



A very BIG FISH

The story about the journey of
a southern community

BECOMING WHO THEY ALWAYS WERE





Shellie Phelps

Artist

Art Teacher

Creative Community Collaborator

COMMUNITY CHANGE MAKER

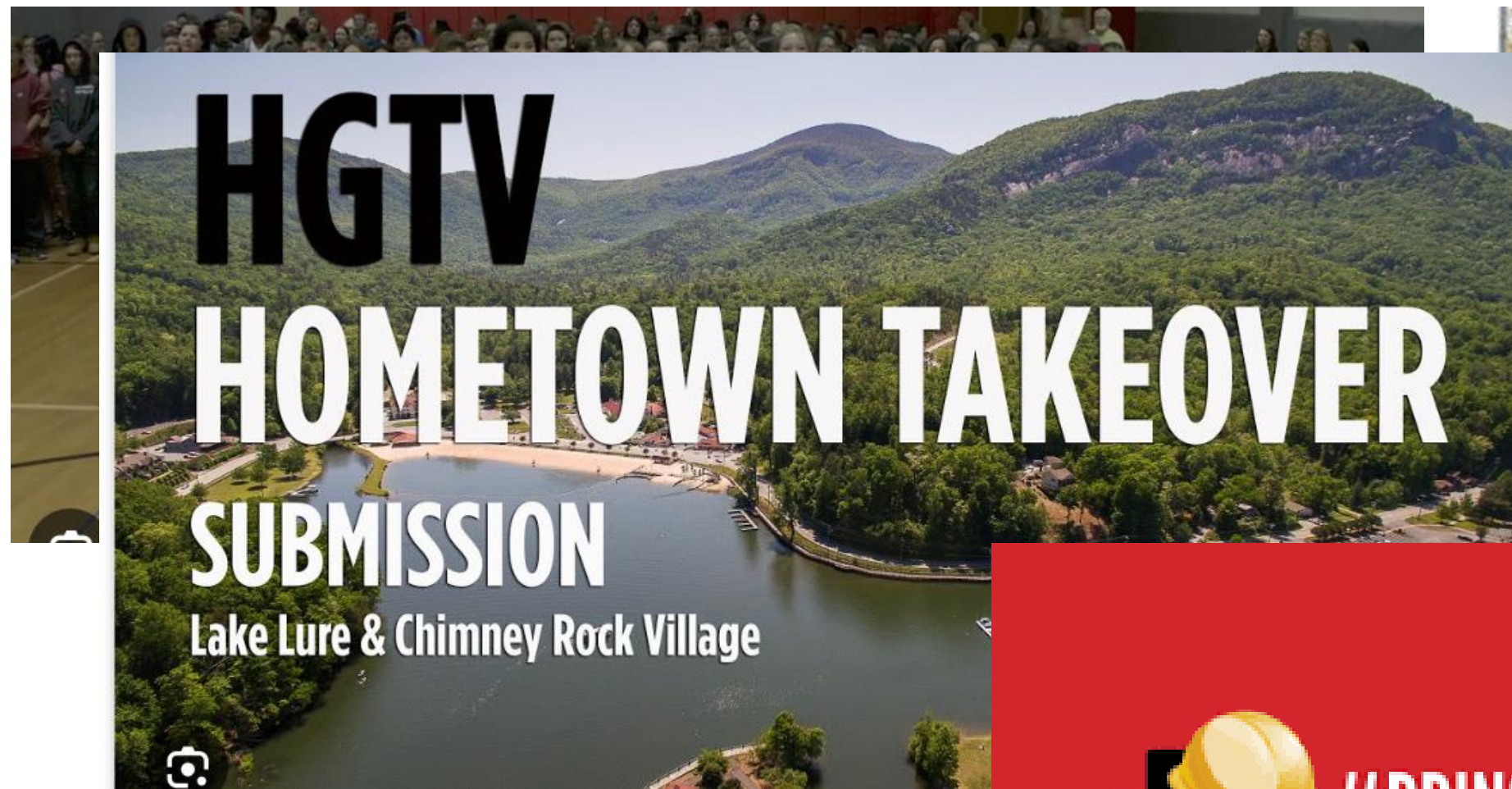




HGTV LAUNCHES MASSIVE NATIONWIDE CALL TO FIND, TAKEOVER AND MAKEOVER AN ENTIRE TOWN

January 8, 2020

The producers were *SHOCKED*
when they received nearly
HALF A MILLION
video submissions
from over 2600 towns



Nenana Alaska - HGTV Hometown Takeover Submission |

[Watch >](#)

WETUMPKA WINS!



**Producers, camera people, sound people
and a design team
all came to live in Wetumpka for 6 months while the
show
was being produced in the midst of a global pandemic.**

**We had no idea how many people and hours it takes to
produce a television show**

(Our nose holes will NEVER be the same!)

Projects

Over 6 episodes
they renovated
6 homes and
6 commercial
properties



**WHY
WETUMPKA?**



What people envision when I say I am from
Colorado...



The LIST

- good schools
- low crime
- diversity
- proximity to water
- distance to a city
- outdoor life
- art community
- good weather

Hyundai



SOUTH
CAROLINA

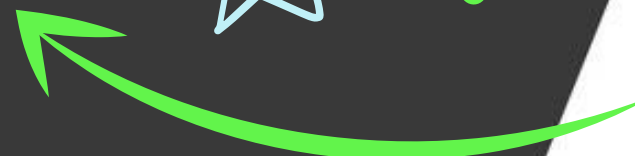
GEORGIA



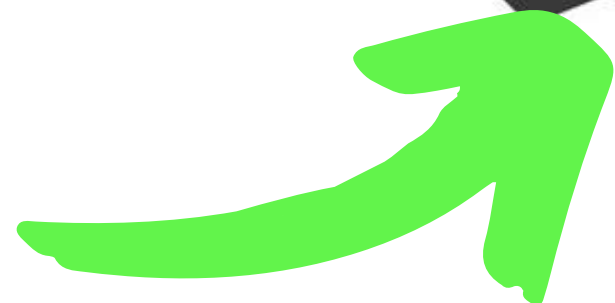
Atlanta



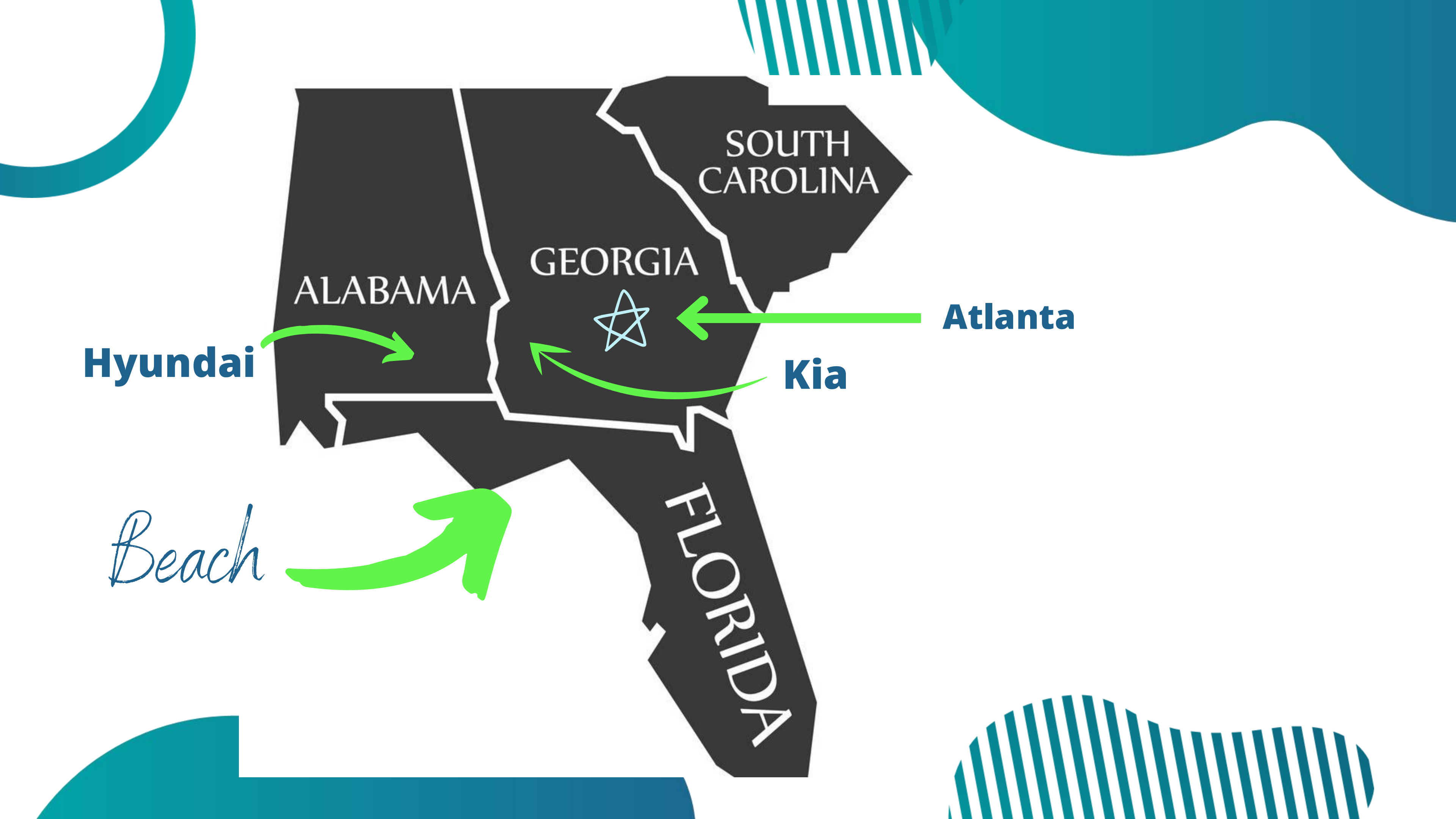
Kia



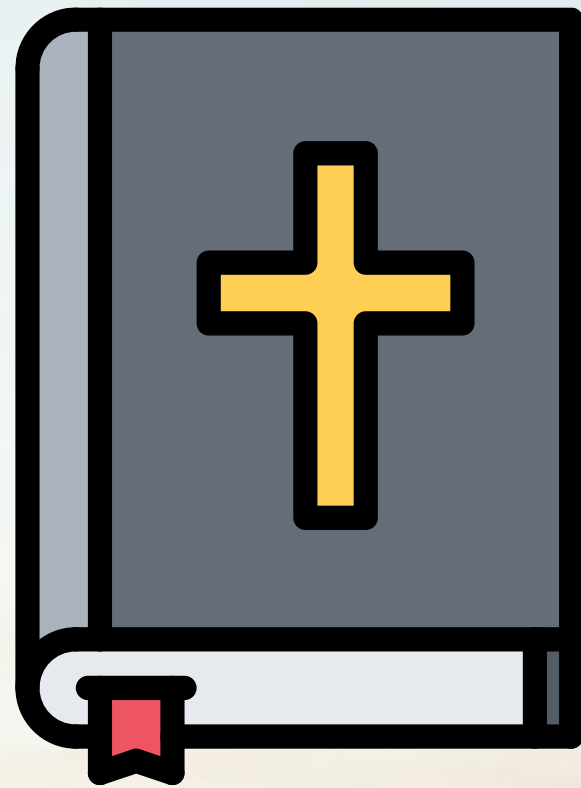
Beach



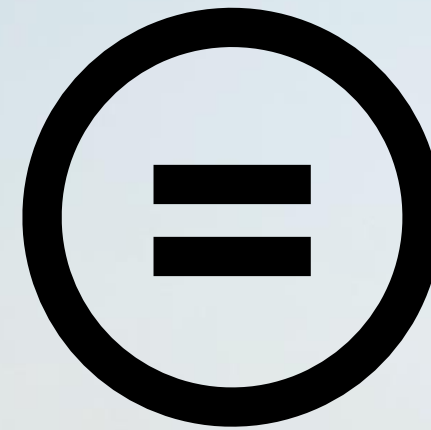
FLORIDA



ARMED WITH MAMA'S BIBLE AND A LIST.....
I FLEW TO ATLANTA



+



**rented a convertible
and started driving...**



By the end of the second day I was feeling defeated



What did I expect?
A flashing sign?
An invitation?



There was only one place
left on my list....

On the third day
I drove over the
bridge
into
Wetumpka, AL



And my heart skipped a beat





**More than
40 percent of the
town was empty or
boarded up...**

**but there was
SOMETHING
so special about it**

The historic
buildings
sitting along
the beautiful
Coosa River

It felt like
stepping back
in time into
an old movie
set.



On a whim I called the number on this building...

A heart-shaped hole is cut into a wooden door. The door is painted a vibrant teal color, which is heavily worn and peeling in many places, revealing a lighter wood underneath. There are numerous small, irregular orange-brown stains scattered across the teal surface, possibly from rust or dried liquid. The heart hole itself shows the natural wood grain and has some of the teal paint on its edges. The text "You should move here." is superimposed in white, bold, sans-serif font across the center of the heart.

**"You should move
here."**

BIG FISH HOUSE

circa 1874



"Mama ...
PLEASE DON'T MAKE US LIVE HERE!"

TEARFUL QUOTE FROM MY CHILDREN

**Gee kids.....
What do you mean?**



empty
run down
buildings





EMPTY
EMPTY
EMPTY

EMPTY
EMPTY
EMPTY





Company Street

**There were two restaurants
One consignment retail shop
A nail salon
And a popsicle shop**

THAT'S IT.

Like so many small towns across America,
the evolution of the shopping mall had taken its toll.

In the defined Commercial Business District Revitalization Area, 56 commercial businesses were in operation in 1990. In 2011, only 15 of those 56 businesses remain open, representing a 74% decline in existing businesses, or a total loss of 41 businesses. Over the last 10 years, 21 of these businesses closed, demonstrating a consistent rate of business loss over the past two decades, with 20 closing in the 1990s and 21 closing in the most recent decade.

And yet...

The City of Natural Beauty



SAVING WETUMPKA

Long before I arrived,
there was a powerful
love for this
community and a
PLAN to bring it back
to life.



The City had
created a long-term
plan that would include a
new streetscape and repair
the deteriorating
infrastructure



Yes...that is a SINK HOLE

then what?



Who was Wetumpka?

What made them UNIQUE?

What did they want to say?

We needed to tell the story
about what made us

DIFFERENT



*What Makes You
Different*

**i
s**

YOUR SUPER POWER

WETUMPKA
SITS ON THE EDGE OF AN
IMPACT CRATER



**85 million years ago,
when southern Alabama
was covered by a shallow ocean
and dinosaurs lived on nearby land.....**

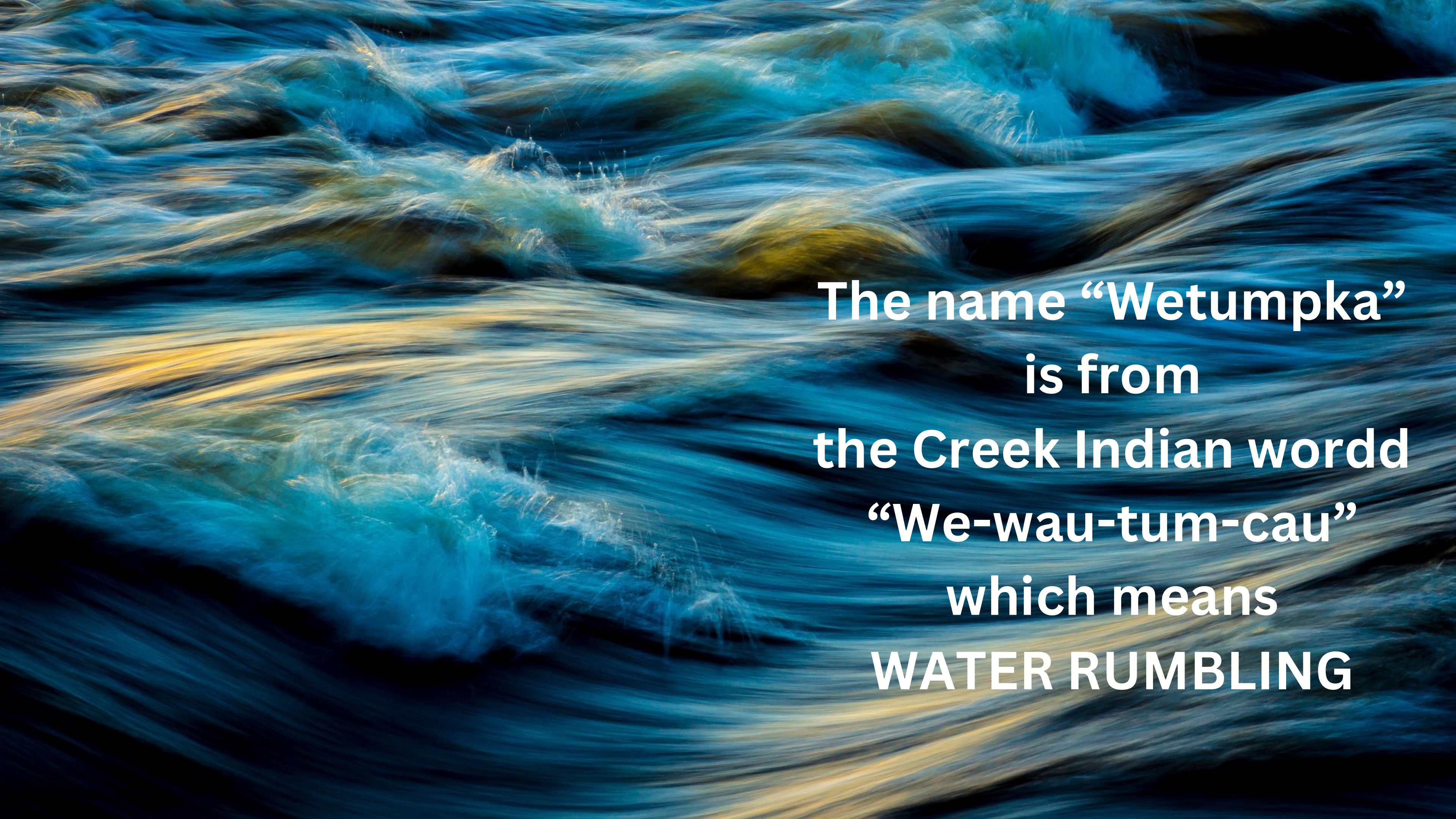
A meteor hit where Wetumpka is today.



**It wasn't until 2002
that the Wetumpka Impact Crater
was officially documented.**

White Water



A long-exposure photograph of a river, showing the water as a series of flowing, blurred streaks. The colors are predominantly deep blue and teal, with bright yellow and white highlights where the water is turbulent or reflecting light. The overall effect is one of constant motion and energy.

The name “Wetumpka”
is from
the Creek Indian word
“We-wau-tum-cau”
which means
WATER RUMBLING

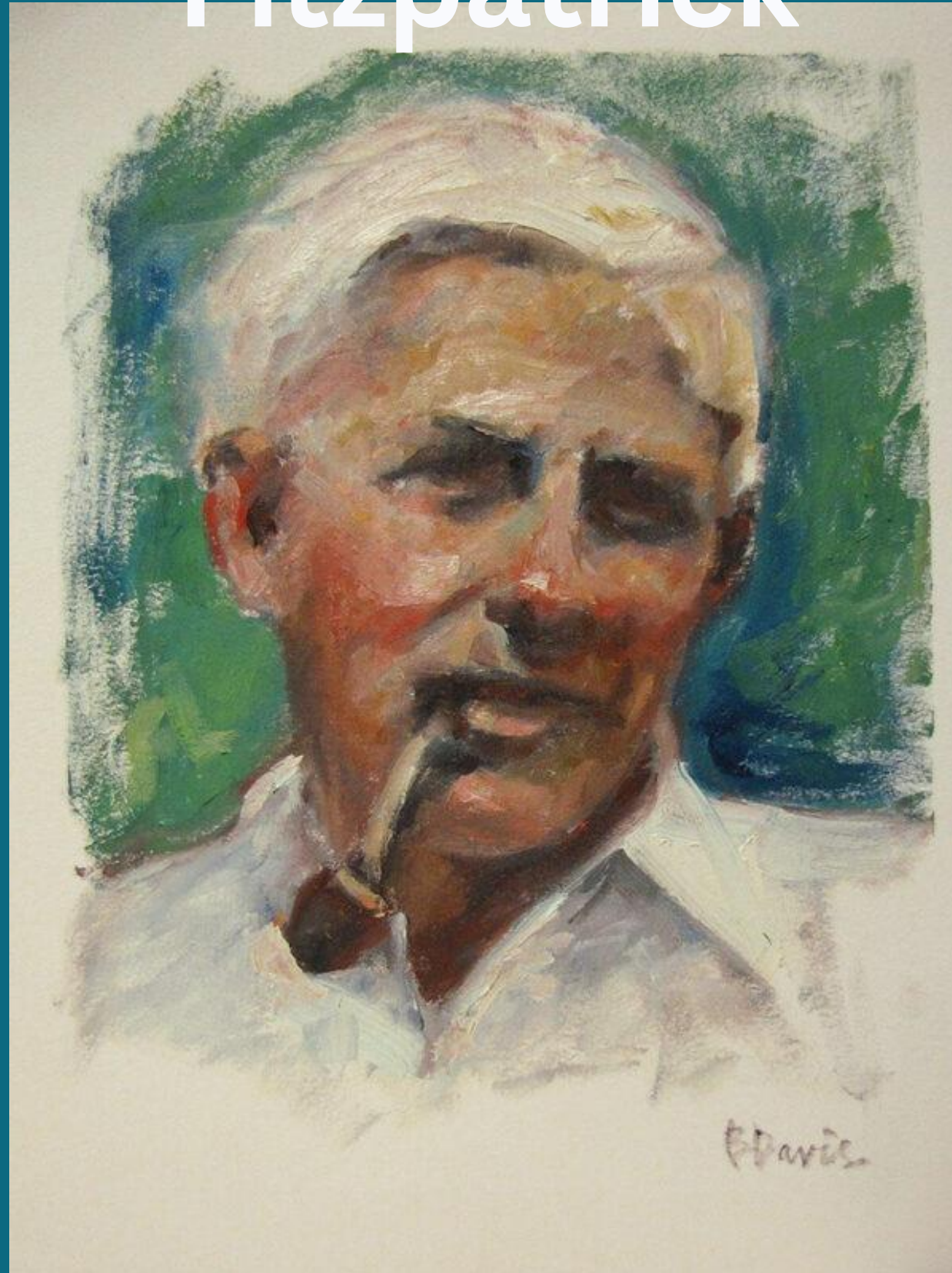


Tulatoma *Snail*

**Who saved
who?**

John Kelly Fitzpatrick

1888-1953
Wetumpka,
Alabama



“ A life
without color,
is like a life
without food
or love.”





**WHAT
ARE YOUR
WEIRD
THINGS?**

What makes *your* community unique?

You can't create positive change if you don't know who you are...



Tell your story

If you are not
intentionally branding
your community...

Someone else is.

**EVERYTHING YOU DO AND SAY
SENDS A MESSAGE...**

AND

**EVERYTHING YOU DON'T DO OR SAY
ALSO SENDS A MESSAGE...**

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

**IF YOU KNOW
WHO YOU ARE
and
SHARE A COMMON VISION**

**You have the POWER
to
CONTROL THE NARRATIVE**

#welovethisplace

#wecantogether

WHAT IS
#hashtag?

**What is your powerful positive
message
for
YOUR COMMUNITY?**



WEtumpka

WE

ARE:

ART

HISTORY

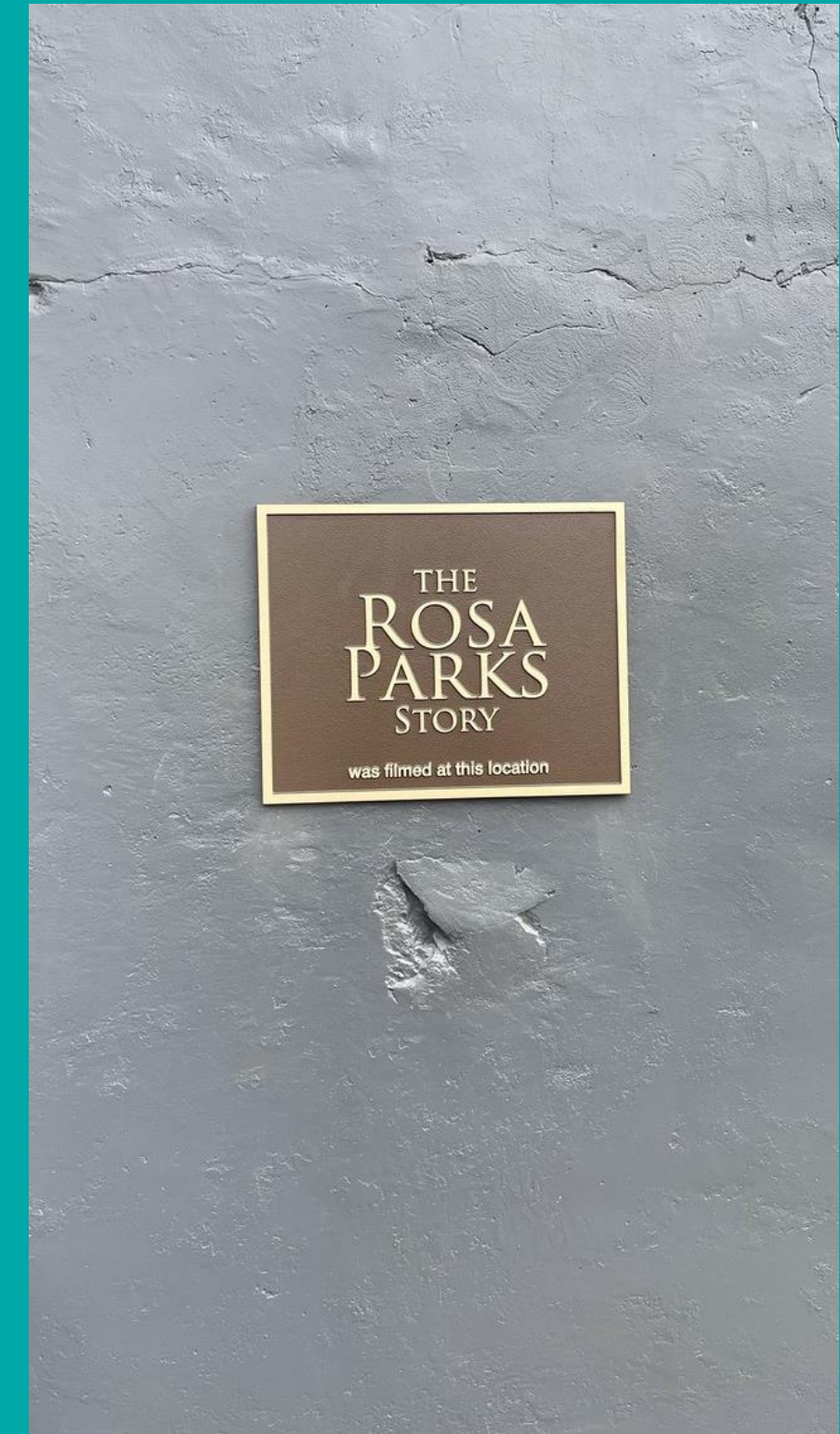
ADVENTURE

BUSINESS



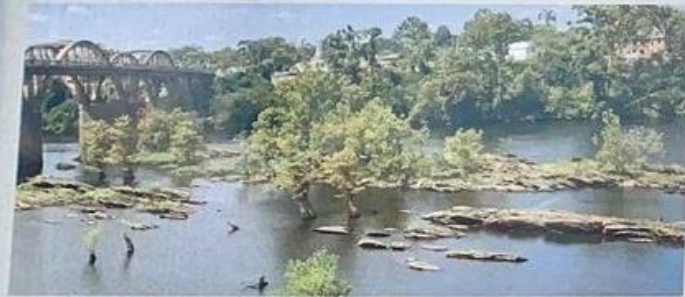


We teamed up to put signage in places that would tell our story



WETUMPKA IMPACT CRATER

Educational Viewpoint #7



The rock layers here in the Coosa River are part of the deeply eroded western rim of the Wetumpka Impact Crater. The Coosa River curves around the rim in the downtown area and these rock layers tilt away from the crater center, typical of layers affected by meteor impact.



For more information
visit the City of Wetumpka at
408 South Main Street
or our website.

WetumpkaImpactCraterCommission.org



Educational Viewpoint signs are part of the self-guided tour to see and understand the 85 million year old Wetumpka Impact Crater.

POPULATION 1,191

ELEVATION 4,944



Chamber of Commerce Welcomes You to... ..

KEENESBURG

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BATTERY - AAA



**Does everything you do
align with who you are?**

Ordinance S MATTER



HOW CAN YOU
THROUGH
COLOR, LINE, FONT
AND WORDS
CREATE
MOTTO MOMENTUM?

TO CREATE
PRIDE OF PLACE?

DREAM

TEAM

**Creatives need a place at the table,
where decisions are being made
for the future of
YOUR COMMUNITY.**

Grant Writers

Local Historians

Magazine Writers

Art Teachers

Art Gallery Curators

Landscape Designers

Architects

Graphic Designers

Marketing

Professionals

Business Owners

City Liaison

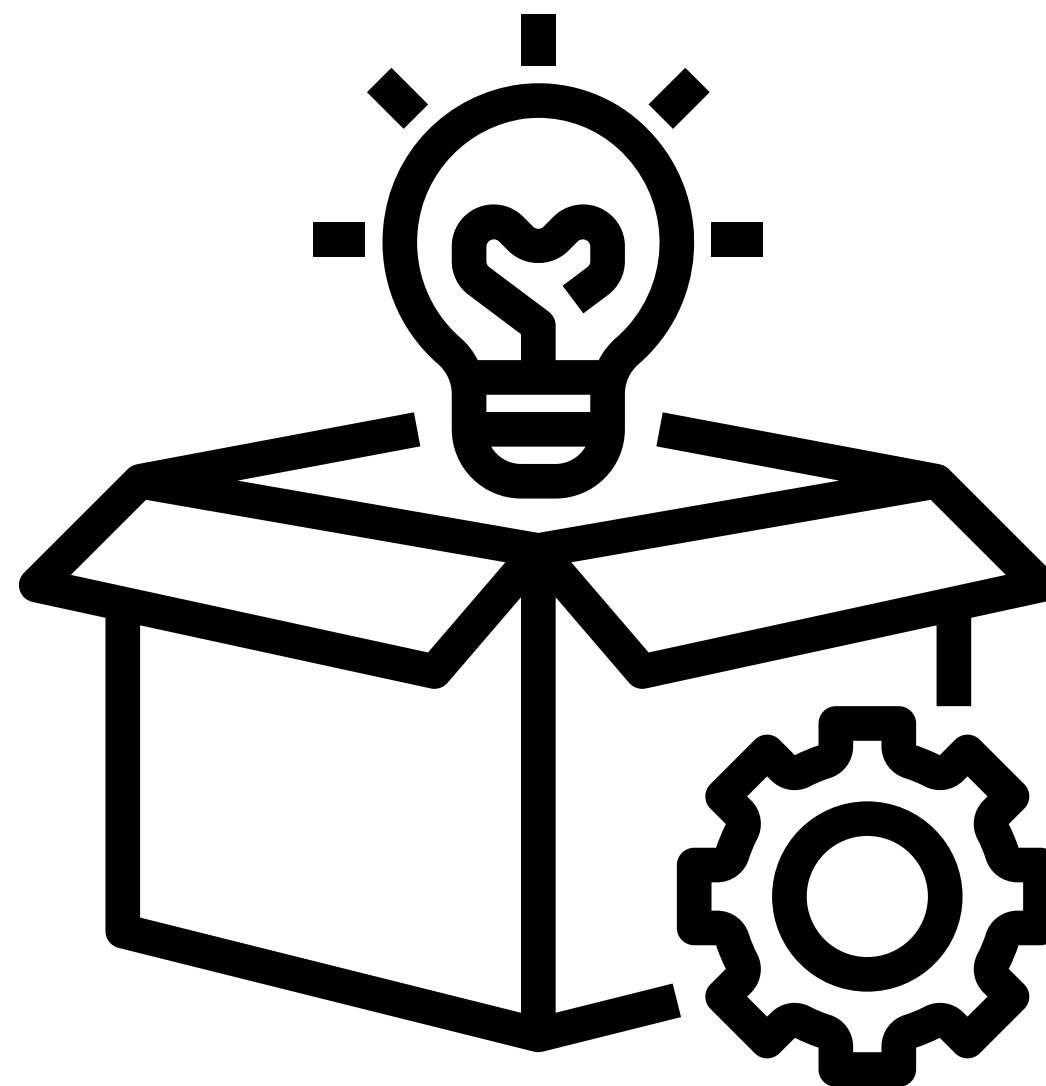
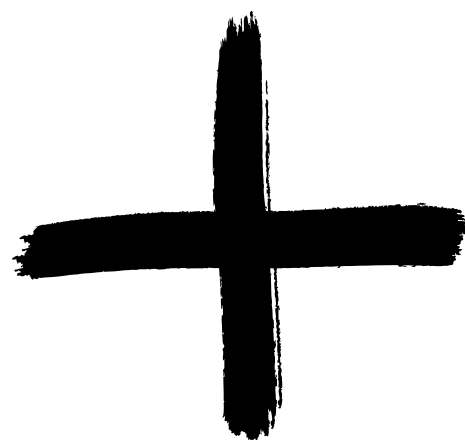
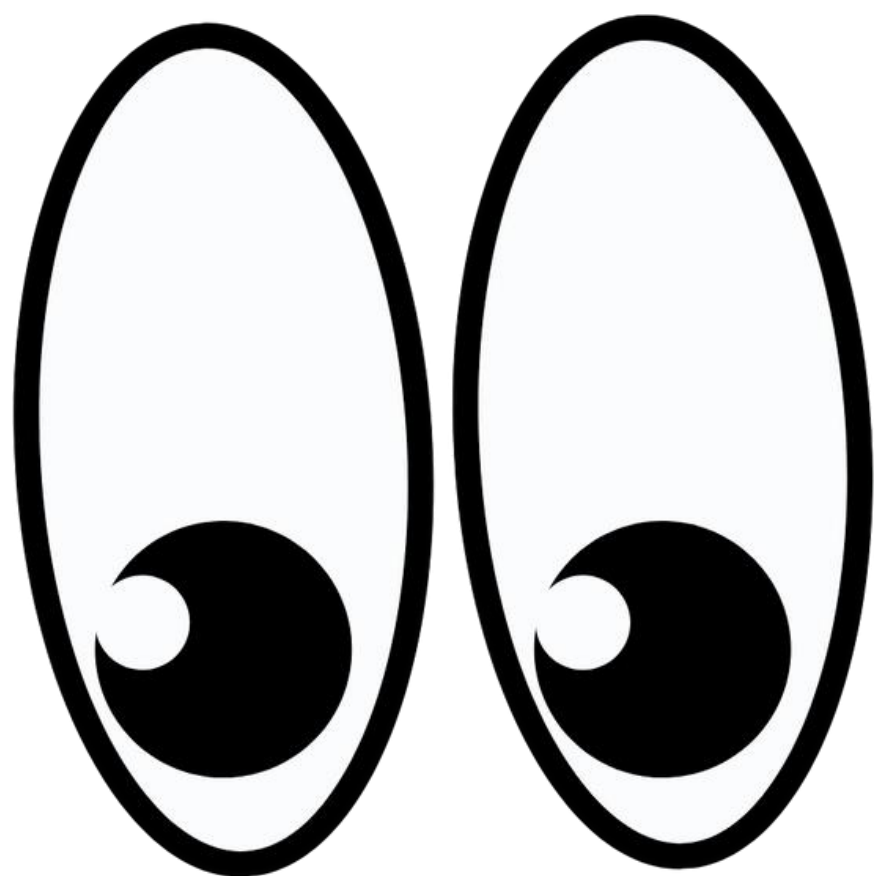
Educators

Master Gardeners

Fund Raisers

Event Planners

Newcomers

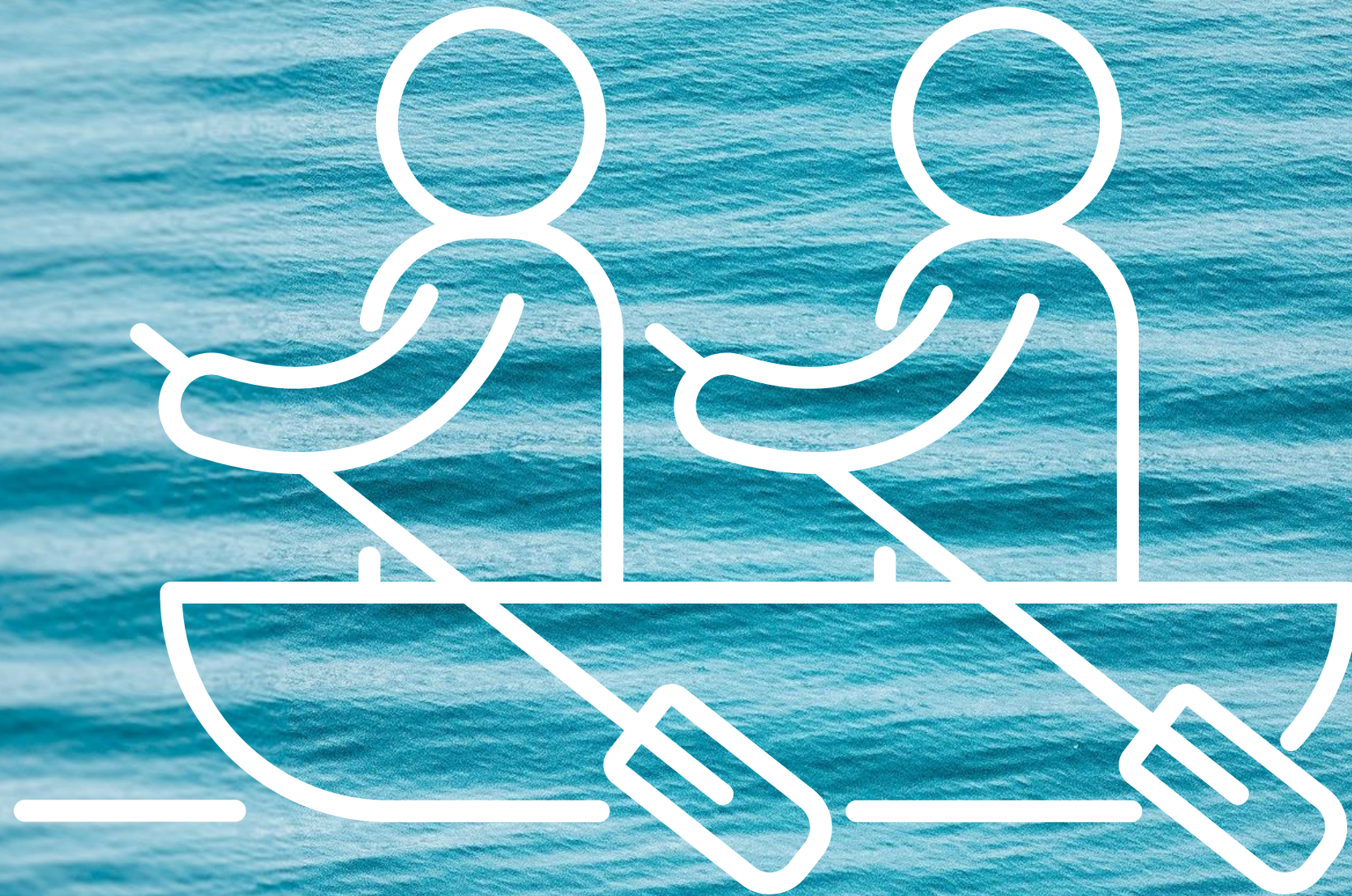


**Who is on your dream
team?**

When you truly understand who you are, it helps
you PARTNER with others.

Then you can cast teams in ways where you bring
in DIVERSE perspective that leads to
out-of-the-box thinking

You don't even have to like each other....



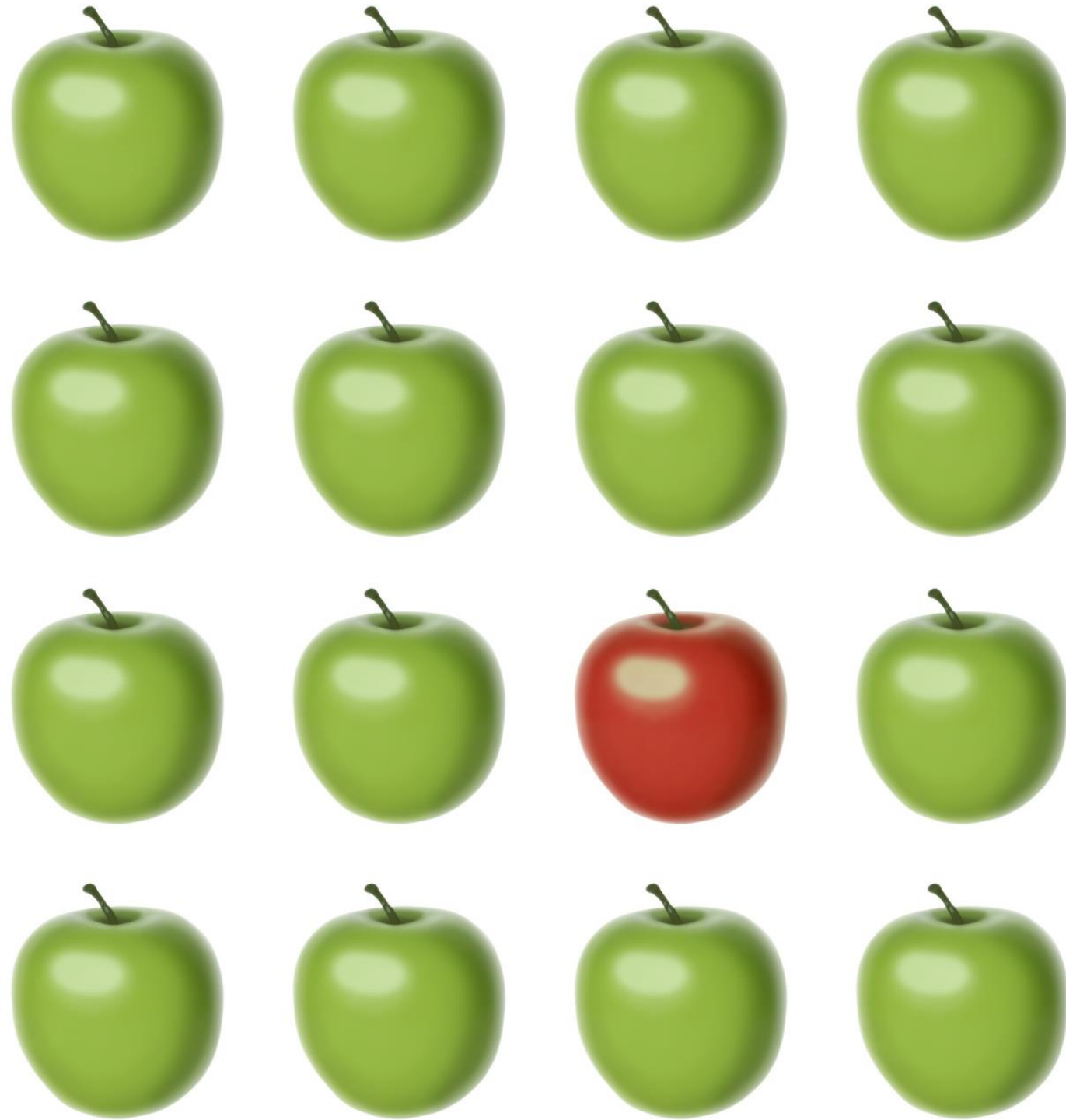
Just row the same direction!

culture of COLLABORATION

not competition

BLUR THE LINES

Are your events unique?



Do the names
reflect
your branding
and tell
your story?

**collaborating
and
creating
one-of-a-kind
events.**

A Downtown Dickens Christmas





CHRISTMAS ON THE COOSA

Wetumpka, Alabama



SANTA

wakeboards



down the Coosa!

Imagine my surprise
when I saw THIS
for the first time.....

Because NOTHING says Merry Christmas quite
like....

The Griswolds!

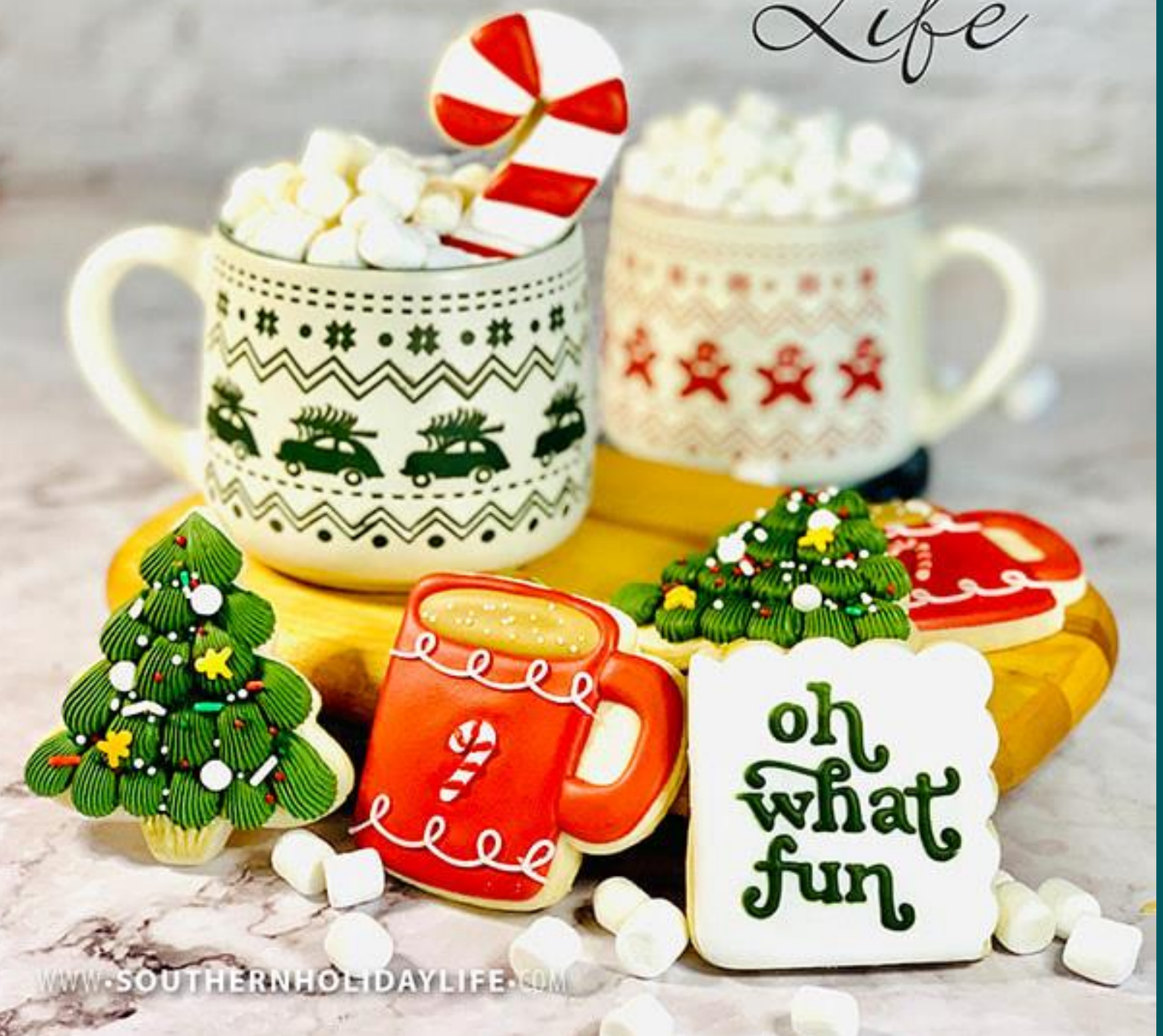




Which is WHY
Wetumpka
was featured
last year
as a wonderful
place to visit
for Christmas!

A Special Publication Courtesy of WEDO Media Inc. & Alabama Small Towns and Downtowns Magazine

Southern HOLIDAY *Life*



WWW.SOUTHERNHOLIDAYLIFE.COM

An Alabama Christmas Road Trip?



Alabama Christmas Road Trip

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Contributors

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Apple and Chilefest
Farmington, NM

Coosapalooza
Wetumpka, AL

Goldens in Golden
Golden, CO

Loblolly Festival
Laurel, MS

Bollweevil
Festival

Boggy Bayou Mullet Festival
Enterprise, AL
Niceville, FL

***“Packer Days
Festival”***

Lake City, Colorado



Alfred Packer

Alfred Griner Packer was a prospector and guide in the [Rocky Mountains](#) during the 1870s who confessed to cannibalism during the winter of 1874.

**What events
could you create
that are UNIQUE
and tell your
story?**

**Events that involve the
ARTS**

bring in people...

**And areas that bring in
people**

bring in NEW BUSINESS



W E T U M P K A

Wildlife Arts Festival

The Kelly Fitzpatrick Center for the Arts

Fine Arts Exhibit

Outdoor Game Cooking

Mixology Sessions

**Build Your Own Wood
Duck Box**

Hunting Dog Exhibition

Dock Dogs Exhibition

Fly Fishing Exhibitions

Live Music

Floral Arranging Classe

Oyster Roast and Bourbon Toast



Big Fish owner crusader for creativity

By Amy Passaretti Jan 2, 2019

1 of 7



Shellie Whitfield creates her personal art at the Big Fish Art Studio across

from her house. Photo by Amy Passaretti

Sometimes the path
is obvious...
other times....
not-so-much and you
just have to focus on
what you believe in...



ELEVATING THROUGH ART

**In 2018 we got our first
mural!**





It's the FIRST thing you see
when you come over
the bridge into
downtown

MOMENTUM

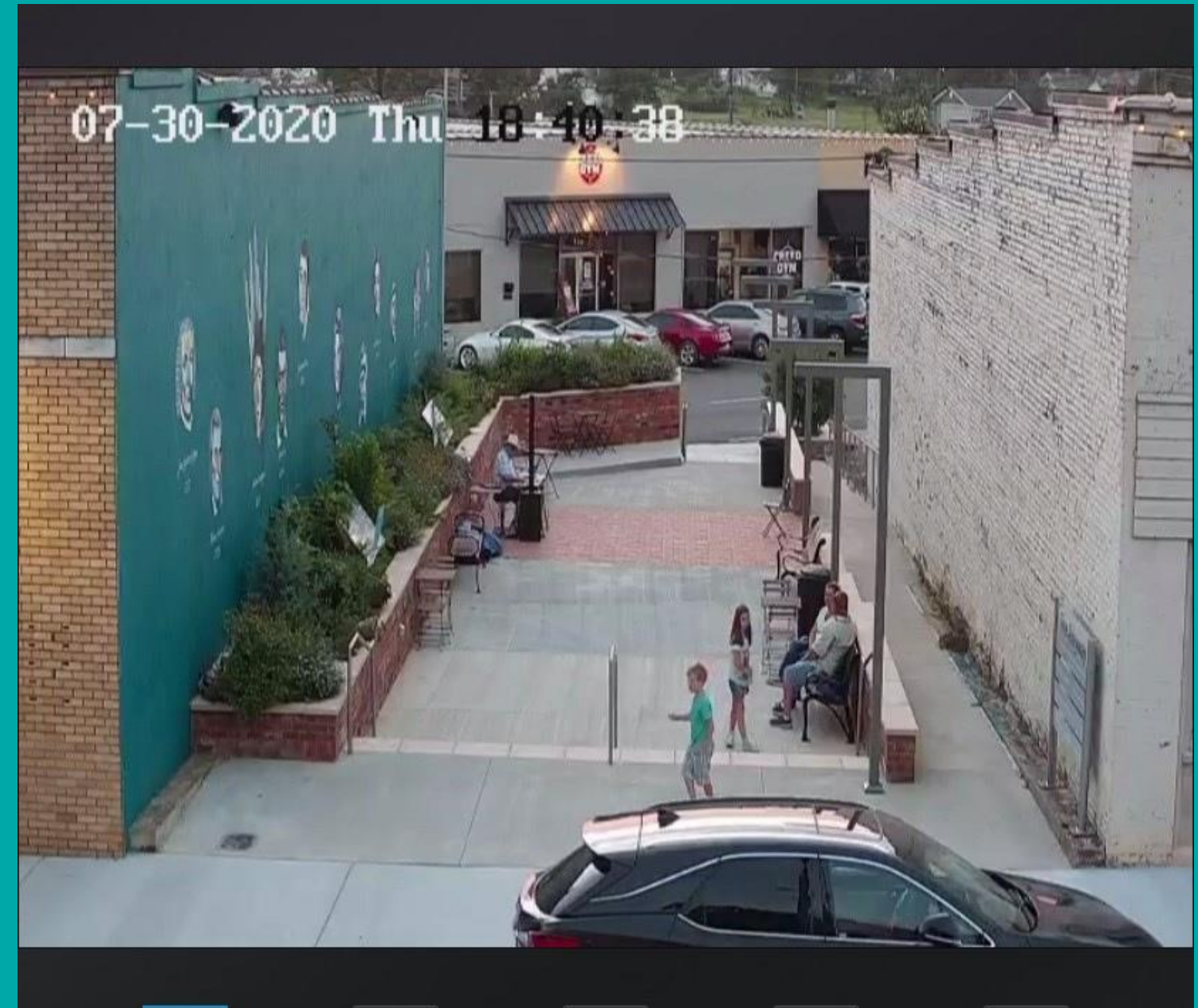


If you've driven through downtown Wetumpka recently, you may have noticed a mural in the works. Unlike many other murals though, this one is on top of a building.

MURAL #2
CREATED BY
WETUMPKA HIGH SCHOOL
ART STUDENTS



The Alleyway



A 90 FOOT -LONG TIMELINE CELEBRATING THE HISTORY OF WETUMPKA



MAKE
PEOPLE
KEEP
WALKING

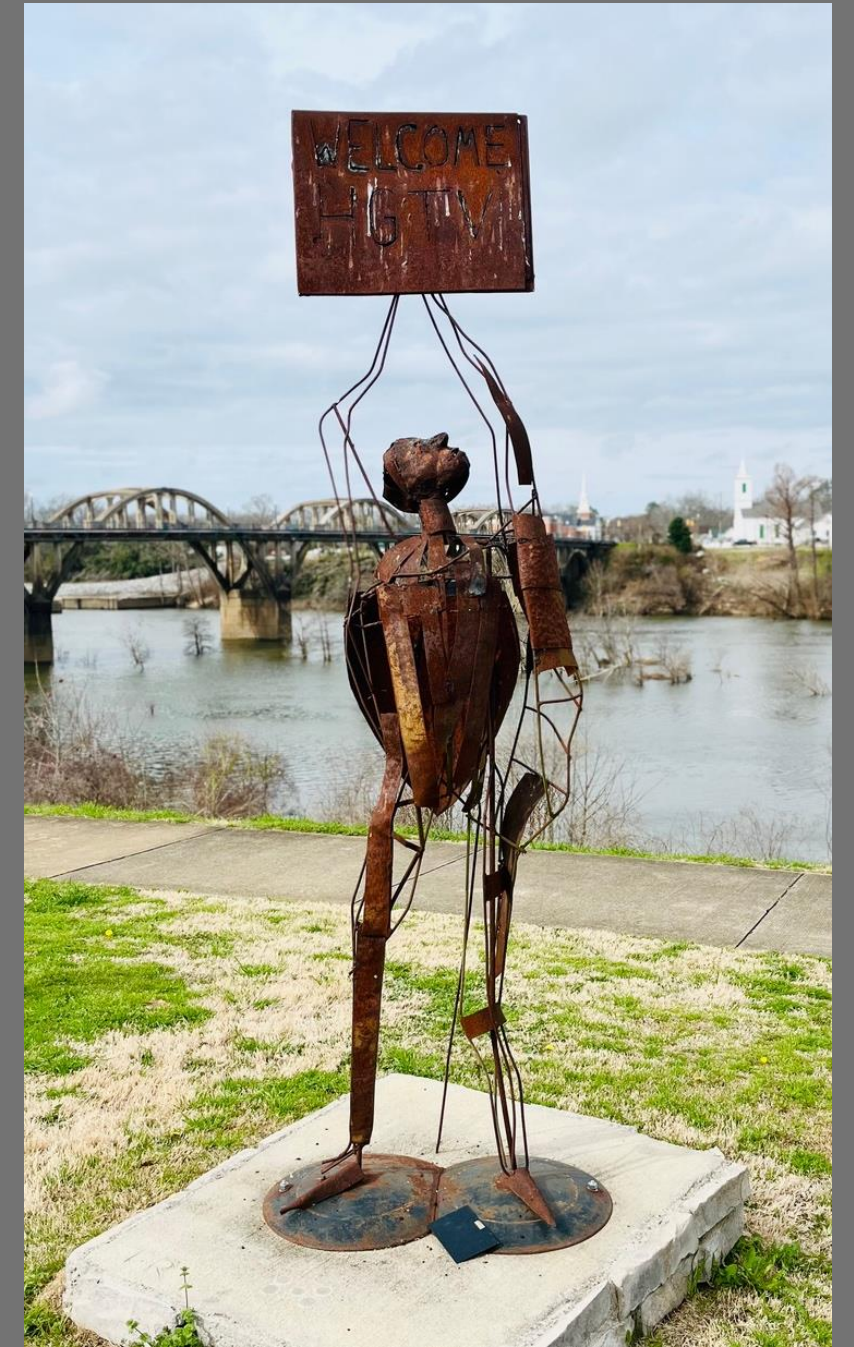
by giving them
something interesting
to look at

STEAM PUNK



DIFFERENT...

***USING WHAT WE HAVE
TO CREATE A VIBE.***



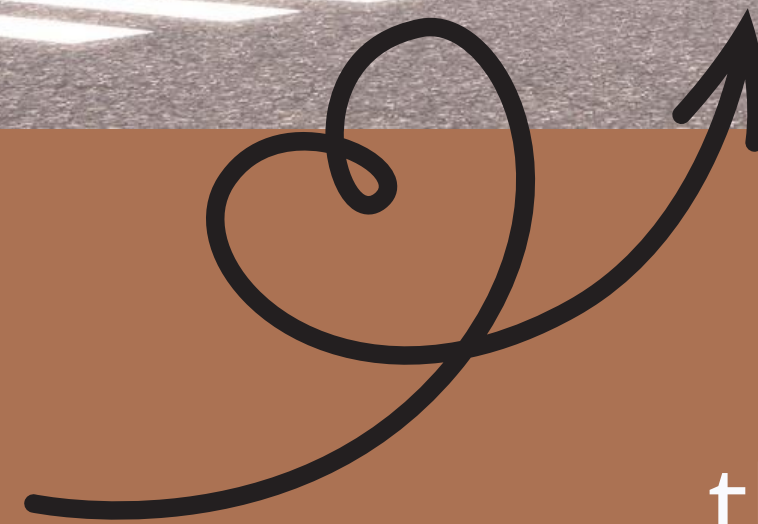
A Colorado Catfish finds
its home in WETUMPKA





Downtown Redevelopment Authority Board

The ugliest building
in
downtown



Is getting
the LOVE it deserves!

Incubator Space



BEFORE BEING CHOSEN WE

ALREADY

Had a DREAM TEAM of creatives that were collaborating

Shared the same vision and had a consistent branding

Were telling our story through ART

Were hosting events that were unique to our community

Had a Downtown Redevelopment Authority Board in place

Had affordable incubator space

**Were working respectfully together toward
REVITALIZATION**

**A television show cannot save a town.
The people that live there have to
DO THE WORK.**

ERIN NAPIER IS AN ARTIST

AND THEY HELPED US
WITH OUR CREATIVE
PLACE-MAKING





We visited Laurel



Customer Service



Disney Institute Quality Service



Welcome to Wetumpka!

Here are some tips for making your customer's experience in Wetumpka the best it can possibly be.

PROJECT A POSITIVE IMAGE FOR OUR COMMUNITY. #WELOVETHISPLACE

- SMILE
- Be approachable and make eye contact
- Greet, welcome, and thank all visitors
- Keep businesses clean and well-maintained
- Keep our community trash-free

BE HELPFUL #WECANTOGETHER

- Promote other businesses positively
- Know what there is to do and see in our area
- Be able to give directions to local attractions
- Provide accurate information about our community

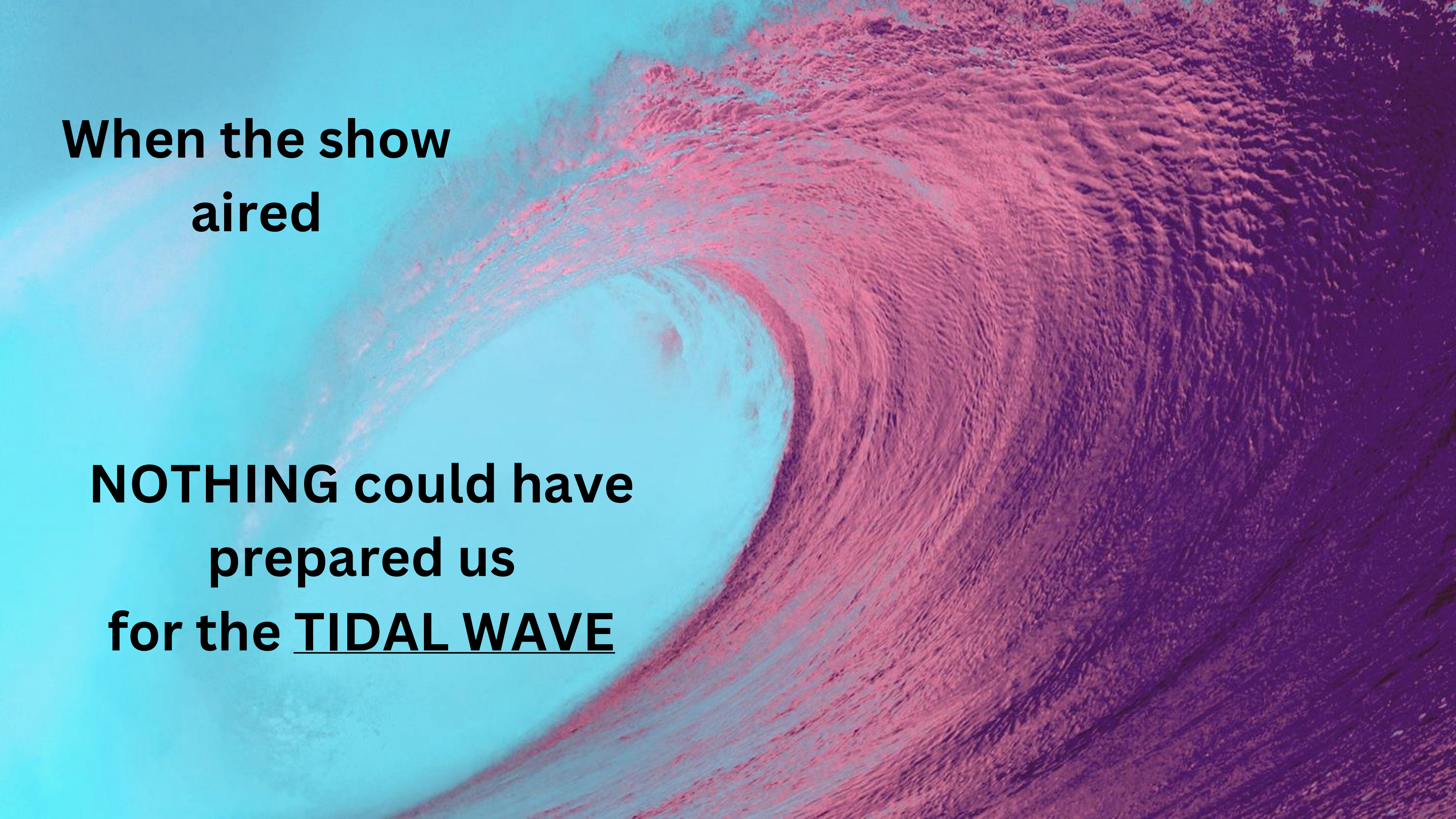
Remember that **EVERYTHING SPEAKS** to a customer/visitor.
What they see, hear, smell and feel will determine
how they feel about our town.
Let's work together to deliver exceptional service to everyone.
We want visitors to **LOVE THIS PLACE LIKE WE DO!**



If you have any questions contact the
Wetumpka Area Chamber of Commerce
116 East Bridge St.
334-567-4811



blind date

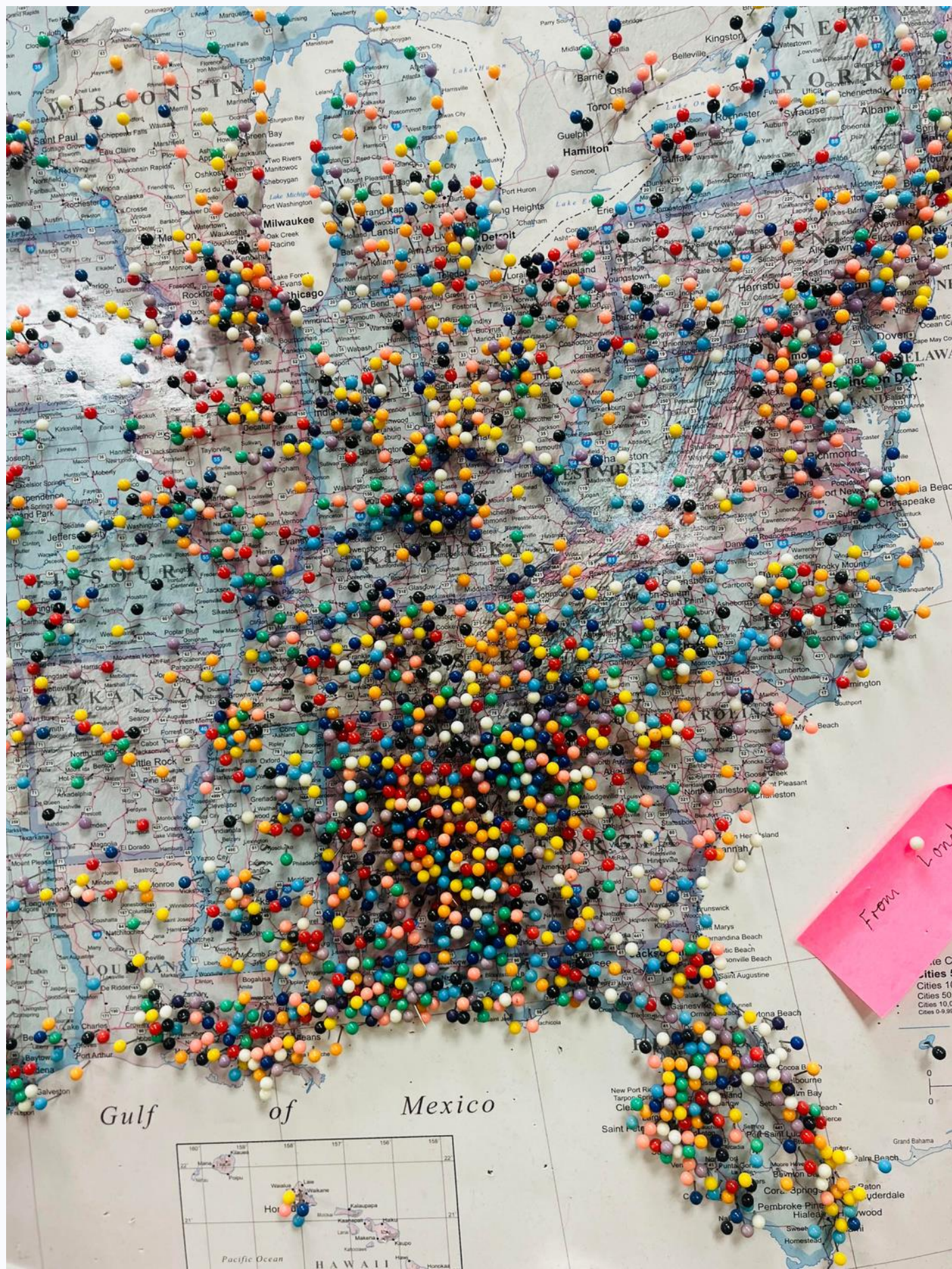


**When the show
aired**

**NOTHING could have
prepared us
for the TIDAL WAVE**

Lightening in a Bottle





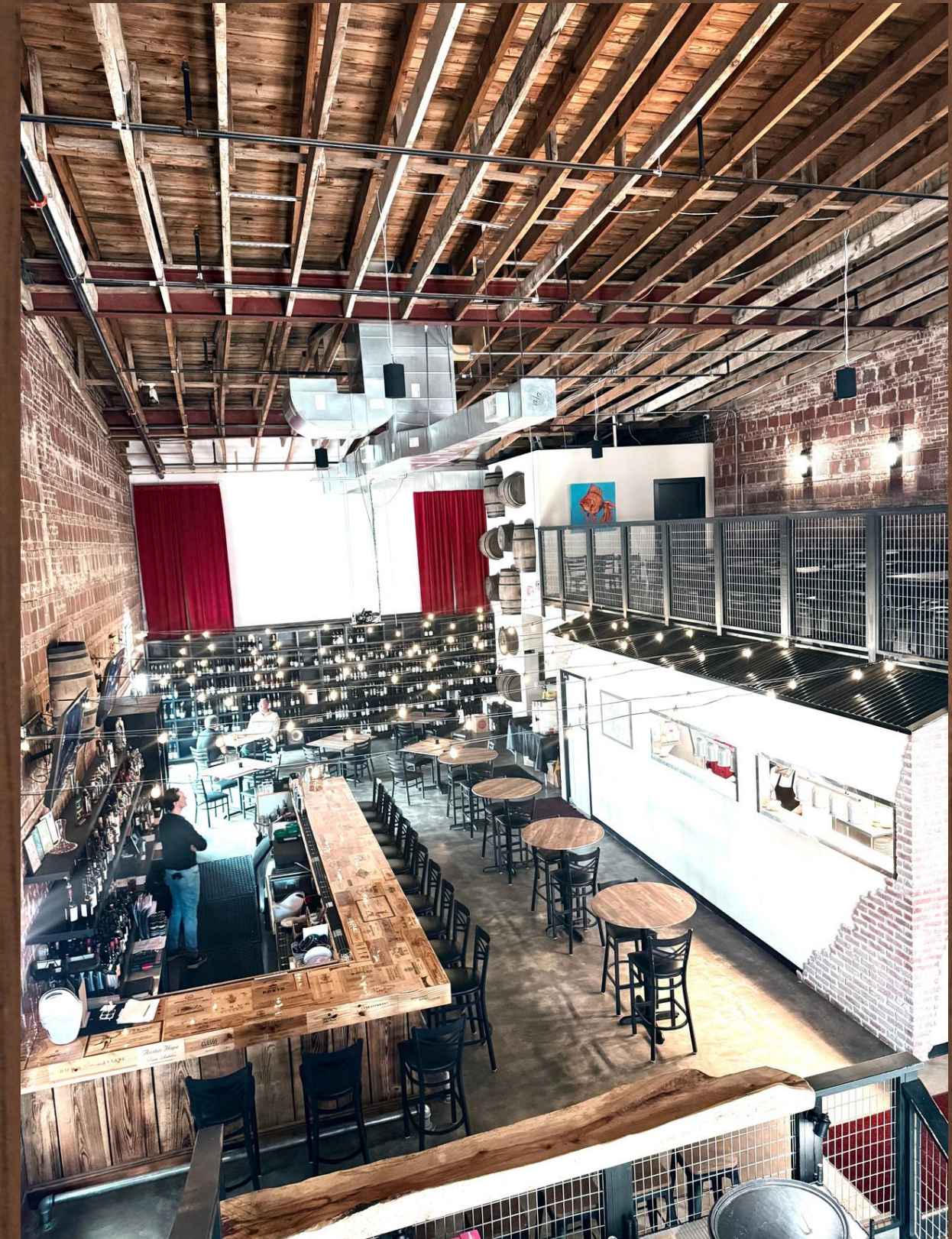
Spain, Denmark, Taiwan, China, Malawi, Serbia, Czech Republic, Israel.....



A BEAUTIFUL
RESTAURANT
IN OUR HISTORIC
THEATER



WITH A
MOVIE
SCREEN
ON THE
BACK WALL!



The Kelly Gallery
whose mission
is to help provide
ART EDUCATION
for
EVERYONE





An URBAN

MARKET!



Our community understands
WHO WE ARE
and are working together
to tell our unique story





WELCOME TO



FORT TOULOUSE
FORT JACKSON



FAIN

Historic
Downtown



WETUMPKA, AL.







WETUMPKA IMPACT CRATER

Discovery

AND VISITOR CENTER

**Our hotels
are running
90-100%
occupancy**

ALL THE TIME



REGIONAL MAPS and TOURISM MATERIALS



Give them a reason to stay overnight and come back

Maximize the ripple effect



Destination....WETUMPKA!



Make them want to come back!

And ALL of this has happened

Because we embraced what made us different....

**And encouraged
people so they would get in the boat....**

And row the same direction.

it has NOT been easy....

the unimaginable happened in January 2019...



**An EF2 tornado
struck our historic district**

**Destroying 35
structures**





But...

We have no money.

**The building owner uses the building as
storage..**

We've never done it that way before.

We can't find employees.



WORKFORCE

WORKFORCE

WORKFORCE

We had to create a pipeline



**NO
MONEY?**



What CAN you

DIFFICULT -APATHETIC BUILDING OWNERS?

Will they let you paint their door?

Will they let you put art in the front window?

Will they let you put a pop up shop inside for an event?

What **WILL** they do? Start small.

WHO ARE YOU?
What's your story?
How can you tell it
creatively?

**How can you connect regionally
to create
sustainable
TOURISM?**

WHAT IS YOUR

WHY?



or





**NOT A
SOW'S EAR**



focus on

your

ASSETS

We want someone else to act.
But miracles aren't what other people do.
They're what each of us does.
They're what happens when ordinary people take extraordinary action.
To be a miracle doesn't mean you have to tackle problems
across the globe.
It means making a difference
in your own living room, cubicle, neighborhood, community.

Regina Brett
Author of "Be the Miracle"



**They
ALL
say
YA'LL!**



**If you
would
like to
take what
you heard
today
home
with
you!**



Available on Amazon



Thank You

Please reach out if I can help !

Shellie Phelps

Biggest Fish Consulting
shellie@bigfishart4you.com

www.bigfish4you.com