

# Good News

exchange

TINA MICHELLE JOHNS

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The true tale of Briar Rose Herbs & Teas in Bell Buckle



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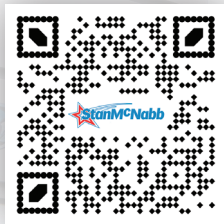
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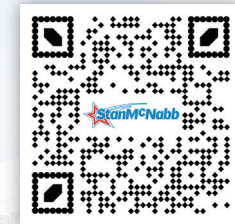
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"GOOD NEWS MAGAZINE" is published monthly by Exchange Media Group Inc., 404 Main Avenue S, Fayetteville, Tennessee 37334. Periodicals postage pending Fayetteville, TN Post Office. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Exchange Media Group, P.O. Box 490, Fayetteville, TN 37334



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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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# From nurturing a sourdough starter to nurturing herself

## Single mom rises above adversity

By Amanda E. West // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes



**M**ACKENZIE RESPRESS “kneaded” a way to nurture herself during a turbulent time in her life, so she turned to the art of baking sourdough. As her confidence in the kitchen rose, along with her sourdough starter that she affectionately named “Sally,” so did the requests for her freshly baked goodies.

As a single mother raising four school-aged children, including a child diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, Respress began to make her mental health a priority. Each night, as she fed and nurtured her sourdough starter, allowing it to ferment so she could bake delectable culinary delights for her family, she would, in turn, nurture herself. Perhaps she’d indulge in a book, light a favorite candle, or immerse herself in a bubble bath. But whatever she chose, it was with the knowledge that she must invest in her own wellness so she could pour into the ones who called her “mom.”

Four years earlier, a powerful truth shook Respress to the core: she could make it on her own. This belief in herself was like a tiny grain of wheat at first, but once it sprouted, she gained the courage to take her children and flee years of abuse. After all they had endured, she craved a life void of the hustle and bustle of Nashville. Her desire was for her children to experience small-town living where deep roots could take hold and they could finally thrive.

Rental prices were soaring, and Respress’ family would need an affordable home that could accommodate all five of them. After applying for a position as a medical technician, she was sent for a drug screening. Not being familiar with the roads in Shelbyville, she made a wrong turn that ended up being serendipity. A “for rent” sign was posted at an apartment complex, and the rest, as they say, is history.



▲ Mackenzie Respress holds a freshly baked sourdough loaf



The community welcomed the Respress family. Her eldest son was playing football for Harris Middle School, and everyone had a core group of friends. But if she couldn't keep a roof over their heads, everything would come crashing down around them. Was it possible she and "Sally" could bake enough loaves of sourdough bread, cookies, cheese crackers, cinnamon rolls, and her favorite blueberry lemon rolls to raise the money they needed?

Respress turned to Facebook with this heartfelt plea in September 2024: "I am not the type of person to ask for handouts because I truly feel there is always someone else more in need than I am. I'd rather work and earn the money I have. This has taken a lot for me to post, so please give me grace. I've been at the same apartment for almost four years and have maintained

my rent on my own for the most part. I work hard, and I do what needs to be done in order to provide for my children, but here is my situation..."

She went on to describe a series of trials that had left her with a lapse of income until she received her first paycheck from the hospital, where she had just landed her dream job. Though she needed \$1,500 — an amount that felt unattainable — she preheated her oven, rolled up her sleeves, and set to work.

"Yes, that's a lot of money," she wrote in the post. "However, to me, that is 108 traditional sourdough breads, or 93 of my specialty breads, and 75 dozen phatty cakes. All of these are doable if it means I can pay my rent and keep my children in a safe, stable environment. So, I'm asking, will you place an order?"



▲ Mackenzie holds the kneaded loaf, ready for the next step in the baking process.



“I told myself, ‘You are very much going to do this. You’re going to get out. You’re going to be okay. You’re going to go on and do great things.’”

– Mackenzie Respress

The memory of the lowest point in her life filtered through her mind as she baked into the early morning hours. The more she reflected on the words she’d encouraged herself with all those years ago, the more powerful they became for her current situation.

“It was as if someone flipped a light switch when I chose to leave,” she recalled. “I told myself, ‘You are very much going to do this. You’re going to get out. You’re going to be okay. You’re going to go on and do great things.’ I was no longer worried about how I would afford to leave; I just knew that if I took the first steps, everything would somehow work out.”

With lots of prayers and through the encouragement of both friends and strangers who connected with her on Facebook, not only did she sell enough to pay her rent, but she officially launched her business, Girl Gone Fermented.

“I sat at the dining room table and bawled my eyes out. Twenty minutes after I made the post, the orders started pouring in, and they haven’t stopped. I am a firm believer that we should never sit in our sadness. We should feel it, experience it, and then get up and do something to change it.”



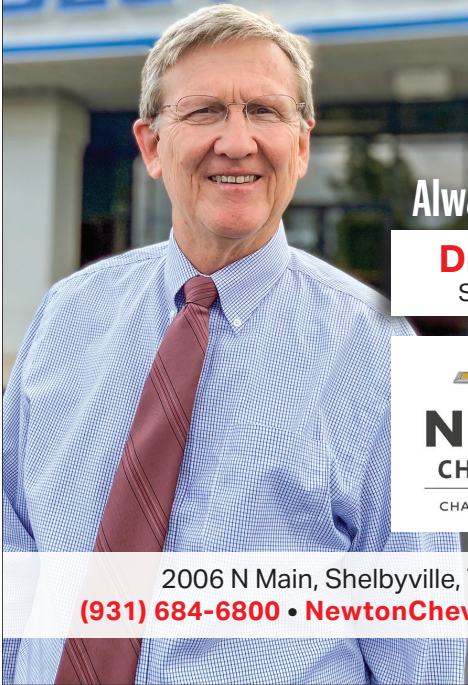
▲ A dusting of flour marks the beginning of the kneading process, as Mackenzie shapes her dough — and her path forward.

Girl Gone Fermented is now working to become a staple at local craft fairs and farmers markets, and she frequently sells her products in the parking lot of Tractor Supply, as well as online. Respress also provides sourdough starters to students who register for her affordable in-home lessons. Since the cultures in everyone’s home are unique, this allows students to experiment with sourdough in the environment that will be nurturing their starter. **GN**


*For more information, go to [www.girl-gone-fermented.com](http://www.girl-gone-fermented.com) or find her on Facebook and Instagram.*



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Neese  
Jones

Ador



# Compassion *IN ACTION*

## Amy Neese Jones celebrates five years with Adoration Home Health.

By Amanda E. West // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes  
and submitted by Amy Neese Jones

**A**MY NEESE Jones grabs her buzzing phone from her purse and presses the answer button. Before the “hello” brushes her lips, a dear friend on the other end unravels a series of heartfelt pleas.

“My wife has been in the hospital recovering from pneumonia. If I can get her home — where she belongs — I know she’ll get stronger. But I’m not sure what services are covered by our insurance, and though I’ve taken care of her for the last 50 years, I’ve realized I can’t do this alone.” Jones hears a slight quiver in his voice before he softly adds, “Can you help us?”

Maya Angelou is credited with saying, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

As a registered nurse (RN) and the patient care liaison for Adoration Home Health, Jones lives this

quote daily. The summer before she attended the University of Alabama in Huntsville, Jones worked at a day care center caring for infants. After earning a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing, she spent 15 years as a labor and delivery nurse. Most of those years were spent at the old Bedford County Medical Center, but she also worked at Harton in Tullahoma and at Williamson County Medical Center before making a career change that better fit her growing family.

“Once I had my own children, and life got busier, I decided to work a job with different hours,” said Jones. “I landed in home health, and it has been a great blessing to me. I realized I love the elderly just as much as I loved the babies.”

Five years ago, Norma Pugh Templeton, who is a fellow RN and the director of the Shelbyville branch of Adoration Home Health, offered Jones a position which quickly became her dream job. Now Jones,



▲ Jon Gregory PTA, Tammy Wilson LPN, Valerie Belew RN PCM, Anissa Rowlett LPN PCC, Donna Cash PTA, Tim Davis PTA, Lauren Thompson RN PCM, Katelyn Carpenter PTA, Norma Templeton RN/director, Amy Jones RN/patient care liaison, Misty McGhee support assistant, Vickie Roden RN, Christina Hale LPN, Chris Linder PT, Jennifer LovVorn PTA, Kaiden Garland LPN PCC, Kelli Overstreet LPN, and Shannon Stewart LPN

along with her team of qualified nurses and therapists, ensures their friends, neighbors, and every family within Bedford and the surrounding counties have access to private duty nursing, home health, and, when needed, hospice care.

“We provide compassionate care at the highest quality for patients with a variety of illnesses, injuries, and rehabilitation needs. This mission is carried out daily by my team — a group of talented, selfless clinicians, a stellar office staff, and our leader, Norma Pugh Templeton. I facilitate referrals for our home health services from various sources, such as doctors’ offices, hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, etc. I love my job because I work with so many amazing people, from my referral sources to my clinical staff to all of my co-workers. My team is top-notch, and they provide the best care and therapy to our patients.”

A few years ago, a terrible bout with pneumonia hospitalized Jones’ grandfather, and her family embraced the help and services offered by Adoration.

Jones said, “Following a serious hospitalization, my Papa recovered from pneumonia and from several wounds on his lower extremities with the help of the care and compassion from the staff of Adoration. This made my heart so happy, and my family got to see what I do and my ‘why’ for doing it.”

When Jones receives a referral from a physician regarding a patient being discharged from the hospital, she contacts the

family and offers them a priceless gift. Not only does she extend kindness and understanding, but she restores their ability to make the choices they feel are best for their loved ones. She guides them toward invaluable resources, such as someone who can provide a wheelchair ramp. She also schedules visits from therapists and nurses and helps families understand what services are covered by their insurance policies.

“At the end of the day, my job is about helping people that need us and making sure that everyone in our community is informed about the resources available and making sure they get the best in-home care. I try to be the ‘easy button’ for all of my referrals and accounts. Home health is a good fit for patients who have a support system in place. We are not a sitter service. We ensure patients receive therapy, social work, and nursing care that is vital for their recovery while keeping their independence within their own homes.”

Jones continued, “Adoration is set apart from other home health agencies because we are the only one that has a physical branch within Shelbyville. Most of our team are local clinicians that are also tied to our community, and that is something very special. Our team is what makes Adoration so wonderful.” **GN**

*For more information, go to [www.adorationhealth.com](http://www.adorationhealth.com).*



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Here's to a surprise addition to our team - Amie Lee Marks!  
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# THREADING QUILTS AND SEEDS OF *Encouragement*

A loving husband continues his wife's legacy

By Amanda E. West // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

**B** UDDY CARTER settles into the seat facing the sewing machine. Turning the handwheel, he ensures the needle pierces the folded edge of the purple and blue calico fabric. He pushes the toe of his tennis shoe on the presser foot beneath the table. The needle bobs up and down, and the motor gently whirrs. Though the wind howls outside and the chilled air presses against the windowpanes, a peace that passes all understanding swells within Buddy's heart as he slowly exhales. It was in this room — in this very chair — that his wife taught him to continue her legacy.

During the entire 30 years they were married, Buddy was Shirley's "knight in shining armor," for it was his job to ensure that all 10 of her sewing machines

were oiled and well-maintained. Shirley was a gifted seamstress with decades of experience, so Buddy had never sewn anything using one of her machines. But all of that changed when Shirley's orthopedic doctor told her she must have shoulder replacement surgery.

"Our quilt closet at the Shelbyville First Church of the Nazarene was almost empty, and Shirley liked to have at least five quilts available at all times. She was like a backseat driver, standing behind my chair, telling me what to do," recalled Buddy. "She had a lot of physical ailments like arthritis and underwent a shoulder and a hip replacement. But her ministry that everyone called 'Shirley's Quilts' was so important that she wanted to ensure it could continue on without her."

Buddy  
Carter





▲ *The heart of his craft: Buddy Carter draws strength and purpose from the memory of his late wife, whose love continues to guide every stitch.*

Decades earlier, the Carters had attended a community-wide Thanksgiving service, and Shirley saw a note posted on a message board at a neighboring church advertising a quilt ministry. Well, of course, this piqued her interest, so she jotted down the number, and that call led to the beginning of “Shirley’s Quilts.”

“Shirley was outgoing, blunt, and loved the Lord and people. She helped anyone with whatever they had going on. Her quilt ministry was a way for her to continue taking care of others, so she was passionate about it. She wasn’t able to do a lot at the church physically, but this gave her a way to stay involved, and it was something she was good at.”

The quilts created by the Carters are unique. Each has a solid white cross in the middle that stretches to all four sides. But the beauty and the time it takes to artfully design the quilts aren’t the only reasons they are so remarkable — the Carters’ entire congregation prays for each person who

will receive the quilts. Before Shirley died three years ago, she had personally sewn 3,500 quilts, which were donated through her ministry.

“Our church members give the quilts to people who are sick, have a cancer diagnosis, have lost loved ones, or are struggling and need their spirit lifted. Shirley kept meticulous records of who her quilts were given to,” said Buddy. “Some of the people who received them were in Italy, Germany, Mexico, France, Canada, and all across the United States, with hundreds given out right here in Shelbyville. I can have a day where I am completely flustered with something going on, and I’ll sit down at one of her machines, and all of my worries go away. I’ve sewn several hundred quilts this way, but I’m not sure where mine have gone. Our church prays over them before they are distributed, and I’ve received several ‘thank you’ cards.”

Even though Buddy knows his congregation will pray over the quilts, he said,

“I pray over them as I’m piecing them together and as I am sewing them. I pray that whoever receives them will feel a touch from the Lord, and I ask Him to help them with whatever situation they are in.”

Purchasing the cloth, thread, and batting to create thick layers can become expensive when you are sewing hundreds of quilts.

But Buddy said, “The Lord always provides. That’s how Shirley knew she was supposed to keep making them. I have at least 20 totes full of material, so I can probably make 1,000 quilts. The only thing I have to buy now is thread.”

Besides working at the soup kitchen, volunteering with the Helping Hands Ministry at his church, and serving as an elder, Buddy has begun teaching others how to sew. Soon, he plans to teach himself how to use Shirley’s embroidery machine.

Buddy is sowing seeds of encouragement with every quilt and ensuring that Shirley’s legacy continues. **GN**



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FUTURE *of* HEALING



TINA MICHELLE JOHNS

# FROM FOLKTALE TO HOLISTIC HEALING

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The true tale of Briar Rose  
Herbs & Teas in Bell Buckle

BY AMANDA E. WEST  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
ASHLEIGH NEWNES

**P**RIOR TO Disney's "Sleeping Beauty," the Brothers Grimm published the original folktale in 1812 titled "Briar Rose," and prior to prescription medication, families relied on gathering wild herbs to ease their ailments. Tina Michelle Johns' husband helped her unite the tale of the jilted fairy who placed a curse on a beautiful princess — which has always been her favorite — with her training in herbal medicine to create the name Briar Rose Herbs & Teas.

As you enter the doors of the Welcome Corner in Bell Buckle, you drink in the invigorating scent of freshly brewed coffee, but as you amble further into Johns' apothecary shop, the calming scents of lavender, rosemary, thyme, and the subtle earthiness of sage delight your senses. Bags of aromatic loose-leaf teas, tinctures, infused vinegar, salves and balms, locally sourced honey, essential oils, and bohemian-inspired jewelry line the shelves.

For the last 27 years, Johns has worked as a respiratory therapist. She scrimped and saved and worked six days per week as a pharmacy technician to afford the tuition for her college degree. During this time, she was plagued by a thought that altered the course of her life



▲ Tina Michelle Johns, owner of Briar Rose Herbs & Teas, showcases one of her handcrafted apothecary products at the Welcome Corner in Bell Buckle, where she offers aromatic loose-leaf teas and herbal remedies.

and has led to the betterment of countless others due to the natural remedies she offers through Briar Rose.

"While I worked at the pharmacy, I watched people struggle between paying for medicine and paying for food," said Johns. "Their decision always weighed heavy in my heart, and I thought, 'There has to be an alternative for them.' That same thought followed me into my years of being a bedside caregiver. I watched as my patients took multiple medications, knowing that one pill helps with the side effects for the one they need to help them get better.



▲ "Cleansing Waters," one of Briar Rose Herbs & Teas' many herbal products available at the Welcome Corner in Bell Buckle

"I believe allopathic, herbal, and holistic medicine can work together. My grandfather used to point out plants we could eat or even a tree branch that we could scrub our teeth with. He knew which roots would make us feel better. The minute we started coughing, he gave us a spoonful of honey. My great-grandmother was a midwife, and her husband was an herbalist. There's always been a calling in my heart for nature."

Since her 20s, Johns has battled chronic arthritis. Over-the-counter medications, prescription pain relievers, and steroid injections alleviated the pain temporarily, but Johns knew she needed a permanent, healthier solution.

"Holistic and natural healing was my only hope. Natural ways aren't addictive, and knowing that my body is meant to process and work with what was naturally created made it an easy choice for me," said Johns. "Finding herbs I could work with in teas, tinctures, and salves that alleviated my inflammation and discomfort has been fun and wonderful."

Johns began devouring books on the subject, and after experimenting with various techniques and recipes, she began to find relief. Neighbors and others in the community requested these remedies, and their interest, combined with her own thirst for knowledge, coaxed another thought to take root. Could this call on her life, which she believed had trickled





**I watched people struggle between paying for medicine and paying for food. Their decision always weighed heavy in my heart, and I thought, 'There has to be an alternative for them.'**

**- TINA MICHELLE JOHNS**

down from her wild-crafting ancestors, become a thriving business?

“Today, I have a certificate in the science and art of herbalism from an intensive program with Rosemary Gladstar in the didactic, therapeutic, laboratory, and fieldwork of herbalism. I regularly attend herbal retreats and conferences with instructors who are part of the American Herbalists Guild — who are experts in this field. These events keep my mind fresh, my skills sharp, and friendships in this field alive.”

Gladstar is a renowned herbalist who has dedicated her life to reviving

the skills that prior generations relied upon for thousands of years. She is the author of multiple books on the subject, including “Planting the Future: Saving our Medicinal Herbs,” “Herbal Recipes for Vibrant Health,” and “Herbal Healing for Women.” Over the years, she has passed down her vast knowledge to hundreds of students.

Like Gladstar, Johns is also passing down her knowledge to others. Those interested in learning about growing, harvesting, drying, and using herbs for better health — and to promote healing in a more natural way — can register

for classes with Johns at the Bell Buckle Coffee Shop or at the Shelbyville Parks & Recreation Center.

“If I were to recommend five herbs that are easy to get started with, they would be chamomile, catnip, basil, thyme, and sage. These herbs are easy to grow and maintain. They can be blended into teas, tinctures, or salves individually. They are gentle for children yet have mighty healing properties.” **GN**

*For more information, visit [www.briarroseherbsandteas.com](http://www.briarroseherbsandteas.com) or follow her on Facebook.*

*Tina Michelle Johns ▶ showcases aromatic loose-leaf teas and herbal remedies.*



FUTURE *of* HEALING



KIMBERLY WILLIAMS

# THE 'NO' THAT BIRTHED A GREATER 'YES'

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Growing Your Nest Birth Services  
celebrates 50 birthdays

BY AMANDA E. WEST  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLEIGH NEWNES  
AND SUBMITTED BY ANNA LAWHORN

**K**IMBERLY WILLIAMS ripped open the envelope and frantically scanned the letter from the College of Nursing. Her excitement shifted to bitter tears as she dialed her mother's number. When the phone call ended, Williams had a backup plan. She'd received a rejection letter from the nursing program in her hometown of Cleveland, so she would follow her mother's advice and apply to Motlow State Community College in Tullahoma. With only a few short weeks before the fall semester began, Williams quickly scheduled an entrance exam. After completing the test, she was chosen from 230 applicants to enter the program.

Williams packed her belongings and moved to Bell Buckle. The day before classes began at Motlow, she received a phone call from the college in Cleveland.

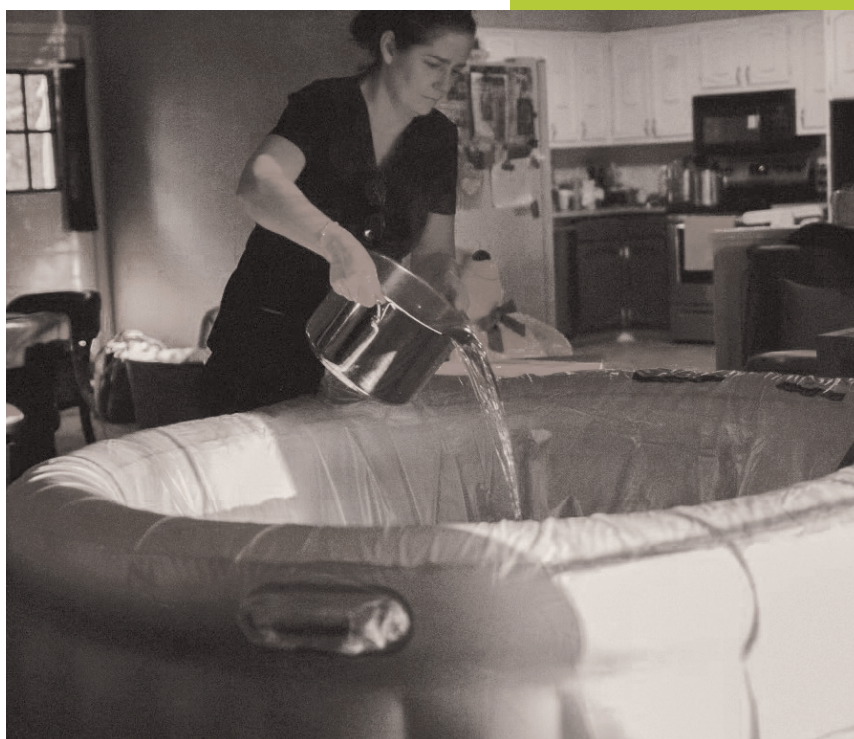
"Why aren't you in class today?" they asked. Williams explained about the letter of rejection, to which they replied, "You received that letter by mistake."

Two months later, Williams met her husband, Jeremy. They have now been married for 20 years and have four children.

"There are no mistakes with God," said Williams. "I wouldn't have moved away from my friends, family, or left my church. God knew this about me and in His sovereignty, He had a letter sent to me that would change the course of my life forever. My husband and children are a direct result of my move to this area. I love my life here, and I am so thankful that, although things seemed bleak at the time, God had a plan for my life."

Williams' mother enrolled in college to become a respiratory therapist, and her stepfather enrolled in nursing school while she was growing up.

"I remember looking through their textbooks, and I fixated on the portions about pregnancy and childbirth. When



*Doula Kimberly Williams creates a calm and supportive home environment.*

I was 10, my mom became pregnant with my little brother. I was in awe of her pregnancy, and I was obsessed with him after he was born. I truly believe my calling is to take care of pregnant women and babies. God used my brother's birth as a catalyst for my passion for pregnancy," said Williams.

As a registered nurse, Williams spent 11 years working in labor and delivery caring for laboring moms. After she gave birth to her son, Judson, at 41, she chose to care for her family full time and homeschool her children.

"After seven years of being home, I had a strong desire to serve pregnant women again. This happened during the pandemic. I started noticing that more women were opting for home births and hiring doulas. I sat down one day, created a website, signed up for doula training, and my business, Growing Your Nest Birth Services, was born."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of home births increased in 2021 to the highest levels in 30 years.



▲ Doula Kimberly Williams supports expecting mother Whitney Dennis.



Meghan Wagenveld labors with the guidance of her doula, Kimberly Williams. ▶



## All pregnant women deserve a calm, peaceful environment to give birth to their baby.

- KIMBERLY WILLIAMS

“While I loved working in the hospital, I struggled with how medicalized birth is, especially now that I have experienced natural physiological birth in a calm setting. If I could change anything, it would be to decrease the number of nonmedical inductions of labor. I don’t think women realize how much it increases their risk for a C-section. I would also change the atmosphere in labor and delivery, making it less like a hospital for the sick and injured and more like a home environment. All pregnant women deserve a calm, peaceful environment to give birth to their baby.”

A doula advocates for the mother while also providing vital information

and emotional support and helping relieve physical discomfort. According to Williams, statistics show that having a birth doula lowers a woman’s chances of undergoing a cesarean section (C-section) by 52.9%, reduces postpartum depression by 57.5%, and they are 31% less likely to receive Pitocin to speed up their labor.

“Doulas aren’t just for women seeking an unmedicated birth,” said Williams. “We can help even if you choose to have an epidural by providing education, comfort, movement, and advocacy. I also offer private or virtual childbirth options, newborn care, sibling classes, and postpartum support.

If you’re interested in birth planning services or documenting your birth preferences, I offer that along with mentorship for other birth professionals and health care providers. I also host birth doula training workshops.”

Recently, Williams tallied the number of births she has assisted with and discovered that she has helped birth 25 males and 25 females! **GN**

*For more information, go to [www.growingyournest.com](http://www.growingyournest.com), or find Williams on Instagram at @growing\_your\_nest\_ or on Facebook at Growing Your Nest Birth Services-Kimberly Williams, RN.*

FUTURE *of* HEALING



ANGELA WOJTKOWSKI

# HOPE REINS EQUINE THERAPY

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Saddle up your horses for better mental health.

BY AMANDA E. WEST  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLEIGH NEWNES

**A**T CREEKSIDE Farm on the outskirts of the Flat Creek community, the aroma of freshly mowed hay mixes with the salty sweat of the horses. They stamp their hooves on the dirt floor, begging Angela Wojtkowski to lead them out of their stalls and into the sunlight. As the children waiting in the arena for their equine therapy lessons squeal with excitement, the ears of each horse point upward, and they swish their tails and neigh in reply. Most of the horses in the Hope Reins therapeutic riding program have emerged from years of struggles themselves, so they understand the children who will ride them.

“Just as horses can have emotional pain, injuries, physical ailments, and disabilities, people suffer the same,” said Wojtkowski. “The average horse has seven to 10 owners during their lifetime, and as herd animals, they are torn from friends and sometimes have neglectful or abusive owners. They grieve, feel happiness [and] sadness, and become scared or playful. Horses suffer loss like we do, and they understand the fear of walking into the unknown. They understand trauma, and they know when a child is feeling uncertain.”

Wojtkowski continued, “We put a girl who had suffered emotional trauma on the back of one of my mares named Lady. Until she felt the child was ready, Lady wouldn’t walk. She was building trust with the child first. When she did begin to walk, she walked as if she were carrying glasses of water and didn’t want to spill anything. Lady even stopped to let the child breathe and relax a bit. Times like these are magical.”

Another time, a child entered Wojtkowski’s barn and approached a gelding named Blue, who has one clear blue eye and one that is chocolate brown. Blue hung his head over the door of his stall, and as the child stroked his velvety pink nose, tears trickled down her cheeks



Certified therapy ▶  
instructor Ann Burkhalter  
teaches student Adrian  
Guzon how to ride Blue at  
Hope Reins Therapeutic  
Riding Center.



◀ *Dr. Francesca Lytle, a Hope Reins board member and volunteer, teaches Adrian Guzon how to saddle a horse.*



## God shows us His miracles through His creations, and His greatest gift to all of us is the horse.

- ANGELA WOJTKOWSKI

until a rolling sob bubbled from her lips. Wojtkowski opened the stall door and led Blue into the hallway. The child wrapped her arms around his neck, and Blue rested his head on her shoulder to offer her comfort.

“God shows us His miracles through His creations, and His greatest gift to all of us is the horse,” said Wojtkowski. “I didn’t know that this child’s parents were in the middle of a nasty divorce, and it devastated her. But Blue, he knew it. If you’ve lived any length of time on this planet, you’ve experienced some sort of trauma or heartbreak in your life. At Hope Reins, we take a child who has an autism diagnosis, or a child that has been

traumatized, or even adults who’ve had bad experiences with horses, and we bring them together so healing can take place.”

Before Wojtkowski, who has been a registered nurse since 1985, started Hope Reins, she and her husband, Paul, operated a nonprofit called Hope Through Education Inc. Through this organization, they remodeled orphanages in Mexico, rehabilitated apartments to house displaced families during the housing crisis in 2008, and completed various other projects. When the opportunity arose for the Wojtkowskis to continue as Hope Reins, they happily opened their barn to the community and provided their own horses.

A few years ago, Wojtkowski received a call from Ann Burkhalter, who had volunteered with Great Strides since 2007. Burkhalter is a certified instructor through the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship. Together, they formed Hope Reins Therapeutic Riding Center, which will begin its third season this spring.

“Ann is a gem. She is not only knowledgeable with horses, but she is extremely knowledgeable with children who have disabilities, and she knows how to keep them engaged,” said Wojtkowski. “She has so much knowledge with running an equine therapy program that I want our program to reflect her knowledge and character.”





According to research, equine therapy has proven to be the most beneficial to riders who have a physical, mental, or emotional challenge because the movement of the horse stimulates muscles, helps build core strength, and improves muscle tone. The relationships formed between the horse and its rider create pathways of communication that encourage socialization, improve social skills, reduce anxiety and irritability, and help to regulate emotions. As riders become more con-

fident in their equine skills, they also see their self-esteem grow.

“Our vision for our equine therapy program is to draw people to the Lord and to help them realize that horses are God’s gift to man. We want others to recognize that God’s healing hand is on them and their children, and as they see that, they come to truly love and appreciate the equine.” GN

*For more information, go to [HopeReinsEquineTherapyCenter.com](http://HopeReinsEquineTherapyCenter.com)*



▲ Board member and volunteer Bette McGarry, nonprofit head Angela Wojtkowski, retired roping horse Blue, student Adrian Guzon, board member and volunteer Dr. Francesca Lytle, and certified therapy instructor Ann Burkhalter gather in the stables at Hope Reins Therapeutic Riding Center, united by their shared mission of healing through equine therapy.



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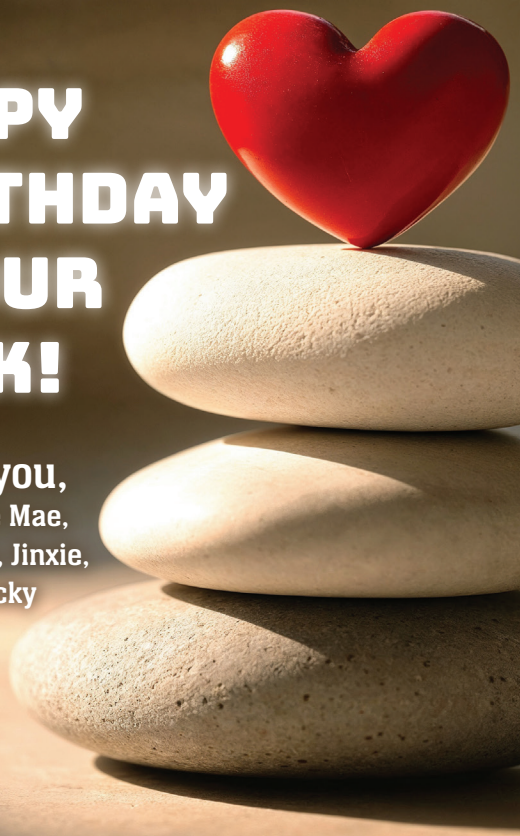
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# Bedford County Christmas - Dec. 3



Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

Bedford County Christmas lit up the Shelbyville square with an unforgettable evening of holiday cheer! From the dazzling tree and courthouse lighting to live music, festive activities, and even reindeer, the event brought joy to families and the community alike — a magical kickoff to the holiday season!



1. Jeb House 2. Liz Palmer and Terri Collins 3. Raelynn Osterhaus with Sheriff Woody and Spiderman  
4. Jayden, Sondra, and Jaxon Hampton 5. Adam Shelton, Paula McCorkle, and Cody Amis

# Pens.com Christmas Party - Dec. 20



Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

At the Bell Buckle Banquet Hall on Dec. 20, 2024, the Pens.com team held their annual Christmas party.



1. Steven Winfrey and Heather Cantrall 2. Amy Squires and Rita Gray  
3. Georgiana and Bryan Smotherman 4. Debbie and William Nichols

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