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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Sprouting from soil, served at supper

Farm-to-table plants seeds generation after generation.

OUR FOOD nourishes us, from the soil beneath our feet to the table where we gather with family and friends. The hot sun beams from the sky into the field of sprouting seeds. Farmers rise early, tending to their crops with the same care and dedication that their families have shown for generations. The connection between the land and our plates is a story of hard work, love, and survival — a story growing more vital as we seek healthier, more intentional ways to nourish our bodies.

The beauty of farm-to-table lies in its simplicity. Cooks transform fresh, seasonal ingredients into meals that are delicious and rich in nutrients, just like nature intended. Each dish tells a story of the farmer who harvested the tomatoes, the hands that crafted the cheese, and the cook

who brought it all together like magic. When we eat farm-to-table, we're not just enjoying a meal; we're participating in a movement that values relationships over transactions.

When we focus on farm-to-table, it also reconnects us with the seasons, reminding us that food is more than a commodity — it's a gift from the earth that should be savored. There's a certain joy in eating what's in season, knowing that the flavors are at their peak and that you're supporting local farms that are the backbone of our communities. The people in this issue bring us closer to nature, yes ... but also closer to each other. This issue of Good News is a return to our roots — a celebration of the land, and a recognition of the hands that toil to bring us the freshest, most nourishing foods. **GN**

Wesley Bryant,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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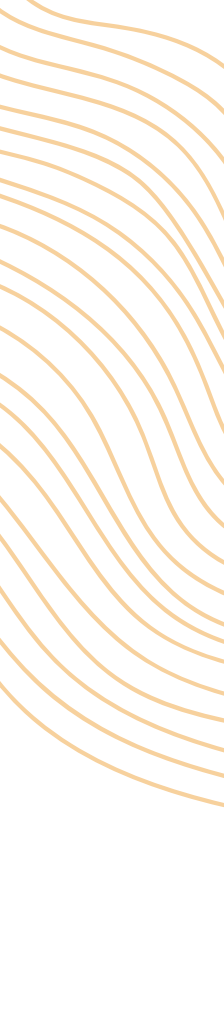
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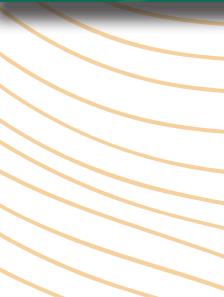
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CELEBRATING THE SEASONS OF THE EARTH

Demeter's Common connects locals, buyers, and sellers season after season.

*By Sara Hook
Photography by
Larry McCormack*



A PEACH SO juicy it drips down to your elbows, fresh and creamy pimento cheese, crisp yellow squash — all of this can be found at Demeter’s Common, lovingly gathered from growers and artisans across Lebanon. Alongside the produce are fresh flowers, organic soaps, and daily grab-and-go foods like chicken pot pies and bowtie pasta.

The grocery is the design of Lebanon native Mallory Jennings, and its success in the past five years shows how much of an impact the store has had on the Lebanon community — and how much the community cares about its local sellers.

“We have such a beautiful community here,” Jennings said. “They just want to come in to feel seen. They want to come in to feel loved. They know that ... anything that I sell them is going to be something that is good — that is from somewhere that we trust and that we love.”

The idea for the store’s name came from an experience Jennings had in college, studying agriculture abroad in the Czech Republic. There, she saw a statue of Demeter, the Greek goddess of agriculture and fertility of the earth. Since she wanted her grocery to offer more than just food, Demeter was an obvious focus.

“We sell just a bunch of different stuff, and so I wanted to be able to include every aspect of the earth — not just the vegetables,” Jennings said.



MALLORY JENNINGS

Demeter's Common aims to support local farmers by providing healthy, high-quality ingredients to the families of Lebanon. As a farm girl herself, Jennings loved to celebrate those things and had the knowledge to teach others. All of those facets became folded into her store.

"I love to not only sell and be a small grocery, but I love to empower people to know not only that they should eat local or support local but also why," Jennings said. "I also like to just sell the products so I can teach people different ways to cook it and different ways to celebrate the seasons."

The store often offers classes and community events to facilitate that celebration. Some are seasonal, like a gravy and dressing class for Thanksgiving, but many are simply meant to get people together to make friends.

Since Demeter's Common sells produce from local growers, its offerings are heavily dependent on the seasons. However, some things are constant, and many families depend on Demeter's for that consistency.

"I get local glass-bottled milk. I get fresh bread delivered on Wednesdays, and I get fresh eggs almost every day," Jennings said. "I have over 40 families in Wilson County and the surrounding counties that solely count on Demeter's Common for their eggs, bread, and milk — and I think that's pretty cool."

Having so many regular customers is a wonderful responsibility, Jennings said, since she has the resources to find the farms and artisans that provide goods, as well as the place for her customers to see those goods. Jennings also sees herself as having a responsibility to the community as a whole and regularly donates leftover food to the nearby homeless shelter.

"[It] has been able to help with us reducing waste, and to help us to give back to our community as well," Jennings said. "That's been really nice — to be able to [do] that."

As the store grows, Jennings' ability to give back will also increase. The hope is for Demeter's Common to become a hub for the community, with people constantly coming in and out and aisles full of amazing, wonderful stuff that locals have made for the community.

"I love the location that we're at now, and I really just want to continue to make this location a well-oiled machine," Jennings said. "I want to be able to have more products on my shelves. I want to be able to have eventually more employees to where I can do more and have different facets of the store — to where we can just keep growing and keep perfecting our craft."

It may start with just a few eggs and a jug of milk, but anyone can eat local and support local, as Demeter's Common is trying to do. After all, a community that supports itself is a community that thrives. **GN**



“

...I love to empower people to know not only that they should eat local or support local but also why.

- MALLORY JENNINGS



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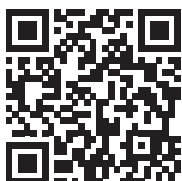
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PLANTING IMPERISHABLE SEEDS





A trauma-informed employer strives to meet the spiritual, emotional, and vocational needs of oppressed women.

*By Gabriel Grant Huff
Photography by Robin Holcomb*



WOMEN WHO have experienced trauma — suffering from the aftermath of human trafficking, addictions, assault, domestic violence, and more — are the people to whom Kelly Orlowski is dedicating her life to help. Her work with recovering women has blossomed into a safe haven for those looking for new life.

Located on Lebanon's public square on East Main Street, Sunday Seed Supply sells flowers, gardening and outdoor accessories, candles, soap, lotion, art, decor, apparel, and other items. When customers walk up to the store, they see a beautiful, historic brick building with creatively presented art displays and flowers, along with uplifting music inside. On the shop's side, there is a mural depicting blue and red flowers. A large yellow stem runs across the wall, from which hangs a blue swing.

The whole scenery of the mural encircles the Bible verse Isaiah 40:8, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”

The hope is to make people feel inspired and point them toward heaven.

Born and raised in Phoenix, Orlowski moved to Tennessee in 2019 with her husband and children. Through her work with recovering women, she learned how essential trauma-informed employment was for healing. She became inspired to start The Sunday Farm and Apiary in Lascassas and later Sunday Seed Supply.

“That’s how our business started, with planting seeds and growing flowers and realizing that was helpful, and then started hiring people who would come along and do that,” Orlowski said.

At the 32-acre farm, they raise bees to make honey and wax, plant seeds to grow flowers, and care for rescue animals — including donkeys and sheep. A large garden is set up, while the bee field rests in the back. Chickens also roam, producing eggs. The venture started with a couple of women coming with Orlowski to the farm, but she soon discovered the hardship for people coming to work due to the farm’s remote location. That’s when the shop in Lebanon came into play.

“There’s the farm part, where I live and where I’m growing all those things, and then we have the shop, which has grown into a nonprofit organization because our main purpose and the whole reason I moved to this area and started the farm was to meet the vocational needs of women coming out of trauma situations and addictions.”



“I named it The Sunday Farm because I wanted the women who worked with us to feel like this was a work that felt like rest so that it would be Sunday every day.”

Kelly Orlowski





From working with different nonprofit organizations throughout her career, Orlowski knew women who had experienced trauma were strained to find decent employment. Sunday Seed Supply became that place. They are paid a livable wage and offered a healing community. On Tuesdays, these women tend the farm. Wednesdays through Saturdays, they spend their time running the shop. The employees are taught various job skills as they discover their true inspirations in life. Orlowski's hope is for each woman to grow in understanding her value, receive spiritual support, and learn new job skills in an atmosphere where every day resonates with the peace and rest of Sunday.

"I named it The Sunday Farm because I wanted the women who worked with us to feel like this was a work that felt like rest so that it would be Sunday every day."

These women grew in the environment provided. One creative employee developed an idea for a candle project, pouring her soul and time into creating a wonderful piece. Nerves told her no one would like it, but fears were proven wrong as the first customer who walked through

the doors on the candle's first day on the stand purchased the piece. Another woman with a green thumb trails life, displaying beauty with the plants she grows. Customers, along with Orlowski, see the value each woman possesses, even if the previously oppressed women did not initially recognize that worth within themselves. These women now serve as the managers of the shop.

Like with any business, challenges have arisen, including financial ones. She wants to be able to hire more women on the employment waitlist but can only do so once sales and donations grow. The nonprofit accepts volunteers, who can still receive all the benefits of working at the business. Orlowski wants to grow exponentially but is patient and sees God's provision. She knows funds and sales will come and go, but she views the work in comparison to Isaiah 40:8.

"We're working on so many perishable things in the shop, but the real imperishable thing that we're sowing into is encouraging people through God's truth that each woman is valuable, capable, and so much more than what trauma has led her to believe." **GN**

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*Shane and
Kristen Meyers*

//

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but we make a life
by what we give.**

**– WINSTON
CHURCHILL**

SOWING THE SEEDS OF GENEROSITY

The Meyers family supports nonprofits and community through love of farming



By Kali Bradford
Photography by Robin Holcomb

KRISTEN AND Shane Meyers have made a life out of giving for well over a decade by being a vital part of the farming community in both Lebanon and Watertown.

From Shane's managing a 1,000-acre farm in Lebanon to the couple running their own 15-acre farm in Watertown, Kristen and Shane work tirelessly to provide for their family and the community around them. They not only provide food, but they also give hope and guidance to those in need.

GETTING INTO THE BUSINESS

According to Kristen, both she and Shane grew up in farming communities. As a married couple, they decided to make their own path in the world of farming. For the past 17 years, Shane has managed Pembroke Farms, owned by Jack Lowery in Lebanon. In 2013, they purchased their own farm, Wellspring Farm.

"Raising animals and growing our own food is very familiar to us," Kristen explained. "After purchasing our property, we dove right in with purchasing cattle, chickens, and goats. We produce about 20 beef cattle and

25 pigs a year that are available to purchase as family shares, many of which we process and package ourselves, along with about 40 laying hens. [The farm has] a large vegetable garden that grows green beans, lettuce, kale, broccoli, cabbage, potatoes, tomatoes, summer and winter squashes, peppers, sweet corn, herbs, and flowers."

Kristen said that since 2013, the farm has been successful thanks to their respect for the animals they raise.

"We were able to increase our beef sales as word spread that we were producing delicious meats that were raised with care and respect for the animal from birth to harvest," she said. "Knowing everything that has gone into an animal its entire life and meeting that animal's need for open pasture, quality feed, socialization, and kindness gives us great confidence in the products we sell."

She also added that farming has become a family affair. The couple's five children play a significant role in keeping the farm up and running.

"They help with all things farming," Kristen said. "From feeding, collecting eggs, harvesting vegetables, to butchering and packaging meat, it's certainly a family affair, and we couldn't do it without them."



REACHING OUT

Since the farm's beginnings, the couple has wanted their farm to have benefits beyond just their family.

The farm's name, Wellspring Farm, comes from the Bible verse John 4:14.

"Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Kristen said, "We believe God calls us to be good stewards of all He gives us, and the food we grow is absolutely a part of that stewardship. We want people to feel as blessed in feeding their family our products as we do in feeding them to ours."

That purpose would lead the couple to help single mothers in the area.

"Several years ago, we were leading a small group that had quite a few single mothers in it, and we began to think about how we could help serve these women and their children practically with what we were doing on our farm," Kristen said. "We decided to give a portion of every beef sale — either meat or proceeds from the meat — to help fill their freezers or help with rent and utilities."

Additionally, their church, The Journey Church, was involved with a local recovery house for women called The Hope Society. Thanks to a growth in beef sales, the couple could extend their outreach.

"We saw an opportunity to help more single moms who were just getting back on their feet after graduating [from] the program," Kristen explained. "Our

hearts were tender towards these women who were doing the good and difficult work of overcoming addiction while also running hard after Jesus to help guide them in their new lives of sobriety."

Over the past five years, Kristen stated that their small farm has been able to do big things by donating hundreds of pounds of meat directly to single-parent families in the community as well as supporting local ministries.

EDUCATING THE FUTURE

Through their outreach to single mothers, Shane began to see another way the farm could help those in need.

"He began to be burdened by the lack of male leadership he was seeing in the sons of the single moms we knew," Kristen explained. "He started thinking about how no one was teaching these boys how to be men, treat women, work, pray, serve, lead, hunt and fish, and how to handle tools, and fix or build something. It was overwhelming, to say the least — when you thought about all the practical skills and spiritual needs that these boys were missing out on."

Starting small, Shane gathered a small group of boys and began teaching them life skills, such as how to handle a rifle and shoot a deer.

"He did this on the 'big farm,' which is the farm he manages. The boys grew in confidence as they learned something totally new and how proud they were to provide food for their families when they got a deer," Kristen said.





Shane and
Kristen Meyers
with their family

After seeing the difference he made with a small group, Shane began to think bigger. Last year, he held his first weekend outdoors camp at the “big farm,” where 25 boys, ages 8 to 13, came and learned valuable skills such as hunting, fishing, archery, and building, along with teachings of the word of God.

“There were about 13 men who helped teach skills and lead groups,” Kristen explained. “The boys learned how to fillet fish, shoot a gun, [do] archery, cook chili, make venison jerky, and kayak. They also built blinds together as groups that were sold to help fund this year’s camp so it could remain free for the boys. One of the blinds they made specifically to be wheelchair accessible was donated to a local group that puts on a yearly hunt for kids who are wheelchair dependent. In June of this year, we had our second camp and had about 32 boys and 17 men help.”

THE ULTIMATE GOAL

The couple said the ultimate goal of the farm is to “use the land and animals God has given them to bless and help families in their community.”

“Whether that’s donated meat, vegetable[s], and eggs for a mom who needs extra help, a weekend for boys to learn skills and see men teach them, believe in them, and pray for them, or using the proceeds from our meat sales to fill the gap when times are lean for a mom who just got her kids back after years of battling addiction — we want to stay open-handed and let the Lord lead us in the ways He would have us serve and help. That’s the biggest thing.”

“We would love it if more landowners or farmers were interested in hosting a similar camp on their property or [allowing] boys and dads to hunt on their land,” Kristen said. “We really want to connect local farmers with families in our community who have never had the chance to experience the blessings we (farmers) enjoy every day.” GN

Those looking to help the Meyers with the outreach can reach out to Shane at (615) 574-5779.



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PLAIN JANE - \$12

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KANSHA JAPANESE Express was an excellent choice for a quick lunch date. It's a charming restaurant with a nice variety of Japanese cuisine. The atmosphere was laid-back, with a few subtle touches to give it an authentic look.

I ordered the salmon bento box, which was an excellent choice. It was served with a delightful assortment, including gyoza, fried rice, a spring roll, and a salad. The salmon was tender and flavorful, complemented perfectly by the teriyaki sauce. The bento box offered a satisfying balance of textures and flavors, making it a well-rounded meal.

The chicken hibachi was another standout. It came with a savory soup featuring a broth infused with mushrooms, adding an earthy depth of flavor. The chicken was cooked just right, with a delicious teriyaki sauce that tied the dish together nicely.

Kansha Japanese Express is known for its sushi as well. While I didn't try it this time, favorites like the spicy crab roll, steak hibachi, and squid salad are popular choices on the menu.

Overall, Kansha Japanese Express delivers a tasty, quick meal in a relaxed setting. It's a great spot for anyone looking to enjoy quality Japanese food without the fuss. Ordering is straightforward — just head to the counter, place your order, and find a seat. The self-service style adds to the laid-back atmosphere, but the staff is friendly and efficient, making sure your food comes out quickly and exactly as you ordered it.





Whether you're in the mood for sushi, hibachi, or a bento box, everything is prepared with care and full of flavor. In short, Kansha Japanese Express is where you can enjoy a tasty, satisfying meal in a relaxed setting. Whether grabbing a quick bite or settling in for a longer meal, it's a spot you'll want to visit again and again. **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 Kansha Japanese Express.

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Nothing Like Having Beef with Family

More than a century-old family farm continues to serve communities with quality beef.

By Gabriel Grant Huff
Photos by Robin Holcomb

THE MOST important agricultural industry in the United States is cattle production, which persistently “accounts for the largest share of total cash receipts for agricultural commodities,” according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Between 2002 and 2022, the USDA said the value of cattle and calf production rose from \$27.1 billion to \$61.9 billion. The world’s largest-fed cattle industry is America, which is the world’s largest beef consumer, with Americans mainly using high-value, grain-fed beef. If it is not already clear enough, cattle and beef farmers are essential to the country and its communities. Lebanon has its very own cattle farmers who are working to feed families. Neal Farms

Beef Co., run by Houston and Brooke Neal’s family, is the name of the business.

The journey began in the late 1800s with Houston’s great-great-grandad. Houston’s grandad, Kenneth Neal, took over around the 1940s and passed the farm down to his three sons: Pal (Houston’s dad), Phil, and Perry. The three did more than just manage the property. The Neal brothers made the farm into one of the largest cow operations in the Southeast.

The family now owns about 1,000 acres and rents another 5,000 acres for hay cutting and running beef cattle. They raise an average of over 1,000 mama cows, which calf either in the fall or spring. Houston and Brooke began finishing some



BROOK, HOUSTON, AND THEIR KIDS



◀ Perry, Phil, and Pal





calves for the local public as a true farm-to-table experience starting in 2022, although they still sell the majority of the calves at the local sale barn.

In addition to Houston helping on the farm in his spare time, he works as a full-time bridge engineer in Nashville, and Brooke is a product manager at a 401(k) integration company, all while both are raising two children. Despite their busy lives, they saw the continuing growth of Middle Tennessee and the significance of people knowing where their food originated, realizing the rising demand for local farm-raised beef. So they decided communities needed a Neal family farm-to-table experience and started Neal Farms Beef Co.

“We are able to provide families food,” Houston said. “We love helping others, and what way helps others more than putting quality beef on their tables?”

The couple also wanted to teach their kids the meaning of hard work.

“We are able to provide families food. We love helping others, and what way helps others more than putting quality beef on their tables?”

HOUSTON NEAL

“We thought this was something that we could do with our kids — teaching them lessons and having them do something that Houston always [enjoyed while] growing up,” said Brooke, who manages the farm’s Facebook and Instagram pages, their best methods for communicating with customers. “We enjoy doing it as a family, so we thought we might as well make a business out of it.”

Neal Farms Beef Co., which shares the same location as the physical farm, prepares all-natural, high-quality, farm-raised beef. The calves are born, humanely raised, cared for, and finished on the same farm, which Houston says is not very common these days and is as local as one can get. Though the cattle are cross-bred, they always consist of Red or Black Angus cows. A trusted local farmer provides the grain that is fed to them, and the Neals’ grass-fed and grain-finished program ensures customers have tender, flavorful, nutritious protein. They sell beef by the pound and in quarter, half, and whole shares. Customers can purchase beef from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Sunday at the farm. People can also find the Neals’ beef at the Mt. Juliet Farmers Market.

For the couple, the community has helped bring success to Neal Farms.

“The community, Wilson County as a whole, has been so supportive,” said Brooke.

“We’re based out of Lebanon, but we set up at the Mt. Juliet Farmers Market twice a month, and we have had so many people recommend us and come back to us. Just the community as a whole has been very supportive, and I think we wouldn’t be doing as well as we have if it wasn’t for them.”

Their kids, the love of God, and the love of the community motivate them every day.

“What I love most about the farm is the quality of life it provides,” Houston said. “I think the ‘farm life’ is in my blood.”

And maybe that “farm life” blood will continue to spread to his children, who may one day help the business as adults. But that decision is still far down the road. For now, the family will keep doing what they do best — feed their community with quality beef. **GN**

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A Cast Iron Community



Cast iron enthusiasts celebrate history and good cooking.

By Sara Hook
Photography by Robin Holcomb

SIZZLING STEW, sweet cobbles, and crumbling cornbread are all staple dishes for the Wilson County Cast Iron Community, and their commitment to teaching and serving means that anyone in Lebanon and Wilson County can experience the wonders of cast iron cooking.

Cast iron has been a staple of construction and equipment for millennia, and cast iron cookware is no exception. From skillets and griddles to cauldrons and woks, functional cast iron cookware has been in use for over a century, making it a highly practical and historically significant part of any family's kitchen. For Cast Iron Community Administrator Ryan Bennett, it is all he uses to cook with.

"Anything that you can find to cook with that's stainless steel, or copper, or Teflon, or whatever, you can pretty much find in cast iron," Bennett said. "It's the original nonstick cookware, and [that's] one of the things we like about it."

The three other administrators, Dave Stout, Scott Selliers, and Richard Stout, all have that same love for cast iron. They and the other group members love to cook with it, and many love to collect vintage pieces



DAVE, SCOTT, RICHARD, AND RYAN

through yard sales and estate sales. In fact, Dave Stout first organized the group as a way to share his passion for cast iron and its history.

“He has a deep-rooted passion, as the four of us all do, to restore and use and understand the history and significance of vintage cast iron,” Bennett said. “The goal of it was to kind of have a place where people who enjoy cast iron or want to know more about cast iron, or maybe inherited some family heirloom cast iron pieces — to help know how they can use it and cook with it and not be afraid of it.”

They coordinated in a Facebook group, sharing pictures, recipes, and restoration tips. In early 2020, the group had only around 30 members. All of that changed when the pandemic hit.

“Restaurants shut down, and people were stuck at home,” Bennett said. “They started pulling out some old cast iron cookware they had, and they said, well, now’s the time for me to learn how to cook with it.”

Now, the Facebook community has over 1,100 members. Many of those pulled out heritage pieces, their grandmother’s cast iron skillet, or a piece their parents used while camping, and the group worked with them to date and restore that cookware.



“If we can make people understand it better, if we make people smile and make them happy with some good food, and if we can help others along the way, then that’s just even better.”

RYAN BENNETT

“It was sort of a lifeline for a lot of us to be able to help people and do things constructive over a difficult season of life,” Bennett said.

Now that the pandemic is over, they have been able to do much more in the Wilson County community. The Tennessee State Fair, the Wilson County Fair, and Fiddlers Grove have all been visited by group members, doing demos and exhibitions on how cast iron was historically used. Many of their demonstrations involve cooking, and audience members are always welcome to sample the food made.

“I think the most important thing, more than seeing it being cooked and tasting it, is to be able to sit around while it’s being cooked and just talk,” Bennett said. “There’s a relationship piece of that because you have to kind of watch it. You have to keep an eye on it; you can’t leave it and do something



else, so you kind of are stationary — and we're not stationary very much in our world anymore.”

However, the administrators are most proud of the group's service component. The Cast Iron Community has fed local firefighters, police officers, EMTs, and teachers. They love cooking cauldrons of stew for Compassionate Hands and the people served there.

“The core of it is, it's just a group of folks who like to get together and use cast iron and cook outdoors,” Bennett said. “If we can make people understand it better, if we make people smile and make them happy with some good food, and if we can help others along the way, then that's just even better.”

So dig into your closets, attics, basements, and kitchen cabinets, and pull out that cast iron. The Cast Iron Community can help you start your adventure in cast iron cooking. **GN**





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A Legacy Built on Faith and Family

Charles “Tommy” Lowe’s
journey with Cracker Barrel

By Haley Potter

Photography by Robin Holcomb

STEPPING INTO a Cracker Barrel kitchen feels like walking into the heart of a Southern home. The air is warm and fragrant, filled with the rich aroma of biscuits baking in the oven and the savory scent of country ham sizzling on the grill. Cast iron skillets clatter against the stovetop while the comforting sizzle of frying bacon mixes with the sound of bubbling gravy. Cooks move quickly, stirring pots of creamy mashed potatoes and ladling hearty servings of chicken and dumplings. We think about the tradition of Southern cooking in Cracker Barrels across the nation, but what we might not stop to think about are the faces and names behind this timeless roadside homespun staple.

From the rolling hills and green pastures of a family farm to those shelves lined with mason jars of spices and fresh ingredients in the kitchens of Cracker Barrel, Charles “Tommy” Lowe’s life has been a journey of resilience, faith, and a love for his roots. As he enters his early 90s, Lowe reflects on a journey not defined by mere business success but by a legacy of hard work, commitment, and deep ties to his hometown of Lebanon, instilled in him from a young age.





TOMMY LOWE



“Cracker Barrel started right here, and it’s still got the same post office box and phone number that we had back then.”

TOMMY LOWE

Born on June 1, 1932, at Vanderbilt Hospital in Nashville, Lowe’s life journey began during the Great Depression. His family moved to Lebanon when he was just 6 years old after his father, a surgeon, made a deal to practice at the local 12-bed hospital. “We lived in a little log cabin down on West Spring Street,” Lowe recalled with a smile. “It’s still there — you know — just a little bitty log cabin.” It was a humble start, but one that taught him the value of community and family from an early age.



Growing up in Lebanon, Lowe attended McClain School and later Castle Heights Military Academy, which was just two blocks from his home. “I’d walk to school every day,” he remembered. “I graduated from Castle Heights in high school and had my room number all set to go to Vanderbilt,” but life had other plans. “My daddy wanted me to be a doctor, but I had a girlfriend who didn’t want me to go,” Lowe chuckled. So, instead of heading off to medical school, he stayed in Lebanon and worked on the family dairy farm.

By the time he was 13, Lowe was running the farm on his own — a task that instilled in him a strong work ethic. But it wasn’t just farming that filled his days. “I did a little bit of everything,” he said. “My daddy helped me buy a backhoe and an air compressor, and I went into the construction business.” Whether it was digging ditches, laying down water lines, or even helping build a motel on West Main Street, Lowe proved he could tackle anything.

It was this can-do spirit and a long-standing friendship that eventually led to the founding of Cracker Barrel. The inspiration came from a combination of events, one of which was an unexpected snowstorm in Jackson, Tennessee. Lowe, who often drove buses, had taken the Lebanon girls basketball team to a state tournament on Dan Evins’ Shell Oilers fast-pitch softball team bus. The next morning, they woke to find 14 inches of snow on the ground. “We slogged through the snow to get to a little restaurant across the street, and that’s where the idea hit me,” Lowe recalled.

However, Cracker Barrel’s founding story is deeply rooted in the friendship and partnership between Tommy Lowe and Dan Evins. Both were Castle Heights Military Academy alumni and even shared the title of Mid-South Wrestling champion in their respective weight classes for two consecutive years. Evins, who was involved with Shell Oil, had asked Lowe to design an affordable building that could accommodate gas pumps in front. He envisioned a place that combined the charm of a country store with the convenience of a gas station. Lowe’s bus trip and the sight of a cozy restaurant sparked the idea that led to the first Cracker Barrel opening in September 1969.



“I told Dan, ‘We can build this little thing right here, put some gas pumps out front, have antiques inside, and you can sell your gas. It won’t cost much,’” Lowe said. “And that’s how it all started.” With Dan Evins serving as president and Tommy Lowe as vice president, Cracker Barrel began as a collaborative effort, blending their shared vision and values.

The rest, as they say, is history. Today, Cracker Barrel is a beloved chain with locations across the country, but it all started with Lowe’s simple idea and Evins’ support, rooted in a deep friendship and a shared commitment to quality and community. Despite his many achievements, Lowe remains humble. “You name it, I’ve done it,” he said with a shrug. From building motels and warehouses to running a travel agency, his entrepreneurial spirit has always guided him. Yet, it’s Lebanon that he’s always called home, even though he now spends half the year in Mexico. “I’ve been going down there since 1950,” he said. “It’s like a second home, but my roots are here.”

Reflecting on his life, Lowe’s pride in his contributions to Lebanon is clear. “Cracker Barrel started right here, and it’s still got the same post office box and phone number that we had back then,” he said. For Lowe, it’s not just about business. It’s about community, family, and staying true to the values that have guided him from that little log cabin on West Spring Street to the successful entrepreneur he is today. “I’ve done a lot of things,” Lowe said, “but Lebanon is where my heart is — always has been, always will be.” **GN**



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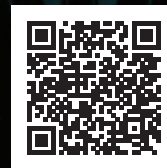
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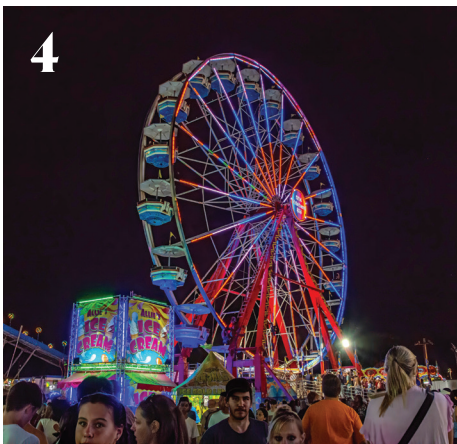
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Tennessee State Fair - Aug. 15



Photography by Hannah Woodcock

On Thursday, Aug. 15, the Tennessee State Fair kicked off at the Wilson County Fairgrounds with all your favorite fair festivities and fares! The fair ran through Aug. 24 and was packed full of events, competitions, and excitement! On the agricultural side of things, there were 4-H and National FFA Organization competitions and livestock shows, as well as horticultural competitions. There was also a special farm-to-table dinner. There were eight stages throughout the fair featuring live music and talented acts, such as The Packard Family Strings and the Smithville Old Time Dance Club.



1. Penelope Fratelli and Peter Brunette 2. Chase Vashel, Hunter Menel, and Amy Chandler 3. Kevin Packard, Josie Packard, Donny Packard, Rori Packard, Davy Packard, and Rosie Packard 4. Ferris wheel 5. Malakai Flores

TGIFF - Thank Goodness It's Fiber Friday - Aug. 2-30



Photography by Hannah Woodcock

Sunshine Weaving and Fiber Arts hosted its popular event, TGIFF—Thank Goodness It's Fiber Friday, every Friday evening this past month from 5-7 p.m. The free weekly gathering brought together knitting and crochet enthusiasts of all skill levels to work on their projects, seek help with questions, and simply enjoy each other's company. This was a relaxed and creative atmosphere, making it a favorite spot for fiber lovers to unwind and connect. Attendees were also treated to the occasional door prizes, with lucky winners walking away with fabulous goodies, provided they stayed until the end.



1. Cynthia Rice 2. Lalo Ruehle
3. Sarah Crane 4. Marecha Jackson and Darlene Mealeses

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