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A father's life and
death inspire a
Tallahoma man to
serve God, family,
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Our Families

PLUS

A HERITAGE
WITH HEART

ISSUE 6 2025

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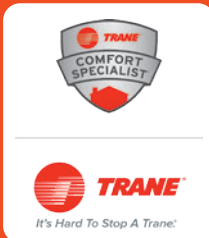
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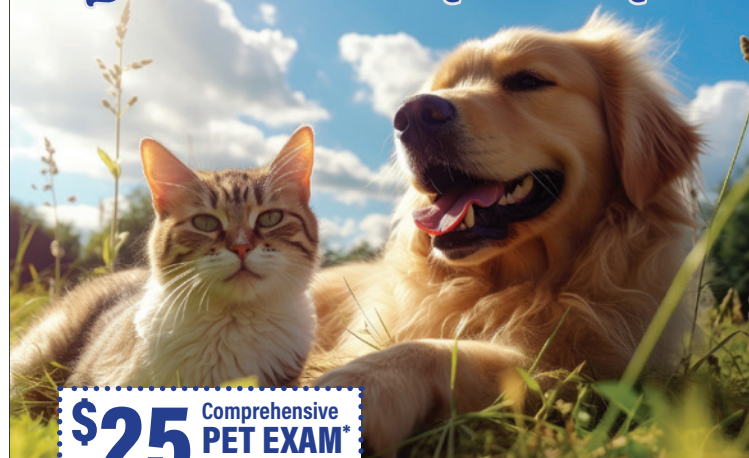
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The bond of blood and honor

Our families survive the test of time.

A FAMILY LOADS up their navy blue Jeep in Tennessee and takes a cross-country road trip. It'll take several days to get to the Sequoia National Park in California. There may be hours when the Jeep feels smaller and smaller by the second. Taking turns picking the music leads to debates on how many songs Brother or Sister picked. The cooler in the floorboard has only a few snacks left. The time on their cellphones changes from Central time zone to Mountain, and then Pacific. After far too many tolls and gas-station stops, the GPS finally uses words that make the "crowd" go wild: "... two miles until your destination."

Grandma, Mom, Dad, Brother, and Sister hop out of the Jeep and stretch their legs. They look up at the leaves above. It's breathtakingly unbelievable. The size and strength of nature demand an undeniable respect. The General Sherman Tree stands almost 280 feet tall on the north end of the Giant Forest. It's believed to be 2,300 to 2,700 years old. It's hard to imagine how far the roots reach. The strength of the branches holds bird nests and gives homes to tiny insects just passing through. Each season

brings new life of connection from the soil to the crisp air, 280 feet above. The chirping bird family belongs together — until, of course, it's time to jump into flight. The ants crawl up and down the bark with a natural interconnectedness that can only be described with one word: family.

Sister misses a step on the way up, and Dad grabs her hand with firm support. "I've got ya," he says. Grandma smiles, not letting anyone know she holds back tears. She knows where her son got that phrase. She had heard it for 50 years before a funeral. Her son says it the same way his father used to. While Sister never got to meet him, his blood still flows through her veins with honor.

Our families weave us together with a generational strength that no wildfire or gust of wind can knock loose. Our memories of those who came before us fly beneath our wings when we jump from the nest. And when the icy cold bites at our fingers in winter, we have an enclave to snuggle into. Families are not just names on a birth certificate or put together with wedding bands. They're a generational structure that will always stand the test of 2,700 years. This issue of Good News honors just that: our families. GN

Wesley Bryant,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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publishing
partner



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Don't Let Your Kids Miss Summer Fun At The Event Nook!

We're offering exciting, age-appropriate events while school's out. Registration for June events opens May 29 on our website (theeventnook.com) or Facebook (@The Event Nook). Spots are limited, so register early!

Each event has a small fee, with sibling discounts available (our Back to School Bash is FREE!). Find full details on our website and FB page. We can't wait for a summer of laughter, creativity, and fun!

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The Rice Family: LOVING PEOPLE, ALWAYS

Every aspect of life is an opportunity to serve and love.

By Sara Hook // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

“IN WHATEVER we’re doing, whether it’s at church, at home, our neighbors, ball, or whatever it may be, we just try to love on people,” Renea Rice said. And that goal captures the essence of the Rice family. Rice serves teens and young adults with Tullahoma City school buses and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). Her husband, Matthew, serves daily in his work as a Murfreesboro police officer. They and their three kids are a tight-knit family, and a wonderful example of the Tullahoma community.

Matthew and Renea were high school sweethearts. They started dating

in 2007, when she was 16 and he was 18, and married in 2013. In the first few years of their marriage, they went through infertility and a tragic miscarriage, but the experience only drew them closer together.

“We just trust the Lord in whatever he may hand us,” Renea said. “Whatever he lets come our way, we know it’s gone through his hands.”

Now their kids — twins in kindergarten, and a 3-year-old — are as much a part of the family’s service mindset as Renea and Matthew. Aside from teaching them about faith and the service God calls for, Renea said they try to serve where the kids can participate.



In the gym where they once walked the halls as students, Matthew and Renea Rice now return with their children.



Matthew joins Millie, Miles, and Maverick in a front yard soccer game.



“We try to do things that we can involve them in, like cooking a meal for somebody that’s just had a baby, or somebody that’s sick, or doing yard work for somebody,” Renea said.

The family also loves to spend time together and with friends. They love hiking, riding bikes, and taking walks — anything that involves playing outside. They are also very involved with their church, Grace Baptist.

While her family is her most significant investment, FCA is a close second. There, she volunteers as a character coach for the Motlow softball team and the Tullahoma High School girls basketball team. There, she said, she does life with the kids.

“We have a devotional, read scripture, and see how God loves us and how we can be like Him more,” Renea said. “For Motlow ... we’ll take a meal either before, during, or after the games. So we feed them; we feed them physically, and we feed them spiritually.”

Matthew and Renea’s 11 years of marriage haven’t been without struggle or hardship, but Renea said their success as a couple and as members of the community comes from their focus on God.

“When you have Him as the center of your marriage and the center of your family, He gives His peace,” Renea said. “It’s a peace that passes all understanding.”

Renea said that the Rice family tries its best to love Jesus and love people through everything. They are dedicated to serving others in good times and bad.

“That is our family motto,” Renea said. “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” GN





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SHORT SPRINGS VILLAGE:

A TASTE OF THAILAND IN TULLAHOMA

This family-run, flavor-packed restaurant is worth every mile off the beaten path.

TUCKED AWAY along the back roads of Tullahoma, Short Springs Village offers a surprising blend of Thai and Laotian dishes. This locally loved spot isn't flashy or over-the-top — it is humble, thrives on consistency and hospitality, and is run by such a welcoming family.

When first approaching Short Springs Village, don't be fooled by its simple exterior, or assume it's closed and keep driving past it! Located inside this old filling station, you will find vibrant flavors and food cooked with love. The atmosphere is simple but warm and inviting. There's a clear sense of pride in what they do, from how the dishes are prepared to how each one is plated. The menu offers a number of traditional Thai and Laotian dishes, but also offers traditional fare like cheeseburgers and french fries for the less adventurous palate or picky kids.

We opted to try the pork fried rice, chicken lo mein, and egg rolls. While I can't wait to go back and try some new items, this visit, I was looking for comfort and flavors I knew I would love. The egg rolls were some of the best I have tasted! Their perfectly crispy fried shell filled with succulent pork and vegetables was somehow light and airy, while also rich and indulgent.

The pork fried rice was savory and delicious. The fluffy rice paired nicely with the crunchy edges of fried pork, making for a wonderful textural experience. The chicken lo mein was won-





derfully saucy and slippery in the best way, with vegetables cooked just right with a perfectly al dente bite left to them. It was the comfort food my soul needed.

Before leaving, we shared a glass of their Thai iced tea. This was an experience all its own. It was a vibrant orange-red color with such a unique taste. At first, I wasn't sure if I liked it, so I had to go back in for another sip. After three or four, I was still trying to figure out the flavors I was tasting, but enjoying it more and more. It is an earthy, nutty

flavor with many warm spices like cardamom and star anise, finished with sweet notes that keep you coming back. We were told it was a beloved drink in Thailand with the long, hot days, and I can see why. It was cold, refreshing, and layered with flavors.

Next time you're enjoying a hike near the Short Spring Natural Area, out for a drive, or just looking for somewhere new, head out to Short Springs Village. Do not be put off by the humble exterior or interior. It serves delicious traditional dishes along with classic favorites, making it a great place for all. **GN**

GOOD NEWS IS COMING TO DINNER!

We will feature a local food critic's thoughts as they dine in Tullahoma. This month Tabitha Buckner visited Short Springs Village.

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Mama's Pot Roast

Submitted by Cathy Gulley

3-4 lb. chuck roast
3 T. vegetable oil
6 med. potatoes, diced
2 lg. onions, diced
1 lb. carrots, sliced
6 c. water
3 cloves garlic, minced
¼ c. soy sauce
2 pkgs. beef stew seasoning mix
1 t. chicken bouillon granules
½ t. ground black pepper
1½ t. Accent®, optional
1 bay leaf



Preheat oven to 375°. In a large skillet over medium high heat, sear both sides of the roast in vegetable oil. Remove from heat; place in the center of a large roasting pan, along with the juices from the skillet. Place vegetables around meat and add water, garlic, and soy sauce. Sprinkle dry ingredients on top; stir lightly to dissolve seasonings. Add bay leaf. Cover, and bake at 375° for 30 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 275° and continue baking for 1½ - 2 hours or until meat and vegetables are tender.

Dinner Rolls

Submitted by Edith Sandlin

1 c. shortening
1 c. sugar
1 t. salt
1 c. boiling water
2 eggs, beaten
1 c. lukewarm water
2 pkgs. yeast
6 c. AP flour



In a bowl, mix shortening, sugar, and salt. Add boiling water; blend and cool. Add the beaten eggs. Soften yeast in lukewarm water; pour into egg mixture. Add flour a little at a time and mix well. Refrigerate 6 hours or overnight. Remove from refrigerator and knead onto a floured board. Roll out into 1/4". Cut out with biscuit cutter. Let rise about 2 hours. Bake at 400° for 15 minutes.

Strawberry Angel Food Cake

Submitted by Faye Bonner

1 angel food cake
2 pkgs. frozen strawberries, 10 oz., thawed
1 lg. pkg. vanilla instant pudding
1 container whipped topping, 8 oz.

In a large mixing bowl, tear angel food cake into pieces. Pour strawberries over cake pieces. Mix pudding according to package directions. Pour pudding over the cake and strawberries. Refrigerate until cold. Cover top with whipped topping. Keep refrigerated.

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CROSSING THE FINISH LINE

A father's life and death inspire a Tullahoma man to serve God, family, and community.

BY GABRIEL GRANT HUFF
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLEIGH NEWNES
AND SUBMITTED BY DAVID SMITH

SWEAT AND fatigue weighed upon David Smith as he dragged one foot ahead of the other, the goal within sight. His wife and children cheered as the distance between him and the target grew smaller. Most importantly, as he finally crossed the finish line, he felt the warmth of his father.

Smith smiled — an action that had been the one thing his dad refused to relinquish, up to his last breath a year prior.

Back then, Junior Smith's muscles were thinning. Movements made limbs ache, throbs spread across his chest, and breathing became a ragged chore as a disease attacked his body, but the Vietnam veteran never gave up



▲ David, Matthew, Preston, Rhett, Kylie, Jayse, and Betsy Smith



▲ David, Preston, Matthew, Kylie, Betsy, Jayse, and Rhetta Smith

the smile — until his body could not keep up with his spirit any longer in 2016.

He left behind a mourning family and a burning fire of determination that flickered within his son.

David, a Tullahoma native, graduated from Lipscomb University and pursued a career in banking. Tullahoma called him back in 2008 to serve at American City Bank. He married Betsy in 2011, and they now have five children. His skills took him to Traders Bank, where he currently works as the regional president.

“I like helping the community,” David said. “There are community needs, there are entrepreneurs, and there are families working to buy homes.”



**I finished the race,
crossed the finish
line, and I did it in
honor of my dad.
And I believed he
was with me every
step of the way.**

DAVID SMITH

*David and Betsy Smith
are committed to faith,
family, and community.*





Such a heart translated into his passion for serving and coaching multiple youth baseball teams in Tullahoma, programs in which his children became heavily involved.

He teaches his players about the importance of accepting failure, learning from defeat, upholding teamwork, working hard, and chasing dreams.

David guides his family in the home according to his beliefs, pointing them toward Jesus Christ. He shares these values with Betsy, a certified public accountant who also involves herself in the community.

David's impact on his family and city culminated in a very rare feat — a mayor's declaration of David Smith Day on Oct. 13, 2017.

All credit pointed to the testimony of David's father, who personified a coach, hero, and best friend for his son. The closeness made life that much harder when his father came down with lung cancer at 60 years old in 2011 and died five years later. The death hit hard, but David refused to wallow in sadness. Instead, his dad's perseverance inspired him to do what he described as the hardest one-day, physical event on the planet.

The Ironman Triathlon is a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride, and a 26.2-mile run.

David had never attempted a triathlon before. People doubted he could, but he trained two times a day while still making



time for his family and staying faithful to his job.

Signing up for the race in 2016, he only gave himself about one year to train for the September 2017 event in Chattanooga.

"I finished the race, crossed the finish line, and I did it in honor of my dad. And I believed he was with me every step of the way."

Like his father, David bestows strength, positive influence, and a legacy for his children to harness during the toughest times, encouraging others to cross their own finish line. **GN**

◀ David, Preston, Matthew, Jayse, Rhett, Kylie, and Betsy Smith on vacation.





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A HERITAGE WITH HEART

A local pastor and guidance counselor continues a family tradition of breaking barriers and caring for others.

BY BECCA ROBERTS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BROOKE SNYDER

STUDENTS AT East Middle School in Tullahoma grin when they see Pastor Lee Brannon III in the halls. Brannon is East Middle School's beloved school counselor. He is the pastor of Burning Bush Original Church of God in Belvidere, where he has served for 24 years with his wife, Tonya Brannon, and two daughters, Hannah and Mikah.

Aside from pastoring, Lee Brannon worked as a case manager at the Highland Rim Mental Health Center. After a tragic school shooting in 1998, Brannon was called to be available at Lincoln County High School to counsel students. This experience led Brannon to serve as the high school counselor in Lincoln County and later in

Franklin County. He was the first Black school counselor in the Franklin County school system. His calling to serve his church and the schools became intertwined.

"If we can change our school, we can change our neighborhood. If we can change our neighborhood, we can change our city. If we can change our city, we can change the world," Brannon said. "The kids know that I am available to listen without judgment, and I think when they leave my office, if they don't know anything else, they know that somebody cares for them."

This dedication to the community's safety, education, and well-being was passed down to Brannon from his whole family.





▲ School Sources of Strength members: Lucy Tucker, Tinsley Poston, Ingrid Fults, Lee Brannon, David Lopez, Kacee Bordenet, Ellasyn Parks, and Eli English

Brannon's father, Lee Roy Brannon Jr., made history as the county's first Black National Guardsman, and his mother, Barbara Brown, broke barriers as the first Black Department of Human Services worker. Lee shares his mother's advice to students even now.

"She would say, 'Son, if you stop to think, you will think to stop,'" Lee recalled. "She meant before you make any decisions, think about the consequences."

Another mentor for Lee was his grandfather, Fred Blackwell Sr. He took over the first Black funeral home in the county (Johnson-Blackwell Funeral Home) and had the only Black-owned laundromat. He was in the first graduating class of Townsend High School. Blackwell and his wife, Julia, were able to send all seven of their children to college by working multiple jobs.



If we can change our school, we can change our neighborhood. If we can change our neighborhood, we can change our city. If we can change our city, we can change the world.

PASTOR LEE BRANNON



School Sources of Strength members Lucy Tucker, Tinsley Poston, Ingrid Fults, Lee Brannon, David Lopez, Kacee Bordenet, Ellasyn Parks, and Eli English sit around the table discussing plans that will take place in the following weeks.



▲ Standing from left to right: Mike Blackwell Sr., Floyd Blackwell Sr., Fred Blackwell Jr., Julia Blackwell, Carolyn Nelson, Barbara Brannon, Alfreda Morris, and Gloria Maddox Kirkpatrick. Sitting in the front is Fred Blackwell Sr.

Lee's family values compassion and education. His grandmother insisted that all her children earn a teaching certification, regardless of their major. She knew that educators are world changers. Lee agrees.

"One of the greatest needs for us is re-evaluating the way that we teach kids. Education doesn't change much, but the way we do things doesn't always work for certain kids; that doesn't mean they aren't as smart or as capable, it's just that the 'four walls' system isn't working for them," Lee said.

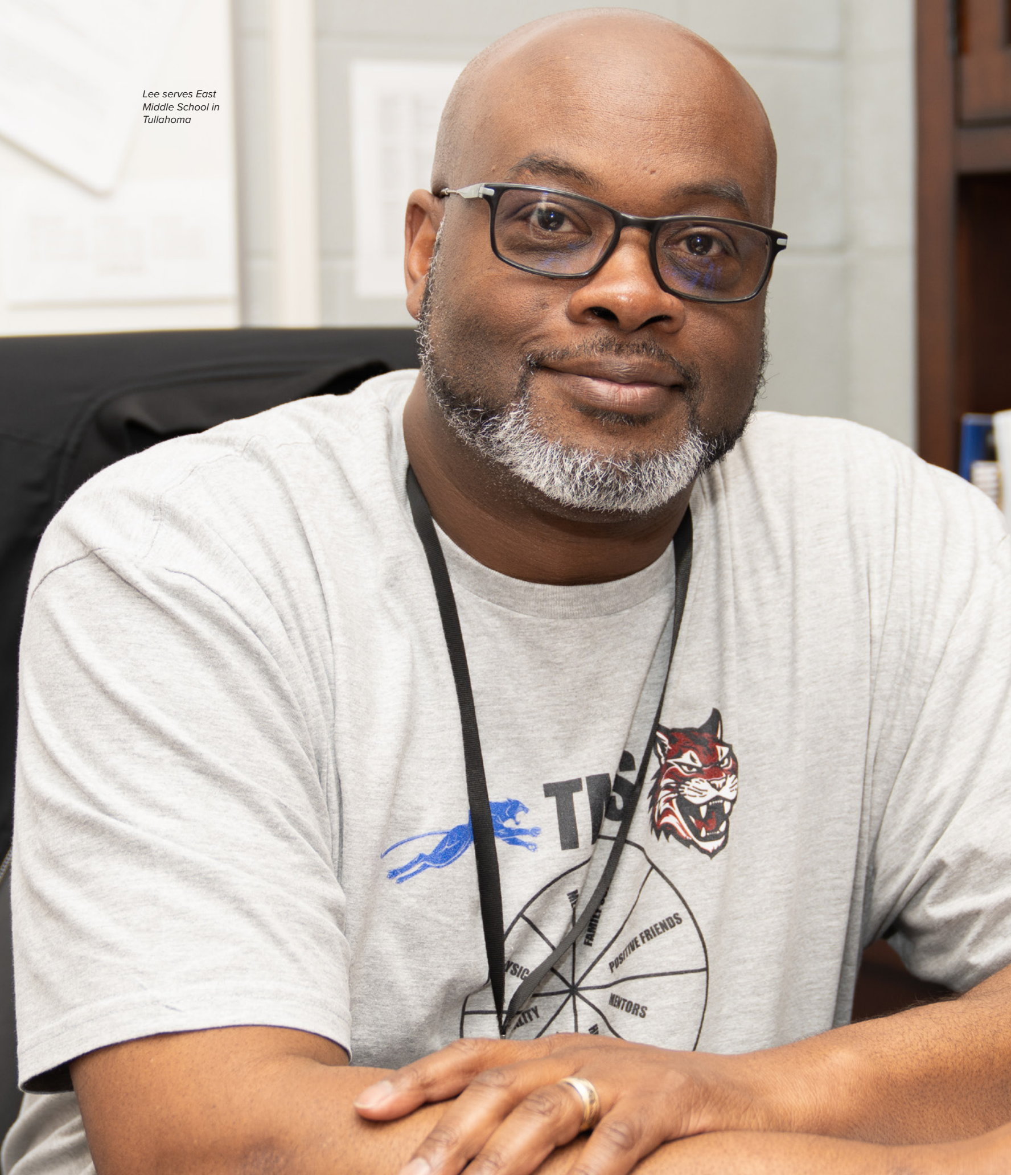
Lee impacts lives through many channels. He is the student council advisor and adult advisor for Sources of Strength, a peer-led program in which students become the eyes and ears in the hallways to keep a pulse on their classmates' emotional well-being. This year, he initiated "Random Acts of Kindness Week" and is planning a sneaker drive.

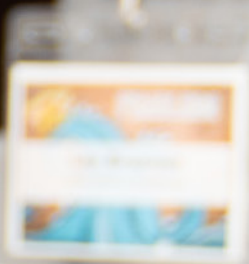
Wherever you find Lee, he is creating and inspiring positive changes in the world, honoring his family's generational values. **GN**



▲ Lee Brannon serves East Middle School in Tullahoma.

Lee serves East
Middle School in
Tulahoma





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THE KEY TO COMMUNITY

From showrooms to school sports, the Barnett family fosters community impact.

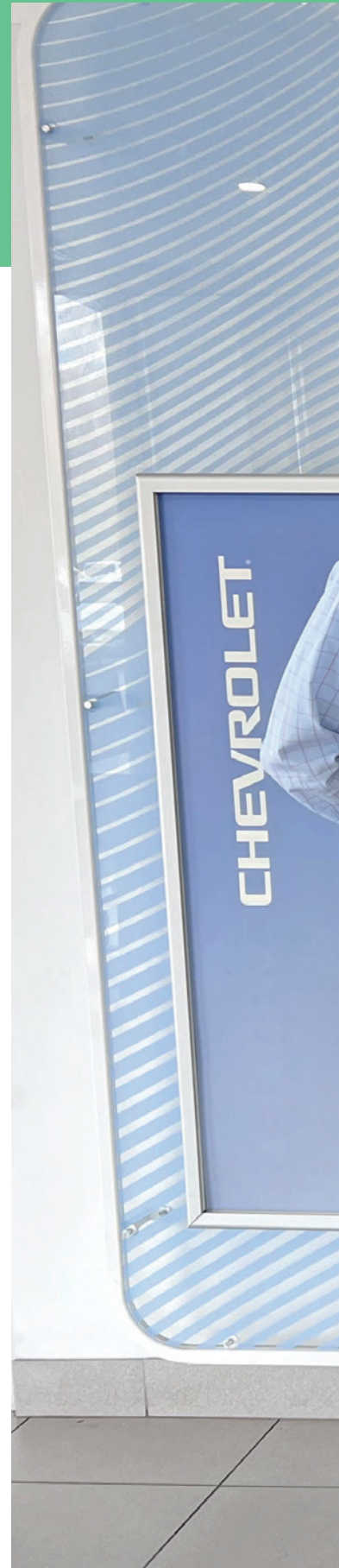
BY BECCA ROBERTS
PHOTOS SUBMITTED
BY CHASE LAWSON

THE RUSSELL Barnett family has been in the automotive industry for 86 years, and their generosity and impact equally match their long-standing reputation of integrity in car sales in the community. Russell Barnett's father, Albert Barnett, started his car business in 1939, and his son followed in his footsteps, establishing five locations in Tullahoma and Winchester.

The Russell Barnett logo can be spotted on vehicles across the country. Through their commitment to excellence and their presence in their communities, the Barnett family name

is well-known and respected. Barnett's sons, Alex and Adam Barnett, run the Ford and the Chevrolet businesses (respectively) in Winchester, and his nephew, Keith Barnett, runs the Ford dealership in Tullahoma. It's a business grown over decades through strong family and community roots. Keith Barnett remembers his Uncle Russell pouring into his life from a young age.

"He coached me in church league basketball 35 years ago," Keith said. "He and Deby (Russell Barnett's wife) have been involved in





The Barnett family — Russell, Keith, Adam, and Alex — work side by side to uphold a tradition of honest car sales and deep community involvement. Whether coaching youth teams or delivering mobile car services to local schools and libraries, they lead with generosity.

Keith Barnett, general manager of Russell Barnett Ford in Tullahoma, brings decades of experience and a personal connection to the family business. His uncle, Russell Barnett, mentored him from a young age — on and off the court.





I will just say that I made my living in this area, and I feel like this is where my money should go back to. It needs to go back to the people I live and work with every day.

KEITH BARNETT



some form of coaching for at least 35 years.” They have made it a priority to be involved in school sports, and they love attending games and coaching various teams: Little League, basketball, football, and other sports. They coach and sponsor youth league teams and contribute to their church and other local places, but Russell prefers to keep the majority of his charitable contributions private.

“I will just say that I made my living in this area, and I feel like this is where my money should go back to,” Russell said. “It needs to go back to the people I live and work with every day.”

Russell lives in Tullahoma, but he invests in Tullahoma and Franklin County.

“We try to do an equal amount between Tullahoma and Franklin County because we have the dealerships there,” Russell said. “The most-known would probably be the waters we give.” Russell’s company donates 32,000 water bottles per year to school sports concessions, whose proceeds benefit the teams and players.

The Barnetts do an excellent job balancing the operation of successful businesses with service to the cities they love. One event hosted last year was to introduce a mobile maintenance service. They went to schools, libraries, and other businesses in town to give the staff free car washes. They blessed people in town while also demonstrating the ease of ordering mobile service. This is a family that makes community a top priority, whether through public-facing or private contributions.

Russell said his business is built on honesty, which is non-negotiable for all employees. He treats his employees and customers like family. Russell Barnett Ford demonstrates that level of care for its customers by offering a limited lifetime powertrain warranty on select units. Keith confirmed that \$250,000 has been saved for the consumer to date, and that number continues to climb.

Honesty, humility, and intentional presence are what make Russell Barnett’s family and business a valued part of Tullahoma and Winchester’s communities. **GN**

CELEBRATING SWEET STRENGTH: WATER'S EDGE CHOCOLATES UNVEILS EMPOWERING NEW LINE

By Haley Potter // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

WATER'S EDGE Chocolates in Tullahoma recently hosted a heartwarming community event to debut its brand-new “You Are” line of chocolate bars. This inspiring series centers around uplifting and affirming messages for women. The event, held from 9 a.m. to noon, invited locals to be among the first to experience this meaningful new collection that celebrates inner strength, positivity, and self-worth.

The morning was filled with community spirit and, of course, lots of chocolate. Guests were treated to complimentary grab bags from the organizers. Local pop-ups, including Project Donuts, Fuel So Good

Coffee, Elegant Permanent Jewelry, and the Country Club Flower Patch, added to the charm of the day. The collaborative nature of this event showcased the best of what Tullahoma has to offer, with small businesses working side by side to create a memorable and meaningful morning.

People from all across the community gathered to support the launch. Families, friends, and fellow business owners stopped by to share in the celebration and enjoy the positive messaging at the heart of the “You Are” chocolate series. With each bar carrying affirmations meant to lift spirits and spread kindness, the collection quickly struck a chord with the community. **GN**



▲ “You Are” Reflection line



▲ Angela Miller with Country Club Flower Patch



▲ Project Donuts



▲ Joel, Griffin, and Scott Claybrook



▲ Jay Chavez with Project Donuts



▲ Joey, Brandy, Cambree, Emma, and Oaklynn



▲ Courtney Campbell and Jodi Struckmeyer

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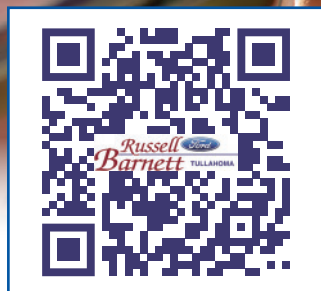
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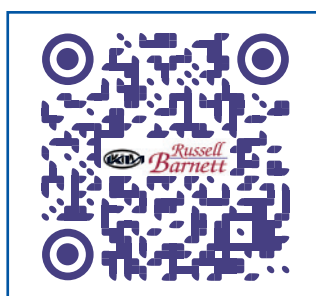


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- Michael J. Fox



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