

Blount County

WINTER 2020

HORIZON



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**Goodwin, Prigmore
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From the Editor

Welcome, 2021!

That's a refrain being heard around the world with much more fervency than at any other time in my remembrance. I don't believe anyone is sorry to see the end of this surreal, unsettling and downright weird year of 2020. When the year began, full of hopes and dreams and plans, no one could have foretold what kind of a rollercoaster ride this world was going to endure, like a carnival ride in a horror movie with an endless loop keeping us off balance and scared to see what the next dip was going to reveal.

A year of COVID-19 has been a difficult ride, for sure. We've lost loved ones. We've watched loved ones suffer with this disease and struggle to come through. We've fought it ourselves. As one of those who fell into that category, I can tell you from experience, I would not wish it on anyone.

We've been separated from the people we love. In my case, my children and grandchildren stayed away or took extra precautions when they came by so they would not inadvertently carry the disease to me. We had many conversations through the back door and from a proper distance when they did come inside the house to help out in various ways. I saw the grandchildren through car windows; their parents didn't let them come in the house at all. The main contact with friends and extended family was by phone rather than meeting for lunch or hopping in the car to go on a jaunt.

We've faced economic challenges, seen our incomes reduced or eliminated altogether. We've faced shortages of food and products we had come to take for granted. We've gone through another divisive political season and seen our country split almost down the middle. When the dust clears, perhaps our society will have the wisdom to work together for the good of the citizens of this country and leave off the hate and discontent.

Yet even in the midst of all this upheaval, we've seen glimmers of hope as we as individuals and society as a whole have made adjustments. What are

some of these blessings? Here are three:

- A vaccine on the horizon to give some protection against COVID-19.
- Making use of technology in more ways: Doing business, attending church services, attending meetings, going to school, visiting with family and friends, even being "virtually" present for special ceremonies such as weddings, birthdays and, for my family, the finalizing of the adoption of my newest grandchild in November, a beautiful 2-year-old sweetheart.

- More delivery services, quite a blessing for those who are unable to get out to shop for necessities, including groceries, health and beauty aids, even prescription drugs.

In this issue of Blount County Horizon, you'll see how some of our neighbors have dealt with this difficult year with grace and ingenuity. You'll see how they are looking forward to 2021 with hope and a renewed sense of purpose. Even a pandemic won't keep us down for long.

I'm reminded of one of my favorite Bible verses: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9. That's what I intended to do in the New Year.

Welcome, 2021. We're ready.

Linda Braden Albert
Linda Braden Albert
Editor



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Blount County WINTER 2020
HORIZON

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"We are stubborn about our past and persistent about our future. And it's time we had a magazine that gives voice to our uniqueness."

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and **hang on!** ~ Franklin D. Roosevelt

When written in Chinese the word 'crisis'
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one represents danger and the other
represents opportunity.

~ John F. Kennedy

Worry does not empty tomorrow
of its sorrow, it empties today of
its **strength.**

~ Corrie ten Boom

Fall seven times,
stand up eight.

~ Japanese Proverb

Pain is inevitable, misery is a **choice.**

~ Unknown

Life is 10 percent what happens to me
and 90 percent how I react to it.

~ Charles Swindoll

What the caterpillar calls
the end of the world, the
master calls a **butterfly.**

~ Richard Bach

The art of living lies
less in eliminating
our troubles than in
growing with them.

~ Bernard Baruch

Weeping may
endure for a
night, but **joy**
cometh in the
morning.

~ Psalm 30:5

Character cannot be developed in
ease and quiet. Only through
experience of trial and suffering can
the **soul** be **strengthened**, ambition
inspired, and success achieved.

~ Helen Keller

Sometimes when you are in a dark place you think you
have been buried, but actually you have been **planted.**

~ Christine Caine

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PROFILE
Will Goodwin



Business at Big Will Auto outpaces the pandemic

By Lee Zimmerman

Some things may go in and out of style, but the need for reliable transportation remains a constant, especially at times when financial resources may be fleeting and finding a fair price for an automobile is absolutely essential.

The combination of cost and quality is one reason why Big Will Auto, a dealership that specializes in quality cars all priced below \$10,000 (most selling for \$8,000 or less), has managed not only to survive but thrive in the midst of the pandemic.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this success story is that it came about so quickly. The business's namesake, William "Will" Goodwin, opened his doors at 416 Harper Avenue in Maryville just this past August and immediately found a loyal legion of customers and clientele. Goodwin is assisted by his daughter Mia, who helps oversee the company's day-to-day operations and social media, and his wife Nikki, who tends to the bookkeeping. Goodwin himself serves as sales manager and also travels throughout the Southeast in search of good quality used cars that can be bought, repaired and then offered for resale. He admits that inventory can be hard to find, but because he knows several good mechanics, he can make sure his inventory is in good running order.

Goodwin is no stranger to the automobile business, having worked in auto sales for over 20 years at different

dealerships in both Blount and Knox counties. He left his last job in May and opted to open his own lot despite the uncertainty posed by the pandemic.

"To be honest, I was worried and scared," he says in retrospect. "But my wife is my backbone and she encouraged me to make the move." Even so, he put his family first by first helping his daughter obtain her master's degree from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., prior to making his move.

Fortunately, it's all worked out well. Big Will Auto found its niche by selling good quality used cars, a product line that Goodwin says is in short supply. "It was scary but it seemed like everything just fell into place," he says. "We're still rolling, and I haven't looked back. It's hard to find good quality cars but I've put a lot of miles on my pickup truck while looking for them in Nashville, Alabama, Virginia, Georgia and the Carolinas."

Goodwin said he keeps between 15 and 17 cars on his lot at any one time, a variety of makes and models dating from 2003 to 2015. He says that he tries not to keep any

vehicle on the lot for more than 30 days, and that so far, he's managed to maintain that objective.

"The pandemic hasn't affected us at all," he adds. "During the pandemic, no one wants to go buy a brand new car. Everyone is looking for cheap, dependable cars. No one wants to spend a lot. Everyone's watching their money."

Clearly, Big Will Auto has found a good niche, especially given the uncertainty of today's economic environment. Asked about his prospects in 2021, Goodwin expresses his

I want to give back and help people like people helped me.



optimism and shares his ambitions. "I want to expand my business and make it even bigger," he said. "I want to take care of the community and continue to offer the best deals possible. I can't compete with the bigger dealers on the higher end, but on the lower end, I can. I offer an alternative option, and I have cars that they don't have."

He also notes that he's able to help customers with financing because of his connections with local banks and lenders. He says that his previous management experience at other dealerships helped him develop that particular tool of the trade.

In addition to his work at the dealership, Goodwin gives back in other ways by bringing deserving local athletes to the attention of college recruiters. He acts the role of a talent scout of sorts and, in turn, helps high school students win athletic scholarships. He claims that over the past 16 years, he's helped approximately 1,000 young people, some of whom went on to play in the professional leagues.

"There were people who helped me in the past, and if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't be where I am now," he says. "That's why I want to give back and help people like people helped me."



Will Goodwin with his daughter, Mia, and his wife, Nikki. Photos courtesy of Will Goodwin

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PROFILE

Sister Lakshmie Napagoda

Faith, hope, perseverance keep her going

By Linda Braden Albert



Photo by Tom Sherlin/The Daily Times

Sister Lakshmie Napagoda never expected to end up in a small town in East Tennessee. But here she is, and her work as executive director at the nonprofit COMPASSion Counseling is making a difference in the lives of many.

Napagoda's roundabout way to Maryville began in Sri Lanka. "I was born in Sri Lanka in a small village," she said. "My parents were divorced when I was 3 years old, and I guess that began the journey of how God prepares people for a purpose."

Her mother did not get custody and she left Sri Lanka, moving to California. In 1981, she sponsored Napagoda and her sister to come to California. "That was after I finished high school in Sri Lanka," Napagoda said.

Although Napagoda's father was Buddhist and raised her in that faith, her mother was Catholic.

"When I was reunited with my mother, she was encouraging us to go to church, become a Catholic," Napagoda said. "Then I met Sisters of the Good Shepherd, an international Catholic women's organization, that works with women and girls. In California, the Sisters were working with victims of domestic violence. After visiting them on the weekends for about two years, they said, 'Maybe it's time for you to join us,' so that's how my journey began with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd."

After taking her final vows, Napagoda was sent to Memphis. "I had an opportunity to start a program for women who had dropped out of high school, women from other countries, to start a program for them to learn skills they needed to go on with their lives," she said. "After doing that for 15 years, it was time to take a break."

As she was visiting her sister in California and helping her with posting a job on an online forum, Napagoda decided to see what jobs were available. "I was on my sabbatical and trying to narrow down what would be my next step, what would I do. I thought it would be nice to engage in something new, something small, where I can use my clinical license." While in Memphis, she had earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from the Christian Brothers University and a master's degree in social work from the University of Tennessee College of Social Work, becoming a licensed clinical social worker.

A small post with a job announcement from Maryville, Tenn., caught her eye. "I had no idea where this place was and I had never been to East Tennessee before," Napagoda said with a laugh. "This little tiny paragraph had all those things I was looking for in there. So I thought, why don't I send in my resume?"

Almost immediately, she was contacted by the Board of Directors of what would become COMPASSion Counseling, asking to do an interview via Skype — which turned into a phone interview when the technology didn't work. "As soon as we started the interview, we really felt connected," Napagoda recalled. "Within two hours, they called back and said, 'We'd like to offer you the job.'"

Although Napagoda accepted the offer, she had second thoughts. "The next morning, I woke up and said, 'Why did I say yes? I don't even know these people, there's no program, they had not even started anything, they were just looking for someone to get it started.' So I asked them, 'Can I come and meet you first?' And that's how I ended up in Maryville on Aug. 1, 2015."

The purpose of our ministry is to provide counseling and education and instill hope, to build resilience and promote mental health and well-being.



The nonprofit COMPASSion Counseling (ccmaryville.org) is located in Preservation Plaza in downtown Maryville. "The purpose of our ministry is to provide counseling and education and instill hope, to build resilience and promote mental health and well-being," Napagoda said. "We can be creative. We can do that in many different ways as needs arise." And like other nonprofits in a pandemic year, those creative ways have included online fundraising events and offering telehealth services when in-person appointments are not possible.

COMPASSion Counseling seeks to serve clients regardless of income. "We do not believe in free services because people need to feel that they invest something in their healing journey," Napagoda said. "Free services do not empower people. However, we welcome anyone and everyone with the option to pay what they can afford to pay."

Napagoda's family includes her sister and her mother's brother and his family, all in California, and her father, three half-brothers and a half-sister in Sri Lanka. Her mother passed away two years ago. Napagoda said, "I also consider the Sisters of the Good Shepherd as my family."

She recalled how she described her mother at the funeral service: A woman of faith, a woman of hope, and a woman of perseverance.

"In many ways, it seems I inherited those characteristics," she said. "That is what keeps me going."



Photo courtesy of Lakshmie Napagoda

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Good
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 2020

Looking forward to a clean slate in 2021

By Steve Wildsmith



At the close of any other December, the previous 12 months are often depicted as a wizened, grandfatherly older gentlemen with a snowy white beard, beaming kindly and gracefully stepping out of the limelight to make way for Baby New Year.

Not 2020. No, this year, with its societal upheaval and election madness and the crushing grip of coronavirus, is a lurching, rickets-riddled hobgoblin shuffling toward the exit on bowed legs and with a nasty leer. We're horrified, but we can't look away, either, because as you read this, there are still two weeks of December left, and at this point, it would surprise absolutely no one to wake up on Jan. 1 and find that it's actually Jan. 1, 2020, and we have to live the same 365 days all over again, like in the film "Groundhog Day."

While such nightmares may be the stuff of a "Black Mirror" episode, however, overseers of area entertainment are moving ahead with plans to treat 2021 as a clean slate. While many area establishments shuttered in the spring and have yet to reopen, others — like Two Doors Down and Brackins Blues Club in downtown Maryville — started featuring live music again last summer, and continue to do so. While many Blount Countians continue to shelter at home out of an abundance of caution, those particular venues see their services as valuable ones during a time when COVID-19 has cost the community so much.

"People are glad to get out again, and we've heard from a lot of people about how they're glad we're open," Philip Sharp, general manager for Two Doors Down on East Broadway Avenue, said earlier in the fall. "We get a lot of folks saying things like, 'It's my birthday in a couple of weeks, so I'm glad you're open!' That in itself is rewarding, because everything is still nuts right

now. It's nice to be able to provide a fun atmosphere where people can come and have a good time and leave their troubles at the door."

Local bands on local stages is one thing, however — venues that rely on working relationships and contracts with a nationwide industry that was effectively shut down for most of 2020 had more difficult adjustments as COVID-19 wore on.

"Unfortunately, the large touring shows are still difficult, because even if we could provide them with all the seats they normally have, their logistical challenges are immense," Blake Smith, general manager for the Clayton Center for the Arts on the Maryville College campus, said in October. "We still have some spring dates on the books, but the reality is that we may see those restructured and repositioned, because I think that's inevitable. However, with what we've learned about ways to keep people safe in a limited capacity through really small test events, we're going to capitalize on that in the next year."

"We're in strong discussions with WDVX-FM radio about possibly bringing back the 'Smoky Mountain Jamboree' we started a couple of years ago, because that's an

opportunity to tap into more regional artists and help them out financially as well as providing great shows in limited capacity. We really anticipate having an announcement for after the first of the year for folks to come enjoy live music again in a socially distanced and safe manner."

And even if socially distanced shows aren't possible, digital ones are: The venue experimented with its first, a virtual live-from-London concert by a tribute to the Moody Blues, a couple of months ago, and while ticket sales for the online concert experience were modest, it did give the Clayton Center staff an opportunity to test the waters. Over in Knoxville, AC Entertainment, the booking company for most of the major downtown theaters and music venues, has been steadily providing virtual concert experiences for several months now, and that looks to be continued in 2021.

Safety, for all area arbiters of entertainment, is paramount. While that may mean logistical dilemmas for planning events in 2021, it's what an organization like Blount Partnership is willing to do to keep patrons safe, Partnership Communication Director Jeff Muir told The Daily Times in September.

"We just want to make sure we have the right protocols in place to make people feel safe," he said. "We always want to make people feel safe, but this is the world we live in now, and this is an extra step we'll have to take to make sure we do our due diligence and that people are aware of it. We're all learning as we're going along, and from our standpoint as the partnership and the chamber, we're going to abide by the Tennessee Pledge guidelines, and when that gets updated and changed, we'll update and change with it."

Customer safety is one of the reasons one of the busiest Blount County concert venues decided to put everything on hold for 2020. The Shed Smokehouse and Juke Joint, on West Lamar Alexander Parkway, holds weekend concerts from April through October, but this year, the entire season was sidelined by COVID-19. Fortunately, Concert Manager Paul Smith told Horizon, most of those dates have been rescheduled for 2021, and with news of a potential COVID-19 vaccine sweetening the possibility that Baby New Year will also be a healthy one, the chatter of customers at Smoky Mountain Harley-Davidson, the parent company and adjacent motorcycle dealership next door to The Shed, is excited, Smith said.

"The climate is going to change some, and we still have to watch everything that's going on nationally and play it by ear so that as it gets closer, we can make better-informed decisions," Smith said. "but I hear it daily whenever I eat lunch over at The Shed. We have customers all the time who are getting excited and amped up to be able to be at shows again, and we want to do our best to facilitate that."



The band Smooth Sailor performs on stage at Smokies Stadium in June. Photos courtesy of BigWheel

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Charities adapt to new world of fundraising

By Linda Braden Albert



Charities have faced unique difficulties in raising funds during a pandemic year. Like other segments of society, these organizations have used their ingenuity and technology to meet the needs of others in creative ways.

Some, including COMPASSion Counseling, have gone to online fundraising rather than holding their traditional galas. New Hope Children's Advocacy Center's 18th annual Black Tie and Blue Jeans Gala, which took place virtually from Nov. 2-8, consisted of a social media campaign that showcased the center's mission and an online auction featuring local items and experiences.

Others have adapted to accommodate social distancing. An example is the United Methodist Women's group at Tuckaleechee United Methodist Church. For decades, the women have held a fall festival and served complete meals along with having an arts and crafts and bake sale in October. In 2020, with so many restrictions in place, they opted instead to have a rummage sale while observing COVID-19 restrictions.

Empty Pantry Fund

The Empty Pantry Fund has also had to find new ways to raise funds to provide 1,400 less-fortunate Blount County families with food at Christmas.

The annual Daily Times Charity Golf Tournament to benefit EPF had to be cancelled in the summer due to the pandemic, and several of the larger donations traditionally made by businesses and civic groups were either smaller or no longer available. The Board found other ways to offset the losses, including turning to restaurants who offer coupon cards or percentage of sales to local charities as well as holding a



Empty Pantry Fund vice president, Blount County Mayor Ed Mitchell, accepts a donation from the employees of the Register of Deeds office who made a contribution to the Empty Pantry Fund. Photo courtesy of EPF

special 12 Days of Christmas promotion on its website, www.emptypantryfund.com.

Donations to EPF are accepted year-round, not only during the fundraising campaign Nov. 1-Dec. 31. Send your check to The Empty Pantry Fund, c/o The Daily Times, 307 E. Harper Ave., Maryville, TN 37804, bring it to The Daily Times reception desk or visit the website to donate via Paypal. For updates, go to [Facebook.com/TheEmptyPantryFund](https://www.facebook.com/TheEmptyPantryFund).

A year of changes

This has been a year of firsts for the Empty Pantry Fund, which was created in 1952 when The Daily Times and what is now the Blount County Jaycees joined forces to meet the needs of the hungry at Christmas. The fund has grown from delivering 100 baskets of food in the early days to delivering 1,400 "baskets," which are actually large, sturdy bags containing canned goods and staples packed by an army of volunteers at the Tennessee Army National Guard Armory in Maryville. That is, they packed and delivered food baskets through 2019; 2020 has been another story altogether, a time which

required rethinking how to pack and distribute the food baskets.

"A need exists, and you can rest assured that the Empty Pantry Fund, even though things may be different, will continue to fulfill this need in our community," Empty Pantry Fund President Lon Fox promised when EPF kicked off on Nov. 1. Board members worked diligently to create a new system that observed all the precautions necessary to assure the safety of both volunteers and recipients, including social distancing, mandatory masks and liberal use of hand sanitizer.

One significant change is that the traditional delivery of all food baskets as well as

toys provided through Junior Service League of Maryville's Toys for Blount County was limited to those who were homebound, and instead of volunteers carrying the items into the person's home, the packages were to be left on the front porch. All recipients, who could do so, are asked to pick up their packages at the Armory on a staggered schedule according to their last name. Deliveries are scheduled for Dec. 20; distribution at the Armory is scheduled for Dec. 19.

Changes were also necessitated for the volunteers who have made packing and delivery a part of their Christmas tradition for many years. Instead of anyone who wanted to participate simply showing up on packing night, volunteers were asked to sign up and work in shifts throughout the day on packing day, Dec. 17, and also for distribution on Dec. 19 and 20.

Fox said at kickoff, "We thank all the volunteers for their support, but it's going to be very different this year." EPF vice president, Blount County Mayor Ed Mitchell, added, "We appreciate over the years everybody helping. We have to change this year but we hope to get back to normal in the future."



Kathy Johnson and other United Way volunteers carry donations dropped off for the United Way Kindness for Kickoff. Photo by Tom Sherlin/The Daily Times

promise

Faith Promise embraces new way of delivering timeless message

By Linda Braden Albert



2020 2020 2020 2020 2020 2020 2020 2020

Reaching people with the Good News of the gospel has been more challenging in a pandemic year when in-person church services and special events were suspended. Even when the doors opened again, many worshipers who would have normally been present chose to stay home to protect themselves and their loved ones from exposure to COVID-19. Instead, online services have given people the opportunity to worship together and still belong to a faith community rather than stay in isolation.

Faith Promise is one of the churches that has adapted to the changing times. Based in Knoxville, the church spans multiple sites, including the Blount campus at 539 N. Foothills Plaza Drive, Maryville, where Hill's Department Store was previously located. Faith Promise celebrated 25 years as a church in early February; the Blount Campus was the first of the multi-sites, opening 10 years ago in October.

Blount campus pastor Jayson Hines understands the 2020 challenges in a special way. As a part of the original team that founded the Maryville site, Hines, a Blount County native, transitioned into full-time ministry in February after being employed at Oak Ridge National Laboratory for 17 years.

"My last day at ORNL was the end of February, and two weeks later we're trying to do ministry a new way," he recalled with a chuckle. "Our country is quarantined, right? And we're trying to figure things out. It's been an interesting season but it's been productive."

The transition to online services was relatively easy. Hines said, "At Faith Promise, we were really blessed because we had embraced online church years before. For us, it was pretty seamless to move the church online, and our online campus grew pretty rapidly. We realized

we were quickly reaching so many people online. It was great. Our Easter services had tens of thousands of people online. It was incredible to see that.

"One of the things that has been a challenge but we were still able to do was move people to small groups virtually," he added. "People who really weren't used to technology were learning to use it, and you had community, even online. That's part of what people crave. They need community. We're supposed to do life together."

Most people did well learning how to use the technology. "Some of our older people who had never used Zoom before met the challenge," Hines said. "Our small groups

respect our governmental authorities. If there is a mask mandate, we will abide by a mask mandate. If there are other laws in place that we need to follow to be respectful, we're going to follow those rules," he said. "But we are super thankful that we have the ability to meet right now and we are also super thankful for the technology that allows us to be able to meet online when we have to do that. We will try to meet people where they are."

Online services begin on Saturday night and meet all weekend. "People can find us on our website, faithpromise.org, or they can visit any of our Faith Promise Facebook pages," Hines said. "We stream our services on there.

You can interact with people on the online

platform or on Facebook. It really is a great way to attend church if people have concerns or they don't feel comfortable coming back yet. We're a little over 70 percent of our folks who have come back so far but there are a lot of people who are still doing church online. Whether they're online or in person, we're still trying to minister to them and minister to our community. We've been here for 10 years now and we're all about real people with real problems who need the real love of Jesus."

As for what's ahead in 2021, Hines said, "This has definitely been a challenging period but so much good has come out of it. Things may not go back to 'normal' but I'm excited to see what this new 'normal' means as far as what God wants us to do as we move forward."



pastor actually put together a guide to help people navigate that technology so they could still do their group online and get together with people. I'm not going to lie. It was a challenge for some people, but we helped as much as we could to help them stay connected."

The Blount Campus has currently resumed meeting at the church with services at 10 and 11:30 a.m. Sundays. Church staff and volunteers wear masks and socially distance, and special cleaning procedures are in place. Visitors are not required to wear masks but are asked to keep a proper distance.

Hines said Faith Promise will abide by any future governmental edicts. "We



Jayson Hines speaking at Faith Promise.

Photos courtesy of Faith Promise

PROFILE

Keri Prigmore



Multiple roles combine to provide best education possible for Alcoa students

By Mitch Moore

Under normal circumstances, Dr. Keri Prigmore has her hands full thanks to her multiple roles within the Alcoa school system. As Director of Attendance, Director of Coordinated School Health and the coordinator for the Homebound, Homeless and Homeschool Education program, she is tasked with making sure Alcoa students at all levels are fully served by the system.

However, these aren't normal circumstances. Add a global pandemic and the expansion of remote learning opportunities to the mix, and Prigmore, like so many of her fellow educators, are adapting their approach on the fly and trying to make sure students get the best education possible, as safely as possible.

"One of our biggest concerns has been the mental strain on our teachers and students," Prigmore says. "We've been focusing on driving uplifting messages and providing resources for the teachers to pass those messages on to their kids."

Those efforts have included providing on-site space and equipment for teachers to work out, practice yoga and even meditate on their breaks. Prigmore is also responsible for making sure each school has sufficient personal protective equipment and disinfectant/cleaning supplies and equipment. At times, she has even gotten as hands-on as taking up slack on custodial duties.

"I'll do whatever is needed, even if it's taking out the trash," Prigmore says.

With more students opting to learn remotely, another of her concerns is that some may fall behind academically.

"Many parents are realizing how difficult it is to keep their children engaged," she says. "We have a good plan in place for wearing masks and sanitizing daily, so we encourage parents to let us protect their children while also helping them keep up with their academics."

As for the future, Prigmore believes the current situation will be the norm for at least another year, possibly longer. Mask wearing and social distancing will continue to be standard protocol.

"It's not going away any time soon," she says. "We're going to have to adjust and adapt. We're going to have a thriving virtual school at some point, but until then, we have to make sure we're providing an equitable education for all our students."

Prigmore originally hails from Alcoa and was a 1993 graduate of Maryville High School. She earned a

Bachelor of Arts in communications as well as a master's degree from the University of Tennessee and a Doctor of Education degree from East Tennessee State University.

She started her career in the classroom, teaching at the middle school level in Blount County and Alcoa before landing her first administrative position in 2009. In 2015, she became Alcoa's alternative school director, and 2020 marks her second year in her current position at the city's central office.

"This is my home," she says of returning to her

hometown. "I don't see myself going anywhere."

Family plays a large role in Prigmore's life. Self-professed puzzle fanatics, she and her children, Shayla and Quincy Jr., have had more bonding time than ever lately, thanks to the pandemic.

She is also close with her mother Marjorie Stewart, who was a teacher at Sam Houston Elementary for 30 years.

"She's part of the reason I am in education," she says. "I modeled her in being a role model for my kids."

Prigmore credits being a mother herself with teaching her what true love was.

"Something changes when you look into the eyes of someone who depends on you," she says. "My kids are awesome. When I had them, they changed my outlook on everything."



Keri Prigmore stands with some of the students at Alcoa Elementary School.

Photos courtesy of Keri Prigmore



Many parents are realizing how difficult it is to keep their children engaged.

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Culinary Institute



Expanding career opportunities for Blount County college and high school students

By Lesli Bales-Sherrod
Pellissippi State Community College

Reagan Whitley of Friendsville is up before the sun. From 5-11 a.m., you can find the 20-year-old Blount County native cooking breakfast at Blackberry Mountain, the newer resort from the luxury hospitality brand behind Blackberry Farm.

From 1-5 p.m., however, you can find Whitley at Pellissippi State Community College, where she is pursuing an associate degree in Culinary Arts.

"I always liked to cook; I just wasn't aware you could major in Culinary Arts in college," said Whitley, who originally planned to pursue a nutrition degree at a four-year university.

Pellissippi State is working hard to make sure other local students know they have that option. On Oct. 23, the college broke ground on its long-awaited Ruth and Steve West Workforce Development Center on its Blount County Campus, not five minutes from Whitley's house in Friendsville.

The new building on West Lamar Alexander Parkway will include a 4,890-square-foot Culinary Institute that will allow Pellissippi State to expand its Culinary Arts degree program and industry-recognized certification programs, increasing the number of graduates ready to fill in-demand culinary positions at hotels, restaurants, farmsteads, breweries, wineries and resorts across Blount, Knox and surrounding counties.

"This facility will provide opportunities for our students to use

state-of-the-art equipment that will be the driving force in the modern food industry," said Chef Joseph Blauvelt, Culinary Arts program coordinator for Pellissippi State and a Maryville resident himself. "We will be able to focus on the top trends in the food industry as a whole, allowing our students to be one step ahead."

The Culinary Institute will support not only Pellissippi State's students seeking an Associate of Applied Science in Culinary Arts, but also will be located adjacent to the workforce development center's Corporate Training Center and Lobby so that Culinary Arts students can cater events and pre-event functions held on the Blount County Campus.

It was a catering event that changed Whitley's college path when she was a senior at William Blount High School. A competitive rower, Whitley had signed a letter of intent to row in college but was taking culinary classes "just for fun."

When her now-retired culinary arts teacher Marty Durand needed help catering a Christmas event, Whitley realized something.

"I never felt like I was working," she remembered.

Durand encouraged Whitley to check out Pellissippi State's Culinary Arts program. He also introduced her to Blackberry Mountain, where she started as a dishwasher. Whitley completed an internship there and worked her way up, becoming the youngest line cook at Three Sisters, one of two restaurants at Blackberry Mountain.

"It's a lot of dark and early mornings, but I really love cooking breakfast," Whitley said. "I learn something new every day at Blackberry Mountain because it's such an advanced kitchen."

Blackberry Farm has a history of providing internships for Pellissippi State students, and a \$250,000 gift from the Blackberry Farm Foundation helped pave the way for the Culinary Institute on the college's Blount County Campus.

"Blackberry Farm Foundation is excited to continue to invest in our already successful relationship with Pellissippi State," said Blackberry Farm President Matt Alexander. "The restaurant and hospitality industries provide so much opportunity for advancement, as well as lifelong careers. We believe it is important for us to expand our impact on the industry and help create pathways to careers in culinary arts."

Despite working 30-32 hours weekly at Blackberry Mountain, Whitley maintains her status as a full-time student, completing 18 credit hours this fall. She also is taking classes in Hospitality, a concentration under Pellissippi State's Business Administration program.

"Reagan has great determination and drive that will take her a long way in this industry," Blauvelt said.

Although construction on the workforce development center is not expected to be completed until February 2022 and Whitley is on track to graduate in May 2022, she still is excited to see the Culinary Institute come to Blount County.

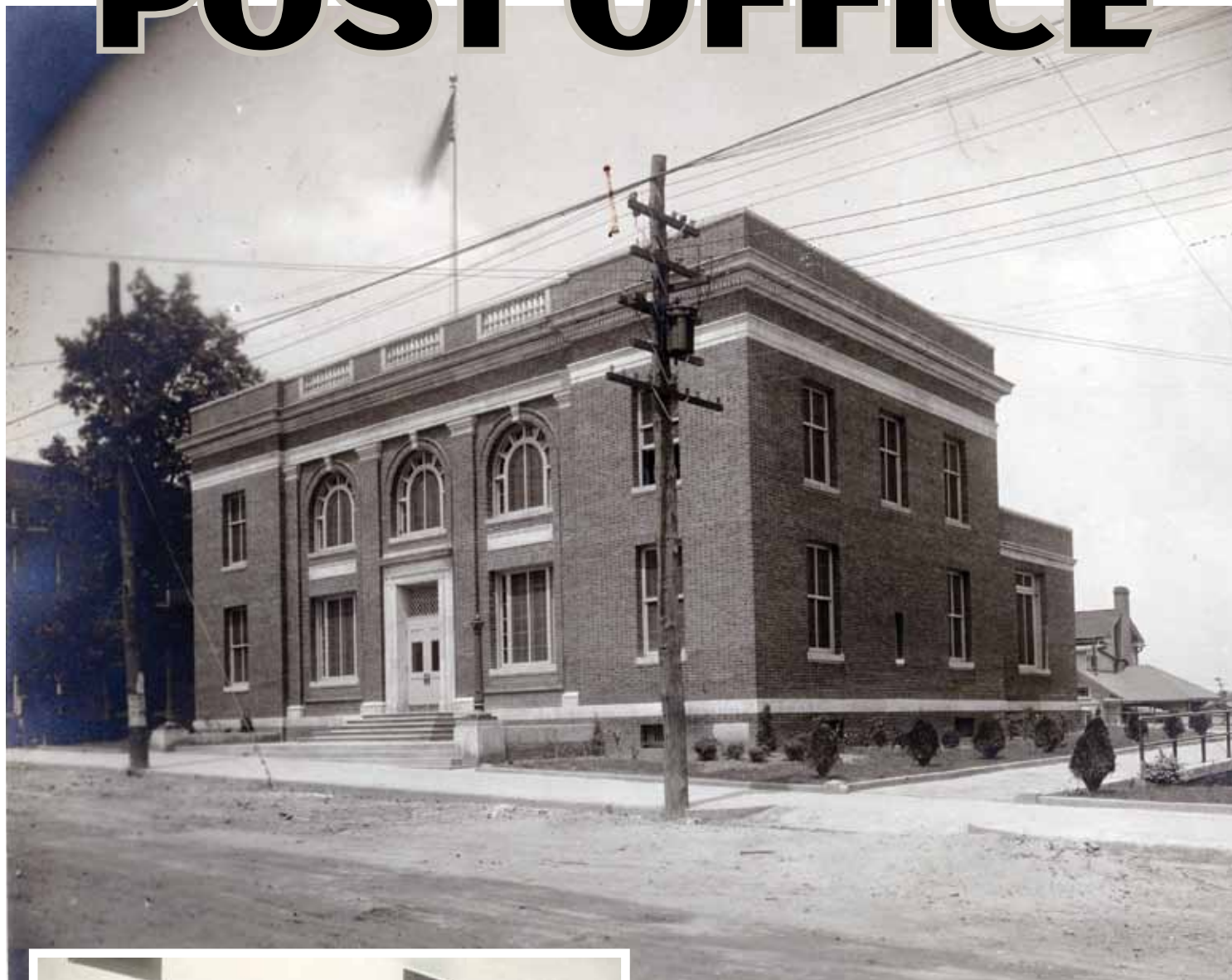
"I think having a Maryville location will be more central not just for our Blount County students, but also for our students who live in Lenoir City and Madisonville," she said. "I think it will be great for our high schools that have culinary programs, too, because students will have opportunities to take dual enrollment classes at Pellissippi State."

Pellissippi State student Reagan Whitley, a 2019 William Blount High School graduate, is pursuing her associate degree in Culinary Arts while working as a breakfast cook at Blackberry Mountain.

Photos courtesy of Pellissippi State Community College



THE FEDERAL POST OFFICE



Above: Federal Post Office completed in July 1917

Left: Federal Post Office interior in June 1917



Looking Back

GREG McClain



Greg McClain is city manager for Maryville and an acclaimed history buff.

Buildings, just like people, project a certain character. Maryville's downtown has an eclectic group of buildings with vastly different character. As time passes, these buildings are renovated, repurposed and renamed, and with each change, they become a totally different place with a brand new character.

As an example, the Pflanze Building has housed a great number of businesses over the years. Originally, it was built to house Charles Pflanze's Furniture and Casket Store, but through the years, it has housed many different stores like Cherokee Lumber Company, Young's Department Store, McCammon Ammons Funeral Parlor, Wright's Five and Dime and so on. Today, we all know it as the Palace Theatre. Most of the buildings downtown have had multiple businesses come and go and taking with it a part of its character. Those individual stores and shops that gave the location its reputation and character for a period of time have faded into history, leaving only a few notations in books—or if we are lucky, a few random photographs.

One building downtown that is still known by its original name is the Federal Post Office. As I talk to people about our downtown, they refer to that building and location as the Post Office. Businesses have occupied the building but it has retained its initial name and character.

The very first post office downtown was established on Oct. 6, 1800, and, at one location or the other, had a presence downtown until 1990. The current building was built in 1916 to serve as the Main Post Office for Blount County until 1962. It was then designated as a branch and served the community up until 1990 when it was closed. It is interesting to note that this Post Office was the first headquarters for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1935 and provided office space for the Park's administrative staff.

The location picked for the Post Office was a lot at the corner of Main Street and North Court Street. This lot and the home that resided there was originally owned by George Toole. During the Civil War, the Toole house had been used as headquarters for Union General Beatty during the winter of 1863-1864, which means the site had already been used by the federal government once before. In 1916, the government would seek to use this lot again so they bought the house from owner Sam Toole and broke ground late in that same year. Construction photographs show progression of the project from October of 1916 to its opening in July of 1917.

Like many federal buildings across the nation, this building was constructed in Colonial Revival style which gives it such a unique character. There is no way to look at that building and not immediately think "that is a government building." The Old Post Office has a character that is forever locked in time and space. Dr. Jack Bowman currently owns the building and Dr. Lyndsey Hazen's Mountain View Family Dentistry office calls the building home today. And even though we know this business is in the building, the dominant sense and reference to the building will likely be that it's the Post Office. I've noticed when people are giving directions to someone for some business on that end of town, they will say "It's beside the old post office," or "If you go past the old post office you've gone too far." This wonderful building will most likely be around for many more decades as a unique and major landmark that wears its character proudly for all to see.



George Toole/Sam Toole residence corner of Main and Court – July 1916



Federal Post Office foundation – October 2, 1916



Federal Post Office framing – December 1916

Growing amidst a Pandemic



Improvise, Adapt and Overcome. That United State Marine Corps mantra sums up where the business community lies amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Since March, businesses and the worldwide population have been in this mode to figure how to survive and be profitable.

One of the best ways brick and mortar businesses adapted is by venturing into online sales. If they had been on the sidelines, wondering how to get in the game, COVID-19 was the push they needed.

Having an online sales platform is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity. One local business that was thrown into the fray is The Village Tinker. For years, it operated solely as a storefront relying on foot traffic. Now, it is finding customers from all over the United States, thanks to adding an e-commerce section to its website.

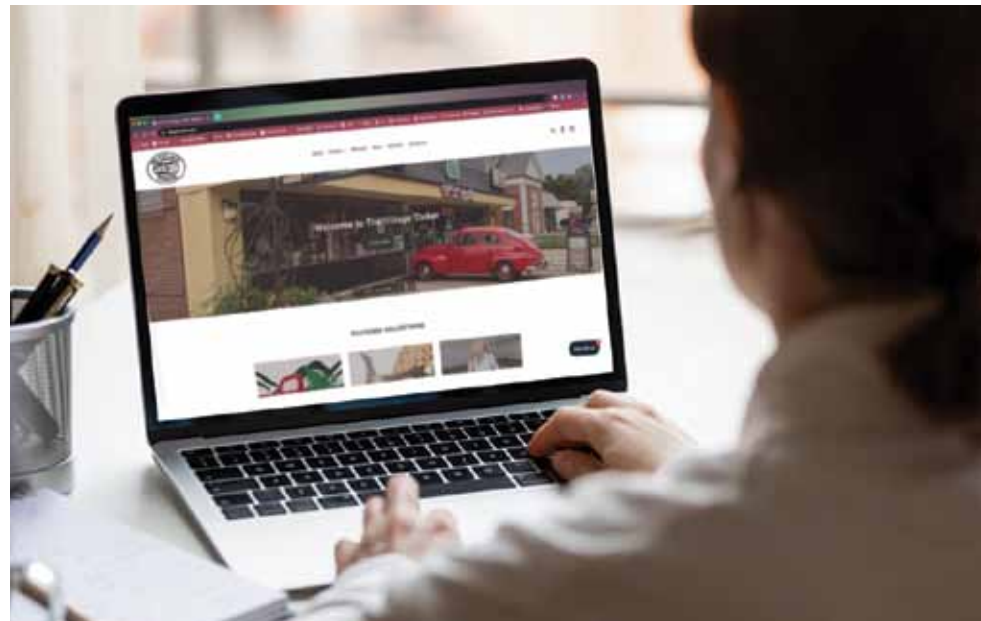
Examples like this are popping up all over the area and that has led to the expanded growth and power of mobile shopping. According to statista.com, "In 2021, 53.9 percent of all retail e-commerce is expected to be generated via m-commerce."

Note: E-commerce is shopping done over the internet using a computer, while m-commerce implies the use of mobile devices.

With companies prioritizing stability over profitability, economic growth is only expected to rise about 2% in the United States according to Northern Trust Chief Investment Officer Bob Browne.

Even with that slow predicted growth rate, many businesses, including many in Blount County, are continuing to equip their workforces to work remotely. Additionally, in order to prepare for the eventual recovery, companies are deciding to push ahead with expansion plans that had been put on hold over the last six months.

With a modest 1.9% rise in new home construction and record-low mortgage rates, new home inventory and single-family starts are expected to reach



pre-pandemic levels in early 2021. Builders are facing challenges from mounting costs in lumber prices, a shortage of buildable lots and skilled labor. Nevertheless, builders' confidence in the direction of the housing market remains at an all-time high according to Kiplinger.com.

With manufacturing being one of Blount County's key industries, it is nice to see that October's output capped a four-month increase and posted its strongest level since January 2019. Continued growth is expected in 2021, although at a slower pace.

As with the recession in 2008-09, when Blount County leaders chose to focus on infrastructure to prepare for the inevitable rebound, that same motivation has been the driving force in continuing to make our local economy strong.

The Alcoa Highway expansion is well underway as is the planning and construction for enterprises at Springbrook Farm.

Not long ago, a groundbreaking ceremony was held for the construction of the Ruth and Steve West Workforce Development Center on Pellissippi State's Blount County Campus. The 51,000-square-foot building will help fill the area's

need for highly skilled, college-educated employees.

The workforce development center will include space for Pellissippi State's Computer Information Technology, Culinary Arts, Electrical Engineering Technology and Electromechanical Engineering programs while TCAAT will have space for its Engineering Technology program, giving that college its first footprint in Blount County.

And finally, in preparation for the return of the business traveler, the Hilton Knoxville Airport recently completed an extensive \$7.5 million renovation of all guest rooms, meeting rooms, lobby and other public areas. But the crown jewel was the creation of a true conference center space capable of handling groups of 600-800, depending on the room configuration.

The new space has an expanded Grand Ballroom that now totals 9,400 square feet and a new Cascade Ballroom that totals 3,300 square feet. A pre-function space called "The Cove" is a spacious 4,200 square feet.

The resolve of Blount County to continue pushing forward has never been more evident even with more outside influences. The drive to improvise, adapt and overcome the COVID-19 obstacles in 2021 is incontestable.

A View from the Middle

BRYAN Daniels



Blount Partnership president/CEO

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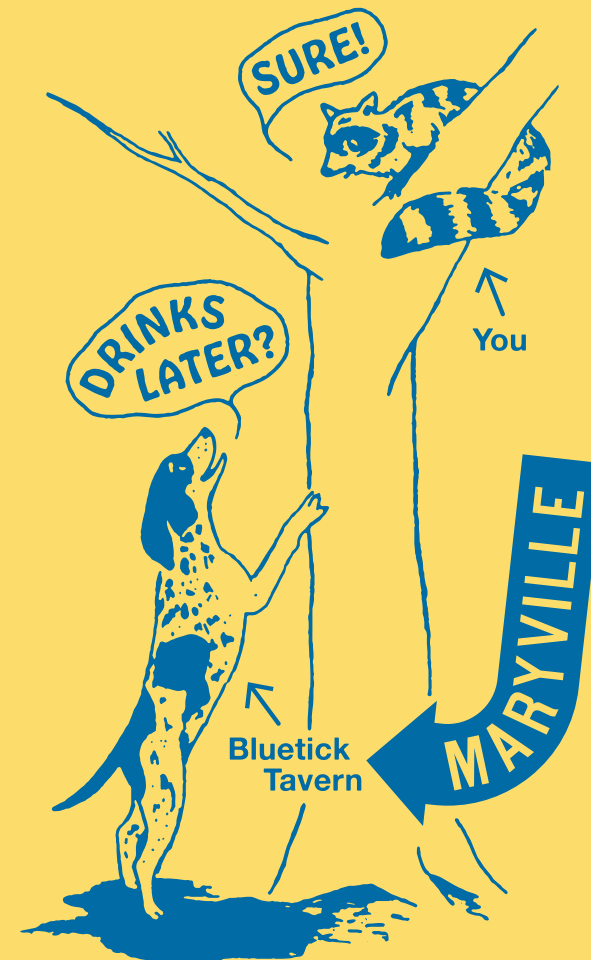
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