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## School sends Christmas cheer abroad

### Kindergarteners stuff Christmas stockings to send to soldiers overseas

BY CHANDLER INIONS  
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Christmas time is exciting for children who eagerly anticipate Santa's arrival, but some students at Mt. Juliet Elementary are finding out, there is more than one way to get into the holiday spirit.

On Friday, the kindergarten wing of MJE resembled a speedy assembly line as the students made their way from station to station, stuffing stockings to be sent to American troops serving overseas.

Each station was manned by a member of Music City Blue Star

Moms, who had different items for the stockings. The items included everything from needed essentials like toothpaste and toiletries to something succulent for the soldiers' sweet cravings.

The stocking goodies were largely donated by students from all the other grades at MJE with the task of getting them stuffed going to the kindergarteners.

For one student, the act really hit close to home. Lily LaBerge is the daughter of two Wilson County veterans, Ethan and Arin LaBerge. Her father was

injured in a bombing during a deployment to Afghanistan.

In May of 2012, Ethan LaBerge arrived at Fort Campbell and was placed in the 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment. When his platoon was leaving a meeting with Afghan officials, a civilian detonated a bomb nearly 10 feet from the soldiers. Mr. LaBerge survived the attack but was left in critical condition from head-to-toe shrapnel wounds, broken bones and a concussion.

LaBerge was awarded a Purple Heart, Combat Infantryman Badge, Afghanistan Campaign Medal with two campaign stars, and he medically retired from the Army in 2016.

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Chandler Inions/Lebanon Democrat

From left, Sadie Martin, Ryan Stott and Lily LaBerge send Christmas cheer to soldiers on tour overseas. LaBerge is the daughter of two local veterans, one who was nearly killed by a bombing during a tour in Afghanistan.

## PHOEBES ... NOT WIDOWS

### Lebanon-based support group has grown, flourished

BY CRAIG HARRIS  
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When women are released from the Wilson County Jail, they sometimes have nowhere to go and only the clothes on their backs.

Their situation isn't something that goes unnoticed

"We have three ladies from three different churches in Lebanon who go to the jail once a week for prison ministry," Lebanon's Elaine Pearson said. "They came to us with this idea and gave us the list of items that would be helpful to an inmate when she is released from jail. I took that list, typed it up and distributed it to our PHOEBES."

Pearson coordinates the ministry projects for the Lebanon-based group PHOEBE Connections.

November's project — pack a purse — was carried out last week.

"It was personal-care items," Pearson said. "We also included stamped envelopes with paper and pens, a gift card from Burger King, because it's the only thing close to the jail and open at 6 a.m. in the morning. There's Bibles in it. There's a list of resources in Wilson County that Compassionate Hands has provided. There's some information



Submitted

The Lebanon-based PHOEBE Connections recently baked and distributed cookies to a variety of first responders across Wilson County, including the Lebanon Police Department.

about three different churches who provide assistance if they need resources or a ride to church. There's snacks, granola and packs of crackers.

"When a woman walks out with nothing, she can have something to help her out."

That's nothing new for PHOEBE Connections though. Each month, the women's group gathers for a new ministry project.

"These ladies are all about serving," PHOEBE Connections President Ronda Martin said. "They're very active in the local community. They're very active in the church. They're an empowered group."

However, one word is off lim-

its as far as the ladies are concerned.

"We don't like the word widow," Pearson said.

There's a reason why they don't care to be referred to as widows.

"We didn't want to use the word widow," Martin said. "Let's face it ... it's a downer. When you think about a widows group, people think, 'Oh, how pitiful.' We wanted something to where people would feel empowered. There's a need to find purpose in life again. We wanted widows to be able to do that again. Serving is a part of healing. When you can serve others, it gives purpose. It's finding that sup-

port they need, finding that encouragement they need, but it's serving too."

The name, PHOEBE Connections, came about during the group's planning process.

"Ronda first felt like the Lord was leading her to do a ministry," PHOEBE Connections Treasurer Carol Pharris said. "She was a young widow with a young son. She knew Elaine. Elaine's husband had passed away. They knew each other as widows. Elaine knew me and that my husband had passed away. They called me and said Carol can you help us with this. I said, I have a friend

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## Friendships forged through common goals

BY CHANDLER INIONS  
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Having an inviting gathering place where socializing becomes the standard is a blessing in and of itself. When you're a senior citizen who relocated to a new area, that place can take on an even greater meaning.

Nell Highers and Joan Carrow are two good friends who both volunteer at the Mt. Juliet Senior Activity Center in addition to attending several of the events and recreational opportunities. On Saturday, they were carefully constructing displays of the items up for grabs during the senior center's Christmas shop yard sale.

Both Carrow and Highers are transplants to Wilson County, although Highers is quick to proclaim she is a "life-long Tennessean." Carrow, on the other hand, lives with her husband and moved to Middle Tennessee from her home in Boston, New York, an area just outside of Buffalo.

While she was pleased with the move, she admitted that making friends in a new place at her age was a bit of a challenge. When she found the senior center, the new friends started lining up.

"The center gives us a reason to all get together," said Carrow. "Making friends was just a matter of time."

Carrow is grateful for those friendships, like the one she has with Highers, and she knows that without the center, she might not even know her.

Highers, who lives in an independent senior facility in Mt. Juliet (Carrick Glen), echoed Carrow's thoughts on the center being a great place to meet people.

"We get to come here and socialize with people our own age," Highers said. "It's truly a blessing."

The center is currently raising funds to try and relocate to a new building. The current building is more than 100 years old and regularly in need of repairs.

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## Triumphant trio: Lebanon, Watertown, Green Hill in round of 8

BY ANDY REED  
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History continued to be made at Lebanon and Green Hill, while Watertown was repeating some second-round success last Friday night.

All three of Wilson County's region champions made it to the state quarterfinals with home-field victories.

A season of shedding monkeys off its backs continued as Lebanon knocked off two more. The Blue Devils' 30-17 win over Riverdale marked the program's first win over the Warriors since 1993 and first trip to the round of eight since

1995. It was the team's 11th win, the most ever in the program's 103-year history.

Green Hill's second-year program continued setting the bar high for future Hawk teams as Columbia lost for the second time this season on the Hill, this time by a 21-17 count, sending coach Josh Crouch's team to the quarterfinals in its first year of playoff eligibility.

Watertown's fourth consecutive region championship has been followed by a fourth consecutive trip to the quarterfinals following a 7-0 win over Marion County. And for

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### FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

#### STATE QUARTERFINALS

##### Class 6A

Farragut (6-6) at Maryville (12-0)  
Lebanon (11-1) at Oakland (12-0)

Beech (9-3) at Hendersonville (9-3)  
Ravenwood (10-2) at Summit (12-0)

##### Class 5A

Knoxville Central (9-3) at Knoxville West (10-2)

Rhea County (10-2) at Powell (10-2)

Page (11-1) at Green Hill (11-1)  
Henry County (7-5) at Springfield (10-2)

##### Class 2A

Hampton (9-2) at Oneida (10-3)  
Trousdale County (11-1) at Watertown (9-3)

Riverside (11-1) at Forrest (9-3)  
Memphis Academy of Health Sciences (11-1) at Westview (11-1)

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Brandon Johnson, Kathy Gray and Joe Fitzgerald

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Blue Devils mark more notches on historic run

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