

FOUR STAR SQUARE

Walthall County's Aspire Project

ASPIRE TEAM MEMBERS: Oliver Bates, Ryan Bruhl, Richard Hay, Mark Holmes, Kyle Johnson, Pam Keaton, Janice McKellar, and Chad Parish.

Our initiative was to make the Centennial Square area more attractive and cultivate an atmosphere where people want to shop and dine. As part of the Aspire training, our team identified our "TOP THREE" as:

Physical Enhancements

Education and Awareness – the "Big Easy"

Activities and Events

Physical Enhancements:

The Aspire project grant funded three 10 x 12 picnic pavilions that were designed and constructed by Aspire team member, Kyle Johnson, and volunteers with carpentry skills that he recruited. Each pavilion has a concrete base and a roof that matches the pitch and color of the adjacent Agri-Heritage Center. The adorable picnic pavilions have certainly enhanced the area and are attracting visitors during lunch, Tuesday's Farmers' Market, and the Old Town Market.



Aspire Team Member, Kyle Johnson



Picnic Pavilions in use during the Farmers' Market

The Aspire team designed and sourced the reflective metal inserts for two "Welcome to Tylertown" signs for Centennial Square that replaced corrugated plastic ones. The team also worked on designs for the downtown kiosk, a series wayfinding signs, and granite building markers, that were considered for the Aspire grant project.



Sign on the South side of the Square



Sign on the North side of the Square

Aspire team members, Kyle Johnson, Janice McKellar, and Pam Keaton, cleaned the blighted storefront of a downtown building, removed the debris, and installed a backdrop to make it more attractive. Kyle provided equipment and paid for additional labor to expedite the project.



Before



After

Education and Awareness:

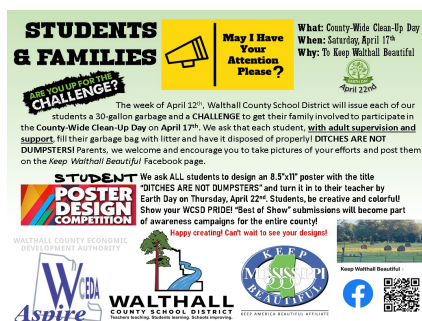
Walthall Aspire developed two programs to help create awareness for and additional interest in the group “Keep Walthall Beautiful” that Chancery Clerk, Shannon Fortinberry, Bruce and Laurie Hill, and others spearheaded to clean up trash along the roads and highways.

“Egging it On” \$1,500 of “Shopping Dollars” provided by the local banks were stuffed in plastic eggs and volunteers scattered them throughout the county for others to find while removing trash. A drawing was held at the Dairy Festival for an additional \$100 to bring additional awareness to the cleanup campaign, along with a tent manned by Shannon Fortinberry and the James family with coloring pages they designed for the kids and other cleanup promotional material supplied by MDOT.



Dugas wins \$100 in anti-litter drawing

Janice Dugas was the winner of a \$100 drawing by Keep Walthall Beautiful. Her name was entered into the Egging-It-On campaign, an awareness campaign started by Pam Keaton and Janice McKellar, designed to bring attention to the litter problem in the county. Dugas entered the drawing by participating in cleaning up roads near her property and finding a “prize egg” intermixed with the trash she picked up from the side of the road. She claimed the \$1 prize from the egg, which made her eligible to enter the grand prize Egging- It-On drawing held at the Dairy Festival. Dugas says she and her husband walk for exercise every day near their home, and while doing so, pick up trash to help the Keep Walthall Beautiful effort.



“Ditches Aren’t Dumpsters” – Aspire team members sourced the donation of 2,000+ garbage bags to provide to students to encourage cleaning up near their homes. Dr. Brad Brumfield, assistant Superintendent of the Walthall County School System, distributed the bags to the students and created material for the poster contest. Janice McKellar secured supplies through MDOT for distribution to citizens to encourage cleaning up Walthall County.

Aspire member, Janice McKellar, helped hang posters in the front windows of the building that she, Kyle, and other Aspire members cleaned previously. Janice also facilitated the donation of cleanup supplies through MDOT that were provided locally and during the Dairy Festival.



The “Egging it On” and “Ditches aren’t Dumpsters” contests designed and initiated by the Walthall Aspire group served the intended purpose of engaging students and their parents in the cleanup process and creating awareness of the local cleanup campaign already underway. Aspire member, Janice McKellar sourced supplies through MDOT and submitted a Walthall Aspire article to the paper to bring additional awareness to encourage cleaning up and not littering.



Litter clean-up encouraged

By Janice McKellar
Walthall Aspire

We should all be willing to make our world a better place. That is just what Ben Atwood is doing by picking up trash on this county road. Ben is the owner of Vintage Guitars, one of our local downtown merchants. Great job, Ben!

A very good start to making the world a better place is through an anti-litter program. This doesn't have to be an organization you join, it is just an activity that you can do, just as Ben is doing. Littering can cause a variety of issues, not just the environmental impact, but can lead toward the disruption of a community's good health and quality of lifestyle. We all want to keep Walthall County healthy and looking its best for today and for future generations.

Research shows that 85 percent of littering is the result of people's attitudes, so that means behavior must be changed. Research also shows that lit-

tered environments attract more litter. Litter is a negative human impact on the environment and can exist for very long periods in the environment before decomposition. Litter can affect the quality of life. For instance, cigarette butts (the most littered item in the world) can take five years or longer to decompose. We've all seen that person driving and tossing a cigarette butt or other item out the window. If this happens, get a tag number, get a photo, and call it in. If we try to keep our own space litter free it will be a start to a cleaner county.

We want new industry in Walthall County and yes litter is a deterrent. First impressions are so important when attracting new businesses to our county. As you travel through the county, take notice, but most of all take action. Don't pass it (litter) up, pick it up. It really does take a village to be litter free.

If you litter, shame on you!

Activities and Events

Aspire team members helped with the development of the “Old Town Market” by coordinating efforts, establishing guidelines, designing the logo, creating a Facebook page, and more, along with market manager, Klara Reid. The Vintage Guitar Shop kicked off the first market with a concert series and jambalaya fundraiser for a local musician. The market is new for 2021 and will be held on the first and third Saturday monthly through December.



Aspire's Picnic Pavilions were designed and built by Kyle Johnson with the help of talented volunteers are shown above prior to the opening of the “Old Town Market”.

The pavilions and picnic tables are used during the Farmers' Market, Old Town Market, and to attract locals and visitors for outdoor lunches or visiting downtown.



Page 2A • The Tylertown Times • Thursday, April 22, 2021

Free music concert all day May 1 at opening of Old Town Market

A free concert of music! That's what you get Saturday, May 1, at the opening day of Old Town Market, a Saturday version of the Farmers Market taking place at the Agri-Heritage Building behind Trustmark Bank.

The Ole Towne Market opens at 7 a.m., while live music featuring local artists will crank up at 8 a.m., said Ben Atwood, owner of Vintage Guitar Emporium.

Atwood said the opening of the market is a backdrop for a full day of entertainment in conjunction with a fundraiser for Robby Aucoin of McComb, a North Pike High School student who is recovering from an auto accident after losing control of his car and hitting a tree while on his way to school.

“He's a big supporter of the shop and a frequent visitor here,” Atwood said.

Aucoin's mounting medical bills prompted the Atwoods—Ben and Heather—to donate a vintage 1990s Korean Hamer Echotone guitar to be raffled to benefit Aucoin.

“Tickets for the guitar are \$10 each. You can purchase them here at Vintage Guitar Emporium, and we'll also have them for sale at the May 1 Ole Towne Market,” he said. “We're also selling jambalaya plates for \$10 beginning around mid-morning. Whatever we raise from the raffle, jambalaya or straight donations people make will go to Robby and his family to cover expenses associated with his medical bills and therapy.”

The drawing for the guitar takes place at 4:45 p.m. the afternoon of May 1.

The winner receives the vintage Hamer Echotone, along with a new case for it.

Atwood says the music lineup during the morning while the market is underway will be mostly acoustic and gospel. In the afternoon, following the market, he's booking local bands to perform.

Walthall counties and those from surrounding areas have been supportive of the fundraising efforts, the Atwoods said.

“The interest has been exceptional. We've had a lot of increased traffic from people wanting to buy a ticket for the guitar,” Atwood said. “The good news is Robby is doing well. He's now able to walk with the use of a walker and full back-brace, and he's still got physical therapy he's going through.”

Vintage Guitar Emporium is a unique addition to Tylertown in that it serves as a magnet

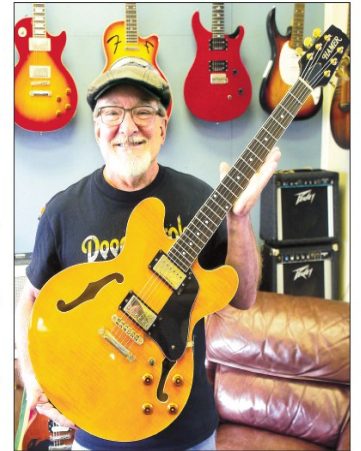
for musicians and music fans, attracting music buffs not only from Walthall County, but from a wide surrounding area.

“We're open Thursday, Friday and

Saturday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and we encourage players to stop in and jam, along with anyone who likes music to come by and listen,” the Atwoods say.

“We're happy to help Robby and his family. He's impressed the Vintage Guitar family with his ability and talent. He's really into his music and karate. Those are his main interests and hopefully we can help him overcome his accident and realize his dream.”

Atwood said Aucoin had lined up some recording time, but the accident has



Ben Atwood shows the vintage 1990s Korean Hamer Echotone guitar being raffled to help with medical expenses of Robby Aucoin, injured in an auto accident earlier this year.

delayed the planned session. Aucoin was seriously

injured in the wreck suffering three broken ribs, a broken back and ankle and torn ligaments in his foot.

“Right now, the most important thing is getting

well, doing what the doctors and physical therapists tell him. We're all encouraging him not to rush it. The session will still be available once he's

back in shape and fully recovered.”



Ole Town Market - Robby Aucoin Benefit Schedule of Events - May 1

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 8:00 am | Ole Town Market Opens |
| 8:00 - 9:30 | Don's Friday Night Gang, Bassfield |
| 9:30 - 10:30 | Robert Stinson and Lane Nunnery McComb |
| 10:30 - 11:30 | Kyle Graves, Brookhaven |
| 11:30 - 12:30 | Hippies in the End Zone, North Pike High School |
| 1:00 pm | Ole Town Market Closes |
| 12:30 - 1:30 | Clear Creek Band, Tylertown |
| 1:30 - 2:30 | Old School Band, McComb |
| 2:30 - 3:30 | Hogwood Band, Tylertown |
| 3:30 - 4:30 | Bulletproof Band, Tylertown |
| 4:45 pm | Drawing for raffle guitar |
| 5:00 pm | Close of Benefit Activities |

Major impact made on the community made by the MDA and Walthall's Aspire Team Members

Aspire team members Ryan Bruhl, Richard Hay, Janice McKellar, and Pam Keaton, worked with Mayor Hughes and Rep. Bill Pigott to secure \$500,000 funding to start the restoration of the former Walthall Hotel for conversion into a workforce training center.

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DEATHS

Smitty Bracey
Jennifer Chambliss
Danny Ray Coon
Harvey Holmes
Willie T. Holmes
Deborah Smith
Linda Thomas

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Thumbs Up, Down

(Editor's Note:
Thumbs Up or Thumbs
Down is a reader
inspired column to give
credit where credit is



Artist's rendering of a renovated Walthall Hotel building. The town received a \$500,000 workforce training grant to repurpose the property to a town-owned community facility, with classrooms, shared space and meeting areas.

Town gets \$500,000 grant for hotel renovation

Tylertown has been awarded a \$500,000 workforce training grant for renovation of the old Walthall Hotel property, to turn the building into a community facility to include classrooms, shared space and meeting areas.

Economic developer Pam Keaton wrote the grant application to bring the 1927 structure up to modern-day standards. The application proposal calls for the town to partner with institutions of higher learning, the state

Cooperative Extension Service and local school district to provide workforce development and training. Additionally, the facility would be utilized to provide public safety classes, including educational classes related to health safety, such as the present COVID-19 pandemic and other health threats, in addition to workforce training, GED classes, college courses, etc.

Mayor Ed Hughes announced the grant at both last week's town

board meeting and at the Chamber of Commerce board of directors meeting the following day. He said the grant is only half of the projected cost, or a little less than half. The estimated project cost is a little over \$1-million. Hughes said the grant funding can be used to leverage access to additional federal money, grants or loans.

"It's a long shot," he said, adding that Keaton and Ryan Bruhl, municipal and justice court

judge, spearheaded the application.

Keaton said the downtown area should benefit from the renovations, likely serving as a catalyst for private investors to purchase or renovate other downtown buildings.

The building has been removed from the state's buildings available for sale or lease calendar as to meet grant requirements it has to be utilized for the uses specified in the town's grant application.

Aspire members Ryan Bruhl and Janice McKellar worked with Pam Keaton, economic developer, to assist in Red Land Cotton opening a sewing operation in Tylertown by attending meetings with company officials and others during and after the decision-making process. The company leased the 37,000 square foot building owned by the Town of Tylertown in October of 2020 to manufacture sheet sets, bath robes, and other products sold online at www.redlandcotton.com. Tylertown was awarded a \$150,000 Small Municipalities and Limited Population Counties Grant from the MDA for improvements to the building. Aspire team members Kyle Johnson and Janice McKellar installed the sign on the building that was provided to the company by the Walthall County EDA.



Janice McKellar and Kyle Johnson



Kyle installing the Red Land Cotton sign

MDA, Entergy assisting to create 40 jobs

Cotton producer Red Land Cotton, manufacturer of high-end linens, in October located sewing operations in Tylertown to support an increased demand for the company's products, all of which are grown and manufactured in the U.S. The project is a \$375,000 corporate investment and will create 40 jobs.

Red Land Cotton began growing cotton in Moulton, Ala., nearly 40 years ago. In 1994, the company built its own gin and today manufactures top-quality luxury linens, including sheets, blankets and towels. The company's new Tylertown sewing operations are located in the 37,000-square-foot facility formerly occupied by Auburn Manufacturing, which it is leasing from the city. Red Land Cotton was in the process of constructing a 25,000-square-foot facility in Moulton to house its new sewing operations. That facility will now be used as a warehousing and distribution hub.

The Mississippi Development Authority is providing assistance for building improvements. Entergy also is providing assistance for the project.

Walthall Economic Authority director Pam Keaton applied for a \$150,000 grant for air conditioning for the building, which was approved for The Town of Tylertown.

Red Land Cotton has filled 20 positions at its Tylertown location and plans to fill the remaining 20 within three years.

"The state of Mississippi is proud to welcome Red Land Cotton as our newest business partner. Walthall County and the city of Tylertown are booming with economic potential, from the area's talented workforce to its existing facilities and infrastructure, all of which Red Land Cotton recognized and quickly took advantage. Tylertown is where Mississippi's First Lady, my wife Elee, is from, and we are excited to watch Red Land Cotton thrive and bring new opportunities to the area's residents for many years to come." – Gov. Tate Reeves

"MDA strongly supports our state's manufacturers, and we are glad to add Red Land Cotton to our robust portfolio of manufacturers and agribusiness companies doing business in our great state. The company's leadership found the ingredients for success in Walthall County, and as a result, an existing facility is being put online once again, and 40 new jobs are being created for the area's skilled workforce. MDA is grateful to our partners at the Walthall County Economic Development Authority and Entergy, whose commitment to economic development was instrumental in bringing Red Land Cotton to Mississippi." – MDA Executive Director John Rounsaville

"I am pleased Red Land Cotton recognized the economic potential, infrastructure and skilled workforce in Tylertown and Walthall County in choosing a location for its new sewing operation. I also commend the cooperation among city, county and state leaders to bring more jobs and opportunities to this region of the state. It's this sort of collaboration that will help this area and our state continue to thrive and grow." – Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.)

"We are honored to grow our manufacturing footprint in the state of Mississippi and in Walthall County in particular. We have found the talent and resources to be plentiful and the local officials to be extremely helpful in getting us up and running. We hope to continue to grow our operation there for years to come." – Red Land Cotton Owner Mark Yeager

"We're excited to have Red Land Cotton in Tylertown and greatly appreciate the state of Mississippi making their expansion here possible." – Tylertown Mayor Ed Hughes

"Helping to bring jobs and growth to the areas we serve is how we power life for our customers, our communities and our employees who live and work here. We're proud to be part of the team that helped bring Red Land Cotton to our state." – Ed Gardner, Director of Business & Economic Development, Entergy Mississippi

About Mississippi Development Authority
Mississippi Development Authority is the state's lead economic and community development agency. MDA focuses on new business recruitment, existing business expansion, workforce training, and tourism promotion. For more information, visit MDA's website at mississippi.org.

mississippi development authority
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mississippi.org

The location of Red Land Cotton and the funds to start the restoration of the former Walthall Hotel, although not anticipated during the Aspire training process, confirms the effectiveness of the program by highlighting the skills and knowledge acquired by Walthall County's Aspire team members.

All of the Aspire team members - Oliver Bates, Ryan Bruhl, Richard Hay, Mark Holmes, Kyle Johnson, Pam Keaton, Janice McKellar, and Chad Parish, were encouraged by the program and pledged to continue to work together to utilize the training provided by the Mississippi Development Authority under the Aspire program to further the efforts of the *Walthall County, Mississippi, Trust for the Preservation of History, Culture, and the Arts* that was started by Mrs. Dell Clawson, Janice McKellar, and others. Team members will also continue working under the umbrella of the Walthall County EDA on future Walthall Aspire projects.