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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

# Love Your Neighbor

The golden rule is golden for a reason.

THE PEOPLE of the year 1000 faced division, uncertainty, and fear for the future. They didn't know it then, but they stood at the edge of change, transitioning from the Dark Ages to the Middle Ages. Nine centuries later, in 1914, I wonder how people felt as the world erupted into the chaos of the First World War — or just two decades after that when World War II shattered any fragile sense of peace. History shows us that humanity has always played tug-of-war with stern conflict, whether with neighbors down the street or across oceans. It's a harsh reality of being human. Yet, the way people treated one another 100 years ago didn't just stay in the past — it shaped who we are today. And the way we treat our neighbors today will ripple forward, changing lives for centuries to come.

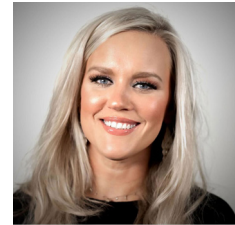
That's why it matters so much to treat others the way we want to be treated. The

golden rule is a guide for living and a good one at that! That rule is golden for a reason. When we choose kindness, when we choose to see the humanity in others, we make the world warmer and brighter with every interaction. Even the smallest actions — a kind word, a helping hand, or a passing smile — can spark a chain reaction of joy and compassion. These moments might seem fleeting, but their impact lasts far beyond what we can see. Loving our neighbors isn't always easy, but it is always the right thing to do. Love is in all of us — it's there, waiting to be discovered, shared, and passed along.

Good News Magazine is celebrating the people who are already living this way, those who make their communities better by choosing love and kindness. Their stories remind us of what's possible when we love our neighbors. **GN**

**Wesley Bryant,**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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# Dreams & Divine Purpose



▲ Neatly organized donated clothing on display at God's Garage, inviting the Manchester community to browse and take home what they need. God's Garage is open on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

**Susannah Lance's faith and garage became a ray of hope in Manchester.**

By Jeriah Brumfield  
Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

**S**USANNAH LANCE stepped onto Manchester's streets with little more than hopes and dreams. Having experienced what it was like to live with almost nothing, she knew she wanted to give back to the community in a meaningful way. Then, something miraculous happened. Just four years ago, while standing in her garage, she believed she heard a voice as clear as day say, "Open your garage." That moment changed everything.

On any given Saturday morning, the garage behind Lance's house illuminates the neighborhood. Volunteers arrive as early as 7:30 a.m. to set up for what has become a regular community event in Manchester: God's Garage. Laughter and conversation abound, and the scraping of tarps as women of all ages pull items from the garage and neatly display them for anyone in need. Many volunteers joyfully hang clothes on makeshift racks, and others fold clothes and store donations, offering wisdom and humor to anyone who will listen.

By the time 10 a.m. hits, there's already a line of people waiting outside, eager to see what treasures await inside God's Garage. Lance and the volunteers begin packing things away at 3 p.m. Even then, Lance and her team are constantly thinking ahead, wondering what new donations will arrive and how they can continue to serve the community.





Susannah Lance





▲ Susannah Lance, Walter Lynn, Wendy Martin, LaDonna O'Bright, Rose Crawford, Becky Lefevers, and Kay Holt

**"I love my God a lot,  
and I know for a fact  
He put me in this  
house for a reason."**

**– SUSANNAH LANCE**

When Lance received divine confirmation, she wasn't entirely sure what it meant, but within weeks, her garage became a center for charitable donations. One of the things that makes God's Garage special is the melting pot of people who come together to make it happen. Donors from all over bring clothing, furniture, hygiene products, and even kitchen sinks.

A local retail associate supplies them with hangers, while others contribute household goods, canned food, and even car parts. Some Saturdays, the carport transforms into a lunchroom and permeates with the comforting aroma of homemade soup made by a volunteer who enjoys cooking for the events.





▲ Neatly organized donated shoes on display at God's Garage, inviting the Manchester community to browse and take home what they need. God's Garage is open on Wednesdays and Saturdays.



▲ Wendy Martin proudly showcases the meticulously organized book donations at God's Garage.

Aside from the hustle, there's always a sense of togetherness, affirmed with a quick prayer before they open the garage to the public. Lance spoke with passion about the deeper meaning behind her work.

"I love my God a lot, and I know for a fact He put me in this house for a reason," she said.

Her home, secured through the Department of Agriculture's Rural Development program, sits within city limits, even though it technically wasn't supposed to be. This was, once again, the divine intervention Lance said she needed.

"I believe God made sure I got this house so I could use it for His purpose."

God's Garage is now in its fourth year and wouldn't be possible without community support. From the women who arrive early every Saturday to the donors who drop off bags of items throughout the week, it's clear that this initiative has improved lives and brought people together.

The garage also has a multilingual element, thanks to one of Lance's volunteers, Wendy, who speaks Spanish. With a growing number of Spanish-speaking individuals visiting the garage, Wendy's ability to translate has become an added, inclusive bonus.

"She's a blessing," Lance said, smiling. "We've had people come in who speak only Spanish, and she helps explain that everything here is free."

Even as she manages God's Garage, Lance faces her own personal battles. She currently lives with two heart problems and often pushes through physical discomfort to make sure that the garage remains a ray of hope for others. The ultimate reward for Lance is the intangible impact it makes on people's lives.

"I love seeing the joy on someone's face when they find exactly what they've been looking for," she said.

One time, a woman told her she needed a toaster, and just two days later, someone donated one to the garage, and Lance was able to give it to her.

It's these moments of connection that drive Lance to continue her work despite the challenges. God's Garage has transformed not only the lives of those it serves but also Lance's own.

"If this lasts another 20 years, I'll thank God for it. And if it doesn't, I'll still thank Him for the time I had with all the wonderful people I've met." GN

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**Roxanne  
Patton**







# Leadership Through Service

Roxanne Patton leads Manchester with heart, history, and service.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

**A**S ROXANNE Springfield Patton strolled through the streets of Manchester, she felt the warmth of familiarity and a connection to the town that influenced her. To those looking from the outside in, it was just another afternoon in this small, harmonious community. But in Patton's eyes, it was a walk through history — a history interlocked with her family's well-established reputation of tangible leadership, honor, and love for the city of Manchester.

"Growing up here was great," Patton recalled. "I didn't know anything else."

She grew up in a place where the past and present coexist peacefully in spite of the complexities of race and community dynamics.

When Patton steps into a room, her presence is magnetic. Not because she chases the spotlight but because she carries the kind of leadership that demands respect. She inherited her poised demeanor and effortless engagement with anyone she meets from her loving family, particularly her grandfather, Sam Nevels, a well-known businessman in the community.

"My grandfather had a cafe," she shared. "There was always a melting pot of people —black, white— it didn't matter. People brought their business to him."

Sam Nevels's cafe, Sam's Place, was a melting pot of unity where the community came together, regardless of color or creed. It was the same cafe where Patton learned how to be resilient, build sincere con-





**“You vote your conscience, and as long as you’re able to sleep at night, you’ve probably done the right thing.”**

**- Roxanne Patton**

▲ Roxanne Patton in front of the Coffee County Courthouse on Sept. 6, 2024

nections with others, and dedicate herself to serving others.

“If you want something, you’ve got to work for it,” she said firmly. “Nobody in my family sat around waiting to be taken care of.”

The principle of accountability and strong work ethics have guided her throughout her life, from her early days working in various offices to her eventual venture into public service.

Throughout her life, Patton often found herself as the only person of color in her circles, a situation that could have felt isolating. However, she

embraced it with pride and used it as motivation to push herself toward excellence — for both her own growth and her family’s future.

Patton’s entrance into public service came unexpectedly when she was asked to join the Manchester Arts Commission.

“That was probably the first board or commission I was on,” she recalled. “I was working at an attorney’s office, and they asked me to be on that board. I served for about five years.”

In 2008, then-county Mayor David Pennington encouraged Patton to run for

alderman. She was elected and served multiple terms, even being appointed to fill a vacant seat in 2020.

“I loved it,” she said. “I didn’t have an agenda. I just wanted to do what was right for the community.”

Patton’s time as an alderman came with several key accomplishments, including the purchase of a new fire truck to support a growing city and the acquisition of land for much-needed soccer fields.

“That field is packed now,” she said proudly. “It’s very good for our community.”



Throughout her years as an alderman and assistant to the county mayor, Patton remained persistent and committed to the community's most vulnerable populations — its older adults and children.

"We have to take care of our seniors and our children," she said.

One of her proudest moments as an alderman was securing city funding for the Manchester Senior Citizens Center.

"The county was contributing, but the city wasn't. We got that passed, and it was a big accomplishment for me."

However, it's not Patton's professional achievements that define her. She's a nurturer with a servant's heart who cares immensely about the well-being of others. She selflessly advocates for older adults by working with the Coffee County Senior Citizens organization and supports the next generation through various boards and commissions. Patton's life is centered around creating meaningful community impact and ensuring prosperity for everyone.

She serves on several boards, including the State Vocational Rehabilitation Board and the Southern Middle Tennessee Local Workforce Development Board. These boards allow her to continue helping others, whether by supporting small businesses or aiding individuals in returning to the workforce after an injury.

"It's a good feeling to be able to help people," she said simply. "I can talk to anybody. I'm always the same, and I try my best to treat everybody the same."

As Patton reflected on her journey, it was clear that her family and life experiences have shaped the woman she is today. Her contagious authenticity and no-nonsense leadership style have earned her the respect and admiration of her peers and the community.



"You vote your conscience," she advised. "And as long as you're able to sleep at night, you've probably done the right thing."

Leadership has never been about titles or recognition for Patton — it's about genuine service to the community and honoring the diligent work of those who came before her. As she steps into the future, a new set of eyes watches her closely — not just from council chambers or board meetings, but from her own family. As she looks into her grandchild-

dren's eyes, she sees the next generation of potential leaders, who look to her as a living example of love, strength, tenacity, and selflessness.

As they observe her actions and blaze their own paths, they carry with them the values of integrity and service that have defined their family's legacy. For Patton, the cycle of leadership doesn't end with her — it's just beginning again in the hearts and minds of those who will continue to build upon the foundation she laid. **GN**





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Kim Watkins turned a simple classroom project  
into a beloved classroom tradition.

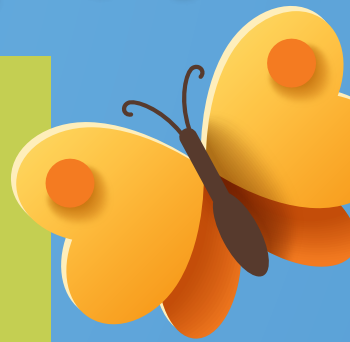
By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

**KIM WATKINS** stood in front of her classroom, the old pages of a homemade book cradled in her hands. The colorful, hand-drawn pictures, carefully illustrated with crayons and pencils, glistened under the fluorescent lights. Her students sat cross-legged at her feet with their eyes wide as they earnestly chimed, “Read it again, Mrs. Watkins!” It was a phrase she had heard for nearly 30 years. Each year, new faces and curious minds sat fascinated with the cardboard-bound story she’d written back in 1994. This book was a simple classroom project that, over

the years, had become a special tradition. But for Watkins, it was a dream, tucked away, waiting to come to life. And this past summer, after 30 years of waiting, that dream finally became a reality.

In 1994, at Middle Tennessee State University, Watkins was working on her master’s degree and enrolled in a class on writing in the classroom. One of her final projects was to create something she could use with her kindergarten students, and that’s how “The Wacky Week” was born.

With crayons, colored pencils, and her lifelong passion for art, Watkins wrote







▲ Kim Watkins shares with her students at College Street Elementary the evolution of her work, describing how the book she created years ago (right) transformed into the newly released edition (left).

and illustrated the entire book by hand. Though it was made of simple materials — cardboard and paper — the story soon became a classroom favorite, with students often pleading, “Read it again!” Those three words were all the encouragement Watkins needed to know she had created something special.

But the dream of publishing “The Wacky Week” faded after a series of rejection letters from publishers. Watkins, in her 20s at the time, set the book aside, disheartened by the experience. Yet, even as her career moved forward and she taught in various schools, Watkins never left the story behind. It had become a part

of her. With every school transfer and every classroom move, she packed the big, colorful book and continued reading it to her students year after year.

“The kids’ reactions were always the same,” Watkins recalled. “Read it again!” And when kids say that, you know the book is a hit.”

Over time, however, “The Wacky Week” was consigned to a dusty closet, waiting for its moment to resurface. Watkins continued to teach and eventually spent the last 12 years helping struggling readers, but the book never left her heart. Then, last year, when her principal moved her to a new classroom, she stumbled upon it once more.

“I saw the book again, and I thought, ‘I need to do something with this,’” Watkins said.

The timing was perfect. That summer, she learned about a local class on self-publishing and decided to attend, determined to give her book the attention it deserved.

By June 2, Watkins took her first steps toward publication. Inspired by local authors and motivated by the potential to finally bring her story to a wider audience, she set to work.

“I’m very goal-oriented,” she explained. “Once I get my mind set on something, I’m going to get it done.”

With a new burst of energy, Watkins rewrote sections of “The Wacky Week” to bring the story up to date. She removed a few outdated elements and refined the narrative with help from her family. Her daughter-in-law, Zoe Watkins, a professional editor; her son, Noah, an English major and editor by trade; and her sister and editor, Teresa Cook, lent their talents to the project to help her polish the story and make it precise.

While Watkins had originally hand-drawn the illustrations, she decided to use Canva — a graphic design platform — to create the updated artwork, saving time while still retaining the playful, whimsical style she envisioned for the book.

“I love to draw, but Canva made it so much easier,” she shared. “It felt like making a great big scrapbook of my story.”

In just a month’s time, Watkins transformed her 30-year-old classroom project into a self-published book available on Amazon. By July Fourth, “The Wacky Week” was ready for purchase.

The reception was nothing short of thrilling. Within its first week, “The Wacky Week” became the No. 1 new release in children’s books on Amazon.

**“I couldn’t believe it,” Watkins said, still excited by the overwhelming sup-**







▲ Kim Watkins reads her book, "The Wacky Week," to her students at College Street Elementary.

port. **"People started sending me pictures of their children reading the book, telling me how much they loved it."**

For Watkins, one of the most special moments came when a former kindergarten student, now grown, purchased the book for her own child.

"It's amazing to think that something I wrote for her when she was 5 is now being read by her own daughter. It's a full circle moment."

"The Wacky Week" may seem like just another children's book on the surface, but at its core, it's a unique and relatable teaching tool. The book introduces children to important educational concepts — days of the week,

color words, number words, and rhyming — all wrapped up in a fun and engaging story. Beyond that, it teaches a valuable moral lesson about kindness and inclusion.

"I've always wanted my students to not only learn the basics but also learn to be empathetic and kind to one another," Watkins explained. "The central theme of the book is just that — being kind."

In the future, Watkins is already considering her next project. The success of "The Wacky Week" has reignited her passion for writing, and she's eager to dive into another book.

"Summers can get a little boring now that my kids are grown," she laughed.

"This gave me something meaningful to do, and it's motivated me to keep going."

From the colorful pages illustrated in a master's class years ago to a published book that's now teaching kindness to a new generation of children, "The Wacky Week" proves that dreams — no matter how long they're put on hold — can still come true. Watkins said she is grateful for the support of her family and the readers who have embraced her story.

"This book is a piece of my heart," she said. "And it's been amazing to finally share it with the world." **GN**

*'Wacky Week Kim Bolling Watkins' on Amazon.*



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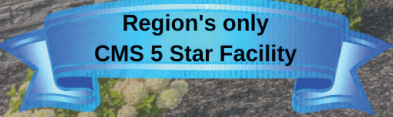
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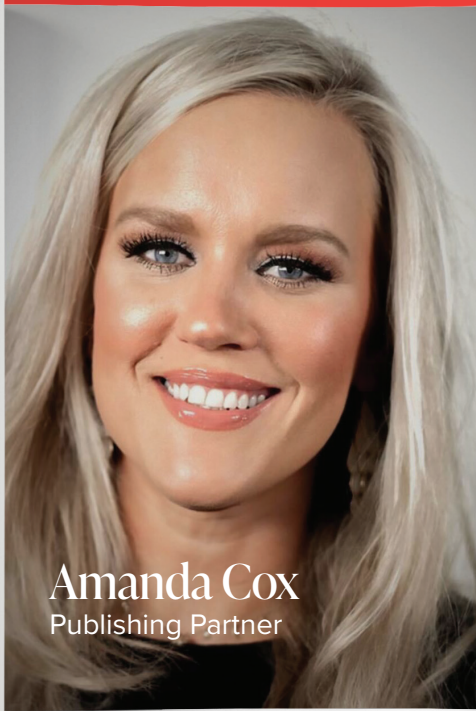
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*Vera Lund holds  
and loves on  
sweet 6-year-  
old Charlie.*





# FINDING 'FUR'EVER HOMES

Coffee County Humane Society  
advocates for animal equality  
and secures forever homes.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

**Y**OUNG VERA Lund held tightly to the frayed leash of her new companion — a prize from a raffle that would forever change her life. Her scrappy mixed dog with tender eyes was a confidant who would guide Lund's path for decades. Now, years later, in Coffee County, that same feeling of satisfaction remains as Lund navigates the realms of rescuing animals. She believes an animal's life could mean a powerful connection between humans and animals — a connection she is fully committed to building every day.

After retiring from Rutherford County Schools, Lund moved to Coffee County and soon began rescuing dogs. As a volunteer, one of her many passions was helping the local animal control transport dogs to rescues in northern states. This experience was so rewarding for her that it soon consumed her life. The sheer number of abandoned animals gave her goosebumps. How could she turn a blind eye?

Lund shared a testimonial in which an older dog had been

Vera Lund kneels to  
give some love to  
Rita and Fletcher.







◀ Vera Lund loves on Rita, who was found on the streets with a crushed foot.

tions. She collaborates with veterinarians to provide spay and neuter clinics and shares resources like donated food. Joint adoption

events and networking opportunities also help to strengthen these partnerships.

The Coffee County Humane Society is on the front lines, advocating for animal welfare policies and raising awareness in the community. Lund and her team strive to promote responsible pet ownership and address the issue of overpopulation.

**“We hold adoption events at local businesses, booths at community events to spread the word on spaying and neutering, and meet with youth groups to bring awareness on being a responsible pet owner.”**

The spay and neuter clinics have significantly reduced the number of stray animals in Coffee County, leading to a healthier and more peaceful community. Partnerships with local veterinarians have improved access to affordable veterinary care for pet owners, helping to keep more animals healthy and out of shelters.

However, there is still work to be done. There is still a shortage of low-cost animal clinics. Ongoing education and awareness, as well as added special clinics, are necessary to prevent the problem from spiraling out of control. Still, Lund remains optimistic about the public’s receptiveness to animal welfare issues.

“When you help someone save their furry family member, it warms your heart.”

Lund’s biggest concerns for the future of animal welfare, both locally and nationally, center around the need for increased education and legislative action. She believes that small, grassroots organizations like the Coffee County Humane Society can significantly drive change.

“As our community grows, hopefully, individuals and businesses coming into our community will bring awareness, new people, and fresh ideas to help grow our organization and bring more resources to help animals.”

hiding behind a local restaurant. After a rescue team member sent it to the veterinarian, and the veterinarian cleared it, the dog was placed in a foster home. The foster parents, who were new to fostering, provided the perfect environment for the dog to heal and thrive. Their bond was so strong that the family continues to visit the dog today, even though he has found his forever home.

**“The man had not had dogs since he was a child, and his wife had never had a dog. But they were exactly what he needed and what they needed. It was a perfect match. They still come to visit, and he still wants to be an only dog.”**

There’s nothing quite like the feeling of finding a forever home for a dog who has been through so much. But the flip side of that coin is the heartbreak of seeing animals in need, knowing that we can’t save them all.

They often find themselves rescuing stray animals, and while they still manage

to get them into surgery, most times, the vet bill is astronomical. The rescue team knows they can’t turn them away, but it is a constant worry, wondering if they would be able to cover the costs. It’s that kind of stress that hangs over them all the time.

Lund said the most rewarding part of this job is witnessing the transformation of a scared, neglected animal into a happy, loving companion. But it’s also the most heartbreaking. Every day, they see dogs and cats who’ve been abandoned, abused, or simply lost. They want to help them all, but their resources are limited. It’s like watching a ship sink while you stand on the shore, knowing you can’t do anything to stop it. It’s a heavy burden to carry. However, the joy of helping someone find their furry family member makes the challenges worthwhile.

Over the years, Lund has helped build relationships with local veterinarians, shelters, and other animal welfare organiza-





▲ Happy boy Fletcher, paralyzed from the middle of the spine down, is on the move in his wheelchair. Thanks to Vera and the Coffee County Humane Society, Fletcher has found his forever home!

Lund believes it is important to prioritize pet wellness and equality for all individuals and households, regardless of their financial circumstances. She believes that pets can provide life-changing companionship, emotional support, and mental health benefits.

Pet companionship also helps you grow closer to your neighbors. According to COTA Veterinary's website, by nurturing and tending to pets, we develop a stronger appreciation for the emotions and well-being of all living creatures. This same empathy can bleed into our interactions with fellow humans, making broader impacts on our communities.

The Coffee County Humane Society is a fantastic, all-volunteer organization that relies

on donations and fundraisers and operates independently of the Coffee County government. The humane society serves Tullahoma, Manchester, and all of Coffee County. It also offers its services to Grundy County, which no longer has animal assistance.

Coffee County Humane Society is always ready to welcome new and younger members who enjoy volunteering or providing temporary homes for animals. Your support can make a real difference in these animals' lives. **GN**

*If you or someone you know is interested in getting involved with the Coffee County Humane Society, visit [www.coffeehumane.org](http://www.coffeehumane.org).*



love your neighbor



▲ Shanon Stowe



# FAITH IN ACTION

A quiet moment of reflection inspired a ministry that now feeds hundreds a week in Coffee County.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

**I**N THE summer of 2019, Shanon Stowe, a longtime member of Canvas Community Church and an active volunteer in the community, sat quietly in reflection. In that stillness, she believes, came a vision from God, as clear as day. She was to start a food and outreach ministry for her home church, Canvas Community Church.

With nerves on edge, Stowe approached her pastors, unsure how they would respond to her sudden revelation. To her relief, they revealed they had been praying for someone to lead an outreach ministry. Stowe's vision was the answer they'd been waiting for — and thus began Community Table.

Community Table's motto is "seeing and serving the one right in front of you." Stowe and her team connect with each neighbor with dignity and respect because they understand that people often come in their most difficult moments. A mother unsure where her next meal will come from, a family hit by an unexpected disaster, or a person facing

Shanon Stowe ▶  
stands outside of the  
Community Table.





# love your neighbor

a health crisis — whatever the situation, Community Table meets them with open arms and a willing heart.

“We meet people where they are, and we love them as they are — no matter what that looks like,” Stowe said.

You can feel that love in Community Table’s actions. Volunteers at Community Table not only provide food, clothing, diapers, and hygiene products, but they also take the time to listen, pray, and connect with the people they serve. They take their service a step further by offering spiritual nourishment and spreading hope and love in the process.

However, as the world changed in recent years, so did the economy — and, with it, the community’s needs. The number of families seeking help at Community Table rose dramatically, straining resources.

“Our budget is tighter than ever,” Stowe admitted.

Even with the strains, the team at Community Table has kept the faith. Fully funded by donations, Community Table continues to serve thanks to the generosity of local businesses, churches, and individuals. But, with every passing day, the need for monetary donations, nonperishable food, hygiene products, and volunteers only increases.

“It takes a village to serve hundreds of families a week,” Stowe added.

In its early days, the ministry was nothing more than a few tables set up in the back hallway of Canvas Church, where food and hygiene items awaited local families.

“We were serving a dozen or so families each week,” Stowe recalled.

But as word spread, so did the ministry and the community’s needs. Soon, more space was required, and they moved into a spacious building between Canvas and Freddie’s, where Community Table found its footing. They added a clothing closet, and on-the-ground outreach efforts began. Volunteers

*The Community Closet Queens — Betty Scott, Kay Chenault, and Pamela Anderson — dedicate their time to managing and organizing the community closet.*







delivered hot meals and personal care items directly to the people.

In November 2023, Community Table experienced another transformation. After years of handing out prepackaged food boxes, Stowe opened a Community Market where neighbors could choose their own food and hygiene items. The market operates on a client-choice system and pairs each guest with a personal shopper to guide them through the process. By allowing families to select what best suits their dietary and health needs, the market reduces food waste and helps each family walk away with exactly what they need.

One of the newest additions to Community Table's services is a diaper partnership, which provides parents with 50 diapers per child each month. For families struggling to make ends meet, this is no small gift. Stowe understands firsthand the relief that these small acts of kindness can bring.

She shared a powerful testimony from one of the families they serve. A single mother working full time at a local fast-food restaurant had been struggling to feed her child, who was severely underweight.

*"Because of the food she's been able to get from the market, the child has been able to gain weight and become healthier," she said. "As a mother, you want the very best for your children and she can now rest easier knowing that she has the support she needs and her child is thriving."*

Stowe said though her heart and vision from God drive Community Table's outreach, it's her village that helps them reach new heights.

"Volunteers are crucial to what we do," she said. "If you come serve, I promise that you will not only be a blessing to someone else, but you will leave blessed."

There is always room for more hands and hearts of all ages to serve Coffee County. Whether it's unloading food trucks, stocking shelves, sorting clothes, or greeting neighbors, every task is important.

*Betty Scott manages the front desk at the community closet, welcoming visitors and helping them find what they need.*



Stowe extended her gratitude to the donors who make the ministry's work possible.

"Because our community outreach is based on face-to-face interaction, we get to see the impact of the program in real time," she explained. "We see their tears of relief when they are able to leave with bags of groceries and now don't have to worry about whether or not they can feed their family this week. We see parents smile with joy and relief when they receive the diapers they need when money is too tight. We experience their grief and their joy simultaneously."

Despite all of the growth Community Table has experienced, there is still a sense of humility at the center of it all.

"Right now, we are focused on our mission to love the one right in front of us every day," she said. "We have grown so much over the last few years, and while that is incredible, our heart is to just be present in this moment while serving our neighbors well. We are grateful to God for sustaining us and growing the impact of the ministry over the years, and we are excited and prayerful about the next season ahead," she said.

Though the need is great, so is the impact, and it's abundantly clear that her faith-driven vision spreads hope and love among her neighbors here in Coffee County. **GN**

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love your neighbor



▲ Fhonda Hatmaker



# FRIENDSHIP AND REAL ESTATE

Fhonda Hatmaker uses the power of friendships as a catalyst for positive change.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photographs submitted by Fhonda Hatmaker

**T**HE CRISP December air brought equal chills and joys, carrying the sounds of children's giggles and the joyful melodies of a marching band. Coffee County's annual Christmas parade was in full effect, with festive floats and twinkling lights that captured the warmth of the season. On one float, Fhonda Hatmaker and her real estate team were the perfect vision of community celebration.

Last year, Fhonda and her team celebrated Halloween at a local trunk-or-treat event and dressed as the "Hocus Pocus" witch sisters. They even had a designated photographer to capture fun moments with the children.

You can feel Fhonda's presence in how she leads — both in business and her personal life. Altruism is her greatest strength, and it guides her as she gives back and inspires others to do the same.

"Growing up in Coffee County, you just have pride in the community," Fhonda said. "Last year, we sent a truck of water to tornado

*Randy and Fhonda Hatmaker dressed up as Mr. & Mrs. Claus for Christmas pictures.*





# love your neighbor



◀ *The Hatmaker Homes (brokered by eXp Realty) team dressed up as "Hocus Pocus" characters for the 2023 Manchester trunk-or-treat*

victims. So, I love when we all come together and get things done."

As a child, she learned the importance of giving back. Now, as a successful realtor and businesswoman, she channels that altruism into initiatives that improve the quality of life in Coffee County. Events like the annual Christmas parade reflect her business goal of creating a brighter, more supportive future for the town she calls home.

This year, for Halloween, Fhonda and her team dressed as characters from "Inside Out 2" and spread joy at the local park. They handed out candy, took photos with children, and made the event truly magical. When it comes to Christmas, they never hold back. Last year, they donned "Toy Story" costumes for the Christmas float, which was a huge hit.

**"You just want your community to do well," she said. "I never got to go to those parades or trunk-or-treats. As a child, I'd always heard about them in school and longed to go."**

The holiday season is always full of fun and excitement. Fhonda and her husband, Randy, have even established their own tradition of dressing as Mr. and Mrs. Claus and passing out candy canes on Christmas Eve.

Festive Christmas traditions and trunk-or-treat events are just a few ways Fhonda

expresses her love for the community. Between organizing fundraisers for local causes, sponsoring youth programs, and honoring

teachers with appreciation gifts, she shows altruism in every facet of her work. But not without sprinkles of fun in between.

You'll often catch Fhonda making fun TikTok videos with her kids to bring smiles to people's faces.

"Hey, hey, it's your girl, Fhonda Hatmaker," is a common phrase in her videos.

Growing up in Coffee County, Fhonda's mother raised her with a sense of community responsibility. Fhonda learned that success means little if it doesn't contribute to the greater good. This philosophy continues to influence how she approaches life in business and her personal endeavors.

Compassionate, generous, and determined, Fhonda has always wanted to help others. But, like many leaders, she has faced her share of personal adversity. Growing up with an abusive father and later becoming a single mother was difficult, but it gave her the courage to rewrite her life's story. Learning to navigate obstacles refined her character and led her to make a difference in her community.

The same challenges that nearly derailed her path instead propelled her rise in the business world, where she and Randy successfully built a real estate team. The couple never wanted their business to be just a series of transactions. They wanted to create a platform for change — and they have.

Fhonda uses her resources and influence to launch community initiatives, support local charities, advocate for affordable housing, and provide opportunities for future generations. Randy and Fhonda lead their team with the motto: "Selling real estate one friendship at a time."

"We don't let our clients go," Fhonda explained. "We have client events. We do a

day at Granddaddy's Farm pumpkin patch. And then we do a secret egg hunt. Four days before Easter, we go to our past clients who have small children, hide a dozen eggs, and put a sign in their yard that says, 'You've been egged.'"

Fhonda has a remarkable ability to bring people together through love and determination. She leads with heart. Over the years, she has become a prominent figure in Coffee County, known for inspiring others to get involved. While her real estate business thrives, her part as a community advocate truly defines her career.

One lesson Fhonda has learned is to put "people over property." Every event she participates in reflects the future she envisions for Coffee County — one where everyone has a role to play, and every contribution matters.

Randy and Fhonda are excited to announce the opening of their brick-and-mortar team in the Manchester-Coffee County area. They plan to launch monthly drives to support causes such as collecting dog food, toys for kids, robes and slippers for older adults, blankets for homeless individuals, and food for people lacking access to sufficient food. They also raise money for holiday turkeys. Their goal is to build a welcoming community and organize events for everyone to enjoy.

Fhonda's story reminds us of the power of altruism and what can happen when one person's love for their neighbors creates ripple effects. As she continues her work, Coffee County's future looks bright and full of promise.

**"When one person gets involved, it inspires someone else to get involved, and then it's like a domino effect," she said. "Show up and be part of that community — be part of that impact. Make it a good experience for the children so that in 15 to 20 years, when they have their own kids, they remember those traditions and bring them back." GN**



The Hatmaker Homes  
(brokered by eXp Realty)  
team dressed up as  
"Inside Out 2" characters  
for the Manchester trunk-  
or-treat.







# Love your neighbor

## neighbor

**I**N CHALLENGING times, one of the first ways we often think of to show we care is through food. For some, it's a go-to dish of Southern comfort food. Soups come to mind when we hear of someone under the weather, and freezer meals for the family of a newborn are a welcomed sight. And nothing says I'm thinking of you more than your favorite dessert – the kind you never make for yourself.

No matter what's prompting you to love your neighbor, these recipes are sure to spread love and comfort. Each bite serves as a reminder that someone's thinking of us. GN

## Brenda's Beef Stew

Submitted by Brenda Hamilton

1 1/2 lbs. stew beef  
1 1/2 c. potatoes, cubed  
1/2 c. carrots, sliced  
1/2 c. celery, chopped  
1/2 c. onion, chopped  
1/2 c. green peas  
3 T. Worcestershire sauce  
3 T. vinegar  
3 T. brown sugar  
salt, to taste  
pepper, to taste  
ketchup, to cover  
water, to cover

Combine stew beef, potatoes, carrots, celery, onions, green peas, Worcestershire sauce, vinegar, brown sugar, salt, and pepper in large saucepan or slow cooker. Add equal amounts of ketchup and water to cover meat and vegetables. Cook until meat and vegetables are tender.



*Submit your recipes to be included in Good News Magazine and the Exchange Cookbook: [www.southernaprons.com](http://www.southernaprons.com)*



## Friendship Bread

Submitted by Cindy Crosslin

- 1 c. vegetable oil
- 1 1/2 c. sugar
- 1 t. vanilla extract
- 3 lg. eggs
- 1/2 t. salt
- 2 t. cinnamon
- 2 1/2 c. flour
- 1 1/4 c. milk
- 1/2 t. baking soda
- 1 box vanilla instant pudding, 3.4 oz.
- 1 1/2 t. baking powder
- 1/3 c. black walnuts, chopped, optional

Preheat oven to 325°. Combine oil, sugar, vanilla, eggs, salt, and cinnamon in a large bowl. Add flour, milk, soda, pudding, baking powder, and walnuts. Mix well. Grease 2 large loaf pans and sprinkle with a mixture of sugar and cinnamon. Pour in bread mixture and sprinkle any leftover sugar mixture on top. Bake for 1 hour. Makes 2 loaves.



## Jumbo Gift Cookies

Submitted by Jo Liggett

- 3/4 c. butter
- 1 c. sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 t. vanilla
- 3 c. AP flour
- 1 t. baking powder
- 1/2 t. salt
- 3/4 c. butter

In a large mixing bowl, combine butter, sugar, eggs, vanilla, flour, baking powder, and salt. For each cookie, measure and pat approximately 3/4 cup of dough into a greased and floured 8-9" cake pan. You can use any shape pan. Bake for 9-10 minutes at 400°. Cool and frost or decorate cookies as you like.





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Encouraging volunteers to create, design, direct, build, paint, manage, and perform as a nonprofit community theater organization based at the Manchester Arts Center.

(931) 570-4489  
[www.millenniumrep.org](http://www.millenniumrep.org)

## **B Love Foundation Inc.**

Providing under-represented citizens in transition with access to academic, interpersonal, athletic, and cultural enrichment programs; providing supportive service resources for disengaged youth, adolescents, and adults seeking gainful employment opportunities and a sustainable lifestyle.

(615) 673-4323  
[www.blovefirst.org](http://www.blovefirst.org)

## **Sportsmen And Professional Men Of Coffee County Inc.**

Giving help and support to the community through various means.

(931) 728-5048  
Facebook: Sportsmen & Businessmen's Charitable Organization





**Coffee County Humane Society**

Promoting the public interest in the general welfare and humane treatment of animals to prevent suffering, neglect, and abuse.

(931) 728-0903  
[www.coffeehumane.org](http://www.coffeehumane.org)

**Dusty Elam Foundation Inc.**

Assisting children with disabilities and economically disadvantaged children through family assistance, scholarships, Christmas Angels, and by meeting other community needs.

Facebook: *Dusty Elam Foundation*

**Coffee County Children's Advocacy Center**

Providing support and resources for children who have experienced abuse or trauma, working closely with law enforcement and other agencies to ensure the safety and well-being of children.

(931) 723-8888  
[www.coffeecountycac.org](http://www.coffeecountycac.org)

**Storehouse Food Pantry**

Alleviating food insecurity in Manchester and surrounding areas.

(931) 409-6040  
[www.storehousefoodpantry.com](http://www.storehousefoodpantry.com)

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# David Bradley's 2024 Birthday Bash Fundraiser - Nov. 16



Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

David Bradley and friends celebrated their annual joint birthday bash on Nov. 16, with a "Bill Murray" theme, raising \$3,004 for the Coffee County Children's Advocacy Center.



1. Bryan Smith and Becky Larsh 2. Dawne Kowalski, Gayla Powers, and Rhonda Myers 3. Nick Northcutt and David Bradley 4. Kallista Foote and Matt Carr 5. Carol Nurse and Jack Siebelaler 6. Angie and LeBron Haggard



# Fourth Annual Mystical Magical Mayhem Craft Show - Nov. 16



Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

The Coffee County Fairgrounds hosted the Fourth Annual Mystical Magical Mayhem Craft Show by Oliver's Wood & Fabric on Nov. 16. The event featured vendors with handcrafted items, food, drinks, and interactive games with prizes.



1. Musa Saber 2. Angell Eckert and Gill Eckert  
3. Ericka Lusk 4. Vicky Hardiman and Lisa Russell



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