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exchange

FRANCES CLARK

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# Hearts of Gold

ISSUE 11 2024

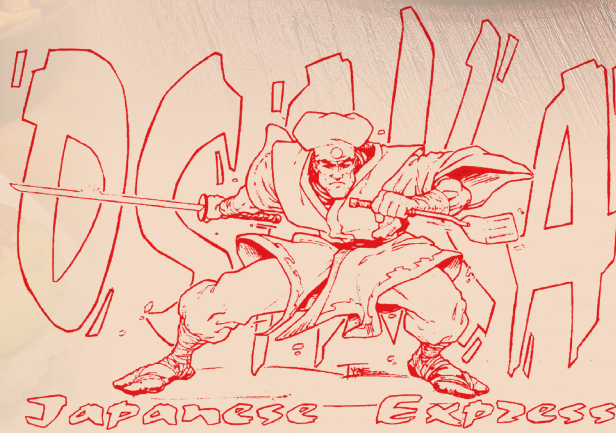
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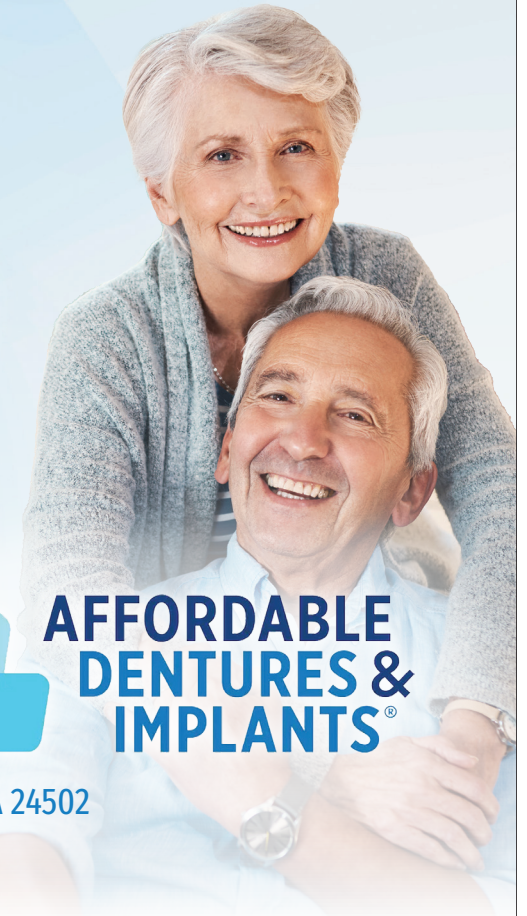
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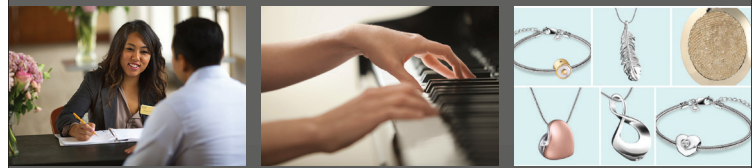
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

# Hearts of Gold

For every leaf on the ground, there is a heart of gold in our town.

AUTUMN SETTLES into our town like a puppy in a warm bed. There's a magic in the air that only this season can bring. Golden leaves drift gently from the trees, painting the sidewalks in shades of amber, rust, and crimson. We share our home with nature's beauty as it peppers our streets and lives with orange celebratory confetti. Some of these leaves catch our eye as they flutter down; others land quietly, unnoticed. They land all around us in crevices we didn't know were there.

In much the same way, we're surrounded by people whose acts of kindness add light and warmth to our lives — our neighbors, friends, even strangers, each with a heart of gold. Like those autumn leaves, some of these generous souls stand out for the ways they give back and lift others up, while others go about their good deeds quietly, adding to

the beauty and goodness that make our community special.

We often don't see the helping hands that work behind the scenes, the thoughtful words, or the selfless acts, but they are everywhere. They're in the volunteers who give their time to those in need, in the teachers who stay late to help a student, and in the countless people who are ready to lend a hand or a smile to make someone's day just a little bit brighter. For every bad day, there's someone here to meet it with hope and compassion.

Our community is not just a place to live — it's a place where love and kindness thrive. The world is not a dark place; it's filled with light and love because of people who give themselves without a second thought. This season, as leaves gracefully brush your shoulder from a 60-degree breeze, know that for every leaf on the ground, there is a heart of gold in our town. GN

Wesley Bryant,  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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# Saved by a stranger

Decades after a terrifying ordeal, Lexi Snider reconnects with the woman who gave her a second chance at life.

By Dave Lenehan // Photography by Chris Morris

IT'S A beautiful sunny day. You and your family and friends are spending the day at the lake. The kids are playing in the water while most of the adults lounge on beach towels, soaking up the sun. You turn your head just for a few moments to answer someone's question. When you turn your head back to the water, you can't see your child anywhere.

This scene nearly took Lynchburg native Lexi Snider's life when she was only 22 months old. Snider was spending the day at the American Legion Lake off Greenview Drive. As Snider learned

much later in life, a young boy pointed out Snider floating face down in the water near the rope that separates the swim area from deeper water. Children playfully pretend but this young boy was serious and pointed out that she wasn't moving. The mom called her husband, who rushed into the water and pulled Snider to shore. The woman quickly began CPR, and eventually, Snider came to, coughing and spitting up water, but alive.

The odd part about Snider's story is that she didn't find out the details until only a year ago. Snider, now 27, works



*Lexi Snider*





▲ Lexi Snider with her sister, Skylar Joyner

*"Life really,  
really is a gift."*

-Lexi Snider

locally as a nurse. She had heard about her near-death experience from other family members but never knew all the details. After talking with her sister, Skylar Joyner, last year, Snider requested her medical records from that fateful day. What she discovered could only be described as a miracle.

When Snider was rushed to the hospital via ambulance, her attending doctor was amazed at how well she had recovered. Snider suffered no ill effects from the near drowning, but the hospital held her overnight for observation. Her doctor noted that Snider was "like a wild snake," almost unfazed by her accident.



▲ Lexi Snider returned to face the lake that almost took her life.

Some people might be content to have the medical details of such a shocking event covered, but Snider wanted to go one more significant step further. She wanted to meet the woman who saved her life.

Snider thought, “What are the chances this woman is even still alive?”

Joyner, who is younger than Snider and wasn’t born until after Snider’s near drowning, encouraged her sister to post her quest online. Joyner posted Snider’s request to meet the woman who saved her on Facebook’s Living in Lynchburg group.

Less than 30 minutes later, Debra Wilson responded, “I know without a doubt it was me that day.”

Snider had found her rescuer! At the time of Snider’s rescue, Wilson worked in the Bedford school system, so she was required to be CPR-certified. That skill, along with Wilson’s quick action, allowed Snider to live to tell her story. Not long after

that initial connection, Snider and Wilson met face-to-face. They keep in contact and have met a few more times in person. The ironic part of their combined story is that Wilson had experienced a similar situation in her life. She needed CPR one day, and someone came to her rescue. In 2014, Wilson met her rescuer as well.

With the details of the day in hand, Snider knew she needed to do something with the new lease on life she was given so many years ago. She and her sister have teamed up with a strong, clear message about water safety.

“Always be aware of your surroundings,” Joyner, who now has five children of her own, warned.

“Toddlers can slip, can get curious, can knock each other down in a crowded swim area.”

The two also emphasized guidelines for parents purchasing swimwear for small children. They urge parents

not to buy green, blue, or black swim outfits. Instead, purchase highly visible neon colors — ones that can be easily seen whether a child is standing or floating in the water. The pair encourage families to learn water safety and to become CPR-certified.

Snider reflected, “Life really, really is a gift.”

Over the past six years, Snider has worked as a nurse. Currently, she serves in psychiatric care but spent two years in hospice care. She said that many of her patients there told her how much they appreciated her care for them in their final days. She felt that her near-death experience had given her the ability to relate to her patients more.

Snider’s miraculous survival opened up a unique perspective on life, inspiring her to cherish every moment and help others do the same. Is there more to come from Snider sharing her story? Perhaps. She admitted she is still discovering the reasons. **GN**

Lexi Snider  
with her sister,  
Skylar Joyner







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# A friendship forged in art: Preserving history in comic book form

Stan Webb and Dion Lee's lifelong bond has led to a unique comic series that celebrates the courage and dedication of the Buffalo Soldiers.

By Dave Lenehan // Photos submitted by Stan Webb

**C**AN COMIC books communicate history? For lifelong friends Stan Webb and Dion Lee, the answer is definitely! Webb and Lee are Lynchburg natives who met in the third grade. Both entered an art contest at school, where Webb was well-known for his animation and graphics skills. Lee ended up winning the art contest, but that event brought the two boys together and launched decades of friendship and collaboration.

Webb's graphic art skills and Lee's adept storytelling led them to create their first comic book in middle school.

Lee commented that Webb's graphic talent continues to amaze him.

"It's uncanny. I will describe something to [Webb], as far as what I had in mind when I'm writing it," Lee explained. "But when he draws it, it's exactly how I envisioned it!"

Stan Webb



Dion Lee





▲ Dion Lee and Stan Webb modeling “Buffalo Soldier” shirts and holding samples of their comics

Webb’s artwork soon found its way into telling the compelling historical story of the Buffalo Soldiers. In high school and later in college, Webb said he would go to the house of one of his teachers and listen for hours to the teacher and his friends tell stories of the past. One that stood out was the service of the Buffalo Soldiers.

The Buffalo Soldiers were two all-Black regiments of the 9th and 10th United States Cavalry established by Congress in 1866, just after the Civil War. Buffalo Soldiers, most of whom were freed enslaved people, were tasked with helping to rebuild after the war, fighting on the Western frontier, helping to develop national parks, and protecting many of the citizens, towns, and railroads during the country’s Western expansion.

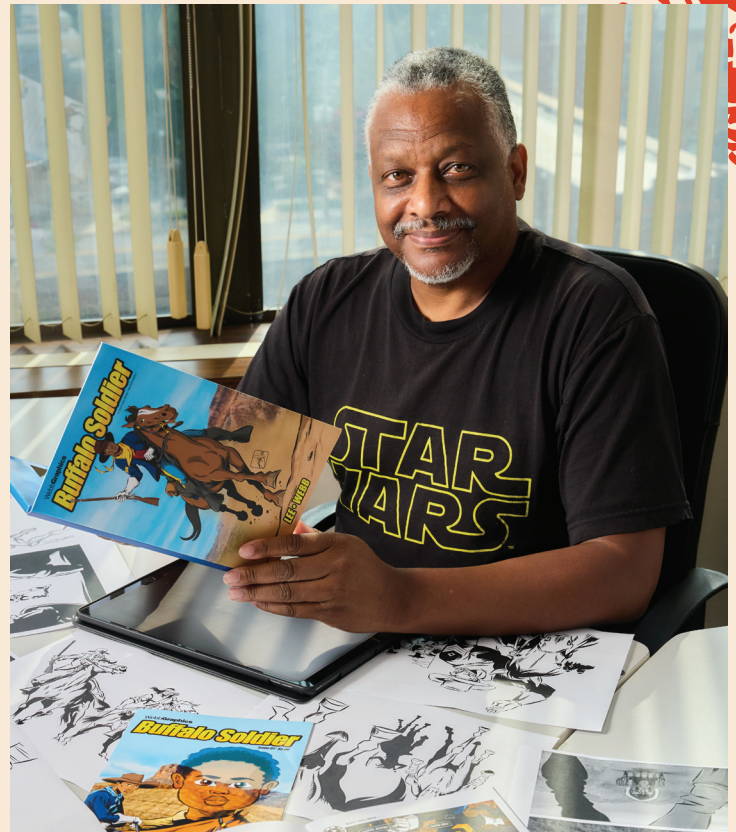
Just after the turn of the 20th century, Buffalo Soldiers fought in the Spanish-American War and both World War I and World War II. Many of the Buffalo Soldiers received the Medal of Honor for their valiant service. They also worked as guides, construction workers, firefighters, and poaching patrols in the Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks.

Webb’s teacher wanted to write a book about the Buffalo Soldiers, but Webb was so captivated by their stories that he suggested creating a comic book instead. When the teacher agreed, Webb called on his friend Lee to join him as the story writer. In the early 1990s, the two released the first of a 10-book graphic novel simply titled “Buffalo Soldier.” Both men developed fictional characters whose lives and actions were based on actual

historical Buffalo Soldiers. The books contained the comics kids would enjoy and understand, as well as pages providing information on the real soldiers’ stories as well as general information about the two regiments.

Gradually, Webb and Lee set the “Buffalo Soldier” comic book project aside as they got married, had children, and moved on in life. Just three years ago, amid the unrest happening in several American cities, the two men realized it was time to bring back the Buffalo Soldiers’ stories. This time, they knew they needed to modernize their delivery.

The new 10-part comic book series still features incredible graphics and storylines, but now is accompanied by a scan feature where kids can use the Zapper phone app to see animated content and hear the characters tell their story in their own voices. They also published comic book cards that engage interactive visual content when scanned with the app.



▲ Stan Webb

While those upgrades were significant, the duo knew they could go one better.

Webb is the president and CEO of Webb Graphics. In his daily work, he's seen and created video books. These slimline books feature a small built-in video display and controls where the reader can select several episodes of the "Buffalo Soldier" comic book story. When Webb and Lee met with two Buffalo Soldiers groups from Los Angeles, California, and Seattle, Washington, they left the video books to hand out to area children. They believed their video comic book was the best way to connect the historical story with children.

In 1992, U.S. Army Gen. Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, dedicated the Buffalo Soldier monument at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. The monument features a Buffalo Soldier astride his horse galloping down a river in the Midwest.

Why is the Buffalo Soldiers' story so important? Lee, a former U.S. Marine, summed it up in one word: patriotism.

"The level of patriotism they had ... to be shunned, disrespected, and overlooked the way they were, but to still have the will and dedication to fight for this country and to follow orders ... Well, it is amazing," Lee explained. "To have that level of discipline is incredible."

Any story about "how the West was won" is incomplete without them. GN



▲ Stan Webb works on art for the comic

Jessica Wells



# Waffles

with a side of

# hope



Jessica Wells' The Happy Waffle is more than a food truck — it's a beacon of positivity and mental health advocacy in Lynchburg.

By Dave Lenehan // Photography by Chris Morris

**Y**OU BELONG here. You are enough. Those words are not just positive, encouraging phrases. They are a small part of one Lynchburg resident's mission to raise awareness of and point people to resources about mental health.

Jessica Wells and her husband, Alex, met in the operating room of a local hospital where she worked as a surgical tech and he as a registered nurse. They got married and started a family. Jessica's mom and dad stepped in to watch their kids every day so both could continue

their careers. Jessica's parents, who worked different shifts from each other, fed the kids, drove them to school when they became of age, and provided all of the fun grandparents could deliver.

One day, that valuable help with the kids radically changed. Jessica and Alex were home when her father suffered a fatal heart attack. They both worked to resuscitate him, but it was too late. Her father was gone. That day occurred six years ago, and it launched Jessica into several years of struggling with her mental health. She



▲ Jessica holds a photo of her late father.

said instead of seeking help for her grief and loss, she immersed herself in helping and serving others.

“I was just trying to find my way back to joy and peace and happiness,” Jessica shared.

She wanted to serve others much like she had in her job in the operating room, but the more she worked, the less her emotions improved. For the first couple of years after her father’s death, she barely processed the deep impact losing him made on her and her family. Jessica knew she needed to talk to someone, so she sought out a mental health therapist. She said taking that

*We believe in more than just tasty treats. We believe in spreading positivity and mental health awareness.*

*-Jessica Wells*

bold first step was significant for her because when she was growing up, mental health issues weren’t discussed openly. She was very intimidated by the whole idea.

Jessica discovered that therapy was truly life-changing. Her therapist encouraged her to find something she loved to do that could be the spark to get herself back on track. She admitted she’s always loved to bake. Her therapist suggested that she take that creative heart in the kitchen and consider what she could do to help bring back her joy. The suggestion led Jessica to a simple and tasty thought: waffle pops.

Waffle pops are popsicle-shaped waffles with a traditional buttermilk base that Jessica created. Waffle pops feature either sweet or savory options that are baked on the outside or infused inside the pops. She also bakes savory waffle sandwiches such as hot Italian, hot ham and cheese, and a happy Cristo. The items are shaped like a pressed panini sandwich but feature the small squares of a waffle. Jessica’s most popular treats are her strawberry cheesecake waffle pop and her pizza waffle, both customer favorites. The Happy Waffle features 25 flavors, with the list growing each month.

2023 was a year full of designing.

Jessica explained, “I wanted people to have an experience when they come up to the truck and not just have a logo slapped on the truck. It was important to craft that experience for our customers.”



In January, Jessica purchased a food truck and put the waffle pops on display. But the waffle pops were only part of her business model.

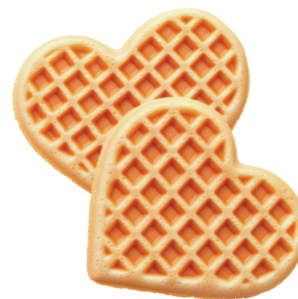
“We believe in more than just tasty treats. We believe in spreading positivity and mental health awareness.”

The Happy Waffle’s motto is, “Serving up smiles, one waffle at a time!” The encouraging words found on every waffle pop stick are more than just phrases, reflecting Jessica’s commitment to helping others find their way back to joy. In October, The Happy Waffle food truck joined the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention as a vendor for one of its “Out of the Darkness” walks in Lynchburg.

“It’s tough out there, and you always think you’re the only one going through it,” Jessica explained, “You don’t realize how many others are going through similar things. You’re not alone in this.”

Jessica recently leased a storefront at 17980 Forest Road, which her family will be renovating over the next few months, with a planned January opening. She plans to expand the mental health resources she provides by dedicating a corner of the new shop where customers can find business cards and pamphlets that refer to local counseling centers and mental health services.

Jessica’s story is a powerful reminder that in our greatest struggles, we can find the strength to help others, one small act of kindness at a time. **GN**



▲ Jessica smiles as she serves coffee to a customer.

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Your new favorite restaurant,  
221 Tap & Table,

# RAISES THE BAR

A dining experience worth savoring

**2** 21 TAP & Table offers a charming atmosphere that perfectly complements its thoughtfully curated menu. During my recent visit, I was particularly drawn to two standout dishes: the short rib gnocchi and the strawberry spinach salad.

The short rib gnocchi, a comforting classic, was simply divine. Each piece was pillowy and tender, showcasing a masterful balance between softness and slight crispness on the outside. The dish, tossed in rich marinara, was adorned with sundried tomatoes and ricotta, adding a unique flare. Fresh basil brought an aromatic element, making each bite an enchanting experience. It was clear that great care had been taken in crafting this dish, elevating a simple staple into a memorable masterpiece.

On the lighter side, the strawberry spinach salad with sirloin

provided a refreshing contrast. The salad was a vibrant medley of fresh greens topped with plump, juicy strawberries and shredded mozzarella, creating a harmonious balance of sweet and tangy flavors. It was adorned with toasted almonds, which added a delightful crunch and depth to the dish. The steak was perfectly cooked, juicy, and flavored to perfection. A drizzle of strawberry vinaigrette tied it all together, enhancing the freshness of the ingredients without overwhelming them.

Together, the gnocchi and the strawberry salad made for an exceptional dining experience. The inviting ambiance and attentive service at 221 Tap & Table only enhanced the enjoyment of these dishes. Whether you're a local or just passing through, this restaurant is a must-visit for anyone seeking comfort food with a twist and a taste of freshness. **GN**



## GOOD NEWS IS COMING TO DINNER!

We will feature a local food critic's thoughts as they dine in Lynchburg. This month Grace Hayes visited 221 Tap & Table.

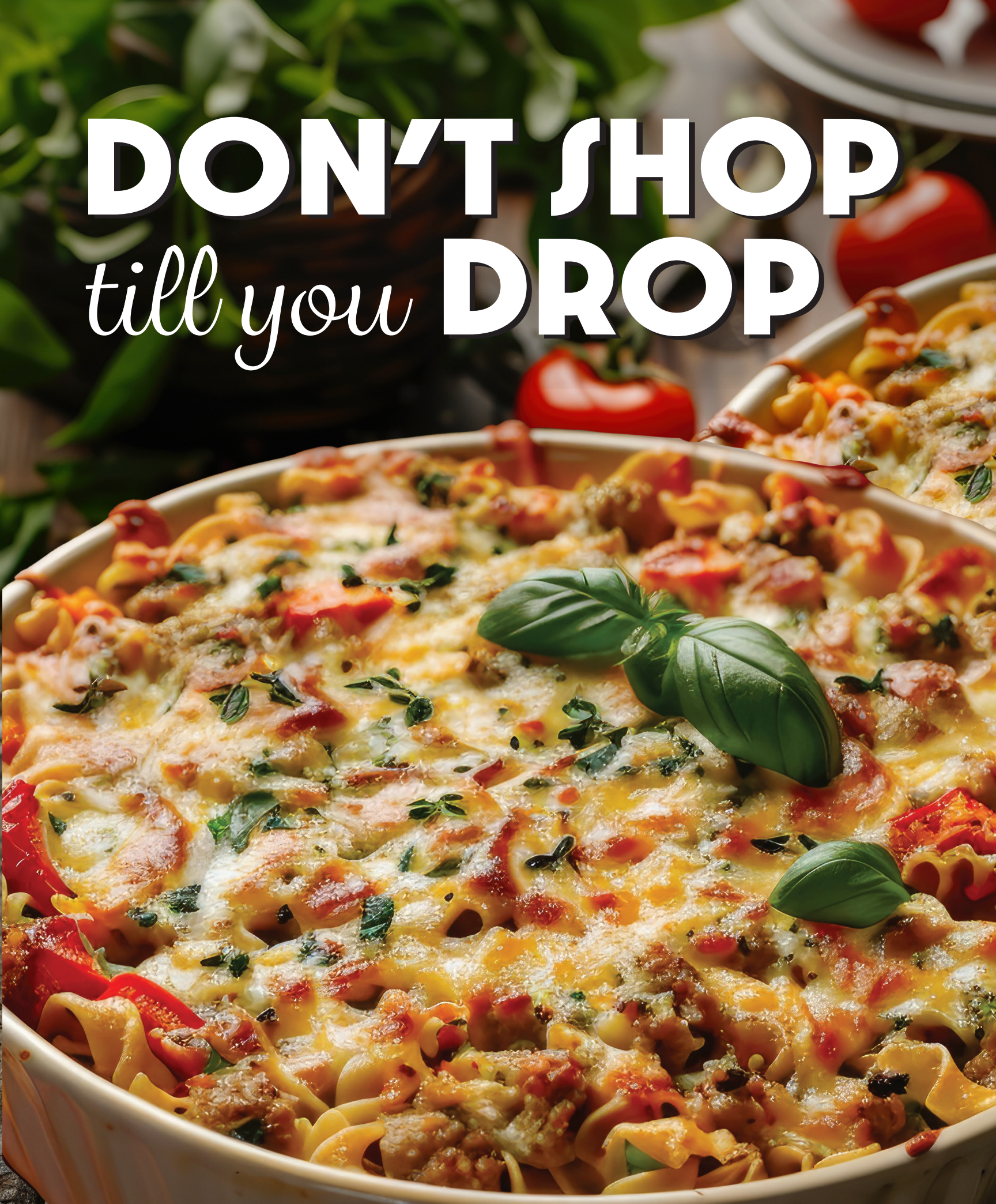
## 221 TAP & TABLE

14521 Forest Road  
Forest, VA 24551  
(434) 616-2588

Facebook: 221 Tap & Table  
<https://221forest.com/>



**DON'T SHOP**  
*till you* **DROP**



# PLAN ON FUELING UP WITH THESE EASY DISHES THIS BUSY HOLIDAY SEASON.

**A**FTER A long day of holiday shopping, the last thing you want is to spend time in the kitchen. Plan ahead with these quick and easy dishes that can be whipped up in no time or waiting in the slow cooker. From cozy casseroles to satisfying soups, these recipes are designed to nourish and rejuvenate, making them ideal for those post-shopping evenings. Enjoy the convenience of delicious meals that allow you to relax and savor the season. **GN**



## BEEF 'N' NOODLES CASSEROLE

*Submitted by Emma Hardin*

- 1/3 c. green onions, sliced
- 1/3 c. green peppers, chopped
- 2 T. butter
- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 can tomato paste, 6 oz.
- 1/2 c. sour cream
- 1 pkg. med. noodles, 8 oz., cooked
- 1 c. cottage cheese
- 1 can tomato sauce, 8 oz.

In a large skillet, saute onions and green peppers in butter for about 3 minutes. Add beef and continue to cook until beef is no longer pink. Drain excess fat. In a medium mixing bowl, combine tomato paste and sour cream. Stir in noodles and cottage cheese. Layer half of the noodle mixture into a 2-quart casserole dish. Top with half of the beef mixture. Repeat layers. Pour tomato sauce evenly over the top of the casserole. Bake at 350° for 30-35 minutes, or until heated through.

## MISS MAUDIE'S MEXICAN CORNBREAD

*Submitted by Terri Sanders*

- 1 c. cornmeal
- 1/4 c. oil
- 2 eggs
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 c. buttermilk
- 1 sm. can cream style corn
- 1 sm. can green chili peppers
- 1 c. cheese, shredded

In a large bowl, combine cornmeal, oil, eggs, onions, buttermilk, corn, and peppers. Mix well. Pour half of batter in greased skillet or pan. Sprinkle cheese over batter then pour remaining batter over cheese. Bake at 425° for 25 minutes or until golden brown.

## CROCK-POT BRUNSWICK STEW

*Submitted by Cindy Crosslin*

- 1 whole chicken, cooked and deboned, reserve 1 1/2 c. broth
- 2 cans barbecue pork
- 1 sm. onion, chopped, optional
- 1 sm. can cream style corn
- 1 can shoe peg corn
- 1 sm. can lima beans
- 2 cans tomatoes, crushed
- 1 lg. potato, cubed, cooked, and drained
- 3-4 T. ketchup
- 3-4 T. Worcestershire sauce

Place chicken, reserved broth, barbecue pork, onions, and both cans of corn in a slow cooker. Stir and add lima beans, tomatoes, ketchup, and Worcestershire sauce. Stir mixture and cook on low for 12-24 hours. The longer it cooks the better it will taste.

# A legacy of care: Honoring lives through compassion

*FRANCES CLARK FOSTERS A NURTURING SPACE WHERE LIFE'S  
PURPOSE ENDURES, EVEN AS TIME FADES AWAY.*

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Chris Morris

**S**HE PLUNGED her hands into the water, the towering suds transporting her to the old ladder-back chair pulled up to the kitchen sink at her mama's side. One dish at a time, in no hurry, she washed them, turning them this way and that before carefully dipping them into the waiting clear, clean water. She was careful not to drop Mama's favorite cup, and she washed the Bundt pan three times, inspecting every ridge and hollow

for hidden crumbs, just as she'd been taught. The dinner plates and silverware sparkled from their Jenga-like stacks in the drainer as she added the last utensil. She knew Mama would brag on her when she came back to inspect her work.

It could have been memories she was inspecting, but at her age, dementia blurred the lines between memory and reality. In her current home, Destiny House, a caregiver, not Mama, stands



FRANCES CLARK

behind her, supporting her as she works at the sink from her wheelchair. Like a favorite dish towel, an encouraging word, a loving pat on the shoulder, or a gentle smile is always within reach.

Frances Clark, founder of Destiny House, understands.

“When they come in, they are in the family. They’re not just somebody’s loved one who came into the house. We’re taking care of them as if it was our own. We try to make sure that they don’t forget they’re still part of society and they’re still alive. I believe if a patient has not left this earth yet, they still have a purpose. We don’t want them to feel like they have lost their life because they’re sitting in a nursing home. We want it to still feel like their home, and that’s the reason why this home was made into a house and not a nursing home,” Clark passionately explained.

Clark’s commitment to family didn’t begin when she opened



▲ One of Doris Campbell’s favorite activities is washing dishes.

Destiny House in Lynchburg eight years ago. And her experience with memory care doesn’t come from walking through dementia with her own mother. When Clark was 27, she lost her mother to breast cancer. She and her five sisters cared for their mother while working full-time jobs. Outside caregivers were hard to find.

And then, breast cancer came for more of her family — one sister, then a second one. When her first sister passed away at 36, she left behind 14- and 15-year-old daughters and 6-year-old twin girls. Although they lived with their father immediately after their mother’s death, one Thanksgiving, they came to visit and never left. Clark was single, worked full time, and enjoyed traveling. Motherhood was not on her radar, yet here she was.

Five years later, the disease took another one of her sisters, who left behind children ages 10, 12, and 15. Clark also took them in as her own. Her house could no longer hold them all, so she purchased a larger home, which soon filled with the children’s teenage friends who found refuge there.

Clark said, “God made it where I had to raise them. At first, I was angry, but then I had to realize — wait a minute — you got a purpose, and I need to know what this purpose is. I would not change it today for anything in the world.”

The children are all grown, and family fills her home once again. Destiny House offers in-patient

“When they come in, they are in the family. They’re not just somebody’s loved one who came into the house.”

- Frances Clark

care and services to patients in their homes. From skilled care to hospice care, Clark and her staff treat each person as family.

“We do 24-hour care. We have med techs, certified nursing assistants, and personal care attendants. We have nurses, physician care, and physical therapists come in,” she explained.

The care goes beyond meeting medical needs. Clark balances care mind, body, and soul.

“We do activities, games, and exercise. We take them to get ice cream and to the mall if they’re able to get in the car and able to walk. We try to make sure that they have an enjoyable time,” Clark said. “We know a lot of them feel like they have no life in them. They will decline very quickly, and so that’s the reason why we have to



keep them going, help them realize that they're still alive and they have purpose. If they're still breathing, they have life to give to others. Some of them come with wisdom. Some of them come with such love and show you such patience. Then, some clients are challenging. God allowed them to teach us to have more patience with the challenging times."

Clark is often the bridge between a patient and their family, between this world and the next. Dementia and Alzheimer's lead patients back to their childhood while the family desperately tries to hold them in the present.

"The family member remembers that Mom takes care of them, but Mama is now at a place where she remembers her mama taking care of her. We go back to where we were born. Our mind is going back to that childhood — innocent — place, and this is the hard thing. Just remember, if she does not remember yesterday, it doesn't change who she is to you; she's still your mama.

"Remember the memory, but don't push them into the future, where they can't go. Let them stay in their past and enjoy the past. Play that role with them, take what you remember of that mom and dad, and hold on to that because that will never leave you. That will always be with you until you go to the time where you are at a dimension when you forget. It's a circle of life."

And when a patient's time on earth is nearing its end, Clark is there, too.



▲ Frances Clark, Doris Campbell, and Laskia Mull are all smiles as they pose with one of Destiny House's therapy dogs

She shared, "I always tell the family I'm a Christian. I'm born again. I pray them through. I sing them through."

At Destiny House, memories blend with present care, creating a nurturing space where life's purpose endures, even as time fades away. **GN**

*Destiny House LLC is located at 428 Woodland Circle in Lynchburg. For more information, call (434) 420-8812.*

# From melodies to memories: A journey of meaningful connections

JOSH URBAN PIVOTS FROM PERFORMANCES TO  
MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Chris Morris

“HELLO, MY baby,  
hello my darlin', hello  
my ragtime gal ...”

The *tinkling* and *plinking* of an old upright piano danced out of the speakers as he danced around the dining room, straw boating hat waving in one hand while the wooden hook cane punched the air with the other. The routine usually signaled the end of his lunchtime old-time radio show for the nursing home residents, but this time was different.

With his DJ cart in tow, Josh Urban spun his way into their

hearts, and they laid down their tracks on his, forever etching life lessons, wisdom, and the power of connection. One by one, resident by resident, they gently turned him inside out, flipping his perspective and focus in life. And this dance was for them. It was goodbye for now as the music blared from his car speakers, and he entertained them one last time from the facility's parking lot, a place visible from their third-floor window. He wanted to leave on a high note.

JOSH URBAN





◀ *Josh Urban writes using an old-school typewriter.*

The difference in their worlds was night and day. Before entering theirs, his world was loud. Band gigs filled nights and weekends, and guitar teaching filled the days. Then, a gap created by students' summer vacations changed his life.

He approached a nursing home with a business card and a proposal.

"I can play you guys some Frank Sinatra," he offered. They would think about it.

Urban's creative wheels were turning before the heavy door chunked shut behind him. What

if, instead of trying to cover Sinatra tunes on his electric guitar, he DJ'd a nostalgic radio show, spinning records that transported residents back to the golden age of music?

Facilities responded favorably, booking him for regular entertainment for their residents. Music helped pay the bills — guitar stints, rolling nostalgic radio shows in dozens of nursing homes, and teaching — but something deeper was missing, occasionally glinting in life's peripheral vision.

The COVID-19 pandemic would forever change that.

"I had everybody call me up and say, 'Hey, let's just take two weeks off.' I was freaking out because my bills aren't going to take two weeks off. And I had a feeling it might be a little bit longer than two weeks," Urban shared.

Luckily, one facility employed him as a full-time entertainer and, later, as the activities director. He settled into an all-too-familiar routine in an all-too-unfamiliar time.

"I started playing four shows a day. In each little area, the residents would be locked in their rooms, so I'd play in the hall. I was playing these shows, and people were so hungry to talk," Urban said.

He realized the residents craved human interaction more than entertainment. So he shortened the music sessions and slipped into the role of "house grandson," helping with various tasks and offering companionship. COVID-19 steered the roller coaster of lockdowns and quarantines, locking those locked away further from their families and the world. And yet, Urban realized, the power of their stories connected us and them to something more than the outside world — it connected us to each other.

**“I started really focusing on this idea of trying to do meaningful things. And that’s in every moment. It’s lurking around every corner.”**

**-JOSH URBAN**

Then, a resident planted a seed that found its way from the deep pandemic soil to the light of human connection.

“This little old lady named Martha pulls on my sleeve, and she said, ‘Josh, I had this dream that we co-wrote this book about our time here in lockdown, and the publisher called. They sold a million copies, and they’re calling for a second printing,’” he vividly recalled.

He promised to dedicate the book to her if he ever wrote it, half-heartedly convinced of the possibility. But as he began to feel pulled toward a smaller community near his family, he realized their stories deserved

telling; their time served in a global pandemic merited medals.

He said, “Finally, my house sold. It was time for me to leave. I wrote them all a goodbye letter. I explained how I came into this as this rock and roll guy, and every day and every moment, they showed me that there’s all this, meaning that I can lean into if I just listen and how meaning is more important than happiness. Their good actions, grace, patience, bravery, and fortitude profoundly changed me, not only personally but also seeing how that echoes out in the world, even if you’re shut away from it. A line from the Sermon on the Mount really struck me: ‘You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.’ In this context, they were a city on a hill, and even though they’re locked away on the third floor, and the only people seeing them are the night nurse, the day nurse, the food service guy, and me, their right actions are just unstoppable.”

Today, Martha’s dream is Urban’s first book, “Cities on a Hill,” written after he moved to Lynchburg. Each chapter is about a different resident and their good deeds and graces — snapshots from their life stories. He felt Martha watching over his shoulder.

“It’s to witness what we did to them, what it’s like when you take one idea and elevate it above all the others, in this case, would-be safety,” he said.

Today, Urban’s nostalgic radio shows play on in nursing homes in the Lynchburg area, and he returns once a month to the home where it all began. He’s reaching new audiences with his message of purposeful living. He’s crafting a workbook to assist with writing life stories, writes a newspaper column, and has a nursing home newsletter inviting readers to write back if they want, connecting again through music.

“I started really focusing on this idea of trying to do meaningful things. And that’s in every moment. It’s lurking around every corner. You just got to pay attention to it and lean into it.” GN

*“Cities on a Hill” is available at Givens Books in Lynchburg and online everywhere. To learn more about Urban and his missions of meaning, visit [joshurban.com](http://joshurban.com), follow his blog [joshurban.substack.com](http://joshurban.substack.com), and find him at [@RealJoshUrban](https://www.instagram.com/RealJoshUrban) on X.*



▲ The tools of Josh’s trade

# Engines of change: Puzzled Car Show breaks barriers for autism

*LYNCHBURG'S LARGEST CAR EVENT  
COMBINES PURPOSE AND PASSION.*

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Chris Morris

**A**S THE family of four unloaded from their van, their oldest child pulled on his father's arm toward the train. Cory Osborne's scaled-back, coal-black engine with its silver cowcatcher waited patiently as its cars and caboose filled with the family and others. Some children pointed and chattered, while others retreated into the comfort of their parents' arms.

It pulled out of its station, passing hot rods, a monster truck, a dragster, vintage automobiles, motorcycles, and other cars and trucks. Pointing, chat-

tering, and wonder overflowed from the train as the car show's entries gave way to the carnival's games and petting zoo. Their favorite superheroes, princesses, and characters roamed the grounds, stopping for hugs, handshakes, and special photos.

After reaching its destination, the train waited as it unloaded, headed for a day of food, fun, and festivities at the annual Puzzled Car Show. It's a Lynchburg event that brings awareness, acceptance, and local resources to autistic people and individuals.

BLAKE BRYANT





◀ *Blake Bryant tries out some of the construction equipment*

Blake Bryant, the founder and CEO of Puzzled Events, understands that some of those excited and seemingly bashful children have unique abilities. Some families live in a world untouched by autism. Others, like Bryant, are blessed to live and thrive in it, making it their goal to ensure that local children with autism know they are cared for and enabled to live at their fullest potential.

Bryant, who identifies himself as on the lower end of the spectrum, said, “I was extremely fortunate because my mom and dad and my sister have always been a great support system. There were lots of teachers that said I would never make it — that I’d

never amount to anything, that I would just be in jail. And that’s the farthest thing from the truth. I have two grown kids, four grandkids, and a great job. I have a charity that does great and comes from the heart. We are all volunteers. We’re all doing it from the heart.”

The car show offers an extraordinary lineup, from classic hot rods to modern marvels. A variety of food trucks and vendors participate as well. The 2023 event, which Bryant claims is the largest in Lynchburg and among the top eight in Virginia, showcased 509 entries. The diversity of vehicles mirrors the spectrum of individuals the organization serves, with special attractions beyond typical car shows. Monster trucks, jeeps, drag racers, and motorcycles aren’t just for viewing — children can climb on board, try on racing helmets, and snap photographs. This hands-on approach reflects Bryant’s commitment to creating an inclusive environment where everyone can engage with and enjoy the fun.

Another way Puzzled Events does this is by joining forces with the Lynchburg Hillcats for the team’s autism awareness night. The event raises funds through donations of a portion of ticket sales, a silent auction, and a jersey auction, but the funds are only part of the purpose. The goal is to reach new families and raise awareness in a relaxed, fun environment.

“It’s more about raising awareness and helping families,” Bryant



explained, highlighting the event's role in breaking down barriers and connecting families with vital support services. Bryant invites other organizations serving children's needs to share resources at the event, too.

Still, the jersey auction is a unique and fun element. Players wear special autism jerseys, which are auctioned during the game. The player takes off the jersey, signs it, gives it to the winning bidder, and poses for photographs.

"People really love that, and it did extremely well this year because a couple of players were getting ready to move up to the major leagues. People really wanted those jerseys," Bryant shared.

He reiterated the mission of the event.

"It's about families being able to get the resources because it's difficult. People don't know how hard it is to find the resources because a lot of those families are so closed off, scared, and trying to protect their children. So that's why I love

the Hillcats game because it affords us the opportunity to meet new families and interact with them. The family's already there having fun, so they'll talk to you, and that's what I really like about it."

Bryant constantly seeks opportunities to expand the reach of his nonprofit.

He said, "I've probably been to close to 50 or 60 events this year just to promote what we do. I'm highly involved with Amaze-ment Square, which is the only autism-certified museum in the state of Virginia and one of five in the United States. They've started a program there [called] Everyone is Special, just for special needs children."

Bryant's personal connection to autism drives his passion and dedication to the children and families he serves.

"No child has a disability; they have a different ability," he emphasized.

This philosophy extends beyond the car show. Bryant and his wife, Andrea, dedicate nearly all their free time to supporting children and families through various initiatives throughout the year. Bryant's goal is to ensure that children know they're valued and filled with potential, especially those for whom others have not yet identified their superpower.

"I try to help children find that ability because, a lot of times, people with different abilities, any kind of disabilities, just need

**"No child has a disability; they have a different ability."**

**- BLAKE BRYANT**

somebody to believe in them," he said passionately and from personal experience.

With each effort, Puzzled Events raises awareness about autism and fosters connections that empower families to embrace their unique journeys. Supported by local partnerships and a dedicated network of volunteers, Bryant and his team are determined to ensure that every child, regardless of their abilities, knows they are valued and capable of achieving great things. **GN**

*For more information and details on upcoming events, visit [puzzledevents.com](http://puzzledevents.com), email [puzzled@puzzledevents.com](mailto:puzzled@puzzledevents.com), or call (434) 477-3933.*



**A** Andrea Bryant

# Mountain View Vintage Market - Oct. 18 and 19



Photography by Chris Morris

The Mountain View Vintage Market transformed two crisp October days into a celebration of style with soul. As thousands browsed the region's finest vintage finds and handcrafted treasures, each admission ticket worked double duty, supporting Family Life Services Adoption Agency's mission of uniting forever families. In true Mountain View fashion, this beloved market proved once again that great style and heartfelt community service make the perfect pair.



1. Zhakia Scott 2. Shoppers were treated to handcrafted and vintage wares 3. Jenee Davis  
4. Bryan Fitz 5. Crowds lined up early for Friday's VIP night

# Puzzled Car Show - Oct. 19



Photography by Chris Morris

The Puzzled Car, Truck, and Bike Show was held on Oct. 19 at The Plaza in midtown Lynchburg. The event offers many free activities for kids and family including a car show featuring 500-plus cars, games, food, and a live auction. All the money raised goes directly to charities for children with autism, like Amazement Square in downtown Lynchburg.



1. Jake, Amanda, Joshua, and Parker Richardson 2. Some car owners “dress up” their cars  
3. The train ride is a favorite activity for the kids 4. Kareem Francis with Janielle and James Lake

# INSPIRE MORE GOOD

Donate or volunteer at your local charities and nonprofits.

Good News Magazine's mission is to build stronger communities through positive stories. We encourage you to donate and volunteer at local nonprofits to spread more good in your community.

## **Lynchburg Daily Bread**

Offers meals and support to those experiencing homelessness.

(434) 845-5703  
[www.lynchburgdailybread.com](http://www.lynchburgdailybread.com)

## **Lynchburg Beacon of Hope**

Focuses on increasing college access and success for students.

(434) 849-8617  
[www.beaconofhopelynchburg.org](http://www.beaconofhopelynchburg.org)

## **Lynchburg Area Veterans Council**

Supports veterans and their families.

(434) 525-7925  
[www.alveteranscouncil.weebly.com](http://www.alveteranscouncil.weebly.com)

## **Lynchburg Community Action Group Inc.**

Addresses poverty and advocates for social justice.

(434) 455-1601  
[www.lyncag.org](http://www.lyncag.org)

## **Lynchburg Art Club Inc.**

Promotes visual arts and artists in the community.

(434) 528-9434  
[www.lynchburgartclub.org](http://www.lynchburgartclub.org)

## **Friends of Lynchburg Community Market**

Supports and assists the Lynchburg Community Market by helping at events at the market, funding market events, and advocating for the market in the community.

<https://lynchburgcommunity-market.com/friends/FriendsoftheMarketLynchburg@gmail.com>

## **Urban Mountain Adventures**

Encourages teens to turn off their cellphones and computers, step out of their comfort zones, and set off on a real adventure by leading them on wilderness experiences, imparting a deeper understanding and respect for the world around them.

(434) 515-0221  
[www.urbanmountainadventures.org](http://www.urbanmountainadventures.org)

## **Lynchburg Historical Foundation**

Preserves local history and heritage.

(434) 528-5353  
[www.lynchburghistoricalfoundation.org](http://www.lynchburghistoricalfoundation.org)

## **Humankind**

Offers programs and services that instill hope and equip people with the tools to build a strong foundation for life, with programs covering everything from financial education to mental health counseling, from early childhood resources to services for adults with developmental disabilities.

(434) 384-3131  
[www.humankind.org](http://www.humankind.org)



**Girls on the Run of Central Virginia and Blue Ridge**

Offers programs for girls of all abilities to find their inner strength, providing trained coaches who use physical activity and dynamic discussions to build social, emotional, and physical skills — encouraging healthy habits for life.

(434) 528-3767  
[www.girlsontheruncenva.org](http://www.girlsontheruncenva.org)

**Lynchburg City Schools Education Foundation Inc.**

Enhances educational opportunities for students.

(434) 515-5081  
[www.lcsedu.net/community/education-foundation](http://www.lcsedu.net/community/education-foundation)

**Rush Homes**

Provides affordable and accessible housing, helping tenant families become more stable. Also offers residential support to help tenant families improve their lives and avoid eviction.

(434) 455-2120  
[www.rushhomes.org](http://www.rushhomes.org)

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**Kevin Maples**  
Publishing Partner

Join inspiring local charities and become a part of a movement that embodies the true essence of compassion. Not only will you have the opportunity to connect with readers on a deep and meaningful level, but you will also have the chance to uplift your brand in an impactful way.

Contact me today!  
(434) 215-8249  
[Kevin@GoodNewsMags.com](mailto:Kevin@GoodNewsMags.com)

**Good News**  
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# GOOD NEWS SUPPORTERS

We can spread Good News because of our generous advertisers. They help make our world a little brighter. We encourage you to do business with them.

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## The Value of Good News

Good News Magazine not only lets you reach your audience directly, it's also a way to build brand recognition and positive associations over time. Placing your ad alongside engaging, positive stories means it's much more likely to be seen and well received.

Our beautiful design and community focus result in a premium publication that readers keep in their home for long periods of time — leading to more views of your ad.



### LOCAL AUDIENCES

Your message reaches fans of the magazine. Local readers suggest more than 90% of the stories we tell.



### LONG SHELF LIFE

Readers look at your ad over and over again. 60% of readers keep every issue for more than 60 days.



### POWER OF PRINT

Social media is drowning in negativity. Readers notice your ad as they crave the good ol' days.



### POSITIVE ASSOCIATION

Your ad lives with positive and 'viral' content. Readers fall in love with their town and your business.



# Making An Impact On The Community

*"I'm so thankful to see Good News Magazine in my mailbox each month because it's the positive news I've been wanting to spur thoughtful conversations with my two teens about deeper issues, current events, and news. We've been reading the articles together as a way to expand their understanding of the world outside of themselves. Any chance to understand different perspectives and those who are different from us, helps them grow into more understanding people. Thank you for bringing this to Lynchburg, and selfishly, these stories and conversations into my home! What you and your staff are doing is making a difference in our community."*

**- Keeley C. Tuggle**

Director of Corporate and Donor Engagement  
HumanKind

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# Let's get this party started

## Individual Breakfast items

Bacon Biscuit  
 Buttered Biscuit  
 Sausage Biscuit  
 Spicy Chicken Biscuit  
 Chick-n-Minis™ Tray  
 8 Oz. Bottle Sauces

## Chicken Trays (Hot or Chilled)

Small Chick-fil-A® Nugget Tray (8 people)  
 Medium Chick-fil-A® Nugget Tray (15 people)  
 Large Chick-fil-A® Nugget Tray (25 people)  
 Small Chick-n-Strips™ Tray (8 people)  
 Medium Chick-n-Strips™ Tray (15 people)  
 Large Chick-n-Strips™ Tray (25 people)

## Grilled Chicken Bundle

Grilled Chicken Sandwiches (10 people)

## Mac & Cheese Tray

Small Mac & Cheese Tray (10 people)  
 Large Mac & Cheese Tray (20 people)

## Cold Trays

Small Chilled Grilled Chicken  
 Sub Sandwich Tray  
 Reg. or Spicy (6 people)  
 Medium Chilled Grilled Chicken  
 Sub Sandwich Tray  
 Reg. or Spicy (12 people)  
 Large Chilled Grilled Chicken  
 Sub Sandwich Tray  
 Reg. or Spicy (16 people)  
 Kale Crunch Side Tray  
 Small (10 people), Large (20 people)  
 Garden Salad Tray  
 Small (5 people), Large (10 people)  
 Fruit Tray  
 Small (12 people), Large (26 people)  
 Small Chick-fil-A® Cool Wrap Tray  
 Reg. or Spicy (6 people)  
 Medium Chick-fil-A® Cool Wrap Tray  
 Reg. or Spicy (10 people)  
 Large Chick-fil-A® Cool Wrap Tray  
 Reg. or Spicy (14 people)

## Individual Lunch Items & Packaged Meals

Chicken Sandwich  
 Spicy Sandwich  
 5 ct Chick-fil-A® Nuggets  
 8 ct Chick-fil-A® Nuggets  
 12 ct Chick-fil-A® Nuggets  
 3 Item Chick-fil-A® Chicken Sandwich  
 Packaged Meal  
 4 Item Chick-fil-A® Chicken Sandwich  
 Packaged Meal  
 3 Item Spicy Chicken Sandwich  
 Packaged Meal  
 4 Item Spicy Chicken Sandwich  
 Packaged Meal  
 3 Item 8 ct Chick-fil-A® Nuggets  
 Packaged Meal  
 4 Item 8 ct Chick-fil-A® Nuggets  
 Packaged Meal  
 3 Item Chilled Grilled Chicken  
 Sub Packaged Meal  
 4 Item Chilled Grilled Chicken  
 Sub Packaged Meal  
 3 Item Spicy Chilled Grilled Chicken  
 Sub Sandwich Packaged Meal  
 4 Item Spicy Chilled Grilled Chicken  
 Sub Sandwich Packaged Meal  
 3 Item Chick-fil-A® Cool Wrap  
 Packaged Meal  
 4 Item Chick-fil-A® Cool Wrap  
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Prices vary. See store for details.

