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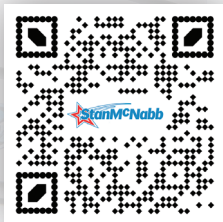
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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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THE ART OF HEALING

DISCOVER THE THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS OF MASSAGE THERAPY WITH LISA MARCROM AT THE VIBE ROOM.

BY JERIAH BRUMFIELD // PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLEIGH NEWNES

LISA MARCROM'S fingers glided across her client's tense muscles, a particular relaxation method that seemed to soothe the body and mind. The client's crumpled brow started to soften as her hands moved with practiced precision. The tension in their shoulders melted away, and a sense of serenity spread through their body. With each technique, a layer of tension peeled away, revealing a deeper sense of calm.

Marcrom's interest in health care was profoundly inspiring. It started when her mother received a life-saving liver transplant at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, a moment that forever altered Marcrom's perspective on health care.



A woman with long, dark hair is standing in a room. She is wearing a light pink, short-sleeved t-shirt and black pants. Her right hand is on her hip, and her left hand is resting on a pink textured surface in the foreground. In the background, there is a blue cabinet with various items on top, including a white vase with flowers and a potted plant. To the left, there is a painting of a tree in a landscape. A yellow and white patterned pillow is visible on a surface behind her.

LISA MARCROM



◀ *Lisa Marcrom, owner of The Vibe Room, provides focused, therapeutic relief for her clients.*

“She would have died,” Lisa recalled. “The care she received, especially from a small town without much health care access, was phenomenal.”

Witnessing firsthand the magnitude of the medical care her mother received, Lisa knew she wanted to be a part of that world.

Five years later, her brother donated a kidney to their mother, which made Marcrom want to pursue the medical field even more. So, she set out on a path to nursing, specializing in surgery.

She eventually earned an internship at Vanderbilt. The moment she walked through the doors, she felt it — a full-circle moment when she realized she was working alongside the very surgeon who had performed her mother’s transplant years earlier.

“I was tripping out every day,” she said. “It was surreal.”

Lisa’s career flourished, but as she moved from surgery to emergency rooms and trauma centers, the high-stress environment began to take its toll.

“Nursing is such a selfless job,” she reflected, “but my mental and physical health was deteriorating.”

The constant pressure from her work and the demands of being a mother to two young children made her reevaluate her future. That’s when the idea of massage therapy entered her life.

“Massage therapy felt like a way I could still work with the human body, still provide care, but also take care of myself,” she explained.

Initially unsure about leaving the world of nursing, Marcrom gave massage therapy a shot, and it paid off.

“It’s been amazing,” she said. “Honestly, I wish I had done it sooner.”

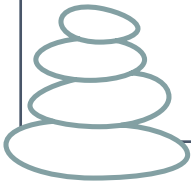
Now that she’s running her own practice, The Vibe Room, in Tullahoma, Marcrom has finally found her home in massage

“I FOCUS ON WHAT THE CLIENT NEEDS AT THE MOMENT, WHETHER IT’S A LIGHTER TOUCH FOR RELAXATION OR A MORE TARGETED DEEP TISSUE MASSAGE TO ALLEVIATE SPECIFIC PAIN.”

- LISA MARCROM



Lisa Marcrom in the lobby of The Vibe Room



therapy. While her nursing career will always be a part of her, she has embraced this new chapter, where she can provide physical and emotional healing to her clients.

Marcrom is motivated to grow her practice and plans to incorporate more modalities over time. For now, she’s focused on providing exceptional Swedish and deep tissue massages in time frames ranging from 30 minutes to two hours.

As a licensed massage therapist, she tailors her techniques to her clients’ needs. She enjoys the one-on-one connections and the ability to offer healing in a different yet equally profound way.

Marcrom shared a particularly moving story from early in her massage career when working at a fast-paced spa in Franklin.

“A woman came in, and from the moment I met her, I could tell something was off,” she recalled.

The energy between them was undeniable, and during the massage, Marcrom

felt as if her hands were guided by something beyond herself.

“I’m very methodical in my approach because of my surgical background, but this time, it was different. It was like I was being pulled to different areas where she needed healing.”

By the end of the session, the woman was in tears and revealed that she had just found out her husband had been diagnosed with cancer. She felt overwhelmed and unable to cope, but the massage brought her clarity and relief.

“Lisa, you’re doing God’s work,” the woman told her, adding that Lisa’s hands had massaged her soul and given her the clarity and strength to keep moving forward.

Marcrom remembered, still moved by the encounter, “It was divine intervention. She felt like she could breathe again.”

Marcrom takes the time to understand each client’s unique needs. Before every session, Lisa consults with her clients to

tailor her techniques to make their experience effective and deeply personalized.

“I focus on what the client needs at the moment,” she said, “whether it’s a lighter touch for relaxation or a more targeted deep tissue massage to alleviate specific pain.”

Marcrom believes in the therapeutic power of touch and strives to create a peaceful, healing space for her clients.

“I may not always know what someone is going through, but I do my best to help them feel cared for,” she said.

Her caring hands, led by medical expertise and intuitive understanding, have enhanced people’s quality of life. In the Vibe Room, she provides a safe space for bodies to find relief and souls to find peace. Even the simplest gestures bring profound healing. **GN**

For more information, visit The Vibe Room Massage Therapy on Facebook or at 1956 N. Jackson St. in Tullahoma.

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A professional portrait of Dr. Catherine Stephens. She is a middle-aged woman with short, styled blonde hair, wearing glasses and a white blazer over a light blue collared shirt. She is smiling warmly at the camera. Her hands are clasped together on a dark wooden desk in front of her. She is wearing several pieces of jewelry: a watch on her left wrist, a bracelet on her right wrist, and pearl earrings. The background is an office setting with bookshelves filled with books and framed pictures. A large, dark letter 'T' is visible on the wall to the right.

DR. CATHERINE
STEPHENS

RIPPLE EFFECTS OF LOVE AND LEADERSHIP

As a superintendent, Catherine Stephens leads the school system with heart.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes and submitted by Zach Birdsong

CATHERINE STEPHENS didn't plan a career as a superintendent — it developed naturally, like a story she was meant to live. Early in the mornings, one could find her in the classroom, her smile growing as she watched students grasp and apply new concepts. The energy of the room fed her own. Over time, she felt a pull to break glass ceilings and push her career in education further.

“As educators, our service is to children. Our commitment is to championing them and making a life-changing impact,” she said. “That happens in every position in education.”

Her rise from classroom teacher to district leader helped her realize the powerful ripple effect of leading with heart.

“As I evolved, I realized school leaders set the tone and make schools feel rich, warm, and positive — or not,” she said.

In her fifth year as superintendent, Stephens championed several initiatives to elevate student voices and expand learning opportunities. One initiative is the student advisory groups she established in middle and high schools.

She listens to these groups and encourages discussions on how leadership can better support students through career advising, unique opportunities, or academic or mental health resources.

“We discuss everything from academic successes to challenges they face, which aren't always school-related,” she said. “We've had meaningful conversations about social media and how it affects them.”

For Stephens, it's essential that students see the impact of their voices in leadership decisions. The advisory groups have influenced decisions such as field trips to universities tailored to students' interests.

Her efforts to engage students are part of her broader vision for every student to thrive, not only academically but also artistically, athletically, socially, and emotionally.

Another initiative under Stephens' leadership is the Tullahoma Virtual Academy, now in its fourth year. This academy caters to students who excel outside traditional classroom settings. Initially focused on high school students, it has expanded to middle school and provides a flexible learning environment for those who need it.

For students who balance work or face challenges in a conventional setting, the virtual academy offers a path to success on their own terms.

Stephens' dedication to creating well-rounded opportunities for all students stems from her own transformative experiences as a young person.

While she started as a teacher, important moments led her toward leadership, which she equates with love. One defining experience came during her time as an assistant superintendent in Franklin Special District, where she led the district's strategic planning process.

Her director of schools recognized her potential and encouraged her to take the lead, perhaps before she fully realized her own capacity. This mentorship helped her understand the importance of leadership and its influence on the community.

Serving as assistant superintendent, she said, allowed her to "engage with various groups — staff, parents, and community members — and facilitate collaborative discussions." It was then she realized she was ready to lead as a superintendent herself and bring people together to work toward common goals.

Stephens' family has been heavily involved in her educational journey. Her husband of more than 34 years and their



▲ Greyson Robinson is greeted by Dr. Catherine Stephens on his first day at school.

two daughters have supported her every step of the way, whether she was grading papers or attending school events.

Her daughters, now grown, continue to inspire her with their work ethic and compassion for others, qualities she has modeled throughout her career.

"One year, I wanted to make cards for every employee, and my oldest daughter helped me. My other daughter choreographed a dance that we taught to a leadership team for an opening number," Stephens said.

Managing personal and professional life hasn't always been easy, especially as Stephens pursued a doctorate while raising her daughters. She reflected on the challenging decision to continue her education during their high school years, knowing it would mean sacrifices, like compromising her study time for family activities or vice versa.

But her family's support made her academic achievements possible.

"I told them I wouldn't pursue my doctorate without their support," she said.

Her husband even created a makeshift office at the dining table.

"My husband has been a partner in this work, and he knows me as Catherine, his wife. That's the title I'm most proud of — Mrs. Stephens."

A middle school teacher once recognized Stephens' potential and helped her see her own worth, which changed the trajectory of her life. Now, she hopes to make the same impact on others.

"If I can change one person's life the way mine was changed, it will affect their children's lives too," she said.

Outside of the school system, Stephens is profoundly connected to her community.

“MY HUSBAND HAS BEEN A PARTNER IN THIS WORK, AND HE KNOWS ME AS CATHERINE, HIS WIFE. THAT’S THE TITLE I’M MOST PROUD OF — MRS. STEPHENS.”

— CATHERINE STEPHENS

Dr. Catherine Stephens in her office at the Tullahoma City Schools administration building.

She is involved with her church and local initiatives and believes that true leadership has a generation-spanning effect.

“We are all connected,” she said. “Our service is to children, but it impacts families, communities, and society as a whole. That’s the heart of education.”

Stephens leads with both head and heart to illustrate the power of education. Through her leadership, she enhances the future of education while inspiring the next generation to see their potential and strive for more.

“I absolutely love what I do and what we are called to do as educators. I truly believe we can impact individuals for the good for themselves, for their families, and for the future. I really hope that people see through my visibility, my passion, and my commitment to this work. I hope they see, unabashedly, that I am a student-focused leader. That’s my heart — always has been, always will be.” **GN**





Lorna
Mitchell



It Takes A

VILLAGE

LOVE GROWS AND CHILDREN FLOURISH AT BOLINGO VILLAGE IN THE CONGO.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes
and submitted by Lorna Mitchell

A HOUSE MOTHER stepped out of her small cottage, clutching a book in her hand. It was warm outside, but what truly stirred the ground were the joyful shouts and the pattering of tiny feet. Children rushed toward her from every direction, eyes bright with expectancy. She barely had time to sit before they gathered around, their eager faces turning toward the colorful pages. Together, they repeated English words, their voices resounding across the village. The house mother knew that these moments, reading Bible stories and learning new words, meant

so much more. For these children, who were once consumed by the daily fight for survival, it was a chance for them to thrive.

Love grows as abundantly as its flourishing mazes in the Democratic Republic of Congo. At Bolingo Village, the mission is to nurture orphaned and abandoned children and give them the loving homes, nutrition, and care they need to thrive. But as you step off the bus and into the village, you'll quickly realize it's less of an orphanage and more like a family. And like any family, it takes a village to make it work.

◀ *After school tutoring time*



PICTURES

from the

CONGO

Lorna Mitchell, who works with the Global Orphan Foundation, has seen firsthand how this little corner of the world has impacted the lives of numerous children of Congo.

“Bolingó means ‘love’ in Lingala, and that is what we hope shines through the most in the village.”

Bolingó Village is the Global Orphan Foundation’s signature project and is designed to feel more like a home than a traditional organization. Cozy cottages spread across the property, home to eight or nine children, lovingly cared for by widowed women who are employed as foster mothers.

“By employing widowed women as licensed foster moms and limiting each cottage to hold eight to nine children, we are able to create a family environment.”

What makes Bolingó even more impressive is its self-sustainability. Surrounding the cottages, you’ll find a flourishing farm full of life. There are fields of peanuts, maize, and sweet potatoes — each crop is grown to nourish the children’s growing bodies with essential vitamins and minerals.

“Thankfully, we have on-call medical staff and access to Plumpy’Nut, a ready-to-use therapeutic food that is designed to treat malnutrition,” she explained proudly. “These resources, alongside the support from many in the U.S., have allowed us to provide three meals a day to every child. Together, we are literally saving children’s lives.”

Sweet potatoes, green vegetables, and maize are all important parts of the children’s daily meals, while goats and chickens provide fresh milk and eggs, rich in vitamin A and protein.

While the farm is prospering, the challenges are real. Malnutrition is still a glaring issue for children arriving at Bolingó. Mitchell remembered one particular boy who was found on the streets, severely malnourished, weighing just 22 pounds.

“The doctor estimated his age to be 7. The lack of proper nutrients in his body for



▲ Children of Bolingó reading books donated by Miss Dot and the Tullahoma Sunrise Rotary Club

an unknown length of time contributed to additional physical and cognitive disabilities. Because of our resources, we watched him gain 10 pounds in just six weeks and saw life come back into his eyes.”

Outside of the farm, Bolingó Village is equipped with its own medical clinic, and the children receive trauma counseling and spiritual support to heal from their difficult pasts.

“We want them to not just survive but thrive,” Mitchell said.

Despite the village being a world away, the generosity of the Tullahoma community has been a blessing for the children of Bolingó. Mitchell recently spoke at the Tullahoma Sunrise Rotary Club, sharing the village’s success stories and challenges. Afterward, the Rotary Club gifted her a tote filled with books for the children.

“As soon as I would step outside of my cottage with a book in hand, the children would come running from all directions to surround me,” Mitchell recalled. “They loved seeing the pictures and repeating the words in English after me. They especially loved reading the Bible stories.”

It’s the little things, like a tote of books, that make the biggest difference at Bolingó.

“These little ones have already lost so much and often live in a state of survival. For so long, their focus was finding the next meal and making it through the day. Now that they are seen, safe, and fed, we want to help them dream again and find a

life they never thought possible,” she said. “I was so thankful for the opportunity to expand their minds and remind them that their story is still filled with beauty.”

For anyone wondering how they can help, Mitchell is quick to point out that every contribution — big or small — counts.

“Sometimes people feel like they have to write a hefty check or sponsor a huge fundraiser in order to make a difference — which is always welcome. But I have found that just doing even a little helps — sharing our information, liking a post, hosting a clothing drive, sending \$10 a month, and the list goes on.”

As for the future of Bolingó Village, Mitchell hopes the program continues to be a source of love and growth for the children.

“We want these children to grow up with the skills, resources, and love they need to follow the path God has for them,” she said. “Yes, there’s darkness in this world, but because of Jesus, there’s always hope.”

Since its beginning, the Global Orphan Foundation has changed thousands of children’s lives through missions in Haiti, Nicaragua, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The organization is proof that when a community comes together — whether in Congo or Tennessee — amazing things happen. It really does take a village. And in this village, love is always in abundant supply. GN

Casa Mexico Tex-Mex Restaurant

An experience for the senses

WALKING TOWARD the door, you are greeted by neon lights and colorful architecture at Casa Mexico. Smiling faces lead you to your table, welcoming you into a cozy interior with music playing and a water feature that just oozes relaxation.

The menu is extensive, offering everything from Mexican favorites like fajitas, burritos, and enchiladas to daily lunch specials, margaritas, and other drinks, along with the perfect end to a meal — the beloved fried ice cream. Take your time and choose carefully as the options are many.

Today's trip started with a pair of dips: the classic guacamole and the fan-favorite cheese dip. The guacamole is fresh and vibrant with tangy notes of lime while the cheese dip is salty, warm, and indulgent. Each pairs perfectly with the chips, served hot and crispy ready to deliver the perfect bite and leave you craving more.

Though already having eaten far more than I should, I welcomed my entree with open arms and bright eyes. Breathing in the deep aroma of the consommé, I took in the beautiful site of the plate of birria tacos expertly chosen from the menu, along with the plate of Mexican rice, which is a must-get for me.

The rich flavor of the tender beef marinated in spices like cumin, oregano, and garlic paired with the melty cheese and grilled to perfection in a corn tortilla created the perfect balance of savory, spicy, and hints of smoky notes in each bite. When the taco is dipped into the consommé, the flavorful cooking liquid that has been reserved for this purpose, it creates a complex taste experience like no other, a symphony of flavors. I highly recommend everyone try birria tacos at least once.

Other favorites from Casa Mexico include chicken and steak fajitas, cheesy steak and rice, and chimichangas. Each is always served hot and fresh by some of the friendliest staff in town. Vegetarian options, a kid's menu, and daily lunch specials are also





offered, so there is something for everyone! And if you want to indulge in an after-work or date-night drink, be sure to check out the full bar.

Finishing off the meal with fried ice cream is just what our evening usually needs. The creamy vanilla ice cream is enveloped in crunchy honey cereal and served with fried tortilla strips tossed in cinnamon sugar and drizzled with chocolate sauce. The salty-sweet combination leaves your taste buds dancing to the very last bite. And the hot and cold combination comes together in a culinary experience like no other.

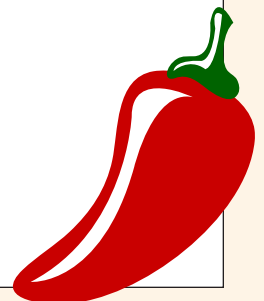
Casa Mexico offers a taste of Mexico right here in Tullahoma. Its friendly staff and welcoming atmosphere are worthy of any date night or family dining adventure. **GN**

GOOD NEWS IS COMING TO DINNER!

We will feature a local food critic's thoughts as they dine in Tullahoma. This month Tabitha Buckner visited Casa Mexico.

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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

YOUNG 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.

nizations. 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 heart-breaking. 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 orga-



▲ 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.

love your neighbor



▲ Joe Capezza

A CYCLE OF INSPIRATION

A childhood fascination led to a remarkable journey across continents and into the hearts of young learners.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

FIVE-YEAR-OLD JOE Capezza gripped the handlebars of his favorite bicycle as he raced down his neighborhood street, his tiny legs pumping with all the force they could muster. The breeze whipped through his hair, and the world blurred around him as his bike seemed to take on a life of its own. The quiet street ahead, a stretch of smooth asphalt, invited him to explore more. Little did he know that that day's adventures would become a lifelong fascination with two wheels — one that would carry him across continents and down both literal and metaphorical roads.

His first bicycle was the spark behind why so many children around Tullahoma today receive their first bikes.

As a seventh grader, his curiosity about his trusty English three-speed bike led him to take it apart piece-by-piece, down to the smallest spring. He figured out how it all worked then quickly reassembled it — affirming his natural knack for mechanics.

Years later, that same boy found himself a proud mem-



William ►
Mooneyham,
Joe Capezza,
Troy Layman, and
Zain Vennur

love your neighbor

ber of the U.S. Army, serving as a contractor in Kazakhstan and then returning to Tennessee.

“There have only been two periods in my life since I was 5 where I couldn’t cycle. One was when I was in Vietnam, and the other was in Kazakhstan,” Capezza explained. “I’ve cycled through major cities in the United States and several countries overseas as well.”

He started cycling in New York and then expanded to include Greece, Belgium, the Netherlands, and even St. Kitts and Nevis. After returning from Vietnam, the adventure continued in New York before settling in Vermont for four years. Eventually, the journey led to sunny Florida for 11 years before moving to Texas. After eight years there, he has found his cycling home in Tennessee, where he has been enjoying the roads for 34 years and counting.

Capezza became a certified cycling instructor several years ago when the Jeff Ross Cycling Foundation reached out to the Highland Rim Bike Club with training opportunities. In 2016, he was asked to take over the program after assisting his predecessor with several sessions at local schools.

Now, at 81 years old, Capezza spends his days channeling that love for cycling into teaching. Alongside the Highland Rim Bike Club, he teaches middle school students at West Middle School how to fix bicycles.

His goal is to help revitalize the local bike recycling program and help as many children as possible learn the joy of working on and riding a bike, just as he did decades ago. Watching the middle schoolers tinker with gears and wheels brings him back to his childhood, racing up and down the same streets on his first bike.

“I love fixing things,” he said. “And that’s one of the things I enjoy teaching these kids. Some of them have never held a tool before — they don’t know a wrench from

Zain Vennur ►
works on
replacing a
bike tire.





a screwdriver. But by the end of the program, they will have used each, along with several other tools. It's a sense of accomplishment for them."

The bike program has become such a hit that Cindy Herrera, the principal at West Middle School, often comments on how much of an impact it has on the kids.

Capezza starts the program with the basics. Students learn how to remove tires, replace tubes, and pump up tires. As the program progresses, they tackle more advanced topics like chain adjustment, derailleur maintenance, and brake alignment. By the end of the first session, they're already well-versed in essential bike maintenance.

By day two, the students dive deeper, inspecting the bike frames for damage, learning to lubricate chains, and discussing the importance of hydration and nutrition for long rides.

Capezza shared his personal experience: "It's important to have nutrition, or you suffer what's called the 'bonk,' when you're riding along and all of a sudden you just can't go anymore."

The program covers everything from installing new brake pads to adjusting handlebars and teaching gear ratios. Some parents have suggested the program be included in the school's STEM curriculum, a recommendation Capezza fully welcomes.

The last day is all about safety. Students learn about helmet fit with helmets donated by Woody's Bike Shop in Sewanee, bike registration, and pre-ride inspections. Additional features like lights, bottle cages, and bike computers can be added if the budget permits.

At the end of the program, the kids participate in a 3 1/2-mile test ride. Capezza rides alongside them, ensuring they know how to signal, stop properly, and ride safely in traffic. And the best part? The students who complete the program get to keep the bike they've worked so hard on.

Capezza remembered one moment vividly. An overjoyed 11-year-old raced

Joe Capezza watches over William Mooneyham and Zain Vennur while they replace a tire at West Middle School.



past everyone on a 25-mile ride and earned the name "the racer." Another time, a student ran up after finishing a ride and gave him the biggest hug. It's those moments that make it all worthwhile for Capezza.

The donated bikes are the foundation for teaching students, with additional donations coming from the Mac 10 Running Club and community members and generous monetary donations from the Jeff Roth Cycling Federation.

The club always welcomes donations.

"We have to buy tires, tubes, chains, and lubricants. Right now, I've got enough to fix at least 10 bikes, but we can always use more."

He's also looking for storage space accessible enough for him or another club member to store their collection of around 40 bikes. He hopes to expand the program to East Middle School to involve more students and even extend the initiative to local high schools.

For Capezza, cycling is a passion he's proud to share with future generations. Between watching young students race their newly fixed bikes and seeing their pride in learning new skills, Capezza knows that the little boy who once sped down his neighborhood street would be proud of the man he's become.

And, of course, he couldn't do it without the support of his club members.

"It's a team effort, for sure," Capezza said proudly. GN

love your neighbor



*Lyle and Valerie
Russell with great
horned owl, Lucy*

FALCONRY, FAMILY, AND CONSERVATION

The Russell family works to preserve raptors and educate the masses on wildlife conservation.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes and submitted by Valerie Russell

JOURNEY, A majestic red-tailed hawk, soared effortlessly above the canopy, her keen eyes scanning the forest below. A master hunter, she has learned to rely on her instincts to survive in the wild. Journey came to the Middle Tennessee Raptor Center injured and grounded, leaving with a survival story. After suffering a wing injury that prevented her from returning to the wild, she found her home with Lyle Russell and his family.

Under their care, she healed and adapted to her new life. Her striking beauty and endurance now symbolize the center's mission: rescue, rehabilitate, and educate. Inspired by Journey's story, the Russell family is committed to wildlife conservation and dreams of a future where raptors flourish in Middle Tennessee.

Journey's story, like many other birds, started as a family hobby.

"We officially started in 2021 as a nonprofit, but really, it began back in 2016 when my wife and oldest son became falconers," the founder recalled.

Lyle Russell ►
holds Ruby, the
peregrine falcon.



love your neighbor



◀ Lyle and Valerie Russell hold Ruby, the peregrine falcon, and Remi, the barn owl.

“The biggest threat to birds like Journey isn’t predators or the wild — it’s us,” Lyle said. “Rat poison is a huge problem. Birds of prey often eat poisoned rodents, which then poisons the bird.”

Through public education, the center advocates for alternatives to harmful substances like rat poison, raising awareness about the unintended consequences of human actions.

Conservation and education go hand in hand for the Middle Tennessee Raptor Center. One of the team’s biggest priorities is to return the birds to the wild and give them a second chance at life.

“We have about a 68% success rate with releasing birds back into the wild. We don’t want to collect them. Our goal is to heal them and send them back out.”

For the birds that can’t be released, the center ensures they still have a purpose. They place them in education programs around the country or use them as ambassadors in local schools and community groups.

The Russells have ambitious plans for the future of the Middle Tennessee Raptor Center. Though they currently operate from their home, they envision creating a public nature center where families can learn about birds of prey, conservation, and the natural world in a hands-on environment. Their vision includes walking trails, outdoor pavilions, and interactive education spaces where visitors can observe their ambassador birds up close.

Through their persistent efforts and love for birds of prey, the Russell family has created an organization for raptors like Journey to heal, thrive, and educate others. Their organization integrates wildlife rehabilitation and community interaction. As they work toward expanding the center, Lyle, Valerie, and their children continue to live in service of these magnificent birds. Together, they are helping raptors not only survive but continue to soar. **GN**

The family’s background in falconry illuminated their path toward serving birds of prey. Lyle’s wife, Valerie, a registered nurse, inspired their transition from hobbyists to wildlife rehabilitators. With her medical knowledge and compassionate nature, community members often called her when injured birds needed help.

“We’re not veterinarians, but my wife’s experience in hospice care has given her a unique understanding of life, injury, and healing,” Lyle explained.

It wasn’t long before the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency recognized the family’s growing knowledge of wildlife and asked them to join the ranks of raptor rehabilitators in their area.

“It became a family affair. I’d help craft leather goods for their falconry, and soon, people started contacting us for help with injured birds,” Lyle said.

By 2021, their fascination with raptors led them to open the Middle Tennessee Raptor Center, a nonprofit organization that rehabilitates injured birds of prey and educates the community on their importance. They also earned three separate licenses for rehabilitation, education, and falconry. Their home is now the Middle Tennessee Raptor Center’s base of opera-

tions. Lyle humorously refers to it as “a fancy name for the downstairs of our house.”

A common question they receive during programs is whether large raptors pose a threat to pets, especially small dogs or cats. Lyle explained that while birds of prey might seem intimidating, they rarely target pets unless they are in a desperate state of hunger.

“They prefer easy meals,” he said, educating the community about raptor behavior and how to protect both pets and wildlife.

“People are afraid that large birds will swoop down and carry off their pets, but that’s not true. Birds of prey are more likely to protect their nests than hunt pets,” he added.

Aside from rehabilitating injured birds, they also educate, dispel misconceptions, and help people coexist peacefully with wildlife. Lyle especially enjoys bringing their ambassador birds to schools, civic groups, and community events.

“It’s my personal favorite,” he said. “Going out and teaching people about these incredible creatures, raising awareness about how we can help preserve their habitats, and debunking myths about birds of prey is incredibly rewarding.”

One of the center’s primary focuses is preventing unnecessary harm to these majestic creatures.



*Ruby, the
peregrine falcon*

Tullahoma Chamber's 5th annual Gobble Wobble 5K - Nov. 23



Photography by Brooke Snyder

The Tullahoma Chamber's fifth annual Gobble Wobble 5K took place on Nov. 23, beginning at 8 a.m. Almost 500 runners and walkers participated in the event to make it a huge success.



1. Chloe Shedd and Emily Cortner 2. Paula Jo Fetter, Melissa Gordon, and Destiny Roberts
3. Amber Fulton, Sonya Brown, Elizabeth Rice, and Sharon Hill 4. Abigail English, Isabella English, and Madeline Muse
5. Whitney Cutshaw and Mary Hollifield 6. Belinda Crump, Brandy Gilliam, Kari Hedrick, and Sernobia McGee

7



8



9



10



11



7. Lisa McDonald and Shonna Starr 8. Chelsy Morris, Whitney Morris, and Emily Goodman 9. Lynda and Dennis Hamm
10. Hope Nunley and the mayor of Tullahoma, Lynn Sebourm 11. Koye Cashion, Autumn Torres, Lane Curlee, and Karen Moran

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www.tullahomasoccer.org

Tullahoma Little League

Providing baseball and softball opportunities for local youth.

tullahomall.president@gmail.com
www.tullahomalittleleague.org

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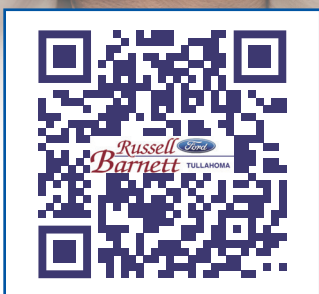


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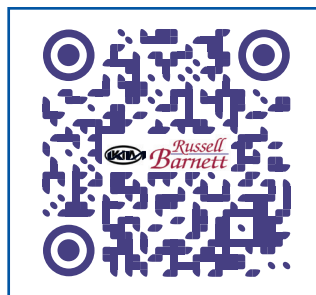
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