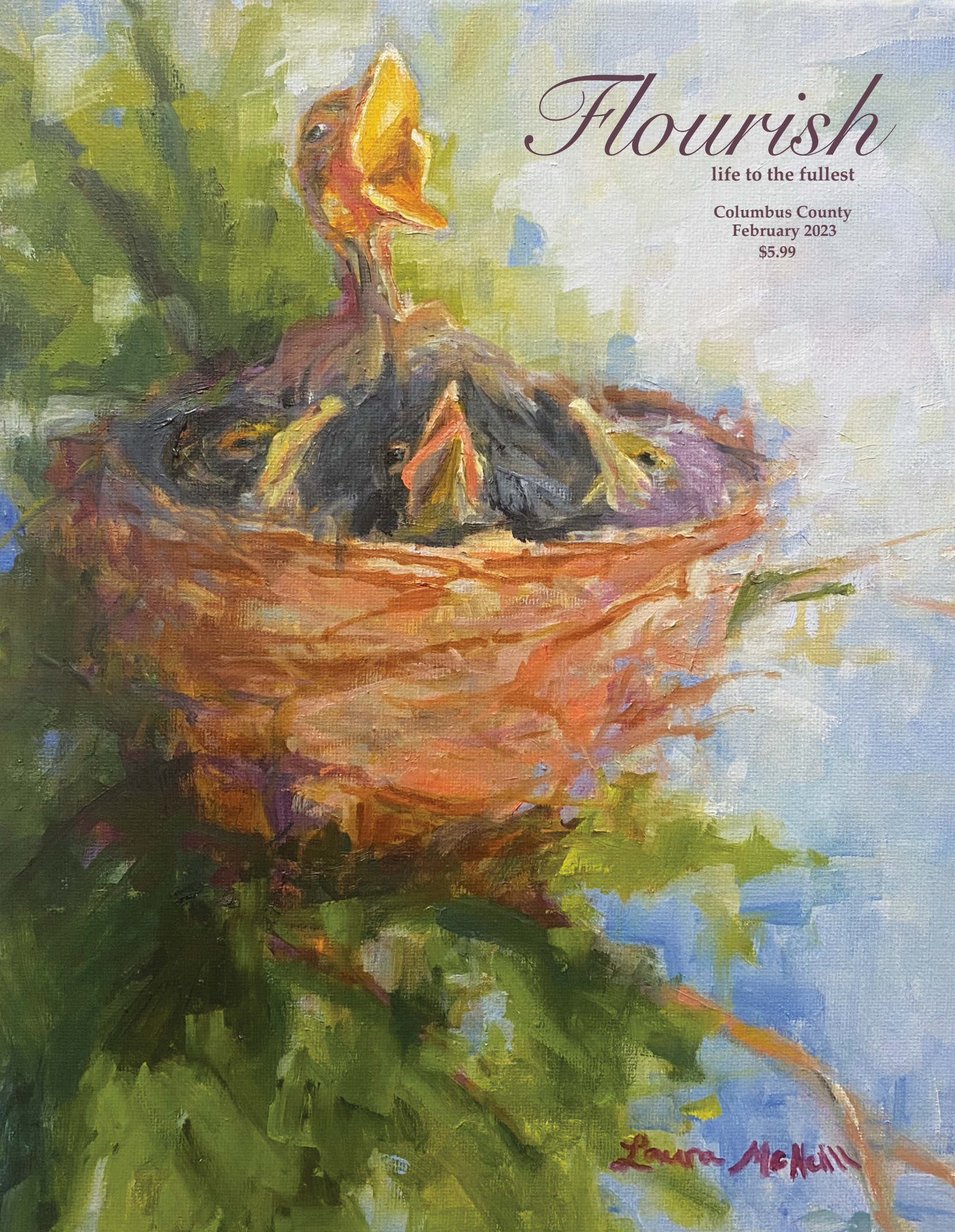




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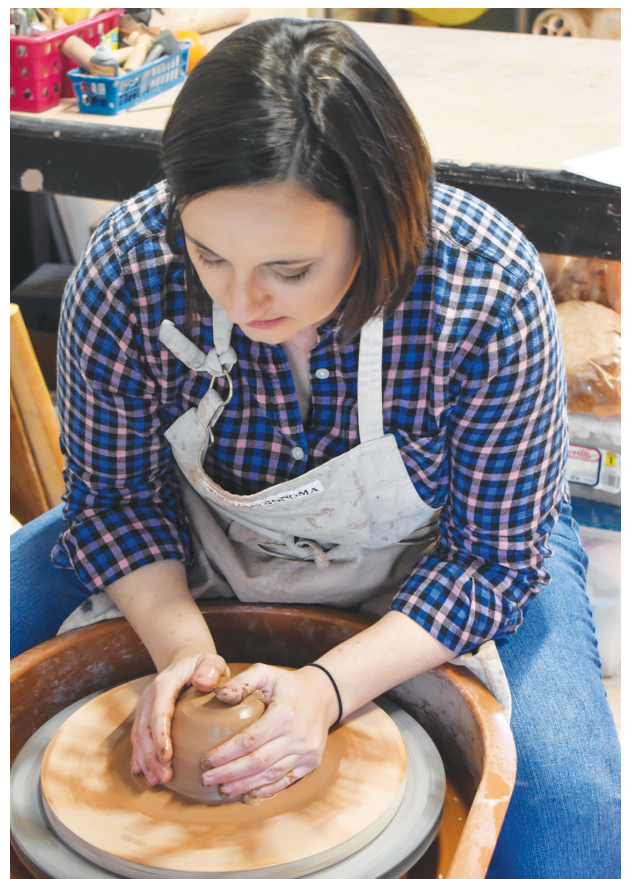


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"In my classroom, I try so hard to open up my students to the idea that art is not just about something pretty. There can be a deeper meaning or understanding there."

- Jennifer Sams

17

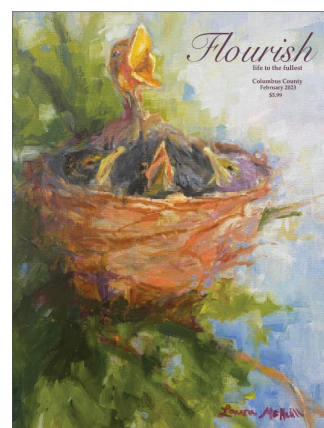


I recently came across this quote by Eleanor Roosevelt that stuck with me: “With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts.” What a gamechanger after a particularly hard day to wake up to a “new day and new thoughts.”

History shows that Roosevelt’s kindness, honesty and dedication won the support of the powerful and the poor, and she leveraged that support to advocate for those suffering great need. While she was serving as First Lady for the four terms of her husband, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, I can imagine Eleanor gave herself the “new day, new strength and new thoughts” pep talk in the mirror more than a few times.

The women featured in this edition of Flourish are wonderful examples of how working in our community with kindness, honesty and dedication can change lives. Everyone deserves a new day.

— Stuart High Rogers



Oil painting on the cover
by Laura McNeill

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Get to know our cover artist Laura McNeill

By STUART ROGERS | Photography by LAURA McNEILL

Meet our talented cover artist, Laura McNeill of Lake Waccamaw. McNeill likes to paint subjects that tell a story and represent a feeling with an impressionistic interpretation, and she doesn't remember a time when she wasn't in the middle of an artistic project. She views art as an adventure and finds inspiration in the moments of everyday life.

McNeill's adventure in art started when she was a young girl and her mother taught her to sew. She sewed clothes for her own children when they were young and has designed and sewn custom flags.

Other projects include a large custom mirror embellished with her seashell collection for the beach house where she and her husband, Danny McNeill, spend some of their time during retirement. Her grandchildren's bedrooms are decorated with furniture she refinished with whimsical painted designs.

'I have been drawing all of my life'

In high school, McNeill was the art editor for her school yearbook, and, while in college at UNC Chapel Hill, she managed to squeeze in several drawing classes while earn-

MEET THE ARTIST

ing a degree in business.

After retiring in 2014 from a successful career in mortgage banking, McNeill decided to seriously pursue her interest in painting. She took classes at the Cameron Art Museum in Wilmington in a variety of subjects and media. When she discovered oil painting, "I was hooked," she says.

Painting with oils allows her to take her time as she works through a piece.

A fun tip McNeill shared is that, if she wants the paint to remain wet on a piece in progress so she can work on it the next day, she just puts it in the freezer. She says, "Many times you can find a painting I am



Flying High



Tractor Time

Laura McNeill

MEET THE ARTIST

working on, on top of a frozen pizza. Danny knows to enter the freezer with care."

Three painting concepts

Studying with dozens of accomplished teachers, McNeill has determined three painting concepts that are the basis for her artistic style and philosophy.

In her own words, McNeill explains that, "First, the Impressionistic style allows me to 'color outside of the lines' and to use color freely and not necessarily where it 'belongs.' Secondly, I understand that success in a painting also comes from learned rules related to color and value, and not just talent. In other words, sometimes you do not paint what you see but paint what you know. Finally, one teacher told me to expect only 25% of my paintings to be a success. With that mindset, it gives me the freedom to take chances on a canvas."

Dog portrait in gold leaf



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'The woman



Barbara Featherson at Mt. Olive School

for the job'

*Barbara Roseboro Featherson is the first
Black woman to serve on the
Columbus County Board of Commissioners.
She's also a farmer, retired federal worker,
mother and inspiration to many in the county.*

By IVEY SCHOFIELD, BORDER BELT INDEPENDENT

PHOTOGRAPHY IVEY SCHOFIELD & GRANT MERRITT

When Barbara Roseboro Featherson was sworn into office on Dec. 5 as the first Black woman to serve on the Columbus County Board of Commissioners, the local notary made a blunder.

The notary, Harlene Walters, certified Featherson as the board's newest member "on this fifth day of December, 1900."

As she corrected the error, chuckles filled the commissioners' chamber.

But some residents of this rural county in southeastern North Carolina say they are frustrated that the county is having such "firsts" nearly a quarter of the way into the 21st century.

"I know (Walters) made a simple mistake, but you would think something like that would happen in 1900-something," Latoya Beatty, chair of the Democratic Women of Columbus County, said of voters electing a Black woman to the county board. "I feel very surprised that we're still having the first African American anything."

Some residents say they hope Featherson will help unite Columbus County, where divisions along racial and political lines became very apparent – and made national headlines – ahead of the Nov. 8 election.

In November, Jody Greene, who resigned as Columbus County sheriff 15 days before the election due to allegations of racial discrimination and corruption, won 54% of the vote to get a second term as the county's first Republican sheriff. (Greene later resigned from this term in January.)

That day, Featherson was the only Democrat to win any office in Columbus County – an example of

local voters' continuing political shift to the right.

Featherson told the Border Belt Independent in late November that she decided to run after Jerome McMillian, who previously held the District 1 seat that includes Fair Bluff, Boardman, Evergreen, Chadborn and west Whiteville, supported Greene's request for riot gear in June 2020.

"I don't ever remember a riot in Columbus County," she said. "We don't need riot gear."

The seven-member board ultimately voted 5-2 to deny Greene's request. Featherson said she told McMillian she was disappointed in him for voting yes.

"Then I thought, 'There's no point for you to get upset about stuff and cry about stuff and not do anything about it,'" she said.

"America cannot stand up straight without a Black woman," said Marcus Norfleet, who ran against Featherson in the primary. "It's taken us that long to get her to where she needed to be. That can be seen as an indictment against our community and county at large."

Featherson beat Norfleet and McMillian, both of whom are also Black, in the May primary. (McMillian recently switched his party affiliation to Republican and is now the chief deputy at the sheriff's office.)

Featherson won 82% of the vote on Nov. 8 against a Republican write-in candidate.

Featherson, 70, said she just wants to do her best.

"My hopes are that I will make a difference in this county, not just as a Black woman or a woman," she said, "but as a good, hard-working commissioner for all people."



Barbara Featherson, the first Black woman to serve on the Columbus County Board of Commissioners, was sworn into office on Dec. 5, 2022, surrounded by her mother, husband and son.

A farmer and federal employee

Featherson grew up with a large family: five siblings on her mother's 16-acre property and eight cousins on her uncle's 16 acres in the Mt. Olive community in Columbus County. Her family, she said, was one of the largest Black farm owners in the county, growing wheat, corn, other vegetables and fruit.

"We farmed together, we played together, we rode buses together," Featherson said. "We all just grew up right in this area."

Featherson said she had a good childhood, ultimately graduating from West Columbus High School. That's where she met Jimmy Featherson, her husband of more than 40 years.

After high school, Barbara Featherson took out a small loan and moved to Durham to get a general business certificate from Southeastern Business College. At the end of the program, she took a civil service exam.

When Featherson returned home to Columbus County, she learned that she was qualified to get a

job at the Social Security office in Whiteville.

"It was God-inspired," said Featherson, a devout Christian. "I always had this thing in me about wanting to help."

Featherson, who said she was the first Black woman to work in the office, stayed there for the rest of her 40-year career, moving up the ranks to ultimately become manager of the branch. Before retiring nine years ago, she helped people navigate the public claims process, including researching and filing for benefits and reversing government oversights.

"(The benefits) had a change in their life," she said. "It was very rewarding."

Not only was Featherson a federal employee, she was also a farmer and a mother of two boys. She would work eight hours at her job and then return home to take her children to sports games and oversee the people who farmed her land.

"It was stressful," Featherson said. "I had to divide my time between too many different things to be effective in all of them."

Her son Ryan Featherson called her “the leader of the family.” She was responsible and caring, he said, like a mother should be.

“As a young child, I always thought she should be (in) a role of importance in that community,” he said. “She finally made it to that step. She did it.”

From prayer to power

In 2020, when her gym closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, Featherson began walking in her neighborhood for exercise. She noticed that many of her neighbors were dying.

“It really troubled my spirit,” she said, “and it seemed to hit the minority population worse.”

In Columbus County, 288 residents have died of COVID, according to late January data from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. Experts say the real number is likely higher.

Then Featherson watched the murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man who died in 2020 when a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for several minutes.

“I have five Black men that I love – two grandsons, two sons and a husband,” she said. “I actually wept because it became very personal to me.”

Then came McMillian’s vote in favor of riot gear.

Featherson said she began to talk to God about what she should do. She prayed until the final day to register for her candidacy. She made it to the elections office in Whiteville three minutes before the deadline.

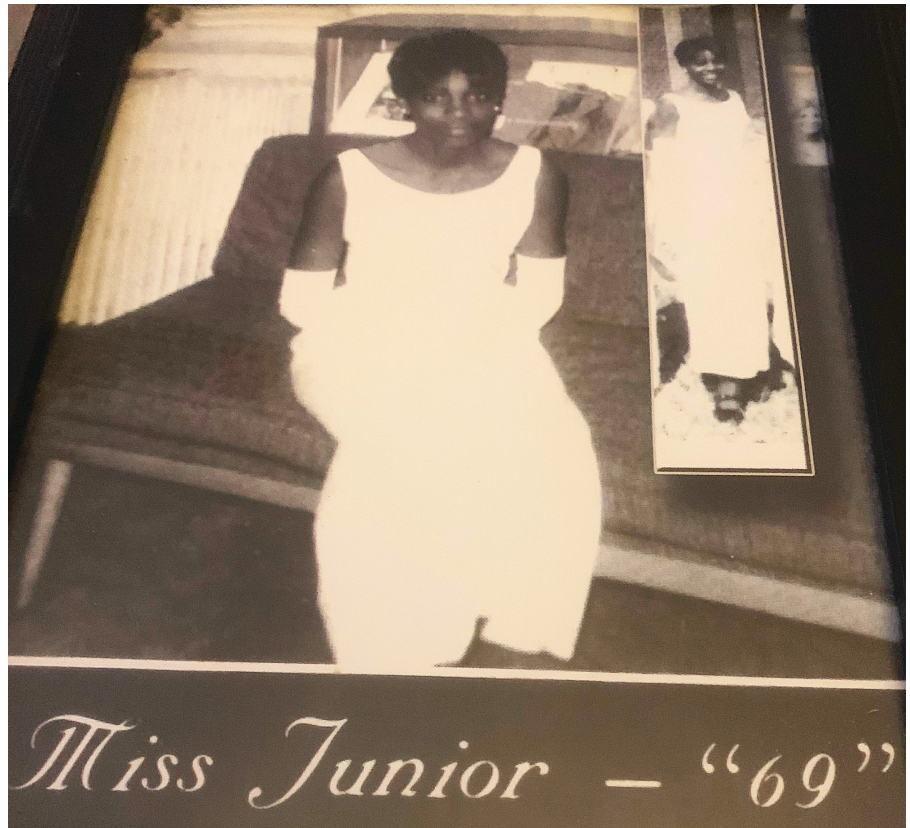
“It wasn’t something I had discussed with anyone else,” Featherson said. “I just said to myself, ‘This is what God intends for me to do, so I am going forward with it.’”

‘She’s the woman for the job’

Featherson said she hasn’t regretted her decision to run, but she admitted she had no idea what she was getting herself into.

“I didn’t realize it would be so time consuming,” she said. “I didn’t realize it would be so expensive, either.”

When she first filed to run, Featherson checked the box on the form that indicated she would not spend



In 1969, Featherson was voted Miss Junior at Mt. Olive School. The next year, she integrated with White students at West Columbus High School, where she graduated.

more than \$1,000 throughout her campaign.

“I had to go back and redo that declaration,” she quipped.

In the general election, Featherson’s campaign, which she said her family contributed to significantly, raised \$1,275 by Oct. 23, according to a quarterly

“This is what God intends for me to do, so I am going forward with it,” Featherson said about filing for candidacy.

campaign finance report. That didn’t include money spent during the primary.

Norfleet, who called himself a “transplant” to Columbus County, said he didn’t know Featherson until he filed for candidacy – the day before she did.

“I would not have run if I had known she was running,” he said. “I believe she’s the woman for the job.” Norfleet said when he saw Featherson at campaign events she was always encouraging of him and his candidacy.

Featherson also was able to connect with young and old residents alike, Beatty of the Democratic Women



Cheers erupted after the swearing-in of Barbara Featherson at the county government's office.

group said. "She's a people's person, she's down to earth," Beatty said, "and she's able to interact with the young and the old."

Ryan Featherson took time off work and drove back and forth from Greensboro, where he and his family live, to help with his mother's campaign. "I felt like it

was very important for my mom to capture the win," he said.

During both campaigns, Featherson said she had a lot of help from family, friends and strangers who put up signs, called residents and encouraged voters at the polls. "They were troupers," she said. "They really picked me up."

Featherson said that, when she won in November, she was speechless. "I felt like my efforts had paid off," she said. "I was in awe that as many people voted for me as they did."

'Mama's home now'

In the weeks following her election, Featherson reflected on her campaign. But she still didn't

know what to say about being the only Democrat in Columbus County to win in 2022.

Beatty said she was disappointed by the county's overall results. The local Democratic Party had hosted candidate meet-and-greets across the county and attended every community event possible.





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THE WOMAN FOR THE JOB

"Everybody was reared up and excited," Beatty said. "For us to have one victory with Barbara Featherson was very upsetting."

The Democratic Women of Columbus County was reinstated in November 2022 after a hiatus during the pandemic. Beatty said she was looking forward to encouraging more Democratic women to run for office in the future.

Nortfleet said he was looking forward to Featherson's matriarchal presence on the commissioners' board for the next four years.

"Mama's home now," he said. "And when Mama's home, people mind their manners."

Featherson said she credited God for making her the first Black woman in the local Social Security office and now the first Black woman on the Columbus County Board of Commissioners. "I just feel like he has directed my life in ways I didn't see," she said.

Featherson said she deliberately didn't set goals for her time in office, since she is just one member of a seven-member board.

"There are some things I'd love to see, but I'm not promising anything," she said. "I would just ask for continued support to help me do the job of a commissioner so that our county can grow."



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Molding Life and Art

By OLIVIA ROGERS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
KAYLA HICKMAN-LENNON & JENNIFER SAMS

Jennifer Sams is an artist, mother and teacher living in Columbus County. Her art has given the self-described “city girl” a chance to experience new opportunities and brought her to Columbus County, where she works to teach others about the importance of art. I was lucky enough to ask the 41-year-old artist how art, community, education, and philanthropy are interwoven in her life.

Sams is currently living in Whiteville. She teaches visual arts at West Columbus PreK-8 School. She also creates unique pieces of pottery in her backyard pottery studio. Sams’ upcoming project involves crafting soup bowls that students get to sell in their community. Sams hopes to show students their art can benefit them and help other people.

Life in Columbus County

Sams explains that she is originally from New York. When she was in the third grade, her family traded New York for Raleigh. Four years ago, Sams moved to the outskirts of Whiteville with her husband, Gary Sams, and children. She explains that the idea of community is prominent and important in her small town. She feels the importance of community every day as a visual arts teacher. Sams says, “Working at West Columbus School, we have such a diverse group of students from multiple communities like Fair Bluff, Evergreen, Cerro Gordo



Jennifer Sams teaches visual arts at West Columbus PreK-8 School. She graduated from UNC Wilmington with a degree in sculpture, ceramics and photography.

and Chadbourn. It’s really exciting to see so many different communities come together in that space.”

As a teacher Sams finds value in “encouraging students to take pride in their community.” She wants to inspire students to better their towns. Sams encourages students to take ownership of where they are from. She wants people to realize that young people are the future of their area. One of Sams’ students has started his own vehicle cleaning service. Sams says, “He’s done really well with it, and I’ve even screenprinted a T-shirt with his logo on it for him.” Sams wants her students to “try new things and not to be afraid to fail.”

Studying Across the Pond

Sams has implemented this idea into her own life as well. She studied for a brief period of time in France. She says, “When I heard about this opportunity to study abroad for three weeks, it was kind of scary because I was in my 30s and I had two small children.” Sams was encouraged to go by her parents, who have always been



Sams wedges the clay to remove air bubbles and line up clay particles.



After the clay is prepared, Sams centers it on the pottery wheel.



Sams sources North Carolina clay for her projects and likes experimenting with glazes. She used Cosmic Oil Spot glaze on this collection.

a great source of support for her. Her experience was very rewarding. Sams says, "I think that's something that every student or person, in general, should have an opportunity to do because it helps you to really get a broader perspective."

When asked how her experience in France has affected her teaching, she starts discussing the challenges of trying to present ideas for opportunities to her students. Sams says she encourages her students to pursue dif-



The purple cup is Sams' first pottery project as a child. The yellow vase was fired with an image transfer of a photograph she took of a medallion on a gate while studying abroad in Paris. Right is a tea cup from a UNCW project.



This piece is almost ready for the kiln, where it will be fired to over 2000 degrees to create a food-safe stoneware finish.

ferent experiences even if they are out of their comfort zone.

Finding her craft

Sams has had an artistic touch for many years. She says, "I think as a kid, my parents were very encouraging of things I did." She remembers growing up and drawing pictures of her aunt's cats. She usually found those drawings later stuck to the refrigerator.



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MOLDING LIFE AND ART



A photograph of Sams' son's hand that she used as a model for his cup.



For a final art project while at UNCW, Sams made a pitcher and three cups and then sculpted her husband's and two children's hands on the cups.



This sculpted feather is a piece that Sams created at UNCW.



A metal sculpture of Sams' design.

MOLDING LIFE AND ART

patterns and gets them into a zone where their main focus is on their present activity. Sams compares this experience to a “runner’s high” that keeps runners in the zone.

At the same time, making art also helps students “find themselves” a little bit more with every project they complete, Sams said. Her students have the opportunity to express themselves through art. She wants “to help open their minds to the idea that art isn’t just about painting or drawing because there are lots of different ways to create it.”

Sams prefers working with pottery because she enjoys manipulating the clay. She says that her mom used to tell her to “Stay out of the clay” so she wouldn’t get red stains all over her clothes, but now, “as an adult, I get to play and make things from it.”

Farmacy on Main, in downtown Whiteville, sells some of Sams’ pottery. She says, “We have such an amazing group of women within this county and community that has been such an encouragement to me.” Jodi Ford, who works at the local shop, reached out about selling some of Sams’ pottery. The encouragement Sams got from many of the other artistic women in the community pushed her to go for it.

Sams explains that selling her work has been an amazing experience so far, and it is always “surreal” when she is approached by someone saying that they were gifted a piece of her pottery.



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Giving back

Columbus County Schools recently awarded Sams with an innovation grant that involves her students making and selling soup bowls. She says, "I wrote a grant that is designed to equip the three county high schools and my middle school with the materials and equipment for a fully functioning pottery studio."

For this particular grant, Sams says, "The students are going to learn different techniques for creating ceramic bowls, and then the bowls will be sold. A portion of the proceeds will go back to the students, and the other portion will go towards supporting a nonprofit."

Sams plans to give the students a chance to choose the nonprofit so they have a "sense of ownership" of the project.

Sams says that the event doesn't have a set date yet, but it will most likely be held at the Arts Council in Whiteville. Sams explains that, "When individuals come to the event they would purchase a bowl, and for \$20 they would get the bowl with soup, a beverage and bread. They're essentially purchasing the bowl and the meal."

Sams says combining philanthropy with art shows students that art is "not just about you." After all, Sams explains that, "Someone invested in us in order for us to make our art, and so we should, in turn, invest in others."

You can keep up with Sams and view or inquire about her work on Facebook at Red Pig Pottery and on Instagram @redpigpottery.



A clay bowl, The Gathering Hebrews 10:25, that Sams' recently placed in the Columbus County Arts Council Brady-Kendall Juried Art Show.



Sams won second place recently in the Brady-Kendall Juried Art Show with her mixed media piece, React/Respond Ephesians 4:26.

MOLDING LIFE AND ART



After moving to a farm outside of Whiteville, Sams and her husband added a large shaded pasture and pond for their variety of farm animals.



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Dr. Selena Rowell, executive director of Columbus County Partnership for Children (Smart Start), lends children's books and learning resources to families and child care facilities that are struggling after the coronavirus pandemic.

SMART START LENDS A HAND TO KEEP QUALITY CHILD CARE AVAILABLE

BY IVEY SCHOFIELD, BORDER BELT INDEPENDENT | PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRANT MERRITT

Sandra Newkirk spends her days visiting child care facilities across the county, ticking through her checklist for a quality center.

How do the teachers and children interact? Is there adequate supervision? What materials are in the classroom? Is it a safe environment? How are children developing self-help skills? Is there diversity?

Then Newkirk, the quality enhancement coordinator of the Columbus County Partnership for Children (Smart Start), hatches a plan to address every aspect of the child care facility, improving its overall state rating one star at a time.

"Anyone that calls, that's who I'm available to help," Newkirk said.

The Columbus County Partnership for Children (Smart Start), is one of 75 such nonprofits that then-Gov. Jim Hunt started legislating for in 1993 to support

early childhood education and to promote classroom practices that better early childhood development.

Research shows that proper growth and development during the first five years of life is integral to individual health, employment and education, along with nationwide economic growth. But in Columbus County, many of the 32 child care facilities are struggling.

During the coronavirus pandemic, many facilities had to close down, forcing some teachers to find other jobs and some parents to either quit their jobs or find more informal child care through family and friends. Now, many facilities don't have enough funds or workforce to operate sustainably.

"My heart goes out to the children, the parents, the teachers and the childcare providers," said Dr. Selena Rowell, executive director of the Columbus County

Partnership For Children (Smart Start). “Routines were disrupted, and a lot of unusual things were happening, adversely affecting all of us.

“It’s just not feasible for some people to open or sustain a facility,” Rowell said.

Clarice Faison, who has run Precious Minds Learn n Play Academy in Cerro Gordo since December 2020, said she can’t afford to pay her nine teachers a high wage or offer benefits. “We just need some more money,” Faison said, “but I think everybody is singing that song.”

Lowering the price

In 2021, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services offered \$805 million in stabilization grants to child care facilities to increase compensation for teachers and help offset tuition costs for families. Since 2021, child care providers in Columbus County have been awarded a total of \$3.35 million in stabilization grants.

Faison said she has used the stabilization grant money she received to lower the cost to parents at Precious Minds Learn n Play, where 75% of children receive free or reduced tuition.

The cost of child care in Columbus County varies depending on what tuition assistance families receive. Newkirk estimated that monthly bills could range from \$50-\$400, depending on subsidies and other tuition assistance.

“Although I can’t afford to do it with every parent, I try to pick the neediest of the needy” to receive subsidies,



Sandra Newkirk, the quality enhancement coordinator of Smart Start, goes through a checklist at every child care facility she visits to help the staff improve its overall state rating.



In December 2020, Clarice Faison took over Precious Minds Learn n Play Academy, which had been a child care facility in Cerro Gordo for about 25 years.

SMART START

Faison said. She also refers parents to the Department of Social Services, which offers Smart Start subsidies and other subsidies for child care.

But Newkirk said parents are now remaining on a waiting list for subsidies for up to a year — the longest time she said she has ever witnessed.

As a result, many local parents are turning to family, friends and neighbors to watch their children while they try to go to work or school, Rowell said. Otherwise, they might have to stay at home themselves, limiting their educational and compensatory opportunities.

The Columbus County Partnership for Children has resources to help parents who take care of their toddlers themselves, since early childhood education like learning the alphabet and counting numbers is now a prerequisite for kindergarten.

"I want to challenge people to say PreK through 12," Rowell said. "And I'm not saying that every child has to go to a daycare facility, but a lot of parents don't have the means to provide what [the children] are needing in the home."

Smart Start is a 'go-to' for help

Facing issues with funds and teacher turnover, Faison said she has turned to the Columbus County Partnership for Children for assistance. So far, the Partnership has helped with staff training and has addressed teacher turnover by granting scholarships and salary supplements for early childhood educators through the NC Child Care WAGE\$ Program.

Smart Start has also been vital in Tabor City, where more than 50% of children live in poverty. Daisy Brooks, a pastor at Facts of Life Church in Tabor City and



Daisy Brooks, pastor of Facts of Life Church, anticipates opening a child care facility in Whiteville soon. Columbus County Partnership for Children has been helping her.



The biggest need for local child care centers is materials. Columbus County Partnership for Children (Smart Start) is working on providing non-cash grants to 19 facilities soon to help meet this need. Smart Start provides free books to families through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

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In this News Reporter photo from several years ago, children are shown enjoying a read-aloud of a book from the Early Learning Facility's Resource Lending Library (ELF).

Whiteville, said the organization has been her “go-to” for help with Daisy’s Good Beginnings, which currently takes care of 16 children ages 0-12.

Daisy’s Good Beginnings, which has been in operation for about 25 years, often takes advantage of Smart Start’s Resource Lending Library (ELF), which lends age-appropriate books for child care facilities and families.

Across Columbus County, the biggest need for child care facilities is materials, Newkirk said. Soon, Smart Start will offer non-cash grants, such as materials for classrooms and outdoor learning spaces to about 19

“They have a huge wish list,” Rowell said.
“We can’t do it all, but we’ll do some.”

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child care centers, Rowell said.

"They have a huge wish list," Rowell said. "We can't do it all, but we'll do some."

Smart Start is also assisting with the opening of a new child care facility in Whiteville, which Brooks will also run as an inclusive, multi-cultural space for about 100 children. At this facility Brooks said she plans to offer competitive pay for teachers, a food bank for families on Fridays and a mobile mental health unit with psychologists and psychiatrists for children with behavioral issues on Wednesdays.

Since the Whiteville facility has yet to open due to pandemic delays, Brooks is now offering local parents a night out with child care that also provides dinner, activities, diapers and wipes on the first Friday evening of every month. One night costs \$22-\$30, depending on the age of the child.

"We just meet the needs of people," Brooks said.

With her new facility in Whiteville, Brooks said she is hoping to offset some of the county's difficulties with child care by offering her teachers competitive pay and her families subsidized tuition. And she's not opposed to expanding into another facility.

Rowell said she is glad to see the opening of more child care centers in the county. And the Columbus County Partnership for Children is there to support them every step of the way.

Two of many Smart Start programs available for families and educators

The Early Learning Facility (ELF)

The Early Learning Facility provides child development resources which parents and providers can use to enhance the early care and education of young children. A variety of children's books, videos, topic resource books, resource kits, toys, and other resources are free to library members. Training and workshops are offered as well as consumer materials in Spanish. For assistance, call 910-642-8226.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

All preschool-aged children, ages birth to four, who are residents of Columbus County are eligible to participate. Parents or guardians must register their children in order for them to participate. Register online at: www.imaginationlibrary.com/usa/affiliate/NCPCCOLUMBUS/ Questions about registering for the Imagination Library should be directed to the Smart Start Early Learning Facility (ELF), 910-642-8226.

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‘SOUTHERN COMFORT’ TO GO



Chef Sarah Gore at a recent event she catered at Vineland Station

By EMILY ANDREWS | Photography By GRANT MERRITT & SUBMITTED

“I’m just blessed to be in a small town and community such as Whiteville,” said Chef Sarah Gore, owner of Chef Sarah Gore – Events and Catering. “Everyone was more than ready to jump on board and embrace my business.”

Gore graduated from Whiteville High School in 2008. At the time she knew she had a passion for cooking and was leaning towards diving into the world of culinary arts. Due to the lack of job security her dream career offered, she decided to pursue other studies at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. By the end of her freshman year, Gore realized that a career in the culinary business was a risk she was willing to take. She transferred to Johnson & Wales University in Charlotte, where she completed her four-year degree in food service management as well as her degree in culinary arts.

“I was in state-of-the-art kitchens, and it was an extremely hands-on experience,” Gore said. “The encouraging professors modeled a great environment for learning — even now I remain in contact with them, and it makes for a good network.”

For one term, Gore studied abroad in Florence, Italy, and she gives credit to her European adventure for in-

stilling in her many of her cooking habits.

“Going abroad was completely out of the ordinary for me, but it taught me so much,” Gore said. One of the things I incorporate into my culinary business is bringing in local foods.” In Italy, she said, “We were going out to markets every day and gathering super fresh ingredients. I knew that would be something that I would bring back with me and utilize in my business.”

Gore surely delivers on her promise of bringing food from farm to table. She recognizes many of the local contributors in Columbus and surrounding counties, such as Robinson Produce Farms, Ray’s Seafood & Produce and Yemma Farm to name a few. Corbett Holden, a Brunswick County resident with a seafood market located in Shallotte Point, is a main supplier of hers.

“There are literally times he’ll call me up and say, ‘You know the boat is coming in and we had a great catch.’ I get shrimp literally fresh off the boat. I mean you can’t get any fresher than that,” she said.

Northwest Land & Cattle, founded by AJ and Wade Stanaland, is another big provider for Gore’s business. She recalled a time when she and AJ created a bone broth. Dan Strickland, who provides her with honey, is yet another example of how supportive the community

CHEF SARAH GORE

is in providing locally sourced food.

"Columbus County is so full of agriculture. We really forget about it, but they're such good local products and you're supporting a small business at the same time," Gore said.

Before Gore's business initially took off, she spent a little over a year at West Columbus High School and one semester at East Columbus High School, teaching the basics of culinary arts. She was hoping to fall in love with teaching because of the enjoyment she gets from sharing her knowledge with others. But she missed the hustle behind the serving scene. So she began catering on the weekends and holidays when she wasn't teaching to build her name and business.

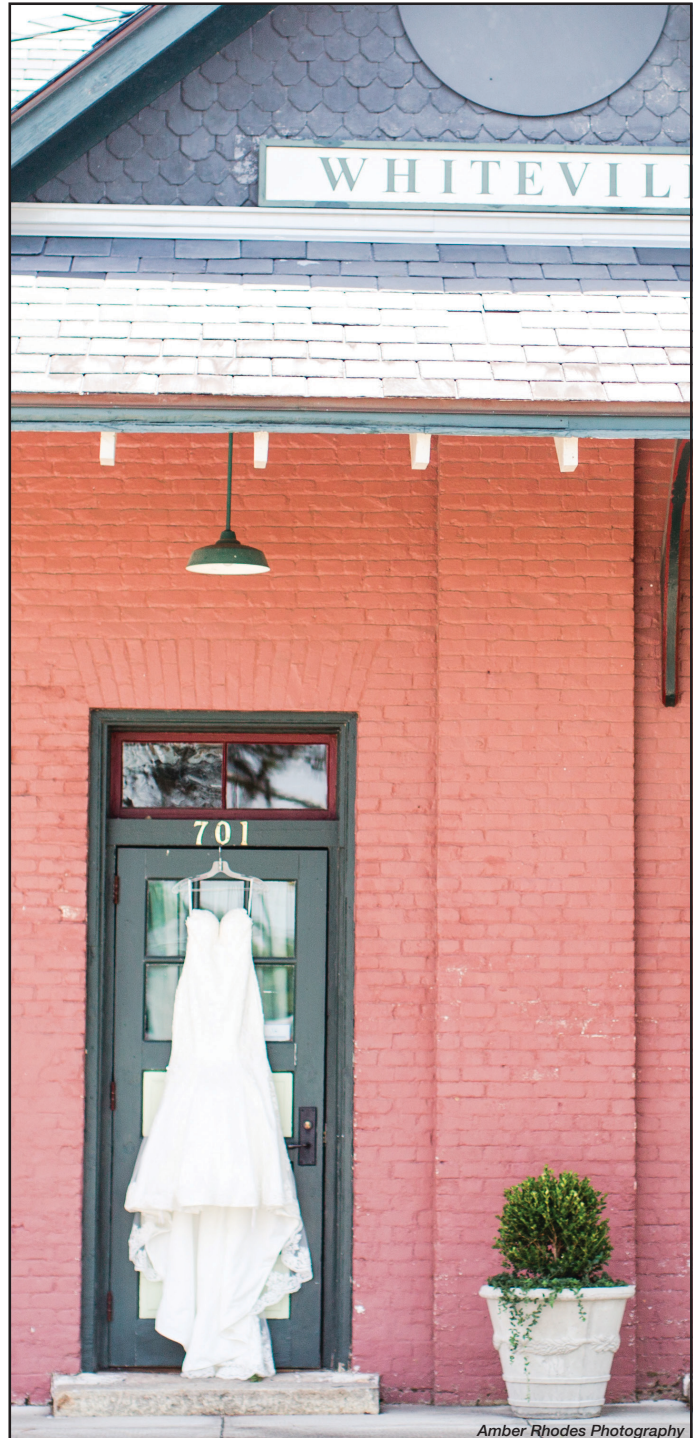
In February 2018, Gore and a group of her supporters cut the ribbon for her commercial building. At the time she strictly fulfilled catering requests and wasn't expecting what was to come next.

"I started posting family meals online that were intended to be picked up in a drive-through type fashion," she said. "This turned into people wanting me to sell my pimento cheese and chicken salad I offered through my catering."

She acted upon the public's requests, and in February 2020 she set up her first refrigerator where people could easily purchase her well-known and loved pimento cheese and chicken salad. This new addition



Gore at the Central Market in Florence, Italy, where she studied abroad with Johnson and Wales University the summer of 2011 at the Apicius International School of Hospitality.



Amber Rhodes Photography

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CHEF SARAH GORE



Chef Sarah Gore Events & Catering commercial kitchen is located at 791 Pleasant Plains Church Rd. in Whiteville. "To go" orders can be picked up here, too.

quickly became popular, so she began adding more refrigerators with more to-go options. Buffalo chicken dip is a big seller of hers.

With that unexpected turn, came yet another—and it was for the best. Gore began incorporating hot, ready-to-go meals in her business that were available for pre-order on her website. Her business was booming.



With food and drink management, teaching, and cooking experience under her belt, in 2016 Gore started her own full-time catering business.

She now has a retail space open usually Tuesday through Saturday around 10:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., with the exception of Saturday, when it closes an hour earlier at 5:30 p.m.

"I really enjoyed knowing that we were cooking for families at night," Gore said. She gets to know repeat customers' likes, allergies and special needs. "I could

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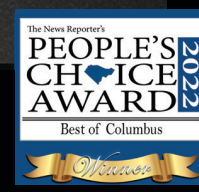

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Originally from Kentucky, she completed the Physician Assistant Program at the University of Kentucky and earned board certification with the National Commission of Certification of Physician Assistants in 1992. She has provided care within the community and its surrounding counties for over 30 years.

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CHEF SARAH GORE

really start customizing, and it became a lot more personal."

Gore describes her food as Southern comfort food.

"I think I cook like this because that's what I like to eat and that's what I grew up on," she said. "Many in the community were raised the same way. I try to put a lot of love in my food."

Gore offered a few words of motivation to those who are aspiring to enter the culinary arts world.

"I hate recipes; I just like to cook," Gore said. She knows that not everybody is comfortable improvising in the kitchen. However, she encourages home cooks to try a little variety. "There are so many ways to cook a piece of chicken. There's not just one route. One of the things I love about cooking is there's no right or wrong and any recipe can be tweaked."



Braised Denver steak over five-herb whipped potatoes paired with sliced carrots



Gore's favorite dish is Southern shrimp and grits.



A classic Low Country seafood boil served at a wedding at Ocean Isle Beach.



Seared Ahi tuna accompanied with wasabi, pickled ginger and scallions



An exhausted and happy crew on the busiest day of the year when customers pick up pre-ordered Thanksgiving meal selections. Sarah Gore Catering staff, shown left to right, are Johnny Covington, Alexandria (Coconut) Williams, Sarah Gore, Anna Kay Nance and Rebecca Parker.



Grilled peach bruschetta with prosciutto, pistachio, arugula and balsamic reduction



Sarah Gore with her parents, Terri and David Gore.



Sarah Gore Catering serving staff Anna Kay Nance, Caroline Gore, Meagan Gore, Gracelyn Garrell, Will Gore and Sarah Gore, sitting, before an engagement party event.

CHEF SARAH GORE

Gore thinks it's important to get in the kitchen and know that the more you do it, the better you get at it.

Many people told her not to pursue culinary arts, and Gore claimed her hard-headedness got the best of her. She knew it was what she was meant to do. She realized that it was going to be hard work, but nothing short of rewarding.

The number of people that lifted her along the way made up the difference and she commends the community for continuously supporting her and her business.

"I would like to thank my customers for being with me since 2015, and my staff and crew for being a great team," she said. "I could not be more blessed to have the people that work for me. I couldn't do this by myself—I've tried to do it in the past, and believe me when I say it truly takes a community."

"Stay hungry, my friends," Gore said.

You can contact Chef Sarah Gore for event and catering inquiries by telephone at 910-840-3362 or via email at sarah@chefssarahgore.com. Her storefront is located at 791 Pleasant Plains Church Rd., Whiteville, NC, 28472. Be sure to check out her Facebook and Instagram platforms. They can be found at Chef Sarah Gore – Events & Catering on Facebook and @chefssarahgore on Instagram.



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AMATEUR ADVENTURES IN CAR CARE

By DIANA MATTHEWS
Photography by STUART ROGERS & GRANT MERRITT



When I changed my first tire in the parking lot at work, I was glad I had the necessary tools, a mat to kneel on, sloppy clothes to change into and friends to cheer me on (and laugh with me).

My first experience changing a flat tire could have been a little easier than it was. On the other hand, it could have been a lot harder, so I won't complain.

My dad never got the opportunity to take me out to the driveway and teach me tire-changing skills on the family car when I was a girl. My high school driver's ed curriculum didn't include that kind of hands-on knowledge.

In 42 years of driving, I've driven many slowly leaking tires to the shop to be patched or replaced. Last summer, however, I finally changed my first totally flat and undrivable tire in the back parking lot of the News Reporter building.

The owner's manual deceived me on a couple of steps as my car turned out to have a different kind of wheel cover than what the book described. And my lug nuts were screwed on incredibly tight. I almost gave up several times during the process, which took at least an hour.

The good news was that it was daytime, the weather was comfortable, I wasn't far from home, I had friends around to encourage me and my Honda Fit wasn't stuck atop a mound of fire ants.

Afterward I wondered, What about next time? Am I as prepared as I should be for the next small automotive emergency?

What about you? If you're not ready, there's no time like now to get ready and feel more confident.

Johnny O'Connell, automotive technology instructor at Southeastern Community College, says he's been working on cars "as long as I can remember."

O'Connell teaches introductory and higher-level automotive technology courses. About half of his students want to work on cars for a living. Those who "put in the effort to learn," he said, have "no problem finding jobs."

The other half of his students "want to learn it as a skill for their own benefit," or for a hobby, he said.

Watching a class

I visited a January hands-on lab in which six of O'Connell's second-semester students said they were at least considering an automotive service career.

Anthony McCray said he has liked cars since he was 13 and took automotive classes at South Columbus High School. He already performs some regular maintenance on brakes, oil and spark plugs.



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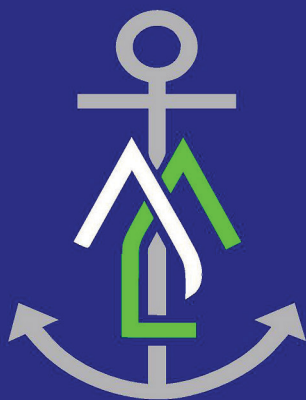
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Southeastern Community College students learn to use an ignition tester during engine performance lab with instructor Johnny O'Connell.

Josh Russ said he's "always been passionate about cars," after growing up watching his brothers, father and grandfather work on their cars. Automotive service could become his career, he said, or it could just be a handy skill to help himself and his friends cope with car troubles.

Haley Gilbert, the only female student in the garage bay that morning, said she was inclining toward an automotive career; a major influence on her interest was her teacher at East Columbus High School, Arthur Moore.

Frederick Munn, who wants to make a career in car service, said he grew up watching his father care for a vintage Oldsmobile Delmont and take it to parades and car shows. As a result of the experience, "I really have a love for cars," Munn said.

O'Connell showed the stu-

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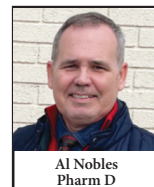
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dents how to test a battery's charge level, measure the voltage needed to jump a gap on a spark plug and find air leaks that could reduce engine performance.

One student after another reached into the engine of a 1993 Ford Explorer, O'Connell coaching them with reminders like "Don't touch there" and "Always use the side of the probe." He prompted them to think through the reasons for each procedure. "Remember, the alternator produces alternating current." "That reading is a little too much: What could cause that?"

He told one student to show a classmate how to use a tool he had missed trying at a previous class. The peer coaching would be good for both of them, O'Connell told me. "Students listen better to other students," he said. "And by teaching something, they learn more themselves."

I asked O'Connell about beginner-level car care skills to help an amateur keep safe on the road and get the best out of his or her car investment.



Haley Gilbert prepares to test for air leaks in a Ford Explorer's engine. Gilbert's automotive class at East Columbus Jr.-Sr. High School inspired her to pursue a career in the field.

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For an automotive professional, the right tool “will pay for itself,” Johnny O’Connell tells his students. For ordinary car owners, correct equipment can be a matter of safety.

Consumer sense

“Even if a person doesn’t perform any of the maintenance or repairs themselves,” O’Connell told me, “they at least need to know when to have someone do it for them. Engine oil should always be changed when recommended, preferably sooner, and the proper fluids should be used. It’s best to go to a reputable business that will perform a multi-point inspection at every oil change.

“During the multi-point inspection, they check all of your fluids and look the vehicle over for wear and tear and anything that could be a safety hazard.”

O’Connell considers it “well worth the price of an oil change” to have those safety-related items checked regularly. If the shop recommends upgrades you don’t want, “You just need to be able to say no,” he said.

In between professional checkups, “Simple things like knowing what type of fuel to use are extremely important. Everyone should be able to look at their temperature gauge and tell if their engine is overheating, look at tires and tell if they are low or are unsafe for use, know how to check engine oil and coolant levels, and know what action to take whenever there are unusual sounds or smells.

“With a new vehicle,” he told me, “let the dealership take care of it. Once that warranty has expired and it has some wear and tear, buy a repair/maintenance manual for your vehicle.” After all, “The manual was written by someone that actually

knows what they are talking about, and there are often photos and schematics.”

Men, women and cars

I asked O’Connell what, if any, differences he’s seen between male and female car owners as they approach basic car care.

“Men tend to be a little bit rougher on their vehicles and not take care of them as well,” he said, “but many will perform their own minor repairs. Women usually pay more attention to details and show more care for their vehicles. They know when something is different and start asking questions.”

But O’Connell knows men and women who defy those generalizations. Much of a person’s attitude toward car care or other skills depends on “the way we are raised [and] the people we are around, especially at a young age,” O’Connell thinks, and less on inborn differences.

As society evolves away from the idea that repairing vehicles is a male role, O’Connell sees more similarities between male and female younger car owners. “I think there is more of a difference between older drivers and younger drivers” than between men and women, O’Connell said. That’s because, “Experience is the greatest teacher that there is.”

Learning is an ‘opportunity to grow’

That maxim was true in O’Connell’s own case. He learned how to perform car maintenance by watching and practicing under the guidance of his father and uncles. “When I began

CAR CARE

driving in my teens, I performed all of my own repairs," he said.

By the time he entered a formal automotive training program as an adult, he already knew most of the skills. Still, "I never looked at [the curriculum] as beneath me and took the opportunity to grow," O'Connell said.

After a few years working for a Chevrolet dealership, "I received a call from the same college that I had attended, asking me to apply for an automotive instructional position," he said. This is his 15th year as an automotive technology instructor, and his first at SCC.

When you're ready to learn

The longtime mechanic and instructor urges wanna-be do-it-yourselfers to begin with observation, questions and a humble attitude.

"If you have the opportunity to watch someone perform repairs or do routine maintenance, take advantage of it and pay attention," O'Connell said. "If there is someone that you are close to that has the knowledge, ask them to teach you a little bit."

Be aware that most professional technicians may not want to repair cars in their free time, O'Connell said. If you are lucky enough to have a friend or neighbor willing to show you around under the hood, keep a teachable, patient mindset. It takes a long time to gain competence.

"Don't pretend to know everything when you have gained a little knowledge, and do not try to convince yourself of it either," he warned. "Performing a repair improperly can result in a collision, which in turn could cause a serious injury or death," to yourself or someone else.

"There's no replacement for experience," he said. "Start out small, checking oil or coolant."

I hadn't actually checked my oil in quite a while, so, encouraged by O'Connell's words, I did so. It was reassuring to see that my oil was at a good level and not too grungy. However, the exercise made me realize that I'd almost forgotten how to open and prop up my hood. That's something you don't want to fumble around with on a dark and stormy night by the side of I-95. So now I can check both those minor skills off. But I won't retain them if I don't practice, so I want to establish a maintenance routine to carry out when gassing up, or at least when prepping for a trip.

Further reading

I asked O'Connell for how-to book recommendations. "The Haynes and Chilton manuals that you see at many of the parts stores are good to have," O'Connell said. "Some information can be found in the vehicle's owner manual, so



Students test for spark plug misfires under the dashboard of a van.

always go through the whole thing. I am a little older, so I feel that reading is best.

"I do use some videos from Youtube, as there are some good ones out there, from people that actually know what they are doing," O'Connell cautions, however, that most online videos aren't from experienced technicians, "and you can get in trouble really fast" by following their advice.

He knows "plenty of stories of people not tightening their drain plug, not installing the oil filter correctly or not filling the engine with oil after an oil change."

"Many of those [errors] resulted in engine replacement, which can be costly," O'Connell said. "I could go on and on."

"Experience is the greatest teacher there is," says O'Connell. "There's no replacement for experience. Start out small, checking oil or coolant."

Your mileage may vary

I gained some beginner tips from "The Savvy Woman's Guide to Cars" by Lisa Murr Chapman and "Auto Repair for Dummies" by Deanna Sclar, both of which are available at the Columbus County Public Library.

Chapman and Sclar emphasize hands-on practice. Reading this article or a book does not substitute for going through the steps yourself in your driveway or taking a class. Remember, even my owner's manual was a little confusing. However, the tips on page 42, borrowed from those two books, may be helpful as starting points. Refer to your manual if in doubt, and call your motor club if you aren't sure you can cope with an emergency on your own.

Remember, this article doesn't contain all you may need to know. Get the help you need, start learning and stay safe out there!

Your mileage may vary

Five skills worth learning and practicing

By DIANA MATTHEWS

The following are a few beginner tips from books available at the Columbus County Public Library and online resources.

Remember: Car experts emphasize hands-on practice. Reading this article or a book does not substitute for going through the steps yourself in your driveway or taking a class.

Instructions may differ for your car and your circumstances. Refer to your manual if in doubt, always do things the safest way and call your motor club if you aren't sure you can cope with an emergency on your own.

How to change a flat tire

Park on level ground off the road in park (first gear if a manual) and with the emergency brake on and emergency flashers lighting.

Safety note: Set the car and the jack on a stable surface such as concrete or asphalt if possible. Most jacks that come with the vehicle have a small base that can lose stability quickly on gravel, sand or soft surfaces.

Locate your tools and user's manual (consult it in case specific directions differ from these).

Block all tires to prevent rolling.

Remove the hubcap or wheel cover using the flat end of your lug wrench and loosen the lug nuts slightly (because it will become hard to do either once the vehicle is jacked up).

Placing the jack on pavement at one of the flat spots on the car's underneath (consult manual for locations to avoid damage), insert the jack handle and crank or pump it. Put the car onto blocks or stands if you have them.

Safety note: Never have any part of your body under the vehicle while it's on a jack. Vehicles sometimes fall while on a jack. The vehicle will often shift in the direction the jack is falling and may move several inches to a foot.

Get the spare out of the well in your trunk or cargo area, or detach from the back or underside of your vehicle.

Remove lug nuts and pull flat tire off.

Replace the flat tire with the spare, replacing lug nuts and tightening them by hand in the same order in which you removed them.

Lower the car until the tire is touching the ground but not supporting full weight.

Tighten lug nuts with wrench as much as you can.

Replace wheel cover if you wish.

Unblock tires.

Put tools, wheel blocks and flat tire away.

How to check tire pressure and correct your inflation

Get the correct pressure from the driver's side door jamb or the owner's manual.

Safety note: The value on the tire is the maximum pressure and it's never a good idea to inflate a tire to its maximum value, especially cold. As the tire heats up, the pressure increases, so it could end up being higher than the maximum value. Also check for any unusual bulges or excessive dry cracking before inflating a tire, as it could burst and cause serious injury.

Remove the valve cap from a cool tire.

Press your tire gauge onto the valve; it will stop hissing when you have it seated correctly.

The last number on the pop-out slide ruler is the pressure in pounds per square inch (psi).

If the number is higher than the recommended pressure for the tire, press the back side of the gauge against the valve to let some air hiss out.

If the number is lower, add air at a service station or using a portable air compressor. Using the hose of the pump, press the end onto the valve to add air.

Push the slide into the gauge and check again.

Replace the valve cap.

While you're at it, take a look at the tread of all your tires. Replace if unsafe!

How to jump-start your car

Find someone with a working car who is willing to be your "source" car.

Safety note: Damage may occur if either vehicle has an electronic ignition system or is an alternatively-fueled vehicle.

Have them drive close enough to yours so your jumper cables can reach from one car's battery to the other.

Turn off both engines and put in park or neutral gear.

Open the hood by pulling the release lever, which is probably inside the car, then pressing the safety catch under the hood. Support the hood on hood prop if needed.

Attach the red clips at the ends of the positive cable to the positive terminals of the batteries (marked "+").

Keep the black clips on the loose ends of the negative cable from touching each other during your next moves.

Attach the black clip on the end of the negative cable to the negative terminal on the source car's battery (marked "-").

Connect the other black clip on the negative cable to exposed metal on your car's engine, keeping it away from the battery.

Start the source car and have the driver idle it fast.

Turn the key in the ignition switch of the dead car to start the engine.

If it doesn't start, check cable connections for good contacts.

If it still doesn't start, let the source car run two to five minutes.

Once the dead car starts, leave it running.

Disconnect black negative cables first.

Thank source car owner for their help!

If your alternator light stays on when your car is running, the problem may not be your battery. Get a mechanic to check it.

Safety note: Some experts recommend jump boxes as safer than cables. Either size box can be charged at home from a wall outlet, and they are designed to keep from damaging electronics. Using jumper cables can cause damage to vehicle electronics and can cause fires or burns.

Many cables being sold are too small a gauge (the wire diameter is too small) to carry the amount of amperage needed to jump a vehicle, experts also warn. The cables may get very hot and even start to melt the rubber coating.

How to check and add oil

Check when on level ground, with engine turned off.

Open the hood by pulling the release lever, which is probably inside the car, then pressing the safety catch under the hood. Support the hood on hood prop if needed.

Locate the metal ring of the oil dipstick.

Pull out dipstick and wipe it free of oil with a clean, soft cloth.

Push it back in all the way. Wait a few seconds and pull it straight back out.

Note where the oil ends compared to the holes or markings on the dipstick. Consult your manual for how to read those markings.

If your oil level is at the bottom of the crosshatch or at the bottom line or hole, it may still be safe, but it wouldn't hurt to add a little oil.

— unscrew the oil cap (It's in a separate spot from the dipstick. If you are reading "OIL" upside down, it will look like "710").

— carefully pour oil from a bottle into the oil-fill hole. You may need a funnel to control it.

— wait a few minutes and check again.

— replace the oil cap so oil won't slosh out as you drive.

Over-filling an engine has its own set of problems, including smoke from the tailpipe and oil leaks.

How to check your radiator reservoir and add coolant

Safety note: The engine must be cool when you open the radiator cap. Never open the cap if it is hot because it can release extremely hot steam under pressure and burn you badly.

Open the hood by pulling the release lever, which is probably inside the car, then pressing the safety catch under the hood. Support the hood on hood prop if needed.

Look at the radiator coolant reservoir, which may be a plastic tank. It will be connected to the radiator by a hose.

If your car has been running, the coolant level should be at the "hot" fill mark.

If your car has been sitting long enough to be cool, the liquid should be at the "cold" fill mark.

Add the mix of coolant recommended by the vehicle manufacturer and water to reach the appropriate mark.

Safety note: Experts say checking coolant level is imperative to keeping a properly functioning engine. Radiator caps are generally in one of two places — on the radiator or on the overflow tank/reservoir. If it is located on the overflow tank, then levels can be adjusted from there. If the cap is on the radiator, then the overflow tank isn't a good indicator of the level in the radiator and shouldn't be used as a gauge for cooling system levels. It can be full and the radiator be empty. In this case, the cap must be removed from the radiator.

It bears repeating: Always make sure the engine is cool before turning the radiator cap!

Experts urge that you prevent overheating by always watching the gauge on the dash for coolant temperature. If it is getting too hot, the vehicle should be turned off as soon as possible to keep from damaging the engine. Understanding the gauges is just as important as, if not more important than, checking the fluids, experienced technicians say.

WEBSITES TO LOOK AT
Your motor club's site
Consumer Reports cr.org

N.C. Department of Transportation ncdot.gov

YouTube Tech Talks: SCC President Chris English talks about industry opportunities and winterizing your car. (Search YouTube for Tech Talk Southeastern Community College N.C. and select Episode 1 or 2.)

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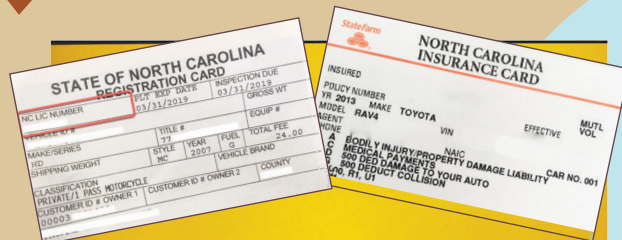
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Ashlei Shaw-McFadden, executive director of the Center for Independent Living disAbility Resource Center, at the center's computer lab, located at Community CPR in Whiteville

ASHLEI SHAW-McFADDEN

Advocating for independent lives

BY STUART ROGERS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY STUART ROGERS & SUBMITTED

Disability to me means that you may just have to work a little harder than others, but you are just as capable as anyone else." That's the philosophy that guides Ashlei Shaw-McFadden from Tabor City in her work as executive director of the Center for Independent Living disAbility Resource Center in Wilmington.

Shaw-McFadden knows personally what it's like to live with a disability. Diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and multiple sclerosis eight years ago, she lost her job and wondered what the future would bring.

That's part of why assisting people with disabilities to lead independent lives is now her calling.

"When I first received my diagnosis," she said, "I

truly thought it meant the end of a lot of things for me, but I have since learned that it was truly just the beginning."

Working at the disAbility Resource Center (dRC) in Wilmington since 2019, Shaw-McFadden says she's "been able to touch a lot of people and watch them grow and flourish."

Simple (and not-so-simple) solutions

On an average day, the center takes calls from people who need accommodations at their jobs but are unsure how to acquire and pay for them.

Shaw-McFadden says one young woman, a cashier, "needed a stool at her station after having major surgery, but she was worried that she would not be able to keep her job if she told them she needed

to sit. Our disability advocate assisted her in the correct process to request and obtain the accommodation and keep her job."

Another time a man brought in paperwork he'd received from the Social Security Administration stating that he owed \$12,000. The supposed debt was to be paid back with monthly drafts from his benefits. After many meetings over a six-month period, his dRC advocate was able to help him resolve the disagreement. He received back pay for the amount drafted in error.

The center accepts used durable medical equipment, repairs it and gives it to those in need. A Columbus County client made contact with dRC after their mobility scooter was damaged during a hurricane. Medicaid could not replace the scooter outside its approved replacement period. With loss of mobility, the client was facing great hardship and limited independence.

A generous donor gave dRC a used scooter that only needed a new battery. Using the agency's limited funds, dRC purchased a new battery and delivered the scooter to the grateful recipient.

The center serves people living in Columbus, Brunswick, New Hanover, Onslow, and Pender counties under the authority of the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Disability advocates and other staff at the center are themselves people with disabilities who focus on help-

ing clients develop their abilities and independence. That attitude is reflected in the spelling of "disAbility" with a capital "A" in the organization's name.

Turning points

After growing up in Florida, at age 20 Shaw-McFadden joined the Army as a unit supply specialist. During 10 years of military service, she was stationed in the U.S. and in Iraq at Baghdad International Airport, Camp Taji, and Camp Stryker. She left the military in 2010 with an honorable medical discharge.

During and since her Army service, Shaw-McFadden has earned three associate degrees, two bachelor's degrees and one master's degree in fields of human services and community and social services. She is currently pursuing a second master's degree in counseling with a specialization in crisis and trauma intervention.

In 2015, five years after her military discharge, and struggling daily to cope with work and family life, Shaw-McFadden sought help. She was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She had learned to push through difficulties in the Army but came to realize she could not push through PTSD without support and treatment.

During this time, Shaw-McFadden was also diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS). "Not all employers are understanding of employees with disabilities," she said. "I was afraid of the day that I



The disAbility Resource Center partnered several years with Community CPR and the Columbus County Sheriff's Office for the holiday Adopt A Family program.

would have to tell my employer about my disability. I was actually laid off while I was in the hospital receiving the diagnosis and was stressed about finding a new job.”

She found her new niche in a position at DHHS’ Center for Independent Living in Savannah, Georgia. There her natural empathy and compassion helped her encourage others learning to live independently with disabilities.

In 2019, Shaw-McFadden, her husband, Carlton McFadden, and her son moved to Tabor City to be closer to her retired parents, Alton and Shirley Johnson Shaw. That’s when Shaw-McFadden started out as the program director at dRC; she became executive director in May 2022.

Challenges in Columbus County include tech access

In 2020 Shaw-McFadden participated in a research study by mapping disability services available in Columbus County. She discovered that many organizations no longer served the county or no longer existed. She says, “We were also able to shed light on the fact that many organizations that proclaim to serve Columbus County have no ties to the county.”

To meet this need, dRC connected with Community CPR and The Carter Clinic; both organizations offered them space in Whiteville to serve their consumers in Columbus County.

Shaw-McFadden says another major challenge for disabled people in Columbus County is access to computers and WiFi for telehealth appointments and online services, such as those provided by the Department of Social Services and Social Security Administration.

At the height of the pandemic, one Columbus County family without reliable transportation and WiFi struggled with renewing their EBT assistance. They’d previously had a social worker come to their

home to help them with the online renewal application. When DSS stopped making home visits, it was devastating, especially with three children at home, to lose their benefits. Shaw-McFadden was able to meet them at the dRC computer lab at Community CPR, located near their home, to help them renew their benefits online.

Digital access allows disabled people to send and receive emails, make online bill payments, attend online classes, and connect with the community and many other virtual services. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to technology eased feelings of isolation by allowing friends and family members to see one another virtually.

Last summer dRC partnered with the Affordable Connectivity Program to provide 45 tablets and WiFi to people with disabilities at minimal cost. The center also plans to reopen the computer lab it maintains at Community CPR in Whiteville in March. A staff member residing in Columbus County will help the disabled connect to digital services. Computers will be available by reservation only and appointments to use them can be scheduled by calling dRC.

It’s okay not to be okay all the time

Shaw-McFadden says, “My job can sometimes be mentally taxing, but it reminds me to be thankful for the opportunities that have been given to me and the platform to advocate for others like me.”

After her diagnosis of PTSD and MS, she thought she had to prove herself to everyone, but she has come to understand the importance of being okay with not being okay all the time. She continues, “I often have to remind myself that no one is perfect with or without a disability.”

Shaw-McFadden’s own conditions mean that she’s had to “work a little harder,” but the result is more independence for many disabled individuals and a more inclusive community that enriches the lives of us all.



An adaptive tennis lesson taught by a dRC disability advocate in partnership with the UNCW recreational therapy program.

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SERVICES AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO THE DISABLED IN COLUMBUS COUNTY

- The disAbility Resource Center offers housing coordination, help with rental applications, budgeting guidance and home modification needs.

- Staff at the center offer peer support and encouragement, employment and disability information and help with accessibility concerns. The center hopes to resume peer support events this year.

- Computer use availability and help to navigate will soon resume at the dRC computer lab at Community CPR in Whiteville by appointment. Call the office in advance for more information and to make a reservation.

- The Next Chapter book club meets monthly via Zoom. Call the center for information.

- Youth Transition Services provides one-on-one counseling for youth transitioning from high school to help them understand options such as post-secondary school, obtaining employment or moving into their own place.

Ways to contact the Center for Independent Living disAbility Resource Center:

- Call 910-815-6618. Disability advocates are available by phone Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- Email to info@drc-cil.org.

- Individuals or agencies can make online requests on the disAbility Resource Center website at drc-cil.org. Click on the “Referral” tab to complete an online request form.

Time for something new?

A BEMC Weatherization Loan can help.

Members can apply for a 5% loan up to \$8,000 for energy efficiency projects, including new HVAC systems. Often the amount of the loan payment is offset by energy savings.

Call (800) 842-5871 or visit bemc.org/weatherization-loans for more information and to apply.



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Online assistance with a dRC staff member's help is available by appointment at the computer lab at Community CPR.

- Members of the deaf or hard-of-hearing community can email questions to info@drc-cil.org or complete the online service request.

How to help:

- Donations of durable medical equipment are always appreciated and put to good use. All equipment donations are tax-deductible.
- The dRC needs spaces that a staff member can use weekly to meet with members of the disabled community in the eastern part of the county and in the Tabor City area.
- Monetary donations made to disAbility Resource Center can be earmarked solely for Columbus County and are tax-deductible. Volunteers are needed; anyone interested can call the center at 910-815-6618 for more information.

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Community CPR founder and director Wallyce Todd, known for her joyful personality and heart for giving, connects services and resources with those in our community who need them the most.

COMMUNITY CPR: ‘WE ALL HAVE MORE TO DO’

BY STUART ROGERS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY STUART ROGERS, HADI IPEKYUN & COMMUNITY CPR

Community CPR (CCPR) is a nonprofit located in Whiteville with a mission to connect resources and services available in Columbus County directly with the individuals and families who need them. The organization had a grassroots beginning in 2016 in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew when Whiteville native founder and director Wallyce Todd saw firsthand the urgent needs in our community.

The letters “CPR” in the organization’s name stand for “connecting people and resources.” Todd, the board of directors and faithful volunteers collaborate with donors, agencies, churches and other nonprofits to meet critical needs, many times with life-changing results.

Community CPR’s home is a warehouse space at 210 E. Walter Street in Whiteville that once housed the Todd family’s well-known furniture business. The organization’s homebase is a safe and inviting place for clients to meet one on one with a case worker or a volunteer who can help them assess their need and connect them with resources that Community CPR can tap into for assistance.

Open by appointment only during the pandemic, Community CPR plans to reopen its warehouse doors in March for scheduled drop-in days when volunteers from collaborating agencies will be on hand to help. Todd says, “It truly is our mission to be #neighboringneighbors and ‘love with boots on the ground.’”

Flourish magazine sat down with Todd to learn more about the work Community CPR is doing in the community.

What do you remember about growing up in Columbus County?

I have many wonderful memories of growing up here, from singing Christmas carols with neighbors as a child, to being “Wally Wolf” (the Whiteville High School mascot) as a teen, to working for *The News Reporter* as a younger adult. And, after years of living overseas and then in Los Angeles, there are so many things I appreciate about my hometown then and now... primarily the people and places found in rural Columbus County. One of my favorite parts of seminary was the sabbatical I spent in Slovakia in a rural



Volunteers from Community CPR and disAbility Resource Center help deliver food in Tabor City in partnership with the Facts of Life Church Food Bank during the pandemic.



The Whiteville High School Art Club provided face painting at the Community CPR booth at the 2022 Pecan Harvest Festival in Whiteville. The art club donated the proceeds to Community CPR.

In November 2022, Todd and Community CPR participated in the community Thanksgiving service at St. Mark AME Zion Church in Whiteville as part of the organization's commitment to community-based faith engagement.



Community CPR volunteer Tammy McCullum helps deliver a mattress in Tabor City.



Community CPR, Coastal Youth Media and young women in Columbus County partnered in a spoken word workshop, We're Still Here. In the 2022 digital media project, young women in the county told their own stories about where they are from. Visit commcpr.org to view the project.

COMMUNITY CPR

village there. I will ever be thankful for my time living in urban areas in North Carolina, England, Slovakia and California. However, at my roots, I'm a rural girl.

How has your upbringing influenced your journey to create Community CPR?

I think our sense of community and how we continue to be neighbors helping neighbors is one of our distinct strengths. I also realize I was very fortunate to have parents — and grandparents for that matter — who gave a lot of their time and talents to the community and its institutions. So when Hurricane Matthew hit and I saw a gap in services and resources, I felt strongly led to coordinate and collaborate with others so we could all stand in the gap. That's the kind of family and community in which I grew up. Connecting people and resources is a natural response to the stewardship model I saw exemplified in my own biological family and my family of faith.

Drama and acting have always been a part of your life. How did pursuing a film career in Los Angeles lead you to seminary school and the ministry?

I always loved creativity and the arts and was involved in many of these pursuits from childhood onward. I felt a calling — and still do — to share my faith and ministerial gifts with creative people. In Los Angeles, that took the form of a more structured industry, Hollywood. In Columbus County, one of the more recent examples is through a collaboration between Community CPR and Coastal Youth Media in an ongoing digital media project called "Where I Come From." In this project, teen girls communicate through poetry and performing arts their unique life stories about growing up in our region. You can hear some of those stories by visiting the CCPR website, commcpr.org.

What brought you back to Columbus County?

I moved back here in 2012 because my father, Lionel Todd Sr., was dealing with late stage Alzheimer's and vascular dementia, and my mother and my siblings needed to address personal and business affairs.



Todd loads a donation at CCPR's headquarters.

Each of us did various things, but a lot of my time was spent caring for my father so my mother could get some relief and take care of other family concerns.

What made you decide to start Community CPR, and how did you launch your mission?

I don't think anything is a coincidence, but at the time, I would not have thought Community CPR was what would come into existence. That was not the direction I thought my life would take. With Hurricane Matthew and the aftermath, the gaps in resources and services were so clear. My "minister's heart" was pierced, and I knew I could convene people and resources and direct initiatives that would help.

In a short time, I had people helping me start the nonprofit, CCPR, and we were able to serve the community after Hurricane Florence and help with many of life's crises and disasters such as fire, domestic violence and other displacement issues. A blessing that women can do for each other and organizations can do for each other is to "come alongside" and help each



Supporters celebrate the official Nov. 11 reopening of Fair Bluff's Building Bridges After School Program. The Progressive Women's Organization and an army of other volunteers restored the building and revived the educational program four years after Hurricane Florence. Contributed photo by Community CPR volunteer Hadi Ipekyun

COMMUNITY CPR

other. You can be a candle in the darkness, but, when you put more candles together, you have more light.

Partnering with the community and other nonprofit organizations is so effective. Some of the organizations we have worked with include Catholic Charities, Samaritan's Purse, Praying Pelicans, Facts of Life Food Bank, Baptist Men, disAbility Resource Center, UMCOR, DSS, local schools and area churches and nonprofits as well as the county's disaster response group.

I am the founder and director of Community CPR, Jennifer Bowling serves as our board president, Jeremy Simmons is vice president and our secretary is Franchon Frances. We have amazing volunteers, and there is always a need for help. The reality right now is there is a real need for financial support as we are coming out of attending to pandemic crisis needs and beginning to address long-range, complex systemic needs in our community.

How did it feel when Community CPR helped its first client/family?

Because it needed to happen during a crisis, it was rewarding, but it also felt like a whirlwind. I didn't have much time to dwell on it. There was so much to do, and the more I've worked on Columbus County's issues, the more it's clear we all have more to do. I'm very proud of how community members have worked together — and I'd like to engage more and support



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COMMUNITY CPR

our efforts in many ways because we can make Columbus County so much stronger and healthier for now and for future generations.

The Community CPR motto is "Love with boots on the ground." Tell us about how Community CPR serves with "boots on the ground."

Our organization is built on a foundation of collaboration. Community CPR is most effective because it collaborates with others who can do what we cannot.

During the height of the pandemic, Community CPR partnered with over 20 other agencies and organizations to deliver protein boxes to over 5,000 people in the parking lot at the warehouse. Everyone worked together to feed our community.

When we get beyond the urgent needs of major crises such as the pandemic and natural disasters, we have discovered there are individuals and families in our community without homes, people who are hungry, kids who need afterschool programs and people suffering from trauma. To those individuals we've been able to help, it has changed their lives.

How can readers support Community CPR?

There are several ways, but I'm going to talk about the most uncomfortable thing for me to discuss first. We do a lot for the community, and I think in some quarters there has been a misunderstanding that CCPR is funded by some kind of Todd Family Foundation.

While my family has been extremely generous to allow the CCPR board to rent warehouse space and has provided other monetary support from time to time, this is an organization that must run on donations. Be it a one-time donation or a monthly contribution, it is appreciated and allows Community CPR to act immediately to the needs of individuals and the community. There, I said it... and, boy, that was that tough.

Then I'd ask those who want to volunteer to let us know how they can help. We need everything from administrative help to strong muscles to deliver furniture and appliances, to maintenance/handyman projects, to event staffing and handing out food and other resources. If you have other resources that can help the community, let us know. We have had people offer home goods, restaurant food, locations for fundraising events and more.

It is the people in our community who have walked through the fire that can help someone still in the fire and make the biggest difference. The key is to give back sacrificially and not just when it's convenient or it fits your schedule. Those are tough words for tough times, but it is a truth. If we can give the truth in love, we can change our community continually for the better. Working together is how we can help.

Do you have any final thoughts?

We cannot do what we do without financial support. We appreciate all donations such as furniture and appliances, but we are at the stage of addressing issues in

our community such as fiscal education, trauma and food scarcity. Our programs and collaborations are able to help the individual and the family as well as the community, but we need donations to fund our work.

As we move forward, we are stronger when we work together and recognize the hurt, the harm and the help needed in Columbus County isn't a hashtag or social media trending topic. These issues are systemic and need the help of many people working together compassionately and effectively to stand in the gap for the people who might not match the requirements for so many government programs and church responsibilities.

What is most needed from Community CPR in Columbus County is to continue to tear down walls, to build bridges, to stand in the gap and to work together to bless our neighbors. When neighbors help neighbors, we are stronger and better and are the light in a world that is full of shadows.

Connect with Community CPR

For more information about Community CPR, to make a donation, or find out how you can help, visit the website at commcpr.org. You can find timely news and event updates on Facebook at facebook.com/CommCPR.

Until regular office hours are reinstated, and prior to stopping by Community CPR to make a donation of items such as furniture, appliances and household items, call the office at (910) 207-6929 or notify Community CPR online at commcpr.org/contact to make an appointment. The email address is emailcommunitycpr@gmail.com.

When you arrive at the Community CPR warehouse, drive around to the back of the building where you will see a ramp and the CCPR sign on the door. Please ring the doorbell for service.

Monetary donations can be mailed to Community CPR, P.O. Box 243, Whiteville, N.C. 28472 or made online at commcpr.org/ways-to-give. Community CPR is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. All donations are tax deductible.

The CCPR team is growing. There are a large number of ways volunteerism is needed such as moving and delivering furniture, organizing clothes and household donations in the CCPR warehouse, and helping with community events. Call or contact Community CPR for more information about volunteering your time and services.

Contact information:

Community CPR

Wallyce Todd - Founder & Director
210 E. Walter Street in Whiteville, N.C.
phone number - (910) 207-6929

Email address - emailcommunitycpr@gmail.com

To make an online donation - commcpr.org/ways-to-give

Website - commcpr.org/

Facebook - facebook.com/CommCPR

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Evelina Trost OTR, George Boggs PTA, Amber Robinson COTA/Rehab Director
Liberty Jones support dog (not pictured - Aimee Calleja, SLP & Navin Kingston, DPT)*



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ARE YOU READY TO TAKE YOUR SIDE HUSTLE TO THE NEXT LEVEL?

BY MELISSA ANDREWS & NR STAFF | PHOTOGRAPHY SUBMITTED



Pamela Young-Jacobs, Director of the Small Business Center at Southeastern Community College

You probably know that Southeastern Community College offers a valuable resource for earning academic credit and career training certifications right here in Columbus County.

But you may not know that SCC's Small Business Center is a launching pad for any entrepreneur hoping to turn a side hustle into a profitable career, or to build their existing small business.

Does that description fit you?

If so, then you might benefit from a course, a seminar or one-on-one advice from the Small Business Center, which helped more than 80 businesses and offered 240 hours of training in 2022.

SBC instructors can teach you to write a business plan, keep proper records and market your goods and services. And local government and nonprofit leaders are eager to help you nurture it into something that will meet needs and provide employment to others in the county.

Pamela Young-Jacobs has been the SBC's director since May 2021. Before that, she had years of successful business experience and had already demonstrated a passion for helping other small busi-

nesses to succeed.

Jacobs said she learned fundamentals such as bookkeeping, managing projects, hiring personnel "and a strong work ethic" beginning in her teens by helping in her father's landscaping business, which over the years grew into a multi-million-dollar corporation.

"Small business owners are some of the most hard-working individuals you will find because their livelihoods are based upon the success of their company," Young-Jacobs said. "My goal is to help our small business owners achieve that success," Jacobs said.

"I started my journey at SCC years ago as a student," Young-Jacobs told The News Reporter shortly after her appointment as SBC director. "I love the fact that I have the opportunity to build a legacy at SCC in helping students and small businesses succeed."

Residents of Columbus County with existing or prospective small businesses can receive SBC services free of charge. In addition to seminars, counseling, and educational materials, ask about the microenterprise loan program available for technical

training, plus access to loans or entrepreneurship training through REAL-Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning.

Jacobs' phone number is 910-788-6419, and her email address is pamela.young-jacobs@sccnc.edu.

Incubation

Across rural North Carolina, small businesses are often the leading employers in their communities, necessitating quality access to support programs and educational opportunities to aid their success. SCC is collaborating with local government and nonprofit organizations to help start-up businesses get off the ground.

Plans are now underway for the SBC to move into the first floor of the former BB&T downtown Whiteville branch building that is now owned by county government. The SBC will become part of an entrepreneurship center where training and recruiting go on and where entrepreneurs can rent space.

SCC President Chris English has collaborated with Columbus County Economic Development Director Gary Lanier and Les High, chair of the Columbus Jobs Foundation to design what High called "a space to foster and grow family owned businesses."

Jonathan Medford chaired the CJF committee that

planned the downtown Whiteville hub. His marketing firm helped develop a name for the facility – The LAB Entrepreneurship Center, an acronym for Launching and Accelerating Business.

"A lab is a place where innovation happens; it's a place where new discoveries are made," Medford said. "What's going to make this building more



Brenda Orders, Associate Dean of Business Careers & Technical Programs at Southeastern Community College

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NEXT LEVEL

than a building is the educational factor that goes along with the Entrepreneurship Center. It's the most important piece."

English has said he wants the building to include a "maker space" for product development, a bay door to move products in and out of the building, a resource center where business owners can conduct market research and even a coffee shop, where entrepreneurs can collaborate over a muffin or a scone.

"We're trying to create an entrepreneurial mindset so that we can help to create productive citizens and folks who can stand on their own two feet," after one or two years in the LAB, Young-Jacobs said.

Online option

Through its online Ed2Go program, Southeastern offers more than 300 personal and professional classes taught by expert instructors from around the U.S. Ed2Go classes take just six weeks to complete and cost as little as \$70 per class. Some courses are self-paced, while others are instructor-led. Although certificates of completion are awarded, degree certification is not included; however, opportunities to roll into a higher-level program and use Ed2Go experience are certainly possible, according to Brenda Orders, associate dean of business careers and technical programs at the college.

Ed2Go is not only beneficial to job-seekers. Certain licensures, such as those held by teachers, require individuals to earn continuing education credits annually. Ed2Go can remove the barriers of travel and high cost associated with attending far-away educational conferences, making it easier for license-holders to meet requirements.

Orders' phone number is 910-788-6317, and her email address is brenda.orders@scnc.edu.

No label required

Learning at SCC goes beyond just earning a degree, landing a job or building a business. Individuals not interested in a career change but simply yearning to try something new and have fun along the way are also welcome.

Elizabeth High, dean of student learning and innovation, stated that, "You don't need a label to meet a goal" at SCC. The community college's personal interest programs are geared toward individuals looking to expand their horizons or find an enjoyable hobby. Included topics range from cooking to fitness, painting and photography.

Topics vary from one session to another due to time and space constraints. High said suggestions for new areas of interest are always welcome.

Visit the welcome center in T-Building from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8 a.m. to noon on Saturday for general information about course offerings including personal enrichment

class information, skilled trade licensure & certification classes and defensive driving classes. You can also call 910-642-7141 and visit scnc.edu for additional information.

One college

Dr. Dallas Herring, one of the founding fathers of the community college system in North Carolina, believed that a successful school would "meet a student where they are and take them to where they want to go."

Under the leadership of Dr. Chris English, Southeastern Community College continues working hard to live up to that motto. Along with the college's leadership team, Dr. English has successfully woven the "one college model" throughout the campus.

SCC's curriculum programs lead to associate degrees and university-transferable credit in academic areas. Workforce Continuing Education Department offers certification programs in HVAC, plumbing, welding, law enforcement and many other careers. Students can complete a highly successful program to ensure they are career-ready before entering the workforce.

Until 2021, the for-credit curriculum classes and not-for-credit continuing education and workforce development were considered separate "silos," with work in one not counting toward the other.

For example, English pointed to how law enforcement training used to be structured at the college. Basic Law Enforcement Training was considered not-for-credit continuing education while criminal justice fell within the for-credit curriculum division even though they served students who generally had the same career goals.

He gave another example of seeing students in the back of an electrical engineering class twiddling their thumbs and finding out they had already learned the material. But because they had previously taken it in a continuing education class, they had to take it again for curriculum credit.

The one-college model will better enable SCC to offer "stackable credentials" and bring all instruction and student support under one umbrella, according to Chief Academic Officer Sylvia Cox. Students arrive with a goal or a career in mind, not necessarily a degree label.

The terms "credit" versus "non-credit" are "artificial" to students, Cox said.

SCC's partnerships with the schools and surrounding community now include a paid hospital apprenticeship for high school students learning to become medical laboratory technicians. These collaborations ensure that SCC's pioneering spirit does not stop at the campus gates.

SCC's WORKFORCE CONTINUING EDUCATION

SCC's Workforce Continuing Education training programs can help you gain the new skills you need in an easy, affordable way.

VISIT THE SMALL BUSINESS CENTER -
sccnc.edu/community/small-business-center/

VIEW THE WORKFORCE CONTINUING EDUCATION SCHEDULE - southeasterncc-register.fundfive.com/
 Call Valerie Register at (910) 788-6350 to register

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INDUSTRY SERVICES

SCC's Customized Training Program provides education, training and support services for new, expanding and existing business and industry in Columbus County.

PERSONAL INTEREST

Personal interest classes are designed to make life more interesting, to try something new to do, and have fun along the way.

DEFENSIVE DRIVING

A safe driving class to improve driving skills or to reduce or prevent points on your driver's license and insurance policy.

SCC offers two courses to address safe driving techniques – Defensive Driving (4 hours) and Defensive Driving (8 hours).

In addition to short-term workforce development classes, our Small Business Center provides assistance to business start-ups and small business owners. Visit sccnc.edu/community/small-business-center for more information.

See an area of interest that you would like explore? Visit sccnc.edu/student-services/welcome-center/request-information/ to request more information. Visit the welcome center in T-Building from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8 a.m. to noon on Saturday for general information about course offerings including personal enrichment class information, skilled trade licensure & certification classes and defensive driving classes. You can also call 910-642-7141 and visit sccnc.edu/continuing-education-2/ online for additional information.

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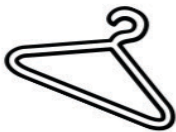
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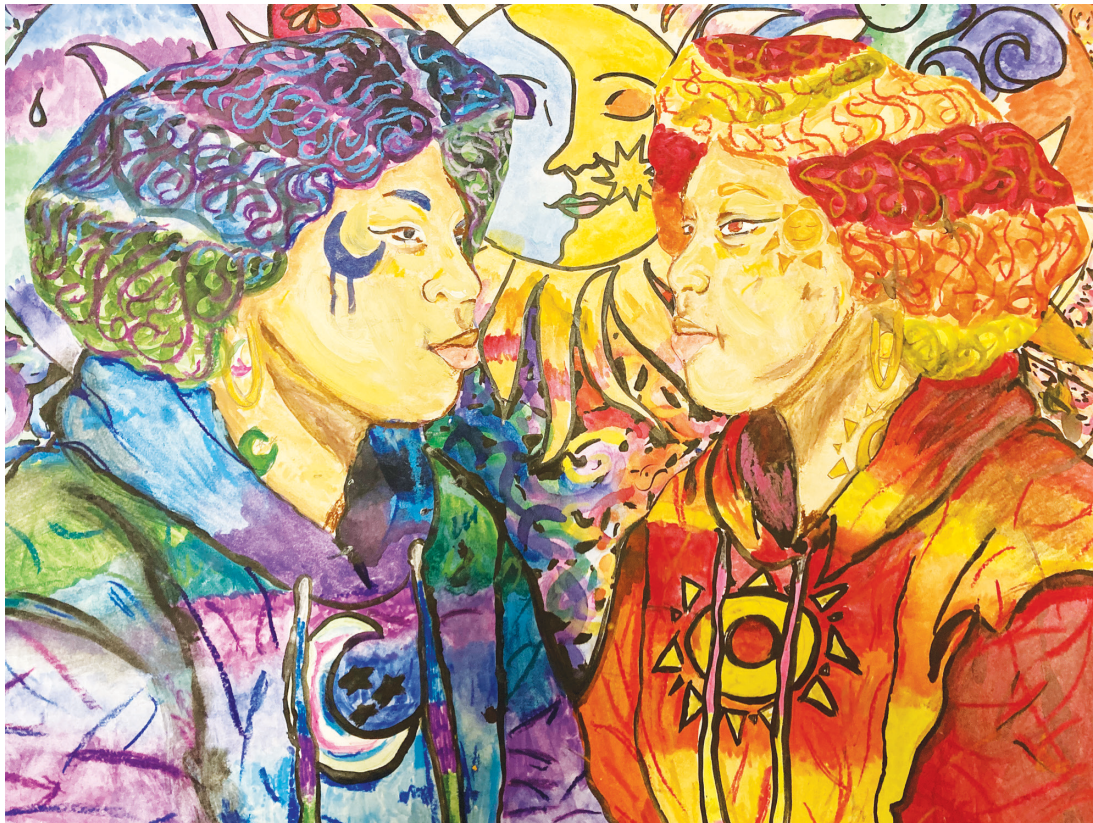
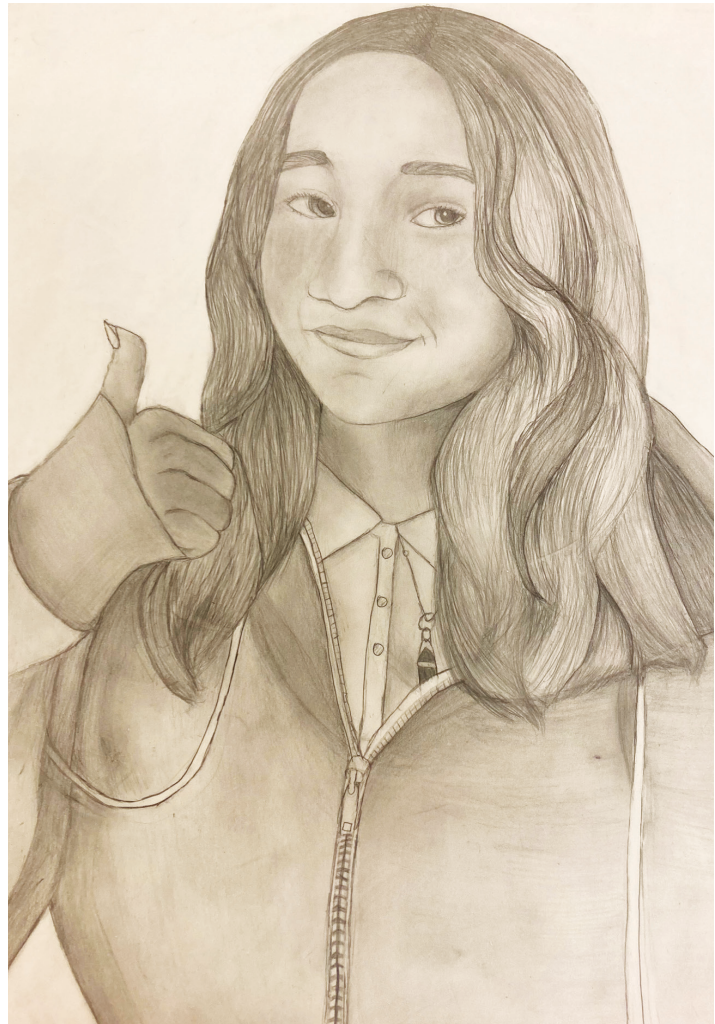
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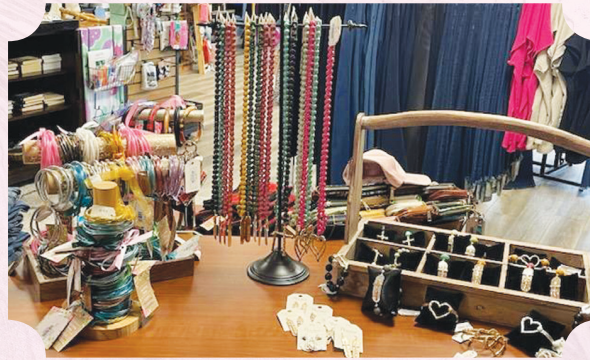
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