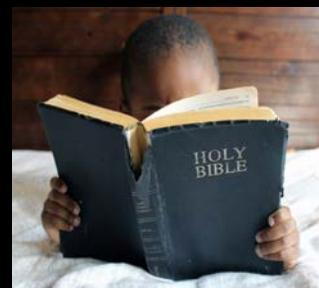
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This Sunday's Lectionary

Sunday, April 20, 2025

**Easter
Sunday**



(Track 2, Year C)

First Lesson:

Acts 10:34-43

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Second Lesson:

1 Corinthians 15:19-26

GOSPEL:

John 20:1-18

*Come Discover
the Magic on
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"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.

A Few Smart Ways to Budget Your Tax Refund

(BPT) - The remnants of tax season remain, and many Americans in the Valley are eagerly awaiting their tax refunds. While it might be tempting to splurge on something fun, there are other clever ways to use this extra cash to improve your financial budget this tax season. Here are three savvy tips to help you budget your tax refund:

1. Opt for a budget-friendly phone plan

Consider using your tax refund to switch to a more affordable and flexible phone plan. There are various no-contract plans available that can help you

save money every month. For instance, you can find deals offering 50% off a Total Wireless 5G Unlimited plan when bringing your own phone and signing up for Auto Pay. This means you could get one line for just \$25 per month, with taxes and fees included, guaranteed for five years.

So, by just cutting your monthly phone bill in half while still enjoying unlimited wireless data, talk and text, you can redirect those savings toward other financial goals.

2. Strengthen your emergency fund

Think of your emergency fund as a financial safety

net. Life happens - whether it's an unexpected car repair or a medical bill, having some extra savings can keep you from going into debt. Savings can start small, and for first-time savers, it can be daunting to put away money. What's important is to start somewhere and sooner rather than later. Aim to save at least three to six months' worth of living expenses.

By doing so, you'll thank yourself for being prepared for those unexpected moments and avoid the stress of crunching numbers.

3. Make home improvements

Your home is one of your

biggest investments, so why not put some of your tax refund into making it better? Consider using your tax refund for necessary repairs or upgrades, such as fixing a leaky roof, updating your kitchen, or adding energy-efficient appliances. These improvements can save you money in the long run and prevent small issues from becoming bigger problems.

It will also improve your living space, making your home more comfortable. Additionally, these enhancements can increase your home's value if you decide to sell or rent it in the future, allowing you to reap the financial benefits

of your improvements.

4. Invest in your future

Your tax refund could be the perfect opportunity to set yourself up for long-term success. Whether it's contributing to a retirement account, such as an IRA or 401(k), it will help you prepare for the future without the worry of not having a fund to rely on.

In addition to retirement accounts, investing in your future can also mean investing in your education and professional development. Enrolling in classes and courses can help you advance your personal learning as well as career aspirations. Many univer-

sities and colleges offer in-person or online courses that can fit best into your schedule.

These investments can yield long-term benefits, helping you achieve financial stability and career growth.

By wisely using your tax refund and exploring cost-effective options, you can enhance your financial budget. Plus, you'll have more peace of mind knowing you're making the most of your hard-earned money!

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Make Believe: The Invisible Bridge Between Worlds

by afroblastik [John 'Jahni' Moore]



Last week, while visiting a job site with a business associate, an unexpected moment unfolded—one that has been echoing inside me ever since. We were talking through project details when an unhoused gentleman approached. Nothing unusual in a city where gentrification collides daily with poverty. But what came next unraveled some of the lines we tend to draw between people. Both men's face lit up—not with friction, but with recognition. Turns out, they grew up just a few houses apart. Same block. Same neighborhood. Same era. I couldn't help but ask what many might think but not say aloud: "What made the difference?" One man with homes in multiple cities, running quite lucrative ventures across several sates. The other, navigating life on the streets. He didn't hesitate. "Attitude," he said. That was a common answer. One that I actually expected. The kind of thing you hear in seminars or printed on coffee mugs. But it didn't sit well enough with me for a number of reasons so I pressed further. That's when he said it...

"It's make-believe."

"Make-believe." I repeated the words. He went on, "Make-believe. I make believe I can do something or be something... and then I just start working toward it and make it real. It's all made up anyway—laws, the dollar values, titles, cities, streets, and names. So I just make believe and do it." We both chuckled at the way he made is sound so simple. But then... it hit me, feeling like home. Make-believe is the same tool we wield freely as children before the world tells us what is and isn't possible. The same gift that built spaceships out of cardboard boxes and kingdoms out of yard dirt. Pillows became forts and sticks transformed into swords. Towels became superhero capes



billowing in the wind as we charged through the house, out the door and leaped from the front porch in that brief airborne glory of flight. It is in so many ways the same energy I now use as a creative. I imagine what doesn't exist yet—and then bring it into the world out of a blank canvas, a sheet or paper, or a wall...or whatever else.

It's not pretend-

ing really, it's a form of creating. It's so easy to think of imagination or daydreaming as child's play, but what if it's actually the cornerstone of everything real? What is money, after all, but a mutually agreed-upon myth of perceived value? A green piece of paper backed by our belief. What is a city but a series of stories and structures laid out in grids and street signs activated by someone's

rules of the game? What is a career, a title, a boundary—except a fictitious outline agreed upon by the masses? Just food for consideration here.

The difference between one person and another, between despair and drive, between stagnation and growth, might just be one's willingness to believe in the invisible long enough to build it. Make-believe.

That's what creatives do. That's what visionaries do. That's what children do. Then we grow up. Perhaps that's what we've lost in the vainglorious grind of adulthood: the sacred skill of making believe. But here's the beautiful twist—I've come to understand that the artist and the entrepreneur, the educator and the dreamer, the activist and the builder—all require the same core recipe: imagination infused with intention, carried by action.

We imagine.
We believe.
We begin.
We become.

So next time someone dismisses "make believe" as a childish thing, we can smile and nod... knowing full well that the world we live in—every towering building, every invention, every institution, political or otherwise—once lived only in someone's imagination. It's all made up. So, if we don't like the world we live in, just like someone made us believe in the this one, let's craft another more equitable one of our choosing. Our inner world would be a great place to start.



A Life Well-lived: Harvest's John A. Drake Sr. Celebrates 107 Remarkable Years

In a time when the world moves fast and traditions sometimes feel like they're slipping away, it's moments like these that remind us of the quiet power of legacy, love, and community. On Saturday, March 22, the Indian Creek P.B. Church Fellowship Hall in Harvest, Alabama, was filled with that very spirit as family, friends, and neighbors gathered to honor one of our own: Mr. John A. Drake Sr., a proud native of Harvest,

a World War II veteran, and a living testament to over a century of history.

Mr. Drake turned 107 years young on March 24, 2025, having been born in Madison County in 1918. That's right — 1918! He has lived through two world wars, the civil rights movement, and technological revolutions that have reshaped the world. And through it all, he has remained rooted in the values of faith, family, and community.

Over 200 guests came to celebrate this extraordinary milestone. With heartfelt words from Rev. Dr. Timothy Rainey and tributes from Mr. Drake's nine children and foster son, the event was more than a birthday party — it was a family reunion and a living history lesson.

There were prayers and musical selections, personal reflections, laughter, and poetry. Each child — from the eldest, Hattie Drake James, to the youngest

— shared their love and memories. Grandchildren recited verses of a poem written especially for Mr. Drake, painting a beautiful picture of a life that has touched so many. His son, Robert Drake, kept the program moving as Master of Ceremony with warmth and grace.

The celebration was also a reminder of the power of caregiving and the deep respect our elders deserve. Mr. Drake currently resides with daughter Eulasteen

Drake Abernathy and son-in-law Larry Abernathy, who serve as his devoted caregivers on Carroll Road.

The food, lovingly prepared by local caterer Teresa Wilson, and the joy of good company reminded everyone why our hometown matters — it's where the heart is, and where heroes like Mr. Drake are never forgotten.

At 107, Mr. Drake still enjoys CNN, The Game Show Network, old

westerns, and baseball — proof that a love for life doesn't fade with time.

Mr. Drake's story is more than a local milestone. It's a legacy — of service, of resilience, and of deep roots in the Alabama soil. As a community, we are richer for his presence and for the family that surrounds him.

Happy 107th, Mr. Drake. May your days continue to be filled with peace, love, and the knowledge that your life has inspired generations.

