



A Tribute to WOMEN'S HISTORY

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Women Make It Happen

Did you know 100% of the people that have ever lived came from a woman? That in itself is quite an accomplishment, however women change the world every day in many ways. Whether by seeing a problem and inventing a solution; fighting for equal rights; or raising strong children, women affect every aspect of life.

Women's history is happening in real time. Women you know are making a difference right here in the local area. As the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said, "Women belong in all places where decisions are being made."

So with this special edition we recognize the sacrifices and dedication of local women.

Thank you to the ladies that shared their stories and the sponsors that supported this edition, both are vital to making a special edition worth reading and keeping. Thank you for your support.

Hometown Health Clinic

Women Leading the Way in Patient-Centered Care

BY BRAD SAM
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Hometown Health Clinic, previously McKenzie Medical Center, serves patients at seven locations across northwest Tennessee.

The Banner spoke with six women in a variety of roles in the company and got their unique perspectives on being a woman in today's society.

Tammy Etheridge, Chief Operating Officer

Tammy Etheridge is a Greenfield native now residing in Gleason.

After high school, she worked at McKenzie's hospital, first in the nursery, then as a phone operator, then as an admissions clerk.

In 1988, she was recruited by Dr. Volker Winkler to work for McKenzie Medical Center, primarily at his clinic in Gleason (one day a week in McKenzie). Etheridge worked in management in Gleason for 28 years and managed satellite locations as the practice grew.

In 2016, she was promoted to assistant practice manager at the main office in McKenzie. For over five years, she has served as chief operating officer.

Etheridge told The Banner, "Through my career, there have been a lot of times when I was the only woman in the room. I've never felt uncomfortable with that. Women represent a large sector of the working population, so having a voice in those rooms when decisions are being made is important."

She noted, "Women, at times, may bring a level of empathy and communicativeness to the equation."

Etheridge said, "If there were any obstacles I faced were because I'm a woman, I was too focused on the obstacle and problem-solving to focus on whether it was because I was a woman."

She offered this advice to younger generations of women. "The best advice I give to anyone is they need to pray about their decisions. They need to follow their heart and be true to themselves. Stay true to your values. And one of the hardest things for a lot of people, including myself, is to embrace change. Change doesn't always mean that it's going to be bad. Embrace change with courage, because sometimes that can open doors that you don't see."

A common thread among comments from the six Hometown Health associates interviewed was a sense of cooperation and support, a point of great pride for the COO.

"Teamwork is what makes everything happen. I could not do my job without my team. I depend on them and lean on them. Honestly, I know I'm prejudiced, but I have the best team ever. They truly care about each other, and they care about our patients. That's the folks that you want to surround yourself with to be successful and to be a part of the community like we want to be."



Hometown Health Clinic associates (L to R): Holly Arnold, PA-C; Candi Lowe, administration; Amy Smith, PA-C; Angela Hacker, Quality and Revenue Cycle Director; Ellen Pruitt, marketing director; and Tammy Etheridge, COO. Photo by Brad Sam/The Banner

"We want our patients and each other to know that we're here for them. We meet people where they're at, our patients and each other. We take care of the whole person here. That's how we want the community to perceive us. That we're here for them. It takes teamwork to accomplish all the goals that we have and offer all of the services that we do and keep everything running day to day. I love my team and I could not do it without them."

According to Etheridge, those sentiments go all the way to the top. "We have the best owners ever. We have support from Dr. [Bryan] Merrick and Dr. [Terry] Colotta that is amazing. They make our jobs easy just because of who they are. And they are a huge asset to the community as well."

She concluded, "I tell my staff, 'We can't forget why we're here.' That's our patients. They keep us here. We want to be here, so we need to take the best care of them that we possibly can. And I tell them, 'Treat them like that's your granny.' And I truly believe our staff does. We're not perfect, but we try to be. We try to do our very best every day and learn from our mistakes to do better."

Ellen Pruitt, Marketing Director

Ellen Pruitt is a Trenton native now residing in McKenzie.

She earned a human services degree at Bethel University in 2011 and then worked there in admissions.

Four years ago, she was hired by a Nashville company operating at Hometown Health, and two years ago, she joined the clinic as marketing director.

She describes her role as "getting out in the community, doing outreach, blasting the name Hometown anywhere and everywhere I can." She also does in-house work such as graphic design, community events and scheduling activities for associates. "To keep the fun alive, we do dress up days, potlucks, different things to get everyone involved."

Pruitt described the benefits of being part of a female-led team. "Both my previous and current bosses are women. Having

a direct line of contact that is a female has helped me run through barriers and push them down if there were any. Women tend to be more empathetic, more nurturing and loving, but also more detail-oriented. And it's a different generation. I think women are listened to a little more than they may have been in the past."

She offered this advice to younger generations of women. "I remember being little and being asked what I wanted to be when I grew up. The world tells you you have to know what you're going to do coming into high school, but you don't have to make up your mind, you don't have to know at this time. Things change, you grow. Things that matter become more prevalent to you. As you change and get older, you can change your career at any point that you feel like God's leading you to change, when it's right and best for you and your family. Never let somebody stand in the way of what you want to do or what you know God has laid out for you."

Angela Hacker, Quality and Revenue Cycle Director

Born in Ohio, Angela Hacker moved to Tennessee in 1975 and graduated high school in McKenzie, where she resides now.

She worked in broadcasting as on-air talent for WHDM and for several stations in Jackson.

After her children graduated high school, Hacker attended TCAT in Paris to become an LPN. She began her nursing career in labor and delivery in Paris before joining McKenzie Medical Center as a float nurse.

Hacker rose through the ranks as an assistant to the nursing manager, nursing director and quality director. She's been with MMC/Hometown for over 17 years, and has held her current titles for almost two years.

In these roles, she works with the billing and coding team to resolve issues and with the management team on workflow and improving patient care.

Hacker told The Banner of some negative experiences from early in her first

career. "When I started in broadcasting I was quite young, and I did face some sexual harassment and salary discrepancies. I had a primetime show at a station and my male counterpart was making considerably more than me. I had to confront management with that and insist on equal pay for equal work, and they did it, so that was a win."

However, she had nothing but praise for three bosses she has had at the clinic.

She described current COO Etheridge as "a very powerful influence and just a very supportive person. She has definitely motivated me and changed how I view what a COO can be."

She also said, "Jill Mayo was the nursing director when I came on board here. She was the nicest, kindest, most intelligent person that I worked with. She really helped me kind of find my feet in management."

"And Patricia Turner was the COO. She was quite kind, and I just really felt like I found a home and a place where they wanted to foster and support women and to put them in the right position."

Hacker advised younger women, "We live in a time where everyone wants to be seen and wants to be heard, but they also want to conform, so you have this generation that wants to be like everyone else. My advice would be, you have a voice, use it wisely. Listen to others and don't surround yourself with people who are only going to agree with you. It's good to consider other people's opinions and then make your decision. When you work with people who respectfully challenge you and have a different perspective, it makes you better as a leader and better as a person."

Candi Lowe, Administration

A lifelong McKenzie native, Candi Lowe worked for Walmart in McKenzie and in Huntingdon before spending six years at McKenzie Banking Company.

She has worked for MMC/Hometown for almost 18 years, beginning at the New Age specialty clinic and the OB department. She did some on-the-job training

for nurses, but when her bosses learned about her banking background, she joined the administration team.

Lowe handles payroll, batches, invoices and accounts payable and serves as the go-between for the company's accountants.

Lowe is also a breast cancer survivor. She told The Banner, "As a working woman, you just have to try to stay as positive as you can and fight."

She said of COO Etheridge, "She helps us through everything. She has not only our back, but everyone here. We're a family here, and that's been the best thing."

Lowe suggested to younger women, "Follow your dreams, and don't ever think you can't do something. If it's school, go. You can go at your own pace. Even in college, people think you have to rush rush. My daughter is in college now, and we tell her to break things down. If it's what you truly want to do, just keep pushing. God could change your plan, but never give up."

Amy Smith, PA-C

Amy Smith is a native of Booneville, Mississippi, who now resides in McKenzie.

She attended Ole Miss for health information management and worked in that capacity for five years.

She then completed the Physician Assistant program at Bethel College in 2007. She began her PA career at a GI clinic in Memphis and then worked in McKenzie in pain management.

Smith joined MMC in December 2015.

She said one challenge in a male-dominated field is networking and building relationships. "You have to be confident and build strong communication in order to get your foot in the door."

She stressed the importance of diversity. "Bringing different perspectives to new things in health care, like drug development, healthcare policies, bridging gaps in healthcare disparities, serving underserved communities. And especially women's health, we bring better representation to the table. We can improve patient care, advocate for patient-centered

care and address biases.

She offered this advice to younger generations of women, "Find your passion, know what excites you. Find a mentor, someone that you can look up to. Be confident in your ability and know what you're worth. Don't be afraid to ask and to negotiate for what you want. Find a way to balance work and life. And don't limit yourself, there's so much out there."

Holly Arnold, PA-C

Holly Arnold is a Tullahoma native now residing in McKenzie.

She graduated from Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Alabama, with a double major in Biology and Spanish.

Arnold completed the PA program at Bethel College in 2008 and immediately joined McKenzie Medical.

She cites her mother as a strong influence. "She was very much a part of pushing me to do more and be better and achieve goals that she didn't achieve in her lifetime. She stressed keeping commitments and encouraged me to not quit. If I started a sport, I had to finish the season. If I did poorly on a test, I studied harder to make sure the next one didn't happen that way."

"She encouraged me to continue playing soccer in college. I wanted to just focus on academics, but she said I was shy and it would be a good way to meet people. It was wonderful, I loved it, and it was very helpful."

"When it comes to budgeting, she's the reason I balance my checkbook to the penny."

She's encouraging, and taught me not to sell myself short."

Arnold said about women in leadership, "Having a different perspective is important. It's good to have all different opinions, races, genders, etc., involved because everybody is so different. Everybody thinks differently. If all the people making decisions are like-minded, you're going to miss out on lots of opportunities and lots of room for growth and things you don't think of."

She gave an example. "When the addition to the clinic was being built, me and another nurse practitioner were in the pediatric department. We were so excited to move into a bigger area. One of the owners showed us the blueprints. The first thing we noticed was that the feet of the exam beds faced the door. We did quite a few women's exams, so we saw that we needed to change the orientation. It's important to have women involved, because if it's something you've never been through, you might not think of certain things."

She suggested to younger women, "Don't be afraid to set the mark high. Reach for whatever you want to reach for. Anybody can achieve anything they want to, but they have to be willing to put in the work and the dedication it takes to get there. You shouldn't expect a handout. You've got to work to get what you want, but don't be afraid to."

CARROLL COUNTY

REGISTER OF DEEDS

Preserving History, Serving the Community

BY JOEL LANCASTER
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HUNTINGDON — The Carroll County Register of Deeds Office has served as the official keeper of property records, legal documents, and historical archives for generations. Now, it also holds the distinction of being the county’s first all-female department, marking a significant milestone in local government.

The office is led by Register of Deeds Natalie Porter, alongside 1st Deputy Denalda Hawks of Huntingdon and 2nd Deputy Natasha Cawthon of Clarksburg. Together, they are responsible for maintaining records that date back to 1822, ensuring the accuracy, accessibility, and preservation of property transfers, mortgages, powers of attorney, and legal filings that form the backbone of real estate transactions and historical records in Carroll County.

“We are the custodians of legal documents that pertain to real estate,” Porter said. “That includes deeds, mortgages, powers of attorney, and property transfers. Our role is to ensure these records are accurate, accessible, and well-preserved for future generations.”

For much of its history, the Register of Deeds Office was led by men, including W.A. Barber and Joe Gately in the 1950s. In 1964, Gloria Giles was elected as the first woman to hold the position, marking a shift toward female leadership in the office.

Giles remained in office until she became ill, at which point Judy Baker, who had been working in

the office, was appointed by the Carroll County Commission. Baker later ran for election and won, serving until her retirement in 2006. Porter, who worked under Baker, credits her with shaping the office and mentoring her during her early years in the department.

“She encouraged me to run for the position when she was getting ready to retire,” Porter said. “She was a blessing and taught me the importance of accuracy, service, and maintaining the integrity of public records.”

The Register of Deeds Office houses centuries of legal and historical records, including military land grants, property transfers, and bills of sale dating back to the early 1800s. These records provide valuable resources for residents researching family history and tracing property ownership through generations.

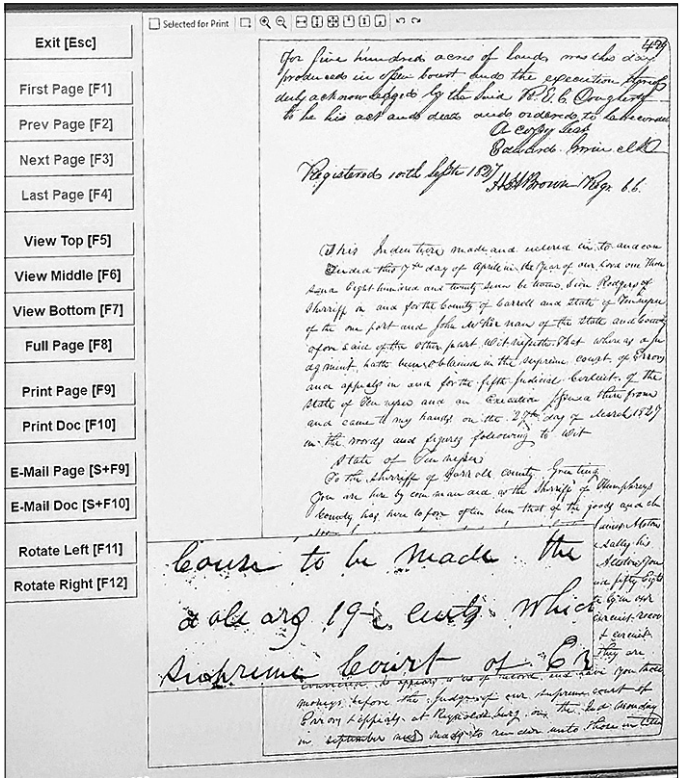
“People come in all the time researching their family history,” Porter said. “We can trace land ownership back generations. It’s incredible to see how land has changed hands over time and to help people connect with their past.”

While handwritten records and bound books were once the primary method of documentation, the office has gradually transitioned to digital record-keeping. Records from 1957 forward have been digitized, with ongoing efforts to scan older documents.

“Many of these books are fragile, so we handle them carefully,” Porter said. “We try to balance preservation with accessibility. Our goal is to ensure that even the oldest records remain



Left, Handwritten records and bound books were once the primary method of documentation. Right, The office gradually transitioned to digital record-keeping. Records from 1957 forward have been digitized, with ongoing efforts to scan older documents.



available to the public without risking damage to the originals.”

Beyond maintaining records, the Register of Deeds Office serves as a critical resource for the community. The team assists residents with understanding property records, accessing legal documents, and ensuring public records remain organized and accurate.

“Our mission is to provide accurate recording of public records for all who use the office,” she said. “It is our goal to provide first-rate customer service and convenient access to the records utilizing the latest technology in an effective, cost-efficient, and customer-friendly manner.”

As part of its mission to safeguard public records, the Register of Deeds Office has implemented My Land Alert, a service that notifies residents when a document is recorded in their name.

“It won’t stop a document from being filed, but it will alert you,” Porter said. “That way, if something is recorded fraudulently, you can address it quickly.”

Although fraudulent filings are rare in Carroll County, similar cases have been reported in other parts of Tennessee, making early detection crucial.

“There have been cases where people have had their property falsely transferred or liens placed against them without their knowledge,” Porter said. “This service gives people an early warning so they can take legal action if necessary.”

Despite the challenges that come with the job, Porter and her team remain dedicated to their work, seeing it as both a responsibility and a privilege to serve the residents of Carroll County.

“I truly enjoy coming to work each day,” Porter said.

“This office isn’t just about paperwork—it’s about protecting records, helping people, and preserving the history of Carroll County.”

The Register of Deeds Office also plays a key role in responding to legal and real estate disputes, often assisting residents facing complex situations. Porter recalled one instance in which a woman, overwhelmed by a family estate dispute, came in deeply distressed.

“She was really upset,” Porter said. “She came back the next day and apologized. Sometimes, people just need someone to listen. We try to provide the guidance and resources they need to understand their options.”

Porter also reflects on the values that guide her leadership and approach to public service, drawing inspiration from her parents.

“They always said, ‘God

first, family second, community third,’” she said. “They taught us that the life you lead may be the only Bible someone reads, so your actions should match your words.”

Porter and her team continue their mission to uphold the integrity of Carroll County’s records, ensuring history remains preserved and accessible for generations to come. Whether through digitization efforts, fraud prevention initiatives, or daily interactions with the public, the Register of Deeds Office remains a cornerstone of the county’s legal and historical foundation.

“It is great to serve in this role,” Porter said. “I appreciate the ability to do so, and I am grateful for the trust the people of Carroll County have placed in us.”

RITA JONES

Assessor of Property, Singer

BY JOEL LANCASTER
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HUNTINGDON — For more than two decades, Rita Jones has served Carroll County as a dedicated public official in the Assessor of Property office. From mapping parcels to overseeing property assessments, her career has been marked by precision, adaptability, and a commitment to the community. Now, as she nears retirement in 2026,

Jones reflects on her years of service and the many changes she has witnessed in her field.

Jones began her tenure in the Assessor of Property office in 1999, initially working as a mapper and clerk. In 2011, following the passing of then-Assessor Johnny Bradford, she was appointed to the role before being elected in 2012. She has remained the county’s Assessor of Property ever since, overseeing real estate assessments, maintaining property records, and ensuring compliance with

state regulations.

“The job changes every year,” Jones said. “It’s the same work, but policies, regulations, and circumstances shift constantly. You have to stay on top of it.”

One of the most significant projects during her tenure was the development of the Thousand Acre Lake area. “They bought all that land out there, and we had to track what was being dug out for the lake,” she recalled. “That was a unique and memorable project.”

Jones takes great pride in the accuracy and transpar-

ency of her office, noting that she has received clean audits every year since assuming the assessor role. “That’s something I’m really proud of,” she said. “It’s important that the public trusts our work and that everything is handled properly.”

Her dedication has not gone unnoticed. Jones was honored as Assessor of the Year in 2021.

A native of Carroll County, Jones grew up between McLemoresville and Trezevant. She attended McLemoresville Elementary and later graduated from Trezevant High School before taking courses at both the University of Tennessee and Jackson State.

Beyond her work in public service, Jones has another passion: gospel music. A singer for more than 50 years, she has traveled

throughout West Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas, performing with multiple groups. In the 1970s and early 1980s, she was a member of the Young Harvesters, a gospel group that included Richard Welch, the former basketball coach at Trezevant High School. Later, she sang with Gospel Edition, a group that even had the opportunity to perform at the Grand Ole Opry.

“We traveled quite a bit back then,” Jones said. “It was an incredible experience.” While she doesn’t perform as often today, she still sings occasionally, though her growing number of grandchildren keeps her plenty busy.

In addition to her work and music, Jones is a devoted mother and grandmother. Her son, Dusty Jones, has followed a path of public service, working

as a paramedic and nurse. Family remains at the center of her life, and she cherishes the time spent with her loved ones.

As she prepares to retire in 2026, Jones is looking forward to the next chapter of her life, but she remains deeply grateful for the opportunity to have served her community. “It’s been an honor,” she said. “I’ve met so many great people over the years, traveling all over the county, attending barbecues, fish fries—you name it. It’s been a wonderful experience.”

Though her time as Assessor of Property will soon come to a close, her legacy of service and commitment to Carroll County will remain, both in the records she has helped maintain and in the voices of those who have heard her sing.

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CHRISTIE CHAPPELL

Leadership in Finance, Family

BY JOEL LANCASTER
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MCKENZIE — Balancing a high-powered corporate career with a strong commitment to family is no small feat, yet Christie Chappell has managed both with determination and success. As Vice President of Finance for Electrification and Business Unit Controller for the Commercial Vehicle Segment of Dana Incorporated, she oversees financial operations across 38 global plants and technical centers, representing \$2.5 billion in annual revenue.

Chappell, a McKenzie native and graduate of McKenzie High School and Bethel University, attributes much of her success to the strong educational foundation she received in her hometown. “The small schools I attended really shaped who I am and ultimately benefited me professionally,” she said. While her background in math and accounting was essential for her career, she also credits exceptional English and literature teachers for equipping her with the communication skills necessary to thrive in leadership roles. “I’m not always the smartest person in the boardroom, but I can string a sentence together, present data in a



way that is understandable, and am comfortable speaking up when I see a problem or have a concern.”

Chappell’s career at Dana Incorporated spans 27 years, during which she has held various roles in finance and strategic planning. Her current responsibilities include financial reporting, budgeting, compliance with both domestic and international accounting regulations, and managing Dana’s global finance team. She also serves as a managing director for TM4, the company’s electrification joint venture. In an industry historically

dominated by men, she has navigated the challenges of inclusion and equality while building a successful career.

While she has achieved remarkable professional success, Chappell considers her greatest accomplishment to be raising her four children alongside her husband of 33 years, Brad Chappell. “Being able to manage a very demanding career while raising four wonderful children is more meaningful to me than any award or professional accomplishment,” she said. Their children, Nick, Jake, Allie, and Drew, have pursued careers in education, sales, and science, and she takes great pride in their achievements. She also cherishes time spent with her daughters-in-law, Brittney and Lindsey, and her three granddaughters, Madilyn, Landry, and Lydia.

Chappell describes her family as close-knit, with strong influences from both her parents, Mike and Laura Bateman, and her in-laws, Richard and Peggy Chappell. Her father, in particular, always encouraged her to think critically and express herself. “My dad told me once that I should have been a lawyer because I sure do like to argue,” she recalled with a laugh. Her family shares a love for travel, with the beach and the Rocky Mountains among their favorite destinations.

Reflecting on Women’s History Month, Chappell acknowledges the importance of recognizing the achievements of women but ultimately wants to be seen as part of the broader professional landscape. “I certainly can see the benefit of highlighting women and their successes, but ultimately I don’t want to be part of only women’s professional groups and women’s history – I want to be part of THE group, THE history.” She remains hopeful that future generations of women, including her daughters

and granddaughters, will live in a world where they are valued and respected in all industries. She also believes in supporting fellow women in their careers, citing one of her favorite quotes: “Be the woman who fixes another woman’s crown without telling the world it was crooked.”

Beyond her corporate career, Chappell’s experiences traveling the world have given her a broader perspective on people and cultures. She has visited Canada, Germany, France, Brazil, and China, working with diverse teams and gaining insight into different ways of life. “Most people are good, regardless of gender, race, culture, or religion, and are all just trying to make their way through life,” she said. Exposing her children to these experiences has been one of the most rewarding aspects of her career.

As the automotive industry undergoes rapid transformation, Chappell sees electrification as more than just

an inevitable shift—it’s an opportunity for innovation and progress. “The transition to electrification isn’t just about new technology; it’s about redefining how we approach transportation and sustainability,” she said. She remains engaged in advancing the financial strategies that will support these developments, ensuring that businesses and consumers alike can adapt to the changing landscape.

Chappell’s story is one of perseverance, leadership, and dedication to both career and family. She has broken barriers in the automotive finance industry while maintaining strong roots in her community. As she continues to lead in the corporate world, she also remains committed to the values of hard work, education, and family that have shaped her journey. Whether in the boardroom or at home, her influence is evident in the lives she has touched and the example she sets for future generations.

Peg Hamlett

Ensuring Fair, Impartial Elections in Carroll County

BY JOEL LANCASTER
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For Peg Hamlett, serving as the Certified Administrator of Elections (AOE) for Carroll County is about more than managing ballots—it’s about upholding the integrity of the democratic process. As the chief administrative officer of the County Election Commission, she oversees elections at the local, state, and federal levels, ensuring that every vote is counted accurately and fairly.

With a background in law and election governance, Hamlett’s responsibilities extend beyond Election Day. She maintains voter registration records, supervises election officials, and ensures compliance with Tennessee election laws. From budgeting and campaign finance disclosures to biennial list maintenance verifying voter eligibility, her role is critical in keeping the electoral process transparent and secure.


When asked about her proudest accomplishments, Hamlett keeps it simple: conducting fair and impartial elections and making sure deployed military personnel can exercise their

right to vote. For her, the job itself is the reward, and she views the salary as recognition for doing what needs to be done.

A Memphis native, Hamlett pursued academics at UT Martin, UT Knoxville, and Texas A&M University. Her experiences extended beyond Tennessee, having lived and worked professionally in Morocco, Mexico, Honduras, and East Africa, gaining a global perspective that informs her work.

For Women’s History Month, Hamlett reflects on the suffrage movement, citing Anne Dallas Dudley and other pioneers who fought for women’s right to vote. She also acknowledges Pat Head Summitt, whose contributions to women’s athletics helped strengthen high school and university sports programs across Tennessee. Above all, Hamlett says what matters most to her is “knowing exactly who I am in Christ.”

As Carroll County’s elections administrator, she plays a vital role in ensuring democracy functions at the local level, carrying on the legacy of women who have shaped history by safeguarding the right to vote.



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CARROLL COUNTY MAYOR

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Left, Pam Joyner reads to students at West Carroll Primary School earlier this month. Photo courtesy WCSSD Above, Trezevant Vice-Mayor Pam Joyner with Mayor Bobby Blaylock and fellow aldermen. File photo Below, Pam (Hall) Joyner early in her teaching career. Photo courtesy Pam Joyner

Pam Joyner

From Lifelong Educator to Vice-Mayor

BY BRAD SAM
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Pam Joyner is a McMoresville native who dedicated her life to education and has now answered a second calling in public service as the vice-mayor of Trezevant. Pam’s mother, Luella Hall, was a maid, and her father, David Hall, worked at the Milan Arsenal and was a lifelong farmer. She told The Banner, “I grew up on a big farm in McMoresville. We had cows, pigs, rabbits, chickens and we grew mostly cotton.” Pam attended MTA and McMoresville Elementary and graduated from Trezevant High School in 1974. She was a four-year basketball player and a member of the state championship team her senior year. She earned her degree in Distributive English from Austin Peay and her Masters in Education from Bethel College. She began her teaching career at Huntingdon High School in 1979 before moving to West Carroll Middle School in 1983. She taught primarily eighth grade up until her retirement from West Carroll Junior Senior High School in 2016. She was called back to teach part of the following year and then continued as a substitute until 2019. Pam was sworn in as a fill-in alderman for the Town of Trezevant in December 2016 and has been

reelected twice since. She has served as vice-mayor for the majority of her tenure. She also serves on the board of trustees for the Carroll County Library, as a clerk at McMoresville Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America and as a member of the Order of the Eastern Star. She is a charter member of the Austin Peay chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha, one of the “Divine Nine” historically black Greek organizations. Pam told The Banner, “I knew I wanted to be a teacher all my life. There were quite a few educators in my family. When I was little, I would always play teacher. “I always wanted to be an English teacher. Ezra Martin, who was one of my English teachers in middle school, as well as my band teacher and basketball coach, really led me to develop a love for English.” She says she didn’t get enough experience writing during high school, so it was a struggle in college. “When I became a teacher, I was going to make sure that my students were well-prepared for writing.” She said, “I loved my students, I think I was probably hard on them, strict, but I wanted them to get the most out of their education. “To see these young people come back and become doctors, lawyers, teachers, it just touches you. It seems like no matter how old you get, they remember you.

It’s amazing to see them. I just love them all. They have really inspired me and touched my heart. I’m grateful to our dear Lord for allowing me this privilege of teaching. They have taught me as well. It’s been a gratifying, humbling experience.” Her foray into politics came at the request of fellow teacher and classmate Alderman Pam Bryant and Mayor Dennis Mitchell, whose children Pam (Joyner) taught. “I’m not a politician. Any little thing touches my heart; it bothers me if I think somebody is being mistreated. When you’re trying to help the citizens of Trezevant, and they know you’re trying, it helps. It’s hard, not having the finances to do a lot of the things that would help the citizens. “You have to put yourself in someone else’s position. If you were there, you would hope and pray that someone would be there to help. To care about people, I think, is the most important thing. The Lord wants us to be an example as he is to all of us to show love and compassion. “I just want to do the best for the citizens of the town of Trezevant and always consider what’s in the best interest of them. And I pray that they will understand that we are really trying our best. We’re here to listen. We don’t have the finances all the time, most of the time. But let’s work together and try to make our town beautiful. I want



to see our town grow and be a beautiful place to live.” She spoke about some of the obstacles she’s faced in the different aspects of her life. “As a woman, and as an African-American, many don’t feel that you are qualified. I’ve had experiences where I’ve said something, and people will go behind you to verify, as though they have to hear it from someone else.” “But,” she said, “They may take away a lot of things, but they can’t take what’s in your mind. I guess after teaching for many years, I’ve decided that I’m gonna speak up.” She spoke about one small victory early in her career. “When I first started at Huntingdon, there was a male in a role, he was my boss, and was of course making more money than I was. He was going to leave,

and I would assume that position. I was going to be doing my job plus his job, so I asked for a raise, simply for what he had been getting. I was told, ‘Well I don’t know if you deserve it.’ I said, ‘I don’t know if I want to work here anymore.’ I think it was important to speak up. For a long time, and there are still times now, when I don’t like to say anything. My dad taught me to just listen to people and you’ll find out a lot about them. But I did speak up, and I got my pay raise.” She noted, “I’m just used to being in a role when you aren’t taken at your value anyway, so I’ve just pushed it to the back and said, ‘I’m just going to do my best. I don’t worry about it.’ She spoke about the strength of women. “I think about my mom. She is my rock. She had to endure

so much. The strength of women is just amazing. I think of Ruby Bridges, Rosa Parks, you could name so many. And the women of McMoresville. They were just so strong. I’m so proud to be from there.” She opined on the source of that strength. “I think it’s faith. Regardless of how you’re treated and misunderstood, if you’ve got a strong faith in the good Lord, He’s going to take care of it in good time.” She offered this advice to younger generations of women. “Make sure that you have a good knowledge of what you’re doing. Stand up, be a good advocate for yourself, be firm, look them in the eye. You’ve got to do that. Be consistent, have confidence in yourself and your knowledge. If you don’t believe in yourself, no one else will. Whatever you do, make sure you take the good Lord with you. You have to have a strong faith and pray and know that whatever storm you go through, God’s gonna be there. “Have a friend that has the same values as you. One with good moral character. That’s what I’ve been blessed to have in my best friend Psyanita McCullough, since we were five years old. When you have somebody that has the same moral character, even though sometimes you fall, you get back up. You may be going one way and they know that it’s wrong; they’re going to tell you. We’re there to help each other. It’s the same with my husband, Ronnie.” Pam is currently the only woman on the Trezevant council, of which she says, “I think it’s very important that we are involved. Women need to have a voice.”

Remembering Ruth Morris

A Pillar of McKenzie Community

BY JOEL LANCASTER
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McKENZIE — For decades, Ruth Coleman Morris played a pivotal role in shaping McKenzie’s financial, educational, and religious institutions. A pioneering banking executive and dedicated philanthropist, she left an indelible mark on the community through her leadership and generosity. Her influence is still felt today, from the institutions she helped grow to the lives she improved through her philanthropy. Trailblazing in Banking Morris began her career at McKenzie Banking Company, where she steadily advanced through the ranks. She became bank president in 1975, making her one of the first women in Tennessee to hold such a position. In an era when female executives in the banking industry were rare, she was a force for progress, modernizing opera-

tions while maintaining the bank’s commitment to local families and businesses. During her tenure, McKenzie Banking Company expanded its lending programs, offering more opportunities for small businesses to thrive. She ensured that the bank remained a pillar of financial stability in the region, providing mortgages, personal loans, and business financing that enabled steady economic growth. Her leadership emphasized both customer service and financial literacy, helping residents navigate complex financial decisions. As president, Morris also believed in mentorship. She took the time to train young professionals entering the field, ensuring that the bank’s legacy of integrity and service continued beyond her tenure. Her commitment to developing the next generation of financial leaders remains one of her most enduring contributions. Commitment to Education Higher education remained a priority for Mor-

ris throughout her life. She contributed \$500,000 to Bethel University, part of a larger \$1 million bequest that funded student scholarships, faculty support, and campus development projects. This donation allowed for the creation of new academic programs, library resources, and facility upgrades that continue to benefit students today. She was also a strong advocate for financial education in local schools. Understanding the importance of financial literacy, she worked with educators to develop programs that taught students the fundamentals of banking, credit, and responsible money management. Her efforts helped ensure that young people in Carroll County had access to the financial knowledge they needed to build stable futures. Her contributions to education extended beyond funding. She regularly met with Bethel University faculty and administrators to discuss the school’s future, offering insights and strategic support. Her dedication to improving educational opportunities made a last-

ing impact, strengthening the university’s role in the community.

Faith and Philanthropy

A devoted member of First Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Morris and her husband, John Morris, made a \$500,000 donation that helped fund church expansions and renovations. This contribution strengthened the church’s role as a hub for community outreach and faith-based programs. The funds helped restore the church’s historic sanctuary, modernize community spaces, and support local ministries that provide food and clothing assistance to those in need. Beyond her work with the church, Morris was deeply involved in charitable giving. She regularly donated to local nonprofits, ensuring that families facing hardship had access to essential resources. She supported programs that provided food security, emergency housing, and medical assistance, always choosing to give quietly rather than seeking recognition. She also played a role in preserving McKenzie’s cultural history, advocating

for the restoration of Park Theatre. She, along with other community leaders such as the Ruth & John H. Morris Memorial, was instrumental in securing funding to renovate the historic venue, ensuring its preservation for future generations. She recognized that community spaces like the Park Theatre were more than buildings—they were places where history and culture could be shared for years to come.

A Lasting Impact

Her contributions were widely recognized by the community and continue to have a lasting impact on McKenzie. The institutions she supported remain a testament to her legacy. McKenzie Banking Company continues to be a cornerstone of financial stability for the region, offering a wide range of financial services that empower individuals and businesses. Bethel University has expanded its programs with the support of her financial contributions, allowing future generations of students to receive a quality education. First Cumberland Presbyterian Church continues to serve as a beacon of faith and community, thanks in part

to her generosity. Morris’s legacy is not only measured in the buildings that bear the mark of her contributions but also in the lives she touched. Those who worked with her remember her not just as a financial leader but as a woman who genuinely cared about the well-being of her neighbors. Whether through quiet acts of charity, financial leadership, or her deep commitment to education, she helped shape McKenzie into a stronger community. Even after her passing in 2016, the impact of her leadership and generosity continues to shape the town she dedicated her life to serving. The lessons she imparted—of service, faith, and responsibility—live on in the institutions she helped build and the people who strive to carry her mission forward. Her work was never about recognition. She gave because she believed in the power of community and the responsibility of those with resources to uplift others. That sense of duty to her town and its people is what defined her, and it is what continues to define her legacy today.



Left, Juanita Jones in her Marine Corps and McKenzie Police Department uniforms. Right, Juanita Jones (center) with her mother, Beatrice (left) and her friend, Brenda Smith after Jones received an award for Keep My Hood Good. Photos courtesy Juanita Jones

JUANITA JONES

A Force for Breaking Generational Cycles

BY BRAD SAM
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Juanita Jones is a McKenzie native now working to improve the lives of youth in Jackson with the ultimate goal of breaking generational cycles as founder and executive director of Keep My Hood Good.

A 1984 graduate of McKenzie High School, she attended the University of Tennessee at Martin to study criminal justice and psychology. During that time, she worked in dispatch at the McKenzie Police Department and directed traffic at schools in the morning.

After four years, she was nearing completion of her degree when some of her classes were delayed.

Unfortunately for Juanita, she had already enlisted and been sworn into the U.S. Marine Corps, so her education was put on hold.

She enlisted for eight years and served as a supply specialist, stationed in California, Hawaii, South Carolina and North Carolina.

“It was difficult to be a woman Marine. In boot camp, our drill instructors groomed us for what was to become of us when we got into the fleet world. I had to prove myself to male Marines that I was like them. Once I had shown that I could hold my own, it was nothing but love and respect.”

Juanita is now part of a Marine Corps detachment in Jackson with other retirees and honorably-discharged Marines.

Following her service, Juanita returned to McKenzie to be near her mother, whom she wanted to help with her own daughter. “I didn’t think I was mother material.”

She worked as a server at Hig’s Restaurant, held road construction signs for

TDOT and was a volunteer firefighter.

She worked for Manpower in McKenzie before transferring to Jackson, where she became branch manager. She worked for Manpower for six years.

She then worked for four years as office manager at a Save-a-Lot warehouse. “That was one of the most boring jobs,” she said with a laugh. “I did not like to sit in the office environment. I needed to be out, so I found myself driving a forklift, pulling groceries.”

In 2006, Juanita opened a transportation business. She transported children to and from school and extracurricular activities and soon had contracts with five Jackson daycares and the Department of Children’s Services, facilitating visitation.

That business would set the stage for her true calling.

When Juanita would serve children and families in certain neighborhoods, she began to witness and experience troubling patterns and cycles.

In Parkway East, gang members would allow her into the neighborhood but would hinder her leaving. “This was three to four days a week. After about four months, one gang member walked up to my bus and asked who I was. He said they had been trying to scare me away. I told him I wasn’t the police, I wasn’t a threat to them. From then on, they allowed me in and out.

“I met a 40-year-old great-grandmother. I thought, wow, this is a generational cycle.

“I saw a mother bring a child to Lincoln Court and make them get out. She said, ‘Whoever makes your sister cry, you’ve got to make them cry.’ So that mom brought her child to fight another child. That’s another cycle I saw, chil-



Juanita Jones

dren fighting.

“God placed it on my heart to help the children. For two years, I said ‘I’m not doing that. I don’t even like children.’ In those two years, I had a lot of rises and falls in life. Finances, vehicles, housing.

“So I surrendered in April 2009. It began on a corner in Lincoln Court. I offered free ice cream and a kickball game. I had four towels and a beach ball. I had no idea what I was going to do with the children, other than to teach them how to respect themselves and each other.

“I named it Keep My Hood Good.”

She soon decided she just wanted boys. “I thought, if I could get the boys straight, the girls would follow.”

She put up flyers for basketball, and soon found herself in a circle of young men. “I still didn’t know what I was doing. But as I was talking, one boy came and punched me in the arm and ran. Everyone laughed. Another came and hit me hard in the back. They laughed again. So I chased one down and caught him. I had him secured on his stomach, with his feet back to his head, and made him say he was sorry in front of all of those boys. Then I caught the other one and made him tell me he loved me and he was sorry. After that, there were no more problems.”

She moved on to other neighborhoods. Still without a center of operation, she would meet groups at laundromats, car washes

and in people’s backyards.

“I taught them accountability, excellence, integrity and respect. I gave them three options after graduation. College or trade school, and I would help them enroll; the military, which I’ve had four enlist; or get a job where you can be self-sufficient. I encouraged them to get out of Jackson in order to break the generational cycle.”

Keep My Hood Good now has that central location, a center that opened eight years ago. Serving boys and girls ages 8-18, the center features a community garden.

“When I was walking the streets, I would get hungry. It was a food desert area, and the only grocery nearby had fruits and vegetables that were wilted. I know kids would use their EBT for chips, cookies and soda. Health is a concern, especially obesity, high blood pressure, hypertension. So we started the garden. I taught children that if they had no money, but they had a seed, they could grow their own food.”

During harvest, children distribute the food in their neighborhoods.

After shutting down her transportation company in 2013, Juanita waited tables on the weekends. At the time, she was receiving no grants or other money for Keep My Hood Good, so she was working to pay her bills and sustain the group.

Juanita also finally completed her education, graduating from UTM in 2017 with a degree in interdisciplinary studies with a focus in health, education and behavioral science.

The non-profit was finally able to start paying Juanita in 2022.

“In Keep My Hood Good, I teach them not to forget me, and they don’t. They come back to volunteer and help teach the

children.”

Juanita estimates that at least 250 children have been in her program, noting that she’s had custody of four of them, now grown.

Juanita spoke about the influence of her mother, Avis Beatrice Dudley Jones, who died in February of last year.

“My mother was the opposite of me. She was never in a bad mood, even up to death. She said ‘God’s got my back.’ She was humble and gentle. I could see that Jesus and God had their arms wrapped around my mother. My greatest memory of my mother was that she said over and over, ‘Pray.’

“She taught me a whole lot. How to sit, how to eat, how to smile. Everything.”

Beatrice was the first black graduate of McKenzie High School, the only senior among the first group of black students to transfer from Webb School to MHS in 1966.

Juanita says she never really talked about that experience, other than one example. “I remember when my mother would walk me into school. She would tell me, ‘This is what I did. I walked with my head up and I just strutted into the school.’ And that’s what I did. Maybe that was her mentality. That’s what she had to do, don’t look back, just look straight ahead.”

Juanita offered this advice to younger generations of women. “Don’t stop. Keep searching from within. Don’t look to be a people pleaser. Look in that mirror. That’s your best friend. That mirror will be your guidance. Believe from your heart and not from what someone else has told you, because what works for one may not work for you. Jump ship if you have to, no need to look back.”

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Qualities Women Bring to Business

Women continue to thrive in the workforce. Wells Fargo reports that, from 2019 to 2023, the growth rate of women-owned businesses outpaced the rate of men-owned businesses in relation to number of firms, rate of employment and revenue earned. LinkedIn also indicates there are 114 percent more women entrepreneurs now than there were 20 years ago.

Every business owner or employee brings something unique to the employment landscape and certain characteristics are universal, regardless of gender. Still, there are certain qualities that women bring to the workforce that can help businesses excel. Forbes indicates women employees offer traits that can help drive engagement, productivity, satisfaction, and various other attributes. The following are some of the traits women may bring to business.

Emotional Intelligence

Women First Jobs says that women often bring high emotional intelligence to the table. Emotional intelligence involves understanding and managing emotions and the emotions of others. Women may be more inclined to understand different perspectives and to help resolve conflicts and build relationships.

Collaboration

Women employees often have traits that can foster collaboration in the workplace, such as reading non-verbal cues and



willingness to take turns in conversations, indicates Forbes. This can help everyone collaborate more effectively.

Room for Improvement

Women in the workplace continually seek opportunities for improvement, advises Sparklight Business. This can involve taking advice from other workers and peers. Women leaders embrace opportunities to do things better and work to improve their skills for the greater good.

Communication

The IWEC Foundation, which empowers women entrepreneurs, says women tend to be effective communicators and often make great leaders because of this trait and their ability to inspire others. Communication often is key to any relationship, whether personal

or in a business setting.

Organization and Planning

Women may excel at organizing and planning. Women can look at things with a detail-oriented eye and recognize flaws in plans even before getting started. This means women can be in charge of distributing workloads or organizing the schedules of others.

Adaptability

Even though it is a cliché, women tend to be natural multi-taskers. Handling multiple jobs at the same time means women can adapt to changing situations.

Generally speaking, there are some inherent characteristics women may possess that can make them viable assets as business owners or leaders in their fields.

Considerations For Your Second Act

Many people see their careers as one of their defining characteristics. Children are often asked what they want to be when they grow up, and as adults they will likely be asked "What do you do for a living?" more times than they can remember. Work is undoubtedly a major component of life for most people from the time they leave school to the day when they retire. And a growing number of adults value work so much that they pivot to second careers.

A phenomenon known as "unretirement" occurs when people who have previously retired return to the workforce. A 2010 paper published in the Journal of Human Resources found nearly 50 percent of retirees followed a nontraditional retirement path that involved partial retirement or unretirement. According to a recent Retirement Saving & Spending Study from T. Rowe Price, around 20 percent of retirees are working either full- or part-time, while 7 percent of study respondents are looking for employment. Some people return to work for financial reasons while others seek the social and emotional benefits employment can bring. But individuals mulling a return to work or those currently working but trying to determine a second act should not feel beholden to previous career paths. A second trip around the employment block can involve an entirely different line of work. The following are some things to look for



in a second act.

- **Flexibility:** Choose a career path that enables you to set your own schedule or possibly work part-time if that is your preference. This way you can still reap some of the benefits of retirement, including the flexibility to travel.
- **Social interaction:** Adults may lose daily opportunities to be social when they retire, which can compound feelings of isolation common among retirees. Consider a second career that lets you interact with a number of people and continue to build relationships and a good network.
- **Personal passions:** Reflect on what you might do for work if money were no object. This may help you narrow down new opportunities that are in line with your interests and passions. Find a job that utilizes your

skills and experience and meshes with your interests. A former graphic artist, for example, may decide to teach design to young people.

• **Nonprofit opportunities:** Many retirees spent years in high-stress corporate environments where bottom lines may be more important than the bigger picture. Shifting to a career in the nonprofit sector can be a personally fulfilling job that utilizes skills learned in the corporate world.

• **Consulting or contract work:** If you're a retiree who loved your job, you might want to have a second career as a consultant or contractor in the same field.

A number of retirees ultimately explore second careers. Finding a match may be easier than one could have imagined.

8 Ways to Thank Women in Your Life

BY BRITTANY MARTIN

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I know we are all usually living life in fast forward and it seems like the days turn into weeks turn into months — so quickly. It is hard to stop and find time to express thanks to the important women in our lives. It doesn't take a lot of money or effort to show gratitude and little moments can make a world of difference. So here are a few ideas of ways to say thanks.

1. Saying Thank You — Yes, saying thank you is sometimes the easiest, yet most overlooked way to express gratitude. Be specific about the thing you are thankful for as this shows you are paying attention. The best part is it costs nothing to say thank you, but has a long-term positive effect on the thanked person. Also, thank you notes mean a lot to some people; knowing you took the time to write a personal note speaks volumes.

2. Taking Care of It — A lot goes into making life happen. Laundry and dishes are never-ending! "I already took care of it," can be a relief when she is feeling overwhelmed. As long as you don't wash new reds with the whites or put thin plastics on the bottom rack of the dishwasher.

3. It's the Thought that Counts — Asking about her day, checking in or showing you care through a text or phone call can be motivation to get through the day. Sending a joke or funny meme can also give a boost.

4. A Small Gift — A small gift that costs little or nothing or a functional gift that helps resolve an issue are great ways to show your heart is in the right place. Like, a hand painted bird feeder; a new screen protector; a surprise visit; a car wash or tank of gas; making her coffee; getting her

favorite candy; sending a song to hear or book to read; making her favorite meal; buying/picking flowers; watching her favorite movie; or simply spending time together.

5. Time for Favorites — Block out some uninterrupted time to watch her favorite show, movie, read a book or enjoy a hobby. I rarely get time to do things I enjoy because of work, family or household chores. I would love to sit and do something completely unproductive that makes me happy.

6. Girls' Night — As women, we need social interaction, that's why we talk your ear off as soon as you get in the door. If we are stuck all day in work mode or mom mode, we need the normalcy of adult conversation. We crave interaction with other people that recharge us. Something as simple as a good conversation via phone or in person can help regroup us.

7. A Night Off — Parents that have a full-time role of raising tiny humans (often after a full day of work) need a break from time to time. Scheduling time for the kids to stay the night with family or friends or watching the kids while Mom goes out (even if it is going out just to sit somewhere in silence) is a huge sanity saver. Sometimes, all I need is an hour or so to decompress. When we have time to mentally "clock out" it helps us be better parents when we "clock back in."

8. Simple Tasks — Getting the mail for her, picking up sticks after a storm (so she doesn't have to), bringing the trash can back up to the house on trash day, paying a balance, or completing other simple tasks can help reduce stress for anyone in your life.

Whatever ways you come up with to show gratitude, remember that it doesn't have to be elaborate or a grand gesture to be effective, it is the thought that counts.

Notable Moments in Women's History

Heroic efforts and milestone moments dot the landscape of women's history. Often forced to fight for equality and inclusion, women have blazed trails and broken down barriers, all the while inspiring millions from their own era as well as future generations.

There's been no shortage of notable events in women's history. Recognition of notable moments in women's history can provide significant insight into the individuals who made them possible.

Women's Rights Convention

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott played pivotal roles in organizing the first women's rights convention in 1848. The Seneca Falls Convention was held in New York on July 19 and 20, and abolitionist Frederick Douglass was among the noteworthy attendees. According to History.com, the work done at the Seneca Falls Convention, including the signing of the Declaration of Sentiments, sparked women's rights advocacy and ultimately lead to suffrage for women, which was granted with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

Earns A Medical Degree

Within months of the Seneca Falls Convention, England-born Elizabeth Blackwell graduates from the medical school at Geneva College in New York. Blackwell not only earns her medical degree, but also finishes with the highest marks in her graduating class. Blackwell's trailblazing days did not

end with the completion of her degree, as she ultimately became the first woman on the Medical Register of the General Medical Council for the United Kingdom.

"And Ain't I A Woman?"

School children in the United States undoubtedly are familiar with the name Sojourner Truth, a noted abolitionist and former slave. In 1851, Truth, speaking at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, asked, "And ain't I a woman?" as she advocated for equal rights. The speech has been noted in popular culture over the last 170 years, but Truth's now-famous query first gained considerable attention in 1863 during the American Civil War.

A Woman Sits on The Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of the United States was initially established by Congress through the Judiciary Act of 1789. Despite that lengthy history, no woman was sworn in as a Supreme Court Justice until 1981, when Sandra Day O'Connor was sworn in by then-U.S. President Ronald Reagan. Justice O'Connor, who passed away in late 2023 at the age of 93, served on the Supreme Court for roughly a quarter century, retiring in 2006.

These are just a handful of the many notable events in women's history that have shed light on the bravery and invaluable contributions women have made through the years.

7 Ways To Celebrate Women's History Month

The month of March is notable for various reasons, not the least of which is it serves as Women's History Month.

Although any time of year is an opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of women and pay homage to those special women in one's life, each March extra attention is given to the impact women make in their local communities and across the world.

According to the World Bank, as of 2022, 49.7 percent of the world was made up of women. Here are some ways to commemorate Women's History Month this year.

1. Support women entrepreneurs. Make it a point to shop at stores owned and run by women, or purchase products that were developed by women.

2. Mentor young or adolescent girls. People can make a difference in the lives of young women and set them on the course for success by sharing their own experiences through mentored guidance.

3. Express personal gratitude. Send a thoughtful letter of gratitude to a woman

who has made an impact on your life and explain how her influence helped you in some way.

4. Celebrate women artists and authors. Take the time to view and experience creative works by women, which may include reading books authored by women or viewing crafts and artwork made by women.

5. Start a business resource group. Woman entrepreneurs can encourage others to start their own businesses by hosting a business resource group that meets periodically and enables others to network easily.

6. Learn about women's rights. Take a step back into history and read up on the journey to establish women's rights, starting with the right to vote.

7. Post on social media. Share stories of inspirational women with others on a global scale by posting thoughts to various social media platforms.

Women's History Month is a time to reinforce the accomplishments of women across the country and the world.

Trailblazing Women Who Changed The World

Throughout history, many dedicated, intelligent and perseverant women have made an impact that not only affected their lives, but also the lives of millions of others. Many of these noteworthy women blazed trails and opened doors for others, forever changing the world with their efforts.

Marie Curie

Curie founded the science of radioactivity, which proved vital in treating cancer. Curie also was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize and the first woman professor at the University of Paris.

Curie also holds the distinction of being the first person to win a second Nobel Prize.

Jane Austen

Few students will make it through a high school or college English seminar without reading at least one Jane Austen book. In fact, Austen may be credited with establishing the romantic comedy genre that still has its devotees in the twenty-first century. Her "Pride and Prejudice" remains a popular novel and has been adapted to film and television many times.

Grace Hopper

After earning a doctorate in mathematics, Hopper became one of the very few women to obtain such a degree. She became a rear admiral in the United States Navy, and helped develop a compiler that was a precursor to the COBOL language used for computers.

Sally Ride

Ride was an American physicist and astronaut who joined NASA in 1978. She was the first American woman and the third woman to fly into space.

Diana, Princess of Wales

Diana Spencer was the first wife of Charles, heir apparent to the British throne, who has since become King of England. The Princess won acclaim for her charitable work for children and for raising awareness for HIV/AIDS and mental illnesses.

Lucille Ball

Not only a prolific woman comic, which was not so common during her tenure, Ball also was a savvy business woman. She and her husband spearheaded her own production company.

Ball also was known for tackling groundbreaking topics (at the time) on her television show, including women in the workforce, marital issues and pregnancy.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Ginsburg made history as the first Jewish woman to be appointed to the United States Supreme Court. She was a strong women's rights activist, and she co-founded the Women's Rights Project at the American Civil Liberties Union.

Lola Baldwin

Baldwin became the first sworn woman police officer in 1908, when she was hired to work in Portland,

Oregon. Her work mainly revolved around protecting women, including acting as a lobbyist for laws to protect women and advising other departments on women's law enforcement issues.

Elizabeth Blackwell

In 1849, Blackwell became the first woman in the United States to earn a medical degree. Blackwell was inspired to become a doctor after a deathly ill friend insisted she would have received better care from a female doctor.

Throughout history, many women have helped to change the course of the world, blazing trails for future generations along the way.

KASEY MUENCH

A Passion for
Community, Tourism

BY JOEL LANCASTER
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PARIS — Throughout history, women have played a vital role in shaping communities, often blending creativity, leadership, and service. In Northwest Tennessee, Kasey Muench exemplifies that spirit, combining her passion for design and tourism to promote and strengthen the region. As Executive Director of Northwest Tennessee Tourism, she now leads efforts to showcase the area’s attractions while ensuring its small-town charm remains at the heart of its appeal.

A Paris native, Muench studied at the University of Memphis, earning a Fine Arts degree with a concentration in graphic design. In her senior year, she was inducted into the Carson Circle, the university’s highest honor for student leaders, recognizing her outstanding contributions to campus life and leadership. After graduation, she returned home and started her career in the print and design industry, working at Abbott’s Print Shop.

“I worked at Abbott’s for 10 years, with a little break in between,” she said. “I was able to learn so much there. At a print shop, you get to work on all sorts of things.”

Her role allowed her to contribute to local projects, deepening her connection to the community. That experience led her to the Paris-Henry County Chamber of Commerce, where she became the community relations director. While there, she helped develop branding

for the Tennessee River Jam, the Downtown Paris Association, and the Chamber of Commerce. “Even though I may not be with certain organizations anymore, my work is still out there being used,” she said.

Working at the Chamber gave her a deeper understanding of tourism’s impact. “Graphic design, marketing, all that goes into building up a community and branding what we have to offer,” she said. “I can literally look at Tennessee River Jam, The Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Paris Association—those are brands I created. They’re still in use, and it’s humbling to know that something I designed continues to represent the community.”

Her growing involvement in tourism led to her role at Northwest Tennessee Tourism in January 2023, where she oversees tourism initiatives for the nine counties that make up the region. Her work involves promoting attractions, managing events, and highlighting the area’s strengths.

“Northwest Tennessee is framed by Reelfoot Lake on one side and Kentucky Lake on the other, with rivers, streams, and outdoor spaces in between,” she said. “Our outdoors have always been a core of who we are, whether it’s hunting, fishing, boating, or just hiking and camping.”

She emphasized that people today are seeking a break from the fast pace of urban life. “Travelers want authentic experiences,” she said. “They want to get away from the hustle and bustle, and we have that here. Our small-town main streets, our historic buildings, our local diners and mom-and-pop restaurants—those are what make Northwest



Tennessee special.”

Under her leadership, the organization has developed a new website, increased its membership, and published a visitor’s guide. One of her biggest initiatives has been launching the Cornerstone Tourism Awards, which will recognize individuals who contribute to the region’s tourism industry. The inaugural event, set for April 3 at The Dixie in Huntingdon, has already received nearly 200 nominations. “We want to recognize the peo-

ple who make visitors’ experiences special,” she said. “They’re the ones who make this region welcoming.”

Muench also established the Northwest Tennessee Legislative Breakfast, now in its third year, to connect local leaders with state representatives. This year’s event will take place on May 23 at Discovery Park of America.

In addition to these key events, Northwest Tennessee Tourism is working on new digital marketing campaigns and video projects to

highlight the region’s attractions. “We’re creating digital ads and video content to showcase what we have to offer,” Muench said. “It’s important to give people a visual connection to our area before they visit.”

Beyond her professional work, Muench sees tourism as a personal passion. She lives in Paris with her husband, Ryan, and their two children, Aubrey and Grant. Her role has allowed her family to experience Northwest Tennessee in new ways.

“This job has allowed us to get to know the region as a family,” she said. “I take them with me whenever I can, and I hope my children grow up appreciating where we live.”

She spoke about the unique accommodations that make the region special. “We have places like Green Frog Farm Cabins, where they’ve restored 200-year-old cabins for people to stay in. It’s not your Hampton Inn—it’s rustic, off the beaten path, and a way to unplug.”

In addition to tourism attractions, Muench credits the people of Northwest Tennessee for making the region a welcoming destination. “You won’t find people like this anywhere else,” she said. “When visitors come here, they’re met with open arms. That’s something you don’t get everywhere, and we take it for granted sometimes.”

As Northwest Tennessee continues to grow, Muench remains dedicated to preserving its history while embracing new opportunities. Her work is part of a long tradition of women shaping the places they call home, ensuring that future generations can experience the same warmth, hospitality, and charm that make the region special.



Kathy Dean and her sister Florence. Photo courtesy American Legion Post #47

Kathy Dean

A Giant Patriot in A Small Package

COURTESY PATRICIA BINKLEY
American Legion Post #47, Huntingdon

Kathy Dean of Huntingdon, Tennessee, was a big part of American military history when she and her sister Florence joined the first group of women to enlist in the Army in July 1948. President Harry S. Truman signed into law on June 12, 1948, Public Law 625: The Women’s Armed Services Integration Act of 1948. This allowed, for the first time, women to serve as regular members of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines Corps. Kathy and Flo were born and raised on the family farm in Mulkeytown, Illinois, which today has a population of only 63. Sadly, the population has decreased since the last census of 2020 when they boasted a population of 128.

In 1948, it was uncommon for women to leave the family farm and go off into the military. They were faced with an arduous task to convince their father to allow it. Finally, he gave in. Florence was underage, so her father had to sign a consent so she could enlist in the military.

The girls flew to San Francisco, California, to enlist in WAC, the Women’s Army Corps. They both had visions of traveling and seeing the world, quite an adventure

for two girls from such a small town. Kathy and Flo were excited to be trained in a career which might not have been possible in tiny Mulkeytown.

They went to boot camp at Fort Gregg in Virginia. In a brief time, they traveled across the entire United States. Kathy never forgot when she led a large rank of women in the front line of a parade. She was terrified of being trampled because she stood barely five feet tall.


Kathy and Flo went to tech school in San Antonio, Texas, and became dental assistants. Together they were transferred to their permanent duty station at Greenville AFB, in South Carolina.

Kathy met her husband, Captain Dean, a dentist from Michigan. After he served his two-year commitment and she served her four-year commitment, they moved back to Michigan. He practiced as a dentist in that state.

They had five children; one daughter and four sons. Two of their four sons followed their family’s military history and served in the United States military. Kathy’s brothers also served in the military. One of her brothers served in WWII and was part of the invasion of Normandy. Today, Kathy has grandchildren serving.

This is an unbelievable story of a family of true American patriotism. It shows in Kathy’s face that she loves America and is filled with pride that she served her country! Even in her now under-five-foot size she is “a giant patriot in a small package.”

"You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.'" — Eleanor Roosevelt



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Left, LaShonda Williams is a 2025 Sterling Award Recipient. Photo by Darren Lykes Center, From left, LaShonda Williams at her store Lakeway Nutrition with daughters Aleecia and Alajah. Right, McKenzie school board Chairman LaShonda Williams with her fellow board members. Pictured are (L to R): Misty Aird, George Cassidy, Williams, Bobby Young, Director of Schools Dr. Justin Barden and Chad Brown. Photos courtesy LaShonda Williams

LASHONDA WILLIAMS

Determined to Succeed, Called to Serve

BY BRAD SAM
brad@mckenziebanner.com

LaShonda Williams has proven herself to be a pillar of the community as an accomplished entrepreneur and a diligent public servant.

She was born in Texas to Oscar Lee Williams and Denecia Paschall. Her military father was a native of the Wingo community between Trezevant and McKenzie.

LaShonda’s mother was an alcoholic, and at age three she was adopted by her great aunt, Joan Taylor, and moved to Wingo.

Her father died when she was eight, and she didn’t see her mother again until she was 18 years old.

She was expecting a visit from her estranged biological mother at some point, and it came during cheer practice at West Carroll High School. LaShonda told The Banner, “She came in, and I knew right away it was her.”

Denecia relocated to the area, started a life and got married. “There was still a disconnect. I was raised in Wingo with such strong family values, but I still respected her as my mother. I saw her on holidays.” Denecia died of cirrhosis of the liver, but was able to see three of her grandchildren, including LaShonda’s oldest daughter Alajah.

LaShonda graduated from West Carroll in 1998. She was chosen as Most School Spirit by her class and earned Who’s Who honors. She served as a principal’s assistant and was admittedly a “teacher’s pet.”

She attended Jackson

State Community College on a cheer scholarship, studying business and marketing. After a few months, she decided it wasn’t for her.

“When I told my family [I was quitting school], it was the end of the world, oh my gosh... But as they see, I had a motivation like no other. I was determined to be successful.”

Having worked at E.W. James in McKenzie during school, she then worked in marketing at a local window company.

She read an ad in The Banner for Rainbow, a vacuum company seeking sales reps. LaShonda was one of many to be interviewed but made the cut.

What would become a long, successful career got off to a rough start for the young, eager seller. “My first 12 appointments, I didn’t sell anything,” she lamented. “But then it was like a rocket taking off, I sold everything.”

She was promoted to sales manager after several months. After several years, she opened her first office in Milan, then another in McKenzie. She employed as many as 20 people at one time.

Despite her business burgeoning as a manager, she never lost the itch for sales, so she returned to sales rep work. That continued until the pandemic, as it felt unsafe to do in-home demonstrations with a daughter with asthma back at home. She scaled back her involvement with Rainbow, but continued to do sales calls.

Around that time, a friend introduced her to the

multi-level marketing nutrition business. LaShonda opened Lakeway Nutrition in Paris, followed by stores in Mayfield, Paducah, Stewart County and Jackson. She has since sold the others, but there are still seven stores in her “down line,” meaning she gets a portion of sales from those stores.

When she narrowed her focus to Lakeway, it took off. “I was amazed at how the community welcomed us with open arms.” She tapped into the school systems and says they probably deliver 200 drinks per week to area schools.

“It was so busy, I couldn’t even think about Rainbow for probably two years.”

After six months, Lakeway had to be expanded to accommodate the customer base. Eventually, LaShonda hired a manager to run the shop day-to-day.

“I tried to create different marketing strategies to separate my loaded tea store from the others, and it’s paid off so far.”

Lakeway’s success allowed LaShonda to resume Rainbow demonstrations.

She has been with Rainbow for over 25 years, and Lakeway Nutrition celebrates its fifth anniversary on July 3.

Both of LaShonda’s daughters, Alajah and Aleecia, have worked at Lakeway, and Aleecia recently began selling for Rainbow.

Somehow, over the years, LaShonda has found the time to serve the public in a plethora of capacities.

She served on the policy council at Head Start for six years, including as vice chairman and chairman.

In 2018, she ran for McKenzie’s school board as a write-in candidate and won with 204 votes. She again rose through the ranks to vice chairman, and has served as chairman for two years.

She serves on the McKenzie Middle School Parent Advisory Board and was president when her kids attended. She also serves on the Pre-K Advisory Board.

She serves on the local foster care board, serves the Miss Teen Volunteer America program and is a member of the McKenzie Rotary Club.

In 2021, she joined the Henry County Chamber board.

She serves on the Henry County Healthcare Foundation Board and completed the Henry County Leadership class.

LaShonda also completed the WestStar program, earning the CP Boyd Award for top leadership. She said, “WestStar was by far the best thing I’ve ever done.”

Recently, LaShonda was nominated for a Sterling Award by the Jackson Area Business and Professional Women as one of the 20 Most Influential Women in West Tennessee 2025.

Lakeway was named Henry County’s Small Business of the Year two years ago.

LaShonda spoke to The Banner about the challenges of being a female in business and in society at large.

“In general, and especially when you’re in leadership positions or an entrepreneur, people look at you differently because you’re a woman. And not only am I a woman, I’m a black woman, a single mom, and a woman that doesn’t have the degrees behind her name. It’s challenging. I’ve had to prove myself.”

“Sometimes as a woman, you don’t have the support you think you should have. Sometimes, when I deal with men in certain roles, I feel like they don’t respect things like they should because they’re coming from a woman. I wish I could say in 2025 we’re not still facing that, but the truth of the matter is we are. But if you look over the last five to ten years, women are really stepping up. There are a lot of women in leadership positions now. I just want people to realize just because you’re a woman doesn’t mean you can’t do it. I do think it takes a strong woman to be in a leadership position, but it doesn’t necessarily have to be a strong, educated woman. If you have experience and passion, somebody will give you a chance.”

LaShonda spoke about one recent challenge. “Hiring a superintendent in a small town was a big deal, and I had to be the lead in that. There were some conversations that made me think people probably

thought I couldn’t do it. But I worked tirelessly day and night to make sure I succeeded, and we worked together and got the cream of the crop.”

LaShonda credits her adoptive mother, her “Momma”, who died just over a decade ago and would have been 100 this year, for the woman she is today.

“She shaped me in everything I am today. She was my all. She taught me how to clean, cook, how to be a mother, she taught me everything I know. I know she would be very proud of me today. A lot of times people will say, ‘why do you do so much?’ It’s me letting her know. That, and leaving a legacy for my kids.”

“She didn’t have to take me in. She was elderly, in her 60s when she adopted me, so that was a challenge in itself. But she didn’t miss a beat. She made sure I had everything I needed and more.”

“I think that’s the reason why I have such a big heart and try to help the less fortunate. I was never less fortunate because of Wingo as a community. Everybody works together. But I could have been. Having a mother that’s an alcoholic that didn’t raise us, I could have been that kid that was thrown out there to either swim or drown.”

“Wingo is a place like no other. It’s a wide-open community, and most everybody is relatives. They come together for everything. They still cook every Sunday. To this day, we all go back.”

“They support you 110 percent. I’m glad my kids have gotten to see how it is. I couldn’t imagine having been raised anywhere else. With really good morals, family values. They always have that strong bond. And there have been a lot of successful people to come out of Wingo.”

LaShonda finds herself on the other side of that equation as a mother.

“I’m trying my best to raise my daughters to be strong. Being a single mother was obviously not ideal, but I overcame it. If I had to work six or seven days a week to make ends meet, that’s what I did. I didn’t want my kids to grow up without just because

they grew up in a single-parent home.

“I first taught them they need to have a good relationship with God, because in this world today we need it, and as a single mother, if I didn’t have that, I don’t know what I would have done.”

“I taught them they needed to work, so when I started [Lakeway] they worked when they turned 14. I’ve been strict when it comes to school work, because it’s important.”

“I’m very proud of them. They’ve done extremely well, they’re good kids. I try my best not to spoil them. I teach them that you have to work in life to have things.”

“They’re my greatest accomplishment. My momma would be proud of them too.”

LaShonda shared her advice to younger generations of women. “You need to fight for what you believe in, whether you’re a woman or not, and I know sometimes when you’re a woman, you think people aren’t going to listen. But if you’re passionate about it, you fight and speak up anyway. If you’re at the table (and if you are, that’s already a plus), while you’re at that table, you’ve got to speak up. And do your research. If you’re going to talk about it and be involved, you need to know the back ends of it.”

She added, “Support other women. Just because it’s not me at that table, if it’s another woman that got it over me, we’ve gotta support one another. That’s one of the biggest challenges is supporting each other. And it doesn’t matter if they’re black or white, they’re a woman at the end of the day.”

She also offered this advice to men. “Respect women. Respect that woman that’s in that position or that leadership role. She’s there for a reason. I know sometimes it’s hard, and a lot of times it’s the way men grew up. Not all men were taught to respect women. But respect that woman. And give that woman your feedback. Just because she’s a woman doesn’t mean she won’t listen to a man. Support that woman, but most importantly, respect that woman.”

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