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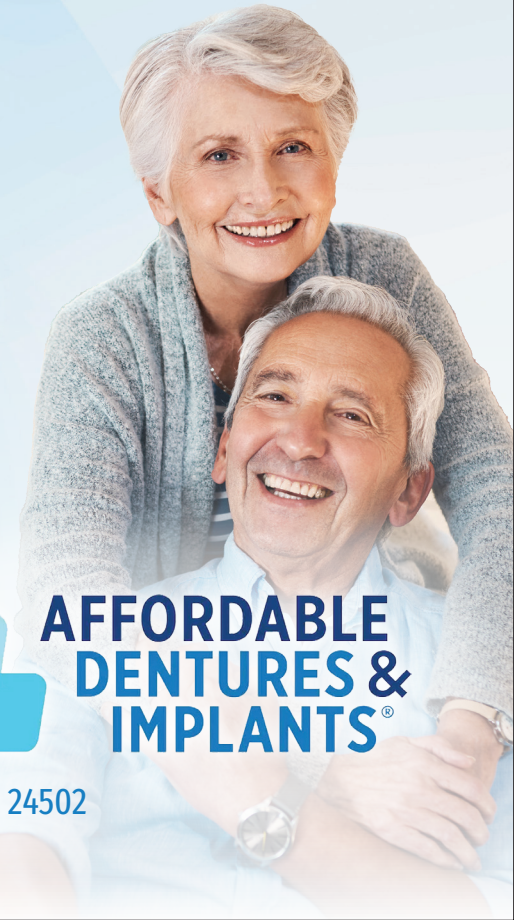


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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Chasing a shooting star

Dreams come true in our hometown.

WHEN I was 8, I wanted to be a teacher. I remember my third grade teacher clicking the chalk on the green board on the wall. And when I was 9, I wanted to be a director. My parents bought me a camera for Christmas, and my cousins and I would recreate our favorite movies in the yard. When I was 11, I wanted to be a writer. I remember classmates telling me how terrible my stories were. While they probably weren't, it felt like a crowd of kids surrounding me, pointing and laughing. I went home and ripped the pages over and over, trying to hold back tears. I thought, "No one will ever read another word I write." The 11-year-old me was wrong. My story — my dream — didn't end there; it was just the beginning. Today, I can offer you living proof that the wildest dreams do come true.

Our dreams are like shooting stars across the night sky. They're beautiful; they're exciting. We think, "How in the world does that work?" And we spend our entire lives chasing that shooting star. We spend every day, step after step, trying to make our dreams come true. Dreams don't always take off into space like a rocket. Sometimes, we land too hard. Sometimes, we never get off the launchpad. Thankfully, we have the launchpad we need. Our hometown is a place where dreams come true, and this issue of Good News Magazine is living proof of that.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." The goal of this issue is to prove your dreams are beautiful and the future is brightly dazzling. The truth is, the shooting star has always been inside us — we just had to realize it. GN

Wesley Bryant,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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PUBLISHING PARTNER Kevin Maples

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Wesley Bryant

VP OF SALES Ken Holtzinger

REGIONAL PUBLISHER Jack Owens

LEAD LAYOUT ARTIST Brianna Brubaker

SENIOR LAYOUT ARTIST Melissa Davis

LAYOUT ARTIST Ben Adams

LEAD PRINT AD DESIGNER Todd Pitts

JR. PRINT AD DESIGNER Jane Morrell

LEAD PHOTOGRAPHER Ashleigh Newnes

PHOTOGRAPHER Brooke Snyder

FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHERS Amanda Guy, Adin Parks,

Sarah Bussard, Chad Barrett, Robin Fast, Gretchen Clark

LEAD WRITER Tina Neeley

STORY WRITER Jeriah Brumfield

FREELANCE WRITERS Amanda West, Sara Hook, Paige Cushman,

Kali Bradford, Gabriel Huff, Dave Lenahan, Richard Klin

FOOD CRITIC Grace Hayes

STORY COORDINATOR Haley Potter

PROOFREADER Michelle Harwell

JR. PROOFREADER Kaitlin Rettig

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Cindy Baldhoff, Faith Cashion,

Amanda Cox, Tony Glenn, Kevin Hines, Mark Mahagan,

Shea Moore, Janet Mullins, Sissy Smith, Sandra Thomas

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DIRECTOR OF MAGAZINES Katie McNabb

VP OF TALENT Chase Perryman

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HUMAN RESOURCES AND FINANCE Tracey Pollock

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DIGITAL DESIGN DIRECTOR Clinton George

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Training and equipping

THE SANDWICH GENERATION



Helping families make quality of life a priority
for those with dementia

By Dave Lenehan // Photography by Chad Barrett

VIRGINIA “GINI” Simmons grew up in Goode and graduated from Jefferson Forest High School. If those words were the sum of her story, her life could be considered typical for the Lynchburg area — but Gini’s life is far more unique.

Gini’s father is British, and her mother is German. Both parents moved to Lynchburg in the 1970s, where her father worked at the Meredith/Burda printing company. Gini explained that she learned both languages from childhood.

“Only English was allowed if it was homework or school or work-related.”

The rest of the time, Gini’s mother spoke to her kids in German. Things got even more interesting

when Gini’s grandparents retired from England to the Spanish island of Ibiza. This opened the door for a third language. Gini said that when her family would visit her grandparents and go out to eat, her dad would speak English with his parents, and her mom would speak German with the kids as usual.

But at a restaurant, she said, “When the waiter would come, my dad would nudge me and say, ‘Order in Spanish’... So the waiter never really knew what language to approach the table with!”

What does the ability to speak three languages have to do with dementia care? For Gini, it’s what makes her Living Active Dementia coaching and training business unique. Gini’s health care education began when she



Gini
Simmons

“

My goal is the quality of life.
We need to make their lives
as better — as happy —
as possible.

-Gini Simmons

obtained a bachelor's degree in recreational therapy at Old Dominion University in Norfolk. She points out that recreational therapy is very wellness-focused in five areas: physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and occupational.

When she entered the health care profession over 20 years ago, Gini also began to encounter patients with dementia. The nurses at one skilled care facility where she worked warned her that a particular male patient was aggressive or might curse at her. Gini said she entered the patient's room and began talking with him. She found out that the man was confused and didn't know why he was in the facility and why doctors and nurses seemed to be forcing treatments he didn't understand.

"I kind of just acknowledged and validated what was going on."

That conversation led Gini to a critical discovery in working with patients with dementia.

"It's all about the person you're talking to — where they are at, what they understand," Gini explained.

She said it's less about getting a patient to do something and more about getting to know them and understanding where they need help. Gini embarked on educating herself in the field in order to bring a level of compassionate care and understanding to patients and their families.

Gini is now a certified dementia practitioner and a certified trainer. As Gini grew her skills, her father pointed out that the rescue squad he volunteered for had no training to handle dementia patients. That led Gini to become a first-responder trainer, too.

Gini said her mission is "to share knowledge about dementia with those in the community through interactive and fun training."

Besides training other professionals, the family group Gini finds herself working with the most is known as the "sandwich generation." The sandwich generation represents families where the parents have young children at home but also bring in one or both of their parents (the children's grandparents) to live with them because they cannot live independently. Gini said this can create a lot of generational stress.

Gini conducts a home safety assessment where the family can see changes they may need to make to the physical house for fall prevention, accessibility, and cooking safety. For the caregivers, Gini



offers support services to help navigate doctor's appointments, power of attorney arrangements, living wills, and other next-step directives that may come into play. In addition, she gets the person needing care involved in fun and sometimes goofy activities and games that bring mental and physical stimulation with the goal of staying independent longer.

When dementia sets in, causing an aging parent to need more direct care, Gini steps in to help families become better care providers and aid them in supporting the person with dementia. Gini offers classes on topics such as Alzheimer's disease versus dementia, aging sensitivity training, communication basics, and changes with aging. She presents to social workers, case workers, first responders, and more.

"My goal is the quality of life. We need to make their lives as better — as happy — as possible."

Gini is well on her way to doing just that. **GN**

To learn about Gini's services in English, Spanish, or German, you may contact her at livingactive22@gmail.com.

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Bishop James Coleman

Devoted and committed to public education



Love for education drives local pastor/educator to equip kids to succeed

By Dave Lenehan // Photography by Chris Morris

“**P** EOPLE DO better when they know better.” Those words come from Bishop James Coleman, a man who sees his roles in ministry and education as dual means to achieve the same goal. He wants to see the children of Lynchburg become better people, students, and citizens.

Coleman serves as senior pastor of Providence Transformation Church International (Baptist) in Lynchburg. He greets everyone in a kind, gentle, and unassuming manner. After spending just a few minutes with him, one can clearly see he has been called to the ministry. But beyond his role as senior pastor, Coleman’s heart beats just as strongly for something else — education. His educational journey began at home.

“What made me get involved in education was that both of my parents were educators. They were devoted and committed to it,” Coleman explained.

Coleman said that growing up, he held on tightly to the love of education his parents modeled. After graduating from Hermitage High School in Henrico County, Coleman attended James Madison University, earning a double major in public administration and political science. He also met his wife, Patricia Denise, at James Madison University. He then moved on to Virginia Union University in Richmond, receiving a master of divinity. He also earned a master of theology from Duke University, a doctor of ministry degree, and conducted post-doctoral work at Harvard University.

While the love for teaching handed down by his parents still burned in his heart, Coleman said he “felt the weight of the call” to the ministry and followed that calling vocationally instead. But the educational realm wasn’t done with James Coleman.

In 2014, Coleman was unanimously appointed to the Lynchburg City School Board. Coleman served for nine years, including his last three years as board chairman. His love for education also brought him to the Virginia School Board Association and the Virginia High School League's Executive Committee.

"It's all tied together — ministry and education," Coleman explained. "We're helping people to move from that place of not knowing to knowing. It's why I do what I do."

One of the darkest times for many school districts nationwide was the years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Coleman is quick to point out that Lynchburg public schools never closed. Instead, classes were moved to a virtual learning experience. Equally crucial to Coleman was that school services, such as accommodations for children with disabilities and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, never stopped.

When students could no longer rely on school cafeterias for meals during the COVID-19 pandemic, Coleman said the school district came up with what some might consider a radical idea. The district launched a program sending school buses into neighborhoods to deliver meals to children. Coleman emphasizes that any child could receive the meals, whether they were a public school student or not. For Coleman, the program fulfilled both a tangible and a ministry need for Lynchburg families.



▲ Dr. James Coleman views a photo of a historic Virginia University of Lynchburg graduating class

Another partnership between local communities of faith and businesses provided another source of help for students. Coleman said the Family and Community Engagement (F.A.C.E.) program identified resources from those entities and matched its services with children in need. Coleman's congregation at Providence Transformation Church International also started its own tutoring program on Saturdays at the church's facilities on Oakley Avenue. The tutoring program had such a dramatic impact on city kids that a church from Richmond came to Lynchburg to learn how Coleman's church put the program together. Coleman notes that each program builds on each other with a common goal — ensuring that every child "by name and by need" can get a quality education, do well, and succeed.

"There's a direct correlation between a good, quality education and a good quality





Teaching
is a great
profession. It's
taking young
minds and
helping them
to develop.
What better
can one do?

- Bishop James Coleman

of life. If you want to excel, you can excel, but you have to have people in front of you who believe that you can," Coleman stated, adding that the church and the community must work together to help kids flourish.

Coleman's nine-year school board term ended last year. Today, in addition to his pastoral roles, Coleman is the faculty chair and dean of The Leonard N. Smith

School of Religion at Virginia University of Lynchburg. Despite the many hats he wears, he has not lost the vision of the city's need for good teachers. Coleman admits that teaching is a hard profession, but he is undeterred.

"Teaching is a great profession. It's taking young minds and helping them to develop. What better can one do?" GN

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.

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It goes into dairy farming. The Nash family started in 2020. "We'd al-



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Meet Mr. Altavista

Donnie Wilkerson lives out his dream of serving his community.

By Gabriel Grant Huff // Photography by Chad Barrett

WITH A broken neck, fractured ribs, two collapsed lungs, and unconscious — that’s how a stricken community found a beloved 71-year-old man who had become a staple and role model for many. Some call him a legend. Others call him “Mr. Altavista.”

Altavista, a small town just over 25 miles south of Lynchburg, is where Donnie Wilkerson was born in 1951, spending most of his life with his wife of 45 years, Nancy. Together, they have two daughters and three grandchildren.

Growing up, Wilkerson attended Altavista High School, where he made sports a way of life, playing football in the fall and basketball in the winter. But he claimed running as his real love. Through sports, he met mentors who invested in him and instilled life-changing greatness.

“I had some coaches that helped me believe in myself,” Wilkerson expressed. “And when I went to college, I knew that I wanted to return the same type of feeling that I got from my coaches.”

Upon graduation, the Altavista native did just that, returning to his hometown to teach in 1973 and finding himself at Campbell County Technical Center. There, he helped kids obtain jobs through an apprenticeship program as a coordinator for



“I wanted to come back and be a part of the community and give back to what people gave to me.”

-Donnie Wilkerson

Campbell County Public Schools. For 27 years, he registered students across the county and administered performance grades. He also met employers and developed programs.

All the while, he adhered to his true calling of coaching. Aligning with his interests as a kid, Wilkerson has been coaching football, basketball, cross-country, and track at Altavista High School. He loves biking and running with the cross-country team during training sessions.

“We — my head coach and I in cross-country — the question was asked over the 27 years that we’ve been coaching cross-country, how many runners have we had,



and we totaled it up,” Wilkerson said. “In 27 years that we’ve been coaching, there was over a thousand runners that we have had on our cross-country team.”

Wilkerson’s impact and love for people have been felt by those students and others, many of whom would simply describe the coach as “just a good person.” His character bleeds into volunteering, assisting with 5Ks, and many other running events in Altavista.

Wilkerson also ran with a gang — no, not that kind of gang. He volunteered with others to move chained sideline markers during Altavista’s home football games. They called themselves the “chain gang.”

Although he coached, Wilkerson never quit competing in sports as an athlete. Road races and triathlons were the norm. He even competed in ultra running. He has participated in all these events for over 35 years, and he retired from competition only a few years ago. He continues to pour into the community through sports and coaching.

“There’s two ways that people sometimes look at it,” Wilkerson said. “Sometimes kids, when you’re growing up — ‘Oh, I can’t wait to get out of this community. I want to go and do this and that.’ But that was never what I wanted to do. I wanted to come back and be a part of the community and give back to what people gave to me. So here I am — going to be 73 years old and still helping out where I can and try to make a difference.”

One day, though, his whole community helped him. The coach has always had a routine of mountain biking in the afternoon. June 21, 2022, was no different. He did not have brakes on his bike and told his wife, Nancy, he would bike downtown to order some. The trip was a success — except for one thing.

“I didn’t make it home,” Wilkerson said.

Unfortunately, Wilkerson never carried a cell phone. Nancy did not find him at the bike shop. Even worse, she discovered he never showed up for a scheduled sports practice. That’s when she knew something was seriously wrong.

“My youngest daughter — we all go to the school, and the head coach’s wife said, ‘We need to call and report a missing person,’” Nancy recalled.

The community responded. Friends were already looking, but the police placed Wilkerson’s missing status on Facebook. Suddenly, more people from the school, technical center, and community were filling the park, searching for Wilkerson. About seven hours later, they found him down a neighbor’s driveway into the woods, unconscious and severely injured, where he was airlifted to a hospital. To this day, the only thing Wilkerson remembers from the whole ordeal is the words, “We found him.”

“That’s what the community means to me,” said Wilkerson, who continues to bike and has his still-bloodied, torn jersey framed on his back porch.

And that’s what Wilkerson means to his community, who nicknamed him “Mr. Altavista.” GN

EVERYTHING BUT THE KITCHEN SINK

A Lynchburg staple

WHETHER YOU are a die-hard ice cream fan or just in the mood for a sweet treat, Mister Goodies is a must-visit gem in Lynchburg. This ice cream shop has become a staple for locals, and each scoop is a testament to the shop's commitment to quality. As you wait in line amidst the outdoor seating, the sweet aroma of waffle cones and chocolate syrup envelops you, promising a delightful treat. The friendly staff is always ready with a smile, which makes the experience even more enjoyable.

The menu at Mister Goodies includes everything but the kitchen sink. From frozen cheesecake on a stick to hot apple dumplings, soft serve, and soda floats, this shop has whatever you are craving. I chose the Strawberry Fudge Basket — soft serve vanilla ice cream in a waffle bowl, topped with strawberries and hot fudge. The ice cream was perfectly sweet without being overwhelmingly rich, and the strawberry and hot fudge combination added a fresh and light element that was necessary to finish the large portion.

Popular favorites include the Flavorburst and rotating flavor cones, the rotating dairy-free and vegan flavors, and the Mister Goodies banana split. Currently, Mister Goodies offers eight dairy-free/vegan flavors, including cake batter, peanut butter, and coffee Oreo.





The charm of this shop is largely due to the outdoor seating. There is a playful energy, with dogs and kids running around and ice cream everywhere you look. Each table holds a variety of desserts, and the joy is almost palpable. Mister Goodies offers more than incredible desserts — it offers a child-like experience that contributes joy and escape to the Lynchburg community. Good News tested, Good News approved! 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 Mister Goodies Ice Cream.

MISTER GOODIES ICE CREAM

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Savor summer's bounty



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and the Exchange Cookbook: www.southernaprons.com

Enjoy the season's first fruits and vegetables.

AS THE warm summer sun shines high in the Southern sky, it's time to embrace the vibrant flavors of the season. Our July recipes showcase the best of summer's produce, from juicy peaches and crisp cucumbers to sweet corn and zucchini.

Whether you're hosting a backyard gathering or enjoying a quiet evening at home, these dishes will have you savoring the tastes of the season. From refreshing salads and grilled favorites to fruity desserts, let's dig into the simple pleasures of summer together! **GN**



Strawberry Pretzel Salad

In memory of Pat Hopper

- 2 c. pretzels, crushed
- 4 T. sugar
- 3/4 c. margarine, softened
- 1 pkg. cream cheese, 8 oz., softened
- 1 c. sugar
- 1 container whipped topping, 8 oz.
- 1 lg. pkg. strawberry gelatin
- 1 1/2 - 2 c. boiling water
- 2 pkgs., strawberries, frozen, slightly thawed, 10 oz.

In a large bowl, mix together pretzels, 4 T. of sugar, and margarine. Pat pretzel mixture in a 9x13 baking dish. Bake at 400° for 6 minutes. Cool. In a mixing bowl, mix cream cheese, and 1 cup of sugar. Fold in whipped topping. Spread over pretzel crust. In a separate bowl, mix strawberry gelatin with boiling water. Stir until dissolved. Add frozen strawberries. Refrigerate until gelatin starts to thicken slightly. Stir, then pour over cream cheese layer and refrigerate until set.

Peachy Blueberry Cobbler

Submitted by Louella Turner

- 1 c. sugar
- 2 t. baking powder
- 1 c. AP flour
- 1 t. salt
- 1 c. milk
- 1/2 c. butter, melted
- 3 med. peaches, peeled, sliced, lightly sugared
- 2/3 c. fresh blueberries
- vanilla ice cream, optional

In a medium mixing bowl, combine sugar, baking powder, flour, and salt. In a small mixing bowl, combine milk and butter. Pour over sugar mixture. Mix until smooth. Pour into a greased 12x8x2 glass baking dish. Spread peaches evenly over the top of butter. Sprinkle with blueberries. Bake at 350° for 50 minutes or until batter rises through the fruit and top is golden brown. Serve cobbler warm and topped with vanilla ice cream, if desired.

Fresh Summer Salsa

Submitted by Marguerite Eddins

- 1 habanero chili pepper, seeded, minced
- 4 lg. plum tomatoes, chopped
- 2 T. vinegar
- 1 t. sugar
- 1/2 t. salt
- 1 med. cucumber, peeled, diced
- 1 c. fresh cilantro, finely chopped
- 2 T. olive oil
- 1 t. ground cumin
- tortilla chips, for serving

In a small mixing bowl, combine pepper, tomatoes, vinegar, sugar, salt, cucumber, cilantro, olive oil, and cumin. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Serve with tortilla chips.



Adelin Lucaci



FROM A DREAM TO A REALITY



Hard work and faith
prompt brothers to innovate

By Sara Hook
Photography by Chad Barrett

P EOPLE ARE natural innovators. We adapt to our surroundings, solve problems, and work to make our lives and others' better. For entrepreneurs, this is especially true, and Lynchburg has recently become home to a perfect example of that innovation — NOVU Pops.

Created by Adelin Lucaci, with help from his brother, Brandon, NOVU Pops started as a basement experiment combining caffeine, vitamins, and lollipops. The product has since exploded in its reach, as a minute-long meeting with a CEO led to the product being accepted into Lowe's stores and, later, several airports. While still in the onboarding

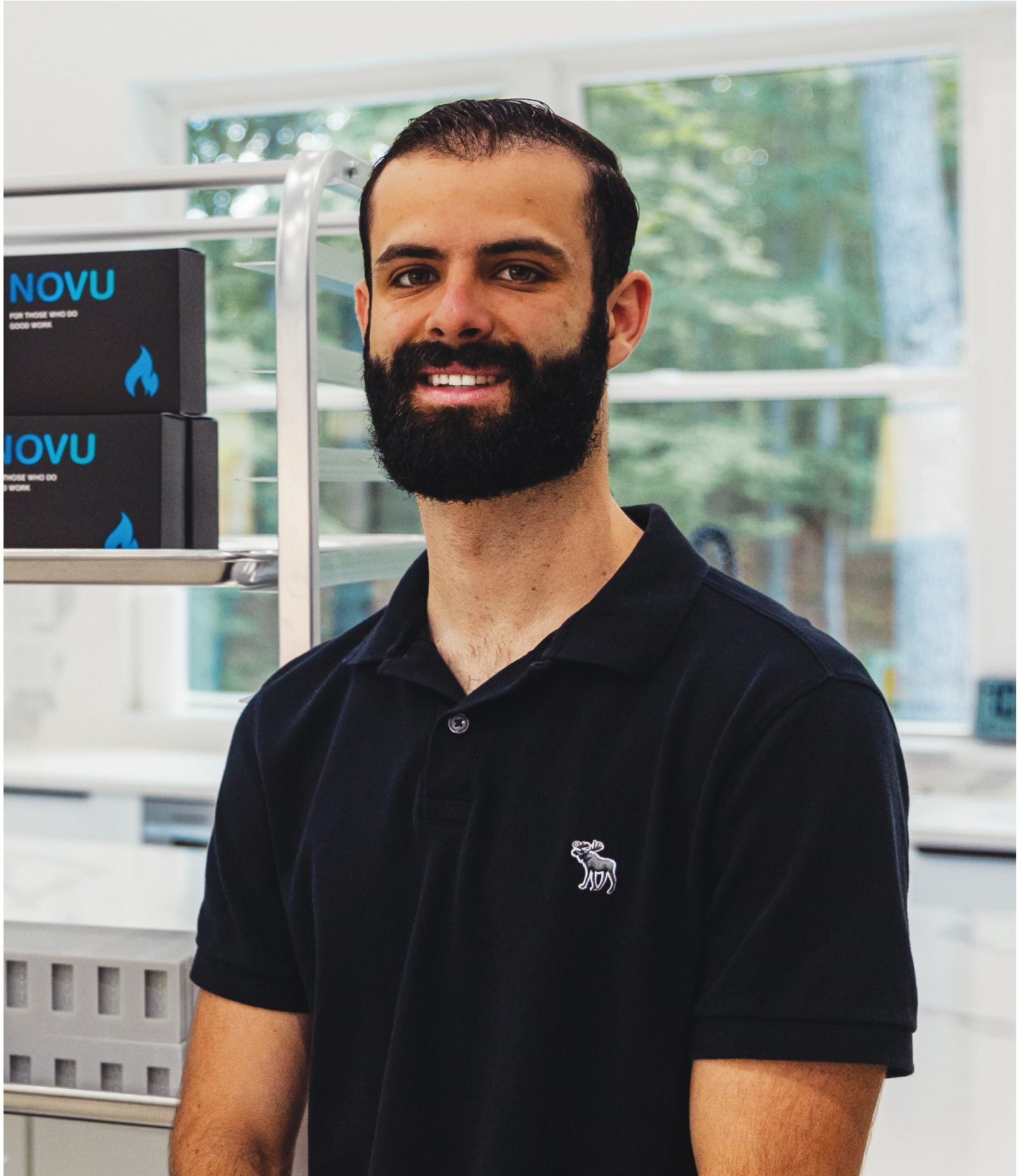


process, the brothers are building a new 2000-square-foot facility for production right here in Virginia.

All that budding success didn't happen by accident.

It resulted from a childhood full of learning, months of hard work, and, Adelin said, the guidance of God. Adelin was born in Romania, but he and Brandon grew up in San Francisco, immersed in entrepreneurship. Their mother and father were business owners in Romania, and their father also had a successful construction business in the States.

"Since our mom homeschooled us, and since our dad involved us in the construction





▲ Adelin and Brandon Lucaci

work a lot because he knew the value of hard work, we lived like entrepreneurs,” Brandon said. “That’s just the way that our brains are wired.”

Adelin was set to take over his dad’s business. He’d gotten a contractor license and his commercial driver’s license (CDL) and was about ready to start. However, all those plans were upended one Sunday morning when an elder at their church spoke to them about a dream he’d had the night before.

“In that dream, we were in a very specific location, and he didn’t know what it was — what it meant — and he didn’t

even want to tell us what it was because he thought it was weird,” Adelin expressed. “When he was describing what he saw — that specific location — I immediately knew what it was. It was a rental property that my parents [owned] in Virginia.”

Taking it as a sign that God wanted them in Virginia, the brothers began making plans. They moved into that rental property with a plan to start a new construction company in Lynchburg as Brandon began school at Liberty University. Then, on the first night in the house, Adelin woke up with the idea of NOVU Pops.

“The first thought when I woke up [was] a whole business — the whole brand — everything. The whole product was in my mind just instantly,” Adelin said. “I was like, ‘Wow, that’s a really, really cool idea.’ And I started to work on it — started getting interested.”

Neither brother had experience in the sweets industry, so Adelin started researching. He converted his basement into a lab, experimenting with making the pops, and contacted a Food and Drug Administration consultant to learn the legalities of making candy.



It took a year and nine months before anything came of the idea — a time Brandon said was fraught with doubt and struggle. NOVU Pops was just one of the hundreds of ideas Adelin had, and there was no guarantee that it would be successful.

“He’s just battling and wrestling with this concept,” Brandon said. “It’s good, the brand is perfect ... it stands for everything that we stand for. Do I even commit to this?”

Still, he kept working. The brothers did construction jobs on the side to fund Adelin’s research and experimentation, and

they went to conferences to network and learn more about entrepreneurship. It was at one of those conferences that everything changed. The Lucaci brothers knew that Lowe’s CEO Marvin Ellison would attend Liberty University’s CEO Summit as a keynote speaker and were determined to speak to him after the event. However, something drew them to approach during a short intermission instead — If they hadn’t, they would have missed him entirely. Ellison came late and left early.

“We showed him, ‘We highly respect you — we see what you have done, how you’ve changed businesses and how you have grown them all, and you’re still a strong Christian leader doing it.’” Brandon said. “We appreciated that, so we wanted to ask for his advice — how do we get something like this into Lowe’s, keep our values, and so on.”

The brothers didn’t even have a pop with them, only some sample packaging, but Ellison pointed them to a Lowe’s event called “Into the Blue: Lowe’s Product Pitch Event.” Though they only spoke briefly, Ellison got them into the currently running finals and chose them as

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THERE’S NO SUCH
THING AS BIG WINS
THAT HAPPEN OUT OF
NOWHERE. JUST TRY
TO GET 1% BETTER
EVERY DAY.

Adelin Lucaci

his personal recommendation to win.

“Why in the world did Mr. Ellison take that risk — risking his reputation to put us as his personal recommendation into the show?” Brandon questioned. “We have no idea why. The only thing that we can think of is it was just the favor of God.”

The brothers succeeded throughout the event. Lowe’s even changed its policy on selling food to sell NOVU Pop in its stores. Now, NOVU Pops is in the process of entering airports as well. The hard work and dedication of the Lucaci brothers are finally paying off.

“There’s no such thing as big wins that happen out of nowhere,” Adelin said. “Just try to get 1% better every day. But for somebody to get to the point of accepting that — that takes a long time. I’m just now realizing and accepting and leaning into ‘one percent better every day.’”

It’s a dream come true, but it also reflects the brothers’ motto and the motto for NOVU Pops: Do good work. No matter what you do or how long it takes, do good work. If you get a little better every day, you never know what might happen. **GN**

Barbara Jahn

KNITTING LOVE INTO EVERY STITCH

Barbara Jahn combines her love for nursing and crafting to provide handmade hats for newborns.

By Dave Lenehan
Photography by Chris Morris

THE PICTURE is a familiar one to anyone who has children. A baby lies in a small crib, tightly swaddled in cozy hospital blankets, with a soft knit cap adorning its head. It's usually the first picture taken of a little boy or girl before they go home.

For babies born at the birthing center at Virginia Baptist Hospital, that knit hat likely came from the loving hands of retired nurse Barbara Jahn. Jahn has been knitting thousands of soft, lightly colored hats for the infants at Virginia Baptist for 12 years. Over 6,500 babies have received her precious gift so far.



Jahn's story began many years ago in the area of Albany, New York, where she grew up. She said that ever since she was 4 years old, she wanted to be a

nurse. After graduating from high school, she enrolled in the nursing program at the Albany Medical Center and launched her career from there.

She worked mainly in critical care units such as coronary care and medical-surgical. Jahn also met her husband, Rudy, in New York. He worked as a firefighter and served for an ambulance company.

Jahn summed up her nursing career in three compelling words: "I loved it." While nursing was Jahn's





career path, she pointed out that she's always been crafty. "I sew, I knit, I crochet, I do photography, [and] I used to quilt."

It's the combination of nursing and knitting that brought an opportunity into Jahn's life to give back. Jahn's daughter, Theresa Bemis, has been a registered nurse at the birthing center for 16 years. Initially, Bemis did not want to pursue her mother's career choice like many people thought she would. However, Jahn said that during one of Bemis' college classes, she observed a baby delivery at an Albany hospital. From that point on, Bemis noted that she was hooked and had become a nurse herself.

While some hats were available for infants at Virginia Baptist, Bemis said the need kept growing. When Bemis asked her mother if she would begin knitting hats for the babies, Jahn wasted no time in responding.

"She saw a need that she could help out with, so she just jumped right in," Bemis explained. "She takes such pride in them."

Jahn agreed, "It's my give-back project."

Jahn attempted to crochet the hats, but that didn't work out. She switched to knitting and never looked back. Her hats are colored in traditional baby blue and pink, as well as teal, purple, and some mixed pastels. The response from both the nurses and the patients at the hospital was electrifying.

Bemis explained that the nurses "love them. Every time I've brought them in, there's always a crowd around the bag of hats, picking out which ones they want to give to their patients."

She added, "It's like someone brings in a bag of candy for them."

Jahn replied with a smile that while she and Bemis share a love for nursing,

her daughter "does not have a bone" of crafting in her.

The hospital's patient response and appreciation for Jahn's special gift have also been very sweet.

"They just love 'em," Bemis exclaimed. "A lot of them say, 'These are something that I'll keep forever,' or, 'I'll put it away for when they're grown or maybe for their children.'"

Jahn said that some of the mothers asked to have their picture taken with their baby in one of her hats and then sent the photo to her as a "thank you" gift. Twelve years of knitting hats might seem like a tall task for most of us, but Jahn pointed out that the process came with several perks.

"It's a great project that I can pick up and put down. It's great for long car rides, [or] for sitting in front of the TV," she said.

Jahn noted that she had to take a few steps back from knitting as often in the past six months. Her dear Rudy passed away in December, so the hats sometimes had to wait. Jahn said that since she has yarn all over the house, Rudy often helped her roll the yarn for her hat projects.

Whether she's producing a lot of hats or a few, Jahn has kept her initial reason for starting the project in sight.

"It makes me feel very good to do something for the community."

The infants who received the precious hats are glad she did. **GN**

“

**IT MAKES ME FEEL
VERY GOOD TO DO
SOMETHING FOR
THE COMMUNITY.**

Barbara Jahn

Kate Goodman

‘EVERYONE DESERVES A HOME.’

Rush Homes lovingly builds affordable
and accessible housing to meet the demand.

By Dave Lenehan
Photography by Chad Barrett

KATE GOODMAN is all too familiar with how quickly life can change. Her sister, Beth, was driving back from visiting the Outer Banks with her 3-year-old daughter when someone suddenly rear-ended her car, sending her vehicle into the back of a flatbed truck. Beth suffered a traumatic brain injury and soon found herself disabled and unable to meet her financial obligations. After looking for appropriate housing for Beth for about 10 years, Kate discovered Rush Homes.

Rush Homes develops affordable, accessible housing for our neighbors with both disabilities and low incomes. The organization

rents one-, two-, and three-bedroom units at affordable rates and manages and maintains the homes. Kate, who serves as the director of development and marketing for Rush Homes, pointed out that its homes differ from what most would consider “plain, old affordable housing.”

Rush Homes accepts housing choice vouchers from the Lynchburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority (LRHA). According to Kate, those vouchers make up the difference between what Rush Homes charges for rent and what a tenant can afford living on, on a low income — often of only \$12,000 a year or less. The LRHA administers the



▲ Michelle Buckland



“

I WANT TO ASK PEOPLE TO TAKE A MINUTE TO LOOK BEYOND THEMSELVES AND THEIR SITUATIONS AND PONDER WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN ... AND TO REALIZE THE DIFFERENCE A GIFT TO RUSH HOMES COULD MAKE.

Kate Goodman

voucher program but doesn't have enough funding to meet the need for vouchers. For those fortunate enough to receive one, the vouchers make it possible to spend no more than 30% of their income on housing, including utilities.

Executive Director Tracey Ballagh said the key to their homes is “dignity.”

“Everybody wants dignity — everybody wants respect and self-respect. When you are independent and have that autonomy, you can say, “This [home] is mine, and look what I can do for myself.”

Rush Homes began with a mother's love for her son with disabilities. James and Mabel Rush accepted a call to a local Methodist church so their son, Jimmy, could live at the Central VA Training Center (CVTC). Born with profound developmental disabilities, Jimmy was cared for at home by his parents as long as was possible. As he and they grew older, it was necessary to find a new way for the family to thrive.

After Jimmy's father died, the CVTC situation became untenable. Mabel searched for a plan that would work for Jimmy and others like him and found a model in Michigan that, with some alterations, seemed like it might work.

Along with other interested parents of children with disabilities and community members, the Mabel Rush Foundation was formed.

Jimmy's house in Lynchburg was purchased in 1996, and he lived there until he died in 2023. When asked what would make him happy, Jimmy replied, “A backyard and a basketball hoop.” He got both. His mother passed away as he was making the move into his new home, but she lived to see that her son would be well cared for beyond the time when she could be his caretaker.

One of the most significant benefits provided by Rush Homes is that all units are built to a high degree of accessibility. Kate pointed out that many homes have roll-under cabinets and roll-in showers for wheelchair users. Many units feature electrical outlets installed higher for easier reach. If you visit a home provided by Rush Homes, you won't find any doorknobs — only handles in case someone has dexterity difficulties. Additionally, all stoves have front-mounted controls.

In addition to building the units where its tenants live, Rush Homes also provides assistance to its tenants in various ways through its resident services coordinator.



The staff member provides services such as nutrition classes, movie afternoons, and bingo games. Beyond the fun activities, the coordinator assists residents with applications for Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, establishing a primary care physician, and other holistic services. Rush Homes also offers training for in-home care and self-care.

“We are advocate landlords and a residential support network for our tenants,” Kate added. “Our residents feel a real pride of place.”



▲ Faith Sunde leads a sing-a-long for residents



▲ James Reed at Florida Terrace

Today, Rush Homes has 152 units throughout Lynchburg with a waiting list of about 500 people.

Kate reflected on her personal experience with Rush Homes.

“I want to ask people to take a minute to look beyond themselves and their situations and ponder what might happen ... and to realize the difference a gift to Rush Homes could make.”

Tracey returned to her initial thoughts about dignity.

“I would like for everyone to see the person and not the situation and recognize that everyone deserves a home.” **GN**

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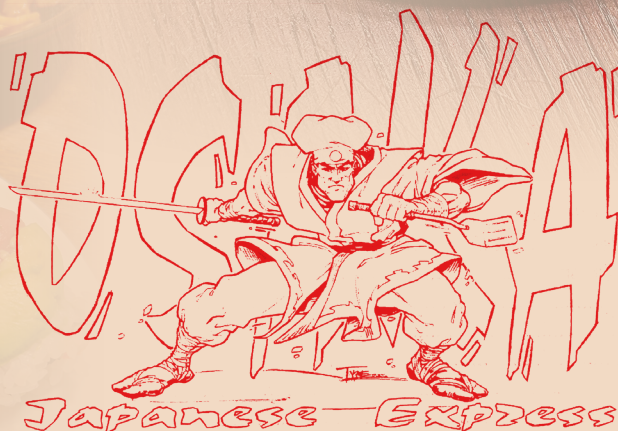
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