

SPECIAL EDITION TO
THE MCKENZIE BANNER

Celebrating BLACK HISTORY MONTH

FEBRUARY 2022

BY BRITTANY MARTIN banner@mckenziebanner.com

Febbruary is a time to recognize and pay tribute to all the contributions people of color have made to society. It's Black History Month, but history isn't black or white and it isn't just confined to one month out of the year. History is constant, it's being made every moment of every day; and we are all a part of it. Black history is American history. Without Black inventors from our past, we wouldn't have many of the conveniences we enjoy today like blood banks, gas masks, pacemakers, three light traffic

lights, refrigerated trucks, golf tees, clothes dryers, potato chips, peanut butter and more. Great minds and people come in all colors, shapes and sizes. The pursuit of equality, allowed these great minds access to the critical tools needed to advance America in technology, in the space race and into modern day. There are several movies and documentaries available that convey the stories of "hidden figures" from history. However, Black history is more than a list of achievements. It's a reminder of our past and hope for the future. It's un-

derstanding that in our shared humanity we find more similarities than differences. And in our small communities, we rely on each other. Our friends, neighbors, classmates and people that smile at the grocery store are all daily reminders that life is better in full color. The Banner interviewed local citizens for this special edition in an effort to highlight the hidden figures in our area. Thank you to the people who shared their stories; and thank you to the local businesses and organizations that made this edition possible.

President TENNESSEE COLLEGE OF APPLIED TECHNOLOGY TCAT-PARIS AND TCAT-MCKENZIE

WILLIE HUFFMAN

Willie Huffman was born the youngest of six children to Ruben and Lennie Huffman in Henry. His first year of education was in the all-black school of Central High School in Paris. In second grade, schools in the South had desegregated and he attended Henry School in downtown Henry and in 1977, graduated from Henry County High School in Paris, where he graduated in a class of over 300 students.



Huffman was one of two finalists for the presidency selected by a search advisory committee. Both candidates participated in an online campus interview and public forum March 11. TBR Chancellor Flora W. Tydings recommended Huffman's appointment to the board after reviewing input from the campus community and conducting final interviews. The board unanimously approved Huffman.

He then attended Bethel College in McKenzie, a school with an enrollment of about 500 students in the four-year school where he graduated in 1981. He advanced his education at Austin Peay State University, where he earned his master's degree in 2012.

Huffman started his career as a student recruiter at Bethel and advanced to assistant director of admissions. He started at the State Area Vocational Technical School, where he worked as student counselor and in financial aid. He transferred to the sister school in Paris, where he advanced to vice-president of the school under the direction of Dr. Brad White.

In March of 2021, Huffman was appointed to be the president of Tennessee College of Applied Technology at Paris and McKenzie.

Huffman has been vice president of TCAT Paris since 2007 and a staff member at TCAT-Paris and its sister school, TCAT-McKenzie, since 1988. He succeeded Dr. Bradley White, who retired as president of the colleges March 31, 2021 after 44 years of service as an instructor, counselor and administrator. White had been president since 2006. Tennessee College of Applied Technology Paris.

Huffman and wife, Gloria have two grown children, Bryan and Heather and two grandchildren.

Willie and Gloria are members of the Greater Enon Baptist Church, McKenzie. He has served in the McKenzie Lions Club, Carroll County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, Henry County Chamber Board of Directors, is a graduate of Leadership Carroll County, and WestStar, and was elected to the McKenzie City Council, Carroll County Commission, and was appointed to the Carroll County 911 Board, McKenzie Housing Authority, and the McKenzie City Board of Zoning Appeals.

DID YOU KNOW?

Madam C.J. Walker invented a line of African American hair products after suffering from a scalp ailment that resulted in her own hair loss. She promoted her products by traveling around the country giving lecture-demonstrations and eventually established Madame C.J. Walker Laboratories to manufacture cosmetics and train sales beauticians. Walker was born Sarah Breedlove on December 23, 1867, on a cotton plantation near Delta, Louisiana. Her parents, Owen and Minerva, were enslaved and recently freed, and Sarah, who was their fifth child,

was the first in her family to be free-born. At age 14, to escape both her oppressive working environment and the frequent mistreatment she endured at the hands of her brother-in-law, Sarah married a man named Moses McWilliams. On June 6, 1885, Sarah gave birth to a daughter, A'Lelia. When Moses died two years later, Sarah and A'Lelia moved to St. Louis, where Sarah's brothers had established themselves as barbers. There, Sarah found work as a washerwoman, earning \$1.50 a day — enough to send her daughter to the city's public schools. In 1907 Walker and her husband traveled around the South and Southeast promoting her products and

giving lecture demonstrations of her "Walker Method" — involving her own formula for pomade, brushing and the use of heated combs. As profits continued to grow, in 1908 Walker opened a factory and a beauty school in Pittsburgh, and by 1910, when Walker transferred her business operations to Indianapolis, the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company had become wildly successful, with profits that were the modern-day equivalent of several million dollars. Her business acumen led her to be one of the first American women to become a self-made millionaire. She was also known for her philanthropic endeavors, including a donation toward the construction of an Indianapolis YMCA in 1913.

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"Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world."

-HARRIET TUBMAN

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"Diversity is not about how we differ. Diversity is about embracing one another's uniqueness." -Ola Joseph

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"Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed."

— Booker T. Washington

from City of
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LaSHONDA WILLIAMS | ALAJAH GILBERT

ENTREPRENEUR, SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER, VOLUNTEER

MINORITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT, CHEERLEADER

LaShonda Williams from Trezevant, Tenn., is the daughter of late Army veteran Oscar Lee Williams. After graduating from West Carroll High School in 1998, LaShonda moved and found her first job in McKenzie. She followed her sister, Josephine Milam, and, though having "strong Wingo hearts," they both fell in love with the city.

She began her career as an entrepreneur selling Rainbow Air Cleaners. Twenty-eight years later, she still works for the company, but not at the same capacity as she once did. Today, much of her focus goes to her self-made nutrition stores.

LaShonda Williams opened Lakeway Nutrition in Paris, Tenn., July 3, 2020, and she never looked back. She opened Mayfield Nutrition in August of the same year, and she transferred ownership of the store to her nephew in July 2021.

LaShonda opened Pomona Nutrition in June 2021, and she opened Stewart County Nutrition July 26, 2021. Stewart County Nutrition was named Business of the Month in January 2022.

While owning three nutrition stores, LaShonda Williams also has several businesses "under her," meaning she profits off of their stores without owning and operating them. Paducah Nutrition, a store under her, opened in August 2020.

LaShonda Williams is an entrepreneur with a passion for volunteering. Serving and giving back to others is one of her primary goals.

In the past, she served on the Northwest Tennessee Head Start Board for nine years, and she served as president of the Pan Advisory Board for McKenzie Middle School for almost seven years.

LaShonda is a four-year member of the McKenzie Special School District School Board, and this is her second year serving as vice chairman of the board. She is a member of the West Tennessee Public Television Council (PBS), the Miss Tennessee Volun-

teer Board, and the Henry County Hospital Foundation Board. Since opening Lakeway Nutrition, she has also been a member of the Henry County Chamber Board of Directors.

When she is not serving her community, LaShonda returns to her home in McKenzie. She is a single mother of two daughters, Alajah and Aleecia. Alajah Gilbert, 16, is a junior at McKenzie High School, and Aleecia Williams, 13, is a seventh grader at McKenzie Middle School. They are both McKenzie cheerleaders.

Alajah Gilbert, 16, is the president of McKenzie High School's Minority Council, and she holds Black History Month close to her heart.

As president of the Minority Club, Alajah has a large part in organizing the school's annual Black History Month program. This year, she chose Kim Bell as the program's speaker. Bell, Ala-

jah's youth director at Greater Enon Missionary Church, has taught her a lot of life lessons over time, including, "how to handle different situations if they were to ever arise."

She also suggests club events and speaks out in school about influential black leaders who have helped others and played a large role in fighting for equality.

"Black History Month," said Alajah, "is a time to recognize history as black people. It is a time to recognize all of the people who are leaders and who have made it possible to have freedom."

Alajah lives in McKenzie with her younger sister, Aleecia, and her mother, LaShonda Williams, who she credits as her biggest inspiration. A hard-working single mother, Ms. Williams owns three nutrition stores and gives back to the community by serving on several boards and committees in McKenzie and Paris.

Alajah is a junior at McKenzie High School, where she is a two-year member of Beta, a three-year member of the Pep Club, and a two-year member of the Minority Club. She has cheered for McKenzie since middle school, and she was on the football and basketball cheerleading teams during the 2021-22 school year.

After Alajah graduates in 2023, she plans to attend the University of Tennessee in Knoxville to be a pharmacist.



LaSHONDA WILLIAMS

ALAJAH GILBERT

BY LYNDESE SUMMERS
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THINGS YOU PROBABLY DIDN'T KNOW WERE CREATED BY BLACK INVENTORS

Blood Bank
Charles Richard Drew became interested in researching the preservation of blood when he was studying at Columbia University. Drew discovered a method of separating red blood cells from plasma and then storing the two components separately. This new process allowed blood to be stored for more than a week, which was the maximum at that time. Drew documented these findings in a pa-

per that led to the first blood bank.
Potato Chips
George Crum was working as a chef at a resort in New York. A customer sent his dish of french fries back to the kitchen, claiming that they weren't good. In an irritated fit, Crum cut the potatoes as thinly as possible, fried them until they were burnt crisps, and threw a generous handful of salt on top. Thus, the chip was born.

Gas Mask
Garrett Morgan developed what he called the safety hood after noticing how many firefighters were killed by smoke on the job. The hood, which went over the head, featured tubes connected to wet sponges that filtered out smoke and provided fresh oxygen.
Protective Mailbox
Philip B. Downing created a mailbox design that featured an

outer door and an inner safety door to avoid parcels being stolen. This safety device allowed mailboxes to be set up everywhere.
Home Security System
African American nurse Mary Van Brittan Brown, devised an early security unit for her own home. She and her husband took out a patent for the system in the same year, and they were awarded the patent three years later, in 1969. Home security systems commonly used today took

various elements from her design.
Three-Light Traffic Light
Garrett Morgan was the first Black person in Cleveland, Ohio, to own a car. After he witnessed a severe car accident at an intersection in the city, he expanded on the current traffic light by adding a "yield" component, warning oncoming drivers of an impending stop.

Continued on Next Page

"Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly."
Langston Hughes

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Celebrating Black History

We are a nation grounded in liberty and justice for all. We represent the greatest diversity of any nation in the world. From veterans to presidents, we honor people for many reasons with special times of remembrance. These events by themselves do not begin to tell the stories of our history and the people who helped write those stories. However, these events remind us to pass on the narrative of the United States to future generations.

To all people of color in our community who have made a difference, we say thank you.

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the achievements of yesterday's African American leaders, athletes, entertainers, writers, artists and intellectuals. It's also a time to focus on the achievements of today's great African Americans.

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Dr. Mae Carol Jemison
 Oct. 17th 1956 - Present

Dr. Mae Carol Jemison was the first Black woman in space. After graduating from Stanford at age 20 with degrees in chemical engineering and African and African-American studies, Jemison obtained her M.D. from Cornell in 1981 and began practicing medicine.

Conducted experiments on weightlessness and motion sickness.

Founded a technology research company and an education non-profit.

NASA

1987: Achieved her childhood dream in being selected as a mission specialist aboard NASA's Endeavour.



Ruby Bridges is escorted to class by the U.S. Marshal Service. Photo Courtesy Associated Press

DID YOU KNOW?

The history of African Americans has been shaped by many influential figures, including various civil rights activists. Ruby Bridges may be one of the youngest. At age six, Ruby Bridges became the first African American student to integrate the formerly all-white William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans.

Although Bridges lived five blocks away from William Frantz Elementary School, she had to attend kindergarten several miles away at an all-black segregated school. Bridges volunteered to take an entrance test to be able to attend the all-white school. The test was purportedly designed to be extremely difficult so that students would have a hard time passing it, and thusly New Orleans could avoid de-segregation if all the African American children failed the test.

Individuals from the NAACP informed Bridges' parents that their

daughter was one of only six African American students to pass the test. On November 14, 1960, she was escorted to class by her mother and the United States Marshals Service due to the presence of angry mobs outside the school. Bridges was the first African American student to attend the school and the first black child to attend an all-white elementary school in the south.

The first day of school proved poor as nearly all of the white parents at the school had kept their children home and Bridges spent the day with the principal. The ensuing days weren't much better. Eventually, only one teacher in the school, Barbara Henry, formerly of Boston, agreed to teach Bridges. Bridges never missed a day of school that year, even though she ate lunch alone each day and no one played with her at recess.

Her early foray into civil rights prompted Bridges to establish The Ruby Bridges Foundation to promote tolerance and change through education.

Inventions

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Refrigerated Trucks
 Frederick McKinley Jones created a roof-mounted cooling system that was used to refrigerate goods on trucks during extended transportation in the mid-1930s. He received a patent for his invention in 1940 and co-founded the US Thermo Control Company, later known as Thermo King.

Automatic Elevator Doors
 Alexander Miles took out a patent in 1887 for a mechanism that automatically opens and closes elevator shaft doors. His designs

are largely reflected in elevators used today.

Folding Cabinet Bed
 In 1885, Sarah Goode became the first Black woman to receive a US patent. She moved to Chicago and opened a furniture store. It was there she came up with an industry changing idea that brought more urban residents with limited space into her store.

Improved Ironing Board
 In the late 19th century, the ironing board was improved by Sarah Boone. One of the first Black women in U.S. history to receive a patent, she created a narrower and curved design, making it easier to iron garments. Boone's design morphed

into the modern board that we use today.

Electret Microphone
 Dr. James E. West co-invented a foil electret microphone, which was less expensive to produce than the typically used condenser microphones.

Color IBM PC Monitor, Gigahertz Chip
 You can thank Mark Dean for co-inventing the color monitor. Without his invention, we'd still be typing in a colorless interweb.

Super Soaker
 Summer just wouldn't be the same without Lonnie Johnson's invention. Johnson was an Aerospace Engineer for NASA who

happened to invent the popular children's toy.

Lawn Sprinkler
 This invention by Joseph A. Smith helped dads everywhere keep their grass green while allowing kids a fun toy to jump around in.

Peanut Butter
 Everyone and their dog can thank George Washington Carver for the invention of peanut butter.

Clothes Dryer
 George T. Sampson created the clothes dryer in 1892.

Laserphaco
 Patricia Bath, an ophthalmologist and laser scientist, invented a device and technique used to

remove cataracts and revive patients' eyesight.

Automatic Gear Shift
 Richard Spikes created the automatic gear shift, helping people drive up hills everywhere.

Folding Chair
 John Purdy created the folding chair, which is used in picnics and school graduations everywhere.

Golf Tees
 Golf was a totally different sport before Dr. George Grant came along.

Ice Cream Scooper
 Alfred L. Cralle invented the ice cream scooper, allowing kids to have larger scoops than spoonfuls. Source: DailyHive.com

BLACK HISTORY MONTH FEATURE

NATALIE McCULLOUGH PORTER

CARROLL COUNTY REGISTER OF DEEDS

BY LYNDSY SUMMERS lsummers@mckenziebanner.com



Before dedicating herself as Carroll County's Register of Deeds, Natalie Porter was a young girl from McMoresville. The youngest of five daughters, Natalie attended Trezevant High School and, later, received a degree in Business Administration from Austin Peay State University in 1987.

Out of school, Natalie's first job was as a part-time substitute teacher. She began working part time in the Register of Deeds' office in 1988 and became a full-time employee in 1989.

A register of deeds, simply put, is a custodian of real, legal property. Natalie worked for Ms. Judy Baker and learned the process of the job until 2006 when Ms. Baker retired. That year, Natalie decided to run for the position, knowing she was qualified after working with Ms. Baker for so long. After gaining support from the Carroll County community, Natalie became the first African American female Register of Deeds in the county.

Her mission as register of deeds is "to produce accurate recording, public records for all who use the Register's office." It is also "to provide excellent customer service and to give convenient access to these records utilizing technology in a cost efficient and customer friendly manner."

"Nearly every citizen invests in property at some point in their lives," she said. It is important to her that everyone has the ability to access their own records.

Since 1989 all records, from 1822—when the county first developed—to 2021, have been scanned and digitized. Any citizen can register their name

into www.MyLandAlert.com to check if someone has filed against them in the county. If something is recorded, any registered individual will be emailed if their name is involved.

Aside from her work as register of deeds, Natalie Porter is very community-focused. She is on the advisory boards for Baptist Memorial Hospital in Huntingdon, Carroll County Watershed Authority, Carl Perkins Exchange Club, and Dixie Carter Performing Arts and Enrichment. She is also a foundation board member for Jackson State Community College.

She graduated from the WestStar Leadership program in 2008 and Adult Leadership Carroll County in 1990. She is a Certified Public Administrator, a title given when an individual completes an 80 hour County Technological Assistance Program, takes courses to keep up with state laws, and takes sixteen-hour courses in

a county officials training program per year.

In 2012, Natalie Porter was chosen by the President of the Tennessee Registers Association as Outstanding Register of Deeds in Tennessee. In 2019, Registers of the State of Tennessee voted her as Outstanding Register of the Year. In 2020, through the Madison County BPW, Natalie Porter was honored as one of the 20 Most Influential Women in West Tennessee.

Through it all, Natalie's biggest inspiration has been her father. He led by example, she said, dedicating his life to, "Jesus, family, and then...yourself to your community." He taught her about integrity and always encouraged her to give back, reminding her that the life she leads might be the only Bible people read. Lastly, she quoted a saying of his: "Remember the words that you speak not be bitter but be sweet because you never know what you may eat."

Natalie lives in Atwood with her husband, Bernard Porter, and her ten-year-old daughter, Annalise. She is a member of Reedy Creek Missionary Baptist Church.



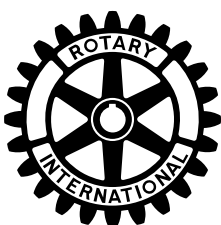
NATALIE PORTER

"My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together."

— Desmond Tutu

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Left, Wilma Pearson, Tennessee State Department Chaplain. Center, Wilma Pearson is pictured with Roots author Alex Haley when he visited during McKenzie's Bicentennial celebration in 1986. Right, One of the greatest events in Wilma Pearson's life is when she met California U.S. Congresswoman Maxine Waters.

WILMA W. PEARSON



Hometown Hero

BY LYNDESE SUMMERS lsummers@mckenziebanner.com

Mrs. Wilma Pearson, "born and reared" in Henry, Tenn., holds preaching and helping others close to her heart. Over time, Mrs. Pearson has received the Knoxville Department Bronze Woman of the Year, the Appreciation Award, the third runner-up Queen of Elks, the Outstanding Award as Concerned Citizen, and the Woodmen of the World Hometown Hero award, among several others.



In 2007, the late Bishop William H. Graves appointed Mrs. Pearson Presiding Elder of the Southeast District in Tennessee.

But before her many accolades, Mrs. Wilma Pearson was a 1964 graduate of Central High School in Paris, Tenn. After graduation, she was one of the first African Americans hired at shirt factory Salant & Salant in Paris. Shortly thereafter, she worked at McKenzie's Brown Shoe Company.

Mrs. Pearson joined the military during the Vietnam era, serving as part of the U.S. Women's Army Tour as a medical corps person. Tennessee Senator Howard Baker then recommended her to serve permanent duty at West Point, New York, the oldest continuously occupied military post in the country.

In 1970, Wilma Pearson found her true love preaching ministry in Asheboro, North Carolina, at the Church of God of Prophecy. Two years later, she moved back home to Tennessee to preach at the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. The church had just opened for women to pastor when she returned, and she was the first woman in the church to be admitted into full connection – a traveling pastor – and the second to be ordained.

Wilma Pearson began pastoring in 1976 at her first assigned church

Hope Hill in Sitka. She pastored at Hullum Temple in Rutherford, and finally Hudson's Chapel in Medina before the first presiding bishop at the First Episcopal District advised her to enroll in college.

In 1976, Mrs. Pearson moved to McKenzie to attend Bethel College, majoring in the broad area of social sciences. She joined the Black Student Union and served as President for three years before graduating college.

After college, Mrs. Pearson worked for a year as the assistant supervisor of the Carroll County Developmental Center, where she assisted special adults. She helped organize the Concerned Citizens of McKenzie, a large group set out to watch out for and contact McKenzie's residents, especially

senior citizens, making sure they were safe.

In February 1984, she spoke with the McKenzie Lions Club about the Concerned Citizens. Later in the year, she spoke to the McKenzie Christian Women's Fellowship about how to help young people. "Most of my speeches," Mrs. Pearson said, "were about unity and love."

Also in 1984, she was assigned as chaplain of the United Negro College Fund Carroll County, a position that she held for two or three years. The organization funds scholarships for black students.

Wilma Pearson moved to Milan in 1990, and she continued pastoring in Henry at Coles Chapel UMC from 1995-1998. In Milan, Mrs. Pearson was the first African

American woman to be elected onto the City Board of Aldermen, winning the election by only one vote her first term.

In 1998, Mrs. Pearson moved across the state to pastor at Mattie E. Coleman CME Church in Knoxville, where she stayed for eleven years.

During her time in Knoxville, she served as chaplain for the police department for ten years, and she was the state chaplain with IBPO Elks of the World. She was an East ZAC board chairman, where she worked to have Knoxville's East Side renovated and revitalized, a movement still in the works today. She worked on the Center for Neighborhood Development Board of Directors, the United Way Greater Knoxville Board of Directors, the Knoxville Housing Partnership, and the Community Action Council.

She, among attorneys, mayors, criminal court judges, and other influential men and women, graduated in Leadership Knoxville's Class of 2004.

She worked with the Knoxville school systems, substitute teaching and working as a music teacher and choir director at one point. She said some of her favorite times of her life were spent working with school systems.

In 2007, the late Bishop William H. Graves appointed Mrs. Pearson Presiding Elder of the Southeast District in Tennessee. Her title spanned over 25 churches, from McKenzie to Knoxville to Chattanooga.

Wilma Pearson was sent to pastor Johnson Temple Methodist Church in McKenzie in 2010. Since then, she helped with Meals on Wheels in McKenzie, and she received the "Hometown Hero" award by the Woodmen of the

World association. She retired from pastoring but "only on paper." She serves as a supply pastor at Johnson Temple.

Mrs. Pearson rejoined the American Legion, Huntingdon Post 47, and she was "immediately" appointed chaplain. As chaplain, Mrs. Pearson organizes memorial services, goes to different local district and state events, prays, consoles, and communicates with families of deceased veterans and active soldiers as needed.

Two years ago, she presented the Four Chaplain Service, a memorial service for chaplains who gave their lives for their comrades. In fall 2020, she was appointed Delegate to the State Department Chaplain, after the passing of State Department Chaplain Rogers.


Through it all, Mrs. Pearson said her greatest joy in life is serving the people of the community and preaching God's word. She treasures her experiences and the people she has met through them. Fondly known as "Big Mama" or "Mama," Mrs. Pearson says, "The Lord has blessed me to be the mother of several," a number of them being children she has met from throughout the state.

In her life, Wilma Pearson has seen it all. She fondly remembers meeting Roots author Alex Haley when his train stopped in McKenzie during the city's Bicentennial celebration. One of the greatest events in her life, other than making the longest shot at any regular game at the buzzer at Central High, was meeting California U.S. Congresswoman Maxine Waters and working with professional gospel singers.

Mrs. Pearson resides in McKenzie with her husband, Richard Pearson.

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I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.
— Philippians 4:13

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH



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We recognize and honor the contributions of Black men and women in our community. Thank you for your perseverance to make our world better and more inclusive.

JOSEPH G. BUTLER
CARROLL COUNTY MAYOR

Honoring African Americans of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

February is Black History Month, a great time to learn about the achievements of African American men and women who have influenced our nation's history, and continue to shape our country's future.



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OUR FAMILY FEEDING YOURS SINCE 1913



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We recognize the myriad contributions and achievements of African Americans past and present whose hard work, vision and talent have made our country and the world a better place.



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SAM THARPE

ROTARIAN, SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, CITY MAYOR, VISIONARY

BY LYNDSEY SUMMERS lsummers@mckenziebanner.com

Although Sam Tharpe was born in Paris, Tennessee, in 1955, he has a close connection to Carroll County. His mother, Nellie Price Tharpe, was born in McLeansville, and his great-grandfather, Levi Price, is the founder of Reedy Creek Missionary Baptist Church in McLeansville. Growing up, Sam's parents, the late William Lee and Nellie Price Tharpe, kept him in church and kept him close to the Lord.



He attended integrated schools at the Henry County Training Center, Robert E. Lee School—which integrated in the 1960s—Grove Junior High, and the consolidated Henry County High School. In high school, Sam Tharpe was an All-State basketball player. After graduating from Henry County in 1974, he attended Neosho County in Kansas on scholarship to play basketball, seeing if he was college basketball material. His coaches inspired him to keep playing, and he transferred to Union University in Jackson his sophomore year of college to continue the sport.

Originally a business major, Sam Tharpe was inspired by his high school coaches to double major in education and business administration. He learned that to pick up the second major, all he would need to do was attend summer school. This gave him the opportunity to student teach alongside his high school basketball coach Fred Gamlin. When he returned home from school, Sam would student teach at Henry County High School.

Because of his basketball scholarship, it did not cost Sam Tharpe "a penny" to graduate from Union University. He admires the university for giving him the opportunity, and he has kept in touch with all of his "extremely passionate" coaches.

He learned the definition of discipline while in college, and he has carried it with him every step of the way since. "Discipline," he said, "is knowing that if you do the right thing without having someone tell you to do it, you can do anything." This applies not only to basketball but to life in general.

When he graduated from Union, Sam decided to begin his career in business. He worked at Plumley Rubber Company for three years and Harley Carburetor for three years before receiving an offer at the Paris College of Applied Technology. They wanted him to work as an instructor, helping students receive their GEDs. With this position, he could go back to school and get a class for free.

After consulting with his wife, Gale, Sam decided to take the position and received an administrative degree from UTM after three years—free of charge. "It is something that you pray for when you're younger," he said, "and God answers prayers."

From there, he received an offer to be assistant principal and basketball coach at Lakewood, which would be in its second year of operation. Although there was a lot of work to be done and he was only able to coach one season of basketball, he enjoyed his five years at Lakewood.

He then transferred to Henry School as principal. As the first black principal at the school, there was a lot of pressure. He wanted

to be successful so others might follow suit. He stayed at the school for eight years before his next offer arose.

At this point, Mr. Tharpe had been an administrator in Henry County for thirteen years, and he was planning to retire. Then he received an offer to be principal at Henry County's new freshman campus. He turned down the offer at least six times before deciding, "Well, let's try it and see." He enjoyed every second of it, preparing the freshmen for high school as well as life.

He brought in athletic directors and college presidents to encourage students to join extracurriculars and identify who they want to be and what they want to do in life. "Once they can see where they want to go, they will apply themselves to achieve that," he said.

Through standardized testing, he and the teachers developed an agenda to best identify and treat students' strengths and weaknesses. Governor Haslam once visited the school to observe their methods to show to other schools. Mr. Tharpe worked at E.W. Grove for seven years before retiring.

During the summer of his first year after retirement, Sam Tharpe received a call from Dean Cynthia West at UT-Martin. He spoke to Dean West and Keith Kelso, Chairman of the Education Department, and he learned about the Call Me MISTER program. Call Me MISTER stands for "Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models" and is a pivot from the original program at Clemson University. The goal of the program is to increase the pool of available teachers from more diverse backgrounds (black, hispanic, Asian). It largely serves socially disadvantaged and at-risk communities.

UT-Martin is the only school in Tennessee implementing this program, and it needed someone to coordinate the program, recruit students, and offer financial stability.

Of the thirteen men enrolled in the program, they all receive financial assistance through tuition, housing, and loan forgiveness, a new computer, and faculty mentorship assistance with job placement. To qualify, they must major in Elementary, Early Childhood Education, or K-12 Certification areas.

After learning of the program, Sam Tharpe could not turn it down. He "can count on one hand" the amount of minority teachers he hired or encountered in his twenty years in the Henry County School System. With his wife, he decided to work part-time as a co-coordinator of the program. Austin Farrow is his fellow co-coordinator, and he keeps track of grades and schedules and keeps everything consistent.

Sam Tharpe resides with Gale, his wife of 43 years, who also plans to retire from the Social Security office this year. He has been on the Paris City Council for 31 years, serving as mayor for six years and vice mayor for 17 years.

He has worked as a chairman with the Paris Housing Board, the Tennessee Municipal League, the Paris-Henry County NAACP, and Paris Rotary, among others.

On the value of being a teacher, he said, "All teachers are responsible for the future of this country! Instilling passion, helping them grow—that is a value that is critical for this country...One thing we need to understand: It's about love and identifying with everyone. Jesus is love, and he is a great teacher. The educational values we instill with our students will be with them for the rest of their lives. We can't take that for granted."

He wants to give credit to his coaches who have guided and inspired him along the way: Fred Gamlin and Steve Steele from Henry County High School Basketball, Jim Swope from Union University Basketball, and Dr. David Blackstock from Union University Athletic Department.

The advocates and mentors of the Call Me MISTER program include Austin Ferrell Co/Coordinator, Samuel Tharpe Co/Coordinator, Dean Cynthia West, Dr. Clinton Smith, Dr. Mark McCloud, Anthony Prewitt, Nassar Nassar, Kameron Echols, Dr. Danny Wayne Prewitt, Ben Jones, Wallace Brown, William C. Milan Jr., Major Wallace Brown, Robert Nunley, Kyle Spurgeon, Brandon Nassar, and Shelia Scott.

JIMMIE SUE STATEN

COMMUNITY LEADER, ACTIVIST, VOLUNTEER

BY LYNDSEY SUMMERS lsummers@mckenziebanner.com

Jimmie Sue Staten has a distinct memory of being around six years old, tagging along with her grandfather when he would go vote. She remembers she would always look up at him and ask, "When am I going to be able to pull that curtain?"

Growing up, her grandfather, R.B. Morgan, would always emphasize the importance of voting, telling her, "People fought real hard to give you the privilege [to vote]." Little did he know, when the time came around, she would cast her first vote before she even had a driver's license.

Early in her life, Ms. Staten was raised in Clarksburg, Tennessee, by parents James Staten and Susie (Morgan) Marshall. She attended junior high in Huntingdon until her dad accepted a new job offer in 1966. That year, right after her older sister, Priscilla, graduated from Webb High School's last graduating class before integration, the Statens moved to Nashville.

Jimmie Sue was in seventh grade when she moved. She finished junior high at East Junior High, and she attended East High School in Nashville through her sophomore year. When her parents divorced in the late 1960s, she decided it was time to move back home, hoping her mother would follow her. She moved in with her grandparents, R.M. and Ronie Morgan, in Huntingdon, where she attended her junior and senior year of high school. She graduated from Huntingdon High School in 1971.

Bethel College was Ms. Staten's third choice of university. However, she is a "Bethel alumni and proud of it," even winning Bethel University's Distinguished Service Award in 2017 for all of the time she has dedicated to volunteering and serving the university. She attended the school on a vocal music scholarship in fall of 1971. After finding nodules on her vocal chords, Jimmie Sue needed to find a new focus. In 1977, she graduated with a degree in Business Administration. She credits her college success to several professors, one being the late Coach Wilcox, for pushing her through her courses and encouraging her to graduate.

In 1971 and 1972, Ms. Staten became Bethel College's first black cheerleader. She was in the Alpha Phi Sigma sorority, which she and other alumni are in the process of reorganizing. Her goal this year is to bring the sorority back to Bethel University's campus.

After graduating, she spent a short time substitute teaching and working at Northwest Economic Development in Huntingdon. She moved back to Nashville in the late 1970s,



where her sister had lined her up a part-time position working for the State of Tennessee. After working for the state, she held a management position at one of Nashville's two unpainted furniture stores. Her first permanent job position was as a sales representative for Leggs Panty Hose, where she worked for up to six years.

Jimmie Sue Staten lived in Nashville for almost eight years, the first of which living with her sister, her brother-in-law, and her nephew. She left Nashville to return home, where she moved back in with her grandparents.

Back in West Tennessee, Jimmie Sue worked at several locations. She returned to Northwest Economic Development, moved to the Carroll County Development Center, and had a great experience working at Carroll Academy's day treatment when it first opened. She worked as a child support specialist for twenty years before retiring at the age of 62 to care for her mother.

Ms. Staten served as a deacon at the Second Cumberland Presbyterian Church of Huntingdon, a small church that has since dissolved. After the church dissolved, she began attending Johnson Temple with her mother, "whose prayers could make her feel better about anything." She serves as a chairman on the Foster Care Review Board, and she is a past President of the Carroll County Democratic Party. She serves as President of Carroll County Democratic Women and as a chairman of the Bethel Alumni Advisory Board.

Through it all, however, Ms. Staten's greatest dedication has been in politics. While attending Bethel College, she joined the Democratic Club, led by Dr. Potts. She remembers attending a Democratic Convention in Nashville's Municipal Auditorium, and it pushed her to love politics even more than she already did.

Ms. Staten returned to Nashville during Apartheid, a system of institutionalized racial segregation

in South Africa and South West Africa that existed into the early 1990s. She remembers marching from the Capital to Centennial Park in a march organized by American comedian and civil rights activist Dick Gregory. What she cherished most about Nashville was being around people who were passionate about making political stances.

Ms. Staten joined the Democratic Club while living in Nashville, but she really became a member when she moved back to West Tennessee. She is a past President of Democratic Women of the State of Tennessee, where she served a two-year term. During her term, she attended the National Democratic Women Conventions in Louisville and Arkansas.

She attributes her grandfather, R.B. Morgan, as her biggest influence. Having the biggest heart, he always had hope in people and treated them the way he wanted to be treated. He was a minister, and he helped her find her way back to church when she was younger. Without him and his trips to the polls, Ms. Staten might not have found her love for voting.

Ms. Jimmie Sue Staten resides in Huntingdon, Tennessee, in her grandparents' old house that was passed down to her when her mother passed away in August 2020. She works part-time at her "second home," Bill's Flowers and Gifts in Huntingdon.

In January, she organized a last-minute "MLK on the Square" event in Huntingdon to honor Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. The event drew at least twenty attendees. "It was good just to be out there to celebrate," said Staten. Concluding the interview, Ms. Staten left a message for the young and the unregistered people in the community: "If we do not exercise our right to vote, it will be taken away." One of the many lessons she learned from her grandfather was to be a part of, not apart from, history, and she hopes to spread that mentality to the next generation.

"Grandparents can do more for us than anyone else in the world; they sprinkle stardust in our eyes."
— Alex Haley, author of *Roots*

FAMOUS QUOTES

"In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." — Booker T. Washington

"A good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination." — Nelson Mandela

"Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us." — Wilma Rudolph

"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." — Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." — Maya Angelou

"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair." — Shirley Chisholm

"Stretch your mind and fly." — Whitney M. Young Jr

"There are still many causes worth sacrificing for; so much history yet to be made." — Michelle Obama

"Life has two rules: number 1, never quit! Number 2, always remember rule number one." — Duke Ellington

"The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any." — Alice Walker

"If everything was perfect, you would never learn and you would never grow." — Beyonce Knowles

"I had no idea that history was being made. I was just tired of giving up." — Rosa Parks

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RICHARD ADKISSON

FIRST TDOT ENGINEER, CITY COUNCILMAN, PREACHER

BY LYNDESEY SUMMERS lsummers@mckenziebanner.com

Richard Adkisson, the son of Louella Adkisson and Roger Bigham, was born and raised in Trezevant, Tennessee. Graduating as valedictorian from Trezevant High School in 1975, Adkisson knew he wanted to pursue a career involving mathematics. After consulting with his advisor, he set his eyes on civil engineering and never looked back.

Fall of 1975, Richard began his freshman year at Tennessee State University in Nashville. While there, he co-oped with the Federal Highway Administration off-and-on for three years. In this position, he worked out of an office in Cherokee, Alabama, conducted survey work, inspected bridges, and laid out roadway. Ultimately, he worked on the Natchez Trace Parkway.

In December of 1984, Richard Adkisson graduated from Tennessee State University, and in May of 1985, he began his first job with the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT). TDOT is made up of two divisions—maintenance and engineering.

Richard Adkisson was the first black person to ever be hired into TDOT's engineering division. He started out by surveying work, laying out jobs, inspecting roads, and laying out asphalt.

Ten years later, Mr. Adkisson made TDOT history once again when he was the first black person promoted as supervisor of an engineering office, supervising McKenzie's office.

He was promoted in 1999, moving to work at the Jackson Regional Office as the Assistant Regional Director of Engineering. Under this position, all office supervisors within the region reported to him.

In 2011 or 2012, the Regional Engineer passed away, and Richard Adkisson was placed into his position as an intern. In 2013, he became the Regional Engineer over all twenty-one counties in Region Four, encompassing the majority of West Tennessee.

Richard Adkisson has made history with every promotion he has received. He was the first black person to be promoted to all of his positions regionally, but he has also been told that he was the first black person in the state to ever

be promoted to these positions.

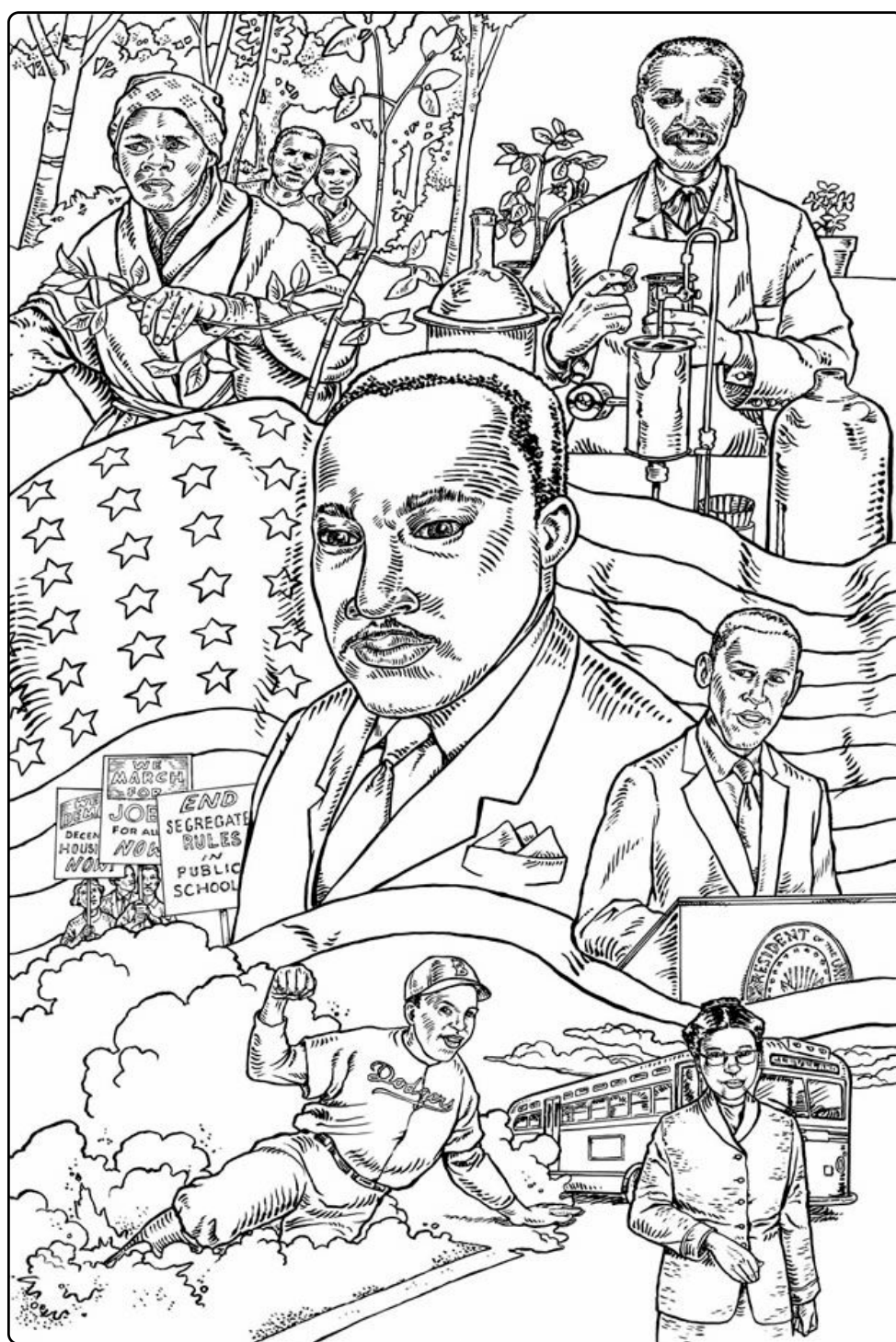
Eventually, there was a realignment. Instead of one region containing twenty-one counties, the region split into three districts. Richard Adkisson became the District Manager of District 47 in McKenzie, where he oversaw eight of the original twenty-one counties. He still works in this position today.

Aside from working with TDOT, Richard Adkisson has been preaching since 1997. He began as an assistant and youth pastor at Mt. Ararat Baptist Church in Trezevant. For the past ten years, Mr. Adkisson has been pastoring at the Progressive Baptist Church in Paris.

Beginning as a councilman in Trezevant with goals to present more programs for the city's youth, Richard Adkisson has been involved with city council for several years. He has since moved to Milan with his wife and, with the same goals in mind, now serves as an Alderman for Milan City Council. In the past, he served four years as vice mayor and six years as treasurer for Milan City Council.

Color A Masterpiece

Artist Unknown



"America is a nation that is a constant work in progress. That's why we are exceptional. We don't stop. There's a gap — there always will be — between who we are and the "perfect union," that ideal that we see. But what makes us exceptional, what makes us Americans is that we fight wars and pass laws, and we march, and we organize unions, and we stage protests, and that gap gets smaller over time. And it's that effort to form a "more perfect union" that marks us as a people."

— President Barack Obama, February 2016

As we celebrate Black History Month

We celebrate the historic and ongoing contributions of African Americans in every realm of our nation's growth and success, from business and politics to art, music, education and beyond. Please join us in saluting the achievements of the black leaders and role models who have made history, and continue to cultivate progress, awareness and a bright future for all.

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Celebrating Black History Month

We take time to honor the pioneers who fought for freedom and civil rights, so that future generations of African Americans could become the leaders we see today. We remember their struggle and sacrifice, and we honor their achievements.



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