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MARY BETH SEALS

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ISSUE 1 2025

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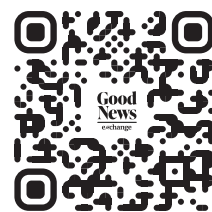


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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The future of healing

The love and care of the past make our health care heroes stronger.

A NURSE WALKED down the hallway his mother walked decades before he did. *Beep ... beep ...* he could hear the sounds from patients' rooms. He kept a small keepsake pinned to his scrubs, a pin his mother gave him when he graduated nursing school. She had once worn the same pin. He became a nurse to honor her and to care for others, just as she had done before him. Years from now, the nurse's son would fasten that same pin to his own scrubs as he healed others with love.

A paramedic raced to the scene of an accident, her movements swift and practiced. This was her calling — running toward danger when others ran away. Yesterday, she saved a family from never-ending heartbreak. Today, she knelt beside a young girl, steadying her voice with calm reassurance. That girl would one day wear the same uniform because of that interaction.

A doctor filled out a prescription in a quiet office, her hand steady and sure. The memory of her first patient came back to her — the blend of nerves and excitement she felt 10 years ago. Today, her experience and knowledge give another person a chance to live longer, to return home to their family, and to hold their loved ones close.

The health care workers of today stand on the shoulders of those who came before them. Their love moves from soul to soul. Their courage ensures that the love and care of the past are not only remembered but carried forward. The health care professionals around us make the world a better place not just today but also tomorrow. The future of healing will be in stronger hands as we pass the torch from the past.

This issue of Good News shares the stories that remind us that the future is one of health, love, and care. GN

Wesley Bryant,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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**Carson
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ANSWERING THE CALL

Carson Locker, a third-generation firefighter, is living his dream.

By Tina Neeley
Photography by Brooke Snyder

THE DANCE floor was full at the Palace of Riverbend as Carson Locker and Savannah Hardiman attempted to capture the memories of a lifetime. Twinkling fairy lights and cell phone flashes cast a unique glow over Savannah's sequined aqua gown, contrasting sharply with Carson's light khaki sports coat and jeans. Despite the crowd, they were the only couple on the floor as John Legend's "All of Me" caused time to stand still. Until ...

The vibration of the pager on Carson's belt told Savannah all she needed to know. The night was magical, but their time together at the Lincoln County High School prom was over. With a quick kiss and a knowing nod, Carson dashed through the double doors into the night.

Duty called.

Carson's mother and grandmother also understood. When the tones dropped and the familiar long ring of their landline or pager sounded, their husbands answered a call that repeatedly interrupted the rhythms of their days and nights.

Today, like his father, Ken Locker, and grandfather, Jerry Locker, Carson answers when dispatchers send the alert of local emergencies.

"My family has always revolved around firefighting. I remember seeing the trucks going down the road with lights and sirens roaring and saying, 'That's going to be me one day,'" Carson recalled.

He wasn't the only one sure of his future career.

“My grandfather used to always say, ‘He will be a firefighter one day.’ Turns out he was right. It was just something that I’ve loved ever since I can remember. I remember going to the Fayetteville Fire [Department] as a kid and jumping truck to truck, dreaming about the opportunity I have now.”

Firefighting is the Locker way of life, and Carson found himself drawn to his father’s and grandfather’s stories about the fires they responded to.

“I just thought it was the most interesting thing ever,” he said.

But these were more than stories and boyhood dreams; they were his role models and heroes. Today, Carson takes his father’s support and the lifetime of knowledge he’s shared with him into every fire and emergency.

“I always wanted to be like my grandfather and father. They were my biggest inspirations. I look up to them more than they will ever understand,” Carson shared.

Carson longed for the day he would finally suit up, step into the truck, and race to the scene. His father always met his pleadings to take him on calls with the same response: “When you get 18, you can come with me.”

Every young person anticipates turning 18. For most, high school graduation looms, along with choices about college and adulthood, but Carson planned his future much earlier.

“From the start of [my] freshman year, I set my goal to graduate early and start my career fast. As soon as I turned 18 at the end of October, I put in an application at Fayetteville Fire Rescue as well as Lincoln County Volunteer Fire Department,” Carson said. “I started volunteering two days after my birthday and got to ride with my father in the fire truck to my first fire the very next day. I started at Fayetteville Fire Rescue as a full-time firefighter in February of the next year, before I even walked the stage at graduation.”

The little boy who loved the sight of the fire engine racing in and out of traffic, sirens blaring, is now the young man inside.

“It’s completely different than just seeing the truck going down the road compared to being in it dressed in turnout gear and ready to go. There’s no greater feeling than being in that truck,” Carson said. “I work with some of the best people I could ever ask for. I’d always heard your crew is your family, but you never understand that until you are with them.”

Because of his family’s commitment to firefighting, what he understands about his work is much older than his hands-on training and personal experience. He knows that fires are even more dangerous today due to the hazards of flammables inside, and things burn hotter and more quickly than decades ago. Thankfully, gear, tools, trucks, and training also continue to advance.

“But, as they always say, sometimes the old way works best,” Carson acknowledged.

Carson’s father said, “Things have changed a lot since we did it, but he’s adapting very well.”

Something that never changed is Carson’s fierce determination to follow in their footsteps as a career firefighter.

He said, “This career choice is everything and more than I could ever dream of. After hearing my grandfather and father’s stories, I knew I wanted to make memories like that and be able to pass them along as they did. It’s been so great to finally run out that door with my father and help someone on their worst day. It’s truly a blessing.”

Carson and his father can now swap stories as members of the same team.

Ken said, “I’m very proud of him for choosing the profession my father and I took. I hope he continues with it, as I know he will.”

“All in all, I chose the right career for me; I always knew this was for me,” Carson declared. “Ever since my grandfather’s passing, everything I do is for him, and I know he’s proud of everything I’m doing.”

Today, another call follows Carson’s return to the station after a dispatch — to his girlfriend, Savannah.

“She is always my first call after a fire. I know she worries whenever I’m on a call, so I do my best to calm her whenever it’s over. She’s been there for me in stressful times, worried times, and happy times. She has never left my side, and no matter what, she’s always so supportive.”

With the support of Savannah and his family, Carson suits up in turnout gear, knowing he’s not just following in his family’s footsteps; he’s answering a call that had been waiting for him all along. **GN**



▲ Carson Locker and his dad, Ken Locker, hold a photo of Carson’s grandfather, Jerry Locker, who was also a firefighter.

BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES THROUGH MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

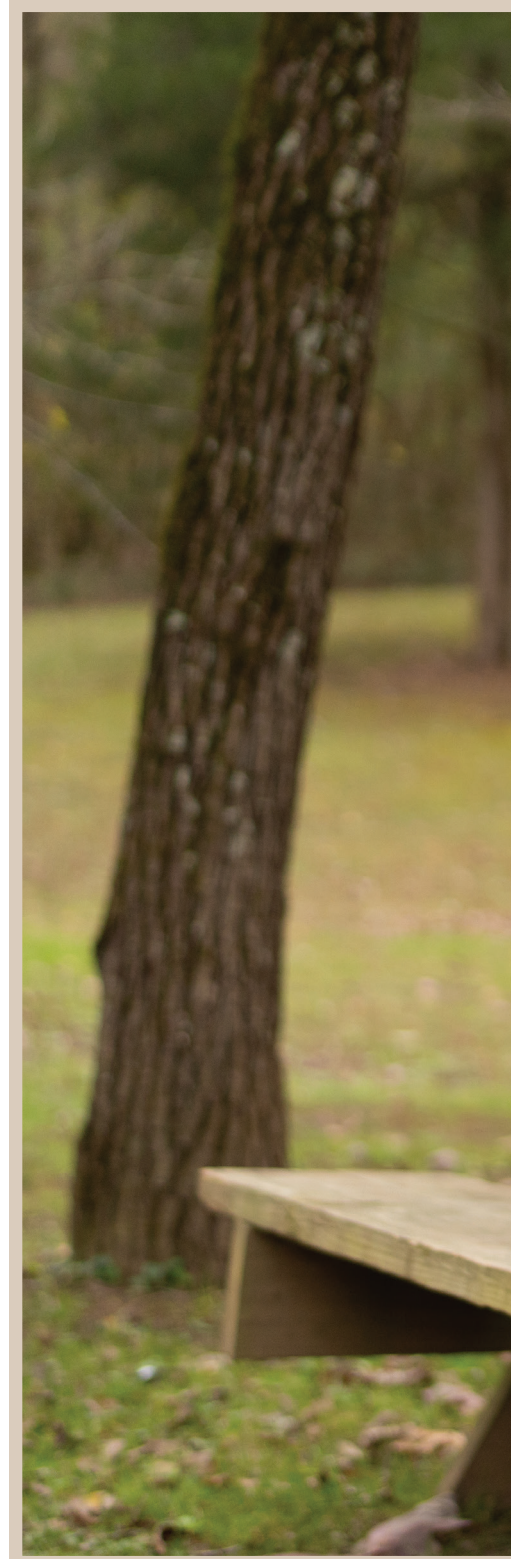
Haley Cash transforms her dark, silent struggles into a light for other silent strugglers.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder

SMALL-TOWN FRIDAY nights look similar for teenagers in small, Southern rural communities. When school is in, the seasons determine the meeting spot. It's Friday night football under the lights, basketball, soccer, softball, and other high school sports. It's a run to their favorite fast food chain, classmates' faces staring back across the counter, taking their orders. It's driving around with friends with their favorite music; it will become the soundtrack of their memories when they look back one day. Yet for everything you might see on the surface — smiling faces, shared laughter, knowing nods, and trending fashion — sometimes you can't really sense the depths of the unseen. They can't always find the words to express it themselves.

When the community sees a need for its own, everyone quickly responds, offering help and lending support. Meeting needs you can see and express is easy. Meeting a need you haven't heard about or can see from the outside is not.

Haley Cash understands; she knows the depth of the unseen and the inability to find the words to share with anyone else.





“

If I could, I would encourage any young person struggling with their mental health to try to find at least one solid person that they can reach out to.

–Haley Cash



"I've always loved my little hometown of Fayetteville. I love the charm, the culture, and, most importantly, the people. As a teenager, I prided myself on being at every Friday night football game. When I wasn't working at the local Pizza Hut, I was hitting up Taco Bell every single afternoon after school and spending a lot of my time just driving around with my friends," Cash shared. "I wouldn't have changed any of my experiences growing up in Fayetteville because those memories are something I will always cherish."

Those are the good memories. Her darker days serve a purpose, too, although she couldn't see it at the time. For nearly three years, between her middle school and high school years, she struggled silently with something she couldn't explain.

"Depression and anxiety often start as simple thoughts and feelings and slowly begin to snowball, enveloping you in the darkness, making you feel very isolated and alone. Even though I had many friends and family who loved me and cared about me, it was easy to feel isolated in my bubble of darkness because I knew that nothing I was going through on the inside was able to be seen by others on the outside," she said.

Ironically, like viewing life in a rearview mirror, the good times in her life revealed the depths of the issues she battled silently.

"I would truly notice just how overwhelmed and sad I was when I was supposed to be having fun, like on camping trips, at sleepovers, and with my friends and family. Sometimes, my head would be swarming with intrusive thoughts that I wasn't able to stop or control," Cash explained. "Struggling with a mental illness isn't always just being sad at night when you're alone, and then it magically goes away during the day. It would hit me in the middle of activities and days I was supposed to be having fun. Those are the moments when I started to become very aware of how much I was struggling, and I didn't know how to make it stop."

As struggles intensified, the isolation of a long weekend became a catalyst for her darkest thoughts. Alone with her mind, she found herself spiraling deeper into despair.

"Being alone with my thoughts often led me down spirals," Cash reflected. "Without knowing how to manage that or having someone to talk to, it would lead me into very intense suicidal ideations."

The weight of her prolonged battle with depression had become unbearable. In a moment of profound desperation, Cash attempted to take her life.

"I truly think I had just had enough of the unwanted, uncontrollable thoughts in my head and wanted it to be over," she explained. "I thought that was the only way to stop it. I now know there were other options, but at the time, I didn't see any others."

Following her attempt, Cash's journey took a turn toward healing. Her family's response became a crucial lifeline, opening doors to professional help and a path forward.

"After my attempt, my family tried extremely hard to understand what was going on in my head," Cash said. "They were led to Centerstone to get me into some counseling sessions. While they might not have had much understanding or known how to deal with it at the time, they always made sure I knew they were on my side."

January, Mental Health Awareness Month, holds special significance for Cash as she reflects on her journey and the challenges faced in her small town. Cash believes that small towns like Fayetteville could better address mental health concerns with more education, communication, and resources.

This lack of awareness has real consequences. "Sometimes, mental illnesses often go untreated for a very long time, simply because of the lack of understanding and knowledge of them," she pointed out. "This is exactly what happened to me."

Cash's experience fuels her passion for raising awareness. She now advocates for better mental health education and open communication in small communities like ours. Her story serves as a powerful reminder that mental health struggles can affect anyone, regardless of their background or circumstances.

"If I could, I would encourage any young person struggling with their mental health to try to find at least one solid person that they can reach out to," Cash advised. "Even if it seems that everyone around you is happy and doing well, that may not be the case on the inside. Mental health struggles are far more common than we ever realize."

By fostering open conversations and education about mental health, we can create a community where these struggles are less likely to go unnoticed or untreated. Let's build this supportive environment by reaching out to others, responding with compassion, and actively working to understand and address mental health needs in our community. **GN**

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PURPOSE



in patient care

Charlie Burk's journey is fueled by compassion and a desire to positively impact lives.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder

“**I** JUST WANT to help people,” he said, his voice soft and calming.

It's the voice you'd like to hear making small talk while taking notes about the issues that brought you to the emergency room. When you're in the hospital, your mind wandering in and out of confusion and anxiety, it's the patient presence of one who genuinely cares about you. And when someone you love is in skilled care, it's a familiarity reflected in the latest report on your loved one's health and conversations about things in your life, big and small. It's Charlie Burk and others like him who have found health care their home and calling.

Burk just wants to help people, and he's committed to pursuing the training and education to do so.

He said, “It makes me feel good to help other people; just knowing that I've made a positive impact on somebody else's life is something I value very closely. It's something that has always meant a lot to me. I've also been blessed with two amazing parents, and they've been very active in my life, showing me what kind of person I need to be and what kind of person I want to be. I attribute a lot of that to them as well.”



Charlie Burk



With a natural inclination to help others, Burk began exploring various careers that would allow him to make a difference.

"I didn't realize until my senior year of high school that health care is what I wanted to do. It was kind of random, but I definitely think it was directed by God," he said with conviction. "It's definitely been a growing experience, but getting to help people is something I value and try to do in every way I can."

The 2022 graduate of Fayetteville High School took a decisive step forward in December of his senior year by earning his certified nursing assistant license through a program at NHC Health-Care Pulaski during Christmas break. This accomplishment marked the beginning of his health care journey. Shortly after, he started working at Marshall Medical Center in Lewisburg on the med-surg floor.

"What I valued at Marshall was getting quality time with patients who were there for a long period of time — getting to build relationships with them. They open up and share stories about themselves and their family," he explained.

But Burk's aspirations didn't stop there. In January 2024, he transitioned to the emergency room (ER) at Fayetteville's HH Lincoln Health, where the volume of patients treated is much greater while his time with them is much shorter.

"It's a lot faster-paced environment than on med-surg, so you don't have as long to bond with the patient, but I still try to get to know them as much as I can for the short time they're there," said Burk. "The most stressful part is the volume of people you see at any given time. And, of course, for each person, whatever they have going on is the most emergent thing. That's definitely when

you have to work on keeping your composure. I try to look at it from the point of view that they came to seek help from us, so it's our responsibility to give them the help they were looking for."

Lessons he learned on the baseball diamond shaped his composure in challenging situations. Just as a pitcher must maintain composure when things aren't going their way, Burk applies this same mindset to the ER's fast-paced, often unpredictable environment.

"There's a lot of life lessons that can be learned from sports. People often look at failure as what it is, but a lot can be learned from failure. Playing baseball, I pitched. Things aren't always going [to go] your way. You're not always throwing strikes every time you get up there. So being able to keep your composure is a big part of being a pitcher, and I think that's something that, over time, I developed, and I've tried to make a conscious effort to work on," he shared.

Now enrolled at the University of Tennessee Southern for his bachelor's degree in nursing, Burk is preparing for his next career chapter. He aims to become a certified registered nurse anesthetist and return to his hometown of Fayetteville.

"I've been fortunate to have opportunities that broaden my horizons," he said, emphasizing how each role has equipped him with valuable skills and insights.


As Burk continues his education and works toward becoming a certified registered nurse anesthetist, he remains committed to serving his community. He takes pride in caring for people he knows personally, seeing it as an opportunity to give back to the place that shaped him.

Burk said, "There have been people that I've had the opportunity to take care of who I know personally. For some people, it can be a little awkward sometimes, but I take pride in taking care of the people that I love and know from my community."

He encourages those who enjoy helping others and are considering their career path: "There are so many different ways you can impact a person's life. It's not just being a nurse or a doctor; it's even down to the people working in the dietary department or physical or occupational therapy. There are so many ways in the medical field that you can impact a person's life. If that's something you've identified that you want, I feel there's somewhere within the medical field that fits your specific personality and how you like to go about things."

Burk's journey from a high school senior unsure of his path to a dedicated health care professional exemplifies the impact one person can have when they follow their calling to help others. His story inspires those who might be considering a career in health care, reminding us all that sometimes, the most profound way to help is simply to show up, stay composed, and care deeply for those in need. **GN**

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MARY BETH SEALS

TWO YEARS OF COMMUNITY CARE

HH Lincoln Health highlights
expansions and achievements.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BROOKE SNYDER

HH LINCOLN Health President Mary Beth Seals shared an update in an August 2024 press release on the system's second year of providing care for the Lincoln County community. She noted various additions to the staff and services and highlighted many programs, partnerships, and participants that combine to offer residents an ever-increasing number of local health care benefits.

"This has been another fantastic year for our health system. Since joining Huntsville Hospital Health System to become HH Lincoln Health on July 1, 2022, we have been working hard to expand our services, update our facilities, and attract more physicians to the area while continuing our long tradition of providing safe, high-quality care that improves lives," said Seals.

The following individuals joined the system's leadership teams: Chief Financial Officer Tammy Cobb; Chief Nursing Officer Max Tunstill; Information Technology Director John Lavender; Med Surg and ICU Director Shana Jennings; Donalson Care Center Administrator JD Davis; and Donalson Care Center Director of Nursing Rachel Hicks. All employees and providers completed high-reliability organization training, providing consistently excellent patient care with a focus on safety.

The network of local physicians grew to include Fayetteville Medical Associates, part of the HH Physician Care Network since 2017, and Nurse Practitioner Brittany Swinford. Dr. Dinesh Gupta now offers a cardiology program, and TeamHealth now employs the emergency department and hospitalist providers. A general surgeon, Dr. Bonnie Lee, and an orthopedic surgeon, Dr. LeRoy Gurganious, are also now part of the local network.

The system prides itself on investing in Lincoln County's future health care needs. It hosted its second annual Student Advisory Board, advising and guiding teenagers interested in the medical field. It also provided CPR training



Alex Richardson, ►
Carrie Finchum,
and Reagan Conn

kits to local schools with the American Heart Association.

The system's commitment to community shined through its participation in Don't Be Fooled, mock interviews at the high schools, Prom Promise, One Day of Hope, the Lincoln County Fair, and community health fairs. Other events included a food drive that collected over 2,900 items for Hands of Mercy, a family fun day at the Patrick for foster families, and events at Donalson Care Center throughout the year for residents and families. It strengthened its partnership with Always Endure to better serve its patients, and the Lion's Club updated the chapel.

Renovations were completed at the Patrick Rehab & Wellness Center, and more are expected in the future, thanks in part to the added support of The Friends of Patrick.

The Foundation actively worked throughout the year to raise funds and resources for the health system. It hosted the "Petals of Inspiration" event, which featured music by Leah Blevins and a talk by speaker Heather Mason, successfully raising awareness and donations. Additionally, the Foundation launched the Lifesaver Club, an employee-giving program that involved a committee of six employees to decide on equipment purchases. Since last January, the Foun-



▲ Max Tunstall and Tammy Cobb inside Lincoln County Hospital in the admin department



Bonnie Lee >



We are incredibly grateful for all the other organizations in our community that serve so well and help our community to be its best.

- MARY BETH SEALS

dation has allocated \$10,000 for equipment, \$2,500 for employee assistance, and awarded nearly \$15,000 in scholarships to local students. It also approved renovations for the gift shop.

The system bestowed the following honors and awards: the Daisy Award to two nurses, the Good Catch Award spotlighting employees, employees of the quarter/year, and the Bee Award recognizing nonclinical staff's impact on patients. The recently formed Better Together Committee now spotlights and highlights different cultures and promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Volunteers selflessly serve patients, families, guests, and staff members.

Their duties include greeting you at the front door, serving snacks on the coffee cart, operating the gift shop, and celebrating and caring for our hospice patients and their families. A Chaplaincy Program composed of volunteer chaplains is available 24/7.

WellSky recognized Home Health and Hospice as one of the Top 25 HHCAHPS, BlueCross BlueShield of TN Quality Care Quarterly Winter 2023 edition featured Fayetteville Medical Associates, and Becker's Hospital Review recognized HH Lincoln Health President Mary Beth Seals as a "Rural Hospital CEO to Know." Dr.

William Jones celebrated serving our community for over 44 years.

"We have already achieved incredible things, and we know this is just the beginning. We are moving forward and are thankful to have the opportunity to serve Lincoln County and the surrounding areas," stated Seals. "We know that we would not be able to do the things we do without your support. We are incredibly grateful for all the other organizations in our community that serve so well and help our community to be its best." GN

Follow HH Lincoln Health's Facebook and Instagram pages to learn the latest.

FUTURE *of* HEALING



GRACEFULLY AGING WITH JOY AND CONNECTION

Holly Crumbley helps provide fresh senior resources.

BY TINA NEELEY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
BROOKE SNYDER

WITH THE morning sun and the center's associates peeking over their shoulders, the senior adults gathered at the tables work intently on the day's craft project. Their conversation is lively, punctuated with laughter, paint brushes pausing in mid-air as they stop their work to compliment their neighbor. They've become fast friends, enjoying the routine and the variety every visit offers.

It's different than the days before they found Gracefully Aging. There were long days with little social interaction, occasional missed meals and medications, and few options for passing time. Every day felt the same.

Some live with family, and others live alone or with their spouses. Caregivers want the best for them but often have limited resources or are unaware of options for assistance. Many adult children care for their children and aging parents, sandwiched between generations. They have jobs and other responsibilities. They need time to take care of personal matters, take a break to renew their energy or go to work. They need adult day care services.

According to aginginplace.org, adult day care centers serve over 260,000 individuals in the United States with an average age of 72. About two-thirds of the participants are women. The programs offer social interaction, caregiver respite,



▲ Loretta Hancock, Gloria League, Irene Swann, and Holly Crumbley

health monitoring, and cognitive stimulation and are often a stepping stone before assisted living or skilled nursing care. Many are pleasantly surprised by the costs.

Gracefully Aging's management and associates play an integral role in their clients' lives, often becoming like family as time progresses. They celebrate holidays, birthdays, and milestones together, mutually improving the quality of life for everyone involved. It's not just a service; it's a partnership pulling together toward a common support goal.

Located just across the state line in Hazel Green, Alabama, it's a short drive. Lashawna Springer, the founder and CEO



▲ Holly Crumbley

of Gracefully Aging, said, “Our services support the Lincoln County area as we are a lifeline for seniors and their families. We understand there aren’t many adult day programs in the county for seniors and want to provide caregivers a well-deserved break. Our center provides support that enhances the quality of life for the geriatric population. At our center, we offer seniors a place to feel independent, valued, engaged, and safe.”

Holley Crumbley, a lifelong resident of Lincoln County and a Gracefully Aging client support specialist, agrees and sees the county’s support for the center’s work growing daily.

“Our work touches the lives of so many in the Hazel Green Community, as well as Lincoln County. Our friends in Fayetteville are greatly appreciated when they show up with donated bingo prizes, as we do a bingo once a month. We have recently had more Lincoln County residents fill up our bingo events and more Lincoln County residents interested in coming to Gracefully Aging ...” she shared. “Recently, we had a sweet lady donate beautiful flowers from a wedding, and we enjoyed them so much. We have had a lady stop by and drop off over 100 books, and our clients could not have been more excited to have new reading material at the center. Things like this from surrounding communities are what let us know that we make an impact.”

Crumbley’s heart for Gracefully Aging clients stems from her personal experiences growing up with aging



The most rewarding aspect for me is watching our clients regain strength and confidence in themselves.

- HOLLY CRUMBLEY

grandparents with dementia and Parkinson's disease. Watching her parents care for them and eventually assisting them prepared her for her current position. She plans arts and crafts, organizes games, leads exercises, and contributes to one-on-one support.

"The most rewarding aspect for me is watching our clients regain strength and confidence in themselves, as well as watching the amazing friendships they make with each other," Crumbley said.

Springer commented, "Holly is a warm, kind-hearted person. She wears her heart on her sleeves and genuinely cares for and respects our clients."

A day at Gracefully Aging unfolds with a comforting blend of structure and flexibility. Clients arrive throughout the morning, greeted by the aroma of fresh coffee and warm smiles from the staff. The day's rhythm includes gentle exercise sessions, engaging activities like crafts or games, and ample time for socializing with meals and snacks woven throughout the day, ensuring proper nutrition. There's always time for rest, with some seniors napping while others relax watching favorite shows like "The Price is Right" or classic Westerns. Throughout it all, the staff remains attentive to each client's needs and preferences, fostering an environment where seniors can genuinely thrive.

There's a growing need for adult day care.

Crumbley said, "I have noticed that senior care tends to be in high demand.

We are that happy medium when they are not ready for assisted living or a nursing home, but they are worried or bored being at home by themselves all day, or even their children or caretakers just need a break occasionally. That is what makes our drop-in program, Brighter Days, such a great thing. Brighter Days offers 3 hours of engagement, games, one-on-one, and tons of fun, costing the family \$60. The program offers sessions from 8-11 a.m. and 1-4 p.m."

Crumbley's inside look and work in the adult day care program changed her perspective on her future.

"It has made me less afraid of getting older. I see how much fun they have and how positive they are about it, and it kind of prepares me for my aging," she said. "It

has shown me how much small businesses and companies rely on their communities; without their support, we would not even have the clients we have."

Gracefully Aging embodies a vibrant community where seniors find companionship and purpose. Each day brings laughter, shared activities, and the chance to forge lasting friendships. As Crumbley noted, the center transforms the view on aging, replacing apprehension with joy and connection, and fosters an environment where seniors thrive. **GN**

Gracefully Aging Adult Care is located at 14267 U.S. 231-431 N., Hazel Green, AL 35750. For more information, visit gracefully-aging.com or call (256) 813-5197.

Crumbley helps clients add paint to their plates to craft together.



FUTURE *of* HEALING



BETH ANDERSEN

THE HEART OF HEALTHY SMILES

Smile On 65+ offers dental care benefits for older adults.

BY TINA NEELEY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BROOKE SNYDER

HIS SMILE fills the brightest scenes in the film of her life's memories. When Beth Andersen's wobbling bicycle steadied, and she rode independently down the driveway, it was there. When she told him about her first day of kindergarten, it was there. It's in the photos of her graduation from high school and college, at her wedding, and after the birth of her children. And today, when many around him struggle to break through the fog of memory, it's there when she visits him in the assisted living facility where four walls and common areas can't contain it.

Andersen treasures her father's smile, knowing the lifetime of careful dental work behind it. Yet, she's acutely aware that such care remains out of reach for many older adults. Determined to ensure that no one over 65 loses their smile to financial constraints or lack of access, Andersen works passionately to spread the word about Smile On 65+. The Tennessee Department of Health funds the program through a grant as part of Tennessee's Healthy Smiles Initiative.

The Healthy Smiles Initiative, launched in 2021 under Governor Bill Lee, is a five-year plan to improve oral health in Tennessee. This collaborative effort involves stakeholders like TenCare, dental schools, and safety net clinics, focusing on increasing access to dental care in rural and underserved areas. Key goals include recruiting and training dental professionals for high-need communities and expanding safety net services, all supported by a significant state investment of \$94 million to ensure long-term improvements in dental care accessibility and quality.

Part of the Smile On 65+ mission is raising awareness about the affordability and accessibility of quality dental care. The purpose is twofold — it will inform older adults of the opportunity for affordable oral health and dispel the misconception of the need for it as we age.

Andersen knows how older people benefit from an awareness of the program's services.

"Long term, more older adults are able to keep their teeth, avoid dentures, and have a healthy vibrant smile which positively impacts their overall health. Short term, we want to get people out of pain and make sure they have the best available dental care so that they can eat and smile," she explained.

Andersen's team spreads the word about Smile On 65+ in places where older adults come together for meals and other social activities. Dental Bingo and Dental Trivia are fun, interactive ways to raise awareness for the program.

Andersen shared, "We network with other agencies that serve older and lower-resourced adults. You will often find one of our community dental health coordinators at local health fairs and community events."

While the services focus on older adults, they also zero in on a particular demographic that often lacks access to dental health care.

"Under this initiative were recommendations to improve access to dental care in Tennessee, paying particular attention to the needs of rural and underserved populations, one of those populations being the senior population in the state. Smile On 65+ helps remove barriers to affordable dental care for lower-income, dentally uninsured adults who are 65 years of age or older," Andersen said. "While older adults may have access to health care, access to dental care can sometimes fall by the wayside. This may be due to costs, not having a dentist in their area, or the inability to travel to the appointments. Smile On 65+ attempts to eliminate these barriers to improve the overall health and well-being of our aging population."

Andersen continued to explain the impact of the program.

"Older adults are sometimes overlooked or discounted, but as people are living longer, it's important to recognize the critical link between dental health and

overall health. There's a misconception that dental care becomes less important with age, but broken, painful, or missing teeth can significantly affect the quality of life, impacting confidence in one's smile and the ability to enjoy healthy foods."

To qualify for the program, you must be a Tennessee resident at least 65 years old, be 200% at or below the poverty level, and have no comprehensive dental insurance. According to Andersen, the plan covers many dental procedures, including emergency care, exams, cleanings, X-rays, fillings, crowns, root canals, extractions, and removable dentures and partials.

The program's community dental health coordinators, experts in dental health and outreach, offer personalized guidance and support. They help individuals find dental homes and may assist with transportation based on individual needs. Smile On 65+ contracts with partner clinics to provide care for its members, reimbursing these clinics for services rendered. The network is continuously expanding, especially in underserved areas, and many of the partner clinics also serve as safety net providers, offering sliding-scale fees for the uninsured.

Smile On 65+ works to improve physical and dental health. By improving both long-term, older adults benefit socially and emotionally from their healthy smiles. Andersen said that several studies show that dental health greatly influences overall health and quality of life by simply impacting a person's general health and psychological state.

Thanks to Smile On 65+, more seniors can confidently share their smiles during life's big moments and everyday interactions. These revitalized smiles create cherished memories and underscore the vital role of dental health in overall well-being, influencing both confidence and quality of life. Like the individuals behind them, these smiles are treasures. **GN**

For more information about the Smile On 65+ program for older adults, call (800) 509-6055.

Breakfast with Santa - Dec. 7



Photography by Brooke Snyder

Breakfast with Santa was held at Lincoln County High School on Dec. 7 from 8-11 a.m. Breakfast, games, face painting, and a photo with Santa made for a magical morning. All proceeds benefited the Child Development Center and the Children's Center for Autism.



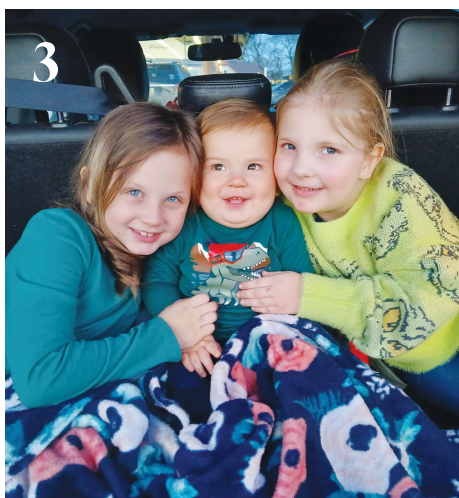
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2024 Christmas Parade - Dec. 7



Photos submitted by folks in our community

This year, the theme of the 2024 Christmas parade was “Christmas Through the Decades.” Many floaters made their way down Main Avenue, tossing candy and waving hands. The event took place on Dec. 7 at 5 p.m.



1. Zach, Kaylea, Sophie, Mercy, and Greyson 2. Lincoln County Fairest of the Fair Shauna Medley
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Buffalo: 4ct., 5ct., 6ct.

TRADITIONAL WINGS & THINGS
Regular or Buffalo

BONELESS WINGS & THINGS
Regular or Buffalo

BIG ZAX SNAK® MEAL
Regular

BUFFALO BIG ZAX SNAK® MEAL
Regular

GREAT 8 BONELESS WINGS MEAL
Regular

BONELESS WINGS MEAL
Regular

TRADITIONAL WINGS MEAL
Regular

DRINKS



DRINK
Small, Medium or Large

GALLON OF SWEET OR UNSWEET TEA

KIDZ® DRINK

MILK
Regular or Chocolate

APPLE JUICE

BIG ZALADS



THE HOUSE ZALAD®
Fried, Grilled, or Garden

THE COBB ZALAD®
Fried, Grilled, or Garden

SHAREABLES & SIDES



FRIED WHITE CHEDDAR BITES

FRIED PICKLES

CRINKLE FRIES
Regular or Large

COLESLAW - CUP

BASKET OF TEXAS TOAST

EXTRA CHICKEN FINGER
Regular or Buffalo

THE NIBBLER

ZAX KIDZ® MEALS
Served with Crinkle Fries, Kidz® Drink, and a Treat.

KIDDIE FINGER

KIDDIE CHEESE

SANDWICH MEALZ



ZAXBY'S® SIGNATURE SANDWICH
Meal or Sandwich only

ZAXBY'S SIGNATURE CLUB SANDWICH
Meal or Sandwich only

KICKIN CHICKEN SANDWICH
Meal or Sandwich only

GRILLED CHICKEN SANDWICH
Meal or Sandwich only

3 NIBBLER® SANDWICH
Meal or Sandwich only

SAUCES

Zax Sauce®, Spicy Zax Sauce™, Ranch, Honey Mustard, Wimpy™, Tongue Torch®, Nuclear™, Hot Honey Mustard, Sweet & Spicy, Teriyaki, BBQ, Buffalo Garlic Blaze



931-227-4999

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*Prices subject to change without notice



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