Remote Area Medical

Paying a house call in Blount County

The Ed F. Harper building
Furniture and Undertaking

Profiles:
Hearon, Ramos, Touchstone

Appalachian Ballet Company
Celebrating 50 years

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In 2014, a new lifestyles magazine appeared for the first time in Blount County when Blount County Horizon was born. It’s been published quarterly ever since. This edition, Summer 2021, marks the 30th issue of the magazine, which first began in March 2014 as a partnership between The Daily Times and Sherri Gardner Howell’s SGH Enterprises. The focus then and now is on Blount County: the people, places and activities that give a uniqueness to this area we call home. Sherri was the editor of the magazine from its inception through Spring 2017.

The first issue’s cover story was on Maryville actor David Dwyer, known for roles in movies such as “Remember the Titans,” “The Blind Side” and “October Sky.” When the issue was published, Dwyer’s “most recent movie credit” was noted as “Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues.” Also in that issue was Maryville City Manager Greg McClain’s inaugural history column, “Looking Back,” focused on Blount County’s namesake, William Blount. Greg continues to write the column for Horizon; in this issue, he discusses Ed F. Harper Furniture and Undertaking, which was located next to what is now Lambert Southern Pies & Bake Shop.

In addition to features on various topics, the Spring 2014 issue included profile pieces on local residents, Blount at Play photo packages, columns on health, economics and books as well as a column written by my former newsroom colleague, Steve Wildsmith. Some of the departments have changed, some of the columnists have changed, but the focus has remained on Blount County since that very first issue came out.

Horizon was available in print at participating advertiser locations, the Blount County Chamber of Commerce and The Daily Times, was available for download in PDF format at The Daily Times website, www.thedailytimes.com, and was delivered to several thousand select households throughout the county in 2014. The main difference now is that TDT decided to make Horizon available to all seven-day subscribers in 2017. Copies may still be found at the reception desk and online, although with the COVID pandemic, some of the other locations may no longer provide them.

I was asked to be the editor in 2017, and the first issue with my name on it was published that summer. The cover story was on the Clayton Center for the Arts. This 30th issue has a mix of features: A cover story on Remote Area Medical, an organization providing critical medical, dental, vision and veterinary services at no charge to underserved and unserved individuals; Appalachian Ballet Company’s 50th anniversary; profiles on Blount County’s new archives and records manager and a man with a passion for helping those with mental health issues; and a feature on a Blount County farmer and retired educator who is still going strong at 98.

Columns, in addition to Greg McClain’s “Looking Back”, are from Blount Partnership, Pellissippi State Community College and Quality Financial. All of us who are involved with Horizon express our appreciation to the people of Blount County for your support. Please feel free to contact us at Horizon@thedailytimes.com for comments and story suggestions.

From the Editor

Our 30th Edition!

In 2014, a new lifestyles magazine appeared for the first time in Blount County when Blount County Horizon was born. It’s been published quarterly ever since. This edition, Summer 2021, marks the 30th issue of the magazine, which first began in March 2014 as a partnership between The Daily Times and Sherri Gardner Howell’s SGH Enterprises. The focus then and now is on Blount County: the people, places and activities that give a uniqueness to this area we call home. Sherri was the editor of the magazine from its inception through Spring 2017.

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Horizon was available in print at participating advertiser locations, the Blount County Chamber of Commerce and
“Maryville, Alcoa, Blount County. There’s just not much ordinary about living here. We are a college town that is next door to a larger college town, giving an orange glow to our pride in the garnet.

We are nestled in the shadow of the No. 1 most visited national park in the country, and we trace our roots back to a pioneer heritage and claim kinship with the founding fathers of our state. We are cashmelers and Carhartt, farmers and freelancers, linemen and lawyers, moms and moguls.

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.”
To the great folks of Alcoa, Maryville, and Blount county. We want to say thank you for all the support you have shown us since opening the local Blackhorse Pub & Brewery. Launching a new restaurant during the time of COVID-19 has been a unique experience. We have found ourselves short on staff and critical pieces of equipment; however, the community has been welcoming and understanding.

We look forward to a time when we have a whole staff to serve the entire restaurant and beer garden.

We would also like to announce our first music series, the Full Moon Jam, hosted in the beer garden. This music series will be a monthly Bluegrass and Americana-oriented live music show starting this June on the 26th at 8:30 p.m. Guests are invited to bring lawn chairs or blankets and enjoy mountain music in the valley of the Great Smoky Mountains under a full moon.

We look forward to serving you all soon!

-Owners, Jeff & Sherri Robinson

Happy Birthday Appalachian Ballet Company

Background photo then clockwise:
– “Peter Pan” in 2014. Richard Calms Photography
– Spring Gala 2016. Richard Calms Photography
– The film crew of Beyond Media is applauded by Appalachian Ballet Company’s cast at the end of filming 2020 “Nutcracker.”

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A TBR INSTITUTION/AN AA/EEO COLLEGE
Fifty years on, Appalachian Ballet Company still dazzles through dance

By Lee Zimmerman

There’s never a need to consider a cultural chasm when roots and relevance somehow manage to find common cause.

For the past 50 years, Appalachian Ballet Company has done just that by integrating local tradition with the forms and finesse of classical and contemporary dance. ABC, currently the resident dance company of the Clayton Center for the Arts located on the Maryville College campus, originated under the leadership of Founding Artistic Director Cheryl Van Metre and currently operates under the same auspices as the Van Metre School of Dance, which was first founded 63 years ago. The two currently share space at 215 W. Broadway in Maryville.

Both organizations are helmed by Amy Morton Vaughn, an accomplished dancer, teacher and choreographer with 30 years of professional experience. She has served as the Appalachian Ballet Company’s Artistic Director for the past 25 years as well as being the owner and operator of the Van Metre School of Dance. Indeed, her dedication to dance runs in the family. Her daughter, Kylie Morton Berry, is the company’s principal dancer and rehearsal mistress for Appalachian Ballet and an instructor in ballet and jazz for the Van Metre School. Vaughn’s other daughter, Laura Morton, is a professional dancer with the Staibdance Dance Company and the Terminus Modern Ballet Theatre, both of which are based in Atlanta, and was recently featured in Dance Magazine’s January issue as one of “25 to Watch for 2021.” Formerly known as the Maryville/Alcoa Civic Ballet Company, the organization opted for a name change in the mid-’70s, hoping to expand its artistic appeal while underscoring both its commitment and connection to the local community. Its goal, as stated in its mission statement, is to provide its young dancers with a high caliber of classical training and performance opportunities, to produce a first-class season of classical and contemporary ballets showcasing local artists, and to promote and foster a love and appreciation of the arts overall. Those efforts have clearly paid off. The company’s alumni have gone on to join any number of distinguished dance companies — among them, the Martha Graham Dance Company, the Houston Ballet, the North Carolina Dance Theatre, Atlanta Ballet, the Paul Taylor Dance Company, Ballet, a program which taps tradition while sharing the common threads that bind classical and contemporary themes. “We developed ‘Bluejeans’ as a means of cutting through the impression that ballet is too stuffy or highbrow to be enjoyed by the average individual,” Vaughn explains. “Once people have an opportunity to experience it, the barriers are broken down and the audience understands that dance can be fun, interesting and exciting,” Vaughn says that there will be a new spin on the Bluejeans performance this year. It will encompass 11 or 12 short pieces that are each based on a different book,” Vaughn says. “My mother wrote children’s books, and that’s what inspired this idea.” The books include “Where the Crawdads Sing” by Delia Owens, “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allen Poe and “Maurice the Art of French Cooking by Julia Child,” the latter of which will find Vaughn herself in the title role. Not surprisingly, the company offers an educational outreach by sharing its performances with nearly 5,000 students every year. In addition, the company plans to establish a satellite school. Appalachian Ballet’s 50th anniversary coincides with its 2021-2022 season. Aside from “Bluejeans, Ballet & Books,” it will include a ballet performance of “The Little Mermaid” next March, as well as its ever-popular annual production of “The Nutcracker” in early December. In addition, Beyond Media has helped create a special documentary that includes the performance of “The Nutcracker” that was slated for 2020 but had to be cancelled due to COVID. Current plans call for a screening of the film in either late summer or early fall. So too, in keeping with the occasion, a commemorative 50th anniversary booklet featuring archival photos and copies of vintage programs is also being printed. “We’re also reaching out to all our alumni and hoping they will reconnect with the company,” Vaughn notes. “We’re inviting them back to share in this special celebration.”

To learn more about the Appalachian Ballet Company Alumni Group go to appalachianballet.org vanmetreschooldance.com

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An example of a life well-lived

By Lee Zimmerman

Take heed. At the age of 98, longtime Blount County resident Sterling W. Hearon offers some simple but solid advice. “Don’t worry about things,” he says, sharing an unflinchingly optimistic attitude. “Just know things will be all right tomorrow.”

Given the life he’s lived so far, he certainly seems to have proven that proverb is true. On his most recent birthday this past February, he celebrated by getting his second COVID vaccination.

It’s only natural then that one would ask Hearon to share the secret of his longevity. Here again, his answer is unapologetic and unassuming. “I never had any dangerous jobs,” he says simply. It’s not that he didn’t have a close call. After enlisting in the Navy following the outbreak of World War II, he served on a submarine supply and maintenance ship, the U.S.S. Pelias. He still remembers seeing an enemy torpedo heading straight for their bow, clearly destined to score a direct hit. Fortunately, the Pelias made a last-minute maneuver and the torpedo passed beneath the hull without inflicting any damage.

After his discharge, his good fortune continued. Born and raised in Happy Valley, one of nine children of Albert and Tenia Hearon, he returned to Blount County where he married his high school sweetheart, Jean Wilson Hearon, the woman who would be his wife for more than 65 years until her passing in 2013. He took a job in a Maryville hardware store before continuing his education and earning his bachelor’s degree from the University of Tennessee, courtesy of the G.I. Bill. He shared his knowledge as a schoolteacher in Blount County, where he remained for 28 years prior to his retirement in 1985. It was, he says, his love of the land that remained his primary passion most of his adult life. It began when Sterling and Jean bought their first parcel of farmland on Calderwood Road and went from sowing crops to raising Hereford cattle. While his son Dennis continues to manage the farm, which grew from 10 to 125 acres, Sterling still tends to some of the daily chores. “He keeps saying he doesn’t think he can do them anymore,” Dennis notes. “But he’s been saying that for five years.”

Indeed, that effort has reaped him wide recognition. In 2001, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Award by the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation, which honored him for his meritorious service to the Blount County Farm Bureau and his continuing commitment to Tennessee agriculture and its farmers. Citations from the Tennessee state Legislature still hang on his wall. He served 18 years as director of the Blount County Farm Bureau and a further 14 years as its president. Nevertheless, his involvement didn’t end there; he was a member of the Blount/Greenback Farmers Cooperative, a charter member of the Tennessee Cattlemen’s Association, director of the Tennessee Cattleman’s Association, director of the Blount County Livestock Association, a lifetime member of the Tennessee Cattlemen’s Association, district director of the Blount/Greenback Farmers Cooperative, a charter member of the American Hereford Association, director and vice president of Farm Service Association and president, vice president and trustee of the Houston Station Community Club.

It’s little wonder that Hearon has a lot to look back on. He’s watched the world go from horse-drawn buggies to jet planes to seeing men land on the moon. He’s visited 49 of the 50 states and traveled to several countries, but still says of Blount County, “There’s no place I’d rather be.” His favorite pastimes once included reading Western novels and listening to country western music, and he says he still enjoys watching reruns of old Westerns on TV. While he insists that he was never fond of smoking or imbibing alcohol, he does admit to having a fondness for greasy food. That said, neither he nor his son Dennis enjoy cooking, which is why they go out for their meals without fail twice every day. “He’s my best friend,” Dennis says of his father. “We’ve never disagreed on anything.”

“He should be a role model for everyone,” Hearon’s granddaughter Shanna adds.

It’s little wonder. “Don’t argue ‘bout politics and religion,” Hearon advises. “I can’t make you change your mind or tell you what to do. What’s right for you may not be right for me.”

Given the life he’s led so far, it would seem silly to argue.
Pistol Creek Catch of the Day is an energetic band with a diverse repertoire of music suitable for special family, community and corporate occasions. Pistol Creek Catch of the Day are Bill Cabage, Carl Gombert, Edward Harper and other musicians that are in our creel. To inquire about booking and availability, contact us by phone or text at:

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865-789-9378 • billcabage@yahoo.com
Amanda Touchstone always knew she wanted to be a librarian. She wasn’t sure which route she would take, but as a student at the University of Tennessee, her path became clear.

“I luckily got a job in the Special Collections and Archives at the University of Tennessee and really loved it, and the rest is history,” Touchstone said.

The Knox County native is now Blount County’s archivist and records manager, beginning her tenure on March 1 following the retirement of Jackie Glenn. Prior to that, Touchstone, who earned both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Tennessee, worked at UT for six years. “I got a lot of good experience there before it was time to move on,” she said.

When asked about her duties at Blount County Records and Archives, Touchstone laughed. “How much time do you have?” she asked before giving a general description of what she and the one other person on staff are charged to do. “First and foremost, we are here to serve our community,” she said. “We answer a lot of requests for divorce decrees, and then I’ll turn my focus outward to see what I want to accomplish long-term.”

Touchstone said what appeals to her about her career is that it has a routine but also that everything is different. “I like that it’s a little bit different and it keeps you interested but it still has rules,” she explained. “I find that really fascinating as well as being around things that most people don’t get to work with.”

“In my last position, I worked on the collection of author Wilma Dykeman. I didn’t know who she was until we got this collection. She had already passed when we got it, but going through her research and letters and correspondence, it was just so cool. I wish I could have met her. She seemed like one of the coolest people.”

She’s run across some interesting things while exploring the more than 7,000 boxes at her new office. “We are doing some storage for the sheriff’s office so we have some exhibits that were used in trials,” she said. “I opened a box the other day, and it was a box of bullets and shrapnel and rocks! That’s probably the most interesting thing I’ve found so far but I know absolutely nothing about it. There is no supporting documentation; it’s kept somewhere else.” She explained that with items such as these, her only role is to store the artifacts, but with other items, such as the land maps, plats, letters, etc., her job is to document it and make it available to the public.

“I am really excited to be here. So far, I’m having a great time and I don’t expect that to change.”

Amanda Touchstone explores the more than 7,000 boxes at her new office.

Photos courtesy of Amanda Touchstone
Remote Area Medical, now headquartered in Rockford, has long been known for providing free, quality health care to underinsured and uninsured individuals. In August, the international nonprofit agency founded by the late Stan Brock in 1985 will offer services in Blount County — medical, dental, vision and, for the first time, addiction-recovery services.

The event will take place all day Aug. 14 and 15, beginning at 6 a.m. at the Everett Recreation Center, 318 S. Everett High Road, Maryville. For specifics, visit www.ramusa.org/event/maryville-tn.

“Where does it hurt?”
Leadership Blount’s Class of 2020 is the community host group. In March, Daily Times reporter Andrew Jones wrote that the idea of hosting RAM in Blount County with an addiction-recovery component began when Jan McCoy, an outspoken recovery advocate, was approached by Keith Brock and Ron Brewer, both of whom were then serving as mentors with Blount Veterans Treatment Court. They suggested bringing the clinic back, but with an addiction-recovery element.

McCoy is one of a six-person cohort of the Class of 2020 alumni that also includes Don Stallions, Mark Moses, Jeannette Beaverzon, Brad Butler and Jessica Hahn. In early 2020, the cohort brought the clinic idea to Leadership Blount Executive Director Pete Carter and others — and the plan to invite RAM and add addiction-recovery services to the two-day event was approved. The clinic had to be scheduled in 2021 due to COVID-19.

Addiction-recovery resources are in addition to the medical, dental and vision services. RAM CEO Jeff Eastman said, “As far as the medical specialties go, we won’t know until closer to the event, but we’ll have vision providers onsite to do complete eye exams. Patients will have hundreds of frames to choose from with glasses made right onsite for those individuals. On the dental side, we’ll be doing cleanings, extractions and fillings. It’s all free. The only question we ask is, ‘Where does it hurt?’ No ID is required. It’s very much a first-come, first-served basis.”

Filling the gap
Eastman said people both within Blount County and all over the region will come to the clinic because they are desperate for health care.

“People come for their immediate needs,” he explained, whether it’s dental pain, no longer being able to function with reading glasses from the drugstore or medical care, such as wound care or even a physical for school. “It’s just all over the board.”

At the clinic, patients have to choose between vision and dental, but everyone can have medical treatment, Eastman said. “They don’t have to worry about being in network. Everyone’s in network with RAM.”

RAM has seen the need for medical services increase significantly over the years. “I think it’s because of the high deductibles, people who are uninsured, the copays — all of that just adds together. Then you throw in the closing of...”

(continued on page 18)
Volunteers are key

Eastman calls volunteers “the heartbeat of the organization.” Locally, Blount County residents who volunteer will be joined by others who travel here at their own expense from all over the country. “Whether we’re here in East Tennessee or Texas or out in Florida, it’s all volunteers,” he said.

Professional volunteers in the medical, vision and dental field are needed, as well as general volunteers. “It takes a whole community to come together to make a difference,” Eastman said. “Go to www.ramusa.org and click on the volunteer button to create a profile. If they can’t come out to volunteer, they can always go to www.ramusa.org and click on ‘donate’ to help us.”

RAM has a very small staff. “In a normal clinic, there may only be two or three staff from headquarters and easily be 300 or 400 volunteers,” Eastman said.

COVID-19 affected the number of volunteers in 2020, especially with traveling restrictions. “Things are getting back to normal now,” Eastman said, adding that RAM is also a unique learning experience for vision, dental and medical students, who also travel to clinics to volunteer. “RAM provides a great opportunity for those students to have hands-on learning as they go through their medical training that they’re not going to get in a classroom,” Eastman said.

“However, with COVID, their travel was negatively impacted just like everybody else. We are now beginning to see schools come back, and that makes a big difference in the number of patients we can treat!”

Eastman himself began his association with RAM as a volunteer in 2008 after seeing a “60 Minutes” special on the organization. He progressed from being a general volunteer to working in the vision lab to running the lab. “In 2014, I retired from another career, and Stan Brock asked me to come to headquarters to help oversee the business side of the organization,” Eastman said. “One year later, in 2015, he made me his first CEO.

“It’s a great honor and very humbling that he entrusted, not only the organization, but the wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of patients and tens of thousands of volunteers in my hands.”

Join the journey

Eastman believes that people inherently want to give back, to do something good for other people, but they have a hard time figuring out how to do it. That’s where RAM steps in.

“What’s unique about RAM is that we do the heavy lifting,” he said. “We have the community host groups that come to us for help. We bring all those individuals, all those volunteers, together. So, if you’re a general volunteer or a medical professional, you just have to show up and spend the day giving back to others and having that great excitement that you made a difference.

Then you get to go home that afternoon and share with your friends what you saw, the difference you made for those hundreds of people who came through the door. That’s a really great, great feeling.”

Funding makes this possible, providing resources for the equipment, supplies, etc. “If you look at that from an investment, for every dollar you donate to RAM, we can donate $3 worth of free care,” Eastman said. “I’d like to find a bank account where I could put $1 in and get $3 out!”

Stan Brock founded Remote Area Medical in 1985, initially to provide free health care to individuals in Central and South America. Eastman said, “In 1992, he got a phone call from Sneedville, Tenn., where the hospital had closed. He took a truckload of dedicated volunteers up there, saw 62 patients, and the next week, the phone calls started coming. The phone still rings every day with people saying, ‘We need RAM to come to our community.’”

Brock’s vision for RAM began after he suffered a severe horse-related injury when he was a young man running a cattle ranch in British Guiana. Health care was 26 days away, and he vowed to make health care more accessible for the people there.

Eastman said, “He learned to fly to bring medicines from Georgetown all the way out to the Brazil-Guiana border. He studied medical books to learn rudimentary medicine. Then Martin Perkins discovered volunteers through ’Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom.’ He had that career, and then he did movies. This whole time he was a pilot.

He started RAM when he was 49 years old! He looked back and said, ‘I made a promise to bring free health care to people,’ and he started this.”

Brock served as RAM’s president without compensation until his death in 2018.

“This all started with the vision and dream of one individual who brought hundreds of thousands of volunteers together to make it happen,” Eastman said, adding, “Come join the journey. Those that volunteer, we get as much if not more out of it than the patients do.”
Luis Ramos is a man on a mission — or more accurately, a pair of missions that actually overlap. As head of youth services at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church, he oversees programs for the church’s younger parishioners. In addition, he plays an active role with Blount Memorial Hospital’s Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention Alliance (or MHASPA for short), by being part of a network that connects people at risk with advice and counseling.

“I’ve always been interested in community service and volunteering,” Ramos replies when asked what drives him to give of his time. “From the time I was 14, I was involved in a lot of community organizations. My full-time job is coordinating the youth ministry, but I also serve as a Spanish language interpreter for Blount Memorial Hospital. I was reading The Daily Times and saw that there was a community class being offered at Heritage High School on suicide prevention for young people. So I looked at what I could do to help, and what I learned from that training drew me to a subject I had never understood before.”

That experience, in the spring of 2016, proved so fruitful that he decided to initiate an after-school program called “Four; 6” at his church the following fall.

“One of the things that I learned was that there’s a high risk for suicide among young people between 4 and 6 p.m., after they get home from school. So I decided to open our doors early, prior to our Wednesday youth ministry meetings. Kids can come directly from school and do their homework, and we have games and snacks and other things for them as well. Little by little, it was something simple that I could do while putting into practice what I had learned.” Ramos also took additional courses so he could learn and share more.

“I became a trainer for the Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network so that I could start teaching suicide prevention classes,” Ramos explains. “I’ve also been trained in post-intervention, which happens after a suicide and involves going to schools and businesses for individual and group debriefings. As a person who speaks Spanish, I’ve also been able to participate in bilingual training as part of suicide prevention classes. When there are additional factors — like language, for example — we can take the efforts further.”

Born in Mexico, Ramos understands that culture can impact the need to share information and dig deeper into other issues that surround suicide prevention.

“There’s a certain stigma attached to this topic, especially in Hispanic households,” he explains. “I moved to the U.S. at the age of 6, but I still saw a strong need to convey information to Spanish-speaking households.”

Although he’s not a clinician, Ramos sits on the board of the Mental Health Association of East Tennessee, and plays an active role in organizing BIPOC (or “Black, Indigenous and Persons of Color”) month, which takes place every July.

“It’s all about having an open and honest conversation,” Ramos says. “I like to describe the process as a race, with hurdles you have to jump over. Everybody starts off on the starting line, and the ultimate outcome is to reach those mental health resources. You have people who have hurdles to overcome, and so it’s all about jumping the hurdles that revolve around the stigma. Other hurdles involve the need to secure healthcare access and then deal with insurance issues and costs. For some Hispanic people, you’ve also got the language barrier. And then you might have a cultural barrier. We have to help people jump those hurdles in order to get access.”

Ultimately, Ramos is pleased that he’s been able to contribute to those essential efforts. “I’ve found it helpful not only to be trained, but also to recognize the issues,” he reflects. “It’s allowed me to work directly with families and to recommend services that might be helpful for our students. When suggestions come from the church, it becomes a little less intimidating. It’s all about having an open and honest conversation.”

By Lee Zimmerman

Ramos, a youth minister at Our Lady of Fatima, talks with young parishioners at a recent program. Photo courtesy of Luis Ramos
Looking Back

GREG McClain

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

DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS

Ed F. Harper
Furniture and Undertaking

In my last column, I wrote about the A.K. and Pandora Harper family. If you remember, the family experienced tremendous tragedy and loss but there was an equally tremendous impact that their family made in the Maryville community. A major impact was made by their son Ed Harper and his furniture and undertaking business that served the citizens of the town and surrounding area for many years.

Edward Fleming Harper was born on March 18, 1878, to Andrew Knott Harper and his first wife Jennie F. Walker. Edward never knew his mother because she died 5½ months after he was born. Andrew married Pandora Reagan in 1882 when Edward was about 4 years old, and she raised him as her own.

Edward Harper married Mary Belle Gill on Oct. 13, 1901. She was the daughter of Professor Francis Marquis Gill and Sarah Davidson. Professor Gill taught in the Maryville College Preparatory Department, and it is interesting to know that Gill

Ed F. Harper Undertaking horse-drawn hearse

Looking Back showing Ed F. Harper building.

1915 Main Street looking West to Ed F. Harper business on lot 56 built by his father A.K. Harper.


Mutual Savings and Loan Business in the 1970s.

Business in the 1970s.


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Ed F. Harper Furniture and Undertaking

Street in Alcoa is named after him.
The Harpers had three children, and only the eldest daughter lived to see adulthood. Venorah Elizabeth Harper was born to the couple on Dec. 30, 1902, and she grew up and married William Arthur “Speedy” Ruble, who played major league baseball for the Detroit Tigers and the Philadelphia Phillies. Their second child, Andrew Knott Harper (named after his grandfather), was born on March 25, 1908, but he only lived to the age of 12. He died on June 28, 1920, from a cerebral embolism. Their youngest daughter, Sarah Jenn Harper, was born on Jan. 25, 1924, but she died from complications from a terrible accident which left her with burns on three-quarters of her body. Her death on Jan. 17, 1936, was just eight days short of her 12th birthday. Edward worked with his businessman father in his early years until he ventured out and started his own business. Ed’s first location for his Furniture and Undertaking business was in a building constructed by J.M. Greer, Captain Will Henry and Charles Pflanze. The building, built about 1870, was located at the parking deck now across from the Palace Theater. He operated out of this location until 1913, when his father bought lot 56 and constructed a two-story brick building located next to the original Bank of Maryville building, which currently houses Lambert Southern Pies & Bake Shop. The Ed F. Harper Furniture and Undertaking business operated through the 1920s and ‘30s until Ed retired. This building on lot 56 has been home to various businesses for the past 100 years. A couple of those businesses were Coulter’s Restaurant that operated in the ‘40s, the Mutual Loan and Thrift Corporation, the School of Dance, the Maryville Collections Service Inc., a bicycle shop and most recently an event space for Lambert Pies.

The current owners are James Fields and Max Hill.

1915 Main Street looking West showing Ed F. Harper building.


Victoria Williams: Following in her father’s footsteps

Victoria Williams started taking classes to be a certified nurse assistant as a student at Alcoa High School — and her passion rubbed off on her dad, who was looking for a career change.

When Victoria, now 22, graduated from high school in 2017, her father, Robert Williams, graduated from Pellissippi State Community College with his Associate of Applied Science in Nursing. The former DENSO manager is now the charge nurse in Parkwest Medical Center’s emergency department.

Now Victoria has earned her A.A.S. in Nursing. The former DENSO manager is now the charge nurse in Parkwest Medical Center’s emergency department.

It was a “huge learning curve,” she says, to adapt to the field of nursing. The Blount County native and Alcoa resident wanted to go into mental health, but her dad had a great experience at Pellissippi State, and she was super comfortable at Pellissippi State already because I started taking dual enrollment classes there in 2016,” Victoria explains.

“I feel like the community is very special on the Blount County Campus,”

During her time at Pellissippi State, Victoria worked in the Blount County Campus’ tutoring center, where she helped other students with science.

“My coworkers in the tutoring center became like a family to me,” Victoria remembers. “I have so many great memories of line dancing in the hallway or walking out with my peers to get popcorn. There are always fun things to do on the Blount County Campus when you aren’t in class.”

It was a “huge learning curve,” she says, to adapt to online learning when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in East Tennessee in March 2020 — though it was not a shock to those in health care.

“You could see the pandemic coming if you were out in the field,” explains Victoria, who was working in the Intensive Care Unit at Fort Loudoun Medical Center in Lenoir City. “Sometimes I’d have to flip to the emergency department or the medical/surgical floor to help because we had so many COVID patients. It was hard.”

Victoria later started working at Village Behavioral Health Treatment Center in Louisville, where she says she “fell in love” with helping children with mental health issues. Prior to her graduation on May 15, Victoria already had accepted a full-time job at Peninsula Hospital, also in Louisville, in their child psych unit, although she planned to stay with Village Behavioral Health part time as well.

“These kids with mental health problems, many of them have been failed by the people meant to take care of them,” said Victoria, who would like to eventually get her Master of Science in Nursing with a concentration in psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner for children and adolescents. “I want to be the support some of them never got, because I couldn’t have made it this far without the support I have.”


Blount County Campus provides COVID-19 trainings, vaccines

While most Pellissippi State classes moved online during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Blount County Campus stayed busy serving the community in new ways.

In May and June 2020, the Blount County Campus opened its Nursing simulation lab to nurses at Blount Memorial Hospital to train them to care for COVID-19 patients.

Sixty-one medical-surgical nurses gained more experience in intubation care, putting patients on a ventilator, adjusting ventilator settings, suctioning and “proning” patients.

In April 2021, the Blount County Campus expanded its COVID-19 support to the community, holding drive-thru vaccination clinics in one of its parking lots. The clinic offered appointments for the one-shot Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine on Fridays and for the two-shot Moderna vaccine on Saturdays. Forty-two Pellissippi State employees and 41 students joined forces to work shifts at the free clinic, where 554 people had received their COVID-19 vaccinations as of May 8.

“The Nursing students who participated in the vaccination clinic greatly enjoyed the experience,” said Dean of Nursing Angela Lunsford. “The students feel it has not only increased their comfort giving vaccines but has greatly increased their comfort with the residents we serve.”

The clinics ended on June 5.
Building Net Worth without spending more

I believe most Americans dream about reaching a point in their life where they no longer “have to” work and can retire. Most Americans know when they receive their Social Security checks, the amount will not be sufficient to sustain their lifestyle. Thus, an additional source of income must be found or created. For some, it is a pension resulting from years of working for a single employer. Many government positions still offer pensions, fewer employers provide that benefit today due to its high cost. The only remaining option is to create a pool of money from which a monthly draw can be taken to meet the retirement income you desire. That pool for most is IRA, Roth, 401k, or 403(b) accounts. So many just contribute to their IRA annually or through their employer 401-k and never give any thought as to whether what they are contributing will actually provide the income they need at retirement and for how long. This leads us to an entirely different conversation, and one for another day.

There is a way to help build net worth without increasing the monthly budget, by using dollars already committed in the budget.

For years, mortgage interest rates have been falling and many have taken advantage of this by refinancing their debt. For some, the choice was to reduce the term to 15 years since the lower rate helped to offset the higher monthly payment. Listening to and believing the pitch that saving all of that mortgage interest was the best option. I disagree, and the following numbers support my assertion.

For discussion, consider this example of a $225K mortgage. If the homeowner does nothing, they will spend $211,267.80 over the next 15 years and still owe $120,489, column A. If they were to refinance to a new 30 mortgage and then invested the savings each and every month without fail, they would spend the same amount of money, and at the end of 15 years, they would owe $133,459, column C. If they average 6% on their investments, they would have a value of $67,669, column E. While their debt is about $13,000 higher, it is more than offset by $67 thousand they now have in investments. Is this guaranteed? No, but the odds are in favor of a very beneficial result.

For the homeowner who wants to refinance and can afford the higher payment of a 15 year mortgage, believing saving all of that interest is better, column B, I would still recommend the 30 year mortgage but now they could invest a larger difference, column D. At the end of 15 years, the potential investment value of $162 thousand is sufficient to pay off the remaining mortgage balance of the 30 year debt and have cash left over. So, the debt is still gone in 15 years; now, the homeowner has $28,922 left over after spending the same amount of cash and could pay for a lot of rounds of golf during retirement!

Investing the savings does require discipline. It is so easy to allow the savings from a new mortgage just to disappear into life’s costs. What if the difference is invested and what if the return is even better than the example of 6%, just imagine the potential increase in net worth which could be created. For those who have already refinanced and did not invest the difference, there is still time to capture that savings back into investments. Investing does not have to be scary. There are hundreds of equity mutual funds that have a ten year or longer track record with an average performance greater than 6% annually. Consistency and discipline should result in a higher net worth. Don’t miss the opportunity of low mortgage interest rates to build net worth and add to your retirement security.

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It doesn't seem like there is much in this world that hasn't been discovered. As the population changes and the next generation enters the workforce, greenways, once thought of as only a means of recreation and exercise, are now becoming economic drivers. As a result, greenway planning has taken on a new life.

Trails and greenways provide countless opportunities for economic renewal and growth. Increased property values are one of the largest beneficiaries.

In fact, tourism and recreation-related revenues from trails and greenways come in several forms. Trails and greenways create opportunities in construction and maintenance, recreation rentals (such as bicycles, kayaks and canoes), recreation services (such as shuttle buses and guided tours), historic preservation, restaurants and lodging.

In February, Amazon announced it was establishing a fulfillment center in Alcoa. That news spurred a flurry of activity when it came to revisiting the establishment of the greenway connection between Knoxville and Blount counties. The long-term goal is to have 45 miles of paved path that will stretch to Townsend and the Smokies. Sparking even more discussions are the Springbrook Farms development in Alcoa and the further revitalization of downtown Maryville. Those talks entail greenway locations and how to get storefronts facing these walkable features. Presently, a 1.4-mile greenway stretch along East Hunt Road in Alcoa is being developed and constructed.

Before “greenways” became popular in metro areas, Blount County officials worked to create a continuous trail for pedestrians and bicyclists along the floodplains of Pistol Creek. The process of developing the greenway began in 1985. It was ultimately recognized in a 2002 publication of the “National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse, A Guide to Transportation Enhancements, Enhancing America’s Communities.”

Currently, the greenway between the cities spans a little over nine miles connecting the various parks, including the Pistol Creek PetSafe Dog Park, and winding through downtown Maryville.

Greenways and community trails help ensure that a week or weekend in Blount County is even greater than the sum of its parts. They tie destinations together and are destinations in their own right. They are a key part of what we need to develop to ensure the vitality of our communities and economy.

In a report produced by the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization, the estimated fiscal benefit to Blount County is $65 million over 10 years. That is $2.66 in returns for every $1 invested. That’s on top of the health and community cohesion that greenways bring.

Additionally, the greenway is expected to attract 4,800 non-local users along with 65,700 local users spending roughly $43 per day to generate $2.5 million in annual output from tourism. That results in $20 million in state and local tax revenue.

With tourism being the state’s second largest industry, studies have shown that a growing number of Americans view outdoor activities as a way to enjoy safe, scenic recreation for the entire family. That is why the creation of greenways and trails needs to be part of our mix of attractions.

Greenways enhance the quality of life, a critical factor in attracting and retaining businesses. They also inspire renewed civic pride and provide a fresh focus for community activities.

Rising of the list of factors that many business leaders say sways their decision on where to relocate or expand operations is quality of life concerns. Trails and greenways help attract desirable employees by enriching life and make an area a more attractive place to live. They provide all residents with relaxation and exercise options, commuting alternatives, and safe, nearby places for families to enjoy.

According to a study by the real estate industry, an overwhelming majority of home buyers are looking for communities with “walking and bicycling paths” and “lots of open space.” These desired features rank well ahead of traditionally thought-of favorites like tennis courts, golf courses and swimming pools.

Involvement in greenway projects offers business owners a visible way to demonstrate a commitment to their community and the environment. Businesses can sponsor employee volunteer workdays, adopt a section of trail or allow trails to cross their property.

Being supportive of greenways and trails is one way to be a catalyst for community revitalization. Behind a strong strategic plan, greenways can transform blighted areas into community centerpieces while becoming a focus of pride and a means of preserving and celebrating what is special about Blount County.
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