

# Good News

exchange.

*Jay Brooks*

## A PLACE OF PEACE

Old City Cemetery  
Museums and  
Arboretum.

# VACATION

*in Lynchburg*

### + A Playground of Possibilities

The Rotary Club of Forest unites  
children through play.





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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

# Go on vacation here in Lynchburg

Start a road trip without your GPS.

SUMMER IS coming. And surely your home will sit empty for a week in this heat. The playful cheers of the kids on summer break go missing for a week that was planned for a year. The dishes sit in the cabinets, waiting for their family to come back home. The doormat sits excitedly to welcome you to the front door. The cool air hits just right over the threshold, pushing its way to the door to fight the heat that keeps increasing by the day. Our furry friends are excited to see our faces instead of the house sitter's. We catch the smell of home for just a moment, and soon, our noses will go back blind to our scent. We're finally home from vacation.

We exchange "I need to forget, so take me to Florida" for "Florida was fun... but it's good to be home." We go back to our work friends. We get to have lunch at our favorite spots again. And we get to drive on roads without the GPS on our phones.

We should explore the world that was created for us. It's exciting to plan a vacation, pack for it, and dig through snacks on the six-hour drive. Those butterflies creep up when the fancy sign starts to get closer on the trip. We jump out in the hotel parking lot and stretch our legs before our first step. The dopamine is on a never-ending conveyor belt. But still, there's nothing like that welcome mat outside our door. The feeling of coming home cannot be matched.

Marketing messages and year-long anticipation pull us away from home for a short time. But I'm convinced every week — even working nine to five — can be a vacation. Our community is packed with things to do that we overlook. I encourage you, reader, to start a list of your home vacation spots. Your home has more fun than you realize, sitting just beyond your backyard. We'll start your list in this issue of Good News. Welcome home to a life of vacation — every day. GN

Wesley Bryant,  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

From our publishing partner



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# GOOD NEWS

## CHAPTER 1 OF 3

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

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Photography by Sarah Bussard

◀ John Seinar





WHEN COMMUNITY MEETS

# CYCLING

Bikes Unlimited helps customers explore Lynchburg's trailways while building lasting relationships with the community.

By Kali Bradford // Photography by Chad Barrett





**JOHN SEINAR**





**A**CCORDING TO Lynchburg Parks and Recreation, Lynchburg is home to one of the most unique urban trail systems in the state. Part of the James River Heritage Trail system, Lynchburg's trails are a diverse network that passes through natural areas and the heart of the city's historic downtown. There is a ton to explore, including 40 miles of trail that boasts five paved trails and a multitude of natural single-track trails.

While you can hike or walk, one of the best ways to enjoy the myriad of trails in Lynchburg is by bicycle. Bicycles allow riders to take in all the sights of both nature and downtown Lynchburg. While you may not own a bike, that needn't stop you. A long-time downtown business, Bikes Unlimited, has got you covered.

In the business of bicycles since 1967, John Seinar and his staff know a thing or two about getting folks rolling on two wheels. Bikes Unlimited offers the latest cycling products and services. The business also rents bicycles to both locals and visitors, including electric, e-bike, and mountain e-bike rentals. Taking ownership in 2020, Seinar understood the history of the shop and wanted to continue to share the love of cycling with customers.

Seinar explained, "I started in 2009 and worked here during college. I fell in love with the area and the shop. It's been a great bike shop for a lot of years. I always knew I wanted to own a

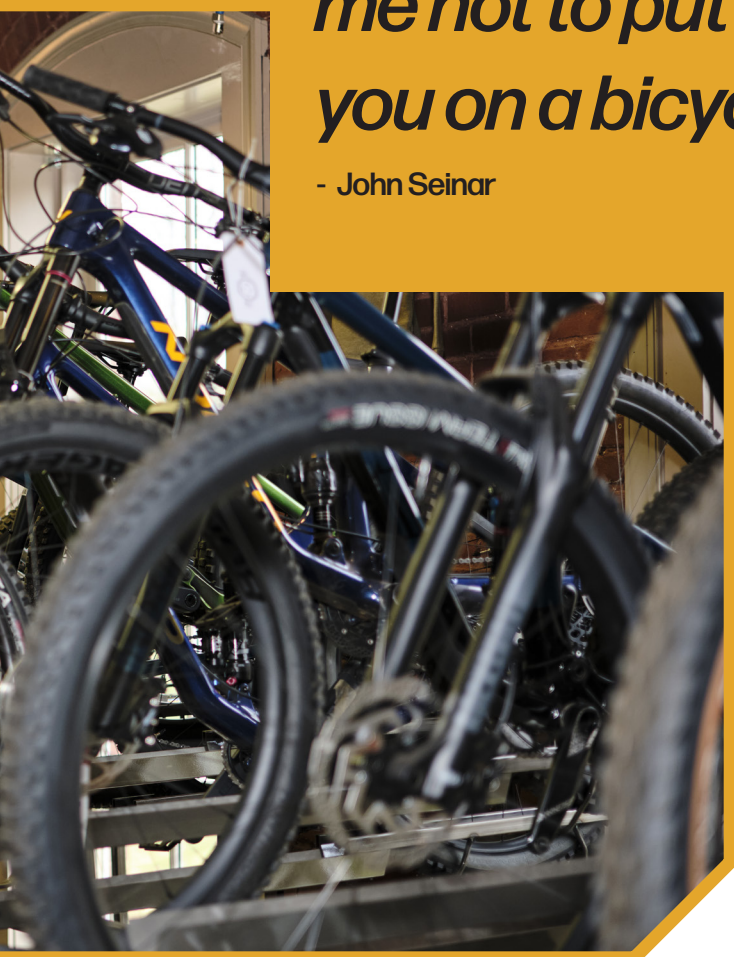






“  
*There’s no  
excuse that  
you can give  
me not to put  
you on a bicycle.*

- John Seinar



shop like this. They say, ‘Don’t turn your hobby into your work,’ but cycling was a tangible way that I could do that. It’s a healthy thing. It’s a community-oriented thing.

“My favorite part of owning a business is the community aspect of it. Partnering with people in the community and helping other businesses thrive within our business is what it’s about. We find strategic partnerships where we can help our business grow and provide a unique opportunity or event for both locals and visitors and the people who live in Lynchburg and then partner with somebody.”

Seinar is building those partnerships through events such as Cycling Without Age. Cycling Without Age offers safe rides on a trishaw — a special bicycle that allows a volunteer peddler to transport one to two people in the front seat of the bike. The program is about helping older people participate, meet people, and remain an active part of their communities. Volunteers sign up to “pilot” older people and are trained to incorporate the program’s principles: generosity, storytelling without age, slowness, and relationships. Seinar also states that it’s about reaching people from all different walks of life.

“One minute, you’re working with somebody that might not have the means to pay for a flat tire, and then the next, you’re selling a bike to a CEO of a billion-dollar nuclear company,” said Seinar. “Anybody and everybody that comes through the door is treated with the same level of respect and dignity.”

Of course, there is also what keeps Seinar in business — the wondrous trails that encompass Lynchburg.

“The trails are incredible down here,” he said. “There are two trail systems, the Blackwater Creek Trail and the Percival’s Island Trail. We are located at the start of both. When I commute to work, I could be having the worst morning, and I just hop on my bike, take my kids to school, and then I can ride some of the single tracks or the paved trails, and it revitalizes my whole day. The trails are a huge part of my life.”

When it comes to bicycles, Seinar said there is no excuse not to hop on and enjoy an adventure.

“No excuses’ is kind of our tagline,” he said. “It’s so multi-faceted. There’s no excuse that you can give me not to put you on a bicycle. Whether it’s an issue of money, skill, or fitness level, I have a rebuttal to every single one of those to help you get on the path to cycle. We’ll do whatever we can to try to help people — no excuses.” **GN**

*For more information, visit [bikesunlimited.com](http://bikesunlimited.com). Bikes Unlimited is located at 1312 Jefferson St. in Lynchburg.*



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A photograph of a nurse in scrubs holding a large teddy bear for a young child lying in a hospital bed. The scene is dimly lit, with a blue tint. The nurse is on the left, leaning over the bed. The child is on the right, looking up at the bear. The text is overlaid on the center of the image.

# ROAD RUNNERS

PAVE THE WAY FOR  
CHILDREN IN NEED

*By Amanda E. West  
Photography by Sarah Bussard*





**O**N A DRIZZLY Friday afternoon many years ago, my then 5-year-old son fell on our trampoline and suffered a terrible break that affected his growth plate right above his ankle. The tiny rural hospital's staff near our home did their best to make him comfortable. Still, in the area of Louisiana where we lived, pediatric orthopedic doctors were scarce, and even those within an hour's drive refused our insurance.

When our pediatrician called a few days later to say they'd scheduled an appointment for our son at Shriners Children's in Shreveport, we were overwhelmed with gratitude. Especially because 10 years prior, another hospital that is also affiliated with the fraternal order of Freemasonry, Scottish Rite Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, had performed emergency surgery on our oldest son when he was only 3. This surgery, coupled with three weeks of intensive inpatient therapy, had saved his life.

As we carried our son through the doors of Shriners Children's in Shreveport, friendly attendants greeted us, and the facilities were cheerful and inviting to our children. Later that summer, our son graduated from a wheelchair to a walker and then learned to walk on his own with the help of orthopedic therapists. X-rays confirmed he wouldn't need surgery to shorten his "good" leg to make it match the length of the leg that was so severely broken.

**"The fraternal organization for men in the Lynchburg area strives to provide programs and services for our members, their families, and their friends through fellowship opportunities that increase social camaraderie."**

**- JOHN SAVILLE**



As the hospital faded from our rearview mirror for the last time, relief flooded my soul. When your child is hurt, and you're powerless to take away their pain, a helplessness greater than yourself finds you. But knowing that my child was in the capable hands of medical staff, paired with the relief that our mailbox wouldn't be flooded with bills, eased my fears quicker than the best salve money could buy.

The Shriners Children's in Shreveport opened in 1922 and was the very first. Formally known as Shriners Hospital for Children, the network has now expanded to 22 nonprofit medical facilities across the United States, Canada, and Mexico and has helped over 1.5 million children in the last 100 years. In 2022 alone, 140,000 children with various conditions, such as burns, spinal cord injuries, cleft lip and palate, and various orthopedic needs, received specialized care.

But what about children who don't live close to a facility? A group of men from Lynchburg Shrine Club, known as "Road Runners," have made it their mission to chauffeur local children who have been burned to the Shriners Children's in Cincinnati, Ohio, over 400 miles away. They also volunteer to drive children and their parents who have other

medical needs to the Greenville, South Carolina location, approximately 300 miles away.

"No man stands as tall as when he stoops to help a child" is their motto, which has been used over the last century by the entire Shriners organization. These mostly retired volunteers use their own vehicles and even provide the gas to ensure these children and their parents arrive at their appointments safely.

John Saville, a native of Lynchburg, is one of these men.

"I am a local business owner, married with three grown children, and I'm actively involved in my community through numerous civic, charitable, and professional organizations. I've held several leadership positions in different groups, and I'm dedicated to my family, business, and our local community. I strive daily to improve myself and my community.

"Being a Shrine Clown and entertaining the families while also bringing support for the children's hospital is what I enjoy most. The Shriners of Lynchburg are here to help children and their families during a time that, for many of them, is the worst thing they've ever experienced, and we do it at no cost to them," expressed Saville.

When Saville was younger, he admired other men who were involved with the Shriners International organization, and longed to be a part of a well-established group that provided social interactions that made the community a better place to live for everyone.

"The fraternal organization for men in the Lynchburg area strives to provide programs and services for our members, their families, and their friends through fellowship opportunities that increase social camaraderie. We also serve others through our commitment to Shriners Children's, a resource for medical care and intervention."

Our children are our future. When we do for the least among us, we all become stronger together. The Road Runners are doing their part to make sure every child has access to the healing hands at Shriners Children's. GN

*For more information, visit [www.shrinerschildrens.org](http://www.shrinerschildrens.org).*



## "No man stands as tall as when he stoops to help a child."

- LYNCHBURG SHRINE CLUB MOTO







# Southern Baptist Convention of Virginia

## Helping others rise from the ashes

By Amanda E. West // Photography by Chad Barrett and photos provided by Ron Steele

**R**ECORD HIGH temperatures, a terrible drought, the effects of El Nino, and possibly a downed power line culminated together to spark a wildfire in Maui last August that has been labeled the world's deadliest and most destructive in the previous 100 years.

When Maui's survivors returned, many were heartbroken; 2,170 acres had been consumed, 3,000 structures were gone, and over 100 people were dead. Lahaina suffered the most damage. Its 1859 courthouse, which once served as

the seat of government for the Kingdom of Hawaii, plus many buildings that lined the main strip, along with the historic Banyan Tree Park, was leveled. Countless families were homeless, and business owners were penniless.

A group of men from Virginia flew into this chaos, bringing with them the know-how to work amid a disaster situation, words of encouragement, and most importantly, a listening ear along with firm shoulders that could help the survivors carry these newfound burdens. Ron Steele,

a Thomas Road Baptist Church member, was one of the men deployed by the Southern Baptist Convention of Virginia (SBCV) Disaster Relief Team to serve two weeks on the island. This wasn't Steele's first deployment. In fact, he's volunteered dozens of times across the southeast and with Louisiana and Oklahoma.

Steele said, "With SBCV, we provide cleanup services for areas affected by tornadoes, hurricanes, and flooding. Typically, this would include mud-outs, which is essentially removing all water, mud, debris,





**Ron Steele**





“The most important thing we provided was an ear to listen or a shoulder to cry on for the people who lost their entire homes.”

- Ron Steele





▲ Harry Martin, Mark Norris, Joey Schnepf, Jeff Slaughter, Bob Peake, Ron Steele, and Bob Johansen



▲ Ron talking with a homeowner at the Maui fire cleanup

and ruined belongings from a person's home. In addition, it would include removing any drywall or insulation that has been affected by the water.

"We would also treat for any black mold resulting from the moisture in the home over time. For disaster events that cause trees to topple, SBCV provides chainsaw crews to remove the debris from the homeowner's property. To a lesser degree, SBCV provides repairs to the areas in the home that were affected. We also partner with other organizations, such as God's Pit Crew out of Danville, Virginia, that rebuilds entire homes for people who have lost them due to a disaster. On at least two occasions, we provided personal property recovery for people who lost their homes due to a fire."

Steele said a good friend who served with the SBCV invited him to help a few years ago in Davis, North Carolina after it had weathered a devastating hurricane. That mission had such a positive impact

on Steele that he now prepares his bags in advance and is ready to go whenever the call for volunteers goes out.

"Officially, we were in Maui to help homeowners with personal property recovery, which is really nothing more than finding things of value to the owner amongst all the ash and debris. The most effective way of doing that was to sift through the ashes once the owner identified the most logical place the item[s] would be. The worst part of the week is having to wear Tyvek suits and face masks in the heat and humidity. We could work 20 minutes and then break for 20 minutes in order to prevent heat exhaustion.

"However, that was really secondary to what we provided while there. The most important thing we provided was an ear to listen or a shoulder to cry on for the people who lost their entire homes. Our church motto is 'to love God and to love people,' and that is really what we were doing in Maui. The people we interacted

with couldn't believe that a group of men would come all the way from Virginia to Maui and do the work we did without charging them a cent. Some wanted to know what compels us to volunteer for things such as this. This, of course, gives us an opportunity to share the love of God and what He has done for us. When I would tell someone that Jesus loves them, that seemed to have a calming effect [on] what they were dealing with."

Many survivors Steele worked with didn't have home insurance or flood insurance, so they suddenly found themselves with nowhere to turn for help. He has since learned that the call to serve others in distress is one that, when answered, pays greater dividends than Wall Street — and that call still rings forth today.

"If you are physically able, [and] have the time and a heart that cares for others, you'll be surprised to learn that, in many cases, you are blessed more than those you are serving," said Steele. GN



The image features three glasses of banana pudding. The foreground glass is in sharp focus, showing layers of white cream, banana slices, and almond flakes. A silver spoon is inserted into the pudding. The background glasses are slightly out of focus. The scene is set on a white surface with scattered almond flakes and a small plate of almond flakes. A green semi-transparent box is overlaid on the top left, containing the text.

# Experience flavor *at home*

Submit your recipes to be included in Good News Magazine  
and the Exchange Cookbook: [www.southernaprons.com](http://www.southernaprons.com)



# You don't have to go far for destination foods.

**S**AVOR THE essence of a hometown getaway with heartwarming flavors that celebrate locally available ingredients. From comforting classics to tempting treats, give yourself a break and bring the charm of a small-town vacation right to your kitchen.

If you want the taste of exploration you find on vacation, try a new-to-you recipe from your dream destination's cookbooks. Or plan a meal resembling your favorite summer vacation spots. Have fun creating an authentic atmosphere that takes you miles away without ever leaving home.

So, kick back, relax, and let your taste buds embark on a journey without leaving home. These recipes are your staycation ticket, where every bite reminds you of the charm and flavors that make your hometown truly special. **GN**

## Banana Pudding

*Submitted by Nancy Parkerson*

2 eggs, separated  
1/2 c. + 3 T. sugar  
pinch of salt  
1 T. flour  
2 c. milk  
1 t. vanilla  
3-4 bananas, sliced  
1 box vanilla wafers

In a saucepan, combine egg yolks and sugar. Add salt, flour, and milk. Cook over slow heat until thickened. Add vanilla. Pour into a baking dish, alternating with bananas. Add wafers. Beat egg whites with 3 T. sugar in a medium mixing bowl. Cover pudding and brown at 350°.

## Fried Chicken

*In memory of Margie Inez Drake*

2 pkgs. Italian salad dressing  
2 c. biscuit mix  
2/3 c. club soda  
1 egg, beaten  
1 fryer chicken, cut up  
oil for frying

In a small mixing bowl, combine 1 package of salad dressing with the biscuit mix. In a small mixing bowl, combine soda and egg. Dip chicken in egg mixture, then baking mix mixture. Set chicken pieces on a rack to drip. Fry in a skillet of deep fat for 3 minutes. Place in a baking dish and bake for 350° for 30 minutes. You can also just deep fry for 20-25 minutes.

## Strawberry Lemonade

*Submitted by Morgan Hargrove*

1 c. strawberries, chopped  
1/4 c. lemon juice  
1/2 c. sugar  
1 can frozen lemonade concentrate  
1 can water  
1/2 c. powdered lemonade mix  
2 bottles strawberry sparkling water  
1/2 c. strawberry soda

Place chopped strawberries in a medium bowl with lemon juice and sugar. Let sugar dissolve to make a syrup. Add lemonade concentrate and water. Stir in lemonade mix. Pour into a large pitcher. Add 1 bottle of sparkling water. Mix well. Add remaining sparkling water. Stir in strawberry soda.





# WOK & ROLL:

## Delicious adventures in Asian cuisine

### Nothing beats the classics

**T**HERE ARE some days when I am in the mood for something new and innovative, and some days when the only thing I want is a classic comfort food. When I want the classic experience of Asian cuisine, there is nowhere in Lynchburg I trust more than Osaka Japanese Express. The restaurant isn't trying to reinvent the wheel or offer a new, trendy entree — just consistently delivering great food, large portions, and that perfect umami flair.

My favorite is the mixed vegetable hibachi entree, which features tender zucchini, onion, broccoli, mushrooms, carrots, and boldly flavored lo mein noodles. If you are looking for a more protein-rich option, you cannot go wrong with the chicken yakisoba, with well-seasoned chicken served with rice and

lo mein noodles. Both of these options deliver a flavorful punch and more food than I could eat in one sitting.

Personally, I can't eat at a Japanese restaurant without trying two things: sushi and wontons. We ordered the "Rainbow Roll," a specialty roll with crabmeat and cucumber topped with tuna, salmon, and avocado. It was served with some of the best pickled ginger I have ever had — perfectly tangy with a bit of a punch. The crabmeat and cream cheese wontons were fried to have a beautiful golden brown exterior and were sweet and creamy on the inside.

This local spot always delivers with flavor. The next time you are looking for a classic comfort food, dine-in or take-out, visit Osaka Japanese Express and tell them Good News Magazine sent you. **GN**



### GOOD NEWS IS COMING TO DINNER!

We will feature a local food critic's thoughts as they dine in Lynchburg. This month Grace Hayes visited Osaka Japanese Express.

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education that comes with celebrating Dairy as father Steve, his and his wife Kara family started dairy when they moved to Tennessee. It's a way to get behind the scenes, in agriculture. It's a way to get on many people's minds. High-energy, high-producing farmers do a lot of work in terms of raising and caring for cattle, being on the road, and wearing their work clothes into dairy. The Nash family has been in dairy since 2020. "We'd al-



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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 A place of peace
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Our stories are based on submissions from local people.

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Photography by Sarah Bussard

◀ Laura Tyree





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JAY BROOKS





# A PLACE OF PEACE

Old City Cemetery Museums and Arboretum protects history, horticulture, and education.

*By Sara Hook*

*Photography by  
Chad Barrett*

**W**HEN LOOKING for a place of peace, beauty, history, and learning, few think of a cemetery – but that is just what the Old City Cemetery Museums and Arboretum is. Home to a 27-acre public garden, multiple small museums, and a wedding venue, the cemetery is one of Lynchburg’s most popular places to visit. As a “grave garden,” Director Jay Brooks said the cemetery sees visitors who are cemetery enthusiasts, history enthusiasts, and horticulture enthusiasts, as well as many who are simply enjoying the atmosphere.

“We have a little bit for everyone, from history to horticulture,” Brooks said. “It’s a very peaceful place to come reflect, or spend time, or just get healthy and walk around.”

While Brooks has only been a director since June 2023, he has been a long-time visitor to Old City Cemetery. He grew up visiting regularly with his father, as both were interested in the famous people of Lynchburg. As they learned more, that interest grew.

“When we started doing research and finding out more information, it just continued with our interest in the cemetery,” Brooks said. “Of course, visiting the candlelight tours that we had every year, it just blew our minds that there was so much here and so much history that we hadn’t seen before and that a lot of people in Lynchburg don’t see very often.”

Part of that history is housed in five small museums, which will become open to the public this spring. The museums were closed in the past because there were not enough staff or volunteers to monitor the collection, but visitors could look through windows. Now, Brooks said, they are able to take proper care of everything.

“People can walk through and look at everything, and we encourage everyone to come out and just learn as much as they can,” Brooks enthused. “We have a historian on site and several other people who can help out with anything that anyone has questions with.”

Other learning opportunities include guided and self-guided tours,



covering topics like Civil War history, Lynchburg history, African American history, medicine in the Victorian era, and Victorian mourning and burial customs, among others. While those tours are not free for everyone, Brooks has worked to raise funds to make them free for those in school — whether preschool or college.

“When I started, I wanted to make education free to those wanting to come learn,” Brooks said. “We found out that, through sponsorships and donations of specific asks, that people were willing to help donate and give us the opportunity to allow people to come in for that free educational tour.”

For those interested in horticulture, Old City Cemetery offers classes on beekeeping, tree tapping, composting, and many other areas. The cemetery’s goats — Braxton, Sampson, and Morris — are popular, as is the heirloom rose collection.

Much of the groundskeeping is done through the work of many volunteers, and there are volunteer opportunities for those who love history and research.

“Being open since 1806, we have a lot of paperwork,” Brooks said. “We go through a lot of our items and research, and there’s opportunities to help with candlelight tours and other tours that we have going on.”

Anyone is welcome to volunteer, even if the work has yet to be considered.

“We have volunteers here almost every day doing things all over the cemetery,” Brooks said. “We’re always open to people coming in, and stopping in, and seeing what they can take care of.”

Its work alongside the Southern Memorial Association has built the Old City Cemetery Museums and Arboretum into something Lynchburg treasures, and all are welcome to experience it.

“It’s just a beautiful place to be able to take a long walk, or catch your breath, or reflect, or come sit on one of our benches,” Brooks said. “We have a lot of new events coming up, so don’t miss it and don’t miss the opportunity.” **GN**

▼ Jay Brooks, Whitney Wilder, and Ashleigh Meyer









# A PLAYGROUND OF POSSIBILITIES

The Rotary Club of Forest unites children through play.

*By Dave Lenchan*

*Photography by Sarah Bussard*

**H**OW DOES a community playground come to life? Not surprisingly, the process can involve dozens of people, months or even years of planning, and a sizeable amount of money. That combination, used to bring a playground from the idea stage to reality, is precisely what the Rotary Club of Forest is doing with the new all-inclusive Rotary Park.

Laura Tyree is a charter member of the Rotary Club of Forest, founded in 2003. Along with Kenneth Selmer, she serves as co-chair of the club's playground committee. The origin story of the new playground demonstrates many of the club's core values: community, problem-solving, and service. Tyree said part of the work that the club is tasked with each year is fundraising and using that funding to support the club and the needs of the local community.

Tyree noted that a couple of the Rotary Club of Forest's members traveled to Danville to investigate the Rotary Club of Danville's participation in the Field of Honor program. The Field of Honor is an annual event held around Sept. 11, during which individuals and corporate donors can purchase American flags to be displayed in memory and hon-





**LAURA TYREE  
AND KENNETH SELMER**









## The more we talked with the Radford-Gooley family [about the playground], they were very excited and gave us their blessing.

- Laura Tyree

or of veterans, active-duty military, first responders, firefighters, police officers, EMTs, health care workers, and those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

Tyree pointed out that the Rotary Club of Danville had great success with its Field of Honor program, so the Rotary Club of Forest decided to adopt it. 2024 marks the seventh year for the Forest Field of Honor, next to Automated Conveyor Systems off Graves Mill Road. Tyree explained that while many ideas were suggested for a fundraiser benefactor, building a playground rose to the top of the pile.

The Rotary Club of Forest met with Bedford County Parks and Recreation officials and discussed the playground idea. Tyree said that the plot of land behind the Forest Library on Forest Road came up in conversation. The land was deeded to the county by the Radford-Gooley family, but

the deed had a number of stipulations that made the county hesitant to develop it.

Tyree shared, “The more we talked with the Radford-Gooley family [about the playground], they were very excited and gave us their blessing.”

From the beginning, Tyree emphasized that the club knew the playground had to be different. The club wanted the playground to be designed for children ages 5 to 12 but added that it would have things for children of varying abilities, whether they [the children] were on the [autism] spectrum and needed things that were tactile or needed things that children with mobility issues would enjoy.

The Rotary Club of Forest sent a survey to its members and posted it in the library for residents to fill out to learn about the community’s specific accessibility needs. When the ideas came back,

Tyree said when the ideas came back, the club contacted the Lynchburg-based MaxPlayFit company to begin building the playground.

Phase I of the playground, completed in 2022, features a modular climbing slide with a couple of stations near the ground. Tyree added that there are transition stations for kids with limited mobility who could still pull themselves up from the stations to one of the slides.

A Rotary district grant helped fund the recently completed Phase II, which includes a musical instrument section. The new section includes a large chime, flowers with petals that each play a different note, and a set of drums. The playground also has swings, including a larger one for a group and a “mommy and me” swing for a parent or older sibling to swing with another family member. Other features of the playground include a lunar rover with gadgets and dials that children can stand or sit in. A four-person see-saw was also just added.

In partnership with the Forest Library, Tyree said the club will install “readers” this summer. Readers are stand-alone signs on posts with a page or two of a book. The 16 readers will allow children to walk or be wheeled around the playground to read a story. The library can change the story as desired. Future additions may include more shaded seating, sidewalks for increased accessibility between playground elements, and game or activity stations.

Tyree concluded by laying out the driving force behind the Forest Playground: “We want them all to be able to play together — that no child feels separated or secluded.” GN

*To learn more about Rotary Park, visit it on Route 221 or go to the Rotary Club of Forest’s website at [www.forestrotary.com/playground-project](http://www.forestrotary.com/playground-project).*





TRINITY  
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TEESHA AND  
IRVIN WARD





# ‘WE HAD TO SAY YES.’

The Ward family’s fostering journey: A testament to love, faith, and selflessness.

*By Dave Lenehan*

*Photography by  
Chris Morris*

**B**ECOMING FOSTER parents was a natural fit for Irvin and Teesha Ward. Growing up in Christian homes, the Wards saw many examples of helping people. It was ingrained in them early on. When their first opportunity to foster their nephew arose, the answer was unquestionably “yes!”

Since 2012, Irvin and Teesha Ward have fostered 47 children, adopted seven of them, and had three biological children. While caring for so many kids over a 13-year period may seem overwhelming, Teesha says their willingness came from their hearts.

“We wanted to help other peoples’ children feel safe — feel that love — knowing that their children were being taken care of by good people.”

Both were working full time when they started fostering. Irvin owned his own construction company, and Teesha’s work focused on mental health in the public school system. The Wards connected with Lynchburg’s HumanKind organization and became colleagues and good friends with Executive Director Jamie Creasy.

“They’ve been so supportive — very open to our ideas,” Irvin says.

Creasy holds the Wards in very high regard.

“Irvin and Teesha really stand out because they said ‘yes’ to any child in need. It is very hard to find homes for teenagers, especially teenage boys, and they took on very difficult teenagers. They were never scared of a challenge and gave each youth a chance.”

Saying “yes” to fostering several teen boys at once meant that the Wards needed more living space in their home. Irvin put his construction skills to work and created five additional bedrooms in the basement. He also used those same skills to help some of the boys begin to learn a trade.

The Wards quickly learned that fostering required teamwork. Teesha adds that having a schedule and a routine for each child was the key.

“It was good for them. Each had his or her own responsibilities,” she explained.

Irvin adds that children in the foster system need structure to





**God gave us the strength to endure the challenging moments. He definitely had our backs.**

*- Irvin Ward*

succeed and be able to either move back home or move out on their own when they age out of foster care. Teesha points out that she and Irvin have had very good relationships with most of their foster kids' parents, even to this day.

However, fostering for more than a decade definitely can take its toll.

"It's an emotional attachment and then a detachment," Irvin said of when a child comes to a home and then leaves to go back to their family.

A clear concept is at the top of Irvin's list for keeping his own family strong while fostering other kids.

"Keep your marriage healthy! Keep the communication open. You both have to be fully committed to want to do this."

Teesha agreed.

"You can do it if you open up your heart, open up your home, and make sure you're caring for yourself well, too."

In 2022, the Wards received one of the most difficult phone calls of their lives. They had already told HumanKind they needed to step away from fostering teenagers and focus more on younger children. HumanKind had four boys — siblings who were ages 1, 2, 3, and 4 — who needed immediate placement. All four were severely malnourished. None of them spoke. Three were diagnosed with autism.

One of the older boys could not walk. Irvin sums up their response to the call in simple words.

"We had to say yes."

Now, two years later, all four boys are thriving and getting the love, attention, and care they need. The Wards' 5-year-old daughter loves to play with the boys and is helping to teach them things like numbers, colors, and the alphabet. The Wards take the boys to many occupational and medical appointments each week but say they are improving.

Not long after the initial call, Irvin and Teesha began the adoption process for the boys. Just last year, they retired fully from foster care. Teesha retired from her work in schools. Irvin, however, admits he is not quite "fully retired" from construction work.

Through their years of loving and caring for so many kids, Irvin says fostering was a ministry, too.

"God gave us the strength to endure the challenging moments. He definitely had our backs," Irvin affirmed.

Teesha wholeheartedly agreed.

"God looked after us all these years."

Last year, HumanKind held a retirement party for the Wards.

Creasy said, "They will always be a part of our family, and we are so proud they chose us to walk through this journey with them." GN







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CHAPTER 3 OF 3

This section of the magazine covers local events, charities, and nonprofits.

**54** Community Events

**56** Charity Listings

**58** Advertiser Index

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Photography by Chris Morris

◀ Andres and Miriam Dahl, and Murphy



# Poplar Forest Naturalization Ceremony - April 12



Photography by Chris Morris

Poplar Forest held a naturalization ceremony on April 12. New citizens took the Oath of Citizenship, administered by Judge Norman K. Moon, then were welcomed by President Thomas Jefferson (portrayed by Bill Barker, courtesy of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello). After the ceremony, families were treated to lunch and tours of Jefferson's retreat home.



1. Ramiro Villafana and Erika Cervantes 2. Ram Gaire and Susmite Bhusal  
3. New citizens take the Oath of Citizenship 4. New citizens take the Oath of Citizenship



# Freedom 4/24 Spring Fling - April 6



Photography by Chris Morris

On April 6, Freedom 4/24 held its Spring Fling - Brunch Down Bedford along Bedford Avenue. The event was designed to bring awareness to human trafficking. Several eateries along Bedford Avenue offered special brunch menus while kids enjoyed bounce houses, face painting, and touch-a-truck activities.

1. Cindy Wood and Marilyn Otey 2. Stacy, Stuart, and Harlan Evans  
3. Maddy Fightmaster and Tania Conner



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