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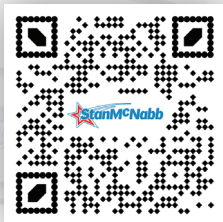
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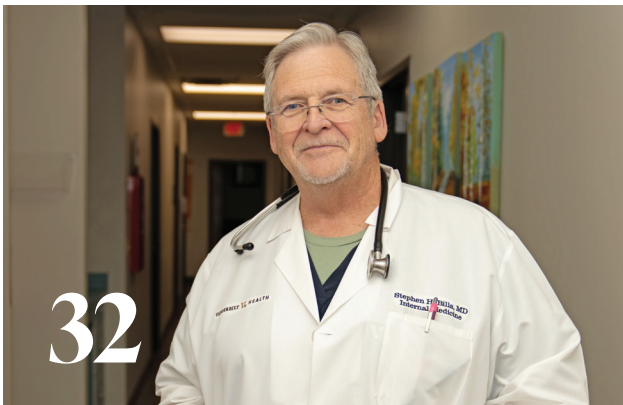
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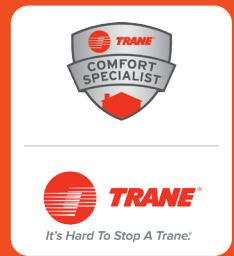
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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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GREG GRESSEL

**SJPAC connects, inspires,
and heals through the
power of art.**

Tullahoma's 'Mini Ryman': A Cultural Gem

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes
and submitted by Greg Gressel

THE AUDIENCE holds its breath as the velvet curtain rolls back, revealing the stage of Tullahoma's South Jackson Performing Arts Center (SJPAC). This moment, repeated numerous times over the years, isn't just the start of a show — it's the core of a community, the essence of artistic expression that has long defined this small town. Known to many as Tullahoma's "mini Ryman," the South Jackson Performing Arts Center is an intimate space where the arts flourish and history meets the aspirations of today's artists.

SJPAC was born from the dreams of community members who envisioned a space dedicated to the arts. Led by Alice Ratcliff, who recognized the potential of the historic South Jackson Street School building, it came to life through unity and unfaltering efforts to preserve the structure. This vision attracted artists, dreamers, and volunteers who saw an opportunity to bring the arts to the forefront of Tullahoma's cultural scene.

"Our legacy is to be a regional epicenter for the arts — providing opportunities for our musicians, thespians, and patrons alike to experience the power of art and contribute to the quality of life for our community," said Executive Director Greg Gressel. "We strive to be that space where people can find themselves and express themselves through art."

Gressel brings decades of experience and a strong passion for the arts. Under his guidance, the team strives to bring their best to every production, outreach effort, and new endeavor.

"SJPAC has served as a powerful medium to express, preserve, and transmit the community's history, traditions, values, and experiences through mediums like music, dance, and theatre," he added. "We provide a platform for diverse voices and perspectives to be heard and celebrated."





One step inside the theatre, and visitors will understand why it earned the title of the “mini Ryman.” The SJPAC’s design transforms it into a stage within a stage, where Tullahoma’s history and dreams share the spotlight with each performance. The center’s acoustically rich hall, 1920s Art Deco renovations, and preserved 102-year-old floors create a story that parallels the acts on-stage — it represents self-expression, transformation, and community pride. Music legends like Sandi Patty and Dustin Lynch have praised its acoustics and added their voices to the legacy that fills this space.

At the center of SJPAC’s pursuits is its diversity in programming. The venue has become a platform for an inclusive mix of performances, from concerts and plays to educational workshops and community events. Its stages have hosted everything from classical concerts to youth programs like Performing Arts for Children and Teens and Theatre Enrichment Arts Curriculum for Homeschoolers, inspiring students and adults alike and promoting an appreciation for the arts that often enrich lives.

“We have had dozens of students in the last couple of years go on to universities and schools of music to study their art further,” Gressel explained. “Some of our staple programs at SJPAC are not strictly for kids but do include kids and produced singer-songwriter artists like Dustin Lynch and HunterGirl.”

Aside from hosting local talent, SJPAC’s legacy is inscribed in its many milestones. It

celebrated the auditorium’s 100th anniversary with a vision for the “Next 100 Years,” adding spaces like the Courtyard Stage and the Spotlight Lounge. The acquisition of the Community Playhouse and the Miss Tullahoma Scholarship Pageant are also notable achievements. These milestones have established SJPAC’s reputation as a premier arts venue in Tennessee.

The SJPAC gives individuals and families a sense of belonging and pride, attracting visitors from neighboring states and over 100 zip codes. Tullahoma has embraced its status as an arts destination, with the center’s success invigorating the community and contributing to the local economy through tourism.

“As a community, we have cultivated our love for the arts through this wonderful facility and all the other art outlets that we have,” Gressel said. “We have created an incredible arts community that people travel to see and be a part of.”



We have had dozens of students in the last couple of years go on to universities and schools of music to study their art further.

- GREG GRESSEL

Like many nonprofits, SJPAC faces financial challenges. Yet, the center has consistently met these challenges through strategic fundraising, grants, and local sponsorships. Community support, including sponsorships from businesses and individual donors, is vital to its financial stability.

In recent years, the SJPAC has shown its adaptability. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it restructured programming to continue reaching its audience, proving its excellence in innovation. Future plans include adding a Black Box Theatre and an orchestra pit, embracing change while preserving the traditional elements that patrons have cherished for many years.

In the future, the SJPAC plans to continue growing and restoring, blending historical and modern elements. Planned upgrades, including energy-efficient windows and a new main stage design, reflect their desire to expand while respecting the building's heritage. Through these efforts, SJPAC continues to serve as a dynamic space where the past and future harmonize.

"We are a living archive of our community's cultural heritage and love for the arts."

SJPAC's achievements are reflective of its volunteers, local businesses, and sponsors. Many leaders have supported the arts in Tullahoma, but the center's story is truly a product of the support

from many individuals and organizations. This community breathes life into the center, ensuring its doors remain open.

In every way, the South Jackson Performing Arts Center represents transformation — of a building, a community, and the many lives touched by the arts. The center is a ray of light for the Tullahoma community, revealing how art connects, inspires, and heals. As SJPAC steps into its next century, it carries forward the hopes, dreams, and histories of Tullahoma. It beautifully reflects the art's ability to inspire and uplift communities. **GN**

Visit <https://southjackson.org> for more information.

INSPIRING Hope

Local church offers mentorship to Bel-Aire Elementary students



CHRISTINE JONES

By Becca Roberts

Photos submitted by Christine Jones

WHEN CHRISTINE Jones pops her head into the class at Bel-Aire Elementary School, one child's smile lights up the room. He runs to her, bursting to tell her about his week as they head to the cafeteria for lunch. The pair sits at the tablecloth-covered "special table," set aside for visiting parents, grandparents, and, in this case, beloved mentors.

Jones is the associate pastor at King's Cross Church and the current director of Kids Hope USA at Bel-Aire. Kids Hope USA partners with churches and schools to equip mentors for elementary students in need of some extra confidence. The organization provides resources to help students in need grow emotionally, socially, and academically. Kids Hope conducts background checks on King's Cross members who seek mentorship roles. These mentors get to spend an hour per week with the students, building connections and pouring into their lives. It is a big commitment, but Jones says the kids thrive having a consistent, trustworthy person show up for them.

Last year, Scott Claybrook, lead pastor at King's Cross Church, initiated the program at Bel-Aire Elementary — one of three schools nearby that King's Cross supports in various ways, from teacher appreciation to campus cleanup projects.

"Our mission is to help people find wholeness because we believe whole people can change the whole world," Claybrook said. "We believe that whole-person transformation happens best in relationships, and Kids Hope is a wonderful tool in helping us build meaningful relationships."

Dr. Clint Epley, the principal at Bel-Aire, agreed. Epley was supportive but preferred to start small for the first year.

"I think they were worried, thinking, 'Are they really going to show up?'" said Jones, and rightfully so.

The school had experienced a lack of follow-through from others in the past. It took time to gain trust and demonstrate

“This program is like a beacon of light for our students ... The smiles on their faces when their mentors come to spend time with them says it all.”

- AMBER MILLER



that they were dependable partners. After getting Bel-Aire on board, Claybrook and his wife, Joy, met with the school board for final approval.

Obtaining approval was one of many hurdles to getting the program off the ground. King's Cross also needed to create a working schedule with the teachers, who were concerned about losing valuable instruction time. They remedied this by giving mentors 30 minutes for lunch with students and another half hour before or after. Students were thrilled to share a meal with their mentors and get a short break from class to play games and work on social and interpersonal skills.

Pairing students with the right mentors was an intentional process. Jones worked with the school's guidance counselor, Amber Miller, to place mentors with students based on strengths, common interests, and personalities. Miller was essential to this process as she was familiar with the students and

their individual needs. After much deliberation, the children were assigned mentors who have since become trusted advisors and friends. Jones continues to work carefully to make sure the program has a positive impact on the staff, the mentors, and the students.

“I owe a huge thanks to Christine for taking this on. She's done a phenomenal job, and it's been a pleasure to work with her ... I look forward to continuing the program next year,” Miller stated.

Jones is quick to admit that while mentoring is a joy, it can also be hard. The school started with five students and five mentors but ended with just three. Two students left for different reasons.

“They were both hard situations and just heartbreaking,” Jones said.

The students who stayed in the program for the full year, however, absolutely soared.

At the end of the school year, Jones asked her student, “What was your favorite thing from this school year?”

The student grinned and replied, “Well ... it starts with a ‘C!’”

“C’ for Christine,” Jones clarified emotionally.

The principal, teachers, and guidance counselor all note a positive shift in the participating students.

Miller said, “This program is like a beacon of light for our students ... The smiles on their faces when their mentors come to spend time with them says it all.”

Jones hopes other churches in Tullahoma will partner with Kids Hope USA to benefit more children in Tullahoma. She recommended churches contact Kids Hope directly to ensure they agree with the guidelines of the program before contacting schools.

Jones believes it is a fantastic program for everyone involved, and Miller agreed, “I dare say, I think the mentors get as much out of it as the students do!” GN

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BY FAITH**



DR. COLLIN BILLS PROVIDES ADVANCED ORTHOPEDIC CARE WITH A HEART-CENTERED FOCUS.

BY JERIAH BRUMFIELD // PHOTOGRAPHY BY BROOKE SNYDER

ORTHOPEDIC SURGERY is advancing at an unprecedented pace in a rapidly evolving medical field. Amid these essential advancements, it's reassuring to know that a love for humanity can surpass even the most sophisticated technology. Dr. Collin Bills, a local surgeon, has established a practice based on faith-driven service and patient-centered, evidence-based care. Aside from being a talented surgeon, he's a devoted neighbor, family man, and advocate for whole-person care. Bills' practice is founded on advanced orthopedic treatment delivered with a deeply personal touch. In his practice, meaningful connections matter.

A RETURN HOME WITH A PURPOSE

Dr. Bills grew up in Tullahoma, and when he returned to establish his practice, he did so with the intention of providing specialized services in a region that often travels to larger urban centers for specialized orthopedic and sports medicine care. His love for the community was clear from the beginning, as he not only invested time in gaining knowledge but also took intentional steps to prepare for his role as a trusted medical provider.

"Most surgeons learn on the job," Bills reflected, noting that he wanted to be fully equipped to serve his neighbors from day one. "I didn't think it would be wise to learn how to operate on people who are close to me."

DRIVEN BY



CARE



▲ Dr. Bills examines a patient.

He was determined to supply the highest quality of care to the people he cared about. Specializing in sports medicine and arthroscopy, Bills has developed expertise in minimally invasive techniques that help his patients recover faster and with less pain.

Arthroscopy, which uses a small scope to examine and treat joint problems, allows Bills to perform procedures through tiny incisions rather than large openings. This especially benefits patients who require shoulder, knee, hip, and elbow surgeries. These specialized techniques help local

athletes and community members recover with reduced downtime, allowing them to stay active and engaged in their lives.

BUILDING A NETWORK OF COORDINATED CARE

One of Bills' unique contributions to the community is his ability to fill the communication gaps between the various professionals involved in his patients' care. He frequently collaborates with athletic trainers, coaches, and physical therapists in the area to provide athletes with coordinated and comprehensive treatment.

By establishing relationships with trainers and coaches, Bills can offer care that considers each athlete's distinct physical and emotional challenges. Athletes, as Bills noted, are "complicated patients" who often contend with not just physical pain but also the mental strain of injury and recovery.

"They come with problems that have huge social impacts," he explained.

He acknowledged the many pressures young athletes face, such as scholarships, team dynamics, family expectations, and personal goals, and how they affect them emotionally, socially, and mentally. In understanding these broader contexts, Bills offers care that supports both his patients' lives and their injuries.

"If you take care of a hand injury and don't ever think about what this person is going back to," he cautioned, "you kind of miss how to treat them well."

SERVING PATIENTS OF ALL AGES

One of the aspects Bills appreciates most about his work as a general orthopedist is the diversity of patients he sees. He proudly serves people of all ages, from infants to older adults, and values the challenge that comes with such a wide range of cases.

"I might see a 6-month-old baby and a 98-year-old lady on the same day. It's the awesome part of what I do as a generalist," he shared.

Unlike urban specialists who may focus on a narrow subset of procedures, Bills enjoys the variety his practice offers and

finds fulfillment in treating a wide range of orthopedic issues within his community.

FAITH AS A FOUNDATION

Faith heavily influences Bills' life and work. He sees medicine as a calling that allows him to serve a higher purpose. Inspired by his father, Dr. Stephen Bills, he learned early in life that versatility, humility, and a strong moral compass would help him become an effective doctor.

"My dad told me being good at a lot of different things might make you a really good doctor because you'll be able to relate to people from different backgrounds," he recalled.

This lesson in diversity and empathy is central to his career as a surgeon, as he connects with patients of all ages, from infants to older adults.

Bills' faith is particularly meaningful when he encounters situations where medical science has reached its limits. In cases where there is no surgery or treatment available, he relies on his faith to offer his patients emotional and spiritual support.

"There have been times when I've met patients who have problems that I can't fix," he admitted.

He recognizes that in those moments, the best he can offer is his loving presence.

These spiritual connections constantly remind Bills that his duty is not just to heal physically but also to offer integrated support and acknowledge the emotional and spiritual aspects of his patients' experiences.

BALANCING FAMILY AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

Family connections are among Bills' highest priorities. He honors his family by being present and valuing family time. He views family time as an important part of his life's mission. He is intentional about how technology fits into his home life, mindful of the need to create meaningful, undistracted moments with his family.

"When I'm with my kids, I try not to be searching the web or answering emails," he shared.



▲ Dr. Bills and his father in his office.

He believes balancing professional and personal life is key to leading a balanced, purpose-driven life.

TECHNOLOGY WITH A PERSONAL TOUCH

While Bills is excited about the potential of emerging technologies like virtual reality to enhance patient care, he's careful to approach these advancements using evidence-based research.

"There's an aspect of surgery that no one's going to allow some computer algorithm to do," he noted.

He sees technology as a tool to support — not replace — the relationships he builds with his patients.

A LASTING LEGACY OF COMMUNITY CARE

Bills has integrated patient-centered care, faith-driven service, and community connection to serve his community both as a skilled medical provider and as a neighbor. In Tullahoma, patients find both an expert surgeon and a compassionate healer who is deeply invested in their well-being and making a difference in their lives. Through his practice, Dr. Bills embodies the spirit of true health care that values each patient, strikes a balance of skill and heart, and recognizes his critical role in improving the well-being of those he touches in the local community. GN



PHILIP HILL

STRONG FRIENDSHIPS AND SUSTAINABLE FITNESS

Philip Hill brings a holistic approach to fitness and recovery, helping clients focus on long-term health and strength.

BY JERIAH BRUMFIELD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BROOKE SNYDER

PHILIP HILL'S career in physiotherapy, like many in the athletic world, began with his own injuries.

"I played sports and got injured, and I liked helping people," he said. "I wanted to stay a part of sports. And as I got older, I realized there were a lot more people who didn't have anywhere to turn after physical therapy (PT). There was a gray area that no one was able to fill."

After graduating from Huntland High School, Hill put aside his basketball shoes and cleats and pursued an education at Middle Tennessee State University. There, he earned a bachelor's degree in athletic training and a master's in exercise physiology. He followed up with an internship at the University of the South, diving deeper into sports performance.

After a brief detour to celebrate his son's birth, Hill returned to school, earning a physical therapy assistant degree from Volunteer State Community College. He also became a certified strength and conditioning specialist and a pain-free performance specialist.

Hill's extensive background in PT, sports medicine, and athletic training led him to work as a physical therapy assistant in a clinic and home health for a while.

About 10 years ago, Hill experienced a turning point. During her final session, a woman who had undergone a total knee replacement expressed her concerns to him.

"I really love going to the gym. That's who I've always been," she said. "I don't know what I'm supposed to do once I leave here."

Hill realized traditional therapy often left patients unsure about how to continue their post-therapy recovery or improve their physical performance. He advised her to try the gym again but knew more could be done. Hill began meeting clients in gyms after hours to help them return to physical activity safely.

"Initially, I didn't charge people for it," Hill said. "But so many people were asking about it. That's where Fit Beyond Therapy came from."



Melani McKamey trains with Philip. Six months of consistency and she has dropped 20 pounds. ▶

Building a unique niche, like Fit Beyond Therapy, was innovative but not easy. He had no idea that such a unique idea could be both daunting and necessary.

“We’re so multifaceted that the hard part is explaining exactly what we do,” Hill said. “We work with everyone — from 6-year-old athletes wanting to get faster to people recovering from past surgeries like total knee replacements.”

Inside Fit Beyond Therapy, an atmosphere of endurance and excellence inspires clients to push beyond their physical limits. Growing athletes fine-tune their agility, older adults regain balance and stability, and individuals

rediscover their strength after athletic or nonathletic injuries.

Hill’s eyes follow every stride and lift as he gauges progress, always offering a hand to guide and encourage, never settling for “good enough.” At Fit Beyond Therapy, recovery is not the end but the beginning of a lifelong journey toward sustainable strength and self-confidence.

Fit Beyond Therapy bridges the gap between PT and sustained fitness, helping clients of all ages and backgrounds regain confidence, overcome limitations, and pursue holistic health through tailored, multifaceted care. The foundation of the business is transforming training



▲ Hope Buchanan



Philip Hill >



I have an open-door policy. Once you become a client of mine, I'm there for you no matter what.

- PHILIP HILL

and recovery into a lifestyle. Hill guides his clients from the end of their PT journey to a point where they are ready to return to the gym.

Hill created a program called the “Three Pillars of Core,” which allows him to assess clients and tailor plans to their goals, whether they’re still recovering from post-surgery rehab or aiming to get stronger. The program focuses on mechanics and progression, helping clients recover and improve their overall fitness and performance.

While the Three Pillars of Core programs provide a strong foundation for recovery and fitness, Hill elevates the experience by prioritizing the quality of his relationships with clients. The titles of ath-

letic trainer, physical therapist, and sports medicine professional don't fully capture the trusted coach and friend known by many. His open-door policy proves it.

“I have an open-door policy. Once you become a client of mine, I'm there for you no matter what,” he said. “If something comes up, they can text me, and I'll bring them in the next day to assess the issue.”

This open-door policy has helped him build trust and a direct line of communication with his clients.

“They feel comfortable knowing someone cares about them past the typical 8-to-5 hours,” he explained.

Recovery often ends with PT, but for Hill, that's where the true journey

begins. By connecting rehabilitation and sustainable fitness, Hill has built a community where clients of all ages push beyond their limits with confidence. His personalized styles help clients regain physical strength and equip them with longer-lasting tools for health and wellness. Creating strong relationships and promoting a sustainable, active lifestyle is Hill's key to empowering clients to thrive well into the future. **GN**

Call (931) 224-6244 or visit www.fitbeyondtherapy.com to jump-start your wellness journey. Fit Beyond Therapy is located in the Tullahoma Plaza Shopping Center at 461 W. Lincoln St. in Tullahoma.

FUTURE *of* HEALING



A NEW COURSE

A simple conversation changed the course of Dr. Roberson's life.

BY JERIAH BRUMFIELD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BROOKE SNYDER

THE STORY behind how Dr. Cason Roberson went from aspiring to be a pro golf manager to an impactful orthodontist reveals the unexpected turns life can take — and how a single conversation can change the trajectory of someone’s future. Standing on the lush green of a golf course as a high school student, he imagined a life spent managing fairways and tee times. Golf was his passion, the sport that consumed his teenage years and heavily influenced his career ambitions. Yet, one simple conversation altered the course of his destiny.

As a teenager, Roberson worked at a golf course, immersing himself in the world he thought he wanted to be part of forever. He could almost picture himself in the future, a pro in khakis and polo, overseeing the operations, planning children’s golf camps, and playing rounds in his downtime. It seemed ideal — until one weekend, while chatting with a man working at the course, reality hit. The man, who worked there as a second job to support his family, shared a hard truth.

“He pointed out that the busiest days at the golf course were always weekends, holidays — all the times that everybody else is off. He basically said, ‘Take it from me as a dad. This is my second job.

Think about all the things I have to miss out on with my kids and my wife on the weekends because I have to be here and because this is when people play golf.”

Roberson reflected on that moment as a turning point, saying, “I wish I could remember his name, and I’d love to go back and just thank him for speaking words to me that were super important at that time — that I wasn’t really thinking about — and it totally changed where I am now.”

Suddenly, the dream of working in golf felt less appealing. But life has a funny way of leading you where you need to go. He went home, confused about what to do next. His mom later suggested he become a dentist, and

Dr. Roberson actively scans a patient’s teeth with new technology. ▶





◀ Karrie Brown, Stephanie Ellis, Dr. Roberson, Hannah Fergerson, Jenni Collins, and Ginger Ennis



Tell them we're proud of them. Tell them we love them. Tell them, either with our words or actions, that they're worthy, that it's okay to be them.

- DR. CASON ROBERSON

after careful consideration, he took her suggestion.

As Roberson began undergraduate studies, his love for science and the challenge of working with his hands progressed.

"I took a two-hour class, and for each hour, they'd have someone come and talk to you about what they did. There was an optometrist, a surgeon, and a dentist. The dentist basically talked about what he did — talked about the fact that he gets to help people and work with his hands. I started job shadowing, and it evolved from there."

From that moment, Roberson was all in. His love for people, his meticulous nature, and his desire to make a difference found their perfect outlet in

orthodontics. Now, as an established orthodontist, he transforms smiles and changes the lives of his young patients, especially those in their formative years.

One of the unique aspects of Roberson's practice is his keen understanding of how critical the middle and high school years are for children. His goal every day is to instill confidence in his patients during some of the most vulnerable years of their lives. In his practice, Roberson creates an atmosphere where being a "big kid" at heart is part of the job description. He and his patients catch up, laugh, and sometimes even share a few humorous stories, and he sends them off with a smile.

"It's like being at the school lunch table," he laughed. "You see all your friends

that aren't always in class with you. You get to cut up with them and have fun."

Known for his fun-loving persona, he once led a Continuing Education course dressed as "Uncle Rico" Dynamite — a fictional character from the famous comedy film "Napoleon Dynamite."

Roberson's playful personality and lively office atmosphere create an inviting "circus" that young children and teens can't get enough of.

"For these kids, socially, it's a really, really hard time," he explained, "My thought process is, 'We're treating these patients during probably one of the hardest times in their life. So why don't we make sure that every time we encounter them, it's a positive experience? Tell them we're proud of them. Tell



[attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder] issues, increased fatigue, poor focus in school, and bed wetting at a later stage in adolescence. All these things can develop from not breathing well.”

Roberson remembered one patient in particular — a young boy who struggled to breathe through his nose. During a routine exam, Roberson noticed that the boy’s tongue wasn’t sitting properly, which was affecting the growth of his palate. Further investigation revealed enlarged adenoids obstructing his airway, which led to a referral to an ear, nose, and throat doctor.

“It could change his ability to get REM sleep and his ability to focus in

school. There are a lot of things that it could help with, because he’s no longer fighting that decreased oxygen state at night or during the day.”

Roberson’s journey to becoming an orthodontist may have started on a golf course, but his actions have reached far beyond the fairway. Through his work, he’s enhancing both the smiles and futures of the children in his care, helping them breathe easier, stand taller, and face the world with confidence. His story is a powerful reminder that, sometimes, the dreams we start with aren’t the ones we’re meant to follow. But the ones we end up pursuing can be far more fulfilling than we ever imagined. **GN**

them we love them. Tell them, either with our words or actions, that they’re worthy, that it’s okay to be them.”

As Roberson continues to build connections and boost the confidence of his young patients, he’s creating an environment where every child leaves feeling a little taller and a lot happier.

But aside from his daily work in the office, Roberson is a vocal advocate for the growing focus on airway health in young patients. He explained that the dental community is becoming more aware of the influence that airway issues, like obstructive sleep apnea, play in children’s development. When a child can’t breathe properly, it impacts more than just their oral health — it can affect their growth, their brain development, and their ability to focus in school.

“The oxygen component of that development is critical,” he said. “When the sleep physician talks about the AHI or apnea-hypopnea index, which is how many times during the night you stop breathing, even one event with a child is considered significant because of the role that that plays in their development. There have been studies that talk about increased



▲ Woody, Tullis, Cason, Birdie, Shelley, Payne, and Davis Roberson



EMBRACING HUMILITY & HUMANITY

Dr. Stephen Bills believes that true patient care comes from deeply understanding patients' stories.

BY JERIAH BRUMFIELD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
BROOKE SNYDER

WHAT DOES it mean to practice medicine in a world increasingly reliant on technology? Dr. Stephen Bills, an internal medicine physician, offers a refreshing perspective. He prides himself on building meaningful patient relationships and taking the time to truly understand their families' histories and backgrounds. In doing so, he challenges the status quo and reminds us of the timeless principles that have always guided the medical field.

As a trusted physician in Tullahoma, Bills exudes a refreshing mixture of humility and openness. He navigates its intricacies and limitations with an informed perspective. In a seemingly technology-centric world, Bills stands firmly by traditional methods that prioritize genuine relationships.

Interestingly, Bills' path to medicine wasn't always clear-cut. In his early years, he had entirely different aspirations.

"When I went to college, I thought that becoming a doctor would be nice, but I set my sights on becoming a forest ranger or pursuing a career in biology because I really enjoyed the subject," he shared.

Bills attended Rhodes College, a liberal arts institution that allowed him to excel in any field he chose. During his freshman year, he began to recognize his academic potential and consistently earned good grades. But he wasn't the only one who noticed. One of his history professors saw a bright future ahead of him and encouraged him to consider the field of medicine.

"He counseled me and told me that I should set my sights on being a physician because he felt like I had the character and intellect to proceed. I think he was a real inspiration to me."

Encouraged by his professor's confidence in him, Bills began to dream

bigger. However, more than just academics influenced his return to Middle Tennessee to study medicine.

"Several factors drove us to reside in Tullahoma. I was accepted to Vanderbilt Medical School in the heart of Middle Tennessee. My high school sweetheart, also a Tullahoma high school graduate, and I were married in 1975. We always felt Tullahoma was our home, and we wanted to raise our family there. Finally, we perceived, and the Harton Hospital administration agreed that there was a need for us in Tullahoma."

Ultimately, with opportunity and dedication to his studies, a legacy of patient care in internal medicine began to unfold.

"I believe I had opportunities that no one else in my family had enjoyed," he reflected.

The drive and discipline he learned from his parents, coaches, and teachers spawned a successful medical career.

From Bills' perspective, every patient encounter is an opportunity to uniquely know and connect with their concerns. In his experience, diagnoses often reveal themselves more through patient observations, appropriate questions, and a hands-on physical evaluation.

He encourages younger physicians and nurse practitioners to rely more on time-tested patient interviews and examinations to determine possible diagnoses that may explain a patient's symptoms.

"Ninety percent of the time, a diagnosis comes from a thoughtful history and hands-on physical exam. Expensive and often unnecessary testing should be done primarily to confirm your thoughts. Referrals are made when specialty treatment is required or diagnosis is unclear.

"The fact remains, most of the time, the patient will communicate what is wrong with them."



Though he values tradition wholeheartedly, Bills recognizes the value of an electronic record.

“Electronic record systems prompt your memory, make you aware of other physician inputs, draw attention to medication interactions, and allow increased cost recoupment. Negative consequences occur when more time is spent interacting with the electronic record than with the patient,” Bills asserted.

“A recorded history and physical of the past should never trump information and physical facts of the present,” Bills cautioned.

By getting to know patients on a personal level, he feels he can offer comprehensive solutions and show them that he isn't just here to diagnose illnesses but is thoroughly invested in their physical and spiritual well-being.

With capable staff to assist him in navigating the intricacies of electronic systems that his workplace demands, Bills has more time to primarily focus on helping his patients live healthier lives.

Bills treats many adult patients, many of whom are older, some surpassing a century in age. Caring for these individuals has helped him better understand the human body's uniqueness and the role of genetics and lifestyle in leading long and sustainable lives. He vividly recalled a patient who lived to 106, noting that although genes play a role in aging, each patient's journey is unique.

“My practice is very much a sharing of minds and a sharing of experiences and feelings, and these older patients are very dear to me.”

Though Bills acknowledged the beauty of living a long, fulfilling life, he believes there is no specific cheat code for longevity.

“I think it's great when you can live that long, and some of it is due to the fact that they took really good care of themselves,” he explained.

“But not everyone who takes care of himself lives a long life. Health is a gift, and life can end due to unforeseen events at any time. And yet, we all live in hope that our lives have meaning. It is our duty to constantly remind our patients of the source of that hope and meaning.”

Bills' outlook on patient-centered care comes from his earnest desire to help his patients lead healthier, happier lives. While technology may advance extremely fast, he believes in returning to the fundamentals of patient care.

In his view, the future of health care should strike a balance, embracing technology without sacrificing the irreplaceable value of a doctor's touch, intuition, and genuine care for the person.

Aside from building relationships and understanding patients, Bills believes another component of basic medical care is humility.

“If you practice medicine long enough, despite your best efforts, you will be humbled. Mistakes will be made, and even knowledge of disease will change. You become more thankful for the right decisions you were able to make, and you become more grateful for the kind, understanding patients who recognized you were doing your best, even when that wasn't enough.”

Through the stories he's gathered over the years, Bills has learned that true healing comes from humility, understanding, and, above all, a genuine love and concern for humanity. This is his belief — and one that he hopes will continue long after his own time in medicine comes to an end. **GN**

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A Christmas Market - Dec. 14



Photography by Brooke Snyder

The Christmas Market took place at the Tims Ford Event Center on Dec. 14, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Vendors were set up with homemade gifts and direct sale items. Free Christmas crafts and hourly raffle drawings made this event much more special.



1. Kirsten Johnson 2. Felicia Barnett, Hope Jones, and Freya Ashby 3. Audrina Colvin
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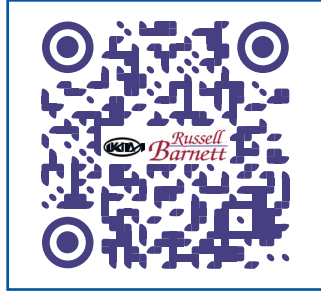


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