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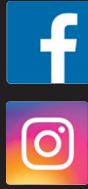
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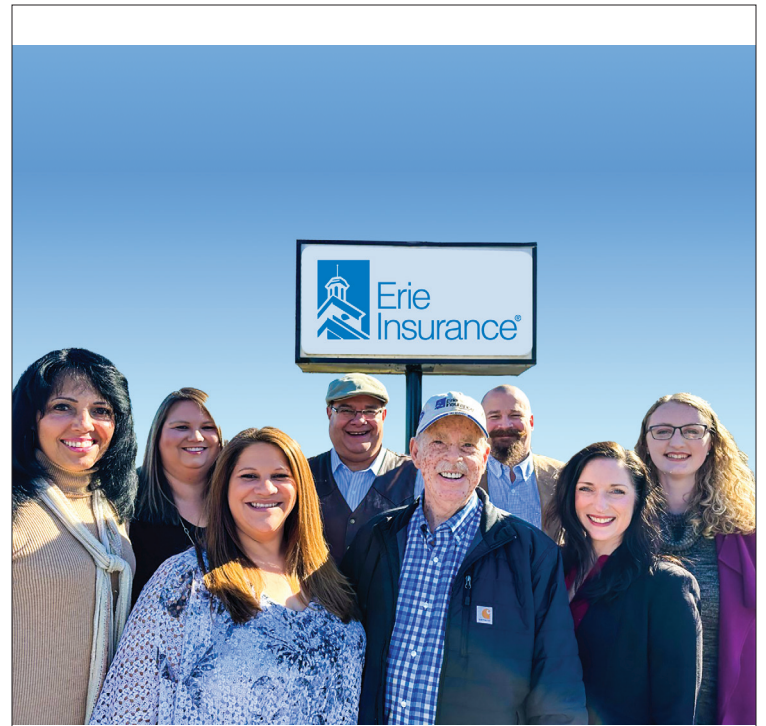


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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The impact of ‘shop local’

Together we can ensure that their legacies continue, our economy is kept stable, and our community continues to thrive.

THE ECONOMIC Policy Institute reports that for every dollar spent at a locally owned business, 68 cents of it stays in the local economy. Compare this to 32 cents staying in a local community when spending money at a chain store. The University of Florida conducted an analysis that showed how local businesses help fight high unemployment rates. When large companies lay off workers, local businesses are able to provide employment opportunities and maintain a consistent workforce. This is critical in sustaining our community and keeping money flowing within it.

Our locally owned businesses have helped our community become what it

is today. The long-standing staples in our community have created bridges between the generations. People who were once shoppers at a young age are now the mature employees who always greet you with a smile. And as new decades come and go, their smiles never fade. And the young shoppers they smile to will one day be in their shoes.

We should all continue to make an effort to support our local businesses. Not only does it help create a stronger economy for our town, but it also helps preserve the memories and traditions of generations before us. Together we can ensure that their legacies continue, our economy is kept stable, and our community continues to thrive. **GN**

Wesley Bryant
Wesley Bryant,
MANAGING EDITOR

From our readers



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— Kay Bartley,
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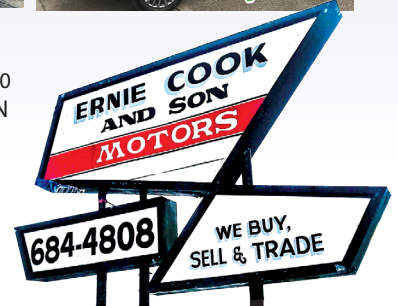


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CHAPTER 1 OF 3

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

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- 18 22 years and counting at Eastside Elementary
- 22 Teenage hobby turned successful career

Submit a positive story on our website:



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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLEIGH NEWNES

◀ Kelly Heflin



▲ Leigh Maddox and Jimmy West

Local program empowers students to avoid substance abuse

The Positive Actions program at Eastside Elementary creates opportunities for conversations with the potential to change lives.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

FIFTH GRADE is a time of transition — the end of elementary school and the threshold of middle school. It’s a practical time to offer students tools for the prevention of substance abuse like goal-setting and risk management. The Prevention Coalition of Bedford County’s (PCOBC) Positive Actions program at Eastside Elementary School empowers fifth graders to stand firm when faced with critical choices regarding abusive substances.

The program’s instructor, Leigh Maddox, speaks to the students from personal experience. She offers a unique perspective as someone who began misusing substances in middle school. Children of addicted

parents deal with feelings of neglect and miss their mother or father’s presence and expressive love.

Maddox said, “I’m a parent myself, so I try to reassure students through my lessons and let them know that if their parents went through addiction, the love is never not there. The guilt and shame set in, but their parents love them, regardless of what they’ve been through or what’s going on.”

The lessons teach goal-setting and address managing emotions, building self-esteem, and a positive self-image, which often factor in becoming vulnerable to substance abuse. Learning to see the impact of these as obstacles to meeting goals is one of the program’s aims.



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“I share my story with them, especially at the end, because I’m a recovering addict. I’ve been in places where their parents have been or [where] their family members are. They open up tremendously as they get to know me and as we play games. If they had parents who were addicts and they had to live with their grandparents, or if their parents have recovered, that opens a doorway for all of them to be able to relate.”

The 16-unit program begins early in the school year and concludes in late winter with a special graduation program. The PCOBC director, Jimmy West, joins the celebration.

“At graduation, we have all the kids together — all three classes,” Maddox said. “We usually have pizza and give gift bags, and Jimmy speaks. We spend time with them, talk with them, and play for that last time together.”

According to West, the program is only offered at Eastside, but the need is great at all schools. The previous PCOBC director, Bob Hudson, initiated Positive Actions as an after-school program years ago.



◀ Leigh Maddox

West said, “The great thing about the Positive Actions program is that most schools are already aware of the curriculum because they produce other curricula used by the schools. I pray this will open up in every school because it’s everywhere. And the biggest thing right now is vaping. THC is going crazy in our schools. If parents tell their school that they want this program for their children, I think that would be very helpful.”

More programs that provide settings for law enforcement to interact positively with students are also a goal.

“I think most kids’ interaction with law enforcement will be negative. Having a positive experience with a law enforcement officer in the school system and hearing them say they love and care about them and want them to make right decisions helps shape how young people grow up seeing law enforcement,” said West.

The Positive Actions program creates positive experiences and safe places for students to share and grow. Wouldn’t director Hudson be proud? **GN**

For more information, follow the Bedford Coalition for Drug Intervention on Facebook or contact director Jimmy West at (931) 575-5100 or by email at jwest@pcofbc.org.

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▲ Kelly Heflin

22 years and counting at Eastside Elementary

Teacher Kelly Heflin is at home at local elementary school.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

MUCH OF education, it feels, centers on a correct answer. Knowing the answer is the key to success, and fourth grade teacher Kelly Heflin gets it in more ways than one.

Many children answer “teacher” to the what do you want to be when you grow up question. Some choose other careers, but Heflin’s answer never wavered. Whether wired from birth to teach or influenced by former Cascade teacher Becky Spencer, who was like a grandmother, Heflin is confident she’s where she’s supposed to be.

It’s affirmed when her students grasp a concept she’s been teaching — the light-bulb moment often witnessed by teachers. Reaching children where they are is a chal-

lenge with today’s fast-paced curriculum, so the value of such moments can’t be underrated. Seeing her students come up with the correct answer after struggling is one of her greatest rewards.

“You can see when they understand. Being able to make a difference and help them grow from where they are is my favorite thing” said Heflin.

In her 22 years at Eastside, Heflin has helped countless students grow from where they are. Running into students everywhere she goes confirms it, many of them stopping for hugs and hellos. She cares for more than their class progress.

She said, “You worry about them. Many are dealing with things in their home life.

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The students become family, and the staff and administrators at Eastside are Heflin's family, too.

Eastside's K-4th 2022-23 Teacher of the Year taught math when fourth graders changed classes but now covers English language arts, science, and social studies in addition to math in her self-contained classroom. She was a developmental kindergarten teacher for eight years before moving to fourth grade.

"We've got great administration. Mrs. Talbott and Mrs. Simons are wonderful to work for," Heflin said. "We're just like a big family; I've always felt at home here. We're very loving and caring towards each other, and if somebody has a need, we all pitch in just like family."

Kelly has been married to Mike Heflin for 22 years. They are parents to two daughters, Hannah, who is currently student teaching and will soon graduate from MTSU, and Krista, an EMT. They also have a son, Micah, a high school junior. A one-year-old granddaughter rounds out their family and has stolen her Roo Roo's heart. While Roo Roo is not your average grandmother name, Kelly wasn't ready for the more traditional names, which felt too mature for her season in life. After tossing out her mother's other suggestions and searching animal names, "rooster" stuck and became Roo Roo, and Kelly is good with that.

Surrounded by family wherever she goes, Kelly can confidently answer one last question — she's where she's meant to be at Eastside Elementary. **GN**



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▲ Nelson Holliman

Teenage hobby turned successful career

Never underestimate creative dreams.

By Tina Neeley // Photos submitted by Nelson Holliman

A CAMERA'S VIEWFINDER in the hands of a shy, awkward 14-year-old became the portal to a successful professional photography career for Shelbyville's Nelson Holliman. What began as another way to experience nature combines with portrait photography to preserve memories for all occasions.

With setting and location at the heart of his creativity, Holliman keeps an eye out for the next great backdrop.

"I will see random locations that I think would make for a good site, whether it's the light or the background, and I like to pick locations that are not as overused and more unique. But even if I shoot in an overused location, I find other places in that area that look different or that someone might not think is beautiful. I'm always looking out the window when I'm driving. And if I'm on a walk, I'm constantly looking at different little spots," Holliman said.

Anywhere beautiful, especially in nature, is Holliman's favorite location. Water, trees, and grass stir his creativity as profoundly as when he walked the fields with his first camera. As uncomfortable as he was initially to add people to his shots, he now makes sure those on the other side of his camera are comfortable and come away with the best possible experience.

"I'm a very inclusive person that welcomes everyone, no matter what," Holliman said. "I think everyone deserves to feel beautiful and [be] seen, and I hope that comes through my work. That's why I do what I do; I just want to make people feel beautiful in their own skin."

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► Yasmin Yata



◀ Bailey and Jarret Womble

Senior photos are at the top of his favorites list.

He said, “Shooting senior photos is one of my favorites because I can relate to them and connect with them in a certain way because that was me not that long ago. I think it’s just such a fun and exciting time in your life. It’s fun to work with seniors. For some, it’s their first time doing professional photos, and it’s always a good time.”

He’s not kidding when he says it wasn’t long ago that he was the senior. It was 2015 when he received his first camera, and Holliman graduated from Cascade High School in 2019. Except for one early nine-to-five job, Holliman has been his own boss from day one.

“I’m honestly very proud of myself. I feel accomplished, even though there’s [a lot] more to go,” he said.

Holliman’s photography has a New York fashion quality that could easily transcend small-town boundaries. He’s happy at home in this season of life but doesn’t rule out a change down the road. With an ultimate goal of photographing the cover of Vogue, each shot takes him closer to his dream.

“I love the idea of a small town, the people, and everybody knowing each other. But I eventually want to move somewhere and expand my name and business,” he said. “I have built such a good clientele, friends, and [relationships with] other creators along the way, and I’m not ready to give that up yet.” GN

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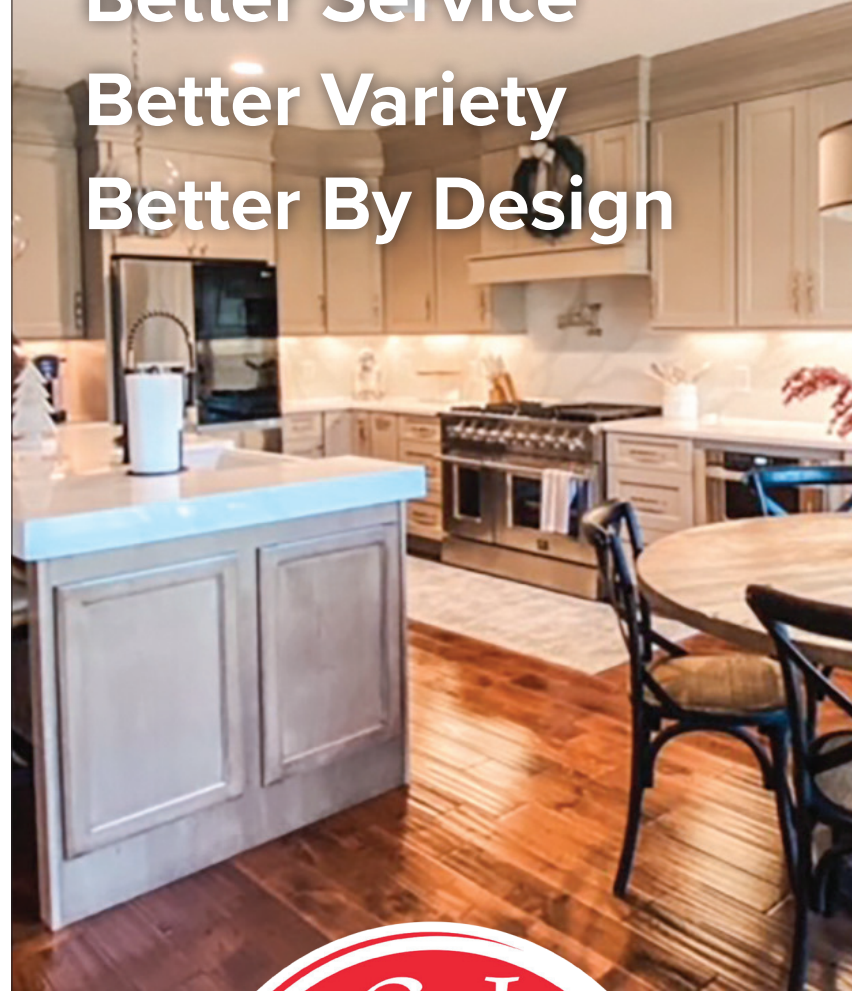
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CHAPTER 2 OF 3

This section of the magazine covers local people or businesses you need to know about.

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- 40 Shop local
- 55 Cooking with love provides food for the soul

Our stories are based on submissions from local people. Submit yours here:



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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLEIGH NEWNES

◀ Alyce Crawford



With *heart* and *soul*

An old barn connects
confections and contentment.

*By Tina Neeley
Photography by Ashleigh Newnes*

DRIVING THE gentle, rolling hills of southwest Bedford County, nature will stop you in your tracks if your spirit is open to its invitation to slow down. Nestled within these hills is the old red barn. Standing like a sentry over the family raised in her midst, she is the quiet gatekeeper of the humans and animals entrusted to her watch.

Mandy Mitchell said, *“To me, the barn is her own entity. She was old, and we kind of repurposed her. That barn and this farm, they’re a person to me, and the barn and I kind of resemble each other. We’ve been weathered, and we’ve been through the storms, but we keep that strong exterior and keep pushing through, protecting those that are near and dear to us.”*

Mitchell has pushed through challenges and changing seasons, all of which influence her choices today and some of which led to her baking business, fittingly named The Old Red Barn.

After a 16-year career at Jostens, Mitchell changed directions and took a position at Cosmolab, later known as Schwan Cosmetics. When her position there was eliminated, Mitchell didn’t immediately pursue the next job. You might say it pursued her.

Photographing their farm and capturing it in its many moods became a habit. Many people enjoyed her posts on social media that included those shots, and Mitchell was invited to take photos for a local special event. Accepting the invitation put her creative wheels in motion, and Mitchell saw other ways to contribute to such events.

“It actually started with the picture side of it, then catering, then that whole broad spectrum of an event. I could cater, take pictures, and bake the cake. But then I realized the older I got, I would have to narrow the scope,” she said.

The spectrum narrowed to baking, and Mitchell focused on baked goods offered

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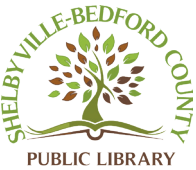
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Mandy Mitchell stands in front of The Old Red Barn ▲

for special occasions and holidays. It gives her what she calls her “egg money.”

“My grandmother would pick me up from school sometimes, and when she did, I’d ask her if we could go to the store. Mawmaw would always say, ‘Let me check my egg money,’” Mitchell said. “Mawmaw raised chickens and sold eggs, which now would be a goldmine. So what I do is my egg money. It’s what I have extra for Christmas presents, and right now, we’ve got both twins getting married this year, so every penny is going to both weddings. I think about Mawmaw every time somebody pays me to do something.”

Mitchell, who also works for Shelbyville Certified Public Accountant David Brown, sees her life verse (Philippians 4:13) threaded throughout the tapestry of her life.

She said, “On the back of my business cards, it says, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.’” At the time, I misunderstood that verse. That verse is about contentment with wherever you are in your struggles, highs, or lows. And I think at this point in my life, that’s where I am; I’m content.”

She continued, “I used to have to punch a clock and scramble and do all that stuff because we had little ones.”



Now I'm still working, sort of punching a clock with David, and content with where I am. I've got an opportunity to make truffles or cakes at the same time I'm coming [to Brown's], and we're getting our daily work done. I'm still building relationships. The running joke in the office is there's not one person who walks through that door or calls on the phone that I don't know or have a connection to."

It's contentment that comes from walking with her husband, Tommy, and daughters, Holli, Matti, and A.J., through life's more challenging seasons.

"We all realize our contentment comes from being all together, all safe and doing the things that make others happy, showing God's love, and trying to build others up. The first thing I do every morning is look to see what beauty is outside and listen to the crickets and birds. It's a peace that I seem to have now. And, of course, that flows to the children and Tommy. Holli is engaged to Nick Brown, and Matti will marry Austin Green, the sons we never had. Each of our children is beautiful and strong, and we're so proud of them," Mandy said.

Her plate is always full of something, whether it's sweets, tax season, or a new calf.

She said, "Tommy and I both farm. We've got about 100 head of cattle with mamas and babies and the weddings coming up; it's always a full plate. I laugh and call myself air traffic control for all things Mitchell."

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Be the *blessing*

Local foster closet works
with the community to meet
the urgent needs of children.

By Tina Neeley
Photography by Ashleigh Newnes



Alyce
Crawford

WE TAKE it for granted. A hot shower or a long bath at home, endless choices for snacks and meals in the pantry and fridge, a closet filled with clothes, a warm coat — so many everyday provisions are routine and present that we can't imagine others lacking them. Children in foster families' temporary care and custody know a different reality. The families that care for them often need necessities that aren't practical or economical to stock daily.

When Alyce Crawford was a child, her parents cared for displaced family members, also known as a kinship placement. She saw firsthand the need for such care, but she also saw the complications with departments of children's services. After moving to Tennessee, she realized she had more love to share and wanted to make a positive difference. She became a foster parent in January 2022.

Shortly into her fostering experiences, she recognized a need for greater support for local foster

families and began researching area resources. Foster closets offer necessities like clothing, formula, and diapers, along with baby and children's furniture, equipment, and other items needed day to day. As Crawford equipped her home to serve the children, many things were available through foster closets in Nashville, Murfreesboro, and other towns, but none were available in our immediate area.

She said, "I was running all over to other foster closets, and it was time-consuming, so I made up my mind to open a local closet. I posted to social media and in groups that I was starting a foster closet and needed community support. I started accepting donations, running it from inside my home, and we grew so quickly that my living room and front porch were overtaken."

Crawford expanded from her home to an outbuilding and named the outreach the Blended & Blessed Foster Closet of Bedford County.



Our families are blended. We're made up of biological children, our foster and adoptive children, and we are relative caregivers. And I thought, what better name than Blended & Blessed?

-Alyce Crawford

“Our families are blended. We're made up of biological children, our foster and adoptive children, and we are relative caregivers. And I thought, what better name than Blended & Blessed?” said Crawford.

Blended & Blessed serves foster, adoptive, and kinship families throughout Tennessee. Arrangements can be made for items to be picked up from the closet, or Crawford can coordinate a meeting with the foster caregiver in a convenient location to deliver whatever is needed. The need for items is great, and the nature of the things requested varies.

“We need support from our community, so we always need volunteers. We want to try to partner with some of the local businesses, organizations, and churches that would be willing to hold monthly drives,” she said. “Each month, we focus on [specific] needs for the foster closet. In April, we're collecting hygiene products and hair supplies, and we have our wish lists for Amazon and Walmart posted on our Facebook page. We update the page with our needs and wants to keep the community informed.”

Children come into care with emergency needs that require items not usually on hand in foster homes, so requests for donations of specific items are posted as situations develop. From the need for a certain-sized jacket to cribs, mattresses, and booster seats, there are many opportunities for the community's support. Volunteers are needed to work in the closet daily, allowing Crawford to focus on ensuring that as many needs as possible are met.

Crawford explained, “When a child comes into care, they typically come with nothing. I've had children come into my home with no shoes on their feet. As foster parents, we may be given a 20-minute notice, so we don't always





have time to collect items for the children. The foster closet is here to provide options to best support the transition for the kids as they come into foster care because having clothes and items is not a stress or burden a child should have to carry. When a child comes into our home, our focus is not on getting those items but on getting the child the services they need and getting them adjusted to their new environment. As foster parents, [we care] for their daily needs and [provide] a safe environment to help them process their trauma and adjust to this new normal.”

Another way Crawford enhances the children’s foster experience is by celebrating birthdays, holidays, and the little things in life.

“I started a birthday blessing bag program with the foster closet in August. We provide birthday cakes, decorations, and a gift for a child in foster care, 100% covered for the foster family. It’s possible with a \$20 donation from the community, and we’re working with local bakers to provide birthday cakes free of charge for the families. For some of these kids, that’s the first birthday they’ve ever celebrated. It lets them feel they’re seen even though they’re celebrating their birthday in foster care. I feel like that’s another way to support a foster family and to help these kids be children and enjoy life’s small moments,” she said.

It’s continuing the blessing of a blended home. It’s offering a hand as a community coming together around families who open their hearts and homes to children in seasons of transition and trauma. It’s being better together. **GN**

To volunteer or donate, follow Blended & Blessed Foster Closet of Bedford County on Facebook or visit blendedandblessedf.wixsite.com/blended-and-blessed.



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By Tina Neeley // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes
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▲ Auburn Wheeler, Bill Mittwidee, Joann Renegar, Alan Gill, Wyman Burns, and David Craig

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Belinda and her sons, Ben and Tad Craig, are celebrating the family's half-century commitment to Shelbyville and Bedford County and pausing to reflect on their experiences with each other and the community they serve.



Belinda Craig

Auburn and David shared a vision but differed in ways that made day-to-day operations challenging. From choosing the colors for the business (Auburn was for black and gold; David was for orange and white.) to disagreeing in various situations, their mutual respect and work ethic and Belinda's intervention and mediation combined for a successful team.

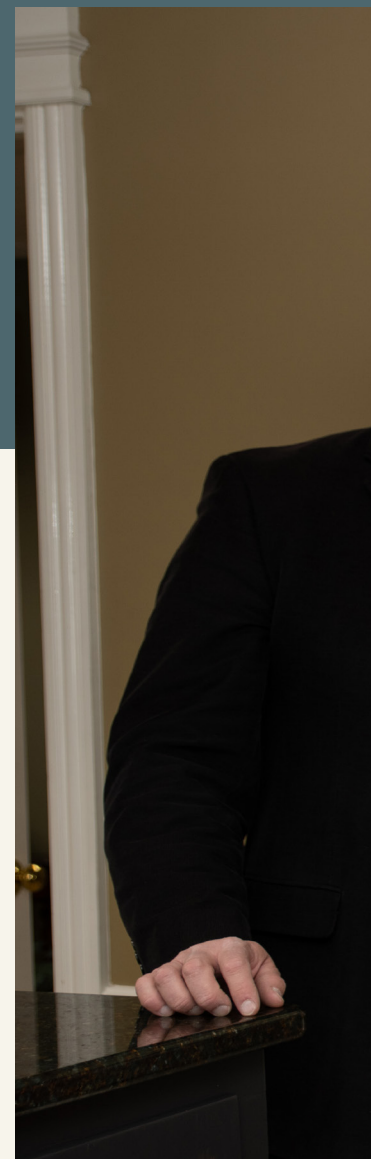
Tad said, "You've got our grandad, the guy telling jokes, shaking hands, and kissing babies that could make anybody laugh. Then you've got Dad, the guy counting every nickel and looking at all angles and was equally humble but driven. He was very focused. They were polar opposites, and that's why it worked. And Ben and I are, too. We each have our strengths, and we play off that."

Belinda agreed. "I don't think I ever realized how genius he was until he was gone. He never made a major decision without asking my opinion. David really pushed integrity and honesty," she said.

David and Auburn agreed on integrity and honesty. All decisions were and are led by the golden rule.

Ben said, "Granddaddy Wheeler gave me a ruler once — a Coca-Cola ruler printed around 1939-40, that said 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' And he said, 'I've always had this in my desk. Take this and keep it in your desk, and don't ever forget it because the world is changing rapidly.' I know how it's changed since he's been gone, and I just haven't forgotten that."

Most changes in the past 50 years have been in the tools of the trade. One-page real estate purchase agreements are few and far between. Listings were kept in a book that had to be signed out and checked back in by agents, and today listings are shared through a Multiple Listing System™ on-



line and accessible to everyone with an internet connection. Cell phones replaced the multi-line desktop system, and emails and texts replaced letters and pink phone message slips.

While all these things changed the business's logistics, the company's heart and its ongoing success continued under Belinda's watchful eye.

Auburn's retirement and passing came following Ben and Tad joining the family business. David continued full speed ahead until a serious accident involving one of his cows caused a decline in his health that collided with cancer and led to his death in 2018.

As his life slowed through the duration of his health struggles, David shared his focused values with them.

Belinda said, "He told the boys, 'All you've got is your name — you lose that, and you've lost it all. Money doesn't matter; it's just paper. But if you're good to people, it will come back to you.' And it has in the repeat business that we get."

Belinda is committed to seeing her sons' continued success. She is an active agent and presence at the office and can and will offer her wisdom and guidance as needed, recognizing when it's time to speak up.

▶
Belinda and her sons, Ben (left) and Tad Craig (right), are celebrating the family's half-century commitment to Shelbyville and Bedford County

There's one thing the brothers always agree on.

"Belinda's been the glue and still is. She's very active in what we do," Tad said.

Ben added, "If she didn't keep it together — the books, everything — we wouldn't be sitting here today. Granddaddy was aware of it, and Dad was aware of it. They would tangle. It was a family business, and there was controversy, but there's less today than there's ever been, thanks to the time we had at the end with Dad."

It's still a family business. Alan traded his agent license for an appraiser license. His son, Tyler Gill, now fills his shoes as an agent,



and his son, Bo, assists him in the appraisal business. Ben's wife, Lana, and Tad's wife, Carissa, are also agents; the other 20 Craig & Wheeler agents are also family.

Belinda said, "I hate that they're not here to see it, especially Daddy. He had seen a lot with David and loved that the boys were back. David was looking so forward to this 50th year. He talked about it a lot; he's missed so much."

Belinda's committed to the company's future, but she knows where to draw the line. "I don't want to be a mediator when I get to heaven," she said.

I guess that settles it. GN

“

All you've got is your name — you lose that, and you've lost it all. Money doesn't matter; it's just paper. But if you're good to people, it will come back to you.

- David Craig



Leo Solis

A Better Life

Local small-business
owner perseveres
and gives back to
the community.

By Tina Neeley
Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

THE COMMUNITY had seen very few Hispanic families in Shelbyville in 1993. The schools had no translators, and our curriculum had no English as a second language (ESL) courses. Leo Solis was a six-year-old in a new country surrounded by faces that looked different from his and hearing conversations that had no meaning to him. What he could understand, however, was the deeply felt belief of his family that the possibility of a better life was all around him.

“It was tough because there was nobody to translate. We were bullied on the bus because we didn’t speak English. At school, nobody spoke Spanish until they hired an ESL teacher, which helped out quite a bit. I was very blessed with teachers who really put effort and time into helping me learn and cared about my education,” Solis said in perfect English.

He believed the best way to honor his parents’ hopes for their new lives was to do his best in school. It was a determination that undergirded his goal-setting and life choices.

“I’ve always wanted to show my community, myself, and my parents that I was capable of doing good. We were immigrants with no other family here. My parents brought us here to better our lives and theirs, and I didn’t want to discourage or disappoint them,” Solis said. “It was kind of hard for me to focus, and that’s why I’m so proud of those primary teachers and elementary teachers [who] took the effort to get me where I needed to be. Because a lot of us were not well-liked here because of certain situations, I took it upon myself to show that I was able to be a good leader. I set goals in middle school, and when I finished high school, I tried to execute those goals. God has blessed me, and I’ve done a lot that I didn’t think I’d be able to do.”

Solis became a father at 18, adjusting his goals and future visions to best provide for his family. While he had dreams of college or the military, he quickly regrouped. In determining a career direction, he considered what lines of work offered services that would always be in demand and found his answer in the heating and cooling business. He learned quickly,

though, after pursuing it for himself, that the overhead left little margin for profit. Never one to give up, he moved from the self-employment business model to work for another, this time in automotive sales and service.

He worked as a detailer for a Murfreesboro car dealership and soon found himself in sales and management for three lots. After attempting to invest in the company but without success, Solis recognized he could do more.

He said, “I was not making enough money at the time. I had a salary of \$350, and I was getting \$25 a car [commission]. But I learned so much and educated myself again. I improved my skills and learned how to do subprime lending, website management, software management, and handle car financing. After 10 years, they wanted to lower my pay. I wanted to get out and start my own business.”

Today Solis owns and operates local businesses offering car detailing, sales, automotive repair, and a body shop. After a slow start, he adapted and learned to operate more efficiently again.

“The reason I love the car business is that I like to help people get into that vehicle when others couldn’t get them approved. I like to challenge myself to help those that say, ‘I couldn’t get approved.’ A lot of these people just need a little mentoring to show them if you do this and that, you will be able to do it. A lot of the reason I’m successful is because I was willing to help them, and then the next go around, they were helping me, giving me business and referrals.”

Giving back by offering a fair service at a reasonable price is important to Solis.

“We do pretty much all [types of] mechanical work. We do brakes, rotors, oil changes, and alternators — anything mechanical in a car, we pretty much do. We also do detailing and collision repair, and that’s what’s different from other shops. I offer affordable prices to my community. We base it on what you can afford and structure scheduled payments at times because it’s tough now. I’ve been there,” he said.

And he’s found opportunities to give back to the community in other areas.

“One of the things I wanted to do is help out my community. I’ve sponsored the Boys and Girls Club multiple times, and I sponsor basketball and soccer teams. I feel very fortunate to be where I’m at in life. I’m willing to do what I can to help because I believe in God, and I want God to know that I’m doing good work for my brothers and sisters.”

Solis has come a long way from the little boy in a foreign town, but he’s never lost sight of the opportunities available. It’s his life’s work now to continue to create opportunities for others. **GN**





“

The reason I love the car business is that I like to help people get into that vehicle when others couldn't get them approved.

- Leo Solis



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Serving Full Circle

Maleah Claxton stays plugged into her community.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes



SOME CAREERS begin with a dream or a plan, but Maleah Claxton's insurance career began, she said, as sheer dumb luck after moving to a new town and needing a job. A Shelter Insurance office hired her part time to answer the phones and file, but one month later, she was told it wasn't working out.

Claxton said, "I kind of freaked out. I said, 'What do you mean, it's not working out? I've been in business. I've done this; I've done that.' And she said, 'Calm down, Tiger. I think you're doing great. I want you to get your license and work full time.'"

And so she did. Four years later, she was offered her own Shelter agency and chose Shelbyville to call home in 2006. Claxton and the Shelbyville community connected right away.

"It took about a year for me to fit in," she said. "People were like, 'Who are you?' And then about a year after that, people would say, 'You remember when we did this thing in high school?'"

With a grandfather who lived with polio, Claxton is passionate about the work of the Rotary Club and has been active in the local chapter since moving to town. She has served in connection with The Imagination Li-



Maleah Claxton



brary, the Habitat Ball, the Bedford County Election Commission, the local Chamber of Commerce board, the Shelbyville Women's Club, and chairman of United Way Bedford County. While her children were in school, she was happy to participate in everything happening in their schools.

Taking care of her community is at the heart of everything she does.

She said, "I really enjoy helping people get what they need at a price point that they need, but more than a price point, what they need if something actually happens, especially with life insur-

ance. It's an act of love to help your family in the future. But I never want anybody to leave my office without understanding what [insurance coverage] they've got. Everybody's different. There's no one-size-fits-all."

An avid reader, Claxton added a Little Free Library lending box outside her office during COVID, and it remains today for any who want to take or leave books for others to read. It's on the Little Free Library World Map.

"I had a lot of books I needed to get rid of, and I thought since nobody could go to

the library during COVID, they could use them. There are books for adults and children in it. It's not to get folks to do business with me but to help the community," Claxton said.

Being married to someone who also works in sales makes life easier. Her husband, Donnie, is a building materials sales representative, so they understand the need to be available to customers outside the average 9-to-5 jobs. Still, they are able to balance work with quality time together.

"We usually both take our stuff with us most of the time. We will leave everything



“

I really enjoy helping people get what they need at a price point that they need, but more than a price point, what they need if something actually happens, especially with life insurance.

- Maleah Claxton

at home every now and then, but it's hard because, in my business, people need things immediately. As long as my assistant, Susie Emery, is there, she can help them or email me," said Maleah. "And at the end of the night, if I'm on vacation, I'll sit down and see the emails that need immediate attention. But I've gotten

lots of phone calls when I've been on vacation when things have happened. People apologize for bothering me, but I tell them it's no bother. This is what I signed up for."

Don't be surprised to find Maleah at Heritage Jewelers on the square in Shelbyville. Her love of jewelry pairs with her salesmanship, and she is in her element.

"I will go up there and meet customers and help the owner, Linda Brown, on holidays or during events and on the weekends for fun. Because I'm a jewelry lover, it's good for both of us. I'm a salesperson who likes jewelry, and she needs help. It's great because I get to see and know different people. Sometimes husbands will text me for ideas for gifts for their wives, and I'll remember they liked my ring, and that automatically gives me an idea of what they'd like. I don't have a

whole lot of hobbies. I'm not a golfer; my husband's a golfer. I read, and I like to work and do community service. I guess that is my hobby," Maleah said.

Finding a way to connect with the community through every aspect of her life brings local small-business life full circle. GN

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Cooking with love provides food for the soul

Good News is coming to dinner!

We will feature a local food critic's thoughts as he dines in Shelbyville. This month Colby Prince visited Bell Buckle Café.

Bell Buckle Café

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FOR THE pinnacle of country cooking, look no further than The Bell Buckle Café. This world-famous restaurant is serving meals reminiscent of eating at Mama's table for dinner — soul food only found in the South and guaranteed to bring back special memories with every bite.

I can hear the old wooden screen door slam. I can envision the stone step out front, worn down by thousands of hungry guests through the years. I can smell the food from across the street, and I know I'm in for something magical.

I cannot start my meal at the café without ordering fried green beans. Easily my favorite vegetable, these are perfectly crispy with a kick of spice that pairs harmoniously with the cool ranch dressing to dip them in. It's always a tough choice between my two favorite entrées — chicken fried steak or the grilled chicken. Both are amazing, but the grilled chicken is a signa-

ture dish here at the café. With a perfectly smokey exterior and juicy interior, it has a taste that cannot be replicated at home, no matter how many times I try.

And dinner isn't complete without one of their amazing desserts like the grits cake or oatmeal cake. Each is an out-of-this-world experience with a decadent taste. The grits cake may sound strange, but it's the softest, moistest cake with a mouth-watering flavor and topped with fresh strawberries. If that doesn't have your teeth rattling, give the oatmeal cake a try. This deeply rich dessert topped with the sweetest caramel sauce over a piping hot oatmeal cake will take your tastebuds on a journey unlike anything else.

Bell Buckle Café is most certainly a restaurant that most people are fond of. If you've never heard of it, then bless your heart. You're missing out. So come hungry, bring a crowd, and enjoy all the Bell Buckle Café has to offer. **GN**

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Good Times

CHAPTER 3 OF 3

This section of the magazine covers local things to do.

- 60 Dancing for a cause
- 62 Community Events
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- 66 Advertiser Index

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLEIGH NEWNES

◀ Phillip and Valerie Lorenz



Dancing FOR A
Cause

▲ Julie Wells Sanders, Eve Kincaid, Maleah Claxton, Pam Birtcil, Linda Brown, and Sheri Heflin



▲ Aaron Huitt, Leandra Huitt, Tabitha Lewis, Samantha Neeley, Danielle Knois, and Todd Knois

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY BALL RAISES MONEY FOR THE ORGANIZATION.

BY KALI BRADFORD

PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY NELSON HOLLIMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

A LOCAL ORGANIZATION, Bedford Builds for Habitat for Humanity, works year-round to help those in need in Bedford County. Their tireless efforts never cease, and they always look for ways to help the community. Recently, staff, volunteers, and others special to the organization enjoyed an evening of dinner, dancing, and more for the 25th Annual Bedford Builds for Habitat for Humanity Ball.

According to Executive Director Pam Birtcil, the annual fundraiser is their largest one of the year and helps them fund the building of about half of a house.

Held in Bell Buckle, guests showed up dressed in their finest. They enjoyed dinner from the Bell Buckle Café, a silent and live auction, and dancing. The Nashville Alternators provided music.

There were many exciting items for patrons to bid on in the silent auction. Among those items were signed guitars from Dolly Parton and American Idol runner-up Hunter Girl, jewelry from Heritage Jewelers, and a tray of pies from the famous Nancy “Mama Phillips” at the Bluebird Antiques and Ice Cream Parlor in Bell Buckle.

Other auction items included a flight on the DC3, a grill from Badcock Furniture, night stays at a Bell Buckle bed and breakfast, and a vase made by Scott Wieland.

Kristin Tomlin, a recent recipient of a home built by Habitat, was the evening guest speaker. She spoke about the organization’s amazing impact on her life.

According to Shontelli Head, who works as a Bedford Builds for Habitat for Humanity store manager, the event is special to everyone who attends. Head said the preparation begins months



▲ Dena and Warren Landers

in advance, with every detail carefully planned. She considers the event a special “thank you” to all those involved with Habitat.

“For me, it is a ‘thank you’ to the people who donate and sponsor us,” she said. “We are showing them all the love we have for them. I believe this is my third year attending, and I love meeting new people and just having fun. It’s that one day a year that you can just let your hair down and have a beautiful and meaningful evening with old and new friends.”

Head, who has been with the organization for four years, is a recipient of a Habitat home. She said she is thankful for what the organization has done for her and is continuously inspired by other Habitat recipients, such as Tomlin.

“I’m so thankful for the organization and all that they do for the community,” she said. “They are beneficial to everyone they reach, especially the ones who are recipients of the homes. I’ve been in my home for four years. There were a lot of struggles and emotions to get to this point, but they were there to help me and walk with me. Now I smile every day, knowing that not only have I been helped, but I am a part of an organization that continues to help. It’s a blessing.” **GN**

For more information on Bedford Builds for Habitat for Humanity, visit their website at www.bedfordbuildshabitat.org.

COMMUNITY EVENTS



▲ Cindy and Freja Scribani

A romantic evening for two

Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

Those looking for a romantic night of dinner and dancing were able to enjoy an evening to remember at The Bell Buckle Valentine's Day Banquet that took place at the Bell Buckle Banquet Hall. Couples enjoyed dinner and dancing to the sounds of the South Jackson Street Band.

► Joe Butcher and Rhonda Stevens



► Lucia, August, and Freja



▲ Anthony and Michelle Yanis

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EVENTS CALENDAR

April 22

8:00 am 14th Annual Barbecue Cookoff
Shelbyville Moose Lodge #2197

Food sales start at 10 a.m. and judging begins at noon.

For more information call (931) 684-9137.

8:00 am Pet Vaccination & Microchipping Clinic
Middle Tennessee Spay & Neuter Clinic
846 Union St.
Shelbyville

Drive up to the back parking lot of Middle TN Spay & Neuter Clinic. Please stay in your vehicle.
Rabies vaccinations \$10
Canine Distemper /Parvo \$15
Bordetella \$15
Feline Distemper \$15
Microchipping \$20
Please have correct change (cash).
For more information visit www.mtsnc.org.

April 25

9:00 am Friends of Shelbyville-Bedford County Public Library Used Book Sale
Bedford County Public Library
220 S. Jefferson St.
Shelbyville

Hardcover books are \$1, paperbacks are 50 cents, DVDs and audiobooks are \$1 each.

If you are interested in volunteering for the book sale, please call us at (931) 684-7323.



April 29

10:00 am **Our Town Fair**

Morgan Cultural Center
103 Alumni Lane
Petersburg

Admission is \$10. Kids under 12 are free. Wristbands for rides are \$8. Sponsorships and booths available.

If you have questions or wish to register as a vendor for the Little Miss/ Mr. Our Town or Our Town Idol, please call (931) 675-7111, or email admin@petersburgccc.com.

May 6

8:30 am **First Community Bank of Tennessee Shred Day 2023**

First Community Bank of Middle Tennessee
207 Elm St.
Shelbyville

For more information call (931) 684-5800.

8:30 am **Paws for a Cause 5K Run & 1 Mile Fun Walk**

Calsonic Arena Pavilion
721 Whitthorne St.
Shelbyville

This is a dog-friendly event. All dogs must be friendly, on leashes, and up to date on their vaccinations.

This event benefits the nonprofit 501(c)(3) Middle TN Spay & Neuter Clinic. For more information visit www.mtsnc.org.

For more events and to submit an event visit:

www.GoodNewsMags.com/events
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