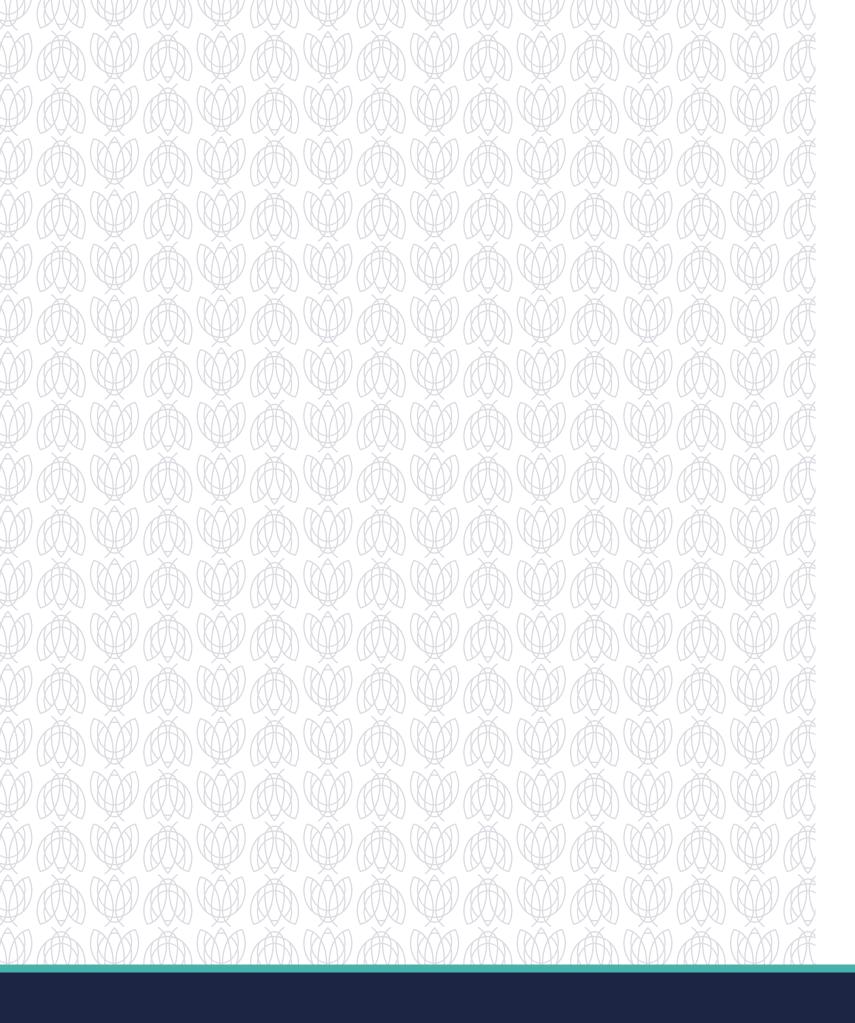




Annual Report 2020



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## **BOARD of DIRECTORS**



From left, John Cook Jr., Lyn Cook, Leslie Cook, Eleanor (Jo) Cook, & Brian Cook

# VISION

- > To encourage curiosity and creativity
- > To grow with our community
- > To be a high-quality natural science resource
- To promote collaboration among diverse groups of people
- > To be leaders that inspire and motivate next generations to be good stewards of our environment
- > To never stop learning

# LEADERSHIP



Scott Mayo Executive > Director



Mark Wallace Senior Director 📏 of Administration



<

John Kelton

Jeanne Payne Director of 🚿 Development



#### Board Chairman

Brian Cook President &





Director of Exhibits & Visitor Experience

### **ADVISORY** BOARD **MEMBERS**

Chief Nate Allen Jim Aycock **Doug Bachuss Greg Barnes** Dr. Marc Bendickson Angela Casciano **Renee Simmons Raney** Tami Reist Destin Sandlin Tara Sandlin Wally Terry Skip Thompson

## **MISSION**

is to engage, excite, & educate visitors of all ages about the natural created world around us.

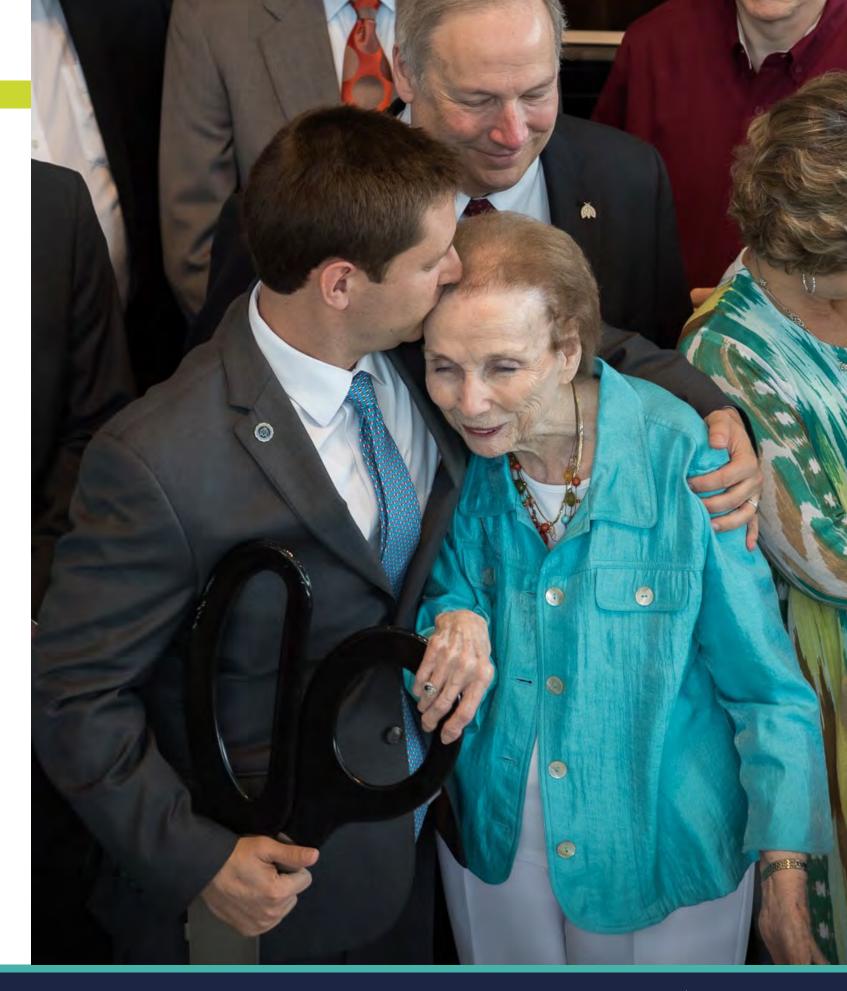
#### **IN MEMORY**



## Eleanor "Jo" Mitcham Cook

September 21, 1928 – December 7, 2020

Te remember with love and gratitude Jo Cook, who was a co-founder, board member, and steward of the Cook Museum of Natural Science in its various forms for over fifty years. Mrs. Cook was overjoyed to see the vision for this new museum come to life, not only with the physical components, but also with the passion, character, and skills of the team members and the enthusiastic embrace and support from our community and region. It's now our honor to carry this baton forward on her behalf.





## **PRESIDENT** & **CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD** BRIAN COOK

ast year, 2020, had more than its share of changed plans for us all. Your new Museum began the year with record setting daily attendance **I** at the Fun Day programs, and field trips were in such high demand that we opened back up on Mondays during the school season. All was going exceedingly well and according to the plan, that is, until we had to close our doors for nearly four months (March - June) due to the worldwide coronavirus pandemic.

It was time to get creative! Initially structured for school field trips, we retooled and modified the guest experience and programming to accommodate, add value, and remain relevant during such unprecedented and cautious times. We launched workshops, Lunch & Learn presentations, camps, family activities, and classes. I am so proud of the entire Museum team, which pivoted well, diligently and creatively reopening even more efficiently, effectively, and with renewed enthusiasm.

While we had always planned to be the forever home of an **endangered**, **non-releasable sea turtle,** the timing and specifics of a turtle in need were out of our hands. Then, in the midst of a global pandemic, on June 29, 2020, we announced the exciting news that Kale, a Kemp's ridley sea turtle, would be our newest resident for potentially the next 50-80 years! Wow! What a timely ray of hope and encouragement that we were now responsible for his care beyond a single generation!

As we carefully and strategically enhanced programming and operations, we saw a tremendously positive response from the community, which the Membership growth reflects. Thank you for your continued partnership in such a meaningful endeavor, that with your support and use, will allow generations to meet Kale and discover Life is Amazing!



#### ABOVE

Visit from Alabama's governor on March 9, 2020, from left: Scott Mayo, Eric Miller, Brian Cook, Lyn Cook, Representative Terri Collins. Governor Kay Ivey, Senator Arthur Orr. Dr. Jeanne Payne, John Kelton, & Mark Wallace.

#### RIGHT

President & Chairman of the Board Brian Cook & his son Davis.







#### ABOVE

Friends visit from The Nature Conservancy, from left, John Gully, Scott Mayo, Mitch Reid, Allison Burns, & Jeanne Payne.

#### RIGHT

**Executive Director** Scott Mayo accepts the 2020 Attraction of the Year PEAK Award on behalf of the Museum.



### Letter from the **EXECUTIVE** DIRECTOR SCOTT MAYO

**T** hat a year! We had a good start with January and February hosting great crowds of smiling guests enjoying field trips, classes, and special Fun Days in and around the Exhibits. While we were ramping up programs, the world was on its way to a pandemic. The Museum, like other attractions, restaurants, and tourist-based businesses, closed, not to reopen for four months.

While there was, and still is, plenty of real pain and economic hardship to go around, we chose to focus on the positives. The shutdown allowed us to restructure and right-size for the new environment upon reopening. We were able to make several structural improvements to the Exhibits while closed as well. While we missed seeing guests, we reopened with a sense of excitement and energy!

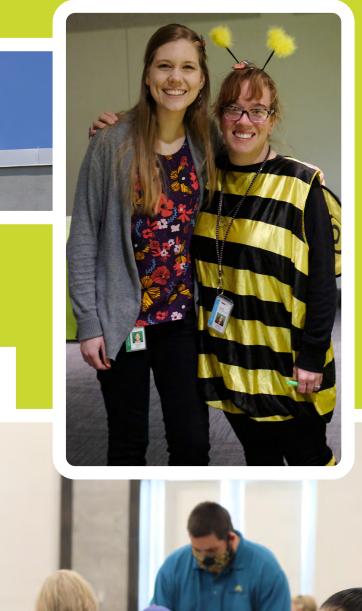
Since reopening, we have been blessed with good attendance. We made every effort to make a visit to the Museum a great experience by taking necessary safety precautions, by adding classes and expanding programs, and by greeting our visitors with tons of hospitality and personal attention. The outpouring of support from guests, Members, and donors has been so humbling. By the fall of the year, things were beginning to feel normal again.

We were always driven by the Mission to engage, excite, and educate visitors of all ages about the natural created world around us. After 2020, we now know and fully appreciate what a privilege it is to have the opportunity to do so. Thank you for your support of the Cook Museum of Natural Science!





# We are a





he team at the Cook Museum is one of its greatest assets. They engage with visitors and guests to provide a truly unique experience. They impart knowledge with excitement and enthusiasm to those around them and impact so many that come through the doors. It is because of their dedication to the Museum's Mission and Vision that we are able to provide a high-quality Museum experience.

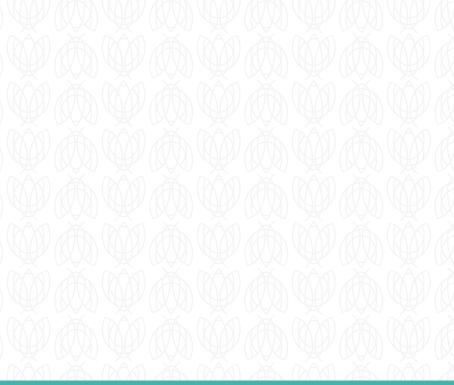
12 | ORGANIZATION











# Encouraging CURIOSITY & CREATIVITY



ducation looked a little different last year for many. The Education Legartment was able to adapt to the changes 2020 brought, and provide a resource for safe, hands-on learning for the community. They offered field trips, Community Classes, Homeschool Classes, and after-school programs. 3,725

**Students attended Museum field** trips in 2020





# **CLASSES FOR ALL**

n 2020, Cook Museum teamed up with Jerraud Powers and the Team Freeze Foundation to provide an after-school program here at the Museum for several of the North Alabama L Boys & Girls Club locations free of charge to the clubs. This program is ongoing, and we hope to expand on these types of opportunities offered at the Cook Museum in the future.

60+

Classes offered to the public

Some of the classes offered to the public last year included:

- Extraordinary Life Cycles
- Fungus Among Us
- Living vs. Nonliving
- Sheep Brain & **Heart Dissections**
- Squid Dissections
- and many more!











Three local clubs were sponsored by Jerraud Powers and the Team Freeze Foundation to take part in an educational experience at the Cook Museum.



Scheduled classes on a variety of topics were offered to the public that provided a high-quality educational experience in a safe environment for hands-on learning alongside other students.

#### **"OLOGIES"** AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

This after-school educational program encompassed six classes based in the areas of herpetology, geology, cardiology, ecology, aerology, and apiology.

1,270 **Students reached** through **Education** Classes



**Biome & Engineering** Summer Camps

Creepy Crawly Single-Day Camp

Seasonal Science Multi-Day Camp

Winter Wonder Single-Day Camp





# **VIRTUAL LEARNING**

T ith the shift from in-school learning to virtual learning last year, the Education and Animal Care Departments, along with several talented team members, worked to create short, educational videos used to promote learning on many different science-related topics.

The Cook Museum Discovery Hub features a wide array of educational videos, activities, and articles that are accessible through the Cook Museum website.

Some topics include:

- **Centrifugal Force**
- Q&As with Animal Care
- Sleep
- The Skinny on Skin
- Volcanoes
- and many more!

# 16k+ views

The Museum's most viewed video on Facebook









# Never stop LEARNING



## **MUSEUM MEMBERSHIPS**

embers are so special to us at the Cook Museum! Due to the Museum's temporary closure in 2020, all active Memberships that were purchased from May 2019 through March 2020 were extended by 4 months. The Museum offered 7 Member events including Double Discount Days for Members in the Museum Store.

Members are a vital part of the Museum family and enjoy a variety of benefits including:

- Unlimited FREE general admission for a year
- 25% discount for additional general admission tickets
- \$50 off birthday party packages
- 10% discount at Nature's Table & the Museum Store •
- Exclusive Member-Only opportunities



1,703

**Memberships** were sold in 2020

## PROGRAMS

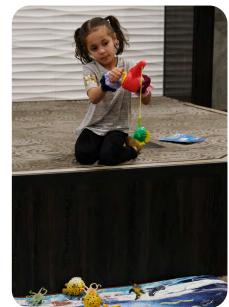
Provide enriching educational experiences through crafts, games, events, and hands-on activities. In 2020, we offered 74 public programs, events, and workshops.























#### ALABAMA'S AMAZING AMPHIBIANS FUN DAY













# A high quality RESOURCE



## **CARE & CONSERVATION**

exican alligator lizards are endangered and live only in a small area of Mexico. Being viviparous (giving birth to live L babies) and having a prehensile tail to enable them to climb high in cloud forests make these lizards unique and amazing.

The Cook Museum was excited to have four babies born in our care turn 1-year-old in May 2020. The Animal Care department continues to raise this endangered species and educate visitors on the importance of conservation and care of animals.



# Endangered **Species** on Exhibit

Diamondback terrapin

cook museum of NATURAL SCIENCE 2020 | 31



Kemp's ridley sea turtle

### **KALE COMES HOME**

ale, a non-releasable Kemp's ridley sea turtle, came to the Cook Museum in June of 2020 and is housed in the Museum's 15,000-gallon saltwater aquarium located inside the Oceans Exhibit.

Kale came from the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center, a facility that rescues and rehabilitates sea turtles and other marine animals so they can be released back into the wild.



Kale, while still a juvenile, was hooked by a recreational fisherman off a pier on Chesapeake Bay in Virginia in 2019. Due to his injuries, it was determined that Kale would require medical attention from time to time, making him a nonreleasable sea turtle.

Cook Museum staff and veterinarians now monitor his condition and give him the care he needs to have a chance at a long and happy life.

The Kemp's ridley sea turtle is currently listed as "Critically Endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and has been on the U.S.'s endangered species list since the 1970s.

# **MORE ANIMALS ON DISPLAY**

Engineer goby





Round stingray





Eastern hellbender

Eastern indigo snake

he Oceans Exhibit received more exciting additions in 2020 with the arrival of two round stingrays, an engineer goby, and a royal gramma!

Royal gramma

he Cook Museum was excited to also place two additional endangered animals on display in the terrariums in the Discover Exhibit, the eastern hellbender and the eastern indigo snake. These animals are used to educate visitors on the importance of habitat protection and ways to help endangered species.

## **EXHIBIT ENHANCEMENTS**

t the Cook Museum we are always working on ways to enhance the Exhibits, create L more unique experiences, and engage visitors. Some additions of note in 2020 include:

- Received a juvenile whooping crane specimen from the International Crane Foundation for the Rivers & Streams Exhibit (installed in January 2021)
- The addition of the Ant Slider interactive to the Little Larvae play area
- The Zipper Up interactive in the Birds Exhibit
- The alligator tank in Discover and freshwater • tank in Rivers & Streams were renovated





# ACCOLADES

#### USA Today 2020 10Best Readers' Choice Travel Award winner

- 2nd in Best New Museum category

#### 2020 Attraction of the Year **PEAK** Award

- Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association

**Family Favorite** Rocket City Mom Award 2020

27,515 followers on Facebook, Instagram, & Twitter

Over 4,700 likes, comments, shares, & more on the Museum's most interactive post

128k+

**Total Museum** visitors since opening



cook museum @NATURAL SCIENCE 2020 | 35



## **CLOSED BUT CARING**

he Museum was closed to the public from March 14th to July 7th while we worked tirelessly on a plan to successfully reopen with new guidelines to promote a safe, socially distanced experience.

During the closure, we were able to unite with others in the area and use our 3D printer to make headbands for face shields that were donated to Huntsville Hospital.

Animal Care worked diligently at the Museum throughout all of the changes brought by the closure. While many things changed this year, the excellent care for the animals did not!





uring the closure, the off-site beehives still received routine checks and care to ensure that they had everything they needed to thrive.

The Museum staff were able to complete the annual deep clean of each Exhibit and the Collection items on display in an accelerated time frame instead of spreading the work out over the course of the year.









# Grow with our COMMUNITY



**7** olunteers are vital to the operation of the Museum. They aid classes, camps, administration, Guest Services, and Animal Care. We are so very grateful for them and the contribution of their time!





**ABOVE:** ULA volunteer Dayna Blankenship presenting their donation in honor of her completed volunteer hours to Cook Museum Volunteer Manager Bill Nelson.

# 3,580

Volunteer hours contributed by 159 Museum volunteers in 2020



he Museum offers several different event space options that are able to accommodate small meetings, large occasions, and the in-between! Think of the Cook Museum's many options when ┸ planning a personal or corporate event!

Last year we offered the first "in the Exhibits" dining experience for Valentine's Day. The sold-out Dinner Under the Sea event was a huge success!

Some events hosted in 2020:

- UNA Legislative Update
- **DCS Authors Conference**
- Dinner Under the Sea
- **Transportation South Meeting**
- Leadership Alabama Dinner •
- Harris Wedding Reception
- Freda Kyle Retirement Party
- Nucor Steel Meeting •
- Decatur Morgan County Tourism Board Meeting



- MCERA Board Meeting
- Hospice of the Valley Meeting
- Chamber of Commerce Association of AL Meeting
- Tennessee Valley Caucus Meeting
- Aetna Meeting •
- MATCHFit Meeting
- ALDOT Meeting
- GMC Meeting



cook museum @NATURAL SCIENCE 2020 | 43

# nature's table

ature's Table serves up fresh, tasty food for dine in, carry-out, curbside delivery, and catering! Located inside the Cook Museum of Natural Science, Nature's Table is open to the general public without an admission ticket. Enjoy healthy wraps, sandwiches, salads, protein bowls, smoothies, and more, all made-to-order with fresh ingredients.

Contact Nature's Table for delicious trays of food or individually-boxed meals for your next event, meeting, or get-together!

In 2020, Nature's Table expanded the kids menu options, offered curbside delivery, and expanded the inside dining area to accommodate socially distanced tables. They also worked with Team Freeze Foundation to promote reading within Decatur City Schools by offering a free smoothie to students for reaching reading milestones set by teachers.



he Museum Store offers a unique selection of gifts, toys, games, and household items for every occasion. There are many local vendors supported at the Museum Store and you can even create a wish list for your wedding, birthday, or baby shower!

In 2020, the Museum Store offered Stories in the Store, Holiday Open House, and Double Discount Days for Members. The Museum was specially-themed for the arrival of Kale, our Kemp's ridley sea turtle, and again for the holidays as a winter wonderland full of beautiful trees and snowflakes.

# museum store





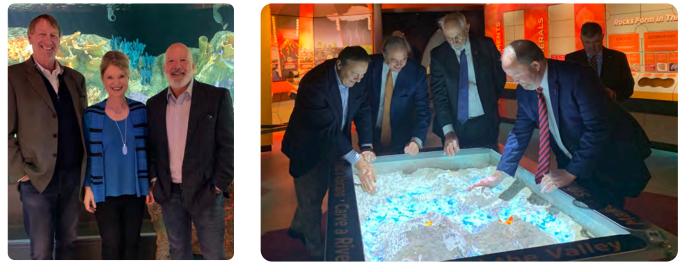






# **Promote & facilitate** COLLABORATION





TOP: From left, Dr. Patricia Sims, President of J.F. Drake State College, Dr. Jeanne Payne, Dr. Joe Burke, President of Calhoun College, & Crystal Brown, Vice President of Development at Decatur Morgan County Chamber of Commerce. BOTTOM LEFT: From left, Steve Armistead, Jeanne Payne, & Yogi Dougher, visiting from Nashville. BOTTOM RIGHT: From left, Representative Andy Whitt, Senator Steve Livingston, Representative Danny Crawford, Jason Cochran, Director at UNA, & Attorney Steve Windom,

# Letter from the DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

he Cook Museum continues to thrive because of the support of so many incredible individuals and businesses! We are grateful to you for sharing the vision for this amazing Museum.

#### 2020 Highlights

- kicked off our very first Giving Tuesday campaign.
- We installed a beautiful Education Sponsorship Wall.
- sponsored field trips for students.
- Sara Underhill became our grant writer and participated in training through the prestigious Lilly Family School of Philanthropy.
- We continued raising funds for our Capital Campaign, Education Sponsorship Fund, and our Annual Fund to support the Museum.

There are still ways you can help us! We have a limited number of wonderful placed on the Donor Recognition Wall in Founder's Hall. We have numerous

naming opportunities available, as well as the opportunity for names to be sponsorships available in the area of education and even sponsorships to help care for the animals.

If you would like more information or would like to help make an introduction to a potential donor, contact me at jpayne@cookmuseum.org. Please come visit us and help us spread the good word about the Museum. You are appreciated!



• Together with a donor, we developed a program with the Boys and Girls Clubs where the clubs' children attend STEAM classes at the Museum once a month.

• We created an online giving option at cookmuseum.org/donate and we

• We started a program where several Alabama Senators and Representatives



Dr. Jeanne Payne & Senator Tom Butler

## **EDUCATION SPONSORSHIPS**

he Education Sponsorship Fund allows children to visit the Museum on a field trip with their peers through a subsidized admission arrangement at little or no cost to them.

This opportunity has been provided by some wonderful donors who deeply value the scientific education of our upcoming generations!

We worked alongside many Senators, Representatives, and other amazing individuals to raise over \$98,000 for the Education Sponsorship Fund in 2020!

39 Schools sponsored

for a field trip by their State Representatives & Senators



# \$98k+

**Funds** raised for Education **Sponsorships** 



LEFT: Sara Underhill, Museum Grant Writer **BELOW:** Jerraud Powers. Team Freeze Foundation



# **ONLINE GIVING**

Check out the new online giving options at **cookmuseum.org/donate**.



# **CAPITAL CAMPAIGN**

#### FOUNDING VISIONARIES \$1.000.000+

Anonymous City of Decatur The Cook Family Corteva Agriscience<sup>™</sup> Davidson Technologies, Inc.

#### FOUNDING PARTNERS

\$300,000 - \$999,999

Alpha Foundation, Inc. The Caring Foundation of Blue Cross & Blue Shield Alabama

The Cook Family In honor of the employees of Cook's Pest Control

Shirley & George McCrary In honor of Cortner Crumlish. Waggoner McCrary, Gamble McCrary, & Eliza McCrary

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\$10,000 - \$99,999

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n Givhan Hospital Urgent Care n Chevrolet anie Minor

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#### \$25 - \$999

Ken & Elizabeth Chandler Family Jerraud Powers & Team Freeze Foundation Walmart



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