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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Empathy in Motion

A walk in different shoes

THE SOUNDS of the self-checkout registers *beep* through the entire store. The short lines of people with baskets and carts move across the reflective tile like a conveyor belt and out the door. *Uh, oh.* A man at the checkout stood frozen. The total amount due on the screen was higher than he knew was on his card. He had to decide what to put back: something he needed or something for his grandkid. His hand hovered over the items, trying to decide quickly so the people behind didn't notice. Luckily, the woman behind him *did* notice. Before he could speak, the woman behind him quietly passed him a few dollars. No hesitation, no grand speech — just a simple nod and a kind smile that said, "I've been there too."

Moments like this don't make headlines, but they are what makes a strong community. Empathy isn't just about understanding someone's struggle — it's about moving toward them. It's choosing to help, even in small ways. It's listening when it would be easier to roll your eyes, huff, and walk away.

Empathy in motion is the teacher who stays after school to help a struggling student. The small business owner who donates meals after a storm. The neighbor who checks in just to say, "How are you doing?" These aren't grand gestures, but they are the moments that build something lasting — connection, trust, and the kind of community where people show up for each other.

That's what this issue is about: people who don't just talk about kindness but live it. Their stories remind us that empathy is not passive — it's an action, a decision, and a way of life.

And in a world that often feels divided, empathy is what keeps us together. It reminds us that our stories are connected, that we belong to each other, and that none of us are truly alone.

As you turn these pages, may you be inspired to move — to listen, to step forward, to choose compassion. Because when we walk in each other's shoes, we walk forward together. And that is what makes a community. GN

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Sentinels of learning

Flintville School dedicates its library to the educational legacy of Margaret Jennings and Judy Edwards.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder and submitted by Velva Walker

THE FLINTVILLE School library hums with the quiet energy of modern education. Today's school libraries hold not just books but endless opportunities for wonder and exploration. Bookcases line the walls, filled with books whose spines stand at varying degrees of attention, inviting discovery. Plush carpet centers provide soft spaces where young hands and minds can connect vibrant puzzle pieces or collaborate on engineering projects. A smart screen flickers to life, adding interactive content to the librarian's presentation. The open floor plan accommodates both individual study and collaborative group work, seamlessly transitioning between focused reading and engaging teamwork.

It's a stark contrast to the library of decades past. In the 1940s through the early 1970s, towering wooden bookshelves

dominated the space. Card catalogs, now obsolete, were meticulously maintained so that students could locate resources. A hushed reverence for learning and literature was as pungent as the distinct aroma of aged paper.

As the years progressed into the late 1970s and beyond, the library began its transformation. Audio-visual equipment and early computers gradually appeared, signaling the shift toward a more diverse array of educational resources. The once-rigid atmosphere softened, encouraging a more relaxed approach to learning while maintaining its core mission of supporting student education.

In January 2024, Flintville School honored two remarkable women who shaped students' hearts and minds through this evolution by dedicating its recently renovated library to Margaret Jennings,

who served from 1944 to 1974, and Judy Edwards, whose tenure spanned from 1974 to 2013. These educators witnessed and actively guided the school's library through significant educational approaches and technological changes.

Jennings, a formidable presence in Flintville High School from 1944 to 1974, left an indelible mark on her students. Once a self-described "rough country boy," Johnny Edwards found his life transformed by her guidance.

"I was going backward, and I probably wouldn't have graduated," he admitted with a hint of wonder still in his voice. "Miss Jennings got me reading [my] sophomore year, and I'd take home two or three books every weekend. By the time I graduated, I'd read nearly two-thirds of the library books. To me, reading teaches you about life. You can learn so much

Rachel Gray (current librarian) and David Golden (principal)

when you sit down to read. I wanted to learn what everything was about.”

Johnny’s love of reading followed him throughout his Air Force service and civilian life. Little could he know when he graduated, but his life and the school library’s place in it would extend beyond his high school memories of Miss Jennings’ positive influence and dedication.

Jennifer Murdock, Jennings’ great-niece, said, “She said a book could take you anywhere you want to go. Even more than that, during my years of teaching, I kept in mind what an impact teachers have on their students and the positive influence teachers are privileged to have on future generations of students.”

Jennings, who taught English before taking over as librarian, loved her students, literature, and reading, all of which combined to star in the plays she directed. Flintville School Principal David Golden spoke to her former students, who remembered her fondly. From running a tight ship to staying after school to ensure students finished assignments and prepared for graduation, she earned the title “legend,” in their opinion.

Upon her retirement, teacher Judy Edwards, Johnny Edwards’ wife, sat at the circulation desk.

At the ceremony to dedicate the library to the two, Principal Golden said, “Mrs. Judy Edwards served as teacher and librarian for Flintville High School, Flintville Jr. High, and our current configuration from 1974-2013. She is well known for the love of her students of all ages, for promoting reading and writing, and for playing a very important role in the early stages of our all-inclusive playground.”

Judy, like Jennings, expected the best of her students. She expected it of herself and all of those around her. She was known for getting things done.



Her husband, Johnny, spent countless after-school hours with her in the library, assisting her as she rotated materials and displays for themes and seasons. When the library needed repainting, the two went to work.

“We painted the whole library in the old high school on the weekends of Christmas break. There was no heat on, so we used little space heaters trying to keep warm,” he shared.

He continued, “When they closed the elementary school across the road and built the new one, they brought all the books across, and we spent the whole summer re-cataloging and reshelving all the books. She loved the kids, and the library was always her thing.”

Today, the Flintville School library continues to welcome students to an ever-growing place of knowledge, exploration, and wonder. Like its namesakes, the Jennings-Edwards Library continues to adapt and evolve, meeting the changing needs of each new generation of learners.

Yet, at its core, it remains a place of discovery, growth, and inspiration — a living tribute to two women who understood that a library is as much a repository of books as a gateway to endless possibilities. The space embodies the enduring legacy of Jennings and Judy, seamlessly connecting Flintville School’s rich educational past with its dynamic present and promising future. **GN**



▲ Wesley Brockman

Pastor Mayo's Calling

Bringing faith and healing to the community at Lincoln Health System

By Haley Potter // Photography by Brooke Snyder and submitted by Lincoln Health System

PASTOR CHARLES Mayo has always believed in the power of faith to heal, comfort, and guide people through life's most difficult moments. His journey with Lincoln Health System began in March 2021 when he was asked to serve as a volunteer chaplain. Seeing an opportunity to minister to people's spiritual and emotional needs, he eagerly accepted the role, primarily working with hospice patients and their families.

For nearly three years, Mayo provided solace to those in their final days, offering



▲ Pastor Kenny McNatt - Hope Assembly Church, Pastor Dezi Fletcher - West End CPCA Church, Pastor Jeremy Ogle - Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist Church, Carolyn Mitchell - layperson at the Church of God, Pastor Bruce McVey - First Presbyterian Church, and Pastor Charles Mayo - Victory Chapel

prayers, scripture, and words of encouragement. But it wasn't until January 2023 that he met Lincoln Health System CEO Mary Beth Seals — a meeting that would change the course of spiritual care within the hospital.

"I was visiting a patient at the hospital," Mayo recalled. "As I was walking toward the elevator, I saw a couple of ladies near the nurses' station and wondered if one of them might be the new CEO. When she walked toward me, we looked at each other at the same time, and both asked, 'Are you?' It was kind of funny."

That chance meeting led to a conversation about the prospect of a hospital Chaplaincy Program, an idea close to both of their hearts. Seals invited Mayo to an informational dinner later that year with other local ministers to discuss the initiative. By November 2023, the plan was set in motion.

"I really appreciate Mary Beth's vision and her heart for combining spiritual care with medical care," Mayo said. "She is very interested and incredibly supportive of this program."

Just days after the dinner, Pastor Mayo was appointed as the lead chaplain, tasked with organizing and overseeing the program.

"I felt extremely honored to be entrusted with that responsibility," he said with pride. "It's been an incredible honor to serve."

President of Lincoln Health, Mary Beth Seals, saw the need for this type of program.

"It was important to me that we started a chaplain program again in our hospital," she said. "Patients, visitors, and staff need a safe place a comfort in their time of need. I am grateful to the men and women who are meeting this need for us. This is another small gift we can offer in our community hospital. What better way to give back."

Officially launched on Jan. 1, 2024, the program started with seven volunteer chaplains, including pastors from various denominations and a dedicated hospital and hospice volunteer. Now, with eight chaplains on call, the program ensures that spiritual support is always available to patients and their families.

"We don't make daily rounds unless a chaplain wants to," Mayo explained. "Instead, we operate on an on-call basis. If a patient requests a chaplain, the nurse contacts the chaplain assigned for that month, and if they are unavailable, a back-up chaplain is contacted. This ensures that someone is always there."

The impact of the Chaplaincy Program has been profound. Mayo remembered a particularly heart-wrenching case: a woman who had been admitted to the emergency room while her husband was tragically killed on the job.

"She was about to undergo surgery the next morning," he said. "Being able to sit with her, pray with her, and offer scripture — she felt a peace in the midst of her grief. I followed up with her the next day, and though she was still grieving, she had a deep sense of calm."

Another chaplain recently ministered to a patient in the intensive care unit, offering support not only to the individual but to the entire family.

"He described how a great sense of peace came over them," Mayo shared. "Knowing that God had used him as an instrument of comfort — it's incredibly rewarding."

The program provides 24/7 spiritual support, with chaplains available for emergency calls after hours, particularly in end-of-life situations.

"There's never a time when someone in need won't have a chaplain available," Mayo shared. "We are here to walk alongside patients and families during their most difficult moments."



▲ Pastor Charles Mayo

For Mayo and his team of chaplains, this program isn't just an act of service for his community; it is a calling.

"It's wonderful to see people being ministered to, finding peace, and knowing that we were part of that journey," he said. "This program isn't just about religion — it's about human connection, compassion, and the power of presence."

With the support of Lincoln Health System and a dedicated team of chaplains, Mayo's mission to integrate faith into healthcare continues to grow. "We are making a difference," he said with certainty. "And that is the greatest blessing of all." **GN**

Those who are involved in the program include: Pastor Kenny McNatt – Hope Assembly Church, Pastor Tommy Vann – Fayetteville First United Methodist Church, Pastor Matt Tidmore – The Rock Family Worship Center, Pastor Dezi Fletcher – West End CPCA Church, Pastor Bruce McVey – First Presbyterian Church, Carolyn Mitchell – layperson at the Church of God, Pastor Jeremy Ogle – Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist Church, and Pastor Charles Mayo – Victory Chapel.

REVVING UP COMMUNITY KINDNESS

VooDoo Customs finds its calling in giving back.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder

WHEN “LITTLE” Joe Burns’ 1954 Buick and his friend Cody Mitchell’s 1949 Chevy 3100 truck hit the road after the extra touches the duo added to their classics in 2015, the process and end results looked like fun to Little Joe’s parents, Brenda and “Big” Joe Burns. When the Burns brought new life to their old vehicles and joined them, VooDoo Customs rolled out.

“There were four of us now, cruising all around, then attention grew,” Big Joe recalled.

When Rex Campbell and his 1947 Ford joined the enthusiasts, they made the rounds to area car shows and cruises every weekend. But the roads they traveled led beyond their initial destinations – they led to an undeniable impact and benefit to the Fayetteville and Lincoln County communities.

In 2018, the club’s membership stood at seven, and Mitchell’s uncle was facing financial hardships due to a serious illness. The club wanted to help, so the group decided to host a VooDoo Customs Conjure car show, offering door prizes donated by area businesses, a silent auction, and a 50/50 raffle.

“We had a total of 76 cars in our first show, and I think a big takeaway was, of course, the money went to helping someone in need. The winners received trophies that Little Joe made of old car, truck, and engine parts, and they loved them. Some who attended the show liked what we were doing and wanted to join our club,” said Big Joe.

Membership steadily grew with each Conjure and the club’s other shows and fundraising efforts.

“We help sponsor the shows at the McBurg Annual Barbeque, Delrose Fire Department, and the Giles County Antique Tractor Show. We helped the Lincoln County High School band with their show. We got all our local buddies and car clubs to come and participate to help them raise money for costly band equipment,” Big Joe explained.

He continued, “Our money from the October show at the Lincoln County Fairgrounds goes to [support] kid’s angel trees, the veteran’s trees, and nursing home residents at Christmas time.”

Other beneficiaries of VooDoo Custom’s kindness are Hands of Mercy, NOKID-

GOESHUNGRY, and the Legion Riders Wreaths Across America program.

“We help the awesome group put out 140 stands and wreaths each year at Lincoln Cemetery, and we’ll return on [the Saturday after Christmas] to remove them,” Big Joe added.

Organizing shows and volunteering for projects like Wreaths Across America requires a lot of work. Sponsorships from area businesses support the group’s efforts.

Little Joe led the club until family commitments temporarily forced him to step back in late 2021. He temporarily handed his duties over to his mom, Brenda, but has since returned to his position as the club’s president.

Big Joe said, “Turning the wheels is what she did in making somewhere around 2,500 flyers, printing them, passing them out, putting trophies together, and getting sponsorships along with the help of our appointed public relations and members. So to car shows we went.”

Today, board members are Kenny and Miki Campbell, Jeff and Shannon Gibson, David and Misty Ford, Steve and

Shelia Nichols, Steve and Tina McAnally, and Billy and Sandra Woodward.

When the club lost its fifth original member, Rex Campbell, on Oct. 1, 2022, the group fulfilled his final wishes, demonstrating the deep bonds shared among VooDoo Customs Car Club members.

The roar of engines echoed through Lincoln County as a procession of vintage vehicles solemnly wound its way to New Sharon Cemetery. In front, Campbell's 1947 Ford carried him on his final ride. Nearly 30 classic cars, trucks, and motorcycles followed behind, their rumbling a solemn salute to a fallen brother. His casket, adorned with VooDoo Customs pinstriped artwork and draped in the American flag, paid tribute to his Vietnam service and his membership in the brotherhood of a group of automo-

tive enthusiasts with hearts of service to our community.

In the following weeks, the group demonstrated its commitment to family — both blood and chosen. The club unanimously voted to cover Campbell's funeral expenses, working with Gallant Funeral Home to settle the costs. This gesture, coupled with donations from friends and the community, ensured that Campbell's immediate family faced no financial burden in their time of grief.

Campbell was a driving force within the club. Known for his no-nonsense approach and uncanny ability to coordinate parking at events, he pushed the group to excel. His loss left a void, but his spirit continues to inspire VooDoo Customs members.



Big Joe said about Campbell, "He was the most influential member we have ever had and will ever have."

Today, the club's motto, "showing up and caring for others," echoes throughout the community, turning what started as a small group of car enthusiasts into a family dedicated to making a difference, one car show at a time. GN

Follow VooDoo Customs on Facebook for more information and details on upcoming shows.

Little Joe Burns, ▶
Brenda Burns,
and Big Joe Burns





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A collage of basketball game photos with a large yellow brushstroke graphic. The background features several scenes from a game, including players on the court and spectators in the bleachers. The yellow brushstroke is a large, expressive stroke that sweeps across the center of the image, partially obscuring the background photos. The text is overlaid on the top portion of the image.

44 YEARS OF SWISH AND SERVICE

**AVA BONNER
AND ANSLEY TIPPS**



Lions Club Basketball Tip-Off Classic helps fund free vision and hearing screenings for students.

By Tina Neeley // Photos submitted by Velva Walker

YOUNG ATHLETES navigate the court under the bright gym lights, accompanied by the rhythmic bounce of basketballs and the swish of nets. The Fayetteville Lions Club Basketball Tip-Off Classic is in full swing. Families and fans fill the bleachers while Lions Club volunteers manage ticket sales, programs, concessions, and scorekeeping. The atmosphere buzzes with youthful ambition and community pride as the club celebrates its commitment to nurturing local talent and promoting a love for basketball.

While the event provides an opportunity for teams to get their first glances at their opponents, it also connects coaches and players from teams that might otherwise not cross paths. It doesn't just kick off the new season; the young players, whether they realize it or not, participate in saving the sight and hearing of children in the Fayetteville and Lincoln County communities. There really are no losers in these games.

Lion Chris Ross, the event's chairman, explained, "The funds raised from this basketball classic continue to support our efforts throughout all the schools in Lincoln County with the vision and hearing screenings. The state requires these to be done every two years on the

students, and either the school system pays for it or the Lions Club comes in and does it cost-free. So it's a win-win for the teams to have these preseason scrimmages. Then, in return, we're giving back to the day cares and Fayetteville City, Riverside Christian Academy, and Lincoln County schools, providing their vision and hearing screening at no cost."

Everything moves quickly. Teams play games consisting of four periods, five minutes each. Halftime is five minutes long, and there are about five minutes between games for the following teams to warm up before the next tip-off.

Ross, who is also the scorekeeper, said about the event's days and pace, "It's a hustling day — a long day — but it's worth it. The kids, coaches, and the parents seem to have fun, too."

Now in its 44th year, organizing the Tip-Off has become increasingly challenging. Changes in the Tennessee Middle School Athletics Association (TMSAA) rules compressed the preseason schedule, forcing the club to adapt and balance between school calendars, sports regulations, and the meet's traditional timing. Still, the Lions remain committed to the event. They've maintained an affordable \$5 ticket price to ensure community accessibility, relying heavily on ad sales in their program to offset costs.



▲ Jeff Phillips, Basketball Vice-Chair; Chris Ross, Basketball Tip-Off Classic Chair; Alex Martinez, Lions District Governor; and George Putman

"We really couldn't put this event on without those sponsors and supporters," Ross emphasized.

He also acknowledged the priceless assistance of others in planning and organizing the event, like Flintville School Principal David Golden.

Golden meticulously organizes the basketball schedules for the region, a task that requires careful coordination and communication with multiple schools. His process begins by developing the brackets for the Middle Tennessee Southeast Conference, ensuring that all participating schools in Section 2, including Areas 12 through 16, receive the necessary informational packets. Once Golden finalizes these brackets and dates, he shifts his focus to creating the regular season schedule for the conference. This schedule includes local teams such as Blanche, Flintville, Unity School, South Lincoln, Highland Rim, and Fayetteville City. As the regular season games take shape, Golden collaborates with Ross to establish the schedule for the Tip-Off.

"Obviously, there are challenges to this as Mr. Ross works with other schools from other counties and districts outside of our conference teams. First, we must begin communicating with Mrs. Christy Wright, the principal at Lincoln Central Academy, to reserve the gym. She is always great to work with and always makes sure we have that week blocked off for use of their gymnasium. When we put this together, we must be aware that teams who participate in the TMSAA only have a certain amount of games they are allowed to participate in before the tournaments, so we use these games as play dates and do not count as wins or losses. We have to work around their schedules as many teams begin their regular season games during that week. With hard work and cooperation from everyone, we have been able to make this happen," Golden shared.

Ross added, "We are grateful to Flintville Principal David Golden for his assistance with scheduling, Lincoln Central Academy

Principal Christy Wright for coordinating her school and gym schedules, and Steve Cunningham for volunteering his time and talents to announce the games and bring them to life with his vibrant energy!"

Golden played in the Tip-Off as a student and fondly recalls those games.

"My earliest memory goes back to when I was a student at the old Flintville Elementary and Flintville Jr. High schools. The Lion's Club always would put on pre-season and postseason tournaments for our schools. It was so much fun to play in and try to win the county championship for the elementary school division and then jr. high junior varsity division," he said.

Today, he deeply appreciates the event and all involved, including the Fayetteville Lions Club, Ross, the referees, and the participating teams.

Golden reflected, "The biggest reward is knowing that all of our students have the opportunity to benefit from the funds raised. Working with all the schools' administrations, coaches, and parents to build positive relationships is an incredible reward. On a personal level, this is something that I personally enjoy because I have so many friends within our district and our region."

It's a series of scrimmages to the outside world, but the Tip-Off's impact builds friendships and unites teams on and off the court in life-changing ways. A student hears the cheers and the ball's slap as it lands in the player's hands following a strong pass. Another child sees the faces in the crowd clearly for the first time. Yes, each dribble and shot prepares players for the season ahead, but the bustling atmosphere is not just a competition. It's the melting pot of true victory – the spirit of giving back, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive. **GN**

Follow the Fayetteville Lions Club on Facebook for the 2025 Basketball Tip-Off Classic dates, or email Lion Chris Ross at LionChrisRoss@gmail.com for more information.





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Jeanie Dodds

STEADFAST IN SERVICE



THE LINCOLN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE HONOR GUARD EMBODIES SERVICE, SACRIFICE, AND SOLIDARITY.

BY TINA NEELEY // PHOTOGRAPHY BY BROOKE SNYDER

THE FAMILY gathers near the mahogany casket adorned with fresh roses and lilies. Despite their grief and exhaustion, they remain steadfast, receiving the hugs and condolences of those who come to pay their respects. It's a scene revisited countless times in our lives.

But this time, others stand, one at the head and one at the feet. Silent and motionless, the overhead light glints off the polished brass buttons and spotless shoes of the officers guarding the casket. This time, it's one of their own, a life sacrificed for the service of others.

As the family leaves and the doors lock behind them, the officers, members of a local honor guard, maintain their solemn watch. Every half hour, with clockwork precision, two fresh officers approach. The vigil transfers with a barely perceptible nod. This casket watch will continue unbroken until the funeral, a 24-hour tribute to their fallen brother or sister. Tomorrow, they'll escort the family, serve as pallbearers, and perform the flag-folding ceremony with meticulous care. Each action bears witness to their unwavering commitment — not just to one of their own, but to the enduring values of service and sacrifice that bind their community and nation.

Locally, a dedicated group of officers embodies this sacred duty. The Lincoln County

Sheriff's Office Honor Guard, founded to serve as the ceremonial arm of the department, carries forward a legacy of honor and respect. Their mission extends beyond somber occasions, as they act as ambassadors for the county at local, state, and national events.

A desire to give back to those who give their all in service to others led Jeanie Dodds to join the honor guard.

"It's about honor and respect for the fallen and their families," said Dodds, a four-year member and the honor guard's team leader.

It's also about training and practice that does more than emphasize protocol. It enables



It's about honor and respect for the fallen and their families.

- Jeanie Dodds



◀ *Jeanie Dodds leads the honor guard as they serve the community.*

officers to maintain their composure while facing deeply moving situations.

Dodds explained, “The training process entails attention to detail with discipline and precision. [It includes] the continuous practice of drill movements, color guard, and funeral ceremonies while maintaining appearances by uniform inspections and grooming standards. In doing so, while performing the duties of the honor guard, it provides reverence that allows one to remain steadfast in their emotions.”

Funerals and memorial services, at first thought, seem to carry the highest toll on the honor guard members. But even when serving at community events and programs that display national, state, and departmental flags, the physicality and emotional elements are real and present.

“Though one remains steadfast while serving in the moment, you still have emotions to process no matter the honoree, whether it is during a funeral or memorial ceremony. The physical strain affects the team by performing precise drill movements for extended periods of time,” Dodds shared. “The team and I support each other through sheer camaraderie and having a certain mindset that allows us to still perform our duties.”

Many of those who witness the execution of these ceremonial duties never forget the feelings it stirs and the clear and certain honor and recognition it contributes to the occasion, whether the

death of one serving their community or country or a local school program honoring veterans. In the case of a loss of life, the value is far greater than what appears on the surface.

Dodds said, “The honor guard’s presence gives families and the community a sense of pride and respect for the honoree, radiating support that they, in turn, embody, helping them remain resolute and secure in their own sentiments in their time of need. Simply put, we are solace.”

She added about the unit’s other duties: “The honor guard is an ambassador of the sheriff’s office that can be requested for community events, school functions, public ceremonies, festivities, and meetings. Honor guard is a bridge between the community and law enforcement, building relationships. It also serves as a platform for educating the public on various law enforcement values and traditions, as well as aiding in raising awareness on important safety issues and highlighting initiatives that impact our communities’ well-being.”

A spirit of dedication guided by honor unites the members.

“Honor is many things in today’s world,” Dodds said. “It’s reverence, integrity, the unwavering commitment to one’s duty, community, faith, and family. It’s the strength to stand stoic in the face of calamity and tragedy.”

According to Dodds, performing their duties while maintaining this stoic and composed presence is not easy. But a constant awareness of the strength they lend fuels them. Taking advantage of moments to recompose by momentarily closing their eyes or offering a nod or smile resets their mindset.

Mindset is the guardrail of a law enforcement officer’s work every day.

“As a law enforcement officer, you have to be able to shift between all types of emotions like flipping a light switch. In this job, you can be in someone’s worst moment and then the next, smiling at and talking to a young child like what you had just witnessed never happened. It’s professional detachment,” Dodds detailed. “But for me, the key is, after all is said and done, taking time for reflection and remembering that the honoree’s legacy lives on.”





▲ Justin Christmas, Eric Hose, Nicholas Reddy, Wayne Graham, Jeanie Dodds, Zek George, Jacob Clark, Nathan Maynard, Jace LaFevers, and Nathan Simmons

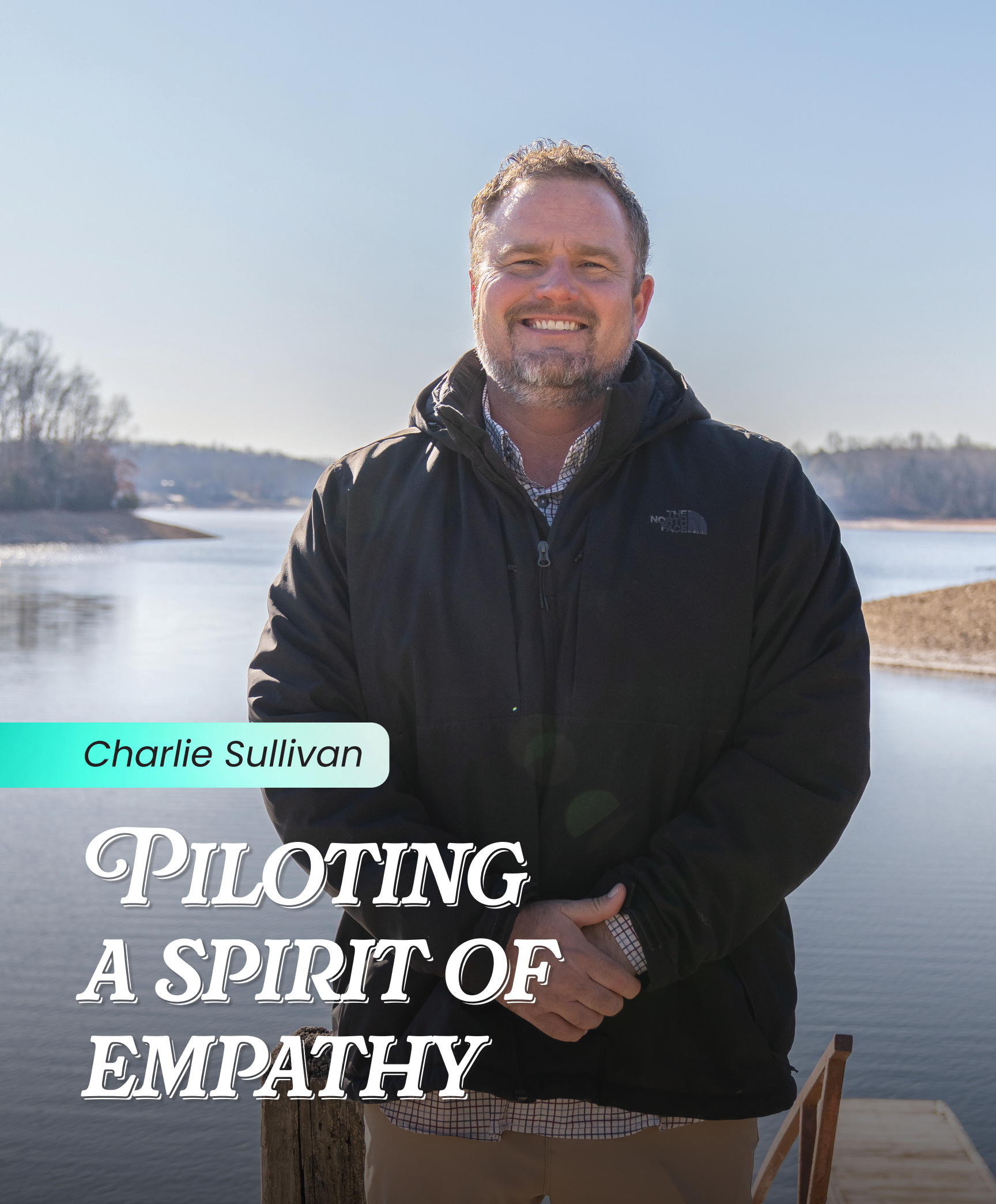
She continued, summing up the unit's role and responsibilities. "The honor guard plays a vital and symbolic role in law enforcement and public service, representing the highest standards of respect, professionalism, and sacrifice. Through our ceremonial duties, we honor fallen officers, public servants, and veterans while ensuring that their legacy is remembered with dignity. The presence of the honor guard at events like memorial services and official functions serves as a reminder of the commitment the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard has made to protect and serve our community." GN

For more information or to request the honor guard's services, call Jeanie Dodds at the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office at (931) 433-9821.



But for me, the key is, after all is said and done, taking time for reflection and remembering that the honoree's legacy lives on.

- Jeanie Dodds



Charlie Sullivan

*PILOTING
A SPIRIT OF
EMPATHY*



DIVINE INTERVENTION PLACED CHARLIE SULLIVAN IN A LIFESAVING LAKE RESCUE.

BY TINA NEELEY // PHOTOGRAPHY BY BROOKE SNYDER

BILL SMITH broke the surface of Tims Ford Lake, his uncle, Bobby Smith, in one numb hand, and his 3-year-old son, Jess, clutched desperately in the other. The 48-degree water bit into their skin through their soaked layers of clothing, dragging them down despite their life vests. As Bill's head went under once more, he had to choose between saving his son, whose whole life stretched before him, and his 62-year-old relative. Within seconds of releasing his uncle, one of the seats from their sunken boat floated to the surface, and Bobby grabbed it.

For at least 20 minutes, the trio remained in the chilling waters, fighting the river channel's current in their futile efforts to reach Bear Trace Golf Course. Bill knew they wouldn't survive without outside intervention.

"I knew we were all going to drown; I just didn't know in what order," he said in a story published in The Moore County News following the accident.

Meanwhile, Charlie Sullivan piloted a pontoon boat with his co-workers, Marc Bell, Chad Stovall, and Matt Heath. The crew, who worked for Danny Sullivan at Lakeside Docks & Marine, was headed for the dam, returning from

a spur-of-the-moment lake home dock repair. It was just another day at the office.

"I thought I heard something," Charlie Sullivan said in The Moore County News story. "I couldn't identify the noise, so I turned the motor down to idle speed and listened. We could hear cries for help and began looking across the water to see where it might be coming from. Then we saw the debris and people out in the middle of the lake."

The pontoon boat's top speed was 10 mph, a five-minute drive to the spot where the three helplessly awaited, but a boater barreled toward the three from the other direction with no signs



I was so glad I had a full crew that day because with their clothing being waterlogged, it took all of us to get them up onto the front of the boat.

- Charlie Sullivan



◀ *Christy Smith embraces Charlie for the very first time since 2002 when Charlie assisted others in saving part of her family when Charlie was just a few years over twenty.*

of slowing down. When the dockworkers' screams and waving arms did nothing to gain the speeding boater's attention, Sullivan, hands tense on the wheel, steered the pontoon boat and redirected the boater, barely avoiding tragedy. Now, the four could focus on pulling the trio from the deep, December waters.

As the pontoon drew closer, they realized a small child was involved. Jess was the first pulled aboard.

In speaking about the event today, Sullivan said, "I was so glad I had a full crew that day because with their clothing being waterlogged, it took all of us to get them up onto the front of the boat. We peeled off some of our layers, covered them up, and tried to situate the



propane heater to warm them up as much as possible.”

Sullivan called emergency services, and Bill called his wife, Christy.

“I called 911 and got them to dispatch the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency to the state park as that was the closest ramp. Luckily, they were there when we arrived to help get them the medical attention they needed.”

No one was seriously injured. When recalling the event, gratitude and a sense of divine intervention are as present today as they were 22 years ago.

“We were there doing our job, but we were really put there by God that day for a reason,” Sullivan acknowledged. “I was the commercial foreman and traveled most of the time building marinas, so it was unusual that this particular crew was on Tims Ford that day.”

Bill agreed, “It was the Good Lord because they weren’t supposed to be there.”

Bill’s uncle, Bobby, lived several more years. That seat that popped up just in time to hold him above the 120-foot-deep lake waters? Bill said when they removed it from the car’s trunk the next day, it had to weigh at least 100 pounds.

“There was no reason it should have floated. It was waterlogged,” Bill said, as amazed today as then.

Today, Sullivan is the Leading Edge Real Estate Group broker in Fayetteville and a father himself. The weight of saving young Jess on that cold December day in 2002 is more poignant than ever.

He said, “Children are our most special gifts, and I’m glad we could help save this child. I hope if the roles are reversed one day, someone will be there to help my children.”

Fortunately, Jess only has a single memory to contribute when others talk about that day.

“The only thing I kind of remember is drinking hot chocolate at the hospital, and that’s about it,” he recently stated.

His mom, Christy, however, will never forget.

“After the accident, we held each other a little tighter and tried to never take anything for granted. We were a young family and didn’t have a whole lot,” she explained.

“They are my whole world, along with my daughter, Cassie, who was 1 at the time, and I’m not sure what I would have done if I had lost them. I’m so thankful that the Lord saw them through.”

Sullivan’s heart of service continues today.

He said, “Helping people is what fuels me, whether at work with my clients and the agents in my office or at home. I love Fayetteville because of the community feel here, and it seems we all help each other out.”



I love Fayetteville because of the community feel here, and it seems we all help each other out.

– Charlie Sullivan

Whether it’s a helping hand out of frigid waters, into a new home, or changing a diaper, Sullivan pours his heart into everything he does. When we do the same, a spirit of empathy pilots the boats of our lives straight into the paths of those who need us most.

Caring spirits encased in hearts of gold unite us. We draw strength from one another, our good deeds prompting others to pay it forward, making our lives and the places we live richer for it. GN

◀ Chad Stovall, Bill Smith, Jess Smith, and Charlie Sullivan

▶ Chad Stovall and Charlie Sullivan show where they were, toward the bottom of the map, versus where the frantic boaters were in the water.





Makayla Martin

DREAMS SET FREE: FROM FIELDS TO OCEAN WAVES

MAKAYLA MARTIN'S JOURNEY
TO MARINE BIOLOGY FROM
HER LANDLOCKED ROOTS.

BY TINA NEELEY // PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY MAKAYLA MARTIN

ON THE beach of Playa Junquillal, Costa Rica, Makayla Martin gently releases baby sea turtles one by one onto the beach. The tiny creatures, no larger than the palm of her hand, instinctively scuttle toward the crashing waves. Each hatchling represents a fragile hope for survival in a world fraught with challenges — poachers, predators, and the sun's relentless heat. But Martin and her team work to give the sea turtles their greatest opportunity for success.

Like the turtles she carefully shepherds to the ocean, she sets her dreams free to thrive.

Growing up, Martin's natural environment was Lincoln County's rural countryside. She was a member of the Lincoln County National FFA Organization throughout high school, immersing herself in all things agriculture. But she always felt drawn to water — a paradoxical passion for someone surrounded by fields rather than oceans. Creeks, ponds, and lakes were the nearest bodies of water for deep study, so Martin's path to marine biology studies at Tennessee Technological University (TTU) was as winding as the trails leading to Costa Rica's beaches.

But her earliest career dreams were landlocked. It was veterinary science until she realized it required the study of medicine, and the eight-year investment quickly recharted her path. Committed to her love of animals and a desire to protect them, zoology and marine biology captured her attention. Narrowing it down to pursuing a marine biology degree and a journalism minor was easy.

"I really love the ocean, the water, and all the aquatic activities. And the main reason I chose marine biology instead of zoology was because I don't like sweating. I hate the heat with a passion, plus I love all the different types of marine animals. The only animal we ever interact with that's an aquatic species is fish, and I want to learn more about all of them — rays, sharks, octopus,

squid, dolphins — all of them. It just piqued my interest,” said Martin.

Martin’s creative passions combine to enable her to be a voice for the animals she loves. As a writer and photographer, she wants to work with endangered aquatic animals.

She said, “I want to be able to explain to people in the world why these animals are endangered, why they’re going extinct, and why we’re not doing a good enough job for them. We can’t just let all these animals die off. It’s not fair to them.”

Her time in Costa Rica solidified this vision, offering her a glimpse into a future where she can explore diverse aquatic environments and advocate for endangered species.

Last July, Martin spent an entire month in Costa Rica, immersing herself in a work-based program dedicated to sea turtle conservation. Nestled in the small coastal town of Playa Junquillal, she lived with fellow volunteers in simple accommodations, sharing experiences and responsibilities. Each day began with breakfast at the communal house, followed by a trek to the hatchery — a 30-minute walk under the relentless sun that tested her resolve.

“The worst part about being there was walking in the heat,” she admitted with a laugh, “but once I got to the hatchery, it was all worth it.”

At the hatchery, Martin learned how to protect turtle eggs from predators and poachers. Under the guidance of Valerie, the marine biologist overseeing the project, her team dug up nests laid by mother turtles and transferred the eggs to a safer environment.

“We had to be careful not to touch them with bare hands,” Martin explained. “The goal was to give them a better chance of survival.”

The experience was eye-opening for her. Studying marine biology in class was one thing and another to see its real-world application.

Living far from coastal areas has not deterred Martin; instead, it has motivated her to work harder toward her dreams.

The first hatched baby turtles that Makayla helped to release while in Costa Rica. This batch had over 100 successful hatchings.



“More people who want to do marine biology probably live on the coast,” she reflected. “But this is my passion, so I’m going to push myself and work even harder to accomplish my goals and dreams, no matter what.”

The support of her third grade teacher, Beth Stewart, who, through her interest in Martin’s life, motivates her even today.

“She was always eager to hear about new things I’m doing with my life and where I’m at. Knowing that I can go back to Fayetteville, and if I talk to her, I know she’ll be proud of me. That’s a good little push for me to keep going and trying to achieve more and more goals,” Martin said.

Similarly, the agricultural teachers at Lincoln County High School helped shape her communication skills through public speaking competitions and hands-on experiences with various animals.

In addition to her work in Costa Rica, Martin has been collaborating on a research project at TTU with professors Dr. Carla Hurt and Dr. Shawn Krosnick in the biology department for about two years. Her current project involves metabarcoding environmental DNA samples from local honey collected by beekeepers in Tennessee and Kentucky. By analyzing the DNA within honey, Martin seeks to uncover what flowers honeybees are attracted to, which can help farmers and beekeepers understand the floral sources present in their honey.

As Martin continues on this path toward becoming a marine biologist, she remains committed to exploring aquatic environments while advocating for

their preservation. Her unique blend of scientific inquiry and artistic expression positions her as a promising voice in marine conservation.

Martin nurtures her dreams and those of the vulnerable creatures she protects, positioning herself to make waves in marine biology. Her journey reminds us that no matter where you start — be it landlocked Tennessee or the shores of Costa Rica — dedication and passion can lead you toward fulfilling your dreams while making a meaningful impact on the world. **GN**



...this is my passion, so I’m going to push myself and work even harder to accomplish my goals and dreams, no matter what.

– Makayla Martin

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