

20 Under 40 2023



PHOTO BY NICOLE COOKE | STAR-JOURNAL

In its third year, 20 Under 40 is a celebration of young people, age 40 and younger, in Johnson County who are contributing to their community in a variety of ways, such as through business, education, civic involvement and community service. Through nominations from the community and the Star-Journal staff, the newsroom narrowed it down to the 20 Under 40 group for 2023. These young citizens are helping create a bright future for our area.

Star
Journal

Friday, Oct. 20, 2023

Mitcheltree gives back to thank the community

By Meliyah Venerable
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Being a military spouse, Monica Mitcheltree, 38, never knows how long her family will be in a community. Despite this, Mitcheltree and her family get involved in almost every aspect of each community.

Mitcheltree's husband, Brandon, is active duty in the Air Force, which brought the family to Warrensburg.

Not only is Mitcheltree involved with the Warrensburg community, but she is also involved in multiple programs at Whiteman Air Force Base.

"Key Spouse is an Air Force program that I have been involved in since back in 2008," Mitcheltree said. "So that has been my key factor at Whiteman and just making sure to funnel information from the local area back to Whiteman to the squadron that my husband belongs to."

Mitcheltree has been asked to join several other programs at Whiteman as well. She said she wants to stay involved with both communities

so the airmen know what is happening in surrounding towns.

"Always being involved with something I like to do and to make sure the airmen also find out what's out there," Mitcheltree said. "I feel like passing along information is part of it, but also to build a strong relationship with the organization."

The Mitcheltrees are involved in Big Brothers Big Sisters in every community they have lived in. Mitcheltree said she will help any organization she can.

"I just like to help," Mitcheltree said. "I don't always have to be part of the boards or anything like that. But if they need help or assistance and they have a volunteer list, I like to pass along information as well as join in to make sure that these organizations help. Just being able to make sure that their goals also come true."

Mitcheltree also belongs to the VFW. She serves as the group's community outreach and is actively training in a different position.

"That is another big heart of mine is just



Monica Mitcheltree takes a selfie while working at the Warrensburg Farmers' Market, where she serves as Market Manager.

making sure our troops, once they become veterans, get in touch with our service officers in the area to make sure they get their benefits too," Mitcheltree said. "So that's another one that's really close and dear to me and then just with the (American) Legion as well, just passing on the information of both organizations.

"But by being part of the VFW as a veteran myself, I helped them out a little bit more because the Legion has such a strong audience. I just kind of make sure I get their word out and things like that, too, and get them back in touch with the base as well."

Mitcheltree is also involved in the Base Community Council and the Military Affairs Committee.

Before working for Warrensburg Main Street, Mitcheltree volunteered for the organization. She now serves as the Farmers' Market Manager for Main Street and the Membership Coordinator for the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce.

The Mitcheltree family was recognized with Main Street's 2020 Heart of Downtown Award, presented to an individual or group who goes above and beyond to help Downtown and Main Street achieve their goals and make ideas come to life. In 2023, the family received the Community Service Award during the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Networking Lunch and Community Service Awards.

"Monica is an Air Force spouse and is heavily in-



The Mitcheltree family — parents Monica and Brandon and children Grace and Leam — gathers for a group photo. PHOTOS COURTESY OF MONICA MITCHELTREE

involved in our community," Main Street Executive Director Jill Purvis said. "She works for Main Street and the Chamber as well as volunteering for a multitude of other local organizations. Monica loves Warrensburg and is a champion for our community, making connections and partnerships in everything she does."

Mitcheltree said she gets involved to give back to the communities that have given so much to them as a military family.

"It makes it a little easier for us to adapt as military families," Mitcheltree said. "We move a lot

and get involved as a way to make sure my kids feel like this is their home... So just showing them that's a way to adapt and give back. It's a way for us to silently say thank you too.

"... Giving back is just one of those things that makes a way to say that it's our home, temporarily at least," Mitcheltree said. "We do that everywhere we go. Me and my husband have done that before with other programs. That is the standard for us, just showing our gratitude for having us here and for taking care of our kids."

McDonald makes impact in classroom, athletics

By Joe Andrews
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Shelby McDonald's career path has included two very different stops when it comes to mentoring young teens.

McDonald initially worked in juvenile detention. The stop made her realize she would be better off working with the same population in an educational environment.

"Ultimately, I just felt like I wanted to meet them before they got to me," McDonald said. "Not that I mind being a disciplinarian, but I didn't like the face of being a disciplinarian where I was at. Working in juvy was hard, it was a blast, really. The kids I dealt with were good kids. They just made bad decisions and got caught. Typically, when I introduce myself to my students here, I always tell them, 'be good or be good at it' because if you get caught, it's not fun."

A 2011 graduate of Holden High School, McDonald decided to shift away from criminal justice while pursuing a career in education.

Now 30, McDonald is in her fourth year as a reading teacher at Warrensburg Middle School.

"I knew I still wanted to work with kids," McDonald said. "Having not only my parents but my grandmother and the mentors I had from teachers, I have quite a few educational connections, which I really didn't realize until I was going back to get my Master's of Arts in Teaching. It really just kind of felt like this homey community to me, being a teacher."

McDonald teaches reading to seventh graders. Over the course of the school year, her students read at least five novels. She pairs each with lessons intertwined with determining literary devices such as theme, point of view and conflict.

"I don't feel like kids read [outside of school] like we had to or were forced to when we were younger," McDonald said. "I think it's cool whether you're a good reader or a bad reader, by the end of the year, you can say you have read at least five whole novels ... We kind of do a contact study for

whatever the content is, which typically they are tested on at the state level. It's easier to understand those concepts when you have a story to go with it."

McDonald said building relationships with each student is her favorite part of working in education.

"I love walking through the hallways and being able to say hi to whoever and call them by name," McDonald said. "I kind of pride myself on getting to know these kids and the things they like and really how they tick. Obviously, middle schoolers are a breed of their own. I feel like it makes it easier when you actually get to know them It's still my favorite part. To get to know them and figure out what can make their day easier. It's hard being a teenager."

McDonald also has a presence in athletics as the assistant cross country coach at WMS and the head girls wrestling coach at Warrensburg High School.

The head girls wrestling coach position is new to the district this year, though McDonald served as an assistant in 2022-23.

"Seeing that fire in a kid, they're just going to work until they're not able to work anymore," McDonald said of her favorite part of coaching. "I was that kind of kid. I wasn't the strongest, I wasn't the fastest. Never truly the best. But I had no issue with working my butt off. Being able to feed and impact kids that way and show them that's what my expectation is, I want you to work, seeing those moments where they weren't that kid at the beginning but around Thanksgiving or Christmas break, you see that turn in them. They're ready to get after it."

Lady Tigers wrestling saw its first wave of athletes last year. Girls wrestling became officially



Shelby McDonald is in her fourth school year as a reading teacher at Warrensburg Middle School. She also serves as the assistant middle school cross country coach and head high school girls wrestling coach. PHOTO COURTESY OF SHELBY MCDONALD

sanctioned by MSHSAA ahead of the 2018-19 school year.

"When I first got hired at Warrensburg, I told [Keith] Chapman that if there is an open position on the wrestling team, I want it," McDonald said. "There needs to be a woman's influence, especially now that girls have their own division. I wrestled boys [in high school]. Very rarely did I ever see a girl at tournaments or even their own bracket. I'm envious that they have their own, but I love that I get to help spearhead that with them."

Even before joining the Warrensburg wrestling coaching staff in 2022, McDonald almost always

kept up with the sport.

She met her husband, Coty, through wrestling during high school.

"He was supposed to get my phone number for some other kid and the rest is history because he kept it," McDonald said. "I just stayed close to the sport. My husband and I, every year that we've been together, we would go to districts because both of our high schools were in the same district. We would just kind of keep tabs on both of our schools' wrestling programs."

McDonald also played softball in high school and initially attended Division II University of Sioux Falls to compete in the

sport before having heart surgery.

She transferred to the University of Central Missouri to study Criminal Justice and Psychology. McDonald earned a bachelor's degree in the field before making the jump to education.

"I'm very extroverted," McDonald said. "But at the end of the day, in the same token, I am pretty introverted. I kind of keep to myself at school. Not to say that I'm not noticed, that's kind of pathetic. But I just kind of do my own thing. I feel like that's my job. I get excited going to work. Even on the hard days. I can't imagine being anywhere else but here."

Corson helps people through health care

By Nicole Cooke
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Jake Corson, 38, of Leeton, said that entering the health care field was simply about helping people.

"It is rewarding to be able to help people, you know, get through whatever trying time they have – they're sick, they're not feeling well, they're injured. They just need help," Corson said. "And I do really enjoy that aspect, too. It's rewarding to help people in need."

Corson has worked for Western Missouri Medical Center for more than 17 years. He was a clinical coordinator for nearly 10 years, followed by his current role as the Manager of Diagnostic Imaging, which he began in January. Corson now focuses on overseeing the X-ray and CT staff and dealing with the hospital's image-storing system.

"Jake continuously goes above and beyond to take care of his patients, coworkers, and community," Jennie Snapp, WMMC Director of Communications & Development, wrote in her nomination. "Jake is well known at our hospital because he lives out our mission to serve the community with excellence and compassion. Our patients are constantly raving about Jake's positive attitude, his bedside manner, and how passionate he is about keeping their care local."

Corson said he has been a part

of many memorable projects and proud accomplishments, but one that sticks out is leading WMMC's American College of Radiology certification process. Snapp noted Corson assisted the hospital in achieving the Gold Standard of Accreditation in Computed Tomography (CT) by the ACR.

The State Fair Community College alumnus has also been part of the department's transition from using film to being completely digital.

Corson's passion for helping people at the hospital goes beyond patient care. He's been a WMMC Foundation board member since 2015 and serves as the chair of the C.A.R.E.givers Committee, a volunteer group of employees.

"I do feel fortunate that I've worked here this long. I do love my job and I just saw the need," Corson said of his decision to join the Foundation board. "... as a foundation, we've raised over \$1 million since 2015. That's been a very big success for not just this facility in my eyes but also our community. We've been able to buy new equipment, cutting edge technology that we would not have had had it not been for our foundation and our community members."

"So that right there kind of just makes me want to continue to be a part of it because it is rewarding and it's great to see all that we've done as a group."

Corson said when the committee was formed in 2016 to manage the funds donated by

employees, the members split the money into two pots: one for WMMC projects and another for an Employee Relief Fund. Snapp noted the C.A.R.E.givers program has achieved 98% employee participation, resulting in more than 110 Employee Relief Funds being distributed to employees in a time of need.

The committee has helped with several hospital projects, such as installing cell phone charging stations in the waiting rooms, purchasing new mattresses for inpatient beds, and replacing the baby changing stations in the outpatient clinics. This year, funds will be used to install water bottle filling stations.

The employees also donate to local charities, with the Old Drum Animal Shelter being a favorite cause.

"(Buying new mattresses was) probably my most rewarding project we've done because our complaints went from a whole bunch to very little just by making their stay more comfortable," Corson said. "And you never know, living in this community, you never know when you might become a patient. So it was kind of a nice thing to do."

Outside of work, Corson has also given back to his community. He served for two terms on the Leeton Board of Education from 2015-21 and volunteers as a youth sports team coach. He and his wife, Jennifer, have two sons, 16-year-old Landon and 12-year-old Parker.

Corson said it was a career

goal to reach the management level, and his current role was created in response to the department's continuing growth.

"They needed more management to help with the staffing needs, so I've really enjoyed being able to be on this side as well," he said. "Just kind of helping anyone that needs help in the department. I'm not doing as much patient care as I was, but I feel like it kind of translates to other people."

His roles with diagnostic imaging and the Foundation are colliding even more than usual, as the Foundation is in the middle of its next project: adding a new CT PET scanner to the imaging department. Corson will help implement the new service line, which he sees as another



Jake Corson is the Manager of Diagnostic Imaging at Western Missouri Medical Center. PHOTO COURTESY OF JAKE CORSON

er way for citizens to receive health care closer to home.

"I'm very excited for that, and being able to add a service line to our community is huge," he said. "I think the number one goal with our department ... the way I view it is I want to keep people here. I want people in town to feel comfortable that we're going to provide quality care and keep them here and have them know that we can take care of them. ... We want to keep people happy and healthy and wanting to come back for their health care here."

Smith runs Brown's Shoe Fit with people-first mentality

By Joe Andrews
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Since taking over Warrensburg's Brown's Shoe Fit Company location in April 2018, Carson Smith has treated business with a people-first model.

The mindset goes back to his upbringing in Kimballton, Iowa, a small town of approximately 200 people located an hour northeast of Council Bluffs.

Even after five and a half years in the Johnson County community, Warrensburg still feels large to the 30-year-old.

"The small-town life has always been important to me," Smith said. "Warrensburg, for me, is still fairly big. Just because it is a town of 20,000 people. We had no stoplights back in Kimballton. I love my hometown dearly. It's very close to my heart. That's where I think a lot of my upbringing kind of came through with treating everybody almost like family."

Smith attended college at Northwest Missouri State in Maryville, where he played baseball from 2011-16 while pursuing a degree in Parks and Recreation. He compiled honorable mention All-MIAA honors as a relief pitcher in 2015 and 2016.

Upon graduation, Smith relocated to Topeka, Kansas, the hometown of his wife, Kaley.

There, his path into the shoe business began while working part-time as a sales associate for Kaley's grandpa.

"I ended up just loving it," Smith said. "Just helping people. That's what I kind of fell in love with. I found out I could make a career out of it."

From Topeka, Smith relocated to Dubuque, Iowa, where he trained for a year. The stop led to the opportunity to become the owner of Warrensburg's Brown's Shoe Fit store, 213 N. Holden St.

He started with one to two employees but now has a staff of nine to 10. The growth correlated with an increase in product availability.

Current brands stocked



Carson Smith has operated the Warrensburg Brown's Shoe Fit Company location since April 2018. PHOTO BY JOE ANDREWS | STAR-JOURNAL

include ASICS, HeyDude, Brooks, New Balance, Saucony, HOKA and Reebok.

"I definitely have grown the store a ton," Smith said. "I started carrying a lot. We focus on the customer service aspect. If you come in here looking for a specific need, we're able to diagnose that and put you in something that is comfortable and right for them. We're recommended by podiatrists, massage therapists, PTs. They don't even tell, 'hey, you need XYZ brand.' They just send them in because they trust us to take care of their patient."

Jennifer DeBacker, the co-owner of neighboring Awesome Blossoms, said the overall quality of Brown's Shoe Fit has increased since Smith arrived.

"He and I became instant friends," DeBacker said. "I almost feel like I was kind of a mentor to him that kind of helped him with different things and getting to know the community. He's just a very caring person. He cares about his town. He cares about the people here. A lot. He goes out of

his way to help with their feet problems. I think he just goes the extra mile."

Smith said he is at the store during most of its business hours.

He carefully selects staff and takes them through a rigorous training program before trusting them to the floor on their own.

"How I tell my staff to treat every customer that they take care of is treat that person like you would your grandma or your mother, and envision them if somebody treated them poorly while they were coming here asking for help, would you like that," Smith said. "Ninety-eight percent of the population is going to say 'no, I want them to be taken care of to the absolute best.' We go through interviews. The process of hiring, that is actually a question I would ask them ... If they say no, the interview is done. I've had people say, 'I'm only looking for sales.' No, the goal is to take care of the customer."

Outside of Brown's Shoes, Smith has sponsored many events, including the Johnson County Cancer Foundation and

RISE. He has donated to several fundraisers and nonprofits, including Piccadilly, University of Central Missouri Athletics,

Ladies Night Out and the Warrensburg School Foundation.

Smith has also been involved with the Warrens-

burg Chamber of Commerce and Warrensburg Main Street.

He also puts on Fit Night on the third Thursday of every month between April and October. The event features a 5K with food, giveaways and networking opportunities for the community.

"In my opinion, it's your neighbor," Smith said. "If you can't do something for your neighbor that you live with every single day, does it show a lot of care? Do you care about your business? How you take care of your community is how they're going to support your business."

Smith said with the success of the people-first model, work never truly feels like work.

"The old saying of 'if you love what you do, you don't have to work a day in your life,' that's something I feel like has always been kind of important to me," Smith said. "For granted, when you're a business owner, you can kind of make your own hours. Most of the time, I'm here ... I love the leading aspect of it. Creating great individuals for the world. That's why I like what I do."

Congratulations!
TOP 20 UNDER 40

Congratulations on your fantastic achievement of being awarded Warrensburg's "Top 20 Under 40!" Thank you for all you do for Western Missouri Medical Center, our patients, and our community. We are proud of you!

Jake Corson
Manager of Diagnostic Imaging

WESTERN MISSOURI MEDICAL CENTER

Jennings works to create positive interaction with law enforcement

By Meliyah Venerable
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Growing up, Joe Jennings, 33, wanted to be in the fire service like most of his family. After working as a dispatcher at Central Dispatch, he got hired as an officer at the University of Central Missouri, and law enforcement quickly became his passion. Jennings serves as the Administrative Sergeant at the UCM Department of Public Safety.

The constant work and community engagement are something that Jennings enjoys.

"I don't have to wait for somebody to say 'come help' before I get to take some sort of action," Jennings said. "It's not just about the law enforcement aspect of it. It's about being out there and interacting with people. That's one of the big things that drew me to UCM to begin with. We do things a little bit differently here. We have a bigger focus on community and community engagement and getting out there. To this day, I still interact with students or staff members that have been here that have moved on ... One of my big draws is that I could be more proactive in what we're trying to do as opposed to being really very reactive on the fire service side."

Campus life and interaction are important to Jennings and the public safety staff.

"The campus community is a big deal," Jennings said. "It's all about our students. The students here are still in a very developmental part of their life, so we can be around and have those good interactions and even make a negative interaction into a good interaction."

Jennings said he tries to make an impact with every interaction.

"That's one thing that I've always strived to when I was on the road and when I also supervised

patrol officers was still trying to make a positive out of those negative," Jennings said. "Find a way to make it a better situation for them so that we can influence and change people's decision-making beforehand."

"I'm also a big evidence-based person, so if we can provide information to people to try to convince them of better decision-making in the future, that's what we really like to do. It's also just really about being there and kind of being a role model and being around for people to feel comfortable interacting with the police."

Jennings was hired at UCM in 2013 and promoted to sergeant in 2016. In 2023, he was appointed as the department's Administrative Sergeant, overseeing the department's accreditation process, grant administration, dispatch operations and technology.

"It's a night and day difference of a job from 2013 to today," Jennings said. "We have to work a lot harder to convince people that we're here for them and a lot of times, all people see is the negatives of policing."

"That's one thing that I really focus on, is trying to shed light to where people feel comfort-



Joe Jennings



From left, Johnson County Fire Protection District Chief Larry Jennings, Warrensburg Fire Department Chief Ken Jennings and Administrative Sergeant at UCM Department of Public Safety Joe Jennings. PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOE JENNINGS



Joe Jennings and his wife during a trip.

able coming and talking to me or talking to the other officers here...Balancing the enforcement aspect, but also the good and approachable and good interaction aspect."

Jennings has been a volunteer firefighter with the Johnson County Fire Protection District since 2004. He was promoted to lieutenant in the District's Training and Safety Division in 2011 and promoted to captain in 2015.

He now oversees the district's Recruit Firefighter Training Program, helping new members and teaching them basic fire-

fighting skills. Jennings has instructed hundreds of firefighting personnel who have remained with the District or continued their careers at other agencies across the country and the world during his time with JCFPD. He is also the District's Public Information Officer.

"Jennings works tirelessly to instruct and prepare law enforcement officers, as well as firefighters in this county," JCFPD Office Manager Mackenzie Schuette said. "He is highly trained and holds numerous public safety certifications and licenses, including Drug Recognition Ex-

pert, Crisis Intervention Team (CIT), Fire Investigator, Fire Service Instructor, Standardized Field Sobriety Instructor, Trauma Informed Sexual Assault Investigator (instructor), and Type II Breath Alcohol Supervisor. He holds Missouri certifications of Firefighter I and II, Fire Investigator, Fire Service Instructor I, NFPA 1403 Live Fire Instructor, Hazardous Materials Awareness and Operations, and numerous additional certifications."

Jennings said he hopes to stay at the university because he enjoys his job. He plans to commute to remain involved with the community.

"I love working here," Jennings said. "I'm new to this position. I worked patrol up until June 1 and then I was moved over... I'm enjoying what I'm doing. I'm learning a completely different aspect of the job that we have here, but I have no intentions of going anywhere else."

"... There's a lot of changes that have happened in the profession, technologies, constantly changing techniques, you're constantly changing, and it's all about trying to keep us up to date with that stuff," he continued. "Support the officers that are here so that they can go out and do what needs to be done in the community."

Pyle helps make voting accessible to all

By Nicole Cooke
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Jennifer Pyle, 36, of Center-view, has worked in the Johnson County Elections Office for about eight years and puts an emphasis on making voting accessible for all citizens.

After taking on a few roles, Pyle has been the Elections Supervisor since late 2022. Pyle oversees all Johnson County elections, from preparing ballots and securing polling locations to managing equipment and communicating with voters.

Pyle, originally from Florida, is a Navy veteran. When she moved to the area roughly a decade ago, she was searching for job opportunities and stopped by the Johnson County Courthouse to see what was available. She didn't find any openings on the first try, but soon, she was contacted about a job in the Elections Office.

Since then, Pyle has come to enjoy working with the whole elections team and the community.

"We really do have a lot of the Johnson County citizens help us with elections and that's how we get it run. It's just manpower and I think it's pretty cool that it works," she said. "And it's cool to be involved in that process. I think when some people hear about stuff on the news, especially when it concerns elections, it's easy to, if you're not involved in it, point your finger and say, 'well, it's those people at the top, that makes sense' and that's not really true. Yes, there are some governmental positions and some staff, but it's really the citizens that come

together and help out."

One example includes the special teams who work at the polling locations or who visit nursing homes to help people vote. Pyle said working the polls is a citizen effort, and added that being part of the Elections Office has renewed her "faith that people can really make a change."

Pyle said her proudest accomplishments stem from her team's efforts to make sure everyone in Johnson County can vote, whether they live in a nursing home, have a disability, or can't make it to the polls on Election Day.

"We might have people that come in and do what's called absentee voting here in our office or they might do what we call curbside voting where they literally just park their car and vote," she explained. "Or they'll give us a call and say, 'Hey, I have difficulty hearing,' or they'll say, 'my spouse has tremors or Parkinson's' or something. And really just being able to help those people in a really specific way, making sure that they're able to vote, they feel comfortable and they're not being excluded from that process. ... They are often surprised to hear that we have options available for them."

Pyle and her husband have a 13-year-old son. Outside of work, Pyle is a photographer and has published a few books on Amazon that feature her Missouri and Florida nature photography.

"You can capture things that aren't always there. If you see a monument or a piece of art or sculpture, that's kind of stable. You'll see it every time you decide to visit that location. But



Jennifer Pyle is the Elections Supervisor for the Johnson County Elections Office. PHOTO BY NICOLE COOKE | STAR-JOURNAL

with photography, you can catch moments that you never see again," she said. "And that's part of the fun of it. It's like going on a treasure hunt."

She's also passionate about the outdoors. Most years, she's had several gardens growing on her family's acreage. Pyle said she loves learning everything she can about plants and flowers. She finds it calming and noted "there's always something really beautiful to surprise you in nature."

Pyle feels connected to nature and said it can help people feel a little recalibrated after spending time in a calm, accepting environment like the outdoors.

"I guess it's an emotional thing. I feel ready to take things

on after I've been in nature for a while," she said. "And if I can be by water, that would be fabulous. Because I'm from Florida and I get a little homesick for water or to see the beach or see the ocean. So that's especially great."

Pyle has been the supervisor for almost a year, and she said her immediate goal is to ensure she can maintain the office's current level of integrity, which she credits to the previous supervisor and her boss, Johnson County Clerk Diane Thompson. 2024 will be a big year for Pyle and her crew as they handle multiple elections during a presidential year.

She also encouraged people to participate in elections, whether by voting or helping the Elec-

tions Office.

"She is an outstanding individual that is thoughtful in her treatment of others and in her day-to-day decision making," Thompson said. "Jennifer came to us as a seasonal employee for the 2014 election year. We were so impressed with her work ethic and level-headed demeanor that when a full-time position came open in 2015, we sought her out to fill it."

"She has become an integral part of the elections team and has advanced to the Election Supervisor position. I have no doubt that her prior military experience plays a role in her ability to think through various scenarios and determine the best course of action."

Hargrave challenges Johnson County to be more inclusive

By Meliyah Venerable
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Five years ago, Elizabeth Hargrave, 31, started working with the Johnson County Board of Services. She has now found her passion in educating the community about inclusion.

Executive Director Melissa Frey said JCBS is lucky to have Hargrave working as the Director of Community Resources and Outreach, and she continues to promote and advocate for the organization.

"Liz is a hard-working employee, an engaging community partner, and a fierce advocate," Frey said. "She is a social worker at heart with a master's degree in business administration – the best of both worlds. She also has a great sense of humor!"

"Liz successfully advocated for the establishment of the Community Resources and Outreach department at JCBS, promoting community inclusion and providing targeted case management for individuals who do not qualify for Medicaid through the Family Navigation program."

"We're very lucky to have her in a strong leadership position at Johnson County Board of Services," Frey added, "which directly benefits the individuals and families we serve and our community."

When Hargrave first joined JCBS, the inclusive park at Cave Hollow was almost completed. After seeing the end of the process and the impact on the community, Hargrave knew this was just the beginning of making Johnson County inclusive.

"My favorite part is just educating the community about inclusion," Hargrave said. "Before I started here, I didn't really think about inclusion that much... I didn't really think about all the different things that are limitations or maybe people not really understanding them and not being as accepting. When I started here, I started to kind of witness more and hear stories from families and individuals experiencing that kind of lit a fire for me to become an advocate."

Cave Hollow inspired Hargrave to start another inclusive project: a sensory garden at Hawthorne Park.

Johnson County Board of Services is still in the design phase of the process, but Hargrave said she intends to

have many musical instruments, art and nature. She would like to invite the community to help decorate the park.

She described her vision for the park as "educational, very colorful and hopefully noisy in the best way."

"Our inclusive park is great; however, it being called the inclusive park is not inclusive," Hargrave said. "Every park should be accessible and parks are really easy to make accessible. Cave Hollow was great. That was a huge project...we have already established amazing parks, so why not just add to them and make them inclusive and make them better? So that's why we chose to do a sensory garden at Hawthorne."

After seeing an organization in Kansas City make a proclamation to become the most inclusive city in the world, Hargrave got the idea to make of Johnson County the most inclusive county in Missouri.

"I saw on Facebook that they did a proclamation with the city to become the most inclusive city in the world," Hargrave said. "I decided that is what I want to do. I feel like Johnson County can be like the most inclusive county in Missouri."

Hargrave tagged many cities within Johnson County to get support. Many were interested in what the cities could do to assist JCBS.

"That's why we try to put ourselves out in the community more and join different organizations because we want to be that voice for the population," Hargrave said. "I just want the place where I live to be inclusive for everybody."

Hargrave currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce, the Crisis Intervention Training Council Committee, the City of Warrensburg Diversity and Inclusion Commission, and various other committees.

"I think it's important to be involved in the community because we should leave the world a better place," Hargrave said. "Which sounds really cheesy, but I really think that no matter what field that you're in, that should be everyone's goal. I really just believe in helping people and I have a passion for helping all kinds of people. I have a passion for helping people with developmental disabilities, and inclusion is always in the top of my mind. But there are tons of other different populations that I really like to advocate for."



Elizabeth Hargrave takes a selfie at the RISE Racks fashion show.



Elizabeth Hargrave is the Director of Community Resources and Outreach for the Johnson County Board of Services.



Elizabeth Hargrave with her husband, Brandon, and daughter, Ayla.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELIZABETH HARGRAVE

Dale turns hobby into a career

By Meliyah Venerable
meliyahv@warrensburgstarjournal.com

Adrian Dale, 25, found a passion for culinary arts while attending high school. He planned on attending culinary school after graduating high school. But business partner Clif Castleman had a building open, which seemed like an ideal place for a restaurant.

At that time, Dale and his father, Todd Dale, teamed up with Castleman to open Raging Bull Steakhouse.

Dale said, "Everything just fell into order. I never went to culinary school, and here we are."

As part owner, Dale has some responsibilities, but luckily for him, his partners handle most of the paperwork, so he is able to run the kitchen.

His father and business partner described him as "The youngest and most mature owner of a restaurant I know."

Raging Bull is family-owned and operated. Dale said he enjoys that he gets to work in a laid-back environment.

"I don't have to answer to anybody but myself," Dale said. "We get to experiment and play around with stuff. We're not corporate and so we don't have to act like corporate and be super, super strict. It all seems a lot more laid back... It's fun to be your own boss, but it's also nice to not

have to run a place like a strict corporation, like a hire, fire, get in, get out type situation. That's the most fun to me, and I like working in the kitchen because I like cooking."

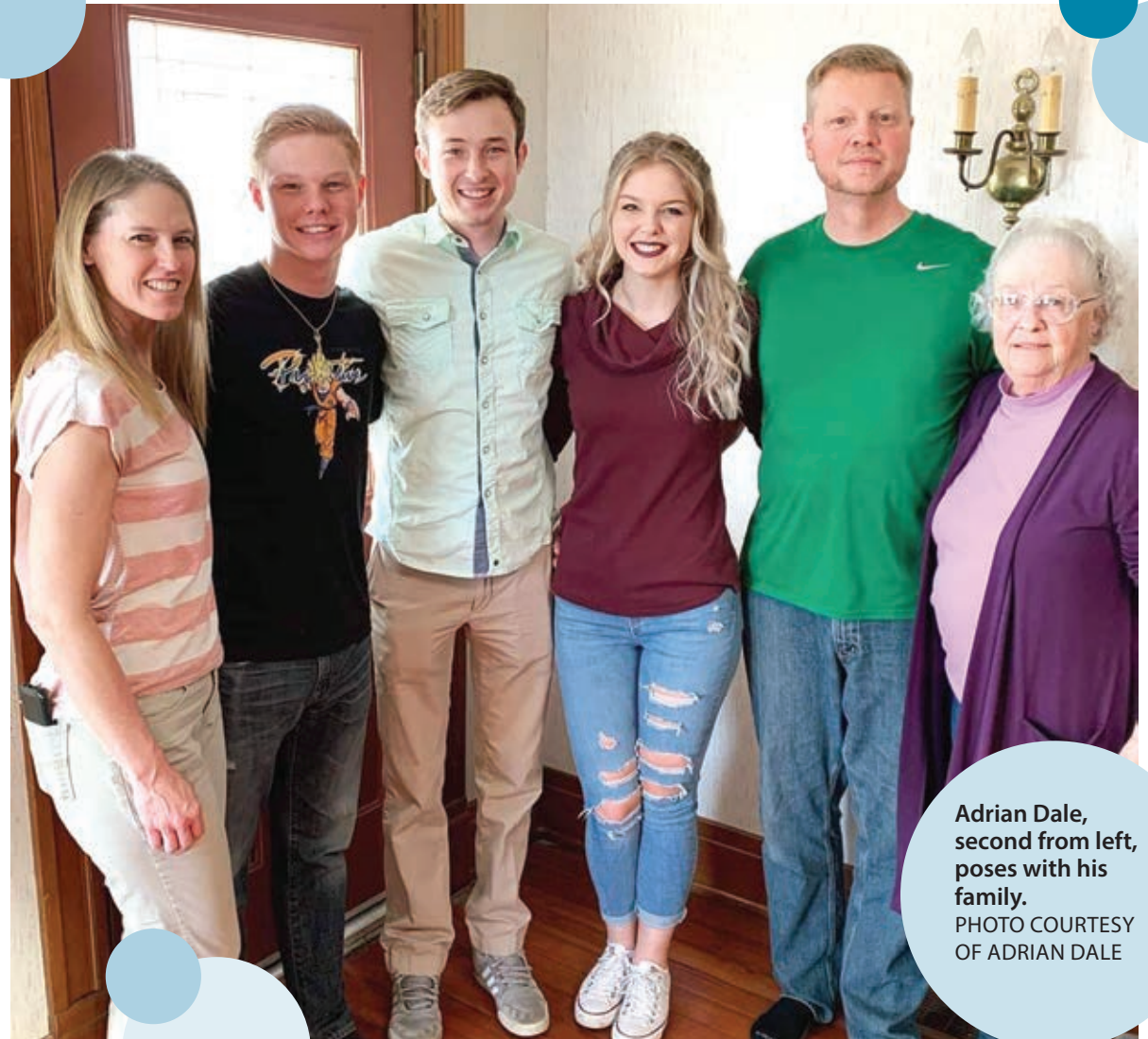
Dale said since he and his business partners are "townies," they enjoy working with local businesses.

"It's important to be involved, one just for customers and clientele, but also because around here, we have a huge 'love what's local,'" Dale said. "We think that our food and service will show for itself, but one being able to impress the people that you kind of know and have grown up around or been around your whole life is neat. Just being able to keep this town and the surrounding towns happy and give them something that isn't around until you get up into Independence or the Kansas City area."

Dale said he spends most of his time working in the restaurant, so he only gets a little free time. When he does find free time, he enjoys spending that time with his friends.

The atmosphere at Raging Bull is something that Dale takes pride in. He wants customers to feel comfortable and taken care of.

"Just the quality of service, the quality of food, the atmosphere and personalized things around the place," Dale



Adrian Dale, second from left, poses with his family. PHOTO COURTESY OF ADRIAN DALE

said. "We're not a suit-and-tie, white tablecloth type of place, but we have plenty of people that come in in suits and dresses and prom and stuff like that."

"We will also sweep up the mud behind you if you come in from the farm or something like that. So I just want to have a place that can be enjoyable for people to be here and stuff. We like to be able to get out of the kitchen when we can and talk with customers...We want to be able to have our customers feel like they're being taken care of and want to come back."

CONGRATULATIONS

Liz

on being awarded Top 20 Under 40! Liz is the Director of Community Resources and Outreach and has an amazing SPARK that touches so many people.



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SPARK – Supporting People with developmental disabilities through Advocacy, Resources, and Kindness

Tegtmeier's business focused on community involvement

By Meliyah Venerable
meliyahv@warrensburgstarjournal.com

Lindsay Tegtmeier, 37, attended the University of Central Missouri for her undergrad and master's degrees. After graduating, she worked for a State Farm agent in Warrensburg. Tegtmeier worked with the agent for nine years, then realized she wanted to stay in Warrensburg and continue to be an agent for State Farm.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do with my MBA," Tegtmeier said. "... I knew State Farm was a great company. I quickly realized that it's an amazing company with great heart and integrity, and it was something I really wanted to do and I enjoyed what I was doing at that office and so quickly kind of looked into what it took to be an agent for myself."

Tegtmeier has lived in Warrensburg for 19 years now and has no plan to leave the city or State Farm.

"It was just a great company to work for and I really enjoy being an agent," Tegtmeier said. "You have something different every day. We have 100 products with State Farm. Most people think we just have auto and home. But it is something that is different every day and I feel like I can really help people."

"I like watching young people come in and they have a renters policy or an auto, and then maybe they get married, so they buy a home and I insure their home. And then they have life insurance because they have a baby. And I like watching that relationship grow over time."

Coworkers said Tegtmeier supports her community and team members in every way.

"Lindsay always goes above and beyond for her team members, family and the community," said Jenny Dumire, Account Representative for Tegtmeier. "There's never a time that she turns away when there is community involvement. She pushes her team members to drive for excellence and provide the best customer service."

Tegtmeier also serves as an adjunct professor at UCM, which she was not



Lindsay Tegtmeier and her sons pose for a photo at the Missouri State Fair.



Lindsay Tegtmeier and her sons take a selfie together. PHOTOS COURTESY OF LINDSAY TEGTMEIER

expecting, but she loves it.

"It is really awesome," Tegtmeier said. "I get to give back kind of the knowledge of the industry versus just classroom material...I never imagined I would do that. I really enjoyed school... but somebody at the university came in here and asked me about being an adjunct professor. And it's interesting because of something that I never even considered before, and so I quickly thought about that and realized that giving students industry experience and hands-on experience is really important."

"I think that professors do a phenomenal job on teaching the content and the subjects and all of that, but having that hands-on worldly experience from doing it for 10 years is really important too. It's been great. This coming spring, I'll be

teaching grad school."

Tegtmeier is also on the business relations committee at Western Missouri Medical Center.

Her agency is focused on community involvement. It gives back to schools, sponsors events and gives back to the university as well.

Giving back to the community is important to Tegtmeier.

"Warrensburg is home for me," Tegtmeier said. "I know I'm not from here. I was 18 when I moved here, but I've now lived here longer than anywhere else I've ever lived."

"I love this community with all my heart...I think Warrensburg does a really great job of being progressive and constantly developing programs and Community Center sports for the kids

and I just think it's important for us as community pillars with owning businesses to pour back into the community so that it can continue to grow."

Tegtmeier stays busy with her agency, teaching, her two sons, and lots of volunteering. Time management is a big thing for Tegtmeier with her busy schedule.

"It takes really a lot of self-motivation, a lot of diligence, a lot of making mistakes and learning from them and continuing," Tegtmeier said. "For me, it's just coming in every day with an open mind, continuing to know that it's going to always change and you have to grow from change. You have to make mistakes to really grow."

Tegtmeier has big goals for the future of her agency.

"On the horizon could potentially be the opportunity for a second State Farm office, and they've kind of presented that a few times," Tegtmeier said. "Nothing's been said, but that's been an option and so potentially in the next three to five years, that could be something that comes up."

For now, she plans to continue growing her current office, ensuring it continues to be a pillar in the community.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI CONGRATULATES



COURTNEY SWOBODA
DIRECTOR OF MILITARY AND VETERAN SERVICES



TYLER HABIGER
DIRECTOR OF ANNUAL GIVING UCM ALUMNI FOUNDATION



REBEKAH MAUSCHBAUGH
COMMUNICATION AND EVENTS LIBRARY ASSISTANT



LINDSAY TEGTMEIER
ADJUNCT PROFESSOR

for being recognized with the **Top 20 Under 40 Community Achievement Award.**

Thank you for your leadership and dedication to the University of Central Missouri and the Warrensburg community.



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI

Mauschbaugh's passion for people inspires her to open bookstore, volunteer

By Meliyah Venerable
meliyahv@warrensburgstarjournal.com

Rebekah Mauschbaugh, 26, moved to Warrensburg after graduating from college. Mauschbaugh said she moved to be closer to her friends, but little did she know she would become heavily involved in the Warrensburg community.

Not only does Mauschbaugh continue to stay involved as a volunteer, but she has also been able to open her own bookstore.

Lamplight Bookstore, which opened this summer, has been a dream for both Mauschbaugh and co-owner Cameron Nuss.

"I've actually been planning a bookstore since the summer of 2013," Mauschbaugh previously told the Star-Journal. "I was still in high school, but the idea just grew from there. I even went to school and got a degree in digital storytelling, but that's a different story. When I met Cameron in 2020, I told him it was my dream and we came up with the concept of a bookstore bar and we think this is the first step in that direction. When we met Kristy (Meyer) at Meyer's (Market), we told her our dream and she loved it...she's been helping us plan for years and we're excited that it was finally time to get started."

Both owners are hoping to see growth in the bookstore. Mauschbaugh's love of books and libraries was also a driving force behind opening Lamplight.

"When I first moved to Warrensburg we had a Readers' World and that closed down shortly after I moved here," Mauschbaugh said recently. "But when I moved here, I didn't have the internet, I didn't have TV. I literally just went to the library every single day."

"I love libraries, but sometimes there just weren't the books that I wanted... My bookstore is super tiny, but hopefully it'll grow much bigger. But we do have a little bit of everything for anyone."

Mauschbaugh and Nuss have been thinking about the future of Lamplight.

"The co-owner of Lamplight and I have talked a lot about when we get our own space," Mauschbaugh said. "We do want to give back to the community. We're not quite sure what that looks like. We hope to follow like Homes by Darcy's lead and raise money for charity and return the favor of all the people that supported and donated books to our space."

Mauschbaugh and Nuss take any unsold books to free little libraries around Warrensburg.

Mauschbaugh also handles



Rebekah Mauschbaugh sits inside her bookstore, Lamplight, which opened this summer in downtown Warrensburg. PHOTO BY MELIYAH VENERABLE | STAR-JOURNAL

social media and events at the University of Central Missouri library. She volunteers with the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce, where she previously worked, and Warrensburg Main Street.

"Rebekah is a hard-working and talented person," Nuss said. "She does her best to make this community better. She is on

multiple committees on Main Street, and she did an amazing job for the Chamber when she was there, promoting business through their social media. She really cares about Warrensburg's small businesses and it shows in everything she does."

She often volunteers as a photographer for community events like Burg Fest and the

Art Walks.

"I always really like making people's days better," Mauschbaugh said. "It was the main reason why I went into my degree. I like telling people stories, I like meeting people and just getting involved with them... I just like doing things that improve people's lives, even if it's super small."

Swoboda advocates for military, veterans

By Joe Andrews
joea@warrensburgstarjournal.com

A passion for serving and bettering the upper-education experience for military personnel, veterans and their families drives Courtney Swoboda, 31.

Swoboda is in her fifth year at the University of Central Missouri, the last two and a half as the Director of Military and Veteran Services.

"I absolutely love it," Swoboda said. "It's a true passion of mine. I'm absolutely blessed I found it at such a young age. I truly love what I do. I love others."

In her position, Swoboda oversees the UCM Military and Veterans Success Center. The office advocates for military members, veterans and dependents.

It specifically assists its constituents in gaining access to military-specific benefits while providing other resources through the course of their higher education experience.

"I get to see so many different types of life and the different stages students are in," Swoboda said. "For us, we have students that might be a dependent and they're a child and they're going to be using benefits. Then we have a veteran who served 25 years and are like, 'Now I don't know what I want to do,' so they're coming to higher education. It's rewarding because I get to see each of them grow and I get to help them find those resources to help them excel."

According to UCM Executive Director for Government Relations David Pearce, more than 10% of the university's student body is military-related. The number breaks down to more than 1,400 students.



Courtney Swoboda serves as the Director of Military and Veteran Services at the University of Central Missouri. PHOTO COURTESY OF COURTNEY SWOBODA

"[Courtney] interacts with all of them in the Military and Veterans Success Center," Pearce said. "I have seen many times when I've been over there that she is talking and counseling to students and parents. She is really their advocate and just goes above and beyond to make it a good experience for our students ... She does it with a smile. She's always happy. She's a good person to be around."

Swoboda operates in her role with first-hand experience. She is a Technical Sergeant in the 442nd Force Support Squadron at Whiteman

Air Force Base. There, she holds the title of Non-Commissioned Officer In Charge Education and Training Specialist, helping with tuition assistance and professional military education.

Swoboda initially joined the Air Force in 2013 as an Aircraft Specialist as a way to pay for her education, a route she took following her brother's footsteps.

She reached 10 years of service in July.

"To me, it's the people," Swoboda said. "It's such an amazing thing that we do, but the people we are connected with and the things we get to do

and see are just things most people don't get to do. That experience has been great for me. It also led me to this position [at UCM]. I feel like if I did not choose to serve, I would not be where I am today. It's crazy where life takes you. The experiences I've been provided by the military, I'm so thankful for them and for the people."

Through the two organizations, Swoboda shares her knowledge with several outlets, such as the Military Affairs Committee with the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce.

She also launched the

Missouri Organization of Veteran Education Specialists, designed to connect institutions on veteran issues. Sixteen schools gathered at UCM as part of the group in June.

"Courtney is perceived as the leader," Pearce said. "They talk all the time among each other. 'How do you perceive this VA rule? I don't like what the Army is doing here. What can the Air Force do better?' They really do a good job communicating with themselves. They all win because of that."

Swoboda added her end goal is to ensure all military members, veterans

and dependents understand how to access resources, whether or not they attend or plan on attending the University of Central Missouri.

"We're very involved, so I don't turn veterans and military-affiliated students away," Swoboda said. "We've had a lot of students, recently we noticed, going to other schools that need more help and support and they get word of mouth and see how supportive our office is. They're coming and traveling from the city to our center because they know we're going to help them and not turn them away."

Cantrell uses her passion to help fellow business owners

Chelsea Cantrell



By Meliyah Venerable
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Growing up, Chelsea Cantrell, 34, was involved in small businesses. Both of her parents had businesses or practices of their own.

When Facebook started to gain popularity, Cantrell used her mother's boutique in Springfield as a "test subject" for digital marketing. Cantrell said her passion for digital marketing continued to grow, and then she began managing marketing for multiple businesses.

After meeting her husband, Cantrell moved to Warrensburg, where she worked various jobs.

In 2018, Cantrell and a few friends started 360 Media Co., a business that builds and manages websites for other companies.

"We mostly build and manage websites so that business owners don't have to," Cantrell said. "We took that model just because business owners are very busy... So, we essentially consider ourselves an extension of our client's office. We handle anything web and email marketing related for them."

Cantrell said the business has a wide range of clients. Around 80% are small niche markets, like all-star cheerleading or gymnastics; others are small businesses in Johnson County and some clients as far as Canada.

Cantrell said she has always loved helping small businesses, and opening this business allows her to do just that.

"I really love helping small business owners think about their business from a digital standpoint," Cantrell said. "We always tell people that they should think of their website as their 24/7 employee, and so



Chelsea Cantrell and her family pose for a group photo. PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHELSEA CANTRELL

we love clients who will come in for help on their website. I just really love working with our clients and helping them find digital solutions."

When not working at her business, Cantrell is a co-lead of a Girl Scout troop and is part of the leadership team for the area Girl Scouts.

She said her two stepchildren

keep her busy with their sports and activities.

To continue her passion for small businesses, Cantrell works closely with Warrensburg Main Street.

"Chelsea is an asset to our community," Warrensburg Main Street Assistant Director Jamie DeBacker said. "She is not only kind and hard-work-

ing but so willing to be a helpful hand no matter the task. Chelsea finds the time to give back to Warrensburg in a number of ways while being a busy mother of two. Chelsea is so deserving of this recognition as she is one of the behind-the-scenes volunteers who helps make the magic happen in our organization anywhere

else she is involved."

Cantrell chooses to work with Main Street because of its involvement with local business owners.

"I really like their mission and I like how they approach getting business owners involved," Cantrell said. "They're always looking to be innovative and they really take opinions and suggestions."

"So I feel like they really are listening and trying to fulfill their mission, but also ensure that there's pieces of what they can incorporate from the opinions that have been given to them."

Cantrell said her goal is to continue helping local businesses. Since starting in 2018, 360 Media has continued to grow. When it began, there were around 10 customers. Now, 360 services more than 100 customers throughout the U.S. and Canada.

"We're really made for somebody who is trying to figure out what to do on their website and how to make it easier for their customers to interact with the business," Cantrell said. "So I would say anybody who is just kind of done with the DIY and really just wants to hand it over to somebody who can take care of it for them but also understands the needs of a small business owner. That is what I would hope is conveyed to people."



Congratulations!

The Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce would like to congratulate all the Top 20 Under 40 Community Achievement Awards recipients!

We would also like to give a special congratulations to our Chamber Members:

- Baylee Garrison
- Chelsea Cantrell
- Monica Mitcheltree

700000at

Congratulations

to the 20 under 40 winners of 2023!

We're inspired by the way you are fostering positive change in our community.



Warrensburg Star-Journal under 40 staff, left to right, Nicole Cooke, Joe Andrews, Meliyah Venerable and Holly Basinger.



Garrison focuses on community involvement for Central Bank

By Meliyah Venerable
meliyahv@warrensburgstarjournal.com

Even though Baylee Garrison, 26, is fairly new to Warrensburg, she has worked hard to become hugely involved in the community.

Garrison grew up in Ozark, between Branson and Springfield. She attended Missouri State University and earned a bachelor's in communication with a minor in sociology.

Shortly after graduation, Garrison moved to Sedalia. The COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak when she decided to move, but she was able to start her career with Central Bank.

"It was kind of a rocky start moving to a new town," Garrison said. "But eventually, when I started with Central Bank, I was really able to start getting involved with the community. I had never had a job that had allowed me to kind of go out and get that involved before. So it was a really, really great experience getting to learn about organizations and volunteer times and things like that through the bank."

Garrison did marketing and commercial banking in Sedalia. She found that marketing is where her strength and passion lie. She then transferred to the Central Bank of Warrensburg to do marketing full-time.

"Transitioning from the Sedalia market to Warrensburg and being able to do marketing full time was a really great transition for me," Garrison said. "I'm a one-person marketing team, so I do it all, from the content to the actual managing our social media pages, some internal communication projects. As well as our public relations and then also getting more involved here in the Warrensburg community."

Garrison said she was nervous about moving to Warrensburg, but she has loved every minute of it and has focused on getting involved. She serves on two committees with the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce and the Farmers' Market committee with Warrensburg Main Street.

"Baylee has only lived in Warrensburg/Johnson County for a few months, but in that time, she has shown more pride than some that have lived here

their whole lives," Joshua Detherage, a Business Development Officer with Central Bank and the Warrensburg Chamber board chair, wrote in his nomination. "She dedicates time to her role as the Marketing Specialist with Central Bank to involve herself and the company in community happenings."

Detherage said Garrison's involvement also includes working with Central Bank's Holden location on local events, helping deliver back-to-school bags to teachers at various schools, giving financial education presentations to the elementary schools in Warrensburg, and reading to kids at the library.

"Baylee is creative and is always looking for ways to share that," he continued. "Baylee had immersed herself in applying her expertise in marketing to the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce while continuing her education with earning her Master's. She is a champion of nonprofit and donates her valuable time to assist in getting their messages out while never taking credit for her work. Baylee is a dedicated, strong coworker who brings to the team an invaluable can-do attitude."

Through her position as Marketing Specialist/Executive Assistant at Central Bank, Garrison has learned new things and connected her passions with work.

"I'm really, really thankful for the position I've been able to have with the bank to allow me to do those things," Garrison said. "I've been able to explore a lot of other like creative outlets and stuff through my marketing department here just because I am by myself...Just working with my coworkers and other employees on helping create a really positive environment for them, and somewhere that they want to come to work and enjoy going to work is something that's really important to me and it's nice being able to tie that into my marketing department as well."

Garrison said she enjoys learning about and helping small businesses wherever she is.

"Small businesses make up a large percentage of the businesses in our country and in our area," Garrison



Baylee Garrison is the Marketing Specialist/Executive Assistant at Central Bank in Warrensburg. PHOTO COURTESY OF BAYLEE GARRISON

said. "I think that Missouri, Warrensburg, Kansas City, Springfield, they all have a really special connection with their small businesses that I have always felt a sense of community."

"So through the Chamber specifically, I'm able to give that support back to the businesses and that's something that I'm really passionate about, making sure that those small businesses thrive and have the support that they need in their community and from the marketing standpoint."

Higher education is also important to Garrison, and she hopes to continue building a relationship with the University of Central Missouri.

Garrison is working on her master's in business management and leader-

ship.

"Positive leadership is also really important to me," Garrison said. "That's another really important aspect of working here at Central Bank that has been amazing is the leadership. So, I work directly with Marshall and Jessica, our CEO and our Executive Vice President. And they create a wonderful environment of just leadership and support because I think there's a huge difference between being a leader and being a manager."

"So as I'm looking to step into that management and leadership role, I'm really thankful to have them as mentors and someone that I can look up to. To be the kind of leader that I want to be moving forward in my career."

Narron creating positive culture in hometown classroom

By Nicole Cooke
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Tyler Narron, 28, of Warrensburg, is in his sixth year of teaching and has spent his career working in his hometown school district.

Narron, a University of Central Missouri alumnus, taught for one year at Sterling Elementary and now teaches fifth grade at Martin Warren Elementary.

Narron said he'd known since high school that he wanted to be a teacher and initially wanted to teach music. However, after spending his freshman year as a music education major, he realized that he enjoyed his education classes much more than the music courses. Eventually, he settled on an interest in elementary education, and that path led him back home.

Not only did Narron student teach at Martin Warren, but he, his parents and his grandparents attended the same elementary school where he's now on the other side of the teacher's desk.

"And so just to be teaching in the same building that my whole family had to pass through throughout their life is so cool," Narron said of staying in Warrensburg. "The community, too, we have such a strong sense of pride in our community and I just love it. We are a family in the Warrensburg R-6 School District and we've got each other's backs. This school district is awesome as far as we do everything we can for the kids, which is just the philosophy I want to live by and I wanted to stay in a district where we put kids first and where we have such a strong sense of community."

Narron said his goal every day is to

make an impact on a child's learning. He also focuses on building a positive classroom, community and culture because he believes those factors lead to engaged learning.

Narron said he builds that positive community by asking questions and getting to know the students on their level. He uses that information to make his lessons more relatable for an audience of 10-year-old students.

"And then also just my biggest thing is humor," he added. "I teach with a lot of humor, jokes throughout the day. I throw some humor into every lesson, and whether it's through just conversation or one-on-one or small group, I just kind of add a little humor in there and the kids like it."

Although Narron didn't fully pursue music education as a career, he's still found a way to incorporate music into his life. He is in his fourth year as the drumline coordinator at Warrensburg High School. The two roles allow Narron to meet students early in their education careers and then later on, he sees their growth when they reach high school.

He and his wife welcomed their first child, a daughter, last spring. Their daughter has "truly become the center of my whole world," he said. The family enjoys outdoor activities such as walking, hiking, and float trips.

Narron's community involvement also stems from his classroom. Each year, he and his students raise money for the Johnson County Angel Tree program to help provide gifts for families in need during the holidays. The class hosts a fundraiser, such as a Culver's night, and then uses those funds to shop for Angel Tree items.

"It's super important the kids get a sense of responsibility, and they learn about the time of year and how it's all about giving, and they learn that there's some students in their community that are less fortunate than others and that some families just need that extra support at that time of year," he explained. "It also leads to some great conversation in the classroom as far as like economics needs and wants and all that. So that's my favorite thing that I do and my class does for the community every year."

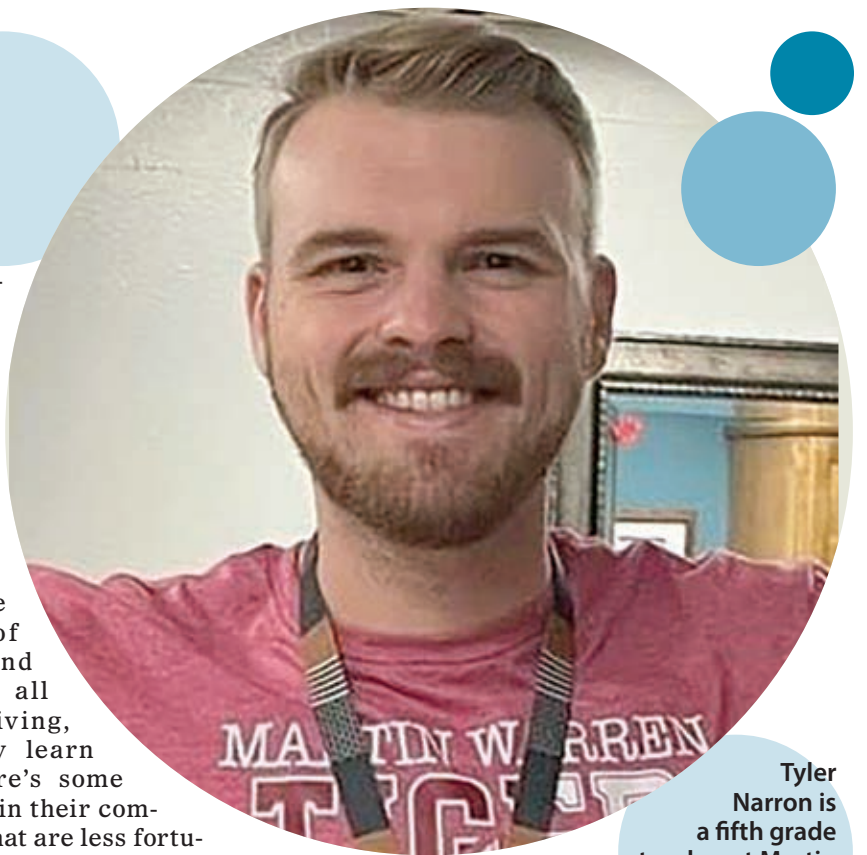
Narron said he's already working with his building's social workers on a plan for the upcoming holiday season.

"Tyler is fantastic at building relationships with students," Principal Lorna Cassell said. "He is able to keep fifth grade students engaged in the learning environment all day. His classroom environment is welcoming, fun, and filled with the best learning! You never know if you are going to see Mr. Narron toss a block of cheese across the room when he is teaching fractions or wear a wild costume for spirit week! He is wonderful with stu-

dents who are struggling to learn or make good choices and never misses an opportunity to praise students who are successful."

Last year, he earned his master's in educational leadership from William Woods University and plans to start his specialist degree soon. He sees himself staying in education and Warrensburg.

"In a perfect world where everything goes according to plan, I would love to become an administrator here and just kind of working my way up the ladder, if possible," he said. "I would love to just be an educational leader in all of our buildings. I just couldn't see myself anywhere else."



Tyler Narron is a fifth grade teacher at Martin Warren Elementary. PHOTO COURTESY OF TYLER NARRON

Barnhart fulfills dream as Solar Pro Tint n Tunes owner

By Joe Andrews
joea@warrensburgstarjournal.com

As a middle schooler, CJ Barnhart would walk by 120 E. Gay St. while on his way to work at the old Corner Cafe.

From 1977 to 2015, the location housed Sound by Design. The building became the 40-year-old's own in 2015 and is now the home of Solar Pro Tint n Tunes.

"I was the kid at like 13, 14 years old," Barnhart said. "I would come in and waste the guy's time. I had no money. I was really interested in all of this stuff. It was really cool. There was always cool cars here ... Even at 16, before I had a stereo at all, I would come in. It got to the point that I would just come in and hang out. They got so tired of my hanging out up here that they would say, 'well, if you're going to talk, at least come back with us so we can keep working.'"

Barnhart began picking up chores such as sweeping the floor and raking the gravel parking lot. Eventually, he got to interview for a position.

Barnhart worked at Sound by Design for almost three years before transitioning into window tinting. At the time, he was nearly 21 and found out he was going to be a father.

"Even though car audio is my passion, window tinting, I was offered more money to do that substantially, so I transitioned into that," he said. "I really, really enjoyed it."

In 2001, Barnhart split his time between Warrensburg, Harrisonville, Independence and Blue



CJ Barnhart is the owner of the Solar Pro Tint n Tunes location in Warrensburg. PHOTO BY JOE ANDREWS | STAR-JOURNAL

Springs to tint windows. In 2003, Warrensburg operations were moved into a detail shop.

Sharing space there didn't last long. A 1,000-square-foot stand-alone shop opened in 2005. Then, Barnhart hired Aaron Schildknecht, who is still with the business today.

Barnhart initially planned to keep most of his work in Kansas City but keep the Warrensburg location open for car stereo sales and installation with tint as an option on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Demand led to a change in action.

"It blew up," Barnhart said. "It just got busy. In 2003, they changed the tint law for the state of Missouri. Everything just got busy. It turned out I was here every day, six days a week. I had my son and I found I was having my daughter in 2007. Then the owner of all of the Solar Pros, there were three locations at the time, asked if I wanted to buy it."

The owner financed the Warrensburg Solar Pro location to Barnhart. His daughter was born soon after. Then in 2008, the Great Recession hit.

"Me and Aaron were

really resilient on keeping our head down and trying to broaden our ability and products that we sold to apply to what people wanted and needed but couldn't get here ..." Barnhart said. "Backup cameras and remote starts were just this whirlwind. After recovering from 2008, we said if we can make it through that, we can make it through anything."

Come 2014, Barnhart received a phone call from the owner of Sound by Design seeking a buy-out. He initially denied the offer, but after some negotiations, Barnhart bought out the inventory plus the building where he started his career at 17.

Solar Pro Tint n Tunes moved into the 5,000-square-foot building in 2015, following renovation and upkeep. Barnhart said that's when "everything changed for us." He developed an eye for business and realized he had been worrying too much about potential competitors.

Barnhart began prioritizing service quality compared to the quantity of services provided.

Solar Pro Tint n Tunes refers customers to other local businesses if the request is out of their specialty.

"We found that having those bonds of sharing business together was more valuable than trying to make a couple extra dollars," he said.

Solar Pro currently employs five techs. Together, they focus on quality and growth.

"I care about each and every one of them," he said. "I don't want to feel like a boss, and I don't want to yell at people that 'you need to do this.' I want to be your coworker. I want to work together. I want to work on these cars. I'm not the type of boss that just sits in the office and looks at numbers all day. I can't do it. I'll take the computer home and I'll look at numbers at home."

Barnhart and Solar Pro Tint n Tunes are also active in the community. The business hosts a Toys for Tots drive each year, offering a discount on window tinting packages for a toy donation.

"Being a father of four, it hurts my heart to

think there's kids that go without," Barnhart said. "We've had our fair share of holiday seasons and Christmas times that I don't want any kid to go through that. Ever. We were fortunate enough with our kids that we were always able to make it work. Some families aren't that fortunate."

In August, Solar Pro partnered with Warrensburg Ford and Warrensburg Cars and Coffee to donate school supplies to the Warrensburg R-VI School District. Barnhart also rarely turns down sponsoring youth sports teams, noting he's "always had a soft spot for kids."

Barnhart credits Solar Pro Tint n Tunes' success to its staff and the community it serves.

"I'm lucky for the guys that we have. I'm lucky for the community. I'm lucky for the building and location that we have," Barnhart said. "Everything was about timing. Me buying the business, it was a bad time, but I made it work. It was a risk, it was a gamble. ... But, it has already showed to pay itself off."

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Miller offering support system for Lime Tree residents

By Nicole Cooke
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Charity “Charlee” Miller, 36, of Warrensburg, doesn’t hide that she’s struggled with addiction. But now that she’s graduated from Johnson County Recovery Court and found a fresh start, she’s using her experience to help others going through the same struggle.

Miller is the housing manager for Lime Tree, which is part of Recovery Lighthouse in Warrensburg. The nonprofit offers support services for people seeking recovery from substance use. Lime Tree offers housing for up to eight women going through the program.

Before she worked at Lime Tree, Miller was a resident at the home while going through recovery court after an arrest.

While she was in the middle of her addiction, Miller said she didn’t always know where she would sleep at night and didn’t know if her belongings would still be there when she woke up. She was focused on getting her next fix and figuring out how she was going to eat.

“I had a pretty hard time in recovery court,” she continued. “At the beginning, I went to jail like numerous times. And then finally, like five months in, I finally got it and I finally really wanted to do it. Just good things were happening all around.”

Miller joined recovery

court in early January 2021 and she’s been sober since Jan. 16, 2021. She graduated from recovery court in April 2022 and was hired at Lime Tree that fall.

Now, she’s helping other women find their path to recovery at Lime Tree.

As the housing manager, Miller helps host life skills groups and walks the women through daily journaling. Plus, she has been hosting celebrations to mark moments such as birthdays and sobriety milestones. Miller said she also supports them once they’ve found permanent housing and ensures her office door is always open. She created an alumni group so graduates can continue to be engaged with Recovery Lighthouse.

“We just try to celebrate them as much as possible,” Miller said. “You know, just because it’s such a hard path to start, and giving them a whole bunch of support and them coming here to the groups and stuff, that helps build their support system as well.”

Amanda Green, a recovery court counselor, said Miller played a huge role in creating the weekly life skills group for the residents, organizing courses such as cooking, cleaning, and gardening. She attends recovery court meetings with many residents and has become a peer mentor for those going through the program. She also spends some Saturdays ensuring residents can see their families.

“She takes that time out of her weekend when most don’t have to do that at all,” Green said. “And she creates these events for them as well – birthdays, sober parties, that kind of thing, which is pretty awesome. And she puts a lot of effort into that. She even got a bunch of pizzas donated from Pizza Hut. She gets out there and she talks to the community as well, too.”

Green said Miller has co-facilitated with her a few times, and she’s watched Miller come out of her shell as she works with the residents.

“It was really great to kind of see her share her knowledge that not only she’s learned in the program, but with her own experience and being able to translate that to the clients has been phenomenal,” Green said. “It’s somebody that they can relate to. And that they can understand.”

From the excitement she showed for the first person she helped get into treatment, to the extra work she’s put into the house while Housing Director Amanda Rowland was on maternity leave, Green said it’s evident that Miller genuinely cares about every individual who comes through Recovery Lighthouse and Lime Tree.

“And my door is always open, so they can always come and talk to me. And you know, sometimes it just takes time and then that short amount of time, good things will start to happen and you just grow from there,”



After going through her own experience with addiction, Charity Miller now helps other women dealing with similar struggles through her role as the housing manager at Lime Tree. PHOTO BY NICOLE COOKE | STAR-JOURNAL

Miller said.

Miller has hit some milestones of her own in the last year. After 10 years apart, her daughter moved back in after she graduated high school. And Miller is engaged. She’s also one test away from earning her GED. She also plans to become a certified peer specialist next year.

Miller went from cutting off her ankle bracelet and going on the run for a week before get-

ting caught – Miller says she’s glad she was caught – to being involved in the community, reconnecting with her daughter, and receiving praise from the recovery court judge and her probation officer. She said that support system is what kept her going.

It’s rare for Miller to experience an addiction trigger these days, but when she does, she thinks about the “bad stuff I was in then” and

“all the good things that have happened in recovery.”

“Honestly, working here, it helps me not only with my recovery, but it helps fill that hole to want to help others,” she said. “Getting to see people at the bottom and then making their way up to the top is like really, really cool. To see their growth and everything, that’s probably my favorite part about the job.”

Dreup has passion for supporting employees, emergency services

By Nicole Cooke
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Cecilia Dreup, 31, of Warrensburg, has worked for Johnson County Central Dispatch for eight years. After working as a dispatcher, she took on the role of Professional Development Director in 2019, which eventually morphed into her current role as Assistant Director.

In January 2014, Dreup attended the Central Missouri Police Academy on a whim; she admits she was more interested in the psychology aspect. She worked briefly as a Henry County Sheriff’s Office deputy before she decided that wasn’t the right fit. Again, on a whim, she applied for a job at dispatch, but this time, she fell in love with the job.

“Dispatching is amazing – fast-paced, really intense, you know, make snap judgments really fast,” Dreup said. “And then I just always wanted to be able to make a difference in my organization, so every opportunity I had to move up, I would take a shot in the dark and apply, and I moved up little by little.”

Dispatchers answer calls for assistance from the public while also talking on the radio channel with the county’s first responder agencies. Dreup said it’s a flurry of information and decisions. The constant multitasking can offer an adrenaline rush, but dispatchers also experience traumatic calls that require a calm demeanor.

On top of that multitasking,

Dreup said dispatchers are responsible for many meticulous tasks, like entering information for warrants, protection orders and theft cases, tracking first responders, and documenting calls for safety and quality purposes.

“They are constantly striving to do their best and always support everybody and their role is like the middle link between all of those response agencies,” she said. “There’s definitely a lot of passion and a lot of love here. And we do tend to be the offshoot of emergency services that we’ve never seen but heard, so we tend to get forgotten a little bit. Despite all of that, the amount of love that our dispatchers have for what they do and for the people that they’re serving is just amazing.”

As the assistant director, Dreup oversees training, quality assurance, and operations. She leads the training program and works with recruits for four to six months. Dreup checks in throughout the process to make sure things are being done correctly.

Director Kimberly Jennings said Dreup has been “instrumental” in recruiting and retaining the best professionals for Central Dispatch.

“Additionally, Cecilia oversees all training, recertification, and quality assurance for all dispatch employees, ensuring that they are equipped with the latest technologies and best practices to handle any emergency,” Jennings wrote in her nomination.

“Ceci’s leadership style is characterized by her ability to

inspire and motivate her team to perform at their best. She values employee well-being and conducts regular check-ins to ensure that everyone is on the same page, and any concerns or issues can be addressed promptly. Her communication skills are top-notch, making her an effective communicator with colleagues, callers, and emergency responder agencies alike.”

Dreup looks back on her experience in the training program when she works with new dispatchers. She said she tries to come from an angle of empathy and compassion and personalizes the training to each person. She’s changed the format to start in the classroom rather than spending their first night on the floor with a trainer, ensuring trainees are better prepared for that first call.

“I remember the feeling of dread every time the phone rang. I would have this millisecond hesitation,” she remembered of her first calls. “No one else could see it, and it would feel like my chest is tightening every single time the phone rang and then just one day, that went away. I’m very honest with my training, remembering that discomfort and that it does take close to a year before you’re really comfortable doing this job.”

During her tenure, Dreup



Cecilia Dreup is the Assistant Director of Johnson County Central Dispatch. PHOTO COURTESY OF CECILIA DREUP

said she’s proud of the culture shift at Central Dispatch. She said it’s been a goal for everyone to be approachable from the top down and to have open, honest communication with the staff.

“And let them know how important they are to us,” she added. “You can have the best equipment in the world, but if your people aren’t supported and valued, you don’t have anything. You’re nothing without your people.”

Dreup and her husband, who she met at the police academy, have a 3-year-old daughter. She spends most of her free time with her family. She’s also an avid reader and a proud member of many “nerd fandoms,” such as Star Trek, Harry Potter, and The Office, which is evidenced by the décor and books in her office; she said it’s important to have some “goofy quirkiness” at work, too. Much of her community involvement relates to

Central Dispatch, such as attending area events and being on the Johnson County Local Emergency Planning Committee.

“That adrenaline, being there for somebody during what is usually the worst moment in their lives is fulfilling. It’s hard, but it’s fulfilling, too,” Dreup said. “Getting to be the compassionate voice on the other end of the phone. And I really prioritize customer service a lot and I’ve tried to kind of help foster that within the agency. The customer service is the most important, especially people that are dealing with emergencies.”

“I just can’t imagine doing anything else, being anywhere else. Like it would fall flat. I don’t think I could ever walk away, even on bad days.”

Mifflin turns love for fashion into two businesses

By Nicole Cooke
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A love for fashion at a young age has turned into two small businesses for Rachel Mifflin, 33, of Warrensburg.

Mifflin's love for fashion began by watching her mom, a seamstress with a master's in clothing and textiles, make clothing for her daughter and customers.

"It was always really fun getting to dream up these ideas and then she just would make them come to life," Mifflin said. "I never wanted to actually do the sewing, per se, but I loved being around the clothes, loved picking them out. I love doing color stories. I love helping figure out what is the most flattering on different body types and I just feel like there is a lot to be said for your personal appearance and how you put yourself out there. I think it can directly impact your success, or how do you want to come across to others?"

She put that interest to work while attending the University of Central Missouri and dreamed of opening a bridal store one day. But plans changed, and after graduation, she took a job at Bischel Jewelry in Sedalia.

The Crest Ridge High School alumna said her time at the jewelry store was educational and she learned how to run a successful business. Soon, she felt the need to return to Warrensburg and have something of her own. Seeing that Warrensburg still had no bridal shop, Mifflin revisited that earlier dream. After working on a business plan with the Small Business Develop-

ment Center and getting an SBA loan, Ivory & Lace Bridal became a reality.

Ivory & Lace opened in April 2014 on Pine Street in downtown Warrensburg. Five years ago, Mifflin made the leap to purchase and renovate the current location at 124 N. Holden St.

Coming full circle, Mifflin's mom does all the alterations for Ivory & Lace and the mother-daughter duo meets at the store once a week for fittings.

"At this point, I couldn't even tell you how many brides we've helped — in the thousands," Mifflin said. "We are a destination shop here, so the majority of my girls actually travel, on average, about an hour to come to the shop. So we get a lot of girls from Kansas City, Jefferson City, and even recently, we've been getting a lot from the Lake of the Ozarks area, which is pretty cool."

"The shop has private appointments. We definitely have some very unique dresses and so I'm really proud of the fact that this is kind of a destination spot in the fact that we bring a lot of new traffic to Warrensburg."

Mifflin continued her fashion business ventures by opening MKT Clothing Co. with her business partner, Karen Vick, in 2017.

"We just noticed that there was a need for more clothing or more clothing specifically for Warrensburg. Just kind of some diversification," Mifflin said. "Kind of the items and stuff, especially for women in their 20s and 30s who are wanting more work-appropriate wear, but still wanting to be trendy."

The boutique has moved locations multiple times and is now primarily an

online business with a downtown warehouse open every second Saturday of the month. The business also does private events and attends events such as Burg Fest.

In March, Mifflin added a third title to her list of jobs: executive director of Johnson County United Way.

"Since taking over that, that has been extremely fulfilling and really cool to give back to my community in a way that I haven't been able to before," Mifflin said. "I have lived here my whole life. I've been active in lots of groups and stuff, but this is definitely the biggest step I've taken into helping with a nonprofit and truly trying to do better in our community. And so our United Way really focuses on youth nonprofits and helping disperse funds with grants to the different organizations."

Mifflin said she is trying to help United Way reach a wider audience across the county, not just in Warrensburg. Just recently, JCUW hosted its first Dog Dash fundraiser, encouraging people and their pets to run, jog or walk for a good cause. Mifflin said the inaugural event was a success and the organization plans to host it annually.

"Rachel has started two amazing businesses for our community, but doesn't stop there," Maggie Burgin, who worked at both Ivory and Lace and MKT Clothing and now is the Marketing and Event Coordinator at Warrensburg Main Street, wrote in her nomination. "She has recently become the Director for United Way of Johnson County. Rachel has become a pillar



Rachel Mifflin is seen standing in her downtown Warrensburg bridal store, Ivory and Lace Bridal. She also co-owns MKT Clothing Co. and is the Executive Director of Johnson County United Way. PHOTO COURTESY OF RACHEL MIFFLIN

to downtown Warrensburg with her amazing business and has revitalized seven buildings in the last 10 years. Rachel and her family are huge supporters of all things local. Rachel truly does not let her age stop her from becoming a pillar within our community."

Mifflin and her husband, who owns Mifflin Lawn Care, have a 5-year-old daughter. Being an entrepreneurial couple has its pros and cons, Mifflin said, but they've helped each other with being business owners and they can relate to each other's work struggles.

When Mifflin isn't busy

at one of her businesses or United Way, she's in "full mom mode," taking her daughter to dance, cheerleading, tumbling or basketball. Their family of three also spends time on their 20-30 acres of land north of town and with both Mifflin and her husband's families, who also live in Johnson County.

Aside from prioritizing time with her husband and daughter, Mifflin said her biggest professional goal is making her clients happy. And while being a small business owner can be challenging, she said it's also "extremely rewarding."

"I just love having cre-

ative freedom. I guess that's the best way to describe it," Mifflin said. "I am very much a kind of a 'get an idea, do it in the next five minutes' type of person. ... You learn a lot of hard lessons that way because not every idea is a good idea. But you don't know, so you try. And so I love being able just to decide, 'OK, we're going to have a massive sale in two weeks. Let's start advertising. Let's go for it.' Or I decided I want to start carrying shoes. Let's do it. Let's add the whole line. And so I know that it might not be the best way to do things, but that's the way that I do things."

Habiger finds calling in higher education, giving back

By Nicole Cooke
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Tyler Habiger, 32, of Warrensburg, has found his calling in helping others through nonprofits and education, whether at work or in the community.

Habiger has been the Director of Annual Giving at the University of Central Missouri Alumni Foundation since July 2021.

He works with donors who make gifts of \$24,999 or below. Habiger also puts together the foundation's annual Giving Days, including Giving Tuesday, and created the March Madness donation campaign for UCM Athletics teams. He said he's secured some scholarships and major gifts "that will continue to make a difference for years to come."

"And I get to work with some of the most fun, energetic, exciting, passionate people," Habiger said. "That \$100 gift may not seem like a whole lot to them, but to you and me, it's everything. Because when you have, you know, 1,000 people that give to the Central Annual Fund every year, that \$100 adds up, and it really does make a tremendous difference for these students."

"I get to do all of the amazing mail, email, crowdfunding special projects. I get to do a lot of writing, which is wonderful. ... It's a role where I get to put all of my talents to work and I get to meet with donors face to face and network with them online. ... No matter where you live, you can make a difference. You don't have to live in Warrensburg to make a difference for the school."

Habiger has worked primarily in higher education, previously working for the University of Kansas Foundation, and had a



Tyler Habiger, the Director of Annual Giving for the University of Central Missouri Alumni Foundation, poses for a photo at the organization's annual donor recognition event, An Evening of Appreciation. PHOTO COURTESY OF TYLER HABIGER

short stint in politics when he worked in communications for then-Lt. Gov. Mike Parson's office. He realized that education

was his true calling, and he said he hasn't looked back since.

"The (UCM Alumni Foundation) mission is timeless and

it's so pure and it's easy to get behind. Because you know exactly what you're getting when you walk into Smiser Alumni Center," Habiger said. "It's like you're you're here to support UCM. Whether it's the students, it's the faculty, it's the programs, it's the capital projects, it's easy to get behind an institution that's 152 years old and has been on the leading edge of educating."

"In his role as the Director of Annual Giving, Tyler works to secure philanthropic gifts to the Central Annual Fund, which supports the institution's greatest needs," said Jackie Jackson, Associate Vice President of University Advancement. "He is dedicated to achieving our vision of transforming the lives of UCM students by creating opportunities for them beyond what they imagined possible."

Habiger loves to travel and also has a side job working for Los Angeles-based Coolwaters Productions. The company represents more than 100 celebrities for convention appearances and other events. Habiger helps with social media and also travels with clients to conventions. As a self-professed Trekkie, he enjoys going to Star Trek conventions across the country.

Habiger said he's also a history nut, and is pursuing a master's degree in history at UCM.

In the community, Habiger is a Big Brothers Big Sisters board member, a CLIMB participant, a member of Emerging Professionals Improving Connection (EPIC) and the Rotary Club of Central Missouri, and volunteers for Warrensburg Main Street.

Habiger said he enjoys giving back to the community in a variety of ways that allow him to offer his knowledge in fundraising and public relations to other nonprofits. In addition to

being a BBBS board member, Habiger is also a Big Brother to Connor. They try to hang out at least once a month and the pair are currently eating their way through Warrensburg restaurants during each visit.

"Tyler brings tremendous energy to every project he works on at the UCM Alumni Foundation," said Courtney Goddard, Vice President of University Advancement and Executive Director of the UCM Alumni Foundation. "He does his work with positivity and he is committed to our alumni, supporters and students. Tyler has also gone beyond just working at UCM, he has truly embraced the Warrensburg community. Through his involvement with Rotary and Big Brothers Big Sisters, he has invested his time to make Warrensburg a stronger community for all. We are very proud of Tyler for earning this award and look forward to seeing him continue to make a difference in this community."

Other than his hometown of Bolivar, Habiger said Warrensburg feels like home. He said he was embraced by the university and other young professionals as soon as he moved to Warrensburg, and he's embraced the community, too. He's quickly become a Mule advocate — and will soon be an official UCM graduate himself — through his work with the university and its global network.

"I've gotten to meet alumni that have worked for decades for insurance companies, and they produce movies, and they write original music and they've gone out and they've taken this universal education and they've made it their own," Habiger said. "We have 100,000 living alumni and there's 100,000 stories. And all I do is I just apply that passion to needs here in Warrensburg."