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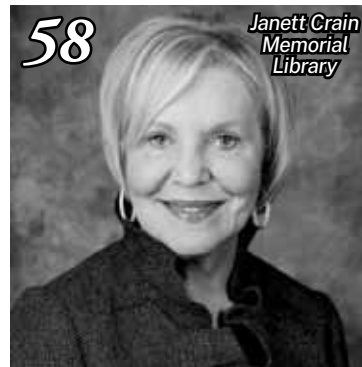


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On the Cover:

J L & MICHELLE TILLET

Photo by
SEARCY LIVING



GREAT EXPECTATIONS & NEW ROUTINES



By Christine Walker Faith



I CAN'T HELP BUT LAUGH every time I pull up to the bank teller window these days as I have a new routine. That is to roll down the back window so our Doberman can prick up her ears looking totally adorable and intently stare down the teller. She knows that the magic drawer holds a treat for her if she looks cute enough. She has absolutely no idea that every dog is treated this way; she just knows that she is special, rewarded, and adored a little extra when we go through that drive through. She has great expectations as soon as we pull up.

I couldn't help but think this week how this is going to be a year of great expectations; and yes, our family dog totally inspired this publisher's note. So many things are changing in our magazine world, my personal world, and of course, our charitable world. As I write this publisher's note, I have spent the past week packing up our former office home on Main Street as the sale of that building will be final in just a few days. So many memories in the more than 22 years of business, almost all of which was spent in that Main Street building. I ran across so many memories that I had forgotten. Pictures of friends, article submissions, the first copy of Searcy Living, news stories I had saved on issues that were [and still are] important to me, and so much more.



It was a bit surreal when I carefully picked up the hand carved horse that was on my office shelf in the window facing Lincoln street. That horse was displayed in that window so that everyone could enjoy its beauty, as its story is as unique as every hand carved curve. It was sent to me by a missionary friend in Juarez, Mexico. One day I randomly received a package and inside was this beautiful horse hand carved by a homeless man living under a piece of cardboard in Mexico. My friend and his wife purchased this horse from the homeless man giving him much needed income, and they shipped it to me at the magazine, as we had featured several stories from their mission adventures

in the past. This gift and so many other Searcy Living memories meant so much as I carefully packed them. Every memory of the magazine's 22 plus years, locating to a new location for purposes I don't yet even understand. But I am encouraged that this location will bless others in ways I cannot yet see.



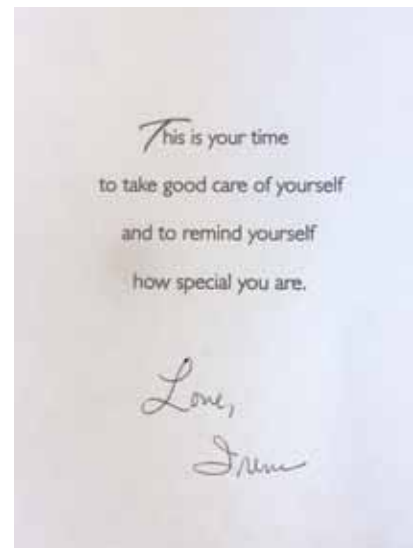
This year I have great expectations for the foster care/adoption ministry to grow and evolve with our new location. I have great expectations that the magazine will continue to encourage and inspire. I have great expectations for this new season. Life is rarely easy for any of us and I am no exception; but we all have the choice to step onto the unique path that God has created just for us.

And as Donnie and I rapidly approach our first completed year of marriage, I have to say my expectations were greatly exceeded. What an amazing gift from God.

New seasons, new challenges, and new opportunities to serve and grow in different ways. So thank you for walking alongside us once again. And thank you, as always, for reading Searcy Living.



~Christine



“I found so many great memories from special friends and readers over the years.”

Publisher's Note



We were hours from going to press with this issue, but these words flowed out of my heart and I thought I would share them with you. That morning I looked out the dining room window and noticed that the tree in the backyard was blooming with its beautiful white buds, preparing for the summer season. That tree reminded me that Donnie and I were approaching our first wedding anniversary.

I want to share what the season a few years before that day looked like. Not that I want to reminisce about my season of self pity and grief, but I remember how angry I was at God almost four years ago when He took my mom home.

I could never understand before that time how people could be angry with the God who created the universe, but He was so gracious to me when I had that season. I was so honest with Him in the way I felt at that time, telling Him, “Really? You leave me an orphan raising orphans??? You call me to this and now there is no one to walk with me?? I know You are the God of the universe and You have the power to strike me down for saying this, but this is REALLY not fair. She was the only person I had to share my deepest feelings with, and You took her home to You leaving me alone in this crazy world??”

During that season, the song *The Goodness of God* went through my head a million times. I was honest with Him then too: “I don’t feel like You are good right now. But I know You love me enough to walk through that resentment towards You anyway. Thank you.”

I will never forget the long drive to Michigan for her memorial service and the grief I felt knowing that my mom would not be there when I arrived. And then I came back home with precious kids to take care of. **Alone.** I can’t really say that I always had the best attitude for the next few months as I cooked, cleaned, worked, and tried to accommodate the needs of everyone else. But I tried.

So fast forward back to that tree. The tree that Donnie and I were married under. That beautiful, simple wedding that has brought so much joy. I was single for over eleven years, and had not even dated

in four. I was determined to do things right this time or die alone. I am so appreciative that God was our match maker and introduced us in HIS time. I am so grateful for a God that loved me through the hardest days. Days that did not make sense to me at the time, but I can see so many lessons and reasons in hindsight.

I say all of this to THANK each and every one of you who chose to help us celebrate. Some at our wedding reception and some after with your sweet and appreciated comments and well wishes. I have been a bit unorganized on thank you cards, but I want you to know that your kindness meant so much to us. I will forever be grateful that you helped us celebrate *a day that was not about accomplishments or charitable works. You just helped us celebrate US.* You showed us love that means more than I can ever convey.

Donnie was worth every second of the wait and I literally thank God for him everyday. As that beautiful tree blossoms with the promise of a new season, we are celebrating the beginning of the second year of ours. Thank you for being a sweet part of our journey.

~Christine (again)



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Publisher
Christine Walker Faith

Art Director & Webmaster
Garrett Johnson

Delivery Director
Debbie Belew

Editorial Assistant
Cherie Sewell

Feature Writers

Cecelia Wilson

Jennifer Webb

Martha Overby

Searcy Living
Locally Owned and Operated
1308 South Benton Street
Searcy, AR 72143
searcyliving@yahoo.com
(501) 368-0095
SearcyLiving.com

For subscription information go to
SearcyLiving.com



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DO PARENTS HAVE SOME ACCOUNTABILITY WHEN YOUNG CHILDREN GET IN TROUBLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA WITH PARENT-SUPPLIED PHONES?

I STRONGLY ADVISE every parent to wait until their child is at least 13 (16 is better) before letting them have a smartphone. One of the more popular excuses parents has to ignore this advice is that their child is home alone after school and needs the smartphone to connect to the parent if something unforeseeable happens.

For safety reasons, the parent is giving a 10-year-old child access to 1000s of local predators, unlimited pornography, sexual desensitization, the possibility of human trafficking, and many more unseen dangers of smartphones.

It does not make sense to add a whole heap of actual danger to counter the small possibility of danger.

Many other safer options are available for your child to be safe after school.

Good alternatives to smartphones: Alexa, hardwired phones, Gabb wireless phone, Troomi, Gizmo, Pinwheel phone, Light phone, Bark phone, no phone, and many more.

Happy parenting,

Officer Gomez

#thetruthaboutyouth, #officergomez

You can find nuggets of wisdom from Officer Gomez on FaceBook. Although he is NOT from this area, he has given us permission to share his wisdom and discernment. Thank you Officer Gomez for boldly sharing your heart.

“

Real preaching will cause people to either hate their sin or hate the preacher.

”

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We welcomed our #5 grandchild October 14, 2021 and our first granddaughter!

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I WAS IN Walmart today getting a huge cart full. Sutton was screaming for at least 10 minutes, but my cart was full and I was just going to press through. I had 4 different women come up to me and they all just spoke some kind of encouragement to me. One said, "I know you don't see it now but you will miss this, please take a moment and enjoy it because mine are grown now." 😊

Another said, "just breathe mama."

And another opened up a package of Oreos and let the girls grab a hand full. She told me she remembered these days and that it gets better. THEN, a man who works at Walmart saw the lady do that and he went and got her a brand new package and told her thanks for what she did.

At this point I'm trying not to cry. Not because I was overwhelmed- I've gotten to the point where I tune it out and move on 😊 but I'm fixing to cry because these women!! They were used by God, whether they know it or not. That was the most powerful moment I've ever been in, in Walmart! I love mothers. Never think your job as a mother is just mundane. In everything you do for your children- everyday you serve your husbands and your family is an act of service to God. I hope this encourages someone as much as it did me! 😊

~ Kayla and Christian Colvin





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- ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

”

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LAST YEAR DAVID got me a gold necklace with a branch on it called Abide. I wore it every day, never took it off, so powerful, reminding me of the scripture of staying or abiding in Him so that I can have what I need. Staying connected to the vine where the life is.

For Christmas, David picked out the silver Laurel Crown. And ohhhh... The symbolism and details are just so precious to me.

~ *Kim Overstreet*

*Everyday Heirlooms

"Blessed is the one who remains steadfast under trial, for when they have stood the test they will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him."

~ *James 1:12*



THE WELL DONE RUN was created to raise awareness about the global water crisis and help the now 771 million people who lack access to clean water. This charity fun walk/run is an experiential 5K designed to simulate what people around the world do daily to collect their needed water. Participants carry an empty jug to the halfway point, fill it with water from a creek and carry it back to the finish line.

While there are some competitive racers, most are not trying to set their personal best. Along the course, you will see runners, walkers and families with strollers. The desire is that this event will impact participants' lives as they help to change the world through safe water.

Proceeds from this year's sign-ups, donations and sponsorships will fund fresh water well projects in Africa and India through Living Water International. This partnership has provided 30 wells in 12 countries over the past eight years!

The Well Done Run is Saturday, April 15th, at 9:00 a.m., beginning and ending at Fellowship Bible Church in Searcy. There's also a virtual option for those unable to attend. For more information, including race registration and other ways to help, visit welldonerun.org.

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Bobby Wilson, guest speaker, a retired John Deere Technical Supervisor who was stationed in Honduras and helped the people there to get water wells, later moved to Heber Springs, Arkansas, and became a member of the Rotary Club there. He was recruited to help form Technical Vocational Schools in some of the towns. It takes a lot of money to provide equipment for each school and Paul Roberts, a Rotarian at Heber Springs was able to write several grants to provide money to purchase equipment to outfit each of the schools. Bobby Wilson, being very familiar with Honduras, took on the volunteer job of getting equipment, some of it donated from Lowe's here in Searcy, making arrangements for the shipment to Honduras, and going there to oversee the installation. Instructors in the vocational schools do not require a teacher's degree whereas teachers in 9th and 12th grade schools must have teaching degrees. The Cleburne County Rotary Club welcomes donations from companies and individuals. Searcy Rotary Club President presented Mr. Wilson a \$1,000.00 check from the club.



William & Cynthia Dismang, owners of Bull Creek Outdoors is a local company located in Beebe and is one of the leading trap manufacturers of wild hog traps. They also have a retail store with mowers, side-by-sides, retail equipment and other products. He also explained more about the wild hog traps which they sell.



Phillip Corder introduced Brandon Grimes, new member, as he was inducted into the Searcy Rotary Club by Blake Hendrix, Club President.



Dr. Jim Carr introduced Josh Chambless to the Rotary Club of Searcy who becomes the newest member, inducted by the Club President, Blake Hendrix. Mr. Chambless retired from the Searcy Police Department after 23 years of service and he and his partner formed Cornerstone Security Business. He is married to his wife Lindsey and they have 5 children. They were also recently approved to become foster parents. We welcome Mr. Chambless to the Searcy Rotary Club.



The Masonic Lodge of Searcy installed new officers December 26, 2022, with several members and guests in attendance, as listed with their positions in the lodge: Bill Swain - Senior Deacon, Cody Louks - Senior Warden, Charlie Adcock - Worshipful Master, Johnny Walker - Junior Deacon, Dave Manary - Junior Warden, Denton McDonald - Tyler, Danny Cooper - Chaplain with Larry Berry and Jiles Pagen performing the installation.



Debbie Higgs is the director of the Searcy Arts Council. Together we are making a difference in Searcy.

The Searcy Arts Council is for everyone who appreciates those who are inspired and create beautiful works of art in diverse mediums of expression. It's about broadening our own inner imagination. It's about educating the public how the arts stimulate our local economy. It's about mentoring students of all ages and encouraging exploration of the arts. It's about building partnerships within the community and bridging gaps in order to enhance the overall effectiveness of arts.

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Guest speaker Darla Ino, Searcy Library Director, told about some of the new things that will be incorporated into the new library location at the corner of Pleasure and Beebe Capps Expressway, such as a coffee shop offering coffee and snacks inside and also an outdoor sitting area. The new library will utilize the main floor and the second floor, with a computer area for use by the patrons, and many other areas that will make the library a more customer friendly place. Remodeling should begin soon with a grand opening to follow.



Kelly Stanley of Stanley Pharmacy became the newest member. She and her husband own Stanley Pharmacy. We welcome Kelly.



We Love To Serve



Dixie Evans spoke about the Literacy Council of White County, which provides adult literacy services in White and Woodruff Counties, working with adults who struggle with reading to reach their goals in career and life. Over 13% of adults in White County and 21% of adults in Woodruff County lack basic literacy skills. More than 70% of prison inmates read below a 4th grade level. Low literacy costs the US \$225 billion each year due to non productivity in the workforce, crime, and tax revenue.

We provide reading and writing classes, dyslexia intervention, ESL classes, Pre-GED tutoring, work skills classes, computer/digital literacy, health literacy classes, family literacy programs, and parent engagement classes. Mrs. Evans can be contacted at 411 N. Spruce St. #200, Searcy or by phone 501-278-5500.



Amber Walker tells about the Chamber of Commerce's plans to inform persons about the upcoming eclipse, which is due to pass through Arkansas on April 8, 2024. Searcy is in an excellent location for us to have a good view of the eclipse which is estimated to last a little over four minutes as it passes over our area. It is very important for persons to wear special glasses to keep from hurting their eyes. More information will be available as we get closer to the estimated April 8, 2024 date.



Searcy School District Superintendent Dr. Bobby Hart spoke about new programs that will benefit students and their parents. He also introduced Betsy Bailey, Director of Information and Publicity, and Holly Haile, 6th Grade Teacher and Director of the after school program and the upcoming pre-kindergarten program. We are very fortunate and proud of our school system.



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Policy/ID # _____

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Member Name _____ Birthday _____ ☐ Male ☐ Female

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PARENTS THINKING they can monitor their kids social media is like thinking you can beat a professional basketball player one-on-one.

Kids are actual professionals at social media and parents are not. Kids have coaches and technical support teams (other kids) that advise them every day. Parents have their work group or friends of 3 or four people who share what they think they know about kids and social media.

Kids spend 6 hours a day perfecting and practicing their skill. Parents don't spend much time on the apps that kids use at all.

Kids research and share that research with each other daily and hourly so they know the latest moves, tricks, and hacks. Parents trick themselves into thinking they know what kids are doing and can keep up.

Parents installing monitoring software to keep up with your kids social media is equivalent to thinking that if you buy a new pair of basketball shoes you can beat a pro player. You are not going to beat the pro-player by putting on a pair of shoes.

(If your kid has a smart phone I highly recommend monitoring software as a way to help control the technological issues. I am just advising that software alone will not stop most kids). I see way too many parents who over rely on software to patrol their kids online life.

The only way parents will win this game is by taking children out of their pro environment and spending non-screen time with them. Parents are the leaders of their family and should spend time teaching your values and ethics to your children. Please don't let Snapchat and TikTok dictate values to your kids.

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OVER THE COUNTER

Aged Eating: Tips For Eating Well As You Get Older

Katie Willard, PharmD Candidate 2023; Melissa Shipp, PharmD, BCPS; Lana Gettman, PharmD

THE DEFINITION OF “HEALTHY EATING” changes a little as you age. For example, your metabolism slows, so your body requires less calories than you needed before. Your body also produces fewer amounts of certain important nutrients, such as calcium, phosphorus, vitamin B12, vitamin D, and dietary fiber, as you age. Therefore you should be certain to add these nutrients into your diet. Applying the following tips to your eating habits can help you to choose the best foods for your body, and increase your health long term.

This graphic from [MyPlate.gov](https://www.myplate.gov) shows the recommended portion sizes for the five food groups. Even if you do not follow this plate method strictly, there are a few other important tips you can implement. First, try to enjoy a variety of foods from each of the five food groups. This will introduce different nutrients into your diet. You should also try to eat enough protein throughout the day to help maintain muscle strength and stability, while incorporating a variety of fruits and vegetables into your diet. When doing so, focusing on what is in season will help to maintain the variety and freshness of your produce. Lastly, choose foods with little to no added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium. It is recommended that these foods be limited in the diets of older individuals.

When trying to incorporate important nutrients, your plate should look like a rainbow - bright colored foods are always the best choice! Lean proteins such as chicken, seafood, eggs and beans are a great source of nutrients. Whole grains also offer a larger variety of nutrients. You can try substituting brown rice or whole wheat pasta for your regular grains. Low-fat dairy or fat-free dairy options are also recommended for the elderly because they can provide patients with all of the needed proteins and minerals, without excess saturated fats.

When following an intentional diet, it is also important to focus on your mind. Certain foods are known as “brain foods” because they can support a healthy mind. Examples of common brain foods include apples, blueberries, butternut squash, dark chocolate, garlic, mixed nuts, and turmeric. These foods are known to protect your brain, increase memory and improve concentration. These foods can provide benefits beyond your brain; they have also shown to protect your heart, blood vessels, and increase energy.

If you are interested in learning more about a healthy mind, the MIND diet may be for you. This is a brain-healthy diet that stands for Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay. It is a hybrid of the DASH and the Mediterranean diets that focuses on food groups within each diet that can maximize brain health and help protect it from age-related mind problems.

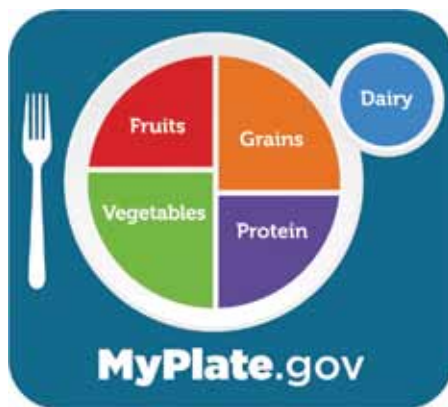
In addition to choosing the right foods to eat, it is also important to focus on using the appropriately recommended serving sizes. Eating the right amounts of food for your age will be a vital component to maintaining a healthy weight. The American Heart Association provides the following recommended serving sizes for individuals over the age of 60. It is recommended to incorporate a minimum of 2.5 servings of vegetables and 2 servings of fruits into a daily diet. A standard serving of fruits and vegetables is approximately half a cup (4 ounces) of cooked greens, or 1 medium apple, banana or orange. It is also recommended to eat approximately 6 servings of grains daily, which is equivalent to a

half cup (4 ounces) of cooked rice, pasta, or oats. It is recommended to not partake in more than 3 servings of dairy per day. A standard serving of dairy is 1 cup (8 ounces) of milk or yogurt. You should also try to eat 5.5 ounces of protein each day, and limit your fats and oils to 3 tablespoons per day. This includes oils used for cooking and food preparation.

Lastly, remember to stay hydrated. Water is one of the most important nutrients that our bodies rely on to function properly. Do your best to refrain from becoming dehydrated. Good practice is to drink small amounts of fluids consistently throughout the day. Water is the most efficient source of hydration, however tea and coffee are other good options

for hydrations. Try to keep fluids with salt and sugar to a minimum, unless your primary care provider has suggested otherwise. These drinks tend to cause your body to retain less water than other beverages.

By applying these steps to your own personal eating habits, you will be more likely to meet your body’s specific nutrient needs, maintain a healthy body weight, and decrease the likelihood of chronic disease. It is not necessary to make all of these changes at once. You can incorporate a few now, and then try to add a few more at a later point. However you choose to proceed, incorporating the above tips into your diet will provide health benefits for years to come. ●





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chopped

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BACON
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cooked

1. Slice each chicken breast in half like a pancake (thin; crosswise) and sprinkle with season salt. Place in fridge until ready to assemble remaining ingredients.

2. Combine honey mustard sauce ingredients and set aside.

3. In a large skillet heat 1 Tbsp rendered bacon grease (or olive or avocado oil if you don't have bacon grease) and sauté the four chicken breast pieces until slightly browned. Remove chicken pieces from skillet and place in a 2 quart casserole dish.

4. Pour honey mustard sauce (reserving some if you want to serve it with the dish later) over chicken, coating each piece well.

5. Top chicken evenly with mushroom slices.

6. Tear bacon slices into pieces and distribute evenly over the mushrooms then top with the shredded cheese.

7. Bake in a 350° oven for about 30 minutes or until heated throughout. Enjoy!



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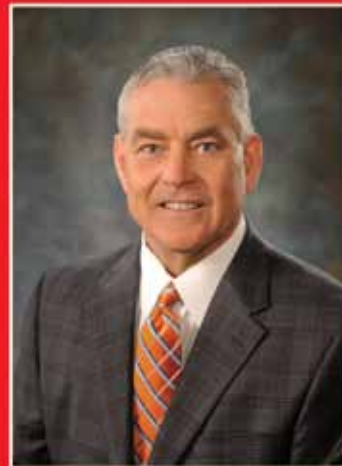
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Operation Christmas Child Gives Thanks

I AM WRITING TO THANK Searcy-area residents for sharing the true meaning of Christmas with children in need this past holiday season.

Generosity throughout contributed to a successful shoebox gift collection season at drop-off locations for the Samaritan's Purse project Operation Christmas Child. Across the U.S., the project collected over 9.3 million shoebox gifts in 2022. Combined with those collected from partnering countries in 2022, the ministry is now sending nearly 10.6 million shoebox gifts to children worldwide.

Through shoeboxes—packed with fun toys, school supplies, and hygiene items—Searcy-area volunteers brought joy to children in need around the world. Each gift-filled shoebox is a tangible expression of God's love, and it is often the first gift these children have ever received. Through the continued

generosity of donors since 1993, Operation Christmas Child has collected and delivered more than 209 million gift-filled shoeboxes to children in more than 170 countries and territories. This year, Samaritan's Purse delivered its milestone 200 millionth shoebox, which was packed on a country-wide tour and then hand-delivered to a young girl in Ukraine.

Across Arkansas, shoebox packers often shop for deals on shoebox items throughout the year, and many serve at a deeper level by becoming a year-round volunteer. Information about ways area participants can get involved year-round can also be found at samaritanaspurse.org/occ or by calling 615-962-7145.

Although local drop-off locations for gifts are closed until Nov. 13 – 20, 2023, anyone can still be a part of this life-changing project by conveniently packing a shoebox gift online in just a few simple clicks at samaritanaspurse.org/buildonline.

These simple gifts, packed with love, send a message to children worldwide that they are loved and not forgotten. ●



Sincerely,

CASEY GOODWIN

Media Relations Specialist

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WHAT IS MEDICARE ADVANTAGE AND Medicare Part D

By Denise Morton

PART C OF MEDICARE is a Medicare Advantage plan. An Advantage plan is your Medicare benefits administered by a private insurance company. You use your Advantage Plan card instead of your Medicare card.

There are different types of Advantage plans available – PPO, HMO, PFFS, D-SNP, C-SNP. All plans are not available in all areas. Advantage plans typically have a lower (or no) premium with copays for doctor visits, outpatient services, a per day copay for inpatient hospitalizations, emergency room services, lab services, home health care, and skilled nursing. There is a maximum out of pocket amount, which, again, depends on the plans available in your area. Some Advantage plans include prescription drug coverage. If a prescription drug plan is not included, you may be able to buy a stand-alone drug plan. The costs you pay for prescription drugs through an Advantage plan do not count toward the out-of-pocket maximum. You will continue to pay your Part B premium. Advantage plans may change each year so it is important to review your coverage each year during Annual Election Period.

Part D is a prescription drug plan. In general, Medicare A and B do not cover routine prescriptions. You may buy a Medicare Advantage plan with drug coverage or without. You may be able to pick up a stand alone drug plan, depending on the type of Advantage plan you choose. Part D plans have four phases – Deductible Phase, Initial Coverage Phase, Coverage Gap, and Catastrophic Phase. In the Deductible Phase, you pay 100% of your drug costs until the deductible is met. Some plans may not have a deductible,

and some may not apply the deductible to Tier 1 or Tier 2 drugs. Once the Deductible is met, you pay a cost share until you and the plan reach the Initial Coverage Phase of \$4,430 (for 2022). You then move to the Coverage Gap. In the Coverage Gap, you generally pay no more than 25% of the cost for prescription drugs

until your out-of-pocket spending is \$7,050 (for 2022), under the standard drug benefit. Once your out-of-pocket spending reaches \$7,050, you will automatically move to the Catastrophic Coverage Phase. In most cases, you pay no more than 5% of the cost for covered drugs for the rest of the year. Prescription Drug plans are unique to each individual and the plans usually change each year so it is very important to review your drug plan each year during the Annual Election Period. If you do not enroll in a Part D plan when eligible, you may be subject to a penalty of approximately \$.34 per month for each month you were eligible but were not enrolled in a plan. The penalty is on top of the premium and continues until you no longer have Part D coverage. ●



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The Storehouse

BY JENNIFER WEBB

Have you ever had to clean out a house and wished that someone could just take some of the household items away and give them to someone that really needs them?

Maybe your kids outgrew that bunkbed that you got for them, or you just got a new table and need to get rid of your old one. Or maybe you have to clean out a house after a loved one has passed (never an easy task!) and feel like you have household items and furniture running out of your ears. What if you have to move and you have items that you really don't want to take with you? There is a ministry in Searcy called The Storehouse that takes those household items, including furniture, and gives it directly to a family that needs them. Your old household items could literally be the blessing that someone else is praying for.

So what exactly is The Storehouse?

The Storehouse's story really starts with another organization called 100 Families. Their goal is to keep families together that are struggling throughout all of White County. A family might be struggling with housing, job loss, drug or alcohol dependence, finding childcare so that they can work, finding reliable transportation, or a whole host of other issues. If a family has no extended family, friends, or church family to lean on, who can they turn to to help? They turn to 100 Families.

When a family that is struggling comes to 100 Families they are assigned a caseworker whose job it is to pool resources to help them get their lives back together. This can include things like helping with housing, food, transportation, jobs, education, medical needs, and more.

All this coordination involves many people and many organizations. Some are government programs such as SNAP, while others are privately run charities and faith-based organizations. The other organizations that 100 Families uses are called "partner agencies." The Storehouse is one of those partner agencies.

After talking with Dana Baker of 100 Families, and her husband Shayne Baker, now of Restore Hope Arkansas, Holly Wilkins felt that God was calling her to serve. There were other organizations that were offering assistance with things like clothing, housing, and food, but none were dedicated to helping with home furnishings after a struggling family had secured housing. That's how The Storehouse came to be in 2021.

Full of enthusiasm and armed with a notebook, Holly started the organization as a loosely run group of volunteers. Its mission is to share the love of Christ by providing 100 Families active clients with home furnishings. One of the local churches donated facilities for storage and they started collecting donations. The donations come from private individuals as well as corporations and churches.

Julie Stratton moved to Searcy in 2020 and had been looking for ways to serve the community, make friends, and get involved. She came on with The Storehouse in July 2021. She and Holly work as a team. Before Julie came, Holly was basically running the organization herself, including transporting large items with the help of her husband and other volunteers. She was more focused on immediate needs. But Julie had a more long-term vision. Julie took Holly's notebook of people's names, addresses, and requested items and made excel spreadsheets to keep better track of what donations came in, what was needed, and how many people they had served.

When a family is trying to get back on their feet, one of the first things that they have to do is secure housing. But housing usually comes empty. It's hard to make the house a home or for it to function when it's empty. How can a person cook if they don't have pots or pans? How can you curl up on the couch if all you have is a bare floor? How do you get your kids back from foster care if you don't have a bed for them to sleep on? And how do you get these items if all your money has just gone for a deposit on the apartment or trailer?

The Storehouse takes donations both from individuals and businesses. They range from linens, small and large appliances, kitchen items, furniture, mattresses, baby items such as playpens, swings, highchairs, strollers, and car seats, AC units, heaters, fans, hygiene products, cleaning supplies, tools for home repair, and other items needed to make a house a home. The Storehouse takes these generous donations and gives them to people that need them and are working to improve their lives.

To date, they have helped approximately 150+ families that live here in White County. If you or your church would like to help or would like Holly or Julie to speak, please email storehouse.searcy@gmail.com. If you would like to learn more about 100 Families visit www.restorehopear.org/100families or call (501) 380-0715. ●

"The Storehouse takes donations both from individuals and businesses... and gives them to people that need them and are working to improve their lives."

Can You Count On

SOCIAL SECURITY?

IF YOU'RE GETTING closer to retirement, you might be thinking more about Social Security. Specifically, can you count on it to contribute part of the income you'll need as a retiree?

There's been an increase in alarming language surrounding the solvency of Social Security, but in reality, its prospects are not nearly as gloomy as you might have heard.

Here's the story: Under current law, Social Security is estimated to exhaust its trust funds by 2035, after which benefits could be cut by 20%, according to the 2022 Social Security Trustees report. However, the large cost of living adjustment (COLA) (8.7%) for 2023 could cause the trust funds to use up their resources sooner.

But this outlook may represent a worst-case scenario. For one thing, the cost of the 2023 COLA will be somewhat offset by higher taxes on workers contributing to Social Security. The maximum amount of earnings subject to the 6.2% Social Security tax jumped from \$147,000 in 2022 to \$160,200 in 2023. And in looking down the road, further increases in this earnings cap may also help reduce the gap in the trust funds. Increasing the payroll tax is another possibility for boosting funding to Social Security.

And here's a political reality: Social Security is a popular program and it's unlikely that any future Congress wants to be blamed for reducing benefits. Of course, there are no guarantees, but it seems fair to say that you can reasonably expect some benefits from Social Security when you retire.

But perhaps the bigger issue is just *how much* you should depend on Social Security for your retirement income. On average, Social Security benefits will provide about 30% of a beneficiary's preretirement earnings, according to the Social Security Administration. But the higher your earnings before you retire, the lower the percentage that will be replaced by Social Security.

Still, you'll want to maximize the benefits that are available to you — and that means deciding when to start taking Social Security. You can begin as early as 62, but your monthly payments could be as much as 30% lower than your normal (or "full") retirement age, which will likely be between 66 and 67.

Even if you were to wait until your full retirement age before collecting Social Security, you'll also need to draw on other sources of funding. So, while you are still working, it's a good idea

to keep contributing to your IRA and 401(k) or other employer-sponsored retirement plan.

The amount you contribute should depend on your overall financial strategy and your financial needs, so, for example, you probably shouldn't put in so much into your retirement accounts that you feel significant stress in your monthly cash flow. But when you do get a chance to invest more in these accounts, such as when your salary goes up, you may want to take advantage of the opportunity.

Ultimately, you should be able to count on Social Security as part of your retirement income. You may want to consult with a financial professional to determine when taking Social Security makes the most sense for you and how you can also get the most from your other retirement accounts. You'll want a retirement income strategy that's built for the long run. ●

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor.





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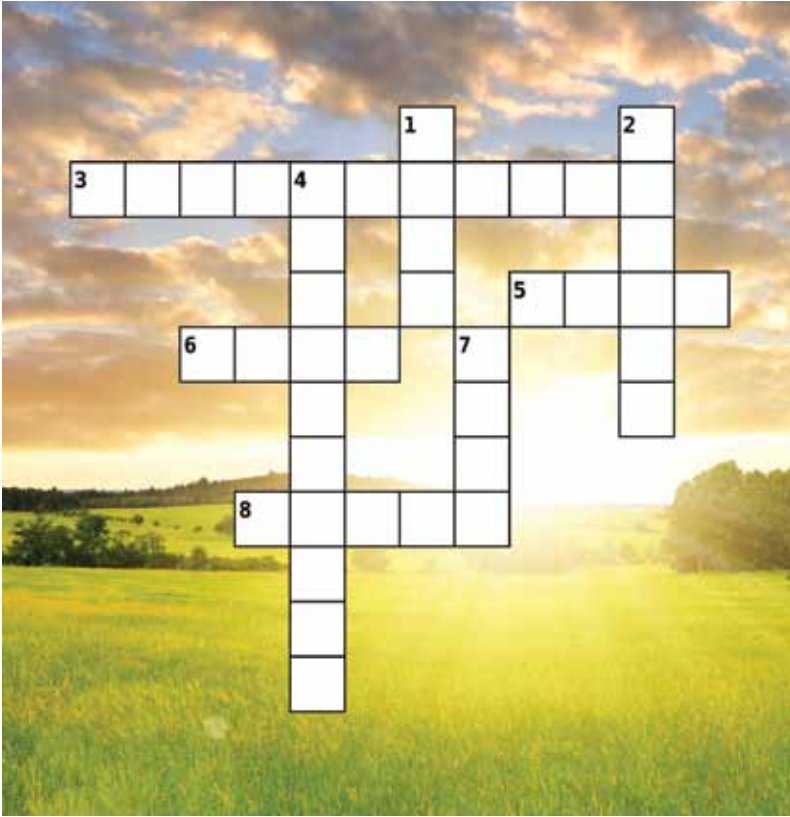


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Crossword



ACROSS

3. The city council is the _____ body of local government.
5. The residents of Searcy and White County have the opportunity to be a _____ of a forward-thinking approach to its citizens' literacy and information service needs.
6. For J L it's about the opportunity to make an impact on others' lives through his _____.
8. The Imagine & Believe Foundation's function beyond supplying clothes is to make foster parents feel _____, supported, and not so alone.

DOWN

1. A simple bed system in your garden will make it _____ to plan, tend and harvest your crops.
2. The Boutique carries many _____-specific items.
4. Julie and Holly work as a team for The _____.
7. "_____ education can really encompass multiple academic topics."

FIND THE ANSWERS *SearcyLiving.com*



Riddles

Can you guess the word or phrase?

1.



2.

over
over
over

3.

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RECOGNIZING

CPL. J L TILLET

BY JENNIFER WEBB

JL TILLET HAD NO INTENTIONS of ever being a police officer, but sometimes our own plans for our life are not what God plans. Everything had been going smoothly up until 2012. That's when everything seemed to hit a wall and his own plans crumbled to dust.

His parents had moved here from California when he was 6, settling outside of town in Center Hill. They had a chicken farm there before moving into town and later establishing Tillett's Paint and Wallpaper. He met his wife when they were still in high school. Michelle was playing piano in the choir room. He walked in, complimented her playing and she followed him out the door. They've been together ever since. He graduated first, but they still continued to see each other and got married her senior year.

J L worked for Walmart Distribution for several years before starting work at his parent's business around 2000. He was blessed to work with them until they made the decision to retire in 2011 and closed the store. He started up his own business but had to close the doors after a year since it was not providing adequately for his family. He and Michelle had 4 lovely daughters to take care of - Erin, Ashley, Avery, and Emily. That's when he realized that his plans had crumbled to dust.

But God provides. In this case, it came from a fellow church member telling him that there was an open position for the City of Searcy - in the Animal Control department. He applied in early 2013 and got the job.

After an exciting year in animal control and working closely with Searcy police officers, he switched to dispatch. He answered 911 calls and emergency services dispatch. It gave him a whole new perspective of what the officers deal with on a day-to-day basis. The job was not always fun, many times intense, but the people he worked with made it a great experience.

The more he worked with the Searcy Police Department, the more he wanted to be a bigger part of it. He made friends and they encouraged him to become an officer. One day in 2015, Chief Eric Webb asked him if he still wanted to be an officer. J L said "Yes." Chief Webb said that he'd make it happen. J L went to the police academy in Camden, AR and he's been an officer ever since.

He was promoted to Corporal in 2021 under Chief Steve Hernandez and was recently named Officer of the Year. As a patrol officer, he serves in the patrol division under Sgt. Higgins and Lt. Wells. They have multiple shifts that rotate in 8-week sequences of days and nights. He loves it because no two days are ever exactly the same. The shifts are divided up into squads which are labeled as A squad, B squad, C squad, etc. His shift is A squad, so when they started calling themselves the A-Team, it stuck!

He loves the camaraderie within the A-Team. They've created t-shirts and other items for the "A-Team" and their families. They get along well as a squad, eating together and enjoying each other's company on and off duty, and they are constantly backing each other up. Even at a "routine" traffic stop, you will sometimes see multiple officers there because they want to make sure that each officer is safe.

"Not everything stays routine. We all want to go home to our families at the end of the day... just like anyone else."

- Cpl. J L Tillett

There are a lot of things about the job he says you're not going to find anywhere else.

"Not just a job well done but it's a job that you know affects somebody else's life."

- Cpl. J L Tillett

It may be separating a couple that has been fighting. It might be talking to a teen having issues with their parents and getting them to hear something that makes sense to them. Sometimes it's helping young kids if there's an accident. Officers frequently still do the job of animal control, especially when the Animal Control Officer is unavailable or off duty. For example, if there's a dog in a vehicle involved in an accident and the owners have to go to the hospital, they make sure the dog is safe and taken care of.

For J L it's about the opportunity to make an impact on others' lives through his work. He's helping the people that are in some sort of crisis and he has the opportunity to intervene and be a positive influence for change. He gets great satisfaction in knowing that he's really helped someone in their life in a way that matters.

When he's not in uniform, you can find him and his wife Michelle on the Tillett Family Homestead or hitting the road and exploring Arkansas parks and campgrounds. They love camping - so much that he custom-built his own small camper and has plans to start another one soon. You can see their adventures and the custom-built camper on the Tillett Family Homestead Facebook Page.

Letting go of Tillett's Paint and Wallpaper and of his own business was hard. Cpl. J L Tillett's story is just one more beautiful example of how when God closes one door in our lives, he opens another one - often one that we never would have walked through otherwise. ●



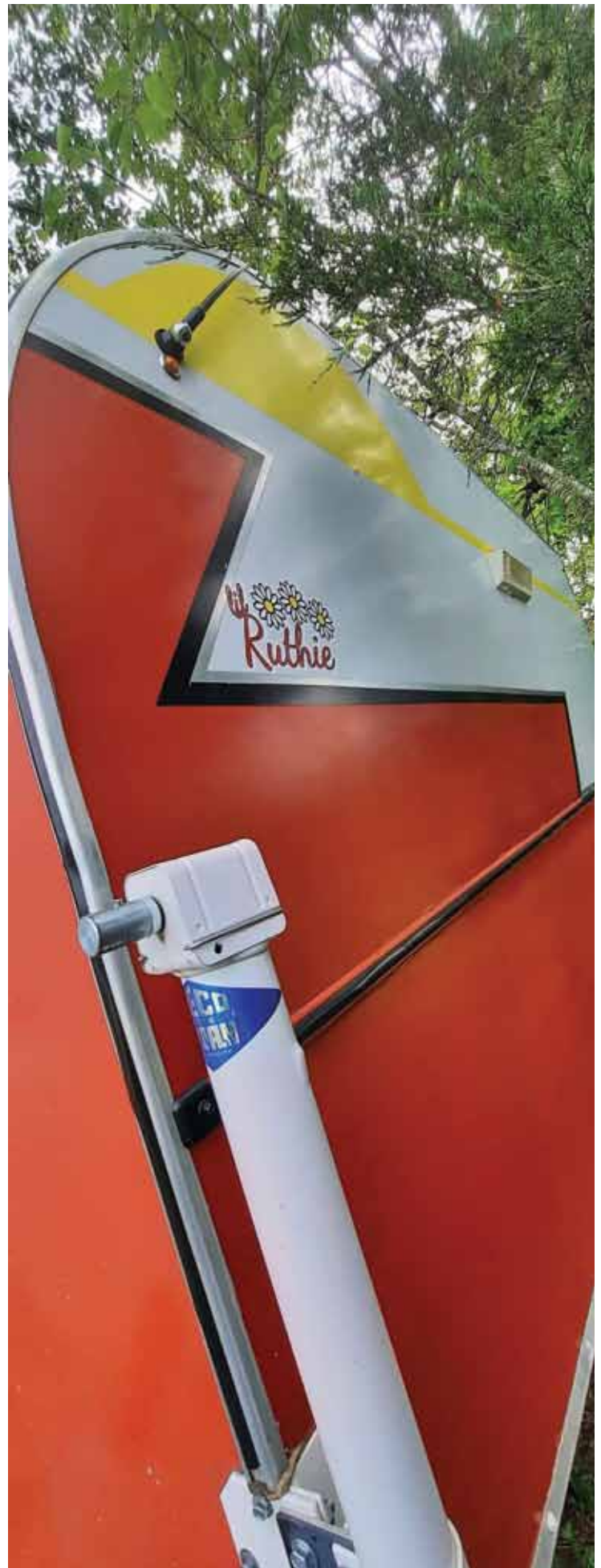


She Finally Got Her Name

LAST YEAR, about August, we were still looking for a good name for our camper, and I asked my grandson what he thought. I hadn't had my truck very long, at the time, and he wasn't sure what to name her, so I asked him what we should call my truck. Without hesitation, Walker blurted out, "Call him Carl." Carl it is! It wasn't long after that I decided the name for our camper, but still asked for opinions and suggestions, and received several, but none as fitting as "Lil Ruthie". Michelle, for those that don't know, was adopted and raised by her grandparents, Carl and Ruth, and her brothers and sisters were her aunts and uncles. I know there are lots of Carls in this world, but I don't know very many of them. The one that we knew well just wouldn't be the same without Ruth behind him. I do know this, they spent 40+ years together before he passed, and she was as tough as they come, fighting multiple battles with cancer.

If you're interested in having a camper built, whether it's like our "Lil Ruthie", or a teardrop style, let me know. I'm going to begin building another one soon.

Like our page and come along for the ride! *Tillett Family Homestead* ●







By Jennifer Webb

LIZ HOWELL looked across the street and could hardly believe what had just happened. It was February 22, 2022. (2/22/2022) and she had just signed the papers that made her the owner of The Boutique in downtown Searcy.

"I can't believe that's my store!" she thought to herself, with immense happiness. Her mind flashed back 48 years ago. She was newly engaged and was in the local drug store in De Queen, Arkansas looking at dishes. She wasn't sure if she should go with a box of Corel dishes or if she should make the leap to the Desert Rose pattern that seemed to call to her. They reminded her of visiting her home economics teacher's home and the pink and green dishes in her dining room that kindled a fire inside her for all things dishes, home, and entertaining.

Just then, a friend's mother came in the door and started congratulating her on the new engagement. "Get the pink and green ones," her friend's mother urged her. "Register for those and I'll buy you your first place setting!"

Who would have thought that such a seemingly small moment would have such an impact on her life? She still remembers the joy the dishes brought as she exercises her gift of hospitality and entertaining in her home. Heartfelt Ministries is based upon Titus 2 where the older women teach the younger women. Liz serves on that committee at College Church of Christ and hosts a group in her home.

Owning The Boutique was a dream that she never dreamed she could have. She wasn't really looking for it either; it just kind of fell in her lap - as is often the case when God works in someone's life.

**"If I could live any place in the world,
I would live in Searcy!"**

-Liz Howell, Owner of The Boutique Gift Shop

Liz has been in Searcy for 35 years and has always loved The Boutique when Jim and Marlyn Smith along with their daughter Marianne Jones owned it. They knew her by name, and they always chatted like old friends. The fudge was delightful, and it was one of the best places she knew to pick up unique gifts. It just made her happy.

But one day, she went in and the shelves were bare! Marianne had told her that she was trying to sell the business, but no one

was interested. To Liz, who is a strong believer in shopping local and supporting small businesses, it felt like a knife to her heart. She knew she had to take action. She talked to JD Gray and Derek Walter who own GrayWalt Properties. Liz is the principal broker for GrayWalt Realty Group and convinced them to buy the building.

With plans to sell the business, she started buying inventory herself to replenish the dwindling stock. You have to have things to sell in order to sell them, after all! Her plan was to find someone to run the business. But somewhere between market, trade shows, and immersing herself in finding inventory, she found herself. She was happy, and not just happy - thriving! But still, her plan was to build up the business and then sell it.

She was talking to her husband one night about the possibility of getting a partner. Charlie, her husband that works in real estate with her, asked her a simple but pivotal question. "Do you really want a partner?" It stopped her in her tracks.

"No," She answered. That's when she knew she was all in. She took the leap and bought the business herself.

One of the first things that she did was talk to other boutique owners in Searcy to ask how they could support each other and work together instead of competing against one another. As a result, each of the boutiques in Searcy strives to offer truly unique items.

"Buy local. Support your neighbors every opportunity. Local people smile, know you, know your family, and have been there when you needed something. You don't get that in a box dropped off at your front door."

-Liz Howell, Owner of The Boutique Gift Shop

Liz had never paid that much attention to brands before, but in going to market and looking for unique pieces, she found some that she really loves including Aromatique, Beatriz Ball, Bogg Bags, Happy Everything, Hobo, Jellycat, Le Creuset, Lux, Meri Meri,

► *Continued on next page.*



*TIM & ANNA CARR RONCAL are showered with gifts from friends and loved ones.
Thank you for choosing the bridal registry at The Boutique.*

and Scout. It's been a humbling and educational experience for her. She also started asking herself "How can I support Searcy?"

The answer came unexpectedly from a lunch with her friends and colleagues Lori Sloan and Kim Kirkman. Lori shared a story about meeting her sister-in-law from Charleston for the first time. Her sister-in-law brought her a small gift and commented "I brought you a Searcy!" Upon seeing Lori's puzzled expression, she went on to explain that a "searcy" is an unexpected surprise. No matter how it is spelled from 'circee' to 'searcy', you will find lots of Searcys in The Boutique.

The Boutique carries many Searcy-specific items as well in the form of throw pillows, mats, signs, pillows, and tea towels. They make for very memorable and unique gifts. The other thing that people always comment on is the fudge from The Boutique along with their selection of gourmet flavored coffee, ground right there in the store. Their goal is to offer a variety of styles and prices with excellent customer service.

The staff, composed of Pam Townsend, Brandy Rowland, Terrie Smith, Debbie Altom, and Rynne Maddox, are Liz's All-Star team. She says they are the heart and soul of it and readily shares

how blessed she's been by them, their creativity, and their love for the store.

"We know how busy everyone is and we want to help. With birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays, we offer a variety of prices for everyone's budget plus gift bags or gift wrapping."

-Liz Howell, Owner of The Boutique Gift Shop

While still sticking to their roots as a hometown boutique, they are also not scared to innovate and reinvent themselves. Liz understands the allure of online shopping so she has started a website for her store as well where people can shop online at searcyboutique.com.

Liz loves seeing the faces of new brides-to-be light up when they come in to register for wedding gifts. She even makes the

experience even more personal by dedicating a table in the store displaying what each couple has picked out along with a picture of the couple and their wedding date.

While the building built in the 1890s looks beautiful on the outside, the inside is just as lovely. Liz believes that the local business is the lifeblood of the community and that the downtown area is at the heart of it. That's why she's such a passionate member of Searcy Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Searcy. Shopping downtown should be a delightful experience where you go into a shop owned by someone you know that knows you by name like the old tv program, "Cheers." They know you and your family, and the joy of a small town community. It should be filled with sights, sounds, and smells that make you feel warm and happy. That's certainly the sentiment that greets you when you walk through the door of The Boutique.

You may call and they will go the extra mile by having your gift wrapped and ready. Custom floral arrangements are also available that are as unique as you are.

"It matters what you do and how you support the locals."

-Liz Howell, Owner of The Boutique Gift Shop



"Liz believes that the local business is the lifeblood of the community and that the downtown area is at the heart of it."

Go shop local and see for yourself! You'll be glad you did. ●

Liz Howell, Owner



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"I use the library's meeting room to teach classes and that has helped me get my small business up and running."

~ JENNIFER



"I come every week and get 10 books. I like fantasy books the best."

~ KAGE, AGE 11



"The Library is a place to come when curiosity gets the better of you."

~ MATTHEW



A FAMILY OF READERS



"When I walk in, I can smell the books. I introduced my husband, my friends, and my children to this place. We travel for business and listen to the library's audiobooks."

~ NIKKI



"I get a whole stack of books every time I come to the library."

~ NORA, AGE 6



"I look forward to the drive-through window where we can pick up our books at the new library."

~ SHELLIE



"I bring my kids, my grandkids, and anyone else who wants to come to the library."

~ WANDA



Janett Crain Memorial LIBRARY

Darla Ino, Library Director
White County Regional Library System

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- A drive-through book drop
- A covered pavilion for library use with a new bridge connection to Yancey Park
- Convenient access and more parking spaces (99!)

These are just a few of the advantages that the new Janett Crain Memorial Library will provide.

The need for expanded library space was identified in 1995. The 10,000 square foot facility, constructed in 1966, no longer meets the needs of the growing community of Searcy and White County. This new facility will offer 33,000 square feet of space, which is triple the size of the current library in Spring Park.

In October 2020, the City of Searcy was presented with a unique opportunity to purchase the Searcy Athletic Club to repurpose as the new Searcy headquarters library at a price of \$1.7 million dollars, approximately half of its appraised value. With the White County Regional Library System's help with half of the \$1.7 million purchase price, the City of Searcy moved forward with the purchase. At the same time, the White County Quorum Court stepped up to support the project with their appropriation of \$500,000 toward the renovation cost.

On February 8, 2022, a press conference was held at the newly-purchased location, and a lead gift of two million dollars from Larry Crain, Sr. was announced to jumpstart the philanthropic giving campaign.

Mr. Crain was eager to memorialize his late wife Janett because of her love for learning and young people. Mrs. Crain taught at Southwest Junior High School in Little Rock, Bald Knob High School, and Searcy High School. She was an active member of First United Methodist Church of Searcy where she served as trustee, youth and children's Sunday School teacher, president of the United Methodist Church Women, youth counselor, and Peru mission team member. She and her husband were also involved with the ministries of Good News United Methodist Church in Santa Rosa Beach.

Active in her community of Searcy and the one to call for a cause she supported, Mrs. Crain was president of Searcy Junior Auxiliary during the establishment of Searcy Sunshine School. She continued to support the school until her death. She was an active volunteer in the Searcy Public Schools where she served as P.T.A. (now P.T.O) president at her sons' schools and always served as a cheerleader for their academics and athletic activities. Mrs. Crain also participated in a literary group she fondly referred to as "Fabulous Book Club" with women of all ages who enjoyed literature as much as she did. The Searcy Public Library is proud to have her name grace the new facility.

On Tuesday, October 11, 2022, the Searcy City Council approved the selection of Hart Construction to serve as Construction Manager for the library project. Recognizing the impact of inflation in today's economy, the goal is to maximize the funds already raised to start work on the project in this new year of 2023, while continuing to secure funds to complete the project, hopefully sometime in 2024.

Continued on next page →

The Executive Fundraising Steering Committee continues to meet weekly to plan the next outreach steps and are now in the public phase of the fundraising campaign. A push was made beginning in early November to ask for year-end donations.

As of January 24, 2023, considering all donations, pledges, the \$500,000 given by the White County Quorum Court and the \$160,000 committed by the City of Searcy for the flood proofing of the building and the City's more recent commitment of \$1,000,000 for the project, a total of \$5,061,196.71 has been raised. There are verbal commitments for another \$115,000, which brings the total to \$5,176,196.71 or 97.66% of the \$5.3 M fundraising goal.

This project is important! The Janett Crain Memorial Library will provide a valuable service to every age group and demographic in our community and is especially crucial to the underserved. According to current statistics, (Arkansas Department of Commerce) 28% of White County residents do not have access to broadband internet and 14.8% are living in poverty (U.S. Census).

The residents of Searcy and White County have the opportunity to be a part of a forward-thinking approach to its citizens' literacy and information service needs. At the same time there will be no tax increase and the community can engage by funding the renovation through private philanthropy. Donations are tax-deductible and may be made as a one-time gift or given over a period of three to five years. There are significant naming opportunities and ways to honor or memorialize a loved one or a friend.

"Be Part of a Brand New Chapter @ Your Library" by a donation to the Janett Crain Memorial Library. Donations may be given in the following ways:

- A check made out to the WCPL Friends Foundation, Memo: New Library Project and mailed to the Searcy Public Library, 113 East Pleasure Avenue, Searcy, Arkansas, 72143
- Give online at whitecountylibraries.org/newlibrary and follow the DONATE button instructions to contribute

The Fundraising Committee is hopeful that all citizens of Searcy and White County will consider showing their support for the new Library by giving a donation, whatever the amount. We are confident you will be proud of this new facility and the opportunities it will provide. ●

"The Janett Crain Memorial Library will provide a valuable service to every age group and demographic in our community..."



Janett Crain Memorial Library

Searcy and White County Regional Library Headquarters - Searcy, Arkansas

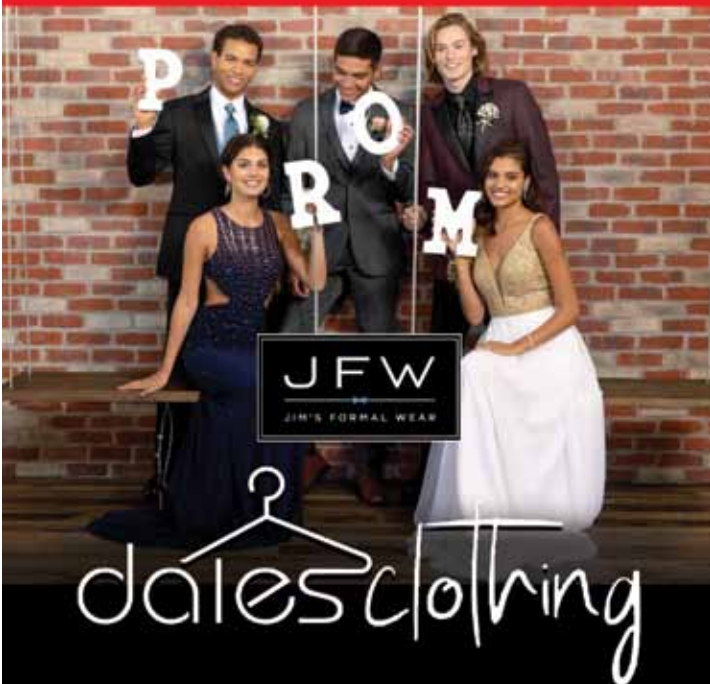
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Planning Your Vegetable Garden

By Sherri Sanders

County Extension Agent – Agriculture
White County Extension Service



Tips

For a beginner, pick 3 to 5 plants that you would like to grow, and buy 3 to 5 plants of each one.



Make sure you have easy access to a hose or water source!



I have been receiving several questions from first time vegetable growers. People are requesting information on how to get started and how to layout or plan a vegetable garden.

First, consider the location of your garden. Do you have options on your property? Where do you get the most sun? Ideally, choose the sunniest part of the garden for your beds, away from frost pockets. Most vegetables need 6 to 8 hours of direct sun a day! Orient the rows north/south which allow for maximum benefit of sunlight. Note that the south, east, and west sides of your home will get more sun than the north. How far away is the water? Make sure you have easy access to a hose or water source! It's important to water your vegetable plants at ground level through soaker hoses or drip irrigation. Keeping water off the leaves and plant canopies helps to lessen disease incidence.

Is there a spot near the house that would allow you to see outside that's easy to water and monitor daily? Perhaps a spot near your kitchen or a path you walk regularly would be a great garden spot. If you have too many shrubs or trees nearby, they may compete with your garden for nutrients and moisture as well as sunlight. Avoid being too close to black walnut trees since all parts of the black walnut contain juglone. This is toxic to many plants, including tomatoes. Many gardeners struggle with growing gardens near theirs or their neighbor's black walnut tree. Try growing your tomatoes at least 50 feet from the tree where the juglone concentration is greatest. However, some plants can tolerate juglone: Coneflower (Echinacea), Bee Balm (Monarda sp.), Yarrow (Achillea millefolium), Calendula (Calendula officinalis), Violet (Viola sp.), and Grapes (Vitis sp.).

How large do you want your garden? It's better to start small and enjoy your success as your garden grows. If you're new to vegetable gardening, a 10' x 10' garden (100 square feet) is a great place to start. Growing in dedicated beds reduces soil compaction, helps to simplify crop rotation, and makes weeding and protecting your crops a snap. A simple bed system in your garden will make it easy to plan, tend and harvest your crops.



Beds can be laid out at soil level or raised and should be no more than 3 to 4 feet wide to make it easy to reach into the center without stepping on the soil. The length of your beds should consider how far you are willing to walk to get around to the other side. A narrow bed also enables you to grow plants in blocks rather than rows, which helps suppress weeds and maximizes the number of plants you can grow in that space. Make each bed the same size to make it simple to move crops, row covers, and cloches from bed to bed as required. Be able to harvest from one side or the other.

You might consider making access paths between beds at least 2 feet wide to enable easy access for weeding and harvesting. Paths can be made of grass if they can be easily mown. Alternatively, lay cardboard and cover it with a mulch of wood chips, or pour a loose material such as gravel over weed-suppressing fabric. For a more permanent path surface, consider using brick or pavers.

For a beginner, pick 3 to 5 plants that you would like to grow, and buy 3 to 5 plants of each one. If you're growing annual plants (most vegetable seeds need to be planted each year), then look at dedicated vegetable beds. For the perennials (such as asparagus or strawberries), you may want to dedicate a separate space to one side or their own beds. Grow tender plants such as tomatoes and peppers in the warmest, sunniest parts of the plot, so add these to your plan first. Next, consider plants such as squash that need a lot of space. Add these near the edges of beds so they don't smother neighboring plants. Tall-growing climbers such as peas and pole beans should be located where they won't shade lower-growing vegetables. You may want to take advantage of potential shade to grow cool-season crops like lettuce and spinach, especially in hot climates. Plants that are regularly harvested and which don't need to be included in crop rotation, such as herbs and salad leaves, should be positioned in beds nearest to the kitchen. Consider pollination requirements. Corn, for example, is best grown in blocks rather than rows, as they are wind pollinated. Include pollinator plants and plenty of flowers such as calendula to attract beneficial insects to your garden and help improve pollination of fruit or pod-bearing crops!


Finally, if this isn't your first garden, think about where you planted your veggies last year, then be sure to rotate them to different beds for the coming season to help prevent diseases and avoid plant-hungry pests that overwinter in the soil. ●

*"It's better to start small and enjoy your success
as your garden grows."*


**For additional information on horticulture related topics,
contact the White County Extension Service at 501-268-5394 or
Sherri Sanders by email at ssanders@uada.edu.**


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If you're new to vegetable gardening, a 10' x 10' garden (100 square feet) is a great place to start.



Ideally, choose the sunniest part of the garden for your beds, away from frost pockets. Most vegetables need 6 to 8 hours of direct sun a day!



Grow tender plants such as tomatoes and peppers in the warmest, sunniest parts of the plot, so add these to your plan first.

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THE ART & EDUCATION OF COOKING FOR KIDS

By Cecelia Wilson

COOKING FOR SOMETHING CREATIVE and unique to pique your children's imagination and be a foundational education for their lives? "Cooking in Bloom" is the perfect blend of learning and fun for youth that may even spill over to the rest of the family. To add a cherry on top (no pun intended), the classes are centered around food! Did I mention tasting is involved as well?

With a Master's degree and years of experience working in dietetics, Denise Albert began "Cooking in Bloom" to teach children about nutrition. But rather than a textbook lineup of facts and figures, Denise's approach is an exciting journey that fully immerses her students in food preparation and sampling. "I'm trying to get the kids really involved with tasting, smelling, feeling, [and] seeing the food," she shares. No common entrees or desserts are prepared during her classes. After all, Denise reasons, those are already standard fare at many students' homes. Instead, she chooses to introduce her pupils to different culinary delights with a higher nutritional value.

Take desserts, for example. During some classes, one popular dessert option is built around a grilled fruit. Taking an in-season fruit such as apples, Denise designed a recipe comprised of grilled apples topped with a honey yogurt. "I'll set out cinnamon in some bowls and I'll let [the students] pinch the cinnamon and kind of put that over the top of this apple yogurt mixture," she explains. "Of course, the cinnamon sort of aerates in the air and now you've got this really deep sensory experience." The effect is immediate with the young cooks. "Oh, my gosh," they exclaim, "this cinnamon smells so good!" Needless to say, the kids want to taste the cinnamon, stick their finger in it, and put it on their tongue.

Their reaction is exactly what Denise is looking for during her lessons. "I love that [reaction] because I know that's going to make an impression. So, what I try to do is make it immersive for the child and, you know, some kids respond, and some kids don't — and that's fine. The kids that don't, I really hope that they do, because I created this multi-sensory experience so that when they get to college they'll remember that they made Pesto and Gnocchi." Her hope is they'll be able to say, "I remember Ms. Denise teaching me how to layer my food groups at each meal, and she said that was the best thing for my body." She even emphasizes food safety so young people will understand food-borne illnesses, how to keep food safe, and what to look for to know food is going bad.

As for those students who respond well, their newfound skills and knowledge not only affect them, but they take those new tools home to their family. It makes Denise happy, "I think what really fulfills me the most is when a child gets really excited about something that we've cooked." During one class, French crepes were on the menu to "take the kids on a taste around the world." It was a rousing success. "We did a blueberry compote and let [each class member] make and actually roll the crepes themselves, and we

made the crepe batter from scratch. I mean, it's super easy. They love that process, and I love it when they get so excited about the food we created, and they can't wait to rush home and have their parents buy the ingredients to make it at home. Or if they've tasted something new that they've never ever had before and they're like, 'I had no idea! I really love this!'"

Though she modestly refers to herself as a "home cook," Denise Albert has an extensive background in dietetics and nutrition. Originally from Iowa, she attended Iowa State University for her

"I think what really fulfills me the most is when a child gets really excited about something that we've cooked."

— DENISE ALBERT

► *Continued on next page.*



"It didn't take long for the nutritionist in Denise to realize there was a real need in Arkansas to enhance children's nutritional education..."

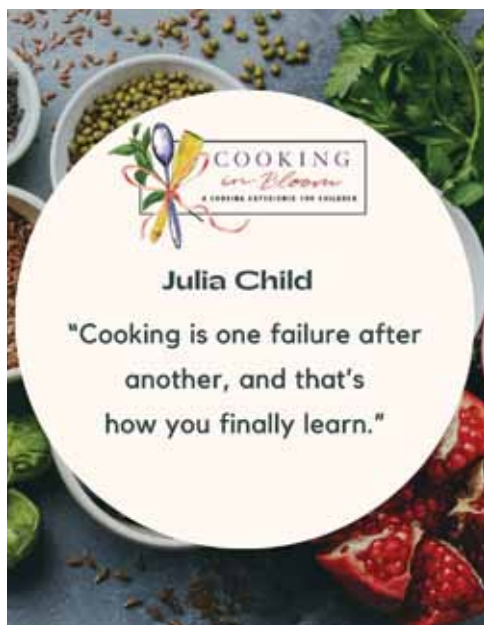
undergraduate degree and then earned her Master's degree in Public Health from the University of Iowa. But the idea for that career choice first budded when Denise was just a child. A family friend, instrumental in Denise's life, worked in a hospital and suggested the field of nutrition to Denise. By the time she was a senior in high school, Denise was convinced. She thought the career path was interesting and she recognized the opportunities available to her whether that was in private practice, research studies, in a gym or as an educator or medical nutrition therapist.

With college in her rearview mirror, Denise's first job was working as the lead dietician for the Women, Infant and Children program under Truman Medical Center, a teaching hospital on the Missouri side of Kansas City. Dietitians with the WIC program do nutrition assessment, counseling and provide adequate resources for other care for women and their children with specialized needs. She went on to become a clinic dietician for a hospital where, for 12 years, she assessed the nutrition status of inpatients and outpatients so they would be well-nourished for healing and medical purposes. Working within the ICU, many of the patients in her responsibility had profound, specific healing needs with many having to be fed through a feeding tube. Working alongside doctors and pharmacists, Denise had to formulate diets designed for each individual patient with the right nutrients in mind for their particular case.

After marrying her Connecticut-born husband and having a son, the Alberts moved to Toronto, Canada where her husband was doing a specialized fellowship as a doctor. As an academic neurosurgeon, his first job out of fellowship meant a move for the young family (which by then included a 3-month-old daughter) to Arkansas Children's Hospital in Little Rock. The relocation had an added benefit the family had been craving — a warmer climate. Fast forward 11 years later, Denise's husband is now Chief of Pediatric Neurosurgery at ACH, their daughter is enrolled at The Anthony School, their son attends Episcopal Collegiate, and the family is active in the community and their church, Trinity Episcopal Cathedral.

Denise put her career on hold during her children's formative years, but kept busy through volunteerism and activities associated with their school and church. It didn't take long for the nutritionist in Denise to realize there was a real need in Arkansas to enhance children's nutritional education, hence "Cooking in Bloom" was born. Named with the blooming of a garden's fruits and vegetables in mind, the name is also a reminder that what we put in our bodies helps our bodies bloom accordingly. While cooking is the draw, the education in good nutrition is the ultimate goal.

Concerned this was a topic not being taught in school, Denise knew if it was, it was only scratching the surface with the kids. Either way, a new approach was needed. "Food education can really encompass multiple academic topics," she muses. "You've got math, you've got science, you've got art that you can incorporate into making and creating food. You know, there's very much an artistic process. I just thought, 'Wow, you know it's such a means of multi-sensory experience for kids and that multi-sensory



experience only helps us remember what we've learned so much better.' The more senses that you get involved, the more that you are apt to remember." Harkening on her dietician's background, she created a curriculum that would incorporate the multi-sensory component in the food's preparation.

In 2018, she began a pilot program in one school's cafeteria before moving to her own kitchen with food her children and the neighborhood children could cook and taste. Funding was an issue plugging into public schools, but private schools in central Arkansas were intrigued, and Pulaski Academy gave her one of her first multi-semester contracts. She then found a community partner and began renting space through a church at 2200 Kavanaugh Blvd. and currently has a contract with The Anthony School, both in Little Rock. Interestingly, as she held summer camps, she noticed that 50% of the youth attending were coming from the Cabot and Searcy areas. If they were willing to drive for this knowledge, she was sure there was a need for these lessons in their communities. By chance, she met former First Lady Ginger Beebe during an Episcopal women's group meeting. Overhearing Denise's discussions with others about "Cooking in Bloom," Ginger was excited. "Come to Searcy!" Ginger implored her. It wasn't long before the wheels were in motion and a regularly scheduled satellite class was born in the educational hall at Searcy's own Episcopal church.

The Searcy classes meet every Thursday at 4:00 p.m. for 1½ hours, and the curriculum is designed for Pre-K to high school age students, but students can come any given Thursday as their schedules permit. "With high school kids, I can get a little more

scientific, of course." But with younger pupils, Denise tweaks the lesson plans: "With the Pre-k, I always let the kids chop something [using plastic knives] and even if it's something soft like a banana or a tortilla, something really simple and easy, just that simple act of chopping, you just won't believe how much joy it brings to a child." When a little face lights up with excitement over the joy of cooking or chopping or tasting, Denise Albert knows they are learning healthy habits and her work is worthwhile. "There are so many reasons why I'm doing this," the transplanted-Iowan says with a smile, "but I think that's what gives me the most pleasure and encourages me for the next day." ●

**To enroll in a class or learn more about
"Cooking in Bloom,":**

EMAIL: cookinginbloom@gmail.com

WEBSITE: CookingInBloom.com

PHONE: 501-804-3103

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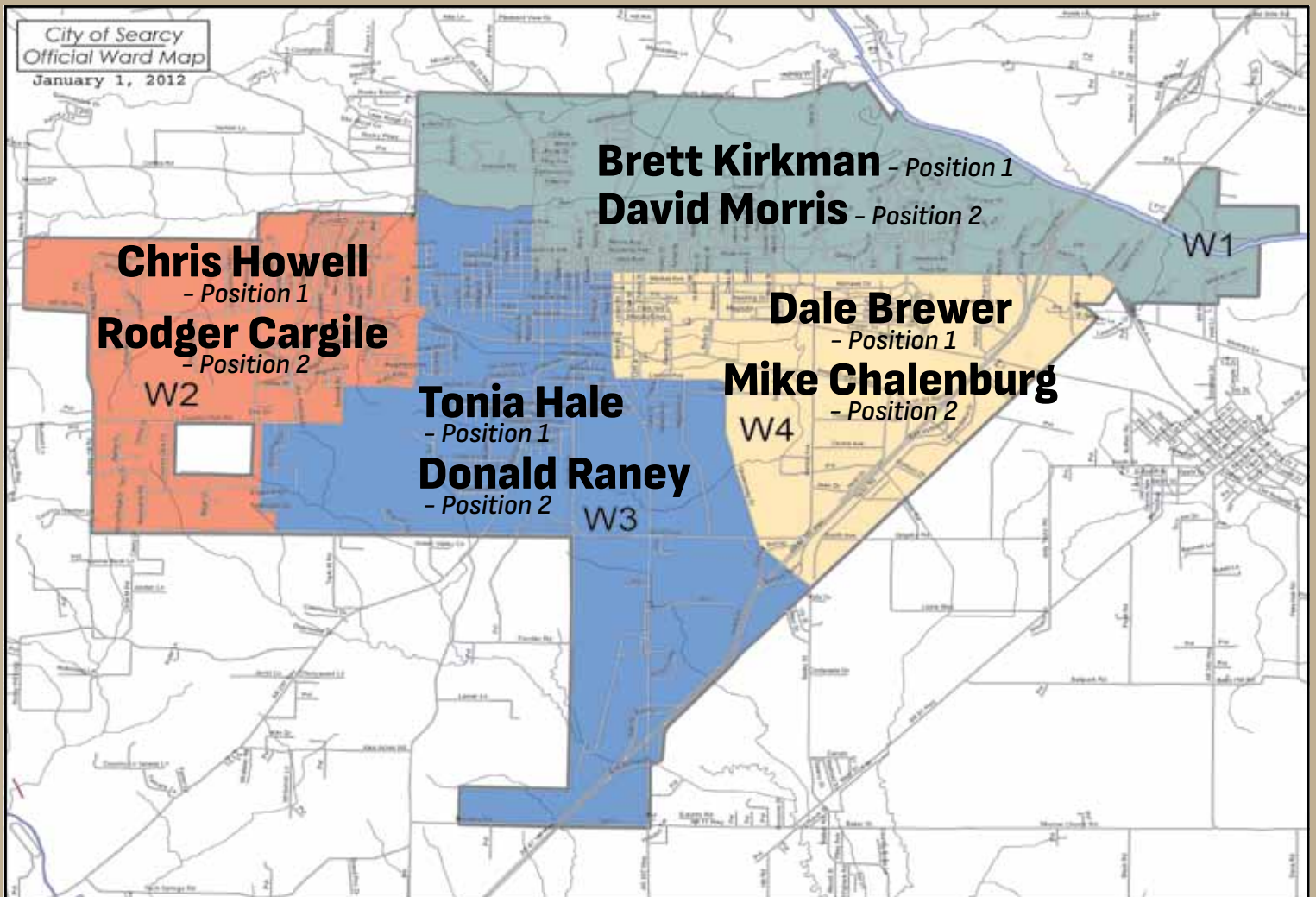
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Elected BY The People And Works FOR The People

By Jennifer Webb

REMEMBER TAKING Civics or American Government in high school? Ya... me neither. I mean, I was there, and I made a decent grade, but I've forgotten a great deal of it. When someone asked me what a city council actually did recently, I found myself stumbling around digging through the depths of my memory trying to come up with something. It was a bit embarrassing.

Most of our government levels operate on the principle of 3 branches - executive, legislative, and judicial. The judicial is easy - that's the courts. On a city level, the executive is the mayor. So, that leaves the city council to be the legislative body.

A few years ago, I would have dismissed the local and even state levels of government as not having much power. But I think 2020 was our wake-up call as to how much power each state's governor has. So what about the city council? How much power do they actually have over your life?

All legislative bodies are a group. How big they are depend on the city. For Searcy, there are 8 city council seats held by elected residents of 4 different districts called "wards." You can see all of the city council officials as well as read the meeting minutes for each meeting on the second Tuesday of each month and the special sessions at www.cityofsearcy.org/city-council. The minutes are great recommended reading for bouts of insomnia, but they do contain a lot of specific information about what's going on in the city of Searcy.

A city council is in charge of:

▶ **Establishing the tax rate for the city and how the budget is spent.**

The sales tax rate for the city of Searcy is currently 1.5%. This is added to the state tax of 6.5% and the White County Tax rate of 1.75%.

If you make a \$100 purchase at any business inside the city limits of Searcy, you pay an additional \$9.75 in taxes. The state of Arkansas gets \$6.50, White County gets \$1.75 and the City of Searcy gets \$1.50.

Little Rock City's sales tax rate is also 1.5%, Cabot's is 2.0%, Conway's is 2.125%, and Beebe's is 1.25%

The money is used to maintain the police and fire departments, infrastructure, sanitation, economic development, courts and administration, parks and recreation, and a reserve fund.

▶ **Passing ordinances and resolutions**

You can see all of the ordinances and resolutions made by the Searcy City Council at: <https://www.cityofsearcy.org/ordinances-resolutions>

Some examples of Searcy city ordinances include: You cannot keep horses, cows, swine, goats, or chickens within the city limits of Searcy. Said banned animals cannot be allowed to run loose on the streets of Searcy at any time. (Section 6) Loose cows can cause quite a traffic jam, after all. (Don't ask me how I know.)

If you build a house, remodel or substantially alter a building within the city limits, you have to pay for a building permit. (Section 7)

If you have a taxicab or want to start a taxi business, you have to get a permit from the city council. You also have to give them a rate schedule and list of vehicles as well as have at least \$500 cash in the bank for maintaining the vehicles. There's also a license fee and you need a certificate from the mayor giving you permission to drive the taxicab. (Section 25) No wonder Uber has gotten so popular!

▶ **Zoning laws and how land is used**

Cities, including Searcy, have different areas of land meant for different uses. For example - how many private houses do you see on Race street? The land that borders Race St. is zoned as "C4" which is "regional and open display commercial." That section is for businesses. The good news for city residents is that there are five different classifications of zones for residential property. That means that Walmart can't flatten the house for sale next door and build its next location beside your house.

▶ **Overseeing the performance of local public employees**

The city of Searcy employs over 200 full-time employees and between 25-50 part-time and seasonal employees. These include police officers, sanitation workers, lifeguards at Searcy Swim Center, as well as maintenance workers and street department workers.

▶ **Regulating business activity through licenses and regulations**

If you operate a business in the Searcy City Limits, you have to have a business license. This includes tradesmen and contractors. Not to worry - most are between \$25-\$50. Unless you want to start a taxi business. The license for that is \$125.

▶ **Public Health and safety**

Both the Fire and Police Departments operate under the direction of the City of Searcy. These fall under the public health and safety category.

▶ **Exercising the power of eminent domain**

In 2012, there was a proposal to connect South Sowell St. to Beebe-Capps Expressway. The City Council met and used eminent domain to obtain the title to the property for the construction of the road.

▶ **Communicating policies and programs to city residents**

The City of Searcy communicates their policies and programs through their website at cityofsearcy.org and through their City of Searcy Municipal Facebook Page

Continued on next page →

▶ **Responding to the needs and complaints of the city's residents**

City Council agenda meetings are held the Thursday before the second Tuesday of the month at 6 pm. Citizens can request to speak at the agenda meeting by signing in during the 15 minutes before the agenda meeting starts (according to the website as of press time).

▶ **Representing the community to other levels of government**

Searcy is the county seat of White County, AR. There are certain projects, such as the proposed new Courthouse building, that the city of Searcy works together with county government officials.

If you live inside the city limits or if you just come into the city limits to do business, the city council's decisions affect your daily life. This includes things like how much tax you pay when you shop at local businesses, how the tax money is used, where you can build a house or business, or if you can keep a few chickens in your yard or not.

As with all levels of government, the city council is elected BY the people and is supposed to work FOR the people. One of their main functions is to address the needs and complaints of the city's residents as well as represent the community to other levels of government. That's worth paying attention to. ●



Brett Kirkman

Ward 1
Position 1

I HAVE LIVED IN SEARCY, AR since moving here to attend Harding University in the fall of 1984 with the exception of three or four years when work took me away from Searcy on a couple of occasions, and I found my way back both times!

My wife, Kim, and I met at Harding University...she was from coastal California and I from coastal North Carolina and we decided to settle and raise a family here in Searcy. We have four children, Conor, Anna-Grace, Mary-Margaret and Everett, who were all raised and educated here at both Harding Academy and Searcy Public Schools where they all had positive experiences and all four graduated from Harding University.

I have the privilege of serving as CEO of Qualis Strategic Networks where we advise and assist over one hundred Arkansas skilled nursing facilities, hospitals, and ancillary health corporations navigate and negotiate the managed care space and the nuances of post-acute care. Kim serves as the Chief of Philanthropy for Arkansas Hospice which is the largest and oldest non-profit hospice in the state of Arkansas.

I have had an interest in serving in a public service role in Searcy for a number of years and since we are recent empty nesters it seemed that the time was right with Logan Cothorn deciding to step down as Councilman of Ward 1 Position 1. I spent earlier years coaching youth sports and serving on local boards such as KLife and we just really love our hometown. We especially enjoy Searcy's outdoor offerings from the bike trails to the parks to youth sports and the golf courses as well as nearby Greers Ferry Lake. Kim and I credit Searcy and the local community in helping to raise our children and providing just a wonderful life that we have enjoyed for over thirty five years.

I am humbled and excited to dive into the work ahead and represent Ward 1. I pray that my experiences and skill sets will be a positive addition to the city as our current mayor and council are very motivated to lead Searcy to new heights!

David Morris

Ward 1
Position 2



DAVID MORRIS IS CURRENTLY SERVING on the Searcy City Council Ward 1, Position 2 and is in his forty-seventh year of local government public service. Morris has previously served as White Count Judge, Assistant Director of the Association of Arkansas Counties (a statewide organization to assist county officials and speak as the official voice of the 75 counties of Arkansas) and most recently served as the Mayor of Searcy.

In his announcement to seek the seat on the Searcy City Council, he said that it was a role in which he could continue to use his knowledge of the city's budget process and the day-to-day operations of the city's various departments and services to help the City of Searcy continue to prosper and move forward.

Morris sings in the choir at Searcy First Methodist Church where he has been a life-long member.

He and his wife, Gail, together have 7 grown children and are blessed with 12 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren.

During my tenure as Mayor several "brick and mortar" new structures were built in Searcy thanks to the "Eight-year Plan". One of my favorites is the indoor Searcy Swim Center which provides year-round access for swimming and water aerobic activities, for it is truly enjoyed by people of all ages.



◀ *My granddaughter, Madison Scarbrough, and me. We are both active in the church music program.*



Chris Howell

Ward 2
Position 1

HOMETOWN: Monroe, LA

COLLEGE: Harding University/ University of Arkansas School of Law

EMPLOYER: B-B Oil Company/B-B-L Oil Company

SPOUSE: Blakely Howell

CHILDREN: Bax and Payne

HOBBIES: I love to hunt and fish

I moved to Searcy in 1993 to attend Harding University. After spending 6 years in Fayetteville, we moved back to Searcy in 2007. My reasons for serving on City Council are to make a difference in my community and try to make this town a place that my kids will want to live and raise a family someday. Searcy is full of energetic people that are passionate in their efforts to ensure this town continues to thrive. I love being a part of that energy.



Rodger Cargile

Ward 2
Position 2

I AM THE CITY COUNCILMAN for Ward 2 Position 2. I was appointed to the council in 2019 to fill the unexpired term of city councilman Steve Sterling who passed away. I was reelected in 2020 and 2022.

My wife Candice and I have two boys, Alex and Henry, and between the two of them we spend a lot of time at the Sports Complex. We often catch a movie at the historic Rialto Theater and I always tell my kids this is where I came every weekend when I was their age. I believe having amenities for kids and families is so important.

I was born in Searcy in 1968 and have had the privilege of calling this city my home ever since.

I serve on the Council because I want to do my part in making sure our city continues to be a great place to live, work, and raise a family.



Tonia Hale

Ward 3
Position 1

MY NAME IS TONIA HALE, I represent Ward 3 position

1. I am thankful to have the opportunity to serve the citizens in this capacity and be a part of continued progress for Searcy. I am married to Norman Hale, retired Captain from the White County Sheriffs department where he served over 32 years. We have 2 children, Jacob Hale who is the Clinical Director as well as a Critical Care Paramedic at NorthStar EMS. Paige Hale who obtained a Masters from Harding University and teaches English at White County Central School. We are a family of serving others. I have worked in EMS in Searcy over 28 years. When asked what my hobby might be I always answer that if I have spare time I prefer to spend that time with my family. We have 2 grandchildren that keep us on our toes. I have one pet which is a Bichon/poodle dog named Zepp. We are blessed to be members of the College Church of Christ. I look forward to continued progress and growth for Searcy.

There are so many things I love about Searcy but some of my favorite things are Searcy Holiday of Lights, Searcy bike trails, Searcy parks and pool for our children to gage safe places to enjoy. I'm excited to see how we can improve Riverside Park.

I'm thankful for our locally owned businesses that have invested in our city. There's so many things to say about our town!



Donald Raney

Ward 3
Position 2

DON RANEY has no problem with staying busy. He's a local attorney at Lightle Law firm on Arch street in Searcy, but he still has a heart to serve on the Searcy City Council. After witnessing a time of great dissension within the Searcy city government, he decided that he wanted to be a positive influence to draw people together in order to help the city move forward. He ran for city council 12 years ago and is still there. He has been married to his wife, Cathy, for 52 years. They have three children and twelve grandchildren. He lives in the same neighborhood with his grandchildren and loves seeing them grow up in this community and enjoy the culture of Searcy.



Dale Brewer

Ward 4

Position 1

I CAME TO SEARCY in August, 1965 to attend Harding College, and I graduated in 1969. While at Harding, I met an amazing young Mississippi girl, Pat Jones. We married while at Harding. After graduation, Pat and I moved to Dallas, Texas, where I taught high school science courses and coached basketball. In 1970, we moved back to Searcy with the intention of making this our permanent home.

I taught school in Jacksonville for two years before entering the insurance business. At this time, I am a semi-retired agent with Haymond Insurance.

I have enjoyed being a member of the Searcy city council for several years. My reason for wanting this position was to be a representative of the citizens of ward 4. I stay in touch with the people, and I try to vote on issues in the way that reflects the feelings of those in my ward. I consider it a privilege to serve in this capacity.

Searcy has grown and changed a great deal since I first moved here. It is an amazing city that offers many opportunities to those who choose to live here. I cannot think of any other place that I would rather be than Searcy, Arkansas.

We have two children, Luanne Walker and Michael Brewer. We have four grandchildren, and three weeks ago, we were blessed with our first great grandson.

Our children participated in the soccer program when it began in the late 1970's. There were no soccer fields at the time, so we used an area on airport property until fields were constructed at the athletic complex.

We spent many hours with our grandchildren, enjoying Berryhill Park and Spring Park. We also took them to the Rialto Theater on many occasions.

Searcy is a great place to raise children. Over the years, there have been many improvements to the athletic complex, the addition of the swim center, the renovation of the Rialto, and the soon to be completed pickle ball courts. The new library will also offer new opportunities for young people in our community. I anticipate the addition of many more programs for adults and young people over the next several years.



Mike Chalenburg

Ward 4

Position 2

MY WIFE KAREN AND I met when we were both in the band at Harding. After graduation and a short time in Illinois, we moved back to Searcy in 1980 so that I could work for Harding where I've been ever since. We were blessed with 4 children that we raised here. All of them are married and we have 6 grandchildren. We are members of the Highway Church of Christ in Judsonia and in my spare time I enjoy woodworking.

When I first ran for the Council, it was because Searcy had been good for our family and I thought I might be able to help the city progress. Karen and I particularly enjoy the Holiday of Lights that the city has been able to restart. ●

"As with all levels of government, the city council is elected BY the people and is supposed to work FOR the people."

"If you live inside the city limits or if you just come into the city limits to do business, the city council's decisions affect your daily life."

You are taxed to provide your community with **security, infrastructure** and other amenities. Lets always remember to thank those in charge of *managing your funds* to provide a great community!

Stewardship

1. The position and duties of a steward, a person who acts as the surrogate of another or others, especially by managing property, financial affairs, an estate, etc.
2. The responsible overseeing and protection of something considered worth caring for and preserving.


"Effective stewardship of the public finances has to be at the heart of everything we do."

~ L. Kendall

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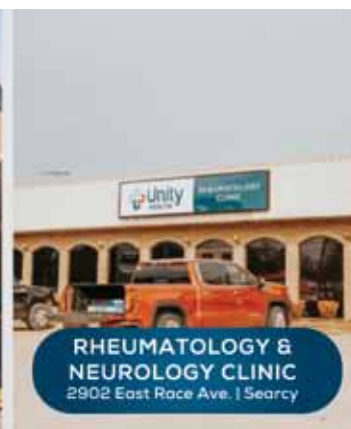
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TURNING LONELINESS *to* LOVE

By Jennifer Webb

Tears streamed down Christine's face as she drove. Her sorrow seemed as endless as the road in front of her; going on for miles with no end in sight. Her foster daughter was heavy on her heart, as she was most days. But sometimes it became unbearable. It was thoughts of the unspeakable abuse this child had suffered most of her childhood, and the weight of the guilt Christine felt from saying "no" to the first call to foster her that overwhelmed her with grief.

That first call described an extreme abuse case and asked her to take the little girl. The scale of it was overwhelming and Christine knew she'd be in over her head. Someone else more qualified needed to take her. "No," she told them, "she needs someone else, not me." But no one stepped up and the child went to an emergency shelter for children they could not find foster homes for.

Then the second call came. They had proof of the abuser's guilt, and a family member had just committed suicide. They had to tell her that this family member had passed - but they weren't even allowed to give her a hug at the emergency shelter. Could Christine take her now?

"Yes." The answer to the second call was "Yes." How could she turn it away? She was indeed in way over her head, but they brought the girl to Christine's home. And then they left.

How to even begin to fix such a broken child? Adults don't always have all the answers. Just as with biological children, foster children do not come with instruction manuals. Love is a start, but it's just the beginning.

Christine did everything she could think of to help - lots of active outdoor activities, horseback riding, and of course sitting through a heart-wrenching funeral with her. What made it even more difficult for Christine was that she couldn't tell anyone except for God what weighed so heavily on her heart. You cannot share a foster child's story unless they remain anonymous. They are obviously not anonymous if they are living in your home.

The only advice she got from the "experts" was to find the child a counselor. But the trauma that the child had been through overwhelmed even the counselor. The counselor was compassionate and willing to do her best, but the trauma was so severe she told Christine, "I don't even know where to start with this." The rest of the "experts" and "support team" were really there to investigate the crime that had been committed against the child

and help the biological family navigate the situations at hand. But the foster parents at that time just had to figure things out on their own.

That's why tears were pouring down Christine's face as she drove. She was overwhelmed, over her head, and felt completely and utterly alone and forsaken.

Fast forward 10 years. Christine got another call, but this time her house was far from empty. She already had five foster kids in her home as "temporary placements." It was the type of temporary placements that were not so temporary. She occasionally got a well-meaning comment of "You really should not take in so many." But what people outside of the foster world do not always understand are 1). You usually say "no" way more than you say yes. 2). "Temporary" placements are not usually temporary. 3) Which adapted child are you supposed to "send away"? But she loved them all, and knew that she would continue to love them all as long as she had them under her care and even after they went somewhere else.

Could Christine take one more? It was not a smooth or easy process. It was bumpy, it was messy, heart-wrenching, and very overwhelming, especially while trying to care for and love 5 other children on her own. Many times she felt that the burden was hers to bear alone. Privacy laws prevented her from telling anyone else about the situation.

It was another overwhelmingly traumatic case that had nowhere else to go. This time, she knew better than to say no. Yes. She would take in the child. How she would manage with six kids she didn't know, but she knew that God would provide.

One night, the child finally confessed to her the true horrors of the abuse she had suffered. Christine immediately booked a sitter for her other children, took the child for medical attention, and was sent to Little Rock for her to be checked out and interviewed.

They sat through a 12-hour interview in a Little Rock hospital, being left alone for hours at a time between talking to people. It seemed as though no one knew what to do. After the first 10 hours, Christine went to the nurse's station to ask if she could leave to get her and the child some food. Instead of a compassionate response, the nurse threatened to call DHS on HER if she left to get the child food.

"If I had it to do over again, I'd have just called and had a pizza delivered to the hospital. But how disappointing that the interview process was handled in a way that was so dishonoring to a child that trusted an adult to reach out for help." Christine said.

When you're already overwhelmed, in over your head, and your mind is clouded from hunger, it's hard to think straight or know how to respond when faced in a situation like that. She went to the professionals looking for help, kindness, compassion, and support to work as a team to help this child. That's not what she got.

The good news is that the information that was gathered resulted in a conviction for the offender on charges of sex trafficking a minor. "I watched many interviews happen, but because of ONE police officer that really cared and was **educated** in Human Trafficking investigations; this child received help, validation, and most importantly, justice".

"These experiences were many years ago, but she has never forgotten that feeling of being alone, isolated, and unsupported."

These experiences were many years ago, but she has never forgotten that feeling of being alone, isolated, and unsupported. If someone could have stepped in and taken just one thing off of her, she would not have felt so alone. One load of laundry, one time

of someone mowing the yard, one person to help run to appointments, one person to cook dinner, anything that let her feel less alone would have helped. But foster parents are “givers” and asking is usually not even on their radar. “I realize now that there were many people who would have helped if I just would have asked,” said Christine. “But that hard journey taught me so much about what others need now. I would not trade those lessons for anything as I believe they are what has given me the vision to help others in ways I could not have understood without living it myself. Imagine & Believe is the conduit between the community and the foster & adoptive parents in equipping these missionaries.”

That’s when she realized the Foster Care Boutique’s function was much more than simply supplying clothes for foster children. It was also about making the foster parents feel loved, supported, and not so alone. It’s run under the umbrella of the nonprofit 501c organization that she founded called Imagine and Believe. Its whole name is **The Imagine & Believe Foundation**.

Christine partially raised many children born to others over a period of approximately 17 years. Fostering comes with a lot of chaos and trying to heal a traumatized child or children in addition to all the other chaos of life. Some of these situations just need a bit of help getting back on track and other situations will almost give you nightmares. Now imagine working a full-time job during the day, running to all the normal sports and extracurricular activities, then adding in court dates, counseling, and a whole other host of ‘not average’ appointments. Is your head spinning yet? Now add to all that never knowing what little thing can trigger an enormous meltdown with the child acting out as a result of the hurt and trauma they have experienced in the past.

That’s a lot, to put it mildly. Foster parents do all this and more on a daily basis.

But they wouldn’t have it any other way. They love hard - despite knowing that it may bring them heartache. They give of their time, their resources, space, privacy, financially, emotionally, and every other way you can think of. It’s no wonder that they feel overwhelmed from time to time.

But love and support from others helps. The Foster Care Boutique at the Imagine & Believe Foundation is a place where foster parents can come in and “shop for free” or have a bag of items packed and ready for them for clothes at no cost for their foster and adoptive children. Since foster parents often literally get children dropped off on their doorstep with nothing

“Imagine & Believe is the conduit between the community and the foster & adoptive parents in equipping these missionaries.”



A beautiful rainbow that signifies God's promise.

but the clothes on their backs or a trash bag with their belongings that may have been exposed to toxic drugs in some situations, the boutique is a huge help.

“The Foster Care Boutique was almost named Brianna's Closet, after a little girl that Christine provided respite care for over a weekend.”

It started small – just one room in the former Searcy Living office on Main Street. Christine was only using the room for storage at the time. She cleaned it out and then called the Harding Home Economics Department to ask if they would like to take on a little decorating project.

They turned the small storage room into a colorful, cheerful place. Foster parents could come and get whatever clothing they needed for the precious little ones dropped off at their home.

At first, she was nervous that it would be empty and there would be nothing to give. But her fears were soon put to rest because the people of Searcy showed up in a big way.

The very first donation was a little Dora the Explorer outfit that an acquaintance donated in honor of Brianna, the little girl that Christine provided respite care for over a weekend that inspired the Foster Care Boutique project.

Then Hays Casual and Western Wear donated an entire truckload of brand-new clothing! Talk about God blessing a project beyond her wildest dreams and making it grow! The growth didn’t stop there, though. The people of Searcy stepped up and brought donations along with other local businesses and organizations. Soon there was a constant flow of diapers, clothing, cleaning supplies, and more! Each donation, no matter how large or small was an outpouring of love and support for the foster care community.

The little storage room in the Searcy Living Office was soon bursting to

overflowing with love and donations. Sometimes growth, though a wonderful blessing, can be a bit uncomfortable – think of a much too large fish crammed in a tiny fish bowl. That’s how the Foster Care Boutique was becoming in the Searcy Living office. They needed more space!

Whitney Lane Family Worship Center offered some space to house the boutique, though the donations still came to the Searcy Living Office since it was easily accessible, centrally located and staffed. But once again, God made it grow beyond the confines of that space. Christine knew the Foster Care Boutique needed a permanent home.

God presented her with a solution, but it was big. Way too big. “No, Lord. I can’t do that,” she argued mentally. It would require a huge leap of faith. “I don’t think I can make that jump. There’s way too much risk. What if...” There were a thousand “What ifs...”

“PEACE, BE STILL. TRUST ME. I WILL PROVIDE A WAY.” Her answer came.

She took a deep breath. And took the leap of faith.

She is currently in the process of purchasing the former Garage Door Service building at 1308 S. Benton Street, as GDS had moved to Lincoln Street. As soon as she walked in, she felt God speaking to her.

It was a bit surreal and one of those instances for Christine where her life has come full circle. Before it had been a Garage Door Service, it had been a church - the first church she attended after moving to Arkansas 27 years ago. Images of the pastor and his family, and all the precious friendships that she had once formed under that same roof flooded her mind.

Along with images of the past, were visions of what it could be for the Foster Care Boutique. The open room that had been the original sanctuary would have plenty of room for a real shopping boutique experience that she had always

dreamed of providing. The former nursery would be perfect to accommodate baby clothing.

The front offices would provide the perfect new home for Searcy Living Magazine, whose employees (on Searcy Living's payroll) were more than happy to volunteer to assist foster and adoptive parents as well as donors when needed, giving in a huge way to save the Foundation money. There were offices for everyone that needed them and ample work and storage space. The only problem was – while the building was very much structurally sound, it needed a major makeover on the inside.

Hanging on to God's promise, she put the original Searcy Living Building on Main St. up for sale, and moved the magazine and the Foster Care Boutique to its new location. They are currently leasing it while the process of purchasing it moves forward.

Moving - such a small word to describe a complicated task, especially when you are talking about moving an entire charity project of this magnitude. Christine started the only way she knew how – one step at a time and trusting God with each step. It was too big for her to do alone, so she asked for help. Hundreds of volunteers showed up in force. They painted walls, moved furniture, sorted through clothes, and did many other tasks. It was a true community effort and an outpouring of love and support. They all have a part in this story as well – and so do you.

Tammy and Monte Hays have known Christine for many years. They began advertising in Searcy Living when they were co-owners of the original Hays Clothing Store. Through their relationship with Christine, their daughter, Whitney, became interested in foster care and adoption. This in turn brought their attention to the needs that there are as well as the opportunity that is to help through donations, time, prayer & more.

While operating Hays, they would donate clothes, shoes & misc. items to The Foster Care Boutique. Fast forward to this summer and Whitney is still interested and still volunteering. After volunteering with a group from their church, Whitney came home and discussed with Monte and Tammy the need for shelving and racks to organize the donated items at Imagine & Believe. Monte said "let's go see what we can do to help".

They met with Christine and saw what was needed. After closing their store, they are now flipping houses so they had just the people to help get this project done. Monte had their guys meet him and go over what Christine needed to be done.



Within a couple of days, new shelving and racks were in place.

Tammy decided to see if she could help get things in order. She knew that organization was a top priority so she called her sister, Diana Downing, who had been a manager and merchandiser at Hays. She graciously agreed to help. Diana and Tammy went to Imagine & Believe and began organizing to try to make it more like a true shopping experience for foster children when they are brought in to get clothing, shoes & supplies.

"Fostering and adopting are not what God has called us to do, but Monte & I do feel that we can help in other ways and this was something we felt like we could do to help the wonderful ministry that Christine has. James 1:27 tells us we are to take care of His children. Each of us can have a part in helping those in need whether it be through foster, adoption, donations or prayer."

Wayne Blanton, manager of Home Hardware Center (formerly McCoy's Building Supply), knew he wanted to help the minute Christine walked through the door. His sister-in-law is a foster parent, still in the beginning stages of the journey. The Foster Care Boutique is close to his heart. "Tell me what you need and we'll make it happen," He told Christine. She



asked for rods and shelves for the Foster Care Boutique. Dean went down and saw what she needed, and came up with an estimate. Home Hardware Center donated a portion towards the supplies, and the employees chipped in with the rest out of their own pockets. **Jeremy and Wyatt** came on their own time and volunteered their skills. They did much more than simply donate rods and shelves. They built a whole wall of shelving and hangers. They finished with "If Christine needs help again, all she has to do is ask."

Ashley and Chris Cifreo have friends that foster children and have adopted through foster care. They do not feel personally called to foster, but feel called to support those that do. They make personal financial contributions to the Foster Care Boutique and volunteered their time to help with the move into the new building.

While she was there, Ashley noticed that there was something the Foster Care Boutique was missing. There were clothes, toys, shoes of every size, cleaning products, baby things, but no food. She thought of her new freezer that she had recently purchased, still sitting unused. She donated it to the Foster Care Boutique so they could keep freezer meals for foster and adoptive families. "It's interesting to see how much love foster and adoptive parents pour into these kids that are not theirs," Ashley says. She and Chris are happy to be a part of supporting that.

► Continued on next page



"It's interesting to see how much love foster and adoptive parents pour into these kids that are not theirs."



Faye Jones and Polly Walters, of Kensett First Baptist Church, sat and listened to Amy Headley, from Whitney Lane Church, talk about fostering. Faye started wondering if she could help too. She got a few ladies together from Kensett First Baptist Church and went down to the Foster Care Boutique and started sorting through clothes. Then, after Ashley and Chris Cifreo donated the freezer, they knew exactly the ladies for the job of filling it up – them! They filled the freezer full of meals for foster families to give them an easy supper on hectic days. She says, “We all have good intentions but get lazy or too busy with other projects. There is always a need and now that the Boutique is in a bigger location they need more help. Consider volunteering with your time and money. It’s not hard and it is rewarding and you will be blessed.”



Ryan Roop, of Roop’s Carpet, has known Christine for many years through church. He’s not really one that likes to stand out and get attention. He’s more of the guy that stays in the back and watches everyone else. When Christine called him to come out and take a look at the floor for new vinyl flooring in the bathroom at the new building which was literally crumbling, she also showed him around the Foster Care Boutique. She excitedly told him her vision and plans for it. He knew it was a good cause and felt God telling him to help. When a floor is done, it changes the whole feel of the room. As

nice as paint on the walls make it look, it’s not finished until the floor is laid. The floor in the rooms with baby clothes looked awful. “I’ll see what I can do.” He told her. He thought of several families he goes to church with that foster and snippets of their conversations ran through his mind on the drive back. “I’ll see what I can do” turned into donating wood-grade vinyl plank in the rooms with baby clothes and items that he will be installing soon.

“We may not be able to do everything, but we can all do something.”

Kelly Gallaher has zero construction skills. She’s a homeschool mom to 2 boys and 4 girls but she can write grants like nobody’s business. Actually, it IS her business. She has her own grant writing business and wrote the grant from Delta Dental which recently made a sizable donation to The Foster Care Boutique specifically to purchase dental supplies. She had previously found the grant while working for Little Rock Angels. She met Christine and became friends with her through that organization as they traded resources and worked together to help each charity fulfill needs that the foster parents had.

The Delta Dental grant was for funding for toothbrushes, floss, toothpaste, and other dental supplies. Scarbrough Dentistry further helped by giving them a significant discount toward the items, so they were able to get almost twice as many supplies as they had originally anticipated! As you might have guessed, the toothbrushes, toothpaste, floss and other dental supplies are one of the items available to foster parents through the Foster Care Boutique. We all have different skill sets and gifts, but each of them can be used to contribute in our own ways.



Amanda Lutrell first heard about the Foster Care Boutique years ago from Christine. “Christine’s passion for foster children and foster parents is infectious. Every time she talks about the Boutique you can see the love and drive in her eyes, and you can absolutely see that this is her calling.” When Christine asked if she would be willing to design and put together a room for the Boutique, there was no question, Amanda was not only willing but honored.

Sponsored by Natural State Ice, Tom and Leigh Anne Watson, and Jackie and Angela Manasco, she was able to create a space for the newborn to 2-year-old boys’ room which houses clothes, blankets, diapers, and other items needed for the children’s care. Her intent was to make the room bright and cheery to be a positive space for both the foster parents and children while also staying very functional with ample storage.

“The Imagine and Believe Foundation and the Foster Care Boutique are blessings to our community. It takes a very special person to be a foster parent, and not everyone is able to or is called to do it. However, we can all do something. Whether it be donating our time, money, resources, or clothes and essentials, we can all do something! The Foster Care Boutique offers an excellent opportunity to serve, and I was very grateful for my small part in it.”

Melissa Badger has done Christine’s hair for years at Tangled Salon. During that time, she witnessed Christine’s passion for fostering and serving the families who answer the call to care for foster children. Melissa has always donated clothes but with the acquisition of the new building,



Christine approached her with her idea of having rooms designated for age groups to make “shopping” easier for families. Melissa chose to decorate the “baby girl” room.

“I truly admire the families who foster children and it is rewarding to know that, while being a foster parent may not be my gift, I can contribute by making a donation of some time and a little decor.”

*-Melissa Badger, Owner,
Tangled Salon*

When Katie Brown heard that her company, Simmons Bank, wanted to give volunteer hours in the community to a local nonprofit, she knew that she wanted to be a part of it. After talking to her pastor’s wife, Kim Overstreet, at Whitney Lane Family Worship Center, she

suggested those hours and donations go towards the Imagine and Believe Foster Care Boutique. There is always a need for diapers, but just as important, is the need for volunteers, especially when they were setting up in their new location. For four days, Simmons Bank graciously sent their employees in two shifts a day to sort and organize clothes for the Foster Care Boutique in addition to hosting a diaper drive. “I definitely want to volunteer more time there!” Katie says.

She had seen multiple families at church go through the process of being foster parents and watching the journey and transformation of the kids is just amazing. She and her husband have thought of fostering, but for now, want to use their time to volunteer and use the opportunity to teach kindness and compassion to their own children. She marvels at how much this community jumps in when a need is expressed and is always moved when she gets to witness it happen.

Growth brings new challenges. The Foster Care Boutique is now fully set up in its new location, but with a bigger building comes bigger bills as well. The gas bill for heating the large area in one of the coldest months of winter was \$600 alone!

It now stands in need of monetary donations to cover expenses as well as diapers (especially larger sizes), and boys’ socks of all sizes.

While we are not all called to be foster parents, each of us can do something to show them love and support. Any

donation, no matter the size is always appreciated. It is an offering of love and support.

In each step of the Imagine & Believe Foundation’s story, different people have held different puzzle pieces to make it work that they have generously given. Which piece is yours to give? ●



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Community Support

Our dream is that no foster or adoptive family will ever walk the journey alone.

ABOUT US

The Imagine & Believe Foster Care & Adoption Boutique is simply a place dedicated for use in helping foster & adoptive families, and sometimes emergency situations. Our awesome Searcy Living readers bring in donations, enabling foster/adopt parents to be able to 'shop' for what they need for foster and adopted children at no cost.

Our office is the drop off location and is located at 1308 S. Benton Ave. in Searcy. We welcome gently used or new items. Thank you, Searcy, for your generosity and time spent to support the Foster/Adoption Care Boutique!

We need your financial support
to keep this ministry going.



Our Purpose:

- ▶ **WE PROVIDE** the Foster Care Boutique, which is where your donations of clothing and diapers are connected to foster parents.
- ▶ **WE CONNECT** seasoned mentors (former foster parents) to new foster and adoptive parents, giving them a resource to ask questions and glean wisdom from someone who truly understands their journey.
- ▶ **WE HELP** new foster homes get set up with things such as play pens and child safety gates. We help fill in the gaps. There are so many things to get and do to prepare to be a new parent of a child or children of varying ages.
- ▶ **WE KNOW** the journey of fostering and adopting is very rewarding, but it can also have great times of discouragement and loss. We try to be an encouragement system and reminder that this community really does care about the orphans and the caretakers of the orphan ministry.
- ▶ **IF A FOSTER FAMILY** does not have the time to come by the Foster Care Boutique, we deliver the clothing and diapers to them. This service is needed, for instance, when a foster family takes in a foster child at 3AM and has to be at work by 8AM the next morning.



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~ CARLA SUMNER

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fostered 6 kids the second go
around**





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THANK YOU to the Kirkpatrick's for the dresser donations that we needed to store socks in our foster care boutique!



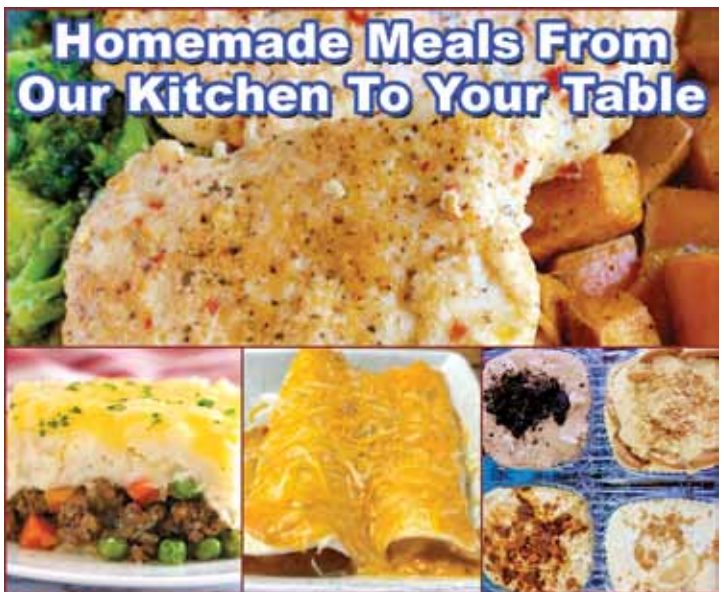
As we prepare for our dessert auction fundraiser, we would like to thank all of those who helped and participated last year.



Our youngest donor this month took a horse ride after bringing in her donation.



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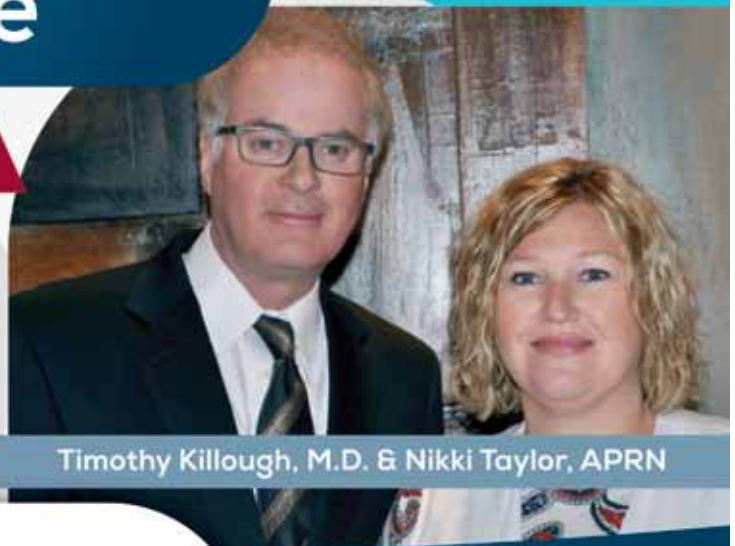
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- You can volunteer to sort clothing (watch our FaceBook page for opportunities)
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- We need funds to help us pay for the many extra expenses we will have
- We always need diapers

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