

# Mature

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BROOKS BRINGS  
HISTORY TO LIFE  
WITH HIS B17...**

SEE PAGE 11

Volume 6, Issue 4  
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***Do you have a story for us?***

***Let us know by calling 912-367-2468 or via email at [matureliving@atc.cc](mailto:matureliving@atc.cc).***

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# Playing his way through Life

By Mary Ann Ellis

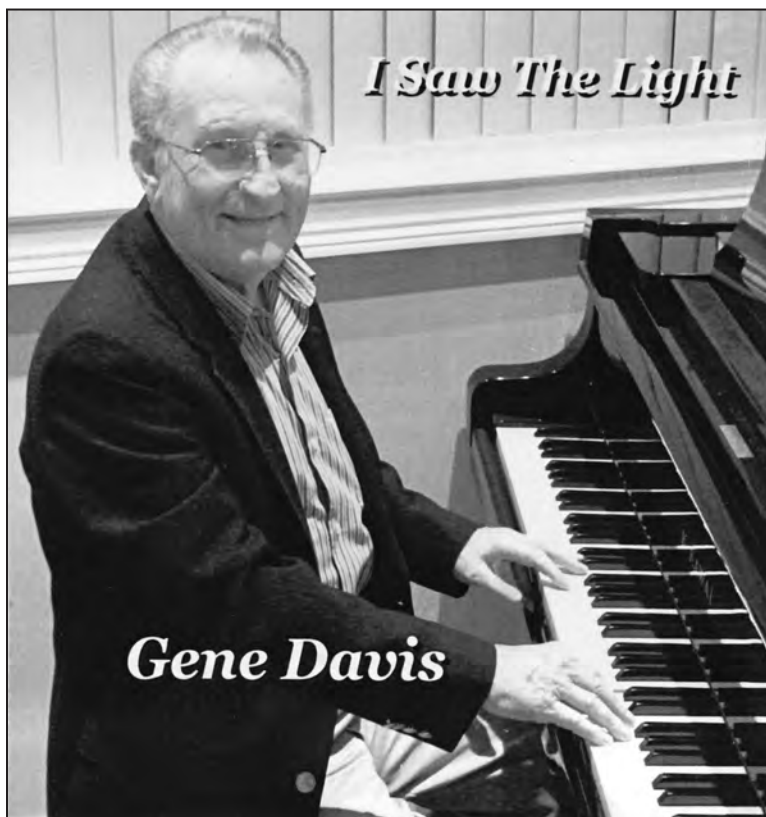
“When I turned 65,” Gene Davis said, “I retired, and I haven’t missed a day of work here at Davis Floor Covering since, except for those 4 weeks I had to take off when I had open-heart surgery back in ’03. I started this business in the early 70s and people have been good to me. This is a family business and my son has the store over close to Waycross. It’s Tom Davis Flooring. I’m a retired musician, too, but I play 3 or 4 funerals a week and I play at the Hunter Opera House with the Floyd Hunter Band pretty often. Man, that’s fun.”

He’s extremely busy for a retired man.

When Gene Davis was born at home in 1938, he arrived with a caul over his face. People have long been superstitious about this condition and this doctor was no different. He said to Gene’s mother, “This child will either be very talented or excellent in math.”

Turns out he is both. Daughter Gina Lewis, who works in the store with him, says that when someone asks for estimates on the cost of flooring, Gene will have the answer for him before she can get her calculator out.

Gene grew up on the edge of Pierce County and graduated from high school there. He can’t remember when he didn’t play the piano. His mother, Myrtle Davis, said that when he was barely 3, she’d set him on her lap at the



GENE DAVIS IS SHOWN ON THE COVER OF ONE OF HIS CDS.

piano and he would pick out songs with his small fingers. Once when he was fairly young, she took him to Blackshear for a piano lesson. When she returned to pick him up, the teacher told her, “There’s no point in bringing him back. He can play everything I can and better.”

That was the beginning and the end of his formal music training, but he’s played all over the country, especially here in the south, for his whole life.

Gene is no stranger to fame. When he was still in high school, his FFA teacher, S.V. Lee started an FFA String Band. It

won state competition. Mr. Lee was able to win state with his bands for the next 4 years, which earned them a place in the Georgia Music Hall of Fame. Gene moved from there to a career in music.

After high school, he attended some classes at a UGA satellite site until he was drafted into the army in 1958. They offered him the position of Chaplain’s assistant and he snatched it up.

“I had lots of free time,” he laughed. “All I had to do was play the organ on Sunday mornings and practice with the choir occasionally. Week nights I was out and about playing music with those boys in Texas—boys like Charlie Walker and Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. We had a lot of fun. That was the ideal job for me.”



Once while they were in Texas, he came home and told his wife he'd administered the last rites to someone that day.

"What?" she demanded.

"How on earth could you do that? You're not even Catholic?"

"Well, the chaplain wasn't there and we were desperate," he replied.

Another time he married a couple in the chaplain's stead.

"Was that even legal?" Margie asked.

"I don't know, but the next 50 years will tell the tale," he laughed.

Right out of the army, Gene went to work with

O'Quinn Auction Company out of Appling County. He worked with Bill Parker, Farnell O'Quinn, Lawton O'Quinn, Joe Frank Miles and many others. They had a good time traveling around the area selling property. He moved from that to the music business.

He spent 20 years playing with the Stateliners, mostly at a night club and restaurant called the Flowing Well, but they played at other places in the south Georgia/north Florida area as well. Big names on

the Billboard in Nashville would come down and play with them.

"When Ernest Tubb came, tickets sold out 3 months in advance," Gene

played on a cruise ship out of Panama City from May to October, but he was home Monday through Thursday.

"Man, that was fun!"



**MEMBERS OF THE PIERCE COUNTY F.F.A. STRING BAND, 1955 STATE CHAMPIONS, POSE WITH JERRY REED (CENTER) INCLUDING RUDY THOMAS, WENDELL WILLIAMS, DOUG THOMAS AND GENE DAVIS.**

said. "We played with guys like John Conlee, George Jones, Ferlin Husky, Charlie Rich, and Marty Robbins. We had a different star every Saturday night. I really enjoyed that."

Gene played as a studio musician in Nashville for quite some time, and in 1976, he played with the original Hank Williams band when they got back together. They played "Rag Mop" together and then the band members reciprocated by playing on one of Gene's CDs.

From 1985 to 1988, he

Gene exclaimed.

Next he played with a band called Borderline from '89-'04. They won many awards. For example, they won second in the nation at the Coca-Cola Country Music Showdown in 1991.

Currently, Gene plays with Floyd Hunter and his band in Appling County.

"This is my favorite band to play with," Gene said. "They are my kind of people. We never play for money unless we are helping someone in need. Then we'll take a collec-

tion. I especially appreciate Mr. Herbert Hunter, who built the Opera House in memory of his wife, who was killed in a car accident.

They liked to go to hear

music played, so he built the place in her honor. Lots of people enjoy it. It's always packed."

"We play for fun, but it's good to help folks out, too, you know," Gene says seriously. "We're getting old and we mainly entertain older people. I'm 76, old as dirt. I play a lot at my church, too. I go to Big Creek. You know Bill Stone from over in Appling County is our pastor. I've got a lot of

ties over there. I used to play with Wayne Bullard from Baxley. He was one of the best musicians I've ever played with, barring none."

That's the way Gene feels about playing at funerals, too. He wants to help people whenever they need him.

Gene served Bacon County for three terms as a county commissioner. He said he wanted to help the county and himself by curbing the spending of tax dollars. On the board of Okefenokee Tech for

11 years, he served the last 3 as chairman.

Back in 1985, the county named Gene Citizen of the Year and Governor Joe Frank Harris flew in to make the presentation. All the people conspired to keep the presentation a secret. Gene looked around the building, saw his daughter Gina, and wondered why she was there, but he soon found out. After the ceremony, Gina asked the governor to hold four-month-old baby Michael, Gene's first grandchild, while she took a picture. When she took the baby back a couple of minutes later, she noticed that the governor's left arm was wet.

"Pampers weren't as good back then as they are now," Gina laughed. "We tell Michael that he has a unique claim to fame."

Gene Davis is also a Mason. He's been a member of the Bacon County Lodge 56 for about 20 years.

Gene and his wife, Margie, have four children: Gina Lewis, Lisa Lane, Kealey Hester, and Tom Davis. They have ten grandchildren, three great grandchildren, and are expecting two more.

One of Gene's grandsons plays the piano by ear, too. Apparently the talent runs in the family because Gene's father played the fiddle.

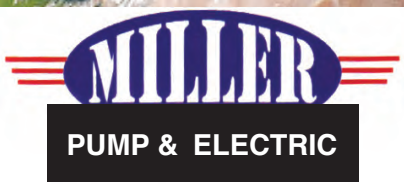
Gene Davis has played all over the country and even



**GENE AND MARGIE DAVIS.**



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several places outside, actually. He's played in Mexico, Canada, and Aruba. Music has brought much joy to his life and still does. Other than his family, music has been the best thing in his life.

"Everybody knows me," Gene said. "It's even helped me in my business. My friends keep me going."

Of course his natural

sales ability has helped build his business, too. Daughter Gina says he could sell ice to an Eskimo.

"He really cares about people, though," she said. "I think they can sense that. His customers come back time after time and send others, too. They like him and want to do business

with him."

He still records music, too. He's done a total of 22 albums, tapes, or CDs, depending on the year. Time and technology have changed during his career. Today he is pleased to be able to use Roy Crosby's big recording studio in Bacon County. He does all his recording there.

People even come down some times from Nashville to use it.

The fact is that Gene Davis has enjoyed his life and continues to do so. As long as he has his music and his family, he'll be just fine, no matter what comes along. He'll just keep right on playing until the Lord calls him home. ¶

## Did you know?

Cardiac arrest is the abrupt loss of heart function in a person who may or may not have been diagnosed with heart disease. Though often mistaken as the same thing as a heart attack, cardiac arrest is not the same. Heart attacks can cause cardiac arrest and even lead to death, but the cause of heart attack and cardiac arrest are different. According to the American Heart Association, heart attacks are caused by a blockage that stops blood from flowing to the heart. Though heart muscle tissue dies because of this lack of blood supply, heart attacks do not always result in death. Cardiac arrest is caused by an electrical malfunction of the heart, which suddenly stops working properly. This can be arrhythmia, a condition that occurs when the heart beats irregularly or abnormally. Once the heart has stopped during cardiac arrest, death can occur within minutes. However, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR, can reverse cardiac arrest. A defibrillator will be used to shock the heart, which can restore the it to a normal rhythm in just a few minutes. Because cardiac arrest is so sudden and strikes without warning, it's imperative that men and women who are with someone they believe is in cardiac arrest take action immediately.



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# Successful ways to stretch retirement savings

Many budding retirees plan to travel, relax and enjoy the company of their spouses when they officially stop working. But such plans only are possible if men and women take steps to secure their financial futures in retirement.

According to a recent survey by the personal finance education site MoneyTips.com, roughly one-third of Baby Boomers have no retirement plan. The reason some may have no plan is they have misconceptions about how much money they will need in retirement. Successful retirees understand the steps to take and how to live on a budget.

- Have a plan. Many people simply fail to plan

for retirement. Even men and women who invest in an employer-sponsored retirement programs, such as a 401(k), should not make that the only retirement planning they do. Speak with a financial advisor who can help you develop a plan that ensures you don't outlive your assets.

- Set reasonable goals. Retirement nest eggs do not need to be enormous. Many retirees have a net worth of less than \$1 million, and many people live comfortably on less than \$100,000 annually. When planning for retirement, don't be dissuaded because you won't be buying a vineyard or villa in Europe. Set reasonable goals for your retirement and make

sure you meet those goals.

- Recognize there is no magic wealth-building plan. Saving comes down to formulating a plan specific to your goals, resources, abilities, and skills. Make saving a priority and take advantage of employer-sponsored retirement programs if they are offered.

- Don't underestimate spending. You will need money in retirement, and it's best that you don't underestimate just how much you're going to need. No one wants to be stuck at home during retirement, when people typically want to enjoy themselves and the freedom that comes with retirement. Speak to a financial planner to develop a reasonable esti-

mate of your living expenses when you plan to retire.

- Pay down or avoid debt while you can. Retiring with debt is a big risk. Try to eliminate all of your debts before you retire and, once you have, focus your energy on growing your investments and/or saving money for retirement.

- Start early on retirement saving. It's never too early to begin saving for retirement. Although few twentysomethings are thinking about retirement, the earlier you begin to invest the more time you have to grow your money. Enroll in a retirement plan now so you have a larger nest egg when you reach retirement age.



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It's hard to believe that we are approaching the finale of another great year. Mature Living in the Southeast is very appreciative of the support we continue to receive from the Southeast Georgia area. Without our advertisers, readers and supporters we know that this magazine would not be possible... Thank You!

This final issue of 2014 is packed with amazing stories about our friends and neighbors. I am always

amazed at the real life stories featured in each issue.

As we approach the holiday season let me wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Know that we are already planning for 2015 and look forward to serving you for many years to come. If we can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to give us a call at 912-367-2468 or email us at [matureliving@atc.cc](mailto:matureliving@atc.cc).

**-Jamie Gardner**

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# Rescuing the Flying Heroes of WWII

By Mary Ann Ellis

Elton D. (Don) Brooks, Jr. grew up in Douglas, attended the public schools there, went to South Georgia College for two years, and then to Northwood University in Midland, Michigan, where he earned a degree in business. His father, Elton, Sr., and his uncles started Brooks Auto Parts in 1937 in McRae, but Elton, Sr. moved to Douglas to start the second store. Don grew up in the business, so he naturally assumed the management of the

store when his father succumbed to cancer in 1978. He married a local girl, Donnell Lewis, and they have one son, Elton III.

Born in 1950 shortly after World War II, Don has always been fascinated with aviation and its history. His father was a tail-gunner on a B17 bomber, a four engine heavy bomber known as the Flying Fortress. He encouraged Don to learn to fly and he obtained his private pilot's license in 1979. He has enjoyed his business, but his hobby has fascinated him. As he flew more and more, he decided that it would be great to find a B17 from WWII, restore it, and fly it around the country so people could see it and become more aware of their own history. He



THE LIBERTY BELLE, PILOTED BY DON BROOKS, FLYING OVER THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE.

believes that it's so important that people not forget what happened in WWII.

"The first one I ever saw was spraying fire ants in Coffee County in the 60s," Don said.

From flying into and out of the Peachtree Dekalb Airport, Don knew Pat Epps of Epps Air Service in Atlanta. In the fall of 1988, he learned that Pat had located a group of planes in Greenland, including two B17s and six P38s. The B17s were bombers, and the P38 fighters were the first planes to go over 400mph. They were the hot rods of planes. This squadron had been on its way to England early during WWII and made an emergency landing on the ice cap in Greenland because they ran low on fuel. The Coast Guard rescued the

25 crew members and abandoned the planes.

Many groups had searched for this lost squadron to no avail. Now Pat Epps had joined the search. Pat Epps formed the Greenland Expedition Society (GES), and in 1988 with the help of modern technology, the society found the planes covered with 270 feet of ice and snow. Don Brooks knew immediately that he wanted to be a part of this expedition. He called Pat, who put him in charge of logistics. It became his job to arrange supplies, tools, equipment, food, etc. for the group. They purchased a C47, the Sky Train, to transport these supplies. This plane had been an invaluable work horse during the war, carrying wounded soldiers back to hospitals, towing gliders, and delivering supplies. Don's group added skis to their C47 to prepare for the snow and ice in Greenland.

At that time Denmark controlled Greenland and the GES had to have permission from the Danish government to search for the planes. The U.S. Air Force refused to give the group the planes, but it did write a letter saying it would not contest ownership should the group find them. Pat's group made big expeditions in '89, '90, and '92. During the '89 excursion, the group worked desperately to bring up just a small piece of one of the planes to prove



**SHOWN IS DON BROOKS' FATHER'S B17 CREW IN FRONT OF THE ORIGINAL LIBERTY BELLE. ELTON SR. IS STANDING 2ND FROM THE LEFT. THE CREW TRAINED AND FLEW AS A 10-MAN CREW AND THESE 7 MADE IT HOME AFTER 35 MISSIONS. THE OTHER 3 CREW MEMBERS WERE KILLED IN ACTION.**

to the Danish government that the planes really existed; else the government would cancel their permit. They did manage to accomplish that task, but the problem of how to recover a plane still remained. The equivalent of a 27 story building of ice rested between them and the planes.

1990 saw the arrival of a large contractor from Vermont who claimed he could recover a plane. He failed. Still determined, Don returned to Douglas and started to work. He designed a machine to melt the ice and then pump the water out. They took his machine to Greenland and it worked well. They melted a 4 foot diameter shaft down to the B17, pumping water out as they worked. Then they



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melted a cave around the plane itself.

“Once down there,” Don said, “we discovered that the plane had been crushed by the weight of all that ice. We packed and came home without the plane, of course.

Nonetheless, we had accomplished one goal and ended a quest. I felt satisfied to some degree. We’d solved a big mystery, but I still didn’t have my B17.”

In 1991, the key people from the 1990 expedition got together in Atlanta for a powwow. They remembered that the engine cowl-

ing on the B17 had not been crushed or damaged. Perhaps the P38s might be in better shape. They had been built stronger to withstand aerobic maneuvers.

“I think they’re crushed, too,” Pat Epps said, shaking his head.

“How will you feel when someone else goes up there and brings one back?” Don asked him.

“Guess we’d better go back,” Pat finally agreed.

Once again they prepared for an expedition. They went up in the summer of ’92. They were on site four months recovering one of the P38s and

they did bring it back this time. It had been damaged by the weight of the ice but could be rebuilt. They sold it to Roy Shoffner, a member of their group, who rebuilt it.

“It is undoubtedly the

Greenland to Iceland, and then to Scotland, from which they could reach any place in Europe. Don discovered that a B17 with navigation problems had landed on a frozen freshwater lake just before

the crew and retrieved one of the caskets. The second one was in the bomb bay and they couldn’t get it out. When Don got down there and found that casket, he knew he’d found the right plane.



**DON AND HIS C47 ON THE GREENLAND ICE CAP.**

best restoration of a WWII fighter in existence. Everything is original to the plane. When Roy died, the family sold it to a California business, who sold it Rod Lewis in San Antonio, Texas,” Don said. “I still see it frequently in big air shows.”

Since Don still didn’t have a B17, he started looking again. He went to Dyke Lake in Labrador, which was a part of the Northern Ferry Route designed to get American troops to Europe during WWII. Planes would fly from Bangor, Maine, to Goosebay, Labrador, to

Christmas in 1947. The spring thaw dropped the plane into the lake.

First came the problem of government rules and regulations. Don haggled with three administrations before he achieved any success. In 2002, they finally agreed for divers to check out the condition of the plane. Don, a certified diver himself, went down to check it out.

The plane rested 5 or 6 miles from the spot it had landed on. Don’s research told him that the plane had been carrying two caskets when it went down. The Coast Guard had rescued

Still the gov- ernments fought. The federal gov- ernment said yes; the provincial government said no. In despera- tion, Don hired a lawyer well- schooled in sal- vage laws. Da- vid Horan, who had been a naval aviator, went to Canada and won the case after two years in court. Don got the sal- vage rights.

David called him and said, “Go get your plane before they change their minds.”

Don did just that. They put air bags under the wings and fuselage and floated it to the surface. Then they towed it with small boats across the reservoir, disas- sembled it with a crane, loaded it on big trucks and hauled it back to Douglas, Georgia. Don had his B17—his first one, that is.

While all the confusion was going on in Labrador, Don felt he’d never acquire that plane so he had continued to search. In

**Continues on page 15**

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Continued from page 13

Kissimmee, Florida, he found that Tom Reilly was rebuilding a B17 for a major corporation. Tom had rebuilt more WWII planes than anyone else in the world. When the company decided to stop the project, the plane went up for sale. Don set up the Liberty Foundation, a 501C3 non-profit foundation, bought the plane, and paid Tom Reilly to finish rebuilding it. The foundation now has quite a staff of volunteers - mechanics, pilots, sales people, etc.

They flew the plane the first time in December of 2004. Don finally had a B17 he could fly around to honor veterans and to educate the public. Today, they fly the plane nine months out of the year, selling rides to defray the costs. It pays for itself. Often veterans show up with their families and enjoy a day of stories and remembrances. They speak of missions they have flown and of losing friends. Something about seeing the plane again brings on the memories.

Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon, flew with them. They even let him pilot the B17 for a while.

“He told us he’d never flown a B17,” Don said. “We considered him pretty well qualified, so we let him fly it. He didn’t even crash us.”



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The B17 was the glamor plane of the war, but the C47 turned out to be the historical one. Don had a professional researcher trace the plane's missions and found that it flew in the Normandy Invasion to resupply missions. It flew in Operation Market Garden when the Americans were surrounded and cut off. They had to fly in supplies under heavy fire and one third of the squadron was shot down. In



**DON BROOKS AND HIS SON, ELTON, TOURING A WORLD WAR II AIR BASE IN ENGLAND WHERE DON'S FATHER WAS STATIONED DURING THE WAR.**

1993 a group of veteran paratroopers from WWII called Don.

"Will you fly your C47 over Saint-Mère-Église in France for us?" they asked. "We want to jump out exactly where we did fifty years ago."

"But the plane is painted red," Don said. "We'd have to repaint it and it needs a new engine before making such a trip."

They agreed with him

that the situation was not feasible and said they'd look elsewhere. They found two other planes, but the company went bankrupt and ruined their plans. Back they came to Don. Amazingly enough, after working day and night for two months, they managed to repaint the plane in its original colors and military markings. Don and Pat Epps flew 25 hours to get there,



**BROOKS AND RAY FOWLER, WHO IS CIEF PILOT OF THE LIBERTY FOUNDATION THAT CURRENTLY OPERATES THE B17 MEPHIS BELLE, ARE SHOWN ON A CONTROL TOWER AT AN ENGLISH WWII AIRBASE.**

but in spite of losing and replacing an engine, they made it to France in time for the D-Day celebration. Twenty-six men jumped out of a C47 just as they had on D-Day fifty years before.

According to Dwight Eisenhower, the C47 was one of seven machines that helped win WWII. It also hauled survivors out of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp at the end of the war.

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“Normally, I’d load 25 passengers in the plane at once,” said one pilot, “but those people were so thin that I put in 50.”

The C47 also flew British POWs home at the end of the war. They cried when they saw the White Cliffs of Dover.

Don flew a B17 back to England, also. The English people remember and honor American veterans. The fields where the planes landed during the war have now returned to farming, but they landed at a nearby airport. He took volunteers from the local museum up over the base. Ducksford, a city near Cambridge, has many restored airplanes and they do air shows. Everyone was delighted to see a B17 there. While he was there, he got permission to fly a mere 1000 ft. over Buckingham Palace, the Thames River, and the Tower of London.

One of the B17s - the Liberty Belle - had an in-flight fire that damaged the plane severely, but it’s currently being rebuilt. The crew was able to land it successfully in a cornfield. No one was hurt, fortunately.

The Memphis Belle was the first B17 to fly 25 missions with all its crew members still alive. Don’s group has been leasing and touring the “movie” version of that B17 for three years now, and it is doing great.

Don Brooks knows how fortunate he is to have

been so involved with these planes and the adventures they brought him. He’s enjoyed every minute of it. The C47 sits out at the Douglas Airport. No local hangar is large enough for it, so it sits in the weather year round. Don spends a lot of his time out at the

airport, too. Don’s son is a pilot as well and earned his license his senior year in college. He doesn’t fly much anymore though because he farms and has added heavy-duty truck parts to the store’s service line. Don’s wife Donnell

has been quite supportive of his hobby throughout the years, even though she often stayed behind while he flew off here and yonder. Good times, good family and good friends lead to great stories and Don Brooks says that he has truly been blessed. ¶



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# Give your Christmas a country feel

Christmas decorations can range from grandiose lighting displays to more subtle adornments. Some families may prefer more traditional holiday decor, while others might like the look of modern trimmings.

Holiday decorations can also be used to create an atmosphere reminiscent of a certain type of locale, giving a home a holiday in the city vibe or a more rustic feel. For those who prefer a rustic look reminiscent of a country Christmas, consider the following tips.

\* Start with the tree. The Christmas tree is the center of many a home's holiday decor, and those who want to create a country Christmas can start with their tree. Instead of traditional holiday lights, choose lights that look like candles while adorning the tree with wooden orna-

ments and strands of popcorn.

\* Forgo traditional wrapping paper. Instead of flashy, store-bought wrapping paper, wrap presents in brown paper and put presents under the tree as early as possible. Instead of store-bought gift tags, create your own and attach a candy cane or another candy to the gift.

\* Think nature with decorations. Items gathered from nature can give a home a rustic appeal during the holidays. Hang a homemade wreath on the front door and include pine cones and clippings from evergreen trees when adding decorative accents around the house. Tuck a few decorative woven baskets in corners to further emphasize a rustic look.

\* Create homemade ornaments. Homemade ornaments can also give a home a more rustic look come the

holiday season. Spend an afternoon creating holiday crafts with the kids and use these instead of store-bought ornaments. For those who are especially gifted craftsmen, put your woodworking skills to the test to create decorative wooden stockings that, if not functional, can be replaced with more traditional stockings come Christmas Eve.

\* Don't forget the music. Another way to create a country Christmas is to play country Christmas albums instead of classical or more traditional Christmas records. Nearly every country music star of the past and present has recorded a Christmas song or album, so create a master playlist of country Christmas songs on your digital music player and play it throughout the season to set the holiday mood in your household.


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# Offering the Olive Branch

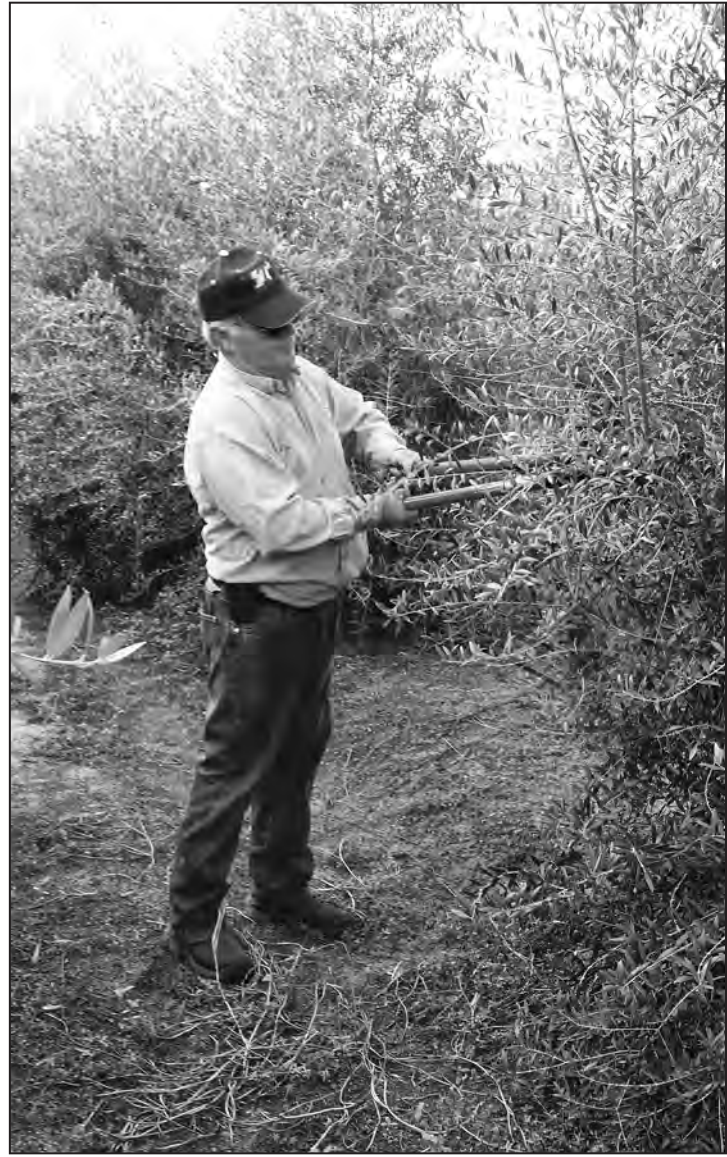
Most people in this area know Tommie Williams as a senator and a native of Toombs County. They might even know that he's been in the pine straw business for the last 25 years, but not very many know that he's recently started growing olives for the market. As a matter of fact, probably few people know that anyone in South Georgia grows olives. Growing on a farm on Glen Lewis Road, five acres of four-year-old olive trees are thriving and producing. Olive trees start producing after 3 years. The winter of 2013/14 damaged the trees substantially, but they have proved themselves resilient. In May 2014, Tommie planted another 25 acres of trees.

Of the Spanish variety Arbequine, the olive trees are planted 6 feet apart on trellises and in a high density pattern. Two pollinators—the Koroniki and the Arbasano—also grow in the grove.

“When we first planted these trees,” Tommie said, “I didn’t know how to prune them, but I’ve learned. The trees need a lot of pruning, especially if you want to gather them with mechanical harvesters.”

The trees grow fast, some up to 7 feet in 5 months. Ideally, the trees should have one central leader growing up, but creating that one requires constant pruning and the limbs that hang down are the ones that bear the olives. Tommie himself and one other man do all the pruning.

Hundreds of varieties of olive trees exist and Tommie Williams has long been fascinated with these trees and the possibility of growing them in this section of the country. He grew up on a farm in Toombs County 10



**TOMMIE WILLIAMS PRUNING THE OLIVE TREES.**

miles south of Lyons. After high school, he attended the University of Georgia in Athens and graduated with a degree in Art. He later earned his Masters Degree from Georgia Southern University. As an art major, he lived

in Italy for a couple of summers, where he saw olive trees growing all over the country. Even then the trees fascinated him. Later when he spent 2 years in Israel with the Southern Baptist Mission Board, he had his eyes on the trees.

“Olive trees live forever if you take care of them,” Tommie said. “There are trees growing in Jerusalem right now that were alive

planted some in Waycross. I was just certain that I could grow them, too. And my heart is still in farming, no matter what else I do.”

A man of many talents, Tommie has taught in the public schools, grown onions, and served as a missionary to China, Israel, and Belize. In 1998, Tommie Williams entered the world of politics when he was

through the ranks, serving as Majority Leader of the Senate for 3 years and President Pro Tem for

Kate, 10, and his son Jack is 7.

“I’ve enjoyed my career in politics and still do,” he



**STORING THE OLIVE OIL IN A CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT.**

when Jesus walked this earth. I have long been convinced that we could grow them here in Toombs County. Besides, I’d seen them growing in Lakeland, Florida, and knew that

elected to represent Georgia’s 19th District, which includes Appling, Jeff Davis, Long, Montgomery, Telfair, Toombs, Treutlen, Wayne, and Wheeler counties. He moved up



**OLIVES GATHERED BY HAND AND READY TO PRESS.**

4. At age 49, he married. He and his wife Stephanie have three children. His step daughter Madison is 18, his daughter Emma

said. “I think I’ve been able to accomplish some good things for Georgians. I had to give up the leadership roles though because I



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**THE LABEL ON THE FINISHED PRODUCT WAS DESIGNED BY STEPHANIE WILLIAMS.**

needed more time for my family and more time to earn a living. That's one reason I started the olive business. My family helps me with it."

After the cold winter last year, the olive grove turned solid white with blooms.

Tommie said, "They looked like white BBs to me and I wondered, 'What will I do with all them if all these blooms turn to olives?'"

He discussed it with his partners, his brother Clint Williams and Darrien Ramsey, son-in-law of Bender and Linda Brown of Appling County. As a solution, Tommie went to Italy and bought a small mill to suffice for processing the 5 acres he's currently growing. No one uses the old olive presses anymore. Next he attended a milling school in California to learn not only about milling, but also about storage, important steps in the process.

Spain grows so many olives that workers cannot possibly process them all in a timely manner, but Tommie's smaller operation can. His philosophy is to not let the bad spoil the good. Once the olives are picked, and his groves are currently picked by hand, they have to be milled the next day. They can't wait. He puts the olives through the mill, where the centrifuge spins the lighter oil from the heavier paste. This particular process requires about 30 minutes. Once separated, the oil still has residue to strain out. Else the oil will spoil. More robust olives will give the oil a more pungent, lighter flavor.

They next bottle the oil under a label which Stephanie Williams

designed. Even the children help with the work in the mill.

This year the trees produced about 2 tons per acre but will be capable of producing 5 tons when the trees are mature. About 250 gallons of oil came from this year's crop. Most of the oil is sold locally now because of the small amount available. However, some outlets in Atlanta and Savannah will take all he can produce.

This year Tommie entered his oil in a New York competition for growers from around the world. About 700 growers participated. He won a gold medal in his class for oil made from medium grade olives. Only 2 other growers in America won as well.

Tommie Williams has discovered that the olive oil business is quite labor intensive, but he is working to prepare his trees for the mechanical harvester. This machine must be able to reach under the trees for optimum operation and much work still has to be done. However, he's learning the business as he goes. The new 25 acres will be handled differently from the first 5 acres. When the new grove starts producing, the current mill won't handle the load and a newer, bigger one might well be required. These few short years in the olive business have taught the whole Williams family quite a lesson—not just Tommie, but he is the main learner. First and foremost, he's learned that the olive business can thrive in hot Georgia soil. And they've learned that working together as a family doesn't seem quite so much like work. ¶



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# *Finding Serenity in a Turbulent World*

By Mary Ann Ellis

In April, 2014, the heat came early to Hazlehurst. My sister Sarah Nell had sold the house that she'd lived in for the past 42 years; my husband Larry and I were helping her move to the country. None of us are as young as we once were and moving is a monstrous job, no matter how old you are. As I loaded a box of her pots and pans into the trunk of my car, I worried. How on earth could we move all the furniture and other paraphernalia? The job would surely put us all in the hospital.

One afternoon, Sarah Nell called me and announced, "I've found us some help with moving. All we have to do is let them know when we're ready."

"How much will it cost?" I asked apprehensively.

"Whatever we can afford to donate," she replied.

"Some guys from the Outback Serenity Center will come and help us. They are available to do community service for older people like us who desperately need them."

"I didn't know Hazlehurst had such a place," I replied, "but I sure am happy to hear it."

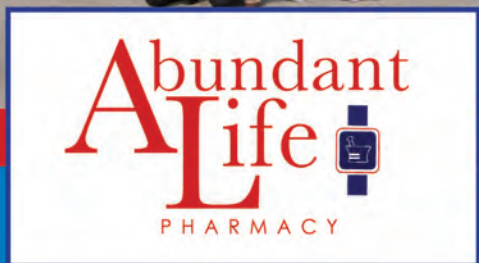
At 9:00 a.m. on moving day, a van with somewhere in the vicinity of twelve men pulled up in the front yard. Accompanying them was a truck and covered trailer. They swarmed into the old house like a whirlwind, loading mattresses and head boards, cabinets and tables, bookcases and boxes--forty-two years' worth of property.

In two hours, all her property was sitting in place in Sarah Nell's new home. I reeled from the efficiency and speed of the operation. Before we could properly thank them, they were loaded in the white van and gone. I had worried for nothing. All these months later, we still talk about them and the amazing job they did that day. When someone called and suggested that I write an article about the Outback Serenity Center, I pounced on the idea.

The Serenity Center is currently located about five miles out Kirkland Still Road in Jeff Davis County, but early next year it will move to a new

facility on Hinson Landing Road not far from Liberty Baptist Church. This Christ-centered residential recovery facility for men who struggle with substance abuse and addiction has the goal of providing a clean, safe atmosphere where residents can learn a new concept and design for living based on the truths and principles of God's Word as taught from a recovery perspective. The program requires 6 months for completion. It uses a 12 Step recovery curriculum that engages each resident in personal examination and application of Biblical principles.

A typical day for resi-  
Continues on page 27



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Continued from page 25  
 dents begins at 5:30 a.m. They have breakfast and then devotion at 6:45. Afterwards, the men divide into crews for cleaning, cooking, outside yard work, and gardening. They are busy throughout the day. The afternoon provides another class and nightly devotion. Men are counseled on an individual basis weekly, and in a group setting daily.

On Sunday residents attend one of three churches in the morning—Hillcrest, First Baptist, or Southside. Afternoons, they receive visitors from 1 to 5. Currently twenty residents from all over the state live at the center. Detox centers



**STEVE TURNER, FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF OUTBACK SERENITY CENTER.**

and probation officers call the Outback Serenity Center seeking help for some individual. Sometimes

calls himself. Then the potential resident goes through a screening process, which considers background, particular problems, ages, etc. The screening determines if the individual will be a good fit with the center and if the program will help him or not. No one is turned away for lack of money. As a matter of fact, the center has as many indigent residents as paying ones.

“We’ve been most fortunate to have churches, the community, and individuals help us,” says Steve Turner, director of Outback Serenity Center. “Churches donate food all the time. Sometimes family members are able to help a bit. So far, we’ve always managed to find the help we need.”

Steve Turner opened the Serenity Center in March, 2013. God laid the project on his heart and he couldn’t ignore it. The strength of the call made him go to work to accomplish it.

“I was raised in church myself,” Steve said. “by a good, God-fearing family, but in my 40s, I developed an addiction to alcohol. I

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fell lower and lower until I finally reached rock bottom. When you're completely broken, then you can start back up and put your life together. Sometimes that's what it takes. I had lost all hope in life and came very near a nervous breakdown and suicide. If you're broken, you are ready to listen. If you're only wounded, your guard is still up and you are not likely to have a breakthrough. Brokenness and surrender are required to make a true change."



**THE OUTBACK SERENITY CENTER IN JEFF DAVIS COUNTY.**

Steve recounts tales of spending six months in a secular treatment facility. There he had a spiritual re-awakening and a change of perspective. Suddenly he viewed his life differently. He knew he wanted to do something for other people who were suffering like he had. He knew also that God wanted him to. He came back to Hazlehurst and set to work.

"It was like changing lenses in your glasses," Steve said. "I saw the world differently and knew this program would work for other people as well as it did for me."

For many years, Steve had worked in the pool business, but now he had a different mission. He leased the property for the center and took stock of his task. He knew it involved much more than getting men off alcohol and drugs. Those problems were simply symptoms of deeper issues, which much be addressed to solve the main problems.

"This facility is Phase One," Steve explained. "We do intensive treatment here. Steve Newton, minister and counselor, works closely with the men. He is also the day-to-day manager of the center."

The classes provide a design for living that uses 12 principles to serve as guardrails for life. These steps are based on Christianity. They teach that man is powerless, and that God can restore the most broken. The teacher/

answered. They also realize that only Christ can help them solve their problems.

The program is a mix of programs and has been quite successful so far, even though it's quite young, comparatively speaking. They measure the success of only the men who stay at least 90 days. So far the center's success rate is higher than the state average.

"We hope the men will learn and go home to start programs in other parts of the state," Steve said. "We find that pills are becoming the main problem now. Since DUI laws have gotten so strict, in an effort to pass a breathalyzer test, people are turning to something even worse—pills. Pill addiction can lead to theft and all kinds of other problems. Alcoholics don't usually commit the kinds of crimes that pill addicts do. The general public has no idea how serious the problem is, but most families are touched directly or indirectly by addiction."

Steve and his staff have discovered that keeping the residents busy is beneficial also. When churches notify them of older citizens who need help with assorted jobs around their houses, the men are eager to assist them. Residents have a wide range of talents and skills—light plumbing, yard work, electrical, etc. Only those who've proved themselves trustworthy are taken out to work. The newest ones remain at the center until the staff is comfortable with their reliability.

"We're working hard at this project," Steve said. "We want the prayers as well as the help of the local churches. It's a big undertaking, but so necessary to the community. When I approached Rev. Ben Glosson, pastor at Southside Baptist Church for 28 years and my pastor during my youth, he told me that any town big enough for a hospital needs a long-term recovery center. So many people need help, far more than the average person realizes. God willing, we're going to fill that need."

Steve Newton, manager of the center, is currently working with the folks at The Prodigal House to provide the second phase of recovery. Stay tuned for further developments.

In the meantime, the leaders of the Outback Serenity Center need your prayers and your help, if God leads you in that direction. You may reach them at 912-375-4040 and they are also on Facebook. ¶

# Understand and avoid elder financial fraud

Elder fraud is a financial crime that targets older men and women who are often unable to recognize they are being victimized. Elder financial fraud is a broad term



that can be applied to a host of crimes, from stealing money or property directly from an individual to using an older person's property or possessions without permission.

Many seniors are targeted through telemarketing scams in which elders are scared into giving money out of fear of losing their homes. Some are exploited by people closer to home who forge signatures or get an older person to sign over deeds or power of attorney.

Criminals often see elderly men and women as easy targets. Seniors may be suffering from declining physical and/or mental health, which compromises their ability to defend themselves or even recognize they are being

taken advantage of. Seniors also may be embarrassed that they were duped and not share their experiences with others as a result. But elder fraud also can be perpetrated by family members who aim to acquire an elderly relative's assets.

Recognizing scenarios where fraud may be committed can help men and women protect their elderly relatives from being victimized by elder fraud.

- Confirm professionals are who they say they are. More than 170 designations and certifications are used within the financial industry to identify professionals. Some of them do not necessarily mean a person is qualified or can be trusted to handle an individual's assets. Always ask a financial advisor if he is overseen by a government agency or is authorized to provide advice under the "fiduciary standard of care." Be especially careful when dealing with advisors who try to push certain products or those who suggest shortcuts and blending services. Such professionals are not necessarily criminals, but they may have ulterior motives in mind and not be overly concerned about you or your loved one's financial well-being.

- Pay attention to your accounts. Unusually large withdrawals from automated teller machines or cashed checks with signatures that do not match the signature on the account are both indicative of fraud. If you are monitoring a loved one's accounts, question any surges of activity in accounts that are normally somewhat inactive.

- Ask a loved one to keep you abreast of changes in their will. Abrupt changes in a will or other financial documents should also cause concern. Family members caring for a senior should be aware of any major changes to important documents.

- Monitor a loved one's purchases. Sudden purchases, whether it's an updated insurance policy or unnecessary home repairs, may be indicative of elder fraud.

Elder financial fraud targets an often vulnerable segment of the population, and it's often up to loved ones to protect their elderly relatives from being victimized by such crimes. ¶



# A Taste of The South

## CHOCOLATE BRITTLE SURPRISE

Ingredients (Original recipe makes 2 dozen Change Servings)

- 35 unsalted soda crackers
- 1 cup butter
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 2 cups semisweet chocolate chips
- 1 cup chopped pecans (optional)

### Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (180 degrees C). Cover cookie sheet with foil. Spray foil with cooking oil spray.

Place crackers on foil in 5 x 7 inch rows.

Microwave butter on high for 2 minutes. Add brown sugar and stir. Microwave on high for 2 more minutes, stirring every 30 seconds.

Pour over crackers. Bake 17 - 20 minutes (should bubble but not burn).

Sprinkle chocolate chips over hot crackers. Spread after 2 minutes (chips have softened). Sprinkle nuts on top.

Refrigerate 1 hour. Break into pieces. Can be frozen.

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