

# Good News

exchange

*Eric Vanzant*

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+

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ISSUE 2 2024

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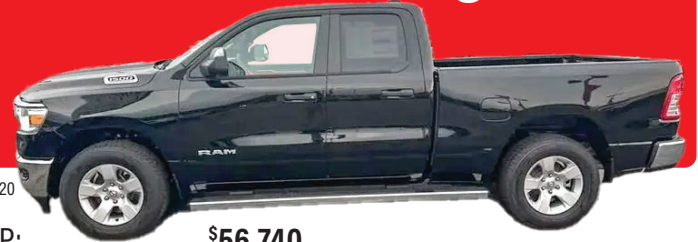
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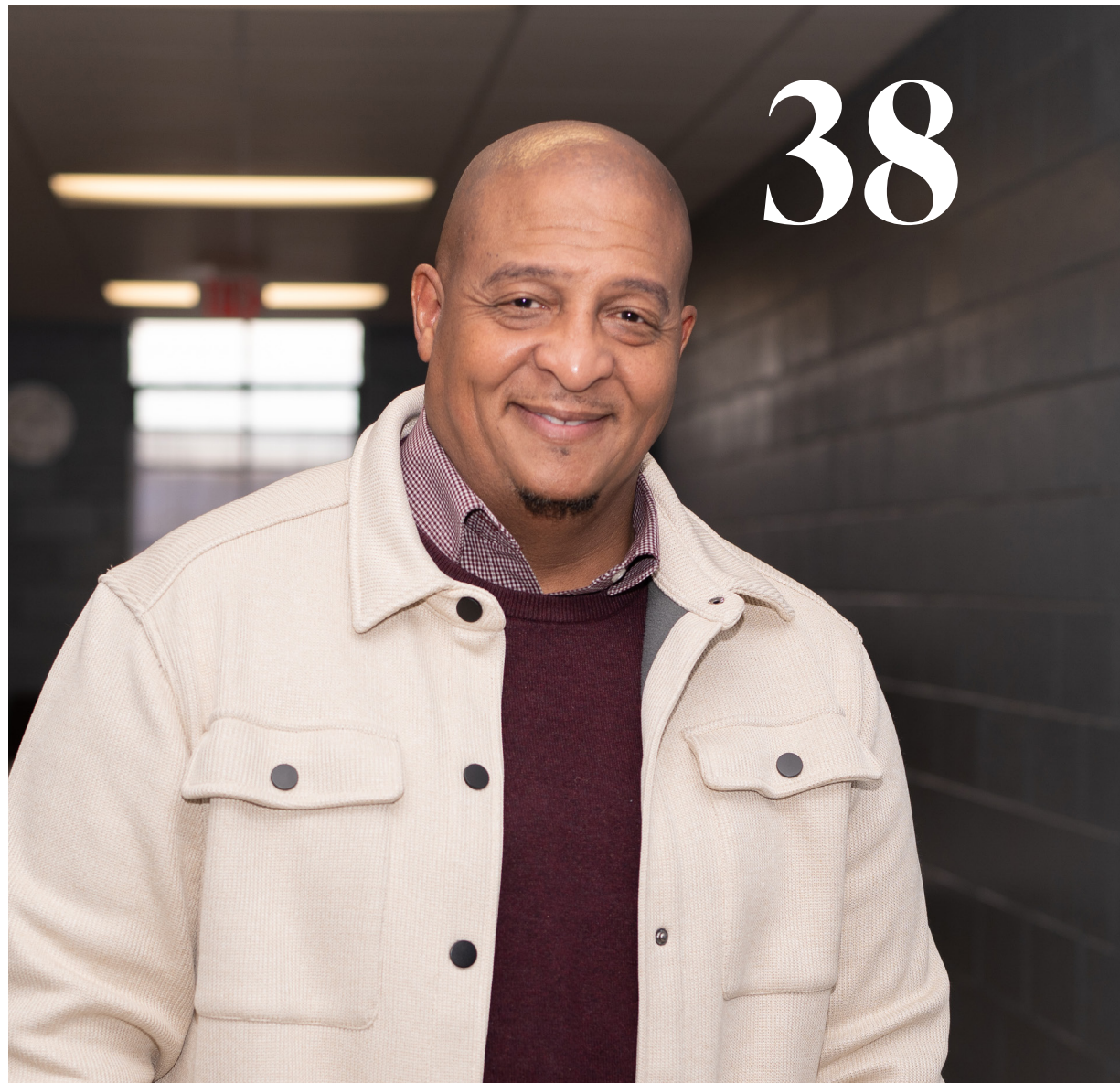
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

# Heartbeats of Our Hometown

We celebrate the silent heroes among us.

**I**N THE quiet corners around us, away from negativity, thrive the true heartbeats of our community — the local charities and the selfless individuals who support them. It's in these spaces, often unnoticed, where the most profound acts of kindness blossom, nurturing the soul of our town the way gentle rain nourishes our earth.

These charities are the sturdy bridges over turbulent waters for many among us. Behind each food drive, each fundraiser, and each helping hand are people like those featured in this issue. They are the pillars of our community, often foregoing recognition and reward, driven by a simple yet powerful desire to make a difference. These are our neighbors, our friends, perhaps even strangers, who embody the purest form of love — giving without expecting anything in return.

The beneficiaries of these charities are not just faceless names on a list. They are people with hopes and dreams, often finding themselves in situations beyond their control. The support they receive is more than just material aid; it's a message that they are not forgotten. Their community stands with them in hours of need.

This cycle of giving and receiving creates a harmony that resonates through our streets, echoing in the laughter of children at a community center or the grateful smiles at a food pantry. It's a reminder that, in the hustle of everyday life, the most impactful moments are often the quiet acts of kindness.

Good News Magazine thanks you for keeping our hometown's heart beating. GN

**Wesley Bryant,**  
MANAGING EDITOR

From our publishing partner



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# Good Living

## CHAPTER 1 OF 3

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

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Photography by Brooke Snyder

< Dr. Helton

# Hope and healing are on the horizon

A car accident inspires the Ratcliffes to turn challenges into opportunities.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Brooke Snyder

**A** CLOSE-KNIT FAMILY faced life-altering challenges yet found strength and resilience through community support. Matthew Ratcliffe, a young man with a promising football career ahead, encountered a devastating accident that would change the course of his life. However, his story is not just one of struggle; it's proof of the power of prayer, faith, unity, and even strangers.

Born and raised in Franklin County, Matthew comes from a tight-knit community. His parents, BJ and Andrea, who also hail from the area, ran a small business before BJ was involved in an ac-

*Matthew  
Ratcliffe*



*"The community has been very supportive to us through this entire ordeal. With the fundraiser that the church had, we had a tremendous turnout. It was very humbling."*

*-Andrea Ratcliffe*

cident. They actively supported local initiatives, schools, and other community projects. Life was full, with Matthew thriving in his football career and his family deeply ingrained in their community.

The turning point came with the car accident that altered Matthew's trajectory. Instead of retreating, the Ratcliffe family embraced their new reality, turning challenges into opportunities for community engagement.

After the accident, the center of the family's focus was on rallying support for his recovery, and the community quickly responded.

In addition to the immense support he receives from his parents, Matthew's journey is enriched by the strong bond he shares with his sister, Morgan. She visits him weekly, encouraging and supporting him, which plays a significant role in his progression.

One significant event that showcased the community's endearing support was a fundraiser organized by Grace and Mercy Church, illustrating the community's overwhelming response. The outpouring of love, cards, and financial support helped with immediate needs and facilitated crucial medical accommodations. With generous donations, the Ratcliffe family constructed a ramp at their home and acquired a specialized lift to ease Matthew's mobility.

Another notable event that underscored the community's support was the "Touchdowns Against Cancer" car show hosted by Russell Barnett. The Ratcliffes actively participated, with Matthew being honored during the event. The local football team presented him with a T-shirt signed by players and coaches, recognizing his long-standing connection with Franklin County football.

A specific participant, honored with the Matthew Ratcliffe award for her family's vintage car, may not have a personal connection to the Ratcliffes, but she shared her emotional connection to their story.

"This is a great family. They have a lot of stuff on their plate, and the fact that they can make an effort to help other charitable organizations when they've got so much on their plate themselves just really blew me away," she said.

Witnessing Matthew rise from his wheelchair to present her family with the award was inspirational for many, including numerous attendees.

"I was in medical research and development for seven years. I realized immediately, without knowing this young man's story, what an amazing thing it was for him to stand up."

The recent senior night at the football game provided a glimpse into the emotional journey of the Ratcliffe family. Matthew, a dedicated member of the football team before the accident, received a heartfelt tribute from his peers. Despite the challenges, he remains an integral part of the team, with coaches even extending an invitation for him to join as a coach next year.

The Ratcliffes, though emotionally impacted by the milestones their son was missing, remain hopeful. Matthew's involvement in football had left an indelible mark on his life, and the community's continued support became a source of encouragement.

Even through adversity, the community continues to stand by the Ratcliffe family. Their unwavering dedication to Matthew's recovery is demonstrated through financial support, attending football games, providing encouragement, and acknowledging important milestones, such as Senior Night.

"The community has been very supportive to us through this entire ordeal. With the fundraiser that the church had, we had a tremendous turnout. It was very humbling. Different churches have reached out. There was one church that made him a blanket and sent it to us, and that's the blanket that he used in the hospital because we were in the hospital for six months," Andrea said.

Despite the formidable challenges, a glimmer of optimism remains that he may rekindle his football career. Colleges have expressed interest, and the family dreams of raising awareness about traumatic brain injuries, offering guidance to those in similar situations.

Community involvement remains a crucial aspect of their journey. The Ratcliffes invite the community to stay connected through their Facebook page, where updates on Matthew's progress, events, and ways to contribute are shared regularly. **GN**

*To be a part of Matthew's ongoing journey and contribute to their cause, visit the Ratcliffe family's Facebook page: [A Miracle for Matthew](#).*





*BJ, Matthew, and Andrea Ratcliffe*



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By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Brooke Snyder

**R**AISED IN the tranquility of nature, Dr. Helton's love for animals found its roots in Upstate New York. Her journey eventually led her to Tennessee for veterinary school and ultimately to the heart of Franklin County's Winchester community.

In 1995, Dr. Helton embarked on a new chapter. Her move to Winchester marked more than a change in geography; it became a connection to the community, a love affair with its meandering hills, and a deep appreciation for the small-town charm that permeated the area. With its warm embrace, Winchester left an unforgettable mark on Dr. Helton's heart, influencing her decision to lay down roots and dedicate her veterinary expertise to the local community.

"Winchester, in Franklin County, is a beautiful area. It's very inviting, very comfortable. I'm not a city girl, and I felt very comfortable here. Of course, I did lay down roots when I moved here."

After graduating from the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine and falling in love with Tennessee, Helton moved to the area to become an associate doctor working for Dr. Harry Prince. After several years of mentorship, she moved on to start Mobile Veterinary Services, a house-call practice.

Dr. Helton's vision of establishing a brick-and-mortar hospital became a reality at Midtown Veterinary Hospital alongside her life and business partner, Wade Anderton. The transition from a house-call practice to the establishment of a full-service vet clinic was a professional evolution. It was born from her passion for providing top-notch veterinary care. Dr. Helton's partner was crucial in shaping the clinic's design and bringing her long-held vision to life.

During the clinic's 10th anniversary celebrations, Dr. Helton reflected on its challenging evolution. The journey echoed her steadfast dedication to her patients and the community.

"Construction takes a little longer than you think, but we got it up and going in a year and a half, and then the business just continues to grow every year. We've had more people moving through the area. We're trying to keep up with that demand, and hopefully, we can get another doctor in here to meet that demand."

The global landscape of pet ownership faced unprecedented challenges during the pandemic. Dr. Helton discussed the surge in pet ownership and the subsequent shortage of veterinary care professionals.



Dr. Helton

"We have a community that really loves their animals. And that's the important thing."  
 -Dr. Helton



Midtown Veterinary Clinic adapted its strategies to meet the increased demand, emphasizing the importance of innovation and resilience in the face of global veterinary issues.

"Each veterinarian has to take care of so many more animals than they did before the pandemic. So, there is a shortage of veterinary care and an increased demand for veterinary care. I've been practicing for 28 years, and the level of care that we can provide has increased. We are all trying to do the best we can."

For Dr. Helton, the rewards of being a veterinarian extended beyond the professional realm. Personal fulfillment blossomed through heartwarming moments and successful treatments. The bond between humans and animals emerged as a central theme, with Dr. Helton emphasizing the joy derived from maintaining and nurturing the unique connections between pets and their owners.

Franklin County's diverse pet ownership mirrored the eclectic nature of the community. Dr. Helton marveled at

the variety of pet owners, each dedicated to their companions in different ways. This community truly loves their pets.

Dr. Helton highlighted the importance of community involvement. Midtown Veterinary Clinic participates in Animal Harbor programs, supporting spay and neuter initiatives, pet fairs, and collaborating with Franklin County's animal control and shelter.

Additionally, Dr. Helton underscored the significance of routine veterinary check-ups, dispelling misconceptions and encouraging pet owners to prioritize preventive measures. She emphasized early detection's role in maintaining pets' health and well-being.

"There are so many diseases we can prevent with vaccinations and early detection. A yearly visit for an

exam, the required rabies shot, and the encouragement of other vaccines and parasite preventatives help keep a pet healthy for a long time. It's definitely worth it to have your pet see their veterinarian yearly," she warns.

While Dr. Helton encourages pet owners to prioritize veterinary care for the well-being of their beloved companions, she acknowledged that the community's love for their pets is palpable.

"In general, we have a community that really loves their animals. And that's the important thing." GN

*Visit Midtown Veterinary Services & Hospital at 505 S. Jefferson St. in Winchester, TN. Find more information at [www.midtownveterinary.com/](http://www.midtownveterinary.com/).*



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**Isaiah117**  
Center for Military and Veteran Assistance  
Susan Johnson

**Isaiah117**

A living room with a grey sofa, a window with blinds, and a pink decorative overlay. The sofa has a pink pillow with 'GINGERBREAD BAKERY' and a white pillow with 'THE'. The window has blinds and a view of a building. The pink overlay is a vertical bar on the right side of the image.

# ISAIAH 117 HOUSE OFFERS HOPE TO FOSTER CHILDREN.

A GLIMPSE INTO THE UNIQUE  
MISSION THAT RESTORES  
DIGNITY AND COMFORT TO  
FOSTER CHILDREN

---

By Jeriah Brumfield  
Photography by Brooke Snyder



**A**S YOU walk the halls of Isaiah 117 House locations all across America, you'll witness the uniformity in warmth, kindness, and bright smiles. These homes have an aura like a soothing embrace, enveloping all who enter in a blanket of safety. Corey and Ronda Paulson founded these havens to care for children awaiting foster care placement. Their story is a testament to the power of community. Every step forward helps rewrite the narrative of Removal Day.

The organization began when the Paulsons were motivated by the problems people face with the foster care system and embarked on a mission to improve the system. In 2019, they were led to begin a new journey for Coffee, Franklin, and Grundy counties. This expanded their reach to impact children across the state and, eventually, the country.

The Book of Isaiah in the Bible became the guiding light for the founders, leading them to their namesake. Their first foster child, miraculously named Isaiah,

gave the founders' mission an even more personal connection.

According to Susan Johnson, program coordinator for multiple Tennessee counties, the organization initially focused on the immediate transition during removal from an unsafe home, ensuring that children experienced comfort and care in those critical first 24 hours. However, the evolving needs of the children prompted a broader approach to supporting them.

The challenges foster children face are diverse, and Isaiah 117 House adapts its approach to meet these unique needs. The organization strives to step in early, reducing trauma for the children by assuring them that they are loved.

"Simply being there for the kids and just listening and letting them talk — knowing someone cares is worth more than you can put into words," Johnson shared.

The organization also seeks to ease the transition into the child's foster home or kinship placement by supplying necessities.



SIMPLY BEING THERE FOR THE KIDS AND JUST LISTENING AND LETTING THEM TALK — KNOWING SOMEONE CARES IS WORTH MORE THAN YOU CAN PUT INTO WORDS.

- Susan Johnson

Ensuring the safety and well-being of the children is paramount at Isaiah 117 House. The Department of Children's Services (DCS) provides supervision for the children, and the organization's volunteers work alongside the caseworkers.

"Whether the children need a bath, something to eat, clean clothes, or want to go outside and play, we want them to be children on [what is] probably their most adult day."

The true essence of Isaiah 117 House lies in success stories where children experience a sense of safety, love, and belonging. Johnson shared a touching story of two young siblings who arrived at the house after a traumatic experience. Simply offering them a bubble bath, blankets, and stuffed animals brought comfort and security, showing the effect of small gestures on a child's well-being.

"They slept for over 11 hours. When they got up, the older child talked about how he couldn't sleep at night because the rats were as big as squirrels, and they would come out when he went to sleep. That showed me they felt safe and loved."

As the organization grows, it faces challenges primarily driven by the increasing need for foster care. Balancing the demand for services with the capacity to provide consistent care creates an ongoing challenge. Training and retaining volunteers has become crucial, requiring a concerted effort to engage the community actively. Isaiah 117 House is working on initiatives to involve the community in various capacities.

"The need is so great not only in our area but also in other areas. There are times when people from other regions come to our house because there's nowhere for these children to go."

Community involvement is pivotal in Isaiah 117 House's success. Individuals can contribute by becoming certified caregivers or assisting with cleaning, organizing, and providing meals.

Isaiah 117 House looks toward the future with a commitment to expanding its impact. Annual community fundraisers include a golf tournament in the fall and a yearly lemonade stand challenge in July. A unique program called "Adopt-a-Bin" is in the works, promoting partnerships with the community to stock essential supplies to help the organization meet the needs of the children who enter the red door.

This organization believes that every child, regardless of circumstance, deserves to feel valued and cherished, making their individual journey a unique measure of success.

"You can't underestimate what a meal does and what a nice bed means to a child. They're our most important individual guest. We want each guest to be treated like our V.I.I.P. — 'Very Important Individual Person.'"

Isaiah 117 House emphasizes that no act of kindness is too small and even the simplest gestures can make an impact. **GN**

*For more information or to get involved with Isaiah 117 House, visit <https://linktr.ee/isaiah117housecoffee>. Locations: Blount County, Bradley-Polk County, Coffee-Franklin-Grundy County, Rutherford County, and more.*





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# Vivid Journey

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**W**HEN YOU think of the name “Vivid Journey,” what do you picture? For me, it’s brightness and lots of color. I think of white, puffy clouds in the sky as you are lying on your back, watching a butterfly land on a daisy blowing in the wind. I think of a simpler time when there wasn’t a care in the world. Of course, this is what I thought before I stepped foot into Decherd’s Vivid Journey – Café, Bar, & Smoke Shop.

Sitting down at the bar, I decided to check out the menu and saw a wide selection of pizza, “dillas n dogs,” and “sammiches” to choose from. Their pizzas included namesakes such as “Cheese and Chong,” “Sticky Icky,” and “Bio-Diesel.” The sandwiches were given names such as “AK-47” or “Dobbins Reuben.” I decided to go for the pizza and chose the “Maui Wauai.” Barbecue was my choice of sauce to compliment the soft, doughy crust.

While I waited for my order, I decided to shoot a quick game of pool with Jimmy, one of the workers. A short while later, Josh, the owner, brought out a smoking hot, sizzling pizza. I had asked for it to be put in a box, knowing I wouldn’t finish it myself in one sitting. I tried so hard to refrain from taking that risky first bite and burning the entire roof of my mouth on the spot, as I could not wait after smelling the cheesy, sauce-smothered sensation.

One bite, then another, and another. The crust was crisp but not burned, the toppings were plentiful, and the seasoning and sauce were perfect. There was just the right amount of cheese to blend all the flavors perfectly together. Every bite was just as good as the first. This pizza was the best I have had in a long, long time. This, combined with the friendly atmosphere, will bring me back time and time again. I can’t wait for my next slice! GN

## GOOD NEWS IS COMING TO DINNER!

We will feature a local food critic’s thoughts as they dine in Franklin County. This month Shannon Beebe visited Vivid Journey.

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To contact the Franklin County food critic for comments and suggestions:  
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# Good Stories

## CHAPTER 2 OF 3

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

- 38 Whispers of hope
- 42 A pathway to partnership
- 46 A special calling to serve

Our stories are based on submissions from local people.

Submit yours here:



[goodnewsmags.com](https://goodnewsmags.com)

Photography by Brooke Snyder

◀ Eric Vanzant

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# RITTY LIGHT

**"It's not how much we give, but how  
much love we put into giving."**

- Mother Teresa



# WHISPERS OF HOPE

CAMPORA FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER IS A ONE-STOP SHOP FOR HOPE, GENEROSITY, AND CHANGE.

*By Jeriah Brumfield*

*Photography by Brooke Snyder*

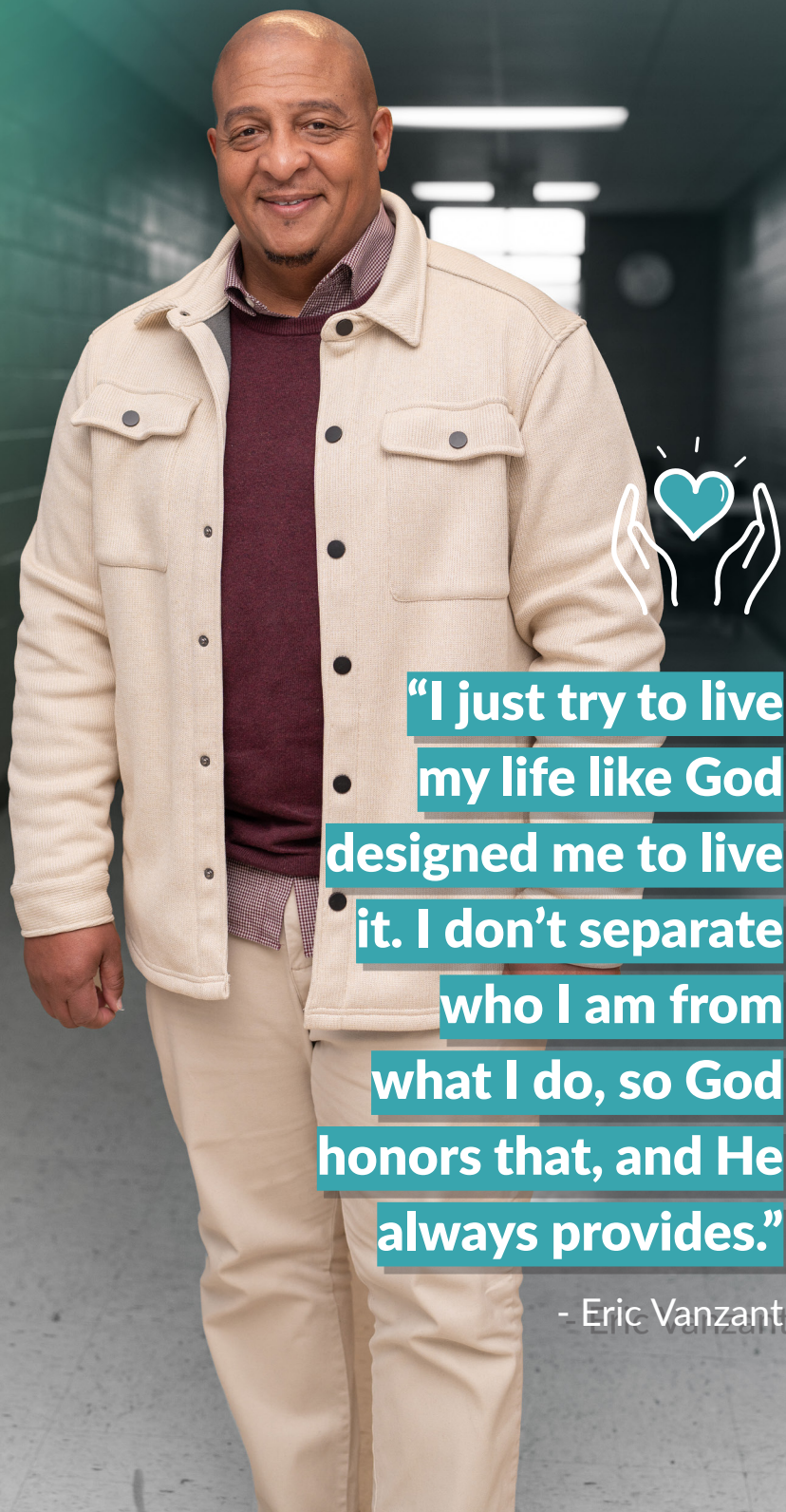
**H**ISTORY WHISPERS through the halls of the old Townsend School, now the heart of transformation at Campora Family Resource Center. Its time-honored history touches the lives of children and families around the community. Eric Vanzant, the passionate director of the center, has a journey intertwined with the evolution of this valuable organization.

Campora traces its roots back to 1993 when family resource centers sprouted across the state. Vanzant, driven to dismantle barriers that hinder academic success, worked on the Townsend Intervention Project grant. The project, named after the historic school's location, focused on building self-esteem in children from kindergarten to third grade, journeying with them through exposure to various experiences and family-centric events.

The old Townsend School, once segregated, holds a significant place in Vanzant's life, with his parents graduating from its halls. Over the years, the building



▲ Eric Vanzant



**“I just try to live  
my life like God  
designed me to live  
it. I don’t separate  
who I am from  
what I do, so God  
honors that, and He  
always provides.”**

- Eric Vanzant

transformed from a school for black students to a kindergarten and, later, a multipurpose facility. The legacy of the Townsend School breathes life into the programs that Vanzant now spearheads.

Vanzant’s journey at Campora has been dynamic. Vanzant departed in 1998 to explore new horizons at Centerstone, a nonprofit organization focused on mental health and substance use disorder treatments for all ages.

“When I left in ‘98, it was a move of God,” Vanzant said, reflecting on his journey.

He returned in 2004 with newfound knowledge and experiences. His mission was to instill hope, inspire success, and empower children to rise above their circumstances. He returned to the Campora Family Resource Center, driven by a divine calling to reduce barriers hindering academic success.

In his current role, Vanzant wears many hats. From launching anger management classes to leading parenting workshops, he is a constant presence in local schools, engaging with students on issues beyond academics. His unique approach involves asking young minds, “What do you not want to become?” A simple question ignites conversations about aspirations, fears, and the power of choices.



A standout initiative is the “Men of Distinction” life skills program for teenage boys. Through this program, Vanzant imparts valuable lessons about becoming men of character, impressing the connection between choices, habits, and lifestyles upon them.

Last year, he orchestrated a transformative experience for these young boys, introducing them to the power of wearing a suit. With the community’s support, he provided suits, shirts, and ties, giving the boys a boost of confidence.

“We did a field trip, and we went to D&K Suits. They got to go in and pick their shirts and ties, and we taught them how to tie a tie. Their whole swag changed. They came out posing and so forth. It was really cool to see that.”

Campora’s impact goes beyond academic support. The center operates a food pantry, ensuring families have access to essentials. Every Thursday, the doors open, welcoming those in need. The Christmas Angel program takes center stage during the holiday season, providing clothing for children ages birth to 18. The community’s generosity, from churches to individuals, ensures no child is left without a Christmas gift.





▲ Eric Vanzant, Cindy Smith, Pam Turner, and Barbara Ladd

Reflecting on the outpouring of support, Vanzant attributes it to the genuine desire of the Franklin County community to make a difference.

“The original director of Campora Resource Center, Janice Bean, used to call the family resource center a ‘one-stop shop for families.’ We’re kind of like Walmart. You can come here and get just about anything. If we don’t have it, we try to connect you to those resources in the community.”

The partnerships with local churches, schools, and businesses create a network of

support for less fortunate individuals and families in crisis. The center’s staff strives daily to help families and children break the cycle of generational challenges.

As the director, Vanzant is a leader and a conduit for positive change. His faith, fused seamlessly with his work, propels the center forward, creating ripples of hope that touch the lives of children and families.

“I just try to live my life like God designed me to live it. I don’t separate who I am from what I do, so God honors that, and He always provides.”

Family Resource Center leadership sows seeds of hope here, cultivating futures that defy limitations and blossom with promise. Campora Family Resource Center ceaselessly molds a brighter future for everyone who walks through its doors.

Vanzant welcomes involvement for those inspired to contribute through volunteering, tutoring, or monetary support. GN

**Visit Campora Family Resource Center at 900 S. Shepherd St., Winchester, or call (931) 967-7825.**

# A PATHWAY TO PARTNERSHIP

SUE FULMER'S INFLUENTIAL PATH TO COMMUNITY ADVOCACY AND CONNECTION



“Through Kiwanis funding projects, I was able to give Head Start kids the opportunity to experience things they wouldn’t normally get to experience and gave families a hand up to better their lives.”

- Sue Fulmer



*By Jeriah Brumfield  
Photography by Brooke Snyder and  
submitted by Sue Fulmer*

**S**UE FULMER'S transformative journey commenced in classroom halls, transitioning from an aide to a teacher, ultimately finding her purpose as the site manager/family partner at Head Start. During a meeting with the Kiwanis Club, a pivotal moment ignited Fulmer's passion for community projects. Embracing the Kiwanis spirit, she embarked on a voyage of volunteering, unlocking a world of opportunities to aid Head Start kids, their families, and the broader community.

"I went to a Kiwanis meeting with our family partner to ask them to purchase us a water fountain for our center. I became interested in all the projects that Kiwanis was doing and joined their club," she said.

"Through Kiwanis funding projects, I was able to give Head Start kids the opportunity to experience things they wouldn't normally get to experience and gave families a hand up to better their lives."

One of the few challenges Fulmer encounters as a community advocate is bridging the gap between available resources and community awareness. After volunteering for a while, she soon realized the importance of networking and communication to ensure those in need find the required assistance.

"In our county, there's plentiful resources, but people do not know that they're there. So the challenge would be connecting the different organizations to the people according to their needs."



▲ Sue Fulmer

Fulmer's involvement with the Franklin County Community Advisory Board (CAB) via the Department of Children's Services helps her foster connections between individuals and resources. She states, "When I encounter representatives from new organizations, I can facilitate their connection with other groups to discuss their services." CAB networks organizations to resources their clients need to improve their family lives.

With a warm smile and a heart dedicated to service, Fulmer took on various roles and initiatives, extending her reach to organizations like Life Choices, The Rain Teen Center, The Franklin County Prevention Coalition, the Grace Center of Hope, Isaiah 117 House, and Sleep in Heavenly Peace.

Fulmer's commitment to volunteerism, especially in serving children in families, stems from a desire to alleviate some of the struggles she faced during her early years of marriage and parenthood.

"When I first got married and had kids, back then, we all struggled. And if I can help someone to better their life and not have such a hard time, it blesses me. There are so many opportunities and organizations out there that help people so they don't have to struggle."

Fulmer's House of Blessings initiative draws inspiration from her collaboration with Eric Vanzant at the Campora Family Resource Center, uncovering a new chapter in her community service efforts. Serving at their clothing and food pantry, Fulmer quickly realized the pressing needs of less fortunate families within the community. She can provide countless resources to people without housing, families starting over, recovery groups, and nonprofit organizations through House of Blessings.

Among countless impactful stories, Fulmer narrated an emotional encounter with a man seeking assistance to attend a disability hearing. The simple act of providing gas changed his day and possibly altered the course of his life.

"He started to cry. And he said, 'Can I give you a hug? You don't know how much this means to me.'"

To those considering community involvement, Fulmer advises finding a passion and aligning with organizations that resonate with that passion. She promotes the exchange of ideas and aspirations, recognizing that various perspectives play a crucial role in effectively addressing the community's needs.

Looking ahead, Fulmer is excited about being the resource advisor to Judge David Stewart's Hope Program, which directs families in the court system to the essential resources required to achieve a higher standard of living. She is equally excited about Sleep in Heavenly Peace's bed provision and Isaiah 117 House's commitment to offering love and support to children in foster care.

Fulmer's story speaks to the positive influence one individual can have on a community.

Her journey is a reminder that compassion paired with action can spread hope like wildfire, transforming lives and creating a stronger, more connected community. **GN**





Sue Fulmer and Harleigh Myers





**“Don’t ever give up when you see something you want to do. Remember other people who are in that situation. You may be able to help them overcome that one day in their life when they need it the most.”**

- Pastor Jim Thomas

# A SPECIAL CALLING TO SERVE

THE DIVERSE CHAPTERS OF PASTOR JIM THOMAS' SERVICE  
TO GOD AND THE COMMUNITY

*By Jeriah Brumfield  
Photography by Brooke Snyder and  
submitted by Pat Thomas*

**P**ASTOR JIM Thomas, the man behind the pulpit at Payne's Baptist Church, was blessed with a journey that spans military service, a career in law, and the skies as a helicopter pilot.

Thomas' story unfolds like chapters in a novel, each career path leading to the same destination: service. His military service spans a decade of active duty and nearly three decades in the Army National Guard. Tours in Korea, Vietnam, and Germany exposed him to the stark realities of poverty, enlightening before him a path of empathy that would burn brightly throughout his life.

Thomas reflected on his decades of service.

"I've always had a heart for those that were less fortunate than I was," he remarked, "When you go to some of these countries, especially Vietnam and Korea, third world countries, you really see people that, according to our standards, really live a life of poverty. And it breaks your heart to see people like that."



▲ Pastor Jim Thomas



▲ Pastor Jim Thomas

Transitioning to a career in law enforcement and later becoming an attorney, Thomas allowed his service to the community to guide his steps. Juggling two demanding jobs, he expressed a dedication to helping others, even taking on clients who couldn't afford legal assistance.

His career extended to the skies, where he flew with Vanderbilt LifeFlight, witnessing firsthand the sudden, life-altering events that fueled his growing empathy. His deeply rooted compassion ultimately led him to Payne's Baptist Church, where his spiritual journey took an unexpected turn.

Joining Payne's Baptist Church in 2001, Thomas initially had no thoughts of becoming a pastor. However, when

asked to serve as a deacon, he took the opportunity to deepen his understanding of God's word. Pursuing theological studies at Liberty University, he graduated and felt a calling to ministry that he initially resisted.

In 2017, Thomas embraced what he believed was his calling, becoming the associate pastor at Payne's Baptist Church. Tragically, in November 2020, the incumbent pastor passed away, leading the congregation to turn to Thomas as their full-time shepherd. Three years into his role, he expressed gratitude for the growth he has witnessed in the church, weathering challenges like the impact of COVID-19 on the community.

He said, "Out of everything I saw in the military and as an attorney, and

helping people when I was flying medical evacuation helicopters, being a pastor is the most important job I've ever had in my life because I am concerned about souls."

Beyond the four walls of Payne's Baptist Church, Thomas collaborates with other local pastors through the Duck River Baptist Association. Every Tuesday, they gather to study the Bible, discuss community issues, and pray for each other. The association engages in various initiatives, such as food drives and after-school programs.

They are also involved in international missions, reaching far and wide — from Taiwan to Canada — endeavoring to share the gospel and extend a helping hand to communities beyond their own. They are persistent in striving to impact their



immediate surroundings, reaching out, and making a difference on a global scale.

In their devotion to community service at their church, they've undertaken initiatives to address essential needs, particularly regarding food provision. They organized a successful drive, preparing "shoe boxes" for children. Thanksgiving and Christmas saw their church extending support to local families by distributing holiday food boxes just in time for the festive season. The church also has a pantry, consistently stocked to assist those in need.

A life of pastoral service often comes with many challenges and rewards. Thomas acknowledged the struggle to engage the younger generation. However, he remained optimistic about the church's future, citing the enthusiasm of his congregation and their proactive approach to community service.

"I really enjoy the ministry, and I've seen our church grow. We went through some tough times at the church when COVID was with us and had parking lot services at the church. And it really took a toll on the church, but we're back in full swing."

Thomas offers advice to people who desire to blend their professional lives with community service.

"Don't ever give up when you see something you want to do. Remember other people who are in that situation. You may be able to help them overcome that one day in their life when they need it the most." GN



Pastor Jim and Pat Thomas



education that comes celebrating Dairy's father Steve, his and his wife Kara family started dairy been in Tennessee with is a way to ob behind the scenes, agriculture. fight on many people re-energized, high-pro farmers do a lot of in terms of raising care of cattle, being roblems, and wear-

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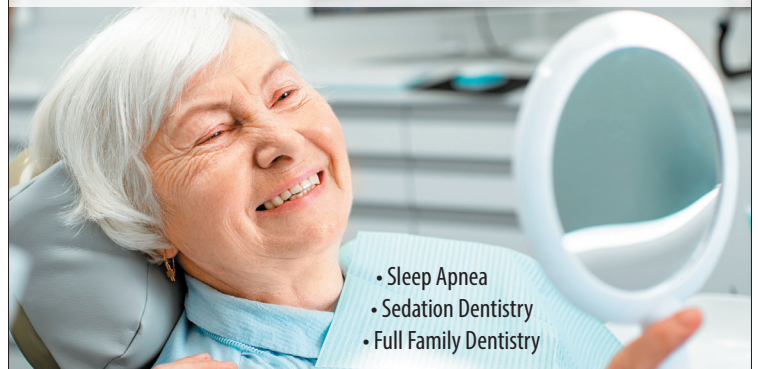
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# Good Times

## CHAPTER 3 OF 3

This section of the magazine covers local things to do.

**54** Community Events

**56** Charity Listings

**58** Advertiser Index

Submit a positive story  
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Photo submitted by the Parks family

◀ Noah Parks

# Snow Days - Jan. 15-19



Photos submitted by folks in our community

A week off school began with MLK Day, followed by snow blanketing Shelbyville in magic. Residents reveled, crafting snowmen and angels in this unexpected winter wonderland.



1. Brandon, Alyssa, Leyla, and Miller Sisk 2. Kennedy Hale  
3. Elijah Gann 4. James and David Tucker 5. Eleanor Gifford



6. Myla, Navy, and Leyla Sisk 7. Krista and Braydon Fanning  
8. Porter Mead 9. Destiny Jones and Haylee Walls 10. Kingston Gann

# INSPIRE MORE GOOD

Donate or volunteer at your  
local charities and nonprofits.

Good News Magazine's mission is to build stronger communities through positive stories. We encourage you to donate and volunteer at local nonprofits to spread more good in your community.

## **Franklin County Animal Harbor**

Committed to animal welfare, volunteers rescue and care for abandoned or abused animals.

(931) 962-4472  
[www.animalharbor.org](http://www.animalharbor.org)

## **United Way of Franklin County**

A community-focused organization that collaborates with local agencies to address critical needs.

<https://www.uwfctn.org>  
(931) 962-0103

## **Franklin County Imagination Library**

Encourages early childhood literacy by providing free books to children.

[www.imaginationlibrary.com](http://www.imaginationlibrary.com)

## **Franklin County Historical Society**

Preserves and shares local history through exhibits and educational programs.

<https://www.franklincountythistory.com/>

## **Franklin County Veterans Services**

Assists veterans with benefits, resources, and advocacy.

[www.franklincountytg.gov/veterans-services](http://www.franklincountytg.gov/veterans-services)

## **Franklin County Senior Center**

Provides services and activities for seniors, including meals and social events.

<https://franklincountyseniors.org/>

## **Franklin County Arts Guild**

Supports local artists and promotes arts and culture in the community.

(931) 313-5686  
[www.franklincoarts.org](http://www.franklincoarts.org)

## **Franklin County Animal Control**

Responsible for animal welfare, licensing, and enforcement.

(931) 967-5389

## **Franklin County Prevention Coalition**

It's goal is to engage community members in creating environmental change to reduce substance abuse and violence.

(931) 800-9112  
[www.fcpctn.org](http://www.fcpctn.org)

## **Bits & Peaces Equine Rehabilitation**

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### **Blessings**

A local ministry providing a hand up to those in need by sharing donated clothing and items.

(931) 691-9989

### **Franklin County American Legion Post 44**

A nonprofit made up of ex-servicemen and women veterans of all ages, branches of service, and active duty years of wartime service. Members come together to support community projects and needs.

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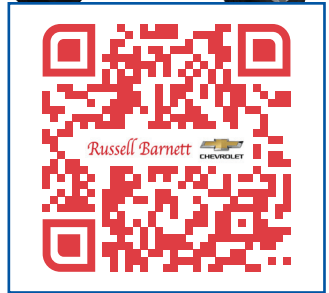


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*Unknown*



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