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Dr. John Mims Has Spent a Lifetime “Fixing” People and Land

By Julie A. Best

Dr. John P. Mims from Colbert County likes to "fix" things. For years, he practiced medicine in Colbert County and ministered to the needs of local residents, fixing their broken and sick bodies, delivering babies, performing surgery, and no doubt, spreading joy and cheer with his home-grown philosophy and kindly nature. In more recent years, he has concentrated on "fixing" the land.

Dr. Mims says, "I just love to take wasteland, or old land that has been mistreated, and try to make something out of it." And, that's exactly what Dr. Mims has done to about 960 acres of land on Hawk Pride Mountain near Tuscumbia.

Dr. Mims purchased his mountain farm in 1966. Typical of mountain land, the area was covered with trees, but the property had not been managed. Dr. Mims says, "The mountain land had been used for moonshining more than anything else!" It had just been allowed to grow. He says, "There had not been a meaningful timber cut on the land in roughly 100 years. The owners would go in and cut a few good trees, and leave the rest. The land was just overcome with nothing but trash trees."



Dr. John Mims and his grandson, Daniel Fisk, enjoy the cabin built on the mountain farm.



Dr. Mims was recently certified to conduct prescribed burns. Before the training course land was torched, Dr. Mims witnessed the burn plan.

While that type condition might be discouraging to many folks, Dr. Mims looked upon the situation as a challenge. He began managing the land, acre by acre, and turning wasteland into productive land. With the aid of conservation programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program, and technical assistance provided for USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and forest consultants, Dr. Mims began to plant trees and manage them in a way that would not only provide income for the family, but more importantly from his point of view, would also protect and improve the land.

Dr. Mims says, "The mountain farm is devoted to wildlife and recreation. I really didn't expect a lot of income from it." While the land may not have provided lots of cash money, it has provided more important benefits to the Mims Family—recreation. In 1983, Dr. Mims built a cabin on the property. He says, "Everything except the metal came off the place—the cedar, the rocks, and the logs. I cleared all the land for the cabin. First, we built an acre pond. Then we built a picnic pavilion and barbecue pit. And then, we built the cabin."

Working with wood is a hobby for Dr. Mims. He says, "All those years as a surgeon, my family wouldn't let me have anything with power to it. When we built the cabin, I split the shingles for the roof with an old time froe, but when we needed another roof, I put metal up there!"

Heritage is important to Dr. Mims. He says, "In 1823, my granddaddy's granddaddy settled in what is now Chilton County, and he brought with him a blue French wine grape, a fig tree, and a scuppernong vine. I planted sprouts from all three of them and set them out at the cabin. The blue French wine grape is still bearing from the 1823 stock."

Dr. Mims has taken advantage of all the natural resources available on the mountain land. He says, "On top of this mountain, because the land is sitting on top of a sandstone cap, the water can't go down. It has to come out somewhere, so there are springs all over the top of this mountain." Dr. Mims has capitalized on that feature and made use of the natural water sources to create ponds for wildlife.

Today, after careful land management and lots of hard work, turkey and deer are plentiful on the mountain farm. According to Dr. Mims, 47 deer were taken off the property last year. To improve the habitat for dove, he plants sorghum and sunflowers.



Dr. Mims planted scuppernong vines near the mountain cabin from stock that his granddaddy's granddaddy brought with him when he settled in Chilton County in 1823.

Dr. Mims has enjoyed life for about 86 years now, but he is still learning and growing. He recently attended a prescribed burn course sponsored by the Alabama Forestry Commission and NRCS. He says, "I attended the course mostly out of curiosity. I have been working with foresters for years, and I help them with the burns. I decided I would get certified and let them help me instead of me helping them!"

The mountain farm, with the rustic cabin, pond, and picnic pavilion, beautiful vistas and hunting opportunities has provided an abundance of fond memories for Dr. Mims and his family. He and his wife, Mary, also share their property with school children in Colbert County. Through the years, they have hosted numerous conservation education programs on their farm. Forest in the Classroom: Classroom in the Forest is a forest-education program that he is actively involved with. After classroom lectures about the significance for Alabama's forest land, students visit his mountain farm to gain first-hand experience with forest management concepts.

In looking back over his life, Dr. Mims says, "I wanted to get training in lots of different medical procedures, and then come to a small town and pretty much do it all." I believe Dr. Mims has certainly accomplished his goal. Not only did he have a very successful medical practice, but he also worked hard to improve the land within his care. I would say, he has done it all.

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