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# HOPE PROGRESS 2023

## Hope and Hempstead County: Redefining progress with community partnerships and a shared mission

By April Lovette

A study of the events and happenings of the last year provide overwhelming examples of progress in Hope and Hempstead County. Current businesses experienced growth and expansion or introduced different products while new businesses opened up, as well. Twenty-two ribbon cuttings were held last year, bringing a variety of shopping experiences to citizens and adding additional revenue and jobs to our local economy. Studies show that 67 cents of every dollar spent at a small business remains in the local community. That's a major investment in one's community... Hence, the Progress Edition: a celebration of our local businesses by showcasing their accomplishments of the last year.

What SWARK.Today discovered though while examining these businesses and organizations who have made major strides over the last year was an achievement that can't be measured by dollars and cents, because the results are everlasting. The sheer number of partnerships that were created this year, all in a shared mission to form something bigger and better for everyone, was astounding. Numerous citizens, businesses, churches, and organizations came together and donated time, energy, and funds for events that were planned for no other purpose than to show appreciation or benefit another.

One example is the Back-to-School Bash that occurred in August. Farmers Bank & Trust has held a Back-to-School Bash for years, but this year they decided to take it further, so they partnered with Hope Public Schools and the Hope-Hempstead County Chamber of Commerce to plan something even bigger. Before too long, numerous other businesses and organizations were on board like Klipsch Heritage Museum Association (KHMA), the Junior Auxiliary of Hope, and local law enforcement agencies

(Hope Police Department and Hempstead County Sheriff's Office), plus many more. The end result was a grand event that saw downtown Hope overflowing with local families enjoying food, games, music, and prize drawings. All free of charge.

Other examples include showing appreciation for local educators, law enforcement, nurses, and more. So many businesses and organizations donated food and/or gifts during Teacher Appreciation Week, National Nurses Week, National EMS Week, and National Law Enforcement Appreciation Day that the names are too many to be listed here. Partnerships were created to support school activities and clubs, local charities like Hope-In-Action and United Way, and local civic groups who serve the community on a daily basis like Lions Club, Rotary, and Kiwanis.

You'll find many of these and other examples throughout this edition, as well as each business or organization's accomplishments for the last year. During our interviews, we noticed certain phrases could be heard frequently, and they came from people of varying backgrounds or business interests. Phrases like "giving back," "serving the community," and "partnerships" were shared repeatedly, and a common theme began to form. What became indisputable was that Hope and Hempstead County have discovered that a genuine testimony to the character of our community is not just the growth made in a year's time, but it is in the process itself: the steps taken together, the relationships built, and the partnerships created. That's the true formula for progress. Community partners plus a shared mission equals great success, and the impact it has on the citizens of this community is exponential.



## Director Christy Burns reflects on her first year with the Hope-Hempstead County Chamber of Commerce

By April Lovette

This time last year, Christy Burns was just beginning her new role as Director of the Hope-Hempstead County Chamber of Commerce and was filled with excitement and anticipation at the year of potential prospects ahead of her. One year later?... She's even more in love with her job, this community, and the incredibly committed citizens who make up Hope and Hempstead County.

During her first year as Director, the Chamber acquired an impressive 23 new members and 11 new Chamber Ambassadors, while also facilitating 33 Community Coffees, 22 Ribbon Cuttings, and a plethora of other annual events like the Chamber Banquet, Small Business Saturday, Chamber of Commerce Week, and so much more. Burns said that she received an abundance of support from countless businesses, organizations, and citizens throughout these events, as well as other Chamber events like the Christmas Parade, Christmas Open House, and the Watermelon Festival. The fellowship and community camaraderie that she witnessed left a profound impression.

"Going into this job, I knew about the primary chamber events and functions that would require planning and hard work," Burns said, "but what I could never have imagined was the sheer amount of community partnerships in which I would get to participate and enjoy. So many people came together to make all of these events a success, and it inspired me even further to serve the chamber, its members, and the community as a whole."

Taking that sense of community partnership to heart, the Chamber worked with several other businesses and organizations to assist in planning or even just lend a hand in community activities like the Back to School Bash, the Lions Club Christmas Baskets, Hope Junior Auxiliary events, Hope Downtown Network events, and more. In addition to the new monthly Chamber Newsletter and Director's Circle, activities were also created that could include any citizen, business, or organization like Livin Local Giveaways or the Christmas Selfie Contest. "We are dedicated to our members and a big part of our day-to-day is about serving and promoting those businesses ... but it doesn't stop there," Burns said. "Some of these new campaigns are about creating opportunities for everyone, and hopefully inspire others to serve the community, as well."

As she reflects on her first year, Burns said she has great appreciation for so many that it would be impossible to list them all. A few, she said, would be the Chamber Board of Directors for their absolute and invaluable support, the Chamber's Admin Assistant Trevor Moses for all of his hard work, and the many, many citizens, businesses, and organizations who came together to make this last year a success for not only the Hope-Hempstead County Chamber of Commerce, but also the community as a whole.

"It's hard not to give this same answer every time I am asked," Burns said, "but all of the progress you see in this community didn't happen overnight, and it didn't occur

because of just one event, person, or organization. True success happens when we all work together, and the 'whole is greater than the sum of its parts.'"



## Hempstead County Farm Bureau Celebrates New Building and Location

By April Lovette

Hempstead County Farm Bureau has had much to celebrate this year with the opening of their brand new office and location at 110 N Hervey Street. The process began in 2019 with a focus on visibility for growth, functionality for events, and an office that was more conducive for the daily functions of a Farm Bureau office. This newly constructed building offers customers a drive-thru, as well as easy access driveways coming off of two streets, and, inside, is a comfortable, roomy waiting area complete with a hospitality bar full of coffee, water, and snacks.

One of aspects of the new building that Farm Bureau staff and members have most anticipated is the spacious boardroom with an attached kitchen. This room will be the meeting place for the Farm Bureau Board Members, as well as the Farm Bureau Women's Committee. Agency Manage Reed Camp says what is most exciting about this space will be the many community events that can now be hosted at this location. "Between our board members, our Women's Committee, and the efforts of our staff members, there is always something going on in the Farm Bureau office," Camp said. Some of the many

activities he speaks of include an upcoming breakfast for all law enforcement in the county, a Member Appreciation Day that will have a bounce house and treats, and passing out Bluebell ice cream on the front porch during Dairy Month.

"We didn't build the big room and nice kitchen for the staff; it's for our members and the community," Camp said. "We have around 2,008 member households, which means every day we're serving almost 8000 people in Hempstead County who are a part of the Farm Bureau family, and we don't take that lightly. Plus, it's our local organizations, the mom and pops, and the small businesses, not the large corporations, who turn around and give back to the community. As a local business, we take that responsibility to heart." Just a few of the events in which Farm Bureau has participated, partnered, donated, or sponsored this last year include the Premium Sale, the Watermelon Festival, Teacher Appreciation Week, National Nurses Week, National EMS Week, school activities like FFA Rodeos, scholarships programs, and much more. Recently, the Farm Bureau team was able to collect 2,100 pounds of food to donate to Hope-In-

Action, and last August they took a little bit of Hope to the state office with 160 watermelons. Camp said many of their activities are made possible by the Women's Committee. "That group of ladies are the most selfless people I've ever met" he said. "They are all volunteers and they do what they do because they love agriculture, and they love this community."

This team is the embodiment of the Farm Bureau motto "Faith, Family, Farm Bureau," and Camp says that while being a member does provide numerous benefits (all of which can be found on their website) what's most important about their organization is the culture they have created and wholly live each day. "Every meeting in this organization begins with a prayer, and that's not common with many companies these days," Camp said. "I'm a fifth generation Farm Bureau member in my family, and you'll find much of the same with other members and staff. We don't just work together. A lot of our families and our kids are friends, and it's a big part of our lives. It's just a wonderful organization that keeps faith and family at its core."



# HOPE PROGRESS 2023

## Hempstead Hall in tenth year sees to upgrades while still providing gorgeous shows

By Jeff Smithpeters

Hope has been home for ten years to Hempstead Hall on the University of Arkansas-Texarkana campus, the best performing venue in Southwest Arkansas. At 65,000 square feet, it also contains space for meetings, conferences, expos and industry training. But its staff doesn't host those things alone. Hempstead Hall often works with schools, civic groups, charities, government agencies and companies.

Right now, the Hall is upgrading its climate control system. Workers are bringing in equipment and making occasional noise in the interest of making the building more comfortable for all who use it. Explains Hempstead Hall's Director John Gladden, "Originally, that project was supposed to begin in the fall. And so we had blocked out a certain amount of time where we didn't schedule anything in the theater, and then dates got pushed back. We didn't actually begin construction until January. So because of that we haven't scheduled just a lot of events for the theater."

Still, there have been big performances over the past year. April's Oak Ridge Boys filled all but a few seats in the auditorium. The Hope bands put on a rousing concert in May. The Hope for the Holidays concert featured the talents of great young singer songwriters with roots in our area in December, Mae Estes, Rachel Hale, Lance Carpenter and C.J. Solar. Fairytales on Ice's Beauty and the Beast utterly transformed the auditorium with song, choreography and stagecraft in February.

Meanwhile, the list of events hosted by Hempstead Hall in its lobby and conference rooms over the past year has been even longer, from 3D Egg Decoration classes just before last Easter, to Spring Hill High's Graduation Ceremony and the Southwest Arkansas Arts Council Youth Exhibit in May. From the Hope Junior Auxiliary Spaghetti Supper in October to that month's Haunted Hall. From a Veterans Day luncheon in November to that month's Holiday Bazaar. From the retirement party for former Hope City Manager Catherine Cook in January of this

year to a Cookie Decorating Class in early April.

When it comes to programs for students in the K-12 or college track, Gladden says Hempstead Hall offers a special deal. "There's an overarching policy that we've always had with Hempstead Hall. And that is, if it is related to K 12, or college education. We waive all of our normal fees. So any time a K12 entity, whether that's Hope public schools, or Spring Hill, or Blevins, whoever needs to come in, we provide the facility to them free of charge." This has meant the hosting of graduations, but also college and job fairs.

Local civic clubs also enjoy the waiving of fees for use of the Hall. "Lions Club has had their Christmas banquets here. Junior Auxiliary hosts their spaghetti supper. Kiwanis has met here one or two times in the past, but we have the same policy with all of them. And that's just open door, if they need the facility, The only stipulation is the date available. So as long as we've got space available, we just welcome them in."

Not least, however, among the Hall's uses is the learning and experience it provides to local students who might see a future in fine arts or conference center management for themselves. "So we try to help the students individually as much as possible, whether that's students who come to work for us as part of their work study, or the Extra Help Program, or whether it's collaborating with the local student groups, multicultural clubs, Trio, Student Government Association, things like that."

Running Hempstead Hall is a continual collaboration among its staff and student workers in reaching a world-class standard, Gladden said. Before the planning of HVAC system upgrades, the auditorium saw incorporation of technical upgrades to its sound and lighting capabilities. "We have upgraded the system recently, in the past two years or so. That includes new line arrays for the audio. We've got new lighting consoles, and things of that nature."

Unless the auditorium continues to be improved as

technology evolves, Gladden is aware it might not be as likely to be chosen by top entertainers. "A lot of the artists that we bring in for these concerts have written specifically into their technical riders, that come to us before we ever sign a contract, specifications of what our house system needs to be able to do. So if our house system falls behind industry standard, we're really in trouble. So that's something that we pride ourselves on, on being one of the technological leaders here with venues on, at least, about staying on top of our game. With that, I really have to brag on director Katherine Daniels. She's really spearheaded that program and she does a fantastic job," Gladden said.

It's this zeal for keeping what Hempstead Hall offers on the cutting edge that has helped the venue attain a nomination once again for Arkansas Country Music Association's Venue of the Year. The awards are to be given June 5 of this year in Conway's Reynolds Performance Hall and Gladden plans to be there.

Early June is an auspicious time for Hempstead Hall for another reason. That will be the official start of its 10th anniversary year with the Plain White Ts performing live June 17. Noted for their hits "Hey There, Delilah," "1, 2, 3, 4," "Rhythm of Love," "The Giving Tree" "Our Time Now," this concert represents Hempstead Hall's attempt to draw a slightly younger audience than previous shows have done.

Asked if he planned to snag any entertainers while at the ACMAs for future appearances at the Hall's auditorium, Gladden said, "Without going into too much detail, we may or may not be in talks with some of them right now. So unfortunately, I can't go into much detail right now. We're looking at genres that span from country to bluegrass to jazz. But keep your eyes on HempsteadHall.com for some exciting announcements coming in the future."



Klipsch Heritage Museum Association's (KHMA) vision is to foster interest in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics by the example of Paul W. Klipsch. KHMA's mission is to restore, preserve, maintain and display Klipsch-related artifacts and archival materials for historic purposes and to host educational activities and events. KHMA operates four facilities in Hope, AR. The facilities include the Klipsch Museum of Audio History, Klipsch Auditorium, Klipsch Education Center, and the KHMA Visitors Center. The visitors center offers a listening experience utilizing a variety of speakers spanning decades. Contact: Phone: 833.794.5287 / Email: info@klipschmuseum.org / Address: 403 W Division Street, Hope, AR.

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# HOPE PROGRESS 2023

## Hope Advertising and Tourist Promotion Commission: In charge of making Hope more fun

By Jeff Smithpeters

On May 6, 1975, the City of Hope Board of Directors passed Ordinance 937 to tax hotels and restaurants one percent of gross receipts and set up an Advertising and Tourism Fund with a commission to oversee tax collections and spending. Back then, the mayor was Sam Strong and the Hope Advertising and Tourist Promotion Commission did not yet oversee the city's parks.

Now the Hope Advertising and Tourist Promotion Commission has seven members, each nominated by the Hope mayor and approved by the Hope Board of Directors. Three commissioners represent the Board of Directors. They are Mayor Don Still and Trevor Coffee. Four commissioners represent hotels and restaurants in the city. These are Sharon Caldwell of Tailgaters, Milko Smith of Sheba's, Charlton Luker of Holiday/Hampton Inn, Steve Montgomery of McDonald's and Juan Rivera, of Amigo Juan's. Rivera was re-appointed to a four-year term, and this was confirmed by the Hope City Board's unanimous voice vote March 21. Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism Superintendent Summer Powell compiles the agenda and the information packets the commission sees and carries out the commission's wishes.

Sharon Caldwell is Chair of the commission, whose public meetings occur the third Tuesday every month starting at 5:00 p.m. in the Community Center at Fair Park. Since last Spring, the commission has been the originator of several ideas for large

scale projects adopted by the city, often funding these with state grants, revenue it generates from fees for park services, or its own budget. From January to December of 2022, the commission had a year when it came in under its projected budget of \$627,380 by \$17,046.

Each meeting tends to start with a consideration of whether the hotels and restaurants of the city who have permits to operate in the city are fully paid on their tax. Next, is the monthly examination of the revenues and expenses of the funds overseen by the commission.

Three new projects received the most attention in the months from last spring to now. The first was the Kelly Field light replacement. Its older metal halide lights will be replaced by LEDs at a cost of \$459,900. The work will start either prior to the Watermelon Festival or immediately after to avoid the light installation interfering with the vital event in early August.

The second was the purchase for \$20,000 from Alex Wilfand, Creative Director of Ice Creative Entertainment, a synthetic ice skating rink with skates. The commission jumped on the purchase, holding a special meeting to approve it, because of the substantial price reduction from buying a new such rink. In September, the commission would agree to a set of rules and in October to a list of civic and church groups willing to supervise its use for half the funds generated by ticket sales. The rink made its debut in The Hub the weekend of Thanksgiving with

96 skaters trying it out. In total, 349 would get in some practice throughout the holiday season, generating a \$1,252.50 profit.

The third was the Splash Pad proposal, which first came to the commission's attention after it was mentioned at a Kiwanis Club meeting. A subsequent City Board meeting decided the location for the Splash Pad would be Northside Park. Whether the project would be built depended on the success of a grant application filed with the state in the summer of 2022. Unfortunately, the project was turned down for grant funding, as announced in early December. But the commission would hold \$100,000 of funding in reserve from its 2023 budget to save for the project if a later attempt to gain grant funding fails.

In smaller-scale items, the commission approved advertising Hope as a tourist destination in several publications as well as on websites. It helped finance the Pocket Park, an East Second Street location with grass, a trellis and a stage. It also provided funds for a sink used for Wednesday morning Farmers Markets at The Hub. That's without mentioning its buying holiday decorations, overseeing Train/Trade Day, Fourth of July Fireworks and, of course, the grounds and facilities used at Fair Park during the 46th Hope Watermelon Festival.

The Hope Advertising and Tourist Promotion Commission looks forward to continued work to improve life in Hope not only for the businesses it represents but for Hope citizens as well.

## Lance and Associates Real Estate: People you know. People you trust.

By April Lovette

Lance & Associates Real Estate, known affectionately around town as the log-cabin office, has been proudly serving Hempstead and Nevada Counties since 2006 and has earned a reputation over the years for stellar service that extends way beyond real estate. "People you know. People you trust." is more than just their motto, but the philosophy in which they approach the relationships they have with their customers and the community as a whole. Over the last year, this dedicated team has, as always, gone above and beyond to contribute to the field of real estate, as well as the area partnerships that brought great success for Hope and Hempstead County.

In order to give clients a variety of pre-viewing options, Lance & Associates has been updating the website by adding videos to the listings so potential homebuyers can get a more detailed overview. Other details like striking graphics have been included, as well, to appeal to those who prefer browsing online for new properties. Executive Broker and Office Manager Lindsey Townsend said Lance & Associates strives to bring the best experience possible to potential clients whether they prefer to browse properties online or in person. "In order to remain competitive and current with the latest advertising and marketing trends, we have to provide a first-rate viewing experience online just as we would with in-person showings," Townsend said. "Technology and marketing change so quickly, and we have to change with it to better serve client needs."

Lance & Associates also added a new member to the team recently and it's a familiar face for many in the area. Judy Duke has lived in the Prescott area for over 40 years, and many knew her in her previous role as the Director and Curator of the Nevada County Depot & Museum. However, some may not know that she has been a licensed real estate agent for 13 years, and she's now the newest agent at Lance & Associates Real Estate. Duke said that she's extremely excited to start this next venture in her life and focus full-time on matching local residents with their perfect home. "I've always been a huge supporter of my community and I've participated in various organizations for a long time," Duke said. "My love of real estate carries over into that because I really enjoy seeing people find the home that is right for them. We want to keep people in our community and keep them happy."

Lance & Associates' family-oriented values and community-minded mission has never been more evident than in the multiple partnerships, sponsorships, and participation hours within the community this last year. Whether it has been a donation in funds or volunteering time, the team has always supported a multitude of school sports, groups and activities, in addition to numerous civic groups, churches, local charities, and other community organizations like the Hempstead County Economic Development Corporation and the UAHT Foundation. This year, they added to that lengthy

list of generosity and goodwill by becoming a Gold Sponsor for the First Annual United Way Gala, and recently they were announced as a Presenting Sponsor for the Hope-Hempstead County Chamber of Commerce Banquet.

One of the most telling examples of Lance & Associates' commitment to service was their annual Christmas Chamber Community Coffee. Since their first year in business, it's been tradition that the last Chamber Community Coffee of the year be hosted by Lance & Associates Real Estate. The log-cabin office was filled wall to wall with merry-making members of the community who were there to enjoy the Yuletide cheer and show their support.

Principal Broker and Owner Steve Lance said the relationships with their customers and their service to the community is just as essential as the homes in their listings. "This business isn't about houses and dirt ... it's a people business," he said. "We work for the public. So not only do we need to stay abreast of the latest market changes to provide a superior real estate service, but we also need to do whatever it takes to help our community. From the very start, when Cindy and I moved here in '96, the people of Hope, Arkansas have given us immeasurable support. We aspire to do the same and return that kindness to the people of our community."



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## Pafford continues expansion, still winning awards for quality of service

By Jeff Smithpeters

Asked to describe Pafford Medical Service today, the company's Chief Operating Officer was succinct. "We are a mobile health care provider, which means that we provide most of our health care services outside of the hospital setting. And we're a nationwide provider, we provide services in five states and the United States Virgin Islands. We're one of the largest ambulance providers in the country," Clay Hobbs said. But within this description hundreds of employees exert hard-work skills, and use the most cutting-edge technologies, from telemedicine to helicopters to see to treatment of its patients.

The 55-year-old company has come to be known in the Hope area for its boundless growth to five other surrounding states and the Virgin Islands. Yet Pafford wins awards including recently the National Association of EMTs 2021 Dick Ferneau EMS Career Service of the Year (in which Pafford competed with 14,000 other services) and just this March 8, Arkansas Business' Category IV (businesses with 151-499 employees) Business of the Year. Both testify to the company's continued attention to providing unparalleled service.

More locally, the Hempstead County Economic Development Corporation awarded Pafford the 2022 Home-grown Industry Award. Hobbs said these successes come from its fidelity to an ethic learned in Hope, Arkansas. "Our roots are here in Hempstead County and Hope and having those hometown, Southern small town values that we've expanded across the country, as we provide the ambulance service to so many communities."

His traveling through town on a float with other Pafford leaders in last year's Christmas Parade was a reminder of these values, Hobbs said. "We're coming down Main Street and the number of people that were yelling our names and people that we knew really instilled into us that Hope is Hope is Hope and Hope is the reason that we're here and that we're successful."

Hobbs believes with Hope's industries including Pafford, a claim can now be made for our corner of the state being a vital economic engine "Look at the Northwest Arkansas corridor, the Northeast Corridor and then, of course, Central Arkansas. And I raise my hand and want to say, 'Hey, it's our turn. We have a good region of the state. We have good people. We have what it takes to be successful in the business world and economics,'" he said.

Pafford is continuing to do its part to contribute, expanding its number of ambulance stations last year to include Saline

and Faulkner Counties and now including Benton County among its 911 service contracts.

The new station in Benton, Arkansas is a point of pride for Pafford right now. "We like our brand new 20,000 square foot station open there. It's a very large location as a regional training center, and it has a clinic for our employees," Hobbs said.

Pafford also distinguished itself this past September and October in providing resources to respond ahead of time to Hurricane Ian in Florida and to help in its aftermath. "We deployed ambulances, aircraft, critical care, nursing teams, neonatal transport teams, and so forth to the state of Florida. And we're able to facilitate evacuations and 911 operations for the state of Florida. Very big operation, but it just goes to show every year our disaster response capabilities increase a little bit more," Hobbs said.

Regarding Pafford's activism in supporting quality of life in Hope, Hobbs mentions last year's opening of the Pafford Medical Services Clinic in April. "We have three nurse practitioners on staff now. And then Dr. Allyson Price-Hanson joined us a couple months ago. She's now part of the Pafford Medical System's program. So we're glad to have her on board with us. Lot of people see the clinic there. They don't know we are open five days a week and people can make an appointment or walk in and we'll take care of you."

Pafford's many sponsorships of local philanthropy, including its support of sports teams, food banks, civic clubs and musical performances is seen at the company as a way of cheerleading for Hope. "One of our biggest events that we support is probably the Watermelon Festival. Yes. And you know, while it's kind of a chaotic weekend for us, we know that so many people enjoy that. And it brings a good, you know, concert into our community that attracts people from outside of the area to come in."



## 'Methodical steadiness' is watchword at Hope's Unity Baptist Church

By Jeff Smithpeters

Unity Baptist Church has had an 85-year-long presence in Hope, said Pastor Nick Flowers, and "started with the connection with the Bible and Jesus and the passion to share that truth with the world. We believe the Bible is the word of God, and we want to point people to Jesus."

Over this past year, steadiness is the watchword at Unity. As Minister of Music, Youth and Education Jay Pollan, with Unity for 26 years, put it, the church is continuing to serve its members and the people living here. "We don't jump from one thing to the next. It's just a methodical steadiness to it. We minister to people. People are coming into the church, and ministry is being done in the community."

About steadiness, Flowers, who grew up in Spring Hill, is in his third year with the church and has 17 years of pastoral experience, said, "We all have our favorite preachers. J.R. Hill always talked about there being praise for plodders. That's moving one day at a time forward. Another guy, Charles Spurgeon said 'The snail reaches the ark.'"

Among the programs reaching out to adults is Unity's Grief Share group, which meets on Monday nights starting at 6:30 p.m. Flowers places importance on it "because everybody walks through the valley of the shadow of death." At least one member drives from 30 miles away to attend. "It gives them a biblical way to handle grief, endure grief, be able not to just lay out and quit, to never get over the one you lost, but to be able to go on ... And this gives you a scriptural way," Flowers said.

Other programs Flowers named includes Celebrate Recovery, meeting Thursday nights at 6:30 p.m. to support those recovering from addictions, not just to substances but to behaviors. There's also the Faith Bible Institute, meeting Mondays at 6:00 p.m., in which adults can start a three-year intensive study of the Bible. Pollan said "It's a video driven curriculum. And I give you a certificate when you get through. It's for teachers and serious church workers. Probably 75 to 100 of our people have been through it." There are multiple programs from Monday through Thursday.

For the younger set, on Wednesday nights there is the Unity Baptist chapter of AWANA Club, instruction and activities for those from two years of age to sixth grade starting at 6:00 p.m. "to form tomorrow's Christian leaders from today's children and youth," according to the organization's website at Awana.org. Youth from grades seven to twelve meet for Wednesday Night Life at 7:00 p.m. Adult Bible Study starts at that hour, too.

Unity Baptist also offers ways of becoming involved in music by singing or playing instruments and hosts other activities for every age and ability, Flowers said. "We have multitudes of choirs, children's choirs, adult choir. So we have things for everybody to do. Not just once. The Bible says that Jesus loves the world. 'God loves the world and whosoever ...,' so we want to reach whosoever we can. Jesus loves them, and we want to reach them, and we have a place for them to plug in and find their purpose."

Among Unity's community partnerships is its work with the Charitable Christian Medical Clinic, which takes patients for free on the first and third Thursdays of every month from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. and receives financial as well as food support from Unity Baptist. Both Hope in Actions one and two receive Unity's support in the form of food, paper good drives,

members who cook, members who take part in fundraisers, mow yards, clean up and paint. Also, Flowers is the Hope PD Chaplain. Hope Police and the Sheriff's Office benefit from food and refreshments brought to their stations monthly. Unity also hosts the yearly police banquet in its fellowship hall.

Unity Baptist's leaders look forward to the building of a new fellowship hall, which will better accommodate serving meals on Wednesday nights and children's activities in AWANA Club. The current fellowship hall would be remodeled and updated to become a children's facility. More room will also mean breaking up of large classes into smaller ones which enhances the ability of those in Sunday School and other programs to form relationships.

Unity Baptist's April 9 Easter morning schedule includes an egg hunt for AWANA members at 10:00 a.m. and Jake Cowley, who has been featured by Bill Gaither and the Gaither Vocal Band, performing at 6:00 p.m.

Unity Baptist Church services can be streamed on YouTube, Facebook Live, and Vimeo. Sunday services start at 10:45 a.m.



# HOPE PROGRESS 2023

## City of Hope collaborates with new City Manager on several ambitious projects

By Jeff Smithpeters

The most momentous news generated in a busy year of projects planned, begun and finished for Hope's city government was the retirement of City Manager Catherine Cook, who began serving in the position in 1996.

Cook announced plans to retire at the end of the City Board of Directors' June 7 meeting. She said months later that she was motivated by having known several dedicated people, including her late husband Jeff Cook, who died without having had a chance to retire.

J.R. Wilson, Cook's successor, who served as Interim City Manager the first two months of 2023 was hired to be the permanent city manager officially this past February 28 after he and two other finalists were interviewed by the board. Express Employment Professionals of Texarkana was the search firm the city used.

Wilson had served as Cook's Assistant City Manager for the past five years while also continuing to be Hope's Chief of Police, a job he began in 2003. Wilson was originally born in Dallas, and after some years living in Memphis, his family moved to a farm near Saratoga, since his father had relatives in Southwest Arkansas. For his last two years of high school, Wilson went to Hope High School.

After college, Wilson served on the Dallas Police Department for seven and a half years. Then followed a period of farming back in Arkansas with his father. Law enforcement called him back, this time to Quantico to train as an FBI Agent and then to a stint on the southern border of Arizona near Yuma. "I worked on the DEA customs and FBI Task Force from 99 to 2003. That's about four years. That's when this job opened up as chief. And I was hired to come back home and was glad to do that," he said in an interview this week.

The City Board itself did not change composition after the November 2022 elections. Directors Mark Ross, Steve Montgomery, Don Still and Linda Clark would be sworn in for new terms January 3 and the board as a whole voted to retain Don Still as Mayor and Kiffinea Talley as Vice-mayor.

The other most consequential decisions by the Hope City Board since the 2022 Progress edition have included uses of grant funding from the state and from the federal government to address problems and improve citizens' quality of life. It also presided over several successful events meant to draw citizens as well as tourists into town.

Among the larger projects is the Sixth Street Project to reconstruct the often-travelled street from the railroad crossing to Spring Hill Road to resurface it, upgrade its drainage system and create sidewalks and bike trails. Another one, the Streetscape Project, which would reconfigure Hope's Downtown area, starting from the Bill Clinton Birthplace Home and moving southeast to make an attractive walking trail. There is also the conversion of the East Wastewater Treatment plant to an ultraviolet light-based disinfection system as opposed to chlorine-based. The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality is requiring the project.

In addition, the board has voted on an improvement of drainage systems at the Hope Municipal Airport's runways. The conversion of the lights at Kelly Field to LED bulbs is scheduled to begin this year. The runway project is being financed mostly from state and federal funds.

The Hope Advertising and Tourist Promotion Commission bought an artificial ice rink and skates in the Summer of 2022, which were put to use in The Hub by hundreds of kids starting just after Thanksgiving, using the rink until New Year's.

On July 4, thousands came to the Hope Municipal Airport to hear music, eat from food trucks and watch fireworks. The 46th Hope Watermelon Festival that took place August 10-14 was judged by the board to be a success, attracting the largest attendance in recent memory.

In 2023, the board saw to the finishing of the new Pocket Park in the downtown area. The city dealt with damage from an ice storm spawned by Winter Storm Mara, with 1,000 Hope, Water and Light Customers losing power and many wires down but fortunately no injuries.

There are still hopes to build a Splash Pad at Northside Park, a project for which the city applies for state grant funds but did not receive. The city will reapply for grant funds this year.

## Herndon-Fuqua seeks perfection in funeral services, contributions to Hope community

By Jeff Smithpeters

New General Manager Amy Booker was clear on why Herndon-Fuqua Funeral Home is a good choice for families making funeral and burial arrangements. "Our objective is to make sure everything with a family is perfect from the first call to burial," she said.

Booker took on the role starting in January and in so doing made Herndon-Fuqua's full-time staff look different from that of other funeral service businesses in the area. "We are now a unique funeral home here. We are an all female full-time staff. We are all very professional and we don't see that as a challenge."

Booker's experience in the funeral services industry dates back to when she was 22, when she began working at Herndon until 2009. In 2019, after a hiatus from the business in which she earned a bachelor's degree in accounting to go with her Funeral Director's license, she returned and in January was promoted to be General Manager of Hope's recently remodeled facility at a business that has 125 years' experience serving bereaved families in Hope. She also now manages Herndon-Fuqua homes in Prescott and Gurdon.

Booker is joined by Funeral Director and Embalmer Sarai Reed, a Hope native herself and 2014 graduate from Spring Hill High School. She received her degree in Funeral Sciences from University of Arkansas Hope-Texarkana in 2020. She has worked for Texarkana Funeral Home since 2019, starting out while finishing her degree. Kaylee Clark is the Hope location's administrative assistant.

As Herndon-Fuqua's website explains, the business was founded in 1898 by W.M. Cornelius and his wife's father, E.G. Porterfield with the next year recording an investment in a team of black horses and a cart that had two options for wheels, rubber for the city, steel for the country.

W.M. Cornelius ended up as the sole owner. He passed the business down to his own son-in-law R.V. Herndon. And R.V., in his turn, passed it down to R.V. Jr. and his brothers. By 1964, R.V. Jr. had bought his brothers' interest and changed the name to Herndon Funeral Home.

The current building on 403 South Main was completed in 1967.

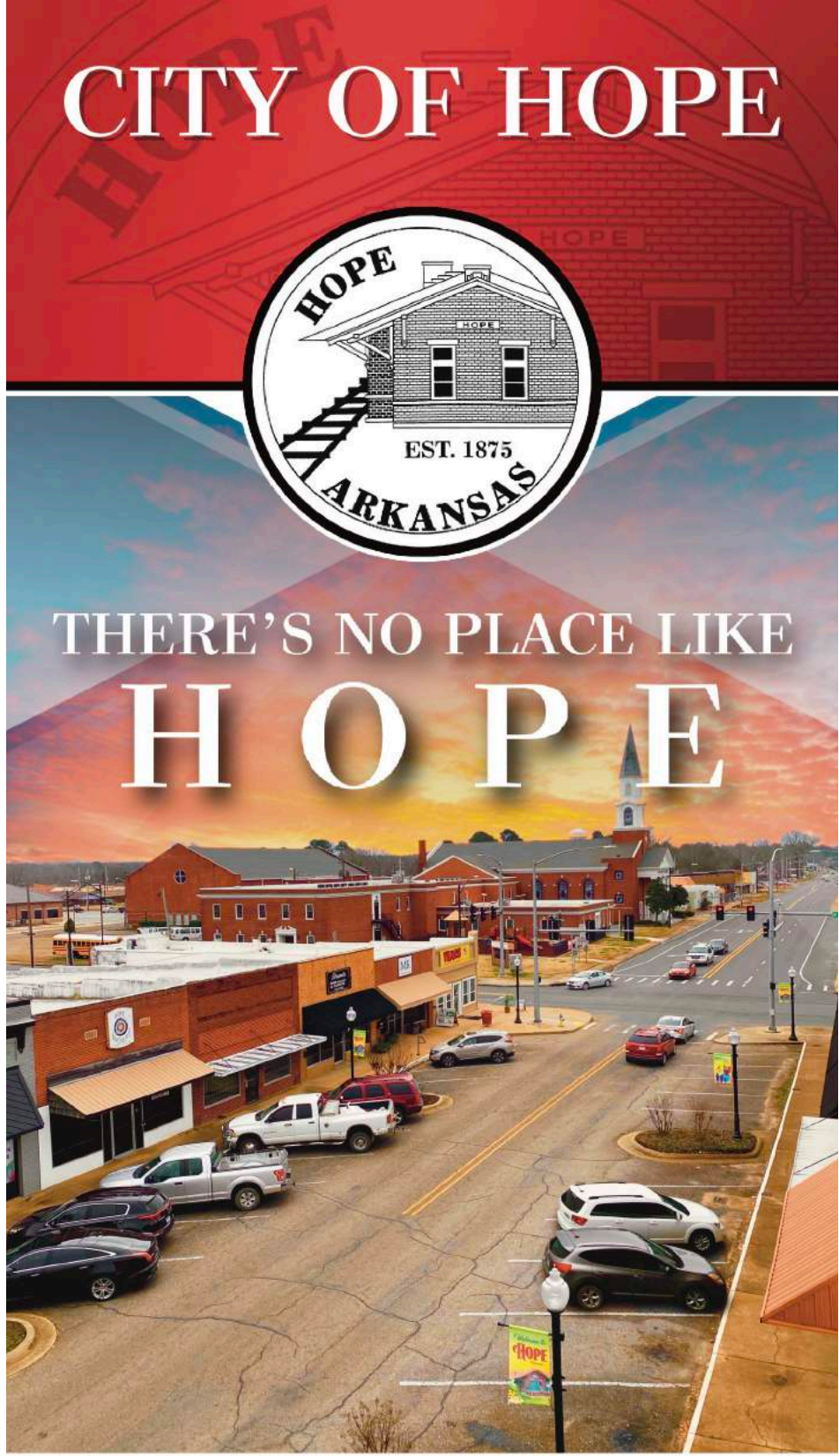
Forty years later, R.V. Herndon Jr., having no heir to pass the business down to, sold it to Terry and Wendy Pharr. The name would change to Herndon-Pharr and the business would expand to include one funeral home in Prescott and another in Gurdon. The Pharrs also bought Hope's Memory Gardens Cemetery. Thomas and Vickers Fuqua would buy the business and merge it into their own business which already owned five funeral homes, three in Texarkana, two others in east Texas.

Vickers Fuqua, currently the president of Herndon-Fuqua Funeral Homes, is himself the third generation of his family to run funeral homes, his grandfather Howard Fuqua having started Texarkana Funeral Homes in 1939. His biography on Herndon-Fuqua's website says, "He feels fortunate serving his community and being there for families in their time of need."

Despite the changes in ownership, the Herndon name and the connection to Hope and its surrounding area has remained. "Our employees have been born and raised here. We, at some point, have had interactions with probably every family member that's ever walked in here. We can always find some connection to somebody in a family that knows somebody. So it's nice to be able to sit down and not only have funeral arrangements, but to actually speak to generations of people coming here saying that you buried our mother or grandmother."

Helping sponsor the Watermelon Festival, including its Saturday night concert featuring Uncle Kracker was just one way Herndon-Fuqua contributed to the community. It has also helped UAHT put together its recent Beads, Bags and Bangles fundraiser for 2023's Kids' College. It also helps sponsor the Hempstead County Fair and Spring Hill's Rodeo. Herndon also makes a habit of providing meals to Hope and Hempstead County's first responders.

Herndon-Fuqua also provides pre-planning services for those who don't wish to leave their families with the task of financing and planning their funerals. Appointments to talk about this can be made by calling 1-870-777-4686.



## Hope Trading Post Auto & Outdoor: The car lot with character

By April Lovette

"The highest form of praise is a recommendation from a customer." That's the philosophy Rick Orr and Gary Weems follow, and this dynamic duo has worked diligently since they opened Hope Trading Post Auto & Outdoor last year to bring their customers the best-car buying experience in town. Their friendly, front-porch atmosphere and rocking-chair style conversations are quite an attraction, and that combined with their showroom-floor quality in used automobiles and outdoor vehicles is what inspires customers to deliver that praise to this car lot with character.

Orr and Weems have been working together since they were in their teens, and with 50 years of combined experience in automobile sales, the two have gotten to know many in the community and have developed a reputation over the years for honesty and integrity in selling quality vehicles. Orr said the goal when opening this new dealership was to offer a nice vehicle with lower mileage at an affordable price, so even if customers couldn't afford to buy brand new automobiles, they still got that luxurious feeling of driving off of the lot in that perfect and new-to-them vehicle. "We take just as much pride in caring for our customers and our vehicles here in the used car business as we did when we sold new cars," Orr said. "We make sure everything that goes on the lot has been inspected before we offer to sell it to somebody." Weems seconded the notion by adding, "We live by the Golden Rule. We treat others as we want to be treated."

Weems also said that very belief is why Hope Trading Post strives to be a good community partner and has donated and/or supported community organizations and churches like they did at Thanksgiving and Christmas. "We live and work in this town," he said, "the person walking down the aisle next to you at the grocery store could very well be the person who walks in on the lot the next day... or... it could be someone who just needs a helping hand. So it's always best to treat them the way you hope to be treated." Orr added to that statement by saying, "This community has been good to us for many years, in our previous ventures and now. Providing a genuine-quality used car dealer and helping others is just our way of giving back."

Hope Trading Post Auto & Outdoor also has campers, side-by-sides, utility trailers, and more for customers to browse either on the lot or their website [www.hopetradingpost.com](http://www.hopetradingpost.com). Plus, they offer extended service contracts, which can be serviced at any ASE Certified shop, and a variety of financing options. Even if one isn't in the market for a new car or truck, Orr and Weems say they are always up for a visit should anyone want to stop by and sit on the front porch in those Razorback rocking chairs for a chat.





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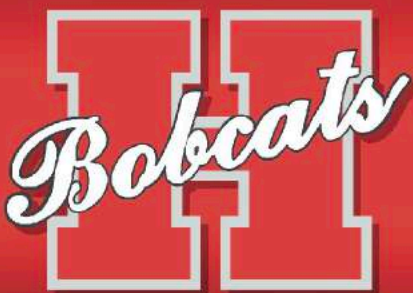
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# HOPE PROGRESS 2023

## Tab's back under popular Ivers ownership: Open 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

By Jeff Smithpeters

Tab's is a combination restaurant and convenience store near the southern end of Hope that was established in the late 1970s as a place where you could get gas, but also pick up an order of fried chicken with Tab's famous potato logs.

Since then it has been through several owners, but one of the most popular was Scottie Ivers, whose energy and enterprise saw Tab's through the years from 2008 to 2019. He admits that he sold it in 2019 because he believed at the time, with all his other businesses taking up his time, he was reducing his stress level.

"I got rid of what I thought was my biggest headache, but always regretted it," he said in an early March interview. "I feel like even though I only had 11 years, and there were owners before me and after me, I always felt like I was the face of Tab's ... I made a lot of what makes Tab's work work."

In December of 2022, he learned of a chance to buy Tab's back and then pounced. After being closed for several weeks for renovations, the store re-opened in mid-February. Now customers will see new gas pumps, brighter lighting inside and new shelving. With the help of friends Mark Keith and Gary Johnson, Ivers has begun a ring of honor along the high part of the walls, photos of illustrious Hope and Hempstead County figures.

Ivers calls the upgraded kitchen, complete with grill, the

biggest little kitchen in the world. The sheer variety of items on the menu attests to this and inspires awe. It suits nearly any taste for every time of day. Among the breakfast items are eggs, build-your-own omelets, biscuits and gravy, pancakes, bacon, ham and sausage. These items are available starting when Tab's opens promptly at 5:00 a.m. and ending at 10:00 a.m.

For lunch, you can choose between two signature sandwiches, catfish on toasted bun or chicken salad on a croissant. There are also the Daily Specials, served from 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. beginning with a chicken finger basket on Monday and running till Sunday, when the special is chicken and dressing. Turn the menu over and you'll see what's available all day: Tab's Favorites, Burgers, Pizzas, Classic Sandwiches (I'm partial to the Club), From the Smokehouse and Healthy Options.

Daughter Melanie Ivers is the store's manager. She is gratified to be working with her father. "It's great to see our 'regulars' every day and to meet newcomers that have heard about us through word of mouth. It's nice to exceed expectations of what people usually expect when they stop by a gas station. My dad has made this place something to remember," she said.

Tab's is open every day from 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.



## Four States Furniture carries 50 brands for any taste, any price level

By Jeff Smithpeters

Four States Furniture, located on 222 South Main, has been an anchor of Hope's downtown for 22 years, since John and Sharron Wilson started the business with him continuing his postal route and Sharron selling furniture during the day. He'd arrive home and then deliver what Sharron had sold. Over the years, their three sons and one daughter would pitch in with whatever needed doing, learning themselves how to keep the business going and grow it considerably.

Company Market Director Mitzi Dowd told us the company's goal with all its stores is "to enrich the lives of our guests with furniture for every house. That looks different for each guest that walks into our store, whether that's a new family in their first house, and they are very conscientious about what they're buying, to maybe someone who's a little bit more established that's looking for something that's heirloom quality. We cater to a variety of ages, demographics and stages of life."

There's so much inventory to choose from. Four States sells from 50 brands, among them Bassett, Hooker, La-Z-Boy, Temp-Ur-Pedic, Southern Motion. If you provide a floor-plan, Four States can provide advice for every room. They also have an in-house delivery team. Then, if you'd rather shop from home, their website, fourstatesfurniture.com is well-organized and even features an Outlet page for those alert to bargains.

Dowd said the stores' inventories are now coming back to what they were prior to the labor and supply chain issues that dogged almost every business after the peak of the pandemic and, in the case of furniture stores, the Texas Snowpocalypse of 2021, which played havoc on the foam stuffing essential for modern upholstery. "All of those things in the last year to 18 months have improved a lot," she said.

With regard to community involvement, Four States Furniture has worked with the Hope Lions Club, with the Hope-Hempstead County Chamber of Commerce, with Domestic Violence Prevention Inc., with Child Protective Services. It has the goal this year to provide 100 free mattresses to children in need. "Having a soft, comfortable, safe good night's sleep is very important. And it's something that I think we all take for granted," Dowd said.

There are two Four States Furniture stores. The first was the Hope location and the second, at 2315 Richmond Road in Texarkana, Texas, are two of the Wilson family's seven stores, now including Ashley HomeStores and American Mattress locations extending as far west as Sherman, Texas. The name of the parent company is Red River Home, it's currently run by Hope natives J.D., Paul and Adam Wilson and it employs 150 people, but enriches so many more lives.



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# HOPE PROGRESS 2023

## The Farmers Bank & Trust recipe for success: Banking with HEART

By April Lovette

For business operations and community partnerships to be successful and productive, a few key ingredients are required, and Farmers Bank & Trust (FB&T) knows the secret to that success. It is proudly displayed on the lobby wall of every single branch and has been included in the training that FB&T's over 400 team members have completed; Farmers Bank & Trust serves the community with HEART. Honor, Excellence, Adaptability, Respect, and Teamwork (HEART) are the core values at the center of FB&T's relationships with employees, customers, and the community, which is why "Right at the HEART" is the first thing one sees when entering any FB&T location and their "Banking with HEART" philosophy takes pride of place on the website.

Those core values are most evident when reflecting over the successes of the last year. While the last year saw growth with the acquisition of nine Arvest branches, expanding the FB&T footprint in southwest Arkansas and Oklahoma, what the Farmers team is most proud of are the partnerships they have continued to foster within the community. One of the most memorable events of the last year was the Back to School Bash that Farmers sponsored, a free, fun-filled event that brought families from all over the county to enjoy a night out before the start of the school year. FB&T partnered with Hope Public Schools and the Hope-Hempstead County Chamber of Commerce to plan the event and numerous other local organizations joined in the fun to give the local kiddos a night to remember. Downtown Hope was packed with citizens enjoying the games, bounce houses, music, prize drawings, and so much more. This event is just one of the many ways Farmers has served their customers and the community with HEART. Market President Jacob Jones said Farmers Bank & Trust is more than just a business.

"We're a true community bank," Jones said. "Our people live locally and they strive every day to serve the community. True

service doesn't just consist of helping customers at the bank; it means donating funds, volunteering hours, or partnering with other organizations to help others. It's hard to measure in quantity, but serving the community as a whole brings the biggest return on the most important investment we could ever make." The FB&T crew has raised funds and/or donated directly to numerous organizations: Arkansas Game & Fish, Arkansas State Police, Huck's Military Care Package Project, local fire departments, school groups and more. They've also provided meals for every teacher in the county and other organizations like the Hempstead County Cattlemen's Association. FB&T partnered with HeBrews 11:1 to give every teacher a free coffee during spring break, and the team passed out free water during the Watermelon Festival. One of the most substantial contributions this last year was a donation to UAHT for a new workforce center. The Farmers Bank & Trust Workforce Center on UAHT's Texarkana campus opens soon, and will serve as a modern employment training center for students in southwest Arkansas.

Any generous projects that support local nonprofits are made possible through the giving arm of FB&T, the Farmers Bank Foundation, and one of the highlights for the Foundation this last year was the FB&T ROSE Event, which included many lady leaders from the area. ROSE stands for Resilient Outstanding Social Engagement, and the purpose of this distinguished ladies program was so FB&T could connect with women in the communities they serve. The ROSE Event in October included esteemed lady leaders from Hempstead and Nevada Counties and they were treated to lunch and a fun activity at Hempstead Hall. The feedback from participants was positively glowing. Janet Choate, FB&T Senior Vice President and Commercial Loan Officer, Sr., in Hope, helped plan the ROSE Event, and she said everyone had a great time. "It was very special," Choate said. "This was a good way for the women

in our community to come together and share insights on different topics and activities. Most of all, everyone had fun together and made connections that they will take with them and hopefully grow."

As the Farmers team has demonstrated time and again, banking with HEART is an entire philosophy that extends beyond money and numbers. Vice President and Agricultural Loan Officer, Sr., Darren Neal summed it up nicely and succinctly. "Yes, banking is a business, but it's also a personal relationship," Neal said. "Our customers come to us because they trust us, and we treat them with courtesy and respect, so we strive to make sure we are worthy of that trust and guide them correctly with financial decisions. The same can be said for our service to the community as a whole. Giving back is just the right thing to do and building these relationships with our community partners is equally as important."



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## UAHT Continues Building Bridges to Brighter Futures

Contributed



The University of Arkansas Hope-Texarkana (UAHT) has faced the changing landscape of higher education head-on by continuing to provide new and better opportunities for students in our service area to reach their goals of job training and higher education. UAHT saw progress in numerous avenues over the past year, including constructing a new workforce center and adding several new in-demand programs.

UAHT completed the new Farmers Bank & Trust Workforce Center in December, and the building officially opened for classes in the 2023 spring semester. The new 14,754-square-foot facility serves as a modern employment training center for students in the southwest Arkansas region and houses the Arkansas High School Collegiate Academy and the Secondary Career and Technical Education Center. The new building also serves as a meeting space for the community and business and industry training. "This new facility is a testament to our dedication to higher education and job training in the region as a whole," said Dr. Christine Holt, UAHT Chancellor.

The college also launched several new degree programs to provide students with the latest training for in-demand jobs. New degrees in Electromechanical Technology were added to the technical and industrial program offerings. The Technical Certificate and Associate of Applied Science degree in Electromechanical Technology combine the coursework of multi-craft maintenance and machining with industrial electricity to create a program that teaches students a wide variety of employable technical skills. "Employers in our area are actively recruiting individuals with both maintenance and electrical training," said Laura Clark, Vice

Chancellor for Academics. "Employers such as Tyson, Georgia-Pacific, and Xylem have these positions open with salary ranges from \$50,000-\$79,000. Electromechanical Technology jobs require skills in both electricity and maintenance/machining. These programs will allow UAHT graduates to have both sets of skills upon graduation and a highly employable degree."

A Certificate of Proficiency and a Technical Certificate in Construction Technology were also added to the technical program offerings at UAHT. The certificates are comprised of electrical, general tool and safety, carpentry, plumbing, and HVAC classes. By pursuing a certificate in Construction Technology, students learn about estimating projects, surveying techniques, scheduling projects, and codes and laws that apply to the industry and gain skills in managing small and large construction projects. Students also learn about construction materials and residential and commercial methods. To further benefit students interested in construction, UAHT partnered with the Arkansas Construction Education Foundation (ACEF) to provide a construction pre-apprenticeship program and Certificate of Proficiency in Construction Technology to high school seniors. Seniors who complete the one-year program will receive 160 hours of pre-apprenticeship training from ACEF and a Certificate of Proficiency in Construction Technology from UAHT. The program is free of charge and is held on the UA Hope campus. Students also have the opportunity to earn \$500 per semester in the program. Average salaries in the construction field range from \$40,000 to over \$60,000 per year.

UAHT also added a 100% online Certificate of Proficiency in Medical Office Assistant. In this program, students build a comprehensive foundation in administrative medical office assistant skills and develop competency in performing procedures required to work effectively in the medical office environment. Students can be on the path to a medical administrative career in just one semester. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the annual mean wage for medical secretaries and administrative assistants in Arkansas is \$33,780 per year or \$16.24 per hour.

With the increased demand in the trucking industry, UAHT also added the Arkansas Trucking Academy (ARKTA) to the college's program offerings this year. The trucking industry supports one in ten jobs in the private sector in Arkansas. The state ranks number one in the country per capita employed in the trucking industry, and the average annual income for an Arkansas trucker is \$45,000.

In addition, UAHT added the new Certificate of Proficiency in Cybersecurity and Certificate of Proficiency in IT Technician programs. These certificates are designed to lead to an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Information Technology. The Certificate of Proficiency in Cybersecurity is a partnership in the CyberLearn Network consortium led by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. The consortium allows sharing of curriculum and instructional resources to provide cybersecurity programs across the state. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), cybersecurity is expected to see a 33% industry projection over the next decade, and the expected starting salary is \$50,000.

The Certificate of Proficiency in IT Technician prepares students to take the CompTIA A+ certification exam. This certification is the industry standard for establishing a career in IT and is the preferred qualifying credential for technical support and IT operational roles. According to CompTIA, it is the only industry-recognized credential with performance-based skills to prove competency. The BLS projects the overall employment of computer support specialists to grow 9% from 2020 to 2030, and the expected starting salary is \$30,000 to \$40,000.

At UAHT, our goal is to strive to provide opportunities for our students to succeed. For more information about any of these programs or to enroll, call 870-777-5722 today.



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# HOPE PROGRESS 2023

## SWARK.Today named 2022 Business of the Year by the Hope Hempstead County Chamber of Commerce

By April Lovette

Everyone's primary news provider had a busy, exciting year, and one of the moments that topped the list was being named the 2022 Business of the Year at the Hope-Hempstead County Chamber of Commerce Banquet. SWARK.Today's General Manager, Bren Yocom, said she was so surprised that at first she was speechless, but overall, she said she felt extremely honored. "It's a humbling feeling to stand at the podium in a room filled with business owners, community leaders, and role models whom I have always admired," Yocom said, "especially after the gracious introduction given to us by Jamie-Pafford-Gresham. She, like so many others who have made amazing contributions to our city and county, have been truly inspiring. We feel extremely blessed to be a part of this community."

Another highlight this year was the addition of a new SWARKansan to the crew, Lance Hawley. Hawley joined the team as a sports reporter, covering local games and all things athletic in Hempstead and Nevada Counties. SWARK.Today President Jim Hawley said he is especially pleased to add Lance's knowledge of sports to the expanding lineup of coverage that SWARK.Today continues to offer the community. "We strive to provide a wide variety of journalism and broadcasting to our viewers," he said. "We know the community will be as delighted as we are with Lance's infectious energy and wholehearted dedication to sports."

The increase in our variety of coverage is all part of the SWARK.Today mission: to bring viewers real-time news and sports, plus community-driven entertainment segments on our site, in addition to special print editions showcasing the best and brightest of the businesses and citizens of Hempstead and Nevada Counties. In addition to our live and on-location sports coverage, civic meetings, and community events like the Watermelon Festival and Christmas

Parade, SWARK.Today brought viewers specials such as Coffee with the Candidates, I am a Survivor, Local Love Stories, The Christmas Caper Investigations, and more. Our special print editions like the 20 Under 50 magazine, Relocation and Tourism Guide, and the Sports Editions for football and basketball were also big hits of the year, as well as the made-for-kids Christmas and Valentine's Day papers filled with games and projects. These and many more special editions were carefully tailored to suit local readers' interests, and the next year will continue to see more of these community-based collaborations and superior-in-quality video productions.

Another integral part of the SWARK mission is serving fellow citizens by being a positive community partner. Over the last year, this news crew participated in, donated to, or sponsored numerous community events, such as the Watermelon Festival, the United Way Gala, the Chamber of Commerce Banquet, the Back-to-School Bash, and many more. This team partnered with local schools to support sports, clubs, and activities like Bobcat Works and Red Ribbon Week. The SWARK.Today staff even hosted a visit from Santa for Santa's SWARKshop, a fun-filled night for any local children who wanted to give the big guy their Christmas Wish List in person.

A recent milestone for the SWARK team was the accomplishment of reaching 6.6 million views. Our goal for the year was to reach 5 million, but thanks to our many viewers, advertisers, and this amazing community in which we serve, we have surpassed that goal and more. As we continue the endeavor to bring bigger and better coverage to local citizens, we know that we are just a very small part of what makes this great community so special. We at SWARK.Today are so incredibly grateful to Hope and Hempstead County for allowing us to be your favorite neighborhood network bringing you breaking news, sports coverage, and local entertainment.



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# HOPE PROGRESS 2023

## Montgomery-owned McDonald's continues commitment to community

Contributed

Since 1981, Hope has had a McDonald's location on North Hervey. The first owners ran the restaurant until 1991 when they sold the Hope McDonald's to Steve Montgomery. But instrumental to the success of the Hope location and to the expansion of Steve Montgomery Company to nine other towns has been the work of Steve's wife Celia, an owner/operator herself.

Celia started working for her father while she was still in high school when her father, Tom Quinn, came into the McDonald's business in late 1977. Steve, from Forrest City, soon came into the picture as they met when she was working the drive through, and he was working at a grocery store. They dated, eventually married, and the rest was history. Both learned the McDonald's ropes, themselves going from crew members to shift leaders to managers.

In 1987, Steve became an owner/operator when he bought his first McDonald's from Quinn in the small town of Wynne, Arkansas.

The couple ran that store and developed ownership skills, raising their two children. Sadly, they lost Tom Quinn four years later. At that point in 1991, the Montgomerys saw it was time to grow, and they bought two McDonald's in Southwest Arkansas, our Hope McDonald's and our neighboring one in Nashville, while selling the one in Wynne. Our company grew from one small, non-interstate store to two stores, one being a high-volume interstate store.

Over the past 30 years the Montgomerys have grown in their business by adding stores, eventually owning a total of 10 locations. We are very happy that they are all in small, hometown communities because that is where our heart is—in their communities.

Despite the expansion, the Montgomerys did not stop working within their communities. Our McDonald's store in Hope frequently contributes to local efforts to lift the community and support education. We've set up an endowed scholarship at UAHT. We've worked with the United Way to fund its annual gala and fundraiser. We have helped sponsor the Watermelon Festival and, last year, the Uncle Kracker concert.

We've teamed with the Southwest Arkansas Arts Council to put on the Youth Art Exhibition. One of our favorite yearly events is Coffee with a Cop, allowing young people or anyone else to get to know members of the local police over a cup of McDonald's coffee. Of course, Steve has been involved in Hope government, having been Ward Six's City Director since 2007 and Mayor from 2017 to 2021.

Celia says, "Our town home people are our family, and we've always supported them. They are not just our customers, they are our friends."

"This is not just in our hometown of Hope. Remember, it's ten small communities, so we keep busy. But we do so to say thank you to our customers for their patronage. We cannot exist without them and their support of our business," Celia adds.

After working in the McDonald's business for over 40 years, the Montgomerys are proud to announce that they soon will be selling some of the business to their own children; a son-in-law and daughter that have worked with them for almost 14 years now. The Montgomerys believe this is just the passing of the cup that came from Celia's father down to them. Now plans are forming to take it to the next generation, and they are very proud of this family heritage.

All our stores have been moving into the digital era. We have just about as many mobile app orders as we do standard orders. It's sometimes tough on those of us from the older generations, but you'd be surprised at the savvy seniors we have met who love the technology.

We are also growing in our delivery service here in Hope. Doordash gives us a run, literally, for our money, as we try our best to get our product out to you in as many ways as possible while keeping it hot and fresh.

On a new digital note, at the end of this month McDonald's Corporation will be updating our locator when you order on the app, so we can start preparing your order sooner, having your order ready as you pull into the lot. Ready on Arrival will be functioning by the end of the month.

But don't worry. We will still be doing our best to keep things old school and simple for our in-house guests whether you're counter ordering or just wanting to pay cash, we will be there for you. That will never go out of style. We will always care about our personal service to all our guests. You are Family.



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# HOPE PROGRESS 2023

## Jeff's on Main is not your ordinary barber shop... it's an experience.

By April Lovette

Anyone on the lookout for a new haircut might want to try Jeff's on Main in downtown Hope, the gentlemen's barber shop that provides trendy cuts as well as that goodtime atmosphere of sitting around a campfire telling stories. While the fish and deer might get bigger with each retelling, what remains consistent is this team's dedication to serving the community.

A new face was added to the team recently, Slade Bissell, and Jeff's on Main proprietor Jeff Smith said expanding the team was just another way to further serve customers. "We serve a large clientele base, so we strive to bring a variety of options for them," Smith said. "Adding Slade to the team brings a little more versatility with the types of cuts he likes to provide. Also, just adding another personality to the mix, means we have another person with his own interests and hobbies to add to our group chats."

Those group chats are a large part of the charm that make Jeff's on Main so popular. Stories of the big game, life

at the deer camp, and numerous other favorite guy pastimes are always topics of conversations. Plus, the vintage style downtown barber-shop aesthetics, which includes recently installed barber poles, combined with rustic country decor makes Jeff's on Main feel like home away from home.

That same feeling is how this barber shop approaches community service. Smith travels to provide cuts at nursing homes, funeral homes, or even clients' homes to make it easier on those who need it. Plus, either on his own, or with his band South Down Main, Jeff donates his time and creativity to entertain crowds at a variety of charity benefits and community functions. "It's about that connection with people," Smith says. "Whether it's giving someone a haircut or playing music for people, that connection and building relationships is a part of what makes our small community successful." This philosophy and outlook on life is why Jeff's on Main isn't just your ordinary barber shop... it's an experience.



## Rainbow of Challenges looking forward to fun and growth in 2023

Contributed

Rainbow of Challenges, Inc. (ROC) continues its march into 2023 providing premium services for their individuals and is excited to make plans for the 53rd year of operation.

The quality services and goals continue to grow each year since the first graduating class of six in 1969 to more than 500 receiving services today in counties in southwest and central Arkansas.

Most know that the individuals at Rainbow of Challenges love to get out in the community. They and their staff are involved in special events from fish fries, to dances, to movies, just about anything that spells F-U-N.

The highlight of the year to many of the ROC clients and staff is the Area 11 Special Olympics games which returns in April.

Individuals from area sites gather at Hope High School

to participate in exciting track and field events. Many of the athletes also move on to the State Special Olympic competition in Searcy.

Look for exciting additions to our physical structures utilized by many of their adult clients. Included are plans to construct a new residential care facility to further provide top-flight services.

For fans of the best down-home cooking in downtown Hope the Melon Patch restaurant continues to fill the bill. Look for daily specials and everyday menu items that will satisfy any palate.

The kiddos of Making Rainbows/Bright Beginnings continue to learn and flourish through fun in the classroom with caring instructors for children birth to five-years-old.

Making Rainbows/Bright Beginnings have sites in Hope,

Prescott and Lewisville. One of the annual highlights is when the little ones will celebrate Arkansas Children's Week in mid-April with a week full of fun, theme-based activities.

None of these services would be possible without exceptional staff members. Exceptional because they have the best interest of their individuals first and bring unmatched quality of life. Many of the employees are personally enriched having given a piece of themselves to those they serve.

Rainbow of Challenges continues to rank as one of the area's top employers and are always adding to their staff. We encourage readers to sign up for employment. It's well worth it.

## River Valley Tractor adds new faces to the team

By April Lovette

"Great products at great prices from great people." That's the River Valley Tractor (RVT) motto which describes the trifecta of superior standards this company has to offer Hope and Hempstead County. This already well-established and respected crew upped their game this year and added a few new faces to the team, and new Store Manager Cody White says that the growth in staff is designed to provide an extensive lineup of services for customers.

"We still have the familiar faces our customers know and trust, especially our service department who has a wealth of knowledge, as well as respect from the community," White says. "Now, though, we also have John Taylor in Sales, Drew Tankersley as Service Manager,

Rachel Sooter as Finance Manager, and Missy Thurman who begins next month as Service Writer. This well-rounded team can offer a wide array of services on numerous products and brands. We're a one-stop shop for everything from work to play."

The RVT staff offers not only a place to purchase these products, but also financing, repair, and parts for numerous types of farm equipment, mowers, small equipment like weed eaters, plus sporty rides for your next adventure like side-by-sides and four wheelers. With a plethora of brands to choose from like Can-Am, Hustler, Vermeer, Radley, and Kubota, just to name a few, the RVT team is ready to serve their loyal, longtime customers, as well as meet and greet anyone new to the RVT experience. Whether one needs a new hay baler for the farm or just wants to check out the newest Can-Am Maverick SXS, River

Valley Tractor invites residents of Hope and Hempstead County to stop by and browse the selections or chat with a team member.



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## First National Bank of Tom Bean, a century of hometown banking

Contributed

The First National Bank of Tom Bean was established in 1906 and has been serving local community needs for over 100 years. With locations already operating in Tom Bean TX, Clarksville, TX, & Lewisville, AR. The Board of Directors opened their fourth location in Hope, AR in April of 2017 with four employees in a modular office. Construction of the new 8500 square foot facility was completed in December 2017.

Since the initial loan was made from that modular office the staff has grown from only four employees to 10 staff members with over 216 years of combined banking experience. Since opening, the First National Bank of Tom Bean Hope Branch has surpassed its own original projections for loans and new deposit relationships multiple times over serving as your hometown bank. The First National Bank of Tom Bean Hope Branch offers a variety of services that allow customers the opportunity of a face-to-face old fashioned banking experience. They pride themselves on the fact that decisions are made by local people in a timely manner to create a one-stop shop banking experience.

As the world continues to navigate the post pandemic era,

as well as navigate through inflation and news of the recent large bank failures; one must keep in mind that America still has the most robust financial banking system in the world that is made up of over 1400 individual banking institutions of all sizes. Over 80% of loans made to small business owners in the United States are made by community banks and not the mega-large to-big-to fail institutions. Despite the Fed aggressively raising interest rates over the past year, in hopes of bringing inflation down, FNBTB has strived to provide low-cost affordable funding options to our customers. Inflation has hit Americans hard, whether it's the price of a carton of eggs, a gallon of gas or the cost of utility bills; and while the rate of inflation has slowed slightly in the last few months, the road to recovery is on the horizon. As interest rates have climbed many have turned to credit card debt rather than personal loans which can be a more affordable option.

The First National Bank of Tom Bean still offers the latest in convenience and technology services available. Online banking & bill pay, telephone banking, remote deposit capture, all the while still providing that personal relationship

that they've become known for in the Hope community. They also offer bilingual services to accommodate the emerging Hispanic market.

Brian Lee, Vice President at FNBTB stated "we take pride in our community and trying to help everyone through these trying times. We want our hometown to know that we are all in this together. Regardless of the constraints we now face, we still want to provide that slice of the good life that embodies everything that has made Hope and its surrounding areas a great place to live for many years."

According to Joan Hardee, Senior Vice President, "Our customers are not simply customers to us; they are our friends and our family. We have strived to excel at bringing you the financial products and technological advancements to meet your needs while retaining our hometown feel. We look forward to being your hometown connection with as much of that old fashioned banking relationship as currently possible for many years to come."

## Heather Manor Nursing and Rehabilitation Center: As full-service as full-service can get

By Jeff Smithpeters

Heather Manor Nursing and Rehabilitation Center has 128 beds and is situated in slate-grey brick buildings located at 400 West 23rd in Hope. The facility offers physical, occupational, and speech therapy services along with residential care. The on-site medical director, Dr. Dale Goins, is also present to be of service to residents.

Heather Manor's Administrator, Stacey Clay is highly knowledgeable about the running of a nursing and rehabilitation facility and has herself served as a nurse. Prior to joining Heather Manor six years ago, she had been an administrator since 2013 and was a director of nurses for 14 years prior.

The health services offered at Heather Manor include short-term rehabilitation, long-term care and respite care. In the area of short-term rehabilitation, the facility's website at [heathermanornursingandrehab.com](http://heathermanornursingandrehab.com) describes the kinds of professional help provided: "Our therapy team consists of a Physical Therapist, Occupational Therapist and Speech Pathologist. Our therapy team is passionate about bringing the latest programs and techniques to our patients. They also utilize therapy modalities combined with a comprehensive therapy program for strengthening, balance training, pain reduction, wound healing, and increasing range of motion. Our Speech Pathologist incorporates swallowing, language and cognitive procedures to meet the needs of our patients.

Patients may receive these services five days per week depending on the physician's treatment order."

In long-term care, the facility's website describes specific ways the needs of residents are addressed: "We offer both private and semi-private accommodations and full-time transportation to and from medical appointments. We prioritize social opportunities and events, so your loved one will always have something to be involved in. Activities range from larger parties to smaller events. Activities also are individualized based on the resident's wishes."

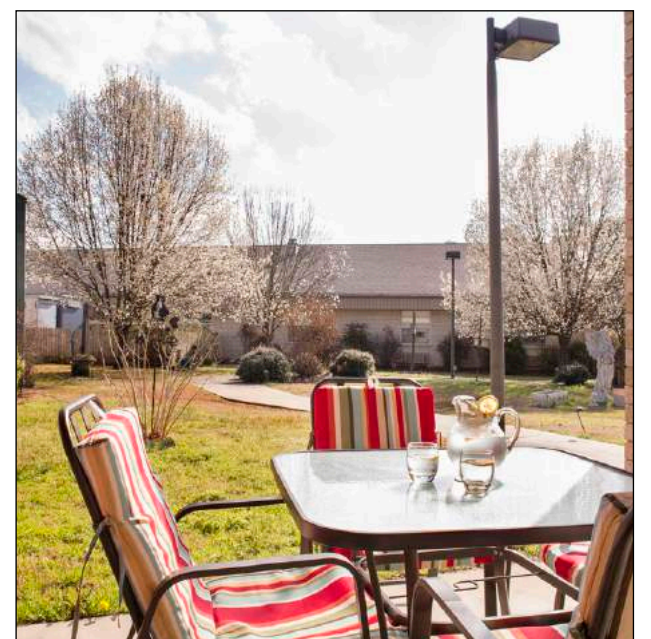
In respite care, the website makes clear that these residents "enjoy all the amenities provided to our full-time residents, including a private or semi-private room, daily housekeeping and laundry services, daily activities, and daily meals including continental breakfast and snacks. Your loved one will experience a safe, warm environment and 24 hour nursing care by dedicated and compassionate care."

Since the numbers of COVID cases have been reduced in the nation and in Hope, Heather Manor has resumed activities such as bingo, which the residents enjoy. The facility is also setting for other activities such as musical performances and church services.

With a dedicated staff of about 130 people Heather Manor's overall health is excellent, according to Administrator Stacey Clay. The facility participates in both Medicare and Medicaid

and has been owned by Michael Morton since 2004.

The facility is proud to be trusted by Hope families, and is looking forward to continuing to provide its services to the mature adults of the Hope community.



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# HOPE PROGRESS 2023

## KHMA promotes legacy of sound and substance left by Paul W. Klipsch

By Jeff Smithpeters

The stately house just next to the Bill Clinton Birthplace home on West Division Street has grown since last year into another Hope showplace, now housing the Klipsch Museum Visitors Center. Since the center's opening on March 9, 2022, people from here and from around the world have sampled the sound of Paul W. Klipsch's speakers from the early days of his patented horn-based designs to today.

The Klipsch Museum Visitor's Center is also home to the office of Beckie Moore, who has now completed a year as Executive Director of the Klipsch Heritage Museum Association and can now look back at a year of accomplishments promoting the legacy of Hope's most famous inventor.

Moore knew little about Paul W. Klipsch while she was growing up in Hope, but has lately learned more about his character while being impressed with what she has found out. "I just knew that tall man and he had something to do with speakers. And that was about where it started and stopped. But I have learned to just appreciate him so much."

So many of his employees worked with him for decades, for starters, which says a lot in itself, but he also made sure to make the rounds at the factory. He was not an absentee employer. "They said, at any given day, when he walked in, he would walk around

and be such a source of encouragement for them, no matter what their job was. If they were sweeping the floor, you're the best floor sweeper I've ever seen. If they were an engineer in the lab, thank you for that. He took time out of his day. And of course, he was extremely busy flying all over the world. But he took time out of his busy schedule, because he knew it was so important."

Moore too shows this spirit of treasuring the work of others as she describes how far the old Feild House has come to get to its present state and what changes are being wrought now: "I will say it every time I speak to clubs, all of the work that you've seen so far, the restoration, barring the electrical and the plumbing all has been done by volunteers. And that is, that's just remarkable." And it goes on. As we talked in her office in early March, the sounds could be heard of a volunteer hammering nails upstairs to bring a room on the second floor into use.

By next year, Moore says a portion of the backyard will be fully converted to a concrete outdoor stage with benches and tables in the lawn for music-lovers to sit back and enjoy the experience. A Lower Middle Delta Initiative Grant will help make its construction possible, but volunteers have already played a part, having installed a drainage system. "There will be a

point that we will have to call in some experts when we lay the sod and when we build the stage with concrete, so there'll be a time that it won't be all volunteer driven," Moore says.

There have been two Paul W. Klipsch Birthday bashes since the Visitor Center opened, with activities taking place the second weekend of March of both 2022 and 2023 at the Visitor Center itself, concerts and art auctions at the Klipsch Auditorium in City Hall, tours of the Klipsch Museum of Audio History and the Klipsch Factory. Performers at the Auditorium last year were Jack Daniels and the Garrett Memorial Christian Church Band and the LLC Band featuring Joe Purvis. This year featured Delta Brass Express, Jennifer Taylor and South Down Main.

This past summer, thanks to the sponsors, says Moore, on the first Thursday nights of June, July and August KHMA was able to bring three extremely accomplished acts to perform under The Hub's canopy. Moore was bowled over by attendance at the three shows, which were free to the nearly 400 attendees who brought their lawn chairs to the venue. For next year's Big Sounds Downtown, Moore has an idea who will play one of the slots, but will only say he has a big YouTube following. Learn more in future postings on SWARK.Today.





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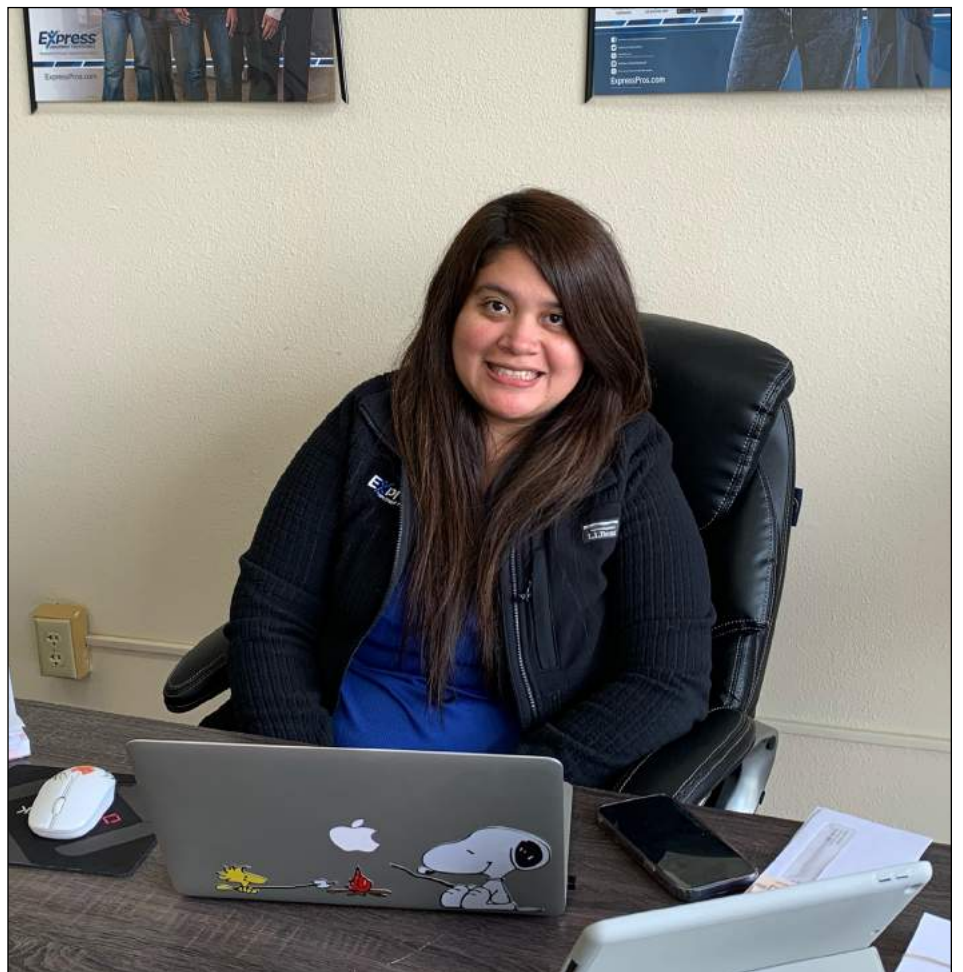
## Express Employment Professionals: Respecting People. Impacting Business

By April Lovette

Express Employment Professionals, a leading staffing provider with locations in the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, has a vision: help as many people as possible find good jobs by helping as many clients as possible find good people. This company brought a little bit of that vision to Hope and Hempstead County in recent years by adding a location at 214 North Hervey Street to support their Hope customers and applicants. The team has been working diligently ever since to assist local citizens and businesses find workforce solutions.

The Express Employment motto is "Respecting People. Impacting Business." and anyone who has ever visited the Hope location can see how this company genuinely lives up to that phrase. Here in the Hope office, Industrial Staffing Consultant Mireya Navarrete is available to match potential employees with local companies, an essential service for the community and a responsibility she greets with sincerity and pride. "We help people and businesses make those connections and build relationships," Navarrete said. "By connecting applicants who need work with the companies who need staff, they can grow and excel. Plus, it takes away a bit of the worry for people who are looking for work and trying to provide for their families. The companies we staff take very good care of their people."

Building relationships is an important philosophy for Express Employment that extends beyond business though. This team has supported, sponsored, and/or donated to many local charities and community organizations like the Hope Lions Club and Hope-In-Action. Express Employment has been a sponsor for numerous community events like the Chamber of Commerce Banquet and the tenth anniversary celebration for UAHT, in addition to numerous scholarships like Back the Blue. Owner Joey Martin says being a good community partner is Express Employment's way of showing appreciation. "The community has been really good to us and shown a great deal of support, so we want to do the same and give back in any way we can."



## Brazzel/Oakcrest offers services for today's families, pre-planning for their future

By Jeff Smithpeters

Brazzel/Oakcrest Funeral Home got its first name in 1978, when Eddie and Janie Brazzel bought Oakcrest Chapel. In 1993 they would buy Cornish Funeral Home in Prescott, which in its turn would become Brazzel/Cornish. The two have presided over memorials and funerals for over 40 years now. Hope's location is on 1001 Main Street.

Scott Brown, General Manager, spoke to us about how Brazzel/Oakcrest and Brazzel/Cornish sees itself. "We're Hope's locally owned funeral home by a Hope family that's grown up here. And we pride ourselves on taking care of our families in their most difficult time of need. We take care of them here, and also our Prescott facility. I think our reputation stands for that," he said.

Brown also mentioned some more recent trends in funeral home services that

Brazzel is providing families. "We're doing the DVD of services ... ours are pretty nice, the way they're done. Cremation, now we do a lot of different types of services. But we're more into that now, because that is something that's the future. Some people don't realize all the things you can do in cremation. Some people just like to cremate, and that's the end of it. But now, you know, we can do so many different viewings and complete services all within the cremation."

Brazzel also offers help years before the funeral with their pre-planning service. "Planning is something we do every day. Of course, the advantage of that is simply today's cost and ten years from now that price can go up. You're getting today's price. That's become a very big part of our business."

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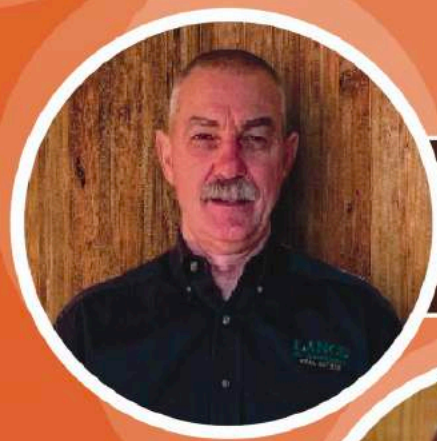
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# HOPE PROGRESS 2023

## Stay abreast of latest developments in deductions with family-owned Burke & Walker

By Jeff Smithpeters

Burke & Walker Tax Preparation is out on 3337 Hwy 29 North, about three miles from Hope's northern city limits but soon will be moving just a couple dozen yards away to a new office building being built under some trees just next to a pond that is part of the working farm that surrounds the current Burke & Walker location.

The owner of Burke & Walker is Keri Shepherd who, now in her 19th year working there, represents the third generation of the same family of women who have run the firm for 50 years. She said completing the move to the new office will have to wait until after tax season, but her husband Merritt Shepherd is helping to do some of the work of readying the new building. He has worked for Burke & Walker for 12 years as an accountant himself. As administrative assistant, Vikki Bearden has been with the company for two years.

It fits that Burke & Walker's offices will continue, as they have been, to be situated on a farm, since the company is experienced in tax preparation for farmers, which can quickly become more complicated than what it would be for a wage or salaried employee. It also, said Shepherd, has a knack for helping small businesses. "We really feel like now we do all kinds of tax returns, personal business, corporations, nonprofits, we can do anything anybody needs. But we really specialize in small businesses and farms. And the reason is, is because we are one. So we try to help everybody save as much money as possible."

Toward that goal, Shepherd said, she spends a lot of time getting up to date on changes in the federal and state tax codes. "Whatever ways that I can utilize, reading through tax codes and figuring out a way to save somebody's money, that is the passion and the joy that I have for what we do. People kind of think that I'm crazy for spending all these hours and long nights dealing with numbers. But if there's a way to save somebody's money, that's actually where my joy comes from."

With the crunch of tax season upon us, Shepherd recommends being careful where you get your information. "I would say to be very careful about what you read on the internet, and also what people try to tell you," she said. "Because not everything that you read, and not everything that everybody says is really the way that it is. ... Read it straight from the IRS so that we know for sure that that's what it is."

On some occasions, Shepherd said, she has had to be a kind of counsellor for people worried about how much tax liability they had. "My husband told me a long time ago. He said 'I'm going to get you a black leather couch for all the people that come in and dump their problems on you.' And of course everybody's very emotional about their money, which is very understandable."

Where it comes to community partnerships, Burke & Walker is honored to be the exclusive accounting sponsor for the Hope Bobcat athletic program. Shepherd adds that the company is also stepping up to help at Garrett Memorial Christian School as well as at Spring Hill and Prescott schools. "We do still try to sponsor inside the community," Shepherd said. "Because in the community, that's where the people are coming to us from. Just because I don't have a kid in Hope Public Schools or Prescott or Nevada or Spring Hill doesn't mean that we don't still sponsor. So we try to spread out as much as we possibly can. Because we have clients from all areas."

Shepherd believes in the value of sports for imparting maturity to youth who play, having participated herself in travel softball with her father and coaching a travelball softball team now.

Asked what she can make of the local economy, Shepherd said she is seeing "signs of real struggle." "We are seeing an increase in wages, I'd say semi kind of across the board, but at the same time, the cost of everything has incredibly risen ... So again, that's where I say people are very emotional about their money. So when they come in here, you know, they're really looking for that last dollar that they can possibly get, because it's imperative to most people's survival." Her recommendation for those who need their refund sooner than later is to electronically file.

Finally, Shepherd recommends that those still doing taxes this year not hesitate to ask questions of their preparers. "We joke that we're not lawyers. We don't charge for answering questions. So what we try to tell people is even if they're not our client, if you have questions about taxes, about billing, anything that's tax-related, financially related, call us, let us try to help."



## Cadence Bank in Hope debuts new services while maintaining stability

By Jeff Smithpeters

We got in touch with the Market President of Cadence Bank in Hope, Chris Cearley, at an auspicious time as a new product is about to make its debut for Cadence Bank customers in our community. "We're weeks away from installing our first Cadence live teller machine in Hope. It allows customers to speak remotely with a teller to quickly and efficiently conduct nearly all transactions that they can do at a normal branch. And it also lets customers conduct banking before and after branch hours. It will be open from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Saturday," he said.

Additionally, Cadence provides a service for customers who either need to build credit or rehabilitate their existing credit, the Credit Builder Loan program. "It has a fixed term, and it allows customers to build savings and credit at the same time," Cearley said. "We're pretty excited about that product. We just rolled it out here about a year ago."

In the wake of the Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank collapses, I asked Cearley about Cadence's stability. "Cadence Bank is well-capitalized, and has been independently serving customers for nearly 150 years. We've been a stable presence through multiple economic cycles, natural disasters, and changing bank dynamics, including the Great Depression and the 2008 financial crisis. We maintain a diverse funding base, which includes a significant amount of FDIC-insured and collateralized deposits, and we remain committed to realizing our vision of helping people, companies and communities prosper."

Among the ways Cadence has helped our community is past service on the Hope Downtown Network, Arts Council, support of United Way, the Hope Junior Livestock Auction and the Relay for Life. "Last week or the week before last, we had a teammate visit one of the preschools here in town to help educate the young kids getting started out on the right foot," Cearley said. "We think it's important to teach financial literacy at a young age to get them started with a lifelong habit."

Cadence Bank in Hope is located at 200 South Elm. The building was decked out with the new Cadence Bank name after BancorpSouth Bank and Cadence Bank integrated their bank systems and introduced a new, unified brand last fall. The banks merged in fall 2021. Cearley said the Hope location has 11 employees who either live in Hope or the surrounding communities. As a result of the merger, Cearley said, "We have more locations, we have enhanced products and services, greater convenience and accessibility." Cadence Bank has 420 locations from central Florida to central and south Texas.





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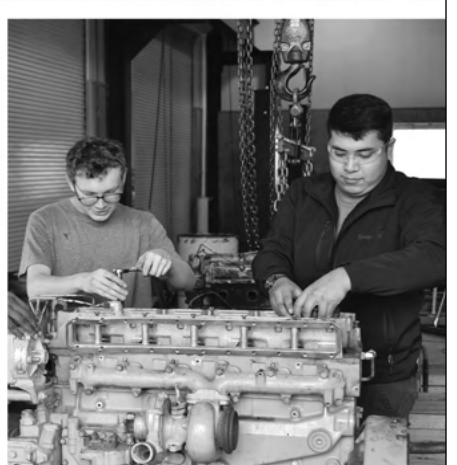
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# HOPE PROGRESS 2023

## Hope Auto to celebrate 100th anniversary with enlarged inventory, new energy

By Jeff Smithpeters

A recent management change at Hope Auto has given the Chevy, Ford and GMC dealership on North Hervey a new lease on business just in time for its second century. The inventory is more numerous. The work culture is more focused on teamwork. As the company gets ready to celebrate 100 years of existence, newly ensconced General Manager Shawn McLish is aware of the history he steps into and sees good things ahead.

"Just with Hope Auto being here 100 years, it's an honor to be working for a place that has got that history and has taken care of the community for that long," he said.

Though he acknowledged Hope Auto needed improvement as he began his tenure at the end of last year, McLish said he was impressed with the employees' attitudes. "They were all excited. They wanted to get to that next level, and they were in a spot where they didn't really know where to go. However, they weren't getting the inventory, and didn't have a lot happening."

So raising the number of cars on Hope Auto's two lots was a priority as was dispelling the notion that if a Hope resident wants a better deal on a car, they have to go out of town. "We have brought the big city here to Hope Arkansas," he said. "You can get the same prices. You can get the same service and get the same attention but on a first-name basis. You're not a number when you come to Hope Auto, you're actually a person, somebody who's in our neighborhood that we see out and about."

Eric Lemley, who manages Hope Auto's Chevrolet dealership, added "When people come in here, they see familiar faces, they see people that they know, so there's a comfort level. We've all been in dealerships, big markets, and you go in and you're a number. Here, you're not. We're all going out into the community and getting to know people. So you'll be dealing with someone familiar."

One of his aspirations, McLish said, is for Hope Auto to become the go-to dealer for multiple generations of families. "It's our goal as a dealership, not only to sell you one vehicle, but to keep you in a position where every three or four years, you can come back and get another one.. We not only want to sell to grandma and grandpa, we want to sell to everybody in the family all the way down to the grandkids. So we have to keep giving them the service, the convenience, the pricing so that family can continue to keep trading in and out. We're not a one and done dealership. We want to service you and your whole family."

To do that, it helps now that Hope Auto has what Lemley describes as its largest inventory in years. Conditions that had reduced vehicle production for the past three years have changed for the better recently, allowing Hope Auto to build up its supply of cars, trucks and SUVs on the lot and present a smorgasbord of choices to appeal to any driver's needs.

McLish described what a larger inventory and what greater variety means for those in the car market: "We've got the vehicle, whether it's the top of the line or the base model. We've got everything in between, because customers need that. They need that selection when they're out buying vehicles. And if we don't got it, we can go get it. There's other dealers that we have a good relationship with, to go get a vehicle from another dealer and swap with them. We're not just Hope auto, we're McClarty Auto Group, one of the biggest dealers in the state of Arkansas, one of the biggest dealers in the nation."

He also cited the availability of up to 600 pre-owned cars that have been serviced prior

to being placed on sale. These can be seen by accessing the Used tab on hopeauto.com. "Literally, we give them a call, see if the vehicle is available. If it is, we'll send drivers to go get it and bring it down here. No strings attached. If you don't like it, we'll just take it back."

With new cars comes new technologies for taking to the road safely. McLish and Lemley both pointed to Adaptive Cruise Control as one of the most impressive of these. It allows you not only to set up a consistent speed for cruising along less trafficked highways, but also to set a car-length or three of distance from drivers in front of you. "And not only does it notice people that are ahead of you. But it gives you a 360 degree safety zone all the way around," McLish said.

Lemley described the experience of driving a 2023 GMC Yukon Denali equipped with Super Cruise hands-free driving. As long as a sensor in the steering wheel detects the driver is present and facing the road, the Denali will use data received in real time to drive lightly trafficked roads in fair weather conditions. It can even change lanes according to the driver's input settings.

As of now Hope Auto is planning for its 100th anniversary. On April 7, the dealership will have a ribbon-cutting. After that comes a flag ceremony by Troop 5 of the Scouts and a free supper that Hope Auto will team up with the Hope Lions Club, of which McLish and Lemley are both members. "The whole community is invited," McLish said.



## Magnet school grant the cause of excitement, opportunity at Hope Public Schools

By Jeff Smithpeters

Superintendent Jonathan Crossley, now in the middle of his second year in the job, describes the Hope Public Schools district as “storied,” and it would be hard to question that. With alumni like Doris Pryor, recently elevated to the US Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, Chris Thomason, who served two terms in the Arkansas House of Representatives and was chancellor of University of Arkansas Hope-Texarkana before becoming a University of Arkansas system administrator, former U.S. Congressman Mike Ross, businessman and Bill Clinton’s Chief of Staff Mack McClarty, it’s clear HPS has produced some notables.

“Because of this pride, there is a deep nostalgia of excellence,” Crossley said. “So as we look into the future, and where we want to go and who we want to be, we can recall things that have been a part of our history and a part of our past that we are proud of, while also trying to make adjustments to right potential wrongs, so that we can become an even better Unified School District.”

In the area of pre-K and elementary school, Crossley said Hope’s pre-K program’s enrollment had seen a COVID-caused reduction, which was much like other school systems had in the state. “However, in this last calendar year, we’ve had an upswing, so we’re looking to max out our slots, and even add additional slots for this next school year. So that’s a big plus.”

The priority for grades pre-K through six, Crossley said, is on students learning to read. “Early Literacy is a big part of what we’re looking forward to the future. We know that really, early literacy is a high indicator of long term success and how we teach reading early on is very important. So we’re investing in that through the magnet grant.”

The magnet grant Crossley refers to is the five-year \$15 million Magnet Schools Assistance Program Grant from the U.S. Department of Education announced October 7 of last year. Its purpose is to, in the words of Hope Public School’s press release that day, to “support efforts to develop and revitalize magnet

schools with academically challenging and innovative instructional approaches designed to bring together students from different social, economic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds.” Hope schools was the only district in the country to receive such a grant in fiscal year 2022.

“When a child is born in Hempstead County in the future, they will have a connection with Hope Public Schools, and we will provide resources if necessary, and a conduit for training for parents, similar to what some other programs do, but with a specific leaning toward getting them ready for early literacy. So we’re very proud of those efforts and look forward to them being in full implementation starting next school year.” Crossley explained.

In the grades heading toward and in middle school, Crossley said the chances for students to explore particular disciplines and professions of their choice will be numerous: “There is an exposure to college career and opportunity that will happen in the elementary level and which is happening and will [continue to] happen on the middle school level. There’s an explosion of opportunity there.”

Right now, Yerger Middle is benefiting from a nearly million-dollar Star Academy grant it received from NOLA Education, as announced on September 23 of this past year, which focuses on math, science, social studies and literacy in the eighth-grade year. Crossley pointed out that students at Yerger will have increased opportunities to take part in the performing arts, as well. To make sure every eighth grader benefits, the district added \$150,000 from ARP and Esser Funds, which come from federal stimulus money provided by three bills passed under Trump and Biden with the goal of COVID-relief to the education system.

Regarding Hope High School students, Crossley wants to see a greater number of graduates having already attained an associate’s degree from UAHT or having completed many hours toward college or a level two skilled trade certificate in the Concurrent Studies program: “Historically, we’ve had somewhere

between 16 and 20 kids [with Associates’ Degrees], I think our high number was this last year with 24. We’re trying to literally double that number to have two times as many as we currently have in the Collegiate Academy and then expand our opportunities for Concurrent as well. Every year, we have around 20 kids who participate in Concurrent, separate from the Collegiate Academy. We want to add minimum double to that number as well.”

But before graduation, Crossley has in mind a new way for Hope students to have some competitive fun. “I’m saying this in public. We’re really leaning into volleyball. We really think volleyball is a thing that kids want to do. I’ve heard it since I’ve been here. And so we’re going to start with a club program that I think will be pretty successful and go to the competitive angle against other other schools formally with AAA and everything else in the near future.” Crossley adds that an increased emphasis on the performing arts will carry over from Yerger to Hope High.

Without its partners in the community, including employers who provide resources, training sessions and even jobs through Hope High’s Bobcats Works program, which allows local companies to put on a job fair at the school and provide part-time positions for those who apply, and organizational partners like Southwest Arkansas Arts Council to help with stage productions in the future, Crossley says his mission would be harder. But he especially welcomes parents and volunteers wanting to become involved, even calling for those interested to come to the district’s second five-year plan meeting this April 17.

“We’re going to talk a lot about community partnerships and a lot about the direction of the district from an academic standpoint and we’re also going to talk about it ... what we can do as a community to support our educators and our paraprofessionals and our administrative staff, secretarial staff, maintenance workers, bus drivers, you name it,” Crossley said. So if you’re about making Hope schools better, put it on your calendar.

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# HOPE PROGRESS 2023

## Diamond Bank continues its 119-year history serving Southwest Arkansas

By Jeff Smithpeters

According to its website at diamond.bank, the precursor of today's Diamond Bank, which has a location on 400 South Main was Pike County Bank in Murfreesboro, which began officially December 19, 1904, when the state of Arkansas granted it a charter. At the time, the bank had a capital stock of \$25,000, which was a lot of money just after the turn of the twentieth century. Adjusted for inflation, this would approximate \$692,172 now.

The bank constructed its first building west of the current Pike County Archives Building in Murfreesboro. However, by 1912, it had built a new brick building located at the northeast corner of the courthouse square. As Pike County Bank grew larger by the early 1950s, it established a new branch office in Mineral Springs in October 1951. Eventually, the bank constructed another building in Murfreesboro in July 1979, which still exists there today.

On March 21, 1986, the Bainum Family, including the late Irvin C. Bainum and Eeva Bainum, purchased Pike County Bank. Later, in August 1996, Pike County Bank changed its name to Diamond State Bank (Murfreesboro), while the Bank of Glenwood became Arkansas Diamond Bank. Finally, in March 2007, Diamond Bank merged with another strong community bank in Southwest Arkansas to create the current Diamond Bank. The bank now has 15 locations in west Arkansas.

Diamond Bank's mission statement is also included on its diamond.bank website: "Diamond Bank strives to provide a stable source of financial leadership in the communities we serve. Southwest Arkansas continues to grow and prosper with good diversity of

economic sectors including industry, education, construction, agriculture and retail trade. The philosophy of Diamond Bank has been and continues to be, one of maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with our customers and communities. Our goal is to provide a high level of sound and meaningful financial services and products to the people we serve, while obtaining a fair return for our stockholders."

The bank does indeed "maintain mutually beneficial relationships" with the Hope community, with recent efforts like its Valentine's Day Cookout at The Hub which delivered deliciously grilled food to Hope Police Department and Hempstead County Sheriff's Office personnel. Market President, Kyla Hamilton said, "We are so very thankful for our local law enforcement and postal workers here in Hope and grateful that we can do a small part to give back to them. They truly deserve so much more."

Diamond Bank also hosted a Holiday-themed coffee in late December, helped sponsor the Uncle Kracker concert to cap off the Watermelon Festival. It has also donated to the Sheriff's Office Operation Christmas. Diamond Bank staffers have also served as Hope-Hempstead County Chamber of Commerce members and ambassadors.

Diamond Bank's office hours are Monday-Thursday 8:30 a.m - 4:00 p.m.; Friday 8:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. and its Drive-Through is open Monday-Thursday 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.; Friday 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.



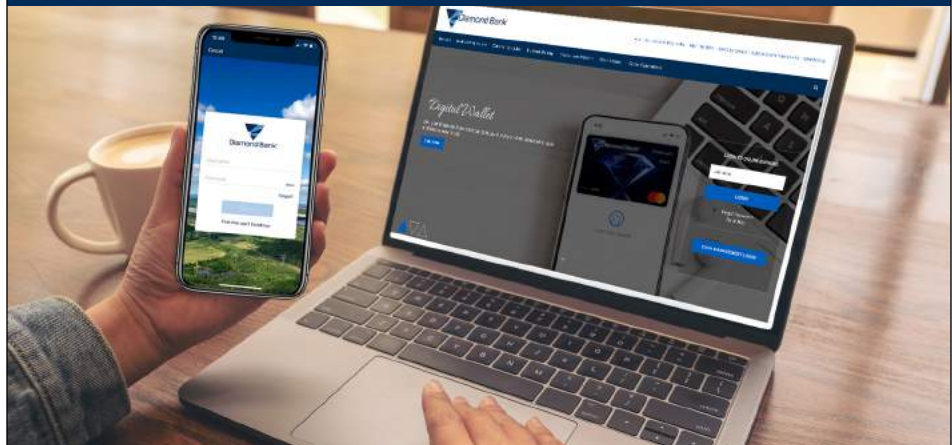
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