



Spirit of America

★ 43RD ANNUAL FESTIVAL ★ POINT MALLARD PARK ★ JULY 3-4, 2009 ★



Murphy winner fought missiles, was POW

Vietnam veteran earned Medal of Honor; held at Hanoi Hilton

By Paul Huggins
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340-2395

Leo Thorsness hasn't had a bad day in more than 35 years — thanks in part to doorknobs.

If something isn't going quite right for this year's Audie Murphy Patriotism Award recipient, he said he simply needs to see a doorknob to retrieve an infinite amount of joyful perspective.

Well, not just any doorknob. It must be attached to a door that leads *out* of a room.

For six years, Thorsness was a prisoner of war in North Vietnam at the famed Hanoi Hilton. Half that time was in isolation. To come and go freely is something he doesn't take for granted.

The doorknob reference may sound comical, but Thorsness, 77, isn't making light of his years in prison and the torture he and more than 300 other American pilots endured. It's just that the lessons of surviving that ordeal provided him with a "better, richer and fuller life."

"People have a greater love of country, if they've ever lost it," he said.

Being a prisoner of war is only part of the reason Thorsness will be given the patriotism award during the Spirit of America Festival. He flew one of the most heroic missions



Courtesy photo

2009 Audie Murphy Patriotism Award recipient Leo Thorsness with President Richard Nixon.

over Vietnam 11 days before he was shot down and taken prisoner. His combat actions on April 19, 1967, saved the lives of two downed airmen and earned him the Medal of Honor, the highest military award an American can receive. (See citation, page 3.)

But neither receiving the Medal of Honor nor surviving his POW experience hold the ti-

tle of what Thorsness calls his proudest achievement. That title belongs to earning the nickname "The Weasel."

Thorsness, a native of Walnut Grove, Minn., now living in

Limestone County, was assigned to the Wild Weasel missions in Vietnam. The job entailed seeking out enemy surface-to-air missile sites and destroying them.

That meant making himself a target so the SAM sites would give away their positions. It was the most dangerous assignment a pilot could get in Vietnam. Wild Weasel losses were 2½ times greater than any other flight mission in that war.

Thorsness and his crew member, Capt. Harold Johnson, destroyed more SAM sights than any other crew before being shot down on their 93rd mission, seven shy of earning a trip home. More important to Thorsness, he said, was he developed flight tactics that improved the effectiveness of destroying SAM sights, thus increasing the odds Wild Weasel pilots would return safely back to base.

The History Channel and PBS have aired documentaries on Thorsness' exploits. During one History Channel episode, Weasel pilot Bill Sparks put it plainly: "Leo taught us how to stay alive."

Thorsness said he's "humbled" by the Audie Murphy Award because many others performed just as heroically, but did not get noticed or reported.

"Being a Medal of Honor winner means I was in the wrong place and the wrong time," he said.

Defeating despair

Thorsness said he could cope with the torture and death threats, but most frustrating was the prisoners lacked

Please see **Murphy**, page 3

Thank You!

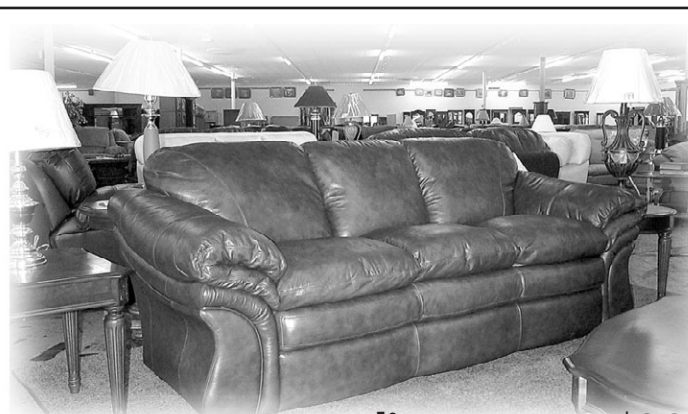
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Murphy

From page 2

confidence in Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and President Lyndon Johnson. That frustration peaked into de-

spair when Americans stopped bombing North Vietnam.

“That (bombing) was our leverage for getting out of there,” he said.

Initially, the prisoners were excited, thinking the bombing halt meant the war was over. That led to despair after the

bombing ceased for weeks, then months and finally years, yet they remained imprisoned.

“It was frustrating to sit there year after year after year. It took a lot of patience and belief in

your country,” Thorsness said.

Please see **Murphy**, page 6

Lt. Col. Leo Thorsness' Medal of Honor citation



For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.

As pilot of an F-105 aircraft, Lt. Col. Thorsness was on a surface-to-air missile suppression mission over North Vietnam.

Thorsness and his wingman attacked and silenced a surface-to-air missile site with air-to-ground missiles and then destroyed a second surface-to-air missile site with bombs. In the attack on the second missile site, Thorsness' wingman was shot down by intensive antiaircraft fire, and the two crewmembers abandoned their aircraft.

Thorsness circled the descending parachutes to keep the crewmembers in sight and relay their position to the Search and Rescue Center. During this maneuver, a MIG-17 was sighted in the area. Thorsness immediately initiated an attack and destroyed the MIG. Because his aircraft was low on fuel, he was forced to depart the area in search of a tanker.

Upon being advised that two helicopters were orbiting over the downed crew's position and that there were hostile MIGs in the area posing a serious threat to the helicopters, Thorsness, despite his low fuel condition, decided to return alone through a hostile environment of surface-to-air missile and anti-aircraft defenses to the downed crew's position. As he approached the area, he spotted four MIG-17 aircraft and immediately initiated an attack on the MIGs, damaging one and driving the others away from the rescue scene. When it became apparent that another aircraft in the area was critically low on fuel and the crew would have to abandon the aircraft unless they could reach a tanker, Thorsness, although critically short on fuel himself, helped to avert further possible loss of life and a friendly aircraft by recovering at a forward operating base, thus allowing the aircraft in emergency fuel condition to refuel safely.

Thorsness' extraordinary heroism, self-sacrifice and personal bravery involving conspicuous risk of life were in the highest traditions of the military service, and have reflected great credit upon himself and the U.S. Air Force.

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Audie Murphy Award Winners

- 1971: Audie Murphy's Family
- 1972: Johnny Cash
- 1973: Gov. George C. Wallace
- 1974: Astronaut John Young
- 1975: Barrett C. Shelton
- 1976: Rep. Bob Jones
- 1977: Gen. Omar Bradley
- 1978: Sen. John Sparkman and late Sen. James Allen
- 1979: Jesse Owens
- 1980: Gen. Alexander Haig
- 1981: Jeremiah Denton
- 1982: Sen. Strom Thurmond
- 1983: Col. Charles Scott
- 1984: Adm. Donald Whitmire
- 1985: All Vietnam Veterans
- 1986: Challenger Crew
- 1987: Vietnam POW Charles Plumb
- 1988: Paul "Bear" Bryant
- 1989: Educator Marva Collins
- 1990: Frank Reed
- 1991: Sgt. Herbert Motes Davis
- 1992: J.R. Thompson
- 1993: Maj. General Richard Burleson
- 1994: Chief Warrant Officer Michael Durant
- 1995: Gerald McRaney
- 1996: Rhonda Cornum
- 1997: Tuskegee Airmen
- 1998: Master Sgt. Gary Ivan Gordon and Sgt. 1st Class Randall Shughart.
- 1999: Navajo Code Talkers
- 2000: Col. Ola C. Mize
- 2001: Gen. William P. Yarbrough and LST Crew
- 2002: New York City Police Department; Fire Department of New York City
- 2003: Eight former POWs in Iraq; 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, US Army; Joe Galloway
- 2004: Pat Tillman
- 2005: National Guard Spc. Michael Acquaviva
- 2006: Capt. William E. Hogan
- 2007: Marine Lt. Col. John D. Harrill Jr.; Maj. John D. Harrill III
- 2008: Capt. Joseph Hooper

Spirit of America Festival

A free shuttle is the best way to ensure entry into Point Mallard Park to watch the fireworks at 10 p.m. Shuttle service will be available at General Electric with drop-off at the campground. When the fireworks end, traffic will exit on both lanes of Point Mallard Circle, via the main entrance and around the golf course.



Guitar Hero competition takes stage on Friday

By Amanda Irlle
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Everyone will have the chance to take the stage Friday night at the Spirit of America festival.

Rather than featuring one band on stage, Spirit of America is hosting the Fox 54 and Pepsi-sponsored Guitar Hero/Rock Band competition.

"We're looking for the best of the best in Guitar Hero and Rock Band," said Bob Boyer, the creative service director for Fox 54.

Guitar Hero is a rhythm-based video game in which players press buttons on a guitar controller as they appear on the screen in order to "play" a song. Both Guitar Hero World Tour and Rock Band 2 include drum and microphone peripherals, allowing players the option of forming virtual bands.

Contestants can enter as individuals or in a group to play either Guitar Hero World Tour or Rock Band 2. The gaming equipment and Xbox 360 will be

Please see **Guitar**, page 11
Spirit of America schedule, 8.

Bike parade starts off children's activities

By Paul Huggins
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Time for every youngster and patriotic parent to get out the red, white and blue decorations and start decorating bikes, trikes, strollers, wagons and

wheelchairs. The annual Children's Spirit Parade will begin the Fourth of July festivities at 10 a.m. The parade, led by Sir Clumsy the Clown, will begin at T.C. Almon Recreation Center and roll a few hundred yards to the children's activity tent, sponsored by Red-

stone Federal Credit Union. Judges will award a first and second prize to the best decorat-

ed entries. Unlike previous Please see **Children**, page 11

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Shelton winner had power to change lives

By Amanda Irle
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340-2355

Friends and family remember Lt. Cmdr. Michael Christian, this year's Barrett Shelton Freedom Award winner, as one of those rare individuals with the power to change lives.

"People who knew him knew what he had been through," said Charlotte Neal, who was Christian's wife. "Our friends, the children's friends, they were impressed with him. He became their hero."

Christian, originally from Huntsville, enlisted in the Navy in 1958 after graduating from Butler High School. He was assigned to Attack Squadron 85, USS Kitty Hawk, during the Vietnam War.

Shot down in 1967

Shot down over North Vietnam in 1967, Christian spent six years as a prisoner of war in the Hanoi Hilton. For the first three years of his capture, his family didn't know whether he was alive or dead.

"North Vietnam didn't identify having him," Neal said. "His name wasn't released until three years after he was shot down."

Christian was kept in the same POW camp as Col. Leo K.



Christian Thorsness and 2008 presidential candidate Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona. "They were tortured daily, deprived of human dignity," Neal said. "They received little food or medical care and were allowed only limited packages from home."

Attempts by the Vietnamese POW guards to break Christian's spirit only strengthened his love for his home country, Neal said. The other men often

looked to Christian for a morale boost.

One day in the POW camp, Christian discovered a piece of dirty rag. With a bamboo needle and thread from his own blanket, Christian fashioned an American flag. The men saluted this flag every day until the guards discovered it and beat

Please see **Shelton**, page 6

Shelton Freedom Award Winners



- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1981: Barrett C. Shelton Sr. | 1996: Dr. Lloyd Nix |
| 1982: Henry Eugene "Red" Erwin | 1997: U.S. Rep. Tom Beville |
| 1983: U.S. Sen. Howell Heflin | 1998: George Lindsey |
| 1984: U.S. Rep. Ronnie Flippo | 1999: Mayor J. Gilmer Blackburn |
| 1985: H. Maynard Layman | 2000: Dean Jones |
| 1986: Jimmy Smith | 2001: Christopher Bell |
| 1987: Bobby Joe Smith | 2002: Michael Spann |
| 1988: Mayor Bill J. Dukes | 2003: Vonetta Flowers |
| 1989: Col. Jerry Sage | 2004: Tennessee Valley Authority |
| 1990: Gov. Albert P. Brewer | 2005: John Caddell |
| 1991: Naomi H. Griffith | 2006: Judge David Breland |
| 1992: Edna Earle Eich | 2007: Barbara Kelly, Nell Standridge, Sally Smartt |
| 1993: Lynn Fowler | 2008: Beverly Walker |
| 1994: Dr. George Hansberry | |
| 1995: Barrett C. Shelton Jr. | |

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Shelton

From page 5

Christian severely.

Two weeks later, after Christian had recovered from the beating, Christian began sewing together another flag.

"Mike made the flag to keep up the morale of the men," Neal said. "He knew it was the highlight of their day, seeing that symbol of freedom."

Christian's story reached millions when McCain shared it at the Republican convention in 1988, and again as he campaigned for president in 2008.

"Mike never said anything about the story; he never bragged," said Lary Christian, Mike Christian's younger brother. "We never knew anything about that part of him till the '88 convention. I thank Leo and McCain for keeping his memory alive."

Lary Christian added that, contrary to the tale told by McCain, his brother did have shoes to wear as a child.

Christian's resourcefulness helped him again and again during his capture.

Sneaking a letter

Unable to send letters at home during the first three years of his capture and allowed only eight- to nine-line form letters after that, Christian managed to sneak a letter written on the back of a Vietnamese cigarette pack home to his family.

When the men were allowed outside, Neal said, they would take turns entertaining each other. Christian would search for a stick, then tie strings from his towel to either end to form a makeshift "guitar" to use when serenading his fellow POWs with the country and western music he loved.

"The joke was that some days he could actually get a sound out of it," Neal said.

Whenever the Vietnamese guards discovered Christian's guitar, they immediately took it,

but they could not stop him from making another the next time his turn to entertain the others came around.

After his release, The Country and Western Music Association invited Christian to the Grand Ole Opry, where they presented him with his guitar and told him, "No one can ever take this one away from you."

Lary Christian said the guitar was one of his brother's two most-prized possessions. The other was the red 1973 Corvette Stingray presented to him by the city of Huntsville upon his homecoming.

Christian was given a hero's welcome when he returned to Huntsville on April 7, 1973, dubbed Mike Christian Day. The city commemorated its hometown hero with the car and a parade in his honor.

"When Mike was shot down, Debbie was 7, Sandy was 5, and Pamela was 2," Neal said of her

and Christian's three daughters. "When he was released, they were 13, 11 and 8. I always tell people that so they can see just how much six years is."

Neal remembers staying up until 5:30 a.m. in 1967 to watch the POWs landing in the Philippines.

"The whole neighborhood was up; you'd think it was the Fourth of July," Neal said. "When we saw Mike, Debbie jumped off the floor shouting, 'I do remember him, I do remember him!'"

Christian died in a house fire in 1983, 10 years after his release from the POW camp.

Lt. Cmdr. Michael Christian was a cellmate of John McCain and Lt. Col. Leo Thorsness.



Murphy

From page 3

A key point that helped Thorsness defeat despair occurred as he realized despite his brutal treatment in prison, he was far more fortunate than the guard who tortured him.

"He had no choice that he was born in a communist regime, nor that he was a prison guard assigned to torture prisoners," Thorsness said. "It doesn't matter how long he lives, he'll never experience what I had in 35 years."

"It was simply because I won the flip of the coin," he said. "I was born in America. He was born in Vietnam."

Thorsness, who works part-time as a motivational speaker by teaching the corporate world how to "get through tough times," said he has no re-

grets about what happened to him in Vietnam. The experience, he said, gave him the rare insight that every day is precious.

"Most people who go through difficult times . . . if you remain whole, you're much better coming out the back end than you were going in the front end."

'Most people who go through difficult times . . . if you remain whole, you're much better coming out the back end than you were going in the front end!'

Lt. Col. Leo Thorsness
Medal of Honor recipient

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Carney makes sure soldiers are validated

By Paul Huggins
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340-2395

David Carney vividly remembers the stinging words as he watched the 1970 Veterans Day Parade outside his office window in Huntsville.

“Don’t you have something better to do?” the co-worker asked.

The U.S. Army veteran who had been out of the service for five months felt unappreciated. He knew other vets felt the same.

“Back then, you didn’t talk about your service,” said Carney, a retired sergeant first class. “People didn’t want to know about it.”

The pain of that co-worker’s comment never went away, and Carney, 63, has used it to fuel a tireless commitment to see that the sacrifices by troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are “validated” by the support they receive from home.

Carney is the ringleader of all official send-off and welcome home ceremonies for the 20,000 Alabamians who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2003. He organized events to take care of soldiers’ families, and one time had four weekly radio shows connecting overseas service personnel with their families. For those efforts, Carney will receive the H.J. Heimlich Humanitarian Award on July 4. It marks the first time since 2002 the Spirit of America Committee has designated a Heimlich recipient.

“I haven’t really done that much more than anybody,” Carney said. “I just feel blessed to be in a position to help. The hardest part is I get frustrated that I can’t do enough.”

Though retired from the National Guard for several years, Carney still assists Guard units in North Alabama. He is vice president of the Association of U.S. Army for National Guard Affairs. He hosts a weekly radio

Please see **Carney**, page 8



Daily file photo by Jonathan Palmer

David Carney with Faye Hooper, the widow of last year’s Audie Murphy Spirit of Patriotism recipient, the late Capt. Joe Hooper.

Carney’s medals



Medals of highest achievement that retired Sgt. 1st Class David Carney earned during his National Guard career:

- Humanitarian Service Medal from National Guard.
- Distinguished Service Medal (highest military award state can award).
- Meritorious Service Medal from U.S. Army.

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Carney

From page 7

show highlighting achievements of local soldiers. The show is simulcast on local Charter and PCL cable providers Saturdays at 9 a.m. He was chairman of the Spirit of America Festival's VIP Ceremony from 2004 to 2008. Carney entered the Army in 1963, after dropping out of school as a junior at Buckhorn High School in Madison County. Months later, after

earning his General Equivalency Diploma, he was servicing nuclear warheads in Europe at the height of the Cold War.

He returned to civilian life in 1970 and since then has worked as a bank loan officer, computer programmer and book publisher. He also earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from Athens State and The University of Alabama in Huntsville, respectively.

Back in service

Carney returned to military service in 1990 with the Ala-

bama National Guard's 279th Signal Battalion. Five years later, he was assigned to the Guard's Public Affairs Detachment and went to Hungary to set up press conferences and arrange press tours relating to U.S. involvement in Croatia and Bosnia.

Deployment ceremonies

In 2003, Carney's military life changed dramatically when Brig. Gen. Dallas Fanning asked him to organize deployment ceremonies for the 18 National Guard units throughout Alabama. The assignment turned into countless ways to serve military personnel and their families.

"David's an outstanding soldier," said Fanning, now retired from the Army and serving as Huntsville's City Planner.

"David's always been articulate and smart," he added. "He had a background in public affairs, had a banking background and he was a good writer.

"(His assignment) was mainly organization and media and coordinating all of that to include the families, and he just fit in perfectly."

Almost immediately after guardsmen left for Iraq, family problems emerged. Some of those related to home damage families received from Hurricane Ivan. Wives and young mothers suddenly found them-

'The more you can show patriotism, the more it helps the troops. The biggest thing is to let them know you care. That helps validate their service.'

David Carney
Humanitarian award recipient

selves with major decisions on repairs with no help.

"That's when I started being proactive with so many organizations. I felt there should be no limitations for what we could do," Carney said.

This led to his favorite support event he helped organize: the Christmas Bear Party, begun five years ago. Instead of soliciting gifts and care packages for troops overseas, Carney said the soldiers are better served by caring for their families back home, particularly children.

The annual Christmas party attracts hundreds from all service branches in North Alabama. Each child gets a teddy bear, dressed like a soldier, with an attached card saying their parent is their hero. Disney characters and Santa Claus entertain children, as well as live music, food, games and inflatable rides.

"If they know you support the

families, they know the community is supporting them," Carney said. "So they can focus their minds on their mission better and have a better chance of getting home."

Carney said it's been a "learn as you go" process to serve the needs of military families, and he tried to follow two rules that have become his personal mantra: *Am I doing my job right? Is there something more I can do?*

Under the "more I can do" category, Carney has organized welcome home and Purple Heart ceremonies. He reinstated the Blue Star Family program, providing banners and car magnets with blue stars for thousands of families of serving troops.

"The more you can show patriotism, the more it helps the troops. The biggest thing is to let them know you care. That helps validate their service."

In 2003, David Carney was asked by Brig. Gen. Dallas Fanning to organize deployment ceremonies for the 18 National Guard units throughout Alabama.

Spirit of America Schedule of Events

Friday, July 3

- 4 p.m. – Flag raising, Spirit of America Stage
- 4-6 p.m. – Spirit Idol, Spirit of America Stage
- 4-8 p.m. – Vendors and food court open, Spirit of America Field
- 6:30 p.m. – Flag lowering, Spirit of America Stage
- 7 p.m. – Spirit Idol Grand Prize Finals, Spirit of America Stage
- 7-9 p.m. – Miss Teen Point Mallard Pageant, Spirit of America Stage
- 9 p.m. – Guitar Hero/Rock Band Contest, Spirit of America Stage

Saturday, July 4

- 9 a.m. – Registration for Children's Bike Parade, T.C. Almon Center
- 10 a.m. – Flag raising, Spirit of America Stage
- 10 a.m. – Children's Bike Parade sponsored by RBC, T.C. Almon Center
- 10:30 a.m. – Parade reception and awards, Children's Tent
- 11 a.m. – Tangerine Tambourines Band, Children's Tent
- 11 a.m.-4 p.m. – Children's activities and games, Spirit of America Field and Children's Tent
- 12 p.m. – Southern Spirit demonstration (cheerleading), Children's Tent
- 12:15 p.m. – Cristina Lynn, Spirit of America Stage
- 1:30 p.m. – Sir Clumsy Show, Children's Tent
- 2:30 p.m. – Terry McNeal Band, Spirit of America Stage
- 2:30 p.m. – Joseph Alexander Studio martial arts demonstration, Children's Tent
- 4 p.m. – Pingpong ball drop (3 age groups), Spirit of America Field
- 4:30 p.m. – Money in the haystack (3 age groups), Spirit of America Field
- 4:30 p.m. – Alaina Wiley, Spirit of America Stage
- 6 p.m. – Flag lowering, Spirit of America Stage
- 6:30 p.m. – VIP program, Spirit of America Stage
- 8 p.m. – Miss Point Mallard Pageant, Spirit of America Stage
- 10 p.m. – Fireworks, Spirit of America Stage

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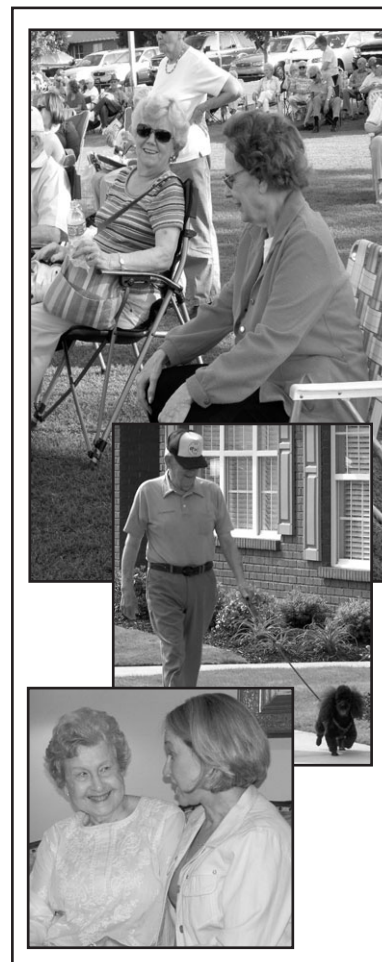
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40th Miss Point Mallard pageant has '60s vibe

By Patrice Stewart
pstewart@decatordaily.com
340-2446

Get ready for the music of the Supremes, the Temptations, the Beatles and the Beach Boys.

"Welcome to the '60s" will be the theme on the Fourth of July when 22 young women will compete for the 40th annual Miss Point Mallard title on the Spirit of America stage.

Contestants will compete in talent, swimsuit and evening gown beginning about 8 p.m. Saturday, right after the VIP awards program. There is no admission fee for the pageant.

Haley Arrington from Glencoe, last year's Miss Point Mallard winner, will entertain the audience and crown her successor at the end of the holiday evening.

The 23-year-old music education major is a senior at Jacksonville State University.

Jamie Langley, who was Miss Alabama in 2007 and Miss Point

Mallard in 2004, will be the emcee for both the Miss Point Mallard event and the teen pageant Friday night. She is now a television personality in Montgomery.

Miss Alabama on stage

Liz Cochran from Helena, who was crowned Miss Alabama on June 6, also will take part in the Miss Point Mallard Pageant on July 4. The dancer, who is a student at Birmingham-Southern College, will entertain during the evening.

Whitney Miles of Decatur will be the featured local entertainer, singing "Welcome to '60s" from the Broadway musical "Hairspray."

Many of the contestants who will compete for the Miss Point Mallard title also were in the recent Miss Alabama program, including Anna Laura Bryan of Decatur and Kristie Osborne of Hartselle.

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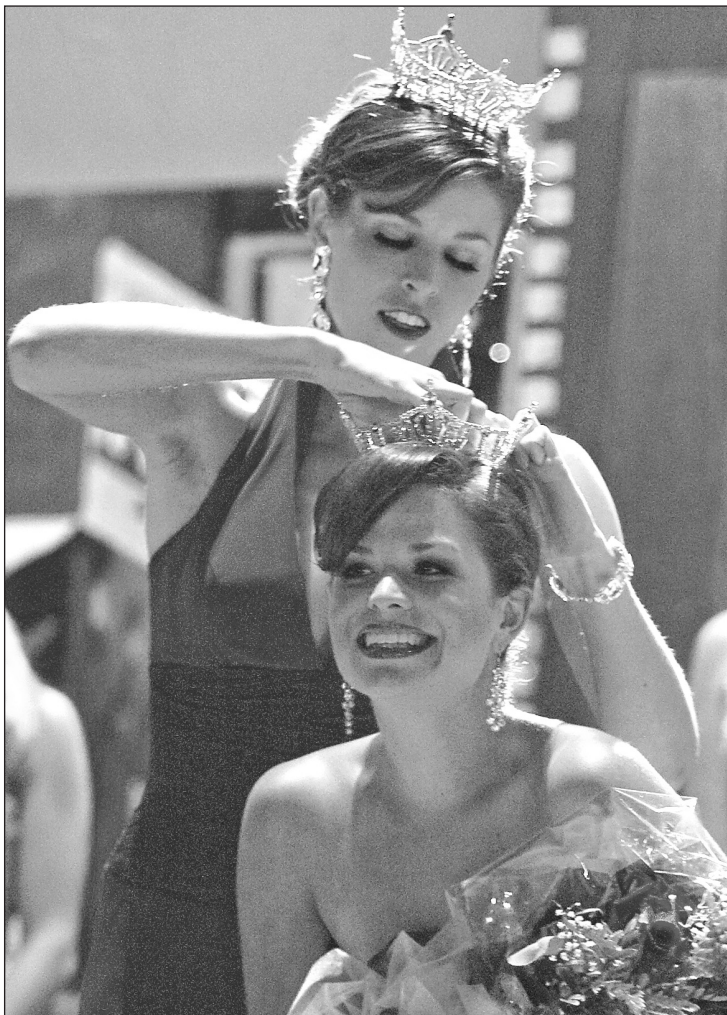
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Daily file photo by Jonathan Palmer

2007 Miss Point Mallard Katie Boyd pins the crown on 2008 Miss Point Mallard Hayley Arrington.

Past Miss Point Mallard winners i

Decatur has a long history of holding Miss Alabama preliminary pageants, though it has had name and time changes through the years. Carol Medders was named the first winner during a May pageant and went on to the Miss Alabama Pageant in 1971, according to Phyllis Holt. Then the pageant moved to July 4. It had a different title in those early years.

These women were Spirit of America Festival winners:

1971: Kathie McDaniel
1972: Becky Marshall
1973: Connie Morrow
1974: Beatrice Files
1975: Kyle Ellis
 In 1976, the name was changed to Miss Point Mallard. Here are the titleholders:
1976: Karen Pressnell
1977: Teresa Cheatham
1978: Cheryl Burgess
1979: Heidi Moore
1980: Deborah Klingenberg
1981: Kathy Waite*
1981: Margaret Ann Renneker
1982: Tammy Little
1983: Angela Stepp

1984: Freda McNair
1985: Julie Hitt
1986: Dana Southard
1987: Tiffany Riggins
1988: Jana Whitehead
1989: Shea Pruitt
1990: Paige Sutton
1991: Kim Wimmer
1992: Heather Whitestone
1993: Leigh Sherer
1994: Alison McCreary
1995: Rachel Bobo
1996: Stephanie Gwaltney
1997: Christine Chilton
1998: Shannon Camper
1999: Britney Colagross
2000: Shannon Camper
2001: Kelley Brown
2002: Amy Drake
2003: Jessica Wheeler
2004: Jamie Langley
2005: Katie Boyd
2006: Jessica Headley
2007: Katie Boyd
2008: Hayley Arrington

*Note: Kathy Waite died in an automobile accident during her reign. She was succeeded by Margaret Ann Renneker, so two names are listed for 1981.

Pageant

From page 9

Leslie Smith of Hartselle is another local young woman who will compete at Miss Point Mallard, while other contestants will come from across Alabama to compete for about \$4,000 in cash scholarships and gifts. Many of these 17- to 24-year-olds have won enough in pageants to pay their college tuition, and many colleges offer scholarships to winners.

Miss Point Mallard is a sanctioned preliminary for the Miss Alabama and Miss America contests.

Barry Sublett of Decatur, who is director of both the Miss Point Mallard and the Miss Outstanding Teen pageants, said the Decatur scholarship programs benefit from being held in the summer and soon after the Miss Alabama Pageant. Young women who regularly enter pageants are eager to participate over the holiday weekend in hopes of winning a title early in the pageant year.

The number of participants has been increasing recently. In 2007, only 13 competed for Miss Point Mallard, compared to 21 in 2008.

Last year, Miss Point Mallard competition was cut from two nights to one to save con-

testants' time and money and to make room for the new Miss Point Mallard's Outstanding Teen Pageant on the Spirit of America stage July 3. Contestants seemed to like the new one-night format last year, Sublett said. This Miss Outstanding Teen pageant makes its return this year with 10 contestants. There will also be a Little Miss Point Mallard pageant at 2 p.m. on Friday.

A panel of five judges from out of town will score contestants. The talent competition counts 35 percent; judges' interview from early in the day, 25 percent; evening gown, 20 percent; swimsuit, 15 percent and onstage question, 5 percent.

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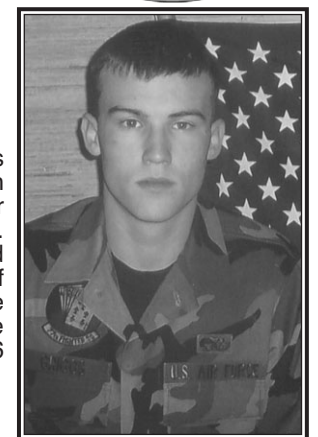
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Staff Sergeant David Griggs of The 94th Fighter Squadron is stationed at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia. David is an Aircraft Maintenance Crew Chief on an F-22 Raptor. The F-22 is the Air Force's latest and most advanced Fighter Jet. David and his wife Amanda live in Newport News, Va.



Proud parents are Marlin and Corinne Griggs and little sister Kendra. Marlin retired November 1, 2007 from the 118th Airlift Wing, Tennessee Air National Guard in Nashville, TN after 23 years of military service.

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Senior Airman Austin Griggs of The 77th Fighter Squadron is stationed at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina. Austin is currently deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is an Aircraft Maintenance Crew Chief on an F-16 Fighting Falcon.

Guitar

From page 4

provided by Play N Trade Video Games. Boyer said Play N Trade will also donate gift cards as prizes for the first-, second- and third-place winners in Friday's competition.

Although contestants were encouraged to register ahead of time, Boyer said walk-ups are welcome. There is no age limit.

The winners will be chosen based on the scores earned in the game.

Friday's competition is one of three preliminary competitions for the Grand Prize Contest at Merrimack Hall in Huntsville on July 25. Only the first-place winners from each of the three competitions in Decatur, Huntsville and the Shoals will compete against each other for the grand prize.

The Guitar Hero/Rock Band competition will begin at 9 p.m. on the Spirit of America Stage, immediately after the Miss Teen Point Mallard Pageant.

For those looking for music entertainment of a non-virtual sort, don't worry. Spirit of America will feature four bands and performers throughout the day Saturday.

Cristina Lynn

Singer/Songwriter Cristina Lynn performs original songs along with country music standards with only Dave Sheppard on acoustic guitar as accompaniment.

A North Alabama native, Lynn has performed with Sheppard throughout the Tennessee Valley at summer concerts, artist expos and area festivals. Lynn has also released a CD titled "What's Next."

Alaina Wiley

A member of Kid Nashville and Nashville Spotlight Kids Club & GCGMA, 9-year-old Alaina Wiley has been performing in front of an audience since age 4.

Wiley was the second-place recipient of the Mark Narmore's Young Songwriter's Award for "He Don't Know."

Tangerine T Tambourine Band

Tangerine Tambourine is made up of North Alabama musicians who perform a mix of R&B, jazz, country, reggae and pop as fun, educational songs

for children.

Jeff Sharp, Jamie Pressnell, Bobby Blount, Josh Lovvorn and Whitney Inscho have performed together since 2008. Their songs include the Beatles-inspired "Mix It Up," a song about the joys of combining favorite foods, and "The ABC's," the alphabet song in the style of The Ramones. Parents can relate to "Spit it Out," a power-pop song describing every parent's battle with orally-fixated toddlers.

Terry McNeal Band

The Terry McNeal Band comprises of four musicians who perform original Christian music in both full-power and acoustic styles. Terry McNeal, Bobby Hendricks, Scott "Scotty" Owens and John David Crowe strive to connect the family through their music and Christian message. The band performs music that will appeal to every generation.

Children

From page 4

years, there will be no age categories for the competition. Registration for the parade begins at 9 a.m. at T.C. Almon, with judging to begin at 9:30.

Following the parade, the Tangerine Tambourines, a local musical group, will entertain children with sing-a-longs beginning at 11 a.m.

Sir Clumsy will remain at the children's tent all day. He will perform a magic show at 1:30 p.m.

Vicki Burks and employees of Premier Designs Jewelry will provide face painting.

Southern Spirits will perform a cheering exhibition at noon. Joseph Alexander Studio will offer martial arts demonstrations at 2:30 p.m. Children can even learn to break special boards.

The ever popular Pingpong Ball Drop will occur at 4 p.m. There will be three age categories so younger children won't have to compete against older, stronger and faster youths.

The grand prizes will be new bicycles. Other prizes will range from memberships and passes to Point Mallard to food coupons from local eateries.

Money in the Hay will occur at 4:30 p.m., featuring two age categories.

The activity tent will offer carnival games throughout the late morning and afternoon until Money in the Hay ends. Tent activities will include temporary tattoos, pickup ducks, a lollipop tree, miniature golf, go fish and a craft table.

The activities under the tent will require either one or two tickets, which cost 25 cents apiece.

In addition to the activity tent, Just Add Kidz will set up

five inflatable rides: a 24-foot double lane slide, an obstacle course, an adventure course, a castle combo and a baseball cage.

Unlike previous years, there are no children's activities planned for July 3.

Rochelle Raney, children's events committee chairwoman, said the decision to drop July 3 youth activities was because of a traditionally low turnout.

"With it being a Friday, that's still a workday, so it's just hard for parents to get home and get the children out there," Raney said. "Usually the only kids we got (on the third) were from the campground. So we decided to focus our resources on the Fourth."

Bicycles will be the grand prize during the Pingpong Ball Drop.



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