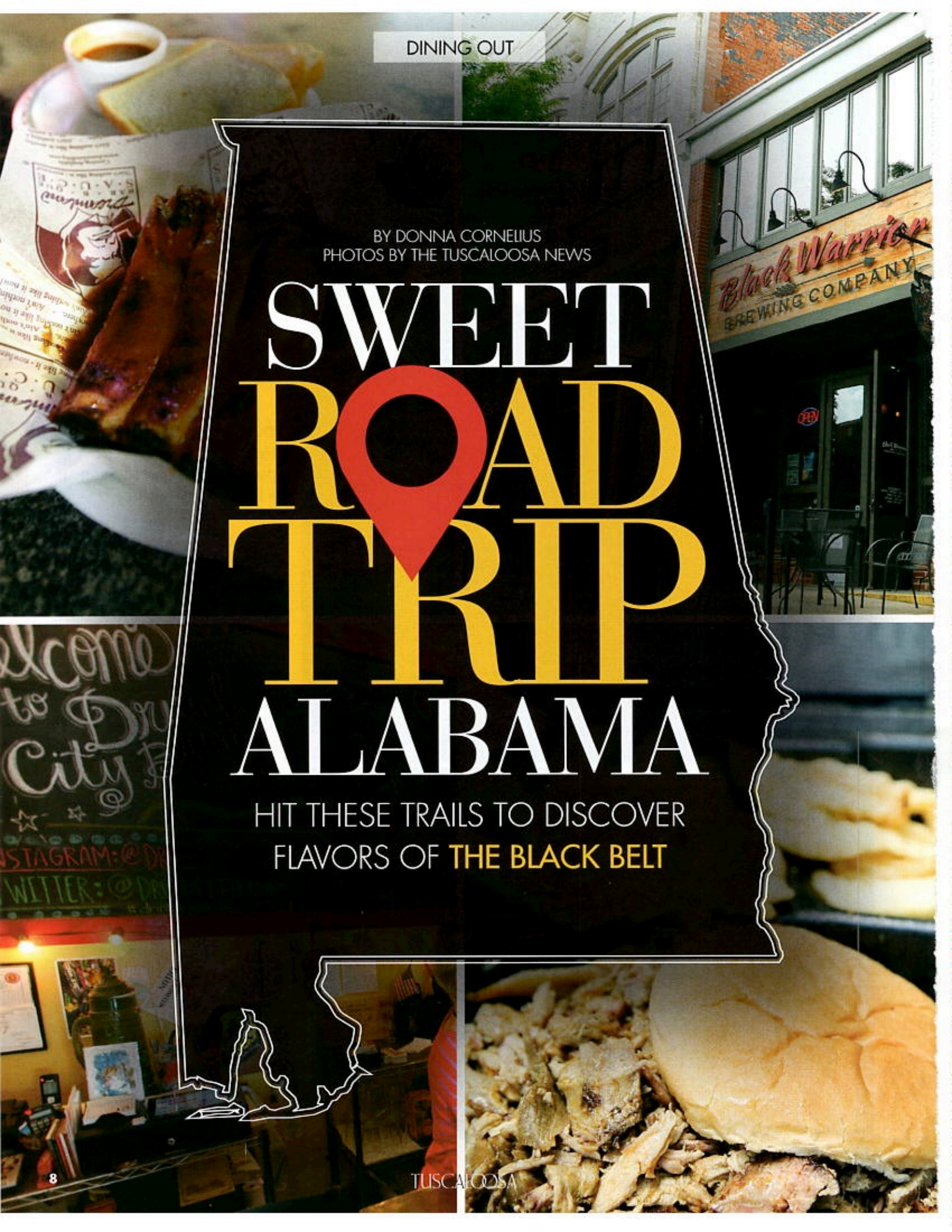


DINING OUT

BY DONNA CORNELIUS  
PHOTOS BY THE TUSCALOOSA NEWS

# SWEET ROAD TRIP ALABAMA

HIT THESE TRAILS TO DISCOVER  
FLAVORS OF **THE BLACK BELT**



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f you've always wanted to take the road less traveled, here's your chance. Just be sure to bring your appetite along.

Feed Your Adventure — Flavors of the Black Belt has nine themed trails that will lead you to Alabama gems like homey cafes housed in former gas stations, vineyards where wine is made from muscadines and scuppernongs, and small-town markets selling tasty treats like homemade pepper jelly and fragrant honey.

The Flavors trails are a project of Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association. The group's mission is to promote and enhance outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities in the Black Belt, a 23-county region that gets its name from the dark, fertile soil found there.

ALBBAA Director Pam Swanner said tourism organizations across the country had to rethink their strategies when COVID-19 restrictions went into effect earlier this year.

"We were no exception," she said.

Greenville Mayor Dexter McLendon pitched the idea for the trails last year at one of the organization's board meetings. At that time, ALBBAA was already involved with another big project: a coffee table book to celebrate its 10th anniversary.

"We put the Flavors idea on the back burner for a while and resurrected it in January," Swanner said. "But we had already done a lot of the work and the planning for it."

By mid-March of this year, the project was ready to launch.

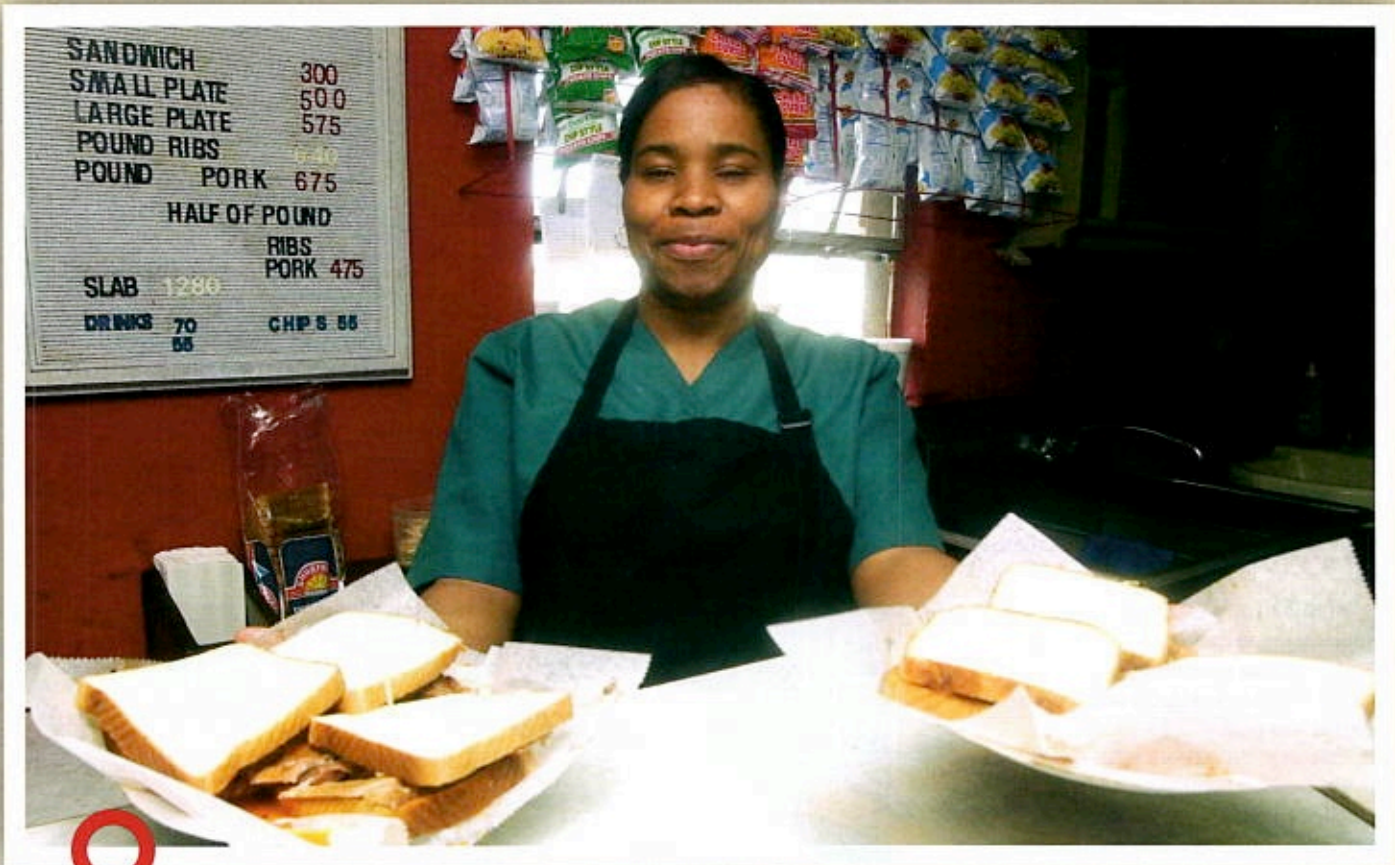
"Then COVID-19 put it on the back burner again," Swanner said. "Traditional vacations were put on hold. But then people began to get antsy and were ready to get out, and they wanted a degree of familiarity with the places they were visiting."

The organization worked hand in hand with Black Belt chambers of commerce and tourism boards as well as the University of Alabama Center for Economic Development. >>



Dreamland BBQ





Archibald's BBQ

"We had meetings across the region and lots of communications about ideas," Swanner said.

Each of the nine trails has its own theme. The name of the trail that includes Tuscaloosa and Pickens County, for example, is "Ques 'N' Brews." Dreamland as well as Archibald's and Woodrow's barbecue joints are listed as are Black Warrior Brewing Co. and Druid City Brewing Co. "Divine Sausages Rival Devil Dogs" encourages visits to Butler, Conecuh and Crenshaw County. Greenville's Camellia City Bakery is the home of the devil dog, a chocolate confection, while Alabama favorite Conecuh Sausage Co. is in Evergreen.

But while you'll find plenty of out-of-the-way eateries on the trails, there's much more to the adventure.

"It's not a restaurant trail but more about small-batch foods and beverages — everything from cheese straws to barbecue rubs," Swanner said. "We wanted to include a shopping checklist and to help people navigate along the way with small, unique places to stay and to stop at."

To that end, look for country stores, overnight accommodations and not-so-well-known attractions like the Old Cahawba Archaeological Park in Orrville, the Alabama Rural Heritage Museum in Thomaston, and Eufaula's Fendall Hall, one of the state's finest examples of Italianate architecture.

Swanner said that since her focus is usually on Black Belt hunting

and fishing, she was surprised by some of the suggestions for trail sites that came in — such as the Cuba One Stop.

"That was a recommendation from the Sumter County Chamber of Commerce," she said. "I asked, 'Isn't it a service station?' I found out that it was but that they have a great burger."

Swanner said she had lunch recently at The Stable in downtown Greensboro, which has sandwiches, soups, wine — and evidently a sense of humor. One of the specials that day was called Roast in Hale — a grilled roast beef sandwich.

Sidney Freeman, executive director of the Sumter County Chamber of Commerce, said Touch of Home Bakery in Livingston is a local favorite.

"It's close to campus, so students can walk there to get comfort food that they can't get at the school cafeteria," she said. "It's a meat and three but also has sandwiches, salads and soups. They have daily specials but always on the same day of the week. Everyone knows about Taco Salad Thursday. I have the specials memorized."

Another Livingston stop on the trail is the Tombeche Trading Post. "It's a specialty market with craft beer, cheese and wines," Freeman said.

Nearby in Epes is Fort Tombeche, built some 300 years ago on a white chalk bluff. During the 18th century, American, British and Spanish flags waved over it. >>

DINING OUT



Black Warrior Brewing Company



Archibald and Woodrow's BBQ

## DINING OUT

Need a place to stay so you can visit all these places? Freeman is especially proud of Lakewood, a Livingston Airbnb, and no wonder. She and her husband bought and brought back to life the charming seven-bedroom cottage that was built in the 1830s.

Freeman said the Flavors trails are a boost for rural communities like hers.

"We're very excited about the trail," she said. "Sumter County is a wonderful place to visit — you can really fall in love with the small-town life here."

Barrett Elder, the Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports Commission's director of marketing and communication, said that while some of the trail stops in the Tuscaloosa area will be familiar to many, others may be pleasant surprises.

"People may not know about Bama Bed and Breakfast, for example," he said.

He's a fan of the chicken swirls, the stuffed, ready-to-cook chicken breasts that are a signature item at Mark's Mart in Northport.

"They also have a butcher shop and lots of cool stuff there," he said.

Like Freeman, Elder said the trail should benefit tourism.

"I think the trail will attract a crowd to town that you may not be able to corner all the time — people who want to try places that are off the beaten path," he said.

A few other neat trail stops through the state are:

- **John Emerald Distilling** in Opelika, which makes John's Alabama single malt, Hugh Wesley's gin, Elizabeth vodka, and Spurgeon's barrel-aged rum.
- **The GainesRidge Dinner Club** in Camden, which offers fine

dining plus a few resident ghosts.

- **The Rosa Parks Museum**, a memorial to the life of the Civil Rights icon, in Montgomery.
- **Whippoorwill Vineyard** in Notasulga, where you'll find muscadine and scuppernon wines.
- **Bird's Farm Hay Art** in Forkland, with imaginative creations made from bales of hay.
- **Sharktooth Creek Outdoor Adventure** in Aliceville, with canoeing, camping, fishing and swimming plus shark teeth and other fossils to find.

The Black Belt Trail includes Barbour, Bullock, Butler, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Crenshaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lee, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Monroe, Montgomery, Perry, Pickens, Pike, Russell, Sumter, Tuscaloosa and Wilcox County.

You can download a brochure and individual trail maps at [www.alabamablackbeltadventures.org](http://www.alabamablackbeltadventures.org). You also can find out how to participate in two other trail-related activities. Those who visit all nine trails can sign up for a passport competition; they will be entered for a weekend getaway at Lakepoint State Park. It includes a guided fishing trip and a guided canoe or kayak aquatic eco-tour. Also on the website is information about monthly photo contests.

In Tuscaloosa, you can pick up brochures at the Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports Commission, 1900 Jack Warner Parkway.

ALBBAA is encouraging travelers to adhere to current health orders, including practicing safe social distancing and wearing a mask where appropriate. Also, it's a good idea to call before you go to make sure the stops on the trail are following their usual hours of operation. ●



Druid  
City  
Brewing

