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August 2024

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Year**

**Brenda
Baker**

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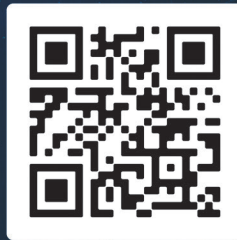


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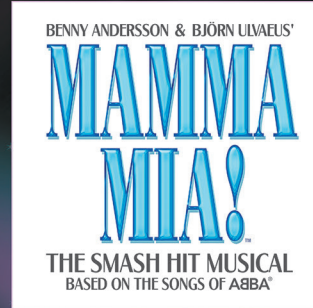
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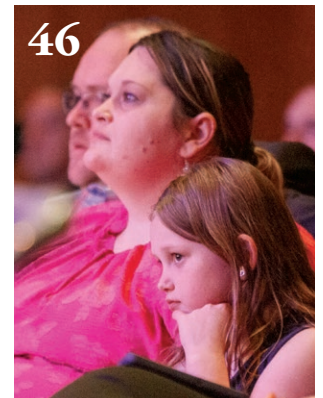
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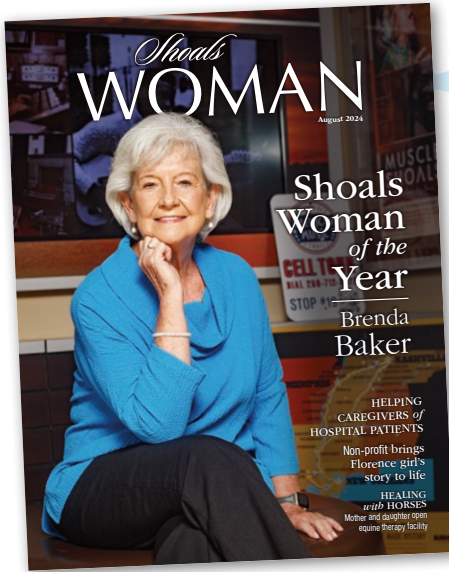
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ON the COVER



Photograph by Dan Busey

Brenda Baker has built such strong bonds with children she has advocated for that to this day she gets updates on their well-being and even a photo or two from their adoptive parents.

Those bonds as a court appointed special advocate (CASA) are what have kept Baker a volunteer for almost 10 years.

“With CASA, you can make a difference,” she told us.

And there is no denying she’s done just that for so many children.

“...We really dig in and learn about that child and make them feel comfortable with us,” she said. “I had one teenager that when I first met her, she wouldn’t hold her head up. She was very distant and didn’t want to say anything. By the end of that case, she was bubbly. She was not wearing black clothes anymore. It’s just really rewarding to see how these children change and blossom.”

Her service to the community, including several children across the Shoals is just one reason why she is the 2024 Shoals Woman of the Year.

Each year, the selection process gets more difficult when Shoals Woman of the Year nominations are whittled down to the final five. It becomes obvious how many wonderful, strong women we have living right here in the Shoals. They excel above and beyond the responsibilities implied in their career title or business name.

We are proud and humbled to again share with you the profiles of five of the finest, not just the finalists, who embody a giving and generous character which makes the Shoals the best place to live.

All of these women have had to endure challenges of one type or another, but they all persevered and have made their mark.

We are so happy to be able to shine a spotlight on these incredible women of the Shoals.

They all have worked so hard to lift others up.

Now, it’s our turn to lift them up.

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executive editor
GARY MAITLAND

city editor
KEVIN TAYLOR

graphics technician
T.J. HILDRETH

contributing writers
CHELSEA RETHERFORD
KEVIN TAYLOR

contributing photographers
IVY ROSE BALL
DAN BUSEY

advertising director
RENITA JIMMAR-HALL

page designer/prepress manager
LIN REYNOLDS

advertising graphic artists
ANDREA GRAY
T.J. HILDRETH
RUSSELL RODEN
RITA STRICKLIN

retail and classified
HOLT BAYLES
SHARON GOENS
KIM ROBERTS

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BRENDA BAKER

builds a longstanding trust while advocating for children

by KEVIN TAYLOR

Photos by DAN BUSEY

Baker spends countless hours, days, weeks and even years with a child.

She built relationships with families and the children she encountered while on those trips.

But a week or two weeks just didn't seem like enough for Baker, and a friend of hers saw that.

Jan Ingle suggested that Baker become involved with CASA (court appointed special advocates).

Baker said she needed some time to think about it and find out more about it.

She also thought about the children she had brief interactions with while on those mission trips.

"You may be there a week or two and then you leave them," she said. "So, you can't advocate for them. CASA is something that gives you the chance to stay with that child through the whole process.

"You get to know that child. You get to love on that child and advocate for them."

And during the process Baker has developed deep connections with the children she has advocated for since 2015.

"With CASA, you can make a difference," she said.

Heading into her tenth year as a CASA volunteer, Baker certainly has made a difference for the children she has advocated for over the years. Those deep bonds with those children may never be broken thanks to Baker.

Her diligent work as a volunteer is sometimes a thankless one.

This time, Baker deserves the thanks and praise for standing up for children across the Shoals. That's why she is the 2024 Shoals Woman of the Year.

Baker spends countless hours, days, weeks and even years. One of her cases lasted three years, which allowed her to develop a deep connection with the children.

"The adoptive mother still sends me pictures of the [four] children so that I know how they are all doing," Baker said. "...With CASA, you can make a difference."

Since 2015, Baker has worked about 30 cases.

"Every child has a different story, but one thing I have found out is even though the child's story may be

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WOMAN OF
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Brenda Baker





different, their parents' story is almost always the same," she said. "Those parents may have been neglected or abused whether it's mentally, physically or sexually. It makes you stop and think if you could get those parents healed from their past traumas, then they may have a better chance getting their children back. We try everything we can to get those children back to their parents first, but so many times that doesn't happen."

And in many cases, those children go to foster parents.

"There aren't very many foster parents in this area – not nearly enough," she said. "At the end of last year, there were 99 children – just in Lauderdale County – in foster care."

Baker said the last report she saw was there were 389 children in the tri-county area (Lauderdale, Colbert and Franklin counties) that were in need of a CASA volunteer. She said there are 26 volunteers in Lauderdale County.

"That's not nearly enough to take care of the children," she said. "We take one case at a time so that way we can totally devote our time to that one case."

"...We really dig in and learn about that child and make them feel comfortable with us. I had one teenager that when I first met her, she wouldn't hold her head up. She was very distant and didn't want to say anything. By the end of that case, she was bubbly. She was not wearing black clothes anymore. It's just really rewarding to see how these children change and blossom."

Baker's love of children goes beyond being a CASA volunteer.

For the last four years, she also has been a board member with the Friends of the Library for the Florence-Lauderdale Public Library.

About two years ago the café was removed from the bookstore and turned into a children's area.

"They can easily reach a book there and sit on the bench and just enjoy being a child," Baker said. "A few weeks ago, four little girls walked by with their mother and each had a book under their arms. It made me think that a lot of the kids I deal with [through CASA] that they may never know the joy of skipping and hopping around and just being a kid."

So, what does it mean to be Shoals Woman of the Year?

"It would shine that light and [raise] awareness to the people out there that are looking for something -- looking for that passion," she said. "It would be worth it all to me if it would just shine the light of awareness, of the need out there, because it's not about me. It's about the needs of the children."





ANGEL MALONE

fights to build children back up

by KEVIN TAYLOR
Photos by DAN BUSEY

Angel Malone isn't someone who seeks attention or admiration, and she likes it that way.

When her husband acted on a vision to mentor and lift up youth who were not given the same opportunities as their peers, Angel sat in the back of a room "camouflaged."

"I didn't want to be seen, pointed out or anything," she said. "...I remember Dewayne giving the children he spoke to a phone number to text so they could ask questions ... a lot of personal questions and they remained anonymous."

Angel told her husband that she wanted to become a part of the team.

Soon thereafter, a board was formed and the Rescue Me Project was granted non-profit status with an office in Muscle Shoals.

Each child who came into the program was assigned a mentor, including Angel.

"I had a young female, so we would go get our nails done. We would go shopping. We would do makeup and just girly things," she said. "I even invited her into our home and I would give her cooking lessons. And I'm passionate about cooking."

A seemingly unbreakable bond had been formed by Angel with her mentee.

The Rescue Me Project soon grew from the 40 children it started with. The non-profit had

outgrown the Muscle Shoals office and a former school building in Sheffield became available.

Now, the non-profit has plenty of room to accommodate about 200 children and offer various classes from STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) to home economics. The building has a barber shop, weight-training facility and a nail tech area.

Through all the classes and activities, the goal of the non-profit is to build the children up to enrich them educationally and build their self-esteem so that they aspire for so much more.

As the non-profit began to grow, Angel was hit with a significant challenge in 2018.

She was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, which is a cancer that attacks bone marrow.

"We had thought about closing the organization so that we can take care of me and focus on healing," she said. "That was my husband's first priority. Then, I remember our team coming together and saying no, we worked so hard. You go and take care of your wife and we will run the organization."

"And our team is phenomenal. They did an amazing job we. The only time we knew of anything was going on is if we stopped by. They didn't want to bother us or anything."

Angel did about 16 weeks of chemotherapy and received a stem

cell transplant.

She admits there were times that she just wanted to throw her hands up and quit, but she didn't.

"My husband, my children and my family -- I had an amazing supportive system. They all made sure I was never alone, even when the children went to school and Dewayne was at work my mom was there. My sisters were there. My father was there as well as Dewayne's parents. So, just knowing that I had a family to fight for and that was fighting with me. That kept me going."

Her fighting spirit also spills over to the Rescue Me Project.

"Knowing that we are changing lives, knowing that we are here for these children -- that drives me," she said. "Some are motherless and some are fatherless, and knowing that we are the closest thing to a parent and that we can give them the love and nourishment they need."

"We have, what I call seasoned mentees. They are the ones that started with us and have graduated, is either in college or has even graduated college. Seeing them, how they're prospering in life now and how they're set up for success. That just gives me the drive to keep going."

And she continues to fight not only for herself and her family, but every child who comes to the Rescue Me Project.





CAROL BEBERNISS relishes in being part of an army

by KEVIN TAYLOR
Photos by DAN BUSEY

It wasn't long after Carol Beberniss had relocated to the Shoals that she was invited by one of her friends to take part in the Salvation Army Angel Tree distribution.

There, she met a group of women – the Salvation Army Women's Auxiliary – who she quickly connected with and learned more about what the group did.

"I met this just wonderful bunch of women there and they were all so happy and giving and working so hard to make this happen. And I thought this is something I think I could like," she recalled.

A few months later, her friend called her about the auxiliary's Empty Bowls luncheon.

After an afternoon with the same group of women, Beberniss was hooked.

She was part of the group.

That was almost 15 years ago, and Beberniss is a mainstay with the auxiliary.

Volunteering was second nature to Beberniss.

It started in a small Texas town where she used to live where she volunteered for the Interfaith Caring Center. There, she volunteered a couple days a week and interviewed people who were seeking help with their power bills and other utilities.

After moving to the Shoals, Beberniss said seeing the work the auxiliary does to help families was what kept the fire burning to help others.

"You really see what you're doing and you can see in their faces when you say to this grandma that lives off Social Security and got two kids, she's taking care of. 'Don't worry. We got Christmas for you.' You can just see the weight off their shoulders when they realize somebody's here to help," she said.

"Then raising the money for the food with the empty bowls and the things we do like that. I guess immediate gratification is what you get when you know it's going to help others."

Beberniss said the camaraderie among the women she works with is second to none.

"We are an army," she said. "It is phenomenal to see us women get together and say this is our goal and we are going to do it, this, this and this ... It takes an army to do what we do to put on empty bowls. It takes an army to do Christmas and it just makes me happy to see all these women working together to help the community."

Beberniss said she was stunned to learn she was a finalist for Shoals Woman of the Year.

"When [they] called, I saw the TimesDaily and I thought they wanted me to renew my subscription," she laughed. "I was in the middle of something at the time of the call, so I couldn't answer. But in the back of my mind I said to myself, 'I need to return that call.' When they told me, I was stunned.

"I mean Mercy Winters won it years ago, and there's nothing like Hurricane Mercy. I mean, that woman does 55 different things for different charities. So, I mean, to be in that category, I was absolutely stunned."





DENISE WILLINGHAM

never gives up in times of trouble

by KEVIN TAYLOR
Photos by DAN BUSEY

June 2009 is a date that Denise Willingham will never forget.

She had learned that her son Jon had been in a fatal car crash.

Family, friends and members of her church were there to show respect and compassion for the Willingham family.

After Jon was laid to rest, Denise sat down to write thank you notes to all of those who supported her and the family in one way or another.

A Bible verse -- 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 -- came to mind.

"It says we often suffer, but we're never crushed," she said. "Even when we don't know what to do, we never give up in times of trouble. God is with us, and when we're knocked down, we get up again. So, that's been my verse the last 15 years."

Willingham and a group of women brainstormed wanting to do something in Jon's memory.

So, they started Run 2 the Cross.

The inaugural year, the run raised about \$6,000 and that money went toward the church's toy and coat giveaway.

But Willingham and the ladies wanted to do more.

They had been on mission trips all over from Haiti to Africa.

The run was moved to October, which was Jon's birth month, and the money which was raised was used to build a well in Africa. Since then, more than a dozen wells have been dug to serve almost 3,000 people in Africa.

The run has also helped children in Haiti and Africa receive an education. In addition, the run has afforded an outdoor basketball court as well as two new homes at Emmaus House in Haiti.

The proceeds aid people across the Shoals, too. Donations from the run have gone to St. Jude, Room in the Inn, Isaiah's Call, Safe Place, the Chosen Ministry, Mission Sunday and the Youth Ranch.

Willingham also started an addiction recovery scholarship program from the proceeds from the run.

"We have started helping people get the help they needed through rehab," she said. "So far, we've sent over 100 men and women to rehab."

So where does Willingham's want to help others come from?

"We had a special needs brother, so we always were very aware of his needs," she said.

Willingham also taught at Mars Hill Bible School for 35 year and was a regular participant in the Special Olympics.

Outside of school Willingham also gave swimming lessons for 30-plus years.

"I've just always wanted to help people," she said. "...I just want to love God and love others."





ROSE MICHAEL has grown comfortable being uncomfortable

by KEVIN TAYLOR
Photos by DAN BUSEY

Rose Michael takes comfort in being uncomfortable.

When she learned that she was a finalist for Shoals Woman of the Year, she said it made her feel uncomfortable.

She said that she felt very humbled and even questioned why she was nominated and then named a finalist.

She later became comfortable with being uncomfortable thanks to a sermon.

"[The pastor] talked about being uncomfortable," she said. "He said we should be comfortable with being uncomfortable because if you get too comfortable, you're not challenged."

Michael has been challenged for sure.

The educator of 25 years had her world turned upside down when her husband was diagnosed with cancer in 2016.

"He was a healthy guy who ran every day, but then he had some stomach issues," she said. "He went to get a colonoscopy and found out that he had colorectal cancer. He fought it gallantly and passed away on June 7, 2020.

"Between those moments from 2016 to 2020 and then afterward, people just embraced us with so much kindness and service, and

not just little things. ... People were thinking enough of me and him, that I found myself wanting to pay it forward."

After her husband passed, Rose became more involved within her church. The drive to help others was always there, she said.

So where did her servant's heart come from?

"My parents planted the seed of giving back and put that in us that you need to do something, be a good person," she said. "My faith is my anchor. My faith taught me that I was going to be OK, even if it didn't look OK. My faith told me, 'girl, you're gonna be fine.'"

She became involved with the miracle league for adults with disabilities. She would go and get involved and push one of the adults in a wheelchair around the field and laugh.

Then she later started visiting assisted living centers because she has always had a love for the elderly and for adults with disabilities.

"I just go to an assisted living facility and randomly take a plant and leave it for someone who I don't know," she said. "I would put it in their room to try to make their day better. I still do it now."

When Michael found out that she

was nominated for Shoals Woman of the Year, she was uncomfortable with the nomination.

She knew of previous people who had been nominated and won. She described them as "powerful women."

"I'm not that person, but I can be a foot soldier," she said. "I can get myself up and be in a good place professionally and personally and spiritually in my life right now. In 2024, I am in a good place in my life. A long time ago, I didn't know if I was going to get there. I knew being a widow at a younger age was a hard title for me. But I'm now discovering who I am, and I like it."

Michael has grown comfortable being uncomfortable.





Do you know a woman who is making a positive impact in our community? We want to meet her, as we celebrate Shoals Woman of the YEAR 2025!

**This is your chance to nominate the next Shoals Woman of the Year.
All nominations must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. April 23, 2025.**

Nomination Guidelines:

- In a 200-300 word summary tell us your nominee's story and specifically how it relates to your nominee being selected for Shoals Woman of the YEAR along with how she has given back to the community including her involvement in the Organization representing courage, determination, heritage, heroism, initiative and vision. (Please detail on a separate sheet)
- Please start with a clear, concise and specific opening statement about why your nominee is deserving of the award.
- Nominee Name/Address/Phone/Email
- Nominated by Name/Contact Phone
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For more information on Shoals Woman of the Year nominations or the event, please contact Mara Beth Cravens at 256-740-5811 (marabeth.cravens@timesdaily.com) or Renita Jimmar at 256-740-5815 (renita.jimmar@timesdaily.com).



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KERRIGAN CASEY: *Art for social activism*



Kerrigan Casey with her piece "The Death House is No House" at "The Art of Resistance" exhibit at the Tennessee Valley Museum of Art in Tusculum. The piece is a compilation of poetry written by death row inmates.

Kerrigan Casey feels she's always had a creative spirit, but more recently, she's been using her artistic talents to create change, beginning in her Shoals hometown.

"I've been practicing for a long time in Florence, and I initially started with spoken word poetry," Casey said. "I would do small events, the Handy Fest and things like that. After I graduated from high school in 2014, I started looking for more ways to express myself."

Casey said she picked up painting shortly after high school and developed her style, which was influenced by urban African expressionism.

"I wanted to see more Black art, so that's what I made," she said, adding that her artistic style and even her skills in new mediums are continuing to grow.

Since she recently stepped in as lead artist of the exhibit "The Art of the Resistance," Casey said her artwork has become more socially engaging and has expanded beyond paint on canvas to include some sculptures as well.

"I'm just navigating it the best way I can," Casey said. "I think that's part of my story, period. I started out with spoken word, and I'm interested in art and creating. It's not going to be one thing. I would do acting too, if I could."

Soon after Casey had picked up the paintbrush for the first time, she had earned a reputation around Florence for

her portraiture, which is how she met Katie Owens-Murphy, an associate professor of English at the University of North Alabama who also serves as the Alabama coordinator for the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program.

"I've worked with people in prison for more than 10 years now, so I know that people are more than the worst thing they've ever done," Owens-Murphy said.

Owens-Murphy, who grew up in Buffalo, New York — a state that performed its last execution in 1963 and outright abolished the death penalty in 2004 — said she was shocked to learn about Alabama's capital punishment practices after moving to the Shoals.

"It was really jarring," she said. "It was in the media all the time, yet nobody was talking about it."

Before the two women decided to put together an exhibit that would encourage thoughtful conversation on the subject, Owens-Murphy and Casey began to do their own research, which led to the beginning of the Alabama Death Row Archive inside UNA's Collier Library in 2019.

Casey said she joined the cause because she has high personal stakes when it comes to discourse surrounding Alabama's governing policies. Her mother, Mia Roy, was incarcerated when Casey was a young girl.

"She is a felon because she didn't tell on someone," Casey said.

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Kerrigan Casey with her piece "Nate" at "The Art of Resistance" exhibit at the Tennessee Valley Museum of Art in Tusculum.

"It wasn't because she actually committed a crime. I mean, I guess it's a crime, but that's what happened. I don't know how to talk about it other than, perhaps she was a product of her environment. Maybe I took a different road in not choosing to be comfortable in dysfunction."

Because Casey wasn't comfortable with the status quo, she decided to join Owens-Murphy's efforts in curating documents related to the history and ongoing practice of capital punishment in Alabama.

Casey and Owens-Murphy eventually teamed up with Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty, a non-profit founded and run by Alabama death row inmates. The two women began conducting interviews with inmates and their families to put together audio and visual files that closer examine state policies on sentencing.

"I really wanted to draw traffic to first-hand accounts and archival documents that show how capital punishment is practiced in Alabama," Owens-Murphy said.

"But it's a digital archive for researchers, and it doesn't draw a lot of traffic. So, I was trying to think about ways in which we could expand the archive into the realm of art, and then we came across this grant opportunity through the National Performance Network."

Casey said she knew she was onboard immediately.

"I would say that art is a great way to express yourself, your ideas, and how you view the world," she said. "It's kind of a responsibility that you have. As it

pertains to my mom, I learned from her how to be an artist and how to be my most authentic self."

Casey and Owens-Murphy said the young artist's personal brush with Alabama policies helped drive her journey in putting together the exhibit.

"Her mom's story also demonstrates how people can get caught up in the system," Owens-Murphy said. "You know, sometimes, it's just people being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and sometimes with the

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wrong people. That's part of so many of the folks' stories who are on death row. That's another thing — understanding how lawmakers can craft policy to ensnare as many people into the system as possible. A lot of Kerrigan's pieces in this exhibit also touch on policy."

At that prompt, Casey pointed to one of her pieces titled "Nate," which had just been hung in the Tennessee Valley Museum of Art earlier in the week.

She said the piece was inspired by Nathaniel Woods, a person sentenced to die by the state of Alabama for his alleged role in the death of three Birmingham

police officers who were fatally shot by someone else.

"He was executed because they believed he was a cop killer," Casey said, adding that she hopes the piece and many other works hanging in the exhibit encourage visitors to take a closer look into the stories of people still on death row in Alabama.

"What I want people to notice most about ('Nate') is that things are covered up, and you have to look a little closer to see what's really going on," she said.

Another piece in the exhibit, a sculpture of a set of lungs bound by chains and featuring

three syringes, is meant to symbolize how inhumane the practice of lethal injection really is, and it's meant to remind viewers of the many failed executions and botched lethal injections that have taken place in Alabama over the years.

"When the state executes, they do it in all our names," Owens-Murphy said. "We elect them. They are responsible to us, and as long as we let it go on, we are complicit. If nothing else, we hope this exhibit gets people to talk and think critically about something that maybe they just took for granted as normal."

The exhibit features much of Casey's original

work, audio and visual files from the UNA Death Row Archive, as well as works contributed by inmates with Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty.

"It's a lot to chew on," Casey said. "We designed the exhibit to be immersive so you could hear, see and feel some of the same things we experienced in putting together the archive. I just want people to understand how the system works, and the responsibility we all have."



An untitled painting by Kerrigan Casey at her exhibit.



Kerrigan Casey's "Holman Cell Replica" by K.V.P., a current death row inmate.



"Drowning Sculpture" by Kerrigan Casey at her exhibit.



Kerrigan Casey with one of her paintings at "The Art of Resistance" exhibit at the Tennessee Valley Museum of Art in Tuscumbia.



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HELPING CAREGIVERS *of* HOSPITAL PATIENTS

by CHELSEA RETHERFORD
Photos by DAN BUSEY

Carolyn O'Byrne began the new year hopeful for Daisy's Place, the new non-profit she founded for others facing a hopeless situation like the one she found herself in about 20 years ago.

Daisy's Place is a home located in the vicinity of North Alabama Medical Center in Florence. When it opens, it will offer caregivers a peaceful, safe place to sleep, bathe, eat and rest while their loved one is at NAMC, or another medical care facility in the surrounding area.

O'Byrne purchased the house two years ago.

She first opened it as an Airbnb home, thinking it would give out-of-town caregivers an option to be near their family



Cutline: Carolyn O'Byrne stands in front of Daisy's Place, which is a non-profit organization to assist the homeless.

member in the hospital. When things didn't go quite according to plan, she decided to start the non-profit so those in need could stay for free.

"Of course, I thought it was all going to happen by the beginning of 2023, but that's not exactly how it worked," she said.

O'Byrne, a self-proclaimed seventh-generation carpenter, was able to do much of the work in all on her own.

"I got the house myself, I rehabbed it myself, and I refurbished it myself," she said. "I did everything. Now, I'm relying on our community to make this work."

Throughout her journey in getting the home operational, O'Byrne said she has received help and donations from others eager to see Daisy's



Carolyn O'Byrne shows some of the signage and art which hangs inside Daisy's Place.



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Carolyn O'Byrne was inspired to open Daisy's Place following her own experience, caring for her daughter Daisy.

Place open. She's had to replace a section of the roof, refurbish the security system, and complete other renovations to the home, but now she is just steps away from her goal.

O'Byrne was inspired to open Daisy's Place following her own experience, caring for her daughter, Daisy, while she was in and out of the hospital and emergency care as a toddler.

Daisy, now thriving at 22, was born with an underdeveloped circulatory system, but the issues had gone unnoticed by physicians until she was about 17 months old, despite much urging from her mother, who knew something was wrong.

"I had taken her to

the doctor several times, mentioning things were wrong, but I wasn't heard," O'Byrne said of her daughter's story. "Her condition worsened to the point that I was terrified to put her to bed at night."

Eventually, O'Byrne was able to get her daughter admitted into the hospital, where a pediatric heart specialist told the family that Daisy would need a new heart. Daisy was taken to Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee, where she was given an experimental drug that caused a catastrophic reaction.

"Within just a couple of days, this drug started burning her body from the inside out," O'Byrne said. "She was in so

much excruciating pain, she put herself into a self-induced coma for three days."

After several blood transfusions and treatment, O'Byrne said her daughter was finally on the road to recovery when she developed MRSA, a type of staph bacterial infection that commonly occurs in people who have been hospitalized. Daisy spent another week in the intensive care unit.

All this time, O'Byrne relied on the charity of friends to keep her belongings in a safe place and for a small space to sleep — a 1980s-model conversion van in the parking lot of the hospital — for the few hours when she wasn't at her daughter's side.

"I would cry my way to the van in the parking lot and try to sleep. I didn't feel safe at all, but it was all I had," she said.

"Because of Daisy's story, it has been my prayer and dream to one day be a part of something that would soften the hardship, stress, and worry that is magnified when you have no place to rest, put your things, wash your clothes, or get a bite to eat while taking care of your loved one in the hospital."

As that dream comes to fruition, O'Byrne said her immediate needs at Daisy's place are volunteers and one more small push for funding.

"We're ready," she said. "It's coming."



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KHAMELA WHITE | isn't defined by her visual impairments

by CHELSEA RETHERFORD
Photos by DAN BUSEY



Khameela White holds her artwork for a portrait inside the Tennessee Valley Museum of Art.

Khamela White, who will be entering the eighth grade at Muscle Shoals Middle this school year, was just developing her creative passions when she began to lose her sight.

Though the straight-A student and avid swimmer was diagnosed with cancer in 2022, her friends and family say they've watched in awe as Khamela takes her condition and challenges in stride.

"She doesn't reflect on what was; she moves forward with what is," Eloise White, Khamela's grandmother, said. "While we say there may be limitations, she sees them as possibilities and opportunities."

In 2022, at age 11, Khamela started experiencing symptoms her primary physician chalked up to migraines,

according to her grandmother.

A couple of months later, as her symptoms worsened, her doctor arranged for Khamela to see a neurologist at Children's of Alabama in Birmingham.

A MRI was scheduled for June 9, 2022, but Khamela experienced a seizure just three days before the appointment. She was rushed to Huntsville Hospital, where a MRI showed brain lesions.

After Khamela was med-flighted to Birmingham, her family received the grim news. She'd been diagnosed with medulloblastoma, a rapidly growing malignant tumor that started in Khamela's cerebellum and ended near the base of her neck, Eloise said.

"We're learning it's

common in children," Eloise said. "We spent 10 weeks at Children's. She sees an ophthalmologist. She's finished with her radiation, chemo, and no cancer cells are there. We're just hopeful that with divine intervention, advancements in medicine, something may happen. We're hopeful of that."

Khamela, who said she's always wanted to explore a career in medicine, is now more certain of what path she hopes to take beyond high school.

"I always knew I wanted to be a doctor. I just didn't know until this happened to me that I want to be a neurologist," she said. "That's when I knew what kind of doctor I wanted to be."

Eloise, who said Khamela comes from a

long line of educators, is also certain her granddaughter has what it takes to make those dreams come true.

On a recent visit to the Tennessee Valley Museum of Art, where Khamela's artwork was hung on display in June, Eloise proudly showed off Khamela's award for making the "A" honor roll at Muscle Shoals Middle School again this past school year.

She also showed off the artwork Khamela recently completed for the exhibit, as well as a piece she painted while still in the hospital at Children's of Alabama.

Khamela said she fostered an appreciation for drawing and painting early on, adding she just began to explore those creative skills as she entered middle school.

"I really liked drawing.



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I would buy a lot of notebooks and colored pencils, and sometimes I would just look up things to draw," Khamela said of the time before the tumor developed.

While in the hospital in Birmingham, Eloise and Khamela's father, LeDale White, said Khamela was encouraged by art therapist Valerie Hanks.

"Ms. Valerie really enhanced Khamela's stay in the hospital," Eloise said. "She came in one day and asked Khamela what she wanted to do. She gave her some watercolors, a canvas, and she painted it. Of course, she had been into it before, but then she realized she could still do it."

Khamela said she has since been encouraged by others to continue to pursue her artistic talents, including her Muscle Shoals Middle School art teacher, Anna Grinnell, and Romano Evans, her Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments.

"My braille teacher would sometimes come to art class with me, and she would bring different things for me to use," Khamela said, adding that Evans introduced her to Wikki Stix, a patented combination of yarn and non-toxic wax that can be shaped or sculpted and stuck to one another or to canvases and other surfaces without the addition of paste.

Khamela said she often paints and draws from memory, and said she's discovered new techniques, like using stones to guide her brush strokes, when creating her artwork.

"Sometimes, I would just ask Mama for a piece of paper. Usually, I would draw a flower or something, and like, where I draw, I would



Khamela White's sunset, oil on canvas.



Jewelry box made by Khamela White.



Jewelry made by Khamela White.



Painting by Khamela White.

put my finger over where I drew," Khamela explained. "So, if I drew a circle or petal, I would just follow my hand around it to measure and make sure I'm not drawing over it. I can work in watercolors if somebody tells me which color I'm using. When I think of a color, if I say the word of it, I can still see it in my mind and I still know how it looks."

LeDale said he's proud of his daughter for how far she's come, despite the condition that she could have easily allowed to hold her back.

"She's always optimistic and never complains," he said. "I wouldn't let her get down and none of that. Actually, when we were leaving the hospital for the last time, I saw this guy walking down the busy streets of Birmingham. He couldn't see, but he had a cane. He didn't miss a step or the curb. I knew right then that she could do anything. She's going to be able to do anything she wants to do."

Besides pursuing her artwork and other studies, Khamela is also involved in show choir and chorus at Muscle Shoals Middle School. Following her last rounds of chemotherapy, Khamela said she also hopes to get back in the water and pick up swimming again this summer.

While her family credits her strong will to persevere when listing Khamela's achievements, Khamela said she also had the support of her loved ones and her faith to see her through each of her challenges.

"No matter how bad it gets, it is going to get better," she said. "Just because I can't see doesn't mean I will stop doing what I love."



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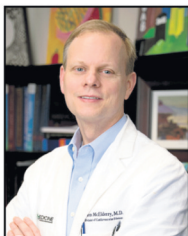
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Mother and daughter open
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Erica Snoddy stands for a portrait with Flash the horse at Flying S Arena.

Erica Snoddy had been grappling with an undiagnosed nervous system disorder, chronic pain and depression following a traumatic car accident that had happened two years earlier when she'd given up on therapy.

Up to that point, that wasn't all she'd given up.

She'd also lost hope that any medical professionals would be able to help her, and having lost her ability to ride, she'd given up her life-long equestrian hobbies and passion.

And then a neglected and emaciated horse sauntered up onto her parents' property.

"Blackabee is the horse that started this

whole process," Erica's mother, Lorinda Snoddy, said of the decision that eventually led to the development of their non-profit, Angel Mission.

Lorinda said her daughter could barely walk herself when she saw the black stunted foal in distress outside their nearly abandoned barn.

"By then, we had sold our horses, except Moon and we still had Ranger," Lorinda said. "I had her on my back bring her back to the house, piggy-back-style, and she's crying, 'Can we keep him, Mama?' I go, 'How are you going to take care of this injured animal? How are you

going to do that? You can't even walk out to the barn.' She said she'd do it, and she did."

The Snoddys suspected Blackabee had been abandoned and left with his bridle still on — which prevented him from eating. When it was discovered, the young horse had poor eyesight.

Lorinda said Blackabee was morbidly thin and as broken in body and spirit as her daughter when he arrived on their farm.

The two took to one another instantly. Erica, who had just begun to try equine therapy as a solution to her physical needs and deteriorating mental state, found purpose in her training

once again with Blackabee.

"That was it, I think she needed a purpose," Lorinda said. "They healed each other."

Erica's problems began when she was 12 years old.

"We were in a 15-passenger van, and we were at a stoplight," Erica recalled of the accident that occurred in 2016. "I had turned around to hand something over the seat, and well, a guy rear-ended us."

Upon impact, Erica said she was thrust backwards, and her neck collided with the seat in front of hers, then she reverbed forward and face-planted into her

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Erica Snoddy works through an exercise with Flash the horse at Flying S Arena.

headrest.

At the ER, several of her fellow passengers were diagnosed with concussions and other injuries related to whiplash, but once Erica's bleeding nose had been checked out and deemed unbroken, nurses moved on without giving her additional scans or assessments.

"I was really out of it, and the nurse asked, 'What's your pain.' Well,

I didn't have any pain. I was numb and couldn't feel anything," Erica said. "After the whole thing at the emergency room, for a while, I was pretty tired, but it kind of went away."

Though her symptoms had subsided for the time being, eventually the head injuries caught up. Erica, an avid runner and among the fastest in her class, said she noticed she gradually was running slower and

slower. She said she still had the muscle strength, yet she struggled to keep up.

By the end of the semester, when her class was required to run a mile for the physical fitness test in P.E., she said it took her 11 minutes to run the four laps she'd typically been able to complete in about six minutes before. Not only was her time off, but she felt her legs buckle and she

passed out by the end.

"After that, I started having more consistent problems," Erica said.

She and her mom had seen physician after physician, and none were able to identify the issues.

"I think I'd already been to a neuro psychologist," Erica said. "They were trying to figure out if it was mental, and that really freaked me out, because if it is mental, what do

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you do with that?"

Two years had gone by, and Lorinda had begun homeschooling her daughter, who was in and out of a wheelchair and regularly wearing leg braces by the time they made the trek to the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida.

At the clinic, Erica was diagnosed with Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS), a form of dysautonomia, which affects the branch of the nervous system that regulates bodily functions not consciously controlled, like heart rate, blood pressure, sweating and body temperature.

Doctors told Erica and her mother that disorder was brought on after a concussion she likely sustained in the 2016 vehicle accident was left

untreated. She was also diagnosed with having chronic pain syndrome in 2018.

Though her injuries were finally recognized, and a treatment plan and pain management were possible, healing still seemed so far out of reach, Erica and Lorinda said.

"Mayo Clinic wanted the two of us to move there for a month so she could take therapy for the nervous system issues she was having," Lorinda said. "It was \$50,000 for that therapy, and insurance does not pay."

She said she momentarily considered mortgaging her home to pay the expenses as limited financial options were laid out for them, but Lorinda was a massage therapist

herself and felt confident she could learn to perform the therapy for her daughter.

Lorinda, who opened Angel Touch Massage in Florence 25 years ago, took some brief lessons from physicians at the clinic, and took her daughter home. Still, as Erica began to physically heal, she had lots of groundwork to cover to get mentally better too.

At the time, Lorinda admits she hadn't heard of Renewed Spirits, which provides equine assisted psychotherapy in the Shoals, when she thought to rekindle her daughter's passion for horses.

"Had I found them, we never would have gone on this journey," Lorinda said, adding that she was desperate to heal her daughter when she did

find an equine therapy provider in Birmingham.

"When the brain is injured, it can cause rage and anger, and part of that is frustration. The injury itself can take a wonderful person and make them angry because they can't go and do. They lose their friends because they can't keep up, and they can't go and do," Lorinda said.

"It made it tough for her, and it made it hard for her to function. My precious child was sad, and if your child is facing suicide, you do a lot of things to help them heal. She needed to heal, and therapy wasn't working."

Though Erica had attended a few sessions in Birmingham, she still needed something she and her mother couldn't

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identify. That's when Blackabee turned up.

"When Blackabee came, I saw what happened," Lorinda said, explaining that in the following days, she watched her daughter pour her hurt and sorrow into healing her newfound companion.

"I thought, somebody else is going to need that too," Lorinda said. "God sent that horse to save my child, and we've got to share that."

Angel Mission earned its non-profit status a year ago. Since then, Erica and her mother have each become certified in providing equine assisted learning — or horse-riding lessons and exercises to help people struggling with depression and other mental issues.

Now, they're looking for other horse enthusiasts, counselors and physical therapists to join their cause.

The mission offers equine assisted learning and therapy and other natural recovery techniques to people struggling with anything from anxiety to ailments more physical, like an injury or handicap.

Angel Mission also seeks sponsors to offer financial support for sessions that range from \$250 to \$350, depending on the client's needs.

"Most of the time, there are two people

leading sessions. You have a horse handler or horse learner, but equine assisted therapy adds a licensed therapist or counselor to the session," Lorinda said. "If there is a counselor in the session, it's \$350 for a session, because you have to pay the counselor, and their fee is about \$150 to \$250 of that cost."



Erica Snoddy escorts out Blackabee, a Tennessee Walker, at Flying S Arena.

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Non-profit brings Florence girl's story *to* life



Paisley Setliff, 7, as well as her mother Jennifer and father Russ watch as the Florence High School choir perform her story.

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At 7 years old, Paisley Setliff has inspired a song written about her journey, thanks to a unique collaboration with the non-profit Sing Me a Story Foundation (SMAS).

In October, Paisley and her parents received some earth-shattering news after her mother, Jennifer, was diagnosed with stage-3 colorectal cancer at age 35.

Jennifer said Paisley took the news in stride, but when she was approached by staff at Alabama's Clearview Cancer Institute about the SMAS project, she knew it would help Paisley cope with the traumatic experience.

"We had never heard of the Sing Me a Story agency," Jennifer said. "The thing I love most about all this is that it gave us something to do as a family, and it gave Paisley something to do to help distract her from what we had going on in our life at the moment."

SMAS creates music inspired by the creative stories of children in need, according to SMAS Director of Operations Autumn Dobbeck.

She said Paisley was offered the chance to write and illustrate a story about anything she wanted. The foundation then partnered with University of Alabama at Birmingham student Emily Zhang, who composed a song inspired by Paisley's

story — "The Tale of Ice Cream."

"Paisley didn't know how she felt about writing a story at first," Jennifer said. "She is just in the first grade, but she loves to draw. We met online with Ms. Autumn, and she just kind of opened the conversation and asked Paisley what she would like to write about. Well, with her loving ice cream, that's what she picked. From that conversation, she built this really elaborate story."

Paisley's story begins with her family walking into what looked like an ordinary ice cream shop, but once inside, the Setliffs are greeted by Princess Peach, a character from Nintendo's Super Mario world.

The UAB student tasked with composing a song from Paisley's story said she instantly fell in love with the narrative, though she admits the project was not without a few challenges.

Before she began composing, Zhang said she was given some direction and parameters by Florence High School choir director Kevin Reese. In March, the Florence High choir sang the song to Paisley and her parents, who heard the piece for the first time at the school's Spring Concert.

"It was an honor working with the Florence High School choir and Mr. Kevin Reese," Zhang said.



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"He gave me a couple of constraints — his tenors have a certain range they sing, and the piece had to be around three to four minutes long. With Paisley's story being so long, the time constraint was something else I had to work through."

Zhang said she didn't want her piece to have singers repeat Paisley's story word for word.

"Rather, I wanted more to capture the essence and innocence of Paisley's imagination," Zhang said.

Still, Zhang worked in a nod to the Mario franchise by including a musical phrase within the piece that is reminiscent of the iconic opening to the game.

"I'm really excited, and I hope Paisley likes it and can pick up on some of those aspects," Zhang said in March before the

concert at Florence High School. "I hope I did justice to her story. I know this is mainly for Paisley, but I hope her mom is pleased too. It's also for her."

Just as Paisley's story ends on a happy note, her family's journey seems to be coming to a sweet end as well. In February, Jennifer received a PET scan that indicated she was cancer free.

"I'm finishing up some radiation treatments, then a surgery and, hopefully, this whole experience will be behind us," Jennifer said. "I'm just really grateful to Sing Me a Story for giving Paisley this moment to shine. As her parent, of course, I'm proud of her and the hard work she put into it."



The Florence High School choir performs "The Tale of Ice Cream."



NOMINEES

for the 2024 Shoals Woman of the Year

Jennifer Sellers Adams

Carol Beberniss

Brenda Baker

Dr. Lindsey Balentine

Mary Carton

Diane Faust-Kiser

Peggy McCollum

Angel Malone

Darlene Menefield

Rose Michael

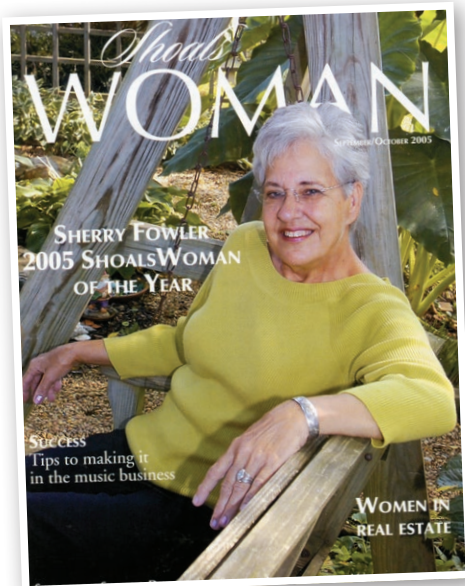
Linda Oliver

Flori Sweatt

Paisley Varano

Denise Willingham

past WINNERS



2005 | SHERRY FOWLER

Fowler was chosen for her work with the North Alabama Head Injury Foundation. Her daughter, Mary Darlene, sustained a debilitating head injury in 1986 when she was struck by an intoxicated driver. Fowler was advised to place her daughter in a nursing facility. She refused. She received the training necessary to care for her 19-year-old daughter at home. Fowler continued working with the foundation after her daughter's death in 2005.

2006 | NATALIE GORDON

Gordon was 24 years old when she battled cancer and underwent a life-saving surgery: the removal of her left arm and shoulder. She was mother to a 7-month-old and a 3-year-old and Gordon and said she was not prepared to lose parts of her body. More importantly, however, she said she was not prepared for her children to lose their mother. She said the surgery was traumatic and depressing, but Gordon adjusted and became an inspiration to others. She vowed not to let her loss stop her.



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2007 | KAY PARKER

Parker and a friend, Sharon Scogin, developed the idea for The Healing Place after Parker saw a television report about a grief support center in Portland. She believed a similar center was greatly needed in the Shoals. The Healing Place became a haven where adults and children learn to work through their grief after a loved one's death. Parker's goal was to give people a place to be heard and to learn healing thoughts, including learning how to cherish memories and keep them from being debilitating. Parker passed away Sept. 25, 2021.



2008 | BETTY BURDINE

Burdine has spent her life helping people, first as a nurse, then as coordinator of the Lifewise Seniors program for Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital in Florence. She didn't stop there, but volunteered in several community endeavors. She helped raise money for the American Heart Association and was instrumental in procuring the monument for Lillian Diebert in Diebert Park in Florence. Burdine's caring nature extended to Lillian Diebert, who she would look in on before Diebert's death in 2011.





2009 | FELICE GREEN

Green retired from the University of North Alabama in 2003 but didn't sit still. She has a special love for children and will don costumes to read to children at various outlets across the Shoals. Green also expressed her love of art and dance and became a member of the Poza Dance Troupe while remaining active in Delta Sigma Theta sorority, which she helped charter at UNA. She is a known organizer of events during the W.C. Handy Music Festival including the ABCs of Blues & Jazz. She is a volunteer with the Salvation Army and St. Vincent De Paul Society at Our Lady of the Shoals Catholic Church in Tuscumbia.

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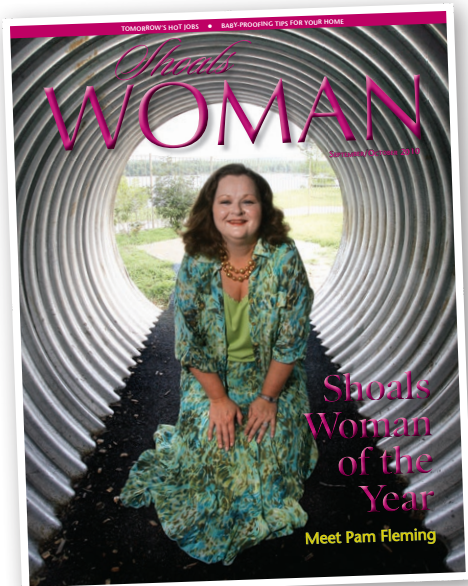
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2010 | PAM FLEMING

Fleming's outgoing personality helped her carry on a tradition she first learned from her parents: help people in need. She was honored for her work in helping to create the boundless playground at Riverfront Park in Sheffield. The playground is play-friendly to any child, regardless of his or her abilities, with a sandbox that wheelchair-bound children can roll up to and play in. Fleming also was instrumental in getting a new home for the Ealy family when their daughter, Shanteki, was diagnosed with leukemia and was told she could not return to her home because of its condition.

2011 | DEBBIE RAPPUHN

Rappuhn took her daughter to the Florence-Lauderdale Animal Shelter for a school project but soon returned to offer her services as a volunteer. She painted and scrubbed and initiated improvements that included a cat habitat room, a puppy room and a laundry room with a sink for bathing animals. She was appalled at the number of animals euthanized and dedicated countless days to finding homes for those unwanted pets – even if it meant sending them to other shelters and homes across the country.



2012 | ELBA BARNES

Barnes needed to care for her ailing parents and moved from Birmingham to Florence to be near them. She soon realized there was an important gap in available services in the area: there was no place where adults like her parents could go for social interaction, exercise and art activities. Such a place would also offer respite for caregivers. Barnes brought an idea for an adult day care to Westminster Presbyterian Church. In July 2009, Westminster Interfaith Caring Place opened, initially as a Sunday-only program. By November, it was offering a mid-week break so caregivers could go Christmas shopping. Eventually the nonprofit center would operate Monday through Friday.

2013 | SARAH JENNIFER THOMPSON

After Thompson's sister, Sidney, died in January 2006, Thompson honored her sister's memory and founded Sidney's Safe! Foundation. It was a place where other women could learn how to stand strong against domestic abuse and how to seek recovery from addiction. The foundation has branched out to help children, too. It is an outreach that provides hundreds of bags of food a week to local schoolchildren who otherwise would go hungry.



2014 | SUSIE MARTIN

Susie Martin was only required to spend four hours a month with the girl who became her "little" at Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Shoals, but she and 13-year-old Sabrina Carles are together every weekend, all weekend. The program allows Sabrina to be Martin's Little until she is 15, but Martin jokes she will keep her until Sabrina gets married.



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2015 | ANGIE HAMILTON

Angie Hamilton presented the idea for a one-stop center that could streamline help for victims of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse and physical abuse, and elder abuse – cases she saw regularly as an assistant district attorney in Lauderdale County. The idea was immediately well received, and One Place of the Shoals was born.

2016 | NINON PARKER

Ninon Parker grew up on the front lines of celebrating the history of the Shoals, including as a member of Ivy Green's first cast of "The Miracle Worker" – the stage play that celebrates the awakening of Helen Keller to the world around her. Parker's community involvement is one of historical preservation and business promotion that keeps the Shoals a vital place that recognizes its important past, as well as its exciting future.



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2017 | MERCY WINTERS

A member of the Salvation Army Women's auxiliary, Mercy Winters was instrumental in bringing the successful Empty Bowl Luncheon to the Shoals as a fundraiser for the Salvation Army each year. She is hands-on in her volunteer work, not only in helping to plan the luncheon each year, but leading her "clay mates" group to meet at her and her husband's ceramic business to make the bowls that are featured at the luncheon. She has even gotten her neighborhood involved in community charity work by organizing an Iron Bowl event that benefits a different charity each year.



2018 | JESSICA DAVENPORT

Jessica Davenport's children, Kruz and Paizlee, were born with Schimke Immuno-Osseous Dysplasia, or SIOD. In simple, dire terms, the children have a rare form of dwarfism that brings with it renal failure and a weakened immune system. It's also fatal, with a life expectancy of 9 to 11 years. Instead of falling apart, Davenport founded Kruzn for a Kure Foundation and has raised the \$1 million needed to get the attention of wealthy philanthropists who can raise the \$6 million needed to kick researchers into finding a cure for the rare disease. In the 12 months since Davenport received the Shoals Woman of the Year award, she and her husband Kyle have moved to California where Kruz has not only received his mother's stem cells, but one of her kidneys as well. Paizlee is being prepped to receive the same from her father. Keep abreast on these remarkable children and their parents through Jessica Davenport's Facebook page or the Kruzn for a Kure Foundation Facebook page.



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2019 | GINGER WILLINGHAM

Ginger Willingham has always had a heart for service, and in 2014 learned there were children in the community whose only opportunities to eat were at school. After much prayer and discussion, she was inspired to establish Isaiah's Call, named for Isaiah 58 in the Bible. She and a bevy of volunteers pack food bags with enough food for the children and their families to have during the weekend. They started with seven families at one school and now serve more than 200 families at schools in Colbert and Lauderdale counties, as well as Safeplace, a local shelter for women and men and their children who are fleeing domestic violence.



2020 | MARY DAY SMITH

Mary Day Smith was on active duty for the Alabama National Guard on Helton Drive when fellow Korean War veteran Ralph Dula visited her there and became her mentor. He recruited her to join the American Legion. When Smith joined the Legion there were a lot of guys, but slowly she worked her way up and became the first female commander for this area. Smith became heavily involved with programs all over north Alabama. "When there's a crisis in your life, its easy to dream about a rescue that immediately rushes to your side, determined to clear the crisis and put you and your family back into a good place" and that is what Smith has a hand in doing. She doesn't seek thanks for anything but she claims that she sees the thanks come to her in unexpected places. Smith believes in the Legion slogan "Veterans Still Serving."



2021 | PAM CLEPPER STUMPE

When you look up the word selfless in the dictionary, there very likely may be a photo of Pam Clepper Stumpe next to the definition. The consensus opinion of her is that when she gives of herself, all worries can be thrown out the window. When she and her husband relocated to the Shoals, the couple soon became active in the community, including the Colbert County Sheriff's FAME Girls Ranch. Clepper's work with the ranch has varied over the years. She and the "posse" went through house parent training so they could spend the night at the ranch and give those house parents already at the ranch some much-needed time off. She also organized the group to bring meals to the ranch to help the house parents. Some of those within her posse were teachers, so they chipped in and helped to tutor the girls. By the fall, Pam's Posse was 25 members strong, and they helped to kick off the inaugural FAME Ranch Round-Up, which has gone on to become a huge event for the ranch. So why does she go that extra mile? "I just enjoy seeing someone succeed and find within themselves all the good that they are and what they can be," she said. "If I can help just a little bit in helping them get there, then that just brings joy. I love to lift people up and make them see what they can do better. Or what's inside them that they don't even know they have."



2022 | AMY GOSS ROBINSON

Amy Goss Robinson, who is a Sheffield native, left the area and obtained her doctorate in physical therapy at the University of South Carolina before returning home in 2011 to provide physical therapy here. Two years later, her world was turned upside down. She was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer which resulted in the removal of her breasts at 36 years old. While she was being treated for cancer, she sought out local support groups pertaining to breast cancer patients and found nothing. So, rather than throw up her hands and accept it, she helped found and develop her own breast cancer support group right here in the Shoals. The Breast cancer Recovery and Awareness Together (BRAT) Pack was formed with the help of Dr. Patrick Daugherty in 2014. After the surgery to remove her breasts, she also began to investigate the possibility of becoming a foster mother. After becoming a foster parent, she had several children stay with her on a short-term basis. Her first possible long-term child came into her home in April 2018. About seven months later his twin sister and older sister were reunited in Amy's home, where they remain. Not long after finishing breast cancer treatment, Amy met Chad Robinson and were eventually engaged. The couple wanted to adopt the children but were hit with the hurdle that they had to be married at least a year. They married and a year later, COVID-19 stepped in the way and slowed the court system to a near halt. It wasn't until March 2022 that the three children became Robinsons. Hurdle after hurdle presented themselves, and Amy Goss Robinson cleared it by a mile.



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2023 | DR. KIM JACKSON

You can call it a leap of faith or just answering the call from a higher being, but that's exactly what Dr. Kim Jackson did. One day in October 2015, she got a call. "God called me to this, and I had never worked with the homeless before," she said. "I did office management and worked in human resources, but I heard Him clearly that day." Shortly thereafter Jackson put in her notice and stepped away from her corporate job to establish Crossroads Community Outreach in the Shoals, where she is the founder and director of the nonprofit agency. "That happened in April 2016, and I've never looked back," she said. "This is a faith walk for me." Crossroads was launched by operating out of her home with the help of her twin sons. Since then, Jackson, her family and Crossroads have assisted thousands of people whether they are homeless or just need some assistance during a rough patch in their lives through street outreach, the day center or community events. "The people I serve everyday are who keep me motivated," she said. "When I go in and talk to someone like the mayor, I'm not speaking for myself. I'm speaking for the people that I serve who are suffering. I am the voice of the people who may never get the opportunity to speak with the mayor or be interviewed by the newspaper. I make sure I speak for them and their heart."



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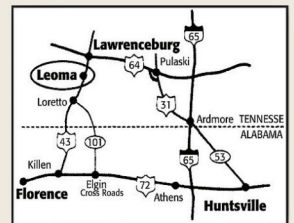
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