# A NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS, FAMILIES AND SUPPORTERS OF THE LEARNING TREE INTERCEPTION OF THE LEARNING TREE

# New United Way Support for Learning Tree Programs

New United Way financial support will benefit Learning Tree programs in Anniston and Mobile. The United Way of East Central Alabama approved The Little Tree Preschool in Anniston as a partner agency for 2015 and awarded \$17,000 for the school. The Mobile region was also approved as a partner agency by the United Way of Southwest Alabama. 2016 funding will be provided for the Little Tree Preschool and Woody's Song School through UWSWA's Community Impact Building Block funding for \$40,000 for the programs. The 2016 campaign will kick off this fall. Please support your workplace campaign if you are not already!

The Learning Tree has provided services for children in Alabama for more than 30 years. •





# **Tallassee School Celebrates 10 Years**

Tallassee's The Learning Tree School on South Dubois Street will celebrate 10 years of service to the community with an open house from 5 to 7 p.m. July 30. The program is one of the city's top five employers. The School serves 35 students who have significant educational, medical and behavioral challenges. "These are students who can't be served in their local school systems or at home because of their behavioral challenges or the level of their educational challenges, so we offer an educational program with special training to meet their needs." The key, Williams noted, is applied behavior analysis, a discipline of psychology that involves changing behaviors by arranging an environment that is conducive to channeling good behaviors.



"We hope this event will provide the community an awareness of the services we provide," said executive director, Dr. Marc Williams. •



**SAVE THE DATE!** On **Saturday, October 24**, the Learning Tree will host the 2nd annual Angling for Autism to benefit the residential school in Tallassee and the Little HAPIE Tree Preschool in Auburn. The tournament is \$100 per boat and will be held at Wind Creek State Park in Alexander City. Early registrations are welcomed! Thousands in prizes are awarded! For sponsorship information contact Stephanie Weldon at (334) 415-9372 or sweldon@learning-tree.org. •

SUMMER 2015 ISSUE: United Way Support • Foundation Awards • 2,500 Mile Ride • Samson's Run

Summer 2015 Volume 3 • Issue 2

#### http://www.learning-tree.org

Established in 1983, The Learning Tree, Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to children and adolescents with significant educational, medical, and behavioral challenges; helping them develop and maintain a quality of life expected by non-disabled members of their family and community.

The Learning Tree is governed by a volunteer board of directors, representative of the primary service areas in the State of Alabama.

#### **Board of Directors**

Dr. John Caldwell Nathan Handmacher Samuel Junkin Allison Kendall Mike Marion Dr. Sam Perna Dr. Marcia Rossi Dr. Jim Siders

This newsletter is published by The Learning Tree, Resource Development Department compiled and distributed by coordinating offices located in these Alabama cities: Anniston/Jacksonville Auburn/Tallassee Mobile

#### The Learning Tree, Inc. Administrative Office

101 S. Dubois Street PO Box 780639 Tallassee, AL 36078 334-252-0025

Executive Director Dr. Marc Williams

**Regional Director-Anniston/Jacksonville** Pat Murphy

Regional Director-Auburn/Tallassee Whitney Hester

**Regional Director-Mobile** Juanita Williams

**Operations Director** Ben Rogers

**Resource Development Director** Sheila Sears

Member of the Alabama Autism Providers Network Collaborating, Advocating and Caring for People with ASD www.al-autismproviders.net



Exciting new program developments and growth continue! Our Consultation and Outreach Department now provides professional training for more than 50 school systems, and serves approximately 180 children across the state. These services significantly increased our statewide impact to serving over 600 children and families.

Additionally this year, we piloted a new community inclusion program in Mobile designed to create work experiences for our older children. The students develop their work skills while fulfilling volunteer activities in cooperation with other community organizations. Please be sure to note the article and photographs in this newsletter for more of this heartwarming success story.

We are also excited about the new training curriculum and format we are starting for our employees. Though I think we have

some of the best, and best trained, employees in this field; this effort will make them even better. Of course, this translates to an even more significant impact on the children we serve.

Message from the Executive Director, Dr. Marc Williams

Our efforts toward a unified Information Technology system for all of our programs are about to start the implementation phase. This will take the efficiency and effectiveness of sharing ideas and news to a point that was almost unimaginable a few years ago. This project will also aid in establishing a consistency of care across our programs that was unachievable prior to this effort.

Please join me in welcoming Dr. Marcia Rossi as the new president of our board of directors. Dr. Rossi is a Professor in the Department of Psychology at Alabama State University in Montgomery. I appreciate her leadership and look forward to working with her and the remaining board members this year.

In closing, once again I want to thank all of our parents, employees, and community volunteers for all that you do to support our programs to help children learn and grow. We appreciate the yard sales, bake sales, runs, golf tournaments, galas and many more events. Also, please note the articles about the special efforts by Samson Kipchirchir in the Boston Marathon and Jerre Brimer in the 2,500 Mile Ride. Thank you and have a great summer! •

# Foundations Awards Exceed \$100,000

Local foundation support is critical to the success of The Learning Tree programs. Thus far in 2015, more than \$100,000 has been awarded. Their support has provided iPads and other technology, therapeutic services, and numerous upgrades to our facilities. We appreciate the support of the following foundations:

- A.S. Mitchell Foundation
- Cigna Foundation
- The Daniel Foundation
- Jo Ann and Cortez Fowler Family Foundation
- Jewish Endowment Foundation
- Ben May Foundation
- Gannett Foundation



- C.D., Helen & Jeff Glaze Foundation
- GKN Foundation
- Altec-Styslinger Foundation
- Anniston Community
  Education Foundation
- The Busfield Foundation
- The Hudson Foundation
- Alabama Power Foundation

# Our Kids Give Back to the Community!

The Community Inclusion program in Mobile began in November allowing older students the opportunity to take part in work-related volunteer activities at various sites in the city. The students are developing their job skills while giving back to the community. The jobs range from helping churches prepare for their services, sorting recyclables, to training for maintenance in a beauty shop. The students are developing good job skills and learning to interact with the public. The Community Inclusion partners are:

- Christ United Methodist Church
- Environmental Studies Center
- Goodwill Easter Seals
  Recycling Center
- Mt. Hebron Church Ministries
- Sai's Hair Studio

Sai, hosts a student at her beauty shop and said, "I've been very pleased with her work. She has progressed very well in the time she has been here. She's a big help!" There are currently thirteen residential students and four students from Woody's Song School participating. •

> Pictured are students sorting plastic and preparing to work at Goodwill Easter Seal's Recycling Center and folding foil at Sai's Hair Studio.

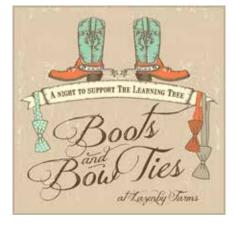
2 The Learning Tree | Helping Children Learn and Grow







# **AUBURN/TALLASSEE REGION**



First Boots and **Bow Ties Event** 

The first annual "Boots and Bow Ties" was a huge success for the Tallassee/Auburn region. The event was held at Lazenby Farms in Auburn on February 27th. The evening was filled with lots of good food, music and friends. Martha's Trouble provided the entertainment

donating their time and musical talents for the night. There were more than 120 guests in attendance to enjoy the silent auction and gaming tables. Board members Dr .Marcia Rossi and Dr. John Caldwell were spotted enjoying the evening, along with distinguished guests, Tallassee Mayor and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Payne, State Representative Mark Tuggle, and Senator Tom Whatley. Jody Fuller was there as the master of ceremonies and kept the evening running smoothly. A big thank you to parent, Mrs. Jennifer Wheeler, for her touching testimony about her daughter and the preschool. The event raised over \$14,000.

The Little HAPIE Tree Preschool parents worked tirelessly on recruiting sponsors and silent auction items.





Center left, Dr. Marcia Rossi and right Jan Newton

The Hudson Foundation Cotton Blossom Sponsors Alabama Power Foundation Max Credit Union Walmart - Tallassee **AES** Industries

Martha's Trouble

## **Bow Tie Sponsors**

Many thanks to our sponsors:

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A special thanks to Southern Hospitality Catering for the delicious food; design work by Anita Sears; Dawn Lazenby of Lazenby Farms; April Rapp; Paige Norris; Pi Beta Phi Sorority; Brittney Lockhart; Natalie Milner and Emily Baker for helping organize the event.





Dallas Weldon, Phillip Beckham, Stephanie Weldon, Lauryn Beckham, and Kami Scarborough

## **Resource Development Committee Organizes for Tallassee and Auburn**

The Tallassee and Auburn region hosted their second resource development committee meeting in May. The members are very excited about their participation and have planned lots of exciting things to bring awareness and new funding to the programs. The members of the committee are: Ben Atkinson with Ben Atkinson Motors in Tallassee; Julie Brown, parent ; Priscilla Hammonds, retired nurse Tallassee; Merideth Henderson, Production Assistant at Country Financial in Auburn; Dr. Doris Hill, Assistant Research Professor at the Center for Disability Research and Service in Auburn; Brad Linville, Linville Memorial Funeral Home and Elmore County Coroner in Tallassee; Laura Leigh Peters, Marketing and Community Relations at Community Home Care and Hospice in Tallassee; Judge Patrick Pinkston, Elmore County District Judge in Tallassee; Laurie Rygiel, HR Management Solutions inTallassee; Trey Taylor, Elmore County Commissioner in Tallassee; Turia Williams, parent of a former preschool student in Auburn. The group will meet quarterly to plan and support the goals of the group. A big "Thank You" to each of the members for taking time out of their busy schedules to support our programs.

### **Drug Education Luncheon**



Learning Tree represented at Drug Education Luncheon; (left to right) Teresa Atkins, Sheila and Jim Sears, Ben Rogers, Heather Osborne, Kim Turner and Laura Broadus.

### **Kids Clothes Connection**

The Little HAPIE Tree Preschool coordinated another fundraiser with Kids Clothes Connection in February/March. The Kids Clothes Connection is a bi-annual consignment sale in the Auburn area. The merchandise they accept includes gently-used clothing (infant - juniors/young men), small household electrics, toys, bicycles, furniture, and baby gear. For the spring sale, the preschool received donations from approximately a dozen families and raised \$633 for the preschool. A big thank you to our donors who brought items to the preschool; The Adamson family, Cornelius family; Deshpande family, Doh family, Ko family, Brown family, Rainer family, Ward family, Carlson family, Quevedo family and Bruner family. Also a big thank you



to the volunteers: Jessica Zevac, Alison Hodge, Laura Wildman, Beverly Adams, Chaitra Gurray, Jinghua Bian, Tina Ledbetter, and Stacy Wilson

# AUBURN/TALLASSEE REGION (cont.)

## **Premier Jewelry Fundraiser**

Donna Higgins, a Premier Jeweler, recently donated 100% of the proceeds from a jewelry party to The Learning Tree programs in our region.





Stephanie Weldon, Resource Development Coordinator receives check from Donna Wiggins.

# Junior League Supports The Little HAPIE Tree Preschool

The Junior League of Lee County recently awarded a grant to The Little HAPIE Tree Preschool in Auburn for a health and wellness program. "Let's Get Growing!" is a gardening program that will allow the preschool students to grow their own vegetables and learn about the importance of eating healthy. The Little HAPIE Tree Preschool serves 80 preschoolers ages 3-5. The Junior League promotes health and wellness to elementary and middle school children of Lee County by providing and assisting with access to food, nutritional education and physical education.



Pictured left to right: Tipi Miller, Keep Opelika Beautiful, Niki Patrick, JLLC, Stephanie Froelich, JLLC, Kirby Farr, JLLC, Katie Kingston, JLLC, Elyse Corbitt, JLLC, Stephanie Weldon, HAPIE, Frixie Melton, Auburn, Daycare, Danielle Ritch, JLLC

# **ANNISTON/JACKSONVILLE REGION**

# 2,500 Miles Down the Mississippi River

Jerre Brimer of Oxford, Alabama and co-founder of The Learning Tree, Inc. began a 2,500 mile bicycle ride on June 9, 2015 down the Mississippi River to increase awareness and raise \$25,000 in funding for The Little Tree Preschool in Anniston, Alabama. The bike ride venture was completed in approximately 35 days, ending on about July 14th. He began the ride in Lake Itasca, Minnesota, pedaling through Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, and ended in Venice, Louisiana.





Jerre Brimer on his 2,500 mile bicycle ride down the Mississippi River.



### **New Resource Development Coordinator** Mrs. Erica Brown joined The

Learning Tree in June as Resource Development Coordinator for the Anniston/Jacksonville region. She replaces Lisa Ann Spurling who transitioned to work with United Cerebral Palsy. She worked for The Learning Tree for almost 10 years. "We are excited to have Ms. Brown. her fundraising experiences while working at the Cherokee Country Club will be extremely helpful to her as she begins her work with us," said Sheila Sears, Director of Resource Development. Ms. Brown's

husband is Shannon and they have a five year old daughter, Claira Beth. They live in Centre, Alabama.

### Aces for Autism benefit Gala

Erica Brown

The 4th annual Aces for Autism benefit Gala was held at Classic II on Noble Street in Anniston, Alabama. The Gala is one of the largest and most successful fundraisers for the Anniston/ Jacksonville region. More than 175 guests from across the state attended the formal Gala. Guests enjoyed an exciting evening of

casino-style gaming, a silent auction, great food and music. Goodfellas from Birmingham did an amazing job entertaining guests with blackjack, craps, roulette, 3-card poker, Texas Hold 'Em, and slots! Each \$60 admission ticket included \$500 in gaming chips, dinner, and dessert. Guests cashed in their



"winnings" for chances to win prizes at the end of the evening, This year's grand prize was a \$100 Willow Tree Boutique Gift Certificate, Nikon Pocket Camera, and Merle Norman Gift Bags with product and \$20 Certificates.

Silent auction items included an autographed football by Coach Nick Saban; a \$500 Gift Certificate to Diamonds Direct; a long weekend vacation in beautiful Gulf Shores donated by, Mr. Mike Marion; an autographed print of Coach Gus Malzahn of the Auburn Tigers; a Disney vacation; a Browning Gold Medallion .270 and Bear Hunt, donated by Country Boy Outdoors of Helen, Ga.; a guided fishing excursion for two, by Kelly Matthews, Professional Angler from Centre, Alabama: and a Browning BPS Shotgun by Creedmoore Guns. There were several baskets to match every guest's interest.

The Learning Tree relies on special event fundraisers to continue important services for children. Thank you to everyone who helped make the Gala a success. We hope to see you again next year!



Alpha Xi Delta ladies



Pictured L to R: Emily Bain, Phyllis Reile, Lisa Spurling, Dr. Marc Williams, Sheila & Jim Sears, and Aimee Spruill.



At 9:00am, Kevin 'The Bull' Bullard donated a Long Drive Presentation. Kevin is currently 8th in the world standings in the Long Drive Competition. He averages well over 400 yards in each drive. His presentation included driving golf balls from his knees, off of a child's tee ball stand, and driving a ball over 200 miles per hour through a ½" plywood plank. Thanks to Kevin, our golf tournament really stood out above the rest.

The main tournament kicked off at 10:00 am, with a shot gun start. Sarah Bright, grandparent of one of The Little Tree's students, provided the BBQ lunch. Players were delivered lunch, drinks and snacks during play by volunteers. A silent auction was also available in the ballroom that included children's art, jewelry, a stay at the PGA Resort and Spa in Florida, and lots more.

At 2:00pm, the winners were awarded their cash prizes.

#### First Place:

Gary Evans, David Morrow, Joe Sapp, and Kevin Bullard Second Place: Will Bedwell, Trevor McCarley, Nick Sawyer, and JR Young Third Place:

Kevin Bedwell, Jeremy Brazier, Scotty McFry, Phillip Hicks

#### **Junior Long Drive Competition Sponsors:**

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#### **Tournament Sponsors:**

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# ANNISTON/JACKSONVILLE REGION (cont.)

## 2015 FORE! the Kids Golf Tournament

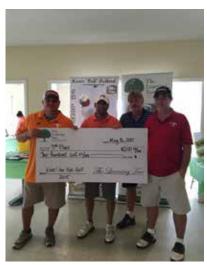
The First Annual FORE! the Kids Golf Tournament was held on May 16, 2015 at Cherokee County Country Club. Despite the thunderstorms and rain clouds, the participants poured in to enjoy the day's activities. Starting at 7:30 am, the junior players on the local high school teams participated in a Junior Long Drive Competition. As their families and friends watched in amazement, the juniors drove their golf balls off of Hole 18 backwards toward the Club's lake. Each competitor received 6 Neon Orange Tournament Balls from the tournament leader, Erica Brown, to ensure each competitor was equal. One at a time, each junior took to the starting point, and gave it their all. The winners were Nick Sawyer (first place at 310 yards), JR Young (second place at 298 yards), and Trevor McCarley (third place at 290 yards). Trophies were awarded to first through third place. Each participant also received a Nike Towel and Ball Marker Set for competing.

Kevin 'The Bull' Bullard gearing up for his presentation



Pictured L to R: Trevor McCarley, JR Young, and Nick Sawyer

Pictured L to R: Gary Evans, David Morrow, Joe Sapp, and Kevin Bullard



Pictured L to R: Jeremy Brazier, Scotty McFry, Kevin Bedwell, and Phillip Hicks

# **MOBILE REGION**

## HPC Pharmacy's Derby Event a Winning Finish for The Learning Tree

The month of April kicked off with the 3rd Annual "A Night at the Races" event sponsored by, HPC Specialty Pharmacy, raising more than \$25,000 for the Learning Tree programs in Mobile. More than 150 guests attended with the ladies wearing beautiful derby type hats. Most appropriately the event was held under the blue lights of the RSA Tower highlighting National Autism Awareness Month. Fifteen members of the Chi Omega sorority also came to help out and welcomed guests as they arrived.

Dale Drinkard, Jr. provided the music for the evening in the beautiful courtyard of the Ezell House in downtown Mobile while guests enjoyed delicious oysters, shrimp and other hors d'oeuvers prepared by Clark's Kitchen. The highlight of the evening was the fun filled betting on ten filmed horse races that sparked a lot of spirited cheering for the favored horse. Chip Herrington sounded the bugle at the beginning of each race! The beverages for the evening were sponsored by United-Johnson Brothers of Alabama, LLC and Gulf Distributing and desserts were donated by Pam Norris of Pollman's Bakery.

Juanita Williams, Regional Director for Mobile, was there to welcome guests and thank the sponsors. Mr. Ron Cieutat, CEO of HPC Specialty Pharmacy, shared his heartwarming comments about his son and their family's successes with Woody's Song School. Other Regional Directors, Whitney Hester and Pat Murphy were also there joining in the fun.

Judy Sykes and her group of helpers organized a huge silent auction with more than 100 items, including some very special artwork by the children. Everyone had tons of fun in the photo booth and took home a complimentary photo provided by Magic Memories Photography. A big thank you to our title and other sponsors, including:

**Triple Crown Sponsor** HPC Specialty Pharmacy

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Dale Drinkard Ir





Greg & Judy Sykes and Chip Herrington



Ron Cieutat and Juanita Williams



## Learning Tree's **Kipchirchir Dedicates Boston Marathon** Run to the Kids

Samson Kipchirchir. Resident Support Supervisor in Mobile, dedicated his run in the 119th Boston Marathon to the children of The Learning Tree. Kipchirchir finished the race in an amazing 2 hours, 59 minutes and 19 seconds, placing him in the top 8% of the more than 30,000 participants. "Over the last 8 years, I have seen firsthand the hard work and dedication from The Learning Tree employees

Samson Kipchirchir

as they provide the services to the children with developmental disabilities, including autism," said Kipchirchir. He added, "When founder, Jerre Brimer, announced his bike ride down the Mississippi River to support the Little Tree Preschool in Jacksonville, I decided that I too wanted to create more awareness. My ultimate goal in dedicating the Boston Marathon to The Learning Tree is to show support and appreciation for The Learning Tree, children, families, staff, donors and locals." Way to go, Samson! Thank you for your dedication.

### **Cigna Foundation Supports Little Tree Preschool**

Thank you to Cigna Foundation for awarding \$1,000 to the Little Tree Preschool. Special thanks to Little Tree Preschool mom, Kim Morvant for nominating the school in Cigna's Sprout Partnership Challenge.



## The Learning Tree Kids Take to the Streets for Mardi Gras

The children from The Learning Tree Residential School and Woody's Song School celebrated Mardi Gras in February. The schools participated in the Mobile ARC and Volunteers of America parades. The theme for Mobile ARC's parade was Disney. The staff put their creativity to work to design a float based on

# **MOBILE REGION** (cont.)

### "101 Dalmations", complete

with Cruella Deville, aka Miss Tijuanna. Mr. Heath, Miss Christy and the kids made the cutest puppies! The Woody's Song School kids chose their favorite superhero, Spiderman, as the theme for their float. A big thank you goes out to Woody's Song School dad, Jeb Fulford, for building and driving the float.

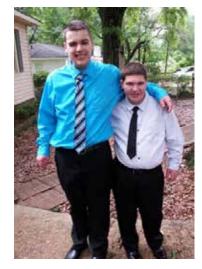


## It's Cookie Time for Kilborn's Kids!

Kilborn's Kids recently took part in the Girl Scouts' cookie sale. The children set up at the Walmart Neighborhood Market dressed as their favorite cookie. They were so excited to learn about handling money, making change and closing the deal. Kilborn's Kids, a program for the children at Woody's Song School and The Learning Tree Residential School, is sponsored by Vincent Kilborn.







# **Students attend Spring Dance**

Students attended a Spring Dance at Mary G. Montgomery High School in April. The boys had a great time getting dressed up and showing off their dance moves with their classmates

## Gulf Distributing Makes the Holidays Brighter at The Learning Tree

Gulf Distributing has played Santa's helper for the children in The Learning Tree's Residential School for a number of years. In addition to the very generous donations made by the company, the employees hold fundraising events, solicit vendors and make their own individual donations to see that our children don't go without during the holiday season. Special "elves" then converge on WalMart with lists in hand to purchase the presents. The children in The Learning Tree's Residential program have very limited resources to purchase items on their own. The gifts provided by Gulf Distributing have made a world of difference to them. They have received toys, clothes, bedding, furniture and electronics. They make sure that each child receives several gifts to open on Christmas morning. One of the most valuable gifts that the company has provided each year is the iPads, given to our nonverbal children. A special "talker" program is installed on the iPads. The staff then teaches the children to "talk" using the iPad. For a child that has never been able to express their most basic needs, this gift is priceless. "We can never express just how much we appreciate the generosity and dedication of Gulf Distributing, says Juanita Williams, Regional Director – Mobile. "The children light up when they see the toys and gifts but the staff knows exactly what an impact these gifts will make to each child.



Pictured L to R: DM, Samuel Rollins, Amy Baldwin, KB, JG, Ka'Leah Rogers and Daniel Harper



Kelly Hulak with Gulf Distributing



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#### In honor of Lee and Ann Barton's marriage: Mr. and Mrs. Paul Handmach

#### In honor of Neil Tepper's Bar Mitzvah

Mr. Lane Barrocas Mr. Phillip Barrocas Ms. Louann Bombe Mr. Harold Brandt Mr. and Mrs. Paul Handmacher Ms. Daniela Kaplan Mr. and Mrs. Richard Lipsey Ms. Rochelle Mullenix Ms. Jill Roby Ms. Margaret Winkler Ms. Miriam Worth Ms. Jessica Yeller In memory of Mr. Bo Black Mr. and Mrs. Paul Handmacher

#### In memory of Ms. Betty Cobb: Mr. and Mrs. Paul Handmacher

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Resource Development Office 205 Lambert Avenue, Suite B Mobile, AL 36604

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Former President of the Board of Directors, Mike Marion, receives a plaque for his service from Marc Williams, executive Director, joined by members of the board (left) Mrs. Allison Kendall, Mr. Nathan Handmacher, (right) Dr. Marcia Rossi (incoming President), and Dr. Sam Perna.

# **SAVE THE DATES!**

October 31, 2015 Chip in for Autism Golf Tournament Mobile, AL

November 14, 2015 Puzzle Piece Dash Mobile, AL

October 24, 2015 Angling for Autism Fishing Tournament on Lake Martin Alexander City, AL

October - December 2015 Holiday Helping Hearts All Regions

Anniston/Jacksonville 256-447-9349 Auburn/Tallassee 334-252-0025

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