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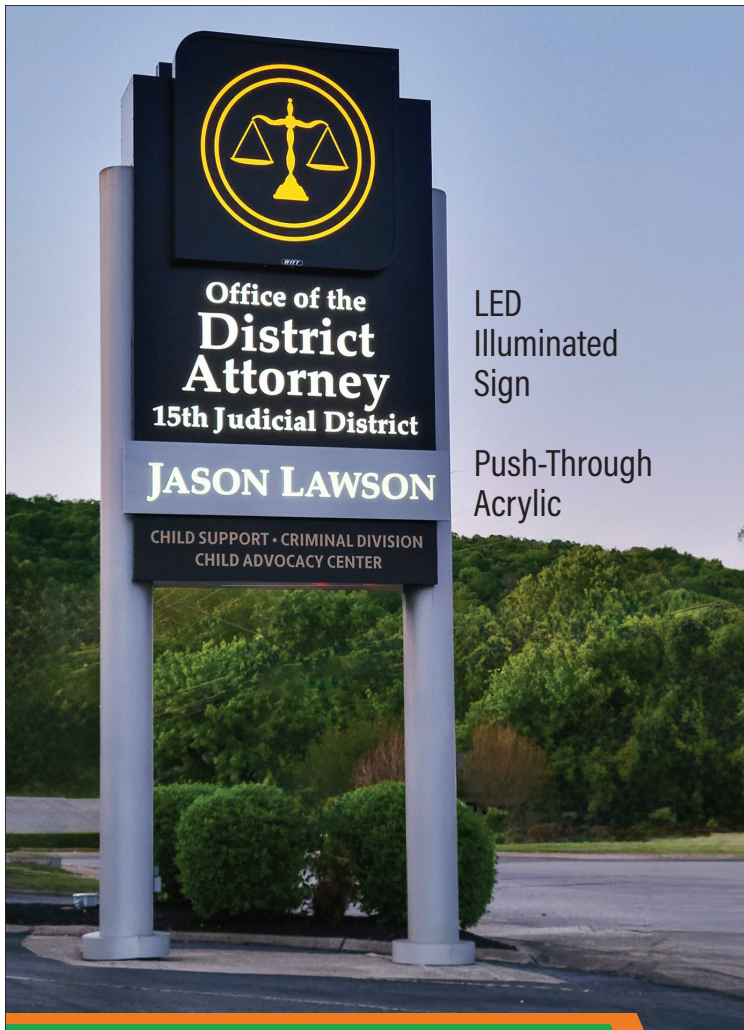
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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 PARTNERS Cindy Baldhoff, Kevin Hines

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 Lenehan, Richard Klin

STORY COORDINATOR Haley Potter

PROOFREADER Michelle Harwell

JR. PROOFREADER Kaitlin Rettig

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Faith Cashion,
Amanda Cox, Tony Glenn, Mark Mahagan, Kevin Maples,
Shea Moore, Janet Mullins, Sissy Smith, Sandra Thomas

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DIRECTOR OF MAGAZINES Katie McNabb

VP OF TALENT Chase Perryman

VP OF MARKETING Gabby Denny

HUMAN RESOURCES AND FINANCE Tracey Pollock

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DIGITAL DESIGN DIRECTOR Clinton George

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Cultivating Community Through Generosity

AMONG SHORTAGES AND EMPTY SHELVES,
JOELEEN DAVIS SHARED HER BOUNTY.

By Amanda E. West // Photography by Robin Holcomb





JOELEEN DAVIS



ON SIX acres tucked into the countryside of Lebanon, Joeleen Davis' garden is a lush oasis. With her hands covered in rich soil and a spirit as generous as the summer sun, she cultivates an abundance of vegetables and herbs. Her raised-bed garden, a tapestry of greens, reds, and yellows, is more than a hobby. When the grocery store shelves were bare during the COVID-19 pandemic, her bountiful garden was her way of nurturing others.

Every week, and sometimes several times a week, Davis would harvest baskets of ripe tomatoes, lettuce, cabbage, crisp cucumbers, hot and sweet peppers, squash, sweet potatoes, and fragrant herbs like thyme, basil, and oregano. Instead of selling her abundance at the community farmers market for a profit, she harvested them to feed five neighboring families. Davis' deliveries were a cornucopia of health and flavor — a testament to her powerful belief in sharing nature's bounty and loving your neighbor as yourself. Her kindness turned strangers into friends, and her garden became a thread that wove the community closer together.

"I grew up food-deprived in low-income housing or apartments as a child," said Davis. "If it weren't for friends, I wouldn't have had lunch many days in school. There's a lot of shame with hunger when there shouldn't be. I watched COVID-19 clear grocery shelves,

and the food chain broke apart by not being able to produce it or deliver it to our stores. Things as simple as flour were unattainable. On the news, I saw lines of cars waiting in the food pantry lines at our local churches — people who, weeks before, would never have dreamed this would be them. And there we were, isolated, with limited access to food here in America. I felt a click inside me that had a drive behind it. I was suddenly focused on backyard gardening.”

Even though she'd suffered a debilitating spinal injury followed by two surgeries, Davis, who is a master gardener, knew that she and her husband, Doug, would step up to ensure others continued to have access to nutritious, fresh foods.

“Sometimes, someone would pick up a bushel of tomatoes and share them with their neighbors. Sometimes, they'd pick up extra plants and share those too. And sometimes, a mom would bring her kids over to pick cherry tomatoes, squash, and okra. Helping isn't always just feeding a family. Helping is also sharing the joy of growing your food. Teaching a family how to plant a seed is just as rewarding to me as handing them a paper bag full of green beans. And to do all of this without shame is just another part of lifting each other up and loving your neighbor.”

Tomatoes are Davis' favorite to grow and give. “The joy on someone's face when you give them a fresh-from-the-vine tomato is such happiness for me. More importantly, it's the possibility of what you can do with a few tomatoes — eat them fresh, roasted, make sauce, chili, pizza, soup, or salsa. You could can them, freeze them, dehydrate them, or even make tomato powder with their skins. I feel tomatoes are the most valuable universal harvest you can grow. Their possibilities are endless.”



DOUG AND JOELEEN DAVIS



Joeleen's husband, Doug, grew up gardening, so it's second nature to him. But she took up gardening in 2010 and transitioned four years ago to raised-bed gardens following her spinal surgeries.

“I had a significant back injury that changed my entire life. I can't do the things I used to do, although my mind thinks otherwise. It's so frustrating. It took a long time for me to reinvent myself. Gardening found me. There's happiness and purpose in that soil. Everyone has challenges. You can either accept them as your story or only as one chapter — I chose one chapter.”

Joeleen and Doug affectionately named their farm “Wine Cottage Gardens.” Here, they teach gardening and host garden tours. They also teach students how to grow their



own gardens through the Wilson County Master Gardeners.

“PBS featured my garden on the ‘Volunteer Gardener’ twice, and I've been a guest on the ‘Live Happy Now’ podcast. But I feel my biggest accomplishment is teaching a new gardener how to grow their own food. Watching them develop their abilities and get excited each time a new leaf emerges, and then wanting to do it all over again the next season — well, that's the legacy I hope to leave.” GN



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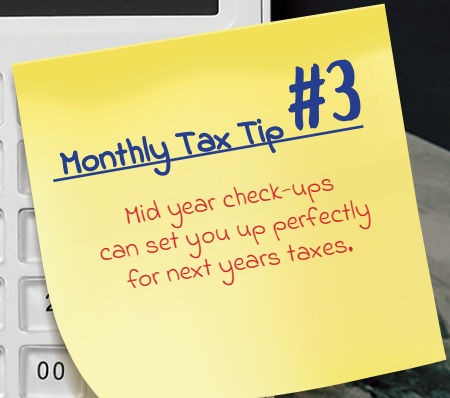
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FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO A ROARING SUCCESS

Poppie's Boutique brings business and community to downtown Lebanon.

By Sara Hook // Photography by Robin Holcomb



DOWNTOWN **LEBANON** is a vibrant place full of food, entertainment, and various locally-owned shops. Among those on the public square is Poppie's Boutique, which recently celebrated 10 years of serving the Lebanon community. From a weekend job under a pop-up tent to a multi-storefront business, Poppie's success has truly been a dream come true for owner Sarah Collins.

It all started in college as Collins used her hobby of fashion and making things to raise money for a mission trip. The trip fell through, but Collins had found a passion for handmade clothing and the community around small fairs and barn sales.

A temporary project became a weekend job — Collins taking her high school car and a 10-by-10 white tent to festivals.

"It was a super humble beginning," Collins said. "That grew from a tent very quickly to a vintage Airstream camper. It was 24 feet long, [and I] spent my entire life savings on it. [I'm] pretty sure my family thought I had lost my mind, but that was my part-time job all through college — [taking] that Airstream camper around and selling clothes out of it."

Not long after graduation, Collins made the decision to open her first storefront with her husband, her mother-in-law, and her sister-in-law as her first employees. The storefront was named "Poppie's"



**Sarah
Collins**



after her grandfather, who Collins said was a fun, personable, loving human and a wise business owner.

"I heard so many stories at his funeral about how he took care of his employees and how he did so many things that went unnoticed that he may never get recognition for," Collins said. "When I thought of the type of business owner that I wanted to be, I thought, 'I can't think of someone better to name it after than him.'"

As a full boutique, Poppie's no longer sells only handmade clothing. Collins works hard to get as many locally handmade items as possible. It is reminiscent of those original days in the Airstream camper and supports other small businesses in the community.

Since that humble beginning, Poppie's has exploded in popularity, with Collins adding another storefront in Cookeville and a thriving online business. None of it would have been possible without the amazing women under her leadership, as well as her husband, friends, and family, who encouraged and believed in her. After all, Collins said, she is only one woman and has only so many capabilities.

"The Lord has consistently sent us amazing people, and I would be a fool to not credit them," Collins said. "They have been so loving and treated my shop with so much care, and they've believed in my dream enough to just be very, very precious stewards of their time with Poppie's. So I would absolutely have nothing if it was not for them."

"WHEN I THOUGHT OF THE TYPE OF BUSINESS OWNER THAT I WANTED TO BE, I THOUGHT, 'I CAN'T THINK OF SOMEONE BETTER TO NAME IT AFTER THAN HIM.'"

- Sarah Collins





Collins said the support of the small business community around Poppie's has been just as much of a blessing and something that a lot of small businesses don't get. Instead of competing, the businesses and boutiques around downtown Lebanon confide in and support each other.

"I think that we've all done a really good job of being comrades and showing the community a reflection of our own individual styles rather than trying to copy each other. So that has been the biggest blessing just to have that support," Collins said. "I just admire all of my neighbors so much. We've all worked so hard — we've all kind of grown up together."

Owning a business may be difficult at times, but Collins said she loves the support the community has given and the friends she has made through the boutique.

"It's just become one of the biggest joys of my life to consider customers like family," Collins said. "At the end of the day, if we weren't reaching out to people and making connections, then it's just selling clothes — and clothes are cute, and we need clothes to wear, but all of this is just extra. It's the community aspect and the relationships that are made that will be a lasting impact."

The culture of downtown Lebanon is certainly impacted by that mentality, and the community will certainly continue to flourish as long as businesses like Poppie's Boutique exist to make those relationships a priority. **GN**



“IT’S JUST BECOME ONE OF
THE BIGGEST JOYS OF MY LIFE
TO CONSIDER CUSTOMERS
LIKE FAMILY.”

- Sarah Collins





The Sherry's Run 5K Run/Walk Event Benefits Sherry's Hope.

The Sherry's Run 5K Run/Walk event is one of the largest community events in Lebanon, TN! The 5K run/walk is a fundraiser that benefits Sherry's Hope, a local nonprofit. Sherry's Hope assists families who live in Wilson County (TN) and surrounding communities and are seeking treatment or in hospice care due to a current cancer diagnosis. The annual fundraiser event is a

communitywide effort as local businesses, churches, and families come together to sponsor, volunteer, and participate in the run. While the event would not be possible without wonderful sponsors and participants, the hearts of volunteers truly make dreams come true at Sherry's Run. Volunteers are rarely in the spotlight, but they play a huge part in making everything come together.

From hanging green bows, working the silent auction tent, selling Sherry's Hope retail, collecting registration forms, picking up trash, and so much more — many hands are needed.

A month before the event, volunteers can be seen hanging up green bows around the race course and the city of Lebanon. Even before that, others donate their time to tie the beautiful bows to "paint the town green!" These green bows act as little reminders that the big race day is approaching. And because of willing volunteers, there are not many places you can go in Lebanon without seeing a wave of green!

Sherry's Run isn't just for those who want some exercise, there are other exciting aspects of the event that draw interest! You can find volunteers working hard underneath the silent auction tent at all times both leading up to and during the run. However, just like the green bows, the work for this part of the event starts months in advance as the silent auction committee seeks out different businesses that might be willing to donate items. So many local





individuals generously give to the cause and provide items for people to bid on. The silent auction has seen a wide variety of items under the tent. From beautiful jewelry, home decor, lawnmowers, power tools, and even a “Men’s Survival Kit” filled with different types of SPAM—the Sherry’s Run Silent Auction is always exciting!

While at Sherry’s Run, visiting the Sherry’s Hope retail tent is a must! There are always fresh new selections of clothing and hats each year! These pieces help spark conversations throughout the year about the organization’s mission. Of course, retail does not sell itself—volunteers help set up, sell the pieces, and organize what is left over.

Runners and walkers alike need to stay hydrated to complete the race! Volunteers can be seen along the course cheering on each individual at water stations and the hospitality tent as participants pass by.

There are so many other little things that one might not consider about putting together a large event

like Sherry’s Run. Who will set up signs for directions? Who will gather trash? Who will set out barriers? Who will take registrations, hand out shirts and timing chips, or take team photos? The list goes on and on! Volunteers do so much behind the scenes to make the event possible!

Volunteers are such a large part of what makes the spirit of Sherry’s Run so unique. Many volunteers use vacation days at their everyday jobs to come and work the days leading up to the event. Sherry’s Hope Executive Board Member and Sherry’s Run Race Director, Scott Jasper shares, “The hearts of our volunteers are so special. They all share a common goal: to positively impact families in our community who are affected by cancer. And because of that goal, all hearts are united to get things done each year!” **Whether you volunteer, sponsor, or participate in the run, you make a difference! The 21st annual Sherry’s Run 5K Run/Walk will take place on Sept. 14, 2024 at 8 a.m. GN**

For more information about volunteering, you can reach out to volunteer@sherryrun.org.

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To register to participate in Sherry’s Run, visit www.sherrysrun.org.

Rooted in values, reaching for progress

Leslie Copeland harvests success.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Emily Kent

GROWING UP on a farm teaches you a lot about life — hard work, commitment, respect, and the resilience to get back up when you fall. For Leslie Copeland, these lessons have profoundly shaped her life and career, making her a true champion. Copeland's childhood on her family farm instilled the values that would later become the cornerstone of her success.

"I am the oldest of four children, which meant I was the leader in my mind, and my siblings simply thought I was bossy," she recalled.

She refined her leadership skills early on, managing sibling disputes and ensuring they completed their chores efficiently.

Little did Copeland know that joining 4-H in the fourth grade would be a turning point. Through these organizations, she developed responsibility, accountability, and leadership skills that would prove valuable in supporting her family, community, and the environment. From public speaking and demonstration contests to parliamentary procedure and 4-H Congress, Copeland absorbed abundant knowledge that she continues to use daily.

One significant challenge Copeland faced was halter-breaking her first market lamb. He got twisted in the lead while tied to the fence and didn't survive the incident. This painful experience taught her about the inevitability of risk and failure.

"There were other accidents and challenges throughout the years. Eventually, I recognized things out of your control will happen. For farmers and business owners, navigating risk is a

daily task, whether it's the weather, sickness or disease, market fluctuations, competition, or equipment breaking."

With enough time passing by and plenty of reassurance from her parents, eventually, she realized that it wasn't her fault but rather an unforeseen accident and risk. This level of understanding has been crucial in her business endeavors, helping her anticipate risks and develop contingency plans.

Copeland's triumphs are as vivid as her challenges. Winning showmanship classes with her cattle and sheep stands out. In livestock shows, the judge selects the winner based on the animal's structure for breeding stock and composition and structure for market stock. However, showmanship is different. It's about the showman's skills — how well they trained and presented the stock. These victories validated her years of hard work, focus, and dedication and showed her the importance of focus and perseverance in achieving desired outcomes.

Today, Copeland balances her professional life with her love for the farm.

"My dad, at age 76, is in better shape than most of us — we can thank his farming lifestyle for this," she said proudly.

Copeland, her husband, and their son live on the nearly 500-acre farm. They tend to their 5 acres and help with various farm tasks. What she looks forward to most is getting outside and embracing the earth with their hands.

Farm life isn't always easy. It comes with moments of physical and mental difficulty. But, despite the challenges, the farm remains a source of therapy and fulfillment for Copeland. The

Ashby family, from whom Copeland hails, has deep roots in their land, with a legacy that stretches back to the early 1800s. Her third great-grandfather landed in Mimosa in the early 1800s, and her great-grandfather built the house at 165 Mimosa in 1912. This rich history fuels her commitment to continuing the farming tradition for future generations.

“Our family roots are deep in this land. My sisters, brother, and I — in some form or fashion — plan to carry on the farming tradition for our children and grandchildren.”

Copeland’s professional journey has been equally impressive. She currently serves on the American Red Cross Heart of Tennessee board. In addition to Ascend’s strategic marketing and business development, she also leads philanthropic and community efforts, working with partners like Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee and The Nature Conservancy of Tennessee.

“At Ascend, we have a strong belief that our success as a credit union is tied to the success of our members and our community,” she emphasized.

Copeland sees exciting changes in Tennessee’s agriculture. She predicts that farmers will use new technologies to grow crops more efficiently and protect the environment. She believes in the importance of farmers adapting to changes and being open to agritourism opportunities while also relishing the wonderful produce they provide to the community.

Throughout her career, Copeland has worked with many excellent leaders and learned valuable lessons from them. Through their example, Copeland understands the impact of assembling solid teams and creating a culture of integrity, trust, respect, and teamwork. Copeland’s professional dream is to continue



Leslie Copeland

making a positive impact at Ascend while advancing community efforts that improve the lives of Middle Tennesseans.

“It’s about finding fulfillment in family and farm life, nurturing those connections, and passing down the legacy of stewardship to future generations,” she said.

Copeland epitomizes dedication, hard work, and community. Her

inspiring journey from the farm to leadership positions in business and philanthropy showcases the values she holds dear. She is a dedicated champion committed to making a positive impact in all areas of her life. **GN**

Ascend Federal Credit Union, the largest credit union in Middle Tennessee, opened its location in Lebanon in January 2023.

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Sake Japanese Grill offers delicious dishes and warm hospitality.

A FRIEND AND I recently visited a local favorite in Lebanon, Sake Japanese Grill, for the first time. The menu features hibachi, teriyaki, sushi, and various Japanese dishes. It has a cozy atmosphere and friendly staff. We were seated quickly and greeted by Leah.

Lunch started with a California sushi roll and crab wontons. The sushi was well presented, with an ample amount of ginger on the side. The wontons were crispy, and the cream cheese and crab mixture was flavorful, especially dipped in the delicious sweet and sour sauce. I had requested to leave off any sesame seeds or roe, and the kitchen staff honored my request.

For our main courses, I opted for the teriyaki salmon. The chef prepared it just the way I liked it, with a savory teriyaki

glaze that was rich but not too overpowering. It was served with a side of rice that paired well with the dish. My guest ordered the Samurai, a combination of chicken, steak, scallops, and shrimp. The meal was tasty, but she especially liked the shrimp. It was a large portion with the right blend of seasonings.

Throughout our meal, Leah was exceptional in her service. We enjoyed sweet tea and Coke Zero, and Leah's attentiveness ensured we never had to ask for a refill. Overall, Sake exceeded our expectations. The food was delicious, the service was excellent, and the ambiance was perfect for a relaxed and enjoyable meal. I highly recommend Sake to anyone looking for a great dining experience. It's a place where you can enjoy high-quality food and excellent service at affordable prices. **GN**



GOOD NEWS IS COMING TO DINNER!

We will feature a local food critic's thoughts as they dine in Lebanon. This month Krys Midgett visited Sake Japanese Grill.

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Marc Aquila



PUT THE PEDAL TO THE METAL.



Marc Aquila's FXPedals is a paradise for guitar and bass enthusiasts.

By Richard Klin
Photography by Larry McCormack

MARC AQUILA owns and operates FXPedals in Lebanon. Almost its entire stock is devoted to guitar and bass effect pedals, making it a very unusual endeavor. Pedals are generally considered accessories, but at FXPedals, the pedal is the store's main feature. It is one of the few stores in the country to have such a specific focus.

Guitar and bass effect pedals are the punctuation of rock 'n' roll — an integral part of music-making. The small but mighty pedal has an outsized significance in modern music. It developed in lockstep with the emergence of rock 'n' roll, and the pedal expanded and grew as the

music grew. The varieties and uses of the pedal are endless, and the guitarists who utilize the pedal run the gamut of style, genre, and era. And there is actually a film — 2021's "The Pedal Movie" — explicitly devoted to the pedal's history.



Aquila is a relatively recent transplant from Connecticut, where he performed keyboard duties in several bands. He makes the wry distinction that he never considered himself a musician — "I consider myself a guy who plays music!" He also owns Crescendo Music in Darien (which is still in operation).

FXPedals' clientele ranges from beginners to seasoned musicians.

MUSIC IS LIFE
THAT'S WHY
OUR HEARTS HAVE BEATS.





Music students and their teachers often seek specific effects, like distortion or delay pedals. Aquila is available to provide guidance or, if guidance isn't needed, to enhance what the customer already knows.

FXPedals has a vast array of pedals — overdrive, distortion, reverb, chorus, and many more. There is a Jimi Hendrix wah pedal that truly evokes the tones of the late, great guitar master. The store offers a whole gamut of effects that one could choose to add. Aquila understands full well that this can be a little daunting for the beginner.



“
I LOVE TO TALK TO
PEOPLE, AND THEY
LOVE TO TALK WITH
ME. IT’S A LOT
OF FUN.
Marc Aquila

“If they’re just starting out,” he observed. “There are some basics you should probably have to get going. To start out, I would recommend an overdrive pedal, maybe a delay pedal or a reverb pedal — just to get going. And then you could always add from there.” FXPedals has inexpensive items for entry-level students and continues up the professional line.

Once that is taken care of, Aquila asks what a customer is specifically looking to get, sound-wise. Although he spreads the word about his business via Facebook, Instagram, his website, and the cloud, word of mouth among the music community has proven to be his best form of advertising.

FXPedals also buys and trades and offers pedal and electronic repairs and pedal modifications.

Lebanon has been a welcome change. For one, he has found Tennessee more receptive to small businesses than Connecticut. He has intriguingly re-created the same dynamic he had in Connecticut. Crescendo Music was in proximity to New

York City, and his client base drew from that huge metropolitan center. Lebanon is in proximity to Nashville — Music City.

The welcome change has much more to do with an improved economic climate. “I love it here,” Aquila said. He welcomes the escape from the fast pace of the Northeast and has discovered that people in Tennessee want to talk and tell you their story. “I just need to learn to slow down a little bit more. I love to talk to people, and they love to talk with me. It’s a lot of fun.” He has the constant opportunity to meet new people and get to know “this better way of life.”

The passion for playing music is often described as a fever or something you can’t shake off. “It’s kind of like a disease!” Marc Aquila echoes. “Because once you start, you don’t stop!”

“Rockin’ Pneumonia and the Boogie Woogie Flu” comes to mind — this is not a bad sort of disease to have. Those who catch it will find themselves a part of a large, equally infected population. GN

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Macieo Gaines

GOING WITH THE FLOW

Macieo Gaines is a coach
for all seasons.

By Richard J. Klin
Photography by Robin Holcomb

MACIEO GAINES has had a sports-filled life. At the age of 4, Gaines began playing softball with 6-year-olds. At 7, he added football and basketball to his repertoire, eventually narrowing his focus to basketball.

That love for basketball grew and grew. After making the all-state team as a high school senior, he took the next natural step of coaching and found that he enjoyed being able to teach basketball. He began coaching at a junior high school and then — at 19 — coached in high school, where he was not significantly older than some of the students. This made for some sticky

moments, but Gaines “put his foot on the pedal” and never looked back.

Today, Macieo Gaines coaches basketball at Wilson Central High and girl’s softball for kids in the 6 to 11 range. The word “flow” comes up a great deal when Gaines discusses his coaching. A coach has to wear many hats — taskmaster, motivator, role model, and disciplinarian, to name a few. Coaching high school basketball and girl’s softball requires some very different approaches. His overall approach — his “flow” — is the same for all ages. His first rule is always to work hard, and his second and most important rule is always to have fun.







Having fun is often not synonymous with a coach's approach. Gaines wants his athletes to win, but he has also found that, ultimately, "just winning" gets him nowhere. To him, sports are an important way to learn and become a better person.

"If I'm winning, but I'm not having fun, I don't want to do it. I've won and lost, but the games I remember most are the games where I had fun. I can't tell you the score, but I can tell you I had fun. I want the players to have fun because, at the end of the day, these are memories. You can play the rest of your life, but you have to enjoy what you're doing to want to continue doing it."

He has discovered that fun and the enjoyment of play are the best motivators. And they're conducive to winning. He also looks for that moment of connection with the player, which he does right away. He can detect even the most basic connection and then know he and the player are on the same page.

"The moment I know you got it, I can be myself, you can be yourself, and everything flows."

Gaines has also struggled with some severe issues. At the shockingly young age of 26, he experienced a heart attack. One day, he was at his parents' house. The next moment, he was picked off the floor and rushed to the hospital. Most people have seen TV dramas with patients hooked up to an electrocardiogram (EKG). For Gaines, it became all too real — he was the patient hooked up to the EKG, not knowing what had happened to him.

The diagnosis was pericarditis, which the American Heart Association defines as an inflammation of the pericardium, a sac-like structure surrounding the heart and ensuring its proper functioning. This happened when he was mid-season into his first full year as a coach. The heart attack was difficult to deal with. Even harder, he related, was changing who he was during the long road to recovery. It was vital that he follow the doctor's orders, which meant not doing many of the things he'd taken for granted. As a coach, he never sat down. Now, he had to.

"Anybody who's seen me coach knows that I get very vocal."



Now, he couldn't be so vocal.

"I had to have somebody yell stuff for me!"

Not surprisingly, he fully recovered, although he must always be mindful of his existing health condition. He has gained a tremendous amount of knowledge from playing, coaching, and just learning from different people.

Everything is an ongoing process. Ma-cieo Gaines is always reaching and growing.

"I'm always looking for ways not just to make myself a better coach," he concluded. "But to be a better role model and help people succeed in every way."

It all comes back to the idea of "flow." **GN**

Ronnie Kelley

DREAMING TO SERVE

Ronnie Kelley helps make
a difference in Lebanon.

By **Gabriel Grant Huff**
Photography by **Larry McCormack**

HELPING THE young and lost is what one man in Lebanon was inspired to do all his life.

Ronnie D. Kelley moved to Lebanon from Hartsville in the fourth grade. He grew up in the Wilson County School District and graduated from high school in 1973. He chose to spend his life with Gail Kelley, having been together for 49 years. They have three children — Angela, Timothy, and Titus — and six grandchildren.

In 1987, he began working at Burchett Ford, later re-named Bates Ford. The 68-year-old has been working there for 37 years now.



An accident in 1977 changed everything for Kelley. Some people asked him for a ride. Something told him not to oblige, but he concurred anyway. The next thing Kelley knew, he had crashed into a tree and became hospitalized. Once finally released from the hospital, he was in a body cast for three months before receiving a leg cast. Since then, he has been committed to listening to the Holy Spirit.

“I hate to have to go through something like that to make something happen,” Kelley said.

The Holy Spirit is now leading Kelley to live a life of service, changing lives in his community. He



“
“WE [HAVE] TO BE PATIENT. WE [HAVE] GOTTA UNDERSTAND THAT WE WERE YOUNG ONCE.
Ronnie Kelley



is affiliated with the Wilson County Civic League, a nonprofit organization working to improve social conditions by promoting programs that enhance self-worth and dignity, placing an emphasis on young people. Problems tackled — through education, seminars, workshops, recreation, and regular tutoring programs — include drug abuse, teen pregnancy, violence, and AIDS. Kelley said at one point, the organization built about 23 apartments with a grant.

In 1999, Kelley graduated from Leadership Wilson, an organization dedicated to developing community leaders. He serves as a board member for the Lebanon Housing Authority to help provide safe and affordable housing. Kelley helps the hungry at Joseph’s Storehouse Food Ministry, shares the Word of God with inmates at Wilson County’s Jail Ministry, and supports his city at the Wilson County Election Commission. He also assisted in starting a community help center. Adding to his resume is his role as a deacon at First Baptist Church, nearly 20 miles away in Gallatin.

Because Kelley “doesn’t have enough to do,” he is also on the board of Lebanon Youth Baseball, a Little League club. He said many kids cannot afford to play travel ball, which is where the club comes in.

“We make sure those kids that play baseball don’t have to pay anything, and this year, we [also] took on softball. So we kind of coordinate both of those together, [and] we have a lot more kids playing ball,” Kelley said.

Bates Ford often donates to Wilson County Civic League and is mirroring his heart and endeavors. The dealership also supports Joseph’s Storehouse.

When Kelley is not looking out for the youth, he likes to study the Bible, spend time with family, and watch the Tennessee Titans.

In his endeavor, some of Kelley’s greatest difficulties are striving to help those who fail to help themselves.

“We [have] to be patient,” Kelley said. “We [have] gotta understand that we were young once.”

That endeavor continues in church. “Right now, we’re trying to talk to young people,” Kelley said. “We’re trying to show them and have people come and talk with them and try to keep them out of trouble. We want to keep them on the straight and narrow and to do that, [you’ve] gotta stay with them all the time. First, [we’ve] gotta build relationships. Once we build a relationship, we can work with them.”





His grandfather and aunt taught him to do right by others and make responsible choices. Listening to those older and wiser was key to Kelley's success in life.

"I learned from the older people, and I cherished that," Kelley said. "They believed in you and [would] help you. A lot of the older people back then [would] give you some advice, and if you followed their advice, [you'd] be okay. But if you [didn't] try to do what they [said], they wouldn't have much to do with you."

Listening is what led him to Bates Ford, after all. Before joining the deal-

ership, Kelley had worked at a used car lot. One day, a man named James Pope approached him.

"He said, 'I've been watching you. You need to be at a new dealership,'" Kelley recalled.

The young Kelley said he did not think it would work out, but he listened and applied to work at Burchett Ford.

"I went in," Kelley said. "I did exactly what he told me to do."

Long story short: Burchett Ford hired Kelley, helping to set him up for a life of service. **GN**

Doing Dishes With Friends - June 14



Photography by Hannah Woodcock

On Friday, June 14, Imagine That Art Studio held its Doing Dishes With Friends wet clay class at 1342 W. Main St., Suite B, in Lebanon. Owner Heather Junkin led the class. Participants got to roll out their own clay, create their shape, and add texture and “antiquing.” After the class, dishes were dried, glazed, and fired in the kiln. The dishes will be ready to pick up in two to three weeks. The class is designed for all ages. The studio will hold two more Doing Dishes With Friends classes on July 13. It also offers ceramic painting, DIY canvas and mosaics classes, and parties and to-go options.



1. Sara McDonald 2. Brandy Turner 3. Caroline and Kim Hendrick 4. Paige Baltz and Lyla Heartman

River The Dog - June 20



Photography by Hannah Woodcock

On Thursday, June 20, River, the blind dog, and his family visited the Lebanon-Wilson County Public Library for their summer series — Adventure Begins at Your Library. River soaked up all the love while his mom, Bethany Van Meter, told his heartwarming story and read her books, “I See With My Heart,” “River Has a Purpose and So Do You,” and “I Got a Cat for Christmas.” Afterward, the engaged audience got to ask questions, River did some tricks, and everyone got to pet him. Books and merchandise were for sale, with a portion going toward training therapy dogs.



1. River and Josh Van Meter

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