

# DeltaStyle

DECEMBER 2016



Merry  
Christmas

from  
**JIM TAYLOR  
CHEVROLET**

FINDNEWROADS™

CHEVROLET









# Mary Blackmon

## FARM STAR LIVING

CINDY INGRAM

**M**ary Blackmon's path to becoming the proprietor of the family farm was anything but a straight line.

After spending her younger years in Lake Village, Arkansas, where her father was a General Practice Physician, she and her family moved to Monroe when her father accepted a position in the St. Francis emergency room.

During this time her mother continued to keep the books for the family's 3,500 acre rice farm in Jones Louisiana, which is at the northern end of Morehouse Parish, right on the Louisiana and Arkansas border, and Mary attended River Oaks School where she graduated in 1985.

After moving to Monroe, she said she never returned to the farm. "It just wasn't in my thoughts," she explained. "While in high school I had gotten the theatre bug and appeared in several plays at the Strauss Little Theater, including the 'Miracle Worker'. I really liked being on stage."

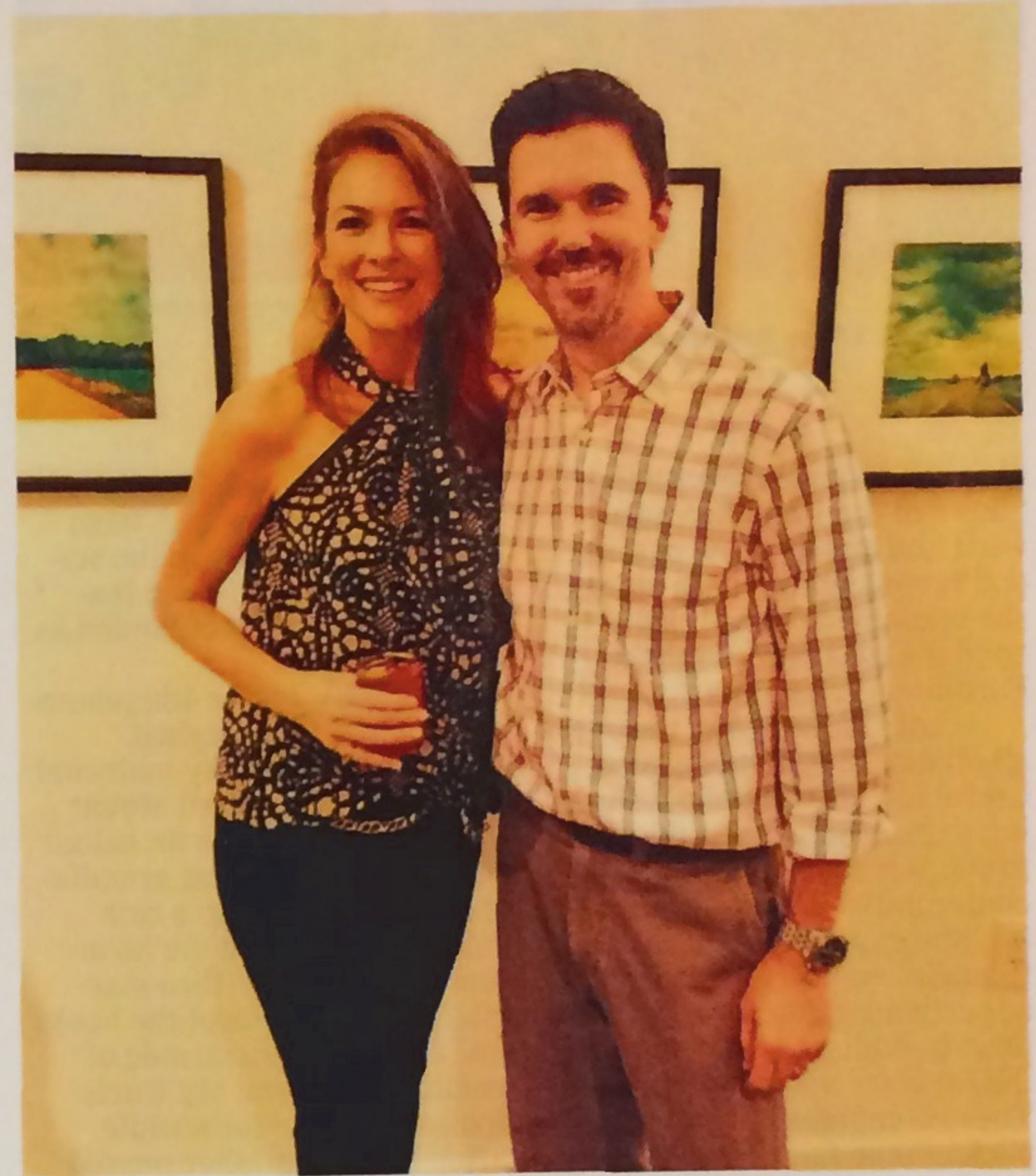
After her graduation from Tulane she launched a professional acting career. "I landed a part in the pilot of 'In the Heat of the Night' and appeared in several of the shows. That led to me having an agent and a SAG card," she explained. One acting job found her playing a romantic love interest to actor Timothy Hutton's character in "Everyone's All-American", which filmed in Louisiana.

That experience led her to move to Los Angeles to actively pursue an acting career. "I approached it as a full-time job," She explained. "I was fortunate to get into a great group of acting professionals, some who later became big names and others who already were."

Later, after deciding an acting career wasn't really her passion, she entered the advertising industry which led to her Atlanta, then to New York, and then back to Los Angeles. "While it was exciting, I was in the air more than I was on the ground," she recalls. "And never home."

When Internet Media launched "Wired" one of their innovations was the introduction of "Ad Banners" and she was tasked with the responsibility of teaching businesses and individuals on the use of these banners to generate activity. "It was very exciting to be in on the ground floor of this new approach of advertising. And I was able to work with Walt Disney's Internet Division as well as Universal. It was a crazy ride for a few years," she laughed.

After a while, she decided she wanted to create something for myself, and launched Spa-Addicts, which she described as similar to Group-On. "Everyone likes a 'deal' and spa deals were a favorite and an untapped niche area. "We were able to generate a lot of attention to our production, including several major publications, such as TV Guide and Oprah Winfrey Magazine. It was stressful but it led me to a



COURTESY MARY BLACKMON

Mary showcasing a photo exhibit of her farm photos. The proceeds were donated to the charity Wholesome Wave.

lot of interesting places and people."

But, here's where Mary's path took a sharp turn. She found out that her family farm, owned by her mother, was in financial and operational trouble and needed help.

"Being a farm girl was never in my range of thinking," she said, "But when I found out that my family rice farm was

in trouble, of course I answered the call. I just couldn't just do nothing and risk losing it."

Noting that she had never realized the how great a responsibility the operation was, but I quickly found out that being involved was not only interesting, but quite fascinating and ultimately rewarding.

"I decided that I could com-





COURTESY MARY BLACKMON

Mary on CBS New York morning news.



COURTESY MARY BLACKMON

Mary on the farm in a "Big Green Tractor".

bine my experience with the power of the internet and advertising and my new passion and responsibility with others," she explained. "And I developed the idea of my website FarmStarLiving.com."

According to Mary, the overall objective is to make good, useful information about farming to be easily accessible and to support the farmers in rural communities across the country. She explained that the financial engine for the site is advertising from natural food brands, which in turn supports the farmers that grow the food. These companies process and package the farmer's products for distribution to the stores.

"After developing FarmStarFarms.com and it started taking off, I quickly discovered I needed to be back in the main stream to be able to be available to the advertisers, but still wanted to be able to get back to the farm quickly," she said. "So now I am back in Atlanta on a part time basis."

She said that she leased the farm to Larry Williams from Sterlington/ Bastrop and his family. His son McClendon is helping to farm the land while he is going to college. "They

are good family and Larry has experience in farming, farm equipment and also in the science of growing. I have featured Larry and McClendon as Farm Stars."

"Actually, I am a 4th generation farmer, she laughed. "Back in the '50s, my maternal grandfather, Garrard Mount Joy or Big Daddy as we called him, turned my great grandfather's tree farm into a rice farm. He managed the farm and also owned it (thru marriage). My mom kept the books and did the financial side of running the farm. My Uncle took ownership for a while after my grandfather passed away then he retired to begin his next life chapter. My brother and I were given the option to take over."

"As fate would have it, I ended up taking over and refurbishing my grandparent's house and got inspired to create and start an internet media presence to evaluate the world of farmer to farmer in a way that would be more accessible and create retention more sales, she recalled. "For me to take over the farm was a major decision for me. I did not want to let it go and lose my heritage



COURTESY MARY BLACKMON

Mary providing samples at the food and wine festival in Atlanta.

to the area (the delta). It was my roots and I felt a connection -- a connection to my past.

She noted that she used to get an eye roll when she talked about the new ventures, but, now the usual response "how cool is that" in admiration. "People have a much deeper appreciation now. They are more open minded now for a farm lifestyle, and embracing the life, and admiring it. I saw

a change happening."

"Now, at the age of 49 and living in Atlanta much of the time, near my brother, I am Farmer-in-chief/CEO of Farm Star Living."

Want to learn how you can be featured in the listings of farmers and farm to table restaurants? Go on line to Farmstarliving.com. There is plenty for the farmers and the end consumers. Or e-mail her at Mary@Farmstarliving.com