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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ISSUE 9 2024

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: 10
Hearts of Gold

Good Living

NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS 12
Eddie Robertson pays it forward in the community of Lebanon

HELP IS A CLICK AWAY 18
Will Rivers spearheads WilsonHelps.org, Wilson County's comprehensive web resource

A STORY OF FAITH & PEACE 24
Lebanon florist shop owner donates kidney in spite of cancer and COVID-19

GENERATIONS OF GRIT: GEORGE MCDONALD, TENNESSEE'S FARMER OF THE YEAR 30

LOS COMPADRES: A LEBANON FAVORITE 34
Delicious fajitas, quesadillas, and exceptional service

DON'T SHOP TILL YOU DROP 38
Plan on fueling up with these easy dishes this busy holiday season





48

Good Stories

- 42 FOUNDED ON RELATIONSHIPS**
Wes Dugan demonstrates leadership and service through connection
- 48 A GIVE-BACK BOUTIQUE**
Iddy & Oscar's empowers kids to succeed
- 54 PAWS, CLAWS, AND HEALING HANDS:
THE VET WHO CARES FOR THEM ALL**

Good Times

- 62 COMMUNITY EVENTS**
- 68 CHARITY LISTING**
- 70 ADVERTISER INDEX**



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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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Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Eddie Robertson pays it forward in the community of Lebanon.

By Kali Bradford // Photography by Robin Holcomb

PAYING IT forward describes the beneficiary of a good deed repaying the kindness to others rather than paying it back to the original benefactor. It has also been referred to as serial reciprocity. Historians can trace its origins back to 317 B.C. when the theme of paying it forward appeared in an ancient Greek play.

However old the act of paying it forward may be, its impact is timeless and will forever be felt by those who practice and receive it. Like a ripple of water, it knows no end. Eddie Robertson of Lebanon is an avid practitioner of paying it forward. The act of doing so is at the core of his personal and professional life. As a recipient himself, he understands the radical change that can come from even the smallest act of kindness.

FROM THE GROUND UP

Robertson's story begins with a turbulent childhood, often filled with uncertainty about food and sometimes shelter. He and his twin brother, Freddie, relied heavily on the generosity of local shelters and churches to provide their family with necessities.

"My brother and I grew up in the projects in Nashville by the fairgrounds called Vine Hill, which was a rough project when we grew up there," said Eddie.

As a troubled teen, he and his brother tried to survive the only way they knew. That was until he met Bert Bailey. Bailey came into Eddie's life around the fifth grade, and his presence would forever change his life for the better.





*Eddie with
longtime
employee
Ms. Diane*



“I was a typical ‘project kid,’” he added. “School wasn’t important, and I was fighting every day. Then, I was introduced to Bert through a buddy program, and he changed my life. He helped me get back to where I needed to be in school, along with many other things. He was a lifesaver.”

Eddie said thanks to people like Bailey and others such as Jim Webb, he and his brother were able to survive and thrive. The two brothers would find jobs working as baggers at a locally owned grocery store, Value Plus Store in Nashville. Making a little over \$3 an hour, the two were grateful for the opportunity to work. “We were ‘yes, sir’ and ‘no, sir,’ and

we showed up on time or 15 minutes early,” said Eddie.

FROM BAGGERS TO STORE OWNERS

Little did he know, but Eddie’s first job as a bagger at the Value Store Plus foreshadowed what would become a dream job for him.

Almost eight years ago, Eddie became co-owner of Moser’s Supermarket in Lebanon. Eddie, Freddie, and Eddie’s friend, Jim Webb, purchased the half-century-old store. The two brothers are the majority owners of the store, now known as Cash Saver Food Outlet or Cash Saver to locals.

“It’s the best thing that ever happened to me,” said Eddie. “This is the first store where my brother and I are majority owners. We’ve blown our expectations out of the water here. This store has allowed us to give back to the community as they have given so much to us over the years.”

Today, Eddie operates the Cash Saver in Lebanon, and Freddie runs the Piggly Wiggly on Dickerson Road in Nashville.

“My brother and I are best friends,” said Eddie. “We see and talk to each other multiple times a day. We have a 50-acre farm and live right beside each other. Growing up the way we did, it’s nice to have somebody like that always there.”



He continually looks to serve his customers and the community wherever he can — from helping someone who’s hungry and without the means to buy food, feeding those on the holidays who don’t have a place to go, to also serving meals and providing water for those displaced by major storm events. If there’s a chance to help, you’ll find Eddie and his family pitching in.

PAYING IT FORWARD

Whether an employee, a loyal customer, or a stranger, Eddie is proud to pay it forward in any way he can. He cheers for each of his employees and helps to provide a clear path for a bright future.

“When I bought the store, it probably had 15 employees, and we have over 50 now,” he said. “I’ve never had a problem keeping employees. Every day, [as] I leave the store, [I] tell every employee I appreciate them. And it’s true. I don’t want to say they work for me — they work ‘with’ me.”

“I love Lebanon. It’s a great place to visit but an even better place to live,” said Eddie. “When I bought this store, my motto was that we are a neighborhood store run by neighborhood people. If you’re hungry, we’ll feed you. We’ve done well in everything we’ve ever done. We try to give back. I’m very lucky, and I don’t like to take a lot of credit because I feel like it’s paying it forward. After all, 100% of paying it forward was done for me and my brother. We wouldn’t be where we are today without the generosity of others. So, we will continue to pay it forward as long as we are able.” GN



Denise, Eddie, ▶
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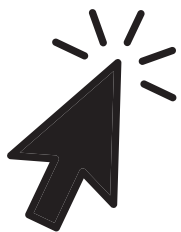
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HELP IS A *CLICK* AWAY.

Will Rivers spearheads WilsonHelps.org,
Wilson County's comprehensive web resource.

By Richard J. Klin
Photography by Robin Holcomb





Will Rivers

WILSONHELPS.ORG IS a large-scale, comprehensive, and user-friendly guide to Wilson County's broad array of available aid. This is the most general way to describe what is an enormous, cross-referenced resource that takes its inspiration from Craigslist.

WilsonHelps.org is the brainchild of Will Rivers, who saw that many residents of Wilson County — new and old — were unaware of the many aid options in Wilson County. Information on help and resources was certainly available, but the details were scattered, hard to find, and sometimes incomplete. There was an urgent need for an online, comprehensive resource guide. With his background in websites, Rivers resolved to create just that.

"I've found," he said wryly, "that almost 99% of the effort to undertake a project falls on that person who says, 'Hey, I've got an idea!'" Rivers certainly had the idea, and he was just the one to implement it. WilsonHelps.org is the end result.



▲ Will Rivers works with a fellow volunteer at the food distribution center.



"It's been an eye-opener," Rivers reflected, "to see how much help is available." That abundance of assistance is more than evident when one gleans the material in WilsonHelps.org. The site offers over 150 categories of help. There is a cross-reference of ministries, volunteer organizations, food banks, churches, government services, state agencies, and veteran services. The comparison to Craigslist is an appropriate one: Visitors to WilsonHelps.org can absorb a massive amount of information in an organized, non-chaotic fashion. A user can conveniently locate a myriad of categories under the "basic needs" heading — employment, free food and meals, health services, and many others. There is a calendar of events, camp-

ing and hiking info, and governmental resources and information. The scope of WilsonHelps.org is such that it's impossible to summarize adequately.

All this information must be kept current and up-to-date, which is a time-consuming endeavor. "It's amazing," Rivers noted, "how many places change their location or their hours of operation. Some of them have even gone out of business. Some don't have enough staff to stay open. Some of them have seasons."

WilsonHelps.org also encompasses a recreational and leisure component, with guides to hiking, camping, music, and many other activities, all of which point to the area's multi-faceted appeal.

What makes this all the more impressive is that the website is, in its own words,

“

I've found that almost 99% of the effort to undertake a project falls on that person who says, 'Hey, I've got an idea!'

- WILL RIVERS



“an independent, autonomous, nonprofit, nongovernmental resource” that is entirely volunteer-run.

Will Rivers has been doing this for the last two years. Websites with WilsonHelps.org's scope and cross-referencing are not unprecedented, but they are certainly rare. Will Rivers credits the community for its support, specifically citing two other resources: Compassionate Hands and Everybody's Wilson. Enthusiastic local government agencies also gave his efforts a “shotgun start” by putting WilsonHelps.org on the county and city of Lebanon's websites.

If there was ever a need for WilsonHelps.org, it is now. Rural poverty is a spiraling, ever-serious issue. “Most of the volunteer organizations, agencies, and ministries are just keeping up.” Will Rivers and his wife, Joy, moved to Lebanon in 2007 and immediately began an involvement with some of the local volunteer efforts, primarily the Joseph's Storehouse Food Ministry. When he first lived in Lebanon, Joseph's Storehouse distributed free food, beverages, personal hygiene items, and paper goods to just a few hundred families a month. That number is now over 1,000 a month — an incredible increase. And when one considers that this alarming trend is transpiring on a national scale, the total picture becomes very dire.

The best way one can get a sense of WilsonHelps.org's scope is, of course, to take a look. In a way, the actual need for this sort of internet resource that focuses on help and assistance is tragic — it indicates a widescale need. On the other hand, if so many people face various crises and need so many different types of help, WilsonHelps.org is a vital component in improving people's lives. Will Rivers and the community at large have made a giant contribution. GN

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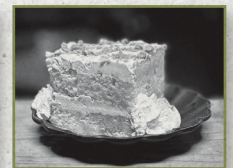
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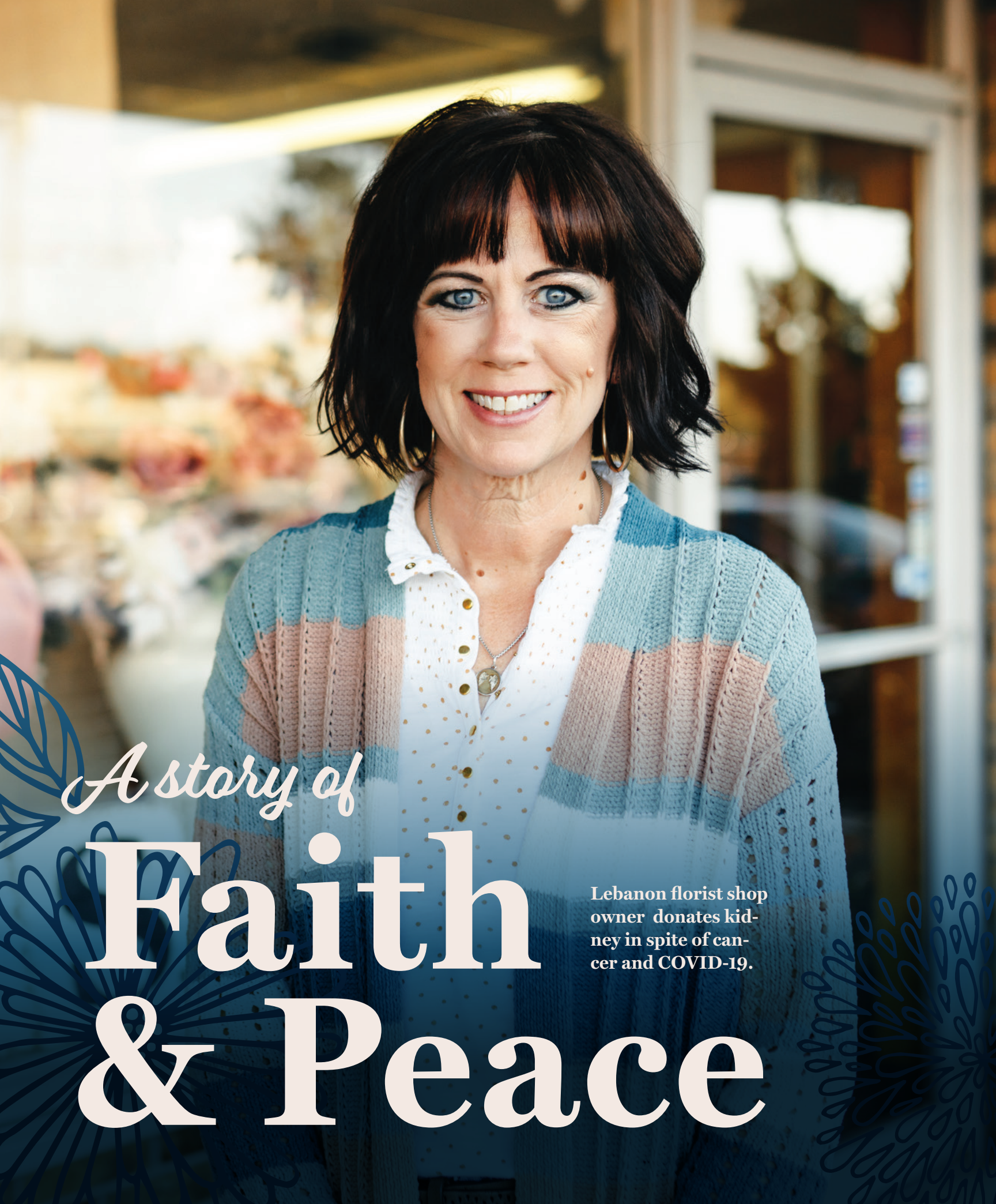
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A story of

Faith & Peace

Lebanon florist shop
owner donates kid-
ney in spite of can-
cer and COVID-19.



By Sara Hook // Photography by Robin Holcomb

IN 2020, less than 6,000 people across the United States became living organ donors, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing. Lebanon is proud to be home to one of those brave donors: wife, mother, and flower shop owner Tracy Underwood. It was a process that took years to get through, and life did its best to get in the way. But the end result was a life and a family changed forever.

A.J.'s Flowers & Gifts has been a part of life in Lebanon for the past 15 years, run by Underwood and her mother, Marcia Pruitte. Every day for 10 of those years, Underwood bought new flowers from one man — Dean Gentry with Flowers Direct in Cookeville. The result was a close friendship between each of their families.

"I talked to him every day on the phone — I tell him what kind of flowers I need, and then he would have them transported to my flower shop locally," Underwood said. "So my family has had dinner with his before. In over 10 years,



you become friends — pretty good friends — with somebody."

Then, one day, Gentry became very sick. He was so sick, in fact, that his kidneys began shutting down, and he had to go on dialysis. At the time, he had four children, Underwood said — one just a toddler. With some 100,000 people on the donor list, the chance of getting a match was slim. Even if Gentry had his family tested to be a living donor, there was a low chance that someone would be a match.

"I had told them from the get-go, I was like, 'You know I would be tested for you. I would have peace at doing that,'" Underwood said. "The more I prayed, I mean, I just had complete peace. I had no fear in doing it."

As she was both female and not a family member, Underwood was told there was a very slim chance of being a match. Still, she felt like this was the path God was calling her to, so she continued the testing process. Her persistence paid off.

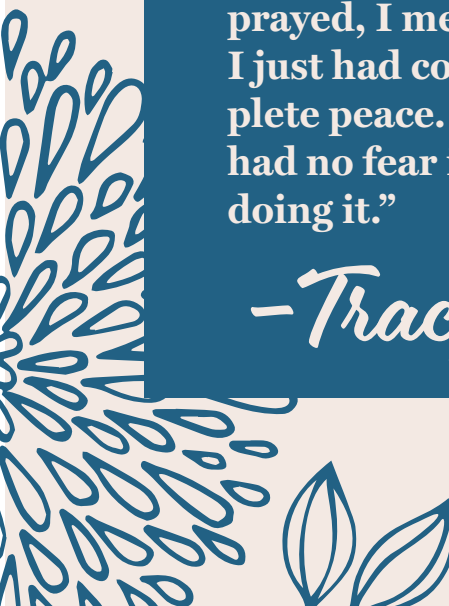
"I was picking up my son, Eryn, at school one day, out sitting in the car rider line, and the phone rang, and it said 'Saint

"The more I prayed, I mean, I just had complete peace. I had no fear in doing it."

-Tracy Underwood



▲ Tracy adjusting products around store





Thomas West Kidney Donation Center.’ And I was like, ‘Okay, here we go,’ and I answered it, and the lady’s already crying,” Underwood said. “She said, ‘This is so-and-so from the kidney center. We have your results back,’ ... and, she said, ‘You’re a match.’”

Not only was she a match, but Underwood was the needle in a haystack — a 100% match. The process was by no means completed, however. Underwood had to go through a full checkup — head to toe, heart, kidneys, everything — to ensure she was in full health. It was all going well, everything falling into place, when Underwood got some bad news. Her husband had cancer.

“We had to put things on hold,” Underwood said. “I can’t lay my life on the table not knowing if my husband’s going to be okay because we have three children.”

It was a hard decision for both families, but they put off the surgery until Underwood’s husband was declared cancer-free in February 2020. Not one month later, the country shut down because of COVID-19, with the transplant

center only performing life-threatening transplants. Throughout it all, Underwood had complete faith that things would work out.

“When you go through something like that ... sometimes you second guess, ‘Am I supposed to be doing this?’ And I never had that inkling at all,” Underwood said. “I had complete peace in what I was doing.”

Finally, in July, they were able to have the full transplant — an over 9-hour surgery. It was a complete success. Gentry has three kidneys now, and Underwood has one, but both families are happy, healthy, and living their best lives.

“[Gentry] is great — 100% back at work, no dialysis, able to do activities with his children, [and] travel,” Underwood said. “The only thing I have to be really careful [of] is [that] there’s certain medications I can’t take that would damage the one kidney. If I’m out — if I’m running or exercising or I’m just out in the heat — I have to hydrate really well. That’s really my only biggest thing. I have to take care of my body.”

There are always risks, Underwood said, but with faith and prayer, people can get through a lot of things that may seem too hard to overcome. Who knows? Perhaps someone’s life may be changed in the process. **GN**



▲ Tracy adjusting products around store





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Generations of grit: George McDonald, Tennessee's Farmer of the Year

By Haley Potter // Photography by Robin Holcomb

SITTING ON his great-grandfather's land, George McDonald surveyed the fields he's tended since he graduated high school in 1978. The roots of his farming legacy run deep, stretching back to 1927 when his great-grandfather purchased the original 257 acres of what would grow into Catesa Farms.

"I knew I wanted to be a farmer when I was in first grade," McDonald recalled with a smile. "I told my teacher without a doubt, 'I'm going to be a farmer.'"

Now, after nearly five decades of hard work, innovation, and family tradition, McDonald has been named Tennessee's Farmer of the Year for the second time — a recognition he humbly attributes to the dedicated team around him.

"This award is not about me," he insisted. "It's about Catesa Farms and Tennessee's farmers. We work together as a family business."

The roots of Catesa Farms run deep, both literally and figuratively. McDonald grew up on the very farm he now runs, in a house shared with not only his parents but his grandparents as well.

"It was unique living in a house that had three generations under one roof. My great-grandfather lived with us, too, in the same old house built in the 1700s," McDonald said. "It had a huge impact on me and my philosophy of life."



For McDonald, family is at the heart of everything. His daughter, Sarah, is the fifth generation to work the farm. With a degree in agricultural economics and a master's in elementary education, Sarah returned to the farm eight years ago to carry on the family tradition.

"She's a unique kid," McDonald explained. "She's got two kids of her own now, and my grandson, well, he loves anything with a tractor. Maybe he'll be the sixth generation."

The McDonald family's operation has grown far beyond its original 257 acres. Today, they farm across six counties, growing a variety of crops, including corn, soybeans,



wheat, milo, and their most celebrated produce — strawberries and watermelons.

“We’re known for our strawberries,” McDonald said proudly. “They stay in the Middle Tennessee area, and we’ve partnered with high-end markets in Nashville and youth organizations for fundraising efforts.”

But it’s not just the crops that set Catesa Farms apart; it’s the people behind it.

“This is not an award for me,” McDonald said humbly when asked about being named Tennessee’s Farmer of the Year. “It’s an award for our team here at Catesa Farms. We don’t have anyone working for us — we all work together.”

He gestured to the pictures on his desk, filled with smiling faces of family and workers alike.

“My mother is 84, and she spends more time in this office than anyone. We’re a tight-knit group.”

McDonald’s passion for agriculture extends beyond his own farm. He’s a vocal advocate for farming across Tennessee, using his platform to educate others about the importance of agriculture in today’s world.

“We’re losing about 10 acres of farmland per hour in Tennessee to rural development,” he explained, his tone more serious. “And I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to be dependent on other countries for our food. If you control the food, you control the people.”

It’s this commitment to advocacy that keeps McDonald engaged despite the demands of running a large operation. He makes time to speak at civic groups and hosts school visits to introduce young people to the realities of farming.

“I don’t have time — I make time.” he shared. “Because we have to be advocating for what we do.”

McDonald’s generosity extends to his community as well. Catesa Farms regularly hosts events like the River City Ball, which raises \$20,000 to \$40,000 annually for local causes.

“I’m a firm believer in giving back,” McDonald said. “If we cannot give back to these communities that have given us so much, we’re not worth much.”

As he reflects on the future, McDonald

is confident in the hands that will carry on his legacy.

“My daughter, Sarah, and Kyle, who works with us, are part of the transition for moving our farm forward. I always tell people, ‘Kyle doesn’t have my blood rushing through his veins, but he’s got my heart in his chest,’” McDonald said with a smile.

Whether it’s through their strawberries in Nashville markets, corn in Chattanooga whiskey, or the community events that Catesa Farms hosts, George McDonald’s impact reaches far beyond the fields he tends.

As McDonald himself said, “We cannot grow if I have to have my finger on everything. This farm is much larger than me.” GN





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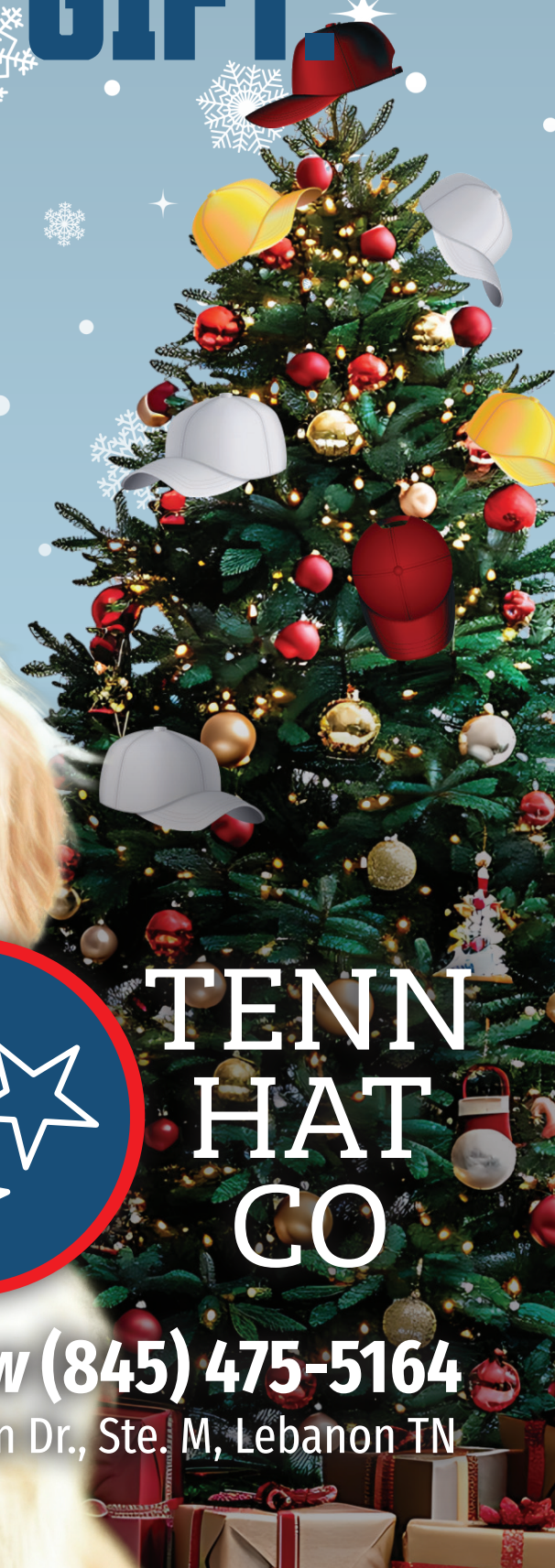
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WHEN I'M in the mood for an authentic Mexican dinner, one of my go-to restaurants in Lebanon is Los Compadres. It always hits the spot, and my most recent visit was no exception. Our server, Manny, was attentive and efficient, and the meal was delicious.

We started with the chips, salsa, and queso. The salsa had a fresh, bold flavor, and the queso was creamy and rich, making for the perfect appetizer. I ordered the chicken fajitas, and my husband ordered the fajita quesadilla for the main course.

The chicken fajitas arrived at the perfect temperature. I love the sound of the sizzle when they bring them to the table. The juicy chicken with a colorful mix of sautéed onions and bell peppers — paired with warm tortillas, rice, and beans — made for a filling dinner. The fajita quesadilla was also a favorite. It's a crispy tortilla packed with chicken, melted cheese, and grilled veggies.

The rich flavor combination was a delicious choice. Both dishes highlighted the fresh ingredients and traditional Mexican cooking Los Compadres is known for.

The decor of the restaurant was fun and warm, with colorful paintings and unique custom brickwork. The intricately designed tile flooring added a beautiful touch, creating a welcoming and vibrant atmosphere that complemented the meal. Manny's service was exceptional — he was friendly, efficient, and attentive throughout the evening, ensuring we had everything we needed. His attention to detail and warm demeanor made the meal even more enjoyable.

Whether you're craving fajitas, quesadillas, or just a fun night out, this is the place to go. The restaurant also has an affordable lunch menu. If you are looking for delicious, authentic Mexican cuisine, you can't go wrong at Los Compadres. **GN**

GOOD NEWS IS COMING TO DINNER!

We will feature a local food critic's thoughts as they dine in Lebanon. This month Kryss Midgett visited Los Compadres.

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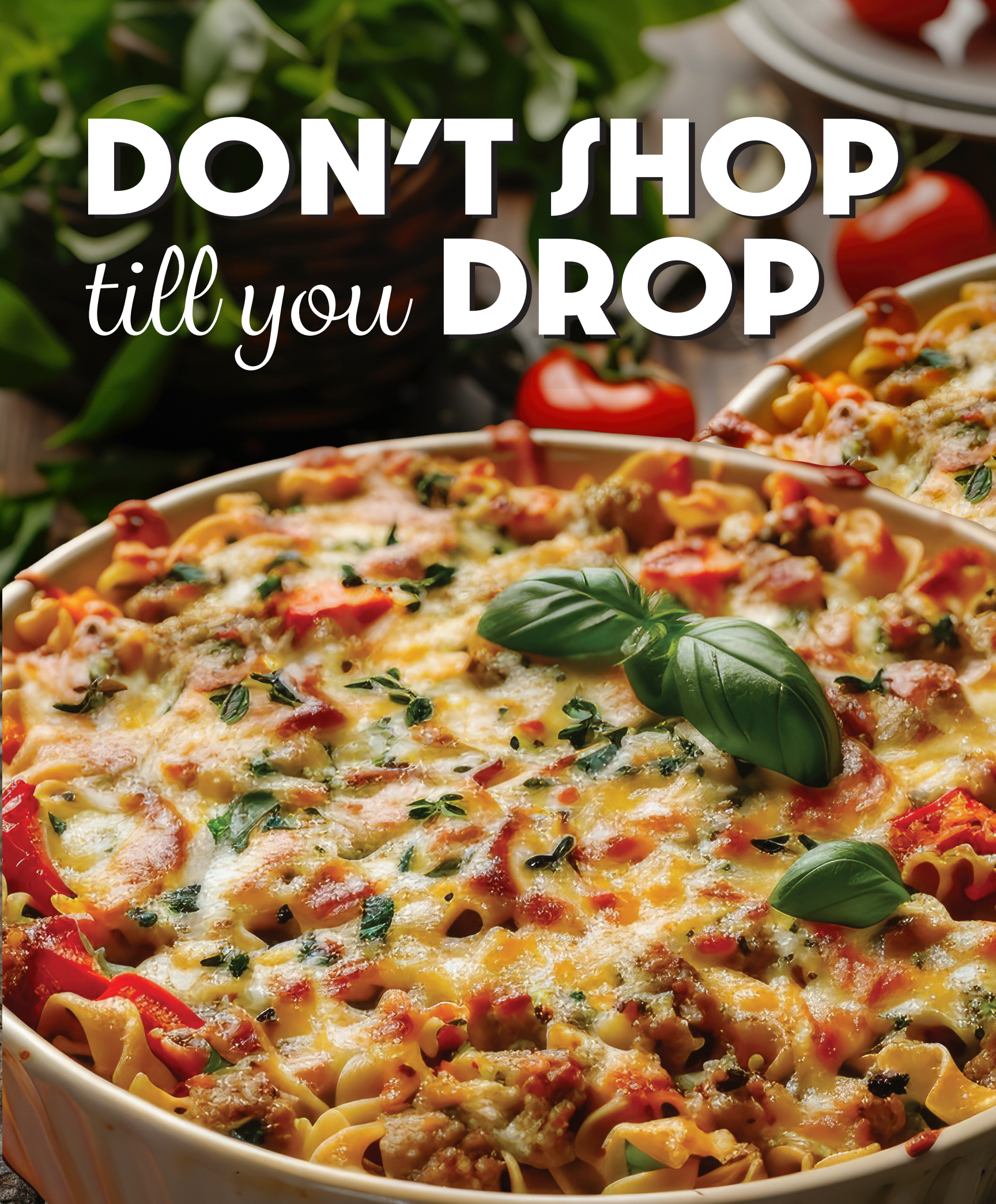
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AFTER A long day of holiday shopping, the last thing you want is to spend time in the kitchen. Plan ahead with these quick and easy dishes that can be whipped up in no time or waiting in the slow cooker. From cozy casseroles to satisfying soups, these 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.

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Founded on Relationships

WES DUGAN DEMONSTRATES LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE THROUGH CONNECTION.

By Sara Hook // Photography by Robin Holcomb

Whether it's through the Court Appointed Special Advocates board, the United Way board, or as chairman of the Lebanon Wilson County Chamber of Commerce in 2023, Wes Dugan is always serving his community. He serves in his day job as an agency manager for Farm Bureau Insurance of Tennessee, a company he has been with for 23 years, and his free time is spent the same way. He wants to give back, Du-

gan said, because the community has given so much to him already.

"I've always been involved in the community here," Dugan said. "If Little League comes and wants me to sponsor, I usually try to help them. [If] there's a local cause in the community I feel strongly about, whether it's Leadership Wilson or Empower Me day center or something to do with agriculture, with Farm Bureau ... anything to help our community. I always want to try to give back."



WES DUGAN



A community is all about relationships, after all, and that is something at the core of Lebanon.

“This town is really founded on relationships in my opinion, and so you just get to meet a lot of good quality people that have a heart of giving and want to help others,” Dugan said. “If you’re surrounded by [good] people, that makes a difference in you personally, spiritually, and also with your business.”

To foster those relationships, Dugan became a founding mem-

ber of Lebanon’s chapter of Business Network International Core Networking, a business referral group. For 15 years now, members have met every Thursday and formed networking relationships that move Lebanon forward. It’s a group that makes a difference, Dugan said.

“It’s been a very good networking referral group that I’m involved in, [and] that I’m very happy to be in,” Dugan said.

Another organization that is especially close to Dugan’s

heart is Empower Me, a recreational, educational and therapeutic center for those with disabilities or special needs. As a parent of a special needs daughter, Dugan has been a part of the Empower Me family for a decade, and he said he is always looking for a way to give back to the nonprofit.

“What they do for special needs kids is amazing. That’s one of the reasons why she’s in it,” Dugan said. “They have great counselors, they have students that are going to be special ed teachers or therapists that come help in the college, and [they’ve] got a lot of good things going.”

Empower Me is looking to build a new facility with many more opportunities for families to get involved.

“It has a big place in my heart,” Dugan said. Dugan supports and participates in fundraising events, including golf tournaments.

What Dugan is most proud of, however, is his time as chairman of the chamber of commerce in 2023. It gave him the opportunity to connect with a lot of new businesses, the people involved in education, and the people who run the day-to-day of the chamber.

“If you’re surrounded by [good] people, that makes a difference in you personally, spiritually, and also with your business.”

- WES DUGAN

“I was very proud of the trust they gave me for that year to be involved and just see so much and see how great this community is,” Dugan said. “It’s amazing how it’s growing.”

As Lebanon moves forward, Dugan hopes to continue to be involved in Empower Me and all the other organizations that serve the local community. He said he is also committed to making Farm Bureau a successful company and helping some of the young agents who work under him grow into leaders in the community. It isn’t just those agents who can find an example in Wes Dugan, however — young people everywhere can look to his example of how to be a leader. **GN**





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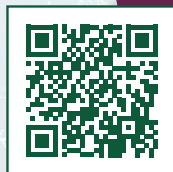
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A Give-Back Boutique

IDDY & OSCAR'S EMPOWERS KIDS TO SUCCEED.

By Sara Hook // Photography by Robin Holcomb

THE WOOD floor and brick walls of Iddy & Oscar's hold a wide variety of items, from clothing to jewelry to bags and decor, but that is only the surface of Joy Pine's give-back boutique. Underneath, Iddy & Oscar's is a story of compassion, joy, and love, with a mission to uplift children and change their lives.

At just 8 years old, Pine decided she wanted to be a nurse. At 16, she felt called to do mis-

sion work in Africa. For a time, she didn't know how those two passions would work together, but then she found the perfect solution: medical missions.

"I got a little bit older and realized that you can be a missionary without going to seminary," Pine said. "You can do mission work through medicine."

As a registered nurse, Pine began going on medical missions to Honduras. Eventually, she was connected to a group from around



JOY PINE

the world that met in Kenya for the same purpose. There, they would treat hundreds of people a day, set up churches, and start feeding programs. Often, the pastors of the churches would take in street orphans, giving them a roof and a place to eat, but they couldn't necessarily afford to send the kids to school. Some pastors had 20 kids, Pine said.

"We realized a need — a great need while we were doing medical work in Kenya. There was a whole generation lost to HIV and AIDS, which left a whole generation unable to afford school," Pine said. "When we would set up to do these medical clinics it was apparent that there were kiddos who were of school age that were not in school and unable to fend for themselves."

She and her husband discussed how they could help those children beyond medicine, and

came to the conclusion that they needed an education. That way, they could grow up able to sustain themselves. They began by paying for one young person's schooling.

"We saw that that was working because they then graduated and became a teacher and started paying their own bills and helping their own families," Pine said. "So my husband was like, 'Why don't we do this on a bigger scale? What does that look like?'"

While she was working as a registered nurse and going on medical missions, Pine was also selling children's clothes on the side. Despite that, being a career store owner was never on her radar.

"I never in a million years thought that I would have a boutique. I thought that I would be a nurse until I retired," Pine said.

That extra money was what the Pines used to send that first child through school. It was her

"This is what life is about. It's about giving back. It's about loving others, it's about helping people succeed."

- Joy Pine

that pitched the idea of a boutique, selling those same clothes and having that same mission — just on a bigger scale. The biggest challenge was their plan to move to Kenya, which meant they would eventually have to manage the business from the other side of the world. Still, they persisted.

Iddy & Oscar's was named after a pair of children that had inspired Pine during one of their trips to Kenya. It opened in early 2015 with the sole purpose of sending Kenyan street orphans to school. Ten percent of the store's profits go directly toward that mission.

Unfortunately, Pine's move to Kenya ended soon after it began. Her husband contracted malaria and typhoid fever and had to be air-evacuated back to the United States. He made a full recovery, but their plans had to change.

"It only made sense to be present with the business so that



▲ Joy Pine talks with employee Merritt Jennings inside Iddy & Oscars.

I could grow it so that we could send more kids to school,” Pine said. “Now we have educated over 30 kids across the country of Kenya through the store.”

The reason she has been able to do that, Pine said, is the people in Lebanon who also want to give back and give to something greater. Not everyone comes into the store knowing the mission behind the boutique, but many purchase items knowing that their money is doing something good for someone. It’s also the reason Pine has had the drive to keep the store going.

“I love fashion, but I don’t love fashion that much,” Pine said. “It has [lent] a greater purpose for the store. I don’t think it would have lasted as long as it has – we’re going into our 10th year now – so knowing that the store exists for these kids is what drives me.”

Iddy & Oscar’s is continuing to grow and branch out. They have expanded their work into Cambodia, and they’re starting to look for scholarship opportunities at home in Lebanon as well. The biggest hope, Pine said, is that they can make a cycle change in young people’s lives. After all, each person affected will go out and change more.

“The mission that we’ve been given to love God and love people — it comes full circle,” Pine said. “This is what life is about. It’s about giving back. It’s about loving others. It’s about helping people succeed ... this is why we do what we do.” **GN**



▲ Joy Pine shows a photo collage in the shape of Kenya made up of photos of her and the children of Kenya.

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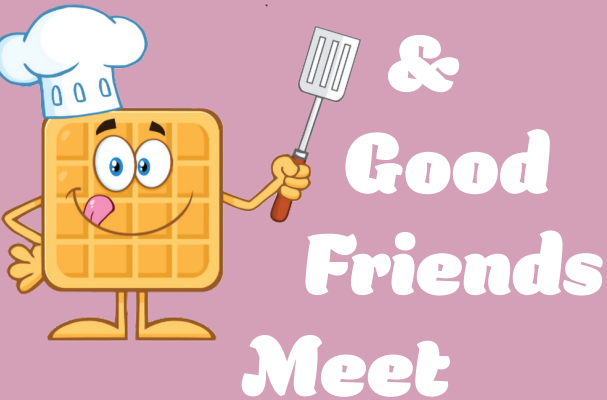
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Paws, Claws, and Healing Hands: The Vet Who Cares for Them All

By Haley Potter // Photography by Larry McCormack

WALKING ALONG West Main Street in Lebanon, where the sound of paws pattering on sidewalks is as common as the hum of passing cars, Dr. Matthew “Matte” Haley’s veterinary practice stands as a welcome place for animals of all kinds. From scruffy dogs to exotic reptiles, Haley’s clinic welcomes every creature in need. His easy smile and calm, reassuring presence instantly

put both pets and their owners at ease, making it feel like more than a clinic — it’s a place for fur, feathers, scales, and shells alike.

From the very beginning, animals have been part of his story.

“As long as I can remember, I wanted to work with animals,” Haley said, his eyes lighting up. “I was around 5 when I started telling people I was going to be a vet, and it stuck. Even growing up, I never imagined doing anything else.”

DR. MATTHEW HALEY





Raised in Nashville, Haley found his calling early and he always knew he wanted to work with animals. His path took him from Nashville to Tuskegee University in Alabama, where he honed his skills in veterinary medicine. But his passion always leaned toward the less conventional patients.

“Exotics are my niche now,” he explained. “We see everything from reptiles to primates — yeah, we have a lot of monkeys around here!”

It’s not unusual for the local community to bring in a parrot with a broken wing or a potbellied pig that needs a check-up.

Haley’s care for animals doesn’t stop at the clinic door. His connection to the community is as natural as a dog’s love for its favorite stick. He talks warmly about a recent homeless outreach event where his team provided free care for the pets of people experiencing homelessness.

“We took care of only a few dogs that day, but we hope to treat more with future events, and it was one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever done. Those animals are family for people who are going through tough times, and if we can make their lives a little easier, I’m all for it,” Haley explained.

His compassion stretches across species, and it’s that deep love for animals, whether they meow, chirp, or snort, that has made him beloved in the area. What makes Haley’s practice truly special is the way he approaches his patients, not as “just animals” but as family members.

His staff is just as devoted, and the clinic runs like a graceful flock of birds.

“I have the best team,” Haley said with pride. “They’ve been trained to handle just about any creature that comes in, and they do it with patience and care. You can’t teach someone to love

“Those animals are family for people who are going through tough times, and if we can make their lives a little easier, I’m all for it.”

- DR. MATTHEW HALEY

animals — that has to come naturally, and my team has it.”

As the practice grows, Haley continues to focus on not only caring for the pets in his clinic but on expanding his outreach.

“There’s always more we can do,” he said optimistically. “We’ve been thinking of visiting homeless camps directly, bringing the care to the pets where they are. Not everyone can make it to us, so we’ll go to them.”

In the end, Haley’s practice is more than just a place for animals to receive care. It is a community staple. His love for creatures big and small is evident in every wagging tail, every chirp, and every nuzzle from a grateful pet. His clients, both human and animal, know they have a vet who not only treats their wounds but also understands the bond between a pet and its person. **GN**



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Halloween on the Square - Oct. 27



Photography by Robin Holcomb

Halloween on the Square in Lebanon was a spooktacular success! Local businesses handed out candy to trick-or-treaters. There were food trucks, bounce houses, and fun for the whole family. The square was filled with spooky fun, bringing the community together for a memorable Halloween celebration.





Fiddlers Grove Event - Oct. 26



Photography by Robin Holcomb

To celebrate the 220th anniversary of Wilson County's founding, Fiddlers Grove in Lebanon hosted a special event. The event featured plaques throughout the village, guiding visitors through the rich history of the county. The celebration also featured live reenactments and demonstrations of historical figures and events, bringing the past to life for all who attended.







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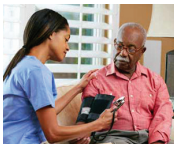
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