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HSV Life Magazine is a monthly publication of the Hot Springs Village Voice newspaper. For additional copies, visit our office. Please send any questions or comments to us following our "Viewpoints" guidelines.

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Village Voice

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Hot Springs Village Voice

A New Year is Upon Us



A red tailed hawk surveys its lakeside domain.
(Jeff Meek photo)

Well, it's January, the holidays are in our rearview mirror and it's time to again put away all the decorations and take a breath. Did you make any New Year's resolutions toward a fresh start in 2025? I gave up doing that years ago.

I remember the first January when we lived in Hot Springs Village. There was no snow on the ground. Having lived in northern Illinois for 55 years, that was certainly a change for us, a lovely change. We had had enough snowy days and icy roads.

I was looking around for special days in the month of January and one popped up at me because it's something I have wanted to do for months. January is National Clean Up Your Computer Month. I've got thousands of old emails I need to dump. I have no idea why I've kept emails from Bass Pro Shops. I have more fishing baits than I could use if I lived another 50 years.

The month of January has a few interesting birthdays like presidents Milliard Fillmore on Jan. 7, 1800, and Richard Nixon on Jan. 9, 1913. Founding Fathers Benjamin Franklin on Jan. 17, 1706, Alexander



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Hamilton on Jan. 11, 1755, and John Hancock on Jan. 12, 1737. And we can't forget Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday on January 15, 1929.

With January comes a fresh start, a time to assess the past and look forward to what may come. Is this the year you take that dream vacation? My wife and I are going on one of Jennifer Allen's HSV Voice Travel Club sponsored trips in June to Glacier National Park. We have been meaning to go there for 10 years.

Whatever January and the year 2025 come your way, we at the Voice hope it's filled with excitement, a future memory perhaps, maybe another grandchild? It's all a part of HSV Life.

Jeff Meek
VOICE CORRESPONDENT

CONTENTS

A New Year is Upon Us	4
ALL AROUND ARKANSAS	
Marylake Monastery	6
NATIONAL PARK COLLEGE	
A Passion for Success	8
HSV ANIMALS	
Love at First Quack	10
VILLAGE PEOPLE	
John Broome - Fire Fighter Pilot	12
COVER STORY	
Sweet, Sweet Mazie	14
EAST	
Problem Solvers	16
CASA	
Beacon of Hope	20
SOZO	
One Day at a Time	24
WINTER WEEKEND CONCERT SERIES	
HSV Announces Concert Series	28
January Events	30

ON THE COVER: Mazie sits on the stoop with this week's caregivers, Dennis and Peg Helmer.
(Submitted photo)

ALL AROUND ARKANSAS

The Marylake Monastery as it stands today.



Marylake Monastery

Darrell W. Brown

Located in the East End community (Saline County), Marylake Monastery played a vital role in the journey of men seeking to become members of the Discalced Carmelites, a Catholic mendicant order. This tranquil retreat was part of the Province of St. Thérèse, serving not only Arkansas, but also Louisiana, Texas, and Oklahoma.

The roots of the monastery began in 1895, when members of the Tull family bought a 400-acre tract in East End and dammed Clear Creek to form a fifty-acre lake. In 1906, the property changed hands when William Baxley purchased it, setting up a grist mill. Unfortunately, his efforts were thwarted when the dam broke, leading to the lake's drain and ultimately causing Baxley to lose the land.

After an extended period of neglect, with the property lying unoccupied for eleven years after initial development attempts, a change occurred. Judge R. M. Mann decided to sell the picturesque lake with its 240 surrounding acres to the Shriners for \$23,000.

In the spring of 1926, the Shriners broke ground on a magnificent stone castle perched on a hill. This structure was envisioned as a charming country club for members.

In the wake of the 1929 stock market crash, the Shriners found themselves unable to meet the obligations on a \$99,000 loan. This led to the bank selling the property to a group consisting of eight businessmen. In a twist of fate, these businessmen turned the property over to the infamous Dr. John R. Brinkley in 1937, who was well-known for his dubious medical practices. After Brinkley faced bankruptcy, his associate, Dr. H. D. Osborn, managed the golf course for a few years and controversially continued Brinkley's outrageous procedure of implanting goat testicles in aging men to boost their sexual vitality.

In an interesting turn of events, the estate was purchased by Baptist Hospital and found new life after its transformation into a convalescent home. The property eventually hit the market again, catching the

eye of R. G. LeTourneau, who purchased it in 1947. It's worth noting that the hospital had placed a stipulation on the estate, mandating it be used for Christian purposes. In keeping with this requirement, LeTourneau handed the reins of the site to his wife, Evelyn, who successfully operated a Christian boys' camp there until she eventually sold it to the Carmelites.

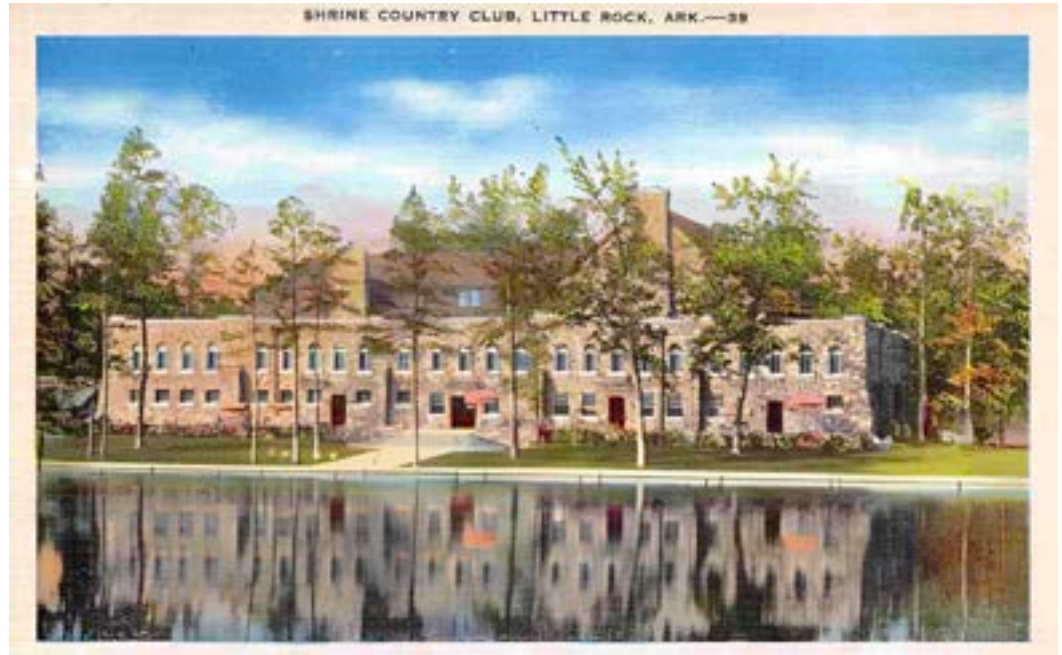
The Carmelite Monastery was founded in 1952 by a dedicated group of monks known as the Trappists. This order was well-respected for its unwavering commitment to a life steeped in prayer, hard work, and deep contemplation. The serene and secluded location was carefully selected to provide the tranquil environment necessary for a monastic lifestyle, emphasizing solitude and spiritual focus.

The first monks to reside at Marylake Monastery were sent to Arkansas by the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. The monastery began with a small group of monks, but over time, it grew in population and infrastructure. The monks built the chapel and other facilities necessary for monastic life, including areas for work, prayer, and hospitality.

The monastery, like many others during this period, dealt with a dwindling number of monks and financial difficulties. The aging community struggled with a decreasing influx of new members, leading to a troubling outlook for this once-thriving sanctuary.

In 2000, the monks chose to close the monastery. The sale of the property symbolized the end of a significant chapter, as the last monks left Marylake Monastery.

Although the doors of Marylake Monastery may have closed, its legacy continues to thrive. It is interwoven into the spiritual tapestry of Arkansas, as well as within the broader Trappist tradition. Following its closure, the property has been revitalized, now serving



The monastery building is featured on this 1928 postcard when it was the Shrine Country Club.

as a destination for those seeking peace and solace in an otherwise hectic world.

Today, the grounds of Marylake Monastery are privately owned, but the whispers of its religious heritage remain. Visitors are encouraged to uncover its storied past and appreciate the lasting influence it has had on monastic life in the Natural State.

A proud sixth-generation Arkansan, Darrell Brown is a lover of all things Arkansas. He lives in Saline County with his wife, Amy, and their Boston Terrier puppy named Tucker.. Find him on Facebook and Instagram at AllAroundArkansas.

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NATIONAL PARK COLLEGE

Jane Browning (left) and Linda Ragsdale (right) speaking with National Park College president Wade Derden at the Hot Springs Village meet and greet. (NPC photo)



A Passion for Success

NPC President Wade Derden boosts opportunities for students

Lewis Delavan
STAFF WRITER

Through community outreach, expanded academic programs and long-range planning, National Park College president Dr. Wade Derden hopes to further boost opportunities for student success.

Hot Springs' community college provides a "safe place" for students who may not be ready to leave home to attend college in Little Rock, Arkadelphia or even further away. And NPC's tuition is well under tuition cost at Arkansas' public universities, he says.

Many new college students are uncertain about their future, and NPC affords an opportunity for young people to find their life's director while obtaining foundational college courses. But other NPC students arrive certain of their future, whether it will be in nursing or other health-care fields, business, skilled trades or other of the school's around 80 fields of study.

Previously NPC's vice president for advancement and governmental relations, Derden became the college's fifth president on July 1.

A sixth-generation Arkansan, Derden enjoys more than 20 years of experience in higher education. He

joined NPC as a professor and department chair in 2011, then was promoted to vice president of academic affairs in 2015, and in 2022 taking the college's advancement and governmental relations leadership.

Derden is recognized as a state and regional educational leader. He served as the president of the Arkansas Community College's Board of Directors and as a peer reviewer for the Higher Learning Commission, a regional commission serving 19 states. Gov. Asa Hutchinson appointed Derden to the University of Arkansas System Criminal Justice Institute advisory board, a post on which he continues to serve.

"That's a good organization. They do a lot of training for police officers. We have a good relationship with them here," he said, adding that officers can complete college courses that are not available at CJI.

Derden loves NPC's campus. "Our mission is focused on learning and student success. I look forward to leading this talented group of faculty and staff as we work together for the future of our students and our community," he said upon his selection last spring.

The new president recently led outreach events in Hot Springs Village and other communities. “These events yielded thoughtful and constructive conversations about the future of the campus as well as what we are currently doing. Part of the purpose of these events has been to listen and gather feedback and to share information about the college and our comprehensive mission,” says Derden.

The campus serves approximately 3,000 credit students, more than 1,000 adult education students, almost 700 high school concurrently enrolled students, nearly 400 high school technology students, and more than 2,000 students through its corporate and community workforce training annually.

“We have a big reach with over \$111 million in economic impact in this community every year,” he says. “I want to create an atmosphere where our community members feel welcome on campus and recognize that we are their community college.”

“These community meetings are opportune, because I am hopeful our community at large, as well as the campus community, will be proactive in providing feedback in our strategic planning efforts, which are now underway. We want this community’s input on

what NPC should be focused on over the next five years. You are going to see a lot of us in the coming months,” said Derden.

In November the governor’s office announced that NPC had been awarded a \$6 million grant for a new welding and metalworking building. A \$200,000 gift from the Oaklawn Foundation will also aid the project.

Board chair Joyce Craft praised Derden upon the board’s unanimous selection. “His distinct knowledge of community colleges, specifically NPC, his trusted leadership and deep compassion for student success are all reasons he stood out among an incredibly strong pool of candidates. Dr. Derden has a clear vision for carrying the legacy of NPC forward. I am personally moved by his strength of character and commitment to this community.”

After the board’s selection, NPC’s fourth president, Dr. John Hogan, praised Derden. “I know Wade to be a person of high character, ambition, vision and passionate about student success. He has earned the position and I know the best is ahead for National Park College.”

Derden enjoys serving as president, and is excited for the college’s future.

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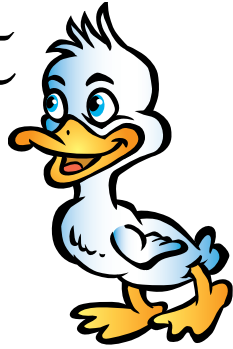
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HSV ANIMALS

Love at First Quack



A family's journey with their duckling

Robin Raborn Burns
VOICE CORRESPONDENT

Philosopher Immanuel Kant said “We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals.” This quote beautifully emphasizes how compassion and empathy toward animals can be a reflection of character. Animal rescue videos are incredibly popular on YouTube and other streaming platforms - videos often feature heartwarming stories of animals being saved, rehabilitated, and adopted, which resonate deeply with audiences worldwide. There is a family in Hot Springs Village, Mark and Kai Beach, and son Mike, who have added a beautiful duck to their family.

The duckling was hatched on July 27, 2022. She and the other non-mallards came from Texarkana. Rae is a Sweetish Blue breed. The family also had mallards, a Black Sweetish (named FOMO) and a White Sweetish (named Pretty) a khaki Campbell (named Harold) and Rae and Rae's sister CJ Sweetish Blues. Rae was the last to hatch. When they tried to introduce Rae to the other ducks in the brooder, the others started pecking at her eyes.

The Beach's looked closely at Rae and realized she could not see.

They then realized that they had to keep her separate. Ducklings imprint (bond) on the first moving object they see, usually their mother, but, ducklings can also imprint on humans or other animals. This



Rae snuggles with her mom, Kai.
(Robin Raborn Burns photos)

bond is formed within hours of hatching and is critical for their survival.

Since Rae was blind, her imprinting occurred as a result of hearing the voices of her humans. Initially Kai and Mark decided to name the sweet little duckling Ray Charles, after the iconic singer, songwriter and pianist, who were blinded during childhood. But, when Little Ray laid her first egg after several months, Kai and Mark realized she was female. They kept her name but changed it to the feminine spelling - Rae.

Even as they matured, the other ducks would still try to peck at Rae. Now, Rae doesn't like other ducks at all. But even though she doesn't swim in the lake behind her house, with the other ducks, Rae is a part of a loving family that adores her. The Beach's, including son Mike, nurture and protect Rae, and have created opportunities for her to participate in family activities.



The Beach family (l-r) Kai, Mark (holding Rae) and Mike.

When they are at work during the week, Rae stays in an outdoor enclosure that Mark built. It is spacious, shaded, weather-proof, with predator-proof wire, includes a kiddie pool, and her food and water. Rae has a portable seat (similar to a child’s car seat) in the living room, where she enjoys spending time with her family. One of her favorite things to do is listening to Steve Harvey, as he hosts ‘Family Feud.’ Rae also takes two baths a day – an opportunity to enjoy time in the water, with one of her parents talking to her. Rae sleeps at night in a big round brooder, an open air container they keep in the living room. They put a pad underneath pine shavings and have fresh made food, duck feed and plenty of water. Kai adds that “we put mill worms around the edges so she can find them at night. She usually is ready for bed around 9:45 pm (she will start yawning). She starts quacking around 6:00 am when she hears the coffee pot start making coffee.”

They even take Rae on vacation – opting to stay in VRBO’s for the comfort and ease, and yes...the bathtubs!

Rae has clearly enhanced their lives. The compassion of the Beach family shines through in each act of care and love. They prove that love sees no limits, as they offer this vulnerable duckling not just a home, but a family and a chance to thrive. In this season of giving and gratitude, their story is inspirational.



**Beautiful Rae in a glamour shot.
(Robin Raborn Burns photos)**



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VILLAGE PEOPLE



Linda and Roxie happy to have John back home safely. (Photos courtesy of John Broome)

John Broome - Fire Fighter Pilot

Sandy Johansen
STAFF WRITER

“When I was around 13 years old, my Dad’s best friend, Austin Robason, asked me if I wanted to learn to fly. Of course, what 13 yr old boy would say ‘no’ to that, he laughed. When I told him yes, he just tossed me a bunch of books and told me to start studying and when I reached 15 years old, he would start teaching me. The rest is my history.”

Forestry pilots are responsible for suppressing wildfires from the air upon the direction of local agencies. They may also plot different types of aircraft to complete various missions, such as forest protection, fire reconnaissance, aerial photography, passenger and supply delivery, and other aerial support requested by state and federal agencies. In addition to their flying duties, Forestry Pilots are expected to assist with aircraft maintenance.

“To solo, the FAA requires you to be 16 years old and

I started learning at 15 just prior to my 16th birthday. I soloed at 16.” The FAA also requires a person to have reached their 17th birthday prior to becoming a Private Pilot and 18th birthday prior to becoming a Commercial Pilot.

Broome attained his Private Pilot’s License at 17 and after reaching 18, earned his Commercial Pilot’s Certificate, Multi -Engine Rating, Flight Instructor’s Certificate and his Advanced Ground Instructor’s Certificate.

Broome also started his Crop-Dusting Career in the fall of 1968 flying a Boeing PT-17 Stearman. These planes were WWII Trainers that had been converted into crop dusters. He also became a Law Enforcement Officer in 1976 and retired from the Phillips County Sheriff’s Department in 1988.

“I flew all during this time but went back to being a



Texas forest fire and lots of water being scattered from the air by Broome.

full-time Agriculture Operator (Crop Duster) in 1988. I got involved in Fire Fighting in 2009 and do that exclusively now," he said

Currently flying a Fire Boss Single Engine Air tanker, Broome is probably the oldest pilot in the US flying this type of plane. There about 27 of these planes

operating in the US.

Broome still fights fires all over the country, working for Henry's Aerial Service and being away from home many weeks at a time. But John is always welcomed back to Hot Springs Village by his wife Linda and their sweet doggie, Roxie.



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COVER STORY

Sweet, Sweet Mazie

14 year old Cocker Spaniel survives car accident

Suzanne Sweeten
VOICE CORRESPONDENT

On October 7, 2024, Sandy and George Rayburn had a typical day planned. The couple had driven out to the Waggin Wheel Veterinary Clinic to take their 14-year-old cocker spaniel, Mazie, for a quick visit.

As they drove home down DeSoto Boulevard, an oncoming car crossed the center line and collided head-on with the Rayburns' vehicle. Sadly, George was pronounced dead at the scene, while Sandy was airlifted to a Little Rock hospital in critical condition. Mazie survived the crash but has been left alone while Sandy remains in a rehabilitation hospital.

The Hot Springs Village Fire Department Firefighters took Mazie to the animal shelter. They contacted Shelley Shepherd, the first Vice President of the Animal Welfare League of HSV, who recognized the Rayburn name. Shepherd then called Julie Keck, who was volunteering at the shelter that day, to inform her that a dog from her vicinity would be arriving soon.

Keck told Shepherd, "I know this dog. She belongs to people in my neighborhood. Can I take her home?"

"I knew that Mazie was elderly. I also understood that changing a dog's food can cause problems, so I knew I had to get to her regular food. I had no access to the Rayburns' home, so I reached out to their next-door neighbors, Carol and Butch Gephart, who had a key."

Mazie was familiar with Carol and Butch, who



Mazie sits on the stoop with this week's caregivers, Dennis and Peg Helmer.

immediately assumed her care. They had sat for Mazie before.

Carol Gephart takes the story from there, "Mazie's a sweet dog. I wanted to help because we're very good friends with the Rayburns. They are the kindest people, always helping other people. George carried Mazie everywhere, and he was devoted to her. George had a gift for doing things. For example,

he mowed the sides of Largo so the neighborhood dog walkers didn't have to walk in the tall grass during summer. He was concerned about snakes. George was a good friend to Butch and me.

We kept Mazie for two weeks, and then Butch needed medical care, so the Kecks agreed to take her for a week. Brenda and Brian Kroll assumed Mazie's care the next week."

Word soon spread down Largo and up Mujeres Lane (located in the far northeast section of Hot Springs Village) concerning Mazie's need for ongoing housing, and other neighbors stepped in. Since then, everyone has been taking turns for a week at a time.

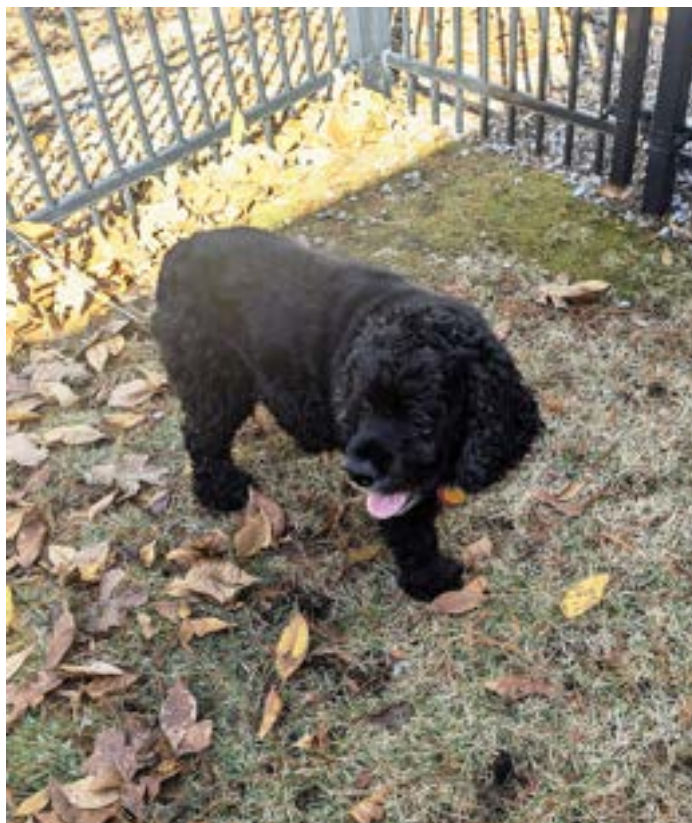
Keck shares, "Let's see, Martha Thompson, Susan Richert, and her husband also helped. I can't recall everyone who has looked after Mazie, but I can confirm her care is arranged until the end of the year. Hopefully, Sandy can decide what needs to be done after that; we'll have to wait and see."

According to Keck, people have yet to request financial reimbursement for diapers, treats, or food. Given the situation, Waggin Wheel has donated medicine and veterinary consultations (she has eye issues) since Mazie is a regular patient.

There is no known date for Sandy's release from her rehab facility in Sherwood. She has expressed her gratitude and acknowledged the neighborhood's support. Her regular life remains on hold till her rehab release.

Keck reflects, "This has affected me. It makes you appreciate every moment because you never know what the day can bring. Life can change in just a moment."

She smiles, adding, "We have a very caring and close neighborhood. Everyone seems to have thought, 'I hope someone would do it for me.' It was their way of giving back to George and Sandy. It's been a sweet, sweet thing caring for Mazie."



Mazie standing by a fence in her neighborhood. (Submitted photos)

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EAST



The EAST program at Fountain Lake High School teaches students to use technology to solve problems in the community. From left, students Nathan Westerman and Ryland Kramarenko, teacher Devry Rhodes, and student Brianna Graves. (Mary Eliades photo)

Problem Solvers

Fountain Lake High School students use technology to solve problems in the community

Mary Eliades
VOICE CORRESPONDENT

Schools today are tasked with so many things: teaching good core skills, helping students learn to socialize with classmates and teachers, running athletic programs, encouraging creativity, and keeping everyone safe and healthy.

The EAST initiative, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Little Rock, seeks to enhance these basic responsibilities with resources that allow students to be creative through the use of technology

in order to learn skills like problem-solving and teamwork.

EAST – Education Accelerated by Service and Technology – was a pilot program in Greenbrier High School (Faulkner County), founded by an educator who saw the need for an alternative learning environment, originally as a means to help at-risk students who were struggling in a traditional classroom environment.

He allowed students to select projects that interested them and began introducing technology into the classroom. The program was successful, and has expanded to schools in eight states, with 210 schools participating – 184 in the state of Arkansas.

Fountain Lake High School has embraced the model wholeheartedly, offering four years of EAST education as a student elective. Devry Rhodes teaches five class periods per day and is currently working with 86 students.

Rhodes, who brings a high level of enthusiasm and expertise to his current position, has worked at Fountain Lake High School since 2017. He has also worked in the Arkansas Department of Career



Fountain Lake students won the mapping app competition at the 2024 EAST Conference for their Shady Grove Cemetery application. From left, Eli Schrader, Brianna Graves, and Ryland Kramarenko. (Submitted photo)



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Education as a program supervisor in the Office for School Improvement, as a career preparation and EAST instructor at Bryant High School, and in the Omaha Public School District as a human growth and development/service learning teacher.

This is not a classroom where students memorize facts and figures from textbooks. This is where “learning by doing,” according to Rhodes, happens. “Using the latest technology, we’re turning theory into practice.”

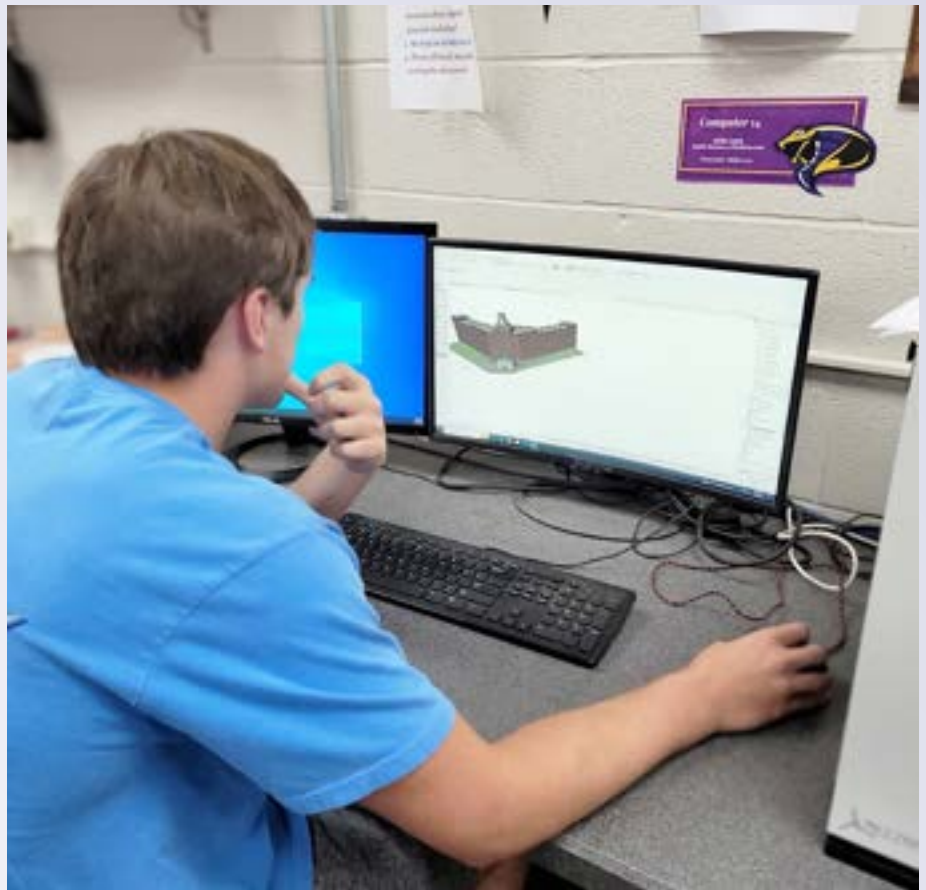
The classroom is full of equipment – computers, scanners, printers (including 3-D printers), drones, cameras, and virtual reality headsets – but the students are also experts in the use of various software packages and software integration with the technical projects.

Students develop expertise with CAD programs, digital publishing, music composition, photography and video virtual reality development, and Web development. The students have latitude in choosing what projects and technologies they’ll focus on. Rhodes said, “Our classroom is a dynamic hub where students are empowered to learn through doing.”

Students have learned to use drones, and one student, senior Nathan Westerman, has been so adept that he’s become FAA-certified as a drone pilot. Nathan is hoping to go into forestry or wildlife conservation after college.

Brianna Graves is a graphics wizard and an expert at film editing. She maintains the EAST website at Fountain Lake, which has won awards. After graduation, she will attend Henderson State to study aviation, and she hopes to become a pilot.

Ryland Kramarenko will focus on music education when he heads off to college, but already knows that



Caden Cates is hard at work on a model of the Army/Navy Hospital in Hot Springs. (Mary Eliades photo)

he wants to have a double major. Rhodes said Ryland is a “jack of all trades” as far as technical expertise, equally skilled at drone piloting, graphics design, and hardware devices. “It’s a wonderful program,” said Ryland. “A lot of the projects are self-led and encourage free thinking.”

EAST students prepare school-wide announcements every morning that include video clips, posters, photos, etc. Monitors in every classroom allow students to see everything that’s happening at the school.

Rhodes has created an environment for the free exchange of ideas (and even criticism), and encourages teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

He said key elements of the program include service-oriented learning, technology integration, and project-based learning. Some areas explored are

drone mapping, photogrammetry (3D modeling from photographs), filmmaking, architectural design, 3D modeling and animation, and GIS mapping. Students select community service projects “that align with their interests and passions” and “provide opportunities for real-world application of their skills and knowledge.”

Ideas for projects come from the students themselves, requests from the community, or from Rhodes, who is constantly looking for new opportunities and resources.

The group has designed outdoor classrooms and made models of the middle school and other buildings. They also created a Braille map of the school district for a blind student.

“We’re also making a difference in our community,” said Rhodes. “Through service projects, we’re applying our skills to solve real problems.”

Students have partnered with the city of Hot Springs on many projects – modeling of historic buildings and

sculptures, etc. They completed a GIS mapping of Shady Grove Cemetery (for which the students won a GIS mapping award), which includes an interactive database with information about the inhabitants.

The students have completed several very professional online documentaries, including “The Creek That Started It All” (about the Hot Springs Creek and tunnels), “Haunted Arkansas,” “The Everlasting Ohio Club,” and “Corruption in the City of Vapors.” They are currently working on a documentary on the Hot Springs Airport, which has a long and interesting history.

EAST students have also shared their skills with the Hot Springs Village community. They have conducted trail mapping (and are preparing to take another pass), filmed a local expo, and even flew a drone over the Cancer Walk.

Both students and teacher are great advocates for the EAST Initiative. “Knowledge is power,” said Rhodes, “service is purpose. Unleash!”

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CASA

CASA volunteer advocates are sworn in at the Garland County Courthouse. Shown here, from left, are Judge Lynn Williams, advocate supervisor Jeni Prestridge, volunteer advocates Jamie Hill and Whitney Monroe, and advocate supervisor Kim Hackney. (Submitted photos)




Beacon of Hope

Tri-Lakes CASA helps children in the foster care system in Garland, Hot Spring and Grant counties.

Mary Eliades
VOICE CORRESPONDENT

Tri-Lakes CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) is a beacon of hope for children in the foster care system in Garland, Hot Spring, and Grant counties.

CASA is a national organization with a mission to “support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy so every child who has experienced abuse or neglect can be safe, have a permanent home and



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the opportunity to thrive” (per the organization’s website).

Garland County CASA was formed in 1995, under the leadership of Juvenile Court Judge Vicki S. Cook, and expanded into Hot Spring and Grant counties in 2015 to form Tri-Lakes CASA.

During the Covid pandemic, Tri-Lakes CASA went through some “challenging circumstances,” according to executive director Suzanne Herron, and lost board members and advocates, many of whom were from Hot Springs Village.

Today, with a new board and new staff, Tri-Lakes CASA is back, stronger than ever.

Volunteer advocates are the backbone of CASA, and work closely with judges, attorneys, foster families, and Department of Human Services (DHS) staff.

No previous training is necessary to become a volunteer advocate (only a “heart for children,” said Herron) but, after a background check, advocates are required to undergo 30 hours of classroom training, followed by 12 hours of continuing education every year.

CASA organizes monthly “Lunch & Learn” sessions for advocates to help them meet the 12-hour requirement. Guest speakers are community partners or resources that are helpful to the parents and children that CASA serves.



Hot Springs School District (HSSD) Junior Academy staff became Foster Angels and provided gifts for over 40 foster children in Garland County. HSSD and CASA staff members are shown here picking up gifts for the children. From left, Elexus Jordan (HSSD), Cherri Mertz-Hatley (HSSD), Suzanne Herron (CASA executive director), Tony Hines (HSSD), Meggan Moody (HSSD), and Jeni Prestridge (CASA advocate supervisor).

There are currently 232 children in foster care in the three counties (Garland, Hot Spring and Grant). “Governor Sanders has put a huge initiative on reducing the number of children in Arkansas foster care and the numbers are coming down statewide,” said Herron.

Once a child is removed from a home, he/she must go before a judge within 72 hours. The adjudication process brings all the parties – children, parents, DHS, and CASA – together to determine the best outcome

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for the child. Once a judge hands down his orders, DHS is responsible for coming up with a plan and carrying it out.

Every case involving a foster child includes volunteer advocates and more are desperately needed. Advocates assist DHS staff and help “push the envelope,” according to Herron.

Because CASA advocates have court backing, they have full access to a child’s records – they can talk to school staff, have lunch with their client at school, look at medical records, and interact with the court. “DHS workers have a heavy load,” said Herron, and CASA can help a great deal with making sure the child is safe and healthy. Advocates visit homes – foster homes, parents’ homes, and group homes – and report their findings.

CASA is looking for a few good men and women (and couples) to serve as advocates. “The training is heavy at first,” said Herron, but the average time commitment is about 10-15 hours a month. In addition to face-to-face visits, advocates can Zoom, Facetime, text, etc. Volunteers enter case notes online and write reports to the court.

“We have 30 volunteers, and our goal is to serve 100% of the children in care,” said Herron. “Because the program is designed to build a relationship with that child and to be their consistent advocate in a system with so many moving parts with attorneys, ad litem, DCFS case workers, foster homes, and group homes, we typically only allow a volunteer to have one or two cases at any time, depending on the severity of the case.”

She added, “Our need for volunteers is huge [in order] to reach the goal of 100% with 232 children.”

CASA is a national organization, with branches in

every state; there are 23 in Arkansas alone. Herron says the purpose of the organization is to “reduce the amount of time [for the children] in the system and keep them from returning to the system.”

Children leave the foster care system by reunification with their parents, adoption, or by aging out (when they reach 18).

Although CASA receives funds from grants, the staff and volunteers are constantly involved in fundraising. While most of CASA’s expenses are covered by two large grants – from Arkansas CASA and the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) – donations are still needed to support the work of volunteer advocates (e.g., for recruitment and training).

On Halloween, CASA sponsored its first annual Zombiethon, in conjunction with Visit Hot Springs, which drew zombies from all over who crawled a short route on Bridge Street. “It was a super fun event with lots of people,” said Herron. “Next year will be bigger as it is not on Halloween, just the week of Halloween.”

The most exciting fundraiser, held annually, is “An Ornamental Affair,” in which local artists contribute glass ornaments for a silent auction. The 19th annual event was held December 7 at the Mid-America Science Museum, and featured more than 100 donated ornaments, some from “celebrity” artists, including coaches, politicians, etc.

On March 16, the day before the World’s Shortest St. Patrick’s Day Parade, CASA will sponsor its fourth annual Zero-K walk/run. The route is 299 feet and will include a beer hydration station and other perks. Last year, more than 500 participants from 14 states participated in the event.

April brings showers, but hopefully not for the Don Baker Memorial Golf Tournament, held at the Malvern Country Club.

The Hot Springs Jeep Fest will return for the third year to the Garland County Fairgrounds for three days of fun over the first weekend in May. Last year more than 600 jeeps from six states enjoyed trail rides, vendors, etc.

For more information about CASA – how to join the ranks of volunteers or to sign up for events – visit <https://trilakescasa.org> or contact executive director Suzanne Herron at 501-321-9269. Herron is also available to speak to local organizations.

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SOZO



SOZO Addiction Recovery Center helps drug and alcohol addicts return to productive lives through a faith-based, best practices, holistic approach.

One Day at a Time

SOZO helps addicts lead productive lives

Mary Eliades
VOICE CORRESPONDENT

For men battling drug or alcohol addiction, one of the best facilities in the state of Arkansas is just north of Hot Springs Village - SOZO Addiction Recovery Center.

While Bob O'Dowd was executive director at Quapaw House in Hot Springs (from 2005 to 2009) he learned about a new 12-step program called "Celebrate Recovery," a Christ-centered addiction recovery effort. Program staff picked up Quapaw House clients and took them to their church, "where

our clients thoroughly loved the program," according to O'Dowd.

He started thinking about a new way of dealing with addiction recovery that consisted of four "prongs": client involvement in a local church congregation, the use of licensed mental health therapists, a best practices curriculum, and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

One of his Quapaw House associates, Frank McIlroy, was a member of the Village Church of Christ and "shared some of these ideas to a group of men in the congregation," said O'Dowd. This core group founded SOZO in February of 2012.

The word "sozo" comes from the Greek, meaning "to heal or to save," and SOZO combines a faith-based approach with treatment to help drug and alcohol addicts recover and become productive members of society.

SOZO's first client was a 75-year-old Village resident, who got sober and stayed that way until his death 10 years later.

From that small beginning, SOZO has grown by leaps and bounds.

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“Most treatment centers in Arkansas are either faith-based or state licensed,” said executive director Brad Lovan, but SOZO has successfully combined the two approaches into one “holistic approach.”

Lovan is a former client of SOZO. He was raised in a Christian household but took a wrong turn over the years after some personal setbacks. A friend introduced him to SOZO, and he wholeheartedly embraced the program and turned his life around. After his recovery, he started working at the center, and eventually returned to Arkansas Tech to get a bachelor’s degree in management and marketing, followed by a master’s in social work from UALR.

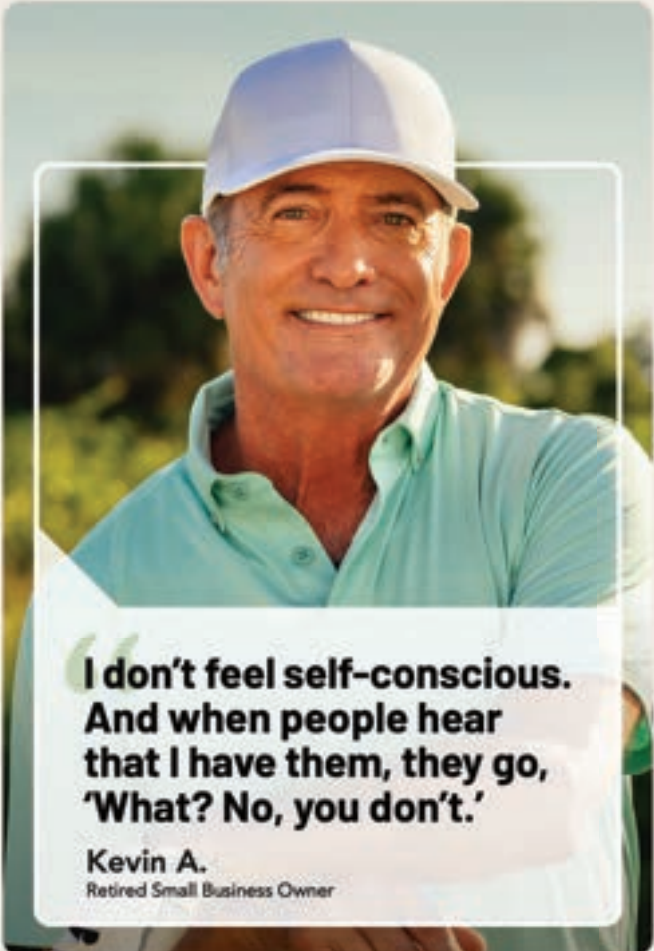
Lovan is also a licensed master social worker and an advanced alcohol and drug counselor. His wife, Kahla, is a registered nurse and serves as program director at SOZO.

Lovan described three main differences between SOZO and other addiction recovery centers, starting with the 2019 accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). Lovan said, “CARF is the gold standard” for accreditation of health and human services, with more than 1500 standards that must be met before accreditation. SOZO was the first faith-based recovery center to receive CARF accreditation and, once that happened, state licensing was quick to follow. SOZO is also the first faith-based treatment center in Arkansas to become state licensed, and thus became eligible for insurance reimbursement, which had been a barrier for some potential clients.

Obtaining a state license also paved the way for referrals from courts, and many clients come to SOZO as part of their probation or parole.

The second major difference between SOZO and other treatment facilities is the funding obtained from the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services under the Faith-Based Treatment Initiative. Lovan said that during the Covid 19 pandemic, addiction “skyrocketed.” In 2022, Arkansas was granted \$2.5 million to help in the recovery process, and SOZO was the first organization to benefit under this fund. SOZO is one of only five treatment centers in Arkansas to receive funds - \$100,000 every six months - after proving compliance with standards, guidelines, and restraints. “This money has been lifesaving,” said O’Dowd.

SOZO currently has residential and outpatient



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facilities but realized that a medical detox unit was essential to a “full continuum of care,” according to Lovan.

SOZO staff started looking for a new center in Hot Springs but ran into zoning issues. After many visits to the Hot Springs Planning Commission, the city manager and the county judge, Lovan and his staff were able to convince the commission that the center would be a good addition to the community. They received the first-ever conditional use permit from the city of Hot Springs and recently

closed on a 27,000-square-foot building on West Grand Avenue. The new center can accommodate 33 residential clients and eight detox clients.

O’Dowd said, “The new facility will allow clients to go from detox to the next step in a self-contained environment.” Clients can stay from three to 12 months in the same place, “a continual phase of detox-treatment-outpatient.”

Lovan said many clients are afraid of hospitals and other institutional environments, and the new detox center will feature individual patient rooms, 24-hour care, etc. The treatment section will have a commercial kitchen with a chef, a barbershop, gym, meditation/prayer rooms, and areas for each level of care.

The Affordable Care Act of 2010 has allowed many more Arkansans to get needed treatment, and the staff at SOZO routinely helps clients set up accounts.

Every client receives an initial psychiatric evaluation, with periodic follow-ups. “We have to deal with mental health before anything else,” said O’Dowd, “and sometimes see very quick results.” He added, “It’s like recovery on steroids.”

Treatment plans are based on a 38-hour week of



SOZO

ADDICTION RECOVERY CENTER, INC.

an “evidence-based curriculum,” which includes Bible study, involvement with a church congregation (“Social connection is so important,” said Lovan), AA meetings, and sessions on anger management and “living in balance.” Lovan said he is constantly researching new treatments and techniques - “the curriculum is continuously evolving.”

SOZO also has long-term recovery facilities, and staff members help clients find jobs and rides to work. “It’s a one-stop center,” said Lovan. “We provide any kind of care.”

SOZO utilizes the Recovery Capital Index to track and measure addiction wellness and further improve treatment programs. This outcome tracking tools allows managers to “take a deep dive into client progress,” said Lovan.

By marrying faith-based treatment and “best practices” assured by state licensing and CARF accreditation, addicts in the Hot Springs/Hot Springs Village area have a much better chance of returning to their communities as productive citizens.

For more information about SOZO, visit the website <https://sozorecoverycenter.com> or call 501-984-5317.

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WINTER WEEKEND CONCERT SERIES

HSV announces Winter Weekend Series 2025

The Hot Springs Village Property Owners Association (HSV POA) is happy to kick off their Winter Weekend Concert Series. Tickets for the entire series or for just individual concerts are available at: <https://hotspringsvillage.thundertix.com/>. All performances at HSV Woodlands Auditorium begin at 7:00 p.m.

HAMILTON LOOMIS - January 5, 2025

A blues guitarist with an appetite for rock and a rock and roll maestro with a sweet tooth for the blues, Loomis lives in both worlds comfortably. A protégé of Bo Diddley, Loomis met the icon backstage at the age of 16 at Houston's famed venue Rockefeller's. Before the night was over, Loomis was onstage playing guitar with the legend. Described by Blues Blast Magazine as "a non-stop turbo of power", Loomis' energetic, get-in-with-the-crowd antics are infectious. The swaying and clapping are just as he envisioned. Don't miss the opportunity to see this Texas legend.

SOFIE & THE NEW RELICS - February 22

Sofie and The New Relics is a dynamic band emerging from Central Arkansas, known for their eclectic blend of indie rock, folk, and blues. Led by the compelling vocals of Sofie Smithson. The band brings a fresh and modern twist to their diverse musical influences. Each member contributes to a rich, distinctive sound that resonates with audiences. Their innovative style and



Jacob Flores

energetic performance mark them as a band to watch.

BAD HABIT TRIBUTE TO TOM PETTY - March 22

Local favorites Bad Habit bring their talents to the Woodlands performing a special Tom Petty Tribute show. Bad Habit is a local rock band from Central Arkansas. The band was started by Jack Bennett and his brother Sam when they were teenagers and have played on stage with notable musical greats like Joe Perry (Aerosmith); Vince Neil (Motley Crue) and Lou Gramm (Foreigner).

This band has been rocking the Central Arkansas music scene since 2015 with their classic rock shows, featuring favorite songs. Sets include music from bands like Aerosmith, Pink Floyd, Peter Frampton, ZZ Top, Weezer and more. There's something for everyone!

JACOB FLORES - AWARD WINNING ONE MAN BAND - April 19

Former American Idol Contestant, Jacob Flores, is an award-winning, one-man band. His music features live looping and an extremely diverse repertoire including both American and Latin-American genres. Flores first broke into the music scene while attending Henderson State University where he was crowned 2013 Henderson Idol. He was featured on NBC's The Voice and Fox Network's American Idol. The Arkansas native was featured AY Magazine as "2023 Men of Distinction," and "Best of Arkansas Local Musicians."

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