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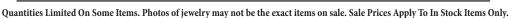






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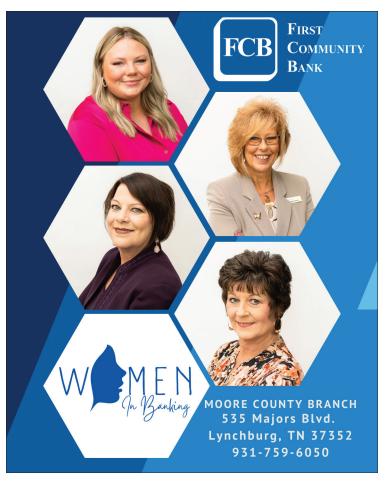
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T HE TEST of history has proven that women have been foundational, like a sturdy rock that can withstand a storm. They overcame obstacles century after century, constantly adapting to the needs of the world while — for many years — receiving little to no recognition. Eventually, they protested and made political maneuvers to earn the right to vote and catch up to other American citizens. They were not the first or last group of people to have to fight for rights, but they won nevertheless.

When I think of women, I think of bravery, determination, compassion, comfort, and strength. I could list a million different words to describe the power women have and deserve, but they all mean the same thing: a role model.

Because of women, we have many things that make our lives better.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The women of Fayetteville

The foundation of centuries and centuries

Because of them, we have experienced the first fire escapes, bullet-proof fiber, word processing technology, and the first computer algorithm, to name a few.

Another thing that has made my life better is the opportunity to create this magazine in your hands. Women write our stories, conduct our interviews, take our photos, edit our words, proof our words, design our pages, and manage the complex process of getting an idea on paper and mailed to your home. If you're like me, this is a blessing that I never knew I needed but am forever indebted for having.

This issue celebrates women in our community. We are thankful and appreciate everything you do to make our lives better, our homes safer, and our world brighter.

Thank you. GN

Wesley Bryant, MANAGING EDITOR

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CHAPTER 1 OF 3

This section of the magazine covers local positive news you may have missed.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY BROOKE SNYDER

◄ Jason Hurt and Nicci Story



Jason Hurt, Eddie Medley

Skills Development helps local people find the dignity of work.

By Paige Cushman // Photography by Brooke Snyder

A TWORK, Eddie Medley wears many hats: job coach, record keeper, counselor, facilitator, job developer, etc. But he said it all comes down to three important tasks: advocate, facilitate, and coordinate. Since 2018, as an employment specialist for Skills Development Services in the area, Medley has been helping adults with developmental and physical disabilities find and keep jobs.

"To me, it's the satisfaction of helping a person who thought they could never get a job — land a job," he said. "There's a little more work than play, but it's still fun."

When working with Skills Development, it's entirely up to the client if they want to seek employment. While many of Medley's clients want to work, they just assume they can't. Yet, time and time again, Medley puts helpful and work-ready adults into jobs where they excel.

"It's all about the dignity of work," Medley said. "When folks get a job, it gives them a real sense of accomplishment, obviously. It makes them feel like they're a bigger part of the community. That's one of the things we push — getting them into the community through competitive, integrated employment."

One client at Skills Development Services assumed he'd never be able to find a job. He deals with physical and developmental disabilities that make using one of his arms hard. After some brainstorming, Medley found a tool that allowed his client to reach and grab using one arm and got him a job picking up litter, which he loves.

"It doesn't sound like glamorous work, but he had never had a job before," he said. "It's a point of pride for people. He's happy as a clam and doing a great job for his employer."

Skills Supported Employment currently has clients working in government facilities, restaurants, grocery stores, pharmacies, recreational facilities, and more





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in Coffee, Lincoln, and Bedford Counties. Recently, Medley said he had a client who worked at a restaurant chain for 16 years. He was laid off due to corporate changes in operations. The department was able to find and secure a similar job at another restaurant immediately. He did not miss a single day of work and is "doing a splendid job" for his new employer.

"During COVID, we had a number of our clients furloughed or laid off," Medley said. "Some had worked for their employer for years. We were able, once things began to settle down, to find new jobs for many and worked to smoothly reintegrate some back into their former work."

Those success stories and Skills Development Services' "very good track record" with employees and employers keep Medley going.

"It's a joy to get people out working and to see them enjoying their work," he said. "And I like being in the community and mixing it up."

In most cases, it's especially beneficial for employers to hire Medley's clients. People with disabilities are statistically proven to have a lower job-leaving rate than those without disabilities, according to the United States Agency for International Development. Once they find a job, they often stay there for a long time.

"Finding and holding a job is a big deal, and it makes you feel good," Medley said

Through his work, Medley said he also found that having a person with disabilities working for an employer motivates the other team members. He said it encourages what is known as "natural supporters."



< Scott Cone

"They're not really learning the job from us or the employer a lot of the time — it's through their coworkers," Medley said. "They're supported by the people they see on the job and work side by side with."

The other agency areas — residential, day program, administration, etc. — work together to ensure workers with disabilities are work-ready. Even after a client is placed at a job, Medley and the rest of Skills Development Services will do anything to ensure the candidate is successful. They will assign a job coach, speak with managers, and make sure they figure out schedules and transportation needs.

"Our work is possible due to the support of our administration and staff. I would be remiss if I didn't give credit to the dedication of our state-certified job coaches in Coffee, Bedford, and Lincoln Counties," Medley said. "They do great work and are total professionals."

Of course, their work wouldn't be possible without the employers and community members.

"I've had no problem finding support from local employers," he said. "Even when they can't offer someone a job, they often do what they can to help. The reception has been good. The response has been good. The results have been good." GN

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At home at Highland Rim

Dana Casey wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder

D ANA CASEY has always loved school; it's where she's wanted to be for as long as she can remember. As a little girl, she loved to play school and was always happy to receive old, discarded textbooks and materials. When it came time to choose a career, nothing but becoming a teacher entered her mind.

"It's what I always wanted to do. I've had people along the way try to talk me out of it, saying I should think about making more money, but it's not about the money. It's about doing something that you love and are passionate about. I've never regretted that decision," Casey said.

That decision led her to Highland Rim School after one year of teaching at Hampton Cove Christian Academy in Huntsville. She taught fourth grade for three years and middle school for 12. Being someone eighth-graders could depend on to listen to and help them in any way possible was important to her.

After 15 years of teaching, Casey moved to assistant principal and curriculum coordinator — positions she'd prepared for but had not actively pursued.

She said, "I had my master's in administration and supervision but never really thought about being an administrator. Then, as I got into some leadership roles through my teaching career, it opened up some doors and gave me a different perspective on what I could do in the school."

In either role, her heart is always in the best interest of the students and the staff.

"I still have the relationship with the middle school students I had, but now I get to see the little ones, too. The hugs and the smiles — they're just so happy to see

▲ Dana Casey



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you. It makes your heart feel good. I just love working with the kids and seeing their excitement," Casey said.

Working with teachers as the curriculum coordinator is an ever-evolving process.

She said, "I work very closely with the teachers now. We have weekly meetings and talk about things going on in their classroom and ways we can improve instruction. I have to be knowledgeable of every subject area at every grade level and relay information to teachers to determine what's best for them and their students. The students come first, but the adults in the building are important, too."

In 2015, Casey was chosen as one of 26 educators statewide to participate in an education fellowship through the State Collaborative on Reforming Education program. For a year, she met with legislators and was able to be a voice for the teachers — one of the things she's most proud of in her career.

Casey is proud, too, of her daughter, Bailey (who is in high school) and her son, Brady (who is at Highland Rim) both of whom are just as at home at Highland Rim as she is.

"They've grown up at Highland Rim. At about 8 weeks old, I have pictures of Bailey being held by the eighth-graders in my classroom because she was always there. When Brady came along, they were always at everything with me. It was their second home. Highland Rim has always been so special to me," Casey said.

Casey is always at home at Highland Rim. GN



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Karen Martinez-Davis

The American dream can be found right here in Fayetteville.

Karen Martinez-Davis loves her life.

By Tina Neeley // Photos submitted by Karen Martinez-Davis

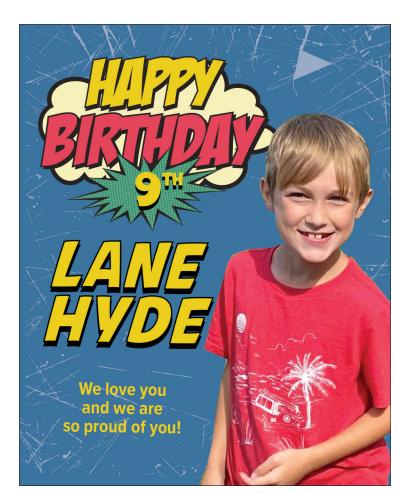
W HEN KAREN Martinez-Davis met Kyle Davis in their first year of high school, neither could have imagined their future. Most students were focused on making it to class on time and hanging out with their friends, but Karen was doing that and more. She was also working in her father's Mexican restaurants, Las Trojas, which she'd been doing since she was 8. Now that the future is here, much has changed, but some things have remained the same.

The thread of education is woven throughout their stories.

Karen and Kyle graduated from Lincoln County High School and obtained degrees from the University of Alabama at Huntsville. Karen continued to work at Las Trojas throughout college and works with her family in restaurant management today. Kyle has returned to Lincoln County High School as a personal finance teacher, and the high school sweethearts are now married and will celebrate their second wedding anniversary in June.

Home is where the heart is, and Karen connects the two as a licensed realtor in Tennessee and Alabama.

She said, "Right after graduating high school, I decided I really liked business and wanted to go into real estate because everybody needs to learn a little about real estate. Since my dad has his own restaurants, I decided that would be a good thing and was something I could use to help him. But it became bigger than I thought, and now I'm helping whoever, in the family or at the restaurants, needs me and the general public."



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"I'm just now living my life, but my dad is amazing. I truly think he's lived the American dream. And it's just a wonderful story."

-Karen Martinez-Davis



Kyle and Karen Davis

Las Trojas is located in Fayetteville and has Alabama locations in Hazel Green, Huntsville, Madison, Athens, Florence, and Birmingham. There are four in Georgia, with new restaurants opening soon in Huntsville and Murfreesboro.

It's a tight-knit family that grew when Karen and Kyle married.

"I gained two more wonderful parents and a sister," she said.

Working to help others find the perfect home or property is also an educational process.

Karen said, "There's still a lot of people that don't know that there are two sides of a real estate transaction; they just think it's one. And they don't know you can access all those houses through the MLS (multiple listing service). You can show them any house listed, but they think certain agents have different houses, and they can only deal with that particular agent. But in all reality, you can access all the houses on the market through your agent. That's been an obstacle, trying to convince them of that."

Convincing them to consider not putting off a purchase until rates drop again has been another obstacle.

"At this point, no one knows what's going to happen in the coming years. I think you should definitely try to see what your options are. Because what if next year, rates are 8 or 9%, and you missed out?" Karen said.

Homeownership and owning your own business are part of the American dream, and Karen's family knows everything about it.

She said, "I'm just now living my life, but my dad is amazing. I truly think he's lived the American dream. And it's just a wonderful story."

Karen is living her dream life with the love of her life and her family. That, too, is a wonderful story. **GN**



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PHOTOGRAPHY BY BROOKE SNYDER

Judy Carter and Sarah Campbell



BECAUSE YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT SOMEONE'S GOING THROUGH

KRISTY TOWRY CLARK LOOKS EXPECTANTLY FOR GOOD ALL AROUND HER.

By Tina Neeley Photography by Brooke Snyder



A Lauren Towry, Kristy Clark, and Brent Clark

N ANY day, countless people cross our paths. Some are distracted, some are irritated, some are angry, and some are hurting. We may be one of them. Who knows how a kind word might change their mood and their day?

Kristy Towry Clark rarely passes up an opportunity to interact positively with those around her. It's practically second nature to her.

"I just try to do the best I can to help them in a positive way and show them the kindness I know and have been taught. You never know what someone's walking through or has walked through. Some are always negative about everything, and it makes me wonder what may have happened in their life. Something may have made a negative impact that they carry with them on a daily basis, and they don't know how to be any other way," Clark said.

Her efforts certainly don't go unnoticed or unappreciated.

She's the type of person that lights up a room. Wesley Bryant, who has known Clark for years, said she was effortlessly joyful.

"Kristy is someone you look forward to seeing," Bryant said. "My stomach hurts after talking with her because I belly laugh the entire time. Certain people just have that aroma to them — that brightening, uplifting joy that you can't reject. It's infectious. And I hope that one day I will be as effortlessly joyful as she is."

Like most of us, Clark juggles her moments of overwhelm, fears, and daily struggles. Her mama's advice to take one day at a time because tomorrow will take care of itself is ingrained in her thoughts. "Let it go," her mama says.

Clark's faith enables her to let it go.

She said, "No matter how bad things are, I try to stay in the moment and manage to make it with God's help and the support of family and friends. There have been many times throughout my life [when] I felt I couldn't make it, but through the grace of

THERE ARE SO MANY PEOPLE IN OUR LIVES WHO LONG TO BE SEEN AND KNOWN AND ULTIMATELY TOUCHED BY THE CREATOR'S HAND. THEY WANT TO BELIEVE THEY ARE WORTHY OF SUCH LOVE.

- Becky Strahle



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931-227-4999 1511 Huntsville Hwy., Fayetteville, TN www.zaxbys.com God and lots of prayer on my knees, I did. My strength comes from God."

Taking it to God in prayer was natural; leaving it there, not so much until her friends encouraged her to lay it all at His feet, leave it there, and don't take it back.

"It's hard to let Him work things out for you if you are still trying to work it out yourself, too," Clark said, from experience.

Her personal experiences give her the courage and confidence to speak to others she encounters.

"I just listen to people's stories to learn what they're going through or have been through. When I can, I watch how they live. I walk away from these conversations, having cried many times and had my heart broken for them. I just pray and ask for God's mercy to be upon them and help see them through. This builds strength for my own life and reminds me that I am very blessed. God has been so good to my family and me."

Clark attends Maranatha Baptist Church and shares her life with her husband, Brent, daughter, Lauren Towry, and bonus son, Jacob Clark.

Fueled by coffee, Jesus, and daily devotions with her husband, Clark loves spending time and making memories with family and friends in her off time. "When I'm with my daughter, my mom, sisters, and their girls, we belly laugh so hard at anything and everything. It's so much fun."

It seems only natural that someone looking deeply for good in others loves thrift shopping, an extension of seeing more than first meets the eye. And like many of us that love happy endings, Clark enjoys Hallmark movies. It might be more surprising to know she collects cookbooks, loves reading and looking through them, but admits she doesn't always cook from them. Can't we relate?

Her parents, Joe and Marie Pendergrass, have greatly influenced her response to and outlook on life. "My parents taught me great values growing up — always to think before you speak, always be true to yourself, treat others the way you want to be treated, and always be the same person no matter where you are or where you go. Kindness and forgiveness go a long way," she said.

Clark's blessings include friends, family, and coworkers at the Lincoln County Courthouse. It's a reciprocal blessing.

She said, "When I find myself down, I think of all the many blessings I have. I look around and see situations outside of my own and know I have so much to be thankful for. I work with so many wonderful people, and I try to keep a smile on my face even if I'm having a bad day. God always puts people in my life at the right time, just when I need a lift. He never fails. It's something I always tell my daughter. He always brings peace and comfort."

"I believe one day God will show me buckets of my tears He's collected from day one, then pour them out from heaven like rain, because we all know there's no pain and sorrow in heaven. Sometimes when it rains, I think of this," said Clark.

Until then, Clark will keep praying and looking for the next person that might need something positive in their day. **GN**

I JUST PRAY AND ASK FOR GOD'S MERCY TO BE UPON THEM AND HELP SEE THEM THROUGH. THIS BUILDS STRENGTH FOR MY OWN LIFE AND REMINDS ME THAT I AM VERY BLESSED.

- Kristy Towry Clark





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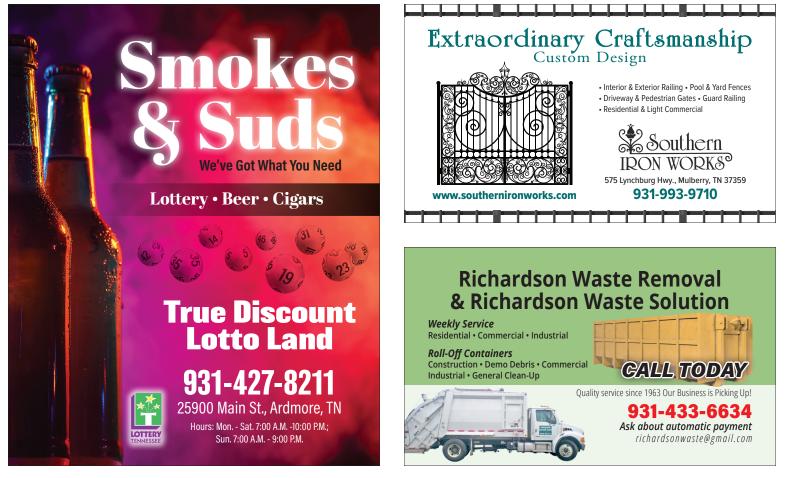
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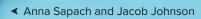
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NOT HOU IT APPEARS

Life with an autistic child is a beautiful, complicated journey.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder

MAGINE YOU'VE planned to spend several hours in your favorite bookstore. You schedule a time to search for a few good books for stolen quiet hours a few times each year. It's something you always look forward to. You start with a specialty coffee, then head to the suspense shelves, pulling the latest novel from your favorite author and another new-to-you writer. You've noticed the toddler going back and forth between his mom and the water fountain, and everything was fine until it wasn't. Without warning, the quiet is interrupted when the child throws himself to the floor and begins flailing his arms, crying uncontrollably despite his mom's best attempts to console him.

What is your honest reaction? What are your first thoughts?

Now, imagine you are the child's mother. You're single, working, and doing all you can to provide

and create a loving, stable home for your child. Hard enough, right? Now, imagine the child is on the autism spectrum.

Anna Sapach is that mom, and her son, Jacob, is autistic. Episodes like these are her reality.

"I've gotten a lot more confident about taking Jacob out in public, but it is hard when stuff like that happens. People stare, and it's very hard because it makes me feel panicked. I'm trying not to cry while people stare, but it's so hard. I cry because Jacob is innocent and doesn't notice people staring or giving weird looks. Aside from having meltdowns, we've both received the same looks while he's stimming/flapping his arms in the grocery store. It hurts because he doesn't notice it, but one day he will. He also understands more than people realize, so questions that may seem innocent in passing aren't as nice on the receiving end," Sapach said.





Sapach processes life with attention deficit disorder, so ordinary tasks are a challenge for her, too. Pair that with her son's needs, and every step of the day must be carefully planned and considered to minimize the frustrations and potential for stressful reactions to sensory overload.

She said, "Sometimes it can be like a nuclear bomb. I feel guilty about something every single day. It's a beautiful and very complex day-to-day life. He has a sensory processing disorder and was diagnosed as nonverbal, but he's gotten better at verbalizing since he's gotten into school. But it's been so hard because he can't tell me what he wants or needs at times, and then he winds up having a meltdown. Then I feel really guilty because I'm not meeting his needs because I can't figure out what he wants."

Things that are no big deal to the average parent and child become huge in their world.

"Because of our needs, it can get messy sometimes. And there's a lot of crying. Sometimes he'll throw things or bang his head, and then I wind up sitting on the floor crying with him. So it's been one of the hardest things I've ever done. Still, it's also the most rewarding because the little things that would seem easy for a neurotypical child are huge achievements when you have a kid on the autism spectrum, like saying a new word at the age of four when other kids are speaking in full sentences, it's a victory. Simple things like my kid picked up a crayon and doodled for two seconds — that's long when the day before he wanted to chew on the crayon and then toss it because he didn't want to do it. There's no such thing as a *little* victory," Sapach explained.

Although the general public is more informed about the autism spectrum today than in the past, many still can't recognize its characteristics and respond differently to it. Families with a child on the spectrum interact more often with the grace and compassion desperately needed by both parent and child.

Today's world of social media often compounds the guilt and weight of parenting children who process the world differently. Posts of family outings, special meals, and daily milestones become an unintended measuring stick for struggling parents, even those of neurotypical children. We don't mean to compare ourselves on either side, but subconsciously we can't seem to avoid it. There's something in all of us seeking to be affirmed and valued, and we look externally for confirmation we're on the right track.

Sapach internally wrestles with her emotions and reactions. "There are days where I can talk myself down and feel like everything's gonna be okay. You'll figure this out. And sometimes, something slight or inconvenient can happen, and I feel like I'm not doing as good as I should be doing right now. But I think that's just being a mom in general." Families living with autism soon learn words many of us never hear — words like neurotypical, neurodivergent, neurodiverse, sensory overload, and nonverbal. Processes that happen naturally for most of us are disrupted in the brain of an autistic child.

"They have such big emotions that they can't regulate on their own, and they can't tell you what they need. And so it's an explosion of many things inside your brain — lights, big noises, misery, happiness, confusion, all of that all at once. And the ones that can't verbalize it can't tell you," Sapach said.

It leaves parents facing uncertain futures with their children as they become adults.

Sapach said, "It leads to so many things down the line, and I try not to think about that. So many kids on the autism spectrum don't get the care that they need in school. Some of their needs are never met, and it's not fair to them. It's an insane world of things — beautiful and heartbreaking and wonderful — so many different things."

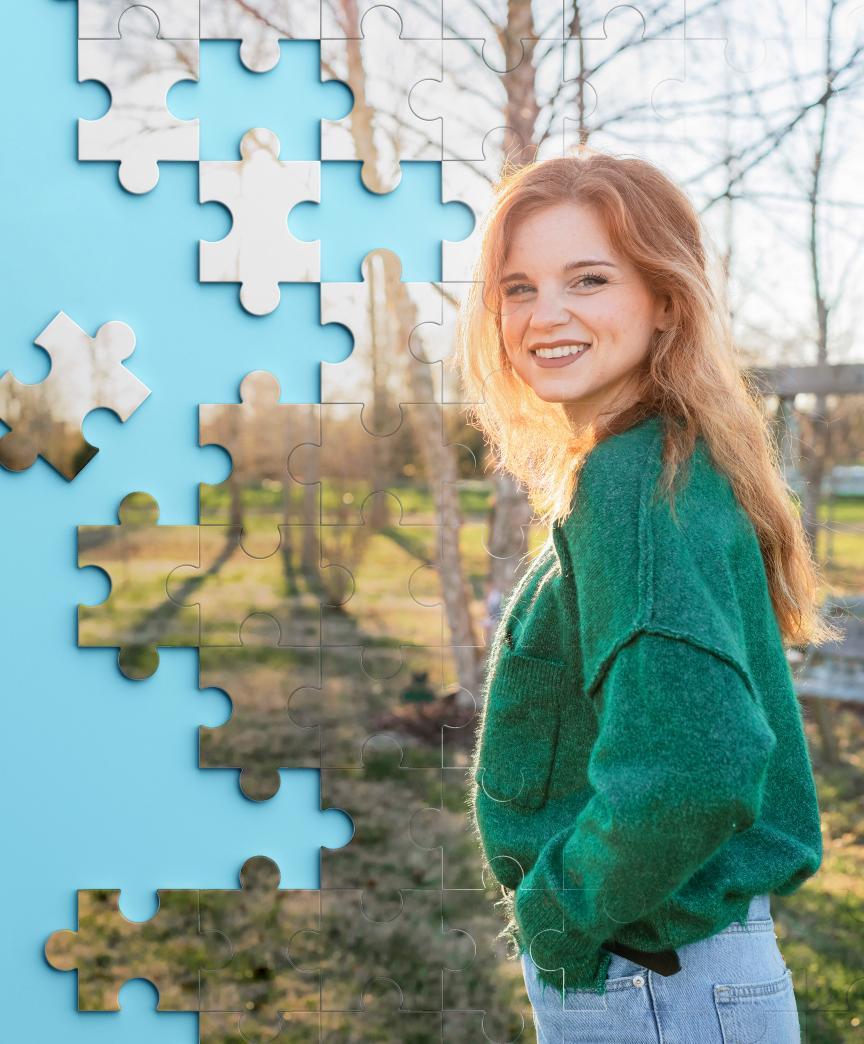
But for all the uncertainties, Sapach is sure of one thing.

"There's a good possibility he could be independent one day, but it could go either way, and I'm fine with it. I'm preparing him to learn to be independent, but if he isn't capable of being on his own one day, then I'm prepared for him to live with me for the rest of my life. I will not complain about it," she said.

The more we learn, the more we can support families and children on the autism spectrum. It's not a once-and-done but an ongoing process of awareness.

She said, "Sometimes autism awareness gets recognition. People wear shirts and bracelets one month out of the year, and that's fine. They recognize it, but it never goes away for people who are living in it. It needs to be talked about more."

Talking more about the needs of those who can't speak up for themselves is a gift that will keep on giving. **GN**



Momen OF FAYENT

POWER, STRENGTH, BRAVERY, AND DETERMINATION IN THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

EVILLE

J UST OVER 100 years ago, women finally received what other Americans, but not all, already had — the right to vote. Now, we have the opportunity to lift up and celebrate the groundbreaking women around us during Women's History Month. From teachers, activists, scientists, athletes, doctors, entrepreneurs, and more — women bring with them ambition, intelligence, creativity, and resilience that will be essential for our future. Their presence in the workforce and leadership can also provide chances for other motivated individuals to rise

up into positions they may not otherwise have access to.

We must celebrate the outstanding accomplishments of these incredible women in order to build a better future. It's important to remember that empowerment is a collective effort that starts with us. Let us use this moment in history as an opportunity to honor women for their strength, bravery, and determination — for without them, the world would be far less vibrant. We can draw strength from one another and continue to make progress toward a better Fayetteville because of these women. **GN**

A Fair TRADE

SARAH CAMPBELL AND JUDY CARTER HAVE BONDED FOR LIFE.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder

AST DECEMBER, Judy Carter enjoyed dinner and Christmas lights with her family. For some, it's a little thing, but for Carter and her family, it was a reason to celebrate. And it was possible because of the connection with her daughter-in-law, Sarah Campbell — well, her connection and the kidney she donated to Carter.

Just a few months earlier, Carter, 62, was taking 12 hours of dialysis at night and sleeping 12 to 14 hours a day, exhausted and without time for anything else. The kidney transplanted from a deceased donor 25 years ago was failing. Carter needed a new kidney to live.

Twenty-nine-year-old Campbell knew she wanted to donate her kidney to her mother-in-law, but Carter had reservations.

"My first reaction was no because she has two small boys at home, is happily married to my son, and she'd just started a business. I didn't want the slightest chance that anything might hurt her or interfere with her life. I waited two and a half years for a deceased donor for my first transplant. This time, Sarah was the first tested, and I couldn't believe she was a match. My prayer from the moment they told me she wanted to test - and she wanted to test; it was not up for negotiation — was that if there was anything that would harm her or hurt her life, she wouldn't match or would be denied for some reason," Carter said.

Campbell wasn't worried, though. She was confident in and trusted God's plan.



"I feel like it was all in God's timing because everything down to the surgery date fell into place the way it should. It couldn't have been any clearer that this was meant to happen, and I guess that's why I felt so positive throughout the whole thing. At first, Jake wasn't for it, but we prayed about it, and nothing made me question it," said Campbell.

The transplant took place on August 19, 2022, and Carter agrees that timing is everything in this case. Kidneys from a deceased donor usually last for only 10 to 15 years, but Carter's lasted for 25. Campbell had married into the family only five years earlier, so had her kidney given out sooner, Campbell would not have been there to donate.

Carter said, "We could just see God's hand in everything. We really have felt it every step of the way; it worked out beautifully. It gives you such confidence that you know God has a plan for us from the moment we're born, and He's just there every step of the way."

It's not uncommon for people to question why Campbell would donate her kidney when she or an immediate family member might need it. The misconceptions surrounding being a living kidney donor are many and something the family hopes to clarify.

One is that organ donation delays burial. Carter said this is not the case; the sooner organs are harvested, the better the chances for a successful transplant. Some fear that harvesting the organs disrespects the body, but a donor's family does not give up control. Carter said, "I think anybody that has ever donated from a loved one that's passed has found they are so respectful of the body and the family."



Both Campbell and Carter have been treated with compassion and respect throughout their experience.

Campbell said, "Let's say I held my two kidneys, waiting for one of my kids to need it. Nine times out of 10, knock on wood, that's not going to happen. Another thing is that I might not even be able to donate at that time. I know that right now, my body is healthy, and I am able to donate. But in 10 years, that might not be the case. So holding on to a kidney and waiting to see what happens or losing my motherin-law and my husband losing his mother just wasn't worth it. If you have someone in your family, you can be a living donor, or you can go in being a living donor to someone you don't know. It's something I never even thought of until I got into this family. It was a really cool experience."

It's an experience that has brought the women even closer together.

Carter said, "I have always loved her. I've loved her from the minute I met her. She's got such a bubbly, sweet personality, and she's just such a good mother and wife. I love her in so many ways. But I just feel a connection and a closeness to her that is just a bond. She will never know what she has given me through the generosity of her spirit. There's not any way you can say thank you. I try to think of what I can do for her, and I keep coming up with: 'There's just no way that you can ever repay somebody for giving you life."

Campbell feels there are no thanks necessary.

"Like I told her from the beginning, joking around, but in all seriousness, she raised an amazing man, so it makes everything good. It was a fair trade," she said. **GN**



Mota

DESTINATION MENTALITY

LAURA RADWAY MAYER TAKES LIFE ONE STEP AT A TIME WITH A HEART FOR BROKEN WOMEN.

> By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder

L AURA RADWAY Mayer always looked for the child on the playground with no one to play with, and it's no different today. Her heart is bent toward women and children with broken hearts and lives, and she has devoted her life to speaking worth into theirs.

At the end of the day, every single person wants and needs to know they are valued. Experience may teach us that our value is limited to the things we do for people, but we long to know someone sees good in us and cares for us even if we can't do anything for them in return. What, then, when we're just "being" and not "doing"?

Mayer learned early on from her grandfather, Rev. Joe Mayberry, that everyone has value.

She said, "He was so good with people. If we saw someone in public who may have been the kind of person not many would stop to talk to, he always did. Then, he would coach me afterward and explain why he did it. He said everybody matters, and we're all equal in the eyes of God; we all have value."

Growing up, Mayer's parents often took people into their home until they could get back on their feet. That and her grandfather's influence shaped Mayer's heart for service. Actually, heart-shaping is her calling.

"I realized I really love public speaking, something a lot of people hate. It's kind of a weird thing to love, but I realized I loved holding people's hearts in my hands and motivating them to see themselves as God sees them and to view others that way, too. I love to build people up. I see people living so far below where they could be because of the messages they believed in their lives.



You will become what you believe about yourself," Mayer said.

Mayer was a stay-at-home mom when she first began to feel a stirring for ministry, the details of which weren't yet clear. She always felt called to be a voice for the voiceless and found her first outreach as co-founder of Clothe Our Kids. Mayer knew a lack of basic necessities like clothes held children back from other developmental areas in life. The organization offers more than clothes, shoes, and duffle bags.

She said, "With Clothe Our Kids, the clothes are just the package the gift is wrapped in. The gift is the confidence we're giving those kids."

Soon Mayer sensed God calling her to a broader ministry, specifically women's ministry. Again, the ministry's details were not yet clarified, so she completed a fouryear accredited ministry program offered through her church, Cornerstone Word of Life, and became a licensed minister while continuing her work as a mom.

Mayer discovered Blue Monarch in Tullahoma, a residential recovery program for women abused or dealing with addictions, poverty, and mental health issues. She followed the program on Facebook and held to a desire within her heart to teach there one day. Before long, the door opened, and Mayer spent a year volunteering with the program. It was a reciprocal blessing.

"I loved being there. Some of my favorite worship times were there with those ladies where we'd have music going before Bible study, and they had their hands raised and were worshiping God with everything they've got. God is putting their lives back together because they surrendered, and that's what it takes. We often think to be a good Christian, we have to work harder to be free. We live in a society addicted to working harder, but freedom always comes after surrendering," she said.



Surrendering in life and ministry is not unfamiliar to her. It's an ongoing dance between her and the Lord.

Mayer said, "I don't have it all mapped out, but I know I want to help people. I know you just keep taking the next right step in front of you. It's not a destination mentality; it's "OK, God, I'm yours." To live every day like you're dancing with Him is a daily walk; it's a daily dance. He leads to green pastures and good places."

While volunteering at Blue Monarch and waiting for clarification on the next steps following Clothe Our Kids, Mayer prayed for discernment. Some offers came, but she had no peace about them.

Amanda Curtis mentioned that one day she'd get Mayer on board at Crossroads Pregnancy Clinic, a center providing care for women and men facing unplanned pregnancies. Mayer was appreciative but knew she didn't have time. Then one day, Curtis, the executive director, called in need of a client development director. It was the perfect fit and answer to prayer, and Mayer felt it was the job God was calling her to take. She has been there since February 2020.

"I'm walking hand in hand with these girls that want more self-development, helping them know they have value and worth," she said.

Now a trainer and board-certified mental health coach, her days are filled with her work at Crossroads, traveling and speaking at women's conferences, and working on her podcast, The Laura Mayer Podcast. The message of her ministry is consistent throughout. As stated on the podcast, she speaks on the topics of depression, self-hatred, anxiety, healthy relationships, and boundaries from a life-giving biblical perspective.

"God gets no glory out of us living broken and wounded," she said.

After putting some things on the back burner while her children were little, she's looking ahead and pursuing her master's degree in mental health counseling and is praying about the next steps from there.

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Mayer said, "I think every day you just wake up and say, 'Lord, what do I do today?' and minister to the people He's putting in your path today. Don't lean on your own understanding, but do it His way today. And if you do that every day, you wake up in the will of God."

What better place to wake up? GN

More than a FEEING

JUDY FLYNT TAKES CARE OF PEOPLE AND BUSINESS WITH HEART.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder and provided by Melissa Davis

S OME PEOPLE spend their life putting others before themselves. They show up at just the right time, armed with answers and resources, making the world a better place through their presence. Judy Flynt *is* that presence.

Whether it's an entire business operation, planning an event, or helping her neighbors, Flynt tends to every little detail. It's her superpower, and every person, place, or thing in her circle feels the warmth of it.

Years ago, she worked for Bill Thomas at Bill Thomas Chrysler Plymouth Ford until rate hikes led to its closing. After Thomas founded the Exchange Inc. (now Exchange Media Group Inc.), she joined him as soon as possible, the two falling back into step as if no time had passed. Referred to by the Thomas family as Mr. Bill's right hand, she remained with the Exchange until her retirement in 2018. Flynt may not be in the office today, but her presence is always felt.

Bill's son, Will Thomas, said, "She is proud but humble, never arrogant; confident and practical, and she cared about her quality of work. Judy held everybody to the high standards that helped engrain the culture at the Exchange and embody the products we published that contributed to our success."

Katie McNabb, Bill's daughter, recalls, "She remembered everything, like numbers and people's names. I remember her memory is incredible. Once she meets somebody, she knows them. She makes people feel like she never forgets them." It's a



feeling that makes Flynt unforgettable to others. Even now, mention the Exchange to almost anyone in Fayetteville, and they'll bring up Flynt. Many customers asked for Flynt time after time and were happy to wait or come back to deal with her despite others being able to take care of them.

Will recalls, with amazement, Flynt's consistent demeanor at the office. "You got the impression she never had bad days. Judy was never moody, was very thankful for what she had, and was ready to work hard every day. I know she had problems in her life from time to time, but she never showed it," he said.

Being detail-oriented, Flynt knows the value of putting the why with the what. Barb Hargrove worked in the front office with Flynt and said, "Judy was always the one that explained the processes to new hires. She'd explain why we do what we do or why we did what we did. She explained everything in detail, which helped us so much because we knew what the process should be."

Flynt was always there as Will and Katie were growing up; she was the office manager, but she was also family. Their mom, Janice Thomas, said, "I don't know what Bill would have done without her. Judy is a caring, loving caregiver who helped raise our children." Will and Katie agree. "She was especially good at poems. If Mom didn't know something, we'd call Judy," Katie said. "She'd proof our school work, and she's been proofreading our cookbooks even after she retired," Will said.

The words defining Flynt call roll on a life of love and character: loyal, kind, caring, attention to detail, helpful, loving, humble, and confident. Will said, "She puts other people first and takes care of all the



▲ Janice Thomas, Judy Flynt, Will Thomas, and Katie McNabb



SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR ALL OF US AND IS ONE OF THE WISEST WOMEN I KNOW.

- Melissa Davis

people in her life." Her niece, Melissa Davis, echoes that and adds "fun" to the list. "She's one of my favorite people in the whole world. She's more than my aunt she's one of my closest friends. She's always been there for all of us and is one of the wisest women I know. We've had so much fun on our girls' trips."

Katie sums up Flynt. "When she walks into a room... her confidence — she has such a presence." It's her presence that enriches the lives of everyone around her, whether it's family, friends, customers, or strangers. The gift of her attention and her generous, caring spirit is known and felt throughout the community. Holding the bar with high expectations for herself and others, Flynt leads with her heart and leaves everyone and everything better than she finds them. **GN**





Peanut Butter Pie

Submitted by Helen Cook

c. powdered sugar
 c. peanut butter
 pkgs. vanilla pudding, 4 oz.
 3/4 c. milk
 baked pie crust or graham cracker crust
 tub of whipped topping

In a large bowl, mix powdered sugar and peanut butter until real fine. Put half of mixture into crust. In a separate bowl, mix vanilla pudding with milk. Pour into crust. Place remainder of peanut butter mixture on top of pudding, holding aside a quarter cup of mixture. Cover pie with whipped topping. Sprinkle remaining peanut butter mixture on top of pie. Keeps well in refrigerator.





Spoon-licking favorite has its own day.

By Tina Neeley

ARCH 1 is National Peanut Butter Lover's Day — a day to celebrate the rich, gooey goodness of a pantry staple. What better way to start the day than with a batch of special pancakes? Then, keep up the momentum at lunch with Elvis' favorite midnight snack and an extra pie to share with a friend or neighbor. Don't forget to lick the spoon! GN

Fried Peanut Butter and Banana Sandwich

Submitted by Fannie Thorpe

1/2 c. butter, softened
3/4 c. peanut butter
3 T. honey
1 1/2 t. + 1 T. ground cinnamon
2-3 ripe bananas
8 slices white bread
1/4 c. sugar

In a frying pan, melt 3 tablespoons of butter. Make sure the butter does not burn. In a small bowl, combine peanut butter, honey, and 1 1/2 teaspoons of cinnamon. Slice the bananas into quarters and add to 4 slices of bread. Spread peanut butter mixture over bananas and bread then top with remaining 4 pieces of bread. Spread the remaining butter onto both sides of the sandwiches. Grill each side in the frying pan until each side is golden. For topping, combine sugar and 1 tablespoon cinnamon in a shallow plate. Coat the grilled sandwiches with the sugar mixture. Cut diagonally and serve hot.



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Carrying the torch for Mimi

By Kali Bates // Photo provided by Kali Bates

T'S THE curse of getting older — you know being told that we are acting like our parents by taking on their traits, actions, and beliefs. And it's true. Now, at 39, I find it happening to me, except I don't take after my parents. I am slowly evolving into who was the matriarch of our family for over 70 years — my grandmother.

Affectionately known as Mimi, Dorothy Wilson was one of the kindest and most pleasing people ever. She called us "babe" and constantly fretted about one of us getting hurt. She was always cooking, and everything she made was delicious, even if she didn't think so. Most of my childhood was spent helping her break beans, make biscuits, or watch the "Andy Griffith Show" with her and my grandfather.

However, there was another side to her that few got to see. Mimi could be a firecracker and was a stickler for presentation. You didn't present things or yourself any old way. You were clean and dressed, and the house also needed to be clean. She educated herself constantly. She wasn't going to discuss anything without studying up on it first. She wanted things done a certain way, and that was the deal. She worked unbelievably hard to make her household what it was, and she wasn't going to have anyone tell her how to run it — not even her husband of 72 years, whom she adored.

She also was fervent in her faith. Both she and my grandfather were devout Christians who served in the Methodist Church as Sunday school teachers and helped in many other areas of the church. She knew the Bible by heart and read it every single day.

While proud to be Christians, my grandparents' faith was an action or way of being. It wasn't just about scripture, dressing up on Sundays, or believing in God. It was about acting out their faith wherever they went and in whatever they did.

Now that she is gone, I find myself acting a lot like her. I can be a firecracker. I worry too much about my children, try to cook, educate myself, and, most importantly, move in my faith. While I miss her terribly, I think about all that she left for me in my heart. Both she and my grandfather left me with faith.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

It can't always be seen or even felt immediately when we put our faith in action. Doing the right thing or helping can take days, weeks, or even years to see fruition. There is also the chance that we may never see our good deeds make the change we had hoped for. But if we have faith, we know it will all work out for good, whether we see it or not. My grandmother was proof of this. Her faith lives on through Joan, Sherry, Keri, myself, and all of the lives she touched.

Mimi taught me that the word of God is essential, but it is also vital to carry it out through our actions and words. Our faith is affirmed in how we treat others and walk through life. So, I'm good with being told I'm just like my Mimi; I hope I can do her justice. **GN**





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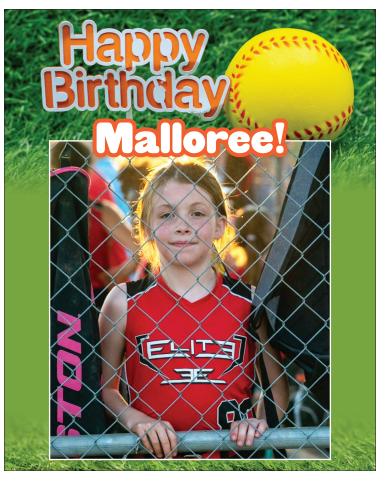
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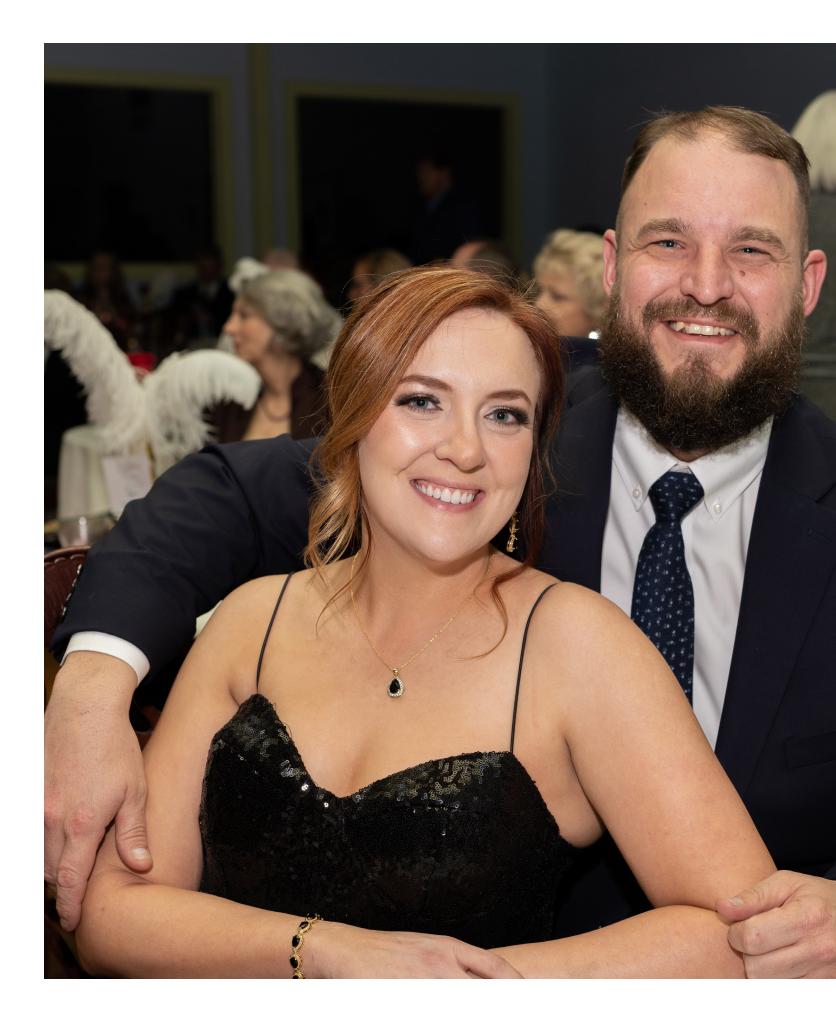


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CHAPTER 3 OF 3

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY BROOKE SNYDER

< Trey Peden and Vivian Fisher

HOLLYNOOD on Main Street

Fayetteville Main Street hosts its annual Main Street Ball.

By Kali Bates // Photography by Brooke Snyder



👗 Zach Hartman, Lindsay Hartman, Bob Cain, Whitley Cain, Jeff Wilcox, John Sessoms, Candice Sessoms, Bonnie Johnson, Battle Bagley, and Brandon Johnson

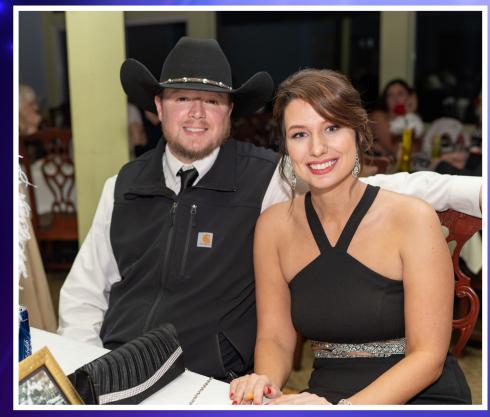
HE STAGE was set for an Oscarworthy evening where attendees enjoyed an evening on the red carpet while raising awareness and funds for a beloved hometown organization. The third annual Main Street Grand Ball was held on January 14 at the Pebble Beach Golf Club. The event was hosted by Fayetteville Main Street, a local nonprofit organization, and included entertainment, delicious food, and excellent company.

"The theme was a red carpet affair," said Executive Director Aimee Byrd. "We brought in a step-and-repeat, sponsored by Hall Signs, where attendees could get a real Hollywood experience in having their pictures taken. We also had Fayetteville spelled out in large white letters, just like the Hollywood sign in California. It was a lot of fun to create and implement this Hollywood look, but with Fayetteville flair, for our guests."

The Andrews Brothers Dueling Pianos, out of Atlanta, provided entertainment for the event. The brothers are well known throughout the Southeast for their high energy, all-request, sing-along, interactive music, and comedy show. "They returned this year, much to the delight of attendees," said Byrd. "They consistently kept folks out on the dance floor throughout the evening. We were thrilled to have them back."

Main Street member and local small-business owner Misty Sims with Sweet Feed Company provided the event refreshments.

"Misty was one of our first members when we relaunched the membership program in May 2022. She does a fabulous job, and we were excited to have her cater the event," she said. "Her custom menu



▲ Jake and Sarah Campbell

for the event was elegant but approachable and delicious. It was an adventurous and filling small-bites bar."

Byrd said she is glad to see the event grow each year. Even with the challenges of COVID, the event continues to draw locals to celebrate an evening for a good cause.

"The board held the first event in 2020," she said. "Two months later, everything was shut down due to COVID, so there was no Grand Ball in 2021. We hosted the second ball in 2022, celebrating The Roaring 20s. This will be our third, and we are proud that the community continues to come out and support the event."

Since 1990, the Fayetteville Main Street organization has been an active and vital part of the community. According to the organization's website, the overall goal of Fayetteville Main Street is to promote and revitalize Fayetteville's downtown while supporting the city's local businesses. The program is accredited through the National Main Street and Tennessee Main Street programs.

"We are reaching many people within and outside the community," explained Byrd. "Every dollar we receive goes back to promoting and revitalizing the downtown, but we also support businesses throughout the county. A thriving downtown is good for the entire county. We want to show results and the community all the good that the organization is creating."

The Main Street Ball is just one of many events the organization holds annually. For a list of upcoming events and more information on the Fayetteville Main Street program, visit online at fayettevillemainstreet.com. **GN**



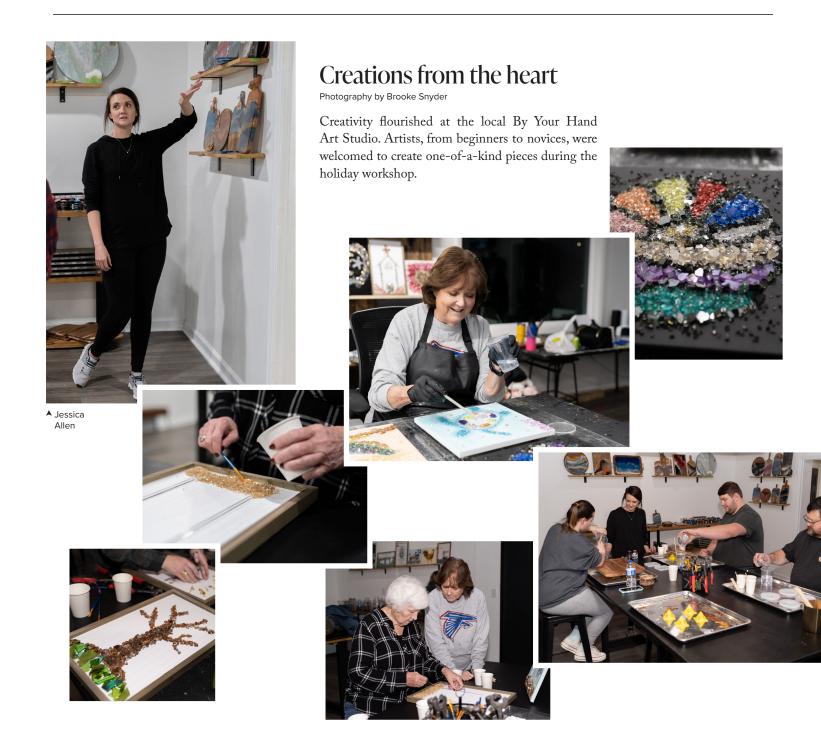






Bill from Andrew Brothers Dualing Pianos

COMMUNITY EVENTS





≺ Resa Beasley, Joyce Jones, Laura Roland













≺ BJ and Jessica Allen



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EVENTS CALENDAR

February 10

5:30 pm Chocolate Walk February 9-28 Downtown Fayetteville

> This self-guided tour will begin at the Main Street office beside On the Corner Nutrition. You will receive a paper bag, wristband, and map of participating merchants. Any square merchant can participate. Merchants will provide something chocolate to consume in the store or take home. This event is ONLY for ticket holders!

February 11

7:00 pm I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change! South Jackson Civic

Center and Mitchell Museum 404 S. Jackson St. Tullahoma

Enjoy this musical comedy just in time for Valentine's Day.

February 18

7:00 pm The Ultimate Oldies '70s and '80s Rock-N-Roll Show South Jackson Civic Center and Mitchell Museum

404 S. Jackson St. Tullahoma

February 24

6:30 am Annual Tractor Day

Lincoln County High School 1233 Huntsville Hwy. Fayetteville

Lincoln County High School celebrates National FFA Week and our agriculture industry. Members drive their tractors to school, and the community is invited to attend.



February 25

8:00 am Basic Life Support Course

Lincoln County Emergency Management Agency 312 W. Market St . Fayetteville

For more information please contact Daniel's CPR AED and First Aid Training at (931) 652-9236.

5:00 pm LC FFA Alumni's Ag's Finest

Lincoln County High School 1233 Huntsville Hwy. Fayetteville

We will be offering dinner, cake wars, and a silent and live auction to benefit the LC FFA Alumni's effort to support the LC FFA in their endeavors.

March 25

8:00 pm Steel 6 Rocks Mickey's Garage

Mickey's Garage Bar & Grill 207 Edison St. W. Fayetteville

Steel 6 will be playing all of your '80s favorites, including AC/DC, Iron Maiden, Guns & Roses, Led Zeppelin, Ratt, Cinderella, and lots more with a high-energy rock show.

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