



From Mayor Ashley Curry **Happy New Year!**

I realized at Thanksgiving how much we have for which to be thankful. In the recent State of the City address to the Chamber of Commerce, I shared that there are two major factors that have contributed to our city's success for 74 years and are especially responsible for the state of our city today: economic strength to provide services for a growing population; and quality of life for our residents that is second to none. Simply put, your city is in great shape and, for this, I am truly thankful.

There is something refreshing about the prospect of a new year. We are glad we made it through the present year and are excited to face a new year. In her classic book, "Anne of Green Gables," Lucy Maude Montgomery said, "Isn't it nice to think that tomorrow is a new day with no mistakes in it yet?" Resolutions are made for the new beginning of the New Year and hopefully there have been no mistakes yet.

Mark Twain said, "I always thought of resolutions as things that go in one year and out the other." National surveys indicate that around 93% of people that made resolutions last year failed to accomplish them. There are a wide range of New Year's resolutions out there but, to be met, they all have one thing in common – they have to be personally meaningful. A good New Year's resolution is one that exemplifies what you want for your life so that you are motivated to work toward your goal, even when you don't feel like it. So, in addition to the usual "lose weight, exercise more" resolutions, I think I will resolve to spend more time with my family and remember the blessing of having them here in Vestavia Hills.

The City also has some resolutions for 2025:

- The new Waldo's Chicken and Beer, Big Bad Breakfast and Guthrie's are anticipated to open in early 2025. These are the first of more developments to come for the south Highway 31 area.

- The pedestrian bridge connecting two of the most visited places in our city – Wald Park with the Library in the Forest – will begin to take shape and you will see a dream that started 20 years ago finally come to fruition.
- If you have not seen the ongoing development at Liberty Park, you will be pleasantly surprised. The buildings around the grand lawn at The Bray are quickly taking shape.
- The much-anticipated roadway and sidewalk improvements on Massey Road are underway and will be completed this year.
- You will hear more this year about the Veterans Memorial at Altadena Valley Park. The Council has approved the memorial and we are grateful to the Vestavia Hills Parks and Recreation Foundation for making the initial financial commitment and for coordinating the fundraising efforts for the building of this memorial.
- During February your elected officials and City leadership will engage in our annual strategic planning session. In determining future priorities for the City, we rely on the results of our anonymous citizen survey. The latest survey was distributed last month and we are eagerly awaiting the results. The priorities identified by our residents will be our resolutions (no pun intended) for this year.
- March kicks off a busy spring, but I want to specifically mention National Employee Appreciation Day. Our citizen surveys clearly indicate that our City employees have a high "customer satisfaction" rating from our citizens. They truly contribute to the quality-of-life that we enjoy in Vestavia Hills and we greatly appreciate their collective efforts.

I wish you all a happy and prosperous new year!

Community Calendar

January 2025

- 1 New Year's Day,** Municipal Offices Closed
- 2 Design Review Board,** Executive Conference Room, 6 p.m.
- 9 Planning and Zoning Commission,** Council Chamber, 6 p.m.
- 13 Senior Citizens Association Luncheon,** Civic Center, 12:00 p.m.
- 13 City Council Meeting,** Council Chamber, 6 p.m.
- 14 Chamber Luncheon,** Vestavia Country Club, 11:30 a.m.
- 16 Board of Zoning Adjustment,** Council Chamber, 6 p.m.
- 20 Martin Luther King Jr. Day,** Municipal Offices Closed
- 21 Parks and Recreation Board,** Civic Center, 7:30 a.m.
- 27 City Council Meeting,** Council Chamber, 6 p.m.
- 28 Viva Vestavia Hills,** Civic Center, 6:30 p.m. (Ticketed event)

February 2025

- TBD Council Work Session – Strategic Planning,** Council Chamber, 8 a.m.
- 2 Groundhog Day**
- 6 Design Review Board,** Executive Conference Room, 6 p.m.
- 10 Senior Citizens Association Luncheon,** Civic Center, 12:00 p.m.
- 10 City Council Meeting,** Council Chamber, 6 p.m.
- 11 Chamber Luncheon,** Vestavia Country Club, 11:30 a.m.
- 13 Planning and Zoning Commission,** Council Chamber, 6 p.m.
- 14 Valentine's Day**
- 18 Parks and Recreation Board,** Civic Center, 7:30 a.m.
- 20 Board of Zoning Adjustment,** Council Chamber, 6 p.m.
- 21-23 Severe Weather Preparedness Sales Tax Holiday**
- 24 City Council Meeting,** Council Chamber, 6 p.m.

(Continued on page 7)

Creating an Emotional Connection

If you are an event planner in our community, how would you respond to this text message:

“Did you do the planning for Deck the Heights? My husband works for Vestavia PD and he said he thought it was you?

I just wanted to message you and tell you that today was FANTASTIC!!! He usually works it but this was the first year me and the kids have been able to come and we had the best time! The different trolley stops all having fun attractions was unique – usually events are in just one central location. But this was like a progressive dinner party! This setup kept any one area from being too crowded. That was such a brilliant idea! Loved it!!

We got to see so much more of the city and experience different things – I had no idea Leaf and Petal was that beautiful! And the youth stringed ensemble music! I really loved it all. Such a great plan. Well done!

Of everything, mine and my 3 girl’s favorite thing ended up being the Holly Jolly Trolley!! Those girl elves were still going just as strong when they dropped us at our last stop at 7pm as they were when we first saw them around 5. They really brought some super fun Christmas cheer with their singalong songs and dances. We bypassed the other buses and waited on the trolley because we all enjoyed it so much. I wish I could’ve left them a tip; they SLAYED their elf role!! That was such a nice touch. If you know them, please tell them how much they added to the whole event! They were clearly exceptional given that they beat out the bouncy beach wave house for everyone’s favorite thing!

This message is overflowing with way too many exclamation points, but they’re all necessary! We all enjoyed tonight so much – I know it was some WORK and wanted to let you know how much we appreciate all the hard work and effort and funding that went in to planning, coordinating and executing this event. I wish I could leave Deck the Heights a public 5-star review! THANK YOU!!!!”

This is the actual text from a participant in the 2024 Deck the Heights event that took place in the Cahaba Heights community on November 16, 2024. The event is produced by the Cahaba Heights Merchants Association and spearheaded by business owner, Katherine McRee. This message is so inspiring to receive when I know all the hard work that Katherine and her team puts into events such as Deck the Heights.

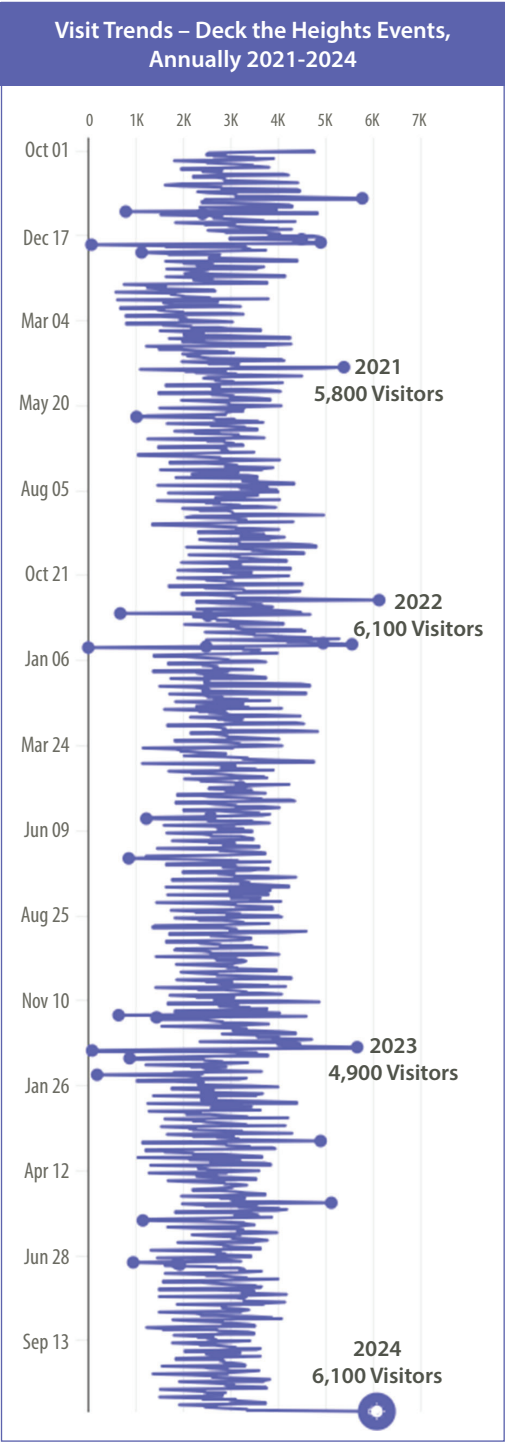
At a philosophical level, it also reaffirms a theme that our city government consistently reinforces – “When we have an emotional connection to our place, we are

less likely to leave it and far more likely to champion and defend it in the face of criticism. **We will fight for it.**” This mantra is taken from “For the Love of Cities” by author Peter Kageyama. His book provides great insights, espousing emotional connections and how those connections are critical for the long-term sustainability of a city. He further expresses a connection between economic development and emotional connectivity. The event attendee that sent the text has clearly established the emotional connection to our community!

Visitor metrics captured by Placer.AI, along with sales reports from business participants, validates our assumptions regarding the

economic value of an event like Deck the Heights. The reported event attendance is greater than 6,100 visitors – a record attendance for the event and acknowledgment that it is Vestavia Hills’ most attended gathering. Increased area business sales trends are very notable. Most importantly, the event brought attendees from all over the Birmingham region. Many of these attendees may be experiencing Vestavia Hills for the first time.

My take away is that we need to celebrate the success of Deck the Heights, replicate its success throughout our city and find more co-creators like Katherine McRee to make our city the most lovable city in the south. Are you in? I hope you are as the Vestavia Hill’s economic development team (aka Department of Fun) will continue our steady efforts at creating more emotional bonds just like the one verbalized in the very welcomed text. Keep on the look-out for other ways to engage in your community.



Loving Where You Live

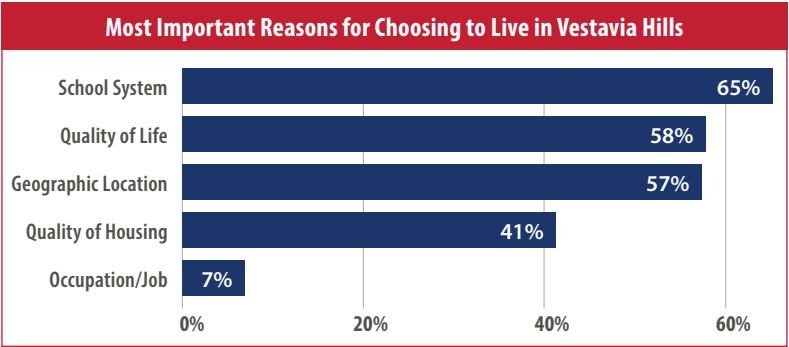
What makes a lovable city? Vestavia Hills City Manager Jeff Downes speaks of this often when talking about a vision for our city. He says a city has to have aesthetics that are intentionally pleasing, a good school system, quality jobs and places to greet and gather. Over the past decade, it is evident that the city has continued to focus on aesthetics and economic development through creative thinking and strategic visioning. This focus on continual improvement is a shared goal with our school system.

The city’s citizen survey consistently ranks our school system as the most important reason for living in Vestavia Hills. We want our schools to be why our community loves where it lives. There are many different ways that citizens in Vestavia Hills can get connected with our schools. You can read about several of those in this newsletter.

Our mission to provide every student the opportunity to learn without limits begins with a focus on academics. The magic that happens in our classrooms is largely because of the exemplary educators, like our Teachers of the Year, who challenge our students to be their best. Recently, Vestavia Hills City Schools received a 97 on our State Report Card. This fall, Vestavia Hills High School recognized 23 National Merit Semifinalists, the highest of any school in the state and the most at VHHS since 2006. Our graduates this past year earned a record-breaking amount of scholarship offers and set new highs in Advancement Placement test scores.

Learning takes on many other forms in our schools. Our community can fall in love with the impressive arts education programs in our schools by attending an event this spring. In addition to arts, there are a multitude of athletic activities that display the talents of our students. This fall, our tradition of success continued with our junior varsity and varsity cheerleaders winning the state championship.

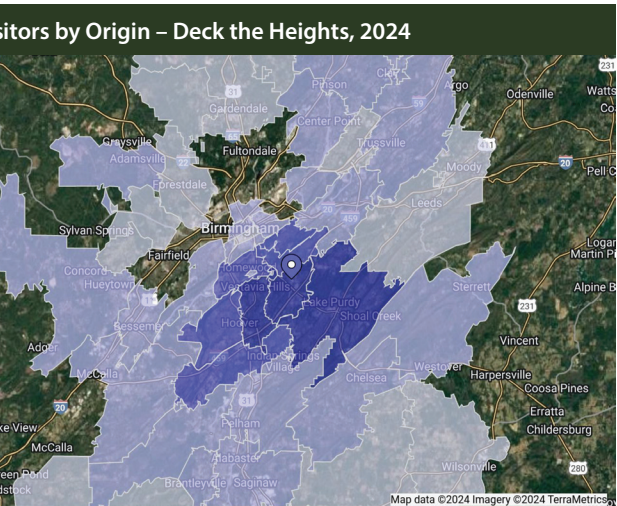
Finally, we want our alumni and all community members to continue to engage with our schools. Recently, we launched 1Legacy as a unique way that you can learn more about schools and stay connected with what we are doing. **You can learn more about these programs and more by visiting our website at www.vhcs.us.**



Student Performances

Vestavia Hills students are gearing up for an exciting season of artistic performances across dance, music and theater. The winter schedule is packed with competitions, concerts and showcases that highlight the district’s talented young performers.

Dance enthusiasts will see the Rebelette Dance Teams in action, with local competitions planned for January 10-11 and a national competition in Orlando from February 14-16. The team will compete in the National Dance Alliance (NDA) National Competition in Florida.



The Vestavia Hills High School Choir will host the Contempo Show Choir Competition on January 18 and compete in state competitions on January 25, February 1 and February 8. Middle school choirs from Liberty Park and Pizitz will travel to Nashville on February 7, while the Pizitz Middle School Symphonic Band will perform at the Alabama Music Educator Association (AMEA) Annual Conference in Birmingham on January 24. The district will also celebrate its musical talent at the 4th annual Vestavia Sings event on February 24, featuring performances from VHHS and both middle schools.

Theater lovers can look forward to Pizitz Middle School’s Theatre Department production of “Finding Nemo” on March 15, promising a delightful performance for the community. The show is open to the public.

These events showcase the rich artistic talents of Vestavia Hills students and provide them with valuable opportunities to demonstrate their skills in various performing arts disciplines.



Celebrating Outstanding Educators

Vestavia Hills City Schools is kicking off the new year by celebrating outstanding educators.

Each fall, the faculty and staff of each of our nine schools select a Teacher of the Year who embodies our mission of learning without limits. Out of this pool of teachers, the district then selects an Elementary Teacher of the Year and a Secondary Teacher of the Year. These two teachers may be selected as Alabama Teacher of the Year and, ultimately, National Teacher of the Year.

This year's Teachers of the Year are **Amy Ashley**, Vestavia Hills Elementary Dolly Ridge; **Lindsay Bass**, Liberty Park Middle School; **Lauren Boykin**, Vestavia Hills Elementary Liberty Park; **Malorie Bryan**, Vestavia Hills Elementary West; **Heather Chavers**, Vestavia Hills Elementary East; **Abby Jaillet**, Vestavia Hills High School; and **Lera Wade**, Louis Pizitz Middle School.

Our Elementary Teacher of the Year is **Haley Wright**, Vestavia Hills Elementary Cahaba Heights; and Secondary Teacher of the Year is **Ann Pickens**, Vestavia Hills High School Freshman Campus.

The school system is also honoring its fifth class of inductees into the Vestavia Hills City Schools Hall of Fame. Each year, new members of the Hall of Fame are selected by committee from nominations submitted by the Vestavia Hills community. Inductees in the Hall of Fame's class of 2024 include **Kim**

Bain, band director at Louis Pizitz Middle School from 2006 to 2021; **Reba Clark**, director of guidance, curriculum

and instruction at the Vestavia Hills Board of Education from 1970 to 1991 (who will be inducted posthumously); **Barbara Gajewski**, social studies teacher, psychology teacher and counselor at Vestavia Hills High School from 1980 to 2010, and again from 2013 to 2021; **George Hatchett**, physical education teacher and health teacher at Louis Pizitz Middle School, and boys' basketball head coach at Vestavia Hills High School from 1977 to 2016; and **Melvise Mann**, second grade teacher at Vestavia Hills Elementary East and West from 1975 to 2005.

Teachers of the Year and Hall of Fame inductees will be honored at a special ceremony Monday, January 27 at 6:30 p.m. at the Vestavia Hills Civic Center. **The event is free and open to the public.**



STEM Success

The inaugural year of the elementary STEM program at Vestavia Hills City Schools has been marked by enthusiasm, hands-on learning and the cultivation of essential 21st-century skills. Across all grade levels, students have been immersed in a diverse curriculum that spans computer science, engineering, robotics and space exploration. Every student in all five Vestavia Hills elementary schools participates in this new STEM class each week.

A cornerstone of the STEM curriculum has been the introduction of computer science concepts through age-appropriate coding activities. Students are learning coding languages to build a solid foundation in programming logic and problem-solving skills.

A key focus of the STEM program has been teaching students the engineering and design process. Through project-based learning curriculum, students are identifying problems, creating plans, drawing blueprints, designing and building prototypes and testing their designs in classrooms specifically created for hands-on learning.

Throughout all these projects, a strong emphasis has been placed on teamwork and collaboration. Students are learning to work together, share ideas and solve problems collectively – skills that will serve them well in their future academic and professional endeavors.

As the school year progresses, students can look forward to many more exciting projects and discoveries in the STEM lab. The program has successfully created an environment where creativity flourishes, teamwork is valued and students are empowered to explore the fascinating world of STEM.

Vestavia Hills City Schools would like to express its gratitude to the founding partners of its elementary STEM program: Sens. Jabo Waggoner and Dan Roberts, Rep. Jim Carns and Mike Shaw, the Vestavia Hills City Schools Foundation, all five Vestavia Hills City Schools elementary PTOs, Schneider Electric, Lathan Architects and Shipt. If you would like to partner with VHCS in support of the elementary STEM program, please contact the Board of Education today.



Haley Wright
Elementary Teacher
of the Year



Ann Pickens
Secondary Teacher
of the Year

1LEGACY Connecting Alumni and Community Members

1Legacy is a dynamic network of Vestavia Hills City Schools alumni and community members committed to strengthening our schools and enriching the local community. Our schools are the cornerstone of our community and we want everyone involved in supporting their success. Through 1Legacy, we aim to create lasting connections between alumni, current students and the broader community, fostering collaboration, volunteerism and mutual support. We are building this robust network to directly support the academic goals and extracurricular activities of our schools. Additionally, we keep the community informed about important school events and celebrate the success of VHHS alumni and Vestavia Hills community members who give back in meaningful ways.

Best of all, joining 1Legacy is FREE! As a member, you'll receive monthly newsletters to keep you updated on school activities and

ways to get involved. We believe the strength of our community is directly tied to the strength of our schools and it takes all of us—alumni, parents, local businesses and residents—to make that happen.

We encourage you to learn more about 1Legacy and how you can be part of this exciting initiative by visiting 1legacy.me.

We're also excited to launch 1Legacy with a Legacy Walk at VHHS, featuring engraved bricks that commemorate the milestones of our school community. The Class of 2025 will have the first chance to purchase a brick, with proceeds benefiting the school. Senior Day in May will be a special celebration, honoring the achievements of the Class of 2025 and the collective efforts of our community—past, present and future. Join us as we come together to make a lasting impact on our schools and community.

Keeping Children Safe Online

Parents, guardians, caregivers, and teachers can take the following measures to help protect children from becoming victims of online child predators.

- **Discuss internet safety and develop an online safety plan with children before they engage in online activity.** Establish clear guidelines, teach children to spot red flags, and encourage children to have open communication with you.
- **Supervise young children's use of the internet, including periodically checking their profiles and posts.** Keep electronic devices in open, common areas of the home and consider setting time limits for their use.
- **Review games, apps and social media sites before they are downloaded or used by children.** Pay particular attention to apps and sites that feature end-to-end encryption, direct messaging, video chats, file uploads and user anonymity, which are frequently relied upon by online child predators.
- **Adjust privacy settings and use parental controls for online games, apps, social media sites and electronic devices.**
- **Tell children to avoid sharing personal information, photos and videos online in public forums or with people they do not know in real life.** Explain to your children that images posted online will be permanently on the internet.
- **Teach children about body safety and boundaries,** including the importance of saying 'no' to inappropriate requests both in the physical world and the virtual world.
- **Be alert to potential signs of abuse,** including changes in children's use of electronic devices, attempts to conceal online activity, withdrawn behavior, angry outbursts, anxiety and depression.
- **Encourage children to tell a parent, guardian or other trusted adult if anyone asks them to engage in sexual activity or other inappropriate behavior.**
- **Immediately report suspected online enticement or sexual exploitation of a child** by calling 911, contacting the Vestavia Hills Police Department at 205.978.0140, contacting the FBI at tips.fbi.gov or filing a report with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 800.843.5678 or report.cybertip.org.



Information published by the U.S. Department of Justice, <https://www.justice.gov/criminal/criminal-ceos/keeping-children-safe-online>.

Space Heater Safety

Vestavia Hills has a history of some mild winters, but we can also have some very chilly days and nights. The Vestavia Hill Fire Department wants you to stay warm and safe to prevent house fires. Space heaters, if used correctly, can keep you warm without putting your home at risk.

The National Fire Protection Association states that space heaters contribute to one-third of home-heating fires. Let's do our part to keep everyone warm and safe with these simple recommendations:

- **Provide at least three feet of clearance from flammable objects.** Blankets and furniture can catch fire after a few minutes if left too close.
- **Keep kids and pets away from the heater.** They do not know which parts of the heater can burn them.
- **Keep the space heater on the floor** to minimize the risk of falling over and scorching your carpet or rug. Most models will turn off if knocked over, but it is far better to be safe than sorry.
- **DO NOT leave the room unattended with a space heater.** Other tasks may cause you to forget the space heater is on.



A Greener Future for Everyone!

Arbor Week in Alabama:
Last full week of February

Arbor Day:
April 25, 2025

Arbor Day is celebrated to:

- Recognize the value trees provide to communities: cleaning the air and water; providing shade; cooling urban areas; reducing stress and supporting wildlife
- Learn about trees
- Plant trees
- Promote health and well-being
- Mitigate global warming

TREE CITY USA

Adult Sports

Soccer

Registration
January 16-February 6

Fees
Competitive: \$1600 per team
Recreational: \$900 per team

Basketball

Registration
January 22-February 13

Fees
\$550 per team

Register online at <https://teamsideline.com/sites/vhparksandrec/content/1108/Program-Registration>.

Active Adults (55+)

Senior Trip
Travel with Diamond Tours to scenic Massachusetts! Visit Boston, Salem and Cape Ann

Trip Dates
June 17-25

Costs
Total cost of \$1,195 per person when sharing a double room; \$75 deposit due by January 30.

Price includes lodging, admission to activities and some meals.

Contact Sandi Wilson at swilson@vhal.org for more information.

For more information about any of these programs or events, call 205.978.0166 or visit www.vhparksandrec.com

March 2025

- 6 Design Review Board, Executive Conference Room, 6 p.m.
- 10 Senior Citizens Association Luncheon, Civic Center, 12:00 p.m.
- 10 City Council Meeting, Council Chamber, 6 p.m.
- 11 Chamber Luncheon, Vestavia Country Club, 11:30 a.m.
- 13 Planning and Zoning Commission, Council Chamber, 6 p.m.
- 17 St. Patrick's Day
- 17 Council Work Session, Council Chamber 6 p.m.
- 18 Parks and Recreation Board, Civic Center, 7:30 a.m.
- 20 Board of Zoning Adjustment, Council Chamber, 6 p.m.
- 24 City Council Meeting, Council Chamber, 6 p.m.
- 24-28 Vestavia Hills City Schools Spring Break

For additional event dates or to subscribe to the City calendar, visit vhal.org/calendar.



KEEP THE FOUNTAIN FLOWING!

Please Help the Vestavia Hills Men's Garden Club Save the Fountain!

After decades of use, the Fountain is in need of repair. As a non-profit, we are asking for your help. Please consider giving to our GoFundMe and help us Save the Fountain.

Donations are tax-deductible.

Please consider donating:

<https://gofund.me/531d3efe>



Vestavia Hills
Men's
Garden Club



Only Rain in the Storm Drain!

What happens when debris enters storm drains?

- It is **ILLEGAL!** Violators who put leaves, clippings or other materials in the storm drains are subject to fines or, when warranted, additional enforcement by the City.
- Clogged storm drains may result in **flooding**, creating safety hazards and causing property damage.
- Rotting leaves cause **algae blooms in water bodies**, harming plants and animals and reducing water quality.
- Debris clogging storm drains can be a breeding ground for **rodents and insects**.
- Cleaning out clogged storm drains **costs taxpayers money!**

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

FEB 14-17

vestavialibrary.org/birdcount

Photo by Lance Shores



A taste of Vestavia Hills Restaurants and Fine Wines

Presented by the
Vestavia Hills Chamber of Commerce Foundation
benefiting the Chamber Foundation
Scholarship & Capital Funds

January 28, 2025, 6:30-9:00 pm

Vestavia Hills Civic Center
1090 Montgomery Highway
Vestavia Hills, AL 35216

Tickets: \$50 each

On sale NOW at <https://www.vestaviiahills.org>



VESTAVIA HILLS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

presents

Guest Speaker, Patrick H. Boone

Monday, April 21 at 2pm – Vestavia Hills City Hall

In the past 45+ years, Patrick Boone has worked with numerous administrations in the City of Vestavia Hills, school superintendents and board members, and has played a part in the city's growth, from the inception of the school system to the annexations of Cahaba Heights and Liberty Park.



COMMUNITY NEWS

1032 Montgomery Highway
Vestavia Hills, AL 35216

PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
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PERMIT #585

Tickets \$25

SEAN DIETRICH

MAR 25 • 10:30 AM

vestavialibrary.org

TALK BUSINESS TUESDAYS

COMING JANUARY 2025

Meet and learn about businesses & organizations in
Vestavia Hills

vestavialibrary.org/talkbusiness