

Good News

exchange

Margaret Dalton

'YOU JUST KEEP DOING IT.'

Margaret Dalton's motivation
for work is unchanged
after 30 years



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THE HUNT IS ON FOR YOUR NEXT PROPERTY!

Completely Renovated Home in Riverbend Country Club!!



Stunning home features 3 BR, 2 BA, hardwood & tile flooring, recessed lighting, custom made shaker style cabinets, farm sink in island, wine cooler/fridge in kitchen, all stainless steel appliances stay, huge walk in closets throughout, tiled shower w/rain heads & body sprays in primary BA, plus a roomy air jetted tub, barn doors in utility room. Exterior features a composite cladding siding, oversized heated & cooled 2 car attached garage & 29x36 deck for entertainment & outdoor living space!

240 Riverbend Country Club Rd., Shelbyville, TN
\$749,900 MLS# 2589395

Stunning Property With Majestic Rolling Hills



This 31+/- acres is a must see. With county water available & a soil site this is a picturesque place to settle in middle TN. Convenient access to Tullahoma, Manchester, Shelbyville, & surrounding towns.

0 Whiteside Hill Rd., Shelbyville, TN 37160
\$697,500 MLS# 2576340

Hunting Cabin Situated on 153+/- Acres



This secluded & private renovated cabin has 3 bedrooms, 3 full baths, soaring ceilings, stone fireplace (wood burning), brick fireplace in basement, covered deck out back, miles of trails, tree stands will remain as well as shooting houses, excellent hunting for whitetail & wild turkey, food plots, mature hardwoods & barn has cooler room for hanging your harvests, spring water & much more!

249 Coffey Road, Petersburg, TN
\$1,450,000 MLS# 2563618

Private & Scenic 68.88+/- Acre Farm



This property features open fields & scattered woods, long winding road leading back, 4 bedroom soil septic site & lots of wildlife. Convenient to Murfreesboro, Franklin, & Chapel Hill. Ideal place for a secluded home, but close to town!

0 Old Nashville Dirt Road, Shelbyville, TN
\$600,000 MLS# 2555044

Location, Location, Location



This property features a House, Studio/Bunkhouse, Shop, Barns & More!!! Generator hook-ups & city water w/spring available. Farm has 2 Hay Barns w/sheds, open equipment barn & cattle working barn, fenced & cross fenced throughout property, 6 waterers & more. Simply breathtaking view of Downtown Lynchburg! Very Secluded - Home half mile off Goosebranch Road.

501 Gray Road, Lynchburg, TN
\$3,250,000 MLS# 2586908

Charming Brick Condo



This charming brick condo has 2 bedrooms, 2 baths, large living room, closets, recessed can lights, utility room, concrete patio, concrete drive, 1 car attached garage

102 Dogwood Crt., Shelbyville, TN 37160
\$244,900 MLS# 2596832

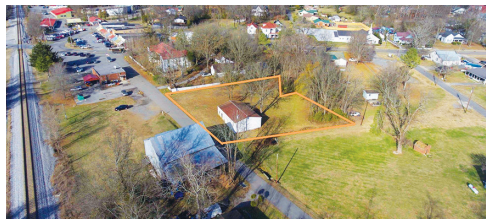
Cascade School District!!



This gorgeous 3 bed 2.5 bath home is loaded with upgrades. New wood flooring, new water heater, upgraded light fixtures throughout. Huge 20x15 back deck. ADT alarm system that just needs to be transferred and assumed. Two car garage with fenced in back yard. This one won't last long.

812 Winners Cr., Shelbyville, TN 37160
\$320,000 MLS# 2612587

Bell Buckle Commercial Property



Great commercial property in a convenient location in the Historic Bell Buckle! Property like this doesn't come available often; it has been in the same family for over 30+ years! Prime location for tourism, ideal for retail space, & water tap on site.

0 Hinkle Hill Rd., Bell Buckle, TN 37020
\$425,000 MLS# 2601184

Mini Farm Paradise!



This beautiful, private 19.84+/- acres is located at the end of Wells Hollow Road & features 16.84 wooded acres & 3 acres of pasture surrounding the bottom of Knob Hill. Amazing for hunting with wildlife throughout the property! Make this your get away or hunting farm!

0 Wells Hollow Road, Petersburg, TN
\$180,000 MLS# 2619638

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100 Logan St., Shelbyville, TN - REDUCED! INVITING: One owner 3 BR, 2.5 BA custom brick home. Home is on a shady corner lot in a highly sought after neighborhood. Downstairs has a large master suite with a walk-in-closet. Kitchen with breakfast nook, formal DR, & LR are all very spacious. Two large bedrooms upstairs w/BA. Home has plenty of closet & storage space. Oversized 2 car garage. Join Riverbend Country Club to get all of the amenities.
\$559,900 MLS#2559687

Dianne Arnold
(931) 703-5104

Madison Arnold
(615) 603-0077



524 Highway 82 E, Bell Buckle, TN - CUSTOM: One owner 3 BR 3 BA brick home with 2 BR 1 BA tenant house on 62+ acres with large pond with pier, older barn & 2 older chicken houses for barn use or storage. This property is great for farm living or possible development property.
\$1,499,900 MLS# 2562991

Dianne Arnold
(931) 703-5104

Madison Arnold
(615) 603-0077



328 Squire Hall Rd., Shelbyville, TN.- Price Reduced!! Gorgeous custom built 3BR, 2 1/2 BA, Hardee board/stone construction home. Open floor plan living, dining, kitchen, & breakfast nook. All BR are downstairs. Spacious Master Suite w/walk-in closet & master BA. Formal dining room on one side & large office on the other side of foyer. Great room has fireplace, kitchen, 3 ovens, all stainless appliances remain w/home/. Upstairs has bonus/game room & large sitting room. Covered front & back porches, patio, she shed, 3 stall tractor shed w/work shop, storage building, 3 stall horse barn. Tornado shelter, generator, & 3 car garage. All this on gorgeous 29.8 acres that are fenced & cross fenced. **\$1,149,900 MLS# 2576312**

Dianne Arnold
(931) 703-5104

Madison Arnold
(615) 603-0077



1790 Unionville Deason Rd. - Have your own OASIS! Beautiful Renovated home on 3.13 acres. Custom Craftman Cabinets to the ceiling, w/soft-close drawers/doors, tile backsplash, & Quartz countertops. The Island features a 5-eye convection double stainless oven & warming drawer w/a stainless hood. Hardwood floors in the dry areas, tile in the wet areas, stone gas fp w/remote, new lights, ceiling fans throughout, lots of crown molding & tray ceilings. Master has 2 walk-in closets, 2 vanities, Walk-In Tile shower w/glass, multiple shower heads & sprayers. Other 2br zoned. Now let's step on the covered porch that overlooks an inground salt water pool w/electric cover, & concrete surrounding it, a nice 20x30 pavilion w/ceiling fans, & gas to the outdoor kitchen. One garage is a Game Room w/flooring & a half bath w/heat. 1 car garage still available for parking w/storage & cabinets. Lots of parking spaces on Concrete Drive, The Backyard is fenced in & has some privacy fencing. Crawlspace professionally encapsulated w/warranty. **\$695,000 MLS#2611891**

Cindy Barnes
(931) 703-3738



202 Rochester Dr. - Nestled in the Hartsville Community on a quiet cul-de-sac. Amazing "Avery plan" by Smith Douglas Homes The foyer has a hallway leading to the formal dining room with wanes coating, crown molding, & a new chandelier. The Kitchen adjoins the dining room w/upgraded cabinets, backsplash, granite counter tops, seating at bar & dining area in kitchen, it opens into the great room w/new lighting. Master has a "Trayed ceiling" & ample space. The master BA has a garden tub, glass tile shower, double sinks, separate toilet area, huge closet that flows to the utility room which has 2 entrances. All BRs have a BA. One could easily be used as an in-law suite. Seller built a new trek deck w/part covered & part uncovered; whole house water purification system. The garage is a nice size w Gas Hot Water Heater & Electric box. is on a quiet cul-de-sac w underground utilities, & conveniently located. The house has wider doorways, halls, if you needed for handicap. **\$449,900 MLS#2601788**

Cindy Barnes
(931) 703-3738



137 Maupin Cir. - COMING SOON! The makeover of this 3BR, 2BA home is almost complete. Situated on a 1.2 acre corner lot in Riverview Subdivision, it is a 5 minute drive golf cart ride to Riverbend Country Club & Golf Course. Though, only a few minutes from Shelbyville, you pay no city taxes & there are no HOA fees. This beautiful home features new light fixtures, new flooring throughout, new tile in the wet areas, granite counter tops, new paint, new plumbing fixtures, new wood shutters, new stainless appliances, large storage room/shop, & much more!
\$524,900 MLS# 2623703

Gerald Baker
(931) 607-6463



2683 Sims Rd. - Very nice 3BR, 2BA, 1705 SF home with open floor plan & large bedrooms, situated on a 2.1 acre lot. Extensive renovation completed - to include new siding, flooring, paint, appliances, cabinets, tile in wet areas, 2 new tile showers, bonus room, new light & plumbing fixtures, new sidewalks, new wood deck, large storage building & more! Come & check out this beautifully renovated home! **\$349,900 MLS#2596021**

Gerald Baker
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1819 S Cannon Blvd. Shelbyville, TN - Currently used as a Residential but Zoned Commercial Property. Make it your own home or have a nice investment property. Cute 2 bedroom, 1 bath home, nicely finished hardwood floors & updated bath. Kitchen appliances stay. Lovely creek view as you sit on the covered back deck, perfect for entertaining. 2 Car carport. Currently rented. **\$234,900 MLS# 2496268**

Sarah Morris
(931) 607-7561

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Ahead of the Curve

The thrill of the learning curve coaster makes the ride to the future worth it.

THE METAL beams *tick, tick, tick* with every inch the cart climbs to the top of the hill. The experienced thrill-seekers in the front cart raise their hands as the coaster inches toward the climax of the ride. Experienced or not, every heart on the ride starts beating faster. *Click.* And the cart takes a dive. The winds move fast, but your stomach drops faster. The speed reaches new levels, then slows with a squeaking halt. The heart rate may still be elevated, but it will come down in due time. The curve may be scary, but mastering it is worth it.

Like turning in a test, the scary part is over. Now all you can do is wait.


“Please raise your hands,” the conductor in uniform announces over the ride’s speaker system.

Our educators are the conductors of this exhilarating ride, guiding our children over the peaks and through the valleys with wisdom, patience, and an unwavering commitment to progress. To be “ahead of the curve” is to lead, to innovate, to blaze trails where others will follow. It’s a place where our local educators stand not just by profession but by calling. With each lesson they teach and every question they encourage, they’re not only transferring knowledge — they’re transforming the future, one curious mind at a time.

In this issue, we celebrate the torchbearers of the classroom, who keep the flame of enlightenment dancing even in the strongest winds of change. They map the topography of young minds and chart courses that will navigate them through life’s myriad complexities. These are the mentors who recognize that the steepest part of the curve is often where the most learning takes place, where character is built, and where perseverance is learned.

Thank you, educators, for every moment spent drafting the blueprint of intellect and character within the halls of learning. You are the architects who draw out the talents within our youth, nurturing not just scholars, but citizens of the world. Your classrooms are incubators for innovation, where “ahead of the curve” isn’t just a measure of academic pace, but a holistic approach to fostering leaders, thinkers, and dreamers.

With gratitude and admiration, we dedicate this issue to you — may you always lead the charge, and may your students always be inspired to stay ahead of the curve. **GN**


Wesley Bryant,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

From our
publishing
partner



“As a lifetime resident of Shelbyville and an experienced advertising/marketing professional, I’m incredibly thrilled to contribute to a magazine that shares positive stories, strengthening our community. If you are interested in building a stronger brand or promoting your business feel free to reach out to me and let’s talk.”

Sissy Smith

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 Ashleigh Newnes

◀ Julie Haynes



Beyond the Bell

Debbie Lawson

Debbie Lawson works behind the scenes to ensure Bedford County's school facilities have everything they need.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

THINK SCHOOLS, and you immediately picture students in class, heads bent over computers and notebooks, and teachers at the front of the room leading lessons. You see the principal walking the halls and the cafeteria lines moving. You hear the bell tones signaling the end of another day of learning. But what you don't see are dedicated souls working behind the scenes to ensure the doors lock properly, the playgrounds are neatly mowed, and there are paper towels and toilet paper for the restrooms.

Bedford County Board of Education's maintenance department handles this and much more. Work orders, invoices, payroll information, inventory updates, and a constant stream of data flow through the careful oversight of Debbie Lawson, the department's secretary. Every school lawn mowed, every playground swing repaired, and every propane tank filled traces back to Lawson and the maintenance department team.

Lawson applied for the job more than 18 years ago because its hours enabled her to focus on her top priority — her

children. Like parenting, it turned out to be more challenging than she imagined, with benefits that exceeded anything in the job description.

"I wouldn't be able to do it without so many good people who have taught, guided, and supported me through the years. There are new challenges all the time. We can't possibly have all the answers for everything, so it's important to know who to go to for guidance to get the job done correctly," said Lawson.

Getting the job done correctly is her top job-related priority. She's as committed to doing things right as she is to her family at home and work. Not doing things right has far-reaching consequences. Because of her dedication to details and the standard of work to which she holds herself, she's often known as the maintenance shop's "mother."

She said, "I've been known to scold our maintenance and grounds crew for forgetting to turn in an invoice, not using their safety glasses, or leaving things on the floor that could cause a tripping hazard. We all work hard and try our best to work in a safe manner and look out for each other. But I hope my coworkers see me as someone trustworthy they can go to for advice, help, or to listen if they need someone to talk to."



"I wouldn't be able to do it without so many good people who have taught, guided, and supported me through the years. There are new challenges all the time."

-Debbie Lawson

You'll find Lawson surrounded by boxes, checking packing slips to make sure everything is received correctly. Comparing the quoted price to the prices on the invoices before sending them to the finance department for payment is something she does on autopilot. Ensuring an insurance company has everything it needs to process a claim is routine. The thought of overlooking a critical detail wakes her up at night.

"I wake up in the night thinking about what I need to get done, and sometimes I send myself an email reminder so I can let it go, and I can rest. During the winter, I worry about our propane levels getting too low and a school not having heat. I do my best to make sure we don't run out of fuel for our vehicles and mowers," Lawson said.

"I order toilet paper, paper towels, and trash bags for our schools. It's important to me that our vendors are paid in a timely manner and that our accounts are in good standing. Our employees work hard, and I try to make sure payroll is turned in correctly and that their sick, vacation, and comp time is accurate."

Work orders and workers move in and out of Lawson's office calmly on some days and like a whirlwind on others. She's wired for details, balancing her caring and nurturing spirit with her no-nonsense management, forever concerned with not letting anything or anyone fall through the cracks.

Director of Maintenance Daniel Kleindienst said, "Debbie takes care of our facility employees. She initiates food drives for anyone in need and sends





PHOTO SUBMITTED BY DEBBIE LAWSON

▲ Bedford County School Grounds and Maintenance Crew

sympathy cards to families who have lost loved ones.”

Lawson and her coworkers are a team and family, there for each other as much as they are there to support and maintain the school system’s facilities.

She said, “My work family are some of the kindest, most talented, and most hard-working people I’ve ever known. We all work hard, but we also laugh and have fun. Most importantly, we care about one another and pray together and for each other. We’re all happy for each other’s successes, and when one person is hurting, we all hurt. I’m proud to be a part of such an amazing group.”

She’s part of another amazing group — her family. Lawson and her husband, Tim, have been married for 31 years. Their son, Andy, and his wife, Julia, live

in Christiana, and the Lawsons’ daughter, Abby, and her fiancé, Josh Hanson, live in Shelbyville. They are all strong supporters of the Shelbyville Bedford County Humane Association and opened their hearts and homes to dogs and cats adopted from the association.

The same love and compassion spill over into Debbie’s work. Though unseen, her meticulous work forms an invisible framework of Bedford County’s schools. Every child who learns, every teacher who teaches, and every parent who finds comfort in a safe and clean environment does so thanks to the maintenance department team.

“They have the hearts of servants,” Debbie said. “I love my work family, and I have the utmost respect for what they do.” **GN**

“My work family are some of the kindest, most talented, and most hard-working people I’ve ever known. We all work hard, but we also laugh and have fun.”

-Debbie Lawson



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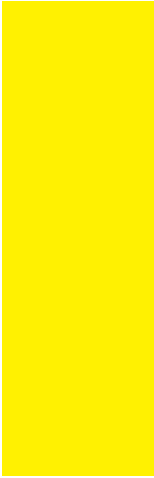
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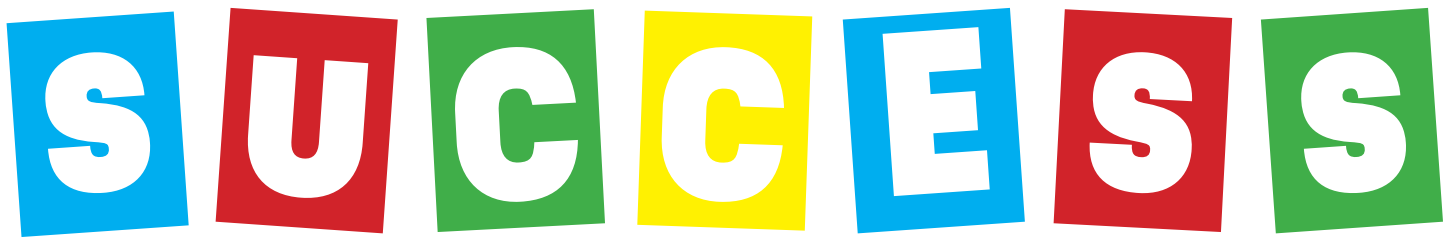
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Julie Haynes and Layne Draper-Talbott
are winning awards and changing lives.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

FEW NAMES appear in resolutions adopted by the Tennessee House of Representatives, but it's a recognition claimed by Julie Haynes and Layne Draper-Talbott. Haynes, Bedford County Schools' Supervisor of the Year, and Draper-Talbott, Bedford County Schools' Principal of the Year, were among nine educator finalists in their divisions for a statewide award. Their greatest honor comes not from the floor of the state Capitol, however, but from the votes of their local peers.

Julie Haynes

Now in her sixth year as supervisor of special education, Haynes works with students, teachers, administrators, and parents to provide services for students ages 3 through 22. Providing support to others is at the heart of everything she does and has been a prominent part of her personality from an early age.

"When I was little, I loved playing school with my older sister and cousins. One year for Christmas, my parents bought my sister and me a chalkboard. I

remember toting that to the backyard, dressing up in my mother's high-heeled shoes so that I could teach my 'class.' I was always the student in school wanting to help, so I guess you can say that when I grew up, I wanted to be a teacher, which aligns with my current career," said Haynes.

Haynes redefined her idea of success, and it's not measured by awards.

She said, "I am a perfectionist and want everything to be completed by the end of the day. Unfortunately, that's not possible in my current position. There is never enough time in the day for me to accomplish everything I would like to complete. My main goal each day is to support my students, teachers, and families. And I love being able to visit schools and work with students. There's something special about seeing a sweet smile, getting a hug, or seeing a student experience success for the first time. If I can do that, then it is a successful day."

Haynes believes none of it is possible without others.



“My teachers, therapists, and support staff work hard each day and give 110% to our students. I have one of the best teams and appreciate everything they do each day for our students and families!”

–Julie Haynes

“Being a finalist and being recognized by the Tennessee State Department of Education was an honor for me. Being a finalist wasn’t just about me; it was also about my work family. It’s impossible for me to do what I do without them. My teachers, therapists, and support staff work hard each day and give 110% to our students. I have one of the best teams and appreciate everything they do each day for our students and families!”

In a previous report by the Shelbyville Times-Gazette announcing the awards, School Superintendent Dr. Tammy Garrett said, “Julie Haynes is a true advocate for students with disabilities. She is a wealth of knowledge and an essential member of our leadership team. Many parents have witnessed how she works with them to design the best educational plan possible for our students.”

Layne Draper-Talbott

Education is in Draper-Talbott’s DNA. With both her mother and grandmother teaching at Shelbyville Central High School for over 30 years, she could have diverged and chosen another career path. However, the desire to follow in their footsteps stirred at a young age.

“I believe teaching is a calling, and I’m so proud of my profession. I always wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. In my first year, I taught kindergarten, then moved to first grade. Later, I taught third grade prior to becoming an assistant principal, and then principal,” said Draper-Talbott.

As principal of East Side Elementary School, managing the multiple layers and supporting her administration is a balancing act where staying mindful of self-care is essential.

She said, “Being a principal is a difficult but rewarding career. Each day is different, some more challenging than others. Some days, you feel like you are juggling 50 different tasks, and you just pray you don’t drop one. The single most challenging thing is just getting it all done. In education, there is never really a finish line — job complete, time to go home. Reminding myself that tomorrow is a new day, my family needs me at home, and I must take care of myself so I can take care of my teachers and students continues to be my biggest challenge.”

She’s quick to add that she could never do it alone.

“I am not a solo leader; I have a great team. My assistant principal, Jennifer Simons, and I work side by side. And from my front office staff to my teachers to my support staff, we all work together to lead this school. I am so very proud of my team!”

The award is a career milestone.

“I still vividly remember Dr. Garrett and Mr. Harwell walking into the East Side gym to announce that I was named Bedford County Principal of the Year this time last year. I can honestly say that I have never been more surprised in my life. The feeling was



a bit overwhelming, thinking that my peers voted and selected me. This job is not glamorous, and there aren’t many accolades associated with it. However, being selected is my greatest career honor to date,” she remembered fondly.

In a Times-Gazette article, Garrett said, “Layne-Talbott is a phenomenal principal. The school culture she creates through her leadership is one of the best, and teachers and students love to be at East Side. She is a great manager as well as instructional leader.”

Haynes and Draper-Talbott are more than award-winners. They’re the faces behind countless student triumphs. They’re tireless advocates who are the beating hearts of Bedford County’s school system. Their passion resonates beyond commendations, leaving an indelible mark on every life they touch. **GN**

“Being a principal is a difficult but rewarding career.

Each day is different, some more challenging than others. Some days, you feel like you are juggling 50 different tasks, and you just pray you don’t drop one.”

-Layne Draper-Talbott

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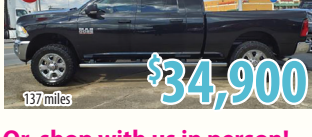




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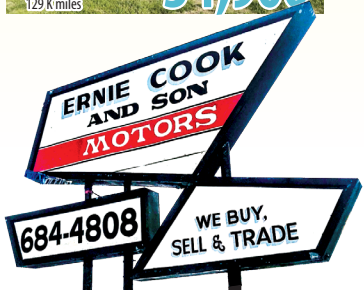
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Furthering Futures



Dr. Colt Boyce revisits his roots at Community Elementary School.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

AS DR. COLT Boyce walks the halls of Community Elementary School, the unmistakable sense of belonging he feels within the school's walls doesn't just come from doing the work he loves but from where he gets to do it. He's traveled full circle, and all roads lead back to the elementary school of his childhood. Boyce is home, rooted in the everyday rhythm of Community Elementary School and the lingering influence of his former teachers and administrators.

His grandmother, Doris Beech, his mom, Dawn Beech Boyce, and his aunt, Kim Beech Hillard, provided a firm foundation for his love for education and children in Boyce's preschool days in their daycare. Later, as a Community High School senior and college

student working in Bedford County's School Age Care Program, he recognized that a pharmacy or pharmaceutical sales career wasn't for him. After two semesters, he changed his major at Middle Tennessee State University and followed his heart.

"I knew that this was God's purpose for my life, and there was no doubt in my mind I was meant to teach," said Boyce.

But where he would teach was yet to be seen. After completing his student teaching, he accepted a fourth-grade teaching job at Community Elementary School. Boyce was home again; the classroom would be his for five years.

Boyce's time with students in the School Age Care Program affirmed his calling, but he



didn't imagine he'd go straight into teaching at Community Elementary School or that his move to an administrative role would come so soon. He became assistant principal two and half years ago and principal of Community Elementary School on Jan. 1, 2024.

Boyce holds a master's in library science and a doctorate in educational leadership, but he brings more than that to his new position. He brings the leadership examples of the administrators from his own school career.

"When I was growing up here, Jeff Yoes and Linda Pinkston were principal and assistant principal, and they're the best of the best," he



said. “I wanted to do something similar to what they’ve been able to do. They left an impact here at this building, and I thought, ‘If I can do that for somebody else, I want to be part of that.’”

Whether it’s finding ways to engage students amid today’s digitally-distracted world or supporting teachers and administrators, one core connection is at the heart of the impact he hopes to leave.

“Today’s educators have a bigger challenge ahead of them than [ever before]. It’s harder to engage kids, so getting creative is important. It all comes back to relationships,” said Boyce. “Each student needs different things, so you’ve

got to make sure you’ve got a good foundation. Building relationships with kids is the best way to reach them. Even though I don’t have a classroom, my classroom is the 670-something kids in our building. So being present, knowledgeable, seen, and getting to know them and their families is something that, in my opinion, you’ve got to do to be successful in administration or leading the school.”

His roots are the building blocks of relationship building.

Boyce said, “Relationships are continuous. You still have to build relationships and work on those; that’s an ongoing thing. But I have initial



My favorite thing about my job is having the opportunities to make a meaningful and positive impact on the lives of Community Elementary School students, faculty, and families.

- COLT BOYCE



relationships with people out here. I know the people, so I know where we need to go, and I don't have to spend as much time figuring out everyone's strengths and weaknesses."

The heart of his leadership goals rests on relationships — caring about everyone around him and seeking to understand and improve their day-to-day circumstances. His goal is to see Community Elementary School faculty and staff feel supported daily. His passion is further fueled by sharing in the growth and well-being of those around him.

"My favorite thing about my job is having the opportunities to make a meaningful and positive impact on the lives of Community Elementary School students, faculty, and families. The essence of my job lies in helping individuals overcome challenges, whether academic, behavioral, or anything in between. There's a profound sense of fulfillment that comes from guiding others to achieve things they never thought possible," he said.

Recognizing that not everyone answers their calling to become educators, Boyce encourages future teachers to give teaching a chance despite an often negative narrative surrounding the career today.

Boyce said, "I never want to be the person that looks at somebody and tells him not to go into education. If your heart is in it, and you have a passion for kids and helping make the world a better place, this is exactly where we need people to be. We need people passionate about changing people's lives and making a difference going into this field."

And the measure of success will forever be connected to relationships.



▲ Mallorie Duckworth, Jax Harris, and Colt Boyce

"After my first full year, I hope I can look back and not just measure academics but measure impact. And we do that by looking at the whole child and the progress we're making in all areas, not just academics. Yes, that's important. But also, are we growing as a community and as a school?" he said. "I want this school to be a place where teachers and faculty want to work and students want to learn, so if we can say that, I think we've succeeded."

Success sounds a lot like home. Now that's full circle. **GN**

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“YOU JUST KEEP DOING IT.”

MARGARET DALTON’S MOTIVATION IS UNWAVERING.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

FROM HER desk in the office of Liberty School, Margaret Dalton watches as the landscape of education changes. She sees, too, generations of learners passing through on their way to high school and adulthood, where their children and their children’s children often walk the same halls. From large floppy discs and jumbo monitors with disk operating system screens to instant access on her desktop to the state’s educational databases, one thing hasn’t changed in her years at Liberty School — her love of its students. Another thing that hasn’t changed either is the love of the students, administration, and parents for Dalton.

Before the first class bell rings, Dalton and the office staff are busy taking calls. Attendance soon follows and must be reported to the state

by 8:30 a.m. and while uploading attendance, the front doorbell rings. Visitors must show their identification, explain their needs, and check in through the office once they’re inside the building. Dalton may pause her other daily reports to register a new student. Then, the teachers’ requisitions that have been approved make it to her desk for order placement.

Ding! Another parent is at her desk for assistance, transferring her child to a different school. The new school requires records from the prior one, and again, Dalton stops what she’s doing to meet another need. It’s an insane hurricane of stops and starts, but Dalton takes it all in stride.

“I love my job; I’ve always loved my job. And that makes it a lot easier to deal with. When you love it, you just keep doing it,” she said.



Margaret Dalton

Her love for the students and her work leaves a lasting impression. Gina Lippman, who moved here with her family from out of state a month before her son started kindergarten at Liberty School, will never forget Dalton's kindness.

"Mrs. Dalton was so accommodating. As soon as we walked into the office, she was so welcoming and reassuring. I was a complete nervous wreck wondering if Liberty would be a good fit for us, but meeting Mrs. Dalton put me at ease and made me feel like this is where we're meant to be," Lippman said.

It's not just what she accomplishes; it's everything about her.

Lippman said, "Her presence is truly like a warm hug. Every time we enter Liberty,

66

I love the kids. I love the hugs from them, the smiles on their faces when they want to show you some little picture they drew. That just makes your day.

– Margaret Dalton

Mrs. Dalton, without fail, is there greeting us with a smile. She's so kind, and I am forever grateful. We absolutely love Liberty, and Mrs. Dalton will always be our first reason."

From the outside looking in, you'd never know how much she's juggling at any point in time. Dalton must complete attendance reporting quickly and accurately.

Dalton said, "The hardest part is getting all this information correctly to the state. They have to have a full day accounted for — a full 420 minutes in class — and when their schedules' minutes are off, you have to go and figure out where it's off and get it fixed."

And amidst it all, Dalton takes time to support the teachers.

"I know their job is hard, and whatever I can do to help them out, I'm more than happy to do."

Teacher Christi Howell said, "Mrs. Dalton has been such a huge help to me since I've been at Liberty. She's the heart and soul of Liberty."

Accomplishing it all means working after the last bell rings.

"They all say that I live here," said Dalton. "There are times when I'm still there at six o'clock because, in my agenda, I've got something I want done on that day. So I'll just stay and work on it. It's easier to work when nobody's here."

It's sort of like working from home when you love your job.

She said, "That's why I stay. Sure, I could have gotten a job somewhere else that paid more, but it's home. It's family, because that's how most of us are out there. Most of my teachers are like my sisters or family. If they need something, I'll do it."

After all, she's paid extra by the students.

"I love the kids. I love the hugs from them, the smiles on their faces when they want to show you some little picture they drew," Dalton said. "I hang their pictures on my filing cabinet. That just makes your day."

And her day is made again when they've grown from hugs and filing cabinet art and return for their senior walk.

"They go right by the office when they come in from outside and up and down the hallways. The students love it, especially the little ones. They're waving at them all like it's a parade," said Dalton.



Now in her 30th year at the school, she's proud of the generations of students that pass through Liberty School's doors under her watch.

"I've seen the older ones with their kids. You remember the little stinkers who did little things they shouldn't be doing, but now they're grown," she said. "When they tell me what they're doing now, I tell them, 'I'm so proud of you.' I'm happy they've grown up and done well for themselves."

Like the landscape of education and technology, the world changes continuously, and Dalton's job changes with it. But one thing will forever be the same — her love for the students and her Liberty School family. It's as solid as their love for her. **GN**



FROM CHALKBOARDS TO SMARTBOARDS

LEAVING A LEGACY OF LEARNING AND LOVE

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

GATHER AROUND the Gordon family dinner table and ask how things are going at school, but be prepared to stay awhile. Former and present teachers fill the seats. Spanning from the use of chalkboards to interactive whiteboards, their combined experiences and shared passion for their students are a renewable resource. This lasting legacy has created a built-in support system for current and future generations of Gordon educators.

Shaped by the influence of former teachers, most knew from childhood that they wanted to follow in the footsteps of Gordons before them. These family members are pouring their best efforts into the school system, spurred by those who invested in them along the way.

David and Mary Frances Gordon are the founders of this lasting legacy. Current teachers in the family include Neal Gordon,

son, Shelbyville Central High School; Karla Moncier, daughter, Rogersville City School; Marla Agee, daughter, Shelbyville Central High School; Macey Agee, son-in-law, Franklin High School; and Kanya Gordon, daughter-in-law, Eakin Elementary School.

Mary Frances said, “God has blessed us with many years as educators. My husband was an educator also, just not in the school system. He taught [members of the 4-H Club] and adult farmers in this county as an agricultural agent. If we count his years, [the two of us] have given thus far a total of 177 years of education to Bedford County and 214 years to the state of Tennessee.”

The support system Mary Frances found at Eakin Elementary School as a teacher’s aide encouraged her to pursue a degree in teaching. Now retired, she taught at Eakins Elementary School for her entire career. She taught for 16 years in the first grade



Marla, Mary Francis, and Neal Gordon

classroom, with 14 years as a certified Title 1 Program teacher. According to the Tennessee Board of Education, Title I is a federally funded program meant to support and improve learning for students in high-poverty schools, helping them meet performance standards.

“Frieda Bone took me under her wing and shared so much with me, even her lesson plans. I learned more on the job than in the teacher prep courses. [I worked with] wonderful teachers and super principals all along the way,” said Mary Frances.

She even worked with Kanya at one point. They taught in the same Title I room for a few years — Kanya taught second and third grade reading on one side of the room, while Mary Frances taught first grade reading on the other.

Reading paves the path to a life of learning. Mary Frances, Kanya, and Whitney love contributing to the learning process.

Whitney said, “Finding the newest books and sharing them with my students and school is a huge passion of mine.”

It’s a passion that she clearly shares with her mom, Kanya.

“I have a huge kids’ classroom library. I may or may not have a little shopping problem with books for my classroom,” Kanya said.

A benefit of sharing an occupation with family is overcoming challenges through close collaboration and years of shared experiences.

Speaking on those challenges, Neal said, “The biggest challenge in education has always been how [to] meet the needs of an ever-changing society and prepare students for a future that doesn’t yet exist. How do we prepare students for the smartphone revolution when we watched television with rabbit ear antennae? When I look at my classroom, I see faces that have changed over the years but are worthy, eager, and want all the good things in this world. It’s our challenge to help them find a way to do just that.”

It’s a topic the family tackles in their loud, passionate conversations at the dinner table and in their classrooms, too. Neal believes Whitney is a leading example in shaping young minds.

“I think Whitney is the best of us all. She has learned from our collective experiences and brings new techniques and technology to old problems. All the solutions are out there; we just have to keep finding them.”

The family emphasizes that nurturing relationships in the classroom is an integral part of the solution.



“I love building a respectful, inclusive, loving culture in my classroom,” said Whitney. “It’s easy to build relationships and a strong classroom family when everyone is cared for, seen, and heard. I truly enjoy teaching my students, having fun with them, and, most of all, seeing them be successful.”

Kanya agreed, “I love loving my kids and doing fun things with them, and I truly enjoy being with them at school. My students know we’re a family, and families stick together.”

Their commitment to their students is rooted in the support they receive from each other.



▲ Mary Francis, Marla, Whitney, Neal, and Kanya Gordon

“My parents have set the example of always being there for each other, no matter what,” said Marla.

“I’m now teaching what I call my ‘grandstudents.’ They are so much fun. Some are just like the 2.0 version of their parents, and others are totally different yet strangely familiar at the same time,” said Neal.

This family of educators continues the legacy of learning and love, supporting each other through challenges and sharing in successful moments.

“Sharing the profession of education just adds one more commonality among

us,” said Marla. “I would say that our biggest support for each other is that we listen and can truly empathize with our daily struggles. We share the joy of our wonderful victories in the classroom or with public education in general. We listen, lift each other up if we are down, and celebrate all of the good.”

The Gordon family’s collective wisdom and resilience continue to create a legacy of learning and love that extends far beyond the boundaries of their classrooms. Navigating the challenges of an ever-changing educational landscape may seem daunting, but they aren’t facing it alone. **GN**

SERVED WITH LOVE

TONYA BECKMAN AND HER TEAM SHARE A HEARTFELT COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY AREA STUDENTS.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

A TIDAL WAVE of chatter washes over the cafeteria as students surge through the doors, their minds more on who they'll sit by than what's on their plate. They pass through quickly, barely looking up at times, but the hands and hearts that serve them breakfast and lunch see and care for them. They're more likely known collectively as "the lunch ladies" than by their given names, and they are a team committed to a single goal: to offer your children meals that are as appealing as they are nutritious.

At Community Elementary and Middle School (Community), Tonya Beckman and her team work behind the scenes to serve students. The constant bustle of changing classes and the banging of returned trays may seem like the most chaotic part of the day to some. Many days, it's far from it. Alarms for a fire or lockdown drill may sound, bringing everything to a grinding halt. Beckman might find the cafeteria understaffed and need extra help getting everything ready. And sometimes, an unexpected crisis prompts a last-minute menu substitution. New challenges arise every day.

"If a school is struggling, and I call Janet Clarkson, the district nutrition supervisor, she sends an SOS out to all the schools, and everybody rallies around each other across the entire county. The generous hospitality of the





Tonya Beckman

Bedford County Board of Education and Child Nutrition never ceases to amaze me,” said Beckman.

The quick pace is not for the faint-hearted. Lunch service begins at 11:00 a.m., and the last group comes in at 12:15 p.m. Within an hour and a half, the Community nutrition workers serve 825 to 850 students and staff. They are the only people who see every student each day of the school year.

Balancing tightropes between state mandates and student preferences can be challenging for Beckman to navigate. Every meal must juggle calorie counts, sodium limits, mandated vegetable servings, and more — all while satisfying hungry students’ tastes.

Beckman said, “We have to hurdle through and get creative trying to provide food that we know our kiddos still want to eat.”

If your child craves something different, students can grab a sack to-go. Delicious sandwiches, crunchy veggies, sweet applesauce, and a cheesy treat await, offering a satisfying escape from the day’s menu. It’s not your average childhood school lunch; there’s something for every taste.

If you think planning your weekly meals is overwhelming, consider this: out of 15 schools in Bedford County, 13 cafeterias staffed by 90 employees served 1,956,596 meals last year and are on track to serve 2,236,000 meals this school year.

There’s another sound nestled among the students’ voices and clinking silverware, and it’s music to Beckman’s ears.

“It’s the sound of everybody working cohesively together. I’ve always told my staff, ‘I don’t ever want this to be a place you regret getting up and coming into in the morning. I know it’s a job, but it has so many rewarding benefits, and I don’t ever want you to feel like your work is not appreciated when you’re here.’ They all know at the end of the day what their responsibilities are, but I want them to have a good time while they’re at work.”

Janet Clarkson said, “Tonya is one of many amazing employees in Bedford County School Nutrition. She’s an outstanding cafeteria manager and has the students’ needs first and foremost in mind. She strives to provide healthy and delicious meals daily, goes above and beyond, and considers her staff a ‘work family.’ We are fortunate to have Tonya as part of our team.”

66

I don’t ever want this to be a place you regret getting up and coming into in the morning. I know it’s a job, but it has so many rewarding benefits.

– Tonya Beckman

Beckman is in her 11th year of cafeteria management, which is long enough to see her earliest students from the cafeteria return for their senior walk.

She said, “You want to cry just like they’re your kids. Those are the kids that you watched grow up and now they’re graduating and becoming adults.”

The students are at the heart of everything the nutrition staff does.

“We get so incredibly close to a lot of the students here,” said Beckman. “[When the school year ends], I know all of us are worn out and ready for that break. But, by the time summer’s over, I’m really starting to miss them and want to get back to see how their summer went. We get attached to the students overall.”

Feeding our children at school is a team effort from the central office to the cafeteria kitchen.

“We definitely couldn’t do it without the support from Janet Clarkson and Marian Alexander at the central office. They are wonderful and are always there to support us in whatever we need. I appreciate both of them and know all the other managers do as well. We all have the kids’ best interests at heart, and we really do care for them and sincerely love them. I want to make sure they’re taken care of at the end of the day and that they go home with full stomachs,” enthused Beckman.

No student goes hungry on this lunch lady’s watch. GN



▲ Kisha Grishom, Beth Smith, Tiffany Vazquez Rodriguez, Tonya Beckman, Erika Sells, Lavenia Green, Elaine Thompson, Diane Woodward, and Jackie Spears



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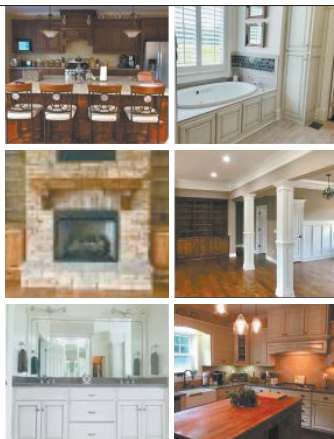


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Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

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Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

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