

Good News

exchange

Our HEROES

Virginia Hamlett

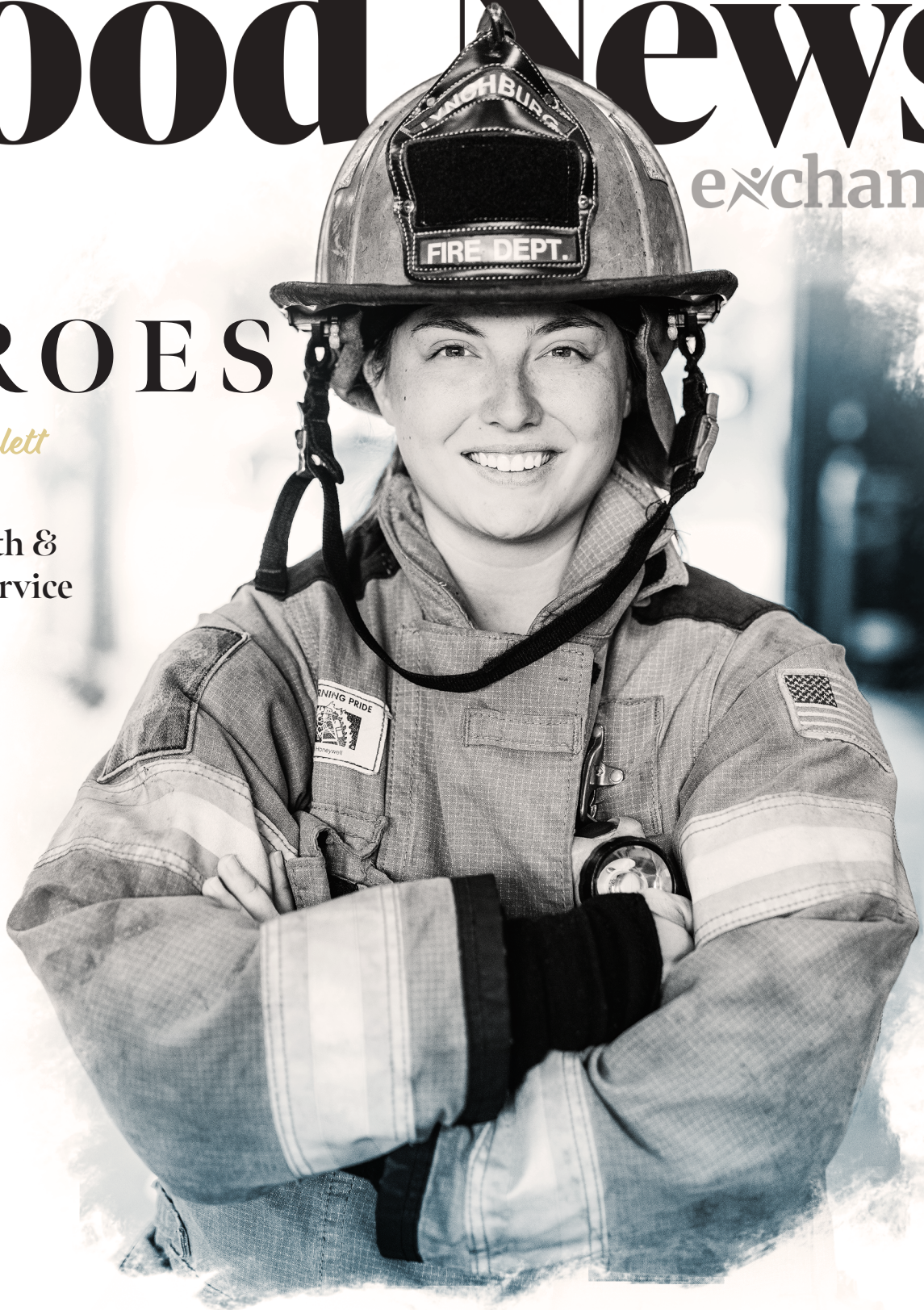
**A Legacy of
Personal Growth &
Community Service**

Calm in the Chaos

Pamela Watson emphasizes resilience and teamwork in the high-stakes world of emergency services.

The Weight of Duty: Lifting Lives in Lynchburg

Officer Peter Begley's river rescue and daily acts of service are the strength behind the badge.



ISSUE 10 2024

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Running toward danger

Celebrating our local heroes

SHE FLASHES her lights and pushes the gas pedal a little harder. The walkie-talkie is too quiet, so she spins the dial and makes her bulletproof vest a little more comfortable. She worked hard to wear that badge. She joined the force to give people comfort and safety — a luxury her mother didn't have. A few people may think she joined law enforcement for pride, power, or influence, but the truth is that she just wants to help people.

He puts on a yellow helmet — the real one — not the play one he wore when he was younger. Decades ago, he watched his dad go to work every morning to go save the day. Sure, some of the days were not as exhilarating, like climbing a tree to get a cat home. But other days were scary. He

thought of his dad every time he ran into a burning house.

And she shops at Bath & Body Works for the new deals they're offering. Her favorite lotion scent is "Into The Night." She is sometimes self-conscious about her cracked, itching hands. When she worked long 16-hour days during the COVID-19 pandemic, she had to wash her hands triple what she used to... because she had to save triple the lives she used to. Only a hero like her could help give a family several more years with their loved ones.

Our first responders are heroes. And this issue of Good News shines a light on the life, happiness, and joy they help us keep. When we scream for help, they run toward danger. We thank you, now and forever. **GN**

Wesley Bryant,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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From dream to reality: **Accessible Camino break barriers**

A Rustburg Spanish teacher steps into an inspirational pilgrimage to help others see the world.

*By Dave Lenehan
Photography by Chris Morris*

BEST FRIENDS Patrick Gray and Justin Skeesuck from Eagle, Idaho, were searching for adventure. Skeesuck, a wheelchair user, asked Gray one day if he would hike 500 miles of northern Spain with him.

Gray simply answered, “Yeah, I’ll push you.”

Their first hike started in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, France, crossed the Pyrenees mountains, and crossed the northern part of Spain, ending in Santiago de Compostela. Now, several years later, the two friends are facilitating trips for other physically disabled people that cover roughly the last 100 kilometers of the Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James).

The trips that Gray and Skeesuck lead feature several “captains” — those who are either wheelchair users or are physically disabled — and their teams who push, pull, and sometimes carry them over

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the roads, rocks, and streams along the Camino. “Camino,” in Spanish, means “a trek, road, or path.” The goal of each trip is to provide captains and team members alike with the breathtaking challenge of hard work, camaraderie, and personal achievement. With the trek now available to people who are physically disabled, the trips were named “Accessible Camino” group trips.

In 2020, the two friends’ story caught the ear of Jennifer Irwin, a Rustburg Middle School and Rustburg High School Spanish teacher. She listened to the pair’s book, “I’ll Push You,” on her drive to and from work.

Irwin thought, “I am healthy enough — I can do this.”

Irwin signed up for the trip online and was approved to go toward the end of 2023. This past June, she boarded a plane for Spain to join Gray and Skeesuck — along with a team of 42 people, six captains, and their support teams — to tackle the journey. That particular trip started in Vigo, Spain, north of the Portuguese border. They were joined by five guides and two others who photographed and filmed the trip. Everyone took turns helping each captain and pitched in where they were needed. Five of the captains also had family and friends join them.

During the trip, Irwin’s group occasionally encountered an Italian man named Vincenzo, who was navigating the Camino on his own. Each day, the teams aimed to reach the next stop on the Camino. Irwin quickly discovered that the journey was far more than good exercise or helping someone out.

“It’s a pilgrimage,” Irwin pointed out. “It became more than just a task [we] wanted to complete.”

For each day on the trip, each participant had to get two stamps in their “Pilgrim’s Passport,” a document similar to a government-issued passport. Local merchants, tourist sites, and other places gladly stamped the passports, so the two-stamp goal was easy, Irwin said. When the passport was turned in, participants received a “Compostela,” a piece of paper written in Latin certifying that someone had completed the Camino pilgrimage.

Irwin’s husband is also a teacher. Since they are both off in the summer, she said they typically travel around the country with their daughter. Irwin said she believes travel is a great way to learn more about our nation and ourselves. Her family has a goal of seeing all 50 states before her daughter graduates high school in two years. Irwin said only two states remain: Alaska and Hawaii. In light of that family tradition, Irwin had an additional interesting perspective about her reasons for signing up for Accessible Camino group trips.



“It was a selfish move, honestly,” she admitted.

She saw her decision to participate in the Accessible Camino group trips was taking a lot away from that regular family bonding time.

As the trip neared its end, however, she thought, “I can come home and be more present with them.”

She said that she knows Alaska and Hawaii will be there for another year and that she does not regret making the Camino journey at all.

On day six of Irwin’s adventure, the six teams walked and wheeled into the courtyard of the Catedral de Santiago de Compostela, believed to be the final resting place of St. James the Greater, one of the Twelve Apostles. They were welcomed with cheers and applause.

“It was great to see the look on everyone’s face — that we did it together.” Irwin concluded, “It was a ‘time capsule’ experience, one I will never forget.”

Just two weeks after her Spain trip, Irwin took 15 people, including some of her students, on a trip through Switzerland, Italy, France, and Spain. Maybe some of those kids will take on an Accessible Camino group trip in the future. **GN**

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CraveABLEs: Changing perceptions of disability in Lynchburg

An ice cream shop with a mission to show the community the abilities of its diverse staff

By Dave Lenehan // Photography by Chris Morris



▲ Anna Anderson

WHEN YOU pull into the parking lot of the CraveABLEs ice cream shop on Route 221 in Lynchburg, you'll instantly notice two things. First, your eyes will be drawn to the ocean-like baby blue paint adorning the entire building. Secondly, you'll notice that four letters in the shop's name are capitalized. The story behind both speaks to the adage, "Don't judge a book by its cover."

Taylor Perkins is the founder and president of CraveABLEs Lynchburg, a nonprofit ice cream shop that opened in June and provides supported employment for people with intellectual disabilities. Perkins worked as a high school adaptive special education teacher for seven years, teaching her students the skills they needed to gain and better their independence. Her students followed an adaptive curriculum and could stay enrolled until age 22. Perkins found that when her students were about to age out of school programs, few companies would hire them due to the support they needed.



**Taylor
Perkins**

Craveables
EST. 2023



▲ Ian Waugh



▲ Hunter Jarman



▲ Ian Waugh and Teagan Scott

Perkins heard from many parents about the fears and frustrations they and their children faced in finding employment for someone with disabilities. Some parents were afraid to drop their kids off at a job at a grocery store, for example, because they weren't sure how their child or fellow employees might handle a difficult or unfamiliar situation that could come up in a workplace. Perkins wanted to open a business that could change the stigma many people think of when they meet someone who is intellectually disabled.

"I wished there was a place nearby where my students could work and interact with the community," she pointed out, "not be stuck in a back room packing boxes."

In the spring of last year, Perkins and her board formed the nonprofit CraveABLEs and opened an ice cream trailer in April of this year. When their current building came up for sale, Perkins and her team jumped at the chance to set up a permanent location.

The lettering in the shop's name has an easy explanation. Perkins said that her employees have only one disability but so many other abilities — thus, the "ABLE" in CraveABLEs. The ABLE staff are learning skills, building their confidence, and expanding their resumes. Some will likely continue working at the shop, while others hope to one day move on to another job. There are 14 ABLE staff working at CraveABLEs alongside 11 other support staff who help the ABLE workers learn and carry out their jobs. Many of the support staff are special education teachers like Perkins, along with other



▲ CraveABLEs staff show off their custom designed shirts

paraprofessionals and high school and college students who want to go into the field of education or disability.

CraveABLEs sells Homestead Creamery ice cream flavors along with some of its own branded flavors made by a local manufacturer. CraveABLEs also has in-store and online merchandise for sale, allowing employees to learn more skills such as making customized bracelets and keychains and fulfilling orders.

Perkins, who currently volunteers 100% of her time and energy to CraveABLEs, said the shop and trailer are making a noticeable difference in her ABLE staff.

“Our employees love it so much they ask to work on their birthday,” Perkins said.

She also holds over 40 applications in hand from others with disabilities who want to work there.

It shows “we’re meeting a need, but it shows we need to do more” to bring in more customers and additional sponsors to help CraveABLEs grow, Perkins related. The shop is open year-round and will be adding some new items for the fall and winter months.

What about the baby blue that covers the shop inside and out? Perkins explained that she wanted the colors to reflect

an Outer Banks beach theme. The customer tables are pastel pink. Perkins said the quieter colors not only express the “beachy” theme but create a more soothing work environment for ABLE employees.

The organization’s mission goes far beyond just serving up delicious ice cream. One of Perkins goals is that CraveABLEs customers will leave with “full bellies and fuller hearts.” She truly wants Lynchburg to see how valuable and capable her staff can be beyond the storefront.

If you want CraveABLEs ice cream at your next event, the trailer is available for booking online. Perkins noted that she is now seeking fiscal year two corporate sponsorships along with additional monthly support including the Cravefuls Club, offering members discounts and CraveABLEs merchandise along with helping the organization grow and continue providing jobs for those that may have never had one. **GN**

To learn how you can help CraveABLEs grow, visit www.craveables.org.





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LORENA ANDRESS MAKES FITNESS FUN FOR OLDER ADULTS



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Known for her energetic classes, Lorena Andress brings enthusiasm and support to SilverSneakers, promoting health and happiness for older adults.

By Dave Lenehan // Photography by Chris Morris

AS WE age, one of the things that becomes more challenging is staying active and healthy. When we get older, it can become harder to move and exercise as much as we did when we were in our 20s and 30s. How can exercising for older adults be fun, create community, and be physically beneficial?

For Kinetix Health Club instructor Lorena Andress, the answer to those questions comes in one word: SilverSneakers. Andress is a physical fitness instructor and dance enthusiast who learned about SilverSneakers when she managed Curves for over 12 years. When Curves had to close its doors due to COVID-19, it needed a new home for its existing members through their health insurance that would cover the SilverSneakers program. Christian Meacham, owner of Kinetix Health Club, welcomed the idea with open arms since most Curves members were older adults.

When Andress first visited Kinetix, she discovered that the health club offered classes for clients called SilverSneakers. Andress quickly discovered that SilverSneakers involved a lot more movement for her clients and that she could create fun within the program, too. She was hooked and became certified in several classes.

Andress said that her move to Kinetix to teach SilverSneakers was “not my plan, but God’s.”

SilverSneakers costs are covered under the federal Medicare program managed through Humana. Andress explained that there are a dozen varieties of classes SilverSneakers offers. The SilverSneakers “classic” sessions involve moving to music through a variety of exercises designed to increase muscular strength, range of motion, and activities for daily living. Clients spend 30 minutes doing exercises



▲ Lorena Andress leading a SilverSneakers class

while sitting and then 30 minutes while standing using exercise bands, balls, and weights. The “circuit” class is more advanced and involves more cardio.

The SilverSneakers classes are more than just a job for Andress. It’s something she’s very passionate about. She begins each class with a short, encouraging word of scripture. Andress added that if someone asks her for prayer, she will step aside with that client and pray on the spot.

“Some come to the class just for the community of one another — others come get a hug from me or to be encouraged. For many, this is their family,” Andress pointed out.

Because of Andress’ love for dance, Zumba, and overall fun, she has her clients exercise to loud music with lots of client participation in the loudness, too.

“Most times, you can hear me from the parking lot,” Andress exclaimed with a big smile.

Even her adult children tell her that she’s sometimes “too loud.” Andress’ energy and her commitment to her members, both in and out of class, was soon noticed by the SilverSneakers national organization. Andress and her class submitted her name to the group’s 2024 Instructor of the Year award program. She also sent in a short video about her class to be reviewed.

Andress thought, “How cool would it be to have Lynchburg on the national map?”



▲ Andress with her SilverSneakers Instructor of the Year finalist award

Not long after her submission, SilverSneakers contacted Kinetix to say that Andress had made it to the top 10. Shortly after that, she found out that she made it to the final four. SilverSneakers sent Andress and her members all the resources needed to hold a celebration party, along with T-shirts featuring the organization's logo. SilverSneakers also presented Andress with a crystal award plaque that says, "Top Finalist: Lorena Andress." But the

celebration wasn't over. Andress' class got together and threw her their own party, inviting WSET ABC 13 TV reporter Brigette Kelly to cover it and participate in the class. Kelly said she had a lot of fun.

Andress' SilverSneakers clients boast incredible longevity. She said that many of her regulars are the women she first began working with at Curves. One of her ladies told Andress that she didn't realize how much fun exercising could

be. That enthusiasm keeps her coming back each week.

Outside of SilverSneakers, Andress also teaches a balance class for older adults. She has some clear and simple advice to help those over 65 stay healthy. The key is to do something.

"You have to stay moving. You have to be consistent and dedicated to your health," she explained.

In the future, Andress would like to bring in representatives from local organization services for older adults so her clients can learn more about what is available here in Lynchburg. Andress' experience is deeply inspired.

"When God opens that door of opportunity to go beyond [what you love], it's huge. It's such an honor." GN



**SANDWICH
SPOTLIGHT**





What makes Westside Deli a local favorite

GOOD NEWS IS COMING TO DINNER!

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

Westside Deli

7701 Timberlake Rd.
Lynchburg
(434) 239-6304
www.westside-deli.com

WITH A gumball machine in the corner, New York cheesecake at the counter, and regulars walking between tables to greet one another, it is easy to feel at home at Westside Deli. We sat ourselves, ordered some sodas, and enjoyed warm and crispy fried mushrooms as we waited for our sandwiches.

First, the Staten Island was a straightforward choice and a no-frills classic. The sandwich featured tender slices of smoked turkey layered generously within a warm, lightly toasted onion roll. The turkey is flavorful, with a smoky richness well complemented by havarti cheese. Each bite was a harmonious blend of textures and tastes, creating an almost nostalgic turkey sandwich. The bread, lightly toasted to a perfect crunch, adds just the right amount of substance without overshadowing the main components.

Next, the Reuben — a classic that Westside Deli transformed into a delightful experience — arrived beautifully grilled, with the rye bread perfectly crisped and golden. Inside, the layers of corned beef were tender and flavorful, with a subtle hint of spice. The sauerkraut was tangy and added a necessary zest, while the Swiss cheese melted beautifully, creating a rich, gooey texture that binds the flavors together. The Russian dressing was the crowning touch, adding a creamy, slightly sweet contrast that elevated the entire sandwich.

As someone who enjoys a good sandwich, I will be making another trip to Westside Deli. The environment was homey, the service was incredible, and overall, this restaurant was simplicity done impeccably well. GN

A Legacy of Personal Growth and Community Service

VIRGINIA HAMLETT SERVES LYNCHBURG WITH ALL HER HEART.

Warren Taylor Jr. understood that personal growth enhances not just the individual's life but also the lives of their family, friends, and community. He was the driving force behind his granddaughter, Virginia Hamlett, always encouraging her to try new things, learn as much as she could, and tackle difficult challenges. Compelled by her grandfather's battle with cancer, Hamlett initially pursued a degree in biomedical sciences. However, her career focus shifted during her sophomore year when she obtained her emergency medical technician (EMT) certification and discovered a passion for emergency services.

Although Taylor died in 2016 and didn't live to see Hamlett graduate from Liberty University, his influence lives on. Today, it touches countless lives through the hands, heart, and service Hamlett extends in her work with the Lynchburg Fire Department.

At 26, Hamlett exemplifies the power of embracing change and following your passion.



"I began by volunteering with a local rescue squad and found my love for emergency services, she said.

This newfound passion led her to switch her major to public health.

"I continued volunteering while I finished out my degree and shortly later applied for the fire department,"

▲ Hamlett holding a picture of her grandfather



*Caption:
Abdovidae nis
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quia porri offici
omnihil liquodi
geniuntem. Et pe
in re*

VIRGINIA HAMLETT

Hamlett recalled. "It's been 4 1/2 years now, and I wouldn't change a single second of it. What started as a passion for medicine soon transitioned into an interest in firefighting as well."

As a paramedic assigned to Medic 3 in an advanced life support capac-

"Don't let the lack of current knowledge stop you from reaching for something greater."

- Virginia Hamlett



ity, she responds to medical and fire calls. Currently stationed at Fire Station 3, Hamlett's days are filled with the unpredictable rhythm of emergency response. A typical shift starts at 7 a.m. with a thorough check of the ambulance and a briefing from the outgoing crew. By 7:30, she's seated with her team for roll call, discussing the day's training plans and any critical updates. From there, the crew inspects their designated apparatus, ensuring everything is ready for the day's calls. The team eats lunch and dinner at the station between responses, bunking overnight on their 24-hour shifts, which end with the 7:30 a.m. shift change bell.

"No two days are the same," Hamlett said. "That's what I love about this job."

Being a woman in a traditionally male-dominated field has its challenges, but Hamlett sees it as an opportunity for growth.

"Although not as common anymore, there is still a stereotype or connotation that women should not be in this field. Thankfully, this thought process is not as common anymore. However, I use it to fuel myself to continue to improve. This hard work and strong ethics for improvement benefit not only myself but my team as well," she stated.

But the job comes with its share of emotional challenges. Hamlett recalled a particularly difficult period.

"This past year, we responded to a high number of critical medical calls involving children that seriously took a toll on our mental health."

In these moments, she leans heavily on her faith, her family — both of her parents are in emergency medical services — and her colleagues for support. The Lynchburg Fire Department takes mental health seriously, offering counseling services, critical incident debriefings, and a peer support team.

"I'm lucky to have people so close to me understand what I'm going through. I grew closer to God during these times as well. Vulnerability in prayer and quiet time will bring more healing than most will give it credit for," Hamlett shared.



Physical fitness is another crucial aspect of the job. The department employs an athletic trainer to aid firefighters in their health journey, and they have access to cardio machines and weights at the station. She prioritizes good nutrition and exercise on her off days, understanding the importance of being in top form for the job's demands.

Hamlett, who gained all her fire training through the department's recruit school, encourages women to consider a career in firefighting.

"If you have the drive to help people and the commitment to maintain this lifestyle, then you should go for it. Don't let the lack of current knowledge stop you from reaching for something greater," she encouraged.

What Hamlett finds most rewarding about serving the Lynchburg community is the trust people place in firefighters.

"We're one of the only professions where people leave their doors unlocked for us and anxiously wait for our arrival," she said. "That is something not to be taken lightly."

Hamlett has found her calling. From those early days, inspired by her grandfather, to serving on the front lines of emergency response, she embodies the spirit of growth and service he instilled in her. With each call she answers and each life she touches, Hamlett carries forward a legacy of personal growth and community service that would make her grandfather proud.

Her love for the job shines through in every word.

"I love this job with all my heart. It's a privilege to be able to serve the people of Lynchburg," Hamlett said with conviction. "I love Lynchburg, the people that live in it, and I'm proud to serve it in whatever way I can."

It's a sentiment echoing her grandfather's lessons, proving that the greatest growth often comes from serving others. **GN**

Despite the challenges, the rewards of the job are immeasurable. While Hamlett rarely sees those she serves once their transport is complete or their fire emergency is resolved, she finds it encouraging when she hears feedback from the community — for example, a Facebook post in a local group thanking her and her partner for their service was particularly moving.

"It was heartwarming to see, especially after the difficult day we had," she said. "To add to it, multiple people started commenting on the post, adding their own positive stories from previous medical responses I had been a part of. That post, and the comments associated with it, were so significant to me."



▲ Lynchburg Fire Station 3



Calm in the Chaos

PAMELA WATSON EMPHASIZES RESILIENCE AND TEAMWORK IN THE HIGH-STAKES WORLD OF EMERGENCY SERVICES.

AN AD for a 911 dispatcher job surely stirs many emotions and ideas for most of us. We imagine we could never do that. How could we help someone else if we couldn't remain calm ourselves? Or, for those of us who keep an eye on the television and an ear to the scanner, a sense of curiosity and intrigue might arise, but we likely prefer our seats on the couch to the one in front of multiple computer screens. It takes a certain personality to wear the headset and answer the calls. It's not for everyone.

Thankfully, it was a fit for Pamela Watson, who works for the Lynchburg Police Department's Emergency Communications Center. She was intrigued by the work and responded to an ad for a dispatcher position in 2000. Her training on the evening shift from 2:30 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. introduced her to a fast-paced environment in which she thrived.

"As an added benefit, I preferred not having to get up early. Call it a win-win," laughed Watson.

She advanced from a dispatcher to a leadership role, eventually as-

suming her current position as personnel and training supervisor. She understands the importance of the dispatcher’s role and its potential impact on callers and first responders.

Watson said, “The daily demands are intense and require a high level of focus, resilience, and quick decision-making. Every call we receive can be a matter of life or death, and it’s essential to remain calm and composed under pressure. Leading a team in this environment involves ensuring everyone is well-trained, supported, and ready to respond effectively to any situation.”

She emphasizes a culture of continuous learning, emotional support, and effective communication, working together to create an atmosphere that equips the team to manage their work successfully.

“We conduct regular roll call training sessions to keep our skills sharp and stay updated on the latest protocols as well as additional training when staffing allows. Additionally, we prioritize mental health by providing resources and support systems to help our team cope with the emotional strain that comes with the job,” she explained. “Effective communication is also crucial. We maintain clear, concise, and calm communication during emergencies to ensure that information is relayed accurately and efficiently. This helps prevent misunderstandings and allows us to coordinate our efforts seamlessly.”

Teamwork and trust round out Watson’s training. Each member plays a vital role and trusts one another’s abilities during high-stress situations. While this strengthens and increases the odds of a positive outcome, supporting the team is of equal importance.

“By creating an environment where everyone feels valued and supported, we can work together more effectively

and make critical decisions with confidence,” said Watson. “Leading a team through such demanding circumstances requires a balance of empathy, strategic thinking, and unwavering dedication. It’s about being there for each other, staying focused on our mission, and continually striving to provide the best possible service to our community.”

Watson emphasizes creating a welcoming environment for new hires from day one. She begins by giving them a tour of the facility and introducing them to the team, fostering an inclusive atmosphere. She then teaches the fundamentals of the role, including essential certifications and terminology, while allowing practice in a low-stress setting.



“Leading a team through such demanding circumstances requires a balance of empathy, strategic thinking, and unwavering dedication.”
 - Pamela Watson

OUR HEROES





To further support new employees, she encourages existing staff to engage with them early on, helping to build confidence and comfort in asking questions. She aims to empower new hires by providing the guidance and resources they need to succeed, ensuring they feel valued as part of the team. Through continuous encouragement, Watson aims to unlock their full potential and integrate them into the supportive culture of the 911 center.

There was a time when Watson was on the other end of her department's calls when a serious car accident injured her daughter. Once again, she recognized the impact and influence of leadership and influence, a spirit of calm in a time of crisis.

"It was an incredibly challenging time for our family. Throughout her difficult recovery, we leaned heavily on the support of our community, from the responding paramedics and my colleagues at the 911 center who took the call and I work closely with, to my colleagues at the Lynchburg Police Department and fire department," she shared. "Despite the fear and uncertainty, I maintained a positive attitude and focused on the daily progress we were making. This optimistic outlook not only lifted my daughter's spirits but also reminded us that we were not alone in this journey. The unwavering support and dedication from the community, along with a positive mindset, were instrumental in navigating this difficult period and moving towards recovery."

Watson's passion for her work extends beyond the center's walls. She actively engages with the community, participating in events like career fairs and speaking engagements.

"One thing I want to emphasize is the critical role the 911 center plays in ensuring public safety," she said. "My goal is to raise awareness about the

"The opportunity to ensure that the next generation of dispatchers is well prepared to serve our community is incredibly fulfilling."

- Pamela Watson

significance of our work and the positive impact it has on the safety and well-being of our community."

After 24 years, the profound impact she can make as a leader and mentor continues to motivate her.

"The opportunity to ensure that the next generation of dispatchers is well prepared to serve our community is incredibly fulfilling," she said.

Her role as a general instructor with the Central Virginia Criminal Justice Academy further amplifies her commitment to shaping future public safety professionals.

As potential hires respond to the center's listing for open positions and as she interacts with the community, Watson shares the importance of the vital services provided by her team. She recognizes the impact she can make in her position, hiring and training dedicated individuals passionate about assisting others in times of crisis. She's as passionate as her team.

"The opportunity to help people in their moments of need remains a powerful and rewarding aspect of my work. Knowing that my efforts contribute to the safety and well-being of our community keeps me inspired and dedicated every day." GN



The Weight of Duty: Lifting Lives in Lynchburg

OFFICER PETER BEGLEY'S RIVER RESCUE AND DAILY ACTS OF SERVICE ARE THE STRENGTH BEHIND THE BADGE.

WHILE MOST of the city slept, Lynchburg police pursued a vehicle that failed to respond to their direction to pull over. The closest responder, Officer Peter Begley, followed the chase's location on the radio and at-

tempted to catch up as it snaked outside the city limits and back in again. Tires screeched as spike strips stopped the vehicle's forward motion but not the suspect's.

Flinging open the passenger door, the woman ran into the early morning

darkness toward the James River. Spotlights danced along the river bank, revealing her location in the water. Officer Begley, who never caught up to the chase, arrived minutes later. He knew the woman's chances of withstanding the chill of the current that swirled around her small frame were not in her favor.

"Hey, keep an eye on my stuff, and give me some light," Officer Begley said as he slipped off the duty belt, which held his gun, phone, and other tools.

He waded out, his body immediately confirming his suspicions about the river's temperature. He pulled the woman from a tree branch, the only thing between her and what could have been the last

OUR HEROES



moments of her life, and handed her to the officers of the Lynchburg Police Department lining the embankment.

Reflecting on the rescue later, Officer Begley attributed his quick action to his background and training.

“I was in the Marines, so I know how to swim with a uniform on, and I was the only one there with any type of swim training or defensive tactics in water through the police academy. I think my adrenaline was pumping, chasing the car and trying to catch it,” said Officer Begley.

He continued, “It easily became ‘yes, that person is a criminal, but they need help.’ Even though they’re a criminal, you have to render aid, and I knew this was within my abilities.”

Officer Begley was recognized as Lynchburg’s “Officer of the Month” in April 2024 by the Lynchburg Police Foundation.

The foundation’s website reported, “The river conditions were extremely dangerous, even for an experienced swimmer. Officer Begley’s quick actions that night saved a woman and

“It still makes me feel good to know that I made a difference, even if it’s the small things like giving someone directions or helping them push their car out of the road.”

- Officer Peter Begley



OUR HEROES



demonstrated his dedication to the preservation of life as a law enforcement officer. He is being recognized for his bravery and selflessness in rescuing a person in extreme danger.”

The car chase and rescue scene resembled how television and the big screen portrayed law enforcement when Officer Begley was growing up. Those images and his desire to help people fueled his plans to pursue a ca-

reer in law enforcement. Approaching his 10th anniversary as a police officer this November, he knows the less dramatic side of the job.

“When you see police on the news or videos, whether it’s good or bad, they’re always doing some enforcement thing — fighting somebody in a shootout, something that really draws people’s attention. They don’t show you the other 99% of the time

where you’re doing paperwork, filling out reports, sitting at the hospital waiting or waiting in court, or things along those lines. I think going into it, you always think you’re going to help way more people than you do. It still makes me feel good to know that I made a difference, even if it’s the small things like giving someone directions or helping them push their car out of the road.”

OUR HEROES

Officer Begley likens managing the impact of more violent or tragic incidents to weight training.

“It’s like going to the gym,” he explained. “The more weight you lift, the stronger you get and the more you can handle. But that doesn’t mean you can’t get hurt or stressed out doing it.”

He emphasized that even with experience, the job’s emotional weight remains challenging.

“I thought going into it, ‘Hey, this is fine.’ But it never really is,” Officer Begley admitted.

He relies on a layered support system to manage the stress.

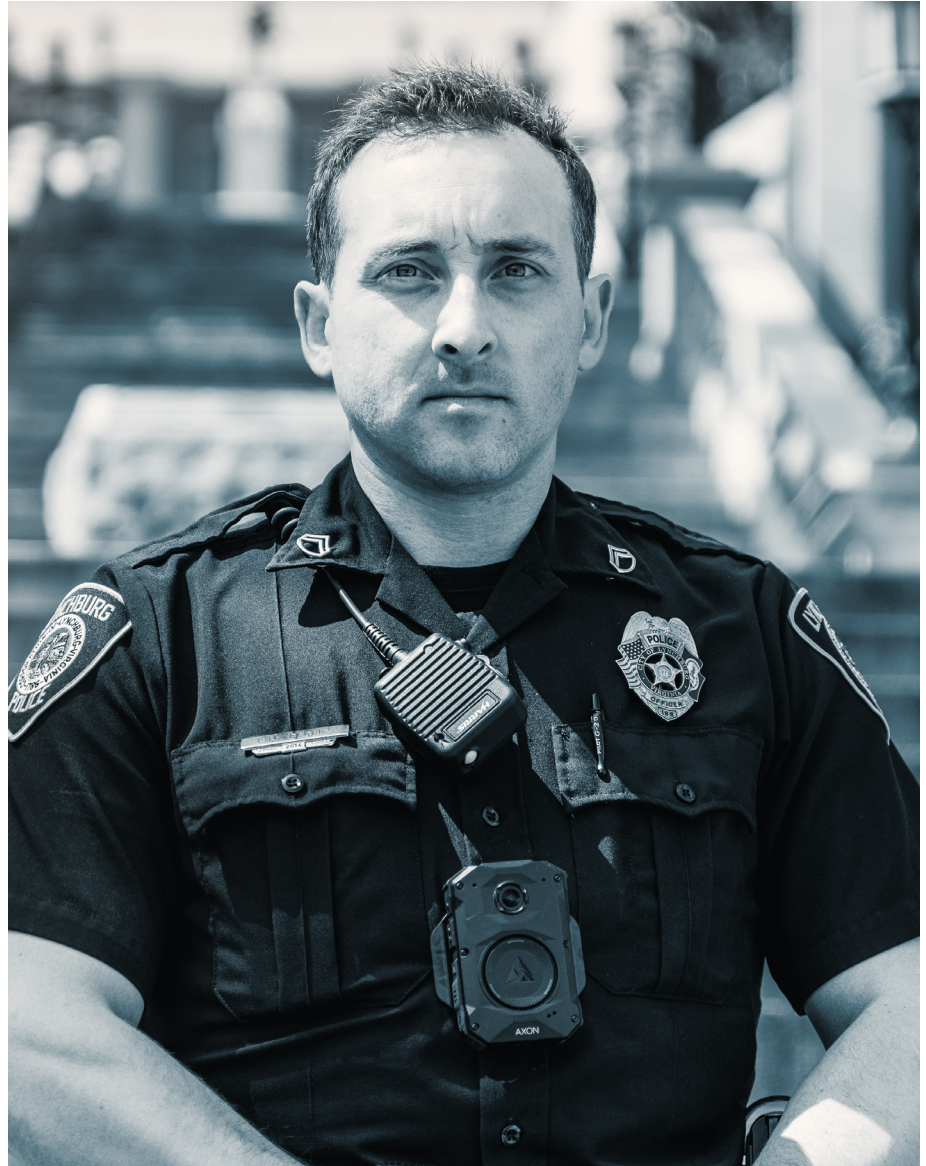
“I have a good structure of friends I can talk to about stuff and my wife,” he said.

Officer Begley also highlighted the department’s resources, including peer support from fellow officers and access to professional counselors who work with the department.

“It’s very important,” he stressed. “I don’t think it’s something we take for granted.”

Regarding his recognition as Officer of the Month for his river rescue, Officer Begley said, “I don’t really like too much publicity on me. It’s a team thing, and we all work together. Without the go-getting attitude and leadership of Officer Logan Skillman and Sgt. Nathan Hendrix, this would never have happened. It’s police officers like that who make our communities better by constantly going out there and finding criminals and bringing them to justice.”

The river rescue may have earned him recognition, but it’s the daily acts of service — big and small — that define his career. Officer Begley’s story reminds us that behind every badge is a dedicated individual striving to make a difference, one small act at a time. GN



“It’s like going to the gym, the more weight you lift, the stronger you get and the more you can handle. But that doesn’t mean you can’t get hurt or stressed out doing it.”

- Officer Peter Begley

Centerfest - Sept. 21



Photography by Chris Morris

Each September, the largest street festival in the area takes place in historic downtown Bedford. Spanning six blocks, Centerfest includes activities for kids, vendors for shopping, numerous food choices, and live music. An estimated 4,000 people came out on Sept. 21 to shop, play, and enjoy the start of Autumn.



1. Our fur friends had just as much fun 2. Crowds enjoyed a six-block street festival 3. Shelley and Pam from Isiah 117 House 4. Crowds enjoyed shopping 5. Nashville recording artist and Lynchburg native Glen Shelton headlined the music lineup

Field of Honor - September



Photography by Chris Morris

For the first two weeks of September, a grassy field comes alive with hundreds of flags given in memory and honor of veterans and active-duty military members. Along with opening and closing programs, a special service is held on 9/11, and taps is sounded each night at 7 p.m.



1. Field of Honor at sunrise
2. The Rotary Club of Forest puts on the Field of Honor every September
3. Hundreds of flags given in memory and honor of military members

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(434) 582-4517
www.freedom424.org

Miriam's House

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(434) 847-1101
www.miriamshouseprogram.org

Lynchburg Humane Society

Promotes animal welfare, adoption, and education.

(434) 448-0088
www.lyncburghumane.org

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(434) 845-4071
www.arcofcva.org

Centra Foundation

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(434) 200-3000
www.centrahealth.com/foundation

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(434) 845-4099
www.brafb.org

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(434) 846-1111
www.bgclyh.org

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(434) 847-7751
www.ywcacva.org

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info@weareloveheals.org
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www.lynchburghabitat.org

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(434) 845-5939
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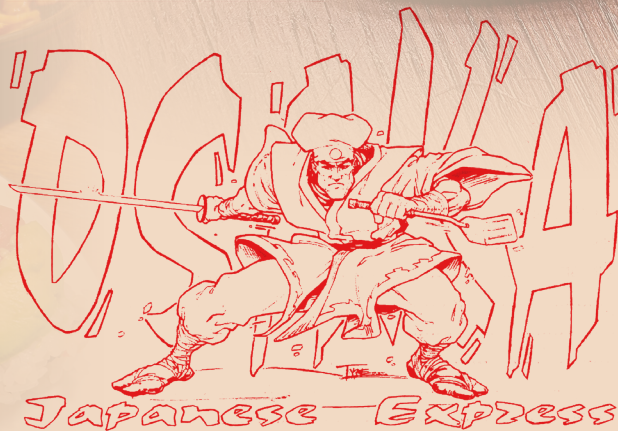
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(Cut into 8 pieces)

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- R12. Spicy Salmon Roll
(spicy salmon, cucumber \$6.90

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(Comes with fried or white rice, zucchini, onion)

Any substitutions made to an order are subject to an extra charge. No rice, substitute noodles \$1.00
•No rice, substitute vegetables \$2.00

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Onion, Broccoli, Mushroom,
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- Teriyaki Chicken \$9.25
- Ribeye Steak (w. Mushrooms)..... \$10.50
- Shrimp (w. Broccoli) \$10.50
- Filet Mignon Steak
(w. Mushrooms) \$13.99
- Salmon (w. Broccoli) \$14.50
- Ribeye Steak and Shrimp..... \$14.50
- Ribeye Steak and Chicken..... \$14.15
- Shrimp & Teriyaki Chicken..... \$14.15
- Ribeye Steak & Shrimp
& Chicken \$18.15
- Filet Mignon Steak & Chicken \$18.15
- Filet Mignon Steak & Shrimp..... \$18.15
- Filet Mignon Steak & Shrimp
& Chicken \$22.15
- Jumbo Shrimp (12 pcs.)
(w. broccoli) \$14.85
- Filet Mignon Steak &
Jumbo Shrimp (6 pcs.)..... \$19.70
- Filet Mignon Steak & Salmon..... \$19.70
- Jumbo Shrimp (6 pcs.) & Salmon.... \$19.70
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Black Pepper Chicken..... \$10.10
- Green Pepper Steak/
Black Pepper Steak \$10.50
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Black Pepper Shrimp..... \$10.50
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- Chicken & Broccoli (white meat).... \$12.85
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(flank steak)..... \$12.85
- Chicken w. Mixed Vegetables
(white meat) \$12.85
- Shrimp w. Mixed Vegetables \$12.85
- General Tso's Chicken
(w. pepper & onion)..... \$12.85
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(Lo Mein Noodles) / Fried Rice

- Vegetable Yakisoba/
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- Chicken Yakisoba/
Chicken Fried Rice \$14.99
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Ribeye Steak Fried Rice \$14.99
- Shrimp Yakisoba/
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*Raw fish/Consuming raw fish may increase your risk of food borne illness.





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