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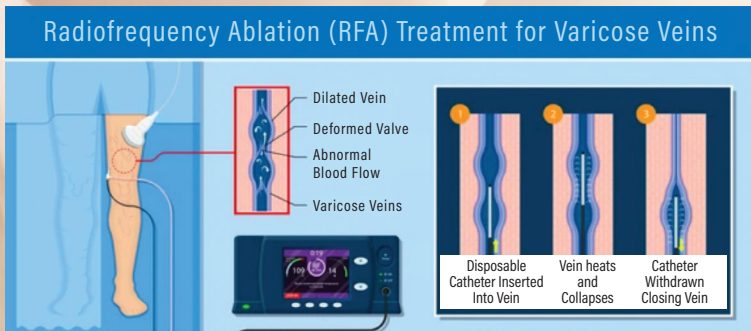
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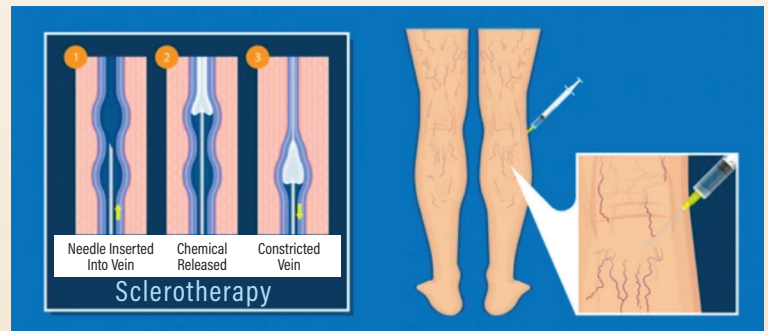
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

## Love is in the air

Good News celebrates the love that strengthens communities, brightens hearts, and makes life more beautiful.

**Y**OU KNOW that first breath of spring? The way the warmer air gives you goosebumps — the air is soft, full of promise, carrying hints of something new. After months of cold, we step outside, and for the first time, the sun lingers a little longer, warming our hands, our faces, our hearts. Maybe it's still daylight when we get home from work. Love is a lot like that. It's the warmth that lingers after the winter. The breath that fills our lungs when we didn't even realize we were holding them.

Love exists in big acts with large sums of money, sure. But more often, it's in the small acts — the moments we miss that swirl through the air like dandelion seeds, taking root in ways we may never fully see. It's checking in on a friend, even when they insist they're fine. It's the extra few seconds we hold the door open, the way

we buy the person behind us a coffee in the morning. It's letting go of old grudges, choosing forgiveness even when it would be easier to stay cold.

The beautiful thing about love is that it multiplies. The more we put out into the air, the more it spreads, catching in the wind, drifting far beyond where we first let it go. Love is not just an action or money, either — it's a kind of magic that moves everything it touches in the right direction.

This issue of Good News is dedicated to that love. Not just romantic love but the kind that makes communities stronger, hearts lighter, and life a little more beautiful. Love rooted in appreciation, in gratefulness, in the quiet choices we make every day to make the world a little warmer.

So breathe it in. And then send it back out into the air. **GN**

**Wesley Bryant,**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In the last issue, we incorrectly spelled Tyson McClanahan's name as Tyson McLanahan on pages 40 - 43. We regret the mistake and appreciate the chance to correct it.

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# A weekly night of service

**S**OME FAMILIES have a weekly game night, a weekly movie night, or a weekly date night. Lebanon knows the Brownlees, however, for their weekly night of service. Every Tuesday, Linda and TJ Brownlee prepare a meal in their home, plate it, and take it out into the community for people without homes and in need.

Mission 13, as it's called, is a tradition the family has been practicing for six years, but the family has been serving the community for much longer. They've been involved with organizations like ShowerUp in Nashville and Compassionate Hands, among others, all because of a few key incidents. The first was an unexpected healing over a year's time.

"In 2012, I was diagnosed with terminal cancer," Linda said. "They told me I had six months to live, and I was healed at that time. So from then on out, our goal [was] to basically do whatever God wanted us to do."

TJ and Linda Brownlee make dinner for their whole family — even those without homes.

**By Sara Hook // Photos by submitted by Linda Brownlee**

Their efforts became focused on community members without homes when, one day after church, TJ had his own unexpected encounter. The family had gone to Taco Bell for lunch, and TJ made eye contact with a man standing outside the building. He walked by, and when he went back out to the car for something, the pair made eye contact again — and a third time on his way back inside.

"I told my wife, 'I'm going to go ask him if he wants something to eat.' So when I went outside, he was gone," TJ said. "I told Linda when I came back in that that won't ever happen again."

Afterward, TJ said it felt like he had denied Jesus three times. From then on, they resolved to help anyone they saw who was in need. Their practice of feeding people without homes began





Left top: Linda prays with a woman on the street.  
Left bottom: Meals are prepped and ready to be distributed.  
Top right: Linda and TJ

in 2019 when Compassionate Hands closed for the spring. The Brownlees recognized a need and resolved to fill it, taking time to make meals and sit and talk with the people they serve. It was a family thing, both in the food they made and the people who participated. When their daughter and her husband and kids visited, they took part, and occasionally, the Brownlees brought other family members along.

“We make a meal like we would want to eat,” Linda said. “We just... we see them, and I think that’s the important part — that we see them.”

In 2020, their weekly practice found a name. One Tuesday, the Brownlees were plating barbecue sandwiches with their nieces when they noticed they had an extra plate and bun.

“I said, ‘That means there’s somebody out there that really needs this plate that we didn’t even account for,’” Linda said. “The kids were laughing, saying ‘Y’all are crazy.’”

Four plates were left at the end of the night, so the Brownlees took them to some of the kids living in hotels — another ministry of theirs. There were three kids that they spent time with weekly, and Linda assumed that the final person was one they would find on the way home. That was until she turned around and saw a fourth little boy carrying a ball and a Solo cup.

“I said, ‘Hey buddy, you want a plate too?’” Linda said. “He said, ‘Yes, ma’am.’ He was so kind.”

Linda said the boy had a disability, so she opened his plate for him.





"We're not sure what's next for us, but we're ready for whatever. That is — whatever God tells us to do next."

-Linda Brownlee

"He goes and sits down, and I turn around, and I see my girls in the car. They said, 'That's number 13,'" Linda said. "He held his cup up and said, 'Would you fill my cup?' And I'm telling you, I sobbed. We all sobbed, and I was like, 'Buddy, you don't know whose cup you just filled.'"

Since that day, the Brownlees have called their work Mission 13 because there is always someone they feel they are supposed to go out and visit, someone they could not have accounted for.

For years, Mission 13 stayed the same. Every Tuesday, the family made a meal as if they were feeding their own family, plated it, and took it out in the community. They would donate items when they had them and took gas cards for people who were spending nights in their cars. Less than a year ago, their work began to find support. Businesses and community members will donate their extra food, churches will send them potluck leftovers, and any need they find is answered immediately.

"We actually had to go buy another freezer to be able to keep a lot of our stuff," Linda said. "In the past six or eight months, I don't think we've had to fund anything except for containers. But before, we just made a meal like we were going to feed our family."

The generosity hasn't stopped with food. Linda said they get sleeping bags and blankets left on their doorstep, and people always call to see if they need more.

"It's just from people in our community wanting to help," Linda said. "If I put it out there and say, 'We need this,' It's pretty much there within two or three days."

It isn't a nonprofit. It's just a family doing what they can to help the community. It's a goal that everyone can be inspired by.

"We are content doing what we're doing," Linda said. "We're not sure what's next for us, but we're ready for whatever. That is — whatever God tells us to do next." **GN**



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*Tim Leeper and  
his wife, Suanne*



# Turning tragedy into a better world

Tim Leeper advocates for prison reform.

By Richard J. Klin  
Photography by Larry McCormack

---

**T**im Leeper's son, Kylan, was a funny, mischievous child who led a typical kid's life — school, church, Little League. When he started exhibiting behavioral issues, his parents obtained counseling for their son. But diligent parenting is not a cure-all. In a moment of horrible judgment, Kylan committed a crime (arson) and was incarcerated at Trousdale Turner Correctional Center, a private prison run by CoreCivic. Five months later, he was dead, the victim of an accidental overdose — a

pill secretly laced with fentanyl. His case is hardly an isolated one. Fentanyl deaths in prison are rising at an alarming rate. In Tennessee, drug-related deaths in prisons surged from six in 2019 to 49 in 2021, with nearly all (45) attributed to fentanyl, according to WPLN News.

Kylan's father, Tim Leeper, has turned this tragedy into a passionate advocacy for prison reform. Prisons, Leeper contended, are a necessary part of society. Nor is he excusing Kylan's transgressions.

"There is," he stated, "a better way to do what we're doing, which is to take inmates and cage them. We don't give them real rehabilitative opportunities. There are no tenets of dignity at all — the way that you're talked to, the way that you're treated."

Some inmates throughout America's prisons have claimed that they feel caged and brutalized, but prison is supposed to rehabilitate people back into society. The situation can be all the more dire in private prisons, which



# “I just want to make people aware.”

- Tim Leeper

in Tennessee can be chronically understaffed and have minimal oversight. Tim felt that Kylan was “basically put into a lion’s den.” Access to mental health and substance abuse resources may be limited for inmates. There are gangs. In essence, Tim believed we are taking “people who are in the worst shape of their lives, and it’s the worst time of their life, and you put them in a big mixing pot. It’s like a school for gladiators.”

Kylan did his best to keep in shape during his incarceration, working out diligently. Tim sent him money so he could purchase healthier fare from the commissary rather than rely on prison food. Kylan also kept in constant contact with his mother and father — behaviors not typically associated with excessive substance use. Kylan was not in active addiction, but as Tim pointed out, one does not have to misuse substances to die of an overdose.

“You take one pill that you think is a Xanax and has something else in it, and then you’re gone.”

Tim is creating Kylan’s Light, an advocacy outreach for pris-

on reform. He and others have raised serious public allegations about CoreCivic. If one’s child, spouse, or family member is sent to prison, they rightfully have a reasonable expectation of guaranteed safety and security, which is not always the case.

One main thrust of Kylan’s Light will be to change the public perception of what an inmate looks like. An inmate could be a neighbor, a friend’s son, a cousin — someone who made a horrible mistake and finds themselves in prison. And often, as in the case of Kylan Leeper, incarceration becomes a de facto death sentence.

Tim makes the case for re-vamping the intake process. He believes prisons need behavioral and clinical staff who can ascertain the various reasons that led to a person’s incarceration. That is the time and place to examine these destructive patterns, “So you can be a different version of yourself when you get out. If you want to be a better father, or if you want to be a better family member, or a better friend to people around you,

and you’re tired of this behavioral pattern that you’ve engaged in and you want to change it — this is where you do that.”

That’s the true nature of rehabilitation. And, looking at the scope of prison policy and the rise of private prisons, “We’re in a bad position right now.”

Tim Leeper’s account is both matter-of-fact and impassioned. On the day of Kylan’s funeral, he put his hands on his son’s casket and said, “I’ll do everything I can within my power” to advocate for prison reform.

When Kylan died, Tim got the strong feeling that his son was speaking to him: “Dad, I am OK right now. However, there are a lot of people in prison who are not OK. They don’t have anybody to talk for them.”

There are lots of “Kylans” out there who could — with help and assistance — turn their lives around. It is Kylan’s insistent voice that has motivated Tim to keep on advocating.

“I just want,” he concluded, “to make people aware.” **GN**



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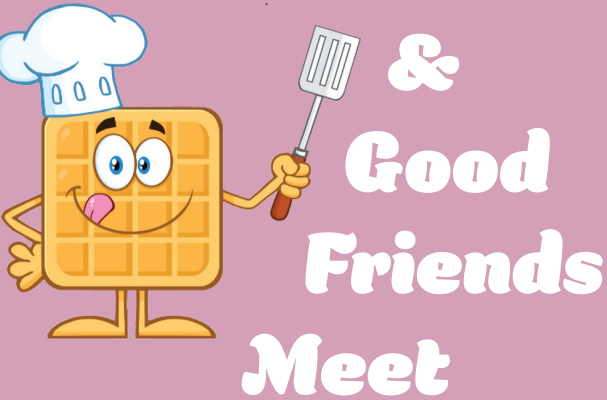


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# A LEGACY OF LOVE

By Haley Potter // Photography by Robin Holcomb

## Mary and Harry Harris' enduring impact on Lebanon

**S**ITTING SIDE by side on a comfy couch in the cozy living room of their Lebanon home, Mary and Harry Harris were surrounded by a lifetime of memories — old magazine articles, newspaper clippings, awards, and accolades carefully laid out as if to tell the story of their remarkable journey. Their love story, spanning an incredible 68 years, is deeply intertwined with their commitment to family, community, and preserving history.



Mary and Harry Harris' >  
wedding photo



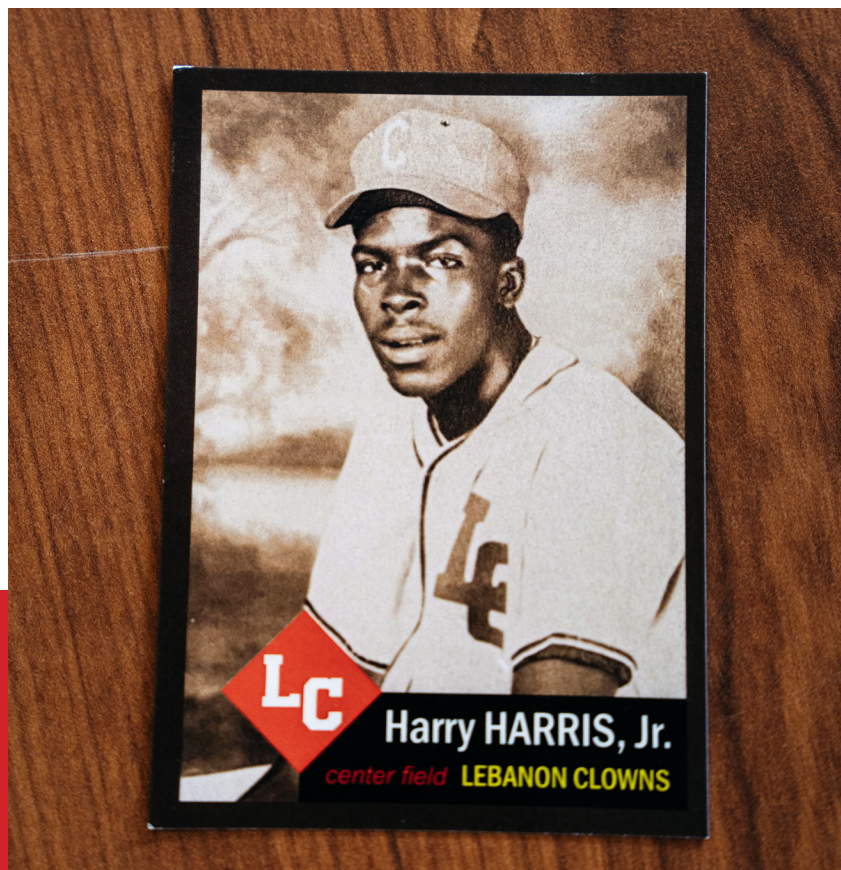




This is a love story that has stood the test of time. “We met in the first grade,” Mary recalled with a warm smile. “But it wasn’t until the third or fourth grade that it became love.” High school brought different friends and paths, but by their senior year, they reunited, setting the stage for a lifetime together. “We’ve had good days and bad days,” Mary admitted. “But respect and just trying to help each other has been our secret.”

Mary and Harry both grew up in Lebanon, where community values shaped their lives. “We didn’t have much growing up,” Mary said. “We were poor, but we didn’t know it. We always treated people the way we wanted to be treated, and that’s a philosophy we’ve carried with us.”

“We met in the first grade, but it wasn’t until the third or fourth grade that it became love.” - MARY HARRIS



▲ Harry Harris' baseball card, celebrating his legacy with the Lebanon Clowns



▲ Mary and Harry Harris, partners in life for over 68 years

Harry, a Wilson County High School athlete, played in the Negro Baseball League for the Lebanon Clowns. He proudly owns a baseball card commemorating his time on the team and remains the only living member. “I’ll have to give you a signed card before you leave,” Harry offered with a chuckle. A cherished team photo sits atop a piece of furniture in their home, symbolizing an era and Harry’s contribution to sports history.

In addition to his athletic achievements, Harry is an Army veteran and a dedicated family man. While he worked multiple jobs to support their family, Mary stayed home to raise their three children and worked as a cosmetologist. “We built this house with a beauty shop in the back,” Mary said. “That way, I could work and still be there for the kids.”

Their shared commitment to their community is perhaps best exemplified by their work with Pickett Chapel, the only



church they've ever known. "This church is the foundation of our lives," Mary explained. "It was sold to freed slaves in 1866, and it holds so much significance for us and the community." Mary, the church historian, and Harry have worked tirelessly for the last 20 years to renovate the chapel, which will eventually house the Roy Bailey Museum and History Center. "When we published our history book, 'In Their Own Voices,' in 1999, we made a commitment to purchase and restore Pickett Chapel," Mary said. "We're working hard to see it finished so the community can enjoy it."

Their activism extends back to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, a time when Pickett Chapel opened its doors to activists. "We've always believed in bringing people together," Mary said. "Not just Black people, but all people, working in harmony and striving for success."

In addition to their work with the chapel, the Harrises have been instrumental in preserving the history of African Americans in Wilson County. As members of the Wilson County Black History Committee, they co-authored the 300-page book "In Their Own Voices," which documents the experiences of African Americans in the area. "We started the book in 1994 and published it five years later," Mary said. "It was a labor of love, and we're proud of what we accomplished."

Their efforts have not gone unnoticed. Recently, the Harrises were surprised with an award recognizing their lifetime achievements. "It was such a beautiful affair," Mary said. "We're grateful to the chamber of commerce for honoring us in this way."

Despite their many accolades, Mary and Harry remain humble. "I don't consider myself a role model," Mary said when asked how it feels to be such a positive role model in the community. "I just hope I've done some positive things so that young people can emulate me."

Their story is one of love — for each other, their family, and their community. As they continue their work on Pickett Chapel, they look forward to seeing their vision



▲ Mary and Harry Harris stand proudly outside Pickett Chapel, a historic church in Lebanon.

realized. "We want this chapel to be a place for everyone," Mary said. "A place where history is preserved, and the community can come together."

After 68 years of marriage, countless community projects, and a lifetime of memories, Mary and Harry Harris are shining examples of the spirit of dedication and love. Their legacy will undoubtedly inspire generations to come. **GN**





# Sammy B's BRINGS A BIT OF HISTORY TO THE TABLE.



**I**F YOU are looking for a bit of history while dining, Sammy B's is the place to go. It is located in a historic building that was once part of the Castle Heights Military Academy in Lebanon. The school operated from 1902 until 1986. My husband loves the rich history and tells me stories about seeing the students in their uniforms marching when he was a kid.

The building's architecture adds a certain charm to the experience. When you walk into the restaurant, the decor celebrates its legacy. The walls are lined with photos and memorabilia from the school and other historic Lebanon sites.

Sammy B's is an inviting place for lunch on a nice winter day. We were seated promptly and greeted by Misty. We ordered tea and Coke Zero. Misty was warm and attentive, which made our experience enjoyable.

The food at Sammy B's is just as impressive as its history. Let's start with the salad bar. It was definitely a highlight of the meal, offering a wide array of fresh and delicious meats, fruits, and veggies that would satisfy any salad lover.

My choice, the "Beef Str-UGA-noff," was rich and creamy, with a cheesy onion sauce that was unlike any other that I've tasted. The beef tenderloins were cooked to perfection. My husband was very pleased with "Chicken on the Row." It was beautifully chargrilled, juicy, and flavorful. The mozzarella-filled shells were a hit; I mean, you can't go wrong with cheese. The sauce had an unexpected sweetness, which added to the flavor.

Sammy B's combines delicious food, excellent service, and a historic ambiance in a way that few restaurants can. Whether you're a history buff or just someone looking for a memorable meal, this spot is a must-visit. The rich flavors, welcoming atmosphere, and storied past make it more than just a meal — it's an experience. If you're in Lebanon, don't miss the chance to visit Sammy B's and enjoy all it has to offer. **GN**

## GOOD NEWS IS COMING TO DINNER!

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

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# A MECHANIC'S MINISTRY OF LOVE

A couple's shared love for mechanics transforms into a life of service.



By Gabriel Grant Huff  
Photography by Robin Holcomb

**L**IFE FORCED Lacie to become an independent woman. The disappearance of a mother left Lacie to help her stepdad care for three sisters at a young age. With a biological father out of the picture following a tragic divorce during her infant years, her stepfather became the four girls' only support out in the country in South Carolina, where Lacie learned how to grow her own food, shoot a gun, and, most importantly, repair cars. Such a life experience served as the backdrop for the teen to help women decades later, turning a life of pain into a car clinic of love in Wilson County.

The Middle Tennessee Missions Market Single Moms and Widows Car Clinic now runs at Fairview Church in Lebanon, where dozens of women get their automobiles repaired once a year. Some

come poor, others carry broken hearts, and even more arrive burdened.

Lacie understood some of their hurts.

## MATURING FAST

Lacie spent much of her childhood in Columbia, South Carolina, with her identical twin sister, two younger sisters, her mother, and stepdad, whom she called Daddy. From the outside, everything appeared normal.

Until one day, her mother gave 10-year-old Lacie a goodbye note, instructing her to pass the message along to her daddy.

He immediately became distraught upon reading the note and took all four girls in their car to look for their mother, but the search turned out fruitless as the family returned home that night in devastated silence.



LOVE  
IS IN THE  
AIR



RICKY AND LACIE ALDRET



“

Being a female that had knowledge of the repairs, it was such a key role for me to help with the car clinic.

- Lacie Aldret

During those long hours in the house, Daddy called on Lacie.

“He just kind of held me, and we just cried, and he told me I was going to be taking care of my sisters in the morning to get them ready for school, and that’s kind of how life went on,” Lacie recalled.

Lacie matured fast, helping her dad care for her sisters, clean the house, and tend to the garden. Just as importantly, Daddy worked on many things, including an old Jeep, and allowed Lacie to assist, giving her a mechanic’s foundation.

Years passed, leading to 14-year-old Lacie moving in with her mother. But Lacie was soon kicked out, forcing her to bounce from place to place until she

rented her own apartment at 17. At 18, she secured her high school diploma.

Shortly after, Ricky Aldret swerved into the picture.

Ricky was born in San Diego and grew up in Charleston, South Carolina after his dad retired from the Navy. He started fixing cars at 16. Due to owning many cars that broke down over the years, Ricky gained a lot of practice. At 17, he began working at Advance Auto Parts, where he met 19-year-old Lacie, who served as his supervisor. They became friends, but Ricky knew she was the one for him.

He later quit after she wrote him up for missing work without calling.

“He asked me out on a date now that we were no longer working



▲ Lacie and Ricky Aldret run Saddle Up Auto and Diesel, using their skills to serve their community.





▲ Ricky makes repairs on a vehicle.

together. I was pretty independent and knew what I wanted in life, but God had other plans.”

Dating turned into marriage in 2000, and love gave birth to eight children in 15 years. Many years later, they started their own repair business in Carthage, Tennessee: Saddle Up Auto and Diesel.

### CARING FOR SINGLE MOTHERS AND WIDOWS

Lacie said God moved the family to Lebanon in 2012, leading to them joining the Fairview Church two years later. In 2015, Ricky and Lacie’s Bible class group created an annual Middle Tennessee Missions Market to offer a low-cost community event during the fourth weekend of September and raise funds for missions. The market features items that are handcrafted, vintage, repurposed, and more, provided by artisans and small



▲ What started as a friendship at an auto parts store became a lifelong partnership.

businesses. As the event grew, church members decided to add the car clinic in 2019.

Ricky wanted to use his skills to serve, and Lacie knew people struggled to afford car repairs. Taking the command in James 1:27 as an inspiration and their joint love for mechanics, they started the Middle Tennessee Missions Market Single Moms and Widows Car Clinic, with Lacie serving as the clinic’s director.

Women’s vehicles are serviced free of charge, with meals, crafts, and balloons provided for children. Partnerships with local organizations and nearly 100 volunteers have helped expand the clinic, which now accomo-

dates up to 50 vehicles during the one-day event. Despite this capacity, some attendees typically end up on a waitlist. April 26, 2025, will serve as the clinic’s seventh anniversary.

“Being a female that had knowledge of the repairs, it was such a key role for me to help with the car clinic,” Lacie said. “The many learning opportunities God provided me in understanding mechanics since I was a teenager helped me bridge the gap between the mechanics and the single moms and ladies.”

Women can sign up for the annual car clinic events on the Mission Market’s or Fairview Church’s Facebook page. **GN**



# MEMORIES, MASTERPIECES, AND MELODIES

Local couple shares  
passion for pianos

By Amanda E. West  
Photography by Robin Holcomb

**M**ATTHEW AND Alexandra Walworth's journey into opening their own piano store began with a single, battered instrument that needed tons of work. Today, their passion for music has transformed into A.M.O. Pianos, a community hub where their love for music, each other, and true craftsmanship come alive. They specialize in the restoration and maintenance of pianos and provide high-quality instruments for musicians of all ages and skill levels. Their dedication and belief in the universal power of music have made their shop a beloved fixture in Lebanon, where they welcome everyone to experience the joy of playing and listening to well-tuned, beautifully restored pianos.

"We constantly hear from others, 'We could never work together!' And it always makes me a little sad to hear other couples say that about each other,"

Alexandra reflected on their close partnership. "I've been best friends with Matthew's sister, Mary, since middle school, but I didn't meet him until almost two years after I graduated high school. One day, she invited me to hang out with her and her brother. We instantly fell for each other, and we've been hanging out ever since. We've always known that we were going to open our own business. We just thought it was going to be a restaurant."

They married in 2008 and proudly sing the song "Just the Two of Us" by Grover Washington Jr., to describe themselves, but could never forget to mention their two cats, Harley and Not Sure. In fact, A.M.O. is short for "Alexandra's and Matthew's" Organs & Pianos.

"I play flute and wanted to learn to play piano, so about 10 years ago, we found our first family piano at home, and it needed a lot of work. Matthew inher-



LOVE  
IS IN THE  
AIR



MATTHEW AND ALEXANDRA WALWORTH





▲ Alexandra and Matthew play the piano together.

“

Music is truly the universal way of expressing ourselves and communicating with others. It's deeply ingrained in human history across every civilization and culture.

- Alexandra Walworth

ited his dad's engineering mindset, which with his woodworking and cabinet-making background, we were able to navigate through the world of pianos — especially after joining the Piano Technicians Guild, which is an amazing organization of colleagues and friends. We've both been members for seven years now. The Nashville chapter meets monthly, so we stay up to date with all the current important piano news and techniques available.”

Music is a passion that runs deep for them both. When asked about his favorite composer, Matthew responded, “This is a super hard question. It's probably Claude Debussy, but it's hard to choose only one. His compositions are just so amazing, and I can't get enough of them!”

Recently, the Walworths moved A.M.O. Pianos to their forever home on the square, making a long-held dream come true.

“We had noticed that one particular storefront had been boarded up for months. Matthew decided to walk into every business to see if anyone had contact information for the building owners. Of course, no one had it until we walked into the last store, which was our future neighbors, Jack's Guitartheology. Our new location is much more convenient for people to find us and enjoy the pianos we have to offer. We welcome all ages and skill levels to come and bang on our pianos as much as your heart desires.”

Both Alexandra and Matthew believe in the power of music to draw people together.

“Music is truly the universal way of expressing ourselves and communicating with others. It's deeply ingrained in human history across every civilization and culture,” said Alexandra.





When she was in high school, she dreamed of being the band director at Lebanon High School.

“Music has always had a major effect on my life, especially as a teen, and I wanted to share the positive impacts with our future generations. Life doesn’t always go as planned, but I found that I have achieved that goal with our piano shop. I’ve gotten to see toddlers’ eyes light up when banging around on a piano or the smile on a retirees’ faces when they pluck out a simple song they haven’t played since they were a kid.”

Matthew added, “I believe music is important for so many reasons, but above all, it’s really just a whole lot of fun for hours on end, whether you are playing an instrument or just listening. Also, true acoustic music is never exactly the same twice, which never gets old and was the original and only way to express music. For the longest time, it was impossible to hear a piece of music without playing it yourself or listening to someone else playing it. The idea of hearing music without personal effort is still a new idea that I think is often taken for granted.”

A.M.O. Pianos is more than a business. It’s a community asset.

“We believe properly serviced instruments shouldn’t be so hard to find, which helps us with our mission to help make pianos available for anyone and everyone. Every piano is a unique situation and always keeps us on our toes,” said Matthew.

“The people we get to meet are incredible,” said Alexandra. “We have people from not just Middle

Tennessee but from all over the world walk through our doors, and they all have stories to tell. Oftentimes, it’s about a piano or about something going on in their lives.”

Reflecting on their journey, the Walworths see their move to downtown Lebanon as pivotal. As they look forward to each new day, they remain excited about the next adventure.

“Nothing can make life more perfect than doing what you’re passionate about with the person you love the most,” said Alexandra. **GN**

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



▲ Alexandra and Matthew with the Mason & Hamlin grand piano built in 1931 — it was purchased that year as a wedding gift from a groom to his bride. It stayed in the same family until they purchased it in 2017.



▲ A beautifully restored piano at A.M.O. Pianos, where Matthew and Alexandra Walworth bring history and craftsmanship to life.



# LIGHTING UP LEBANON



Children of all abilities grow and learn together at SHINE Inclusionary Preschool.

By Amanda E. West  
Photography by Robin Holcomb

“**B**RYSON IS being turned down because of his special needs again? I don’t understand why he can’t attend preschool and learn alongside everyone else.” The young mother squeezed her husband’s hand, and the hearts of Nickye Hamlet and Nicole Davis ached. “I’m out of options,” the woman sobbed. “This program was our last hope.”

Davis holds a master’s degree in special education from the University of Tennessee, coupled with 15 years of teaching experience in a public school. Hamlet has 40 years of teaching experience and earned a bachelor’s degree from Middle Tennessee State University in speech pathology and special education, along with a master’s degree in special education from Vanderbilt. She also serves as an adjunct professor at Cumberland University.

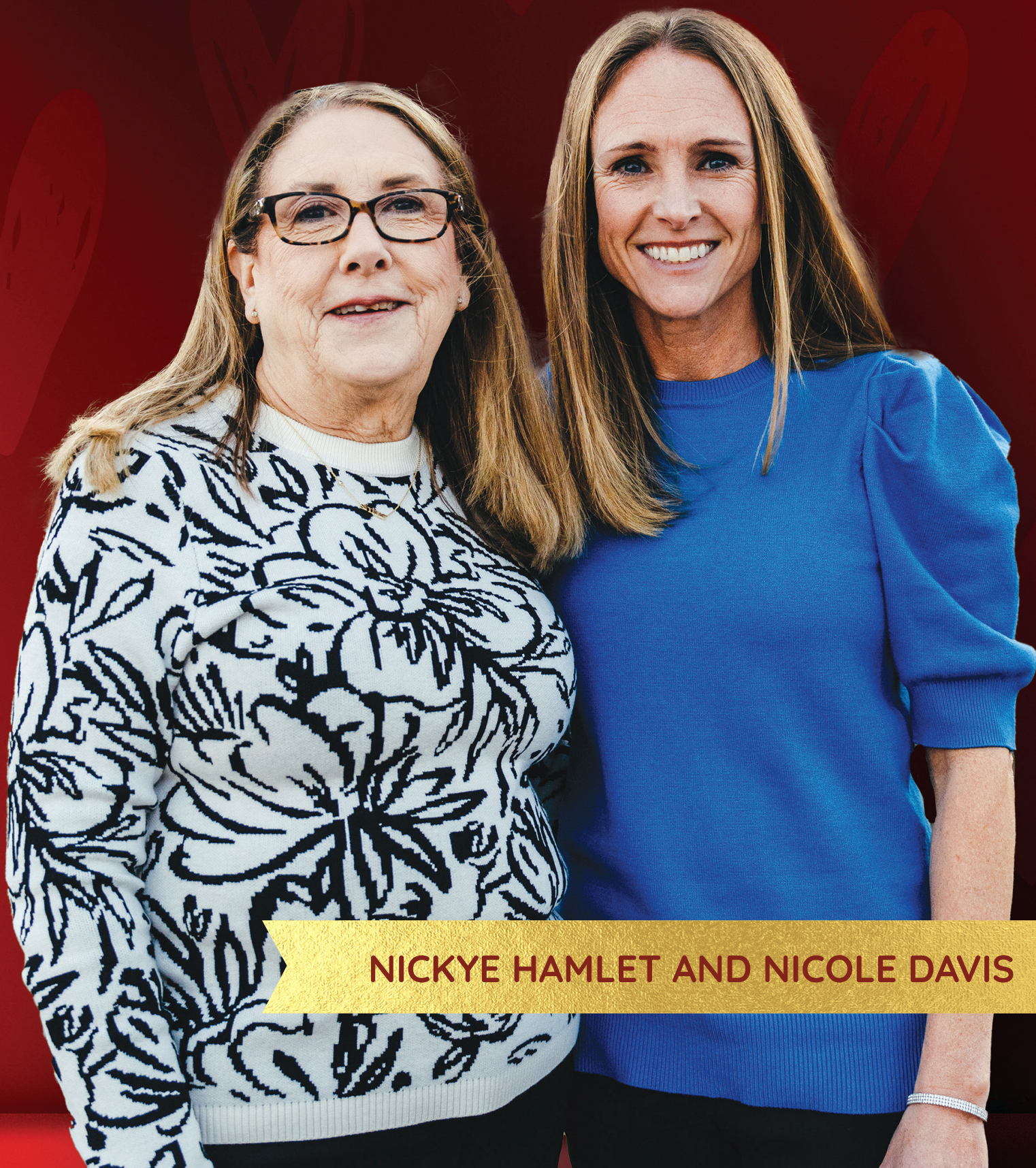
For two years, the two had watched as this same scenario played out in front of them multiple times, but this time, everything would change.

“We sat in meetings with parents who wanted their child to have access to community preschools with their friends from church or from the community. Parents also wanted to work, but because of their child’s therapies or only half-day services offered in the school system, it was difficult for them to find a job that would work around their unique schedules. We would leave these meetings feeling like we needed to do something,” recalled Hamlet and Davis.

After they left the meeting that day and walked solemnly down the hallway, they reached a decision that would change their lives and that of hundreds of children.



LOVE  
IS IN THE  
AIR



NICKYE HAMLET AND NICOLE DAVIS





◀ Nickye Hamlet engages with young learners at SHINE Preschool, where children of all abilities learn and grow together in an inclusive environment.



**When those parents broke down in that meeting, it was our tap on the shoulder from God. We decided to step out on faith and opened SHINE Preschool in 2018.**

**- Nickye Hamlet**

“When those parents broke down in that meeting, it was our tap on the shoulder from God. We decided to step out on faith and open SHINE Preschool in 2018. We currently have 30 children who are between the ages of 3 and 5. We are inclusionary and enroll children of all abilities. We show every child God’s love,” said Hamlet.

Davis said, “We focus on everyone’s strengths rather than their weaknesses. Our goal is for children to leave SHINE and go to school and shine their light by being kind and accepting of everyone.”

Although leaving their secure jobs with the public school system and starting SHINE was a giant leap of faith, the two didn’t stop there. They continue to use their experience to teach parents how to navigate the programs that are available in the public schools so that students who graduate from SHINE will continue to thrive.

“We assist parents of students with special needs as they transition

from preschool to kindergarten,” said Hamlet. “We walk them through what to expect in the evaluation process and explain how services are provided by their school district. In the past, we have also worked with Sunday school teachers, Mother’s Day Out programs, and private schools to help them form strategies as they work with children who have developmental delays.”

SHINE Preschool now has three certified teachers who have a combined 86 years of experience, and in 2019, 2022, and 2024, they were nominated as finalists for the Main Street Award for Best Preschool/Day Care.

Davis said, “Preschool is an amazing tie in the children’s lives because, for some it will be their first time away from parents. We have an awesome opportunity to shape young children’s lives every day in a positive way. No day in preschool is the same, and that’s what makes it fun for us and the kids. We have a very important responsibility to help parents prepare their child for the educational experience. We want them to be excited about learning and to become lifelong learners.”

“I enjoy engaging with the children every day in different activities,” said Hamlet. “I love to watch their faces light up when they are exploring their environment and making connections with learning.”

The mission of SHINE is to provide a preschool experience where all children learn together.

Both agree, “All children are exceptional in their own way, and they do not all develop the same. The research has consistently demonstrated that students with and without disabilities generally do as well or better, both academically and socially, in an inclusive setting. As



licensed educators, we believe that while learning academic and school readiness skills are important, children should have a well-rounded developmental education where they become leaders who shine in their own communities.”

The ladies dream of one day moving into a larger facility where they will have greater opportunities to help more families and children.

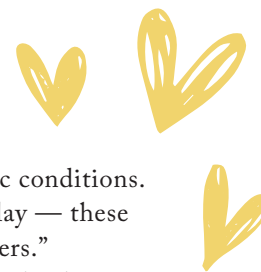
“We love our little house, but we receive calls every week

from parents who are in need of a preschool for their child, and we hate having to turn them away,” said Hamlet and Davis. “We would also like to expand to have early elementary classes. One in six children, ages birth to 5, in the United States has a developmental delay. These include speech/language, children on the autism spectrum, delays in motor skills, social skills, vision or hearing delays,

and health/genetic conditions. No matter the delay — these children are learners.”

At SHINE Preschool, 122 N. Greenwood St. in Lebanon, all children are embraced, empowered, and prepared to shine their light brightly in every community they touch. **GN**

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



▲ Nicole Davis works closely with students at SHINE Preschool, fostering a love for learning and creating a supportive space for all children.



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# 2025 Membership Awards Banquet - Jan. 23



Photos submitted by Legacy Photo Company and The Big Event

The 2025 Membership Awards Banquet took place on Jan. 23 and was a night of celebration, honoring outstanding achievements and contributions. Attendees gathered for an elegant evening filled with recognition and community. The event opened with welcoming remarks and inspiring speeches, setting the tone for the night. Awards were presented to individuals and organizations for their dedication and impact.

Guests enjoyed a delicious meal, meaningful conversations, and heartfelt acceptance speeches. The atmosphere was one of gratitude and excitement as winners took the stage. As the evening concluded, attendees left feeling inspired and proud. The banquet was a memorable tribute to those who strengthen the community, setting the stage for another year of success.

1. Cory and Megan McDonald 2. Ja'Rob Coggins, Krys Midgett, and Melanie Minter  
3. Krys Midgett and Melanie Minter 4. Genevieve Waelchli, Cindy Baldhoff, Francis Garcia, Roberto Ramirez, and Quentrece Smith





6. Mary and Harry Harris with Ian Isbell 7. Passing of the Gavel – Ian Isbell, 2025 board chair and Ja'Rob Coggins, 2024 board chair  
 5. 2025 board of directors swearing in



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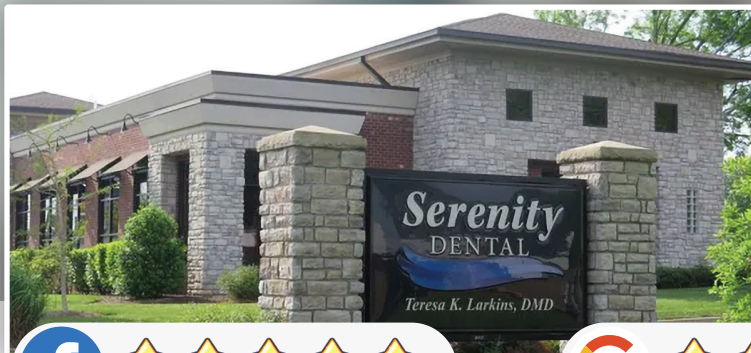
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