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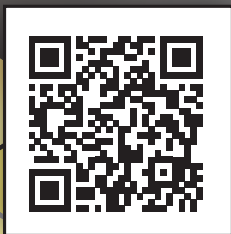
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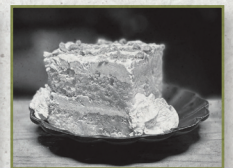
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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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publishing
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BRAND AMBASSADOR Cindy Baldhoff

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Wesley Bryant

REGIONAL PUBLISHER Jack Owens

LEAD LAYOUT ARTIST Brianna Brubaker

SENIOR LAYOUT ARTIST Melissa Davis

LAYOUT ARTIST Ben Adams

LEAD PRINT AD DESIGNER Todd Pitts

JR. PRINT AD DESIGNER Jane Morrell

LEAD PHOTOGRAPHER Ashleigh Newnes

PHOTOGRAPHER Brooke Snyder

FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHERS Amanda Guy, Adin Parks,
Sarah Bussard, Chad Barrett, Robin Fast, Gretchen Clark

LEAD WRITER Tina Neeley

STORY WRITER Jeriah Brumfield

FREELANCE WRITERS Amanda West, Sara Hook, Paige Cushman,
Kali Bradford, Gabriel Huff, Dave Lenehan, Richard Klin

FOOD CRITIC Christina Midgett

STORY COORDINATOR Haley Potter

PROOFREADER Michelle Harwell

JR. PROOFREADER Kaitlin Rettig

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Faith Cashion,

Amanda Cox, Tony Glenn, Mark Mahagan, Kevin Maples,
Janet Mullins, Sissy Smith, Sandra Thomas, Jay Hutt

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VP OF TALENT Chase Perryman

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ROOTED



in service

Chris Crowell encourages giving back.

By Sara Hook // Photography by Larry McCormack

IT MIGHT be at a city council meeting, at a Rotary Club fish fry, or at Liberty State Bank's veteran's breakfast, but you will always see Chris Crowell involved with the community. Crowell's roots go deep — he was born and raised in Lebanon, but even more importantly, he has actively worked to get involved in a variety of ways and with a variety of people.

As a member of the city council, Crowell is involved with several commit-

tees, but he also takes the time to get to know the people in his ward, even going door to door at times to meet those he serves. With Liberty State Bank, Crowell is one of the organizers of the TennCom-mUNITY program, walking alongside other banks to uplift local businesses. At First United Methodist, he serves as a lay leader, worshiping and serving alongside his community there. Most of the organizations Crowell has served with for years, some 30 or more.



*Liberty State Bank's
Chris Crowell is a
city councilman but
also involved in
many aspects of the
Lebanon community.*



To me, as time has gone on, it becomes kind of a richer experience in the community to be involved, and not just in one thing but in several different things – to meet new people.

-Chris Crowell

“To me, as time has gone on, it becomes kind of a richer experience in the community to be involved, and not just in one thing but in several different things — to meet new people,” Crowell said.

TennCommUNITY is one of the youngest of those organizations. It was organized in 2020 by John McDeerman as a way to support struggling small businesses during COVID-19. The partnership between local banks — Pinnacle, Liberty State, First Freedom, Southern Bank of Tennessee, F&M, First-Bank, and Wilson Bank & Trust as well as the local chambers of commerce — allowed the banks to offer coupons to small businesses in the area after Thanksgiving each year.

While the pandemic is no longer closing businesses, TennCommUNITY continued on. The banks involved enjoyed cooperating with each other, Crowell said, and enjoyed putting money back into the hands of local businesses.

“We hear lots of stories from individuals who it makes a difference for in their shopping experience at Christmas,” Crowell said. “We also hear quite a bit from businesses that our banks have relationships with, and they enjoy seeing the people come in to their businesses to spend.”

While the coupons aren’t worth enough to cover all of someone’s Christmas shopping, it can make their money go further. More importantly, it helps encourage people to spend within the community.

The Lebanon Breakfast Rotary Club has a similar goal of putting money back in the community. Every year they raise some \$70,000, then turn right around and write checks back to the community. Service opportunities also abound, and Crowell said anyone who is interested in service only has to ask to find an opportunity.

“There’s so many ways in the community and so many needs that it’s easy, and all of the organizations

that I know of here in the community welcome volunteers or any kind of help with open arms,” Crowell said. “There’s lots of work [to] go around and plenty of ways that people can help.”

The trick, he said, is to find something interesting and enjoyable and work alongside others — be it through a faith-based organization, a club, or a nonprofit.

“I certainly would be happy to try to help direct anyone that’s interested in getting more involved in our community and pointing them in the right direction or bringing them alongside several of us here in the community that are working to make it better every day,” Crowell said.

As Lebanon continues to grow, it becomes more and more important for everyone to stay connected, to work with each other and support each other. Chris Crowell is a great example of how to do just that. **GN**



▲ Lebanon Mayor Rick Bell and Chris Crowell chat as they exit the city council chambers.





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MAKING LEBANON SHINE: THE STORY OF TERRY WRIGHT

By Haley Potter

Photography by Robin Holcomb

EVERY MORNING, as the sun begins to peak through the clouds across the quiet streets of downtown Lebanon, the rhythmic swish of a broom and the creak of a well-worn cart signal the start of Terry Wright's day — a mission of sweeping away debris and leaving behind a spotless town square.

Every community has its unsung heroes — individuals who quietly enrich the lives of their neighbors without seeking recognition. In Lebanon, Wright, a 70-year-old man with mental disabilities, embodies this spirit of selfless service. Every day, armed with a cart and a broom, Wright makes his rounds, sweeping sidewalks, picking up trash, and brightening spirits across the city.

"I started doing this years ago because I was bored," Wright explained. "It makes me happy, and it feels good to help out."

Wright's sweeping routine is not just a task but a habit he looks forward to bright and early every morning. Starting at the local library, he makes his way to landmarks such as the fire department, the post office, and even the attorney's office across the square.

◀ Terry Wright





Terry Wright blows leaves off sidewalk ▶

“I started doing this years ago because I was bored. It makes me happy, and it feels good to help out.”

- TERRY WRIGHT

“I go out every day except Sunday,” he said, his face lighting up as he described the places he cleans.

Wright’s efforts have not gone unnoticed. Local businesses sometimes compensate him for his work, and during election season, politicians even placed signs on his cart to advertise because so many people see Wright sweeping on a daily basis. Despite this, it’s clear that Wright’s primary motivation isn’t material. His dedication stems from a genuine desire to keep his community beautiful and to stay active.

Peggy Zide, the chief operating officer of Cedarcroft Home, where Wright resides, shared insights into his life and contributions. Cedarcroft is a faith-based, nonprofit boarding home for men with mental illnesses, offering them a safe and supportive environment.

“Terry is part of our volunteer therapy program,” Zide explained. “Residents choose tasks they want to do, and in return, they receive a small stipend. It’s not much, but it gives them purpose and doesn’t affect their disability benefits.”

For Wright, sweeping is more than a chore; it’s his way of connecting with the community. He often chats with locals during his rounds.

“People thank me for what I do,” he said, clearly touched by their appreciation.

His brother, a significant influence in Wright’s life, initially helped him get started by giving him \$100 to purchase his cart and broom. This gesture has meant a lot to Wright and that money has gone a long way, as the cart and broom are used almost daily.

Cedarcroft, where Wright has lived since 1988, is home to 136 residents,



◀ Terry Wright and Peggy Zide (COO) outside Cedarcroft

making it the largest facility of its kind in Tennessee. Zide highlighted the boarding home's commitment to providing care for local men like Wright.

"We include everything residents need — meals, toiletries, laundry services, and even over-the-counter medications," she said. "For those who can't afford the full room and board fee, we offer discounts to ensure everyone has a safe place to live."

Wright resides in what is called "The Rock House," which is reserved for higher-functioning residents. His independence and proactive nature set him apart.

When asked about his perseverance, even in extreme weather, Wright's response was simple. "I work in cold winters and hot summers," he said. Rain, however, keeps him indoors. On those days, Wright still finds ways to contribute by helping around Cedarcroft.

Wright's impact extends beyond just his sweeping duties. As a devoted Christian, he often purchases Bibles to give to anyone he meets.

"I buy Bibles to give away," he said proudly. His generosity is fueled by a sense of purpose, as he explained, "I want to help people."

Zide sees Wright's contributions as a symbol of Cedarcroft's mission to foster community involvement among its residents.

"We encourage our guys to take pride in what they do," she said. "Terry's work is a shining example of that."

As Wright approaches his 70th birthday in February, he reflects on a life of quiet dedication, marked by small but meaningful acts of service.

"I like to stay busy," Wright said, summing up his philosophy. "It keeps me young."

For anyone in town who has come across Wright, he is more than a man with a broom — he's a symbol of kindness, resilience, and the profound impact one person can have on a community. Terry Wright reminds us all that greatness often lies in the simplest of actions. **GN**



▲ Terry Wright with sweeping cart

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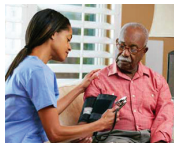


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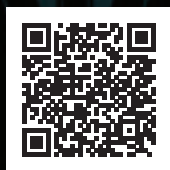
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Preserving community, **ENHANCING LIFE**

WILSON RIDES PROVIDES TRANSPORTATION AND
MORE TO OLDER ADULTS IN WILSON COUNTY.

By Sara Hook // Photography by Robin Holcomb

A COMMUNITY IS often judged by how it treats its older adults, and the staff and volunteers of Wilson Rides Inc. work hard to make sure Lebanon and Wilson County rise above all expectations. Founded in April 2020, Wilson Rides serves older adults ages 55 and up in Watertown, Lebanon, Mount Juliet, Old Hickory, and all the spaces in the county between. Its mission is to preserve older adults' community and quality of life while providing access to affordable and assisted transportation.

Wilson Rides takes a holistic approach to its mission, Executive Director Gaye Lynn Wilson said, offering its users more than just transportation. Two community dinners are offered every year at Easter and Thanksgiving, both as a way to thank the volunteer drivers and as a way for riders to get a good community meal. Wilson Rides works with the Mt. Juliet Breakfast Rotary Club to put on Sips & Sounds at the end of every summer, an event that offers live music, food, a silent auction, and other

activities. Wilson Rides also partners with churches to send holiday cards, with Lebanon and Mt. Juliet Noon Rotary Clubs to offer Easter gift bags to community members in assisted living, and with Lebanon's Home Instead Senior Care to give Christmas gifts to older adults who may not have family in town. Their work alongside the Wilson County Mayor's Office has helped the county become an AARP certified age-friendly community.

"We try to enrich the lives of our older adults in the community by more than just giving a ride to a doctor's appointment because that in itself can get uninspiring," Wilson said. "If all you ever did to get out of your house were to go to a doctor's appointment, your life would not be as enriched as it is with all the other things that we offer."

One of the most unique projects Wilson Rides has begun is "Story Time with Wilson Rides," a podcast series focusing on the remarkable stories older adults have to tell. Last year, a partnership with Leader-



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ALL OF THEIR
SPIRITS HAVE
LIFTED - THE
VOLUNTEERS
AND THE RIDERS.

- Gaye Lynn Wilson

ship Lincoln helped record Season 2. Wilson said the podcast was inspired by the conversations they had during rides.

“They had some great stories to tell about their lives in the '30s and the '40s and the '50s,” Wilson said. “They’ve shared with us what the different buildings used to be within Wilson County — those that have been torn down or still stand. We’ve just learned a lot from our older adults. They are a piece of history that we’re trying to preserve.”

Wilson Rides does great things, and its founders have worked hard to make the nonprofit successful. The program began as a conversation between Home Instead franchise owner Maggie Lea and Wilson County Mayor Randall Hutto, who had noticed a need for older adults to have transportation in the county. Together, they created a task force to establish the nonprofit. That task force became Wilson Rides’ first board of directors, and they received a grant in 2020 to help get the program started.

“There are other public and private transportation opportunities; they can’t possibly service everyone, and neither can we, but we are all filling a gap and a need in these older adults’ lives,” Wilson said.

COVID-19 put all those plans off for months until, in February 2021, Wilson was hired with only three months to get the program running before the grant expired. Wilson Rides began with just one rider and one driver in May. Now, the number of volunteers is in the 60s, with around 125 riders taking advantage of the program. Everyone is benefiting, Wilson said, from the older adults who can keep medical appointments, shop, and take pets to the vet to the volunteer drivers who visit with and learn from those they drive.

“I have seen a tremendous change in all of those folks’ lives,” Wilson said. “All of their spirits have lifted — the volunteers and the riders.”

As Wilson Rides continues to grow, Wilson hopes the other programs within it will grow and expand as well. To do that, however, the program needs volunteer drivers. Those drivers get to pick the day, the time, and the person that they drive, and Wilson Rides only asks for one or two trips a month. Most volunteers, Wilson said, end up doing more because they enjoy it so much.

“If you are looking for an easy way to volunteer that is very meaningful in your own life, this is one of the ways you can,” Wilson said. “We need to take care of our elders, and this is an easy way in Wilson County to do that.” GN

To learn more about Wilson Rides, volunteer, or become a member, go to wilsonridesinc.org.

◀ *Gaye Lynn Wilson, Nancy Hodney (who gave the most rides in 2023), Bob Morrison (who drove the most miles in 2022 and 2023), and Susan Shaw*





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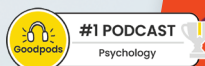
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George McDonald, a fourth-generation farmer in Smith County, Tennessee, understands how important it is to preserve the family farm. His great-grandfather founded Catesa Farms in 1927, and today, George grows a variety of crops for the operation across six counties with the help of his daughter, Sarah Owen.

After graduating from college, Sarah worked as a first-grade teacher before she decided to return to the farm and follow in her father's footsteps. George knew it would take more than his family's strong work ethic to prepare the operation for a successful transition when the time came. That's why he started the succession planning process, and the important conversations that it requires, early.

To help, he turned to his financial officer at Farm Credit Mid-America.

"My financial officer has been a lifelong friend. He has seen our operation grow through many different stages," George says.

"He knows my family. He understands that farming is not always good times. There are hard times in farming and things that change, just like the seasons. It's wonderful to have someone like Farm Credit Mid-America to understand those changes and all the people who help support our farming operation.

"I'm very proud of our heritage," George says. "We're having the necessary conversations to secure our family legacy and preserve our business for many generations after me."

In addition to the 1:1 support, George and Sarah also attended Farm Credit Mid-America's Growing Forward® Know to Share Conference. This two-day event gave them hands-on opportunities to learn how to navigate generational conversations and provided resources to help successfully transition assets. They also got to meet other multi-generational farming families and learn how they're preparing their operations for transition.

Sarah, for one, is grateful for her father's proactive approach.

"I think it shows his willingness to take the proper steps and involve me to make the transition go smoothly," Sarah says. "I'm glad I can make a life of it and have my family and kids involved as well. I hope one day my kids can carry on this legacy, too."

If you need support developing your succession plan, contact your local Farm Credit Mid-America office.

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SPEEDY BURRITO

EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

FOR A quick lunch, my family and I stopped at Speedy Burrito. The restaurant is a neighborhood favorite. Its worn brick walls and mural add to the charm of the place. The decor was simple, with an authentic feel. There was also a consistent line of patrons. It was a walk-up-and-order restaurant.

We ordered the multitas, a beef burrito with queso, and chicken fajitas. Of course, queso and chips started the meal. For drinks, we got the mango Jarritos and the mandarin Jarritos.

The multitas are my son's favorite and come with two crispy corn tortillas loaded with juicy pork, onions, cheese, pico de gallo, and guacamole. The combo was perfect — crispy on the outside and packed with flavor on the inside. It's definitely something you want to try if you're looking for something satisfying and delicious.

The beef burrito with queso was another solid choice. It was huge, stuffed with tender beef, and the queso made it extra creamy.

The chicken fajitas were also really good. The chicken was tender and paired with sauteed peppers and onions for a classic fajita flavor. It came with three tortillas, which I stuffed with the delicious chicken and veggies, then topped with queso. You can never have too much cheese!





Speaking of cheese, we started the meal off with queso and chips. The queso was not too spicy, and the chips were crispy and fresh. It kept us happy while we waited for the rest of the food.

Even though Speedy Burrito was busy, the service was quick, and the food hit the spot. The mulitas were a standout, but honestly, everything we tried was great. It is a family favorite when we are in the mood for a quick lunch for a decent price. **GN**

GOOD NEWS IS COMING TO DINNER!

We will feature a local food critic's thoughts as they dine in Lebanon. This month Krys Midgett visited Speedy Burrito.

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Love your neighbor

IN 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.



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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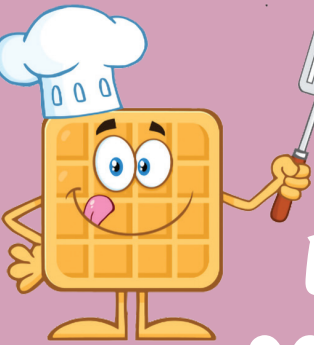
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love your neighbor

*Steven George
at Seven Cedars
farm and ranch*



FARM TO STORE TO TABLE

Steven George's Seven Cedars
is an ambitious local enterprise.

By Richard J. Klin // Photography by Robin Holcomb

STEVEN GEORGE'S parents ran a butcher shop in Alabama. At a young age, he began helping out and — when not attending school or sports events — worked there full time. He also started farming. This background and expertise proved to be invaluable when he moved to Tennessee around nine years ago and launched the amazingly ambitious Seven Cedars farm and ranch operation.

The formation of Seven Cedars was a crash course in adaptability. Moving and settling into a new place is hard enough. In George's case, he also needed to get an entire farming operation off the ground. And Seven Cedars is not simply a small-scale farming operation. It occupies 1,800 acres in Wilson County. There are over 800 cows, and the total herd — counting calves and steers — runs to around 1,500. He also raises sheep and pigs as well as laying chickens for eggs. If this were not enough, there is also Seven Cedars Butcher Block, which carries his farm products that are made available for retail purchase.

*One of the Seven Cedars
cows enjoys feeding time.*



love your neighbor

George's farming ethos is resolutely natural. The meat he sells is not pumped up with hormones, genetically modified organisms, antibiotics, or steroids. This is no small thing, considering how rampant these elements are in so much of our food. George had been selling his proteins off the farm. Word began to spread throughout the community about this high-quality meat, generating a high demand. The brick-and-mortar Seven Cedars Butcher Block was the natural outgrowth.

Now three years old, it's a store where people can buy his products retail and not, in George's words, "have to order half a cow or a whole cow at a time. We still sell that but now offer what other farms cannot — the option to buy a couple [of] steaks at a time or any cuts along with daily ground beef." And, of course, the meat is always fresh and never frozen.

Just as it was in Alabama, this enterprise is a family affair. His parents and brother handle the day-to-day operations in the butcher shop, while George manages the business and production side of things — there are nonfamily employees as well. His ethos is also resolutely local, which is a huge component of the retail business.

"As far as the store's concerned," George said, "everything is locally supplied." The meat and the proteins, of course, come from his farm. The store sells baked goods that are provided by local suppliers. There are seasonings and spices made by local people. Produce is also provided by local farms. And the milk products are provided by a neighboring dairy — they have their own dairy farm and they process their own milk and ice cream that we carry."

All over the country, farms like Seven Cedars have adapted and expanded to provide a whole new array

George checks on the livestock at feeding time. ▶





▲ George feeds the cattle.

of offerings that can include farm-to-table dining experiences, family-friendly endeavors, and often feature live music. George has also expanded his reach. There is now the Seven Cedars experience, where groups of eight to 10 people can come to the farm and get a real

feel for the endeavor. They're given the chance for hands-on interaction with the animals — seeing the cattle, riding the horses, and experiencing the barn — all with supervision, of course.

“And then they can sit down and have a nice farm-to-table dinner with everything provided by the farm,” he explained.

There is also entertainment as well. This aspect of Seven Cedars is basically getting started and can be expected to grow.

Referring to something as a “throwback” can be a double-edged sword. Seven Cedars is an up-to-date, active enterprise but is also a throwback in the nicest, most positive sense of the word. The meat is produced in a time-honored, healthier fashion than the chemical-heavy factory farm method. The operation — like so many

generations of farmers — is a family-run enterprise. We all could use a lot more throwbacks like Seven Cedars. **GN**



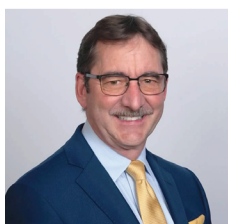
◀ One of the pigs at Seven Cedars. The meat is not pumped up with hormones, genetically modified organisms, antibiotics, or steroids.

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love your neighbor

*Lisa Wilcox
makes a batch
of cookies in
her kitchen.*



FAITH, LOVE, AND COOKIES

How Lisa's sweet mission
became a local movement

By Haley Potter // Photography by Robin Holcomb

LISA WILCOX walks through her welcoming kitchen and opens her stainless steel refrigerator to shelves packed with bricks of butter, gleaming in their golden wrappers, stacked four and five high. Dozens of egg cartons squeeze into any available nook, and there are more cartons of milk than you would imagine she and her husband, Brian, would drink in a week. This fridge belongs to someone who is constantly baking, turning these raw ingredients into something that goes far beyond just yummy cookies. This refrigerator belongs to the founder of Faithful Cookie Co.

When Lisa first rolled up her sleeves and started baking cookies, she wasn't looking to start a business and had no idea she would be selling her cookies in farmers markets across Lebanon and surrounding areas. It was a small, heartfelt gesture — a way to give back to her own doctors and nurses who cared for her following her breast cancer diagnosis in February of 2021.

At the time, she felt called by God to bake for her medical team while also taking the time to share the gospel and give them Bibles.

*A batch of cookies being
frosted in Lisa's kitchen.*





◀ Lisa prepares a batch of cookie icing.

act of kindness started to catch on. Friends and family encouraged Lisa to think bigger, and with a gentle push, she decided to step out of her comfort zone.

“It wasn’t easy,” Lisa admitted. “I thought, ‘Who am I to start a business?’ But I felt God saying, ‘Now, take this to the public.’”

With the name “Faithful Cookie Co.” clear in her heart, Lisa set out to create a business that could serve her community while honoring her faith. Faithful, she explained, represents three things: “Faithful first to the Lord, faithful to the first responders and the medical community, and faithful to others.”

Her cookies soon became available for order online, as well as at local markets and select stores in the area. Farmers markets, community fairs, and even church events opened doors to share her mission more widely. Today, Faithful Cookie Co. is growing, and proceeds from every sale go back into serving cancer patients, providing them with small comforts like gas and grocery cards to help ease the burden.

Earlier this year, Lisa entered her lemon pie cookie — a personal favorite of hers and many — into the Taste of Donelson competition, a local culinary event featuring dozens of restaurants and food artisans. It was a leap of faith, but one that paid off.

“I couldn’t believe it when they announced we’d won,” Lisa says. “It was a judge’s favorite. She said it had the perfect balance of sweetness and tartness.”

Lisa remembers the moment vividly.

“The judge was a professional pastry chef, so to have her say that my cookie was outstanding — it was just surreal,” she recalled. “I said, ‘This lemon cookie has always been my favorite, and to have someone else feel the same way? That felt like validation for all the love we put into this.’”

Winning the competition was a high point for Faithful Cookie Co., but Lisa re-

But as it often does, love grew into something bigger. The cookie baking that began as a labor of kindness soon blossomed into Faithful Cookie Co., a unique business on a mission to bring comfort and hope to those who need it most. Lisa recalled the early days of her journey when she felt a strong desire to uplift the spirits of both cancer patients and the medical teams supporting them.

“The goal was never to have a business,” she said with a warm smile. “It was always to show love to these doctors and nurses. It was a natural progression. One step, one prayer, one cookie at a time.”

What might seem like a humble beginning — a batch of cookies, carefully made and wrapped with love and a Bible verse on the packaging — would soon become the foundation of a much larger purpose. Faithful Cookie Co. may sell cookies, but Lisa’s vision goes far beyond simple treats.

“God gave me an idea to have a small business,” Lisa said, “but it was to impress on

people’s hearts how much He loves them.”

And impress she did — starting with a warm batch of cookies, and now, a growing legacy. From day one, Lisa saw each batch of cookies as a small but powerful way to spread joy and faith. Her deep religious convictions inspired her to create a business grounded in her beliefs, even before she realized she was building one.

“We just kept baking,” Lisa shared. “For every batch, we prayed that God would use this simple thing — a cookie — to reach people in ways we couldn’t on our own.”

Lisa started experimenting with recipes, carefully crafting each one to bring something unique.

“Each cookie had to feel special,” she explained. “Like it was meant just for that person.”

Whether it was the creamy richness of the lemon pie cookie or the sweet and tart taste of the caramel apple cookie, she poured her love and faith into every detail. The cookies were a hit, and soon, her small

mained humble, seeing it as another chance to shine a light on her true mission.

“This is the Lord’s award, really,” she said. “We’re just executing through some of this stuff for Him, and every little bit of recognition is a way to share our faith and our purpose.”

As Faithful Cookie Co. officially took off last fall, Lisa found herself juggling more responsibilities. She knew she would be baking for more than her own hospital staff. That’s when Debbie, a friend from Bible study, offered to help.

“I love to bake, and I felt like the Lord was telling me, ‘You could help Lisa,’” Debbie shared with a smile.

She quickly became Lisa’s right hand, and the two developed a rhythm, baking together several days a week.

Debbie laughed as she described her introduction to Faithful Cookie Co.: “I told Lisa, ‘If you ever need help baking, I’d love to help,’ and she took me up on it right away!”

Since then, Debbie has been an integral part of the business, sharing in both the baking and the mission. Lisa is grateful for Debbie’s support, acknowledging that Faithful Cookie Co. has become a shared journey of faith and friendship.

“We’ve become closer than friends,” Lisa said, smiling. “We’re a team — working together, praying together, baking together. It’s humbling to have someone by your side who believes in the mission as much as you do.”

True to its mission, Faithful Cookie Co. gives back every chance it gets. For Lisa and Debbie, the business isn’t just about making sales — it’s about supporting cancer patients in tangible ways.

“We’re not in this for the money,” Lisa explained. “If we could make a small profit for our future, that would be wonderful. But for now, our focus is on giving back, and that’s what keeps us going.”

The work is demanding, but Lisa and Debbie find energy in their purpose. Every week, they bake, package, and pray over hun-



▲ Lisa and Debbie with a plate of freshly baked cookies.

dreds of cookies, trusting that each one will find its way to someone who needs a reminder of love and faith. Each cookie comes packaged with a Bible verse chosen each week by Lisa.

Looking ahead, Lisa envisions expanding Faithful Cookie Co. to reach even more people while staying grounded in its mission.

“We’re constantly praying, daily, ‘God, this is your business. Show us what you want us to do,’” she said. “We believe every cookie is an opportunity to show God’s love.”

For Lisa and Debbie, Faithful Cookie Co. is far more than a bakery — it’s a ministry.

“This business isn’t about us,” Lisa said. “It’s about faith. Faithful to the Lord, faithful to each other, and faithful to everyone we meet.”

As Faithful Cookie Co. continues to grow, Lisa remains dedicated to spreading hope, one cookie at a time. And in every bite, you’ll taste the ingredients that matter most: love, faith, and a sprinkle of something divine. **GN**

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love your neighbor

*Benny Nolen in
the food storage
area of Joseph's
Storehouse*



PUTTING LOVE INTO ACTION

Benny and Lisa Nolen carry forward a mission to serve those in need.

By Kali Bradford // Photography by Robin Holcomb

LOVE IS more than just a word — it's an action. When expressed as such, it can manifest through helping others. This form of love transcends from just mere words to embodying a commitment to the well-being of those around us. When we lend a hand, offer support, or simply show up for someone in need, we are actively choosing to invest in their happiness and comfort. Acts of service — whether small, like holding the door open, or large, like volunteering with local nonprofit organizations such as Lebanon's Joseph's Storehouse — speak volumes about one's dedication and care for others. These actions foster a sense of community and belonging, reminding us that we are not alone. They create a ripple effect, inspiring others to also act with kindness and compassion. Love in action is about making a difference and showing that we genuinely care.

Growing into helping others

Lebanon resident Benny Nolen is an avid practitioner of putting love into

*Benny and his wife, Lisa, ►
in the food storage area.*





◀ Nolen with a wheelbarrow of food

“It takes a lot of people to make that happen. We have around 100 to 150

people who make this giveaway a possibility. To see different people come together as the body of Christ and work together with a common goal and a common purpose of helping their neighbors is a huge blessing.”

Love thy neighbor

Benny said that an additional blessing of the organization is the ability to put love into action in more ways than just donating food.

“Love is a verb. It’s an action,” said Benny. “God gave us the example of loving our neighbors in the verse, John 3:16. ‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ That was an act of love. Jesus did the same thing in Mark 10:45, which says, ‘For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’ We have an example that God and Jesus put before us, and we need to follow that example. Our neighbors can be anyone we come in contact with who has a need. Some people just need a few minutes of quiet time, someone to listen, or even to offer a word of encouragement.”

As the organization moves into its 26th year, Benny said he hopes to continue meeting the needs of those hurting the most.

“The legacy for us is that we leave here knowing that, as a community of believers, we can work together with a common purpose and goal,” he added. “And in doing so, with the support of individuals, companies, churches, civic organizations, and others who support us, we can continue to meet the needs of hurting people. It’s the hope that we can see that need diminish over time. While I’m unsure if we will ever get to that point, I know we can come together, even when so much divides us. We can be a testament to what it means to unite with a common goal and vision and get some things done while meeting people right where they are.” GN

action. Since childhood, he’s understood the infinite good that comes from helping those in need.

“I was raised to help others,” said Nolen. “But it really started in church — taking part in mission trips and being involved in special projects at church for people who needed something done.”

Throughout his 35 years in the health care field, Nolen saw the good that came from helping others. This act of doing for others continued in his personal life when Nolen married into what he calls a “family of giving.”

“I had the privilege of marrying Lisa Evans. Her parents are the founders of Joseph’s Storehouse,” he added.

According to their website, Joseph’s Storehouse is a faith-based food ministry that Bob and Peggy Evans began in 1999. They are also the founders of Love One Another Embassy, a faith-based ministry focused on international missions.

The storehouse’s beginnings saw the distribution of food to around 22 families. Today, it aids an average of 800 families per month. Joseph’s Storehouse distributes over \$100,000 worth of food, toiletries, and household items each month. The food program targets the financially challenged, disabled people, older people, and single parents. Additionally, the organization also

assists other nonprofit agencies in the Middle Tennessee area.

With the eventual passing of the torch to Benny and Lisa, Benny now serves as president and executive director of Love One Another Embassy and Joseph’s Storehouse. Lisa serves as administrative director, and together, they work to keep the organization running and benefiting those in need.

“We’re fortunate to be able to work together,” he said. “It’s been a lifelong dream of ours at some point in time to work together, and God just made a way later in life. It is a joint effort. I wouldn’t do this without her by my side,” he said.

As executive director, Benny is in charge of day-to-day operations, working with the organization’s staff and volunteers and doing different things in the community.

“I enjoy helping to meet the needs of those who are coming to us for food,” said Benny. “I also enjoy working with the volunteers who sacrificially give their time and efforts to be here. It’s a blessing to work with them and see the ministry move forward to help those who need it most.”

Each month, the organization provides local families with much-needed food. “We’re feeding 800 families a month and providing them with anywhere from 140 to 150 pounds worth of food and drink,” explained Benny.



▲ Benny and Lisa Nolen

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Christmas Tree Lighting - Nov. 14



Photos submitted by Lebanon Wilson County Chamber of Commerce

What a magical evening it was at the city of Lebanon's annual Christmas Tree Lighting on Nov. 14! Held at the historic Mitchell House, a large crowd gathered to kick off the holiday season in style. Guests enjoyed Christmas caroling by local elementary school students, photos with Santa, and shopping from local vendors offering festive treats and gifts. The energy soared as the band SweetN3 took the stage, setting a lively tone for the evening. The night's highlight came when city of Lebanon Mayor Rick Bell and Necole Bell, joined by members of the city council, lit the Christmas tree, officially welcoming the holiday season. The city's grounds, including city hall and the Mitchell House, will remain illuminated throughout the holidays, adding to the seasonal cheer.



100th Annual Christmas Parade - Dec. 1



Photos submitted by Lebanon Wilson County Chamber of Commerce

On Dec. 1, the city of Lebanon and the Lebanon Wilson County Chamber of Commerce hosted the 2024 Christmas Parade: Toys Through the Ages — and what a celebration it was! This was the 100th anniversary. The Grand Marshal Float, sponsored by Vanderbilt Wilson County Hospital, set the tone for a parade filled with creativity, featuring everything from classic toys to modern favorites.



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<https://nashvillebagpipes.com/>

The Bridge House Inc.

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(615) 681-2960
www.thebridgehousetn.org

Sherry's Hope Inc.

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(615) 925-2592
<https://sherryshope.org/>

Wilson County DART Association

Helps animals in disaster situations. The volunteer Wilson County Disaster Animal Response Team (DART) deploys under the Wilson County Emergency Management Agency for intra-agency response, conducting search and rescue for animals, setting up sheltering operations for displaced animals to be reunited with their owners, and helping law enforcement and animal control in times of overwhelm.

(615) 497-1770
www.wcdart.org

Women With a Vision Foundation Inc.

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