

Google Staffer Completes A&M Residency - p. 8

FREE

Rising RSV and Babies - p. 9

Friday
December 15, 2023
Vol. 10, No. 15
ValleyWeeklly.com

SALUTE!
Rosetta James Foundation
ELDER OF THE WEEK



Rev. Leroy Cole



Valley Weekly

Coping with Holiday Depression in the Rocket City - p. 7

"Every man is guilty of all the good he did not do." - Voltaire



NW Huntsville Site for Key HCS Structure

Mayor Tommy Battle joined Huntsville City Schools representatives and members of Huntsville City Council to celebrate the groundbreaking on a new state-of-the-art Central Office and Career Technical Facility.

The City transferred 14 acres at the corner of North Memorial Parkway and Max Luther Drive to Huntsville City Schools for the new campus. The projected completion date is fall 2025.

Referencing the new career tech center, Mayor Battle said the facility will empower students with the practical knowledge and hands-on experience needed to excel in their chosen fields.

Huntsville City Schools Superintendent Dr. Clarence Sutton said the school's investment in the state-of-the-art facility represents an investment in the "limitless potential" of students.

"Our commitment to excellence is not just about constructing buildings," he said. "It's about constructing opportunities, opening doors and lighting the way for generations to come right here in Huntsville."

At 40,000 square feet, the Central Office will serve as the administrative center for Huntsville City Schools. The facility will feature a board room and dedicated offices for the Superintendent and HCS staff.

The 81,000-square-foot Career Technical Center will feature more than 20 CTE programs now housed at high schools across the district. Focus areas include welding, precision machining, building construction, advanced manufacturing, culinary arts and cosmetology. The district plans to offer automotive, industrial technology and advanced health sciences in the future. - huntsvilleal.gov

TVW Mourns Death of Educator, Administrator

Funeral services were held last Friday, December 8, for retired Tennessee Valley educator and administrator William Lloyd Huston, Sr.



Huston, a long-time avid aviator, along with a flight instructor, Nikul Navin Desal, were both involved in a fatal plane crash in Limestone County on Monday, December 4.

Following his retirement, Huston enjoyed a wide array of hobbies and interests, as well as attended several community and civic activities. Moreover, he was integral to the success of the Rosetta James Foundation, The Valley Weekly and several other organizations.

The father of two sons and a daughter, Huston was married to entrepreneur and former higher education administrator Dr. Dorothy W. Huston, editor-in-chief of *The Valley Weekly*.

New 5-Year Drake Partnership Enables Outreach

Amesite Inc., a leading artificial intelligence software company offering a cloud-based learning platform for business and education markets, announces a five-year partnership with Drake State Community and Technical College. Drake State is the first higher education institution in Alabama to leverage the NAFEO-Amesite Alliance.

This partnership represents a strategic move for Drake State, allowing it to extend its educational reach beyond traditional classroom settings. It aligns with the college's commitment to working with regional businesses and addressing local workforce learning needs.

Dr. Ann Marie Sastry, CEO of Amesite, commented on the new partnership. "NAFEO, as the Nation's only advocacy and membership organization for all HBCUs and predominantly Black institutions, has created an efficient and effective way of engaging the most economically significant cohort of institutions that impact workforce diversity in the United States. We are proud to be part of this Alliance, and to work with members like Drake

State. This collaboration is an important step for us in Alabama. Our goal is to extend our learning solutions to NAFEO's members. This agreement with Drake State is an important part of our commitment to enhancing education through technology."

Dr. Lezli Baskerville, CEO of NAFEO, said, "The Alliance that we have established with Amesite is yielding favorable results. During this season in particular, when it is so critical for professionals to have certifications that enable them to advance economically, we are looking forward to engaging other NAFEO members, including 106 HBCUs and roughly 70 PBIs. To engage the most diverse cohort possible, NA-

FEO and our members must be effective online, delivering 95 percent retention with Amesite technology."

"Partnering with Amesite enables us to expand our educational capabilities and reach," said Dr. Patricia Sims, President of Drake State. "This collaboration aligns with our goal to meet and adapt to the changing educational and workforce training requirements in our community."

The partnership will focus on developing customized learning platforms to meet the specific needs of the regional workforce, offering accessible and high-quality educational resources to support professional development and skills enhancement.

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The Valley Weekly

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The Valley Weekly

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	2.5x2.5	\$75
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The Valley Weekly
Washington
One Minute

by Ron Hamm

Here is what's happening in Washington, D.C., the nation's capital, this week:

1. CONGRESS. The House and Senate are in session this week and are expected to adjourn for the year by this Friday. The House has a big floor agenda, including a resolution to authorize an impeachment inquiry into President Biden, 2 competing GOP bills to reauthorize the U.S.'s foreign spying authority, a bill to extend the FAA reauthorization bill through March 8, 2024, and the conference report on the \$866 billion defense authorization bill. The Senate will also take up the defense authorization bill conference report this week, after last week failing to break a filibuster of the

Ukraine/Israel aid bill due to GOP objections that the bill did not contain the Mexico border policy changes they sought. Last Thursday, House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) sent out a "dear colleague" letter stating that he would not consider any further short-term appropriations measures when the current stopgap measures expire on Jan. 19 and Feb. 2., raising for some the specter of a full-year continuing resolution.

2. THE WHITE HOUSE. ... Monday, the President traveled to Philadelphia for a fundraiser with Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro and to announce a \$22.4 million grant for the Philadelphia Fire Department. The President and First Lady

hosted a Hanukkah reception at the White House. On Tuesday, the President hosted a meeting at the White House with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who will also went to Capitol Hill to meet with House Speaker Mike Johnson and with all Senators. On Wednesday, the President's son, Hunter Biden, will appear at a closed-door deposition by the House Oversight and Accountability Committee, which is investigating his business dealings as part of an impeachment investigation into his father. Also on Wednesday, President Biden delivered remarks at the National Infrastructure Advisory Council. Last Thursday, the President spoke to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and urged him to protect Palestinian civilians by separating them from Hamas through corridors that allow people to move safely from defined areas of hostilities.

3. SUPREME COURT. The Court has no scheduled arguments until January 8, 2024.

4. NOVEMBER JOBS REPORT/FED MEETING. Last Friday, the Labor Department announced that employment surged by 199,000 jobs in November, with the unemployment rate falling to 3.7% from the previous month's 3.9%. The increase in employment included tens of thousands of autoworkers and actors (and other workers in related businesses) who returned to their jobs after strikes. According to a White House statement, the unemployment rate has remained below 4% for 22 months in a row and inflation has fallen by two-thirds ...

5. UNIVERSITY FIRING LETTER. Last Thursday, a bipartisan group of 74 House Members, led by Reps. Jared Moskowitz (D-FL) and Elise Stefanik (R-NY), sent a letter to the governing boards of Har-

vard University, the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) demanding that they remove their presidents in light of statements made at a Dec. 5 House Education and the Workforce Committee hearing about anti-semitism on college campuses, at which the 3 presidents suggested that context matters on whether comments calling for the genocide of Jewish people would be considered harassment. On Saturday, UPenn President Liz Magill (along with UPenn Chairman of the Board of Trustees Scott Bok) resigned.

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" ... In All Things Give Thanks ..."

-1 Thessalonians 5:16

My Beloved Sisters in Christ and in Delta:

The finest words I know, cannot begin to convey the depth of my heartfelt gratitude to you for your ongoing kindness and support.

You represent the "Ideal Deltas" who use your blessings to be a blessing to others. I would be remiss if I didn't express my deepest appreciation to the "Sisters Supporting Sisters committee," and four extraordinary Sorors who have kept me soaring above my seemingly unending health complications. They transport me to and from medical appointments, shop for my groceries (and put them away). Additionally, they assist me with light household tasks, and come over just to visit and sometimes play two of my favorite games with me: scrabble and dominoes. Who are they: Sorors Carol Toney, Linda Fowlkes, Rosalynn Strickland and Gloria Ayers.

It's December and many are contemplating about the best gifts to give to loved ones. One of the greatest gifts you can give during the Christmas season, is the gift of spending time with them.

I invite you to come spend some time with me during the holiday season. We can share a special meal and play a game.

Again, thanks to all of you who continue to provide SONshine to brighten my days. Best wishes for a joyful, healthy and safe Christmas season. In sisterly love ...

- Soror Margaret J.M. Kelly



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**VALLEY
DEATHS**



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Funeral service for MR. DEXTER PENDLETON (b. 1962) was held on Sunday, December 10, at Mount Zion Primitive Baptist Church (2350 Wall Triana Hwy SW, Triana, Ala.) with Dr. Mylon Burwell officiating.

Funeral service for MRS. MAMIE H. HANDY (b. 1928) was held Saturday, December 9, at Lakeside United Methodist Church in Huntsville, Ala., with Dr. Randy Kelley officiating.

Funeral service for MRS. MINNIE PEARL PRIDE (b. 1949) was held on Saturday, December 9, from Newhaven Church - Belle Mina, Ala.

Funeral service for MRS. LINDA DELOIS KEITH-DOUGLAS (b. 1961) was Thursday, December 7, at Touch By The Word Ministries - Apostolic Center (2611 Pulaski Pike, Huntsville, Ala.) with Bishop Tony Mason officiating.

ROYAL FUNERAL HOME

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Huntsville, AL 35810 - (256) 534-8481 - www.royalfh.com

Funeral services will be announced at a later date for MRS. RUBY E. BLACKBURN (b. 1950); MR. JESSE L. GOODE (b. 1956); MRS. DONNA FAYE MOORE (b. 1950); DR. FAYE A. BRATHWAITE (b. 1953); and MRS. LUCILLE JANE SANDERS DENT (b. 1934).

Graveside service for BABY GIRL DIOR ALICE WILLIAMS (b.2023) will be 1 p.m., Friday, December 15, at the Northside Cemetery (Jordan Lane, Huntsville, Ala.).

Funeral service for MRS. YVONNE WALLACE TUCK (b. 1952) was Saturday, December 9, at the Fellowship of Faith Church (3703 North Memorial Parkway, Huntsville, Ala.) with Pastor Troy Garner officiating.

Graveside service for MR. COLLIER LEE BUSH, JR. (b. 1967) was Tuesday, December 5, 2023, at the Meadowlawn Garden of Peace (450 Mount Lebanon Road, Toney, Ala.) with Reverend James Jamar officiating.

SERENITY FUNERAL HOME

2505 University Drive NW
Huntsville, AL 35816 (256) 539-9693 - www.serenityfuneralhm.com

Funeral service for MR. SOL ANDERSON (b. 1941) will be Saturday, December 16, at New Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church, 11479 Dogwood Flats Road, Tanner, Ala., at 11 a.m.

Spiritual Game Plan

Valley Weekly
PRESTON BROWN'S



"The Real Meaning of Christmas"

Luke 2:10 says, "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.'"

We will never enjoy the season of Christmas until we enjoy the reason for Christmas.

In other words, until we understand the real meaning of Christmas, it will only be about parties, Christmas trees, and making sure we get everything on our shopping lists. There is nothing wrong with these things if we keep them as side attractions and not the main event. We need to know that Jesus is the reason for the season and there is no

substitute. So often when the season of Christmas gets here, we become distracted by so many other things that we miss the message.

Jesus did not come to entertain us. He came to be the Savior of the entire world. He didn't come to be politically correct. He came for the message of hope. He also came to be Lord of our lives.

I believe we often miss the main event of Christmas because we make our God too small. We reduce Him down to sleigh bells and jingle bells and Santa Claus coming to town.

Yes, It's the most wonderful time of the year, but not for the reason that most people think. There is no way that any of us could be saved without God sending us His one and only son. This act of love will



always be the real meaning of Christmas.

May God grant you spiritual success in finding the real meaning of Christmas.

Question: What does the real meaning of Christmas mean to you?

Stay encouraged, my brothers and sisters, and make sure you purchase a copy of my books *Spiritual Game Plans For A Successful Life* and *A Champion Game Plan for Life* at amazon.com, Westbow Books or, if you have a PayPal account, email me at prestonbrown81@gmail.com and I will send you an autographed copy.

NEXT WEEK:
"Holding on to Your Faith at Christmas"

Huntsville Council Meetings



Huntsville City Council's regular meetings are held in the City Council Chambers of the Municipal Building on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month at 6 p.m.

Council work sessions are also held in the Chambers of the Municipal Building on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. For more information, call (256) 427-5011.

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NAAACC Meetings

The North Alabama African American Chamber of Commerce (Huntsville) meets monthly on the 3rd Tuesday at 12 noon.

The meeting location varies. Call (256) 564-7574.

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VALLEY EVENTS

HAPPENINGS, ACTIVITIES & MORE!

December 14
Premium Paint Party
With RAD Rocket City
At Brewers Cooperative
Stovehouse
Huntsville, Ala.

December 15
The Legacy Center
3rd Annual Christmas
Open House
2212 Jordan Lane NW
Huntsville, Ala.
11 a.m.-2 p.m.

HIT Men of Comedy
Showcase
Renard Hiirsch, Mike-
James, Brian Covington

December 16
Holiday Pop Up with Santa
8760 Madison Boulevard
Madison, Ala.
(Vendors Options - \$50)
10 a.m.-3 p.m.

December 16-17

The Flip Sports Card &
Collectibles Trade Show
Von Braun Center - 5 p.m.

December 17
Vision Your Journey
Chanda Davis Real Estate
475 Providence Main St.
NW Ste. 404
Huntsville, Ala.
(214) 407-0525 - 1-4 p.m.

December 22 & 23
Comedy - Rickey Smiley
Stand Up Live Huntsville
7 p.m.

January 1
Wim Hof Method Fun-
damentals Workshop by
Certified Instructor Paul
Stoneking
Movement Massage &
Breathwork
[Link](#)

January 4-6
Comedy

Mark Curry
Stand Up Live Huntsville
7 p.m.

January 14
"Calling All Titans"
Huntsville Titans Cham-
pion Force Athletics
erp.championforce.com

January 26
Concert
American Spiritual En-
semble
Host:
Huntsville Chamber Music
Guild

March 9
Rosetta James Foundation
"Honoring Our Elders"
Celebration/Day Gala

Concert
Lawrence Brownlee
Host:
Huntsville Chamber Music
Guild

DECEMBER 15 - JAHLIL OKAFOR - Jahlil Okafor is an American professional basketball player for the New Orleans Pelicans of the National Basketball Association (NBA). He played his freshman season of college for the 2014-15 Duke national championship team. He was selected with the third overall pick in the 2015 NBA draft by the Philadelphia 76ers. He has previously played in the NBA for the 76ers and Brooklyn Nets. Okafor was heavily recruited since before high school and had been at the top of the recruiting rankings for several years. He played high school basketball in Chicago, Illinois for Whitney M. Young Magnet High School.

- BlackCelebrityBirthdays.org



PowerShot

"In the quiet
of our minds
and the
darkness
behind our
lids, we
sharpen our
ability to see."

J. T. Moore



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on their
ACHIEVEMENT WEEK



"... No state is civilized which has citizens
too ignorant to help rule it."

- W. E. B. Du Bois

Fist Bump ...

Millennial Moment

by Gloria B. Caldwell

Every morning at 6:45, I watch my young son board his elementary school bus. He always leaves with a smile, his toothless grin shining. Rain or shine, his step is lighter when his regular bus driver is there.

I soon realized why - the driver greets him with a simple fist bump. To my son, this small gesture means the world. It's a boost of confidence and support that he needs, living in a post-divorce household with just his mother and sister.

It has made me realize the power of small acts of

kindness and support.

As someone who loves to uplift others, this experience resonates deeply with me. It reminds me that acts of love and kindness can have a profound impact on others, regardless of their gender or circumstances.

We should never

underestimate what a person may be going through. Our emotions can shift rapidly, and life happens quickly. You never know what someone needs in a given moment. There have been days when my son

walked out upset or tired, but the atmosphere shifted with that simple fist bump.

It makes me reflect on the gifts God has given us, and how they can shift the world around us. Something as simple as a kind gesture can create a ripple effect, changing or saving lives. Figure out what that gift is for you, and utilize it to shift the atmosphere!

God loves you, and so do I.

He has given you a gift; open it.



Image: DALL-E/AI/TVW

This Sunday's Lectionary



Sunday, December 17, 2023

Third Sunday
of Advent

(Track 2, Year B)

First Lesson:

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Psalm 126

Second Lesson:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

GOSPEL:

John 1:6-8, 19-28

"Life is an unfoldment, and the further we travel the more truth we can comprehend."

- Hypatia



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Remembering our December 7ths: from Bombs to Blessings

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." - Psalm 30:5

For democracy-loving world citizens, December 7 commemorates bombs and subsequent blessings. On this date in 1941, Japanese warplanes bombed Hawaii's Pearl Harbor, killing 2400 Americans.



This surprise attack forced the United States into World War II, and our response to those Japanese bombs led us to the subsequent blessings of victories over German Naziism, Italian

fascism, and Japanese totalitarianism.

"December 7" also represents my first anniversary from a potential bomb to multiple blessings. On December 7, 2022, I requested from Ms. Leteria Moses-Waters, my Synovus Bank branch manager, a Square device to receive credit and debit card purchases for my book sales.

She then connected us to a corporate relationship banker, who denied my request; I was not generating enough income to justify those Synovus fees and services, he said.

However, I told him the Square was to be used primarily for sales of my yet-to-be-written book combining basketball and the Bible. He then pivoted and reminded me that basketball was invented in a YMCA gymnasium. Wow! I immediately responded, "Sir, your last seven seconds have outweighed the first three minutes of our conversation!"

The fact that basketball originated in a Young Men's Christian Association gym was just the alley-oop I needed to write this book.

For me, Synovus' initial bomb of the Square device rejection became my blessings of writing and self-publishing *Where Jump Shots Meet Jesus*.

Although it will launch officially in January 2024, that initial Square rejection bomb from December 7 has resulted already in at least three blessings. *Where Jump Shots Meet Jesus*:

1. Has been published in print, digital, and audiobook versions;
2. Generated more than 524 pre-launch sales; therefore
3. Ranks in the top one percent (#142) on the Amazon worldwide best-sellers list.

Do you have a bomb-turned-blessing experience in 2023? Share it with others, and together let's do even more in 2024!

Tim Allston

Leadership Coach & Three-time Amazon Best-Selling Author

Leading from the Middle

(256) 212-0949

leadingfromthemiddle.tim@gmail.com

ON THIS DAY



On December 15, 1961, the Spingarn Medal was presented to psychologist and educator Kenneth B. Clark for his pioneering studies that influenced the Supreme Court decision on school desegregation.

- Blackfacts.com



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

Rev. Leroy Cole



Reverend Leroy R. Cole, pastor emeritus, Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church, succeeded Rev. Williams in leadership of Hopewell in 1978.

He watered the seeds planted by his predecessors with the word of God and the anointing of the Holy Ghost. The church grew to a membership of over 800.

Rev. Cole also introduced the phrase, "HOPEWELL EXPERIENCE," which is popular throughout New Market, Huntsville and other surrounding areas.

Due to the significant increase in church membership, Hopewell erected, with the help of God, a new Worship complex.

The first service was

held in this new facility on September 13, 1998, with the observance of Holy Communion.

Rev. Cole took Hopewell to great heights during his

34 years of leadership. His numerous contributions to Hopewell, New Market, Huntsville and the Madison County community are immeasurable.

"Spotlight on Our Elders" is a weekly feature sponsored by the Rosetta James Foundation to promote volunteerism and activism in our community among those who are 70-plus. The Foundation also provides scholarships. Learn more about us at www.rosettajamesfoundation.org. Know an outstanding elder (70+) that you would like to see featured? Send us a photo and 250-word write-up to info@valleyweeklyllc.com.



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NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC CITY OF HUNTSVILLE

The City of Huntsville's Community Development Department has completed its Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) for FY22. A draft copy of this report may be viewed on line at www.huntsvilleal.gov/residents/neighborhoods/housing/fair-housing/ and at the Community Development Department Office located in the Yarbrough Office Center, 120 E. Holmes Avenue, and the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library, located at 915 Monroe Street. Submit comments to Scott Erwin, City of Huntsville Department of Community Development, P.O. Box 308, Huntsville, AL 35804 or scott.erwin@huntsvilleal.gov. Deadline for comments is **December 15, 2023**. For more information regarding this public notice or to request special accommodations, please call (256) 427-5400. Hearing or speech impaired residents are encouraged to use the TTY line at (256) 427-7092 for requests.

AL PÚBLICO CIUDAD DE HUNTSVILLE

El Departamento de Desarrollo Comunitario de la Ciudad de Huntsville ha completado su Informe Anual Consolidado de Desempeño y Evaluación (CAPER) para el año fiscal 22. Una copia preliminar de este informe se puede ver en línea en www.huntsvilleal.gov/residents/neighborhoods/housing/fair-housing/ y en la Oficina del Departamento de Desarrollo Comunitario ubicada en el Centro de Oficinas de Yarbrough, 120 E. Holmes Avenue y la Biblioteca Pública del Condado de Huntsville-Madison, ubicada en 915 Monroe Street. Envíe sus comentarios a Scott Erwin, Departamento de Desarrollo Comunitario de la Ciudad de Huntsville, P.O. Box 308, Huntsville, AL 35804 o Scott.erwin@huntsvilleal.gov. La fecha límite para comentarios es el **15 de diciembre de 2023**. Para obtener más información sobre este aviso público o para solicitar adaptaciones especiales, llame al (256) 427-5400. Se recomienda a los residentes con discapacidad auditiva o del habla que usen la línea TTY al (256) 427-7092 para las solicitudes.

The 'Rocket' City and the Valley's Holiday Depression

Holiday depression, also known as holiday blues or seasonal affective disorder (SAD), can manifest differently in rapidly growing cities like Huntsville, Alabama, compared to other areas throughout the state and nation. Several factors can influence the experience of holiday depression in such a place as The Rocket City.

Rapid Urbanization and Change

Rapidly growing cities often undergo significant urbanization and transformation. This can lead to increased stress and feelings of disconnection as people may struggle to adapt to the fast-paced changes around them. This sense of instability can exacerbate holiday depression, as the holidays are traditionally associated with stability and tradition.

Social Isolation

Paradoxically, in a rapidly growing city, it can be easier for some individuals to feel socially isolated. As new people move in and old acquaintances may move away, the sense of community and social support networks can be disrupted. This can intensify feelings of loneliness and depression during the holidays when people typically seek connection and belonging.

Economic Disparities

Moreover, in rapidly growing cities where hardly a quadrant of the city is unimpacted by pop-up



developments, income inequality and cost-of-living challenges can be more pronounced. Some residents may experience financial stress during the holidays due to the rising costs of living in Madison County and surrounding areas. This financial pressure can contribute to depression and anxiety during what is supposed to be a joyful time of the year.

High Expectations

In Huntsville and in cities experiencing rapid growth, there may be a growing culture of high expectations and competitiveness. This can create additional stress during the

holiday season as people may feel pressure to meet or exceed these expectations, leading to feelings of inadequacy or failure if they don't live up to them.

Limited Access to Nature

If not monitored, Huntsville and other rapidly growing cities may develop a limited access to green spaces and nature, which can impact mental well-being, especially for those who rely on outdoor activities as a way to cope with holiday stress and depression.

Traffic and Commute Stress

Traffic congestion and longer commutes are often common in growing cities. The added stress of daily traffic and long travel times can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and depression, making it more challenging

for individuals to enjoy the holiday season.

Diversity and Inclusivity

On a positive note, Huntsville could be in store for more diverse popula-

tions and a wide range of cultural celebrations during the holiday season. This can provide opportunities for individuals to explore different traditions and find a sense of belonging within various cultural communities.

New and old Huntsvillians, in particular, should note that the experience of holiday depression can vary widely from person to person, and not everyone in a rapidly growing city will necessarily experience these challenges.

However, understanding the unique dynamics of a rapidly growing city can help local communities and mental health professionals better support individuals dealing with holiday depression in such environments. If you or someone you know is struggling with holiday depression, seeking professional help from a therapist or counselor can be beneficial, regardless of the Huntsville's growth rate.

-TVW staff with A.I. Assistance

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2500 Jordan Lane, Huntsville, AL

INTERVIEW: Google Staffer on Loan Completes AAMU Residency

The Valley Weekly interviews Joon (John) Lee, a software engineer at Google. As a participant in the Google in Residence program, Lee taught an introductory computer science course at Alabama A&M University during the just-ended fall semester. Lee and his wife Kim will return to Cambridge, Massachusetts.

TVW: What was happening in your hometown, high school and everyday life that inspired you to pursue computer science as a major? What other schools did you apply to?

LEE: Looking back, I should have applied to an engineering program, but I was in the Arts & Sciences college at Cornell. When I took a Computer Graphics class, I was captivated by the visual elements and programming became “real” to me, and I decided to pursue a Computer Science major.

TVW: After receiving your B.A. from Cornell in computer science and math, what other paths were open to you in addition to software engineering?

LEE: Other than software engineering, I was accepted into a Ph.D. program at Princeton. I loved my college experience, but I realized that I had only applied because my parents wanted that path for me. Since I was eager to work on products that folks used, I decided to accept a job offer from Microsoft. My parents were initially disappointed, but came around when they saw my career success.

TVW: What was your greatest barrier in transi-

tioning from Microsoft to Google in 2011?

LEE: The skill sets that Microsoft and Google look for are similar, so I can't say that there was a barrier.



TVW: In as simplest terms as possible, please explain the different facets within software engineering. What concepts should any software engineer know?

LEE: Software engineering has become huge and spans so many fields, it would be difficult to talk about them all. The concepts that any software engineer should know are data structures and algorithms.

TVW: In a parallel universe, how would your career path have changed had your B.A. had come from Alabama A&M rather than Cornell?

LEE: In 1996 when I graduated, tech companies only recruited from a handful of universities. I was able to take advantage of recruiters coming to campus and I felt fortunate to get a job with a great tech company right out of college. If I graduated from Alabama A&M in 1996, I feel confident that I would still have gotten a job at a premier tech company, but I would have needed to be more resourceful. Now that Google maintains an active presence at Alabama A&M as well as several other HBCUs, I no longer believe that there would be a difference.

TVW: Describe the similarities and differences between Cambridge and Huntsville.

LEE: Both Cambridge and Huntsville celebrate academics and people in both cities are proud of their academic achievements. The food scene is quite different. Cambridge has a number of great seafood restaurants whereas Huntsville has great soul food and barbecue. I never had Alabama white sauce until now and I have to say that I'm a big fan.

TVW: In your analysis, what computer science fundamentals are imperative for an introductory course?

LEE: I emphasize mastery of a language. Then I emphasize visualization. All computer science concepts can be visualized, so I emphasize techniques for visualizing how code operates. Lastly, software requires a level of details that humans are not capable of and we all make mistakes. So, I emphasize debugging.

TVW: Would the disadvantages of Python (e.g., use in mobile app development, compatibility issues, packaging, etc.) make its focus in an introductory setting questionable?

LEE: Not at all. Every language has a set of strengths. I personally love Python for its fast development speed. Startups love Python because time to market is a critical factor.

TVW: Have there been some fundamentals that have drawn greater scrutiny than in the past (e.g., algorithms, computer ethics, privacy and security and social implications)?

LEE: Ethics, privacy, security, and social implications are drawing greater scrutiny and deservedly so. The rise of AI in particular amplifies public concern. Software is powerful, and we need to ensure that everyone is using it responsibly and for the greater good.

TVW: What component of ethics is your primary focus, and should ethics have a role in determining a student's future employer?

LEE: In class, I like to talk about AI ethics because AI bias is such an important topic. And, yes, ethics should have a role in choosing an employer. Students should select employers that align with their values.

TVW: What, in your summation, has been the greatest impediment to diversity within software development?

LEE: I see a lack of empathy as a barrier to diversity in the software development field. When I started teaching at Alabama A&M, I knew that inequality was an important issue in the industry, but as I started to get to know my students and learn from their personal journeys, I realized what a sheltered life I've lived. Many of my students have overcome substantial adversity in their lives which I find to be extremely admirable. Working alongside these talented students has made me want to bring my lived experiences back to Google and lead the charge for doing even more to diversify the industry.

TVW: How can inadequate resources at the undergraduate level impact the trajectory of computer scientists in the future?

LEE: Inadequate resources at the undergraduate level can be a detriment. At the minimum, students should have access to laptops so that they can constantly play with code. When I was learning to program, I also

needed access to experts and I made sure to attend office hours whenever I had a question. Providing students access to experts during office hours is a critical resource.

TVW: Who are the largest international players (corporations) in the race toward innovation and are today's students prepared to join groundbreaking teams globally?

LEE: The large tech companies all innovate. So, Google, Microsoft, Meta, and Amazon are the important players. Companies like OpenAI are smaller, but any company at the forefront of AI is crucially important.

TVW: What have you been impressed by in working with AAMU students?

LEE: The students are ambitious, smart, curious, and also playful. They know how to work hard and they also demonstrate a commitment to giving back to the community. They have also embraced my somewhat unconventional teaching methods. I can be goofy in the classroom at times and the students do not mind being goofy with me.

TVW: What will you always remember about your Google in Residence experience?

LEE: The students! My students are amazing. I cannot wait to see all that they achieve!

RSV Respiratory Illnesses Rising for Babies, Experts Warn



While the resurgence of COVID-19 cases in the United States has been dominating the news, an old viral enemy has been making a quieter comeback. In late spring, U.S. pediatric hospitals began reporting an unexpected rise in serious infections caused by respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

Unlike COVID-19, RSV is a long-established foe that normally emerges in late fall, peaks in the winter, and nearly disappears by summer. Although it can affect anyone, it affects infants at a more serious rate.

The risk is also higher and more severe in premature babies. This is a cause of concern for Black women who have a higher risk of giving birth to a premature baby. On average Black women give birth to approximately 100,000 premature babies a year, the Savannah Tribune notes.

In most people, RSV causes nothing more than cold-like misery, such as a runny nose and cough. But it can trigger serious lung infections in babies, especially preemies, and young children with certain medical conditions.

RSV is the most common cause of pneumonia in babies younger than 1, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It's also behind most cases of bronchiolitis, where the small airways of the lungs become inflamed.

When RSV gets deep into the lungs, youngsters can struggle to breathe and may need to be hospitalized to receive oxygen and

fluids.

In June, the CDC warned that pediatric hospitals in the South were seeing an unusual rise in children sickened with RSV.

Now, the pattern is showing up in other parts of the United States.

At Salt Lake City's Primary Children's Hospital, there has been an uptick in positive tests for RSV in the past few weeks, according to Dr. Per Gesteland, who is based at the Utah hospital.

During a recent hospital media briefing about RSV, he said that the hospital's current RSV numbers are similar to where they would normally be in early January.

"We're watching this very closely because we're concerned those trends are really starting to pick up, and we're going to start to see a lot more disease," Gesteland says.

COVID-19 and RSV

One reason for the concern, he says, is that the unseasonal RSV spike is happening in tandem with a rise in pediatric COVID-19 cases, due to

the more contagious Delta variant.

At some other hospitals, experts have warned that the combined trends are stretching resources thin. Last week, Texas Children's Hospital in Houston said it will now require its whole workforce to be vaccinated against COVID-19. It said that "bold action" was needed in the face of the dual surges in COVID and RSV.

The hospital has also reportedly seen over two dozen children infected with both COVID-19 and RSV.

However, it's generally different groups of kids who are at risk from the two viruses, Dr. Larry Kociolek, of Lurie Children's Hospital and Northwestern University, in Chicago says.

RSV is ubiquitous, he explains, and for older kids whose immune systems have been exposed to it, it's simply a cause of colds. So the virus is mainly a threat to babies — especially preemies and infants younger than 6 months.

According to the CDC, over 2 million American children visit the doctor for an RSV infection during a normal year. About 58,000

end up in the hospital.

There is no vaccine against RSV. But, Kociolek says, there is a way to help prevent severe infections in certain high-risk youngsters: an injection medication called palivizumab.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends the drug be given to some preemies in the first year of life, and to toddlers with conditions that severely dampen the immune system. The injections are given monthly, for up to five months, typically starting in November.

But last week, the AAP advised pediatricians to consider starting palivizumab now.

"With the level of RSV

activity we're seeing now, we're trying to roll that out in summer," Gesteland says.

Why the Rise?

What's going on? It's fairly simple, according to Kociolek and Gesteland: At the start of the pandemic, with widespread social distancing and mask-wearing, RSV cases all but vanished and remained low during the normal 2020-2021 season.

Then as restrictions loosened and large gatherings became the norm again, people came into contact with pathogens, including RSV, that have been lying in wait, Gesteland says.

Besides medication for

high-risk babies, Kociolek says parents can also help shield infants from RSV by limiting their exposure to large gatherings or people with cold symptoms.

Early symptoms of RSV — fever, cough and congestion — can look a lot like other respiratory ills, including COVID-19. Generally, Gesteland says, testing is the only way to know for sure which virus is the culprit.

According to the AAP, almost all youngsters recover from RSV on their own. But if a baby is wheezing or showing other signs of labored breathing, parents should call their pediatrician, Kociolek concludes.

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