

Village Living

neighborly news & entertainment for Mountain Brook



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More important than ever: Mountain Brook City Schools Foundation

By Jennifer Gray

Jenny Motes knows she is fortunate to teach in the Mountain Brook school system. "Before the school year even started, I was able to attend a week of technology training," Motes said. "I learned how to use all of the wonderful equipment we have in the classroom such as the Interact pad and document camera."

Motes, a first year teacher at Crestline Elementary, uses this technology in her kindergarten classroom daily. "The use of these tools makes classroom time so much more engaging," Motes said. "The students don't sit and stare while I teach. They are actively engaged, using the technology. I can have them changing positions in the classroom, using the Interact pad along with me."

The learning experience that Motes and other Mountain Brook teachers are creating for students is possible because of the gifts made to the school system by the Mountain Brook City Schools Foundation. The Foundation steps in and fills the funding gaps that are left by statewide



Cherokee Bend 5th grade teacher, Mr. Haller, using a Smartboard with his students

proration and other funding shortfalls.

Mountain Brook resident Lisa Rutherford is on the Board for the MBCS Foundation. "The foundation is critical in helping our students to always move forward with new technologies and techniques that keep them well prepared for the future," Rutherford said. "Our students are already familiar with the technology being used at colleges and will

be better students there as a result."

As many Americans have been dealing with economic setbacks that began in 2008, so have school systems across the country. Mountain Brook is no different. Despite the city's reputation as being one of the most affluent communities in the country, the sting of the longest lasting recession and the collapse of the housing market have been felt here too.

The 2010-2011 school year marks the third year in a row that schools in Alabama are experiencing proration. Proration is where the state cuts the funding to the schools. This has happened in the state of Alabama 19 years since 1950.

"This (proration) was a \$1.3 million impact last year on Mountain Brook schools. This year they anticipate close to a \$1 million less," says Carmine Jordan, director of the Mountain Brook City Schools Foundation.

Another challenge the Mountain Brook schools are facing for the first time is a drop in its tax revenue. This is revenue generated from property taxes. The amount of property tax paid is based on the value of the property.

"Our local school revenues are directly affected by the drop in home values," Superintendent Dicky Barlow said. "And 59 percent of our budget comes from our local revenues."

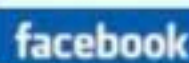
A strong school system and high property values go hand in hand. "If our school system isn't good there isn't much reason to move to Mountain Brook," Jordan said. "Our property taxes are some of the highest in the state, although still low for the Southeast. Because of the schools, people want to live in Mountain Brook."

Even if you do not have children in the Mountain Brook schools, everyone in our

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Artist-in-Residence

Watercolors of former Mountain Brook City Councilman recognized worldwide

By Lauren Nix

After singing "God Save the Queen" in Saint Bartholomew's the Great, the oldest church in London, Mountain Brook residents Bob and Rebecca Moody, along with their son Luke, walked across the street to the reception where they would present Bob's second book of paintings to Queen Elizabeth. In the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Prince Philip and Her Majesty the Queen, Rebecca and Bob were "blown away," Rebecca said.

Then the moment came for the family to remember the rules they were told before the ceremony - how to curtsy, do not speak until spoken to, how to address Her Majesty - because the Queen was making her way to them. "She was so gracious, just as sweet as she could be," Bob said.

Most Mountain Brook residents know Bob as the talented architect who served on the City Council from 2006 until recently. What many people may not realize, however, is that Moody is an exceptional, accomplished artist recognized not only by the Queen of England, but by many, many others.

Seven years after their encounter with the Queen, Bob and Rebecca are working on new projects. They hope to complete



Queen Elizabeth meets Rebecca, Luke, and Bob Moody

more books, the first being a book of Bob's watercolors of Birmingham. For this, they would like to take suggestions about what buildings and sites are special to Birmingham residents.

"We're working with a web design company to make it interactive so that

people can suggest things that Bob can paint, and maybe include some stories about why it's important to them," Rebecca said. "We want to make it not just our Birmingham, but everyone's Birmingham."

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ARTIST
cover story

Rebecca says she also hopes to send out a monthly newsletter with a free watercolor included

to keep people updated on their plans. A book with paintings of the livery halls in London and a book of New York Churches are also possibilities.

She is a writer and he a painter, and with their combined talents, the couple has self-published their two books. The first, "Gifts of Grace - Alabama Churches in Watercolor," was published in 2001 and, as the title suggests, is a collection of Bob's watercolor paintings of various churches in Alabama along with a description and history of the churches and Bob's personal experiences there.

"It really was fun," Bob said. "I had traveled the state so much, and I had sketched and painted a lot of churches in Alabama, and I thought we're going to do a book. And that was just a natural with Rebecca being a writer."

The second book, "The Church Triumphant - English Churches in Watercolor," is the one presented to the Queen. It is comprised of Bob's paintings of English churches. James Blott, director of the Historic Churches Preservation Trust, approached the couple and asked them to create this book after seeing their work in "Gifts of Grace."

"[Gifts of Grace] had been out for about two years, and we got a call from an Englishman, and he said that we needed to get involved with the Historic Preservation Trust in England because they were having their 50th anniversary," Rebecca said.

The Historic Churches Preservation Trust is an organization whose goal is to preserve and restore churches in England, and her majesty the Queen is the patron. Bob and Rebecca expected the book to take a few years to complete, but were told if they could have it done by the Trust's 50th anniversary ceremony, they could present the first copy to the Queen.

"We started in October, and he said if you can have it finished by next June

and published, you can present the first copy to the Queen at this 50th anniversary ceremony," Bob said. "So we worked like fiends and got it produced."

Before the Books

After graduating from Auburn University where he earned a degree in architecture with a focus in interior design, Bob began working as a graphic designer for R.G. LeTourneau in Dallas, Texas.

Next, he worked for NASA in Huntsville when it was first formed as the Art Director in their future projects department. His department was responsible for illustrating the Apollo I project, and his illustrations were presented to Congress. Each slide was a hand-painted watercolor.

"Our future projects department did 56 slides of the Apollo program," Bob said.

After working at NASA for seven years, Bob said he felt it was time to return to architecture, and moved to Birmingham to work for Charles H. McCauley, which was the largest architectural firm in the southeast at the time.

After heading their interior design department for seven years, Bob decided to open his own firm, Moody and Associates, which specialized in historic restoration and renovation.

Bob and Rebecca have been married for 31 years and working together for 30 of those. After meeting at Redmont Gardens, Rebecca left her job at *Southern Living* magazine to work with Bob.

"She, for not being trained in design, is the best designer who ever worked in the office," Bob said. "We've been a pretty good team."

After 30 years in business, Bob and Rebecca closed the office to write a book. After the completion of the two books, Bob began serving on the City Council in 2006. He says his only regret is not being able to get Mountain Brook Village designated as a historic place on the national register.

"I had worked so long in historic preservation and restoration, and

An open letter to the citizens of Mountain Brook

Dear Mountain Brook residents,

After four years on the Mountain Brook City Council, I would like to say how much I have appreciated the opportunity and would like to welcome the newest city council member, Amy Carter. I look forward to her thoughtful contribution and unique perspective. While I thoroughly enjoyed my four years, many very critical development issues impacting our community's quality of life will arise during the next four and it will take the effort of many citizens to make responsible municipal decisions. I urge everyone to remain informed and engaged. We are all so lucky to have such a remarkable community in which to live, and it is our civic responsibility to guide our City Council in making decisions which will impact all of us.

On that note, I want to thank everyone who assisted me during my term, including the countless volunteers for lending their particular expertise toward council decisions. I appreciated each and every person who encouraged me, wrote me, or expressed an opinion indicating their passion and interest in Mountain Brook. Your vision is what keeps this community special and the envy of communities nationwide! During my service on the council, I was continuously reminded of the many, many residents in our city who contribute their

time, their experience, and their dollars toward making our community better and stronger. The work of our volunteers is the backbone of what makes this community outstanding - from athletic advocates, cheerleaders, and coaches, PTO volunteers, chamber and event volunteers to library workers, historians, board members, and city officials - thank you! There are hundreds of volunteers in our community, and please know that your efforts are appreciated and do not go unnoticed!

I've also been privileged to serve with the finest group of municipal employees anywhere in the country. Gaining insight into the efficient workings of our city government and getting to know our staff was one of the true pleasures of my term on the council. Our City Manager, Sam Gaston, has been nationally recognized, but all of our city employees are the best and the brightest in their fields (and also the nicest!) - and we are so fortunate to have them working hard on our behalf.

I plan to remain right here in Mountain Brook for the rest of my life. So I hope that like many other volunteers in this community, I can continue to remain engaged and make a positive contribution. It's a special place with very special people and I appreciated the opportunity to serve in our city government.

Sincerely yours,
Bob Moody

Mountain Brook Village, to us, is the most special place in America," Bob said.

Bob was also the only council member to vote against the Lane Park development, a vote he is still confident in today. "I worked in that [industry] for 30 years or 40, and I just feel like my vision for Mountain Brook is what it ought to be, and when you feel that strongly that's the way you vote, whatever the consequences."

Overall, Bob feels serving for the council was a positive experience and

allowed him to learn about the city. "I got to know all of the city and realized we have the very best," Bob said. "I was amazed at the number of volunteers."

Bob's work will be featured at the Mountain Brook Art Association's Holiday Art Show on Nov. 4.

For more information on Bob and Rebecca, and to see some of Bob's watercolors, visit their website at www.moodywatercolors.com or find them on Twitter at twitter.com/moodypaints.

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