

# Drake Hosts Ribbon-Cutting for Leidos Complex - p. 9

FREE



## AAMU Black Tie, 150th Event - p. 3

Friday  
May 2, 2025  
Vol. 11, No. 35  
ValleyWeeklyllc.com

**SALUTE!**  
Rosetta James Foundation  
ELDER OF THE WEEK



Mr. Bob Petty

# The Valley Weekly

"Live simply so that others may simply live." - bell hooks

### The People's Patch Power Stroll Set

The People's Patch Power Stroll, in conjunction with the 100 Alabama Miles Challenge, will take place at The People's Patch Community Farm on May 3, at 3701 Meridian Street.

The 100 Alabama Miles Challenge urges Alabamians to walk, run, hike, bike, swim, paddle, ride, or roll with family and friends for 100 miles each year. The program encourages participants to get their miles in by visiting Alabama's beautiful parks, nature preserves, and rivers. The People Patch is a 25-acre community farm established in North Huntsville in 2024. There is no Power Stroll registration; however, register at 100alabamamiles.org for the challenge.



### Drake, Leidos Celebrate New State-of-the-Art Complex

Leidos CEO Tom Bell and Dr. Patricia Sims, president of J.F. Drake State Community and Technical College (with scissors) cut the ribbon, joining elected and other officials during an 11 a.m. ceremony to formally open the Leidos Advanced Training Complex on Friday, April 25. See details on Page 9.

### Campus Radio Station Begins Vehicle Donation Program

As Alabama A&M University continues to commemorate its 150th Anniversary, the University is proud to announce a new partnership that turns unused vehicles – running or not – into support for a powerful cause. AAMU has teamed up with Arc

Thrift Stores, Inc. – a Colorado-based nonprofit that operates the Vehicles for Charity program, to offer alumni and friends across the nation a meaningful way to give back. Whether your vehicle is old, new, working – or not – every donation counts. Vehicles in

any condition are accepted, including cars, trucks, motorcycles, RVs, boats, and more. There's no need to worry about repairs or towing. Vehicles for Charity handles everything – from free pickup to title transfers – at no cost to the donor. Best of all,

proceeds directly benefit WJAB Radio and TV, the University's public broadcast stations. Donors will also receive a confirmation and tax-deductable receipt for their gift. To donate, simply call 1-866-628-2277 (CARS) or visit [vehiclesforcharity.org/donate-here](http://vehiclesforcharity.org/donate-here).

**150<sup>TH</sup> FOUNDER'S WEEK**  
**COFFEE & CONVERSATION ON THE HILL**

Join us for a warm cup of coffee and meaningful conversation as we celebrate our rich history and cast vision for a bold future.

 Judge Lynn <b>SHERROD</b>	 Dr. Oscar <b>MONTGOMERY</b>	 Dr. Dorothy W. <b>HUSTON</b>	 Moderator President Daniel K. <b>WIMS</b>
 Ms. Mya <b>GIBBS</b>	 Mr. Damein <b>GREEN</b>	 Councilwoman Michelle <b>WATKINS</b>	

MAY 1, 2025 | 1:30 PM

CLYDE FOSTER AUDITORIUM

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE!**

Washington Update, Page 2  
Preston Brown's "Spiritual Game Plan," Page 4  
Gloria B. & Tim: Perspectives, Page 5  
"Jahni" Moore's PowerShots, Page 6  
Sunday Lectionary, Page 7  
Honoring Our Elders, Page 7

# Valley Weekly Washington One Minute

by Ron Hamm

Here are the latest top issues and events in Washington:

1. **CONGRESS.** The Senate and House reconvened Monday after a two-week recess. Five House committees – Homeland Security, Armed Services, Financial Services, Oversight, and Education & the Workforce – have scheduled markups this week to begin the Budget Reconciliation process, which is the vehicle for the GOP's key 2025 legislative priority: the reauthorization of the 2017 tax cuts. Unlike Homeland Security and Armed Services

(which are allowed to mark up at least \$200 billion in new spending for the Pentagon and border security), Education & Workforce must find at least \$330 billion in mandatory spending cuts, most of which are expected to come from Head Start programs, school meal programs, and federal student aid.

2. **EXECUTIVE BRANCH.** On the first international trip of his 2nd term, the President and the First Lady traveled to Rome for a 14-hour trip Saturday to attend Pope Francis' funeral, at which the President

had an impromptu 15-minute meeting with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy in St. Peter's Basilica immediately before the start of the funeral ... Last Friday, a New York Times/Siena College poll of 913 registered voters found that 53% of voters think the country is on the wrong track (with 36% who think that it's on the right track) and that by 54% to 42%, voters disapprove of the President's handling of his job as president. A Washington Post/Ipsos poll of 2,464 adults released on the same day showed that 61% of Americans disapprove of the President's handling of the economy; 53% disapprove of his handling of immigration; and 64% disapprove of his tariffs ... On Wednesday, the Commerce Department will release data on 1st quarter 2025 gross domestic product (GDP), and the Treasury

Department is expected this week to release the date when the nation will hit the current debt limit.

3. **U.S. DOGE SERVICE.** Last week, it was reported that Elon Musk will significantly restrict his DOGE work to "1 or 2 days per week," as he refocuses on Tesla, which reported a 71% decline in revenue last Tuesday. The DOGE website (<https://doge.gov/savings>) claims to have saved taxpayers \$160 billion as of April 20 through firings, asset sales, and contract and grant cancellations.

4. **SUPREME COURT.** Last Thursday, the administration petitioned the Supreme Court to allow it to enforce its ban on transgender service members that has been blocked nationwide by a lower court judge. The Court asked for a response from the service members challenging the case by May 1. On Wednesday, the Court will hear a pair of cases, Oklahoma Charter School Board v. Drummond (consolidated with St. Isidore of Seville School v. Drummond), regarding whether Oklahoma violates the First Amendment's guarantee of the free exercise of religion by

excluding privately run religious charter schools from the state's charter-school program because they are religious.

5. **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.** On Wednesday, April 23, President Donald Trump signed an executive order titled "Preparing Americans for High-Paying Skilled Trade Jobs of the Future," directing the secretaries of Commerce, Education, and Labor to overhaul federal workforce development efforts. The order aims to strengthen U.S. manufacturing and skilled trades by consolidating fragmented programs and boosting registered apprenticeships, with a target of creating 1 million new apprenticeship opportunities. Agencies must submit reform strategies within 90 days and an apprenticeship expansion plan within 120 days. While community colleges may benefit from greater support for apprenticeships and streamlined grant requirements, concerns remain that program consolidation could lead to funding cuts, echoing past Trump administration proposals.

6. **HIGHER EDUCATION.** Last Wednesday, President Donald Trump signed an

executive order aimed at overhauling the accreditation system for higher education, criticizing accreditors for approving low-quality institutions and burdening students with unnecessary costs. The order directs Education Secretary Linda McMahon to reduce regulatory barriers, promote intellectual diversity, and encourage competition among accreditors. It also instructs the Department of Education to create an experimental site for approving career pathways outside the traditional accreditation process and to streamline the process for colleges to switch accreditors. The EO continues the administration's attack on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) standards, labeling them as unlawfully discriminatory. Although sweeping changes to accreditation face legal limits under the Higher Education Act, the administration may pursue policy shifts through regulatory and sub-regulatory actions in the coming months.

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## OU, Samford Partner for Accelerated Law Program

Oakwood University and Samford University's Cumberland School of Law have signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that establishes a new Accelerated Law Degree Program. This academic partnership will provide Oakwood students with a unique opportunity to earn both a bachelor's degree

and a Juris Doctor (JD) in just six years, instead of the traditional seven.

Eligible OU students will apply to the law school after completing three years of undergraduate coursework. Upon acceptance, their first year of law school will also count as their final undergraduate year at Oakwood, allowing them to complete

both degrees in a reduced timeframe.

The MOU aligns with both institutions' goals of increasing educational access and providing innovative academic pathways that meet the needs of today's students, OU officials say.

Contact Richard Hodnett at Oakwood for details at (256) 726-7202.

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## A Legacy of Excellence and a Future of Promise - AAMU Celebrates 150 Years

This past weekend, our community had the distinct honor of witnessing history as Alabama A&M University marked its 150th Anniversary with a powerful weekend of events that showcased the institution's proud legacy, cultural vibrancy, and ambitious future.

At the heart of the celebration was the 25th Annual Black-Tie Scholarship Gala, a shining tradition that reached new heights this year. With record-breaking enthusiasm and generosity, alumni, supporters, and friends of AAMU



Roosevelt Conley and Dr. Dorothy W. Huston (center), founders of the Black Tie event, honored by AAMU VP Ali and President Daniel K. Wims.

raised over \$1 million in one night — a milestone that speaks volumes about the commitment to advancing educational opportunity. Testimonies from student scholarship recipients reminded us that behind every dollar raised is a life changed and a dream made real.

Yet the weekend was about more than just fundraising. It was a full-bodied celebration of history, faith, and community spirit. On Sunday, the inaugural Gospel Celebration filled the AAMU Event Center with the soaring harmonies of the legendary Clark Sisters. For decades, their groundbreaking fusion of gospel, blues, jazz, and R&B has lifted spirits around the world, and their voices provided the perfect soundtrack to honor AAMU's rich past while inspiring hope for its next chapter.

The Gospel Celebration was more than just a concert; it was a call to action. As part of AAMU's \$15 million 150th Anniversary Campaign, proceeds from the event support critical investments in campus improvements, STEM education, and student scholarships — the very pillars that ensure the University continues to thrive for generations to come.

Throughout the year, AAMU is inviting its alumni, friends, and broader community to be part of this historic effort through the Torch Bearer program. Each Torch Bearer commits to rallying support, with every event and every dollar raised pushing the University closer to its goals. It is a testament to the power of community and the enduring spirit of "Start Here, Go Anywhere" that defines AAMU.

This celebration was not just for those who wore maroon and white — it was for all of us. Alabama A&M has been an engine of opportunity, excellence, and pride for our region and beyond for a century and a half. Its impact ripples through businesses, classrooms, government halls, and homes across our city, our state, and our nation.



As we reflect on the joyous sounds, heartfelt stories, and historic achievements of this weekend, let us also look ahead with hope and determination. The success of Alabama A&M University is a success for all of us. Investing in AAMU means investing in the future leaders, innovators, and change-makers who will shape a brighter tomorrow.

Congratulations, Alabama A&M University, on 150 years of excellence. Here's to the next 150 years — may they be even more inspiring, impactful, and transformative.

To learn how you can support the #AAMU150 campaign, visit [www.aamu.edu/150](http://www.aamu.edu/150). Until next week ...

A NOTE FROM THE ...



The Valley Weekly

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Classified	1 col.x1 inch	\$100/Flat Fee

*Dorothy*

# Spiritual Game Plan

PRESTON BROWN'S



The Valley Weekly

## Today's Spiritual Game Plan: "Are We There Yet?"

Genesis 8:22 says ... *as long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest time will never cease.*

The reason I like this scripture is that it helps me to understand that "time" is just as important as the "seed." You can't grow anything without the seed. And it takes time for the seed to grow and mature.

I can remember taking my family to the beach when my daughters were young. It was about a six-hour drive. So every two hours they would ask the question, "Are we there yet?" Just like many of us, we are more excited about the destination than we are about the journey, which is just as important, because it not only helps us in our growth but it also helps create memories that will help teach us the things that we need to know.

Oftentimes, we may find ourselves asking God the same thing as it pertains to our spiritual growth. Or as it pertains to our financial growth. Or even as it pertains to growth in our maturity. No matter what the situation is, we ask God the question, "Are we there

yet?" When can I see the fruits of my labor? "Are we there yet?" When can I see a difference in my relationship with my spouse? "Are we there yet?" When will I see a difference in my children's behavior? "Are we there yet?" When will I see a change at my job? "Are we there yet?"

In times like these, we have to remember that when we enter a relationship with God, we have to learn to be patient. Just as I would tell my



daughters to" just enjoy the ride." Remember, in the words of King Solomon, "There is a time for everything". (Ecclesiastes 3:1). That's why we all need to understand this principle of patience. Just enjoy what God is doing in our lives. Because sometimes the more we focus on the outcome,

the less we enjoy the journey.

*Prayer:* Dear God, help us to learn to be patient while you are working in our lives.

*Question:* What are some things in your lives that are causing you to be impatient with God's timing for your life?

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:**  
"Gifts and Talents"

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*Funeral services for MS. ARNETTA WHATLEY (b. 1932); and MR. JOHN FLETCHER (b. 1945) will be announced at a later date.*

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

### NELMS MEMORIAL FUNERAL HOME

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[www.nelmsmemorial.net](http://www.nelmsmemorial.net) - (256) 539-8189

*Funeral service for MS. JEWELL ANDERSON (b. 1952) of Los Angeles, California, and a native of Huntsville, Ala., will be Thursday, May 1, at 1:30 p.m. in the Inglewood Park Chapel.*

*Funeral service for MRS. IRENE OGLESBY (b. 1921) was Saturday, April 26, at Saint Rebecca Primitive Baptist Church, 330 Grimwood Lane, Hazel Green, Ala., with Bishop Carl Pruitt as eulogist.*

*Funeral service for MR. WILLIAM E. HORTON, SR. (b. 1949) was Saturday, April 19, at Syler Tabernacle.*

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*Funeral services for MRS. RAUBY OVERTON (b. 1938); MRS. CASSANDRA GREEN (b. 1963) and MR. ROBERT RUSSELL (b. 1952) will be announced at a later date.*

*Funeral service for MRS. ELISE CLIFTON MCWILLIAMS (b. 1951) was Wednesday, April 30, 2025, at Lakeside United Methodist Church (3738 Meridian Street, Huntsville, AL 35811) with Reverend Waymon K. Smith as officiant.*

*Funeral service for Mrs. RUBY LEE ALLEN (b. 1960) will be held at 12:00 noon, Saturday, April 26, 2025, at Royal Chapel of Memories, 4315 Oakwood Ave NW, Huntsville, Ala., with Pastor Willie James Gardner as officiant.*

**Payton Pritchard: #1 @ being #6**

*“But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’” - Luke 14:10*

When the NBA named the Boston Celtics’ Payton Pritchard its 2024–25 Sixth Man of the Year on April 22nd, it wasn’t just recognizing a spark plug off the bench — it was honoring a Masterclass in Emerging Leadership.

**FROM HEADLINER TO BENCHWARMER, TO ...**

Let’s go back a few years. Pritchard was a college star at Oregon — four-year starter, Pac-12 Player of the Year, and All-American. He was drafted by the Boston Celtics in 2020, and Celtics fans were cautiously optimistic.

But by his third season? He found himself buried in the rotation. In an NBA season of 82 games, he played just 48 games that year. Often the last one off the bench — *if at all.*

**... EMERGING FROM OBSCURITY**

Just two years ago, Pritchard was still stuck in basketball’s purgatory: too talented to ignore, yet not fully trusted to lead. Instead of complaining, he committed. Instead of demanding more minutes, he delivered more value.

This season? The Celtics are back on top, looking to repeat as NBA champions — something they haven’t done since the Bill Russell era of 1969-1970. And guess who’s been an essential ingredient in that resurgence to repeat?

**BOSTON**



You guessed it - Payton Pritchard who averaged 14.3 points per game; shot 40.7% from beyond the three-point arc; played in 80 of 82 NBA regular season games. But with only three starts, yet he averaged over 28 minutes a night. *Why?*

Because he earned every second. He leaned into the moment and grew. Quietly. Consistently. Courageously. **In other words: he led from the bench.** But there’s more ...

**LEADERSHIP THROUGH LEGACY**

The Sixth Man of the Year Award is named after Hall of Famer John Havlicek, a Celtics legend who made the sixth-man role iconic. Havlicek came off the bench, but outplayed starters. He energized teams. He changed outcomes. *Sound familiar?* Now, 50 years later, another Celtic — Payton Pritchard — is carrying that torch.

In a world obsessed with starting lineups and star stats, Payton Pritchard is a reminder that greatness can come off the bench. He’s not just a player. He’s a principle.

And in basketball — as in life — the first shall indeed be last... but the last shall be first.



**Tim Allston**

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The Valley Weekly  
**M**illennial  
**Mo**ment  
by Gloria B. Caldwell

**Preparation for Failure ...**

Preparing yourself for failure is a crucial part of your journey toward success. Why are you doing this? We all know that not planning to win is a plan to fail. So, what are you doing to prepare yourself? Are you all talk and no action? Great ideas are pointless if you aren’t moving forward with them. Are you always seeking advice and never using it?

Do you have impostor syndrome? Many neglect the talents and gifts within themselves because of past experiences and trials they have overcome. Recognizing and embracing your unique



strengths is essential. Those challenges don’t define you; they refine you and contribute to your resilience.

Create an action plan with specific steps to turn your ideas into reality. Avoid the

trap of inaction—take small, consistent steps toward your goals, even if they seem minor at first. Progress is progress, no matter how small.

Surround yourself with supportive people who uplift you and hold you accountable. Ultimately, preparing for failure isn’t just about envisioning success; it’s about actively embracing the journey, learning from setbacks, and continually moving forward. Empower yourself to take action! Watch as you turn obstacles into opportunities. We’ve Got This!!

Lace Up! Let’s Go!!

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The Valley Weekly

# VALLEY EVENTS

HAPPENINGS, ACTIVITIES & MORE!

- 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  
3701 Meridian Street  
Huntsville, Ala.  
9 a.m.
- May 5**  
Girls on the Run
- Fern Bell Recreation Center  
107A Sanders Road  
Huntsville, Ala.  
4-5:30 p.m.
- May 6**  
"Chicago Stepping"  
Ballroom  
Robert "Bob" Harrison Senior Wellness and Advocacy Center  
6156 Pulaski Pike NW  
Huntsville, Ala. - (256) 519-2040  
4 p.m.
- May 13**  
"Chicago Stepping"  
Ballroom  
Robert "Bob" Harrison Senior Wellness and Advocacy Center  
6156 Pulaski Pike NW  
Huntsville, Ala. - (256) 519-2040  
4 p.m.
- May 20**  
"Chicago Stepping"

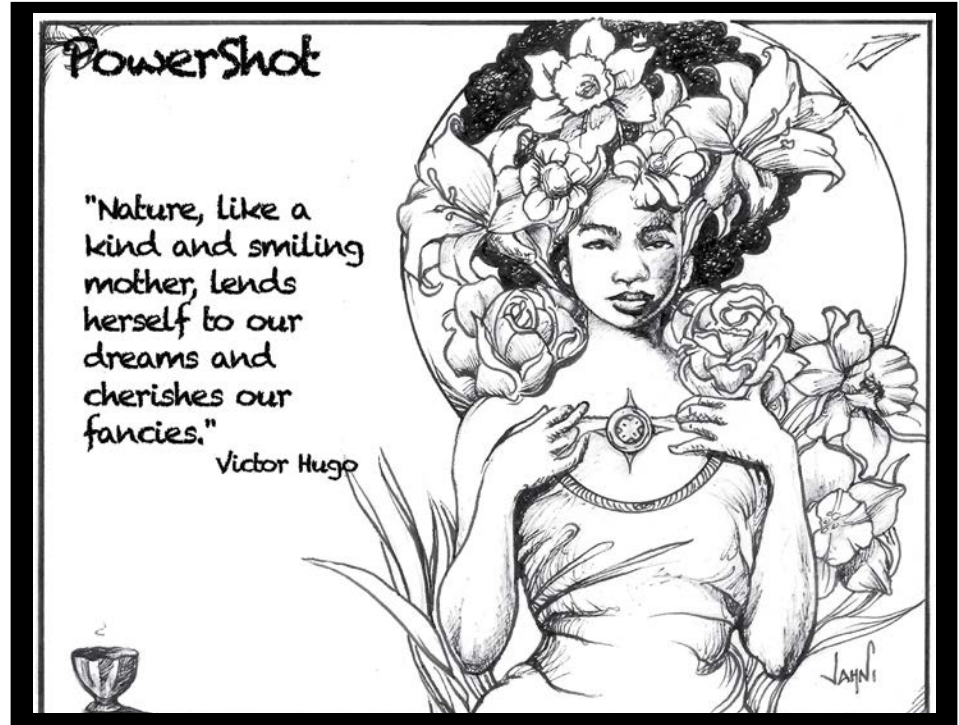
Ballroom  
Robert "Bob" Harrison Senior Wellness and Advocacy Center  
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Huntsville, Ala. - (256) 519-2040  
4 p.m.

**May 27**  
"Chicago Stepping"  
Ballroom  
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6156 Pulaski Pike NW  
Huntsville, Ala. - (256) 519-2040  
4 p.m.

**May 28**  
Etowah Youth Orchestra Performance  
Lowe Mill ARTS & Entertainment  
2211 Seminole Drive SW  
Huntsville, Ala.  
2-3 p.m. (Free)

**May 29**  
Comedian  
"Darren Brand"  
Huntsville Levity Live  
2012 Memorial Parkway SW  
Huntsville, Ala.  
7 p.m.

**May 30-31**  
Comedian  
"Shuler King"  
Huntsville Levity Live  
2012 Memorial Parkway SW  
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*"I can't believe what you say,  
because I see what you do."*

- James Baldwin



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

## Mr. Bob Petty

Mr. Bob Petty has served in some capacity as an education professional for well over 45 years, utilizing his extensive experience in teaching, training and supervision in various settings to impact the lives of hundreds of young men and women.

Petty earned the Bachelor of Science degree in engineering technology and the M.Ed. degree in industrial technology education from historic Alabama A&M University.

He went on to pursue additional studies at Athens State University, Mississippi State University and Winston-Salem State University (N.C.). These institutions equipped Petty with a proven ability to teach electricity, electronics and applied physics, as well as to serve as an able supervisor of both students and other teachers.

The educator traces his long length of service back to his nearly 30-year affiliation with J.F. Drake State Community and Technical College where, from 1972-2000, he ably taught in and ultimately led the Department of Electronics/Electricity, providing able guidance to instructors, supervis-

ing the total operations of the unit, counseling and interviewing students for enrollment, coordinating and spurring job placement for graduating students, serving on boards and committees, and even networking with high schools and technology centers.

From 2000-2010, Petty served as an education service provider for AWS Limited, where he served as a liaison between the firm and various area colleges, in addition to securing tutoring, transportation and housing for international students.

During the period, he primarily served as an education service provider for the National Training Board (NTB)-Bermuda, operating as liaison between NTB and Tennessee Valley area colleges and universities.

Further, Petty maintains a nearly 20-year affiliation with the North Alabama Center for Educational Excellence (NACEE), providing tutorial services to high school students, developing partnerships with community industries and agencies, counseling and interviewing students for mentoring program, and serving as the industry liaison for Upward



Bound and Upward Bound Math & Science programs.

Petty enjoys a continuing affiliation with the Alabama Education Association, the Alabama Vocational Association, J.F. Drake Education Association, the National Education Association, Alabama VICA Association, and the National VICA Association.

Among his most recent honors are the William Hooper Council Distinguished Alumni Award from Alabama A&M University Alumni Association, Inc., and the Benjamin Banneker Friends in Planning Award presented by Alabama A&M University's Department of Community and Regional Planning.



"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](http://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](mailto:info@valleyweeklyllc.com).

# This Sunday's Lectionary

Sunday, May 4, 2025

Third  
Sunday  
of Easter



(Track 2, Year C)

First Lesson:  
Acts 9:1-6, (7-20)

Psalm 30

Second Lesson:  
Revelation 5:11-14

GOSPEL:  
John 21:1-19

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## NOTES OF A NATIVE SON

## Cosmic Conduit

by afroblastik [John 'Jahni' Moore]



From childhood, the red clay of Alabama has been more than dusty earth beneath my feet — it has been companion, witness, keeper, and quiet participant in my life's southern screenplay. Its deep, iron-rich hues tell tales far older than roads, houses, or city outlines. This clay, saturated by millennia, holds within it the memory of those who walked, worked, sweated, prayed, and bled on it. I recall a professor once telling me, "This Alabama red clay is rich with the blood of your ancestors." It was then that I began to understand — this soil is not just ruddy dirt; it is charged matter, a living archive.

In the age-old folk wisdom of the South, particularly in the African American tradition, earth is not a passive object or substance. In clay and soil have long been used as



vessels for intention — for grounding, for protection, for healing, cleansing, and for calling forth what is

unseen. The red clay in particular, with its rich iron content, acts almost like a spiritual conduc-

tor, transmitting energy between the seen and unseen worlds. It anchors prayers, catches tears, and carries whispers into the earth's core. But its power extends beyond the personal or mystical — it is cosmic. Science teaches us that the same iron oxide that reddens Alabama clay also exists in places like Morocco, Tehran, Nigeria, Kenya, and yes on the surface of Mars, giving the planet its scarlet glow. There's something poetic in that: this humble dirt is a terrestrial mirror of a

celestial body, connecting us to the wider universe. How we walk should not be common because what we walk upon is not ordinary — it is stardust, drawn down to earth, thickened and spread by time and memory.

This allows me to weave this red clay into my work not as a symbol of something superstitious, but as a tangible metaphor for what binds us all: dust to dust, earth to star, ascendant to descendant. It's a reminder that our faith traditions, though varied, often

share this same foundational truth — that life is cyclical, that spirit moves through matter, and that the earth itself is a key element in the divine story. I have come to see red clay as a sacred material. It quietly affirms what so many faiths already teach — that we are intimately connected to both the earth and the heavens. We are tethered to power. May each step we take upon this hallowed ground remind us of our origin story, our resilience, our rootedness, and our inevitable rising.

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## Drake State Hosts Ribbon-Cutting for New Leidos Advanced Training Complex

Drake State Community and Technical College hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony today for its new Leidos Advanced Training Complex. The event featured remarks from Drake State President Dr. Patricia Sims, Leidos CEO Tom Bell, elected officials, and community leaders.

The ceremony marked the grand opening of the 50,000-square-foot facility on Drake State's campus, which will support education and training for the aerospace and advanced manufacturing industries. The training complex houses in-demand training programs, including precision machining and welding. It also features dedicated space for additive manufacturing, mechatronics, electrical technology, engineering design, and more, as well as lab spaces, classrooms, and

offices for instructors and administration. Additionally, the complex will serve as home to a new cohort of Federation of Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) students, an apprenticeship-style program that Drake State started in 2024.

"The Leidos Advanced Training Complex represents a transformative investment in workforce education and regional economic growth," said Dr. Patricia Sims, President of Drake State. "This state-of-the-art facility will allow us to expand training opportunities in high-demand industries such as precision machining and welding, preparing our students for the careers of tomorrow while strengthening the talent pipeline for our local and national partners. I want to thank our state elected officials, the

Alabama Community College System, and Leidos for supporting this transformative project."

The Leidos Advanced Training Complex was identified as a key initiative through the Alabama Community College System's ASPIRE 2030 plan, which stands for "Achieving Systemwide Potential through Increased Resources and Engagement." The initiative was made possible by a statewide bond issue passed by the Alabama Legislature in 2020 to support facility upgrades and new construction across Alabama's education system.

"The facility here will effectively serve Drake State students and North Alabama for a long time," said ACCS Chancellor Jimmy Baker. "We are in the business of making life better for everyone. It's our job and mission to make sure every area of

this state has the resources needed to provide training and support economic development. The innovation and talent that will be produced at this training complex will be among the best in the state."

In November 2024, Leidos announced a \$1.75 million donation to Drake State. The gift helps fund Drake State's advanced manufacturing and IT programs, student apprenticeships, campus technical and infrastructure upgrades, a new scholarship endowment, and faculty development opportunities. In recognition of the donation, Drake State named the new building the Leidos Advanced Training Complex.

"Huntsville has been a cornerstone of aerospace and defense talent since the industry's earliest days," said Leidos CEO Tom Bell. "This

partnership with Drake State will grow the pipeline of talented people who will solve our nation's most vexing challenges in smarter and more efficient ways."

Drake State broke ground on the facility on June 9, 2023. The complex features 10 laboratories, seven classrooms, multiple offices, a multipurpose room, specialized tool and storage areas, a storm shelter, a testing suite, a kitchen and serving area, a break room, and modern restrooms. Additional features include glass viewing areas for prospective students and industry partners, as well as digital displays providing key information for students and visitors.

The new training complex will equip students with skills to help them earn high wages and gain nationally recognized certifications at a low cost.

Goodwyn Mills Ca-wood provided architectural, interior design, civil engineering, and landscape architecture services for the complex, which was constructed by Fite Building Co.

"This building was designed to be more than just a place to learn — it's a space that fosters connection, growth, and opportunity," Hunter Swatek, GMC project manager, said. "GMC was eager to work closely with Drake State and the community to create an environment that reflects their values while supporting the success of every student who walks through these doors. It's exciting to see it opening and ready to inspire the next generation."

For more information about programs available in the new facility, visit [drake-state.edu](http://drake-state.edu).

- Daniel Owen, Drake